

Instructor's Manual

to accompany

The Longman Anthology of World Literature

COMPACT EDITION



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Instructor's Manual to accompany The Longman Anthology of World Literature, Compact Edition by David Damrosch et al.

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The Ancient World



✧ PERSPECTIVES ✧

Creation Myths and Social Concerns

This section makes a wonderful introduction to the ancient world itself and to a broad survey course in general: in only fifty pages of texts, students can see how dynamic the literary relations really were in the ancient Mediterranean world. These selections show how themes and texts cross borders and are transformed in different languages, as later writers revise earlier ones, and as poetry and literary prose are used to explore ultimate truths and concrete social concerns alike. This Perspectives section can usefully be assigned along with the introduction to “The Ancient Near East” section, from which the majority of these texts come, thereby giving students a first feel for the literature as they encounter the region’s overall literary and cultural history.

These texts also raise questions that are likely to resonate far beyond the ancient world’s selections: Just what is literature? What are its relations to religious belief and to political and historical circumstances? How do ancient and foreign texts challenge our views of literature and of society, and our very ways of reading? For the teacher, pedagogical issues arise as well: How do we make best use of sometimes fragmentary works whose frame of reference is known only to specialists, sometimes unclear even to them? All these questions can be set out as challenges for the class and instructor to explore together. It’s useful to stress from the outset that a world literature course isn’t a course in history but an adventure in reading. All of us who read these ancient texts can see ourselves as textual archaeologists, even detectives, looking closely at these works to see what they reveal about their authors’ world, their assumptions, and their literary methods. Our authority as teachers in this context comes not from our absolute mastery of every culture the course encompasses but from our skill as readers and as questioners. The following pages suggest some ways to pursue our questions to best effect, even when our knowledge, or the ancient texts themselves, won’t allow for definite answers.

A first point to emphasize in teaching these materials is that the term “myth” should not be taken to mean “fiction” or “lies,” as we often use it today. You should draw students’ attention to the section on “Myth, Legend, and History” in the initial introduction to the volume. As the Greeks originally used the term, a *mythos* or

myth isn't an idle tale or false belief but a story about ultimate realities. We deliberately apply this term in this section to ancient texts from around the region, including the creation-flood stories of Genesis 1–11, even though many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readers will grant the Bible a truth value that few if any readers today would give to the Egyptian or Babylonian works in this section. We use the term “myth,” emphasizing its original seriousness, not to reduce the Bible to literature but to prod students to take the nonbiblical texts seriously as they try to understand what these stories would have meant to their ancient authors, people for whom gods and goddesses like Ishtar and Zeus were living presences.

The Bible raises special problems in this respect that don't generally appear with other texts of the ancient Mediterranean world; few students today worship Shamash, Amun Re, or Apollo. Yet students and teachers alike may come to the classroom with widely divergent views on the Bible, some taking its narratives as accurate historical accounts, many considering them as essentially true though embellished with legendary and miraculous elements, others quite prepared to treat them as pure fiction, perhaps even insisting on this approach in a rebellion against views they were taught at home. Further, Jewish students may bristle when Christian students refer to the “Old Testament,” particularly if the “Old” is assumed to have been permanently eclipsed by the New; Muslim students may discomfit both groups by the assumption that Old and New Testaments alike have been superseded by the Qur'an. In the *Longman Anthology* we use literary rather than theological modes of analysis, while respecting the fact that individual students and teachers may well have definite beliefs of their own.

On literary grounds, we use the term “Hebrew Bible” rather than “Old Testament” because the Israelite writers didn't think they were writing an old anything, much less a prologue to Christian scripture. On the other hand, we do use the term “New Testament” because its writers did indeed consider that they were doing something decisively new. For similar reasons, we follow most contemporary world history books in using the terms B.C.E., “Before the Common Era,” and C.E., “Common Era,” in preference to B.C. and A.D., with the direct theological reference to the years “Before Christ” or to a later date “Anno Domini,” “in the year of Our Lord.” (On literary grounds as well, biblical texts are presented in the *Anthology* without the verse numberings that were added centuries after the books were composed for liturgical convenience, though we do retain the chapter divisions, which assist in reading.)

