

## SCTR 100R: Biblical Poetry and Ancient Myth

### Religious Studies Seminar Course Outline and Reading Schedule Fall 2009

**Instructor:** Dr. J. David Pleins  
**Office:** Kenna 300J, extension 4763  
**Office Hours:** T/Th 1:00-2:00, 4:00-4:30, or by appointment  
**Email:** [jpleins@scu.edu](mailto:jpleins@scu.edu)  
**Eres password:** mythology (eres = <http://eres.scu.edu>)

#### Class Meeting Time:

51333 (5.0 Units): Mon/Wed 2:15-4:00 pm, Kenna 104

#### Prerequisites:

·The prerequisite for this Third Course in Religion is any course from among the Second Courses in Religious Studies numbered 020-099. Not open to students who have taken SCTR 110.

·NOTE: This seminar is only open to Religion Majors, Religion Minors, and Honors Students.

#### Course Reading:

Campbell, J. *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday).  
 Mitchell, S. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Free Press).  
 Mitchell, S. *The Book of Job* (San Francisco: Harper).  
 Pleins, J. D. *When the Great Abyss Opened* (Oxford University Press)  
 Sandars, N. K. *Poems of Heaven and Hell* (Penguin).

#### Scope of the Course:

Why are myths so violent? What do hero myths do for their societies? Is there wisdom about suffering in myth? Do myths reinforce false stereotypes about gender? Has science destroyed the Bible and belief in myth? Do we need myth today? These are some of the questions we explore in this course by means of a discussion of theories of myth and a selection of texts from the Bible and the ancient Middle East.



### **Pedagogy:**

·Collective Inquiry: In a course that employs a collective inquiry format, students engage in a group-oriented investigation into the topic. Prime importance is placed on students raising their own questions of the material, discussing and debating the issues at hand, and formulating tentative hypotheses in dialogue both with the course readings and with the other members of the class.

·Question-Oriented Learning: Rather than being a teacher focused class or even a student focused class, the class seeks to put the key questions about the subject at the center of each session, treating each of us as “knowers” who are willing to wrestle with and explore the issues as they emerge.

### **Methodological Aims and Learning Outcomes:**

·Hermeneutics/interpretation: Students will regularly engage and analyze the broader hermeneutical questions regarding the interpretation of poetry and of the nature of myth. Students will critically assess and compare numerous theories of myth.

·Reflective/existential: Students in this course will discuss and write (both analytically and creatively) on the contemporary religious and philosophic dimensions of human suffering, hope, social justice, political power, gender, and war as these issues are raised by these texts and additional select modern poetry and analytic readings.

·Biblical/textual: By exploring the narratives and poetry of ancient Israel, students will engage in reflection, discussion, and written analysis regarding the enduring theological questions of biblical belief and worship.

·Ancient/comparative: Through the reading of various Mesopotamian and Egyptian poems/myths, students will develop perspectives on how to place the biblical materials into broader historical and literary contexts.

### **Required Assignments and Breakdown of Grade:**

1. Class Participation: 20%
2. Midterm Thematic Research Paper: 40%
3. Final Research Paper: 40%

#### **1. Class Participation:**

Class participation means:

(1) Active preparation and consistent involvement in the lecture/discussion sessions of the course: Prepare a response to the day’s assigned question; ask good questions; make relevant comments; raise key issues; explore hypotheses. Be active in addressing questions posed in class, whether you are asked them in a general way or if the instructor calls on you for comment.

(2) Leadership in group discussions.

- (3) Evidence of knowledge of course readings as preparation for the class session. Submission of annotated bibliography and paper proposal by due date.
- (4) *Bring the relevant course books, articles, and assessments to each class session.*
- (5) Set up additional appointment times to discuss course content, and paper topics with the instructor.
- (6) Participate in outside of class group discussions and other activities such as related films and lectures that may be noted for extra credit.
- (7) E-mail the instructor your ideas about the course subject matter, questions discussed in class, or thoughts about the readings.

