

# **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

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**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 than 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>) to set up a meeting. Papers should be proofread prior to submission. **Papers are due on March 13<sup>th</sup>, April 3<sup>rd</sup> and May 8<sup>th</sup>.** 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>).

#### **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:**

- Shalom Aleichem. Nineteen to the Dozen: Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things. Trans. Ted Gorelick. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1998.
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. Satan in Goray. Trans. Jacob Sloan. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

### **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

Reading: Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, Eds. The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, 519 & 526-7.

Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, Eds. A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry, 220-1.

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

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

Reading: Dovid Katz, Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish, 1-77.

Quiz

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

Reading; Benjamin Harshav, The Meaning of Yiddish, 3-26.

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

Reading: Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, Ed., Yiddish Folktales, 15-18, 37-43, 77-79, 85-88, 101-104, 131-135, 158-160, 163-166, 186-188, 196-197, 207-209, 211-213, 233-234, 240-242, 279-281, 294-295, & 340-343.

*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)”

Reading: Arnold Band, Ed. Nahman of Bratslav: The Tales, 51-62 & 139-162.

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”

Marvin Zuckerman and Marion Herbst, Eds. The Three Great Classic Writers of Modern Yiddish Literature, Vol. 3: Peretz, 398-468.

Quiz

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

Reading: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Stories, 118-148.

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

Reading: Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, Eds. The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, 262-267, 268-271, 293.

Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, Eds. A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry, 185 & 192-193.

Quiz

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

Reading: Joseph Sherman, Ed. From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing 1917-1952, 91-144.

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

Reading: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, Eds. Ashes Out of Hope: Fiction by Soviet-Yiddish Writers, 193-218.

Quiz

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

Reading: Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, Eds. The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, 376-377.

Joseph Leftwich, Ed. An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Literature, 306-307.

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)

Screening: The Dybbuk. Dir. Michal Waszynski. 1937. DVD. National Center for Jewish Film, 1989.

*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*

Reading: Itzik Manger, The World According to Itzik: Selected Poetry and Prose, 4-29.

*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"

Reading: David Roskies, Ed. The Literature of Destruction, 424-434.

*Quiz*

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

Reading: A. Sutzkever, A. Sutzkever: Selected Poetry and Prose, 151-52, 168-170, 181-2.

David Roskies, Ed. The Literature of Destruction, 494-5 & 500.

*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