

Judaism and Comic Books

Religion Studies/Jewish Studies 156

Professor Jodi Eichler-Levine

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Office Hours: Thursdays 9-11 am and
by appointment

Class meets: MW 2:35-3:50

Class location: Maginnes 480

Is the Thing Jewish? Do Orthodox Jewish girls fight trolls? In this course, we will closely examine comic books and graphic novels in order to expand our understanding of what Jewishness might mean. With a POW! and a BAM!, we will consider many topics “from Krakow to Krypton,” including American Jewish history, how representations of Jews are gendered, global Jewish traditions, monsters and mutations, and more!

Student Learning Objectives

Students in this course will:

- 1) Acquire a general knowledge of Jewish traditions in global and historical context
- 2) Receive training in research methods and information literacy in religious studies and its intersecting fields
- 3) Practice close reading skills in terms of both textual and visual literacy





Assignments

1) **Attendance and participation:** Both are mandatory. Learning happens in conversation. I expect you to be present and to contribute to our learning. For those of you who are a bit more on the shy side, rest assured that you don't have to raise your hand every second— but I *do* expect you to speak up, thoughtfully, a least once per week.



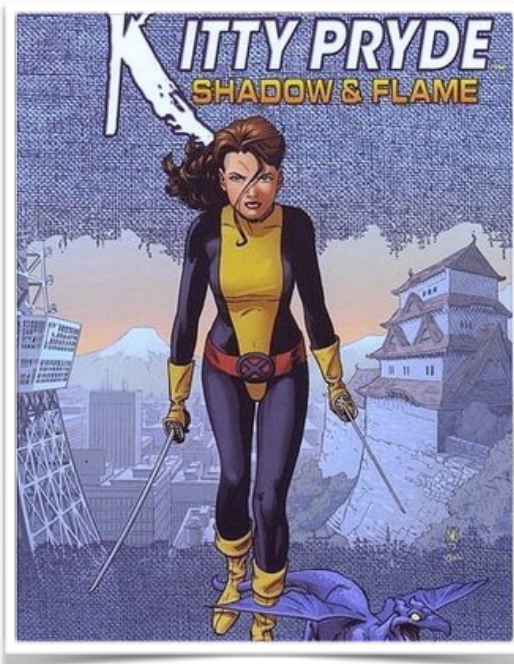
Attendance works this way: Everyone gets four “free” absences, no questions asked, just please do me the courtesy of sending an e-mail to let me know if you will miss class. Those can be for: illness; religious holidays; family issues; job interviews; playing video games in your dorm room. I don't care what you are doing, just spend them *wisely* (this means that if you take one for playing video games in September, you might be out of luck when you catch some horrible flu in November). After you have exceeded four absences, your grade will be reduced further from what it would be based on the combined quality of your participation *and* full attendance. (Accommodations can be made for truly serious issues— i.e. extended illnesses or hospitalizations—ONLY if you work through the Dean of Students office to document what is going on).

Value=100 points

Introductory Letter: Write me a 1-2 page letter introducing yourself. Explain why you are taking the course, what your time at Lehigh has been like so far, and include anything else you would like me to know. You may type or handwrite your letter, but I strongly, strongly encourage you to try mixing it up creatively and also including some visuals, either drawn or from photos— this class is, after all, about visual culture! **Due: At the START of class (hard copy), Wednesday, August 30. (Credit/no-credit).**

Value=30 points

Weekly Responses: You will write a short response assignment for this class *almost every week* (except for the first week, when you write your intro letter, and the final two weeks, which will be





mostly presentations). Everyone must complete **10 such papers**. There are 11 weeks they are due, which means you get one “free” week to skip submitting a paper— your choice when. These papers will be very short— no more than 2 typed, double-spaced pages or 1 typed-single spaced page (that’s approximately 500 words). These are due in class on *either* Monday or Wednesday: to start the semester, I am going to let you choose on which day to bring your response each week, but if I find everyone is picking the same day, I will split the class in half and assign dates. The idea of these papers is to prepare your thoughts and questions on the reading so that we will have a lively discussion. Further details on format and grading are available on Course Site. **Due: weekly. Total number of papers: Value=10x10=100 points total**

Close Reading Assignment: This will be a slightly longer, 3-4 page essay in which you choose a passage from one our primary source readings and analyze it in very close detail. Further details are available on Course Site. **Due: Electronic submission to Course Site folder, October 12, by 10 PM. Value=70 points**

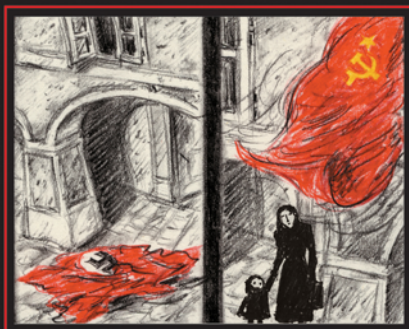
Final project: Deconstructed research paper and presentation: There are far more interesting graphic novels and comic books— and related themes— than we can begin to cover in one semester. Throughout the second half of the term, each student will work on an independent research project (due in multiple steps) on a book/books or theme of their choice. We will spend some class time discussing these projects and research methods. However, rather than producing a formal long research paper, each student will produce an annotated bibliography and accompanying short essay explaining what sources they learned from and how they would use them *to* write a research paper, if writing a long paper were the goal. The final 1-2 weeks of the class will be dedicated to student presentations of this research. More details to follow in class and on Course Site!

