**SPECIAL TOPICS: NATURE AND CULTURE IN GERMANY (GERM 4900)**

**Fall 2017**

Instructors: Heidi Hart & Doris McGonagill

doris.mcgonagill@usu.edu

Class hours: T/R 3–4:15

Classroom: Old Main 301

Office Hours: T/R 1:30–2:30 (and by appointment)

Offices: Old Main 341

Phone: 336.253.1567 & 435.797.9181

**Course Description:** This interdisciplinary course will explore relationships between nature and culture in Germany, from the early 19th century through the present. Combining the study of literary, visual, and musical texts with an interest in the physical environment, we will begin by reading *The Invention of Nature*, Andrea Wulf's 2015 biography of explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, paying particular attention to ideas of environmental interrelatedness that inform modern science and contemporary discourse. On a field trip with naturalist Jack Greene (USU Sustainability Council), we will explore our own mountain geography with Humboldt's sense of environmental connectivity in mind.

After this historical grounding, the course will move to imaginative treatments of nature in German Romantic poetry and fairy tale, as we study cultural tropes such as forests as carriers of memory and transformation.

Our next unit will cover twentieth-century narratives of nature and war, with readings, film excerpts, and a visit to the site of the Bear River Massacre not far from Logan, to better understand how geographic memory of trauma has been processed in our own area.

The course will conclude with an overview of current environmental practices and controversies in the German-speaking lands, e.g. approaches to recycling and renewable energy sources (in particular solar and wind). We examine how these approaches might be seen as amalgamations of longstanding (mythological, religious, folkloristic, literary) forms of engagement with the natural realm and aspects of (scientific) modern thinking and technology.

In addition to serving as a theoretically informed introduction to the relationship of nature and culture in Germany, our approach is designed to adapt numerous contexts, discourses, and disciplines. We envision for this class the design of challenging, student-oriented curricula that draw on multiple disciplines (e.g. the Natural Sciences, Green Studies, Memory Studies, Romanticism Studies, Anthropology, Mythology, History, and Sociology) to promote both, a deeper appreciation of the historical specificity of certain texts and contexts, as well as awareness of the complex relationship between historical and contemporary dimensions.
Language of instruction: This class will be conducted primarily in English. German texts will be made available, there will be German discussion groups, and assignments written in German will always be welcome.

Texts: Most readings for this class both in English and German. Our main text for the first part of the semester will be Andrea Wulf’s, *The Invention of Nature/Alexander von Humboldt und die Erfindung der Natur* (2015). During the second part of the semester, Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung/Visitation* (2008/2011) will be of central importance. Other texts will be made available via our course website or as photocopies. Online sites that will be useful for students reading in German include Projekt Gutenberg (http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/, www.zeno.org, or www.vorleser.net. For our discussion of fairy tales, the following (German) sites provide valuable material:

- http://khm.li
- http://www.maerchenlexikon.de
- http://www.sagen.at/texte/maerchen/maerchen.htm

Course requirements: Active class participation, including one short presentation (ca. 5 min.), during the semester, and one, slightly longer presentation (ca. 10 min.) at the end of term.

- Short interpretive position papers (ca. 200 words in German or English)
- Participation in field trips, events, and performances such as *The Crossroads Project*, “Rising Tide” (Sept. 6, 7:30 pm., 75 min, USU Performance Hall); Excursion to Logan Canyon with Jack Greene; Excursion to the site of the Bear River/Boa Ogoi Massacre, et al.
- One in-class midterm exam
- One (interpretative) final paper

Grading: Class Participation (including attendance, presentations) 50%

- Weekly Response Papers (ca. 200 words, in German or English, due Wednesdays by 8 pm) 30%
- Midterm Exam 10%
- Final Paper (8-10 pp., due Dec. 7) 20%

No Class Dates: October 19 (Friday Class Schedule), 23 November (Thanksgiving)

Student Responsibilities: Students are required to read the assignments listed on the class schedule prior to class. Since all class discussions will depend heavily on students’ contributions, thorough preparation and active participation are essential.

Extra-Credit: You may attend German Film Night, watch a German movie, or read a German book and write a paragraph about it. Or you may attend a
performance of Utah Opera or a concert sung in German. You may
meet with a German tutor and talk German with them, discuss aspects
of German culture or grammar, or consult help with an assignment.
(TALC Language Lab is in OM 004; the tutoring schedule will be made
available shortly.) Please have the tutor send us an e-mail confirming
the meeting. Or you may share something “German(-speaking)” with
our class, e.g. a play German song (and explain what you like about it),
recite a poem that is appropriate for class, and/or give a brief
introduction to its theme and/or central vocabulary.

Students with Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act states: “Reasonable
accommodation will be provided for all persons with disabilities in order to ensure equal
participation within the program. If a student has a disability that will
likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must
contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability
Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the
course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance,
pedagogy, taking of examination, etc. must be discussed with and
approved by the instructor.

Learning Objectives: Based on the IDEA evaluation system, the following four objectives
apply most closely to this course:

• Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of
intellectual/cultural activity (music, science, literature, etc.)
• Learning to analyze & critically evaluate ideas, arguments, points of
view
• Gaining factual knowledge (terminology, classifications, methods,
trends)
• Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing

Academic Integrity, “The Honor System”: (http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty/teaching/syllabus-resources.cfm)

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his/her academic expe-
rience free of dishonesty. The Honor System is designed to establish the
higher level of conduct expected and required of all Utah State
University students. To enhance the learning environment at Utah
State University and to develop student academic integrity, each
student agrees to the following Pledge: “I pledge, on my honor, to
conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity.” A
student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more
than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor
Pledge: (1) Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential
principle of the Utah State University community; (2) Understands that
each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is
awarded by this institution; and (3) Is a welcomed and valued member
of Utah State University.
Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is defined as “Representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.” The penalties for plagiarism include warning or reprimand, grade adjustment, withholding of transcripts, probation, suspension, expulsion, and denial or revocation of degrees.

