



**New Approaches to Teaching a Capstone or Final
Survey Course in German Studies at a North
American University: With an Emphasis on Medieval
Online Sources as Tools for the Modern Classroom**

Albrecht Classen, Tucson, Arizona

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This study introduces a teaching concept for the upper level of an undergraduate program in German Studies at university level through which a successful balance between the traditional demands of the 'canon' and the emerging diversity of available readings can be achieved. Focusing on cities as literary hubs makes it possible to integrate a wide range of literary works that we would want our majors to have been exposed to before graduation, while also allowing them to gain a solid understanding of regional and historical differences. This concept also relies on digital resources and thus combines print material and online material, especially with respect to medieval literature, allowing for a productive interaction between aspects of the Digital Humanities and German Studies.

1. The Capstone Experience

Most departments of German Studies in the United States, and in some cases elsewhere, require some kind of final project for graduating seniors (Majors), or a capstone course in which a cumulative overview of the history of German literature, culture, maybe also of the language and history itself, is to be acquired. This then also provides us with an effective assessment tool to identify whether our majors have a solid understanding of many significant literary texts from the Middle Ages to today and can integrate that knowledge into a broader understanding of cultural conditions in the various German-speaking countries. At this skill level, we can and indeed ought to expect our students to be capable of handling some research tasks on their own in the foreign language and to contribute independently to the entire class. For some students, this will be the terminal class in their B.A. program, for others it might be the crucial steppingstone into an M.A. program. Traditionally, Departments of German worked toward that goal by offering two or three literature courses to ensure that students would by the end of their program have been exposed to all major literary and cultural periods and many of the major writers and poets. This is rarely the case today, but a solid new alternative does not seem to have arisen, something the project to be presented here will try to address constructively.

Inspired by advances in the Digital Humanities (Börner et al. 2018; Jannidis et al. 2020), this study reflects on methods, strategies, and online materials that make it possible to teach a broad final survey course on the history of German literature by means of a variety of (auxiliary) digital materials that facilitate a considerable deepening of study topics, creating a learning environment where the entire class contributes to the learning experience (almost like a flipped classroom), and where traditional and innovative study methodologies combine for the most effective learning outcome. While I will first outline a general concept relevant for all periods from the Middle Ages to the present day, centrally I will elaborate on two examples of how to integrate Middle High German literature, especially *minnesang*, at undergraduate level. The vast new corpus of digitized manuscripts makes access to primary materials more possible than probably ever before and opens many doors toward new teaching styles and reading materials. This promises to provide an innovative approach to the study of pre-modern literature and to reposition it as deeply relevant and attractive for undergraduates in German Studies once again.

However, the approach to be discussed here does not intend to privilege any literary period. Instead, the selection of a city will be the foundation for the choice of the reading material, which thus also takes us back to the Middle Ages as a meaningful and relevant period to the study of German literature today. For the present purpose, reference to the concept of ‘Digital Humanities’ does not necessarily imply that the class focuses only on online material, or that students engage with each other exclusively in a chatroom, for instance. Instead, the advantages of having access to the World Wide Web in a literature and culture course makes possible a much more inclusive approach to topics, works, writers and material conditions both for students and instructor, which provides extensive freedom in the selection of readings and research agendas. The approach adopted by the Digital Humanities does not simply consist of resorting to materials electronically available; instead, the latest push in this field aims at ‘texturing the digital humanities’ (defined by Altschuler & Weimer 2020: 74 as an “unproblematic translatability of information between the senses”), an approach I want to modify and instrumentalize here for a fairly simple but highly effective approach integrating texts, images, music, architecture, foodstuffs, and other cultural aspects for the capstone experience.

2. The Issue with the Canon

With the emergence of a new administrative and conceptual structure of German Studies, a traditional approach has often been replaced by a more topic-oriented course structure. This has the advantage of providing much more flexibility in offering innovative subject matter, freeing us from the usual canon-specific perspectives and opening up the thematic range to many heretofore ignored or neglected voices. There are, however, also disadvantages because as a result many of the central figures in the history of German literature might simply be left out; our Majors would possibly graduate with a B.A. without having ever studied Goethe, Schiller, Maria von Ebner-Eschenbach, Thomas Mann, Brecht, or Christa Wolf, not to mention any of the medieval or Baroque writers (*Nibelungenlied*, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Sebastian Brant, Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, or Angelus Silesius).

