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Literature and ...? Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity: Introduction

Interdisciplinarity has been gaining in popularity over the past few decades and in some contexts even seems to have become a 'must' for innovative and successful research. This, at least, is the impression one may get from all the lip service paid to the need for interdisciplinary cooperation and from the prestige it appears to enjoy as a matter of principle, judging from the programmatic declarations in university marketing materials, the funding policies of various grant agencies, and even from a recent *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research* for undergraduate students [*sic!*], which promises "new insights and better answers to complex problems" as a result of interdisciplinary approaches (Menken and Keestra 2016, blurb). Indeed, interdisciplinarity can be extremely beneficial, and to enter a dialogue with other disciplines enables entirely unforeseen approaches, questions, and outcomes. It fosters, to borrow formulations from Dame Gillian Beer, the transformation of ideas and the destabilisation of knowledge, and thus helps "uncover problems disguised by the scope of established disciplines" (1996, 115). Interdisciplinarity is fundamentally, and often productively, transgressive, and this alone may signal its appeal to literary and cultural scholars. However, interdisciplinarity also comes with its problems, both conceptually and pragmatically, and it is both these challenges and potential benefits that this focus issue explores.

This collection results from a panel at the *Anglistentag* in Leipzig in 2019 and includes essays by all participants of that panel – if partly with a shifted focus – as well as two newly commissioned essays. The panel itself originated in a discussion at the *Anglistentag* in Hannover in 2014, when we (JMG and UK) discussed our own experiences in different interdisciplinary research contexts, work we have both continued and extended since then (see Gurr 2021; Kluwick 2013; Kluwick and Zemanek 2019; Walloth, Gurr, and Schmidt 2014). Ursula Kluwick had then already had several years of experience of working in the environmental humanities, sustainability science, and ecocriticism generally, for instance, as part of a DFG Network on the "Ethics and Aesthetics in Literary Representations of Ecological Transformations," and as a member of an exploratory group that was trying to set up interdisciplinary collaborations on the environmental crisis in the Faculty of Humanities in Bern. Jens Martin Gurr had for six years been directing a centre of inter- and transdisciplinary "Urban Systems" research in project teams including engineers, urban planners, social scientists, economists, mathematicians, as well as historians and literary scholars.

Thus, we discussed our own exhilarating as well as deeply frustrating experiences, and we surveyed existing studies in the emerging field of 'interdisciplinarity research' in which our own field of literary studies seemed – and still seems – clearly underrepresented: while there is a lot of interdisciplinary work in literary studies (or:

work in interdisciplinary literary studies), there is very little work *on* interdisciplinarity in literary studies, let alone literary studies contributions to research on interdisciplinarity. We believed then that the benefits and the challenges of such collaboration should be more systematically explored from the perspective of literary studies. This is still as necessary as it was seven years ago, when we first thought of such a panel for the *Anglistentag*: take one of the most wide-ranging as well as conceptually and empirically informed recent surveys of interdisciplinarity research, Scott Frickel, Mathieu Albert, and Barbara Prainsack's 2017 collection of essays *Investigating Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Theory and Practice across Disciplines*. In their introduction, Frickel, Albert, and Prainsack survey some 1800 studies – and they abstract helpful categories and issues for discussion, such as the "epistemological status of interdisciplinary knowledge," "structural and cultural barriers," "standards of evaluation," "the emergence and institutionalization of fields," but also the career implications for early career researchers as well as for more advanced researchers (2017b, 9). They also helpfully discuss three common if partly problematic assumptions underlying much interdisciplinary work, namely the assumptions (1) of the inherent superiority of interdisciplinary as opposed to disciplinary knowledge, (2) of constraints allegedly resulting from disciplinary silos and (3) that interdisciplinary work helps to contain or overcome "status hierarchies and power asymmetries" (Frickel, Albert, and Prainsack 2017b, 9). What is curiously absent from their impressively broad array of contributions is anything resembling a literary studies approach.¹ A similar tendency can be observed in Robert Frodeman's *Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, the second edition of which was also published in 2017, in which the most explicit engagement with literary studies happens within the context of a historical overview chapter on "Interdisciplining Humanities." In this chapter by Julie Thompson Klein and Frodeman, literary studies serves as one of four case studies discussed under the general rubric of the humanities, and this approach noticeably differs from the editorial decision to devote separate individual chapters to interdisciplinarity in the physical, the biological, and the cognitive sciences as well as mathematics, among many other fields.

