

Yiddish Literature and Culture in America

Jewish Studies 279/ German 279/ Lit Trans 279

University of Wisconsin- Madison

Spring 2017

Lecture: TR 1:00-2:15 Van Hise 594

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Office Hours: TR 2:15-3:15 or by appointment

Course Overview: At the turn of the 20th century, millions of Yiddish-speaking East European Jews arrived in America. Through study of the Yiddish literature and culture they produced, this course will give students insight into these immigrants' experience and their efforts to find a comfortable perch in the American landscape. The course will be subdivided into four sections covering different aspects of these Yiddish-speaking immigrants' experience and efforts: The immigration process and arrival in America; immigrant entry into the workplace; encounter with urban modernity and America's racial and ethnic diversity; the tension between assimilatory pressures and the desire for a transnational identity. Although turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants produced an unprecedented Yiddish cultural blossoming worthy of concentrated study, this course, which fulfills the Undergraduate Studies Ethnic Studies General Education Requirement, strives to employ this rich culture as a jumping-off point to help you achieve greater understanding and appreciation of the experience of contemporary ethnic/racial minorities with origins abroad who have become a growing element of American society since the expansion of immigration to the United States in the 1960s.

Learning Goals:

- 1) Students will achieve greater understanding and appreciation of diversity and thereby help improve campus climate and better prepare themselves for life and careers in an increasingly multicultural U. S. environment.
- 2) Through study of American Yiddish culture students will attain knowledge of the immigration process and the challenges faced by ethnically and racially divergent immigrant groups as they work to find their desired place in America.
- 3) Students will achieve grounding in American Yiddish Culture through encounter with works created by fifteen of its leading authors, poets, and directors.
- 4) Students will learn strategies for analyzing literary, filmic, and poetic texts intended to improve their critical thinking.

- 5) Students will learn how to communicate their analytical insights in writing more effectively.

Attendance, Tardiness, and Preparedness Policy: Students are expected to attend **every** class, arrive **on time**, and **remain for the whole class period**. Attendance will be taken every lecture. More than four unexcused absences, tardiness, or early departures will lower student grades.

Students should **always** bring paper or electronic copies of assigned readings to class for reference and be prepared to discuss them. Such preparedness will be an important component of the participation grade. *Laptops will only be permitted during class discussion of literary texts.*

Breakdown of Grades (approximate):

Short Response Papers, Reading Questions, and Quizzes: 20% - While lecture will provide students with possible interpretations and approaches to the assigned scholarly, epistolary, biographical, literary, and filmic texts, lecture and class discussion can't replace direct encounter with them. Such encounter is not always easy and students will frequently be assigned short written assignments to help them start thinking and preparing for class discussion. Beyond such assignments, student preparation will be gauged in class through quizzes based on supplied reading questions and an additional deep-thought question. Quiz administration will take place during class and absent students will not be given the opportunity to retake the quizzes without prior notification of tardiness or absence. *The lowest 2 quiz scores will be dropped* (including zeroes for absences or tardiness). *Students may also attend two Center for Jewish Studies (CJS) lectures and write two double-spaced, one-page summary/response papers whose grades will substitute for 2 quiz scores.* Approved lectures will be listed on the CJS website, (<http://jewishstudies.wisc.edu/events/>.) Approximately 20 quizzes and short response papers will be administered over the course of the semester.

Distinctive Feature Papers (500-750 Words): 2 X 20% - The aim of these assignments is to give students practice making observations and claims about ideas and arguments embedded in literary texts. These papers allow students to gain analytical traction with a text through construction of focused analyses based on recurring and distinctive textual features. Repeated details, passages, textual features, or moments that the author invites the reader to compare and contrast constitute examples of textual features suitable for such analysis. Every text is laced with numerous repetitions and they may include recurrent images, phrases, plot points, references, scene structures, or stylistic features. After identifying a repeated distinctive feature, students will be asked to explore how this recurrent feature serves to illuminate a topic, concept, or literary or aesthetic quality that the text seems to be exploring or commenting upon. Further written and oral instructions, as well as examples of effective assignments, will be provided over the course of the semester. If you have difficulty preparing these assignments, it is recommended that you meet with the instructor, the teaching assistant, or contact **The Writing Center**

(<http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html>) to set up a meeting. *Papers should be proofread prior to submission.* **Distinctive Feature Paper drafts will be due on March 9th & April 20th. Deadline for submission of final versions will be March 30th & May 4th. Students should submit electronic copies of their drafts to the appropriate drop box and bring physical copies of their paper to class on the due date for their peer reviewers.** Every twenty-four hour delay in submission of either the draft or the final paper will reduce the grade 5%.

