

**Call for Papers: “(Re)Reading Ralph Ellison,” Symposium at Goethe University Frankfurt, July 19–21, 2019**

**Deadline: February 28, 2019**

**Organizers:**

Luvena Kopp (University of Tübingen)

Stephan Kuhl (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Nicole Lindenberg (University of Münster)

In 1954, the S. Fischer Verlag published Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* (1952) in a German translation under the title *Unsichtbar*. In the fall of that year, Ellison visited Frankfurt am Main for the first time while presenting his debut novel on a reading tour through Germany. He returned to Frankfurt for the second and last time in his life as the chief American delegate to the international P.E.N. congress that opened in the city on July 19, 1959. Exactly 60 years later, this symposium brings back the author to Frankfurt for the third time, in order to (re)read Ellison’s literature and life from three intersecting vantage points.

First, the symposium (re)reads Ellison’s literature and life in his own words. After his death in 1994, publications of books by Ellison have become more frequent than they were during his lifetime and his own words are becoming increasingly accessible as scholars explore the archives and retrieve previously unpublished material. The publications of *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996), *Juneteenth* (1999), and *Three Days Before the Shooting...* (2010) made Ellison’s formerly uncollected as well as his uncompleted fiction easily available, while books like *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (1995), *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray* (2000), and *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings* (2001) show the author’s depth as a cultural critic in his non-fictional writings and correspondences. The prospective publication of Ellison’s letters will grant further access to the author in his own words. How do these posthumous publications and the archives command (re)readings of Ellison’s canonical work? To what extent does the new accessibility of Ellison’s own words challenge existing biographical writings about the author?

Second, the symposium investigates how (re)reading Ellison twenty-five years after his death contributes to contemporary cultural, political, social, and economic debates. How does Ellison’s work elucidate phenomena such as digitization, the global consolidation of neoliberal capitalism, or the rise of populism in Western democracies? Given that Ellison continues to draw criticism for his supposed detachment from the Civil Rights Movement, how do his writings respond to the emergence of what Michelle Alexander termed “the New Jim Crow”? Do recent social activist movements reference Ellison’s work, and if so, in what ways?

Third, the symposium uses a link between Ellison and Goethe University Frankfurt as a frame for (re)reading the author in relation to recent developments in literary and cultural studies, philosophy, and the sciences. *Invisible Man* played a prominent role in the conceptual development of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Due to Theodor W. Adorno’s notorious disdain of jazz, the positions of the early Frankfurt School and Ellison’s jazz-infused literary aesthetic appear as unlikely companions.

However, Axel Honneth, until recently the director of Goethe University's Institute for Social Research, conducted an in-depth analysis of Ellison's debut novel to establish his concept of "invisibility," which in his theory is the antithesis of "recognition." What does it say about Ellison and the Frankfurt School that the former was so central to the latter's theoretical shift toward recognition? What are further connections between Ellison and the intellectual traditions of Goethe University and other German academic institutions? More generally, which role did and does the author play in the formation of other philosophical, sociological, literary, and cultural theories and what are promising new theoretical approaches to Ellison's life and literature?

**Confirmed speakers:**

Christa Buschendorf (Goethe University Frankfurt)

John F. Callahan (Lewis & Clark College; Ralph Ellison's literary executor)

Glenda R. Carpio (Harvard University)

Paul Devlin (US Merchant Marine Academy)

Michael Germana (West Virginia University)

Derek C. Maus (SUNY Potsdam)

The organizers seek proposals for individual papers that address the exemplary questions raised above or that in other ways clearly engage with one of the outlined vantage points. To submit a proposal, please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a biographical note of no more than 100 words to:

[frankfurt@rereadingralphellison.de](mailto:frankfurt@rereadingralphellison.de)

The deadline for proposals is February 28, 2019. Accepted speakers will be informed within two weeks after the deadline.