

REL 324 / SAS 300 M004 Spring 2010  
**RELIGIONS AND STORYTELLING**  
TTh 11 - 12:20 114 Hall of Languages

Instructor: Ann Grodzins Gold      office: HL 507 voice mail: x-5717; dept.: x-3861  
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In many religious traditions stories happily combine the virtues of entertainment and instruction. In this course we take advantage of stories to learn about several different religious worlds. We also think about why stories have the power to entrance and move human minds. Through studying stories and storytelling in various contexts, both "traditional" and "modern," we may hope to learn how stories transmit religious teachings but also question and sometimes transform them. Besides the primary focus on narrative dimensions of religious teachings, other topics touched on include gender roles, personal and political identities, quests and journeys, resistance and empowerment, and aesthetic aspects of narrative performances. This course fulfils a "*critical reflections*" requirement for the Liberal Arts Core.

### Success / Requirements

Requirements include extensive active participation in group discussions, frequent writing tasks based on the syllabus materials, and one story project using outside sources. Success will depend most of all on coming to class, doing the readings carefully, and demonstrating this attentiveness in your class contributions and written work. I have not designated discussion days on the syllabus because I expect discussion to be our usual mode. Work breaks down into the following categories (see p. 7 of syllabus for additional information on each category):

participation	30%
5 response papers	30%
4 are 2+ pages @ 5 each	
1 is 4+ pages @ 10	
story project	25%
take-home final essay question (5+ pages)	15%

### Textbooks

Five books and selected on-line reserve materials contain the required readings. The books are available for purchase at the **Orange** bookstore. The reserve materials can be accessed through the folders in course documents on the merged REL/SAS Blackboard site.

The required books are:

Bright, William, ed. 1993. *A Coyote Reader*

Hejaiej, Monia. 1996. *Behind Closed Doors: Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis*

MacDonald, Margaret Read. 2006. *Ten Traditional Tellers*.

McElroy, Colleen J. 1999. *Over the Lip of the World: Among the Storytellers of Madagascar*

Rushdie, Salman. 1990. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Blackboard should have the following materials:

[REL/SAS.324/300.Merged.SPRING10.Religions & Storytelling](#)

**Buddhist stories**

Khoroché, Peter. 1989. Selections from: *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: "The Hare" 32-38; "Unmadayanti" 88-95; "The Jar Full of Spirits" (110-114); "The Ibex" 173-177; "The Buffalo" 245-248.

**European/Christian stories as retold by a pioneering American storyteller**

Sawyer, Ruth. 1990 [1942] *The Way of the Storyteller*, pp. 219-315, 9 stories.

**India's storytelling traditions**

Gold, Ann Grodzins, transl. 1995. "Mother Ten's Stories," in *Religions of India in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., read introduction and "The Brahman's Daughter and the Five Bachelors," "The Sword-Husband," and "The Old Woman and the Yellow Calf," 434-448.

Gold, Ann Grodzins. 1994. "Purdah is as Purdah's Kept: A Storyteller's Story" from *Listen to the Heron's Words* by Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, 164-181 (includes the story of "Ganeshji and the Brahman Girl")

Narayan, Kirin. 1989 *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*, "There's always a reason", 15-36; "Loincloths and Celibacy," 113-131; "False Gurus and Gullible Disciples," 132-159

Richman, Paula, ed. *Questioning Ramayanas*. selections

Richman, Paula, ed. 2008. *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology*. selections

**Jewish stories**

Ben-Zvi, Hava. 2006. *The Bride Who Argued With God: Tales from the Treasury of Jewish Folklore*. Part I: Set Me As A Seal Upon Thine Heart, all 8 stories, pp. 3-39.

Bin Gorion, Micha Joseph. 1990. *Mimekor Yisrael: Selected Classical Jewish Folktales*. "Nathan of the Radiance" 85-87; "The Scholar, the Rich Man, and the God-Fearing Man," 247-252

Schwartz, Howard. 1986. *Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales from Around the World*. "Miraculous Dust," 20-22; "The Sword of Moses," 39-47; "The Disguised Princess," 105-111; "The Donkey Girl," 202-208

Weinreich, Beatrice Silverman. Editor. 1988. *Yiddish Folktales*. "A Letter to God," 163-166; "The Baal Shem Tov and the Herdsman," 267-269

Yassif, Eli. 1999. *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*. "The Emperor and the Rabbi" p. 204; "The Gate of Hell," 358-360

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. 1979. *When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw*. "Shrewd Todie and Lyzer the Miser," 3-13

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. 1991. *A Day of Pleasure*. "Why the Geese Shrieked," 39-45

### ***Korean stories***

Cho, Hee-wong. 2001. *Korean Folktales*. "The Farting Daughter-in-Law," 33-36; "The Fox Sister," 153-156.

Chun, Shin-Yong. 1979. *Korean Folk Tales*. "The Bride's Island," 41-45; "Princess Bari," 97-106.

Chung, Hyo Ye. 2007. *Tales of filial devotion, loyalty, respect and benevolence from the history and folklore of Korea*. "Sim Chong: The Girl Who Became the Eyes of Her Father," 34-45.

