

**Prof. Ken Frieden** ([kfrieden@syr.edu](mailto:kfrieden@syr.edu)) Office hour in 310 Tolley on Mondays, 11:30-12:30  
**TA: Emma Brodeur** ([embrodeu@syr.edu](mailto:embrodeu@syr.edu)) Office hour in 514 Hall of Langs. on Mondays, 12:30-1:30  
**JSP/REL/LIT 131; meets with ETS 184-2** **Fall 2015; MWF 10:35-11:30**

## **Great Jewish Writers** **(Ethnicity and Literary Texts)**

An introduction to some of the best fiction written by Jewish authors, such as Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Franz Kafka, Isaac Babel, S. Y. Agnon, Elie Wiesel, Yiddish women writers, and Philip Roth. Topics include shtetl life, modernization, rebellion against authority, love, marriage, violence, alienation, superstition, American Jewish life, madness, and the Nazi genocide. Short assignments will be due at the start of each class session, in answer to the questions listed below. Write 100-200 words—typed and double-spaced—to ensure that you read carefully and come to class with something to contribute.

*No cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices may be used in class unless approved by Ken Frieden or Emma Brodeur. If a student uses an electronic device in class, that student will be marked absent.*

### **Schedule**

- 31 Aug. Introduction: “Ethnic literature” and “Judaic/Jewish literature”
- 2 Sept. Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” (photocopy distributed in class)  
What is the significance of this “parable”?
- 4 Sept. Delmore Schwartz, “A Bitter Farce” (photocopy distributed in class)  
What is the “bitter farce”? What’s is Mr. Fish’s problem?
- 9 Sept. S. Y. Abramovitsh, “Fishke the Lame,” sections 1-3, in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 32-37. Write about the significance of Alter’s mistake.
- 11 Sept. S. Y. Abramovitsh, “Fishke the Lame,” section 4-end, pp. 38-54.  
List all of the different narrative voices in this novella, and discuss how they express different social classes.
- 14 Sept. **No Class:** Rosh Ha-Shana

- 16 Sept. Sholem Aleichem, from *Tevye the Dairyman*: “Hodel,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 57-73  
Why does Tevye quote incessantly?  
In class: Film clips from the Yiddish film *Tevye* (1939)
- 18 Sept. Sholem Aleichem, from *Tevye the Dairyman*: “Chava,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 74-88  
Analyze one of Tevye’s quotations. Does he quote correctly?  
How does he give the passage new meaning in a new context?  
Film clips from *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) and *Get Thee Out* (1991)
- 21 Sept. Sholem Aleichem, from the *Monologues*: “Joseph,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 108-129. Is the monologist an “unreliable narrator”?  
Also “A Business with a Greenhorn,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 130-134. Is Mr. Tumbler an “unreliable narrator”? Why?
- 23 Sept. **No Class:** Yom Kippur
- 25 Sept. Sholem Aleichem, from the *Monologues*: “Advice” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 95-107. What is the relationship between the frame narrator and his visitor, the monologist? Where do the reader’s sympathies lie?
- 28 Sept. I. L. Peretz, from the *Hasidic Stories*: “Kabbalists” and “The Rebbe’s Pipe,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 147-151 and 158-162.  
Give examples of narrative irony that serves a critical purpose.
- 30 Sept. I. L. Peretz, “Teachings of the Hasidim,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 152-157. The narrator is a disciple of the Rebbe, but Peretz was not hasidic. How does Peretz counterbalance the biases of the narrator?
- 2 Oct. I. L. Peretz, “If Not Higher,” and “Between Two Mountains,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, pp. 163-178. Same question: How does Peretz counterbalance the biases of the narrator? Does the narrator become “unreliable” when he expresses his superstitions?
- 5 Oct. Midterm Exam
- 7 Oct. Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer:

“An Imperial Message,” “The Great Wall of China,” “On Parables” (pp. 4-5, 235-249, 457). What is the relationship between “An Imperial Message” and the story in which it appears, “The Great Wall of China”?

- 9 Oct. Franz Kafka, “The Hunter Gracchus” followed by “A Fragment” (pp. 226-234). What is Gracchus’ view of “coherence,” and how does it relate to this story and fragment?
- 12 Oct. Franz Kafka, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” (pp. 360-376). Does Josephine represent the artist or a Jewish artist?
- 14 Oct. Franz Kafka, “A Country Doctor” (pp. 220-225). How does Kafka create the aura of a dream narrative? What does this dream reveal?
- 16 Oct. Isaac Babel, *The Collected Stories*  
 “The King” and “How It was Done in Odessa” (pp. 237-54).  
 Do these stories present an admiring view of Jewish gangsters? Are there any hints of criticism of Benya Krik? Consider the use of narrative voice.
- 19 Oct. Isaac Babel, “The Story of My Dovecot” (pp. 27-40). How does the narrator establish the tone of this story?
- 21 Oct. Isaac Babel, “The Rebbe,” “Zamosc,” and “The Rebbe’s Son” (pp. 123-126, 204-208, and 225-227). Analyze the use of “objective correlatives” in one story. How does an object or event express an emotion?
- 23 Oct. Isaac Babel, “Gedali” and “My First Goose” (pp. 116-123). Same question: Analyze the use of “objective correlatives” in one story. How does an object or event express an emotion?
- 26 Oct. Isaac Babel, “Guy de Maupassant” (pp. 71-80). Discuss the parallels between life and literature as represented in this story. What does the end of the story say about emulating fiction?
- 28 Oct. S. Y. Agnon, “Agunot,” in *A Book That Was Lost* (pp. 39-51).  
 How does the opening parable relate to the rest of the story? Point to a specific moment when “some hindrance creeps up and snaps a thread in the loom.”
- 30 Oct. S. Y. Agnon, “The Tale of the Scribe” (pp. 177-193).

