MA in Modern German and Comparative Literature
Introduction

“Das einzige das die Menschheit wirklich fürchtet / ist der menschliche Geist”
Thomas Bernhard

Programme Director:
Dr Ben Hutchinson

This MA is aimed at students who want to deepen their knowledge of modern German literature within a broader European context. Kent is one of the few universities in the UK to have a thriving Comparative Literature department; within an expanding school of European culture, students will hone their literary and analytical skills not only on German texts, but also on a broader range of modern literature.

As a taught course, the MA is suitable both for those who wish to take their undergraduate studies a stage further, and for those who are planning to go on to a career in literary studies or intend to do a PhD.

The programme consists of four modules, each of which is assessed by a 5000 word essay: a core module in comparative literature (‘Literature and Theory’), two core modules in German literature (‘German Modernism’ and ‘Post-war Literature and Memory’), and one further module chosen from across the Faculty. This will then be supplemented by an end of year dissertation (approximately 15,000 words) on a subject arising out of the student’s work over the course of the year.

Prior knowledge of German (proven by BA degree or equivalent) will be a course requirement, as will adequate English.

The programme is offered on a full-time basis, with completion of the programme in one year, or on a part-time basis, with completion of the programme in two years.

Core modules:
- Literature and Theory
- German Modernism
- Post-war literature and memory
- Dissertation

Optional non-core modules (others may also be chosen from across the Faculty):
- Studies in Autobiography
- Women Writers and the Family
- European Tales of the Fantastic
- Classical myths: Modern & Postmodern
- Avant-garde in literature, art and film
Core modules

Literature and Theory
This module will introduce students to a wide range of theoretical positions with the aim of enriching their understanding and appreciation of literature and critical practice. The syllabus will include work by some of the following thinkers: Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, Benjamin, Adorno, Lévi-Strauss, Genette, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray. As well as encouraging a critical engagement with the claims of the theories themselves the module will examine a number of representative theoretical readings of literary works. Students will learn to evaluate these various thinkers and apply their ideas, as appropriate, in their own writing.

German Modernism 1890-1933
This module has three main aims:
• to explore what was distinctively German about the Modernist era, and to deepen the students’ understanding of this period
• to help develop the skills needed for the close analysis of poetry and poetic prose
• to consider how literary movements need to be understood in terms of their origins and subsequent development

Authors studied will include: Hofmannsthal, Musil, Benn, Rilke, Brecht, Trakl, Dada and the Expressionists. Questions of both genre and literary movements will thus be addressed. Students will learn to read the poetry and poetic prose of this key period both thematically and stylistically, as well as how to place them in their political and historical context.

Post-war literature and memory
This module explores differing models of remembering in post-war German literature. It moves from first-hand responses to the Shoah, through the problematization of memory in the 1960s (‘documentary’ literature and the psychological work on collective memory of the Mitscherlichs), to the various approaches to memory developed in the internationally renowned novels of Grass and Sebald. Questions of genre will be raised: in what sense does a poem suggest different models of memory than a novel or play? Students will learn to distinguish between differing kinds of artistic remembrance, between first-hand ‘witnessing’ and second generation retrospect, between claims to absolute ‘truth’ and methods of falsification.

Dissertation
The final dissertation, consisting of an extended piece of original work of approximately 15,000 words, will be written over the summer vacation and submitted in September. In consultation with the tutors the student will devise a question based on the work done across the year; this question may take either a comparative or an exclusively German approach. This dissertation will be the culmination of a year’s in-depth study, but will also serve as preparation for those contemplating a PhD.
Example of optional modules

**Studies in Autobiography**
The notion of autobiography as a documentary genre, in which the writer unproblematically records the facts of his or her life, has been called into question by modern criticism. Many of the most important theorists of autobiographical writing insist upon its central place in the literary canon, alongside plays, novels, and poems, with which it would share a certain ‘literariness’. Focusing on a wide range of modern autobiographical texts from different national and linguistic cultures, this module treats questions of generic definition, form, motivation, and rhetorical strategy. Among the questions to be considered are: Can autobiography be strictly defined? How does autobiography relate to other literary genres such as the diary or the first-person novel? Is autobiography a particular kind of narrative? Is there an identifiable rhetoric of autobiography? Is sincerity a meaningful criterion when considering autobiography? What kinds of relationship do autobiographers attempt to establish with their readers? We also consider some of the recurring themes in autobiographical writing since the Romantic period, including the representation of childhood, the family, sexuality, gender, ethics, morality, and politics.

