

Brown University

Religious Studies 026, Spring 2014

Religion Gone Wild: Spirituality and the Environment

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Books Ordered:

Mary Oliver, *House of Light*
Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
Leslie Silko, *Ceremony*
Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?*
Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Trees*
Reading Packet (on OCRA) (password: Wild)

Course Description

A study of the dynamic relation between religion and nature. Religion, in this course, includes forms of religion within and outside the bounds of conventional religious traditions or of what sometimes are called "world religions." In this course, then, religion includes Buddhism and Christianity, on the one hand; and ecofeminism, nature literature, and Australian Aboriginal religion, on the other. Topics in this study of religion, ethics, and ecology include: religious depictions of creation, nature, and the place of humans in the natural world; religions' contribution to environmental degradation and environmental health; religion and environmental justice; and environmentalism as a form of religion.

The course is taught in the tradition of the liberal arts, exposing us to cultural history and to ethical inquiry. "What is the relevance of this material to me and to my community?" will be an implicit, sometimes explicit, question in the course.

Course Requirements

- A. You are expected to participate actively in every aspect of the course. Participation will be an important factor in your life.
- B. Attend every class. Attend every field trip.
- C. Read attentively. The number of pages of assigned reading is sometimes quite limited, but the reading nonetheless requires much attention. Be prepared to say something about the reading during our discussions.
- D. No cell phones; no laptops; no exiting to the bathroom (emergencies only).
- E. Additional requirements:

1) *Daily poem.*

Each class will begin with a poem from Mary Oliver's *House of Light*. Each member of the seminar will be responsible for the selection and reading of one poem.

2) *A journal/ learning portfolio*

You will be required to make at least one entry per week in the journal. Sometimes I will ask you to reflect on a particular question in your journal; other times it will be open-ended. On occasion, I will ask you to write in class in your journal on a particular topic. This assignment is not intended to be onerous, but to provide a flexible venue in which to reflect on a variety of issues that arise during our course together. Your journal/portfolio will include various assignments, for example, maps, songs, poems, and:

3) *a mid-term exam* on questions distributed at least four days before the exam; and

4) *a take-home, final exam*, due by 4:00 pm on May 2 in the Religious Studies Departmental office, 59 George Street (look under the mail boxes for the Religion Gone Wild slot). Your final exam should be embedded in your journal/learning portfolio.

5) *A class retreat* at the end of the semester.

Institutional Grade Evaluation

The grade opportunity for this course is S/NC. Much work will be required for an "S." If you cannot attend a class or field trip due to illness or an extraordinary circumstance, you must write to me in advance. Assignments are to be read carefully, sometimes twice, sometimes more than twice. All written work must demonstrate scholarly care and thoughtfulness.

Course Schedule And Readings

Introduction: What is nature? What is religion? Where do they meet?

Week 1, Jan. 23.: --**Thursday**: General introduction

Week 2, Jan. 28: --**Tuesday**: Peter Van Ness, "Spirituality and the Secular Quest"

Jan 30: --**Thursday**: Kate Soper, "Nature, Human and Inhuman"; Thomas Berry, "The Hudson River Valley"

The Sense of the Sacred in Nature

Week 3, Feb. 4: --**Tuesday**: Carson, "The Sense of Wonder"; Emerson, "Nature"; Dillard, "Teaching a Stone to Talk"; Lopez, "Arctic Dreams;" begin Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (chapters 1-3, 6, 8, and 15)

- Feb. 6: --**Thursday:** finish Dillard.
- Week 4, Feb. 11: --**Tues: Special Night session in the woods** ; meet at 7:15 at Wilson. (be prompt). Readings: John Burroughs, "Snow Walkers"; Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain" and "Good oak;" Thoreau, "Ktaadin"; Cladis, "On the Importance of Owning Chickens" (*No day class*)
- Feb. 13: --**Thursday:** Terry Tempest Williams, "Yellowstone," "In Cahoots with Coyote," and "Winter Solstice at the Moab Slough"

Damaging and Healing Christianity

- Week 5, Feb. 18: --**Tuesday: No class: long weekend**
- Feb. 20: --**Thursday:** Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis"; Fortin, "The Bible Made me to it"
- Week 6, Feb. 25: --**Tuesday:** Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation" and "God and Country"; Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (ch 1 and 5).

Eco-Buddhism

- Feb 27: --**Thursday:** Macy, "The Greening of the Self," Hayward, "Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness"; Eckel, "Is There a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature";
- Week 7, March 4: --**Tuesday:** Harris, "How Environmentalist is Buddhism?"; Deane Curtin, "Dogen, Deep Ecology, and the Ecological Self"
- March 6: --**Thursday: *midterm exam*** (do not miss this class!)

Indigenous Religion: American Indian and Australian Aboriginal

- Week 8, March 11: --**Tuesday: no class: compensation for fieldtrips.**
- March 13: --**Thursday:** "J. Donald Hughes, "American Indian Ecology"; Albanese, "Native Ground"; Barry Lopez, "Language and Narrative"
- Week 9, March 18: --**Tuesday:** Leslie Silko, "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination"; start Silko, *Ceremony*
- March 20: --**Thursday:** Finish *Ceremony*

Week 10, March 25/27: No class; Spring break

Week 11, April 1: --**Tues:** Noonuccal and Noonuccal, "The Rainbow Serpent";
Deborah Bird Rose, "Exploring an Aboriginal Land Ethic";
Scott Russell Sanders, "Settling Down"

Ecofeminism

April 3: --**Thursday:** Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism";
Shamara Shantu Riley, "Ecology as Sistah's Issue Too,"
Paula Gunn Allen, "The Woman I Love is Planet"; Terry
Tempest Williams, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women";
Starhawk, "Fantasy of a Living Future"
Also: receive RISD assignment in class

How Shall We Live, then?

Week 12, April 8: --**Tuesday: No class.** Instead:
1) design and create a map of your homeland;
2) begin the final reading assignment, Jean Giono, *The Man
Who Planted Trees*

April 10: --**Thursday:** "How Shall We Live?" with, Ismar Schorsch,
"Learning to Live with Less"; David Orr, *Ecological Literacy*"

*****April 12??: --**Sat: FIELD TRIP, Providence Zen Center, leave campus
promptly from McGee Street (across from the Main Green, location of
the Faculty Club) at 12:15; return at 4:00**

Week 13, April 15: --**Tuesday:** Wendell Berry, "Waste" and "The Pleasures of
Eating"; Wendell Berry, "Damage" and "Healing"

April 17: --**Thursday: Meet at RISD, outside the main entrance to the
museum, at 4:00. Reading assignment for this session:
Paul Kane, "Inner Landscapes as Sacred Landscapes"**

Week 14, April 22: --**Tuesday:** bring in and share maps

April 24: --**Thursday: Class Retreat** (date may change; details to be
announced) *Final reading assignment*, Jean Giono, *The
Man Who Planted Trees*; Wendell Berry, "Journey's End."

Reminder: *your take-home, final exam*, due by 4:00 pm on May 2 in the Religious Studies
Departmental office, 59 George Street (look under the mail boxes for Religion Gone Wild
slot). Your final exam should be embedded in your journal/learning portfolio.