

LIT 360: Modern Jewish Writers

Fall 2000

Required Texts:

The Shawl, Cynthia Ozick

Mr. Mani, A. B. Yehoshua

The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

Kaaterskill Falls, Allegra Goodman

Dead Men's Praise, Jacquelyn Osherow

The Wedding Jester, Steve Stern

The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories, Ilan Stavans

Brief Description

In this course, we'll be reading mostly fiction and poetry by modern and contemporary Jewish writers—Israeli, European, and American. In our discussions of the texts, we'll focus on the ways in which these texts represent Jewish history, culture, thought, belief and practice. The particular areas of conflict/crisis we'll experience and examine through our readings and discussions include the following: religion and secularism, faith and doubt, the community and the individual, and Jewish continuity and assimilation. We'll also look at the impact anti-Semitism, pogroms, the Holocaust, the establishment of the modern State of Israel, and the Israeli/Arab/Palestinian conflict have had on Jewish life.

As members of a minority group, Jewish writers of the diaspora have an opportunity to represent Jewish experiences as a way of entertaining and articulating for Jewish readers the nature of their predicament living as Jews in not always hospitable places. Jewish writers also have an opportunity to represent Jewish experience for non-Jewish readers. We can ask the question, does it make a difference which way the literature faces: inward toward the Jewish community, outward toward the world?

Our focus will remain on the particularities of Jewish culture as represented in literature written by Jewish writers. Through our study of the particular, however, we should be able to gain some insight into how a literature in general reflects and shapes a culture and how a historically engaged literature differs from history, and how secular literature can play a significant role in a reader's spiritual and, perhaps, religious life.

Assignments

Reader's Notebook

Please keep a reader's notebook throughout the semester. In the notebook, you can respond to assigned readings, quote favorite passages and reflect on them, and keep a list of terms you don't understand. You can also write about new things about Jewish history, culture, belief and

practice you discovered through the readings. Above all, this notebook can be a place where you discover and explore the areas of Jewish culture in which you are most interested this semester.

In addition to responding to the assigned readings, I'd also like you to find three things in the news each week having to do with Jewish life and summarize those news items in your notebook. You should try to make connections between what you read in the news and the fiction, poetry, and non-fiction we read in class.

Newspapers/magazines to consult:

The New York Times: <http://nytimes.com/>

The Asheville Citizen Times: <http://www.citizen-times.com/>

The Jerusalem Report: <http://www.jrep.com/>

The Jerusalem Post: <http://www.jpost.com/>

Haaretz: http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/1_1.htm

Forward: <http://www.forward.com/>

If at all possible, type these notebooks. I'll collect them a couple of times during the semester.

Project

Do one project. This can be a creative project or a literary or scholarly essay. You can memorize and perform some Jewish folktales. If you play an instrument, you can learn to perform some klezmer music and present it, along with an introduction to klezmer, to the class. You can write a group of poems, a short story or two, or a non-fiction essay that engages some of the issues we discuss in class or uses a midrashic method in its creation. You can study bibliodrama and lead a bibliodrama experience in class. These are just a few suggestions. Whatever you choose to do for your project—whether a traditional academic essay or something less conventional, you must inform me in advance and discuss your plans and progress with me as the semester progresses. Also, please keep in mind that even a creative project must be accompanied by some kind of short paper, the nature of which we will determine at the time I approve of your project. You should schedule an appointment with me sometime before Fall Break to discuss your plans. You will be asked to make a presentation to the class at the end of the semester.

Mid-Term and Final

There will be a take-home mid-term and a take-home final.

Grades:

Reader's Notebook: 25%

Project: 25%

Mid-Term: 25%

Final: 25%

Schedule

Week 1

- 8/16 Course Introduction; Midrash and Literature
8/18 “Introduction: Language and Tradition,” Stavans

Week 2

- 8/21 Rabbi Nakhman of Bratzlav, “The Rabbi’s Son” 27
Sholem Aleichem, “A Yom Kippur Scandal” 30
8/23 Anzia Yezierska, “America and I” 68
8/25 Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” 86,
Bruno Schulz, “The Street of Crocodiles” 117
Reader’s Notebook Due

Week 3

- 8/28 Shmuel Yosef Agnon, “A Whole Loaf” 105
8/30 Isaac Babel, “The Story of My Dovecot” 125
9/1 Isaac Bashevis Singer, “The Spinoza of Market Street” 135

Week 4

- 9/4 Bernard Malamud, “Angel Levine” 166
Philip Roth, “The Conversion of the Jews” 312
9/6 Primo Levi, “The Mirror Maker” 213
Ida Fink, “The Key Game” 217

9/8 *The Shawl*

Week 5

- 9/11 *The Shawl*
9/13 *The Shawl*
9/15 *Mr. Mani*: First Conversation

Week 6

9/18 *Mr. Mani*: First Conversation

9/20 *Mr. Mani*: Second Conversation

9/22 *Mr. Mani*: Second Conversation

Note: Be sure to speak with me about your project plans before Fall Break!

Week 7

9/25 *Mr. Mani*: Third Conversation

9/27 *Mr. Mani*: Third Conversation

9/29 *Mr. Mani*: Fourth Conversation

Week 8

10/2 *Mr. Mani*: Fifth Conversation

10/4 Robert Pinsky, handout

10/5 Robert Pinsky, poetry reading, 8 p.m., Lipinsky Auditorium

10/6 Robert Pinsky workshop; Chancellor Mullen's Installation

Week 9

10/9 Yom Kippur: Class Cancelled

10/11 Yehuda Amichai
Mid-Terms Due

10/13 Yehuda Amichai

Week 10

10/16 Fall Break

10/18 Yehuda Amichai

10/20 Amos Oz, "Nomad and Viper" 364

Week 11

10/23 *The Book of Joseph*

10/25 *Katschen*
Reader's Notebook Due

10/27 *Kaaterskill Falls*

Week 12

10/30 *Kaaterskill Falls*

11/1 *Kaaterskill Falls*

11/3 *The Wedding Jester*

Week 13

11/6 *The Wedding Jester*

11/8 Chess at University of Tampa: Class Cancelled

11/10 Chess at University of Tampa: Class Cancelled

Week 14

11/13 *The Wedding Jester*

11/15 *Dead Men's Praise*

11/17 *Dead Men's Praise*

Week 15

11/19 *Chair in the Desert*: I read from my new book at Malaprop's.
Evening: View a Jewish Film

11/20

11/22 Thanksgiving Holiday

11/24 Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 16

11/27 Presentations
Reader's Notebook Due

11/29 Presentations

12/1 Presentations

Week 17

12/4 Presentations
Final Due

12/6 Reading Day

12/8 Final