

Gender and the Body in Yiddish Literature // Jewish Studies 39L

Instructor: Anna Elena Torres ~ anna.torres@berkeley.edu

W 2-4 p.m., 201 Giannini, Fall 2015

Office hours: Melo Melo cafe (1701 University Ave at McGee), Thursday noon-2pm



This course will explore the representation of the body and gender in Yiddish literature, particularly engaging with questions of race, disability, and religiosity. Literature will span both religious and secular texts, from medieval memoir to 20th Century experimental poetry. Using gender theory as a lens into the world of Yiddish writing, we will encounter medieval troubadours and healers, spirit possession, avant-garde performance. . .

Familiarity with Yiddish is not required. All literature will be in English translation. Any students of Yiddish are also invited to read the texts in the original.

Required Texts

Course reader, available at Instant Copying and Laser Printing (ask for Arnon)

Celia Dropkin, *The Acrobat*, transl. by Faith Jones, Jennifer Kronovet, and Samuel Solomon, 2014

God of Vengeance, Sholem Asch. Translated by Donald Margulies.

Glikl. *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*. Translation by Lowenthal (1977 edition)

Students should also consult the *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, a tremendous online resource: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/default.aspx>

Course Objectives:

This course is an introduction to Yiddish literature and theories of gender, disability, and embodiment. The readings combine primary and secondary source materials, chosen to offer a taste of the breadth of styles and genres within Yiddish literature.

Students are required to complete all readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss them in a respectful manner with their fellow students. Attendance in the first three weeks is especially important, both because we will be laying the intellectual groundwork for the course, and to ensure that you maintain an enrolled spot. (We have a full waiting list.)

Students are required to give one presentation during the semester related to the course topic, to be discussed in advance with the instructor in office hours. These presentations should include an introduction to the week's author (consult the JWA encyclopedia or YIVO); summarize the key aspects of primary texts and secondary articles; then ask three questions to begin discussion. Those questions should also be sent ahead of time via bCourses to guide others' readings and preparation. Successful, exciting presentations bring together theoretical insights (especially from the secondary materials) with original readings of primary sources.

Attendance is mandatory. Students who miss class are required to write a 3-page summary of that week's readings to make up the absence.

There will be one midterm. Students are also required to write a research paper due at the conclusion of the course (approx. 15 pages). Topics for the paper should be discussed well in advance of the deadline with the instructor. Students will be required to write an abstract for the paper in advance, as well as turn in an annotated bibliography.

If you need accommodations for any physical, psychological, or learning disability, please speak to me after class or during office hours.

Week 1 – Gendering Modern Yiddish

“Once I Was a Lad” / *“Ikh bin geven a mol a yingling”* — Anna Margolin

Shmuel Niger. *“Di yidische literatur un di lezerin”* (Yiddish Literature and the Female Reader; 1913)

A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Yiddish and Hebrew Intro and Ch 1. Naomi

Seidman. (Note: full book's text is available to students via Oskicat online for free.)

Week 2 – Gender and Virtue in Old Yiddish

“Virtuous Joseph” (“Yosef ha-tsadik”). In Frakes, *Early Yiddish Epic*.

Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*. Introduction and Part I.

OPTIONAL: Diane Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish: Gender, Identity, and Memory in the Illustrated Yiddish Books of Renaissance Italy*. Intro, Chapter 6.

Week 3 – Gendering the Soul

S. An-sky — *The Dybbuk* (film)

Agi Legutko — “Feminist Dybbuks: Spirit Possession Motif in Post-Second Wave Jewish Women’s Fiction.” *Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal*

OPTIONAL: The following two chapters are from *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Matt Goldish. Wayne State University Press, 2003

“Possession and Exorcism in the Magical Texts of the Cairo Geniza,” Jonathan Seidel

“The Taming of the Deviants and Beyond: An Analysis of Dybbuk Possession and Exorcism in Judaism,” Yoram Bilu.