Value: 100 points total

Due: Final projects= in class. Final paper=online, December 7, 10 PM.

Extra Credit: The study of religion intersects with a host of other fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the study of race, gender, history, sexuality, modern languages and

WE ARE ON OUR OWN



A MEMOIR BY MIRIAM KATIN



literatures, sociology, and philosophy, to name just a few possibilities. Throughout the semester, I will be sharing mentions of events, typically sponsored by academic departments and programs, that can broaden your intellectual horizons while at Lehigh. You can also ask me about events you have learned about on your own. For extra credit, you may attend *up to 3* such events and write them up in a 2 page typed, double-spaced summary and reflection paper. *The final date on which you may e-mail me such papers is December 4, by midnight, so plan ahead.* Value: 0-5 points per reflection, depending upon its clarity and quality.

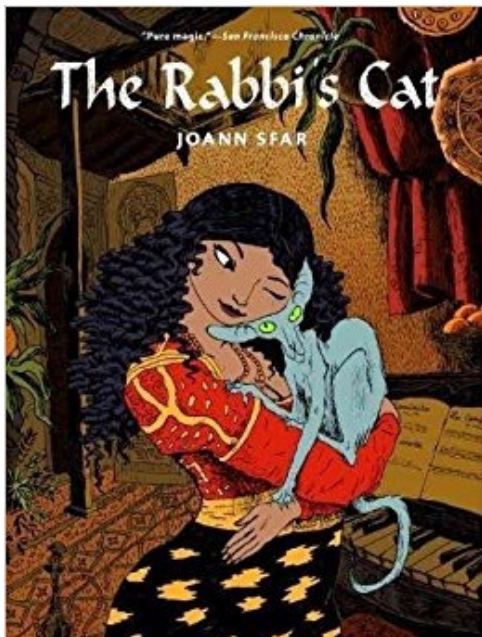
Policies

Low-tech life: Try it. You'll like it. We will have a mostly low-tech classroom experience this semester. All readings should be brought in hard copy to the class for which they are scheduled. There will be **no phones, tablets, e-readers, or laptops** permitted in class. I realize that this may sound daunting. However, this provides a focused, interactive, and distraction-free environment in which we can all deeply engage with one another. See, for example, the study discussed in this article: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>

Ch-ch-ch-changes: The instructor reserves the **right to alter readings, assignments, or the schedule below** as dictated by the needs and interests of the class. This is why attending class, finding out if you missed any announcements from a colleague, and checking your e-mail and Course Site are all crucial.

I love e-mail. It is the best way to reach me. That said, I get a lot of it and don't always check it on weekends. Please be patient when awaiting a reply—up to 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. **Always indicate your name and what course you are taking in your e-mail! Your university e-mail address is an official form of university communication; check it daily.**

Academic Integrity: Here is the Lehigh University Undergraduate Student Senate Statement on Academic Integrity: “We, the Lehigh University Student Senate, as the standing representative body of all undergraduates, reaffirm the duty and obligation of students to meet and uphold the highest principles



and values of personal, moral and ethical conduct. As partners in our educational community, both students and faculty share the responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure an environment of academic integrity. As such, each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards set forth by the faculty and in compliance with the University's Code of Conduct.”

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, Williams Hall, Suite 301 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted..

Lehigh University Endorses the Principles of Our Equitable Community [http://www.lehigh.edu/~inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity_Sheet_v2_032212.pdf]. I expect each member of this class to acknowledge and practice these principles. Respect for each other and for differing viewpoints is a vital component of the learning environment inside and outside the classroom. At times, we will disagree. This is normal. However, we will not engage in mockery, the use of slurs, or other disrespectful behavior.



