

God, Beauty, and the Body
Jewish Literature of Muslim Spain
Religion 330

Marla Segol
Ladd 207

Fall 2011
TH 3:40-5:30

Office hours: M: 4:20-5:30; W 10-11 a.m.

Course Description:

This course is about religion, bodies, and beauty. Specifically, it focuses on medieval ideas about the human relation to the material world, to the embodied self and to other bodies as a site for human relation to the divine, and aesthetics, or the conditions for appreciating and valuing these relations. We'll examine Hebrew and Arabic literature of Muslim Spain, because of its emphasis on these themes, because of its importance to the formation of medieval European culture, and to modern conceptions about embodiment and beauty.

These attitudes are produced and articulated in three important ways in this time and place: by government and the material conditions it creates (economics and law), by philosophy, and by literature. The system of government 'produces' both community and body. Philosophy theorizes human identity in relation to God, to the material world, and to other bodies. Poetry and belletristic literature animate these concepts and set them in motion, experimenting with them by trying them out in imagined situations. This course will focus on the second two categories, philosophy and literature.

The conceptions emerging in the religious literature of Muslim Spain persist in contemporary culture. We will pay attention to the way that these concerns carry over into contemporary discourse on embodiment, sexuality, and beauty in contemporary religious thought.

Getting in touch:

My office hours are Wednesdays from 4:30-5:30, and Mondays from 1-2 in 215 Ladd Hall or by appointment.

Required Texts:

1. Raymond Scheindlin: *Wine, Women, and Death*
2. Raymond Scheindlin: *The Gazelle*
3. Lenn Evan Goodman: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*
4. Jane Gerber: *Jews of Spain*
5. Reeve: Plato on Love
6. Aaron Hughes: *Texture of the Divine*

Coursepack, distributed in class

Course Requirements:

1. Participation (10%) You know what to do. Read everything. Think, ask, listen, talk.
2. Reading and topic selection. You will choose one reading ideally related to your final paper, and you will lead discussion that day. You'll also assign the reading question, in consultation with me, two weeks before the day you present.
3. Seminar Paper (15%). Each student will lead a class discussion on the reading related to his or her topic research topic. Each discussion leader will need to prepare a "seminar paper" which will guide the discussions. All seminar papers will be sent to the class list two full days prior to the presentation. All students are expected to print these out and to bring them to class with their own questions and comments.
4. Reading Responses x3 (5 points each for a total of 15%).
5. Annotated Bibliography (10%) The bibliography should contain at least ten to fifteen sources, depending on your topic. It should contain a mix of primary sources, and secondary sources such as books, book chapters, and scholarly articles. Some of you will probably also use interviews as primary and secondary sources.
6. Final Paper (50%) It will be 15-20 pages long. We'll talk about it. At length.

Assignment Deadlines

1. Reading responses due 9/22; 10/25; 12/1 (15% total)
2. Seminar Paper topics due 9/27
3. Preliminary thesis & annotated bibliography, due 11/17 (10%)
4. Final paper due 12/14: (50%)

Reading Schedule:

Unit 1: Our Preoccupations with the Body

9/8

1. Bryan S. Turner "Body," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2006, vol 23 (CP1)
 2. Turner: "Social Fluids: Metaphors and Meanings of Society" *Body & Society* 2003; 9.1 (CP2)
- What is our interest in the body, according to Turner? How has it changed over time? How does the body signify to us? Does this make sense?

9/13: Ancient and Late Antique Sources on the Body

1. Plato on Love, xi-xxviii
2. Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes.
3. Phaedrus, speech 1

In these two speeches, what is their approach to function of beauty and love?

9/15:

1. Phaedrus, speech 2 till the end

Compare this third speech to the first two. Try to theorize the relation between love and Socrates' distrust of poetry and other forms of non-discursive writing.

9/20

1. Ariel and Chana Bloch: *Song of Songs*, intro plus chapters 1-4

9/22

1. *Song of Songs II*, chapters 5-8.
2. Boyarin: *Carnal Israel*: Ch 2: The Evil Instinct is Very Good, pp 61-76 (CP3)

How does the *Song of Songs* theorize love? How does it theorize the body? What are their respective functions, and how are they related to each other?

Now: Compare Plato's writing and *Song of Songs* in terms of their attitudes toward love, beauty, and literary writing. You'll need to do some extrapolating here, since *Song of Songs* does not talk about writing per se. You should do this by paying attention to style.

Paper 1 due 9/22

9/27

Theorizing Religion and the Body

Stephen P. Hopkins: "Extravagant Beholding: Love, Ideal Bodies, and Particularity." *History of Religions*, 2007, vol. 47. 1 (CP4)

Use Hopkins to discuss the relationship between the human body and the divine in the primary source materials we've read so far, paying particular attention to the role of beauty.

Seminar Paper topics due now.

9/29: Rosh HaShanah, no class

10/4- 10/6: History!

Gerber, chapters 1-4.

Come in with questions please.

Unit 2: Philosophy

10/11: Intro to Jewish Theologies on Embodiment

1. Joel Kramer: "Islamic Background of Jewish Philosophy." From *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (CP5)
2. Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, Chapter 4, pp 86-100. (CP6)

10/13 Saadya

1. Saadya Gaon: *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*: Chapters 2 and 6: "The Unity of the Creator" and "On the Nature of the Soul" (CP7)

According to Saadya, why can't God have a body? How does Saadya define body and soul? What are his ideas about the relation between them? What does this mean practically for those subscribing to his views?