Realistically speaking, however, exhaustive treatment or total coverage can never be achieved, and a compromise in the selection of class materials has always been the *modus operandi* out of simple necessity. Is it more important to cover Nietzsche, Hofmannsthal, or Rilke, or to turn primarily to the Romantics (Eichendorff, Novalis, Heine)? Should we give precedence to female writers, to minority writers, Jewish writers, young writers, postmodern writers, and leave out anything composed prior to 1900 to the disadvantage of some of the ‘classical’ authors (Gryphius, Lessing, Kleist, the Schlegels)?

Undoubtedly, the obvious dilemmas resulting from such choices cannot be overcome easily, if at all, and there can be hardly any German language department in North America or elsewhere where the faculty have not discussed seriously these questions and their implications because they concern the very identity of the academic field of German Studies (cf. the contributions to McCarthy & Schneider 1996; cf. also Bein 2019). Very recent examples of this programmatic shift are provided by Grinnell College, Iowa, as reported by Julia Anderson on April 25, 2019, or by the German Studies Department of the University of Puget Sound which switched in 2017/2018 to a new teaching model (German Studies) and has gained a significant number of new majors since then, even more than Spanish (email from the Dept. Head, Prof. Kent Hooper, Oct. 15, 2019).

3. German Studies and the Digital Humanities

We are now facing the challenges and promises of the Digital Humanities and must figure out how we can profit from the ever-changing technological opportunities for the teaching of German language, literature, culture, and history. There is growing pressure to resort to publicly accessible teaching materials at no cost to our students (Open Access), but undoubtedly there continue to be significant problems with online editions of texts because many of them are available only in long outdated versions, often do not come with a good page or verse numbering system, and are difficult or slow to navigate, often terribly cluttered with advertisements. Often, when we rely on online sites with German poetry, such as ballads, the poems are presented in an easily retrievable fashion, but there is no sense at all of the critical editorial issues, so readers are commonly presented with texts which might, or might not represent the original, or authentic, versions, as established by modern scholarship.

The seemingly best German literature websites are also some of the worst enemies to literary scholarship because they project the illusion of a final, perfect product, for which there are no comments, remarks, or questions provided by an editor explaining, for instance, how the published text version came about and what the true challenges continue to be in light of many different manuscripts or printed versions (critical philology). If we want to study the poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77-1445), for instance, we could draw from some of the available websites, but there are numerous problems: the poems are not identified by the name provided by the most influential editor, Karl Kurt Klein, some are quietly rendered into modern German, others are presented with only part of their text, truncating the poetic works in an unacceptable manner (by contrast, cf. the most recent critical edition by Wachinger 2015). The brief selection does not do justice to the wide thematic spectrum of Oswald's songs and does not reveal to us why he was one of the most powerful poets of his time.

On the other hand, there is the impressive platform created by the actor and speaker Fritz Stavenhagen (b. 1945), "Gesprochene deutsche Lyrik," where he provides more than 1300 poems by 110 German poets from the Middle Ages to the present day, both in textual form and through recorded readings, and all this free of charge and delivered at a high technical standard. Many of his readings represent powerfully dramatized versions with excellent intonations highlighting impressively the key aspects of the text. However, with respect to the pre-modern period, he chose only the following Middle

High German poems: “Du bist min” (anonymous, after 1150), “Ich saz ûf eime steine,” “Owe war sint verschwunden,” and “Under der linden,” all by Walther von der Vogelweide (d. ca. 1220). Unfortunately, the pronunciation of the Middle High German is deficient. The next period covered here is the Baroque, meaning that the entire period from ca. 1250 to 1650 has been left out. Nevertheless, this website still deserves to be acknowledged, making a vast range of German poems available both as text and as recorded readings, by an obviously trained orator. It proves to be considerably more difficult to track down German prose narratives online, especially in such a comprehensive fashion, tantamount to an anthology.

In light of all these new challenges, this study will present, first, one constructive approach to the issue of how to balance traditional methods of teaching German literature with innovative strategies more in line with what we mean by German Studies. Second, utilizing this as a critical segue, this paper will also highlight how we can draw effectively from many different materials recently made available online, especially medieval manuscripts, incunabula, and early modern prints, and reintegrate them into our advanced literature classrooms.

