Jewish Studies/ History 307

Mon. 2:30- 4:20

Seminar on Jewish Memoirs and Jewish Memory:
Writing the Self in Jewish Society
This course explores the emergence of writing about the self in a culture that traditionally put primacy on collective memory, doing close readings of a selection of Jewish memoirs for what they say about self and society.

Fundamental questions are: why did Jewish memoirists write? Who was the intended audience? What is the relationship between personal and collective Jewish experience? How does the larger historical context influence individual Jewish experience and expression? What role do gender, class, age at the time of writing, play in the portrayal of one’s life? Is memory necessarily nostalgic? What role do anger, guilt, desire for revenge, self-aggrandizement, play in memoir writing? How do the memoirists perceive their Jewishness; their relationship with non-Jews? How do we read memoirs critically (what can you trust about what a memoirist says, and how do you know?), and how can they be used as sources of Jewish history?

We will read a selection of memoirs from early modernity to the present, not necessarily in chronological order, from Europe and the US. Prior study of Jewish history (JWST 131, 132 or equivalent), expected and assumed.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance, preparation, and participation: Seminars are heavily peer-driven and require active participation, meant to enhance the learning of all. There are only 13 class sessions, two of which are devoted to work on your research papers; attendance at all is required. If illness or emergency prevents your attendance or preparation, please contact me as soon as possible by phone and email. In such a case, make up work will be required, including but not limited to, meeting with one or more students and me about the missed session. Even so, absence/ lessened participation will affect final grade.
Seminar participants must come to class prepared: having done the readings carefully, and with at least one but no more than two, pages of considered, focused Observations to contribute during discussion (see below). We will read all or most of a memoir per session (except those devoted to presentation on your research projects); learning to read rapidly but actively, with discernment, is crucial. Do not leave reading for the day before (let alone the day of) the Seminar; if you read some daily, you will be in great shape for class and will enjoy it most. You MUST research the basics about the author and work we will read for each session, using Encyclopaedia Judaica (on line or hard cover ed.), or other reliable sources. We will discuss these and more in-depth research methods and sources during sessions, as well as in individualized library session; see below.

* PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS READING FOR THE FIRST SEMINAR MEETING.

Observations are to be informed comments about the reading, a blend of reaction and analysis, neither simple reaction nor reporting. You may say that you found something “interesting” only if you explain WHY. See and use the questions listed above, but you need not limit yourself to these. Make comparative observations. The main point of the Observation assignment is for you to contribute focused remarks to the Seminar. Preparing but not contributing observations does not fulfill their purpose.

Submit your Observations to me will be at the end of each class, including when you present the lead off; no late submissions. Observations will not be graded but their consistent submission and quality will count toward the course participation requirement (see below). Observations need not be a polished piece of writing but must be comprehensible. Typed preferred but legible handwritten is acceptable.

HARD COPY ONLY OF ALL WRITTEN WORK; NO ELECTRONIC SUBMISSIONS.

Lead-off presentation: Each student will lead off 1-2 sessions, taking the first 10 minutes (do not exceed this limit or go much under it; practice pacing yourself). In the lead off, tell us about the author and her/ his time and place, based on encyclopaedia articles/ bibliography search, other resources I suggest or you discover, and lay the groundwork for discussion by stating main themes and issues, as you do in your Observation papers, but in greater depth. Your presentation is a basic Seminar requirement and counts heavily toward the final grade; it is also a service to the learning of all Seminar participants.

Writing: two short essays/ papers (6-8 typed, double-spaced pages, 12 point, 1” margins), one due before Fall break, one after (due dates on syllabus), based on assigned readings; one 18-25 page research paper on a topic chosen by the student in consultation with me and discussed in the
Seminar, in lieu of a final exam, due on or before the date set for the final exam by the Registrar. You must see me to choose your topic and have at least its general outlines and preliminary bibliography BEFORE SPRING BREAK; see syllabus. All students will circulate drafts of their work for peer and instructor comments in sessions devoted to this. Once you have your approved topic, you must to make an appointment with a research librarian re: bibliography. This appointment should be held BEFORE spring break but at the latest, the week we return from it; confirm that session with me.

