

Immigration and Assimilation in Jewish-American Literature

118:001; Fall 2008
TTH 1:05-2:20pm
205 EPB

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Course Description

"The writing of the American-Jewish novel is essentially ... an act of assimilation," writes Leslie Fiedler. "[It] is a demonstration that there is an American Jew (whose Jewishness and Americanism enrich each other) and that [the American Jew] feels at home!"

This course will test Fiedler's assertions against a series of twentieth-century Jewish-American works, whose primary subject is the complex and often ambivalent formation of Jewish identity and Jewish community in the modern or "new" world. We will begin the semester with the story of Henry Harland, a turn-of-the-century Protestant who, pretending to be a Jew named Sidney Luska, wrote a series of "Jewish"-themed books that were celebrated for their authentic treatments of Jewish life and of Jewish concerns: intermarriage, the role of the Jewish artist in America, the dangers that assimilation poses to Jewish religious identity. Harland's works and fabricated identity suggest the complexity both of Jewish self-conceptions and of representations of Jewish-American life in politics, the media, and the arts more generally--a complexity epitomized by Jerome Siegel's Superman, "the world's most famous muscle Jew" and, more recently, by Jackie Mason's and Mike Myers's comedic treatments of Jews and Jewish humor. Following Luska we will move into a discussion of Jews' own descriptions of the problems and pleasures associated with immigration and assimilation. We will pay particular attention to the role of Jewish mysticism and theological debate in Jewish texts, recurring images of the nomadic Jew, the leftist Jew, and Jews in mourning, and Jewish images of the idealized gentile--from Superman/Clark Kent to Mattel's blond Barbie.

II. Texts

Required Texts (Available at the university bookstore in the IMU unless otherwise stated)

Roth, Henry	Call It Sleep
Yeziarska, Anzia	Bread Givers
Singer, Isaac Bashevis	The Collected Stories
Course Reader	Available at Zephyr Copies
Selected Works	Available on e-reserve on icon

The reader includes fictional works by Woody Allen, Mary Antin, Nathan Englander, Bernard Malamud, and Cynthia Ozick and theoretical essays by Jewish studies scholars such as Jon Stratton. The reader must be purchased at Zephyr Copies, 124 E. Washington Street, prior to week three of the semester.

Additional required materials will be placed on reserve in the main library or will be distributed in class.

Recommended Texts: (Available online and at university and used bookstores)

Lunsford and Connors, The New St. Martin's Handbook (2001 edition)
Joseph Gibaldi, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (5th edition)

Some Useful Sites for Research on Judaism, Jewish Life and Culture, and Jewish-American History

www.ajhs.org/reference/Links.cfm;
www.ibiblio.org/yiddish

III. Course Policies and Requirements

Requirements

Two quizzes
Informal writings, both in class and at home
Midterm Exam
Round Robin Discussion questions
Active Participation in small and large group discussions
Peer Editing
Final paper (8-10pgs.) w/ draft of introduction

Your responsibilities are:

To Attend: Attendance is mandatory. After three absences your grade will be dropped. If you miss more than six classes you will not pass the course. To each class you must bring the text(s) we are currently discussing (this includes material on reserve in the main library and on icon). If you are unable to attend a class session, you must get in touch with a classmate to make sure that you know what you have missed and what assignments are expected of you. No matter how valid your reasons for being absent (illness, religious holiday, family emergency), you are still responsible for knowing what has been assigned for each class period. (Keep in mind that the schedule on the syllabus is subject to change.) If at any point during the semester you find that you will be absent for an extended period of time, it is your responsibility to get in touch with me. You'll need to contact me immediately. Finally, a friendly but firm warning: class attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. If you come in late, it is your responsibility to let me know that you've arrived.

To Participate: You will be required to participate actively in both small and large group discussions. If you find yourself struggling with speaking in class, please come talk to me. Participation is a skill that can be developed, much as one develops skills in reading and writing. Good participation skills will serve you throughout your college careers. Please note that participation is not an activity that can be "made-up" with extra credit work. Note also that your participation will be figured into your final grade, over and above your attendance. Your active participation in classroom discussion will help me to gauge your understanding of the material we're covering and your willingness to engage with your classmates and the work. In addition to daily participation, you will be required to prepare questions for a series of round robin discussions. These questions should be typed and handed to me in class the day that the discussion is scheduled (see below).

To Read: In order to help shape class discussions, you must come to each class having carefully read the assigned material and ready to contribute your ideas to class discussion. (Come ready to make at least two points.) Most works do not open themselves up to interpretation immediately. Please give yourself time to digest the material and assume that you will have to read many of the works at least twice. As you read, think both about the issues that each work is addressing and the methods used by the authors to convey information.

To Write: A final 8-10 page paper will be due at the end of the semester. (The paper must be typed, proofread, and double spaced; left and right margins should be 1-inch.) A draft of the introduction of the paper will be workshopped with your classmates. We will spend at least one session discussing the elements of composition and argument prior to the paper's due date. In addition to the formal essay, I will be assigning a variety of informal papers, the style and scope of which will vary according to the specific assignment. Please keep extra copies of every paper you turn in and save everything that I hand back to you. If anything goes missing, I will simply ask for another copy. If you find yourself struggling with your writing skills, please make an appointment with the Rhetoric department's Writing Lab, located in rm. 110 of EPB. (The Writing Lab holds frequent writing workshops, and offers individual tutoring sessions.) Email tutoring is also available at www.uiowa.edu/~writingc

To Visit: The simplest way to reach me is right before class, by email, or during my office hours. I will return email messages within twenty-four hours. Please feel free to speak to me about your ideas or concerns regarding the course at any point during the semester. If you're concerned about a particular grade, or confused by class discussion, please come talk to me soon as soon as possible.

Suggestions for Participation and coursework:

In thinking about participation consider the following:

- a) You cannot participate if you do not attend the class regularly.
- b) Remember, participation means more than just attending class. While you may learn from listening to others, others will not be able to learn from you.
- c) You cannot participate well if you do not read the assignments.
- d) Participation does not mean being able to talk the most. It entails listening to others and adding interpretive and constructive ideas to the discussion.
- e) The best participation is the kind where each class member shoulders some of the responsibility for guaranteeing productive and enjoyable discussions. Talk to each other. Listen to each other. Learn from each other. Build on each other's ideas.

Course Preparation and Homework: Students will be expected to spend at least 6 hours per week preparing for classroom discussion and completing course assignments.

IV. Some Additional Notes on University of Iowa Academic Policies and Course Requirements

This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS). Class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. For additional information on university policies, please consult the CLAS bulletin. Information is also available online at www.clas.uiowa.edu.

Turning in Assignments/Papers: All assignments must be handed to me in class unless we have made other arrangements prior to the date the assignment is due (see late work policy below). If you need to get materials to me outside of class, please leave them for me in my mailbox, which is located in the English department office (310 EPB). Department office hours are M-F 9-12 and 1-5. Mailboxes will generally not be accessible outside those times. Please remember to staple together any loose sheets of paper. Both your name and my name should be clearly visible on the first page of any assignment you turn in. In addition to the hardcopy of your final paper, each student will be required to send me an electronic copy, using the university's anti-plagiarism program, Turn It In. Instructions will be distributed with the first paper assignment.

Late Work Policy: If, because of circumstances out of your control, you need to turn in a paper late, or are having difficulty completing the assignment, please notify me at least 2 class periods before the assignment is due so that we can make arrangements for its completion. Late papers which have not received my blessing will be lowered by one-half a letter grade (A to A-, B- to C+, etc) per class period. After a paper is two weeks late it will not be accepted.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a very serious offense. If you are unsure how to cite a source or about whether a particular kind of writing constitutes plagiarism, please consult with me. Plagiarized work (no matter how seemingly small the occurrence) may result in your failing the course; you may also be reported to the Dean for disciplinary action. For general information on plagiarism, please consult the CLAS website (www.clas.uiowa.edu).

Lateness: Please do not be late to class or leave early, unless you okay it with me in advance. Both habits are disruptive to me and to your classmates. Repeated lateness or early departures will be treated as if they were absences.

Cell phones: All phones must be turned off during class.

Disabilities: If you need accommodations for a disability (for instance, on seating arrangements, testing, or other class requirement), please contact me within the first two weeks of class so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please also contact Student Disability Services at 3100 Burge Hall (335-1462) to obtain a Student Academic Accommodation Request form (SAAR).

Dropping this course: Students wishing to drop this course after the official deadline must receive approval of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Collegiate Complaint Procedures: A student who has a complaint against any member of the college's teaching staff is responsible for following the procedures described in the Student Academic Handbook, which is available on the CLAS website. University policy requires that you speak with me about any disputes that arise involving this course. If the issues causing you concern have not, at that point, been resolved, you should then contact the Associate Chair of Undergraduate Programs (335-0454).

V. Grading Policy

Your final grade will reflect your competence on all the requirements, your individual efforts, your progress over the duration of the semester, and your work with other members of the class. While it may be that the well-rounded student who excels in participating, writing, and presenting information to the class will come away with the highest grade, I look very favorably upon attitude, effort, and improvement in evaluating each of you individually. I am most impressed, in fact, by a steady commitment to the course and improvement in your work. Of the "intangibles" that strongly influence my perception of your efforts I suggest the following:

Commitment: to the work, questions, and responsibilities of the class.

Interest: in the ideas, opinions and concerns of the class and your classmates.

Earnestness: in spending time in and out of class thinking seriously and in a determined way about the material that we cover.

A Rough Break Down on Grading Percentages

Round Robin Discussion Questions	10%
Quizzes	20%
Participation:	20%
Midterm	25%
Final Paper w/ intro.	25%

You are required to hand in all assignments. Failure to hand in an assignment will result in an "F" for the course and not simply an "F" in the percentage designated for that particular work.

