

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Building a platform for modern German poetry and mediating its reception by English-speakers
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Leeder has made a major contribution to raising the levels of cultural awareness and understanding of modern German poetry in the UK and beyond. Her research has enabled the English-speaking public to discover poetry previously unknown to them and has brought emerging poetry into the public realm. It has revived interest in forgotten writers via public engagement, commissioning and translation of new work and through Leeder's advisory work with media and cultural institutions. Leeder has influenced the programming and presentation of German poetry, engaging new media to create new audiences. Her research and translation expertise has contributed both to changing how German poetry is translated and performed by others, and to how artists respond to it in their own work.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since 1993 when Karen Leeder, now Professor of Modern German Literature, arrived in Oxford, she has pioneered research on modern German poetry and its reception in English, treating both canonical and emerging writers. Leeder was one of the first to examine the reception of Bertolt Brecht by English-language poets^[see §3.1]. This led to HEFCE funding in 2003-4 to compile a database of poetry 'after Brecht', to publish two anthologies of these poems and a further four articles drawing on the research to illuminate the reception of Brecht's poetry today. Leeder's research moves beyond the political controversy that traditionally surrounds Brecht's reputation, and explores the work of the great lyric poet. In putting Brecht's poetry into new contexts – for example his relationship with the English-speaking world, the reception of his poetry by later generations – she has redefined ways of approaching him. Leeder undertook similar research on Rilke, another great German poet: tracing the 'English Rilke' from first translations through to modern responses from a range of major UK and US poets, examining how they reflect the contexts in which he has been rewritten, and what it reveals about his lyric capacities. Preliminary conclusions were published in her contribution to <i>The Cambridge Companion to Rilke</i>^[2].</p> <p>Arising out of these 'legacy' projects came Leeder's growing interest in 'lateness' in modern poetry, the notion of work influenced by old age or incapacity, or self-consciously 'after'. Leeder is the first to apply this to the poetry of the 'belated' nation Germany, but simultaneously also to challenge the biographically-inflected notions of 'late style' as advanced by Adorno or Said and to place 'lateness' as a broader category within the context of philosophies of time and speed. She has published five pieces on different poets^[3] along with <i>Nach Duino</i>^[4], the first volume to examine Rilke's neglected late work after the <i>Duino Elegies</i>, as a body of poetry. A special interdisciplinary volume of <i>New German Critique</i> is due to appear in 2013, edited and introduced by Leeder and containing her contribution on the late poetry of Heiner Müller.</p> <p>Leeder has also organised a series of research symposia on 20th-century German poetry and has edited collections of pioneering essays arising from them. They each seek to place German poetry in new contexts: the British Academy-supported 'Faschenpost'^[5] presents an overview of a 'long twentieth century' of German poetry, focussing on the competing claims of poetry and politics; in doing so it explores the dominant trope of the 'message in a bottle'. 'Schaltstelle'^[6], a 550-page account of contemporary German poetry, elucidates various strands such as late poetry, dialogue with tradition, poetry and the body, poetry and place, language games and new writing.</p> <p>The intensive research involved in the commissioning, shaping and editing of such volumes has helped define the field as a whole, but Leeder's own contributions have also been concerned to bring emerging poets into the public realm: she was among the first to write in German or English on the poetry of Ulrike Draesner, Raoul Schrott, Barbara Köhler and Evelyn Schlag^[7]; her work has been instrumental in defining and advancing their reputations.</p>

