

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

GERMAN LITERATURE – Early Modern Period

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16th Century German Literature

As we enter the sixteenth century we must note that while England, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy were by this stage moving vigorously into the rediscovery of the Classics, and the power of their Romanic tradition, the Germans—but one cannot refer to them as such, for they were still four centuries away from nationhood—were barely starting to harvest their cultural traditions. And yet, complexly enough, there was cultural movement, from with the ‘Germany’ of the sixteenth century, which was to have exceptionally far reaching effect on subsequent centuries throughout Europe, indeed throughout the world.

From the very first, the humanist movement took a unique direction in north-central Europe. In the first place the revival of classical literature, especially Latin, was for Italy—and to some extent for France and Spain—a revival of its own past glories, while for Germany the Renaissance was of foreign origin. Furthermore humanism appealed primarily to the intellectual elite in Germany, who could speak Greek and Latin, whereas it appealed to a far wider audience in the countries where the languages were derived from Latin. Instead of an Italianate Renaissance, it might be said, Germany turned with fervor toward a kind of religious Renaissance, the Reformation.

It should not, though, be assumed that humanism made no headway in Germany. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1455-1522) and others became great scholars of classical languages. The invention of the printing press, in the mid-15th century, did much to stimulate reading and learning, and at least fifteen universities were founded in Germany between 1538-1545 A.D. Martin Luther himself was a friend to classical learning, except where it clashed with his religious beliefs.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther. With Martin Luther, born more than a century after Meister Eckhart, the 'new modern world' began to include significant new perspectives in religion. While Eckhart, remaining orthodox, opened the soul to new kinds of direct confrontation with the God within, Luther went farther, and much more publically, toward modifying public understandings of the Christian enterprise. In a word he opened a movement toward reform, in the Catholic Church, which was to have widespread effect on European, we might say world, culture to this day.

The Reformation. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was born in Eisleben, the son of a miner, was sent to primary school where he learned the trivium—grammar, rhetoric, and logic; a combination he found equivalent to Hell and Purgatory combined, then entered an Augustinian priory as a monk, in 1505, and three years later accepted a Professorship in theology at Wuerttemberg. (In other words he, like Eckhart or Saint Augustine, was academically precocious.) From this significant post he three years later paid a visit to Rome, which was to be influential for him. He was shocked by the corruption of the clergy, and inwardly formulated careful resentments against the intrusion of the Papal world onto the simple message of Christ. For this priest professor, the turning point was encountering head on the 'sales of indulgences,' which were as he saw it being peddled by the Catholic hierarchy—in particular by one Dominican bigwig, Johann Tetzel-- for such purposes as beefing up the building fund for St. Peter's Cathedral. (The galling instance was the monetary sale to parishioners, by the priesthood, of remissions from time due to be spent in Purgatory.) The events consequent on Luther's new perception, and rebellion, were to be the first effective steps toward 'reform' within Christianity, and though reformers like Jan Hus had preceded Luther, and paid for it with their lives, the Luther world was in significant ways more flexible toward individual expression than had been the late mediaeval world of Eckhart.

Luther's boldness and excommunication. In 1517 Luther reached some kind of expressive crisis, in one way or another 'posted his 95 theses' on church and religious matters, for all members of his order to read. Whether or not the posting was done on the Cathedral door is unclear, and is part of the personal mythology that surrounds many of Luther's actions—like throwing an inkwell and pen at the Devil. The upshot of the posting, for sure, was rapid retribution from the Church hierarchy. In 1520 Pope Leo X demanded that Luther retract all his writings to date—they were already voluminous; both as prof and priest Luther was prolific—and on being rejected the Holy Roman Emperor stepped in and excommunicated Prof. Luther. At this point, not only forbidden the rites of the Church, but considered an outlaw, Luther was saved from serious punishment by a cadre of his supports, especially his influential religious friend, Philip Melancthon, and was spirited away (in a cloak and dagger intervention) to the Castle of the Wartburg in Thuringia, where he was safe and protected. It was in that setting that he started to undertake his translation of the Bible into vernacular German, an achievement of vast importance to the German language, to its literary vigor, and to world culture.

Luther's later life. Luther's later life is one of vast productivity, as he began to concentrate on the creative religious works that have given their meaning to the Reformation. It must first be said that he renounced his monasticism (1525) and that in 1530 he married a former nun. In 1535 he and many fellow spirited friends founded the Augsburg Confession, in which they formally abandoned Catholicism. Among the many powerful literary texts Luther left behind him were a rich variety of prose tracts and sermons, vigorous in language and thought, and a collection of some thirty seven hymns, which remain as lasting treasures of Christian worship.

Reading

Primary Source Reading

Dillenberger, John, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, 1958. (Reprint updates; outstanding.)

Secondary Source Reading

Erickson, Eric, *Young Man Luther*, 1953 (A towering classic of insight.)

Further Reading

Oberman, Heiko, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, 2006.

Original language reading

Arnold, Heinz Ludwig, ed. *Martin Luther*, 1983.

Suggested paper topics

Luther was born more than two hundred years after Meister Eckhart. Please indicate some of the major differences between the two thinkers as those differences relate to the conception of God. (Both men were critical of the organized Church, though one remained within it, while Luther staged a 'rebellion.') Do the differences in their views of God reflect the huge cultural differences that were occurring in Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries?

Luther's translation of the Bible into German was immensely influential, as was the King James version of the same book into English, a century later. Why was a Bible translation a text of such great potential cultural importance? Luther's contemporary, Erasmus (next entry), was famed for his translations of the New Testament into both Greek and Latin. What would you see as the motivation of such a herculean effort? Whom would Erasmus reach by that work?

Excerpt Martin Luther Table Talk <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9841/9841-h/9841-h.htm>

Proofs that the Bible is the Word of God.

That the Bible is the Word of God, said Luther, the same I prove as followeth. All things that have been and now are in the world, also how it now goeth and standeth in the world, the same was written altogether particularly at the beginning, in the First Book of Moses concerning the Creation. And even as God made and created it, even so it was, even so it is, and even so doth it stand to this present day. And although King Alexander the Great, the kingdom of Egypt, the empire of Babel, the Persian, Grecian, and Roman Monarchs, the Emperors Julius and Augustus, most fiercely did rage and swell against this Book, utterly to suppress and destroy the same, yet notwithstanding, they could prevail nothing; they are all gone and vanished; but this Book, from time to time, hath remained, and will remain unremoved, in full and ample manner, as it was written at the first. But who kept and preserved it from such great and raging power; or, Who defendeth it still? Truly, said Luther, no human creature, but only and alone God himself, who is the right Master thereof; and it is a great wonder that it hath been so long kept and preserved, for the devil and the world are great enemies unto it. The devil doubtless hath destroyed many good books in the Church, as he hath rooted out and slain many saints, concerning whom we have now no knowledge. But, no thanks unto him, the Bible he was fain to leave unmeddled with. In like manner Baptism, the Sacrament, and the Office of Preaching have remained among us against the power of many tyrants and heretics that have opposed the same. These our Lord God hath kept and maintained by his special strength. Homer, Virgil, and suchlike are profitable and ancient books; but, in comparison of the Bible, they are nothing to be regarded.

By whom and at what Times the Bible was translated.

Two hundred and forty-one years before the humanity of Christ, the Five Books of Moses, and the Prophets, were translated out of the Hebrew into the Greek tongue by the Septuagint Interpreters, the seventy doctors or learned men then at Jerusalem, in the time of Eleazar the High-priest, at the request of Ptolemeus Philadelphus, King of Egypt, which King allowed great charges and expenses for the translating of the same.

Then, one hundred and twenty-four years after the birth of Christ, his death and passion, the Old Testament was translated out of Hebrew into Greek by a Jew, named Aquila (being converted to the Christian faith), in the time of Hadrian the Emperor.

Fifty and three years after this Aquila, the Bible was also translated by Theodosius.

In the three-and-thirtieth year after Theodosius, it was translated by Symmachus, under the Emperor Severus.

Eight years after Symmachus, the Bible was also translated by one whose name is unknown, and the same is called the Fifth Translation.

Erasmus

Desiderius Erasmus. Desiderius Erasmus, ‘the crowning glory of Christian Humanists,’ was born in the late 1460’s, in Rotterdam. (German literature? Given the proximity of German to Dutch, and the porous proximity of Germany and Holland, in the Renaissance, we might call Erasmus a representative of Germanic rather than German literature. His regional greatness, in any case, ensures his position in the present encyclopedia of German literature.). Orphaned—his parents never married, and remained a lifelong source of shame to Erasmus—Erasmus grew up in poverty, yet thanks to his exceptional ability he qualified for an outstanding primary education. (His school was the first pre University school in Europe at which Greek was taught, and Erasmus’ total familiarity with those two languages, in which he did most of his writing, began at this stage.) By a natural course, given his remarkable gifts, Erasmus took his vows and was ordained at the age of 25, was next entered into an Augustinian monastery, in which he was quickly disgusted, he says, by the crude manners of the monks. Through the intervention of the Bishop of Combray, Erasmus was permitted to leave the cloister, while of course still in full Catholic communion as priest, and to start on what would be a lifetime course of travels, during which he lectured and resided regularly at the best of European Universities, but meantime retained his cherished role as an independent scholar.

Life of an independent scholar. An independent, Erasmus was to write incessantly, and voluminously, and to disseminate his ideas widely among the elite of what intellectual environment he was traversing. The ideas he disseminated were those of a humane scholar, ever more aware that he was living through a period of culture-shaping importance—we would later call it the Reformation—but refusing to take a militant stance in the movement. (Erasmus turned away from the Augsburg Confession in which Luther and Melancthon, and other dissident dignitaries of the German church abjured Catholicism, and remained true to his own priesthood.) It was this independent but faithful position that Erasmus maintained, through a seventy year life of writing, teaching, and scholarship.

Erasmus travels and writes abroad. In 1492 Erasmus went to study at the University of Paris. Shortly after he accepted an invitation to teach at the University of Cambridge, where he occupied the Chair of Divinity, and collaborated on theological texts and issues with many of the outstanding intellectuals in Britain. (He complained of British weather and ale, and that there was not sufficient wine to reduce his aches and pains, but he remained.

Reading

Primary source reading

Collected Works of Erasmus, 1974-. (Ongoing project, University of Toronto Press.)

Secondary source reading

Betenholz, Peter, *Encounter with a radical Erasmus. Erasmus’ work as a source of radical thought in early modern Europe*, 2009.

Further Reading

Huizinga, Johan, *Erasmus and the Age of the Reformation*, 1952. (Old but classic.)

Original language reading

Garber, Klaus, ed. *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Fruehen Neuzeit.*, 1989.

Suggested paper topics

Erasmus is the only non German writer—he was Dutch—to be included under German literature in the present Encyclopedia. Not all editors agree on the decision to include him in such a context. What is your feeling? How sharply is the word ‘German’ definable, when it comes to writers of the 14th and 15th centuries?

How would you characterize the attitude of Erasmus vis a vis the ‘Church abuses’ Martin Luther decries? Is Erasmus appalled by those abuses, or more ‘tolerant?’ What is the background for Erasmus’ particular orientation?

EXCERPT from Erasmus Colloquies

http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1494033&pageno=4

AN ADMONITORY NOTE OF ERASMUS ON THE TRICKS AND IMPOSTURES OF A CERTAIN DOMINICAN, WHO HAD PUBLISHED IN FRANCE THE COLLOQUIES OF ERASMUS RIDICULOUSLY INTERPOLATED BY HIMSELF. _A Book of Colloquies had appeared, the material of which was collected partly from domestic talks, partly from my papers; but with a mixture of certain trivialities, not only without sense, but also in bad Latin,--perfect solecisms. This trash was received with wonderful applause; for in these matters too Fortune has her sport. I was compelled therefore to lay hands on these trumperies. At length, having applied somewhat greater care, I added considerable matter, so that the book might be of fair size, and in fact might appear worthy even of the honour of being dedicated to John Erasmus, son of Froben, a boy then six years old, but of extraordinary natural ability. This was done in the year 1522. But the nature of this work is such, that it receives addition as often as it is revised. Accordingly I frequently made an addition for the sake of the studious, and of John Froben; but so tempered the subject-matters, that besides the pleasure of reading, and their use in polishing the style, they might also contain that which would conduce to the formation of character. Even while the book I have referred to contained nothing but mere rubbish, it was read with wonderful favour by all. But when it had gained a richer utility, it could not escape [Greek: tôn sykophantôn dêgmata]. A certain divine of Louvain, frightfully blear of eye, but still more of mind, saw in it four heretical passages. There was also another incident connected with this work worth relating. It was lately printed at Paris with certain passages corrected, that is to say, corrupted, which appeared to attack monks, vows, pilgrimages, indulgences, and other things of that kind which, if held in great esteem among the people, would be a source of more plentiful profit to gentlemen of that order. But he did this so stupidly, so clumsily, that you would swear he had been some street buffoon: although the author of so silly a piece is said to be a certain divine of the Dominican order, by nation a Saxon. Of what avail is it to add his name and surname, which he himself does not desire to have suppressed? A monster like him knows not what shame is; he would rather look for praise from his villany. This rogue added a new Preface in my name, in which he represented three men sweating at the instruction of one boy: Capito, who taught him Hebrew, Beatus Greek, and me, Latin. He represents me as inferior to each of the others alike in learning and in piety; intimating that there is in the Colloquies a sprinkling of certain matters which savour of Luther's dogmas. And here I know that some will chuckle, when they read that Capito is favoured by such a hater of Luther with the designation of an excellent and most accomplished man. These and many things of the like kind he represents me as saying, taking the pattern of his effrontery from a letter of Jerome, who complains that his rivals had circulated a forged letter under his name amongst a synod of bishops in Africa; in which he was made to confess that, deceived by certain Jews, he had falsely translated the Old Testament from the Hebrew. And they would have succeeded in persuading the bishops that the letter was Jerome's, had they been able in any tolerable degree, to imitate Jerome's style.

17th Century German Literature

The historical event of huge importance for Germany, in the seventeenth century, was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which was brought on by the Hapsburgs' renewed attempts to stamp out Protestants—thus, by the continuing inter faith conflict opened up Martin Luther, and a century after the Reformation mired in power-turf issues which were decidedly not theological. The Protestants were aided in the war by Denmark, Sweden, and France, and once again they won freedom of worship. Such freedom, however, was dearly bought. Germany was so utterly devastated and so nearly depopulated (about two thirds of the population perished) that it was unable to recover for nearly a century.

The century was for the most part literarily barren, with important exceptions made for the religious/visionary poetries of Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius, and the fascinating novel *Simplicissimus* (1669) by Grimmelshausen.

Jakob Boehme

Christian tradition in early German literature. Meister Eckhart, Erasmus, Luther, now Jakob Boehme the true Christian mystic, and not much later Angelus Silesius (1624-1677), who was born in the year Boehme (1515-1624) died: however shaky the engagement of early German literature with Christianity, one can say that by the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance there is complete entanglement between German literature, the topic of this part of our Encyclopedia, and the Christian tradition. The just named authors would be at the top of any reading list of German literature through the seventeenth century.

Jacob Boehme the individual. Jacob Boehme was born near Goerlitz, in present day Poland, in what was then the Holy Roman Empire. His father was a well to do Lutheran peasant, but the boy's circumstances dictated a modest career, and he was first assigned to cattle herding, until it was found that his health would not permit such exertions. He then took up shoemaking, was assigned to live with a supportive family, but they were not Christian and Boehme left them, in need of spiritual nourishment. In 1599 he got this nourishment, married, and went on to have four children. But he was no candidate for a settled bourgeois life. In 1600 he had the first of many visions. Though he would live and write profusely around those visions he would continue, for the rest of his life, to reside and work in the communities where he was born.

Boehme's visions and thought. The first of Boehme's visions occurred in 1600, when he was watching a beam of sunlight on a pewter dish, and in that perception had a vision of the structure of the universe, and of its inherent order. (He will come to write, at length, about evil as essentially disorder, as nothing but absence of order.) Despite warnings that he should desist from the direction of his thoughts—for Boehme began rapidly to write down and disseminate his visions—Boehme persisted from 1602 on with the text, *Aurora*, which was going to be his first shocking appearance on the religious stage of his time. There was much uproar against what appeared to some to be the pantheism of this early thought, and the uproar grew. Among the notions assuming thematic form in Boehme's extensive writings—particularly in the *Mysterium magnum* and *De signatura Rerum*-- are many which, in the sensitive new religious climate of Reformation, when new movements and affiliations were shaping in the wake of Luther, were extremely unnerving to orthodoxy. Boehme's notion that the Fall (and the Devil) are necessary parts of the Creation touched the Christian sensibility forcefully. Is God then partly evil? Was Christ's sacrifice necessary and 'good'? The counterpart idea that man can become 'as god' by divesting himself of humanity and seeing the world as God sees it, is equally disturbing, and confusing to the orthodox. We are reminded of the daring conflation, in Meister Eckhart, of the perceptions of human and the existence of God. In all of these realms of thought, whether seeing the creation as a vast birth giving field of suffering, or seeing mankind as evil struggling toward the light, and doing so with the power of free will, given by God, Boehme's often 'daring' thought put him at odds with the newly established Lutheran church, and yet his thinking remains inscribed inside the theology of Luther.

