
The brilliant literature that flourished at the courts of the German aristocracy between 1170 and 1230 was centred on three genres that have shaped the canon down to the present day: heroic epic, love lyric (minnesang), and romance. The latter is the direct ancestor of the modern novel, the form of writing that practically defines literature for us nowadays. The module focuses on three masterworks of the romance genre, and will explore not only their themes but also their ideology and their aesthetics. Romances are a manifestation of the "discovery of the individual" that took place in the twelfth century: their narratives open up a new literary space in which the self can be seen in its relation to others: the other of love, and the other of society with its norms and expectations. At the same time, romance narratives are collective "myths of restoration": Veldeke's *Eneasroman* offers a political version of this myth, as the world order destroyed in the Trojan Wars is restored by the rise of Rome and its legendary founder Aeneas; Hartmann's Arthurian romance *Erec* is a myth of the restitution of the flawed individual to a state of harmony with himself and society; Wolfram's *Parzival* combines both the political and the individual variants of the myth in the religious perspective of the Holy Grail, which restores kingdoms and sinful humans alike to a state of grace and oneness with God. Finally, the authors of romances present themselves in more or less developed roles: through commentary and focalization they achieve an ironic refraction of the narrated content, and in passages of "literary theory" they develop profile for themselves and their particular poetic project.

Texts:


Introductory reading:

- the relevant chapters in:

  - Elisabeth Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane des Mittelalters*, Berlin 2001

Topic 2. Eros and performance: the medieval German love-lyric

Minnesang (literally "love song") is the genre par excellence of that most medieval of phenomena, courtly love: the wooing of a noble lady by a lover who hopes to gain the reward of her love in return for the services he performs for her. From historical record, we know that this scenario did not reflect the reality of relations between the sexes. Nevertheless, courtly love enjoyed enduring success as a literary theme, for two reasons. Firstly, the lover's feelings were expressed in a stylized language whose formal conventions could be presented in ever-new variations in order to give pleasure to an audience of connoisseurs. Secondly, the lyric provided poets with a medium for articulating all kinds of desires and
impulse that had no essential connection with love: the impulse to self-fashioning, the desire for social distinction and - paradoxically for such a code-bound mode of expression - the yearning to transgress. This module looks at lyrics by foremost practitioners of Minnesang. Reinmar has long been stylized by literary historians as the "Meister des schönen Schmerzes"; his lyrics convert the pain of unrequited love service into the aesthetic and ethical capital of beautifully articulated, patiently borne suffering. Heinrich von Morungen, by contrast, allows full rein to his disaffection, playing out phantasies of violence and also a dialectic of singing versus silence; this alienation is however all an act by a consummate performer wishing to stand out from the rest. Walther treats scenarios of wooing and courtship as transparently literary models, setting himself up as the "expert" who can handle them all and assess their relative merits. Finally, in the "post-classical" lyric of Neidhart the courtly love scenario is relocated a non-courtly setting, opening the door not only to caricature and burlesque, but also to the realization of a desire for tactile contact with the beloved.

Primary texts:


Introductory reading:


**Topic 3. The Middle High German Epic: Rolandslied and Wolfram’s Willehalm**

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, European and Middle Eastern politics were dominated by the clash between Christian and Islamic worlds. As heirs to the Holy Roman Empire, German nobles and princes were caught up in a series of military actions, with varying degrees of support and war-weariness. Such events left their mark on the literature of the period, which reflected upon and processed the parameters and paradoxes of ideological conflict in various ways. This module concentrates on two highly significant works from either end of the *Blütezeit*, Pfaffe Konrad’s *Rolandslied* and Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Willehalm*, which has been described as ‘one of the great narrative texts of medieval literature’. It will explore how such works raise and attempt to answer questions on issues such as race, empire, religion, multiculturalism, political allegiance, and war that resonate with considerable urgency in the modern world. At the same time, it will focus on the specific poetics of the epic genre, investigating how the texts construct characters, portray emotions, explore human relationships, generate meaning and play off other literary works in the period.

