AMHERST COLLEGE

Religion 39/Wags 39

Women in Judaism

Fall 2010

Professor Susan Niditch Chapin 114

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*Books* on sale at the Amherst Book Store

Mary Antin The Promised Land

Judith R. Baskin Jewish Women in Historical Perspective

Lis Harris Holy Days

Norman Solomon Judaism. A Very Short Introduction

Anzia Yezierska The Breadgivers

A Bintel Brief

Lowenthall, trans. The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln

A Bible, any modern translation

*Course Reader* in the Religion Department Office, Chapin Hall.

*Readings on Ereserve*.

I. **Judaism, Feminism**

Sept. 8: *Introduction*: Methods, moments, sources, the search for meanings.

Sept. 13:

Readings:

Jacob Neusner, The Way of Torah, Intro; Timeline; pp.50-52; 81-111 (on reserve in Chapin Lounge)

Norman Solomon, Judaism. A Very Short Introduction, pp. 1-16, 30-134 (buy).

Susanna Heschel, On Being A Jewish Feminist, Introduction, xiii-xxxvi (Course Reader).

Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There," in Heschel, On Being, pp. 12-18 (Course Reader).

Judith Plaskow, "The Jewish Feminist: Conflict in Identities," in E. Koltun, The Jewish

Woman, pp. 3-10 (Course Reader).

Judith R. Baskin (Ereserve), “Women in Contemporary Judaism” in The Blackwell Companion to

Judaism, eds. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)

393-414 (Ereserve).

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Sept. 15: **Lecture by Professor Susannah Heschel**, "Liberation or Oppression? Ambiguities of

Jewish Feminist Analysis,” 4:30 p.m., 101 Chapin Hall.

To open the course we will juxtapose Norman Solomon's and Jacob Neusner’s fairly traditional introductions to Judaism with some brief pieces by Jewish feminists. In the following weeks we will trace a more chronological sequence. Throughout the semester, however, we will couple "primary" literature with modern "secondary" literature, realizing that secondary literature is itself primary literature worthy of analysis and critique. Consider and be prepared to discuss the following:

1. What do the pieces by Baskin (2000) and Heschel (1983) and Adler (1973) and Plaskow (1973) tell us about Jewish feminists’ critiques and their engagement with the tradition in the 70s and 80s and beyond?

2) As you read Solomon’s brief book and excerpts from Neusner (reserve in Chapin) and look at Neusner’s timeline, what recurring patterns or themes emerge in the history of Judaism that might influence roles and views of women? How do Neusner and Solomon address issues pertaining to Jewish women? Are certain threads or pieces of content included in their works specifically to present matters relevant to “women in Judaism?”

3) How do the materials read in Neusner and Solomon compare/contrast with Heschel’s introduction? Note you will hear in person from Professor Heschel on Wednesday, September 15.

4) **PAPER**: Write a two page response essay that addresses one small aspect of the above questions and issues. Perhaps, for example, you might like to write about something that surprised you in one of our sources.

II. **Heroines of the Hebrew Scriptures**

Helpful readings which expand upon Solomon's cursory discussion of biblical literature are:

Joel Rosenberg, "Biblical Narrative," in Barry Holtz, Back to the Sources, pp. 31-81 (on reserve).

Edward Greenstein, "Biblical Law," in Barry Holtz, Back to the Sources, pp. 83-103 (on reserve).

Feel free to skim and to read these over the next few weeks if you wish. An overview of this section of our course is provided by S. Niditch "Portrayals of Women in the Hebrew Bible," pp. 25-42 in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, ed. Judith R. Baskin (buy or reserve).

Sept. 20:

*The Matriarchs and Other Heroines*

Readings:

Genesis 1-3; Woman.

Genesis 16-18:15; 21:1-14: Sarah.

Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-28:5: Rebecca.

Genesis 29-31: Rachel.

Genesis 38: Tamar.

Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers..." in Adela Yarbro Collins, Feminist

Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship ,117-136 (Course Reader).

