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# Being at Home in the Other: Thoughts and Tales from a Typically Atypical *Germanist*

*Mark W. Roche (Notre Dame University)*

There is a nice joke about academics. It goes something like this: "You join another professor for lunch, and he immediately and incessantly talks only about himself. After twenty minutes, he pauses and says, 'Enough about me. Let me tell you about my work.' Then after listening to him pour forth for another twenty minutes, you finally hear, 'OK. Enough about my work. Let me tell you what others are saying about my work.'"

The joke evokes our unease about talking too much about ourselves or hearing more than we want about others. Yet I want to balance it with a story that offers the opposite perspective and might help justify our anthology and this essay. Some years ago I finished the draft of a book about the value of a liberal arts education (Roche 2010). I gave it to two colleagues for feedback. By coincidence I received their feedback the same day. I had lunch with a historian who liked it but observed that it operated mainly at the conceptual level. In order to grab the reader, he said, historians tend to open their books with stories. Where are you in the book? You went to Williams, you studied abroad, you led a liberal arts college. Why don't you wind your own story into the book? I then had dinner with a philosopher, who said: It's good, but much too positive, too idealistic. You need to talk about the challenges of realizing the liberal arts, especially with faculty members who might be unwilling to move beyond their own specialty or discipline. That weekend I dictated 10,000 words to my computer, all personal anecdotes, which I then slowly wound into the book. Those personal stories gave the manuscript color and texture, and so it became a much better book, more than a string of concepts. I found the genre—integrating ideas, anecdotes, and statistics—appealing enough that I chose it again when writing a book on challenges and strategies in serving as a dean (Roche 2017).

So at the risk of falling into the role of the ugly academic, I will, as I believe can sometimes be interesting or even helpful to others, tell you my tale, winding into it responses to the questions we have been asked to

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consider.[1] I cover three areas. First, my experiences as a German literature scholar in the age of German studies. Second, my work in the humanities, which has focused on interpretation, intellectual history, and aesthetics. Third, my six years as a chairperson and eleven years as a dean, including my scholarship on higher education. In each section I interweave comparisons between Germany and the US, recounting my experiences with both traditions.

## I

I begin with the most significant development in American *Germanistik* during my career, a widening of the field from language and literature to interdisciplinary German studies.

Unlike an ambitious friend of mine, who said he learned German in order to read *Faust* in the original, I had only mundane reasons, hardly worth retelling, for having chosen German. In the fall of my sophomore year at college, I was struggling to read novels and stories by Rilke, Kafka, and Mann in the original and having to look up too many words. I resolved one night that I would make my way to Germany as quickly as possible, so as to leap ahead in the language, or perhaps even drop German. I went to Bonn that spring. Those seven months abroad were pivotal. Everything was an existential learning experience. Everything. All was new to me, and I soaked up the language, developed an insatiable curiosity about German society, history, politics, literature, and philosophy. It became clear that German would now always be a part of me.

During my first two years of college I had become especially interested in literature and philosophy, which opened up new and fascinating worlds. German, it turned out, was extremely rich in both literature and philosophy, including their intersection. I knew early on that I would enjoy teaching, and by the time I embarked on my senior thesis, I also wanted to do research. As a *Germanist* I understood that I could continue to pursue interests also beyond literature.

In some ways I was a student of German studies before encountering the term. I majored in the History of Ideas, which introduced me to Greek literature and philosophy, historical-critical Bible studies, and early Christian theology; to the development of modern science and philosophy; and to historical methodologies. Our senior seminar was devoted to one idea through time. We also developed our own concentration by selecting a cluster of courses. I combined courses in German literature, on Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and on German history to develop a focus on German Literature and Thought.

I continued my exploration of German studies by earning a graduate degree in philosophy at the University of Tübingen. When I was

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there, I noticed a strange paradox. Because of their liberal arts education, American undergraduates were broader than their German counterparts, but German graduate students had more range than their American peers. At the time a graduate degree in Germany required two majors or a major and two minors. Moreover, Germany had a tradition, foreign to Americans, of students visiting lectures in other disciplines, purely for the intrinsic value of being exposed to the content or to great lecturers. Credits played no role.

