



Jews in the Western Literary Imagination

ENGL 2920 • Fall 2025

Dr. Shaina Trapedo
shaina.trapedo@yu.edu
Office: 215 Lex, 701
Hours: By appt

Course Meeting Info:
CRN 91945
T/TH, 9:00 – 10:15 am
Location: 215 Lex, 210

Course Description

From medieval blood libels to *Ulysses*' Leopold Bloom, the figure of the Jew has loomed large in the Western literary imagination. This course will examine how authors through the ages have represented Jewishness in poetry and prose for their predominantly Christian readers. How are Jews positioned in relation to law, commerce, community, morality, wisdom, and faith in the fictional worlds they inhabit? What technical or thematic purpose do Jewish characters serve in the construction of the text as a whole? Through deep engagement with a variety of texts, we'll consider to what extent these works reflect, reinforce, challenge, and/or change the existing archetypes and assumptions about Jews in their respective historical and cultural moments, and how these characterizations reverberate in the social history of antisemitism (and philosemitism). We'll also briefly consider the literary afterlives of these characters in the hands of Jewish writers, such as Will Eisner's graphic novel *Fagin* and Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*. Taught under the auspices of both the English department and the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, this course will feature occasional guest lectures by affiliated humanities faculty.

Learning Objectives

- Analyze literary representations of Jewish characters and themes across diverse historical periods, genres, and cultural contexts, developing skills in close reading and textual interpretation that illuminate how authors construct meaning through characterization and narrative technique.
- Evaluate the intersection of literature and social history, examining how representations of Jewishness both reflect and shape cultural attitudes, social tensions, and religious dynamics in their respective periods, and critically assess how fictional portrayals contribute to, challenge, or complicate broader patterns of antisemitism and philosemitism throughout Western literary tradition.
- Synthesize insights from multiple disciplines, drawing connections between literary analysis, religious studies, and cultural history to develop a nuanced understanding of how texts function within broader intellectual and social frameworks.
- Articulate complex arguments through written and oral communication, demonstrating the ability to construct compelling interpretations of literary works while engaging respectfully and thoughtfully with sensitive cultural and religious material.

Course Materials

- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Folger, ISBN 9780743477567)
- George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (Oxford, ISBN 0199682860)
- All other required readings and viewings will be shared on Canvas.

Course Requirements & Grading

It is English Department policy that grades on student written work are based not on effort but rather on the quality of the work produced by the student. Although we tend to think of writing as an expression of self, please keep in mind that grades on essays are not evaluations of you as a person or even as a writer and are not based on effort, personal investment, or degree of improvement; they simply reflect the quality of the writing and the degree to which a given submission does or does not achieve the assignment objectives and meet rubric criteria (which are not negotiable). Grades serve you best when they initiate self-reflection and conversation with your instructor and your craft, and I am always happy to discuss ways to strengthen your skills at any point throughout the course.

Below is a breakdown of your final grade for this class:

- Attendance: 5%
- Active Participation: 10%
- Exam: 20%
- Group Research Project/Presentation: 30%
- Critical Essay: 35%

Specific guidelines and grading criteria will be available throughout the course and posted to Canvas. All essays and drafts must be completed using Google Docs collaborations and submitted to Canvas/Turnitin.com. Late assignments will be penalized at a reduction of 1/3 letter grade for each day late. After one week has passed the due date, papers will not be accepted and will receive 0%. Along with prior notification of missing a due date, you may be asked to provide medical/legal documentation. Make-ups for missed in-class work are granted at the instructor's discretion. It is your responsibility, and a good idea, to back up your work and keep a copy of all drafts.

Policies for Attendance and Active Participation

Attendance and active participation count for a total of 15% of your grade in the course, as active and collective engagement is essential for a successful learning experience. Understandably, life happens, and should you need to miss a class you are responsible for making up what you miss by obtaining any materials and notes generated in your absence. Zoom will not be an option. Up to three unexcused absences are allowed, but after that you must have documentation (i.e., medical emergency), to avoid your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade. In the event of an emergency of some kind, I will do my best to support your continued progress in our class.

