Tutorials: Modern Languages: German

THE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES of Britain’s European neighbours are the focus of well established and internationally recognised scholarship in Oxford. Students have the chance to study medieval as well as contemporary forms of each language and early literary forms as well as European cinema. The Language Centre provides resources in various media for independent language study, the Taylorian Institute had rich library resources, and proximity to Europe enables students to travel independently to practice their language skills among native speakers during the mid-term break.

The descriptions below are copyright University of Oxford and cover tutorial courses offered by the University to matriculated undergraduates. SSO students follow such courses as closely as is practicable, though there may be scope for minor variation to take into account students’ previous experience. Students will not necessarily cover all the material cited in the description (especially when they take the course as a secondary tutorial). All tutorials involve in-depth study: where the title might suggest a survey course, the content of the tutorial will involve focused study on part of the syllabus.

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Descriptive Analysis of German as Spoken and Written at the Present Day: Advanced Level
This course is concerned with the form and structure of the kinds of linguistic knowledge that native speakers of German possess. You will learn about sounds, words and sentences and will see that a native speaker’s linguistic knowledge consists of a set of discrete units and a set of rules for combining them. This rule system is responsible for the infinite creativity of language and explains why there is no longest German word or sentence and why all German speakers can be language innovators. In other words, it is part of a speaker’s mental system and not to be confused with a set of prescriptive rules that tell German speakers how they should speak (as e.g. the preposition wegen may be used only with the genitive and not with the dative.). Given our interest in describing, rather than prescribing, a German speaker's rule system, our focus will be on the spoken language, which, as you will learn, may differ considerably among speakers from different regions and social groupings.

A second question that arises regarding linguistic knowledge is how it is acquired by children. The course also provides an opportunity to learn about studies and theories of German child language, including what explains the perhaps surprising fact that German-speaking children acquire the word-final sound in ich long before the one in das, when it is the former and not the latter which English learners of German find difficult.
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Finally, a child must become not just a speaking but also a communicating member of society, i.e. the child must acquire the conventions which govern linguistic exchanges. A third question that arises regarding linguistic knowledge is then how it is put to use in communication. Here, you will learn about the extralinguistic factors, such as class, sex, and age, which influence a German speaker's use of language in conversations and address.


Early Modern German Culture , 1450–1730: Texts, Contexts and Issues
This period ranges from the invention of printing to the dawn of the Enlightenment. It includes such intellectual milestones as the Renaissance and the Reformation and sees the creation of many art forms still flourishing today, for instance opera, ballet, and the novel. There is no compulsion to cover the whole period, though you will be encouraged to see texts and authors in context and to study genres and themes across a chronological range. You can study Luther and his writings in the context of the Reformation. You can contrast the carnival plays of Hans Sachs with sixteenth-century biblical drama. You can trace the development of German comedy from the late sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth. You can examine early modern conceptions of gender in such works as Grimmelshausen’s Courasche and Lohenstein’s tragedies. You can read works by a whole range of women authors from Caritas Pirckheimer (1467–1532) to Margaretha Susanna von Kuntsch (1651–1717). You can read Grimmelshausen, one of the greatest novelists in the German language, whose tales of adventuring during the Thirty Years’ War are also profound religious and moral allegories. You can choose from a number of outstanding poets, e.g. Opitz, Gryphius, Fleming, Greiffenberg, Scheffler, Kuntsch, Hofmannswaldau, or Günther. You can study the tragedies of Lohenstein, the greatest political dramatist in German before Schiller, as well as those of Gryphius, Haugwitz, or Weise.


Early Modern Literary Texts
The early modern period in German (from the invention of printing in 1440 to the dawn of the Enlightenment around 1730) is one of the key periods in German literature and thought. It is in this period that many features of modern Germany and many important genres in modern German literature become established. Students study a selection from the following six topics:
1) Luther: Von der Freyheit eynis Christenmenschen and Von weltlicher Obrigkeit (both available on http://luther.chadwyck.co.uk via Oxlip)
2) Reformation controversy: Hans Sachs, Die Wittenbergisch Nachtigall (Reclam), and Caritas Pirckheimer, Denkwurdigkeiten (http://sophie.byu.edu)
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3) Religious Poetry: Andreas Gryphius, Gedichte (Reclam) and Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, Gedichte (www.wortblume.de)
4) Secular Poetry: Paul Fleming, Gedichte (Reclam) and Sybille Schwarz, Gedichte (www.wortblume.de)
5) The novel: Historia von D. Johann Fausten and Grimmelshausen: Courasche (both Reclam)
6) Baroque tragedy: Daniel Casper von Lohenstein: Cleopatra and Sophonisbe (both Reclam)


Early Texts Prescribed for Study as Examples of Literature
The study of Middle High German texts provides an opportunity for you to broaden your experience of literature by tackling literary works that are separated by hundreds of years from the present, and which nonetheless deal with themes that are still recognisably the domain of literature today: love and revenge, personal identity and destiny, the individual and society, gender roles. The four set texts represent distinct literary genres (heroic epic, courtly romance, religious drama, love lyric), but they are chosen above all for their literary quality:

Nibelungenlied. C.1200. The German heroic epic, based on the oral poetry of an earlier period, tells the story of Siegfried’s marriage to the Burgundian princess Kriemhild and his murder by Hagen, the vassal of her brothers, the Burgundian kings. In the second part of the work Kriemhilt is married again, this time to Etzel, king of the Huns, and takes her revenge by bringing about the total destruction of the ‘Nibelungen’ (the name given to the Burgundians after the theft of Siegfried’s treasure, the ‘Nibelungen hoard’). (Prescribed passages: Nibelungenlied, ed. K. Bartsch et al. (Reclam 1997), avent. 1, 14–17, 23–30, 36–39.)

Wolfram von Eschenbach: Parzival. c.1210. This work combines the theme of Arthurian romance with the story of the Grail. Parzival fails to put the question of compassion expected of him, when he meets the sick Grail King, thus failing to meet a condition necessary for the fulfilment of his
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destiny. After years spent seeking the Grail and in love-service of Condwriramurs he miraculously achieves what had seemed impossible and is summoned to be Grail King. (Prescribed passages: Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, books 3, 5 and 9.)

