

# Religion and the Senses

Religion 110 | Whitman College | Fall 2018

Professor Lauren Osborne

M-W-F 10-10:50AM | Olin 205

**Email:** [osbornle@whitman.edu](mailto:osbornle@whitman.edu)

**Office:** Hunter 304

**Office Hours:** Mondays and Tuesdays, 2:30-3:45

**Course Writing Assistant:** Izzy Sherwood-Reid, sherwoif@whitman.edu

**Course Description:** Looking across a range of religious traditions, this course examines the modes of the human senses in relation to religious experience, drawing on both primary and secondary literature. We will ask such questions as: are the senses acting as a means allowing for perception of the divine, or some kind of experience or contact? Are they a medium for self-discipline, in either a positive sense through the cultivation of a pious self, or negatively, through denial? Are the senses serving as a metaphor, and, if so, to what end? We will also interrogate the boundaries and relationships between senses. In doing so, this course serves as an introduction to the academic study of religion, through the particular lens of humans' experience of the world as mediated through the body and perception. Open only to first- and second-year students.

## Course Objectives:

Through our discussions and students' independent written work, students will learn to:

- recognize and explore the various positions and roles taken on by sense perception in religious texts and religious experiences.
- read religious texts closely, and formulate rich questions about a specific topic or idea within those texts.
- develop a vocabulary and set of questions for understanding meaning in sense experience, particularly in a religious context.

## Required Texts:

Most of our readings consist of excerpts taken from larger works, and will therefore be available as pdfs on CLEo. We will be reading substantial portions of the following texts, which means they will be available for purchase at the bookstore and on reserve in hard copy at the library, and will not be available via the CLEo site.

- *The Song of Songs: The World's First Great Love Poem*, translated by Ariel and Chana Bloch. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Constance Classen. *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Diana Eck. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

### **Assignments and assessment:**

**2-3 page paper on St. Augustine (15% of final grade): Due 9/17.** For the first writing assignment in this class, I will post a question on CLEo that will direct your reading of St. Augustine's chapter on memory. This short essay will be graded on clarity of writing, understanding and use of the text, and the depth of consideration of the question.

**Sense experience essay (10% of final grade): Due 11/16, 3-5 pages.** This is a reflective essay on your own observation of sensory experience in the religious ritual of a tradition other than your own. Attend and observe a ritual or service of a local religious group (this can be a local congregation or a campus religious organization; the list of campus and local organizations is linked from our CLEo site). Graded on depth of engagement with both the event and our course readings, as well as clarity of writing.

The purpose of the assignment is for you to observe a religious ritual or event of some kind, taking the perspective of an outside observer. Take thorough notes on what you observe, either during the service/ritual or shortly thereafter if taking notes during the service would be disruptive. What do you see, hear, smell, etc? Does the service or the experience of it seem to be revolving around perception through one of more senses in particular? What parts of the service highlight sense experience and how? Your essay will consist of a short reflection on the roles of the senses (or if you would like to focus on one sense in particular, that is fine) in this service, providing a thick description of the context (location, group, tradition), events (what happened? Who did what?), and what the sense experiences involves.

I advise you to select an event or organization that is of interest to you as early as possible. Should you choose to attend an event early in the term, it would be best for you to write this paper shortly thereafter, in which case, I would invite you to submit it early (but please note that I will grade all the assignments at once in order to be consistent in my evaluation, so if you do submit early you will have to wait before receiving feedback, unfortunately).

**Song of Songs close reading paper (20% of final grade): Due 10/1, 4-5 pages.** Your first major written assignment will consist of a close reading essay on *The Song of Songs*, which we will be discussing for one week of class. You may draw on the theoretical texts we are also reading in the first unit, although this is not necessary. It is crucial to note that although this is a close reading paper, it must be argument driven. Select a short passage for close examination, or a theme that runs throughout the work, and provide an argument-driven close reading thereof.

For this assignment, you will be required to meet individually with our course writing assistant, Izzy Sherwood-Reid. Izzy will contact you to set up times to meet in order to discuss a draft of the paper. Failure to fulfill this portion of the assignment (i.e., if you do not meet with Izzy and discuss a draft) will result in a grade reduction of one fraction of a letter grade for the paper.

