

USEM 01a: Jewish Literatures in Eastern Europe: Syllabus

Antony Polonsky
Spring 2007
Lown 308

Description of the Course

The emergence of a modern literary consciousness among the Jews was one of the results of the breakup of traditional Jewish society and the attempt to transform the Jews from a religious and cultural community transcending national boundaries into citizens of the different countries in which they lived. In Eastern Europe, where the majority of European Jews lived, this new literary consciousness was expressed in various languages including Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish and Russian. This course will study of the development of modern literary forms, both prose and poetry, among the Jews of Eastern Europe. The works will be studied in English translation.

Prescribed Reading

- Sholem Aleichem *Tevye the Dairyman* in *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*, translated with an introduction by Hillel Halkin, Schocken Books, New York, 1996. ISBN 0-8052-1069-5
- Isaac Leib Peretz Selected stories from *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, edited with and introduction by Ruth R. Wisse, Schocken Books, New York, 1996. ISBN 0-8052-1001-6
- Selected poems by Yehuda Leib Gordon, Khaym Nakhman Bialik and Shaul Tchernichowsky (will be supplied by the instructor)
- Devora Baron *'The First Day' and Other Stories*, translated and edited by Naomi Seidman and Chana Kronfeld, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2001. ISBN 0-520-08538-8
- Shai Ansky *The Dybbuk* in *The Dybbuk and Other Stories*, edited by David Roskies, Schocken Books, New York, 1992. ISBN 0-8052-4111-6
- Selected Russian and Yiddish poetry from the Soviet Union (will be supplied by the instructor)
- Isaac Babel *Tales of Odessa* and *Stories* from *The Collected Stories*, edited and translated by Walter Morison, with an introduction by Lionel Trilling, Meridian

Books, 1974, no ISBN, Library of Congress Catalog
Card Number: 60-6743

Bruno Schulz

The Street of Crocodiles, translated by Celina
Wieniewska, introduction by Jerzy Ficowski,
Penguin Books, 1977, ISBN 0-14-00.4227 X

Selected poems by Julian Tuwim (will be supplied by the instructor)

Henryk Grynberg

The Victory, translated by Richard Lourie,
Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1993.
ANSI Z39.48-1984

*Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An
Anthology*, edited by Antony Polonsky and Monika
Adamczyk-Garbowska, University of Nebraska
Press, Lincoln and London, 2001. ISBN 0-8032-
3721-9

Selected poems dealing with the Holocaust (will be supplied by the instructor)

Course Outline

Week One

17 January

Introduction: The transformation of the Jews under the influence of modernity

Week Two

22, 24 January

The emergence of modern Yiddish literature

Reading:

Sholem Aleichem

Tevye the Dairyman in *Tevye the Dairyman and
The Railroad Stories*, translated with an
introduction by Hillel Halkin.

Week Three

29, 31 January

The emergence of modern Hebrew literature

Reading:

Selected poems by Yehuda Leib Gordon, Khaym Nakhman Bialik and Shaul Tchernichowsky (will be supplied by the instructor)

First USEM paper, 3-5 pages, due:

‘How did the new literature in Hebrew and Yiddish differ from that of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment)?

Week Four

5, 7 February

Women in Jewish Eastern Europe

Devora Baron

‘The First Day’ and Other Stories, translated and edited by Naomi Seidman and Chana Kronfeld,

Week Five

12, 14 February

Jewish writing in Russian and Polish down to 1914

Reading:

Isaac Leib Peretz

Selected stories from *The I.L. Peretz Reader*, edited with and introduction by Ruth R. Wisse.

Week Six

26, 28 February

The ‘new’ Yiddish literature down to 1914

Reading:

Shai Ansky

The Dybbuk in The Dybbuk and Other Stories, edited by David Roskies.

Weeks Seven/Eight

5, 7, 12, 14 March

Jewish writing in the Soviet Union 1921-1941

Reading:

Isaac Babel

The Collected Stories, edited and translated by Walter Morison, with an introduction by Lionel Trilling.

Selected Russian and Yiddish poetry from the Soviet Union

Weeks Nine/Ten

19, 21, 26, 28 March

Jewish writing in interwar Poland

Reading:

Bruno Schulz *The Street of Crocodiles*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, introduction by Jerzy Ficowski, Penguin Books, 1977.

Selected poems by Julian Tuwim

Second USEM paper, 3-5 pages, due

Weeks Eleven/Twelve/Thirteen

11, 16, 18, 23, 25, 30 April

The Holocaust and its aftermath in the Soviet Union and Poland

Reading:

Adolf Rudnicki 'Ascension', in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*, edited by Antony Polonsky and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska.

Bohdan Wojdowski Extract from *Bread for the Departed* form *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*.

Henryk Grynberg *The Victory*, translated by Richard Lourie.

Henryk Grynberg Poems in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*.

Hanna Krall 'Briefly Now, 'The Dybbuk' and 'The Armchair' in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*.

Selected poems dealing with the Holocaust

Deadline for completed research paper draft

Final Take-Home Examination:
one essay question on research paper, plus

revision of, or commentary on, first USEM paper

USEM Guidelines and Requirements

In-class Notes

This USEM course is designed to help prepare you for your future reading and writing. It is therefore vital that you regard the work you do for it as done not only for its own sake, but also as a basis for the type of work you will be undertaking in the remainder of your undergraduate career. Be practical in your in your note-taking; while you may want to jot down information that helps focus your attention in class or that you may want to use in a future paper, you may benefit most by only recording in your notebook material that you will need to use later. Your notebook should be a record of what you have learned, especially of what you have learned about *how* to read and write. It may be that your most helpful notes will not be ready-made answers but questions you have still to answer.

In-class Performance

This class is conducted as a seminar and its goal is to achieve a shared learning experience. *Your primary obligation is thus social* - your first priority should be those types of work which contribute both to your learning and that of the others in the class (class reading, the preparation of written material to be considered in the class and so on). The principal basis for evaluation in this course is your written work, but class participation can significantly affect a borderline grade. This may take various forms - in-class discussion, peer review of papers and perhaps smaller discussion groups.

Class attendance is vital and you should not miss class except as a consequence of a personal or medical emergency or a scheduling conflict which you have discussed with me in advance. Unexcused absence from the class will affect your final grade.

Evaluation

In order to obtain a passing grade, your work on each assignment must be awarded a passing grade and you must show that you have completed the overwhelming majority of the assigned readings. You may revise a paper right up to the granting of the final grade, but only a significant improvement in the work will lead to a grade being altered. Your final grade *will* reflect your fullest achievement in the course: you can efface the effect of early poor grades if your later work shows real improvement. Grading is the most difficult aspect of my work - I am happy to discuss with you your grades, but you should understand that in the final analysis the awarding of a grade has to be the result of judgement, which is always partially subjective.

Communication

Please do not hesitate to let me know about any difficulties you are having with the course or any suggestions you may have for improving it. You can communicate with me in class, by telephone or by e-mail

If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and with to have a reasonable accomodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.