

JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Fall 2013

Prof. David G. Roskies

LIT 5513x **From Immigrant to Post-Holocaust Writings:**
American Jewish Literature
Tues. 5:40-7:30, Kripke Tower, 406

Course Description: The canonical writers of American-Jewish fiction—from Abraham Cahan to Philip Roth and from Anzia Yeziarska to Cynthia Ozick—have created a self-defined and self-generating body of writing by and for American Jews in the English language. How did this come about? How did a literature designed to explain an ethnic minority to the rest of America become an essential vehicle of American self-understanding? How did the Jewish literary imagination help define what's funny and what isn't? How did a people trying to escape from history end up taking history by the horns?

Course Content: Taking its cue from exemplary works of American-Jewish fiction, this course will focus upon the family romance--the complex relations of husbands and wives, children and parents, children and grandparents, sibling relations--from the economic, religious and social upheaval wrought by the mass immigration to the traumatic aftermath of the Holocaust. Chronologically, the course covers a century of American-Jewish life and letters. Thematically, it rarely strays from the kitchen and parlor room.

Expectations & Assessment:

Weekly Online Discussion

Soon after the conclusion of class, 1-2 questions or discussion topics will be posted on Blackboard to the online forum. Questions will focus on either the expansion of an idea presented in class or an aspect of a text for which there wasn't sufficient time to fully explore. From Tuesday evening through Friday morning each student is expected to participate with at least one comment on the online forum. The goal is allow students to collectively grapple with texts and concepts introduced in class, demonstrating their comprehension of the text and lecture while also encouraging critical engagement with class material.

The online forum will be monitored by the course TA, Mr. **Saul Zaritt** and the course instructor. Ongoing participation will count for **10% of the final grade**.

For the online forum to work, it is important that you actively monitor your JTS e-mail account.

The final grade will be based on two writing assignments, as follows:

One midterm paper (5-6 pages) due October 31st. Worth 25% of the final grade.

The midterm paper will focus on any one of the following aspects of *Call It Sleep*:

- *as a family romance
- *the child as metonymic immigrant
- *cityscape and mindscape or, the self and the city
- *the theme of light and darkness
- *Reb Yidl and the secular city
- *portrait of the artist as a young man
- *sex and the city
- *multilingualism & the missing mother tongue

Final take home exam. A take home exam will be handed out on November 26th. Consisting of five essay questions, the student will answer any two, each answer 5-6 pages in length. The exam is due on. Tuesday December 17th. Worth 65% of final grade.

These book-length works available for purchase from Book Culture 536 W 112th Street:

- Saul Bellow, *Herzog*
- Abraham Cahan, *Yekl and The imported bridegroom and other stories of the New York ghetto*
- Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*
- Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*
- Philip Roth, *The Counterlife*
- Art Spiegelman, *A Survivor's Tale, II: And Here My Troubles Began*
- Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*

This book may be purchased online:

Jewish-American Stories (A Mentor book; ME 1546), edited by Irving Howe [henceforth: JAS]

All other required texts will be distributed in class. Additional required readings are available on Blackboard (= BB).

Disability Policy: The JTS policy on disabilities may be found at [www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Students with Disabilities.xml](http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Students_with_Disabilities.xml)

Academic Integrity Statement: Students in this class are expected to maintain academic integrity; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. JTS Student Disciplinary Procedures can be found at [http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Student Disciplinary Procedures .xml](http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Student_Disciplinary_Procedures.xml)

Office Hours: Unterberg 506, ext. 8914; Tuesdays 10:00-12:00. The best way to get in touch with me is via e-mail: daroskies@jtsa.edu.

For technical matters, please contact Mr. Saul Zaritt sazaritt@jtsa.edu

- Sept. 10 **Reading Jewish: The Making of American-Jewish Literature**
- Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael Kramer, "Introduction" *Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature* (1-11) - BB.
- Emma Lazarus – 1492 (1883)
Henry Roth, "The Surveyor (1966)" - JAS
- Rec: "Introduction" to *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology* (1-16)

Immigration: The Melting Pot?

