

**University of Toronto
Centre for the Study of Religion**

RLG315H1S Rites of Passage

Summer Session: July 5–August 13, 2010

Tuesdays & Thursdays 3-5pm

Room: SS 1073

Instructor: Dr. Barry Stephenson

Office: JHB 324; Hours: Tuesdays, 5:15pm-6:15pm

DESCRIPTION

Rites of passage are ways of marking major transitions, of exiting an old way of life and beginning a new way of life. This course is an introduction to the study of ritual, concentrating specifically on rites of passage (especially births, initiations, weddings, and funerals) both traditional and experimental. Our focus is largely, but not exclusively, on contemporary North America. We will study some comparative materials from a variety of cultures in order to better understand contemporary ways of negotiating lifecycle transitions.

I. GOALS

1. To survey the ways people around the world, particularly in North America, use ritual to negotiate lifecycle transitions.
2. To provide a forum in which to reflect on your own and other people's experience of passage.
3. To introduce controversial issues and persistent problems in ritual theory and practice, criticism and creativity.

II. READINGS

1. Grimes, Ronald L. *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000. ISBN: 0520236750.
2. Anthology of readings.
3. A passage film, viewed outside of class time, and chosen from a list.
4. Reading required to complete course assignments.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- a. Passage narrative, 25%. A personal account of a passage, drawing on and integrating material from readings. **Due July 20, in class.**
- b. Course Assignment, chosen from one of the following options (40% of final mark). **Due August 5th, in class.**
 - A reading journal, mainly of responses to the course readings.
 - A ritual criticism project. A paper that is a description and critique of an existing rite of passage.
 - A constructive-creative paper, in which you invent or radically re-design a rite of passage.
- c. Term Test (25%). In class, **August 10th**
- d. Participation and Contributions to class (10%).

Late Policy: After the due date, required coursework will be docked 2% per working day, and, if not submitted within 7 days, the work will not be accepted. Under no circumstances should papers be mailed, slipped under an office door, or placed outside an office door. If course work is not turned in during class, it must be signed/stamped by the department; otherwise, they will be dated when in hand.

Passage Narrative

A personal account of a passage, drawing on and integrating material from readings. 3-4 single-spaced, typed pages in which you (a) narrate an experience of passage such as birth, wedding, funeral, or coming of age and (b) reflect on the ritual dimensions (or lack of them), meaning, and cultural context of the passage. You may choose a rite in which either you or someone else is the central actor, as long as you reflect on someone's actual experience of that rite. It is my hope that students will be willing to share portions of these narratives in class. This assignment is challenging, but also potentially rewarding. The task is not easy, since we will be making semi-public things that we may have been taught to consider private or semi-private. If you have problems with this assignment, please see me. If we cannot overcome them, I will negotiate an alternative (but by no means easier) assignment. See "Absent at Birth" for an example of a passage narrative, and tend to the many narrative accounts in *Deeply Into the Bone*.

The following are questions I ask in evaluating passage narratives:

- Does the account tell a good story? Does it provide telling, concrete details, or is its description abstracted, disembodied, and generic?
- Is the narrative engagingly written? Are style, grammar and syntax impeccable?
- Does the paper attend to symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of passage?
- Does the account include the social and/or political dimensions of passage?
- Does the account include the emotional, psychological, and/or religious dimensions of passage?
- Is the account reflective, critical, self-critical? Does the writer not only describe events but reflect on them as well? Does the author have a perspective on her-or himself? Is the account honest? Full? Does it avoid self-indulgence?
- Does the account draw on and integrate ideas from course readings, where appropriate?

Course Assignment (one of the following three options)

- A reading journal, mainly of responses to the course readings.

Journals emphasize process. They record thoughts in the process of being thought out. A journal is not merely a personal diary of events that happen throughout a day. Instead, it consists of: (1) brief abstracts of what you read, (2) personal responses to those readings, and (3) reflections that do not arise from readings but are related to the topic of the course. Although a journal is less formal than a term paper, it is still a scholarly tool and requires critical thinking. Journal entries must not be random notes but should be written with a view to communicating with me (not with yourself, as is the case in a diary). If possible, type your journal using a word processor. The complete, edited journal should be printed in a standard 12-point type with 1 ½ - inch margins. If possible, have a table of contents. Single space **within** entries; double space **between** entries. Each entry should be **dated** and **titled**. The easiest format would be to title entries using the book chapter and article titles. As a rough guide, each reading entry should be approximately 1-2 pages in length.

The following are questions I ask in evaluating journals:

- Does the journal *organize* and *summarize* basic ideas or theses, providing a clear account of authors' main ideas?
- Have you developed some of *your own ideas* in dialogue with the material?
- Is the journal *reflective, analytical, critical* in perspective?

- Is the journal *focused* on the course topic? Are the entries related to key issues, rather than secondary ones?
 - Have you included all the *required items* for this course?
 - Have you noted topics you might like to do *further work* on and marked them plainly so you can find them later? Have you marked *questions or issues* which you want to raise in class or discuss? Have you listed *bibliographical* references to which you refer or which you plan to consult later?

- A ritual criticism project. A paper that describes and critiques an existing rite of passage. You may use either a generic, textual version of the rite or an actually experienced or observed one. First describe, then critique. The description should be the lesser part of the paper; the critique, the greater. See Barry Stephenson, "Ritual Criticism of a Contemporary Rite of Passage," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17.1(2003): 32-41, for a model on how to approach the paper. The key here is to find a well-defined, contained rite or enactment, rather than a broad theme. For example: 'An Orthodox Jewish Funeral,' not 'Contemporary Funerals in Urban Canada'; the latter is far too broad. As a rough guide, the assignment should be 5-6 single-spaced pages, typed, standard 12 point font, 1 ½ inch margins.

- A constructive-creative paper, in which you invent or radically re-design a rite of passage (such as a divorce rite, a retirement rite, an abortion rite, etc.). Describe the social, cultural, and/or religious context before presenting the ritual scenario. The scenario must lay out in detail what is done and said. It should be followed or accompanied by a commentary or some other form of interpretation. Exercise care in borrowing from other rites. If you borrow, document your sources. You must make obvious the research you did in preparing your ritual script, and it must be substantial, not token. See, for example, the wedding scenario from chapter 7 of *Marrying & Burying*, by Ronald Grimes. It is not a model for you to imitate, but it does illustrate one way of putting together a scenario, around which you frame a commentary and rationale. As a rough guide, the assignment should be 5-6 single-spaced pages, typed, standard 12 point font, 1 ½ inch margins.

Your redesign or invention could tackle any of the following cases:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Birth and early childhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ baby shower ○ birth rite ○ naming, blessing, presentation ○ circumcision ○ starting school
 ▪ Coming of age: middle childhood to adulthood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ graduating from school(s) ○ initiation as a teenager ○ coming out (e.g., debutante balls) ○ initiation as an adult ○ initiation into group membership; joining an organization; entering a profession (e.g., clergy, monk, doctor, etc.), ordination
 ▪ Courtship / marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ wedding ○ divorce rite ○ anniversaries ○ interfaith/interethnic marriage
▪ Death <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ funeral ○ cremation, burial ○ memorials, commemorations
▪ These are examples of less conventional occasions that might receive ritual attention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ conception (love-making for the purpose of conceiving) ○ adoption ○ entering school ○ same-sex commitment/marriage ○ coming out (as gay or lesbian) ○ becoming friends or partners ○ a silent wedding ○ a coming-of-age rite for mentally challenged people |
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- passage commemorations or renewals (e.g., anniversaries, renewals of wedding vows)
- abortion
- giving up a child for adoption
- healing, recovery from illness
- reaching a certain age (e.g., 30, 40, 50, 65)
- retirement
- leaving home
- coming home, returning home (e.g., from war, from university)
- emigration (or immigration)
- empty nest (last child leaving home)
- a repatriation rite for First Nations' remains
- disaster rites, e.g., funeral for children killed in a playground massacre or teens killed in an auto accident

Term Test

Details on the term test will be given in class. The test will examine your ability to synthesize and articulate the key themes of course, in a creative fashion. One question on the exam will consist of a short interpretive essay on a passage film. The film must be viewed outside of class time, prior to the exam, and chosen from a list provided.

Participation and Contribution

Are you present, prepared, attuned, thoughtful, involved?

IV. OUTLINE

R = reading

July 6	Course Introduction R: Grimes, <i>Deeply into the Bone</i> , Introduction
July 8	Rites of Passage Theory; Ritual Criticism and Ritual Creativity R: Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox" R: Stephenson, "Rites of Passage, An Overview"
July 13	Coming of Age Rites I R: Grimes, <i>Deeply into the Bone</i> , chap. 2 R: Gill, "Disenchantment: A Religious Abduction"
July 15	Coming of Age Rites II R: Stephenson, "Ritual Criticism of a Contemporary Rite of Passage" R: Grimes, <i>Deeply into the Bone</i> , 289-299 R: Mircea Eliade, "Patterns of Initiation"
July 20	Birth I R: Grimes, <i>Deeply into the Bone</i> , chap. 1 Passage Narrative due
July 22	Birth II R: Davis-Floyd, "Ritual in the Hospital: Giving Birth the American Way" R: Klassen, "Procreating Religion," from <i>Blessed Events</i>

