Instructor	Thorsten Ries
Course	GER 373 - Forces of Nature / History in German Literature
Short title	ForcesNatureHistoryGermLit
Instructor	Thorsten Ries <thorsten.ries@austin.utexas.edu>
Semester	Fall Term 2022
Cross-listed	Comparative Literature.
Flags	Global Cultures.

Description

„The citizen's hat flies off his pointed head, / All skies echo like clamor [...] And on the coasts–one reads–sea levels are rising [...] The trains fall off the bridges.“ The eerie topical semblance of Jacob van Hoddis' expressionist poem *Weltende* (*End of the World*, 1911) with present-day debates about anthropogenic climate change and environmental impact is the starting point for this course that traces the literary interrelation of catastrophic natural events and concepts of forces of nature, intellectual history and the history of human violence in German literature from the 18th century to contemporary literature. This literary history of forces of nature / history will cover aspects of literary theory and current approaches to the anthroposcene debate.

The course will start with reflections of the Lisbon earthquake of Nov 1, 1755, in Heinrich von Kleist's *Erdbeben in Chili* (*Earthquake in Chile*), and Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*), his idea of the sublime in nature and art, and proceed to Ewald von Kleist's poetic landscape descriptions of the battlefield. We will discuss Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Sturm und Drang* and scientific natural disaster prose and Friedrich Hölderlin's poetological reflection of language and inspiration as a force of nature. Also in the 19th century, Clara Viebig's *Naturgewalten* (*Forces of Nature*) will give us opportunity to discuss gender and imaginations of forces of nature. From the 20th century, next to van Hoddis, we will read Ernst Jünger's WW I novel *In Stahlgewittern* (*Storms of Steel*), and Gottfried Benn's poetic-scientific vision of radioactivity as new natural force (*Physik 1943*, *Verlorenes Ich*). Marcel Beyer's novel *Kaltenburg* offers an animal and ornithology perspective on German history, and we will talk about his reflection of the Elbe flooding disaster. We are entering the anthroposcene with historical garbage disposal issues in Christoph Ransmayr's *Morbus Kitahara*. Nobel prize winner Elfriede Jelinek's *Kein Licht* and Alexander Kluge's *Die Pranke der Natur (und wir Menschen)* shed light on the anthropological and intellectual history dimension of the nuclear incident at Fukushima Daaichi, Japan. In the literary reception of the 09/11 attacks, the events were often compared to natural disaster and the Lisbon earthquake, which we will trace in newspapers, Thomas Kling's *Manhttan Mundraum* and Katrin Röggla's *Really Ground Zero*. Michael Stavarič's novel *Magma* rereads history as a demonic history of natural disasters. W.G. Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn* and Reinhard Jirgl's *Nichts von euch auf Erden* take a planetary view on the *anthroposcene*, fundamentally changing the narrative mode. Anja Utler's poetry *kommen sehen: Lobgesang* will lead us into a climate change future of ‚three years summer'. With Juli Zeh (*Über Menschen*) and Marlene Streeruwitz (*So ist die Welt geworden*), we will take a look at the covid19 crisis as a literary event, natural and social disaster.

The course will introduce theoretical perspectives on forces of nature / history in German literature in a contrastive manner, from close reading to poststructuralist approaches, as well as the theoretical context of anthroposcene, ecostudies, *dark green* and biodiversity concepts.

The course will be conducted face-to-face. Instruction will combine direct instruction, in-class discussion and group work (flipped classroom) with out-of-class collaborative group projects, and individual assignments in writing and as class presentations.

Main readings are German, research literature is in German or English. Throughout the course, we will work with relatively short exemplary chapters or excerpts. Project groups will work with the full text.

Other requirements: aside from Canvas, this class will use digital tooly relevant to these materials, including hypothes.is, Etherpad, and others. These are all open-source, cross-platform, and free. The instructor will support deploying and experimenting with digital humanities approaches to all projects, but they are not required.

