ENGLISH 340: JEWISH WRITERS (Spring, 2017)

Instructor: Mary Wood
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Office hours: T 2-3:20 p.m./W 1:00-2:30 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will examine the constellation of history, memory, and family that informs so much of Jewish-American literature. While we will read a handful of pre-2000 texts to get a sense of the wider history and contexts of Jewish literature, the focus of the course this term will be on twenty-first century Jewish narrative across a range of genres, including short story, novel, speculative fiction, graphic memoir, autobiography. In particular, we will look at the ways that writers—through innovative uses of form, history, and story—have created new versions of what it means to be Jewish in America.

GOALS OF COURSE: Students will develop a knowledge of the history, myriad narrative forms, and diverse contexts of Jewish American literature. They will learn to read Jewish American literary texts closely, with an attention to narrative perspective; voice; orientation to place and space; representations of self, family, community, and nation; relationship to displacement and diaspora; and key cultural and historical references.

TEXTS:
Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*
Nicole Krauss, *Great House*
Amy Kurzweil, *Flying Couch*

Texts above are available at the Duckstore and online outlets of your choice. You might find them as well at Smith Family Books or Tsunami Books in Eugene. Stories and book excerpts are available on the Canvas site for the course.

WORK REQUIREMENTS:

1) **Read!!** Please have each work read by the day it’s listed on the syllabus. For longer works, you may divide them up by the number of class days. Be sure to finish each work by the last day it’s listed on the syllabus.

2) **Post and Comment**—Beginning April 10th, please post on Canvas a 250- word comment on the upcoming readings for the week **every Monday by midnight**. Also write a 1-2- sentence comment on another student’s post by this same time. Please comment on each reading for the week, though you may choose to focus primarily on one. This means reading ahead a little, or at least reading one text ahead and skimming the others. **No post and comment on April 24th (Week Four). You should have a total of 8 posts and 8 comments by the end of the term.**
4) **Point of View Exercise (2-3 pages)**—Choose a passage from one of the texts read so far in class and rewrite it from a different point of view. This could be the point of view of another character, an omniscient point of view, a close in or far out third person point of view, or the point of view of an object. **Due May 6th, on Canvas, by midnight.**

5) **Tree of Codes assignment**—Choose a text or section of a text read in class and re-express it, as Foer does with *Tree of Codes*. You may use any medium you like (narrative, illustration, comic, ceramics, paper art, video, music, etc.); it just has to reflect substantial care and thought and clearly speak to and from the original text. Write a 1-2-page, double-spaced essay explaining your project and how it relates to the original text. This paper should refer to at least one specific scene from the original, quoting from the text and explicating the quotation. **Due May 18th in class.**

6) **Final essay (6-8 pages)**—Please write an essay on a topic of your choice, focused on one or two texts read in class. This essay should have a clear thesis, be free of grammatical and spelling errors, quote from the text for support and illustration of ideas, and provide close readings of language and scenes from the text.

**Grade Breakdown:**
- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Posts and Comments: 20%
- Point of View Assignment: 20%
- *Tree of Codes* Assignment: 20%
- Final Essay: 30%

**READING SCHEDULE:**

**Week One—What is Jewish literature in America?**
- Tues., April 4th—Introductions.
- Thur., April 6th—Kate Bornstein, excerpt from *Queer and Pleasant Danger,* on Canvas.

**Week Two—How have Jewish writers explored Jewish American identity?**
- Tues., April 11th—Stories by Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin (Canvas)
- Thurs., April 13th—Excerpt from Brenda Serotte’s *Fortune Teller’s Kiss* (Canvas)

**Week Three—What are the forms and histories of Jewish cultural expression and why do these matter? Or do they?**
- Tues., April 18th—Silent film *East Meets West.*
- Thurs., April 20th—Bruno Schultz, “Tailors’ Dummies” from *Street of Crocodiles* (Canvas).
Week Four—How do Jewish texts speak to one another?
Tues., April 25th—Visit to Art Library to see Jonathan Safran Foer’s art book Tree of Codes
Thurs., April 27th—Discussion of Tree of Codes

Week Five—What does Reimagining History lead us Reflect on Jewish American life and literary expression in the Present?
Tues., May 2nd—Philip Roth, The Plot Against America.
Thurs., May 4th—Roth. Continued

Point of view exercise due May 6th, by midnight.

Week Six—Roth continued
Tues., May 9th—Roth continued.
Thurs., May 11th—Roth continued.

Week Seven—How Do Twenty-First-Century Writers Write History, Especially the Holocaust?
Tues., May 16th—Amy Kurzweil, Flying Couch.
Thurs., May 18th—Kurzweil continued. Tree of Codes project due in class.

Week Eight—How Does Contemporary Jewish Literature Represent History, Nation, and Jewish Identity?
Tues., May 23rd—Nicole Krauss, Great House.
Thurs., May 25th—Krauss continued

Week Nine—Krauss Continued.
Tues., May 30th—Krauss continued
Thus., June 1st—Krauss continued.

Week Ten—How Does Jewish Literature Queer Tradition, Culture, and the Past?
Tues., June 6th—Ellen Galford, chapters; from The Dyke and the Dybbuk.
Thurs., June 8th—Galford continued.

Email me your thesis statement by midnight on Wed., June 7th.
Final essay due on Canvas by midnight on Wed., June 14th.