Novel by Ellen Galford — *The Dyke and the Dybbuk*

Week 4 – Film and Queer Studies

Films: *American Matchmaker* (*Amerikaner Shaḏkhn*) and *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (clips)

Eve Sicular, “Outing the Archives: From the Celluloid Closet to the Isle of Klezbos.” In *Queer Jews* (eds. Shneer and Aviv)

Irena Klepfisz, “*Etlekhe verter oyf mame-loshn*/A few words in the mother-tongue,” poem from *A Few Words in the Mother Tongues: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)*, Eight Mountain Press, 1993

Eve Sedgwick, “The Epistemology of the Closet,” in [*The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*](#)

Illustration by E. M. Lilien for Morris Rosenfeld’s “Ghetto Songs”



Week 5 —

Gender Multiplicities

God of Vengeance, Sholem Asch.

Translated by Donald Margulies.

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert — "Regulating the Human Body: Rabbinic Discourse and the Making of Jewish Gender"

Fonrobert, “Gender Duality and Its Subversion in Rabbinic Law.” In *Gender in Judaism and Islam: Common Lives, Uncommon Heritage*.

OPTIONAL: Anne Fausto-Sterling — “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” and “The Five Sexes, Revisited.”

Warren Hoffman. “Androgynous Tales: Gender Ambiguity in the Short Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer.” In *The Passing Game: Queering Jewish American Culture*.

Week 6 — Disability

Sholem Aleichem, *Dos Naye Kasrilevke* (selection)

Introduction and Chapter 1. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Mitchell and Snyder

Sunny Yudkoff, "Tubercular Capital: American Yiddish Literature at the Sanatorium"

Week 7 – Modern Masculinities

Chaim Grade, selection from *Tsemakh Atlas / The Yeshiva*

"Chaim Grade," cartoon by Harvey Pekar and illustrated by Sharon Rudahl. In *Yiddisbkeit: Jewish Vernacular and the New Land*.

Interview on Jews, Hasidic audiences, and wrestling in interwar Poland. Eddie Portnoy, curator of YIVO exhibit "Yiddish Fight Club."

<http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/audio/jewish-roots-yiddish-fight-club>

Meyshe Kulbak, *Dizner childe barolde* (trans. Robert Adler Peckerar)

OPTIONAL: David Assaf, "[My Tiny, Ugly World: The Confession of Rabbi Yitzhak Nahum Twersky of Shpikov](#)," *Contemporary Jewry*, 26 (2006), pp. 1-34

Week 8 – Glikl

Glikl. *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*. Translation by Lowenthal (1977 edition)

In-class film clips from Jenny Romaine and Great Small Works theater: *Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln/Zikhroynes Glikl*

JWA Encyclopedia entry by Chava Turniansky: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/glueckel-of-hameln>

Week 9 – Anna Margolin and Celia Dropkin



Jenny Romaine (as Gluckel), Roberto Rossi (as her first husband, Chaim), and their twelve children (puppets by Clare Dolan), in Great Small Works' *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln/Zikhroynes Glikl*, directed by Jenny Romaine, created and conceived by Jenny Romaine, Adrienne Cooper, and Frank London, performed in Toronto in 1999. This adaptation of a seventeenth-century Yiddish memoir, written by a Jewish woman living in northern Germany, was performed in a mixture of English and Yiddish. At performances of the play in New York City's LaMaMa E.T.C. the following year, bilingual lyrics to the production's songs were sold as broadsides to the audience.

Photograph by N. Bereket. Courtesy of Great Small Works.

Anna Margolin, poetry selection in course reader.

Celia Dropkin, *The Acrobat*, transl. by Faith Jones, Jennifer Kronovet, and Samuel Solomon, 2014

Kathryn Hellerstein, "The Art of Sex." In *A Question of Tradition: Women Poets in Yiddish, 1586-1987*

Zohar Weiman Kelman, chapter from dissertation: "What to Expect When You're Not Expecting: Resisting Futurity through Hebrew and Yiddish Women's Poetry"

Week 10 – Motherhood, Domesticity and Birth Narratives

Selections by Malka Lee, Dropkin, and Schumiatcher Hirschbein, translated by Ri Turner and others.

Dvoyre Fogel, "Circular Landscapes."

