

Call for Papers

**“Hush! Practicing Silence in Literature and Culture”**

**FRIAS, University of Freiburg, Germany | April 15-17, 2026**

**Deadline for Submission: September 15, 2025**

Silence has always been part of conversation, part of storytelling, and a part of speech. It constitutes an ambiguous presence that looms large in literatures across space and time as well as in cultural products such as film, comics, and games, on digital platforms, and in political discourse. Silence (and its breaking) can draw attention to ‘silencings’ in the form of oppression and censorship (exemplified by the women behind the #MeToo movement), the underrepresentation of minority groups, or the invisibility of systemic inequalities. However, silence also has positive connotations – for example, when it is utilized as a means of resistance or empowerment, as an alternative mode of expression, or as a tool for introspection and deceleration.

The conference starts from the premise that literature and other cultural products function as means by which silence materializes. As a result, its ambivalent effects are newly negotiated. We seek to explore various forms and affordances of silence in Anglophone literatures and media, addressing the intentions, drawbacks, and potentialities implicated in instances and mediations of silence. Paying close attention to the political dimension of silence and silencing, we also want to examine the potential cultural work silence can perform in literature and the arts. One way in which we aim to contribute to the current turn to silence is by bringing English and American literary and cultural studies into dialogue with perspectives from other disciplines (including visual and sound studies, religious studies, and psychology), thereby paving the way for novel cross-disciplinary approaches to silence. In addition, we will practice silence ourselves over the course of the conference, uncovering its potential for academic discourse through “silent discussions”, mindfulness exercises, and other ‘quiet’ formats.

Organizers:

Anne Rügemeier & Sophia Philomena Wolf

**Confirmed Keynote Speakers:**

Dr. Nathalie Aghoro (North American Studies/Sound Studies, University of Munich/LMU)

Prof. Dr. Anne Koch (Religious Studies, University of Freiburg)

Prof. Dr. Kate McLoughlin (English Literature, University of Oxford)

Dr. Barbara Postema (Narrative Theory & Comics Studies, Groningen University)

We invite proposals for papers that engage with questions such as the following:

- Through which strategies is silence conveyed in literature? What are the interpretive or emotional effects of its manifestation in texts?
- How can we recognize and uncover historical, archival, and canonical silences within literary history and criticism?
- How is silence rendered visible and audible across different (audio-)visual media, and how do material and formal choices shape audience perception and responsiveness?
- How are the temporal and material/spatial dimensions of silence conceptualized and practiced in cultural, religious, or social rituals and artistic performances?
- When does silence constitute an act of political agency or resistance? Under what conditions does silence amount to complicity?
- What are the therapeutic dimensions of silence in the context of mental health? How can silence contribute to psychological well-being?
- How do silence and silencing manifest in digital spaces such as social media?
- What is the role of silence in mediating power relations? What is its role in political discourse?

Please send proposals of no more than 300 words and a 50-word biography to [hush@frias.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:hush@frias.uni-freiburg.de) by September 15, 2025. Notification of acceptance will be sent by October 15, 2025.

The conference will be held in person. We offer a travel bursary and accommodation to all confirmed speakers. We welcome scholars at all career stages, and especially encourage early career researchers to apply.