



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

HUMANITIES SEMINARS

German-Jewish Writers from the 1800s to the Present — Are they Germans, are they Jews, are they both, or are they neither?

Fall 2020

Thursdays 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

October 1 – December 10, 2020 (Thanksgiving excluded ☺).

Online via Zoom

Instructor:

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Seminar Content:

This course will explore texts starting with the Enlightenment figure Moses Mendelssohn and continuing until the present day, and examine how issues of identity are addressed by the writers in their texts, but then also how these writers are viewed by the general (largely non-Jewish) population. Though there is a rich tradition of writings in German by Jewish authors leading up to the early twentieth century and the beginning of the Nazi era, clearly this topic is still overshadowed by our knowledge of the Holocaust. For many Jews throughout the world, the notion of a rebirth of Jewish life in Germany was unthinkable, but it has nevertheless taken place; in the 1990s (due mainly to the large influx of emigrants from the former Soviet Union) Germany was home to the world's fastest-growing Jewish population.

Moses Mendelssohn exemplifies the radical idea that someone could be both a participating member of a European culture and an observant Jew. Due to the turmoil and the rising resistance to Jewish assimilation in the wake of the French Revolution, Jews of the following generation struggled with their conflicted sense of identity, and several of the writers chose to convert to Christianity, which the famous German-Jewish writer Heinrich Heine famously called “the ticket of admission to European culture”. These identity conflicts continued throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, shaped by a series of political events: the Revolutions of 1848, the formation of the first united German state in 1871, the

granting of rights of citizenship to Jews in Austria (in 1867) and Germany (in 1871), the stock-market crash of 1873 that led to a rise in antisemitism, and finally the defeat of the Austrian and German empires in the wake of World War One (1918).

Though the “Weimar Republic” — the first German democracy, founded in 1919 — is inevitably viewed from the perspective of the rise of Nazism to power in 1933, it was the high-point of Jewish participation in German culture. Franz Kafka, one of the major prose writers in German literature, was born and lived most of his life in Prague (Czechoslovakia after 1918) but was German in his language and culture. Else Lasker-Schüler is regarded still today as one of the most significant German-language poets of the early 20th century.

Moving to the post-1945 era, we will examine texts by writers for several post-war generations: 1. Writers like Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs who were best known for their Holocaust-related texts, and others like Erich Fried and Hilde Domin, who tried to escape their Jewish identity, 2. Those who came of age in the 1960s and 70s, and were caught in the dilemma of being raised by Jews who felt guilty about their decision to return to Germany, and who thus gave them conflicting messages about “fitting in” on the one hand, and emigrating to Israel on the other, 3. Those in the 1980s and 1990s who more aggressively claimed their Jewish identity, and finally 4. The post-unification generation of Jews, a majority from the former Soviet Union, who aimed to define a new kind of identity.

Readings:

For purchase:

- Heine, *Poetry and Prose* (Continuum)
- Schnitzler, *Road into the Open* (University of California Press)
- Kafka, *The Basic Kafka* (Pocket Books)

The other course readings will be posted by the end of August on a special Box@UA site for this course. After they are posted the link to this site will be shared with any student registered for this class.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/germany-virtual-jewish-history-tour>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Germany

Class schedule:

Oct. 1: Introduction

Excerpt from Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln
Excerpts from Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*

Oct. 8: Salon Women, the Mendelssohn family, Heinrich Heine I

Memoirs of Henriette Herz, Letters of Dorothea Schlegel and Rahel Varnhagen
Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy's letter to his son Felix
Heinrich Heine, *Harz Journey*
Heine Poems: "The Grenadiers," "I don't know the reason," "The night is calm,"
"You're lovely as a flower," "The young miss stood by the ocean"

Oct. 15: Heinrich Heine II

Heine, *Germany: A Winter's Tale*
Heine, writings on Jewish themes

Oct. 22: Assimilation?

Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question"
Samson Rafael Hirsch, "Emancipation"
Theodor Herzl, excerpts from *The Jewish State*

Oct. 29: Jewish responses to the rise of antisemitism

Arthur Schnitzler, *The Road into the Open*

Nov. 5: Psychoanalysis, "The Jewish Science?"

Sigmund Freud, excerpts from *The Interpretation of Dreams*
Freud, excerpts from *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*
Freud, excerpts from *Moses and Monotheism*

Nov. 12: Franz Kafka

"Before the Law", "The Judgment", Letter to his father
"A Report to an Academy", "The Animal in the Synagogue," "Josephine the
Singer, or the Mouse Folk"

Nov. 19: Else Lasker-Schüler and Elias Canetti, and Shoah-related poems

Lasker-Schüler, "Land of the Hebrews", poems
Canetti, "The Challenge" and Backenroth"
Paul Celan, "Death Fugue"
Nelly Sachs, "O the Chimneys", "You Onlookers"

Dec. 3: Post-1945 generation of Jewish writers in Germany and Austria

Short texts by Katja Behrens, Chaim Noll, Barbara Honigmann, Henryk Broder,
Robert Menasse, Rafael Seligmann, Maxim Biller

Dec. 10: The current generation: are they Russian, German, Jewish, or all of the above?

Short texts and excerpts by Katja Petrowskaja, Lena Gorelik, et al.