

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM

Negative Symbiosis? Germans and Jews after the Holocaust

Spring 2017

Monday 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

January 23 – April 3, 2017. No class on March 13.

Dorothy Rubel Room

Instructor:

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Seminar Content:

This course will explore a variety of texts (including films) by Jewish and German authors in the post-war era. The term “negative symbiosis” was coined originally by Hannah Arendt and then made famous by the Jewish-German scholar Dan Diner. In contrast to the hopeful concept of “German-Jewish symbiosis” articulated by a number of German-Jewish intellectuals around 1900, signaling the optimistic idea that these two cultures were closely interwoven and benefited greatly from each other’s presence, “negative symbiosis” suggests that though Germans and Jews were still united by the burden of the Holocaust, their opposing roles as perpetrators and victims created a chasm that could not be bridged.

The German texts and films cover a period from the late 1940s up to the post-unification period of the present. Differences will be noted between the three successor states of Nazi Germany — the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), and Austria. Also, attention will be given to the shifts in the decades following the war, and the different ways in which people in all three countries dealt with the legacy of guilt for Nazi crimes, but also with their feeling of victimhood due to the bombing of German cities and the division of the country after the war.

The Jewish texts, apart from a few Holocaust-related poems from the late 1940s, stem from the post-Unification era, since the very small Jewish community living in Germany prior to its rapid growth in the 1990s (due to emigrés from the former Soviet Union) was rather reticent about sharing its experiences with a German reading public. Jewish writers of the 1980s generation reflect on how their parents felt shame about their decision to

remain in or return to the land that had carried out the mass-murders of their families and friends, and thus were hesitant to claim German identity — the phrase “sitting on packed suitcases” was often invoked by the younger generation to describe the kind of denial that characterized their parents’ generation. But starting in the 1980s a new generation of Jewish writers in German sought to define a new kind of Jewish-German identity.

Though the complexities of the German-Jewish relationship have hardly vanished, there is reason for hope, based on more recent writings and films, that the tensions will diminish with time.

Readings:

The readings will be posted by Kerstin Miller by the end of December on a special Box@UA site for this course. After they are posted, Kerstin will share the link to this site with any student registered for this class.

Class schedule:

Jan. 23:

Discussion of film *The Murderers are Among Us (Die Mörder sind unter uns, 1946)*.

Read poems by Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs (1947-48)

1:00 pm in Dorothy Rubel Room: Optional screening of film *The Murderers are Among Us (Die Mörder sind unter uns, 1946)*.

Jan. 30:

Read *The Man Outside (Draussen vor der Tür, 1947)*

Read Ingeborg Bachmann, “Among Murderers and Madmen” (“Unter Mördern und Irren”, 1961)

1:00 pm in Dorothy Rubel Room: Optional screening of film *The Second Track (Das zweite Gleis, 1962)*

Feb. 6:

Discussion of film *The Second Track (Das zweite Gleis, 1962)*

Start reading Alfred Andersch, *Efraim’s Book (Efraim, 1967)*

Feb. 13:

Finish reading Alfred Andersch, *Efraim's Book*
Read Christa Wolf, "Exchanging Glances" ("Blickwechsel", 1974)

Feb. 20:

Read Henryk M. Broder, "Heimat? No, Thanks!"
Read Peter Stephan Jungk, from *Shabbat: A Rite of Passage in Jerusalem* (1985); Read Peter Schneider, *Daddy (Vati)*, 1987)

Feb. 27:

Read short texts by Biller, Seligmann, Hermann, Feibel, Menasse, Broder, Noll, Sucharewicz (1989-1992)

Mar. 6:

Read Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader* (1995)

1:00 pm in Dorothy Rubel Room: Optional screening of film *Downfall (Der Untergang)*, 2004)

Mar. 20:

Read Martin Walser, "Peace-Prize Speech" (1998)
Discussion of film *Downfall (Der Untergang)*, 2004)

1:00 pm in Dorothy Rubel Room: Optional screening of film *Go for Zucker (Alles auf Zucker)*, 2004)

Mar. 27:

Read short texts by Seligmann and Biller (1991)
Discussion of film *Go for Zucker (Alles auf Zucker)*, 2004)