

**JSP/REL 107: Religion, Literature, Film**  
(Meets with ETS/LIT 200)

This course illustrates literary and cinematic approaches to religious life, focusing on the diversity of Jewish and Christian expression and practice (e.g., words, symbols, rituals, music, and gesture). One of our goals in co-teaching this course is to disrupt the frequent use of the term “Judeo-Christian” in our culture, encouraging students to view, read, and reflect on the differences between Jewish and Christian ways of life. Each week, readings and film will present central literary and cinematic elements for our consideration, such as intertextuality, objective correlative, surrealism, and allegory.

**Required Texts** (available at the Syracuse University Bookstore in Schine Student Center):

1. Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* (used copies of 11<sup>th</sup> edition are available inexpensively);
2. *Classic Yiddish Stories*, ed. Ken Frieden (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004);
3. Kathleen Norris, *Dakota* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993);
4. Aharon Appelfeld, “Badenheim 1939,” *B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies*, number 3;
5. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Scribner, 1978).
6. Recommended: *God, Man, and Devil*, ed. Nahma Sandrow (Syracuse: S.U. Press, 1999).
7. Other readings, posted on our course Blackboard page (abbreviated as BB below). Selections: Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today”; T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems”; Ken Frieden, “A Century in the Life of Sholem Aleichem’s *Tevye*”; Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry*, ch. 11; Peretz Hirschbein, *Green Fields*; Flannery O’Connor, “Parker’s Back,” from *Everything That Rises Must Converge*; Nahman of Bratslav, *Tales* 1, 2, 6; Henry James, “The Turn of the Screw”; Parable of three rings, an excerpt from Lessing’s play *Nathan the Wise*.

**PRINT OUT BB SELECTIONS, TAKE NOTES ON THE READINGS, AND BRING THEM TO CLASS AND SECTION.**

Film screenings for this class will be held once a week. We urge students to attend these group screenings, both because films are made to be seen in public by large audiences, and because conversations arise spontaneously after these screenings and enhance the class experience. If you cannot attend a screening, watch the film in Bird Library or at home; most are available from Netflix.

List of Planned Screenings :

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|-----------|-------|---|
| 107 HL    | 9/12  | <i>Tevye the Dairyman (Tevye der milkhiker; Schwartz, 1939)</i> , Bird DVD 12700                        |
| 107 HL    | 9/19  | <i>Elmer Gantry</i> (Brooks, 1960), Bird DVD 16273  |
| 110 Bowne | 9/26  | <i>Green Fields (Grine felder; Ulmer and Ben-Ami, 1937)</i> , Bird DVD 12730                            |
| 107 HL    | 10/3  | <i>Winter Light (Nattvardsgästerna; Bergman, 1963)</i> , Bird DVD on order                              |
| 107 HL    | 10/17 | <i>The Dybbuk (Der dibek; Waszynski, 1937)</i> , Bird DVD on order                                      |
| 110 Bowne | 10/24 | <i>Wise Blood</i> (Huston, 1979), Bird DVD 16272  |
| 107 HL    | 10/31 | <i>Doubt</i> (Shanley, 2008), Bird DVD 15969  |
| 107 HL    | 11/07 | <i>Ushpizin</i> (Dar, 2004) [“Ushpizin” are sacred guests during the Sukkot holiday],<br>Bird DVD 16720 |
| 110 Bowne | 11/14 | <i>Life is Beautiful (La Vita è bella; Benigni, 1997)</i> , Bird DVD 8962                               |
| 107 HL    | 11/28 | <i>Dogville</i> (von Trier, 2003), Bird DVD 11949   |

## Requirements:

1. Regular attendance at all three weekly sessions is expected; TAs will be responsible for noting absences. More than two absences during the semester will lower your final grade.
2. We expect careful and attentive reading of the written texts and viewing of the films *before* class discussions. Bring texts to class and annotate them with your reading notes and questions. Keep a folder or notebook to collect notes you take during film screenings.
3. The midterm exam will be held on Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup>. This will count 20% of your final grade. No makeup exams will be offered unless you are undergoing a dire emergency.
4. The final exam will be held during finals week, at 12:45 p.m. on Thursday, 15 December. Please do not ask to reschedule the date. This exam is *cumulative*—that is, it will cover material from the entire semester—and it will count toward 30% of your final grade.
5. The remaining 50% of your grade will be assessed through assignments due in or given during Friday sections, including responses assigned on Mondays or Wednesdays, free-writes or group work, and pop quizzes. No late assignments or make-up assignments are allowed.

N.B. The synthetic, interdisciplinary work of this class will be practiced and discussed most thoroughly in Friday sections. Therefore, attendance and focused participation in sections is crucial for performing well in this class.

## Schedule

### **Weeks 1-2: Introductions**

- Aug 29 Syllabus review and introductory discussion  
Aug 31 Lecture on film form (Eisenstein). See Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today” on BB.  
Sept 02 Section: film as a textual and visual medium. Read Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, chs. 1-2, on photography (camera angles) and mise-en-scène.  
Sept 05 **Labor Day: No classes**  
Sept 07 Lecture on literary critical approaches, including a discussion of formalism, structuralism, narratology, and rhetorical criticism; introduction to Sholem Aleichem. Read T.S. Eliot on “objective correlative,” in “Hamlet and His Problems,” from *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1922), on BB.  
Sept 09 Section: different approaches to literature.

## **PART ONE: INTERTEXTUALITY**

- Week 3:** Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye stories “Hodel” and “Chava,” in *Classic Yiddish Stories*, and the film *Tevye the Dairyman* (Schwartz, 1939)  
Sept 12 Lecture on Yiddish literature, Sholem Aleichem, Tevye, and his use of quotations.  
Sept 14 Analysis of *Tevye the Dairyman* in relation to the original stories.  
Film clips from *Fiddler on the Roof* and other versions of Tevye, as discussed in Ken Frieden’s essay “A Century in the Life of Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye” (On BB and on reserve in the library.)  
Sept 16 Section: the Tevye stories and films.

