

## LIT 3374 : The Bible as Literature

Turlington 2328

Tuesdays, Period 7 (1.55 - 2.45 pm)

Thursdays, Periods 7 & 8 (1.55 - 3.50 pm)

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**Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1-3pm, and by appointment**

### **Course Overview**

According to conventional wisdom, the Judeo-Christian Bible is a book. Indeed, in certain socio-religious communities, it is regarded as *The Book*. However, as both theologians and secular literary critics have observed, the Bible is not so much a singular book as it is a collection of many different literary forms composed during various historical periods and only later anthologized by representatives of dominant socio-religious communities. Moreover, the Bible can be defined as much as by what it excludes as by what it includes: indeed, different communities read different editions of the Bible.

The purpose of this class, then, is to analyze the disparate forms and genres contained within the Judeo-Christian biblical canon. For example, we will examine such different literary forms as origin myths (Genesis), romance/adventure stories (Exodus), lyrical poetry (the Psalms), erotic poetry (Song of Songs/the Song of Solomon), prophecy (Isaiah), fairy tales (Jonah and Job), gospel tales (the synoptic gospels and the Book of John), epistolary writing (Paul), and apocalyptic literature (Daniel and the Revelation of St. John the Divine).

We will also study the influence of these forms on secular works of literature (e.g., those by Blake, Kierkegaard, Melville, and Milton). In doing so, we will consider how the formation of the Biblical canon influenced the formation of the secular literary canon.

### **Some Additional Comments on the Course Objectives**

If you choose to continue with this course, I insist that you take into account the following two caveats:

1. **This is a literature course.** Although many of the course lectures will address the historical, theological, and anthropological aspects of the assigned texts, the ultimate objective of this class is to examine their complex literary elements.
  - a. In other words, this course is not designed as a forum in which students might debate, say, the existence of God or the ultimate “truth” of Biblical texts. Certainly, you might have strong opinions on these matters - and indeed, you are entitled to have them. However, I would ask you to keep such discussions outside the parameters of our class.
  - b. When you are in class, I would ask you to grant the assigned texts the same degree of respect and intellectual curiosity you would grant to, say, a play by William Shakespeare, a novel by Jane Austen, or a poem by Sylvia Plath. That is, I would like to you to approach each of these texts just as you might encounter texts assigned in any other literature course.
  - c. Finally, please keep in mind that we are studying these materials in a public university environment that includes students from diverse backgrounds. *All students - regardless of their disparate religious backgrounds, or lack thereof - are welcome to participate in this class.* Please remain respectful, then, of your classmates’ various subject positions.
2. **Each student enrolled in this course will be responsible for a considerable amount of weekly reading.** During some weeks, you will be responsible for reading up to 200 pages of material; during other weeks, you will only be responsible for 20-30 pages of reading.
  - a. It is important, then, that you *think ahead* and *pace yourself* as you work through the assigned material listed on the syllabus.
  - b. I will expect you to have read each of the assigned texts on the dates I have listed on the reading schedule below - and I will give regular quizzes to ensure that you have done so.
  - c. Before you decide to stay in this class, please look over the schedule below in order to determine whether you can handle the course-load.

### **Required Texts**

- A copy of the Judeo-Christian Bible
  - o The edition of this Bible is up to you, but it must include *both* the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (in other words, both the “Old” and “New” Testaments).
  - o I recommend the **New Oxford Annotated Edition** of the Judeo-Christian Bible. This edition not only includes both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures,

but it also includes helpful annotations. Moreover, it also includes the “apocrypha” - that is, parts of the Hebrew bible that were originally written in Greek and that are often excluded in Jewish and Protestant editions.

- o If you have another edition/translation of the Judeo-Christian Bible - for example, the Norton edition of the King James Bible - this is fine. Over the course of the semester, we will consider how various translations affect our interpretation of the same texts; in turn, this will allow us to explore the role that translation plays in literary appreciation.
- Elie Wiesel’s *Night*.
  - o In addition to a copy of the complete Judeo-Christian Bible, this is the only other complete text assigned for the course.
  - o We will be reading *Night* alongside the Book of Job - a Biblical text to which Wiesel’s literary testimony both implicitly and explicitly alludes.
- A standard-issue exam booklet for the midterm exam.
  - o I.e., a “blue book” or “green book.”
  - o You can easily purchase one of these exam booklets at the UF bookstore or at a local venue such as Target Copy.

