San José State University
Humanities Department
Religious Studies/Comparative Literature/English 124
Literature and Religious Experience
Section 1, Spring 2017

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Rycenga
Office Location: Clark 437
Telephone: (650) 440-0063 (cell; preferred phone number, messaging fine)
(408) 924-1367 (office; not checked regularly)
Email: jrycenga@earthlink.net (please use this instead of sjsu account)
Office Hours: Wednesday 11:30 am – 2:30 pm, & by appointment
Class Days/Time: Wednesday 3:00 – 5:45pm
Classroom: Boccardo Business Classroom 205

Course Description
Many of the world’s religions thrive on literary expression of their core ideas in scripture, poetry, and narrative. Writers, even when not representing a specific religious tradition, often pursue religious themes, or employ religious metaphors, symbols, and histories. This course will concentrate on a wide range of literature, with a focus on literary representations of spiritual experience, death, war, philosophic insight, religious constraints on creativity, and mysticism.

Washington University in St. Louis offers an academic program in Religion and Literature, described thus: “Religion can be thought of as a set of institutions, a set of ideas and beliefs, or a lived practice (including the rituals, behaviors, and day-to-day life of individuals and communities)—all of which have complex relations with each other, and all of which are affected by and in turn affect literature (not least in the interpretations of scriptures). Necessarily interdisciplinary…as a critical approach, literature and religion asks how these impulses compete, coordinate, or otherwise inform one another and other practices and traditions.” These are strong ideas to guide you in this new way to read literature and comprehend the complexities of religion.

Catalog Description: How authors and poets represent spiritual ideals and human dilemmas in a variety of literary genres such as the epic, the novel, the essay, love poetry and the haiku; writers such as Plato, Emerson, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Merton, Shakespeare, Basho, Hanshan, Rumi and Sufi poets, Kabir, Indian Virasaiva poets, and authors of The Book of Odes and The Mahabharata. Course is repeatable as readings and themes change.
Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

The goals of the course, quite simply, are to provide you with the disciplined reason to become a more perceptive reader, a more persuasive writer, and an increasingly insightful, thoughtful, and reflective human being, replete with analytical skills and broader perspectives on reality.

When students successfully complete this course, they will be able to:

Student Learning Objective One: To write on increasingly complex literary and religious ideas with clarity, focus, and detail (assessed in paper and final exam).

Student Learning Objective Two: To articulate the relation of form and content in literary works, and to develop dexterity in doing this across genres, cultures, religions, and eras (assessed in weekly discussion assignments).

Student Learning Objective Three: To apply technical vocabulary from religious studies, humanities, and theology to literary works in ways that are appropriate and original (assessed in weekly discussion assignments and paper).

Student Learning Objective Four: To sustain multiple interpretations of meaning in literary works, defensible from internal evidence in the text, cultural and religious presumptions around the text, and biographical knowledge of the author and her/his contexts (assessed in classroom discussion and final exam).

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

These textbooks have not been pre-ordered; please order online, new or used, any edition, or obtain an electronic copy, or a library copy. I have given live online links for shorter works, and links to the Amazon.com page for longer works, for your convenience (Amazon.com pages include useful information like ISBN numbers).

Richard Jeffries  
William Shakespeare  
Sophocles  
Plato  
Gotthold Lessing  
Ananda Murthy  
Meena Alexander  
Ilango Adigal  
Octavia Butler  
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz  

The Story of My Heart (available online [here](#)).
Measure for Measure (available online [here](#)).
Antigone (available in a lively translation [here](#)).
Symposium (available online [here](#)).
Nathan the Wise (available online [here](#)).
Samskara (Amazon page [here](#)).
Nampally Road (Amazon page [here](#)).
Shilappadikaram (The Ankle Bracelet)(Amazon page [here](#)).
Parable of the Sower (Amazon page [here](#)).
Poems, Protest and a Dream (Amazon page [here](#)).

