

5th Graduate Student Conference
English Department, University of Heidelberg
June 2-3, 2023

Call For Papers

Deadline for submissions: April 30

All students (not just from the English Department of Heidelberg University) are invited to apply to participate in one of the panels. Detailed descriptions as well as the respective panel organizers' contact information can be found on the following pages.

1. English Worldwide – Trends in Language Use, Variation, and Change
(Yannick Ganz, Lin Han, and Jiahui Yue)
2. Gendered and (Im)Mobile Bodies in Literature
(Sabrina Dora and Ruben Trunzer)
3. “No Sex and the City?” – Representations of the City in Literature and Film
(Franziska Friedl and Eva-Marie Heimers)
4. Greening the Literary Landscape: (Re-)Thinking Human Ecological Entanglements
(Ruxandra Burghilea, Lisa-Marie Kienzle, and Lara Kossowski)
5. Reading Conspiracies: Conspiratorial Thought in Language, Literature, and Culture
(Cara Vorbeck and Lukas Schutzbach)
6. The Rise of Dystopian Fiction
(Cecília Monleón)
7. Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Literature
(Irene Cano, Timm Shanks, and Jiacheng Mo)
8. Speculative Fiction and Imaginative Potentialities
(Lukas Schutzbach and Charlotte Schmiegel)
9. The Author in Exile
(Marcel Krynauw)
10. Travelling Narratives across Time and Space
(Pauline Lantermann and Emanuele Russo)
11. The Female Experience in Contemporary Feminist Literature
(Andra Flatter)

Yannick Ganz, Lin Han, and Jiahui Yue

English Worldwide – Trends in Language Use, Variation, and Change

From the ice sheet of Antarctica to Pacific islands with tropical turtles: English is spoken all around the world and, with about 1.5 billion speakers, serves as a global lingua franca. It is the main language of international business, diplomacy, science, and technology. This panel aims to explore the different roles that English has in today's world and the changes that English is experiencing.

Given the multifacetedness of English language use, the presentation topics for this panel can be equally varied. Possible subjects include the variation, convergence, and divergence of English dialects and accents across different regions, the variation and emergence of English-based creoles and pidgins, the influence of the internet and social media on the usage and evolution of English, the role of English in education and international business, contact between English and other languages, and the preservation of minority and endangered languages in the face of English dominance. Of course, a range of further linguistic topics would also make for suitable presentations.

However, this panel is not only open to linguistics; it also invites renegade participants from disciplines such as literary studies, anthropology, sociology, and media and communication studies, to contribute their insights and perspectives. These topics might include, among many others, analyses of English language use in fiction, connections between gender and language, and English in current political discourse.

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

Sabrina Dora and Ruben Trunzer

Gendered and (Im)Mobile Bodies in Literature

“Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument” - Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Bodies are continually constructed, reciprocally influencing their environment. With the rise of accessibility, technological advances, and changing perspectives on gender, bodies encounter different limitations, cross a number of boundaries and inhabit and ‘haunt’ a variety of spaces: liminal, natural, urban. As such, literature has always had a central part in helping readers make sense of these complex embodied experiences. In books like Mohsin Hamid’s *The Last White Man* mobility changes for a body once it becomes non-white. In Janette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* a variety of bodies, both born and constructed, challenge and reiterate a number of prevalent assumptions about gender, family and sex.

This panel seeks to look at a variety of different intersecting facets relating to bodies: What are the limits imposed on bodies based on factors such as gender, cultural backgrounds, disabilities and more? Who is allowed to occupy which spaces? Which conditions restrict bodies from moving? Who gets to cross from one space into another? What is considered a healthy body? Which language is used to represent embodied experiences? And how are non-human bodies treated?

Keywords: Embodiment, post-humanism, gender studies, disability studies, mobility, illness, spaces

If you are interested in participating with a presentation of your own, please send a short abstract (200-300 words) stating your topic to R.Trunzer@stud.uni-heidelberg.de. We’re looking forward to hearing from you.

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 live in urban areas than in rural areas – and this trend will continue. 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 extremes pre-figured in the representation of the city in fiction.

On the one hand, cities have always been and continue to be pinnacles of civilization: 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.

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). 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. This panel encourages submissions of papers addressing the representation of the city as a place of alienation and modernity, of capitalist excesses or cooperatism, no matter whether the subject is *Bladerunner* or *The Dark Knight*, or the *Sex and the City* revival.

Moreover, 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 eco-critical writing. Finally, 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 we can consider urban space itself as monstrous.

keywords: modernism, space, liminality, urbanity, ecocriticism, capitalism, cooperatism

If you wish to participate, please send an abstract of about 300 words to eva.marie.heimers@stud.uni-heidelberg.de.

**Ruxandra Burghilea, Lisa-Marie Kienzle, and Lara Kossowski,
Greening the Literary Landscape: (Re-)Thinking Human ecological entanglements**

“When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” - Aldo Leopold

“I’m going to die one day. I know it’s coming for me, too. I’ll be a mountain, I’ll be a stone on the beach. I’ll be nourishment.” - Mary Oliver

Recent polarizing issues such as climate change and the alarming recurrence of natural disasters have led to literary studies paying an increased attention to the relationship between human beings and the environment, whether it be positive or negative.

A long line of literary works consider the role of the human as constituent of the biosystem and humanity’s historical impact upon the natural landscape. The goal of this panel is to investigate literary ecologies and human interaction spanning different centuries and cultural backgrounds, as well as to see what the relationship between humanity and nature reveals about both entities. This investigation could also look into the ways in which nature is depicted and character-reader attitudes towards the environment.

We invite presentations on literature (poetry, fiction, drama) which focus on the topic of human interaction with the natural world, the relationship between the environment and the text, and the literary awareness of human impact on the ecosystem. The literary works in question may look into scenes of enclosed landscape, such as the countryside or urban nature, or the open space of the wilderness.

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

- Crisis Fiction (climate fiction, environmental sciences)
- Gender (e.g. eco-feminism)
- Postcolonial Readings
- Plant Studies
- Indigenous Literatures

To participate, please send your proposal of 200-300 words to greening.panel@gmail.com.

Cara Vorbeck and Lukas Schutzbach

Reading Conspiracies: Conspiratorial Thought in Language, Literature, and Culture

The current resurgence of conspiratorial thought has led commentators to declare the present time the 'era of post-truth' or an 'age of conspiracy'. But is this really the case? Or do such labels legitimize and reproduce the very phenomenon they criticize? What would a responsible engagement with conspiratorial thought by the public sphere look like? In order to explore such questions, it is interesting and useful to gain an understanding of the nature and the epistemic and discursive mechanics of conspiracies.

This panel aims to examine the variety of strategies and functions of conspiratorial thought in literature, language, and culture. It seeks to foster discussion about the structure of conspiracy and its possible impacts on the social, cultural, and political spheres they emanate from. We welcome contributions on conspiracies from a range of disciplines (including, but not limited to linguistics, cultural and literary studies, political science, etc.) and cultural backgrounds and are particularly interested in papers that not only explore the discursive intricacies of conspiratorial thought and language, but also seek to situate it within a contemporary or historical context.

Possible topics of contributions may include, but need not be limited to:

- Conspiracies in, about, or propagated by literary and cultural artefacts
- The cultural and political impact of conspiracies on the discourses they are embedded in
- Conspiratorial thought and power dynamics
- The language and/or narrative strategies of conspiracy
- The theory of conspiracy and the relationship of conspiratorial thought and knowledge production

If you wish to participate, feel free to send an email with a 200-300 word abstract and a short biographical note to vorbeck@stud.uni-heidelberg.de. We are looking forward to your contributions!

Cecilia Monleon

The Rise of Dystopian Fiction

In 1516, Sir Thomas More published *Utopia*, a book which described an ideal society living in a perfect imaginary world. The term itself derives from the Greek u-topos (“no place”) and eu-topos (“good place”), and according to More, such a place did not resemble anything we knew; hence, it could not exist.

If utopias are too good to be true, then dystopias lie at the opposite side of the spectrum. Dystopias present imbalanced and flawed societies in which an authoritarian power rules over its oppressed citizens. These stories speculate what might happen to humanity, in a near future, if we fail to address the flaws of our current world. In this context, readers can critically reflect on the present and become aware of their surroundings and the systems they are part of. Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that the modern dystopian novel appeared at the turn of the 20th century, a period of political turmoil and general unease. During the first half of the century, canonical dystopian works which reacted to the anxieties of the time were published, including *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, or *1984* by George Orwell.

Dystopian narratives allow the reader to get involved in a compelling, yet disturbing, world from the comfort of their own home. Our current reality is far from perfect and there are still plenty of issues that can be extrapolated, stretched out, and criticized in the dystopian genre: matters like inequality, unstable political systems, powerful monopolies, the rise of social media and AI, pandemics, emerging wars, and global warming are just the tip of the iceberg.

Therefore, as long as our society continues to be troubled by concerns, there will always be room for dystopian narratives. This panel is a place to discuss any aspects related to this genre, in terms of recurrent themes, narrative devices, and mechanisms that are involved in the making of such fictive worlds. Other points of interest would be the evolution of the genre, its possible didactic value, as well as the rise of interest (from general readers to academics) in the last decades.

Please send your proposals (in 200-300 words) to ceciliamonleon@gmail.com.

Irene Cano, Timm Shanks, and Jiacheng Mo

Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Literature

It has been suggested that “rationality” exists in the human mind as a universal essence (Badmington 2000: 3). Every person possesses it, and it is what distinguishes humans from other forms of life (ibid.: 4). However, this hypothesis is hardly defensible especially in the face of the rapid development of science and technology in the past centuries. Not only have machines seemingly grown more rational than humans in many respects, but they are also beginning to manifest the potential for creativity, a trait once assumed to be exclusively human.

Literature, the epitome of human creativity, is perhaps no longer a human privilege. On the one hand, the creativity of machines is already exerting great influence upon human society, as computer programs are released online that are capable of generating texts at users’ request. It should not come as a surprise, nonetheless, that technological advances such as printing and the Internet have always had a major bearing on literary production and reception. On the other hand, science and technology have been frequently thematized in human-written literature. In many fictional and factual narratives, artificial intelligence, robots, cyborgs, mind-uploading, etc. take centre stage, reflecting narrators’ exploration of the material, cultural, and ethical relationships between humans and their great achievements. The representations of these and other technologies in literature thus constitute another intriguing aspect of literary studies.

This panel is mainly concerned with two topics: the literary potentialities of technology and its representation in literature. What influences does or will technology have on literature? To what extent do machine-generated texts count as literature? How does technology configure story-worlds? In what ways do literary representations of technology change people’s perception of it? We look forward to your contributions to these and other relevant questions.

Please send your proposal to the following email address: mjc150@gmail.com. Thank you very much.

Work Cited:

Badmington, Neil. 2000. “Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism.” In: Neil Badmington (ed.). *Posthumanism*. Hampshire: Palgrave. 1–10.

Lukas Schutzbach and Charlotte Schmiegel

Speculative Fiction and Imaginative Potentialities

“Be realistic: demand the impossible” urged the student radicals of the 1960s – a sentiment which has lost nothing of its urgency today. The present seems plagued by crises of insurmountable complexity: climate change, racial and social injustice, staggering global inequality, and increasing geopolitical instability. Whenever we try to tackle these problems and to think up viable alternatives, however, we inevitably find ourselves confronted with seeming imaginative boundaries, given that our imagination is necessarily tethered to the hetero-normative, racist, neoliberal ideological constraints of the status quo.

In order to address the impasse of this paralysis of the imaginary, contemporary theorists turn towards the aesthetic, that is, to art and especially to literature. The latter has long been discussed in terms of its general imaginative capacity, which is especially true for speculative fiction (SF) such as sci-fi, fantasy, horror, utopian/dystopian fiction, all of which is focused on surpassing the confines of “reality” by dreaming up qualitatively different ways of being. This panel seeks to illuminate these imaginative capacities of SF, and to investigate if and how literature can aid us in surpassing the confines of a present that seems to be without a realistic alternative.

Possible topics for contributions can include but are by no means limited to the following questions:

- Can these imaginative potentialities change our perspective on the present and help us critically reflect upon it?
- Can they broaden our scope of possible solutions to the pressing issues of the present?
- What are some strategies of creating different imaginaries in SF?
- Do these strategies differ from those of other literary modes and genres and if so, how?
- Are these imaginative potentialities per se subversive or may they also reproduce the categories and social coordinates of the status quo?
- ...

If you wish to participate, please send an abstract of 200-300 words to charlotte.schmiegel@stud.uni-heidelberg.de.

Marcel Krynauw**The Author in Exile**

This year, the student graduate conference of the English Department is hosting a panel about the relationship between exile and literature, which will examine and analyze:

1) works of literature which were produced in exile and which reflect on this circumstance (either explicitly or implicitly). Of particular, though not exclusive, interest in such works are themes of homesickness and, conversely, a rejection of 'home', or a combination of both as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

2) works which resulted in the banishment of their author. Here, the themes and content of the works are to be discussed in the light of the social and political environment which has tabooed these themes. A 20th-century example of this kind is Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*.

3) the political, social or philosophical reasoning behind exile, provided that these perspectives do not neglect to discuss the literature or literary theory at play.

Neither the personal ramifications for the author nor the literary themes in question (provocations for or responses to exile) are merely to be enumerated. Meticulous sociological, historical and/or literary-theoretical study should accompany and underpin the interpretation of these texts. For a biographical approach, assumptions about the author's psyche are to be avoided, but an author's comment on the text or role in it (e.g. the mock execution in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*) can be very illuminating.

If you are interested in the topic of this panel and would like to participate in the conference, we encourage you to submit an abstract, detailing your specific take and approach. Please send your abstracts to: marcel.krynauw@stud.uni-heidelberg.de

Pauline Lantermann and Emanuele Russo

Travelling Narratives across Time and Space

The theme of travelling in literature may well be as old as literature itself. Impressions from far-off landscapes, interwoven with a longing for home or the desire to finally arrive have found different expressions over time. In this panel, we hope to throw a light on how the topos of travelling has been realized in literature(s) from different regions and periods in time.

At the core of the genre is the authors' desire to report "findings about human nature for the benefit of stay-at-homes". In this, the primordial use of such a theme can be traced to the accounts of journeys made by many, from Pausanias with his *Guide to Greece* to more modern explorers such as Marco Polo. The trend was further consolidated from the 18th century onwards, as various intellectuals embarked on the so-called Grand Tour. Here, they acted as observers of the social and political behaviour of people who did not belong to their native culture. Moreover, reports of the visited places were made in the form of diaries or letters sent to beloved ones, as well as narrated events during their travels.

As the mode of travel developed, so did the literature produced on tour. Travel in the USA was, before the rise of the motorcar, dependent on the railroad. Thus, it comes as no surprise that trains have found their way into literature and music as a recurring trope with different connotations. Originating in African American spirituals and blues music, the trope chugged into rock'n'roll music and later funk. As white musicians appropriated stylistics of the blues and rock'n'roll, the train came along – and as with other themes of travel literature, connotations of the motif may have changed over time.

Finally, the expanse of travel literature also includes texts that narrate journeys that did not take place. Fantastical stories of explorers can be read as a central element in many novels: the success of Jonathan Swift, despite not having been a great traveler in life, for example, is more due to the compelling character of Lemuel Gulliver, always eager to learn. Not only, but imaginary journeys are also found in poetry, where, through imagination, the poet encounters distant figures, as in P. B. Shelley's *Ozymandias*, and explores both old and new places, as in E. A. Poe's *Eldorado*, pushing the limits of reality.

Evidently, the theme of traveling and means of transportation has cropped up over several epochs and geographical regions. What may seem haphazard at first glance is – like cities on a map – connected by the pathways that we career along to get from A to B. We are interested in all papers that in some way investigate travel narratives – be it blogs, poetry, journals, music, or novels.

We are looking forward to receiving proposals for your talks (ca. 200-300 words long). Please send them to pauline.lantermann@stud.uni-heidelberg.de and emanuele.russo@stud.uni-heidelberg.de.

Andra Flatter

The Female Experience in Contemporary Feminist Literature

The field of contemporary women-authored fiction is fueled by themes of female experience. One only must consider the rising trend of Greek mythology retellings, in which ancient stories are narrated from the perspective of formerly silenced female characters, such as Circe and Penelope in *The Odyssey* or Briseis in *The Iliad*. The emergence of new feminist dystopias in the tradition of 1985's *The Handmaid's Tale*, both on television and in literature, tells a similar tale: governmental control of women's bodies and their reproductive capacity seem more alarming than ever, mirroring the anxiety around the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. A further trend deals with the female experience in terms of suffering and alienation: "Sad-Girl-Lit". This pop-culture-term encompasses a variety of character-driven novels that feature a female character struggling with issues that are often directly linked to their sex or gender; this literature finds resonance with the "original sad girls" of the 1960s: Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. It becomes clear that the themes emerging from such literature more or less remain the same as those that were the focus of feminist literary theory of the mid to late 20th century: sexual violence against women, female rage in a male-dominated world, the limited space for female identification and expression, and discourses of embodiment, such as the control of women's bodies.

There is, of course, not one female experience, but an intersectional convolute of female voices, including those of queer women, trans women, WOCs, women with disabilities, etc. Feminist literary theory, which has a highly interdisciplinary dimension, cuts through humanities, social sciences and sciences – thus, it is especially interesting to map the connections of the study of women with other theoretical fields, such as ecocriticism, Marxism or psychoanalysis, for instance.

This panel calls for papers that investigate all kinds of female experience in contemporary fiction, including novels, short fiction and poetry, as well as non-fiction, such as essay collections and memoirs. I am looking forward to receiving proposals for your talks (ca. 200-300 words long). Please send them to andraflatter@gmail.com.