How does this story view Raphael's devotion to the Torah?

- 2 Nov. S. Y. Agnon, "The Lady and the Peddler" (pp. 209-221). Is this a story of Gothic horror, or is it an allegory with another level of meaning?
- 4 Nov. S. Y. Agnon, "The Doctor's Divorce" (pp. 309-333)  
What message does the first-person narrator's story convey?
- 6 Nov. S. Y. Agnon, "To the Doctor" and "To Father's House" (pp. 369-371, 433-436). What might lead one to call these stories "Kafkaesque"?
- 9 Nov. Aharon Appelfeld's "Badenheim 1939," pp. 1-18  
Analyze the allegorical significance of one character.
- 11 Nov. Aharon Appelfeld's "Badenheim 1939," pp. 19-30  
Analyze the allegorical significance of another character.
- 13 Nov. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 3-46  
Discuss illusions or the narrator's ironic tone.
- 16 Nov. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 47-97  
How does the narrative present Eliezer's loss of faith?
- 18 Nov. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 98-115  
What is the significance of the representation of fathers and sons?
- 20 Nov. Fradel Shtok, "The Veil," in *Found Treasures*, pp. 99-104.  
Irena Klepfisz's poems (photocopy distributed in class)  
How does Klepfisz's poem about Fradel Shtok represent her?
- 23-27 Nov. **Thanksgiving Break**
- 30 Nov. Yente Serdatzky, "Unchanged"  
Has the first-person narrator changed?
- 2 Dec. Celia Dropkin, "A Dancer"  
How does the third-person narrator represent Gysia and her breakdown through perspective and/or figures of speech?

- 4 Dec. Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*, Part 1, Maestro, pp. 3-74  
What is Nathan Zuckerman's tone as narrator?  
or: What is the relevance of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*?
- 7 Dec. Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*, Part 2, Nathan Dedalus, pp. 75-121  
Discuss the relevance of Henry James' story "The Middle Years" to the opening chapters of Roth's novel.
- 9 Dec. Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*, Part 3, Femme Fatale, pp. 122-155  
What narrative strategies does Roth use to make this chapter believable?
- 11 Dec. Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*, Part 4, Married to Tolstoy, pp. 156-180  
How is Kafka relevant to Nathan Zuckerman?

**Texts** (in order of appearance):

*Classic Yiddish Stories of S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz.* Ed. Ken Frieden. Trans. Ken Frieden, Ted Gorelick, and Michael Wex. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004.

Kafka, Franz. *The Complete Stories.* Ed. Nahum Glatzer. New York: Schocken, 1976 (or subsequent Schocken editions of *The Complete Stories*).

Babel, Isaac. *Collected Stories.* Trans. David McDuff. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Agnon, S. Y. *A Simple Story.* Trans. Hillel Halkin. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night.* Trans. Marion Wiesel. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Appelfeld, Aharon. *Badenheim 1939.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001.

*Found Treasures.* Ed. Frieda Forman et al. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1994.

Roth, Philip. *The Ghost Writer.* New York: Vintage, 1995.

**Attendance:** Your final grade will be adversely affected if you miss more than three classes. Save these permissible absences for when you really need them!

**Goals:** While learning about Jewish literature and ethnic literary traditions, students should develop skills such as close reading and rhetorical analysis, critical thinking, and scholarly writing.

**Papers:** There will be daily short writing assignments (100-200 words). They will usually involve close analyses that combine thematic issues with literary aspects such as narrative techniques or figurative language.

**Requirements and Grading:** 35 short writing assignments (50%); careful preparation of readings, regular attendance, and class participation (20%); quizzes and midterm examination (10%), and final examination (20%).

**Midterm and Final Examinations:** The midterm and final will include four sections that test 1) the definitions of literary terms; 2) identification of major authors, characters, and other elements in the stories read in this course; 3) identification and interpretation of passages from the stories; and 4) one or two short analytical essays.

**Extra Credit:** There will be opportunities for you to earn extra credit by attending pertinent lectures on Jewish Studies outside of class (to be announced). After you go to an event of this kind, submit a one-paragraph synopsis to receive credit.

**Plagiarism:** Always acknowledge your sources, because plagiarism is a serious offense. Don't even think of taking anything off the web without using quotation marks. It's unethical, as easy for professors to catch as it is for students to steal, and the consequence is a failing grade. Or, in other words:

“The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.” Further information at <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

**Disability-Related Accommodations:** “If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue Accommodation Authorization Letters to students with documented disabilities, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.” For further information, see the ODS website, <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>