

JEWISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Goldie Morgentaler

COURSE OUTLINE:

This course will present an overview of Jewish-Canadian literature from the early twentieth century until the present day. Lectures will focus on the history of Canadian Jews, on questions of identity (how do we define Jewish-Canadian literature; what is ethnic literature in a Canadian context and on the way in which this literature has been influenced by Canadian cultural, historical and political realities.

Given the enormous influence of Yiddish writers on the subsequent development of Jewish literature in Canada, we will begin by examining in English translation the work of the major Yiddish-language poets of Montreal (I. J. Segal, Melekh Ravitch, Ida Maze, Rokhl Korn). We will also look at the work of the poet A.M. Klein, who, while fluent in Yiddish, wrote in English and so serves as a transitional figure between the Yiddish-language poets and the English-speaking world. Subsequent writers, like the poets Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen and the novelist Mordecai Richler, all of whom wrote in English, owe a debt to both the Yiddish literary tradition of Montreal and to A. M. Klein “the founding father of Canadian-Jewish literature.” In fact, Klein figures as a character in one of Richler’s novels, *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. The study of Richler’s novel will bring us into the second part of the course, which will concentrate on prose fiction, moving chronologically forward in time and westward from Montreal to the novels of the Toronto-based Anne Michaels and Michael Redhill and the Winnipeg fiction of Adele Wiseman. Wiseman was in fact one of Canada’s first internationally acclaimed novelists when her book *The Sacrifice* became a best seller in the United States and Britain. In this course, we will be looking at another of her novels, *Crackpot*, which is set in Winnipeg.

While several of the writers featured in the course were immigrants to Canada and wrote about their homelands in eastern Europe, the focus of the selected readings will be primarily on Canada itself and how all of these writers depict this vast country. What was it like, for instance, to be a Yiddish-speaking immigrant in a city like Montreal where there was constant tension between the English and the French, yet it was possible to live one’s entire life in Yiddish? And given the large number of post World War II immigrants, how did the Holocaust impact Jewish-Canadian literature? How do Jewish-Canadian writers depict non-Jews in their fiction? How do Canadian language tensions translate into the poetry and fiction of Jewish-

Canadian writers? These and related topics will come up for discussion in class. It is hoped that students will contribute freely and frequently to these discussions.

TEXTS (subject to change):

Course pack.

Klein, A. M., *The Second Scroll*

Michaels, Anne. *Fugitive Pieces*

Redhill, Michael. *Martin Sloane*

Richler, Mordecai, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* or *Solomon Gursky Was Here*

Rosenfarb, Chava. *Survivors: Seven Short Stories* (Selected stories in course pack)

Wiseman, Adele. *Crackpot*

(*N.B. All of the novels are readily available in paperback. I will include the two Rosenfarb stories in the course pack.*)

TENTATIVE EVALUATION:

One presentation (subject to enrollment numbers): 30%

Two essays, each worth 30%

Quizzes: 10%

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

(Based on Tues/Thurs Spring schedule Feb. 13, 2011—June 10, 2011)

Feb 15: INTRODUCTION

Feb. 17: The Montreal poets (Course pack)

Feb. 22: The Montreal poets

Feb. 24: The Montreal poets

March 1: The Montreal poets

March 3: A.M. Klein. *The Second Scroll*

March 8: Klein

March 10: Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*

March 15: Richler

March 17: Richler

March 22: Richler

March 24: Wiseman, *Crackpot*

March 29: Wiseman

March 31: Wiseman

April 5: Wiseman

April 7: Rosenfarb, “The Greenhorn” and “Edgia’s Revenge” from *Survivors: Seven Short Stories* (Course pack)

April 12: Rosenfarb

April 14-29: PASSOVER

May 3: Rosenfarb

May 5: Rosenfarb

May 10: INDEPENDENCE DAY

May 12: Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*

May 17: Michaels

May 19: Michaels

May 24: Michaels

May 26: Redhill, *Martin Sloane*

May 31: Redhill

June 2: Redhill

June 7-9: SHAVUOT: NO CLASS

June 10: *Semester ends*
