

## Robert Deam Tobin

### Leir Chair Report: Highlights of 2020-21

#### I. Pandemic-Era Pedagogy



In fall 2020, I taught my courses in a “hybrid” format. Students in the Faust course (seen above) met with me once a week in person and once a week online. The First-Year Seminar, “Human Rights and Literature,” was slightly too big to meet at one time in one room. We met online when it was important that everyone be part of the discussion, and otherwise I alternated meeting with one half and then the other. During Intersession, “German-Jewish Culture and Modern Multiculturalism” was online. In the spring, I was co-teaching “The National Imagination” with two colleagues who needed to be online. COVID has spurred me on to rethink and improve my pedagogy. I was able to come up with short, quick assessment mechanisms, such as online forum posts, that made sure everyone was keeping up. Even online, students were able to do a lot of small group work. I also developed my ability to give short online introductory and concluding lectures that helped students understand what the key points of the unit were.

## 2. #Faust4Now

SPONSORED BY THE HENRY J. LEIR CHAIR  
CLARK UNIVERSITY

# #Faust4Now

NOVEMBER 14, 2020  
ONLINE CONFERENCE, ALL TIMES EASTERN  
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
REGISTER AT [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YYCTX2QZ](https://tinyurl.com/YYCTX2QZ)



*Deutsche Bank's senior art director in front of the recently sold 'Faust' (1991) by Gerhard Richter.  
Photo by Nicole Bengtson/The New York Times.*

Goethe	Thomas Mann
10:00 AM Wendy Nielsen (Montclair State University): "Homunculus, Motherless Creation: The Irony of Professing Love and Science in Goethe's Faust"	2:00 PM Tobias Boes (University of Notre Dame): "Doctor Faustus and the Weight of the German Past"
11:00 AM Ruxandra Looft (Iowa State University): "Rosa Mayreder's Anda Renata: Subverting Faust and the Cult of Male Genius"	3:00 PM Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University): "The 'Fascism' of Twelve-Tone Music: Emigration, Exile and the Genesis of Dr. Faustus"
12:00 PM Simon Richter (University of Pennsylvania): "Fossil Free Faust: Goethe and the Climate Emergency"	4:00 PM Todd Kontje (University of California - San Diego): "The Dark Side of Diversity: Saul Fitelberg's Failed Seduction"

FOR UPDATES SEE: [HTTPS://WORDPRESS.CLARKU.EDU/ROBIN/FAUST4NOW/](https://wordpress.clarku.edu/robin/faust4now/)

An example of rethinking pedagogy took place in my course on Faust. In this course, we read two difficult canonical works, Goethe's *Faust* (both parts 1 and 2) and Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. Based on my positive experience of reading Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* with a reading group on Twitter, I decided to require students to tweet about the texts as they read, always using the hashtag "Faust4Now."

At the end of the semester, we organized a fantastic on-line symposium based on Goethe's and Thomas Mann's Faust stories, with talks by Wendy Nielson (Montclair State University), Ruxandra Looft (Iowa State University), Simon Richter (University of Pennsylvania),

Tobias Boes (Notre Dame University), Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University), and Todd Kontje (University of California, San Diego), on topics such as "motherless creation," "the cult of male genius," "Goethe and the climate emergency," connections between Thomas Mann and H.P. Lovecraft, Thomas Mann's life among the German emigrés in California, and anti-Semitism in his texts. Students stuck with the entire day-long on-line symposium; scholars from as far away as Brazil and Germany also attended.



Left: An example of a student tweet, in this case comparing Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.



### 3: German-Jewish Culture and Modern Multiculturalism



For my intersession course, “German-Jewish Culture and Modern Multiculturalism,” I was also able to take advantage of the new normal of online talks and bring in an amazing series of speakers, who spoke on a fascinating set of topics:

Liliane Weissberg (University of Pennsylvania): “Benjamin Veitel Ephraim: The Life and Work of Jewish Merchant, Writer, and Spy in Late Eighteenth Century Berlin”

Elisabeth Imber (Clark University): “Theodor Herzl”

Andreas Krass (Humboldt University, Berlin): “Magnus Hirschfeld in Palestine”

Frances Tanzer (Clark University): “The Habsburg Empire and the Jews”