Additional readings will be provided by the professor, primarily on Canvas (Emily Dickinson, Richard Jeffries, Akkamahadevi, Ralph Waldo Emerson, scriptures, Dostoevsky, etc.)

Canvas and MYSJSU Messaging

This course requires you to access the Canvas Learning Management System. Course materials, including the syllabus, assignments, readings, and more, will be posted on Canvas. Most assignments will be handed in via Canvas.
There are four requirements for students participating in Canvas.

1. Please include a picture of yourself for the thumbnail on your Canvas profile. This enables me to connect your face, name, interests, and coursework.

2. Whenever possible, upload your assignments directly into the Canvas system using MSWord; that way I can make corrections, pose questions, and comment on your work directly.

3. Within the first three weeks, initiate a conversation with me about yourself and your interests in the course, in college, and asking specific questions you have for me as your professor. If you would rather visit during office hours, that is fine, too.

4. Once you have a few graded assignments back from me, indicate to me in a message what types of feedback are most useful to you. These can include “micro” comments on your writing (spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.), “macro” comments on your writing (style, structure), “micro” questions for content clarification (“What do you mean here? “Are you sure that the Pope is Catholic?”), or “macro” questions on content (“If your contention that religions are always warlike is accurate, how do you explain religious non-violence from Jesus to Martin Luther King?”). I will probably still use all four methods, but if one is especially important to you, I will try to emphasize that one.

My faculty web page can be found at here (at http://www.sjsu.edu/people/jennifer.rycenga/). It contains useful background information about your professor (a.k.a. me), and links to interesting pages about religion (this latter content is being gradually moved to Canvas). I also encourage Facebook users to like three Facebook pages connected to our department:

- American Studies at SJSU: https://www.facebook.com/groups/29260064778/
- Religious Studies at SJSU: https://www.facebook.com/relstudsjsu
- Humanities Club at SJSU: https://www.facebook.com/groups/HumanitiesClubSJSU/

While I prefer to use the Canvas system for messaging students, I will sometimes still use the MySJSU system. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU, in any case, because some university announcements come through that channel. If the email associated with MySJSU defaults to your parents, stay in touch with them!

**Library Liaison**

Peggy Cabrera  
Phone: (408) 808-2034  
Email: peggy.cabrera@sjsu.edu

**Classroom Protocol**

1. The Religious Studies classroom is a no-proselytizing zone! We are engaged in the academic, comparative study of religion. There will be no attempt on the part of any student to convince other students of the truth or falsehood of any given belief. Absolutely no threats of eternal damnation, or promises of eternal reward, are to be enunciated by the professor or the students. The purpose of Religious Studies is NOT to evaluate the truth claims made by religions, but to understand the interpretive systems established by religions as a part of human life. As long as we are in the classroom, the professor has no stake in whether or not a given religious assertion is true or false in the ultimate sense, nor will such questions be entertained.

2. Try to be on time; it is both responsible and respectful.

3. If you must eat in class, try to bring something not overwhelmingly fragrant, or really noisy (e.g. Nacho Cheese Doritos would violate both rules), or really messy.

4. Please place your name prominently atop all written work, including in-class work.
5. Turn off all text messaging devices and cell phones. You may have your computer on for taking notes, but please don't surf the internet when the professor or your fellow students are talking. I am a realist: I know this is happening. But it is disrespectful, much as reading a newspaper when someone else is talking.

6. Be respectful of others in class discussions. Those who violate the common etiquette of good dialogue can receive a lower grade for class participation.

7. Be certain to check the professor's faculty page, and the page for this course, in case of changes, study guides, etc. Check the website before emailing the professor if you are looking for an assignment.

8. While this professor is often glued to her email account, she also has a penchant for traveling to remote natural areas without email or cell phone coverage. She will respond as quickly as she can, but do not expect always-instantaneous response.

