

THE VIEW FROM HERE

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Letter from the Chair

With record numbers of talks, readings, screenings, Visiting Professors and guests, workshops, and performances, 2016-17 was an action-packed year in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures!

Highlights included the 10th anniversary of our annual Toronto German Studies Symposium, "Displaced Philologies: Translations of the Other and the German Tradition," organized by Willi Goetschel. We were also honoured to host the DAAD "Begegnungstagung," an event previously staged in many different countries and now, for the first time, in North America, attracting colleagues from German programs across Canada and the US as well as an international cast of DAAD representatives. The academic year was capped off with a collaborative translation initiative focusing on women's writing in Yiddish. The project, which culminated in a public performance, was organized by Alexandra Hoffman, who is doing a brilliant job filling in for Professor Anna Shternshis while the latter heads the Centre for Jewish Studies.

Judging by the palpable enthusiasm at our recent orientation for first and second-year students, we can look forward to a very strong cohort of new majors and minors next year. Nearly 100 future program students were on hand to hear from faculty and current students about the amazing opportunities offered by our department, from our Business German and Yiddish streams to study and research experiences abroad. Jaws were dropping as Alexandra Gerstner detailed all the ways the DAAD funds study and research stays for our students in Germany! This year there was again much anticipation leading up to Erol Boran's latest theatre production, a gender-bending reimagining of Büchner's "Woyzeck," performed by a fantastic group of undergraduates. We also sponsored a rap contest that left no doubt that our undergraduates can lay it down – auf Deutsch! It was also a great year for our graduate program, with our busy students teaching up a storm, presenting papers at international conferences, engaging in cutting-edge research, and winning prestigious grants from Canada's major funding agencies.

I am also very pleased to report that this Fall we will embark on a new high school partnership with the University of Toronto Schools. We envision this community engagement project for graduate students as the beginning of a long-term collaboration. The launch of iPRAKTIKUM, our internationalization and experiential learning initiative, kicked off with a "Bier & Bratwurst" networking event for stakeholders that was sponsored by the Vice President International and attended by students and faculty from fields ranging from Environmental Sciences to Architecture and Music. Also on hand were potential community partners and representatives from the German Consulate, Goethe Institute, and Canadian-German Chamber of Commerce. Look for updates on our website.

Most rewarding about my brief interlude as chargé d'affaires was helping smart and talented people do wonderful things. Before handing off to returning Chair, Markus Stock, I would like to recognize the incredible team that kept things running so smoothly: Dale Gebhardt, Gayle Grisdale, and Helena Juenger in the financial, undergraduate, and graduate offices, Associate Chairs Angelica Fenner (Graduate) and Christine Lehleiter (Undergraduate), and Language Coordinator Hang-Sun Kim. Special thanks to Christine, who is vacating her position after a long and successful term, and to Erol Boran, who will step into this key role. We are fortunate to have such dedicated colleagues.

Stefan Soldovieri
Acting Chair of Germanic Languages & Literatures
Associate Professor of German

NEWSLETTER 2017/18

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CELEBRATING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

by Professor Christine Lehleiter, Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies

Among the most exciting moments that we witness as teachers is when undergraduate students take their first step towards an independent research endeavour. It is our goal to provide students not only with the skills that make such research possible, but also with opportunities to present the results to a wider audience.

This year, we held our 5th *Undergraduate Colloquium in German Studies*, co-organized with our partners from the University of Waterloo and the Goethe-Institut Toronto. Participants from universities in five different provinces - B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland - presented on such diverse topics as medieval manuscripts, memory in post-war culture, Kafka and hunger, and obesity in German speaking countries. For generous funding towards this initiative we credit the Goethe-Institut, CERES, the Munk School of Global Affairs, the Waterloo Centre for German Studies, and our own Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures.

Students of German Studies also participated this year in the St. Michael's College *Undergraduate Research Forum*. The first prize in the German category of this forum went to Gonjun (Katie) Gao for a poster on "Language Change: What History Reveals about German." The second prize was awarded to Nina Christianson for her poster on "BMW and the Stock Market: Relations to World History and Political Economic Events." Events like these provide a framework for students to apply their research skills, showcase results, and engage with intellectual community both in Toronto and across the country. The topics pursued reflect the extraordinary breadth of coverage in our classes and makes



visible the diversity of career paths we strive to facilitate.

