GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

ENGLISH SEMINAR

25TH AND 26TH JUNE

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Concept and Organisation:
M.A. Students of the English Studies Programme
Friday 25th June

Room: P18

9.00 – 9.15   Welcome and Greetings
              Prof. Dr. Vera Nünning (Heidelberg University)

9.15 – 10.30  Coetzee, Dylan, and the Living Dead: Prize Granting and
              Antehumous Archiving in the Contemporary Literary Field
              [Tim Sommer (Heidelberg University)]

11.00 – 12.30 Text, Image, and Intermediality
                [Chair: Lea Autenrieth]

13.30 – 16.00 2nd Time’s the Charm or (Dis)Enchanted? – Classics Retold
               [Chair: Eva Marie Heimers]

Saturday 8th June

Room: P18

9.00 – 10.30   It’s the End of the World As We Know It – And I Feel Fine?
               [Chair: Eva Marie Heimers]

11.00 – 12.30 Uncloseted - An Exploration of Queerness Across Fiction
               [Chair: Lara Kossowski]

13.30 – 15.00  Poetry and the Endurance of Human Life
               [Chair: Tanya Gautam]

15.15 – 17.00  The Spectre Haunting Academia: Understanding the Role of
               Academia in the Rise of the Far Right
               [Chairs: Armen Hesse]

17.00   Final Discussion
TEXT, IMAGE, AND INTERMEDIALLY

Chair: Lea Autenrieth

Eloquent Art and Artistic Eloquence – The Interplay between Art Work and Text in Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch and Tracy Chevalier’s Girl with a Pearl Earring

Eva Marie Heimers

‘Art is meant to make you feel something,’ such is the common opinion; these feelings then beg to be shared. Ekphrasis, the practice of verbally describing a work of art in vivid detail, tries to convey the essence of artwork by creating another work of art in another medium. This presentation will argue for a synergy effect that arises when visual art and fiction collide, which serves to heighten the impact of both the artwork and the novel. The combination of text and image strengthens the emotional response in the reader or recipient. In embedding their narrative in a real-life context, one in which readers can relate to the text on the basis of shared experience – for example, knowledge of the referenced painting – they convince their readers to accept the story as more realistic than other fictions that are not grounded in reality in this way.

This stylistic device is used, on the one hand, in popular fiction such as Dan Brown’s 2003 mystery thriller The Da Vinci Code, which centres around “symbologist” Robert Langdon, who uses his knowledge of art history to uncover the workings of religious fanatics, on the other hand in works of high culture such as W. H. Auden’s 1938 poem Musée des Beaux-Arts which reflects upon human suffering and its banality by making reference to Brueghel’s painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (ca. 1560s).

This presentation will sketch a history of ekphrasis in literature, spanning from medieval times to modernity. Moreover, it will focus on the resulting realism effects the use of real-life art constitute and its reliance on cultural memory. The multi-mediality or even intertextuality of these reading experiences will be analysed in detail. Focussing on Donna Tartt’s The Goldfinch and Tracy Chevalier’s Girl with a Pearl Earring, this presentation sets out to investigate the relationship between artwork and text. The premise to prove is that the use of real-life artworks in fiction produces a reality effect that serves to heighten the reader’s emotional response to both the original work of art and the novel it inspired.
From Astronomy to Zirkonium: Poetry meets *Breaking Bad*

Timm Shanks

This presentation will examine the role of poetry in the acclaimed TV show *Breaking Bad*. Offering a reading of *When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer*, I aim to show how the themes of Whitman’s short poem interact with the TV show on the level of narrative, character, and style. The result of this intermedial connection, I claim, is a mutually beneficial one: where it adds depth and scope to the story of *Breaking Bad*, the poem – far from being lessened – is freed from the page and treated to a recitation, thereby exhibiting poetry’s too-often-neglected performative and aural qualities.

Images of War, War of Images – Visuality and Violence in the Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

Franziska Friedl

Since 9/11, the discussion about the power of the image and their “global, political and cultural significance” has been led with a newfound urgency in relation to the so-called image wars. It is this period of violent spectacle and weaponized images during which Suzanne Collins wrote *The Hunger Games* trilogy, naming footage of the Iraq War as a source of inspiration for her writing. Accordingly, Collins presents the readers not merely with an image of war, but also with a War of Images as she explores the convergence of visuality and violence in her novels.

