Cultural Crossings

Postgraduate Conference

Saturday, 27 June 2015, Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna

Abstracts

Speakers

Fairy Tales Rebooted: Breaking Habits in Bill Willingham's *Fables* and Telltale Games' *The Wolf Among Us*

Bettina Bódi

I would like to examine the intermedial transgression of generic and medial conventions in Bill Willigham's comic book *Fables* (2008) and *The Wolf Among Us*, (2013) an interactive video game set in the same fictional universe as both exhibit a salient awareness of their generic conventions (detective and film noir), while deploying characters from well-known fables. "Bigby" Wolf, Snow White, & Co. inhabit Fabletown, a secret society in contemporary New York for the survivors of the attack on their homeland. Such intertextual transportation of public domain characters, story arcs, and narration techniques shed a different light on new features of content and form alike.

Through the example of *Fables* I would like to emphasise the versatility of comics as a medium. By adapting such rigid characters and stories as those in folklore to a modern environment, *Fables* proves that comics is a truly unique art form with endless possibilities for meaning making. This refashioning outgrows the boundaries of the medium, as we are given the power of choice in *The Wolf Among Us* to shape our character, our relationships, and ultimately, the turn of events, drawing us ever so close to the heroes and villains of our bedtime stories.

The empowered time traveling child: The exemplary case of Harry Potter

Petra Ederer

Unlike real, i.e. actually existing children and teenagers, their fictional counterparts are allowed to become powerful, strong and independent - in stories written by adults intended for children and teenagers. In the specific case of children's and YA (= young adult) time travel fiction, children leave their homes and families – their worlds - to travel some place and time else where they can become leaders, heroes, kings and the like. Only by going away, children can become powerful because in their so-called native worlds they naturally take a powerless position. In the case of Harry Potter from the third instalment of the series - *The Prisoner of Azkaba*n – his native world is the domain of the Muggles, the non-magicians, and, more specifically, the Dursley family. There he stands at the bottom of the power hierarchy. However,

through his adventures in the wizarding world in general and through time travel specifically, Harry- together with Hermione and her time-turner - saves the life of Sirius Black, Harry's godfather and a reportedly convicted murderer. Empowered by this experience, he returns to the Dursleys for another summer. Back in his native world, however, Harry has to adapt again to the structures the dominant discourses dictate. And yet, he can now drop the name of his greatly feared godfather anytime he wants to get something from the Dursleys. So, Harry has turned out to be quite powerful after all. This example shows that the empowerment of the child happens only "on certain conditions, and for a limited time" (Nikolajeva 2010: 10); however, as I will show in my thesis, the empowering effect does not vanish entirely, but to a certain extent and in some ways it continues to exist in the native world of the time traveling child.

15:30, Seminarraum 3

Ich bin ein Belieber: Justin Bieber in the Changing Global Landscape of Childhood Celebrity

Reanna Esmail

This paper examines the Canadian-born pop star Justin Bieber as a globally marketed product. I argue that Justin Bieber negotiates the conflicting expectations faced by the child star due to the recent changes in celebrity.

Once a completely idyllic figure, the child star is gradually evolving into an object of desire and a global commodity. With the growth of social media, the Internet, and gossip magazines, the lives of celebrities are now a greater source of capital and entertainment than the films, television shows, and music these performers create. As a result, the child star enters into a space where he/she is expected to be simultaneously a Christ-like figure and the embodiment of deviancy.

Justin Bieber is not only a prime example of this duality, but also an example of how globalism and the rise of the Internet is changing the way celebrities are branded and marketed. I will use Dyer's film theory, as well as media and consumer theory to analyse Bieber's music, films, interviews, online persona, and tabloid headlines. My paper will challenge the concept of the child star gone bad and contribute to the study of celebrities as globally marketable commodities.