4. The City-Focused Teaching Concept

Insofar as it seems to be virtually impossible to agree upon a generally acceptable literary canon (for a variety of reflections, see the contributions to Toepfer 2019), here I suggest a very different concept to be applied in a capstone course, drawing from digitally available sources and students’ contributions based on their own research. Criss-crossing German-speaking lands, moving from city to city as cultural hubs, teaching a final survey course on German literature and history suddenly makes very good sense because writers, poets, and dramatists from many different epochs have left their marks in specific cities (Classen 2013). In relation to Würzburg, for instance, the class could study the poems of Walther von der Vogelweide (d. ca. 1220) because he was probably buried there (Lusamgärtlein); in the context of Hamburg, the focus could be on the famous Anacreontic poet Friedrich Hagedorn (1708-1754), and with reference to Görlitz on the mystical writer and spiritualist Jakob Böhme (1545-1624).

How would we then handle the complex issue of studying the entire history of German literature, and could we ever hope to do justice to this task? Put differently, how would a city-focused kaleidoscope of varying topics, periods, genres, writers, poets, and styles

create a meaningful whole? Focusing on standard literary history represents a huge hurdle at undergraduate level. But if we address Goethe through the lens of Weimar, and then Thomas Mann by focusing on Lübeck, we can embed both major German writers within their urban context, which then also invites us to study, at least briefly, local architecture, infrastructure, foodstuffs, fashion, industry, and politics, a task for which the students would be responsible, along with finding short readings by both famous authors, also available online.

The solution suggested here is to draw first from valuable online resources (all links are listed at the end), such as www.pohlw.de/, where each major period is presented in fairly easy language and in a transparent structure, without being marred by too many content deficiencies or shortcomings. Each historical section is thematically subdivided into the following categories: 1. general introduction; 2. the term; 3. architecture; 4. literature; 5. major poets and their works. Depending on the size of the seminar group, those sections can be assigned as part of the homework, or they can be worked through in class by the entire group of students. It would be reasonable, however, to make a selection here and to limit this historical framework to larger periods, such as: the Middle Ages, Baroque, Enlightenment, Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism. Alternatively, one could also draw from ready-made tables available online that list the periods, the time span, characteristics, and major authors, and yet still leave much room for students to fill gaps, to add additional information, names, titles of works, or historical background, which can be researched by resorting to a standard online search engine, such as *Literaturepochen* (see also, although it neglects the Middle Ages: *Frustfrei lernen*).

Once cultural-historical categories have been established, the seminar can then move toward a more playful and highly flexible approach, studying a variety of cities and the most important poets, writers, and texts associated with that specific location. The cases highlighted here are only representative and can be easily modified from semester to semester, from city to city, mirroring also the personal preferences of students and instructors. In short, relying on individual cities to provide the focal point of class discussion introduces a high rate of flexibility regarding text selections and student interests. Without access to the World Wide Web, however, much of this teaching approach would be highly difficult, if not impossible.

Regarding the modern state of Hesse, for instance, the emphasis could first be placed on Fulda, where the Old High German “Hildebrandslied” was composed or recorded (ca. 820) in the local Benedictine monastery, then we would move to Kassel, where the Brothers Grimm lived and published their collection of fairy tales (1812), among many other important works, such as the first volumes of their *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Kassel also matters for us because the famous manuscript of the “Hildebrandslied” is kept there in the Kassel University Library (formerly the Murhard Library of the City of Kassel) under the signature 2° Ms. theol. 54, also accessible online. Finally, turning to Marburg, the occasion arises to take into consideration some of the most famous Romantic writers, including Bettina and Clemens Brentano, Karoline von Günderode, Sophie Mereau, Achim von Arnim, Leonhard and Friedrich Creuzer, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Karl Wilhelm Justi, Friedrich Carl von Savigny, and Priest Bang, who studied there and created some of their narratives and poems during that period. The Philipps-University of Marburg was founded in 1527, so it does not come as a surprise that the city can display a long list of famous individuals who spent time there either as students or professors, as poets or artists.

Even though Werner Bergengruen (1892-1964), today unfortunately largely unknown and little studied, was born in Riga, he spent many years in Marburg and exerted a huge influence on the German literary scene and was a standard author in most high schools until well into the 1980s. The focus on Marburg would make it easily feasible to introduce him to the modern American generation of students of German Studies once again, although it is difficult to find any of his texts online (apart from some of his poems; see the link above).

