

PROLOGUE:

Silent Meditation

Have you ever called someone “a Yenta”... either to her face or behind her back? If yes, when & in what context? What does this word mean to you?

Has anyone ever called you “a Yenta” to your face... or perhaps maybe you think you might have been called “a Yenta” behind your back? If yes, how does this make you feel?

Have you ever called a man “a Yenta”... or heard a man referred to as “a Yenta”?

Store these questions in the back of your mind now & we'll return to them during the Q&A...



Temple Beth Emeth
v'Ohr Progressive Shaari Zedek
The Reform Congregation of Victorian Flatbush

Temple Beth Emeth Sisterhood Lecture Series

Yente/Yenta: How a Name became a Noun



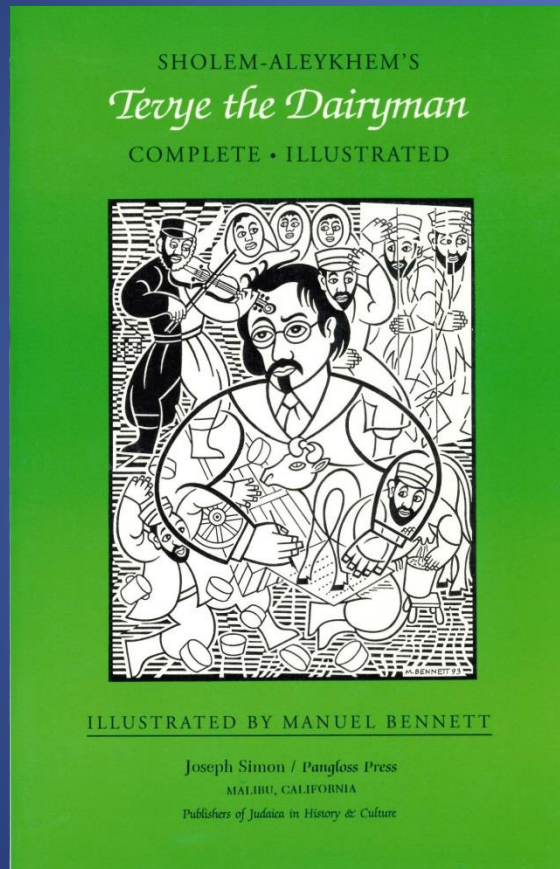
Bea Arthur on Broadway (1964)

Presented by
Jan Lisa Huttner
March 14, 2015

A Show of Hands...

- Who here has seen *Fiddler on the Roof* **on stage** either a Broadway production &/or a local production?
- Have you seen *Fiddler on the Roof* **on screen** either in the theatre &/or DVD/Cable TV?
-
- Do you **own a copy** of the **DVD**?
- Do you own the **original cast album either** on LP &/or CD?
- Who here has **never** seen *Fiddler on the Roof* anywhere at any time???

Sholem Aleichem's Tevye



Miriam Katz Translation (1994)

We all know that the text of the beloved musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was based on Sholem Aleichem's Tevye stories...

Right?

Of course right!

So let's start there...

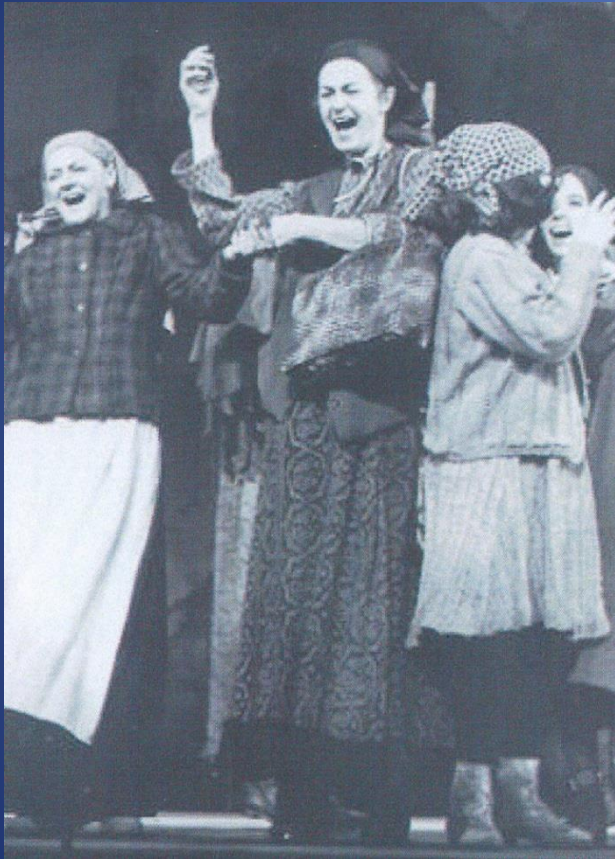
This Presents a Challenge...