- Week 4:** *Elmer Gantry* (Brooks, 1960) and Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*, ch. 11, 165-190.  
 Sept 19 Lecture on *Elmer Gantry* (the novel) in light of the history of American Christian revivalism. Clips from *Inherit the Wind*, *The Apostle*, *Touch*, *The Calling*, and/or *Jesus Camp*.
- Sept 21 Analysis of *Elmer Gantry* in light of the novel. What concerns do they share? How are they situated differently in the decade that produced the novel versus the decade that produced the film? Contrast filmic and novelistic techniques.
- Sept 23 Section: intertextuality and adaptation in the novel & film *Elmer Gantry*

### PART TWO: OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

- Week 5:** Hirschbein's play *Green Fields* (1916), on BB, and the film *Green Fields* (Ulmer and Ben-Ami, 1937)  
 Sept 26 Lecture on American Yiddish Theater and on Hirschbein's play; the use of "objective correlative," as discussed by T. S. Eliot in "Hamlet and His Problems" (BB)  
 Sept 28 Analysis of the film *Green Fields* in relation to the published script.
- Sept 30 **Rosh Ha-shana** No Section meetings
- Week 6:** *Winter Light* (Bergman, 1963) and K. Norris, *Dakota*, 1-13, 66-8, 107-123 204-220.  
 Oct 03 Lecture on *Dakota* in terms of religion and nature. Clips from *Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries*.  
 Oct 05 Analysis of *Winter Light* and *Dakota*: 1) nature as 'religious' in text and film; 2) using natural elements/movements to convey human emotions or reactions.  
 Oct 07 Section: objective correlatives in Bergman and Norris
- Week 7:** Midterm Review and Exam  
 Oct 10 Lecture on film form in *Fiddler*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Green Fields*, and *Winter Light*  
 Oct 12 Lecture on literary form in the Tevye stories, *Elmer Gantry*, *Green Fields*, and *Dakota*  
 Oct 14 Midterm Exam

### PART THREE: NEO-ROMANTICISM & SURREALISM

- Week 8:** I. L. Peretz, "Kabbalists," "Teachings of the Hasidim," "If Not Higher!" and "Between Two Mountains," in the anthology *Classic Yiddish Stories*, and the Yiddish film *The Dybbuk* (Waszynski, 1937), based on S. An-ski's 1916 play.  
 Oct 17 Lecture on Hasidism, neo-Hasidic writing, and Peretz's stories  
 Oct 19 Analysis of *The Dybbuk*  
 Oct 21 Section: Peretz's neo-romanticism and expressionism in *The Dybbuk*
- Week 9:** *Wise Blood* (Huston, 1979) and Flannery O'Connor's "Parker's Back" (BB)  
 Oct 24 Lecture on Southern Gothic literature, mid-century "spirituality", and connections to the early twentieth-century Surrealist movement. Discussion of "Parker's Back"  
 Oct 26 Analysis of *Wise Blood* in comparison with the literary style of "Parker's Back"  
 Oct 28 Section: Surrealist and Southern Gothic elements in *WB* and "Parker's Back"
- Week 10:** *Doubt* (Shanley, 2008) and Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw"  
 Nov 07 Lecture on the uses of ambiguity (and the supernatural) in narrative fiction

Nov 09 Analysis of *Doubt*, especially in terms of its use of ambiguity  
Nov 11 Section: The surrealism of James and *Doubt*

#### **PART FOUR: ALLEGORY AND PARABLE**

**Week 11:** Nahman of Bratslav's Teachings and Folktales; the Hebrew film *Ushpizin* (Dar, 2004)  
Oct 31 Lecture on Nahman of Bratslav, focusing on analyses of Tales 1, 2, and 6 (BB)  
Nov 02 Analysis of *Ushpizin*  
Nov 04 Section: Nahman's allegories and *Ushpizin*

**Week 12:** Appelfeld's story "Badenheim 1939" and *Life is Beautiful* (Benigni, 1997)  
Nov 14 Lecture on Israeli fiction, Appelfeld's "Badenheim 1939," and Lessing's Parable of the Three Rings (BB)  
Nov 16 Analysis of *Life is Beautiful*  
Nov 18 Section: Lessing's parable; allegory in Appelfeld and *Life is Beautiful*

**Week 13:** **Thanksgiving Break: No Classes**  
November 20- November 27

**Week 14:** *Dogville* (von Trier, 2003) and C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*  
Nov 28 Lecture on Lewis' use of parable.  
Nov 30 Analysis of *Dogville*  
Dec 02 Section: allegory and parable in Lewis and *Dogville*

**Week 15: Review Sessions**  
Dec 05 Lecture on film form of *The Dybbuk*, *Wise Blood*, *Ushpizin*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *Dogville*.  
Dec 07 Lecture on literary form of Peretz, O'Connor, Nahman, Williams, Appelfeld, and the parable.  
Dec 09 Section: Review Session  
  
Dec 15 Final Examination, 12:45-2:45 p.m.

#### STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

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. For more information and the complete policy, see the Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures (PDF) at <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

#### STATEMENT ON DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. The ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact the ODS as soon as possible.

#### STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE POLICY:

Syracuse University recognizes the diverse faith traditions represented among its campus community and supports the rights of faculty, staff, and students to observe these traditions. According to SU’s religious observances policy, students will be permitted to make up any assignment or examination that is missed because of religious observance, provided that they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes.