

FU/BEST Program

Name: Christoph Kapp

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Course title: Jewish Life in Central Europe

Course number: FU-BEST 25

Language of instruction: English

Contact hours: 45

ECTS-Credits: 5 **U.S. semester credits:** 3

Course description

With the beginning of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the Jews of Central Europe were faced with the ambiguities of modernity. Whereas equality was one of the main demands of the time, it was granted to the Jewish minorities in Central Europe only after long struggles. And even this political achievement did not last long. Yet since the late 18th century and its emancipation movement, one of the most influential and versatile cultural legacies in Central Europe was created by German speaking Jews. The philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and the salonière Rahel Levin Varnhagen, among many other Jews, not only influenced European high culture of their time. They also founded a unique German-Jewish tradition that many artists and intellectuals draw upon to this day. Jewish writers such as Franz Kafka and Joseph Roth have added to the aesthetics of German literature to become a part of a modern world literature, while Zionism became a veritable alternative after 1900. Many Jews remained in Germany, however. They stuck to the German language and canon – even after Hitler’s rise. And even after many of them were murdered in the concentration and extermination camps and on German streets during the Shoah, it was Jewish intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, Theodor W. Adorno, and poets like Paul Celan who began the greater part of working through what had happened to the once glorified „German-Jewish symbiosis“. This work goes on today, while Jewish writing in Central Europe has yet again diversified greatly and new voices make themselves heard. However, none of them can go on writing without relating, one way or another, critically or nostalgically, to that great and tragic German Jewish legacy of the past.

This course will introduce and discuss canonic texts by European-Jewish authors from Moses Mendelssohn to Paul Celan. It thus gives an extensive overview of German-Jewish culture since the late 18th century. Every class session starts off with a contextualization of the historic circumstances in which each text was created. In this

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part, the wider picture of German-Jewish culture and history will be developed, whereas in the second section of each class session, reading assignments will be discussed in greater detail. Here, the class will concentrate on one or two exemplary readings the students will prepare and present. These literary readings constitute the core interest of each session, this course being situated in the field of cultural studies. Poetic and philosophical texts will not be read for their own sake but in order to shed light on everyday life in Central Europe.

All readings are available in English, but most of them are originally in German and thus may also be read in German.

Student profile

Second-semester sophomore or above

Prerequisites

None

Learning objectives

The overall aim is to awaken interest in the riches of transdisciplinary Jewish Studies. That includes to enable students to:

- discover the wide range of cultural and religious influences of Jewish religion, literature and art on the history of Central Europe
- experience the contributions of Jewish Life to the cultural landscape of Berlin
- improve the skills to present their views and insights in class and in writing
- deepen their knowledge of the political and cultural dynamics of minority/majority relations in different centuries and countries of Europe
- discern the similarities and differences between former Jewish Life in Central Europe and today.

Course Requirements

Midterm exam: 20%

Term-Paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Class participation (includes 1 Independent Project report): 30%

Literature

Course Reader (see below for details)

Theodor Herzl: *The Jewish State*, Penguin 2010.

Joseph Roth: *The Wandering Jews*, Norton & Company 2001.

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Course schedule

Sessions	Topics, Readings, etc.
Session 1	Topic: Introduction: Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the Territories of „Central Europe“; Jewish Origins and Genealogies
Session 2	Jewish Berlin: Guided Tour.
Session 3	Topic: German-Jewish Relations in the Times of Enlightenment: Mendelssohn, Lessing and Lavater: Jewish, Christian – and Friends? Readings: (1) G.E. Lessing: <i>The Jews</i> ; (2) Johann Caspar Lavater’s attempt to convert Moses Mendelssohn (3) Rubinstein: Enlightenment and emancipation in continental Europe
Session 4	Topic: The Struggle for Assimilation: Rahel Levin Varnhagen – A Jewish Parvenu Readings: (1) Hannah Arendt: <i>Rahel. The Life of a Jewess</i> (excerpts); (2) Barbara Hahn: “A Dream of Living Together. Jewish Sociability in Berlin around 1800”; (3) Text montage from: <i>Rahel Levin Varnhagen: A Commemoration for Her Friends</i> (English translation)
Session 5	Topic: The Politics of German-Jewish Existence at the Beginning of the 20 th Century: The Rise of Zionism Readings: (1) Theodor Herzl: <i>The Jewish State</i> (1896) [esp. chpts. 1,2 & 6]; (2) Ismar Schorsch: “Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism 1870-1914”; (3) Jehuda Reinharz, “The C.V. and the ZVfD: 1897-1914”
Session 6	Midterm Exam
Session 7	Topic: The Aesthetics of German-Jewish Writings at the Beginning of the 20th Century Readings: (1) Joseph Roth: <i>The Wandering Jews</i> (1927) [esp. chs. 1 & 2]; (2) Franz Kafka: “Josephine the Singer”;

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	(3) Michael Brenner: Authenticity and Modernism Combined: Music and the Visual Arts
Session 8	<p>Topic: Life under Nazi rule in Berlin</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>(1) Hermann Simon: Jews during the Period of National Socialism (2) Poems by Mascha Kaléko and Gertrud Kolmar (3) John Bormanis: Kolmar a Jewish Poet (4) Sigrid Bauschinger: Mascha Kalékos Berlin</p>
Session 9	<p>Topic: After Auschwitz. How to go on</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>(1) Theodor W. Adorno: excerpts from <i>Minima Moralia</i> (“Refugium for the homeless”); (2) Paul Celan: “Deathfugue”, “Conversation in the Mountain” (3) Atina Grossmann: Jewish Displaced Persons in the American Zone</p>
Session 10	<p>Topic: Jews under Stalin</p> <p>Video in class: Bundaím, Socialists in Yiddish and Hebrew</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>(1) Antony Polonsky: From 1944 to the Death of Stalin (2) Timothy Snyder: Stalinist Anti-Semitism</p>
Session 11	<p>Topic: Contemporary Jewish Life in Germany. Soviet Legacies?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>(1) Judith Kessler: “Homo Sovieticus in Disneyland” (2) Julius H. Schoeps, Olaf Glöckner: “Fifteen Years of Russian-Jewish Immigration to Germany” (3) Zohar Milchgrub / Yoav Sapir: Israelis in Berlin</p> <p>Video in Class: Oma and Bella</p>
Session 12	<p>Topic: Summary and Conclusion. Open Questions</p> <p>Readings:</p> <p>(1) Gershom Scholem: „On the German-Jewish dialogue“ (2) Dan Diner: „Negative Symbiosis. Germans and Jews after Auschwitz” (3) Wolfgang Benz: “The Legend of German-Jewish Symbiosis”.</p>
Session 13	Final Exam