Kadya Molodovskaya, "Froyen-lider," from Hellerstein, *Paper Bridges*

Zehavit Stern, "The Idealized Mother and Her Discontents: Performing Maternity in Yiddish Film Melodrama," in *Choosing Yiddish*

Malka Heifetz Tussman: "Widowhood" and "Cellars and Attics" poems in course reader

Week 11 – Race, Representation, and Yiddish "Translations" of Black Experience

"Salute," Moyshe-Leyb Halpern. In *Sing, Stranger*.

Yankev Glatshsteyn, "Zing Ladino"

"Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science: Max Weinreich's Trip to Tuskegee, 1932." Jennifer Young. In *Choosing Yiddish*.

Marc Caplan – "Yiddish Exceptionalism: Lynching, Race, and Racism in Opatoshu's *Lintsberay*"

Merle Lyn Bachman. "American Yiddish Poetry's Encounter with Black America," *Shofar*: Vol. 21, No. 1, Special Issue: Jewish Poetry (FALL 2002), pp. 3-24

Week 12 — Gender in Socialist, Communist and Anarchist Social Movements

“Freydke,” poems by Kadya Molodowsky, 1935-6, Warsaw. In *Paper Bridges*.

Meyshe Kulbak, *Zelmenyaners* (wedding chapter)

Dovid Edelshtat, “Worker Women” (“*Arbeter Froyen*”) text. Sung by Adrienne Cooper and Amanda (Miryam-Khaye) Seigel: <https://vimeo.com/40158512>

“Yiddish is My Homeland” chapter from *Immigrants Against the State*, Kenyon Zimmer

Image from “Berele,” children’s book about “a poor boy raised to struggle.”



Week 13 — Yiddish Dance and Embodiment

Tsilye Dropkin, “A Dancer.”

Short story in *Found Treasures*.

Zvi Friedhaber, “The Bride and Her Guests: The Dance with the Separating Kerchief.” In Judith Brin Ingber, *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*

YIVO article on Hasidic dance

(<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hasidism/Dance>)

OPTIONAL: Kathy Peiss, chapter on dance halls, in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*

Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* — chapter describing Elka’s wedding and simkhe tantstn (Access digital edition through Oskicat)

Performance clip — TBD



Tańczący chasydzi (Dancing Hasidim). Maurycy Gottlieb, ca. 1875. Pencil on paper.
(Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw)

Week Fourteen – The Animal and the Human

Meyshe Kulbak poems: “*Asore dibraye*” (Ten Commandments), trans. Robert Adler Peckerar. Kulbak selection in course reader, from *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*

Judd (J. L.) Teller, poetry selection from Harshav and Harshav, *American Yiddish Poetry*

Reflection. Opportunity to return to any previous text at students’ choice.



The final grade is determined thusly:

- 20% Class Participation & Attendance
(Attend office hours at least once a semester and vocal contributions in class)
- 20% Class Presentation
- 20% Midterm
- 40% Final Paper:
(5%= abstract; 10% = annotated bibliography; 25% final paper)

A range:	98-100% A+	93-97% A	90-92% A-
B range:	87-89% B+	83-86% B	80-82% B-
C range:	77-79% C+	73-76% C	70-72% C-
D range:	67-69% D+	63-66% D	60-62% D-
	59% and below: F		

A Note on Plagiarism

From the Report of the Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism Subcommittee, June 2004: "Any test, paper, or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not been previously submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, websites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. "Proper attribution" means that you have fully identified the original source and extent of your use of the words or ideas of others that you reproduce in your work for this course, usually in the form of a footnote or parenthesis. As a general rule, if you are citing from a published source or from a website and the quotation is short (up to a sentence or two), place it in quotation marks; if you employ a longer passage from a publication or website, please indent it and use single spacing. In both cases, be sure to cite the original. If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or examination, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor or GSI beforehand. Finally, you should keep in mind that as a member of the campus community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors and will be evaluated on your own merits. So be proud of your academic accomplishments and help to protect and promote academic integrity at Berkeley. The consequences of cheating and academic dishonesty — receiving an academic penalty for the assignment or for the class, receiving conduct and educational sanctions, or being asked to disclose your conduct history on a graduate school, law school, medical school, or dental school application — are simply not worth it."

Cheating includes fraud, deceit, or dishonesty in an academic assignment, or using or attempting to use materials, or assisting others in using materials that are prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment in question. **Plagiarism** includes use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source.