THE LITERATURE OF GOD AND EVIL (ENG 490.001)—English Department, SFA
Fall 2011  MWF  10:00-10:50  F184
Dr. Marc Guidry, Associate Professor of English  468-2128 (o); 569-8534 (h)  mguidry@sfasu.edu
Office: LAN 262; Office hours: MW 1:00-3:00 p.m.; TR 8:00-11:00 a.m.

Course Description

This course fulfills the senior seminar requirement for the literature major. The prerequisite is 12 semester hours of English. This course is an in-depth study of the literary genre known as theodicy—the attempt to explain the problem of evil and human suffering within the context of belief in or the possibility of an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. The problem is especially vexing when considered from the perspective of the suffering of innocents (little children, people who have done nothing to deserve harm). Theodicy has its roots in ancient Hebrew scripture and has been particularly prolific in the West; therefore, we will concentrate on Western theodicies, starting with the Old Testament Book of Job and proceeding chronologically through the major literary periods to the present. We will read some of the best attempts at theodicy in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantic Period, the late nineteenth century, and the twentieth century. Some of these texts, such as Milton’s Paradise Lost, declare themselves to be theodicies; others, such as Elie Wiesel’s Night, do not advance a systematic program to “justify the ways of God to men” (to quote Milton), but nevertheless deal intensely with what we might call the mystery of horrific suffering and the felt presence or absence of a god figure in the midst of that suffering. Given the pogroms of the twentieth century, the development and use of nuclear weapons, and the large-scale environmental degradation that is beginning to occur due to Global Warming, the problem of evil as an existential, moral, and spiritual crisis is as pressing as ever. There have also been new scientific developments in biology and psychology that have strained the traditional understanding of moral evil (suffering inflicted by humans on other sentient beings) as an act of free choice. For instance, to what degree is our behavior dictated by our genes? Science also challenges the traditional belief in a loving, abundantly good God due to the realization that creation has evolved out of a process of natural selection that, in the words of Darwin, is “constantly destroying life” (“Nature, red in tooth and claw,” to use Tennyson’s memorable phrase). Evolutionary biology reveals the locus classicus of the origin of evil in Western belief—the Genesis story of the fall of Adam and Eve—to be a myth. And modern psychology challenges the notion of human sexuality as a result of fallen, sinful human nature. What role, then, does that still resonant foundational story of evil play in our understanding of human nature today? And where do we turn to when we see loved ones suffering from degrading and debilitating illnesses or witness (at first- or second-
hand) inexplicable acts of violence, such as the destruction wrought by modern warfare or traumatic weather events like Hurricane Katrina and the Japanese tsunami? (The latter phenomena are classified as natural evil, as opposed to moral evil.) Imaginative literature does not necessarily answer these questions, but it provides us with a powerful outlet for meaningfully addressing the inescapably tragic aspect of human experience. In addition, the particular stories we will be reading contain some of the most profound visions of both human misery and bliss ever imagined. Along with reading imaginative theodicies, we will also read a history of the idea of evil, Joseph F. Kelly’s The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition. You will be writing 5 short papers that will be comparison/contrasts. You will also write a term paper analyzing one or more of the assigned texts and take a final, cumulative exam intended to synthesize the content of the course.

Program Learning Outcomes
1. The student will demonstrate the ability to read complex texts, closely and accurately.
2. The student will demonstrate the ability to comprehend both traditional and contemporary schools/methods of critical theory and apply them to literary texts to generate relevant interpretations.
3. The student will demonstrate knowledge of literary history in regard to a particular period of British literature.
4. The student will demonstrate ability to effectively conduct literary research.
5. The student will demonstrate the ability to write clear, grammatically correct prose for a variety of purposes in regards to literary analysis.

Student Learning Outcomes
● To define theodicy and apply our definition to imaginative literature across different time periods
● To analyze texts through close reading as well as the use of historical criticism and other critical methodologies (such as eco criticism, feminism, and psychoanalysis)
● To synthesize scientific insights into moral and natural evil with the insights upon the problem offered by art, theology, and philosophy
● To continue to develop your writing skills

Required Texts
● The NRSV version of the Bible, available online at http://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/job/
Course Requirements and Grading

- Card question  20%
- Short papers  25%
- Term paper  30%
- Final Exam  25%

All grades, except for the card questions, will be based on a 100-point scale (A = 90-100, B = 80-89, etc.). For the card questions, you will receive half a point per question, for a possible total of 20 points at the end of the semester.

- The card questions will be based on the readings for a given day. You will be asked two questions and will answer each on an index card I will provide you. Each answer is worth half a point. Card questions will be asked randomly throughout the course of the semester. We may have a class where I ask no card questions, and I may decide to ask card questions on consecutive classes. Therefore, careful reading and strict attendance are the best way to do well on the card questions.
- There will be 5 short papers assigned over the course of the semester. Each short paper should be about 2 pages (following MLA style). Each short paper will be focused around a comparison of how two different texts address a specific topic or issue related to theodicy. I will give you specific prompts for the short papers.
- The term paper will focus on one or more theodicies—the choice of what you want to write on is up to you. You must develop a sustained analysis of some aspect of your chosen text(s) and support it with evidence from the text as well as from outside sources. You must use a minimum of 10 outside sources for this paper, and you will have to do an annotated bibliography of your sources. The length of the paper is approximately 10 pages plus the annotated bibliography. I will give you further guidelines and prompts for the term paper. A prospectus describing your issue (in about 1 ¶) and giving a preliminary bibliography of at least 4 outside works is due on October 31.
- The final exam will be cumulative and closed-book. I will give you a study guide for it in advance.

Prompt and regular attendance, preparedness (including having the required text with you in class), contributions to discussion, a high completion rate of assigned work, and general courtesy (not texting, using a cell phone, or listening to an i-pod during class; not leaving class unannounced in the middle of the period; not talking out of turn, etc.) will help your grade if you are borderline.

Withheld Grades Policy (A-54 in the SFA Policy Manual)
Ordinarily, at my discretion and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if you cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms, the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.
Attendance Policy (A-10 in the SFA Policy Manual)
This is a capstone experience, a culminating event in your career as an English major at SFA. Therefore, you are expected to attend each session. I will not tolerate a pattern of absences. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. If you show up late, you are likely to be marked absent. Three tardies will constitute 1 unexcused absence. Leaving class early 3 times will constitute 1 unexcused absence. In accordance with the university attendance policy, you are allowed 3 unexcused absences. I will detract a letter grade from your final grade for each additional unexcused absence. Participation in all university-sponsored events is excused provided you show me a letter from the faculty advisor/coach listing you as a participant in advance. I will only excuse absence for illness or emergency if I deem the situation to be serious enough for missing class and if said illness/emergency is properly documented in a timely manner (with a doctor’s note, funeral card, etc.).

Late Assignments/Makeups Policy
I generally do not accept late assignments or papers. You may submit an assignment early if you must miss the class when it is due. I will only accept a late assignment or paper in cases of a valid and documented illness or emergency, and even in those cases there will be a limit as to how many days late I will accept the paper. A pattern of late assignments will not be tolerated. I generally do not give makeup quizzes or exams.

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp.

The minimum penalty for plagiarism is a zero on the writing exercise/essay in question. Academic dishonesty/plagiarism may result in failure of the course. All instances of academic dishonesty/plagiarism will be reported to the Office of the Dean of the student’s major and will remain part of the student’s record for at least 4 years.

All formal essays for this course must be submitted electronically to turnitin.com via the homepage for this course on mycourses.

Student Misconduct Policy (D-34.1 in the SFA Policy Manual)
You can be removed from the classroom if you disrupt the instructional environment. If you become disruptive through such acts as screaming, using profanity with me or fellow students, constantly talking out of turn, using a computer for anything unrelated to pertinent in-class work,
texting in class, leaving the classroom without my permission prior to the end of class, eating in class, etc., I may have you removed from this class.

**Students with Disabilities**
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify me and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

**AARC Tutoring**
Free writing tutoring for this course is available both in the Academic Assistance and Resource Center (1st floor of Steen Library) and online. To arrange online tutoring, go to mycourses and click on the link to “AARC Owl” in your course list.

