

**Queering Jewish Studies** Fall 2002

Lori Lefkowitz: Room 003; ext. 147

Monday 10:30-12:20

Office Hours: most Mondays 2:00-3:00, and by appointment, of course

**Description:** The purpose of this course is to explore how gender analyses and queer theory might help us to find new meanings in Jewish texts, culture, and practices. Against the background of selected influential essays in the field of contemporary gender and queer theory, we will read both exemplary analyses of Judaism that are informed by these theories and theory that incorporates analyses of Judaism or Jewish identity. Students will be asked to apply theory to areas of their particular interest.

Objectives:

- Enhance analytic text skills by reading and applying the techniques of contemporary critical theory
- Explore how queer theory can be applied to selected fields in Jewish Studies of special relevance to Reconstructionist rabbis, such as, Bible, rabbinics, Jewish history, literature, and sociology
- Discover how Jews and Judaism are represented in contemporary queer theory
- Learn how to translate new theoretical insights for the practical rabbinate
- Do our part to “bring a queerer world into being” (Berlant and Warner)

Texts (available for purchase at Giovanni’s Room):

Rebecca Alpert. *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbianism and the Transformation of Tradition.*

Ken Stone, ed. *Queer Commentary and The Hebrew Bible.*

Daniel Boyarin. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man.*

The other readings, articles and book chapters, will be supplied as handouts.

The emphasis of this course is on critical theory and the Jewish textual tradition in relation particularly to Judaism and Jewish practice. Unfortunately, we will focus less on accounts of Jewish gay and lesbian experience, partly because these accounts are generally engaging and accessible. I want to recommend four books as excellent supplementary reading for this course:

Christie Balka and Andy Rose, eds. *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, And Jewish.*

David Shneer and Caryn Aviv, eds. *Queer Jews.*

Rebecca Alpert, Sue Levi Elwell, and Shirely Idelson. *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation.*

Daniel Mendelsohn. *The Elusive Embrace.*

#### Requirements:

- Your presence and participation are crucial to the success of the course. You are therefore required to attend class prepared to contribute to the conversation, having completed the assigned reading.
- Each student will make one oral presentation (no longer than 10-15 minutes) at the beginning of one class. A sign up sheet will go around during our second meeting. This talk may be a dvar Torah or a short sermon; it may be an "occasional" address such as: a rabbi's charge at a lifecycle ceremony; the rabbinic contribution to a Martin Luther King commemoration; opening remarks at a board meeting; a "set piece" for the communal Seder—anything you can think of. You will specify the occasion and the audience. The special requirement is to translate the work of "queering Jewish Studies" for the practical rabbinate in ways that are at once appropriately sensitive and useful. The class will be invited to comment on the presentations.
- Students will also submit two short writing assignments, 3-5 pages each:
  - One must be an academic critical analysis of some aspect of Judaism, using the tools of Queer Theory.
  - The other should be rabbinic writing, such as an editorial or synagogue bulletin article or a dvar Torah column for an educated lay readership. Again, the trick is to practice what it would take to occasionally "queer Judaism" as some part of the larger work of your rabbinate.

Writing assignments are due on **10/28** and **12/9**. You may choose which assignment you are doing for which date, provided that you do one of each. Please specify on the top of the page a particular context that you imagine for your writing, eg.: *Prooftexts*; *Inquirer* editorial; Hillel newsletter.

**I AM INTOLERANT OF LATE WORK.** These are exercises in meeting the writing deadlines of the rabbinate. There is often no leeway on rabbinic writing. (It's like journalism that way.) However good it is by the time it's due, submit it. These exercises are designed for you to do your best in the time allotted and in the context of all of the other pressures and requirements of your life. The good news is that you will get one of your courses quickly out of your way by semester's end.

#### Tentative Schedule:

This course is new and experimental, and (as far as I could discover) there are neither textbooks nor model syllabi. The reading list is long and varied. We will therefore make adjustments as necessary to best accomplish our goals. The background theory readings are often in the *Literary Theory* packet. In many cases, I have put a reading assignment in parentheses surrounded by \*\* to indicate that you may skim or read only as much as you are able to of that selection.

9/23 Introduction to Queering Jewish Studies. Contesting identity: sex, gender, sexuality, history, discourse, biology, preference, performance, essence, desire. What is queer? What is Jewish? Where's the queer in Jewish Studies and where's the Jewish in Queer Studies?

