

SYLLABUS

ARTS AND LETTERS 100g

Unorthodox Jewish Writing in the Americas

Spring 2012
Section: 35239R
Time: MW 2-3:20
Location: VKC 203

Professor: Erin Graff Zivin
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Off. Hrs.: W 12-2

Course description: Contemporary “Jewish” narrative in the United States—if it can be categorized as such—has little in common with the works that have comprised the so-called Jewish-American literary canon until now. Writers such as Nathan Englander, Gary Shteyngart, Nicole Krauss, Jonathan Safran Foer, Rivka Galchen, and USC’s own Aimee Bender construct carefully choreographed universes populated by traditional and nontraditional figures of Jewishness that depart from the works of the generations before them. If Jewish-American literature was traditionally conceived as the space within which tradition and identity could be alternatively preserved (Sholem Aleichem) or rejected (Philip Roth), current literary production by writers who in some way identify as Jews resists the narrow classification of “Jewish writing.” Jewishness enters the pages of these novels obliquely, indirectly: as organic yet contradictory elements of their landscape, or as consciously sought-out signs and symbols to be called into question. This course will consider contemporary literary (and cinematographic) forms that engage with ideas of “Jewishness” by placing them in dialogue with earlier works (which, upon closer examination, may turn out to be more “unorthodox” than critics would have us believe). Students will be expected to produce—through written and oral assignments, as well as rigorous in-class participation—original and critical readings of these creative works.

Schedule:

I. Precursors

Week 1. Introduction

1/9-

- Introduction

1/11-

- Borges, Jorge Luis. “Kafka and His Precursors”**
- Kramer, Michael. “Race, Literary History, and the ‘Jewish’ Question” (*Prooftexts*)*
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. “Defining the Indefinable: What Is Jewish Literature?” (*What Is Jewish Literature?*)*
- Presentation assignments

Week 2. The Old Country

1/16- NO CLASS (MLK, Jr. Day)

1/18-

- Aleichem, Sholem. “The Windfall” (*Tevye the Dairyman*)*
- Stein, Joseph. *Fiddler on the Roof* (selected scenes, in class)

II. Rupture and Refusal

Week 3. Refusal

1/23-

- Roth, Philip. *Goodbye, Columbus**

1/25-

- Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus** (cont.)

Week 4. Refusal (cont.)

1/30

- Peerce, Larry. *Goodbye, Columbus* (film; in class)

2/1

- Peerce, *Goodbye, Columbus* (cont.)

Week 5. Rupture

2/6-

- Roth, Philip. “The Conversion of the Jews” (*Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*)*
- Allen, Woody. *Hannah and Her Sisters* (selected scenes)

2/8-

- Ozick, Cynthia. “Envy; or, Yiddish In America: A Novella”*

Week 6. Mourning

2/13-

- Ginsberg, Allen. “Kaddish” (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/179391>)
- Dylan, Bob. “Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie,” “Hava Nagila” (audio recordings; in class)

2/15-

- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. “Disguised” (*The Death of Methuselah*)*

Week 7. Accent Marks

2/20- NO CLASS (President's Day)

2/22-

- Paley, Grace. "Interview" (<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2028/the-art-of-fiction-no-131-grace-paley>)
- Paley, Grace. "In This Country, But in Another Language, My Aunt Refuses to Marry the Men Everyone Wants Her To" (*The Collected Stories*)*
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Accent Marks: Writing and Pronouncing Jewish America" (*Call It English*)*

Week 8. Exam

2/27-

- EXAM #1 REVIEW

2/29-

- EXAM #1

III. Unorthodox Jewish Writing

Week 9. Unorthodox Orthodoxy

3/5-

- Englander, Nathan. "The Wig" (*For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*)*

3/7-

- Englander, "The Gilgul of Park Avenue" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/99mar/gilgul.htm>)
- Final paper abstract workshop (in class)

Week 10. Spring Break – NO CLASS

Week 11. Postmodern Searches

3/19-

- Safran Foer, Jonathan. "The Very Rigid Search"***
- Shrieber, Liev. *Everything is Illuminated* (film; in class)

3/21-

- Safran Foer, "A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease"***
- FINAL PAPER ABSTRACT DUE at the beginning of class

Week 12. The Void of Memory

3/26-

- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus* (selection)**
- Krauss, Nicole. “From the Desk of Daniel Varsky” (*Harper’s*)*

3/28-

- Bender, Aimee. “Dreaming in Polish” (*The Girl in the Flammable Skirt*)*
- Visit by Prof. Bender

Week 13. When the Truth is Found to be Lies

4/2-

- Coen, Ethan and Joel Coen. *A Serious Man* (film; in class)

4/4-

- Coen and Coen, *A Serious Man* (cont.)

Week 14. Science Fiction

4/9-

- Galchen, Rivka. “The Region of Unlikeness”**
- Final paper workshop (in class)

4/11-

- Shteyngart, Gary. “Lenny Hearts Eunice”**

Week 15. Presentations

4/16-

- Final paper presentations

4/18-

- Final paper presentations

Week 16. Conclusion

4/23-

- Final paper presentations

4/25-

- Final paper presentations
- FINAL PAPER DUE at the beginning of class
- EXAM #2 (take-home) distributed

Requirements:

PARTICIPATION. Each student should read the texts specified above before each class session. You are expected to voluntarily contribute to class discussions, which will be reflected in your participation grade. This means that you should prepare notes with comments and questions to bring up in class.

COURSE BLOG. You will be required to make weekly contributions to the course blog (<http://unorthodoxjewishwriting.blogspot.com/>). These contributions are twofold. First, you will be expected to post a 200-word response to one of the required readings FIVE TIMES THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER, due by noon on the Sunday before the reading is to be discussed. Second, you will be expected to post a comment on at least one other post each week, due by noon on the Sunday following class. No late posts will be accepted for credit.

PRESENTATIONS. You will be responsible for two in-class presentations (approximately 15 minutes in length). The first presentation is based on one of the required readings. The presentation will not summarize the text nor give biographical information about author, but rather critically engage the themes, images, metaphors and rhetoric of the work in question. The second will be a presentation of your final paper during the last two weeks of class. Please speak to Prof. Graff Zivin if you have any questions about this assignment.

EXAMS. There will be an in-class midterm on February 29 and a take-home midterm exam distributed on April 25 and due on Monday, May 7 at 4pm. There are no make-up dates for exams.

FINAL PAPER. The final paper (7-8 pages) is due AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS on April 25. Papers handed in late will receive a lower grade. In addition, you will be required to turn in a one-page proposal for your final paper on March 21, which will describe in prose form your main thesis and supporting arguments. Late or missing abstracts will result in a lower grade for the final paper. Paper assignments will be distributed in early March.

FINAL GRADE. The final grade will be calculated in the following manner: participation (15%), blog (10%), presentation #1 (10%), final paper presentation (5%), final paper (20%), exams (20% each = 40%).

Course Materials

* Readings marked with one asterisk will be accessible via USC's Automated Reserves System (ARES) or on physical reserve at Leavey Library (<https://usc.ares.atlas-sys.com/>).

**Readings marked with two asterisks will be distributed in class.

Statement for Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. The Trojan Integrity Guide can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tio.pdf>. The Undergraduate Guide for Avoiding Plagiarism can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/tig.pdf>.