

ENG 231

Spring 2008

**THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE:
The Authorized Version**

Jan	15	Introduction			
	17	The Mythic Cycle (Gen 1-3)			
	22	The Mythic Cycle (Gen 4-11)	Mar	18	Saul/Samuel/David
	24	<i>Dutchman</i>		20	Saul/Samuel/David
	29	The Patriarchal Cycle (Gen 12-50)		25	Psalms
	31	The Patriarchal Cycle		27	Jonah
Feb	5	The Patriarchal Cycle	Apr	1	Ecclesiastes
	7	Joseph and the . . . Dreamcoat		3	Job
	12	Exodus		8	Job
	14	Exodus		10	The Intertestamental Period
	19	Torah		15	The New Testament
	21	Torah		17	The Synoptics
	26	Judges (13-16)		22	The Synoptics
	28	Ruth		24	John, Acts & Epistles
Mar	4	Reinterpretations		29	<i>Jesus Christ, Superstar</i>
	6	Judgment Day: Midterm	May	6	The Harrowing of Hell
	11, 13	Paradise Regained			(Final: Monday 8-10 A.M.)

*Both read the Bible day and night
But thou read'st black where I read white.* (William Blake)

ENGLISH 231: THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

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Objectives

If you complete all assignments with diligence, intelligence, an open mind, and a sense of humor in *The Bible as Literature*, by the end of the term you should be able to (1) discuss the variety of literary forms in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as the sources, authorship, and audiences of a significant number of books of the Bible; (2) recognize and evaluate differences among biblical translations; (3) explain both the history of Judaism during the pre-Christian era and the origins of Christianity; (4) develop a vocabulary to discuss the Bible and its history, themes, and conventions; (5) understand ways language constructs meaning; and (6) demonstrate an improvement in the quality of your analytical skills.

Grading

Midterm (March 6)	20%
Final (May 6)	25%
Paper I (Feb 14)	20%
Paper II (April 17)	25%
Participation/Projects	10%

Texts

Almost any edition of the Bible is fine, although some are more gracefully written and/or more accurate translations than others. Many readers regard the King James Version (KJV) as the most elegant but a little archaic and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) as the most readable. Try to avoid a paraphrase (e.g., *The Living Bible*). If you have a Bible, bring it along and see whether you find it useful. Quotes on tests will be taken from the RSV.

Tests

Tests will be taken from the readings and discussions. They will involve a combination of identifications and short essays based on textual passages.

Papers

Any paper of fewer than five to eight pages probably does not have a very promising idea behind it. Papers should focus on a literary—not a theological—issue (i.e., characterization, theme, style, plot, or structure). If you have not written many English papers, it often helps to begin with a comparison/contrast essay. Papers will be evaluated in six areas: (1) the quality of the central idea or thesis; (2) the quality and quantity of the detail supporting that idea; (3) the coherence of the paper's organization; (4) the clarity and interest level of the writing; (5) the effectiveness of the style; and (6) the care of the editing. And yes, spelling and proofreading do count.

Ideology

Although the class will probably have students with a wide range of religious views, this is an English class not a class on religion. You must begin by listening carefully to everyone's point of view, however silly it may initially appear to you. You may—and even should—disagree and debate those points of view. But—and this is the big “But”—all discussion, disagreement, and debate needs to be based on the text, not on something Aunt Matilda told you. And you need to show respect for your classmates (even while skewering their arguments).

Academic Freedom

Since this class will often deal with issues which some people regard as controversial, it is critical that all participants accept the principle that freedom of speech is essential to achieving truth. All participants have an obligation to themselves and their classmates to present their ideas and arguments as clearly and effectively as they can. But all participants—whether devoutly religious or militantly atheist—have an equal obligation to challenge or question ideas with which they disagree. (The ultimate arbiter will be the text.) In this class political correctness and speech codes are the enemy.

Attendance

No teacher could imagine anything more important than your attending his or her class. If you happen to miss class for any reason (e.g., brain surgery, an Olympic tryout, your honeymoon), you are responsible for all material distributed during that class, all information provided during that class, and any assignments made during that class.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

Remember the academic honor pledge. Don't cheat. And remember that those plagiarists who don't go to hell wind up on academic probation or spending eternity listening to their parents' music.

Attitude

Get enough sleep; eat breakfast; don't whine. Come to class prepared to discuss the assignment. Your teacher believes that you have a moral and intellectual responsibility to yourself and your classmates to question any material you find confusing. Remember, however, that some ideas are innately complex or paradoxical or even confusing. The key is to recognize and define the nature of that complexity, paradox, or confusion.

Grandparents: Warning

There seems to be an extraordinary connection between the timing of assignments and the health of grandparents. You may want to write your grandparents to let them know when exams are scheduled and when papers are due. Warn them that they face serious health risks at each of these times.