The Bible as Literature

Course Description: According to Kenneth Burke, "Whether or not there is a realm of the 'supernatural,' there are words for it." In this course we will examine some of those words and consider how they construct cultural understandings of good and evil, origins and ends, the idea of "God," and human beings in relation to that idea. Our study will include The Book of Genesis; The David Story; selected Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, and The Book of Revelation. We will consider textual problems of translation, interpretation, and reception; narrative style, voice, and structure; genre; and literary strategies. Our analysis will be informed by an understanding of the complicated relationship between the cultural construction of stories and stories' constructions of cultures.

Required Texts (available in the UO Bookstore): Genesis (Robert Alter, trans.; Norton); The David Story (Robert Alter, trans; Norton); The New Oxford Annotated Bible

Grading and Requirements:

1. APP (Attendance, Preparation, Participation) – 50 points

This important element of your grade includes the following: Come to class; arrive on time; stay in class for the entire class session; be prepared by having read the assigned texts thoughtfully, taken notes, and written your thoughts down in your journal; have your book and your journal with you in each class and refer to them during discussion; actively participate in discussion; turn all your electronics off before class and put them away; listen and respond thoughtfully and respectfully to the ideas of others.

2 point possible for each of 20 class sessions for 40 points total. Being a body in a chair will earn 1 point or less; being an active and prepared participant who has read and taken seriously the notes above will earn 2 points.

2. Journal: This is worth 10 points. It may be handwritten in a notebook or typed and printed out as hard copies for each class and collected in a folder. Be sure to number, date, and label each entry as well as put your name on the notebook or each page if separate sheets. There may be in class writings assigned in addition to required reflections on each reading prior to class.

3. Conference: A minimum of one conference to discuss your final project is required, but please come see me at any time during office hours or by appointment to discuss the class or your work.

2. Three Essays – 10 points each, 30 points total.
We will develop questions-at-issue for these three essays through our class discussions in conjunction with your journal responses. Each essay will focus on a well supported thesis based on textual analysis and interpretation of a literary concern arising from close readings of the texts and supplementary commentaries.

3. Midterm – 10 points.
Each person will choose a psalm to research, read interpretively, analyze, and discuss. There will be both an oral and a written component.
4. Creative Project – 10 points

These will be scheduled throughout the term to coincide with a particular reading. The goal is to examine ways that artists have used the Bible as a source of creativity, perhaps for inspiration, to re-tell stories or re-imagine mythologies, to question theologies, or to express beauty, truth, wisdom, or grandeur. Some possibilities are art, poetry, drama, film, fiction, music, dance. This allows you to explore a creative field and biblical portion that you find personally compelling.

Plan and schedule for this early in the term.

5. Final Exam – 20 points

This exam may be inclusive but will primarily focus on the Acts, Epistles, and Book of Revelation.

Total points possible: 120 points: A = 108-120; B = 96-107; C = 84-95; D = 72-83

Course Policies:

Electronics-free zone: Turn off and stow your stuff and refrain from leaving class to text.
Plagiarism-free zone: Do your own work. If you use another’s thoughts or words, give credit.

Tentative Schedule:

1a Introduction
1b Genesis
2a Genesis
2b Genesis
3a Genesis
3a David; Essay #1 due
4a David
4b David
5a Reader’s Choice
5b Reader’s Choice; Essay #2 due
6a Midterm
6b Midterm
7a Gospels
7b Gospels
8a Gospels; Essay #3 due
8b Acts
9a Epistles
9b Epistles
10a Revelation
10b Revelation

Final Exam -- time and date tba.

Details of required assignments will be discussed in class.