Zong, In-Sob. 1984. *Folk Tales from Korea, Third Edition*. "The Two Sisters, Rose and Lotus," 201-207.

### ***Pashtun stories***

Ahmad, Aisha and Roger Boase. 2008. *Pashtun Tales from the Pakistan-Afghan Frontier*. "The Parrot and the Starling," 129-151; "The Prince and the Faqir," 152-157; "The Dancing Dolls," 158-160; "The Merchant and the Parrot," 161-176.

### Week/Date    Topic/Readings

#### *Stories about stories*

1 Tu 1/19    Organizational session / introduction / openings  
"Once upon a time"; "In a certain town"; "Long long ago"; "Allah has spoken and his word is a blessing"; "I went and saw for you, I give you a story"; "See so that we may see"

Th 1/21    Stories, lives, values, morals, meanings  
Read: begin Rushdie's Haroun  
*student self- introductions through stories*  
• hand-out for RP 1 •  
*Note:* After 1/21, all "*hand-outs*" will be paperless and available on Blackboard "*assignments*."  
• sign-up for discussion leaders: weeks 2-6 •

2 Tu 1/26    More on stories and lives  
Read: continue Rushdie's *Haroun*  
*introductions continue*  
• hand-out for all remaining response papers •

*Professor Gold will be traveling to a conference in Japan and miss the next 4 classes:  
Soonki is in charge!*

Th 1/28    "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?"

Read: finish Rushdie's *Haroun*

First half: student point-people on *Haroun*

Second half: visual and narrative arts in India

Film: Mithila Painters (40 minutes)

•• RP 1 due ••

*Women in tales from India and Korea:*

*Clever, virtuous, brave, self-sacrificing, and transgressive females*

3 Tu 2/2 Women's worship and women's power in India  
Read: Gold, "Mother Ten's Stories" and "Purdah is as Purdah's kept" (BB, 2 PDFs)  
student point-people on 3 stories and on Shobhag Kanvar

Th 2/4 Korean folk heroines  
Read: All Korean stories (BB, 4 PDFs, 6 stories)  
No point-people; Soonki will give cultural background, show film clips and lead discussion; everyone should come with ideas and questions

*storytelling as religious teaching and learning:  
subtle and less subtle morals in Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Christian traditions*

4 Tu 2/9 **Guest in the classroom: Professor Jane Marie Law, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, will give a guest storytelling presentation**  
Read: Khoroché, Jataka stories (BB, 1 PDF, 5 stories)

Th 2/11 A Hindu guru teaches through stories and humor  
Read: Narayan, *Storytellers* (BB, 1 PDF, 3 chapters)

5 Tu 2/16 Demons, rabbis, miracles and a few strong women:  
selected stories from Judaic traditions  
Read: All Jewish stories (BB, 7 PDFS, 20 stories)  
• hand-out on story projects •

Th 2/18 Good deeds, faith, blessings and other Christian themes  
Read: Sawyer, *Way of the Storyteller* (BB, 1 PDF, 9 stories)  
• sign-up for discussion leaders: weeks 7-10 •  
•• RP 2 due ••

*Women's story worlds: gender, religion and imagination in an Islamic society*

6 Tu 2/23 Muslim women's tales; strategies of compliance and resistance  
Read: Hejaiej, pp. 1-94

Th 2/25 Adventures, virtues, trials and triumphs; heroines and harridans  
Read: from Hejaiej, pp. 97-139, select **any three** stories by Ghaya

7 Tu 3/2 Women's words and worlds  
Read: from Hejaiej, pp. 140-193, select **three more** stories by Ghaya

- Th 3/4 What might we learn about Islam from Tunisian women's stories?  
and what about Pashtun men's stories?  
Read: Hejaiej, pp. 194- end *select at least 2 stories each by Sa'diyya and  
Kheira plus two from Pashtun Tales* (BB, 1 PDF, 4 stories)  
•• RP 3 due date ••

Searching for storytelling in modern Madagascar

- 8 Tu 3/9 Colleen McElroy's journey  
Read: McElroy, Introduction and Chapters 1-2

- Th 3/11 Strange roads and "familiar paths"  
Read: McElroy, Chapters 3-5  
Film: *Angano Angano: Tales from Madagascar* (64 minutes)  
•• story project topic and preliminary source list due ••

## 9 SPRING BREAK

- 10 Tu 3/23 Poetry and politics  
Read: McElroy, Chapters 6-7

- Th 3/25 Common human truths:  
Why it is better not to marry a monster, and why stars are like ancestors  
Read: McElroy, Chapters 8-9  
•• RP 4 due date ••

*an epic and transcultural interlude: the travels of Sita*

- 11 Tu 3/30 The Hindu epic *Ramayana*  
Read: Richman, ed. *Ramayana Stories*, pp. 2-13 (BB, 1 PDF)

**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED EVENT outside the classroom:**  
film *Sita Sings the Blues* presented by the filmmaker Nina Paley DETAILS TBA

