

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Fall 2013

LIT 5921x *Modern Yiddish Fabulists*

Prof. David G. Roskies

Monday, 3:40-5:30, Unterberg, 509

Yiddish Tutorial: Monday 2:00-3:30 508

Course Description: The historical development of fanatstical Yiddish fiction from the early modern period until the late twentieth century. We begin with the two basic types of folk narrative--the fairy tale and legend—jump to their revival in Hasidism and Jewish neo-Romanticism, and then proceed to the great flowering of the Jewish fantastic under the impact of modernism. An introduction to six of the greatest Yiddish fabulists: Reb Nahman of Braslav, I. L. Pertetz, Sholem Aleichem, Der Nister, I. B. Singer and Abraham Sutzkever.

Course Content: The course examines the shift in Jewish fantasy from the demons without to the demons within; how the search for cosmic redemption gave way to a search that was national and personal; and how the Jewish literary imagination keeps shifting from the metaphysical to the social and psychological realms and back again. The medium was also the message. Accompanying the revolution in consciousness were new and ever-more complex ways of constructing a story and ever-bolder borrowings from other cultures. This in turn has stimulated new and competing readings of these stories in our own day and age.

Expectations & Assessment: There is no distinction made in this course between primary and secondary readings. The student is equally responsible for both. Each classroom session will therefore combine an historical contextualization and close reading with an analysis of the relevant critical literature. The final grade will be based on two writing assignments and one oral presentation, as follows:

One short paper (5-6 pages) due Friday October 25. Worth 25% of the final grade.

Final take home exam. A take home exam will be handed out on Monday November 25. Consisting of of five essay questions, the student will answer any two, each answer 6-8 pages in length. The exam is due on Monday December 16. 65% of final grade.

Both papers are to be submitted electronically to daroskies@jtsa.edu by 12:00 noon on the day that they are due.

Graduate students may substitute a major research paper worth 90% of the final grade.

In addition, each student will deliver a 10-minute oral précis in class on one of the assigned secondary readings. 10% of the final grade.

A tutorial for those able to work with the texts in Yiddish will meet M 2:00-3:30.

Course Readings: It is recommended that students purchase the following books available for sale at Book Culture, 536 West 112th Street, New York, NY 10025; (212) 865-1588:

- *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination*, ed. Joachim Neugroschel (Syracuse UP, 2000). \$24.95
- *The I. L. Peretz Reader*, ed. Ruth R. Wisse (Yale UP, 2002). \$20.00
- Optional: David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Harvard, 1995). \$22.50. PJ5124 R67 1995.

All other required texts will be distributed in class. They are marked in the syllabus with an asterisk.

Additional required readings are available on Blackboard (= BB).

Disability Policy: The JTS policy on disabilities may be found at www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Students_with_Disabilities.xml

Academic Integrity Statement: Students in this class are expected to maintain academic integrity; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. JTS Student Disciplinary Procedures can be found at http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Student_Disciplinary_Procedures.xml

Office Hours: Unterberg 506, Tuesdays 10:00-12:00. The best way to get in touch with me is via e-mail: daroskies@jtsa.edu

I. "Der nit-guter zol dikh aveknemen": Demons and devils in their natural habitat

9 Sept. **Fairytale & Legend = Novella**

Der rebe vos iz gevorn a vervolf / The Rabbi and the Werewolf (1602) – *Mayse-bukh**

Max Lüthi, "Aspects of the *Märchen* and the Legend," in *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 17-33. **BB**

16 Sept. **Household Demons**

Mayse fun Vorns / A Man Who Married a She-Wolf (1514) - Neugroschel
Jacob Ben Abraham of Mezritch - The Possession (1602) - Neugroschel
Mayse beruakh bek"k Korets / The Tale of the Evil Spirit in Korets (1665)
Neugroschel

Tsvi Hirsh Kaidonover - A Tale of Poznan (1706) – Neugroschel

Jeremy Dauber, "Thinking with *Shedim*: What we can learn from the *Mayse fun Vorns*?" *In the Demon's bedroom: Yiddish literature and the early modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, chap. 4. **BB**

