

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

Prof. Steven F. Walker [sfw@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:sfw@rci.rutgers.edu) office hours: before or after class (Scott239)

Monday Wednesday 6:10-7:30PM

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 Jean-Luc Godard's *Hail, Mary*/the Annunciation to the Virgin) 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, several 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**

Introduction:

Week 1 . 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.

Suggested reading: Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), Chapter Five: Sigmund Freud: The Return of the Repressed, pp. 144-167.

Week 2 . Viewing/discussion of Peter Weir's film *The Last Wave* (1977)

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

Suggested reading: "Midlife Transformation and the Oneiric Text," in: Steven F. Walker, *Midlife Transformation in Literature and Film: Jungian and Eriksonian Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 6-29.

Week 3 . **1<sup>st</sup> Response Paper due** ("The Last Wave")

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.

Suggested reading: C.G. Jung, "Concerning Rebirth" in: *Four Archetypes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 47-81.  
Edward F. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse* (Chicago; Open Court, 1999).  
Steven F. Walker, "Myth as Compensation," in: *Jung and the Jungians on Myth* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 19-27.

Week 4 . 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.

Suggested reading: Steven F. Walker, "Apocalypse, transformation, and scapegoating: moving myth into the twenty-first century," in: *Myth, Literature and the Unconscious*, ed. Leon Burnett, Sanja Bahun, and Roderick Main (London: Karnac Books: 2013), pp. 3-16.

Week 5 *\*The Book of Job* (translated by S. Mitchell)

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

Suggested reading: Steven F. Walker, *Borderline Personality Disorder and the Enigma of Tartuffe. Quadrant: the Journal of the C. G. Jung Foundation of New York for Analytical Psychology*, XXX.1 (Winter, 2010), 92-108.

See also Week 3, "Apocalypse, transformation and scapegoating."

Week 6 . *\*The Book of Job* + Jung, *\*Answer To Job* (pp. 3-35)

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.

Suggested reading: Paul Bishop, *Jung's Answer to Job: A Commentary* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001).

Weeks 7-8. \**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.

Suggested reading: J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata: a Bilingual Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), "Introduction" (pp. 1-29).

Week 8 (3/23, 25) Vivekananda, *Karma Yoga* (I will supply free copies)

Week 9. REVIEW + **Midterm Examination** (really!)

Week 10. Viewing/discussion of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Hail, Mary* (1985)

+ *Answer to Job* 99-108. **2<sup>nd</sup> Response Paper due "Hail, Mary" Monday 4/13**

Topics: Jung's surprising enthusiasm for the newly promulgated doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Godard's approach to the Annunciation: a parody? A postmodern rendition? The science fiction subplot and its alternative myth: the panspermia theory of the creation of life on earth.

Weeks 11-13.

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).

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.

Suggested reading: 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.

Steven F. Walker, *Midlife Transformation in Literature and Film: Jungian and Eriksonian Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 187-200.

Week 14 Conclusion + **Final Paper** due.

**Final examination**: (as officially scheduled)

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