The short papers will be on ca. three sets of assigned readings and should be comparative, thematic, and analytical (not merely descriptive). No bibliography needed in these; abbreviated citation fine; details in class.

Significant class time will be spent on researching, conceiving and writing your research paper, including reading and commenting on each other’s drafts, copies of students must send electronically to all, and to the instructor, in hard copy. Formal bibliography and foot/ endnotes, using established conventions, are required in this paper and will be assessed in its grade.

For these conventions and other very useful writing tips, consult any of the following inexpensive paperbacks, worth owning:
Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual;
May Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History;

In general, use simple and direct style, using the fewest, most precise words to make and substantiate your point. NEVER use passive tense unless the subject is truly unknown. Do not use “impact” as a verb unless you mean “violently collide;” say “affect,” “influence.” Avoid other inflated verbiage.

Late submission of essays results in 1/3 grade reduction per day unless there is documented significant illness or emergency, discussed with me if at all possible, before the due date. Late submission of the final paper requires an Incomplete only the Registrar can process. No late submission of Observations.

I am happy to read and comment on drafts of your written work if you give me at least two days before a submission deadline.

**Grading:**

participation (including observation papers): 45%
written: 55% (ca. 8% and 9% for the short papers; ca. 38% for the research paper).
HONOR CODE: This course, as all at Oberlin, is governed by all the College Honor Code. It is each student’s responsibility to know and understand the Code, which includes but is not limited to, questions of plagiarism and attribution. Consult the HC section of the College website and/or members of the Honor Code committee; reference librarians, me, with any questions.

READING; REQUIRED TITLES:

All required reading has been ordered for shelf reserve in Mudd, and when in print, has also been ordered in the College bookstore. If you do not find a title on reserve or in the bookstore, CONSULT SUPERVISORY STAFF (Michael Palazzolo in Mudd), immediately, in person or email. Emailing me is not an effective way to get help; all I can do is email them (with the delay). I strongly urge you to obtain all readings up front but at least three weeks before you expect to do them—glitches happen in any system. Ohio Link is an excellent resource but be sure to order well in advance of your expected time to read. Since we are mostly reading whole books, little is on eres (pword: JWST 307), though assigned articles/chapters, NOT including encyclopedia articles, will be. I may have some copies of readings in my office; see me. Do share with one another.

However you do it, obtaining and preparing assigned reading is the responsibility of each student. There is no excused failure to obtain readings. If illness or other circumstances prevent you from doing them or otherwise preparing for or attending class or fulfilling any other requirement, please speak with me as soon as possible. If illness/emergency prevents you from doing readings, come to class anyway; speak with me.

Always bring assigned reading to class.

If you are having trouble entering the discussion, speak with me.

"Recommended reading” means precisely that; it is on the syllabus to give bibliographical help toward your papers and lead off presentations.

You are expected to have your own copies of the following works. If purchase poses an untenable financial burden, partner with another student to purchase and share the list, or plan well and use Ohio Link, or be incredibly organized and use shelf reserve copies:

Paul Cowan, An Orphan in History

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor

Memoirs of Glueckel of Hameln, M. Lowenthal OR Beth Zion Abrhams trans. (see syllabus for merits of each)
Autobiography of Solomon Maimon, J. Clark Murray trans. only

Mary Antin, The Promised Land
Eva Hoffman, Lost in Translation
Chaim Grade, My Mother’s Sabbath Days
Lucy Dawidowicz, From That Time and Place
Yossi Klein Halevy, Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist

Welcome to the course! I look forward to studying with you.
1. Introductory: Loss and Recovery/ Discovery  2/2

Paul Cowan, *An Orphan in History*, entire

No student lead off today; bring your observations, as described, above; we will do a round table, everyone contributing points and commenting on those of others.

