

From Scribalism to Torah-Telling: Bible Performance through the Ages
RRC/ Spring 2011
Elsie R. Stern

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the wide range of ways in which biblical texts and traditions have been performed and otherwise “brokered” for popular Jewish audiences from Ancient Israelite times to the present. The course will begin with an exploration of orality and textuality in ancient Israel and biblical literature. We will then explore examples of some of the main genres of biblical performance and text-brokering throughout history, including translation, poetry, preaching and alternative versions. We will end with an exploration of contemporary modes of biblical performance. Throughout the course, our focus will be two-fold. The course is designed to introduce students to past examples of text-brokering and also to engage them in the experience of biblical performance, both as text-brokers and as audience member. I hope that immersion in the aural experience of torah will broaden our understanding of the nature and content of torah for Jews both past and present.

Goals:

The course is designed to:

Introduce students to the concepts of orality, textuality and text-brokering in the context of the Hebrew Bible.

Introduce students to examples of biblical text-brokering and oral performance of torah from Jewish history and from the present.

Immerse students in the experience of torah as an oral/aural phenomenon

Explore how our experience and understanding of “scriptural” material changes when we experience it aurally through traditional text-brokered genres.

Objectives:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the relevance of the ideas of orality, textuality and “text-brokering” to our understanding of torah.
2. Identify three genres of biblical text-brokering and identify at least one example of each.
3. Perform at least two genres of biblical text-brokering
4. Articulate what happens in aural (vs reading) encounters with biblical material
5. Articulate how the experience of performing biblical material and experiencing biblical material aurally has changed their own relationship to torah as a phenomenon.

Class Process

Our exploration of each topic will have two parts. In the first week, we will discuss the topic at hand in an academic mode: students will prepare the assigned readings and we will discuss them in class. I will also give mini-lectures as needed to introduce students to the material. In the second week, students will perform examples of the genre that we studied. Some of these performances will be of pre-existing material, others will be original compositions. We will then use these performances as opportunities to reflect on the experience of the given genre. We will stagger the topics so that each week will consist of the performance of the previous genre and the academic exploration of the next. We will also go on one field trip and hopefully have two guest speakers who are contemporary Bible performers.

Requirements:

Students are expected to come to class weekly and prepare all assigned readings.

Students will each perform three times during the semester: one performance of a pre-existent text; one original composition and a final performance of your choosing.

Students will also either write a paper or prepare an oral discourse about a topic or text related to the course. This will be due during finals week.

Class Schedule

All classic Jewish texts are in the library. All other texts are on infoserive unless they are marked with an *. I will provide these texts for students.

Weeks 1-4: Orality and the Tanakh

Week 1: Intro: Literacy and Orality: Theory and Ancient Near Eastern Evidence

- Carr, David. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York Oxford University Press, 2005), 3- 14; (17-46, rec).
- Jaffee, Martin, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-38.
- Toorn, Karel van der, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-73
- Niditch, Susan, *Oral World and Written Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 108-34.

Week 2: Orality in textuality: Ancient Israelite Poetry I

Ex 15; Ps 136, 150

t. Sotah 6:2; b. Sotah 30b

- Niditch, *Oral World*, 1-38.

Week 3: Orality in textuality: Ancient Israelite Poetry II

Ps. 78, 105, 106, 135, 136

*Lord, Albert. *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 13-29.

Week 4: Telling Stories I: Type scenes and story types

Gen 24:1-49; Gen 29: 1-14; Exod 2:16-20 (well scenes)

Exod 14-15; Jos 3; Ps. 114 (water crossings)

Exod 15: 22-5; 2K 2: 19-22; 2K 4: 1-5, 38-41 (Food and water miracles)

- Alter, Robert, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (NY: Basic Books, 1981), 47-62.

Week 5-6 Texts and Torot

Week 5: Texts and Torot I: Other Versions

The Akedah:

Jubilees 17:15-18:19 (Charlesworth, James, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (NY: Doubleday, 1985), 90-1.

