

GERM 480: Perspectives on German Swiss Film in the context of German film history (spring 03)

T 5-8:45 in LAB-212

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Office Hours: T 12:30-1:45 & TH 12:30-1:45 and by appointment.

Despite its comparative inferiority in economical power, the Swiss film production of the German speaking part of Switzerland (64 percent of the country, about 4 million inhabitants) has been throughout its history often complementary to the film production of its big neighbor Germany (85 million inhabitants). Sharing the same language it is thus part of the German film history being at the same time different. The similarities and the differences are, among other topics, subject of the course.

There will be a Swiss (or Swiss subject related) movie shown in every session throughout the semester (including two double features!). The screenings will be preceded by an introduction based on a written summary in English and followed by a discussion. With the exception of English versions, the movies are German or Swiss German spoken with English subtitles.

Students are expected to be present at all class sessions. Oral participation accounts for one third of the final grade. It is in the interest of every participant to contribute regularly to a vivid class discussion in every session. Film viewing in a film class is no passive lean back. You should take notes during the screenings since you have to write a journal, consisting of a 1-page, type written, cohesive, brief essay on every movie or topic. The journals account for 25 percent of the final grade.

Swiss cinema is no different from any cinema in the world: it treats the same subjects and themes as everywhere - love, hate, tolerance, envy - destiny, war and peace. For the latter, Swiss film production played a very distinct role at the end of WW II, celebrating its biggest international success with the film "The Last Chance" at a time when nations worldwide were hoping for enduring peace. We'll see that special "war movie" as the opening film of the course.

You might never have heard of German Swiss film production. So, I might surprise you with the presentation of a Golden Globe Award winning Swiss film written by a two-time Academy Award winning and one time Academy Award nominated Swiss Screenwriter. Furthermore you shall discover another Academy Award nominated Swiss film followed by an Academy Award winning film from Switzerland. And we shall see a Swiss documentary nominated only last year for an Academy Award.

In the second part of the course I'll present two German Swiss box office hits - one of them being one of the rare comedies in Swiss films. And we shall have a look at screen adaptations of Swiss literary works of which Sean Penn's recent "The Pledge", starring Jack Nicholson, is the latest example. Last but not least: as a filmmaker myself, being director and screenwriter, I don't want to miss including three of the films I participated in: "Klassentreffen" (fiction, as writer/director), "Der schwarze Tanner" (fiction, as writer) and "Fading Traces" (documentary, as writer/director). I shall share my experiences with you. I expect the Academy Award winning director Xavier Koller (1991, "Journey of Hope") as a visitor in our course. And I expect guests from the Swiss community in the LA area, which might share with us their experiences with the screened films (earlier and contemporary ones).

At the end of the course students will have won insights into a special segment of German film history, gained a knowledge of German Swiss film production, and shared experiences with contemporary filmmakers.

Requirements and Grading:

- Regular attendance and oral participation (30%)
- Journal (25%)
- Midterm (20%)
- Final (25%)

Final: Thursday, May 22 at 5-7 pm

Warning: Plagiarism will not be tolerated and has serious consequences. Do not copy without citation.

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| <u>Date</u> | <u>Film Shown / Class Activity</u> | <u>Assignments</u> |
|-------------|--|--|
| Jan. 28 | Introduction: Filmhistory / Early Swiss motion pictures (from the Swiss film archive – brand-new!) War - Golden Globe Winner Die letzte Chance (The Last Chance) 1945/46 | <u>Read:</u> Tassilo Schneider: Reading Against the Grain: German Cinema and Film Historiography (Perspectives on German Cinema 1996, Library) |
| Feb. 4 | Filmmaking I. Presenting my own feature movie: Pre-War - Klassentreffen (Class Reunion) 1988 | |
| Feb. 11 | Filmhistory: War - Der 10. Mai (May 10 th) 1957 | <u>Research:</u> What kinds of movies were made in Germany from the end of WW II–1965? (Library, Internet etc.) |
| Feb. 18 | War - Academy Award nominee Das Boot ist voll (The Boat is full) 1981 | |
| Feb. 25 | Filmmaking II: Presenting my job as screenwriter War - Der schwarze Tanner (Black Tanner) 1985 | <u>Hand in:</u> 2-page essay on film and history – its impact on society: compare eventually with newer German or US- movies on WW II and Vietnam. |
| March 4 | Academy Award winning Reise der Hoffnung (Journey of Hope) 1990 In the presence of Academy Award winning Director Xavier Koller , Pacific Palisades, CA. | |
| March 11 | Midterm | <u>Hand in:</u> Journals |
| March 18 | Film history: Box Office Hit Wachtmeister Studer (Sergeant Studer) 1939 | |
| March 25 | Film history: Box office hit: Bäckerei Zürrer (Zürrer's Bakery) 1957 | |
| April 1 | Film history: Box office hit Die Schweizermacher (The Swiss Makers) 1980 | <u>Research:</u> What Box office hits were made in Germany before 1970? (Any history of narrative film, Library, Internet etc.) |
| April 8 | Film history: Box office hit: Höhenfeuer (On Fire) 1984 | |
| April 15 | Spring Recess | |
| April 22 | Swiss Literature in film I (double feature) Der Besuch der alten Dame I: The Visit 1964 Der Besuch der alten Dame II: Hyènes 1990 | <u>Hand in:</u> 2-page assessment of what makes a box office hit (historical, political, cultural, social factors) |
| April 29 | Swiss Literature in film II (double feature) Das Versprechen I: The Pledge 2000 Das Versprechen II: It happened in full daylight 1958 | <u>Read:</u> Eric Rentschler: Introduction: Theoretical and historical considerations. (from: German film and literature 1986, Library) |
| May 6 | Academy Award nominee documentary War photographer 2002 | |
| May 13 | Presenting my documentary: Fading Traces 1998 Concluding Discussion | <u>Hand in:</u> Journals |
| May 20 | Final | |