GERM 4900

NATURE AND CULTURE IN GERMANY

FALL 2017

Week 1 (August 29 and 31):

Introduction, general overview over the course project
Watching the Eclipse: Cultural echoes of a natural phenomenon
Texts: Herodotus, The Histories, Book 1 (Excerpt)
James Fenimore Cooper, “The Eclipse,” (esp. 4-6)
Annie Dillard, “Total Eclipse,” (esp. 3-8)
Genesis 1, 1-31
The Wessobrunn Creation Prayer/Wessobrunner Schöpfungsgebet

Week 2 (September 5 and 7):

Beginnings around 1800; Fantasie and Nature; Humboldt’s New Goals
Texts: Part I: Andrea Wulf, The Invention of Nature [Engl.], 1-54;
Alexander von Humboldt und die Erfindung der Natur [Dt.], 19-74

Week 3 (September 12 and 14)

South America: Arrival, Journey, Rivers and The Mountain
Texts: Part II: Andrea Wulf, The Invention of Nature [Engl.], 57-107;
Alexander von Humboldt und die Erfindung der Natur [Dt.], 77-127

Week 4 (September 19 and 21)

Encounters: North-America, Europe, and South-America again (Humboldt and Thomas Jefferson, Charles Darwin, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Simón Bolívar)
Alexander von Humboldt und die Erfindung der Natur [Dt.], 128-145; 188-221; 274-295; 314-329; 392-415

Week 5 (September 26 and 28):

Concluding Discussion of Wulf/Humboldt
Excursion into Logan Canyon with Jack Greene (September 28)
Texts: Review; No new text
Week 6 (October 3 and 5)
Romantic Concepts of Nature I: Philosophy
Texts: Excerpts by Novalis (Fragments/Fragmente, 1798; Die Lehringe zu Sais, 1798/99), Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert

Week 7 (October 10 and 12)
Romantic Concepts of Nature II: Literature (Narrative) and Art
Texts: Ludwig Tieck, Der Runenberg (1804); Adelbert von Chamisso, The Alaska Diary/Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1815-18, Tagebuch; Excerpts); Adalbert Stifter, Rock Crystal/Bergkristall (1845)
Painting: Caspar David Friedrich (Selected Works)

Week 8 (October 17; No class on October 19, Friday Class Schedule)
Romantic Concepts of Nature III: Literature (Poetry) and Music
Music: Das Romantische Lied (Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann)

Week 9 (October 24 and 26)
Romantic Concepts of Nature IV: Nature in Folk and Fairy Tales
Texts: Selected Grimms’ Fairy Tales
Rapunzel (KHM 12), Hansel & Gretel (KHM 15), Cinderella/Aschenputtel (KHM 21), The Girl without Hands/Das Mädchen ohne Hände (KHM 31)

Week 10 (October 31 and November 2)
Nature, War & Memory: American Trauma and German 20th Century (I)
Texts: Jenny Erpenbeck, Visitation/Heimsuchung (2010/2008), [Engl.], 1-68; [Dt.], 7-92

Excursion to the Bear River/Boa Ogoi Massacre Site, Preston, ID (October 31)

Week 11 (November 7 and 9)
Nature, War & Memory: Germany in the 20th Century (II)
Texts: Jenny Erpenbeck, Visitation/Heimsuchung (2010/2008), [Engl.], 69-150; [Dt.], 93-188

Week 12 (November 14 and 16)
Land, Territory, Terrain: Perpetrators, Area Bombing, Notions of Victimhood
Texts: Concluding discussion of Erpenbeck, Visitation/Heimsuchung
W.G. Sebald, On the Natural History of Destruction/Luftkrieg und Literatur (2003/1999; Excerpts)

Week 13 (November 21; No class on November 23, Thanksgiving)
Current Environmental Practices and Controversies: Communal and Private Spaces (Manipulation, Violation, Restoration)
Texts: t.b.a.
Week 14 (November 28 and 30):
Adding Complexity/Differentiation: Political Approaches, Gendered Approaches, Historical Approaches, Regional Approaches, Linguistic Approaches
Texts: t.b.a

Week 15 (December 5 and 7)
Branching Out: Depiction of Nature as a Window to German History and Culture: Literature, Art, Idiomatic Expressions, and Proverbs
Texts: t.b.a

Supplemental Texts/Additional Topics/Impulses for Presentations:

Part I:

Measuring the World/Die Vermessung der Welt, Film by Detlev Buck (2012)

Part II:

Simon Shama: Landscape and Memory (1996) [chapter 2: “Der Holzweg: The Track Through the Woods,” 75-134]

Part III:

Part IV:


Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything* (2014)


**Additional Texts/Topic Ideas for Final Projects/Papers:**

- Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, *Undine* [http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/suche?q=Undine](http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/suche?q=Undine)
- Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, [http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/woyzeck-419/1](http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/woyzeck-419/1)
- Bayon, “Stell’ dich mitten in den Regen,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUw3ZenKjQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUw3ZenKjQ4)