

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE OUTLINE 2002

The faculty union is in the midst of contract negotiations and there is a possibility of work interruption that may affect this course. Updates on this situation will be provided throughout the course.

RS 310: Religion and Literature: William Blake and the Visionary Recital

Sierra Hall 314

Thursdays, 7:00 to 9:45 p.m., Ticket No. 74516

Professors:

Amir Hussain

Office: Faculty Office Building, Room 234

Phone: (818) 677-2741 (or Religious Studies Dept. at 677-3392)

Fax: (818) 677-3985

Email: amir.hussain@csun.edu

Web Page: <http://www.csun.edu/~ah34999>

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Crerar Douglas

Office: Faculty Office Building, Room 233

Phone: (818) 677-7525 (or Religious Studies Dept. at 677-3392)

Email: crerar.douglas@csun.edu

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:45 to 4:15 p.m.

Course Description:

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places".

--Ephesians 6:12, epigraph to *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*

This course will focus on the life and work of the visionary artist and poet William Blake (1757 — 1827). "William Blake was a Stranger from Paradise in an alien world, in the Realm of the Beast. His real life was in the imagination, in the realms of gold". So read two sentences from Professor G.E. Bentley, Jr.'s magisterial new biography of Blake. From these two sentences, it is evident that the study of religion is crucial to an understanding of Blake. In the first part of the course we will do a close reading of Blake's biography. While learning about Blake, we will come into contact with the art and poetry that he created. In the second part of the course, we will do a close reading of some of Blake's poetical works.

Goals for students enrolled in this course are 1) to learn more about the life and work of William Blake; 2) to understand the roles of religion in Blake's life and work; 3) to use the study of religion as an analytical tool to understand Blake's life and work; 4) to understand how Blake dissented from the dominant religious traditions of his time; and 5) to gain an appreciation of the scholarship of Blake scholars such as Northrop Frye, G.E. Bentley, Jr., Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi, and in so doing to gain a new understanding of how scholarship *should be* done. This course satisfies the C-3 category of General Education requirements, and is classified as "writing intensive".

Required Texts:

G.E. Bentley, Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Geoffrey Keynes, editor, *Blake: Complete Writings with Variant Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Both texts are on reserve in the Reserve Book Room of the Oviatt Library. Both texts can be purchased at Amazon.com for cheaper (in the case of the Bentley book, much cheaper) than at the Matador Bookstore.

Web Sites:

- The William Blake Archive at <http://www.blakearchive.org/main.html>
- Selected Poetry at <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/authors/blake.html>

Evaluation:

It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires daily reading, written assignments and a final (take home) examination. Moreover, regular class attendance and participation are required. Clear, grammatically correct composition and standard spelling are expected on all written assignments.

Information on the book review and the research paper (which will be on a topic of the student's choice, in consultation with the professors) will be provided separately during the course. The final examination will be a take home, based on both books. The exam will be graded on a) familiarity with the readings and b) independent questioning and reflection elicited by the lectures and classroom discussions. Methodical reading, conscientious writing of the assignments, and participation in class discussion will prepare students for the exam. **Professor Hussain will be entirely responsible for the grading in this course and all questions about grades should be directed to him.**

Active class participation will positively affect the student's final grade. More than one unexcused absence during the semester will negatively affect the student's grade. The University's grading policy, including the plus/minus system, will be used. The University's cheating policy will be followed in this course.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- 20% A book review of not more than 5 pages, due March 21
- 40% A reflective research paper of not more than 15 pages, due May 2
- 30% A final take home examination given on May 16 and returned by May 23
- 10% Class participation

Tentative Schedule of Topics:

Jan. 31: Introductory meeting: What are we doing in this course and why? Methodological and other issues in this course. Background and context.

Feb. 7: "God at the Window". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 1.

Feb. 14: "The Visionary Apprentice". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 2.

Feb. 21: "Delighted with Good Company". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 3.

Feb. 28: "Dark Profitable Years". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 4.

March 7: "The Ocean of Business". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 5.

March 14: "Sweet Felpham and Rex vs Blake". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 6.

March 21: **Book Review Due.** "Drunk with Intellectual Vision". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 7.

March 28: Spring Recess, No Class.

April 4: "I Am Hid". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 8.

April 11: "The Ancients and the Interpreter". *READING*: Bentley, Chapter 9 to end.

