German Film and Literature after 1990

ECTS credits: 4

Instructor: Klaus Roehm, Ph.D. / e-mail: klaroehm@web.de

Approach:

This course deals with literature and film in Germany since reunification in 1990. We will examine the themes, styles of expression and narrative technique of selected literary and cinematic works. Many of the works we will discuss were created in the last twelve years, since the beginning of a new century. This course offers the opportunity to get acquainted with some very recent works and important figures on today's literary and cinematic scene, including Herta Müller (Nobel Prize in Literature 2009) and director Fatih Akin. This course is about Germany NOW.

We will focus on two central themes:

1. **New Stories / New Voices: Germany as a multi-cultural society**
   (Fatih Akin, *Head On*; Vladimir Kaminer, *Russian Disco*)
   The experience of living in two worlds raises issues of integration and cultural identity. We will study two possible artistic strategies of treating the immigrant experience. One approach is stark realism; another method uses irony and satire as strategies of dealing with seemingly incongruous contradictions.

2. **Echoes of the Past – historical memory:**
   Historical reality shapes biographies and will be reflected in artists’ world views, their choice of topics, even their modes of expression. No surprise then that memory – the individual experience of history – is a frequent subject.
   a) **Life behind the Iron Curtain:**
      East Germany and Rumania (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others*; Herta Müller, *The Passport*)
   b) **Student rebellion and ideological division this side of the Iron Curtain:**
      West German terrorism in the 1970s - RAF (Hans Weingartner, *The Edukators*)

Field Trips:

We will visit two art museums:
- Kunstmuseum Schlossplatz
- Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Seminar format:

Typical for literature and film classes, this course will be conducted in seminar style. There will be lectures and oral reports but, above all, the course will rely on discussions comparing personal impressions and individual viewpoints. We won't assume any such thing as a 'correct interpretation.' The counterpoint of our subjective views will provide the basis of your own perceptions of the works. To a large degree, the success of this course depends on your interest, input and involvement. Some guidelines and questions provided for each work will help you with your investigations.
Requirements

A critical final paper (3-4 pages) comparing two or more of the works, preferably on a topic of your choice. You will also contribute a researched oral report to provide historical background information on the works under discussion. For two of the works, a 2-page summary is due the following class.

Since there is very little secondary literature on these works in English, we'll rely on an intrinsic approach of interpretation, backed by historical information.

Grade: based on your critical paper, your oral report, the work summaries and in-class participation.

List of the Works/Course Material:

- **Films:**

  *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*) by Fatih Akin, 116 min., 2004

  *Four Minutes* (*Vier Minuten*) by Chris Kraus, 111 min., 2007

  *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*) by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 137 min., 2006

  *The Edukators* (*Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei*) by Hans Weingartner, 127 min., 2004

- **Literary Works:**

  Wladimir Kaminer, *Russian Disco*,

  Herta Müller, *The Passport* (*Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*)

  Nobel Prize Lecture, 2009

**Please note:** For organizational reasons, you will have to purchase these books on your own. Be aware that supplies for these works in English translation are limited. Plan for at least 4 weeks to get the order delivered!