

Abstract:

My research proposal offers a historiographical analysis of the poetics of *Rausch* (intoxication) at the turn of the nineteenth century and its demise in the years following the Second World War. The shift from intoxication to detoxication, I suggest, is a crucial element in the development of German literature and should be, therefore, further studied.

The longing for *Rausch* in the prewar years expressed itself in a variety of reactionary responses to the thought of the Enlightenment, in the rejection of bourgeois rationalism and in fascination with anti-establishment, demonic, nihilistic impulses. Such expressions were common, for instance, in German literature written in the first half of the twentieth century, especially in relations with Nietzsche's thought. *Rausch* took the shape of inflamed erotic passions in Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* [*Der Tod in Venedig*] (1912) and in Stefan Zweig's novella *The Amok* [*Der Amokläufer*] (1922). It brought Freud to explore unconscious human drives that led groups and individuals to clash with the values and expectations of a civilized society. The poetics of *Rausch* also heavily influenced modern German-Jewish intellectuals such as Walter Benjamin, Martin Buber, and Gershom Scholem, who integrated them into their writings about revolution and Messianism.

The destruction that the Second World War brought upon Europe also brought a total shift in the course of German literature. In a postwar era, German authors and intellectuals were expected to contribute their share to the nation's detoxication. A shift in Modern German-(Jewish) literature had then occurred from a reactionary, anti-Enlightenment, "barbaric" literature to a more moderate, rational, "democratic" literature. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the poetics of *Rausch* gradually cleared the way to other ways of expression, when many German writers began to show a renewed interest in the more moderate values of the Enlightenment.

In the following years, German literature either had to adapt to a detoxified postwar bourgeois ethos or go underground. It acted, for a great extent, in concert with the German establishment and its new national ideals that, all in all, was ready to replace the ecstatic ethos of the Third Reich with economic cooperation and bourgeois values. Similar to German politics of the time, German literature gave up on the rhetoric of "blood and iron" for the sake of a rational, moderate, placatory poetics and gradually

exchanged former national myths for an enlightened narrative whose ideals were also adopted by the institutions of the European Union.

However, many authors of the war generation were having a hard time turning their back on the poetics of *Rausch* even in the face of the devastating consequences of the war. Present in many works of the time, it seems that the tension between the need for “detoxication” versus a rather positive relations to *Rausch* impelled many a German author to develop sophisticated poetical mechanisms that were supposed to assist them in approaching literary and political turning points that not necessarily coincided with their own values or poetical stances. Their poetical straggles were in this sense part of Germany’s process of rehabilitation.