Of course, attendance and participation are not the same thing. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the assigned materials, and explicitly draw on that preparation to propel conversations by posing and responding to questions and stimulate

a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Participation will make our sessions more productive and will ensure that you develop a "habit" of thinking and communicating creatively and critically at an educated level. For scheduled remote classes on Zoom, keep your camera on to make our learning environment as rich and engaging as possible (and not be marked absent).

Active participation in the classroom will not only enhance our discussions but will also help you prepare for the in-class **exam** (20%) administered early in the semester. A partnered **research project/presentation** (30%) and a **critical essay** (35%) will conclude the course assessments. More information will be provided in class.

Failure to complete work assigned for a particular class should not prevent you from attending that class; while it is always best to turn in your assignments on time, it is better to have you without your assignment than neither you nor your assignment. You are responsible for keeping track of assignment due dates as they appear on the syllabus and posted on Canvas. Though some modifications to the syllabus might be made during the term to match our progress through the material, these changes will be announced at the beginning of class and posted on Canvas.

Lastly, we all need to tend carefully to keeping lines of communication open. I will work to challenge you as much as I can without overwhelming you. To support your progress throughout the course, I plan to check in throughout the semester, not only to make sure you're keeping up with the reading and writing but to make sure that you are doing well. And when you're not, to help you find the support you need. Patience— with oneself and with others— is critical for a successful learning experience.

Classroom Standards and Expectations

In addition to compliance with YU's Code of Conduct, in this course, students will be expected to:

- ***Come to discussions prepared***, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- ***Initiate and participate effectively*** in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with your peers, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.
- ***Tech-Free Learning Environment***. Cell phones, mobile devices, or laptops may not be used during class. If you have an accommodation letter, please make a meeting to discuss during the first week of class. You will need to have hard copies of the reading materials in class and take notes by hand. All course materials, slides, and handouts will be available on Canvas and copies will be distributed.
- ***Demonstrate considerate classroom conduct*** to enhance your academic experience and that of your colleagues. In particular, you are asked to contribute to the learning environment by being prompt and courteous, not eating during class, and not walking in and out or talking inappropriately or out of turn.
- ***Respect our time together***. At a research university such as YU, instructors have many responsibilities and demands on their time in addition to teaching, and they are not available to students at all times. Here are some methods of respecting your instructor's time (and yours) outside of class:

- Bring focused questions when you attend office hours and be sure to contact your instructor in a timely fashion if you will not be able to keep a scheduled appointment.
- When writing an email, be succinct and present your questions as clearly as possible; always use an appropriate tone, sign your name, and proofread your emails.
- Avoid emailing your instructor about matters that can be addressed in person before or after class.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at Yeshiva University. Cheating, forgery, dishonest conduct, and plagiarism erode YU's educational, research, and social standards. They devalue the learning experience and its legitimacy not only for the perpetrators but for the entire community. It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with YU's [Academic Integrity Statement](#) along with this syllabus. It is essential that all members of our academic community subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work. Since plagiarism is a serious transgression of ethics, any instances of plagiarism will be pursued through the appropriate disciplinary channels; all instances of plagiarism are reported to the Dean and may become a part of your permanent file. Penalties for plagiarism range from receiving a failing grade on the essay to receiving a failing grade for the course, loss of honors, suspension, or even expulsion from school.

Plagiarism means misrepresenting someone else's words or ideas (or the words or ideas produced by AI like ChatGPT) as your own. Plagiarism can be an act of deliberate fraud, such as turning in work wholly or partially cut-and-pasted from the internet as your own, misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) technology like ChatGPT (details below), or it may be an inadvertent error, such as forgetting to cite a source whose ideas you paraphrased or meant to quote. Although all instances may not receive the same penalty, these are all forms of plagiarism, and you are expected to know and take responsibility for your writing and use of outside sources.

This course follows Yeshiva University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) on artificial intelligence (AI). The use of *generative* artificial intelligence or any platform with generative artificial intelligence capabilities is prohibited in this course. The use of *assistive* artificial intelligence—including grammar checkers, spell checkers, and digital thesauruses—is allowed. Pre-approved assistive AI platforms include spell checkers and grammar checkers in Microsoft Word and Google Documents, Grammarly, and Hemmingway. Any platform not listed above is not approved for use. If you are unsure whether a platform or technology is allowed, please ask me, and see <https://www.yu.edu/academic-integrity> for further information.