### **Additional Required Readings - available through UF Course Reserves**

In addition to the complete texts I have outlined above, I expect you to read specific literary excerpts that I have posted on the UF Course Reserves list, under the number and title of this class.

In order to access these texts, log on to Course Reserves through the UF library database.

You must read these texts on the due-dates I have listed in the reading schedule below.

- John Milton, Book One of *Paradise Lost*
- Soren Kierkegaard, selections from *Fear and Trembling*
- Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’s Scar” from *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*
- Northrop Frye, “The Mythos of Summer: Romance” from *Anatomy of Criticism*
- William Blake, selected passages and images from *The Four Zoas* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- Herman Melville, “The Sermon” from *Moby-Dick*

## Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Quizzes and Take-Home Assignments: 20%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Adaptation Project: 20%

Take-home final: 25%

## Attendance/Participation

Each session of this course involves a great amount of material and intensive lecture and discussion. Therefore, you must attend each session in order to stay ahead.

You may only be excused from a session for the following reasons: (a) a documented illness, (b) a documented family emergency, (c) a religious holiday, or (d) a documented university event.

If you anticipate missing class for one of the reasons listed above - say, the observance of Passover or Easter - please contact me in advance in order to catch up on the material you will be missing.

Please note that your attendance grade will also include my evaluation of your active participation. Even during lecture sessions, I'll expect you to remain attentive and to respond to the questions I offer. Moreover, I'll expect you to play an active role in both large- and small-group discussion sessions.

**N.B. - Each instance of in-class texting counts as an absence.** When you text in class, your body might be present but your mind is not. Ultimately, your attendance/participation grade depends upon your *mindful presence* - not merely your bodily presence.

I take attendance and participation **very** seriously. Your attendance/participation grade has the potential to make or break your final mark.

### **Quizzes/Take-home assignments**

Throughout the semester, I will regularly give in-class quizzes that (a) test your reading of the assigned texts and (b) evaluate your comprehension of previously-given lecture material.

Additionally, I will also ask you to compose brief, informal writing assignments that either ask you to (a) reflect on previously discussed material or (b) prepare for future assigned topics. (For example, after our discussion of Biblical poetry, I might ask you to compose a brief informal paper that addresses one poetic trope we discussed in our class sessions. OR, in anticipation of our discussions of prophetic literature, I might ask you to compose a brief, informal paper in which you account for your own personal understanding of the term, “prophecy”).

### **Midterm Exam**

On Thursday, 27 February, you will complete an in-class, two-hour long, mid-term exam. *You must be present in class on this day in order to complete this exam.* (If you foresee potential scheduling conflicts, please consider dropping this course at the beginning of the semester!)

The midterm exam will be divided into two halves. The first part will include short-answer questions and brief textual identification exercises. The second part will involve a longer essay response that will allow me to evaluate your comprehension and analysis of the texts we’ve discussed in class.

Please bring a standard issue exam booklet (a “blue book” or “green book”) to the midterm exam. You can purchase such a booklet at the university bookstore or at local venues such as Target Copy.

### **Adaptation Project**

Since this course addresses not only the literary elements of key Biblical texts but the ways in which these texts have been addressed in more contemporary secular works, one of its main assignments will invite you to analyze the ways in which a particular (secular) work adapts and re-envision a specific Biblical text.

When I give you this assignment (on Thursday, 13 March), I will provide you with a list of literary and filmic texts that explicitly allude to or adapt key Biblical texts. In turn, you will select, read/view, and analyze *one* of these adaptations in order to produce a paper of *at least five pages* that (a) accounts for the ways in which this specific text addresses the form and content of a key Biblical text, (b) addresses the significance of its mode of adaptation, and (c) takes into account the implications of such adaptation with respect to the conversations we have had over the course of the semester.

Your hard copy of this adaptation project is due on Thursday, 10 April. It should be double-spaced and printed in 12-pt Times New Roman font with standard one-inch margins.

Additionally, this paper should include proper in-text citation and a works cited page (*/ will not read a paper that does not include proper citation*). Finally, this paper must not include your name; rather, it *must be headed only with your UF student identification number*, this heading will ensure that I read your paper as objectively as possible.

Please be prepared to discuss your paper and the arguments you make within it on the final day of class.

