

Welcome from the Editors

The decision to learn a foreign language is to me an act of friendship. It is indeed a holding out of the hand. It's not just a route to negotiation. It's also to get to know you better, to draw closer to you and your culture, your social manners and your way of thinking.¹

John le Carré, who died as final edits were being made to the articles that appear in this issue of *Xanthos*, is best known as an author of spy fiction, born out of his own experiences in the British secret service. His death, however, also saw many members of the British modern languages community expressing their sorrow. Le Carré was a linguist, and had begun to learn German at the comparatively late age of 13, and in the days following his death, a quote from an address he gave at the German Embassy in 2017 found a second life on Twitter.² With the deadline for Brexit negotiations looming as this issue goes to press, certain British newspapers have been quick to apportion blame for their continuing difficulties to the perceived 'otherness' of Europe.³ Le Carré's view of Germany, on the other hand, offers a counterpoint to such a zero-sum view of cultures, in which cultural competency and a desire to celebrate cultural differences can bring nations closer together, rather than forcing them apart.

The three articles featured in this second issue of *Xanthos* reflect precisely this approach: one that sees engaging with foreign literatures and languages not merely for instrumentalist reasons (in Brexit trade deals or otherwise), but also for their own sake, and out of a desire to understand them — and others — better. They range in scope from the medieval to the present-day, and from short courtly poetry to lengthy Russian novels, but each of them engages with their subject matter from the same place of deliberate enquiry and careful reflection. However, they take very different approaches to achieve this same end, and we are very proud to include in the same issue both literary translation and syntactic analysis (the latter of which required an alternative citation style, in an interesting new challenge for the editorial team).

The issue was also, as readers will doubtless be aware, produced in unique and challenging circumstances shared by colleagues around the world. While the articles that

¹ John le Carré, 'Why we should learn German', *The Guardian* (2 July 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/02/why-we-should-learn-german-john-le-carre>> (accessed 18 December 2020).

² Many Tweets shared a screenshot from le Carré's 2017 *Guardian* article. The most popular was that of Wolfgang Blau, which was retweeted over 1000 times. Wolfgang Blau, 'Jean le Carré, a great European, on learning foreign languages:' (@wblau, 13 December 2020).

³ On the day of Le Carré's death, the British *Daily Mail* tabloid reported on Brexit negotiations by characterising Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, as 'Frau Nein', with the columnist Douglas Murray claiming that she has 'completely failed to understand Great Britain'. 'How 'Frau Nein' blocked a Brexit deal: Top British officials blame clergyman's daughter Angela Merkel's 'Lutheran' distaste for 'libertine' Boris Johnson', *Mail Online* (12 December 2017) <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9047055/Officials-say-Angela-Merkels-distaste-libertine-Boris-Johnson-blocked-Brexit-deal.html>> (accessed 18 December 2020).

appear in this issue were largely written before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, difficulties surrounding library access in particular made the tasks of reviewing, revising and editing submissions, key parts of our editorial work, problematic. These are under-appreciated endeavours, and we are very grateful to the authors who showed such willingness to engage with our revisions process. Likewise, we appreciate the work of the anonymous peer reviewers who provided such valuable feedback.

This second issue also marks a milestone for *Xanthos*, as many of the editorial team — among them Coline Blaizeau and Sveta Yefimenko, the two Editors-in-Chief, Ben Shears, Peer Reviewer Liaison, and myself — are moving on after coming to the end of our doctoral studies. We're excited to discover the new directions in which a new editorial team will take the journal, and are confident that future issues will be produced in the same spirit of friendship and enquiry that motivated our first two volumes.

I myself have been very fortunate over the past three years to have had a unique perspective on *Xanthos*, through my work on designing, typesetting and proofreading our first two issues. The role of design editor is an unusual one, incorporating endless wrestling with desktop publishing software, surprisingly in-depth discussions of referencing styles, and significant amounts of back-and-forth with other editors discussing the correct way to format an indented quote inside a footnote. Nevertheless, it's also been immensely rewarding, as I've had the opportunity to engage with some writing by several of the very best early-career researchers in the Modern Languages landscape. On behalf of all of the team, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all of the authors with whom we've been lucky enough to work over our first two issues, as well as to the many people who may not appear in the list of contributors, but who have played a key role in making sure that *Xanthos* is able to exist in its present form. The Doctoral College at the University of Exeter provided valuable funds to allow us to produce and host our website, xanthosjournal.com, which Gleb Severisky has maintained tirelessly since its launch. Further funding from the Humanities PGR Activities Awards scheme and support from the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures have also been invaluable, and we look forward to the exciting new areas in which a new team will take the journal in the years to come.