

Yiddish G6200x
Fall 1996
Thursday 11-12:50
Hamilton 617B

YIDDISH ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Major theoretical stances and methodologies followed during the history of the ethnographic study of Yiddish culture will be discussed. The class will examine the basis for the ideological affinity for viewing traditional life as imminently disappearing and the concomitant necessity for doing salvage ethnography. Historical ethnographic studies will be compared with contemporary ones. Contemporary views of the ethnographic process will be analyzed, as well as specifically dwelling on the role of the participant observer. Students will become aware of such problems as the conflicting perspectives of insider and outsider, the depiction of the ethnographer in the written study, and representing speech in the written record.

We will review the main collections of Yiddish folklore, and their availability to students of the subject. Although the class will discuss work done on folk music, folk drama and material culture, we will devote most of our attention to Yiddish folktales and proverbs. We will discuss the methods followed in collecting and publishing, sources and structures detected in the text and the influence of folklore on sophisticated modern Yiddish literature.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will present and discuss readings in class. Two written reports (10 pages) on projects are to be handed in on October 31 and December 5. All students will conduct a fieldwork project, which will normally consist of participant observation and/or ethnographic interviews within Jewish communities. As a second project, each student will write a report on the status of one folklore collection.

! Mr. Gutman - interview
or meeting

beg's Nov.

end of term

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Syllabus

- Sept. 5. First class. Syllabus. Course requirements. Getting to know the instructor and the students. What is ethnography? The role of the ethnographer. Insider versus outsider. Writing ethnographic reports.
- Sept. 12. The history of Yiddish ethnography. Ethnography of East European Jewish society. Ethnography of Yiddish culture. Ethnographic work in Yiddish.

- Sept. 19. Ethnographic commissions and expeditions. Review of the organized efforts of doing ethnographic research. Who were the ethnographers and what methods did they follow? Where are the collections? Which findings have been published? Preparing for The Restaurant assignment.
- Sept. 26. Sh. Ansky. The career of this outstanding writer, folklorist and political leader. The politics of ethnographic work. The connection between folklore and literature. His published works. What remains of his collections?
- Oct. 3. The study of traditional Jewry. Why has the ethnographic study of Hasidim become popular? Problems of entry and ethics (with reference to Shaffir's revelations about his fieldwork).
- Oct. 10. Ethnography of Yiddish-speaking Jews in America I. Review of the literature and locating lacunae. Immigrants versus succeeding generations. The variety of settings for these observations. Written report on ethnography of the service encounter in a restaurant due (4-5 pages).
- Oct. 17. Ethnography of Yiddish-speaking Jews in America II. With or without Yiddish language? Collecting life histories.
- Oct. 24. Yiddish folklore. The position of folklore in traditional Jewish society. High and low culture in Ashkenazic society. Yiddish folklore genres: folksong, drama, riddles, incantations.
- Oct. 31. The Folktale I. The collectors, the methods they follow, the status of the texts.
- Nov. 7. The Folktale II. Analysis of texts. Types of tales. Sources of the tales. Issues of structure and style. Problems in translation. Group values embedded in the tales.
- Nov. 14. Folklore and literature. Influence of the folktale on the rise of modern Yiddish literature. Parallel versions of the same tale. Writers who went out in the field. The folklorist as a subject of satire.
- Nov. 21. The Proverb. An age-old genre. The functions of proverbs in communication. Current use of Yiddish proverbs. *no class*
- Nov. 28. Thanksgiving. No class.
- Dec. 5. Survey of the various topics of proverbs. The image of the non-Jew. Attitudes toward women. The fool in Yiddish culture. How are wealth, power and religion treated? Sources of Yiddish proverbs. Structure of Yiddish proverbs. Last class.