- Sept. 17 **Stories of the New York Ghetto**
- Abraham Cahan – *Yekl* (1896), *The Imported Bridegroom* (1898)
- Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton, 2006), chap. 1. BB.
- Sept. 24 **Anzia Yezierska - *Bread Givers* (1925)**
- Priscilla Wald, "Of Crucibles and Grandfathers: the East European Immigrants," CC (50-67). BB
- Janet Handler Burstein, "Translating Immigrant Women: Writing the Manifold Self," in *Writing Mothers, Writing Daughters* (University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 19-33. BB.

Ethnicity and Modernism

- Oct. 1 **Henry Roth - *Call it Sleep* (1934) – 1st half**
- Henry Roth, "On Being Blocked & Other Literary Matters: An Interview," *Commentary* (August 1977). BB.
- Marshall Berman, "'A Little Child Shall Lead Them': The Jewish Family Romance from Samuel to *Call It Sleep*," *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*," ed. Linda Nochlin & Tamar Garb (Thames & Hudson, 1991), chap. 14. BB
- Oct. 8 **Henry Roth - *Call it Sleep* (1934) – 2nd half**
- Ruth Wisse, "The Classic of Disinheritance" in *New Essays on Call It Sleep*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Cambridge UP, 1996), chap. 4. BB.
- Hana Wirth-Nesher, "Christ, it's a kid!—*Chad Godya*," in *Call It English*, chap. 4. BB.

Oct 15 **Delmore Schwartz and the Voice of Alienation**

Delmore Schwartz, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" – JAS, America!
America! – JAS
Isaac Rosenfeld – The Situation of the Jewish Writer – BB
[This class will be taught by Saul Zaritt.]

Postwar America

Oct. 22 **The "Jewish" Short Story**

Bernard Malamud – The Magic Barrel (1958) – JAS; "The Last Mohican"*
Philip Roth – Eli, the Fanatic, Defender of the Faith - JAS
Grace Paley - "The Loudest Voice" (1959) – JAS

Alan Cooper, Philip Roth and the Jews (SUNY, 1996), chaps. 1-2. BB.

Oct. 29 **World of Our Mothers and Fathers**

Tillie Olsen - "Tell Me a Riddle" (1961)- JAS
Cynthia Ozick – Envy, or Yiddish in America (1966) JAS
Adrienne Rich - "Split at the Root" (1982). BB.

Oct. 31	Midterm paper due
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Nov 5	List College Elections [No Classes]
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Nov. 12 **Saul Bellow - *Herzog* (1964)**

Gabriel Josipovici, "Bellow and *Herzog*," The Viking Critical Library
Edition of *Herzog*, ed. Irving Howe (New York, 1976), pp. 401-15. BB.

Nov. 19 **Counterlives: Imagining/Representing the Holocaust**

Art Spiegelman – *Maus: A Survivor's Tale, II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991)

Emily Budick, "The Holocaust in the Jewish American Literary
Imagination," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American
Literature*. BB.

Nov. 26 **Counterlives: Imagining/Representing Israel**

Philip Roth - *The Counterlife* (1987)

Eugene Goodheart, "Writing and the Unmaking of the Self,"
Contemporary Literature 29 (1988): 438-53. BB.

Dec. 3 **American Jewish Humor**

Woody Allen – No Kaddish for Weinstein - JAS
Philip Roth, excerpt from *Portnoy's Complaint* (120-142)
<http://www.youtube.com/user/OldJewsTellingJokes>

Ruth R. Wisse, *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor*. Princeton UP 2013, 117-42. BB.

