

RELS 4050/5000
MOURNING, TRAUMA and the RELIGIOUS IMAGINARY
Tue., 3:30-6:15
Macy 110

Kent L. Brintnall
kbrintna@uncc.edu
OH: Tue., 2-3PM, and by appointment

Joseph Winters
jwinter6@uncc.edu
OH: Wed., 2-3PM, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The late French philosopher Jacques Derrida once claimed in an interview, “I mourn, therefore I am,” suggesting that responding to loss is a hallmark of human existence, fundamentally constitutive of identity. Derrida also claimed that mourning typically follows a traumatic experience that destabilizes one’s sense of coherence or meaning—such as loss of or separation from a loved one, natural disaster, war, sexual assault, genocide, or forced exile. Yet if mourning (which can be described as a mode of remembrance triggered by trauma) is unavoidable, when does the work of mourning become debilitating, an obstacle to living well? When does it lead to melancholy or despair? Is melancholy an unhealthy condition or can it be productive? Does the memory of traumatic forms of loss undermine hope, or generate a longing for a different future? Do mourning and trauma indicate the unavoidable presence of the past? The remainder that survives any instance of loss? Is mourning simply an individual response to violence and loss or does it have a social dimension, with political implications? And if mourning and trauma are constitutive of human identity, how then do we draw distinctions between the various kinds of trauma which bring with them very different kinds of loss, injury and violence?

In this course, we will explore the work of authors who have explicitly or implicitly used the categories of mourning, loss, melancholy and trauma to frame a theoretical response to the violence and suffering that punctuate everyday life. For these authors, mourning and trauma have different meanings depending on the context. Part of our job will be to discover what set of meanings and connotations the category of mourning elaborates. In addition, we will examine how it might compel us to re-imagine other “familiar” categories, concepts, and practices—such as agency, identity, power, race, gender, and sexuality. These categories in turn will elicit questions such as: What counts as a grievable life? Who is permitted to grieve? Can a life that is not valued be mourned? Can a life that is not mourned be valuable? Is life itself always already haunted by loss?

REQUIRED TEXTS

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (Columbia University Press, 2002)

Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (Norton, 1990)

Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Additional readings will be made available through Moodle.

Please bring all relevant readings to class.

EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to (1) attend, and be on time for, all class meetings; (2) read carefully all assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are assigned; (3) participate actively and productively in class discussions; (4) be familiar 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.

Students are **NOT** expected to agree with the views espoused by the instructors, the course materials or other students; they are expected to manage any disagreement respectfully and productively.

CLASS PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION

Although we will often begin each class with brief comments and some points of clarification, most of the class will consist of discussion, debate, and dialogue among all of the participants. A successful, productive class will therefore require that you come prepared, that you read all of the relevant material, that you participate responsibly in the discussions, and that you respectfully and charitably listen to the views and ideas of other students.

In this course, we will engage in close, critical readings of the relevant texts. There will not be a large amount of reading assigned for each class but the reading will be difficult. We expect you to read closely and carefully so that we can spend time in class on specific passages, problems, or questions. While reading for class, you should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to the discussion. All members of the class, students and instructors alike, are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.

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 three-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 getting any course announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this rule is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the classes you will be missing for this reason no later than **Tuesday, January 25.**

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

We 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 regularly 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 we 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 we observe you using your computer for any other purpose, it will result in a full letter deduction in your grade for the course.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, we pledge to do our best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus.

ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that qualifies you for accommodations, please provide a letter from Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (www.ds.uncc.edu).

SCHEDULE

1.11 Introduction to the Course

1.18 Sophocles, *Antigone*

For the text of the play: <https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/antigone.htm>

For background on the Oedipus trilogy: <http://www.enotes.com/oedipus-trilogy>

1.25 Butler, *Antigone's Claim*

2.1 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (Moodle)

Sigmund Freud, "Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (Moodle)

Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism" (Moodle)

Analysis Paper due (Sophocles & Butler)

2.8 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

2.15 Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*

2.22 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 1-24, 57-72

Analysis Paper due (Freud)

3.1 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 91-112

Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 60-110 (Moodle)

3.8 **SPRING BREAK – No Class**

3.15 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253-64 (Moodle)

Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19-27 (Moodle)

Analysis Paper due (Caruth, Hollywood)

3.22 Shoshana Felman, *Judicial Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10-54 (Moodle)

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-64 (Moodle)

6:30PM, Atkins Library, Personally Speaking Authors Series featuring Dr. Sean McCloud. Religious Studies graduate students are expected to attend this lecture.

