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FROM THE EDITOR

In its sixteenth year, *Focus on German Studies* has once again succeeded in accomplishing its original goal: not only to provide an outlet and discussion forum for graduate students in German Studies, to share their scholarly work, but also to offer an excellent networking opportunity between graduate students and faculty beyond their local institutions. Each year the German Studies Department at the University of Cincinnati offers advanced graduate students this unique opportunity. Since 1993, the department (in connection with the Graduate School) has been able to provide one advanced PhD candidate with an editorial assistantship. While our graduate student training almost exclusively focuses on research and teaching, the work invested in this venture - mainly organizing a graduate student conference as well as in editing a scholarly journal - in turn proves to be an invaluable experience in acquiring knowledge that future scholars need.

Little did I know, I came to the University of Cincinnati as a first-year PhD student in 2005 what kind of opportunities I would be given here at UC. At the end of my first quarter, I only had a vague idea what *Focus on German Studies* was all about. I was then approached by the book review editor to consider writing a book review for this graduate student journal. The book review editor praised the journal's immense value to the department and its remarkable reputation within the world of German Studies. This innocent encounter marked the beginning of my journey within the world of *Focus on German Studies*. In the last four years, I have written several book reviews, conducted interviews for, as well as copy-edited three issues of *Focus on German Studies*. Eventually I organized the annual student conference and finished editing this volume that you now hold in your hands.

Having been involved with the journal for such a long time, I have had the opportunity to work closely with three excellent editors. I am immensely grateful for the patience, advice and experience they shared with me. But my thanks also go to all editors before them who envisioned this project that has continually seen growth and change. Moreover, I experienced first hand how well known this journal is. When attending the annual conference of German Studies Association in 2008, various German Studies professors congratulated me on editing *Focus on German Studies*. All of these professors have either been interviewed, have peer-reviewed articles or even have – as graduate

students – published in the journal. Once again, this goes to show that we have not only maintained our reputation, but also ascertained that our name continues to spread further and wider through academia.

During my tenure as Editor-in-Chief, I came to realize how much responsibility lies with the editor. My predecessor Todd Heidt called it “a veritable academic decathlon”: e-mailing, snail-mailing, accounting, grant writing, selecting, requesting, following up, keeping to deadlines and vice versa. However, it would not have been possible without an extensive network of support in this department, at the University of Cincinnati as well as with the German Studies community at large. When looking at the table of contents, the reader will get a glimpse of the people who made this volume possible.

On October 31 and November 1, 2008 we hosted our Thirteenth Annual *Focus on German Studies* Conference in the Max Kade Cultural Center at the University of Cincinnati. The topic was “Mediating the Message: The Poetics of Communication in German Literature, Language, Film and Culture” and concerned itself with various forms of media, their depiction and underlying communication processes within the realm of German literature, film and culture. It addressed the methodological development and refinement of media theory inherent in both literature and culture as well as the discussion of artistic works that serve as a platform for exposing and analyzing discourses that emanate boundaries that are fluid at best. We also discussed the use of media and communication as tools that have always been prone to: the power to convey ideas, images, concepts and thoughts that have shaped our cultural knowledge and influenced individuals or entire people for centuries. In the age of digital media, ideas and notions are now transmitted in the blink of an eye. The question of reality and validity, however, still remains open.

All of the papers presented during the conference responded to how communication processes work in the framework of literary texts and films at large. The papers presented engaged a wide range of methodologies and primary sources as well as made an attempt to better understand the interplay between media and communication and the effects they exert upon the larger context of German culture. We welcomed fourteen presenters, some of whom traveled far and wide from countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Italy, to present their original research and share it at this venue.

Focus on German Studies, in conjunction with the Charles Phelps Taft Research Center, invited Dr. Katrin Sieg from Georgetown University to deliver the keynote address. The topic of her lecture was

entitled “German Theater in the Age of Intermediality”. Dr. Sieg’s work often engages such arguments and projections of culture across physical and theoretical boundaries. Her accomplishments within German Studies at large and specifically in the field of theater and visual culture have been decisive in creating methodologies and discourses in visual culture studies. Her influence within the field of German theater studies continues to grow and her importance in this arena is immeasurable.

