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# San José State University Jewish Studies Program/ History Department JWSS 111/ HIST 111: Yiddish History and Culture Fall Semester 2023 Three Units

#### **Course and Contact Information**

Instructor: Ms. Rokhl Kafrissen

Telephone and Email: rokhl.kafrissen@sjsu.edu

Office and office hours: I will be available for 30 minutes before each class session and by individual appointment. For individual appointments, please email me at the address listed above.

Class Days/Time: Mon-Wed 12-1:15 p.m.

Classroom: Virtual

# **Prerequisite**

Prior to enrollment, all SJSU Studies courses require completion of core GE and upper division standing. Completion of, or simultaneous enrollment in, a 100W course is required for enrollment in Areas R, S and V. Completion of the Upper-Division Writing Directed Self Placement is required (https://www.sjsu.edu/wac/wst/)

# **Course Description**

This course covers the development of Yiddish, the historic language of the Jews of Eastern Europe; the culture and way of life produced by its speakers; and the fate of those speakers in the  $20^{th}$  century.

Over the course of the semester, students will gain an understanding of Yiddish as more than a language; it is a 1000-year transnational phenomenon, in which a shared culture has provided a quasi-national identity to millions, across sociological, economic, and political boundaries.

We will use Yiddish as a lens through which to explore some of the major historical trends in Eastern European and, in turn, American Jewish life, such as Hasidism, the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), nationalism, immigration, secularization, and antisemitism.

The class will also improve your reading, writing, and analytical skills.

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#### **Course Format**

This class will be taught in an online synchronous format.

The course will be given primarily in the form of readings, lectures, and student presentations. During lectures you are encouraged to ask questions and make comments. Taking careful notes during lectures will improve your grade. Some assignments will be collaborative projects and students are encouraged to work together throughout the course.

# **Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging**

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, lecture slides, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on the <u>Canvas Learning Management System course login website</u>. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through <u>MySJSU</u> on <u>Spartan App Portal</u> (or other communication system as indicated by the instructor) to learn of any updates. For help with using Canvas see <u>Canvas Student Resources page</u>.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1. Draw on a multi-disciplinary conceptual framework for understanding the complex, transnational character of Yiddish, including concepts from the fields of linguistics, feminist and queer theory, and sociology. (Week 1: What is Yiddish?; Week 3: The Many Genders of Yiddish; Week 12: Queer Yiddish; Week 13: Yiddish Theater)
- 2. Analyze the development of modern Yiddish culture and how it reflects the changing socio-economic condition of Eastern European and North American Jews. (Week 2: Diaspora vs. Galut vs. Goles vs. Exile; Week 3: The Many Genders of Yiddish; Week 6: Shtetl and Empire: Austro-Hungary and the Russian Empire; Week 7: The Era of Great Migrations, 1881-1921; Week 8 & 9: Yiddish as a Language of Political Revolution)
- 3. Analyze texts (songs, short stories, films) within their literary, geographic, religious, and historical contexts. (Week 2: Diaspora vs. Galut vs. Goles vs. Exile; Week 4: The Creation of Modern Yiddish Culture, 1860s-1880s; Week 5: What are Jews? Religion vs. Ethnicity vs. People; Week 8: Yiddish as a Language of Spiritual Revolution: Hasidism and Its Opponents)
- 4. Use key concepts like diaspora, assimilation, and racialized prejudice to analyze what the Jewish experience does and does not share in common with other diasporic peoples, immigrants, and national minorities. (Week 2: Diaspora vs. *Galut* vs. *Goles* vs. Exile; Week 5: What are Jews? Race vs. Religion vs. Nationality; Week 7: The Era of Great Migrations, 1881-1921; Week 9: Yiddish as a Language of Political Revolution)
- 5. Analyze, describe, and compare works of art (songs, short stories, films) considering criteria such as style, point of view, emotional impact. (Week 4: The Creation of Modern Yiddish Culture, 1860s-1880s; Week 7: The Era of Great Migrations, 1881-1921;

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#### **Week 13: Yiddish Theater)**

# Required Readings

#### **Textbook**

Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement*. Expanded Ed., Fordham University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8232-1695-0