Is Meister Eckhart a literary creator? Is this work German literature? As we track the development of German literature, from *The Niebelungenlied* to the Reformation, we see that the German cultural imagination staged its first efforts in terms of what we would call religion imagination. Whether we consider this imagination purely fictive, or part of another reality discourse, will depend on the viewpoint toward religion which we bring to reading visionaries like Boehme.

Reading

Primary source reading

An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception, ed. Hessayon and Apetrei, 2013.

Secondary source reading

Goodrick-Clarke, N., *Jacob Boehme and Theosophy*, 2008.

Further reading

Weeks, Andrew, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the 17th century Philosopher and Mystic*, 1991.

Original language reading

Kemper, Hans-Georg, *Deutsche Lyrik der fruehen Neuzeit*, 3 vols., 1986-7.

Suggested paper topics

Does Boehme seem to you to break from the spirit of Luther's movement, or to exceed Luther in giving the individual free and direct access to the experience of god? Had the churches, both Catholic and Lutheran, reason to fear the thought of a 'maverick' genius like Boehme? What has been the history of church response to mysticism?

What relation do you see between the mystical imagination and that of the great (but not mystical) writer, like Shakespeare? When Boehme sees the order of the universe in a bowl of water is he having a 'poetic vision'? Consult, in answering, the work of William Blake, who was one of the 'writers' most profoundly indebted to Boehme.

Excerpt The Way to Christ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/boehme/waytochrist.ii.ii.html>

Showing how Man should consider himself.

CHRIST said, Except ye turn and become as Children, ye shall not see the kingdom of God. Again, he said to Nicodemus; Except a Man be born again, of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God; for that which is born of the Flesh is Flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

2. Also the Scripture positively declareth, that the fleshly natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, for they are Foolishness unto him, neither can he know or conceive them.

3. Now seeing that all of us have Flesh and Blood and are mortal, as we find by Experience, and yet the Scripture saith, that We are the Temples of the Holy Ghost, who dwelleth in us, and that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that Christ must be formed in us; also, that He will give us his Flesh for Food, and his Blood for Drink: And that, Whosoever shall not eat of the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood hath no Life in him. Therefore we should seriously consider, what kind of Man in us it is, that is capable of being thus like the Deity.

4. For it cannot be said of the mortal Flesh that turneth to Earth again, and liveth in the Vanity of this World, and continually lusteth against God; that it is the Temple of the Holy Ghost; much less can it be said that the New Birth cometh to pass in this earthly Flesh, which dieth and putrieth, and is a continual House of Sin.

5. Yet seeing that it remaineth certain, that a True Christian is born of Christ, and that the New Birth is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us, and that the New Man only, that is born of Christ, partaketh of the Flesh and Blood of Christ; it appeareth that is is not so easy a Matter to be a Christian.

6. And that Christianity doth not consist in the mere knowing of the History, and applying the Knowledge thereof to ourselves, saying that Christ died for us, and hath destroyed Death and turned it into Life in us, and that He hath paid the Ransom for us, so that we need do nothing but comfort ourselves therewith, and steadfastly believe that it is so.

7. For we find of ourselves that Sin is living, lusting, strong, and powerfully working in the Flesh, and therefore it must be somewhat else, which doth not co-operate with Sin in the Flesh, nor willeth it, that is the New-Birth in Christ.

8. For St. Paul saith, There is no Condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. And further, Should we that are Christians be yet Sinners? God forbid, seeing we are dead to Sin in Christ.

9. Besides, the Man of Sin cannot be the Temple of the Holy Ghost; and yet, there is no Man that sinneth not, for God hath shut up all under Sin. As the Scripture saith, No one living is righteous in thy Sight, if thou imputest his Sins to him. The righteous Man falleth seven Times a Day; and yet it cannot be meant that the righteous falleth and sinneth, but his mortal and sinful Man. For the righteousness of a Christian in Christ cannot Sin.

Grimmelshausen

Simplicissimus. By 1668, the year of publication of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, we have encountered nothing in German literature like 'prose fiction.' (What have we encountered, in the realm of high literature or religious-literary thought? We have been reading epic material—*Niebelungenlied* and *Parzifal*--which ties us to archaic Germanic culture worlds; poetries of love and urban guild, which were pronounced factors of German life from the 12th to the 16th centuries; deeply meditative religious philosophical thinking—Eckhart and Boehme; activist religious thought, scholarship, and creativity in the path breaking moves of Luther and Erasmus.) With *Simplizissimus* (1668) we come on full blooded imaginative prose, a novel, one that arises from personal experience, passed through the sieve of wide reading and careful workmanship. This work remains one of the wonders of its time, and takes its place with the work of Smollett and Defoe in the formation of a European novel tradition.

Grimmelshausen and the Novel. The novel is just beginning to make its voice heard in Europe: the reading public for popular literature is growing, especially in Germany, where the western printing press was created and book selling and the book industry were starting to take off. The conclusion of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was only recent, Germany had been left in shambles and disease, and persons like Grimmelshausen (1621-1676) were on all sides, for the most part disoriented and directionless refuse of the War. *Simplizissimus* is a fictionalized autobiography of its author, who grew up among scenes of destruction and havoc, and who captures them in a fascinating fictional canvas; this book before you—and its sequel, *Courage*, which may particularly capture your attention for the vigorous, sympathetic, and sexy picture of the life of a camp-follower during the war.

Grimmelshausen's own life and the novel. Whether the present text is an autobiography of not—for certainly it might seem so—we know that Grimmelshausen lived events that intermeshed with the war. At the age of ten he was kidnapped by Hessian soldiery—fighting for the Holy Roman Emperor against the Protestants—and held captive by them throughout his teen years; a time, we can imagine, when he saw some aspects of the brutal war up close. At war's end, still a young man, he was taken into service by the Bishop of Strassbourg, with whom he resided until, in 1665, he was made a Magistrate in Baden, a position, and residence, in which he remained for the rest of his life. In other words, parts of his life suggest the world of the war, others a post-war existence of considerable stability. From hearsay and from his own imagination, at least in part, we have to imagine him bringing forth a tale that includes such events as these: a hero who is left on his own as a child and goes out into the fields to learn religion from a hermit, who went on to become a page to a great man, then a robber, then the discoverer of a significant treasure, who next marries, promptly deserts his wife, heads to Paris where he makes out to be a classy flaneur, returns to the cave of the hermit, whom he discovers to be his father, and then settles down, pipe and slippers, to a comfortable aging process.

What it all means. An account like the foregoing, which may seem flip, fails if it leaves out the maturely human tone of the narrator's life. The narration is carried out with some ironic distance, much compassion for the presented world, and a sense of humor which leavens the roughness of the war—one thinks perhaps of the brilliant tone of *Catch-22*. Readers who will love Tom Jones, a century later, can here see one of the seedbeds of that thoughtful and reckless comedy.

Reading

Primary source reading

Simplicissimus, trans. Mike Mitchell, 1999.

Secondary source reading

A Companion to the Works of Grimmelshausen. Otto, Karl 2003,

Further Reading

Grimmelshausen, Life of Courage, 2001. (Grimmelshausen's fascinating sequel to *Simplicissimus*.)

Original language reading

Meid, Volker, *Grimmelshausen: Epoche—Werk—Wirkung*, 1984.

Suggested paper topics

Suggestion: look into the Spanish novel tradition of the picaresque—check the prototype novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, from the mid 16th century, some plays of Quevedo, or for that matter *Don Quixote* of Cervantes—and then check out some of the collateral work being done, in the 17th century, by writers like Grimmelshausen, who display a picaro character in circumstances which are often full of human meaning. Is this a genre of writing we understand and appreciate today?

Courage is a star player in *Simplicissimus*, then reappears as the main figure in a continuation fiction, written by Grimmelshausen a couple of years later, *Courage*. What is Grimmelshausen's attitude toward this 'woman of the road,' this easy going but long suffering figure of strength? Take a look at Defoe's *Moll Flanders* for a characterization of the same kind of rough and ready, and witty, street woman—from the standpoint of contemporary British society.

EXCERPT

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7cq85KGmb3sC&dq=grimmelshausen&printsec=frontcover&source=in&hl=en&ei=kkCNS538DovcNtTglW4&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=&f=false So far and no further could I get with my song: for in a moment was I surrounded, sheep and all, by a troop of cuirassiers that had lost their way in the thick wood and were brought back to their right path by my music and my calls to my flock. "Aha," quoth I to myself, "these be the right rogues! these be the four-legged knaves and thieves whereof thy dad did tell thee!" For at first I took horse and man (as did the Americans the Spanish cavalry) to be but one beast, and could not but conceive these were the wolves; and so would sound the retreat for these horrible centaurs and send them a-flying: but scarce had I blown up my bellows to that end when one of them catches me by the shoulder and swings me up so roughly upon a spare farm horse they had stolen with other booty that I must needs fall on the other side, and that too upon my dear bagpipe, which began so miserably to scream as it would move all the world to pity: which availed nought, though it spared not its last breath in the bewailing of my sad fate. To horse again I must go, it mattered not what my bagpipe did sing or say: yet what vexed me most was that the troopers said I had hurt my dear bagpipe, and therefore it had made so heathenish an outcry. So away my horse went with me at a good trot, like the "primum mobile," for my dad's farm. Now did strange and fantastic imaginings fill my brain; for I did conceive, because I sat upon such a beast as I had never before seen, that I too should be changed into an iron man. And because such a change came not, there arose in me other foolish fantasies: for I thought these strange creatures were but there to help me drive my sheep home; for none strayed from the path, but all, with one accord, made for my dad's farm. So I looked anxiously when my dad and my mammy should come out to bid us welcome: which yet came not: for they and our Ursula, which was my dad's only daughter, had found the back-door open and would not wait for their guests. _ HOW SIMPLICISSIMUS'S PALACE WAS STORMED, PLUNDERED, AND RUINATED, AND IN WHAT SORRY FASHION THE SOLDIERS KEPT HOUSE THERE Although it was not my intention to take the peace-loving reader with these troopers to my dad's house and farm, seeing that matters will go ill therein, yet the course of my history demands that I should leave to kind posterity an account of what manner of cruelties were now and again practised in this our German war: yea, and moreover testify by my own example that such evils must often have been sent to us by the goodness of Almighty God for our profit. For, gentle reader, who would ever have taught me that there was a God in Heaven if these soldiers had not destroyed my dad's house, and by such a deed driven me out among folk who gave me all fitting instruction thereupon? Only a little while before, I neither knew nor could fancy to myself that there were any people on earth save only my dad, my mother and me, and the rest of our household, nor did I know of any human habitation but that where I daily went out and in. But soon thereafter I understood the way of men's coming into this world, and how they must leave it again. I was only in shape a man and in name a Christian: for the rest I was but a beast. Yet the Almighty looked upon my innocence with a pitiful eye, and would bring me to a knowledge both of Himself and of myself.

Angelus Silesius

Introduction to Silesius. "I am like God and God like me. I am as large as God. He is as small as I." Angelus Silesius (1624-1677) plays off of the identity of God and man. (Silesius was off and on accused by the Church of pantheism, of believing that the world exists as God, but that God is more (the animating force) than the world.) Who was this 'Silesian Angel,' and why was he such a source of distress for many theologians in his time?

The life and perspective of Angelus Silesius. Angelus Silesius, the 'Silesian Angel' as he christened himself later in life, having changed his name from plain German to suggestive Latin, was born in Breslau in 1624, only three years after the death of Grimmelshausen. His father was a military man of some distinction, a member of the lower nobility, and the future Angelus was sent to the prominent Elisabethgymnasium, a promising preparatory school in Breslau; his education was excellent. For higher studies Angelus was sent to the University of Strasbourg and to the Netherlands, where he became aware of the mystic thinking of Jacob Bohme. Meanwhile, following an inclination strong in him since childhood, he had converted to Catholicism, and been ordained; in 1663, he also pursued medical studies on an advanced level. This well credentialed and brilliant young man was then appointed Court Physician to the Duke of Wuertemberg, a position which promised him a good career, but the chemistry of the appointment was not effective. Silesius began to speak out critically against Lutheranism, in this court which had strong Lutheran leanings, and, above all, began to enter more frequently into the visionary condition. In the end Silesius was fired from his court position, and the rumors of heresy, which were quick to follow in such cases—think of Eckhart and Jacob Boehme, both of whom were victims of smear campaigns—and retired to a Jesuit retreat house where he spent the rest of his life.

The visions of Silesius. Visionary thinking, among members of the clergy, inevitably leads to official nervousness. (We see, in our own day, the time consuming protocols that proceed any ratification of miracles or the saintly condition.) in the case of Silesius, the records of visions fitted exquisitely into the prosody made available to him in time by the elegant works of Martin Opitz (1597-1639), who had dominated the scene of German poetry in the seventeenth century, and had particularly reshaped the technical direction of the craft, by introducing the French alexandrine line as the standard line for German poetry. Silesius moved directly into this verse form—the translations to be found below, in our excerpts, don't attempt the difficult challenge of putting Silesius into alexandrines in English. In any case, in the 1650's when Silesius decided to ask permission to have his poems published—as a priest he required an imprimatur—he was granted it, and in his 1676 his collection of 1500 short poems, aphorisms, and epigrams, *Der cherubinische Wandersman*, was published. Most of the work there was in rhyming alexandrine couplets, often arranged—through syntactical inversion, wordplay, learned allusions—to conceal a hidden and mystical meaning. The reason for the secrecy can perhaps be sensed from the brief excerpts offered below. 'I am as large as god/ he is as small as I': this leitmotif, with which we opened the entry, pervades Silesius' poems, and contributes even to the simplest of his pieces a paradoxical richness.

Borges and Silesius. The brilliant Argentinian writer and poet, Jose Luis Borges, viewed Silesius as a chief inspiration. Put in English, the Silesian verses—'The rose is without a why; it blossoms because it blossoms'—were for Borges the summary of Silesius' (and his own) view of life.

Reading

Primary source reading

Angelus Silesius: the Cherubic Wanderer, trans. Shradly and Schmidt, 1986.

Secondary source reading

Wehr, Gerhard, Angelus Silesius. The Mystic, 2011.

Further reading

Sammons, Jeffrey, Angelus Silesius, 1967.

Original language reading

Walz, Herbert, Deutsche Literatur der Reformationszeit: eine Einfuehrung, 1988.

Suggested paper topics

What, from your own experience, could be threatening to any church about the kind of 'pantheism' or 'panentheism' (check the term) attributed to Angelus Silesius? Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme, who preceded Silesius, both reviewed, deepened, modified the notion that man and God are intricately interwoven. Does this position, which Silesius reaffirms, leave room for Trinity, Crucifixion, Redemption?

You will have noticed that the high literature of the early period of German literature intersects at many points with religious thinking. Does the Reformation period seem to you especially replete with the religious imagination? Is the impression correct, that the purely literary imagination, the creative force behind art for its own sake, is irrelevant in such a period as the seventeenth century in Germany?

Excerpts

en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Angelus_Silesius

GODHEAD

BEING IS NOT MEASURED

Turn wheresoe'er I will, I find no evidence
of End, Beginning, Centre or Circumference.

GOD NEVER EXPLORETH HIMSELF

The Thought and Deed of Deity
Are of such richness and extent
That It remaineth to Itself
An Undiscovered Continent.

IN THE SEA MANY ARE ONE

A Loaf holds many grains of corn
And many myriad drops the Sea:
So is God's Oneness Multitude
And that great Multitude are we.

ALL INTO ONE AGAIN

The All proceedeth from the One,
And into One must All regress:
If otherwise, the All remains
Asunder-riven manyness.

18th century German Literature

The 18th century, especially the second half of it, is arguably the richest period in German cultural life, and the period of its influence over world wide culture, to this date. Although the country was still a hodgepodge of more or less independent states bounds together in a loose confederation, Prussia began to emerge as the dominant power, and glimmerings of a national consciousness began to appear. In the Seven Years War (1756-1763) the brilliant leadership of Frederick II (the Great, ruled 1740-1786) enabled Prussia, assisted by troops from Hanover and subsidies from England, to withstand the armies of France, Austria, and Russia.

In Germany, as in most of the other European countries, rationalism and deism were beginning to attract many adherents. These systems of belief were opposed first by pietism (a revival of simple piety, plus religious emotionalism) and later by Rousseauism. The theories of Diderot and Rousseau about democracy, the rights of man, and individual liberty led to no political upheaval in Germany—but in the social and intellectual realms Rousseauism imposed on rationalism helped to foster the indigenous movement known as Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) ‘which had as its objectives a reform of political and social life and a regeneration of literature.’ After mid century there was a burst of great writing—one thinks of this as the Classical Age of German literature—Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Herder, and from there, passing into the following century, the rich contributions of Germany to the Romantic movement, and to its philosophic drivers, Kant and a lineage of greats

Lessing

Gottfried von Lessing. Gottfried von Lessing (1729-1781) was the exemplary Enlightenment figure of the German 18th century: a dramatist, public art critic, an art theorist, and a public figure in the new urban art world. As we step into his world, we leave the world of Grimmelshausen (d. 1676) and Silesius (d. 1677), for example, far behind—where ‘behind’ means fifty years closer to the intense world of very early modern Europe, to which still clings much of the late Mediaeval—even the worlds of the Meistersingers or Meister Eckhart. Those two or three generations of difference were of great importance for the cultural environments of all western European societies, and perhaps of greatest importance for Germany, which—as the documentation in this Encyclopedia suggests—barely had a Renaissance, through which the mediaeval could be mediated, and might be said to have substituted a Reformation for a Renaissance. How does this play out in Lessing’s life?