For the first time in *Focus on German Studies* history, we were able to secure a second speaker. In conclusion of the conference, Austrian-Iraqi writer and filmmaker Susanne Ayoub gave a unique presentation. She presented on one literary topos involving various forms of media. She first read a short story entitled “Revolution” from her book “Die Welt, an der ich schreibe” (2005). Then we listened to short sequences from her audio book “Geboren in Bagdad”. Finally, the audience viewed the screening of her short documentary “Baghdad Fragments” (2007). Later on, she described how all of these semi-fictional stories were intertwined with each other. With this artistic ending of our graduate student conference, we were able to see a successful attempt to translate one idea into many forms of media – a multi-media presentation that brought together several artistic forms to convey one common literary theme. Our interdisciplinary conference proved to be a fruitful venue attracting a myriad of scholars, faculty, graduate as well as undergraduate students across the disciplines that were interested in and inquisitive about papers and panels to discuss the complicated nexus of media and German language, literature, film and culture.

Our call for submissions for the journal received 35 submissions this year from three different continents (from as far away as Australia) as well eight countries. All submissions underwent a rigorous selection process by faculty reviews and in the end six papers were accepted. Thank you to our board of referees for their thoughtful and constructive criticism of this year’s submissions.

The contributions in this volume explore a variety of themes and approaches. The first two articles focus on contemporary German literature. The journal begins with Daniele Vecchiato’s essay, which examines Grünbein’s becoming of a poet and traces his poetic dialogue with the oeuvre of Gottfried Benn and Ossip Mandelstam, specifically in Grünbein’s cycle *Monologische Gedichte*. In particular, the author seeks out Grünbein’s lectures and interviews to reconstruct an idiosyncratic definition of modern poetry and utilizes media theory to interpret Grünbein’s communicating with Benn and Mandelstam, respectively. In the second article, Guido Schenkel examines Feridun Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak*

Sprake and *Koppstoff*. By comparing inherent constructions of gender with regard to spatial, social and linguistic mobility in the above-mentioned texts, the author argues that Zaimoğlu essentially subverts, mocks, and even rejects common preconceptions of Otherness in Germany.

The next two articles concern themselves with German literature and visual/media culture of the early 20th century. Peter-Christian Pohl investigates the depiction of media in modern German literature. While examining the use of print media in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, utilizing Martin Heidegger's *Gerede* as theoretical background, the author contrasts his findings with the usage of visual media in Franz Kafka's fragment *Der Verschollene* using Walter Benjamin's work as a theoretical approach. He argues that although his comparison discloses how mechanisms of print and of visual media constitute a series of events as well as subjects, collective and individual certainty produced by journalistic (visual) rhetoric is however extremely fragile. Nora Hoffmann's essay on Theodor Fontane's *Mathilde Möbring* examines the protagonists Mathilde as well as Hugo by analyzing their visual attributes in the text. Hoffmann is interested in the characters' ability as well as habit of 'seeing' which are interpreted as signs of a general perception of themselves and the world respectively. Fontane's play of gender roles and his assignment of visual media to the specific gender make this interpretation in its contemporary context particularly fascinating.

The final pair of articles in this volume deals with different perspectives on reality. Till Greite looks at the psychiatric institution "Am Steinhof" as a topographical location, which has been defined by police, psychiatric, juristic and administrative interventions over time. He analyzes this historic power struggle with regard to Thomas Bernhard's narrative *Geben*. By attempting to flesh out binary constellations of the normal and the pathological, Greite discovers Bernhard's playful criticism towards Anti-psychiatry. In turn, David-Christopher Assmann's essay focuses on production and construction of the literary *auteur*. By examining the recent scholarly debate of "the return of the author within literature", Assmann skillfully sketches out the difference between the "individually acting" author (production) and the discursive/collective element of the author within the literary system (construction).

