

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

REL 849

Old Story, New Lives: The Book of Job

Instructor: David Michalek

Course description and aim:

This course poses the question of how the book of Job and its universal concerns about human suffering might inspire an artist to respond to contemporary realities: the aim is for you to become inspired. An artist, your instructor will be participating in Yale's World Performance Project while developing a multimedia project based on Job. The course will emphasize close, rigorous reading and discussion, centered on the most human of questions about suffering and meaning, with the aim of inspiring and guiding each of you to imagine or create an artistic or literary-critical response. An artistic response can take any form (including a liturgy) or involve any media; a critical response should involve reading in the course, but may also involve other texts. Whether creative or critical, your project will need to be outlined at the mid-point of the semester.

Course Requirements:

1.) Class attendance and participation in discussion.

2.) Reading and re-reading the assigned texts and keeping a notebook or portfolio that records your thoughts about the reading or anything else related to the course. (The notebook/portfolio may contain personal writing, quotations, newspaper clippings, drawings, photographs.) The notebook might naturally begin where the course begins—with the book of Job and its commentaries and criticism, but as the course turns from the book to the world, so might your entries in the notebook reflect this.

3.) 6-8-page essay (due in the middle of the semester)

or

Class presentation (of five or ten minutes): raise questions and present ideas about the reading, for the sake of discussion. (Sign up at least a week in advance, on a first come, first serve basis.)

4.) Final Project (two options):

Option 1: a seminar paper (12-15 pages) that theorizes a work of art based on Job and the themes of the course.

Option 2: a work of art in any media that engages the major themes of the course.

For either option, you must submit a short proposal that will be discussed in individual conference midway through the semester.

Grading:

- Class participation: 10%
- Notebook/portfolio: 20%
- Midterm essay or oral presentation: 30%
- Final paper or project: 40%

Course Texts:

*Stephen Mitchell (trans.), The Book of Job
 Raymond P. Scheindlin (trans.), The Book of Job
 Job/ ArtScroll Tanach Series, edited by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann
 *Carol A. Newsom, The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations
 Joan Chittister, O.S.B., Job's Daughters: Woman and Power
 John Calvin, Sermons from Job
 *Philippe Nemo, Job and the Excess of Evil
 Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil
 Michel Foucault, Power
 *Daniel Berrigan: Job and Death no Dominion
 *Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace
 *Simone Weil, Waiting For God
 *Robert Coles, The Call of Stories
 *Robert Coles, Doing Documentary Work
 John Dewey, Art As Experience
 *Ananda Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art
 Ashfield and de Bolla, The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory
 William Blake, Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job

* Recommended purchase

- Two Tyco course packets will be required: one for each half of the semester.
- All books will be on reserve in the Divinity School Library.

Schedule

Week 0:

- Course Introduction
- A Reader's Theater (works under this heading will be read aloud in class):
 The Book of Job translated by Stephen Mitchell (Handout)

Assigned reading:

(The following will be bound into the first course packet)

- Carol A. Newsom, The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations –Chapter 1
- Philippe Nemo, Job and the Excess of Evil, Introduction
- Job/ ArtScroll Tanach Series, Introduction by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann

Week to week, please add to the notebook.

Week 1:

- Discussion
- A Reader's Theater:
 -Prose Tale clipped from the King James Bible 1: 1-2:10 and 42: 11-17 (Handout)
 -Babylonian Theodicy from Benjamin Foster's Before the Muses (Handout)

Assigned reading:

-Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*—Chapters 2-3 (Course Packet)

-John Calvin, *Sermons from Job, Sermons 1 and 2* (Course Packet)

Week 2:

- Discussion
-

Assigned Reading:

-Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* –Chapter 4

-Rabbi Moshe Eisenmann’s commentary on the speeches (Handout)

Week 3:

- Discussion
 - A Reader’s Theater: Elie Wiesel’s *The Trial of God*
-

Assigned Reading:

-Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* –Chapter 5

-Simone Weil, *The Love of God and Affliction* (Course Packet)

-Philippe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil, Chapter 1: The Anxiety of Job* (Course Packet)

-Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil, Chapter 1: On Defilement* (Course Packet)

Week 4:

- Discussion
-

Assigned Reading:

-Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*—Chapter 9: *The Voice from the Whirlwind: The Tragic Sublime and the Limits of Dialogue*.

-John Calvin, *Sermons from Job, Sermon 20: The Lord Answers Job* (Course Packet)

-Three essays on the sublime by Longinus, Edmund Burke and Robert Lowth (Course Packet)

Midterm Paper

(Please respond to the following two questions in a paper of roughly six to eight single-spaced pages. Paper due March 2nd).

Essay 1.

The book of Job is a perennial challenge to every reader and every aspect of the Book poses problems that each reader must solve for him or herself. There is no universal agreement on such major issues as the structure, the unity, and the basic meaning of the book, or even on such minor questions of its style, date and origin.

Throughout the ages, the religious faithful and the philosopher, the rationalist and the mystic, the skeptic and the existentialist, have all been fascinated by Job. Each has found in it a

matchless expression of his or her own temperament, or some striking illumination of his or her own problems. If it might be said that each reader creates a Job in his or her own image, what is the image of Job that you have created for yourself and how does this tie in with what might be characterized as your own most striking illumination or response to the work?

Essay 2.

So far the course has emphasized close, rigorous reading and discussion centered on the Book of Job and its related criticism and commentary. But we are now moving into that part of the course where I'll be asking each of you to meld the readings and discussions with your own creativity and to craft a response to them (in some given form) by, with and through art. As I've said, this artistic response can take any form or involve any media. But how might such an artistic response differ from any other form of response or from any other kind of mere making or creating?

Even though every human culture, throughout all of history, has shown the tendency toward working with art (and to creating works made by or with it), the concept of art remains an elusive one. The word "art" is like the words "love" or "happiness" in that everyone knows what they mean or recognizes what they refer to, but, when pressed, finds them difficult to define with consistency or wide application. But since we are, today, the humans who evolved (and are presumably still evolving), art must still be "for" what it was for, although as cultural as well as biological creatures humans have elaborated the tendency toward art (and the arts) to serve multifarious political, religious, social, psychological and utilitarian purposes, and thus art may today also be "for" other things. Although many of those elaborations are interesting and could be addressed within our purview, they lead us too far afield from the basic questions: What is art? What is it for?

Without presupposing that any answers are the "right" ones, please apply some focused thought into a response to these questions. Also, I would ask that your response consider both the act of making and experiencing art, as well as incorporate a notion of art as characteristic of all human beings, and not just the rare or special province of a minority called "artists," although to be sure, as is true of all behaviors, some persons may be more attracted to or skilled at displaying it. One last point--I'm not necessarily asking that you do research in order to craft your response (although it may not hurt) but rather to look into yourself as a being who has naturally inherited the tendency, or shall we say the gift to both use and appreciate it.

Week 5:

(March 2nd)

- Discussion

Assigned reading:

-Joan Chittister, O.S.B, Job's Daughters: Women and Power (Handout)

-Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power (Handout)

Week 6:

(March 9th)

- Discussion

- Film: David Achkar, Allah Tantou (God's Will)

Assigned Reading:

- William Blake's illustrations for the Book of Job (Tyco)
 - Daniel Berrigan: Job and Death no Dominion, preface and chapters 1-3 (Bookstore)
-

Week 7:

(March 30th)

- Discussion
- Video and presentation: David Michalek's, 14 Stations

Assigned Reading:

- David Michalek, 14 Stations (Handout)
 - Ananda Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, chapters 1-5 (Bookstore)
 - John Dewey, Art As Experience, chapters 1-2 (Tyco)
-

Week 8:

(April 6th)

No Class—Good Friday

Week 9:

(April 13th)

- Discussion

Assigned reading:

- Simone Weil, Waiting For God, essay: Forms of the Implicit Love of God (Bookstore)
 - Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace (Tyco)
- (Chapters: Gravity and Grace, Void and Compensation, To Accept the Void, Detachment, Imagination Which Fills the Voids, Decreation, Self-Effacement, Necessity and Obedience, Evil, Affliction, Violence, The Impossible, The Distance Between the Necessary and The Good, He Whom We Must Love is Absent, Attention and Will, Meaning of the Universe, Metaxu)

Gilles Peres, The Silence (A copy will be on reserve at the Divinity School Library)

Week 10:

(April 20th)

- Discussion
- Film: The Real Deal (documentary film about the Los Angeles Poverty Department (L.A.P.D.) a "Skid-Row" based theater company made up of homeless and formerly homeless men and women.

Assigned Reading:

- Robert Coles, Doing Documentary Work, chapters (Bookstore)
 - Robert Coles, The Call of Stories (chapters 1, 2, 3, 8) (Bookstore)
-

Week 11:
(April 27th)

- Discussion
 - Guest Speaker: John Malpede: Artistic Director and Founder of (L.A.P.D.).
-

Week 12:
(Tuesday, May 1st)
Make-up day for Good Friday

- Open discussion

No Assigned Reading
Work on final projects

Week 13:
(May 11th)

- Final Project Presentation – Marquand Chapel

NOTEBOOKS DUE