

LT333 Introduction to German Literary History

Seminar Leader: Dr. Andreas Martin Widmann

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Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:45-12:15, room tbc.

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is designed to give students a broad and comprehensive understanding of German literary history, from the emergence of German as a written language to the present day. Through readings of representative works from formative periods such as Enlightenment, Romanticism and Modernism, and literary movements such as Naturalism and Expressionism, we will explore the evolution of aesthetic ideas within their historical contexts. We will also consider how the writing of national literary histories establishes and reflects ideas about national identity at a given time. Our survey will pay attention to canonized writers such as Lessing, Goethe, Kleist, Heine, Droste-Hülshoff, Rilke, Thomas Mann, Irmgard Keun or Emine Sevgi Özdamar. To complement these readings, we will also consider historically marginalized voices and outsiders, and engage with renegotiations of established narratives through seminal texts of literary theory like Deleuze/Guattari's concept of "minor literature" or Hans Mayer's *Außenseiter*. Conversations with guest speakers from the literary world will offer contemporary perspectives on selected key texts. Reading material and discussions will be in German and English. Students should have at least German B1 competence. Throughout the course, students will develop specialist vocabulary and skills enabling them to write about and discuss literary works in German.

Requirements

Students are required to come to class prepared and with the relevant materials and texts, as well as to take part in field-trips to places off-campus. This may involve allowing for extra-time for making the way to and from BCB campus; if necessary, a class may be moved to the evening to attend a theatre performance. Students should also be willing to make time for one or two film screenings in the evening (e.g. *Effi Briest*, *Der Zauberberg*, and/or *Berlin Alexanderplatz*)

Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned. Students are also expected to invest time in vocabulary acquisition, if necessary, and/or to look up words to deepen the understanding of original material in German.

Reading materials will be made available via through a reader and/or GoogleClassroom prior to classes dedicated to these texts and subjects. Unless stated otherwise, these texts should be printed for use in class. COMPUTERS, TABLETS OR PHONES should usually not be used during in-person classes. Exceptions may be in-class readings where online dictionaries may be useful tools.

All assignment must be completed to pass the course. Assignments and deadlines are specified in the schedule below.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (e.g. due to plagiarism) will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation 30%

Homework, including occasional one-paragraph responses: 10%

Midterm Essay (ca. 2000 words): 25%

One In-Class Presentation (Text Introduction): 10%

Final Essay (ca. 3000 words): 25%

Schedule

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change. In some cases, I have assigned more works or larger portions of a text than we may have time to discuss in class; when it comes to novels and plays, we will have to confine ourselves to representative excerpts. This practice is meant to give you a broader context into a period, movement or an author, and to offer optional additional reading. As we go along, I will either designate in advance the work or works on which we will focus our collective discussion, or I will ask you to identify the works that you think we should discuss most intensely. If we should find that we would like to devote more time to certain readings, topics linguistic structures etc., we have the option to do this. We may then adjust the readings or move a text.

Week 1: Introduction / Literary Beginnings	
Tuesday, January 27	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Hermann Kurzke: "Deutsche Literatur und deutsche Identität", p. 38-43. (please read in preparation of our first session)</p> <p>Christine Meyer: „Theorizing the Canon/The German Canon at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century”, p. 27-34. (please read in preparation of our first session)</p>
Thursday, January 29	<p><i>Hildebrandslied</i></p> <p>Minnesang und Mystik</p> <p>Hildegard von Bingen: „Die heilige Maria“</p> <p>Mechthild von Magdeburg: <i>Das fließende Licht der Gottheit</i></p> <p>Walter von der Vogelweide: „Unter der Linden“</p>
Week 2: The Baroque Age	
Tuesday, February 3	<p>Nürnberg, 1400: The Culture of the Book & The Printing Press</p> <p>Regelpoetik und Märtyrertragödie</p>

	Andreas Gryphius: <i>Katharina von Georgien</i> (1657) (excerpt)
Thursday, February 5	Georg Rodolf Weckherlin: „Sonnet. An das Teutschland“ Andreas Gryphius: Sonette Sybilla Schwarz: Sonette
Week 3: Enlightenment of the Mind	
Tuesday, February 10	Was ist Aufklärung? Udo Müller: <i>Literatur der Aufklärung und des Sturm und Drang</i> (p. 4 – 7; 30-31) Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: <i>Nathan der Weise</i> (1779) (excerpt)
Thursday, February 12	Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: <i>Nathan der Weise</i> (1779) (excerpt) Hamburg, 1766: Lessing: „ <i>Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie</i> “
Week 4: Enlightenment of the Heart	
Tuesday, February 17	Sturm und Drang Straßburg, 1771: Goethe: „Rede zum Shakespeare Tag“ Goethe: <i>Die Leiden des jungen Werthers</i> (excerpt)
Thursday, February 19	Goethe: <i>Die Leiden des jungen Werthers</i> (excerpt) Heinrich von Kleist: „Brief an Wilhelmine von Zenge vom 16. November 1800“ (optional) Heinrich von Kleist: „Über das Marionettentheater“ (optional)
Week 5: Classicism	
Tuesday, February 24	Becoming Greek Tübingen, 1804: Friedrich Hölderlin: „Hälfte des Lebens“ (optional)