This year's unusually high number of book reviews was edited by Marie Büsch. The reviews engage with well-established authors like Peter Handke and with promising newcomers like Julia Zange and Alina Bronsky. Christian Kracht's new novel is as much part of the list as Anna Mitgutsch's *Zwei Leben und ein Tag* and Markus Orths' *Zimmermädchen*. The

2008 winner of the Deutsche Buchpreis, Uwe Tellkamp's *Der Turm*, was part of our selection as well as several longlist aspirants such as Karen Duve's *Taxi* and Feridun Zaimoğlu's *Liebesbrand*. The review section also includes drama such as Hugo Ball's collected plays.

The subject matter of the selected secondary works covers a broad spectrum from the Middle Ages to the present, from sexuality to terror and from literature to film. The edited volumes by Albrecht Classen and Gerrit-Jan Berendse together with Ingo Cornils illustrate the richness of their field with contributions on sexuality in the Middle Ages and on issues concerning Baader / Meinhof, respectively. Katharina Gerstenberger's book on Berlin and Post-Wall Literature deals with current issues as much as Cheesman's work on Turkish settlers. Aly's provocatively titled *Unser Kampf* examines the 68 Generation and RAF terror in Germany whereas König inspects Günter Grass's unveiling of his past in a short monograph on the trouble of remembering. Beilein takes a closer look at Austrian literature from 1986, Long studies Sebald and his work in regards to modernity and Presner goes deeper into the connection between *Mobile Modernity. Germans, Jews, Trains*. Picking up Handke from the primary work section, Weymann examines *Intermediale Grenzgänge* in her work on novels by Handke, Weiss and Bernhard. Secondary works on film by Haase and Fay, on poetry by Eskin, or on theory by Weber round off the carefully selected list of books being reviewed in this year's volume of *Focus on German Studies*. We would like to thank the reviewers for their time and effort and hope to have awakened the desire in the reader to peruse the fruits of their labor.

This year's interview section consists of two compelling as well as informative interviews. The first is an interview Marie Büsch conducted with Christiane Ivanović, this year's Max-Kade Professor from the University of Tokyo. They had a lively discussion about German Studies as a subject and the reception of German literature in Asia or Japan, respectively. I had the opportunity to talk to Austrian-Iraqi author and filmmaker Susanne Ayoub. The treatment of her Austrian-Iraqi heritage on the silver screen, the reception of her biographical documentary in the United States, and the usage of the same topic in different literary genres were the topics of this interview.

Next year's editorship will be in the hands of Marie Büsch who is currently planning the upcoming conference. The fourteenth annual *Focus on German Studies* graduate student conference, entitled "Morphing Identities and the Merging of Cultures in German Literature, Language and Film" will be held on October 16 and 17, 2009 in the Max Kade German Cultural Center at the University of Cincinnati. For further

information please refer to the advertisement in the Announcements section at the back of the journal. Next year's book review editor will be Joshua Arnold who already dedicated a great deal of time to the book review section and copy-editing process this year. *Focus on German Studies* will certainly flourish in their hands next year. I wish them both much success with the conference and with Volume 17.

Working as the editor of *Focus on German Studies* has given me a wonderful insight into the world of publishing, scholarship, and networking opportunities with graduate students and professors from a variety of universities, as well as authors, editors, and many other interesting people. I would like to express my appreciation to the Department of German Studies at the University of Cincinnati for entrusting me with the position of editor: Acting Department Head Todd Herzog, graduate advisor Sara Friedrichsmeyer as well as Katharina Gerstenberger deserve sincere thanks for their continued support of the journal and the annual conference. I would also recognize the Graduate Student Governance Association of the University of Cincinnati for their continued financial support. The Graduate School at the University of Cincinnati has provided assistance for this journal from its inception. Graduate School Dean Neville Pinto is due a great amount of credit for his support and dedication to his project. I would like to express sincere gratitude to The Charles Phelps Taft Research Center as well as the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for their generous financial support. Additional thanks go to Volume 15's editor, Todd Heidt, for his helpful suggestions and support. Thank you to my fellow graduate students of the University of Cincinnati German Graduate Student Association for their enthusiastic support of last year's conference and of the journal itself. Finally, Ferenc Traser deserved a special mention for invaluable technical support and his abundant design ideas for the conference as well as for the layout of the journal.

Alexandra Hagen