**Schedule**
All readings are to be read before the class date listed on the schedule. In addition to carefully reading each literary text, you should read the introductory material provided by the editor/translator of the text, as well as any endnotes provided. “PE” = *The Problem of Evil in the Western World*

- **M8/29** Intro to the course
- **W8/31** PE, Ch. 1, “Some Perspectives on Evil”; Ch. 2, “Israel and Evil”
  - The book of Genesis, Chs. 1-3 (online text)
  - The book of Job, Chs. 1-3 (online text)
- **F9/2** The book of Job, Chs. 4-31 (online text)
- **M9/5** Labor Day Holiday
- **W9/7** The book of Job, Chs. 32-42 (online text)
- **F9/9** PE, Ch. 3, “The New Adam”; Ch. 4, “Out of Africa”; Ch. 5, “The Broken Cosmos”
  - Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. XI.17, 22; XII.6, 22-23; XIII.14; XIV.1, 15-16; XVII.49; XIX.17, 27; XX.22; XXI.3; XXII.30 (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
- **M9/12** PE, Ch. 6, “The Middle Ages”
  - Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos I-III
  - **Short Paper 1 due by class time**
- **W9/14** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos IV-V
- **F9/16** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XIII, XV-XVI
- **M9/19** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XXI-XXII
  - **Short Paper 2 due by class time**
- **W9/21** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XXIV-XXVI
- **F9/23** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XXVIII-XXIX
- **M9/26** Dante, *The Inferno*, Cantos XXXIII-XXXIV
- **W9/28** Dante, *The Paradiso*, Cantos XXX-XXXIII (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
- **F9/30** PE, Ch. 7, “Decline and Reform and Humanism”; Ch. 8, “The Devil’s Last Stand”
  - Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. I
- **M10/3** Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bks. II-III
- **W10/5** Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. IV
  - **Short Paper 3 due by class time**
- **F10/7** Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. VIII
M10/10 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. IX
W10/12 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. X
F10/14 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. XII
M10/17 PE, Ch. 9, “Rationalizing Evil”
    Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Pt. 1 (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
W10/19 Voltaire, *Candide*, Chs. 1-18
F10/21 Voltaire, *Candide*, Chs. 19-30
M10/24 PE, Ch. 10, “The Attack on Christianity”; Ch. 11, “Dissident Voices”; Ch. 12, “Human Evil in the Nineteenth Century,” pp. 154-64
    **Short Paper 4 due by class time**
M 10/31 PE, Ch. 12, pp. 164-71
    Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bks. I-II
    **Prospectus for the Term Paper due in class today in a hard copy**
W11/2 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bks. III-IV
F11/4 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. V
M11/7 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bks. VI-VII
W11/9 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bks. VIII-IX
F11/11 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. X
M11/14 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. XI
W11/16 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. XII; Epilogue
    **Short Paper 5 due by class time**
F11/18 PE, Ch. 13, “Science, Evil, and Original Sin”
    Darwin, from Ch. 3 of *Origin of the Species*, “Struggle for Existence” (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
    Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, sections 54-6 (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
    *The Encyclopedia of Evolution*, “Evolutionary Ethics” (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
M11/21 PE, Ch. 14, “Modern Literary Approaches to Evil”
    Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 3-65
W11/23 Thanksgiving Holiday
F11/25 Thanksgiving Holiday
W11/30 Scenes from *Shoah* (landmark 1985 film documentary featuring eye-witness accounts of Holocaust survivors and guards as well as Polish citizens living near and in some cases working for the Nazi death camps)
M12/5 Dillard, *Holy the Firm*, Pt. 3
    **Term Paper due by class time**
W12/7 PE, Ch. 15, “Some Scientific Theories of Evil”
    *The Encyclopedia of Evolution*, “How Much Do Genes Control Human Behavior?” (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
F12/9 PE, Ch. 16, “Modern Religious Approaches to Evil”; Epilogue
    Nel Noddings, selections from *Women and Evil* (available on Blackboard as a pdf)
W12/14 **Final Exam, 10:30-12:30**