Creating Canadianness by Crossing Cultures and Borders in the TV Series *Due South*

Nina Fanninger & Angelika Pumberger

Crossing cultural boundaries form the basic element of parody in *Due South*, one of the internationally most successful Canadian TV series, broadcasted from 1994 to 1999. Set in Chicago, the storyline features Royal Canadian Mounted Police constable Benton Fraser from the Northwest Territories and American police detective Ray Vecchio. Only after transgressing geographical, political and cultural boundaries, the archetypical national symbol, which is the Mountie, takes shape. Both characters rely heavily upon stereotypes: the pluriethnic, urban, rude American is contrasted to the Anglo-Saxon, rural, well-mannered Canadian. Additionally, the Canadian constable adopts supposed indigenous cultural habits and frequently tells Inuit myths. In terms of Homi K. Bhabha (The Location of Culture, 1994), the colonizer, represented by the Mountie, imitates the colonized what can be described as a reverse mimicry. While mimicry destabilizes the colonist's culture, reverse mimicry stabilizes it and reinforces Canadianness which opposed to Americanness becomes the heart of parody. The main character, RCMP constable Benton Fraser, integrates supposed indigenous culture but acts like a distorting mirror. The reformed recognizable "Other" is "almost the same, but not quite". Mimicry and reverse mimicry are essential components of the parody evoked through this 'not-quite sameness'.

Resisting the Urge to Cross Moral Boundaries: The Transgressive yet Conventional Heroine of Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but Too Well*

Sarah Frühwirth

Like the majority of sensation novels written in the 1860s and 1870s, also Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but Too Well* is not only concerned with the heroine's infringement of moral standards but also with the roots of her transgressiveness and her consequent suffering and discontent. Although the novel teems with foreshadowings, dreams and omens, I will argue that it is not so much the vagaries of fate that inhibit Kate's path to happiness, but rather the heroine's ill-balanced attitude towards morality. Kate, unlike many other sensation heroines, does not suffer as a consequence of abandoning conventional moral standards and giving in to the temptations presented to her, but rather because she resists her sexual urges and

constantly hovers between transgressive sensuality and conventional moral standards. Starting out as an active, outspoken sensation heroine, her passion for Dare and her entire self-abnegation gradually take on unhealthy, masochistic features. Her love for Dare becomes "an exacting master, a tyrannical god" and Kate lets her lover assume the role of fate for her, on the resignation to which her happiness depends. But despite her initial resolution to obey him whatever he "had enjoined upon her, even if it had been her own utter destruction", Kate's adherence to conventional morality prevents her from succumbing entirely to her lover's wishes, which eventually seals her fate.

11:30, Unterrichtsraum

To No Man's Land and Back: Remapping Space and Identity in Indigenous Crime Fiction

Alexandra Hauke

Blackfeet author Stephen Graham Jones has been described as an avant-garde storier, an aesthetic conversationalist, and a literary chameleon for producing across a variety of na(rra)tive spaces crime stories of unusual, distracting, and excellently compelling kinds. Jones speaks to and with the reader in unnerving conversational style, transgresses boundaries of chronology and genre, and reconceptualizes the cultural significance of contested Indigenous land as his (anti) heroes navigate back and forth between tribal landscapes and Western police territory. The intra- and cross-cultural struggles that henceforth ensue in Jones's *All the Beautiful Sinners* (2003), *The Bird is Gone: A Manifesto* (2005), and *Not for Nothing* (2014) result from the attempts to reconcile Native cultural knowledge with Western ways of detection and serve to negotiate the strong sense of space that shapes Indigenous identity-making in the United States.

This paper examines Stephen Graham Jones's extravagant literary techniques and the significance of (crime) space within the frame of his hybrid forms of Native crime fiction.

