

SCAR 2BB3 – IMAGES OF THE DIVINE FEMININE Summer 2022

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Course Description

An examination of some of the ways the divine has been portrayed as feminine in diverse cultures. In this course, we will explore the variety of ways in which people, in both the past and at present, have envisioned, interpreted, and worshipped the feminine divine. Studying these manifestations of the divine feminine, and the ways that such figures are worshipped and understood helps to uncover societal assumptions of gender roles, how they are reinforced, or at times, how they are challenged and re-interpreted. Exploring how the divine feminine exists within traditional mediums, such as religious texts, and in more modern representations, such as popular media, we will analyze how gender and sexuality intersect with religion, culture, and power.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Gain a broad understanding of how female figures are represented in a variety of cultures and traditions
- Learn to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, as well as learn how to evaluate sources and determine their value
- Gain an awareness of the study of religion, culture, and gender through consideration of manifestations and perceptions of female figures
- Develop a critical ability to identify and understand the significance of gender in relation to privilege and power
- Critically consider gender roles, their traditional positioning in various cultures and contexts, and the implications of these roles
- Gain tools and knowledge to participate in contemporary debates concerning gender roles and the representation of women

Required Materials and Texts

- Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*
- David Kinsley, *The Goddess' Mirror: Visions of the Divine Feminine from East and West*
- Additional readings and materials (texts, podcasts, videos) will also be required, and will either be accessible via the internet, or made available by the instructor through Avenue to Learn. *Note:* If you experience any issues accessing course materials, please reach out to the instructor.

Class Format

Virtual lecture style and class/group discussions. Each class, we will be meeting via Zoom. The Zoom link will be made available through the course Avenue to Learn page.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Participation & Engagement – 15%, due: ongoing
2. Goddess Podcast – 20%, due: July 11
3. Media Response Paper – 10%, due: July 29

Research Project

4. Research Proposal – 10%, due: July 4
5. Annotated Bibliography – 15%, due: July 18
6. Final Paper – 30%, due: August 5

Course Evaluation – Details

Participation and Engagement (15%), ongoing

Attendance is mandatory for all classes. Please be considerate of all class members by arriving on time and staying until class concludes. Participation in class discussions is also mandatory, and forms a portion of your grade. Participation in discussions requires that you attend each class having read/viewed and reflected on all assigned course materials for that class.

Goddess Podcast (20%), July 11

In a group, students will produce a podcast of roughly 5-7 minutes that discusses a goddess you have chosen. The precise format of the podcast is up to you, but information that must be discussed includes: the historical context of that goddess, contemporary manifestations of that figure, and how/why this figure is relevant to major themes we have discussed throughout the course.

Media Response Paper (10%), July 29

In Weeks 5 and 6, we will be watching films that offer both historical interpretations of divine women and contemporary manifestations of how the divine feminine is understood. In a short paper (roughly 600-800 words) your job is to reflect on one of these films. Issues that your reflection should consider include: who is the divine feminine that is being depicted, what historical assumptions does this film make, how does this depiction resonate with other depictions we have explored, what message do you feel that the creator was attempting to portray, and what was your response or reaction to the film? In addition to the assigned readings that touch on these films, students should also engage with other literature on the subject, and cite their work appropriately.

Research Project (55%)

This is a three-part project that will ask you to engage with research on a topic and communicate your findings.

Topic Proposal July 4 10%

Propose the topic of your project in roughly 250 words. Your proposal should include the topic that you plan to focus on, why you are interested in that subject, how you plan to find information, what information you have already found, and why it is important to study this topic.

Annotated Bibliography July 18 15%

Cite at least eight sources that you are using to investigate your topic. It is acceptable to consult both academic and more popular sources in your research, but at least five sources in your annotated bibliography must be academic sources. Below each citation, include 5-8 sentences summarizing that source and explaining its relevance to your research.

