

Spectres of the City: E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Demonic Berlin"

5 ECTS

COURSE TIMES: Weekly seminar on Tuesdays, 10:00-12:00; at Hausvogteiplatz 5-7, Room 0203

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SUBJECT AREA: Language and Literature.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What place might the practice of literary 'realism' find within the city? What, in turn, might 'realism' and the 'fantastic' have to do with the notion of place? And how, specifically, does E. T. A. Hoffmann — one of the most influential German writers of the nineteenth century — arrive in his own most frequented place of residence, the city of Berlin, through his idiosyncratic poetological praxis?

Hoffmann reached the peak of his writerly prowess in Berlin. The aim of this course will be to uncover the hidden, fantastic 'Berlin' that he knew, whilst sketching an account of what we might call Hoffmann's 'realism' in the process. It aims to serve both as an introduction to Hoffmann and as an enquiry into the kind of writing that might enable us to reproduce the character and secrets of a specific city. As such, we will begin to question Hoffmann's alignment with the literary and cultural currents of his own time, and to question his conventional reputation as Gothic Romanticist. Above all, we will begin to 'read' the city of Berlin through the eyes and words of Hoffmann.

We will take our lead from Walter Benjamin's essays and radio pieces on Hoffmann and his 'dämonische[s] Berlin' as we follow through a series of readings of his literary and artistic works. The sessions which form the heart of the course will focus on close readings of Hoffmann's major Berlin tales, and the swarms of urban ghosts, demons and *Doppelgänger* at work within them. Questions of mockery and imitation as well as the motifs of revenants and ghosts, of split identities and paranoid fantasies, come to life in these urban tales. One of our main lines of enquiry will be what these motifs tell us about mimetic realism, as a reproduction or 'doubling' of objects, people and experiences. We will also devote time to thinking about how literary life flourishes in the city, reading about Hoffmann's own close literary circle and its fictional double in *Die Serapionsbrüder*. The seminar embraces an interdisciplinary approach, interspersing readings of Hoffmann's texts with sessions devoted to his visual artworks, many of which are Berlin-focused, with a view to asking how we might begin to study these pictures alongside his writings. We will also devote a session to a 'Hoffmann-tour' of Berlin, led by the expert Michael Bienert, aiming to 'read' the city through Hoffmann's eyes and words by returning to significant places and structures from his time in Berlin, and to the settings from the tales we have read together.

The course will end with a gesture towards Hoffmann's influence on literary theory, particularly theories of the fantastic; and on other 'demonic' cities and their writers. We will accordingly look at extracts of writings by Balzac, Baudelaire, Poe and Dickens on Paris and London, considering the 'Hoffmannesque' inflection of their city descriptions. Students will have the opportunity to propose their own readings for these sessions, as we consider the importance of Hoffmann as a figure who influenced not just the face of literature, but the face of the literary city.

ASSESSMENT

- **Active participation** in the sessions is an integral part of this course, and will accordingly form a percentage of the final grade.
- Students will also be required to give a **short (10-15 minute) presentation** on one of the set texts. These presentations should serve as brief introductions to the text in question and as a stimulus for wider class discussion, not simply as a resumé of the material at hand. They should ask pertinent questions and begin to sketch a framework for our discussion.
- For the **final written assessment**, students are required to submit a **3.000-word long piece of work** — an academic ‘response’ paper — to something that they have learned and read during our sessions. This paper should not be an extensive *Hausarbeit*, so much as a concise reflection on a theme covered in class, showing a clear argument and an ability to engage with academic criticism and thought. In the first few weeks, I will distribute essay questions: students may either write a response to one of these, or they may design their own question, based around their personal interests, in agreement with me. Pieces of work should be no longer than 3.000 words. Students should **present a précis** of their work to the rest of the class in the final session and be prepared to answer questions on it.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

The course discussions will be conducted in English. **A high standard of academic English (at the very least B2-level) will be requisite** and translations into English of all texts will be provided. Although there is no minimum level of German required, since our aim is to engage closely and authentically with Hoffmann’s tales, attention and sensitivity to the texts’ original language is encouraged. Our class discussions, accordingly, will try as much as possible to bring Hoffmann’s German into play. Work for assessment may be submitted in English or German.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Session 1. Arrival in Berlin: First words.

Introduction to the course; explication of our aims and expectations, including discussion of the seminar format.

