

Lit Trans 229: Representations of the Jews in Eastern European Cultures

Topic: Writing the Jewish Body **(Meets with GER 266 and JS 230)**

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

Course:

This course meets M/W (2:30-3:45) in Ingraham 222.

Course Description:

What does the Jewish body look like? How do representations of the body change over time and across languages? How is the figure gendered, racialized, and medicalized? This course considers these questions by examining a series of literary and visual texts that explore the Jewish body—male and female, old and young, healthy and enfeebled, maligned and adored. Readings focus primarily on depictions of the Jewish body in eastern and central European literature from the late-nineteenth century to the present day. Of particular importance will be such figures as the Jewish patient, the Jewish soldier, the Jewish daughter, and the tattooed Jew. Throughout this course, we will also interrogate what it means to “write a body,” engaging texts where human bodies are written about and written upon. Finally, we will turn toward our attention to recent examples from the visual and performing arts to investigate how literary representations of the past influence contemporary discussions about the Jewish body, race, and national identity.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- identify the major texts of the central and eastern European Jewish canon in which the Jewish body is the central subject
- plot the transnational and multilingual tradition of central and eastern European literature
- mobilize a critical vocabulary with which to speak about textual and visual representations of the body, gender, and ethnic stereotype
- implement the close-readings skills necessary to analyze both historical and contemporary figurations of ethno-religious identity and difference
- demonstrate reflective writing practices, respond critically to feedback, and assess one’s own communicative strengths

Course Requirements

See Appendix

Grade breakdown

Class Presence and Participation	10%
Postings	10%
Paper #1	15%
Mid-Term	15%
Paper #2	25%
Final	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 or graduate auditors.

Computers and Phones

Like the cafés of Warsaw and Berlin in the 1920s where many of the writers of this course congregated, 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. UBorrow, Interlibrary Loan) offered by the library to procure copies of the longer texts. I will review how to access these sources in the first class meeting. All novels 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 does not include weekly postings).

Statement on Inclusion

Speaking about Jewish bodies as well as the historical representation of ethnic stereotypes 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 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 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 in the first day of class.

Required Texts (On Reserve at College Library as well as available at the University Bookstore and through online retailers)

S.Y. Agnon. *To This Day*. New York: The Toby Press, 2008.

Bruno Schulz. *The Street of the Crocodiles and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.

Stefan Zweig. *Fräulein Else*. London: Pushkin Press, 2013.

Jiří Weil. *Mendelssohn is on the Roof*. London: Daunt, 2011.

Course Schedule

Please come to class having read all of the material assigned for that day.

* = pdf on Learn@UW; some material below is also hyperlinked.

Introduction: What Does a Jewish Body Look Like?

- Wednesday
Jan 18: How the Jewish Body is Painted
Selected images:
Maurycy Gottlieb, “Jews Praying in the Synagogue on the Day of Atonement (1878)
Samuel Hirszenberg, “The Wandering Jew” (1899)
E.M. Lillien, Illustration for *Altneuland* journal (1904)
Marc Chagall, “White Crucifixion” (1938)
- Monday
Jan 23: How the Jewish Body is Read
Sander L. Gilman, “The Jew’s Body: Thoughts on Jewish Physical Difference” (1996)*;
Sholem Aleichem, “Two Antisemites” (Yiddish, 1905)*

Ailing Bodies

- Wednesday:
Jan 25 Small Bodies
Mendele, “The Little Man” (Yiddish, 1864)*
Posting #1 due by Tuesday at 5pm
- Mon,
Jan 30: Children’s Bodies
Sholem Aleichem, “The Pot” (Yiddish, 1901)*
- Wed.
Feb 1: NO CLASS: Class rescheduled for Friday, April 7th
No posting due – see below
- Mon.
Feb 6: Shrinking Bodies
I.L Peretz, “The Kabbalists” (Hebrew/Yiddish, 1891/4)*
PAPER #1 TOPICS DISTRIBUTED
Posting #2 on due by Sunday at 5pm