Final Research Paper August 5 30%

In roughly 1500-2000 words (6-8 double-spaced pages), critically engage with the topic that you have explored. More information about the topics you may wish to explore and how to succeed in this assignment will be covered in class.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (June 20 & 22)

Class 1 (June 20) – Introductions

Readings:

Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess" Available online at:
<https://www.goddessariadne.org/why-women-need-the-goddess-part-1>.

Other Materials:

Crash Course World Mythology: Great Goddesses
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpM-pfh-WWo&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNCG9Vq7vdyJytS-F-xGi7_&index=15

"Race, Gender, and Sexuality – What's Religion Got to Do With 'Em?" *Keeping it 101* (Podcast) <https://keepingit101.com/e201>

Notes: Make sure to read syllabus thoroughly, and reach out with any questions!

Class 2 (June 22) – Paleolithic and Neolithic Great Goddesses

Readings:

Ruether, Chapter 1

Other Materials:

“Nude Woman (Venus of Willendorf)” *Smarthistory* (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENAZqOoOVal>.

Jacques Leslie “The Goddess Theory” *Los Angeles Times*
<https://12ft.io/proxy?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.latimes.com%2Farchives%2Farchives-xpm-1989-06-11-tm-2975-story.html>.

Notes: n/a

Week 2 (June 27 & 29)

Class 1 (June 27) – Ancient Near East: Mesopotamia and Egypt

Readings:

Kinsley, Chapter 6 & 8

Other Materials:

“Ishtar” Entry in the World History Encyclopedia, by Louise Pryke
<https://www.worldhistory.org/ishtar/>

“The Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld” *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative*
(online digital resource)
https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=descent_ishtar_netherworld.

“Isis” Entry in the World History Encyclopedia, by Joshua J. Mark
<https://www.worldhistory.org/isis/>

“Pantheons of the Ancient Mediterranean” *Crash Course* (video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcQ-6Zd1638&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNCG9Vq7vdyJytS-F-xGi7_&index=8.

Notes: Begin planning topic/proposal for Research Project

Class 2 (June 29) – Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome

Readings:

Kinsley, Chapter 7 & 9

Other Materials:

“Bringer of Death, the Dread Goddess Persephone, and her mother, Demeter”
Let’s Talk About Myths, Baby! (podcast) <https://play.acast.com/s/lets-talk-about->

[myths-baby-a-greek-and-roman-mythology-podcast/lxxxvi-bringerofdeath-theadreadgoddesspersephone-andhermother-demeter.](https://www.worldhistory.org/persephone/)

Pick 2 Goddesses from the Ancient Greek pantheon, and read their *World History Encyclopedia* entry. One example can be found here:

<https://www.worldhistory.org/persephone/>.

Notes: Begin working with group members for Podcast project

Week 3 (July 4 & 6)

Class 1 (July 4) – Women in the Bible

Readings:

Ruether, Chapter 3

Kinsley, Chapter 10

Other Materials:

“Genesis 1-3” **Note: Any version of the Bible that you can get your hands on is acceptable, but for an online link to the King James Version, see here:*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201-3&version=KJV>.

Pick and read at least 2 profiles from the “Know Your Mothers” project online <https://knowyourmothers.com/> (also available on the Apple app store)

“Women in the Bible” *Reclaiming the Garden* (podcast)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/women-in-the-bible/id1563043996?i=1000535291494>

CW: mention of sexual assault in the context of Biblical stories

Notes: Proposal for Research Project due (worth 10% of Final Grade)

Class 2 (July 6) – Goddesses in India

Readings:

Kinsley, Chapters 1 & 5

Other Materials:

“Women in Hinduism” *BBC: Beyond Belief* (podcast)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mhn3>

“Quick Guide to the Ramayana” *British Library*

<https://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/whatson/exhibitions/ramayana/guide.html>.

“Ramayana – Overview” *British Library*

<https://www.bl.uk/learning/cult/inside/ramayanastories/overview/ramaoverview.html>.

