

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America  
Graduate School

Spring 2001

Prof. David G. Roskies

LIT 5518y *Introduction to Yiddish Folklore*  
T 8:20-10:10

**Course Objectives:** Welcome to this crash course on the inner life of Ashkenazic Jews. We begin with an overview of the main interpretive schools of Yiddish folkloristics. Because all these methods are still considered valid (with Ansky, for example, enjoying a spectacular comeback), our purpose is both critical-historical and practical. To test the applicability of these diverse methods, we devote the rest of the semester to the settings of Yiddish folklore, both in *shtetlekh* and inner-city ghettos, in the Old World and the New.

The contemporary implications of this course are threefold: (1) to challenge our exclusive concern with canonical, highbrow, aboveground, and print culture; (2) to make the study of Yiddish folklore a requisite part of the Jewish mental curriculum; and (3) to expand the search for a usable past beyond the confines of Klezcamp and pilgrimages to Eastern Europe.

**Requirements:** An 8-10 pp. midterm paper, **due on March 13** and a final, take-home exam.

Students must acquire the following books, which will be available for sale in class:

- 1) Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, eds. *Pearls of Yiddish Song: Favorite Folk, Art and Theatre Songs* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1988). \$11.00.
- 2) Shirley Kumove, *More Words, More Arrows: A Further Collection of Yiddish Folk Sayings* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). \$21.00.
- 3) Beatrice Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, trans. Leonard Wolf. Pantheon/Schocken, 1988. \$11.00.

All the other required reading is contained in the course packet, available for sale from the Faculty Secretary, Miriam Goldberg (ext. 8966). As of this writing, Ms. Goldberg is still located in the gym. Everything else is on reserve.

Three audio cassettes will also be available for sale in class:

- 1) The shtetl at play (a *Mekhires-yoysef-shpil*). 21 August 1981.
- 2) Songs from the Lodz ghetto. Berlin, 26 January 1992.
- 3) *Pearls of Yiddish Song*. \$6.00

Some of the assigned readings are in Yiddish. If this is your first post-Yiddish-grammar course, you may wish to acquire (1) Harkavy's *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary* and (2) a study-partner/חברותא.

**Office Hours:** Unterberg 505, Thursdays 10-12 or by appointment. The best way to get in touch with me is via e-mail: [daroskies@jtsa.edu](mailto:daroskies@jtsa.edu).

Jan. 16 *The Gay Science of Folklore*

Dan Ben-Amos, "The Idea of Folklore," *Studies in Aggadah and Jewish Folklore* 7 (1983), English section, 11-17.

Idem, "Jewish Studies and Jewish Folklore," *Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1990), Division D, vol. 2: 1-20.

Idem, "Old Yiddish and Middle Yiddish Folktales," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 14:1-2 (1992):4-5.

Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, "Modern Yiddish Folktales," *ibid.*, 14-15.

SCHOOLS

Jan. 23 *Ethnopoetics*

Abraham Rechtman, "The Jewish Ethnographic Expedition" [1958] in Mariëlla Beukers and Renée Waale, eds., *Tracing An-sky: Jewish Collections from the State Ethnographic Museums in St. Petersburg* (Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum, 1992), 12-15.

Sh. Yudovin, Introduction to *Yidisher folks-ornament* (Vitebsk, 1920).

S. Ansky, from "Di yidishe folkshafung" [1908], *Folklor un etnografye*, vol. 15 of *Gezamlte shriftn*, ed. Zalmen Reyzn (Vilna-Warsaw-New York 1921), 29-94.

Idem, "The Jewish Ethnographic Program" [1914], *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 14:1-2 (1992): 66-67.

Idem, "Mutual Cultural Influences" [1920], *ibid.*

Idem, "From the Ethnographic Expedition: Questionnaire," in *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader*, ed. Joachim Neugroschel (Syracuse University Press, 2000), 53-60.

Mark W. Kiel, "Vox Populi, Vox Dei: The Centrality of Peretz in Jewish Folkloristics," *Polin* 7 (1992): 88-120.

Jan. 30 *Marxist*

Susan Slotnick, "The Contributions of the Soviet Yiddish Folklorists," *Working Papers in Yiddish and East European Jewish Studies* 20 (YIVO, 1976).

H. Aleksandrov, *Forsht ayer shtet!* (Minsk, 1928).

Mark Slobin, Introduction to Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.)

Moshe Beregovski, "Jewish Folk Music" (1934); "The Interaction of Ukrainian and Jewish Folk Music" (1935) in Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*.

