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First Year Seminar  
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Memoirs and Diaries in Modern European Jewish History

This course analyzes modern Jewish history through the use of memoirs, diaries, and letters, sometimes called ego-documents. These can offer an abundance of detail about the public political, economic, social and religious worlds of individual Jews and provide valuable, often rare glimpses into the motivations and expectations of Jews regarding the non-Jewish world. Moreover, these ego-documents reveal crucial concealed thoughts and emotions. They offer us a picture of the full human being as well as her or his attitudes and behaviors within the family, friendship networks, and the Jewish community. These documents also allow students to delve into relations between parents and children, spouses, generations, neighbors and friends. Finally, memoirs, diaries (and also letters) give us clues as to the ways in which people thought they should write about their lives and the ways they fashioned their own images in relation (or opposition) to their societies.

The course begins with the very first memoir that we have written by a Jewish woman, Glickl of Hameln, in the late 17th century. The course continues through the Holocaust and postwar generation. It includes, among others, the autobiographies of Leon Modena, a 17th-century Venetian rabbi; Pauline Wengeroff, a traditional Jewish woman in 19th-century Russia; and Puah Rakowski, a Polish radical and feminist. Students will study a variety of memoirs and diaries from the period of the Holocaust and also view survivor testimonies, including how these memories have been passed down to another generation.

Books to Purchase (The books are also on reserve at Bobst Library, and you can purchase them at the NYU Bookstore, or at Shakespeare & Co. (716 Broadway), but you may also purchase them at a variety of websites including (used books at) abebooks.com, Amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com.)

Marc Cohen, ed., THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN RABBI: LEON MODENA’S LIFE OF JUDAH

Hameln, G., THE MEMOIRS OF GLÜCKL OF HAMELN (trans. by M. Lowenthal)

Hoffman, Eva, LOST IN TRANSLATION: A LIFE IN A NEW LANGUAGE
Hoffman, AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE: MEMORY, HISTORY AND THE LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Hyman, Paula ed., MY LIFE AS A RADICAL JEWISH WOMAN: MEMOIRS OF A ZIONIST FEMINIST IN POLAND by Puah Rakowsky

Kluger, Ruth, STILL ALIVE: A HOLOCAUST GIRLHOOD REMEMBERED

Richarz, Monika, ed., JEWISH LIFE IN GERMANY: MEMOIRS FROM THREE CENTURIES (may be out of print – but will be on “Classes” too)


Zapruder, Alexandra, ed., SALVAGED PAGES: YOUNG WRITERS’ DIARIES OF THE HOLOCAUST

REQUIREMENTS:
1. serious and consistent class participation (this means attendance is essential because your participation is part of your grade); 10% of grade
2. regular introductions of the homework readings -- each class will begin with a student presentation of about 5 minutes in which s/he introduces the author’s life based on her/his own research (online or at the library); 10% of grade
3. short written assignments; 35% of grade (first paper = 5%, others =10% each)
4. oral presentations; 15% of grade (5% each)
5. term paper; 30% of grade
Late papers will be docked a grade a week.

1. Introduction: Why are we interested in the lives of individuals? What can we learn from them? We will read some examples in class.


Recommended: Natalie Davis, “Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena’s Life as an Early Modern Autobiography”

#1 Writing Assignment due today: Write a 3 page response paper analyzing one or two of the themes raised by Modena in the autobiography. [Please note the writing rules at the end of this syllabus for each and every paper.]

3. THE MEMOIRS OF GLICKL OF HAMELN. Introduction and “Books” (chaps. 1-7)
Prompt: For our discussion of Glickl of Hameln, I would like each of you to react to 3 or 4 themes that recur in her narrative. What stands out for you and why? Please jot these ideas down in your notebook, so that I can call on you and you will have a response you
have thought about (including pages to which you may want to refer). This is the first of a few short oral presentations for which you are responsible.


#2 Writing assignment due today. In 4 pages, discuss a few of the themes that are raised by several memoirists in order to get an understanding of the issues faced by German Jews between 1780 and 1871, the “age of emancipation.” [Be sure to read the parts of the editor’s introduction to the memoirs that deal with the period up to 1871 -- scattered throughout the intro. pp. 1-28.]


6. Rakowsky, MY LIFE AS A RADICAL JEWISH WOMAN: MEMOIRS OF A ZIONIST FEMINIST IN POLAND (entire)

#3 Writing Assignment due today. Write a 4 page comparison of Pauline Wengeroff’s and Puah Rakowsky’s memoirs. To do this well:

Please make absolutely sure that you read the Introduction to the Puah Pakowsky autobiography by Paula Hyman. It is 19 pages long and will help you understand the shifting boundaries of E. Europe. On the bottom of p. 7, she addresses the issue of Jewish religion/ethnicity in the context of Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish religions/ethnicities. And remember, she is younger than Pauline Wengeroff.