Marc David Baer (London School of Economics): “German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Time of Hugo Marcus”

Hana Green (Clark University): “Passing as Aryan: Female Jewish Identity during the Holocaust”

Tiffany N. Florvil (University of New Mexico): “Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement”

#### 4. First-Ever Plenary Forum Devoted to Diversity, Equity and Social Justice at the annual conference of the German Studies Association

★ **GSA Forum on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice**  
 Add to [Google](#) | [Outlook](#) | [iCalendar](#)  
 Special Session

[View description](#)

**Moderator:** Priscilla Layne, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

**Speakers:**

Irene Kacandes  
*Dartmouth College*

Sai Bhatawadekar  
*University of Hawai'i at Mānoa*

Ela Gezen  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Regine Criser  
*University of North Carolina Asheville*

Harriett Jernigan  
*Stanford University*

Ervin Malakaj  
*University of British Columbia*

Rosemarie Peña  
*Rutgers University-Camden*

Robert Tobin  
*Clark University*

I was honored to be included in the first plenary forum on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice at the annual conference of the German Studies Association in October, 2020, with colleagues from the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, Dartmouth College, the University of Hawai'i—Manoa, the University of Massachusetts—Amherst, the University of North Carolina—Asheville, Stanford University, the University of British Columbia, and Rutgers University. Most participants spoke on issues of race, particularly the Afro-German experience, and some about the role of universities and the Native American experience in the United States today. My contributions had to do with my work on LGBTQ+ studies.

#### 5: Eurovision in America



In addition to the talk I gave on Eurovision in Israeli queer films at the Modern Language Association, I was also a leading source for Stephen Norris's documentary, "Euramerica," about Eurovision in America.

<https://filmfreeway.com/Euromerica>

6: **Moderating On-Line Discussions between Queer German and American Authors**



I was the moderator for two discussions on Queer Literature hosted by the Goethe Institutes of Kansas City and Boston. The Goethe Institute made sure to include diversity above and beyond categories of sexuality. One discussion (pictured above) was between Afro-German author Olivia Wenzel and American activist Sarah Schulman. The other discussion featured Jayrôme Robinet, a transman of French origin who now resides in Berlin, and Kenny Fries, a disabled Jewish gay writer currently completing a book on Nazi Euthanasia programs (pictured below).





## 7. Julius Evola and the Far Right Today



**VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE**

**CONFRONTING HATRED:  
Neo-Nazism, Antisemitism,  
and Holocaust Studies Today**

A SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL OF HOLOCAUST RESEARCH (35.2)

PLEASE JOIN THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE JOURNAL OF HOLOCAUST RESEARCH FOR  
A VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE WEBINAR WITH THE AUTHORS OF OUR LATEST SPECIAL ISSUE -  
CONFRONTING HATRED: NEO-NAZISM, ANTISEMITISM, AND HOLOCAUST STUDIES TODAY

			
<b>Janet Ward</b> Guest Editor The University of Oklahoma	<b>Atina Grossman</b> The Cooper Union	<b>David Myers</b> University of California, Los Angeles	<b>Heidi Tworek</b> University of British Columbia
			
<b>Manuela Achilles</b> University of Virginia	<b>Hannah Winnick</b> Obama Foundation	<b>Michelle Kahn</b> University of Richmond	<b>Robert Tobin</b> Clark University

**THURSDAY  
APRIL 29  
12:00 PM EST**

**REGISTRATION REQUIRED**

"Holocaust: Colony" by John Lee, 1988. Imaginology.  
With the kind permission of the Estate of John Lee, 1988.

**JHR** Journal of  
Holocaust  
Research

My work on the Italian fascist philosopher, Julius Evola, who still provides much of the ideological framework for the far right today, continues to draw attention. In anticipation of the release of a special issue of *The Journal of Holocaust Research* that includes my article, "The Evolian Imagination: Gender, Race, and Class from Fascism to the New Right," I posted a blog entry and participated in this virtual roundtable on Neo-Nazism, Anti-Semitism, and Holocaust Studies today. We had over a hundred attendees, including at least one of my students from the course on German-Jewish culture. Between this forum and a series of blogposts by the authors, the publishers of this special issue made a real effort to get our scholarship beyond the boundaries of academe.

