

# Syllabus for the Contemporary Jewish Writing Class at Congregation Beth Ami in April-May 2015

by Gabor Por - April 16, 2015

Available online at [JewishBookWorld.org/tag/cjw/](http://JewishBookWorld.org/tag/cjw/)

## Summary

This course will

- explore emerging trends and current issues in contemporary Jewish writing
- provide resources and tips on using the internet to find new books and reviews
- introduce recent books on these topics/genres: Novels, American Jewish History, (Auto)Biographies, World Jewish History, Shoah and Mysticism
- provide opportunities to deep-read and discuss texts
- encourage participants to bring their questions and suggestions and share their favorite recent Jewish books

## Information

- Class meets six Thursdays from 7 to 8:30 and starting April 16, 2015
- No test, no grading: the goal is personal enrichment
- All handouts (in PDF format) at <http://jewishbookworld.org/tag/cjw/>
- Online sources to find (new) Jewish books and reviews at <http://jewishbookworld.org/sources/>

## April 16: 1st class - Introduction and Novels

- What is Contemporary? Jewish? Writing?
- Themes/trends in Jewish literature, including novels: Holocaust, Israel, exile, magical realism, mysticism, crime, urban living, gender issues, absurd modernity, meaning making...
- Sources for new books and reviews: Top 5 Sites, Social Sites, Journals
- Break, if needed (5 min)
- What is a Novel?
- Close reading of an excerpt from **The Golem and the Jinni** by *Helene Wecker*
- Introducing recent novels
- Homework for 2nd class:
  - Read "**Holy Thief**" a short story by *Ruchama King Feuerman*  
<http://tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/190011/holy-thief>
  - Read "'**At Home in Exile**' and '**The Pious Ones**'" by *Peter Beinart* in The New York Times  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/books/review/at-home-in-exile-and-the-pious-ones.html>
  - Bring/recommend a recent book related to American Jewish History

- Recommended readings, books and videos:
  - **Jewish-American War Novels - Leah Garrett** - 40 minute video from 2013  
 “The central role of Jews in fictionalizing War World II for a postwar readership has gone unnoticed in literary and historical studies. Either the Jewishness of the writers is uncommented on, or the Jewishness of the text is negated.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJ1lAn6uQe0>
  - **Jewish Fiction Editors Speak Out**, Topics include: What trends are you seeing in Jewish fiction? What makes a manuscript stand out for you?  
<https://thewholemegillah.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/jewish-fiction-editors-speak-out-a-cyber-roundtable/>
  - **Unpacking the Book: Jewish Writers in Conversation** - “brings together some of the finest writers of the day for conversations around contemporary Jewish life and identity”  
 Details and video of first two conversations, hour long each, is available at  
<http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/unpacking-the-book>
  - **What is Jewish Literature?** by *Shachar Pinsker* from 2011  
<http://www.newrepublic.com/book/review/jewish-literature-dan-miron-continuity-contiguity>
  - **On Writing Jewish Literature and Being a Jewish Writer**; essay collection  
<http://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/essays/on-writing-jewish-literature-and-being-a-jewish-writer>
  - **Books**
    - **The New Diaspora: The Changing Landscape of American Jewish Fiction**; edited by *Victoria Aarons, Avinoam J. Patt, and Mark Shechner* (Wayne State University Press, 2015)
    - **Promised Lands: New Jewish American Fiction on Longing and Belonging**; edited by *Derek Rubin* (Brandeis University Press, 2010)
    - **The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature**; edited by *Alvin H. Rosenfeld* (Indiana University Press, 2008)