

Angels and Monsters: Queer and Trans Religion

Religion XXXX (Advanced Seminar)

Spring 2024

KEY INFORMATION AND POLICIES

- Instructor:** Siobhan Kelly (siobhankelly@g.harvard.edu)
- Course Level:** Advanced seminar. Familiarity with work in queer and trans studies is recommended, but not required. Please talk to me if you have any questions or concerns about this.
- Office Hours:** I will be available to meet before and after our class meetings. If you know you would like to meet in advance, send me an email to schedule a time. If you aren't available before or after class, let me know and we can find an alternative.
- Where and When:** Wednesdays, time TBD
- Course Description:** Gender and sexual diversity is often described in religious terms: before “gay” became shorthand for homosexuality, German activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs proposed “Uranian” in the 1860s, based off Greek mythology; in 2023, a Florida state representative called trans people “demons.” Queers have used religious language to make sense of experiences and carve our space for gender and sexual non-normativity to flourish. At the same time, those who decry such forms of life *also* use religious language to make their case. In this seminar, we use religious studies and queer and trans studies to examine the relationship between queerness, transness, and religion, thinking across religious difference through fiction, film, poetry, and academic work alike. Students will undertake an independent project of their choice, building analytical and argumentative skills. What might thinking queerly about religion, or religiously about queerness, do for us?
- Course Format:** We will meet once a week, during which time I will give background and contextualizing mini lectures as needed. However, the majority of our class time will be spent in active discussion as a class. Come prepared to engage and think aloud with each other, and with me.
- Learning Goals** Representations of gender and sexual non-normativity often occur on religious terms. We can see this in everything from cross-dressing figures in early Christianity, to specific religious and spiritual roles for genders outside of the binary norm, to drag queens in religious drag, to the contemporary Catholic Church's stance on what they call “gender ideology.” When queerness and transness are figured in religious

language, it both hurts and helps—it can bring us affirmation and meaning just as much as it can be brandished as a weapon. In this class, we'll think about how these approaches coexist, and what they can illuminate about each other. Along the way, we'll work together to explore thinking forms of gendered and sexual difference that contest and complicate our normative Western categories. We will attend to forms of difference where race, ethnicity, nation, religion, and gender all interact, exploring how gender becomes racialized through and alongside religious meaning. We'll read novels and poetry, watch films, engage queer theory, trans studies, and the study of religion, and think about creative, artistic, and academic process. We will explore approaches to thinking gender through historical, racial, and contextual difference, as well as how gender and sexual non-normativity is represented and lived in various historical, religious, and cultural contexts including contemporary Islam, medieval European Christianity, Hindu South India, and Rabbinic law. We will also explore how artists and writers have drawn on associations between religion and gender and sexual differences across genre, the work done by such representations, and how we might stage creative and scholarly interventions into normative and limiting frameworks. Why might we be drawn to think queerness and transness in religious terms? How might they be put into productive tension and conversation? Students will receive substantive feedback on their written assignments, giving you a chance to grow both between smaller assignments and in the scaffolded production of a final project.

- Course Materials:** The following texts will be read in their entirety. I will work to make digital and reserve copies available for as many as possible.
- Rabih Alameddine, *The Angel of History* (Grove Atlantic, 2016)
 - \$12.95
 - Cameron Awkward-Rich, *Sympathetic Little Monster* (Ricochet Editions, 2016)
 - \$15.00
 - Catalina De Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun: The True Story of a Cross-Dressing, Transatlantic Adventurer Who Escaped From a Spanish Convent in 1599 and Lived as a Man* (Beacon Press, 1997)
 - \$11.71
 - Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case* (Penguin Classics, 2003)
 - \$9.00
 - Read Lamya H, *Hijab Butch Blues: A Memoir* (The Dial Press, 2023)
 - \$17.97
 - Aurora Mattia, *The Fifth Wound* (Nightboat Books, 2023)
 - \$12.99
 - Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots and their Friends Between the Revolutions* (Nightboat Books, 2019, reprint)
 - \$11.92

- Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Iran* (Duke University Press, 2013)
 - \$30.95
- Read Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (University of Chicago Press, 2005)
 - \$11.99
- Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (NYRB Classics, 2000)
 - \$15.69
- Ely Shipley, *Some Animal* (Nightboat Books, 2018)
 - \$16.95

Total Cost: \$167.12

Designation: This course aims to have an “RPP” and “WRIT” curricular designation.

Course Time Allotment:

We will meet fourteen times over the course of the semester, for 2.5 hours each meeting (35 hours). I expect students to spend approximately 9 hours per week reading, reviewing required reading, and watching assigned films (117 hours). I expect students to spend 6 hours on Reading Journals and 6 hours on Critical Reviews (12 hours total). For the final project proposal, students should spend at least 5 hours researching and writing you. The Work in Progress should require 10 additional hours researching, creating, and writing. The Final Project should entail an additional 10-15 hours of research, writing, and editing on your final paper (25-30 hours total).

Accessibility and Accommodation:

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you may require accommodations or modification of any of course procedures. You may speak with me after class, during office hours, or by appointment. If you need accommodations around online learning or in classroom accommodations, please be sure to reach out to Student Accessibility Services (SAS) for their assistance (sas@brown.edu, 401-863-9588). Undergraduates in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact an academic dean in the College by emailing college@brown.edu. Graduate students may contact one of the deans in the Graduate School by emailing graduate_school@brown.edu.

Academic Integrity:

"A student's name on any exercise (e.g., a theme, report, notebook, performance, computer program, course paper, quiz, or examination) is regarded as assurance that the exercise is the result of the student's own thoughts and study, stated in his or her own words, and produced without

assistance, except as quotation marks, references, and footnotes acknowledge the use of printed sources or other outside help." ([Academic Code](#), p. 5)

Students are welcome—encouraged—to discuss course material with each other and others in your life as you find helpful. However, I expect the work you produce in this class to be your own, and quotations, ideas, and information you use from sources other than yourself should be properly cited in all assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grading:	Letter graded.	
	Participation:	15%
	Reading Journals:	15%
	Critical Reviews:	15%
	Final Project Proposal:	10%
	Work in Progress:	15%
	Final Project:	30%

Participation: Learning is an active undertaking! I ask that you come to our class each week having read and annotated the assigned readings and ready to join in conversation. **Participation includes both class attendance and contributing to the class discussion.** We will discuss a number of controversial and difficult topics over the semester, given the nature of this material: I expect students to engage each other in good faith and generosity, and to take part in the co-creation of a critical, questioning, and respectful classroom environment. Students are allotted one unexcused class absence, and the ability to make up a second unexcused absence through a short writing summary assignment. Additional unexcused absences will count against your participation score; excused absences require permission and/or a Dean's excuse. If you ever have questions or concerns about participation, please contact me.

Reading Journals: Over the course of the semester, students are responsible for writing **two (2) reading journals that are 2-4 double-spaced pages in length. The first is due by February 16 at midnight. The second must be handed in by April 26 at midnight.** These reading journals are deep, thoughtful engagements focused on a single academic text that we have read. Who is the writer's intended audience? What are they hoping to get across? How successful are they? Be sure to reflect on how this text approaches queerness and transness in relation to religion, and include your own critical voice. What assumptions still undergird the text? How might you intervene? Students will receive substantive feedback on their first journal in order to improve your writing skills in the discipline and beyond.

Critical Reviews: Students are also responsible for two **(2) critical reviews of a film, novel, or other cultural object**, one of which must be from the syllabus (the other can be either from the syllabus or of your own choice [requiring my approval]). These reviews should be **2-4 double-spaced pages in length. The first is due by March 1 at midnight, and the second by May 3 at midnight.** Analyze the work in question: attend to its formal elements, stylistic choices, and rhetorical strategies. Use at least two readings from class to do your analysis. Think about these as potential reviews for a public audience, or a critical academic reading of an important if underdiscussed work of art. This is also the chance for you to try on a different writerly voice than in your reading journals. Students will receive substantive writing feedback on their first critical review to aid in honing that voice, or voices.

Final Project Proposal:

Write a **three-page final paper proposal, due by March 15 at midnight.** This project is open ended, exploring queerness and transness in relation to religion: you may write a traditional academic research paper, create a documentary, short film, podcast, chapbook, or other artwork, or another creative and critical project that you can imagine. The proposal should describe the form of the work you hope to make, explain *why* you chose this form, and discuss the process of creation you plan to undertake. You should include an overall thesis or aim for your project—what you hope to communicate through this work.

Since the form is open, I will think about this not as about page limits, but about the amount of time spent on the project—see the above “Course Time Allotment” section for guidelines on this. I expect academic papers to be at least twenty double-spaced pages in length. Students will receive substantive feedback at both the proposal and work in progress stages to improve the final project.

Work in Progress: Here, I ask students to show a significant amount of work in progress. I do not expect you to be at the halfway point in your project, but here students are meant to show the development of your work and a plan for how you will finish it. Reflect on the creative/writerly process, provide the raw material—unfinished files, transcriptions, draft essay sections, sketches, etc.—and describe next steps ahead of you. **I expect this to be at least five pages of writing along with any creative material. Due by April 19 at midnight.**

Final Project: **Due by May 15 at midnight. A completed work along with a two-page write-up on the creative process.** Note: it is okay if your work changes directions at any point in the progress, but be sure to describe how and why those changes occurred in your write-up (or in the piece itself, as appropriate).

CLASS SCHEDULE

Course Meetings: All meetings take place on **Wednesdays, from x-x, in ____**
Note that this is a preliminary schedule, subject to change as necessary.

January 24 *Introducing Ourselves*

- No Reading

January 31 *Resignifying Traditions*

- Watch *The Blue Kaftan* (dir. Maryam Touzani)
- Read Lamya H, *Hijab Butch Blues: A Memoir*
- Read Amy Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization”

February 7 *Categories of Self*

- Read Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto”
- Read Afsaneh Najmabadi, *With Respect to Sex: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Iran*

February 14 *Embodying Possibility*

- Read Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage”
- Read Cameron Awkward-Rich, *Sympathetic Little Monster*
- Watch *A Fantastic Woman* (dir. Sebastian Lelio)

****First Review Journal due February 16 by midnight****

February 21 *Analyzing Gender*

- Read Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*
- Read Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case*

February 28 *Fictionalizing History*

- Read Rabih Alameddine, *The Angel of History*
- Read Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” (117-148)

****First Critical Review due by March 1 at midnight****

March 6 *Historicizing Identity*

- Leah DeVun, “Introduction: Stories and Selves,” “The Monstrous Races: Mapping the Borders of Sex,” and “The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Alchemy in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance” in *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*

- Catalina De Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun: The True Story of a Cross-Dressing, Transatlantic Adventurer Who Escaped From a Spanish Convent in 1599 and Lived as a Man*

March 13

Functioning Religiously?

- *Acts of Paul and Thecla*
- Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender History: A Movement Whose Time Has Come”
- Evan B. Towle and Lynn M. Morgan, “Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the “Third Gender” Concept”
- C Libby, “The Historian and the Sexologist: Revisiting the “Transvestite Saint”

****Final Project Proposal due by March 15 at midnight****

March 20

Who is “We”?

- Read Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*
- Read Amanda Lucia, “Guru Sex: Charisma, Proxemic Desire, and the Haptic Logics of the Guru-Disciple Relationship” (953-988)

March 27

NO CLASS- SPRING RECESS

April 3

Kids, Queerly

- Read Michael Warner, “Tongues Untied: Memoirs of A Pentecostal Boyhood” (215-224)
- Watch Episode 2: “Un viaje en el tiempo” of *Veneno* (dir. Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo)
- Watch *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (dir. Desiree Akhavan)

April 10

Animality

- Read Ely Shipley, *Some Animal*
- Read Mel Chen, “Animals, Sex, and Transsubstantiation” in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*
- Read Max Strassfeld, “The Gendering of Law: The Androgyne and the Hybrid Animal in Bikkurim” in *Trans Talmud*

April 17

Saying and Unsayings

- Read Bini Adamczak, “On Circlusion”
- Read Paul Preciado, “Technogender” (99-129) in *Testo Junkie*
- Read Amy Hollywood, “On the True, the Real, and Critique in the Study of Religions” in *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays*

****Work in Progress due by April 19 at midnight****

April 24

Nostalgia

- Read Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*
- Read Heather Love, “Epilogue: The Politics of Refusal” (146-165) in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*
- Hil Malatino, “After Negativity?: On Healing and Whiteness” in *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*

****Second Review Journal due by April 26 at midnight****

May 1

Closing—or, Opening

- Read Aurora Mattia, *The Fifth Wound*

****Second Critical Review due by May 3 at midnight****

May 8

NO CLASS- FINAL EXAM PERIOD BEGINS

****FINAL PROJECT DUE MAY 15 BY MIDNIGHT****