

## Reflective Essay

I have studied Lotte Reiniger, creator of the first fully animated feature film, for my entire undergraduate career. My first project compared Reiniger to other filmmakers that I could prove she had connections to. I watched films by Reiniger and her contemporaries and read about German film movements from 1910 through 1930 — namely expressionism, absolute film and the avant-garde. I made my own film, *The Golem*, to juxtapose principles of expressionism with Reiniger's style. My new research paper goes beyond *The Golem*, responding to how my previous research was limited by access to sources and my own naiveté.

The LMU's interlibrary loan system had given me access to the anthology *Animation and Avant Garde: Lotte Reiniger and Absolute Film* — a seminal publication on Reiniger — but I had not read very much about Weimar Germany. When presenting *The Golem*, I met LMU history professor, Dr. Elizabeth Drummond, with whom I would later take an independent study. Professor Drummond directed me to explore beyond film into the Weimar cultural, artistic and political context in which Reiniger lived. Professor Drummond pushed me to realize that I had used terms like 'expressionism' and 'avant-garde' without understanding the historical context or that those terms are adopted from other mediums like theater and dance.

My new paper was the final for my course with Professor Drummond, but I wanted it to be about more than the investigations we conducted. I wanted to combine my new understanding of Weimar with knowledge I collected during my self-planned travels in Europe. When researching for *The Golem*, I was limited to viewing only films that I could purchase or find online. Traveling to Europe enabled me to visit archives at the British Film Institute and Tübingen City Museum, and meet researchers whose work I had previously cited, like Dr.

Caroline Ruddell, Tashi Petter and Hannes Rall. The archives contained a wealth of pieces by Reiniger and valuable sources like photographs and news clippings saved by Reiniger, letters written by Reiniger and her husband, pieces she had preserved, and memorabilia from her films.

Having never previously visited an archive, I had not imagined so many primary source materials could still exist. I used to think that in studying an artist like Reiniger, you could only access the work she finished and distributed, like final films. The British Film Institute and Tübingen Museum contained materials that provided a more direct vision into Reiniger's mind: those sketches and scraps would have been stored in Reiniger's own studio as records of her daily life and business correspondence. My interviews with Ruddell and Petter also showed me that I had misread their work. Both women had consulted a wider variety of resources than I had known: the few published papers I had read were only a shallow survey of their research. My interactions with Ruddell, Petter and Drummond pushed me to realize that in research, you never finish reading all the relevant sources. There are many ways to evaluate and understand the same event or person.

I started my new paper by challenging the things I had previously assumed about Lotte Reiniger. My earlier research and *The Golem* compared Reiniger to her male contemporaries in film, evaluating her in a masculine archetype. My work with Professor Drummond helped me understand the gender divide in Weimar Germany, and my interviews and time with the archives showed me that Reiniger was not only aware of how she was disregarded in her time for her sex, but she chose to work within the female stereotype. She embraced her status as an outsider, while challenging the system that deemed her as such.

Realizing that Lotte Reiniger accepted and rejected the gender norms of her time convinced me to write my final paper on the female artists of Weimar. I wanted to give back to

historic women the power of self-determination: they had defined themselves as artists a century ago, and they were all inspired by artistic events and styles outside of their mediums and fields. Though they surely suffered hardships due to their sex and circumstances, each woman had also chosen how they described themselves and how they styled their work.