



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

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 Kohelet* 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**