

Jewish Memoirs and Memory: Writing the Self in Jewish Society

Jewish Studies/ History 233

Tu Th 9:30-10:50 King

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Office: Rice 310

Office hours: Tu Th 2:30-4, self-sign up on my office door, and by appointment.



This course explores the emergence of writing about the self and individual experience in a culture that traditionally put primacy on collective memory and expression and supported and encouraged only that of men. We will read memoirs by Jewish women and men for what they can tell us about the relationship of self, Jewish society, and the larger world, and about a Jewish genre that blends literature and history.

Fundamental questions we will ask are:

- Why did Jewish memoirists write? Who was the memoirists' intended audience? What is the relationship between personal and collective Jewish experience in the memoirs?

- 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?
- Is memory necessarily nostalgic? What role do anger, guilt, desire for revenge, self-aggrandizement, play in memoir writing?
- How do memoirists perceive their Jewishness; their relationship with non-Jews?
- How do we read memoirs critically, as sources of history? What can you trust about what a memoirist says-- and how do you know?

We will read memoirs from early modernity to the present, not necessarily in chronological order, from Europe and the US. Prior study of Jewish history (particularly JWST 132) helpful but not required.

This course gives CD, writing, JWST, and HIST credit and is an approved elective for the German Literature major and minor and for GSFS (confirm all credit particulars for other Departments with those offices).

This syllabus and the “Course Guide,” both in hard copy and on bb, contain much information for which you are responsible. Read them; ask me any questions.

SKILLS GOALS:

Students will learn how to approach memoirs as historical sources and will become adept at discussing orally and analyzing in writing questions such as those, listed above, as “Fundamental questions,” for assigned course reading, and in independent research for the final project.

REQUIREMENTS: Basics here; details on Course Guide

ATTENDANCE; PARTICIPATION:

Attendance is expected, will be noted, and will factor in the final grade. If illness or emergency prevents your attendance, please contact me as soon as you are able. If such prevents your preparing for class or participating but you are able to attend, do; see me. If any circumstance prevents you from meeting any course requirement in an ongoing way, please speak to me promptly.

In the unlikely event class is cancelled for any reason, e.g., weather, stay current with the syllabus: prepare the current and next session on schedule. We will arrange a makeup.

Discussion: Class will be a mix of lecture and informed student participation. Students are expected to have done the session's readings, prepared insights to contribute, and to engage those of others in active discussion.

Observation papers (OPs): One typed, double-spaced page (or readable handwritten), per week (=13 total), of journal-like observations about the readings, submitted at end of class; no late submissions. Submission for your leadoff presentation (see below) counts as one OP.

READING:

All required reading except encyclopedia articles has been ordered on shelf reserve in Mudd, not a good routine option but always there. See under "Discussion," above.

Since we read mostly whole works, not much is scanned on bb (indicated on the syllabus); you must have your own copies of readings. Titles have been ordered in the College bookstore.*Ohio Link or other ILL are other options; be sure to allot sufficient time for this. Have reading in hand well before you need to do it. Always bring reading to class. *Pagination in different editions may differ from that on the syllabus.

Refer any questions about reading on shelf reserve or bb to the Reserve Room supervisor, Michael.Palazzolo@oberlin.edu. All I can do is email him so go directly to the source; same with any issues in the Bookstore. Do tell me of any problem your efforts do not resolve. Secure readings well before you need to do them.

ORAL:

Lead-off presentation:

Each student will lead off 1-2 sessions for 7-10 minute presentation on the author's work under discussion and on major issues in and about the reading. Submit a 1-page outline or summary of your presentation on the day you give it. This counts as an OP.

WRITTEN:

Two 5-page essays at approximately one month intervals, based on assigned readings and class discussion; one final, 10-12- page research paper on a topic you choose, in consultation with me, due on the date set for the Final exam by the Registrar.

There are no exams in this course.

Deadlines for submission: Work is due on dates stated. Without authorization, late submission results in 1/3 grade reduction per day of lateness (A- becomes B+, etc.).

Grading:

40%: participation: 20% discussion and OPs; 20%: leadoff presentation/s;
60%: written work: 15% and 20% for first and second essays, respectively; 25% for the research paper.

HONOR CODE: This course is governed by the College Honor Code, for knowledge of whose provisions each student is responsible. See the College website, members of the Honor Code committee, a reference librarian, me, with any question.

DISABILITY:

I will work with you about any needs upon submission of documentation from the Office of Disabilities Services.

REQUIRED TITLES: The following have been ordered at the Bookstore:

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory*
The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln, trans. M. Lowenthal
 Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas
 Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, Werner Sollors/ Penguin ed. preferred
 Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*
 Lucy Dawidowicz, *From That Place and Time and Place*
 Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*

Welcome to the course!

1. Introductory On reading Jewish memoirs: self and society 2/4

In class:

Uriel Dacosta, "My Double Life and Excommunication," in Leo Schwarz, ed., *Memoirs of My People*, pp.84-94, on bb/ copies in class

Pauline Wengeroff, "Memoirs of a Grandmother," excerpt in Lucy Dawidowicz, ed., *The Golden Tradition*, pp.160-168, on bb/ copies in class

-- Compare these two pieces of writing. Who are the authors; when and where do they write? Why do they write? For whom is each writing (audience); what is the author's "message;" what effect do you think each hopes to achieve in readers? How does each piece of writing illuminate a larger issue in Jewish history of its time?