Lessing’s career and thought. Gottfried was born in a small village in Saxony. His father was a clergyman at the local Latin School, and Lessing himself was well educated in classical languages, before going on to study theology and medicine at the University of Leipzig. (Noteworthy that among the intelligentsia, of early modern Europe, advanced study of medicine and theology were often coupled; twin skills in understanding personhood, corporeal and spiritual.) Between 1748-1760 Lessing was employed by various opinion journals and art critical papers, which played important roles in the , growing cultural life of major cities like Hamburg. He wrote reviews of plays, art exhibits, and social events, starting to gather the texts which would be part of his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. While carrying out that urban critic work—a byproduct of the new cultural sophistication of the city, in which bourgeois middle class values, and a new level of expendable income, were changing the landscape—Lessing had been working as a dramaturgical adviser to the Hamburg National Theater. It was during this time that he was also writing, producing, and directing his own path breaking dramas, comedies (like *Minna von Barnhelm*) that opened out the inner ironies of domestic life), bourgeois tragedies (like *Emilia Galotti*), or idea plays—a fresh phenomenon on the German stage (like *Nathan the Wise*, which is one of Lessing’s many eloquent appeals for respect among members of different religions.)

Lessing’s critical mind. It was in the course of this active professional and dramaturgical life that Lessing wrote a number of his most remarkable critical works, like *Laokoon* (1766), in which he analyzes a famous piece of sculpture, based on a scene from Virgil’s Aeneid, in order to discriminate between the skills (narrative and depictive, respectively) proper to poetry and sculpture. From such a text we see what an immensely sharp aesthetic perception Lessing brought to his work. This prominence of the aesthetic, in his thinking, is one more indicator of the new cultural world we move into with the German Enlightenment. We have seen powerful artistic skills, like those of the earliest German poetry, epic and love song, but we have not seen critical thinking about the arts.

Lessing and the Enlightenment. Lessing was a major voice for toleration and human understanding, one might say a Christian humanism with some resemblance to a much earlier thinker like Erasmus. But there is a difference, and it points to the Enlightenment. Lessing is a friend to humanity and its dignity, and for him the Christian input (which he takes for granted as essential) is a broad civilizing spirit rather than a powerful set of arguments.

Reading

Primary source reading

Lessing, Gottfried, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. McCormick, 1984.

Secondary source reading

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt, ‘So...What is Enlightenment?, An inquisition into modernity,’ *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Spring, 1994), 524-556.

Further reading

Luckhurst, Mary, *Dramaturgy: A revolution in Theater*, 2006.

Original language reading

Bahr, E., ed., *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, 1974.

Suggested paper topics

The Enlightenment of course opens attention onto the role of women in literature and the arts, as well as in society. What kind of understanding of women does Lessing show in dramas like *Emilia Galotti* or *Minna von Barnhelm*? Compare his view of women with that of earlier German writers we have met. Or, if you can, with Goethe's treatment of Gretchen in *Faust*. From the strictly aesthetic standpoint, does Lessing put women to good artistic use?

Please reevaluate the argument of *Laokoon* for our own time. What are the issues of lasting interest here? Are we still interested in the difference between the narrative work of language arts like poetry, and the 'static' pictorial quality of works like sculpture? Do those issues go to the heart of the nature of the arts?

EXCERPT Laocoon Introduction

[www.archive.org/.../laocoongott00lessuoft/laocoongott00lessuoft_djvu.t.](http://www.archive.org/stream/laocoongott00lessuoft/laocoongott00lessuoft_djvu.t.)
http://www.archive.org/stream/laocoongott00lessuoft/laocoongott00lessuoft_djvutxt

The first person who compared Painting and Poetry with each other was a man of fine feeling, who perceived that both these arts produced upon him a similar effect. Both, he felt, placed before us things absent as present, appearance as reality. Both deceived, and the deceit of both was pleasing. A second person sought to penetrate into the inner nature of this pleasure, and discovered that in both it flowed from one and the same source. The beautiful, the notion of which we first derive from corporeal objects, has general rules applicable to various things; to actions, to thoughts, as well as to forms. A third person, who reflected upon the value and upon the distribution of these general rules, remarked that some of them had prevailed more in Painting and others more in Poetry, and that with respect to the latter rules, Poetry could be aided by the illustrations and examples supplied by Painting; with respect to the former rules, Painting could be aided by the illustrations and examples supplied by Poetry. The first was an amateur; the second was a philosopher; the third was a critic. It was not easy for the two first to make a wrong use either of their feeling or of their reasoning. On the other hand, the principal force of the remarks of the critic depends upon the correctness of their application to the particular case, and it would be astonishing, inasmuch as for one really acute, you will find fifty merely witty critics, if this application had always been made with all the caution requisite to hold the scales equal between the two Arts. Apelles and Protogenes, in their lost writings upon Painting confirmed and illustrated the rules relating to it by the rules of Poetry, which had been already established; so that we may be assured that in them the same moderation and accuracy prevailed, which at the present day we see in the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian, when they apply the principles and experience of Painting to Eloquence and to Poetry. It is the privilege of the Ancients in no one thing to do too much or too little. But we moderns have often believed that in many of our works we have surpassed them, because we have changed their little byways of pleasure into highways, even at the risk of being led by these shorter and safer highways into paths which end in a wilderness.

Herder

Johann Gottfried Herder. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) was an influential German philosopher, memoirist, social critic, and early stage cultural anthropologist, who contributed deeply to the German Enlightenment, to the movement of *Sturm und Drang* (*Storm and Stress*; the pre-Romantic move toward a freeing of emotions on the stage and in writing: 1760's-1780's), and to Weimar Classicism, which became the prevailing literary development of the German late eighteenth century, centered around Goethe, and was already merging into Romanticism.

Herder's Life. Herder was born in Mohrungen, Prussia, and was brought up in an impoverished household, his father a preacher. Extremely studious, as well as hard worked, Herder learned and earned his way to the not distant University of Königsberg, hoping to study medicine. As it turned out he came under powerful influences: the lectures of Immanuel Kant, who was drafting the early stages of his culture shaking 'idealism,' and Johann Georg Hamann, a friend and adviser, who led Herder to read and admire Shakespeare. Already from these influences traces of the Herderian world view become visible. From Shakespeare Herder would go on to discover the powerful nation-uniting force of a great poet, who above all formed and formulated the language of his culture, while from Kant, we sense, Herder deepened his instinctual sense that sense life—the daily empirical life of 'ordinary men and women'—is closely allied to their conceptual ideologies and spiritual achievements.

Herder's career develops. In 1764 Herder became a pastor and teacher in Riga, from which, after five years of work, he retired to take a sea voyage to Nantes, in France, and on to Paris. (The account of this trip, *Journal of my Journey in the Year 1769*, is one of his typically brilliant accounts of life as he experienced it—a blend of comparative literature and linguistics, anthropology, and folk nationalism.) By 1770 Herder moved on to Strassbourg, where by great luck he met the young Goethe, with whom he exchanged heady innovative ideas that would lead both men into the *Sturm und Drang* movement. By the mid 1770's Herder would join Goethe, who had helped Herder find a job in Weimar, and with others they worked into writings that constitute the Weimar classicism which was not much later to slip over into the Romanticism of the early 19th century.

Herder and German Folk Culture. While Herder was extremely sensitive to the spirit of his time, certain ideas pervade his thinking from beginning to end, and work their way into his numerous writings, of which we might say, today, that they do not peak in any masterwork but contribute consistently, for more than thirty years, to building a national culture for Germany. His early *Fragments on Recent German Literature*, 1766-67, is a creative diatribe against what Herder considers the coldness of French neoclassicism, with its Latinate base; and a plea for a German literature based on German folk and literary traditions. His *On German Ways and Art* (1773) is a eulogy of Shakespeare, who caught the spirit of his own age, and in whose example Germans can read the potential they have in their own cultural traditions for the making of the greatest literature. *Volklieder, Volksongs* (1778-79) is a collection of 182 folksongs from many different cultures, much of the work translated by Herder, and evidence of the creative power residing with the Volk. Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-1791) concentrate his many notions of the evolution of mankind toward Humanity, a gradual process through which all nations and peoples, in their different ways, contribute to the making of a worthy human race.

Reading

Primary Source Reading

Herder: Selected Writings on Aesthetics, ed. G. Moore, 2006.

Secondary Source Reading.

Herder: *Philosophical Writings*, ed. M.N. Forster, 2002.

Further Reading

J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture ed. F. M. Barnard, first pub. 1969, reprinted 2010.

Original language reading

Kiesel, Helmut; Muench, Paul, *Gesellschaft und literatur im 18. Jahrhundert: Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Markts in Deutschland*, 1977.

Suggested paper topics

What seems to you to be the driving center of the many areas of thought in which Herder was prominent? Is he a philosopher, in your opinion, or a nationalist, or a linguist, or an early sociologist? Or is he a thinker who is constantly reforming a new center for himself as he goes along?

Shakespeare plays an important role in Herder's thought. What is that role? Do you see, in Shakespeare's writing, the massive power that Herder is drawn to? Can you see that power in Hamlet, which was the first play of Shakespeare Herder read in English—in his schooldays, under the tutelage of his friend, Hamann. Can you see why Herder preferred Shakespeare to French neoclassicism, and referred to the great alexandrine works of 17th century France as 'sewage from the Seine'?

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Johann_Gottfried_Herder

With the greatest possible solicitude avoid authorship. Too early or immoderately employed, it makes the head waste and the heart empty; even were there no other worse consequences. A person, who reads only to print, to all probability reads amiss; and he, who sends away through the pen and the press every thought, the moment it occurs to him, will in a short time have sent all away, and will become a mere journeyman of the printing-office, a compositor.

Calmly take what ill betideth;
Patience wins the crown at length:
Rich repayment him abideth
Who endures in quiet strength.
Brave the tamer of the lion;
Brave whom conquered kingdoms praise;
Bravest he who rules his passions,
Who his own impatience sways.

Every one loves his country, his manners, his language, his wife, his children; not because they are the best in the World, but because they are absolutely his own, and he loves himself and his own labours in them.

I am no longer misled, therefore, by the mechanism of revolutions: it is as necessary to our species, as the waves to the stream, that it becomes not a stagnant pool. The genius of humanity blooms in continually renovated youth.

•

Air, fire, water and the earth evolve out of the spiritual and material staminibus in periodic cycles of time. Diverse connections of water, air, and light precede the emergence of the seed of the simplest plant, for instance moss. Many plants had to come into being, then die away before an animal emerged.

Winckelmann

Winckelmann and Lessing. Like Gottfried Lessing, and many of his German contemporaries, Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768) took his deepest impulses from the Classical World, which was of course at the center of academic education in eighteenth century Europe and England, and served as the conventional pathway to the higher careers in the University and in the Church. In fact, when you consider Lessing's *Laokoon*, you may say that for both Winckelmann and Lessing the plastic arts of the Greeks and Romans formed the text of supreme importance. For Winckelmann the preoccupation with the Greeks, in particular, became the leitmotif of his life.

Winckelmann the man. Who was Johann Winckelmann? He was born in Stendahl, the son of a cobbler, of a mother who was daughter of a weaver; Winckelmann's childhood was hard and simple, but his academic drive to learn was powerful, and prevailed to gain him a solid classical education at two private gymnasia, from where at age 21 he went on to study Theology at the University of Halle. It was obvious, though, that Winckelmann was no theologian; he turned instead to classical languages, but was unsatisfied with the instruction he found, and moved on, in sequence, to try his hand at a school teaching job, to do private tutoring—where as often he fell in love with a handsome young man, whom he was tutoring, and was rejected—and then to work as curator of the private library of Count von Bunau, an opportunity to extend his reading of contemporary Enlightenment as well as ancient Greek thought. From this point on, Winckelmann's trajectory was to be toward the lands of antiquity, especially Rome, that were targets for all German creators of his time. In 1754, in a well planned move, Winckelmann joined the Catholic Church, and with a grant from the Elector of Saxony left for Rome, and a sequence of posts with Papal dignitaries and Roman noble families. With the support of such agents, for work as a resident art historian and critic, and especially as a brilliant forerunner in archeological methods, Winckelmann remained in Rome until 1768, when he returned to the north, was totally depressed by it, and was in Trieste, on his way back to Italy, when he was murdered.

Winckelmann's masterwork. *The History of Art in Antiquity* (1764) was the most influential of Winckelmann's many works on ancient Greek art—especially on the examples of ancient Greek (and fake Greek and Roman) sculpture which were abundant and widely sought out in the Rome of the time. Winckelmann's History was a testimony to the beauty and ideal sensuality of the ancient Greek figure, and artist. In that art Winckelmann found what he called 'a noble simplicity and a quiet greatness,' and from the model of such art he wished to inspire his contemporaries in their quest to honor and depict the beauty of the human form. (Winckelmann stressed the brilliance of the ancient Greek sculptor, in rendering the essence of the depicted figure without any suggestion of the veins, muscles, nerves which lay under the surface, and in place of which the Greek genius like Phidias was able to strike right for the essence of the human, which was like 'the purest water from the center of the well.')

Like Lessing, Winckelmann turned to the ancient world for spiritual direction in the 'modern world.' From the time of these two great pioneers of Enlightenment, German culture was to remain preoccupied with Antiquity, especially with the Greek example. The inspired descriptive writing, with which Winckelmann drives his History, puts him in the first rank of the German literary minds of his time, as it made him the first widely popular German writer throughout European culture.

Reading

Primary source reading

North, J.H., *Winckelmann's 'Philosophy of Art': A prelude to German Classicism*, 2012.

Secondary source reading

Nisbet, ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, 2009.

Further reading

Butler, E. M., *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, 1935; reprinted in 2012. (A classic study.)

Original language reading

Stolpe, Heinz, *Aufklaerung, Fortschritt, Humanitaet: Studien und Kritiken*, 1989.

Suggested paper topics

Winckelmann puts much stress on the 'imitation' (Nachahmung) of the greatest works of Greek art, especially sculpture. In fact his greatest work is consciously devoted to that 'imitation.' What does he mean by that? Does he suggest a creative kind of imitation, by which the imitator raises himself to a higher level of humanity? Or is he following another tradition, by which 'art is thought of as the imitation of nature,' the precise representation?

The Enlightenment is a pan European movement with many meanings, all of which have to do with the modernization of European culture—in science, political and social thought, and art. Why do you suppose the influence of the ancient Classics was so coercive at this time? What was the particular driver behind the German form of this return to the Classical? How does the aesthetic humanism, which bursts out in Germany, relate to the formality of the contemporary French classical theater of Corneille and Racine?

***EXCERPT* On the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture**

<http://www.arthistoryspot.com/2009/12/johann-joachim-winckelmann-reflections-on-the-imitation-of-greek-works-in-painting-and-sculpture/>

Good taste, which is becoming more prevalent throughout the world, had its origins under the skies of Greece. Every invention of foreign nations which was brought to Greece was, as it were, only a first seed that assumed new form and character here. We are told that Minerva chose this land, with its mild seasons, above all others for the Greeks in the knowledge that it would be productive of genius.

The taste which the Greeks exhibited in their works of art was unique and has seldom been taken far from its source without loss. Under more distant skies it found tardy recognition and without a doubt was completely unknown in the northern zones during a time when painting and sculpture, of which the Greeks are the greatest teachers, found few admirers. This was a time when the most valuable works of Correggio were used to cover the windows of the royal stables in Stockholm.

One has to admit that the reign of the great Augustus was the happy period during which the arts were introduced into Saxony as a foreign element. Under his successor, the German Titus, they became firmly established in this country, and with their help good taste is now becoming common. An eternal monument to the greatness of this monarch is that he furthered good taste by collecting and publicly displaying the greatest treasures from Italy and the very best paintings that other countries have produced. His eagerness to perpetuate the arts did not diminish until authentic works of Greek masters and indeed those of the highest quality were available for artists to imitate. The purest sources of art have been opened, and fortunate is the person who discovers and partakes of them. This search means going to Athens; and Dresden will from now on be an Athens for artists.

The only way for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients. What someone once said of Homer—that to understand him well means to admire him—is also true for the art works of the ancients, especially the Greeks. ..

Klopstock

Klopstock's Work. Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1723-1803) lives into the century beyond, and in many ways is evidence of energies fermenting the future, in Enlightenment German thinking. It is not that he was fully aware of these gifts fermenting inside himself, for his great passion, from early on in life, was to complete a masterpiece, *Der Messias* (The Messiah), which was to link him to the efforts of John Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (1667), which were part of the great past. What powers Klopstock, as poet, could carry into the future of literature were to come from his lyric poetry—his volume of *Odes* (published in 1771) is today much more appreciated than his *Messias*, of which a distinguished scholar wrote that ‘of all the religious poems of the world, the *Messias* is unquestionably the most monotonous and difficult to read.’ (Of his lyrics, an equally notable critic observed that Klopstock was ‘the greatest lyric poet between Walther von der Vogelweide and Goethe.’) Who was this Klopstock?

Klopstock's Life. Klopstock was born in 1724 in Quedlinburg, eldest son of a lawyer. In 1739 he was sent to the outstanding classical gymnasium in Schulpforta, where he made his first acquaintance with Homer's epics—largely through the translation of the Swiss writer, Bodmer—and began conceiving of a long epic poem of his own, which was to gestate into the *Messias*, the thirty cantos of which would not ultimately be published until 1773, although sections of the work were appearing from 1751 on. For University Klopstock went to Jena, where at first he was to study theology, at which he was a brilliant thinker, but one endlessly going back to his epic visions. After Jena he spent some time working as a private tutor, then went to visit Bodmer in Zuerich. At that point a conflict of lifestyles—Klopstock was always the active one, social and expansive, a superb horseman—divided the two men's tastes, and as Klopstock, in the manner of literary men in his time, was sizing up his opportunities for the next move, among the princely court supporters, he drew the attention of King Frederick V of Denmark, and went to Copenhagen. His pleasure, and soon sadness, were wrapped up in this trip north, for on the way he met his wife Margaret Moeller, who died four years later—leaving him, in sadness, with the memory of the happiest years of his life. Not much later, the King of Denmark died, and Klopstock returned to Hamburg, to spend there the remainder of his life.

The achievement of Klopstock. The *Messias*, by general agreement, foundered on the impossibility of its theme, to dramatize and hallow Christ's Redemption of the world. (Milton had tried the challenge, in *Paradise Regained*, and by general consent was much less successful than in describing the drama of the Fall.) It is, though, noteworthy that in this huge epic, 20,000 lines, Klopstock made a prosodic decision which was game changing for German poetry. Instead of composing in French alexandrine lines, the ruling Latinized form of French classical literature, Klopstock created in hexameters, the verbal form of Greek and Latin poetry. The result was a greatly invigorated inheritance for future German poetry. In his lyrics, however, he carried his historical presence further, by reaching out, in genuine feeling—that is, relatively free of the neoclassical icing required at the time—to express feelings, about poetry, friendship, love, nature, which are of a very promising freshness, and pervaded by fully realized religious feeling.

The challenge. Why was the challenge facing the *Messias* so difficult? Why did Milton struggle to try to deal with the redemption of man, in *Paradise Regained*, and why was he unsuccessful? Can you identify other long poems which attempt to deal with religious matters—not with the religious sentiment but with religious doctrine and sacred history? Would you say that Dante's *Divine Comedy* is an example of what we are talking about? If so, was that work successful, and how?

Reading

Primary source reading

Hilliard, K., *Philosophy, Letters, and the Fine Arts in Klopstock's Thought*, 1987.

Secondary source reading

Kohl, K. Rhetoric, *The Bible, and the Origins of Free Verse: the early Hymns of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock*, 1990.

Further reading

Lee, Meredith, *Displacing Authority: Goethe's Poetic Reception of Klopstock*, 1999.

Original language reading

Buerger, Christa, *Tradition und Subjektivitaet*, 1980.

Suggested paper topics

Take a look at Boileau's *Art Poétique* (1674) to get the spirit of French neo-classical poetry of the 17th century, the poetry of the dramas of Racine and Corneille. You will see the importance of formal issues, many resting on the model use of the alexandrine line. Klopstock first started to write the *Messias* in alexandrines, then switched to hexameters. What was important about that change? What kind of statement was it about the direction of German poetry? What kind of move was Klopstock making, to redirect German poetry away from the French model?

Are there topics which are impossible to write about in imaginative literature? (I reference Klopstock's effort to deal with the Christian Redemption.) Even Milton had trouble with certain aspects of theology, but why? Is 'sacred literature' not accessible to the imagination? Does this issue come up in our time? What about the case of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*? Is the problem there one of 'blasphemy' or one of the misadjustment of theme to literary imagination?

Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/hermann-and-thusnelda/>

Hermann and Thusnelda

Ha! there comes he, with sweat, with blood of Romans,
And with dust of the fight all stained! O, never
Saw I Hermann so lovely!
Never such fire in his eyes!

Come! I tremble for joy; hand me the Eagle,
And the red, dripping sword! come, breathe, and rest thee;
Rest thee here in my bosom;
Rest from the terrible fight!

Rest thee, while from thy brow I wipe the big drops,
And the blood from thy cheek! --- that cheek, how glowing!
Hermann! Hermann! Thusnelda
Never so loved thee before!

No, not then when thou first, in old oak-shadows,
With that manly brown arm didst wildly grasp me!
Spell-bound I read in thy look
That immortality, then,

Which thou now hast won. Tell to the forests,
Great Augustus, with trembling, amidst his gods now,
Drinks his nectar; for Hermann,
Hermann immortal is found!

'Wherefore curl'st thou my hair? Lies not our father
Cold and silent in death? O, had Augustus
Only headed his army, ---
He should lie bloodier there!'

Let me lift up thy hair; 'tis sinking, Hermann;
Proudly thy locks should curl above the crown now!
Sigmar is with the immortals!
Follow, and mourn him no more.

Goethe

Goethe's Life. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was born in Frankfurt, to a prosperous and respected city family. His mother was the daughter of the city mayor, while his father, though living off his capital, was trained in the law—though perhaps never satisfied with what he himself had accomplished, thus ready to lavish any assistance on his young son. (Goethe himself was thus an unusual example, from among German writers, of both a privileged and fostering background.) After a traditional gymnasium education—with a strong start in a variety of languages, stretching from Greek to Hebrew—and upon matriculation Goethe rapidly took charge of his immense intellectual capacities—writing, reading, meeting people—and brought out the text which would make him an overnight celebrity. The Sorrows of Young Werther, published in 1775, touched a powerful sentimental and literary chord with the reading public, and drew attention on the highest levels to this young man of 25. The Duke of the small kingdom of Saxe-Weimar, who was himself only 18, ennobled the 25 year old Goethe, and made him a member of his Privy Council, where Goethe stayed for ten years—while off and on, for the rest of his life, he remained either close to the Weimar court or resident there.

Goethe's achievement. It is hard to encompass, even in a profile survey, the many-sidedness and consistent brilliance of Goethe's long life of books, actions, and personal influences. Among the influences on him Herder should be highlighted, for from the time when they met, in Strasbourg in 1770, Goethe realized that an almost national-level literary responsibility was impending on him. Herder saw in Goethe the mind, and linguistic/creative genius, that could give voice to the German historical and now national consciousness, and so he brought Goethe to a specially high sense of his potential and responsibility. What Goethe did with this mandate in some sense satisfied Herder's hopes—Goethe listened carefully to the voices of German literature—writers like Hans Sachs and the 16th century voices that surrounded the Goetz, of his path-breaking early drama, *Goetz von Berlichingen* (1771), as well as to Shakespeare. And throughout his writing life, in poems and plays he reached back into his national traditions—most powerfully in his tragedy of *Faust* (worked and reworked intermittently between 1790-1830; and building from an image of the mediaeval German magus, Dr. Faustus.) But Goethe's achievement went beyond this response to Herder's mandate. So far did it go that one cannot imagine a modern writer with more claims to the achievement of a Renaissance genius.

Goethe in literature and science. In the most fragmentary way, we have hinted at the power of Goethe's literary achievement: plays; tales; unique novels like *Wilhelm Meister* (1821-1829), travel accounts like the *Italienische Reise* (1816-1817), which recounts the crossing of the Alps into that Italy which was a kind of artistic promised land; criticism, like *Literary Sansculotism* (1795), which calls on the German people to read and be educated by their own, instead of foreign, authors. The outpouring of powerful and fascinating imaginative works seems to have no end but death! What can we say of a man who has left us more than 10,000 letters, more than 3,000 often very detailed drawings, and who has contributed consequentially to the development of a number of branches of science: the theory of colors; the interpretation of cloud formations; the evolution and morphology of plant forms; the geology of volcanoes and tectonic plates. Nor is it as though Goethe was forever at work on his projects, for he had one period of serious illness, a heart problem, to deal with and rest from, and any number of romantic engagements, in the course of which he enriched his skill set with a keen sensitivity to the emotional tussles of the human condition.

Reading

Primary source reading

Boyle, Nicholas, Goethe: *The Poet and the Age*, 2 vols., (1991,2000).

Secondary source reading

Bruford, W.H., *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, 1775-1806*, 1962.

Further reading

Reed, T.J., *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar, 1775-1832*, 1986.

Original language reading

Chiarini, Paolo, ed. *Bausteine zu einem neuen Goethe*, 1987.

Suggested paper topics

Does Goethe's activity as a natural scientist seem to you to play a role in his creative work? What about the character of Faust himself, originally a kind of mediaeval magus? Does Faust display the traits of an early modern scientist? Read in Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, the journal of his journey over the Alps to Italy. Does Goethe have the observant eye of a scientist as he travels? Is the scientific eye consistent with the imaginative eye, in the same individual?

Goethe frequently deals with issues of the moral and cultural development of young people, from the unfortunate Werther to the more fortunate Wilhelm Meister. Goethe is also very interested in the evolution of the human being and in the developmental stages of plant life. Do you see a connection there? Does the Bildungsroman—check it again, please—seem to you close to the scientific perspective onto organic and human evolution?

Excerpt (from Werther, Book 1) <http://www.bartleby.com/315/1/11.html>

MAY 4.

HOW happy I am that I am gone! My dear friend, what a thing is the heart of man! To leave you, from whom I have been inseparable, whom I love so dearly, and yet to feel happy! I know you will forgive me. Have not other attachments been specially appointed by fate to torment a head like mine? Poor Leonora! and yet I was not to blame. Was it my fault, that, whilst the peculiar charms of her sister afforded me an agreeable entertainment, a passion for me was engendered in her feeble heart? And yet am I wholly blameless? Did I not encourage her emotions? Did I not feel charmed at those truly genuine expressions of nature, which, though but little mirthful in reality, so often amused us? Did I not—but oh! what is man, that he dares so to accuse himself? My dear friend, I promise you I will improve; I will no longer, as has ever been my habit, continue to ruminate on every petty vexation which fortune may dispense; I will enjoy the present, and the past shall be for me the past. No doubt you are right, my best of friends, there would be far less suffering amongst mankind, if men—and God knows why they are so fashioned—did not employ their imaginations so assiduously in recalling the memory of past sorrow, instead of bearing their present lot with equanimity.

Be kind enough to inform my mother that I shall attend to her business to the best of my ability, and shall attend her the earliest information about it. I have seen my aunt, and find that she is very far from being the disagreeable person our friends allege her to be. She is a lively, cheerful woman, with the best of hearts. I explained to her my mother's wrongs with regard to that part of her portion which has been withheld from her. She told me the motives and reasons of her own conduct, and the terms on which she is willing to give up the whole, and to do more than we have asked. In short, I cannot write further upon this subject at present; only assure my mother that all will go on well. And I have again observed, my dear friend, in this trifling affair, that misunderstandings and neglect occasion more mischief in the world than even malice and wickedness. At all events, the two latter are of less frequent occurrence.

In other respects I am very well off here. Solitude in this terrestrial paradise is a genial balm to my mind, and the young spring cheers with its bounteous promises my oftentimes misgiving heart. Every tree, every bush, is full of flowers; and one might wish charming variety, and form the most lovely valleys. The garden is simple; and it is easy to perceive, even upon your first entrance, that the plan was not designed by a scientific gardener, but by a man who wished to give himself up here to the enjoyment of his own sensitive heart. Many a tear have I already shed to the memory of its departed master in a summer-house which is now reduced to ruins, but was his favourite resort, and now is mine. I shall soon be master of the place. The gardener has become attached to me within the last few days, and he will lose nothing thereby himself transformed into a butterfly, to float about in this ocean of perfume, and find his whole existence in it.

Schiller

Friedrich Schiller. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) was brought up in tightened financial circumstances, the only son of a military doctor—Schiller had five sisters—and obliged to move frequently during his youth. His father, however, favored him and took him along with him, on assignments and missions, and Schiller grew up well educated, with strong gymnasium training in the Classics. In his late teens he seemed destined for the ministry—which appealed to his imagination—but later he shifted these choices toward law and then medicine, finally ending up for a short time, as a military surgeon. (Throughout his brief life Schiller, who died at 45 of tuberculosis, remained fascinated with self-cures for the many ailments that plagued him.) After being fired from that post, he wandered for several years from city to city, relatively poverty stricken. (It is not to be imagined that ‘wandered’ means he was idle, for among other things, Schiller composed his Europe-awakening play, *The Robbers* (1781), during these years, not to mention several other overnight success dramas.) Thanks to his brilliant productivity during these years of no formal occupation, Schiller found himself offered a Professorship at the University of Jena—with Goethe’s assistance—and an annuity which helped him to restore his financial security. In 1794 Schiller received a significant salary to edit a new literary/intellectual journal, *Die Horen*, The Hours, to which he asked Goethe to contribute. That was the beginning of a close friendship between these two masters of ‘aesthetic humanism.’ In 1799 Schiller moved to Weimar to work more closely with Goethe. Schiller died there in 1805.

Schiller’s themes and masterpieces. Schiller remained concerned, throughout his writing, with the theme of freedom, and, as he matured in his self-awareness, in the deep relation between freedom and the aesthetic, as well as the ethical. Despite appearances, the fabric of Schiller’s work is more unified and completed than that of Goethe—who was forever undertaking lateral adventures in thought and writing. It should be noted that Schiller was a historian and essayist as well as a dramatist and lyric poet. As a Professor at Jena he wrote a History of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and a profusion of distinguished essays on topics of Greek art and society. (One of the finest, ‘*How the Ancients depicted Death*,’ characterizes the kinds of bas reliefs left by fifth century Athenian sculptors on the tombs of the departed, in the Kerameikos cemetery. Schiller penetrates deeply into the Greek compromise with death obtained by the Hellenes through beauty.) As a lyric poet, Schiller was prone to deal with ideas—especially ethical ideas—but to tweak them, so that the quality of the language forestalled any aridity in the thought. Schiller’s dramas, of which we mentioned only *The Robbers*, play boldly over events in German history, targeting clash areas where love, honor, and remorse are thrust into forceful interaction. (It may be said that these plays, like *Intrigue and Love* (1784) and *Wallenstein* (1798), are widely considered among his greatest achievements.)

Schiller and Kant. The culminating thought for Schiller is his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), in which he sums up many of the drivers of his whole body of expression, and especially his relation to the epoch shaping philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), profoundly dissected the interrelation between aesthetic and ethical judgments. (His complex and powerful argument is that the ethical is a far higher category than the aesthetic; which, in a word, is the point Schiller sets out to contest, in his Letters.) In contesting Kant’s position, Schiller develops the notion of the aesthetic as the realm of appearance as liberty, a condition in which we can penetrate to the ethical through the realm of the aesthetic.

Reading

Primary source reading

Sharpe, Leslie, *Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought, and Politics*, 1991.

Secondary source reading

Martinson, Steven, *A Companion to the Works of Friedrich Schiller*, 1982.

Further reading

Will, Frederic, *Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic thought from Winckelmann to Victor Cousin*, 1958.

Original language reading

Riedel, Wolfgang, *Der Spaziergang. Aesthetik der Landschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie der Natur bei Schiller*, 1989.

Suggested paper topics

Does it seem a significant part of Schiller's skill set that he was both an academic historian—a scholar—and a creator of powerful dramas? Consider the fact that Schiller's plays—Don Carlos, Wallenstein—are almost entirely devoted to historical themes. Does Schiller write these plays with the eye of a 'scholar' of history, or does he transmute the raw materials of history into a vision we would call art?

As a student of Immanuel Kant, and of the Greek classics—both literature and sculpture—Schiller is deeply concerned to harmonize the claims of both the aesthetic and the moral dimensions of human nature. How does he attempt to do this, through the category of 'freedom'? Is he on the right track? Can the beautiful and the good co-exist in the same value system?

Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/columbus-2/>

Amalia

Angel-fair, Walhalla's charms displaying,
Fairer than all mortal youths was he;
Mild his look, as May-day sunbeams straying
Gently o'er the blue and glassy sea.

And his kisses!--what ecstatic feeling!
Like two flames that lovingly entwine,
Like the harp's soft tones together stealing
Into one sweet harmony divine,--

Soul and soul embraced, commingled, blended,
Lips and cheeks with trembling passion burned,
Heaven and earth, in pristine chaos ended,
Round the blissful lovers madly turn'd.

He is gone--and, ah! with bitter anguish
Vainly now I breathe my mournful sighs;
He is gone--in hopeless grief I languish
Earthly joys I ne'er again can prize!

Columbus

Steer on, bold sailor--Wit may mock thy soul that sees the land,
And hopeless at the helm may droop the weak and weary hand,
Yet ever--ever to the West, for there the coast must lie,
And dim it dawns, and glimmering dawns before thy reason's eye;
Yea, trust the guiding God--and go along the floating grave,
Though hid till now--yet now behold the New World o'er the wave!
With genius Nature ever stands in solemn union still,
And ever what the one foretells the other shall fulfil.