

Religion 287: Queer Religiosities
Professor Melissa M. Wilcox
MTTh 11:00-11:50, Olin 343
Whitman College
Spring 2007

Office: Olin 183
Office phone: 527-5247
E-mail: wilcoxmm@whitman.edu

Office hours: W 1:30-3:30
Reid hours: M 1:30-3:30
(If you can't make these times, see me
for an appointment)

Course summary and goals

This course offers a unique opportunity to examine religion from a queer perspective, exploring the ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people have created religious spaces for themselves in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We'll begin with a brief historical overview of the development of LGBTQ communities in the U.S., then hone in on the rich variety of religious developments that have taken place in such communities since the 1960s. Course readings include historical, autobiographical, sociological, and theological discussions of religion and spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ people, and the course concludes with an examination of the sociological studies of queer religiosities that have been conducted over the past fifteen years. At the end of the semester, I hope you will have gained a sense of the vast diversity of religious beliefs and practices in queer communities, an appreciation of how people grapple with religious challenges to their identities, an understanding of the formation of breakaway, "identity-focused" religious organizations, and—perhaps most importantly—an alternative perspective to that most often promulgated in the media by heterosexual religious leaders. Since this course assumes a queer-positive perspective, it is advisable that students not take the class if they feel unable to try out such a perspective for at least the duration of the course.

Required texts:

- Thumma, Scott and Edward Gray, eds., *Gay Religion* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 2004).
- Debra R. Kolodny, ed., *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000).
- David Shneer and Caryn Aviv, eds., *Queer Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, eds., *Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1997).

Additional reading assignments will be posted on the CLEo site for this course. All course books will be on reserve in Penrose, and you are welcome to share books with a classmate in order to keep your expenses down.

Course requirements

Your grade in this course will be calculated as follows:

Attendance, preparation, and participation.....	15%
Midterm.....	25%
Term project proposal.....	5%
Term project.....	25%
Final exam.....	30%

Remember to keep all papers I return to you in case there are any discrepancies at the end of the semester. If you keep your papers, you can also track your own grade!

Attendance, preparation, and participation: Since this course relies partly on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Please do the day's reading before coming to class, and be prepared for the possibility that we might discuss the reading assignments. You are expected to bring the day's reading materials, or detailed notes on the reading, to class each day. Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose at least 50% of this portion of their grade.

Term project proposal: This will be a 1½ - 2 page (double-spaced) paper, and should be accompanied by an annotated bibliography containing at least 3 books and 5 journal articles or anthology chapters outside of the class reading that you plan to use in preparing your final project. Since resources for research on queer religiosities are sometimes rare, please see me for permission if you need to use web sites as primary sources. Your proposal should include the topic and format of your project, a tentative thesis statement, and a summary of your anticipated argument. Project proposals are due in class on **Thursday, April 12**.

Term project: Your final project should be an analytical exploration of some aspect of queer religiosities in the United States. Your paper can be historical or contemporary, and it can focus on a person (such as Troy Perry), a group (such as the Radical Faeries), or an issue (such as queer Muslims' approaches to the Qur'an). Other areas of focus are possible too, but please check them with me first. There are two format options for your project: a research paper or a creative project.

Research paper: If you choose this option, you will need to write your analysis in a formal paper of **12-15 pages** (plus the bibliography).

Creative project: In this option, you will express your analytical argument through a work of art that you create. Almost any medium is acceptable: film, music, poetry, short story, painting, sculpture, photography, drama, dance, and so on. Your creative project should be accompanied by a **6-7 page** (plus the bibliography) artist's statement that explains your analysis, the research behind it, and how you attempted to express that analysis in your art. Creative projects will be presented during the last two days of class; your presentation will count toward your overall project grade.

Final papers will be due *at the beginning of class* on **Thursday, May 3**.

Course policies

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resource Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can. If you suspect you have a learning difference but have not had your suspicions confirmed, the Academic Resource Center can help you to identify that difference and figure out how to adjust your learning style accordingly. *The only thing wrong with a learning difference is an inflexible educational system.*

Inclusive language: Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in this course. It's important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women specifically. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

I am always happy to help you find more inclusive language for what you want to say – see me in office hours if you'd like assistance with this.

"Late fees": Project proposals and final projects will lose **5 percentage points** for each day they are late (including weekends and holidays). Unless you make arrangements with me in advance, you may not make up a missed term project presentation or exam.

