

WOMEN AND JEWISH LITERATURE
GRMN 262-401/ JWST 102-401/ GSOC 162-401/NELC 159-401
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SEMINAR
FULFILLS GENERAL REQUIREMENT SECTOR III ARTS AND LETTERS
Dr. Kathryn Hellerstein
SPRING 2007
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
Tuesday-Thursday, 10:30-12
4 Williams Hall

DESCRIPTION:

"Jewish woman, who knows your life?
In darkness you have come, in darkness do you go."
J. L. Gordon (1890)

This course will bring into the light the long tradition of women as readers, writers, and subjects in Jewish literature. All texts will be in translation from Yiddish and Hebrew, or in English. Through a variety of genres -- devotional literature, memoir, fiction, and poetry -- we will study women's roles and selves, the relations of women and men, and the interaction between Jewish texts and women's lives. The legacy of women in Yiddish devotional literature will serve as background for our reading of modern Jewish fiction and poetry from the past century.

The course is divided into five segments. The first presents a case study of the Matriarchs Rachel and Leah, as they are portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, in rabbinic commentary, in pre-modern prayers, and in modern poems. We then examine a modern novel that recasts the story of Dinah, Leah's daughter. Next we turn to the seventeenth century Glikl of Hamel, the first Jewish woman memoirist. The third segment focuses on devotional literature for and by women. In the fourth segment, we read modern women poets in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. The course concludes with a fifth segment on fiction written by women in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Attendance and participation** in class and the following reading and writing:
2. **Read** assigned texts (primary texts and specified critical essays).
3. **Informal writing**, as assigned, such as posing questions and summaries on our class listserv or Blackboard.
4. **Reading journal**, to be written for each class and handed in periodically. (1 page double-spaced each.)
5. **In-class presentation**
6. **Write two short essays (3-5 pp.) and the final essay (10-12 pp.)**

TEXTS:

Purchase books at the Penn Book Center, 130 South 34th (at Sansom). I will put as many as possible on reserve in Rosengarten, as well.

REQUIRED:

1. *The Torah: The Five Books of Moses. A new translation of The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic text*, First Section. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1962 (first edition). [OTHER TRANSLATIONS ARE ACCEPTABLE, AS WELL.]
2. Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*. (PicadorUSA, 1997)
3. *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal (Schocken, 1977)
4. *The Merit of Our Mothers*, ed. and trans. Tracy Guren Klirs (HUC Press, 1992)
5. *Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky*. Trans. and ed. Kathryn Hellerstein. (Wayne State University Press, 1999)
6. *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems*. Ed. Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess. (The Feminist Press, 1999).
7. *Found Treasures: Yiddish Women Writers*, ed. Frieda Forman, et. al. (Second Story Press, 1994)
8. Cynthia Ozick, *The Puttermessaer Papers* (Vintage, 1998)
9. *Bulkpack*, available at Wharton Reprographics (basement of Steinberg-Dietrich on Locust Walk)
10. Miriam Meghnagi, "Canticas de parida, Songs for the Mother of a Newborn Child," and "Between Jasmin and Nana: Hebrew songs collected and translated into Italian," in *La Nascita Nella Tradizione Ebraica: Birth in Jewish Tradition* (Livorno: Belforte, 2005). (Handout)
11. Songs by Miriam Meghnagi (Sephardic), Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman, Chava Alberstein, Adrienne Cooper (Yiddish) on Blackboard

RECOMMENDED: (also on reserve in Rosengarten)

1. *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991).
2. *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1994)

SYLLABUS:

SEGMENT I: THE MATRIARCHS: A CASE STUDY

Class 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

1/9/07

Ancient and Modern: Woman, Man, and Creation

- Genesis 1-3 (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt01.htm>)
- Celia Dropkin, "Adam" (from the Yiddish, 1935)
- Miriam Oren, "Eve" (from the Hebrew, c. 1971)

The course will open with a consideration of how the most central Jewish text, the Hebrew Bible, depicts the first woman, the first man, and the act of creation. First, we will read aloud and discuss the two versions of the Divine Creation and the story of Eve's disobedience in Genesis. Then we will read two modern poems (in translation), which interpret the Biblical story in terms of women's biological and artistic creativity. This pairing of ancient and modern texts will be a foretaste of the themes and questions that lie ahead about gender, sex, and text.

