

## **Humboldt/Princeton Strategic Partnership Proposal**

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### **Final Proposal**

#### **Stages of Diversion: The Unacknowledged Legacy of German Popular Theater**

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, theater in the German-speaking world led a Janus-faced existence: on the one hand, theater flourished as the most prominent form of popular entertainment and, on the other, it emerged as an ennobled artistic medium. Whereas the fixed dramatic text has overwhelmingly stood in the focus of literary historical research, the regionally variable, market-driven institutions of popular theater have been disregarded as a frivolous distraction. The processes of mutual exchange between literary drama and popular theater, as well as the migration of forms and practices between the two, require further scholarly research.

We apply for the support of the HU-PU Partnership to investigate, in the classroom and in scholarly symposia, the vital commerce between artistically ambitious dramatic texts and the entertainment-driven theater at the threshold of modernity. Our proposal consists of two components. First, we seek travel allowances for faculty guest residencies for the Principle Investigators of approximately four weeks in, respectively, Berlin and Princeton. These stays shall culminate in scholarly symposia to include local faculty, a small number of external guests, and graduate students. Second, we wish to establish an undergraduate course offering at Princeton University on the history of German-language drama, which shall include a one-week educational trip to Berlin. This second component pertains particularly to the two Princeton Principle Investigators, who have recently received long-term appointments and wish in the coming years to establish undergraduate and graduate courses in the history of modern drama in the German-speaking world. We believe that this programmatic ambition would be significantly enhanced through the proposed scholarly exchange. In what follows, we outline, first, the research program relevant to faculty and graduate students and, then, the accompanying undergraduate course proposal.

## I.

### *Research Proposal*

Modern German theater, as it emerged across the eighteenth century, is distinguished by its remove from traditional institutional supports. Whereas theater in classical antiquity was intimately linked to ritual practices, and early modern European theaters arose within courtly, religious, and pedagogical contexts, theaters in the German-speaking lands never enjoyed a lasting association with any of these institutions. Instead, the establishment of theaters in Germany depended on its success as a popular mode of entertainment. Even though literary drama aimed at the lettered social elite never achieved significant theatrical success, it has perennially served as the centerpiece to research on the theater in modern Germany. The form and function of popular theater has remained accordingly an unwanted stepchild.

This scholarly development has its roots in the theatrical reform project undertaken by Enlightenment intellectuals, who strove to eliminate genres lacking a precedent in ancient authorities like Aristotle and Horace and to reduce the improvisational prerogative of the actor. Literary historians have, in other words, focused attention almost exclusively on elevated literary genres such as comedy and tragedy, while placing a remarkable emphasis on the text at the expense of popular forms and performance history. For this reason, the status of theater as a form of mass entertainment has been entirely neglected. There is, in fact, an unappreciated tradition of stages equipped not with literary masterpieces, but with serially produced texts and loose adaptations, whose performance depended largely on the extemporization of actors and the performance decisions of directors. Our investigation of the crucial role of this neglected popular tradition will highlight the extent to which artistically ambitious literary movements from German Romanticism to Modernism appropriate, integrate, and transform popular theatrical forms. The nuanced processes of exchange between these two spheres, between literary drama and the popular stage, will be the focus of our discussion and research.

Our project wishes to provide a setting for research into the two under-appreciated questions: how the popular theater formally achieves its remarkable success and, conversely, how literary dramas subtly rely upon forms and techniques adopted from the popular stage. The popular

traditions we wish to consider include the plays of eighteenth-century itinerant performers (the so-called *Wanderbühne*), the Viennese folk theater, and the melodrama. Whereas itinerant performers in the eighteenth century sought to amuse ever-changing townspeople across the German-speaking world, Viennese folk plays and melodrama owe their ascendancy to the amusing diversion with which they fascinated the urban crowd. All three of these generic forms evince a manifest disinterest in the conventions of classical drama, instead indulging in a proliferation of plot, time, and space. These popular theatrical forms provided a multi-medial spectacle as well as a virtuoso oscillation between abbreviation and acceleration, extension and compression. They also created a space for continuous reflection on time in the mode of songs, changes between prose and verse, or temporal leaps. Our focus on the orchestration of time will disclose the unique ways in which these forms relate to the modern world. Of particular interest is the imbrication of theatrical temporality and the rapid and serial mode of production by means of which these plays were produced.

### **Principal Investigators**

This project grows out of the scholarly exchange between the Principal Investigators that, since 2007, has proved remarkably fruitful. Fortuitous events led to a number of productive encounters at University of Konstanz and Princeton University. Funding for this project would provide an institutional platform for productive dialogue that should have impact on graduate student research and undergraduate education.

The three Principal Investigators are uniquely suited to engage in this project. Prof. Dr. Ethel Matala de Mazza (Institute for German Literature at the Humboldt University) has completed a large-scale study of the relationship between the operetta and feuilleton in nineteenth-century France, Austria, and Germany. This investigation of the political implications of diminutive popular genres is immediately relevant to this cooperative research endeavor. The PU-HU cooperation would provide a forum to develop a project Prof. Matala is presently launching, for which she has submitted a grant proposal to the German Research Foundation (DFG) to fund one doctoral and one postdoctoral position at the Humboldt University. This project, entitled “Temporal Economies in Popular Theatre of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”, investigates two remarkably

successful forms of extemporized theater: the Viennese folk theater and the melodrama. The genres in the focus of Professor Matala's research thus provide apt case studies for the investigation of the relationship between literary texts and popular theater in the nineteenth century. The aforementioned grant proposal is, in addition, part of a large-scale international project "Ästhetische Eigenzeiten" (<http://www.aesthetische-eigenzeiten.de/>), with which we hope to collaborate in the proposed scholarly colloquia.

Dr. Saskia Haag, formerly Assistant Professor at the University of Konstanz and beginning 2014 Associate Research Scholar and Lecturer in the German Department at Princeton, focuses her research on the nineteenth century. She has recently published an article on the Viennese folk theatrical tradition, and has conducted broad-based research on nineteenth-century Austrian and German literature. She also has extensive teaching experience in the history and aesthetics of drama.

Dr. Joel Lande, currently a Cotsen Fellow of the Princeton Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts and beginning 2014 as Assistant Professor in the German department, is completing a book manuscript on the tradition of the stage fool. Concentrating primarily on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German literature within the broader European context, his current research is focused on the interaction between the popular improvisational theater and the literary tradition. Dr. Haag and Dr. Lande wish to use the PU-HU cooperation to provide a context for scholarly interaction with graduate students and other Princeton faculty. They furthermore wish to establish a focus within the German Department on history of drama and theater, which would also afford future opportunities for collaboration with members of the Princeton faculty with other departmental affiliations.

Support for this research endeavor will draw upon and strengthen the research profile of the respective home departments. The graduate student exposure to the history of German drama and theater in the period before 1900 would be significantly bolstered in the Princeton German Department. The project will also expand the ongoing scholarly exchange between the two universities, presently sustained by Prof. Dr. Joseph Vogl, who holds a permanent

professorship at the Humboldt University but serves as Permanent Visiting Professor at Princeton. The Humboldt Department of German, meanwhile, has a long tradition of research of eighteenth-century literature and culture, which would be enhanced by means of this new focus on theatrical traditions. This project extends the historical scope of research and teaching in the department, while establishing connections between ongoing endeavors and the study of ‘minor’ genres.

### **Connections to Ongoing Cooperative Endeavors**

The project will thus dovetail productively with a number of other ongoing cooperation efforts between Princeton University and Humboldt University. Firstly, research visits and colloquia could serve as springboards for graduate students to participate in the PhD-Net “Das Wissen der Literatur”, which serves as a platform in Berlin for graduate students at Princeton and the Humboldt University. Our colloquia could not only benefit from graduate students already participating in the PhD-Net, but also serve as a feeder for future participants. In addition, the German departments at PU and HU have already committed to a joint-degree PhD agreement, which our cooperation could bolster. By increasing interaction between graduate students and professors at both universities, the colloquia and discussions for which we seek support aim to provide a stimulus for future research into the history of theatrical forms and modern literature. We also hope that this initial proposal will provide the foundation for larger scale research collaborations, which might involve literary scholars, theater specialists, and musicologists from both universities, including but in no way limited to Prof. Scott Burnham (Princeton, Music), Prof. Michael Cadden (Princeton, Theater), Prof. Russ Leo (Princeton, English), and Prof. Nigel Smith (Princeton, English), Prof. Ernst Osterkamp (Humboldt, German), Prof. Helga Schwalm (Humboldt, English), Dr. Jutta Toelle (Humboldt, Music) and Prof. Christina Wald (Humboldt, English).