Feb. 6 ***Regionalist vs. Pan-Ashkenazic***

N. Weinig "Organizatsye un arbet fun an etnografishn krayz," *Landkentenish* 2 (1934):5-17.

Mordecai Kosover, "Yidishe maykholim (a shtudye in kultur-geshikhte un shprakhforshung), *Judah A. Joffe Book*, ed. Yudel Mark (New York: YIVO, 1958), Introduction.

Isaac Rivkind, *Yidishe gelt in lebnshteyger, kultur-geshikhte un folklor* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1959), Introduction.

Feb. 13 ***Structuralist***

Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" [1908] in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 129-41.

Benjamin Hrushovski, "Habayit hatipusi beshir 'am beyidish," *Sefer Dov Sadan*, ed. Shmuel Werses et al. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977), 11-28.

Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, "Four Yiddish Variants of the Master-Thief Tale," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 199-213.

[To be read in conjunction with Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, # 33]

Idem, "Toward a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverbs," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978): 1-20.

Feb. 20 ***Performance [ & Popular Culture ]***

Roger D. Abrams, "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms" [1969] in *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (University of Texas, 1976), 193-214.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Concept and Varieties of Narrative Performance in East European Jewish Culture," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman & Joel Sherzer (Cambridge UP, 1974), 283-308.

Mary Douglas, "Jokes" [1975], in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (University of California Press, 1991), 291-310.

Eli Yassif, "What Is a Folk Book?" *International Folklore Review* 5 (1987): 20-27.

David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10-17.

hot-line 774-8000 x 7911

## SETTINGS

Feb. 27 *Folklore of*  
***The Heder***

"Songs of Childhood," in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song: Favorite Folk, Art and Theatre Songs* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1988).

Sh. Bastomski, *Yidische folksretenishn* [1919], 2nd ed. (Vilna, 1923).

Shmuel Lehman, from "Di kindervelt: gramen, lidlekh, hamstoets un shpiln" in M. Vanvild, ed., *Bay undz yidn* (Warsaw 1923), 113-20.

Silverman Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, Part Two.

Mordkhe Schaechter, "On Children's Nonsense Oaths in Yiddish," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 196-98.

Yekhiel Shtern, "A Kheyder in Tyszowce (Tishevits)," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 5 (1950): 152-71.

Diane Roskies, "Alphabet Instruction in the East European Heder: Some Comparative and Historical Notes," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978): 21-53.

X Mar. 6 ***Shul-besmedresh-shtibl***

"Our Beloved Rebbe," in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*.

Abraham Rechtman, "The interiors of old synagogues," "What is a pinkas?" in Mariëlla Beukers and Renée Waale, eds., *Tracing An-sky: Jewish Collections from the State Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg* (Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum, 1992).

Yekhiel Shtern, *Kheyder un besmedresh* (NY: YIVO, 1950), 91-125.

Silverman Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, Parts One, Six, Seven.

Mar. 13 ***The Home / Gender***

"Once Upon a Time," in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*.

Shirley Kumove, *More Words, More Arrows: A Further Collection of Yiddish Folk Sayings* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

Silverman Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, Parts Three, Four.

Idem, "Images of Women and Girls in Yiddish Folktales: From the Rebellious to the Goody Two-Shoes," *Di froyen: Women and Yiddish Tribute to the Past Directions for the Future* (NY: National Council for Jewish Women, 1997), 78-79.

Beatrice & Uriel Weinreich, "Der repertuar fun teyg-materyaln fun a yidisher baleboste," *Yidisher folklor* 1:3 (1962): 58-59, 68-69.

**Midterm paper:** Pick a dozen proverbial sayings from Kumove's book. Rearrange them within their possible social settings. Then subject each proverb to a critical analysis employing two or more of the methods we have learned. Those adopting the Pan-Ashkenazic Method should consult the following reference works:

Israel Davidson, *Otsar hameshalim vehapitgamim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1969). PN 6414 D32.

Aaron Hyman, *Otsar divrei hakhamim ufitgamehem* (Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1955). BM 495 H9 1955.

Mar. 20 ***The Purim Carnival***

*Purim p/serody*

"Yoysef un zayne brider" (1910), "Mekhires-yoysef" (1966) in Jacob Weitzner, *Mekhirat yosef bate'atron hayehudi ha'amami* (Tel Aviv: I. L. Peretz, 1999).

\* Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Contraband: Performance, Text and Analysis of a Purim-shpil," *The Drama Review* 24 (1980): 5-16.

\* David Roskies, "The Shtetl After Dark," audiotope.

Mar. 27 ***Weddings***

"Humorous Songs and Songs for Celebration and Parties" in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*.

