

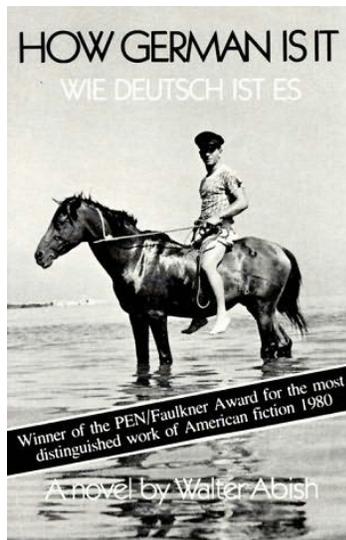
The University of Toronto
"HOW GERMAN IS IT?"
An Introduction to German Culture
German 150H / Summer 2011

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Class meets on **TR 4-6** at **WW121**

COURSE OUTLINE



This course is intended for 'beginners' of German culture (i.e. students who are rather unfamiliar with it). The goal is, simply put, to familiarize you with important characteristics of modern Germany, its historical and cultural developments, its poets and thinkers, its great and not-so-great minds, its politicians, radicals and liberals, ideologists and dissidents, its scientists, artists and stars of film, fashion and sport. And, not to forget, its common people, the ones who don't make it into the headlines every day. What are the clichés that abound about the entity called 'Germany,' how do we challenge them and look behind the façades? And who tells us that what we'll find there is any more 'real'?

What is Germany's position in Europe and within the world at large? What is it about the Germans? Why are they hated? Why are they loved? And, most importantly, why is it so impossible to feel indifferent towards them? To be sure, these are too many and rather

too far-reaching questions to address exhaustively within the all-too-narrow frame of an intro course. And what did you expect, really? The mystery of German (cultural) identity can't possible be rendered coherently and conclusively anyway. The most any course can shoot for is try to provide a frame of action. Within this frame, each of us has to assume the part of an investigator – a culture detective, as it were – embarking on a mission. There is a case to be solved, evidence is to be collected, conclusions are to be reached and, who knows, there might even be bad guys to be convicted – all, of course, in the name of collective and personal enlightenment. So, I guess, this is really a course about you!

What is it all about? It's about collecting data, structuring it, making sense of it – and coming out on the other side of the tunnel sane & sound. We'll be examining historical, political and cultural developments in Germany from approximately 1871 to the present. That's the general time frame. But as cultural investigators, ever so often we'll have to go beyond these limits. We'll have to stretch, grab hard and pull in facts and ideas to make events within this historical period more meaningful to us. The main goal of the course is to develop a general idea of major developments and people who've could be said to have had their share in influencing and shaping Germany and the Germans as they are today. So we'll embark on in-depth studies of events, movements and people of ... let's say: 'special interest.' And since that's where it gets most

exciting, the better part of our operations will be executed in the field of the arts, more precisely, through the medium of literature, film and other visual and textual media.

Allow me to be a bit more 'academic' for a moment. More specific course goals include: (1) To familiarize you with the history of modern Germany. (2) To introduce you to vital currents of contemporary German culture and society, as well as to central authors and their literary works. (3) To encourage you to deal critically with various representations of Germanness (e.g. clichés, prejudices). (4) To acquaint you with social structures and ethnic minority populations in Germany, as well as with some of the leaders of modern German life and thought. (5) And, most importantly, to encourage you to develop critical, analytical yet creative thinking, to identify existing biases and to generate a reality-based understanding (whatever that means) of gender, so-called racial or ethnic issues.

... Are you still with me? Moving on!

There is, to be sure, fun involved. But don't deceive yourselves: It also entails a hellova lot of work! More work than fun? You have to decide for yourselves. Here are the rules of the game. And since there seems to exist a direct relation between rules and grades, let me give you the exact grade break down first. Course evaluation is based on:

- 20%** Attendance / Preparation / Participation
- 15%** Weekly Reaction/Reflection Postings
- 15%** Short Presentation (Cultural Contexts)
- 25%** Class Project (Cultural Portfolio)
- 25%** Final Examination

Yes-yes, I know. Wait. I'll explain ...