Das Osterrspielen von Muri; Das Innsbrucker Osterspiel. The Easter plays are a form of elaboration, in dramatic form, of the events after Christ’s death, generally beginning with the watchmen at the grave, and including such scenes as the Harrowing of Hell, the devils’ claims on the sinful souls, the visit of the three Marys to the tomb, and encounters with Jesus after the resurrection. The fragmentary play from a manuscript found in Muri is the earliest example of an Easter play in German (northern Switzerland, c.1240–60). The second play, preserved in a manuscript at Innsbruck, is a complete text from Thuringia, dated 1391, which permits the study of the intrusion of social satire, burlesque and parody into the religious framework.

Heinrich von Morungen: Lieder. The dominant form of the medieval German lyric is the ‘Minnesang’, a form which centres around the themes of the male lover and his fruitless love-service of a lady. The songs of Heinrich von Morungen (died c.1220) permit the study of this genre at the hands of one of the most masterly Middle High German poets, famous for his handling of imagery, his range of literary forms, and his bold handling of such themes as love beyond the grave and the lovers’ farewell at dawn. (Prescription: Heinrich von Morungen, Lieder (Reclam 1975), with an invaluable commentary.)


German Film Studies

The course focuses in particular on the cinema of the Weimar Republic. There are four set films. In each case the preferred edition is listed first.
1) Der Student von Prag (1913, Rye) available in an American edition from the UK Amazon site (the Faculty has the necessary multi-region DVD players) – it is also available from Alpha Video as a video;
2) Der letzte Mann (1924, Murnau) in the Transit classics edition, but also available (as The Last Laugh) from Eureka Classics;
3) M (1931, Lang) in the Ufa classics edition, also available from Eureka and as a video cassette from BFI;
4) Das bluene Licht (1932, Riefenstahl) available as DVD from ArtHaus, through Amazon.de.

The course will examine the development of film style and film technology in the 1920s and early 1930s, as well as putting the films in the wider context of German culture after the First World War. Work set may include commentaries on sections of the set films, and essays relating to questions of film form and technique, and to thematic issues.

Introductory reading: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (6th or 7th edition); Sabine Hake, German National Cinema (London: Routledge, 2002).

Goethe

Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) not only holds a central position in German literature, comparable to those of Shakespeare in English and Dante in Italian literature, but wrote in an astonishing variety of genres. As a novelist, he took Europe by storm with the impassioned letter-novel Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774), produced the key Bildungsroman in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795–96), and wrote a novel of manners with tragic depths in Die Wahlverwandtschaften (1809). Besides Parts
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One and Two of Faust, a cosmic drama that spanned his entire creative life, his plays include the vivid early historical drama Gotz von Berlichingen (1773), the proto-feminist enactment of classical humanism Iphigenie auf Tauris (1787), and the portrayal of an emotionally fragile poet among calculating courtiers in Torquato Tasso (1790). Not least, he produced a vast body of lyric poetry, bearing a complex relationship to his own emotional life, and including the frank eroticism of the Romische Elegien (1795) and the attempt in the West-östlicher Divan (1819) to bridge the gulf between European and Islamic culture. The paper makes it possible to gain an overview of Goethe’s literary work, and, for those who wish, to explore his autobiographical and travel writings, or to examine his problematic reactions to the French Revolution, his controversial scientific researches, or his attempt with Schiller to establish a German classicism.


Key Texts in German Thought
The focus of this course is on close reading of four short texts. Translations may be consulted, but students are expected to develop a good grasp of the original works. Work set may include commentaries on passages taken from the texts studied, plus essays on subjects which invite wider discussion of the questions raised by the texts and the relationship between them.


Linguistic Studies I: the Development of the German Language, from 1170 to the Present
The history of the German language is a mirror of the literary, social, political and cultural history of the German-speaking countries. This paper covers the Middle High German (up to c.1450), the Early New High German (c.1450-1750) and Modern German periods. You will be expected to familiarize yourself with the salient phonological and grammatical aspects of these different periods, but in your study of the linguistic history of German you will be encouraged to make a more detailed study of individual themes and topics rather than to attempt to survey everything.

Popular areas of study, in addition to basic historical grammar, are: loan words from the various European languages at different times, Middle High German ethical and abstract vocabulary, the language of the medieval German mystics, the language of Bible translation (focussing on Luther), the ‘Sprachgesellschaften’ in the seventeenth century, linguistic ‘Purism’ (from the seventeenth century to the present day), the language of National Socialism, the language of a divided Germany (1945–1989). It is also possible to study topics with a more theoretical character, e.g. problems of the periodization of the German language, the conceptual differences between historical grammar and linguistic history, the emergence of standard norms, grammatical codification, and the questions that arise from interaction with other speech communities.

There are three prescribed texts (Werner der Gärtner, Helmbrecht, dating from c.1270, Reclam edn; Luther’s Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen - ed. K. Bischoff, pp. 6/7-28, l. 21/29, l. 22, and pp. 36-57; Gryphius, Verliebtes Gespenst - Die geliebte Dornrose, Reclam edn.) These should be studied individually for their intrinsic linguistic interest and should also be used as material for the study of the development of German phonology and grammar. The Gryphius text provides an opportunity to study a historical example of dialect literature, in this case exemplifying Silesian dialect in the seventeenth century. The Taylor Institution Library (University library for...
modern languages) holds versions of the set texts in electronic form.


Linguistic Studies II: Old High German
The Old High German paper provides an opportunity to study the earliest recorded stages of the German language, from the period c.800-1100. The course is based on the study of prescribed texts, which have been chosen to demonstrate a range of different uses of the language, including examples of the heroic lay, secular, and religious poetry, Bible translation and even a set of phrasebook-style ‘conversations’ (with forfright expressions for ‘give me my shield’ and ‘get lost’). At the centre of the work for this paper lies the acquisition of a basic reading knowledge of Old High German, but there is also considerable scope for acquiring a familiarity with the literary and cultural context in which written records in the vernacular have been preserved (especially the early German monasteries, such as Fulda and St. Gallen, and the Carolingian court). In addition to studying the set texts, students will acquire a familiarity with the historical grammar of the earliest stages of German, with the principal differences between the Old High German dialects (as represented by the set texts), with the manuscript context of the individual surviving works, and with developments in vocabulary (including the question of loan words). They also come to an understanding of the place of Old High German within the history of the German language. The prescribed texts, in the Althochdeutsches Lesebuch, comprise the following sections: V Gesprache, VIII Isidore, cap. iii; XX Tatian, subsections 2, 4 and 7; XXIII Notker, subsections 1 and 13; XXVIII Hildebrandtslied; XXIX Wessobrunner Gebet; XXX Muspilli; XXXII Otfrid, subsections 7 (Missus est Gabrihel angelus) and 21 (De die judicii); XXXVI Ludwigslid; XLI Ezzos Gesang, Strasbourg version only.

It is also important to work systematically through the prescribed texts using the glossary in Braune’s Althochdeutsches Lesebuch and the Old High German grammars.


Medieval German Culture to 1450: Texts, Contexts and Issues
The period of fifty years from 1170 to 1220 saw the development of a sophisticated courtly literature in German that is a landmark of world literature. There are poems of travel and warfare such as the Alexander romances (Strasburger Alexander), the Eneide of Heinrich von Veldeke which combines the journeying and battles that led to the foundation of Rome with a love romance, Herzog Ernst’s adventures in the Orient combined with a story of intrigue and civil war at the German imperial court (Herzog Ernst), and the story of Charlemagne and Roland’s battles against the Saracen in Spain, recast under the influence of the Crusades (Rolandslied). The new genre of the Arthurian romance, imported from France, exploits an idealized presentation of love and of knighthood to discuss broader questions such as partnership in marriage, the identity of the individual in society, as well as religious themes (Hartmann von Aue’s Erec and Iwein, Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival). The Tristan romances of Eilhart von Oberg and Gottfried von Straßburg exploit the ethical and aesthetic potential of an adulterous, and ultimately tragic, love relationship played out against the tensions of the royal court. There are important religious poems such as Hartmann von Aue’s Gregorius, which discusses questions of sin and redemption in the context of a story of incest between mother and son. With the Nibelungenlied, from about 1200, narrative traditions that had been passed on by oral performers for hundreds of years are amalgamated into a great epic poem dominated by the conflicts of forceful characters who bring
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about the destruction of the whole world in which they live. This is also the period of the finest German love poetry, the ‘Minnesang’, which ranges from the sophisticated songs of courtly love through more openly erotic genres such as the woman’s lament and the parting of lovers at dawn, to the burlesque peasant world of Neidhart. The poets studied include Der von Kürenberg, Friedrich von Hausen, Reinmar, Heinrich von Morungen, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Walther von der Vogelweide. Walther is also important for his political and didactic poetry. Most students begin by making a study of this central period. After that they may go on to consolidate this work by further reading from the ‘High Middle Ages’. Alternatively they may choose to explore the earlier, Old High German period, where there are individual poems of great interest and importance, such as the Hildebrandslied - the only surviving heroic lay; the Ludwigslied - about a victory over the Vikings; and the Evangelienbuch of Otfrid von Weißenburg - the Old High German biblical epic. Another approach is to expand into the German literature of the later Middle Ages. Here it is possible to study the writings of the mystics (in particular Mechtild von Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart and Heinrich Seuse), the popular and frequently scurrilous short-story genre (‘Märendichtung’), the later heroic epics (Kudrun, Ekenlied, Dietrichs Flucht), the demanding peasant epic by Heinrich Wittenwiler in which a brawl at a village wedding leads to a world war of cosmic dimensions (Der Ring), and the poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein.


Modern German Literature, from 1730 to the Present: Texts, Contexts and Issues

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of modern literature written in German. It runs from the mid-eighteenth century, which saw the emergence of classical drama, domestic realism, and hymnic poetry addressed to God and nature, down to the present day, in which writers are exploring the implications of German unification and the experiences of underprivileged groups (women, homosexuals, immigrants). During this period, modern German literature developed an enormous richness and diversity, influenced by (and sometimes influencing) a series of dramatic historical events: the French Revolution, Napoleon’s conquests, the post-1815 repression under Metternich, the 1848 revolutions, the founding of the German Empire in 1871, the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the First World War and the establishment of German and Austrian republics, the Third Reich, war and genocide, the division of Germany into capitalist and communist states, and the collapse of the Eastern bloc. It is important to see the literature of the period within this historical framework.

You may, in consultation with your tutor, have tutorials on individual authors or on several texts grouped by genre or theme; different tutors approach this period in diverse ways. Subjects most often studied include Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist; the Romantic ‘Märchen’; the nineteenth-century ‘Novelle’; Büchner, Heine, Fontane, Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Kafka, Brecht; Naturalist drama; Expressionist poetry and drama; documentary drama of the post-war period; the literature of the GDR; such post-1945 writers as Böll, Grass, Frisch, Christa Wolf, and Ingeborg Bachmann. With each author you study, you should try to read enough texts to gain an overview of the individual oeuvre, but also to place each writer in the wider literary and historical context. There is no canon or list of prescribed authors. Through sampling a succession of writers, you should become aware
of literature as a historical phenomenon in which there are both constants and changes. As the blank spaces on your map of the period get filled in, you should look out for essentials, be ready to make comparisons, and take an interest in larger developments - of form, style, ideas, choice of subjects etc. - beyond the individual work and individual writer. Reading should be going on throughout your course: you should be reading more works by writers on whom you have already worked, preparing writers on whom you intend to work (often with the help of lectures); and generally exploring the detail and layout of the period.


Die Grossbibliothek: a searchable DVD text database of most significant German texts from the early 16th century to the Weimar Republic, in reasonably good editions.

Modern Prescribed Authors
This paper complements the broader sweep of the period papers by providing the opportunity to study in depth the work of two of the most important and challenging German writers from the early modern period to the present. You will read widely within the work of your two authors, set them in their intellectual and historical context, and study closely one (or two) central works that are prescribed for special study, with a view to detailed textual analysis.

