Yiddish Literature and Culture in Europe
Jewish Studies 269/ German 269/ Lit Trans 269
University of Wisconsin- Madison
Spring 2014
Lecture: TuTh 2:30-3:45, Ingraham 22

Prof. Philip Hollander
860 Van Hise Hall
Department of German/ Center for Jewish Studies
Email: phollander@wisc.edu
Office Phone: 265-5193
Office Hours: TuTh 1-2 or by appointment

Course Overview: This course offers an introduction to European Yiddish literature and culture and the important roles they played in European Jews’ lives for a millennium. It starts by acquainting students with Yiddish language and the role it played alongside other Jewish languages in creating a distinct way of life for Central and East European Jews. Then the course explores Yiddish’s role in the creation of a Jewish folk culture and a popular culture mediating between Jewish and non-Jewish cultural expression. Attention then shifts to the blossoming of Modern European Yiddish culture that took place between 1864 and 1945. Focus on period texts, as well as important textual precursors, teaches appreciation of the modern literary and filmic Yiddish texts’ aesthetic merit. Following analysis of literary works by Yiddish literary pioneers Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Yitzhok Leibush Peretz and Sholem Aleichem, the course will explore Interwar Polish and Soviet Yiddish cultural expression to expose students to divergent twentieth century cultural trends. The course then concludes with exploration of Yiddish literary responses to the Holocaust that confront the precipitous decline of Yiddish culture and its practitioners on European soil.

Learning Goals:
1) Students will attain knowledge of how European Jewish life manifested itself in Yiddish.
2) Students will achieve grounding in European Yiddish culture through encounter with the literary and filmic texts of seventeen leading authors, poets, and directors.
3) Students will learn strategies for analyzing literary, filmic, and poetic texts intended to improve their critical thinking.
4) Students will learn how to more effectively communicate their analytical insights in writing.

Attendance, Tardiness, and Preparedness Policy: Students are expected to attend every class and to arrive on time. Attendance will be taken every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more that four absences).
In addition, 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.

**Breakdown of Grades (approximate) and Grading Scale:**

*Reading Questions, Quizzes, and Short Response Papers: 20%* - While lecture will provide students with possible interpretations and approaches to the assigned oral, literary, scholarly, and filmic texts, lecture and class discussion can’t replace direct encounter with them. Nonetheless such encounter is not always easy and students will be provided with reading questions or short response prompts to help them start them thinking and preparing for class discussion. Reading quizzes based on the reading questions provided will be administered throughout the semester to test student preparation. Quiz administration will take place during class and absent students will not be given the opportunity to retake the quizzes without providing prior notification of tardiness or absence to the professor. 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/](http://jewishstudies.wisc.edu/events/) Approximately 21 quizzes and short response papers will be administered over the course of the semester.

*Textual Echo Papers (500-1000 Words): 3 X 15%* - The aim of these assignments is to give students the opportunity to practice making observations and claims about ideas and arguments embedded in oral, literary, and filmic texts. These papers allow students to gain analytical traction with a text by discerning textual “echoes” around which to build a focused analysis. For purposes of this paper, a “textual echo” can be understood as a sequence of details, passages, textual features, or moments that the narrator, author, or director invite the reader to compare and contrast. Every text is laced with numerous echoes and they may include repeated images, phrases, plot points, references, scene structures, or stylistic features. After identifying such textual echoes, students will be asked to explore how a particular textual echo considered interesting or important serves to illuminate a topic, concept, or literary or aesthetic feature 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 or contact The Writing Center [http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Individual/index.html) to set up a meeting. Papers should be proofread prior to submission. **Papers are due on March 13th, April 3rd and May 8th.** Late papers will be accepted, but every twenty-four hour delay in submission will reduce the grade 5%.

*Final: 20%* - The final exam will have two parts. 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 first section. Students will be asked to write two short
essays comparing and contrasting works read over the course of the semester in the second part. The Final Exam will be administered on May 11 from 10:05AM-12:05PM.

Participation: 10% - 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. Occasionally students will be asked to prepare additional materials for class discussion. 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.

Attendance: 5% Class attendance proves integral to student success. Attendance will be taken every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more than four absences).

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 misconduct see [http://students.wisc.edu/saja/pdf/UWS14.pdf](http://students.wisc.edu/saja/pdf/UWS14.pdf).

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 should be employed for class purposes only.

Required Texts:

**Reserves and Electronic Reserves:**  
Copies of the required texts will be placed on reserve as College Library. Films, books, or portions of books unavailable for purchase will be placed on Learn@UW.