## 8: History of Sexual Rights

I published two short pieces on sexuality and human rights, one on the roots of sexual rights in the Enlightenment and one on how even Pompeo's "Report on Unalienable Rights," issued under the Trump administration, ultimately endorses sexual rights.

"The Enlightenment Origins of Sexual Human Rights," *German Quarterly* 93.3 (Summer 2020), pp. 394-396.

"LGBTQ+ Rights after the Report on Unalienable Rights," *Telos* 193 (Winter 2020): 127-133.

## 9: Talks at the Modern Language Association

I gave talks on human rights and the Enlightenment and on the importance of the Eurovision Song Contest for gays in Israel at the Modern Language Association annual conference in January, 2021, theoretically in Toronto, but of course actually online:

"Freedom as the Work of Friendship: Sexuality and Human Rights in Alexander von Humboldt's Thinking"

"Eurovision in Israeli Queer Cinema"

## 10. Student Research

I was thrilled to sponsor two student posters at Clark's annual spring undergraduate research conference, Academic Spree Day.

Samantha Whittle, '21, presented a poster version of her 100-page thesis on the use of comedy and humor to memorialize the Holocaust. She subsequently defended the thesis and was awarded *magna cum laude*. She also received the J. Fannin King Award for Excellence in Comparative Literature. I'm happy to report that she has received a full tuition remission from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she will pursue a master's in comparative literature.

### The Double Edged Sword of Laughter:

### Memorialism of the Jewish Holocaust Through Humor and Comedies

Samantha Whittle '21 - Excerpts from Samantha's Senior Honors Thesis in Comparative Literature (Defense Scheduled for May 13th, 2021)

Advised by Professor Robert Tobin, Professor Shelly Tenenbaum and Professor Frances Tanzer



Holocaust humor continues to shock the public 75 years after the liberation of the concentration camps. The very idea that there could be anything comical in the experience of the fascist menace that was National Socialism and its greatest crime is astonishing, particularly when approached from the popular perspective. This narrative argues that the Holocaust and its many characters are easily delineated between "good" and "bad," a textbook example of true, unadulterated evil and its predation on pure innocence—followed, of course, by the rescue of this innocence and a restoration of the world to entirely "good," with no traces of the "bad" left behind. This is certainly the version purported by critically acclaimed Hollywood films on the Jewish Holocaust, such as *Schindler's List* and *Sophie's Choice*. And with this narrative in mind, it is hardly a surprise that the thought of laughter is appalling—the suffering of the innocent, and their rescue by a knight in shining armor are not the subjects of laughter. So why is it that, resting alongside *Schindler's List* in the library of Holocaust literature, there are countless novels and films with the express purpose of laughing within the context of the Holocaust?

... Holocaust humor originated as a Jewish coping mechanism by the Third Reich's targets both during and immediately following the Holocaust, signifying Holocaust humor as an affirmation of life and dignity, as well as a therapeutic approach to traumatic healing. However, as survivors have passed on—thus making film and literature ever more crucial in remembering this mass atrocity—the uncritical and decontextualized Americanization of Holocaust humor in modern film and literature has instead resulted in the widespread distribution and normalization of antisemitic ideals in the modern era, thus producing a result counterproductive to its original intent.

#### Timeline of Holocaust Memorialism and Comedy



Thus, humor can be considered to have four possible intentions: laughter to reinforce social norms; laughter to challenge social norms; laughter as an escape; and laughter as nihilistic resignation. Finally, a distinction between two approaches within each category must be made: laughing at others or laughing at oneself. This distinction is what makes an expression of the comic "good" or not, according to Freud and Critchley (Critchley 96). Their concept of a joke being "good" or not is adapted into the context of the Holocaust humor debate as being the primary conflict: in this sense, a "good" Holocaust joke is that which does not laugh at those suffering—which, at first glance, no prevalent Holocaust comedy actually does. Humor and jokes were extraordinarily amongst prisoners in concentration camps, and play a major role in many first person accounts and memoirs. What these stories reveal is that so long as one could find the humor in social incongruity, in a place as heinous as the concentration camps, there was the opportunity to have a moment's reprieve—and that moment could be the difference between the attitude of a musliman and a prisoner determined to do all in their power to survive. This laughter aimed at minimizing the experience, at distancing the Holocaust, and at satirizing the absurd nature of antisemitism. But their laughter was informed, their laughter was personal, their laughter was in spite of tears: "It was insiders' humor. Can this tragic form of humor be transposed into film media without betraying it?" (Klein 18).



