

Lecture Series ERRANS, in Time – Monday, 20 February 2017, 19:30, in English

This talk postulates that religious or quasi-religious systems and practices can be read as a defense against the ever-threatening possibility of radical reversals of meaning. This threat deserves to be named ‘the Irony Monster’ since its effect evokes a cruel kind of force: the Irony Monster ceaselessly turns coincidence into the compelling appearance of significance and thus conjures an agency that stands above the gods.

Irony, here, does not mean a rhetorical figure or a manner of speaking but refers to a configuration of events we have come to call ‘tragic irony’, a course of events in which the very action taken to avert catastrophe makes it happen all the more surely. Both literature and myth return to such configurations over and over again: Oedipus in Ancient Greece, the Old Testament’s Book of Job, or Kleist’s *Penthesilea* may serve as examples.

While Greek antiquity and Biblical monotheism, ‘The Irony Monster’ will argue, developed distinct strategies to contain or tame the monster’s force, modern agnosticism has no defense against it since its fitful courtship of the metaphysical has itself become ironic and thus devolves into perpetual oscillations. The talk will demonstrate this process through a reading of Kleist’s drama *Amphitryon*.

Silke-Maria Weineck is professor of German and comparative literature at the University of Michigan. She has published three books that investigate the relationship between antiquity and modernity and the persistence of religious figuration in secular systems: *The Abyss Above: Philosophy and Poetic Madness in Plato, Hölderlin, and Nietzsche* (2002), *The Tragedy of Fatherhood: King Laius and the Politics of Paternity in the West* (2014), and, co-edited with Victor Caston, *Our Ancient Wars: Reading War Though the Classics* (2016).

ICI Lecture Series ERRANS, in Time Conceptions of time and temporal experience seem more at odds now than ever. Hamlet’s hunch that ‘the time is out of joint’ has turned into an evergreen of critical discourse. Admittedly, ideas of physical, social, revolutionary time, internal time consciousness, or historical experience are far from settled in their respective discourses and practices. Yet attempts to harmonize or correlate the understanding of time and temporal phenomena generated in different disciplines all-too quickly – and largely with violent effect – resort to normative, if not teleological ideas of progress, efficiency, narrative sense-making, or experiential plenitude. The ICI’s current Lecture Series **ERRANS, in Time** asks whether the heterogeneous relations between discordant conceptions of time and temporality can be understood as being ‘erratically’ structured, that is, as marked by inherent misapprehensions, a dissonance that defies regulation, and an unexpected variability.

Silke-Maria Weineck

**The Irony Monster:
First and Last Deity**