Peer Review Assignments: 2 X 5% -The peer review assignments will have two parts. The first part of the assignment will ask students to compose reverse outlines of other students' papers. Not only will these reverse outlines help the students whose papers are reviewed revise their work and receive better grades, they will also help reviewers think more deeply about what constitutes a good paper. One puts together a reverse outline after a writing assignment has been completed, and it allows the reviewer to track how effectively a paper communicates its ideas. Composition of a reverse outline involves the following steps: 1) The reviewer numbers each paragraph in the paper 2) The reviewer then notes the main point or points of each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper 3) The reviewer then comments on the content of each paragraph. Does the paragraph have a clear purpose, is it attempting to accomplish too much, or does it serve no purpose at all in the paper? 4) The reviewer notes any extraneous ideas in each paragraph and either recommends that they be removed from the paper or moved to a more appropriate paragraph. In the second part of the assignment the peer reviewer will answer three questions about the paper: 1) After identifying the textual repetition upon which the paper is based, the reviewer will be asked to comment on whether it proves sufficient to advance the asserted thesis. *If the paper is not constructed around a textual repetition, the reviewer would alert the writer to this fact.* 2) After noting whether the paper's organization aligns with the provisional thesis advanced by the author, the reviewer should make suggestions about ways to either revise the thesis or the paper's organization if there is a lack of alignment. *If the paper lacks a viable thesis, the reviewer should alert the writer to this fact.* 3) Does the paper feature excessive plot summary? Reviewers should make suggestions about what plot summary can be removed. **Peer Review Assignments will be due on March 16th and April 27th. Electronic copies of the Peer Review Assignment should indicate the name of the person whose paper is being reviewed both in the file name and at the opening of the peer review.**

Final: 20% - The final exam will have two parts. In the first section students will be asked to identify and discuss the significance of passages drawn from the literary works read over the course of the semester. In the second part students will be asked to write two short essays comparing and contrasting works read over the course of the semester. **The Final Exam will be administered on May 7th from 2:45PM-4:45PM.**

Attendance and Participation: 10% - Class attendance proves integral to student success. Attendance will be taken every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more than four absences). Active engagement in class constitutes an important part of the learning process and students will be rewarded for asking meaningful questions and making significant contributions through their comments. Students will be provided with questions to guide their reading and should, at a minimum, be prepared to respond to these questions. Listening in lecture only constitutes a starting point to student involvement. **Finally, students observed surfing the web, texting, or talking with fellow students will have their participation grade lowered.**

Grading Scale:

A= 93-100%

AB= 88-92%

B= 83-87%

BC= 78-82%

C= 70-77%

D= 60-69%

F= 0-59%

Disability Policy:

Students registered with disabilities at McBurney Disability Resource Center can receive accommodations with the presentation of the proper forms. Disabled students should meet with the instructor during office hours or by appointment to arrange these accommodations. **Such meetings should be arranged as early in the semester as possible.**

Code of Academic Integrity:

All students are expected to conduct their academic work according to university standards. Students should be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and do their best to avoid it. To learn more on what constitutes academic integrity see <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>.

Food, Drink, Cell Phone, and Laptop Policy:

Students are asked to refrain from eating and drinking during class. Cell phones should be turned off before class and *laptops will only be permitted during class discussion of literary texts.*

Required Texts:

- Shalom Aleichem, The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl & Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son. Trans. Hillel Halkin. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002.
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. Enemies, A Love Story. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.

Reserves and Electronic Reserves:

Copies of the required texts will be placed on reserve at College Library. Films, books, or portions of books unavailable for purchase will be placed on Learn@UW.

Schedule:

General Introduction

January 17 General Introduction

The Immigration Process and Entry to America (January 19-February 9)

January 19 East European Jewish Immigration in Comparative Perspective
Reading: Nancy Foner, From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration, 9-35.

Response Paper

January 24 Migration in Real Time: Immigrant Letters as Mini-Narratives
Reading: Gur Alroey, Bread to Eat & Clothes to Wear: Letters from Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth Century, 91-111; 139-143.

Response Paper

January 26 Making Sense of One's Immigration- Immigrant Biographies as Mini-Narratives

Reading: Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer, eds., My Future is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants, 18-34 & 288-310.