It thus seems that the issues that, seven years ago, we believed would be worth exploring have not lost any of their interest and topicality – to us, to the members of the *Anglistenverband* who kindly voted for this section during the 2018 conference, and to some twenty colleagues who submitted proposals for the panel. This encouraging response might, we have reason to believe, indicate that this is not just a trendy topic which will seem passé in another seven years: while the constellations and disciplinary compositions may have changed (and we are not even sure that is the case, because the likely and not-so-likely combinations of interdisciplinary pairings have remained remarkably stable over the years), the potential benefits *and* the theoretical and methodological as well as the practical challenges will most likely remain. This focus

1 There are, it is true, a few brief remarks on the institutionalisation of American Studies in the US (Light and Adams 2017, 133-134) and one essay includes survey data on literary scholars (McBee and Leahey 2017).

issue therefore aims to explore the challenges and difficulties of interdisciplinary research as much as its benefits. It is the absence of literary studies perspectives in most research *on* interdisciplinarity that led us to devise this not as a focus issue that very broadly engages with a multidisciplinary range of perspectives on interdisciplinarity but rather to assemble literary studies perspectives on a range of interdisciplinary fields, such as cognitive literary studies, law and literature, literature and business studies, ecocriticism, evolutionary criticism,² and education for sustainable development, literature and science, literature and (health) risk research, as well as literature and urban studies. The essays in this focus issue thus cover a broad range of interdisciplinary fields. Despite this literary studies focus, however, contributors engage with some of the challenges *generally* faced in interdisciplinary collaboration.

A number of – deliberately selective – heuristic categories and distinctions and a few guiding questions, which we also asked contributors to engage with, might serve to frame the discussion in the ensuing essays. One of the main conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary research concerns the acquisition of sufficient knowledge from another field – here, one might ask what counts as sufficient "interiority" (Shattock 2007, 57).³ Is it sufficient to know enough so that one may borrow terminology, questions, methods from other fields? For Stephen Turner, the sharing of the "common language" and the "common understanding of that language" characteristic of knowledge formations (of which disciplines are "one type") is merely a "condition of communication rather than a form of communication" in itself (2017, 10). Interdisciplinarity, in this view, can only begin to develop after this initial step has been mastered with the acquisition of a new disciplinary language. But does this mean that truly interdisciplinary work has to meaningfully contribute to two or more disciplines? To express this differently, can interdisciplinarity be a solitary effort in which one absorbs and engages with knowledge generated in other disciplines, or can 'true' interdisciplinarity only happen through genuine collaboration and dialogue?⁴ This also concerns the distinction between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, which, though conceptually easy to define,⁵ is frequently somewhat more unclear in practice – indeed, one might ask how realistic or even useful such a distinction can be.

As for the definition of what counts as 'interdisciplinary,' how does this change over time and in different societal contexts? When, for instance, do established fields of interdisciplinary research become disciplines of their own, with their own academic

2 The essay by Dirk Vanderbeke and Hendrik Müller is the exception to this, as it has been jointly written by a literary scholar and a biologist.

3 See also Hartner in this focus issue.

4 As David Damrosch claims about the context of teaching, "a genuinely interdisciplinary course would be so far beyond any one person's competence that it could not be made to work under the present structure" (2013, 129).