Academic dishonesty: Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teacher, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a high-quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and copying others' assignments. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty at Whitman is permanent expulsion.**

This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of cultural and social minorities.

Course Schedule: Queer Religiosities

Guide to abbreviations

CL = Readings on CLEo

QD = *Queer Dharma* (out of print; on reserve in Penrose)

GR = *Gay Religion*

BB = *Blessed Bi Spirit*

TS = *Two-Spirit People*

QJ = *Queer Jews*

Week 1: Introductions

Tuesday, 1/16: Introduction to the course

Film: Segment from *In the Life* (2002)

Thursday, 1/18: The origins of “homosexuality”

Reading: Syllabus, CL – Halperin, Vicinus

Week 2: Revolution and backlash

Monday, 1/22: “Inverts” and communities

Reading: CL – D’Emilio, Rupp, Marotta (Ch. 1)

Tuesday, 1/23: Stonewall and its aftermath

Reading: CL – Marotta (Ch. 4)

Thursday, 1/25: Religion and sexuality after Stonewall

Reading: CL – Melton, Umansky

Week 3: From repression to self-determination

Monday, 1/29: Biblical controversy and the “ex-gay” movement

Reading: CL – Bible selections, Payne, Schow

Movie night! *The Transformation* (dir. Carlos Aparicio and Susana Aiken, 1995)

Tuesday, 1/30: Dilemmas of the ex-gay movement (discussion day)

Reading: GR – Ponticelli

CL – Ponticelli, Warner

Thursday, 2/1: The Metropolitan Community Church

Reading: CL – Perry, Wilson

Film: *God, Gays, and the Gospel: This is Our Story* (dir. Mary Anne McEwen, 1984)

Week 4: Queering Christianities I

Monday, 2/5: Queer Christian theology (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Goss, Tanis

Tuesday, 2/6: Mainstream Protestantism opens up

Reading: GR – Cadge (Ch. 2)

CL – Suárez, Law, Miller

BB – All three pieces by Craig (pp. 101, 197, 226), Andrew

Thursday, 2/8: Queer Black church movements

Reading: CL – Monroe, Leong

GR – Bates

Film: *All God’s Children* (dir. Sylvia Rhue, 1996)

Week 5: Queering Christianities II

Monday, 2/12: Queer conservative Protestants

Reading: GR – Drumm, Crapo

BB – Klopovic

Film: *The Lost Tribe* (dir. Rachel Landers, 2005, 56 min.)

Tuesday, 2/13: Claiming contemporary Catholicism

Reading: GR – Primiano, Savastano

BB – Ehrig, Soriano

Thursday, 2/15: Queer Catholics in the ranks (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Jordan, Curb/Manahan

Week 6: Bread on the Seder Plate? Queering Judaism

Monday, 2/19: Presidents' Day – No class!

Tuesday, 2/20: Claiming Judaism

Reading: CL – Sass, Shokeid

Film: *Keep Not Silent – Ortho-Dykes* (dir. Ilil Alexander, 2004, 52 min.)

Thursday, 2/22: Wrestling with Jewish tradition(s)

Reading: QJ – Greenberg, Michels and Cannon, Anonymous, Dubowski, Kadish

BB – Rosenthal

Week 7: Queer Jews, Queer Muslims

Monday, 2/26: Queer Jewish theology

Reading: CL – Alpert

Film: *Treyf* (dir. Alisa Lebow and Cynthia Madansky, 1998)

Tuesday, 2/27: Individual expressions of Judaism (discussion day)

Reading: QJ – Nestle, Dubowsky (44), Nagle, Litman, Hirschmann and Wilson

BB – Kolodny

→ Midterm study guide available in class

Thursday, 3/1: Sexual and gender diversity in Islam

Reading: CL – Dossani, Minwalla et al., begin Al-Haqq Kugle

Explore Al-Fatiha web site (link on CL)

Movie night! *I Exist* (dir. Barbosa and Lenoir, 2003)

Week 8: Queer Identities in the Abrahamic Religions

Monday, 3/5: Sexual and gender diversity in Islamic theology (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Finish Al-Haqq Kugle, Ali

Tuesday, 3/6: **Midterm Exam**

Thursday, 3/8: Identity negotiation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Yip (“Negotiating”), Yip (“Queering”), Schnoor

→ Extra credit: LGBT-RAN treasure hunt available in class

MARCH 10-25: SPRING BREAK!

Week 9: Identity Negotiation, continued

Monday, 3/26: Identity negotiation in Catholicism and Orthodox Judaism (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Halbertal and Koren, Dillon (*through 131 only*)

→ **LGBT-RAN treasure hunt due in class (extra credit)**

Tuesday, 3/27: Vernacular religion (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Primiano (“Vernacular Religion”)

GR – Gray and Thumma (Ch. 16), Shokeid (Ch. 5)

Thursday, 3/29: Where are the women? (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Primiano (“I Would Rather”), Shokeid (“The Women are Coming”),
Dillon (*pp. 149-160 only*)

Week 10: Two-Spirit People

Monday, 4/2: Two-spirit histories

Reading: TS – Lang, Medicine, Thomas, Tafoya

Tuesday, 4/3: Contemporary two-spirit people

Reading: TS – All of Part 3 (“Life stories”)

BB – Bowen

Thursday, 4/5: Homophobia, racism, neocolonialism (discussion day)

Reading: TS – Ch. 21

Week 11: Queering Buddhism

Monday, 4/9: Scholars’ perspectives on queer Buddhism

Reading: QD – Reader’s Note, Cabezón, Zwilling, begin Jackson

Tuesday, 4/10: Undergraduate conference – no class

Reading: Work on your project proposal!

Thursday, 4/12: Queer Buddhism past and present

Reading: QD – Finish Jackson, Sunseri

GR – Cadge (Ch. 8)

→ **Term project proposals due in class**

Week 12: Voices from a Rainbow of Religions

Monday, 4/16: Personal experiences in Buddhism (discussion day)

Reading: QD – Whitney, Marion, Bernie, Hall, Karuna, Conkin

BB – Nellhaus

Tuesday, 4/17: Sexual and gender diversity in Hinduism

Reading: CL – Pattanaik, Wilhelm

BB – Durgadas

Thursday, 4/19: Reclaiming Aztec and African traditions

Reading: GR – Vidal-Ortiz

CL – Anzaldúa, Monroe

BB – Threatt

→ **Sign up in class for creative project presentations**

Week 13: Queer Pagans, Queer Seekers

Monday, 4/23: Wicca and the Radical Faeries

Reading: GR – Hasbrouck, Neitz

BB – Starhawk, Kaldera

Tuesday, 4/24: Seekers, Sheilism, and sifting

Reading: CL – Shallenberger

BB – OchO, Rosefire, Wolf

Thursday, 4/26: Seekers in L.A.

Reading: CL – Wilcox

Film: *Each of Us*

Week 14: Finding Religion in the Queerest of Places

Monday, 4/30: Religion in queer cultures (discussion day)

Reading: GR – Sell, Gorrell, Boisvert

Film: *Backstage with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence* (dir. F. Backman, 2003)

Tuesday, 5/1: Theoretical directions (discussion day)

Reading: CL – Schippert, Glenn

→ Final exam study guide available in class

Thursday, 5/3: Term project presentations

Please respect your classmates by being in class and awake for ALL presentation sessions!

→ Term projects due at the *beginning* of class today!

Week 15: Term project presentations

Tuesday, 5/8: Term project presentations

Please respect your classmates by being in class and awake for ALL presentation sessions!

Final Exam: Saturday, May 12, 9:00-11:00 am, in Olin 343 (our regular classroom)

“I Had a Bad Dream!”
Ibrahim Farajajé

I had a bad dream
That lasted too long
That started some weeks,
Some months, some years, some centuries ago
Of way too many people, places, laws and things
Telling me
That my coloured body was not good,
That it had no value,
Telling me that it could not be fat or too tall or too short or too skinny;
Telling me that bones-and-wheelchair bodies,
Bones and braces bodies,
Deaf bodies and blind bodies
Were bodies without value
Telling me that we could not be coloured and kweer at the same time,
Telling me that black and white were the only realities
(and that if we were anything else or more than one thing at a time,
or, goddess forbid, too many things!
Then we were
Doomed to be erased)
Telling me that desire and sexualities were not fluid,
Telling me that everything had to be either/or,
Telling me that I could not be a shape-shifter, a border bandit
Telling me that gender was fixed and that there were only two
(and that male definitely equalled superior)
Telling me that I (!) was confused
Telling me that the sharing of erotic power was wrong
Telling me that I could not raise my children
Telling me that I could not live and work in this country, because I was suspect
Telling me that I could not claim my lover’s body because I was not family
Telling me that my relationships did not merit any recognition by law;
Telling me that I was wrong,
Telling me that I was a shade
a shadow
a half-life.

