

English 340-16873: Jewish Writers
Archives in Contemporary Jewish Literature
Fall 2014

Professor H. Kaufman

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Office Hours: MW 1:30-3:00 and by appointment

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Class Meetings:

360 Condon

MW 12:00-1:20

Course Description

In recent years Jewish fiction and non-fiction writers have turned to the archive quest narrative to explore family secrets, confusing histories, and lost or misunderstood rumors about Jewish culture and people. These narratives are interested not only in recovering events from the past but in charting the writer's experience of recovering the past. Not surprisingly, one of the prominent features of these works is the obsession with the archive's material fragments—bunches of letters, photographs, old train tickets, diaries, and/or misplaced objects from another world. As the characters in these narratives search (impossibly) for “historical truths” they wrestle with relationships among history, narrative, and the meaning of Jewish identity. This course will study a selection of archival quest narratives written by contemporary Jewish writers to understand how the archive's objects/papers work rhetorically and aesthetically to create stories; how fiction and/or memoir shape and reflect knowledge of Jewish history and culture; and why archival objects and texts carry or unleash so much emotional power.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) To read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions.
- 2) To draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- 3) To perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts.
- 4) To write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose.
- 5) To employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
- 6) To employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Required Texts (books will be available at the UO bookstore).

* Dara Horn, *A Guide for the Perplexed: A Novel* (Norton, 2013)

ISBN (paperback): 978-0-393-34888-0

* Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (Granta, 1999)

ISBN (paperback): 978-1862073296

* Ilan Stavans and Steve Sheinkin, *El Illuminado: A Graphic Novel* (Basic Books, 2012)

ISBN: 978-0465032570

* Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated* (Harper, 2002)

ISBN: 978-0060529703

* Assorted readings posted on Blackboard (BB) or in links listed on the syllabus

Course Expectations and Details

I Class Work

Respect

Everyone enrolled in this course is expected to help foster a community of respect. We will read controversial material and you may find that you don't always agree with a view expressed by a classmate, teacher, author, or text. It is crucial that we listen carefully and contribute respectfully to class discussions. Classroom behavior should enable and not interfere with learning.

The use of cell phones and social media during class time is prohibited

This prohibition applies to spaces outside of the classroom, such as the bathrooms, hallways, or lobbies of the classroom building.

Please turn cell phones to vibrate before class begins, and silence electronic equipment capable of interrupting class.

Class notes should be taken on paper. Unless an exception has been made, computers should not be used during class.

Restrooms should be used prior to or following class

Excessive absences from class for visits to the bathroom are disruptive. If you have a medical situation requiring you to make regular visits to the restroom during class please let me know during the first week of the term so that I can make appropriate accommodations to minimize disruptions.

Plan to attend all classes on time and remain for the duration of the class period

If a one-time situation interferes with class please let me know in advance. Persistent lateness or early departures are prohibited.

Please bring the following to each class: the course syllabus, the book we are studying, hard copies of assigned reading from Blackboard, paper for in-class writing exercises and note-taking, and a writing utensil. Website readings (excluding essays on Blackboard) will be made available in class.

Quizzes

Quizzes are unannounced and will focus on the reading due on the day of the quiz. If you are absent on the day of a quiz you cannot make it up (since it will be "pop"). However, you may drop one quiz grade from your quiz grade average. If you've missed one quiz you can count it as your "dropped" quiz. If you haven't missed a quiz then the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Quizzes take place at the start of class.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Your regular attendance is vital to the goals of this course. You may miss two class meetings without penalty. *Your final grade will drop one-third of a letter grade for each subsequent absence unless you have contacted me and we have agreed on alternative arrangements.*

**** You are responsible for work due or assigned on days you are absent. If you miss a class it is your responsibility to contact a fellow student to find out what you've missed. ****

What to do if you are absent

There is no need to email me. I will assume you're using one of your two allotted absences.

More than two absences will result in a lower final course grade (see Attendance Policy).

If your absences are the result of a medical situation **it is your responsibility to provide a medical note.** The note should be written by the medical doctor who treated your illness. It should be written on official stationary from your doctor's office, and should not only state that a medical situation prevented you from attending class but should include the dates of your absences. The doctor's name must be clearly identified on the note.

It is your responsibility to communicate long-term (more than two missed classes) absences due to medical situations. Specific medical details are private and do not need to be shared. However, you *do* need to take responsibility for missing class by communicating with your professors and by providing medical documentation verifying your absences.

Class Participation

You should expect to participate fully in class discussions by contributing your ideas, asking questions, pointing to passages that interest or confuse you, and by taking notes.

II Written Work

Written assignments should be turned in by the deadline and in the format (electronic or hard copy) specified in the "Writing Assignments" section of this syllabus. Blackboard assignments should be **saved as a single MS Word file.**

Written work can be turned in after a deadline but will be counted as late. Assignments will be docked 5 points for each day beyond the deadline. Extensions and incompletes will be given only for documented emergencies.

I do not accept written work submitted by email.

I encourage you to find a backup plan in case your printer stops working. Late papers resulting from broken printers will be counted as late.

