

REL 306

RITUAL STUDIES

FALL 2009: REL 306 (#86250) Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:15 pm (Wingate 206)

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“Of course, rituals come in all sizes and kinds, from those linking humans to superhuman powers (possession trance, prayer, exorcism, and the like) to the everyday rituals (greeting, socializing, cleansing, and eating) to the rituals of the state, professions, clubs, and affinity groups. There are birth, puberty, courtship, marriage, death, and afterlife rituals. All of life—from the most mundane to the most special—is saturated with and marked by ritual. But what is ritual?” — Richard Schechner (in Bell 2007: 17).

This course will introduce students to, and foster critical appreciation of, the major figures, debates, and theories that have shaped the modern academic field of ritual studies, while examining comparative rituals and ritualized practices from around the world. Students will be expected to apply theory with critical awareness in the analysis of religious and secular phenomena as performed and represented within rituals and within society at large. To be “critical” in an academic sense means that students will engage in the material with sympathetic, judicious evaluations based on careful, reasoned, and historically grounded judgments.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

1. Bell, Catherine. 1992. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford).
2. Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge).
3. Grimes, Ronald, ed. 1996. *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Prentice Hall).
4. Harvey, Graham, ed. 2005. *Ritual and Religious Belief* (Routledge).
5. Further Articles will be placed on Blackboard.

ASSESSMENT:

Discussant Role (3)	15% (5% each)
Journal	20%
Short Essay	20%
Research Presentation	10%
Long Essay	35%

This class will be graded on a straight scale:

A 94-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69	F 59 or below
A- 90-93	B 84-86	C 74-76	D 64-66	
	B- 80-83	C- 70-73	D- 60-63	

- Regrettably, excessive absences will have a negative effect on final grades. YOU MAY NOT MISS ANY UNEXCUSED CLASSES. An unexcused absence will automatically entail a loss of 5% from your overall percentage total, and thus potentially a reduction in your final letter grade (A>B, B>C, etc.). Excused absences or assessment extensions will only be given with a doctor's certificate or other serious personal or family issues.
- Special Needs: If you have a disability that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (LAC; 758-5929) within the first two weeks of the semester (117 Reynolda Hall; www.wfu.edu/campuslife/lac). Wake Forest University also has an excellent Writing Center, adjacent to LAC, which provides assistance in the process of writing papers. Walk-ins are welcome or call 758-5768 for an appointment.
- Academic Honesty: Be careful not to copy the work of peers or to use material without correct citations. Nothing can be more disastrous for your grade in this course or for your college record than to be found to have violated the rules of academic honesty. If you have any questions about properly utilizing sources, check with me ASAP. As a general rule, websites are NOT acceptable (or even reliable) sources for exam study or essays. Please refrain from using them.
- 'Act of God' Plan: In the case of unforeseen circumstances that prevent the entire class from finishing the semester at Wake Forest (as in the case of many universities after Hurricane Katrina), please finish all the weekly readings, complete your journals, and finish your essays as best you can at home based on assigned readings. Submit all material by post or email.

ASSESSMENT DETAILS

DISCUSSANT ROLE (15%): Students will be discussants three times (5% each). There will be three discussants each class. The discussants will briefly (15 minutes max.) present the key arguments or themes in the readings that they in consultation deem the most compelling or worthy. The discussants must not summarize the readings since everyone is expected to have read them. After this, each member of class will ask one question of the discussants in order to stimulate class discussion and debate. Discussants must record their presentations and all questions and responses asked of them in their journals. Discussants will be graded on how well they clearly, succinctly and critically understand and analyze the readings and respond to questions. One last task for discussants: For each member of class send via email 1-2 "sidebar(s)" of information about the authors/arguments/rituals such as online photos, website links, diagrams, interesting anecdotes, factoids, etc. These should be small enough (no more than 2"x2") so each member of class can cut and paste them electronically into her or his journal.