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3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Karen Leeder, "After Brecht": The reception of Brecht's poetry in English', in Karen Leeder, ed. [with Tom Kuhn], *Empedocles' Shoe. Essays on Brecht's Poetry* (London: Methuen, 2002). Available on request. Published by leading London publishing house with reviews *Tribune* 27 September, 2002, *Morning Star*, 26 August 2002, *Contemporary Review*, January 2003; *Modern Language Review* 99.2 (2004): 541-2.
- [2] Karen Leeder, 'Rilke's Legacy in the English-Speaking World', in Karen Leeder, ed. [with Robert Vilain], *Cambridge Companion to Rainer Maria Rilke* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010); <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521879439.014> Cambridge Companions are a renowned series of authoritative guides, written by leading experts in the field and published by a leading university press with reviews *Times Literary Supplement* (21 May 2010); *German Studies Review* 34.1 (February 2011); *German Quarterly*, 85.4 (2011): 514-15.
- [3] Karen Leeder, "Nachwort zu Brechts Tod": The Afterlife of a Classic in Modern German Poetry', in *Brecht und der Tod / Brecht and Death*, *Brecht Yearbook / Brecht Jahrbuch*, 32, (2007): 333-354. <http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/German/German-idx?type=div&did=German.BrechtYearbook032.i0033&isize=M> The Brecht Yearbook is a refereed international journal. Leeder's contribution was an invited plenary lecture at the Brecht Society and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
- [4] Karen Leeder, Ed. [with Robert Vilain], *Nach Duino: Studien zu Rainer Maria Rilkes späten Gedichten* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010). Available on request. 'It is a tribute to the evocative richness of this stimulating volume, which enhances our understanding of Rilke's "Spätwerk", to say that virtually all the essays invite further study and in many cases provide the basis for entire monographs on their topics' (Theodore Ziolkowski), *Modern Language Review*, 106.3(2011).
- [5] Karen Leeder, ed. 'Flaschenpost': *German Poetry and the Long Twentieth Century*, special edition of the journal *German Life and Letters*, 60.3 (July 2007) <http://www.swetswise.com/swoc-web/details.html?journalId=83978&yevold=2037147> *German Life and Letters* is a leading peer-reviewed journal in British German Studies It was described as 'full of fascinating essays, rich in insights from some of the best scholars of German poetry', in *Modern Language Review*, 104.1 (2009): 287-9.
- [6] Karen Leeder, ed. 'Schaltstelle': *Neue deutsche Lyrik im Dialog*, German Monitor 69 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007). Available on request. The German Monitor book series has a system of double-blind peer-reviewing. 'Leeder's volume brings together an all-star line-up of groundbreaking essays on contemporary German-language poetry. It is a volume that students of newer German-language poetry will want to keep nearby.' *H-net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, online July 2008.
- [7] Karen Leeder, "Time, Love and Literature!": The Work of Elegy in the Poetry of Evelyn Schlag', invited paper for special edition of *Austrian Studies* (The Austrian Lyric), 12 (2004): 231-248 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27944725> *Austrian Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal published by the MHRA.

4. Details of the impact

Leeder has played a crucial role encouraging and advising poets, translators, artists and cultural organisations to advance the performance and presentation of modern German poetry in the UK and beyond. Leeder's research insights and prize-winning translation expertise have contributed greatly to increasing the accessibility and coverage of modern German poetry in the UK, attracting new audiences, and enabling more culturally and historically revealing performances and presentations of existing and new work.

Advising creative and cultural institutions

Leeder has regularly advised cultural organisations concerned with promoting international cultural cooperation and mediating public awareness of contemporary European literature, such as the **Goethe-Institut**, **The Austrian Cultural Forum** and the **South Bank Centre**^[1], on how to make European literature (especially German poetry) more visible through translation and transmission

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via various media. Her guidance has enabled these institutions to expand their coverage of modern German poetry and to deliver new interpretations, bringing it to new audiences. She advised the Senior Commissioning Editor of Oxford University Press's **Oxford World's Classics** book series on translations of Rilke; she regularly advises **BBC Radio 3 and 4** on German poetry programming, and advised the premier New Zealand trade poetry magazine **SPORT** about its special German issue for the **Leipzig Book fair** (2012). Leeder's research was cited^[2] as influential in the preparation for the **BBC Symphony Orchestra's** UK premiere performance of Detlev Glanert's 'Musik für Violine und Orchester, Op 33' inspired by Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus (Barbican, 11/02/2011).

Engaging public audiences through radio

Leeder has regularly used the discussion of her research on **BBC Radio 3 and 4**^[1] culture and arts programmes such as **The Verb, Word of Mouth, and Night Waves** as a way of reaching a large public audience and broadening their understanding and appreciation of modern German poetry. Her appearance with Dennis Marks, on 'Fin de Siècle Vienna', at the **Proms Literary Festival**, 05/08/09 (broadcast on Radio 3), was described as "warmly authoritative, informal and informing" in BBC feedback. The producer of the Radio 4 programme 'The Women of Rainer Maria Rilke' (16/05/09) said of Leeder's contribution: "Your knowledge and expertise are utterly invaluable to us and your tone, enthusiasm and appraisal of the texts were absolutely perfect for our audience". She also participated alongside **Martyn Crucefix, Don Paterson, Philip Pullman and Rowan Williams** in 'Among the Ranks of the Angels - Rainer Maria Rilke' (Radio 3, 27/03/11 and 05/08/11), unpacking Rilke's *Elegies* for a general audience.

The confidence and interest in Leeder's work has led to repeat requests for advice and participation. Leeder was commissioned to write and present a Radio 4 programme on Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus (**Dancing the Orange**, 21 and 27/07/13, **Radio Choice in The Times**, 20/07/13). The producer said: "A number of people who heard the programme told me that they were impressed by Karen's depth of knowledge, her ability to communicate complexity engagingly and her own engagement with the subject. My editor and the commissioning editor were pleased and have encouraged me to submit more proposals for programmes presented by Karen."^[3]

Reaching out through cultural events

Leeder has participated in, chaired and curated public events, as a vehicle for raising cultural awareness and public appreciation of modern German poetry. Her research on the reception of Brecht's poetry led to an invitation to chair a public event with poets **Bernard O'Donoghue** and **Jamie McKendrick** (03/03/13), as part of the '**The Rest Is Noise**' festival^[4]. The session combined readings and poems sung with piano accompaniment and discussion to engage the 400-strong audience with Brecht's poems. The Festival Programme Manager^[1] said: 'Karen's academic expertise was to the fore in advising on the shape and material used in our Brecht poetry event [...] the event [...] was very well judged, allowing space for new research and insights about Brecht to come to the fore.'

