INTERNATIONAL FEUCHTWANGER SOCIETY

CALL FOR PAPERS:

Feuchtwanger and the Theater

INTERNATIONAL FEUCHTWANGER SOCIETY CONFERENCE
USC Libraries and Villa Aurora,
A three-day conference between September 16-19, 2026, Los Angeles

The twelfth conference of the International Feuchtwanger Society (IFS) will take place September 16-19, 2026 in Los Angeles. It is jointly organized by the University of Southern California Libraries and the International Feuchtwanger Society, in collaboration and with support of the USC School of Dramatic Arts, the USC Max Kade Institute, Villa Aurora/Thomas Mann House, the Goethe Institute Los Angeles.

This conference is the first ever to be devoted to the role of theater in the life and work of Lion Feuchtwanger. Feuchtwanger gained international fame as a novelist, but he also produced a substantial body of dramatic works. These include around eighteen original plays and several adaptations, among them translations from Sanskrit, Greek, Spanish, Italian, and Russian. Between 1915 and 1930 there were about 5,000 stage performances of his dramatic works. Feuchtwanger, the future bestselling author of novels, was in his forties when he published his first successful novel, *Jud Süss*, in 1925. Until then he had mainly worked in the theater, as a playwright, theater critic, director, dramaturge, and advisor for stage publishers. Please see the appendix for additional details about Feuchtwanger's career in the theater.

The conference will explore all aspects of Feuchtwanger and the theater, situating his dramatic works within their cultural and political context. We invite papers on Feuchtwanger's plays and their productions, as well as their reception; on Feuchtwanger's ideas about the theater, such as his concept of "the dramatic novel;" on his work as a theater critic; on Feuchtwanger's networks in Weimar theater; and on Feuchtwanger's attempts to write for Hollywood. In addition, we welcome papers on the relation between Feuchtwanger's dramatic work and his novels, as well as about contemporary stage adaptations of his novels, or earlier adaptations of his plays for television. Other topics of interest include the significance of theater for the German-speaking exile community in California and beyond, as evidenced for instance by such outstanding cultural events as Max Reinhardt's 1934 production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Hollywood Bowl. We invite papers about exile experiences in theater, as well as playwrights and performers working in theater in the German-speaking exile community in the United States and elsewhere. We welcome submissions from a variety of disciplines such as performing arts, art history, and gender studies.

Abstracts are due January 9, 2026. You will be notified about the decision regarding your abstract no later than March 6, 2026.

Papers should not exceed 20 minutes. Please submit a PDF of your brief abstract (maximum 300 words) to conference organizers Taylor Dwyer (tdwyer@usc.edu), Margrit Froelich (froelich@evangelische-akademie.de), Herwig Lewy (herwiglewy@gmail.com).

Papers by graduate students and postdocs who are researching the conference topic are especially welcome. The IFS supports new scholars by providing them with opportunities to present their work and facilitating a stimulating exchange between young researchers and those already established in the field. Please share this Call for Papers with your students and encourage them to submit an abstract.

The conference organizers encourage in-person attendance; those unable to travel can deliver their papers remotely.

The conference will take place in a hybrid format so that audience members can watch presentations via Zoom remotely.

We would like to make presenters aware of this, as written consent to record and make available your presentation will be required.

The organizers will seek funding for travel and accommodation for accepted speakers but in the current political and economic landscape, it is likely that funding will be minimal, if it can be secured at all. Since these funds are limited, participants with access to funding through their home institutions are asked to apply for this funding first. Feel free to contact Taylor Dwyer (tdwyer@usc.edu) with any questions.

A selection of revised conference papers will be published in a volume of the Feuchtwanger Studies series (Peter Lang: Oxford).

Conference languages: German and English.

Appendix:

Feuchtwanger was fascinated by the theater from early on. While still a student, he began working as a theater critic, for example writing about Max Reinhardt's influential production of Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," commenting "On the Psychology of the Stage Reform," or reviewing a production of an ancient play he had seen during a trip to Syracuse (Italy). Feuchtwanger also wrote profound essays on the theater, such as "The Adventure and the Drama" or "Dramatic Art and Religiosity," but often also about seemingly peripheral topics such as "What is the Meaning of 'Journalistic'?" or "The Beginnings of French Theater Journalism." Several of his novels include important passages about the theater, giving evidence of his passion for the theater. Feuchtwanger's novels were often preceded by plays in which he addressed a chosen topic.

Feuchtwanger's early successes as a playwright coincide with World War I and its immediate aftermath, and they testify to his ambition to overcome cultural and national boundaries. In 1914 he completed his first dramatic version of Aeschylus' "The Persians," and he also adapted plays from the Spanish and British Renaissance (Calderon, Webster). In 1917, Feuchtwanger directed the German premiere of Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," introducing German audiences to one of the most innovative playwrights of this era. Feuchtwanger was intimately familiar with both tragedy and comedy, and he also focused in his plays on the tension between two opposite philosophical principles. Inspired by the philosophies of Nietzsche and Buddha, one of his core ideas was the notion of the human being torn between action and contemplation. Plays like "Warren Hastings – Gouverneur of India" (1916), which initially was censured for its all-too friendly view of England, and "Vasantasena" (1916), a drama inspired by a classic Sanskrit tale, made Feuchtwanger the most sought-after playwright in his hometown Munich during the last two years of the war. His drama "The Prisoners of War" (1919), a play about the romance of a German woman and a French prisoner of war that breaks apart under the social pressures of the two hostile nations, was censored in Germany. Yet it was the first literary work from Germany published in France after the end of World War I. Feuchtwanger's drama "Thomas Wendt" (1920)

is a timepiece (labeled by Feuchtwanger as “Dramatic Novel”), written under the impact of the revolution in Bavaria 1918/19 and its subsequent crushing. The protagonist is a writer, who struggles to describe the reality that collapses around him during the violent political upheavals in 1918/19. During that time Feuchtwanger discovered the talent of the young Brecht and helped the aspiring playwright to get his play “Drums in the Night” produced in Berlin. He collaborated with Brecht time and again (e.g. “Kalkutta, 4. Mai” [1926], a new version of “Warren Hastings;” which became a major success in the theater). Moreover, Feuchtwanger’s notion of the “dramatic novel” inspired Brecht’s “epic theater.”

Irrespective of his international fame as a novelist, Feuchtwanger never turned his back on the theater. His last plays, “Weapons for America” (1943/1962), “The Devil in Boston” (1946/1948), and “The Widow Capet” (1947/1956), written in Pacific Palisades during his later years, focus on historical subjects, while commenting on contemporary issues in McCarthy’s postwar America.