

Religion 230

Sex, drugs RoCk & roll And Religion

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:10-12:30, Ladd 206

Office Hours: Monday, 11:30-12:30; Wednesday, 1-2, Ladd 215

Or by appointment

The Structure:

This course is based in the processes of dialogue - between the texts we read, the cultures we know, and with each other.

Getting in touch:

Come to my office hours, or e-mail me at msegol@skidmore.edu

Required Texts:

1. *The Symposium* (Penguin Classics): Plato, Christopher Gill: Books. ... 2003)
2. Ariel and Chana Bloch: *Song of Songs*
3. *Augustine's Confessions*: Oxford World Classics
4. Gilbert Rouget: *Music and Trance*, University Of Chicago Press
5. Aldous Huxley *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*
6. Abraham Maslow: *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, Penguin
7. Coursepack, distributed in class. Please note that every required reading that does not come from the sources above will be found in the coursepack.

Course Description:

This course will explore sexuality and ecstasy, the ritual use of intoxicants, and music and trance in religious life. These present opportunities for psychically and physically intense experiences, and they can induce transpersonal and ecstatic states, as well as those of euphoria, harmonization and interconnectedness, sometimes called ‘peak’ and ‘flow’ experiences. We’ll look at how peak and flow experiences are generated by these means, how religious institutions authorize or sanction those practices, and the ways in which they are integrated into religious canons, rituals, and lives.

Course Requirements:

- 1. Attendance.** Attendance is required. You will lose points after three absences, and if you miss seven or more classes, you will fail.
- 2. Reading.** You are required to do ALL of the reading for this course. You will be accountable for it in a variety of ways throughout the term, including informed class participation, reading questions, and contribution to class discussion.
- 3. Class participation: (10 points)** Class participation is a must. I will lecture for about half of each class, while the remainder of most meetings will consist of structured class discussion. You will be graded on your informed participation.
- 4. Writing Assignments:** I’ve assigned seven reflection papers of 2-3 pages, worth seven points apiece (50% total, one extra point for having completed all of them)
- 5. Paper Proposal (5%)**
- 6. In-depth analysis paper (35%) Due May 3 for seniors, May 6 for non-seniors.**

Readings

1/25: Intro: defining religion, and transcendence in it.

A. Theorizing Peaks & Flows in Religion:

1/27

- 1) Berger, Peter: Cakes for the Queen of Heaven
- 2) Lincoln, Holy Terrors, pp 5-8

2/1

- 3) Maslow: Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences. Chs 3, 4, and Appendix A

2/3

- 4) Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1987). The flow experience. In M. Eliade (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Vol. 5, pp. 361-363). New York: Macmillan

- 5) Walter John Carl: Flow - A Theory of Optimal Experience: History and Critical Evaluation

Assignment 1: What are peak and flow experiences? How are they produced? Why might they be religious experiences?

B. Sex, Love, Warm Fuzzies, and Theology

2/8

- 1) Plato's Symposium: read Intro, Phaedrus, Pausanias

2/10

- 2) Symposium cont'd, Aristophanes, Agathon,

2/15

- 3) Socrates

Assignment 2 (due 2/17) What is the point of love, according to Plato's Symposium?

2/17

- 4) Ariel and Chana Bloch: Introduction and chapters 1-3

2/22

- 5) Song of Songs, Chapters 4-8

- 6) Boyarin: Carnal Israel

2/24

- 7) Augustine's confessions: Oxford World classics, books 2, chapters 1-3
book 3: chapters 1-5

3/1

- 8) 10 chs 26-34

Assignment 3 (due 3/1) Consider the purpose of sexuality and love in the *Song of Songs* and *Augustine's Confessions*. Use Boyarin's article to compare the authors' attitudes toward them.

3/3

- 9) Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God

- 10) Mira Bai

3/8

- 11) Stephen Hopkins "Extravagant Beholding"

Assignment 4 (due 3/11): Use Stephen Hopkins' article to discuss the theological function of viewing the beloved (and of descriptions of viewing the beloved) in the sources we've read for this unit.

March 12-20: Spring Break

C. Drugs: Sacred Intoxication:

3/21

- 1) Huston-Smith: Do Drugs Have Religious Import?

3/23-8

- 2) Aldous Huxley: Doors of Perception

Question to consider: Are there religious aspects to Huxley's experience? If so, what are they and what is the best way to characterize them? If not, explain why they do not fit into the category of religious experience.

3/31

- 3) Hymn to Demeter
- 4) Road to Eluesis Chapter 2: Albert Hoffman: "A Challenging Question and my Answer"
- 5) Rouget: Music and Trance Among the Greeks: pp 188-206

4/5

- 6) The Soma
- 7) Wasson: what was the Soma of the Aryans? pp 201-13

Paper proposals due (4/5) and:

Start thinking about Assignment 5: So far, what is the answer to Huston-Smith's question? And to what extent does the manner of cultivating the experience determine its value?

4/7

- 8) Robert Fuller: from the plant kingdom to the Kingdom of God (Stairways to Heaven, pp 1-16)
- 9) Do Drugs Have Religious Import: A 40-year retrospective
- 10) Review article by Benny Shannon: The Divine Within

Assignment 5 (due 4/12): What is the answer to Huston-Smith's question? And to what extent does the manner of cultivating the experience determine its value?

D. Rock 'n' Roll: Singing, Dancing, Ecstasy

4/12

- 1) Gilbert Rouget, Music and Trance, chapter 1: "Trance and Possession"
- 2) Watch: Zar Dance

4/14

- 3) Watch: Les Maitres Fou: The Mad Masters
- 4) Rouget, chapter 2, Music and Possession

4/19

- 5) Rouget, ch 3, pp 126-38; conclusion, pp 315-21
- 6) From Deadhead Social Science: Jennifer Hartley: "We Were Given this Dance" plus video

Assignment 6: Use Rouget's terminology to describe the events depicted in the videos, the *Zar Dance*, and *The Mad Masters*, and in *Deadhead Social Science*. You will need to take careful in-class notes to do this.

4/21

- 7) Rave Culture and Religion, Ch4. 'Connectedness' and the Rave Experience: Rave as New Religious Movement? *Tim Olaveson*
- 8) I. M. Lewis: Trance Possession, Shamanism, and Sex

4/26

- 9) <http://athousandtongues.com/2008/09/29/straight-edge-a-hardcore-religion-by-joshua-guilbeau/>
- 10) Straight Edge: Clean Living Youth, Hardcore Punk, and Social Change, Introduction
- 11) Devin Landry's senior thesis: Voices of Protest and Purity: Straight Edge and its Relationship to American Health Religion

Assignment 7 (due 4/27): Compare Rave and Straight Edge on the basis of the categories outlined in Trance Possession, Shamanism, and Sex, and other relevant theoretical models such as Rouget's work.

4/28

- 12) Watch: The Taqwacores

5/3

Wrap-up

Final Assignment: Essay: 7-8 pages

Question: How do trance, ecstatic, and transcendent experiences become religious experiences? How do they gain religious significance and under what circumstances?

Directions:

1. Choose a source on these experiences, from this class or outside it.
2. Use in-class theoretical readings to describe this experience.
3. Use in-class readings to answer this question about it.