

## FU/BEST Program

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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

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### Course description

With the beginning of the Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 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

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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

### Course Requirements

Midterm exam: 20%

Term-Paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

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

Each student is required to hold one short presentation on one of the readings.

Also, a term paper (10 pages, not more than 30,000 characters) is to be written. Students choose one of the session topics and readings, developing their own research question. They may also extend their in-class presentation to a paper.

### Independent Project Subjects

a) Jewish Museum Berlin

*Visit the exhibition. Describe and contextualize one of the exhibits on Moses Mendelssohn: What do you see? Where does the exhibit come from? What does it tell you about Mendelssohn and his time? Etc.*

b) Jewish Quarters in Berlin: Prenzlauer Berg & Mitte

*Search for places and markers of Jewish life in Berlin in these city quarters. Select one site and describe and analyze (1) the site, and (2) the way it is being represented in terms of cultural remembrance: How is it represented and contextualized on signs or plaques at the site? What strikes you as remarkable? How does it relate to the surrounding areas today? Etc.*

c) Jewish Life and History of Fasanenstraße

*Walk the Fasanenstraße in Berlin Charlottenburg. You will find the Jewish Community Center between Kurfürstendamm and Kantstraße. Investigate the history of the old and of the rebuilt Community Center. What can you find out about the attack of 1969?*

d) Jewish Cemetery Weißensee

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*Visit the Jewish cemetery (check out Jewish holidays and opening hours before!). Try to find the grave of Hermann Cohen, then do some research on his life and work. What do the grave's engravings say? What was Cohen's philosophical background? What was the German-Jewish symbiosis?*

- e) Neue Synagoge, Oranienburger Straße  
*Visit the new Synagogue in Oranienburger Straße and its exhibition. Describe and contextualize one exhibit in greater detail. Can you also find out some facts about the Synagogue? When was it first built? Etc.*
- f) Metro Station Westhafen & Heinrich Heine  
*Make a stop at U-Bahn station Westhafen. Describe the way Heinrich Heine is remembered here. What do you see? Which text(s) by Heine have been used? How do you interpret the way they are being represented here?*
- g) House of the Wannsee Conference  
*You will find the House of the Wannsee Conference museum right next to the residence of Max Liebermann, directly at Wannsee lake. Visit the exhibition and research the roots of German anti-Semitism. What was the Wannsee Conference? What specific interpretation of its significance does the exhibition suggest?*
- h) Memorial at the train station Grunewald  
*Go to S-Bahn station "Grunewald" and visit the memorial site "Gleis 17". Describe and analyze the concept of the site. How did you experience it? How do you interpret its layout? What do you know about the history of station Grunewald?*
- i) Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe  
*Visit the memorial and the museum underneath. At the end of the exhibition, check out the video room and choose one Holocaust survivor video testimony from the database. Summarize the survivor's biography and reflect on how the medium video influenced your way of listening to the survivor's story.*

### Literature

Course Reader (see below for details)

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

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

### Course schedule

Sessions	Topics, Readings, etc.
Session 1	<b>Topic:</b> Introduction: Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the Territories of „Central Europe“; Jewish Origins and Genealogies

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	<p><b>Readings:</b>                  (1) Sander Gilman/Jack Zipes: “Introduction: Jewish Writing in German Through the Ages”;                  (2) Jehuda Reinharz, “Jewish Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Central Europe”</p>
<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Jewish Berlin: Guided Tour.</b>
<b>Session 3</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> German-Jewish Relations in the Times of Enlightenment: Mendelssohn, Lessing and Lavater: Jewish, Christian – and Friends?</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>                  (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</p>
<b>Session 4</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> The Struggle for Assimilation: Rahel Levin Varnhagen – A Jewish Parvenu</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>                  (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) [optional] Text montage from: <i>Rahel Levin Varnhagen: A Commemoration for Her Friends</i> (English translation)</p>
<b>Session 5</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> The Politics of German-Jewish Existence at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Rise of Zionism</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>                  (1) Theodor Herzl: <i>The Jewish State</i> (1896) [esp. chpts. 1,2 &amp; 6];                  (2) Ismar Schorsch: “Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism 1870-1914”;                  (3) [optional] Jehuda Reinharz, “The C.V. and the ZVfD: 1897-1914”</p>
<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>
<b>Session 7</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> The Aesthetics of German-Jewish Writings at the Beginning of the 20th Century</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>                  (1) Joseph Roth: <i>The Wandering Jews</i> (1927) [esp. chs. 1 &amp; 2];                  (2) Franz Kafka: “Josephine the Singer”;                  (3) Michael Brenner: Authenticity and Modernism Combined: Music and the Visual Arts</p>
<b>Session 8</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Life under Nazi rule in Berlin</p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p>

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	<p>(1) Ulrich Charpa / Ute Deichmann: Jews and Sciences in German Contexts  (2) Hermann Simon: Jews during the Period of National Socialism  (3) Poems by Mascha Kaléko and Gertrud Kolmar</p>
<b>Session 9</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> After Auschwitz. How to go on</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  (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>
<b>Session 10</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Jews under Stalin</p> <p><b>Video in class:</b> Bundaím, Socialists in Yiddish and Hebrew</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  (1) Antony Polonsky: From 1944 to the Death of Stalin  (2) Timothy Snyder: Stalinist Anti-Semitism</p>
<b>Session 11</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Contemporary Jewish Life in Germany. Soviet Legacies?</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  (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><b>Video in class:</b> Oma and Bella</p>
<b>Session 12</b>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Summary and Conclusion. Open Questions</p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  (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>
<b>Session 13</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>