Moshe Beregovski, "Jewish Instrumental Folk Music" (1937), in Moshe Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, ed. Mark Slobin.

Ezra Lahad, "Habadhanim," *Bamah Drama Quarterly* 95/96 (1983): 43-68.

Ezekiel Lifschutz, "Merrymakers and Jesters among Jews" [1930], *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 7 (1952): 43-84.

Silverman Weinreich, *Yiddish Folktales*, Part Five.

Apr. 3 ***The Urban Ghetto***

~~"Songs of Love," "Songs of Work, Poverty and Protest," in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*.~~

Shmuel Lehman, "Ganovim un gneyve: rednsartn, tsunemenishn, shprikhverter, fragn, gramen, anekdotn, un mayseyes," in Vanvild, *Bay undz yidn*, 45-59.

Apr. 17 ***Immigration***

"The Golden Land," "Songs of the Theatre," in Mlotek & Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*.

Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, "America in East European Yiddish Folksong," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 179-95.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore," *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Indiana University Press, 1983), 39-47.

Apr. 26 ***The Nazi Ghetto***

Shimon Huberband, "Wartime Folklore," *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust*, trans. David E. Fishman (New Jersey: Ktav, 1987), 113-29.

Israel Kaplan, *Dos folksmoyl in natsi-klem*, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters' House, 1982).

Gila Flam, *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), chaps. 2-3, 5.

Songs of the Lodz ghetto, audiotape.

## SOURCES

Roger D. Abrams, "The Complex Relations of Simple Forms" [1969] in *Folklore Genres*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (University of Texas, 1976), 193-214.

H. Aleksandrov, *Forsht ayer shtet!* (Minsk, 1928)

S. Ansky, "Di yidishe folksshafung" [1908], *Folklor un etnografye*, vol. 15 of *Gezamlte shriftn*, ed. Zalmen Reyzn (Vilna-Warsaw-New York, 1921), 29-94.

\_\_\_\_\_, "From the Ethnographic Expedition: Questionnaire," in *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader*, ed. Joachim Neugroschel (Syracuse University Press, 2000), 53-60.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Jewish Ethnographic Program" [1914], *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 14:1-2 (1992): 66-67.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Mutual Cultural Influences" [1920], *ibid.*

Haya Bar-Ytshak, "He'arot lamasah 'Ha'etnografiyah heyeyudit' leSh. Anski," *Chulyot* 5 (1999): 363-68.

Sh. Bastomski, *Yidishe folksretenishn* [1919], 2nd ed. (Vilna, 1923).

Dan Ben-Amos, "Jewish Folklore Studies," *Modern Judaism* 11 (1991): 17-66.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Jewish Studies and Jewish Folklore," *Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1990), Division D, vol. 2: 1-20.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Idea of Folklore," *Studies in Aggadah and Jewish Folklore* 7 (1983), English section, 11-17.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Old Yiddish and Middle Yiddish Folktales," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 14:1-2 (1992):4-5.

Moshe Beregovski, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, ed. Mark Slobin. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982; 2nd ed. Syracuse University Press, 2000. M1852 B404.

Mariëlla Beukers and Renée Waale, eds., *Tracing An-sky: Jewish Collections from the State Ethnographic Museums in St. Petersburg* (Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum, 1992). DS 135 R9 T64 1992.

Judah Leib Cahan, ed. *Yidishe folks-mayses* (Vilna: YIVO, 1940). GR 98 C3 1940.

Mary Douglas, "Jokes" [1975], in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (University of California Press, 1991), 291-310.

Gila Flam, *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). ML 3776 F62 1992.

Rivka Gonen, ed. *Back to the Shtetl: An-sky and the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition, 1912-1914* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1991).

Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, "America in East European Yiddish Folksong," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 179-95.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Joseph Mlotek, eds. *Pearls of Yiddish Song: Favorite Folk, Art and Theatre Songs* (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1988). M1852 P42 1988.

Benjamin Hrushovski, "Habayit hatipusi beshir 'am beyidish," *Sefer Dov Sadan*, ed. Shmuel Werses et al. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977), 11-28.

Shimon Huberband, "Wartime Folklore," *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultura; Life in Poland During the Holocaust*, trans. David E. Fishman (New Jersey: Ktav, 1987), 113-29.

Yisroel Kaplan, *Dos folksmoyl in natsi-klem*, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv, 1982).