Soldiering Bodies

- Wed.
Feb 8: Muscular Bodies
Max Nordau, “Jewry of Muscle” (German, 1903)*; View: Gallery, “E.M. Lilien (Maurycy Lilien)” on Learn@UW*
PAPER #1 ROUGH DRAFT DUE TO WRITING FELLOW
No Posting due
- Mon.
Feb 13: Soldiers and Jews
Lamed Shapiro, “White Challah” (1919)*
- Wed.
Feb 15: Monstrous Bodies
Film: *Der Golem* (German, 1920); Film available through *Kanopy* streaming
PAPER #1 ROUGH DRAFT REVIEWED BY WRITING FELLOW; MEETINGS SCHEDULED
Posting #3 due by Tuesday at 5pm

- Mon. Feb 20: Midterm (in-class)
- Wed. Feb 22: Discharged Soldiers—Berlin
S.Y. Agnon, *To This Day* (Hebrew, 1952), pp.1-66
Posting #4 due by Tuesday at 5pm
- Mon. Feb 27: Monstrous Soldiers—Berlin
S.Y. Agnon, *To This Day* (Hebrew, 1952), pp.67-125
- Wed. March 1: Traumatized Soldiers—Berlin
S.Y. Agnon, *To This Day* (Hebrew, 1952), pp.125-186
PAPER #1 DUE BY NOON (submission instructions on Paper #1 handout)
No Posting due

Literary Bodies

- Mon. March 6: Bodies as Text (I)
Bruno Schulz, “The Book,” “The Night of the Great Season” (Polish, published in book form in 1937)
- Wed. March 8: Bodies as Text (II)
Bruno Schulz, “The Street of the Crocodiles” (Polish, published in book form in 1934)
View: “The Art of Bruno Schulz—Gallery: Jews” (<http://www.brunoschulzart.org/>)
Posting #5 due by Tuesday at 5pm
- Mon. March 13: Text on Bodies
Franz Kafka, “In the Penal Colony” (German, 1919)*
PAPER #2 PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED
- Wed. March 15: Text on Bodies
S.Y. Agnon, “Forevermore” (Hebrew, 1954)*
Posting #6 due by Tuesday at 5pm

[ENJOY SPRING BREAK! MARCH 18-26]

Performing Bodies

- Mon. March 27: The Womb as Stage
Dvora Baron, “The First Day” (Hebrew, 1927)*
- Wed. March 29: The Steps as Stage (I)
Arthur Schnitzler, *Fräulein Else* (German, 1924), 1-50.
PAPER #2 ROUGH DRAFT REVIEWED BY WRITING FELLOW; MEETINGS SCHEDULED
No Posting due
- Mon. April 3: The Steps as Stage (II)
Arthur Schnitzler, *Fräulein Else* (German, 1924), 51-end.

Wed.
April 5: The Circus Stage
Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist" (German, 1922)*
Posting #7 due by Tuesday at 5pm

Marked Bodies

Friday
April 7: Class re-scheduled: Film screening of *Europa, Europa* (Polish [German, and Russian] 1991). Room TBD.

Mon.
April 10: Circumcised Bodies
Film: *Europa, Europa* (Polish [German, and Russian], 1991).

Wed.
April 12: Numbered Prisoners
Yehoshue Perle, "4580" (Yiddish, 1942)*
Posting #8 due by Tuesday at 5pm

Mon.
April 17: Tattooed Bodies
Primo Levi, Selection from *Survival in Auschwitz*, pp. 9-37 (Italian, 1958)*

Wed.
April 19: Tattooed Bodies by Choice
View and Listen: "[A Tattoo to Remember](#)"
Jodi Rudoren, "[Proudly Bearing Elders' Scars, Their Skin Says 'Never Forget'](#)," *New York Times* (English, 30 Sept 2013)*
PAPER #2 DUE BY NOON (submission instructions on Paper #2 handout)
No posting due

(Un)Recognizable Bodies

Mon.
April 24: The Jewish Statue (I):
Jiří Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof* (Czech, 1960), chs. 1-7
Hint: Get started on your reading early!