**The Great Dictator (1940)** Charlie Chaplin  
The Great Dictator can be seen as a call to arms, a necessary one given the dire situation in Europe. But the final scene of The Great Dictator changes its entire message. Despite Chaplin's claims that the film was made for the Jewish people, the film ignores the problem of antisemitism, and reduces the threat of the Third Reich to purely the fascist regime, instead of a larger, more insidious system.

**To Be or Not to Be (1942)** Ernst Lubitsch  
This approach seems at first to be an act of completely removing the Holocaust from the equation of World War II and its atrocities, a concerning implication. However, Lubitsch's approach results in a far more rounded approach. The film carefully balances a blend of farcical and satirical elements with the tragedy of Warsaw's destruction.



**This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen (1948)** Tadeusz Borowski  
Tadeusz Borowski wrote some of the most painful Holocaust narratives imaginable, drenched in cruel irony. His story in particular tells a disturbing account of Birkenau that is laced with hyperbolic irony. This story would not be considered a true comedy or satire by American standards. However, it is the inclusion of dry, painful irony that forces the reader to face the true horrors of the Holocaust.  
**Mr. Theodore Mundstock (1963)** Ladislav Fules  
Fules takes a familiar nihilistic approach, as Mundstock's mental health gradually unravels due to his helpless nature. This tragic irony is the most defining characteristic of the novel's theme—Mundstock desperately seeks to control his destiny, but the only possible way he can exert control is through delusions.  
**Jacob the Liar (1969)** Jurek Becker  
The source of Becker's incorporation of comedy is similar to that of Ernst Lubitsch, for critically, it is not the plot that is comedic, but rather the characters who litter the plot itself. Becker's narrative tone itself seems to not only give permission, but encourage the reader to laugh—even when describing actions that are themselves rather simple and unhumorous. Becker takes a conversational tone, and insists that the reader consider the possibilities to find light.



**The Producers (1967)** Mel Brooks  
But what truly made Brooks struggle to find a film and production company was his incorporation of humor into National Socialism. Or rather, it might be better to describe The Producers as a comedy with elements of the Holocaust. But Nazism's antisemitism, concentration camps, and Holocaust are not mentioned. In a movie and musical centered around Hitler, this is a crucial decision to have left this out of the narrative, and implies intentionality.



**Maus (1983-91)** Art Spiegelman  
This graphic novel cannot be deemed a true comedy by any definition, but it is critical to examine the public's reaction to it. Spiegelman's decision to tell his father's story through the medium of a comic strip was the primary target of Maus's critiques, due to the inherent association of the comic style with visual comedy, which is only further cemented by the term itself, "comic."  
**Life is Beautiful (1997)** Roberto Benigni  
Benigni relies explicitly on the tropes of the Americanized Holocaust consciousness, rather than using humor to examine the circumstances of the Shoah and its impact not on American ethics, but on the victims and their descendants themselves. Despite the film's accolades, it failed to translate any multidimensional understanding of the Holocaust in its actual form.



**Look Who's Back (2012)** Timur Vermes  
The premise is, as is par for the course with Holocaust humor, absurd. Adolf Hitler magically wakes up in a parking lot in 2012 Germany, unscathed and unaged. As more people feel comfortable laughing along with the supposed satirist, more people begin to feel comfortable in blurring the lines between satire and reality.  
**Jojo Rabbit (2019)** Taika Waititi  
By balancing the comedy of the Nazi adults with the gestapo's serious presence, Waititi's film does not trivialize the crimes of the Nazi regime, and instead emphasizes it. But it is enough to place all of Nazism's brutal reality into one gestapo member? Deetz may behave as the human embodiment of the monstrous results of unchecked antisemitism, but there is hardly a connection made between Deetz's inherent wickedness and antisemitism, as antisemitism is made out to be silly and harmless.

