

Jewish Studies/English 593 The Literature of Jewish Identity in America
Topic: The Literature of Angry Jews: From Saul Bellow to Bernie Sanders

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11-1
Office: Van Hise Hall 1352

Course:

This course meets T/Th 9:30-10:45 in Ingraham 222.

Course Description:

What does it mean to argue for something passionately? What does it mean to channel anger into the written word? And what does it mean to develop an opinion that grows out of one's experience as an ethnic minority? This course, which fulfills the Ethnic Studies General Education Requirement, considers these questions by examining a series of essays, creative texts, and films in which a writer argues—and argues *angrily*—for a particular vision of Jewish culture and politics. Of particular importance will be the literary record of the so-called New York Intellectuals, several of whose leaders would shift ideologically from left to right from the 1920s to 1980s. We will also turn our attention to the work of a series of angry first and second-generation Jewish American writers, including Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Cynthia Ozick, and Elie Wiesel. We will touch on such subjects as: the history of Jewish socialism and communism in America; the sexual revolution; the role of the Holocaust in Jewish American identity; and the changing dynamics of Black-Jewish relations in multi-ethnic America over the course of the twentieth-century.

Learning Objectives

- To acquire a deeper understanding of multi-ethnic intellectual life in America and to better prepare students for life and careers in multicultural America
- To trace the literary and political trajectory of Jewish cultural production in the twentieth century
- To develop close-readings skills with which to analyze the rhetoric of anger and the genre of the polemical essay
- To produce a series of argumentative close readings that are coherent, convincing, and responsibly-sourced

Course Requirements

See Appendix

Grade breakdown

Class Presence and Participation	10%
Response Papers	10%
Paper #1	10%
Paper #2	25%
Final Exam	25%

Academic Honesty and Student Accommodation

I hope that you'll meet with your fellow students to discuss course readings and to continue class discussions. All submitted work, however, must be your own. If you choose to bring in outside sources, such as internet sources, please be sure to cite your references! Please also refer to the University of Wisconsin-Madison's policies regarding Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

<https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>. For information on the university's policies regarding Student Accommodations, please see the resources of the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#).

Auditors

All those interested in auditing the course must speak to the instructor. Note that the course is **not** open to undergraduate auditors.

Computers and Phones

Like the offices of *Partisan Review* in the 1930s, this course will be a **computer-free** and **cell phone-free** environment. The use of cell phones or computers during class will result in the lowering of the class participation grade by a 2 full grades at the discretion of the instructor. It is highly recommended that you come to class with a physical copy of the text. You may avail yourself of the various services (e.g. U-Borrow, Interlibrary Loan) offered by the library to procure copies of the longer texts. All novels and books will also be on reserve at the library. If you have trouble procuring a copy of the texts, please do not hesitate contact me. Finally, Kindle and E-Reader versions of the texts are permissible in class; please note, though, that all papers must reference page numbers that can only be found in physical books. If you choose to use an E-Reader or Kindle, please make sure to access a physical copy of the book for the writing assignments (note: this includes weekly postings).

Statement on Inclusion

Speaking about Jewish identity, anger, and questions concerning persecution, race, and minoritized groups demands a sensitivity to language and tone. This class supports the free exchange of ideas and intense discussion in an open and supportive environment. You may find yourself disagreeing with some texts and puzzled by others. The goal is to come to class ready to engage with the material in a respectful and civil manner. To that end, you may find yourself disagreeing with your fellow students who will likely arrive to class with opinions and points of reference different from your own. I ask that you come to class ready to listen to your peers as well as to engage in empathetic debate about the cultural history and literary output of an ethno-religious minority group. Please note that this class does not assume any prior familiarity with the subject of Jewish history or literature.

Email Etiquette:

I welcome the chance to hear from students as well as to answer any questions you might have. Please note that I will respond to all emails received Monday to Thursday within 36 hours. All emails received between Friday and Sunday will be answered within 48 hours. I will also review my preferred form of email address and salutation on the first day of class.

Required Texts (Available at the University Bookstore)

Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Saul Bellow. *Ravelstein*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

James McBride. *The Color of Water*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2006.

Philip Roth. *Portnoy's Complaint*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Elie Wiesel. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Course Schedule

* = pdf on Learn@UW

(hyperlink) = link available through online syllabus

Introduction: Writing, Rage, and Jewish Identity in the Twentieth Century

Tuesday
Jan 17: Translating Anger
Yankev Glatshetyn, “Good Night, World”* (Multiple Translations)

Anger and the Isms (1920s-1940s)

Thursday
Jan 19: Socialism and Communism
Irving Kristol, “Memoirs of a Trotskyite”*
Irving Howe, “New York in the 1930s”*
Morris Rosenfeld, “[The Sweatshop](#)”* and “Corner of Pain and Anguish”*

Tuesday
Jan 24: New York Intellectualism
Partisan Review, Editor Statement: 1937*
Delmore Schwartz, “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities”*

Thursday
Jan 26: Elitism
Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenberg, “The Song of Songs of Mendl Pumshtok”*
[T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”](#) (hyperlink)

Tuesday
Jan 31: Anti-Semitism
Leslie Fiedler, “What Can We Do About Fagin?”*

Anger and Race (1920s-1960s)

Thursday
Feb 2: **No class.** Class rescheduled for evening of Wednesday, April 5th at 7pm
First response paper due!

