

List of books to review (12/24/13).

This list represents a wide range of topics and perspectives (and I will likely keep adding to it over the course of the month). Some titles are more accessible (Ekblad) while others are more academic (Sommer). Some are more theological (Brueggemann, Claassens, Levenson and Madigan) while others are more theoretical (Beal, Maier). I think all of them are compelling reads and represent the original work of fine biblical scholars, written for broader audiences (broader than other biblical scholars!).

I invite you to spend some time on the internet, reading reviews (search on EBSCO and/or on Review of Biblical Literature <http://www.bookreviews.org/>) and previewing the books on google books (when available). My goal with this assignment is for you to find a book that will be fun to read and interesting to you. Also, I'd like you to get the chance to see what contemporary biblical scholars are working on and thinking about – get a sense of what's happening in the field (which is partly why I'm charging you to do some research and internet searching in order to decide).

If in your searching, you find something not on this list that you want to read, e-mail me and tell me about who wrote it and why you want to read it. The author has to be a biblical scholar, and the book has to be a monograph, not a collection of essays or a commentary. It can be very scholarly and academic (I tried not to list über-academic books here but if you want to read one, by all means, go for it! send me your proposal) or more accessible, but I want it to be a work of scholarly significance – not 'Bible Study' or derivative (clearly, this is a subjective call, but if you find something, I can tell you if it's what I have in mind).

Beal, Timothy K. *The Book of Hiding Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther*. London: Routledge, 2002 (originally published in 1997).

Brueggemann, Walter. *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

Claassens, L. Juliana M. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

Damrosch, David. *The Narrative Covenant; Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Davis, Ellen F. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Dever, William G. *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012.

Ekblad, Bob. *Reading the Bible with the Damned*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Jennings, Theodore W. *Jacob's Wound Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva Simone. *Reading the Women of the Bible*. New York: Schocken Books, 2004.

Madigan, Kevin, and Jon Douglas Levenson. *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Maier, Christl. *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Mobley, Gregory. *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel*. New York: Doubleday, 2005.

Niditch, Susan. *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002.

Schipper, Jeremy. *Disability and Isaiah's Suffering Servant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Smith, Mark S. *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Sommer, Benjamin D. *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Book Review. 600-750 words (2-3 pages double-spaced).

Write a review of the book you chose, begin with a concise summary of the content, including a relevant description of the topic as well as its overall perspective, argument, or purpose. The review should also include your critical assessment of the content. This involves your reactions to the work under review: what strikes you as noteworthy, whether or not it was effective or persuasive, and how it enhanced your understanding of the issues at hand.

Your review should not rely on quotes from the book. Summarize and assess the reading IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

“Above all, a review makes an argument. The most important element of a review is that it is a commentary, not merely a summary. It allows you to enter into dialogue and discussion with the work’s creator and with other audiences. You can offer agreement or disagreement and identify where you find the work exemplary or deficient in its

knowledge, judgments, or organization. You should clearly state your opinion of the work in question, and that statement should resemble other types of academic writing, with a thesis statement, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion.”

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/book-reviews/>

Grading Criteria / Rubric

Contains a concise and accurate summary of the book's content (20%)

Articulates the significance and purpose of the book (20%)

Contains an insightful critical assessment of the book (20%)

Makes an argument and supports it in a reasoned, organized, and well structured way (20%)

Mechanics (spelling, grammar, style) (20%)

From the UNC Writing Center (click the url above for more tips and examples):

BEFORE YOU WRITE (as you read)

There is no definitive method to writing a review, although some critical thinking about the work at hand is necessary before you actually begin writing. Thus, writing a review is a two-step process: developing an argument about the work under consideration, and making that argument as you write an organized and well-supported draft.

What follows is a series of questions to focus your thinking as you dig into the work at hand. While the questions specifically consider book reviews, you can easily transpose them to an analysis of performances, exhibitions, and other review subjects. Don't feel obligated to address each of the questions; some will be more relevant than others to the book in question.

