

Brandeis University
Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies
NEJS 75a
Fall, 2006
Monday and Wednesday 3:30-5:00 (Lown 302)
Instructor: Professor E. Kellman
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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 3:00-3:30 (and by appointment)

Introduction to Yiddish Literature

This course introduces students to Yiddish fiction, drama and poetry within its cultural context. The seventy-year period (1870-1940) represented in the literary works included in the course coincided with great social, economic, religious and cultural upheavals in the world of Eastern European Jews, in many cases transforming their lives and belief systems. In addition to evaluating the works on the basis of their literary merits, we will examine the ways in which they both reflected and helped shape this transformative period.

The first half of the course includes introductory readings on the social history, communal structure, economics and folklore of Eastern European Jews, and an introduction to fiction by the three "classic" Yiddish writers, Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher-Sforim), Sholem Rabinovitsh (Sholem Aleichem) and I. L. Peretz. In the second half of the course we will read a play, novellas, stories and poetry by a variety of Yiddish writers whose careers began in the early- to mid-twentieth century: S. Ansky, I.M. Vaysnberg, Yoysef Opatoshu, Dvora Baron, Dovid Bergelson, Rokhl Faygenberg, Shira Gorshman, Israel Rabon, Rokhl Korn, Rokhl Faygenberg, Moyshe Kulbak, Itsik Manger, Isaac Bashevis Singer and I. J. Singer.

Requirements

* Active participation in class. You are expected to do all reading assignments in advance and to come to every class session prepared to discuss the readings. You will sometimes be asked to prepare questions for class discussion.

* Written work. NEJS 75a is designated a writing intensive course. Special attention is paid to development of paper topics and to revision of problematic passages in your papers.

1. Keep a reading journal in which you record your responses each week to the readings you do for class. You may be asked to comment on several shorter works or one longer one in a given week. Use each journal entry to respond to questions discussed in class or to develop your ideas for a paper. Each entry should be at least two typed double-spaced pages. I will collect and comment on the journals several times during the semester.

2. You will write three 6-10 page papers in this course. You will be able to choose from a list of several topics for each paper. If you wish, you may propose your own paper topic. You will be asked to submit an abstract of each paper one week before it is due. The abstract should summarize the main points you intend to make in the paper. Each paper will receive separate grades for content and organization/mechanics/word usage. You will have the option of submitting revised versions of the first and/or second papers in order to improve your grades on

them. All information taken from books, journals and electronic sources must be fully and properly footnoted. Please speak to me if you have not used full footnotes in previous courses at Brandeis. Please use internet sources judiciously. Check with me if you are not certain whether a source is legitimate or not.

Grading

Class participation	20%
Reading journal	20%
Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	20%
Paper #3	20%

Graduate student requirements

Graduate students may petition to take this course for graduate credit. Course requirements are different from those for undergraduates. Active participation in class discussions is expected, but the major requirement is a research paper of 18-20 pages on an aspect of Yiddish literature treated in the course. Topics will be developed in consultation with the professor.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.

Academic integrity

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. A statement of Brandeis University's policy on academic honesty can be found in section 3 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. Please read the attached statement of student rights and responsibilities carefully. If you have any questions about my expectations, be sure to ask.

Required readings (books to purchase at the Brandeis Bookstore)

1. Ruth R. Wisse, ed., *A Shtetl and other Yiddish Novellas* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986)
2. Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1987)
3. Itsik Manger, *The World According to Itsik: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

All other readings are found on WebCT. You should download these and print them out for yourself. Please bring all assigned readings to class sessions.

Recommended reading

1. Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995)
2. Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000)
3. Ruth R. Wisse, I.L. Peretz and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991)
4. Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon* (New York: The Free Press, 2000)

CALENDAR OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

September 6: Introduction to NEJS 75a (look over syllabus, introductory discussion, map of Jewish Eastern Europe)

John Klier: "What Exactly was a Shtetl?"; Daniel Soyer, "The Old World" (WebCT); Abraham Ain, "Swislocz: Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe" (WebCT)

Bernard D. Weinryb: The Jews of Poland (Introduction) (WebCT)

WEEKS 1 and 2 (Sep. 6, 11, 13) **Jewish Life in Eastern Europe**

Sept. 6: John Klier: "What Exactly was a Shtetl?" (WebCT); Daniel Soyer: "The Old World" (WebCT)

Sept. 11: Abraham Ain, "Swislocz: Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe" (WebCT)

Sept. 13: Bernard Weinryb: Introduction to *The Jews of Poland* (WebCT)

WEEK 3 (Sept. 18, 20) **Yiddish Folk Tales**

Sept. 18: *Yiddish Folk Tales* (selected tales: #1, #12, #13, #29, #47, #54, #55, #56, #70, #s80-93, #107, #108, #127, #150, #s154-160) (WebCT); *Mayse-bukh* (selected tales) (WebCT)

Sept. 20: **Three tales "in the folk vein" by I.L. Peretz:** "If Not Higher," "The Magician" and "Seven Good Years" (WebCT)

WEEK 4 (Sept. 25, 27) **Yiddish Literature of the Haskalah**

Sept. 25: Shmuel Feiner: "Towards a Historical Definition of the Haskalah" (WebCT)

Sept. 27: Sholem Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher-sforim), "The Little Man" (WebCT)

WEEK 5 (Oct. 3, 4) **Yiddish Literature of the Haskalah**

Sholem Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher-sforim), "Of Bygone Days" in *A Shtetl and other Yiddish Novellas*

WEEK 6 (Oct. 9, 11) **Tevye the Dairyman by Sholem Aleichem**

Oct. 9: Michael Stern, "Tevye's Art of Quotation" (WebCT); Hillel Halkin: Introduction to *Tevye the Dairyman*; Sholem-Aleichem: "Tevye Strikes it Rich", "Tevye Blows a Small Fortune" and "Today's Children"

Oct. 11: Sholem-Aleichem: "Hodl", "Chava" and "Shprintse"

Abstract for first paper due October 9

Oct. 11: Evening film *Tevye*

WEEK 7 (Oct. 16, 18) **Stories by I.L. Peretz**

Oct. 16: "Uncle Shakhne and Aunt Yakhne", "Happiness in Marriage", "Teachings of the Hasidim", "The Rebbe's Pipe" (WebCT)

Oct. 18: "The Shtrayml", "The Treasure", "Miracles on the Sea", "Four Generations – Four Wills" (WebCT)

First paper due October 18

WEEK 8 (Oct.23, 25) **Classic Yiddish Drama** Sh. Anski's *The Dybbuk* (WebCT)

Oct. 23: Discussion of the play

Oct. 25: Film: *The Dybbuk*

WEEK 9 (Oct. 30, Nov. 1) **Poetry and Prose of Itsik Manger**

Oct. 30: *The World According to Itsik*: “Introduction”, “Itsik’s Midrash” and “Songs of the Megillah”

Nov. 1: excerpts from *The Book of Paradise*, “The Tales of Hershel Summerwind” and “The Story of the Nobleman’s Mustaches”

Abstract for second paper due Oct. 30

WEEK 10 (Nov. 6, 8) **The Historical Novel in Yiddish**

Nov. 6: I. M. Vaysnberg: *A Shtetl* in *A Shtetl and other Yiddish Novellas*

Nov. 8: Yoysef Opatoshu: *The Romance of Horse Thief* in *A Shtetl and other Yiddish Novellas*

WEEK 11 (Nov. 13, 15) **Yiddish Modernism**

Nov. 13: Dovid Bergelson: *At the Depot* in *A Shtetl and other Yiddish Novellas*

Nov. 15: Israel Rabon: excerpts from *The Street* (WebCT)

Second paper due Nov. 13

WEEK 12 (Nov. 20, 22) **Yiddish Modernism**

Nov. 20: Dvora Baron: “Kaddish” and “Bubbe Henya” (WebCT)

Nov. 22: I.B. Singer: “Gimpel the Fool” and “Yentl, the Yeshivah Boy” (WebCT)

WEEK 13 (Nov. 27, 29) **Yiddish Fiction in a Time of Revolution**

Nov. 27: Moyshe Kulbak: excerpts from *Zelmenyaner* (WebCT)

Nov. 29: Shira Gorshman: “Unspoken Hearts”; Rokhl Korn : “Earth” (WebCT)

Abstract for final paper due Nov. 27

WEEK 14 (Dec. 4) **The Yiddish Literary Memoir**

I. J. Singer, excerpts from *Of a World that is No More*; Rokhl Korn: “The Sack with Pink Stripes”; Rokhl Faygenberg: “My First Readers” (WebCT)

Final paper due Dec. 8