HDS 2709 / Religion 2488: Queer Theology, Queer Religions (Fall 2014) 9/22/14

Mark Jordan

Tuesdays, 4-6p

How does the project of "queer theology" relate to the larger aspirations of queer religion or spirituality in America? We will begin by sampling the efforts to revise traditional Christian theologies in order to accept or affirm same-sex loves. We will then move beyond the present discussion in several directions. We will look at some forgotten possibilities in historical engagements between advocates of homosexual rights and established religious bodies (chiefly churches and synagogues). We will consider the boundaries between queer theology and queer theory or between it and other political theologies. We will test the boundaries of “Christianity” while considering the varied forms of queer religion outside familiar religious institutions—in spirituality or spiritualism, in magic or neo-paganism, in erotic asceticism.

**Reading**

The required readings will consist entirely of ‘primary’ texts, read whole or in self-contained portions. You are expected to read them freshly, attentively, and reflectively—especially if you already know them.

Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (Seabury Books 2011)

Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (originally 1979; rev. ed., HarperCollins, 1992)

Gayle S. Rubin, *Deviations* (Duke U P, 2011)

Samuel Delany, *Trouble on Triton* (Wesleyan U P, 2011)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (Theater Communications Group, 2003)

Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (HarperCollins, 1993)

Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (Routledge, 2003)

Gerard Loughlin, ed., *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Wiley-Blackwell 2007)

Copies of most of these books have been ordered into The Coop. The Coop reports the Goss volume as out of print and not available from its used-book suppliers. You will find dozens of used copies available on line through various vendors at very reasonable prices. I urge you to find your copy and order it in as soon as possible.

**Meeting**

The lectures will aim to help your reading of the texts—by analysis, by criticism, and by exhortation. Of course, no lecture can perform reflective reading for you.

Your discussion section will invite you to develop, examine, and revise your readings of the common texts in collaboration with your colleagues. Your section leader may ask you to prepare short interpretations, comments, or elaborations of assigned readings. Attendance at discussion sections is required, but mere attendance cannot give you all their benefits.

**Writing**

You will be asked to write three pieces for the class. The first, due by class time on September 16, will be a definitional exercise of about 1000 words. For it, you will consider various descriptions of "queer theology" that you have encountered (if only in Patrick Cheng’s book) and then propose a description of the project (or wish?) that seems to you compelling—at least for the moment. More detailed advice about the assignment will be given as it approaches.

The second piece, due by 5p on October 14, will be an exegetical exercise of about 2000 words. For it, you will choose a text or artwork that seems to you helpful in addressing the fundamental questions of the course. You will then explore its terminology, images, arguments, or genre(s) in relation to the project(s) of a queer theology or the practices of a queer religion. More detailed advice about this assignment will also be given as it approaches.

If you come to this course already familiar with work in queer theology or queer religion, you may decide not to submit an exegetical exercise in order to concentrate your writing energies on a final essay about 6000 word. In that case, please notify us of your decision on October 14, giving us a brief description of the topic for that essay.

The final piece, due by 5p on Wednesday, December 10, will be an essay of about 4000 words (or 6000 words, as described above). It should treat a topic of your choosing that is related to queer theology and/or queer religion as you understand it/them. About four weeks before the essay is due, you will be asked to discuss your plans for it with your section leader.

Please understand that these deadlines are firm. There will be no extensions except in the case of an emergency.

Since this course is fundamentally concerned with the ethical effects of language, you are expected to be deliberate in your speaking and writing, not least when it comes to using gendered nouns or pronouns to describe all human beings or their disembodied deities.

**Evaluation**

Grades should be the least helpful kind of evaluation you will receive in the course. More helpful—and ultimately more consequential—are comments on your written work and on your participation in the discussions. But grades must be assigned. In this course, the final grade will be determined by giving 40% to the final paper, 20% to the exegetical exercise, 10% to the definitional exercise, and 30% to participation in the discussion sections. (If you choose not to write the exegetical exercise, as described above, the essay will count for 60% of your final grade.) There is no formula to specify how each of those components will be graded. It may or may not help to say that we will consider your success in treating the assigned readings attentively, critically, and creatively; your efforts to relate them in some way to your central intellectual preoccupations; the clarity, interest, and persuasiveness of your written or oral expression; and your development across the whole semester.

Being a member of an academic community both requires and encourages the practice of specific virtues. These virtues are not so very different from the virtues required for life in any community—or in any relationship. Like most virtues, they are difficult to define; they are better learned by doing than by reciting formulas. But modern American universities are compelled by the litigious logic of late capitalism to articulate these virtues as if they were rules.

Here is a version of those ‘rules’ for this course: Serious discussion, in and out of class, is essential to what we are doing. Whether you are reflecting on the readings or imagining your writing, you are encouraged to talk with your instructors, your classmates, and anyone else who will listen. When it comes time to write, you should make sure that any written work you submit for evaluation is fully your own, as regards both conception and composition. This means, for example, that you must acknowledge quotations, but also summaries, paraphrases, and any specific arguments you have taken from others. You must also adhere to standard citation practices for any books, articles, websites, lectures, or other sources. If you received any editorial help with your writing other than from the instructors for the course, please acknowledge this assistance as well. Finally, if you have any questions about when or how to cite the kind of material that you are using, please ask us—before submitting the assignment.

**Coordinates**

*Mark Jordan*

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My office is Divinity Hall 302. I will be keeping office hours weekly on a day to be announced once my schedule settles down. You can try your luck dropping in at that time, but it would be safer to book an appointment through Ashley Richardson (Divinity Hall 314), [arichardson@hds.harvard.edu](mailto:arichardson@hds.harvard.edu) or (617) 495 4518. She will also help you to find other times and days if the office hours are inconvenient for you.

*Jacob Quiring* (Teaching Fellow)

[jquiring@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:jquiring@mail.harvard.edu)

Office hours TBA and by appointment

**Calendar** (Fall 2014)

Tuesday, September 2. Introduction: some definitions and descriptions, alternate histories, project for the course, and a bit of queer iconography.

Tuesday, September 9. Cheng, *Radical Love*.

Tuesday, September 16. Christ and Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising*: “Introduction” (pp. 1-17); Valerie Saiving, “Human Situation” (25-42); Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Motherearth and the Megamachine” (43-52); Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father” (53-62); Merlin Stone, “When God Was a Woman” (120-130); Judith Plaskow, “Coming of Lilith” (198-209); Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” (259-268); Carol Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess” (273-287). Definitional exercise due.

Tuesday, September 23. Rubin, *Deviations*: “Thinking Sex” (pp. 137-181), “Afterword” (182-189), “Postscript” (190-193), “Blood under the Bridge” (194-223), “The Catacombs” (224-240), “Of Catamites and Kings” (241-253).

Tuesday, September 30. Delany, *Trouble on Triton*, at least “*Der Satz*” (pp. 1-20), “Solvable Games” (21-43), “Avoiding Kangaroos” (45-116), “Objective Knowledge” (185-234), “Tiresias Descending” (235-277), “Appendix B” (291-312).

Tuesday, October 7. Kushner, *Angels in America*, Part 1: *Millennium Approaches*.

Tuesday, October 14. Kushner, *Angels in America*, Part 2: *Perestroika*. There will be no lecture this week, but sections will meet as regularly scheduled. Exegetical exercise due.

Tuesday, October 21. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up*, at least pp. *xiii-xxi*, 61-85, 87-111, 143-159, 177-180.

Tuesday, October 28. Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*: Introduction (pp. 1-4) and Part 1 (5-110).

Tuesday, November 4. Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*: Part 2 (pp. 111-171).

Tuesday, November 11. Loughlin, *Queer Theology*: Stuart, “Sacramental Flesh” (pp. 65-75); Loughlin, “Omphalos” (115-127); Ward, “There Is No Sexual Difference” (76-85); Jordan, “God’s Body” (281-292); Beattie, “Queen of Heaven” (293-304).

Tuesday, November 18. Loughlin, *Queer Theology*: Burrus, “Queer Father” (pp. 147-162); Hollywood, “Queering the Beguines” (163-175); Rogers, “Bodies Demand Language” (176-187); Jantzen, “’Promising Ashes’” (245-253).

Tuesday, November 25. Thanksgiving recess.

Tuesday, December 2. Loughlin, *Queer Theology*: Rudy, “Subjectivity and Belief” (pp. 37-49); Shaw, “Reformed and Enlightened Church” (215-229); Woodhead, “Sex and Secularization” (230-244). Reread Cheng, *Radical Love*, 2-23 and 139-140.

Wednesday, December 10. Final paper due.