BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**GERMAN IN THE WORLD**

**93RD ANNUAL AGS CONFERENCE**

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Conference Committee: Dr Ian Ellison, Prof. Henrike Lähnemann, Prof. Karen Leeder, Prof. Bernhard Malkmus, Prof. Barry Murnane, Dr Joanna Neilly

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# President's Guest: Natasha A. Kelly in conversation with Kirstin Gwyer

**Prof. Natasha A. Kelly,** promovierte Kommunikationswissenschaftlerin und Soziologin, ist Autorin, Herausgeberin, Künstlerin und Kuratorin. Ihre künstlerischen Arbeiten wurden u.a. in der Carnegie Hall New York, am Goethe Theater Salvador de Bahia und am Deutschen Historischen Museum Berlin präsentiert. 2018 feierte ihr Filmdebut auf der 10. Berlin Biennale. Sie lehrte an zahlreichen Universitäten in Deutschland, Österreich und den USA und ist derzeit Gastprofessorin an der Universität der Künste Berlin. Zu ihren zahlreichen Publikationen zählen der Bestseller „Rassismus. Strukturelle Probleme brauchen strukturelle Lösungen" (Atrium Verlag, 2021) und der Longseller „Schwarz. Deutsch. Weiblich. Warum Feminismus mehr als Geschlechtergerechtigkeit fordern muss" (Piper Verlag 2023). Kelly ist bekennende Afrofuturistin und setzt sich für die Sichtbarmachung Schwarzer deutscher Perspektiven in Kunst, Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft ein.

# Lead Panel: German in the World

Chairs: Oxford convenors

**Dr Sophia Buck (University of Oxford)**

'"The Other Germany." From Enemy Studies to Counter-canons and Re-education in the UK'

In the wake of the Second World War, (Jewish and dissident) Germanophone culture was forced to disperse and be scattered in the world. In turn, the world outside of German territory was faced with reimagining how to understand, grasp, research and teach a 'German world'. This contribution will investigate specifically how the military antagonism catalysed the disciplinary outlook and understanding of (trans)Germanic culture from abroad, as it emerged in and was shaped by UK universities during the postwar years.

This concerns evolving (research) collection policies and emerging analytical frameworks or topographical metaphors. In the 1940s, for example, collections were started in London, framed as 'Enemy wartime publications (known as EPCOM)'. Furthermore, interdisciplinary circles of scholars and activists, including Elizabeth Butler, the first female Cambridge professor of German Studies, promoted ideas of 'the "Other" Germany', dividing and constructing an alternative canon to Nazism. This and other concepts, such as the 'Two Germanies', soon careered through scholarly circles concerned with re-educating defeated Germany, but also émigré communities. At the same time, categories of 'inner' and 'outer' emigration were introduced. So what were emerging patterns of how post-war scholarship negotiated the links between German philology and cultural studies? Which analytical and topographical frameworks were developed by UK based scholars? And to what extent were intercultural aspects or contemporary German émigré discourses and literature included or excluded from the picture formed by the discipline? Therefore, this contribution aims to sketch different phases and 'turns' in the directions of the discipline before conceptualizing the subject as 'transnational German Studies'.

**Dr Ian Cooper (University of Kent)**

'Critique of pure worldliness: David Blackbourn, the Reformation, and global Germany'

Can we talk about 'German in the world' without a distinct idea of Germany, and is Germany more than the sum of its transnational imbrications? This paper offers a methodological contribution to 'German in the world', by way of a critique of some assumptions behind David Blackbourn's influential *Germany in the World: A Global History 1500-2000*. Blackbourn's model, based on a rejection of the *Sonderweg* in all its forms, risks both obscuring what makes 'German in the world' a pressing question, and abdicating explanatory power. Put in its starkest and ultimate form: how does the sheer entanglement for which Blackbourn argues allow us to account for the Third Reich and the Holocaust as, specifically, 'a genocidal *German* regime'?

The paper argues that the nation state cannot cede centrality in an account of Germany's global history, because it was present as an aspiration from the beginning of the period Blackbourn treats. Attempting at the outset to decentre the Reformation into its 'global setting', he ignores the extent to which the concept of German identity was harnessed to the prospect of religious and political autonomy by Protestantism. Throughout the age of the absolutist polities which drew their identity from that moment, the non-national elements and achievements of German culture were in tension with the social and political reality which Germany was. But the national culture, in the form of Germany's secularized classical inheritance, also created what Blackbourn calls 'the modern self' (investigated in the research university: made in Germany too), which has only grown in standing since that culture's end in 1945. So Blackbourn's question of 'German history viewed through a global lens' presupposes a global perspective itself only made possible by the paradoxes of a (German) national context, which an enmeshed approach to 'German in the world' cannot itself illuminate.

**Dr Hans Lind (Tübingen University)**

'Fictions of Homogeneity: The "Sorbian Problem" in Law and Literature'

Between Berlin and Dresden lies an area populated by a non-Germanic minority that has been considered a 'problem' from the Middle-Ages on: the Sorbs. Though the Sorbs long were the ethnic majority in these areas, having settled on uninhabited or relinquished land during the late Migration Period, German institutions later sought to turn the majority into a minority by applying factual, legal and cultural pressure. In addition to compulsory relocation, a forced assimilation in the form of targeted Germanization was applied early on in order to solve the 'Sorbian Problem' (Brězan). Already medieval laws made the use of Sorbian – a West-Slavic language – illegal, establishing a long practice of a suppression of the Sorbian ethnicity as the 'worst of all nations' (Martin Luther) that reached its last peak during the Third Reich. Here, e.g. the ban of Sorbian as a written language was rigorously enforced, leading to a 'successful solution' of the problem that included the fiction of a homogenous Germanic culture in this area. The GDR government tried to revive the Sorbian culture and language in Germany after WW2, but with questionable motives, and with limited success only. My talk aims at establishing the main characteristics of the legal and cultural sanctioning of the Sorbian ethnicity, a process that more recently has been described as a 'colonization' of rural areas as part of Germany's national ambitions (Donovan 2010). For this purpose, I will resort to a centrepiece of Sorbian-German literature, Jurij Brězan's *Der Gymnasiast* (1958), an itself not unproblematic GDR novel that describes the mechanics of a forced assimilation of a young Sorbian protagonist during Weimar Germany and the Third Reich who struggles to establish an identity with only two options being provided by the regime: assimilation or segregation.

**Prof. Kiyoko Myojo (University of Oxford/Seijo University)**

'Conveying Kafka's writing process to a Japanese audience: An alternative to Editionswissenschaft'

There is a large gap between Kafka scholars and general readers of Kafka. Scholars have been made aware of the fragmentary and unfinished nature of Kafka's texts through scholarly

editions. But general readers are normally only aware of the neat reading texts that are available on the market (and even if they were to pick up a scholarly edition, they would likely be overwhelmed by its inaccessible style). To illustrate the problem of the gap between scholars and general readers I will use the example of current Japanese translations of Kafka's texts and how they mislead the audience about the nature of his writings. I will then state the need for 'third generation editing', which has not yet been discussed in the area of Editionswissenschaft.

What I refer to by 'first generation editing' is the practice of editing focused on the immediate task of gaining recognition for an author. The work done by scholars to correct those popular editions is then called 'second generation editing'. With these in place, there is then the opportunity for a new kind of editing that doesn't aim to popularise an author, nor produce an authentic and definitive text (as the second generation had attempted), but rather to produce an array of alternative texts. One of these alternative texts I would like to consider is a translatable text. More specifically, a text edited to convey Kafka's writing process while also being translatable into Japanese.

**Prof. Bill Niven (Nottingham Trent University)**

'The Metamemorial: Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe'

The term metamemory refers to people's cognitive engagement with memory. In analogy, I would like to introduce the concept of the metamemorial. By this I mean a memorial which becomes the focus, in the course of its design evolution, its construction, or its reception, of developing and contrasting ideas of how something is, can or should be remembered. I apply the term in my paper to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. This can be seen as a countermemorial ('Gegendenkmal'), but I wish to explore artistic responses to it which do not necessarily seek to 'counter' a particular perspective (though they might), but rather to raise questions about the concept of memorialisation and the way we connect with memorials. The paper will therefore concentrate on aspects of the post-inauguration history of the 'Holocaust-Mahnmal'. I will examine three engagements with it: German composer Harald Weiss's musical composition 'Before the Silence', performed at the memorial in 2008; Israeli-German Shahak Shapira's 2017 online project 'YOLOCAUST'; and, finally, 'Cacti', a 2003 photographic project by the Palestinian artists Rasha Al Jundi and Michael Jabareen. All three projects transform the Berlin Holocaust Memorial into a metamemorial.

**Prof. Georgina Paul (University of Oxford)**

'Hitchcock's Sandmann, or E. T. A. Hoffmann goes to Hollywood'

The film director Alfred Hitchcock began reading the work of E. T. A. Hoffmann when he was working at the Babelsberg Studios in the 1920s and it is known that he possessed Hoffmann's works, in both English and German editions. Some scholars have written of the influence of Hoffmann in Hitchcock's films (e.g. Mogg on *Rear Window*, 2021). In this paper I will briefly contextualise Hitchcock's reading of Hoffmann before going on to a detailed reading of *Vertigo* (1958), demonstrating how the characters map onto the characters of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* – Scottie (James Stewart) as Nathanael, Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) as Clara, Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) as Olimpia, and Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) as Spalanzani/Coppola, the creators of the deceptive automaton – and how Hitchcock redeploys the story's themes of perception and misperception and the tower as the site of climactic tragedy. From this examination of how Hitchcock works with Hoffmann's characters and themes in the new narrative context, it will become discernible how Hitchcock subtly contemplates the language of 1950s Hollywood film, and especially the centrality of the female star, in Hoffmannesque terms of visual deception, desire and maimed masculinity. It may even be argued that, just as Hoffmann's story is legible as allegory – 'Das Ganze ist eine *Allegorie*', as the Professor der Poesie und Beredsamkeit claims – so Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, as one of his signature films, is an 'allegory' for Hitchcock's own film art, a self-conscious demonstration of the rhetoric of the uncanny.

**Kemal Sultanov (University of Cambridge)**

‘Die Schaubühne in Strasbourg: vom Halleschen Tor zur École déconstructionniste de Strasbourg, 1975-1982’

This paper tells the story of how the Berliner Schaubuhne am Halleschen Tor came to have a decisive influence on the development of certain strands of French philosophy. It does so by first considering how the Schaubühne under Peter Stein's direction provided both an artistic and organisational model to a number of theatre and performance practitioners in Strasbourg – particularly those surrounding the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (TNS) – and to the philosophers associated with the École déconstructionniste de Strasbourg (EDS) – notably Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. It outlines the complicated interconnections between artistic and intellectual communities in Berlin and Strasbourg, and reflects on processes of intellectual and artistic exchange, transition and translation. It demonstrates how modes of collective artistic production [*Kollektivproduktion*] and models of collective organisation [as a *Mittbestimmungstheater*] proposed by the Schaubühne spurred a range of theatre-philosophical experiments with forms of collectivity – from experimental performance projects modelled on the Schaubühne's to real-life experiments in communitarian living – which involved and brought together the TNS and the EDS. Focusing, in particular, on two productions by the Schaubühne in this period – *Empedokles. Hölderlin Lesen* (1975) and *Winterreise im Olympiastadion* (1977) – this paper considers how these provide Strasbourgois philosophy modes and models of reading philosophy – catalysing its intense interest in Hölderlin – and, in turn, considers the ways in which philosophical texts were staged, performed and theatrically worked over by the Schaubühne ensemble. While the status of the Schaubühne's productions as a pan-European models and exempla staging Hölderlin is well charted, this paper revises their reception history, pursuing their resonance not only into theatrical but also intellectual cultures, showing how these came to be integral to the ENS's thought and its development in this period. This paper concludes by offering some broader reflections on the interactions between intellectual history and the history of the German theatrical avant-garde in the latter half of the twentieth century.

# Critters and Pests

Chairs**: Dr Alice Christensen (University of Reading); Dr Ina Linge (University of Exeter)**

**Dr Alice Christensen (University of Reading)**

‘Käfer, que faire: The philological beetle and the helplessness of all life’

In an 1897 letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Sigmund Freud writes about a patient who recalled a panic attack at age 10, in which he tried but failed to catch a beetle. According to Freud, the patient discovered the latent meaning of this episode by connecting the German 'Käfer' to the French homophone 'que faire?'. What to do now? How can we proceed from this gesture of re-mastery, of having solved the puzzle? This paper reads Freud's letter again, and reads Werner

Hamacher's interpretation of Freud's patient's beetle as philological work, with the aim of recuperating some of the helplessness – what to do – of the patient's wordplay and of turning back again to the elusive beetle.

**Dr Lee Holt (Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam)**

'Insect, interrupted – Humans and the silkworm. Three stages of a relationship'

In *The Rings of Saturn*, the German writer W.G. Sebald meditates on 'a long account of calamities' in man's interaction with his environment. The book's last chapter focusses on *Bombyx mori* (the silk moth), describing how the harvesting of the silken cocoons requires the killing of the silkworm pupae, thus preventing the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into the moth, its final insect form. The history of sericulture in Germany can therefore be read not only as a Sebaldian history of destruction, but also as a history of interruption, namely the prevention of insect development. I would like to trace the history of this interruption on the basis of visual and literary representations of the silkworm and sericulture from the early modern period to the present and present it as a history of relationships, whilst acknowledging that humananimal relationships are, of course, not equal. Three phases in the development of this relationship can be distinguished: 1) an aesthetic fascination with the silkworm and its exclusive food source, the leaves from the white mulberry tree, combined with a natural-historical curiosity; 2) an economic interest that focused on the production of silk for profit, the establishment of national economic self-sufficiency, and the enforcement of social norms related to class and gender, all the while creating landscapes, architecture, and machinery in the service of sericulture; and 3) an emancipatory push that was reflected in the emergence of artificial silk and the efforts of animal rights groups to end the killing of silkworm pupae. Throughout my talk, I will return to the question of how the interruption of the silkworm's metamorphosis is represented in a series of images, architectures, landscapes and texts that document the rise, decline and eventual abandonment of sericulture in Germany.