**Integrative essays (2, each worth 20% of the total course grade): Due 11/16 and 12/14, each 4-5 pages.** Twice in the semester, you will be asked to compose an argument-driven essay focusing on prompts related to our course readings and discussions. Prompts will be posted on CLEo in advance of the deadlines. The second integrative essay will be in lieu of a final exam.

|                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Participation                | 15% of final course grade |
| 2 page essay on Augustine    | 15%                       |
| Song of Songs essay          | 20%                       |
| Sense experience essay       | 10%                       |
| Integrative essays (2 total) | 20% each                  |

### **Class Policies:**

- Each student will be expected to attend class having read the assignment beforehand so as to participate in discussion to the best of their ability. Additionally, always bring each day's readings to class.
- Be mindful of your use of technology in class. You may use computers/tablets in class (do not use your phones in class, though), but do keep in mind that technology can often act as a barrier to conversation and meaningful participation in the classroom, however, so I ask you to limit your use of technology to the readings and examples for our class only. If I notice what appears to be deep engagement with a technological device, I will likely make a deliberate effort to bring you back in to the class discussion (i.e., cold calling).
- Participation is worth 15% of the final course grade. I will occasionally lecture on background for some of the readings, but much of the class will be discussion-driven. It is absolutely crucial that students have a copy of that day's reading in front of them. Participation is not graded on quantity of questions/comments, but rather, quality. Valuable participation is that which demonstrates critical engagement with the texts we have read for that day. Class attendance is obviously a key component of participation. I don't take attendance but I do notice when a student is absent, and make a note of it. I understand that you may need to miss class 1-2 times for various reasons (illness, etc., in which case I always appreciate an email letting me know); missing class beyond that will negatively affect your participation grade. Excused absences (for college-approved reasons such as sports or religious observance) must be communicated to me in advance.
- All written assignments must be written in clear, grammatically correct prose and follow standard formatting (1-1.5" margins, 12 point standard font such as Times New Roman or Calibri, double spacing). Assignments must be submitted

in Word or PDF format; NO PAGES FILES, please. Clear and complete citations must be provided in every piece of written work. Personally, I prefer Chicago Style, and there is a handy quick guide available online here:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

- Written work must be turned in via CLEo on the day it is due; late assignments will only be accepted when there are significant extenuating circumstances (eg. medical or family issues) that are communicated to me in advance. In the event of an extension (depending on the timeline), I may not be able to return your work at the same time as that of the rest of the class; I'll do my best, however.
- Late written work (for which you have not been granted an extension in advance of the deadline) will be graded down one grade percentage per day (eg., A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, etc.). Assignments that are more than 7 days past due will not be accepted.
- It is your responsibility to make sure written work reaches me on the day it is due; if you have any doubts about the reliability of technology, feel free to email me to confirm that your paper arrived, or simply hand in a hard copy in addition to the electronic version.
- All written work must be your own; if you have any questions about academic honesty, please feel free to ask me. Any assignment in which I find plagiarism will receive a failing grade. A second occurrence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the college.
- All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class.

### **Readings and Schedule (subject to change):**

\* indicates a reading that is provided as a pdf or link on CLEo.

#### **Week 1**

W 8/29            Course introduction

#### **Beginnings: Comparison and the Senses in the Academic Study of Religion**

F 8/31            Doniger, Wendy. Excerpt from *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.\*

#### **Week 2**

M 9/3            Classen, Constance. "Introduction" and "The Scented Womb and the Seminal Eye: Embodying Gender Codes through the Senses," in *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination*. London: Routledge, 1998. Pages 1-10 and 63-85.

W 9/5            "Body" and "Experience" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*\*

F 9/7            Plate, S. Brent. "The Skin of Religion: Aesthetic Mediations of the Sacred." *CrossCurrents* 62 no. 2 (2012): 162-180.\*

### Week 3

#### Reading the Senses in Religious Texts

M 9/10 St. Augustine. "Memory." In *The Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pages 179-220.\*

W 9/12 St. Augustine, cont.

F 9/14 *Song of Songs*

### Week 4

#### Monday 9/17 2-3 pages on Augustine due via CLEo

M 9/17 *Song of Songs*, cont.

Alter, Robert. Excerpt from *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 2011. Pages 231-254.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/penrose/reader.action?docID=10495109&ppg=1>\*

W 9/19 *Song of Songs*, cont.

F 9/21 Falk, Marcia, trans. *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004. Excerpts on Falk's webpage, linked here and from CLEo. Please read both the excerpts and the translator's commentaries that are linked from that page. <http://www.marciafalk.com/songs1.html> (Bring your Alter translation to class, as we will be comparing the two editions.)

Discussion of *The Song of Songs* close reading paper assignment.

### Week 5

#### Individual meetings with Izzy Sherwood-Reid on *Song of Songs* papers during this week.

#### Sight

M 9/24 Eck, Diana. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Chapters 1-2.

W 9/26 St. John of Damascus, "First Apology," in *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*. Translated by David Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. Pages 13-33.\*

F 9/28 Visit to St. Silouan Orthodox Church

### Week 6

#### Monday 10/1 *Song of Songs* papers due via CLEo by 5PM.

M 10/1        Eck, Diana. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Chapter 3.

