

# **ILiADS Institute Week Proposal**

## **Mapping the Literary Railway in the German-Speaking World**

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### **Team Information**

Paul A. Youngman, PI – will attend ILiADS

Jeff Barry, Assistant Head Librarian (OMEKA, Neatline) – will attend ILiADS

Mackenzie Brooks, Metadata Librarian and Assistant Professor (OMEKA, Neatline) – will not attend ILiADS

Alston Cobourn, Digital Scholarship Librarian and Assistant Professor (OMEKA, Neatline) – will not attend ILiADS

Gabrielle Tremo, Research Assistant (Literary analysis, OMEKA, Neatline)

Elizabeth “Lizzy” Stanton, Research Assistant (Literary analysis, OMEKA, Neatline) – will attend ILiADS

Ulemj “Lenny” Enkhbold, Research Assistant (Literary analysis, OMEKA, Neatline) – will attend ILiADS

### **Project Description and ILiADS**

Our project is dedicated to the question: is visualization interpretation? It is a question not posed often enough in humanities research – an area of study in which words have historically been seen as the medium through which we express our interpretive ideas – but a question, in light of the myriad mapping tools available to humanist researchers, that will ultimately have to be dealt with. During Summer 2014, my research assistant, Gabi Tremo, and I built a mapping system using the Omeka platform and the Neatline mapping tool to map the railway in Theodor Fontane’s novel *Effi Briest* (1895). We also completed a draft of our paper in which we offered new interpretations of a more than one hundred year old novel based on our Neatline map of the work.

Our research results were striking. The ability to see the railway space changes forever one’s understanding of the role of the train in the novel. Our most important results were threefold: 1) Fontane’s mixture of actual railways and fictional ones is

quite characteristic of literary realism with its mix of the real with the fantastic; 2) Contrary to traditional criticism that claims an eastward orientation in the novel, our map shows that the travel space had a primarily westward orientation; and 3) The repetitive nature of the railway and the ability to see the repetition on the map very much underscores the use of repetition as a strategy for realist authors in providing a reassuring sense of structure on the one hand, or a sense of constriction or entrapment on the other. For a closer look at “Mapping the Literary Railway in the German-Speaking World” in its prototype form, please see <http://omeka.wlu.edu/neatline/show/effi-briest-rail>.

Gabi and I presented our project at the Annual Conference of the German Studies Association – the premier German Studies conference in the world. Our paper was well received. We have thus far had two requests to present again – one from the University of Washington and one from Michigan State University. Finally, our paper was solicited for publication at the peer-reviewed *TRANSIT: A Journal of Travel, Migration, and Multiculturalism in the German-Speaking World*.

We seek to attend ILiADS to continue work on “Mapping the Literary Railway in the German-Speaking World.” We have built the prototype infrastructure on our Omeka site, but it still needs work. My grand plan is to make this project a very large, collaborative one by attracting scholars of other cultural traditions to map the literary railway in their respective countries. Before we can do that, we need more work on the German cultural tradition, especially as it manifests itself in the nineteenth-century literary fiction known as *Eisenbahnliteratur* (railway literature). We are off to a good start with our mapping of *Effi Briest*, but we need to map at least 6 novels this summer. Our primary objective at ILiADS is to gain more expertise in OMEKA. We would like to find a way to present more than one work on a site without it being too cluttered. That said, while we believe that OMEKA is the platform for us, we are also open to learning about web publishing platforms.

Mapping the Literary Railway is an important project for several reasons. First and foremost, this project can, in some cases, yield truly new interpretations as you read about above in my discussion of *Effi Briest*. Moreover, it is not an exaggeration to say that one cannot approach these literary works in the same way once one has seen these maps – visualization is truly interpretation. Second, the field of German Studies is woefully behind the times when it comes to the application of digital research techniques. This project, with its emphasis on visualization is already serving as an example in the field. With “Mapping the Literary Railway in the German-Speaking World,” we are leading the way in DH research in German Studies. Finally, the collaborative nature of this project dovetails nicely with the teacher-scholar model at Washington and Lee. I cannot imagine doing this project alone – the amount of time it would take would be prohibitive and diminish its impact. By using summer scholars in this collaborative enterprise, I get to teach and conduct research throughout the summer.

## **Timeline**

Our goals are twofold for summer 2015. First, we plan to map six works of literary fiction. We will finish Fontane's *Cecile* (1887). We began to map this work this summer, but were overwhelmed with site development and had to limit ourselves to perfecting our *Effi Briest* map for presentation. We will map two works by Berthold Auerbach – *Sträflinge* (1846) and *Das Nest an der Bahn* (1876). We will do one work by Gerhard Hauptmann – *Bahnwärter Thiel* (1888). Finally, we will map two novels by Peter Rosegger – *Die neue Bahn* (1873) and *Das ewige Licht* (1895). By completing this work, we will finally begin to develop a clearer picture of the literary railway in the German-speaking world. Beyond the actual mapping, we need to work on the Omeka platform while at ILADs conference. We are looking for a way to put all of our novels on one platform without it looking too cluttered and, in general, we hope to gain more expertise on OMEKA.

In Summer 2016, I hope to finish 10 more works and at that point, I will be to reach out to scholars of other literary traditions in an attempt to expand the literary map outside of the German-speaking world.

## **Sustainability**

Our project is fully sustainable at the university. Our library is on the cusp of adopting "Archive It" so that as the project grows, we will be able to accommodate its ever-increasing size. Moreover, through our Digital Humanities Action Team, staffing is never a problem. As you can see above, I have a rather large team interested in this project.