Assignments and Grading Policy

This class features regular writing in response to the readings, two quizzes (one of which is a mid-term), a mid-length research paper (7-9 pages), and a final exam. The most important assignments are the weekly writing responses and the research paper. The writing assignments will be explained in the early days of the course, and the paper will be fully discussed by late February. The paper will involve your researching one of the literary works and/or authors in the course, filling in the context on the authors, the religious traditions involved, and the range of interpretations offered on the person's work.

Unless otherwise noted, papers are to be typed and double-spaced with standard margins, and submitted to the Canvas interface. I insist that you use standard bibliographic formats, and proofread your papers. If grammar or spelling errors are rife throughout a paper, that will affect your grade. I will have no mercy on papers that are plagiarized, either intentionally or unintentionally. Full footnoting of all sources, including paraphrases, is required. This professor encourages re-writes on papers; college is the ideal time to practice your writing. Any paper with a grade below A- can be re-written without asking the professor for permission. Please note carefully: the two Absolute Rules for rewrites!

The Two Absolute Rules for Rewrites

1) You must genuinely and substantively rewrite the paper, not just correcting spelling and grammar errors. Indeed, you must rethink, reconceptualize, and revise (a "revision/re-vision" is a seeing-again, seeing something anew). Papers which are merely 'corrected' are unlikely to warrant a substantial change of grade. You should be self-critical, assessing how you can improve. This means both heeding my professorial advice, and spending the time to incorporate your own perception on how your work can improve.

2) You must hand in the graded original along with the new, revised version

Grades for all assignments follow a 100-point system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A+</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>F</th>
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<td>98-100</td>
<td>88-89</td>
<td>78-79</td>
<td>68-69</td>
<td>00-59</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>82-87</td>
<td>72-77</td>
<td>62-67</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-81</td>
<td>70-71</td>
<td>60-61</td>
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A Warning About Canvas Grades: Canvas’s calculations of your current and projected grade will not always be accurate. Primarily this stems from Canvas not knowing how to quantify work you’ve not handed. Therefore, in a course like this with regular steady work, do NOT be fooled by your overall Canvas grade: if you’re not handing in PARCs and TJs with regularity, your grade will suffer in the long run.
Schedule and Weight of Assignments

Reading Quiz #1 05%
Reading Quiz #2 (Midterm on Emerson) 10%
Weekly One-Pagers (WOs), once/week (best 9 of 13) 45% (5% each)
Research Paper 20%
Final Exam 20%

University Policies (Required)