Notes: n/a

Week 4 (July 11 & 13)

Class 1 (July 11) – Goddesses in Mesoamerica

Readings:

Ruether, Chapter 7

Other Materials:

“Religion in Mexico” *BBC: Beyond Belief* (podcast)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bgpqgh>

Kirby Farah, “Day of the Dead: From Aztec Goddess Worship to Modern Mexican Celebration” *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/day-of-the-dead-from-aztec-goddess-worship-to-modern-mexican-celebration-124962>.

Rebecca Janzen, “Why the Virgin of Guadalupe is More Than a Religious Icon to Catholics in Mexico” *The Conversation* December 10, 2020

<https://theconversation.com/why-the-virgin-of-guadalupe-is-more-than-a-religious-icon-to-catholics-in-mexico-151251>.

Notes: Goddess Podcast due (worth 20% of Final Grade)

Class 2 (July 13) – African Diasporic Religions

Readings:

Carolyn Morrow Long, “Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo: Sin, Fraud, Entertainment, and Religion” *Nova Religio* 6.1 (2002): 86-101.

Other Materials:

“You Don’t Know African Diasporic Religions” *Keeping it 101* (podcast)

<https://keepingit101.com/e402>

Taylor Crumpton, “Glory B: Beyoncé, the African Diaspora, and the Baptism of ‘Black is King’” *The Ringer* August 4, 2020.

<https://www.theringer.com/movies/2020/8/4/21353713/beyonce-black-is-king-african-diaspora-orisa-oshun>.

Brujas in Brooklyn (BBC documentary)

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/B-byAHOn8n5/?igshid=1gi64jwzdxz5o>

Inside the Coven: Voodoo in New Orleans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-TLa2jGMf0>

Notes: n/a

Week 5 (July 18 & 20)

Class 1 (July 18) – Women and Witches in Medieval Europe and Colonial America

Readings:

Ruether, Chapter 6

Other Materials:

Joanne M. Pierce “Who are Patron Saints and Why Do Catholics Venerate Them?” *The Conversation* November 10, 2020 <https://theconversation.com/who-are-patron-saints-and-why-do-catholics-venerate-them-148508>

“Brigid: Survival of a Goddess” *The Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids*
<https://druidry.org/resources/brigid-survival-of-a-goddess>.

Marta Cobb, “Morgan le Fay: How Arthurian Legend Turned a Powerful Woman from Healer to Villain” *The Conversation* January 31, 2019
<https://theconversation.com/morgan-le-fay-how-arthurian-legend-turned-a-powerful-woman-from-healer-to-villain-109928>.

“Witchcraft” *Crash Course European History* (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rW4XFiHUQAs&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtMsMTfmR0mkVQG8AqrAmJFX&index=12>.

Notes: Annotated Bibliography for Research Project due (worth 15% of Final Grade)

Class 2 (July 20) – The Monstrous Feminine

Readings:

Laurel Zwissler, “‘I am That Very Witch’: On The Witch, Feminism, and Not Surviving Patriarchy” *Journal of Religion and Film* 22.3 (2018): 1-34.

Other Materials:

Yale Film Analysis Guide (<https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/>). Read especially 'Basic Terms' and 'Cinematography'

"What Really Happened During the Salem Witch Trials?" *TedEd* (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVd8kuufBhM>.

"The Salem Witch Trials" *BBC: In Our Time* (podcast)
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06pxp2z>.

Notes: In-Class Film Screening – *The Witch* (2015)

Week 6 (July 25 & 27)

Class 1 (July 25) – The Divine Feminine in Western Popular Culture

Readings:

Kristy Maddux, "The da Vinci Code and the Regressive Gender Politics of Celebrating Women" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25.3 (2008): 225-248.

OR

Rikke Schubart, "Bulk, Breast, and Beauty: Negotiating the Superhero Body in Gal Gadot's *Wonder Woman*" *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 33.2 (2019): 160-172.

