

“Metaforms” is soliciting articles for upcoming volumes on special topics. Please consider submitting essays to the following volume:

Myth and Religion in German Expressionism | Deadline for Abstracts: Oct. 1, 2012 | Contact: Almut-Barbara Renger ([renger@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:renger@zedat.fu-berlin.de)) & ISGRL ([holy\\_lit@web.de](mailto:holy_lit@web.de))

## Call for Proposals

Title: Myth and Religion in German Expressionism: Arts and Discourses

(Subtitle: Transfer and Transformation of Ideas, Practices, and Narratives)

Despite a strong, Enlightenment-driven trend toward increased secularization across German-speaking culture, literature continued to exhibit various religious forms and manifestations after 1900. Alongside critical examinations of religious traditions and a general air of skepticism, one also finds a genuine spirit of rediscovery and revitalization of a spectrum of religious heritages passed down from antiquity. From roughly 1910 to 1925 the broad movement identified as German Expressionism is saturated with metaphors and motifs drawn from religious traditions, for example: ideas of fate, destiny, and the holy; plots of sacrifice, suffering, and redemption; allusions to the sacred and the mystical; and aspirations for messianic heroism. Expressionist experiments frequently viewed art in religious terms and thereby recalibrated aesthetic experience as an abandonment to some kind of spiritual, sublime energy. A deep commitment to the irrational, unpredictable, and often frightening aspects of the human or world soul drove writers and artists to shatter bourgeois expectations and complacency.

For instance, in Franz Werfel’s drama, *Die Mittagsgöttin* (*The Mid-day Goddess*, 1919), the poet encounters Mara, a heathen goddess who embodies the eternal feminine principal that would help him move through difficult pain toward self-realization. Werfel’s case is not unique. Ancient religious texts and mythologies ranging from the most popular to the most obscure played a considerable role for many artists and writers of the period. Syncretism was a common feature, audaciously blending varieties of paganism with Catholic and Protestant themes, which resulted in often quite singular repertoires of symbolic and allegorical language. Inspired by Nietzsche’s formulation of the Dionysian, the modern stage was to be redesigned into a site where otherwise suppressed energies would be unleashed. Painters like Emil Nolde, Max Beckmann and Paul Klee created a plethora of outstanding works on religious subjects, bringing a strikingly personal, psychological content to bear on Biblical episodes. A similar approach is discernible in many German Expressionist films of the silent era, where manifestations of the demonic or the satanic impinge on everyday scenes. From another angle, scholars have long pointed to the employment of religious allegory in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), which presents an intriguing mosaic of Hebrew, Christian and pagan materials. Analogously, Mary Wigman’s development of “Expressive Dance” aimed toward a reawakening of a wild spirituality, which corresponded to new directions in the study of ancient Greece and Rome that gave fresh focus to archaic forces prior to the sobriety of classical forms. In literature one reads how religion is instrumentalized to various ends, for example, the establishment of an international, pan-religious community in Ludwig Rubiner’s essay “Der Mensch in der Mitte” (“The Man in the Middle,” 1917) and his anthology *Kameraden der Menschheit* (*Comrades of Humanity*, 1919) or the celebration of ecstatic eroticism in the poetry of Richard Dehmel. In a philosophical key, one would include Ernst Bloch’s *Geist der Utopie* (*Spirit of Utopia*, 1918/1923), which offered a mystical interpretation of historical progress, as well as Franz Rosenzweig’s and Walter Benjamin’s heady forays in Kabbalistic prose. Finally, in addition to reoccupations of Western legacies, there is ample evidence of incorporating the religions of southern and eastern Asia. Figures of art and thought from Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions were engaged by writers as diverse as Alfred Döblin, Franz Werfel, Albert Ehrenstein,

and Klabund. Throughout, these few examples amply demonstrate the vivacity of a religious sensibility that would instigate some of the most exhilarating and the most damning thinking of the age, from social revolutions to calls for the “New Man,” from cultural innovation to insidious demagoguery, from an inspired investigation into Jewish mysticism to the detrimental consolidation of anti-Semitic stereotypes.

The planned collection of papers intends to redirect and refocus research on the role of religion in Expressionist literature, the arts, and film in the light of recent theoretical developments. The survey will explore the transfer and transformation of religious thinking in Expressionism through discussion of ‘problem areas’ such as intertextuality and intermediality, secularization and (de-) sacralization, historicity and mythicity, hermeneutics and deconstruction, and issues of religious aesthetics and philosophy, not least in the context of questions of gender studies. Routes of exploration may be suggested by the following key questions, which should consider how far the aforementioned categories of “sacralization” and “secularization” are applicable to the research context in question, and where their problem issues lie:

- What effect does the claim of sacred texts to truth and authority exert on their appropriation in Expressionist literature and art? Can a distinction be made between sacred and profane works?
- Are forms and strategies of text sacralization apparent, e.g. in orientation to genres such as the hagiographic legend or women’s mystical texts? Is there a sacral connotation to the genesis of the work in reference to paradigms and topoi such as inspiration, divine gift, or even divine intervention on the material substance of the newly-created work? Do gender roles play a part here?
- What forms of speech establish similarities to religious (e.g. prophetic or demonic) speech? And with what concepts of spiritual, affective, or physical understanding are they associated?
- Is there an “anxiety of influence” (Harold Bloom) in Expressionist literature and art in respect of religions? What other theoretical models may be used to describe the relationship between religion and Expressionism?
- And, last but not least, how should the issue of the translation of religious texts be approached?

Please send your electronic application, by **1 October 2012**, both to [holy\\_lit@web.de](mailto:holy_lit@web.de) and to [renger@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:renger@zedat.fu-berlin.de). The application should include a précis (approx. **500 words + 5 keywords**) and a concise and telling CV not exceeding a half page in length.