10/18 Bahya

1. Bahya Ibn Pakuda: from *Duties of the Heart*: Chapters 2 and 9: "Meditation on Creation," and "On Asceticism: Its Kinds and Advantages" (CP8)

According to Bahya, what is the value of the created world, and what is accomplished by meditating on it? What sorts of theories of beholding and of embodiment are implicit in Bahya's ideas about these things? What are the advantages of asceticism, and how does this use and adapt the theories of beholding and embodiment described in chapter 2?

10/20

- A. *Keter Malchut*, (Kingly Crown) from Cole, *The Poetry of Ibn Gabirol* (CP9)

Paper 2 due 10/25

Is the medium the message? Compare ibn Gabirol's ideas about the nature of creation to those of other Jewish philosophers we've read so far. In doing so, pay attention to the ways in which he theorizes the human body. Does the poetry treat it differently than the philosophy?

10/25: catch-up, wrap-up, planning projects

10/27

1. Aaron Hughes: *Texture of the Divine*: pp 1-47

11/1

1. Goodman: Ibn Tufayl: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, pp 3-6, pp 95-166

For this class, we'll discuss up to p. 134

What sort of anthropology does this story communicate? How does it treat the body? What is the role of aesthetics? What sorts of mothers are there in this story and why does this matter?

11/3

Hayy ibn Yaqzan, continued, 134-end

11/8

1. Hughes, *Hayy ben Meqitz*: pp189-209.

2. Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve*, chapter 4. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003 (CP10)

Compare to *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

What are the functions of beauty, the body and the senses in the *Hayy* materials we've read so far?

11/10:

Hughes, Chapter 2: Reading Between the Lines: Text as Encounter with the Divine

How does this help us think about the reception of the texts we've read so far? What might they have meant to their medieval readers, and how is that different and similar to the way it might mean to contemporary readers?

11/15: *Hayy* wrap-up

Hughes, chapter 5

11/17

Paper discussion seminar: Preliminary theses and annotated bibliographies due today!!!

DO NOT miss this day!

11/22 Unit 3: Poetry

1. Michael Sells: on Love, from *Literature of Al-Andalus*, pp 127-58 (CP11)

2. Philip Kennedy: *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry*, Chapter 2: Love, Wine, Sodomy, and the Lash: pp29-73 (CP12)

How do Abu Nuwas' aesthetics compare to those in the texts we've read so far, and to those described by Sells? Is there a sacred/profane distinction, how do we know, and what does it matter?

Thanksgiving Break: 11/23-27

11/29

1. Scheindlin: *Wine, Women, Death*: Introduction, pp 3-33
2. Scheindlin: Women: pp. 77-134. You are only required to read the poems. Read the explanations if you want but it is not required.

12/1: Piyyut

1. The Gazelle: Intro, pp33-70; poems only to 105

How does the *piyyut* differ from the love poem? How do we know it's meant to be sacred? And is there a difference in the way these treat the created world?

Paper 3 due today: This is a VERY MINI paper- 2 paragraphs only. But I want it anyway, and you will get full credit for it.

12/6 Zohar

1. From Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*: "Blessing," p 433
2. The Origin of the Soul and the Origin of the Body, pp778-82
Images of Man, pp 787-9

(CP13, both)

12/8

Wrap-up:

1. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimlet: The Corporeal Turn (CP14)
2. BIG Question: Discuss the movement of bodies and beauty from secular to sacred discourse.

Final papers due 12/14

Assignment Guidelines

Mini-Papers (5% each, 15% total)

There are three, placed at key junctures in the course in order to encourage you to synthesize the material. Ideally these should be three paragraphs long, and they should cut straight to the chase. They should make your argument, briefly provide examples, and draw a conclusion. The point is to think and to argue clearly and briefly.

Seminar Papers: (20%)

They should last approximately half the class time.

These are meant to be the jumping-off point for your final papers.

They pose a question central to the work we're studying, and one that helps you pursue your interest in that particular source.

1. First, in preparation for your seminar presentation, meet with me two weeks prior to your presentation.
2. Next, decide upon your discussion questions, and circulate them one week in advance, by email.
3. For your presentation, you will present relevant background to the material.
4. Then you will present your discussion question, and break that question down into its constituent parts.
5. For each of the parts of the question, you will provide references to the text relevant to that question. For example, if you want to know about the different meanings attributed to the gazelle in poetry, you provide the names of the poems that discuss it, along with page and line numbers. With your guidance,

the class will draw their own conclusions about this. You can consider them while writing your final paper.

6. Do the same for each part of the question.

7. Draw some conclusions, ask some questions for further discussion if you'd like.

8. That's it. You're done.

Annotated Bibliography (10%)

The bibliography should contain at least ten to fifteen sources, depending on your topic. It should contain a mix of primary sources, and secondary sources such as books, book chapters, and scholarly articles.

Besides bibliographical information, each entry should contain a paragraph explaining three things:

1. The main argument of the source.
2. The way the author develops the argument (what are the sources, how are they used, what is the methodology?)
3. What good is it to you? You should explain how this source will help you write your paper.

Final Paper (50%)

The final paper should be 15-20 pages long. It should be thematically related to material we've studied in this course. We will talk about this.

Goals for the Paper:

- 1) write an essay that is clear, well-organized, and driven by a specific thesis relevant to the paper's topic.
- 2) effectively utilize primary and secondary source to develop the paper's argument
- 3) define and properly use technical terms and concepts
- 4) make distinctions between the presentation of relevant data and/or arguments made by others and the critical analysis of these materials.
- 5) accurately apply theoretical models and/or disciplinary methods to specialized content.