9:30, Seminarraum 3

Portraits of Women in Proverbs

Dzenita Joldic

Throughout history cultures have influenced other cultures in one way or another, usually in the form of one-way direction influences of bigger cultures on smaller ones. Language is one

of the most important vehicles of these cultural influences, since it encodes the cultural beliefs and behaviors of a certain society. Today, English as a lingua franca exerts an important cultural influence on a global scale. Proverbs are one area of language in which cultural influences can be easily seen and immediately identified. There are proverbs which exist in the same form in cultures that are geographically close but also in cultures which are geographically and culturally quite distant. This paper presents a contrastive analysis of English proverbs about women and proverbs about women found in the Bosnian language in order to investigate the extent of similarity of proverbs in these two cultures, as well as to identify the direction of cultural influences between Europe and the U.S.A. Do both cultures perceive women in the same way and what are some of the possible reasons for such similarities? The analysis has shown that a great majority of the proverbs in both languages are derogatory and full of sexism and represent women in a very negative way. Proverbs from both languages can be classified into 26 common topic categories which proves their semantic equality. Proverbs from two of the topic groups i.e. 'Women rule 'and 'Women should be bitten' will be presented and explained. The messages proverbs from these groups send out to the society, as well as common grounds and possible reasons for such attitudes will be discussed.

9:30, Unterrichtsraum

Role of Religion in Transgressions of the Ecological Self: Ecocritical Perspective on Margaret Atwood's The Year of the Flood and Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower

Tihana Kovac

According to Dunja M. Mohr, there is a new literary subgenre of contemporary, transgressive utopian dystopias emerging and it differs significantly from classical dystopias, such as Orwell's *1984*. This paper aims at analysing and comparing the transformative cultural-ecological potential of the two fictional religions that represent the basis for foundation of utopian communities within an eco-dystopian society – the first established by the Oral Hymnbook of God's Gardeners in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* and the second named Earthseed in Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*. Starting from the premise established in Brian Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories* that art and by implication also religion can be seen as a cultural advantage for human survival, the paper argues that the religious narratives in the two selected novels offer an alternative perspective on and even an impetus for a change of – what environmental philosopher Freya Mathews terms as – the ecological self. Moreover, it suggests that Hubert Zapf's triadic model of relation between literature and culture can be applied in the closer analysis of the two fictional religions in order to describe cognitive and

creative processes which have the potential to induce a spiritual and cultural (self-) renewal, to reform one's self-identity and reconcile the two spheres - culture and nature, transgressing thereby the culturally entrenched culture/nature dichotomy. In the age of environmental crises focusing scholarly attention on literature's potential for dismantling the one-dimensional, materialistic view of the self and by opening it towards the repressed and excluded other, the non-human is of foremost importance.

14:30, Seminarraum 3

Illegals. A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the Asylum Seeker Debate in Australia.

Matthew Leroy

When is a person illegal? My presentation will examine the asylum seeker debate in Australia via a Foucauldian discourse analysis. First, I will highlight an *episteme*—what Foucault described as "a grid of knowledge making possible every scientific discourse, every production of statements" (Eribon 158)—by analysing the groups of statements that have accompanied the debate since the introduction of the Howard government's "pacific solution" in 2001. At this time Australia had recently emerged from an economic recession, elected a conservative government and was experiencing a surge in nationalism. Stopping asylum seekers from reaching Australia became a major electoral issue. After commenting on historical, economic, political and legislative influences I will show what can and cannot be said in the debate, namely that asylum seekers were/are branded either as 'illegal immigrants' or 'illegal asylum seekers' and not as people. I will comment on how the exclusion of statements from the asylum seekers themselves (what Foucault called the rarefaction of the speaking subject that limits who is allowed to speak (Mills 61)) has shaped and still is shaping the discourse. I will also show that the asylum seeker discourse in Australia is discursive and material at the same time—the visibility of the immigration detention centres on Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Manus Island conditions the statements on asylum seekers and vice versa. When the asylum seeker debate takes place these detention centres are always present and influential to the debate. Finally, after underlining the productive nature of discourses and the conflicting statements they encompass, I will highlight the possibility for new statements regarding asylum seekers, that if the current and former asylum seekers are given a voice a counter-discourse can be created.

Works Cited

Eribon, Didier. *Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991. Print.

Mills, Sarah. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.

10:00, Seminarraum 3

Mountain Man unmasked- the corporate reality of the mountain man in *Astoria* and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*

Lisa Oberberger

In my presentation, I aim to expose the corporate realities that lie underneath the romance of the mountain man myth. The romanticized picture of the frontier hero in nineteenth century literature gives the reader a distorted image of the mountain man. His true nature is hidden under a veil of marvelous and heroic stories and adventures, which have been passed on over many generations. I want to expose the corporate mechanisms of the mountain man which have been disguised by a veer of romance and myth, using examples from two primary sources, namely *Astoria (1836)* and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville (1837)* by Washington Irving. The mountain man found himself in a corporate form of bondage. As a corporate agent of the fur companies, he explored the unmapped territory and exploited it of its resources. Both works depict these mechanisms of corporate bondage very well. This fact is supported in *Astoria* on page 124 where hired hunters and company agents agree on general terms and conditions for the expedition. The same can be found in selected paragraphs in *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* as well, furthering the point I am trying to make. My short talk will challenge the common romanticized image of mountain man in literature and unmask the mountain man as a dependent man, serving the needs of the company.

11:00, Seminarraum 3

Owens, R. Corinne: Illuminating Black Comedy: Marina Carr's 'Ariel' and Celtic Tiger Transformation

R. Corinne Owens

Globalisation during the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland prompted widespread debate over its challenge to understandings of Irish national identity. Even so, scholarly discussion on Irish theatre's relationship to globalisation during that period is limited. This paper redresses the lack of consideration given to Celtic Tiger theatre through an examination of its use of black comedy on Irish stage. Specifically, the paper concentrates on Marina Carr's Ariel, written in 2002, as a demonstration of Irish artistic pursuit anchored in tradition yet fraught with rapid

transformation. The research in the paper will explore this darkly humorous and tragic play as a circumstance of both the playwright's metamorphosis as an artist and the shifting trajectory of her nation. I argue that Carr's use of black humour in Ariel is more than the comedic relief characteristic of Celtic Tiger theatre, but instead a form standing on the shoulders of a well-wrought Irish literary tradition. By closely examining the black comedy of Marina Carr's Ariel, this paper illuminates the friction of a nation and its artist at the cusp of transformation as they both reach ever back.

10:00, Unterrichtsraum

Metamorphoses of power – from a past of patriarchy towards non-monogamous visions of the future

Michaela Pasterk

In my talk I will look at Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-1989) and its two fictional, communities, which are constructed as opposites to each other. The focus of the investigation will be the experiences of characters who cross over from one culture into the other, and by contrast make visible the power mechanisms (Foucault) that govern both communities. This confrontation of two cultures with their respective Other not only reflects on the constructedness of the communities' power dynamics and their resulting patterns of violence, but also problematizes the inescapability of such constructedness: despite their vastly different politics and philosophies, neither community manages to eschew dynamics of oppression and truly provide a basis for a positive future. However, in this very crossing of cultures, the text also provides a solution: Ultimately, it is through the experiences of cultural crossings of characters that an opportunity for a productive transformation of these discourses is created, and existing structures of power can be opened and re-defined towards a positive, life-affirming vision of the future

14:00, Seminarraum 3

Pacific Crossings: Redefining the Family and the Nation in Chinese American Family Memoirs

Nicole Poppenhagen

In Chinese American life writing, the family becomes a primary site of "cultural crossings" as cultural influences from both sides of the Pacific transform and often upset family relations.

This paper will examine how definitions of the family in Chinese American family memoirs challenge traditional notions of the family but also defy conventional concepts of the nation.

In "Manifest Domesticity," U.S. scholar Amy Kaplan argues that that in nineteenth-century American culture the family and the nation are conceptually linked as both depend on the spatial and conceptual opposition between the *domestic* and the *foreign*. Critics like Ruth Mayer demonstrate that anti-Chinese immigration laws as well as Chinese American literature both reflect and complicate this discourse of the family as nation and vice versa. Indeed, families in Chinese American memoirs like Lisa See's *On Gold Mountain: A Family Memoir of Love, Struggle, and Survival* are characterized by mixed-race marriages, paper identities, and transpacific family ties that redefine or extend familial, cultural, and spatial boundaries. Ultimately, this paper will argue that cultural and spatial crossings as represented in Chinese American family memoirs do not only challenge traditional concepts of the nation but also suggest transpacific families as essential communities for Chinese Americans.

11:30, Seminarraum 3

Experimental Negotiations of Closure: Transgressing Closure in Modernist Fiction

Tamara Radak

Modernist writers have become (in)famous for their subversion of traditional narrative structures and their foregrounding of the transient quality of "life […] which is always in latent opposition to form" (Simmel) with the help of novel and often experimental techniques.

In this paper, I will argue that whilst endings form a mandatory part of any text and even texts written as early as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) call attention to and question narrative structure in their own way, the issue of closure becomes particularly pertinent in post-WW I times, which were marked by an increased sense of uncertainty with regard to national and cultural borders. Signature Modernist texts like James Joyce's *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*, but also the formal experiments of Virginia Woolf or Gertrude Stein go to great stylistic lengths to vividly convey the decaying wastelands of modernity and the paralysis of the modern condition. Rather than obeying the traditional narrative structure of a beginning, a middle and an end, these texts break up teleological structures through the introduction of pauses, lacunae, and hiatuses in a narrative "chaosmos" (Eco 1989) of polychronicity. Such experiments in form are directly related to the texts' lack of what Frank Kermode famously called "the sense of an ending" and their radical rejection of traditional notions of closure.

This paper explores the dialectic interaction between form and fragment by focussing on Modernist texts which foreground the incomplete and the fragmentary by either displacing or evading closure altogether (Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* Woolf's *Orlando*).

16:00, Seminarraum 3

Superheroes: Negotiating Masculine Identities

Ranthild Salzer

"Masculinity means different things to different people at different times" (Kimmel 1996) as the qualities that shape hegemonic masculinity are subject to constant change. In my presentation I will discuss the different masculine identities performed by the protagonists found in American superhero-comics in the 1930's, exploring how they transgress ideas of both successful and failed masculinities which were in fashion at the time of their creation and how they circulate between American masculine archetypes: the genteel patriarch, the artisan hero and the self-made man (Kimmel 1996). Batman will be my main focus point.

Batman was created in 1938, a period when American masculinities were under an economic threat due to the Great Depression. Popular narratives at the time, such as crime novels and pulp-magazines, favored working-class, muscular masculinity as their protagonists and upper class, effeminate masculinity as their antagonists (Armengol 2013). The character Batman/Bruce Wayne reconciles these oppositions as he successfully performs physical actions as Batman on the one hand and upper class eccentricities as Bruce Wayne on the other. I argue that superhero narratives reveal gender identity as multi-layered: instead of allowing their characters to only perform one idea of masculinity, superhero comics offer protagonists, who don't have to settle for one idea of masculine identity but enact multiple masculinities.

15:30, Unterrichtsraum

The Hybridisation of Genres in Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*

Susanne Zhanial

The huge success of Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* blockbuster series has to be attributed to a range of postmodern techniques. This presentation will focus on one particular aspect, the

hybridisation of genres. In particular, Disney's systematic fusion of pirate fiction with the mode of the fantastic and its influence on stereotypical plot elements will be examined.

On a superficial level, the fantastic is most clearly recognisable in Disney's portrayal of the bad pirates as Gothic and supernatural villains. While earlier pirate text simply emphasised the bad pirates' cruel and inhuman nature, Disney equates evilness with a supernatural existence. However, as the presentation will demonstrate, in the Disney movies, the fantastic becomes an integral part of piracy itself and is in fact employed to depict the pirates in general in a positive manner. The pirates' embracement of the fantastic, for example, is repeatedly contrasted with the disbelief and narrow-mindedness of the British characters. In addition, the different attitudes to the fantastic serve as a source for much of the movies' humour and irony.

The presentation aims to show that the systematic blend of pirate fiction with fantasy elements can be regarded as one postmodern technique employed by Disney to successfully rework and update the motif of the pirate for the 21st century.

Poster presentations

"I'm all for cheating. This is war." - Machiavellian Politics in Game of Thrones

Patrick Hanslmaier

The name Machiavelli is often associated with concepts such as ruthlessness, deceit and immorality. At the same time, there is a century-old discourse resulting in vastly different interpretations of Machiavelli's works. On close inspection, an extensive political theory reveals itself. It is based on Machiavelli's experiences in Renaissance Italy, as well as his occupation with the history of the country. Additionally, this theory embraces a character of practical instruction, which includes ethical difficulties that are often thematised.

Game of Thrones presents a world that is significantly influenced by European history. Moreover, it includes structures and characters that allow for an association with the concepts Machiavelli describes. This results in the question whether these are suitable means for understanding the processes of this fictional world.

The theoretical part of this thesis is dedicated to Machiavelli's life and works in order to produce a differentiated picture of the person. Focusing on his political career, this is supposed to result in a fundamental overview, correcting popular simplifications. In the following chapters, key

events of the series are analysed chronologically, in order to examine them and the Machiavellian competence of characters based on the introduced theory.

Coming to America: The Jinn of New York in Neil Gaiman's 'American Gods'

Somaye Rezaei

In his novel 'American Gods', Neil Gaiman tells the story of how the old gods from Asia, Africa and Europe have come to the United States and how they are faring now. Among these old gods are the Jinn, the supernatural creatures of the Islamic tradition. In the novel, Salim, a disillusioned middle-eastern immigrant in New York encounters a taxi-driver who turns out to be a jinn (ifrit) and after a sexual encounter, the ifrit takes his identity and leaves him with his own and thus, fulfilling Salim's desire to be free from his family and the past. The ifrit, repeatedly states that he does not grant wishes, although it seems, that is exactly what he does for Salim. Granting of wishes is the main feature of the Orientalized version of the Jinn in the western culture, which Gaiman is trying to change and endeavouring to break with the exotic and romanticized tradition and present a closer to the east version of the Jinn by quoting from Quran and the Arab folklore. Here, using Said's notion of Orientalism, which holds that the Orient is a European invention, I will try to find out whether he is successful in his portrayal of the Jinn according to the Islamic tradition of the Middle-East or he is still writing in the Orientalist tradition about the eastern supernatural.

The development of cross-cultural relationships in Australian literature after 1950

Julia Schwob

How are cross-cultural relationships portrayed differently in texts by indigenous and white Australian authors after 1950 and to what extent have these changed ever since?

This paper attempts to examine the depiction of cross-cultural relationships in Australian literature on the basis of 10 books from 1950s onwards.

The focus here lies on the portrayal of indigenous men and women as such before it centres more closely on rape as an instrument of oppression in the respective novels. Furthermore, it will be analysed whether there is a development of these cross-cultural relationships throughout the various periods of time and to what extent aboriginal men and women are treated differently.

The examined corpus of literary texts is constituted of the following:

- 1960s: Riders in the Chariot versus Wild Cat Falling
- 1970s: Mallonkai versus Karobran
- 1980s: Radiance versus No Sugar
- 1990s: The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith versus My Place
- 2000s: Secret River versus That Deadman Dance

These novels will be reviewed according to their depiction of cross-cultural relationships on the basis of the concept of intersectionality. The treatment of the role of the female and the male natives in their respective relationships appears to differ vastly as the women are not only discriminated against due to their race, but their gender as well. Black women in these texts are often regarded as sexual objects, who are used for the white man's pleasure, whereas indigenous men are encouraged to marry white women in order to increase their status. Moreover, the rape of native women is not considered an offence as Aboriginals have not been granted full citizenship until 1967. Therefore, white men did not take responsibility for the children they have sired, which resulted in the loss of identity for theses half-caste children in most cases, who have been taken away from their mothers. What is more, the assimilation policy even encouraged these cross-cultural relationships in order to breed out the Aboriginality of the people.

Nevertheless, the development of cross-cultural relationships into something normal and wonderful can also be observed in many of these texts especially in the most recent ones. Here the question of skin colour does not even arise in the first place and thus strengthens the overcoming of racial boundaries.