

English 542
SLN 24840
Spring 2012
Tuesdays 5:40-8:30P
Prof. Lockard

Jewish American Fiction



Cover of a Yiddish edition of
Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman*

Course Description

How did Jewish literature become American? Within approximately a century Jewish writers have established themselves as integral voices in US literature. This course examines how this process occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries as Jewish narratives and languages encountered American modernism. We will examine transatlantic Yiddish modernism, immigrant and proletarian fictions, Jewish high modernist novels and short stories, Sephardic crypto-Jewish tales, Mizrahi narrative, and contemporary Jewish writing on alternative futures.

This course is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Horst Poethe (z"l) of Berlin, a friend of humanity.

Course Texts

The course texts will be, in reading order:

Introduction / Transatlantic Modernism

S.Y. Abramovitsh [Mendele], "The Little Man" (1864-65) & "Fishke the Lame" (1869)
Sholem Aleichem, "Hodel" (1904), "Chava" (1906), "Holiday Dainties" (1904), "Advice" (1904), "Joseph" (1905), "A Business with a Greenhorn" (1916)

Immigration, Poverty, & Americanization

Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) [Penguin]
Mike Gold, *Jews without Money* (1930) [Public Affairs]

Jewish American Modernism

Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (1964) [Penguin]
Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer* (1966) [Farrar, Straus & Giroux]
Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl* (1981-84) [Vintage]
Grace Paley, *Enormous Changes at the Last Moment* (1985) Farrar, Straus & Giroux]

Jews & Revolutions

Achy Obejas, *Days of Awe* (2001) [Ballentine]
Dalia Sofer, *The Septembers of Shiraz* (2007) [Ecco]

Millennial Jews: Future Visions

Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) [HarperCollins]
Gary Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) [Random House]

Course Requirements

This is a reading-intensive course. Reading averages 230 pages per week over the 15-week semester, but there will be periods with significantly heavier reading loads. Because we will cover nearly 3500 pages total, it is recommended to read some of the texts prior to the beginning of the semester.

There will be discussion question exercises and four papers. The course will be conducted in a less-formal book-club format where students will prepare, discuss, and teach the novels. Students will be assigned presentation classes where they will be expected to lead discussion. There will be no exams.

Grades

Paper-writing (90 percent). The coursework comprises four double-spaced 8-10 page papers, a total of 32-40 pages. Paper assignments will be announced. *Advice:* Do the reading and paper-writing on weekends, when there will be adequate time to do the work well.

Class discussion and presentations (10 percent). Consistent advance preparation for class is expected. This is a small seminar so inadequate preparation will be noticeable.

Paper 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 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. 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.

Instructor

I am available via e-mail at Joe.Lockard@asu.edu and generally respond quickly, Monday thru Friday. I will not be available on weekends. By pre-arrangement I am also available on Skype.

Credits

This course is eligible for Jewish Studies Department credit. For English graduate students, this fulfills the post-1900, ethnic studies, and cultural studies requirements. For English undergraduates, it fulfills the 400-level post-1800 requirement. Honors College footnote 18 credit will be available.

Detailed Schedule [16 classes]

January 10	Introduction, Mendele
January 17	Aleichem
January 19	Cahan, Paper 1 assigned
January 24	Cahan
January 31	Gold
February 7	Bellow, Paper 1 due, Paper 2 assigned
February 14	Bellow
February 21	Malamud
February 28	Malamud
March 6	Ozick
March 13	Paley
March 27	Obejas, Paper 2 due, Paper 3 assigned
April 3	Sofer
April 10	Chabon, Paper 3 due, Paper 4 assigned
April 17	Shteyngart
April 24	Reserve class, Paper 4 due