The 3-day conference ‘Impact: German-language Culture and its Reception’ was held at the University of Liverpool, organised by Lyn Marven and Rebecca Braun. Coinciding with Liverpool’s ‘European Capital of Culture’ 2008 as well as celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Women in German Studies, this conference addressed how ‘impact’ may be conceptualised with reference to German-language culture and its reception, both at home and abroad. The broad scope for interpretation, which the central theme offered, was reflected in the diversity of approach, with papers exploring impact in, on and of literature, film, museum displays, music, experimental and traditional theatre, the visual arts, the media, translation and language. The conference raised issues about the relation of culture and politics, particularly with regard to twentieth-century German history; how cultural impact affects literary and artistic production; how such production may impact upon societal attitudes; and commercial impact upon the arts. Several papers drew attention to matters associated with reception, including the gap between the artist’s intention and reception of their work; the reception of the artist him/herself; and the effects of censorship or political orientation.

That the ‘impact’ of the theme extends to fields beyond German Studies was evident during the lively and interdisciplinary round table at Tate Liverpool, which discussed the impact of German-language culture in the UK (see below). An edited podcast of the discussion will be available via the WIGS website shortly (www.wigs.ac.uk).

In her opening keynote lecture, ANNE FUCHS (Dublin) engaged with the question of why the city of Dresden became an iconic memory site for ‘German wartime suffering’, describing it as one of the most significant ‘impact stories’ of the 20th century. Based on an analysis of the TV drama Dresden (2006), and the debate surrounding the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche, Fuchs argued that the recent Dresden discourse illuminates wider cosmopolitan trends to recode the war experience.

In the first panel on theorising cultural impact, KATRIN KOHL (Oxford) stressed the role of language for a concept such as ‘impact’ by focusing on the power of abstract forms, particularly the metaphor. Based on the assumption that metaphors can be seen as the most important cultural force, shaping the concept of culture and, thus, our identities, Kohl examined different conceptualisations of national culture that deal with the metaphor “word is a weapon”. Her examination led to the conclusion that after 1945 German culture has been dissociated from political functions in the public sphere. ELIZABETH BOA (Nottingham) explored the impact of Kafka’s artist stories, demonstrating that these texts reflect upon the relationship between artist and audience, between the work of art and the cultural institutions that frame it. Boa argued that the focus of these stories, in particular Bericht für eine Akademie and Joséfine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse, is in the slippage between intended meaning and reception, and therefore represent the artist as a victim of misunderstanding, confined to the margins and yet celebrated by Kafka for precisely this outsider status. SARAH COLVIN (Edinburgh) examined the seemingly contradictory concept of the ‘zero impact’
of prison writing after 1968. Using Peter Paul Zahl (APO-
member and later literary award holder) as an example,
Colvin examined functions of prison writing that do not
intend ‘impact’ in the standard sense. Colvin’s analysis
of Zahl’s poem ‘nigungeo – verniemandung’ showed that
political prisoners saw their writing predominantly as a
way to make their voice heard and keep their identities
alive.

Three papers reflected on the cultural impact of the
process of translation. Based on English and German
translations of Tadeusz Borowski’s Holocaust narratives,
PETER DAVIES (Edinburgh) enquired into the role of
translation in the construction of the Holocaust between
cultures. As Borowski’s texts cut across several generic
categories, Davies examined the way in which translators
and editors have dealt with the ethical issues surround-
ing categorisation, revealing that the different transla-
tion strategies reflect both the cultural perceptions and
paradigms of the culture of the target language, as well
as changing notions of authenticity in writing about the
Holocaust. ANNE BODEN (Trinity College Dublin) dis-
cussed Paul Peikert’s *Chronik über die Belagerung Bres-
laus 1945*, a diary describing the siege of Breslau and the
mass expulsions in the final months of the war. First pub-
lished in Poland, and then in the GDR in the 1960s, Bo-
den focused on the text’s reception in the GDR, reveal-
ning how the text – which suggests that expulsion was a
logical consequence of the Germans’ support for the Ger-
man war machine and constituted a liberation by the Red
Army – was used to support the official East German in-
terpretation of the war. DAVID BARNETT (Sussex) dis-
cussed the difficulty of ‘translating’ German theatre onto
the English stage. Outlining the effects of the subsidised
German theatre system, and identifying a fundamental
conservatism within the institution of a commercial the-
atre in the UK, he argued that challenging dramaturgies
have little chance of appearing, or succeeding, in Britain.