She advised on and chaired a post-performance discussion with distinguished photographers **Adam Broomberg** and **Oliver Chanarin** and conductor Paul Kildea at the film and opera event based on their artists' book **War Primer 2**^[5] (a contemporary recasting of Brecht's *Kriegsfiabel*) at the **London Photographers' Gallery** (25/04/2013). Chanarin emailed afterwards: 'Thank you for a wonderfully informative introduction last night. I think you managed to set just the right tone, and create an atmosphere in which the audience felt able to participate' (26/04/13). The **Academy of Arts in Berlin** has requested a repeat of the event next year.

Developing professional practices for translators and other professional groups

Leeder's research and prize-winning translations have helped to change how German poetry is translated into English, and how artists respond to it in their own work. She has served in a consultative capacity on various non-academic bodies including the **English PEN**, the **Translator's Association of the Society of Authors**, the **British Centre for Literary Translation**, and **New Books in German** (a trade magazine). She was a member of the editorial board and then a trustee of **Modern Poetry in Translation** and a Judge of the **Schlegel-Tieck Prize** for German translation, the **Times / Stephen Spender Poetry Competition** and the Poetry Society **Corneliu M. Popescu Prize 2013**^[6]. This has further enhanced the visibility of German

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poetry in the UK and within the poetry and translation communities.

She has influenced translation practices through working directly with translators such as Martyn Crucefix^[4] and also through knowledge-sharing via events and the media. Thus she chaired a round table on 'The Art of Translation', with Jenny Erpenbeck, Michael Hulse, and Marco Szondi, for an audience of 250 at the **Writers and Readers Festival in Wellington, New Zealand** (04/13). In 2008 she held a round table with industry specialists (publishers, theatre workers, translators, etc.) at **Tate Liverpool**^[v] intended to overcome the practical and cultural challenges of presenting German-language culture to a British audience. One translator at the event commented: 'Leeder has been a substantial influence on my career as a translator [...]. I have also been inspired by her approach to the practice of translation - hearing her talk about translating poetry has helped me to think through the process, and to develop my own creativity in translating literature.'

Stimulating and shaping creative practice

Leeder's research on Rilke and Brecht has led to work with major UK poets. She has advised **Jamie McKendrick, Robin Robertson, and Martyn Crucefix**^[4] on their Rilke translations and poems 'after', Rilke, including Crucefix's version of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* (2012) and the *Duino Elegies* (2006) which has been toured by **Aya Theatre** in London (2012 and 2013). She worked with **Andy Croft** on his poems 'after Brecht'; his poem 'In the Brecht Museum' (in *Sticky*, Flambard Press, 2009) is dedicated to her and responds directly to her research on Brecht [§3.3].

Leeder's research on emerging German poets and her translations of their work has helped them to establish their presence and careers. Her research on the Austrian poet **Evelyn Schlag**^[5] led to commissions which have been instrumental in increasing Schlag's profile in the UK and beyond: e.g. Schlag's poem 'Honeymoon Years' (tr. Leeder) was selected for **World Poetry Day** by the European Commission and the European Parliament, November 2008. Schlag was selected as Austria's representative in the 2012 London Olympics' **Poetry Parnassus**^[vi] where she read a poem translated by Leeder. Schlag said of Leeder: 'Not only have her articles given me a profile, collaborating on the translations with a sensitive translator such as Karen Leeder has also had an influence on my own writing.'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonial evidence

- [1] Email correspondence from The Rest is Noise Festival Programmer, The South Bank
- [2] Email correspondence from the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Radio 3 contact
- [3] Email feedback from a BBC Radio Producer
- [4] Email testimonial from poet and translator
- [5] Email testimonial from an emerging poet

Non-testimonial evidence

- [i] Example links to some of Leeder's BBC Radio appearances:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/search/schedule/?q=karen%20leeder>
- [ii] Event programme: The Rest is Noise Festival, The South Bank Centre:
<http://therestisnoise.southbankcentre.co.uk/explore/berlin-in-the-20s-and-30s#1>
- [iii] Event information and podcast: *War Primer 2* performance, London Photographers' Gallery:
<http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/broomberg-chanarin-with-paul-kildea>
Podcast of Q&A session: <http://vimeo.com/67305432>
- [iv] Website information about the Popescu Prize and judging panel:
<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/competitions/popescu/>
- [v] Event podcast, 'The impact of German-language culture in the UK', Tate Liverpool, 24/07/2008:
<http://www.wigs.ac.uk/wigs2008roundtable.html>
- [vi] Website and podcast, 'Poetry Parnassus' (2012): <http://ticketing.southbankcentre.co.uk/poetry-parnassus/poets/schlag-evelyn>