

# .Human. Animal. Nature.

**German Literature in Translation, Spring 230, MW 3-4:30**  
**Prof. Katja Altpeter-Jones**

Germans are said to revere their forests. With Germany being a hot-spot for nuclear escalation during the Cold War, Germans across the political spectrum developed opposition to reliance on nuclear energy in the late seventies and early eighties. Recently, Germany declared ambitious goals for a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a transition to an energy system solely based on renewable sources and boldly labeled this transition *Energiewende* or energy revolution.

In this course, we will examine the relationship of .Human.Animal.Nature. with a focus on German literature, culture, and history. We will study several influential literary texts that foreground the relationship and intersection of human and animal (... we will study Franz Kafka's famous human bug) and human to nature (... we will read Theodor Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter*, the story of a man who loses his struggle for domination over a raging ocean). Our investigation of literature will take us from Hildegard von Bingen's medieval writings on nature and medicine to the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm and writings by German authors of the Romantic period and finally to contemporary authors like Jenny Erpenbeck. We will view documentary films and movies on the topic and study painting, sculpture and performance of various German artists whose work reimagines our relationship with animate and inanimate nature. In addition, we will investigate the history of the environmental movement in Germany and current efforts of preservation.

Some of the broader questions this course seeks to address are:

Do nature and animals have agency in art and literature? In real life? Are we part of nature? Do we presume domination over it? What responsibilities do humans have vis-à-vis animate and inanimate nature? Does nature teach us things? What happens when we lose touch with nature?

This course will engage these and other questions through readings, discussions, and practical/experiential work with/in/on nature.

No knowledge of German necessary.

