

OBERLIN COLLEGE
SYLLABUS
English 113: The English Bible and Its Literary Authority
Fall Semester, 2007

Meeting time: MWF 10
Meeting place: King 101
Credit Hours: 4

Instructor: Robert Longworth
Office: 404 Mudd Library
Office Hours: MW 11:30-12:30

Aims of the Course: Intended by the Department of English “to serve a general audience interested in learning about literature from topical approaches,” this course (like others of its kind) will not count toward a major in English, nor will it contribute toward meeting the general requirement in writing. The course will afford its students an opportunity to study the text of the Bible as translated into English; and to reflect on the historical setting of the Bible, some of its cultural uses, and certain examples of its interpretive history. In part, this aim will be served by the study of literary works that have been written over time in English with more or less explicit reference to the Bible.

Texts: Each student will be expected to read regular assignments in the English Bible. There are many versions of this translation, and no single version will satisfy all the needs of a careful student. The fabled “King James Version” [KJV] was first published in 1611, and (though slightly modified by editors from time to time over the intervening centuries) is probably the version that has been best known to most English writers. In the past 60 years or so, however, several versions have been published with the proclaimed purpose of improving the intelligibility of the text to a contemporary reader or to assist the reader in wisely interpreting the text. Students will find it useful now and then to consult several such versions (some of which are available on-line and many of which can be found in the Oberlin College Library). No particular version is required; but the instructor suggests that for students who plan to purchase a version of the text for use in this course, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha* (in the New Revised Standard Version, 3rd edition) is fairly easy to read, buttressed with scholarly annotation, and relatively inexpensive. Other texts assigned will be available on-line or at the Oberlin College Library through electronic reserve (cited below as ERes).

Evaluation: The instructor’s assessment of each student’s performance in the course will be based on a mid-term hour exam and a two-hour final examination that will cover the material assigned for reading.

Schedule of Assignments:

SEPTEMBER 5 Introduction

7 The Problem of Evil: Read *Job*

10 Job Revisited: Read Robert Frost, “A Masque of Reason,” from *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, pp. 587-606 (ERes)

12 Biblical Folklore and Proverbial Wisdom: Read *Ruth*, *Ecclesiastes*; and John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale” (ERes)

14 At the Beginning of the Biblical Narrative: Read *Genesis* 1-10; Dylan Thomas, “Fern Hill” (ERes), Robert Lowell, “The Public Garden” (ERes), and Christina Rossetti, “Daughter of Eve” (ERes)

17 Biblical Narrative and Cultural Mythology: Read *Genesis* 11-21; and Anna Akhmatova, “Lot’s Wife” (ERes)

19 Patriarchs and the Promise: Read *Genesis* 22-26; and S. Kierkegaard, “A Panegyric Upon Abraham,” from *Fear and Trembling* (ERes)

21 The Making of Israel: Read *Genesis* 27-50; Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Carrion Comfort” (ERes), and Emily Dickinson, “A Little East of Jordan” (ERes)

24 From Bondage Into Freedom: Read *Exodus*; John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (ERes), and Henry W. Longfellow, “The Jewish Cemetery at Nantucket” (ERes)

26 The Law and the Covenant: Read *Leviticus* 15-18, *Numbers* (especially chs. 9-14; 20-25), and *Deuteronomy* (especially chs. 1-11; 27-34)

28 The Promised Land: Read *Joshua* 1-12; 23-24; “Deep River,” “Joshua Fit de Battle,” and “Wade in the Water”—all of which can be accessed at <www.negrospirituals.com>

OCTOBER 1 Heroic Legends: Read *Judges*

3 With Inward Eyes Illuminated: A Puritan’s Samson. Read John Milton, *Samson Agonistes* (ERes; also available online)

5 Saul and David: Kingship and Glory. Read *I Samuel* and *II Samuel*

8 Exile and Loss: Read *I Kings*, *II Kings*; and George Gordon, Lord Byron, “The Destruction of Sennacherib” (ERes)

10 Sexual Love and Spiritual Allegory: Read *Song of Songs*; and John Donne, “Batter My Heart” (ERes)

12 Envisioning Recovery Through Messiah: Read *Isaiah*

15 Voices of the Psalmists: Read especially *Psalms* 1, 13, 19, 23, 24, 42

17 God and the Hebrew Lyric Poet: Read especially *Psalms* 46, 51, 84, 90, 100, 121, 130, 137, 139, 148

19 Mid-Term Exam

29 The Politics of Prophecy: Read *Jeremiah*; Gerard M. Hopkins, “Thou Art Indeed Just” (ERes), and Thomas Hardy, “In Time of ‘Breaking of Nations’” (ERes)

31 The Power of Prophetic Symbol: Read *Ezekiel*

NOVEMBER 2 The Problem of Social Justice: Read *Amos*, *Hosea*, and *Micah*

5 Deliverance for the Enemy: Read *Jonah*; and Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, chs. 1-9 (ERes)

7 ‘Novo Ordo Saeclorum’: Read *The Gospel According to Mark*

9 The New Law and the Old: Read *The Gospel According to Matthew*; and T.S. Eliot, “Journey of the Magi” (ERes)

12 Dreaming of a White Christmas: Read *The Gospel According to Luke*; and Sylvia Plath, “Lady Lazarus” (ERes)

14 Good News for the Gentiles: Read *The Acts of the Apostles*; and the hymn “Amazing Grace” (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Grace for text; and for versions of the tune, see <http://www.markrhoads.com/amazingsite/index.htm>)

16 Word Into Flesh and Flesh Into Word: Read *The Gospel According to John*; Emily Dickinson, “A Word Made Flesh” (ERes) and “The Bible Is an Antique Volume” (ERes)

19 The Bible and Popular Culture. Look Around!

21 Looking Toward the End of Things: Read *Daniel* [from the Hebrew Bible] and *Revelation* [from the New Testament]

26 The Last Judgment: Read William Shakespeare, Sonnet 146, John Donne, Holy Sonnet 4 (“At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners”), W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming,” and Gerard M. Hopkins, “That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire” (all ERes)

28 Making Theology for Christians: Read *Romans*

30 Shaping a Community by Letter: Read *I Corinthians*, *Galatians*, and *Ephesians*

DECEMBER 3 ‘A Better Hope’: Melchizedek? Read *Hebrews*, *I John*; and Wallace Stevens, “Sunday Morning” (ERes)

5 The Canon and Canonicity: Read *Judith*, *Susannah* [from the Apocrypha] *Jude* [from the New Testament]

7 Merging the Covenants: Read St. Augustine, “Preface” to *Christian Doctrine*, and John Donne, “Hymn to God My God in My Sickness” (ERes)

10 The Word of God Under Siege: Read Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach” and “Conclusion” to *God and the Bible* (both ERes)

12 The Bible in Post-Modernity: Read Marilynne Robinson, “Gospels,” from David Rosenberg, *Communion*, pp. 133-149 (ERes)

?? Final Exam (to be scheduled)