Plagiarism

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources. Plagiarism will be handled according to the [Student Conduct Code](#)

III Coursework Assessment, Support, and Access

- 20% Class participation — including quality and consistency of contributions to discussions, punctuality, preparedness for class, and quiz/in-class writing grades
- 20% The Archive's Stories Essay
- 20% Response Essays (averaged together)
- 20% Inventing an Archive Part I
- 20% Inventing an Archive Part II

Course Website (blackboard.uoregon.edu)

You will need to access this site to download reading assignments, to upload writing assignments, to receive feedback on your written work, and to access syllabi and handouts. I frequently return essay comments electronically on Blackboard. Please be sure to check those comments when they have been returned. I am always happy to set up meetings to discuss your work. **When you come to my office for appointments please bring a printed copy of your essay along with my comments.**

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and will need accommodation, let me know by week two of the term so that I can make appropriate arrangements. Please request that the [UO Accessible Education Center](#) send me a letter explaining that you've consulted with them about your disability.

Tutoring and Help

Writing help is available through Academic Learning Services located in 68 PLC (call for an appointment: 541-346-3226). I am also very happy to help you with coursework. Please feel welcome to contact me by email or in person to set up a time to discuss your work in this course.

IV Assignment Schedule and Homework

This class will have some demanding (but wonderful!) reading assignments. We will move at a steady pace and I will expect everyone to keep up. As you read each night's assignment you should take notes—asking questions, identifying important or confusing passages, observing features of the writing that interest you.

Assignments are due on dates listed below. Please use editions of the texts listed on the first page of this syllabus.

Week 1

M 9/29 Introductions

W 10/1 **What is an Archive?** Read the [Wikipedia entry](#) for “Archive” and make a list of 3 archives you know about and/or found while searching on the internet. Write one paragraph describing features common to all three archives.

Week2

M 10/6 *Rodinsky's Room* (**Read ONLY parts written by Rachel Lichtenstein**—sections by Sinclair are optional and will not be discussed in class): Read “The Princelet Street Synagogue” 14-129 (begins on page 14 although the page number is missing) Keep in mind, this section is shorter than it may appear because **you will skip the parts written by Sinclair.**

W 10/8 *Rodinsky's Room*: Read 151-278 (again, no page number; this section is titled “The Man who Never Was”) **skipping Sinclair parts**

Week 3

M 10/13 Readings: (1) *Rodinsky's Room*: pages 279-end (including the Afterword);
(2) "Johnson—Israelites" (BB); and (3) "Johnson—Hebrews" (BB)

W 10/15 **Essay 1: The Archive's Stories Essay due**

Readings: (1) Eakin (BB)
(2) Kenny (BB)

Week 4

M 10/20 Readings: (1) *El Iluminado* Part 1 (3-72)
(2) "Johnson Spain & Diaspora" (BB)

W 10/22 Finish *El Iluminado*

Week 5

M 10/27 Readings: (1) Wiesel (BB)
(2) Bendavid-Val (BB)
(3) Johnson Holocaust (BB)

W 10/29 **Response 1 Due; *Everything is Illuminated* pages 1-26**

Week 6

M 11/3 *Everything is Illuminated* 27-85

W 11/5 **Response 2 Due; *Everything is Illuminated* 86-145**

Week 7

M 11/10 *Everything is Illuminated* 146-193

W 11/12 *Everything is Illuminated* 194-228

Week 8

M 11/17 **Response 3 Due; *Everything is Illuminated* to end**

W 11/19 Readings: (1) *A Guide for the Perplexed: A Novel* 1-91
(2) Johnson "Maimonides and Geniza" (BB)

Week 9

M 11/24 **Inventing and Archive Part I due; *A Guide for the Perplexed: A Novel* 92-168**

W 11/26 Read *A Guide for the Perplexed: A Novel* 169-237

Week 10

M 12/1 Read *A Guide for the Perplexed: A Novel* to end; Visit by Dr. Judith Baskin, Philip H. Knight Professor in Humanities and Associate Dean of Humanities

W 12/3 **Inventing An Archive Part 2 due by 6:00 PM**

Writing Assignments

10/15 Essay 1: The Archive's Stories

Essays should include the following:

- 1) Description of an Object: Describe the physical features of one object from the class archive using as many details as necessary.
- 2) Detection of the Object's role: Read/Study the object carefully. If you choose a book you'll want to skim the first chapter to get a sense of the subject matter. Pay attention to signs of ownership or use of your object, such as names, dates, and locations. If you select a letter pay attention to the envelope's evidence in addition to the contents of the letter (return address, date, stamp, and other interesting details). What kind of evidence do you find in the content of the object? Why might this particular object, given its content or function, have been saved? Google titles, events, or anything else this object recalls that will help you get a better read of the object.
- 3) The Archive's Contexts: How do you interpret your object within the context of the rest of the items in the archive? How does one object impose meaning on other objects? How do other objects in the archive impose meaning on your object? How do you read single objects in light of the rest?
- 4) What story does your object tell? What does it suggest about a person, a moment in history, an event, etc.?

