



## German Film and Literature after 1990

Lecturer: Klaus Roehm, Ph.D.

### Approach:

This course deals with literature and film in Germany since reunification in 1990. October 03, 1990 marks the end of a long post-war period, of national, ideological division and, for millions, the end of stifling political oppression. At the same time, it is the beginning of a new, unexpected “normality” that involves a quest for identity and adjustment to the changing realities of globally expanding capitalism.

In another context, modern German society includes a large number of people from other countries and many of the successful new figures on the scene have a multi-cultural background with new stories to tell, or they tell their stories in a new, different way.

Historic realities shape biographies and will be reflected in artists' worldviews, their choice of topics, even their modes of expression. No surprise then that memory – the individual experience of history – is a frequent subject. Another subject is the experience of living in two worlds (the immigrant experience – a global phenomenon) raising issues of integration, identity, and how to adjust to a sometimes contradictory multi-cultural reality.

We will examine the topics, styles of expression and narrative techniques of selected literary and cinematic works. Another aspect of investigation deals with responses to the multi-cultural experience – including irony and satire as strategies to overcome seemingly incongruous contradictions.

Many of the works we will discuss were created in the last fifteen years. This course offers the opportunity to get acquainted with some very recent works and important figures on today's literary and cinematic scene, including director Fatih Akin and author Daniel Kehlmann.

This course is about Germany NOW.

### Themes:

- The multi-cultural experience; the emergence of new voices
- Subject matter and forms of expression
- The historical perspective – themes from the past; individual experience in a totalitarian state



### **Seminar Format:**

Typical for literature and film classes, this course will be conducted in seminar style. This means you will not be faced with ready-made interpretations. The course represents a process of investigation – there will be lectures and oral reports but, above all, we will rely on discussions comparing our observations and individual viewpoints. The counterpoint of our subjective views – which would be expressed through persuasive argumentation and analysis beyond mere emotional impressions – will provide the basis of your own perception of the works. To a large degree, the success of this course depends on your input and involvement.

### **Requirements & grade:**

You will be expected to write two critical papers based on two different works (2-3 pages, Word or Open Office, 12-font, 1,000 words, to be mailed to the lecturer), preferably on a topic of your choice. The first paper will be due by the end of week 3, the second by the end of week 5. If you are interested, comparative papers are encouraged. The goal of these two analytical papers is to arrive at a deeper level of understanding of the works discussed (you should define your paper through a topic, a title). You will also contribute a researched oral report to provide background information on one of the works on our schedule.

Papers: within academic convention, it is perfectly legitimate to refer to other writers' ideas but make sure to cite your sources! Since there is very little secondary literature in English on these works, we will rely on an intrinsic approach of interpretation. What counts is your perception and understanding of these works. Be sure to support your position with rational arguments.

The lecturer will be available to discuss topics for critical papers after class.

Grade: based on your critical paper, your oral report, the work summary and in-class participation. The German grading system is a number system from 1 to 4 analogous to grades A to D in the US. A grade 5 means no pass.

Please be aware that this course presents art films whose intentions are not mere entertainment. Even though fictional in character, these works deal with sometimes disturbing psychological realities and unsettling historical facts.



**Tentative Course Schedule:**

45 contact hours/4 ECTS

Topic
Introduction to class & Film: "Head-On" by Fatih Akin, part 1
Film: "Head-On" by Fatih Akin, part 2
Literature: Wladimir Kaminer "Russian Disco"; oral presentations: Germany as a multi-cultural society
Excursion: museum
Film: "The Lives of Others" by Florian von Donnersmarck, part 1; oral presentations: GDR/Romania
Film: "The Lives of Others" by Florian von Donnersmarck, part 2
Literature: Daniel Kehlmann "Measuring the World", part 1
Literature: Daniel Kehlmann "Measuring the World", part 2
Excursion: museum
Film: "Four Minutes" by Chris Kraus, part 1
Film: "Four Minutes" by Chris Kraus, part 2
Oral presentations: Political Rebellion BRD & RAF; Film: "The Edukators" by Hans Weingartner, part 1
Film: "The Edukators" by Hans Weingartner, part 2
Film: "Never Look Away" by Florian von Donnersmarck, part 1
Film: "Never Look Away" by Florian von Donnersmarck, part 2
Film: "In July" by Fatih Akin
Conclusion – final discussion