The assignments for students would consist of doing individual research on the various writers, drawing from library resources and online databases. This approach quickly proves to be highly flexible, productive, and diversifying. Concentrating on Düsseldorf, for instance, the major role played by Heinrich Heine in that city can be easily explored by means of the website created by the Heinrich-Heine-Institute, which serves also as the local museum for this poet (for texts online, see Heine, texts), whereas Augsburg, as the birthplace of Bertolt Brecht, can be the springboard for an intensive examination of his various plays, poems, and short prose narratives, many of which are well represented online (Brecht, texts; Brecht, texts, 2). While the class discusses a few of his texts collectively, other poems can be assigned to individual students. In the context of

Augsburg, it might also be advisable to read some of the verse narratives by Heinrich Kaufringer, who lived in near-by Landsberg am Lech around 1400 (Classen 2014/2020). Of course, this would represent a huge chronological jump, but Kaufringer also voiced considerable social criticism and left profound messages about the fundamental conditions of human life, and this ca. 600 years before the modern socialist author – unfortunately none of his texts seems to be available online. Granted, Brecht was later in his life much more associated with East Berlin, above all, but Augsburg can still be studied in light of Brecht's major contributions because it was his birthplace (see the Brecht Museum). Geography and the history of German literature thus become intriguingly intertwined. Also granted, most writers did not live all their lives at the location where they were born, instead they moved around, of course, but the concept outlined here uses the city as a reference point, not as an absolute.

Once we turn to major cities such as Berlin, Munich, or Vienna, the number of options grows exponentially. After various experiments with different models, the most effective approach seems to be to select only a small number of cities for a fifteen-weeks seminar, thus allowing two to three weeks per city. In most cases, student presentations unfortunately tend to be based on Wikipedia.de, which is not the worst, but certainly also not the best option if we also want learners to become familiar with the relevant research tools in the library (print) and online (catalogs). With respect to medieval literature, for instance, when the chosen city happens to be Heidelberg, students can be required to write about a selection of major Middle High German poets and include at least a reference to the relevant articles in the famous *Verfasserlexikon*. Both print and online materials ought to be consulted, and if we can thus help our students to operate successfully within a research library, drawing both from print and digital media, we achieve an additional educational purpose, especially for graduating seniors.

The focus on five to ten cities only per semester also opens up the possibility of assigning additional tasks to the students. As part of their portfolio, or learning journal, they can choose a specific interest of their own and investigate how it is represented in relation to the respective city. Students can become experts, for instance, on the local libraries, the health care system, the parks and gardens, museums, architecture, economic conditions, logistics (trains, highways, canals, rivers, bridges, tunnels), political structure, food items, brewing traditions, the music scene, or the sports environment of a

particular city. Most of that information will certainly be drawn from local websites, and even when students then probably copy the data almost verbatim, they soon acquire soon enough expertise about their specific area of research to gain easy access to even complex websites in German.

5. The Middle Ages, Case I: The *Ambraser Heldenbuch* and Innsbruck

Medieval courtly love poetry, *minnesang*, courtly romances, or heroic epics represent, of course, an additional challenge because of the older language (Middle High German; see Bein 2019). However, there are numerous solid modern German translations available, such as the selection created by Joachim Schmid (online) or by Albrecht Classen (online). Dealing with sixteenth- or seventeenth-century literature at times proves to be much more difficult because there are rarely any modern translations available, even though poets such as Hans Sachs or Andreas Gryphius used a fairly transparent German easily understood by modern students of German. Sebastian Brant (1458-1521), the author of the famous *Narrenschiff* from 1494 and a major representative of Humanistic Strasbourg, can be studied online now chapter by chapter, along with the significant woodcuts. Even though Strasbourg is a French city today, it has been deeply influenced by German culture throughout the centuries when it belonged to the Holy Roman Empire and later once again to the Second Empire after the Franco-Prussian War.

