This course surveys a specific ethnic literary tradition: Judaic literature from the Bible to modern literature. After discussing the meaning of “ethnicity,” and its expression in Jewish literary tradition, we will turn to Judaic literature topics such as Jewish imagination and its views of Mimesis, traditional methods of Jewish interpretations and their characteristic rhetorical means, devices such as, disguise, irony, allusion, parable and allegory, mysticism and Hasidism. Modern Hebrew authors raise issues of survival ranging from holocaust experiences to contemporary Israeli history and politics. Selections by the classic Yiddish writers, who focus on the use of social satire and literary parody, present additional historic background of Jewish suffering and struggle to uphold their cultural identity. Their heritage will be traced also in fiction by American Jewish writers. Ashkenazi legacy will be matched with the Sephardic tradition represented by authors from around the world. We conclude with contemporary Israeli fiction. There will be screenings of films that focus on various aspects of Jewish Diasporas.

**Introduction: What is Jewish Imagination?**

**W 20 January**  
Introduction/Methods:  
What makes “Judaic literature” an ethnic literary tradition?  
Reading: Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” (in class Handout)

**M 25 January**  
S.Y. Agnon, “Agunot” (in class Handout)

**W 1 February**  
S.Y. Agnon, “A Tale of a Scribe” (Reserve)*

**M 3 February**  
S.Y. Agnon, “A Tale of a Scribe” (Reserve)*

**M 8 February**  
F. Kafka, “The Penal Colony” (Reserve)*

**W 10 February**  
Agnon and Kafka conclusion. *Paper #1 due*

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* Please print out the reserved material (if e-copy is available) or photocopy the text on your own (if no e-copy is available) and bring the text under discussion to class.
A. Bible: The Book of Genesis

M 15 February  Genesis 1-11: From the Creation to the Tower of Babel
W 17 February  Genesis 12-22: Abraham and Isaac
   Additional Reading: E. Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis* (Reserve)*
M 22 February  Genesis 27-37: Jacob and Joseph
W 24 February  Genesis 38-50: Joseph and Pharaoh; *Paper #2 due*

B. Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature (Ashkenazi Tradition)

M 1 March  Mendele Mocher Sforim [S. Y. Abramovitsh], “Shem and Japheth on the Train”
W 3 March  I. L. Perez, “Bontsha the Silent”
M 8 March  H. N. Bialik, “The Short Friday”
W 10 March  I. Bashevis Singer, “Gimpel the Fool”
M 14 March  Spring Break
W 21 March  Spring Break

C. American Jewish Fiction

W M 22 March  Anzia Yezierska, “How I Found America”

W 24 March  Screen clips from *Hester Street*
M 29 March  Cynthia Ozick, “Envy; Or, Yiddish in America”
W 31 March  Passover, no class.

D. Sephardic Fiction

M 5 April  Primo Levi, "Story of a Coin"

W 7 April  Film: The Story of Chaim Rumkowski and the Jews of Ghetto Lodz

   *Paper #3 due*
E. Contemporary Israeli Fiction

W 14 April Amalia Kahana-Carmon, “Bridal Veil”
M 19 April “Bridal” Veil (continued).
W 21 April Savion Librecht, "A Day at the park with Nannies"
M 26 April Librecht (continued).
W 28 April Final examination; no exceptions, please

Texts:

I. Copy Centers (on Marshal): A Course Packet
Title: Judaic Literature; Course Number: JPS/LIT/REL 231 ETS 230

II. Syracuse University bookstore

III. Books on Reserve:

Goals: While learning about Judaic literature and ethnic literary traditions, students should develop skills such as close reading, critical thinking, scholarly writing, and public speaking.

Papers should be 3-page (double-spaced) close analyses, focusing on literary aspects such as narrative techniques or figurative language. Because this is a literature class, each paper will be revised on the basis of comments from the instructors. The revision is in most cases due one week after the marked paper has been returned to the student. Be sure to reread the comments on your previous paper before you write the next one.

Requirements and Grading: Three three-page papers with revisions (45% of grade); careful preparation of readings, regular attendance, and class participation (20% of grade); quizzes and final examination (35% of grade).

Quizzes: To ensure diligent preparation of the reading assignments by all students, there will be random quizzes. Come to class even if you haven’t read the assignment
as carefully as you would like, because an absence counts as a “0” (even lower than the grade for turning in a blank sheet of paper with your name on it).

**Final Examination:** The final includes five sections that include 1) the geography of Eastern Europe and Israel; 2) the definitions of literary terms; 3) major authors, characters, and other elements in the stories read in this course; 4) identification and interpretations of passages from the stories; and 5) one short analytical essay.

**Extra Credit:** There will be several opportunities for you to earn extra credit: (1) By undertaking difficult reading assignment: G. Hartman’s essay "On Jewish Imagination" (on Reserve) (2) By attending relevant public lectures (info. will be given in class). 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.

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