There has never been a time in Holocaust memory where laughter could not be found, and thus, comedy is not only inextricable when examining Holocaust historiography and literature, but it cannot be pushed to the side as irrelevant or too offensive to examine. And further, its capacity to provide not only liberation, but comfort, therapeutic healing, and community cannot be overlooked in spite of its controversial nature. In fact, maybe it is those possibilities of laughter combined with its controversial nature that gives it such a great prospect to impact the narrative of the Holocaust: "Said [Mel] Brooks: 'If I got up on the soapbox and was eloquently, it'll be blown away in the wind. But if I do 'Springtime for Hitler', it'll never be forgotten'" (Lipman 240). But comedy is and always will be imperfect. It is far too easy for the words of humor to be given multiple meanings, and not just in the suggestive form of double entendres, but in the forms of satire, irony, and self-deprecation that are most frequently used in Holocaust humor. Literature and film are some of the most important tools that exist in educating the greater public about atrocities, but solely art cannot be relied upon to enact social change. Comedy is far too easily manipulated for any purpose, regardless of the author's intent, and thus must be treated as a source with deeply problematic repercussions in spite of comedy's positive impact for many. Holocaust comedy thus cannot be relied upon for Holocaust consciousness in any significant, broader circumstances, but, if approached with a self-aware, critical, and educated eye, can still hold positive benefits in understanding the Holocaust and its survivors in a unique, nuanced light.

## (Student Research, Continued)

Ceci Bachana ('24), a first-year student who took my Faust course in the fall, continued to work on the ideas from the course in the spring semester and submitted a poster analyzing F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* as a faustian tale, with connections to Goethe and Thomas Mann.

### Faust and National Trajectory in *The Great Gatsby*

Cecilia Bachana '24 – (Sponsor: Professor Robert Tobin)



#### Jay Gatsby as Faust

A standard Faust has a goal, a means, and a sacrifice(s), and the titular character of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) fulfills these criteria. At its core, Gatsby's goal is the love and devotion of Daisy Buchanan, his Fay. He believes that the married her husband "because [Gatsby] was poor and she was tired of waiting for [him]" (Fitzgerald 139) while he was stuck in Europe after World War I, so he accrued enough wealth, she will return to him. He hosts extravagant parties, hoping that she will show up. Thus, the means to his goal are wealth and celebrity. Finally, what does Gatsby sacrifice? In life, he sacrifices his genuine self and a chance at moving forward. Ultimately, he pays for it with his life. This self-imposed bargain is an impossible and misguided one: Daisy can never truly come back to him, as she, unlike her lover, has moved on and is beholden to her husband and child.

At the core of Gatsby's final sacrifice is his refusal to give up Daisy and his clinging to the past. In brief, after a heated argument in the Plaza Hotel involving Gatsby's insistence that Daisy deny ever having loved her husband, Daisy accidentally kills Tom's mistress in a hit-and-run. Gatsby takes the blame and reveals the truth only to Nick. Outraged, Myrtle's husband tracks the car to Gatsby and kills him. Thus, he dies because he cannot give up Daisy. Nick even tries to get him to leave town, knowing that his car will be traced, but as Nick reports, "he couldn't possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free" (Fitzgerald 139). Thus, like any good Faust, Gatsby meets a tragic end because of his commitment to his ill-fated bargain.



Fig 1: Image of a daisy, from Wikipedia.com

#### Daisy Buchanan as Margarete

In Gatsby's Faustian tale, Daisy plays the central part of the goal. But she doubles as a Margarete figure, as the woman who misses an opportunity to break free of society's rigid expectations in failing to go all the way with her lover. In Goethe's *Faust*, Margarete breaks gender expectations and tradition when she has sex with Faust out of need. The stories of Daisy and Margarete parallel each other: both live in societies with very specific expectations, and both realize this, their respective lovers then provide a potential way out, but neither woman ultimately escapes. Margarete's society expects her to remain an obedient virgin until after a respectable marriage. Daisy's expects her to be just as proper, and though virginity is not necessarily as important in her circles as it is in Margarete's, she is still viewed as a pretty object to someday complement a respectable husband and have children. Daisy realizes that this is the role of women in her society; she reports to her cousin and the narrator, Nick, that when she heard her child was a girl, she said, "I hope she'll be a fool — that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald 21).

