Nature and Environment in German Literature and Thought

GERM 357 · Winter 2021
T/Th 10:05-11:25am

Course Description:

From Goethe’s studies of nature and their influence on his literary output, to romantic natural philosophy as interpreted by its contemporary poets, to natural-scientist heroes in nineteenth century novellas, to many postwar authors’ involvement in politics and environmentalism, conceptions of ‘nature’ and ‘environment’ are instructive points of entry into the German literary tradition. The experience of the natural world has inspired prominent German literary and artistic works and informed a long tradition of philosophical thought. Owing to the historical significance of nature and environment for German culture, these also remain central to present-day German cultural identity and politics. In this course we will read texts by German-language authors from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries which take as their theme natural surroundings, created spaces, emotionality and sexuality, experience of the sublime, observation and visual perception, subjectivity, identity, rural vs. urban environments, metropolis, alienation and cultural renewal. We will also examine the questions surrounding the aesthetic representation of nature in art and literature, and look at the historical, cultural and philosophical contexts surrounding these texts and ideas. All readings and discussions will be in English.

Professor Tove Holmes
tove.holmes@mcgill.ca
Office hours (Zoom): by appointment
**Required Texts**

All course materials are available on MyCourses.

**Weekly Schedule and Assignments**:

**Week 1**
1/7  Introduction (Zoom 10:05am); Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sorcerer’s Apprentice

*Landscape and the Sublime*

**Week 2**
1/12-14  introductory text; Poems by Brockes, Haller; Goethe auf dem See, Sorrows of Young Werther letter of May 10th, additional passages; Chenxi Tang, Aesthetic Origins of Modern Geography part 1

**Week 3**
1/19-21  Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment 22-29; paintings by Caspar David Friedrich; Heinrich von Kleist, Feelings before Friedrich’s Seascape; Adalbert Stifter, Solar Eclipse; Jocelyn Holland on Stifter’s Solar Eclipse

*Writing Exercise and Creative Project assignments posted*

**Goethe, Humboldt and Romantic Ecologies**

**Week 4**
1/26-28  Goethe, Metamorphosis of Plants, Theory of Colors (excerpt), secondary text by Dalia Nassar

*Writing Exercise Due*

**Week 5**
2/2-4  Alexander von Humboldt, On the Nocturnal Life of Animals in the Primeval Forest, excerpts from Geography of Plants; Chenxi Tang part 2; Caroline Schaumann, ‘Calamities for Future Generations’: Alexander von Humboldt as Ecologist

**Week 6**
2/9-11  Humboldt, cont.; Ernst Haeckel, selection; Jakob von Uexküll, An Introduction to Umwelt, A New Concept of Umwelt

**Realism: Cultural Knowledge and Small but Significant Things**

**Week 7**
2/16-18  Adalbert Stifter, Preface to Many Colored Stones, Granite

*Midterm exam questions posted*

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1 Readings on this draft of the syllabus are provisional and subject to change. Please refer to version posted on MyCourses for final selection of texts.
Week 8

Midterm Due

3/2-4 Study Break: class does not meet

Perception of Erosion, Erosion of Perception

Week 9
3/9-11 Theodor Storm, Rider on the White Horse; Georg Lukacs excerpt (OR for German readers: Wilhelm Raabe, Pfisters Mühle)

Essay questions posted

Week 10
3/16-18 Storm, Rider on the White Horse (OR: Raabe Pfisters Mühle); Goethe, Faust II selection

Modernism and Metropolis

Week 11
3/23-25 Georg Simmel, Metropolis and Mental Life; Walter Benjamin, The Return of the Flaneur; Franz Hessel, The Suspicious Character; Walther Ruttmann, Berlin: Symphony of a Great City

Essay Due

Coming to Terms with the Faschist Appropriation of ‘Nature’

Week 12
3/30-4/1 Bertolt Brecht: Poor B.B., To Those Born After; Simon Schama, Der Holzweg: The Track through the Woods; Artworks by Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer

Scaling Time and Precarious Landscapes in Postwar Literature

Week 13 Max Frisch, Man in the Holocene (1979)
4/6-8 Creative Project Due

Week 14
4/13 Frisch, Man in the Holocene, concluding discussion (Zoom 10:05am)

Final Exam (take-home): due by the centrally-scheduled exam date and time for this course.
Course Requirements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation (live)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation (alternative)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Exercise</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>January 25, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>February 22, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>March 22, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Project</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>April 5, 11:59pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>TBA (centrally-scheduled date/time)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Descriptions of graded course components:

Attendance and Participation
Students are expected to carefully read and prepare the week’s materials, and to attend live (Zoom or in-person) discussions when possible OR complete the alternative assignment as described below. Students are expected to participate in the larger group discussions, in breakout rooms, and/or via the chat function of Zoom. I strongly encourage you to attend the live discussions if you can, since this will have an indirect impact on your learning and facilitate your sense of being in the group (through review/deepening of important theoretical issues raised in the lectures, exercise in textual interpretation, debate and honing of arguments among classmates, further contextualization of historical and cultural phenomena, etc, that arise in the course of our conversations). Alternative assignments will try to target these areas and be integrated into the larger course discussions to the extent possible. Zoom will automatically record you as present if you type any word into the chat function, so please remember to do this at the beginning of every session. Attendance in the weekly meetings OR alternative accommodations will be monitored and three or more absences will result in a lowering of the course grade.

