

MYSTICISM, PORNOGRAPHY, SUBJECTIVITY

Wed., 3:30-6:15

Fretwell 305

RELS 4050

RELS 5000/WGST 5050

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Office Hours: Wed., 1:00-2:30, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine relations between language and desire. To do so, it will engage in a close reading of Christian mystical texts and avant-garde literary pornographic texts through the theoretical writings of Roland Barthes. These readings will focus on the stylistic, formal, thematic and affective features of the respective texts. With these features in mind, we will explore what these texts seek to do to their readers, what literary devices are relied upon to perform those tasks and what, if anything, distinguishes the texts under consideration. We will ask what kinds of writing counts as “mystical theology” or “pornographic literature,” how these respective texts figure, rely on, evoke and disrupt the reading subject’s desire, and what conclusions follow if these kinds of writing are fairly indistinguishable in their strategy and intended effect.

Given the nature of the course, students will be required to read about, talk about and write about sexual identities, desires and practices—some of which may seem foreign, disturbing or even repellant. If such work will make you uncomfortable, you should not be in this class. Class discussion will focus on the assigned texts. No student will be required to reveal their own sexual identity, desires or practices, but some students may choose to do so. If such revelations will make you uncomfortable, or if you will be unable to engage the fact of sexual diversity in a respectful, mature manner, you should not be in this class.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY

I want every student to succeed in this class. In selecting readings, crafting assignments, setting a schedule and articulating expectations, I have tried to create a framework that will enable this. In presenting material and responding to assignments, I strive to be clear and to give you guidance that will help you improve. I will not, however, hunt you down, or pester you, to make sure you are doing the work required of you. *To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.* This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if any problems arise. If you don’t understand something, if you are struggling with the material, if life is impinging on you, if the course itself or my teaching style is presenting problems, *please* let me know. I will do what I can to help, but I am unable to help if I do not know there is a problem.

EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to (1) attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings; (2) read attentively all assigned readings prior to class; (3) participate actively and productively in discussion of the assigned material; (4) familiarize themselves with the syllabus; (5) take responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of the course; and (6) check their 49er Express e-mail accounts regularly for course announcements and personal communications from the instructor.

Graduate students are also expected to (1) read all recommended readings; and (2) attend three additional meetings, one for each unit, over the course of the semester.

This course requires a significant amount of close, attentive reading as well as a good deal of careful, thoughtful analytic writing. It will be run like a seminar, which means students are expected to come to class with a deep familiarity with the assigned texts as well as questions and comments about them that will advance the conversation. Because the course is an upper-level undergraduate and graduate class, students are also expected to perform advanced-level work in their written assignments.

Students are **NOT** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructor, the course materials or other students, but are expected to manage any disagreements respectfully and productively.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend, and be on-time for, all class meetings. *Every absence after one, for whatever reason, will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade. Every two instances of arriving late or leaving early will count as one absence.* If you are absent from class, you are responsible for obtaining any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using the 49er Express e-mail system. You are responsible for checking this e-mail account and responding promptly to any e-mail requests.

CLASS DECORUM

(1) Be on time for class. If you must arrive late or leave early, please do so as unobtrusively as possible. (2) Cell phones must be turned off prior to class. If your cell phone rings, or if I observe you text-messaging during class, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course. (3) Computers may only be used to take notes during class. If I observe you using your computer for any other purpose, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (Grove Press, 1978)
Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (Paulist Press, 1993)
Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* (Hill & Wang, 1975)
Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Hill & Wang, 1974)
Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* (City Lights Books, 2001)
Dennis Cooper, *The Sluts* (De Capo Press, 2005)
Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (Grove Press, 1994)

All other readings will be made available through electronic reserve.

Students are expected to bring all assigned readings to class.

