Jewish American Literature and Culture

Amerikanische Literatur und Cultural Studies (USA), 4 CP
050615 Aufbauseminar

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
Room and time: GB 5/37 (Nord), Thursdays 12-14
First session: April 23, 2009

Short description:
Cultural criticism of the past few decades has been marked by a conspicuous exclusion of Jewish American experience and literature from dominant discourses of multiculturalism and antiracism. Recent collections such as Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader (ed. David Theo Goldberg) barely mention Jewish writers or artists. This course wants to challenge the consensus in multiculturalism studies and examine Jewish American literature and culture as a crucial part of this discourse. We will discuss works by authors such as Cynthia Ozick, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth and analyze influential films (e.g., Crimes and Misdemeanors and The Piano) as well as U.S. sitcoms (The Nanny, Seinfeld). In close readings, the main themes of Jewish American literature and culture, e.g., the Jewish vision of the “promised land,” immigration, anti-Semitism, Jewish humor and wortwitz, as well as the persistence of religious traditions, will be examined. For a general introduction to the course theme, see Louis Harap’s Creative Awakening: The Jewish Presence in Twentieth-Century American Literature (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 7-44).

Grading: Quality of class participation counts 1/3; expert session 1/3; final paper of ca. twelve pages 1/3. Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your grade.

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, October 30, 2009. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus:

23. April Introduction: Jewish American Literature and Culture

30. April Yiddish Writing
Abraham Cahan, “A Ghetto Wedding” (1898) (available online)

07. May A ‘Cinderella of the Sweatshops’: Authenticity and Immigrant Women
Anzia Yezierska, “Children of Loneliness” (1923)

14. May Fictionalized Autobiographies: Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 1920s
Michael Gold [Itzok Isaac Granich], from Jews without Money (1930)

21. May Ascension Day (Christi Himmelfahrt)
Relax and enjoy!
28. May  Jewish—Yiddish—American
   Isaac Bashevis Singer, “Gimpel the Fool” (1944/1953)

04. June  Pentecost Holiday (Pfingsten)
   Relax and enjoy!

11. June  Feast of Corpus Christi (Fronleichnam)
   Relax and enjoy!

18. June  The ‘Schlemihl’ and the Picaresque Novel
   Saul Bellow, excerpts from The Adventures of Augie March (1953)

25. June  Urban Experience and Jewishness

02. July  Morality and Happiness
   Crimes and Misdemeanors (1988, dir. Woody Allen)

09. July  The Holocaust as a Comic Strip
   Art Spiegelman, Maus: A Survivor’s Tale (1989)

16. July  Jewish Humor and Popular Culture
   The Nanny (U.S. TV series, CBS, 1993-1999)

23. July  Postmodern Fiction
   Jonathan Safran Foer, excerpts from Everything Is Illuminated (2002)
   Everything Is Illuminated (2005, dir. Liev Schreiber)