

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A DRAFT, A FINAL VERSION OF THE SYLLABUS WILL BE AVAILABLE IN SEPTEMBER**

The University of Toronto

## **YIDDISH LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION**

GERMAN 361H / Fall 2020

Instructor: **ALEXANDRA HOFFMAN** Dept: German  
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**Class meets online on Thursdays 11-1**

### **DESCRIPTION AND COURSE GOALS**

This course is an overview of the major figures and tendencies in modern Yiddish literature and culture from the beginning of the 19th century to the present. Yiddish literature bears the markings of *goles* – diaspora, exile – as the language carries within it the history of Jewish migrations within and beyond Europe. Its development has been driven by various ideological aspirations which were associated with locales just as varied. The stateless literature has a conceptual home in English translation. Through readings (in English) of modern Yiddish prose, poetry, drama and cinema, we can examine the different strategies Yiddish writers adopted in confronting the changing political and cultural reality around them.

While honing their analytical reading and writing skills, and participating in class discussions, students will gain a better understanding of the intersections of ethnic and gender identities, political ideology, and literary aspects of Yiddish cultural production.

Please don't hesitate to email or call me with any questions, concerns, comments, etc.

### **REQUIRED BOOKS**

All readings available through the course website or in class.

### **REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION**

Preparation and participation in class discussion	30%
Presentation of the week's reading	10%
Reflections on readings	20%
Final Paper (10 pages)	40%

The course requires your thoughtful engagement with Yiddish literature. Much of this is achieved through regular **attendance and participation** in class discussion. One very short **presentation** (10 minutes or so) about or relating to the week's readings is in this vein of communal learning.

The short **weekly reflections** (a paragraph is more than enough) are very open in terms of content. They can be a brief elucidation of a stylistic or thematic pattern you noticed in the reading, an interpretation of a particularly beautiful/moving passage, an articulation of a question that the reading raises for you, a brief comparison between two-three of the week's readings, a sketch of how the text relates to something else we've read, etc. These short reflections are also meant to facilitate discussion in class. They are due via email before the beginning of class.

The **final paper** requires a more careful analysis of one or two texts, with consultation of a couple of scholarly articles. Writing is a process. In order to produce a significant paper, I will ask you to write in steps: topic consultation, bibliography, draft, argument. The topic is quite open. You may also complete a creative translation project. Please consult with me by October 22 regarding the topic of your paper, and we'll move on from there.

## **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS, DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS, AND ATHLETIC COMMITMENTS**

If you will be observing any religious holidays this semester which will prevent you from attending a regularly scheduled class or interfere with your fulfilling any course requirement, inform your instructor of the dates of your religious holiday(s) within two weeks of the beginning of the semester or immediately if your holiday is near the beginning of the semester so that we may make appropriate alternative plans.

In order for your disabilities and athletic activities to be appropriately accommodated, you must provide documentation during the first two weeks of class (or as soon as possible if a disability, including mental illness, emerges during the semester).

The University's Accessibility Services Office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400; Phone: **416-978-8060**; Email: [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca).

The University's Health & Wellness Centre is located at 214 College Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor. Phone: **416-978-8030**. <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/#node-1084>

## **GENDER PRONOUN PREFERENCES**

Please let me know if I can help you establish your preferences for this class, at any point of the semester.

