

Monday January 15, 2018 3:30 – 5:30 pm

FA-202 (2060 Mackay)

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIONS AND CULTURES:
GRADUATED GRAD STUDENTS CELEBRATION/ SYMPOSIUM
to celebrate the research accomplishments of our students
who have received their M.A. or Ph.D. degrees in 2016 and 2017

PRESENTATIONS BY:

Nicola Morry (M.A. 2017) - *Blood Rights: The Discourse of Impurity in Hinduism*. This is a Guided Research Paper which explores the logic of menstrual taboos in Hinduism through a close analysis of mythological explanations and legal restrictions found in the primary sacred texts of Hinduism. The scientific discourse around menstrual prohibition is also explored using Ayurvedic texts, and popular and Tantric attitudes towards menstruation are considered as well, in order to determine which of these contexts are the most and least restrictive for menstruating women.

Kalyna Spooner (M.A. 2016) - *The Women behind the Apron: Women, Food, Cultural Identity among the Ukrainian-Canadians*. This project on Ukrainian women's ritual expressions examines the relationship that exists between Ukrainian immigrants and their food practices. It exposes the many ways in which Ukrainian food has become an integral identity marker among Ukrainian immigrants in Montreal. The paper also is a means to understand the ways in which cultural and religious identity is expressed through Ukrainian cuisine.

Elyse MacLeod (M.A. 2017) - *Accommodation via Understanding: Philosophical Hermeneutics and Intercultural Dialogue*. I argue that seeking to understand the Quebec accommodation crisis through the lens of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers both novel and practical insights into: 1) the ways in which the ontological/ phenomenological turn in hermeneutics can help expose, clarify, and assuage some of the challenges facing inter-cultural/ religious dialogue in Quebec; 2) the ways in which philosophical hermeneutics falls short in this regard, particularly with respect to its lack of concern with issues of power. I conclude that philosophical hermeneutics must be supplemented with critical theory if its full potential for use in the realm of inter-cultural/religious dialogue is to be realized, and I briefly explore the work of Paul Ricoeur as one possibility.

Ashely Crouch (M.A. 2017) - *New Social Movements and the Future of Interfaith Activism*. This research examines the growth and change of the interfaith movement in the twenty-first century. Using historical analysis, social movement theory and modern case studies, this paper then explores the implications of globalization, the internet and social media on millennials' involvement in interfaith activism. Analysing the historical and current shape of the movement, it offers an overview of the strengths and weaknesses, and makes suggestions for the future of interfaith work.

Claire English (M.A. 2016) - *Territorial Impairment in Prophetic Discourse: Body and Place in the Narrative of Jeroboam, 1Kings 11-14*. A close reading of 1Kings 11-14 suggests that a tension between the Lord's will or mandate and human action operates as an overarching theme in the Jeroboam narrative. This tension can be expressed in terms of characters either being in harmony or in disharmony with the divine will. I adopt this paradigm in order to trace the shifts between these two states, to discover the accompanying shifts in power, and to examine the ways in which these features are map onto bodies and places within the text. My argument demonstrates the ways in which body and place articulate a rich and textured discourse on the tension between the Lord's will and human action, and the instability of power that obtains as a result. Places shift according to a scheme of "territorialization", while bodies shift in ways that draw on themes of disability and death. When tracing these shifts over the course of the Jeroboam narrative, what emerges is a portrait of the instability of power under the kingship arraignments. This instability arises due to the contingency of power on a seemingly unsustainable harmony between the Lord's will and human action.

Lindsey Jackson (M.A. 2016) - *Advocating for Agency, Negotiating Power, and Inciting Controversy: The Push for a Recognized Alternative to Brit Milah in the Montreal Jewish Community*. My research consists of an ethnographic study of non-circumcision Jews in the Montreal Jewish community. My research examines why some Jews are opting out of circumcision, the non-cutting rituals that are being created as alternatives to the traditional *brit milah*, the impact of ritual change on family dynamics and conflict, and responses from the wider Jewish community to this small but growing movement. My research also examines the anti-circumcision movement (also known as intactivism) and anti-circumcision Jews. My Master's research, which was the first study of non-circumcision Jews in the Montreal Jewish community, served as a starting point for examining this topic, which I am continuing at the PhD level.

Dragos Stoica (Ph.D. 2017) - *In The Shade of God's Sovereignty: The Anti-Modern Political Theology of Sayyid Qutb in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. This thesis is a study of the Egyptian radical Islamist thinker Sayyid Qutb's (1906-1966) concept of God's Sovereignty in a comparative and cross-cultural perspective. Thus, this dissertation employs a methodological mix of comparative hermeneutics, discourse analysis and a diagonal, lens comparison in order to provide a more capacious understanding of Sayyid Qutb as the first political theologian of God's Sovereignty in the Sunni Islamic space. This study aims to expand the perspective on Qutb's Islamist radical critique of modernity by placing it in a family resemblance model. Therefore, it compares Qutb's master concept of God's Sovereignty and the dichotomies listed above, within and across the religious divide with commensurable constructions produced by other anti-modern political theologians. At the level of *endogenous* comparison, this dissertation focuses on the Pakistani Islamist Abu al-A'la Mawdudi (1903–1979), while at the level of *exogenous* comparison, the counterparts are two important anti-modern, antitheses political theologians: the Catholic counter-revolutionary Juan Donoso Cortés (1809–1853) and the Protestant political theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).