Tuesday
Feb 7: The Yiddish Poet and the African-American Subject
Selected Yiddish poems by A.G. Leyeles* and Moyshe-Leyb Halpern*
PAPER #1 TOPICS DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

Thursday
Feb 9: Race and the Holocaust Survivor
Film: *The Pawnbroker* (dir. Sidney Lumet, 1965)—available via Kanopy (be sure to watch before coming to class)

Tuesday
Feb 14: Race and the Intellectuals (I)
Norman Podhoretz, “My Negro Problem—and Ours”*
Harold Cruse, “My Jewish Problem and Theirs”*
PAPER #1 THESIS AND OUTLINE – PEER REVIEW IN CLASS

Thursday
Feb 16: Race and the Intellectuals (II)
Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What Happens to Them Happens to Me”*
Martin Luther King, Jr., “What Happens to Them Happens to Me”*
James Baldwin, “Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because They’re Anti-White”*
PAPER #1 MEETINGS WITH PROFESSOR (SIGN-UP SHEET DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS)

Sex, Race, and Repressed Anger (1960s)

Note: Long reading ahead!

- Tuesday Sex
Feb 21: Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, beginning to 100
Roth, "Writing About Jews"*
- Thursday Race
Feb 23: Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, beginning to 101-200
- Friday
Feb 24: PAPER #1 DUE BY NOON BY EMAIL
- Tuesday Religion
Feb 28: Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, 200-end
Yankev Glatshteyn, "Yiddish or Jewish Books"*

Post-War Anger (1950s-1960s)

- Thursday Calm
March 2: Elie Wisel, *Night*
- Tuesday Rage
March 7: Naomi Seidman, "The Holocaust in Every Tongue"* *Pay specific attention to the section, "Elie Wisel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage"*
- Thursday Eichmann on Trial
March 9: Hannah Arendt, "Note to the Reader," "The House of Justice," "The Accused," "The Expert on the Jewish Question" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem**
- Tuesday Arendt on Trial
March 14: Hannah Arendt, "Evidence and Witnesses," "Judgement, Appeal, and Execution" and "Epilogue" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem**; Anson Rabinbach, "Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy"*
- Thursday Humor and Anger
March 16: Isaac Bashevis Singer, "A Party in Miami Beach"*

[ENJOY SPRING BREAK! MARCH 18-26]

Anger and Bilingualism (1960s-1970s)

- Tuesday Between English and Yiddish (I)
March 28: Cynthia Ozick, "Envy, or Yiddish in America"*
- Thursday Between English and Yiddish (II)
March 30: Cynthia Ozick, "America: Towards Yavneh"*
Giles Harvey, "[Cynthia Ozick's Long Crusade](#)"*

Tuesday
April 4: Between Chicana/o Activism and Yiddish Activism
Irena Klepfisz, “A Few Words in the Mother Tongue”*
Gloria Anzaldúa, “To Live in the Borderlands”*
PAPER #2 TOPICS DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

Culture Wars (1980s-2000s)

Wednesday
April 5th The Intellectuals
Class rescheduled: Film screening, *Arguing the World*, at 7pm, Room TBD

Thursday
April 6: The Intellectuals
Film: *Arguing the World* (directed by Joseph Dorman, 1998)
PAPER #1 THESIS AND OUTLINE – PEER REVIEW IN CLASS

Tuesday
April 11: The Intellectual and the Academy
Alan Bloom, “Introduction” from *The Closing of the American Mind**
Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 1-69
PAPER #2 MEETINGS WITH PROFESSOR (SIGN-UP SHEET DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS)

Thursday
April 13: Fiction and the Intellectual
Bloom, “Books” from *The Closing of the American Mind**
Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 70-15

Tuesday
April 18: Sexuality and the Intellectual
Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 153-end

Wed.
April 19 PAPER #2 DUE BY EMAIL BY NOON

A Turn from Anger (1990s)

Thursday
April 20: Between Black and Jewish (I)
The Color of Water, 1-78

Tuesday
April 25: Between Black and Jewish (II)
The Color of Water, 78-191

Thursday
April 27: The Residue of Anger
The Color of Water, 193-end

A Return to Anger (2000s)

Monday
May 1: Class screening of *Inglorious Basterds* (*Basterds* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009), screening time and place TBD). *Please note that this film has extremely violent content.*

Tuesday
May 2: Revenge
Inglorious Basterds (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009).
Please note that this film has extremely violent content.