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ Syllabus Information web page at http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/”
# RELS/CLIT/ENG 124: Literature and Religious Experience
## Spring 2017, Section 1 - Class Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with fair notice. Attend class and check the website for changes and assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</th>
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| 1    | February 1 | Introduction to the Class and to Each Other; Form and Content in Religion and in Literature; Authorial Intent and Reader Interpretation  
Authors: Allama Prabhu, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Enheduanna, Akhenaten, Walt Whitman |
| 2    | February 8 | Basic Terms in the Study of Religion; Mysticism, Immanence, Transcendence  
Reading: Richard Jeffries – *The Story of My Heart*  
http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2317/pg2317.html  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to Jeffries (this and all other weekly one-pagers have more specifics on Canvas) |
| 3    | February 15 | The Literature of Scripture  
Note (or bring) the translations of the Bible and Qur’an you used  
Readings: Hebrew Bible: Psalms 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 19, 22, 23; Ecclesiastes  
New Testament: Gospel of John chapters 1-3  
Qur’an: Sura-s 5, 97, 112, 113, 114  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to Western Religions Scripture |
| 4    | February 22 | The Literature of Scripture  
Readings: (all provided on Canvas)  
Bhagavad Gita – excerpts  
Guru Granth Sahib — excerpts  
Japanese Zen poems – to be provided  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to Eastern Religions Scripture |
| 5    | March 1   | The Literature of Philosophy and Mysticism  
Readings: Plato, *The Symposium*  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to Plato |
| 6    | March 8   | Religion as Resource and as Source of Disaster I  
Reading: Sophocles, *Antigone*  
Assignment: Reading Quiz 1, on names, characters, concepts and vocabulary to this point (study guide give March 1)  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Antigone* |
| 7    | March 15  | Religion as Resource and as Source of Disaster II  
Reading: Ilango Adigal – *Shilappadikaram*  
(Edition to order is New Directions, translated by Alain Danielou, |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ISBN 978-0811200011; it can also be found on Amazon, here. Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to <em>Shilappadikaram</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8    | March 22   | Religion as Resource and as Source of Disaster III  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Samskara*                                                                                                               |
| 9    | April 5    | Literary Presentation of Religious Tolerance  
Reading: Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*  
Assignment: Mid-term (Quiz #2) available as a take-home, due April 3 (Monday), based on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Oversoul” and articles in *Religion & Literature* 41:1– available on Canvas March 22  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Nathan the Wise*                                                                                                         |
| 10   | April 12   | Raising Questions I  
Reading: Dostoevsky’s “The Grand Inquisitor” (excerpt from *The Brothers Karamazov*) (available in “files” section on Canvas)  
Assignment – Weekly One-Pager: Response to Dostoevsky                                                                                                                  |
| 11   | April 19   | Utopia/Dystopia  
Reading: Octavia Butler – *Parable of the Talents*  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Parable of the Talents*                                                                                                |
| 12   | April 26   | Raising Questions II  
Reading: Meena Alexander, *Nampally Road* (either hard cover or paperback are fine to order)  
Assignment: Paper Due (Deadline to enable time for rewrites)  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Nampally Road*                                                                                                                |
| 13   | May 3      | Religion as a Ruse  
Reading: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest and a Dream* (pages TBA)  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to Sor Juana                                                                                                                    |
| 14   | May 10     | Religion as a Trap  
Reading: William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*  
http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=measure  
Assignment: All rewrites due (on Canvas or in class) May 11th  
Assignment - Weekly One-Pager: Response to *Measure for Measure*                                                                                                        |
| Final | May 19 Friday | Final Exam: Online, due by 5:00 this day, but can be done earlier. It will be made available on Tuesday May 16                                                                                                           |
Bibliography -- some classics in the study of American religion (not an exhaustive list!)

This list also illustrates two kinds of bibliographic form. First is an MLA format, with annotations (annotations are not necessary in a paper assignment bibliography).


These second items are in a social science format:


Reference Works in the Study of Religion
Encyclopaedia Judaica (DS102.8 E496, 16 vols.);
Encyclopedia of Monasticism (BL631 .E63 2000, 2 vols.);
The Encyclopedia of Islam (DS27 .E523 1986, 10 vols.);

Reference Works in the Study of American Religion
Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics, Djupe & Olson, editors (BL2525 .D58 2003);
Encyclopedia of Religion in American Politics, Schultz & West, editors (BL2525 .E52 1999);
Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, Lippy and Williams, editors (BL 2525 .E53 1988, 3 vols.)
Religions and American Cultures: An Encyclopedia of Cultures, Diversity, and Traditions, Laderman and Léon, editors (BL2525 .R448 2003, 3 vols)
Common Religious Studies Misspellings

