

Language, Sexuality, and the Metamorphosis of Yiddish During the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, the body seemed to stalk speech in a new way. Hunger, disease, slave labor and torture all created a type of hyper-awareness around the body for ghetto and camp prisoners. Judging by the case of Yiddish, this over-embodiment changed the way that language worked from the victims' perspective. Khurbn Yiddish (Yiddish of the Holocaust) is saturated with new terms for excrement, for hunger and, most prominently, for sex. This lecture will make new Holocaust-era Yiddish words for sex and sexual violence its focus, treating these neologisms as archives of sexual experience, desire and abuse. The words help uncover the importance of new historical realities such as sexual barter and loss of libido, as well as long-standing notions of the Jewish female body.

Hannah Pollin-Galay will present a lecture on her new book, *Occupied Words: What the Holocaust Did to Yiddish* (U Penn, 2024). Dr. Pollin-Galay is Associate Professor in the Department of Literature and head of the Jona Goldrich Institute for Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture at Tel Aviv University.

Occupied Words is available from Penn Press for 30% off with the discount code PENN-POLLINGALAY30.

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Gilman 479

