

“Music in Philosophy & Literature, 1800-1947”

This seminar will explore affiliations of music with literary and philosophical culture in 19th and early-20th-century Germany. This cultural history is often said to have begun with the early fragments of F. Schlegel and Novalis, and the path-breaking manifestos of E. T. A. Hoffman—memorably transposed into Schumann’s post-classical experimentation with fragmentary forms in his early piano music—and to extend all the way to Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, where the hero’s biography is fatally entangled with the successive compositional idioms and musical aesthetics of Romanticism, Impressionism, and high Modernism. Rarely do material (sonorous) beauty, formal-aesthetic models, and the shifting ideological purposes of cultural work come into such vivid alignment as in Germany’s prolonged and increasingly troubled preoccupation with musical culture.

We will take up three paradigms of musical form and -aesthetics, as well as the changing literary/philosophical models aimed at rendering intelligible the inner workings and socio-cultural mission of music—especially so-called *absolute Musik*. (1) The first such cluster will involve on the emergence of organic form, the watershed moment where music, literature, and science show Romanticism to break decisively with the classical style. Our principal materials here will be Goethe’s botanical writings (“Metamorphosis of Plants” et al.) and the shift from an architectural (or “quadratic”) to an epigenetic and variational conception of form in Beethoven’s middle- and late instrumental works. (2) A second focal point will address the growing entanglement of musical culture with pessimistic metaphysics—above all in Schopenhauer and Wagner—as well as the critique of that configuration in Nietzsche’s oeuvre. The dominant formal paradigm here is

one of *Steigerung* (“intensification”), entwined with the increasing destabilization



of classical tonality and the cultivation of the quasi-hypnotic types of *Klang* (“sonority”). Our focus here will be on Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*, Wagner’s *Tristan & Isolde*, as well as on Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* and “The Case of Wagner.” (3) The final cluster of readings will explore the emergence of a constructivist and hyper-rationalist model of aesthetic *form* in the modernism of Arnold Schoenberg—as well as how Modernist (musical) aesthetics and ideological commitments are being re-imagined in Adorno’s *Philosophy of Modern Music* and T. Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. A variety of secondary materials will complement our discussions throughout the semester.

