

## Love and Romance in Pre-Modern Jewish Culture

Dr. Caroline Gruenbaum

Spring 2021

### ***Course Description***

This course explores the fascinating body of love stories and romance in medieval Jewish culture, written mostly between the tenth and fourteenth centuries across the Mediterranean basin and Christian Europe in a variety of languages. This corpus includes poetry, narratives, folktales, philosophical texts and chivalric romance. From magical herbs to men dressed in women's clothing, these entertaining stories challenge our perceptions of medieval Jewish culture as a place only of religious observance and rabbinic stringency.

In these stories, "love" appears in various forms with some repeating characteristics, such as the objectification of the female body, a woman's duplicity, or the happy marriage between two suitable partners. Men are alternatively the victims and the perpetrators of horrific acts done in the name of love. Through a close reading of these texts in English translation, students will understand the complexities of love, marriage, and romance in medieval Jewish literary culture. No previous knowledge of Judaism, Hebrew, or medieval literature is expected.

Medieval Jewish culture appears in Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, Judeo-French, Yiddish, and other vernacular languages, which challenges any preconceived notions of medieval Judaism as monolithic. Many aspects of Jewish love poetry and literature stem from non-Jewish sources, especially through Arabic and French sources. This course will emphasize the importance of an interdisciplinary approach when discussing Jewish culture, paying close attention to places of innovation and reinterpretation. Students will emerge with a new perspective on the wide-reaching networks of medieval literature across religious, geographical, and cultural boundaries.

### ***Required Texts***

- 1) Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*
- 2) All other readings will be posted on course website

### ***Requirements and Evaluation***

There are 2 Short Papers (20% and 25%), 1 Long Paper (35%), and Class Participation (20%) that count toward the final grade calculation.

2 Short Papers (the first one is worth 20% and the second worth 25%) – Each short paper (3-4 pages) should be an analysis/response to a specific primary text (a poem, a philosophical text, a fictional narrative) that we read in class. Your goal is to offer a close reading that shows engagement with the text. Support your reading with textual references.

1 Long Paper (35% of final grade) – This is a research paper (6-8 pages) in which you may pursue a topic of your choice. You may choose to expand upon a subject that we cover in class or develop your own topic. Research topics must be discussed with the professor. The research paper is due on the scheduled date of the final exam.

Class Participation (20% of final grade) – You are expected to come to class well prepared and ready to discuss topics for the day and general themes of the course. There are additional opportunities to contribute to this grade including: leading discussions, meeting with the professor, or communicating on the course website.

### ***Other Policies***

*Academic Honesty:* Students must adhere to the University of Florida guidelines of plagiarism and academic honesty.

*Students with documented disabilities:* Students with disabilities certified by the appropriate university department will be given all necessary accommodations.

*Online Accommodations:* If this course is held online, the expectation is to run synchronous Zoom meetings that will operate as a discussion seminar. There will be additional opportunities to participate over discussion boards and email forums.

## *Schedule of Assignments*

### Week 1: Introduction to Hebrew Love

- A. *Song of Songs* chapters 1, 4

### I: Southern Europe and Mediterranean

### Week 2: Poetry and Literature in the Arabic Tradition (“*adab*”)

- A. “Ghazal” entry from the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*
- B. Selection of poems:
  - a. ‘Alqama, “Is What You Knew Kept Secret,” translation by Michael Sells
  - b. Umar Ibn Abi Rabia, translation by A.J. Arberry
  - c. Love Poems from al-Andalus, translations by Cola Franzen
  - d. *Classical Poems by Arab Women: A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Abdullah al-Udhari (London: Saqi Books, 1999)

### Week 3: Wine as Lover

- A. Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women and Death*, introduction and chapter 1.

### Week 4: Women and Death

- A. *Wine, Women, and Death* chapters 2-3.
- B. Poem by the wife of Dunash ben Labrat, published in Sarah J. Pearce, “Bracelets Are for Hard Times ...” *Cultural History* 3:2 (2014).

### Week 5: Homosexual Love?

- A. Jefim Schirmann, “The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry”, *Sefarad* (15: 1955), 55-68.
- B. Norman Roth, “Deal Gently with the Young Boy: Homoeroticism in Medieval Hebrew Poetry,” *Speculum* 57 (1982).

### Week 6: Men and Women in Disguise

- A. The *Maqamat* of Badī‘al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, Book VI.
- B. Judah al-Harizi, *Takhemoni*, Book 19. Trans. Segal. Oxford: Littman, 2003.

### Week 7: Marriage Gone Wrong

- A. Judah ibn Shabbetai, "Judah the Misogynist" (trans. Raymond Scheindlin in *Rabbinic Fantasies*, New Haven: Yale, 1990, pp. 269-294).
- B. Judah al-Harizi, "Of One Too Swiftly Sped to the Marriage Bed," in *Takhemoni* (trans. David Segal, Oxford: 2003).

#### Week 8: Women as Philosophy, Wisdom and God

- A. Raymond Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*, introduction and selections.
- B. Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature*, chapter 4.

#### Week 9: Love in Folktales

- A. *Mishle Sendebār/The Seven Sages of Rome*, trans. Morris Epstein. Philadelphia, JPS: 1967.
- B. "The Barber's Wife" from *Kalila and Dimna*

#### Week 10: Sonnets and Love Poetry

- A. Selections from Immanuel ha-Romi
- B. Andalusian-Hebrew wedding poetry
- C. Romance sonnets

### III: France, Germany, England (Ashkenaz)

#### Week 11: Wives as Saints and Martyrs

- A. R. Eleazer of Worms, "Elegy to Dulcia" (trans. Judith Baskin in *Judaism in Practice*, Princeton: 2001, pp.433-437).
- B. "Rachel and her Children" from Solomon ben Samson's *Chronicle* (trans. Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315-1791*, New York: 1938, 115-120).

#### Week 12: Jewish Romance

- A. *Melekh Artus* (trans. Curt Leviant, 2003)
- B. Hebraico-French Wedding Song. Trans. Kirsten Fudeman, "They Have Ears, But Do Not Hear ..." *JQR* (4:2006), 542-567.



Week 13: Folktales of Love and Romance

- A. "The Poor Bachelor and his Rich Maiden Cousin"
- B. "The Gate to Hell"
- C. "A Slave for Seven Years,"
- D. "Johanan and the Scorpion"--- **all** trans. Rella Kushelevsky. *Tales in Context: Sefer ha-Ma'asim in Medieval Northern France*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017.

Week 14: Yiddish Romance

- A. *Duke Horant*
- B. *Vidvilt* – **all** trans. Frakes, *Old Yiddish Epic*, Syracuse, 2014. p. 159-237

Week 15: New Beginnings

- A. *Elia Levita Bachur's Bovo-Buch: A Translation of the Old Yiddish Edition of 1541 with Introduction and Notes* by Elia Levita Bachur, translated and notes by Jerry C. Smith, Fenestra Books, 2003.