Thursday
May 4: The Angry Old Man and the Jewish Community
Bernie Sanders, “[Speech on Democratic Socialism](#)”*

Joseph Berger, “Bernie Sanders Is Jewish, But He Doesn’t Like to Talk About it”
Evan Goldstein, “How Bernie Sanders Reveals Our Own Jewish Identity Anxiety”
Danielle Diaz, “Bernie Sanders, ‘My Father’s Family Was Wiped out by Hitler in the Holocaust”

MONDAY FINAL EXAM, 12:25-2:25 P.M. (ROOM TBD)
MAY 8TH

Appendix: Requirements

There are five main requirements for this course:

Grade breakdown

Class Presence and Participation	10%
Response Papers	10%
Paper #1	10%
Paper #2	25%
Final Exam	25%

1. Class Presence and Participation

This class runs as both a lecture and discussion-based course. Students **are required** to attend all classes and to participate fully. Three absences or more will result in the reduction of your attendance grade by two whole grades (A to C). Two or more late arrivals will also result in the lowering of the participation grade by a full grade (A to B). Please come to class having read the material in advance of the course meeting and be ready to engage the texts or films, to ask questions about the material, to have conversations with your peers about the major and subtle themes of the works, and to answer the who/what/where/when/why of each text. Students who tend not speak in class should make an appointment to talk with me during office hours.

2. Response Papers (5 total)

A key element of reading a text closely is recognizing when you are left with questions or when you do not understand a term. A goal of this course is to practice asking questions and developing our skills necessary to conduct close readings. To that end, students will be required to submit 5 response papers over the course of the semester. Each response paper should be 500 words and submitted to me as a word document (Times New Roman, 12-pt. font, double-spaced, 1” margins). The first response paper is due in Week 3 of the semester (see syllabus above). All students should submit 2 additional response papers before spring break and 2 after spring break. **All papers should be submitted to me by email by the Monday evening before class by 5pm.**

Please choose from the following 2 prompts when writing your response papers:

a) Anger can be expressed in literature through a variety of literary styles and figurative choices. In the following response paper, choose a passage of 2-3 sentences in which the author exhibits literary anger. Then, in 500 words, explain what stylistic devices and literary choices the author draws on to convey that anger. You are welcome to compare this passage to other passages in the chosen text. The primary goal of the assignment is to refine your close reading skills by attending to the question: How does the author convey anger? (Note that you may also wish to focus on a passage that conveys a type of anger, such as: passion, hatred, annoyance, etc.). Be sure to include the passage and page number in your post.

b) The authors whom we will read this semester often elicited strong reactions in their readers and reviewers. In the following paper, you are invited to respond to the week's reading by taking up a position in opposition to that proposed by the author. Alternatively, in the case of a literary text, you are invited to argue for why that text is either a great success or clear failure. The goal of this response paper is to develop your analytical skills to dissect an argument or to present a strong critique of a chosen text. In either case, your response paper should argue persuasively for the position it takes.

3. **Paper #1**

The first paper will ask you to produce an argument-driven close reading of one of the literary texts we have encountered. No paper prompts will require external research and **late papers will be deducted by a whole grade (A to B) for each day late**. All papers should be 4-5 pages (Times New Roman, 12-pt. font, double-spaced, 1" margins).

When deciding between prompts, I recommend choosing to write about a text that has left you with questions and that you want re-read. A goal of these writing assignments is to offer you the chance to return to a text that has captured your attention, frustrated you, or that has provoked an unexpected response in you. This may or may not be your favorite text!

A rubric for the final grade on the paper will also be made available online.

4. **Paper #2**

The second paper will ask you to produce an argument-driven close reading of one of the literary texts we have encountered. **Late papers will be deducted by a whole grade (A to AB) for each day late**. The second paper will also ask you to work comparatively as well as to incorporate three outside sources in your work. Specific instructions for this paper will be provided. All papers should be 6-7 pages (Times New Roman, 12-pt. font, double-spaced, 1" margins).

When deciding between prompts, I recommend choosing to write about a text that has left you with questions and that you want re-read. A goal of these writing assignments is to offer you the chance to return to a text that has captured your attention, frustrated you, or that has provoked an unexpected response in you. This may or may not be your favorite text!

A rubric for the final grade on the paper will also be made available online.

5. **Final**

The final exam, scheduled for Monday, May 8th 12:25-2:55 p.m. (Room TBD), will consist of three parts. In the first, you will be asked to identify key passages from the texts and films as well as their significance. In the second, you'll be asked to answer a series of questions from the perspectives of key characters and historical figures. In the third, you will be asked to complete a short essay assignment. The goal of this exam is to bring the assigned course materials into conversation.

Resources

- Encyclopedia Judaica
- The Hebrew Bible (English translation, 1917): <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0.htm>
- Jewish Women's Archive: <http://jwa.org/>
- YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/>