

Religion and Literature: Biblical Poetry

RLST 3160/ENGL 2450

James E. Bowley

T/Th, 3:15PM

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Office Hours: MWF: 11-12; T/Th: 1.30-2.30 & by appointment

I. Course Description

This is a poetry class, an ancient poetry class, an ancient Hebrew/Jewish poetry class about passion. The ancient poetic passions that we will explore are found in three classic Hebrew books of Bible: Psalms, Song of Songs, and Lamentations, all of which appeal to deeply human emotions. In this class we will read and discuss these classic poems carefully, listening to the workings of Hebrew poetry, noting their literary setting, and, hopefully, enjoying and wondering.

II. Specific Objectives

1. Learn basic content of the three poetry collections.
 2. Gain familiarity with their ancient world environment.
 3. Explore the poetic forms and expression of piety, sensuality, and loss.
 4. Create, satisfy, and perpetuate curiosity for poetic learning.
- Only you can prevent forest fires and only you can make this class valuable.

III. Our Poetic Friends' offerings.

1. Alter, Robert, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. HarperCollins, 1984.
2. Bloch, Ariel and Chana, *The Song of Songs*. University of California, 1995.
3. Walsh, Carey, *Exquisite Desire*. Fortress, 2000.
4. Slavitt, David, *The Book of Lamentations*. Johns Hopkins, 2001.
5. Tanakh, Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

IV. Here are the multiple ways we will engage our poetic studies:

Learning Basic Information

Our final exam will consist of questions about "the basics" of our three ancient poetry collections. Students will have a great deal of input into the final exam.

Reading Engagements

For each of our three primary poetic texts and each of our five secondary texts, students will write one 3-5 page reflection paper. The questions will be distributed at least one week in advance.

Personal, Critical, Creative, Thinking Expression; Thesis paper

And what about you? What are you most interested in pursuing more deeply regarding poetry and passions? Each student will write a 10-13 page paper regarding one of the three poetic books covered in class. Students, in consultation with the teacher, will choose the topics. Papers are

intended to allow each student to follow her/his curiosity for the sake of research, analysis, and expression. Topics will be chosen by the fifth week of class.

IV. Outline and Assignments (Subject to revision)

Assignments are listed below in the boxes. EACH PAPER SHOULD INCLUDE AT THE TOP, YOUR NAME, DATE, and NAME OF ASSIGNMENT. NO TITLE PAGES OR COVER SHEETS

Week 1 12 Jan. M: Introduction

W: Read "A Library of Tradition: the Beginnings of the Bible"

Tehelim: Psalms

Week 2 20 Jan. T: For the love of poetry

TH: Read "A Library of Tradition: The Beginnings of the Bible"

Week 3 27 Jan. T:

TH:

Week 4 3 Feb. T:

TH: Alter (Chapters 1-3, 5,9) report due

Week 5 10 Feb. T:

TH:

Week 6 17 Feb. T:

TH: Psalms report due

Shir HaShirim: Song of Songs

Week 7 24 Feb. T:

TH:

Week 8 2 Mar. T:

TH: Walsh report due

Week 9 9 Mar. T:

TH:

..... SPRING BREAK

Week 10 23 Mar. T:

TH: Bloch/Song of Songs report due

Eika: Lamentations

Week 11 30 Mar. T:

TH:

Week 12 6 Ap. T:

TH: Lamentations report due

Week 13 13 Ap. T:
TH:

Week 14 20 Ap. T: Slavitt report due
TH: ATTENDANCE REQUIRED

Monday 26 April, 5.00 PM Final Paper due

Saturday 1 May 9.00 AM Final Exam