**Virgins, Vamps, and Viragos: Women in the Hebrew Bible**

**Religion 214**

**Smith College**

**Spring 2014**

**M/W, 1:10–2:30**

Instructor: Maria Metzler

Email: mmetzler@fas.harvard.edu

Phone: 317-750-5537

Office hours: M/W, by appointment

**Course Description**

This course focuses on the lives of women in ancient Israelite society through close readings of the Hebrew Bible. We will look at detailed portraits of female characters as well as the role of many unnamed women in the text to consider the range and logic of Biblical attitudes toward women. We will also cover female deities in the ancient Near East, women in biblical law, sex in prophetic and Wisdom literature, and the female body as a source of metaphor.

**Required Texts:**

1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible,*New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, 4th College edition.

2. Coogan, Michael. *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says.* New York: Twelve, 2010.

3. Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *Reading the Women of the Bible.* New York: Schoken, 2002.

4. Lyke, Larry. *I Will Espouse You Forever.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.

5. Day, Peggy L., ed. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

**Recommended Texts:**

1. Chapman, Cynthia. *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 62; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

2. Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

**Course Requirements:**

 Class Participation: 20%

Students must come to class each day prepared to participate in course discussions, having completed assignments. Three unexcused absences will result in a lower final course grade.

 Response Papers and Quizzes: 15%

There will be four short (1–2 pages) response papers and four quizzes on assigned readings. See below for due dates and descriptions of response papers.

 Midterm Examination: 20%

On March 12, there will be a midterm exam on material covered in the first half of the semester.

 Final Paper: 20%

A substantial research or interpretive paper (7–10 pages) will be due on the last day of class. I will provide a list of suggested topics, and students must submit a topic for approval by March 24. A first draft of the paper is due on April 16.

 Final Examination: 25%

To be scheduled during final exam period, May 6–9. The final exam will be cumulative.

A note on grading: Papers will be evaluated on the basis of mechanics, creativity, organization, and serious engagement with course material. Part of the grade for the final paper will also be based on the revision process. Students must present an idea for their final paper on March 24 and submit a first draft on April 16. I will review the first drafts and hold individual conferences with students to discuss their papers the following week. To achieve a high grade on the revision process, students must meet deadlines, show solid research and effort on the first draft of their papers, conduct themselves graciously during the paper conference, and demonstrate a sincere effort to improve their papers by implementing suggestions from the conference in the final draft.

**Tentative Schedule**

Week 1

January 27: Introductory Lecture: Characterizations of Women in Biblical Literature

 *God and Sex*, chapters 1–2

 Esther Fuchs, “Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible.” Pages 76–95 in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*. Edited by Frederick E. Greenspahn. New York: NYU Press, 2008.

January 29: All About Eve

 Genesis 1–3

 Phyllis Trible, “A Love Story Gone Awry.” Pages 72–143 in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. London: SCM Press, 1978.

***Response Paper 1 due***

Week 2

February 3: The Monstrous Mother: Tiamat and *Enuma Elish*

 *Enuma Elish* (The Babylonian Flood Story): Pages 60–72 in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969).

February 5: Female Deities and Demons in the Ancient Near East

 *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, pp. 9–70

 *God and Sex*, chapter 6, “Fire in the Divine Loins: God’s Wives in Myth and Metaphor”

***Response Paper 2 due***

Week 3

February 10: Matriarchs: Sarai/Sarah, Hagar, Lot’s Daughters

 Genesis 12–23 

 J. Cheryl Exum, “The Accusing Look: The Abjection of Hagar in Art,” *Religion and the Arts* 11 (2007): 143–71.

February 12: Rebekah, Rachel and Leah

 Genesis 24–33

 *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 5–23

***Quiz 1***

Week 4

February 17: Seduction: Tamar and Potiphar’s Wife

 Genesis 37–39

 *God and Sex*, chapter 5

 Susan Tower Hollis, “The Woman in Ancient Examples of the Potiphar’s Wife Motif.” Pages 28–42 in *Gender and Difference*.

February 19: Rally Day (no class)

Week 5

February 24: Wilderness Women: Miriam and Zipporah

 Exodus 1–4, 15, Numbers 12

 Susan Ackerman, “Why Is Miriam also among the Prophets? (And Is Zipporah among the Priests?)” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 47–80.

February 26: Women and Sex in Biblical Law

 Exodus 20–22, Leviticus 12, 15, 18–21, Numbers 5, 27, 36, Deuteronomy 21–25

 *God and Sex*, chapter 4

 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31),” *VT* 34 (1984), 20.

 Martha T. Roth, “Gender and Law: A Case Study from Ancient Mesopotamia.” Pages 173–84 in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East*, edited by Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky. JSOTSup 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

***Response Paper 3 due***

Week 6

March 3: Women and Warfare: Deborah and Jael

 Judges 4–5

 Susan Niditch, “Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael.” Pages 43–57 in *Gender and Difference*.

 Geoffrey P. Miller, “A Riposte Form in the Song of Deborah.” Pages 111–27 in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*.

March 5: Rahab and Delilah

 Joshua 1–2, Judges 13–16

 *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 45–57, 74–92

***Quiz 2***

Week 7

March 10: Jephthah’s Daughter and the Cut-up Concubine

 Judges 11, 19–21

 *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 102–138

March 12: **Midterm examination**

Week 8 (no class - Spring Break)

Week 9

March 24: Ruth

 Ruth 1–4

 Esther Fuchs, “Who Is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism.” Pages 137–44 in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins. Chico: Society of Biblical Literature, 1985.

***Paper Topic due***

March 26: Dinah and Judith

 Genesis 34, Judith 1–16

 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible.” Pages 79–96 in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*.

***Quiz 3***

Week 10

March 31: Women in Wisdom Literature

 Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus

 *I Will Espouse You Forever*, chapter 2, “The Temple, Women, and Wombs” and chapter 3, “Women, Wells, Wisdom, and Torah”

 Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9.” Pages 142–60 in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, edited by Peggy L. Day. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

April 2: The Song of Songs

 Song of Songs 1–8

 Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 73–112.

 Carol L. Meyers, “Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs,” in *Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 197–212.

***Response Paper 4 due***

Week 11

April 7: Michal and the Witch of Endor

 1 Sam 18:17–30; 19; 28, 2 Samuel 3:1–16; 6

 *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 143–57

April 9: Abigail and Bathsheba

 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 11–12, 1 Kings 1

 Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, “The Political Import of David’s Marriages.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 507–18.

 *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 209–14, 301–14

***Work on Paper Draft!***

Week 12

April 14: Sex in the Prophets

 Isaiah, Zephaniah, Nahum

 *I Will Espouse You Forever*, chapter 1, “Marriage, Apostasy, and Divorce: The Prophetic Critique”

 *The Gendered Language of Warfare*, chapter 3, “Daughter Zion: The Gendered Presentation of the Assyrian Crisis in First Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum”

April 16: Sex in the Prophets, con’t.

 Jeremiah, Ezekiel

 *The Gendered Language of Warfare*, chapter 4, “From Daughter to Whore and Back Again: The Transformation of the Jerusalem Complex in the Post-Assyrian Period”

***First Draft of Final Paper due***

Week 13

April 21: student paper conferences

April 23: Jezebel

 1 Kings 16:31–34; 17–19, 21; 2 Kings 9

 Tina Pippin, “Jezebel Re-Vamped.” *Semeia* 69–70 (1995): 221–33.

***Quiz 4***

Week 14

April 28: Esther

 Esther 1–10

 Sidnie Ann White, “Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora.” Pages 161–77 in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*.

April 30: Susanna and the Elders

 Book of Susanna

 Amy-Jill Levine, “ ‘Hemmed In on Every Side’: Jews and Women in the Book of Susanna.” Pages 175–90 in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

***Final Paper due***

***Final Exam:*** to be scheduled during exam period, May 6–9

**Descriptions of Response Papers**: 1–2 pages, double-spaced

1. Due January 29: *Introduce Yourself*

Why are you interested in this course? How do you expect your religious, non-religious, academic, or personal background to shape your approach to the subject of women in biblical literature? What do you hope to gain from taking this class?

2. Due February 5: *Introduce Your Female Deity*

Choose a female deity or demon from the ancient Near East that you find captivating. Now imagine you have just invited her to a party at Smith College. Describe what she looks like and what she will wear to the party. How will you introduce her to your friends? Tell them where she is from, what her interest are, and explain her special talents, as well as any personality traits that might make for awkward social interactions.

3. Due February 26: *Sex on Trial*

You be the judge! Your task is to apply your knowledge of biblical sex laws to one of the characters (female or male) we’ve discussed in class thus far. Choose a character whose sexual conduct could be considered dubious, and put this person on trial. Which biblical laws might the prosecutor cite to prove the character is guilty? Which biblical laws would the defendant use to plead innocence? After considering at least one argument from each side, decide whether the character should be judged guilty or innocent, and defend your decision. If your character is guilty, specify the punishment, again according to biblical law.

4. Due March 26: *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Text?*

In her book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Phyllis Trible makes the following declaration about the Song of Songs: “In this setting, there is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Do you think this is an accurate assessment? Can you identify any signs of male dominance or female subordination in the Song? Should the Song of Songs be called a feminist work? Defend your view.

1. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)