While the focus on Berlin or Vienna could be almost endless in terms of major poets and artists, the situation in Innsbruck proves to be unique because of a special manuscript previously kept at Castle Ambras outside of the city for hundreds of years until it was finally moved to Vienna, kept today in the National Library (Cod. ser. nova 2663). This so-called “Ambraser Heldenbuch” contains a large collection of medieval verse narratives, some belonging to the heroic genre, others falling into the category of courtly verse narrative. Copied down by the Tyrolean toll keeper Hans Ried, either at his post in Bozen (Bolzano) south of the Brenner Pass, or in an Innsbruck scriptorium, this anthology contains a massive selection of relevant texts from the high to the late Middle Ages (*Handschriftencensus*) and is intimately associated with the house of Habsburg and its castle of Ambras just outside of Innsbruck. Again, it would be overly demanding even for senior undergraduate students to read any of those texts quickly and to gain a good comprehension. They should not be expected to become experts in

medieval German literature, as desirable as that might be for instructors working primarily in that period. Instead, the availability of the table of contents of this manuscript alone provides enough of a way in to an intensively interactive approach if students are assigned a little research on the individual texts and asked to present either a brief plot summary or a biographical outline (Klarer 2019). Advanced students might be able to read the article by Hubert Alisade about the scribe, Hans Ried, and the current debate about where the manuscript was copied down (Alisade 2019). Others could be assigned to study the historical background (the dynasty of the Habsburgs), or the history of the north-south traffic across the Alps. Most important, however, would be the opportunity to gain a very quick insight into the history of medieval German literature through the lens of a most influential collector, Emperor Maximilian I who commissioned Ried to create this massive manuscript for his own glorification (Noflatscher 2019), assuming that the volume edited by Klarer is available in the library. Alternatively, and probably even more effectively, the relevant page on Wikipedia.de makes it possible to ask students to research the biographical and/or historical background of each poet or text represented here in German. Most impressively, the entire massive manuscript has been digitized recently, and students can now easily enter a huge database of texts and study them in depth, focusing on either the manuscript itself or the illustrations.

6. The Middle Ages, Case II: *Minnesang* and Heidelberg

The crowning piece of the teaching approach presented here would be Heidelberg, a city famous nationally and internationally for its deep historical roots, its architectural beauty, and romantic location on the river Neckar. On the one hand, we could return to the various Romantic and Classical writers, such as Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, Joseph Görres, and Friedrich Hölderlin. The so-called “Heidelberger Kreis” also included such famous figures as the Brothers Grimm, Karoline von Günderode, and Bettina von Arnim, not forgetting Johann Heinrich Voß. At the current time, however, it is difficult to access their texts through easily available webpages, unless we are content with selections that do not claim to live up to the standards of critical scholarship (*Lyrikmond*) and instead pursue pragmatic perspectives for the classroom.

For very recent literature, we could draw on Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* (1995), which mostly takes place in Heidelberg, if there is enough time to add a whole novel to

the reading list. We also need to keep in mind that this work achieved global success and represents a major contribution to current German literature and was also made into a film in 2008, adapted by David Hare and directed by Stephen Daldry. Many helpful teaching materials for this novel are already available (Schlink [in English]; Schlink, questions).

With respect to medieval literature associated with Heidelberg, it would be highly productive to focus on the large corpus of courtly love songs contained in the *Manesse* codex, or the *Manessische Liederhandschrift* (Voltz 2015), truly a bibliophile and literary masterpiece that represents one of the best works of art in Heidelberg today, whether tourists are aware of it or not. A large percentage of cover designs for modern scholarly monographs on the Middle Ages draws on this illustrated manuscript, irrespective of the specific content, because of the high artistic quality of the miniatures and the open access availability of the manuscript online. This provides also many pedagogical advantages that I want to explore here at some length.

The Cod. Pal. germ. 848, today kept in Heidelberg University Library, was created in Zurich around 1300-1340 on behalf of the wealthy family Manesse. This most valuable anthology of Middle High German courtly love poetry contains poetic works by 140 poets amounting to ca. 6000 verses. Most importantly, the texts are accompanied by 137 images of the various poets, which do not, however, offer realistic portraits and serve more as illustrations of what was characteristic of the individual poets and their songs, themes, motifs, or topics. There are, unfortunately, no musical scores.

The manuscript contains courtly love songs by a wide range of poets, beginning with works by King Henry VI and other nobles, then turning to highly ranking professional poets of noble and bourgeois background, including such famous singers as Friedrich von Hausen and Walther von der Vogelweide (Walther von der Vogelweide). The webpage offers excellent zooming functions, and the reader can easily move from folio to folio, expanding the image to an extreme, which facilitates the deciphering even of difficult handwriting.