#### **Readings on Canvas**

- "Language of the Way of the SHaS," Max Weinreich
- Chapter 3, *How to be a Mentsh (& Not a Shmuck)*, Michael Wex
- Chapter 1, *The Jewish Century*, Yuri Slezkine
- "'For Women and for Men Who Are like Women': The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature," Chava Weissler
- "Is Hebrew Male and Yiddish Female?," Naomi Seidman
- Introduction and Book Three, *Glikl: Memoirs 1691-1719*, presented by Chava Turniansky
- "Geese," Sholem Aleichem, My First Love Affair and Other Stories
- Introduction and "Tsipke," Salomea Perl, *The Canvas and Other Stories*
- "History as Fiction: Isaac Bashevis Singer's Pseudonymous Personas," David Neal Miller
- Introduction by Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog
- Piotr Wrobel, "The Jews of Galicia under Austrian-Polish Rule, 1867-1914"
- Introduction by Sasha Senderovich, *The Zelmenyaners: A Family Saga*, translated by Hillel Halkin
- "Folk Traditions," *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions*, Steven M. Lowenstein
- "Day of Atonement," Burning Lights, Bella Chagall
- "What is Yom Kippur?" September 2009, *Tablet* magazine
- "Making Soul Candles," *Pulling at Threads* website
- Introduction, Tenement Songs, Mark Slobin
- Introduction and Chapter 1, Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way, Hasia Diner
- Introduction and Chapter One, *Hasidism: A New History*, David Biale, ed.
- "Transmigration of a Melody," I.L. Peretz
- "The Bundist Women's Organization," *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland*, Jack Jacobs
- Introduction, A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York, Tony Michels
- "Fighting Anti-Semitism and Jim Crow: 'Negro-Jewish Unity' in the International Workers Order," Jennifer Young, *AJS Perspectives*
- "A Brief and Not-Entirely Uncomplicated History of the Yiddish Press," Eddy Portnoy, Bad Rabbi and Other Strange But True Stories from the Yiddish Press

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- "The American Yiddish Press at Its Centennial," B.Z. Goldberg, Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters
- "A Day in Coney Island," Isaac Bashevis Singer
- "The Ghost of Queer Loves Past: Ansky's "*Dybbuk*" and the Sexual Transformation of Ashkenaz," *Queer theory and the Jewish Question*, Naomi Seidman
- "Khonen in Drag: Cross-Dressing in Two Productions of "The Dybbuk," Digital Yiddish Theater Project website, Zachary Baker
- "Pepi Littman, Yiddish Drag King," Chana Pollack, Forward
- "Yeshaye Katovski: Letter to the *Forverts* Editor," translated by Eddy Portnoy, *How Yiddish Changed America and How America Changed Yiddish*
- "The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds, A Dramatic Legend in Four Acts," Joachim Neugroschel, translator and editor, *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader*
- Chapter One, "Spectacular Failures," Debra Caplan, Yiddish Empire: The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theatre, and the Art of Itinerancy
- "The Malavskys, a family portrait" blogpost by Jeremiah Lockwood
- "The Malavskys: A Family Portrait The Horowitz's and the Malavskys" blogpost by Jeremiah Lockwood
- "Melekh Ravitsh: the eccentric outback quest of an urbane Yiddish poet from Poland," article
- YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, entry for Yiddish, *Misnagdim*, Labor Zionists, Folkists, *Frayland Lige*, *Haskalah*, Sholem Aleichem, Social Conduct
- The Immigration Act of 1924, webpage, history.state.gov
- Emergency Quota Act of 1921, webpage, www.nps.gov
- Short Biography of Glikl Haml, entry at JWA website
- Selections from *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds.: "Yiddish is a Corrupt Jargon," Map and Delineation of the Pale of Settlement, "The Question of the Jew is a Question of Race," "On the Latest Wave of Emigration"
- Songs: "Royz, Royz," "How the Jews Came to Europe," "Zol Nokh Zayn Shabes," "Got fun Avrom," "Lebn zol kolumbus," "S'iz nito keyn nekhtn," "Az der rebbe zingt," "Yesterday is Buried," "In ale gasn/Hey, hey, daloy politsey!" "Di shvue," "Arbeter froyen," "Bread and Roses"
- Movies: "An American Tail," "Hester Street," "Der Dibek," 2020 production by the Congress for Jewish Culture

# **Recommended Reading**

Recommended Reading selections (if any) will be listed in each week's Page

# **Library Liaison**

The History Department Library Liaison is Nyle Monday (Nyle.Monday@sjsu.edu; (408)

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808-2041). Contact him for help with any library assignments in your history classes.