Response Paper

January 31 Migrational Fiction: *Motl, the Cantor's Son* (European Origins)

Reading: Sholem Aleichem, The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl & Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son, 107-235.

Quiz

February 2 *Motl, the Cantor's Son*: European Origins (Continued)

February 7 Migrational Fiction: *Motl, the Cantor's Son* (To America)

Reading: Sholem Aleichem, The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl & Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son, 239-318.

Quiz

February 9 *Motl, the Cantor's Son*: To America (Continued)

Eyn Kemakh, Eyn Torah – Jewish Immigrants and Work in America (February 14 – March 3)

February 14 Jewish Immigrants and Work in America

Reading: Nancy Foner, From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration, 70-107.

Response Paper

February 16 Morris Rosenfeld and Dovid Edelshtadt: Labor and the Immigrant Jewish Family

Reading: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, Eds. A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry, 79-80.

Benjamin Harshav, Ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 13; 27-28; 55-60.

Response Paper

February 21 Morris Rosenfeld: Portraying the Immigrant Labor Experience (continued)

Reading: Benjamin Harshav, Ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 21-27; 32-34.

Response Paper

February 23 Poets Against Capitalist Excess- Dovid Edelshtat and Yoysef Bovshover

Reading: Benjamin Harshav, Ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 53, 65-67; 70-72.

Response Paper

February 28 Cinema and the Jewish Capitalist: *Uncle Moses*

At-Home Screening: Uncle Moses directed by Sidney Goldin and Aubrey Scott. 1932. DVD. National Center for Jewish Film. 1992.

Quiz

March 2 Cinema and the Jewish Worker: *Motl the Operator*

At-Home Screening: Motl the Operator directed by Joseph Seiden. 1939. DVD. National Center for Jewish Film. 2007.

Quiz

Encounter with Urban America: Wonderment, Exclusion, Integration, and Transformation (March 7- April 6)

March 7 The Urban Experience in Yiddish Poetry: Yehoash, Berish Vaynshteyn, and A. Leyeles

Reading: Benjamin Harshav, ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 104-106, 346-349, 356, 360-362 & 365-6.

Response Paper

March 9 The Urban Experience in Yiddish Poetry (continued)
Distinctive Feature Paper #1 Draft Due

March 14 Representations of the Subway in Yiddish Poetry: Yehoash, Zisho Landoy, Moyshe-Layb Halpern, and A. Leyeles
Reading: Benjamin Harshav, ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 94, 187, 190, 263, 362-363, & 391-3.
Response Paper

March 16 Representations of the Subway in Yiddish Poetry (continued)
Peer Review Assignment #1 Due

March 21 & March 23 Spring Break

March 28 From Race to Ethnicity: Jews in America
Reading: Nancy Foner, From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration, 142-168.
Response Paper

March 30 Alienation, Race, and the City: Lamed Shapiro's "New Yorkish"
Reading: Lamed Shapiro, The Cross and Other Jewish Stories, 198-212.
Quiz
Distinctive Feature Paper #1 Final Version Due

April 4 African-Americans in Yiddish Poetry: Yehoash, H. Leyvik, Berish Vaynshteyn, and A. Leyeles
Reading: Benjamin Harshav, ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 107, 236, 365, 339-340.
Response Paper

April 6 African-Americans in Yiddish Poetry (continued)

Jewishness and Transnationalism (April 13-May 4)

April 11 CLASS CANCELLED PASSOVER

April 13 Transnationalism and Americanization's Limits
Reading: Nancy Foner, From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration, 169-187.
Benjamin Harshav, ed. Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry A Historical Anthology, 250-253.
Response Paper

April 18 CLASS CANCELLED PASSOVER

April 20 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in I. B. Singer's *Enemies, a Love Story*

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Enemies, a Love Story, 3-126.

Quiz

Distinctive Feature Paper #2 Draft Due

April 25 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in Singer's *Enemies, a Love Story* (continued)

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Enemies, a Love Story, 129-280.

Quiz

April 27 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in Singer's *Enemies, a Love Story*

Peer Review Assignment #2 Due

May 2 Chaim Grade's "My Quarrel with Hirsh Rasseynner" and Unresolved Jewish Questions in the Golden Land

Reading: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Stories, 579-606.

Quiz

May 4 Chaim Grade's "My Quarrel with Hirsh Rasseynner" and Unresolved Jewish Questions in the Golden Land (continued); Conclusions; Final Review

Distinctive Feature Paper #2 Final Version Due

May 7 Final Exam 2:45-4:45PM