1) Luther (1483–1546): Luther has made a mark on modern Europe greater than that of any other German. Such pamphlets as An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation present a fascinating combination of Renaissance ideas, nationalist rhetoric and intense personal piety. Why it was he who acted as a catalyst for the Reformation is an interesting question which bears on history, theology and literature. Luther’s social teaching, as expounded in his many writings on marriage, his translation of the Bible, which made its indelible mark on the modern German language, his ideas about secular authority, his theory of translation and his development of such forms as the hymn in German are some of the aspects which might be explored in this option. The set text is Von der Freyheyt einis Christenmenschen, Luther’s defence of his central theological idea – justification by faith.

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2) Gryphiis (1616–64): Gryphiis is equally remarkable as a poet and as a dramatist. His poetry, which laments the passing of time and the fragility of life here on earth, is full of memorable images and magnificent language. The Reclam volume Deutsche Gedichte, ed. Adalbert Elschenbroich, is the set text. As a dramatist his plays cover a wide range of genres and themes. In Carolus Stuardus, for instance, a so-called martyr tragedy, we are shown Charles I of England as a Christ-figure murdered by his barbarous people on their distant northern island. In Leo Armenius we see the political tensions which result when a usurper takes the throne. Catharina von Georgien shows us how a weak woman can triumph in death over the lustful advances of an infidel aggressor and, in a radical departure from contemporary theories of tragedy, Cardenio und Celinde uses ordinary characters and ordinary language to explore questions of love, lust and marriage, heaven and hell from a Christian perspective. The comedies are different again. There is the glorious fun of Horribilicribrifax, in which the efforts of two boastful but cowardly soldiers to avoid each other are woven round a series of sub-plots on the theme of false and true love. Das verliebte Gespenst-Die geliebte Dornrose intersperses acts of a mini-opera, in which a lover has to pretend to die to gain the woman he loves, with acts of a dialect peasant play whose plot is a mirror-image of the opera. Herr Peter Squentz, based on an episode from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, is used to spoof the sixteenth-century Meistersinger drama and to force us to meditate on the world as a stage.

Introductory reading: Nicola Kaminski, Andreas Gryphiis (Stuttgart, 1988); See also the comprehensive introductions in Hugh Powell’s editions of Carolus Stuardus, Cardenio und Celinde, and Herr Peter Squentz.

3) Grimmelshausen (1622–76): Grimmelshausen is one of the greatest novelists in the German language, combining racy narrative and humour with religious profundity. His most important novel is Simplicissimus, the tale of a young man’s adventures in Germany during the Thirty Years’ War. It can be read simply as a good story, but also as an allegory on the life of the good Christian or on the theme of knowledge and ignorance. It has also been shown to have a complex structure based, among other things, on astrology. Grimmelshausen himself indicated that such other works as Courasche, the tale of a female counterpart to Simplicissimus, Springinsfeld and Das wunderbarlich Vogelnest, parts I and II, all of which pick up elements and characters from Simplicissimus and develop them further, formed part with Simplicissimus of a cycle of works which must be read as a whole, thus opening further fascinating narrative perspectives. Courasche, the basis for Brecht’s Mutter Courage, has been the subject
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recently of interesting feminist analysis. Springinsfeld sets its tale of an old soldier during the Thirty Years' War within a framework which explores in a sophisticated and surprisingly modern way the way in which reading and writing are two aspects of the same endeavour.

Introductory reading: Kenneth Negus, Grimmelshausen (New York, 1974); Dieter Breuer, Grimmelshausen-Handbuch (Munich, 1999); Günther Weydt, Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen (Stuttgart, 1971)

4) Goethe (1749–1832) as dramatist: Goethe’s dramatic work is extraordinarily varied. The text prescribed for special study, Part One of Faust, takes the archetypal German myth of the unsatisfied intellectual who makes a pact with the Devil and combines this with the new genre of domestic tragedy to produce a cosmic drama of good and evil. An early draft of Part One, discovered in 1887 and known as the Urfaust, should also be read. Besides Faust, Part One, you will be expected to study at least three other plays by Goethe, though the commentary passage will come only from Faust, Part One. The ambitious will want also to read Faust, Part Two, which portrays the rest of Faust’s life, his death, and his ascent into heaven, providing a symbolic survey of Western culture and a mysterious drama of redemption. The earlier plays include two historical dramas, Gotz von Berlichingen and Egmont. Gotz, set in the age of Luther, marks the explosive eruption of Shakespeare into German drama; the more restrained Egmont celebrates resistance to tyranny while querying the political role of the charismatic leader. Clavigo centres on one of Goethe’s lasting concerns, the complex psychology of the indecisive hero.

Goethe’s plays in classical form include Iphigenie auf Tauris, a Greek drama adapted to explore women’s relation to moral and political power, and the tragedy of an artist, Torquato Tasso, which examines, with lyrical intensity and novelistic subtlety, the relationships among a small group of characters surrounding the awkward, disturbed, and fascinating genius Tasso. A number of less well-known plays (Die Aufgeregten, Der Burgergeneral, and above all the enigmatic tragedy Die natürliche Tochter) articulate Goethe’s largely hostile response to the French Revolution.


5) Schiller (1759–1805): Schiller is unsurpassed as a political dramatist. His explosive early play Die Rauber sets youthful rebellion against a familial, social, and ultimately cosmic background, while Kabale und Liebe treats a cross-class love-affair within the petty tyranny of a German court (clearly based on Schiller’s experience of absolutist Württemberg). Don Carlos, a massive play of political intrigue in which principle is pitted against friendship, marks the end of Schiller’s first dramatic period. After a ten-year interval he returned to the stage with the historical trilogy Wallenstein, set in the Thirty Years’ War and centring on the charismatic but inwardly undecided general who, by planning treachery, imposes a conflict of loyalties on his closest devotees. This trilogy is the text prescribed for special study. Schiller followed it with a series of historical tragedies that increasingly turn on guilt and redemption (Maria Stuart, Die Jungfrau von Orleans, and Die Braut von Messina) and explore the tension between politics and myth-making, which is most apparent in Wilhelm Tell.