Many, if not most, battles inside and outside of the arena are fought with images. Accordingly, this talk will explore the scope of scenarios in which visuals are weaponized – not only by the Capitol and the Games it stages, but by various interest groups and in a multitude of forms, whether it be the control of the population through the yearly Hunger Games shown on screens, the art installations Katniss produces to evoke pain in the viewing audience, or the impactful installments of human suffering during war. In the fictional world of Panem, every visual from gesture to dress to painting to pin has the potential of beginning, advancing, or ending a war.

Finally, this talk contemplates the question whether a trilogy this distinctively engaged with mechanisms of the visual can be adapted to the screen without inevitably reinforcing the very beliefs the novels criticize. Considering that the visual and mechanical violence of the war in Panem is shown to be intrinsically linked, fought with an “onslaught of imagery” (HG, p. 236) and weaponized images of Katniss, her extraction from vision and visibility seems essential to the overt anti-war message of the books. What happens when a story about the inherent power of images transgresses the border of the written medium?

---

2ND TIME’S THE CHARMS OR (DIS)ENCHANTED? – CLASSICS RETOLD

Chair: Eva Marie Heimers

Subversive Narration: The Stepmother Figure in Contemporary Fairy Tale Retellings

Sara Rassau

“The wicked stepmother is a staple of the popular fairy-tale tradition and arguably its most famous villain […]. Snow White's stepmother stands out for her terrifying image as the wicked queen. Since then, the wicked stepmother has become a stock figure, a fairy-tale type that invokes a vivid image at the mention of her role — so much so that stepmothers in general have had to fight against their fairy-tale reflections”. 2 As this quote points out, fairy tales have deeply influenced our perception of the stepmother figure. Even though she was originally a mother and only later changed into a stepmother by the Grimms in their process of rewriting, the stereotype of the ‘wicked stepmother’ is still prevalent today.

Recent fairy tale studies often focus on feminist readings, challenging stereotypical gender roles assigned to women and questioning prevalent clichés. While many works focus on the heroine, some scholars investigate the stepmother figure, contending, for instance, that ‘Snow White’ is actually a story about the queen. These studies also investigate the way in which fairy tale rewritings such as Angela Carter’s ‘Snow Child’, Robert Coover’s The Stepmother, and films such as Snow White and the Huntsman contribute to reshaping the stereotypical portrayal of women. In many retellings, be it written or cinematic, the attention is thus shifted away from the heroine and towards the stepmother through narration and focalisation. In my proposed presentation, I will discuss how contemporary fairy tale retellings challenge the prevalent stereotype of the ‘wicked stepmother’ by shifting the narration away from the heroine. I also address the way postmodern fairy tale retellings subvert gender conventions.

Re-workings of the Human Fall: The Free Will Question and its Implications for Gender Relations in John Milton’s Paradise Lost and Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials

Kieran Sommer

Milton’s epic Paradise Lost and Pullman’s trilogy His Dark Materials both re-work the Fall of Eve and Adam in unique ways. Both re-tellings provide new perspectives on the question of human free will when faced with an omnipotent God, in Milton’s case, and with regard to the question of destiny, in Pullman’s text. In Paradise Lost, the providential upholding of free will creates a model for the relationship between the First Parents and the pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve uphold the

necessity of individual free will as a basis for gender relations. Pullman, on the other hand, turns the whole concept of the human Fall and original sin on its head by having his protagonists, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry as the new First Parents, fight to free the multiple universes His Dark Material is set in from the oppression by its false god and, through the Fall-like consummation of their relationship, enable a revitalisation of human development. By placing Lyra as the new Eve in such a vital position, Pullman asserts her positive agency and gender equality in this re-framing of the human Fall. The examination of free will in both texts therefore has implications not just for religious principles and social relations, but also subverts the inferences of the biblical narrative the two texts re-fashion.

When The Scarlet Letter Turns into a High School Dramedy: Easy A, Little Fires Everywhere and the Question ‘What is a Good Film Adaptation?’

Laura Herges

Have you ever walked out of a cinema, muttering in a disappointed voice “The book was so much better than the film”? Then what could have improved the film, in your opinion? This presentation will be dedicated to the question what actually makes a good film adaptation, how close a film can and should be to its source material, and how a literary classic like The Scarlet Letter can be translated into a modern setting.