2. Memoir, Memory, and History 2/6

Leadoff:

On being human and having memory; on Jewish collective memory:

Hebrew Bible, *Book of Lamentations* (Eichah), chps. 3. 5. Any edition ok, in JPS translation (*Tanakh*, pb, pp1432-1436, 1438-1440) on bb

Hebrew Bible, *Book of Psalms*, chapter 137 (in JPS Tanakh, p. 1272) on bb
Lawrence Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions*, pp.471-472 on bb

Lucy Dawidowicz, "History as Autobiography: Telling a Life," in Dawidowicz, *What is the Use of Jewish History?*, pp.20-37; on bb

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor; Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Prologue, chp. 1, pp.xiii-26

In class: taped Krista Tippett interview

3. Conceptual Approaches, continued 2/11

Leadoff:

Yerushalmi, chps. 2-4, pp. 29-103

4. History and Memory; Loss and Recovery/ Discovery 2/13

Leadoff:

Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning*, Introduction, pp.3-17 (rest of this book, recommended)

Paul Cowan, *An Orphan in History*, part one, pp. 3-97

5. Cowan, continued 2/18

Leadoff:

Cowan, part two, pp. 101-246

6. Glikl Hamel 2/20

Leadoff:

The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln, trans. M. Lowenthal, Intro. (by Robert Rosen), and Books 1-3, pp.1-89

7. Glikl, continued 2/25

Leadoff:

Glikl, *Memoirs*, Books, 4-5, pp.90-174

First essay questions; essays due Mon., 3/10, by 10AM.

8. Glikl, Concluding 2/27

Books 5 (rest)-7, pp.174-277

9. Solomon Maimon 3/4

Leadoff:

"Solomon Maimon," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (henceforth, EJ), volumes in Mudd or in e version; ask Reference re: access

Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas

10. Pauline Wengeroff 3/6

Leadoff:

Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoirs of a Grandmother*, transl. and ed., Shulamit S. Magnus, 1:93-229

Sign up for o hour time re: your research paper topic.

First Essay due Mon. 3/10 by 10 AM.

11. Wengeroff, continued 3/11

Leadoff:

Wengeroff, *Memoirs*, S. Magnus transl., ed., v.2, pp. TBA

12. To America: Mary Antin 3/13

Leadoff:

Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, chps. 1-6, pp.1-136 (*pagination as in Houghton Mifflin Sentry ed.; if another edition, follow chp. numbers.)

13. Antin, continued 3/18

Leadoff:

Antin, chps. 7-13, pp.137-263

*Preliminary paper topic statement and Bibliography due next class

14. Antin, continued 3/20

Leadoff:

Antin, chps. 14-20, pp.264-364

Preliminary Statement of your paper topic and bibliography.

SPRING BREAK 3/22-3/30 Revised paper topic statement and Bibliography due next class.

15. Another Journey West: Eva Hoffman 4/1

Leadoff:

Revised paper topic statement and Bibliography due in class today

Second essay questions distributed; essays due Wed., 4/16, by 10 AM.

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, part one, pp.3-95

16. Hoffman, continued 4/3

Leadoff:

Hoffman, part two, pp. 99-164

17. Hoffman, continued 4/8

Leadoff:

Hoffman, part three, pp.167-280

18. Chaim Grade: Self, Other, Memory, Guilt 4/10

Leadoff:

"Chaim Grade," in EJ

Chaim Grade, *My Mother's Sabbath Days*, Forward and pp.1-128

Second essay assignment distributed; essays due FRIDAY 4/20 by 3PM

NO CLASS 4/15 Passover *Second essay due 4/16 by 10 AM

19. Grade, continued 4/17

Leadoff:

Grade, pp.129-259

NO CLASS 4/22 (Passover); paper research prep time: work on your topics; come to next class with revised oral statement of focus; sources; methods

20. Grade, continued 4/24

Leadoff:

Short, in-class statements of progress on paper topics

Grade, pp.259-389

21. Yossi Klein Halevi: Whose Memory? Memory and Burden 4/29

Leadoff:

Yossi Klein Halevi, *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, chps. 1-4, pp.1-121

22. Halevi continued, and Conclusion 5/1

Leadoff:

Halevi, *Memoirs*, chps. 5- Epilogue, pp.122-248

23. Reversing Course: Return to Europe: Lucy Dawidowicz 5/6

Leadoff:

Lucy Dawidowicz, *From That Place and Time, A Memoir, 1938-1947*, selections (pagination as in 1989/1991 ed.): Preface, chp. 1, 6-9, 14, pp. xiii-xiv, 3-27, 120-203, 299-326. Note street map of Vilna, just inside the book.

24. Memory, Meaning, Intergenerational Difference--and Connection 5/8

Leadoff:

Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*, selections, Introduction, chps. 1-4 (Sept.-Dec.), 8 (April), 11-14 (July -Sept.), pp.xi-xiii, 1-99, 191-224, 289- 361 (* some of these pages are food recipes)

Think back over the course, look at your OPs, and prepare observations about what have you learned; what you are taking from this course. Which memoirs affected you the most—why? What have you learned about Jewish history from these memoirs? Would you think of writing a memoir—why; for whom?

