Jewish Storytelling: From the Russian Shtetl to New York

Professor Brett Kaplan

YDSH 220, CWL 221, ENGL, 223, RLST 220; SPRING 2006
Tu/Th 10-11:20; 186 Lincoln Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 or by appointment, 3123 FLB
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This course satisfies the Literature and the Arts, and the Western Comparative Culture
requirements

This course examines various kinds of Jewish Storytelling, from Yiddish short stories
(in translation), to films, to American novels, to French graphic novels (in
translation). The course hopes to teach students about the rich variety of Jewish
literature and Jewish history. A discussion based course, students will participate in a
series of in-class exercises designed to encourage student input in the learning
process.

Required Texts: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds., A Treasury of Yiddish Stories;
Sandra Bark, ed., Beautiful as the Moon, Radiant as the Stars: Jewish Women in Yiddish
Stories; Steve Stern, The Angel of Forgetfulness; Philip Roth, American Pastoral; Joann Sfar,
The Rabbi’s Cat; course reader available at Notes-n-Quotes (502 East John Street).
Pearl Gluck.

Course Requirements: Active participation in class discussions is required, and
students will write three papers. I will hand out a detailed essay prompt one week
before each peer-editing session. The first essay (4 pages) is worth 15% of your grade
for the semester. The second essay (5 pages) is worth 30%, and the final essay (7
pages) is worth 35%. 15% of your final grade is class participation and attendance,
and the remaining 5% is derived from peer-editing. If the first two papers are late
they will be marked down 10%; the latest they may be turned in is one week after the
due date. The final paper must be turned in on time so that grades can be turned in
on time (if you would like your final paper returned to you, please include a stamped-
self-addressed envelope). Papers must be delivered by hand: emailed or faxed papers
are not acceptable.

Web resources:
http://www.yivo.org/
http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/
http://www.forward.com/
Encyclopedia Judaica (available in paper and online in the main library reference
room)
Course Schedule

Week One:
Tuesday 1/17 Introduction
Thursday 1/19 Katz, *Words on Fire* 1-9; 173-223 (in reader)

Week Two
Tuesday 1/24 Katz, *Words on Fire* 349-397 (in reader)
from *Beautiful as the Moon*, “Bryna’s Mendl” 259-268

Week Three
Tuesday 1/31 Isaac Babel, “Italian Sunshine,” and “Life and Adventures of Matvey Pavlitchenko,” from *Red Cavalry* (in reader);
Elif Batuman, “Babel in California” (in reader)
Thursday 2/2 Isaac Bashevis Singer: from *Treasury*: “Gimpel the Fool” 401-414; from *Beautiful as the Moon*, “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy” 101-130; from Reader: Stavans,
“Singer’s Typewriter…and Mine;” Seidman, “Who’s the Fool?”

Week Four
Tuesday 2/7 film: *Yentl* screened in Comparative Literature Library, 3024 FLB during class

Week Five
Tuesday 2/14 IN CLASS PEER EDITING: DRAFT OF FIRST PAPER DUE
Thursday 2/16 FIRST PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE DURING CLASS TIME

Week Six
Tuesday 2/21 Sholem Aleichem, “Tevye Strikes it Rich,” “Tevye Blows a Small Fortune,”
“Today’s Children,” from Hillel Halkin’s translation of *Tevye the Dairyman* (3-52, in reader). Guest Speaker Hillel Halkin
Thursday 2/23 Steve Stern, *The Angel of Forgetfulness*, 1-107

Week Seven
Thursday 3/2 Steve Stern, *The Angel of Forgetfulness*, 228-404
Week Eight
Tuesday 3/7 Irena Klepfisz: from Reader, “Secular Jewish Identity: Yidishkayt in America”; “Di rayze aheym/The Journey Home”; “Etlekhe verter oyf mame-loshn”; selections from A Few Words in the Mother Tongue; second essay prompt handed out
Thursday 3/9 Celia Dropkin: from Beautiful as the Moon: “At the Rich Relatives” 55-74; “Bella Fell in Love” 211-232; from Reader: “A Dancer”; selections from Jewish American Literature

Week Nine
Tuesday 3/14 IN CLASS PEER EDITING: DRAFT OF SECOND PAPER DUE
Thursday 3/16 SECOND PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE DURING CLASS TIME

Week Ten
Spring Break

Week Eleven
Tuesday 3/28 Kadya Molodowsky: from Reader, “Women-Poems”; “Olke”; “The Lost Shabbes”; from Beautiful as the Moon, “The Fourth Mitzvah” 303-308; final essay prompt handed out
Thursday 3/30 film: Divan, screened in Comparative Literature Library, 3024 FLB during class

Week Twelve
Tuesday 4/4 Philip Roth, American Pastoral, 3-113
Thursday 4/6 Philip Roth, American Pastoral, 117-281

Week Thirteen
Tuesday 4/11 Philip Roth, American Pastoral, 285-336
Thursday 4/13 Philip Roth, American Pastoral, 337-423

Week Fourteen
Tuesday 4/18 Joann Sfar, The Rabbi’s Cat;
Thursday 4/20 Joann Sfar, The Rabbi’s Cat;

Week Fifteen
Tuesday 4/25 IN CLASS PEER EDITING: DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE
Thursday 4/27 FINAL PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE DURING CLASS TIME