We also have several departmental awards for students who have demonstrated outstanding performance and engagement. Our most prestigious awards and their 2016 recipients are: Helmut Krueger Undergraduate Scholarship in German (Livia Rrokaj), Ann (Medres) Glass Memorial Scholarship in Yiddish (Chad Jordan), Sara Friede-Miransky Memorial Bursary in Yiddish (Anna Broymann), and the Hermann Boeschstein Memorial Scholarship (Victoria Rebelo). Tatiana Velickovic is the recipient of this year's 4th-year undergraduate scholarship sponsored by Bharati Mukherjee. Congratulations to all award recipients and a heartfelt *Dankeschön* to our donors in German Studies and Yiddish for helping to advance German Studies!

M.A. IN GERMAN PAVES THE WAY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

by Yannick Muellenbach, MA Student

Throughout my life I have always loved languages. Because of my German heritage and my enjoyment of the German theatre and German literature courses I enrolled during my undergraduate degree, I wanted to continue my immersion in German culture. The M.A. in German at the University of Toronto posed the opportunity to further develop my German language skills in a North American setting, while also earning a degree that could serve as a stepping stone to fulfilling future goals. I first and foremost wanted to leverage the Masters Program as a means to either continue my academic career, possibly in a German PhD program, or to relocate to and

work in Germany. After completing my graduate degree this past year, I must admit that the German MA Program has been a very challenging one. In hindsight, I probably should have taken less than four courses in my very first semester, but the program was nonetheless also an incredibly rewarding experience. The coursework broadened my cultural horizons, and all the professors I was fortunate to learn from have been insightful and helpful guides. I moreover appreciated the fact that my fellow graduate students hailed from many different countries and academic backgrounds. Overall, what I have come to appreciate is the intersectionality of culture, literature, history, and theory, reinforcing my impression that an interdisciplinary approach dwells at the heart of any robust academic program. In addition to contributing to my general development as a graduate student, this program has provided many opportunities to refine my critical thinking, composition and research skills. As a result, I feel I have grown immensely, both as a student and person.

After graduation, I plan to explore opportunities in both academia and industry. I am very much open to and looking forward to pursuing any available international opportunities, as well as possibilities for further study, as I have always held the notion that learning should be a lifelong journey.



BÜCHNER'S WOYZECK AS GENDER BENDER

by Professor Erol Boran

Since its introduction to our undergraduate program in 2010, GER340 ("German Theatre Production") has become a highly popular course. Designed to improve language skills through creative practice, it focuses on staging, rehearsing and performing a German play.

This year's production was an adaptation of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Written almost two centuries ago, the play is still very relatable, as it deals with universal aspects of the human condition: individuality deformed by society, science and suspicion. Büchner's early death left *Woyzeck* unfinished, and it is precisely its fragmentary form that makes the play so fascinating. The gaps and short, enigmatic scenes ask to be filled with new meaning.

In our production, we made two major changes: we added a grotesque emcee character to guide the audience and make it complicit in the undoing of the protagonist; and we performed

with an entirely female cast – with the exception of Woyzeck's love interest, Marie, played by Iouri. These two additions allowed us to experiment and reinterpret many aspects of the original play.

Our three performances at the Georg Ignatieff Theatre in late November were enthusiastically received. The course itself received stellar evaluations from the students, who described it as "THE course to take," and "one of the best experiences I had during my undergrad." Participants commented on how the course improved various skills: "You get a lot of language practice, learn how to do production work, learn the difference between studying the play and actually playing it. And you get the satisfaction of successfully completing a team project."

GER340 is scheduled to be taught again in the winter of 2019. We hope that many new students will be among its participants!



