

Course Title:

Agonistic Collectives: Conflict and the Concept of Individuality

Week 1:

- Introduction: “Es wird ein Mensch gemacht” – Becoming an individual, framing collectives in the long 19th century

Theme 1: Identification and Enlightenment

- “Was ist Aufklärung?” by Immanuel Kant

Week 2:

- *Nathan der Weise* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
- *Nathan der Weise* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Week 3:

- *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (selections)
- *Emilia Galotti* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Week 4:

- *Emilia Galotti* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Theme 2: Collectives on trial

- “Prometheus” and “Ganymede” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- *Die Räuber* by Friedrich Schiller

Week 5:

- *Die Räuber* by Friedrich Schiller
- “Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet” by Friedrich Schiller

Week 6:

Theme 3: Idealizations political, natural, and female

- *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* by Friedrich Schiller (selections)
- *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* by Friedrich Schiller (selections)

Week 7:

- “Ein apokalyptisches Fragment” by Karoline von Günderode
- *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* by Novalis
- *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* by Novalis

Week 8:

- “Das Hohelied” by Heinrich Heine
- “Würde der Frauen” by Friedrich Schiller

From *des Knaben Wunderhorn* by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano: “Liebe ohne Stand,” “der Tod und das Mädchen im Blumengarten,” “Die hohe Magd,” “Schürz dich Gretlein”

“An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich” by Annette von Droste-Hülshoff

Theme 4: Revolution and repression

- *Reden an die deutsche Nation* by J.G. Fichte

Week 9:

- *Reden an die deutsche Nation* by J.G. Fichte
- *Das Erdbeben in Chili* by Heinrich von Kleist

Week 10:

- *Dantons Tod* by Georg Büchner
- “das Lied der Deutschen” by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben
- Vorrede to Kinder- und Hausmärchen* by the Brothers Grimm
- *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner
- “die schlesischen Weber”

Week 11:

- From *Bunte Steine* by Adalbert Stifter: “Bergmilch”

Theme 5: Outcasts and village tales

- *Die schwarze Spinne* by Jeremias Gotthelf

Week 12:

- *Die schwarze Spinne* by Jeremias Gotthelf
- *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* by Gottfried Keller

Week 13:

- *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* by Gottfried Keller
- *Das Gemeindegeld* by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

Week 14:

- *Das Gemeindegeld* by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach
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The title of this hypothetical course is “Agonistic Collectives: Conflict and the Concept of Individuality.” In terms of content, the course aims to explore the constitution of individuals and collectives throughout the long 19th century in Germany. A point of emphasis is the type of conflicts that arise between individual and individual, individual and collective, and collective and collective. A hypothetical course description might begin: “Nationality, religion, sex, and class. Categories such as these are expected to be discussed at almost every turn of humanistic conversation. Yet what is remarkable about the course of German literature from the 18th to 19th centuries is not only the way German perspectives about any one of these areas evolve, but also Germany’s development of ways of grouping themselves.” The goal of the course would be to stress these “ways of grouping” with particular focus on the individual types brought under the banner of collectivity and what violence might be resolved or inflicted in this motion of bringing-under.

As well as exploring the relationship between individuals and collectives, the course ought also to serve as an overview of the history of German literature between the 18th and 19th centuries. To this end, a variety of genres and forms will not only provide students with fundamental literary-critical knowledge of seminal texts and genre conventions but also raise discussion about how works of art mediate or represent changing views of individuals and collectives. Students could consider the course goals to altogether be: 1) the development of an understanding as to how individuals and collectives relate, 2) the development of a framework for conceptualizing German history/literary history, 3) exposure to seminal works, and 4) introduction to genre-based methods of inquiry. Especially with the second goal in mind, each class meeting would begin with a frontloading of historical context as relates to a given work, including but not limited to the biography of the author, the significant events and trends

political, military, or economic surrounding the work's construction, and any relevant retrospective or utopian views to be found in the work.

Each text on this syllabus has a takeaway as regards grouping and conflict. The largely chronological progression of the texts is intentional.

Theme 1: Identity and Enlightenment

The significant aspect of the Enlightenment for this course is its attention to the development of a new sense of autonomy and intellectual freedom. Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" is representative with its maxim of *sapere aude*. At the same time, the text speaks to the stereotypical rigidity of the Enlightenment via Kant's acquiescence to authority's role in the private sphere.

Lessing's works build on Enlightenment intellectualism to craft an argument about identification's role in building community. *Nathan der Weise* in particular shows how the rational principles of the Enlightenment might lead to a utopian collective based on religious relativism and identification with one another on the basis of similarity. This theme illustrates the fact that Enlightenment rationality can effectively see past the individuating circumstances of religious difference and join a group of individuals under worldly wisdom. Especially worth investigating is the text's didactic way of framing natural religion in the conversation regarding Recha's rescue by her "angel." In these conversations, Nathan demonstrates not only a rational, near-deist understanding of how miracles function, but one that refers back to the methods of Maimonides, who, in his adoption of Aristotle, represents the similarity of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thought in shared scholasticism.