Grading

30% Oral Participation:
- 20% class participation activity.
- 10% conference paper presentation.

70% Written Assignments:
- 10% argument abstract of conference paper presentation. 3pp.
- 20% two reaction papers. 3pp.
- 10% digital project
- 40% individual conference paper based on original research. 12 pp (incl. endnotes, bibliography).

Readings I

- Peter-André Alt: *Ästhetik des Bösen*. München: Beck 2010.
- Robert H. Brown: *Nature's Hidden Terror. Violent Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Germany.* Columbia, SC: Camden House 1991.
- Bernd Hamacher: *Offenbarung und Gewalt. Literarische Aspekte kultureller Krisen um 1800*. München: Fink 2010.
- Alexander Kluge: *Die Pranke der Natur (und wir Menschen). Das Erdbeben in Japan, das die Welt bewegte, und das Zeichen von Tschernobyl*. Hörbuch. Kunstmann 2012.
- Lars Langer, Manuel Burghardt, Roland Borgards, Katrin Böhning-Gaese, Ralf Seppelt, Christian Wirth: *The rise and fall of biodiversity in literature: A comprehensive quantification of historical changes in the use of vernacular labels for biological taxa in Western creative literature*. People and Nature. Volume 3, Issue 5 p. 1093-1109 https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pan3.10256
- Gerhard Lauer, Thorsten Unger (Eds.): *Das Erdbeben von Lissabon und der Katastrophendiskurs im 18. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Wallstein 2008. (Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert Supplementa 15)
- Helmut Lethen: *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte - Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*. Frankfurt, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2010.
- Susan Neiman: *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy.* Princeton UP 2015.
- Solvejg Nitzke, Mark Schmitt (Eds.): *Katastrophen. Konfrontationen mit dem Realen*. Essen: Bachmann 2012.
- Peter Sloterdijk: *Luftbeben. An den Quellen des Terrors*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2002.

- Heather I. Sullivan: *Petro-Texts, Plants, and People in the Anthropocene: The Dark Green.* In: Green Letters 24.2 (2019), ed. by Hannes Bergthaller, Christa Grewe-Volpp, and Sylvia Mayer, 152-167.
- Heather I. Sullivan, James Shinkle: *The Dark Green Ecology in the Early Anthropocene: Goethe's Plants in Die Metamorphose and Triumph der Empfindsamkeit.* In: Goethe Yearbook 26 (2019), 143-62.

Readings II

- Gottfried Benn: *Physik 1943*, *Verlorenes Ich* (1943)
- Marcel Beyer: *Kaltenburg* (2008), Wasserstandsbericht (2003)
- Dietmar Dath: *Die Abschaffung der Arten* (2008)
- Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), *Wilhelm Meister* (1796) *Italienische Reise* (1816), Briefe.
- Jacob van Hoddis: *Weltende* (1911)
- Friedrich Hölderlin: *Brod und Wein* (1800/01)
- Erlfriede Jelinek: *Kein Licht* (2011), *Fukushima Epilog* (2012)
- Reinhard Jirgl: *Nichts von euch auf Erden* (2013)
- Ernst Jünger: *In Stahlgewittern* (1920)
- Immanuel Kant: *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790)
- Ewald von Kleist: *Der Frühling* (1749), *Cißides und Paches* (1759)
- Heinrich von Kleist: *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (1806)
- Thomas Kling: *Manhattan Mundraum* I, II (2001, 2002)
- Alexander Kluge: *Die Pranke der Natur (und wir Menschen)* (2011)
- Christoph Ransmayr: *Morbus Kitahara* (1995)
- Katrin Röggla: *Really Ground Zero* (2001)
- Michael Stavarič: *Magma* (2008)
- W.G. Sebald: *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995)
- Marlene Streeruwitz: So ist die Welt geworden (2020)
- Anja Utler: *kommen sehen: Lobgesang* (2020)
- Clara Viebig: *Naturgewalten* (1905)
- Juli Zeh: *Über Menschen* (2021)