Hint: I know nothing about the origins or history of this archive. Therefore, I'm not asking you to find the truth or to determine anything certain about the events or people named in this archive. Rather, the point of this assignment is to get you thinking about how objects and papers in an archive create stories or parts of stories (that is, fictions, histories, narratives, characters, etc.).

Essays should be 2 pages (min.), should follow the Writing Checklist and Guide (below), and a hard copy should be turned in at the beginning of class on 10/15.

10/29 & 11/5: Response Essays 1 & 2: *Everything is Illuminated*—*Illuminated*?

Select a paragraph from the novel that confuses you. Answer the following questions in a full-page response:

- 1) Describe the feature(s) of the writing that make(s) this paragraph confusing.
- 2) Identify the subject of this paragraph (What is it about?). What kinds of issues or topics are addressed in this paragraph? What does the paragraph say about those issues?
- 3) If you could meet Foer for coffee and ask one question about this passage what would it be? What features of the passage do you want to understand better?

Responses should be one full page (min), should follow the Writing Checklist and Guide (below), and a hard copy should be turned in at the beginning of class.

11/17: Response Essay 3: Illumination!

Identify something about Jewish culture you have learned by reading this novel. You may want to think about the writing of the text; what this novel suggests about recovering history; and/or what this novel has to say about Jewish archives or Jewish literary culture.

Responses should be 1-2 pages (min), should follow the Writing Checklist and Guide (below), and a hard copy should be turned in at the beginning of class on 11/17.

11/24 at the start of class: Inventing an Archive Part I

Using digital images or written descriptions create an archive containing 5 (or more) objects left by one character from one of novels we've studied. You'll want to think about what you know about the character, how he/she develops in the text, and/or what you might have wished to know about this character. Once you've collected and/or created these objects write a brief caption describing their identity, origin, and connection to the character you've selected.

The objects in your archive will need to be placed in a "container" (some kind of program accessible using a PC (such as MS Word, Powerpoint, Wordpress, etc.). I do not use or own an Apple device so please be sure that the program you select is accessible to PC users. If you're not using a program included in the MS Office Suite you should clear the program with me before you begin working on this project.

The archive can be created out of a simple MS Word document. You might collect a group of letters, images, or pieces of music (for example) all of which can be pasted into a Word document. The goal if the first part of the assignment is twofold: first, to select objects that will reveal an observation you've made about the character you've selected; and second, to collect and assemble objects will work together in some way to tell a story.

Your invented archive should be uploaded to Blackboard by the start of class on 11/24. If you create a website then paste the link to a document and upload that document onto Blackboard.

12/3 at 6PM: Inventing an Archive Part II

Dara Horn makes the following statement in the Reader's Guide to her novel: "Recording everything is the same as recording nothing, because it makes memories meaningless. It's the act of choosing what's worth saving that turns a lifetime's worth of memories into a story" (Horn n.p.). Write an essay in which you make an interpretive claim about the story your archive tells based upon the saved objects. What kind of meaning do these objects hold for the character?

Hint: It might help to think of this assignment as a kind of character study.

Essays should be 3-4 pages min., should follow the Writing Checklist and Guide (below) and should be uploaded to blackboard by 10PM on 12/4.

Writing Checklist & Guide

Responses and Essays should focus on the assigned essay questions. Be sure to read the assigned questions several times before starting your essay. As you draft and revise your essay you will want to revisit those questions to be sure your thinking remains on task. Your essays should **NOT** address features of the text that you “relate to.” Such responses may be good places to begin thinking about a text, but analysis requires us to think beyond first impressions. Instead you should consider the following questions as guides: identify an important feature of the writing; offer an interpretation of why that feature is important; and point to examples from the text to help you prove your interpretation.

1) Unless otherwise noted, all essays should be typed and double-spaced with 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and sides. You should use Times New Roman 12 pt. font.

2) Essays should have a title focused around your thesis. Titles should not have quotation marks.

Correct: Response Essay 1: The Uses of the Hidden Archive

Incorrect: Response Essay 1

3) Your name should appear in the upper left-hand corner of the essay’s first page followed by the professor’s name and assignment due date.

4) Insert page numbers on the bottom center of each page except the first.

5) Keep a copy of your paper.

6) Staple all work longer than one page.

7) Revise, proofread, and edit your paper many, many, many times before submitting it. Thoughtful, well-written, edited essays cannot be thrown together at the last minute.

8) Introduce authors by citing their complete name; thereafter, use the last name only. For example,

Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* emphasis the interior struggles of his characters. For example, the narrator describes features of Bella Wilfer’s character that render her a traumatized victim of circumstance. **Dickens** develops these features in later passages by including adjectives highlighting Bella’s emotional struggle.

The title of the work you are discussing should be italicized (if it is a published book). Published articles or shorter works should have quotation marks around the title.

9) Quotes should be cited according to MLA guidelines. A direct quote from a text should look like this:

“As an incontrovertible proof that those baleful attributes were all there, Mrs. Wilfer shuddered on the spot” (Dickens 117).

Please note: quote marks appear at the start and end of the quote and not at the end of the sentence; only the author’s last name and page number appear inside parentheses (no need for “page” or “p.”); and the period always appears at the end of the sentence.