**Dr Margaret Ives (Lancaster University, Emerita)**

'"Horcht! Einen Floh! Habt ihr das wohl gefasst?" On the significance of the insects in Goethe's *Faust*'

There are several mentions of insects in Goethe's 'Faust', notably in the Song of the Flea in Auerbachs Keller in Part 1 and as Mephistopheles 'neue Schöpfung' on his return to Faust's former study in Part 2. They are generally regarded as irritants and nuisances, but isn't this how the Lord sees Mephistopheles? As a companion 'der reizt und wirkt und muss als Teufel schaffen?' So perhaps insects do have a role to play in the overall scheme of God´s Creation, even if only as warnings or punishments like the lice and flies inflicted on Egypt in the Bible, and are therefore to be marvelled at as manifestations of the infinite variety and possibilities of Being. Or by describing them as Mephistopheles 'neue Schöpfung' and Mephistopheles as 'der Geist, der stets verneint', is Goethe perhaps hinting that these irritants have developed an agenda to their own which challenges the established order? The drunken tipplers in Auerbach's Keller make fun of the reverence paid by the King and his courtiers to the flea and

his companions, but have no doubt that common sense requires their destruction, but could it be that Goethe is here opening up some perplexing ethical and theological questions? Are all life forms to be held sacred, or are there are some which need to be eliminated?

**Dr Ina Linge (University of Exeter)**

'"Eine neutrale, geschlechtslose Form": Nature, Nationalism and Geschlecht in Hanns Heinz Ewers' *Ameisen* (1925)'

Hanns Heinz Ewers' *Ameisen* (1925), ostensibly a natural history book about ants, interweaves scientific explanations of the lives of ants with 'myrmecomorphic' (ant-like) short stories, where humans increasingly become antlike in their (a)moral and erotic behaviour. In the 1920s, ants as eusocial animals that form complex colonies were often considered to hold up a mirror to human society. In my talk, I trace how in *Ameisen* the social and productive (but not *re*productive) behaviour of worker ants is presented as parallel to that of queer humans, and how both are made to play a pivotal role in developing an understanding of nationalism across species boundaries. Ewers' example thereby disrupts scholarship in queer ecology that draws on queer and ecological ways of thinking to establish more equitable and just futures. *Ameisen*, too, draws on queer and ecological ways of thinking, but ultimately ties these to fascist ideology. My talk therefore offers an intervention into the political surety of scholarship in queer ecology.

**Dr Anna Richards (Birkbeck, London)**

'"Mit einer einzelnen Schnecke hätte er vielleicht noch Mitleid haben können,… aber mit so einem dicken braunen Batzen?": Slugs, empathy and individuation in Karen Duve's *Regenroman*'

In Karen Duve's *Regenroman* (1999), slugs carry many connotations. They are 'amorphous entities' (Koch) troubling boundaries between liquid and solid and between inside and outside, an embodiment of Kristeva's concept of the abject. They are associated both with femininity, in particular with the overweight Isadora, and with failed, impotent masculinity. Several critics have analysed these associative dimensions in the novel, but little has been said about slugs as themselves. In this paper I want to discuss slugs as members of a cast of non-human animals in the novel in the context of current tensions in critical animal studies and environmental studies about the individual versus the species. While Noah the dog has the status of a character, the slugs are represented as an endlessly generative mass, who when killed in bucketloads return all the more numerous to Leon's garden, more suggestive of the force of nature than sentient animality, perhaps also more in keeping with Rosi Braidotti's view of all life forms as 'a field of forces' in 'flows of becoming'. But does readerly sympathy for nonhuman animals depend on their individuation? If so, how does this illuminate the representation of broader environmental concerns versus animal rights in fiction?

**Katie Unwin (University of Cambridge)**

<u>'Critters and Futures: Trash Animal Teachings in German Language Speculative Fiction'</u>

In his foreword to *Trash Animals: How We Live With Nature's Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species*, Randy Malamud suggests, 'there is a range of nonhuman animals who are despised or feared or mocked because we have constructed them as the disgusting "other" in our anthropocentric fantasies of existence'. In 'exposing their place in our human-ordered world [...] these animals slide into roles as symbols for human fears or frustrations'. In speculative fiction, writing non-human voices becomes a thought experiment that extends beyond the use of 'trash animals' as mere symbols or metaphors, instead deploying them as a critical mirror to humanity. Speculative imaginings of utopian and dystopian futures using animal perspectives offer up new forms of knowledge that outlive and outfox human exceptionalist thinking. These imaginings call for marginalising, hierarchical narratives and their central tensions (i.e. who belongs and who doesn't, whose story should be told, who deserves to live and die) to be unpicked and assessed. This unpicking becomes particularly urgent when we consider how such narratives uphold and further the global climate crisis that threatens all life on earth. Using an analysis of Günter Grass' *Die Rättin* and Ulla Hahn's *Tage in Vitopia*, this paper illustrates how the use of a rat and a squirrel narrator respectively challenges human-centered epistemologies, disrupts traditional storytelling and prompts reflection on environmental responsibility. Drawing from Donna Haraway's concept of 'making kin' and Giorgio Agamben's critique of climate governance, I examine how animal speculative fiction reconfigures agency, ecological entanglement and interspecies communication. I also assess how useful animal science and climate fiction are as speculative devices for imagining alternate futures. My two chosen German language novels offer a literary experiment in multi-species justice, prompting readers to reconsider moral obligations beyond the human and envision alternative modes of coexistence by listening to and learning from 'trash animals'.

# Speakers of 'Minority German' in the German-Speaking World

Chair: **Nadine Buchmann (University of Oxford)**

**Prof. Andrea Abel (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano/Eurac Research)**

'Which German at School? On Dealing with Linguistic Variation in the South Tyrolean School System'

Linguistically and culturally, South Tyrol is essentially characterized by the clash of two worlds, the Italian and the German-Austrian. The annexation of South Tyrol by Italy after the First World War had a significant impact on all relevant areas of life. The region has developed its own German-speaking school system, which serves as a targeted language planning measure to protect the linguistic minority.

For a significant portion of the population, dialectal and regiolectal varieties of German are used in daily life, private settings, and professional contexts, as well as in parts of the education system. In contrast, the standard German language, often seen as the language of formal education, is the focus of most institutional language policies.

Despite the dominance of standard German in educational settings, the role of dialect is acknowledged and addressed within educational policies and curricula, according to which dialect should play a role in German lessons. Particular emphasis is placed on the ability to differentiate between varieties, including dialectal ones, as well as their deliberate use.

This paper explores how dialectal variation interacts with the standard language within the South Tyrolean school system. This includes examining institutional guidelines, didactic materials, and teaching practices that highlight the relationship between standard and non-standard forms of German.

**Nadine Buchmann (University of Oxford)**

'Teaching Minority German: Methods, Perspectives, and Linguistic Realities'

This paper presents both the linguistic and pedagogical dimensions of teaching Minority German in a seminar setting. Beginning in Switzerland and expanding across Europe and beyond, the seminar explores standard and dialectal German language variants in different countries, examining linguistic features alongside the lived experiences of non-Germans as German speakers. Key discussions include what distinguishes a language from a dialect, the status and perception of dialects, and broader questions of language vitality, endangerment and extinction. The seminar combines theoretical exploration with hands-on learning: students engage directly with spoken and written content in Swiss German, Yiddish, Belgisches Platt and Südtirol German. This paper will not only highlight the content of the course but also reflect

on the teaching methods used, the enjoyment of students discovering lesser-known varieties, and the broader implications for a well-rounded language education, illustrating the diversity of German-speaking communities and how their linguistic realities can be meaningfully integrated into the classroom.

**Prof. Joseph W. Moser (West Chester University of Pennsylvania)**

'Herta Müller's Engagement with the Romanian Language in her Literary Oeuvre'

There is fluidity between Herta Müller's autobiographical texts and her fiction, yet she manages to keep both genres distinct from one another, creating an imaginary literary depiction of Romania's German-speaking minority. Within this imaginary landscape, Müller shows the linguistic isolation of the German minority speaking 'Landdeutsch' versus the urban Jewish city dwellers of Temesvár/Timisoara who spoke 'Stadtdeutsch'. Of course, to be a professional in post-1918 Romania, the German minority had to speak Romanian too. This paper will show how Müller addresses this linguistic isolation and how she was inspired by the Romanian majority language, even since she has moved to Germany where she sees herself as a linguistic outsider–a minority language speaker who moved to where the language is spoken by the majority.

In this context, the paper will examine how Romanian phrases continued to make their way into her German-language oeuvre, and how she expresses the differences between the German and Romanian languages. The paper will also briefly examine her Romanian language collage poetry in her poetry volume *Este sau nu este Ion* (Polirom, 2005). After the fall of communism, Müller sought to access her Securitate file, which was not made available until 2008, in an incomplete version. Thus, her continued interest in Romania after moving to Germany was also driven by a desire to come to terms with the oppression under Ceausescu regime.

**Verena Rasp (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)**

'Writing in a language contact situation. Exploring argumentative texts from the German-speaking Community of Belgium'

The paper focuses on language contact between German and French in the German-speaking Community (GC) in East Belgium. As the official language of the region, German is the language of instruction as well as a subject taught in schools of the GC, while French as the main contact language in the region is taught as the first foreign language from first grade on. In my paper, which is based on my PhD thesis, I will investigate, how contact between language and culture affects the written language skills in the students' first language (L1) German and the second language (L2) French, as they grow up in such a multilingual environment.

Fundamental to the investigation is the study by Riehl (2001), who explored the influence of French on German by analyzing written texts from students in the GC. Based on this work,

the present contribution strives to find out how the situation has evolved since then and how German has a reverse impact on French as well. An analysis of argumentative texts by students of the GC will investigate how German and French affect each other during writing and what influence the contact culture has at this point. A further subject of interest is the extent to which extralinguistic factors have an effect on textual competences in both languages.

# 19th- and early 20th-century

Chair: **Dr Margit Discherl (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)**


**Dr Katherine Calvert (University of Leeds)**

<u>'Women's Newspapers as Sites of Activist Community Building in Early Twentieth-Century Germany'</u>

This paper analyses early twentieth-century women's newspapers as sites of activist community building by studying the dialogues that emerge between readers' letters and editors' notes.

In the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, women's access to the political sphere increased significantly and a substantial number of women's organisations representing a broad range of political positions – from Christian nationalism to the far left – were established. Cultural production, including print media, became an important tool in attracting and sustaining support for political organisations during this time; the number of political print media publications grew rapidly in Germany from the late nineteenth century and regional newspapers, such as the *Hamburger Frauenzeitung* (1909–1914), *Süddeutsche Frauen-Zeitung* (1921–1928) and *Frauenzeitung für das westliche Westfalen* (1911–1914), were a key means through which women's organisations sought to engage members in their activities and campaigns. The editors' notes and readers' letters published in many women's newspapers provide valuable insights into the views and priorities of those active within and supportive of the women's movement.

This paper adopts a history of emotions framework to investigate the role that women's newspapers have played in building activist emotional communities. Emotions are fundamental to engaging and sustaining political participation, as theorists including Sara Ahmed (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2004) and Ute Frevert (*The Power of Emotions*, 2023) have shown. Furthermore, expectations of emotional expression are highly gendered, and the extent to which politically active women in the first decades of the twentieth century accepted and/or subverted normative ideas about women's emotionality will be a central point of enquiry in this paper.

Building on William M. Reddy's notion of emotional regimes (*The Navigation of Feeling*, 2001) and Barbara H. Rosenwein's concept of emotional communities (*Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 2006), this paper argues that written exchanges between editors and readers of women's newspapers represented a space in which activist emotional communities could be modelled, nurtured and contested.

**Dr Yaroslava Kovalova (University of Glasgow)**

<u>'The Image of Galicia in Joseph Roth's Journalistic Work (*Reisereportagen*, 1924-1928)'</u>

This presentation explores the imagological and linguoimagological aspects of Austrian writer Joseph Roth's journalistic texts dedicated to Galicia, his homeland. In Roth's journalistic reports, Galicia appears not only as a historical and cultural reality but also as an imagined mental construct shaped by personal memories, historical reflection, and cultural stereotypes.

An imagological analysis reveals the binary oppositions that structure Roth's portrayal of Galicia: home – journey, homeland – foreign land, religion – eternity, past – present, native language – foreign language. Meanwhile, a linguo-imagological approach allows for an examination of the linguistic specificity of Roth's depiction of Galicia, emphasizing the perception and evaluation of historical and cultural processes. These aspects reflect not only Roth's individual worldview but also his national identity, value system, and the broader image of Galicia as a space of dialogue between Eastern and Western Europe.

The presentation will highlight how Roth's journalistic works captured the tragic historical events of the First World War, the collapse of Austria-Hungary, and revolutionary upheavals, as well as how his texts intertwine factual representation with a subjective cultural myth of Galicia. Special attention will be given to the role of language in shaping this image and to how Roth's stylistic and rhetorical choices convey his nostalgic perception of his lost homeland and his ambivalent attitude toward its past and present.

**Dr Sina Stuhlert (Concordia College, Minnesota)**

<u>'Heroines of Pathos: Emotion, Pathos, and Patriarchy in Emma Vely's *Herodias'*</u>

Revising the literary canon is not a new endeavor, but it remains a relevant and necessary undertaking. Margaretmary Daley emphasizes this point in her recent book, *Great Books by German Women in the Age of Emotion, 1770–1820* (2022). While Daley's work focuses on women writers around 1800, I argue that her approach can be applied to the period around 1900 as well. Daley's main idea is to broaden our understanding of what constitutes high-quality literature. I support her conviction that the criteria for significant literature should encompass the portrayal and examination of emotion, as well as the use of pathos as a stylistic device. These qualities, she argues, make literary works more relatable and impactful for readers.

In this talk, I will focus on the rarely discussed author Emma Vely and her novel *Herodias* (1883), to illustrate how she employs pathos to narrate her story and convey the emotions of her characters. Vely's heroine Belisa longs for a deeper sense of fulfillment beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother but is constrained by the rigid expectations of society. Belisa's struggles, suffering, and passionate emotions dominate the narrative. Using pathos, her best friend delivers the novel's central message to the reader: Belisa's misery and tragic fate are not the result of her own failures but rather of the oppressive structures of the patriarchal society. The significance of pathos is further emphasized through an intertextual

reference to a highly ironic line from a poem by Heinrich Heine. Stripping the line of its irony, Vely exposes the tragic reality embedded within it.

I will argue that Vely's use of pathos not only amplifies her message but also emphasizes the relevance and centrality of her characters' emotions. By placing emotion at the forefront, she exposes the profound challenges faced by women at the end of the nineteenth century, making her work undeniably worthy of study.

# Literary and Filmic Explorations of the 'good enough life'

Chairs: **Prof. Anne Fuchs (University College Dublin); Dr Gillian Pye (University College Dublin)**

**Prof. Axel Goodbody (University of Bath, Emeritus)**

'Gardening and the "good enough" life: Daniel Schreiber's *Allein*'

Gardening has been a central activity in reflections on and narratives of retreat from society to lead *the simple life*, from classical civilisation (Virgil's *Georgics*) to the 1970s (Helen and Scott Nearing, *Leading the Good Life*; BBC sitcom *The Good Life* – see also Shi, *The Simple Life*). In the twenty-first century, the benefits of gardens for human health, wellbeing and quality of life have attracted growing academic and popular attention (Panțiru et al.; Stuart-Smith), and gardening has been hailed as a model for our relationship with the natural environment on a planetary scale (Clément; Marris). Claims have attracted new interest that gardens provide a space in which *the good life* can be lived and from which it can be imagined, and that gardening trains individuals and communities in virtues whose practice is required if we are to live well. David Cooper (*A Philosophy of Gardens*) and Robert Pogue Harrison (*Gardens: An essay on the human condition*) are among those who have revisited Epicurus's teaching that communal growing of fruit and vegetables is conducive to the cultivation of friendship and the acquisition of virtues including patience and hope.

Daniel Schreiber has given a new twist to these contentions in his extended autobiographical essay, *Allein* (2021) by arguing that gardening is a way of leading the *good enough* life. In my paper I will examine how Schreiber depicts friendship as inferior to romantic attachment in some respects, but uniquely capable of acknowledging the otherness of others, both human and nonhuman. Friendship extends to a relationship with the natural environment which is found in a kind of gardening that has gained prominence in recent years, one seeking to strike a balance between the desire to impose human will and letting nature be, and to do justice to the needs and rights of both humans and nature in the Anthropocene. Reading *Allein* as a work of garden writing, in which philosophical reflections are bookended by descriptions of gardening, I will finish by pointing to the parallels between Schreiber's proposals of an intrinsic link between friendship and gardening, and their contribution to living the *good enough life*, and recent British garden writing (Jarman; Laing; Mabey).

**Dr Denise Henschel (University of Warwick)**

'Crip-Queer Temporalities: Navigating the "Good Enough Life" in Selma Kay Matter's *Muskeln aus Plastik* (2024)'

This paper examines how Matter's novel *Muskeln aus Plastik* (2024) reimagines temporality through intersecting frameworks of disability and queerness. After developing Long COVID and ME/CFS, the genderqueer, disabled protagonist 'Kay' learns to inhabit a radically different

temporality. Rather than being governed by achievement and progress, this temporality is structured by careful energy management and acceptance of limitation. The novel's aesthetic form, which weaves together medical documentation, reflections, pop cultural references, and classical narration, produces forms of 'crip-queer-temporalities' that simultaneously disrupt (hetero)normative time and compulsory able-bodiedness. This, I suggest, challenges neoliberal optimization and gestures towards a 'good-enough life' which is grounded in alternative forms of being-in-the world.


**Evelyn Preuss (University of Oklahoma)**

‘Home(less) in Jena, or An Open Ending is Happy Enough in Olivia Vieweg's *EndZeit* (2018)'

In Olivia Vieweg's graphic novel *EndZeit* (2018), only two towns in the East German province have so far withstood the onslaught of the zombies: Weimar and Jena. The veneer of Weimar's civilization, however, wears thin, or rather it reveals itself to be as predatory as the zombies raging beyond the dilapidated fence, prompting two young women to escape in the hopes of finding home and healing in Jena. As they make their way through the no man's land between the two towns, they learn to respect and care for each other, and that it is possible to stay human – and perhaps only possible to stay human – outside of the society they left behind. When they eventually reach Jena, they decide to turn back because its civilization would not extend the same respect, care, and humanity to them. Instead, they choose to live unprotected in the no man's land, as one of the protagonists herself transforms into a zombie. Vieweg casts their new beginning in a highly ambivalent, open-ended history, as they are guided by the dog that in Chickasaw legend showed the American Native tribe to its new homelands.

Paradoxically, even though – or precisely because – they turn away from Jena, the protagonists also reach it in a more metaphorical sense and, possibly, find a new home in the utopian understanding of Jena that is rooted in the late 18th century when it became synonymous with a spiritual upheaval that restructured the universe. The key concept in this revolution was, as Klaus Vieweg – Olivia Vieweg's father – argues in the introduction to his biography *Hegel: Der Philosoph der Freiheit*, freedom.

The Jena concept of freedom sharply contrasts with the contemporary notion of freedom as consumerist choice, which defines 'the good life'. Choice as 'proxy for freedom' (Sophia Rosenfeld, *Age of Choice*) drives a pervasive commodity culture, which entails living way beyond sustainability and hurls us into environmental and social catastrophe, as it equates more choice, and thus supposedly more freedom, with more consumption. It also inflects our humanity, which is conceptually linked to the capacity for self-determination and will, meaning that those with fewer or no options are by implication lesser or no humans. The ramifications of this thinking entail depriving the dispossessed and disenfranchised of their human rights in large holding camps, special zones, and even within our societies. Finally, in political terms, freedom as choice undermines democracy – i.e., the rule of the people – as it reduces our agency and voice to trading in our vote – a temporary, state-issued currency – for a prepackaged political deal that no politician is, in the end, accountable for and abides by. Freedom as choice does not include active co-participation in government, co-creation of the

social space, or the self-governing of a people. It cripples creativity, agency, and indeed our ability to live freely. 'The good life' fails its promises – not only for too many, but for all.

In my paper I argue that Vieweg critiques what we have come to think of as 'the good life' by invoking the philosophical legacies that defined Jena at the dawn of the modern industrial age as 'the freest place on earth' and that revolutionized our way of thinking about agency, world-making, our relationship to nature, and the self – that is the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, Novalis, and Friedrich Schiller, none of which are mentioned in Rosenfeld's study of our contemporary notion of freedom as choice. I will show how Vieweg translates this philosophy into her manga-inspired visuals and a thought-provoking text that in itself demonstrates an inclusive practice as it speaks to teenagers as well as to adults. Setting up her protagonists up for an open-ended, precarious experiment of carving out an existence on the wastelands of capitalist modernity, Vieweg sought to impart on her readers an optimism to explore sociability based on mutual care, a more inclusive understanding of life, and the freedom of imagining – and living – new beginnings.

**Dr Maria Roca-Lizarazu (University of Cambridge)**

'Infrastructures for Troubling Times' (Berlant): Racialised Violence, Relationality and Futurity in Shida Bazyar's *Drei Kameradinnen*'

Shida Bazyar's *Drei Kamderadinnen* (2022) explores the potentials and limits of narrative in the face of racialised and gendered violence, a structural force which, for the novel's characters, makes impossible aspirations of a good or even a 'good enough' life. At the same time, the novel is invested in mapping and modelling alternative possibilities of relating, worlding, and future-making as they may be opened in the space of fictional experimentation. The theme and concept of friendship are central in this context, as also argued by Miriam Schwarz (2024). Friendship in the novel presents a space for alternative relationalities and solidarities, while also functioning as a tool for epistemic empowerment, as argued by Schwarz.

Building on Schwarz's analysis, my paper argues that there is even more to the portrayal of friendship in *Drei Kamderadinnen* if re-framed as an 'ambivalent' concept, in Lauren Berlant's sense (Berlant 2022). By invoking ambivalence, I aim to show that friendship is framed not simply as a 'positive' utopian counter-space that is clearly pitted against the broken world that the three protagonists inhabit. While friendship undoubtedly offers a model for alternative, non-normative, and potentially enabling relationality, it is also presented in the text as something that needs to be made and remade from and in the broken world. Its force thus needs to be understood as precarious or 'infrastructural', to use Berlant's term, in the sense of an 'experiment extended [that] can become a form of life (Berlant 2022, p.30; my emphasis)'. As such, friendship points to a precarious futurity and possibility of a different life in the face of the ongoingness of racialised violence. This needs to be understood as a non-sentimental manifestation of hope, rooted in an openness to other, yet-to-be-defined organisations of the world that may already be emerging in the here and now.

# Staging and Performing in the 18th Century

Chair: **Pauline Preisler (University of Bonn/University of St Andrews)**

**Luke Beller (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore)**

'Staging Sociability: Schiller's "Sociable Law" in *Kabale und Liebe*'

In his treatise *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1794/95), Schiller formulates two extremes for the future of society and the republic: the constant struggle of competition through 'feindselige Selbstsucht' (hostile self-interest) or harmonious collaborative efforts toward a better world in accordance with 'das gesellige Gesetz' (the sociable law). For Schiller, 'the sociable law' is a law which binds individuals in the social realm, creating a sort of social economy constituted by a scope of possible actions and limits on the amount of resistable self-interest. Schiller's plays are often a demonstration of the scope and limits of this concept. This paper takes the play *Kabale und Liebe* (1784) as an example which stands in accordance with Schiller's mature concept. More specifically, this project seeks to examine the stage directions for *Kabale und Liebe* in order to present them as an embodiment of 'the sociable law' and thus an example of Schiller's attempt to stage sociability. As will be demonstrated, the purpose of the stage directions in making 'the sociable law' tangible is to depict its degradation and eventual dissolution, which inevitably leads to the death of Luise Miller. By providing this negative paradigm of sociability, Schiller lends a powerful critique of that which threatens social bonds.

**Glen Gray (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore)**

'"La destra o sinistra": Metastasio's Staging of Political Hierarchy'

Court poet for the Holy Roman Empire Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782) corresponded throughout his career with composers, authors, and stage directors across Europe in order to influence the performance of his operas beyond the court of Vienna. In 1748, Metastasio corresponded with Baron Dieskau in Dresden who was overseeing a performance of Metastasio's opera Demofoonte. The main topic of their exchange was how the rank of characters should determine their stage entrances and on which side they should stand. Against Dieskau's insistence that the higher-ranking character must always stand on the left or the right side, Metastasio demands that the dramatic action must determine the characters' positions. Dieskau implies that the political structure of the piece and the state that it represents is rigid and pre-determined. Metastasio, on the other hand, does not take for granted that the political hierarchy is stable, rather, his works depict how the political hierarchy can be put in danger and how it can be preserved. This paper will argue that Metastasio's works cannot be reduced to mere court function of monarchical representation based on staging. Instead of delivering a simple analogy of political hierarchy, an analysis of the dramatic action is necessary to understand the political message of his works.

**Pauline Preisler (University of Bonn/University of St Andrews)**

<u>'All the dream is a stage: Staging the unconscious in Jean Pauls *Blick in die Traumwelt* and Thomas De Quincey´s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*'</u>

My paper offers a comparison between Jean Paul´s essay *Blick in die Traumwelt* which was published in his collection *Museum* (1815) and Thomas De Quincey´s novel *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). As I will show, both texts draw on the stage as a metaphor for the brain which can also be found in the encyclopaedia *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* (1617/19) of the Renaissance scholar Robert Fludd. This metaphorical stage sets the scene for the dream in both texts, but with a crucial difference. While Jean Paul defines the dream as the sphere of the unconscious and clearly separates it from the state of being awake, De Quincey emphasizes 'a sympathy […] between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain'. By analysing these different variations on the 'theatre of dreams', I will highlight its function for the construction of the self and the poetics of the respective authors. At the same time, I will shed new light on De Quincey´s reception of Jean Paul which scholars have largely overlooked to date.

**Dr Rebecca Stewart-Gray (Oklahoma State University)**

<u>'Staging in the Score and on the Stage: Racialization in Mozart and Schikaneder's *Die Zauberflöte*'</u>

Opera houses have long grappled with the challenge of staging Mozart and Schikaneder's *Die Zauberflöte* (1791) for modern audiences in light of the Singspiel's presentation of race. Expanding on a project that has thus focused on contemporary directorial strategies involving costuming, makeup, staging, and modification of spoken dialogue to render Monostatos more presentable to contemporary audiences, the present paper analyzes the Monostatos of 1791 in regard to the ways that racialization is staged in the *Singspiel* and in comparison with later eighteenth-century adaptations, including the Monostatos figures in Paul Winter and Schikaneder's *Das Labyrinth* (1798) and in Goethe's 1802/1807 *Der Zauberflöte zweyter Theil*.  The comparative analysis casts the dialogical nature of the music and text of the 1791 Monostatos into relief, thereby pointing to the constitutive ambiguity of Mozart and Schikaneder's Monostatos and his concomitant resistance to binary modes of interpretation.

# New developments and trends in Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF)

Chair: **Mandy Poetzsch (University of Bristol)**

**Dorit Fellner-Whitgreave (University of Manchester)** and **Hanna Magedera (University of Liverpool)**

‘Games as the Key to Intercultural Communication’

Culture consists of many components, layers, and dimensions (Clarke et al. (1976), Hofstede (1980), however, reading about them does not necessarily make us fully understand them. Experiencing different cultures first-hand and practicing intercultural communication leads to a better understanding and therefore to more success. IC can lead to successful business relationships on the one hand but also improve everyday experience of friendly cooperation in our globalised world on the other.

