

# **Yiddish Literature and Culture in Europe**

## **Jewish Studies 269/ German 269/ Lit Trans 269**

University of Wisconsin- Madison

Fall 2015

Lecture: TuTh 11:00-12:15, Ingraham 225

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Office Hours: TuTh 12:15-1:15 or by appointment

**Course Overview:** After a brief introduction to Yiddish language, this course will investigate how Yiddish culture gave European Jewish life its distinctive stamp. It will concentrate on the modern period (1864- 1945) when advocates of Yiddish turned it into an independent vehicle employable for describing and detailing every aspect of Jewish life and experience. Focus on this period will teach students to appreciate the aesthetic merits of modern literary and filmic Yiddish texts. An introduction to Yiddish literary pioneers Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Yitzhok Leibush Peretz and Sholem Aleichem's literary work will be followed by exploration of the interwar period when Poland and the Soviet Union's political and social environments birthed divergent forms of Yiddish cultural expression. The course will conclude with analysis of Yiddish literary responses to the Holocaust that confront Yiddish culture and its practitioners' precipitous decline 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 fifteen 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. *Laptops will only be permitted during class discussion of literary texts.*

## **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 thinking and preparing for class discussion. To test student preparation reading quizzes, based on the supplied reading questions and an additional deep thought question, will be administered throughout the semester. 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 18 quizzes and short response papers will be administered over the course of the semester.

*Textual Echo Papers (500-1000 Words): 2 X 20%* - 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. **Draft Papers are due on October 29<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Final Versions are due on November 12<sup>th</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup>.** Late papers will be accepted, but every twenty-four hour delay in submission will reduce the grade 5%.

*Reverse Outline Peer Review Assignment: 2 X 5%* -Reverse outlines are outlines composed following completion of a writing assignment they outline. A useful tool for helping students consider how best to revise and improve a paper, we will be employing them as part of a peer review process intended to assist students

in improving their writing prior to assignment of a formal grade. Each student will receive a paper of another student and will be asked to create a reverse outline of this paper to assist its author in revision of his/her paper. Composition of a reverse outline will involve the following steps: 1) Number each paragraph in the paper 2) On a separate sheet of paper list the main point (s) of each paragraph 3) Note whether each paragraph is properly focused or whether there are multiple main ideas competing for control of the paragraph. 4) Note whether the main point of each paragraph is reflected in a topic sentence at its outset 5) Note any extraneous ideas in each paragraph that should be deleted or moved to a more appropriate paragraph. 6) Following completion of the whole outline, note whether the paper's organization aligns with the provisional thesis advanced by the author. If there is a disconnect between the paper's organization and the provisional thesis suggest ways to either revise the thesis or the paper's outline. **Reverse Outline Peer Review Assignments will be due on November 5<sup>th</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup>.**

*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 December 23<sup>rd</sup> from 10:05AM-12:05PM.**

*Attendance and 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.** 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 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:**

- 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 (September 3- September 8)***

**September 3** General Introduction

*Yiddish Literature as World Literature*

**September 8** 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.

#### ***Introduction to Premodern Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture (September 10- September 24)***

**September 10** *Yiddish Language and Culture – A Brief Introduction*

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

Quiz

**September 15 Class Cancelled –Take-Home Activity**

**September 17** *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*

**September 22** 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, 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

**September 24** Time off from Torah: The Knights, Giants and Dragons of “Vidvilt”

Reading: Jerold C. Frakes, Ed. Early Yiddish Epic, 184-237.

Quiz

***Yiddish Literature Between Hasidism and Haskala (October 1 – October 13)***

*New Yiddish Cultural Forms – The Hasidic Tales of Nahman of Bratzlav*

**September 29 Class Cancelled – Take-Home Activity**

**October 1** Stories to Awaken the Soul– Nahman of Bratzlav’s “The *Hakham* and the *Tam* (The Clever Man and the Ordinary Man)”

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

Quiz

*Yiddish Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah)*

**October 6 CLASS CANCELLED Take-Home Activity**

**October 8** 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

**October 13** Challenging Traditional Society (continued)- S. Y. Abramowitsh, “Fishke the Lame”

***Yiddish Literature Comes of Age (October 15 – October 27)***

## *Classic Yiddish Literature*

**October 15** 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*

**October 20** I. L. Peretz and Creative Betrayal - "Devotion Without End"  
Reading: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Stories, 118-148.

*Quiz*

**October 22** Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue - The Female Voice  
Reading: Sholem Aleichem, Nineteen to the Dozen: Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things, 3-16, 81-102.

*Quiz*

**October 27** Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue (continued) - The Male Voice

## ***Interwar Yiddish Culture (October 29 -December 3)***

### *Yiddish Culture in the Soviet Union*

**October 29** Yiddish Poetry's Embrace of The Soviet Future - "City" and "Procession"  
by Dovid Hofshsteyn  
Reading: Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, Eds. The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, 259, 262-267, 268-271.

*Quiz*

### **October 29 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #1 DRAFT DUE**

**November 3:** 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*

**November 5** Ambivalence and the Soviet Jewish Future: "The Worker's Club"  
Reading: Joseph Sherman, Ed. From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing 1917-1952, 91-144.

*Quiz*

### **November 5 REVERSE OUTLINE PEER REVIEW ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE**

## *Yiddish Culture in Poland*

**November 10** Yiddish Drama and Cinema Meet Tradition: S. Ansky's "The Dybbuk"  
Reading: S. Ansky, The Dybbuk and Other Writings, 1-49.

*Quiz*

**November 12** 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*

### **November 12 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #1 FINAL VERSION DUE**

**November 17** 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.

*Short Response Paper in lieu of Quiz*

**November 19** Modern Midrash: The Case of Itzik Manger's *Itzik's Midrash*  
(continued)

**November 24** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side –  
Historical Background

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Satan in Goray, 3-118.

*Quiz*

### **NOVEMBER 26 CLASS CANCELLED THANKSGIVING**

**December 1** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side –  
Literary Analysis

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Satan in Goray, 121-239.

*Quiz*

**December 3** Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Satan in Goray* and Modernity's Dark Side –  
Literary Analysis (continued)

### **December 3 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #2 DRAFT DUE**

## ***Yiddish Literature of the Holocaust (December 8-10)***

**December 8** A Holocaust Miniature – Leyb Goldin's "Chronicle of A Single Day"  
Reading: David Roskies, Ed. The Literature of Destruction, 424-434.

*Quiz*

**December 10** Art from the Ashes – Selected Poetry of Abraham Sutzkever

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

*Quiz*

**December 10 REVERSE OUTLINE PEER REVIEW ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE**

***Conclusions (December 15)***

**December 15** European Yiddish Culture – A Summing Up; Preview of Yiddish Literature and Culture in America Class; Exam Review

**DECEMBER 15 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #2 FINAL VERSION DUE**

**December 23 FINAL EXAM – 10:05PM-12:05PM**