Classes 2-7: THE TRADITION OF THE MATRIARCHS

1/11

In the Hebrew Bible: Rachel and Leah

- Rachel and Leah: Genesis 29-30
- (for reference: Genesis 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 46:1-26; 48:7; 49:31)
(<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt01.htm>)

Our discussion of the tradition of the biblical matriarchs will begin with an overview of the stories of Rachel, and Leah as told in the book of Genesis. We will consider the characteristics of the biblical narrative, as well as the ways it presents these women as characters within sacred history.

Reading Journal 1: Choose 2 or 3 verses in Chapters 29-30 in which you see conflict or tension between the characters. Discuss.

1/16

Rachel and Leah in Midrash

(In Bulkpack):

- "Two Narratives about God II," translated D. Stern, in *Rabbinic Fantasies*, eds. Stern and Mirsky (JPS 1990).
- In *The Book of Legends; Sefer Ha-Agadah*, eds. Bialik and Ravnitzky (Schocken, 1994, #70, 71, 72, 73 (p. 47); #87 (p. 50); #12, "Mourning by the Fathers" (pp. 146-148).

Reading Journal 2: How did the rabbis interpret the stories of Rachel and Leah? What are the attributes of these women characters? **Respond to one of these legends.**

1/18

Rachel and Leah in the *Tkhines*, the Yiddish Prayers For and By Women

- Yiddish *tkhines* of the matriarchs (in Klirs, *The Merit of Our Mothers*)

- Sore Rivke Rokhl Leyeh Horowitz, *Tkhine of the Matriarchs*. (18th century)
(in *The Merits of Our Mothers*, 84-88; *The Defiant Muse*, 62-81.)
- Chava Weissler, "Tears for the Shekhinah: Leah Horowitz," *Voices of the Matriarchs*, 104-125 (Bulkpack)

Reading Journal 3: How do the Yiddish prayers by and for women interpret the stories of Rachel and Leah, and for what purpose? How do these vernacular prayers utilize the rabbinic interpretations? **Write a page about one of these prayers.**

***** HAND OUT ASSIGNMENT FOR ESSAY #1**

1/23

Rachel and Leah in Modern Yiddish and Hebrew Poems of the Matriarchs

In Bulkpack:

- Miriam Ulinover, "Reading the *Taytsh-khumesh*"
- Roza Yakubovitch, "Rachel"
- Itzik Manger, "Rachel and Leah"
- Rokhl Korn, "Rachel"

In Paper Bridges:

- Kadya Molodowsky, "Women-Poems VI" (78-81)

In *The Defiant Muse*:

- Rahel, "Rachel" (p. 85)
- Nurit Zarhi, "She is Joseph" (p. 167)

Reading Journal 4: How do these modern poems subvert or expand upon the earlier traditions of the Matriarch stories? What do the poems add? Leave out? Why? **Write one page about one of the assigned poems.**

1/25

A Contemporary American Novel of the Matriarchs

- Genesis 33:18-34:31, The Rape of Dinah
- Midrash on The Rape of Dinah
- Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*.

Reading Journal 5: How do Diamant's depictions of Rachel and Leah differ from the earlier traditions? Focus on a specific moment.

1/30

Diamant, *The Red Tent* (continued)

Reading Journal 6: How does Diamant's fictional reconstruction of the story of the rape of Dinah change the earlier interpretative traditions?

SEGMENT II: A LEARNED WOMAN

Classes 8-9: THE FIRST FEMALE JEWISH MEMOIRIST (1646-1724)

2/1 *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal
(Schocken, 1977)

Reading Journal 7: Respond to one of Glikl's stories.

2/6 *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, continued.

Critical Essays:

- Dorothy Bilik, "1689: Glikl of Hameln begins writing her memoir..." from *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096-1996*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 49-54. (in Bulkpack)
- Natalie Zeman Davis, "Arguing with God: Glikl bas Judah Leib," in *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (Harvard, 1997), pp. 5-62.