Besides reading all the plays, you should also read Schiller’s principal essays on tragedy (collected in the Reclam volume no. 2731 as Schiller, Vom Pathetischen und Erhabenen). Start with ’Über das Erhabene’, the most essential, and work back. You should also read at least the last section of Schiller’s great work of literary criticism, Uber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, for its discussion of two character-types, the realist and the
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idealist, who also feature in his dramas.


6) Hölderlin (1770–1843): Hölderlin is generally regarded as one of the most important poets of the German language. His poetry is a poetry of contradictions. Visions of wholeness stand side by side with moments of disappointment, and celebrations of ideal fulfilment give way to painful isolation. Hölderlin is often thought of as a classical poet, and indeed, the most complete manifestation of the ideal was for him to be found in ancient Greece. Figures from Christianity, classical mythology, and his local Swabian landscape are blended together to make a uniquely compelling mythical and personal poetry. But he was also committed to his own time, which he saw as a time of darkness, and, like many of his contemporaries, he was inspired by hopes for change embodied in the French Revolution. Famously, he spent the last 36 years diagnosed as incurably insane in a tower-dwelling in Tübingen, where he continued to write poetry which he signed with strange names. You will be expected to know his poetry after 1797, the ‘Diotima’ poems, written with his beloved Susette Gontard in mind, to the odes, great elegies and hymns. The set text is Gedichte, ed. Gerhard Kurz and Wolfgang Braungart, Reihe Reclam (ISBN 3 15 056267 8). In this edition, you must read the poetry written from 1798 to 1806. This set reading could usefully be supplemented with the most recent edition of Michael Hamburger’s dual-language anthology listed below. From there, you may follow your interests in one of the bigger Hölderlin editions. You should also read the epistolary novel Hyperion (available in Reclam, 559) the story of a young Greek and his pursuit of the ideal, and Empedokles, ed. by Maurice Benn (Oxford, 1968), a tragedy which Hölderlin saw through three versions, but did not finish.


7)  Kleist (1777–1811): Kleist belongs by definition, to the Romantic generation, his work representing a bold challenge to that of Weimar Classicism despite his veneration for Goethe. His world is one of violent extremes and destabilization, of paradoxes and ambiguities, and it reflects something of the turmoil and confusion caused by the aftermath of the French Revolution and its impact on Germany. Kleist himself was a compulsive traveller and journeyed through post-revolutionary France on many occasions, drawn especially by the stimulus of Paris, which was at the time a cultural mecca, and by his fascination with the
ambigious figure of Napoleon (he tried twice to join Bonaparte’s army of invasion of England!). Another well-documented strand in Kleist’s work is his inheritance of Kantian ideas, especially in the field of epistemology: Kleist drew from Kantian writings a firm conviction in the impossibility of interpreting accurately the phenomena we perceive in the external world through sense impressions. This explains the prevalence in his works of the themes of illusion and deception. Typically, Kleistian characters, whose psychological make-ups are marked by volatility and emotional instability, are brought face to face with crisis situations (e.g. earthquakes, rape, murder, war) which force out often destructive qualities which have been lying hidden beneath the surface (e.g. Michael Kohlhaas, Penthesilea). For all that, however, like the very greatest writers, Kleist’s works encompass the extremes of tragedy and comedy; Der zerbrochne Krug is one of the greatest comedies in the German language, if not the greatest, and Amphitryon, is a true tragicomedy in which the two elements complement one another convincingly. Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, the set text, depicts the conflict between duty to the state and individual will, and places an ambiguous, anti-heroic figure at the centre of the action. Whereas in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century it was Kleist’s dramas which were most acclaimed, nowadays critical attention has been principally focussed on the prose tales, which have been admired by many twentieth-century writers, including Kafka and Thomas Mann. Particularly remarkable features are his unique and distinctive style and syntax - lean, compressed and tightly structured - and the subtle ironic stance of his narration. You should endeavour to read a wide selection of the Erzahlungen (e.g. Michael Kohlhaas, Das Erdbeben in Chili, Der Zweikampf, Die Verlobung in St. Domingo) but do not neglect the dramas; of these, in addition to the prescribed text, you should read Die Familie Schroffenstein, Der zerbrochne Krug, Penthesilea and Amphityon.


8) Hoffmann (1776–1822): E.T.A. Hoffmann is one of the greatest German Romantics, but his fiction also contains a healthy dose of realism which puts his Romantic aspirations in an ironic perspective without dismissing them. The short works prescribed for special study are Der goldne Topf, described in its subtitle as ‘a modern fairy-tale’, and the horror-story Der Sandmann: each treats the plight of the artist in a philistine society, from opposite viewpoints. Ever since Freud wrote an interpretation of Der Sandmann, Hoffmann’s stories have provided a testing-ground for psychoanalytic approaches to literature. Hoffmann wrote many other humorous and poetic fairy-tales (Meister Floh, Klein Zaches genannt Zinnober, and above all Prinzessin Brambilla); relatively realist ‘Novellen’ turning on psychological enigmas (e.g. Rat Krespel, Das Fraulein von Scuderi) or the situation of the artist (e.g. Die Jesuitenkirche in G---, Des Vetters Eckfenster); and two novels. Of these, Die Elixiere des Teufels is a complicated thriller centring on a runaway monk who is plagued by a terrifying double and other supernatural visitants, while the unfinished Lebensansichten des Katers Murr is a masterpiece of Romantic irony, juxtaposing the comical autobiography of a conceited and philistine cat who has learnt to write with the fragmentary and tragic biography of the genuine artist Kreisler (Hoffmann’s fictional alter ego).