Would it surprise you to learn there is no character called Yente in Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye* stories?

It sure surprised me!

So, Nu: What do we make of this?

Three Specific Questions...



Bea Arthur (1964)

Why did the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* feel the need to **add** this character?

Where did they get Yente from... thin air???

And what happens when we **change** Yente...

Challenge #1

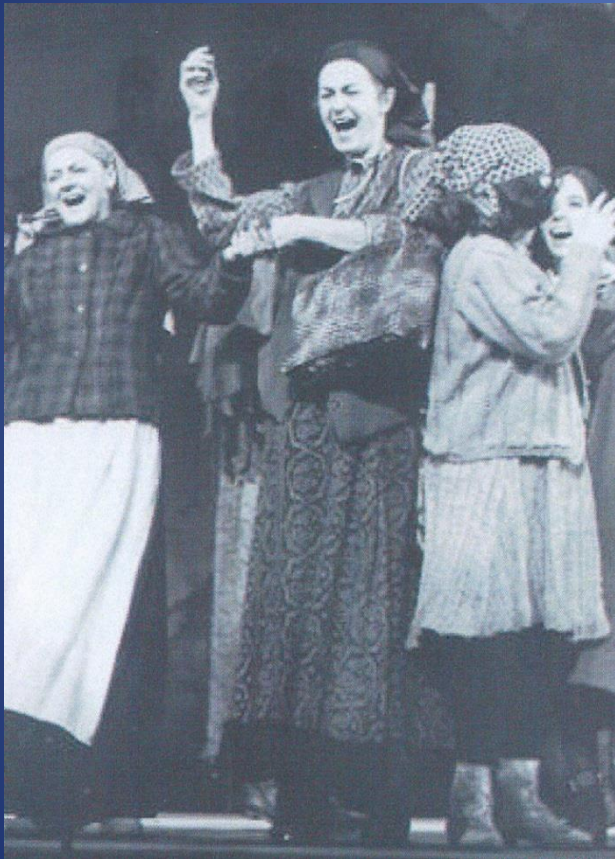


Bea Arthur (1964)

Why did the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* feel the need to **add** this character?

This is a **huge** question which I will be happy to discuss further during the Q&A...

Challenge #2



Bea Arthur (1964)

Where did the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* get Yente—this specific character and this specific name—from... thin air???

Or perhaps you think Yente was always a Yenta???

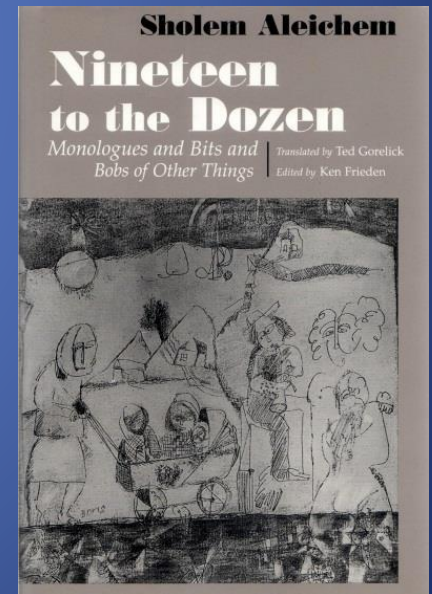
TEVYE'S DAUGHTERS



SHOLOM ALEICHEM

Yente as she appears
in Sholem Aleichem's story
“Dos Tepl”
 (“The Little Pot”)

(“The Little Pot”
 is currently available
 in two different collections
 of Sholem Aleichem stories...)



TEVYE'S DAUGHTERS



SHOLOM ALEICHEM

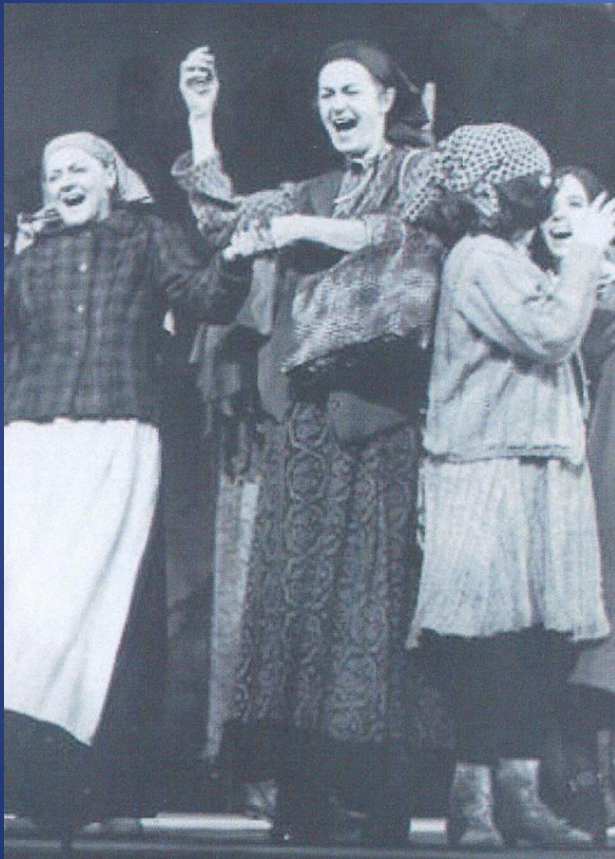
איד בין יענטע בין איד, יענטע די קורעלאפניטשקע.

“I am Yenta—that’s who I am—Yenta the Poultrywoman.”

דאס טעפעל

Challenge #3

And what happens when we **change** Yente...



Bea Arthur (1964)



Molly Picon (1971)

From Bea to Molly?



Bea Arthur
Broadway (1964)



Molly Picon
Hollywood (1971)



Bea as Yente with Avram



Yente: Avram, I have a perfect match for your son. A wonderful girl.

Avram: Who is it?

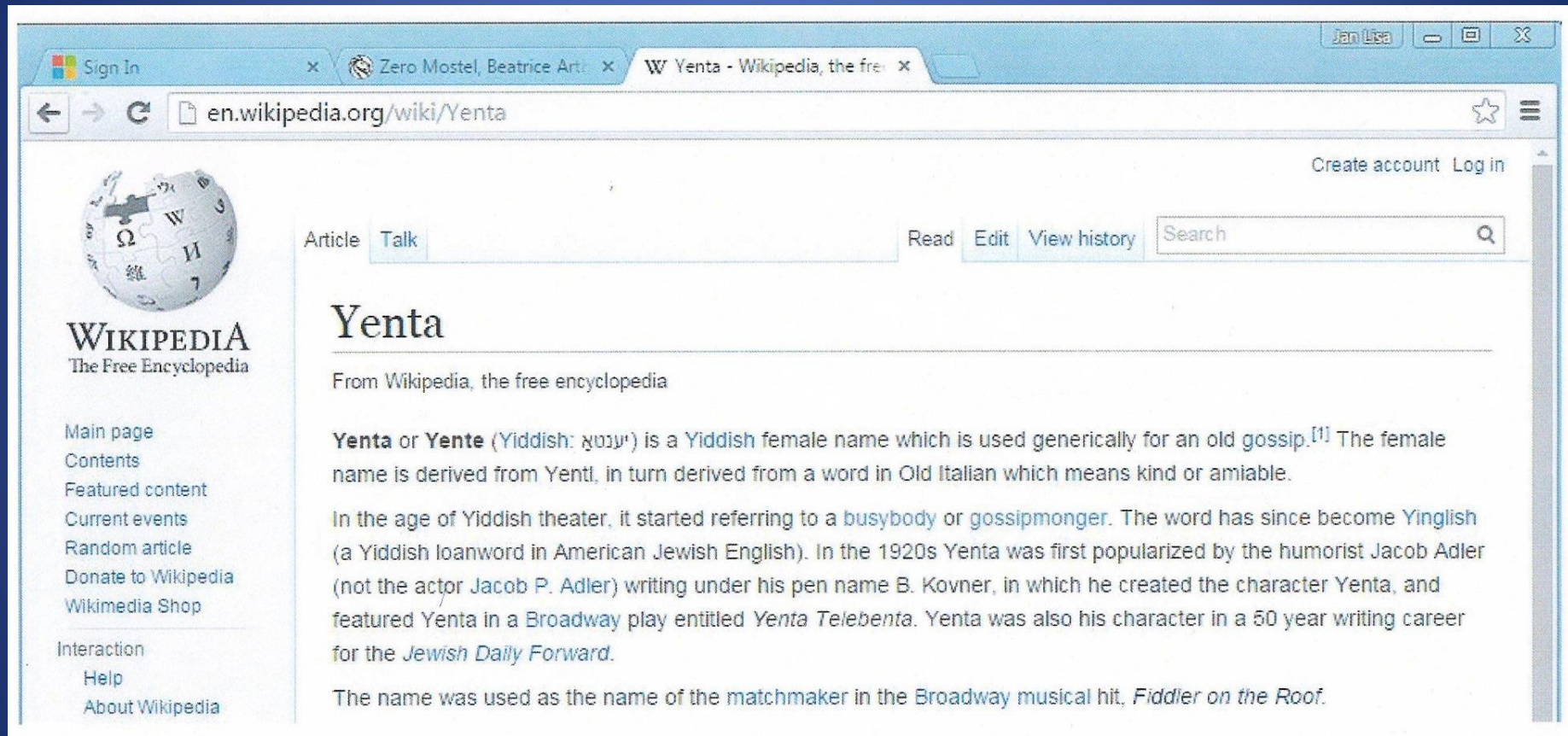
Yente: Ruchel, the shoemaker's daughter.