Alternative Accommodations
If for any reason students are not able to attend live discussion sessions (e.g., due to technical/bandwidth limitations, time-zone discrepancies, caregiver responsibilities during the pandemic, a particularly stressful week, etc.), they can opt write a 1-page (double-spaced, ca. 350 word) response to the week’s readings and submit this on MyCourses by Monday following the relevant week (11:59pm EST). No late work will be accepted, ie, response papers should be submitted within the week for which they are to be counted, and by the following Monday night at the latest. Students may choose to respond to one of my general questions (see more detailed instructions on mycourses for alternative accommodation assignment), or they may respond to one of the MyCourses discussion prompts as long as they have not already written on that topic. Please note that the 1-page responses in lieu of Zoom class attendance are not the same thing as the 5 MyCourses discussion posts (see below). Also, a portion of the Zoom class may be recorded, in which case students who do not attend should view these (see note regarding recording below).

Written Contributions to the Discussion
During the semester, 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. More detailed criteria for written discussion contributions can be found on MyCourses.

Writing Exercise
Early in the semester there will be a 1-2 page passage analysis as a writing exercise. The goal of this assignment is to practice careful textual analysis skills on a limited passage or textual phenomenon. More detailed instructions will be posted ahead of time on MyCourses, and you are encouraged to refer to the writing guide (MyCourses) in preparing your assignment.

Take-Home Midterm Exam
There will be a take-home midterm exam comprised of short-answer questions. Please note that the exam will cover all material discussed up until that point. Students who add the course toward the end of the add-drop period should arrange to make up the missed material. The exam will be designed to solidify what you have learned so far and stimulate critical thinking. My definition of ‘short answer’ is usually about a paragraph to a page, but I may ask for some even shorter answers (one word or one sentence). The exam will be posted one week in advance and will include detailed instructions.

Papers (4-5 pages)
Papers should be mainly based on a close reading of a primary text from the syllabus but can be supplemented with secondary materials. Paper topics (along with more detailed instructions) will be posted on MyCourses ahead of the due date, but students are welcome to develop their own topics if they wish or modify the given topics as they see fit. Please also refer to the writing guide on MyCourses in preparing your essay.

Creative/Research Project and Presentation
Students will have the choice of doing a creative project (no limit to scope or medium, as long as it shows substantial engagement with the course themes) or, researching a theme or theory related to the course and writing a 2-3-page expository essay on it. 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 presentations 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 day of class, and students are requested to have a look at them before our final Zoom meeting on April 13 so that any questions
can be resolved as a group. The questions will be a combination of short answer questions (similar to the midterm) and a choice of essay topic (similar to the paper, but shorter). 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 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);
this is also the due date for the alternative accommodation assignment from the previous week
Tuesday by 10:05 (class time)*: recorded lecture and discussion questions posted on MyCourses
Wednesday 9pm: contributions to the Mycourses discussion due (5x per semester)
Thursday 10:05-11:25am (class time): Live discussion over Zoom based on the week’s readings, lecture, and online discussion thread

*The only Tuesday on which there is a synchronous (live) meeting planned is the last day of class, April 13. Otherwise Tuesday’s class period will consist of asynchronous activities to be completed at students’ convenience before Wednesday night (if the student is contributing to MyCourses discussion that week) or Thursday.

Technical requirements and online environment:

Students will need a computer or mobil device, internet connection, camera and microphone (these can be integrated into the computer or device). Students will need Zoom (free download: https://zoom.us/) and should familiarize themselves with its basic features: https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources/learning-zoom

All course programs, materials, and resources will be integrated into and accessible via MyCourses.

Cameras, recordings, and privacy considerations:

Live discussions in which students are speaking will not be recorded out of privacy considerations for all participants. I do not consent to having recordings made of the discussion portion. However, I will record those portions in which I give brief overviews or additional mini-lectures for the benefit of students who cannot attend the live sessions. These recordings will be posted on MyCourses after class.

While I strongly encourage you to turn on your camera in order to foster a sense of togetherness as a group and for myself and others to get to know you, I understand that this may not be
possible for everyone due to bandwidth or other considerations. Students may also wish to use the virtual background feature in Zoom so that we can see faces but not into personal living spaces, etc.

McGill statement on courtesy in the online environment:

The University recognizes the importance of maintaining teaching spaces that are respectful and inclusive for all involved. To this end, offensive, violent, or harmful language arising in contexts such as the following may be cause for disciplinary action:

1. Username (use only your legal or preferred name)
2. Visual backgrounds
3. "Chat" boxes

To maintain a clear and uninterrupted learning space for all, you should keep your microphone muted throughout your class, unless invited by the instructor to speak.

You should follow instructors’ directions about the use of the “chat” function on remote learning platforms. You should close all browser windows and programs unrelated to the course during synchronous (Zoom) sessions.

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 the pandemic will 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 via the online delivery platforms, 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 Remote Learning Resources: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources)

**Studying and Living Remotely**—McGill’s Remote Student Life Hub: [https://www.mcgill.ca/remote-students/](https://www.mcgill.ca/remote-students/)

**Accessibility**—McGill Office for Students with Disabilities: [https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/](https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/)


**Mental Health Counselling**—Keep.meSAFE: [https://ssmu.ca/blog/2020/03/mental-health-resource-available-keep-mesafe/](https://ssmu.ca/blog/2020/03/mental-health-resource-available-keep-mesafe/)

**Mental/Physical Health and Wellness**—Student Wellness Hub: [https://mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/](https://mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/)

**Technical**—McGill IT Services: [https://www.mcgill.ca/it/](https://www.mcgill.ca/it/)

Other resources and tips may be posted in the Pandemic Resources folder on MyCourses (also feel free to suggest any that you think might be helpful to other students).