The Search for Self: Twentieth-Century Jewish Women Writers
From World War II to 1990 (Part II)

The course focuses on the memoirs and fiction of American Jewish women writers who published from 1945 to 1990; it is divided into three sections. Section I examines the work of three significant Jewish women writers in the post-World War II period—Jo Sinclair, Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley—in relation to their representation of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant experience, depiction of Jewish women and presentation of gender issues. Section II begins with an analysis of two creative works prominent in American mainstream culture—Philip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint (1969) and Neil Simon’s film The Heartbreak Kid (1972)—and their depiction of Jewish American women. This section also includes readings reflecting Jewish women’s responses to and incorporation of second wave feminism into Jewish American identity, religious practice and ritual observance; the film Half the Kingdom (1989) articulates some of these responses; the section concludes with Erica Jong’s novel Fear of Flying (1973) and the installation at the Brooklyn Museum of Judy Chicago’s The Dinner Party (1974-79). Section III analyzes the work of—Elana Dykewomon, E. M. Broner, Marcia Freedman, Meredith Tax, Kate Simon, Rebecca Goldstein, and Lore Segal—Jewish writers who consciously incorporated various visions and ideas of second wave feminism into their fiction and memoirs, and, in so doing, attempted to put forth a new vision of Jewish women’s lives and experiences. Secondary readings contextualize these works.

Guest Speaker: Marcia Freedman

**REQUIRED TEXTS, FILMS, VISUAL ART**

Hortense Calisher—“Old Stock” (1950)
Jo Sinclair—“Second Blood: A Rosh Hashonah Story” (1944)
—The Changelings (1955) (oop)
Grace Paley—Little Disturbances of Man (1959)
Tillie Olsen—Tell Me a Riddle (1961)
Lore Segal—Other People’s Houses (1964)
—“The Reverse Bug” (1989)
Cynthia Ozick—“The Shawl” (1980)
Philip Roth—Portnoy’s Complaint (1969)
The Heartbreak Kid (1972) (Media Center)
Erica Jong—Fear of Flying (1973)
Linda Nochlin—“Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists” (1971)
Judy Chicago—The Dinner Party (1974-79) (Brooklyn Museum)
Half the Kingdom (1989) (Media Center)
Nessa Rapoport—“The Woman Who Lost Her Names” (1979)
Elana Dykewomon—Riverfinger Women (1974) (oop)
E. M. Broner—Weave of Women (1978) (oop)
Freedman, Marcia—Exile in the Promised Land (1990) (oop)
Meredith Tax—Rivington Street (1982) (oop)
Kate Simon—*Bronx Primitive* (1982)
Rebecca Goldstein—*The Mind-Body Problem* (1983)
Leslea Newman—“A Letter to Harvey Mild” (1988)
Lynn Sharon Schwartz—“The Melting Pot” (1989)

**Course Requirements**

(a) Class attendance and class participation: The seminar relies on the active participation of all students; students should be prepared to discuss primary and secondary texts.

(b) One 5-minute presentation on a relevant article from a Jewish, general, local, national newspaper or journal.

(c) Primary text presentation: Each student is required to give one 15-minute class presentation on an assigned primary reading and relevant secondary materials. The presentation should offer the class significant background on the text and author, interpretative suggestions for discussion and relevant questions to be explored.

(d) Four papers: 4-5-page papers (1000-1250 words) on a primary text.

(f) One conference: with instructor before February 15.

**Guidelines**

(a) Bring all texts to class (including hard copies of supplementary materials posted on Courseworks) and be prepared to participate in class discussion on the required readings.

(b) Prepare one 5-minute presentation on a relevant article from a Jewish, general, local, national newspaper/journal. Select articles that touch upon (directly or indirectly) issues raised in class, such as the nature of “ethnic/mainstream” American literature, American Jewish women’s identity and experiences, etc.

Bring a copy of the article (2 sides of a single 8 x 11 sheet—no longer!) a week ahead of time for xeroxing for the class. Otherwise, bring enough copies the day of the presentation.

This presentation does not exempt the student from either a paper or an exploratory essay for that day.

