

EVE, INTERRUPTED

RE 330-002

Wed & Fri 12:20-2:10 pm
Classroom: Palamountain 400

Prof. G. Spinner

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“She is [...] Everywoman, the prototypical woman, all of her sex who are yet to come.”

John Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea*, p. xiii

“I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.”

Susan B. Anthony, in an 1896 address to the
National American Woman Suffrage Association

“Feminism is a mortal sin.”

Yelena Pavlova, presenting closing arguments against the band Pussy Riot,
www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/07/pussy-riot-trial-prosecutors-jail-term?newsfeed=true

“Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.”

David Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 62

By delimiting what we read, canons define who we are. Yet, viewed in historical perspective, the *fixed texts* of canons are *fluid in their meanings*, so varied are the ways that people read and reinterpret their holy books. Surely, the biblical account of Eve & Adam is one of the most universally recognized and widely repeated stories in history, but people have had drastically different ideas about what actually happens in the course of this fairly brief narrative, and what it means for the subsequent conduct of human affairs. While what the biblical text *actually says* frequently differs from what people *claim it says*, it is imperative to take seriously the ways in which readers bring their own concerns and new concepts to their sacred text, to better enrich their engagement with both Scripture & Tradition.

In this course, we cannot possibly survey all these readings, but we are particularly concerned with interpretations that gender blame, that is, which blame a gender, by narrowly fixating on Eve’s culpability. Our critical examination of this tendency will employ feminist and queer theories, even as we expand our purview to include a much wider range of interpretive strategies. We will see that openings and ambiguities in the biblical text allowed readers to map both androgyny and gender dimorphism onto this influential account, and to model both sexuality and celibacy on the first people, even to read racist agendas back onto Scripture. That the same set of texts is taken by some to be a charter for egalitarian relationships, while others invoke it to legitimate the subordination of women and to defend slavery, is certainly astonishing. Yet it

provides us with an excellent opportunity to consider the contested nature of reading Scripture, and it provokes us to reconsider our own assumptions about knowledge and authority -- a consideration paralleled by the biblical account itself.

Welcome to a Seminar

This course is conducted as a seminar, so let me address my general expectations for such a format: students will take the lead in asking questions, proposing answers and steering discussions. Our term "seminar," indicating an intimate class focused on close readings and collaborative efforts, comes from the Latin *seminarium*, literally a "seed-plot," a small area to plant ideas and watch them grow, the place where one nurtures intellectual habits of thought. The analogy of academic development to gardening may seem quaint, but those familiar with gardening will recognize that the analogy is demanding real commitment and critical rigor, just as gardening requires regular attention and honest labor. The seminar format means that you must engage each other, and not just the instructor; it means that it is *you who will be doing the talking*, by asking each other questions and working through the answers together.

Seminars are always reading intensive, but as a course about how people read and reread the opening chapters of Genesis, reading here becomes our central concern and our own critical practice. I believe you'll find this subject very rewarding, and even enjoyable -- just never easy. It requires your sustained effort and the mutual support of your classmates, and I hope that you are as excited as I am by the challenges it poses.

Course Materials

There are two required books: *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, edited by Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing & Valarie H. Ziegler; and Gary Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection : Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*.

Other required readings will be distributed as a Course Reader.

A recommended text is *HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV with Apocrypha)*. You will occasionally need to consult a Bible, so I ordered one in case you don't have one around. As the cornerstone of both Jewish and Christian spirituality, as well as the great touchstone of Western literature, it is not a bad idea to have a copy handy. This revised and updated edition provides an accurate English translation, along with *scholarly* introductions and notations that should help you gain a purchase on the material.

Course Requirements

Your grade consists of the following components:

Participation	10 %
Preparing Questions	5 %
Midterm	30 %
Group Presentation	25 %
Individual Research/Creative Project	30 %
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Total	100 %

A few words are in order, at the outset, about some of these components:

Attendance is mandatory: you will come to each and every class. If you are too sick to attend, or if an emergency arises, then please contact me as soon as possible.

While participation is contingent upon attendance, it involves much more than just showing up. **Participation** requires active engagement: you must have done the reading and be prepared to discuss it. You should have your own questions prepared, and you should be game for answering the questions that others pose. Our goal is focused conversation: it involves talking with and listening to others, rather than sitting quietly by (no matter how deep in thought you are).

