

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

by Gabor Por

Available online at 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 Pinsky* 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)

April 23: 2nd class - American Jewish History

- Discussing “[Holy Thief](#)” a short story by *Ruchama King Feuerman*
- Sources for new books and reviews: **Publishers**
<http://jewishbookworld.org/sources/publishers/>
- Studying American Jewish History **Timeline**
<http://americanjewisharchives.org/education/timeline.php>
- Sharing related **books brought by the class**
- Discussing “[‘At Home in Exile’ and ‘The Pious Ones’](#)” by *Peter Beinart* in The New York Times
- Introducing the American Jewish History **bibliography**
<http://jewishbookworld.org/2015/04/recent-books-on-american-jewish-history/>
- Homework for 3rd class:
 - Read “**Interview with Yehudah Mirsky about Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook**” by *Alan Brill*
<https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/interview-with-yehudah-mirsky-about-rabbi-abraham-isaac-kook/>

- Bring/recommend a recent (auto)biography
- Recommended readings, books and videos:
 - **American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader**; edited by Gary Phillip Zola, Marc Dollinger (Brandeis, 2014)
 - **American Jews and America's Game: Voices of a Growing Legacy in Baseball** by *Larry Ruttman and Dr. Martin Abramowitz* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013)
 - **The American Jewish Story through Cinema** by *Eric A. Goldman*, (University of Texas Press, 2013)
 - **From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America**: Library of Congress exhibition marking 350 years of Jewish life in America. Interactive timeline <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/>
 - **The Jewish Americans: They Came to Stay & A World of Their Own**
Originally broadcast on PBS, The Jewish-Americans covers 350 years in the lives of Jews who have struggled to maintain their religious identity and still be fully accepted as Americans.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M52S1A6k4c0&list=PLEaSB81aNjlwwA4RU0p088ZW7m_sA_ZbJ

April 30: 3rd class - (Auto)Biographies

- Discussing “**Interview with Yehudah Mirsky about Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook**”
- Sources for new books and reviews: **Newspapers and blogs**
<http://jewishbookworld.org/sources/>
- Sharing related **books brought by the class**
- Introducing the **Auto(Biography) bibliography**
<http://jewishbookworld.org/2015/04/recent-jewish-autobiographies/>
- Homework for 4th class:
 - Pick an era and/or area of Jewish History and bring three interesting fact about it.
 - Read **Autobiography in the United States** by *Wendy Zierler*
<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/autobiography-in-united-states>
 - Bring/recommend a recent book related to World Jewish History
- Recommended readings, books and videos:
 - **Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust** Edited by Jeffrey Shandler - <http://amzn.to/1Anm33M>
 - **Encyclopedia Judaica: Biographies and Autobiographies**
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0003_0_02993.html
 - **Jewish Biography as History Dr. Henry Abramson**
<https://www.youtube.com/user/hillelabramson/search?query=biography>
 - **My Future Is in America Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants**
Edited by Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer
<http://nyupress.org/books/9780814716953/>

May 7: 4th class - World Jewish History

- Discussing “**Autobiography in the United States**” by *Wendy Zierler*
- Sources for new books and reviews: **Newspapers and blogs**
<http://jewishbookworld.org/sources/>
- Introducing the **World Jewish History bibliography**

- Sharing related interesting **history facts brought by the class**
- Recommended readings, books and videos:
 - **My Jewish Learning's section on Israel's History:**
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israeli-history/>
 - **A Tour of Jewish History in Australia** <http://jewishhistoryaustralia.net/jha/>
 - **A History of the Jews** by *Paul Johnson* (Harper, 1988) 656 pages
<http://amzn.to/1AJ67Jl>
 - **History of Jews in Turkey** <https://youtu.be/JeKxqRKBtXc>
 - **Bukharian Community in Uzbekistan** <https://youtu.be/LjWoEpebbzU>
- Homework for 5th class:
 - Read **Life and Light** by *Shira Gorshman* (Translated from Yiddish by Faith Jones)
 - <http://www.jewishfiction.net/index.php/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/124>
 - Bring/recommend a recent book related to Shoah

