

return again and again to women's experience. Halsband and Grundy each calls her "feminist," but perhaps "proto-feminist" would be more accurate. An example of her engagement, the poem "Epistle from Mrs. Y[ong]e to her Husband" is explicit in its negative assessment of contemporary divorce laws, and its justification of an adulterous wife:

Are we not form'd with Passions
like your own?
Nature with equal Fire our Souls
endu'd,
Our minds as Haughty, and as
warm our blood,
O're the wide World your pleasures
you persue,
The Change is justify'd by some-
thing new;
But we must sigh in Silence—
and be true.

Her sharply critical view of 18th-century gender relations at times extends beyond sexual politics and indicates an indictment of masculinist social institutions. For example, her writings on smallpox inoculation privilege a feminine, non-Western tradition over the interventionist model of Western medicine. She rejects outright the misogynist satires so common in the 18th century:

Such a paper, either to ridicule
or declaim against the Ladys, is
very welcome to the Coffee
houses, where there is hardly on
Man in ten but fancys he has one
reason or other, to curse some of
the Sex most heartily. Perhaps
his sisters' fortunes are to run
away with the money that would
be better bestow'd at the Groom
porter's [in gambling], or an old
Mother good for nothing keeps
a Jointure from a Hopefull son,
that wants to make a settlement
on his mistriss; or a Handsome
Young Fellow is plague'd with a
Wife, that will remain alive to
hinder his running away with a
great Fortune, haveing 2 or 3 of
them in love with him. These are
serious misfortunes that are suf-

ficient to exasperate the mildest
tempers to a contempt of the
sex....

Her criticism, however, is doubly-veiled, first by an irrepressible humour that for the most part sweetens the potential violence of her scenarios here, and also by her adoption of an anonymous male persona.

This writing across gender is one of the most fascinating aspects of the collection. Montagu turns what was essentially a necessary strategy in the literary market of her day into a vehicle for the exploration of multiple subject positionings: a vehicle, moreover, with immense potential for irony. One anonymous editorial essay opens thus: "I have allways... profess'd my selfe a Freind thò I do not aspire to the character of an admirer of the Fair sex," and in another she writes:

I am very much entertain'd with
the variety of Censures that are
pass'd on my harmless paper,
which I hear allmost every day
with an Indifferent Face, and to
say truth without much violence
to my selfe, not feeling the paternal
Affection that most Authors
do for their productions, neither
my Fame or Fortune being any
way affected by their Success.
My Acquaintance think me no
more qualify'd for a writer than
for a General....

She is here tweaking the readers' noses with their own prejudices about who may write and publish. The joke is no less rich for being essentially private.

Grundy pays particular attention to the production and publication of the texts, and the collection is noteworthy for its scrupulous scholarship. The preface contextualizes Montagu's work within current critical traditions, broaches questions of censorship and self-censorship, alludes to Montagu's critical reception and calls for scholarly reevaluation. Grundy locates this collection as part of the ongoing recuperation of a tradition of women's writing, and ar-

gues persuasively that Montagu was herself conscious of her position of a woman, writing.

EDUCATED AND IGNORANT: ULTRAORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR WORLD

Tamar El-Or. Translated from Hebrew by Haim Watzman. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.

by *Katherine Side*

I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes.

—Maxine Hong Kingston

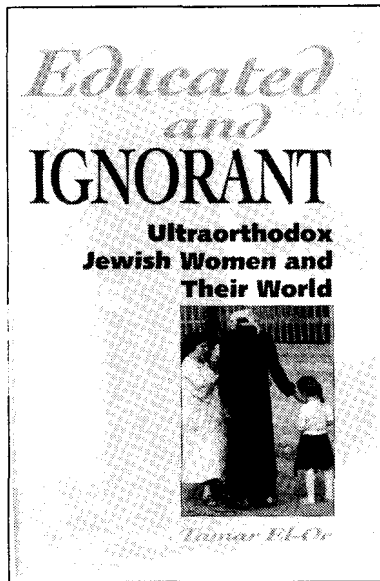
It was El-Or's title that immediately caught my attention. Education and ignorance are often considered paradoxical companions. Furthermore, the blatant characterization of a community of women as "educated and ignorant" seemed to me to be a bold statement. Yet, El-Or, in this detailed ethnographic study of women in the ultraorthodox Jewish community, cogently demonstrates that education and ignorance are conceivable, and in this case, desirable companions.