20% of grade

## 2. Midterm and Final Thematic Research Papers

Overall Writing Requirement: Students will develop two major research essays on the study of mythology. These essays are to be crafted with divergent methodological perspectives in mind and should reflect the varied literary conventions of the field of religious studies. For English majors with a creative writing emphasis, students may propose a fictional presentation for one of the major research essays.

Scope: Each of the mid-term and final papers are to be a *research-oriented analytic essay of eight to ten pages in length, typed double space with an attached bibliography*. For this paper, you are asked to examine a debatable question appropriate to the myths, biblical texts, and theories of myth relevant to the segment of the course under examination.

Paper Topics: The *midterm* paper is to explore some aspect of psychology in myth, the hero's journey idea, the quest for wisdom, heroic suffering, or the question of gender and myth. The *final* paper is to emerge out of issues that we have dealt with since the midterm research paper, namely, myth and science, race and myth, fundamentalism and myth, myth and society, and the future of myth.

Consultation: The specific paper topics will be of the student's own choosing, in consultation with the instructor. Students must make an appointment with the instructor well in advance of the paper's due date to secure a paper topic.

Thesis: The essay must pose a central debatable question, offering a succinctly stated initial answer that constitutes the overall view defended in the essay. In other words, tackle a contentious question and take sides in the debate, arguing for a specific position regarding the material at hand. Papers that simply summarize the views of others are deficient in this respect. You must seek to defend a point of view through your efforts, taking into account opposing viewpoints throughout.

Class Readings and Research: Papers must reference (by quotation) the course readings but go beyond that reading into a specific question. These essays are to be based proportionately on quotations from the assigned reading and library research. Research

should include books and scholarly articles, not simply Websites. At the very least, use JSTOR to isolate appropriate scholarly essays. Only the course texts are acceptable as your primary sources for translations of the assigned readings. Do not rely solely on how others might translate the texts in question or other translations you may have read in the past.

**Synthetic Analysis:** Papers are to be organized according to 3-4 sub-topics that carry forward the thesis, not around persons or stories. So, for example, do not organize your paper as (1) Jung, (2) Campbell, (3) Doty, (4) Sontag. Set it up around 3-4 ideas that cut across the persons and stories under consideration. In other words, use each section to unpack a specific aspect of your total thesis.

**Fictional Paper Option:** Depending on the student's training and major field of study, it is possible to submit a fictional piece, epic-style poem, play-script, or film-script (with filmed scenes) as either a midterm or final paper. These creative works still need to take into account the issues raised in the relevant section of the course and engage in research but will express that research in a creative literary mode. *Such works must be approved by the instructor and must be taken through at least one draft that is reviewed by the instructor.* Proposals obviously must be made well in advance of the due date for a fictional work. A digest of the student's research as well as a discussion of the piece should accompany the fictional work as an appendix. Please, only suggest *serious* efforts here and nothing at the last minute. The creative projects must give evidence of on-going development during the relevant segment of the quarter. Note that the Fictional Paper Option can only be exercised once (either midterm or final, not both).

**Due dates:** Dates are listed in the syllabus. Note that late papers are not accepted without significant reduction in grade. You must complete all assignments to receive a grade for the course.

**Length:** 8-10 pages with separate bibliography page.

80% of the course grade

## **Standards, Policies, and Procedures**

### **Grading Policy**

Course grades run from A to F. But what are the qualities that distinguish high grades from low? There are three areas that are considered as papers are evaluated for *quality*.

1. **Comprehension:** Excellent papers will show a high degree of comprehending the course content, avoiding superficial comparisons. Such papers will offer strong critical reflections on a broad range of readings.
2. **Critical Reasoning:** Excellent papers will ask thought-provoking questions that can be debated. Such papers will quote (and evaluate and analyze) relevant sources and offer rigorous use of evidence to make the case. These papers will

tap different analytic approaches to examine the data. These papers will unfold in a logical fashion a tightly considered argument. They will also show a healthy ability to spar with opponents' views.