The webpage created by the Heidelberg University Library is fully searchable and makes it very easy for the user to find individual poets. Most usefully, online browsing is available, so it is basically possible to leaf virtually through the entire manuscript. For our purposes, students can be assigned a variety of tasks, either identifying all the poems by one poet, or analyzing unique features and objects in the paintings. Or, groups

of students can identify one of the poets and develop a portfolio on the individual texts, presenting their findings to the rest of the class. The artists were not interested in realism; instead, they presented characteristic scenes with crucial elements illustrating specific themes, values, ideals, or topics, including birds of prey, musical instruments, architectural details, birds, natural spaces, hair styles, scrolls, helmets and head gear, weapons, bathtubs, chalices, horses, lances, wreaths, or altar pieces.

In class, individual songs can be discussed in light of the respective illustration and vice versa which adds a meaningful art-historical perspective to the investigation. As part of students' homework, individual songs can be assigned that later need to be presented to the class, enriched with the direct information drawn from the manuscript. Since there is the helpful zoom function, it is also possible to expose students to the original script, which can be used as a playful puzzle to decode the handwritten text, certainly not an insurmountable challenge and one that could be easily employed to pique general interest in older periods of German culture and literature. Students can also develop special projects, focusing on the common appearance of birds (of prey), musical instruments, and weapons, all typical accoutrements of courtly culture. Although the *Codex Manesse* represents crucially the world of the medieval courts, it is available now in the most advanced technological manner through this digitized manuscript. Old and contemporary teaching tools can thus join hands and invite us to develop much more creative advanced literature and culture classes.

Since there is such a focus on falcons as central icons of courtly love, the class could pursue this topic even further and examine the images of such birds of prey in the famous book of the *Art of Falconry*, the *De Arte Venandi cum avibus*, by Emperor Frederick II, written in the 1240, also available at least in part online. It can be nicely combined with a German YouTube video focused on this famous manuscript, created on the occasion of an exhibition at the Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch in Oldenburg (Oldenburg). This type of hunting is still very appealing to many people, as documented by various YouTube videos (Falconry I; see also Falconry II). Medieval culture thus proves to be topical right up to the present day and these videos make it possible for us to combine the study of current hunting practices with and of birds with literature representative of the Middle Ages (cf. also Bein 2019: 24-25).

Another crucial theme in all of medieval courtly culture was the game of chess (O'Sullivan 2012). There are numerous possibilities to explore this game as depicted

both in the illustrations contained in the *Codex Manesse*, and in numerous other medieval manuscripts, now available online as well, such as in the British Library, Add. MS 11616, or in the *Libro de los Juegos* by King Alfonso X, el Sabio, folio 17 verso, Escorial Manuscript.

Returning closer to home in the German-language area, we also find an example of a manuscript illumination depicting a game of chess in the famous collection of the *Carmina Burana* where this game serves as a form of entertainment for a man and his lady (Vollmann 1987), along with an image of a game of backgammon, both ancient and highly aristocratic board games of great significance to medieval court life (*Carmina Burana* I; *Carmina Burana* II). Students could be asked to identify other online copies of medieval illuminations depicting scenes of noble characters playing chess. The overall structure of a capstone course set out in this way would consist of close cooperation and exchange between the instructor and the students, transforming the class into a real learning space with everyone actively contributing.

7. Outcome and Assessment

Within one semester, probably the last for many of our majors in German Studies, numerous major cultural and literary hubs in the German-speaking world can be dealt with intensively. This does not mean that students would therefore graduate with a solid knowledge of the ‘canon,’ a highly fluid and maybe even nebulous concept of little value today. However, as majors in German Studies, they will have gained a solid understanding of German geography, of the global scope of a broadly conceived history of German literature, of the major centers of music, architecture, food production, economy, and politics, and will have gained a universal perspective on major or minor writers and poets from a substantial period of time and across Germany. The outcome of this teaching approach consists of a solid understanding of aspects of German literature, culture, history, and geography.

