

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Fall 2011

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LIT. 5530x *Isaac Bashevis Singer*
Wed. 5:40-7:30; K406

Description: A reading-intensive course that follows the prolific career of Isaac Bashevis Singer from Poland to America and from Krochmalna Street to Stockholm. Readings will alternate between the novel and romance, between anatomies of seduction and possession and tales of true love. Most of the protagonists will be male and most of the victims—female, except when gender boundaries blur.

Goals: To investigate Singer's demonic realism as a twentieth-century response to the problem of evil; to explore the crisis of faith and reason through Singer's deeply pessimistic lens; to examine how this breakdown of reality speaks to us so profoundly.

Objectives: To distinguish between epic narrative and monologue, the natural and supernatural, ethnography and existential concerns. To discover the power of orality and storytelling in modern times.

Required Readings: The following books are available for sale at Book Culture, 536 W. 112th Street: *Collected Stories: Gimpel the Fool to the Letter Writer* (Library of America, 2004), *Satan in Goray*, *The Family Moskat*, *The Slave*, *The Magician of Lublin*, *Enemies*, *a Love Story*. Please patronize our local bookstores. They are a dying breed.

Assessment: Students! Please keep up with the reading and bring a copy of the text to each class. There will be one midterm paper, 5-8 pp in length, worth 25% of the final grade and a final take-home exam worth 75% of the grade. The midterm is due on **Wednesday Nov. 2** and should be submitted in both hard copy and electronically.

Office Hours: Mondays 10:00-12:00; Unterberg 506, Ext. 8914, or by appointment.

7 Sept **The Author Speaks**

Why I Write for Children (1970)
 The Nobel Speech (1978)
 Why the Geese Shrieked (1956) – from *In My Father's Court*

14 Sept **Demonic Realism**

Satan in Goray (1933) – Part I
 Introduction to the novel by Ruth R. Wisse

21 Sept **Seduction and Possession**

Satan in Goray – Part II, The Tale of the Dybbuk

28 Sept. **Rosh Hashana**

5 Oct. **The Art of Creative Betrayal**

Zeidlus the Pope (1943)
 The Unseen (1943)
 Gimpel the Fool (1945)
 The Wife Killer (1945)
 The Spinoza of Market Street (1944) – *Collected Stories*
 Problems of Yiddish Prose in America (1943)

Ruth R. Wisse, "Holocaust Survivor," *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago, 1971), chap. 4.

12 Oct. **Sukkot**

19 Oct. **Hoshana Raba**

26 Oct. **The Family as History**

The Family Moskat (1945-1948) – Books I-V
 Concerning Yiddish Literature in Poland (1943)

2 Nov. **The Family as Myth**

The Family Moskat – Books VI-X
The excised chapters

Midterm Writing Assignment (5-8 pp.): Compare and contrast any two stories from the assigned reading for Oct. 5. Focus on any combination of the following:

The role, gender, and belief status of the narrator
the hero(ine) in relationship to family and society
the role of learning, education, quotation
the interplay of the real and the fantastical
the story's ending

9 Nov. **Demonologies**

The Little Shoemakers (1945)
Short Friday (1945)
The Mirror (1956)
The Last Demon (1959)
Taibele and Her Demon (1962) – *Collected Stories*

Avrom Novershtern, "History, Messianism, and Apocalypse in Bashevis's Work,"
The Hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer, Seth L. Wolitz, ed. (Austin : University of
Texas Press, 2001), chap. 3.

16 Nov. **Ecumenical Love Story**

The Slave (1961)

23 Nov. **American Fantastic & the Shtetl Redux**

Alone (1960)
Three Tales (1964)
The Séance (1965)
The Lecture (1965)
Zeitl and Rickel (1966) – *Collected Stories*

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Thanksgiving*

Joseph Sherman, "Scrutinizing the Shtetl: I. B. Singer's 'Tseytl un Rikl,'" *Prooftexts* 15 (1995): 129-44.

30 Nov. **Portrait of the Artist as a Traveling Magician**

The Magician of Lublin (1960)

3 Dec. **Lost in America**

Enemies, a Love Story (1966)

3:30-5:30 Screening of *Enemies*, dir. Paul Mazursky (USA, 1989), 119 minutes.

15 Dec. 10:00 AM: Final take-home exam is due.

Disability Policy: The JTS policy on disabilities may be found at www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Students_with_Disabilities.xml.

Academic Integrity: Students in this class are expected to maintain academic integrity; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. JTS Student Disciplinary Procedures can be found at http://www.jtsa.edu/About_JTS/Administration/Policies/Student_Disciplinary_Procedures.xml JTS students are expected to bear sole responsibility for their work, to learn the rules and definitions that underlie the practice of academic integrity and to uphold its ideals.

For Further Reading

Hugh Denman, *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2002). PJ 5129 A4 S55 Z699: see esp. the essays of Adamczyk-Garbowska, Shaked, and Turniansky.

Ken Frieden, "I. B. Singer's Monologues of Demons," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 263-68.

Janet Hadda, *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life* (Oxford, 1997), chaps. 1-3. PJ5129 A4S55 Z693 1997.

Dan Miron, "Passivity and Narration: The Spell of Isaac Bashevis Singer," *The Image of the Shtetl and other studies of modern Jewish literary imagination*. (Syracuse UP, 2000), chap. 8

David G. Roskies, "The Demon as Storyteller: Isaac Bashevis Singer," *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), chap. 8.

Naomi Seidman, *Faithful renderings: Jewish-Christian differences and the politics of translation* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 263-75. PJ5067 .S45 2006

Joseph Sherman, "Bashevis Singer and the Jewish Pope," in Wolitz, *The Hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer*, chap. 2.

Chone Shmeruk, "Monologue as Narrative Strategy in the Short Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer," in *Recovering the Canon: Essays on Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. David Neal Miller (Leiden, 1986). PJ 5129 S55 Z81 1986. pp. 108-15

Seth L. Wolitz, ed. *The Hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2001. PJ5129.A4 S55 Z695 2001.