

The University of Toronto

**„IT SOUNDS BETTER IN YIDDISH“:
AN INTRO TO JEWISH HUMOUR**

German 367H / Fall 2016

Instructor: **ALEXANDRA HOFFMAN** Dept: German
Office: Odette Hall #326 Email: sasha.hoffman@utoronto.ca
Hours: T 2-3 (& by app.) Tel.: 647-609-7215

Class meets in **323 Odette Hall** on **Tuesdays, 12-2**

DESCRIPTION

What is Jewish about humour and what is humorous about Ashkenazi Jewishness? What's so funny about Yiddish? These are the basic questions that inspire this course. To experience the richness of Jewish European humour, we will analyze a variety of humorous genres (short fiction, film, stand-up, jokes, music) using a variety of analytical perspectives (historical, psychological, ethnographic, queer, and literary). A central theme will be the ways in which humour, through translation and adaptation, accompanied Jewish migrations within Europe and beyond.



COURSE GOALS

While honing your analytical reading and writing skills, and participating in class discussions, you will gain a better understanding of the intersections of ethnic and gender identities, political ideology, and literary and visual aspects of Jewish cultural production.

REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

Preparation and participation in class discussion	20%
Presentation of the week's reading	15%
Short bi-weekly reflections on readings (1-2 pages)	30%
Final Paper (8-10 pages)	35%

MATERIALS

[All materials will be available on Blackboard]

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 Defining Jewish Humour: What’s so funny about Yiddish? What's Jewish about humour? (Lenny Bruce, Jokes, schlemiel/schlimazl)
- Week 2 How does Jewish humour work?: Psychological approaches to Jewish humour (Freud, Dooley, Rosten)
- Week 3 Sources of Jewish humour: ethnographic and folkloristic approaches to Jewish humour (Weinreich, Allen, folk tales and jokes)
- Week 4 Jewish humour, ethnicity and transnationalism: from Kafka to Ali G (Deleuze and Guattari, Lowe, Leonard Simons)
- Week 5 The “Fiddler on the Roof” model of traveling humour (Finkin, Sholem Aleichem, Hoffman)
- Week 6 Laughter through the iron curtain (Litvak, Shternshis)
- Week 7 Yentas, Jewish princesses and patriarchy (Yidl mitn fidl, Making Trouble, Del negro, Stora-Sandor)
- Week 8 Yentl vs. Yidl and his fiddle: Funny girls and queer humour (Barbara Streisand, Yentl, Stacy Wolf, Michael Moon, Naomi Seidman)
- Week 9 The ins and outs of satire: Hasidim, misnagdim, communists, and Zionists (Gilman, Schachter, Joseph Perl, Mendele moykher sform, Psoy Korolenko and Daniel Kahn)
- Week 10 Who’s laughing at whom?: The other Jews and other others (Gillota, Gilman, Jazz Singer, Blazing Saddles, It sounds better in Amharic)
- Week 11 Faith and Questioning: religious philosophical approaches to Jewish humour (Allen, Maurice Samuel, Leo Schwartz)
- Week 12 Multilingualism and Jewish humour (Psoy, Klepfisz, Sacha Baron Cohen, Sholem Aleichem)