

**Religious Studies 241 (Biblical Literature) (W):**  
**Nostalgia and Reevaluation**  
Fall 2009: DePauw University  
TR 2:20-3:50, 201 Asbury Hall

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**Texts:**

1. Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*
2. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*
3. Lewis, *The Lone and Level Sands*
5. Lawrence, *The Man who Died*
6. MacLeish, *J.B*
7. Attridge (ed.) *HarperCollins Study Bible*
8. Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (recommended)

**Course Description:**

The term “Biblical literature” presents us immediately with a set of complicated issues: What assumptions do we need to make in order to read the Bible as a work that we might describe as “literary” in nature? How to approach a set of texts that do not present a unified or necessarily coherent message? In this class, we’re going to be considering the phrase “Biblical literature” primarily from two vantage-points. The first is the *Bible as literature*. Here, we will look at Biblical texts themselves, addressing how these pieces might be read in the context of traditional interpretive approaches, but also as discrete entities that shed light on the historical, political and religious environments in which they were written. As we look at these texts, we will want to think about the question of *redaction*, or the process by which these pieces become part of the Biblical canon. Beginning with the first two chapters of Genesis, we as readers are presented with any number of seemingly conflicting claims. How do these conflicts work together to form the finished piece we know as the Bible? We will also be considering the *Bible in literature*, and this venture will occupy the majority of our discussions. Here, we’ll encounter a number of modern works that echo pieces of the Bible—some quite subtly, others more explicitly. As we confront these works, we will want to explore possible motivations on the part of the authors who wrote them. In each case, these authors are involved in a process of revision, of re-evaluation: how does the borrowed Biblical text help them in this process?

**Expectations and Requirements:**

The most important expectation I have of you (which also happens to be the most basic requirement) in this course is that you come to class prepared, with an open mind, and ready for an engaged and lively discussion. Discussion really is the most crucial component to honing and refining your own interpretations of the literature we will be reading—rather than passive recipients of the one “right” interpretation of each work, your role in this class is to be active participants in uncovering multiple meanings of the pieces we address. I expect your questions, concerns, and even confusion with the material to be our starting point for discussion. A rule of

thumb in this class: speak up often and without reserve—each one of you has something unique and worthwhile to bring to our discussion.

This is a “W course, therefore, you will be doing various kinds of writing assignments, both formal and informal. You are expected to participate in a **workshop group** and to turn in **three essays (including proposals and preliminary drafting materials) and a final, collaborative essay**. It is my hope that these essays will build on one another, that they will allow you to discover and grapple with what is at stake for you in this material, and that they will help you to develop a voice and style that both reflect and communicate these stakes. You will also be asked to complete a series of “**letters**” to me about your impressions of the course material and our treatment of this material, from which I will compile a master letter for the class. The intention here is to keep a living and dynamic account of the conversation that develops in and out of class over the course of the semester. This account will then, in turn, help to provide you with a foundation for your essays. **Please note:** you need to earn a B- or better on formal written work to receive your “W”; it is possible to pass the course but not receive the “W.”

The **workshop groups** will meet during class, and will address your essays at various stages of the writing process: brainstorming, proposals, and drafts. In general, the purpose of these groups, and of the larger discussions we will have about the process of writing, is to help you to become deliberate and intentional writers.

Your **final essay will be collaborative**. You will be asked to work in groups—chosen by you on the basis of a shared set of concerns and an understanding of the deeper questions you would like to pursue—to produce an essay that negotiates a biblical text, a literary text and a popular biblical representation. In preparation for this assignment, you will be asked to give a **short group presentation** on a popular representation of the Bible (this will not necessarily be the same group or focusing on the same issues or texts as your collaborative essay. The intent here is to start thinking early on in terms of how to negotiate three texts of this sort. The basic question we’ll be asking is this: what makes these biblical stories so compelling that they continue to be rewritten in so many ways and for so many purposes?)

Grades will be determined **approximately** like this: essays 1-3 15% each, collaborative essay 20%, workshop group (including your own preliminary materials and the feedback you provide to others) 10%, letters 10%, presentation 10%, participation 5%.

Jewish Studies option: This course counts toward a minor in Jewish Studies. If you are interested in pursuing this minor, please come talk with me.

A few niggling details: Don’t miss class unless you have a really, really good reason. Good judgment and discretion, I trust, will help you to determine what these really, really good reasons are. **Beginning with your third absence, however, your grade will be marked down.** The rationale behind this policy is simple: the whole point of discussion is the collective aspect of it—you miss that and you miss the essence of the particular session. Also, turn your assignments in on time. It’s unfair to your classmates if I grant unwarranted extensions. **Late assignments (that have not been cleared first by me) will, therefore, bring down your final grade.**

\*\*\*\* Please don’t hesitate to come to my office hours if you have **any** questions or concerns. The door is always open.

## Class Schedule:

Aug	Th	27	Introduction to course; Midrash and Interpretation Please come having read Berlinerblau's "The Composition of the Hebrew Bible" (on Moodle)
Sept	T	1	Genesis: Chapters 1 and 2 Return to Berlinerblau; focus on "Modern Approaches"
	Th	3	Genesis: Chapters 3-11 Return to Berlinerblau: focus on "A Secular Answer" <b>essay #1 assigned, brainstorm possible approaches</b>
	T	8	Hemingway, <i>The Garden of Eden</i> (Chapters 1-9) <b>workshop proposal for essay #1</b>
	Th	10	<i>The Garden of Eden</i> (Chapters 9-20) <b>Group presentation #1</b>
	F	11	<b>letter #1 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm</b>
	T	15	<i>The Garden of Eden</i> (Chapters 20-end) <b>workshop draft of essay #1</b>
	Th	17	Barnes, "The Stowaway" <b>Group presentation #2</b>
	F	18	<b>essay #1 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm</b>
	T	22	Lewis, <i>The Lone and Level Sands</i> [Canto 1] Exodus: Chapters 1 through 10 <b>Group presentation #3</b>
	Th	24	<i>The Lone and Level Sands</i> [Canto 2] Exodus: Chapters 11 through 20 <b>essay #2 assigned, brainstorm possible approaches</b>
T	29	<i>The Lone and Level Sands</i> [Canto 3] Exodus: Chapters 21-30 <b>Group presentation #4</b>	
Oct	Th	1	<i>The Lone and Level Sands</i> [Canto 4] Exodus: Chapters 31-40 Wiesel, "Moses: Portrait of a Hero" <b>workshop proposal for essay #2</b>
	F	2	<b>letter #2 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm</b>
	T	6	The Book of Job
	Th	8	MacLeish, "J.B" [Scenes 1-6] <b>workshop draft of essay #2</b>
	F	9	<b>essay #2 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm</b>
T	13	"J.B" [Scenes 6-end]	
Th	15	Wiesel, "Job: Our Contemporary" <b>Group presentation #5</b>	

\*\*\*\*\*Fall Break—October 17-25\*\*\*\*\*

- T 27 Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1 through 8)  
Genesis 16  
**essay #3 assigned, brainstorm possible approaches**
- Th 29 *The Handmaid's Tale* (9 through 17)  
Book of Ruth  
**Group presentation #6**
- Nov T 3 *The Handmaid's Tale* (18 through 24)  
Isaiah: Chapters 1-16  
**workshop proposal for essay #3**
- Th 5 *The Handmaid's Tale* (25 through 31)  
Isaiah: Chapters 17-33  
**Group presentation #7**
- F 6 **letter #3 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm**
- T 10 *The Handmaid's Tale* (32 through 39)  
Isaiah: Chapters 34-50  
**workshop draft of essay #3**
- Th 12 *The Handmaid's Tale* (40-end, including "Historical Notes")  
Isaiah: Chapters 51-end
- F 13 **essay #3 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm**
- T 17 Book of Daniel  
**essay #4 assigned, brainstorm possible approaches**  
**\*\*begin posting compelling questions, concerns, issues you would like to pursue in your final essay on Moodle**
- Th 19 Book of Revelation  
**determine groups for final collaborative essay**
- F 20 **letter #4 due on Moodle by 5:00 pm**
- T 24 O'Connor, "Revelation"

\*\*\*\*\*Thanksgiving—November 25-29\*\*\*\*\*

- Dec T 1 Gospel of Mark  
**share proposal for essay #4 with class**
- Th 3 Gospel of John  
**share proposal for essay #4 with class**
- T 8 Lawrence, *The Man who Died* [Part 1]  
**Group presentation #8**
- Th 10 *The Man who Died* [Part 2]

**Final essay due Wednesday, December 16, by 5:00 pm**