We will therefore take a look at two different adaptations of Hawthorne’s story, namely the high school dramedy film Easy A and the miniseries Little Fires Everywhere, and analyse whether they succeed in giving the story a breath of fresh air without losing the connection to the its original spirit.

“We ain’t no delinquents, We’re misunderstood!” – Retelling Shakespearean Conflicts in West Side Story

Jessica Fingerhut

When asked about adaptations, most people would immediately think of movies or TV series. Nevertheless, there are far more possible media to be considered for adaptations, and one of the most popular adaptations up to date is a stage musical: West Side Story. Based on Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, West Side Story has excited audiences in numerous stage adaptations of itself and soon to be two movies. Given its famous source text and its enthralling reception, West Side Story has already gained vast research interest. However, as this presentation argues, one of the most interesting aspects to investigate in West Side Story is the adaptation of conflict. Apart from the most prominent conflict between both houses in Romeo and Juliet and both youth gangs in West Side Story, other contributing aspects to conflict, such as generational conflict, have so far mostly been overlooked or reduced to West Side Story only.
Moreover, *West Side Story* is a transcultural as well as an intermedial adaptation. Integrated musicals, such as *West Side Story*, consist of book, music, and dance working hand in hand to create one stringent work. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach first contextualizing and then analyzing the individual components of *West Side Story* needs to be chosen to find out how youths and generational conflict as depicted in *Romeo and Juliet* are adapted into *West Side Story*. Since the musical number “Gee, Officer Krupke” condenses many adaptational aspects of what turns a play into a musical as well as of generational conflict, its case study is used to reveal how *West Side Story*’s roots in *Romeo and Juliet* can still be traced.

**IT’S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT – AND I FEEL FINE?**

Chairs: Eva Marie Heimers

“Terrible Rage” – the Dystopian Turn in Contemporary British Theatre and Caryl Churchill's play *Escaped Alone*

Sarah Jaber

Dan Rebellato³ published in 2017 an essay titled *Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Theatre* and indeed the rising number of recent plays about the end of the world and beyond cannot be ignored or put away as a single-phenomena. Realism becomes more and more inadequate to express the problems of our time within a capitalist system that makes us believe there simply cannot be an alternative future without it. Thus, playwrights now turn repeatedly to the imagined end of the world with their works. One of the plays that certainly can be seen within this development is Caryl Churchill’s play *Escaped Alone*, first performed in 2016. It portrays an apocalypse behind the fence. While the audience only sees a seemingly harmless garden get-together between seniors, one member of the group interrupts conversations about shops, cats and hairdressers with images of a dystopian world. Here, the air has become toxic by poison, the villages of the poor have been buried beneath the earth, a hunger crisis forces the obese to sell their own flesh to make ends meet, and a pandemic forces countries to bomb each other’s capitals. The play is marked by images of an ecological crisis, intensifying class inequality, and social despair caused by the neoliberalist system. Hereby, Churchill stays intentionally vague if the images she represents are from the past, present, future or a parallel reality within the play - but the horror of the words stay and are echoed in the ecological and social problems of our time.

Human Devolution – The End of Ritualistic Gender Performances in Lidia Yuknavitch’s Dystopian Novel *The Book of Joan*

Ulrike Freitag

“The end of the world as we know it“: In terms of the challenges facing humanity in the course of the 21st century, these usually result in a long list of disastrous consequences if they are not consistently addressed. One of the most recently published novels that is considering one possible disastrous end to planet earth and all of its inhabitants is Lidia Yuknavitch’s dystopian opus *The Book of Joan*. One section of the novel focuses on a small human community that has managed to escape the human-made cataclysmic destruction of the planet and is now trying to negotiate the aftermath of the ecological breakdown of the earth on a space station that circumnavigates the earth.

One of the most severe consequences of this new life in space is the radical devolution of the human body, most noticeable in the complete degeneration of people’s inner and outer sexual organs. This devolution renders not only normal human procreation impossible, but also the ritualistic performance of typical gender norms. As rituals and everyday ritualistic performances are at the very core of all human social interaction, the removal of essential rituals such as gender performances has a severe impact on the members of a society. What shall be discussed in my presentation is the negotiation of this new reality of life without gender and how people are finding new ways to express themselves and their sexuality.

