

# The Language of Heresy

(RST 201; CRN 93179)

Spring Quarter, 12:10-3pm on Tuesdays  
822 Sproul Hall

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Amidst global struggles for cultural identity, the power to name constitutes an elemental means of discipline and exclusion. This is especially apparent in religious discourse. This course proposes focusing on heresy in order to explore how named identities are historicized, spatialized, and embodied. Readings will emphasize cross-cultural and cross-historical approaches to heretical discourse, focusing especially on Christianity and Islam. Part of the course will examine case studies of foundational heresy outbreaks, including those in medieval England, early modern France, and the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century Islamic Middle East. We will also investigate the legacies of such contexts for modern charges of heresy and "fundamentalism" in contemporary settings, especially the post 9/11 United States. Close readings of specific heretical texts will be conducted, and may include those by Ann Askew and Afghan Arab militants, among others. Special attention will be given to text production, authorship, gender, culturally situated notions of silence and censorship, intersections of religion and ethics, and relations between law and religion. Emphasis will also be given to the work of Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault.

"'Punishment, if I may so put it, should strike the soul rather than the body' (Mably [1789])... It is true that, today, to punish is not simply a matter of converting a soul; but Mably's principle has not remained a pious wish. Its effects can be felt throughout modern penality."  
Michel Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned," in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) (p.16).

"Language is the primary and ultimate structure of madness." Michel Foucault, "The Transcendence of Delirium," in *History of Madness* (1961) (p.237).

"To reiterate, the lie is no longer that which, were it to be eliminated, would allow for a system of truth or an order of thought. It is the field in which the effects of utterance will be produced. Mystic discourse does not expel the demons of deception. Just as, in the past, monks would depart for the Egyptian desert to be, through their bodies, the operators of the Spirit on earth and the very tongue of the Deceiver, so this discourse is a spiritual practice of 'the diabolical.'" Michel de Certeau, "The Circumstances of the Mystic Utterance," in *The Mystic Fable* (1982) (p.176).

"... all the enemies of the Church, however blinded by error or depraved by wickedness, train the Church in patient endurance if they are given the power of inflicting bodily harm, while if they oppose her only by their perverse

notions they train her in wisdom. Moreover they train her in benevolence, or even beneficence, so that love may be shown even to enemies, whether this takes the form of persuasive teaching or of stern discipline." Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (5<sup>th</sup> century CE) (Book 18, Chapter 51).



## Expectations and Requirements Performance and Politics

Grades will be based on:

- Class Participation: 10%
- Weekly E-mail observations: So that all participants in the course play an active role in setting our agenda for discussion, you will be asked to e-mail observations about the readings to the whole class (see attached handout): 30%
- Paper project, including: (see attached handout)
  - Bibliography (of 15-25 texts, due April 28) and prospectus (2-3 pages, due May 12): 10% each
  - Paper: 40% (see "Assessment for Formal Papers" handout); (Optional: 30%, and the remaining 10% based on a 15-minute, in-class oral presentation of the paper. Let me know no later than May 12<sup>th</sup> if you want to do this.)

**Attendance:** Mandatory. In the event of an absence, make sure to find out from a classmate what we have covered and to pick up/turn in assignments and papers.

**Class Participation:** This class involves some lecture and much discussion. Because discussion only works when everyone is alert, involved, and conscientious about participation, class participation significantly affects your grade. Good class participation not only means speaking up in class, it means demonstrating that you are listening well to your peers and the instructor.

**Late Papers:** Late papers inconvenience all of us. To receive full credit for your work, your paper must be turned in at the appointed time. Late papers (*whatever* the reason for them) will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late (e.g., a B paper would become a B-).

## Schedule and Readings Performance and Politics

Required textbooks (on reserve at Shields):

- Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.
- John Henderson. *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns*. Buffalo, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- G.R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy*. New York: Blackwell, 2003.
- R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2007.

- Michel de Certeau. *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Excerpts from Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writings in Late Medieval England*. Sound Bend, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.
- Frances Dolan. *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture*. Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
- Anouar Majid, *A Call for Heresy: Why Dissent Is Vital to Islam and America*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Additional material to be posted regularly in Smartsite's "Resources" folder.

**Week One** (March 31): Introduction

**Week Two** (April 7): Forms of Discipline - Michel Foucault.

Excerpt from *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York: Pantheon, 1972. (pp.3-76).

Excerpts from *Discipline & Punish*. "The Body of the Condemned" (pp.3-31) and "The Gentle Way in Punishment" (pp.104-31).

Excerpts from *History of Madness*, New York: Routledge, 2006 [1961]. "Stultifera Navis" (pp. 3-43), "Introduction" to Part 2 (pp.163-74), "The Transcendence of Delirium" (pp.208-50)

**Week Three** (April 14): Comparing Orthodoxies in Four Religious Traditions

John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns*.

**Week Four** (April 21): Heresy in the Christian World: Laying some Groundwork

G.R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy*.

Excerpts from Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* (circa CE 185).

**Week Five** (April 28): Persecution and Capital in Medieval Europe's Christendom

R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*.

***Bibliography due in class***

**Week Six** (May 5): Approaching Heresy through Early Modern French Mysticism

Michel de Certeau. *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986. (Pp.1-200)

**Week Seven** (May 12): The Circulation and Censorship of Visionary Theology: Moving beyond Lollardy in Late Medieval England

Excerpts from Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writings in Late Medieval England*.

***Prospectus due in class***

**Week Eight** (May 19): Whores and Piety in Early Modern England

Frances Dolan. *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture*.  
Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

**Week Nine** (May 26): Student-led Research Reports

**Week Ten** (June 2): Modern Heresies in America and Islam  
Anouar Majid, *A Call for Heresy: Why Dissent Is Vital to Islam and America*.

**Final Paper Due:** Wednesday June 10 at 4 pm (hard copy required unless you've spoken  
with me earlier.)