El-Or worked, as a doctoral student, among Israel's Gur Hasidim, on the outskirts of metropolitan Tel Aviv. The Gur Hasidim are a Jewish religious sect, conspicuous by their strict adherence to mid-18th-century dress and customs, and characterized by Gur mens' devotion to religious study.

El-Or's research revolves around the core themes of women, literacy, and education. Gur Hasidim, recognizing that girls and women who do not receive religious education are susceptible to assimilative practices, have established an elaborate educational system for a population that,

paradoxically, they feel requires none.

There is lengthy consideration, in *Educated and Ignorant*, of social literacy, a concept believed to equip women with the tools to understand, and find meaning in, their socio-cultural position. Social literacy is of paramount importance in recognizing Gur women as architects in the construction of their own world, and in this regard *Educated and Ignorant* is a welcome addition to the existing



body of feminist scholarship that acknowledges the agency of ultraorthodox Jewish women, including Lynne Davidman's *Tradition in A Rootless World*, Debra Kaufman's *Rachel's Daughters*, and Vanessa Ochs's *Words on Fire*.

El-Or's principal revelation is that the Gur system of education for girls and women is contradictory. Because education provides girls and women with the potential to bring about undesirable community changes, they are instead taught to immerse themselves in strict adherence to the status quo. Their education centres on knowledge that is not new, but reinforces that which they already know. Discussions around matters which the women themselves term "substantive," such as Biblical and Talmudic passages and interpretations, are consciously avoided. Instead they concentrate on "practical" matters, exacting ways to carry out the reli-

gious dictates with which their lives are already intimately connected. El-Or recounts, as an example, a lesson that refrained from all discussion around reasons for Jewish dietary restrictions, yet was devoted entirely to practical ways of eliminating the risk of worms in food because dietary laws forbid their consumption.

According to El-Or, this education perpetuates entrenched gender segregation and limits roles, while simultaneously reinforcing that there are important social meanings and values to be derived by girls and women.

[O]n one hand they know how to experience this world as ignorant and simple women, but on the other hand, they are sufficiently literate to be aware of the situation they are in and find meaning in it.

Educated and Ignorant bravely engages with contemporary critiques of the discipline of anthropology. Critical of the position that views anthropology only as capable of perceiving 'Others,' El-Or does not leave the complexities of social boundaries and marginality between researcher and subjects unproblematized. She shares her interactions and relations within the community, and remains cognizant throughout of the implications of her intervention on relations among the Gur women, some of whom are more willing than others to accept her presence and her project. Moreover, she astutely recognizes that her findings, compiled in the form of a book that is largely of use to academics in anthropology, sociology, women's studies, and Jewish studies, cannot begin to express her gratitude to the very women whom it is about, as their education precludes them from reading and understanding it.

The work of the late, Jewish feminist anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff ventured into the Jewish community because her grandparents never told her about life in the shtetl. And it is only well into *Educated and Ignorant* that the reader discovers that El-Or's grandfather's family, respected Gur

Hasidim, never told her about their lives. Her grandfather's brother's grave, in close proximity to the grave of an eminent Gur Rabbi, leaves El-Or with yet another paradox, a respected history and place within a closed community of which she will never truly be a part.

El-Or shares with the reader her hesitations, set-backs, and frustrations, but in some parts I wished that she had shared more. Why, for example, was she unable to gain access to the Gur community girls' school? What did her secular colleagues, peers and family think of her extended involvement with the Gur Hasidim? It is disappointing that El-Or gives only scant consideration to her use of the concepts of education and ignorance. Learning as an important precept of Judaism does not necessarily result in one being or becoming educated. Ideological adherence and/or conviction of moral certainty, as feminists can attest, does not necessarily connote ignorance. El-Or's reliance on common-sensical understandings, and her reluctance to critically explore her own construction and use of these concepts, hinders an otherwise careful piece of scholarship. Nonetheless, *Educated and Ignorant* offers important glimpses into the private world of Israel's Gur Hasidim women. Considering the relative paucity of scholarship on religious, Jewish women, and that only a minute amount of it is from a feminist perspective, El-Or's *Educated and Ignorant* is an important contribution.