

CfP: Reflections on (Literary) Solitude (03.11.2022–04.11.2022)

The postgraduates and ECRs of the German Schiller Association (DSG) invite the submission of abstracts for an interdisciplinary conference at the German Literature Archive (DLA)

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Scholarly Networks and Solitude

Solitude: Sometimes it is voluntary and other times – as in lockdown – it is imposed. Early Career Researchers in particular have accumulated many experiences of solitude during the ongoing pandemic, not always by choice.

The German Schiller Association (DSG) is a literary society that offers its community the space and conditions to mitigate that solitariness. It is an environment that we, as Early Career Researchers, aim to employ to come together, physically, in the German Literature Archive in Marbach with a conference that will represent the launch of a new network for ECRs. Our launch event will focus on reflections on solitude in theory, in literature and in philosophy, but it will also take in psychological aspects of the experience of solitude in reality.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of solitude was recognised as a serious issue for literary and scholarly writing, as well as reading. How solitude is handled, but also the need for solitude, is different for every form of reading and writing, and in Literature Studies the ambivalence of solitude raises questions that go well beyond the contexts of literary production. While working alone at a desk may be regarded as disciplined, for early career researchers, interaction and exchange with a network is also essential. There are in fact numerous arguments for the establishment of a network of young researchers, whose members come together and work to strengthen the interaction between postgraduates and ECRs, irrespective of their institutional affiliation.

In order to address this need, as postgraduates and ECRs, our aim is to organise an annual conference with the support of the **German Schiller Association (DSG)** and the **German Literature Archive Marbach (DLA)**. In addition to the opportunity to present their research, this will allow ECRs to get acquainted with the DLA and its museums and to discuss issues affecting ECRs outside the immediate field of their research.

While the network aims to invite scholarly dialogue, it also aims to facilitate opportunities for free and informal exchange between participants and experts about career paths and the challenges showing up prior to, during and after the qualification period. In addition to this, skills workshops will be offered. The first conference of this kind will take place **3-4 November 2022**, and be dedicated to the broad theme of reflections on solitude:

1. Research papers reflecting on solitude (interdisciplinary)

2. **A workshop on ECRs and mental health**
3. **Tour of the archive and the museums in Marbach**
4. **Evening event**

For (1.) abstracts (300 words) reflecting on **the subject of solitude** accompanied by a short CV of the applicant are highly welcome. Note it is still possible to attend the conference without giving a research paper.

You do not have to be a member of the German Schiller Association or a Schiller researcher in order to submit an abstract. External submissions are welcome!

- Presentations (**15 minutes**) can be given in German or English.
- The deadline for submissions is **March 31, 2022**
- Please submit abstracts [using this portal](#)
- For further inquiries and registration (for attendees not giving a paper), please email: forschung@dla-marbach.de
- The conference is planned to take place in-person.

Submissions should consider the following:

Reflections on (Literary) Solitude

While nowadays search engine results for the term 'Solitude' principally name publications concerning the pandemic, the conference intends to address reflections on solitude in literature, philosophy and art in the current context of Covid-19 as well as beyond the latter.

Solitude is an ambiguous phenomenon: while it is understood on the one hand as exclusion from a society, isolation, or social anxiety, on the other hand, positive conceptions of solitude emphasise the individual sense of freedom and autonomy, and the creative energy that is released by it. Conceptions of solitude are linked here to aspects of mental and physical health, and ideas of happiness.

What are the prevailing forms and characteristics of solitude in different places and times? How are they individually experienced and shaped by literature? Who seeks solitude and who avoids it? What duties and freedoms does an individual have in a society that may support or condemn isolation? Is solitude a means of stimulating creativity and self-reflection or an elite privilege involving an egoistic and antisocial mind-set? What is its relationship with the related concepts of boredom and loneliness? When is sociability preferable to solitude? Is there an 'Aesthetics of Solitude'? Are there any trends that can be demonstrated through increased use of specific motifs or narrative patterns? Who writes about solitude? To what extent are literary production and literary reception solitary tasks, or forms of 'interaction-free communication' (Luhmann)? In an era of globalisation and digitisation, how are research findings in the fields of sociology and psychopathology on the subject of solitude expressed in literature? Is solitude gendered? To what extent is solitude defined as a place of longing?

Due to its ambiguity, the concept is also relevant to the field of literature: reflections on solitude and literature can relate to the thematic level or indeed to those of reception or aesthetics and production. Thus, since the birth of the modern era, neither the act of reading nor literary production have been construed as a solitary activity. The dialogues of Plato, for instance, stand in stark contrast to the concept of the lone genius.

Even in the eighteenth century, the literature of the Enlightenment considered this problem: In *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782), for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau calls for a conscious retreat into solitude for the purpose of self-reflection. Sophie von La Roche began her major work, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771), in reaction to her solitude and boredom. Besides Christian Grave and Joseph von Sonnenfels, the popular philosopher Johann Georg Zimmermann also devoted himself in several texts in the eighteenth century to the question of solitude, in which he also opposed lone contemplation with the human 'drive to socialise'. Contemplation and creativity in solitude and the longing for recognition and security in society also defined the field for literary reflections on solitude in subsequent centuries.

Romantic loners, such as Ludwig Tieck's Christian, sought a path between social integration via marriage and isolated hiking on the Runenberg (1804). There are many such lonely travellers as Heinrich Heine's wanderer, and in Sophie Mereau's »Blüthenalter der Empfindungen« (1794; The Blossoming Age of Sensibility) the image of his beloved is always in the mind's eye of the protagonist, Albert, in his lonely Paris room. Paintings of the same period ›glorify‹ solitude, as in Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes – whereas Edward Hopper's twentieth-century images present a much more sombre, even ominous, emptiness around his figures. Friedrich Hölderlin's self-isolation in his tower in Tübingen even introduces a pathological element of solitude to literary production in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Contemplation and creativity in solitude, as well as a yearning for the recognition and the protection of society continue to be significant themes for literary reflections on solitude in subsequent centuries.

In his *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), Rainer Maria Rilke advised the young author Franz Xaver Kappus to utilise the severity of solitude for his writing, and Stefan Zweig demonstrated in his work *The Royal Game* (1944) what the psychopathological consequences of imposed solitude can be with the character of Dr B. In exile, authors seek support in solitude and make efforts to form networks – for example, Hilde Domin repeatedly urged her friend, Nelly Sachs, to support her career. In contemporary post-migration texts like Deniz Ohde's *Streulicht* (2020) or Sasha Mariana Salzmänn's stage work *Us Braids* (2014), the solitude of the protagonist can often be interpreted as a mode of being, which stages their condition in the space between their homeland of their (grand)parents' generation and their own country of birth. In Marius Goldhorn's *Park* (2020) however, solitude seems to the narrator to be a postmodern feeling of loneliness, meaning that, despite the networking effects of globalisation and digitisation, he seems only to perceive the world passively.

This brief overview is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, but it repeatedly illustrates the multifaceted uses of the motif of solitude. On the one hand, solitude is cast as a

requirement for inventive creativity, a means of exploring belief and the soul, and a mode of deepening engagement with nature and self-knowledge. On the other hand, it is also viewed as the result of societal alienation, a lifestyle of melancholy, and the result of discrimination and exclusion. We aim to explore solitude in all its permutations, from imposed to voluntary and that which lies between these two poles.

More information about the work of the German Schiller Association can be found here:
<https://www.dla-marbach.de/ueber-uns/traegerverein-dsg/>