Recommended: Stephen Dubner, *Turbulent Souls: A Catholic Son's Return to His Jewish Family*

Helen Epstein, *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History*

Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen, A Memoir*

2. Jewish Memory and Memoir-Writing  2/9

Presenter:


Lawrence Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions*, pp.471-472

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor; Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, pp.5-103


Recommended:

Dawidowicz, "What is the Use of Jewish History?," in Dawidowicz, *What is the Use of Jewish History?*

David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*

3. Glikl of Hameln  2/16

Presenter:

Read either edition: Lowenthal has fewer pages and is readily available pb; Abrahams is less abridged and better translation:

*The Memoirs of Glueckel of Hameln, trans. Marvin Lowenthal* entire
The Life of Glueckel of Hameln, 1646-1724, Written by Herself, transl. and ed. by Beth-Zion Abrahams entire

Recommended: Natalie Zemon Davis, Women on the Margins, pp.5-62 (presenter should consult this)

4. Solomon Maimon   2/23

Sign up to see me re: your paper topic. We must have met and you get an approved topic before Spring Break, see # 7, below. Once you have your topic, make and have your session with Research Librarian, which should be held before Spring Break but at latest, in the week of return from it; confirm with me when you’ve had your session.

Presenter:


In addition to "Maimon," presenter should research "Moses Mendelssohn," and "Haskalah" (focus only on the German haskalah)

5. Pauline Wengeroff   3/2

FIRST ESSAY DUE, IN CLASS

Presenter:

Memoirs of a Grandmother, trans. Shulamit Magnus Several hard copies will be made available

Recommended:

David Biale, “A Journey Between Worlds: East European Jewish Culture from the Partitions of Poland to the Holocaust,” in Biale, ed., Cultures of the Jews, 799-860

Lucy Dawidowicz' Introduction to her Golden Tradition

6. Mary Antin   3/9

Presenter:

Mary Antin, The Promised Land, Werner Sollors/ Penguin edition preferred; entire

The presenter should use Sollors' Introduction as well as encyclopedia entries.
Recommended:

There is much writing on the east European Jewish immigration to the US, Jewish immigrant society in New York, and more recently, women's experience. Some selected titles are:

Hasia Diner, The Jews of the United States; Her Works Praise Her

Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers

Sydney Stahl Weinberg, The World of Our Mothers

See also Anzia Yezierska's novel, Bread Givers, and the collection of her stories, The Open Cage

7. Eva Hoffmann  3/16

* PRELIMINARY RESEARCH PAPER TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS TODAY. Email this to everyone by Sunday, 3/15, 7pm; give me hard copy in class. We will discuss these in class.

N.B.: Revised topic and bibliography due when we return from Spring Break; if you haven’t had your Reference Librarian session, do so now.

Presenter:

Eva Hoffmann, Lost in Translation, entire

SPRING BREAK NO CLASS  3/21-3/29

8-9. Chaim Grade  3/30; 4/6

REVISIONS IN PAPER TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE TODAY. Email to everyone by Sun. 7 pm, 3/29; bring me hard copy in class. We will discuss in class.

Chaim Grade, My Mother's Sabbath Days, A Memoir, Schocken ed.

Read through p.220 for the first Grade session, through the end for the second.

Presenters should use the Foreward to this book as well as encyclopedia/bibliographical references; please get copies of some of Grade’s other books and bring these to class.

Presenter:

Presenter:
10. Lucy Dawidowicz  4/13
SECOND ESSAY DUE TO ME IN CLASS

Presenter:

Lucy Dawidowicz, From That Place and Time, A Memoir, 1938-1947, entire
Presenter should bring Dawidowicz’s other books to class.

11. Yossi Klein Halevi  4/20

Presenter:

Yossi Klein Halevi, Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist, entire


No assigned common readings.

In these sessions, all will present on their projects, having circulated drafts electronically to all and hard copies to me, by NOON on Sunday, 4/26 and 5/3.

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FURTHER RECOMMENDED MEMOIRS:

Toby Knobel Flueck, Memories of My Life in a Polish Village, 1930-1949
visual memoir: in drawings

Memoirs of My People Through A Thousand Years, ed. Leo Schwarz

Lucy Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition

I. J. Singer, Of A World That Is No More


Jewish Life in Germany, Memoirs from Three Centuries, ed. Monika Richarz

Peter Gay, My German Question, Growing Up in Nazi Berlin
The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist, The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem

Puah Rakowski, My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland, ed. Paula Hyman

David Weiss Halivni, The Book and the Sword

Miep Gies, Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped to Hide the Frank Family

Nechama Tec, Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood