To claim that countries develop their cultural and national identities through their rejection of those it deems foreign is to state the obvious. All nations emerge out of, and in conjunction with, a set of beliefs pertaining to its subjects that defines them in part as different from those beyond its borders. To the American imagination, this seems to be particularly the case with German-speaking Europe, largely owing to the continued association in popular culture of Germany with its National Socialist past, and that means with Hitler and the Jews. On the one hand, this is unfair because Germany was, unfortunately, not unique in this regard, as the histories of France, Italy, Austria, and Great Britain demonstrate. On the other hand, throughout the centuries prior to the rise of Nazism, Germany already had a history of rejecting those it deemed foreign—not only Jews, but also a host of “Others,” such as, in addition to those of foreign national provenance, Gypsies, homosexuals, and those considered the sexually deviant, and the standard concept of who constituted a German also evinced a degree of misogyny not unusual for Europe prior to the feminist movement.

The subject of this course will be the subtleties and complexity of this process of rejection as an important part of the development of Germany’s national cultural identity. We will investigate diverse kinds of works—essay, short story, novella, poetry, drama, music drama, and film—by major figures in the cultural history of German-speaking Europe—Heinrich Heine, Georg Büchner, Annette-Droste-Hülshoff, Karl Marx, Richard Wagner, Otto Weininger, Richard Strauss, Stefan George, Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, Paul Celan, Leni Riefensthal, Nelly Sachs, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Emine Sevgi Özdamar.

There are three (3) writing assignments, the first two ca. 5-8 pages in length each, and the final paper ca. 10-12pp. Paper I should concern a summary of, and a response to, a given aesthetic work (on the syllabus); Paper II should assess any one (or at most, two) methods of interpretation (also discussed in class). If they wish, after their papers have been returned, students may revise and resubmit either Paper I or Paper II within one week of its return, after which the grade for the revised version will replace that of its original. In the final weeks of the course, preceding exam week, students will submit a bibliography and outline for, and give a short presentation in which they describe, an independent research project, the subject of which will have been agreed upon by the student and the instructor no later than three weeks beforehand. These projects will form the basis of the final paper, which will be due at the time scheduled for the final exam (in place of the exam).

Your presence and participation in discussions are an important part of the dynamic of the class. A student may have up to two (2) unexcused absences; every absence thereafter (without the proper documentation from a doctor or senior academic advisor) will lower the final grade by 1/3 (e.g., for three unexcused absences, a grade of “A-“ would be lowered to “B+,” for four
unexcused absences “A-“ would be lowered to “B,” etc.). Nonetheless, credit is not given for attendance alone, but solely for participation.

All texts will be read in English translation. No knowledge of German is required. No credit given in Germanic Studies.

Grades will be computed as follows:

- Participation = 40%
- Writing Assignment I = 15%
- Writing Assignment II = 15%
- Final Paper = 30%

Recently, the faculty have been advised to include the following on a course syllabus, which I quote here verbatim (with the exception of the passage regarding the specific form of documentation required). Please do not be offended by this text; it is simply a matter of policy:

Plagiarism constitutes using others’ ideas, words or images without properly giving credit to those sources. If you turn in any work with your name affixed to it, I assume that work is your own and that all sources are indicated and documented in the text (with quotations and/or citations, either in the form of foot- or endnotes, or of parenthetical references to a List of Works Cited).

I will respond to acts of academic misconduct according to university policy concerning plagiarism; sanctions for plagiarism can include a grade of F for the assignment in question and/or for the course and must include a report to the Dean of Students Office.

For further information, please refer to the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct.