English 388-01: Jewish Literature of Exile and Return--Pr. Bizzell—Spring 2014

My heart is in the East—
And I am at the edge of the West.
How can I possibly taste what I eat?
How could it please me?
How can I keep my promise
Or ever fulfill my vow,
When Zion is held by Edom
And I am bound by Arabia’s chains?
I’d gladly leave behind me
All the pleasures of Spain—
If only I might see
The dust and ruins of your Shrine.

--Yehudah Ha-Levi, b. in Spain 1075 C.E.; d. after 1140 C.E. in Palestine (?); translated from Hebrew by Peter Cole, The Dream of the Poem

Office: Fenwick 210, x 2524; pbizzell@holycross.edu
Hours: M 1-3:30, W 11-12, 1-3:30, by appointment (I am often available after 3:30 every day but Friday)

Required texts:


Course Plan
People are in motion all over the world today, leaving their homelands to escape oppression, to relocate after natural disasters, or just to find better opportunities for
themselves and their families. So today, it is quite obvious that Jews are not the only people who have experienced diaspora. But the Jewish experience is marked to an unusual degree by dislocation, emigration, and adaptation in alien and often hostile environments. Thus it could be said that Jews are experts of diaspora.

Although all of the works we will read in this course were written in English, our authors come from many places: Eva Hoffman was born in Poland and Mary Antin in Russia, Andre Aciman in Egypt to a family who originated in Spain; Rich Cohen, Nomi Eve and Dara Horn, all American-born, are closely tied to European-Jewish relatives in Israel.

In the fiction and nonfiction we will read in this course, these Jewish writers reflect on how their fictional characters or nonfiction narrators have attempted to maintain the distinctive Jewish shared consciousness of a common history, culture, and language (Hebrew), no matter where they traveled. They tell how Jews resisted pressure from surrounding non-Jewish cultures to assimilate—or how Jews embraced the opportunity to change and leave tradition behind.

Like the medieval Jewish poet Yehudah Ha-Levi whose poem forms the epigraph to our syllabus, these writers also remember that there has always been a Jewish homeland, too, described in the Judeo-Christian Bible, always retaining some Jewish population, and continuously drawing Jews back to it from all over the world: the land now known as Israel and as Palestine. These writers consider whether return from exile is possible.

Note: I do not know how much you know about Jewish history and culture. I will assume you know very little, so I apologize in advance for any explanations that seem unnecessary. On the other hand, you are invited to ask any questions you may have about things Jewish. I will try to answer as best I can.

Assignments and Grading

You will have varied opportunities to develop your understanding of our course materials:

- Two 5-7-page papers are required, one due on March 11 and one on the date (tba) of our final exam. Each of these papers counts 30% toward your final grade.
- An hour exam on some course material (see syllabus) will be required on April 3. This exam counts 20% toward your final grade.
- You may choose one of these options for an additional 20% of your final grade: You may write an exam on the date/time scheduled for our final exam, which will be similar in length and format to the hour exam but which will cover the entire semester’s readings; OR You may choose to deliver a 20-minute oral report on one of our readings; oral report opportunities will be presented for each book.

Just to be clear: there is no required final exam in this course, unless you choose to write the second exam instead of delivering an oral report. Detailed assignment sheets will be given for all written and oral assignments.
Please feel free to consult me about any oral or written assignment for this course. You should also feel free to consult Writers’ Workshop tutors; they are an excellent resource. I expect you to adhere to the College’s policy on academic honesty in all your work for me, and I will penalize you if you don’t. Any questions about whether you are following this policy correctly can be addressed to me, without penalty.

**Syllabus**

Jan. 21:
Introduction: Jewish exile and return in the Bible (please bring a Bible to class).

**I. America: The Promised Land?**
Jan. 23:
Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*: her “Introduction” and Chapters I-VII (pp. 1-129).

Jan. 28:
Antin, Chapters VIII-XX (pp. 130-286).
Jan. 30:
Antin, continued.

Feb. 4:
Dara Horn, *The World to Come*: Chapters 1-6 (pp. 9-102).
Feb. 6:
Horn, Chapters 7-9 (pp. 103-175).

Feb. 11:
Horn, Chapters 10-19 (pp. 176-310).
Feb. 13:
Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*: read “Paradise” (pp. 3-95).

Feb. 18:
Hoffman, “Exile” and “The New World” (pp. 99-280).
Feb. 20:
Hoffman, continued.

**II. Nomads**
Feb. 25:
Feb. 27:
*Transit* essays, continued.

**SPRING BREAK**
Mar. 11:
PAPER DUE on Antin, Horn, Hoffman.
André Aciman, *Out of Egypt*: read “Soldier, Salesman, Swindler, Spy” and “Rue Memphis” (pp. 1-94).
Mar. 13:
Aciman, *Egypt*, “A Centennial Ball” and “Taffi Al-Nur!” (pp. 95-216).

Mar. 18:
Mar. 20:
NO CLASS on 3/20 (I will be away at a professional meeting).

Mar. 25:
Mar. 27:

Apr. 1:
Apr. 3:
HOUR EXAM on *Transit* essays and Aciman books.

**III. Return to the Land**

Apr. 8:
Letters, Martin Buber and Mahatma Gandhi, early Zionist documents (on course Moodle site).
Apr. 10:

**EASTER/PASSOVER BREAK** (no class on Apr. 15)
Apr. 22:
Apr. 24:
Cohen, continued.

Apr. 29:
Nomi Eve, *The Family Orchard*: read Chapters 1-10 (pp. 9-181).
May 1:
Eve, Chapters 11-21 and Epilogue (pp. 182-312).

May 6:
Eve, continued.

PAPER DUE on date of final exam (tba) on Zionist documents, Cohen, and Eve; AND EXAM (only for those choosing this option).