

“Topics in Yiddish Literature and Culture”: The City and the Countryside in American Yiddish Literature

Fall 2024

Mr. Shachar Levanon

YDSH 1111-401 (Cross listed with GRMN 1111, COML 1111, JWST 1111)

Class: TR 3:30pm-4:59pm

Classroom: COLL 318

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00pm (by appointment)

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Course Description

With the rise of the modern metropolis, topics of immigration, identity, alienation, communication, and materialism have become central to the literary imagination. In this course, we will focus on Yiddish writers who have represented the city and the countryside in their work. One of the primary questions the course will address is how Jewish immigrant writers and children of immigrants acclimated and reacted to American culture and society through their representations of urban and rural landscapes. What kind of themes emerge in their attempts to represent the American metropolis and, alternatively, the countryside? Writers' encounters with these settings often reflected their hybrid and fluid identities, at times highlighting American components, at times underscoring Jewish elements. The course will explore the interplay between these aspects.

Course Readings

*All course readings will be in English translation, although some primary sources may be available in Yiddish for students who know the language. Classes and coursework will be conducted in English.

** The poems and prose works in the syllabus will be made available on Canvas.

Grade Evaluation

- Class attendance, preparation, and participation (30%)
- Oral presentation (15%)
- A short essay (3-5 pages) (15%)
- A final essay (8-10 pages) (40%)

Preparation and Participation

Discussion is a mainstay of the course and participation is crucial to its success. Reading the texts before class is essential. Your questions, opinions, and observations are an important aspect of the course, and you are encouraged to participate in the ongoing class discussions. The texts and supplemental readings are intended to provide further context for the different periods and writers.

Sample Course Schedule

Part One: Jewish Immigrants in New York City

Week 1 –

08/27 Tuesday: Introducing American Yiddish Literature, Reading the syllabus together, Moyshe Leyb Halpern: “Watch Your Step!,” “Our Garden” (1919)

08/29 Thursday: Halpern continued, “In Central Park” (1930); Berish Vaynshteyn, “My Street—Sheepshead Bay” (1936)

Week 2 –

09/03 Tuesday: Vaynshteyn continued, “Sheepshead Bay” (1936); Carl Sandborg, “Chicago” (1914)

09/05 Thursday: Sholem Asch, *Uncle Moses* (1918). Chapter 1, “Over the Williamsburg Bridge,” 1-9; Chapter 3, “Dawn,” 15-20