



Russia and the Jews Literature, Culture and Religion

SLAVIC 245/LITTRANS 247

Prof. Marina Zilbergerts

T- Th 11-12:15

Office: 1350 Van Hise Hall

Hours: Th 9:30-10:30 or by
appointment.

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Course Description

This course explores the rich world of Russian Jewish culture from its very foundations. After a brief foray into antiquity, our study will begin in late-1700s and will examine the processes of secularization which accompanied the rise and development of Jewish and Russian literature and culture. The course will familiarize students with important movements such as Hasidism, the Jewish Enlightenment, and Zionism, asking how and why they arose in the context of the Russian Empire. Reading literary, theological and political works by Jewish and Russian writers, our aim will be to understand the creative and often-troubled relationships among them. The course will acquaint students with the classical works of Hebrew and Yiddish literature, examining them alongside works of Russian writers. This introductory course will help students gain the background necessary to pursue higher-level courses in Slavic and Jewish studies. All materials will be provided in English translation and no prior knowledge is required.

Objectives

The aim of this course is to provide you with a core knowledge of the texts and ideas that created and comprised the world shared by Jews, Christians and other groups living in the Russian Empire. Students will gain deep insights into the following topics: 1. The foundations of Jewish religious and cultural practice in the Russian Empire, 2. The process of secularization, and the rise of secular Jewish literature, 3. The cultural and literary context of the Russian Empire and way that Jewish literature interacted with it. 4. An understanding of various Jewish and Russian movements of the late 19th century, 5. Knowledge of the classic texts of Russian-Jewish literature written in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, 6. Training in effective analytical and writing practices, and the ability to think, argue, and write about literature.

Materials

Materials will be provided online. **Note:** You are expected to bring to each class a **printed** copy of the assigned readings.

Grading

Participation: 30 %

In-class panel discussions: Students will sign up to participate in panel presentations about the readings which will be held at various points during the semester. During the panel, two students, facing the class, will present and debate opposing angles on question regarding the interpretation of

a text, bringing support to their positions from the reading materials and lectures. The rest of the class will follow with a discussion. Students will be graded both on their own presentations, as well as on their involvement in discussion following the presentations of their peers.

Preparation: You must bring printed copies of the readings to class. Failure to come to class prepared, and on-time, will negatively affect your participation grade. The use of computers or other electronic devices in class is to be reserved only for writing workshops.

Absences: There will be a 5 % deduction for each unexplained absence.

Written assignments:

30%: Midterm Exam, in class. **March 2**

20 %: Completed Draft of Final Paper (To be revised based on professor's feedback) **April 13**

20 %: Final paper, due on last day of class. **May 4**

Calendar of Readings

Week 1	
Jan 17	Introduction: Lecture: Survey of Eastern European Literature and Culture at a glance 1800-1912, sign up for panel discussions.
Jan 19	The Classics of Talmudic Literature: “Not in the Heaven,” “These and Those” (translated and adapted by Jeffrey Rubinstein)
Week 2	
Jan 24	“Four who Entered Paradise,” “Elisha, the Sinning Sage” (translated and adapted by Jeffrey Rubinstein)
Jan 26	Mitnagdim and the Yeshiva Movement: “Tales of Eliyahu of Vilna”
Week 3	
Jan 31	Lecture: “The Yeshiva”
Feb 2	Hassidism and Hassidic Literature: “Praise of Ba'al Shem Tov” Part 1
Week 4	
Feb 7	“Praise of Ba'al Shem Tov” Part 2
Feb 9	Lecture: The Tanya and Hassidic literature
Week 5	
Feb 14	Russian Religious Life and Literature: “Life of Alexei, Man of God” from <i>Stories of the Saints</i>
Feb 16	<i>Memoires of Village Priest</i> , chapters 1,2
Week 6	
Feb 21	Haskalah: Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire: U. Kovner, “Notes of a Jew”
Feb 23	Poetry of Y. L Gordon, “For Whom Do I Toil,” “Awaken My People”
Week 7	
Feb 28	Ayzik Meyer Dik, “The Panic, or the Town of Herres”
March 2	Midterm Exam
Week 8	
March 7	Satire and Realism in Russian and Yiddish Literature: Mikhail Saltykov Shchedrin, “How One Plain Peasant Fed Two High Officials”
March 9	Mendele the Bookpeddler, <i>The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third</i> , Preface, chapter 1, Cervantes, <i>Don-Quixote</i> , chapter 1.
Week 9	
March 14	Mendele the Bookpeddler, <i>The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third</i> , chapter 2,3
March 16	Mendele the Bookpeddler, <i>The Brief Travels of Benjamin the ,Third</i> chapter 4,5
Week 10: Spring Break	
March 21	No class
March 23	

Week 11	
March 28	The Rise of Zionism and Jewish Nationalism in the Russian Empire: Leon Pinsker, "Autoemancipation," Ahad ha-am "The Wrong Way"
March 30	The Hebrew Poetry of Hayim Nahman Bialik: Yehuda ha-Levi's poetry of Zion: "Glad Tidings," "Zion will Thou Ask," "Between East and West" Bialik, "To the Bird"
Week 12	
April 4	Bialik, poems of the Kishinev Pogrom: "On the Slaughter,"
April 6	Bialik, "The City of Slaughter"
Week 13	
April 11	No Class, Passover
April 13	Draft of Paper due, bring it to class Representation of the Jews in Russian Literature Dostoyevsky's "Isay Fomich" from <i>Notes from the House of the Dead</i>
Week 14	
April 18	No Class, Passover
April 20	Chekhov, "Rothschild's Fiddle"
Week 15	
April 25	Draft of Paper Returned , in-class paper revision workshop
April 27	Paper workshop cont.
Week 16	
May 2	An-sky's <i>Der Dybbuk</i> 1947 film screening and discussion
May 4	Closing discussion, hard copy of final paper due at the end of class.

Note: Please refer to the UW website for letter-grade breakdown and disability policy.

Image: Chagall, "Vitebsk"