J. Cheryl Exum, "Mother in Israel" in Letty M. Russell, Feminist Interpretation of Scripture, 73-85 (Course Reader).

Exodus 15:20-21: Miriam.

Numbers 12:1-16; Mic 6:4, 1 ch 5:29 (6:2).

Joshua 2: Rahab.

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Jael.

The Book of Judith.

*The Wise Women and The Lover*

Readings:

1 Samuel 25.

1 Samuel 28:1-25.

2 Samuel 13-14.

2 Samuel 20:1-22.

The Book of Ruth.

The Book of Esther.

Proverbs 1-9

The Song of Songs

Sept. 27:

*Legal Material*

Readings:

Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in R. Ruether, ed., Religion and Sexism,

41-71 (on reserve, Frost Library).

Leviticus 12; 15:19-30.

Leviticus 18.

Numbers 5:11-31.

Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

*Appropriations by Modern Women*

Readings:

Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," in E. Koltun, The Jewish Woman, 217 240 (Course Reader).

Mary Gendler, "The Restoration of Vashti," in E. Koltun, The Jewish Woman, 241-247 (Course Reader).

For a wonderfully dated 1930's presentation by a man, compare B. Jacob, "The Jewish Woman in the Bible" in Leo Jung, The Jewish Library, Vol. 3, 3-26 (on reserve in Chapin Lounge).

Sept. 30: PAPER DUE

Essay on portrayals of women in the Hebrew Scriptures. Further details will be provided in class.

III. **Portrayals of Women in Classical Judaism**

For an historical overview of the Rabbinic period see Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Judaism to the Mishnah: 135-200 CE," and Isaiah M. Gafni "The World of the Talmud: From the Mishnah to the Arab Conquest," in Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, ed. H. Shanks, pp. 195-265 (on reserve).

Oct. 4:

*Non-legal Texts*

Readings:

On the genre midrash see Barry W. Holtz, "Midrash" in Barry W. Holtz, ed., Back to the Sources, 177-211 (on reserve).

A selection of midrashim from Genesis Rabbah (Course Reader).

Linda Kuzmack, "Aggadic Approaches to Biblical Women," in E. Koltun, ed., The Jewish Woman, 248-256 (Course Reader).

Anne Goldfeld, "Women as Sources of Torah in the Rabbinic Tradition," in E. Koltun, ed., The Jewish Woman, 257-271 (Course Reader).

Oct. 18:

*Legal Texts in the Rabbinic Tradition*

Readings:

See entries in Encyclopaedia Judaica under "Mishnah," "Niddah," and "Talmud, Babylonian

(available in the Yegian Library in Chapin Lounge and in Frost Reference)."

m. Niddah and other selections from the Mishnah (available in Course Reader).

m. Niddah, the tractate of the Mishnah dealing with the menstruating woman, is fascinating but

difficult reading. Fear not. We will divide up the assignment and work through the material

together.

Judith Hauptman, "Images of Women in the Talmud" in R. Ruether, ed., Religion and Sexism, 184-212 (on reserve).

Rachel Adler, "Tumah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings," in E. Koltun, The Jewish Woman, 63-71 (Course Reader). (Readings continued on following page)

Judith Romney Wegner, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism," pp. 68-93 in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, ed. J. Baskin (buy).

IV. **Medieval Views of Women and Modern Views of Medieval Women**

Oct. 25:

Readings:

Judith R. Baskin, "Jewish Women in the Middle Ages," pp. 94-114 in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, ed. Baskin.

I.A. Agus, The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry, 1-22, 277-309 (on reserve and available in Course Reader).

Franz Kobler, The Letters of Jews Through the Ages, letters #26, 27, 34 (Course Reader).

I. Epstein, "The Jewish Women in the Responsa," in Leo Jung, The Jewish Library, Vol. 3, 123-152

(reserve).

A guest class by Professor Judith Baskin, University of Oregon.