***** FIRST SHORT ESSAY DUE (3-5 PAGES)**

SEGMENT III: PRAYERS AND POEMS BY AND FOR WOMEN

Classes 10-11: EARLY YIDDISH PRAYERS & POEMS: 16TH-18TH CENTURIES

2/8 **Prayers:**

In *The Merit of Our Mothers: Tkhines*, Tracy Guren Klirs (HUC Press, 1992)

Reading Journal 8: Either discuss one of the *tkhines* or write a prayer of your own.

2/13 **Poems:**

In Bulkpack:

- Royzl Fishls (1586)
- Toybe Pan (17th century)
- Gele (1710)
- Hannah Katz (17th-18th century)

Critical Essays (Recommended and on reserve):

- Chava Weissler, "Prayers in Yiddish and the Religious World of Ashkenazic Women," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin, pp. 159-181.
- Shmuel Niger, "Yiddish Literature and the Female Reader," trans. Sheva Zucker, in *Women of the Word*, ed. Judith Baskin, pp. 70-90.

Reading Journal 9: Describe the women who wrote these poems.

Class 12: A HASIDIC WOMAN REBBE?

2/15 Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism, S. A. Horodecky and The Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, eds. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: Peter Halban, 1988), pp. 495-525. (in Bulkpack)

Reading Journal 10: Based on the evidence discussed in this article, do you think the Maiden of Ludmir existed? Explain.

Class 13: **EARLY HEBREW POEMS BY WOMEN: 10TH-19TH CENTURIES**
2/20 In *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems*, eds. Kaufman, Hasan-Rokem, Hess
(Feminist Press, 1999), pp. 62-81.

- The Wife of Dunash Ben Labrat, late 10th century, Andalusia
- Mercina of Gerona, 15th century, Catalonia
- Asenath Barzani, 16th century, Kurdistan
- Sarah Rebecca Rachel Leah Horowitz, early 18th century, Central Europe
- Freyha Bat Avraham Bar-Adiba, late 18th century, Morocco
- Rachel Morpurgo, 1790-1871, Italy

Critical essay: "Introduction," pp. 1-21, in *The Defiant Muse*.

Reading Journal 11: Respond to one of these poems.

*** **HAND OUT SECOND ESSAY TOPIC**

SEGMENT IV: MODERN VOICES

Classes 14-15: 20TH CENTURY WOMEN YIDDISH POETS

2/22 **In Bulkpack**

- Malka Heifetz Tussman, pp. 193-198, 264
- Celia Dropkin, pp. 199; 239-244
- Anna Margolin, pp. 230-238

Critical Essays (optional):

- Janet Hadda, "The Eyes Have It: Celia Dropkin's Love Poetry" from *Gender and Text* (In Bulkpack)
- Kathryn Hellerstein, "From Ikh to Zikh: A Journey from I to Self in Yiddish Poems by Women" from *Gender and Text*. (In Bulkpack)

Reading Journal 12: Compare two of the poems (in a page). Sex? Gender?

2/27 **Modern Yiddish Poets, continued**

In Bulkpack

- Miriam Ulinover, pp. 245-249
- Roza Yakubovitsh, pp. 250-252

Critical Essays (optional):

- Kathryn Hellerstein, "Canon and Gender: Women Poets in Two Modern Yiddish Anthologies," in *Women of the Word*, ed. Baskin, pp. 136-152.

Reading Journal 13: Are these poems religious? Discuss.

Class 16: **20TH CENTURY WOMEN HEBREW POETS**

3/1 In *The Defiant Muse*:

- Esther Raab, pp. 92-101, esp. "Holy Grandmothers in Jerusalem"

- Yocheved Bat Miriam, pp. 104-109, esp. "Miriam"
- Dahlia Ravikovitch, pp. 142-155
- Yona Wallach, pp. 184-193

Critical Essays (optional):

From *Gender and Text* (In Bulkpack):

- Anne Lapidus Lerner, "A Woman's Song: The Poetry of Esther Raab"
- Ilana Pardes, "Yocheved Bat Miriam: The Poetic Strength of a Matronym"
- Dan Miron, "Why Was There No Women's Poetry in Hebrew Before 1920?"

Reading Journal 14: With Wallach's "Hebrew" in mind, write a poem about the English language (or a page of prose).