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1, ch. 13

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=J.+AJ+1.13.&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146>

The Shechem incident:

Jubilees 30 (Charlesworth, II:112-3)

Testament of Levi 1-8 (Charlesworth, I: 788-91)

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. W. Whiston, ed., 1:21:1

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=J.+AJ+1.21&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146>

Joseph in Egypt:

Jubilees 39-41 (Charlesworth, II, 128-30)

Joseph and Aseneth 1-21 (Charlesworth, II, 202-38)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 2:36

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=J.+AJ+2.3&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146>

Week 6: Texts and torot II: First Person Torot (pun intended)

Life of Adam and Eve (Charlesworth, 267-87, odd pages only)

- **Twain, Mark**, “The diary of Adam and Eve,” *The Diary of Adam and Eve and Other Adamic Stories* (London: Hesperus Press, 2002),
- **Clifton, Lucille**, “Tree of Life,” *Quilting: Poems 1987-1990* (Brockport, NY: BOA Editions, 1991), 71-80.

Week 7-10: Seder Kriat Hatorah

Week 7: Framing Torah: Rules and Liturgy for Seder Kriat Hatorah

m. Meg 3:4-4:10

Soferim 13-14

- **Perrot, Charles**. “The Reading of the Bible in the Ancient Synagogue.” Pp. 137-60 in M. Mulder and H. Sysling, eds. *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004)
- **Langer, Ruth**. “From Study of Scripture to a Reenactment of Sinai : The Emergence of the Synagogue Torah Service,” *Worship* 72:1 (1998): 43-67.

Week 8: Targum and other Jewish Bible Translations

Gen 4 in: MT; *Targum Onkelos*; *Targum Jonathan*; *Septuagint*, Fox, Everett, *Five Books of Moses*; Alter, Robert, *Five Books of Moses*.

Weekly Midrash (Tz'edah ur'edah), N. Scherman and M. Zlotowitz, eds. (NY: Mesorah Publications, 1994), 1:41-5.

- Alexander, Philip, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures,” *Mikra*, M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2004), 225-41.
- Fraade, Stephen. “Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third-Sixth Centuries.” In *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, L. Levine, ed., (NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 253-86.
- Shinan, Avigdor, “Sermons, Targums and the Reading from Scriptures in the Ancient Synagogue.” Pps. 97-110 in L. Levine, ed. *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (NY:ASOR, 1987). (rec)
- Buber, Martin and Rosenzweig, Franz, *Scripture and Translation*, L. Rosenwald with E.Fox, trans. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994), 40-6; 73-89; 166-71; 205-19.
- Alter, *Five Books*, xvii-xlv.

If you don't have enough time to do all the readings listed for this week, you can choose either the Alter or the Buber-Rosenzweig. As a group, please make sure that you are dividing up relatively evenly between the two.

Week 9: Preaching or Biblical epics:

PRK 22, Passages from PRK cited in Anisfield, *Sustain with me Raisin-Cakes*

Or

Excerpts from *Bereshit-Nameh* (14th c. Judeo-Persian biblical epic) in Moreen, Vera, *In Queen Esther's Garden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 26-55.

*Old Yiddish Biblical Epics

- Anisfield, Rachel, *Sustain me With Raisin-Cakes: Pesikta d-Rav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 45-66.
- *Stern, Elsie, *From Rebuke to Consolation*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 2005), 98-111.

Week 10: Poetry I

Eleazar Kallir's Piyyutim for Vatomer Tzion

Stern, *From Rebuke to Consolation*, 137-54.

Lieber, Laura, the Rhetoric of Participation: The Experiential Elements of Early Hebrew Liturgical Poetry.” *Journal of Religion* 90 (2010): 332-55.

Week 11: Poetry II Field Trip!

Texts TBD

Weeks 12-13: Modern Bible Performance

Week 12: Modern Bible performance I: Audio Bibles and Scripture Performance

Assignments TBD

Week 13: Modern Bible Performance II: Story-telling and Bibliodrama
Assignments TBD

Exam week: Performance party and conclusion