Be a part of our upcoming Let’s Talk About It: Jewish Literature series.

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Abromson Center, USM, Portland Campus

When
Sessions begin at 5:30 on September 13, October 4, October 25, November 15, and November 29

Facilitated by
Abraham J. Peck, Sampson Center Judaica Scholar in Residence, Adjunct Professor of History
Visiting scholars: RabbiCarolyn Braun, Rabbi Harry Sky, Lorry Stillman, and Jean Peck

Books for Discussion
Lost in Translation, by Eva Hoffman
Mr. Sammler’s Planet, by Saul Bellow
Out of Egypt, by Andre Aciman
Centaur in the Garden, by Moacyr Scliar
Katterskill Falls, by Allegra Goodman

Free and open to the public, free parking available.

To Join Us
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Let’s Talk About It:
Jewish Literature—Identity and Imagination
is presented by Nextbook, a gateway to Jewish literature, culture and ideas, and the American Library Association.

Jeremy Dauber, Atran Assistant Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture at Columbia University, serves as the project scholar.

Presented by Nextbook and the American Library Association
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS
Stories of Estrangement and Homecoming

A central tension of the Jewish Diaspora takes on psychological, metaphorical, and even physiological dimensions as writers from Egypt, Brazil, Europe, Canada, and the United States explore what it means to belong.

Eva Hoffman
Lost in Translation

If exile is the hallmark of Jewish experience in the 20th century, then Eva Hoffman is a representative of the age. Born in Krakow, Poland, to a Jewish family that had survived the Holocaust, she emigrated as a child to Canada, where she was thrust into a new language and a new culture. In this intimate memoir, she recalls her struggle to belong in this alien world, and the later challenges to her identity as a student in Texas and a writer in New York. As she tries to reconcile her femininity, her religion, and her intelligence, Hoffman shows how many different “languages” we all have to master, and provides an unforgettable portrait of a Jewish woman’s coming of age.

Saul Bellow
Mr. Sammler’s Planet

Artur Sammler is a Holocaust survivor who has seen the world destroyed once, and is pessimistic about our ability to stave off disaster a second time. Haunting Manhattan and its environs, a ghost in all but name, Sammler tries to provide useful advice for family friends while struggling to undo the damage his possibly mad daughter has done by stealing a manuscript by the noted scholar Govindha Lal.

Mr. Sammler’s Planet is a political novel in the broadest sense: written in the wake of the undergraduate takeover of Columbia University and the Apollo moon landing, the novel reflects Bellow’s controversial attitude towards the sixties generation. As Sammler reflects on the events around him, often citing the great European thinkers, the reader senses Bellow asking whether these ideas — indeed any ideas — can still matter.

Moacyr Scliar
The Centaur in the Garden

“I am a centaur, a mythological creature, but I am also Guedali Tartakovsky,” proclaims the narrator of this affecting novel. Born half-human and half-horse to immigrants from Russia who staked out a new life in Brazil, the boy struggles with his identity. Much of the book’s deadpan comedy arises from the intersection of the mythical with this real Jewish community. When the lonely Guedali finally meets a centaress, there’s one problem: She is beautiful, but she is also a gentile. Tartakovsky is a vivid symbol of the dual consciousness of Jews inspired to leave Europe for South America by philanthropist Baron de Hirsch’s utopian vision — forever an outsider, yet uniquely suited to Brazil’s farmlands.

André Aciman
Out of Egypt

For Aciman’s family, home is a mercurial concept. In 1905, the Sephardic Acimans moved from Turkey to Alexandria, where they flourished financially for decades. But theirs was a life in exile: expecting to be sent to Germany during World War II, the women knitted woolens. As a boy, when asked which country he hailed from, he replied, “France, of course.” Aciman sketches a cast of eccentric characters — from his Ladino-speaking grandmothers to Uncle Vili, an Italian fascist turned British spy — and creates an elegy to a lost culture. Fittingly, his last night in Alexandria falls on Passover: Aciman flees the seder (“I don’t want to be in Jerusalem next year”), heading to the waterfront. There, he writes, “I caught myself longing for a city I never knew I loved.”

Allegre Goodman
Kaaterskill Falls

Set in the mid-1970s, this sweeping novel follows three Orthodox families over two eventful summers spent in the bucolic town where they retreat each June from the grittier confines of Washington Heights. Elizabeth Shulman, perfect wife and mother, begins to long for the secular world’s “loose days and weeks.” Her neighbor, Hungarian refugee Andras Melish, undergoes a crisis of faith, unable to understand his young wife’s piety. Meanwhile, Rav Kirshner, the group’s spiritual leader, discovers he’s dying and must choose a son — Isaiah, dull but devout, or clever but worldly Jeremy — to take his place.

From their multiple perspectives, Goodman creates an exquisite group portrait that explores how individuals shape their identities within — and against — the seemingly unshakable community laws that define them.

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