

## Modern Jewish Literature

Over the last one hundred years, Jewish writers throughout the world have composed a remarkable array of works that deal with the modern experience. Some of those writers, such as Franz Kafka and Isaac Babel, were disinclined to call themselves “Jewish writers” rather than merely writers, while others embraced the particular status of the Jewish writer. In the course, students will read and analyze an array of modern Jewish novels, short stories, poems, and plays and will consider the following questions: How did the writers understand modernism and their own identities as “modern” writers? How did they deal with issues of Jewishness and the intersection of the Jewish and the modern? What were the influences in their writings from European and American literature? How did they place their work in the larger framework of Jewish literature? What language did they choose to write in and what was the significance of that choice?

### **Reading List:**

Franz Kafka *The Trial*  
Isaac Babel *Red Cavalry Stories*  
Isaac Bashevis Singer *Satan in Goray*  
Primo Levi *The Periodic Table*  
Lamed Shapiro *Xeroxes*  
Philip Roth *Goodbye Columbus*  
Orly Castel-Bloom *Human Parts*

## Course requirements:

1.) Five 1-2 page response papers. 2. One 5-7 page final paper. 3. Class participation.

Class participation is a key element of this course. There will only be one unexcused absence.

### **Response Papers:**

On occasion, I will randomly select students to read the response paper that they have prepared about the class reading. Some classes I will specify what should be written about; other times I will leave it open. *Along with the paper, each student should prepare a question that has arisen from the reading for the class to discuss.* As a class we will discuss the student's comments and try to answer the question. Topics the papers could consider are:

- How does the author describe his/her Jewishness?
- Is antisemitism mentioned? How is it described?
- Does the author seem to address a specifically Jewish readership?
- How has modernization influenced the story?
- Would you say this is a Jewish novel/story/poem/play?
- Compare the reading with a previous one.
- How are non-Jews portrayed?
- Does the piece deal with issues of gender?
- Does the work deal with why the author chose the language he/she did to compose it in?

### **Final paper:**

No late papers will be accepted after the *March 14<sup>th</sup>* deadline. The paper will be a detailed exploration of one of the works or a thematic study comparing a few of them. I will give the students the subject of the paper on February 28<sup>th</sup>.

The paper should be written in 12-point font with appropriate margins and page numbers and should be 5-7 pages long. The paper should be written in clear, precise prose. The paper should seek to carry the reading of the novel further than the class discussions on the novel. In the essay, the student should develop a strong voice that offers original insights about the text. The paper should be written in proper essay style, but students should feel free to develop their thesis in a way that best expresses the insights they have made about the text.

## **Reading assignments:**

### **Monday January 8:**

The Trial: 4-53

### **Wednesday January 10:**

The Trial: 54-110

Response paper due: Students choose topic.

### **Wednesday January 17:**

The Trial: 111-166

### **Monday January 22:**

The Trial: 167-230

### **Wednesday January 24:**

Lamed Shapiro: Xeroxes

Response paper due: Compare how Kafka and Shapiro present the violence of modern life.

### **Monday January 29:**

Isaac Babel: Red Cavalry Stories 197-261

### **Wednesday January 31:**

Isaac Babel: Red Cavalry Stories 261-320

### **Monday February 5:**

Isaac Babel: Red Cavalry Stories 321-375

Response paper due: Students choose topic.

### **Wednesday February 7:**

Satan in Goray: 1-76

### **Monday February 12:**

Satan in Goray: 77-160

### **Wednesday February 14:**

Satan in Goray: Finish book

Response paper due: Would you consider this to be a modern novel? Why or why not?

**Monday February 19:**

The Periodic Table: 3-78

**Wednesday February 21:**

The Periodic Table: 79-159

**Monday February 26:**

The Periodic Table: Finish Book

**Wednesday February 28:**

Goodbye Columbus: Stories: “The Conversion of the Jews” “Eli the Fanatic”

Final response paper due: What does it mean to be American and Jewish in Roth’s stories?

Final paper topic given.

**Monday March 5:**

Video viewing: Annie Hall

Human Parts: 9-72

**Wednesday March 7:**

Human Parts: 70-135

**Monday March 12:**

Human Parts: 135-192

**Wednesday March 14:**

Human Parts: Finish Book

Final paper due.