

# **RE224Z GODDESS RELIGIONS**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7pm-9:50pm

Alvin Woods 5-205; July 2-August 19, 1997

(2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students; 35-40 students; 6 week course)

Kathleen O'Grady, Instructor

Wilfrid Laurier University

email: [ko10001@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ko10001@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

Office Hours: 5:30-7pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays

## **Course Description**

"This course is an examination of the concept of deity as feminine, examining the images, symbols and myths of goddesses in selected societies".

## **Required Textbooks:**

1. Course pack, RE224.
2. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. New York: Viking Arkana, 1991. (\$27.99 Canadian)
3. David Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*. New York: SUNY, 1989. (\$24.95 Canadian)

**All texts are also available for free use at the Reserve Desk in the Library.**

## **Course Requirements**

1. (Group) Seminar 25%
2. Research Paper 40%
3. Final Exam 35%

1. (Group) **Seminar** -- 25% of final mark. Each person in the class will be asked to give a short seminar on a goddess topic of her or his choice (proposed topics will be distributed). Topics should be selected by the student in consultation with the instructor. Each person is responsible for preparing a presentation that lasts approximately 10 minutes in length. Small group presentations (of three or less) on a single topic are permitted.

The material presented must be a careful and thoughtful account of the research conducted on the selected topic. This may include an in-depth discussion of a single book (per person, in the case of group seminars), or a small sampling from a variety of sources. The bulk of the seminar will be an interpretation of this research,

but a good seminar will also raise important questions that the material does not answer and indicate possible directions for further research. Creative presentations (dramatic interpretations, for example) are encouraged, so long as the academic material is presented in a clear way to the class.

Alternatively, a student can arrange with the instructor to write a small paper (5-7 pages) in lieu of the seminar.

## 2. **Research Paper** -- 40% of final mark.

This assignment requires extensive research into a particular goddess or goddess tradition. Suggested topics will be distributed during the first week of classes. Topics must be selected in consultation with the instructor.

A research paper is a focused analysis of material obtained from any of a number of different sources (course books, other academic books and monographs, the Internet, magazines, newspapers, personal interviews). The paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, opinions and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed. This paper should be carefully structured and presented. The paper must include a title page, endnotes and a bibliography. I will distribute a style guide indicating the format for the essay. The paper should be approximately 10-12 pages in length. Late papers will be penalized.

Please note: Plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don't be afraid to trust your own words and opinions.

## 3. **Final Exam** -- 35% of final mark, date and place to be announced.

The final exam is a formal test of what you have learned during the class lectures, seminars, guest lectures, films and assigned readings. The questions on the exam will be taken from discussions generated during class. I will indicate the types of questions that may be asked on the final exam during the last class. Textbooks and notebooks will not be allowed in the exam room.

## **Class Schedule**

### **Class 1**

- "**Introduction**" to the course materials and requirements.

"**The Prehistoric Goddess Across Cultures**" We will examine the archaeological evidence of goddess worship and compare the interpretations given by different schools of archaeologists. Careful attention will be paid to the work of Marija Gimbutas. We will discuss how our position in society influences the kinds of questions we ask and the assumptions we may make about another culture.

Readings: Baring text, "Chapter I: In the Beginning"; "Chapter 2: The Neolithic Great Goddess".

### **Class 2**

"**Spiritual Goddess Movements**" We will examine the claims made by a variety of different feminist thinkers and theologians on the goddess worship of prehistory. We will explore whether the existence of a goddess tradition necessarily implies a matriarchal society. In the second half of the class, we will look at the feminist spirituality movement of North America, from the 1970s to the present.

Film -- *Goddess Remembered*; 54 minutes. A look at the archaeological and anthropological evidence of the goddess in prehistory: from France, Malta, Britain, Greece (Delphi and Crete) (with Merlin Stone, Carol

Christ, Starhawk, Charlene Spretnak and others).

Readings: *Course pack* -- Stella Georgoudi, "Creating a Myth of Matriarchy"; Sally Binford, "Are Goddesses and Matriarchies Merely Figments of Feminist Imagination" (and all responses); Cynthia Eller, "Not Just God in a Skirt"; Merlin Stone, "The Great Goddess".

\*\*\*Deadline for choosing a seminar topic. Dates for seminar topics will be assigned.

### Class 3

**"Goddesses of Sumeria and Egypt"** This class will focus on the goddess mythology and archaeological evidence of Inanna/Ishtar from Sumeria and Isis from Egypt. Parallels will be drawn between these goddess traditions and some well-known Hellenic goddesses.

Readings: Baring text, "Chapter 6: Isis"; Kinsley text, "Chapter 6: Innana"

Optional: Baring text, "Chapter 5: Inanna-Ishtar"; Kinsley text, "Chapter 8: Isis"

### Class 4

**"Asherah"** This class will focus on the Canaanite goddesses, particularly "the cult of Asherah". We will look at the references to the Canaanite goddesses in the Hebrew Bible and also discuss the significance of gendered language surrounding "god-talk" in the Bible. The class will conclude with a discussion of the Shekhinah in the Jewish mystical tradition.

Film -- *The Forbidden Goddess*; 28 minutes. An investigation into the varying interpretations of archaeological evidence from the "cult of Asherah".

Readings: Baring and Cashford text, "The Hidden Goddess in the Old Testament"; "The Shekhinah (pp. 638-643).

Optional: "Eve: The Mother of All-Living";

### Class 5

**"Research Paper Guidelines"** -- How to write and document a good research paper.

**"Mary as Goddess"** This class will focus on the varied symbology of the Blessed Virgin Mary, throughout the ages and in different cultures, and link her worship to other goddess traditions of the past. We will also look closely at "Our Lady of Guadalupe" and the "Black Virgin".

Film -- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth: Love and the Goddess, Part II* (abridged). 35min. Campbell, with Bill Moyers discusses the role of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic church, and link her to part of a larger goddess tradition. Great attention is paid to the significance of her "virginity" and the "virgin birth".

Readings: Kinsley text, "Chapter 10: Mary"; Baring text, "The Black Virgin" (pp. 643-647).

Optional: Baring text, "Chapter 14: Mary"

**Small papers due.**

### Class 6

**Part I: "The Moon, Menstruation and the Goddess"**. This class will deal with the importance of menstruation and menarche (first menstruation) in the writings, worship and imagery of a variety of goddess traditions.

**Part II: "Sun Goddesses"**. Generalizations about goddess traditions abound. One of the most prevalent is the proclivity of scholars to align all goddess traditions with the cyclical movements of the moon and all god traditions with the worship of the sun, goddesses with fertility and gods as warriors. We will demonstrate how this generalization is part of a cultural stereotype of the genders, and a marginalization of cultures which resist such polarized categorization. We will then uncover the numerous traditions where the sun is the realm and tool of the goddess, and the variety of interpretations that result from this sun symbology.

The goddess traditions to be discussed in this class include the Aboriginals from Australia, Native traditions from North America, Celtic and African goddess traditions.

Readings: Kinsley text, "Chapter 2: Kuan-yin"; Chapter 4: Amaterasu"

Course Pack: Judith Ochshorn, "Reclaiming Our Past"

### **Class 8**

**"Hindu Goddesses"** Goddesses, such as Laksmi, Durga and Sita will be the focus of this class. We will examine the living tradition of goddess worship in Hinduism and the implications this has for the position of Hindu women in society. We will also discuss the appropriation of Hindu goddesses for the purposes of a feminist spirituality by people from other traditions.

Readings: Kinsley text, "Chapter 1: Durga"; Chapter 3: Laksmi";

### **Class 9**

**"Hindu Goddesses, Part II"** I will provide an introduction to Devi.

Film -- "Devi", 3hours+ Guests are welcome to this class. Feel free to bring snacks.

