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Jews in Film and Fiction

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Jews in Film and Fiction. JWST 23200

Dr. Amy W. Kratka

This Class Meets In Person Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am- 10:45 am
in NAC 4/222

Films to be shown in class:

The Jazz Singer (1927 Dir. Alan Crosland)

Gentleman's Agreement (1947 Dir. Elia Kazan)

The Pawnbroker (1964 Dir. Sidney Lumet)

Annie Hall (1977 Dir. Woody Allen)

A Life Apart: Hasidism in America (1997 Dir. Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum)

Trembling Before G-d (2001 Dir. Sandi Simcha Dubowski)

A Serious Man (2009 Dirs. Ethan Coen and Joel Coen)

The German Neighbour/El Vecino Alemán (2016 Dir. Rosario Cervio and Martin Liji)

Required Texts:

Unless Otherwise Noted, All Texts Are Available on our Blackboard Page

1. Goodman, Allegra. *The Family Markowitz*. Washington Square Press, 1996.
2. Ozick, Cynthia. *Bloodshed and Three Novellas*. Syracuse University Press, 1972.
3. Ozick, Cynthia. *The Shawl*. Vintage, 1990.
4. Roth, Philip. *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*. Vintage, 1959.
5. Halberstam, Joshua. *A Seat at the Table*. Sourcebooks Landmark, 2009. (NOT on Blackboard. Please buy or borrow from bookstore or library!)

Recommended Reading:

1. Gabler, Neal. *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. Anchor, 1989.
2. Goldman, Eric. *The American Jewish Story Through Cinema*. University of Texas Press, 2013.
3. Insdorf, Annette. *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
4. Whitfield, Stephen J. *In Search of American Jewish Culture*. Brandeis University Press, 1999.

Course Objective: In this class we will examine the portrayal of Jewish characters in (mostly) post-WWII fiction and film. We will discuss the way directors and writers treat stereotypes and stock characters; we will investigate the nuanced depiction of complex characters and ask what role religion plays in these depictions. We will look at the representation of women compared to men, the portrayal of parents and their expectations, talk about the significance of children, examine the importance of bearing witness to tragedy, investigate the way in which stories change

when subjected to different media, and discuss, in general, the larger questions that are posed by being Jewish in America.

Course Learning Outcomes: Students will learn to

1. *Analyze* primary sources in detail.
2. *Evaluate* secondary sources that revisit or interpret primary texts.
3. *Formulate* new, creative approaches to tradition based on independent research.
4. *Present* orally on these creative approaches to the history and the tradition as they relate to primary texts.
5. *Connect* classroom lectures with research that makes tangible elements of contemporary Jewish life.

Requirements:

***Every student must write 1 paper, an author or *auteur* study (!) 2 pages long. Specific guidelines will follow. You will present this paper during one of the two class days devoted to student presentations at the end of the semester!

***You'll have a few opportunities to do in-class writing assignments—responses to some of our films and readings (dates noted below). These will be graded and combined to form a percentage of your grade.

***There will be one midterm and one final exam in this class.

***Plagiarism is a serious offense. Taking someone else's work and passing it off as your own constitutes plagiarism. Students who plagiarize will automatically fail the class.

***Absences should be limited to 4, total, for the semester. Any more and you risk failing the class.

Methodology:

We will maintain an intellectually rigorous approach in this course, stressing careful and close-viewings and -readings of films and primary texts as augmented by an awareness of theory, culture, language and literary trajectory as written into the secondary texts. Watch carefully, read carefully, and bring your ideas and books to class!

Percentage Breakdown:

Response/Presentation 20%

In-Class Writings 20%

Midterm: 30%

Final: 30%

This Schedule May Change According to the Needs of the Class

Accommodation and Assimilation in Postwar America:

Thurs 8/25: *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947: Dir. Elia Kazan)

Tues 8/30 *Gentleman's Agreement* cont'd

Thurs 9/1: Please read Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus (the novella, not the film)*

Tues 9/6: Please read selections from Eric Goldman's "The American Jewish Story Through Cinema";
Debriefing and in-class graded writing

The Persistence of Memory:

Thurs 9/8: Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl and Rosa*

Tues 9/13: *The Pawnbroker* (1954: Dir. Sidney Lumet)

Thurs 9/15: *The Pawnbroker* cont'd; also please read Annette Insdorf's "Indelible Shadows"

Insiders and Outsiders Looking In:

Tues 9/20: *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1997: Dirs. Menachem Daum and Oren Rudavsky).

PLEASE FINISH FILM at home! (It's on Blackboard)

Thurs 9/22: Discussion of *A Life Apart*; also please read Cynthia Ozick's story "Bloodshed"

Tues 9/27: **No Class, Rosh Hashana**

Thurs 9/29: **No Class, Monday Schedule**

Tues 10/4: **No Class, Erev Yom Kippur**

Thurs 10/6: Please watch *Annie Hall* (1978: Dir. Woody Allen) on your own **and in class we will watch selected clips for discussion; please read selected pieces by Dylan Farrow and Ronan Farrow**

Tues 10/11: **No Class, Sukkot**

Thurs 10/13: Review for Midterm Exam

Tues 10/18: **No Class, Simchat Torah**

Thurs 10/20: **Midterm Exam**

Tues 10/25: *The German Neighbour/El Vecino Alemán* (2016 Dir. Rosario Cervio and Martin Liji)

Thurs 10/27: *The German Neighbour/El Vecino Alemán*, cont'd

Fathers and Sons:

Tues 11/1: *The Jazz Singer* (1927: Dir. Alan Crosland)

Thurs 11/3: *The Jazz Singer*, cont'd; please read selections from Stephen Whitfield's "In Search of American Jewish Culture"

Tues 11/8: Please read Joshua Halberstam's novel *A Seat at the Table*

Family and Faith:

Thurs 11/10: *Trembling Before G-d* (2001: Dir. Sandi Simcha Dubowski)

Tues 11/15: *Trembling Before G-d*, cont'd

Thurs 11/17: Please read Allegra Goodman's "The Art Biz" "The Wedding of Henry Markowitz"

Tues 11/22: Please read selections from Neal Gabler's "An Empire of their Own"; in-class graded writing

Thurs 11/24: **No Class, Thanksgiving**

Tues 11/29: *A Serious Man* (2009: Dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)

Thurs 12/1: *A Serious Man*, cont'd.

Tues 12/6: **Student Presentations of Response Papers**

Thurs 12/8: **Student Presentations of Response Papers** and Review for Final Exam

Tues 12/13: **Final Exam**