

**HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION**  
**New York Campus**

**The Bible and Modern Hebrew Women Writers:  
 Feminist Perspectives**

Spring 2006

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Office Hrs: By Appointment. (I am in my office pretty much every day, and will be happy to meet with you anytime!)

**Course Description:**

This course will examine how particular biblical sources have been understood by feminist and gender studies scholars and have been revisioned or re-told by modern Hebrew writers. Discussion will encompass the Biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and Song of Songs. The goal of this course is three fold: 1) to acquaint you with the broad array of interpretive strategies from the world of feminist and gender studies 2) to provide opportunity for you to improve your skills at literary interpretation of the Bible 3) to extend this feminist and literary analysis to works of modern Hebrew literary sources and 4) to improve your facility with these texts and argue for their relevance to the feminist study of the Bible. Special emphasis will be given to the work Hebrew women writers.

**Requirements:**

1. Regular class attendance.
2. Assigned readings.
3. 2 short in-class presentations: a) summarizing and/or critiquing a critical/theoretical article (5-10 minutes) b) analyzing a poem or prose text and its relevance as a feminist critical tool.
4. 1 short paper (3-5 pages) due mid-way through the semester on Genesis 27-29; paper should make reference to the critical essay assigned and should analyze at least one of the poetic selections **Due Date: Feb 28**. We will be discussing Genesis 27-29 that day and so your papers will serve as the basis for that discussion.
5. A long paper (10-15 pages) that involves applying feminist/gender studies critical tools to the comparative study of theme of import. Suggested topics include: 1) the representation of mothers, heroines, or sexuality in two or more biblical narratives 2) an analysis of the Dina story (Genesis 34, using critical and/or literary materials 3) the story of Bat-Yiftach and how it has been represented in modern literary sources 4) female literary treatment of male characters in the Bible, for eg. The poetry of Rachel, Anda Pinkerfeld, Leah Goldberg or Yona Wallach 5) an analysis of several modern Hebrew poems on a Bible-related gender-related theme 6) women writers as Psalmists 7) Zion as woman in Isaiah and Lamentations and in modern Hebrew women's writing 8) an extended midrash that involves an reflective analytical portion analyzing the feminist reading strategy employed. **Due Date: TBA**

**Required Books and Materials to Purchase:**

1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (WB)
2. Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible* (Countertraditions)
3. Wendy Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, available for purchase directly from me; I have arranged for a 20% discount for students and will order in bulk.
4. Readings Packet (RP) available for purchase at **New University Copy & Graphics, 11 Waverly Place, (212) 473-7369.**

**Syllabus****Week 1 (Jan 17) Biblical Voices, Biblical Ancestors**

- Genesis Rabbah 45:5; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Introduction to *The Woman's Bible*," Athalya Brenner, "On Reading The Hebrew Bible as a feminist Woman: Introduction to the Series," Gilbert and Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence," Shulamit Kalugai's "Ei sham," Esther Ettinger, "Ha-shir shelifnei hasheinah."

**Question:** How can one relate the questions that direct feminist biblical study to the study of Hebrew women writers?

**Week 2&3 (Jan 24/ 31): Male and Female He Created them**

Biblical Material: Genesis 1-5

(Feminist) Critical Sources:

- Abravanel on Genesis 1
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, pp. 14-27
- Gerda Lerner, Excerpts from *The Creation of Patriarchy*
- Kate Millet, excerpt from *Sexual Politics*;
- Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation"
- Ilana Pardes, "Creation According to Eve" and "Beyond Genesis 3" in *Countertraditions*, pp. 13-59.
- Ken Stone, "The Garden of Eden and the Heterosexual Contract"

**Question:** What do these critics agree and disagree on when it comes to the Eve story?

Literary Sources (translations for most available in Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, Chapter 1):

- Ya'akov Fichman, ""Hava" (translations
- Y. Karni, "Kinah Rishonah"
- Shulamit Kalugai, "Hava"

- Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, “Hava”
- Yokheved Bat-Miriam, “Ofel Ha-tohu,” “Hava,” “Adam”
- Y. Amichai, “Kvar nigmaliti”
- Esther Raab, “Shirat Isha,” “Bnot Hava.”

**Question:** Why is the Eve story so crucial to the enterprise of feminist biblical criticism? How do the poems respond to the issues raised by the critical essays?

#### **Weeks 4&5 (February 7/14) Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar**

Biblical Material: read through Genesis 16-22

Hagar and Sarah discussion will focus on Genesis 16 and 21:1-21

Important Material on Sarah in Genesis 18

(Feminist) Critical Sources:

- E.C.S, *The Woman’s Bible*, pp. 39-44
- Phyllis Trible, “The Sacrifice of Sarah”
- Savina J. Teubal, “Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries” (RP)
- Alice Walker, “Womanist” in from *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (RP)
- Renita Weems, “Reading Her Way Through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible,”
- John W. Waters, “Who Was Hagar?”
- Phyllis Trible, “The Desolation of Rejection.”
- Lori Lefkowitz, “Eavesdropping on Angels and Laughing at God”

Literary Sources:

Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, “Hagar”

Yokheved Bat-Miriam, “Hagar” in *DM*, pp. 108-109.

Zerubavela, “Shvuat Hagar ba-midbar.”

**Question:** Who is the feminist heroine of the Sarah/Hagar stories? As Jews, how do we deal with the mixed legacy of this encounter between Sarah and Hagar?

**No Class During Presidents’ Week, as I am lecturing in Florida.**

#### **Week 6 (Make-up Class) Sodom and its Legacy**

Biblical material: Genesis 19

Critical Sources / Literary Sources:

- Yochi Brandeis, “Hakravat nashim b’hevrat resha.” (RP)
- Gerda Lerner, excerpt from “The Patriarchs” from *The Creation of Patriarchy*
- Midrashic sources
- Michael Carden, “Remembering Pelotit: A Queer Midrash on Calling Down Fire”
- Anda Pinkerfeld Amir, “Eshet Lot”
- Galit Hazan Rokem, “Kemo Eshet Lot”
- Enid Dame, “Lot’s Wife Revisited and Mrs. Lot makes a Political Statement.”

**Question:** Why is this story so significant both to feminist and to queer critics? What does this story tell us about the biblical attitude toward incidents of rape and/or incest and what gender issues are raised by these incidents?

**Week 7 (February 28): Biblical Impersonations (Paper on this material due today)**

Biblical Sources, Genesis 27-29

Critical Sources and Poems:

- Lori Lefkowitz, “Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance”
- Anda Pinkerfeld Amir, “Esav” and “Leah”
- Rivka Miriam, “Yaakov, Sulam, Rachel, Rivka”
- Yehuda Amichai, “Yitzhak heriah” and “Yaakov avinu.”

**No Class on Purim**

**Weeks 8&9 (March 7/March 21) And Rachel Stole the Idols**

Biblical Material: 29-32

Feminist Critical Sources:

- E.C.S. *The Woman’s Bible* pp. 59-61.
- Esther Fuchs, “For I Have the Way of Women: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative” (RP)
- Ilana Pardes, “Rachel’s Dream: The Female Subplot” (Countertraditions)
- Moshe Greenberg, “Another Look at Rachel’s Theft of the Teraphim” (RP)
- W. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, p. 1-4, 15-29.
- Alicia Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language.” (RP)

Literary Sources

- Rachel Morpurgo, “Kol beramah nishma” “Ad lo zakanti,” (Zierler, *And Rachel Stole The Idols*, pp. 76-77)
- Rachel (Bluwstein), “Rachel,” (Zierler, *And Rachel Stole The Idols*, pp. 82-83) “Zemer nugeh,” (84) “Akarah” (201)
- Leah Goldberg, “Ya’akov veRachel” (Zierler, *And Rachel Stole The Idols*, 87-88)
- Nurit Zarhi “Vehi Yosef” (*DM* 166-167)

**Question:** What were the teraphim and why did Rachel steal them? How the story of Rachel stealing the idols serve as a metaphor for feminist writing in Hebrew?

**Week 10 (March 28) Miriam, Moses, and the Cushite wife**

Biblical Material: Exodus 1-2, 15, Numbers 12, 20, Micah 6:4

Feminist Critical Sources:

- E.C.S. *The Woman’s Bible*, pp. 81-83, 101-103
- S. Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres” (RP)
- Alicia Ostriker, “Out of My Sight: The Buried Woman in Biblical Narrative” (RP)
- Virginia Woolf, excerpt from *A Room of One’s Own*
- Ilana Pardes, “Miriam and Her Brothers” (Countertraditions pp. 6-12)

- George Brooke, “Power to the Powerless: A Lost Song of Miriam”

Literary Sources:

- Yokheved Bat-Miriam, “Kifsukim hayamim” (RP), “Miriam (DM 106-107)
- Rachel (Bluwstein) “Minneged”
- Zierler, Midrash on Numbers 12

**Question: What do we know about Miriam as prophet and poet in Israel? What special place does she occupy in the tradition for feminist critics?**

### **Week 11 (April 4) Deborah and Barak, Siesera and Yael**

Biblical Material: Judges 4-5

Feminist Critical Sources:

- E.C.S. *The Woman’s Bible Part 11*, pp. 18-27.
- Adrien Janis Bledstein, “Is Judges a Women’s Satire of Men Who Play God?”
- Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Warriors by Weapon and Word”

Literary Sources (translations for Morpurgo and Raab in Zierler, *And Rachel Stole*), 91, 96):

- Rachel Morpurgo, “Re-eh zeh hadash hu” (RP)
- Esther Raab, “Savtot kdoshot b’yrushalayim” (DM 92-93)
- Yaakov Cohen, “Ma’aseh Yael”

**Question: Compare Deborah and Miriam as feminist poetic/role models. To what extent does the context of the book of Judges effect one’s assessment of Deborah as poet/Mother-in-Israel? How does Yael episode fit into all of this?**

### **Week 13 (April 25) Song of Songs: Female Author? Feminist Work?**

Biblical Material: the entire book of Song of Songs

Feminist Critical Sources:

- S.D. Goitein, “The Song of Songs: A Female Composition” (RP)
- Phyllis Tribble, second section of “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation” (RP)
- Ilana Pardes, “I am a Wall and My Breasts Like Towers” (Countertraditions, pp. 118-143)
- Wendy Zierler, “Yokheved bat-Miriam’s “Erets Israel” in *And Rachel Stole the Idols* (p. 169-186 and Appendix, pp. 277-288)

Literary Sources:

- Yokheved Bat-Miriam, “Erets Yisra’el”
- Leah Goldberg, “Ahavatah shel Teresa de Meun.”

### **Suggested Further Reading:**

Feminist/Literary Readings of the Bible:

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative, The Art of Biblical Poetry, The World of Biblical Literature, Hebrew and Modernity.*

Nehama Ashkenasy, *Eve's Journey and Woman at the Window*.  
 Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*.  
 Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love, Death and Dissymetry, Murder and Difference*.  
 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In The Wake of the Goddesses, Reading the Women of the Bible*.  
 Katherine Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels*.  
 Jill Hammer, *Sisters at Sinai*  
 Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*  
 Alicia Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible and The Nakedness of the Father*.  
 Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel*.  
 Norma Rosen, *Biblical Women Unbound*.  
 Elizabeth Schussler-Forenza, *Searching the Scriptures*.  
 Adin Steinsaltz, *Nashim baMikra*.  
 Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality and Texts of Terror*.

#### Feminist Readings/Translations of Modern Hebrew Literature

*Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* (Judith Baskin, ed.)  
*Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Judith Baskin, ed.)  
 Yael Feldman, *No Room of Her Own*  
 Miriyam Glazer, *Burning Air and a Clear Mind and Dreaming the Actual*  
 Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*  
 Dan Miron, *Imahot m'yasdot ahayot horgot* (1991)  
 Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* and *The First Day and Other Stories*  
*Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature* (Sokoloff, Lerner and Norich eds.)  
*The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems* (The Feminist Press)