

Women in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

RELS 3371/JWST 3397

Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau

Fall 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:30 a.m.

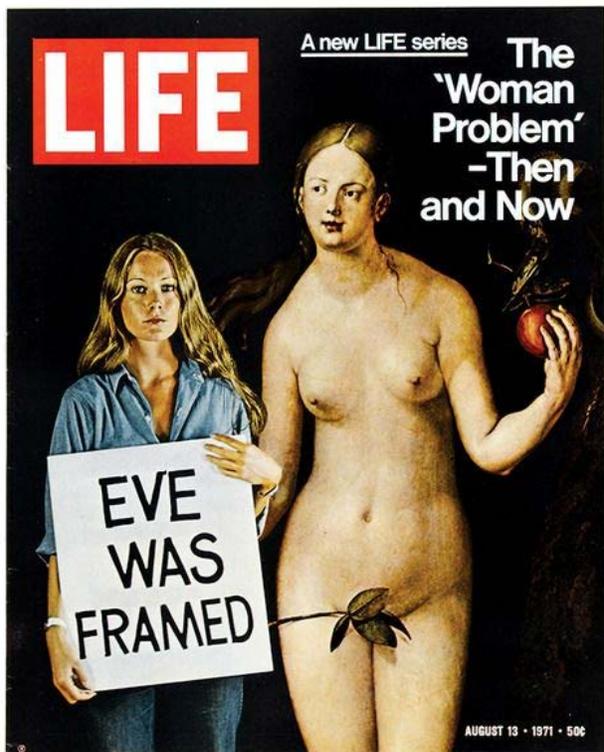
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Office hours: Wednesdays 3-4 p.m., Thursdays 1-2 p.m., or by appointment (Please do not hesitate to visit my office to discuss the course, questions you have, assignments, etc.)



Course description: This course discusses female characters and voices in the Hebrew Bible (sometimes referred to as the Old Testament), the places in the Bible where we would expect to hear women's voices but only hear those of men, and interpretation of the Bible by female and feminist/womanist/gender-critical scholars. From Eve to Esther and beyond, we will read closely biblical texts featuring female characters, and we will sample scholars' and artists' interpretations of those characters and their stories. In addition, we will discuss the afterlives of biblical women in literature, art, music, advertising, and more. Students will work together to come up with creative ways to teach others about the afterlives of biblical women. We will predominantly focus on the texts themselves, but where appropriate we will delve into the historical circumstances of real Israelite women.

Course goals:

- Be able to speak and write knowledgeably about women in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament;
- Understand the ancient context of the Bible, especially as it relates to women and gender;
- Explore how scholars, artists, and religious leaders have treated female characters from the Bible;
- Get a feel for women's, feminist, womanist, and gender-critical biblical interpretation;
- Gain critical-thinking skills through learning to read and evaluate scholarly articles.

Required books:

An edition of the Bible with Apocrypha. I recommend this study Bible because it contains helpful footnotes, essays, and maps, but any straightforward translation is fine:
Coogan, Michael D. et al., eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (4th edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*. New York: Picador, 2007. (20th anniversary edition)

Course requirements and policies:

1. Attendance is required at all sessions. If you must miss class, please *let me know in advance* if possible; it will be your responsibility to make up work that you have missed.
2. You are entitled to two absences, no questions asked, without your attendance and participation grade suffering. Further absences will affect your grade unless they are excused. Examples of excused absences include holidays, personal illness, or family emergency. Documentation of absences may be requested by the professor for them to count as excused.
3. This class is discussion- and participation-based. Therefore, except in cases of serious extenuating circumstances, students missing more than one-quarter of the total number of class sessions will be ineligible for a passing grade in the course.
4. Class participation is important and counts significantly toward your grade! Please come to class prepared to contribute to class discussions. You are expected to do the assigned readings for every class, share insights or ask questions, and thus contribute to the class discussions.
5. It is impossible to pay attention and participate if you are on Facebook or Twitter, so please refrain from using your computer, tablet, or phone during class time for any non-class-related purpose. I strongly encourage you to use paper and pen to take notes.
6. Bring your Bible and assigned readings to class each session.
7. For most class sessions, you will be asked to read/listen to/watch a) a chapter or section from the Bible and b) an interpretation of the biblical material. This may be a scholarly article or *midrash*. Please prepare for each class as follows:
 - a. Read the biblical text. Even if you have read it before, read it again with an eye toward the women in the text. Note three questions or observations you have about the text, paying special attention to the questions offered by Exum, Stone, and Gafney.
 - b. Read or listen to the interpretive material. How does the article, song, or poem affect your understanding of the biblical text? Does it answer any of your questions? Do you agree with the author's interpretation?
8. In between class sessions, I will occasionally need to communicate important information to the class via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your university e-mail regularly.
9. Students will pair up to research and deliver a short (10-15 minutes) presentation. The presentations will relate to cultural portrayals of biblical women. Each pair will deliver its presentation on the day on which we discuss their assigned biblical woman. Assignments will be given and discussed on August 28.
10. Over the course of the semester, students will write three short (2-3 pages) response papers to course readings. Prompts will be distributed one week before the due date for

each assignment. Each student may elect to replace one response paper of her or his choosing with an alternative type of response such as a poem, song, video, or painting. If you elect to do an alternative assignment, please get your plan approved by Prof. Tamber-Rosenau no less than two days before the assignment is due.

11. Students will complete a midterm paper (3-4 pages) answering the following questions: which biblical story or character that we have covered so far do you find most problematic? What about this character or story disturbs you? Have biblical scholars writing on this topic dealt with your concerns? Do they do it satisfactorily, in your opinion? A detailed prompt will be distributed in class two weeks before the due date.
12. Students will complete a final project of about 8 pages, which may be a traditional research paper, an in-depth study of one biblical text (exegesis), a comparative review of three books on a single topic, or an extended *midrash*.
13. Students will have the opportunity to earn extra credit points by attending events on campus and/or completing a (fun!) bonus assignment.

Grading:

Attendance and participation: 20%
Group presentation: 15%
Response papers: 30%
Midterm project: 15%
Final project: 20%

Grading will be on the following scale. Please note that the highest *final course grade* the University permits is A.

97-100: A+	77-79: C+
93-96: A	73-76: C
90-92: A-	70-72: C-
87-89: B+	67-69: D+
83-86: B	63-66: D
80-82: B-	60-62: D-
	<60: F

Academic integrity:

Students at the University of Houston are required to adhere to the university's academic honesty policy. If you are unsure how the honesty policy applies to a given assignment in this course, please ask me. I have a zero-tolerance policy towards any type of academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) and will refer all violations to the department hearing officer.

According to plagiarism.org, plagiarism includes:

- a. "turning in someone else's work as your own
- b. copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- c. failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- d. giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- e. changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit

- f. copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not” (<http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism>)

CAPS Statement:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let’s Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Special accommodations for students with disabilities:

The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students with a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, the University of Houston strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. Students seeking accommodation in this course should contact the instructor after obtaining the appropriate documentation through the UH Center for Students with Disabilities.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

Tuesday, August 21: Introductions and syllabus review

Thursday, August 23: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, scholarly study of the Bible, and women in the Bible

Read: Sharon H. Ringe, “When Women Interpret the Bible”

Week 2

Tuesday, August 28: Approaching the text: an introduction to gender-related methods in biblical studies

Read: J. Cheryl Exum, “Whose Interests Are Being Served?” pp65-69 (rest of chapter optional)

Ken Stone, “Unmanning Abimelech” pp183-192 (rest of chapter optional)

Wilda C. Gafney, “Introduction” from *Womanist Midrash*

Listen: Imaginary Worlds: “The Canon”

Hand out and discuss: Group projects

Thursday, August 30: Eve

Read: Genesis 1-3

Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread" and "Not a Jot, Not a Tittle: Genesis 2-3 After Twenty Years"

Hand out and discuss: Response paper #1 prompt

Week 3

Tuesday, September 4: Eve

Read: Anne W. Stewart, "Eve and Her Interpreters"

Google and share: "Eve" and "advertising"; send one Eve ad to show and discuss

Start reading: Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*

Thursday, September 6: The Mothers: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah

Read: Genesis 12, 15-18, and 20-31

Read and listen: Lyrics, song, and introductory essay for Alicia Jo Rabins, "Rachel and Leah: Being Sisters"

Due: Response paper #1

Week 4

Tuesday, September 11: NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year)

Thursday, September 13: The Forgotten Mothers: Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah

Read: Wilda C. Gafney, "The Torah of Enslaved Women"

Guest speaker: The Rev. Eileen O'Brien—Hagar in Christian tradition

Week 5

Tuesday, September 18: Motherhood, Fertility, and Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible

Read: Candida Moss and Joel Baden, "The Matriarchs as Models" from *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness*

Hand out and discuss: Response paper #2 prompt

Thursday, September 20: Dinah

Read: Genesis 34

Yael Shemesh, "Rape Is Rape Is Rape: The Story of Dinah and Shechem"

Finish reading: *The Red Tent*

Week 6

Tuesday, September 25: Tamar

Read: Genesis 38

Phyllis Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine"

Due: Response paper #2

Thursday, September 27: Miriam, Yocheved, Shifra, Puah, Pharaoh's Daughter, and Zipporah

Read: Exodus 1-4, 15, Numbers 12, 20:1

Read: Funlola Olojede, "Miriam and Moses's Cushite Wife: Sisterhood in Jeopardy?"

Hand out and discuss: midterm paper assignment

Week 7

Tuesday, October 2: Rituals and laws pertaining to women

Read: Leviticus 15, Numbers 5:11-31, Deuteronomy 22

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah"

Thursday, October 4: Cozbi, The Daughters of Zelophahad

Read: Numbers 25, 27, 36

Guest speaker: Rabbi Sarah Fort—Miriam in Jewish Tradition

Week 8

Tuesday, October 9: Rahab, Deborah, Jael

Read: Joshua 2, Judges 4-5

Cristina García Alfonso, excerpt from *Resolviendo: Narratives of Survival in the Hebrew Bible and in Cuba Today* (pp5-8, 52-61)

Thursday, October 11: Jephthah's Daughter and the Levite's Concubine

Read: Judges 11, Judges 19

Lyrae van Clief-Stefanon: "The Daughter and the Concubine from the Nineteenth Chapter of Judges Consider and Speak Their Minds"

Due: Midterm paper

Week 9

Tuesday, October 16: Delilah

Read: Judges 16

Lori Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah"

Thursday, October 18: Bathsheba

Read: 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Kings 1

Deryn Guest, "Looking Lesbian at the Bathing Bathsheba"

De'Anna Daniels, "Bathsheba" from *Lady Parts: The Bible and the Vagina Monologues*

Hand out and discuss: Final project prompt

Week 10

Tuesday, October 23: Michal, Abigail, Tamar

Read: 1 Samuel 18-19, 25, 2 Samuel 3:1-16, 6, 13

Thursday, October 25: Jezebel and Athaliah

Read: 1 Kings 16:30-34, 18-19, 21, 2 Kings 9, 11

Josey Bridges Snyder, "Jezebel and Her Interpreters"

Week 11

Tuesday, October 30: Goddesses in Israel? (Yes!)

Read: Jeremiah 44

Guest speaker: Dr. Abla Hasan—The Queen of Sheba in Muslim tradition

Thursday, November 1: Women in the prophetic books

Read: Hosea 1-2, Ezekiel 16 and 23

Bryan Bibb, "There's No Sex in Your Violence"

Meredith Brown, "God's Wife" in *Lady Parts: The Bible and the Vagina Monologues*

Hand out and discuss: Response paper #3 prompt

Week 12

Tuesday, November 6: Song of Songs

Read: Song of Songs 1-8

Donald Polaski, "What Will Ye See in the Shulammitte?"

Hand in: Response paper #3

Thursday, November 8: Woman Wisdom and the Woman of Valor

Read: Proverbs 1-9, 31

Susan Ellman, "A Husband of Valor"

Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "The Good Wife: Who Is a Worthy Woman?"

Week 13

Tuesday, November 13: Ruth

Read: Book of Ruth

Gale Yee, ““She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn””: Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority

Thursday, November 15: Esther

Read: Book of Esther

Renita Weems, “A Crown of Thorns (Vashti and Esther)”

Week 14

Tuesday, November 20: NO CLASS (Society of Biblical Literature conference)

Thursday, November 22: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 15

Tuesday, November 27: Judith and Susanna

Read: Judith 8-16 and Susanna 1

Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, “Biblical Bathing Beauties and the Manipulation of the Male Gaze: What Judith Can Tell Us about Bathsheba and Susanna”

Thursday, November 29: Wrap-up and discussion of final projects

Read: Phyllis Trible, “If the Bible’s So Patriarchal, How Come I Love It?”