Wed.
April 26: The Jewish Museum (II):
Jiří Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof* (Czech, 1960), chs. 9-15
Posting #9 due by Tuesday at 5pm

Mon.
May 1: The Jew in the Box
Jiří Weil, *Mendelssohn is on the Roof* (Czech, 1960), chs. 16-22
Read: "[The Whole Truth...Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Jews](#)," an exhibit organized by the Jewish Museum Berlin
Sally McGrane, "[Ask a Jewish Person](#)" (English, 2013)

Wed.
May 3: Conclusions
Wisława Szymborska, "Hitler's First Photograph" (Polish, 1986)*
Posting #10 due by Tuesday at 5pm

Sunday, May 7th Final Exam – 7:45am-9:45am (Room TBD)

Appendix: Requirements

There are six main requirements for this course:

Grade breakdown

Class Presence and Participation	10%
Postings	10%
Paper #1	15%
Mid-Term	15%
Paper #2	25%
Final	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. **Weekly Postings (total: 10 postings)**

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 acquiring the tools necessary to conduct close readings. Beginning in Week 2, students will post to the Learn@UW website by Tuesday at 5pm (see the exception for reading due 2/6). There will be a total of 10 postings. Throughout the semester, we will draw on these postings in class discussions and in-class group work. The postings should answer one of the following prompts:

- a) Choose a passage (max. 2 sent.) from that week's reading that contains a term with which you are unfamiliar. The term can be a word, place, ritual, etc. Look up the term (some suggested resources are below). Then, explain in 100-200 words how your understanding of the term has changed the way you understand the passage. Be sure to include the passage and page number in your post. If you are using an E-Reader, please note the chapter number or section from which the citation is taken.

- b) Choose a passage (max. 2 sent.) from that week's reading. After quoting that passage in full as well as noting the page number (or, if a film, the time stamp), pose two questions based on the language of the passage. Your questions may concern issues of style or content. Alternatively, you may use these questions as opportunities to point to larger concerns that the sentence raises for the text. The questions should indicate that you are thinking about how language works in the chosen text. **Keep in mind that the most probing questions do not elicit "yes/no" answers.** Be sure to include the passage and page number in your post. If you are using an E-Reader, please note the chapter number or section from which the citation is taken.

To post on Learn@UW: Visit the course Canvas website. Click on the "Discussions" button. Click on the appropriate posting. Paste your response. If you have any questions about this, please email me or consult the Student Manual on the Learn@UW homepage. Please note that late postings will not be accepted. Note that a rubric for the weekly postings is also available online.

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 3-4 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!

We are lucky to have the chance to work with Writing Fellows (WF) in this class. These Writing Fellows will be working with you to produce the strongest and clearest essays. For each essay, you will submit your rough draft to the WF, who will read, comment on, and return your essay within one week. You will then meet with the WF the following week to discuss the feedback you received and plans for revision. Then, you will have two weeks to submit **both** the final version and rough draft to me along with a cover letter explaining what revisions you made between the drafts. Please be sure to approach your meetings with the WF seriously and with an eye towards producing the strongest paper possible. Your final grade will be reduced by a whole grade point (A to B) if you fail to meeting with the WF at the scheduled time.

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

4. **Mid-term**

The mid-term will consist of two 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 that we have discussed. The goal of this exam is to bring the assigned course materials into conversation and to examine the material from a different viewpoint.

5. **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 5-6 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!

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producing the strongest paper possible. Your final grade will be reduced by a whole grade point (A to B) if you fail to meeting with the WF at the scheduled time.

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

6. **Final**

The final exam, scheduled for Sunday, May 7th 7:45-9:45 a.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 that we have discussed. 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.

Resources

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