Margarete's relationship with Faust gives her a way out of stifling tradition, if she can take the last step of leaving her hometown. Daisy, who does fulfill her expected role and marry the wealthy Tom Buchanan, is also offered an escape route when Gatsby moves in across the bay with his self-made fortune. But in the end, Margarete meets her end in prison, and Daisy stays with Tom. When Margarete has sex with Faust and gets pregnant, she is not ready to raise a child on her own, and it is implied that she drowns the baby and is imprisoned for infanticide. When Faust comes to rescue her, she refuses to leave, and she ultimately dies. Daisy does not have sex with Gatsby, but she does court him. At one point, she declares her love for him with the famous phrase, "I've never seen such — such beautiful shirts before" (Fitzgerald 99). When Gatsby tells Tom that Daisy is going to leave him, she responds to Tom's dismissal by protesting, "I am, though" (Fitzgerald 142). But she, like Margarete, never takes the final step. Perhaps Daisy feels that she has nowhere to go, especially after Gatsby is dead. *Margarete*, on the other hand, could easily leave with Faust, but cannot bring herself to completely reject her hometown. However, each woman has an opportunity to escape her rigid responsibilities by way of a different and exciting man, and both ultimately remain where they are.

An interesting extra piece of information to think about, here, is that Marguerite, the French form of the name *Margarete* or *Margaret*, is a word for Daisy, and Daisy is often a nickname for Margaret. Perhaps Gatsby's Daisy was, in fact, named Margaret at birth, or perhaps not, but it's certainly noteworthy that the names are so connected. Either way, the name adds another layer of similarity between Daisy and *Margarete*, and extra depth to Daisy's character.

#### Fitzgerald and Goethe: National Trajectory and Striving

In Goethe's *Faust*, the concept of "striving" is central. Faust always wants to do more, to know more, to experience more. He and Mephistopheles agree that the time will come for the devil to take his soul when he pronounces that he is finally satisfied: "If I should ever say to any moment: 'Thou, remain! you are so fair! then you may lay your fetters on me and I will gladly be destroyed'" (Goethe 1.4.1699-1702). After his deal with Mephistopheles, in fact, Faust says, "It is to strive with all my might that I am promising to do" (Goethe 1.4.172-1743). His soul is ultimately saved, which implies that striving is a desirable trait in a man. Gatsby also strives toward a goal, though not one of knowledge or even wealth: he wants Daisy. Nick appears to admire this in Gatsby, his commitment to a dream, however unattainable: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the organic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter" (Fitzgerald, 280). Further, Barbara Will asserts that to Nick, the narrator and Gatsby's friend, what matters in Gatsby's story is "the sustaining belief in the value of striving for a 'wondrous object'" (Will 126). Even in the end, when he knows that Gatsby will be traced and probably killed if he does not flee, he cannot bring himself to dash Gatsby's last hopes at being reunited with Daisy.

Though Gatsby and Goethe's Faust do not drive for quite the same goal, the important thing in both contexts, at least to Goethe and to Nick Carraway, is the act of striving itself. This is in line with the idea of the American Dream, as well, which Oxford Dictionaries defines as "the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved." The 1920s, with its seemingly-boundless resources and the exuberance for Americans that came with winning World War I, appeared a perfect time to pursue the American Dream. That is exactly what Gatsby does in Fitzgerald's novel; though, as we find out, one who pursues such a dream is not always destined for success.

#### Fitzgerald and Mann: A National Precipice

Though in different countries, both Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* take place in a period of fervor in the early 1900 and reflect the idea of a precipice toward which the nation and its people hurtle, carried by their aspirations. *Gatsby* unfolds in the 1920s, and *Doctor Faustus* spans a few decades, from the 1890s to the 1930s. In the United States, where *Gatsby* makes his deal, the 1920s were a period of prosperity, parties, and high spirits for the young and wealthy. Then, after the stock market crash of 1929, the US — and then the world — was plunged into the economic crisis that was the Great Depression. It is this pre-Depression world, nicknamed the "Roaring Twenties," that Gatsby inhabits (in an attempt to attract Daisy, in Leverkühn's Germany, Mann describes the beginning of World War I and the excitement of German young people, who were thrilled to fight for the country they thought was destined for greatness: "The destiny that had brooded over Europe for so long was unleashed... in our Germany its primary effect was elation and historical exuberance, a heroic festival" (Mann 116). After the war ended, Germany was blamed and required to pay reparations, creating economic problems for the country. Even further, when Germany counted on Adolf Hitler to redeem itself, it lost World War II and fell apart, by Mann's own assessment throughout his novel. These are the worlds in which Leverkühn and Gatsby's stories unfold: on a rush of excitement, fervor, and high spirits, just before a great fall. Just as Mann allegorizes the decline of Germany and its Faustian bargain through Adrian Leverkühn, Fitzgerald allegorizes the precipice that the US stood on in the 20s, from which it ultimately fell into the Great Depression, through Gatsby.