May 14: 5th class - Shoah

- Discussing **Life and Light** by *Shira Gorshman*
- Watching
 - **Historic Stock Footage Jewish Ghetto New York 1932** (1:26)
<https://youtu.be/ydhgedv6Co>
 - Segment of **War and Love** movie with Dohány Street synagogue (2:13)
<https://youtu.be/sCN0AKgl7t0>
 - **Dohány Street Synagogue** (2:24)
<https://youtu.be/WD97y-X2PGI>
 - **Violins of Hope Book Trailer** (2:26)
<https://youtu.be/OtJsw67Re3Y>
- Sharing related **recent books related to Shoah brought by the class**
- Introducing and discussing the **Shoah bibliography**
- Recommended readings, books and videos:
 - **Sonoma State University's Holocaust & Genocide Lecture Series**
<https://www.sonoma.edu/holocaust/lectures/academics.html>
Video archive
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CSUSonoma/search?query=holocaust>
 - **Popular Holocaust Books at Goodreads**
<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/holocaust>
 - **Quora: What are the best books about the Holocaust?**
<http://www.quora.com/What-are-the-best-books-about-the-Holocaust>
 - **Holocaust denial at Tablet Magazine**
<http://tabletmag.com/tag/holocaust-denial>
- Homework for 6th class:
 - Read **Introduction to the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism: interview with Daniel C. Matt**
<http://www.examiner.com/article/introduction-to-the-kabbalah-and-jewish-mysticism-interview-with-daniel-c-matt>
Part 2 is optional:
<http://www.examiner.com/article/intro-to-the-kabbalah-and-jewish-mysticism-interview-with-daniel-c-matt-part-2>

- Bring/recommend a recent book related to Kabbalah/Jewish Mysticism

May 21: 6th class - Kabbalah / Jewish Mysticism

- Discussing **Introduction to the Kabbalah: interview with Daniel C. Matt**
- Introducing **Kabbalah Typology**
 - **Science:** academic principle, study of text
Gershom Scholem: Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism
 - **Magic:** folkways, superstition, tradition
Joshua Trachtenberg: Jewish Magic and Superstition A Study in Folk Religion
 - **Religion:** integral part of orthodox Judaism
Shneur Zalman of Liadi and Menachem Schneerson: Tanya (Chabad)
 - **Self-Help/Spirituality:** focus on personal enrichment
David A. Cooper: God Is a Verb
 - **Business:** Making money through producing “Kabbalah” books, events, classes
Rav P. S. Berg: The Kabbalah for the Layman (The Kabbalah Center, kabbalah.com)
 - **Christian Kabbalah:** From Renaissance on, starting with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola
Dion Fortune: Mystical Qabalah
 - **Religion/Self-Help/Business:** well-marketed, to non-Jews too
Michael Laitman: Awakening to Kabbalah (Bnei Baruch, kabbalah.info)
Yitzchak Ginsburgh: Living In Divine Space (Gal Einai, inner.org)
- Sharing **books related to Kabbalah brought by the class**
- Introducing and discussing the **Kabbalah bibliography**
- Watching
 - **Kabbalah Me** Official Trailer (2:05):
<https://youtu.be/Y7bpUsP3cH4>
 - **Parasha Bereshit: Kabbalistic Questions about Creation** (4:21):
https://youtu.be/ZDKxEDKb_tE
- Recommended readings, books and videos:
 - Books published by the **Jewish Lights Publishing**
<http://jewishlights.com/page/category/KABB>
 - Information about the **Pritzker Edition of the The Zohar**, published by Stanford UP
<http://www.sup.org/zohar/>
 - List of **scholars and students** who are interested in Kabbalah
<https://www.academia.edu/People/Kabbalah>
 - **"Rethinking Jewish Mysticism"** - Rachel Elior
https://youtu.be/hhtyp5Ppa_E