Among the vast body of early 20th-century literature by Ashkenazi immigrant women — Eastern and Western, and U.S. born — many texts address the tensions between maintaining cultural and religious Jewish identity and recognizing the necessity and/or inevitability of integration, acculturation, and assimilation. Through memoirs, autobiographies and fiction, women writers of this period reflect a variety of Jewish attitudes toward the “old home” in Europe and toward their new U.S. surroundings. Much of their writing also documents a quest to realize their full potential and gauges how this potential is limited or expanded in Jewish and non-Jewish communities on both sides of the Atlantic. This search for self — as a Jew, as an American, and as a woman — parallels a search for a voice and a language that can articulate the needs of each identity.

The majority of the texts were written in English. But since many immigrants also produced a rich American Yiddish literature, a number of Yiddish women writers in translation (with original texts provided) are included for discussion. Their Yiddish stories will be analyzed for the ways they mirror or contradict writing in English and for the ways the chosen language intersects with issues of gender. Fiction by two male writers will provide students with still another point of comparison of how Jewish women’s immigrant experiences have been represented in American literature.

Together with supportive secondary materials, texts will be discussed from multiple perspectives: their historical context, their genre and literary achievement, their depiction of European and U.S. Jewish experiences, their attitude to Jewish and gentile communities, their authors’ awareness of gender issues and their use/rejection of anti-Semitic and gender stereotypes.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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

(b) Class presentation: A one 15-minute class presentation on an assigned reading and relevant secondary materials. The presentation should offer the class significant background on the text and author, interpretative suggestions for discussion as well as relevant questions to be explored.

(c) Current journal/newspaper presentation: A 5-minute presentation on a relevant journal/newspaper article.

(d) Weekly exploratory essay + 2 questions: A weekly exploratory essay of about 250 words on a primary text should address some important/interesting aspect of the work. Also submit two questions about the text that would be important to address.
(e) Four papers: 4-5 pages (1000-1250 words--no more) on a primary text.
(f) One conference with instructor before Sept. 28.

**GUIDELINES**

(a) Bring all texts to class—including **hard copies** of texts on Courseworks—and be prepared to participate in class discussions on the required readings(s). Present at least 2 questions you believe need to be addressed that day about the assigned readings.

(b) Prepare one **15-minute talk on the assigned reading(s)** and relevant secondary materials. Speak from notes; **do not read** an essay. Plan your presentation carefully. Prepare an outline of your presentation (**not more than one side of one page**) to be distributed to the class at the beginning of your talk. Also, 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 an exploratory essay or a paper for that text.

(c) **Five-minute current journal/newspaper presentation:** The article should focus on **American Jewish women** and should raise **directly or indirectly issues of gender in the arts** or related topics. Book/film/theater/museum reviews or profiles and interviews with American Jewish women in the arts are appropriate. Possible resources: **Bridges magazine, Lillith, The Forward, The Jewish Week, Nextbook**, general, local newspapers, etc. Check websites of these and other newspaper/journals.

   Post articles **by Monday morning** in “Newspaper/Journal” File—in “Shared Files” under “Class Files in Courseworks.” -- Title of file should include the date of presentation.

   This presentation **does not** exempt the student from either an exploratory essay or a full paper.

(d) **Weekly exploratory essay + 2 questions:** Submit two questions and a 250-word essay—on a primary text. An exploratory essay is neither a paper nor a “why-I-like-this-book” response paper. Rather, it is an opportunity to point out issues that could contribute to a better understanding of the work — though obviously ones that cannot be fully developed in such a short space. The essay will be evaluated on the originality of ideas and critical insights. These essays will receive numerical grades (1-10).

(e) **Four papers:** The papers should be 4-5 pages or 1000-1250 words (**no longer**) on a primary text(s) assigned for that class. Papers should, when appropriate, refer to secondary sources and previously assigned works and should address a significant theme or issue; analyze (not summarize) it succinctly. These papers 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.