In the keynote lecture that followed, HELEN
WATANABE-O’KELLY (Oxford) drew attention to the
neglected figure of the ‘woman warrior’. By tracing the
recurrence of the figures of the Amazon, Judith and Ger-
mania, as well as literature’s heroic maidens of Brecht
and Schiller, Watanabe-O’Kelly argued that the image
of ‘woman warrior’ has in fact dominated the German
imagination from at least the Renaissance to the present
and takes up a central and continuous place in the coun-
try’s tradition.

In the opening keynote to Thursday’s proceedings,
JÜRGEN LUH (Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten)
outlined the SPSG’s plans for the 300th birthday celebra-
tions of Friedrich the Great in 2012. The project aims to
find innovative ways to disseminate information on Prus-
sian history and 18th century culture, and to awaken a
renewed interest in this period. Luh addressed the issue
of the German reception of Friedrich which oscillates be-
tween truth and legend, and highlighted how Prussian
history has become a specialist topic over time.

Panel A opened with CLAIRE ROGAN’s (Wesleyan)
examination of the German artist Max Klinger’s impact
as the first German-speaking artist to depict lesbian de-
sire in art which was displayed to the public, for instance
in his last portfolio, ‘Pavilion’ (1916). Rogan presented
Klinger as having been misrepresented by the main body
of reception and argued that the negative reception of
the work contributed to his failure to secure a long-term
legacy. This was followed by a paper on the impact of
transborder theatre festivals on the German-Polish bor-
der by JANE WILKINSON (Leeds). Wilkinson focused
on two cross-border theatre events, *Unithea and Viathea*,
as case studies to illuminate wider issues about the im-
 pact of such events on cross-border relations. Wilkin-
son demonstrated that audience reactions starkly con-
trast with the aims of the festivals, and with the effects
claimed by the organisers, concluding that while there
is general support for such initiatives, their effectivness
in practice is questionable. CHLOE PAVER (Exeter) ex-
plored how material culture of the National Socialist pe-
riod impacts upon museum displays of this period more
generally and highlighted the difficulties in presenting
the past in such displays. Paver argued that the concep-
tion of Nazi Germany as entirely totalitarian is transmit-
ted through such museum exhibitions, primarily because
the fringe elements of the regime, such as resistance and
dissent, cannot easily be displayed. Museum displays can
only focus on those objects which are, so to speak, per-
vaded by the symbols of Nazism, such as the swastika,
and often display objects without their original context.

A parallel session explored ‘transmission and recep-
tion in popular culture’, presenting a compelling investi-
gation into the impact of political song and film in new
contexts. DAVID ROBB (Belfast) examined the reception
of songs of the 1848 revolution in the folk revivals of post-
1945 West and East Germany. He showed that the broad
spectrum of attitudes conveyed in these songs - positive
revolutionary content, retreat and resignation, the cele-
bration of emigration - meant they chimed with several
strata of society in both the FRG and the GDR from the
1950s to 1980s. The particular lyrics and musical set-
ing chosen reflected both the political situation in the
respective countries and the political persuasion of the singer. CHRISTIANE SCHÖNFELD (Galway) was also concerned with the new reception of an earlier text, the transformation of Lion Feuchtwanger’s 1917 drama and 1925 novel ‘Jud Süss’ into the Nazi film of 1940, directed by Veit Harlan. Contrary to the current view that the film was not based on Feuchtwanger’s novel, Schönfeld demonstrated that the film functions as a negative image of the novel, perverting and reversing its intentions.

In the session on the cultivation of culture, the keynote lecture by GUNther NICKEL (Mainz/Deutscher Literaturfonds) illustrated the development of German literary sponsorship and in this context the specific role of the (19th century) bourgeoisie. Nickel outlined the possibilities of financial aid available to contemporary writers in the German-speaking regions. Questioning the intention of literary sponsorship, he challenged this kind of ‘continuous alimenter’, where writers stay dependent for long periods of time, and instead recommended the sponsorship of reading, for instance at schools.

Panel A opened with a paper by REBECCA BRAUN (Liverpool), outlining her latest research into the Gruppe 47 and examining post-war constructs of Heimat which can be read into their work. Through an examination of documentary films about the Gruppe 47 and examining post-war constructs of Heimat which can be read into their work. Through an examination of documentary films about the Gruppe 47, Braun suggested that the symbolic importance of the group appears to be constructed in two ways: those outside seek to establish its place in post-war discourse by connecting the ‘rootlessness’, which the group sees as self-defining, to the German landscape, while those within preserve the notions of a rootless resistant group which resists definition, which adds to the rhetoric of mythmaking. Thus, Braun’s conception of Heimat as related to Gruppe 47 shows us that its primary characteristic is a separatist, coherent myth. Public conceptions of the figure of the author were also addressed in KAREN LEEDER’s (Oxford) paper on Ingeborg Bachmann, which discussed the reception of Bachmann through two recent critical essays by Ulrike Draessner and Evelyn Schlag. She addressed Bachmann’s iconic status and the myth which has grown around her as an author, both during her lifetime and after her death, which has fuelled critical and scholarly fascination with her not only as an author but increasingly as a public figure. Leeder examined the 1954 Spiegel coverage of Bachmann, using this as a way to explore the cultural impact of the author and, more specifically, the female author. JENNY MCKAY (Leeds) examined Ingo Schulze’s acceptance speech on winning the Thüringer Literaturpreis in November 2007, in which he outs Germany’s commercial chiefs as the new feudal lords. She related this to his collection of short stories, Handy: dreizehn Geschichten in alter Manier (2007), and outlined how this work both supported Schulze’s claims about the increasingly feudal position of the German writer, and indicated that authors are in a state of ‘dependent independence’ on the financial bounty of these modern barons.

In the panel on the shaping of the public sphere, KATRIN HENZEL (Leipzig) concentrated on the impact of anthologies of quotations around 1800. Based on the thesis that literature changes its functions when quoted, Henzel used examples to illustrate how anthologists influenced the readership. An analysis of paratexts, such as prefaces or subtitles, explained the intentions of these collections. Henzel also showed how anthologies of quotations preserved parts of literary texts, turning them into proverbs, while their writers’ identities were lost. MATTHEW PHILPOTTS (Manchester) examined how the literary journal Sinn und Form, once an official product of the GDR, protected itself in the post-Wende period in order to survive on the market. Using Bourdieu’s model of the cultural field, Philpotts analysed reviews of the early 1990s to illustrate the struggle for symbolic capital at a time of scepticism towards former GDR journals. ANA-MARIA PĂLIMARIU (Iasi) examined the role of the German-speaking minority in Czernowitz during 1918 and 1940 by analysing the Feuilleton of the Czernowitz Morgenblatt, one of the most important media sources of the Bukovina and a platform for all minorities in Romania at that time. Pălimariu analysed aspects of rhetorical media research such as the self-image of this medium and its influence on the readership.

The ‘Round Table’, held at the Tate Liverpool, concluded Thursday’s sessions with a discussion on how German-Language culture impacts upon British culture in the 21st century. The panel, chaired by Michael Schmidt, Professor of Poetry (Glasgow) and editor of Carcanet Press, included Christoph Grunenberg, director of Tate Liverpool; Karen Leeder, fellow at New College, Oxford, and translator; Walter Meierjohann, associate director at the Young Vic Theatre, London; and Rebecca Morrison, editor of the journal New Books in German, which aims to introduce German-language publications to the English market. The lively discussion centred on the reception of German culture in Britain, including the visual arts, theatre, literature and translation. Questions about common perceptions of German culture abroad were addressed, as well as concerns about the dearth of young German-language playwrights at British theatres. The
difficulties of translating German-language literature for the English-language market were also outlined. Finally, the discussion moved onto the ways in which German-language culture is disseminated in the UK and it was suggested that it achieved a greater impact when less overtly ‘German’.

ANDREW WEBBER (Churchill College, Cambridge) opened the last day of the conference with his keynote lecture on Berlin as the cultural capital of the 20th century. Based on Walter Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit* and his description of Paris having been the cultural capital of the 19th century, Webber examined places and monuments in relation to the history of Berlin, Germany and the world during the last century. Webber offered a survey of different topoi of Berlin, including boundaries and thresholds, concluding with an analysis of Berlin’s materiality.

The three speakers on ‘culture and spectatorship’ examined different forms of witnessing. LARA ELDER (Oxford) discussed the ambivalent position of Heine’s reports on revolutionary politics for the German Allgemeine Zeitung as an attempt to conceal for the censor while simultaneously revealing for the reader. Elder demonstrated that a theatrical idiom pervades Heine’s reports, which implies that French revolutionary politics employed a dramatic mode, manipulating the visual in order to stage-manage its own reception. BEN MORGAN (Oxford) proposed a new reading of the first colour feature film made in Germany after the war, *Schwarzwaldmädel* (1950), as evidence against the received image of 1950s Germany as amnesiac. Rather, he showed that for contemporary viewers the film helped to construct a sense of emotional continuity with the pre-war era, through the re-appearance of pre-war actors and of motifs from earlier versions of the *Schwarzwaldmädel* story, especially the popular operetta of the 1910s and 1920s. DEBORAH HOLMES (Vienna) showed excerpts from Harald Bergmann’s 2006 film *Brinkmanns Zorn* and examined Bergmann’s discussion of the film in a 2007 interview, in order to explore the generic implications of this experimental film. Holmes highlighted the ambiguous generic status of the film, which uses Brinkmann’s own audio recordings with staged visuals, as a unique fusion of the documentary and the bio-pic, while simultaneously assessing its position as ‘verfilmte Literatur’.

In the panel on ‘cultural icons’, the first two papers examined their ‘icons’ lack of impact. Using Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual, JOANNE SAYNER (Birmingham) analysed the attempts by Greta Kuckhoff to use her public role to create a democratic anti-hegemony. Analysing a wide range of Kuckhoff’s radio broadcasts, journal articles and speeches, Sayner illustrated Kuckhoff’s consistent awareness of her own positionality and suggested why Kuckhoff was unable to achieve the impact she wanted, looking at questions of censorship and the remit of a ‘public sphere’ within the occupation zones. KARINA BERGER (Leeds) examined Walter Kempowski’s reception in Germany from the late 1960s until his death in 2007. Outlining the author’s status as a *persona non grata* with the literary establishment in the highly politicised 1970s, Berger traced the cultural and political changes which led to the eventual volte-face in Kempowski’s reception, and a new-found appreciation of the author. LAURA BRADLEY (Edinburgh) traced the impact of Wolf Biermann’s expatriation on the Deutsches Theater and its production of *Michael Kohlhaas* in 1976-7, adapted by the director Adolf Dresen, who had refused to withdraw his protest against Biermann’s expatriation. Bradley analysed how the theatre dealt with an unexpectedly controversial text under the institutional pressures of state censorship and examined the divergent reception by local SED officials, the Stasi and Western reviewers.

The breadth of papers suggested that ‘impact’ is a concept with significant resonance in German Studies, and central to a wide variety of research interests. The round table discussion of the impact of German-language culture in the UK included observations of cultural perceptions, compatibility and differences in the arts, literature and theatre, themes of interest, for instance, to those working in the fields of cultural studies, translation or comparative studies.

**Conference overview:**

**THEORIZING CULTURAL IMPACT**

**KEYNOTE**
Anne Fuchs (University College Dublin), ‘Dresden Discourses and the Impact of Cultural Memory’

**PANEL: Impact in language and literature**
Katrin Kohl (Oxford), ‘The cultural impact of metaphor’
Elizabeth Boa (Nottingham), ‘Kafka’s artist stories: artist, artwork, impresario and public’
Sarah Colvin (Edinburgh), ‘Zero impact: the case of the unknown writer’

**PANEL: Translation and cultural impact**
Peter Davies (Edinburgh), ‘The obligatory horrors:
Translating Tadeusz Borowski’s Holocaust narratives into German and English

Anne Boden (Trinity College Dublin), 'Translated Memory? The Polish framing and GDR reception of Paul Peikert’s Chronik über die Belagerung Breslaus 1945'

Lina Glede (East Anglia), 'The effect of gender on the translation and reception of Sarah Kirsch and Ingeborg Bachmann'

David Barnett (Sussex), 'I’ve been told [...] that the play is far too German': The interplay of institution and dramaturgy in the failed reception of German theatre in the UK'

KEYNOTE

Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly (Oxford), 'The Warrior Woman on the Loose: The Wider Impact of German Tropes of the Warrior Woman after 1800'

EXHIBITIONS, FESTIVALS AND POPULAR CULTURE

KEYNOTE

Jürgen Luh (Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten), 'Friedrich300 in 2012 - Coordinating the tercentennial of Frederic the Great’s birthday'

PANEL A: Public exhibitions and festivals

Clare I. Rogan (Wesleyan), 'Nicht gerade was für die Volksbildereien': Fantasies of lesbian desire in Max Klinger’s Pavilion, 1916

Jane Wilkinson (Leeds), 'Discrepant narratives: The (non)-impact of transborder theatre festivals on audiences as the German-Polish border'

Chloë Paver (Exeter), 'The role of museum displays in mediating an understanding of the National Socialist era'

PANEL B: Transmission and reception in popular culture

David Robb (Belfast), 'The Songs of the 1848 Revolution: History of reception from the 19th to the 21st Century'

Christiane Schönfeld (Galway), ‘’Niemand ist an nichts unschuldig‘: Lion Feuchtwanger, Jud Süß, and the Nazi film industry'

CULTIVATING CULTURE

KEYNOTE

Gunther Nickel (Mainz / Deutscher Literaturfonds), ‘‘Die Kunst geht nach Brot’: Anspruch, Wirklichkeit und Probleme der Literaturförderung in Deutschland'

PANEL A: Creating authors

Rebecca Braun (Liverpool), '1967-2007: The Gruppe 47 as a literary “Heimat”'

Karen Leeder (Oxford), 'Reading posterity, reading Bachmann'

Jenny McKay (Leeds), 'Cultural feudalism and the East German author: the case of Ingo Schulze'

PANEL B: Shaping the public sphere

Katrin Henzel (Leipzig), 'The impact of anthologies of quotations on literary reception in the late 18th century'

Matthew Philpotts (Manchester), 'Closing the circle of belief: The Sinn und Form legend and the post-Wende cultural field'

Ana-Maria Palimariu (Jassy), 'Vielfältige Kulturen in einer deutschsprachigen Literatur: das Feuilleton des Czernowitz Morgenblattes'

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: The Impact of German-Language Culture in the UK

With select industry specialists

THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

KEYNOTE

Andrew Webber (Cambridge), 'Berlin: Cultural Capital of the Twentieth Century'

PANEL A: Culture and spectatorship

Lara Elder (Oxford), 'A German in Paris: Heinrich Heine’s art of spectatorship on the revolutionary street'

Ben Morgan (Oxford), 'What is coming to terms with the past? German film revisited'

Deborah Holmes (Vienna), 'Brinkmanns Zorn – Recreating the creative process in literary film biography'

PANEL B: Cultural icons

Joanne Sayner (Birmingham), ‘„Sie gehörte zu den Aktivisten der ersten Stunde“: Greta Kuckhoff’s political engagement in the immediate post-war period'

Karina Berger (Leeds), ‘„Ein groteskes Mißverständnis“: Walter Kempowski and the literary establishment'
Laura Bradley (Edinburgh), 'Nach dem Biermann-Debakel las jeder die Geschichte anders': Michael Kohlhaas at the Deutsches Theater, 1976-7

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