

JWST 272  
**Love and Power in Jewish Literature and Film**

**This course counts for the major in (consult the program or department major requirements) :**

English, Gender and Sexuality Studies

***Semester Offered:*** first Semester

***Credits (Range):*** 3 Hours

***Attribute:*** 3HU, CD, WR

Spring 2011

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday 2:30-4:20

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The experience of love is to a significant degree constructed by culture, ethnicity and history, and by the field of power that these create. Power and the search for power have a complex relationship with love. While initially love may be kindled by a perception of power and charisma in the other, in an established relationship the quest for power and independence often disrupts the interdependence, the “weakness” and vulnerability that love entails. We will start with narratives in which male preoccupations with power and status lead to a paranoid violent reaction to female autonomy and sexuality, (Schnitzler, Agnon)

We will move to early life and look at childhood and motherhood. Jewish motherhood is proverbial for mixing love with an overbearing power. We will complicate this picture by reading David Grossman’s novel “To the End of the Land” depicting a devoted mother and Orly Castle Bloom “Dolly City” which features a monstrous one. We will ask what does it mean to be formed by the care of a mother.

We will then look at the great ambivalence literature bestows on fathers as early representative of power which come to a clash with love (Kafka). We will examine the way in which the Jewish father comes to embody or distance himself from this patriarchic model, and look at vicissitudes of the relationship with the father. We will also look at classic Jewish fatherhood under the strain of modernity (Shalom Alichem)

The next section will be devoted to Jewish Masochism, with the way in which the subjugated position of European Jewry has been eroticized by Jewish writers. We will then deal with the power of community, and attempt an in depth interpretation of the somewhat hackneyed narrative of illicit love, in which the hardships and obstacles of falling in love and marrying outside ones religious community are narrated.

Finally we will look at homosocial and homosexual love, especially how this love has been used to symbolize and re-narrate the nation using Tony Kushner's Play "Angles in America" and Israeli films "Walk on Water" and "Yossi and Jager".

In our examination and class discussion of literature and film we will attempt to delineate the interconnection between love, power and Jewishness on the one hand and the formal aspects of literary and filmic work, such as point of view, literary language, editing, narrative sequence and their influence on the implicit and real audience. We will use short expositions of key theorists on love, sexuality, poetics, and Jewish cultural studies including Aristotle, Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, Foucault, Gillman, Butler and Boyarin, in order to illuminate the texts and films that we are reading and seeing.

### **Assignments and Grading Policy**

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Oral Presentations and Participation 10%  
First Paper 20%  
Second Paper 20%  
Reading Test 10%  
Final Paper 40%

### **Oral Presentation**

Each student will give a presentation (approx 10-minute) on the session's reading. During the first two lectures you will have the opportunity to sign up for the presentation. Effective communication and interesting content are highly desirable. The presentation will be graded according to interpretative depth, how convincing it is, and whether it raises important questions for class discussion.

### **Attendance, Reading and Participation**

As can be seen by the grade distribution above, I place great stress on coming to class, having read the relevant material, and on active participation, all of which will be noted. This is a discussion based class, participation is required. If anything prevents you from coming to class or doing the assignments, please see me.

### **Blackboard Assignments and Informational Postings**

This course will have a blackboard web site. An updated syllabus and some of the reading materials will be posted there. You will often have to prepare a question or a theme which interests you regarding the text or film.

### **Written Assignments and Final paper**

You will write two take home, open-book essays of around 4 pages (using four new sources). These essays will challenge you to derive analytical and interpretive insights from the texts.

For the final paper you will have to send me a research proposal (with a list of at least 7 new sources) which we will meet and discuss. A 12 page research paper will be due on 20/12, 12am. Assignments are to be submitted on the due date. You will send all papers to me by email. If you have not received verification from me within three days please write another email or contact me immediately at 440-935-6069. Late papers submitted without prior permission will be reduced by one grade-step for each day of lateness.

**Plagiarism and the Honor Code:** Plagiarism is an ethical violation as well as a criminal waste of educational resources. For the Oberlin honor code see:

<http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/2011-2012/11-Policies-Honor.pdf>

### **Disabilities:**

Please see me at the beginning of the course if you have any disabilities that require special academic accommodation.

### **Required Books for Purchase**

Orly Castel Bloom “Dolly City”

David Vogel “Married Life”

David Grossman “To the End of the Land”

## **Sep 5**

### **Introduction**

### **Dependence/Interdependence: and the critique of Masculinity and Modernity**

Sep 10

Agnon “The Doctors Divorce”

Schnitzler “Dream Novel”

Sep 12

Kastel Bloom “Mystery of the Pigs Heads”

David Vogel “Against the Sea”

Sep 17

Yaacov Shabtai “Uncle Peretz Takes Off”

Terry Eagleton “Literary Theory”

### **Mother and Child in Times of Crisis**

Sep 19

Grossman “To the End of the Land” Part I

Sep 24

“To the End of the Land” Part II

Oct 10

“To the End of the Land” Part III

Oct 3

“Der Brivele der Mamen”

Ozick “The Shawl”

Oct 8

Levin “The Child Dreams”

Kastel-Bloom “Dolly City” Part I

Oct 15

“Dolly City” Part II

### **The Father/ Family Romances**

Oct 17

Kafka “Letter to Father”

“Life is Beautiful”

Oct 29

Keret “Horsie”, “Pride and Joy”

Schalom Aleichem “Tvye the Diarymen”

Freud “Family Romance”

Oct 31

Bruno Schultz “The Street of Crocodiles”

“Footnote”

Dec 5

Genesis: 12, 15, 16, 17, 18:1-15, 19:30-38, 21:1-21, 22:1-19, 24, 25:19-34, 27, 28:1-9, 30:1-24, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46:1-7, 50:1-21.

## **Jewish Masochism and Masculinity revisited**

Dec 7

Agnon “Lady and the Peddler” [BB],  
Freud “The Economic Problem of Masochism”

Dec 12

“Married Life” Part I

Dec 14

“Married Life” Part II

Dec 19

“Married Life” Part II

“The Night Porter”

Boyarin “Goyim Naches: Or the Mentsh and the Jewish Critique of Romance”[BB]

## **Love and Gender and in a Traditional Society**

Dec 21

Gitai “Kadosh”,

“Yidel mit der Fidl”

“Fishke Der Krumer“

Dec 26

Agnon “A Simple Story”

Dec 28

Gitai “Kadosh”,

“Yidel mit der Fidl”

“Fishke Der Krumer“

Nov 3

Consultation regarding final paper

## **Homosociality, homosexuality and the power of the Nation**

Nov 5

Kushnir “Angels in America”

Nov 10

“Yossi and Jager”, “Walk on Water”

Nov 12

Conclusion