3. Synthesis: Excellent papers will make strong comparisons between different readings, time periods, and analytic methods. Such papers will "make connections" between thinkers, sources, time periods and regions.

Good papers (B) are less strong, usually in at least one key area. Fair papers (C) show some command of these three categories but are more superficial in character. Deficient papers (D) make a weak effort at these categories. Failing papers (F) have not made any solid headway in most if not all aspects.

### **Attendance Policy:**

- All students are expected to attend all classes and to *arrive promptly*. Chronic lateness or failure to attend class may result, at the instructor's discretion, in immediate dismissal and/or failure of the course, *regardless* of completion of assigned work.

- Exceptions require written proof of illness from the health service or from the student's personal physician. If you are unable to attend, leave word at 554-4763.

- The basic rule of thumb is: 3 absences and the highest grade you may receive in the course is a C (you have missed 15% of the course at this point); with 4 absences (20% of the course), you are encouraged to withdraw from the class because if you do not, you will fail the course.

- Note that your presence in class is *mandatory* for the discussion of papers and that your papers may not be handed in by another student.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty Policy:**

- One's Own Work: All written work must be uniquely and individually one's own work. While in-class discussion and outside of class discussion is certainly desirable and encouraged, the material that a student hands in must reflect one's own labor and ought to be clearly and decisively distinguishable from the work of all other students in the class.

- Quoting Sources: In assignments and papers, you are to make clear when you are quoting sources others have written or when you are substantially paraphrasing the work of others. You are not to claim as your own the work that others have done. Such dishonest conduct harms the class, fellow students, the university degree, and oneself.

- Failure and Dismissal: Failure to abide by the spirit and the letter of this policy will result in immediate dismissal from the course and will merit a failing grade for the course. Note also that such academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office for Student Life and Leadership for action under the University Code of Conduct.

Students in the School of Engineering are reminded that their work is also governed by the Engineering Honor Code.

### **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION POLICY:**

To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216, (408) 554-4109. Students must register and provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations. (Other advising matters can be directed to The Drahnann Center in Kenna 101, (408) 554-4318.)

### **PLACE OF THE COURSE IN THE DEPARTMENT AND THE UNIVERSITY**

#### **A. This Course and Its Place in the Department:**

Religious Studies courses are divided into three major categories:

Area I--Scripture and Tradition

Area II--Theology, Ethics and Spirituality

Area III--Religion and Society

This course is in Area I, which means that the course examines the sacred texts and stories of specific religious traditions both in terms of origins and later historical developments.

#### **B. This Course in Relation to the University's Core Requirements:**

The Third Course in the Core Requirement in Religion is devoted to the Third Theme of the core, namely *Integrating for Leadership*. At this level, students are expected to draw on and evaluate a broad range of perspectives to articulate a personally integrated vision of religious values and beliefs in relation to societal needs and commitments.

#### **C. Description of Third Courses (Upper Division) in Religion:**

Third Course => APPLICATIONS = Critical engagement of current, open-ended issues in religion:

- As the last required course, the third course should model on-going intellectual engagement with difficult questions and issues involving religion as it is currently addressed in the three areas.

- In terms of cognitive development, this course should be organized around problems, issues, or controversies that require students to explore and assess multiple positions and then make intellectually defensible, integrative, and nuanced decisions.

· As the last substantive core curriculum course for most undergraduates, the third course should serve as a "capstone," giving students the opportunity to bring together their core and disciplinary knowledge, their acquired analytic skills, the intellectual challenge of current issues, and the "meta-questions" that will invoke ethical and ontological concerns.

