

The View From Here

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Letter from the Chair

Looking back over the past academic year, it strikes me that these are good times for German Language, Literature, and Culture at U of T. We continue to have strong enrolments, a distinctive teaching mission, and this last year – once again – we received far more requests for enrolments in our language courses than we could accommodate. The year's highlights included two weeks of celebration of 150 Years of German at U of T, culminating in a gala evening, involving a lavish reception followed by a theatrical performance by students and faculty under the direction of Erol Boran. I had the pleasure of connecting with many students, alumni, and both old and new friends from the GTA and beyond. We received a strong endorsement from U of T's President, Meric Gertler, who attended the festivities and spoke of our Department's role in cultivating deep global competence among our students. And isn't this what we are about? We are providing a historically and conceptually deep global competence, encompassing a rounded critical literacy in German literature, culture, and intellectual history.

We are, of course, the Department of *Germanic* Languages and Literatures, and so I'd like to mention that we also celebrated another anniversary this year – smaller, but no less significant: It was forty years ago that our Department offered the first Yiddish course. We now have a dedicated group of undergraduate, MA, and PhD students pursuing a concentration in Yiddish within our Department, under the auspices of the Al and Malka Green Program in Yiddish. This has been an extraordinary success and one owing in no small measure to our steadfast supporters, Al and Malka Green, who both passed away in the course of this last year. Their passing is deeply felt among all who were touched by their vision and generosity, but their legacy continues to live on in so many ways.

We are very pleased and grateful that friends and donors continue to support us through gracious gifts and bequests. Mrs. Beebee Mukherjee, who in 2012 established the Scholarship for Language Study, which rotates among the seven languages available for study at U of T, has once again stepped forward, this time as founder of the German Studies Excellence Award for a deserving fourth-year student in the program. This year's recipient, Tobi Wilczek, will use the Award towards travel to Vienna where he will present the results of his senior undergraduate research at an international conference.

Another donor, who has chosen to remain unnamed, has made a major legacy gift, designating the funds for a specific purpose. In her own words:

"Celebrating its 150th anniversary, the University of Toronto's Department of German has much to be proud of. In recognition of the contribution of the Department to national and international scholarship and to the cultural life of Toronto, and in memory of my parents, German-speaking immigrants who met and raised their family in Toronto, I shall be bequeathing an endowment to sponsor in perpetuity an annual lecture in German Studies by distinguished scholars from around the world."

In closing, let me mention that I will be on a long-planned administrative leave this year to focus on my research. I am very grateful that Stefan Soldovieri has agreed to serve as Acting Chair while I am away. Knowing that the Department is in the best of hands, I am signing off until the summer of 2017... See you then!

Markus Stock
Chair of Germanic Languages and Literatures
Associate Professor of German & Medieval Studies

NEWSLETTER 2016/17

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A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

by Professor Christine Lehleiter, Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies

“Das Leben ist zu kurz für Knäckebrot!” (Life is too short for dry bread!) – this is the motto under which students, faculty, and staff meet twice a month during the semester to practice their German, to discuss recent developments in German-speaking regions, and, yes, to try a great variety of delicious cakes and cookies. More often than not, the cakes are home-made by participants who share family recipes handed down over the generations, inscribed with stories of immigration and adaptation to local conditions and life styles. In recent months, we have tasted Apfelmuchen made with hand-picked apples from Ontario orchards, Lebkuchen (gingerbread) adapted to a vegan diet, and German Quarkkuchen (cheese cake). Consequently, we exchange not only ideas for the next theatre play and information about how to apply for scholarships, but also about how to replace “Quark” in a cheese cake recipe when executing it in Toronto (apparently, ricotta works very well).