3/6-3/8 SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

Class 17: 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN POETS

3/13

In Bulkpack:

- Adrienne Rich
- Irena Klepfisz
- Linda Zisquit
- Jacqueline Osherow
- Shirley Kaufman

Reading Journal 15: Respond to a poem.

Classes 18-19: A MAJOR VOICE IN YIDDISH

3/15

Kadya Molodowsky, *Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky*, trans. and ed. by Kathryn Hellerstein (Wayne State UP, 1999)

Reading Journal 16: Respond to a poem.

3/20 Molodowsky, continued

Reading Journal 17: Respond to another poem.

SEGMENT V: WOMEN'S LIVES IN FICTION

Classes 20-21: SHORT STORIES IN YIDDISH

In *Found Treasures: Yiddish Women Writers*, ed. Frieda Forman, et. al. (Second Story Press, 1994):

3/22

Old World:

- Sarah Hamer-Jaklyn, "My Mother's Dream"
- Esther Singer Kreitman, "The New World"
- Rokhl Brokhes, "The Zogerin" (85-90)
- Fradl Shtok, "The Veil" (99-104)

- Malka Lee, "Through the Eyes of Childhood" (159-185)

Critical Essays (optional):

- Irena Klepfisz, "Introduction: Queens of Contradiction: A Feminist Introduction to Women Yiddish Writers" (*FT*, pp. 21-62).

Reading Journal 18: Characterize a girl's childhood in one of these stories, or write a page about a memory of your own.

3/27

After the Destruction

- Chava Rosenfarb, "Edgia's Revenge" (243-310)
- Rokhl Korn, "The Road of No Return"
- Lili Berger, "On Saint Katerine's Day"
- Blume Lempel, "Correspondents"

Critical Essays (optional):

- Norma Fain Pratt, "Culture and Radical Politics: Yiddish Women Writers in America," in *Women of the Word*, pp. 111-135.

***** SECOND SHORT ESSAY DUE (3-5 PP)**

Classes 22-23: SHORT STORIES IN HEBREW

3/29

IN BULKPACK, from *Ribcage: Israeli Women's Fiction*, ed. Carol Diamant and Lily Rattok (Hadassah, 1994).

- Dvorah Baron, "Excision" (1-9)
- Esther Ra'ab, "Wedding" (20-26)

Critical essays: Introduction to *Ribcage* by Lily Rattok

Reading Journal 19: Discuss these depictions of marriage.

4/3

PASSOVER—NO CLASS

4/5

IN BULKPACK, from *Ribcage: Israeli Women's Fiction*, ed. Carol Diamant and Lily Rattok (Hadassah, 1994).

- Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "N'ima Sassoon Writes Poems" (48-70)

Reading Journal 20: Why is it important that the protagonist writes poetry?

4/10

PASSOVER—NO CLASS

Class 24: WOMEN SING—REVIVING SEPHARDIC TRADITION

Make-up class—4:30-6:00 PM

4/11

Guest Lecturer: Miriam Meghnagi—singer and scholar.

- Listen to songs on Blackboard from Meghnagi's CD's, *Dialoghi Mediterranei* and *Songs of Exile*
- Read: Miriam Meghnagi, "Canticas de parida, Songs for the Mother of a

Newborn Child,” and “Between Jasmin and Nana: Hebrew songs collected and translated into Italian,” in *La Nascita Nella Tradizione Ebraica: Birth in Jewish Tradition* (Livorno: Belforte, 2005). (Handout)

Classes 25-26: THE FEMALE GOLEM

4/12

- Cynthia Ozick, *The Puttermessa Papers* (1997)
***** HAND OUT FINAL ESSAY TOPIC**
8 PM—attend Freedman Jewish Music Archives Concert, Miriam Megnagi performing (optional)

Reading Journal 21: How does “writing” figure in this novel?

4/17

Ozick, continued.

Class 27: WOMEN SING—REVIVING YIDDISH TRADITION

4/19

Listen to songs on Blackboard by:

- **Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman**
- **Chava Alberstein**
- **Adrienne Cooper**

5/3

***** FINAL ESSAY DUE (10-12 PP)**