

**RELS 4000.003/5000.003**  
**SEX|DEATH|RELIGION**  
**Thursday, 6:30-9:15**  
**Macy 110**

**Kent L. Brintnall, [kbrintna@uncc.edu](mailto:kbrintna@uncc.edu)**  
**Office Hours: Wed., 2-3PM, or by appointment**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The sacred has been a central category of interpretation and analysis in the study of religion, but sexuality has not. Both the sacred and the sexual, however, are frequently described as disruptive and dangerous, while simultaneously alluring and tantalizing. Both have been associated with pleasure, ecstasy and joy as well as with violence, trauma and death. Both have been assigned importance in understanding the organization of culture, the distribution of prestige and the constitution of the self. Why are they so frequently described in such similar terms, while often—especially in our contemporary moment—understood as oppositional? What insights can be gained about the nature of society, subjectivity and power by exploring the structural similarities in descriptions of religious and erotic experience?

This course is organized around an observation and an intuition. The observation: various accounts of the sacred—and its dangerous otherness—bear a striking resemblance to psychoanalytic accounts of the (death) drive and contemporary articulations of the disruptive force of erotic desire. The intuition: something generative can be gained by thinking these seemingly disparate accounts of supposedly distinct phenomena together. By thinking about the fundamental sameness of religion, death and sexuality, we may gain insight into the significance of alterity, transgression, rupture and negativity for our sense of self and social order. Additionally (or, alternatively), we may come to understand that religion and sexuality are more alike than they are different and that their similarity is to be found in their fundamental violence—and that this *self-shattering* violence has the ability to overcome the alienating, instrumentalizing, *other-shattering* violence that comprises various forms of oppression, exclusion, degradation and hatred.

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY

***To succeed in this course, you must be proactive.*** This includes both doing the work outlined in the syllabus and taking initiative if problems arise. If you do not understand the material or my expectations, if life is impinging on you in some way, or if my teaching style is not working for you, please let me know. I will do what I can to help, but I am completely unable to remedy the situation if I do not know there is a problem.

***I want every student in this class to succeed.*** In selecting readings, crafting assignments, and setting a schedule, I have tried to create a framework that will help you do your best work. In presenting material, articulating expectations, and responding to assignments, I strive to be as clear as I can. I will not, however, hunt you down, or pester you, to make sure you are doing the required work.

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

You 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 all course requirements; and (6) check your NinerMail account regularly for communications from the instructor.

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

## 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 I observe you text-messaging during class, I will ask you to leave class and it will be counted as an absence. (3) Computers may be used during class only to take notes or read electronic-reserve readings. If I observe you using your computer for any other purpose, you will be asked to leave class, it will be counted as an absence, ***and it will jeopardize use of computers for the remainder of the semester for all students in the course.***

## E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with you as a class and as individuals using your NinerMail (university e-mail) account. You are responsible for checking this account regularly and responding promptly to any requests.

## **CLASS PREPARATION**

Because this course focuses on close, critical analysis of difficult texts, you will need to devote sufficient time to preparing for class both to contribute to discussion and to do well on assignments. You must read carefully prior to class taking note of the ideas and questions you want to bring to our collective conversation. You should make sure, at a minimum, that you can summarize the author's main point(s), the evidence marshaled, the chief rhetorical strategies employed and any notable short-comings. You should familiarize yourself with new vocabulary and investigate the relevant historical, cultural and intellectual background.

You should come to class having identified a few passages that struck you as particularly interesting, troubling, puzzling or generative. You should be prepared to discuss your reasons for selecting these passages and to guide your classmates through a consideration of the passage in relation both to the readings as a whole and the themes and questions of the course. ***All members of the class—students and instructor alike—are responsible for understanding, explaining, analyzing and teaching the material under discussion.***

We will not have time to discuss fully all of the assigned reading during class time, but our collective consideration of the material will give you practice at engaging these texts, enhancing your ability to explore the materials more carefully and thoughtfully on your own. Our class meetings are an opportunity to deepen your understanding of, ask questions of, and develop ideas about the readings, as well as improve your strategies and skills for analyzing them. Your written work provides the opportunity to demonstrate, develop and deepen this engagement.

## **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, you are responsible for getting any announcements, lecture notes, handouts or assignments.

The exception to this policy is absences necessitated by religious observance. You may miss two classes for religious observance, but you must provide me with written notice (which includes e-mail correspondence) of the class you will be missing for this reason no later than **Friday, January 20.**

## **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](http://www.ds.uncc.edu)).

## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Consistent with the University's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my 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, body size, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus.

As a sign of this respect, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should, at the very least, use gender-inclusive language and strive to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic racial, ethnic, class, sexual or (dis)ability connotations.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986 [1957]).

Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992 [1948]).

Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1990 [1920]).

Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000 [1905]).

Additional course readings are available through Atkins Library's electronic course reserves: <http://library.uncc.edu/caos/coursreserve>.