# **Course Requirements and Assignments**

Four short (500 words max.) writing assignments drawing on that week's readings, as well as course texts and concepts covered so far. Grading is based on comprehension and application of assigned readings and concepts, student's ability to craft an argument, and prose that is free of spelling and grammar errors and cliche. Each essay is worth 100 points and must be turned in at the beginning of class. All sources should be cited parenthetically. Example: (Goldsmith, 27). More guidance on these writing assignments will be given in class in advance of their due dates. **400 points total.** 

Three assignments will require students to read a short story or dramatic text and choose a five-minute excerpt which they will annotate and dramatize in any form they choose. Students may work together in groups of two or three if they choose. Grading will be based on demonstration of comprehension of the short story, as well as its literary and historical context. Each dramatization is worth 50 points. 150 points total.

Culminating Assignment: Students will find and choose two Yiddish short stories in translation and write a 1000 word (maximum) analysis, using key course concepts. 450 points.

#### **Grading Criteria**

Grading: the course is letter graded.

There are no tests in this class. The majority of course work will be readings and short writing and performance assignments for each major course section. A longer analytic essay will be required as a culminating assignment. Students will be asked to use course concepts to read and understand scholarly articles and analyze relevant historical documents, literary texts, movies and songs. Students should come ready to class having completed assigned readings for each week.

Grades will be awarded based on points earned out of 1000 possible points:

A 930-1000

A- 900-920

B+860-890

B 830-850

B- 800-820

C+ 760-790

C 730-750

C- 700-720

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D+ 660-690 D 630-650 D- 600-620 F Below 600

Plagiarizing in whole or in part, including the submission of essays obtained online will not be tolerated. Copying from AI is the same as copying from another person, and will be treated as plagiarism. The penalty for plagiarism and cheating may include expulsion from the university.

Essays will be evaluated based on clarity of argument, use of sources with careful assessment of applicability, agenda, purpose, and proper citation per assignment prompts.

"Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus." University Policy S16-9

#### **Classroom Protocol**

Attendance is strongly encouraged but not mandatory, but you are responsible for all the material presented in the lectures and assigned in the required readings. My lectures are secured by copyright. You may not record lectures. Lectures may not be shared or posted on the internet under any circumstances. Doing so may result in civil or criminal penalties according to copyright law. You need not receive my permission if you are forced to be absent.

Pay close attention to the corrections and comments made on your written assignments. If you feel you need special assistance with your writing, come see me. Please turn off or silence cell phones while in class. Keeping cameras on is strongly encouraged in order to foster group learning. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. If you have any questions or difficulties, do not hesitate to see me after class, come to my office hours or arrange an appointment.

# **University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9, relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on Syllabus Information web page

(https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

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#### **Additional Information**

# **Academic integrity**

Your commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The University's Academic Integrity policy, located at http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/S07-2.htm, requires you to be honest in all your academic coursework. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The Student Conduct and Ethical Development website is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/.

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include your assignment or any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy S07-2 requires approval of instructors. The penalty for plagiarism and cheating may include expulsion from the university.

# SJSU Counseling Services

The SJSU Counseling Services is located at the Student Wellness Center, corner of 7th and San Carlos, across from the Event Center, 3rd floor, Room 300B. Professional psychologists, social workers, and counselors are available to provide consultations on issues of student mental health, campus climate or psychological and academic issues on an individual, couple, or group basis. To schedule an appointment or learn more information, visit Counseling Services website at <a href="http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling">http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling</a>.

# **Veteran Services**

For Student Veterans, Dependents and Spouses, Reservists and National Guard services are available. The SJSU Veterans Resource Center is in the Diaz Compean Student Union, Room 1500 (first floor).. For more information contact director Maggie Morales at (408) 924-8129 or Maggie.morales@sjsu.edu.