JOURNALS (20%): You must keep a weekly, class-based journal (purchase a standard WFU notebook or ring-binder from the bookstore). (For a sample journal entry, see end of the syllabus.) For every class, prepare no more than two FULL pages of summaries, analysis, and discussion points/questions based on the assigned readings. You must also include 2-3 questions; one

of which, when appropriate to the current discussion, should be directed at the discussants. Record how you engage with, modify, or critique your own views in relation to the interpretations of discussants or other students. Journals will be submitted 4 times during the semester to receive a provisional grade based on overall presentation, succinct analysis, critical thought, and question formulation. This grade can improve or worsen over the semester (your final grade will be assigned after the 4th journal submission). Consider your journals a work of art in progress! You may use a word document to construct your journal pages, etc., but all such work must be printed out before class and placed in your journal. Try to refrain from unnecessary or tangential doodling in your journals, as all information contained therein should relate in some way to the course and will be graded as such. After class, you may edit/clean up your journal, make side notes, cut and paste typed questions/quotes, add “sidebars”, etc. However, please retain/recopy all handwritten, in-class notes. These will add to the overall aesthetic of the finished journal and will also demonstrate your daily thought processes. In short, each class you will be expected to formulate thorough analysis of all assigned readings, ask at least one question in a sophisticated analytical way, and record in detail class exchanges that directly or indirectly relate to your interests/analysis. Failure to do this will substantially lower your overall journal grade.

THE SHORT ESSAY (20%) is due MONDAY, OCTOBER 5th by 5pm. The short essay should be no more than 6-8 pages in length (1500-2000 words) and should be a polished piece of work based on your critical analysis of a ritual tradition, ritual performance(s), or ritualized practices that you have clearly defined and researched. Analyze this ritual — or clearly defined rites, symbols, myths, or performers that are a part of the ritual — in terms of two or three theoretical approaches that we have studied in class. The essay should demonstrate critical reflection on the required readings and an awareness of the social, economic, political, and most importantly historical context of that ritual. Alternatively, you may write a theoretical paper wherein you analyze the strengths and weaknesses of several interrelated theories of ritual so as to discuss their development, implications, and applications for the study of rituals in general.

RESEARCH PRESENTATION (10%): Students will present for 10 minutes on their long essay research projects. You will be graded on timing, pace, presentation, and clarity of argumentation. At exactly 10 minutes you will be cut off, whether finished or not (poor timing will lower grades). There will be 5 minutes of question time for each presentation.

THE LONG ESSAY (35%) is due MONDAY, DECEMBER 7th by 5pm. The final, long essay should be approximately 12-15 pages in length (4000 words max.) and should be a polished piece of work that examines in depth a clearly defined ritual tradition/practice and analyzes it with a critical awareness of its specific social and historical context and in relation to theories that deal with ritual performance, the body, agency, politics, gender, etc. Long essay research should include substantial resources (10-15) beyond our class readings. The long essay should not be a longer elaboration of the material discussed in the short essay. It can however deal with the same ritual tradition, etc., yet this must be done in a substantially different, more complex manner.

Late essays will have their overall grade automatically lowered (I follow this policy in order to be fair to those who turn their work in on time). The highest marks are received by those who clearly and concisely show that (a) they have done an adequate amount of research and clearly defined a topic theoretically and socio-historically, and (b) they have something original and thoughtful to say.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Encircled numbers at end of each day refers to total pages for daily readings

Week 1

- Thursday August 27 — 22
 - Introduction to Course.
 - Ruel, “Christians as Believers”, pp.242-264 (in Harvey).

Week 2

- Tuesday September 1 — 20
 - Film: *Sacred Ceremonies*.
 - Durkheim, “Ritual, Magic, and the Sacred”, pp.188-193 (in Grimes).
 - Van Gennep, “Territorial Passage and the Classification of Rites”, pp.529-536 (in Grimes).
 - Turner, “Liminality and Communitas”, pp.511-519 (in Grimes).
- Thursday Sept 3 — 27
 - Film: *Altar of Fire*.
 - Staal, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual”, pp.483-494 (in Grimes).
 - Penner, “Language, Ritual and Meaning”, pp.1-16 (on Blackboard).

Week 3

- Tuesday Sept 8 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 47
 - Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”, pp.217-229 (in Grimes).
 - Lévi-Strauss, “The Effectiveness of Symbols”, pp.368-378 (in Grimes).
 - Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual”, pp.495-511 (in Grimes).
 - Turner, “Symbols in Ndembu Ritual”, pp.520-529 (in Grimes).
- Thursday Sept 10 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 28
 - Douglas, “Dirt: Purity and Danger”, pp.159-170 (in Grimes).
 - Reader, “Cleaning Floors and Sweeping the Mind”, pp.87-104 (in Harvey).