CALENDAR

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Week 1 Sept. 10	A few words in the mother tongue: brief intro to Yiddish language and literature	Irena Klepfisz, <i>A few words in the mother tongue</i> (1990): pp. 216-227.
Week 2 Sept. 17	For women and men who are like women: Tsene-rene, Tkhines and early Yiddish literature	Eli Bokhur (1507); “Noah and the Flood” from Tsene-rene (?1608-22); “The Tale of the Pious Jew” from Glikl of Hamelin (1691-1719); Till Eulenspiegel (1735), in Neugroschel, <i>No Star too Beautiful</i> [2002], pp. 19-29, 47-54, 71-83, and 92-96. “The Tkhines: An Introduction”; “The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature”; “Candles for the Dead” in Weissler’s <i>Voices of the Matriarchs</i> (1998): pp. 3-35, pp. 51-65, pp. 126-146. Suggested: “Old Poems in a Modern Anthology” in Hellerstein’s <i>A Question of Tradition</i> (2014) (pp. 43-102).
Week 3 Sept. 24	Hassidism, Misnagdim, Maskilim, and the Yiddish Folk	Part Six in Howe and Greenberg’s <i>A Treasury of Yiddish Stories</i> (1990): pp. 655-673; Part Two and Three (In Praise of the Besht, Dik, Linyetsky, and Ansky in Neugroschel’s <i>No Star Too Beautiful</i> (2002): pp. 101-104, 158-189, 354-357. Suggested: Neugroschel pp. 97-100 and 139-141; Beatrice Weinreich’s intro to <i>Yiddish Folktales</i> (1988): xix-xxxii; “Haskalah” in the <i>YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe</i>
Week 4 Oct. 1	Guest speaker: Frieda Forman The classics, aka the patriarchs I: The zeyde Mendele Moykher Sforim (aka Sholem Yankev Abromovitch)	“The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third,” trans. Hillel Halkin, in <i>Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler</i> (1996): pp. 299-394. Mendele Mocher Sforim’s “The Calf,” trans. Jacob Sloan, in <i>A Treasury of Yiddish Stories</i> (1990): pp. 97-111. Secondary: Intro by Dan Miron to <i>Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler</i> (1996): pp. vii-lxxiii.
Week 5 Oct. 8	The classics, aka the patriarchs II: The zeyde and his eynikl Sholem Aleykhem (aka Sholem Rabinovitsh)	Sholem Aleichem’s “Motl, the Cantor’s Son, Part One,” trans. Aliza Shevrin, in <i>Tevye the Dairyman and Motl the Cantor’s Son</i> (2009): pp. 137-280. Secondary: Introduction by Dan Miron to <i>Tevye the Dairyman and Motl the Cantor’s Son</i> (2009): pp. ix-xxxvi.

Week 6 Oct. 15	The classics, aka the patriarchs II: Sholem Aleykhem continued.	<p>Selections from <i>Tevye the Dairyman</i>: “Kotonti,” “The Great Windfall,” and “Shprintze” in <i>Tevye the Dairyman and Motl the Cantor’s Son</i> (2009): pp. 3-21 and 83-96.</p> <p>Selections from the Railroad Stories: “To the Reader,” “The Happiest Man in All Kodny,” and “The Man from Buenos Aires,” trans. Hillel Halkin in <i>Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories</i> (1987): pp. 135-136, 143-152, 166-177.</p> <p>“Dreyfus in Kasrilevke” (trans. Hilde Abel) and “On Account of a Hat” (trans. Isaac Rosenfeld) in <i>A Treasury of Yiddish Stories</i> (1990): pp. 111-118 and 187-192.</p> <p>Secondary: David Roskies’s “Inside Sholem Shachnah's Hat,” in <i>Prooftexts</i> 21.1 (2001): 39-56.</p> <p>Leah Garrett, “Trains and Train Travel in Modern Yiddish Literature,” <i>Jewish Social Studies</i> 7.2 (2001): 67-88.</p>
Week 7 Oct. 22	The classics, aka the patriarchs III: The daddy Yitskhok Leybush Peretz	<p>“Bontsha the silent” and “If not higher” in <i>A Treasury of Yiddish Stories</i> (1990): pp. 223-231.</p> <p>“Between Two Mountains” and “A Night in the Old Marketplace” in <i>I.L. Peretz Reader</i> (2002): pp. 184-195 and 361-432.</p> <p>“Between Two Mountains” trans. Helena Frank</p> <p>Secondary: Intro by Ruth Wisse to the <i>I.L. Peretz Reader</i> (2002): pp. xiii-xxx; Mahalel, Adi. “Weaving The Revolution: I. L. Peretz The Social Protest Writer.” In <i>geveb</i>, May 2016.</p>
Week 8 Oct. 29	Modernist prose and poetry across the Atlantic I: Europe	<p>Rokhl Brokhes, “The Zogerin,” trans. Shirley Kumove, in <i>Found Treasures</i> (1994): pp. 85-90.</p> <p>Shira Gorshman, “Unspoken Hearts,” trans. Ethel Raicus, in <i>Found Treasures</i> (1994): pp. 145-157.</p> <p>Bergelson, David. “Harsh Judgment.” In <i>geveb</i>, August 2015: Trans. Sasha Senderovich and Harriet Murav. Or: Der Nister, “Beheaded,” in <i>Neugroschel, No Star Too Beautiful</i> (2002), pp. 570-583.</p> <p>Manger, Itzik. “Two Poems.” In <i>geveb</i>, October 2017: Trans. Murray Citron.</p> <p>Manger, Itzik. “Excerpts from Itzik Manger's <i>Megile Lider</i> (Megillah Poems).” In <i>geveb</i>, February 2018: Trans. Hershl Hartman.</p>
Week 9	Modernist prose and poetry	Shtok, Fradel. “A Dance.” In <i>geveb</i> , December 2017: Trans. Sonia Gollance.