· Examples: SCTR 107 Scripture and the Moral Life; TESP 128 Issues in Contemporary Catholicism; RSOC 184 Race and Religion in the U.S.; ANTHRO 150 Religion in Culture and Society; HIST 164 Catholic Church in Latin America

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE**

The course readings are arranged by the week and you will need to prepare ahead of time to participate fully in the course. Remember: Only your consistent preparation will ensure a strong course for the quarter. *Group discussion will depend on your questions about the text*, so be prepared *ahead of time* with questions and observations on a consistent basis.

### **A. MYTH AS PSYCHOLOGY: THE HERO'S QUEST MODEL**

#### **January 6: Introduction**

Definition of Myth: What is myth?

Video: Campbell, *The Hero's Journey*, tape 4355, part 1

#### **January 8: Myth and the Hero's Quest Idea**

Question: Are we biomythic creatures? Do we have a built-in psychological need for myth?

Reading:

Adapa in Sandars, *Poems of Heaven and Hell*, pp. 169-172.

Campbell, chap. 1 and chap. 2

Video: Campbell, *The Hero's Journey*, tape 4355, part 2

### **B. MYTH, RITUAL, AND SOCIETY**

#### **January 13: Origin Myths as Social Charters: Creation Epics**

Question: By what myth does our society live? Is the American Dream a myth?

Reading:

Sandars, *Poems of Heaven and Hell*, 73-111 (= Babylonian Creation Story)

Malinowski, *The Role of Myth in Life* (e-res)

Hooke, *The Myth and Ritual Pattern of the Ancient East* (e-res)

#### **January 15: Myth and Social Violence: Combat Myths**

Question: Is religion to blame for the world's violence?

Reading:

Lichtheim, pp. 214-223 = Horus and Seth (e-res)

Exodus 1-20 (e-res)

Juergensmeyer, ch. 8, *Cosmic War* (e-res)

### **C. THE SUFFERING HERO: WISDOM IN MYTH?**

#### **January 20: Dying Saviors and Suffering Heroes**

Question: Why are we addicted to the image of the violent male hero? Is this a healthy addiction?

Reading:

Mitchell, Gilgamesh, pp. 69-199

Campbell, ch. 5

#### **January 22: Innocent Suffering**

Question: Should we protest suffering or accept it?

Reading:

S. Mitchell, The Book of Job, pp. 5-37, 69-91

Hudson, Jung on Myth and the Mythic (e-res)

Jung, Psychotherapy Today (e-res)

\*Evening: View "Paradise Now" in Media Services at 4:30 or 7:00

### **D. GENDER AND MYTH**

#### **January 27: Smashing the Hero Model**

Question: Is the hero's journey a universal myth or a male fantasy that needs to be smashed?

Reading:

Segal, Introduction: In Quest of the Hero (e-res)

Caputi, On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking (e-res)

Gilgamesh (bring books to class)

Video: Gilgamesh

#### **January 29: Damsel in Distress or Warrior Princess?**

Question: Would our world be better off focusing on female mythic heroes?

Reading:

Covington, In Search of the Heroine (e-res)

Walker, Blurred Boundaries (on Xena) (e-res)

### **February 3: Beauty and the Patriarchal Beast**

Question: Why are we obsessed with the beauty myth?

Reading:

Wolf, Beauty Myth (e-res)

Esther (e-res)

Ruth (e-res)

Beauty and the Beast (e-res)

### **February 5: The Goddess Revival**

Question: Will the goddess revival save the planet?

Reading:

Campbell, chap. 6

Brenner, The Hebrew God and His Female Counterparts (e-res)

Video: Goddess Remembered

### **February 10: The Myth of Love and the Construction of Desire**

Question: Do myths construct deceptive views of love?

Reading:

Song of Songs (on e-res = "The Song of Songs by Marvin H. Pope")

Lichtheim, pp. 181-193 = Egyptian Love Poems (e-res)

Campbell, chap. 7

### **February 12: Discussion of Midterm Paper Proposals: Initial Bibliographies Due**

### **February 17: Thematic Research Paper #1 Due**

Research paper #1 is due at the beginning of the session. Come prepared to present a synopsis of your paper to the class. Your presence at the presentation is mandatory.

