

The University of Toronto

## **JEWISH CULTURE IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC**

German 323HF / Fall 2011

Instructor:	<b>RACHEL SEELIG</b>	Dept:	German
Office:	Odette Hall #303	Email:	TBD
Hours:	W 11-12 (& by app.)	Tel.:	TBD

Class meets on **T 5-7** at **NF 119**

### **DESCRIPTION**

The historian Peter Gay described Weimar culture as “the creation of outsiders, propelled by history into the inside.” Many of the figures marked as “outsiders” within mainstream German society were Jewish. What was unique about German culture between the wars that encouraged Jewish involvement, and how did the Jews leave their mark on this culture? Why were those largely responsible for the vibrancy of Weimar culture targeted by those responsible for its demise? In this course we will explore the rich culture of the Weimar Republic, drawing particular attention to the contribution of Jewish artists and intellectuals. In addition to reading literary texts by writers such as Franz Kafka, Alfred Döblin, Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin and Gertrud Kolmar, we will explore artistic and architectural movements such as the Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, innovations in photography and film and issues of gender and sexuality as reflected in the fashion of the day. We will consider the economic and political upheaval surrounding this cultural flowering, which led to the decline of the republic and of Jewish culture culminating with the rise of Nazism. Finally, we will examine the legacy of Weimar culture in the major sites of exile and immigration.

### **COURSE GOALS**

This course will provide a varied, interdisciplinary introduction to Weimar culture in general and to German-Jewish culture in particular. Students will learn to appreciate the various tensions—between democracy and fascism, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, city and country, high art and mass media—that contributed to the cultural vitality of the republic and to its political instability. The structure of the course will be a combination of lecture and discussion, with active participation expected. Although classes will be conducted in English, students with the ability are encouraged to do the readings in German.

### **REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION**

Attendance and participation	40%
Short response paper (2 pages)	10%
Midterm take-home exam	20%
Final paper (8-10 pages)	30%

## MATERIALS

Select Readings (provided online, unless otherwise indicated\*)

S. Y. Agnon, *To this Day* (Toby Press, 2009) **\*for purchase**

Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism: Part Three*

Steven Aschheim: *Brothers and Strangers*

Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*

Walter Benjamin, select writings

Dovid Bergelson, *The Shadows of Berlin*

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf*

Gertrud Kolmar, *A Jewish Mother from Berlin*

Franz Kafka, select stories and writings

Joseph Roth, *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin*

Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, 2009) **\*for purchase**

Arnold Zweig, *The Face of East European Jewry*

Film (excerpts shown in class)

*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*

*The Blue Angel*

*Metropolis*

## CALENDAR

Note: The purpose of this calendar is to provide a general idea of how this course is structured. It may be subject to change. A binding course syllabus will be provided at the first class session.

Week 1	The Wounds of War and Birth Pangs of Democracy
Week 2	Walking Berlin: Metropolis and Modernism
Week 3	The Berlin-Jewish Spirit
Week 4	Weimar Surfaces: Art, Architecture and Advertising
Week 5	Fashioning the “New Woman”: Film, Fashion and Female Subjectivity
Week 6	Sex, Bodies, Gender
Week 7	Assimilation vs. Jewish Renaissance
Week 8	The Cult of the “Ostjuden”
Week 9	Vilna on the Spree: Yiddish Culture in Berlin
Week 10	The Romanisches Café and Hebrew Culture in Berlin
Week 11	The Decline of the Republic and Rise of the Third Reich
Week 12	Exile, Immigration and the Legacy of Weimar Culture Abroad