Artificial Environments: Pastorals of Civilisation and Un-Natural Forces in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*

Anna Becker

Don DeLillo’s postmodern novel *White Noise* presents a world in which nature is replaced by human-made environments. People do no longer get lost in the forest, but in shopping malls; a trip to the supermarket becomes as recreational as a walk in nature; life is lived indoors. Nature has turned into something that is either abstract and far away or hostile and threatening. Instead, people see civilisation as beautiful and sublime. Human beings have created and seem to control every part of their environment. Their world is perfect, full of happiness and serenity.

At the same time, the artificially created environments threaten to destroy their creators. A quasi-apocalyptic event, the so-called “Airborne Toxic Event” – also human-made – becomes as uncontrollable as a force of nature, challenging human notions of mastery. The forces humans have summoned now threaten to overpower them, causing the “Frankenstein-effect”: toxic spills, radiation and chemical substances have become more powerful than their creators. Human-made environments herald the anthropocene, the “age of humans”, which invariably changes Earth.

Considering that since 2007, roughly two decades after the first publication of *White Noise*, more people have been living in urban than in rural areas (UN estimation), the issues raised by DeLillo
are relevant as never before. For more than four billion people living in cities, artificial environments are an everyday phenomenon. Ever increasing numbers of catastrophes caused by humans, such as desertification, oil pollution, plastic in the oceans, and, most importantly, climate change pose a challenge to human beings. What is the human response?

UNCLOSETED - AN EXPLORATION OF QUEERNESS ACROSS FICTION

Chair: Lara Kossowski

Whose Place is in the Kitchen? Redefining Ideas of Femininity in Professional Kitchen Spaces

Philine Schiller

The themes treated in fiction, even of the most fantastic kind, are often said to reflect issues and challenges of the contemporary moment. And while fiction is becoming increasingly diverse, not only to reflect but to respond to criticism of the status quo, literature in the broader sense follows this shift as well. Today, queer people are increasingly able to recount their life’s experiences openly and publicly, often without centering their queerness in the narrative. In her memoir *Burn the Place* (2019), Iliana Regan narrates her path to becoming who she is—a successful, female, lesbian chef—in a way that has been described as “bold and soulful” and “deeply personal”. The memoir is a form that traverses the thin line between fact and fiction in a particularly complex way, just as the kitchen as a conceptual space has been a ground for contention when it comes to women and cooking. In a domestic context, women are often still said to “belong in the kitchen,” in professional spaces the kitchen continues to be dominated by men and an environment of aggressive heterosexual masculinity. How do we bridge this divide and redefine what it means to be a (queer) woman who cooks professionally? At the same time, Regan’s memoir is as much about becoming a chef than it is about a woman coming to terms with her gender identity and sexual orientation: she also tells the story of growing up in rural Indiana as a young lesbian girl who longed to be a boy for a large portion of her life. By offering her life story in a profoundly vulnerable and literary way, Regan contributes to a growing canon of (I) modern memoirs and (II) openly queer literature, creating her own space not only in the kitchen but in the world.
Defying Heteronormativity and Performing Gender: Queer Afterlives of Woolf’s *Clarissa Dalloway*

Jessica Seidel

As a temporally relocated afterlife of its modernist predecessor *Mrs Dalloway*, Michael Cunningham’s 1998 novel *The Hours* adopts and develops controversies over female identity and sexuality initially raised by Virginia Woolf that remain as relevant as ever to a contemporary readership. By the conversion of one narrative into three interrelated female realities in the decades of 1940 and 1990, Cunningham steers attention to both socio-historically contingent hetero- and non-heteronormative lifestyles and sexualities whereby he explores the ‘what-if’ scenarios posed by Woolf’s novel to determine whether in a different, possibly less restrictive environment than that of Clarissa Dalloway a woman would choose heterosexuality and the fulfillment of traditional femininity.