As newcomers to Berlin ourselves, we will begin our discussions by exchanging our own first impressions of Berlin as we read extracts from Hoffmann's diaries and letters narrating his arrival in the city.

Session 2. 'Romantic' Demonic Berlin.

Required reading: Walter Benjamin, 'Demonic Berlin'; Jürgen Barkhoff, 'Romantic Sociability, Aesthetics and Politics'

Session 3. Tiergarten: 'Ritter Gluck' (1809).

Required reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Ritter Gluck'.

Optional Reading: Miranda Stanyon, "'Rastrierte Blätter, aber mit keiner Note beschrieben". The Musical Sublime and Aporias of Inscription in Hoffmann's *Ritter Gluck*', *German Quarterly*, 83.4 (2010), 412-430.

Session 4. The Gendarmenmarkt: 'Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht' (1815).

Required reading: E. T. A. Hoffman, 'Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht'.

Optional reading: Adalbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*; Todd Kontje, 'Biography in Triplicate: E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht"', *The German Quarterly*, 58.3 (1985), 348-360.

Session 5. Unter den Linden: 'Das öde Haus' (1817).

Required reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Das öde Haus'.

Optional reading: Robert McFarland, 'Reading "das öde Haus": E. T. A. Hoffmann's Urban Hermeneutics', *Monatshefte*, 100.4 (2008), 489-503

Session 6. Drawing Hoffmann's Berlin.

Discussion of theoretical/methodological questions: how might we 'read' Hoffmann's visual artworks alongside his literature?

Introduction to and readings of Hoffmann's Berlin-related drawings, including, particularly, the *Kunzischer Riß*, a poetological 'map' of the Gendarmenmarkt.

Session 7. Literary circles and salons: the *Serapionsbrüder* and the *Seraphinenbrüder*.

Required Reading: Extracts from *Die Serapionsbrüder*; Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*.

Session 8. An urban Märchen? 'Die Brautwahl' (1819)

Required Reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Die Brautwahl'

Session 9. City vision: 'Des Veters Eckfenster' (1822).

Required reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Des Veters Eckfenster'; Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'

Optional reading: David Darby, 'The Unfettered Eye: Glimpsing Modernity from E. T. A. Hoffmann's Corner Window'

Session 10. Theorizing the ‘fantastic’

Required reading: Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (extract), Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (extract)

Session 11. Field trip: Reading Hoffmann’s Berlin.

Field trip: tour of Berlin

Session 12. Extending our framework (I): Baudelaire.

Required reading: Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil* (extracts)

Session 13. Extending our framework (II): Poe.

Required reading: Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man of the Crowd*

Session 14. Extending our framework (III): Balzac.

Required reading: Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus, Le Père Goriot* (extracts)

Session 15. Extending our framework (IV): Dickens.

Required reading: Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (extract)

Session 16. Conclusion

A seminar devoted to self-evaluation, discussion of conclusions drawn from the readings during the preceding weeks, and to short presentations of written papers, aiming to critically evaluate each others’ work and to draw out correspondences between papers and thoughts.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY READING

Balzac, Honoré de, *Ferragus, Le Père Goriot* [selected extracts TBD].

Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal (The Flowers of Evil)* [selected poems TBD].

Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften*; unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno & Gerschom Scholem. Hrgb. Rolf Tiedemann & Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1980), 7 vols.

Dickens, Charles, *Our Mutual Friend* (1853).

Hoffmann, E. T. A., *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*. Hg. von Wulf Segebrecht und Harmt Steinecke (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988). [English translations for each text will be provided].

Lavater, *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-8) [extracts with English translations TBA]

McFarland, Robert, ‘Reading “Das öde Haus”’: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Urban Hermeneutics’, *Monatshefte* 100.4 (2008).

Poe, Edgar Allan, ‘The Man of the Crowd’ (1840).

SECONDARY READING

Bienert, Michael. *E. T. A. Hoffmanns Berlin: Literarische Schauplätze* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2015).

Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mas.: MIT Press, 1992).

Gill, Miranda, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

Lubkoll, Christine & Neumeyer, Harald (eds.), *E. T. A. Hoffmann Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2015)

Piper, Andrew. *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Röder, Birgit, *A Study of the Major Novellas of E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003).

Saul, Nicholas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006)

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975)

Webber, Andrew (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Berlin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017)

Röder, Birgit, *A Study of the Major Novellas of E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Rochester: Camden House, 2003).