Gatsby outwardly embodies the spirit of the Roaring Twenties: he hosts extravagant parties, makes money by bootlegging alcohol, and displays his wealth with a fancy car and a beautiful mansion. And as discussed in the last few paragraphs, he tirelessly strives to win back Daisy Buchanan. Yet, for all his effort and his wealth, he is doomed to fail his quest. Fitzgerald could not have known yet about the Great Depression, as the novel was published in 1925, but Gatsby still depicts a nation on the brink of collapse, its coffers inevitably to run dry after a decade of reckless fun.



Fig 2: Leonardo DiCaprio as Jay Gatsby & Carey Mulligan as Daisy Buchanan, 2013 film



## Summary of all Leir Chair Activities, 2020-21

### Scholarship:

#### Publications (appeared)

"The Enlightenment Origins of Sexual Human Rights," *German Quarterly* 93.3 (Summer 2020), pp. 394-396.

"Eine Geschichte, die Geschichte verändert," introduction to Niki Trauthwein, *Peter Pan in Hamburg. Gert Christian Südel: Transpioneer, Aktivist und Überlebenskünstler* (Berlin: LitVerlag, 2020), pp. 7-20.

"LGBTQ+ Rights after the Report on Unalienable Rights," *Telos* 193 (Winter 2020): 127-133.

"Plague and Protest in LGBTQ+ History," *Worcester Pride Guide + Resource Directory 2020-2021*, pp. 8-9.

"Behind the Issue w/Robert Tobin," Interview posted on the academic blog of *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, April 25, 2021.

<https://journalofholocaustresearch.wordpress.com/2021/04/25/behind-the-issue-w-robert/>

"The Evolian Imagination: Gender, Race, and Class from Fascism to the New Right," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 35.2 (2021): 75-90.

#### Publications (submitted)

Review of Javier Samper Vendrell, *The Seduction of Youth: Print Culture and Homosexual Rights in the Weimar Republic*, forthcoming in *Monatshefte*.

Review of Katie Sutton, *Sex between Body and Mind: Psychoanalysis and Sexology in the German-Speaking World, 1890s-1930s*, forthcoming in *Social History of Medicine*.

"Zweimal James Steakley: Ein Beitrag zur Entsehung der *Queer German Studies*," forthcoming in *Festschrift für James Steakley*, ed. by Florian Mildemberger.

"Winckelmann und die Menschenrechte," forthcoming in *Winckelmann and His Passionate Followers*, ed. Wolfgang Cortjaens and Christian Loeb.

"Queer Camp against Franco: Zulueta's *Un dos tres*," submitted to *The Eurovision Song Contest: From Concert Halls to the Halls of Academia*, ed. by Adam Dubin, Antonio Obregon, and Dean Vuletic.

### Public Talks and Speaking Engagements

"So long, Beautiful Gay World? LGBTQ+ Rights in Germany since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," American Institute of Contemporary Germany Studies, Washington, DC. Conducted as a webinar on June 12, 2020.

Lunchtime lecture on Worcester LGBTQ+ History for the employee group DuPont Pride! June 2020.

Moderate discussion between Jayrôme Robinet and Kenny Fries hosted by Goethe Institutes of Boston and Kansas City. September 24, 2020.

Moderate discussion between Olivia Wenzel and Sarah Schulman hosted by the Goethe Institutes of Boston and Kansas City. September 30, 2020.

Panelist, Inaugural Plenary Forum on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice at the GSA, Washington, DC, online, October 2020.

"Freedom as the Work of Friendship: Sexuality and Human Rights in Alexander von Humboldt's Thinking," MLA, Toronto, online, January 2021.

"Eurovision in Israeli Queer Cinema," MLA, Toronto, January, online, 2021.

Panelist, Virtual Roundtable, "Confronting Hatred: Neo-Nazism, Anti-Semitism, and Holocaust Studies Today," *Journal of Holocaust Research*, April 2021.

"Criminality and the Continent," part of panel discussion with Elizabeth Blake on Anthony Minghelli's film of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in Rox Samer's course, "Gender and Film" (SCRN 288), April 2021.

Invited speaker, "Queering the Canon from Napoleon to Franco," University of Missouri – Columbia, May 2021.

Featured interviewee in Stephen Norris's documentary, "Euromerica" (May 2021). Available on line at: <https://filmfreeway.com/Euromerica>

"1869: The Birth of 'Homosexuality' in Germany," On-Line PRIDE Event, June 2021.

### Scholarly Service

External Review for Promotion: Baruch College, CUNY; Johns Hopkins University; Australia National University [each case required reading and assessing at least one new scholarly book by the candidates in question, as well as numerous articles]

Blind Review for Scholarly Journal: *The Journal of the History of Sexuality*

## Scholarly Campus Events Organized:

### #Faust4Now

Christopher Dea (independent director), On Directing Goethe's *Faust*, October 2020.

Todd Kontje (University of California, San Diego), "The Dark Side of Diversity: Saul Fitelberg's Failed Seduction," #Faust4Now, November 2020

Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University), "The 'Fascism' of Twelve-Tone Music: Emigration, Exile and the Genesis of *Dr. Faustus*," #Faust4Now, November 2020.

Tobias Boes (University of Notre Dame), "Doctor Faustus and the Weight of the German Past," #Faust4Now, November 2020.

Simon Richter (University of Pennsylvania), "Fossil-Free Faust: Goethe and the Climate Emergency," #Faust4Now November 2020.

Ruxandra Looft (Iowa State University), "Rosa Mayreder's *Anda Renata*: Subverting Faust and the Cult of Male Genius," #Faust4Now, November 2020.

Wendy Nielsen (Montclair State University), "Homunculus, Motherless Creation: The Irony of Professing Love and Science in Goethe's *Faust*," #Faust4Now, November 2020.

### Human Rights and Literature

David Tse-Chien Pan (University of California, Irvine), Faculty Colloquium on the Report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, December 2020

Christian Emden (Rice University), Faculty Colloquium on the Report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, December 2020.

### German-Jewish Culture and Modern Multiculturalism

Liliane Weissberg (University of Pennsylvania): "Benjamin Veitel Ephraim: The Life and Work of Jewish Merchant, Writer, and Spy in Late Eighteenth Century Berlin," January, 2021

Elisabeth Imber (Clark University): "Theodor Herzl," January, 2021

Andreas Krass (Humboldt University, Berlin): "Magnus Hirschfeld in Palestine," January, 2021

Frances Tanzer (Clark University): "The Habsburg Empire and the Jews," January, 2021.



Marc David Baer (London School of Economics): "German, Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Time of Hugo Marcus," January, 2021

Hana Green (Clark University): "Passing as Aryan: Female Jewish Identity during the Holocaust," January 2021

Tiffany N. Florvil (University of New Mexico): "Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement," February, 2021

### The National Imagination

Patricia Layne (University of North Carolina): "Afro-German Writing Today: Olivia Wenzel's *1000 Coils of Fear*," March 2021

Velma Pollard (Jamaican Poet), co-sponsored talk in Prof. Ferly's seminar on Caribbean Women Writers, April, 2021.

Susana Antunes (University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee), "Portugal and the National Imagination," May, 2021

### **Teaching**

Fall: Comparative Literature 109, Human Rights and Literature (First-Year Intensive) (hybrid)

German 222, Faust and the Faustian (hybrid)

Comparative Literature 297: Directed Study

Intersession: German 286, Germans, Jews, and Turks (on line)

Spring: Comparative Literature 130, The National Imagination (on line)

Comparative Literature 297: Honors Thesis

### Additional teaching service:

DAAD campus liaison. Received an award for Hana Green.

Letters of Recommendation for students (medical school, graduate school, grants, post-graduate opportunities).

Sponsored 2 students at Academic Spree Day, the undergraduate research conference.