

German Culture - Western Civilisation

The story of a rivalry from Immanuel Kant to
Thomas Mann

3:30pm, Friday 1st October, Elsie Locke 611



In 1784, Immanuel Kant wrote about an inner societal divide, which he detected between the moralistic ‘culture’ of the educated German middle classes and the superficial ‘civilisation’ he saw represented by the Francophile aristocracy across the German states. During the war against Napoleon and the years of French occupation, the two concepts transformed from an inner societal distinction to a description of French (civilisation) and German (culture) national psyche. Using Kant as a starting point and ending with Thomas Mann and Karl Kraus, this presentation will discuss the origin and genesis of this distinction as it informed the growing tensions between Germany and Francophone as well as Anglophone Europe, ultimately culminating in two World Wars.

Andi Dorrer is a lecturer and the program coordinator of the German Program at the University of Canterbury. His research interests include literary and cultural representations of nationalism and identities. His PhD engaged on German WWI dramatic literature has recently been published as the first monograph on this topic and was awarded the Friedrich Ebert Prize 2021 for the best Dissertation or Habilitation on the Weimar Republic.