

# Modern Jewish Literature

## Hebrew Studies 318/ Jewish Studies 318

University of Wisconsin- Madison  
Spring 2014

Lecture: TR 4:00-5:15, Social Science 5231  
Section 301: W 12:05-12:55, Van Hise 487  
Section 302: T 1:20-2:10, Ingraham 215  
Section 303: W 2:25-3:15, Van Hise 240

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**Course Overview:** This course will provide students with a conceptual framework for understanding Modern Jewish Literature and deriving greater aesthetic pleasure and cultural understanding from its varied works. Alongside discussion of Benjamin Harshav's theory of Modern Jewish Culture, students will gain exposure to fictional and poetic works originally written in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Russian, and English by eighteen prominent modern Jewish writers, including Nobel Laureates Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Through their study, students will learn how the breakdown of pre-Modern Jewish society, immigration, the challenges of Jewish integration and exclusion, and the establishment of new Jewish communities, influenced the creation of literature during what Harshav refers to as the "Modern Jewish Revolution."

### Learning Goals:

- 1) Students will achieve grounding in Modern Jewish literature through encounter with eighteen of its leading authors and poets.
- 2) Students will learn how to employ Jewish history and culture to better interpret Modern Jewish literature.
- 3) Students will learn strategies for analyzing poetry and prose.
- 4) Students will learn how to more effectively communicate their thoughts in writing.

**Attendance, Tardiness, and Preparedness Policy:** Students are expected to attend **every** class and to arrive **on time**. Attendance will be taken in section and monitored by the TA every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student

grades (more than three discussion section absences). In addition, students should **always** bring paper or electronic copies of assigned readings to class and discussion section for reference and be prepared to discuss them. Such preparedness will be an important component of the participation grade.

### **Breakdown of Grades (approximate):**

*Reading Questions and Quizzes: 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 19 quizzes 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 4<sup>th</sup>, April 10<sup>th</sup> and May 6<sup>th</sup>.** Late papers will be accepted, but every twenty-four hour delay in submission will reduce the grade 5%.

*Final: 25%* - **The final exam will be held from 2:45PM to 4:45PM on May 16<sup>th</sup>.** It 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.

*Attendance and Participation: 10%* - Class and section attendance proves integral to student success. Attendance will be taken in section and monitored by the TA every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more than three discussion section absences). Active engagement in class and discussion section constitute an important part of the learning process and students will be rewarded for asking meaningful questions and making significant contributions to lecture and class discussion 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 if called upon in lecture or section. Listening in lecture and class discussion 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.**

*Extra-Credit: 5%* - On March 2<sup>nd</sup> from 2-4PM the actor Andrei Malaev-Babel will be presenting his one-man show **How It Was Done in Odessa** in the H'Doubler performance space in Lathrop Hall. Inspired by the literary work of Isaac Babel, whose short stories will be read later in the semester, the show will offer students a unique opportunity for insight into the author's oeuvre. Students who attend the event will have the opportunity to submit a 1-2 page response paper communicating their impressions of the performance and its relationship to the course themes. **The Submission Deadline for Extra-Credit Assignment is March 13<sup>th</sup>.**

#### *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 their TA 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:

- Agnon, S. Y. *A Simple Story*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2000.
- Roth, Philip. *Goodbye Columbus: And Five Other Stories*. New York: Vintage International, 1994.
- Shalom Aleichem. *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*. Trans. Hillel Halkin. New York: Schocken, 1987, 3-134.
- Schnitzler, Arthur. *Round Dance and Other Plays*. Trans. J. M. Q. Davies. London: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Yeziarska, Anzia. *Bread Givers*. New York: Persea Books, 1975.

## Reserves and Electronic Reserves:

Copies of the required texts will be placed on reserve as College Library. The remaining readings will be placed on Learn@UW, but students are encouraged to purchase the books from which longer readings are drawn.

## Schedule:

### ***Introducing and Contextualizing Modern Jewish Literature (January 21-February 4)***

**January 21** General Introduction

#### *Exploring Contemporary Jewish Literature*

**January 23** Thematizing the Holocaust – “On the Grounds of the Complex Commemorating the Nazis’ Treatment of the Jews” by Todd Hasak-Lowy and “Siren” by Etgar Keret

Reading: Todd Hasak-Lowy, *The Task of This Translator*, 1-20 (Learn@UW).

Etgar Keret, *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God & Other Stories*, 57-60 (Learn@UW).

