

University of Nebraska at Omaha
Department of English
Fall 2014
Assaf Gavron

Office: ASH 200D
Phone: 402-554-3175
E-Mail: gavron@gmail.com
Office Hours: Tuesday 16:30-17:30
or by appointment

ENGL 2000-009: Contemporary Jewish-American Fiction **The current generation of Jewish authors in America**

Wednesday, 4:00-6:40 PM

Classroom: Center for Jewish Life at the Jewish Community Center, 333 S 132nd St.

Course Description

Jewish authors have been hugely important in American literature during the 20th century, whether they dealt in their fiction with their Jewishness, like Isaac Bashevis-Singer, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, or whether their Jewishness did not play a major role in their writing, like J.D. Salinger, Norman Mailer or Joseph Heller.

An exciting and fresh generation of young Jewish writers has sprung up in recent years in America. Who are those new Jewish-American writers for the 21st century? Do they write about Jewishness and their identity? How do they do that, and is it different than the way their predecessors did it? Can we learn from their fiction about American society, about being a minority in this society, about the changing political landscape in which they operate – and specifically, what is these young Jewish-American writers' relationship with Israel? Also, how do they compare to contemporary European-Jewish writers? Finally, how do contemporary Israeli writers deal with America and American Jews?

Class Goals

By the end of this class, students are expected to:

- Acquire an understanding of Jewish-American writers and writing, throughout the 20th century, with an emphasis on contemporary Jewish writers.
- Evaluate the issues those writers are dealing with in their fiction, and how they explore their Jewishness in current US.
- Develop and enhance writing and critical skills through assignments and essays.

Required Texts

Reading list available on reserve in the library and excerpts of required readings will be available electronically. No need to purchase any books. Texts will include short stories or chapters from novels, in most cases translated from Hebrew into English. Film adaptations of relevant books will be screened and discussed.

Grade Scale

A+	100+	B+	88-90	C+	78-80	D+	68-70
A	95-100	B	84-87	C	74-77	D	64-67
A-	91-94	B-	81-83	C-	71-73	F	> 64

Academic Integrity

All students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha are expected to conduct their academic affairs in an honest, forthright and responsible manner. To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, or to cheat on an examination, corrupts the essential process by which knowledge is advanced. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to: plagiarism (using the ideas, words, or works of another person without crediting the source), cheating, assisting others in the act of cheating, false use or receipt of academic research materials, submitting the work of another as one's own, and altering academic records.

Special Needs

If you have any special needs (i.e. learning disability, visual or hearing impairment, or medical condition) that you believe I need to be aware of, please contact me after class or at my office so that I may help in arranging accommodations.

Classroom Etiquette

Please show respect to this class and your fellow students by turning off or silencing cell phones and pagers during class time.

All of you are expected to arrive in class on time and to avoid leaving the class during lectures, discussions, and other activities. Coming into or leaving the class while it is in session is very disruptive and signifies disrespect to your instructors and fellow students. If you are more than 10 minutes late, please do not enter the classroom. If you need to leave ahead of time, make sure to notify me before the beginning of class and sit as close as possible to the door. Late arrival and early departure may result in loss of participation credit points. Disruptive behavior may also result in deduction of points from your credit.

Class Format, Requirements and Grade Distribution

General requirements:

- ◆ Attend faithfully
- ◆ Come to class having read assigned material
- ◆ Be prepared to talk about the texts
(Please let me know if you are having problems or need help)

Grading

The grade evaluation will be based on the following:

- 1) Reading of assignments by the date on which they are to be discussed. We will spend time discussing the texts. This will be fruitful only if you arrive at class having read the assigned works, thought about them, and are ready to contribute to class discussions.
Attendance and class participation is worth 20% of your grade.
- 2) Pending on number of students, one-page responses to the readings will be required weekly, alternating between students.
This will be worth 20% of your grade.
- 3) An extended 6-7 page paper on a topic you choose (and is approved) will be required once throughout the semester, and **will be worth 30% of your grade.**
- 4) A term paper, consisting of a 6-7 page book review on one of the books or writers discussed, emphasizing a topic of your choice (that is approved), **will be worth 30% of your grade.** The students will present their papers to the class in the last class, December 10th.

