

## SYLLABUS

### GESM 120g: Unorthodox Jewish Writing in the Americas

Fall 2017  
Section: 35363D  
Time: MW 2-3:20  
Location: VKC 155

Professor: Erin Graff Zivin  
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Office: THH 156M  
Off. Hrs.: W 12-2



**Course description:** At first glance, contemporary Jewish writing in the United States would seem to have little in common with the works that have comprised the so-called Jewish-American literary canon until now. Writers such as Nathan Englander, Jonathan Safran Foer, Rivka Galchen, Jill Soloway, 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—and artistic expression more broadly—was traditionally conceived as the space within which tradition and identity could be alternatively preserved (Sholem Aleichem) or rejected (Philip Roth), current cultural production by writers who in some way identify as Jews resists the narrow classification of “Jewish.” Jewishness enters these works 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 artistic 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 critical readings of these creative works, which will include novels, short stories, poetry, music, film and television.

## Schedule:

### I. Precursors

#### Week 1. Introduction

8/21-

- Introduction
- Frederic Brenner, *Jews/America: A Representation* (photographic images; in class)
- Abel Meeropol, "Strange Fruit" (music; in class)
- Presentation assignments

8/23-

- Kramer, Michael. "Race, Literary History, and the 'Jewish' Question" (*Prooftexts*)\*
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Defining the Indefinable: What Is Jewish Literature?" (*What Is Jewish Literature?*)\*

#### Week 2. The Old Country

8/28-

- Aleichem, Sholem. "The Windfall" (*Tevye the Dairyman*)\*
- Stein, Joseph. *Fiddler on the Roof* (film; in class)

8/30-

- Stein, Joseph. *Fiddler on the Roof* (cont.)

#### Week 3.

9/4- NO CLASS (Labor Day Holiday)

9/6-

- Aleichem, "The Man from Buenos Aires" (<https://archiveofourown.org/works/939002>)

### II. Rupture and Refusal

#### Week 4. Refusal

9/11-

- Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus*\*
- Pearce, Larry. *Goodbye, Columbus* (film; in class)

9/13-

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

### Week 5. Rupture

9/18-

- Roth, Philip. "The Conversion of the Jews" (<http://www.macalester.edu/religiouslife/programs/sacredstories/documents/RothConversionoftheJews.pdf>)
- Allen, Woody. *Hannah and Her Sisters* (selected scenes)

9/20-

- Ozick, Cynthia. "Envy; or, Yiddish In America: A Novella" \*

### Week 6. Sacrifice and Mourning

9/25-

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

9/27-

- "Interview with Leonard Cohen by Robin Pike in ZigZag Magazine" (<http://www.leonardcohenforum.com/viewtopic.php?t=20064>)
- Cohen, Leonard. (Selected songs; in class)

### Week 7. Accent Marks

10/2-

- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Accent Marks: Writing and Pronouncing Jewish America" (*Call It English*) \*

10/4-

- 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*)\*

### Week 8. Exam

10/9-

- Take-home EXAM #1 distributed

10/11-

- Take-home EXAM #1 DUE at 3:20pm

## **III. Unorthodox Jewish Writing**

### Week 9. Unorthodox Orthodoxy

10/16-

- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. "Disguised" (*The Death of Methuselah*) \*

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

10/18-

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

#### Week 10. Memory/Postmemory

10/23-

- Bender, Aimee. “Dreaming in Polish”\*
- Bender, “Job’s Jobs” ([http://webdelsol.com/Other\\_Voices/Bender.htm](http://webdelsol.com/Other_Voices/Bender.htm))
- Visit by Prof. Bender
- FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE at the beginning of class

10/25-

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

#### Week 11. Memory/Postmemory (cont.)

10/30-

- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus*.\*\*
- Shrieber, *Everything is Illuminated* (cont.)

11/1-

- Galchen, Rivka. “The Region of Unlikeness”\*\*

#### Week 12. Trans-identities

11/6-

- *Transparent* (TV series; selected scenes in class, binge-watching at home encouraged)
- Freedman, Jonathan. “‘Transparent’: A Guide for the Perplexed.” (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/transparent-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/>)

11/8-

- Bunin Benor, Sara. “Have You Noticed These Images in ‘Transparent’?” (<http://lilith.org/blog/2016/02/have-you-noticed-these-images-in-transparent/>)
- Visit by Prof. Bunin Benor

#### Week 13. Unorthodox Jewish Politics

11/13-

- #IfNotNow (selected videos; in class)
- Englander, Nathan. *Dinner at the Center of the Earth*\*\*
- FINAL PAPER ROUGH DRAFT DUE
- Final paper workshop (in class)

11/15-

- Englander, *Dinner* (cont.)

#### Week 14. Thanksgiving Week

11/20-

- Individual meetings with writing partner

11/22-

- NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

#### Week 15. Conclusion

11/27-

- Final paper presentations
- FINAL PAPER DUE at the beginning of class

11/29-

- EXAM #2

#### 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 provided by professor.

\*\*\* Readings marked with three asterisks should be purchased online.

#### 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 FACEBOOK PAGE.** You will be required to make weekly contributions to the course Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1110905385706427/>). These contributions are twofold. First, you will be expected to post a paragraph-long response to one of the required readings each week, due by midnight on the Monday before the reading is to be discussed. Second, you will be expected to post a comment on at least two other posts each week, due by midnight the following Monday. No late posts will be accepted for credit.

**PRESENTATIONS.** You will be responsible for two in-class presentations. The first presentation (approximately 20 minutes in length) 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 (approximately 10 minutes) will be a presentation of your final paper during the last week of class. Please speak to Prof. Graff Zivin if you have any questions about these assignments.

**EXAMS.** There will be two midterms on 10/11 and 11/29. There are no make-up dates for exams.

**FINAL PAPER.** The final paper (5-7 pages) is due AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS on 11/27. 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 10/23, 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. You will also be required to bring a first draft of your paper to class 11/13. Paper assignments will be distributed in October.

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

**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 GFS 120, 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>. A Guide for Graduate Students can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/forms/GradIntegrity.pdf>.