## II.

### *Undergraduate Teaching Proposal*

The cooperation between the Principal Investigators also aims to establish a programmatic focus on the history of drama and theater within the undergraduate curriculum of the German department. Dr. Lande would like to use the partnership with the other Principal Investigators to launch a pilot course in the German Department tentatively entitled “The Vitality of the Modern German Stage”, which will provide undergraduate students with an introduction to the rich history of German theater from the eighteenth century to the present. This course would include not just readings of the most historically significant dramatic texts, but also screenings of recent performances by artistically advanced directors and dramaturges in the German-speaking world. The dual focus on literary history and contemporary culture in this 300-level course would attract students from a variety of disciplines, including ones without or with little knowledge of the German language. In addition, it would spearhead Joel Lande’s long-term teaching focus within the German department on drama and theater, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A long-term goal of this project is to establish a a week-long trip during Fall Break to Berlin with the undergraduate students. Having successfully led a similar trip to Greece with students from the HUM 216-219 sequence in Fall 2012 (with a second installment planned in Fall 2013), Lande has experience in planning and executing educational trips abroad for undergraduate students abroad. The initial research stay in Berlin is essential to making the necessary local contacts in order for a future trip with undergraduates to Berlin to be successful. We hope such a trip will figure in a second stage of our collaboration.

Such a trip would provide a twofold benefit to undergraduate students: students would, first, gain exposure to one of the most vibrant and historically important cities in Europe, and, secondly, attend theatrical performances and engage in seminar-like discussions with the Principal Investigators as well as undergraduate students at the Humboldt University. Especially for undergraduate students with intermediate or advanced knowledge of the German language, this exposure to German peers and to the thriving artistic scene in Berlin would be a

singularly enriching experience. In addition, it could provide an avenue for students to further pursue theater studies or German at Princeton, or to participate in already existing internship and study abroad programs.

Potential future outgrowths of this cooperation extend beyond course offerings in the German department and might include cooperation with performing arts groups on campus, including theater studies students in the Lewis Center for the Arts and student performers in the music department and the university orchestra. If this undergraduate project course should prove successful, it could become a regular part of the German-department curriculum, especially if regular funding for an undergraduate trip becomes available. Combining the study of theater praxis with literary analysis, the course would provide an essential link between theatrical performance and literary studies at Princeton.

### **III.**

#### ***Plan for Project Execution***

##### **1) Scholarly Exchange**

We propose a month-long stay in June 2014 for Dr. Haag and Dr. Lande at the Humboldt University. The stay would take place following the end of the Princeton Spring semester, while the Humboldt Summer semester is still in session. This would afford the Principal Investigators the opportunity to hold the first workshop with selected scholars, meet colleagues working in the same or related fields, and collect materials for the proposed undergraduate course. Dr. Lande wishes to use this time in Berlin to begin planning the undergraduate trip, which should place within immediately ensuing years. The scholarly workshop will take place at the beginning of July 2014.

In a second stage, Prof. Dr. Matala would visit Princeton in March 2015. Her stay would culminate in a one-day workshop, including graduate students and faculty members. This workshop would have the benefit of introducing graduate students to historical material that is otherwise missing from the departmental curriculum. We also wish to include faculty members from other Princeton departments.

##### **2) Fall 2014 – GER 3XX Vitality of the German Stage**

Dr. Lande requests seed money to prepare an undergraduate course on the history of German drama, which will be taught in Fall 2014 in the Princeton German department. The request for supplemental research funds is to cover the cost of procuring research materials, including texts and DVDs, and attending theatrical events. Once the course has been established, the course could become a regular offering in the German Department, with significant appeal to undergraduate students in theater and literary studies. Such a course would enhance departmental undergraduate instruction in German literature before 1900 and the history of drama.