5 In the most common usage, it seems to us, 'interdisciplinarity' requires the transfer and exchange of objects of study, research questions, or methods between disciplines, whereas 'multidisciplinary' involves no such transfers and describes a mere side-by-side engagement with related topics in more than one discipline, often resulting in collections nicely described by the German term '*Buchbindersynthese*' ('bookbinder's synthesis'). For an insightful account of different definitions, see also Julie Thompson Klein's typology (2017, esp. 22).

societies, journals, degree courses, and similar benchmarks of "legitimacy and autonomy" (Turner 2017, 13), as has long happened in the fields of, say, bioethics or medical technology or as has more recently and more tentatively happened in literary urban studies? One of the fields within literary and cultural studies that has developed most dramatically in recent years and which has, in the course of this development, influenced our discipline in general, is environmental criticism, which in its present form can be regarded as, fundamentally, itself the interdisciplinary product of the confluence between literary studies and the environmental sciences (such as biology, ecology, climate science, etc.; see Vanderbeke and Müller as well as Bartosch in this issue). And this is acknowledged, of course, in the extension of environmental criticism into the environmental humanities.

As a frame for our discussion of some central issues of interdisciplinarity, we want to propose a heuristic distinction between foundational vs. applied research and between research in established constellations as opposed to widely and wildly interdisciplinary research, between research in which there is a clearly hierarchical donor-recipient relation between disciplines as opposed to communication at eye level, between research groups organised top-down or in response to large-scale funding calls on the one hand and bottom-up initiatives on the other, and finally between generously funded as opposed to unfunded or precariously funded research. While these may of course appear in a variety of permutations, there are clearly elective affinities, so that we might – schematically – distinguish between two types of interdisciplinary research: on the one hand, primarily applied, problem-solving research, in which one discipline has a problem and another discipline provides approaches to a solution; this will frequently be top-down and often occur in fairly established constellations for which funding – frequently corporate – appears to be somewhat easier to secure; medical engineering would be an archetypal example (we propose the shorthand 'interdisciplinarity type I'). On the other hand ('interdisciplinarity type II'), there is more foundational, exploratory interdisciplinary research, which typically takes place between more than two disciplines, often in less established constellations, and in terms of less clearly defined donor-recipient relationships.⁶ As Klein contends about what she calls "methodological interdisciplinarity," the results of such forms of interdisciplinary cooperation are potentially more radical: "Individuals may also find their disciplinary methods and theoretical concepts modified as a result of cooperation, fostering new conceptual categories and methodological unification" (2017, 26). Such research is frequently only funded by some few more adventurous foundations. In such contexts, the interest of participating academics tends to be more curiosity-driven and bottom-up-oriented, and the scarcity of funding options is due to the high-risk nature of such enterprises. As the head of a mid-sized funding organisation stated in a discussion of future directions in the funding landscape, "God protect us from applications in which engineers and literary scholars propose to work together. They will never yield any meaningful results." One might add here that they would also face the practical

6 For an alternative classification that to us seems rather less based on concrete empirical observation, see Klein (2017).

challenge of having to convince reviewers from very different cultures with widely differing expectations.

As for the type of research problems addressed by these two types of interdisciplinary research, we suggest Rittel and Webber's distinction between "tame" and "wicked problems" (1973, 160) might provide a useful framework. While what they call "tame" problems can be circumscribed and fully solved, "wicked problems" frequently even elude a clear problem definition. They preclude "optimal solutions" (Rittel and Webber 1973, 155) and can only be "re-solved – over and over again" (160), more or less convincingly and in ways that generally raise new issues and entail new problems. Here, it would be tempting (if possibly simplistic) to argue that the more established forms of interdisciplinary research ('type I') tend to address primarily "tame" problems, while the more exploratory interdisciplinary research in less established combinations ('type II') predominantly tackles "wicked" problems.

In addition to such principal theoretical considerations, we are also interested in the hands-on practical challenges encountered by interdisciplinary researchers and research groups. For instance, we believe that the manner in which differences between disciplines – whether in terms of objects of study, central research interests, methodologies, publication strategies, or funding needs – are communicated to governing bodies within universities, to reviewers, funding institutions, or to the public, deserves more scrutiny: both the 'strategic' dramatisation and the downplaying of differences frequently occur in different contexts, in which they tellingly fulfil a range of functions.

