

JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Fall 2003

Prof. David G. Roskies

Lit. 5217x *Sholem Aleichem: The Comedy of Dissolution*

Objectives: To understand how comedy turns one thing into another: a goat into a gilgul, losers into victors, grown-ups into children, a pot into a parable, a Gentile into a Jew, Scripture into nonsense, nonsense into Scripture, disaster into miracle; the end into the beginning; and all on account of a Russian Jew named Solomon Rabinovitch, who turned himself into Sholem Aleichem.

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

Logistics: Whosoever is doing the reading in English should purchase the following two books, which are available from Labyrinth Books, 536 W 112th Street. Everything else is in your course packet, Secondary readings are on reserve.

1. *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*. Hillel Halkin, trans. Schocken, 1987. Paperback.
2. *The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl & Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son*. Hillel Halkin, trans. Yale Univ. Press, 2002. Hardback.

Office hours: Thursdays 1:00-3:00; Unterberg 506. daroskies@jtsa.edu, ext. 8914.

Scheduling: Please note that the October 17 class has been rescheduled for Thursday at a time TBA.

How to Prepare for Class

5 Sept. **Solomon Rabinovitch, The Letters and the Life**

Dan Miron, "Sholem-Aleykhem: Person, Persona, Presence," *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Essays in the Jewish Literary Imagination*, (Syracuse, 2000), chap. 4. PJ 5129 A3 S5 Z7642 2000.

12 Sept. **The Comic Quest**

דער אונזר / האונזר (1889)

דער פֿאַרפֿישפֿטער שניידער / The Haunted Tailor (1901)

Zoya Prizel, "The Narrator in SA's 'The Enchanted Tailor'," *Yiddish* 2:4 (1977); 55-60 - article on reserve.

Dov Sadan, "Three Foundations," *SA and the Yiddish Literary Tradition* (=Proof texts 6 [1986]: 55-63) - article on reserve.

19 Sept **The Comic Capitalist**

+מנחם-מענדל / *The Letters of Menakem-Mendl and Sheyne-Sheyndl*

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

Dan Miron, "A Dash for Freedom: Sampling Menakhem-Mendl." in *The Image of the Shtetl*, chap. 5.

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

26 Sept. **Erev Rosh Hashanah** [no class]

3 October **Exegetical Comedy**

Tevye the Dairyman, trans. Hillel Halkin:

דאָס גרויסע געווינס / Tevye Strikes It Rich (1895)

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

אַ בוידעם / Tevye Blows a Small Fortune (1899)

היינטיקע קינדער / Today's Children (1899)

Hillel Halkin, "Introduction" to *Tevye the Dairyman*
 Michael Stern, "Tevye's Art of Quotation," *SA and the Critical Tradition*
 [=Prooftexts 6 [1986]]:79-96 - article on reserve.

10 October **The Monomaniacal Mind**
 Erev Sukkot [Regular classes]

ווען איך בין ראטשילד / If I Were Rothschild (1901)
 דאָס טעפל / The Pot (1901)
 יוסף / Joseph (1905)

Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, & Peretz* (Albany, 1995), chap. 7. PJ5124 F75 1995, .
 Hana Wirth-Nesher, "Voices of Ambivalence in SA's Monologues,"
Prooftexts 1 (1981): 158-71 - xerox on reserve.

16 Oct. **The Comedy of Endurance** 6-8
 Make-up Class

Hodl (1905),
 Chava (1901), 6
 Shprintze (1907)
 טביה פֿאַרט קיין ארץ-ישראל / Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel (1909)

Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (California, 1990), pp. 102-7.
 PJ 5113 H33 1990,
 Ruth R. Wisse, "The Comedy of Endurance," *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture* (The Free Press, 2000),
 chap. 1. PN842 W57 2000.

17 Oct. **Hoshana Rabba** [no class]

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

24 Oct. **The Comedy of Childhood**

דאָס מעסערל / The Penknife (1886)

די פֿאַן / The Flag (1900)

דער אורח / The Guest (1906)

David G. Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Harvard University Press, 1995). pp. 147-75.

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

31 Oct. **The Comedy of Dislocation**

מאָטל פייסי דעם חזנס+ / *Motl, the Cantor's Son* (1907-1916) -

Dan Miron, "Bouncing Back: Destruction and Recovery in Sholem-Aleykhem's *Motl peyse dem khazns*," *The Image of the Shtetl*, chap. 6.

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

7 Nov. **Trains, Stories, & Miracles**

אייזנבאן-געשיכטעס / *Railroad Stories*:

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

Leah V. Garrett, "*Journeys beyond the Pale: Yiddish Travel Writing in the Modern World* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), chap. 3. PJ 5120.7 T73 G38 2003.

Nov. 14 **Patriarchal Comedy**

שווער צו זיין אַ ייד / It's Hard to Be a Jew (1914)

דאָס גרויסע געווינס / The Jackpot (1915)

Jacob Weitzner, *Sholem Aleichem in the Theater* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), pp. 111-49. PJ 5129 A3S5 Z885 1994.

21 Nov. **The Comedy of Dissolution**

Railroad Stories - the other 16 tales

Dan Miron, "Journey to the Twilight Zone: On SA's Railroad Stories," *The Image of the Shtetl*, chap. 7.

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

28 Nov. THANKSGIVING

5 Dec. **The Artist as Comic Hero**

פֿונעם יריד / *From the Fair: The Autobiography of Sholom Aleichem* (1908-1916), Curt Leviant, trans.

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