

Sport and Literature: An International Conference

at the University of Rostock, Germany, 13-15 January 2011

“The opposite of play is not serious occupation, but – reality”: Sigmund Freud observed that the child at play resembles the poet who imagines alternative realities. If this is true, one could assume a close bond between the athlete (as player of a game) and the author of literary fictions. This is not necessarily the case, though. For various reasons, numerous writers and intellectuals have cultivated an anti-sporting impulse and fashioned themselves and their trade in direct opposition to the very idea of physical effort, bodily fitness and competitive sport. The Swedish author Sven Lindquist voices a commonplace when he alleges that “art is often born out of early physical humiliation“, and that “writers are the sort of people who couldn’t clear the high vaulting horse at school“. Despite the ubiquity of such claims, there is a great deal of common ground between sport and literature that has not been sufficiently covered by scholars of literature.

The lack of attention that literary scholars have given to sport seemingly disregards the fact that hardly any field in modern life and culture attracts as much public and media attention as sport. Why is it that its omnipresence in the media is not at all mirrored by the amount of research into or analysis of the fictional representation of sport in literary studies? While philosophers and sociologists have long since started to explore that topic, a veritable aversion seems to hinder many “literary people” from engaging with it – a phenomenon all the more noteworthy if one considers the ever-present discourses of the body in literary and cultural studies. The absence of the theme in literary texts themselves can hardly be cited as an argument: there is an overabundance of fictional texts dealing with the issue. The conference aims to challenge the reservations of literary scholars about sport as a field of serious study. This is highly desirable as sport constitutes a junction of many socially, politically and culturally relevant discourses. Given the conference’s clear focus on fiction, possible topics – to be tackled from all kinds of perspectives and theoretical angles – include:

- cross-cultural explorations of sport and literature
- sport and the cult and culture of the body
- sport and modern heroism
- sport and the “perfect” and the “imperfect” human being
- sport and youth cult(ure) in ageing societies
- sport and war
- sport and fascism
- sport and consumer culture
- sport and masculinities / femininities / gender identity
- sport and national / regional identity
- sport and class
- sport and “race”/racism
- sport and athletes in a postcolonial discourse
- woman/man and technology – modifications of “nature” and the ethics of doping
- sport as an image or a counter-image to society
- ...

Please send proposals (abstracts of suggested papers of around 250 words and a short biographical note) by June 1, 2010, to both conference organisers:

PD Dr. Christian Schmitt-Kilb (christian.schmitt-kilb@uni-rostock.de)

Andrea Zittlau (andrea.zittlau@uni-rostock.de)