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Principle. Critique and Creativity (Rochester, NY & Woodbridge, 2006)

9) Heine (1797–1856): Heine stands out in German literature as a great humorous and ironic poet, a self-conscious Jew, a journalist of genius, and a radical political writer (though his politics are not easy to pin down). His vast body of poetry extends from the ironical late-Romantic love-poetry of the early Buch der Lieder via the biting political satire of his middle years to the bitterly humorous, searching, and mythopoetic poems written during the fatal illness that brought him back to a problematic belief in God. The texts prescribed for special study are the two verse-narratives of the 1840s, Atta Troll: Ein Sommernachtstraum and Deutschland: Ein Wintermarchen. In the eponymous figure of the dancing bear who escapes from captivity gives rise to political satire but also enables the narrator to explore an imaginative world of myth, while in the latter, an actual journey that Heine made through Germany becomes the occasion for a satirical review of German society and politics and reflections on the poet’s share in revolution. The most recent anthology is Heine, Poems, with an introduction by Ritchie Robertson (Bristol Classical Press, 1993). There is a useful annotated edition of Atta Troll and Deutschland by Barker Fairley (Oxford, 1966). Heine’s extensive prose works include travel-sketches, popular accounts of German philosophy and Romantic literature, reports on life in Paris, memoirs, and much else, all highly readable and with a dense poetic texture. You might start with Die Harzreise and Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand, which begin the series of Reisebilder that first made Heine famous in the 1820s.


10) Rilke (1875–1926): Rilke’s poetic career was spent in an attempt to find the unity which he felt modern humankind had lost; a unity that could embrace life and death, the visible and the invisible. His poetry laments the curse of consciousness, the banality and fragmentation of modern man who is shamed by the greater integrity of plants, animals and works of art. Yet paradoxically, Rilke also recognizes that the material world can be redeemed only by the uniquely human act of transforming the world into lasting artistic form. The supreme formal skill of his work can be seen as an attempt to combat forces of disintegration through art. The mixture of the metaphysical and the material is a hallmark of his work from the subjective mood and intangible musicality of Das Stunden-Buch (1905) to the final Sonette an Orpheus (1922). Rilke is an intensely visual poet who was inspired by a series of encounters with visual artists: the “Jugendstil” artists of a colony in Worpswede, his time spent working as a secretary to the sculptor Rodin, and a return to the most modern impulses in painting, most important of which was Cézanne. The prescribed text, which you should aim to know very well, is Neue Gedichte (the first part). This collection contains many of Rilke’s most famous individual poems. They can be read with his monograph on Rodin in mind and are characterized by plasticity and supreme craftsmanship. Themes of transience and the redeeming possibilities of art are also present. These are taken up once again in the Duineser Elegien, a cycle of ten poems written in two bursts of creativity over a decade apart. They form Rilke’s supreme lament for the disjunction of human life, but are also an attempt to endorse human experience in the face of the transcendental beyond, which is represented by terrible and supremely beautiful angels. Apart from these works you would be expected to read a number of uncollected poems and short prose works. There is also Rilke’s novel, Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge, a
visionary and pathological account of the disintegration of an artist figure who has come to Paris, and who is haunted by the squalor of the modern city and by disturbing memories of childhood. This text, based on Rilke’s own experiences, is a key document of literary Modernism and charts the crisis of identity and language experienced by many artists in the first decade of the twentieth century.


11) Thomas Mann (1875–1956): Thomas Mann is among the central figures of modern German literature. His reputation as a heavyweight philosophical novelist (based partly on the faulty English translations of his works) has sometimes hindered readers from appreciating the irony and humour, the detailed realism, and the political implications of his fiction, and from realizing that he treats ideas both seriously and playfully.

The text prescribed for special study is Die Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull. In addition, you are expected to read a wide range of Mann’s short fiction (e.g. Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Gladius Dei, Beim Propheten, Tristan, Tonio Kroger, Der Tod in Venedig, Der Weg zum Friedhof, and the inter-war stories Unordnung und frühes Leid and Mario und der Zauberer) and, most importantly, at least two of the major novels. Buddenbrooks, Der Zauberberg, and Doktor Faustus are obvious choices, the last especially because it reworks an intensely German myth as a means of exploring the complex relations between art, the intellect, and the inhumanity of politics. Among Mann’s medium-length novels, Lotte in Weimar stands out, the latter for its portrayal of Goethe as the exasperating yet irresistible centre of Weimar life. With Mann’s political books and essays, including the problematic Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen of 1918, one can follow a responsible but uncommitted writer adjusting to the Weimar Republic, opposing Nazism, and reflecting on the Germans’ character and history.


12) Kafka (1883–1924): Kafka’s fiction, though indebted in many ways to such nineteenth-century writers as Kleist and Dostoevsky, has long been recognized as central to Modernism and is still a vital presence in contemporary literature. Besides the three novels, none of which Kafka considered complete (Der Verschollene, Der Proces, Das Schloß), there are a number of Novellen published in his lifetime (Das Urteil, Die Verwandlung, In der Strafkolonie), collections of short fiction (Ein Landarzt and Ein Hungerkünstler), and a mass of teasingly enigmatic, often humorous short stories, parables and aphorisms which have been extracted from his notebooks. Anyone studying Kafka should be familiar with the whole of his Samtliche Erzählungen (available as Fischer paperback, no. 1078) or at least with Ein Landarzt und andere Drucke zu Lebzeiten (Fischer paperback no. 12441). The text prescribed for special study is Der Proceß, in the version edited by Malcolm Pasley: this text is available as a Fischer paperback (either no. 11413 or no. 12443: both cost the same, but are differently paginated; the latter also contains a four-page account of Kafka’s life in tabular form). In addition, you should read the other two novels and at least sample Kafka’s diaries and letters.

