



Demon, directed by Marcin Wrona (Poland, 2016)

Overview

Media representations matter. This course explores the ways in which East European Jews represented themselves, and were represented, on the big screen. We will examine films from Poland and the United States as we think through the history and the memory of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Our course will focus on images of the *shtetl* and on images of postwar “returns” to Eastern Europe.

Objectives

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the various representations of East European Jewish life in film
- Interpret films as primary texts
- Identify key themes in the history of representing Eastern European Jews on film
- Apply classroom discussion to outside sources
- Reflect on texts and multimedia sources orally and in writing.

Class topics and readings

Assigned readings should be prepared by the course date under which they are listed.

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are found in the “files” section on our course’s Canvas page

Readings not marked with an asterisk are available in the bookstore, and in the library on two-hour reserve

Are you confused about the readings? Feel like you need some background? Try the following sites:

- MyJewishLearning.com (professional and reasonably reliable but not academic or peer-reviewed site on things Jewish)
- YIVOEncyclopedia.org (academic, reviewed encyclopedia dealing with aspects of Jewish life in Eastern Europe)

Week

1

Tuesday, April 2: Introductions

📖 No readings assigned

🎬 In class: Gefilte Fish (dir. Karen Silverstein, USA, 1984), 14 minutes

🎬 In class: Borat (dir. Larry Charles, USA, 2006), excerpts

Thursday, April 4: Self-Representations

📖 *Bryan Burns, “‘The Approaching Storm’: The Goskinds on Jewish Life in Poland,” in Sylvia Paskin, ed., *When Joseph Met Molly: A Reader on Yiddish Film* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications, 1999)

🎬 In class: Six Cities (dir. Shaul and Yitshok Goskind, Poland, 1939), 50 minutes

Week

2

Tuesday, April 9: Self-Representations

📖 *J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*, excerpts

🎬 In class: The Yiddish Cinema (dir. Rich Pontius, USA, 1991), 60 minutes

Thursday, April 11: Self-Representations

🎬 In class: Children Must Laugh/Mir Kumen On (dir. Alexander Ford, Poland, 1935), 63 minutes

Week

3

Tuesday, April 16: Immigration and Culture Clash

📖 *Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994) (excerpts)

📖 Liana Finck, *A Bintl Brief: Loving and Longing in Old New York* (New York: Ecco, 2014)

📖*Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), introduction and chapter 1 (“Kissing Business”)

📖*Joseph Cohen, “Yiddish Film and the American Immigrant Experience,” in Sylvia Paskin, ed., *When Joseph Met Molly: A Reader on Yiddish Film* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications, 1999)

Thursday, April 18: Immigration and Culture Clash

📖*Jeffrey Shandler, “*Ost und West*, Old World and New: Nostalgia and Antinostalgia on the Silver Screen,” in Sylvia Paskin, ed., *When Joseph Met Molly: A Reader on Yiddish Film* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications, 1999)

📖*Ewa Morawska, “Changing Images of the Old Country in the Development of Identity of East European Immigrants, 1880s-1930s: A Comparison of Jewish and Slavic Representations,” *YIVO Annual* 21 (1993)

🎬 In class: *East and West* (dir. Sidney M. Goldin, Austria, 1923), 85 minutes

Week 4

Tuesday, April 23: American Jews Looking “Home”

📖*Letters to Afar* (exhibit catalogue)

📖*Roberta Newman, “Home Movies and the *Alte Heym* (Old Home): American Jewish Travel Films in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 15.1 (1993)

📖*Roberta Newman, “Pictures of a Trip to the Old Country,” *YIVO Annual* 21 (1993)

📖*Daniel Soyer, “The Immigrant Travel Agent as Broker Between Old World and New: The Case of Gustave Eisner,” *YIVO Annual* 21 (1993)

🎬 In class: Home movies from the YIVO collection

Week
5

Thursday, April 25: American Jews Looking “Home”

📖*Glenn Kurtz, *Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2014), selections

📺 In class: Home movies from the YIVO collection

📁 Yiddish film response due via Canvas

Tuesday, April 30: The Shtetl and its Afterglow (Professor Zarrow at a conference!)

