

REL 192- fall 2014

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American Jewish Literature

You cannot call them Jewish-American writers; they are all American writers who happen to be Jewish. Or are they? What kind of personal identity do they have and from which cultural roots do they feed? In the course of the semester we will explore the first, second, third and fourth generations of writers in this country whose ancestors were Jewish.

Is there a distinct Jewish Humor and does it make you laugh or cry? What is the place of the American Jewish women writer in American literature, and what did Philip Roth's and Woody Allen's mothers have in common?

We will read Isaac Bashevis Singer's colorful Yiddish turned into English and will touch some writers' attempts to trade Judaism for socialism. We will merge into Saul Bellow's rich world and explore writers like Grace Paley, Tillie Olson, Cynthia Ozick, Chaim Potok and Jonathan Safran Foer. Kosher cookbooks are not on the syllabus, however food does play a meaningful part in Jewish culture and some recipes will be savored.

Drama written by American Jewish writers will be an important part of this course. While working in groups you will get to choose one of the many plays this section includes: Sholem Asch, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller, Oscar Hammerstein II, Stephen Sondheim, Eve Ensler, Lilian Hellman, Tony Kushner, David Mamet are few of American Jewish play writers you can choose.

The course will depend greatly on your direct involvement and impassioned curiosity. Your own interests will be reflected in the course's agenda.

Some of the written assignments will be graded. There will be other un-graded assignments relating to watching films, reading, writing and researching on line and in the library.

The major assignments in this course will be as follows:

A. A research paper on a topic of your choosing, a subject you are passionate about. Here are examples of acceptable topics: First generation writers – can you detect the roots? Or: Explain literature of rebellion: feeling embarrassed about your parents’ broken English and Old Country habits. Or: Women’s place in the first generation of Jewish American Writers. You will be asked to submit a first draft as a take-home midterm and your final research paper at the end of the semester, or you can choose 2 different topics.

B. Short creative writing assignments each week (1-2 pages long), reflecting your personal perspective on the literature we will be reading and discussing in class. You will receive feedback from fellow students and the instructor, improving your skills of reflecting and analyzing. By talking in class about your chosen subjects you will improve as well your expressive skills.

C. Informal journal of your reading as well as about the various presentations and interactions taking place in class.

D. A presentation on a topic that is close to your heart it should be visual (power-point) and raise a question that the class would discuss.

Un-graded assignments will be submitted to the course instructor and receive feedback. Late assignments are not accepted. Missing, incomplete, or late un-graded assignments will result in a lowering of the “written assignments” part of your grade.

Purposes

American Jewish writers are an important part of our culture. Understanding their literature will enhance your understanding of the society and civilization we belong to. Throughout this course you will increase your awareness of Jewish history as well as the history of this country that absorbed a series of immigrants from all over the world. Lots of the immigrants were escaping discrimination, persecution, poverty and violence, which found its way into their writings. You will learn about the difficult acculturation these immigrants went through and how it affected their thinking and writings. You will distinguish between first generation of writers and second, third and fourth generations and will enhance your understanding of your own roots.

Goals

1. Learn to identify the different narratives of American Jewish writers.

2. Become knowledgeable of the history of your country since its creation.
3. Appreciate writers from different faiths, cultures and continents.
4. Learn to contrast and compare diverse literary works.

Expectations

You are expected to show up to every class, and on time. Unjustified absence and tardiness will interfere with your learning and hence affect your grade. For every unexcused absence your attendance grade will be lowered by 5 pts.

Kindly avoid ringing cell-phones, **text-messaging** and eating during class.

All assignments will be presented in print, and in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to perform your academic work honestly and fairly. Since you can choose your subject and your writing is supposed to be personal, write it on your own. The consequences of failure to meet those expectations are outlined in the current *Student Handbook*.

Blackboard

You are expected to use Blackboard for course information and assignments throughout the course. You will be enrolled in Blackboard and you have to make sure you check Blackboard before each class.

Grading

1. Active contribution to class	20%
2. Group work	10%
3. Journals.....	10%
4. Presentations in class.....	15%
5. Written assignments	20%
6. Midterm	10%
7. Final essay.....	15%

Required Texts

Jewish American Literature A Norton Anthology

Optional Readings

Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran-Foer

The Yiddish Policemen's Union by Michael Chabon

Schedule- *with possible modifications according to student's topic researches*

Week I

Monday August 25 Introduction

Wednesday August 27 first generation

Week II

Monday September 1 burning bridges

Wednesday September 3 is this the Promised Land?

Week III

Monday September 8 Women's voices

Wednesday September 10 parents with an accent

Week IV

Monday September 15 second generation

Wednesday September 17 how secular is secular?

Week V

Monday September 22 Jewish humor and its roots

Wednesday September 24 mixed marriages

Week VI

Monday September 29 how inspirational is sorrow?

Wednesday October 1 Mid-term paper due

Week VII

Monday October 6 is evil banal?

Wednesday October 8 does religion define you?

Week VIII

Monday October 13 fall recess

Wednesday October 15 third generation

Week IX

Monday October 20 coping with testimonies

Wednesday October 23	guilt as an incentive
Week X	
Monday October 27	Jews on Broadway
Wednesday October 29	Jews in Hollywood
Week XI	
Monday November 3	bearing witness to otherness
Wednesday November 5	fourth generation
Week XII	
Monday November 10	wars of religions
Wednesday November 12	engaged literature
Week XIII	
Monday November 17	making excuses
Wednesday November 19	taming prejudices
Week XIV	
Monday November 24	Final essay due
Wednesday November 26	Thanksgiving recess
Week XIV	
Monday December 1	Affirmations
Wednesday December 3	Conclusions

Notes

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability must contact Ms. Elaine Mara, assistant director of academic support Services for academic and disability support at the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.
- 3) The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.
- 4) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 5) This syllabus is subject to change.

