

## Introduction

The articles in the thematic section of this issue of *Germanistik in Ireland* are responses to the deliberately provocative title of *After Postmodernism*, specifically to the question: If we are finally ‘over’ postmodernism, as has been suggested for some time now, then what becomes of the values, trends and attitudes associated with that allegedly by-gone ‘epoch’? If postmodernism is associated with hybridity, lack of political commitment, extremism, relativism, an anything-goes mentality, the ironic turn, the cultural turn, game-playing, globalization, the practices of late Capitalism, then what next? Does post-postmodernism entail a complete or partial departure from this, and, if so, in what form: reversal, negation, inversion, restoration? Additionally, in relation to the periodization difficulties associated with postmodernism, if it cannot be conceived as an epoch in the first place, how then do we move forward from it, if at all? With the first decade of the twenty-first century behind us – a period marked at one end by the 9/11 attacks, and at the other by financial meltdown – what possibilities (aesthetic, ethical, philosophical) does the category post-postmodern offer?

In the opening contribution, **Alan Kirby** notes that postmodernism, in its very plurality, cannot die a single death, but rather will have (and may already have had) different types of passings, retreating at different tempos in different arenas. The article goes on to examine some of the forms this much-proclaimed and much-debated demise may take within different contexts, from philosophy and logic to the academy, noting in the latter case that “the question of the putative end(s) of postmodernism is [...] bound up with the socio-cultural status of the academy and within it of certain of its members.”

**Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker** regard post-postmodernism as an oscillation between old and new. Dubbing it “metamodernism,” they see it as caught in a tension between, for example, irony and enthusiasm, pragmatism and utopianism, hedonism and sustainability, but at home with its inherent contradictions. They further argue that, “whereas both the modern and the postmodern were tied, temporally, to a Hegelian understanding of history, the metamodern links itself to a more Kantian concept of history.” Kant, they argue, conceives of history not as inexorable movement forwards towards some necessary, if unknown, goal, but rather as seeming to move along such a trajectory, an illusion that is morally and politically necessary. Similarly, metamodernism moves, but the movement is towards a goal that can, it is aware, never really be reached. It is conscious of its inevitable failure, but equally aware that the sense of movement (or momentum) is necessary.

**Leonard Herrmann** explores the concept of history in Thomas Lehr’s novel *September Fata Morgana*. He argues that the attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 led to a serious questioning of postmodernism’s reduction of history to acts of narration without extra-textual referents. In contrast, Lehr’s novel refers quite explicitly to the events of 9/11, embedding these events in a pre- and

post-history, including within the context of the conflict in the Middle East and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Herrmann's article also examines the influence of Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* on *September Fata Morgana*, pointing out, for example, similarities in the character constellations and structure, and noting the same principle of bipolarity at work in both texts. Ultimately, he argues, Lehr's novel sees history as a constant repetition of polar opposites. This cyclical version of history means that the individual cannot act but rather only react, either with analytical resignation or with escapism.

**Carl Niekerk's** article looks at Doron Rabinovici's recent novel *Ohnehin*, discussing the way in which characters remember, forget and reconstruct both their own personal histories and the historical events that form the backdrop of the work (in this case, the Shoah and the war in Yugoslavia). Niekerk positions *Ohnehin* beyond what he sees as a distinctly postmodern attitude to such events, arguing that, while "postmodern theory has allowed greater insight into the narrative element in our views of history and identity," history is, as this novel emphasizes, not merely reducible to narrative construction, fiction or simulacrum. The analysis also looks at the function of the visual within the novel, reading the central character's obsession with this 'superficial' mode as a flight from "the world of the discursive" in which traumatic historical events have to be confronted, into the less problematic, ahistorical "world of the image." Niekerk interprets this fixation on the visual, understood as "an autonomous realm beyond any reference to content or reality (or history)," as a decidedly current issue. According to his interpretation, *Ohnehin* takes us beyond this, suggesting modes of "(re)conceptualizing the 'visual' in relation to language and history," bringing history back into the picture, as it were.

**Gillian Pye's** contribution examines the concept of belonging in a post-postmodern world, as well as the related issue of how spaces and the people within them interact and co-constitute one another in an age that is arguably uniquely marked by the transient, and increasingly sees "social and cultural identities as hybrid and mobile." Looking at this question through the lens of two recent works by German author and journalist Ulf Erdmann Ziegler, Pye interprets his novel, *Hamburger Hochbahn* (2007), and *Wilde Wiesen* (2007), an "autogeographic" account of his movements in and between places over the course of his life, as works that, amongst other things, "reveal the complexities of belonging as intersections of the personal, social and material." While Ziegler's concentration on the designed environment in his descriptions of human beings in both urban and provincial settings may be seen as elitist and emotionally detached, Pye's analysis reads these descriptions as an "example of an aesthetic appreciation of the material world dovetailing with psychological and emotional processes."

In his article, **Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa** looks at a recent book by German author Karen Duve, *Anständig essen: Ein Selbstversuch*, analysing it in the context of a new discourse on vegetarianism, which, Schmidt-Hannisa argues, emerged with the end of postmodernism. Duve's book provides a personal and subjective account

of her attempts to find a more ethical way of eating and food-shopping. Schmidt-Hannisa interprets this record of acts of “self-experimentation” as part of a new post-postmodern genre that moves away from mostly theoretical confrontations with social problems, replacing these with very individual and subjective real experiences. He also argues, however, that the *Selbstversuch* described in Duve’s book contains a performative element that ultimately brings it back to a postmodern play with identities.

In the first article of the general section of this issue, **Regina Hartmann** reads Thomas Brussig’s novel *Helden wie wir* against the backdrop of East-German literature of the 1990s. Brussig is part of that generation of authors who only started to publish in the post-Wende years, who came of age in GDR times, experienced reunification as young adults, and consequently were ‘children of the GDR’ although they did not identify with the East-German state. However, according to Hartmann, Brussig’s acclaimed novel introduces a new tone into this literature, using a combination of black humour and satire to confront and come to terms with the GDR past. The author uses topoi and themes typical of *Wendeliteratur*, but exaggerates or distorts them, thereby undermining not only the genre, which is often written from the perspective of the victim, but also the myth of the Wende itself. His novel can therefore be seen as a turning point in the aesthetic representation of this caesura in German history.

**Sascha Harris** explores the representation of masculinity in German-language films of the 1990s, in which he sees the co-existence of traditionally realist, modernist and postmodern tendencies. He argues that, despite a certain postmodernism in its treatment of gender, for example, New German Film often, in fact, has restorationist tendencies. Looking at portrayals of gender role reversal, which seem to deconstruct traditionally-conceived masculinity, Harris notes that these films do not, in fact, really collapse the gender binary, instead reproducing conventional ideas about male and female roles, albeit in reverse.

**Kerstin Fest’s** contribution also analyses gender roles, in this case in the context of a relatively unknown novel by German author Christa Winsloe, *Life Begins*. Fest asks if the central female character, a sculptress named Eva-Maria, is actually a liberated figure and a liberating portrayal of the new “Weimar Girl,” or rather fails in the end to synthesize artistic achievement, seen at the time as a predominantly, if not exclusively, male domain, with womanhood or femaleness, thereby merely reinforcing the established gender paradigms of the period.

**Bertin Nyemb** examines how the first generation of Turkish migrants who arrived in Germany in the 1960s are portrayed in Michael Richter’s collection of biographies, *gekommen und geblieben*. Nyemb interprets Richter’s volume as an attempt to correct and counteract the still prevalent view of the migrant as troublemaker, unwilling or unable to integrate into German society, a cliché that has affected the way in which immigrants, especially from Muslim or Turkish backgrounds, have been treated, and continues to inform even recent debate. Nyemb

argues that the differentiated picture painted by the biographies collated in Richter's volume dispels the notion that a typical Turkish migrant exists.

**Nóra de Buitelér's** article on Thomas Kilroy's reworking of Frank Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891) looks at how the work has been adapted to speak to the concerns of post-clerical abuse scandal Ireland. The transposition of the plot to small-town Ireland in the nineteen fifties is, **de Buitelér** argues, one of the reasons why Kilroy's version has managed to avoid the pitfalls of recent productions of the original, breathing new and painful life into an old, and, many critics have argued, now passé plot.

**Susan O'Shaughnessy's** contribution presents findings from a survey of German teachers in Irish Institutes of Technology who have been struggling with dwindling student numbers and management demands for their professional redeployment. The article looks at the effects that recent developments in the education sector have had on the sense of professional identity among these teachers, and also argues for a national language policy for Ireland to help prevent faddish short-term reactions to ebbs and flows in the popularity of Modern Languages, and enhance awareness of the fact that "English is not enough."

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