

Departmental Seminar:

A conversation about two short texts by Annemarie Schwarzenbach

Friday, March 10, 1:30pm

359 Denny Hall

Refreshments Provided



Annemarie Schwarzenbach, author of “The Steppe” (6pp) and “Plaza Hotel” (4pp)

Please come to our second quarterly department-wide seminar! This is a chance for everyone in German Studies at UW -- undergrads, grad students, staff, friends, and faculty -- to come together to discuss a short text. We will work to shake off the normal hierarchies of academic instruction: no lectures, no experts, not even an introductory presentation. We will begin with a question meant to open up a genuine exploration of shared inquiry. During the conversation, everyone will be on equal footing. Undergraduate students should have just as much ‘say’ as the most grizzled (and garrulous) faculty members.

You do not need to be an expert in German literature to take part in this discussion! All you need is to read and think about these [two very short texts](#) by Annemarie Schwarzenbach, in German or English.

Engaged Discussion:

Seminar Etiquette¹

- You don't need to be an expert! All you need is to have read the text² and thought about it carefully.
- We begin with a question meant to open up a genuine exploration of shared inquiry. But we needn't be slaves to the opening question: it is fine (and welcome!) for our conversation to go in surprising directions.
- Let's dispense with conventional academic hierarchies. In this conversation, faculty are learning alongside students.
- Say what you really think, as clearly and succinctly as you can.
- Respect one another. The seminar is an exercise in civility.
- Be morally present at the table. The texts are interesting because they are about *you*.
- Remember, we are all in this together. A seminar is a community—at its best, a **small republic**, a **jazz improv** group, or **special ops** mission.
- No question is too simple or elemental.
- Listen and remember the conversation.
- We are *doing* philosophy. Not just studying it. Help one another to clarify thoughts and assumptions by asking questions of each other.
- Have the courage to be willing to change your opinions.
- Be willing to doubt what you think you know and to treat the ordinary as extraordinary.
- We succeed when we render something complicated intelligible without rendering it simplistic or dogmatic.
- Cite the text. We all have the text in common. It is a friend.
- Conversation is deepened by focusing on the text.
- When you bring in context or supply information, you make an educative choice to be an expert at the table. Better to discuss the text which we all share than to clutter the conversation with context, which depends on questionable authority that others are unable to evaluate.
- It is bad to interrupt. But it's worse to speak so that you need to be interrupted.
- Silence for periods of time is OK. It may mean everyone is thinking.
- Finally:
 - Please avoid making speeches... unless absolutely necessary.
 - Please do not engage in side conversations. Share your ideas with all.
 - Please do not leave the room unless it is necessary.
 - Please disregard any of these suggestions if they cause you to do something downright barbaric.

¹ Adapted from David Townsend's "Rules for Good Seminar Participation"

² A 'text' doesn't have to be words on a page: it can also be a shared performance, film, or artwork.