Mark W. Kiel, "Vox Populi, Vox Dei: The Centrality of Peretz in Jewish Folkloristics," *Polin* 7 (1992): 88-120.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Concept and Varieties of Narrative Performance in East European Jewish Culture," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman & Joel Sherzer (Cambridge UP, 1974), 283-308.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Contraband: Performance, Text and Analysis of a Purim-shpil," *The Drama Review* 24 (1980): 5-16.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore," *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Indiana University Press, 1983), 39-47.

Mordecai Kosover, "Yidishe maykholim (a shtudye in kultur-geshikhte un shprakh-forshung), *Judah A. Joffe Book*, ed. Yudel Mark (New York: YIVO, 1958).

Shirley Kumove, *More Words, More Arrows: A Further Collection of Yiddish Folk Syaings* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). PN 6519 J5 M67 1998.

Ezra Lahad, "Habadhanim," *Bamah Drama Quarterly* 95/96 (1983): 43-68.

Shmuel Lehman, "Di kindervelt: gramen, lidlekh, hamstoes un shpiln" in M. Vanvild, ed., *Bay undz yidn* (Warsaw 1923), 113-49.



\_\_\_\_\_, "Ganovim un gneyve: rednsartn, tsunemenishn, shprikhverter, fragn, gramen, anekdotn, un mayses," *ibid.*, 43-92.

Ezekiel Lifschutz, "Merrymakers and Jesters among Jews" [1930], *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 7 (1952): 43-84.

Joachim Neugroschel, ed., *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader* (Syracuse University Press, 2000).

Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" [1908] in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 129-41.

Abraham Rechtman, *Yidishe etnografye un folklor: zikhroynes vegn der etnografisher ekspeditsye ongefirt fun Sh. An-Ski* (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1958). GR 98 R4.

Isaac Rivkind, *Yidishe gelt in lebnshteyger, kultur-geshikhte un folklor* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1959). +GR M6 R5 REF.

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

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Golden Peacock: The Art of Song," *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), chap. 6. DS 112 R65 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_, "S. Ansky and the Paradigm of Return," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (JTS, 1992), 243-60. BM 195 U83 1992.

Diane Roskies, "Alphabet Instruction in the East European Heder: Some Comparative and Historical Notes," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978): 21-53.

Mordkhe Schaechter, "On Children's Nonsense Oaths in Yiddish," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 196-98.

Yekhiel Shtern, "A Kheyder in Tyszowce (Tishevits)," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 5 (1950): 152-71.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Kheyder un besmedresh* (NY: YIVO, 1950).

Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, "Four Yiddish Variants of the Master-Thief Tale," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York, 1954), 199-213.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Genres and Types of Yiddish Folk Tales about the Prophet Elijah," *The Field of Yiddish, Second Collection* (NY, 1965), 202-31.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Images of Women and Girls in Yiddish Folktales: From the Rebellious to the Goody Two-Shoes," *Di froyen: Women and Yiddish Tribute to the Past Directions for the Future* (NY: National Council for Jewish Women, 1997), 78-79.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Modern Yiddish Folktales," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 14:1-2 (1992): 14-15.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Toward a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverbs," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 17 (1978): 1-20.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Yiddish Folktales*, trans. Leonard Wolf (New York: Pantheon/Schocken, 1988). GR 98 Y52 1988.

Susan Slotnick, "The Contributions of the Soviet Yiddish Folklorists," *Working Papers in Yiddish and East European Jewish Studies* 20 (YIVO, 1976).

M. Vanvild [Moyshe-Yoysef Dikshteyn], ed., *Bay undz yidn* (Warsaw, 1923).

N. Weinig, "Organizatsye un arbet fun an etnografishn krayz," *Landkentenish* 2 (1934): 5-17.

Beatrice & Uriel Weinreich, "Der repertuar fun teyg-materyaln fun a yidisher baleboste," *Yidisher folklor* 1:3 (1962): 58-59, 68-69.

Uriel & Beatrice Weinreich, eds. *Yiddish Language and Folklore: A Selective Bibliography for Research* (Hague: Mouton, 1959). Z7070 H4 REF.

Jacob Weitzner, *Mekhirat yosef bate'atron hayehudi ha'amami* (Tel Aviv: I. L. Peretz, 1999). PN 3035 H44 1999.

Eli Yassif, *Jewish Folklore Studies: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York & London: Garland, 1986. Z6374 F6Y 37 1986 REF.

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelboim (Indiana University Press, 1999). GR 98 Y3713 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_, "What Is a Folk Book?" *International Folklore Review* 5 (1987): 20-27.

Sh. Yudovin, Introduction to *Yidisher folks-ornament* (Vitebsk, 1920).