In addition to being careful to properly attribute proprietary ideas, be aware of the difference between proofreading and plagiarism: a proofreader points out mistakes and typographical errors that you are capable of detecting but have missed through carelessness. It becomes plagiarism when your reader rewrites your essay or corrects your mistakes for you. Since this course will require research work and the use of secondary material, you must be aware of your intellectual obligations and take care to document your work diligently. We will discuss the problem of plagiarism and how and why to avoid it in class. If you are unclear in any way about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me. In general, one good rule to follow is "when in doubt, cite your source."

Special Accommodations

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, berenODS@yu.edu as soon as possible, preferably during the first week of class. The office is located in 215 Lexington Ave, Suite 505. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.”

Learning Success Center: Any undergraduate at Stern College for Women interested in improving study skills and academic performance is welcome and encouraged to visit the Learning Success Center for academic support. A learning specialist helps you develop the reading, writing, and study skills necessary for academic success. To learn more or schedule an appointment, go to [Learning Success Center](#).

The Writing Center: Free Help with Your Writing! The [Beren Writing Center](#) offers individualized tutoring that can support your projects for this course. All writers need feedback, even strong ones. Find out more and/or book an appointment [here](#).

Library Support

Get all the support you need with research for your courses. The **Yeshiva University Libraries** (library.yu.edu) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Skilled information-seekers succeed academically and in the workplace. Prepare for the future by contacting the library at [https://library.yu.edu/ask the library](https://library.yu.edu/ask_the_library) You can [schedule an appointment](#), [email](#) a librarian, or [Live Chat](#) for assistance.

Out of Class Assistance

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your progress in the course and address any individual questions/concerns you might have. You are always welcome to email me to set up an appointment.

Schedule of Classes

This class schedule is a “living” document that will be modified as needs dictate throughout the semester. Readings and due dates will be available on Canvas and any alterations will be posted and announced in class.

Dates	Course Materials
Week 1 Tuesday 8/26 & Thursday 8/28	Course Introduction Thomas of Monmouth’s <i>The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich</i> (selections) Boccaccio’s <i>Decameron</i> (selections)
Week 2 Tuesday 9/2 & Thursday 9/4	Boccaccio’s <i>Decameron</i> (continued) Chaucer’s <i>Canterbury Tales</i> (The Prioress’s Tale)

Week 3 Tuesday 9/9 & Thursday 9/11	Chaucer's <i>Canterbury Tales</i> (continued) Marlowe's <i>Jew of Malta</i>
Week 4 Tuesday 9/16 & Thursday 9/18	Marlowe's <i>Jew of Malta</i> (continued)
Rosh Hashana, No Classes Monday 9/22 – Thursday, 9/25	
Week 5 Tuesday 9/30 (Remote)	Shakespeare's <i>Merchant of Venice</i>
Yom Kippur and Sukkot, No Classes Wednesday, 10/1 – Wednesday, 10/15	
Week 6 Tuesday 10/21 & Thursday 10/23	Shakespeare's <i>Merchant of Venice</i> (continued) Exam
Week 7 Tuesday 10/28 & Thursday 10/30	Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's <i>Nathan the Wise</i>
Week 8 Tuesday 11/4 & Thursday 11/6	<i>Nathan the Wise</i> (continued) Presentations
Week 9 Tuesday 11/11 & Thursday 11/12	Dickens's <i>Oliver Twist</i> Presentations
Week 10 Tuesday 11/18 & Thursday 11/20	Dickens's <i>Oliver Twist</i> (continued) George Eliot's <i>Daniel Deronda</i> Presentations
Week 11 Tuesday 11/25 No Class Thursday 11/27	<i>Daniel Deronda</i> (continued) Presentations
Week 12 Tuesday 12/2 & Thursday 12/4	<i>Daniel Deronda</i> (continued) Presentations
Week 13 Tuesday 12/9 & Thursday 12/11	Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> Presentations
Week 14 Tuesday 12/16 & Thursday 12/18	Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> (continued)
Week 15 Tuesday 12/23	Conclusion Critical Essay Due