

**195:318 + 840:362 POSTMODERN APPROACHES TO SACRED LITERATURE
(PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS)**

Prof. Steven F. Walker sfw@alc.rutgers.edu

Monday and Wednesday (CAC) 6:10-7:30PM (7th period)

An examination of some significant aspects of postmodern literary, psychological and cinematic approaches to religion through the close analysis of a few select texts. The course does not deal primarily with the theological or historical interpretation of canonic sacred texts, but rather is designed to highlight the literary daring and the sometimes even outrageous postmodern freedom of authors who, through a process of *bricolage*, and via reference to a canonical sacred text, create statements of religious orientation and personal declarations of faith. By means of the elaboration of a creative and original literary, cinematic and/or psychological response, these authors come to terms personally with the ongoing power of the sacred text to captivate modern minds. Their own texts, when put into juxtaposition with the original sacred texts, may be taken to some degree as personal confessions in terms of their particular *sensibilité religieuse*. The course will analyze key texts by such original postmodern interpreters as Sigmund Freud (*Moses and Monotheism*/the Biblical story of Moses), D.H. Lawrence (*Apocalypse/ John of Patmos' Apocalypse*), C.G. Jung (*Answer to Job/The Book of Job*), and Marcel Proust (*Time Regained*/the ritual of the Tridentine Mass). The analysis will also include films of two modern directors (Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*/apocalyptic themes) and Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda* (secret messages), and my own literary contextualization of the *Bhagavad Gita* (based initially on van Buitenen's *The Gita in the Mahabharata*). These analyses will provide material for the study of such postmodern religious themes as the antinomy of Good and Evil, apocalypse as a myth of both world and individual transformation, and the feminine side of God.

The course will require two examinations, two short response papers, and one long course paper.

The three particular goals of the course are to train students to think and write freely (in the postmodern spirit) about traditional sacred texts; to do close reading and analysis; and to compare related texts in meaningful ways (the particular focus of Comparative Literature and intertextuality). ***=books to buy**

Weeks 1-2. (1/17, 22, 24) Sigmund Freud, **Moses and Monotheism* (1-90; 131-143; 152 + 170-1) and the Biblical story of Moses

Topics: two religions, two Moses's. Freud's coming to terms (his own terms) with the religion of his ancestors. Analyzing the psychoanalyst: his last book as unintended spiritual confession? Freud's unconscious (?) identification with the figure of Moses? Freud's personal *sensibilité religieuse*. Jung on Freud's "religion of Eros." Freud and the dark side of God.

Week 3.(1/29, 31) Viewing/discussion of Peter Weir's film *The Last Wave* (!977)

Topics: Postmodern primitivism. World apocalypse and personal transformation. The power of symbols. The spiritual initiation/transformation paradigm at midlife.

Week 4 (2/5, 7) **1st Response Paper due** (“The Last Wave”) **Monday, 2/5**

John of Patmos, **The Apocalypse* (translated by Willis Barnstone).

Topics: the myth of world destruction and renewal and its possible interpretation as a myth of the individual’s psychological and spiritual death and rebirth. The power of myth and of symbolic imagery. The compensatory function of myth.

Week 5. (2/12, 14) D.H. Lawrence, **Apocalypse* (pp. 45-56; 59-129 and 141-9 only) + C.G. Jung, *Answer to Job* pp. 73-99

Topics: Lawrence’s “release of the imagination.” Allegory and symbol. Coming to terms with the book (John of Patmos’ *Apocalypse*) he loved to hate. *Apocalypse* as spiritual testament. The religion of cosmic connection. Popular vs. aristocratic religion.

Week 6. (2/19, 21) **The Book of Job* (translated by S. Mitchell)

Topics: a divinely disordered personality? Job as scapegoat. The transformational image. Job’s spiritual transformation.

Week 7 (2/26, 28)**The Book of Job* + Jung, **Answer To Job* (pp. 3-35, 99-108)

Topics: Jung’s use of the term “antinomy.” The fairly obscurely written book he found (untypically) perfect as it was, needing no revision: a spiritual confession? Jung as would-be prophet. The “*anamnesis of sophia*.” The feminine side of God. Jung’s surprising enthusiasm for the newly promulgated doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

Weeks 7. (3/5, 7) **Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God* (translated by Christopher Isherwood and Swami Prabhavananda): 13-31; 35-56; 107-117; 153-156; 163-171. + Peter Brook’s filmed drama *Mahabharata* (selected DVD clips). Steven F. Walker, “Arjuna’s Eunuch Problem and the *Gita*’s Epic Frame.” *American Vedantist* 14.2 (Fall, 2008), 8-16 (xeroxed sheets) and “Appreciating the Opening of the *Bhagavad Gita*” (xeroxed sheets)

Topics: The spiritual hero and the feminine. The compensatory dimension of the apocalyptic vision (Book 11). The dark side of God. The epic framing of the spiritual discourse and its significance.

#####SPRING BREAK: March 10—18 #####

Week 8 (3/19, 21) **Bhagavad Gita* continued

Week 9 (3/26, 28). REVIEW + Wednesday March 28 **Midterm Examination**

Week 11 (4/2, 4) Viewing/discussion of Haifaa al-Mansour’s film *Wadjda* (2012)

. **2nd Response Paper due** (“Wadjda”) **Monday 4/9**

Topic: Postmodern messages in sacred texts.

Week 12-13 (4/9, 11, 16, 18): Marcel Proust, **Time Regained* (translated by Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin), pp. 238-336, 523-532. Viewing/discussion of filmed Roman Catholic Mass in Latin. Viewing/discussion of Raul Ruiz' film *Time Regained* (1999) +Steven F. Walker, "The Name of the Madeleine: Signs and Symbols of the Mass in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*." *Religion and the Arts* (Boston College) 7.4 (2003), 389-411.(xeroxed sheets)

Topics: Marcel's private Mass. Cryptic symbolism. "Resurrections" of memory and Proust's "variety of religious experience." Midlife spiritual transformation. Ritual themes of death and rebirth in the Mass.

Weeks 14 (4/23, 25) discussion of *The Last Letter of Pontius Pilate*" (xeroxed sheets)

Week 15 (4/30) REVIEW + **Final Paper** due .

Final examination: as officially scheduled)

.

Grading: attendance/participation 15% (3 unexcused absences without penalty), midterm 25%, final exam 30%, final paper/response papers 30%