Avram: Ruchel? But she can hardly see. She's almost blind.

Yente: Tell the truth, Avram, is your son so much to look at?

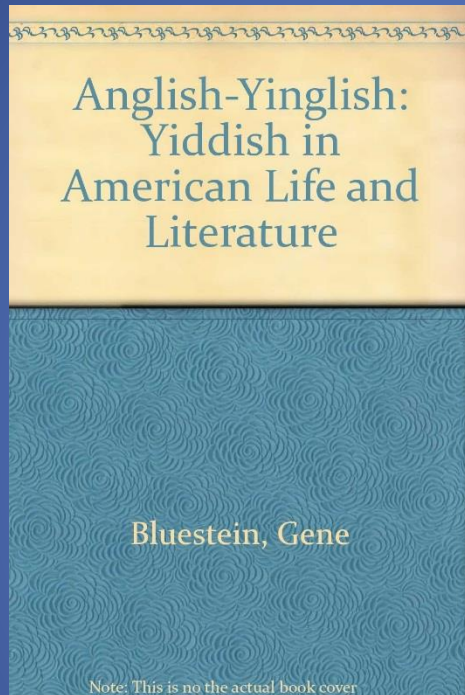
**The way she sees and the way he looks,
it's a perfect match.**

“Conventional Wisdom”

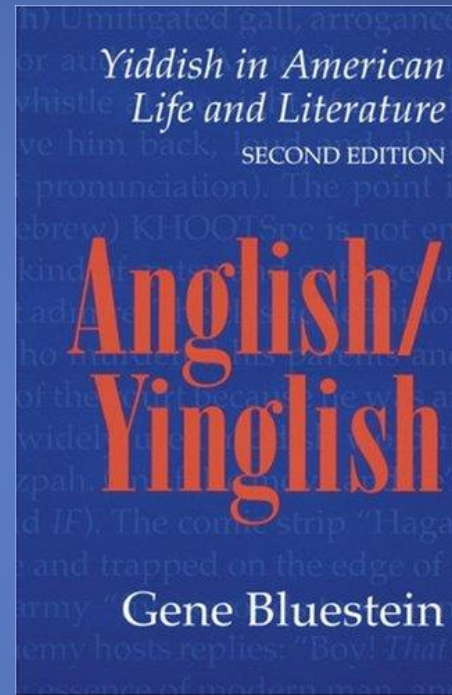


Cropped from Wikipedia Today → 3/14/15

But **Whose** “Conventions”...?



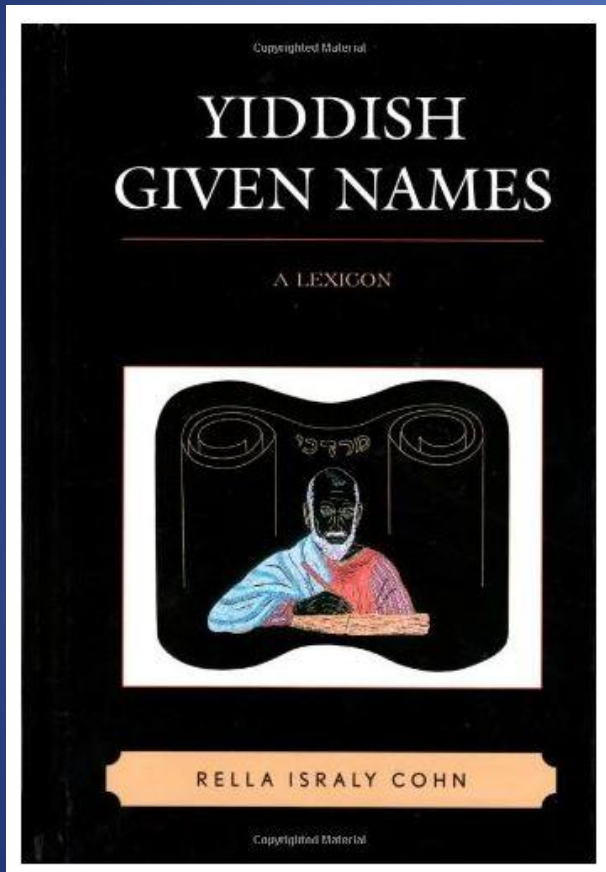
University of Georgia Press (1989)



