

**COLLEGE OF THE HUMANITIES  
RELIGION PROGRAM: RELI 4850A/5850W**

**Historical Fiction and the Study of Ancient Religions**

**Instructor:** Shawna Dolansky

**E-mail:** Shawna.Dolansky@carleton.ca

**Office hours:** 2a60 PA, Wed 12:45 pm – 2:15pm

**Phone:** 520-2600 ext. 7029

**Seminar:** Wed 2:35pm-5:25pm, Paterson 2a46

This seminar is about reconstructing life in the biblical world based on historical research into the social, cultural, religious, political, geographical, and economic context from which biblical texts emerged. Students will choose a biblical character and then spend the semester learning about his or her historical circumstances toward the production of a short fictional piece describing an event or a short time period in the character's life. The goal is for the historical fiction to realistically reflect the situated perspective of the character, while students simultaneously reflect on the historiographical process of reconstruction. Class presentations of research and drafts, and peer feedback are important components of producing the narrative. The final writing assignment will be a concluding reflection on the work and the limitations and rewards of "experiencing" someone else's life in the context of an ancient culture.

We have four related foci: to reconstruct the historical contexts of biblical texts; to learn the theories and methods of effecting such reconstructions; to reflect on the nature of historiography and its kinship with the writing of historical fiction; and to produce short fictional pieces that provide authentic, accurate, and realistic portraits of fictionalized biblical characters in their ancient contexts.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will learn:

- How to read the Bible from an historical-critical perspective;
- How to conduct research on ancient cultures, reconciling and interpreting written and material remains;
- How historians and religionists select evidence, make arguments, and construct their subjects;
- To appreciate diverse perspectives on Self, Other, the world, history, and religion, and the challenges and limitations inherent in scholarly reconstructions of other cultures.

**Evaluation**

1. Weekly blogs – see schedule (8 blogs Jan 16-Mar 6) @ 5% each = 40%
2. Active & constructive weekly seminar participation and peer feedback = 20%
3. Written drafts/analyses March 13, 20, 27, and April 3 @ 5% each = 20%
4. Take-home "exam" = 20%

***Notes on attendance:***

- The seminar format depends on student preparedness and attendance. More than 2 absences over the course of the semester will result in a grade of F for the course.
- Leaving after the break, or arriving to class at the break, or engaging on your phone or computer with non-class-related content, will count as absences from class.
- If medical or other issues prevent you from attending, please provide documentation to the professor either in advance, or within 24 hours of your absence.

***Notes on written work:***

- An ongoing annotated bibliography will form the heart of your posts Jan 23 through Feb 13; be sure to demonstrate how your readings are helping (or not) to fill out the context for your fictional piece. Bibliography and citations must follow Chicago style.
- Spelling, grammar, structure, and style are all important components of any kind of writing and will figure in my assessment of all of your written work. Proofread your work carefully before posting/submitting it.
- All work in items 1 and 4 above is due at 2:35pm on the dates posted in the schedule below. Late work will be docked 4 marks out of 5 but must still be completed in order to pass the class.
- Take-home exam is due on the last day of finals by 11:55pm by e-submission with no exceptions. **Late exams will not be marked.**
- Please review the note on plagiarism on the "Regulations" page at the end of this course outline.

## Schedule

### **Jan 9 Intro to the Course and the Bible**

Before class read:

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/how-do-biblical-scholars-read-the-hebrew-bible.aspx>

<http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/does-the-bible-relate-to-history-meyers>

<http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/does-the-bible-relate-to-history-as-it-actually-happened>

and feel free to browse other articles here - <http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics?StartIndex=0> – and on the bibleodyssey website in general, as they relate to your interests and the research you might do in this course.

### **Jan 16 History, Historiography, and the Study of Ancient Cultures**

Before class read: (all articles available on cuLearn):

Hayden White, "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality" *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 9:2-3, 147-157, 2005.