Chanita Goodblatt, "Women, Demons, and the Rabbi's Son: Narratology and 'A Story From Worms,'" *Exemplaria* 12:1 (2000), 231-253. **BB**

23 Sept. **Reb Nahman's Quest**

Mayse miaveydas bas-melekh / A Tale of a Lost Princess (1806) - Neugroschel
Mayse mimelekh vekeyser / A Tale of a King and an Emperor (1807) -
Neugroschel
Mayse mirov uven-yokhid / The Rabbi's Son (1807)*

Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms*. Stanford 2011, pp. 25-38, 52-65. **BB**

Ora Wiskind-Elper, *Tradition and fantasy in the tales of Reb Nahman of Bratslav*. Albany : State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 115-40, 163-66. **BB**

David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Harvard, 1995), 20-36, 41-44. **BB**.

II. The Art of Creative Betrayal

30 Sept. **The Romance: I. L. Peretz**

Dray khupes / The Three Weddings Canopies (1901) – trans. Joachim Neugroschel
Mesires-nefesh / Devotion Without End (1904)

Leah Garrett, "I. L. Peretz," *A Knight at the Opera: Heine, Wagner, Herzl, Peretz, and the Legacy of Der Tannhäuser*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2011, p. 95-96, 103-24. **BB**.

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, 1-19, 99-114, 125-35. **BB**.

7 Oct. **Peretz and the Stylized Folktale**

Bontshe Shvayg (1894) - *Peretz Reader*
Di tayve tsu kleyder / A Passion for Clothes (1904) - *Peretz Reader*
Iber a shmek tabek / A Pinch of Snuff (1906) - *Peretz Reader*
Der kuntsn-makher / The Magician (1904) - *Peretz Reader*
Dray matones / Three Gifts (c. 1908) - *Peretz Reader*
Nile in genem / Yom Kippur in Hell (1915) *Peretz Reader*

Axel Olrik - *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative* (1908) **BB**

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, pp. 108-14, 125-46. **BB**

14 Oct. **Peretz and the Hasidic Revival**

Mekubolim / Kabbalists (1891/1894) – *Peretz Reader*
Oyb nisht nokh hekher / If Not Higher (1900) - *Peretz Reader*
Tvishn tsvey berg / Between Two Mountains (1900) - *Peretz Reader*,
Mishnes khsidim / The Missing Melody (1894/1902) – *Peretz Reader*
Hisgales, oder di mayse fun tsignbok / Revelation: or, The Story of the Billy-Goat (1904) – *Peretz Reader*
Der Bal-shem firt oys a shidekh / The Baal-Shem Tov Arranges a Marriage – Neugroschel

Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz* Albany, N.Y. : State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 281-309. **BB**.

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, 99-108, 114-25. **BB**.

Ruth R. Wisse, Intro. to *The I. L. Peretz Reader*

21 Oct. **The Modern Quest Tale**

Sholem Aleichem – Der farkishefter shnayder - The Haunted Tailor (1901/1913)
– Neugroschel
Der Nister - Der nozir un dos tsigle / The Hermit and the Little Goat (1913) –
Neugroschel

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, pp. 160-66, 186-87, 193-201. BB.

25 Oct. 1st Writing Assignment: The Role of the Miraculous in Nahman and Peretz: A Comparison of Any Two Stories

28 Oct. **Frame tales: The story-within-a-story**

Sholem Aleichem – Stantsyer Baranovitsh / Baranovitsh Station (1913)*
Der Nister – Sheydim / Demons (1918) – Neugroschel, 258-74

Ross Chambers, *Story and situation: narrative seduction and the power of fiction*; foreword by Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 33-34. BB.

Roskies - *A Bridge of Longing*, 176-81, 201-5. BB.

III. **The Modernist Fantastic**

4 Nov. **Weimar Fantasies: Der Nister**

Afn grenets / At the Border (1922)*
In vaynkeler / In the Wine Cellar (1922)*
Gekept / Beheaded (1923)*

Delphine Bechtel, *Der Nister's Work, 1909-1929* (Peter Lang, 1990). BB.

Roskies - *A Bridge of Longing*, 201-20. BB.

Marc Caplan, "The Hermit at the Circus: Der Nister, Yiddish Literature, and German Culture in the Weimar Period, " *STUDIA ROSENTHALIANA* 41 (2008): 173-96.*

11 Nov. **The Devil's Diary: I. B. Singer**

Der roye ve-eyno nire / The Unseen (1943)*
Zeydlus der ershter / Zeidlus the Pope (1943)*

Joseph Sherman, "Bashevis Singer and the Jewish Pope," in *The Hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer*, chap. 2. BB.

Naomi Seidman, *Faithful renderings: Jewish-Christian differences and the politics of translation* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 263-75. BB

18 Nov. **Demonic Performances: I. B. Singer**

Der shpigl / The Mirror (1956)*
Mayse Tishevits / The Last Demon (1959)*
Taybele un Hurmiza / Taibele and her Demon (1962)*

Ken Frieden, "I. B. Singer's Monologues of Demons," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 263-68. BB.

Avraham Novershtern, "History, Messianism, and Apocalypse in Bashevis's Work," chap. 3. BB

25 Nov. **The Metaphysics of Memory: Abraham Sutzkever**

Lupus (1975)*
Dortn vu es nekhtikn di shtern / Where the Stars Spend the Night (1975)*
Getraye nodlen / Faithful Needles (1977)*
Der shtivl un di kroyn / The Boot and the Crown (1977)*
Glikele (1977)*
Der betler in di bloye briln / The Beggar with the Blue Eyeglasses (1978)*
Di matbeye fun himl / The Coin from Heaven (1977)*
A shvartser malekh mit a shpilkele in hant / The Black Angel with a Pin in His Hand (1980)*
Di pulver-brigade / The Gunpowder Brigade (1985)*

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, 318-29. BB.

Ruth Wisse, "Abraham Sutzkever the Storyteller," Intro. to *Di nevue fun shvartsaplen* (Jerusalem 1987). BB.

2 Dec.

American Fantastic

Aleyn / Alone (1960)*
Der seans / The Séance (ca. 1965)*
Di kafeterye / The Cafeteria (1968)*

Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Uncanny and the Miraculous," in *The fantastic : a structural approach to a literary genre* / Tzvetan Todorov ; translated from the French by Richard Howard ; with a foreword by Robert Scholes. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1975, chap. 3. **BB**.

9 Dec.

The Storyteller

I.L. Peretz – Mayses / Stories (1903) - *Peretz Reader*

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" (1936) in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (NY: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 83-109. **BB**

Reserve Readings

Delphine Bechtel, *Der Nister's Work, 1909-1929* (Peter Lang, 1990). PJ5129 A4 K27 ZS5.

Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms*. Stanford 2011.

Jeremy Dauber, *In the Demon's bedroom: Yiddish literature and the early modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. PJ5120.5 .D38 2010

Hugh Denman, *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2002). PJ 5129 A4 S55 Z699.

Frieden, Ken. *Classic Yiddish fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz*. Albany, N.Y. : State University of New York Press, 1995. PJ5124 .F75 1995

Leah Garrett. *A Knight at the Opera: Heine, Wagner, Herzl, Peretz, and the Legacy of Der Tannhäuser*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2011.

David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Harvard, 1995). PJ5124 R67 1995.

Seidman, Naomi. *Faithful renderings: Jewish-Christian differences and the politics of translation* / Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. PJ5067 .S45 2006

Abraham Sutzkever. *Di nevue fun shvartsaplen* (Jerusalem 1987). PJ5129 A4 S86 N4

Todorov, Tzvetan, 1939- *The fantastic : a structural approach to a literary genre* / Tzvetan Todorov ; translated from the French by Richard Howard ; with a foreword by Robert Scholes. Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1975. PN3435 .T613 1975

Ora Wiskind-Elper, *Tradition and Fantasy in the Tales of Reb Nahman of Bratslav* (SUNY, 1998). BM532.W57 1998

Seth L. Wolitz, ed. *The hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2001. PJ5129.A4 S55 Z695 2001