For our purposes, IC helps us to better understand international colleagues in the university sector, to prepare students for their year abroad and to learn about intercultural interaction in the university in general.

As preparation for experiencing culture, games are a good way to try out different situations. In playing them, we become aware of our own values and an attentiveness towards others can be created and increased.

Cultural difference does not simply mean differences in cultural customs. Rather, differences arise on the crossroads between cultures, where it unfolds in processes of mutual questioning.

In our interactive workshop, we will focus on games that create intercultural awareness and promote global competence, drawing upon Abt's concept of ‘Serious Games’ (1970). We refer to German language teaching in the UK and discuss activities that are particularly relevant in this country. Participants of our workshop will be asked to act out different activities and then discuss aspects of intercultural competence areas together, referring to the ‘interkulturellen Methodenkoffer’, a tool kit for intercultural learning created by Brainworker.at.

**Dr Claire O'Reilly (University College Cork)**

‘Rethinking Traditional Approaches to Study Abroad, Reimagining SA in the future’

Given the investment, increasing time commitment and workload associated with the preparation and pastoral care of students before and during their study abroad [SA], and a mixed, but largely underwhelming picture of language competency after the SA, it makes sense, from both a student and an institutional perspective, to re-assess the traditional model of study abroad. This paper will discuss the findings of a 2024 survey of students abroad and

reflect on 20 years of academic curricular preparation of students going abroad. While being mindful of the transformative potential of SA, but cognizant of evidence from the SA period as well as an increasing diverse student population, the paper reflects how non-traditional paths offering alternative routes to learning about Self and Other, as well as hybridized versions, will become increasingly important in the future of Higher Education, as institutions think about teaching the whole-person, and what this might mean. This paper will draw on research in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching, as well as taking current discourses into consideration that are shaping and influencing the delivery of education at Higher Education.

**Dr Emma Riordan (University College Cork)**

<u>'Developing Plurilingual Identities During Study Abroad'</u>

Plurilingual identities refer to the complex, dynamic self-perceptions that emerge when individuals develop competence across multiple languages, enabling them to navigate and express themselves within diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. In this paper, we argue that students' ability to develop and articulate plurilingual competences – which transcend traditional monolingual notions of language proficiency – will be crucial for maintaining the relevance and impact of language degrees in an era where technological advancements might otherwise diminish the perceived utility of language learning. This paper examines how language-oriented international mobility affects such identity development in three cohorts of predominantly L1 English-speaking students from an Irish university.

The study encompasses students from three programs: BA World Languages (n=37), BA International (n=62), and BSC International Business (n=56). All participants study at least one foreign language and complete a mandatory period abroad in countries including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, China, Japan, and Korea.

The research investigates two main questions:

1. How do students' plurilingual identities develop during study abroad?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators to this development?

The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, using a blended version of the Plurilingual Identity Questionnaire, administered at intervals throughout the sojourn. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted online with five self-selected students. Initial findings suggest that identity development is influenced by several factors: individual characteristics (resilience, openness, self-efficacy), social interaction opportunities during the experience, specific program of study, and language proficiency levels. These results have significant implications for practitioners supporting students throughout their study abroad experience.

**Nathalie Stummer (University of Freiburg)**

'Gender-inclusive language in the German classroom – Perspectives from speakers with English as L1'

Although they are a large group, second language speakers of German who live outside of German-speaking countries are often overlooked in socio-linguistic research, although their valuable insights can shape the way first language speakers think about language teaching and language trends (Truan 2024). When learners of German with English as L1 translate person nouns (*teacher, student*) from English into German, they are faced with a major challenge: how do you translate genderless person nouns from English into a language like German, where grammatical gender and gender stereotypes shape our associations with social gender? The emergence of certain linguistic trends, particularly the avoidance of generic masculine forms in favour of gender-sensitive alternatives (*die Lehrer\*innen, die Lehrenden*), is highly relevant for learners (Acke, 2019; Lipsky, 2021; Peuschel, 2018). However, most teaching materials have paid little attention to trends around gender-sensitive language and predominantly use generic masculine nouns for persons (Stummer 2024).

This paper aims to investigate what speakers of German in the UK think of gender-inclusive language from a general and an educational perspective through interviews that were conducted with students and tutors of German at higher education institutions in the UK. The following questions are of particular interest: Do students use gender-sensitive language directly after it has been introduced as a topic in class? What challenges do non-fist language speakers personally face around the use of gender-sensitive forms in German? How do tutors determine whether to introduce gender-inclusive language? The results provide valuable didactic implications for tutors and publishers of textbooks and also sheds light on the question how language change in German is perceived by speakers who live outside of German-speaking countries but are still part of the language community.

# German and the Environmental Humanities

Chair: **Dr Anja Rekeszus (University of Reading)**

**Dr Tara Beaney (University of Aberdeen)**

‘Storms and the Spectre of Catastrophe in Theodor Fontane’s “Die Brück’ am Tay” (1879) and Theodor Storm’s _Der Schimmelreiter_ (1888)’

When the newly built Tay Bridge catastrophically collapsed during a violent storm in December 1879, causing a train full of passengers to plummet to their deaths, news quickly spread across Europe. Theodor Fontane’s ballad ‘Die Brück‘ am Tay’ was published less than two weeks later to great acclaim. Fontane’s text has been widely read as a warning against technological hubris. However, what makes the ballad so impactful is the depiction of elemental forces in the form of the three witches from Shakespeare’s _Macbeth_, whose dialogue frames the poem. While Fontane is considered a realist writer, whose work tends towards naturalistic explanation, disaster calls for different forms of narrative. The presence of the supernatural gestures towards the need to think beyond the dominant cultural narrative of anthropocentric agency, revealing the limits of human control.

My reading of Fontane’s poem draws on Kate Rigby’s ecocritical reading of Theodor Storm’s _Der Schimmelreiter_ (1888), a novella set on the North Frisian coast with its long history of flooding and dyke building. Rather than read the text as depicting a heroic battle between man and nature, as was once the dominant reading, Rigby attends to the distributed agency in the text, reading the text as disclosing the limits of human mastery in the face of unruly natural phenomena (Rigby 2016). Through attending to the more-than-human agents in both Storm and Fontane’s narratives of catastrophe, this paper explores ways in which literary texts contest the paradigm of human mastery over nature, which David Blackbourn has argued was central to the making of modern Germany, and instead pave the way for different ways of relating (Blackbourn 2007).

**Dr Conor Brennan (University of Oxford)**

‘Oh Schriftsteller, oh Schutz vor ihnen: Environmentalist “Nestbeschmutzung” in international comparison’

This paper considers the ironies of the epithet ‘Nestbeschmutzer:in’ when applied to writers who hold their home countries to account for ecologically destructive policies and practices. The best-known ‘Nestbeschmutzer:innen’ in German-language writing are, arguably, the Austrian writers Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard, whose works engage closely with mountain settings while exposing the national myth of Austria as a land of pristine alpine lakes and forests. The talk will outline how works by Bernhard and Jelinek anticipate and expose the ways in which the tourist-friendly image of a pristine ‘Alpine Austria’ papers over ecological exploitation and degradation in the present. At the same time, it will place the concept of

'Nestbeschmutzung' in a wider international context, drawing parallels between the hostile reactions provoked by Bernhard and Jelinek in Austria and attempts to suppress or silence writers whose works has exposed environmental hypocrisy in other European contexts and further afield. These include the Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk and Australian novelist Richard Flanagan, both of whom have faced political opposition at home for their environmental activism in both fiction and journalism, and Irish writers such as Patrick Kavanagh who have faced sharp criticism for subverting romantic views of 'the land'. In tracing these comparisons, the paper will consider the often-contradictory relationship between nationalism, conservation, and ecological destruction, and attempt to identify ways in which these writers point beyond the nation state and towards alternative environmental frameworks.

**Clara Busch (University of Cambridge)**

'Entangled Methodologies and Seismic Writing in Judith Schalansky's *Servus Versus* and *Schwankende Kanarien*'

This paper engages with two shorter, essayistic pieces by German writer Judith Schalansky: her lecture-turned-essay *Servus Versus* (2019) and the essay *Schwankende Kanarien* (2023). From her Verzeichnis einiger Verluste, to her involvement in the 'Future Library' project, to Schwankende Kanarien, Schalansky's writing consistently demonstrates a theme of absence, something that is not yet, is no longer, or cannot be grasped. This paper traces the pattern of absence in Schalansky's work in relation to her ongoing environmentalist efforts, auto-critical reflections on the same, and their implications for human-non-human coexistence. Taking as its starting point two of Schalansky's most contemporary pieces of writing, both texts are contributing elements to her broader body of work centering absence. This theme is experimentally explored in here as a form of 'beyond-human autotheory'. Autotheory, as a form of thinking and making that fuses artistic creation and theorisation, fundamentally questions the notions of 'self' and 'theory' and allows for fresh perspectives on the potential of genre-transcending writing. At the same time, Schalansky's literary positions, which decenter the human and evolve around an absent, fugitive core, present a productive challenge to autotheoretical thought and its approaches to subjectivity. By reading Schalansky's work through the framework of autotheory, as well as in the context of theories of absence in the arts, this paper explores both possible answers and further questions in response to Schalansky's inquiry into how literature might record or anticipate what is unpredictable.

**Dr Nicholas Jones (University of Warwick)**

'Anticipating the Crisis: Alfred Döblin and Interwar Ecological Thought'

A *Teufelskreis* inheres throughout Alfred Döblin's *Berge Meere und Giganten* (1924): Technological attempts to overcome nature-imposed challenges to human society unleash new natural forces requiring more powerful technological fixes – which, in turn, trigger greater natural threats.

This paper examines the consequent state of permanent crisis by reading Döblin's novel alongside Andreas Malm's recent writings on 'ecological autonomism' and global warming. It thereby uncovers within the novel an unsustainable constellation of humanity, technology, and nature that, rooted in capitalism's exploitation of the natural environment, endures till today.

However, whereas Malm frames his theory as a materialist rejection of posthumanism, this paper contends that Döblin literarily marries these two tendencies. It argues that Döblin's portrayal of posthumanist hybridity avant la lettre – blurred boundaries between human, machine, and organic matter – underpins a materialist critique that foregrounds human singularity. The depicted *Teufelskreis* is namely shown to result from the impossible bid to overcome what Döblin's theoretical writings call humanity's 'Zwitterstellung': While humankind can transcend natural obstacles by remaking its surroundings, this Promethean ability is naturally given and, therefore, also affirms the human as part of nature.

Thus, the paper argues, the depicted technological transformation of the world, intended to subjugate nature, instead intensifies humanity's hybridity, its entanglement with natural phenomena. The paper hereby contends that Döblin's novel unites materialism and posthumanism to challenge interwar socialists' often uncritical faith in technological progress, and to insist that forging a sustainable and egalitarian society necessitates reckoning with humankind's 'Zwitterstellung' as both producer and product of its environment.

**Dr Anja Rekeszus (University of Reading)**

<u>'Bark Beetle Devastation and Far-Right Support in the German Harz Region'</u>

This paper examines the effects of landscape changes on public support for far-right groups in the German federal states of Niedersachsen (Nether-Saxony), Sachsen-Anhalt (Saxony-Anhalt) and Thüringen (Thuringia). In particular, it will focus on the devastation of spruce-based forests caused by bark beetle infestation in the Harz National Park (Beetz et al. 2024), the role these landscape changes play in the publications of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party and the far-right extremist group Identitäre Bewegung (IB), and social media interactions with these discourses.

Within the last three years, Niedersachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Thüringen have grown to be among the German states with the highest support for the AfD and right-wing activist groups (Reuband 2022). They are also the federal states encompassing the Harz National Park, which has seen far-reaching arboreal devastation due to bark beetle infestations in recent years (Huo et al. 2024). I will draw on research examining the interconnectedness of landscape identity and political sentiment (e.g. Forchtner 2019 and 2024, Lekan 2004), on recent studies conducted by FARN (Fachstelle Radikalisierungsprävention und Engagement im Naturschutz, transl. *Specialist Unit for the Prevention of Radicalisation and for Environmental Volunteering*) and the RIOET project (Rechtsextremismus in Ökologischen Transformationsräumen, transl. *Right-wing Extremism in Areas of Ecological Transformation*) and on social media engagement with AfD and IB publications to expose the influence of bark beetle devastation on the extent of, and arguments surrounding, far-right support in Germany. In so doing, I will illuminate two main lines of argument present in far-right publications and

online discourse: bark beetle devastation as a symbol of governmental neglect, and arboreal devastation as a 'promethean' (Kølvraa and Forchtner 2024) opportunity for a German national renewal.

**Sarah Alicia Schwarz (University of Oxford)**

'Re-Visiting Nature. Adalbert Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* and the therapeutic practices of eco-conscious living'

After an emotional crisis, Augustinus, the protagonist of Adalbert Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* (1868) overcomes his trauma through a stern programme of self-help. Among other aspects, this programme entails the observation and study of nature as well as extensive expeditions through the Bohemian forests in search of medicinal plants. In this way, cultivating nature serves as both a therapeutic programme and a therapeutic effect in Stifter's *Mappe meines Urgoßvaters*. The novel scaffolds sensory perceptions of the natural surroundings and gentle interactions with the environment as strategies for habituating to and coping with situational crises. I argue that the literary characters' conscious attendances to the affordances of nature enhance their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviours. In this way, Stifter portrays characters as both shaping and being shaped by their bodily engagement with the natural world.

In doing so, *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* articulates a pragmatic environmental ethic centred on intertwined ecological and self-awareness, contrasting with the ecological transformations at the incipits of the Anthropocene. Adopting an eco-narratological approach, I examine how the novel firstly constructs an affective and embodied relationship between its characters and their natural environment. In a second step, I aim to explore how the characters' embodied experiences of nature might extend to the reader by considering the role of embodied simulation in literary immersion. This allows to reflect on how the novel's historical portrayal of nature fosters a rethinking of our own perception of and interaction with our ecological environments.

**Dr Elliot Sturdy (University of Leeds)**

'A new relationality: nature as subject in Ludwig Fischer's *Naturallianzen*'

In recent years, the Environmental Humanities have struggled to provide a new form of relationality that might allow for a way of thinking nature and culture together. Although calls have often arisen for flat ontologies that consider non-humans to be just as involved in the production of meaning as humans are, a responsive and open mode of relation between the human and more-than-human world still seems to be lacking.

There are two main approaches to our ecological entanglement that have become the habitual modes adopted by contemporary academia. The first of these is the tragic posture within Anthropocene Theory – ecologies are either too complex, too large, or too small to be perceivable. Consequently, we have to resign ourselves to a certain alienation from ecology

– as we can no longer unentangle ourselves from it, we can no longer behold it as an object or build meaningful relations with it. The second posture, one that can be found within New or Weird Materialism, expresses an attempt to forcefully break through the barrier between nature and culture by 'giving' or 'lending' nature a voice with which it can speak. However, *this can lead to* a certain disavowal of human influence and human responsibility.

In order to attempt to find a way out of this deadlock, this conference presentation will critically engage with the work of Ludwig Fischer and his recent work on *Naturallianzen* (2024)*.* It will describe the ways in which Fischer builds upon the work of Ernst Bloch in order to formulate a new understanding of nature as a subject, the agency of nature, and what new relationships might then become possible.

# Transforming Kafka. Adaptation, Interpretation, Community

**Prof. Carolin Duttlinger (University of Oxford)**
**Dr Ian Ellison (University of Oxford)**
**Prof. Katrin Kohl (University of Oxford)**
**Prof. Barry Murnane (University of Oxford)**

Introducing some of the collaborations developed under the auspices of our AHRC-funded project 'Kafka's Transformative Communities', this panel will discuss the importance of engaging with creative artists as a means of finding bold and innovative routes into the Prague writer's fiction.

# Eighteenth-Century Studies

Chair: **Dr Joanna Raisbeck (University of Oxford)**

**Marie-Christine Alberts (University of Freiburg)**

‘Friederike Brun as a woman of letters and transcultural mediator’

Friederike Brun (1765-1835) was born in Germany shortly before her family moved to Copenhagen, where her father became vicar at the church of the German-speaking community. German and Danish intellectuals and writers such as Klopstock, Gerstenberg, and the brothers Stolberg frequently assembled in the vicar's house and stimulated Friederike's intellectual curiosity. She began writing poetry at an early age and later reached fame through various travelogues. Despite her exclusive use of the German language in her literary works, she never really identified with her country of origin. In her memoirs *Wahrheit aus Morgenträumen* (1824) Friederike reflects on her ‘gänzlicher Mangel an ausschließender Vaterlandsliebe‘ and admits, ‘zu welchem Volk ich nun eigentlich gehöre, weiß ich wirklich nicht’.

Her cosmopolitan mindset is mirrored in her vast network that comprised famous intellectuals and politicians from various European countries as well as young and unknown artists, who profited from Friederike's connections. Not only in her internationally known salon near Copenhagen, but also during her travels through Italy and Switzerland did she interact with European intellectuals, politicians and artists such as Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt, Germaine de Staël, Friedrich Matthison (who called her ‘nordische Sappho’ (Bonstettiana 1997)), and Bertel Thorwaldsen, the latter of whom she came to know in Rome and promoted in Denmark. Aside from personal interaction, Friederike cultivated her network through literary correspondence with contemporaries such as Johann Caspar Lavater, Georg Zoëga and Elisa von der Recke. Against this background, the aim of my paper is to shed light on Friederike as an influential writer, networker and mediator of culture in Europe, who has been largely neglected by German literary history, and illustrate her role in the *republic of letters*.

**Flavio Auer (University of Freiburg)**

‘Platonism and Empiricism in Enlightenment Science. Christlob Mylius and Christoph Martin Wieland’

All too often, the emergence of modern science is viewed as an empiricist movement. However, the Scientific Revolution can be conceptualised more appropriately as an amalgamation of platonic and empiricist strands. In the case of astrophysics, Kepler was clearly a Platonist, whereas Galileo would be better called an empiricist avant la lettre. Broadly speaking, the platonic aspect can be seen in the mathematisation of physics and the assumption of the reality of mathematical objects, the empiricist aspect in experimentation and observation as foundation of science.

In contrast, in early 18th century Germany, Enlightenment thought seems to be predominantly empiristic in its approach to science, despite Leibniz and Wolff. In my paper, I would like to demonstrate the subsurface continuation of the platonist-empiricist dichotomy in early German Enlightenment didactic prose resp. poetry by two case studies from the middle of the 18th century: Christlob Mylius (1722-1754) and Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813) (with a short digression on Gottsched, Lessing, and Lichtenberg).

Mylius, on the one hand, ridiculed abstract, theoretical speculations in his parody *Anfangsgründe der Physikopetitmaitrick* (1747). On the other hand, he praised Newton's purely theoretical conclusion that the earth is flat at the poles, which was demonstrated by the Maupertuis expedition, in his *Lehrgedicht von den Bewohnern der Kometen* (1744). Wieland's poems (*Die Natur der Dinge*, 1752; *Briefe von Verstorbenen*, 1753) present an idealistic philosophy of nature heavily influenced by Plato, which nonetheless is full of examples from empirical, experimental science to underpin his arguments.

I endeavour to analyse two aspects of Mylius's and Wieland's writings: Firstly, the aforementioned interweaving of platonic and empiricist elements in their respective reasonings, and secondly, to what extent they reflected this dichotomy on a philosophical level. Thereby, I would like to contribute to a more thorough understanding of Early Enlightenment thought on science.

**Dr Elystan Griffiths (University of Birmingham)**

'Kleist's Palimpsests'

My paper will consider the composition of Kleist's first play, *Die Familie Schroffenstein* (1802). Conceived in Paris and finished in Switzerland, Kleist later described it (or perhaps its faulty first edition) as 'eine elende Scharteke'. For all its faults, the play provides us with insights into Kleist's literary development and ambitions. It includes a breathtaking range of references, from Plato and the Bible to Shakespeare and the literature of his own times. The paper will trace these Kleistian 'palimpsests' and consider possible answers to the question of why he composed in this way. Were his allusions intended as homage, irony, parody or none of these? Moreover, what do these intertexts tell us about Kleist's engagement with gender and politics? Finally, I will consider what light the play may shed on Kleist's path to becoming an author – albeit one whose qualities were often not recognised in his own age.

**Alexandra Hertlein (University of Oxford)**

'Becoming Stone. Romanticism, Deep Time, and the Boundaries of the Human'

This paper examines how Romantic literature conceptualises humanity's relationship with the mineral world, exploring both the distribution of agency in this context and the aesthetic and philosophical implications of petrification – as both metaphor and material process. Emerging geological theories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which radically expanded the timescale of earth history into what is now termed *Deep Time*, destabilised

traditional distinctions between organic and inorganic matter. No longer mere curiosities, fossils revealed a vast, prehuman past, forcing a reevaluation of nature's temporality and the human place within it. In this shifting intellectual landscape, the mineral world was no longer a static *other* but an active force – sometimes hostile, sometimes revelatory. Romantic literature registers this epistemic transformation, portraying stone as both an alien presence and a latent repository of meaning.

Romantic writers such as E.T.A. Hoffmann (*Die Bergwerke zu Falun*) and Ludwig Tieck (*Der Runenberg*), for instance, frequently depict the lithic realm as an alien and menacing *other*. Their protagonists descend into subterranean landscapes only to experience a profound estrangement from their own humanity. Yet Novalis complicates this portrayal. Rather than positioning stone as a static and lifeless *other*, his works imagine it as a domain of continuity between human and non-human existence. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the subterranean is not a site of alienation but of return – both to a spiritual 'fatherland' and to an original, more primordial order of being. Meanwhile, in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, petrification emerges not as a symbol of death but as an ambiguous transformation, one blurring the boundary between organic and inorganic, human and mineral.

This Romantic preoccupation with the lithic extends beyond mere metaphor. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* provocatively suggests that nature itself may have turned to stone upon humanity's arrival. To recognise nature as a living being, humans must attune their vision to the Earth's deep past – looking beyond its petrified surface, which reveals only the most recent layer of time. The novel casts stone as a repository of ancient wisdom. One apprentice, gazing at old statues, suddenly acquires a 'strange understanding of the stone world'. As this insight takes hold, he notices on himself 'Steinrinden, die nach innen wachsen' – a striking image ofabsorption into the lithic. In this vision, is his transformation an erasure of the human, or a reconnection with nature's deep past? This unsettling thought experiment reflects a broader Romantic preoccupation with the epistemic status of stone: is it an inert remnant of the past, or a repository of latent meaning?

Novalis's works, in many ways, prefigure aspects of Anthropocene discourse, yet not in the familiar terms of human geological agency. Instead of casting humanity as a planetary force shaping the Earth's future, his texts situate human existence within a vast, pre-existing mineral temporality. By collapsing distinctions between cultural memory and natural history, his texts translate geological temporality into aesthetic experience. Petrification, in this context, does not mark an interruption of life but a reconnection to an older, non-human continuum – one in which humanity is not the agent of transformation but also subject to deeper, geological forces.

# Germanophone culture in (Habsburg) Central Europe: alternative voices of community

Chair: **Martin Lindner (University of Oxford)**

**Dr Sabine Egger (University of Limerick)**

‘Somnolent memories in Jaroslav Rudiš’ novel *Winterbergs letzte Reise*: A literary act of “Sterbebegleitung” for “Central Europe”?’

In *Winterbergs letzte Reise* (2019), Czech writer Jaroslav Rudiš’ first novel written in German, the focus is on Central European events and places that have been largely forgotten in today’s Germany and Austria. The story is told by the almost 100-year-old protagonist, in pathological, repetitive ‘Erinnerungsschüben’ on his train journey from Berlin to Sarajevo. Winterberg's listener in the narrative is the Czech geriatric nurse Jan Kraus, who is specialised in ‘Sterbebegleitung’ and accompanies the old man on his last journey. Various reviewers have criticized the novel’s ‘Erzählobsession’, the narrative being structured by repetitive accounts of historical events by the protagonist. According to the *Deutschlandfunk* review of 2019, this means ‚dass nicht nur sein Sterbebegleiter, sondern auch der Leser allmählich zu ermatten droht’.

In my paper I will explore two alternative – or complementary – readings of this narrative strategy. On the one hand, Rudiš's novel could be read as a self-reflexive example and implicit critique, a provocative *Sterbebegleitung* of a 'Central European’ literature that has understood itself as a mode of rethinking post-Soviet Europe, as Milan Kundera and György Konrád outlined in their essays of the 1980s, while drawing on the ‘Habsburg myth’ (Magris). Much of this ‘Central European’ literature, written in various languages, could be classified as travel writing. The narratives often trace train journeys from West to East, or vice versa, while reflecting on historical places and transcending national and temporal borders. Examples include texts by Ilma Rakusa and Andrzej Stasiuk, with Martin Pollack's *Eine Imaginäre Reise durch die verschwundene Welt Ostgaliziens und der Bukowina* (1984) as an early key text. (The boom of this literature in the following decades was also driven by publishing houses and EU initiatives.) The blurb on the back cover of the 2019 Luchterhand edition of *Winterbergs letzte Reise* clearly places *Winterbergs letzte Reise* in this tradition. However, what Rudiš’ novel does, is to highlight the ‘ageing’ or fatigue (even decomposition) of such*Mitteleuropa* discourses. On the journey, Winterberg refers to the ‘letzten Baedeker’ of the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy from 1913. What he reads there is the benchmark for everything the traveller encounters. In contrast, his daughter Silke attempts to dispose of his *KuK* model railway, together with other mementos of her father in his Berlin apartment. On the other hand, the memory flashes of the Sudeten German Winterberg, retold by his increasingly tired carer, but also linked to the latter's own memories and memory gaps, create a network of nodes that can be grasped with Anil Bhatti's concept of ‘similarity’. For the Czech carer is an expellee from the communist ČSSR. ‘Similarity’ arises here through an antinomian structure. For Winterberg, characterised by ‘historischen Anfällen’, is confronted by Kraus as someone who ‘historisch nicht durchblickt’. Not only are German and Czech, Prussian and Habsburg

discourses brought together here, but dementia-like surges of memory are linked antinomically with memory gaps. This also happens at the level of communication with the reader. The novel's overwhelming memory flashes, the abundance of stories and histories, combine antinomically with gaps in memory and disinterest on the part of the imagined readers. The novel can thus both be read as a (empathetic) diagnosis of historical disenchantment, literally 'audible' in the monotonous chugging of the train, into which Winterberg's stories flow, and, at the same time, as a plea for the continuation of storytelling, and for new perspectives on Central Europe emerging from it to counteract current tendencies towards division.

**Dr Veronika Jičínská (Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Ústí nad Labem)**

<u>'Women's writing in the Czech Lands in the first decades of the 20th century'</u>

The status of Germanophone culture in the Czech Lands (Bohemia), as part of the Habsburg Monarchy, was undergoing a major transformation in the last decades of the 19th century. Around 1900, a wide range of varying cultural and linguistic identities occurred in writers, especially those in major urban centers. The complexity of linguistic identities in these lands – in the research literature mainly understood as an interchange between Czech and German-speaking culture – and its impact on literary production has been subject of recent seminal studies (cf. Becher et al 2017; Nekula 2006, 2019; Petrbok 2014; Stewart 2019). However, little attention has been paid so far to the specificity of women's participation in the literary scene of this period. German-speaking or bilingual (Czech-German) women authors, a large part of which were of Jewish origin, developed rather divergent linguistic identities (*Sprachbiographien*) then their male counterparts. This divergence can be attributed i. a. to different ways of socialization and education (lack of access to higher education) and limited access to public platforms for intellectual and social exchange. Combined with modernist tendencies in both Czech and German-language communities and the emergence of new media, the specific position of German-speaking (or bilingual) women writers in the predominantly Czech-language environment also yielded differing forms of self-formation and loyalties to Germanophone culture.

Using the example of the work of Gisa Picková-Saudková (1883–1943), a bilingual Czech-German writer, journalist, and translator, the paper will deal with women's writing in the Czech Lands in the first decades of the 20th century, with special attention to the activities of Germanophone Jewish women in general.

**Dr Clemens Ruthner (Trinity College, Dublin)**

<u>'Realism Rules? On a possible connection between empire, nationalism, genre and epoch in "Kakanien"'</u>

According to common sense in literary studies, eras and genres owe their existence to aesthetic and media-historical constellations as well as to the history of ideas and socio-

economic relations. But what role did the tension between empire and nation play in Habsburg Central Europe in the 19th and early 20th century, Eric Hobsbawm's 'Age of Empire', when it came to shaping literary history? In my talk, I will present a brief outline of my work in which I will attempt to think further about the connection between literature and empire – or the post-imperial situation – in relation to the Habsburg monarchy along the lines of theses developed by Edward Said in his influential book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), also including the 'Habsburg myth' postulated by Claudio Magris (1966). The thesis of realism as an imperial form and of modernism as anti-imperial plays a major role here. The proposed approach questions the 'national-philological' approach and suggests a comparative, transnational approach.

# Centring Marginalised Perspectives (W+IGS Panel)

Chair: **Prof. Margaret Littler (University of Manchester, Emerita)**

**Robin Crawford (University of Oxford)**

‘Development and its Failures: Reading Klaus Mann’s *Der fromme Tanz* (1926) as Queer Bildungsroman’

Klaus Mann’s first novel, *Der fromme Tanz* (1926), stands as an intriguing case study of openly queer writing that manages to preserve a skeleton of traditional narrative shape while interacting with the formally disruptive forces of modernism. The novel follows a journey of change in the life of a young man, meeting the basic requirements of a Bildungsroman but representing a deliberate intervention in the genre. ‘Bildungsroman’, despite its ubiquity, remains a highly contested term, and recent decades have led critics to question the degree to which the developmental aspect of ‘Bildung’ is actually a value fulfilled by the novels bearing that label. If ‘Bildung’ is treated as something to be achieved, its achievement means development is then over. Either individual characters are failing, or the concept of development itself involves an inherent failure to be completed. This opens up the Bildungsroman to queer interpretations of a construction that is already often situated on the margins of what is accepted as success. In response to Jack Halberstam’s question, ‘What kinds of reward can failure offer us?’, I argue that reading the Bildungsroman queerly via the lens of Mann’s novel can reconcile failure with development when the latter is decoupled from an external standard of ‘success’, showing that failing can be a productive process. For the queer Bildungsroman hero, development may not lead where it’s expected to, but the redirection can be constructive; going awry is still going somewhere.

**Dr Tobias Heinrich (University of Kent)**

‘Subverting the colonial gaze in German migrant cinema: Amel Alzakout and Kahled Abdulwahed’s *Purple Sea*’

*Purple Sea* (Germany, 2020) captures the harrowing struggle for survival of a group of refugees whose boat capsized off the coast of Lesbos during an illegal crossing from Turkey. The film is composed of footage from the handheld camera of Syrian filmmaker Amel Alzakout, who is one of the survivors of the sinking and is now based in Germany. Blurry, fragmented images from the water are accompanied by Alzakout’s voice, reflecting on the events, intertwining the immediate chaos of the sinking with her broader journey, her escape from war-torn Syria and her hopes for an uncertain future.

Building on William Brown’s concept of ‘non-cinema,’ this paper examines how films like *Purple Sea* challenge the colonial gaze that shapes mainstream representations of migration in German and European cinema. More than just a firsthand portrayal of the perilous – and, for some, fatal – experience of forced migration, *Purple Sea* interrogates conventional viewing

habits and the visual norms of migrant cinema. Through a deliberately non-cinematic aesthetic, films like *Purple Sea* expose the inherent power imbalance in Western visual culture. Finally, the paper explores how this aesthetic approach contributes to a post-national reimagining of German cinema.

**Prof. Charlotta Seiler Brylla (Stockholm University)** and **Prof. Ingo H. Warnke (University of Bremen)**

<u>'If a Center Claims to Be the Margin – Considerations on *Mimicry of Marginality*'</u>

It is important to keep centring marginalised perspectives and thus to critically reflect on hegemonic discourse positions. This also applies to marginalised positions and approaches in academia in general and in German Studies in particular. However, a research-ethical consideration of marginality should be complemented by an understanding of the dynamics of a discursive reversal, as is characteristic of *New Despotism* (Keane 2020) or *Soft Authoritarianisms* (Randeria 2021; Steinhauer 2024: 146): what happens when a hegemonic centre describes itself as marginalised and acts as such? A central question for German Studies and the humanities more broadly, e.g., for Trans and Queer Studies.

Our contribution is concerned with a reflection on the discursive shift of marginality in times of threatened marginal voices. We will look at the reversals of centre and periphery and focus on contemporary German discourses, which we contextualise in international scope; the reversal of centre and periphery is a transnational discourse strategy for questioning anti-discrimination rights.

At the centre of the paper is the discourse-analytical concept of *Mimicry of Marginality* (Warnke, Bonacchi & Seiler Brylla 2024). *Mimicry* here refers not only to biology, but also to post/colonial situations within them. By discussing *mimicry*, it will become possible to explain the strategic functions of the discursive reversals of centre and periphery.

Our contribution to the panel will be a theoretical one, in which the empowerment of marginalised positions and voices will be discussed in the context of distressing politics that de-authorise marginalised positions and subjects.

# German Screen Studies

**Chair: Prof. Christiane Schönfeld (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick)**

**Prof. Marco Abel (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)**

'With Nonchalance at the Abyss: The Cinema of the New Munich Group (1964–1972)'

This talk will offer a brief introduction to the New Munich Group (NMG), a group of filmmakers who constituted one of the most interesting phenomena in West-German cinema during the second half of the 1960s. Yet, although they both received modest critical support from film critics writing in *Filmkritik* and *Film* and made several features that have assumed cult status (and, in the case of *Zur Sache, Schätzchen*, also enjoyed tremendous box office success), the group has been (actively and even intentionally) written out of German film historiography. This happened, I argue, because their films are characterized by an aesthetic and political sensibility of *nonchalance* – a *Gleichgültigkeit* in terms of both *gleiche Gültigkeit* (equally valid) and *gleichgültig* (being indifferent) – that affectively expressed the attitude of an 'aesthetic left'. This sociopolitical disposition, encapsulated in a specific film aesthetic, did, in turn, not sit well with the so-called 'political left' of West-German film criticism – a film-critical tendency that not only dominated the period of the 'long 1968' but also shaped (West-)German film historiography in subsequent decades. I argue that today it is worth recovering the NMG around filmmakers such as Klaus Lemke, Rudolf Thome, Max Zihlmann, May Spils and Werner Enke, as well as Martin Müller, as their style of filmmaking is expressive of what I call a 'left without leftism', which embodies an as-of-yet unrealized virtual potential for the possibility of making a different kind of left-political German cinema – one that significantly differs from both the 'Brechtian' tradition and the typical social-realist *Problemfilm*-tradition that have largely defined the notion of what (left) political cinema in German can be, should be, and *is*.

**Dr Dora Osborne (University of St Andrews)**

'Fur and Fascism in *The Zone of Interest* (2023) and *Finsterworld* (2013)'

In *The Zone of Interest* (2023), Jonathan Glazer focuses on the home of Rudolf and Hedwig Höss to show how the household is crucial to the broader structures of fascism in maintaining the border between the Nazi protagonists and their victims. The horrors of the camp, however, penetrate and contaminate their carefully constructed and regulated domestic space in various ways. In this paper I consider the striking scene of Hedwig Höss trying on a fur coat selected from the looted belongings of prisoners, a gesture that at once asserts her absolute dominance over its former owner and brings her into close proximity with the both the Jewish other and the animal other. Indeed, Glazer here draws on the trope of the emotionally cold, cruel woman in (warm) furs, as well as the historical figure of Brigitte Frank, fur-clad wife of the high-ranking Nazi official, Hans Frank. The fur coat also suggests one of several connections to *Finsterworld* (2013), a conceptually and formally very different film by Frauke Finsterwalder

and Christian Kracht, but one which is similarly interested in the structures of fascism. Here furs represent and activate the desire for touch, for contact with the other that has been rendered impossible as both a legacy of fascism – the film is set in contemporary Germany – and the condition of its resurgence. They also evoke non-human animals, which are significant in both films, not as inferior beings, but as part of an idealised nature that masks the inhumanity of the camp.

**Dr Leila Mukhida (University of Cambridge)**

Nostalgia in the films of Valeska Grisebach

Valeska Grisebach is a director who is interested fables, in telling stories which have been told time and time again, in plot lines that can be reduced to a single sentence. Her laconic lead men contribute to a sense that we are seeing types: her modern-day cowboy protagonist in *Western* (2017) remains stoically silent for much of the film, for example, watching, listening, and embodying a masculinity that is epitomises generic performances of masculinity on screen, not only those of the western. In an interview about her 2006 film, *Sehnsucht*, Grisebach says: '*Für mich hatte [die Geschichte] etwas von einem Country-Song, etwas ganz Schlichtes. […] Es ist […] die Vorstellung von dem, was man damit verbindet, was zu einer gewissen Form von Schlichtheit beitragen kann, oder auch von Dingen, die man mit einer altmodischeren und märchenhafteren Sache assoziiert – wie das Dorf, das Haus, die Straße, die Frau, der Mann.* As such, a nostalgic impetus seems to drive her storytelling.  At the same time, Grisebach is one of only a handful of contemporary German directors to set her feature films in a white, former East German working-class milieu. Her films attend to the precarious economic reality of post-unification Germany, and she is one of the few Berlin School directors to maintain a formally reductive filmmaking style that roots her work firmly in the real: the deployment of lay actors, naturalistic sound and lighting, and improvised dialogue.

In this paper, I consider this double-structure of Grisebach's storytelling, arguing that it is precisely the nostalgic affective charge of Grisebach's films that electrifies their social commentaries. To make this argument, I will draw on Linda Hutcheon's theorisation of the double-structure of nostalgia. For Hutcheon, nostalgia shares a 'secret hermeneutic affinity' with irony: they both contain a double meaning, 'a twin evocation of both affect and agency, or emotion and politics'.  Key nostalgic characteristics – simplifications, ellipses, misrememberings, wishful or fantastical moments – serve as double-utterances in Grisebach's cinema, articulating something that is also percipient and critical.

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# Language and Linguistics

Chair: **Prof. Sascha Stollhans (University of Leeds)**

**Cecilia Berti (University College London)**

'A critical discourse analysis of populist women leaders of radical right parties between 2012-2021 with Marine Le Pen, Alice Weidel, Frauke Petry and Giorgia Meloni as case studies'

A superficial reading of the European radical-right's success under women's leadership might expect advances in women's rights to follow, but prevailing nationalist and nativist elements of their political ideology result in Femonationalism (Farris, 2017), an appropriation of feminist narratives for ideological purposes. As of yet, there is no cross-cultural study of Marine Le Pen, Alice Weidel, Frauke Petry and Giorgia Meloni, and their analysis of gender related discourse. This corpus-based project builds on Femonationalist studies through a critical discourse analysis of the leaders and their parties' rhetoric and imagery. The corpus and close reading will take source material from social media, political rallies and conferences, and manifestos. Gender is examined as a variable across the leaders for them to construct, or perform, a political identity, and gender as thematic discourse and medium to communicate their worldview. This enables them to obscure political consequences behind personal presentation. The cross-cultural comparison shows how despite shared political stances, each woman can form their own narrative (e.g. mother, daughter, outsider), and not be treated as a hegemonic group. Their discourse affects the material conditions of women, the demographic makeup of society, and a collective sense of national identity with, or in opposition, to their language and political power.

**Dr Michael Hofer-Robinson (Royal Holloway, University of London)**

'The Societal and Emancipatory Function of DaF/DaZ and Culture-Based Learning'

This paper examines the societal and emancipatory functions of teaching German as a Foreign and Second Language (DaF/DaZ) and culture-based learning, focusing on value transmission, empowerment, and post- and decolonial and power-critical perspectives. It analyses discourses of external and internal cultural, educational, and integration policies regarding value transmission in DaF/DaZ contexts. The corpus includes documents such as curricula, educational standards, and policy papers issued by governmental institutions. The aim is to identify key themes and discourse statements about the function and relevance of value transmission in DaF/DaZ learning environments.

The paper addresses whether DaF/DaZ education has a broader societal or emancipatory task, and if so, what this entails and how it can be justified. It explores the potential differences in societal roles between DaF and DaZ, questioning if the aim to transmit 'our values' (Auswärtiges Amt 2020: 3) should apply globally to DaF education. The discussion includes an analysis of what 'value transmission' means, the specific values involved, and whether this

constitutes an imposition from a post-/decolonial power position. It also addresses how DaF education positions itself regarding post-/decolonial power dynamics and dependencies, particularly in relation to the German language and culture-based learning.

The conclusion contrasts the central demands of German and Austrian external and internal cultural and integration policies with the academic discourse on culture-based learning in DaF/DaZ. It advocates for greater recognition of academic discussions in policy-making to enhance the effectiveness of value transmission and culture-based learning in DaF/DaZ education, while considering the potential overburdening or ideological instrumentalization of DaF/DaZ educators.

**Dr Geraldine Horan (University College London)**

<u>'"Kein Nazis he op unser Plätz!" The instrumentalisation of dialect in political discourse in Cologne'</u>

This paper examines the strategic use of *Kölsch*, the dialect spoken in the city of Cologne, in contemporary political discourse. For centuries, the dialect has occupied a central place in annual *Karneval* celebrations, and, for many in the city, this is one of the main opportunities to speak and hear the dialect (Horan 2016, 2017. See also Schröder and Stellmacher 1989). Modern-day *Karneval* sees itself as following in the footsteps of nineteenth-century predecessors who rebelled against Prussian domination and mocked its officiousness and rigidity (Godet 2020). Costumes and jollity aside, *Karneval* is inherently political, with a strong emphasis on political humour communicated in dialect. Comedians perform stand-up comedy in the form of *Büttenreden* [lit. 'barrel speeches'] and participate in satirical sketches to live audiences in *Karnevalssitzungen* [Carnival 'sessions'] – large-scale ticketed events held in concert halls or similar venues. Dialect performances touch on current socio-political topics including gender-inclusive language and environmental issues, and mock local, national and international political figures and events. Dialect is also a feature of political protests in the city, as exemplified by the activities of the *Arsch huh, Zäng ussenander* ['Get off your ass and speak out'] initiative, founded in 1992 in response to the rise of right-wing extremism, and more recently active in demonstrations against far-right populism, which has generated slogans such as 'Kein Nazis he op unser Plätz' ['No Nazis here on our city squares']. Focusing on selected examples from recent *Karnevalssitzungen* and anti-far-right activities led by *Arsch huh*, this paper will examine how *Kölsch* is instrumentalised in humour and protest as a linguistic-cultural lens, a conduit, through which political events are 'translated' into a local context, beyond the restrictions and conventions of the standard language and political discourse.

**Dr Björn Kasper (Kobe University)**

'Politik Leicht gemacht – The Potential of "Leichte Sprache" for Cultural Learning in Beginner-Level University DaF Courses'

In the field of cultural learning research, calls for a more critically oriented perspective within German as a Foreign/Second Language (DaF/Z) studies have been growing louder in recent years (cf. Biebighäuser et al. 2021, Kasper 2025, in print). Despite the controversies surrounding the role of value-based education – specifically, the extent to which language teaching can or should be political – such a perspective appears necessary: whether in the context of integration policies in DaZ (German as a Second Language) or university curricula aiming to foster global citizenship in DaF (German as a Foreign Language). Critical thinking (e.g., Gerlach 2020) as part of 'informed participation' ('mündige Teilhabe', Altmayer et al. 2016) has become indispensable, particularly in a globalized and digitalized world where information is disseminated in a flat hierarchy. This makes empirical findings such as those presented in Fornoff's (2018) study all the more concerning, as they indicate a certain 'distance from democracy' ('Demokratieferne', 267) and a tendency toward 'authoritarian orientation' ('Autoritätsorientierung', ibid.) in integration courses.

However, this paper does not aim to engage in theoretical discussions within DaF/Z research, but rather to address an urgent question from the perspective of didactic practice: How can complex political topics and contemporary discourses be meaningfully introduced to beginners in German as a Foreign Language and integrated into a cultural learning curriculum?

The recent state elections in Germany, with their politically charged results, as well as the upcoming 2025 federal election, serve as starting points for this approach in beginner-level DaF instruction. Particular emphasis is placed on materials provided in 'Leichte Sprache' (plain language) by German federal ministries and the Federal Agency for Civic Education, as well as on the interactive election tool 'Wahl-O-Mat'. Despite their accessibility and authenticity, these resources have so far received relatively little attention in foreign language education. The didactic framework is based on the 'design principles of a critical foreign language pedagogy' ('Gestaltungsprinzipien einer kritischen Fremdsprachendidaktik', Schart 2020). In addition to acquiring linguistic structures and subject-specific vocabulary, the primary focus is on fostering critically reflective development among students by engaging with diverse discursive positions.

# National Postgraduate Colloquium in German Studies and Emerging Scholars

Chairs: **Katie Unwin (University of Cambridge), Pauline Preisler (University of St Andrews)**

**Zara Fahim (University of Nottingham)**

<u>Urban linguistic practices in the German-speaking world: Exploring linguistic variation among Austria's youth</u>

This talk introduces my doctoral project on linguistic variation among urban multiethnic speakers in Vienna and their linguistic practices. In large multiethnic urban areas – shaped by substantial immigration, change and increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity – highly specific slang-like linguistic styles have emerged among multiethnic adolescent groups since the 1970s, which I shall refer to as urban youth speech practices. There has since been growing interest among sociolinguists in the emergence of these urban youth speech practices: in how to describe and label them (e.g., are they styles, vernaculars, ethnolects?), and in their use and functions (e.g., identity forming). Such urban phenomena have been widely documented in both larger cities in Western Europe (cf. 'Multicultural London English' in London, Cheshire et al, 2011; 'banlieue French' in Paris, McAuley, 2022, etc.), and elsewhere in African cities, in the Americas and in Asia (see Nortier and Svendsen, 2015 for examples). Within a German-speaking context, research thus far has centred primarily on Germany, especially Berlin, leading to the emergence of 'Kiezdeutsch' as an established multiethnolect (cf. Wiese, 2009; 2012). However, research into the wider German-speaking world, including Vienna, is scant, despite increasing linguistic and cultural diversity trends similar to other European capital cities. Therefore, in this paper, I take the first step in confronting this research gap.

What are the characteristics of youth vernacular language in Vienna? (e.g., lexis, morphosyntax).

a. To what extent can youth vernacular language be characterised as an emerging multiethnic urban vernacular?

b. To what extent are the features and use of youth vernacular language in Austria similar to, or different from, other German urban multiethnolects (i.e., 'Kiezdeutsch' of Berlin)?

I will (i) provide an overview of the current landscape of urban youth speech practices in Europe (specifically the sociolinguistic contexts and prototypical linguistic features which shape and make up these varieties); (ii) evaluate existing attempts to classify urban youth speech practices (highlighting their challenges and epistemological implications within sociolinguistics and popular representations); and (iii) outline existing research specifically in the German-speaking landscape, so I can situate my future findings from Austria in my project. I will end by introducing my research hypotheses and outlining future research steps, including data collection and methodological considerations.

**Dr Danya Harvey (University of Glasgow)**

'Transidentifications: Autofiction and Translingualism in the Germanophone Context'

My research assembles diverse Germanophone texts with a unifying intention of decolonising translation through translator (re)embodiment and considers the ethical future practices imagined through reexive and refractive translingual experimentation within hegemonic (cis/mono)-lingual contexts. In the light of paradigm-shifting theories of prismatic translation (Reynolds 2019) and black trans feminism (Bey 2022), whilst concerned with the tactics of autotextuality and the ambitions of untranslatability, this paper will assess the fertile intersection of autoction and translingualism in recent Germanophone writing as, simultaneously, an embodied space and a decolonial process. Offering close readings of contemporary Ukrainian-Jewish, queer and black translingual texts produced for the German literary market – by Katja Petrowskaja, Kim de l'Horizon, and Sharon Dodua Otoo respectively – it will consider how transidentification can be fostered – and translational ethics/affects transmitted – through the translingual prism. The depth of identification, and love, that is made possible by meaningful (embodied) attempts at translation I am calling transidentification. Such works demythologise mono- and cislingualism and proliferate empathy beyond and beneath the modern/colonial constructs of language, nation, race, gender, class and generation. These authors practise carecraft, that is consent and commitment to the fostering of life beyond and beneath difference, or prismatic mothering. Such strategies are technically divergent, but ethically attuned.

**Anna Hell (University of Vienna)**

'The Magic Lantern as an Object of Collective and Individual Memory in 20th-Century Literature'

The coexistence of magic lanterns and literary production for around 300 years led to a reciprocal influence of both art forms, including literary adaptations by means of media transfer into 'slides' as well as literary aesthetic processes in which the magic lantern serves as a metaphorical model of the mind or poetological model of the respective text. The understanding of literature as a medium of collective memory allows to draw conclusions about the cultural relevance of the magic lantern based on its secondary presence in literary texts. Given the medium's omnipresence at the end of the 19th Century, the starting point of my dissertation is the following question: In which form and in which contexts does the magic lantern recur in 20th Century literature considering the tension between continuous presence and imminent obsolescence of the former visual mass medium? My focus lies on the dual role of the magic lantern as an object and a carrier of memory. The corpus comprises mainly German, English and French-language texts with reference to the magic lantern. Memory studies, questions about the collectivity and subjectivity of media experience along with the notions of 'media nostalgia' (Böhn 2007) and 'lanternicity' (Jones 2014) serve as a framework.

**Lisa Hufschmidt (University of Würzburg)**

'Constructing an Analytical Model for Photopoems: Methodological Approaches and Considerations'

The presentation addresses the development of an analytical model for Fotogedichte, a recently (re)discovered literary genre (eng.: photopoems – i.e., a conceptual combination of a lyrical text and at least one photograph), elaborated as part of a doctoral thesis within the DFG-funded project Das Fotogedicht in illustrierten Zeitschriften zwischen 1895 und 1945. The talk focuses on the methodological considerations necessary for developing a model that adequately captures the text-image relationship in photopoems without establishing a hierarchy between the two components – a limitation often found in existing models. It highlights how multimodality can be adapted to address the specific demands of photopoems, enabling an analysis that equally considers both text and image, as well as the photopoem's design elements (such as typography and layout) and its publication context. Additionally, it explores how interdisciplinary approaches, particularly from photo theory and journal research, can be integrated into the analytical framework. The presentation aims to outline and discuss the fundamental principles and methodological choices that shape this development of the analytical model.

# Schools Panel

Chair: **Dr Ian Ellison (University of Oxford)**

**Prof. Katrin Kohl (University of Oxford)**
**Dr Charlotte Ryland (University of Oxford)**
**Joseph Mehrabian (Cherwell School)**
**Dr Ed Turner (Aston University)**
**Dr Daniela Havenstein (Europa School)**

# Black Literature and Culture in German

Chairs: **Dr Kirstin Gwyer (University of Oxford); Dr Tara Talwar Windsor (University of Cambridge)**

**Dr Lawrence Alexander (University of Oxford)**

<u>'Looking for the Faces of Black People in Berlin's Empty Centre: May Ayim and Hito Steyerl'</u>

This paper traces a dialogue between May Ayim's poetry and prose and Hito Steyerl's contemporaneous early work for her thesis film: *Die leere Mitte* (1998)*.* In particular, in 'Das Jahr 1990. Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive', Ayim describes how she stays on the lookout for the faces of Black people in public space, a more or less direct inspiration for a sequence in Steyerl's essay film, which follows a white woman in blackface walking as a 'colonial subject' in the parade for the 1994 Tag der deutschen Einheit. An emblem or paragon – a 'Paradebeispiel' ('prime example') – she performs race as type and reifies the abstraction of the Black body's value to ensure the marginalisation of actual black faces in German society. Taking Steyerl's engagement with Ayim's writing as a point of departure, I open up a comparative analysis of two lyrical artistic practices. Both Ayim and Steyerl, I contend, draw on musical form (blues and counterpoint respectively), citation, and wordplay to render at once polyvocal and deeply personal accounts of the racial exclusion foundational to German national unity. This analysis also considers the question of how an artist of East Asian heritage confronts anti-Black racism in her excavation of the 'empty' metropolitan centre and incorporates references to Black German writing and activism in her work. In this regard, my reading suggests the relation between these two artists as an example of the zones of 'coincidence' articulated by Joan Kee in her recent study on the the 'geometries of Afro Asia' in contemporary art (2023). I argue these works and their 'staging of (anti-)Blackness' (Priscilla Layne and Lily Tonger-Erk 2024) suggest ways of performing solidarity and critique between poetry and politics that are as urgent today as ever.

**Santhia Velasco Kittlaus (University of Oxford)**

<u>'"But what on earth is whiteness, that one should so desire it?" On Race, Silence, and the Legacy of the Good German'</u>

By taking the question posed by W. E. B. Dubois as a point of departure, a compass along the way, and a destination in my intellectual learning journey, I would like to ponder the (im)possibilities of a German listening to Black voices. Those born after the so-called 'good Germans' (Ó Dochartaigh, Schönfeld 2013) are the citizens of the 'never again', yet 'incapable of doing the work', as Christina Sharpe observes it (2023). German racism is alive and with it, its deafness to Black voices.

With this paper, I share my approach of resistance against the brutality of Whiteness despite being White and of Germanness despite being German. I seek to be a listener-in-practice,

learning from Black scholars. In listening to their voices, I make sense of and interrogate my own scholarly and personal German being in and with the world. Drawing on the concept of the 'dividing line, the fence, the line of enclosure […], the line that defines what is outside of us' as articulated by Allen-Paisant (2024), I examine ways in which this line can be both the destination and the origin of my direction of vision, to look back on what it is that I think defines where I come from. It is a gaze I have learned from those who are not me, who do not share likeness with me, who carry different beings through this world as a space I share with them. Can I meet them at the dividing line that lies between us?

**Kendra Löwer (University of St Andrews)**

'Linguistic and performative resistance in Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo's, Audre Lorde's and May Ayim's poetry'

In this paper I intend to explore Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo's, Audre Lorde's and May Ayim's ways of linguistic and performative resistance through their poetry and performance. All three activists and poets did and/or still do exceptional work in using their voices to criticize the underlying racism in the German language as well as in our everyday lives. I will work closely with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theories on intersectionality, as all three poets have been discriminated against in multiple parts of society, because they inhabit more than one marginalized identity. By focusing on forms of reappropriation, self-assertion and creation of new terminologies as well as Jeannette Oholi's theories about the aesthetics of Black resistance, I intend to explore their use of language and performance in a subversive manner. This way, I will be able to answer the following questions: How can language be used as a tool for resistance? How can it change or challenge discriminatory views? How can it help marginalized people to claim societal space and bring the needed change? Additionally, by looking closely at the importance of rhythm, visual and audio in Aukongo's performance, I will be able to show that spoken word poetry has the potential to allow poets to work more freely with lyrical resistance and that the genre therefore enables them to occupy literary and political spaces.

**Sina Menrad (University of Oxford)**

'Project-based learning with Postcolonial German Literature'

Literature is a great way to motivate language learners of any level to think about and practice their language skills. For the sessions of project learning presented here advanced learners of German are exposed to German postcolonial literature and historical background material with the didactic aim of inspiring them to think about the historical context of German and Germans in the world on an abstract but at the same time inspiring level.

In this case we worked with Katharina Döbler's *Dein ist das Reich* and Mirianne Mahn's *Issa* to combine language learning, cultural learning and literary learning. Both novels offer not only a postcolonial storyline, but also one highlighting family stories.

The chosen method of project-based learning gives the students the opportunity to take what they need to learn individually and follow their personal interests. They have the possibility to study according to their individual needs, rather than following a bigger group of learners.

The developed material seen in the Trinity Terms 24 and 25 with second year students of German at Oxford University will be presented and put out to discussion as well as offered up as inspiration to colleagues to include literature for language learning purposes in their classrooms.

**Dr Hannah Scheithauer (University of Oxford)**

‘The Sankofa Bird and the Angel of History: Narrative Temporality and Memory Ethics in Sharon Dodua Otoo’s *Adas Raum* (2021) and Anouar Benmalek’s *Fils du Shéol* (2015)’

Under the auspices of two winged creatures, the Sankofa bird and the angel of history, this paper proposes a comparative perspective on the poetics of time and the ethics of memory in Sharon Dodua Otoo’s *Adas Raum* (2021) and Anouar Benmalek’s *Fils du Shéol* [Son of Sheol] (2015).

Otoo’s debut novel in German has been praised for the challenge it posed to the hegemony of Western post-Enlightenment temporalities. As a vision of ‘freedom time’ (Colvin) mediated through an engagement with Akan religion and the memory ethics of Sankofa (Cha), the novel’s emphatically anti-linear, looping temporal structure addresses the biases underlying mainstream historiographies in Germany and beyond, especially as they concern the particularly fraught intersection of post-Holocaust and postcolonial memories.

This ambition unites Otoo with the Francophone Algerian author Benmalek who, in *Fils du Shéol,* adopts a spectral perspective tracing the Holocaust’s alleged colonial pre-histories. Benmalek’s novel mobilises the Jewish scriptural notion of the afterlife, ‘Sheol’, and the Benjaminian figure of the angel of history in following the ghost of a German-Jewish boy, who relives his family history in reverse, regressing from the Nazi extermination camps to the Herero and Nama genocide in German colonial South-West Africa.

Both novels speak to recent debates regarding the Holocaust’s singularity and the place of colonialism in German memory culture. Drawing on the spectral and the spiritual, they unsettle the very fabric of time, demonstrating the exciting potential as well as the ethical risks inherent in poetic approaches to inter-memorial relations today.

**Dr Tom Smith (University of St Andrews)**

‘Black Gay Nights: Black Queer Performers around Berlin’s Club Scene’

Ever since Berlin’s clubs began to achieve fame and notoriety in the 1990s, performers and promoters have developed spaces in and around the city’s nightlife to celebrate queer of colour art and performance. Black queer artists were prominent in shaping the early techno

scene and refusing the growing association between European techno music and whiteness (Weheliye 2015). Many artists were exploring embodied performances, revelling in fleeting live performance while always shaping their work for the camera and its promise of posterity (see Nyong'o 2018). Photographs, sound art, press reviews and video help reconstruct this growing queer Black German scene, while always gesturing to powerful queer silences and practices of refusal that preserved performers' privacy and creativity (see Smilges 2022, Campt 2019). Figures like Queen Kenny, Rik Maverik and Todd Ford critiqued the whiteness that structures German society and their work shows how influential a critical race theory of Berlin's clubs was, not only in the clubs but in Berlin's theatre, slam and film scenes. Their creativity was anchored in the specific context of Berlin and post-unification Germany, but they also shone a light on racism and homophobia in the music scene internationally. Their legacy has continued to shape these discussions into the twenty-first century.

**Dr Tara Talwar Windsor (University of Cambridge)**

<u>'Resonances across time and space: a festival of literary performance, knowledge production and political intervention'</u>

In this paper, I take the literary festival *Resonanzen* – curated by the writers Sharon Dodua Otoo and Patricia Eckermann – as a case study to explore the intersections of Black German literary writing, cultural performance and transnational knowledge production. I demonstrate that *Resonanzen* is a key example of a kind of interventionist praxis increasingly enacted by marginalized groups in contemporary Germany to make themselves heard and to make others listen. The conception and organization of this event as 'ein Festival im Festival' points to the incursion of hitherto marginalized actors into established cultural spaces in order to challenge and change the structural composition of such events from within. One of the overarching aims of the *Resonanzen* festival is to counteract the erasure of long-standing Black literary and scholarly traditions in the German context by highlighting the rich heterogeneity of Black literatures and identities in the past, present and future. My paper argues that the festival does this by invoking networks of knowledge across time and space, not only through the literary texts performed and discussed at the festival, but also in the wider curation strategies and the presentation and promotion of the festival through written and visual documentations, as well as on social media. In doing this, I also reflect on my own participation in the festival and work creatively with the titular concept 'resonances' – which originates in this case in the grassroots activism of Black queer-feminists – to explore its critical potential as a more inclusive extension of the notions of visibility and audibility.

# Medieval German in the Modern World

Chair: **Dr Sarah Bowden (King's College London)**

**Dr Sarah Bowden (King's College London)** and **Prof Almut Suerbaum (University of Oxford)**

'Medieval Literature and Contemporary Creative Practice'

Many contemporary writers, artists and other practitioners work with medieval culture as inspiration, source or interlocutor. In this paper, we look at some case studies of contemporary creative engagement with medieval German literary culture and ask what it is that makes the medieval such a rich resource for practitioners. We will consider: cultural and temporal difference; experimental forms and experimental language; public engagement and collaborative practice. The paper will also involve discussion of the (positive) challenges of academic collaboration.

**Julia Brusa (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)**

'Memes and Emblematics – A Comparative Analysis of Meaning-Making Strategies, Analogy and Metaphor'

This contribution examines the structural and functional parallels between early modern emblems and contemporary memes to gain new perspectives on the dynamics of cultural communication. Both media formats function as condensed visual and textual sign systems that encode social, political, and moral messages through specific strategies of meaning-making – particularly metaphor, analogy, and intertextual references.

While emblems in the early modern period established a hermeneutic interplay between image and text – often in the form of riddles, allegories, or didactic symbols – memes employ a strikingly similar iconotextual structure. Both formats combine visual and linguistic elements to generate meaning through metaphors, analogies, and symbolic codes. This process of meaning-making arises from the interaction between image and text: emblems integrate a *motto*, a *pictura*, and a *subscriptio* into a multi-layered sign system whose meaning emerges only through the interplay of these elements. Memes operate on a comparable principle, utilizing image-text combinations that reference existing cultural contexts, subvert them through irony, or reconfigure them into new semantic frameworks.

Special attention is given to the modes of dissemination of both phenomena: emblems were not only disseminated through book illustrations but were also incorporated into friendship albums (*Alba Amicorum*), where they were personalized, adapted, and circulated within an interactive social space. This functionalization of emblems within early modern social media parallels the digital meme culture, in which content circulates through online networks and is continuously reinterpreted through remixing, variation, and creative appropriation.

By conceptualizing memes as 'digital emblems', this paper demonstrates how traditional patterns of meaning-making are transformed within contemporary media environments. The analysis bridges past and present, reflecting on the anthropological constants that underlie how humans generate and disseminate meaning through visual signs, linguistic condensation, and social circulation.


**Josephine Spelsberg (King's College London)**

<u>'Sexist or feminist? A comparison between the fifteenth-century epic Salman und Morolf and the twenty-first-century motion picture *Jennifer's Body*'</u>

Can a text be interpreted as sexist and feminist at the same time? The 15th century *Salman und Morolf*, a Middle High German epic, blurs these lines masterfully. In this epic, the protagonist Morolf hunts the beautiful Salme, who is married to Salman, king of Jerusalem, brother of Morolf. Due to her exceptional beauty, Salme is repeatedly abducted and recaptured throughout the tale. She is described as a dangerous woman who causes the deaths of men, though she is throughout the narrative victim of masculine oppression and murdered in the final scene. Yet the violence Salme is subjected to and her status as mysterious prize give her a substantial amount of power in the tale. She is neither active nor passive – the driver of action yet not the protagonist of this tale. In this way, she resembles the 21st century character Jennifer, embodied by Megan Fox in the 2009 motion picture *Jennifer's Body*. Initially a box office failure, this film has in recent years achieved cult status due to its intricate interpretations of female agency and friendship. Like Salme, Jennifer is portrayed as a men-murdering woman, though she is, in this film, possessed by a demon who feeds on the flesh of men. Neither Jennifer nor Salme are entirely positive nor negative characters, and they are both hunted by the protagonists of their stories. Though centuries apart, bringing these two stories and their representations of female character into conversation opens new ways of understanding the value of gendered suffering for entertainment purposes in medieval and modern times. It also brings forward how the representation of female storylines can be interpreted in feminist and sexist terms, and both the epic as well as the motion picture derive parts of their entertainment value from the ambiguity of their political stances. This paper will interrogate in detail how the two cultural productions overlap in their storylines and receptions, and how the medieval and the modern can speak to each other in compelling ways.

# Postgraduate/ECA Roundtable

Chairs: **Dr Katherine Calvert (University of Leeds), Dr Joe Prestwich (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London)**

This session is specifically targeted at anyone who identifies as a postgraduate or early-career academic and is an opportunity to discuss our experiences in a relaxed, supportive environment. The session will take a roundtable format with discussions covering issues specific to postgraduates and early-career academics, including research and teaching opportunities, research-related careers, and managing the challenges faced by PGRs and ECAs.

# Elias Canetti and the British in a European Context

Chair: **Dr Margit Discherl (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)**

**Dr Jack Arscott (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich/Swansea University)**

<u>'Trials of a Translator'</u>

Elias Canetti's unpublished diaries and notebooks are not typical literary translation material. Uncensored, often un-revised and certainly unconstrained by considerations of space, they don't make many concessions to the reader. Nor have they been curated to furnish that reader with a circumspect, let alone favourable, impression of their author. Instead, the welter of reactions and judgements that Canetti committed to paper over half a century of full and later part-time residence in England is characterised by its immediacy, unequivocal moral certainty and unbridled emotional force. For the translator, this throws up at least three recurring questions. How do you capture what was unique about Canetti's response to a particular person, event or cultural phenomenon when he writes almost exclusively in superlatives? Then there is the dilemma, in equal parts aesthetic and ethical, of how far, in the name of literary merit, you succumb to the temptation to tweak in those instances when he repeats himself in the heat of the moment. And finally, how to render into another language Canetti's made-up metaphors and sometimes frustratingly concise imagery without clouding his lucidity or cramping his evocative style? This paper offers some very provisional answers.

**Magdalini Makres (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)**

'<u>*Das Buch Gegen Tod* und "Death shall have no dominion": Canettis kuriose Faszination an Dylan Thomas</u>'

So glasklar Elias Canetti meistens denkt und formuliert, so schwer ist seine 'Todfeindschaft' zu verstehen, eine komplexe philosophische Haltung, die Paradoxien und Widersprüche nicht scheut. In einer Aufzeichnung schreibt er, er habe Dylan Thomas ins Herz geschlossen, und er überlegt sich, warum das so ist; er hat ihn nur einmal getroffen. Auf der Suche nach Parallelen zu dem walisischen Dichter erwähnt er zwar das Gedicht And death shall have no dominion, überraschenderweise hält er den Text aber nicht für besonders gelungen und entdeckt hier gerade keine Parallele zu seiner eigenen Haltung 'gegen den Tod'.

Bei der Suche nach biographischen Berührungspunkten ist Canetti hingegen erfolgreicher; so schmal seine Aufzeichnungen über Thomas sind, so reichhaltig sind sie doch. Bei aller Kritik, die nicht ausbleiben kann ('lyrische Kindheitserinnerungen ekeln mich'), gibt es hier ungewöhnlicherweise auch einen selbstkritischen Blick auf eigene Begrenzungen – offenbar hat er sich Thomas gegenüber wie ein prink verhalten und bedauert das nach dessen Tod. Der Vortrag zeigt, wie Canetti sich Dylan Thomas zu einer komplexen Projektionsfigur ausbaut – einem Autor, den er auch als Antipode hätte sehen können.

**Prof. Julian Preece (Swansea University)**

'Crowds, Politics and Power: Canetti's Observations on Current Affairs, 1945-1990'

Elias Canetti identified with the Left throughout his life, first in 'Red Vienna' whose defeat he witnessed firsthand, then in British exile where he welcomed the Labour victory in 1945 and supported Nye Bevan over Hugh Gaitskell during the period of Labour opposition after 1951. Visiting his relatives in Paris in May 1968, his sympathies were with the protesting students. In postwar London he took an instinctive interest in post-imperial politics, immigration from the British Empire and the resulting multilingual streetscape, under the guise of concepts he was developing for his magnum opus, *Masse und Macht* (1960). He was by conviction a fanatical and forensic anti-racist and never excused tyranny in any form, but he could also be guided by emotion, such as when he supported the ill-fated Franco-British annexation of the Suez Canal in 1956. He is highly selective when it comes to the events and personalities meriting comment in his compendious *Aufzeichnungen* and recently released Diaries. This paper argues that Canetti dissects British and European politics through the lens of the conceptual framework of *Masse und Macht*, which itself was a diagnosis of the civilizational crisis of the mid-twentieth century which he directly experienced.