- Th 4/1 Sita, Speak!  
Read: Richman, ed., *Questioning Ramayanas*, selections TBA (BB, 1 PDF)

*Trickster tales on American ground*

- 12 Tu 4/6 Introducing Coyote and fellow tricksters in the context of indigenous religions  
Read: Bright, 1-23

- Th 4/8 Coyote's many talents  
Read: Bright, 24-64

13 Tu 4/13 . . . and susceptibilities  
Read: Bright, 65-120

Th 4/15 "You sure Coyote is a myth?"  
Read: Bright, 121-184 **and** MacDonald, 181-189 ("Coyote and the Field Mice")  
•• RP 5 due ••

*Global storytelling, local origins*  
*student performative projects will be scheduled during weeks 14-16*

14 Tu 4/20 Native American, Tibetan, Brazilian  
Read: MacDonald, 1-62

Th 4/22 Thai, Hawaiian, Liberian  
Read: MacDonald, 63-114

15 Tu 4/27 New Caledonian, Alaskan, Ghanaian  
Read: MacDonald, 115-165  
•• all written components of story projects due in class ••

Th 4/29 nothing but *performative projects*  
• hand-out for take-home final essay •

16 Tu 5/4 Conclusion, evaluations, food stories  
"The story has ended."  
"And they all lived safely . . . "  
"They are there, we are here."  
"This is the place that my story ends. The matter as I understand it,  
that's what I give to you."  
"One spot out, one spot in, My little tale is done."

•• On the date of our class's scheduled final exam, your take-home essays are due at noon in 501 Hall of Languages ••

*more about requirements*

**Participation** means:

1) **All students** are expected to come to **every** class prepared to talk about the day's reading assignment.

2) Beginning the second week of class, 3-4 students will take **pre-arranged**, rotating turns at being "point-persons" also known as discussion leaders. A point-person gives a **brief** (under 3 minutes) opening presentation of the assigned readings. This is **not** a summary, but more of an oral response. Its main purpose is to **get a general discussion going among all class members**. Ideally, you would conclude with questions, addressed to fellow students (not your professor). Sometimes this will be an opportunity to practice storytelling. *Any and all creative strategies are encouraged!* Please consult one another and cooperate to prepare. I will facilitate this with an advance sign-up sheet. **Everyone must take at least two turns in the course of the semester!**

Your participation is assessed largely on presence and preparation; discussion leadership is a major component. Everyone starts with a B (22 points). You will maintain it through fulfilling the conditions detailed above. Consistently well-prepared discussion and near-perfect attendance can of course raise this grade; evident negligence and no-shows on your discussion leader turn day can lower it.

- **attendance counts**, but I don't want unwilling prisoners. Therefore, missing three or fewer classes will not affect your grade. Each cut over three will take 3 points off your participation score. Soonki, as TA, will do her best to keep an accurate written record of student attendance, beginning the second week of the semester. *But it is your responsibility to sign the sheet!*

Note 1: Only documented medical and family *emergencies*, religious holidays (or, for participants in athletic programs, documented, prearranged events) will not count against your attendance record.

Note 2: Students missing class for any reason are themselves responsible for finding out what they missed, turning in their work, and obtaining assignments. Contact instructor or TA by email, or check with the Department of Religion secretary in 501 HL. And of course look on Blackboard!

**Response papers** are just that: a chance for you to respond to each unit of readings. They may be written informally, and in the first person -- but that does not mean without correct grammar and spelling. Out of 5 response papers, 4 will be at least 2 pages; 1 will be at least 4 pages. You may choose among papers 3-4-5 which one you will write as the longer assignment.

**Story project** Process and options will be detailed in a later hand-out. In general, options will include: traditional library research on a topic selected in consultation with the instructor; performance such as dramatizations of stories or other creative events in the classroom; other artistic representations of stories or storytelling; story collection, transcription and interpretation. Performance, artistic and collection projects may be collaborative, and will include some analytic writing, but significantly less than the library research option.

**Take-home final essay** should demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of syllabus materials and your ability to link different units through themes raised over the course of the semester.

## *Learning Outcomes*

*In keeping with University-wide concerns to assess learning outcomes in undergraduate courses, the religion department advises all students of the following goals. You will learn:*

- to understand better what we mean by "religion" and to think more critically about the subject;*
- to become more aware of a diversity of perspectives within the study of religion;*
- to know and understand better diverse manifestations of religion within human cultures and societies, and be able to describe and interpret them.*

*Your grades in this course, based on written and classroom performance, will reflect your achievement of these goals, at the broadest level.*

### **IMPORTANT NOTICES REGARDING DISABILITY, INTEGRITY AND COURTESY: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

*disability* Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the Office of Disability Services website, <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>

*academic integrity* The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/> Students in REL 324/SAS 300.4 found violating academic integrity in any aspect of their class work will receive the grade F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.

*academic courtesy* All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. Please come to class on time to avoid disrupting the class. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Turn off and put away all cell phones and MP3 players. Refrain from using computers for any non-course related activities. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; your instructor will let you know when class is over. Eating is not allowed during class. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.