

Literary Studies in the New Decade

IS THERE STILL A NEED FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY?

These lectures will demonstrate that there most certainly is. By discussing the issues and problems that are currently central to their research in German studies, these leading scholars will explore how literary studies can fulfill the expectations of an academic discipline and connect with wider society. Of interest to anyone who cares about literature and its place at the university.

1 TUESDAY 2. FEBRUARY 2010 2 PM. HAGEY HALL 373	2 TUESDAY 23. FEBRUARY 2010 1 PM. TATHAM CENTRE 2218	3 TUESDAY 2. MARCH 2010 1 PM. HAGEY HALL 373	4 TUESDAY 16. MARCH 2010 1 PM. TATHAM CENTRE 2218	5 FRIDAY 19. MARCH 2010 1 PM. TATHAM CENTRE 2218	6 TUESDAY 30. MARCH 2010 1 PM. HAGEY HALL 373
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STEPHEN BROCKMANN
Carnegie Mellon University

LITERATURE AND MEMORY TWO DECADES AFTER THE FALL OF THE WALL

This talk will explore the role played by literature in the memory of the German Democratic Republic. It will look at the significance accorded to literature in the years of the GDR's existence and at the changes in the status of literature in Germany in the two decades since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Of particular interest will be the use of literature as a vehicle for remembering the specificity of the GDR state, which can be contrasted with the use of other media, such as film. The talk will explore both literature written and published in the GDR and literature created after the demise of the GDR. In posing the question as to how literature addresses history and memory, the talk will ask the more general question as to what function literature serves in historical memory.

KATHERINE ARENS
University of Texas at Austin

REMAPPING THE LITERARY: LITERATURE, GREAT BOOKS, AND NEW CULTURAL LITERACY

The cases of cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, Austrian writers Peter Handke and Elfriede Jelinek, and current histories of "German" literature and culture all suggest that we lack models for understanding texts marked by the cultural dislocations of the 20th and 21st centuries, and the intellectual and artistic contact zones from which they speak. This presentation will use these examples to argue for extending literary and cultural studies beyond national frameworks, and particularly for evolving new literacies about how texts speak in an era of globalization and transnationalism.

MARK RECTANUS
Iowa State University

MOVING OUT: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES ON LITERATURE, MUSEUMS, AND VISUAL CULTURE

The lecture will examine how the intersections of contemporary German literature, museums, and visual culture reflect and engage discourses on deterritorialization, memory, language, mobility, and urban spaces. Recent work by the writer Ulf Erdmann Ziegler and projects realized at the Schirn Kunsthalle (Frankfurt/Main) and the Jewish Museum Munich provide an aperture for increased engagement with literature and visual culture while revealing how literature "moves out" and intersects with performative dimensions of culture in everyday life. Making these connections more visible, and investigating their paths, heightens both our understanding of literary studies and the significance it may have in diverse contexts.

JOHN SMITH
University of California at Irvine

IS GOD DEAD? MODERN GERMAN THOUGHT FOR A POSTSECULAR WORLD

Does the history of modern philosophy, as the theologian Hans Küng has asked, lead "inevitably" to the "death of God"? The idea that our age could be considered "postsecular" allows us to look back at the development of modernity in a new light that brings out a more complicated dialectic than a story of monolinear secularization. The German tradition—from the Reformation through Idealism, Nietzsche, and early 20th-century crisis theology, to the contemporary debates between Habermas and Benedict XVI—provides the central arena for exploring "dialogues between faith and reason" that contribute to a better understanding of our present condition.

RICHARD LANGSTON
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

LITERARY REALISM IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL NETWORKS

Over the past five decades, dominant trends in literary theory have left the concept of literary realism—a literary idiom intent on imitating reality—in ill repute; realism still provokes sophisticated scholarly arguments for denying its referential function. While seemingly bankrupt within literary theory, the concept of realism is, however, alive and well in other disciplines (like media studies) that critically query the digital images and virtual narratives circulating throughout our postmodern world. When sited within this media ecology, literary realism inhabits a marginal yet nevertheless especially powerful place. This presentation illuminates how one unique brand of contemporary German realism—the stories of Alexander Kluge—intervenes in this aesthetic economy.

SUSANNE KORD
University College London

THE KEMPNER EFFECT: GERMANY'S WORST POET AND HER LAUGHTER COMMUNITIES

'Surely, the knave is not yet born who is base enough to make fun of Friederike Kempner,' wrote Peter Hacks in the foreword to the ninth edition of Kempner's collected poems in 1986. By that time, readers had been making fun of Friederike Kempner for over 100 years. Known variously as the 'Silesian Swan,' the 'Silesian Nightingale,' the 'Queen of Involuntary Humour' and 'Germany's worst poet,' her poetry collection reached eight editions by the time of her death in 1904, a feat unmatched by Germany's greatest and best, including Goethe. Both the entertainment value of her poems and her tremendous visibility are usually linked with the wretched quality of her writing. This talk asks why Friederike Kempner is funny, why we think we know that her humor was involuntary, and why we think we know that she was a wretched writer.

These lectures are being held in conjunction with the search for the inaugural holder of the Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker Memorial Chair in German Literary Studies.
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