See note below on the films we will be discussing, and read the article that corresponds with the film you decided to watch

Other Materials:

Chloe Germaine Buckley "Hag, Temptress or Feminist Icon? The Witch in Popular Culture" *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/hag-temptress-or-feminist-icon-the-witch-in-popular-culture-77374>.

Watch **EITHER** *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) **OR** *Wonder Woman* (2017)

Read the following film reviews:

["How *Wonder Woman* Succeeds as a Feminist Film"](#)

["*Wonder Woman*"](#)

["The New 'Wonder Woman' Is Really A Story About Jesus"](#)

["'Wonder Woman' is a Win for Women and Jewish People"](#)

Notes: While you are only required to watch one of the two films, both will be discussed (and spoiled) in class

Class 2 (July 27) – Modern Paganism: Rebirth of the Divine Feminine

Readings:

Ruether, Chapter 10

Other Materials:

“Reclaiming’s Spiral Dance: Three Decades of Magic” (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5k8EU4TeBXM>

Charlotte Allen, “The Scholars and the Goddess” *The Atlantic*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2001/01/the-scholars-and-the-goddess/305910/>.

Notes: Media Response Paper due Friday July 29 (worth 10% of Final Grade)

Week 7 (August 1 & 3)

Class 1 (August 1) – No Class (Civic Holiday)

Readings: n/a

Notes: n/a

Class 2 (August 3) – Modern Paganism: Going Viral

Readings:

Áine Warren, “The Morrigan as a ‘Dark Goddess’: A Goddess Re-Imagined Through Therapeutic Self-Narration of Women on Social Media” *The Pomegranate* 21.2 (2019): 237-255.

Other Materials:

Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan, “WitchTok: How the Occult Became Big Online” *Financial Times* April 6, 2021 <https://www.ft.com/content/ed8dd8b7-77d2-4c9c-8da8-2fa06230daf4>.

Deborah Netburn “The Working Witches of Los Angeles Just Want You to Be Your Best Self” *Los Angeles Times* June 11, 2019

<https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-col1-witches-of-los-angeles-20190611-htmlstory.html>.

Carol P. Christ, “Why Women, Men and Other Living Things Still Need the Goddess: remembering and Reflecting 35 Years Later” *Feminist Theology* 20.3 (2012)” 242-255.

Notes: Final Paper due Friday August 5 (worth 30% of Final Grade)

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be submitted through Avenue to Learn as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file. Assignments submitted as email attachments will not be graded.

If you have a query about a grade for an assignment, please make an appointment to discuss the issue. Please note that any grades which are reviewed may be increased, may stay the same, or in some cases, may be decreased. Please also be advised that grades can no longer be reviewed after they have been submitted to the Registrar's office at the end of the term.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Late assignments, without a valid and approved reason (e.g. medical reason with a doctor's note, arranging an extension before the deadline) will be accepted up to 6 days past their due date. For each day that an assignment is late, the final grade of that assignment will be docked 10%. After 6 days, assignments will no longer be accepted, and you will receive a mark of zero.

Please note: If you find that you are having a hard time meeting a deadline, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your situation. Speaking with me does not guarantee you will receive an extension. However, I understand that stressful circumstances can arise which make meeting deadlines difficult, so do not hesitate to get in touch before a deadline approaches if you are facing challenges.

Personal Email Policy

I will only respond to emails sent from a McMaster email address. Please be sure to include the course number or title in the subject line. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. If you email me Friday afternoon/evening, or over the weekend, you can expect a response by Monday afternoon.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

In this course, plagiarism on an assignment will automatically result in a grade of zero for that assignment, and may lead to more serious consequences, as determined by the Office of Academic Integrity.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their

work electronically to Turnitin.com through Avenue to Learn so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor at the beginning of the term. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

This course will use various on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), Zoom, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further

information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Course Modification

The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course during the term. This includes the dates and deadlines for any assignments, or the required readings or assigned materials for a given week. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with students will be given. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email and course websites regularly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.