

Yiddish Literature and Culture in America

Jewish Studies 279/ German 279/ Lit Trans 279

University of Wisconsin- Madison

Spring 2015

Lecture: TuTh 2:30-3:45 Educational Science 212

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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 for achievement of 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 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 more effectively communicate their analytical insights in writing.

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. Excessive unexcused absences, tardiness, or early departures will lower student grades. *Students absent more than four times will be penalized.* 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):

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. Nonetheless 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. When short written assignments are not given, 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.

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 meeting 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. **Textual Echo Paper drafts will be due on March 12th & April 21st. Deadline for submission of final versions will be March 26th & May 5th. Students should submit their initial drafts and the Reverse Outline Peer Review of the draft together with the final version of the paper.** 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 March 19th and April 28th.**

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 13th from 7:45AM-9:45AM.**

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.**

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 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 as College Library. Films, books, or portions of books unavailable for purchase will be placed on Learn@UW.

Schedule:

General Introduction

January 20 General Introduction

The Immigration Process and Entry to America (January 22-February 12)

January 22 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 27 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 29 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

February 3 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 5 *Motl, the Cantor's Son*-European Origins (Continued)

February 10 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 12 *Motl, the Cantor's Son* –To America (Continued)

Ein Kemach, Ein Torah – Jewish Immigrants and Work in America
(February 17 - February 24)

February 17 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 19 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 24 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 26 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; 70-75.

Response Paper

March 3 Cinema and the Jewish Capitalist: *Uncle Moses*

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

Quiz

March 5 Cinema and the Jewish Worker: *Motl the Operator*

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 10- April 9)

March 10 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 12 The Urban Experience in Yiddish Poetry (continued)

Textual Echo Paper #1 Draft Due

March 17 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 19 Representations of the Subway in Yiddish Poetry (continued)

Reverse Outline Peer Review Assignment #1 Due

March 24 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 26 Alienation, Race, and the City: Lamed Shapiro's "New Yorkish"

Reading: Lamed Shapiro, The Cross and Other Jewish Stories, 198-212.

Quiz

Textual Echo Paper #1 Finale Version Due

March 31 & April 2 SPRING BREAK

April 7 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, 335-340, & 349-50.

Response Paper

April 9 African-Americans in Yiddish Poetry (continued)

Jewishness and Transnationalism (April 14-May 7)

April 14 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 16 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

April 21 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in Singer's *Enemies a Love Story* (continued)

Textual Echo Paper #2 Draft Due

April 23 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in Singer's *Enemies a Love Story*

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

Quiz

April 28 The Reassertion of Transnational Jewishness in Singer's *Enemies a Love Story* (concluded)

Reverse Outline Peer Review Assignment #2 Due

April 30 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 5 Chaim Grade's "My Quarrel with Hirsh Rasseynner" and Unresolved Jewish Questions in the Golden Land (continued)

Textual Echo Paper #1 Finale Version Due

May 7 Conclusions; Final Review

May 13 Final