

## The Naked Truth: Dissolution and Crisis in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna



Instructor: Dr. S. Kye Terrasi  
Time: T/Th 1:00-2:20  
Place: Online  
Office: Zoom Meetings  
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### Course Description German 351 / CHID 270 / Lit 298/C Lit 320:

This course is taught in English. All readings and discussions will be conducted in English.

This course is an interdisciplinary exploration of the literature and the visual culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the aftermath of its disintegration into World War I. With an emphasis on the relationship between different disciplines (literature, art, critical theory, history and psychology) the course will be organized around major themes from the period, such as sexuality, gender, decay, and the crisis of identity and language. The analysis of works such as Egon Schiele's self portraits reveals mankind's crisis of identity when confronted by an era characterized by the absence of any ordering principles. Arthur Schnitzler's play *Reigen* and his novella *Night Games* unmask a battle of the sexes and the changing dynamic between men and women. Gustav Klimt's Secessionist paintings express a fresh hope for a renewal in art and society and his portrayal of the feminine form undercut previous views regarding gender and sexuality. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Chandos Brief* lays bare the notion that the inherited language of past traditions is no longer capable of expressing modern man's experience. Wes Anderson's modern film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* seeks to capture the decay of the Empire as it holds up a mirror which brilliantly reflects 'the world of yesterday' that Stefan Zweig so faithfully describes as he looks back to the Vienna of his youth. Finally, with the primary material contextualized within variety of social, historical and theoretical texts pertinent to the topics and

the era, such as Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna Politics and Culture* and Hermann Broch's *Hofmannsthal and His Time*, the course will inquire into the relationship between the political and social change of Vienna and its literary and artistic representation.

Through written, analytical responses as well as creative individual and group projects, students will have the opportunity to delve into other cultural aspects of the city, both from the turn of the century and contemporary Vienna.

### Course Objectives:

- To examine the foundations of the various literary and artistic movements of fin-de-siècle Vienna and the social and cultural context in which they emerged.
- To introduce the predominant themes of fin-de-siècle Vienna: sexuality, gender, crisis of identity and language, decadence, death and psychology.
- To make students aware of the traditions of modernity in Austrian literature and art.
- To strengthen students' strategies for interpreting literary texts and visual works.
- To improve critical thinking skills through a comparative and interdisciplinary examination of art, film and literature.

### Course Requirements and Grading:

Class Participation and discussion: 10%

Museum Project: 15%

Theater Project: 15 %

Final Project: 20%

4 Analytical Response papers: 40%

#### Museum Project

The purpose of this project is for the class to explore and gain an overview of the collections of Vienna's numerous art museums. Working in groups, students will be assigned one museum and will present a broad description of the institution and its permanent collection and investigate any current exhibitions. The group should choose one artwork from the collection and provide an analysis of its significance to our course. Each presentation should be **20** minutes.

#### Theater Project

There are two options for the theater project. Option 1: To write and perform an additional/lost scene for Schnitzler's play *Reigen (La Ronde)*. The extra scene should reflect and extend the general themes of the play and time period. When presenting your scene, please provide a copy of the text you have written and be prepared to offer an analysis of your scene's relevance to the main issues of the course.

Option 2: To provide a creative interpretation of a scene from *Reigen* or one of Schnitzler's other plays. The genre, style and medium can be determined by the group. Please provide the text if necessary and be prepared to offer an analysis of the content of your scene and what it reveals about the themes of turn of the century Vienna, as well as the reasoning behind your creative interpretation.

Possible Creative Platforms:

Social Media

Interview

Video blog

Reality Show

Digital Scrapbook

Artistic Storyboard

Theater projects should be **20** minutes long.

### Final Project

Students will collaborate on contributions to a feuilleton journal for the course modeled on various publications in Vienna at the turn of the century. The completed project will feature their creative interpretations of the cultural, literary, social and artistic trends of the turn of the century. Examples of possibilities for contributions: a theater critique of one of Schnitzler's plays, a review of an art exhibition by an artist discussed in class, a poem or short story, an editorial commenting on politics/social issues, an interview with a figure from this time period etc. Final projects should be **20** minutes long.

### Response Paper Topics

Response papers should be 2-2.5 pages long, 12 point font, double spaced. Since the response papers are fairly brief, delve right into your critical analysis of the material, provide concrete evidence to support your discussion and avoid summarizing the texts.

Paper 1: What issues and topics from Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* does Wes Anderson incorporate in his film *The Grand Budapest Hotel*?