Important dates to remember:

- **October 8** Due date to notify me about your extended paper topic
- **October 22** Deadline for submission of extended paper electronically
- **November 19** Due date to notify me about your term paper topic
- **December 10** Deadline for submission of term paper electronically

Tentative Schedule of Classes

Week One **Introduction, previous generation 1 – immigrants**

Wednesday, 8/27/14:

Introduction to the class: the writers and writings and films we will encounter, the questions we will ask. Immigration and Jewish immigration to the US.

Isaac Bashevis Singer – The Cafeteria in "The Collected Stories"

Bernard Malamud – The Jewbird, in "The stories of Bernalrd Malamud"

Week Two **Previous generation 2 - stereotypes**

Wednesday, 9/3/14:

Jewish stereotypes, Jewish relations with gentiles, Jewish life in a North American suburb in the 1930s and 1940s.

Mordecai Richler – “The Apprenticeship of Dudi Kravitz” (film)

Week Three **Previous generation 3 - anxiety**

Wednesday, 9/10/14:

More Jewish-related themes: the Jewish mother, sexuality, relations with gentiles.

Philip Roth – “Portnoy’s Complaint”

Week Four **The New Crop: searching for a history**

Wednesday, 9/17/14:

Jewish history, identity, memory, language and writing, etc.

Jonathan Safran-Foer – “Everything is Illuminated” (film)

Week Five **Searching for tradition**

Wednesday, 9/24/14:

Tradition among young Jewish Americans: why and how.

Nathan Englander and Foer – “New American Haggadah”

Week Six **Searching for identity**

Wednesday, 10/01/14:

Identity, memory, relations with gentiles etc. – compared to previous generations.

Nathan Englander – "Everything I know about my family on my mother's side" and

"Peep Show", from "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank"

Week Seven **Reimagining histories – holocaust**

Wednesday, 10/08/14:

History, parody, black humor – can you laugh about that? How do they tackle the subject?

Shalom Auslander – “Hope: A Tragedy”

Week Eight **Reimagining histories – Israel**

Wednesday, 10/15/14:

Alternatives to Zionism: Alaska and other places. Language (Yiddish v. Hebrew), tradition, relation between place and nation.

Michael Chabon – “Yiddish Policemen’s reunion”

Week Nine **New anxieties – or perhaps old ones?**

Wednesday, 10/22/14:

Are the anxieties of Jonathan Ames and Nathan Englander's different than Roth's? Also, do you have to be part of the cool Jewish gang?

Jonathan Ames – “Wake up Sir, Bored to Death”

Week Ten Jewish Families

Wednesday, 10/29/14:

What is Jewish about it? Gender perspectives: do men dominate Jewish literature? (Grace Paley, Nicole Kraus)

Myla Goldberg – “Bee Season” (film)

Week Eleven New styles of commemorating

Wednesday, 11/12/14:

Discussion: reflections of holocaust. Compare to Auslander and Englander. Humor.

Todd Hasak-Lowy – “On the Ground of the Complex Commemorating the Nazis’ Treatment of the Jews”, from “The Task of This Translator”

Week Twelve The view from Europe

Wednesday, 11/19/14:

Europe Jewry: Holocaust, movement, assimilation. Compared to US.

Eva Menasse – “Vienna” (German).

Howard Jacobson – “The Finkler Question” (English)

Week Thirteen The view from Israel

Tuesday, 12/03/14:

Three perspectives: holocaust, the sabra, the Israeli in America. How does each one tackle these subjects. Compare to Jewish-American perspective.

Etgar Keret – Shoes (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/381/turncoat?act=4>)

Amos Oz – “Tale of Love and Darkness” (chapters 44-45)

Assaf Gavron – “The Hilltop” (the fund, the assistant)

Week Fourteen Wrapping up and student presentations

Tuesday, 12/10/14:

Summary of the course, student presentations

If time permits: **“A Serious Man”** by the Cohen Brothers (film)