Malbim and Modernity: Syllabus

Semester: Spring 2020
Course Number: JTP-1479-511
Sessions Meet: Thursday, 1.05pm-2.45pm; Furst Hall 304
Instructors: Rabbi Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Description:
The aim of this class is to explore the thought of one of the most well-known Jewish exegetes of the nineteenth century—Malbim—with a heavy emphasis on his historical and intellectual context. We will briefly survey the major intellectual movements of modern Europe, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, through the prism of some of the key texts that defined the respective projects. We will then consider their impact on the role of the Bible in European life generally, and the resulting crises which faced the newly emancipated Jews of Europe. After succinctly examining the attempts of Mendelssohn, Meklenburg, and Hirsch, to protect and conserve Jewish tradition, we will turn to Malbim. The theses of his sermons and the themes of his exegesis will be contrasted with some of the biblically inspired literature of the age—including Lord Byron’s Cain and Rossini’s Moses in Egypt. We will conclude the course with an assessment of how Malbim’s claims have fared over the past one hundred and fifty years.

Evaluation:
Attendance and Participation – 20%
Midterm – 35%
Final – 45%
Week 1: Introduction to Malbim and Modernity
Readings: Judges 11.
   January 23rd: Welcome, Weisser, and Wiesel

Week 2: Modern European Movements
Readings: I. Kant, What is Enlightenment?; J.J. Rousseau, 1st Discourse
   January 30th: Enlightenment and Romanticism

Week 3: The Death of Scripture
Readings: The Limits of Enlightenment (77-107); The Origins of Narrative (Introduction); The Enlightenment Bible (Chapter 6).
   February 6th: The Three Threats—Text, Tradition, Genre

Week 4: Modern Rabbinic Responses
Readings: Mendelssohn—Introduction to Megillat Kobolet and Netivot HaShalom; Meklenburg, Introduction to HaKetav VeHaKabbalah.
   February 13th: Mendelssohn, Meklenburg, and Hirsch

Week 5: Malbim’s Biblical Introductions
Readings: Malbim—Introductions to Isaiah, Song of Songs, and Leviticus.
   February 20th: Saving the Text

Weeks 6: Malbim’s Early Sermons #1
Readings: Malbim—Sermons 1 and 2.
   February 27th: Saving the Mind

Week 7: Early Sermons #2
Readings: Malbim—Sermons 3 and 4.
   March 5th: Saving the Soul

Week 8: Early Sermons #3
Readings: Malbim—Sermons 5 and 6.
   March 12th: Saving the Will

Week 9: Early Sermons #4
Readings: **MIDTERM**
   March 19th: The Problem of Pain

Week 10: Malbim’s Formal Exegesis #1
Readings: Lord Byron, Cain; Genesis 4 (selections), with Malbim.
   March 26th: The Mystery of Cain

Week 11: Exegesis #2
Readings: Laurence Sterne, Sermon VII; Genesis 28 and 32 (selections), with Malbim.
   April 2nd: The Terror of Jacob

Week 12-13: Pesach
Readings: n/a

Week 14: Exegesis #3
Readings: Gioacchino Rossini, Moses in Egypt; Exodus (selections), with Malbim.
   April 23rd: The Spirit of Moses

Week 15: Malbim versus Modernity
Readings: TBD
   April 30th: Where We Stand

Week 16: Final Project
Readings: Review
   May 7th+ Reading Day

Weeks 17-18: **FINAL**