Some teachers prefer to pass over the Bible altogether rather than venture into this difficult terrain. To do so, though, only reinforces the imbalance traditionally found in many world literature surveys, which treated Greco-Roman literature as the real foundation of Western culture, leaving students unaware of the immense importance of the Bible for millennia of later writers, up to and including our own time. The issue may never arise as a problem if both the teacher and the students happen to share a common general background and assumptions about the Bible, but in many classrooms this won't be the case for everyone in the room. One way to begin is to defuse potential doctrinal controversy by reminding students at the outset that this is no more a religion course than it is a history course, and the bib-

lical texts that have been chosen for inclusion are ones of specifically literary interest. It's perfectly reasonable to bracket the issue of the historical truth of the Flood story, for example, or the resurrection of Jesus, to focus for present purposes on the literary milieu out of which biblical writing arose, and the innovative literary contributions these texts made that have had such lasting influence on later writers, believers and unbelievers alike.

Some students (and some of us faculty!) may remain uncomfortable with the idea of “reducing” the Bible to literature, but this very concern gives an opportunity to help broaden students’ understanding not only of the Bible but also of many ancient texts. Most of the books of the Bible certainly were not written as literature at all, and even today, outside any faith context, it may not be the most productive thing to read them as if they were supposed to be literature in the senses we typically use the term today. The Bible is often intensely *literary*, but it rarely wants to be *literature* as such. Certainly the rabbis who fixed the canon of the Hebrew Bible in the last centuries C.E. were responsive to the beauty of the Song of Songs and the rhetorical power of the Book of Job, but literary values were hardly uppermost in their minds: they gave more space to “the Death Valley of Chronicles,” as the biblical scholar Morton Smith once aptly described 1 and 2 Chronicles. The Song of Songs was regarded by some rabbis as too purely literary (not just too erotic, but too untheological) to merit inclusion, and it almost certainly would have been left out—and lost to us today—had it not been attributed to King Solomon.

The problem of a faith-based literal reading is, in fact, a mirror image of what may be the most common problem teachers of the Bible will encounter in a literature course: rather than take the texts in a purely literal way, as some students will, other students will take them in a purely *literary* way. That is, they may look to them to provide the sorts of characters and plots they know from modern novels and TV shows, or the detached lyricism they may associate with later European love poetry. Students are all the more likely to miss much of what’s really going on in these texts if they “already know them” in a vague way picked up years ago from sermons or Sunday School craft projects. The challenge is to help our students discover the ways in which the biblical writers are playing by different rules than Charles Dickens, John Keats, or Britney Spears. This is also one of the great payoffs of teaching the Bible early in the course: nothing beats the “Aha!” effect of showing students something they thought they knew but now can see in a fresh and vivid way.



A Babylonian Theogony

This short text reveals an ancient world very different from our own—the early generations of gods and goddesses indulge in incest and murder as the world begins in a chaos of violence and desire. The antiquity of this text is suggested on the page by its sheer fragmentation. We see the earliest writing emerging from the wreckage of early history, in a fitting embodiment of the poem’s own themes. Cosmic

though these themes are, they are grounded in realistic details: the first gods dig into the primordial mass of earth with a plough, just as if they were human farmers, evidently digging down to release groundwater that forms the Sea. One of the early divinities' first acts is to build a city, "Dunnu, the twin towers" (line 6), as the seat of their earthly rule, as Babylon and other cities would also portray themselves. Already here, as in the creation epic *Enuma Elish* and in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, we see the importance of settled farming culture and the great cities it supported, in contrast to the nomadic shepherds' culture of the Hebrews and their suspicion of cities (see the discussion of Genesis 1–11, below).

Students will be struck by the frank immorality of the Babylonian gods, a theme that will resonate on through Hesiod to Homer and beyond. Students raised in one of the monotheistic traditions are accustomed to an all-wise and entirely good God, not to a pantheon of violent, lustful, and duplicitous divinities. The Near Eastern gods and goddesses can be seen as personifications of powerful, arbitrary natural forces, but they can also be seen as embodying very human motives of desire, jealousy, and the will to power. Chaotic and unbridled though the action seems at first sight, on closer examination it can be shown to display elements of incipient order: the bases of modern political and social life are here being worked out in their first forms. Note how Earth doesn't simply force herself on her son: "Come, let me make love to you," she entreats (line 9). Having married his mother and killed his father—the crucial pair of crimes underlying Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*—the young Amakandu treats his father's corpse with reverence, laying him "to rest in the city of Dunnu, which he loved" (line 12). Amakandu in turn is treated the same way, murdered but then laid to rest with his father. Patterns begin to emerge, showing the repetitious violence of desire (both sexual lust and the desire for power) and also inaugurating the ritual order and the dynastic order that will channel these desires and lead to the building of society.

The "Babylonian Theogony" makes a good beginning not only for its themes but also for the sense it gives of the first emergence of a minimal literariness out of the pure sequence of events: the verbal repetitions from one set of events to the next create order out of chaos. The single line of direct speech and the very brief characterization of Dunnu as the city that Amakandu's father loved set the stage for the far more elaborate dialogues and characterizations that are found in *Enuma Elish*, in Genesis, and in Hesiod.



The Great Hymn to the Aten

The tension between individual and social norms often centered in antiquity on support of an upper class or opposition to it, and particularly to its king. A far-reaching crisis arose in Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C.E. when the king Akhenaten set himself against the religious order of his country, elevating his patron god above all others. The introduction to this hymn suggests the parallels

that can be drawn between it and psalms like Psalm 104. Both poems give world-wide authority to their God, and both echo older creation narratives in describing the Aten's or God's creative and sustaining power. The Egyptian hymn surveys the land of Egypt and also looks abroad, asserting that "All distant lands, you make them live" (line 87). The Hebrew psalm focuses more particularly on the natural world, and God himself seems like a nomad whose camping site is the earth: "Thou art clothed with honor and majesty," the psalm says, "who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent" (Psalm 104:1-2). By contrast, the Egyptian hymn links its praise of the heavenly king directly to the authority of the Egyptian king and queen, as the hymn asserts in its final section: "You are in my heart, / There is no other who knows you, / Only your son, *Neferkheprure, Sole-one-of-Re*, / . . . *Akhenaten*, great in his lifetime; / And the great Queen whom he loves" (lines 107-124).

Along with this political dimension, the Egyptian hymn is notable for its sheer, joyful exuberance, giving a valuable counter to any impression students may have of the Egyptians as a gloomy, funereal people. The sun's radiant power is emphasized from the outset, and the poem shows a lively realism in its descriptions of darting fish, frisky flocks, and the chick coming out from the egg "To announce his completion" (line 61).



Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Creation Epic

This selection, and the selections from Hesiod and Genesis that follow it, all present fairly late and highly developed versions of creation. "Late" is of course a relative term. *Enuma Elish* as we have it, from the early or mid-first millennium B.C.E., is evidently based on a first version from around 1500 B.C.E.; yet even that date comes after more than a thousand years of literary composition in the region. *Enuma Elish* gives a far fuller account than more basic works like the "Babylonian Theogony" of early struggles between the first generations of gods and goddesses, with outright incest and cannibalism having modulated into civil war in heaven. If you invite students to compare these works, they will see how much more attention the poet of *Enuma Elish* gives to his divine characters' thoughts and feelings, and the minimal speeches seen in the earliest texts now become extended, dramatic dialogues.

A particularly important development is the poem's emphasis on an epic hero, Marduk, who boldly faces the fearsome Tiamat when his fellow gods hold back in fear. Marduk is thus one of the very first heroes, in the long line extending forward to Odysseus, Sir Gawain, and Captain James T. Kirk of the starship *Enterprise*, who will boldly go where no one else dares to go; in this, Marduk can be compared to the greatest of Mesopotamian epic heroes, Gilgamesh.

Tiamat herself is a striking antagonist, at once a horrific monster and an indulgent mother who can't bring herself to quiet the raucous younger generation surging around in her belly (lines 23-28). Marduk's heroism is explicitly set against

Tiamat's female power: "don't you realize," his own father Anshar fearfully tells him, "that it is Tiamat, of womankind, / Who will advance against you with arms?" (lines 27–28). Once she is defeated, she becomes a literal earth mother by an extended process of mutilation and dismemberment: the poem wears its gender politics on its sword belt rather than on its sleeve.

Having set the dimensions of the earthly world, Marduk then makes humanity from the blood of Tiamat's slain general Qingu, to serve the gods and give them leisure, and finally creates Babylon as his earthly throne, meeting place between heaven and earth. You can ask students what is implied in this strange creation of humanity. Is the effect to emphasize our duty as humble servants or to suggest a basis for the ongoing human propensity for violence and discord?

This whole tumultuous series of events can effectively be compared with the chaotic origins of the world described by Hesiod and the very different uses to which many of the epic's elements are put in Genesis 1–11; see below for more on these comparisons. As students discuss these works, it can be good to prod them to go beyond their likely first impression that the *Enuma Elish* is primitive and immoral, whereas the biblical account is more refined and humane. In some respects, this is certainly true: God in the Bible is a just and loving god, and his earthly creation is repeatedly described as good—no cracking open of rebels' skulls to make the landscape. Yet in other respects, the Babylonian poem reflects the higher level of material culture that Babylon enjoyed. The gods live in magnificent splendor, and Babylon itself is established as a great and wealthy city.