**Schedule:**

*Beyond Jokes and Curses - Addressing Expectations About Yiddish Culture (January 21- January 30)*

**January 21** General Introduction

*Yiddish Literature as World Literature*

**January 23** Tackling Universal Themes: Addressing Art and Love in Modern Yiddish Poetry  

*Introduction to Premodern Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture (February 4- February 25)*

**January 28** *Yiddish Language and Culture – A Brief Introduction*  
*Quiz*

**January 30** *Yiddish Language and Culture – A Brief Introduction* (continued)  
*Quiz*

*Drawing Strength From Its Surroundings – Yiddish Folktales and Popular Literature*

**February 4** Beyond the Letter of the Law: Yiddish Folktales and the Jewish Spirit  
*Short Response Paper in lieu of Quiz*
February 6 Time off from Torah: Bringing Knights, Princesses, and Werewolves to the Jews in “The Story of Bovo”
Reading: Joachim Neugroschel, Ed. Radiant Days, Haunted Nights: Great Tales From the Treasury of Yiddish Folk Literature, 380-429.
Quiz

Yiddish Literature Between Hasidism and Haskala (February 11 – February 20)
New Yiddish Cultural Forms – The Hasidic Tales of Nahman of Bratzlav

February 11 Stories to Awaken the Soul– Nahman of Bratzlav’s “The Loss of the Princess” and “The Hakham and the Tam (The Clever Man and the Ordinary Man)”
Quiz

February 13 Stories to Awaken the Soul (continued)

Yiddish Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah)

February 18 Challenging Traditional Society - S. Y. Abramovitsh, “The Little Man”
Reading: Ken Frieden, Classic Yiddish Stories of S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz, 3-54.
Quiz

February 20 Challenging Traditional Society (continued)- S. Y. Abramowitsh, “Fishke the Lame”

Yiddish Literature Comes of Age (February 25 – March 6)

Classic Yiddish Literature

February 25 I. L. Peretz and Creative Betrayal - “The Golden Chain”
Quiz

February 27 I. L. Peretz and Creative Betrayal - “Devotion Without End”
Quiz

March 4 Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue – The Female Voice
Reading: Sholem Aleichem, Nineteen to the Dozen: Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things, 3-30, 44-53, 73-80, 81-102, 115-148.
Quiz
March 6 Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue (continued) – The Male Voice

**Interwar Yiddish Culture (March 25 –April 29)**

**Yiddish Culture in the Soviet Union**

**March 11** Yiddish Poetry’s Embrace of the Soviet Future – Poems by Dovid Hofshteyn, Peretz Markish, and Leib Kvitko
*Quiz*

**March 13**: Ambivalence and the Soviet Jewish Future: “The Worker’s Club” by Peretz Markish
*Quiz*

**March 13 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #1 DUE**

**March 18 & 20** Spring Break

**March 25** Symbolism or A Little Something Different: “Under a Fence: Revue” by Der Nister
*Quiz*

**March 27** Peretz Markish and The Difficulties of Soviet Yiddish Identity
*Quiz*

**Yiddish Culture in Poland**

**April 1** Yiddish Drama and Cinema Meet Tradition: S. Ansky’s “The Dybbuk”
Reading: S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, 1-49.
*Quiz*

**April 3** Yiddish Cinema Meets Tradition: “The Dybbuk” (continued)

*Short Response Paper in lieu of Quiz*

**April 3 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #2 DUE**

**April 8** Modern Midrash: The Case of Itzik Manger's *Itzik’s Midrash*


*Quiz*

**April 10** Modern Midrash: The Case of Itzik Manger's *Itzik’s Midrash* (continued)

**April 15** Passover – Class Cancelled

**April 17** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side – Historical Background

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray*, 3-84.

*Quiz*

**April 22** Passover - Class Cancelled

**April 24** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side – Literary Analysis

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray*, 85-168

*Quiz*

**April 29** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side – Allegorical Reading

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray*, 169-239

*Quiz*

**Yiddish Literature of the Holocaust (May 1- May 6)**

**May 1** A Holocaust Miniature – Leyb Goldin's "Chronicle of A Single Day"


*Quiz*

**May 6** Art from the Ashes – Selected Poetry of Abraham Sutzkever


*Quiz*

**Conclusions (May 8)**
May 8 European Yiddish Culture – A Summing Up; Preview of Yiddish Literature and Culture in America Class; Exam Review

May 8 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #3 DUE

May 11 FINAL EXAM – 10:05AM-12:05PM