**Texts:**

- *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*, ed. Dieter Kartschoke, Stuttgart 1993 (Reclam)

**Introductory reading:**
Religious and profane drama was performed all over German-speaking central Europe from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, but it offered a very different theatrical experience from any we are used to. First, religious drama is in between ritual and representation. Although it originated in the liturgy of the church, it is not quite the same thing, nor - because the actors waver between self-consciously playing a part and actually being the characters they impersonate - is it exactly a make-believe representation. Second, the drama promotes both social harmony and social division. Early drama was a collective enterprise, performed by and for the whole community; one of its functions was therefore to represent and celebrate the cohesion of the social unit. Yet this community is simultaneously forged through excluding and deriding out-groups, such as Jews and women; performers and spectators often used the occasion of the performance to act out tensions and rivalries that otherwise remained latent; these exclusions and these 'unscripted' performances reveal the darker side of community.

Texts

(a) Religious drama


(b) Profane drama


Introductory reading


Topic 5. The German Reformation: the power of the Word

The German Reformation changed the face of Europe, and had a radical impact on culture and politics, initiating the divisions within the Christian community, which still run deep in modern society. The monk and scholar Martin Luther's teachings on Christian salvation, using new humanist editions of the New Testament (e.g. by Erasmus, 1516), precipitated a crisis in the Catholic Church (at that time the only western Church and an important secular authority), beginning in 1517 with his 95 theses on the sale of indulgences. A wave of propaganda pamphlets followed, many using striking visual images to inform the illiterate of their ideas. Luther's new translation of the Bible into German, designed to appeal to the 'common man', is (among other things) an important landmark in German's linguistic development. His supporters also used hymns and drama to take their message into communities. However, the conversion of a state or city to Lutheranism was not possible without the support of its rulers, and so here the Reformation became a political movement, whose impact went far beyond that envisaged in the earliest days.

Introductory reading:

- Luther, Schriften, (Reclam 1578)

Topic 6. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation 1495–1648

The early modern German polity was a unique system. Quite unlike the English and French monarchies, it had more in common with the elective Polish monarchy of the time. However, the Imperial title held many different meanings. The Holy Roman Emperor was the successor to the emperors of ancient Rome; he was the head of Christendom and, in theory at least, the premier monarch of Europe; he was also the elected ruler of a federal system that loosely comprised the German-speaking areas of central Europe. This module will examine the development of the German Empire from the reforms of the Emperor Maximilian in the 1490s, through the upheavals of the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and Thirty Years War to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. We shall examine the institutions of the Empire and the ways in which many Germans identified strongly with it, making it one of the more durable and successful political systems of the pre-modern period. We shall also consider the ways in which the legacy of this period of the empire’s history continued to shape German history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Reading:

- Axel Gotthard, Das Alte Reich 1495–1806, (Darmstadt 2003)
- Peter Wilson, The Holy Roman Empire 1495–1806, (Houndmills, 1999; 2nd edn, 2011)

Anxieties about women and Islam permeate Western culture not only in the twenty-first century. In seventeenth-century texts what we might now call “hegemonic” masculinity is defined in relation not only to a feminine but to an “oriental” Other which – in the context of historical tensions between the Holy Roman and Ottoman Empires – is often coded as Islamic. In Grimmelshausen, transgressive dressing and inappropriate behaviour are used to reflect on gender, power, and the social order. Comedy of course has its own ways of reflecting (on) power, and both elements in Grimmelshausen’s prose narratives and the Lustspiele of the period demonstrate the controlling power of comic humiliation alongside the arguably anarchic potential of comic agency.

Suggestions for reading:
- Trauerspiel: Gryphius, *Catharina von Georgien* (Reclam); Lohenstein, *Sophonisbe* (Reclam); *Cleopatra* (Reclam)
- Lustspiel: Gryphius, *Verlibtes Gespenst*/*Die gelibte Dornrose* (Reclam), *Horribilicribifax Teutsch* (Reclam)
- Prose narrative: Grimmelshausen, *Courasche* (Reclam)

Secondary literature:
- Sarah Colvin, *The Rhetorical Feminine: Gender and Orient on the German Stage 1647-1742* (1999)