

**Jewish Historical Fictions**  
**563:396:01/510:391:02**  
**(provisional syllabus)**

**Professor Nancy Sinkoff**

**Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays: 3:00-4:00, Miller Hall, or by appointment.**

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This course will explore a variety of Jewish historical fictions and their relationship to the historical periods they purport to represent, starting from late antiquity and continuing into the modern period. The course will investigate the differences and similarities between two kinds of narrative, history and fiction. Readings will include primary and secondary historical sources, as well as several novels. Topics to be covered include: Second Temple Sectarianism; Medieval Jewish Marriage Law and Customs; Mysticism; Sabbatianism; Revolution in the Soviet Union.

The following *required* books are available for purchase at the Rutgers University Bookstore:

Milton Steinberg, *As a Driven Leaf* (Behrmann House, Inc. 1996)  
I. B. Singer, *Satan in Goray* (1955, Noonday, reissued 1996)  
Myla Goldberg, *The Bee Season* (Anchor Books, 2001)  
Maggie Anton, *Rashi's Daughters* (Banot Press, 2005)  
A. B. Yehoshua, *Journey to the End of the Millennium* (Doubleday, 1998)  
Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966/2004)  
Dara Horn, *The World to Come: A Novel* (Norton, 2006)

[Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, an excellent survey of Jewish history, is on Reserve for the course Jewish Society and Culture I and can be useful for general background information]

**Course Requirements:** The assigned readings have been put on the Sakai website (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>) or at Alexander Library's Undergraduate Reserve Desk. Students are *required* to prepare the course readings and to participate actively in class. The readings listed for a given date must be read by that date. Please note that some weeks have more reading than others, so try to pace yourself accordingly. Moreover, we will have to schedule a few make-up classes to compensate for the missed classes due to the Jewish holidays. Students are also required to post, via Sakai and/or an email listserve, terms and discussion questions for each session. Students will be asked to lead mini-discussions in class about particular readings.

Every student is *required* to write four short papers and one take-home final exam. The four short papers are to be done in relationship to our class discussions of the novels. Because there are seven required novels, students may choose on which four of the seven books they wish to focus. Assignments for a given book are *due* on the date of discussion.

The final exam, in essay form, will require students to synthesize and analyze the course material. No late work will be accepted under any circumstances.

### **Special Needs**

Any student with special needs is urged to see me early in the semester to make the arrangements necessary to support a successful learning experience in this course.

### **Grading:**

Attendance, class participation, Sakai contributions: 10%  
Short Assignments: 60% (15% each)  
Final Exam: 30%

#### **1. Introduction: A Tale of Two Narratives**

On writing:

[http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=147](http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=106&Itemid=147)

On plagiarism:

[http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=109&Itemid=147](http://history.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=109&Itemid=147)

Start reading *As A Driven Leaf*

#### **2. Literature v. History**

Simon Schama, “Afterword” to *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*.  
(Sakai)

Gordon Wood, “The Fiction of History.” (Sakai)

Roger Chartier, “History between Narrative and Knowledge,” pp. 13-27, 167-69.  
(Sakai)

Jill Lepore, “Just the Facts, Ma’am: Fake Memoirs, Factual Fictions, and the History of History.” (Sakai)

#### **3. Second Temple Judaism**

Lee Levine, “The Age of Hellenism.” (Sakai)

Martin Jaffee, *Early Judaism*, Chapter Two: “Dynamics of Texts and Traditions,” pp. 55-91. (Sakai)

#### **4. The “Rabbinic Period”**

Martin Jaffee, *Early Judaism*, Chapter Four, pp. 125-146. (Sakai)

Gerson Cohen, “The Talmudic Age,” in *Great Ideas & Ages of the Jewish People*, ed. Leo W. Schwarz, pp. 143-212. (ALEX reserve)

Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, pp. 103-61. (Sakai)

#### **5. Discussion of *As A Driven Leaf* [Short Assignment #1 Due]**

## **6. Jews in Medieval Europe**

Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, “The Middle Ages,” pp. 385-402; 462-476. (ALEX Reserve)

Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, introduction, 77-103, 201-03, 232-237. (Sakai)

Start *Journey to the End of the Millennium*

## **7. Jewish Marriage Laws**

Judith Baskin, “Jewish Women in the Middle Ages.” (Sakai)

Renee Levine Melammed, “Sephardic Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods.” (Sakai)

Ze’ev Falk, “Monogamy.” (Sakai)

Rachel Biale, “Divorce,” pp. 70-84, 100-101. (Sakai)

## **8. No Class. Rosh Hashanah Eve**

## **9. No Class. Rosh Hashanah**

## **10. Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe**

**Makeup Session: Discussion of *Journey to the End of the Millennium* [Short Assignment #2 Due]**

Start *Rashi’s Daughters*

Elisheva Baumgarten, “Birth,” pp. 21-54, and notes. (Sakai)

Cecil Roth, “The Success of the Medieval Jewish Ideal.” (Sakai)

## **11. No Class. Yom Kippur Eve**

## **12. No Class. Sukkot Eve**

## **13. No Class. Second Day of Sukkot.**

## **14. No Class. Shemini Azeret Eve**

Start reading *The Bee Season*

## **15. No Class. Simhat Torah.**

## **16. The World of Kabbalah; Jewish Mysticism**

**Makeup Session: Discussion of *Rashi’s Daughters* [Short Assignment #3 Due]**

Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought* (ALEX reserve, under the course “Jewish Society and Culture I”), pp. 419-450.

Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah* (Sakai)

## **17. Ecstatic Kabbalah; Abraham Abulafia**

Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Chapter Five, “Mystical Techniques.” (Sakai)

---., *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 82-124.  
(Sakai)

Gershom Scholem, "Abraham Abulafia and Prophetic Kabbalah," in Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (ALEX reserve)

**18. Discussion of *The Bee Season* [Short Assignment #4 Due]**

Start *Satan in Goray*

**19. The Expulsion from Spain and Lurianic Kabbalah**

Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, pp. 1-102. (ALEX reserve)

Chone Shmeruk, "Yiddish Literature and Collective Memory: The Case of the Chmielnicki Massacres." (Sakai)

recommended: Gershom Scholem, "Isaac Luria and His School," in G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 244-286. (ALEX reserve)

**20. Sabbatianism in Poland**

Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatian Prophets*, pp. 1-40. (Sakai)

Scholem, "Poland," in *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 591-601. (ALEX Reserve)

**21. Discussion of *Satan in Goray* [Short Assignment #5 Due]**

**22. Medieval Anti-Jewish Hatred**

Ronald Po-Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, pp. 1-13. (Sakai)

Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, pp. 124-155. (Sakai)

**23. The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe**

"Ritual Murder Texts" and "Emperor Frederick II, 1236." (Sakai)

"Protests Against the Kiev Ritual Murder Accusations." (Sakai)

Albert Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, pp. 129-193. (Sakai)

**24. Discussion of *The Fixer* [Short Assignment #6 Due]**

**25. No Class. Wednesday is a Friday.**

Start reading *The World to Come*

**26. Revolution on the Jewish Street**

Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, chapters 2-5. (ALEX Reserve)

**27. Soviet Yiddish Culture**

David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 30-59.  
(Sakai)

Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, introduction, *Ashes out of Hope*. (Sakai)

Recommended: <http://sovietjewishculture.org/>

**28. Discussion of *The World to Come* with author Dara Horn. [Short Assignment #7 Due]**

**29. Conclusions**

**Conduct Code:**

Regular attendance of class and active participation in class discussion is required. Students are expected to come to class on time, having prepared the assignments due that day; to respect the protocols of classroom conduct (e.g., arriving promptly, turning off cell phones, not eating during class, avoiding distracting chatter); to check their email regularly for class announcements (e.g., changes in schedule or assignments); and to turn in written work on the dates due. Students who find that they are unable to attend class regularly for some pressing reason are required to notify their dean as well as the instructor as soon as possible. Excuses for absences will not be accepted after the final assignment for the course is due.

Except for collaborative assignments officially approved by the instructor in advance, all work a student submits must be his/her own independent effort. Students must cite properly all outside sources consulted in preparing written assignments. Students should review the university policy on Academic Integrity (see the website for the Teaching Excellence Center). Failure to comply with this policy can result in failure of the course. I wish to reiterate that the final exam *must be done independently*.