#### **Jewish Studies**

The SJSU Jewish Studies program offers a minor, and puts on events and programming

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throughout the school year. For more information contact the Jewish Studies Coordinator, Vicki Harrison at <u>Victoria.harrison@sjsu.edu</u>

# JWSS 111: Special Topics in Jewish Studies: Yiddish History and Culture

#### Fall 2023 Class Schedule

# This schedule is subject to change. Notice of changes will be given through Canvas.

Week One – What is Yiddish? (August 21)

- Readings
  - "The Language of Ashkenaz," Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture* page 27-44
  - "Language of the Way of the SHaS" by Max Weinreich, page 175 190
  - Chapter 3, How to be a Mentsh (& Not a Shmuck), Michael Wex
  - "Yiddish is a Corrupt Jargon," Isaac Dov Levinsohn, *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, page 324-325
  - Yiddish and Ashkenaz entries from the YIVO Encyclopedia (See Week One Page)
- Assignment for Week Two
  - In your reading of "Jewish Existence: End and the Endless," by Simon Rawidowicz, please choose a passage, between a paragraph and a page, that you find interesting or notable and be prepared to explain it to the other students

Week Two – Diaspora vs. *Galut* vs. *Goles* vs. Exile (August 28)

- Readings
  - Excerpt from "Jewish Existence: The End and the Endless," by Simon Rawidowicz
  - Excerpt from Chapter 1, *The Jewish Century*, Yuri Slezkine
  - Short readings on Spanish Expulsion of 1492 and Glikl Haml, available in Canvas Pages section
- Songs
  - "Royz, Royz" "The Ballad of How the Jews Got to Europe" and "Zog Maran" all available in Canvas Week Two Page
- Assignment
  - Write 250-300 words comparing how the assigned songs depict concepts of

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diaspora, *goles*, and spiritual exile. Students should make use of vocabulary and concepts covered in readings so far.

Week Three – The Many Genders of Yiddish (September 6)

[NOTE: Only one class this week, on Wednesday, September 6]

- In class assignment: Choose a song from the two assigned blogposts and be prepared to give a short introduction to the class about the song and why you chose it.
- Readings
  - "Is Hebrew Male and Yiddish Female?" by Naomi Seidman
  - "'For Women and for Men Who Are like Women': The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature," by Chava Weissler, Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1989)

See Week Three Page

- Haskalah entry from the YIVO encyclopedia article
- "The Malavskys, a family portrait" blogpost by Jeremiah Lockwood
- "The Malavskys: A Family Portrait The Horowitz's and the Malavskys" blogpost by Jeremiah Lockwood
- Songs (See Canvas Page for Week Three)
  - o "Zol Nokh Zayn Shabes"
  - o "Got fun Avrom"

Week Four – The Creation of Modern Yiddish Culture, 1860s-1900s (September 11)

- Readings
  - "The Emergence of Yiddishism," Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture*, page 45-70
  - "Yitzkhok Leybush Peretz," Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Modern Yiddish Culture, page 121-136
  - YIVO Encyclopedia entry, Sholem Aleichem
  - o "Geese," Sholem Aleichem, My First Love Affair and Other Stories
  - o Introduction and "Tsipke," Salomea Perl, *The Canvas and Other Stories*
- Assignment
  - Prepare a five-minute (or less) dramatization of any kind for either "Tsipke" or "Geese" (excerpt or entire text)

Week Five – What are Jews? Religion vs. Ethnicity vs. People vs. Nation (September 18)

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# Readings

• "Folk Traditions," in *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions*, Steven M. Lowenstein

(see Week Five Page for links)

- "Day of Atonement" in Burning Lights, Bella Chagall
- "What is Yom Kippur?"
- "Making Soul Candles"
- YIVO Encyclopedia entries on Social Conduct, Labor Zionism (*Poale Tsiyon*), Folkists, and *Frayland Lige*
- "Melekh Ravitsh: the eccentric outback quest of an urbane Yiddish poet from Poland" journal article

Week Six – Geography, Shtetl, and Empire: Austro-Hungary and the Russian Empire [NOTE: Only one class meeting this week. No class on Monday, September 25, in observance of Yom Kippur]

# Readings

- Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Introduction, Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl, by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog (New York: Schocken, 1995)
- Delineation of the Pale of Settlement, 1835, Czar Nicholas I, and map of the Pale 1835-1917, page 307-308, The Jew in the Modern World, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz
- o Piotr Wrobel, "The Jews of Galicia under Austrian-Polish Rule, 1867-1914"
- o Introduction, *The Zelmenyaners: A Family Saga*, Sasha Senderovich pages ix-x.