Nov. 1:

*Maimonides*

Readings:

Renée Levine Melammed, "Sephardi Women," pp. 115-134 in Jewish Women, ed. Baskin.

S. D. Goitein, "The World of Women," in A Mediterranean Society, Vol. 3, preface and 312-360 (on

reserve and available in Course Reader).

I. Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, "Introduction" (on reserve).

Encyclopaedia Judaica under "Maimonides, Moses."

Maimonides, The Book of Women, trans. Klein, portions to be assigned in class (we may divide the work among ourselves).

Is Maimonides' view of women an idiosyncratic one in the Middle Ages?

We will try to gain some sense of Islamic and Christian environments. Did lives of Jewish women in Islamic countries differ significantly from those in Christian Europe?

V. **Case Studies in Women of the Pre-Modern Period and Modern Representations: Urban Central Europe, Rural Eastern Europe**

Nov. 5: PAPER DUE On a topic in the classical or medieval period. The topic must be discussed with Professor Niditch, and may deal with a selection from Maimonides on women.

Nov. 8:

*A Woman of Late 17th Century Germany*

Readings:

The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln (buy).

For historical background see Howard M. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, 36-52

(reserve).

*Women in the Shetl and the Transition to America: Myth-Making, Self-Reflection, and Re-creation*

Nov. 14: Film Screening “Yentl”: 4:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m, Fayerweather 117 (film also streamed). This film is one modern Jewish woman's reflection on a particular vision of East European Judaism. Be prepared to discuss in class (Nov. 15) the layers within layers in a process of mythic and historical recreation.

Nov. 15:

Readings:

Y.B. Singer, “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy” (available in Course Reader).

Felicia Herman, “The Way She *Really* Is. Images of Jews and Women in the Films of Barbra

Streisand” in Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture, ed. Joyce

Antler (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) 171-190 (Ereserve).

A discussion of the film “Yentl” (See Nov. 14 above) and the article by Herman.

Zborowski and Herzog, Life Is With People, 11-28, 124-141, 269-290 (Course Reader).

Mary Antin, The Promised Land, 1-162, excerpts to be announced (buy).

Did Zborowski and Herzog systematically report on and help to preserve a world or did they in some sense create it?

Nov. 29:

*Hasidism and Woman*

Readings:

“Hasidism” in Encyclopaedia Judaica (can be read in Chapin Lounge).

Lis Harris, Holy Days, pp. 9-135, 242-259 (buy).

Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism, S.A. Horodecky and The Maid of Ludmir

Tradition," in Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., Jewish History: Essays in

Honour of Chimen Abramsky, pp. 495-525 (on reserve).

Andrea Lieber, “Domesticity and the Home: Blogging and Blurring of Public and Private among

Orthodox Jewish Women,” in Jews at Home, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Portland, Oregon: Littman

Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010) pp. 257-282 (Ereserve).

**Viewing** of Hallmark movie, “Loving Leah” (streamed).

VI. **Jewish Women in Modern America: The Immigrant Generation**

Dec. 5: Film, “Hester Street,” (streamed) (to be discussed on Dec. 6).

Dec. 6:

Readings:

A Bintel Brief, 38-43; 56-58; 83-86; 105-106; 110-112; 117-118; 144-145. 72-73; 91-92;

94-95; 103-105; 109-110; 121 (buy).

Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States," pp. 222-242 in Jewish Women, ed. J. Baskin.

Mary Antin, The Promised Land, (skim 163-240; 264-285; 321-364).

In class viewing of film based on Anzia Yezierska’s short story “Hungry Hearts.”

Dec. 13: **A guest class by Professor Laura Wexler, Yale University**

Readings:

Anzia Yezierska, The Breadgivers (buy).

Do these different writers and sources make for different histories?

In-class viewing of film based on Yezierska’s short story “Hungry Hearts.”

Dec. 17: PAPER DUE On immigrant women, topic to be cleared with Professor Niditch. Detailed suggestions to be provided.