

DR. Erella Brown ([ebrownso@syr.edu](mailto:ebrownso@syr.edu))  
Office Hour: MW. 3:00-3:45,

JSP/LIT/REL 231ETS230

MW 3:45-5:05  
Spring 2009

*Judaic Literature*  
(*Ethnic Literary Traditions*)

This course surveys a specific ethnic literary tradition: Judaic literature from the Bible to modern short stories. After discussing the meaning of “ethnicity,” we will turn to Judaic literature and topics such as interpretation, disguise, rhetoric, irony, allegory, and Hasidism. Modern Hebrew authors raise issues relating to contemporary Israeli history and politics; selections by the classic Yiddish writers, who focus on the use of social satire and literary parody, will be matched with the Sephardic tradition represented by authors from around the world. We conclude with fiction by American Jewish writers. There will be screenings of films that focus on the ethnic aspects of Jewish Diasporas.

**Introduction**

M 12 January Introduction/Methods. What is an “ethnic literary tradition”? What is the relationship between race and ethnicity? Which are the main ethnicities in European and American culture? What makes “Judaic literature” an ethnic literary tradition? Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” (in class Handout)

W 14 January S.Y. Agnon, “Agunot” (in class Handout)

M 19 January Martin Luther King Jr. Day—no class

W 21 January S.Y. Agnon, “A Tale of a Scribe” (Reserve)\*

M 26 January F. Kafka, “The Penal Colony” (Reserve)

W 28 January Agnon and Kafka (continued)

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\* Please printout 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 2 February Genesis 1-11: From the Creation to the Tower of Babel  
 W 4 February Genesis 12-22: Abraham and Isaac  
 M 9 February Genesis 27-37: Jacob and Joseph  
 W 11 February Genesis 38-50: Joseph and Pharaoh; *Paper #1 due*

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

- M 16 February Mendele Mocher Sforim [S. Y. Abramovitsh], "Shem and Japheth on the Train" (**MHL**)  
 W 18 February I. L. Perez, "Bontsha the Silent" (**TYS**)  
 M 23 February H.N. Bialik, "The Short Friday"  
 W 25 February I. Bashevis Singer, "Gimpel the Fool" (**TYS**)  
 M 2 March Film excerpts and discussion: *Tevye*  
 W 4 March *Tevye* continued  
 M 9 March Spring Break  
 W 11 March Spring Break

### C. Modern Hebrew Literature: Sephardic Fiction

- M 16 March Ruth Knafo Setton, "Ten Ways to Recognize a Sephardic 'Jew-ess'" (**MSL**)  
*Paper #2 due*  
 W 18 March Knafo Setton (continued)  
 M 23 March Edmond Jabes, From *The Book of Questions* (**MSL**)  
 W 25 March Film: Sami Michael, *Forget Baghdad* (DVD12044)  
 M 30 March Sami Michael (continued).

### D. Contemporary Israeli Fiction

- W 1 April Amalia Kahana-Carmon, "Bridal Veil" (**HSS**)  
 M 6 April "Bridal" Veil continued  
 W 8 April A.B. Yehoshua, from *Mr. Mani* (**MSL**)  
 M 13 April *Mr. Mani* (continued)

## D. American Jewish Fiction

W	15 April	Anzia Yeziarska, "How I Found America" (AJF)
M	20 April	Screen clips from <i>Hester Street</i>
W	22 April	Cynthia Ozick, "Envy; Or, Yiddish in America" (AJF);
M	27 April	Ozick (continued) <i>Paper #3 due</i>

Final examination; *no exceptions, please*

### Texts:

- A. *Genesis*. Trans. and commentary by Robert Alter. (New York: Norton, 1997).
- B. *Modern Hebrew Literature (MHL)*. Ed. Robert Alter. (West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, 1975).
- C. *Modern Sephardic Literature (MSL)*, ed. Ilan Stavans (New York, Schocken Books, 2005).
- D. *American Jewish Fiction: A Century of Stories (AJF)*. Ed. Gerald Shapiro. (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska Press, 1998).
- E. *Treasury of Yiddish Stories (TYS)*, ed. Irving Howe (New York, Schocken Books, 1977).
- F. *The Oxford Book of Hebrew Short Stories (HSS)*, ed. Glenda Abramson (Oxford University Press, 1996).

**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* (posted on Blackboard) (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!