Yiddish Literature and Culture in Europe
Jewish Studies 269/ German 269/ Lit Trans 269
University of Wisconsin- Madison
Fall 2017
Lecture: TuTh 1:00-2:15, 583 Van Hise

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Office Hours: TuTh 3:45-4:45 or by appointment

Course Overview: After a brief introduction to Yiddish language, this course will investigate how Yiddish culture gave European Jewish life its distinctive stamp. It will concentrate on the modern period (1864-1945) when advocates of Yiddish turned it into an independent vehicle employable for describing and detailing every aspect of Jewish life and experience. Focus on this period will teach students to appreciate the aesthetic merits of modern literary and filmic Yiddish texts. An introduction to Yiddish literary pioneers Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Yitzhok Leibush Peretz and Sholem Aleichem’s literary work will be followed by exploration of the interwar period when Poland and the Soviet Union’s political and social environments birthed divergent forms of Yiddish cultural expression. The course will conclude with analysis of Yiddish literary responses to the Holocaust that confront Yiddish culture and its practitioners’ precipitous decline on European soil.

Learning Goals:
1) Students will attain knowledge of how European Jewish life manifested itself in Yiddish.
2) Students will achieve grounding in European Yiddish culture through encounter with the literary and filmic texts of fourteen leading authors, poets, and directors.
3) Students will learn strategies for analyzing literary, filmic, and poetic texts intended to improve their critical thinking.
4) 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 and to arrive on time. Attendance will be taken every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more than four absences). 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) and Grading Scale:

Reading Questions, Quizzes, Short Response Papers, and Take-Home Activities: 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 thinking and preparing for class discussion. To test student preparation reading quizzes, based on the supplied reading questions and an additional deep thought question, will be administered throughout the semester. 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. On occasion students will be asked to prepare short response papers or to complete take-home activities instead of preparing for quizzes. The lowest two quiz/assignment 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 16 quizzes, short response papers, and take-home activities will be administered/assigned over the course of the semester.

Distinctive Feature Papers (500-1000 Words): 2 X 20% - The aim of these assignments is to give students practice making observations and claims about ideas and arguments embedded in literary texts. These papers allow students to gain analytical traction with a text through construction of focused analyses based on recurring and distinctive textual features. Repeated details, passages, textual features, or moments that the author invites the reader to compare and contrast constitute examples of textual features suitable for such analysis. Every text is laced with numerous repetitions and they may include recurrent images, phrases, plot points, references, scene structures, or stylistic features. After identifying a repeated distinctive feature, students will be asked to explore how this recurrent feature serves to illuminate a topic, concept, or literary or aesthetic quality 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. Distinctive Feature Paper drafts will be due on November 3rd & November 30th. Deadline for submission of final versions will be November 16th & December 12th. Students should submit electronic copies of their drafts to the appropriate drop box and bring physical copies of their paper to class on the draft due date for their peer reviewers. Every twenty-four-
hour delay in submission of either the draft or the final paper will reduce the grade 5%.

Reverse Outline Peer Review Assignment: 2 X 5% - The peer review assignments will have two parts. The first part of the assignment will ask students to compose reverse outlines of other students’ papers. Not only will these reverse outlines help the students whose papers are reviewed revise their work and receive better grades, they will also help reviewers think more deeply about what constitutes a good paper. One puts together a reverse outline after a writing assignment has been completed, and it allows the reviewer to track how effectively a paper communicates its ideas. Composition of a reverse outline involves the following steps: 1) The reviewer numbers each paragraph in the paper 2) The reviewer then notes the main point or points of each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper 3) The reviewer then comments on the content of each paragraph. Does the paragraph have a clear purpose, is it attempting to accomplish too much, or does it serve no purpose at all in the paper? 4) The reviewer notes any extraneous ideas in each paragraph and either recommends that they be removed from the paper or moved to a more appropriate paragraph. In the second part of the assignment the peer reviewer will answer three questions about the paper: 1) After identifying the textual repetition upon which the paper is based, the reviewer will be asked to comment on whether it proves sufficient to advance the asserted thesis. If the paper is not constructed around a textual repetition, the reviewer would alert the writer to this fact. 2) After noting whether the paper’s organization aligns with the provisional thesis advanced by the author, the reviewer should make suggestions about ways to either revise the thesis or the paper’s organization if there is a lack of alignment. If the paper lacks a viable thesis, the reviewer should alert the writer to this fact. 3) Does the paper feature excessive plot summary? Reviewers should make suggestions about what plot summary can be removed. Peer Review Assignments will be due on November 9th and December 7th. Physical copies of the assignment should be brought to class on the due date and given to the student whose paper you reviewed. Electronic copies of the Peer Review Assignment should be uploaded to Learn@UW and indicate the name of the person whose paper is being reviewed both in the file name and at the opening of the peer review.

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 December 18th from 12:25PM-2:25PM.

Attendance and Participation: 10% - 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. Occasionally students will be asked to prepare additional materials for class discussion. 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. Class attendance proves integral to student success. Attendance will be taken every lecture. Excessive unexcused absences will lower student grades (more than four absences).

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 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 integrity and do their best to maintain it. To learn more on what constitutes academic integrity see <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>.

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.

Reserves and Electronic Reserves:
All required materials will be available on Learn@UW.

Schedule:

Beyond Jokes and Curses - Addressing Expectations About Yiddish Culture (September 7- September 12)
September 7  General Introduction

*Yiddish Literature as World Literature*

September 12  Tackling Universal Themes: Addressing Art and Love in Modern Yiddish Poetry

*Introduction to Premodern Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture (September 14- September 28)*

September 14  *Yiddish Language and Culture – A Brief Introduction*
*Quiz 1*

September 19  *Yiddish Language and Culture – A Brief Introduction* (continued)
*Quiz 2*

September 21  CLASS CANCELLED ROSH HASHANAH

*In Dialogue with Their Surroundings – Yiddish Folktales and Popular Literature*

September 26  Beyond the Letter of the Law: Yiddish Folktales and the Jewish Spirit
*Short Response Paper 1 in lieu of Quiz*

September 28  Combining the Hebrew Bible and Medieval Epic – “The Book of Samuel”
*Short Response Paper 2 in lieu of Quiz*

*Yiddish Literature Between Hasidism and Haskalah (October 3 – October 17)*

*New Yiddish Cultural Forms – The Hasidic Tales of Nahman of Bratzlav*

October 3  Stories to Awaken the Soul– Nahman of Bratzlav’s “The Hakham and the Tam (The Clever Man and the Ordinary Man)"
Quiz 3

October 5 CLASS CANCELLED SUKKOT

Yiddish Literature of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah)

October 10 Challenging Traditional Society - S. Y. Abramovitsh, “The Little Man”
Reading: Ken Frieden, Classic Yiddish Stories of S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz, 3-54.

Quiz 4

October 12 CLASS CANCELLED SHMINI ATZERET

October 17 Challenging Traditional Society (continued)- S. Y. Abramowitsh, “Fishke the Lame”

Yiddish Literature Comes of Age (October 19 – November 2)

Classic Yiddish Literature

October 19 I. L. Peretz and Creative Betrayal - “Devotion Without End”

Quiz 5

October 24 I. L. Peretz and Creative Betrayal - “Devotion Without End” (Continued)

October 31 Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue – The Female Voice
Reading: Sholem Aleichem, Nineteen to the Dozen: Monologues and Bits and Bobs of Other Things, 3-16, 81-102.

Quiz 6

November 2 Sholem Aleichem and the Monologue (continued) – The Male Voice

November 2 DISTINCTIVE FEATURE PAPER #1 DRAFT DUE

Interwar Yiddish Culture (November 7 –December 3)

Yiddish Culture in the Soviet Union

November 7 Yiddish Poetry’s Embrace of the Soviet Future – “City” and “Procession” by Dovid Hofshteyn
Quiz 7

November 9: Symbolism or A Little Something Different: “Under a Fence: Revue” by Der Nister

Quiz 8

November 9 REVERSE OUTLINE PEER REVIEW ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

November 14 Ambivalence and the Soviet Jewish Future: “The Worker’s Club”
Reading: Joseph Sherman, Ed. From Revolution to Repression: Soviet Yiddish Writing 1917-1952, 91-144.

Quiz 9

Yiddish Culture in Poland

November 16 Yiddish Drama and Cinema Meet Tradition: S. Ansky’s “The Dybbuk”
Reading: S. Ansky, The Dybbuk and Other Writings, 1-49.

Quiz 10

November 16 DISTINCTIVE FEATURE PAPER #1 FINAL VERSION DUE

November 21 Yiddish Cinema Meets Tradition: “The Dybbuk” (continued)

Short Response Paper 3 in lieu of Quiz

November 23 – NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

November 28 Modern Midrash: The Case of Itzik Manger’s Itzik’s Midrash

Short Response Paper 4 in lieu of Quiz

November 30 Modern Midrash: The Case of Itzik Manger’s Itzik’s Midrash (continued)

November 30 DISTINCTIVE FEATURE PAPER #2 DRAFT DUE

Yiddish Literature of the Holocaust (December 5-7)

December 5 A Holocaust Miniature – Leyb Goldin’s “Chronicle of A Single Day”
Reading: David Roskies, Ed. The Literature of Destruction, 424-434.

Quiz 11
December 7 Art from the Ashes – Selected Poetry of Abraham Sutzkever
*Quiz 12*

December 7 REVERSE OUTLINE PEER REVIEW ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE

**Conclusions (December 15)**

December 12 European Yiddish Culture – A Summing Up; Preview of Yiddish Literature and Culture in America Class; Exam Review

December 12 DISTINCTIVE FEATURE PAPER #2 FINAL VERSION DUE

December 18 FINAL EXAM – 12:25PM-2:25PM