

GERM 875
Spring 2017
Fri 9:05 AM-11:55 AM
Germans, Jews, and the Theatre
Jonathan M. Hess



“What good actor today is not a Jew?” Friedrich Nietzsche asked in 1882, posing a question that drew on a long tradition of regarding Jewish efforts at integration into the modern world as a mode of dissimulation. This seminar explores the real and symbolic roles that theatre played in shaping Jewish identity and relations between Germans and Jews from roughly 1750 to 1900. Examining a range of dramas and writings about theatre, the course explores relations between concepts of Jewishness and understandings of theatricality as these shift over time. We will consider antisemitic conceptions of Jews as actors and mimics while studying the role that the theatre played in promoting idealized conceptions of Jewish men and creating affective communities of compassion with the suffering of exotic Jewish women.

We will begin by considering Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Die Juden* (1749) and *Nathan der Weise* (1779) against the backdrop of German adaptations of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. Moving into the nineteenth century, we will study Julius von Voss’s *Der travestierte Nathan* (1804) alongside both Karl Sessa’s anti-Jewish farce *Unser Verkehr* (1813) and Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn’s German-Jewish family drama, *Leichtsinn und Frömmerei* (1798). The next section of the course will consider two dramas that became fixtures in theatre repertoires throughout the German-speaking world: Karl Gutzkow’s *Uriel Acosta* (1846) and S. H. Mosenthal’s *Deborah* (1849). After a detour to consider the Orientalist exoticism of Karl Goldmark’s grand opera, *Die Königin von Saba* (1875), we will conclude the semester by studying Karl Emil Franzos’s Bildungsroman *Der Pojaz* (1905), a recasting of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in which the Yiddish-speaking protagonist longs to play Shylock on the German stage. Close readings of texts will be supplemented by discussion of reception documents, contemporary responses, and theoretical readings on questions of identity and performance.

The primary goal of the seminar is that students produce a paper similar in scope and format to an article that would be published in a scholarly journal. To this end, students will spend a significant portion of the semester working on an individualized research project and sharing their work with the seminar. Students will be expected to contribute to the seminar through regular oral presentations, a fifteen-minute conference paper to be presented in the final weeks of the semester, and a final research paper due at the end of the semester. *Reading knowledge of German essential; class discussions in English.*