

## **'IN DER WELT DER FARBEN': COLOUR IN/AND POETRY AROUND 1900**

### **Abstract**

The liberation of colour was central to the development of modern art—and, as I argue in ‘In der Welt der Farben: colour and/in poetry around 1900’, to the development of modern poetry. Around 1900, researchers—physicists, psychologists, linguists, philosophers—made colour central to their work, asking questions such as: what is colour? How do we perceive it? And how can we communicate this experience? My book turns to four poets who addressed these same questions, using colour to explore the relationship between language and perception, between art and reality. Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke may stand at opposing poles of German Modernist poetry, but they are united by a shared interest in the visual arts—and an ambivalence towards the move to abstraction. Through colour, they attempt to write poetry to rival painting, whether George’s aesthetics of the surface or Rilke’s multidimensional ‘Dinggedichte’. Wassily Kandinsky and Else Lasker-Schüler approached the problem from the opposite direction: as multimedia artists, they brought colour into their poetry to explore the possibility of a universal artwork, with colour as a universal language. Bringing together research into colour in science and spiritualism, art history and linguistics, I paint a picture of the ‘world of colour’ that provided the backdrop for the innovations of these four poets and artists, offering a new perspective on their work, while broadening the currently blossoming field of colour studies in which literature, and above all, poetry, is often neglected.

### **Chapter Outline**

*Introduction:* A world of colour?

*Chapter 1:* Stefan George: The aesthetics of the surface

*Chapter 2:* Rainer Maria Rilke: The dimensions of art

*Chapter 3:* Wassily Kandinsky: Colour universals/colour universes

*Chapter 4:* Else Lasker-Schüler: The colour of experience

*Conclusion:* Colour beyond meaning