

Your first essay assignment is to write a short paper (about 1500 words, or six pages typed and double-spaced) on the fiction of Anzia Yeziarska and Isaac Bashevis Singer. The following are *suggested* topics: you are encouraged to work on a topic of your own devising, providing (1) it deals with both authors we have read so far this semester, (2) it is an analytical essay proving a specific point, and (3) you clear it with me beforehand. Even as suggested topics, the following are probably too general to be covered fully in a short essay. Therefore, focus on a limited aspect of your topic, construct a developed thesis explaining why that aspect of it is significant, and then design essay so that each paragraph in it contributes directly to the support of that thesis. And, whether you write on one of the suggested topics or propose your own, remember that your essay must cover both writers, and must focus primarily on the assigned readings for each.

Please do not use a cover sheet, or bind the pages with more than a single staple; do be sure that your name is on each sheet, and that the pages are numbered. State your thesis in your essay as usual, making clear the specific point to be proved, and develop your paragraphs to prove it. To support your readings and to make your analysis clear, you will need to quote short passages from the texts, integrated into your own prose, which relate to the central claims or themes of your essay; please cite the page number for each quotation or group of quotations parenthetically at the end of the phrase or sentence, and avoid using long, indented quotations. Using shorter quotations makes it easier to establish what your reading of each is, through discussion and analysis, as well as to employ that reading in supporting the thesis of your essay. Revise for content and to strengthen your thesis and transitions; proofread thoroughly, even if you use a spell-checker first; and follow MLA style, including a Works Cited list at the end, even if you have only used texts the class anthology. You are not asked to use secondary sources for this essay, and using them cannot replace or supersede your own analysis of quotations from the text, but if you do use them, follow MLA style in documenting them.

In addition to handing in a printed copy of the essay in class on October 21, you must also submit the essay to Turnitin.com on or before the same date. It would be a good idea to go online and establish your Turnitin.com account before you need to upload your essay, just to make sure there are no problems. Once that account is established, you can link it to the course by using the course number (2452271) and password (bashevis). Then, when your essay is ready to be submitted, simply choose “Essay 1: Yeziarska and Singer” and upload (or paste in) your work.

Except by prior arrangement, printed essays can only be submitted in the seminar and by students attending the full class; otherwise, make an appointment to hand in the material during my office hours, but do not email it to me, or leave it in my mail box or under my door. Expect significant delays in the marking and return of late work. After you receive the marked essay back, you will need to correct the technical errors (of grammar, word-choice, fact, spelling, and so on) and resubmit a new draft, along with the original marked draft. Those corrections must be submitted and approved before you hand in the second essay this semester.

1. **Home and Away.** It is probably not surprising, since Yeziarska came to this country as a teenager and Singer as an adult more than twice her age, that they have very different associations with the old country and the new. Compare and contrast their European and American settings, looking for a consistency of connection with their fictional themes rather than any accuracy of presentation. Of course, the worlds they knew may have actually been very different – the late nineteenth-century Polish shtetl familiar to Yeziarska, for example, may have changed considerably by the time Singer was taken to live in the shtetl of Bilgoray during World War I. But for the purposes of this essay, assume that Yeziarska and Singer are effectively describing the same place at the same time, so that differences can more easily be attributed to artistic treatment.
2. **Men and Women.** Nor is it surprising that Yeziarska and Singer have different takes on the roles and lives of men and women, in both modern and traditional settings. The vast majority of Yeziarska’s protagonists and narrators are women, of Singer’s men, but characters of the opposite sex may offer revealing glimpses into the authors’ attitudes. Discuss some of those characters, looking for comparisons with each authors’ same-sex creations that help to elucidate their fiction as a whole.
3. **Self and Other.** From Yeziarska’s Dewey-like American savior to Singer’s gentiles and converts, both writers seem excessively aware of those just beyond their main characters’ experiences. But they are also aware of the special calculus involved in crossing cultural boundaries—of what is lost, as well as gained, when one goes from being a Jew to a gentile, or from being an immigrant to an American. Consider the use of “the other” in their writings, to determine what stretching those limits gains and loses, and if any limits, finally, should not be tested.
4. **Fiction and Autobiography.** This topic may be require more research, but it is at least worth considering, because both Yeziarska and Singer wrote autobiographical sketches that can be read (and often are) as fiction. Does it make a difference which is which? Is it important for you, as the reader, to know whether you are reading fiction or not? And are there elements about the autobiographical sketches that cannot be found in the fiction (or vice versa), and if so what do those elements reveal about our authors?