

The Life of Birds in Literature

University of Siegen, 23-24 May 2014

Of all the animals big and small that make their appearance in literature, birds hold a special appeal for scholars. For the orniphile, there is much to admire about birds, including the beautiful plumage of many species and the unfailing sense of orientation and physical stamina of migratory birds, but it is the melodious sequences of sounds emitted by songbirds that align them with poets. Poets have therefore invoked them as their muses, appealing also to their flight capacity to take them above the human world on “the viewless wings of poesy” (Keats). Birds have served as allegorical figures (Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*) and symbols (dove, eagle). Beyond rhetorical uses, they themselves have been the subjects of poetry from John Clare to Gerard Manley Hopkins and Ted Hughes. In recent years, as the (near-) extinction of several avian species is felt by many to be the most apparent loss of biodiversity on this planet, birds have begun to feature prominently also in fiction (Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom*).

We invite proposals for twenty-minute papers focusing on representations of birds in Anglophone literature and culture. Topics may include aspects of the history of birds in literature, analyses of rhetorical and narrative functions of birds, ecocritical readings of the lives of birds and humans, as well as the place of birds in contemporary culture (bird watching, bird protection).

Deadline for proposals: 28 February 2014

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