- What is the thesis—or main argument—of the book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?
- What exactly is the subject or topic of the book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? What is the method or approach to the subject (topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive)?
- How does the author support her argument? What evidence does she use to prove her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information (or conclusions) conflict with other books you've read, courses you've taken or just previous assumptions you had of the subject?
- How does the author structure her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense? Does it persuade you? Why or why not?

- How has this book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the book to your reader?

Beyond the internal workings of the book, you may also consider some information about the author and the circumstances of the text's production:

- Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. Does it matter, for example, that the biographer was the subject's best friend? What difference would it make if the author participated in the events she writes about?
- What is the book's genre? Out of what field does it emerge? Does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its genre? These questions can provide a historical or literary standard on which to base your evaluations. If you are reviewing the first book ever written on the subject, it will be important for your readers to know. Keep in mind, though, that naming "firsts"—alongside naming "bests" and "onlys"—can be a risky business unless you're absolutely certain.

WRITING THE REVIEW

Once you have made your observations and assessments of the work under review, carefully survey your notes and attempt to unify your impressions into a statement that will describe the purpose or thesis of your review. Then, outline the arguments that support your thesis.

Your arguments should develop the thesis in a logical manner. That logic, unlike more standard academic writing, may initially emphasize the author's argument while you develop your own in the course of the review. The relative emphasis depends on the nature of the review: if readers may be more interested in the work itself, you may want to make the work and the author more prominent; if you want the review to be about your perspective and opinions, then you may structure the review to privilege your observations over (but never separate from) those of the work under review. What follows is just one of many ways to organize a review.

Introduction

Since most reviews are brief, many writers begin with a catchy quip or anecdote that succinctly delivers their argument. But you can introduce your review differently depending on the argument and audience. The Writing Center's handout on [introductions](#) can help you find an approach that works. In general, you should include:

- The name of the author and the book title and the main theme.
- Relevant details about who the author is and where he/she stands in the genre or field of inquiry. You could also link the title to the subject to show how the title explains the subject matter.
- The context of the book and/or your review. Placing your review in a framework that makes sense to your audience alerts readers to your "take" on the book. Perhaps you want to situate a book about the Cuban revolution in the context of Cold War rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. Another

- reviewer might want to consider the book in the framework of Latin American social movements. Your choice of context informs your argument.
- The thesis of the book. If you are reviewing fiction, this may be difficult since novels, plays, and short stories rarely have explicit arguments. But identifying the book's particular novelty, angle, or originality allows you to show what specific contribution the piece is trying to make.
 - Your thesis about the book.

Summary of content

- This should be brief, as analysis takes priority. In the course of making your assessment, you'll hopefully be backing up your assertions with concrete evidence from the book, so some summary will be dispersed throughout other parts of the review.
- The necessary amount of summary also depends on your audience. Graduate students, beware! If you are writing book reviews for colleagues—to prepare for comprehensive exams, for example—you may want to devote more attention to summarizing the book's contents. If, on the other hand, your audience has already read the book—such as an class assignment on the same work—you may have more liberty to explore more subtle points and to emphasize your own argument.

Analysis and evaluation of the book

- Your analysis and evaluation should be organized into paragraphs that deal with single aspects of your argument. This arrangement can be challenging when your purpose is to consider the book as a whole, but it can help you differentiate elements of your criticism and pair assertions with evidence more clearly.
- You do not necessarily need to work chronologically through the book as you discuss it. Given the argument you want to make, you can organize your paragraphs more usefully by themes, methods, or other elements of the book.
- If you find it useful to include comparisons to other books, keep them brief so that the book under review remains in the spotlight.
- Avoid excessive quotation and give a specific page reference in parentheses when you do quote. Remember that you can state many of the author's points in your own words.

Conclusion

- Sum up or restate your thesis or make the final judgment regarding the book. You should not introduce new evidence for your argument in the conclusion. You can, however, introduce new ideas that go beyond the book if they extend the logic of your own thesis.
- This paragraph needs to balance the book's strengths and weaknesses in order to unify your evaluation. Did the body of your review have three negative paragraphs and one favorable one? What do they all add up to?