❖ **1ST JOURNAL SUBMISSION, Due Friday, Sept. 11 by 5pm.**

Week 4

- Tuesday Sept 15 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 53
 - Beattie, “On Understanding Ritual”, pp.240-268 (on Blackboard).
 - Styers, “Introduction” to *Making Magic*, pp.1-24 (on Blackboard).
- Thursday Sept 17 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 37
 - MacDonald, “Magic and the Study of Religion”, pp.137-153 (on Blackboard).
 - MacDonald, “An Interpretation of Magic”, pp.83-104 (on Blackboard).

Week 5

- Tuesday Sept 22 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 58
 - Tambiah, “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts”, pp.60-86 (on Blackboard).
 - Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words”, pp.175-208 (on Blackboard).
- Thursday Sept 24 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) 46

- Ter Haar, “Ritual as Communication”, pp.163-189 (in Harvey).
- Bell, “Ritual Reification”, pp.265-285 (in Harvey).

❖ **2ND JOURNAL SUBMISSION, Due Friday, Sept. 25 by 5pm.**

Week 6

- Tuesday Sept 29 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ⑤1
 - Bell, “Introduction” & “I: The Practice of Ritual Theory”, pp.3-54 (in Bell).
- Thursday October 1 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ⑤0
 - Bell, “II: The Sense of Ritual”, pp.67-117 (in Bell).

❖ **SHORT ESSAY IS DUE Monday, October 5th, by 5pm.**

Week 7

- Tuesday Oct 6 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ④8
 - Scheper-Hughes & Lock, “The Mindful Body”, pp.6-41 (on Blackboard).
 - McGuire, “Religion and the Body”, pp.283-296 (on Blackboard).
- Thursday Oct 8 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ④7
 - Bell, “Ritual Traditions and Systems”, pp.118-142 (in Bell).
 - Stallybrass & White, “Introduction”, pp.139-162 (in Harvey).

Week 8

- Tuesday Oct 13 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ⑤4
 - Bell, “III: Ritual and Power”, pp.169-223 (in Bell).
- Thursday Oct 15 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ③3
 - Bell, “Performance”, pp.205-224 (on Blackboard).
 - Schieffelin, “Problematizing Performance”, pp.124-138 (in Harvey).

Week 9

- Tuesday Oct 20 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ③4
 - Smith, “To Take Place”, pp.26-50 (in Harvey).
 - Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual”, pp.473-483 (in Grimes).
- Thursday Oct 22 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ③2
 - Severi, “Memory, Reflexivity and Belief”, pp.218-240 (in Harvey).
 - Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge”, pp.324-334 (in Grimes).

❖ **3RD JOURNAL SUBMISSION, Due Friday, Oct. 23rd by 5pm.**

Week 10

- Tuesday Oct 27 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ③3
 - Grimes, “Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances”, pp. 279-293 (in Grimes).
 - Schieffelin, “Introduction”, pp.1-20 (on Blackboard).
 - Hüsken, “Ritual Dynamics and Ritual Failure”, pp.337-366 (on Blackboard).
- Thursday Oct 29 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ③7
 - Flanagan, “Holy and Unholy Rites”, pp.78-86 (in Harvey).
 - Kertzer, “The Rites of Power”, pp.189-201 (in Harvey).
 - Kertzer, “Ritual, Politics, and Power”, pp.335-352 (in Grimes).

Week 11

- Tuesday November 3 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ⑦①
 - Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp.1-71.
- Thursday Nov 5 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____) ⑦①
 - Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp.72-104.
 - Strathern, “Body Thoughts”, pp.1-39 (on Blackboard).

❖ 4TH JOURNAL SUBMISSION, Due Friday, Nov. 6th by 5 pm.

Week 12

- Tuesday Nov 10 —
 - Presenter 1: _____
 - Presenter 2: _____
 - Presenter 3: _____
 - Presenter 4: _____
 - Presenter 5: _____
- Thursday Nov 12 —
 - Presenter 1: _____
 - Presenter 2: _____
 - Presenter 3: _____
 - Presenter 4: _____
 - Presenter 5: _____

Week 13

- Tuesday Nov 17 —
 - Presenter 1: _____
 - Presenter 2: _____
 - Presenter 3: _____
 - Presenter 4: _____
 - Presenter 5: _____
- Thursday Nov 19 —
 - Presenter 1: _____
 - Presenter 2: _____
 - Presenter 3: _____
 - Presenter 4: _____
 - Presenter 5: _____

Week 14

- Tuesday Nov 24 — No Class. THANKSGIVING.
 - Wallendorf & Arnould, “Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day”, pp.536-551 (in Grimes).
- Thursday Nov 26 — No Class. THANKSGIVING.