### **Final Take-Home Exam**

You will not be required to sit for a final exam for this course. Instead, I will give you a prompt - or a set of prompts - on the final day of the semester. In turn, I will expect you to produce a document of *at least five pages* that satisfactorily addresses the prompt (or set of prompts) I give you.

You can either send this exam to me via email ([aulanow@ufl.edu](mailto:aulanow@ufl.edu)) or place a hard copy in my faculty mailbox (across the elevators on the fourth floor of Turlington). In either case, your final take-home exam is due *no later than 6pm on Thursday, 1 May*.

Your final exam should be double-spaced in 12-pt New Roman Times font with standard 1-inch margins. It must not include your name - rather, it must be headed with your UF student ID number (again, in order to ensure my objective reading of your submission).

### **Tentative Schedule**

#### **WEEK ONE: Course Introduction**

**T, 7 January:** Review Syllabus

What is the Bible? What does it mean to study the Bible as *literature*?

**H, 9 January: NO CLASS (Professor attending a professional conference)**

Take this time to decide whether you want to carry on with this class, and whether you are ready to meet its requirements. If you decide that this class isn't "for you," please be aware that you can always drop it so that another student can take your seat.

*Part I: The Hebrew Scriptures*

**WEEK TWO: The Judeo-Christian Creation Story**

**T, 14 January:** A brief history of the production of the Bible.

Genesis, chapters 1-11

**H, 16 January:** Genesis, chapters 1—11

Book One of *Paradise Lost*

**WEEK THREE: Abraham, Issac, and the Great Leap of Faith**

T, 21 January: Genesis, chapters 12-24

H, 23 January: Genesis, chapters 12-24

Auerbach, “Odysseus’s Scar” from *Mimesis*

Kierkegaard, from *Fear and Trembling*

**WEEK FOUR: Exodus as Romance?**

**T, 28 January:** Northrop Frye, “The Mythos of Summer: Romance” from

*Anatomy of Criticism*

The Book of Exodus

**H, 30 January:** The Book of Exodus

**WEEK FIVE: Biblical Poetry**

**T, 4 February:** The Book of Psalms

**H, 6 February:** The Book of Psalms

The Song of Songs (or, in some editions, The Song of Solomon)

**WEEK SIX: Prophetic Literature, Part I**

**T: 11 February:** First and Second Isaiah

**H: 13 February:** First and Second Isaiah

**WEEK SEVEN: Prophetic Literature, Part II**

**T, 18 February:** Ezekiel

**H, 20 February:** Ezekiel

Selections from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*  
and *The Four Zoas*

**WEEK EIGHT: Review/ Exam Week**

**T, 25 February:** Review Session

**H, 27 February:** Midterm Examination

**WEEK NINE: No Classes - Happy Spring Break!!!**

**WEEK TEN: Encountering Leviathan, Part I**

**T, 11 March:** The Book of Jonah

**H, 13 March:** The Book of Jonah

Melville, "The Sermon" from *Moby-Dick*

*(Adaptation Assignment Given)*

**WEEK ELEVEN: Encountering Leviathan, Part II**

**T, 18 March:** The Book of Job

**H:20 March:** The Book of Job

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

*Part II: The Christian Scriptures*

**WEEK TWELVE: Gospel as Theological Portraiture: The Synoptic Gospels**

**T, 25 March:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

**H, 27 March:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

**WEEK THIRTEEN: Gospel as Lyric: The Gospel of John**

**T, 1 April:** The Gospel of John

**H, 3 April:** The Gospel of John

**WEEK FOURTEEN: Christian Epistolary Literature**

**T, 8 April:** 1 and 2 Corinthians (Paul)

**H, 10 April:** 1 and 2 Corinthians (Paul)

*Adaptation Project Due*

**WEEK FIFTEEN: This is the End! Biblical Apocalyptic Literature**

**T, 15 April:** The Book of Daniel (from Hebrew Scriptures)

**H, 17 April:** The Book of Daniel (from Hebrew Scriptures)

The Book of Revelation (from Christian Scriptures)

**WEEK SIXTEEN: After the End...**

**T, 22 April:** Review Session

Final Exam take-home assignment given

**H, 24 April:** Reading Day

*Take-home exams are due (either in my faculty mailbox or via email) no later than 6pm on Thursday, 1 May.*