CROSSING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BORDERS WITH YIDDISH

by Alexandra Hoffman, Lecturer of Yiddish

Last summer, I returned to Toronto to take up the position of lecturer in Yiddish at U of T after studying and teaching in Ann Arbor, Michigan for over a decade. Many students who had trained under Prof. Anna Shtershis enrolled my Fall seminar, "It sounds better in Yiddish: an Introduction to Jewish Humour." I was delighted to discover that Jordan Chad, a U of T alumnus and current graduate student, was organizing a weekly conversation group attended by students, faculty, and other community members. Another student, Anna Kalimouline, co-organized the "Ot Azoy!" festival of Yiddish culture in North York in March. The intermediate Yiddish class was a small group of curious, earnest and creative minds, who got to display their creativity at the Hanukkah party in December, performing – along with Vardit Lightstone's beginner class – a new version of the folk-song "Yome, yome." It was great fun, and an honour to be upstaged by the Ashkenazi Chorale.

In the Winter semester, the Beginning Yiddish class drew a delightful medley of graduate and undergraduate students, as well as auditors. The advanced class was also well attended, and concentrated on women's writing in Yiddish, including a symbolic play by Leah Kapilowicz Hofman called "Power" [Kraft]. Two colleagues in the US – Dr. Anya Quilitzsch at the University of Michigan and Dr. Sara Feldman at the University of Illinois – joined me in an experiment in collaborative Yiddish teaching and learning, a project we named "The Great Lakes Yiddish Theatre Troupe" to



acknowledge the ways Yiddish thrives in spite of political borders. Students on all three campuses worked on translating the play, and then met up in Toronto, May 16-18. Miriam Borden, yet another graduate student who contributes to Yiddish culture well beyond the walls of the university, led us on a tour of Kensington Market, still remembered by some as the Jewish Market, and north along Bathurst, where some of the market's institutions have moved. The students edited the collaborative translation, which will be submitted to *In geveb* this summer, shared food, and performed a dramatic reading of the play at Free Times Café. The audience was generally well-entertained, and even included one person disgruntled at our amateur performance, making it a perfect Yiddish theatre experience.

This summer, students, faculty and other community members will begin meeting twice a month to workshop their translations from Yiddish into English. Please contact me at sasha.hoffmann@utoronto.ca if you'd like to join us. All are welcome!

SUSTAINABLE GRADUATE STUDIES

by Professor Angelica Fenner, Associate Chair, Graduate Studies

This Fall, in another round of robust enrolments, our graduate program welcomes two new PhD students, and ten MA students, including three in the Yiddish field. Our newcomers hail from as far away as Egypt, Germany, Switzerland, and Turkey as well as various Canadian provinces and the GTA. This year, the School of Graduate Studies is also rolling out new avenues of academic support, including workshops to help Humanities students prepare for the comprehensive exams, as well as 'boot camps' that advance their progress on the dissertation. For the latter, enrollees can choose between day-long intensives on campus or a full weekend at select retreat centers in the wider GTA with writing coaches on hand to help students stay 'on task.' SGS has also launched the Milestones and Pathways program, which supports unit-level initiatives posing meaningful steps towards professionalization and also fosters experiential learning that brings into focus how skills acquired in graduate studies can gain traction across a variety of professional contexts.

Our students continue to excel in earning competitive fellowship to support their studies. Last year, M.A. student Laurence Côté-Pitre earned an Ontario Graduate Scholarship, while PhD Student Christin Bohnke garnered a SSHRC and a research grant from the Joint Initiative in German and European Studies. This year, PhD students Vardit Lightstone and Tobias Wilczek also secured highly coveted SSHRC fellowships.

Over the past academic year, we also witnessed a record six

dissertation defenses in the newly renovated meetings rooms of the School for Graduate Studies, now equipped with state of the art communication technologies to facilitate video conferencing with external examiners around the world. The thesis topics reflect the diversity of German Studies as a discipline: in Fall 2016, Marlo Burks defended the thesis, "Art's Challenge: An Analysis of the Role of Aesthetics in the Work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal," and Lara Pehar the thesis, "Kafka: A Blueprint of Desire," both under the supervision of Professor John Zilcosky. In Summer 2017, Ermelinda Luzi defended "The Chiaroscuro Technique in the Works of W.G. Sebald" (Prof. John Noyes), Christin Bohnke, "Postcolonial Theory Reconsidered: Race, Gender, and Imperialism in the German-Japanese Realm" (Prof. Angelica Fenner), Nicola Vöhringer "Chanting Nuns, Chiming Bells: Sound in Late Medieval Mystical Literature and Devotional Culture" (Prof. Markus Stock), and most recently, Stefana Gargova, "Culture, Identity, and Attitudes of Immigrant Learners of German in the Context of the German Integration Course" (Prof. Michael Hager). We wish our newly minted Doctors of Philosophy much success!





THE 10TH ANNUAL GERMAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM: DISPLACED PHILOGIES: TRANSLATIONS OF THE OTHER AND THE GERMAN TRADITION

by Professor Willi Goetschel

This year's German Studies Symposium was organized by U of T Professor Willi Goetschel and David Suchoff (Colby College, Maine, USA), and was conceived to explore multilingual aspects of the German literary and cultural canon and the significance of its multiple origins. Taking place across two days, 12 scholars examined various strategies of resistance to the national commitments that have defined the classic canonical readings. Unwilling to recognize strata of internal difference as sources of literary expression's most creative moments, dominant narratives of German literary history have reduced such otherness to forms of the foreign that warrant exclusion. The conference highlighted the ways German literary texts critically displace the claims of national philologies; at the same time, some papers also made a case for the "foreign" as the figure that resists the nationalistic claim to a natural and unified culture. Providing a framework for this theme, Gesine Palmer explored the emancipatory move of Rosenzweig's canon, and its defiant and open forms of defying linguistic politics. Gilad Sharvit discussed Rosenzweig's politics of translation as another means of exile rather than as a form of surrender to assimilation. Vance Byrd highlighted the complex intersectional dynamics of Kleist's presentation of the color lines between whiteness and blackness. Willi Goetschel traced Heine's literary project as a continuous play of displacement that

reminds its readers that the only authenticity that remains is that of disclosing inauthenticity. Catriona MacLeod demonstrated the critical function of the liberating force of the vernacular that informs the modernism of Kafka's Scottish translators, the Muirs, as it performs its displacement Kafka style. David Suchoff examined Beckett's use of Goethe's metaphors of the swallowing and expulsion of difference, as part of Beckett's redemptive linguistics in *Watt*; Maria Kager examined the Mauthner's critical role for Joyce. Jessi O'Rourke-Suchoff argued that Celan's voice of otherness, and the most deeply German, finds one of its most suggestive readings in the work of Anne Carson. Nathaniel Wolfson showed how Max Bense and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht see in Brazil's rugged wilderness the pristine origins of what they can no longer project into their own heritage. Andreas Stuhlmann explored the dynamics of difference and the revision of German cultural identity in Arendt; Mathura Umachandran followed Benjamin's and Adorno's theorizing of the "foreign word" or *Fremdwort* as the site of liberation from linguistic forms of nationalism and Ian Fleishman addressed Derrida's refusal to submit to the nationalist aspirations of the German culture's claiming of Walter Benjamin. A collection of the papers is slated to appear in a special theme issue in *The Germanic Review* in early 2018.

DAAD SPONSORS LANGUAGE TEACHING & LEARNING WORKSHOP

by Professor Hang-Sun Kim, Language Coordinator

In December 2016 the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures held the second annual DAAD-funded German Language Teaching and Learning Workshop, which I organized with assistance from Yasmin Aly, Stefana Gargova, Gayle Grisdale, Helena Juenger, and Teresa Sudenis. The one-and-a-half-day workshop promoted the professional development of graduate student and early-career German language instructors at Canadian universities through hands-on workshops by expert practitioners and researchers focused on the practice and theory of second language pedagogy. The symposium theme of diversity in the classroom correlates with the diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and different linguistic skills of our student body. This enriches our classrooms with a multiplicity of perspectives, but also present distinct challenges for language teachers. The conference approached the topic of diversity from a number of different angles: Enrica Piccardo (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto) spoke about the criteria and curricular implications of language assessments based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Karin James (University of Manitoba) held a workshop on the use of film

for the exploration of the topic of intercultural communication. Mary O'Brien (University of Calgary) spoke about ways to target intelligible speech, while moving beyond a focus on accent. Nicola Townsend (University of Toronto Schools) had us reflect upon the ways in which we can create an inclusive classroom environment for students of all genders and sexual orientations, drawing particular attention to the need for a critical and self-reflexive engagement with language textbooks. Ulrike Kugler (Goethe-Institut Toronto) shared a wealth of ideas on how to promote differentiated learning. Finally, Barbara Schmenk (University of Waterloo) discussed theories and approaches to advancing translingual and transcultural competence. Altogether twenty-two graduate students and six German language specialists from across Canada (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia) came together for a lively exchange of ideas on innovative pedagogical approaches to teaching German. The event provided an excellent opportunity for us to share our common challenges and experiences in the classroom, and I look forward to hosting it again next year.



RECENT PHD LANDS PROFESSORSHIP IN NEW ZEALAND

by Nicole Perry, alumna

By the time I completed my PhD in 2012 in our department, I had already secured a postdoctoral position in the Department of German at the University of Vienna. Like many things in life, it was a result of both competence and luck. I happened to be at a conference in 2011 with a professor who was looking to fill the opening and he offered it to me on the spot- I just had to have my dissertation finished by July of the next year! During the ensuing two years, I also applied for permanent positions in the US and Canada. I took up a 4-month post at the University of Guelph and had moderate success on the American job market with one on-campus interview.

During this time I also applied to other postdoctoral positions and ultimately won (very generous) funding from the Austrian Science Fund for my research proposal entitled "Performing Germanness, Reclaiming Aboriginality." This project essentially reversed the direction of study of my earlier dissertation thesis and analyzed the reappropriation of the German "Indianer" image by North American Indigenous artists, filmmakers, and new media artists, an initiative that has oriented me more heavily towards Indigenous Studies. With the generous travel and research supplement included in this grant, I was able to travel to conferences, film festivals and purchase important books and films. While working on the project, I applied to a position at the University of Auckland as I have always seen my research extending into the South Pacific, in regards to

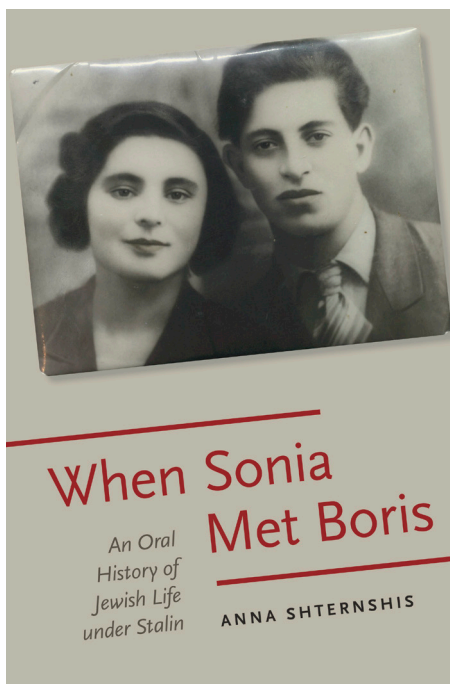
Māori and Pasifika reappropriations of Germanic colonial legacies. The job description also spoke to many of my research interests.

Since December 2015, I have been a lecturer in German at the University of Auckland teaching both language and literature. The beginning of a new job in a new country was overwhelming and tiring. The administrative work associated with a permanent position is not to be underestimated! The network I formed both during my graduate studies as the graduate student representative to the CAUTG and as a postdoctoral researcher has been an essential component to my success. I have been invited to give lectures and attend symposiums in Europe and North America, asked to contribute book chapters and was even recently headhunted! My advice would be to begin forming a strong network, finish the dissertation in a timely manner, and don't be afraid to ask for help and advice.



NEW BOOK ON ORAL HISTORY OF JEWISH LIFE

by Professor Anna Shternshis



Russian-speaking Jews from the former Soviet Union are a peculiarity in the Jewish world. After decades living in a repressive, nominally atheistic state, these Jews did manage to retain a strong sense of Jewish identity—but one that was almost completely divorced from Judaism. Today, more than ten percent of Jews speak or understand Russian, signaling the importance of an ever-vexing question: why are Russian Jews the way they are?

In pursuit of an answer, Anna Shternshis's groundbreaking *How Sonia Met Boris: Oral History of Jewish Life Under Stalin* draws on nearly 500 oral history interviews on the Soviet Jewish experience with Soviet citizens who were adults by the 1940s. Soviet Jews lived through tumultuous times: the Great Terror, World War II, the anti-Semitic policies of the postwar period, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. But, like millions of other Soviet citizens, they married, raised children, and built careers, pursuing life as best they could in a profoundly hostile environment. One of the first scholars to record and analyze oral testimonies of Soviet Jews, Shternshis unearths heartbreaking, deeply poignant, and often funny stories of the everyday choices Jews were forced to navigate as a repressed minority living in a totalitarian regime. Shternshis reveals how ethnicity rapidly transformed into a disability, as well as a negative characteristic, for Soviet Jews in the postwar period, and shows how it was something they needed to desperately overcome in order to succeed.

That sense of self has persisted well into the twenty-first century, and has impacted the Jewish identities of the children and grandchildren of Shternshis's subjects, the foundational generation of contemporary Russian Jewish culture. An illuminating work of social and cultural history, *How Sonia Met Boris* traces the fascinating contours of contemporary Russian Jewish identity back to their very roots.

CHARITABLE GIVING: THE HERMANN BOESCHENSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND

by Professor Angelica Fenner

The Hermann Boeschenstein Memorial Fund is the source for two of the most significant scholarships awarded annually by the Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures. This summer, I was able to reconstruct a micro-history of the Fund from a file folder of crisp but yellowing paperwork dating back to 1985. It was established under the Chairship of the late Prof. Heinz Wetzel, once a leading scholar of Georg Trakl and editor of *Seminar*, who passed away this past March 2017 in Ottawa. In one letter, Professor Wetzel acknowledged the dedication of colleagues Barker Fairley, Karl-Heinz Packer, and G. W. Field in helping establish this fund in honour of esteemed colleague Professor Hermann Boeschenstein. The relay of university correspondence, evidently hammered out on a typewriter, evokes for me an era of comparative leisure in matters of administration when compared to the algorithmic rate at which electronic communications circulate in the workplace today. And yet, these documents also testify to the Fund's impact on generations of students and exemplify the ways German history in the earlier 20th-century, although often defined by mass-mobilized war and persecution, has also inspired individual acts of compassion, moral vision, and benevolence.

Back in 1984, the first deposit of exactly \$12,227.00 accrued through donations of individuals from Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, Switzerland, and Germany. One Colonel Karl-Heinz Boettger, president of the Association of Former German Prisoners of War in Canada, who lived in Norderstedt, West Germany, arranged a (for that era) sizable donation to the Fund (\$1,522.95) collected from members of his association, thereby bringing their total to close to \$4,000. These funds from individuals likely in their 70s

and 80s at the time, sought to acknowledge that Boeschenstein's "war work on behalf of the international Swiss Red Cross from 1941 to 1946 inspired such dedicated loyalty and friendship." After the Swiss-born professor immigrated to Canada and joined the U of T faculty, he also served the War Prisoners Aid group of the YMCA during World War II, and helped German Prisoners of War in various capacities while they were imprisoned in Canada. A prolific scholar, he authored nine books and numerous articles before retiring in 1967.

The Boeschenstein Fund's mandate was – and remains to the present day – to offer meaningful support to students in German Studies. By 1987, the Fund's principal had been raised to \$30,000 through continued generous support from across Canada, leading the Governing Council to officially approve both a scholarship for undergraduate German specialists in their second or third year, and a Fellowship for an incoming graduate student. The first scholarship recipient was a second-year Specialist in German, awarded \$200 in 1986. One of the first fellowships went to incoming graduate student Bruce Proevencher of Omaha, Nebraska, who in 1988 received \$2,000 and membership in University College, which included High Table privileges for lunch at noon, and the morning coffee hour at 10:30. For a more recent undergraduate recipient, Victoria Rebelo, the funds enabled travel to Germany in 2016 for language study. The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures welcomes the possibility of establishing further named awards and invites potential donors to contact our Chair, Professor Markus Stock.

SELECTED EVENTS

April 12-14, 2018 | 11th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium 2018
"Environmental Humanities and German Studies: Imagining Sustainability"

GUEST LECTURES

October 18 | Stefanie Buchenau (Université Paris-VIII)

February 7 | Vocalis Liederabend: Winternächte - Lieder über Träume und Sehnsucht (co-sponsored by the Faculty of Music, the German Department, and the Goethe-Institut)

SPECIAL NOTE update!

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