   Rewrites 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 September 28--the earlier the better. You may want to discuss your presentation ahead of time, but are not required to do so.
Required Texts
(at Book Culture
536 West 112th)

Antin, Mary.  The Promised Land.

Antler, Joyce ed. America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women Writers. oop

Baum, Charlotte, Paula Hyman, Sonya Michel. The Jewish Woman in America (excerpts in Reader on Courseworks).

Cahan, Abraham. Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories.


Simon, Kate. Bronx Primitive. oop


Yezierska, Anzia. The Open Cage.

--Bread Givers.

Joan Micklin Silver. Hester Street (1975) (at Media Center)

Syllabus

A & I = America and I, ed. Joyce Antler  oop
FT = Found Treasures, eds. Forman et al
C = Reader/Courseworks

September 7
Introduction
Grace Paley: “A Midrash on Happiness” (handout in class)

September 14—The Old Country in English and Yiddish

Mary Antin--"Malinke’s Atonement" (1911) (A & I) oop

Fradel Shtok--"The Shorn Head/Opgeshnitene hor" (1919) (C)
--- "The Veil/Der shlayer" (1919) (English--FT; Yiddish—C)

Baum, et al. The Jewish Woman in America: "Preface" and Ch. 1 (C)
September 21—The New Home—In Yiddish

Yente Serdatzky—"Unchanged/Umgebitn" (1913) (English--FT, Yiddish--C)
--- "Confession/Vide" (1913) (English & Yiddish--C)

Norma Fain Pratt. "Culture and Radical Politics: Yiddish Women Writers in America," in Baskin, ed. Women of the Word (C)

Irena Klepfisz. "Queens of Contradiction: A Feminist Introduction to Yiddish Women Writers" in FT.

September 28

Abraham Cahan—"Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto" (1896)

Baum, et al.--The Jewish Woman in America, Ch. 2 (C)

Hyman, Paula “Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States” from Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, Judith Baskin, ed. (1991) (C)

“The Forward” (a brief history)

Video—Hester Street—Joan Micklin Silver (1975) (available in Media Center—watch only after reading "Yekl")

Kenneth Turan—“A Wig, a Fence, and One White Horse” [On Hester Street] in Pakn Treger/Book Peddler (2003) (C)

Riv-Ellen Prell—"Introduction" and "Ghetto Girls and Jewish Immigrant Desire" from Fighting to be Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation (1991) (C)

Last class to submit Paper 1.

October 5

Mary Antin—The Promised Land (1912)—Preface and Chs. 1-7


October 12

Mary Antin—The Promised Land (1912)—Chs. 8-20; "How I Wrote The Promised Land"

Burch, C. Beth. "Mary Antin's The Promised Land and the Unspoken Failure of Assimilation," in Studies in American Jewish Literature. 12, 36-41. (C)

Baum, et al. The Jewish Woman in America, Chs. 3-4 (C)

**October 19**

Edna Ferber—"The Girl Who Went Right" (1918) (A & I)


**October 26**


**Last class to submit Paper 2.**

**November 2—Election Day**

**November 9**

Anzia Yezierska. *Bread Givers*. 1925


Baum, et al. *The Jewish Woman in America*, Chs. 5-6 (C)


**November 16**

Anzia Yezierska. from *The Open Cage*


November 23

Fannie Hurst. "Seven Candles" (1923) (A & I)


**Last class to submit paper 3.**

November 30

Michael Gold. Jews Without Money (1930)

Michael Brewster Folsom—“The Education of Michael Gold” in Proletarian Writers of the Thirties, David Madden, ed. (1968).

December 7

Celia Dropkin. "A Dancer/A tentserin" (1935) (English–FT, Yiddish—C)

Miriam Raskin. "At a Picnic/Oyf a piknik" (1941) (English–FT, Yiddish-C)

Kate Simon. Bronx Primitive: Portraits in a Childhood (1972)

**Last day to submit paper 4.**