Readings: Kinsley text, "Chapter 5: Sita";

Course Pack: Sandra P. Robinson, "Hindu Paradigms of Women"

### **Class 10**

**"Jungian Psychology, Therapy and Self-Help through the Goddess"** This class will look at both the academic and popular therapeutic approaches through the goddess.

Readings: *Course pack* -- Judith Hoch-Smith, "Introduction"; Nelle Morton, "The Dilemma of Celebration"; Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith"

**and**

**"Contemporary Feminism and the Goddess"** We will undertake an exploration of the different ways in which the goddess is used to buttress writings from contemporary feminist philosophers and theologians. Much time will be spent on both contemporary French feminism (Irigaray and Kristeva) and American liberal feminist writings.

Readings:

Course book: Luce Irigaray, "Divine Women"; Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater"; Emily Culpepper, "Are Women's Bodies Sacred?";

## Class 11

**"Wicca and Neo-paganism: Goddess Worship Today"** We will examine the contemporary practice of Wicca and neo-paganism. This class will explore both the politics and the spiritual focus of these movements.

Film -- *Full Circle*; 57minutes. Contemporary Gaia movement; Wicca movement; importance of a feminist spirituality for a political feminism (with Starhawk, Charlene Spretnak, Matthew Fox, Margo Adler).

Readings:

Course book: Margot Adler, "The Craft Today"; Rosemary Ruther, "Goddesses and Witches"; Mary Jo Weaver, "Who is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?"; Rosemary Ruether, "Female Symbols".

## Class 12

**I. "The Goddess in Popular Culture"** An examination of the use of Goddess imagery and mythology in comix, films, video games, music, and in high art forms, including novels, paintings, operas. Class members will be asked to bring in (or describe) examples (positive and negative) of how the goddess is used in various art-forms today.

**II. "Concluding Reflections: 'What would it have been like to grow up in a world where God was a woman?'"** (Shirley Ann Ranck)

Course Pack: Marsha A. Hewitt, "Cyborgs, Drag Queens and Goddesses";

**Final Exam** -- Good luck!

## **RE 224Z: GODDESS RELIGIONS Class Reader [1](#)**

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring, "Introduction" from *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles* (NY and London: Plenum Press, 1978), 1-23.
2. Nelle Morton, "The Dilemma of Celebration" from Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 159-166.
3. Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology" from Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 198-209.
4. Mary Jo Weaver, "Who is the Goddess and Where Does She Get Us?" *Journal of Feminist Studies* 5 (Spring 1989): 49-64.
5. Judith Ochshorn, "Reclaiming Our Past" from Janet Klaven and Mary I. Buckley, *Women's Spirit Bonding* (NY: Pilgrim's Press, 1984), 281-292.

6. Merlin Stone, "The Great Goddess: Who Was She?" from Charlene Spretnak, ed., *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (NY: Doubleday, 1982), 7-21.
7. Stella Georgoudi, "Creating a Myth of Matriarchy" from Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., *A History of Women* (Cambridge MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1992), 449-63.
8. Cynthia Eller, "Not Just God in a Skirt" from *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (NY: Crossroads, 1993), 130-149.
9. Sally Blinford, "Are Goddesses and Matriarchies Merely Figments of Feminist Imagination?" from Charlene Spretnak, ed., *Politics of Women's Spirituality* (NY: Doubleday, 1982), 541-61.
10. Rosemary Ruether, "Goddesses and Witches: Liberation and Countercultural Feminism" *Christian Century* Sept. 1980: 842-847.
11. Rosemary Ruether, "Female Symbols, Values and Context", *Christianity and Crisis* January 12, 1987: 460-464.
12. Emily Culpepper, "Are Women's Bodies Sacred?: Listening to the Yes's and the No's" from Elizabeth Dodson Gray, ed. *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience* (Wellesley, MA.: Roundtable Press, 1988), 199-209.
13. Marsha A. Hewitt, "Cyborgs, Drag Queens and Goddesses: Emancipatory-regressive Paths in Feminist Theory", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 5/2 (1993): 135-154.

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1. Based on the course reader created by Prof. Kay Koppedrayer, Wilfrid Laurier University.