The Babylonians also had a sophisticated understanding of political life, far less absolutist than the Egyptian system. The poem stresses, for example, that its great hero takes authority by the will of those he governs: "Your election of me shall be firm and foremost," as Marduk tells the other gods (line 21), and the government he inaugurates entails just punishment of the wicked and the establishment of the world's ritual order, meant to foster peace and prosperity among gods and mortals alike. The poem closes with the grateful gods renewing their allegiance with a further oath. Archaic though the poem is, the younger gods are drawn with great psychological skill, both in their fears and in their triumphs, and the scenes are brought to life with lively realistic details. It's a good idea to have students look at the presence of everyday objects in the poem, as an index of the earthly reality found in this portrayal of heaven. Thus the gods take shovels and spend a year shoveling mud to make mud bricks, then enjoy a great banquet in the hall they've built, relaxing with their beer mugs. At once violent and homely, crude and sophisticated, *Enuma Elish* gives students a first glimpse of a heroic world they'll see fleshed out in works from *Gilgamesh* and the *Iliad* up through *Beowulf* and King Arthur's court.



Hesiod

Hesiod is an important figure who links Greece with the traditions of Asia Minor, where his father was said to have been born. Remarkably for an ancient text, most of which were anonymous, the poet himself is named at the beginning of his *Theogony* (line 25) and is commissioned by the Muses to sing his song. What difference does this (possibly fictional) self-portrait make? Framed as a human song, the poem begins with a charming evocation of the Muses, dancing on Mount Helicon with delicate feet, but then surprises us with the dark violence of the archaic world of the early gods. For all the polish of the opening, the poem goes on to describe a cosmos closely comparable to that seen in *Enuma Elish*, with the powerful, evil goddess Earth resembling the earth mother Tiamat.

You can show students the ways in which Hesiod continues to present sudden, unexpected shifts of tone and substance as the poem continues, notably with the surprising birth of Aphrodite from the severed genitals of the castrated Kronos. Hesiod presumably took this detail from older legends, but he goes out of his way to emphasize the goddess's loveliness and her "sweet delight, and friendliness, and charm" (line 224). Then the "hateful battle" resumes once more, with Zeus taking the heroic role earlier played by Marduk in *Enuma Elish*; you can ask students how their characters and actions compare.



Genesis 1-11

However we and our students assess the Bible's claims of truth and its status as revelation, it should be evident that the old traditions presented in Genesis 1-11 re-work elements seen in the earlier creation stories. One advantage of Robert Alter's vivid new translation, used in the *Anthology*, is that it allows us to read these chapters freshly. Alter's translation stays very close to the oral quality of the original and respects the rhythms and the patterns of phrase used in the Hebrew text (the sort of patterning he has so effectively unfolded in his book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1981). Comparisons can be made most directly to *Enuma Elish* and to the Flood story in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. You can ask students to make lists of the points of similarity and the major differences they can find. These lists can become a kind of scavenger hunt and will help train them in looking for details as well as providing a ready basis for class discussion. Both the war in *Enuma Elish* and the biblical Flood story, for example, end with a divine bow (the rainbow) set in the sky as a sign of peace, and there are manifold parallels between Utanapishtim's story of his survival of the Flood and Noah's in Genesis 6-9.

Once students have seen these parallels, the Bible's distinctive approach to these old materials becomes all the clearer. In marked contrast to *Enuma Elish*, the world's creation doesn't require a titanic struggle, or any struggle at all: God simply creates everything (like Ptah in the "Memphite Theology") by verbal command, not by subduing any monstrous forces of chaos. Hints of alternative traditions of heavenly struggle are, in fact, preserved elsewhere in the Bible itself, particularly in several of the psalms and in passages in the Book of Job, in which God has to subdue unruly forces as he creates the world. One such passage can be found in Job 38, when God declares that he "shut in the sea with doors, / when it burst forth from the womb; / . . . and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, / and here shall your proud waves be stayed'" (lines 13–20). The proud waves bursting forth from the womb of the sea sound much like Tiamat and the roiling gods in her belly, and the watery deep at the start of Genesis, *tehom* in Hebrew, is actually cognate with "Tiamat." Genesis 1, however, doesn't show any such conflict openly: the Priestly writers who are thought to have composed the opening chapter give no space to any defeat of rival forces in heaven.

As the *Anthology*'s introduction to Genesis 1–11 notes, the absence of rivals to an omnipotent and just God led the biblical writers to a searching exploration of the problem of the origins of evil, which could not be portrayed (as in polytheistic works) as rooted in struggles between rival gods. What Genesis 1–11 shows is a gradual, tragic process of separation of humanity from God. Students can trace this growing separation across these chapters, beginning as early as Chapter 2, before the famous prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been breached, and indeed before Eve has been created. God realizes that his new human being needs company, but God himself seems unsure just what companion to offer, and he creates a whole series of animals and birds, bringing each in turn to his new, still nameless human being, "to see what he would call it. . . . but for the human no sustainer beside him was found." This terse passage is a classic "Jahwistic" composition, an old, enigmatic account that doesn't try to solve the mystery it presents: How is it that God doesn't know what his human needs? In making the human in his own image, it seems that God has created a being who shares something of his own mysterious unknowability, and there even seems to be a note of impatient relief in the hymn the man offers once he is finally presented with the woman made from his rib: "This one *at last*, bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh, / This one shall be called Woman" (emphasis added).

In the next chapter, the serpent is not yet the evil Satan of later biblical tradition; newly created by God, he is not evil but simply "cunning," and he tempts Eve by exploiting her genuine confusion as to what God had prohibited Adam. As early rabbinic commentators already noted two thousand years ago, Eve doesn't manage to get the prohibition right: in Chapter 2, God had commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit, but in her telling, she adds a new clause: "God has said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" Long passages of dialogue are repeated word for word in ancient texts as a matter of course: but here, Eve has misremembered the short and simple command given to her husband just

a page earlier. The serpent has reason enough to question whether God really said what Eve thinks he said, and it can be imagined that when she touches the fruit and suffers no harm, the seriousness of the whole prohibition could be called into question. The separation from God is growing wider even before she touches the fruit, which tempts her for its goodness and beauty—she responds, in other words, as God himself has done to his creation: as we’re told in Chapter 1, at each stage of creation, “God saw that it was good.”

Early Christian theologians (and later poets like Milton) saw the serpent as a figure of pure evil, a fallen, rebellious angel, and Adam and Eve embodied the Catholic sin of pride. Genesis itself never uses any such term, however, but seems instead to see Eve as thoughtless, not fully in control of her divinely given senses (the tree “was good for eating and . . . it was lust to the eyes,” as Alter’s translation puts it). The degree to which our understanding of these chapters has been shaped by centuries of much later commentary can be illustrated for students by the fact that everyone “knows” that the forbidden fruit was an apple—portrayed as such in countless Renaissance paintings and still stuck in our throats in the form of our “Adam’s apple.” Yet the forbidden fruit can’t be an apple, as apple trees aren’t prohibited, just the sole “tree of knowledge.” How then did this singular fruit come to be thought of as an apple? Thanks to a pun in Latin, exploited by early Church fathers, which then passed into common consciousness: “apple” in Latin is *malus*, which makes a useful play on words with the adjective “evil,” *malum*. So we still refer today to our “Adam’s apple” as a result of a pun in Latin, which wasn’t yet a written language when the Genesis story was composed and which has ceased to be spoken or written outside the Vatican for centuries now. Reading Genesis 1-11 closely, we can help our students discover anew a text they probably don’t know well even if they think they do.

The devolution of humanity away from God continues through the balance of Genesis 1-11, with Cain’s murder of Abel (the settled farmer resenting God’s unexplained preference for Hebrew-style sheep herding), the improper sexual mingling of human women with “the sons of God” (apparently semidivine members of God’s heavenly court) and the punishment of shortened lives, and then the disaster of the Flood and humanity’s tenuous redemption in Noah and his immediate family. Even this redemption is immediately called into question by Noah’s drunkenness in Chapter 9, leading to a murky scene of sexual exposure and possible incest, which leads in turn to Noah’s curse on his youngest son, ancestor of the Hebrews’ Canaanite rivals. The primeval history ends, like *Enuma Elish*, with the establishment of Babylon or Babel (Chapter 11), but here the earthly city is an embodiment of arrogance, and the Hebrew writers satirically derive “Babylon” from the Hebrew verb *balal*, “to babble,” pretending not to know its quite obvious, glorious meaning in Akkadian, “Gate of God.”

It’s important for students to keep in mind that the disaster of the Tower of Babel and the splitting up of human languages and societies are not the end of the story: this is only the end of the prologue to Genesis, which turns to God’s new covenant with Abram/Abraham and his wife Sarai/Sarah, who appear at the very end of Chapter 11 and will be the founders of the Hebrew people. A disaster in re-

mote antiquity, the splitting apart of languages is not necessarily a bad thing from the perspective of the biblical writers themselves: the result is that they can speak—and write—Hebrew, the language of their own small people, feigning ignorance of Akkadian, the language of the dominant imperial powers to the east, the language spoken around them during their long exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E., the time when the Hebrew Bible began to take its final shape. The old stories of Genesis 1–11 continued to serve present needs throughout antiquity as they have in the two millennia since then.