Nov. 5	across the Atlantic II: United States	<p>H. Leivick, “He” in Neugroschel (2002), pp. 527-534.</p> <p>Avrom Reyzen, “The Jew Who Destroyed the Temple,” in Neugroschel, <i>No Star Too Beautiful</i> (2002), pp. 563-566.</p> <p>Celia Dropkin, Selected Poems, trans. Faith Jones, Jennifer Kronovet, and Samuel Solomon.</p> <p>Anna Margolin, 4 poems, trans. Maia Evrona.</p> <p>Moyshe Nadir, “My First Love,” trans. Hilde Abel, in <i>A Treasury of Yiddish Stories</i> (1990): 427-437.</p> <p>Secondary: “The Art of Sex” in Hellerstein’s <i>A Question of Tradition</i> (2014) (pp. 243-322).</p>
Week 10 Nov. 19	Yiddish literature in Canada and Israel after the Holocaust	<p>Chava Rosenfarb, “Edgia’s Revenge,” trans. Goldie Morgentaler, in <i>Found Treasures</i> (1994): pp. 243-310.</p> <p>Chava Slucka-Kestin, “Her Story,” trans. Ronnee Jaeger, in <i>Found Treasures</i> (1994): pp. 317-328.</p> <p>Rikudah Potash, “Pirkhah Ozeri,” trans. Norma Fain Pratt, in <i>Found Treasures</i> (1994): pp. 343-347.</p> <p>Sholem Shtern, from “In Kanada” in <i>Canadian Yiddish Writings</i> (1976): pp. 137-146.</p> <p>Secondary: Shachar Pinsker, “Choosing Yiddish in Israel” in <i>Choosing Yiddish</i> (2013), 277-294.</p>
Week 11 Nov. 26	Yiddish literature in the U.S. after the Holocaust	<p>Kadia Molodowsky’s “El Khanun”</p> <p>Blume Lempel’s “Oedipus in Brooklyn,” “The Debt,” and “The Bag Lady of Seventh Avenue,” trans. Ellen Cassedy and Yermiyahu Ahron Taub in <i>Oedipus in Brooklyn and Other Stories</i> (2016), pp. 49-54, 63-74, and 115-120.</p> <p>Frume Halpern, “Dog Blood” in Neugroschel, <i>No Star Too Beautiful</i> (2002), pp. 656-660.</p> <p>Isaac Bashevis Singer, “The Mirror” from <i>Gimpel the Fool</i>, trans. Norbert Guterman, in Neugroschel, <i>No Star Too Beautiful</i> (2002), pp. 671-679.</p>
Week 12 Dec. 3	The state of translation and contemporary Yiddish literary and cultural projects	<p>In geveb, Yiddish Book Center, Ashkenaz, Yidlife Crisis, Yiddish Glory.</p>