INTRODUCTION TO YIDDISH CULTURE: IMAGES OF THE SHTETL

In collective memory the shtetl (small Jewish town) has become enshrined as the symbolic space par excellence of close-knit, Jewish community in Eastern Europe; it is against the backdrop of this idealized shtetl that the international blockbuster Fiddler on the Roof is enacted. The shtetl is the central locus and focus of Modern Yiddish Literature; Fiddler on the Roof itself was based on a Sholem Aleichem story. In this seminar we shall explore the spectrum of representations of the shtetl in Yiddish literature from the nineteenth century to the post-Holocaust period. We shall also focus on artistic and photographic depictions of the shtetl: Chagall and Roman Vishniac in particular. The course will include a screening of Fiddler on the Roof followed by a discussion of this film based upon a comparison with the text upon which it is based, Tevye the Milkman.