W 10/3        Scheifinger, Heinz. "The Jagannath Temple and Online Darshan." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24, no. 3 (October 1, 2009): 277–90.\*

Mallapragada, Madhavi. "Desktop Deities: Hindu Temples, Online Cultures and the Politics of Remediation." *South Asian Popular Culture* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 109–21.\*

### October Break 10/4-5

#### Smell

#### Week 7

M 10/8        Classen, Constance. "The Breath of God: Sacred Histories of Scent." In *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination*. London: Routledge, 1998. Pages 36-60.\*

W 10/10       Corbin, Alain. "Introduction" and "Air and the Threat of the Putrid," and "Social Emanations." In *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. New York: Berg, 1986. Pages 1-21 and 35-56.\*

F 10/12       Corbin, cont.

#### Week 8

M 10/15       Excerpt from Green, Deborah A. *The Aroma of Righteousness: Scent and Seduction in Rabbinic Life and Literature*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011.\*

#### Taste

W 10/17       Sack, Daniel. Excerpts from *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.\*

F 10/19       Sack, cont.;

Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Pleasures of the Proximate Senses: Eating, Taste, and Culture." In *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Pages 226-234.\*

#### Week 9

M 10/22       Excerpt from David M. Freidenreich. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.\*

### Tuesday 10/23 First Integrative Essay due

W 10/24       Rumi, Jallaluddin. Selections from the poems in *Rumi: Swallowing the Sun. Poems Translated from the Persian*. Translated by Franklin D. Lewis. Oxford:

Oneworld, 2008.\* “The Mother of fasting” (Ghazal 2375), “Close your mouth to bread” (Ghazal 2307)\*

Selected poems from *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*. Translated by Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.\*

Bynum, Caroline W. Excerpt from *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.\*

## **Touch**

F 10/26        Roberts, Mary Nooter. “Tactility and Transcendence: Epistemologies of Touch in African Arts and Spiritualities.” In *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, edited by David Morgan. New York: Routledge, 2010.\*

## **Week 10**

M 10/29        Lucia, Amanda. *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. Pages 37-75.\*

W 10/31        Hood, Ralph W. and William Paul Williamson, *Them That Believe: The Power and Meaning of the Christian Serpent-Handling Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Pages 1-12, 79-101 (skim this chapter if you’re especially interested, but our discussion with focus primarily on the other two portions), and 132-156.\*

F 11/2        Excerpts from Classen, Constance, ed. *The Book of Touch*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.\*

## **Hearing**

## **Week 11**

M 11/5        Corbin, Alain. “Identity, Bells, and the Nineteenth-Century French Village.” In *Hearing History: A Reader*. Edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. Pages 184-204.\*

W 11/7        Lee, Tong Soon. “Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore.” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (Winter, 1999). Pages 86-100.\*

F 11/9        Classen, Constance. “McLuhan in the Rainforest: The Sensory Worlds of Oral Cultures.” In *Empire of the Senses*, edited by David Howes. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Pages 147-163.

## **Week 12**

M 11/12        Graham, William. Excerpt from *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.\*

**Friday 11/16 Sense Experience Essay due**

## Disability and Difference

W 11/14 and F 11/16: NO CLASS. I will be away conducting interviews for a new faculty position. While I am away, in lieu of class time, watch the following interview with Nashiru Abdulai, who started the Global Deaf Muslim organization:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2014/01/nashiru-abdulai-needs-deaf-muslims-2014124131926756911.html>

## Thanksgiving Break 11/19-23

### Week 13

M 11/26 Broesterhuizen, Marcel. 2005. "Faith in Deaf Culture." *Theological Studies* 66 no 2 Je 2005, p 304-329.\*

W 11/28 Otieno, Pauline. "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability." *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* 29, 2009.\*

F 11/30 Sacks, Oliver. "The Mind's Eye: What the Blind See." In *The Empire of the Senses*. Edited by David Howes. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Pages 25-42.\*

### Week 14

M 12/3 Nabokov, Vladimir. Excerpt from *Speak, Memory*. New York: Random House, 1989.\*

Howes, David and Constance Classen. "Synaesthesia Unravelled: The Union of the Senses from a Cultural Perspective." In *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Pages 152-174.\*

W 12/5 Classen, Constance. "Natural Wits: The Sensory Skills of 'Wild Children'." In *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Pages 37-49.\*

Desjarlais, Robert. "Movement, Stillness: On the Sensory World of a Shelter for the 'Homeless Mentally Ill'." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Edited by David Howes. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Pages 369-379.\*

F 12/7 Seremetakis, C. Nadia. Excerpts from *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Pages 1-43.\*

**Friday 12/14 Second integrative essay due (in lieu of a final exam)**