

# MAGIC JEWS: Contemporary American Jewish Fiction

English 333 – **ONLINE**

Summer Session A – 2014

May 19-June 27

Prof. Lockard

SLNs 45098 (iCourse) & 45666 (ASU Online)

## Texts

Nathan Englander, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (2000)

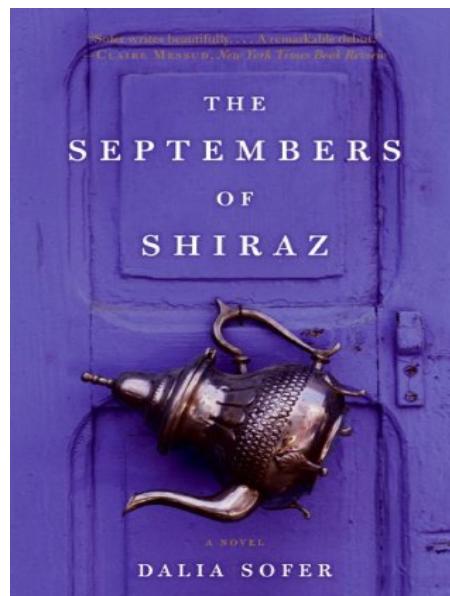
Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl* (1980)

Charles Reznikoff, *By the Waters of Manhattan* (1930)

Dalia Sofer, *The Septembers of Shiraz* (2011)

Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007)

Gary Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010)



## Description

This course explores themes of magical transformation, metamorphosing pasts and futures, and alienated romanticism in recent American Jewish fiction. It begins by considering the nature of ethnic literature: what is Jewish literature, or what makes a fiction ‘Jewish’? Nathan Englander, one of the most prominent young Jewish writers, will lead off the course readings as we consider such questions. We shall then read two fictions by Cynthia Ozick and Charles Reznikoff that engage with memories of the Europe and how these memories shape individual lives. Throughout much of the twentieth century Jewish communities have disappeared and the United States has served as one locale for the reconstitution of these memories. Exile, immigration, and Americanization have happened to Mizrahi communities too, as captured in Dalia Sofer’s quasi-autobiographical exploration of post-revolutionary Iranian Jewish experience. We will read Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* to explore how the hardboiled detective novel, a subgenre that originated in American literature, has been employed to portray alienated consciousness and alternative ethnic history. The brief excursion of this course concludes with Gary Shteyngart’s recent apocalyptic-comic novel of ethnic assimilation amid America’s post-imperial decline.

## **Coursework**

**Paper-writing** (100 percent). The coursework comprises one 3-page response paper (10 percent) and four five-page essays (90 percent), a total of 23 pages. Paper assignments will be announced.

The course is designed to begin slowly in order to give students an opportunity to read ahead. It is advisable to take this opportunity, since *the reading pace gets much heavier by the middle and end of the course*. This course will not use journaling or discussion boards, common features of online coursework. The course functions as a guided summer reading program – except that it has papers, grades and academic credit. If you come to the course with the idea that it is an undemanding exercise, then you may wish to reconsider your enrolment.

**Advice:** Do not let the reading and paper-writing remain for Sundays, when it will require much catch-up time. Daily work is more likely to be successful than irregular work. Students who ignore this advice usually do less well in the course since their written work tends to be rushed and of visibly lower quality.

## **Grades**

Grades will be posted each Tuesday or Wednesday for work done the previous week. Grades will be sent to individual students. In order to provide clarity on the grading standards for this course, note the following information.

**Grading standards for papers:** A successful paper should begin with a well-framed argument based on an abstract concept. It will elaborate that initial conceptual argument through the length of the paper, without meandering, and employ sufficient evidence from the text under discussion. Further instructions will be provided together with the first paper assignment, and anonymized examples of more successful papers will be made available with student consent. Paper grades will include plus/minus grades. *This is not a writing course, so paper comments will be summary. If you wish to have more detailed comment on your paper, contact the instructor.* **Writing quality** is a crucial issue in online work, and this course requires consistently high-quality writing that includes well-expressed, concise argumentation.

The instructor is a liberal grader and those who complete the coursework can usually expect at least a B-range grade. Grades of A- and A are more difficult to achieve and get distributed more parsimoniously. These require excellent argument and absence of significant technical writing errors. At his discretion, the instructor may decline to grade work beneath a C level and instead request that the student re-submit an improved version.

If the coursework is not complete (e.g. missing papers), then there will be a failing grade. *Important: all papers must be completed and accomplished timely for a passing grade.* No extensions or incompletes will be given. Grades may be queried and appealed for reconsideration. Every student has the right to do so without concern for adverse instructor reaction. If you wish to appeal a grade, send me an e-mail stating the reason succinctly.

## **Technologies**

This course will use a myASU Blackboard course site, accessible via <https://myasucourses.asu.edu>. This site contains course materials, and will be where students drop their papers.

If there are technical issues that create obstacles, please contact the instructor for advice. Responsibility for resolution of technical difficulties, however, resides with the student.

## **Course Communications**

All course announcements will be made both via announcements on the myASU course website and via e-mail to your ASU e-mail account. E-mail will not be sent to non-ASU addresses; if you wish to receive e-mail at a non-ASU account, please set forwarding at your ASU e-mail account.

## **Paper Due Dates**

Papers are due by Sunday at 11:59pm; the final paper is due on a Friday at the same hour. The initial response paper is due May 25. The due dates for the essay papers are June 8, 15, 22, and 27.

## **Instructor**

I am available via e-mail at [Joe.Lockard@asu.edu](mailto:Joe.Lockard@asu.edu) and generally respond quickly, Monday thru Friday. I will not be available on weekends. If you have paper-writing questions, please contact me on a weekday. By pre-arrangement I am also available on Skype.

## **Work Schedule**

### **Week 1 (May 19 – May 25)**

- Read Englander, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*
- Paper 1 (3 pages) due May 25.

### **Week 2 (May 26 – June 1)**

- Read Ozick, *The Shawl*
- No paper due

### **Week 3 (June 2– June 8)**

- Read Reznikoff, *By the Waters of Manhattan*
- Paper 2 (5 pages) due June 8

### **Week 4 (June 9 – June 15)**

- Read Sofer, *The Septembers of Shiraz*
- Paper 3 (5 pages) due June 15

**Week 5 (June 16 – June 22)**

- Read Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*
- Paper 4 (5 pages) due June 22

**Week 6 (June 23 – June 27)**

- Read Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story*
- Paper 5 (5 pages) due June 27