

Walking through Literature: Poetics of the Step from Classicism to Postmodernity

"Only those thoughts that come by walking have any value."
-Friedrich Nietzsche

"Method is detour."
-Walter Benjamin

"The Rebellion begins as an urban promenade. Against the traffic regulations during working hours. The streets belong to the pedestrians."
-Heiner Müller

GERM 357 · Fall 2021
T/Th 4:05-5:25pm, room 395, 688 Sherbrooke Street West



E. Fröhlich, Verkehr

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office hours (Zoom): M 12-1pm (link on MyCourses)

Course Description and Objectives:

The literary walk as narrative device and mode of perception has occupied a central position in the German literary tradition since the Enlightenment. Disconnected from the stasis of the desk, walking as the other scene of writing exemplifies basic principles of narrative as well as gender

dynamics and cultural practices that affect our experience of moving through space. Arising concurrently with the bourgeoisie, the walk became a symbol of *Freizeitkultur* or the Enlightenment institution of leisure time, at a pace at once consistent with but also resistant to a socio-cultural world caught up in the acceleration of modern life. No longer the aristocratic promenade, a vehicle to see and be seen, walking becomes a mode of aesthetic engagement with one's natural and social environment as well as a means of exploring inner conflicts and the splintering of modern subjectivity. As literary motif the fictional walk coincides with the progression of the narrative and the act of writing itself, overlaying the experience of environment and self with poetological reflections and facilitating a critical practice resistant to the primacy of linearity and directness. Beginning with Schiller's classical elegy, readings will follow the Romantic wanderer, the Realist educational walker, the flâneur of the modern industrial city, and the Postwar walk as inroad to individual and collective histories. The course will also examine the productive encounter between German and French critical thought that this theme brings to light. In addition, students will develop their literary analysis skills and their abilities in written expression and presentation. All readings and discussions will be in English.

Method of Instruction: This course will be taught through a mix of asynchronous, online activities and weekly in-class meetings (dates for in-class meetings bolded in schedule below). All students will be required to wear a mask or face covering during in-person meetings, but there is no distancing requirement. Please see “description of graded course components” and “a typical week will look like this” below for complete format details. Please note that these plans are subject to change due to public health directives.

Required Texts (available for purchase at Paragraphe Bookstore, 2220 McGill College Avenue):

Robert Walser, *Selected Stories*
Ingeborg Bachmann, *Three Paths to the Lake*
Thomas Bernhard, *Three Novellas*
W.G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*

Other materials are available on MyCourses.

Weekly Schedule and Assignments:

I. Walking through History

Introduction: The Philosophers' Walk from the Ancient Rhetoricians to Modern Peripatetic Thought

Week 1

9/2 Introduction, Robert Walser, “Walk in the Park,” “Someone Once Told a Story” (ca. 1915); Optional but recommended: Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* chapter 1

The Enlightenment Stroll, Classical Promenades, and Romantic Wanderers

Week 2

9/7-9 Friedrich Schiller, *The Walk* (1795); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1776-1778, excerpts); Friedrich Hölderlin, *Out for a Walk* (1807-1843?); Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* (1818); Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* chapter 2

Realist Ramblings: Walking as (Dis)Integration

Week 3

9/14-16 Adalbert Stifter, *Granite* (1853); Georg Büchner, *Lenz* (1836)
Paper 1 assignment posted

II. Modernism: The City and the Perambulatory Unconscious

Metropolis and Mental Life

Week 4

9/20

Paper 1 due

9/21-23

Georg Simmel, *Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903); Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (1919, excerpt); Arthur Schnitzler, *Lieutenant Gustl* (1900)

Flow and Blockage in Walking and Writing

Week 5

9/28-30

Franz Kafka, *The Sudden Walk* (1913); Robert Walser, *The Street, The Walk* (1917)
Paper 2 and creative writing project assignments posted

The Flâneur

Week 6

10/5-7

Walter Benjamin, *The Return of the Flâneur* (1929); Franz Hessel, *The Suspicious Character* (1929); Charles Baudelaire, *Crowds; Baudelaire on the Flâneur* (from: *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863); Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man of the Crowd* (1840); Janet Wolff, *The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity*

Week 7

10/12-14

FALL BREAK (class does not meet; Zoom office hours during Th class time)

Week 8

10/18

Paper 2 topic proposal due

10/19-21

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940, excerpts); Walter Benjamin, *A Discussion of Russian Filmic Art and Collectivist Art in General* (1927); Walther Ruttmann, *Symphony of a Great City* (1927)

Walking in Theory: Psychogeography and Relationships to Space

Week 9

10/26-28

Michel de Certeau, *Walking in the City* (1980); Guy Debord, *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Unity of Time* (1959); Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* chapter 12

III. Walking Past: Postscript is Preamble

Memory and the Post-War Walker

Week 10

11/2-4

Ingeborg Bachmann, *Three Paths to the Lake* (1972)

Writing Revisited

Week 11

11/8 **Paper 2 due**
11/9-11 Thomas Bernhard, *Walking* (1971)

Week 12

11/15 **Creative project due**
11/16-18 Peter Handke, *Afternoon of a Writer* (1987)

Post-Modern Walking and the Return of History

Week 13

11/23-25 W.G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn* (1995) 3-190

Week 14

11/30-12/2 W.G. Sebald, *Rings of Saturn* 193-296 *final exam questions posted*

Final Exam (take-home): due via MyCourses by the centrally scheduled exam date for the course.

Course Requirements:

Due Date and Time (EST)*:

Class participation	15%	ongoing
-- in-class discussion	10%	
-- 5 MyCourses discussion posts	5%	
paper 1 (close-reading exercise): 2-3pp	20%	September 20, 11:59pm
paper 2 topic proposal: 1-2 paragraphs	5%	October 18, 11:59pm
paper 2 (research paper): 7-10pp	25%	November 8, 11:59pm
creative project + artist's statement	10%	November 15, 11:59pm
Final Exam (take-home)	25%	TBA (centrally scheduled date/time)

**All assignments should be submitted via MyCourses.*

Descriptions of graded course components:

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to carefully read and prepare the week's materials, to view the recorded lecture before the in-class discussion, and to attend weekly in-person discussions. Attendance in the weekly meetings will be monitored and three or more absences will result in a lowering of the course grade. Additionally, as part of students' participation grade, they are expected to write 5 discussion posts during the semester (see description below).

Written Contributions to the Discussion

During the semester (between weeks 3-13), students are expected to make a total of 5 written contributions to the discussion via the MyCourses discussion forum. Discussion posts should fall in the time frame between Tuesday's scheduled class period and 9pm on Wednesday. Students should also read the responses of other students before our live meeting Thursday afternoon. Students should have completed the week's reading assignment and listened to the recorded lecture *before* contributing to the discussion. These contributions should engage questions or prompts that I post along with my recorded lectures and/or the responses of other students. At the end of the semester, students should copy their 5 responses (noting the relevant week) and submit them in one document as a "discussion journal" on MyCourses.

First Paper (2-3 pages)

The first paper will be a close reading exercise examining a limited passage of text from our syllabus to identify its structures and potential meanings. A more detailed assignment sheet, along with resources for writing about literature, will be posted ahead of time on MyCourses.

Second Paper (7-10 pages plus 1-2 paragraph proposal)

The second paper will be longer and will allow students to focus on texts or themes from our course readings that most interest them given specific guidelines. The assignment has two components, a brief topic proposal, and the finished paper. A detailed grading rubric will accompany each paper assignment, and students are encouraged to discuss difficulties they encounter at any stage of their writing projects with me in office hours.

Creative Project and Artist's Statement

Students will be asked to do a creative project that shows substantial engagement with the course themes. Otherwise there is no limit to scope or medium. Upon submission, all projects will be posted (unedited) to a gallery on MyCourses so that other students can view them. The project will also be accompanied by a brief 'Artist's Statement,' in which students will introduce their work and demonstrate the connection between the project and the larger course themes. Projects and statements will be integrated into class discussions. More detailed instructions will be posted by the third week of class so that students can work on this throughout the semester if they wish.

Take-Home Final Exam (4-6 pages, including a 2-3 page essay)

The final exam questions will be posted on *MyCourses* by the last week of class, and students are requested to have a look at them before our final meeting on December 2 so that any questions can be resolved as a group. The questions will be a combination of longer short-answer questions (somewhat similar to discussion prompts), and a choice of essay topic (similar to the first paper). The exam is open-book/open-note, but should be completed by each student independently (no group work—a more detailed explanation of this policy will be included in the exam document). The exam is due on MyCourses by the end of the centrally-scheduled exam date and time for the course.

Policy on Late Work:

Late assignments (except for alternative accommodation essays—see above) will be accepted but with a penalty of 1 point subtracted per day late (for assignments out of 100 points).

A typical week will look like this:

Thursday-Tuesday: Students complete assigned readings for the week

Monday night by 11:59pm: assignments due (if applicable for the week—see due dates above)

Tuesday by 4:05pm (class time)*: recorded lecture and discussion questions posted on MyCourses

Wednesday 9pm: contributions to the Mycourses discussion due (5x per semester)

Thursday 4:05-5:25pm (class time): in-person discussion based on the week's readings, lecture, and online discussion thread

*Please note that class does not physically meet on Tuesdays, only on Thursdays. Tuesday's class period will consist of asynchronous activities (reading, viewing recorded lecture, writing discussion post) to be completed at students' convenience before Wednesday night (if the student is contributing to MyCourses discussion that week) or Thursday.

Statements and Resources:

Academic Integrity:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). Students should be aware that their written work may be subject to screening with text-matching software in MyCourses. Specific issues relating to the course assignments (especially regarding the online format and take-home exams) will be discussed in class in advance of the dates due and clarified on the assignment sheets. Please do not hesitate to approach me in office hours with any questions or concerns.

Intellectual Property:

All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action.

Language of Submission:

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or French any written work that is to be graded.

Extraordinary Circumstances:

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or format of this course is subject to change.

Academic and Wellness Resources:

I realize that attending university during this time continues to be difficult for students for a variety of reasons. I will do everything I can to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment in this course and I encourage you to contact me and/or the appropriate McGill offices to discuss any barriers you might encounter. Below is a partial list of McGill resources to address specific challenges:

Academic—TLS Learning Resources: <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/learning-resources>

Accessibility—McGill Office for Students with Disabilities: <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>

Covid-19 Information for Students: <https://www.mcgill.ca/coronavirus/students-0>

Mental Health Councelling— Keep.meSAFE (downloadable app available via website): www.keepmesafe.org

Mental/Physical Health and Wellness—Student Wellness Hub: <https://mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>
Alternatively, via Instagram: @HealthierMcGill

Student Services: <https://www.mcgill.ca/student-services/>

Technical—McGill IT Services: <https://www.mcgill.ca/it/>