SCHEDULE

Jan 13 Introduction

UNIT ONE: Mystical Texts

Jan 20 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) (*Divine Names*, chapter 1, 4, 7-9, 13; *Mystical Theology*) (electronic reserve)
Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986 [1957]), 7-25 (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Christopher Gill (New York: Penguin, 1999) (excerpt) (electronic reserve)

Jan 27 Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980) (excerpts) (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Karma Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz, 180-200 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) (electronic reserve)

Amy Hollywood, "Sexual Desire, Divine Desire: Or, Queering the Beguines," in *Toward a Theology of Eros*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, 119-32 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) (electronic reserve)

Feb 3 John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991) (*The Dark Night* and “Sayings of Light and Love”) (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Rick Rambuss, “Pleasure and Devotion,” in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg, 253-80 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) (electronic reserve)

Feb 10 Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, 123-218
Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988 [1943]), 3-29 (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1988 [1939-43]), 11-17 (electronic reserve)

Amy Hollywood, “Mysticism and Catastrophe in Georges Bataille’s *Atheological Summa*,” in *Mystics*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard, 161-87 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) (electronic reserve)

UNIT TWO: Theoretical Interlude

Feb 17 Balzac, “Sarrasine,” from Barthes, *S/Z*, 221-54
Barthes, *S/Z*, 3-107

Recommended:

Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, 155-64 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977 [1971]) (electronic reserve)

*****Unit One essay due by 9AM, Thu., Feb 18**

*****Grad Student meeting this week.**

Feb 24 Barthes, *S/Z*, 106-217

Recommended:

Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, 142-48 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977 [1968]) (electronic reserve)

Mar 3 Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*

Recommended:

Roland Barthes, "Responses," in *The Tel Quel Reader*, ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack, 249-68 (New York: Routledge, 1998 [1971]) (electronic reserve)

Mar 10 **Spring Break – NO CLASS**

UNIT THREE: Pornographic Texts

Mar 17 **Reading Week – NO CLASS**

Mar 24 Sade, *120 Days in Sodom*

*****Unit Two essay due by 9AM, Thu., Mar 25**

*****Grad Student meeting this week.**

Mar 31 Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," in *Styles of Radical Will*, 35-73 (New York: Picador, 2002 [1967]) (electronic reserve)
Kathy Acker, "Reading the Lack of the Body," in Kathy Acker, *Bodies of Work*, 66-80 (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997 [1994]) (electronic reserve)
Roland Barthes, "Sade II," in *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller, 123-71 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1976 [1971]) (electronic reserve)
Georges Bataille, "Sade," in *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton, 105-29 (London: Marion Boyars, 1985 [1957]) (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?," in Marquis de Sade, *120 Days in Sodom & Other Writings*, trans. Annette Michelson, 3-64 (New York: Grove Press, 1966 [1951-52]) (electronic reserve)

Apr 7 Bataille, *Story of the Eye*

Roland Barthes, "Metaphor of the Eye," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, 239-47 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972 [1963]) (electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 36-59 (electronic reserve)
Kent L. Brintnall, *Ecce Homo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming) (to be distributed)

Apr 14 Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School*

Recommended:

Peter Wollen, "Kathy Acker," in *Lust for Life*, ed. Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, and Avita Ronnell, 1-11 (New York: Verso, 2006 [1998]) (electronic reserve)

Gayle Fornataro, "Too Much is Never Enough," in *Devouring Institutions*, ed. Michael Hardin, 85-109 (San Diego: Hyperbole Books, 2004) (electronic reserve)

Kathy Acker and Sylvère Lotringer, "Devoured by Myths," in *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, 1-24 (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) (electronic reserve)

Apr 21 Cooper, *The Sluts*

Recommended:

Leora Lev, "Introduction," in *Enter at Your Own Risk*, 15-39 (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2006) (electronic reserve)

Timothy C. Baker, "The Whole is Untrue," in *Writing at the Edge*, ed. Paul Hegarty and Danny Kennedy, 52-67 (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2008) (electronic reserve)

Dennis Cooper and Danny Kennedy, "'It's the Shift that Creates,'" in *Writing at the Edge*, ed. Paul Hegarty and Danny Kennedy, 191-209 (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2008 [2007]) (electronic reserve)

*****Paper proposal due by 9AM, Thu., Apr 22**

Apr 28 Concluding Thoughts

*****Grad Student meeting this week.**

*****Unit Three essay due by 9AM, Thu., Apr 29**

May 10 **Final Paper due by 6PM, Mon., May 10**
Book Report due by 6PM, Mon., May 10 (Grad students)

ASSIGNMENTS

You must submit your assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). ***You must submit them as “.doc” or “.rtf” files (Word documents), not “.docx” files.*** Assignments submitted in formats I cannot open will be graded at my discretion. All assignments should double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with 1-inch margins. ***No late papers will be accepted.***

Your assignments are evaluated, in part, on the quality of your writing. ***This is especially true for graduate students.*** You should privilege depth over breadth in your writing. It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially. I am not asking you to be *comprehensive* and *exhaustive*, but I expect you to be *clear*, *accurate*, and *thoughtful*. ***Remember*** you will not be in the room when I am reading your paper, so what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.