As a second example of the relevance of such pragmatic considerations, the question of how communication and cooperation between different fields and their representatives actually work within interdisciplinary research teams has frequently been explored. Typical 'success factors' and common pitfalls, for instance, are discussed by several contributors to Frickel, Albert, and Prainsack's collection (2017a), as well as to *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (2017),⁷ particularly part VI. A specific facet of this hands-on negotiation of different disciplinary practices concerns the question of how such communication is reflected in collaborative interdisciplinary research output. For instance, how are disagreements and differing assessments expressed in publications resulting from such projects? How and in what formats do colleagues from different disciplines voice different opinions, say, in a joint essay? Do contributors explicitly author separate identifiable sections of an essay or do they use footnotes explicitly authored separately to document reservations and qualifications that reflect their authors' specific disciplinary perspectives? Is there an afterword that signals disciplinary divergence or that documents the process of interdisciplinary negotiation and the search for compromise? Or do project partners later comment individually on a joint publication? Do the standard formats – an essay in a journal, a joint monograph – even formally allow for such signalling of interdisciplinary struggles

7 Part VI of the *Oxford Handbook*, for instance, contains essays on funding (König and Gorman 2017), peer review (Holbrook 2017), programmes (Holley 2017), among many others.

for consensus?⁸ Beyond the interest in how such practicalities are dealt with in individual cases, this is an understudied issue in research on interdisciplinarity.

A central concept at the interface between conceptual and pragmatic concerns in research on interdisciplinarity is that of the role of "boundary objects," defined by Star and Griesemer as "an analytic concept of those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds [...] and satisfy the informational requirements of each" (1989, 393). In practice, these are terms, concepts, and artefacts that are used differently in different disciplines or between professionals and laypeople. This concurrence has two opposed effects: while, on the one hand, such "boundary objects" can serve as the initial spark for cooperation by even making a tentative mutual understanding possible in the first place, they can also suggest deceptive 'parallels' and convergences that end up creating potentially problematic misunderstandings. Even in the latter case, however, they can lead to productive debates by demanding that their meaning, applicability, and reach be clarified.⁹ Indeed, we would argue that criticism of the notion of "boundary objects" as vague or fuzzy frequently confuses object level and descriptive level. To put this differently: might not the fact that "boundary objects" in practice often result in or from lame compromises and frequently serve to gloss over conceptual or methodical differences – not least by means of deliberate ambiguity and openness – precisely be a part of their descriptive achievement at an analytical level?

In a discussion of "boundary objects" and ambiguities from a literary studies perspective, it may be worth bearing in mind the potential challenge emerging from the very different valuation of ambiguity in different fields: while ambiguity has long been regarded as a central and valorised characteristic of literary texts and while the teasing out of ambiguities and the multiplication of meanings are part and parcel of the 'business' of literary studies, most societal fields and most academic disciplines and research cultures generally seek to eliminate or at least to minimise ambiguity – law, medicine, or technology come to mind, but the same can, for instance, be said of the field of planning. Here, in a way strongly reminiscent of the notion of "boundary objects," scholars of narrative have argued that ambiguity may also foster social cohesion: by allowing more diverse groups of stakeholders to find points of identification, narratives with a certain fuzziness and indeterminacy, which leave room for interpretation and negotiation, are *more* rather than *less* socially binding than precise narratives and thus *more* conducive to generating social cohesion and to canvassing public support (Koschorke 2013, 349-352 *et passim*). A classic case in point would be programmes of political parties, which, if too specific, could hardly generate broad

8 For a discussion of a concrete case of how such disagreements may be formulated in joint publications across disciplines, see Susanne Gruss's essay in this issue.