7. JEWISH LIFE IN GERMANY (Weimar [1918-33] and Nazi eras), pp. 301-473.

As you read these short memoirs, look for topics that crop up often. For example, Jewish and non-Jewish relationships. (Since I just suggested this, you can’t use it!) Then note 3 such recurring topics in several memoirs (write the pages down under the theme, with one phrase descriptions) and see if you can describe them. Come up with three topics or arguments and justify them with the pages you have written down. Each of you will present your observations in second, short oral presentation pointing out the documents you used. In other words, like a historian, you will make a statement based on some hard evidence.

8. Zapruder, ed., SALVAGED PAGES, selections

9. “Partisans of Vilna,” 1986. Another form of ego-document can be an interview where individuals explain themselves, their motivations, their views of the world. We will view and discuss interviews with partisans. (130 minutes)

Please look at your syllabus re. selections from Zapruder for this session. We will try to compare what we learned from memoirs (Zapruder) to what we saw in the film on Vilna.
10. **SALVAGED PAGES**, selections (1-63; 190-226; 361-395)
“The Holocaust through Our Own Eyes,” 1994 (class will view several video interviews with survivors, 38 minutes). Please be ready to compare both films with the readings and with each other.

11. Kluger, **STILL ALIVE**.

**# 4 Writing Assignment** due *today*: 3 pages. Compare diaries and memoirs to survivor testimonies (in videos or films). What are the advantages and disadvantages of each form of historical information? Use examples from your readings of memoirs and diaries and your viewing of the videos in the previous classes.

12. Hoffman, **LOST IN TRANSLATION: A LIFE IN A NEW LANGUAGE** (first hour).

   How is this memoir *similar* to some memoirs we have already read? (Which ones? How?) How is it *different* from other memoirs? (Style? Subject matter? Readership? Message? etc.) What would you point to as 2 or 3 of the main points Hoffman is addressing in her memoir? Please write your answers down in outline form.

*Term paper outlines due.* Students will meet with me individually by appt. during the second half of this class.


   Think about: 1) how is this a memoir? 2) is this a mixed genre?

First draft of term papers due on or before this date.

14. Last day of classes. **Oral presentations** of term papers. Use your classmates’ questions and response to help you edit or add to your paper. Term papers are due at the time of the final exam. The paper should be under 10 pages.

**WRITING GUIDELINES** for assignments:

Please learn the definition of plagiarism, one of the most serious forms of academic misconduct: “*Presenting another’s words or ideas as your own.*” Always cite your sources (including books, articles, and web sites) and use quotation marks whenever you use a phrase of more than 3 words in succession from another person’s work. Paraphrasing an idea does not make it your idea. You may use it, but give credit where credit is due. Remember that professors can find websites as easily as students. Plagiarism will result in an F for the course and notification of the deans.

A quick checklist of common writing mistakes:
1. Have you paginated?
2. Have you underlined all foreign words and book titles?
3. Does EVERY sentence have a subject and verb? Have you read each sentence aloud to see if it makes sense?

4. Quotations: A short quotation – of fewer than 5 lines—should be enclosed in quotation marks and combined smoothly as part of your own sentence. A longer quotation should be single spaced, indented, have no quotation marks, and be introduced by you. Quotations cannot stand by themselves.

5. Quotations marks: "Quotation marks enclose punctuation."

6. Citations: simple in-text citations come at the end of the sentence, followed by a period (Author, page __).

7. Paragraphs start with a topic sentence, support its ideas, and end with a concluding thought that rounds up the paragraph. Watch out for extraneous ideas that don’t help you build your paragraph.

8. You need "transition" thoughts between paragraphs. They have to follow each other in some logical order. This will be easy if you have outlined your paper logically.

9. Watch how you use tenses! You should refer to historical issues and events in the past tense. However, you will be working with literary texts and may use the present tense to describe what your author is writing.

For example: Glickl of Hameln lived in Germany and worked very hard. In her memoir, she declares that she loves … or In her memoirs she writes …

It is easier to stay in the past tense in all situations.

10. Avoid the passive voice and the verb “to be” (is, are, was, were). Reread your paper and rewrite 80% of the sentences that use some form of the verb to be (including were or was). If no one ever corrected your papers with regard to the passive voice, please be forewarned and check out this website:

www.winthrop.edu/wcenter/handoutsandlinks/passive.htm

Term Papers:
Hundreds of ego-documents (memoirs, diaries, letters) tell the story of Jewish history through a personal lens. Find two that allow you to compare different viewpoints during a particular era. You can decide – in consultation with me – which books you would like to read. For example, you could read a memoir written by a French Jewish leader and a young girl in France of the same era. Or you could read a memoir by a young German-Jew and a young German non-Jew during the Nazi era. Also, you could choose to read the memoirs of an Italian family escaping from Europe during World War II and compare that to someone who helped refugees escape. You could choose to read a book of letters among one family and compare that to a diary from the same era. We will discuss this further in class. Ten pages.