In consideration of feminist and queer theories, this paper will examine the protagonists’ contestation of naturalized heterosexism and stigmatized lesbianism by their volatile self-identification as women and sexual beings; firstly, Laura’s compliance with the suburban housewife ideal in contrast to the queer desires for her neighbor will be investigated, while secondly Clarissa’s wavering between her openly lesbian life and pervasive heterosexual norms and desires for her befriended former lover will be evaluated. Both women attempt to fulfill contemporary female ideals premised on presumptions about gender and sexuality; however, their respective realities redefine notions of not one but multiple female selves that emerge as an always evolving, equal compromise of ambiguous self-stylization and fluid sexual orientation.

“*Carmilla*” – Le Fanu’s Ambiguous Homoerotic Tale

Lara Kossowski

The Victorian Age – a period where homosexuality was amongst other immoral and indictable activities such as debauchery and adultery – was seemingly fascinated and equally appalled by abnormal behaviour which mirrors itself in its literature. Naturally, the open display of such unnatural acts was rather problematic, which called for specific narrative techniques such as utilising the supernatural and inverting gender norms. Especially the figure of the death-defying vampire grants the indirect exploration of taboo erotic activities due to its inherent sensualism and openly flaunted sexual ravenousness. One such piece of literature is Sheridan Le Fanu’s Gothic novella “*Carmilla*” (1872); an extraordinaire vampire tale primarily because of its depiction of same-sex love and attracting attention for its uncommon female monster.

As a consequence of the Gothic’s inclinations to establish an open discussion of Victorian anxieties, it provides ample room for experimentation and implementation of acts that would be unspeakable in a social climate that actively suppresses any passions. In a society that idealised women and their sexual innocence, the notion that two rational women could form a bond which goes beyond any other form of female friendships, or any family relation implies a breakthrough that was doubtlessly
horrifying to many. The tales’ provocative nature presents opportunities for an analysis of the implementation of homoeroticism which assumedly would need to realise itself discreetly, considering the perception of homosexuality in the nineteenth century. Through close reading, this paper aims to investigate the employment of queer intimacy and how an interplay of hidden female homoeroticism and failing patriarchy enable the bond between an innocent girl and an alluring monster.

POETRY AND THE ENDURANCE OF HUMAN LIFE

Chair: Tanya Gautam

The Tension of Private and Public in Heaney’s Work

Caifang Xue

In his essay, “Belfast”, Heaney puts forward his definition of poetry as “secret and natural” on the one hand, and “public and brutal” on the other hand4. Likewise, his oeuvre pulls in two directions, into the private memory of the rural life, and out towards the public and brutal world. In Heaney’s early books, his work is rather private in the way in which he observes trivia in rural life, techniques of yard work and conflict about the vocation choice (i.e., poet versus farmer). In this sense, Heaney’s work is almost autobiographical and gives a profound account of “the wish to be alone and the wish to be part of the community”5. In the meanwhile, Heaney has fulfilled his role as “a poetic spokesman for the aggrieved minority”. The most obvious example would be “Requiem for the Croppies”, a public elegy in memory of the Rebellion in 1798. Some poems such “The Tollund Man” also couch his unsettlement about the contemporary situation in Ireland. These poems, albeit political, are the result of blending feelings about home, religion and politics, and involve “an adjustment between outer and inner realities”6. The true public aspect of Heaney’s work, as Koster says, leads directly to “the question of moral responsibility” which urges the poet to “speak about matters that are almost impossible to represent in language”7. Heaney’s work after 1990, for instance, “A Sofa in the Forties”, constantly involves innuendoes of the Second World War, the Holocaust in particular. In this essay, I will analyse the domestic and political elements in Death of a Naturalist and District and Circle, look into the poetic techniques adopted therein, and discuss the tension between the private and the public in Heaney’s work.

6 Heaney, Seamus. ”The Poet as a Christian." The Furrow, no. 64, 2013, pp. 541-45.
South African Poetry: Apartheid, Censorship and Black Consciousness Poetry (Danielle Van der Merwe)

Danielle Van der Merwe

“When shall I write about the daffodils?
How can I write about the beauty of nature
When the ground is daily soaked with the blood of the innocent?”

Mzwakhe Mbuli

This panel will discuss a time in South African history, when human rights were not freely applied to all, and people of colour faced the challenges of segregation and brutality on a daily basis. The system is known today as apartheid. In the mid-1960’s Steve Biko fuelled and led a grassroot anti-apartheid activist movement titled: The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Members of the Black Consciousness Movement believed that addressing the psychological damage done during years of oppression was just as important as dismantling the oppressive political structures: In order for people of colour to take back power, they had to believe in the value of their “blackness”. Thus, the goal of the movement was for members of the black community to regain their dignity and pride.

This led to black poets attaining a new voice and writing poetry that reflected the lives of ordinary black people. Black Consciousness Poetry was often political in nature and addressed issues such as human rights, rebellion and in some cases an upcoming revolution. This led to the government banning and detaining the movement’s poets, under the Publications Act of 1963.

What follows is an oral poetry tradition used to defy apartheid, where poetry was read aloud during funerals of apartheid victims, mass rallies and large gatherings. Not only did it solve the problem of censorship, but it also spoke to everyday people on a personal level. The poetry was simple, yet filled with anger, sorrow and defiance – with humanity’s strength and ability to exist and show courage in the face of adversity.

This panel will analyse and discuss a handful of anti-apartheid poems written by revolutionary poets like Mongane Wally Serote, Chris van Wyk and Mzwakhe Mbuli “The People’s Poet”. Among these are In Detention, Child of the Song and The Crocodiles.

Apocalypse and Moral Decay in the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg

Jonas Faust

Allen Ginsberg, known as the poetic voice of the Beat Generation and the later hippie/counterculture movement, engaged in political, social and religious debates by imagining future scenarios, often apocalyptic, in which humanity is driven to and beyond its limits by its own corruption. In works like “Iron Horse”, “Wichita Vortex Sutra”, and “Plutonian Ode”, he contextualized then-current political issues like the Vietnam War, the Cold War and its medialization, government corruption and capitalist greed within a wider scope of dehumanization.
and moral decay. This suggests a dual structure: (I) an array of surface-problems, which are based on imagined projections of present trends into the near future, and (II) the identification of a more or less singular undercurrent, a lack of spiritual (self-)awareness. Ginsberg’s poetry is heavily charged with religiously or spiritually connoted imagery—in the apocalyptic scenarios painted in his poetry, the imminent humanitarian issues are often embodied as all-devouring, malevolent deities. Two striking examples of this are the personification of Plutonium as the ultimate element of destruction in “Plutonian Ode” and the Blakean-Biblical “Moloch” of “Howl” part II, whose nefarious presence can only be countered/escaped by personal spiritual awakening. In my paper I want to explore his fictional renderings of the apocalypse, focusing on the ways in which he relates particular issues to their underlying root, his conception of a world beyond the apocalypse, the individual and societal solutions he offers, and how he offers them.

Strategies of Endurance in the Poetry of Kae Tempest

Tanya Gautam

Endurance is the ability to withstand adversity; to confront and resist the grueling pressure of reality; to champion the inescapable moment of weariness and to continue to exist. Every life in this expanding cosmos is, by nature, endangered and vulnerable. Its longevity hinges on its ability to persevere and survive. The human heart, in its all-encompassing sense, has unique systems at its disposal to facilitate its survival. Poetry is one such extraordinary system which can reorder the disorderliness of existence, reconnect the human heart to unknown, apparent, or hidden relationships, transform the traumatic experiences into bearable truths, witness, record and condemn injustices and can help further human consciousness. By doing so, poetry extends gently yet unfailingly the fortification we need in our attempt to endure this life. This paper seeks to expand on the above-mentioned assertions about the enduring powers of poetry by discussing Kae Tempest’s book long poem, Brand New Ancients—a tale of two families from South East London whose lives intertwine in dramatic ways. Hailed as the wordsmith whose work has the power of both wounding and healing Tempest, in Brand New Ancients, attends to the confusion and chaos of our times and spreads sincere truths and a profound love for humanity which further speaks volumes about the role of poetry in not only preserving the particular and universal human experience but also in inspiring in us the ability to endure.
THE SPECTRE HAUNTING ACADEMIA: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ACADEMIA IN THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

Chair: Armen Hesse

The Bright Danger of The Far-Right

Pravin Prakash

This presentation charts the rise of the far-right and its evolution from the fringes of global politics to the centre stage. Using Cas Mudde’s (2019) influential typology, I expand on the ideological characteristics of and the major themes in far-right discourse. Having done so, the presentation discusses the rise of the far-right in developed democracies across the world, focusing on India in particular.

I contend that the rise of the far-right in developed democracies cannot be comprehended without a critical examination of its proliferation at the grassroots level. Democracies decay at the roots long before the leaves show signs of infection and through an examination of far-right ideology and discourse in India I highlight the bright danger of the far-right, even in societies where it has yet to earn its place in the sun.

Facing Nationalist Appropriations – A Case Study

Martina Marzullo

The contested term is not neutral. In fact, one cannot be neutral in the face of racism. Scholarly work, even historical studies, are never separate from current social and political realities. Such refusal to understand the racist roots of the discipline and how the term inaccurately represents the early English demonstrates an insidious and obstinate ignorance within academic institutions. By the same token, replacing the term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ with one that is more historically accurate does not mean we are ceding to white supremacists. […] It matters when we use a racist dog-whistle term like ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ which is neither neutral nor correctly represents the early English people. As the old adage goes: “words matter”.

The idea of a mythical past, a medieval heritage which somehow grants a sense of racial superiority, is a narrative which has been circulating since the early 19th century. Nowadays, the notion of an ‘Anglo-Saxon race’ has become the foundation of many white supremacist groups all over the world. Fuelled by cultural misappropriations and historical insensitivity, this ‘fantasy’ has been

growing more and more powerful, leading even to a change in the perception of the (original) Anglo-Saxons themselves.

The problem, naturally, does not stop with the Anglo-Saxons. By now, any associations with certain ancient times or cultures is automatically interpreted as being part of one of those extremist groups, such as Stormfront or Blood & Honour. White Supremacy, National Identity, and Racism have always been integral part of our history, and now more than ever (with social media, fake news, and the internet trolls) have been shaping the way we do scholarly work. However, Academia itself needs to embrace the responsibility it has had in perpetuating systemic racism and bias by supporting silently under the banner of ‘Academic Freedom’.

Academic Freedom or Polite Quietism?

Jonathan Lench

Academic freedom is the cornerstone of the University system, allowing individuals the right to freely pursue truth, through the cultivation of expertise and subjecting that expertise to rigorous debate between peers. It also gives Academia the right to self-regulation, the practice of rooting out bad ideas and discarding them from academic discourse, free from outside influences governing what Academia can and cannot study.

However, this principle frequently clashes with reality, as academic freedom is a right increasingly considered as interchangeable with freedom of speech and conscience, which, in many instances, has hampered Academia’s ability to self-regulate, as backlash against bad ideas is muted by the demands of civility and free expression inherent to the right to free speech. This is made clear by a pattern of racist and ideologically far-right scholarship that has been granted the dignity of Academic platforms, under the justification of freedom of speech and conscience. Just some examples include Bruce Gilley’s 2018 article, “The Case for Colonialism” to Bernard Lewis’ racist and bellicose claims about the Middle East and Raphael Patai’s *The Arab Mind*, many Academically sanctioned ideas have gone insufficiently challenged, and with devastating consequences.

The failure of Academia to deny these scholars the authoritative platforms that Academia provides has led to the growth of far-right ideologies, and in the case of Bernard Lewis, even being put front and centre of the decision making that surrounded the decision to invade Iraq in 2003; his scholarship being used as a guidebook for torture practices used during this invasion, such as at Abu-Ghraib. The failure of academic institutions to appropriately denounce and challenge the ideas of such scholars is a complex phenomenon, with a similarly complex array of solutions. Any solution must nevertheless begin with a re-iteration of a distinct right to academic freedom.
IMPRINT

Poster Layout: Eva Marie Heimers
Book of Abstracts: Franziska Friedl

Special thanks to: PD Dr. Margit Peterfy and the English Seminar
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Lea Autenrieth
Anna Becker
Jonas Faust
Jessica Fingerhut
Ulrike Freitag
Franziska Friedl
Tanya Gautam
Eva Marie Heimers
Laura Herges
Armen Hesse
Sarah Jaber
Lara Kossowski
Jonathan Lench
Martina Marzullo
PD Margit Peterfy
Pravin Prakash
Sara Rassau
Philine Schiller
Jessica Seidel
Timm Shanks
Kieran Sommer
Tim Sommer
Danielle Van der Merwe
Caifang Xue