Spring 2014

Spring 1-15-2014

ENG 3600-001: The Bible as Literature

Michael Loudon
Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2014

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2014/76

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2014 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2014 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
ENG 3600.001: The Bible as Literature

Course Description: No single book other than the Bible has had the shaping influence of Western thought, initially as revealed truth then as the motive to search for the historical truth of its production and the situation of its authors. Read and studied for two millennia, the Bible has moved innumerable intelligent men and women, but biblical reading has most often been centered in theological concerns. Scholars, Jews and Christians as well as secular readers have found the Bible a source of profound literary force and authority, the virtues and conflicts therein instructive for writers of great stature from Dante and Milton through Blake and Joyce to Melville and Douglass. In recent decades, critical literary methods of reading the Bible have offered perspectives that have affected even professional, theological biblical studies. Rarely assimilated now in early youth, modern readers of literature all too often encounter biblical allusions without recognition, and everyday English speakers employ—often unknowingly—hundreds of phrases and images lodged from previous generations who knew the King James Version, perhaps only by ear.

This course seeks to open biblical reading through literary analysis to a broad range of perspectives that includes students of literature and students of the Bible—atheists, agnostics and the religious from all faiths are all welcome. Our principal text will be selected Hebrew and New Testament chapters from the King James Version (KJV), still arguably that translation which best preserves the literary qualities of the original languages. Its philological deficiencies and sometimes misleading archaic constructions, however, make the New Revised Standard Version a necessary reference, so we will also have that translation for consultation when needed.

Course format, requirements and grading: Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute to discussions. Grading will be based on participation (discussion, reading quizzes and brief responses—20%), a critical essay (8–10 pages—40%), a midterm essay examination (15%) and a final essay examination (25%).

Course texts:

Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, ed. The Literary Guide to the Bible
Ariel and Chana Bloch, The Song of Songs: A New Translation
John Gable, et. al., ed. The Bible as Literature (4th ed)

Our principal text will be The English Bible throughout the course, but I have included recommended readings in The Literary Guide to the Bible and The Bible as Literature should you wish to pursue topics and texts more deeply than the primary readings permit. Please also feel free to consult The Harper-Collins Study Bible on questions of historicity, translation and context that is more modern than the KJV.
General Policies:

Grading Standards: I shall follow the EIU English Department Guidelines, distributed in class. In all cases, I shall use a plus and minus system to distinguish, say, a high B from a low one.

Attendance: I do take roll, and I evaluate attendance only indirectly in the context of your participation in the course (15%); however, each two days is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts have a direct influence on your participation.

Conferences: These are at your request unless I ask to see you. Please ask for help as soon as you feel you need it; please don't wait until the last few days of class.

Submission of work: Essays should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, titled and indicate the following: name, date, course and section number, and assignment number. Exercises and quizzes must be legible.

Late Essays: For each day that the essay is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an A essay due on Friday will be an F by the next Thursday. If difficulties arise, please see me.

Plagiarism: The English Department Policy

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If I discover an act of plagiarism, I shall exercise the right to the fullest extent possible. (See The Blair Handbook, pp. 242-244, but see also pp. 228-242 for a further discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to integrate properly your material from sources.)

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
ENG 3600.001: The Bible as Literature—Syllabus

January
T 14: Course Introduction and student repertoires [perspectives, interests and experiences of the Bible]
R 16: The Bible as Language: The Word as Symbol, the word as sign

R 23: The Literary Guide to the Bible (LGB): “General Introduction” (1-8); “Introduction to the Old Testament” (11-35); see also “The King James Bible” (Adam Nicholson, National Geographic, December 2011: 36-61—electronic copy emailed to you)

T 28: The Bible as Literature (BL): Ch 1—“The Bible as Literature” (1-14)
R 30: BL: Ch 2—“Literary Forms and Strategies...” (15-41)

February
T 4: Genesis: 1-11 in The English Bible: King James Version, Vol I (EB:KJV-I). Further readings in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible are from this edition. [As you will note, the footnotes are extensive, and I encourage you to peruse them as you wish; ideally, the readings in the EB:KJV-I can be completed a second time in The Harper-Collins Study Bible [NRSV] (HSB) for comparative purposes—but, at the very minimum, read the assigned chapters in EB:KJV-I. Recommended reading: J. P. Fokkelman, “Genesis” in LGB: 36-55.

R 6: Genesis: 12-25

T 11: Genesis: 26-36
R 13: Genesis: 37-50

T 18: Exodus: 1-19
R 20: Exodus: 20-40

T 25: Book of Ruth
R 27: Book of Esther

March

R 6: Midterm Examination

Spring Break: March 10-14

T 18: Book of Job
R 20: (continued) [Essay assigned]
T 25: Bloch translation, The Song of Songs [The Song of Solomon]
   Recommended reading: F. Landy, "The Song of Songs" in LGB: 305-319.
R 27: (continued)

April
T 1: Psalms (selections), Proverbs (selections) [TBA]
R 3: The Prophets: Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and Jonah
   Recommended reading: Chapter 6: "The Prophetic Writings" in BL: 121-133.
   Recommended reading: James Ackerman, "Jonah" in LGB: 234-243.

   Recommended reading: Chapter 12: "The Hellenistic Background of the New
   Testament" in BL: 189-205.
R 10: (continued)
   Recommended reading: Chapter 14: "The Gospels" in BL: 224-244.

T 15: (continued)
R 17: (continued)

T 22: Film: Pasolini, The Gospel of Matthew
R 24: (continued) Essay Due

T 29: Discussion of Pasolini’s version of The Gospel of Matthew;
   Study guide for final examination distributed

May
R 1: Review for final examination

Final Examination: Thursday, May 8, 10:15 am-12:15 pm
ENG 3600.001: The Bible as Literature—(Second) REVISED Syllabus

April
T 1: Book of Job [Essay assigned]
R 3: Bloch translation, The Song of Songs [The Song of Solomon]
T 8: (continued)
   Recommended reading: Chapter 12: “The Hellenistic Background of the
T 15: (continued)
R 17: (continued)
T 22: Film: Pasolini, The Gospel of Matthew
R 24: (continued) Essay Due

T 29: Discussion of Pasolini’s version of The Gospel of Matthew;
      Study guide for final examination distributed

May
R 1: Review for final examination

Final Examination: Thursday, May 8, 10:15 am-12:15 pm