HONOURING OUR GRADS WHO CANNOT JOIN US:

Michelle Bakker (Ph.D. 2016) - *Concerning Development: An Ethnography of Contingency and Ethics in a Cross-Cultural, Faith-based Aid Relationship*. My dissertation is an ethnography of an international, cross-cultural, intergroup relationship, as mediated by a North American faith-based development NGO (non-government organization) called World Renew, which comes out of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. I sought to discover two things: first, what, exactly, the "faith" of "faith-based" entails for this relationship; and, second, what kinds of difference faith really makes in the strategy and practice of the rural development projects that World Renew supports. I spent six months in Kenya interviewing development workers and community members and three months interviewing Christian Reformed Church members in Alberta, for a total of over 150 interviews. What I found includes an enormous disconnect between ideas that Albertans have about development and poverty issues, and the realities of these issues and contexts overseas; and, further, that faith, and specifically Christianity, in these disparate contexts, tends very much to adapt to and reflect the socio-economic and material conditions of believers. For studies of religion and development, this means that local religious praxes can and ought to be studied for ways in which development assistance can be tailored to particular cultures and contexts: a way out of the largely ineffective generalist practices of international development to date.

Mrinal Kaul (Ph.D. 2016) - *Abhinavagupta's Theory of Reflection: A Study, Critical Edition and Translation of the Pratibimbavāda (verses 1-65) in the Chapter III of the Tantrāloka along with the commentary of Jayaratha*. The present thesis studies the theory of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*) as discussed by Abhinavagupta (*fl.c.* 975-1025 CE), the non-dualist Trika Śaiva thinker of Kashmir, primarily focusing on what is often referred to as his magnum opus: the *Tantrāloka*. The present study has as its foundation a new critical edition of a small, nonetheless important, passage of the *Tantrāloka*—chapter-3, verses 1-65 and the commentary titled *-viveka* thereon by Jayaratha (*fl.c.* 1225-1275 CE)—along with an annotated English translation. Abhinavagupta's teachings are laid deep under the esoteric influence of the Kaula and the Krama systems, and he employs a robust model of developing a critical dialectical structure that manifests in his works like those of the theories of reflection amongst many others. In the *Tantrāloka* as also in his other Trika works, he is endeavouring to establish a unique ontological status to a reflected object (*pratibimba*) rejecting the thesis of Naiyāyikas, Sāṃkhyavādins and Vijñānavādins.

Georgia Carter (M.A. 2017) - *Omar Souleyman: Music, Identity, and Intercultural Relations*. This paper examines the potential of music and its performance for creating the conditions for intercultural learning and relationship building. Approaching intercultural relations through the study of materiality, this project examines the reception of contemporary Syrian musician, Omar Souleyman, by Western, English-speaking audiences. Souleyman has been recently catapulted into international stardom. By drawing upon interviews with Souleyman fans, as well as scholarship in the fields of material cultural, interreligious/intercultural relations, and the study of music socialites; this paper seeks to explore the role of Souleyman's image, music, and performance in facilitating relational behaviours.

Jeremy Cohen (M.A. 2016) - *Speaking to The Ghost in the Machine: An Opportunity for Enchantment in the Digital Age*. By the end of 2015, over 30 million Facebook users had died. In fact, 10,000 Facebook users die every day, leaving family and friends to negotiate their online presence post-mortem. My research was based on a content analysis of four online memorial websites and four social networking case studies. My analysis looked for patterns of communication between living and deceased to ascertain why people engage with the dead online and with whom they believe they are communicating. The results suggest that online and social networking memorials are techno-spiritual, enchanted spaces that offer the possibility of erasing the boundaries between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Dorota Dejneka (M.A. 2017) - *Mostafa Malekian's Vision of Spirituality as a Novel Direction of Religious Discourse in Iran*. Malekian has emerged as a new figure on Iran's intellectual scene since the early 2000s due to his unconventional project of rationality and spirituality. In my research I analyze his vision of spirituality which in its ideal form would shed the rigidity of organized religion, remain faithful to reason and satisfy the needs of modern human beings. I present his philosophy as a departure from the mainstream current of religious intellectualism in Iran as well as a challenge to the regime's authoritarian interpretations of religion.

Jesse Toufexis (M.A. 2017) - *Northern Gothic: An Investigation of Jewish Literature through Creative Fiction*. This project took place at the intersection of traditional academic inquiry and postmodern fiction. Through the use of narrative, it functioned as an investigation of the central mysteries of Jewish literature over time. It begins with my reception of an odd, mystical document from a former Religion Department colleague whom none of us have heard from in a few years. At a loss for what to tackle in my GRP to close out my Master's degree, and obsessed with the mystery of the document, I analyzed it using the tools I've developed while studying Jewish literature at Concordia.

Emily Williams (M.A. 2017) - *"I never could forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands": An examination of Holocaust memorial museums at the intersection of Jewish and non-Jewish memory*. Using the Montreal Holocaust Museum and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights as touchstones, I attempted to look at the ways that Holocaust memorial museums operated differently depending on whether their mandate was secular or religiously based. It was my conclusion that it is more useful to consider Holocaust museums as places that are both sacred and secular, rather than trying to differentiate the two.

Taylor Baruchel (M.A. 2016) - *Receive the Widow Judith, Exemplar of Chastity...and her Favourite Slave-Girl: A Gender Critical and Queer Analysis of the Book of Judith*

Emily Kwiecien (M.A. 2017) - *A Chosen Faith for the Chosen People: Jewish Unitarian Conversion Experience and Identity Continuity*

Adeel Merali (M.A. 2017) - *First-Generation Young Adults of the Tablighi Jamaat in Montreal: Negotiating Identities, and Finding a Place in Society*.

Eleni Psarudis (M.A. 2016) - *Moving Mary Towards Queer Identity: Queering Perpetual Virginity in the Protoevangelium of James*.