

Prof. A. Norich  
THE YIDDISH CLASSICS AND MODERNITY  
MW, 8:30 – 10:00; 1359 Mason Hall

- Winter 2007

Office Hours: Mon. 11:00 – 12:00;  
& by appointment  
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**Course Description:**

What do we know about modern Yiddish culture? What are its origins and how did it develop? Who were its major writers and what were the themes, social structures, literary forms of primary concern to them? In this course we will answer these and other questions by reading the fiction of three writers: Sh. Y. Abramovitch (also known as Mendele Moykher Sforim, the “grandfather” of Yiddish literature), Sholem Aleichem, and Y.L. Peretz. Their short stories and novels are considered the classics of modern Yiddish literature and offer a provocative introduction into the Eastern European Jewish milieu in which they wrote and the historical, political, social and economic transformations of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will also consider some of the adaptations made of their work in Yiddish and English drama and film, and some of the changes made when their stories and novels were brought to an American audience. All readings will be in English translation. No knowledge of Yiddish is required for this course.

This course fulfills the New Traditions Requirement for English concentrators.

**Requirements** for the course include weekly reading assignments, some in-class 1-page responses, active classroom participation, two 6-8 page essays, and a take-home final. Please note due dates for the essays.

**Required books for this course are available at SHAMAN DRUM BOOKSTORE (313 S. State Street):**

Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories, trans. by Hillel Halkin.

Sholem Aleichem, The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl & Sheyne-Sheyndl; and Motl, the Cantor's Son, tr. by Hillel Halkin

The I.L. Peretz Reader, ed. by Ruth Wisse

**A required course pack is available at ACCUCOPY (518 E. William).**

Sh.Y. Abramovitsh = Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835 – 1917)

Sh. Y. Rabinovitsh = Sholem Aleichem (1859 - 1916)

Y.L. Peretz (1852 - 1915)

**A few useful terms:**

*HASKOLE*

*MASKIL*

*MISNAGID*

*HASID*

**Some dates to keep in mind:**

- 1854-56 – Crimean War
- 1863 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish uprising to gain independence. [Poland divided among Russia, Austria, Prussia until it gained independence at the end of World War II]
- 1880 – 1924 – massive Jewish immigration to U.S. from Eastern Europe
- 1894: Dreyfus Affair
- 1897 - First Zionist congress – Basel, Switzerland
- 1903 Kishinev Pogrom (Russia)
- 1904-5 – Russo-Japanese War
- 1905 – first (failed) Russian Rev.)
- 1908 – Czernowitz conference (Bukovina / Romania / Austro-Hungarian empire)
- 1911-1913: Beiliss Trial (Kiev, Russia)
- 1914-1917 : World War I

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| Jan. 8       | INTRODUCTION   |
| Jan. 10      | Sholem Aleichem, “Dreyfus in Kasrilevke” and “On Account of a Hat;”<br>Abramovitsh, “The Mare”                                       |
| Jan. 15      | Martin Luther King DAY – No Classes  |
| Jan. 17      | Sh. Y. Abramovitsh, “The Little Man” (COURSE PACK)   |
| Jan. 22      | Abramovitsh, “The Brief Travels of Benjamin III” (COURSE PACK)   |
| Jan. 24      | Cont: <u>The Brief Travels of Benjamin III</u>   |
| Jan. 29      | Sholem Aleichem, Preface to <u>Stempenyu</u> , and <u>Stempenyu</u> (COURSE PACK)  |
| Jan. 31      | <u>Stempenyu</u> cont.   |
| Feb. 5       | Sholem Aleichem, from The Railroad Stories, pp. 135-177<br>(RESERVE)   |
| Feb. 7       | FILM: Fishke the Lame  |
| Feb. 12      | Sholem Aleichem, <u>The Railroad Stories</u> , pp. 177-238<br><br><b>(1<sup>st</sup> essay due, 6-8 pp.; topics to be announced)</b> |
| Feb. 14      | Cont.: The Railroad Stories, pp. 238-284   |
| Feb. 19      | Sholem Aleichem, Motl, the Cantor’s Son, PART ONE  |
| Feb. 21      | Sholem Aleichem, MOTL, Part TWO  |
| Feb. 26 - 28 | WINTER BREAK   |
| March 5      | Sholem Aleichem, Tevye, the Dairyman, pp.3-82  |
| March 7      | <u>Tevye, the Dairyman</u> : completed   |
| March 12     | <u>Tevye</u> cont.; TEVYE films  |
| March 14     | Sholem Aleichem, The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl and Sheyne-Sheyndl  |

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| March 19 | Menakhem-Mendl, cont.   |
| March 21 | I.L. Peretz, <u>The I.L. Peretz Reader</u><br>“Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region,” especially pp. 20, 30-34, 42-44, 49-52, 74-84<br>“Venus and Shulamith,” pp. 88-93<br>“In the Mail Coach,” pp. 104-118<br>“The Pious Cat,” pp. 128-130<br><br><b>(2<sup>nd</sup> essay due, 6-8 pp.; topics to be announced)</b> |
| March 26 | Peretz, “The Golem,” pp. 130-131<br>“The Shabbes Goy,” pp. 131-138<br>“A Contribution for a Wedding,” pp. 156-162<br>“The Dead Town,” pp. 162-171<br>“Uncle Shakhne and Aunt Yakhne,” pp. 171-178   |
| March 28 | I.I. Peretz,<br>“A Conversation,” pp. 181-184<br>“Between Two Mountains,” pp. 184-196<br>“The Missing Melody,” pp. 196-200<br>“Revelation, or the Story of the Billy Goat,” pp. 212-218<br>“The Magician,” pp. 218-222  |
| April 2  | Peretz,<br>“Three Gifts,” pp. 222-230<br>“A Chapter of the Psalms,” pp. 242-251<br>“A Pinch of Snuff,” pp. 251-258<br>“Yom Kippur in Hell,” pp. 258-262   |
| April 4  | Peretz,<br>“Monish,” pp. 3-15<br>“My Memoirs,” pp. 265-359  |
| April 9  | Abramovitsh, OF BYGONE DAYS (COURSE PACK)   |
| April 11 | Sholem Aleichem, FROM THE FAIR (COURSE PACK) and Last Will  |
| April 16 | LAST DAY OF CLASSES<br><b>TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAM</b>  |