Week 15

- Tuesday December 1 —
 - “Who Gets to Live Forever in Ancient India?” Article by Whitaker.
- Thursday Dec 3 —
 - “Empowering Men Ritually in Ancient India.” Article by Whitaker.

❖ LONG ESSAY is Due Monday, DEC 7th, BY 5PM.

SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY

Taken from REL 300: Approaches to the Study of Religion

- Thursday Jan 31 — (Discussant 1: _____; Discussant 2: _____; Discussant 3: _____)
 - Olson, Chap.3, “Quest for the Origin of Religion”, pp.49-99.

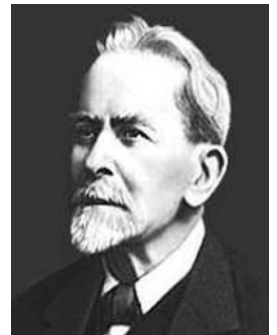
Edward Burnett Tylor, Sir (1832-1917).

- Victorian anthropologist, first scholar to explain magic systematically in tour de force *Primitive Culture* (1871).
- Tylor applies the term “animism” (Latin *anima*, “spirit”) to the universal “belief in spiritual beings” (his minimal definition of religion). To explain causality primitive people believe that creatures and objects (“fetishes”) possess personal souls or spirits (*anima*) that transcend the body in destruction or death (which explains the belief in immortality). Hence, treated as sacred, as the spirit within is worshipped, giving the object its life and power.
- Tylor assumes all humans share the same cognitive and interpretative processes. This allows him and others such as Frazer to imagine the primitive mind-set. Consequently, he expounds universal customs and beliefs, with little concern for any social or historical contexts.
- This animistic process is evolutionary as a hierarchy of spirits culminates in monotheism. The human race is thus involved in a process of intellectual evolution. To account for the existence of various practices at different developmental stages, Tylor introduces his influential “doctrine of survivals”: when magical practices exist in modern countries, they are survivals of a past age.
- As a universal system, magic is primarily an “association of ideas”. When ideas are connected in thought, primitives invert this so that the connection is believed to exist in reality. Primitives thus believe that people can be healed, injured, or even killed at distance if the magician possesses an item or physical piece of the victim or benefactor. As a rational effort to influence the environment, magic is thus a pseudo-science.



James George Frazer, Sir (1854-1941).

- Student of Tylor. Magnum opus, *The Golden Bough* (various revised editions; 1890, 1911, abridged version in 1922); most widely read and significant academic work of its time.
- Frazer argues that “sympathetic magic” — a phrase that he coins — is based on associations of numerous ideas. When primitive peoples construct mental associations, that is, when two or more concepts appear sympathetic, to the primitive mind such concepts represent physical realities. First, the “Law of Similarity” states that the magician employs “imitative” (“mimetic”) or “homeopathic” magic, which associates phenomena through their similarities; that is, “like affects like” and an “effect resembles its cause”. The magician believes that an effect can be produced simply through imitation. Second, the “Law of Contact” or “contagious” magic associates objects through attachments or “contiguity” and states that “part affects part” and a part represents the whole. Thus, magic is primitive albeit false science (an “abortive art”; a “Pseudo-Science”) that allows practitioners to believe that they control the natural world through universal principles; a belief that by its very nature guarantees success.



QUESTIONS:

1. Tylor and Frazer were criticized for over intellectualizing culture and for their lack of appreciation for social relations. What does this mean?
2. Tambiah argues that sympathy and metaphor equally connect entities that share some similarity through linguistic substitution. Contagion and metonymy identify one entity with another through linguistic complementation. Both metaphor and metonymy thus involve a verbal and wholly symbolic transfer of characteristics. What are some examples of this in our world? Moreover, how do we understand Tambiah's criticism of Frazer that similarity and contiguity are really basic operating principles of signs, that is, metaphor and metonymy? What exactly is metaphor and metonymy?
3. What does Tambiah mean when he states that the expressive and symbolic characteristics of language are interwoven with the instrumental performance of actions?

IN-CLASS NOTES: