



Yeshiva University
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

The Hebrew Bible on the World Stage

BIBL 4931H
Spring 2023

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Office: 215 Lex, 701
Hours: By appt on [Calendy](#)

Course Meeting Info:
CRN 12392
T/TH, 11:50 – 1:05 pm
Location: 215 Lex, 313

Course Description

This course considers how popular/popularized stories from the Hebrew Bible and their interpretative traditions influenced the biblical dramas that emerged from the 12th-century and onward. Due to the concise and compact nature of scripture, playwrights who craft dramas for the public based on biblical narratives must make certain interpretive decisions about how to develop the plot, characters, and dialogue; in doing, they function as both creative writers and commentators, often drawing from their own imaginative powers, personal knowledge of scripture, exegetical traditions, and homiletic. For instance, we can find pathways from Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra's approaches to Bereishis in medieval dramas like *Jeu d'Adam* up through Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Joseph and the Technicolor Dream Coat*. Abarbanel's readings of Yonah and the David and Batsheva episode also shaped dramatized adaptations of these biblical stories designed for Renaissance audiences as a form of public ("secular") entertainment. Such texts invite us to explore the role of the arts and creativity in Tanakh study and pedagogy throughout the ages and into our own time, as well as reflect on the indebtedness of the Western literary tradition to the Hebrew Bible and its exegetical tradition. Taught under the auspices of both the English department and the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, this course will feature occasional guest lectures by affiliated humanities faculty.

Course Materials

Primary Texts

- *Jeu D'Adam* (12th century)
- Lodge and Greene's *A Looking Glass for London* (1589/90)
- Peele's *David and Bethsabe* (1599)
- Lope De Vega's *La Hermosa Ester* (1621)
- Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671)
- Jean Racine's *Esther* (1689)
- DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956)
- Weber's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1972)

(Some of our) Secondary Readings/Selections

- *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* by David Nirenberg
- *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in 17th-Century England* by Achsah Guibbory
- *Enacting the Bible in Medieval and Early Modern Drama* Eds. Goodblatt and Von Contzen
- *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* by Naomi Seidman
- *Hebraica Veritas?: Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* Eds. Coudert and Shoulson
- *Leaves of Faith* by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein
- *One People* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
- *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage* by Michelle Ephraim
- *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi* by Jason Rosenblatt
- *Seventy Faces* by Rabbi Norman Lamm
- *Shaped by Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* by Marshall Gregory
- *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* by Susan Handelman
- *The Bible on the Shakespearean Stage* Eds. Poole and Fulton
- *Additional required readings and viewings will be shared on Canvas.

Course Requirements

Attendance/Active Participation: 10%

Two Reflective Responses: 20% (10% each)

Research Project/Presentation: 30%

Final Exam: 35%

Expectations

Attendance and participation count for 10% of your grade in the course as active and collective engagement is essential for a successful learning experience. Understandably, life happens, and should you need to miss a class you are responsible for making up what you miss by obtaining any materials and notes generated in your absence. Zoom will not be an option. Up to three unexcused absences are allowed, but after that you must have documentation (i.e., medical emergency), to avoid your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade. In the event of an emergency of some kind, I will do my best to support your continued progress in our class. Of course, attendance and participation are not the same thing. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the assigned materials, and explicitly draw on that preparation to propel conversations by posing and responding to questions and stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Participation will make our sessions more productive and will ensure that you develop a "habit" of thinking and communicating creatively and critically at an educated level. For scheduled remote classes on Zoom, keep your camera on to make our learning environment as rich and engaging as possible (and not be marked absent).

In addition to active participation in the classroom, to enhance our discussions, students will contribute two short **reflective written responses** (between 500 – 700 words) to our ongoing discussion forum over the semester (20%). More information will be provided in class. A partnered **research project/presentation** (30%) and **critical essay** (35%) will conclude the semester. More information will be provided in class.

Lastly, we all need to tend carefully to keeping lines of communication open. I will work to challenge you as much as I can without overwhelming you. To support your progress throughout the course, I plan to check in throughout the semester, not only to make sure you're

keeping up with the reading and writing but to make sure that you are doing well. And when you're not, to help you find the support you need. Patience— with oneself and with others— is critical for a successful learning experience.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to uphold the highest levels of academic integrity according to the policy of our university, summarized in the YU academic integrity statement available on the YU website. Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at Yeshiva University. Cheating, forgery (including ChatGPT/AI), dishonest conduct, and plagiarism erode YU's educational, research, and social roles. They devalue the learning experience and its legitimacy not only for the perpetrators but for the entire community. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with YU's [Academic Integrity Statement](#) and abide by it. Since plagiarism is a serious transgression of ethics, any instances of plagiarism will be pursued through the appropriate disciplinary channels and may include receiving a failing grade for the assignment or class. Since this course will require research work and the use of secondary material, you must be aware of your intellectual obligations and take care to document your work diligently. We will discuss academic integrity (and how and why to avoid plagiarism) in class. If you ever have any doubts or questions, please ask.

Academic Support

Academic support is available if you are having any difficulties such as: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life, or general college adjustment. Contact Dr. Beth Hait to make an appointment at: yu2.mywconline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support."

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Library Support

Get all the support you need with research for your courses. The **Yeshiva University Libraries** (library.yu.edu) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Skilled information-seekers succeed academically and in the workplace. Prepare for the future by contacting the library at https://library.yu.edu/ask_the_library You can [schedule an appointment](#), [email](#) a librarian, or [Live Chat](#) for assistance.

Out of Class Assistance

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your progress in the course and address any individual questions/concerns you might have. You are always welcome to email me to set up an appointment.

Schedule of Classes

This class schedule is a "living" document that will be modified as needs dictate throughout the semester. Readings and due dates will be available on Canvas and any alterations will be posted and announced in class. *For each assigned reading from Tanakh, you'll be asked to prepare specific commentaries in advance, which will be announced in class.

Dates	Course Materials
Week 0 Thursday 1/19	Course Introduction Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1*
Week 1 Tuesday 1/24 & Thursday 1/26	Genesis 1 – 4 <i>Jeu D'Adam</i>
Week 2 Tuesday 1/31 & Thursday 2/2	Sefer Jonah <i>A Looking Glass for London</i>
Week 3 Tuesday 2/7 & Thursday 2/9	<i>A Looking Glass for London</i> (continued) 2 Samuel 11 – 19 <i>David and Bethsabe</i>
Week 4 Tuesday 2/14 & Thursday 2/16	<i>David and Bethsabe</i> (continued)
Week 5 Tuesday 2/21 & 2/23	Judges 13 - 16 <i>Samson Agonistes</i>
Week 6 Tuesday 2/28 & 3/2	<i>Samson Agonistes</i> (continued) Esther 1 - 10
Week 7 (No class 3/7, Purim) Thursday 3/9	<i>La Hermosa Ester</i> <i>Racine's Esther</i>
Week 8 Tuesday 3/14 & Thursday 3/16	<i>Racine's Esther</i> (continued) Exodus (selections)
Week 9 Tuesday 3/21 & Thursday 3/23	<i>The Ten Commandments</i>
Week 10 Tuesday 3/28 & Thursday 3/30	<i>The Ten Commandments</i> (continued)
No class 4/4 – 4/16 (Pesach Break)	
Week 11 Tuesday 4/18 & Thursday 4/20	<i>The Ten Commandments</i> (continued) Student Presentations
Week 12 Tuesday 4/25 & 4/27	Student Presentations Genesis 37 - 50 (selections)
Week 13 Tuesday 5/2 & Thursday 5/4	<i>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</i>
Week 14 Tuesday 5/9 & Thursday 5/11	<i>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</i> (continued) Conclusion Final Exam (TBA)