

Spring 2011
University of Toronto
German 250HS

WEIMAR CINEMA: THE BIRTH OF GENRE

Tuesdays 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (includes screening)
Emmanuel Hall 119



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COURSE OVERVIEW

This survey course offers an overview of a crucial period in German cinema history: its “golden age” during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). The era witnessed the consolidation of classical techniques of filmmaking as well as the emergence of specific storytelling conventions that have coalesced into the film genres we know today: e.g. the crime thriller, melodrama, science fiction, horror, mountain and city films. To understand how and why these genres evolved, we need to investigate more closely contemporaneous historical and aesthetic movements such as Expressionism, “Neue Sachlichkeit” (i.e. “New Objectivity”), the stylistic difference between realism and Soviet-influenced montage, and the so-called “Kino Debate,” in which the distinction between literature and film in mass culture were contested among contemporaneous theorists and practitioners.

We will moreover read films of the Weimar era as engaging with the major upheavals of the early twentieth-century: post-traumatic stress from World War I, changing terms of women's participation in the public sphere and in public space, the rationalization of private and civic life under the dual terms of technological 'advances' and capitalist enterprise, the vacillations of the money market and the social and psychological impact of economic instability, and the dangers and attractions of authoritarian political figures and institutions. In the final segment of the course, we will screen several sound films from the early 1930s, to clarify how that technological transition transformed the manner in which 'moving pictures' generate narrative meaning.