I don't subtract for spelling when errors are incidental, but when they become endemic, I get annoyed. If I detect that you don't care about the work you hand in, I get very annoyed indeed. The words listed below are errors that not only occur commonly, but won't be detected by any computer Spell Check. Please watch for them!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORRECT</th>
<th>INCORRECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aisle (passageway)</td>
<td>isle (island)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allot (v. divide and distribute)</td>
<td>a lot (many [two words])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altar (n., platform used in ritual)</td>
<td>alter (v., to change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angel (heavenly being)</td>
<td>angle (point where lines meet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arminian (a Protestant theology)</td>
<td>Armenian (about the region of Armenia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascetic (strict, severe, self-denying)</td>
<td>aesthetic (concerning beauty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>border (boundary line)</td>
<td>boarder (lodger, renter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bored (uninterested)</td>
<td>board (a piece of wood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covenant (agreement)</td>
<td>conven (nuns' residence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dual (having two parts)</td>
<td>duel (contest or combat b/w two people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eerie (weird, uncanny)</td>
<td>Erie (Great Lake; Native Amer. tribe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flee (v. escape, run away)</td>
<td>flea (n. tiny biting insect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hallow (v., make holy)</td>
<td>hollow (adj., empty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holy (adj., sacred)</td>
<td>holly (a shrub w/ spiny leaves &amp; berries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immanent (internal, within)</td>
<td>imminent (impending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immanent (internal, within)</td>
<td>eminent (distinguished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meditation (contemplation)</td>
<td>mediation (negotiation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midst (in the middle of)</td>
<td>mist (light fog, dew)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parish (ecclesiastical subdivision)</td>
<td>perish (v. to die, to be destroyed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prophet (person who speaks for god)</td>
<td>profit (benefit, financial gain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public (open to the entire community)</td>
<td>pubic (of or near the groin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reign (royal rule, authority)</td>
<td>rein (strap or harness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rigid (inflexible, strict, severe)</td>
<td>ridged (having a raised edge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rite (ceremony, ritual)</td>
<td>right (correct)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacred (holy, religious)</td>
<td>scared (afraid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satan (chief demon in Christianity)</td>
<td>sataff (a highly smooth textile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suffering (pain)</td>
<td>suffrage (right to vote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veil (covering for face and head)</td>
<td>vale (meadow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warrior (one who engages in war)</td>
<td>worrier (one who worries excessively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wretched (miserable)</td>
<td>retched (vomited)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beware of confusing these common words

| accept (to respond affirmatively) | except (to exclude, leave out) |
| belief (noun)                  | believe (verb)                 |
| beliefs (plural noun)          | believes (verb)                |
| coarse (lacking in delicacy)   | course (a route or class taken, of course!) |
| creation (the act of creating) | creationism (literal belief in Genesis) |
| descent (lineage, or going downward) | decent (fitting, passable) |
| devote (verb)                  | devout (adjective)             |
| diseased (ill)                 | deceased (dead - i.e., more than just ill) |
| doomed (fated to a bad end)    | domed (covered with a circular roof) |
| form (shape; noun and verb)    | from (preposition)             |
| gentle (mild, kindly, not rough) | gentile (not Jewish) |
| halo (nimbus, light encircling a head) | hallow (make holy) |
| insight (excellent perception) | incite (to urge on)            |
| lose (when you misplace something) | loose (not tight)            |
| performed (done, acted)        | preformed (already formed)     |
Memorable Grammar Hints

Your professor assembled this from various sources, including similar lists by William Safire and various college writing centers.

1. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
4. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
5. Avoid cliches like the plague. (They're old hat).
6. Always avoid annoying alliteration.
7. Be more or less specific.
8. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
9. Also, too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
10. No sentence fragments. No comma splices, run-ons are bad too.
11. Contractions aren't helpful and shouldn't be used.
12. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
13. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
14. One should never generalize.
15. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
16. Don't use no double negatives.
17. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
19. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
20. The passive voice is to be ignored.
21. Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.
22. Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.
23. Kill all exclamation points!!!!
24. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
25. Understatement is probably not the best way to propose earth shattering ideas.
26. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
27. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
28. If you've heard it once, you've heard it a thousand times: resist hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly.
29. Puns are for children, not groan readers.
30. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
31. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
32. Who needs rhetorical questions?
33. Exaggeration is a million times worse than understatement.
34. Profanity is for assholes.
35. Use italics for emphasis sparingly.
36. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
Some Friends You’ll be Making This Semester!

Sor Juana Inés

Gotthold Lessing

William Shakespeare

Meena Alexander

Plato

Octavia Butler