

George Mason University
Department of Religious Studies

RELI 408-001/641-001

Ritual and Drama in Global Religions/Drama in the World's Religions

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Office Hours: TR 9.15-10.15 a.m., 3.00-4.00 p.m. or by appointment

Spring 2008

Robinson B 103

TR 10.30-11.45 a.m.

Course Description

An exploration of ritual, liturgical and religious dramas as they appear in selected world religions, past and present. The nature and function of religion in the interaction of the divine and human realms, in actualizing myths, shaping the moral and cultural lives of believers is considered. The roles of sacred drama, ritual, symbol, location, plot and characterization in presenting religious beliefs and permitting worshippers to have direct experience of the divine and to express their faith will be studied. Religious themes in some modern plays of the western stage will be examined.

Course Goals

- To understand sacred drama as an essential expression of basic religious truths
- To appreciate the roles of drama in global religions ancient and modern
- To see how such concepts are dealt with in performance

Course Requirements

Class Participation – attending lectures and participating in class, course involves communal reading and viewing, and discussion of the course material.

Readings – assigned material should always be read and understood before class.

Students must hand in papers on the dates and the times that they are due: late papers will incur the loss of a grade-point per weekday M-F. Should a very serious crisis make this difficult, the instructor must be notified as soon as possible. Excuses for illness must be accompanied by a medical certificate. A grade of IN (incomplete) must be requested in writing and is only given for the most severe circumstances.

Evaluation

There will be four papers, one on each unit of the course and counting 25% of the final grade.

Students will be graded on their ability to gather, utilize and analyze information, to write clearly, argue cogently and offer reasoned conclusions. Writing assessment criteria established by the Department of Religious Studies will be used.

Required Texts

- W. Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults (Harvard, 1987)
A.C. Cawley, Everyman and the Mediaeval Miracle Plays
P. Chelkowski, Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran (course package/handout)
Francis Edwards, Ritual and Drama: The Mediaeval Theatre (Lutterworth, 1976)
H. W. Fairman, The Triumph of Horus (course package)
D. Grene and R. Lattimore, Sophocles I: Oedipus The King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone (University Of Chicago Press, 1991)
P. Shaffer, Equus (Penguin)
G. J. Watson, Drama: An Introduction (course package)

Recommended Texts

- Eric Csapo and Margaret Miller, The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama (Cambridge UP, 2007)
Robyn Gillam, Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt (Duckworth, 2005)

Course Outline: Topics/Readings

- Week 1 1/22, 1/24: Introduction to the concepts of religious ritual and symbol and the nature, language and topics of (sacred) drama (Watson 1-18)
- Week 2 1/29, 1/31: Ritual and Drama in the Religions of the Ancient Near East
- Week 3 2/5, 2/7: continued
- Week 4 2/12, 2/14: Greek Drama – ritual to drama, determinism, freedom, innocence and guilt in the Theban tragedies of Sophocles (Grene and Lattimore)
- Week 5 2/19, 2/21: continued
- Week 6 2/26, 2/28: continued
- Week 7 3/4, 3/6: Ritual Drama in the Graeco-Roman Mysteries (Burkert)
- Spring Break 10th –16th March
- Week 8 3/18, 3/20: continued
- Week 9 3/25, 3/27: Mediaeval Miracle, Mystery and Morality Plays (Cawley and Edwards)
- Week 10 4/1, 4/3: continued

Week 11 4/8, 4/10: continued

Week 12 4/15, 4/17: Ta'ziyeh: The Ritual Drama of Iran (Chelkowski, handout)

Week 13 4/22, 4/24: Religious Ecstasy: *Equus* (Shaffer)

Week 14 4/29, 5/1: continued

Finals Week Examination Period

Please note – this syllabus is not inflexible and we will move at our own pace