Preparing Questions: for each class you should prepare a minimum of two questions, *along with your own (tentative) answers*, that you could ask the other students with the express purpose of facilitating classroom discussion. You are not trying to stump your classmates; rather you are trying to direct the conversation to some of the more salient points from the readings. Your questions should therefore be carefully chosen and thoughtfully worded. I will collect your questions at the end of each class session, and will only accept them in class on the day they were due. While I won't be assigning grades (or returning them), I will be looking over your questions to see what you have been thinking about and to assess your level of engagement.

The **midterm** will be a take-home essay, and must be submitted in hard-copy form. Closer to the time of the assignment, I will spell out my expectations as to what makes for a good essay. *Late work will be marked down.* I will deduct half a letter grade for each day any assignment is late. While due dates are firm, the instructor is not inflexible. It is, however, incumbent on you to explain to me why you deserve an extension. And here's some good advice: *one asks for an extension before a deadline is missed.*

Group Presentations involve leading a class discussion in the latter half of the semester. I will say more about how that will work, and how your **individual projects** will be structured, soon enough. The Research/creative projects will address *visual representations* of Eve (or Adam, the serpent/Satan, etc.).

Do note that this is a 4 credit hour class, and thus my expectations for your time and effort, both inside and outside of the classroom, are set accordingly.

Academic Integrity

I have zero tolerance for any form of intellectual dishonesty. Make sure your work is entirely your own, and that you give credit to any ideas or formulations that originate with others. Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity, whether fully intentional or not. Recall that Skidmore's Honor Code does not accept ignorance or error as adequate defense for violations. To learn more about the Honor Code and related matters, please consult:

<http://cms.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.cfm>.

Suspected infractions of this policy will be reported to the Office of Academic Advising.

Student Disabilities

I am happy to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you believe you will need it, then you must formally request academic accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, and provide documentation verifying your disability. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Palamountain Hall.

Partners in Learning

To my mind, a syllabus establishes a kind of social contract, in which you and I agree to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment. I hope that we find a mutual interest in critical inquiry, share a passion for increased understanding, and have a good time while we are at it. You may always ask questions; I will not mind if you ask me to repeat something or to clarify a point. The most expedient way to contact me is by e-mail. And please feel free to come by my office if something's on your mind.

I trust that with this syllabus I have made clear my expectations, and that if I have not, you will call me to account. I also ask that you make your own expectations clear to me, so that we can best achieve a partnership in learning. I look forward to an exciting semester of working together.

Dr. Spinner

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CLASS & READING SCHEDULE

Sept 5. Introductions: syllabus, classmates, instructor.

Sept 7. Bible, I. **A World So Good, It Was Created Twice**. Reading 1.

Sept 12. Bible, II. **Forbidden Fruits & Feminists**. Reading 2.

Sept 14. Bible, III. **Androgynes & Queer Theorists**. Reading 3.

Sept 19. **(re)Reading/(re)Writing Eden**. Reading 4.

Sept 21. Midrash, I. **Giving a Fig**. Reading 5.

Sept 26. *No class*: Yom Kippur.

Sept 28. Midrash, II. **Husbands & Pandoras**. Reading 6.

Oct 3. **New Testament, New Adam**. Reading 7.

Oct 5. **Christians**. Reading 8.

Oct 10. **Gnostics**. Reading 9.

Oct 12. **Satan, the Old Foe**. Reading 10.

Oct 17. **Mary, the New Eve**. Reading 11.

Oct 19. **Bodies of Light, Garments of Skin**. Reading 12.

Oct 24. **Sinners & Penitents**. Reading 13.

Oct 26. The Demonic Feminine, I. **Lillith**. Reading 14.

Oct 31. The Demonic Feminine, II. **Witches**. Reading 15.

Nov 2. **Reformers & Radicals**. Reading 16.

Nov 7. Abolition Debates: **Wives & Slaves**. Reading 17.

Nov 9. Return to Eden, I. **The Shakers**. Reading 18.

Nov 14. Return to Eden, II. **The Oneida Community**. Reading 19.

Nov 16. *No class*: American Academy of Religion.