Introductory reading: Heinz Politzer, Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox (Ithaca, NY, 1962); Ritchie Robertson, Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature (Oxford, 1985);

13) Brecht (1898–1956): Brecht is one of the major European dramatists of the twentieth century. You might well have some awareness of, even familiarity with, his work from school or the theatre. Reading him after the fall of the Eastern bloc raises new questions about political literature and the uneasy relationship of both post-war German states to this most famous writer and his work. In the early years critical opinion was often characterized by crude political polarisations. However, Brecht has also attracted attention from a number of most important writers, philosophers and critics, and more recently there have been interesting attempts at revision from, for example, poststructuralist and feminist perspectives. Brecht was a prolific author in a variety of genres, and slippery in all of them. Tracing the development of his writing takes you from his anarchic Expressionist beginnings via his Marxist conversion and the work of his antifascist exile years to the late works penned in the newly founded German Democratic Republic. In your study of his work you should certainly cover a variety of plays and have a good knowledge of at least some of his poetry; beyond that you are free to place the emphasis on poetry, prose or theory, as you wish. The play about the achievements and limitations of the modern scientific revolution, Leben des Galilei (in the final 1955 version), is the text prescribed for special study (Suhrkamp BasisBibliothek, ISBN 3 518 18801 0). In addition you should read a cross-section, chronologically, of his dramatic works, from the bleakly lyrical early text Baal through to the famous later plays written in exile: Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder, Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, Der kaukasische Kreidekreis. Brecht is perhaps best known for his radical experimentation with theatrical convention. You should certainly look at his ‘Lehrstücke’ (e.g. Die Masnahme) and familiarize yourself with the essays in which he sets out and develops his commentary on literary and theatrical practice. Brecht is also one of the most significant German poets of the twentieth century. You might like to start with the provocative early collection of religious parodies, celebrations of material existence and ballads of social deprivation: Bert Brechts Hauspostille, before moving to the antifascist exile collection Svendborger Gedichte and the more spare and lyrical poetry of the late years, the Buckower Elegien. One way into his large and varied output of poems is the volume Ausgewählte Gedichte ed. Siegfried Unseld and Walter Jens (Frankfurt, 1964).


14) Grass (b. 1927): Grass has written a great deal and is still writing. He is one of the most controversial and compelling of contemporary storytellers. The text prescribed for special study is Die Blechtrommel (1959), the first half of which has since been made into a famous film by Volker Schlöndorff. This is an account of the years of the Third Reich and after, in which the post-war German economic miracle is portrayed as a mixture of the grotesque, the humorous, the fantastic, the blasphemous and the provocatively obscene. It stands in the tradition of the picaresque novel, and its archly self-conscious narrator Oskar Matzerath is a hunch-back dwarf who, considered insane and accused of murder, drums up his tale from his hospital bed. You should make sure you have looked at Katz und Maus and perhaps Hundejahre, which together with Blechtrommel became known as the Danzig Trilogy. Beyond that you could look at some of the shorter texts e.g. Ortlich betaubt, Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke, Kopfgeburten, Das Treffen in Telgte etc. Constants in all these texts are complex
narrative style, play with time levels, and an interrogation of memory and the possibilities of art. A special focus of interest is Der Butt which offers an alternative history of the world focussing on sex and cookery, told by a talking flounder derived from fairy-tale. It is a hilarious and yet shocking text which at once probes gender politics and narratives of history. While Die Rattin continues this interest, mixing fairy-tale and the grim reality of a post-holocaust world, Unkenrufe and Ein weites Feld focus on the problems of re-unification and a specifically German history. Although Grass could be linked with Magic Realism (there is a famous correspondence with Salman Rushdie), his work is also marked by a constant and very specific political commitment. He is known as a controversial essayist and outspoken commentator (and one-time campaigner for the SPD) but has also produced a number of dramas, poetry (from early surrealist texts to more explicitly political pieces), and a large body of etchings and drawings, some of which feature on the covers of his works but which have recently gained attention in their own right.


15) Christa Wolf (1929– ): Christa Wolf became known as one of the most distinguished writers of the former German Democratic Republic. Recently, she has been championed in the West by a body of feminist criticism, but alongside her commitment to record an explicitly feminine experience of contemporary reality runs a larger humanist and socialist vision. Her works also document a progressive disillusionment with the proclaimed socialist utopia. Metaphors of illness become dominant to chart the marginalisation and stultification of the individual in a contemporary socialist society. Early texts like the famous story of ‘star-crossed lovers’ and the Berlin Wall, Der geteilte Himmel, can be set against the background of the young socialist state, Cold-War politics and the prescriptions of socialist realism. The text prescribed for special study, Nachdenken uber Christa T., is a far more oblique and challenging text about the assertion and disintegration of personal identity. Later texts turn away from specifically socialist themes to embrace the threat of ecological destruction, dark visions of nuclear menace and intense concern with gender politics as well as an obsessive review of Wolf’s own possibilities as a writer, and those of literature itself. You will be expected to read widely among her later texts including the controversial Kindheitsmuster which attempts to come to terms with the fascist past: Kein Ort. Nirgends which records a fictional meeting of the Romantic writers Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode: Storfall, written in the wake of the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl, and the key text Kassandra (along with the Frankfurt lectures Voraussetzungen einer Erzahlung of which it was originally the final one). Kassandra offers a revision of the myth of the fall of Troy from the perspective of the prophetess Kassandra herself and the women who have been written out of successive versions of history, whilst also providing a bleak insight into the ideological stalemate of the 1980s. Almost all of Wolf’s work draws more or less explicitly on autobiographical sources, and challenges conventional genre categories (she has also published a large body of essays and correspondence). Reading her work after the fall of the Berlin Wall raises new and difficult questions about the role of the writer in the GDR, censorship, and the nature of morality and political commitment. Wolf’s 1990 text Was bleibt, which documents her treatment at the hands of the secret police, initiated a large-scale literary debate in the newly united Germany about political engagement and aesthetics. This was taken up again in 1991 after it was revealed that Wolf herself was, for a short time, involved with the ‘Staatssicherheitsdienst’.

Introductory reading: Angela Drescher (ed.), Dokumentation zu Christa Wolf:
W. G. Sebald (1944–2001): Over the past two decades, W.G. Sebald has emerged as one of the most distinctive and important voices in contemporary German literature. His academic career as professor of German at the University of East Anglia is reflected in his literary works, which are underpinned by a complex network of intertextual references to authors as diverse as Adalbert Stifter, Robert Walser, Franz Kafka, Joseph Roth and Thomas Bernhard. Yet while Sebald’s writings self-consciously inscribe themselves into a wider literary tradition, they also stand out through their use of innovative literary techniques, in particular through their use of photography and other illustrations, which lends his texts a particular sense of immediacy. Indeed, Sebald’s prose narratives skilfully blur the distinction between fiction and documentary, a strategy which gains particular relevance for Sebald’s central concern, question of memory, testimony and remembrance. His narrators are restless travellers whose journeys across Europe and beyond are driven by the goal of recovering stories and events from the margins of history and collective consciousness. This theme is most prominent in the last novel, Austerlitz, the text prescribed for special study, which deals with the traumatic effects of genocide, exile and persecution. A similar sense of dislocation informs his other prose texts, Schwindel, Gefühle, Die Ausgewanderten and Die Ringe des Saturn, which chart the experiences of people who are in one way or another alienated from their lives and surroundings. Yet while Sebald’s texts often betray a deeply-rooted sense of melancholy, they also contain many moving reflections on nature, art, history and literature – themes which are also taken up in his theoretical essays. Anyone studying Sebald as special author should read the volumes Die Beschreibung des Unglucks,
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Unheimliche Heimat and Logis in einem Landhaus, which contain his essays on literature and art, as well as his historical study Luftkrieg und Literatur. Of further interest are the posthumously published text Campo Santo and the volume Unerzählt, which emerged from Sebald’s collaboration with the painter Jan Peter Tripp.


17) Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945–82): The set film is Katzelmacher (1969). There are a number of ways of establishing a wider context for this film. One is to see how it arises from Fassbinder’s theatre of the late 1960s. He wrote theatre versions of Katzelmacher (1968), Der amerikanische Soldat (1968) and Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant (1971) before he made films with the same material in 1969, 1970 and 1972 respectively. Another way to contextualize Katzelmacher is to compare the treatment of similar material in the film Angst essen Seele auf (1974), which Fassbinder made under the influence of the melodramatic techniques of the Detlev Sierck (Douglas Sirk once in Hollywood in 1937) and in particular the film All that heaven allows (1956). Der Handler der vier Jahreszeiten (1972) similarly works with Sirk as a model. The film style of Katzelmacher can also be compared with the techniques prompting both identification and analytic distance in the later films. Die Ehe der Maria Braun (1979) is normally analysed as part of the ‘BRD trilogy’, Lola (1981) and Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss (1982), but is equally interesting to analyse it alongside the very different, and more personal film In einem Jahr mit dreizehn Monden (1978) that Fassbinder made alongside Maria Braun and shot and edited himself. Lola can also be usefully compared with Sternberg’s Der blaue Engel, starring Marlene Dietrich, of which it is a modernisation, and Veronika Voss watched alongside the Ufa features made in the 1930s, such as Hotel Sacher (1938), starring Sibylle Schmitz, the figure on whom the character of Voss is modelled. Finally, Fassbinder was a re-reader of literary texts other than his own as well as a re-maker of films, as can be seen in his film versions of Fontane Effi Briest (1974) and Berlin Alexanderplatz.


18) Elfriede Jelinek (1946- ): Elfriede Jelinek is a contemporary Austrian author who won the Nobel prize in 2004. She is a controversial writer: a feminist, one-time Marxist, both reviled and celebrated in her home country, who sometimes cultivates shock as part of her political aesthetic. She has a substantial oeuvre in all genres: from her early poetry Lisas Schatten (1967) to her experiments with satirical prose, like wir sind lockvogel baby! (1970) or Michael: Ein Jugendbuch für die Infantilgesellschaft (1972), books which satirize popular culture and its duplicitous presentation of ‘the good life’. She became well known with her novels Die Liebhaberinnen (1975) (a short satirical text...
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and a good way into her work), Die Ausgesperrten (1980) and the autobiographically based Die Klavierspielerin (1983), which was made into an acclaimed film by Michael Haneke in 2001. Die Klavierspielerin is the text prescribed for special study. These novels each present a pitiless world where a regime of violence and submission keeps human beings, especially women, in check. She demonstrates how the entertainment industry’s clichés seep into people’s consciousness and paralyse opposition to class injustices and gender oppression. Her disturbing satire of pornography, Lust (1989), offers a hard-hitting presentation of sexual violence against women as the template for our culture. This line is maintained, seemingly in a lighter tone, in Gier: Ein Unterhaltungsroman (2000), a study in the cold-blooded practice of male power. In her drama she has also developed from fairly traditional models (like Was geschah nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hatte which picks up the story of Ibsen’s A Doll’s House where Ibsen leaves off), to much more radical pieces that do without roles in a traditional sense but present voices that allow various levels of the psyche and history to be heard simultaneously, e.g. Totenauberg, Raststatte, Wolken. Heim, Ein Sportstuck, In den Alpen, Das Werk. Her most recent published works for drama, the so-called ‘princess dramas’ (Der Tod und das Madchen I–V, 2003 and Bambiland; Babel, 2005), are variations on one of the writer’s basic themes, the inability of women fully to come to life in a world where they are painted over with stereotypical images. Jelinek has long been an outspoken critic of Austria: depicting it as a realm of death in her massive phantasmagorical novel, Die Kinder der Toten (1995). In this her writing builds on a lengthy Austrian tradition of linguistically sophisticated social criticism, with precursors such as Johann Nepomuk Nestroy, Karl Kraus, Ödön von Horváth, Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard, and the Wiener Group.


Translation from Modern German: Advanced Level
This course is designed to develop the skills needed to translate from German into English. Passages for translation will be taken from texts written in the modern or contemporary period. All language tutorials will take account of the competencies, experience, and particular needs of the individual student, and their content will vary accordingly.

Translation from Pre-Modern German: Advanced Level
This course is designed to develop the skills needed to translate from pre-modern German into English. Passages for translation will be from the period 1150–1730. All language tutorials will take account of the competencies, experience, and particular needs of the individual student, and their content will vary accordingly.

Translation into German and Essay in German: Advanced Level
This course develops the skills needed to translate material into German, and to write essays in the language. Passages for translation into German will be from text written after 1900, in narrative, reflective, or journalistic registers. Essays will be on a range of topics, and will be written in an accessible Feuilleton style aimed at a well-informed general reader. This part of the course is designed to test and develop linguistic proficiency, and specialist knowledge is not required.
All language tutorials will take account of the competencies, experience, and particular needs of the individual student, and their content will vary accordingly.