Class Schedule

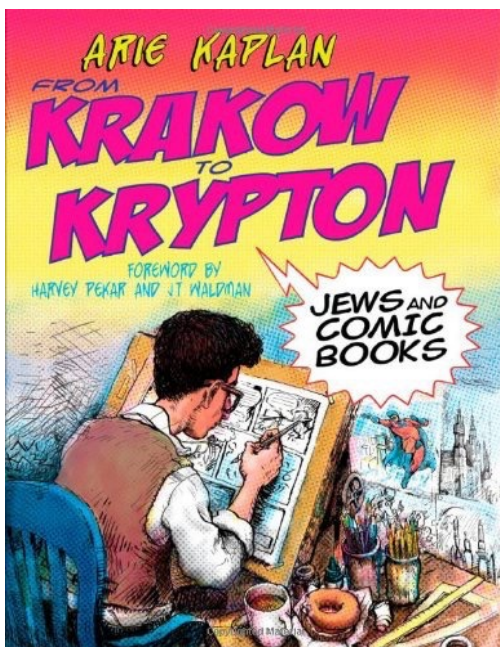
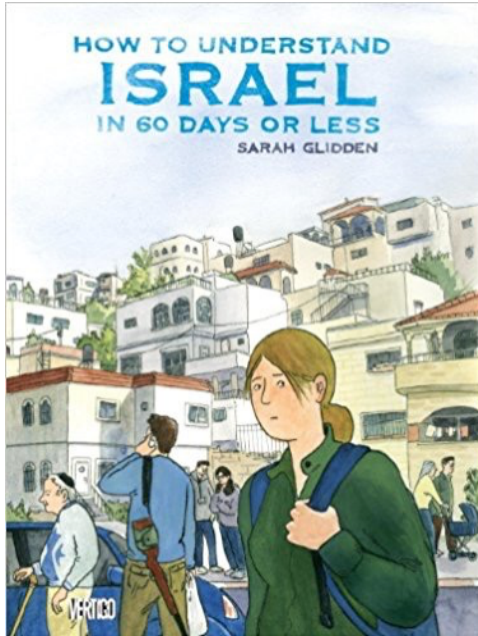
Readings are to be completed *before* the class date for which they are assigned. Readings with a (CS) are available on Course Site— all other readings are available for purchase at University Books and More. Bring all readings with you to class in hard copy format.

M 8/28: First class

W 8/30: Brod, *Superman is Jewish?*, 1-20. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1-23 (CS).

M 9/4: Brod, 21-65. *Superman* excerpts (CS). McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 24-59. Roth, “Contemporary American Jewish Comic Books” (CS)





W 9/6: Brod 66-99. *Fantastic Four* 56 (CS). Trina Robbins, “The Great Woman Superheroes.” (CS) Weiner, “Marvel Comics and the Golem Legend.”

M 9/11: Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton*, excerpts (CS). *The Jewish Hero Corps* (CS). McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 60-93 (CS).

W 9/13: Brod, 101-123. Gloria Steinem, “Wonder Woman.” (CS) Jill Lepore, “The Last Amazon.” Discussion of Wonder Woman and Jewish identity— further texts to be announced on Course Site. Suggested: More McCloud. (CS)

M 9/18: Eisner, *A Contract with God*, ix-92. Jeremy Dauber, “Comic Books, Tragic Stories: Will Eisner’s Jewish History.” (CS)

W 9/20: Eisner, *A Contract with God*, 92-181. Josh Lambert, “Wanna Watch the Grown-Ups Doing Dirty Things? Jewish Sexuality and the Early Graphic Novel.” (CS)

M 9/25: Deutsch, *Hereville*, 1-85

W 9/27: Deutsch, *Hereville*, 86-139

M 10/2: Lawrence Baron, “X-Men as J-Men: The Jewish Subtext of a Comic Book Movie” (CS)

W 10/4: In class discussion of research projects.

M 10/9: Glidden, *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*, 1-94 Kaminer, “How to Understand Sarah Glidden in 2,000 Words or Less.” (CS) Kelner, *Tours that Bind*, excerpt (CS)

W 10/11: Glidden, *How to Understand*, 95-206. Oksman, *How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?*, excerpt, 167-220 (CS)

M 10/16: NO CLASS: PACING BREAK

W 10/18: Waldman, *Megillat Esther*, Introduction-91. Esther (CS)

M 10/23: Waldman, *Megillat Esther*, 92-153. Waldman, “Judaism, Comix, and Me” (CS)

W 10/25: Chast, *Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*, 1-118

M 10/30: Chast, *Can’t We Talk?*, 119-228

W 11/1: Katin, *We Are On Our Own*, 1-84.



M 11/6: Katin, *We Are On Our Own*, 85-end. Baskind, “A Conversation with Miriam Katin.” (CS)

W 11/8: Cheryl Malcolm, “Witness, Trauma, and Remembrance: Holocaust Representation and X-Men Comics.” (CS)

M 11/13: Joan Sfar, *The Rabbi’s Cat*, 1-94. Paul Eisenstein, “Imperfect Masters: Rabbinic Authority in Joan Sfar’s *The Rabbi’s Cat*.” (CS)

W 11/15: Sfar, *The Rabbi’s Cat*, 95- 142. Brod, 161-182

NO CLASS 11/20-11/23: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

M 11/27: Brod, 183-194. *Possibly other readings TBA.*

W 11/28: Presentations

M 12/4: Presentations

W 12/6: Presentations

