To the SLLC Travel Award Committee:

I am applying for funding for presenting a paper at the 37th Annual German Studies Association Conference in Denver, CO, October 3-6, 2013.

“Women Aren’t Just a Sexy Presentation Space’: Charlotte Roche’s Appeal Against ‘Female’ Beauty Expectations”

This paper investigates the highly debated method of TV moderator and author Charlotte Roche in her debut novel *Weilands (Feuchtgebiete, 2008)* which draws attention to the social expectation of “female” perfection. The novel was equally seen as a (pop)feminist manifesto and postmodern pornography. The protagonist, Helen Memel, is admitted to the hospital with an anal fissure after shaving herself too vigorously. During her hospital stay, she shamelessly demonstrates her disdain for hygiene as well as her unrestrained sexuality. But even though the protagonist harshly criticizes today’s beauty norms for women, she remains a prisoner of her own body and emotions, displaying self-destructive tendencies which mainly originate in a highly problematic mother-daughter relationship. Ultimately, Charlotte Roche’s debut novel proves to be emblematic for the backlashes and contradictions involved in any attempt to subvert or reclaim “femininity”.

The paper I presented explores the ambiguous image of beauty in Charlotte Roche’s bestselling debut novel *Wetlands (Feuchtgebiete, 2008)*, which was equally seen as a feminist manifesto and as postmodern pornography. The female protagonist harshly criticizes the ideal of the clean, shaved, and well-shaped female body. At the same time, however, she remains as obsessed with the female body as the women she loathes, who slavishly follow beauty trends. Furthermore, the deeply disturbed relationship to her mother evokes self-destructive tendencies that play into the protagonist’s provocative behavior.

Though it has been extensively discussed in the popular press and widely translated, Charlotte Roche’s bestseller has not yet received much attention on an academic level. My paper demonstrates that *Wetlands* exemplifies the two-fold nature of current German feminism: Younger feminists feel the need to separate themselves from the aims and demands of the second-wave movement of the 1970s, and they heavily focus on an individualized, consumer oriented feminism influenced by pop culture. Yet, with their neo-liberal attitude of absolute freedom of choice, they run the risk of repeating those oppressive societal structures which feminism actually strives to overcome.

This paper evolved as a side project from my dissertation which has the title “‘Female’ Madness in German Literature of the 20th and 21st Century”. It offered me the chance to look more deeply into the works of Charlotte Roche than I will be able to in the context of my dissertation. Furthermore, the discussion ensuing my presentation offered me new ideas and perspectives for my further research.