- 3.29** Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-29 (Moodle)
W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Passing of the First Born" and "Of the Coming of John" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 2005), 153-59, 169-84 (Moodle)
- 4.5** Douglas Crimp, "Melancholia and Moralism: An Introduction" in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 1-26 (Moodle)
Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3-30 (Moodle)
Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132-50 (Moodle)

Analysis Paper due (authors from 3.22, 3.29, 4.5)

- 4.12** James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, Part One

Proposals for final paper due.

- 4.19** James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, Part Two

- 4.26** Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part One

Analysis Paper due (Baldwin)

- 5.3** Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part Two

Final Examination Period: Tue., May 10, 2:00-4:30
Re-read and be prepared to discuss Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Analysis Paper due (Morrison)

Final Papers due, by noon, Thu., May 12.

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be submitted by e-mail to both instructors (kbrintna@uncc.edu; jwinter6@uncc.edu). If we cannot open attachments and you do not send a readable version of the paper within 24 hours of being notified of the problem, we will grade the paper at our discretion. *No late papers will be accepted.*

Analysis Papers

Undergraduates must submit **3**, 3-4 page analysis papers over the course of the semester; graduate students must submit **4**, 4-6 analysis papers over the course of the semester. *They are due before class on February 1, February 22, March 15, April 5, April 26, and May 3 respectively.* These papers should focus on one or two passages from a single reading, or a specific theme or issue that occurs across the readings. Your analysis should demonstrate close, careful and accurate reading of the materials. It should discuss the passage or theme, its meaning and significance for the issues of the course as well as your own assessment of and reactions to the argument. *Do not try and say everything about the various readings from the course. It is always better to focus on a narrow point and deal with it clearly and completely, rather than trying to say something about a broad range of topics and deal with them clumsily and superficially.*

Final Paper

Undergraduates must write a final paper of 8-10 pages; graduate students must write a final paper of 15-20 pages. The final paper must frame an argument in response to themes that are relevant to the course. *Proposals for the final paper are due before class on April 12. The paper is due by noon on Thursday, May 12.*

Book Review

Graduate students must submit a 3-4 page book review. The book may be by an author considered in the course, but not read in the course, or a book that is thematically related to the course. The book must be approved by one of the instructors.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Undergraduates:	Analysis Papers:	60% (20% each)
	Final Paper:	40%
Graduate Students:	Analysis Papers:	40% (10% each)
	Final Paper:	50%
	Book Review:	10%

GRADING CRITERIA

In grading your assignments, we will use the following criteria:

- (1) Is the work satisfactory as an *expository* exercise? Does it accurately characterize the material under consideration? Does it select the most relevant and important ideas from the materials in relation to the student's central claim(s)? Does it offer a sympathetic reading of ideas with which it disagrees? Does it consider a sufficient range of sources?
- (2) Is the work satisfactory as an *analytical* exercise? Does it have a clear thesis or central claim(s)? Is the writing articulated and organized in a persuasive manner? Does it show evidence of the student's voice, of a personal intellectual engagement beyond summary of the author's claims? Does it show an understanding of the questions, themes and ideas pursued in the course? Does it demonstrate insight into the materials beyond class discussion?
- (3) Is the work satisfactory as a *writing* exercise? Is it free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors? Does it provide accurate and adequate citations? Does it demonstrate some attention to rhetorical stylization?

With respect to grammar, style and citation form, students should follow Turabian's *Manual of Style*, 7th ed. With respect to citation form, students should consult the examples in the Department of Religious Studies' writing guidelines (www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/research/writingguide.htm). You may use either footnotes or parenthetical citations, but should use the form accurately and consistently.

Remember, you will not be in the room with your reader: what you put on the page must be a clear, complete and precise statement of your ideas.

Finally, 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.

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

- A** Exceptional work. Shows very close attention to the materials under discussion. General observations supported by specific details from the materials under analysis. Selection of the most relevant and intriguing moments from the texts. Contains a strong and clear thesis. Contributes something 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 details of the materials under discussion. Conversant with the themes, questions and issues of the course. Has an obvious main point around which the entire paper is organized. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence from the film. Selection of passages and ideas from the texts well-chosen. Clear and well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. May fail to pay attention to important features of the materials under discussion. May fail to show comprehension of the themes, questions and issues of the course. May have an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may proceed at too general a level. Writing may be unclear in places, lack a clear organizational structure or have numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis proceeds at a very general level, gets significant details wrong, or ignores issues that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the readings from the course or issues raised in class discussion. Significant problems with the clarity or organization of the writing. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of 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 show up to class, work hard on your assignments and improve your work over the course of the semester, we will take that into consideration when translating your individual assignment grades into a course grade.*