

The University of Toronto

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

German 367H / Fall 2019

Instructor: SASHA HOFFMAN Dept: German
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Hours: Wed. 1-3 and Thurs. 11-1 Tel.: 647-609-7215

Class meets in 119 Northrop Frye Hall on Thursdays, 1-3 p.m.

DESCRIPTION AND COURSE GOALS

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.



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. Please don’t hesitate to email or call me with any questions, concerns, comments, etc.

REQUIRED BOOKS

All readings available through the course website or in class.

REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

Preparation and participation in class discussion	25%
Presentation of the week's reading	10%
5 short reflections on readings (1-2 pages)	30%
Final Paper (8-10 pages)	35%

The course requires your thoughtful engagement with a variety of humorous genres as well as some theories of humour. Some of this engagement is achieved through regular attendance and participation in class discussion. A very short **presentation** (10 minutes or so) of one of the week's readings is in the same vein of communal learning. The presentation can provide biographical and historical context, raise questions to encourage class discussion, a sharing of your understanding of a text, etc.

The bulk of the grade, however, is based on written engagement and analysis. The **short reflections** are meant to be kernels of an argument, or tentative hypotheses: an elucidation of a stylistic or thematic pattern you noticed in the reading, a detailing of a particularly beautiful/moving passage, an articulation of a question that the reading raises for you, a brief comparison between two-three of the week's readings, a sketch of how the text relates to something else we've read, etc. The short reflections may also be useful for trying out ideas for the final paper. They are due in the beginning of class.

The **final paper** requires a more careful analysis of one or two texts, with consultation of scholarly articles. The topic is quite open. You can also write about a text that isn't on the schedule, or complete a creative translation project. Writing is a process, and so I ask you to begin work on this paper quite early. Please arrange to meet with me by October 17th regarding the topic of your paper.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS, DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS, AND ATHLETIC COMMITMENTS

If you will be observing any religious holidays this semester which will prevent you from attending a regularly scheduled class or interfere with your fulfilling any course requirement, inform your instructor of the dates of your religious holiday(s) within two weeks of the beginning of the semester or immediately if your holiday is near the beginning of the semester so that we may make appropriate alternative plans. In order for your disabilities and athletic activities to be appropriately accommodated, you must provide documentation during the first two weeks of class (or as soon as possible if a disability, including mental illness, emerges during the semester).

The University's Accessibility Services Office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor, Suite 400; Phone: **416-978-8060**; Email: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca.

The University's Health & Wellness Centre is located at 214 College Street, 2nd Floor. Phone: **416-978-8030**. They are not open in the evenings or weekends. This link has a list of places that have better hours: <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc/emergencies#node-1084>

GENDER PRONOUN PREFERENCES

Please let me know if I can help you establish your preferences for this class, at any point of the semester.