Additional Readings (On Reserve)

**The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American literature* / edited by Hana Wirth-Nesher, Michael P. Kramer. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2003. PS153.J4 C34 2003

**Jewish American literature: a Norton anthology* / [compiled and edited by] Jules Chametzky [et al.]. PS508.J4J492 2000

Janet Handler Burstein. Writing mothers, writing daughters tracing the maternal in stories by American Jewish women. Urbana : University of Illinois Press, c1996. PS153.J4 B87 1996

Cahan, Abraham, 1860-1951. Yekl and The imported bridegroom : and other stories of the New York ghetto. With a new introd. by Bernard G. Richards. New York : Dover Publications. 1970. PS3505.A35 Y3 1970.

Hutchins Hapgood. The spirit of the ghetto. Edited by Moses Rischin. Cambridge : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967. F128.9.J5 H2 1967

Irving Howe, ed. Jewish-American stories. New York : New American Library, c1977. PS647.J4 J4.

Alan Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance: The Holocaust, Multilingualism, and the Problem of English*. University of Nebraska, 2005.

Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Univ. of Minnesota, 2000). D804.348 .R68 2000

Hana Wirth-Nesher. *Call it English : the languages of Jewish American literature* / Princeton : Princeton University Press, c2006. PS153.J4 W57 2006

_____, ed. *New essays on Call it sleep*. Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1996. PS3535.O84 C3 W5 1996

Ruth R. Wisse, *No Joke No Joke: Making Jewish Humor*. Princeton UP 2013, PN6149.J4 W49 2013.

EMMA LAZARUS

1849–1887

Most famous for *The New Colossus*, her sonnet welcoming the hordes of immigrants to America, Emma Lazarus was a American-born Jew of colonial Sephardic and German-Jewish stock. Part of a literary circle that included Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, Emily Dickinson's proctor, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and having written and translated poetry from girlhood, Lazarus evolved into a Jewish American poet who combined the contradictory forces of Jewish peoplehood and Puritan America, of Hebraism and Hellenism, to create a highly cultured expression of Jewish American identity for the new masses.

Born on July 22, 1849, the fourth of the seven children of Esther Nathan Lazarus and Moses Lazarus, a sugar merchant and descendant of the original Sephardic settlers in New Netherland, Emma Lazarus enjoyed the luxury of spending winters in New York City and summers in Newport, Rhode Island. Her parents hired private tutors, who taught the Lazarus children literature, music, and languages (French, German, and Italian). And Emma and her sisters were members of Julia Ward Beecher's Town and Country Club, where the members discussed science and literature. Her family belonged to Shearith Israel, a Sephardic congregation in New York City.

Lazarus's ambitions as a writer began when she was young. In 1866, when Lazarus was seventeen, her father privately printed her first book, *Poems and Translations: Written between the Ages of Fourteen and Sixteen*. Soon afterward, Lazarus met Ralph Waldo Emerson, and they began a correspondence as pupil and mentor that lasted until 1882, when Emerson died.

Lazarus's second book, *Admetus and Other Poems*, appeared in 1871 and her novel, *Alide: An Episode of Goethe's Life*, in 1874. She published a verse drama, *The Spagnoletto*, in 1876. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, she published poems, essays, letters, and a short story in popular American magazines and newspapers such as *Scribner's*, *Lippincott's*, the *Century*, and the *New York Times*.

1492

Thou two-faced year,¹ Mother of Change and Fate,
Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword,²
The children of the prophets of the Lord,
Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
5 Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state,
The West refused them, and the East abhorred.
No anchorage the known world could afford,

Close-locked was every port, barred every gate.
Then smiling, thou unveil'dst, O two-faced year,
10 A virgin world³ where doors of sunset part,
Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!"⁴
There falls each ancient barrier that the art
Of race or creed or rank devised, to rear
Grim bulwarked hatred between heart and heart!"

1883

1. In 1492, the "two-faced year," the Jews were expelled from Spain while Columbus was discovering America. "Two-faced" also refers to Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and endings, who is represented in art as having two faces that look in opposite directions, symbolizing his knowledge of the past and the future.
2. A reference to the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3.24).

3. America.

4. This invitation anticipates *The New Colossus*, lines 10–14.

1889