

Dr. Erella Brown ([ebrownso@syr.edu](mailto:ebrownso@syr.edu))  
Office Hour: Wednesday 10:00-11:30  
And/or by appointment  
Office Location: HBC 301A (3-2047)

JSP/LIT/REL 231  
Spring 2015 TU/TH 9:30-10:50

## *Judaic Literature* (*Ethnic Literary Traditions*)

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?**

Tu 13 January      Introduction/Methods:  
What makes “Judaic literature” an ethnic literary tradition?  
Reading: Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” (in class Handout)

Th 15 January      S.Y. Agnon, “Agunot” (in class Handout)

Tu 20 January      S.Y. Agnon, “A Tale of a Scribe” (Reserve)\*  
Th 22 January      ATale (continued); “The Penal Colony”

Tu 27 January      F. Kafka, “The Penal Colony” (continued)  
Th 29 January      Hoffman’s article on Agnon and kafak.

**Paper No 1: “Agnon & Kafka” due February 21**

### **A. Bible: The Book of Genesis**

- Tu 3 February Genesis 1-11: From the Creation to the Tower of Babel  
Creation and Flood myths
- Th 5 February Genesis 12-22: Abraham and Isaac  
Additional Reading: E. Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis*
- Tu 10 February Robert Alter, Type Scenes
- Th 12 February Genesis 27-37: Jacob's Family; Article by Ilan Pardes.
- Tu 17 February Genesis 38-50: Joseph and Pharaoh; Article by Meir Sternberg

### **B. Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature (Ashkenazi Tradition)**

- Th 19 February Mendele Mocher Sforim [S. Y. Abramovitch], "Shem and Japheth on the Train"
- Tu 24 February I. L. Perez, "Bontsha the Silent"
- Th 26 February I. Bashevis Singer, "Gimpel the Fool"
- Tu 3 March Gimpel & Bontsha, Continued
- Th 6 March Yiddish Literature Conclusions
- Tu 10 March **SPRING BREAK**

### **Paper No II: "Genesis" due after break March 21**

### **C. American Jewish Fiction**

- Tu 17 March Anzia Yeziarska, "How I Found America"
- Th 19 March Cynthia Ozick, "Envy; Or, Yiddish in America"
- Tu 24 March Cynthia Ozick, Continued
- Th 26 March Jewish American Literature --Conclusions

### **D. Witnessing Soah and Judaic Poetics**

Tu 31 March Primo Levi, "Story of a Coin"

Th 2 April Film: The Story of Chaim Rumkowski and the Jews of Ghetto Lodz

Tu 7 April Primo Levi conclusions  
 Th 9 April Savion Librecht, "A Day at the park with Nannies"  
 Tu 14 April Librecht Continued  
 Th 16 April Shoa Conclusions  
 Tu 21 April Review for Final

**Paper No 3: Shoa, due April 18**

Th 23 April Review for Final  
 M 28 April **Final Examination**

**Texts:**

**I. Syracuse University bookstore**

*Genesis*. Trans. and commentary by Robert Alter. New York: Norton, 1997.

**II. Books on Reserve:**

1. *Genesis*. Trans. and commentary by Robert Alter. New York: Norton, 1997.

**III.** All other material available on Blackboard.

**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!

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability, accommodations will be made in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. For more information regarding the proper procedure to follow, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 315-443-1371.

**Religious Observance:**

SU's religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp\\_ben/religious\\_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm). Students who observe a religious holyday are allowed to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance. Please notify me before the end of the second week of classes of such event.