Even though the modern period will probably dominate in such a course, access to many medieval manuscripts in digitized form and to many fairly solid online anthologies makes possible the inclusion of the pre-modern world as well. After all, the focus on a city does not limit the historical range. On the contrary, many names of writers and other personalities would have to be considered, for instance, when engaging with the fairly small town of Fulda in northern Hesse from the fifteenth to the twenty-first

century (Fulda), but no other literary work created there would deserve more respect than the “Hildebrandslied” (see above, and cf. Popa 2003). Online we find various good editions and translations (Hildebrandslied), which is often not the case with modern literature because of copyright issues. In short, taking a city as a starting point and drawing from the many available webpages for the cities, the respective authors/poets, and the relevant literary texts, opens many different perspectives regarding the history of all of German literature and culture and transforms such a cultural-historical capstone course into a highly interactive learning experience in which all students and the instructor engage closely with each other.

8. Conclusion

Altogether, as we can now summarize, there are countless opportunities to combine the study of medieval literature in certain cities with the study of the actual manuscript(s). This then allows for a remarkably integrative approach to the general teaching goal, incorporating social, cultural, historical, and art-historical perspectives within the framework of literary history.

Moreover, emphasizing individual cities instead of specific literary-historical periods brings into play a constantly changing selection of literary documents from the entire timeframe from the Middle Ages to the present. Above, I mentioned Hamburg and Friedrich Hagedorn. Today, Saša Stanišić, the most recent winner of the Deutsche Buchpreis in 2019, lives there, and while studying the culture, infrastructure, economy, and art scene of Hamburg, students can also learn about two of the most famous representatives of that city, one from the eighteenth, the other from the twenty-first century. Moreover, Siegfried Lenz (1926-2014) spent most of his life in Hamburg as well, so his work could also be consulted, depending on individual interests and on the availability of primary texts either in print or digitally. I would also recommend the novels of the contemporary author Renate Ahrens, such as *Der andere Himmel* (2019). However, it is very difficult to track down online copies of modern German literature because of copyright laws, with the partial exception of poems and ballads (see above).

We could thus forgo the quest for an elusive canon and accept the huge diversity of our subject matter in horizontal (present) and vertical terms (past). If such a course were offered in a trimester, the number of chosen cities could be reduced, while the overall aims of the class could still be fully met, providing an overview of German culture,

history, economy, technology, architecture, and the arts in general. The ever-growing number of online resources can thus be successfully integrated into the teaching of a critical final class in the B.A. program of many German Studies departments.

The advantages of the outlined approach consist of several aspects: the study of the history of German literature is harmoniously integrated into an exploration of the social, economic, technological, culinary, musical, artistic, educational, and other developments in the German-speaking countries, both past and present. Moreover, the selection of individual texts or writers is closely connected with individual urban centers, allowing us to develop a series of localized and intimate cultural perspectives within the broader context of German literature. Finally, the approach outlined above facilitates the transformation of our students from passive to active learners, and on that basis we can confidently assume that they will graduate with a solid, broad-based, in-depth understanding of German culture, history, and literature.

List of weblinks

Alfonso X:

<https://www.ancientgames.org/alfonso-xs-book-games-libro-de-los-juegos/>

Ambraser Heldenbuch, manuscript:

http://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL_3332756&order=1&view=SINGLE

Ambraser Heldenbuch, Wikipedia:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambraser_Heldenbuch

Ballads:

http://www.balladen.de/web/sites/balladen_gedichte/autoren.php?b05=8

Brant:

<https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/das-narrenschiff-2985/1>

Brecht Museum:

<https://www.brechthaus-augsburg.de/>

Brecht, texts:

<https://derfunke.at/theorie/kunst-und-kultur/299-gedichte-lieder-texte-von-bert-brecht>

Brecht, texts, 2:

<https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/ballade-von-der-unzulaenglichkeit-menschlichen-planens-770>

British Library:

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/large107725.html>

Carmina Burana I:

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Biodata

Dr. Albrecht Classen is University Distinguished Professor of German Studies at the University of Arizona. He focuses on pre-modern literature and has published well over 100 scholarly books and ca. 730 articles on a wide range of topics; most recently on *Imagination and Fantasy in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (ed. 2020). He is the editor of the journals *Mediaevistik* and *Humanities*. He has received numerous awards for research, teaching, and service, including the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Band in 2004. He has served for ca. 30 years as Director of Undergraduate Studies and teaches the wide range of German literature from past to present. He has published a number of volumes with his own poetry and two volumes of his satires. Email address: aclassen@email.arizona.edu.

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