SUMMER LANGUAGE STUDY IN BERLIN

by Victoria Rebelo

I first decided to pursue an undergraduate German Major because I was intrigued by the language and the culture. Over the course of my studies, this has blossomed into a fascination. The professors and instructors in the German department create such a welcoming environment and encourage students to adopt a hands-on approach. The program’s intimate size facilitates more personable and consistent interactions. This also made it fairly simple for me to obtain a recommendation letter after I decided last summer to travel to Germany for further language study. I applied for a travel award available through

University
College

specifically for German Studies and was granted the Gertrud Davis Scholarship. This paid for a two-week intensive language course at the Goethe Institute in Berlin. My experience was beyond words. The course was so much more than merely a language course; the Institute also organized cultural excursions such as a scavenger hunt in the multicultural district of Kreuzberg, and evening get-togethers with fellow students in various Biergärten around the city. The small class of 20 students enabled us to quickly develop strong friendships. Outside of class, the instructor made herself available for an insider tour of Berlin and took us to places that locals would visit such as Pfaueninsel (Peacock Island) and authentic German restaurants.

When I returned to Toronto last Fall, my German instructors informed me that my vocabulary had advanced ahead of the level I was studying – all because I had been able to continue using the language over the summer break, rather than speaking English as I otherwise would have, had I remained in Toronto. Because of the possibilities made available to me by the German Department, I was able to apply and exhibit these developments in my classes and excel in my studies far more than I could ever have anticipated. It was a wonderful experience and I encourage other students to do the same!



NO CRIME TOO COMPLICATED FOR THE GERMAN DRAMA CLUB

by Rong Shan Liu

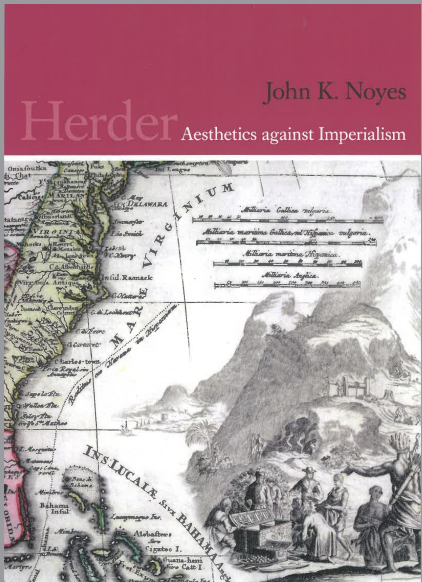
In two evening performances on March 22 and 23, 2016, nine actors from the U of T German Drama Club staged a laid-back yet mysterious criminal comedy in the Victoria College Chapel. The play *Wo ist Bob?* is based on a crime story written by Martina Schäfer.

The plot revolved around a large dinner party. One company was acquired by another, and all the employees gathered together to celebrate the occasion. Suddenly, the lights started to flicker, and without a trace of evidence, a portrait painting of Bob Marley valued at several million dollars was discovered stolen. Although everyone present held a plausible motive for stealing the artwork, the very clever detective, Kommissarin Sumpf, noted down every single detail of the crime and was eventually able to deduce the real mastermind behind the heist.

This year’s production appears to have been particularly successful, judging by the enthusiasm and positive feedback from our audiences. The actors fully utilized the unique space of the chapel, and expanded the stage into the aisles and even beyond the hall. It was an interactive play, wherein the audience assumed the role of the workers at the party, and were invited to solve the crime together. The most enjoyable part of the production actually involved the rehearsals, where we began to bond by pooling our ideas together to make the characters livelier, while also rapidly gaining proficiency in the German language week by week.

We sincerely thank everyone whose support made this play a success, especially the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and the German and Yiddish Graduate Students’ Association who provided us with financial support. Be on the lookout for more exciting German drama next year!