Joan W. Scott, "Storytelling," Forum: Holberg Prize Symposium Doing Decentered History, *History and Theory* 50 (May 2011), 203-209.

Zeba Crook, "Fictionalizing Jesus: Story and History in Two Recent Jesus Novels," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 5.1, 33-55, 2007.

Joshua Schwartz, review of Ben Witherington III *A Week in the Fall of Jerusalem*, in *Review of Biblical Literature* 06/2018.

DUE: CuPortfolio set-up, with initial "About Me" reflection on who you are, your interest in this class, and what you hope to get out of it.

DUE: a thoughtful blog post reflecting on the discussions in the articles above. Consider: whether there are differences between writing history and writing well-researched historical fiction; in what ways the modern author/historian is hampered in her ability to reconstruct the lives of ancient people; and in what ways this is further complicated when the history and/or fiction in question draws its inspiration from biblical texts.

DUE Jan 15 by email to professor: the name of the biblical character you wish to focus on this semester (first-come first-served).

IN CLASS: **Guest lecture by Dr. Zeba Crook on writing historical fiction** (2:35-4:00 PM)

From 4:10-5:25 we will divide into HB/NT groups for directed group research and discussion; professor will consult with each group regarding suggested resources. Grad students will function as group leaders. Going forward, groups will prepare weekly presentations on topics listed, dividing up research equally (though grads will coordinate/provide overviews) and presenting contextual information to the class. Research results will be shared on cuPortfolio with the class, including annotated bibliographies and research summaries.

### **Jan 23 Context: Geography, Climate, Cultural Influences, Peoples of the Region**

Readings TBD in consultation with group and professor the week before. See also: <http://bibleodyssey.org/places>, <http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/map-gallery>, and <http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/timeline-gallery>.

DUE: write-ups of individual research toward the group presentation, posted on cuPortfolio.

IN CLASS: **Guest lecture by Dr. David Dean on public history** (2:35-4:00 PM)

Group presentations (4:10-5:25 PM)

### **Jan 30 Context: Religions in Text and Artifact**

Readings TBD in consultation with group and professor the week before. See also

<http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/in-what-ways-is-the-bible-a-religious-text> and

<http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/bible-basics/in-what-ways-is-the-new-testament-a-religious-text-neufeld> as well as

Ephraim Stern's "Pagan Yahwism" on CuLearn.

DUE: write-ups of individual research toward the group presentation, posted on cuPortfolio.

IN CLASS: Group presentations.

**Feb 6**            **Context: Kinship, Community, Gender, the Body, and Individual Agency**

Readings TBD in consultation with group and professor the week before. See also "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" by Carol Meyers.

DUE: write-ups of individual research toward the group presentation, posted on cuPortfolio.

IN CLASS: Group presentations.

**Feb 13**            **Context: Economic & Political Organization (including food, trade, government, warfare, etc)**

Readings TBD in consultation with group and professor the week before.

DUE: write-ups of individual research toward the group presentation, posted on cuPortfolio.

IN CLASS: Group presentations.

**Feb 20**            **NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

**Feb 27**            **Guest lecture TBA**

**Mar 6**             **NO CLASS TODAY**

Keep working on your first draft, and also on putting together critical reflections on the work so far.

DUE: a blog piece on where you're at, including how the fictional piece is shaping up and your critical reflections on the process.

**Mar 13**            **First Drafts**

DUE: post of first draft of fictional piece

IN CLASS: Individual presentations of works-in-progress for feedback

**Mar 20**            **Critical Reflections**

DUE: post of critical reflection on theory and method in reconstructing and fictionalizing history

IN CLASS: Individual presentations of problems, pitfalls; critical assessment of the historiographical enterprise in creating realistic fiction about ancient characters; class discussion.

**Mar 27**            **Draft review**

DUE: post of latest draft of fictional piece

IN CLASS: Individual presentations of works-in-progress for feedback

Discussion of what has changed, why, and ongoing improvements and/or difficulties.

