

Veranstalter:	Julia Lange
Modul:	Russian-Jewish-American Immigrant Literature as a Site of Transcultural Memory [ENG-7, ENG-7a, AA-V4a, AA-V4b, ENG-13, AA-MA01, AA-MA02, AA-MA5, AA7, AA11, LAA10, LAA13, AA-WB, Master-WB]
Art der Veranstaltung:	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer:	53-566
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Kursbeschreibung:

This seminar explores the currently trending sub-genre of Russian-Jewish-American (auto-)fiction. In recent years, autobiographically infused (graphic) novels by anglophone émigré Jewish writers from the former Soviet Union such as Gary Shteyngart, Lara Vapnyar, and Boris Fishman have created quite a stir, if not a veritable hype, on the US literary scene (and beyond). What accounts for the current popularity of Russian-Jewish-American life writing? Can we identify recurring themes and discursive strategies that these texts have in common? In other words, is there perhaps a shared translingual aesthetic at work in these fictional (meta-)memoirs?

Taking six (graphic) novels by Russian-Jewish-American authors as case studies, we will explore how these texts function as sites of transcultural memory, i.e. as texts that negotiate the contemporary dynamics and complex interplay of memory, identity, and mobility/migration. How do these novels stage the travels, entanglements and the merging of individual and collective memories in a transcultural Russian-American diasporic space? A special focus of the seminar will lie on the “travel and translation“ (Erll) of traumatic memories, i.e. on “(post)memories on the move,” so to speak. How is the Holocaust (and its afterlife) represented in contemporary Russian-Jewish-American (auto-)fiction? And what about the Gulag? Differently put, how are current discourses on the ethics and aesthetics of representing atrocity reflected in the selected texts?

In addition, we will shed light on the construction of Russia as a geographical and mental space (of inner migration) in contemporary Russian-Jewish-American writing. How is the (post-)Soviet space and its politics, economy and culture represented? More specifically, how do the novels intertextually engage with the triple legacy of Russian, Hebrew/Yiddish and (Jewish-)American literary history? Do the texts privilege an insider's perspective on Russia / the USSR or an outsider's perspective on the United States – or possibly both? In other words, does the signifier “Russia”/“USSR” function as the exoticized “other” and/or does it serve as a projection screen for contemporary American (political) anxieties? And, if the latter, how does the re-telling of the immigrant tale reaffirm, challenge or subvert the notion of the American dream in these new(er) novels of the Jewish American immigrant experience, esp. if compared to the early 20th-century immigrant conversion narratives about assimilation by Jewish American writers such as Abe Cahan, Anya Yezierska, and Henry Roth?

Texts:

Gary Shteyngart, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002)
Maxim Shrayer, *Leaving Russia: A Jewish Story* (2013)
Yelena Akhtiorskaya, *Panic in a Suitcase* (2014)
Anya Ulinich, *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel* (2014)
Boris Fishman, *A Replacement Life* (2014)
Lara Vapnyar, *The Scent of Pine* (2014)