April 18: The Art of William Blake.

April 25: Selected Poetry of William Blake. *READING*: TBA from Keynes.

May 2: **Research Paper Due.** Selected Poetry of William Blake. *READING*: TBA from Keynes.

May 9: Selected Poetry of William Blake. *READING*: TBA from Keynes.

May 16: **Take Home Final Examination to be Distributed.** Overview and review.

May 23: **Final Examination to be Returned by 8:00 p.m.**

Responsibilities and Respect:

In this course, as in this life, we all have responsibilities toward each other. We have found that our most successful classes are those in which we respect each other, and understand our mutual responsibilities. With that in mind, we offer our understanding of these responsibilities with the following assumptions. We will discuss them in the first week of class, and we hope that you will consult them throughout the course. Tina Pippin has articulated the following "manifesto" with her students, and it is with her words that we would like to begin:

- we have the responsibility for sharing in and contributing to the learning process;
- we have the right to voice an opinion that is based on a self-chosen value system;
- we have the right to dissent or differ from the professor and from others in class;
- we have the right to personal dignity not to be infringed by the conduct of the professor;
- we have the responsibility for evaluating and suggesting positive directions for the class at informal

evaluations throughout the course and at the end of the formal evaluation in order to make the learning process more efficient and valuable;

- we have a right to a curriculum that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Assumptions We Make About You

1. You have made a conscious, informed choice to be a member of this class. This means that you have read the syllabus, and know the workload required. Be aware that on average, you should spend 3 hours on your own (reading, studying, making notes, working on assignments, etc.) for every hour that you are in class.
2. You will give the basic respect that is due to us and the other students in this class.
3. You will observe basic classroom decorum. In this class that means (but is not limited to!) the following: 1) You will turn off (or set to "silent" mode) watch alarms, pagers, and cellular phones. 2) If you come in late, leave early, or need to leave during the class, you will do so with a minimum of disruption. To do this, open the door slowly, and close it slowly behind you. Don't make a lot of noise packing or unpacking your things. If you are coming in late, it's a good idea to take off your coat and open your book bag/knapsack in the hallway. 3) You may eat or drink in the class, providing that you don't disrupt the class (no "noisy" foods, and please clean up after yourself). 4) You won't start to put away your things until the class is over. 5) You will not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
4. You will do all of the required reading. This means that you will often have to read something more than once in order to fully understand it (remember the 3:1 ratio in the first assumption). You will attend class regularly and on time.
5. You will be responsible for all of the material that we cover in class. If you miss a class, you will contact another student to find out what you missed.
6. If you have a question, any question, you will ask it. You may ask during class, during our office hours, by telephone, or email.
7. You will turn in your assignments on time. If you are unsure of the requirements for an assignment, or when it is due, you will ask Professor Hussain.
8. You will improve your writing skills throughout this class. You will ask us for help, and also contact the [Writing Skills Center](#) at 677-2033 if you need to.
9. You will share your personality, knowledge, skills and special expertise with the rest of us throughout this semester.

Assumptions You Can Make About Us

1. We will give you the respect that we ask you to give us and the other members of this class.
2. We will begin and end the class on time. We will try to follow the schedule of topics as closely as possible.
3. We will be available to help you, but you must let us know that you need help. We will be available during our scheduled office hours (and can often schedule appointments at other times), and will return phone calls and emails promptly. Please contact us when you first have a problem. If you wait until it is

too late, then it is too late!

4. If you do not turn in an assignment, Professor Hussain will not ask you for it. He will assume that you are content with a grade of zero for that assignment.
 5. Professor Hussain will grade fairly and responsibly, returning your assignments to you in a timely manner. He does not grade on a curve, and will grade each assignment on its own merit. Through the [grading standards outline](#) he will let you know how he grades. He is willing to explain his grade to you, but if you request a grade change, you must be willing to explain to him (using the same outline) why you deserve another grade.
 6. We will follow and enforce the university policy on academic dishonesty, particularly with regards to cheating and plagiarism.
 7. We will be receptive to and encourage constructive comments about our teaching (as an example, "you're ugly and your mother dresses you funny" is NOT a constructive comment...).
 8. We will do our best to help you, but we cannot learn the material for you.
-

[Return to Amir Hussain's Web Page](#)