

Canonical Pressures: German Literature and its Voices of Difference

The discipline of Germanistik – and, to some degree, North American German Studies – has long presented German Literature as a unified field of study. But its canonical approach reflects literary, philological, and theoretical commitments that have been under pressure from the start. While canonical constructions of the narrative of German literary history have profoundly informed the project of German philology and literature, the texts on which this construction has been based frequently contain voices that expose this project as conflicted and problematic. The dynamic of this internal tension is yet to be fully examined as a particular instance of the return of the repressed.

This conference workshop seeks to recover the critical aspect of the voices of difference – occasionally noisy and marked as ‘foreign’ and other, and often marked as creaturely, primordial, pre-cultural, excessive, and subversive – within canonical and non-canonical texts in the German tradition.

In this workshop, we will explore voices of alterity and difference in relation to their historical encounters with German philology. What are the diverse concepts, practices, and discursive strategies used to make them audible or inaudible, and legible or illegible?

We will consider authors such as Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Hölderlin, Heine, Keller, Fontane, Kafka, Brecht, Celan, Bachmann, and Tawada, as well as others whose texts show hidden or overt traces of tracking this tension. We seek papers from a variety of historical and methodological perspectives, with focus on authors at the ‘center’ as well as on the ‘peripheries,’ inside and outside the German canon.

The workshop is planned June 23-24, 2022 at the University of Toronto. Please send 250-500 word abstracts to Tanvi Solanki (tsolanki@yonsei.ac.kr) and Willi Goetschel (w.goetschel@utoronto.ca) by October 15, 2021.