Paper 2: Choose one of the ten scenes from Schnitzler's *Reigen (La Ronde)* and provide an analysis of the couple's relationship and how Schnitzler's portrayal relates to the social/cultural atmosphere of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Paper 3: Discuss the conflict between the sexes in Schnitzler's *Night Games*. Does Schnitzler subvert prevailing assumptions about gender or does he reinforce and build on old stereotypes?

Paper 4: Analyze Hofmannsthal's *Chandos Letter* within the broader themes of the course. How does this text connect to issues of dissolution, crisis and appearance versus reality?

### **Required Reading:**

#### Required Texts for Purchase in the UW Bookstore

Schnitzler: *Four Major Plays (Reigen/La Ronde)*

Schnitzler: *Night Games and Other Stories and Novellas*

#### Required Online Texts

Online readings are posted on Canvas

Altenberg: "How I Became A Writer" and "Coffeehouse"

Freud (excerpts)

Hofmannsthal: *The Lord Chandos Letter*

Kraus: *The Last Days of Mankind* (excerpts)

Polgar: "Theory of the Cafe Central"

Zweig: *The World of Yesterday* (excerpts)

## Required Viewing

Anderson: *The Grand Budapest Hotel*

### **Religious Accommodations:**

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at:

[Religious Accommodations Policy: https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/)

Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form: https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/)

### **Class Schedule:**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
1 Framework for the Crisis	Tuesday March 30	Intro	
Nostalgia and Looking Back	Thursday April 1	Stefan Zweig: <i>The World of Yesterday</i>	<b>Due:</b> Read excerpts from <i>The World of Yesterday</i> : "The World of Security" and "Eros Matutinus" (online) <b>Due:</b> Info Sheet
2	Tuesday April 6	Wes Anderson: <i>Grand Budapest Hotel</i>	<b>No Zoom Meeting At home:</b> View part 2 of <i>The Grand Budapest Hotel</i> and prepare discussion topics. (online)
	Thursday April 8	Discussion <i>Grand Budapest Hotel</i>	<b>Due:</b> Response paper #1 (online)
3 To Every Age Its Art, to Every Art Its Freedom	Tuesday April 13	Art: Gustav Klimt	<b>Due:</b> Read Freud excerpts (online)
	Thursday April 15	Art: Egon Schiele	
4	Tuesday April 20	Museum Project	<b>Due:</b> Present projects <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals
	Thursday April 22	Museum Project	<b>Due:</b> Present projects <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals

5 Vienna's Intellectual Life	Tuesday April 27	Cafe Culture/Feuilleton	<b>Due:</b> Read excerpts from the <i>World of Yesterday</i> : "School in the Last Century" and "Universitas Vitae". (online) <b>Due:</b> Read Polgar's "The Theory of Cafe Central" and Altenberg's "How I Became A Writer" and "Coffeehouse" (online)
Sex as Power: The Deconstruction of Gender Roles	Thursday April 29	Sexuality and Gender Schnitzler: <i>Reigen/La Ronde</i>	<b>Due:</b> Read Schnitzler's <i>Reigen/La Ronde</i>
6	Tuesday May 4	<i>Reigen/La Ronde</i>	<b>Due:</b> Response Paper #2 (online)
	Thursday May 6	Preparation for Theater Projects	<b>No Zoom Meeting</b> Meet/Coordinate with your group
7	Tuesday May 11	Theater Project	<b>Due:</b> Present project <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals
	Thursday May 13	Theater Project	<b>Due:</b> Present project <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals
8 Crisis of Masculinity	Tuesday May 18	Schnitzler: <i>Night Games</i>	<b>Due:</b> Read Schnitzler's <i>Night Games</i>
	Thursday May 20	Schnitzler: <i>Night Games</i>	<b>Due:</b> Response paper #3 (online)
9 Crisis of Language/ Possibility for Renewal	Tuesday May 25	Hofmannsthal: <i>Chandos Letter</i>  Rilke: <i>The Duino Elegies</i>	<b>Due:</b> Read Hofmannsthal's <i>The Chandos Letter</i> (online)  <b>Due:</b> Response paper #4 (online)
The End of Time	Thursday May 27	Karl Kraus: <i>The Last Days of Mankind</i>  Conclusion	<b>Due:</b> Read <i>The Last Days of Mankind</i> (online)

<b>10</b>	Tuesday June 1	Final Presentation	<b>Due:</b> Present project <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals
	Thursday June 3	Final Presentation	<b>Due:</b> Present Project <b>Due:</b> Peer Evals