Quiz

**January 28** Reembracing Quietism and Folklore – “Gimpel the Fool,” and “From the Diary of One Not Born,” by Isaac Bashevis Singer and “Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven” by Steve Stern

Reading: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Collected Stories: Gimpel the Fool to The Letter Writer*, 5-19 & 103-111(Learn@UW).

Steve Stern, *Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven*, 27-40 (Learn @UW).

Quiz

#### *Contextualizing Modern Jewish Literature*

**January 30** The Modern Jewish Revolution

Reading: Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 3-75 (Learn@UW).

Quiz

**February 4** The Modern Jewish Revolution (cont.); “The God of Israel” by A. Leyeles  
Reading: Leyeles, American Yiddish Poetry, 70-73, 76-79 (Learn@UW).  
*Quiz*

## ***East European Jewry in Crisis (February 6 – March 4)***

**February 6** “The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third” by S. Y. Abramovitch  
Reading: Abramovitsch, Tales of Mendele, 299-391 (Learn@UW).  
*Quiz*

**February 11** “The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third” (continued)

**February 13** “Tevye the Dairyman” by Shalom Aleichem  
Reading: Aleichem, Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories, 3-134.  
*Quiz*

**February 18** “Tevye the Dairyman” (continued)

**February 20** A Simple Story by S. Y. Agnon – PART 1  
Reading: Agnon, A Simple Story, 3-100.  
*Quiz*

**February 25** A Simple Story - PART 1 (continued)

**February 27** A Simple Story by S. Y. Agnon – PART 2  
Reading: Agnon, A Simple Story, 100-230.  
*Quiz*

**March 4** A Simple Story by S. Y. Agnon – PART 2 (continued)

**March 4** TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #1 DUE

## ***Assimilation and Its Discontents (March 6– March 25)***

**March 6** “Serkele, or, In Mourning for a Brother” by Shloyme Ettinger  
Reading: Ettinger, Landmark Yiddish Plays, 113-200 (Learn@UW).  
*Quiz*

**March 11** “Serkele, or, In Mourning for a Brother” (continued)

**March 13** “Professor Bernhardt” by Arthur Schnitzler  
Reading: Schnitzler, Round Dance and Other Plays, 289-400.  
*Quiz*

**March 18 & 20** Spring Break

**March 25** "Professor Bernhardt" (continued)

***Leaving Europe: Immigration as Solution: (March 27-April 17)***

*America*

**March 27** Breadgivers by Anzia Yeziarska - PART I

Reading: Yeziarska, Bread Givers, 1-151.

*Quiz*

**April 1** Breadgivers – PART I (continued); Jacob Glatshteyn "Sheeny Mike" & "On The Butcher Block"

Reading: Glatshteyn, American Yiddish Poetry, 203-7, 240-5, & 313-317 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**April 3** Breadgivers by Anzia Yeziarska - PART II

Reading: Yeziarska, Bread Givers, 155-297.

*Quiz*

**April 8** Breadgivers – PART II (continued); Moyshe-Leyb Halpern "Salute" and "Sacco-Vanzetti"

Reading: Halpern, American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology, 388-391, 430-3, & 436-9 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**MIDTERM PAPER DUE**

*Palestine*

**April 10** "Nerves" by Yosef Chaim Brenner

Reading: Brenner, Eight Great Hebrew Short Novels, 31-58 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**April 10** TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #2 DUE

**April 15** CLASS CANCELLED FOR PASSOVER HOLIDAY

**April 17** "Until Daybreak" by Moshe Shamir

Reading: Shamir, Until Daybreak, 114-137 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**April 22** CLASS CANCELLED FOR PASSOVER HOLIDAY

## ***World Revolution as Solution (April 24 -April 29)***

### *Russian Revolution*

**April 24** Red Cavalry by Isaac Babel

Reading: Babel, The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel, 197-204, 208-212, 227-236, 290-310, 331-333, 362 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**April 29** Red Cavalry (continued)

## ***Winding Down The Revolution (May 1- May 8)***

### *America*

**May 1** “Goodbye, Columbus” by Philip Roth

Reading: Roth, Goodbye Columbus, 1-136.

*Quiz*

**May 6** “Goodbye, Columbus” (continued)

**May 6 TEXTUAL ECHO PAPER #3 DUE**

### *Israel*

**May 8** “Departure” by Yaakov Shabtai; Conclusions

Reading: Shabtai, Uncle Peretz Takes Off, 217-227 (Learn@UW).

*Quiz*

**MAY 16 FINAL EXAM 2:45-4:45**