(c) Prepare a 15-minute presentation on the assigned readings and relevant secondary materials for that day. Plan your presentation carefully since you will not be given extra time or a second opportunity. Distribute an outline of your presentation (not more than one page) to the class at the beginning of your talk. *Do not read notes, but refer to them.* Include a list of questions that the class should address. Be ready to lead class discussion.

A student giving an oral presentation may not also submit a paper for that text.

(d) Four papers: The papers should be 1000-1250 words (no longer!) on one of the primary texts scheduled for that class and, when appropriate, may refer to secondary sources as well as previously assigned works. Papers should address a significant theme or issue and
analyze (not summarize) it succinctly. They will be graded on both the argument and the writing (letter grade).

Papers may only be submitted on the day of discussion. No late papers will be accepted. You must skip at least one week between papers. If you are submitting a revision, do not submit a new paper until after the revision has been returned.

(cont'd) →

Revisions are permitted, but not required, for the first two papers only and must be submitted the week after they are returned. No late rewrites will be accepted.

(f) One conference with instructor before February 15.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Note: Miriam Raskin's short story and all secondary materials are available from the syllabus on Courseworks. Please bring hard copies of all secondary materials due for each session.


**Tues. Jan 18**
Introduction—Tryna Hope—“Riva’s Story”

**Tues. Jan 25**
Miriam Raskin’s—“At a Picnic” (1941) (in the original Yiddish and English translation) in Found Treasures
Jo Sinclair—The Changelings (1955)

Bio-bibliographic essay by Gay Wilentz (Shapiro)

Bio-bibliographic essay by Sara R. Horowitz (Hyman and Moore)


**Tues. Feb. 1**
Grace Paley—Little Disturbances of Man (1959)

Anita Norich—Bio—Grace Paley (Hyman and Moore).


(cont’d) ➔


(Bring *Tell Me a Riddle* to class)

**Tues. Feb. 8**

Tillie Olsen—*Tell Me a Riddle* (1961)

“A Tribute to Tillie Olsen: January 14, 1912-January 1, 2007.”

Bio-bibliographic essay by Oliver B. Pollak (Hyman and Moore).


**Tues. Feb. 15**

Philip Roth—*Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969)

*The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) (Media Center)


“Preface” to *The Jewish Woman in America*, eds. Baum, Hyman, Michel (1975).

“Chapter 8: From Veneration to Vituperation: Jewish Women Today” in *The Jewish Woman in America*, Baum, Hyman and Michel (1975).

**Tues. Feb. 22**

*Half the Kingdom* (1989) (viewed in class)


(cont’d) →

Tues. March 1

Erica Jong—Fear of Flying (1973)


Martha A. Ravits—“The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture,” Vol. 25, No. 1, Jewish American Literature (Spring, 2000), 3-31. MELUS

Sun. March 6

Judy Chicago—The Dinner Party (1979) (Brooklyn Museum)

Deborah Wacks—Bio—Judy Chicago (Hyman and Moore)


Rachel Beckman—“Her Table Is Ready,” Washington Post (April 22, 2007).

Tues. March 8

Elana Dykewomon—Riverfinger Women (1974)

Rebecca T. Alpert—(Jewish) Lesbianism (Hyman and Moore)


Tues. March 15—Spring Break

(cont’d) ➔

Tues. March 22
Freedman, Marcia—Exile in the Promised Land (1990)
E. M. Broner—Weave of Women (1978)

Bio-Bibliographic essay by Kathryn Sklar (Hyman and Moore)


We will be honored to have Esther Broner speak about her work.

Tues. March 29
Meredith Tax—Rivington Street (1982)


Tues. April 5
Kate Simon—Bronx Primitive (1982)


Tues. April 12
Rebecca Goldstein—The Mind-Body Problem (1983)

Bio-Bibliographic essay by Sylvia Back Fishman (Shapiro)

Rebecca Goldstein—“Against Logic” in Who We Are: On Being (and Not Being) a Jewish American Writer, ed. Derek Rubin (2005), 140-150.

Susan Jacobowitz—“Hardly There Even When She Wasn’t Lost”: Orthodox Daughters and the ‘Mind Body Problem’ in contemporary Jewish American Fiction,” Shofar, 22.3 (2004), 72-94.

No Class—April 19 Passover
Hoffman, Eva—*Lost in Translation* (1989)

Conclusions