**Apr 3**             **Final Drafts**

DUE: post of final draft of fictional piece

IN CLASS: Individual presentations of final drafts of fictional pieces.

**TAKE-HOME "EXAM" due April 27 11:55pm** – produce a concluding reflection on the work and the limitations and rewards of writing about "experiencing" someone else's life in the context of a culture and worldview so different from our own. Give examples from your piece and draw on assigned readings as necessary to showcase what you have learned this semester both in terms of content and in terms of research theory and method. 4850: 15 pages double-spaced; 5850: 20 pages double-spaced – include a section on how this type of research and critical inquiry affects your ongoing and/or planned MRE research.



## University Regulations for All Humanities Courses

### Copies of Written Work Submitted

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Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

### Academic Integrity at Carleton

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Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own. Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, and material on the internet. More information can be found [here](#).

### Academic Accommodation Policy

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#### **Academic Accommodation**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

**Religious obligation:** write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at

613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the [PMC website](#) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](http://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support)

### **Accommodation for Student Activities**

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

## **Grading System at Carleton University**

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Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion is below. Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value. Where the course credit is greater or less than one credit, the grade points are adjusted proportionately.

[Grading System](#)

## **Course Sharing Websites and Copyright**

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Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copy protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or

distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s).

## Statement on Class Conduct

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The Carleton University Human Rights Policies and Procedures affirm that all members of the University community share a responsibility to:

- promote equity and fairness,
- respect and value diversity,
- prevent discrimination and harassment, and preserve the freedom of its members to carry out responsibly their scholarly work without threat of interference.

## Deferred Term Work

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In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work.

Students who claim illness, injury or other extraordinary circumstances beyond their control as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the instructor concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor and **in all cases this must occur no later than three (3.0) working days after the term work was due.**

The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of term. More information is available [in the calendar](#).

## Deferred Final Exams

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Students who are unable to write a final examination because of a serious illness/emergency or other circumstances beyond their control may apply for accommodation. Normally, the accommodation for a missed final examination will be granting the student the opportunity to write a deferred examination. In specific cases when it is not possible to offer a deferred examination, and with the approval of the Dean, an alternate accommodation may be made. [More information.](#)

The application for a [deferral](#) must:

1. be made in writing or online to the Registrar's Office no later than **three working days** after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination; and,
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation and, in cases of illness, by a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination, or by appropriate documents in other cases. Medical documents must specify the date of the onset of the illness, the (expected) date of recovery, and the extent to which the student was/is incapacitated during the time of the examination. The University's preferred medical form can be found at the Registrar's Office [forms and fees page](#).

Any questions related to deferring a Final Exam or Final Assignment/Take Home Examination should be directed to the [Registrar's Office](#).

## Withdrawal From Courses

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Withdrawn. No academic credit, no impact on the CGPA. WDN is a permanent notation that appears on the official transcript for students who withdraw after the full fee adjustment date in each term (noted in the Academic Year section of the Calendar each term). Students may withdraw on or before the last day of classes.

Important dates can be found [here](#):

## Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

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**Make sure that you are aware of the separate deadlines for Financial and Academic withdrawal!**

Making registration decisions in Carleton Central involves making a financial and academic commitment for the courses you choose, regardless of attendance. If you do not attend – you must withdraw in Carleton Central within the published deadlines to cancel your registration. [More information](#)

## Department Contact Information

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**College of the Humanities** 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

[CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop box for CLCV, HUMS LATN GREK Term Papers and assignments is outside 300 P.A.

**Greek and Roman Studies** 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

[GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop Box is outside of 300 P.A.

**Religion** 2A39 Paterson Hall (613)520-2100

[Religion@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:Religion@cunet.carleton.ca)

Drop box for RELI and SAST Term Papers and assignments is outside of 2A39 P.A.

**Registrar's Office** 300 Tory (613)520-3500

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/>

## Student Resources on Campus

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[CUKnowHow Website](#)

[Academics: From registration to graduation, the tools for your success.](#)