Lessing's letters on *Trauerspiel* contain a similar note on how *Mitleid* functions as a social virtue insofar as it collectivizes through identification with one another's pain. This also

provides occasion to discuss the Enlightenment's multifaceted acceptance of and divergence from Aristotelian poetics in the form of the *Trauerspiel*. In the same vein, *Emilia Galotti* discusses identification in the form of identification with the mores of one's social class. Compounded with the play's treatment of passion and unconscious desire, these details compose a transition to the intensity of *Sturm und Drang*.

Theme 2: Collectives on Trial

For the purposes of this course, *Sturm und Drang* will be presented as the ambiguous position between rebellion and submission. One fundamental question will be whether or not we can view *Sturm und Drang* as a form of counter-Enlightenment. The two texts introducing the movement, "Prometheus" and "Ganymede," reflect this in their combined ambivalence between resistance against and surrender to the gods. Likewise, *Die Räuber* presents a complicated view of this movement. Moor's band of robbers form an obvious collective of rebellion against the once again (from *Emilia Galotti*) shrewd and insidious forces of aristocratic desire, yet they stop just short of iconoclasm as Moor rejects Spiegelberg's cruelty and, at the play's end, surrenders himself to the authorities. In effect, both the collectives of rebellion and social order are judged. The sentiments on national theater and drama's didactic abilities in Schiller's "Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet" also show that *Sturm und Drang* is ambivalent about individualism and society at large.

Theme 3: Idealizations political, natural, and female

The course's next theme looks at idealizations in the forms of utopian states, prescriptive ecology, and romanticized femininity. In all these cases what is sought is collectivization without

violence or moral errancy. Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* positions the utopian state as an aesthetic enterprise held together by the harmony of moral and sensuous faculties. Likewise, it can be argued that the Romantics are seeking collectivity without agonism in their interpretations of the absolute as totality. Günderröde's "Ein apokaliptisches Fragment" expresses this search in the form of *Sehnsucht* oriented towards unification between the self and the collective wellspring of individuality.

As well, Novalis' *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* depicts the search for the absolute as a noble aim, but only if performed appropriately. Here Novalis depicts the erroneousness of artificial collectivization in the school of Sais' efforts to gather natural artifacts. Rather than constitute a harmonious image of nature, the school's designs instead become a form of violence done upon nature as the artifacts they force into their collection cry out against being removed from nature's totality. In their condemnation of the human avarice and egotism that have led to their condition, the artifacts present a negative argument against institutionalization. In effect, one collectivity criticizes another: the artificial collection of natural objects against the collective of students at Sais. Novalis reinforces this sentiment in a critique of immediate attempts to realize the absolute by depicting the academic conversations at Sais as merely so many disparate and conflicting voices. Against the disharmony of this reflective thought, Novalis erects a productive space where one can explore the secrets of nature in the form of a *Märchen* whose narrative unity overcomes Sais' endless argumentation to produce real knowledge. The agonism of the collectives at Sais is therefore juxtaposed with the presentation of one *Lehrling's* individuality to himself via a *Märchen* about his life, effectively extolling the benefits of reflection that alienates over and against the hubris of mastery over nature.

Romantic idealizations nevertheless enact their own kind of violence in the way they try to construct a uniform notion of feminine virtue. Looking at selected poems from the period, students can see how the reduction of femininity into an ideal character of passivity, purity, and sacrifice creates a narrow space for women. “Würde der Frauen” and the selection of poems from *des Knaben Wunderhorn* illustrate the dichotomy of Madonna and whore that has dominated perceptions of women. Droste-Hülshoff’s “An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich,” though a later work, provides the female perspective on such pigeonholing.

Theme 4: Revolution and Repression

The political background of *des Knaben Wunderhorn*’s collection also serves to represent the development of nationalist sentiment in literary projects. Transitioning from Brentano and von Arnim’s attitudes at the end of the War of the Fourth Coalition to those of the War of the Sixth Coalition and the *Freiheitskriege* is not difficult as the common thread of nationalism joins them. Perhaps most representative of this thread, Fichte’s *Reden an die deutsche Nation* focus intensely on the rising collectivization “Deutsche.” Fichte’s implicit opponent in the form of French occupation affords the opportunity to discuss the wars that issued forth from the French Revolution. Along these revolutionary lines, Kleist’s “Das Erdbeben in Chili” helps facilitate more general discussion about the mob mentality behind such destructive events as the September Massacres and the Reign of Terror. Unlike the ambiguous position of *Sturm und Drang* literature, rebellion and revolution here are relatively unbridled.