Nov 21 & 23. *No classes held this week*: Thanksgiving Break.

Nov 28. Reading Race, I. **Pre-Adamite Theory**. Reading 20.

Nov 30. Reading Race, II. **The Serpent Seed**. Reading 21.

Dec 5. Wives & Mothers, I. **Quiverfull**. Reading 22.

Dec 7. Wives & Mothers, II. **Pious Bodies**. Reading 23.

Dec 12. Conclusions.

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Readings

Unless otherwise noted, the assigned pages refer to the Eve and Adam reader.

Reading 1. Gen 1:1-2:25. Read the General Introduction, pp. 1-10. For some context on the biblical accounts, read pp. 15-21. Then read both the texts of and commentaries on Gen chs. 1-2, pp. 22-top 31. Fill out the worksheet as you read.

Reading 2. Gen 3:1-4:2 and 5:1-5. Read both the texts of and commentaries on Gen 3-5, pp. 31-39. Also read both essays by Tribble: “Eve and Adam,” pp. 431-438, and “Not a Jot, Not a Tittle,” pp. 439-444.

Reading 3. Plato, *Symposium* (CR). Stone, “The Garden of Eden and The Heterosexual Contract” in Bodily Citations, edited by Armour and St. Ville, which you can access as an e-book through Scribner.

Reading 4. We will read selectively in ch. 2 (Jewish Postbiblical Interpretations). Focus on three texts: Sirach (pp. 48-50), *Jubilees* (pp. 50-54), and Philo (pp. 64-66; cf. the discussion of Philo earlier, on pp. 41-42).

Reading 5. We begin reading ch. 3 (Rabbinic Interpretations) For context, read pp. 69-76, then read the midrashic & talmudic excerpts, pp. 77-very top 87. Selections from Blidstein, In The Rabbis’ Garden (CR).

Reading 6. Read more midrashic & talmudic excerpts, pp. 87- 100. Compare Hesiod’s two versions of the story of Pandora (CR). Further selections from Blidstein, In The Rabbis’ Garden (CR).

Reading 7. We begin reading ch. 4 (Early Christian Interpretations). For context, read pp. 108-mid 110 and mid 112-114. Carefully inspect the New Testament passages on pp. 117-119, and also look up Romans 5:12-21. Read Bassler, “Deception in the Garden,” pp. 444-455.

Reading 8. The latter part of ch. 4 samples Church Fathers, whom we will read selectively: Tertullian (pp. 131-132), Origen (pp. 133-135), Chrysostom (pp. 141-147), and Augustine (pp. 147-154). Read Al Hartley, Adam & Eve (Spire Christian Comics, 1975), which can be accessed through Blackboard, approaching Hartley’s work as a *theological* document.

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Reading 9. From Eve & Adam, read the section on *The Gospel of Philip* (pp.121-123). From the Course Reader, read *The Revelation of Adam and Seal*, “Gnostic Eve.”

Reading 10. Begin reading Anderson, Genesis of Perfection, by reviewing the three theses before the title page. Read the introduction and ch. 1 (pp. 1-41). If you like, you can skim the Milton passages in Eve & Adam, pp. 288-304.

Reading 11. Anderson, chs. 2-4 (pp. 43-97).

Reading 12. Anderson, chs. 5-6 (pp.99-134).

Reading 13. Anderson, chs. 7-8 (pp. 135-176). Read Appendixes C-D (*Life of Adam & Eve; Gospel of Nicodemus*, pp. 219-230). Compare the selections from Kummer, Ladies in Hades (CR).

Reading 14. For context, read pp.161-165. Read pp. lower 206 (from “Sammael and Eve”)-top 208. Read *only* the following excerpts from the *Zohar*: Bereshit 35a, 36b, 49b & 55b, pp. 222-225; supplement these with Zoharic materials presented by Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar (CR). For background on Lilith, review Scholem (CR). Carefully peruse the story from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, part v, skimming episodes vi-ix (CR). For a contemporary reappropriation of Lilith, you can skim Plaskow (Eve & Adam, pp. 421-430).

Reading 15. For context, read pp. mid 169-mid 172. Read selections from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, pp. 241-248. Read Stratton (CR), skimming the sections on ancient terminology.