***Please bring the relevant readings to each class session.***

## **SCHEDULE**

### **8.23 INTRODUCTION TO COURSE**

#### **SACRED/PROFANE**

### **8.30 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 1-44, 84-98.**

Michèle Richman, *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1-65 (electronic Reserve).

### **9.6 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 190-41, 303-54, 418-48.**

- 9.13** Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1987 [1957]), 8-65 (electronic reserve)
- Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1959 [1939]), 19-59, 97-127 (electronic reserve).
- 9.20** Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 7-58 (electronic reserve).
- Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]), 1-18, 56-73, 90-112 (electronic reserve).
- 9.27** Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 17-61.
- Georges Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion I" and "Attraction and Repulsion II," in *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, 103-25, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1938]) (electronic reserve)
- Georges Bataille, "The College of Sociology," in *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, 333-41, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 [1939]) (electronic reserve)

## **SEX|DEATH**

- 10.4** Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*
- \*\*\*ANALYSIS PAPER DUE by noon, Saturday, October 6.**
- 10.11** Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*
- Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Principle of Masochism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 159-70 (London: Hogarth, 1961 [1924]) (electronic reserve).
- 10.18** Bersani, *Freudian Body*, 29-78.
- Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (1987): 197-222 (electronic reserve).

**10.25** Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* 1 (2002): 11-31 (electronic reserve)

Leo Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 641-56 (electronic reserve).

Leo Bersani, "Shame on You," *After Sex?*, ed. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, 91-109 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011 [2008]) (electronic reserve).

**11.1** Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 134-73, 269-79 (electronic reserve).

Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), ix-xiii, 48-96, 176-212 (electronic reserve).

**11.8** Bataille, *Erotism*, 7-146.

**\*\*\*PROPOSALS for FINAL PAPER DUE before class on November 8.**

**11.15** Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, 116-30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985 [1933]) (electronic reserve).

Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," in *Visions of Excess*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, 61-72 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985 [1930]) (electronic reserve).

Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. I: Consumption, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1949]), 9-41 (electronic reserve).

Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. II: History of Eroticism and vol. III: Sovereignty, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1955]), 187-235 (electronic reserve).

**11.22 THANKSGIVING – No Class**

**11.29** Edelman, *No Future*, 1-109.

Recommended: Lee Edelman, "Ever After," in *After Sex?*, ed. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, 110-18 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) (electronic reserve).

**\*\*\*ANALYSIS PAPER DUE by noon, Saturday, December 1.**

**\*\*\*FINAL MEETING – Thursday, December 13, 8:00-10:30PM**

**\*\*\*FINAL PAPER DUE by noon, Saturday, December 15.**

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

You must submit all assignments by e-mail (kbrintna@uncc.edu). If I am unable to open your attachment, I will notify you. If you do not submit a readable version within 24 hours, I will grade the paper at my discretion. All assignments must be double-spaced, in a 12-point font, with one-inch margins and no extra spaces between paragraphs. ***No late papers will be accepted.***

### **Expository Papers**

You must submit **four (4)** 1-2 page expository papers over the course of the semester. These papers should focus on a single reading and must be submitted before class on the day the reading is assigned. (For example, an expository essay on Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* would be due before class on September 13.) Two of these papers must be submitted on or before September 27; the other two must be submitted after September 27. These papers should summarize the reading's main idea and explain the argument that supports it. A strong expository paper will provide a concise, clear and complete summary of the author's ideas. These papers should not move beyond summary to critique or interrogation; the skill you should be practicing is the skill of accurate and adequate summary of an argument.

### **Analysis Papers**

You must submit **two (2)** 4-6 page analysis papers over the course of the semester. One of these papers is due October 6; the other is due December 1. These papers must do more than summarize the readings; they must develop an argument, raise a question, generate an idea or explain an insight in relation to the course materials. These papers may explain the value of an author's idea(s), express disagreement with an author's idea(s), or defend an author's approach against criticism. They may also place authors in conversation. Or, you may use these papers to place course material in conversation with an experience, phenomenon or text from outside the course. You must, however, select a topic that will allow you to give close, careful attention to course materials and questions.

### **Final Paper**

Undergraduates must write a final paper of 12-15 pages; graduate students must write a final paper of 15-20 pages. ***Proposals for the final paper are due before class on November 8. Final papers are due by noon on Saturday, December 15.*** The final paper must frame an argument relevant to the course's themes and questions. You should not attempt to discuss all of the authors and readings considered in class; you should instead identify a specific idea, question or theme that is interesting to you and then develop it in relation to the most pertinent course materials.

### **Book Review**

Graduate students must submit a 3-4 page book review. ***These reviews are due on or before Thursday, November 29.*** The book must be by or about an author considered in the course, but which is not an assigned text for the course. Students should consult a major journal in their field (e.g., the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*) for questions about format, content and style.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

### Undergraduates

Expository Papers:	30%
Analysis Papers:	30%
Final paper:	40%

### Graduate Students

Expository Papers:	20%
Analysis Papers:	20%
Final paper:	50%
Book Review:	10%

## NOTE ON GRADES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The range of grades used in graduate courses at UNC Charlotte is A (commendable), B (satisfactory), C (marginal), and U (unsatisfactory). Most A-level undergraduate work is B-level graduate work. At the graduate level, a B indicates you must refine and develop your skills to succeed in the academy. A C indicates serious deficiencies in the skills essential to success; it is the equivalent of a D or F in undergraduate study. One final grade of C automatically generates a written warning from the Graduate School Dean and may prevent you from pursuing further graduate work. A second C is sufficient grounds for permanent dismissal from the graduate program. The receipt of a single U in any graduate course while at UNC Charlotte results in immediate academic suspension, which effectively ends your graduate career at this institution.

## GRADING

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

- (1) Is the work satisfactory as an *expository* exercise? Does it summarize accurately the material under consideration? Does it give attention to the most relevant and important ideas? Does it characterize fairly and engage sympathetically 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 it expressed and organized in a persuasive manner? Does it evince intellectual engagement beyond summation and exposition? Does it engage questions, themes and ideas relevant to the course? Does it extend consideration of course 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 attention to rhetorical stylization?

Ideally, your work will open up some new dimension of—i.e., teach me something about—the material. At a minimum, it must summarize the materials accurately, clearly and completely and present an analysis (evaluation, critique, application, extension) that engages the course's themes and questions.



Ideally, your writing will be absolutely free of spelling, grammar, stylistic and citation mistakes. Your reader cannot engage your ideas if she or he is distracted by problems in your writing. ***If I find myself spending too much time copy-editing your work, I will deduct a letter grade, return it without comment and give you 24 hours to submit a revised version. If I find spelling errors that could have been caught by spell-check, I will give the paper a U and return it without comment.***

You must follow Kate L. Turabian's *Manual of Style*, 7th ed., or the *MLA Style Manual*, 7th ed., for questions of grammar, style and citation form.

Two additional style rules that apply to assignments for this course:

- (1) Do not use "you" in formal writing.  
Incorrect: "This passage in Irigaray makes you aware of your body."  
Correct: "This passage in Irigaray makes the reader aware of her body."  
(Note that this version forces the writer to think about the identity of the reader: would male-identified readers have the same bodily experience as female-identified readers?)
- (2) Do not use contractions in formal writing.

Your writing should privilege depth over breadth. It is better to address a small point, and do it well, than to try something grand, and do it superficially. There is no expectation, in this class or the world, that you be exhaustive. Instead, you should frame a question well, engage texts attentively, represent others' ideas accurately, explain your own thinking clearly, and write in an engaging, rhetorically sensitive manner.

You should consider issues beyond proofreading and clarity of expression. You should also think about form and style. You should be attentive to how you organize an essay, how you begin and end a paper, how you express yourself (from word choice to examples to quotations to metaphors), and how you vary the length and complexity of sentences and paragraphs. While I do not expect you to imitate the style(s) of authors from this course in any specific way, you should pay attention to what you like and dislike in their writing, what you think works and what you think fails, and try to incorporate that knowledge into your own writing. In other words, you should read course materials not only to gain ideas, but also to glean insights about how you want to express ideas.

***Remember, you will not be in the room when I am reading your work: 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**

Grades are not a judgment on you as a person or an evaluation of your *overall* capacity to perform academic work. They are a way of communicating how one particular assignment reflects analytical skills and writing ability with respect to a specific set of materials and questions.

- A** Exceptional work. Evinces exhaustive preparation and thoughtful engagement in every aspect of the assignment. Careful, accurate, complete, sympathetic interpretation of material and presentation of ideas. General observations supported by specific, concrete detail. Contains a strong, clear thesis. Contributes something interesting, unique or creative beyond class discussion. Clear, well-organized writing free of grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- B** Strong work. Attentive to the most significant details of the material under consideration. Conversant with the course's themes and questions. Expresses an obvious main point. Presents a reasonable interpretation supported by sufficient evidence. Clear, well-organized writing free of serious grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- C** Acceptable work with some problems. May fail to attend to important features of the material under discussion. May fail to address the course's themes and questions. May have an unclear or unsupported thesis. Analysis may be too general or superficial. Writing may be unclear, disorganized or have numerous grammatical, spelling and stylistic errors.
- D** Work with serious problems. Analysis is very general, gets significant details wrong, or ignores details that are inconsistent with the paper's main point. Discussion fails to engage the readings or the course's themes. Significant problems with clarity or organization. Significant issues with grammar, spelling or style. Repetition of errors noted in prior papers.
- F** Unacceptable work.

***If you come to class, participate in discussion, demonstrate a commitment to doing well 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.***