9/30 The Invention of Homosexuality; homosexuality as ethnicity; Jews and Gays in the Closet

Readings:

- Gayle Rubin, "Sexual Transformations" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* packet
- \*\* (Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality* in *Literary Theory* packet) \*\*
- Entries on "Israel" and "Judaism" in *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* from *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*
- \*\* (Lori Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah" in Stone, pp. 106-115) \*\*
- Please refresh your memory of the Book of Esther, the stories of Moses and Joseph in Pharaoh's courts, and other foundation stories of "closeted Jews."

10/7 Jews as Women, as Homosexuals, as Americans... homologies and interarticulations and pretenses

Readings:

- John L. Beusterien, "Jewish Male Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century Spain," in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*
- Harry Brod, "Of Mice and Supermen: Images of Jewish Masculinity"
- Warren J. Blumenfeld, "History/Hysteria: Parallel Representations of Jews, Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals" in *Queer Studies*
- Daniel Itzkovitz, "Secret Temples" in *Jews and Other Differences*
- Ann Pellegrini, "Interarticulations: Gender, Race, and the Jewish Woman Question" in *Judaism Since Gender*
- Naomi Seidman: Fag-hags and Bu-Jews in *Inside/Outside*
- (Ann Pellegrini, "Whiteface Performances: Race, Gender and Jewish Bodies" in *Jews and Other Differences*)

10/14 Queering Torah: Beyond David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi

Readings:

- Ken Stone, *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 11-106: introduction; Jennings, "YHWH as Erastes"; \*\* (Roland Boer, "Yahweh as Top: A Lost Targum") \*\*
- Rebecca Alpert, *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformations of Tradition*, pp. 1-53.
- \*\* (Sedgwick, from *Between Men* in *Literary Theory* packet) \*\*
- \*\* (Jeffrey Weeks, Introduction to Guy Hocquengham's *Homosexual Desire* in *Literary Theory* packet) \*\*

10/21 Drag, Mimicry, Camp, Passing

Readings:

- Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” in *Literary Theory* packet. **This article is difficult but very influential.**
- Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse” from *The Location of Culture*
- Lefkowitz, “Passing as a Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance,” in *Narrative* (January 2002)
- **\*\***(Judith Halberstam, “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity in *Literary Theory* packet)**\*\***

10/28 **first paper due** Acting, Shape Shifting, and Sexuality as Vengeance

Readings:

- Sholom Ash, “God of Vengeance” in *The Great Jewish Plays*
- Alisa Solomon, “Queering the Canon: *Azoi toot a Yid*,” in re-dressing the canon
- Rebecca Alpert, chapter 8, “Modern Texts: Lesbians as Gender Nonconformists”
- **\*\***(Lee Edelman, “Homographesis,” in *Literary Theory* packet)**\*\***

11/4 More “transvestite effects”

Readings:

- Chaim Potok, “Isabel” in *The Kenyon Review*
- Marjorie Garber, “Jew, Woman, Homosexual,” from *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*
- Naomi Seidman, “Lawless Attachments, One-Night Stands: The Sexual Politics of the Hebrew-English Language War”

11/11 Counting the Sexes in the Nursery and in the Talmud

Readings:

- Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” in *The Sciences*, March 1993
- Julia Epstein, “Ambiguous Sexes,” from *Altered Conditions* (not yet in packet—to be distributed)
- Talmud selections, courtesy of Sarra Lev
- **\*\***(Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender,” in *Literary Theory* packet)**\*\***

11/18 Boyarin’s revision of rabbinism

Readings:

- Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Part I, pp. 2-185

11/25 Boyarin, part 2

12/2 Scoping the Field: Mysticism, Assessments, and Methodologies,  
Readings:

- Wolfson, selections, *Through a Speculum that Shines*
- Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, selections from *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (not yet in packet—to be distributed)
- Timothy R. Koch, "Cruising Methodology: Homoeroticism and Scriptures"; and Part II "Responses," all in Stone, pp. 169-227.
- Matti Bunzl, "Jews, Queers, and Other Symptoms: Recent work in Jewish Cultural Studies," book review

12/9 **second paper due** Queer Jews, Queer Culture

Readings:

- Rabbi Norman J. Cohen, "Wrestling With Angels," in Tony Kushner in conversation
- Tony Kushner, "A Prayer"
- Fenton Johnson, "Reinventing Marriage" in *Gay Men in the Millenium*
- Mona West, "The Gift of Voice, The Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of Aids," in Stone, pp. 140-151.

12/16 Queering Jewish Studies. Conclusions  
SLACK

If there is interest, I will schedule several optional after-school theory discussion workshops, 3:30-4:45. Tentatively: Tuesday October 8, Thursday, October 24, and Tuesday, Nov. 19. We will choose essays from the syllabus to return to more closely and open these discussions to anyone who is interested, making the readings available in advance.