Reading assignment: Berenard Batto, Introduction to *Slaying the Dragon* (last item in Packet 1).

Written seminar preparation:

1. What would Bernard Batto be likely to say to someone who challenged him with this question: “Over the centuries, hundreds and hundreds of millions of people have found the Bible to be a source of truth, wisdom, guidance, and comfort. How dare you say it is full of myth?” In constructing an answer on Batto’s behalf, point to and quote from at least three different places in his introduction.

Remember: The idea is to write not about what you might say to such a person, but what Batto would say. Our first goal in seminar discussions should be always to help each other be clear about what the reading says, what the author means.

2. Draw one line of connection between Batto’s introduction and one passage in Suzanne Langer’s “Prince of Creation” essay. If you’re really good, bring in Scott Noegel’s lecture and Genesis 1-3 as well. Write just a paragraph on where you find a linkage.

3. In your own words, what does Batto mean by "mythopoeic speculation"?

4. According to Batto, why did the writers of the Hebrew Bible engage in mythopoeic speculation?

5. The common assumption is that myth is an oral medium, transmitted orally. What does Batto say about this?

Optional:

As I did with the Langer essay, I here offer a series of questions to help you through the main ideas in Batto’s introduction. You do not have to answer these in writing, but you would do well to pause over them. I use Batto’s page numbers – the printed ones.

Page 1, first and third paragraphs: Batto refers to myths as “one of the chief mediums by which biblical writers did their theologizing.” Are you clear as to what “theologizing” means here? I guess it means “thinking about the nature of God.” Had you thought before about the Bible as a book in which human writers – authors of “creative genius,” as Batto says on pg. 2 – offered ideas about God?

Pg. 2: Having heard Professor Noegel’s lecture, you are in a position to understand why Batto says he begins his book about mythmaking the Bible with a look at myths of Mesopotamia. At the end of that first paragraph, that expression “mutatis mutandis” just means “after allowing for necessary changes.” Don’t worry about it!
Pg. 2, second par.: You may find it hard to understand what Batto is getting at in his description of what he does in his chapter 2. You’d have to read the chapter. Again, don’t worry about it for now. (I have copies of the chapter and will try to digest the contents for you.

Pg. 3 – first full paragraph (“Some centuries later”): In Gen. 1, what was the Priestly writer’s main purpose in his retelling of the creation myth, according to Batto?

Pg. 3, second full paragraph: How important does Batto think the Combat Myth is for understanding Israel’s faith? Remember: the central story in the whole Hebrew Bible is the story of the exodus out of Egypt, the story being celebrated this week by Jews celebrating Passover. At the end of this paragraph, Batto refers to Ezekiel – one of the prophets who wrote in late in Israel’s disastrous history of decline. What does Batto say Ezekiel did with the Combat Myth? Are you sure in your mind what “eschatological hope” means?

Pg. 4 – the little paragraph that ends the section (“This volume...”): What claim does Batto make for “myth and mythmaking speculation” in the Bible?

Pg. 4 middle through pg. 8: This begins an interesting survey of how “myth” has evolved from something dismissed dismissed by early Greek and New Testament writers as “mere fictions” to a word used by modern scholarship to better define and understand that very important dimension of human thinking and action, religion. You should skim through this pretty fast, slowing down at the middle of pg. 8, where he begins a very informative look at what myth came to mean for “our own century,” by which he means the 20th century.

Pg. 8 through 11: Try to grasp what Freud, Jung, structuralism, “other approaches,” and “the phenomenological approach” consist of.