Telling me that I should not be allowed to exist
Telling me that I had no rights:

You know what?

I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That if I escaped the
Razor blades and pills of my mind
I would only encounter bigger,
More brutal tortures,
More constant threats of violence,
Of annihilation,
Of massacre;
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That they would still say that
there is no such thing
as persecution of queers in gold mountain:
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That we queers would still say that
We didn't care about what happened to others
As long as we got ours

I had a bad dream
That we would say
That there is no such thing as queers
Who need public assistance
Or queers in prison;
That affirmative action is not our issue;

Those nasty old isms are all just things of the past; why
Don't we just get on with life?
(after all the playing ground is already level)

Why don't they just stop dividing our movement with all of their
Diversity and inclusion?????
(after all we're all equal here on Turtle Island):

We're free and happy:
(after all, we don't have any political prisoners or prisoners of war here in the US)

Why don't they just stop whining?
After all, no one suffers more than we queers.
Why can't we all just get along?

I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream that we would be afraid of
Delighting in the dazzling display of our differences
And that instead,
We would
Run to new closets of 'we're-
Just-like-everyone-else':
New and renovated closets that would confirm our belief that
Different equals wrong;
Condo-closets that would promise equality if we but erase
Ourselves;
Duplex-closets that would close in on us and
Suffocate us:
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That we would begin to believe, as we had been taught,
That spirit
And body did not belong together
That body was bad and coloured, full of desire, needing to be
Policed, dominated and controlled,
Just like we had been taught that women and the earth had to be
Controlled;

I had a bad dream that we would forget that we were the
Dreamers of the dream, the tellers of the tale, the keepers of the
Rhythm,
The tribes of the moon, the people of the rainbow
A sacred people,
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream:
That the violence against us would increase
That in Oakland and in Richmond,
In the military and in prisons,
In Veterans' Administration hospitals and in reservations,
In breast cancer wards and farm towns
In aids wards and homeless shelters,
In abortion clinics and parks;
In immigration detention centres and sex clubs,
In shrines, places of prayer and prostration, and mental hospitals
We could still be lynched and executed at will,
Bitter fruits of a bitter tree:
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That once dispersed to the four directions
We would be forgotten like the countless others
Victims of a media white-out

Killed twice
Our voices no longer heard:
I had a bad dream!
But now my sound is carried through you
My bad dream
Becomes
Sweet dream
As you
Scream
That there can be no renewed hope,
No equality and justice for all
As long as there is no equality and justice for all of all of us;
For each one of us,
With all of our madly beautiful pieces, parts, fears,
Contradictions and dreams.
That there can be no postmodern/post-colonial equality and
Justice for all
As long as our bodies and minds are still colonized,
Are still kept as someone's occupied territories,
As long as dreams are still squashed,
As long as kweers and Chumash and post-nuclear Pacific Islanders
And Bosnians and Pilipinas and women with cervical cancer
And Miwoks and Yokuts and Iraqis
And immigrants and women with HIV
And Chechnyans and Kashmiris and Pilipino Moros
And poor, coloured butch dykes and mixed blood people
Drag kings and drag queens and Rwandans and Israeli refugees
And people living with HIV and Palestinians
And Chicanas and pagan leatherkweers
And south Asians and people without healthcare
And intersex and polysex and Puertorriqueñas and transgender Sufis
And black folks and sex workers and Persian Muslims
And Ethiopian Jews and Tibetans
And Maidu and Pomo and Muslims
And people with disabilities and Sri Lankan freedom fighters
And prisoners and Asian teenagers
And homeless people and Arabs
And who knows how many others
Of all sizes, shapes, colours, and combinations of all of
The above (and then some!)
Continue to be made erased,
Continue to be suffocated,
Continue to be killed.

You, you, you are
my sweet dream.
Through you
I live on
From generation to generation
From everlasting to everlasting
And fiercely, proudly,
Tenderly, queerly,
I come home to
Run to
Fly, to float,
To shout, to say: **no more nightmares!**
Fulfill my sweet dream!

From Ibrahim Farajajé, "Keynote Address: Loosening the Canons," *Culture and Religion* 5.2 (2004): 245-65.