

Rel. 660  
Carolyn J. Sharp

Spring 2002  
T, Th 9 - 10:20 a.m.

office: 300 Porter Hall  
phone: 432-2011  
e-mail: carolyn.sharp@yale.edu

## **IRONY AND THE OUTSIDER IN OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE**

This course will examine the theologically and politically motivated constructions of meaning and social identity in narratives in the Old Testament in which outsiders (non-Israelites, marginalized Israelite women) deal in significant ways with Israelites. Special consideration will be given to the role of irony as a destabilizing literary device intended to subvert or otherwise deconstruct traditional representations of Israel, Israel's heroes and heroines, and Israel's God. Narratives to be studied in depth include the stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden, Abraham and Isaac with foreign rulers (the "endangered ancestress" stories), Hagar, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Judah and Tamar, Balaam, Rahab, Jephthah and his daughter, Samson and Delilah, Ruth, Jonah and the Ninevites, and Esther and Haman. The hermeneutical challenges, opportunities, and risks involved in interpreting irony in sacred literature will be considered.

### **Evaluative Measures**

Each student's course grade will be based on the following:

1) one exegetical paper (8-10 pages) on an Old Testament passage of the student's choice from among those on the syllabus (30% of the grade);

2) one paper (10-12 pages) treating an exegetical or other problem in Old Testament material in which the student has discerned that irony plays a role, this essay to include thorough critical evaluation of two scholarly interpretations of the relevant passage or passages (50% of the grade);

3) regular class participation (20% of the grade). The category of class participation includes conscientious preparation of Biblical and secondary material for class; engagement in class discussions; leading of class discussion on assigned secondary reading once or twice during the semester; and preparation of a 350- to 450-word abstract for each paper, to be shared with classmates.

All written work must be submitted by the last day of the semester (May 10). Any paper received after May 10 will likely not receive feedback from me other than its grade.

All written work submitted by you must be your own. If you cite, paraphrase, or in any other way rely on ideas, distinctive phrases, or argumentation from a written source, that source must be properly acknowledged. For more information, consult the sheet on plagiarism appended to this syllabus.

Papers are to be typewritten in a 12-point font, double-spaced, paginated, with margins between 1" and 1 1/4" on all sides. If the paper has notes, they should be footnotes (i.e., located at the bottom of the relevant page) rather than endnotes. Block quotations and footnotes should be single-spaced. A separate bibliography is not necessary if full initial citations of works are provided in the notes. If you are unsure as to proper footnote style, consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson, 1999), available in the Divinity Library, or another accepted authority such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

I am pleased to provide written comments on drafts of papers that are given to me by April 18. Considering feedback about a paper's strengths and weaknesses enables the student to improve logic and argumentation, refine written expression, and otherwise strengthen the paper before it receives a grade. Students are also welcome to submit a rewritten version of one of their papers, in which case the grade for the paper will be the grade earned by the rewrite.

### Required Books

The following book will be used heavily in this class. Additional required reading is available in a photocopied course packet that may be purchased at TYCO, located at 262 Elm Street downtown. The TYCO packet and book will be on Reserve in the Divinity Library, should you prefer to consult them there rather than purchase them. In addition, the course packet will be available on-line under this course at <http://classes.yale.edu>.

Adam, A. K. M. *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Booth, Wayne C. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

You may find helpful the following book on Reserve, which offers study tips, organizational aids, and suggestions for writing and rewriting papers for seminary classes:

Core, Deborah. *The Seminary Student Writes*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000.

----- **Schedule of Class Sessions and Readings** -----

Readings are to be completed before the meeting of the class session under which they are listed.

When leading discussion, each student leader should be prepared to engage the following or similar questions with classmates:

- \* What are the strengths of the arguments made in the article? What is compelling or imaginative or original about the piece?
- \* On which points is the argument weakest, methodologically or conceptually?
- \* How is this piece useful (or not) for helping us to read and understand the Biblical text?

### **January 15**

Introduction; purposes of the course. Brief survey of classical and modern definitions of irony. Mapping of possible points of intersection with ideological criticism.

### **January 17 Genesis 2-3: Adam and Eve in the Garden**

Be prepared to discuss:

- Adam, pp. xi-43
- Dragga, "Genesis 2-3: A Story of Liberation" (course packet)
- Ward, "A Postmodern Version of Paradise" (course packet)

### **January 22 Garden of Eden story continued**

Be prepared to discuss:

- Clines, "The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible" (course packet)
- Carr, "The Politics of Textual Subversion" (course packet)

### **January 24 Genesis 12, 20, 26: Three "Endangered Ancestresses"**

Be prepared to discuss: