Abstract of Dissertation Proposal by Thomas Fuhr

**Eternal Return? Revisiting *Heimat* in the 21st century: The Material Turn in Contemporary German Literature**

In my dissertation project on contemporary *Heimat* literature, I analyze four German novels from the 2010s that are all set in fictitious German villages. Following an introductory chapter that establishes an overview of the intellectual history of the evasive concept of *Heimat* in relation to space, I analyze the four novels in regard to their notions of *Heimat*, and how they comment on *Heimat* discourse.

After the second half of the 20th century has witnessed the decoupling of *Heimat* from its spatial and geographical dimensions (e.g., *Heimat* as utopia, *Heimat* as feeling, etc.), I argue that the current wave of Heimat literature constitutes a return to the conservationist aims of the *Heimatbewegung* around 1900, which placed emphasis on the preservation of local culture and the natural environment. To buttress this claim, I will then delineate thematic and narrative strands in the four novels to draw parallels to the concept of *Heimat* in 19th century literature, and to highlight new ways through which they express this material concern.

First, I will portray Dörte Hansen’s *Mittagsstunde* (2018) as a refurbished update of the classic *Heimat* story plot depicting the challenges and experiences of a returnee. Then, I interpret Saša Stanišić’s *Vor dem Fest* (2014) as a multilayered meditation on the possibilities of constructing *Heimat* through collective narrativity. Juli Zeh’s *Unterleuten* (2016) and Mischa Kopmann’s *Dorfidioten* (2019) evoke characteristics of *Anti-Heimatliteratur*, as they portray the village as a dismal, confining space governed by narrowness and demise. Nonetheless, they offer alternative conceptualizations of *Heimat* that harken back to 19th century.

Lastly, I will explore possibilities of conceptualizing *Heimat* in a global context by applying the particularities of the 21st century *Heimat* novels to other genres and cultural contexts. The dissertation closes by examining wildlife biologist J. Drew Lanham’s *The Home Place – Memoirs of A Colored Man’s Love Story With Nature* (2016) as a depiction of home that offers surprising parallels and connections to the characteristics I mapped across contemporary German *Heimat* literature.

**Summary of Bibliography**

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