Your writing should be free of spelling, grammatical and typographical mistakes, and should include accurate and adequate citations. Failure to correct writing mistakes I note in one assignment in subsequent assignments will negatively influence my evaluation of your work. I rely on Kate L. Turabian’s *Manual for Writers* (7th edition) to resolve questions about punctuation, grammar and style. If you have questions in these areas, please consult part III of Turabian’s *Manual* (or some other reputable grammar handbook). The Department of Religious Studies’ writing guidelines (www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm) provide sample citation forms. You may use parenthetical citations instead, but make sure you use them properly.

You should familiarize yourself with and conform your conduct to the University’s Code of Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

(1) **Unit Analysis Papers**

Students must write a paper for each unit of the course. Papers for unit one are **due by 9AM, February 18**; papers for unit two are **due by 9AM, March 25**; papers for unit three are **due by 9AM, April 28**. These papers should be 4-6 pages.

Unit analysis papers should focus on one text from the unit and discuss it in relation to the questions and issues raised in the course. You should not try to say everything about the text, but focus on a representative passage (or passages) that allow you to engage the text closely and carefully as well as present an argument or analysis related to the themes of the course.

(2) **Final Paper**

Students must write a final paper. They are **due by 5PM, May 10**. Undergraduate papers should be 10-12 pages; graduate papers should be 15-20 pages.

In addition, students must write a 1-2 page proposal for the final paper **due by 9AM, April 22**. The proposal should provide a brief description of the paper and a provisional bibliography. The proposal is an informal document that allows me to give you feedback; it will not be graded.

The final paper should stage a reading similar to the one pursued during the course. You should select a religious text and a pornographic text and read them alongside each other in relation to some theoretical framework. (“Religious,” “pornographic” and “theoretical” should all be understood broadly.) You can use materials from the course or select materials from outside of the class. The final paper should demonstrate your ability to engage your chosen texts closely and carefully as well as your understanding of the project of the course.

(3) Book Report

Graduate students must write an analytical paper on a book that is not part of the course materials. This paper is **due by 5PM, May 10**. It should be 4-6 pages.

You may write a paper on any text by any of the authors we are reading for the course (as long as we have not read the book, or portions thereof, in the course). You may also write a paper on a book by any of the following Christian mystical writers: Aelred of Rievaulx, Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Genoa, Catherine of Sienna, Julian of Norwich, Marguerite Porette, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila. Or by any of the following novelists: Angela Carter, Marguerite Duras, Jean Genet, Pierre Klossowski, Anais Nin, Matthew Stokoe. Or by any of the following theorists: Georges Bataille, Leo Bersani, Julia Kristeva. If you would like to write on any other text, check with me.

You may not write on a text that has been the subject of one of your unit analysis papers or on a text that will be considered in your final paper.

The paper should analyze the work in relation to the issues, questions and ideas explored in the course. You should both summarize the work and suggest how it might add to the conversation pursued in the course.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

<u>Undergraduates:</u>	Unit Analysis Papers:	60% (20% each)
	Final Paper:	40%
<u>Graduate Students:</u>	Unit Analysis Papers:	45% (15% each)
	Book Report	15%
	Final Paper:	40%

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

- A** Exceptional work. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of the text(s). General observations supported by specific detail from the text(s) under analysis. Contains a strong and clear thesis. Contributes something particularly interesting, unique or creative above and beyond class materials and discussion. Clear and well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the text(s). Conversant with the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear and well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. Fails to understand the text(s) on some points, or presents an incomplete explanation of them. Fails to show comprehension of the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may proceed at too general a level. Writing unclear in places, lacks a clear structure or has numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors. Fails to show a progressive improvement in analytic precision over previous assignments.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis proceeds at a very general level. Analysis gets significant details wrong or ignores issues that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the course materials. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of writing errors noted in prior papers.
- F** Unacceptable work.

Given these standards, most students get B-range grades on most of their papers, especially those submitted near the beginning of the course. A handful of students will do A work, and another handful of students will do C work. Only rarely do students submit work that merits a D or F. *If you come to class, participate in discussion, work hard on your assignments and improve over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.*