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HCC (Fall, 2014)

Reading Guidelines and Reading Questions – Week 4 / Gryphius, “Tears of the Fatherland” (1636) / Grimmelshausen, *The Adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus*, and the Thirty Years’ War

Reading Guidelines – Read through these questions before you start reading, and think about the issues they ask you to address.

1. Genre, Verse vs. Prose, and War from Below:

So far this quarter, you have been looking at a variety of different textual genres.

Genre: The term for any category of literature or other forms of art or creative expression (painting, music, film) based on some set of stylistic criteria or content-driven classificatory categories; “science fiction” is a genre of fiction, and the “action film” and the “romantic comedy” are genres of movies.

Homer’s *Iliad* is one of the founding texts of the genre of heroic epic; it is an “extended narrative poem in elevated or dignified language, celebrating the feats of a legendary” and usually upper-class / ruling-class “hero,” like Achilles. Gryphius’ “Tears of the Fatherland” (1636) is a poem, a sonnet in fact. Like the *Iliad*, it is in verse and is highly structured in terms of meter, rhyming patterns, but the lyric “voice” of the poem differs by being first-person (both plural and singular). Still, as does the *Iliad*, it functions as poetry to create ‘immortal’ memories.

Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus*, on the other hand, belongs to the genre of the picaresque; the picaresque novel is a text of prose fiction that is usually satirical, and follows in realistic and humorous detail the adventures of a “hero” (way below Thersites in the class hierarchy...) from a low social class (the so-called pizaro) as he lives by his wits in a corrupt world. Think Huck Finn or Forrest Gump. Grimmelshausen’s picaresque is narrated as a (fictional) first-person autobiography, told retrospectively from some point in the future. (**NOTE: We are only reading two chapters of this six-chapter book. Other stuff happens later!**) Picaresques are usually episodic; this means that, unlike the lyric with its close-up-and-personal point of view or the epic, with its sweeping coherence of characters and plot, the picaresque usually strings story after story together in a more or less disjointed way. (In this respect, is there any kind of “development” in the character of Simplex that we think we can count on?) The picaresque is clearly less earnest than Gryphius’ lyric poem; it also disrupts / interrupts and displays the underbelly of the epic, one might say, and often self-consciously critiques the world of the epic by making fun of its values, plots, and formal terms. (Note Simplicius’ mock epic-battle with the lice on 94-5 and his tongue-in-cheek wish, as “Hunterboy,” for a “Trojan War” on 101.) This doesn’t mean that the picaresque isn’t deadly serious about the issues at stake in the text; consider the message of Simplex’s “dream” of the “Tree of the Estates” (25-28). Look for places in the Grimmelshausen text that offer a different take on war or that make fun of both lyric and epic. Ask yourself what the impact is of taking epic down a notch in particular by using prose rather than poetry / verse, (fictionalized) first-person / autobiographical narration rather than epic invocation and description, etc., to tell the story of war “from below.” What does the world of war look like from the pizaro’s point of view? **Does Simplex have “agency”? If so, what kind? Do the “warriors” of *Simplicissimus*, including Simplicius himself, seek kleos? Is it the same kleos that Achilles seeks? What is the war underway in this text actually about? Thinking with the Professor**

Izenberg: What are the privileged “values” in its world / what are the “modes of authority” on display here as compared to the Iliad?

2. Brutality, Obscenity, and Genre: The Question of Satire: Gryphius’ poem is pretty direct, even graphic, about the brutality of war. Take a look at the last three lines in particular, however; what is even “more terrible” than physical death in the opinion of the lyric “I”? (How does this “more desperate” devastation compare with the threat of “dishonor” and “shame” in the Iliad?) In the first two books of Grimmelshausen’s text, there are likewise numerous episodes of shocking war-time brutality (rape, pillage, torture; “foraging”) as well as scenes that dwell on a variety of obscene activities that involve the human appetites (sexual desire, gluttony, drunkenness, etc.) in fairly grotesque, sometimes disgusting, and always over-the-top ways. You may find yourself somewhat put off (and grossed out) by some of these episodes in ways that may be the same or may differ from your reaction to the violence of the Iliad. It is worth thinking about how – no matter how “realistic” the scenes in Grimmelshausen in particular seem – they are actually not necessarily “realistic” depictions of events, but rather moments of satire (“the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people’s stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues”). Think about the relationship between epic brutality, lyric brutality, satirical brutality, and the real brutality of war. Would Simone Weil consider Grimmelshausen’s Simplicissimus a “(picaresque) novel of force”? Do her terms about the ‘de-humanization’ that occurs in war apply here?

3. History and Story: “Tears of the Fatherland” and *Simplicissimus* as “Historical Sources”?:

The Thirty Years’ War lasted from 1618 to 1648. These two texts have a different relationship to the war itself, then, with Gryphius’ poem being written during the war and Grimmelshausen’s novel written some twenty years after it was brought to an end (by a famous treaty, called the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648). Think about the difference and “close-up” vs. “distanced” relation to the conflict as it is captured in the texts’ respective dates. How are they processing the war at those different times?

Still and all, both texts bear some relationship to the historical events of the war. Indeed, some scholars have argued that we should read Gryphius’ “Tears of the Fatherland” as a description of the sacking of Gryphius’ hometown of Glogau in 1636; the first several books of Simplicissimus have likewise been read as a (fictionalized form) of its author, Grimmelshausen’s, own autobiography and story of his youth. And some of the ways of conducting war in the seventeenth century that we see in the novel – such as “foraging” to support the troops (71) – were indeed standard at the time. And the Siege of Magdeburg (78, 81) and the Battle of Wittstock (92-3) did occur. Still, it’s important to think about how both texts actually work in terms of seeming to serve as “historical sources” and thus seeming to offer us a direct window on to the events of the Thirty Years’ War. George Schulz-Behrend, the translator and editor of the version of Simplicissimus that we are reading, gives ample footnotes – these notes were not there in the original 1668/69 text – to explain the various historical figures and place locations to which the text refers. Even though they do help orient us, these notes are nevertheless somewhat misleading insofar as they give us the impression that we are hearing about the ‘facts’ of the war. Remember that these texts are (only) representations of the historical events (read my “Representing History” in the HCC “Writer’s Handbook” for a discussion of the term “representation”), and that episodes like Simplicius’ “riding with the witches” point to the narrative’s fictionality (unless you believe in witches... which the seventeenth century might have done more than some people do today...) and the constable’s “magic” (83). Think about the version of history we are getting in both cases.

4. *Simplicissimus*, Religion, and the Thirty Years' War: It is clear that Gryphius would have us think that forced religious conversions are as "terrible" as pillage and rape (see the last three lines of "Tears of the Fatherland"); the poem thus has the effect of painting the period of the Thirty Years' War as a really pious one. Religion has a somewhat more complicated status in Grimmelshausen's novel. Simplex refers to himself as a unique figure in all of "Christendom" (3) (= a mispronounced version of "Christendom" which was the word used for all of Christian Europe – as opposed to the Muslim Ottoman Empire, say) because he seems genuinely to not understand much of anything about religion at the beginning. Religious doctrine and practices beyond the very most rudimentary elements are 'simply' not within his field of vision, and the Hermit must teach him the basics. He nevertheless then becomes very pious and notes the impiety of the rest of the world (he even "doubts whether or not [he] was living among Christians" (43) when he is in Hanau); see his prayer on 68. As a result, those whom he meets are made to seem as ignorant – even dismissive – of religion as he initially was, even though they are neither peasants nor hermits! (*In the course of Book Two, he gradually becomes less pious, and finds the earthly "Paradise" "as...good as if it had been the real thing,"* 97). Think about the way that **piety and religiosity (or their absence)**, on the one hand, and **religious / denominational (Catholic or Protestant) identity**, on the other, are represented in this novel. What is the role of religion in war in general? In this war (the Thirty Years' War) in particular?

5. Political Environments and the "Sides": It may have sometimes been difficult for you to tell the Greeks and the Trojans apart in the *Iliad*. Part of the power of Oswald's poem, "Memorial," is in fact that it shows how the sides actually just get all mixed up in the end in death; what was the point of the conflict? In Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, there are *sometimes* indirect references to which "side" the soldiers are on; if they are part of the "imperial" troops or fighting for the "emperor," for example, they are probably Catholic (29, 44, 78); if they are fighting for or allied with the Swedes, they are probably Lutheran (see 58-59, 85). (Remember that the notes by Schulz-Behrend were not in the original text, so any clarification you find there is added!) Note, however, that the probably Protestant "governor" of Hanau thinks about giving Simplex to the French Catholic Cardinal Richelieu as a present (70). This isn't a mistake! The Catholic Richelieu was allied with the Protestants for political reasons! – But more often than not all we hear is that an otherwise generic "troop of heavy cavalry" (5) and "musketeers" and "infantry" (22-3) swept through, and that numerous (mercenary) fighters appear to have switched sides (44, 78). Again, what are the loyalty systems that are being showcased here? Are the "sides" political or religiously "determined" (to use Prof. Izenberg's term)? Whose "side" might the picaro – or anyone one who is caught up in the war – exercise "agency" by choosing to be on? Do all the "sides" look the same from "below"?

Reading Questions – Use these questions to make sure that you understand the sense of the Gryphius poem and are following the plot of Grimmelshausen's novel!

Andreas Gryphius, "Tears of the Fatherland" (1636)

1. Analyze the shift between first-person plural ("now we are destroyed") and first-person singular ("Yet, I pass over in silence") in this poem. What is the relation between the "fatherland" of the title of the poem and the singular and plural lyric "I's" in the poem itself?
2. Analyze the relation between the physical and material destruction of the first eleven lines of the poem and the spiritual destruction of the last three lines. Does devoting more lines to the physical impact of war make it "more terrible" for us as readers, even if the lyric "I" says that the spiritual impact is worse?
3. Even if you don't know German (you could always learn it...), look at the rhyme

scheme of the original German poem (Posaun / Karthaun, Blut / Flut, Tod / Hungersnot (these would have rhymed when they were said). This is a tightly, tightly structured poem and piece of art. What is the relationship of the incredibly ‘artful’ formal properties of the poem (rhyme, but also meter (it is in so-called “Alexandrine” meter), sonnet format of 4-4-3-3 line strophes) to the chaos of war it depicts?

Grimmelshausen, Simplicissimus (1668/9)

1. Where do we first meet Simplex, and what are the two other locations where we see him in Book One?
2. Who is / was the Hermit, and why was he living in the woods? Did he seem to be Protestant or Catholic, according to the Parson? (“Popish” means “Papist,” believing in the Pope, thus Catholic.) Note that the Hermit’s life with Simplex does seem rather monastic, but that there were both Catholic and Protestant monasteries at the time.) Can you discern from the notes that the modern editor, Schulz-Behrend added, what religion he actually was originally? How does he die? (NOTE: In the original German text of the novel, the word for “Parson” is “Pfarrer,” which generally designates a Protestant minister; so be careful to think about the Parson’s position on things!)
3. How does Simplex get to the walled city of Hanau and what earlier acquaintance does he meet there? Why does the “governor” of Hanau take him on as a page? What religion is the “governor”?
4. Why does the “governor” have the banquet party / dance at the end of Book One? What happens to Simplex there?
5. Describe how the “governor’s” men make Simplex into a court jester. What is the sequence of events involved in his “rebirth” as the “Calf”? Why does he play along and what is the secret of his success?
6. How many “sides” does Simplicius (Simplex) serve on in the course of Book Two (in Hanau, with the Croats, as part of the siege army outside Magdeburg, in “Paradise,” near Soest)?
7. How do the “commanders” in the various ‘camps’ (the city of Hanau, the siege camp outside Magdeburg), etc. keep order? What kind of “legal systems” and systems of discipline exist during times of war (compare here the peasants’ “justice,” 22-23)?
8. Who are the two Heartbrothers? Who is Oliver? What is the purpose of introducing these characters at this point in the story? What is the status of friendship here?
9. Why does Simplicius cross-dress as a woman, and what are the results?
10. What happens to Simplicius at / during the Battle of Wittstock?
11. Where is “Paradise” and what does Simplicius do and learn there?
12. Who is “Hunterboy” and how does he “make a name for [him]self and arouse admiration among the people” (101)?