

Gendering the Old Testament

MEL 321 (40775); MES 342 (42140); RS 353 (43195); WGS 340 (46610); JS 363 (39395)

Spring 2015; BEN 1.106; T,Th 11:00–12:30

Professor: Jo Ann Hackett

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Gendering the Old Testament involves, rather obviously, an understanding of both gender and the biblical stories we will read. What makes a character masculine or feminine, besides the obvious factor of the character's biological sex? How do the characters perform their gender? What is involved in assessing gender expectations for ancient people and societies whom we can only know through highly selected and edited literary pieces? Along with questions like these, others come to mind. What previous life and educational experiences lead you to be interested in some characters and stories, but not in others? What can understanding how ancient peoples dealt with biological differences change the way you think about contemporary problems? And what can your experiences bring to the stories and their interpretations of gender?

We will concentrate on a small subset of biblical stories and milk them for all they're worth: the matriarchs and patriarchs in **Genesis**; the many salient stories from the book of **Judges** and the life of **King David**; and the books of **Ruth** and **Esther**. Through secondary readings we will learn of the societies described in the stories, of the differences between the Hebrew original and various English translations, of the contributions studies of more modern and accessible societies can make to our understanding of ancient Israel. We will also take advantage of each other for anything any of us can add to the class materials already assembled. The stories we explore can be unexpectedly bawdy; they are often funny or satirical; they can be surprisingly tragic or deceptive. They can generally be more easily explained and understood when their ancient context is taken into account, and finding that context will be much of the work we do in the course.

Most weeks the class content will follow the two day per week schedule. On most Tuesdays, which will be lecture classes, students will bring to the class meeting the two most pressing questions they have about the week's reading, and the Thursday class will revolve around those questions. For the most part, then, the Thursday class will be a discussion class, including full-class discussions, small-group discussions, and even a debate format.

The **Independent Inquiry** flag provides an opening for a student to become a researcher. Everything about the final presentation should come from the student, although a short list of possible approaches is provided in the syllabus. The student should choose an appropriate topic; find pertinent bibliography; and outline, draft, and create the

presentation based on her/his research. Hence the “**Independent**” modifier. As a realistic check on the **Inquiry**, however, these issues should be discussed with the professor or teaching assistant at every point along the way.

Course Grading and Assignments:

Attendance. Students are expected to attend class, and they will hand in (or more likely email) before class each Tuesday **two** questions from the week’s readings. These questions will determine part of each Thursday’s class discussion. The reviews will count as **10%** of the student’s grade, and participation in class discussion will be another **10%**. Students are allowed two unexcused absences, **until Presentations start at the end of the semester.**

Article reports. Each student will choose an article from a list that will be provided and will produce a **4-page review of the article**: the article should be summarized and critiqued (with both positive and negative comments) and can be related to the student’s final project (but need not be). The report will be judged on the student’s grasp of the article as well as on the student’s writing. This review comprises **20%** of the final course grade.

Final projects. The final project will be a **presentation to the class (around 20 minutes)** that will rely on both the material taught in this course and the previous interest(s) of each student. The presentation might, for instance, use one of the characters discussed in this course and discover his/her later life, as a character in a modern novel or the topic of a work of art. How and how well has the character been represented? Was there an agenda behind the artist’s/writer’s/composer’s use of the character, and if so, what was it? It might instead trace an Old Testament character’s use in the New Testament or early church. Deciding on the topic of the presentation will be different for each student and will be a major part of the project itself. The presentation will be worth **25%** of the student’s grade, and an early draft presentation and bibliography, to be discussed with the professor, will be worth another **10%** of the grade.

Peer reviews. Each student will be given a code name (the name of a biblical character) and under that name will **review every other student’s presentation.** Appropriate forms for the review will be provided, and the accuracy and usefulness of the reviews will be graded and will count for **25%** of the final grade. The peer review will ask the students not only how well the presenter did, but also what the most interesting/enlightening portion of the presentation was as well as how the reviewer could suggest improving it.

Required Textbooks:

an English Bible (the *Harper-Collins Study Bible, Student Edition* has been ordered by the Co-op)

Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*

Grading Scale: I do use + and – grades in this class.

95–100=A; 90–94=A-; 88–89=B+; 83–87=B; 80–82=B-; 75-79=C+;
70-74=C; 68-69=C-; 65-67=D+; 63–64=D; 60–62=D-; below 60=F.

Please refer to <http://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars/11-12/index.html> for information on drop/add deadlines and penalties.

Use of Canvas and e-mail for this class:

All announcements, additional handouts, and additional information for the class will be available on Canvas. Outside of office hours, students may contact me by e-mail, and I, in turn, will use e-mail for contact of students. E-mail has become quite important in the university community, so you must find a way to have access to it several times each day.

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed of changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked several times each day. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

Academic Integrity:

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in class with other students, and we may also use Canvas for such a forum. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

Documented Disability Statement:

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice), 1-866-329-3986 (video phone), or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information: http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php. Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

Please notify the instructor or TA as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL):

If you are worried about someone who is acting in an unusual manner, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual’s behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Q drop Policy:

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

“Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.”

Emergency Evacuation Policy:

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

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Weekly Classes

Readings listed under each week should be done before the Tuesday class.

Week 1: 1/20-22 Introductions to ancient Israel and to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Reading (for Thursday’s class): •Carol Meyers, “An Introduction to the Bible”
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Week 2: 1/27-29 Gender

Readings (to be done in order): •Jo Ann Hackett, “In the Days of Jael,” pp.15–22;
•Diane Richardson, “Conceptualizing Gender”;
•Michael Kimmel, “Introduction: Human Beings, an Endangered Species”

Week 3: 2/3–5 Family Dynamics in Genesis, I

Readings: •Gen 11:27–38:30 (minus chapter 36)
•Ronald Hendel, Chana Kronfeld, and Ilana Pardes, “Gender and Sexuality”;
•Susan Niditch, “Genesis”

Week 4: 2/10–12 Family Dynamics in Genesis, II

Readings: •Re-read Genesis 19; 34; read Judges 19
•Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*

Week 5: 2/17–19 Judges, I

Readings: •Judges 4–12
•Susan Niditch, “Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael”;
•Alice Logan, “Rehabilitating Jephthah”;
•Peggy Day, “From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter”

Week 6: 2/24–26 Judges, II

Readings: •Judges 13–16
•Gregory Mobley, “The Wild Man in the Bible and the ancient Near East”

Assignment Due: 4-page article review

Week 7: 3/3–5 Deity/Deities in ancient Israel

Readings: •Deut 16:21; Judg 6:25–26; 1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Kgs 21:1–7
•Handouts from Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions;
•William Dever, “Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet Ajrud”

Week 8: 3/10–12 Ruth

Readings: •Ruth
•Eunny Lee, “Ruth the Moabite: Identity, Kinship, and Otherness”

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: 3/24–26 Esther

Readings: •Esther
TBA

Assignment Due before class on Tuesday: Draft #1 of Presentation, plus bibliography; half-hour consultation with Dr. Hackett sometime this week

Week 10: 3/31–4/2 The Life and Times of King David, I

Readings: •1 Samuel 16–2 Kings 2
•Steven Weitzman, Review of three books about David

Week 11: 4/7–9 The Life and Times of King David, II

Readings: •1 Samuel 8–15
•Yaron Peleg, “Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender”;
•Mark George, “Yhwh’s Own Heart”

Week 12: 4/14–16 The Life and Times of King David, III

Readings: •Jon Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History”;
•John Kessler, “Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Misplaced Husband in the Books of Samuel”

Weeks 13, 14, 15 Presentations and Peer Reviews