University of Nebraska Press (1998)

And when...?

יענטא = “Gentil” from 1096!!!



Scarecrow Press (2008)

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name **Yente**, Yentl

gender f

colloquial form

hypocoristics Yentl, Yentke, Yentshe, St

diminutives Yentele, St

type, formal

type, semantic quality name

gloss 'well-bred'

language source Ital.

source form *gentile*, MW; *gentil*,

date 1096, Sal

Sal

shem hakodesh

kinnui

combination

Hebrew sources

Yiddish sources

St, Yentl historical base, Gol, Sam, MW 416 S. Loez, 641 Eydl probably a translation from **Yente**. Birn, **Yente**.

Russian sources

Kul: under Yante(?) **Yente**, Yentl. Beid.

rabbinic sources

German sources

Zunz: 37:74, European names 1000–1492, Gentil 1096, Gentilis, 75:46 + Gentile.

Salfeld: Many Gentil <yntyl>, Worms, etc., 1096 on.

Many Jenta <ynt'> [he terms this a close form], Würzburg 1298. Jentlin <yyntlyn>, Würzburg 1298.

comments Sal gives *gentil* as the source and labels it *franz*; MW says Y. Yentl came into Yiddish through southern Loez (early Italian); LZ has Gentil, Gentilis, and Gentile. The forms Sal discusses vary in the initial consonant in the Hebrew: #G and #Y. MTT has fifteen ambiguous Hebraized 'itā, of which two are **Yente** or Yete. (Y. Yete may be a derivative of **Yente**.)

MW mentions that negative connotations ('vulgar, coarse, gossip', RIC) are modern. The original etymological meaning has been reversed. Harkavy does not have **Yente**; he does have a verb *yentshn*, 'to groan, complain, grumble'. Did the verb change the connotations of the name, or is the verb recent, deriving from the name? Compare gloss with Eydl.

Genteel → Gentry → Gentleman

Gentry

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses, see Gentry (disambiguation).

Gentry (origin Old French *genterie*, from *gentil*, "high-born, noble") are "well-born, genteel and well-bred people" of high social class, especially in the past.^{[1][2]} *Gentry*, in its widest connotation, refers to people of good social position connected to landed estates (see *manorialism*), upper levels of the clergy, and "gentle" families of long descent who never obtained the official right to bear a coat of arms.

Cropped from Wikipedia Today → 3/14/15

And what about “gentile”...???

From Bea Arthur in 1964...

Tall...

even compared
to the men!

Has lots of dialogue
& even has
her own song!



Bea Arthur (1964)

...to Molly Picon in 1971:



Molly Picon (1971)

Tiny...
even compared
to the women!

Minimal dialogue
(just with women)
& **no song!**

Yente starts “The Rumor”



Yente: Rifke, I have such news for you. Remember Perchik, that crazy student? Remember at the wedding, when Tzeitel married Motel and Perchik started dancing with Tevye's daughter Hodel? Well, I just learned that Perchik's been arrested, in Kiev.

Villagers: No! **Yente:** Yes!

Woman One: Shandel, Shandel! Wait till I tell you... Remember Perchik, that crazy student? Remember at the wedding. He danced with Tevye's Hodel? Well, I just heard that Hodel's been arrested, in Kiev.

Villagers: No! Terrible, terrible!

Woman Two: Mirila! Do you remember Perchik, that student, from Kiev? Remember how he acted when Tzeitel married Motel? Well, I just heard that Motel's been arrested for dancing at the wedding.

Villagers: No! Woman Two: In Kiev!