**Women Writers and the Family**
In this module, we analyse a variety of fictional and theoretical texts in order to shed light on the practice of a number of European women writers.

The introductory discussions explore seminal works which have radically questioned the traditional role of women in given societies. While studying the set texts, we also consider related theoretical issues; for instance, to what extent is gender eclipsed by other issues? Principal topics for analysis include: incest, women’s place in society, writing as a means of expressing one’s identity in a patriarchal society, women joining the work force, lesbian relationships, filial relationships, colonial experience, class and cultural boundaries, demystification of official male models. The theme of the family serves to a varying extent as a framework for the discussion of such issues.

**European Tales of the Fantastic**
Theoretical interest in the literary fantastic has developed rapidly over recent decades following the acclaimed seminal study by Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973). In this module, we look at works by a range of European writers that fall within the category of the fantastic as established by Todorov. Topics to be considered will include: narrative unreliability, madness, magic, witchcraft, gender, and the uncanny. The seminar discussions on each author are enriched by a consideration of different branches of literary and psychoanalytic theory.

**Classical myths: Modern & Postmodern**
This module analyses some of the key factors contributing to the construction and deconstruction of dramatic movements in Western Europe in the twentieth century, by looking at the adaptation of classical works by modern authors. It focuses on links between established literary and non-literary mediums and between European cultures. Of particular interest are the techniques used to configure political messages: to what extent can the reworking of ancient myths be seen as an act of cultural and political subversion? After looking at the classical versions of the stories of figures such as Orestes, Electra, Oedipus, Antigone, Phaedra and Hippolytus, there follows detailed analysis of plays and films on these myths by a range of modern European figures.

**Avant-garde in literature, art and film**
What is the avant-garde? This interdisciplinary course explores the artistic movements at the beginning of the 20th century that shook established traditions to the core and triggered a revolution not only of representational conventions, but also of traditional separations between art and politics. We will investigate literature, art and film across the famous -isms, including Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism. We will explore the cultural and historical contexts from which they continued
emerge, study their manifestos and essays and their different aesthetic and political agendas. What are typical avant-garde strategies and procedures? Are there common denominators between the movements? Is ‘avant-garde’ an aesthetic, a historical, a political or a cultural phenomenon? How do literature, art and film build upon and react to each other? How is the avant-garde conceptualised and defined in different theoretical contexts? The course will allow students to investigate the expressive and aesthetic qualities of literature, the visual arts and films, exploring similarities, differences and creative interconnections between them.

Dr Ben Hutchinson
Areas of Interest: nineteenth and twentieth-century German and European literature (esp. French); Rilke, W.G. Sebald, Jean Améry, Vergangenheitsbewältigung and Gedächtniskultur, Kafka, Thomas Bernhard; 20th century poetry, modernism, comparative poetics, Frankfurter Schule.

Professor Osman Durrani
Areas of Interest: Eighteenth to twentieth-century German literature; popular culture; Goethe; Grass; contemporary fiction; instrumentalisations of the Faust myth; Thomas and Klaus Mann.

Dr Anna Katharina Schaffner
Areas of interest: avant-garde and neo-avant-garde literature, art, theory and film; digital poetry; the short story; European and American cinema; and modernism and post-modernism.
Dr Shane Weller
Areas of interest: European modernism, postmodernism, and literary theory. Theories of aesthetic value and the relation between literature and ethics.

Dr Thomas Baldwin
Areas of Interest: nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature; representations of art in literature; literary theory and philosophy.

Dr Axel Stähler
Areas of interests: Jewish literature and culture, early modern European festival culture, the eighteenth-century novel in Europe, intermediality and ‘iconarratology’, postcolonial literature and theory, contact zones and intercultural communication, fundamentalism and literature.

Dr Karl Leydecker
Areas of interest: divorce in German and European literature, eighteenth to twentieth centuries; German drama and social history 1890-1930; censorship of the theatre in Berlin 1890-1918; Expressionism; Ernst Toller; novelists of the Weimar Republic; history of German-English literary translation.

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