Week Seven – The Era of Great Migrations, 1881-1921 (October 2)

- Readings
  - Introduction, Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs*
  - Introduction and Chapter 1, Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way, Hasia Diner
  - On the Latest Wave of Emigration (1891), *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, page 335-336 (see Week Seven File)

(See Page for Week Seven)

- The Immigration Act of 1924
- Emergency Quota Act of 1921

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- Song
  - "Lebn zol kolumbus" (see Week Seven Page)
- Assignment
  - Watch the movies "Hester Street" and "An American Tail" and write no more than 500 words comparing the ways the two movies depict immigration to the United States.

Week Eight - Yiddish as a Language of Spiritual Revolution: Hasidism and Its Opponents (October 9)

- Readings
  - o Introduction and Chapter One, *Hasidism: A New History*, David Biale, ed.

(See Week Eight Page)

- YIVO Encyclopedia entry Misnagdim
- o "The Migrations of a Melody" by I.L. Peretz
- Songs (See Week Eight Page)
  - "Az der rebbe zingt"
  - o "S'iz nito keyn nekhtn"
  - "Yesterday is Buried"
- Assignment
  - Read and prepare a five-minute dramatization of a section of your choice from the I.L. Peretz story, "The Migrations of a Melody"

Week Nine -- Yiddish as a Language of Political Revolution Part One, Eastern Europe (Oct 16)

- Readings
  - "The Political Impetus," Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture*, page 71-98
  - "The Bundist Women's Organization," in *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland*, by Jack Jacobs
- Songs
  - o "Di shvue" (The Oath)
  - "In ale gasn/Hey, hey, daloy politsey!"(Down with the Police)
  - o "Arbeter froyen"

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Week Ten -- Yiddish as a Language of Political Revolution, Part Two, North America (Oct 23)

# Readings

- o Introduction, A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York, Tony Michels
- "Fighting Anti-Semitism and Jim Crow: 'Negro-Jewish Unity' in the International Workers Order," Jennifer Young, AJS Perspectives (See Page for Week 10)
- Songs (See Page for Week 10)
  - o "Bread and Roses," Brivele
  - "Hassidic Chant," Paul Robeson
- Assignment
  - Write a 300-word description and analysis of this performance of "Hassidic Chant" by Paul Robeson, using concepts from the course so far.

Week Eleven – The Yiddish Press (Oct 30)

# Readings

- "Introduction: A Brief and Not-Entirely Uncomplicated History of the Yiddish Press," Eddy Portnoy, Bad Rabbi and Other Strange But True Stories from the Yiddish Press
- o "The American Yiddish Press at Its Centennial," B.Z. Goldberg, Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters
- o "A Day in Coney Island," Isaac Bashevis Singer
- "History as Fiction: Isaac Bashevis Singer's Pseudonymous Personas," David Neal Miller

#### Assignment

• Write 300 words on the use of pseudonyms in modern Yiddish culture, using course materials covered so far

Week Twelve – Queer Yiddish (Nov 6)

#### Readings

- o "Pepi Littman, Yiddish Drag King"
- Yeshaye Katovski: Letter to the *Forverts* Editor," translated by Eddy Portnoy, *How Yiddish Changed America and How America Changed Yiddish*
- Act 1 and 2, "The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds, A Dramatic Legend in Four Acts" Joachim Neugroschel, translator and editor, *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader*
- o "The Ghost of Queer Loves Past: Ansky's "*Dybbuk*" and the Sexual Transformation of Ashkenaz," Naomi Seidman, *Queer theory and the Jewish question*

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• "Khonen in Drag: Cross-Dressing in Two Productions of "The Dybbuk" during the 1920s (Plus, a Review of One of These Productions), Zachary Baker

Week Thirteen – Yiddish Theater (Nov 13)

- Readings and Watchings
  - Chapter One, "Spectacular Failures," Debra Caplan, Yiddish Empire: The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theatre, and the Art of Itinerancy
  - Act 3 and 4, "The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds, A Dramatic Legend in Four Acts" Joachim Neugroschel, translator and editor, *The Dybbuk and the Yiddish Imagination: A Haunted Reader*
  - "Der Dibek," 2020 production by the Congress for Jewish Culture,
- Assignment
  - Working in small groups, present a 15 minute annotation and dramatization of a *Dybbuk* excerpt of your choice

Week Fourteen – Yiddish Culture Before it Was Modern (November 20)

- Readings
  - Introduction and Book Three, Glikl: Memoirs 1691-1719, presented by Chava Turniansky
- Song
  - o "Glikl's Ballad of Mother Love," by Adrienne Cooper (See Week Fourteen Page)