	<p>Weimar as the capital of German literature?</p> <p>Goethe: <i>Faust</i> (excerpt)</p>
Thursday, February 26	Goethe: <i>Faust</i> (excerpt)
Week 6: Romanticism	
Tuesday, March 3	Goethe: <i>Faust</i> (excerpt)
Thursday, March 5	<p>Goethe: <i>Faust</i> (excerpt)</p> <p>Romantik</p>
Week 7: Realism and Revolution	<p>Jena vs. Weimar</p> <p>Romantik als Weltanschauung und literarische Bewegung</p>
Tuesday, March 10	<p>Gedichte der Romantik</p> <p>Caroline von Günderode: Gedichte</p> <p>Novalis: „Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren“</p>
Thursday, March 12	<p>Heinrich Heine: Gedichte</p> <p>Wien, 1828: Franz Schubert: <i>Die Winterreise</i></p> <p>Essay Writing</p>
Week 8: Naturalism	
Tuesday, March 17	<p>Georg Büchner: <i>Woyzeck</i> (excerpt)</p> <p>Georg Büchner: <i>Der hessische Landbote</i> (excerpt)</p>
Thursday, March 19	<p>London, 1848: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: <i>Manifest der kommunistischen Partei</i> (excerpt)</p> <p>Martin Puchner: <i>Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-gardes</i> (excerpt)</p> <p>Thomas Pfau: “Between Sentimentality and</p>

	<p>Phantasmagoria: German Lyric Poetry, 1830-1890" (excerpts)</p> <p>Gescheiterte bürgerliche Aufklärung, Patriarchat und soziale Fragen</p> <p>Annette von Droste-Hülshoff: „Am Turme“ / „Die junge Mutter“</p>
Friday, March 20: Midterm Essay due	
Week 9: Fin de Siecle	
Tuesday, March 24	<p>Literatur und Imperialismus</p> <p>Todd Kontje: "Introduction: Reawakening German Realism" (excerpt)</p> <p>Judith Ryan: "Germany's Heart of Darkness"</p> <p>Wilhelm Raabe: <i>Stopfkuchen</i> (excerpt) (p. 1-12)</p> <p>Gerhardt Hauptmann: <i>Die Weber</i> (excerpt) (optional)</p>
Thursday, March 26	<p>Sprachkrise</p> <p>Wien, 1899: Hugo von Hofmannsthal: „Ein Brief“</p> <p>Franz Kuna: "A Geography of Modernism. Vienna and Prague 1890-1928"</p> <p>Arthur Schnitzler: „Leutnant Gustl" (excerpt)</p>
Week 10: Expressionism and War	
Tuesday, March 31	<p>Text Introductions</p> <p>Reiner Ruffing: <i>Deutsche Literaturgeschichte: „Expressionismus“</i>, p. 205-215</p> <p>Else Lasker-Schüler: „Ein alter Tibetteppich“</p> <p>Georg Trakl: „Grodek“</p> <p>Jakob van Hoddis: „Der Kinematograph“</p> <p>Alfred Lichtenstein: „Prophezeiung“</p>

Thursday, April 2	Prag, 1912: Franz Kafka: "Das Urteil"
Spring Break (Monday, March 30, - Sunday, April 5, 2026)	
Week 11: Literarische Moderne	
Tuesday, April 7	Alfred Döblin: <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (excerpt) Marylin Sibley Fries: "The City as Metaphor for the Human Condition: Alfred Döblin's <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1929)": p. 41 - 48
Thursday, April 9	Alfred Döblin: <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (Film)
Woche 12: Neue Sachlichkeit	
Tuesday, April 21	Irmgard Keun: <i>Das kunstseidene Mädchen</i> (excerpt)
Thursday, April 23	Gebrauchsliteratur, Cabaret und Musik Erich Kästner: „Kennst du das Land, wo die Kanonen blühen“ Bertolt Brecht: <i>Die Dreigroschenoper</i> (excerpts)
Woche 13: Trümmerliteratur	
Tuesday, April 28	Nicholas Boyle: <i>German Literature. A Very Short Introduction</i> : p. 99-108 Heinrich Böll: „Am Ufer“ Wolfgang Borchert: <i>Draußen vor der Tür</i> (Graphic Novel, excerpts)
Thursday, April 30	Text Introductions Adorno/Horkheimer: <i>Dialektik der Aufklärung</i> (excerpt) Ingeborg Bachmann: „Reklame“

	Köln, 1968: Rolf-Dieter Brinkmann: „Godzilla“
Friday, May 1: Final Essay due for graduating students. Final grades for graduating students are due May 8, 2026 by noon.	
Woche 14: Deutsche Literatur global	
Tuesday, May 5	Guest Speaker: tbc
Thursday, May 7	Final Discussion Tomer Gardi: <i>Broken German</i> (excerpt) Christine Meyer: “At the Threshold of Rewriting: De- and Reterritorizing the Canon”, p. 77-81 Elisabeth Herrmann: “How Does Transnationalism Redefine Contemporary Literature?”, p. 19-25
Completion Week	
Friday, May 22: Final Essay due for all non-graduating students	

The Spring semester runs from Monday, January 26 and runs until Friday, May 15, with the Spring break planned from Monday, March 30, - Sunday, April 5, 2026.

Normal course sessions end on Friday, May 15th.

Completion week is from Monday, May 11th through Friday, May 15th.

o Make-up classes and final exams can take place in completion week.

o Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>