Mendel: Rabbi! Rabbi! Remember Perchik, with all his strange ideas? Remember Tzeitel's wedding where Tevye danced with Golde? Well I just heard that Tevye's been arrested and Golde's gone to Kiev.

Villagers: No! Mendel: God forbid.

Villagers: She didn't. Mendel: She did.

Avram: Listen, everybody, terrible news, terrible...

Remember Perchik, who started all the trouble?

**Well, I just heard, from someone who should know,
that Golde's has been arrested, and Hodel's gone to
Kiev. Motel studies dancing; Tevye's acting strange.
Shprintze has the measles; Bielke has the mumps.**

**Yente:
And that's what comes
from men and women dancing!**

From Yente to Yenta!



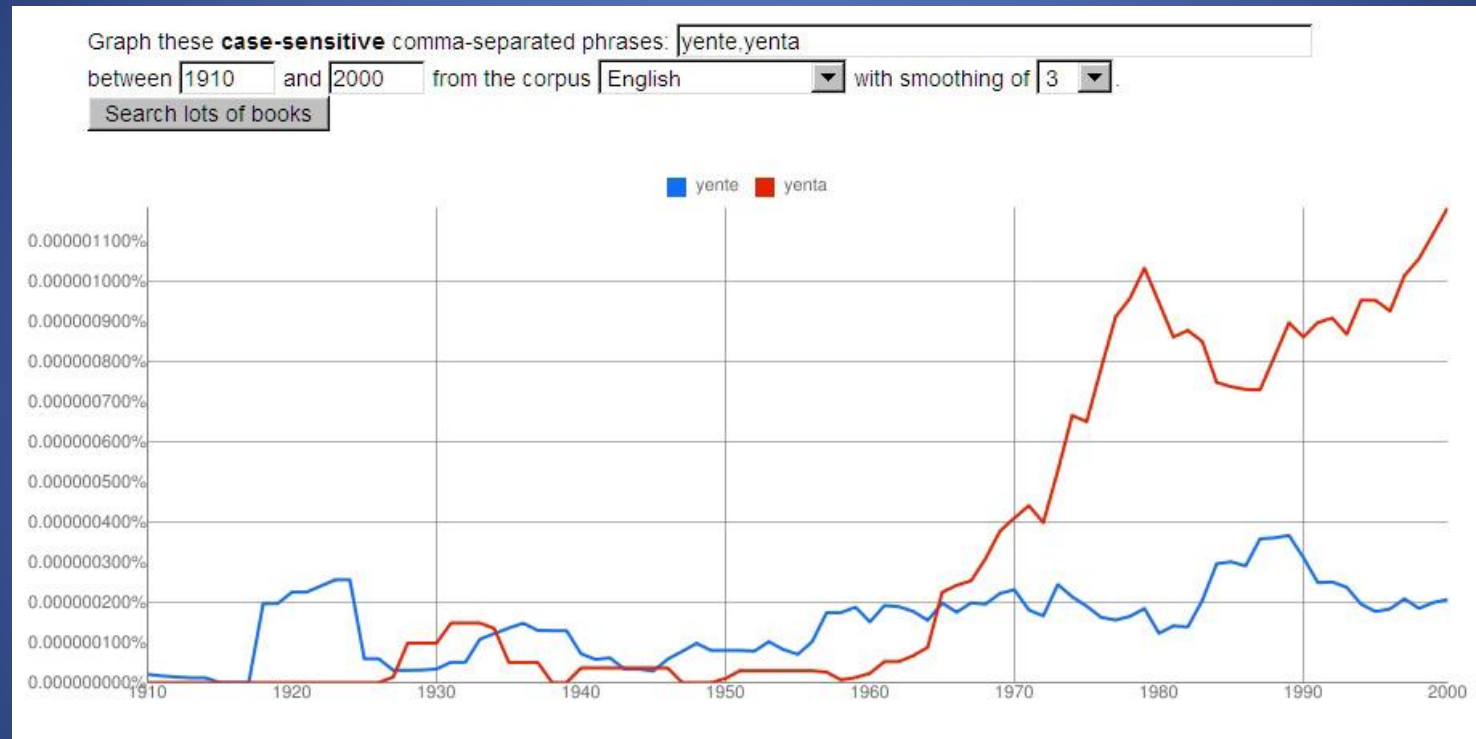
A ruthless **businesswoman**
with her own agenda?



A harmless old busybody;
a gossip and a meddler?



Yente (blue) → Yenta (red)



Wikipedia: 3/8/11

Q&A

Bring it on



JLH NOTE:

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