

LITERATURE 61J: INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH LITERATURE
AND CULTURE
UCSC, WINTER 2016

During their long history Jews have generated three periods of astonishing literary creativity: the biblical period, which extends over nearly a millennium; the flowering of Jewish lyric poetry in Muslim Spain during the medieval period; and the modern period of mainly secular Jewish literature, with multiple centers of literary achievement arising across the global Jewish diaspora and in modern Israel as well. Our course will examine the interplay between history and literature in each of these periods, searching for distinctive features of Jewish literary creativity, while savoring the extraordinary diversity of Jewish life in a diaspora that is unique in both its duration over time and its extension in space.

REQUIREMENTS: Regular attendance of both lectures and discussion sections; active participation in class discussions; careful, thoughtful and critical reading of assignments; a midterm examination; a six-page paper; and a final examination.

READINGS: The following books are available at Baytree Bookstore and also on reserve at McHenry Library. (Additional short readings will be posted on our eCommons website).

Robert Alter (translator), *The David Story*

Geraldine Brooks, *People of the Book*

Abraham Cahan, *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom & Other Stories of Yiddish New York*

David Liss, *The Coffee Trader*

Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father's Court*

Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*

Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*

Dara Horn, *A Guide for the Perplexed*

Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*

COURSE WEBSITE: Notes for each lecture will be posted on eCommons, as will study questions to guide your reading and help you to prepare for the discussion sections.

TOPICS AND READINGS:

1. THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE I: GENESIS (January 4-8)

TOPICS: Who Wrote the Bible?—"Fraught with Background": Auerbach on Genesis—Joseph and His Brothers

READING: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, chapter 1: Israelite Origins and Kingdom (Before 1220 BCE to 587 BCE); chapter 2: Judea and the Origins of the Diaspora (587 BCE to 70 CE)

Genesis (on-line), especially chapters 3-4, 16, 18, 21, 22, 37-39, 44

RECOMMENDED: Erich Auerbach, "The Scar of Odysseus," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (on eCommons)

2. THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE II: THE DAVID STORY (January 11-15)
TOPICS: Kings of Israel: Saul and David—Crime and Cover-up: David and Bathsheba—An Iron Age King Lear: David and Absalom
READING: Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*



Marc Chagall, *David and His Harp* (1956)

3. HEBREW POETRY: FROM THE BRONZE AGE TO THE MIDDLE AGES (January 20-23)
TOPICS: The Art of Biblical Poetry: Psalms and Job—Pen of Iron: Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Spain
READING: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 4: The Jews in the Islamic World: From the Rise of Islam to the End of the Middle Ages (632 to 1500)
The Book of Job (on-line), chapters 1-3, 38-40
Psalms 1, 3, 23, 27, 37, 40, 63, 69 (on-line)
Poems by Samuel Ha-Nagid and Judah Halevi (eCommons)

4. THE SEPHARDIC DIASPORA (January 25-29)
TOPICS: The Spanish Catastrophe—The Venice Ghetto—Kaballah and Poetry
READING: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 6: The Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East (1453 to 1948)
Geraldine Brooks, *People of the Book*
Poems by Jewish mystics (eCommons)

5. ON THE CUSP OF MODERNITY (February 1-5)
TOPICS: Going Global: From Lisbon to Amsterdam—Jewish Noir
READING: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 7: The Jews of Western Europe (1500 to 1900)
David Liss, *The Coffee Trader*

MIDTERM EXAMINATION (February 5)

6. COMEDY AND CATASTROPHE: THE FLOWERING OF YIDDISH LITERATURE (February 8-12)

TOPICS: The Founders: Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz—In His Father's Court: Isaac Bashevis Singer—Singer and his Demons

READING: Sholem Aleichem, "Station Baranovich" and "The Search" (eCommons)

I. L. Peretz, "If Not Higher" and "Bryna's Mendl" (eCommons)

Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Last Demon" and "Taibele and Her Demon" (on eCommons) and *In My Father's Court* (especially: "The Sacrifice," "Why the Geese Shrieked," "A Broken Engagement," "The Washwoman," "A Major Din Torah," "To Warsaw," "My Sister," "Wolf the Coal Dealer," "A Boy Philosopher," "The Studio," "Bilgoray," "New Friends," and "The New Winds")

7. HOW THEY FOUND AMERICA (February 17-19)

TOPICS: Emma Lazarus and Anzia Yezierska—Abraham Cahan and the Birth of American Jewish Literature

Readings: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 8: The Jews of Eastern Europe and the United States (1770 to 1940)

Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0B9CitsfU0>

Anzia Yezierska, "Wings" and "How I Found America" (eCommons)

Abraham Cahan, *Yekl*, "The Imported Bridegroom," and "A Ghetto Wedding"

8. LITERATURE AND THE HOLOCAUST (February 22-26)

TOPICS: The Holocaust in History—Primo Levi: Writing and the Holocaust—Poetry and the Unspeakable

READING: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 9: The Holocaust
Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*

Poems by Primo Levi, Miklós Radnóti, Abraham Koplowicz, and Paul Celan (eCommons)

PAPER DUE: Friday, February 26

9. A HEBREW RENAISSANCE (February 29-March 4)

TOPICS: Zionism and the Revival of Hebrew—Amos Oz and a Masterwork of Israeli Literature—Yehuda Amichai: Why Jerusalem?

Reading: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 10: Zionism and the Origins of the State of Israel

Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (especially chapters 1-11, 18, 25-47, 51)

Poems by Yehuda Amichai (eCommons)

10. THE WAY WE LIVE NOW (March 7-11)

TOPICS: Rewriting Genesis and Job: Dara Horn—Five-Ninths a Jewish Writer: Rebecca Goldstein—Conclusion: Jewish Literature: From the Bronze Age to the Twenty-First Century

Reading: Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History*, chapter 11: The Jewish People After 1948

Dara Horn, *A Guide for the Perplexed*

Rebecca Neuberger Goldstein, "Against Logic" (eCommons)

FINAL EXAMINATION: Monday, March 14, 8:00-11:00 am

Instructors: Bruce Thompson
Office hours: Stevenson 276; MWF @ 1:30-3:30; 9-3467 (phone)
Rebekkah Dilts (rdilts@ucsc.edu)
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A note on academic integrity: For information on proper citation of sources, please see

<http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/citations-and-style-guides>. For information on university policy regarding plagiarism, please see http://undergraduate.ucsc.edu/acd_integrity/index.html

Students with Disabilities: If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible. Contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu for more information.

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT: *Thou shalt not send or receive text or email messages during class; neither shalt thou consult Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, nor indeed any other social media; neither shalt thou surf the Internet.*