9 For the notion of "boundary objects," see especially Star and Griesemer (1989) and Star (2010); for their role in interdisciplinary research, see also several contributions in Frickel, Albert, and Prainsack (2017a) as well as the essay by Julia Hoydis in this issue.

support across different societal groups and coalitions of interest.¹⁰ However, one will hardly want to suggest that legal texts or contracts should deliberately be ambiguous, and it may be helpful to bear in mind the limits of strategic or tolerated ambiguity: rather than genuinely resolving contentious issues, deliberate ambiguity frequently merely glosses over and 'postpones' them, so that they resurface later and often when they are least called for.¹¹

We would like to suggest that it is not least in its specific understanding of the role of ambiguity that literary studies has an important contribution to make both to interdisciplinary research *and* to research on interdisciplinarity. Thus, while we should also ask how interdisciplinary research challenges us to reflect on the questions and forms of analysis that typically concern us and on what literary studies can learn from other disciplines – do literary scholars merely tend to "retool" concepts from other disciplines, as Graham Huggan (2008, 6) has suggested? – we would here like to focus on what literary studies may have to offer both through its subject matter and material, as well as through its specific methodologies, forms of enquiry, and types of analysis.

Can and should we, for instance, make use of the recent interest in 'narrative' in all sorts of fields? Thus, a wide range of disciplines and practice fields have recently found narratives (in a very broad sense of the term) central to their concerns – from economics (Shiller 2019), via business organisation and change management (Hansen 2020) or resilience research (Goldstein et al. 2015) all the way to – yes – wildfire management (Goldstein and Butler 2010), to name but a few – often without any reference to work in literary studies: Shiller's widely discussed book, which does not contain a single literary studies source, is merely a particularly glaring example.

We might here want to think about how, as a discipline, we should deal with the only seemingly paradoxical observation that the often diagnosed decline of institutionalised literary studies, perceivable in low public esteem and dwindling student numbers, at least in North America, but increasingly also elsewhere, coincides with the growing prominence of literature in business studies, medical ethics, and numerous other academic and societal fields¹² – and with an almost ubiquitous celebration of the power of 'storytelling' and uncritical, simplistic, or downright misleading references to the importance of 'the narrative' of an institution, a city, or a community, etc. (for a critical discussion, see for instance Buchenau and Gurr 2021). What, we should ask ourselves, does it say about our discipline if we, who think we 'own' the study of narrative, are not even considered relevant sources by respectable academics in other disciplines who find 'narratives' central to their concerns? Should we lament the fact, sulk, and remain in our corner?

10 For a fuller discussion of the role of ambiguity in interdisciplinary collaboration using the field of narratives in planning as an example, see Gurr (2021, 125-127); this paragraph reuses material from this discussion.

11 For the ambivalent effects of ambiguity in strategic planning from a management perspective, see Abdallah and Langley (2014).

12 For this, see Emre's fascinating ongoing work on "post-disciplinary" professional engagements with literature and the institutional crisis of literary studies. For a brief account of her forthcoming book, see Emre (2020); for part of the argument, see Emre (2019).

In such debates about the role of our discipline in interdisciplinary contexts and in academia generally, it is useful to look at fields in which, by contrast, our contribution *is* valued, indeed explicitly sought. The field of urban planning and urban development comes to mind here: the fact that planning is essentially storytelling has long been recognised, for instance, with respect to the question of what a specific plot of land, neighbourhood, or city is at present, what it could be in the future, and how the transition from the present to this future could be accomplished. This approach may, initially, sound no different from how economics or management studies (fail to) engage with literary studies. Urban planners, however, are increasingly realising they *do* need input from literary studies and are explicitly making use of our disciplinary expertise in order to understand how narratives function and what intended and unintended effects they may have in urban development contexts (for a compelling recent account of the "narrative turn in planning," see Ameel 2021; for a conceptualisation of literary urban studies thus understood, see Gurr 2021). By the same token, cultural negotiations of climate change are increasingly recognised as an important means of raising awareness. The role of literature in fostering ecological consciousness may, therefore, be another subject in which literary and cultural studies can contribute to interdisciplinary research in meeting central societal needs, without giving up core competencies and without 'selling out' (for a conceptualisation, see Bartosch 2019). Indeed, as Richard Kerridge announced already in 1998, the ecological crisis is "also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation" (4), and literary and cultural studies, therefore, offer important expertise when it comes to understanding both the roots of and current engagements with the Anthropocene and climate change.¹³ Further fields in which literary studies can make important contributions are explored in this focus issue – in each case with a realistic assessment of the opportunities and pitfalls of such endeavours. In bringing our core analytical skills and key concepts to bear on central societal challenges, and thus by doing what we do best, we can make our work more central to interdisciplinary research. This may be one way of abdicating our dual role as academia's 'unloved children' as well as the 'cry-babies of the university,' who like to see ourselves as perpetually but undeservedly marginalised within academia (and society generally). There is, we argue, reason to believe that we may confidently and realistically claim an important role both in judicious interdisciplinary research *and* in research *on* interdisciplinarity.

Let us provide a brief overview of the essays in this focus issue: In the opening essay, Susanne Gruss explores the interdisciplinary field of 'law and literature,' offering an overview of its history from the beginnings of 'Law-and-Literature' in American law schools in the 1970s up to its recent evolution into the subfields of 'Critical Legal Studies,' 'Law in Literature,' 'Law as Literature,' 'Law and the Humanities,' and 'Law and Culture.' Foregrounding the necessity to engage with the pitfalls of

13 See, for instance, Taylor (2016) and Kluwick (2014), respectively.

interdisciplinarity, Gruss stresses the importance of treating both legal studies on the one hand and literary studies and literature on the other as equal partners in interdisciplinary endeavours. At the same time, she foregrounds the need for scholars to position themselves clearly and self-consciously with respect to their areas of expertise. Gruss rounds off her discussion with an analysis of the Shakespeare Moot Court Project, a collaboration between legal and Shakespeare studies, and ends on the plea for the interdisciplinary field of law and literature to pay more attention to the generic laws of literature as well.

Caroline Koegler's contribution on literature and business studies draws analogies to the history of 'Law and Literature,' in pointing out that both fields originally framed literature and its relation to law and to economics and business studies, respectively, in terms of moral refinement. Also like Gruss, she discusses the history of her specific interdisciplinary field and the subfields that have evolved, arguing particularly for the need to clarify the relationship between literary and cultural studies and business studies. Specifically, and drawing on her own background in literary as well as business studies, Koegler also criticises literary scholars for treating business studies as a disciplinary and ideological monolith and relates this to the unease displayed by many literary scholars working on the nexus between literature and economics in their self-ironic positionings towards their field. Advocating the integration of critique and care, she argues that interdisciplinarity can lead to forms of collaboration that encourage self-reflection and counter limiting forms of complicity, which literary scholars tend to see as an unavoidable symptom of economy-related interdisciplinary research.

Cecile Sandten moves the discussion to a different thriving new field in her engagement with the nexus between urban and postcolonial studies. Sandten surveys the field through a focus on the postcolonial metropolis; specifically, she analyses four 'Bombay' poems in order to explore how the urban studies focus on how real people live in cities can be integrated with literary studies and its interest in epistemology and representation. While she suggests possible areas of collaboration, Sandten nevertheless insists that the further development of literary urban studies also depends on the willingness of urban scholars to engage with literature on a more than purely representational level.

Marcus Hartner addresses general conceptual challenges of interdisciplinarity by focusing on a specific example from the field of cognitive literary studies: A.S. Byatt's neuroaesthetic reading of a Donne poem and the critique of her use of neuroscience by clinical scientist Raymond Tallis. On the basis of these two texts, Hartner reflects on the general challenges of interdisciplinary practice and suggests Gregory Bateson's 1941 plea for a combination of 'loose' and 'strict' thinking as a heuristic tool for conceptualising interdisciplinary borrowing, especially when it comes to balancing ideals of methodological rigour with the question of compatibility with the target discipline.

Julia Hoydis continues the enquiry into the potential role of literary studies contributions in collaborative research with the natural sciences and the life sciences by engaging with interdisciplinary risk research, focusing on the role of narratives in health risk research. Her contribution explores common ground between literary studies, cultural risk theory, and understandings of health risk: after offering a

genealogy of risk and reviewing different definitions of this concept, it discusses 'risk' and 'narrative' as "boundary objects" in the sense of Star and Griesemer (1989) and, with reference to Fleck's notion of "thought styles" (1979, *2 et passim*) argues that what constitutes risks should be understood by health risk researchers as shifting dynamically. In addition, and based on her own experience in a large interdisciplinary project, Hoydis engages with general opportunities and pitfalls of interdisciplinary communication from the point of view of a literary and cultural studies scholar.

