

Allegory and Parody

Under the star of Franz Kafka, our readings emphasize the role of figurative language in allegorical narratives, quasi-allegorical texts, hasidic tales, and parodies. Short stories by Kafka, S. Y. Agnon, Aharon Appelfeld, and Isaac Babel raise questions surrounding symbols, tropes, allegory, and representation. Biblical and midrashic narratives provide a background in religious parable and *mashal*. Study of stories told by Nahman of Bratslav and about the Baal Shem Tov prepares us for reading anti-hasidic satires and neo-hasidic parodies by Joseph Perl and I. L. Peretz. Pertinent literary criticism includes Walter Benjamin's and Robert Alter's essays on Kafka, and especially Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody, which defines the term in a broad, post-modern sense. In a Nietzschean tradition, Jacques Derrida's essays illustrate the centrality of metaphor in modern texts, while Paul De Man's rhetorical studies show that allegory, which declined in the nineteenth century, has returned to prominence.

Introduction: Post-modern Parody and the Return to Allegory.

Read **Linda Hutcheon**, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, chapters 1-2 ([Hutcheon.pdf](#)).

I. Franz Kafka. A. Published in his Lifetime: "Before the Law," together with a longer excerpt from chapter 9 of *The Trial* ([Kafka.pdf](#)), and "An Imperial Message"; "A Country Doctor" (220), "An Old Manuscript" (415), "Jackals and Arabs" (407), "The Next Village" (404), "The Cares of a Family Man" (427); "A Report to an Academy" (250) and "A Report to an Academy: Two Fragments" (259); "A Hunger Artist" (268) and "Josephine the Singer" (360).

Robert Alter: "Kafka as Kabbalist," in *Salmagundi* ([Alter.pdf](#))

B. Posthumously Published: "On Parables" (457) and "The Problem of Our Laws" (437); "The Great Wall of China" (235) and "The News of the Building of the Wall: A Fragment" (248); "The Hunter Gracchus" (226) and "The Hunter Gracchus: A Fragment" (231); "The City Coat of Arms" (433) and "Give It Up!" (456). Also, available: "The Tower/Pit of Babel," "Abraham," "Mount Sinai," "The Building of the Temple," and "The Animal in the Synagogue" ([Kafka1.pdf](#))

Walter Benjamin: "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death" and "Some Reflections on Kafka" ([Benjamin.pdf](#))

II. S. Y. Agnon: "Fable of the Goat," "The Tale of the Scribe," "Agunot," "Two Pairs," and "The Lady and the Peddler," and other selections; "Forevermore" ([Agnon.pdf](#))

Aharon Appelfeld: "Badenheim 1939."

Theoretical Interlude on Rhetoric

Friedrich Nietzsche: "On Truth and Lie" ([Nietzsche.pdf](#)) and **Paul de Man:** *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, chapters 5-6 ([Deman.pdf](#)); Another recommended theoretical text: **Jacques Derrida:** "White Mythology" ([Derrida.pdf](#))

III. Isaac Babel: "Old Shloyme," "Shabbes Nakhamu," "The Story of My Dovecot," "First Love," "Guy de Maupassant," "Gedali," "My First Goose," "The Rebbe," "Zamosc," "The Rebbe's Son," "The King," and "How It was Done in Odessa."

IV. Bible: Narratives and Signs (e.g., Gen. 1-3, 11, 22, 28, 37-50; 2 Samuel 12).

Midrash—Allegories and Parables:

Genesis Rabbah 1, 3:1, 38, 55, 89:8 ([Midrash.pdf](#))

“The Tale of the Jerusalemite” ([Stern.pdf](#))

V. Hasidic Stories: Nahman, *the Tales*, esp. I-VI, XII, XIII;

“The ‘Dream-Talks’ of Nahman of Bratslav ([Stern2.pdf](#))

In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, selections

VI. Joseph Perl: *Revealer of Secrets*

Letters and Notes #1 - 31 ([Perl.pdf](#))

Letters and Notes #64 - 70 and #76 - 81 ([Perl2.pdf](#))

Letters and Notes #90 - 93, #101, #135 - 136, #142, & #150 - 151 ([Perl3.pdf](#))

VII. I. L. Peretz: “The Shtrayml,” “Kabbalists,” “Teachings of the Hasidim,” “The Rebbe’s Pipe,” “If Not Higher,” and “Between Two Peaks.”

VIII. Your Turn: Each student will select one additional work—such as a New Testament parable or a twentieth-century short story—for independent, in-depth research. Toward the end of the semester, graduate students (and undergraduates who wish to do so) will assign the text as a class reading and give an oral presentation on it.

Texts:

Agnon, S. Y. *A Book That Was Lost and Other Stories*. Ed. Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman. New York: Schocken, 1995.

Appelfeld, Aharon. *Badenheim 1939*. Trans. Betsy Rosenberg. Ed. Ken Frieden [The B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies, New Series, Lecture 3]

Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001.

Babel, Isaac. *Collected Stories*. Trans. David McDuff. New York: Penguin, 1994. [Also issued more recently under the title *Red Cavalry and Other Stories*.]

Classic Yiddish Stories of Stories of S. Y. Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz. Ed. Ken Frieden. Trans. Ken Frieden, Ted Gorelick, and Michael Wex. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004.

Kafka, Franz. *The Complete Stories*. Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

[For a clearer picture of the stories and volumes published by Kafka during his lifetime, compare *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir. New York: Schocken, 1948.]

Nahman of Bratslav. *The Tales*. Trans. Arnold Band. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

Recommended (some of these are out of print or excerpted in the PDFs indicated above):

Alter, Robert. *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

- Brod, Max. *Franz Kafka: A Biography*. Trans. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston. New York: Schocken, 1960.
- Canetti, Elias. *Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*. Trans. Christopher Middleton. New York: Schocken, 1974.
- De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Derrida, Jacques. "White Mythology." In *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Midrash and Literature*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Midrash Rabbah*. Ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon. 3rd ed. Volume 1: *Genesis*. Trans. H. Freedman. New York: Soncino, 1983.
- Perl, Joseph. *Revealer of Secrets*. Trans. Dov Taylor. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997.
- Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*. Ed. David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990.

Requirements:

Undergraduates: six short essays (2 pages, double-spaced) involving careful, empirical analysis of the readings; a longer paper (4 to 6 pages) on a broader topic, arrived at in consultation with the instructor; regular attendance.

Graduate students: eight short essays (2 pages, double-spaced) involving careful, empirical analysis of the readings; a longer paper (6 to 10 pages) on a broader topic, arrived at in consultation with the instructor; oral presentation on a short parable, allegory, parody, or other text; regular attendance.

Plagiarism:

Acknowledge your sources! Don't even think of taking anything off the web (or from a book or another student's paper) without using quotation marks and a reference to the site or source. It's unethical, as easy for professors to catch as it is for students to steal, and the consequence is always a failing grade.

Syllabus Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, [Office of Disability Services](http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/) <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>