Attendance / Preparation / Aactive Participation: (a) You show up! Oh yes, you do! If not, you're in trouble. All German courses are attendance-based! And you're punctual! Oh yes, you are! I am, so you are too! If not, you better have a good reason. (b) You are prepared! You sure are! How do I know? You post short weekly reading reaction papers. No worries, they are really short, only about ½ a page. You can do it! But you first have to get the reading done. (c) Oh, I almost forgot: Showing up on time after having posted your reaction papers may earn you an automatic 50% in the participation section, but no more. If you want to raise the grade ever so slightly, you first have to prove that you're alive. Get my attention! You can do that by blinking an eye ... ta-taa, 52%! ... yawning or snoring ... wrong, back down to 50% ... raising a hand ... good idea, up to 55% ... saying something faintly coherent or even slightly stimulating ... well now, THAT gets your participation grade going. OK, I'm sure, you get the idea. But to spell it out ... the idea: participating means being active. If you're active and have a clue of what you're talking about (preparation!), your participation grade will go straight through the roof!

Reaction/Reflection Postings: More work? Yes, indeed! If it's relaxing you want and getting a tan, go to Cuba! ... These short assignments are to be posted on a weekly basis. What, you already know that? Ah, I mentioned it above. Good, you're paying attention – the first rule for a cultural investigator. Like the presentations, the reaction/reflection postings aren't too long, not over 1 page is our rule of thumb. So you're not expected to unearth new universes or to win the Nobel Prize for your reactions. But still they go beyond the silly superficial rumblings some of you might emit in your sleep (commonly referred to as snoring). Keep your eyes peeled for more detailed instructions.

Presentation: It's really short & sweet – but nonetheless it takes some effort to get it right. Each presentation is 5 min (presentation proper) plus 5 min (discussion, based on your discussion questions) – this isn't much time, so you need to be well organized and your presentation well structured. A detailed outline has to be sent to me a week in advance, my reaction has to be heeded (i.e. changes might be necessary), and finally the handout (1 page plus reading/viewing materials, i.e. guidelines & discussion questions) needs to be posted on Blackboard early enough for the class to read them and comment on them. Presenters, in turn, need to incorporate class reactions into their presentation. ... So it's 5+5 minutes – and I advise you to stay within the limit, because I like to talk too. And I like the rest of the class to talk even more. So what are the presentations about? Thematically, they have to do with either the primary reading of the week (the text / the author) or with some contextual issue (and that's an open field, let me assure you!). Strategically, these presentations are all about providing essential background information in as appetizing a manner as possible. That's where PowerPoint presentations might come in ... or transparencies ... or weird dance moves – all with the goal of making the presentation appealing and consequently interactive. Don't doubt for a moment that the process of preparing a presentation is challenging and requires careful organization of selected information & materials on one page and one page only, so help me God! And, to stress this point once more, presentations are meant to stimulate thought and trigger reactions among your peers. So whatever works ... do it. Make me proud!

Class Project: The class project is the gem of this course. Like many projects it will occupy your mind throughout the semester. Thus it can, in fact, be considered the perfect preparation for the final exam (as this is a 100-level course, we're required to have one) – and it's furthermore closely connected to the idea of cultural detectivery I'm so keen on. Let me explain:

It's silly to believe that answers are readily available – not in life, and certainly not in this course. It's learning by doing – you know the slogan. And in our class it's learning by finding out by/for ourselves, by investing in personalized projects, by investigating our personal cases. Each perspective, everyone's outlook on things is different. Thus, culture, to get back to the focal point



of this course, can't ever be just one thing– not even German culture. You have to find your own approach to it. The course will provide the frame, you create the painting, your painting. I'd like to use the metaphor of a cultural investigation as our guiding principle. I'll give you a frame (culturally: Germany / historically: from 1871 to the present), and you'll fill it with meaning by organizing the info we gather throughout the semester in reading texts, in class lectures, presentations and discussions, but mostly through personal investigation into matters that might or might not matter. It's you who makes them matter. Make them matter!

So, compiling the cultural portfolio is tantamount to making sense of German culture and, in extension, sense of yourself. A lofty goal! But more to the point: this assignment is your preparation for the final exam, which will be jubilantly celebrated once you've survived the 12 class sessions. Apropos celebrating: the day of the last session, I'd love to see as many of you as possible at a place of our liking for a post-investigation party. Its motto will be: "From Theory to Practice: The Art of Being Ach-So-German!" All the work has to be good for something, right?

And, by the way, you don't even have to turn in your portfolio. All I want you to give me in the last class session is your detailed portfolio index list. But don't expect that to be just a walk in the park! Once again: Keep your eyes peeled for more detailed instructions.