- R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 310-320
- July 27 Marriage
R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, chap. 3
R: Otnes and Pleck, "Romance, Magic, Memory and Perfection"
- July 29 Marriage II
R: Otnes and Pleck, "Variations on a Theme"
R: Grimes, "A Wedding that Weds"
R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 307-310
- August 3 Death I
R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, chap. 4
- August 5 Death II
R: Myerhoff, "A Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama"
R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 299-302
Course Assignment due
- August 10 Term Test
- August 12 Uncharted Passages, conclusion
R: Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, chap. 5 & Conclusion

V. ANTHOLOGY

- Davis-Floyd, Robbie. 1996. "Ritual in the Hospital: Giving Birth the American Way." *Readings in Ritual Studies*, 146-158. Ed. Ronald L. Grimes. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Eliade, Mircea. "Patterns of Initiation in Higher Religions." *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 133-136. New York: Harper Row, 1958.
- Gill Sam D. 1977. "Disenchantment: A Religious Abduction." *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion*, 58-75. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Grimes, Ronald L. "A Wedding that Weds." *Marrying and Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life*, 84-104. Westview Press, 1995.
- Klassen, Pamela. "Procreating Religion: Spirituality, Religion and the Transformation of Birth," 63-96. *Blessed Events: Religion and Home Birth in America*. Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Myerhoff, Barbara G. 1984. "A Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama." *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, 149-178. Ed. John J. MacAloon. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. 1982. "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox." 109-135. Ed. Victor Turner. Washington, DC: Smithsonian.
- Otnes, Cele and Carol Pleck, "Romance, Magic, Memory and Perfection." *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, 1-24. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Otnes, Cele and Carol Pleck, "Variations on a Theme." *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, 228-263. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Stephenson, Barry. "Rites of Passage, An Overview [Further Considerations]." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones. Gale (2005).
- Stephenson, Barry. "Ritual Criticism of a Contemporary Rite of Passage." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 17.1 (2003): 32-41.

VI. Rites of Passage: Key Words for Searching

GENERAL THEORETICAL WORKS ON RITES OF PASSAGE OR THE LIFE CYCLE

Key words: ritual, passage, life cycle (or lifecycle), rites of passage, rites de passage, Turner, Victor, van Gennep (or Genep), human development, liminality, communitas

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD RITES

Key words: birth, childbirth, parturition, couvade (simulated or sympathetic pregnancy symptoms acted out by the father), parenting, mothering, fathering, parenting, abortion, midwifery, stillbirth, naming, bonding, menarche, menstruation, menopause, lactation, puerperium (post-partum adjustment period), churching (reincorporation of mothers into a church after birth), lithotomy position (lying on the back to give birth), paternity, maternity, kinship, descent, caesarean section, godparents, sponsors

INITIATION RITES: Puberty, Becoming an Adult

Key words: initiation, secrecy, puberty rites, circumcision, transition rites, clitoridectomy, manhood, womanhood, baptism, education, religious education, education, sponsors, teachers, teachers and students, upanayana (initiation in Brahmanical Hinduism)

INITIATION RITES: Ordination, Succession, Secret Societies

Key words: ordination, succession, status, office, priest, priestess, priesthood, secret societies, sororities, fraternities, sodalities, cults

MARRIAGE RITES

Key words: marriage, weddings, bride, groom, in-laws, etiquette, meals, matchmakers, arranged marriage, shivaree, kinship, exchange, gifts, gift-giving, bride price, mock weddings, clothing, dress, sexuality, gender, honeymoons, wedding poetry, wedding music, sealing (Mormon wedding practice)

DEATH RITES

Key words: death, funerals, mortuary customs, mortuary law, mourning, grief, death lore, burial, internment, embalming, cryonic suspension, cremation, crematorium, aging, illness, suicide, cemeteries, specific cemeteries (e.g., Flanders Field, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier), tombs, morgues, tombstones, gravestones, ossuaries (bone repositories), commemorative plaques or monuments (e.g., Vietnam War Memorial), death certificates, obituaries (death notices), eulogies (funeral orations), autopsy, death benefits (e.g., inheritance, insurance money), funeral homes (or funeral parlors), funeral directors, caskets, ancestors, ancestor cults, veneration of the dead, burial remains, the archaeology of death, relics, sati (or suttee) [the burning of a spouse on a funeral pyre--a now-illegal practice in India], state funerals, baptism for the dead (a Mormon practice), funerals of famous people (e.g., Pope John XXIII, Abraham Lincoln), military funerals, lynching, execution, war, celebrations of death or the dead (e.g., Halloween, All Souls Day, All Saints Day, Memorial Day, Remembrance Day, Day of the Dead), viaticum (food for the dying--Roman Catholic), obsequies (synonym for funeral rites), effigies

EXPERIMENTAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL RITES OF PASSAGE

Key words: women in ritual; theatre, ritual in; self-generated rites; the occult; wicca; performing ethnography; performance studies