## **E. MYTH, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION**

### **February 19: Myth, Science, and Fact: The Flood Story Today**

Question: In an age of science, why are there so many fundamentalists?

Video: PBS Evolution: What About God?

Reading:

Pleins, chs. 1, 2

Genesis 1-11 (e-res)

### **February 24: Fundamentalism, Science, Racism and the Bible**

Question: Why is America still at war over the Book of Genesis?

Reading:

Pleins, chs. 3, 4, 7

### **February 26: Digging Up God in an Age of Science**

Question: Does science destroy religion?

Reading:

Pleins, preface, chs. 5, 10, conclusion

Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology (e-res)

## **F. THE FUTURE OF MYTH**

### **March 3: Toward a Global Myth?**

Question: Does the world need a new myth or are myth's days numbered?

Reading:

Thich Nhat Hanh, Peony Blossoms (e-res)

Levi-Strauss, The Structural Study of Myth (e-res)

Lyotard, A Postmodern Fable (e-res)

Video: Our Planet Earth

### **March 5: The Many Meanings of Myth**

Question: What was right and what was wrong about your initial definition of myth for this class?

Reading:

Honko, The Semantic Span of the Concept of Myth  
Sontag, Against Interpretation

### **March 10: Myth and Death**

Question: Given all the modern world's scientific advances, should we prefer medicine and machines to Shakespeare and spirituality?

Reading:

Sandars, Poems of Heaven and Hell, pp. 135-165 (= Inanna's Journey to Hell)  
Lichtheim, pp. 119-32: The Egyptian Book of the Dead (e-res)

Video: Wisdom of the Dream, vol 2, Inheritance of Dreams

### **March 12: Discussion of Final Paper Proposals: Initial Bibliographies Due**

### **FINAL EXAM TIME: Final Thematic Research Paper Due**

Time: Tuesday, March 17 at 9:10 am-12:10 (be prompt!)

Research paper #2, covering an issue raised since the midterm and developed in consultation with the instructor, is due at the beginning of the session. Arrive promptly and be prepared to read either the introductory material or the conclusion of your paper to small groups for discussion of your thesis. *Note that your presence at this session is mandatory and you should make travel plans accordingly.*

## SCTR 100R: Biblical Poetry and Ancient Myth

### Religious Studies Seminar Course Outline and Reading Schedule Fall 2009

**Instructor: Dr. J. David Pleins**  
**Office: Kenna 300J, extension 4763**  
**Office Hours: T/Th 1:00-2:00, 4:00-4:30, or by appointment**  
**Email: [jpleins@scu.edu](mailto:jpleins@scu.edu)**  
**Eres password: mythology (eres = <http://eres.scu.edu>)**

#### Class Meeting Time:

51333 (5.0 Units): Mon/Wed 2:15-4:00 pm, Kenna 104

#### Prerequisites:

The prerequisite for this Third Course in Religion is any course from among the Second Courses in Religious Studies numbered 020-099. Not open to students who have taken SCTR 110.

NOTE: This seminar is only open to Religion Majors, Religion Minors, and Honors Students.

#### Course Reading:

Campbell, J. *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday).  
 Mitchell, S. *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* (Free Press).  
 Mitchell, S. *The Book of Job* (San Francisco: Harper).  
 Pleins, J. D. *When the Great Abyss Opened* (Oxford University Press)  
 Sandars, N. K. *Poems of Heaven and Hell* (Penguin).

#### Scope of the Course:

Why are myths so violent? What do hero myths do for their societies? Is there wisdom about suffering in myth? Do myths reinforce false stereotypes about gender? Has science destroyed the Bible and belief in myth? Do we need myth today? These are some of the questions we explore in this course by means of a discussion of theories of myth and a selection of texts from the Bible and the ancient Middle East.