Drawing on a long-term project involving literary scholars, sociologists of science, scientists, and fiction writers studying representations of science in literary fiction he has directed, Anton Kirchhofer's contribution further explores the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration between literary studies and the sciences, engaging with both conceptual and more practical issues in such collaborations. He also suggests how such interdisciplinary engagements can help literary scholars hone disciplinary research questions and methods. Kirchhofer's essay thus also addresses the question how literary studies can carve out a position which allows it to play more than a subservient role in such projects or how we can best bring our core competencies to bear without, as it were, 'selling out.'

In a related vein, Zoë Lehmann Imfeld builds on a two-year fellowship as a literary scholar in an environment of astrophysicists and astronomers to address recurring issues in such interdisciplinary work, among them the concerns that literary texts here are frequently tapped into merely for their mimetic qualities, while literary scholarship often cannot leverage its key competencies and hence fails to make a more substantial intervention. Having discussed benefits and shortcomings of different ways of 'doing' 'literature and science,' she illustrates her point by discussing two short stories that explore implications of the 'Schrödinger's Cat' thought experiment in quantum mechanics. She concludes that literary studies can play a more rewarding role in 'literature and science' research precisely by insisting on taking literary texts seriously for what they are rather than merely as pieces of science communication, and thus by preserving the integrity of both literature and literary studies without removing either from the interdisciplinary dialogue.

Dirk Vanderbeke and Hendrik Müller, from the dual perspective of a literary scholar and an evolutionary biologist, take as their starting point reflections on how sufficient familiarity with another field can be ensured. They illustrate this critically by engaging with different strands of ecocriticism before, in the second part of their essay, addressing key controversies within and about evolutionary criticism. Arguing against widespread reservations in the humanities against evolutionary criticism as uncritically biologicistic or problematically determinist, they here consider approaches attempting to use evolutionary processes to account for both the development of literary forms, modes, and motifs and, more fundamentally, for the human affinity to narrative and to more than purely referential uses of language.

In his essay on interdisciplinarity in literature pedagogy and education for sustainable development, Roman Bartosch takes his cue from the controversy initiated by Jonathan Franzen's 2019 essay "What If We Stopped Pretending?". Inspired by *and* deviating from the novelist-conservationist's notorious demand that, rather than

continuing to claim that climate change might still be mitigated, humanity should admit defeat and prepare for the worst, Bartosch similarly raises a number of uncomfortable questions and probes a set of established pieties about the inherent benefits of interdisciplinary research, the efficacy of literature pedagogy, and the alleged ability to promote a sense of agency in learners that is frequently ascribed to education for sustainable development. It is precisely this responsabilisation of the individual, Bartosch argues, that problematically depoliticises the debate. Bartosch, too, thus raises conceptual, institutional, and practical challenges of interdisciplinary cooperation.

We conclude with celebrated novelist and cultural theorist Tom McCarthy's keynote¹⁴ "From Paper to Pulp: A Report from No Man's Land," which explores the role of literature by reflecting on his 2015 novel *Satin Island* and the inherently 'interdisciplinary' endeavour of its protagonist, "corporate anthropologist" U., tasked with compiling "The Great Report" for a global consulting firm. Reflecting both on the processes of writing the novel and of having it translated, McCarthy here takes his cues from Mallarmé, Lévi-Strauss, and a wide range of other readings informing his own and his protagonist's attempts at a comprehensive diagnosis of the present (for a compelling reading, see Reinfandt 2017). Here, too, one is tempted to say, it is hard to state anything *about* the text that the text, allusive and highly self-reflexive as it is, does not already state itself.

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14 We wish to note here that, at the *Anglistentag*, Tom McCarthy's paper functioned as a joint keynote of our panel and of the "Making Matter Matter" panel organised by Ingrid Hotz-Davies, Martin Middeke, and Christoph Reinfandt.

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