

JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Spring 2000

Prof. David G. Roskies

Lit. 5217y Sholem Aleichem: The Comedy of Dissolution

Objectives: To survey Sholem Aleichem's comic oeuvre in loose chronological order with an eye to the ever-growing tension between the What and the How: the dissolution of community, family, and personal identity vs. anecdotal plots, the grotesque, the carnivalesque, the mythic, the tragic, the melodramatic, and the dialogical.

Requirements: Three 8-10 pp. writing assignments chosen from among the suggested topics. These papers are due on the assigned date.

Logistics: Books marked by an asterisk are available from Labyrinth Books, 536 W 112th Street. Those marked with a plus sign are available for sale in class. All other primary sources will be in your course packet. Secondary reading are on reserve. My office hours are Wednesdays 1:00-3:00 and my office is in Unterberg 505. I also respond to e-mails: daroskies@jtsa.edu, preferably written in Yiddish.

19 Jan. **Why Did Sholem Shakhne Lose His Hat?**

איבער א הײטל / On Account of a Hat (1913)

26 Jan. **Transitional Objects**

דאָס מעסערל / The Penknife (1886)

דער אוצר / האוצר (1889)

Sadan, "Three Foundations (SA and the Yiddish Literary Tradition)."
Dan Miron, *Sholem-Aleykhem: Person, Persona, Presence*.

2 Feb. **The Jewish Artist and his Forbidden Loves**

סטעמפעניו / Stempenyu (1888)

Frieden, chap. 5.

9 Feb. **Scenes from a Marriage**

+ מנחם-מענדל / *The Adventures of Menakem-Mendl* - trans Tamara Kahana

Erik, "*Menakhem-Mendl* (A Marxist Critique)."

Wisse, "Ironic Balance for Psychic Survival," *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*.

Miron, "A Sampling of *Menakhem-Mendl*."

16 Feb. **The Monological Mind**

דאָס טעפל / *The Pot* (1901)

יוסף / *Joseph* (1905)

גיטל פּורישקעוויטש / *Goody "Purishkevich"* (1911)

Frieden, chap. 7.

Wirth-Nesher, "Voices of Ambivalence in SA's Monologues."

23 Feb. **Tevye: The Prosaics of Dialogue**

**Tevye the Dairyman*, trans. Hillel Halkin. (Schocken pb, 1987):

דאָס גרויסע געווינס / *Tevye Strikes It Rich* (1895)

plus orig. version from *Hoyzfraynd* 4 (1895)

אַ בּוידעם / *Tevye Blows a Small Fortune* (1899)

היינטיקע קינדער / *Today's Children* (1899)

Hillel Halkin, "Introduction" to *Tevye the Dairyman*

Meir Wiener, "On SA's Humor"

TBA Screening of Maurice Schwartz's *Tevye* (USA, 1939)

1 Mar. **The Comic Job**

Hodl (1905), Chava (1905), Shprintze (1907)

טביה פאַרט קיין ארץ-ישראל / *Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel* (1909)

Lekh-lekho (1914).

Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, pp. 102-7.

Stern, "Tevye's Art of Quotation."

8 Mar. **Comedy and the Carnival(esque)**

דער פֿאַרכישופֿטער שניידער / The Haunted Tailor (1901)

עולם-הבא / Eternal Life (1902)

אויף פסח אַהיים / Home for Passover (1903)

די פֿאַן / The Flag (1900)

דער אורח / The Guest (1906)

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (MIT Press, 1968), chap. 3 - xerox on reserve.

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, pp. 147-75.

15 Mar. **American Comedy**

+ מאָטל פייסי דעם חזנס / *The Adventures of Mottel the Cantor's Son* (1907-1916) - trans. Tamara Kahana

Miron, "Bouncing Back: Destruction and Recovery in Sholem-Aleykhem's *Motl* " Shmeruk, "Sholem Aleichem and America."

22 Mar. **Trains, Stories, & Miracles**

אייזנבאַן-געשיכטעס / *Railroad Stories* (Halkin trans.):

To the Reader, The Slowpoke Express, The Miracle of Hoshana Rabba, The Wedding that Came Without its Band, Third Class - Halkin

Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, pp. 176-81.

29 Mar. **The Comedy of Dissolution**

Railroad Stories - the other 16 tales

5 Apr. **The Storyteller as Comic Hero**

פֿונעם יריד / *From the Fair* (1908-1916) - Leviant

Roskies, "Unfinished Business: Sholem Aleichem's *From the Fair*."

12 Apr. **The Politics of Comedy**

שווער צו זײַן אַ ייד / It's Hard to Be a Jew (1914)
 דאָס גרויסע געווינס / The Jackpot (1915)

Weitzner, *Sholem Aleichem in the Theater*, pp. 111-49.

Warnke, "Of Plays and Politics: Sholem Aleichem's First Visit to America."

Bibliography

Max Erik, "Menakhem-Mendl (A Marxist Critique)," *SA and the Critical Tradition* (= *Prooftexts* 6 [1986]): 23-39) - file #157 on reserve.

Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, & Peretz* (Albany, 1995). PJ5124 F75 1995

Ted Gorelik, trans. *Nineteen to the Dozen: Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things*, ed. Ken Frieden (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998). PJ 5129 A3S5 M6663 1998.

*Hillel Halkin, trans., *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories* (Schocken pb - \$15.00). PJ 5129 A3 S5 T4213 1987.

Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (California, 1990). PJ 5113 H33 1990

Curt Leviant, trans., *From the Fair: The Autobiography of Sholom Aleichem*. PJ5129 A3 S5 F83 1985.

Dan Miron, "Bouncing Back: Destruction and Recovery in Sholem-Aleykhem's *Motl peyse dem khazns*," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978): 119-84 - file #6003 on reserve.

Dan Miron, "A Sampling of Menakhem-Mendl," *Michigan Germanic Studies* 3:2 (1977): 12-33 - file #2 on reserve.

Dan Miron, *Sholem-Aleykhem: Person, Persona, Presence* (NY, 1972) - PJ5129 A3 S5 Z7643

דן מירון, "מסע באיזור הדמדומים: אחרית דבר לסיפורי רכבת," סיפורי רכבת, עמ' 227-300.
 PJ 5129 A3 S5 K675 1989

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

University Press, 1995). PJ 5124 R67.

David G. Roskies, "Unfinished Business: Sholem Aleichem's *From the Fair*," *SA and the Critical Tradition* (= *Prooftexts* 6 [1986]): 65-78 - xerox on reserve.

Dov Sadan, "Three Foundations," *SA and the Yiddish Literary Tradition* (= *Prooftexts* 6 [1986]: 55-63) - file #157.

Khone Shmeruk, "Sholem Aleichem and America," *YIVO Annual* 20 (1991): 211-38 - xerox on reserve.

Naomi B. Sokoloff, "Sholem Aleichem -- *Mottel, the Cantor's Son*," *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction* (JHUP, 1992), chap. 3. PN842 S6 1992.

Michael Stern, "Tevye's Art of Quotation," *SA and the Critical Tradition* [= *Prooftexts* 6 [1986]): 79-96. file #5014

Nina Warnke, "Of Plays and Politics: Sholem Aleichem's First Visit to America," *YIVO Annual* 20 (1991): 239-76. Xerox on reserve.

Jacob Weitzner, *Sholem Aleichem in the Theater* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994). PJ 5129 A3S5 Z885 1994.

Hana Wirth-Nesher, "Voices of Ambivalence in SA's Monologues," *Prooftexts* 1 (1981): 158-71 - xerox on reserve.

Ruth R. Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago, 1971), chap. 3. PN 6149 J4W5 1971.

Writing Assignments

2 Feb. **Romantic Realism in Stempenyu.**

How does SA combine romantic and realistic elements in his plot and characterization? Describe the interplay of comic-grotesque and lyric styles of narration within each chapter and from one chapter to the next. What do these disparate elements add up to?

9 Feb. **Reading Menakhem-Mendl through the Lens of Gender**

How does SA distinguish between male and female speech patterns? What is the function of the mother-in-law's embedded folk speech? Why does Sheyne-Sheyndl ultimately disappear from the scene?

16 Feb. **Structure and Meaning in "Dos tepl"**

Despite appearances, "Dos tepl" is a carefully structured work. How does this structure manifest itself? What is Yente's real question?

1 Mar. **Tevye's Dialogic Art in "Chava"**

How is this monologue different from all the others? How does Tevye replay the confrontation with the priest? How, in general does his narration change the nature of the experience? Why does speech fail him here?

8 Mar. **SA's Myth of the Mundane**

How does SA reappropriate the Jewish holidays? Does myth -- both Jewish and pagan -- mitigate the sense of fatal inevitability? provide a safety zone for the lone individual?

15 Mar. **Motl Between Old and New**

If Motl ever grows up, he might become a caricaturist. How does his style of narration betray this proclivity? What are we meant to see that is beyond his field of vision? Who's side is the author on?

29 Mar. **The Comedy of Sexual Exploitation**

"The Man from Buenos Aires" is one of the most harrowing tales in SA's oeuvre. How is his comic art being stretched to its limits?

5 Apr. **SA: A Man for All Seasons**

Is Sholem Nokhem Veviks the archetypal EveryJew? A romantic hero? A portrait of the young artist?