Schedule: *Subject to changes*

* indicates readings are in Course Reader

** indicates readings are on e-reserve (accessible through ICON at www.icon.com) or available in Too Jewish: Challenging Traditional Identities, ed. Norman Kleeblatt (Rutgers U. Press, 1996). The book can be purchased on amazon.com, abebooks.com, or bookfinder.com

TBA = readings to be arranged

<u>Wk. 1</u> (8/26-28)	(T)	Introduction: policies and course content
	(TH)	Introduction: Shtetl Life, Immigration, and the Lower East Side

IMMIGRANT JEWS AND THE NEW WORLD

<u>Wk. 2</u> (9/2-4)	(T)	Roth's <u>Call It Sleep</u> pgs. 9-114 ("Prologue" through Book I, Ch. XIV) Questionnaire due in class
	(TH)	<u>Call It Sleep</u> , pgs. 114-221 (Book I, Ch. XV through Book III, Ch. III)

<u>Wk. 3</u> (9/9-11)	(T)	<u>Call It Sleep</u> , pgs. 221-328 (Book III, Ch. IV through Book IV, Ch. X)
	(TH)	<u>Call It Sleep</u> (Con't) Round Robin discussion—bring in two questions

<u>Wk. 4</u> (9/16-18)	(T)	<u>Call It Sleep</u> , pgs. 329-441 (Book IV, Ch. X through Ch. XXI)
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(TH) Yeziarska's Bread Givers, pgs. 1-88 (Book I, Ch. I thru V)

Wk. 5 (9/23-25) (T) Bread Givers, pgs. 89-151 (Book I, Ch. VI thru IX)
(TH) Bread Givers, pgs. 155-234 (Book II, Ch. X thru XVI)
Round Robin Discussion—bring in two questions

Wk. 6 (9-30-10/2) (T) TBA
(TH) Bread Givers, pgs. 237-297 (Book III, Ch. XVII-end) plus
Antin's "My Country" (excerpted from The Promised Land)*

REMEMBERING THE OLD WORLD

Wk. 7 (10/7-9) (T) **NO CLASS:** Yom Kippur
(TH) I. B. Singer's "Gimpel the Fool"
"Taibele and Her Demon"

Wk. 8 (10/14-16) (T) Singer's "The Slaughterer"
"The Dead Fiddler"
"A Crown of Feathers"
Round Robin Discussion—bring in two questions
(TH) Singer's "Grandfather and Grandson"
"The Last Demon"
"Alone"

JUDAISM AND JEWISHNESS IN TRANSITION

Wk. 9 (10/21-23) (T) **Midterm Exam**
(TH) Ozick's "Envy; or, Yiddish in America"*
"The Pagan Rabbi"

Wk. 10 (10/28-30) (T) Malamud's "The Magic Barrel"*
"The Silver Crown"*
(TH) Malamud's "The Last Mohican"*
"Jewbird"*

Wk. 11 (11/4-6) (T) Englander's "The Tumblers" and "The Twenty -Seventh Man"
(from For the Relief of Unbearable Urges)*
(TH) "The Tumblers" and "The Twenty -Seventh Man" (con't.)
plus Englander's "The Wig"*

JEWES AND POPULAR CULTURE, or MOVING INTO THE MAINSTREAM: THE BIRTH OF THE "NEW" JEW

Wk. 12 (11/11-13) (T) Allen's "The Whore of Mensa"*
"No Kaddish for Weinstein"*
(TH) **No Class**

Wk. 13 (11/18-20) (T) Prell's "Why Jewish Princesses Don't Sweat" (from Kleeblatt's
Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities)**
Lieberman's "Jewish Barbie" (from Kleeblatt)**
(TH) Berger's "The Mouse that Never Roars: Jewish
Masculinity on American Television"***
Quiz #1 (covers Prell and Lieberman)

Wk. 14 (11/25-27) (T-TH) No class; **Thanksgiving Break**

Wk. 15 (12/2-4) (T) Stratton's "Seinfeld is a Jewish Sitcom, Isn't It?*"**
(also available on icon)
Quiz #2 (covers Berger & Stratton)
(TH) Stratton (con't) & in class writing exercises

Wk. 16 (12/9-11)

(T) Peer editing; **2 copies of introduction due IN CLASS**
(at least 1 full pg. w/ claim); **NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED**

(TH) TBA; **Final paper due**

Jewish-American Literature
Trubowitz
Fall 2008

I have read the syllabus and understand the course requirements:

Signature: _____

Name (Printed): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: * _____

Major (or major area of interest if not yet declared): _____

Year of Study: _____

Date: _____

*It is your responsibility to notify me if your email address or phone number change during the course of the semester.

What other courses are you now taking? What is the focus of each class?

What sort of material do you most enjoy reading and/or writing?

Tell me a little about yourself (use otherside of the page if you need more space):