



## Call for Papers

### **Fourth Heidelberg Graduate Student Conference in English Studies**

**Concept and Organization: MA Students of the English Studies Program**

**June 10-11, 2022**

**All students (not just from the English Department of Heidelberg University) are invited to apply to participate in one of the following panels. The conference will take place in person, with an option of remote access for those participants who cannot come to Heidelberg.**

**Overview:**

Language Change and Cultural Change (Yannick Ganz)

The Productive Role(s) of Corpora in Linguistic Research (Hanna Dzhurynska)

Unfinished Business: Failed Projects and Open Endings in the Arts (Lea Autenrieth)

Symbolism and Its Uses (Debbie Zimolong)

Good Villains and Why We (Don't) Like them – An Exploration of Empathy in Fiction, Stage, and Screen (Jiacheng Mo)

War and Literature: Informative Role and Literary Topos in Poetry and Prose (Emanuele Russo)

The 'Other' Classics (Cecília Monleón Cubero)

Being(s) in Time: Exploring Temporalities in and through Literature (Charlotte Schmiegel)

Monster Mash: Bodies in Gothic Fiction from the 18th to the 21st Century (Cara Vorbeck)

Plays, Novels and Their Adaptations (Danielle van der Merwe)

Hybrids, Deviants, Mediators: Fictional Characters between Social Divides of Identity Construction (Kieran Sommer)

National Literature(s)/ Literature of Nationalism: Exploring the Connections of Prose, Drama and Poetry with their National Space (Kieran Sommer)

The Nature of Fairy Tales (Lara-Marie Kossowski)

Mapping Neoliberalism & Literature (Lukas Schutzbach & Williams Rothvoss-Buchheimer)

Conflict, Harm, and Violence in Speculative Fiction: A Literary Perspective (Sabrina Dora)

“No Sex and the City?” – Representations of the City in Literature and Film (Eva Marie Heimers and Franziska Friedl)

**Yannick Ganz**

**Language Change and Cultural Change**

Language is constantly changing, and so is culture. Often, but not always, innovations in either area cause change in the other, which is why the analysis of factors, mechanisms, and the outcome of these changes is an engaging subject of research. Also, since the terms language and culture can be defined in a number of ways, depending on the methodological approach, the relations between language, culture, and thought can be analyzed from many different angles. As a result, this panel intends to serve as a hub for a wide variety of linguistic questions. Presentation topics can range from the study of language contact, or the formation and classification of World Englishes, to the concept of linguistic relativity, that is whether or how much a culture-specific language determines or influences the cognition of its speakers. Moreover, scholars have applied comparative approaches, for instance in the domains of linguistic (im-)politeness and gender and language, or have focused on the influence of culture in language processing and language acquisition. Other relevant subject matters include the formation of cultural identity via language as well as the inquiry of language shift, endangerment, and death and its ties to the extinction of cultures. Farzad Sharifian's *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (2015) gives an overview of different significant issues and research topics and also points towards Cultural Linguistics as a new emerging branch of linguistics that still lacks a unified methodology and theoretical model, which opens up this panel to the discussion of diverse questions concerning the relationships between languages and cultures.

Please send your proposals of about 200-300 words to Yannick Ganz (Ganz@stud.uni-heidelberg.de)

**Hanna Dzhurynska**

**The Productive Role(s) of Corpora in Linguistic Research**

All students sooner or later approach the moment when they have to conduct their own linguistic research. It does not matter if it is just another term paper or the Master's thesis. Each of us uses a variety of methods and approaches best suited for the project in question. But have you ever used a linguistic corpus in your research?

Corpus linguistics may be described as a methodology that uses the statistical analysis of large collections of data to investigate linguistic phenomena. The main advantage is that it allows researchers to confirm or refute their linguistic hypotheses, as well as outline other, more relevant areas of research on which scholars have not focused before. Moreover, a well-sampled corpus can be seen as representative of specific text or speech types. Let's not forget that one corpus can be reusable for various kinds of research. This is not the end of the list of its advantages, although there are still many other open questions: What collection of texts can be called "corpus"? What types of corpora exist? How can linguistic corpora be used in practice? And finally, how reliable is the corpus? As a result, you will conclude whether linguistic corpora can be useful in your own research. And you are always welcome to share ideas and express your opinion about corpus linguistics. Students would benefit greatly from hearing about the experience of others using this approach.

I look forward to your abstracts, which you can send to [hanna.dzhurynska@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:hanna.dzhurynska@stud.uni-heidelberg.de)

**Lea Autenrieth**

**Unfinished Business: Failed Failed Projects and Open Endings in the Arts**

Orson Welles, today probably best known for creating ‘the best American film of all time’, *Citizen Kane*, was infamous for his many unfinished film productions. He successfully finished little more than 15 films, another 25 were left unfinished or never publicized, and about 30 projects never became more than a film script. He was only 25 when he partly wrote, directed, and acted in his masterpiece *Citizen Kane* – why did the majority of his projects fail afterwards? In 2018, Netflix published Welles’ *The Other Side of the Wind*, 33 years after his death, despite Welles having cut only about 45 minutes of it (the film is 122 minutes long). We will never know if this is the film Welles had planned and the question arises if the process of finishing an artist’s work is in any way justifiable.

Orson Welles is of course not the only creator that has left behind unfinished business, it has happened before and is still happening today. Samuel Taylor Coleridge never finished his poem “Kubla Khan” – an interruption caused him to forget the lines in his head, and many *Game of Thrones* fans fear that George R.R. Martin might never complete his novel series (particularly after having watched season 8). What if an artist has left sketches behind of how the unfinished canvas was supposed to look like and someone else finished the painting? What if an author has left just enough notes for us to reconstruct the supposed ending of a novel? Where does this leave the reader?

This panel seeks to discuss how unfinished works of art (or works of art finished by someone else at another point in time) are to be treated in different fields of study. What were the reasons for the failings of projects? What are the consequences for their reception? A multitude of perspectives is welcome from all disciplines – art history, literary studies, architecture, history, history of music, film studies – unfinished creative projects linger everywhere.

If you wish to participate, please send an abstract of about 300 words to [cc271@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:cc271@stud.uni-heidelberg.de)

**Debbie Zimolong**

**Symbolism and Its Uses**

We encounter culturally coded symbols everywhere in our daily lives and more often than not, we have become extremely familiar with their meanings: flowers are a symbol of love, a four-leaf clover symbolizes luck and fire often means danger. As a literary device, symbols add a deeper meaning to a text that goes beyond the literal. The possibilities of symbolism are almost endless; when authors go beyond clichés and conventionality, symbols can open up interesting and unique ways of conveying meaning. Authors can even use original symbolic systems.

Symbols in literature can be used as connecting themes, they can add depth to characters and they can function as tools of social criticism and subversion: it is *because* we are so familiar with their traditional meanings that these meanings can be subverted to powerful effect.

I welcome presentations covering analyses of symbolism in a range of genres and time periods to allow for a diachronic view on the topic. The focus on the talk should be on the unique use of symbolism in the given work(s). This can relate to the role symbolism plays in structuring the text, how it relates to characterisation or how it relates to social criticism on existing contemporary ideals regarding gender, race or similar categories. Of course these are only examples and papers with a different focus are welcome, so long as they relate to the functions of symbolism.

As an example, I would like to contribute a presentation on nature symbolism in the works of Virginia Woolf and discuss how she subverts both gendered and heteronormative ideals by using symbols in an unconventional way.

I look forward to your ideas and / or abstracts (of about 200-300 words)! Please send them to [debbie.zimolong@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:debbie.zimolong@stud.uni-heidelberg.de)

**Jiacheng Mo****Good Villains and Why We (Don't) Like them – An Exploration of Empathy in Fiction, Stage, and Screen**

Suzanne Keen in her *Empathy and the Novel*, presents her definitions of narrative empathy. From one perspective, it is “a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect” when people see, hear, or read another’s condition (4). In other words, empathy occurs when people imagine what others feel and thus share the same emotions. On the other hand, Keen questions the wide belief that reading novels necessarily leads to empathetic responses, and further casts doubt upon some scholars’ claim that empathy necessarily leads to the enhancement of altruistic and pro-social personalities, especially when readers empathize or identify themselves with self-serving motivations, actions, and characters. Rebecca Mitchell also notices what Hammond and Kim (119) calls “difficult empathy”, and argues for the possibility for readers to empathize with seemingly “unlikeable” characters, and the important role affective responses play in the process of reading (Mitchell 121-34).

As both scholars have mentioned, empathy with or affection towards an “unlikeable” character is not only possible, but also of academic value. What interests this panel are the empathetic responses prompted by villains or so-called “bad guys” in novels and other forms of fiction. In fact, there have been numerous fictional villains in e.g., novels, dramas, films, and some recent video games, who are portrayed as rather ambitious, resourceful, practical etc, and there seem to be little difficulty for readers to empathize with or simply to be fond of them. The problem is, should they? And if yes, then to what extent?

This panel welcomes discussion around questions such as:

What is a villain? What is a good villain? Who is your favourite villain? Why is it possible for readers to empathize with villains? Is it justifiable for readers to invest empathy and affection in villains? If any, what are the positive or negative outcomes of empathizing with or liking a villain, even when he/she is fictional? How far should people extend their empathy-related responses?

Other villain-related discussion topics are also welcomed.

Please send proposal of 200-300 words to: [mjc150@gmail.com](mailto:mjc150@gmail.com). Thank you.

**Works Cited**

Hammond, Meghan Marie, and Susan J. Kim. *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*. Routledge, 2018.

Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Keen, Suzanne. “Novel Readers and the Empathetic Angel of Our Nature.” *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, edited by Meghan Marie Hammond and Susan J. Kim, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 21–33.

Mitchell, Rebecca. “Empathy and the Unlikeable Character: On Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Zola’s Thérèse Raquin” *Rethinking Empathy through Literature*, edited by Meghan Marie Hammond and Susan J. Kim, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 121–34.

**Emanuele Russo**

**War and Literature: Informative Role and Literary Topos in Poetry and Prose**

War is one of the most recurrent literary motifs of all time. This theme has been treated differently in many literary works, depending on, among others, the intentions of each author, historical circumstances, and literary traditions.

Many scholars have translated “topos” (from Ancient Greek “τόπος”) as “commonplace”, highlighting the opportunity exploited by various authors to readapt different themes according to multiple goals. Traditionally, poetry was considered the main genre through which the controversial feelings and situations due to the conflicts found expression, either in affirmative (heroic) or critical (anti-war) ways. The novel, on the other hand, is the literary genre in which the topic of war has been revisited for entertainment purposes. As a result, artists created intriguing stories set in different eras: for instance, Walter Scott, in his historical novel *Ivanhoe*, sets gripping events against the backdrop of the contrast between the Saxons and Normans; Ernest Hemingway, in *A Farewell to Arms*, constructs a love story between a lieutenant and a nurse during the First World War.

War have thus affected literary production throughout history. Various writers have dealt with these in the first person, sharing their experiences in their works and the consequent changes caused by war. A great deal of attention has been paid to these aspects. As a result, literature has also taken on an informative role. Thus, the multitude of works published give the reader an explanation of what was going on from various points of view.

For this edition of the Graduate Conference, interested students are invited to contribute by presenting their research/ideas on literary genres and-or specific works in which war is used for one of these two purposes. You can contact me at the following email address:

[emanuelerusso7@gmail.com](mailto:emanuelerusso7@gmail.com).

I look forward to hearing from you! - Emanuele Russo

**Cecilia Monleón Cubero**

**THE "OTHER" CLASSICS**

What makes a book a classic? This question does not have just one answer, but most definitions would probably include: novels which have withstood the test of time, stories dealing with universal subjects such as love or death, or texts with an outstanding narrative or writing style. Not all publications get to be venerated with this status, but some of them get to enjoy temporary fame and reach the top of the book's best-selling lists. There are some popular genres, like crime fiction, young adult fiction or chick-lit which appeal to the general population, the perfect consumer of fast-paced stories and sagas. The most successful books in these categories get to be admired and widely read, sometimes even turned into movies, to be forgotten after some years. Some examples from the past years are *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, *Bridget Jones Diary*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, amongst others.

These novels present what some critics perceive as cookie-cutter stories, stereotypical characters, and rather predictable plots. Even if they do not fit the canon of the classics, they become favorites of readers. The aim of this panel, therefore, is to discuss such phenomena in the context of literary critique. Are these books as empty and plain as they are perceived? Are they looked down upon or considered not "intellectual enough" to analyze? What makes them so likeable? Subjective views on what the panelists think is a good book are also welcome, as are analyses of previous best-sellers fitting the definition of a "classic".

If you would like to participate in this panel, please send your ideas and/or abstracts (200-300 words) to [ceciliamonleon@gmail.com](mailto:ceciliamonleon@gmail.com).

**Charlotte Schmiegel**

**Being(s) in Time: Exploring Temporalities in and through Literature**

Time has been central to the study of literature since the beginnings of Western literary criticism: Aristotle in his *Poetics*, for example, based his distinctions between different literary genres on temporal criteria and, over the centuries, time has continued to play an essential role in literary studies, most obviously in genre classifications as well as in period designations in literary history (Bushnell 2018, 44-46). At the same time, literature also enables us to deal with, and address, notions of time and temporality more explicitly, bringing to the fore the central role that our conceptions of time play for the way we experience our lives, on both a macro-level of societal organisation and control, for example in the form of calendars, or culturally specific schedules and routines (Foucault 1995 [1975], 149ff), as well as on the micro-level of an individual's life.

Literature can engage with time in different and varyingly explicit ways, for example by taking us to times that are not our own – to the past, or what we imagine it to have been like, in historical fiction, to experiences of the present moment that are radically different from our own, or to potential futures that may or may not tell us a lot about the times we live in today, such as those explored in Science, Dystopian, or Utopian Fiction. Additionally, literary works may also play with the way we experience the progression of time, such as, for example, through unusual and/or non-linear narrative structures as those oftentimes found in modernist literature, or by focussing on functions and forms of personal and/or cultural memory.

This panel aims to explore the innumerable ways in which literature – used here in its broadest sense, including various forms of modern media, such as film and video – engages with time and temporality as well as how it has thereby shaped (and continues to shape) our understanding of ourselves as beings “in time” with a past, a present, and future(s) (Traub 2013, 33, emphasis in original).

If you would like to participate in this panel, please send an abstract of about 200 to 300 words to [ch.schmiegel96@web.de](mailto:ch.schmiegel96@web.de).

Keywords: Time, temporality, genre, memory, (non-)linearity, science fiction, historical fiction

Bushnell, Rebecca. 2018. “Time and Genre.” In *Time and Literature*, edited by Thomas M. Allen, 44-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1995 [1975]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

Traub, Valerie. 2013. “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies.” *PMLA* 128, no 1: 21-39.

**Cara Vorbeck**

**Monster Mash: Bodies in Gothic Fiction from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Much of Gothic fiction explores the monstrous, uncanny, and grotesque margins of its storyworlds, and some of the bodies of characters and narrators in these works equally reflect this tendency. Examples of more supernatural iterations of such bodies range from Frankenstein's creature(s) to the vampires of *Dracula* or one of the multitude of ghosts or spectres that haunt Gothic stories. But an analysis of bodies in Gothic fiction cannot be reduced to the monstrous alone; many Gothic bodies are also profoundly human and bear signs of trauma and the endurance of hardships indicative of larger structures of power the works they originate from engage with. On the other hand, Gothic works also contrastively present some bodies as unspoiled, subsequently threaten such bodies through (super)natural entities, or present the gradual decay of bodies living and dead.

This panel seeks to explore the diverse range and nature of bodies contained in Gothic works from Walpole to the present day and the way in which their representation may inform readings of these works. In addition, it also aims to discuss if and how uncanny or grotesque somatic representations may strengthen our understanding of the Gothic as a mode or genre and our understanding of literary representations of human and non-human bodies more generally. Works which might serve as subjects of investigation for this purpose may range from (literary) narratives to poetry, film, television, graphic novels, or games.

- Thematically, submissions may include, but need not be limited to:  
monstrous bodies
- spectral bodies or disembodied entities
- threatened and/or marginalized bodies
- non-human or post-human bodies and the Gothic
- dynamics of embodiment (symbolic, phenomenological, cognitive) in Gothic fiction

If you wish to participate, please send an abstract of 200-300 words to [Vorbeck@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:Vorbeck@stud.uni-heidelberg.de); I am looking forward to receiving your proposals!

**Danielle van der Merwe and Armen Hesse**  
**Plays, Novels and Their Adaptations**

“Whenever we reread a favourite book, we bring to it an updated self and look back at it from a changed world. Film adaptations serve the same purpose of reappraisal: in retelling a story they revalue it in relation to the different reality we now inhabit. Fidelity to a classic is no virtue.” – Peter Conrad (The Guardian, 2011)

Adaptations play a key role in keeping older texts relevant. In recent years, the film industry in particular has ensured that English classics get reintroduced to the public through a medium that attracts large audiences. While some may try to stay true to the original’s plot and characters, many adaptations either update or reinterpret familiar works. This panel is particularly interested in the latter adaptations.

This panel explores the noticeable changes and artistic choices adaptations make to retell a popular story to a new generation. What are the circumstances and effects of specific changes during the adaptation process? How did people respond to these changes? Are there certain political or social messages embedded in the retelling of old themes? Literary papers theorising about adaptations themselves, as well as papers discussing the changes made due to new cultural/historical circumstances are required.

In case you have already written a term paper on one of these topics or if you are interested in researching and presenting your findings, please write to me.

Please send proposals of about 300 words to Danielle van der Merwe: [daniellevdm@outlook.com](mailto:daniellevdm@outlook.com)

Conrad, Peter. 2011. “Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights: Do we need new film versions?” The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/21/classic-novels-film-tv-eyre-wuthering> [14/03/2022]

**Kieran Sommer**

**National Literature(s)/ Literature of Nationalism: Exploring the Connections of Prose, Drama and Poetry with their National Space**

Literature and nationality are interlinked in a myriad of ways: a nation's literature creates and disseminates forms of national consciousness, provides a space for national discourse as well as for aspects of a nation's culture(s) to be shown and explored. Prose, drama and poetry are classified according to the nationality of their authors, who, incidentally, are also often considered to be among a nation's most prominent figures. The list could be continued indefinitely.

According to the often-quoted political scientist Benedict Anderson, a central influence on the formation of the "imagined political communit[ies]" of Americo-European nations in the nineteenth century was their public's reading of printed texts such as newspapers, for instance, with these nationally distributed texts, shared reading practices and the print-language itself providing the basis for a national consciousness among readers (B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2016: 7, 35–36, 55). Such a nation and its culture are heterogeneous and inherently unstable, characterised by "disjunctive forms of representation" as literary theorist Homi Bhabha writes, in which not the longevity or wholeness of a nation's nature are vital, but rather the force and validity it attains through the narrative associated with these representations (H. Bhabha, *DissemiNation*, 1990: 292). Literature and its interpretations therefore add to the understandings of nationality and its many complexities through the re-workings of national symbols, identities and values.

It is these interconnections between nationhood or nationalism and literature that this panel will deal with, including questions such as how literature can create, influence or undermine national identities, how national narratives can be (re-)used, (re-)interpreted and (re-)appropriated through literature, how literary works come to be regarded as representing a national culture or how national affiliation is connected with other identities in literature.

Keywords: constructionist paradigm of nationalism, counternarrative, founding myths, national epic, national(ist) literatures, national identity, (re-)appropriation, transculturation, transnationalism

If you have any questions or would like to send an abstract for this panel (200 to 300 words), you can email me at [kieran.sommer@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:kieran.sommer@stud.uni-heidelberg.de).

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London, New York: Verso 2016.

Bhabha, Homi K. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in: *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, London: Routledge 1990, 291–322.

**Kieran Sommer**

**Hybrids, Deviants, Mediators: Fictional Characters between Social Divides of Identity Construction**

Constructions of identity based on binary opposition or other demarcation phenomena, and the hierarchies often associated with them, depend on the maintenance of clear-cut mental boundaries between the sides of the divide, whether with regard to ethnic, class, national or gender identities. Yet Anglophone literature abounds with figures who are positioned, or place themselves, between these seemingly diametrically opposed sides, whether it is Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, George Eliot's Daniel Deronda or the unnamed narrator of Natasha Brown's *Assembly*.

Such liminal positions enable more comprehensive understandings of identity, as individuals within them are able to view its constructions with a more detached frame of reference or recognise its artificiality, for instance. Through their experiences and viewpoints in such liminal positions, characters may be able to bridge, call into question or deconstruct the divides they encounter. Once affinities based on shared traits with both sides have been established, "belonging [...] to both sides of the imperial divide enables you to understand them more easily", as literary theorist Edward Saïd writes from a postcolonial perspective (E. Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1994: xxx), and this can of course be applied to other contexts. This opens up possibilities for what literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt terms "contact zones" to be recognised or created, namely "social spaces where cultures [or, arguably, individuals] meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (M. Pratt, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, 1991: 34), leading to (ex)change, hybridisation and a consciousness of reciprocity between supposedly dual opposites of self/other, us/them or in/out-group. However, at the same time, such positions between social groups may also cause uncertainty, disconnectedness and crises of identity among the divided groups or the individuals placed between them.

This panel will therefore examine the positions, views and experiences of characters who transcend oppositional structuring of identity in various contexts, thereby exploring their unique placement, deconstructions of clear-cut social divides and, more generally, struggles over individual and group identity.

Keywords: Deconstruction, hybridisation, synthesis, contact zones, transculturality, queerness, transethnicity, class divides

If you have any questions or would like to send abstracts (200 to 300 words please), you can email me at [kieran.sommer@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:kieran.sommer@stud.uni-heidelberg.de).

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, 1991, 33–40.

Saïd, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage Books, 1994.

**Lara-Marie Kossowski**

**The Nature of Fairy Tales**

“Once upon a time...” These words undoubtedly are associated by many with fond childhood memories and when appearing in a text one automatically assumes it to be a fairy tale. However, fairy tales can be more than magical beginnings and a portrayal of outdated gender roles. Providing a simple framework for the author, they lend themselves to conveying contemporary human values through literature. With an inversion of worldviews, the human condition may be examined, and modern issues can be periphrastically highlighted.

They have been attracting academic interest since the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and a wide variety of conceptual perspectives have been part of the discourse. Methodologies used reflect their critical and historical context and their circumstances are therefore an integral part of fairy tale studies. Some approaches to mention are psychoanalytic, structuralist, feminist, and folklorist. We encourage a discussion that is open to any theoretical approaches that aim to analyse the nature of fairy tales. Thus, any examination of a fairy tale regardless of its time period is welcome.

Topics addressed in this panel could include, but are not limited to:

- Exploration of archetypes
- Feminist fairy tale
- The Postmodern fairy tale
- Components of fairy tales and their implications, e.g.: cultural context
- Discourses of racism, gender roles, politics, the human condition, etc.

To take part, please send your proposal of 200-300 words to [lara.kossowski@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:lara.kossowski@stud.uni-heidelberg.de)

**Lukas Schutzbach & Williams Rothvoss-Buchheimer**  
**Mapping Neoliberalism & Literature**

In recent years, "neoliberalism" has become a bit of a buzzword throughout the humanities, including literary studies. Some scholars go as far as to suggest something like "neoliberalism fatigue" (Elliott & Harkins 2013: 2) and argue that the word is dangerously close to becoming a vacuous "theory of everything" (Rowlands & Rawolle 2013) – a term used so ubiquitously and off-handedly that it loses any useful critical specificity, putting it in line with concepts such as "globalization" or "postmodernism."

But what is it that so many scholars are trying to grasp with the term? Apart from merely being a "generic descriptor for right-leaning, negative phenomena" (ibid.: 261) there seems to be a particular quality to the contemporary nexus of politics, culture and economics "neoliberalism" attempts to serve as a shorthand for. A particular interest in literary and cultural studies has been the role of cultural production, reinvigorating age-old discussions of representation and the relationship between society and culture.

This panel intends to interrogate the connection between different perspectives on neoliberalism (be they economic, political, or socio-cultural) and literature (but you are more than welcome to discuss other media as well). We are interested in how neoliberalism is digested by cultural production, and how different aspects of culture participate in and interact or even interfere with neoliberal social tendencies.

Questions we are trying to explore may include but are by no means limited to:

- Is there something like "neoliberal literature"?
- How does neoliberalism affect the literary mode of production?
- Is there a relationship between neoliberalism and the autonomy of the cultural sphere?
- Does neoliberalism impede on the so-called "critical capacities" of literature?
- How does neoliberalism affect the way we read?
- ...

Please send proposals of about 200-300 words to [schutzbach@stud.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:schutzbach@stud.uni-heidelberg.de).

**Sabrina Dora**

**Conflict, Harm, and Violence in Speculative Fiction: Literary Perspectives**

What is often called speculative fiction includes such popular genres as fantasy, horror and science fiction, among others. Many of these are hardly imaginable without acts of violence, whether they are performed against monsters, others or the self. When Game of Thrones appeared on TV all over the world, people were shocked but also excited by the levels of violence in the show, and the retribution against certain characters several seasons later proved to be almost cathartic for viewers. Violence in speculative fiction ranges from the numerous brutal acts of racial violence committed in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* to Bard heroically slaying a dragon in *The Hobbit* and beyond. This panel wants to explore the various functions that acts of violence serve in speculative fiction, whether they are committed by people or systems, inflicted on individuals or groups, political or not. Is violence justified, and if so, how? In which context or environment is it used and is it explicit or implied? How do characters react to it? Are there power hierarchies at play, and if so which ones? Does it resolve conflicts? How does it relate to real-life violence? And when is it too much? You don't have to limit yourself to the questions above, though. Any and all papers dealing with topics and questions relating to this theme are welcome. Please send an abstract of around 200-300 words to [Sabrina.Dora@outlook.de](mailto:Sabrina.Dora@outlook.de)

**Franziska Friedl and Eva Marie Heimers:**

**“No Sex and the City?” – Representations of the City in Literature and Film**

For the first time in human history, more humans are living in urban areas than in rural areas – and the number keeps rising. City space increasingly translates to densely populated space as we watch the continuous emergence of megacities. Then, in 2020, a global pandemic disrupted this development and transformed popular cities such as New York into empty, desolate landscapes. These events exemplify both extremes in the representation of the city in fiction.

On the one hand, cities continue to be “the place to be”: From the Mesopotamian city of Ur to the Greek polis and ancient Rome, cities have emerged as epitomes of political, technological, and societal advancements – a sentiment that continues to this day. To quote Frank Sinatra’s “New York, New York”: “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere.”

On the other hand, we can observe depictions of the city as the root of all evil – the phenomenon of urbanity having sickening, immoral, and alienating effects on its populace. One of the earliest cinematic representations and most influential examples, the German expressionist film *Metropolis* (1922), casts the city as a dystopian space where the protagonist attempts to overcome the class divide between the wealthy and the workers. Be it *Bladerunner*, *The Dark Knight*, or the *Sex and the City* revival, this panel encourages submissions of papers addressing the representation of the city as a place of alienation and modernity, of capitalist excesses or cooperatism.

In the Victorian age, advancements in industrialization and the resulting urbanization spurred literary notions of pastoralism: fleeing from the corrupting influence of 19th century London to the countryside. This myth of the rural-urban divide has since been addressed – and refuted – by such influential thinkers as Raymond Williams in his book *The City and the Country* (1973). Likewise, this panel seeks texts that maintain, question, or disrupt the rural-urban binary. We especially welcome papers concerning the role of the city in the larger context of ecocritical writing.

Last but not least, we are looking forward to papers exploring the themes of monstrosity and abjection in relation to the city. The haunting liminality of modern cities as non-places forces us to question whether or not we can consider urban space itself as monstrous.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch, and/or send your abstract (of about 200-300 words) to [franziska.friedl@web.de](mailto:franziska.friedl@web.de) or [eva.marie.heimers@web.de](mailto:eva.marie.heimers@web.de).