Büchner’s political activities as well as his sobering pessimism present *Vormärz* as a grounded response to romanticism’s ethereal nature. *Dantons Tod* depicts tyranny’s distortion of the French revolutionary spirit, while *Woyzeck* turns criticism against more status quo

institutions of repression from the perspective of the proletarian family unit. “Das Lied der Deutschen” and the Grimms’ “Vorrede” recapitulate the theme of a united Germany and provide an occasion to compare Büchner’s view of French tyranny with the German states’ restrictions of liberal nationalism. On the other hand, pairing *Woyzeck* with Heine’s “die schlesischen Weber” highlights the insidious nature of all large institutional bodies of authority, complicating the discussion about whether the nationalism and militarism of the period are progressive or, as viewed with a more modern eye, authoritarian measures.

In contrast to the anxiety and pessimism of Büchner’s works, Stifter’s writings embody the “sammeln und hegen” of the *Biedermeierzeit*. Nevertheless, the exceptionally political story “Bergmilch” from *Bunte Stein* counters claims that this literary epoch is merely concerned with domesticity. “Bergmilch” grounds a retrospective of the French wars in symbolic imagery that forms a comment on the significance of vulnerability to outside forces. Faced with a lack of successors, the *Schlossherr* of the isolated Castle Ax plans to leave his estate to a hired *Verwalter* and his family. Together they form a close-knit group that tends to the castle’s duties until it is commandeered to defend against the French. The war ignites the xenophobia and patriotism of the otherwise docile *Schlossherr* who has no time to enact his own plans against the French before a white-cloaked spy—in fact a German fighting in service of the French—infiltrates and forces him to point out the castle’s vulnerabilities, which are used to exploit and conquer it. By the story’s end, the *Verwalter*’s daughter has fallen in love with the dashing character of the spy and marries him, producing children who, as the narrator notes, don the same style of white cloak as their father, who now only wears black. The story’s symbolism depicts not only a nostalgia for French ideals, but the necessity of breaking down barriers and welcoming intercourse—literal as well as figural—with foreignness. Discussion in this regard is

enriched by reincorporating and contrasting Fichte's notion of the French as a mere otherness to be overcome. If "Bergmilch's" political commentary makes it exceptional with regards to Stifter and the general view of Biedermeier literature, its concentration on inheritance and the family can nevertheless be tied back to the aforementioned "sammeln und hegen."

Theme 5: Outcasts and village tales

The final theme of the course turns towards realism. The three village tales discussed under this theme represent proletarian collectives and their microcosm in the image of the outcast. Among the most important of realist tropes in these novels are the *Schlägereiszenen* that materialize working class anxiety about the injustice of the world. Individuals here are tortured souls, while collectives are suffocating yet necessary. A possible coordinate to earlier discussions is Büchner's realistic grasp of life in the lower classes, as well as Lessing and Schiller's depictions of self-involved aristocracy.

Die schwarze Spinne depicts the cruelty of nobles while simultaneously maintaining a critical view of the peasantry who, in their desire to escape the overbearing rule of their knights, make a deal with the devil. The collective guilt that results and passes from one generation to another results in trials and banishings that drive home the tale's Christian views of poetic justice and polarized morality. Accordingly, with this work students will gain insight into the adoption of types over individuals that marks this period of literature. A discussion on the effect of protracted symbolism, for instance with the spider and the detailed gastronomical scenes, can also build upon the meeting on Stifter.

Properly realist, "Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe" permits discussions of intertextuality regarding its title, grounds close-readings attending to Keller's descriptions of country and urban

detail, and assists generalizations about realism's empirical tone as regards both the ending's voice and the character of *Die Leute von Seldwyla's* preface. The story's opening scene, involving Sali and Vrenchen dissecting and reconstructing a doll, and its ending, where one reading assumes the lovers have committed suicide due to their dedication to proletarian values (and the feud inherited as a result), speak to the nature of indoctrination and the impossibility of escape from one's class.

Das Gemeindegeld closes out the course with a narrative focusing on the ostracizations endured by outcast Pavel Holub from childhood to adulthood. Central to this work of late realism is the question concerning inheritable traits and the shapes destiny takes with regard to social status. The broad view of Pavel's development provides many inroads to analyze the impact of ostracism on his psychology, with the most explicit depictions concerning Pavel's derivation of individual pride from the fact that society believes he is corrupt—a view which, because Pavel subconsciously knows it is false, turns society into a fool for him to mock. Despite this complicated lens through which Pavel's recklessness is filtered, realism's polarized view of morality rematerializes in the figure of Pavel's sister Milada. Working against what he considers to be his base nature, Pavel uses his admiration of Milada's Christian humility to try and ground his reincorporation into society. The dreary prospects of Pavel's ability to gain public respect coupled with Milada's untimely death nevertheless provoke comparison of how Christian ethics more easily apply to a cloistered existence than they do Pavel's worldly problems. As such, *das Gemeindegeld* ends in an ambivalent position situated between the complexity of individual character and the simplicity of virtuous paragons. This can be viewed as an attempt to overturn the earlier realist tropes of literary types and binary views of good and evil.