📖No readings assigned; get started on readings for May 7

📺 In class: *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, USA, 1971), 181 minutes

📁 Immigration and return response due via Canvas

Thursday, May 2: The Shtetl and its Afterglow (Professor Zarrow at a conference!)

📖No readings assigned; get started on readings for May 7

📺 In class: *Fiddler on the Roof* (dir. Norman Jewison, USA, 1971), 181 minutes

Week
6

Tuesday, May 7: The Shtetl

📖*Stephen J. Whitfield, “Fiddling with Sholem Aleichem: A History of *Fiddler on the Roof*,” in Lawrence Baron, ed., *The Modern Jewish Experience in World Cinema* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis UP, 2011)

📖*Sheila E. Jelen, “A Treasury of Yiddish Stories: Salvage Montage and the Anti-Shtetl,” in Eliyana R. Adler and Sheila E. Jelen, eds., *Reconstructing the Old Country: American Jewry in the Post-Holocaust Decades* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State UP, 2017)

📖*David Gaunt et al, “Introduction” and David Engel “What’s in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence,” in David Gaunt et al, eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 2011)

📖*Samuel Kassow, “Introduction” Steven T. Katz, ed., *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: NYU Press, 2007)

Thursday, May 9: The Shtetl

📖*J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film between Two Worlds* (Phila., Penn.: Temple UP, 1995), chapter 17 (“We’re on Our Way”)

📖Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), first section (“Tevye the Dairyman”)

📺 In class: *Tevye* (dir. Maurice Schwartz, USA, 1939), 96 minutes

Week
7

Tuesday, May 14: The Shtetl and Modernity

📖 “Passover (Pesach) 101” from MyJewishLearning.org:
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/passover-pesach-101/>

📖*Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012), available from library as an ebook, introduction, chapter 1, chapter 3

🎬 In class: *The Feast of Passover* (dir. Sidney M. Goldin, USA), 15 minutes

Thursday, May 16: The Shtetl and Modernity

📖*Joel W. Finler, “Sunny Skies and Green Fields: The Making of a Yiddish Movie Classic,” in Sylvia Paskin, ed., *When Joseph Met Molly: A Reader on Yiddish Film* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications, 1999)

🎬 In class: *Grine Felder* (Green Fields) (dir. Edgar G. Ulmer, USA, 1937), 97 minutes

Week
8

Tuesday, May 21: Tourism and the Impossible Past

📖*Jack Kugelmass, “The Rites of the Tribe: The Meaning of Poland for American Jewish Tourists,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 21 (1993)

📖*Erica T. Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana UP, 2013), introduction and chapter 3 (“Poles and Jews: Significant Others,” and “The Quest: Scratching the Heart”)

📁 Shtetl paper due via Canvas

Thursday, May 23: Tourism and the Impossible Past

📖Jonathan Safran Foer, “The Very Rigid Search,” *The New Yorker* (June 18, 2001):
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/06/18/the-very-rigid-search>

🎬 In class: *Everything is Illuminated* (dir. Liev Schreiber, USA, 2005), 106 minutes

Week
9

Tuesday, May 28: Property and Restoration

📖Rutu Modan, *The Property*, trans. Jessica Cohen (Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013)

Tuesday, May 30: Property and Restoration


🎬 In class: *Divan* (dir. Pearl Gluck, USA, 2003), 90 minutes

🎬 In class: *Kredens* (dir. Jacob Dammas, Poland, 2007), 28 minutes

Week
10

Tuesday, June 4: Coping Strategies

📖Various authors, discussions of Yael Bartana’s work:
<http://yaelbartana.com/text/>

 In class: And Europe Will be Stunned (dir. Yael Bartana, Poland, 2007-2011), 61 minutes

Thursday, June 6: Coping Strategies

 Postmemory response due via Canvas