HERDER'S CRITIQUE OF IMPERIALISM

by Professor John Noyes

When I first started to investigate colonialism in the German Enlightenment some 15 years ago, I had no idea I was going to write a book on Herder. I knew him as an eccentric critic of colonialism and a cultural nationalist who had been made to stand in for some of the less savoury sides

of modernity. So when I realized that the Herder I knew was very different from what Herder actually wrote, I became increasingly interested. A detailed study of his works revealed a chameleon, an intellectual Proteus (to use one of his favourite terms), whose core ideas were couched in allusions, figurative language, ironic outbursts and glib denouncements of his fellow scholars. But these core ideas are so radical, so prescient, that they are worth the trouble it takes to extract them. What emerges is an attempt to define the alternative to a rationalism that grounds knowledge in apriori principles.

At an early age, Herder takes the decisive step of turning his back on the 'big' philosophical questions, such as 'what is

truth?' or 'can we prove the existence of god?' Instead, he develops a theory of cognition that is remarkably close to the Sapir – Whorf hypothesis that language and reason are inextricably entwined: you can't have reason without language and you can't have language without reason. Furthermore, you can't have either without the neurological structures in which reason and language are both embedded, the physiological embodiment of thought. Drawing on a wealth of writers in fields as disparate as animal psychology, embryology, ethnography, aesthetics and philosophy – and many more – Herder did his best to draw the full conclusions from this insight into embodied thought. If thinking is always attached to a body, then thought is always located in time and space. It has a history and a geography. As a result, thought is culturally specific; it consists of cultures representing themselves to themselves, and interpreting these representations.

Herder used this concept of culture to develop the first critique of imperialism that is based not only on morality but on epistemology. Imperialism is wrong because it is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of human cognition. In my book, I argue that the problems Herder encountered in his epistemological critique of imperialism are the same problems faced by postcolonial theory.



by Yiddish PhD student Vardit Lightstone, currently studying Jewish folklore in Jerusalem. Christin Bohnke has received a travel grant from the Joint Initiative in German and European Studies to finance summer travel to Berlin's Staatsbibliothek. There, she will examine the complete collection of the bilingual journal Ost-Asien, published between 1898-1910, which charts the influence of German cultural, political and social thought upon Japanese émigrés living in Wilhelmine Berlin. Anna Stainton has been pursuing archival research on East German cinema at Potsdam's Konrad Wolf Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen, and Nicola Vöhringer is currently serving as DAAD lecturer and Director of the DAAD Information Centre in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Our incoming cohort this Fall includes six MA students, one of whom will pursue the Yiddish field inaugurated three years ago. The PhD program also welcomes three new students hailing respectively from Leipzig and Halifax, as well as graduating senior Tobias Rene-Wilczek from our own program, who secured a competitive CGS-Master's scholarship and was named a Jackman Junior Fellow of the Jackman Humanities Institute.

GERMANIC GRADUATE STUDIES ARE THRIVING

by Professor Angelica Fenner, Associate Chair, Graduate Studies

Over the past year, unit-level initiatives across campus have been enhancing conditions for graduate study at the U of T. In Germanic Languages & Literatures, a working group comprised of faculty and graduate students formed to explore ways to support productivity during the critical years of dissertation research and writing. Of particular concern: the distractions of teaching and the psychological isolation that can accompany the writing process, which can impede time-to-completion. As one solution, "Side-by-Side Writing" was conceived and implemented in two-hour sessions four mornings per week throughout the semester. Members of the department have availed themselves of these drop-in opportunities, coming to the German seminar library with laptop in tow. As these motivational energies continue, we hope participants will reap the benefits of heightened productivity.

We also continue to facilitate the blending of faculty and graduate researches. Last December, we collaborated with the Waterloo German Studies Forum to host a day of meetings and small group discussions at the Munk Centre for Global Affairs organized around areas of mutual interest, including Medieval Studies, Transnational Literatures, Foreign Language Pedagogy, Visual Media, and Eighteenth-Century Studies.

Meanwhile, current doctoral candidates have been traveling the globe for research and teaching, as evidenced

FOLKLORE STUDIES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YIDDISH LIFE STORIES

by Vardit Lightstone

I first became interested in Yiddish literature while completing my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto. In my final year, a comparative study of Yiddish and German literature was offered, team-taught by Professors Markus Stock and Anna Shternshis. I took the course out of curiosity, little knowing the effect it would have on my future. Immediately after completing it, I decided to enroll in a Yiddish summer school at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts.

During the program, I realized I was interested in folklore: understanding cultures through a combination of ethnographic, anthropologic, historiographic, and literary methodologies. I enrolled in the Folklore and Folk Culture M.A. program at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the best program in Jewish folklore, and one of the best folklore programs in the world. My instructors there emphasized the importance of studying Jewish cultures in relation to both surrounding cultures and other Jewish cultures. I studied folk literature, art, and religion of various eras and cultures: Ethiopian foodways, Yemenite clothing, German amulets, Israeli bumper stickers, etc.

In the process, I was drawn to the everyday folk genre of life stories, the ways individual and communal identities are conveyed through storytelling. We tell ourselves and others stories about our lives all the time, whether about something recent, our career paths, or a brief personal history when meeting someone new. In my dissertation, I will be exploring the life stories of Yiddish speaking immigrants who moved from Eastern Europe to Canada, with an eye to how descriptions of their new home reveal assumptions about how societies should operate. In immigrant narrative, stories of the past are used to comment on the present.

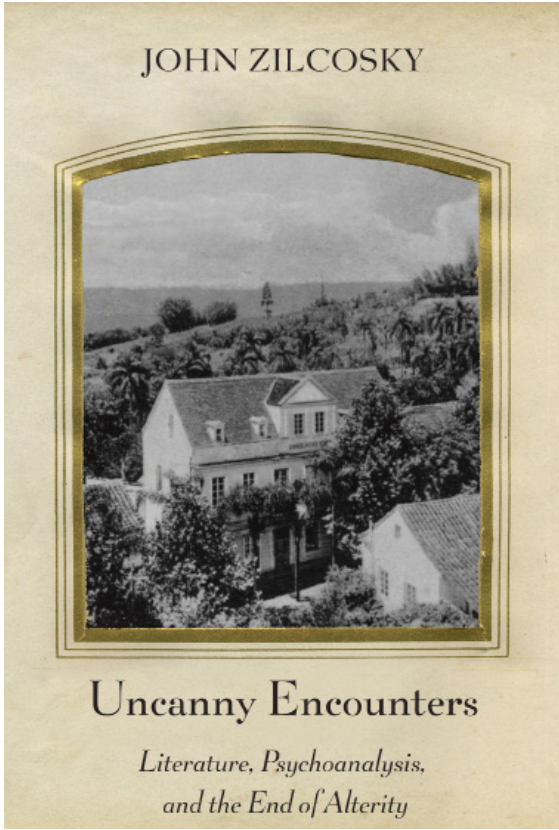
The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures has proven an excellent setting for pursuing a transnational project such as this. Ongoing collaborative arrangements with other programs on campus, and Prof. Shternshis' interdisciplinary work in particular, have also been very beneficial. While enrolled in the first year of my PhD, I am also pursuing select courses in Folklore and Folk Culture Program at the Hebrew University. I look forward to further collaborative opportunities between these two outstanding departments.

UNCANNY ENCOUNTERS

Read about Professor John Zilcosky's latest book

Around 1900, when the last blank spaces on their maps were filled, Europeans traveled to far-flung places hoping to find the spectacularly foreign. They discovered instead what Freud called, several years later, the uncannily familiar: disturbing reflections of themselves—either actual Europeans or Westernized natives. This experience was most extreme for German travelers, who arrived in the contact zones late, on the heels of other European colonialists, and it resulted not in understanding or tolerance but in an increased propensity for violence and destruction. Their quest for a "virginal," exotic existence proved to be ruined at its source, mirroring back to the travelers demonic parodies of their own worst aspects. In this strikingly original book, John Zilcosky demonstrates how these popular "uncanny" encounters influenced Freud's—and the literary modernists'—use of the term, and how these encounters remain at the heart of our cross-cultural anxieties today.

U of T News interviewed John Zilcosky about *Uncanny Encounters*.





9TH TORONTO GERMAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM

SPORTS: ALLURE & ETHICS

by Marlo Burks

In April 2016 the Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures hosted its 9th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium, organized by Professor John Zilcosky with assistance from Marlo Burks. The theme, Sports: Allure & Ethics, attracted renowned speakers from North America and Germany with expertise in various disciplines including German, Philosophy, History, Classics, Literature, and Physical Education & Kinesiology. Scholars, professional athletes, and audience members came together to investigate the dynamic and often troubling relationship between the allure of sports and the ethical questions surrounding sports as an industry, a social phenomenon, and an aesthetic experience.

With support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures, the Joint Initiative in German & European Studies, the Centre for Comparative Literature, Victoria College, the Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education, and the Department of Religion, the symposium succeeded in providing a welcome forum for scholars from different disciplines to converse and create a

historical framework hitherto absent from discourses on sports.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's keynote lecture set the stage and the tone for the discussion, which, while academic in delivery, nevertheless included a recurring, personal note. This was remarkably fruitful, resulting in lively dialogue while striking at the heart of the Symposium's theme: our concerns around the (changing) ethics of sports can be intimately entwined with and strangely related to the allure that sports have for us. Gumbrecht's notion of the 'mystical body' of spectators inaugurated the discussion with rich themes and theoretical speculations that were addressed from numerous angles over the course of two days and, in true symposium fashion, onward into the dinners.

The closing lecture, given by Bruce Kidd, OC, ended the conference with a perfect pendant by calling for the democratization of sports and addressing some of the local and immediate issues of policy development in Ontario around sports and education. We look forward to making this conversation available to a broader audience through publication of a book featuring essays by the presenters.



NEW VOLUNTEER POSITION: ALUMNI AMBASSADOR AND EXECUTIVE IN RESIDENCE

by Joan Andersen

In July 2015, a new volunteer position was created within the German Department - that of Alumni Ambassador and Executive in Residence. I have stepped into that role with the mandate to "create and implement programs/initiatives to connect with alumni, work with students on job search skills and initiate contact with German companies in the GTA." A three-prong plan to realizing the mandate was approved.

The work commenced in Fall 2015 with a 'Needs Analysis' conducted with some of the stakeholder groups in the project. Interviews were held with eight faculty members, eleven graduate students who also serve as Teaching Assistants, and three undergraduate students, to obtain their input on what programs could be offered to assist German students in transitioning from the academic world to the business world. My basic approach was to 'listen to the voice of the students and faculty' before initiating any activity. Discussions were also held with the university's

Career Centre to gain insight into the services/programs available there.

Work is currently underway to compile a list of German Alumni with whom we would like to initiate contact. We hope to determine their interest in providing job shadowing opportunities and internships as well as in participating in initiatives coordinated by the University of Toronto's Department of Alumni Affairs.

One result of our analysis is that a 'Career Planning Workshop' will be offered in Fall 2016 to German students interested in translating the skills they are acquiring during their studies into marketable job competencies. I believe that this is a key component in attracting to our program most especially those students who pursue German studies more as a passion than as an immediate and direct career goal; this was certainly the case for me when I studied German at the University of Toronto.

SELECTED EVENTS

September 15 | Career Planning Mini Workshop 2016

May 11-12, 2017 | 10th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium 2017
"Displaced Philologies: Translations of the Other and the German Tradition"

GUEST LECTURES

October 5 | Nadja Sennewald (Goethe University Frankfurt)

November 3 | Grazyna Jurewicz (Goethe University Frankfurt)

November 24 | Pierre-Louis Patoine (Sorbonne University)

March 2 | Martin Kagel (University of Georgia)

March 31 | Nick Saul (Durham University)

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