I grew to admire many aspects of the German university. First was the freedom of students to pursue whatever courses interested them, a legacy of *Lernfreiheit*, a kind of academic freedom for students. *Lernfreiheit* ensured the student's freedom to learn independently and without interim exams. German students—and I with them—had the flexibility to pursue intellectual questions in an organic way. As a result of such independence the best German students were self-motivated. True education has freedom as one of its prerequisites.

Second was the tremendous engagement students had with their studies. We developed intellectual friendships that were more substantial and intense than I had experienced as an American undergraduate. Because there was so little structure, with few assignments, our advancement had as much to do with us and our conversations as with what was going on in the classes. We had to take the initiative, but that was not a problem; the questions we raised with one another were fascinating.

Such explorations had no bounds. I can remember discussions with fellow students in the swimming pool and the locker room: What were the differences in the ways that East and West Germany taught the Holocaust? Which of Shakespeare's tragedies was the greatest? How would contemporary science address Kant's cosmological antinomies? Surely, the German tradition that recognizes intellectual work as a calling and that elevates intrinsic over instrumental value played a role in fostering such an environment. In comparison with Americans, German students score much higher on interest in general education and *Bildung* over against income and status (Roche 2014, 279). Whereas business, at 19.6%, is by far the largest major in the US, only 8.6% of German students study business (Roche 2014, 55–56).

Third, focused courses were a tremendous advantage. At the German university I experienced close reading for the first time. Seminars tended to be on discrete topics, which facilitated our learning extraordinary amounts about focused areas of inquiry and in ways that could become models for future scholarship. In a seminar on Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Science of Logic), we talked extensively about the entire work, but in terms of close analysis we made it through just over 10% of the two volumes. The class opened my eyes to the value of lingering over a text. The practice, I saw, was well suited to the seminar format, which had

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originated in Germany a century earlier: students, and not only professors, were to be engaged in research.

I felt privileged because my German counterparts often lacked the wider orientation I had received at Williams, where we had introductory and overview courses in a variety of disciplines. In their first semesters German students were often lost at sea. The broad education I had received at home combined with focused seminars in Germany seemed to me to offer a perfect combination, an ideal education.

Fourth, faculty members were not narrowly interested in one period or genre but covered an entire field. This was partly driven by the low number of professors. At an American university, in contrast, faculty members might apportion, say, all of English literature by specialization. In Germany the expectation in literature was that the *Habilitation* would be on a different period and genre than the dissertation. Whereas a German professorship in theology would not be awarded without the faculty member knowing Hebrew and Greek, in the US one can become an endowed chair in theology without such knowledge—simply by developing expertise in a subfield such as ethics or systematics. The German environment cultivated breadth, for which German scholars were to me models. Jochen Schmidt and Wilfried Barner, two of my favorite teachers, were close readers of German literature whose teaching and scholarship were informed by historical and intellectual horizons reaching back to the Greeks.

Despite this breadth, Germany did not have anything resembling German studies. Few, if any, literature professors in Germany even today would ever venture to teach Kant or Marx or Weber, as we do here. These were the provinces of scholars from other disciplines.

My subsequent graduate studies at Princeton were focused on literature, but the exam structure incorporated flexibility, which I found superb. First, we were to create our own topics and reading lists, of primary and secondary literature, on which we would be given written exams. One topic should be diachronic, the other synchronic. The idea was that one or the other would lead toward an eventual dissertation, the other to a future course, so they were forward-looking. The second part of the exam was more prescribed. We were to master twenty great works of German literature from the *Nibelungenlied* to *Doctor Faustus*. We then had an oral exam with the entire faculty, an intense and engaging experience. Preparation gave us ample opportunities to learn together, and afterwards we had a work from virtually every period or genre that could be wound in to unanticipated teaching assignments.

In my dissertation I offered new readings of ambiguities in Schiller's essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry) and of narrative voices in Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion*. The dissertation also explored Büchner's inversion of intellectual traditions in his

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novella fragment *Lenz*. I was happy to have introduced new readings of major works and in each case to make intellectual history productive for close readings. I received superb counsel from my advisor, Walter Hinderer, who combined the German scholarly model with the supportive tendencies of American professors.

I recognized many informal differences between German and American academic culture. After a lecture in Germany, faculty may well criticize the speaker's thesis aggressively or offer a mini-presentation from the questioner's area of expertise. Here one is more likely to hear something like, "Anna, I disagree with you, but if you were to add the following point to your argument, you could perhaps strengthen it further." Both models have their advantages: the American model is more nurturing, the German model more intense.

When I gave my job talk at Ohio State in 1984, I spoke about laughter in Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*. The talk was in English, but I delivered the quotations in German. I began with a short joke, which elicited laughter; I then stepped back and noted that the laughter in *Doctor Faustus* is of a different kind, a diabolical laughter. After the presentation, I handled a half dozen or so questions. Then came a question in German. I assumed that this was a test of my linguistic abilities and so responded in German. My German wasn't bad at the time, so I spoke with good diction and without seemingly making any grammatical or stylistic mistakes, but I eventually realized that I was not saying anything substantial. Why? I was not responding to a question because there was no question. I stopped and said, "What exactly is your question?" The speaker looked befuddled, paused, and then withdrew his query. Afterwards he introduced himself. His speaking German was not a test of my German, it turned out. He was a visitor from Germany and he spoke German because he felt more comfortable speaking his native tongue. In a moment of self-reflection over dinner, he confessed that he indeed had not had a question, but having seen me begin with a joke, he had given a little *Referat* on the Baroque concept of laughter and its relation to rhetoric. I was right. It was not a question but a mini-lecture.

When I began as an assistant professor at Ohio State, I integrated film into my teaching repertoire. I participated in the inaugural summer seminar on German film as film taught by Tony Kaes and Rick Rentschler. Each year, sometimes twice a year, I taught a large class on "Weimar and the Third Reich in German Literature and Film." Regularly being assigned that course saved time on class preparation, which freed me to develop a wide range of other courses. I taught whatever was needed, which helped me continue to learn: Austrian literature and culture; Swiss literature and culture; poetics, rhetoric, and stylistics; the development of German comedy; narrative theory and the interpretation of fictional narratives; intersubjectivity in drama; German intellectual history. In twelve years I was happy to have offered twelve different graduate courses.

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I also taught some unusual courses, such as "Literature in the Age of Technology" and "Objective Idealism and the Study of Literature." These were German studies courses if one has a capacious understanding of German studies as engagement with German authors whose works come from a variety of fields: Hegel, Rosenkranz, Heidegger, Benjamin, Jonas, Szondi, Hösle, and of course literary writers. At the undergraduate level one of my German studies courses was "Religion and Antireligion in German Literature and Thought," which likewise took me beyond literature.

German studies, I saw, was a huge benefit to students, whose primary interests tended to be twofold: developing greater capacities in the German language and understanding Germany in its widest scope—history, society, politics, culture. Some of my best class sessions have been on topics well beyond literature, for example, comparisons of the *Grundgesetz* with the US Constitution. Students learn well by relating something new to something they already know. And students from every discipline could see implicit or explicit connections to German. To help ensure students' motivation I developed a lengthy handout I use in fourth-semester classes "Why Study German?" that addresses the richness of German for virtually every discipline.

The development of German studies is one reason we are so diverse as a profession. For a time I thought of myself as anomalous, perhaps even a maverick: I was strongly critical of poststructuralist theory, much more interested in artwork aesthetics than production and reception aesthetics, as much intrigued by systematic as historical questions, and my philosophical interests were oriented toward idealism. None of this was mainstream. However, the opening up of German studies has made the field so diverse that everyone is unconventional in his or her own way. We are all typically atypical.

Though I embrace German studies, I have been critical of two aspects. First, instead of German studies becoming part of our repertoire along with literature, it has in some programs replaced literature. At one department I reviewed, the graduate students had formed a semi-clandestine canon-reading group to compensate for the lack of literature offerings. I was also concerned about my own colleagues no longer teaching literature as literature. At Ohio State one of my best graduate students stopped by my office one day as he came from another class and asked in despair: "I get it that *Minna von Barnhelm* is critical of the military, but is that *all* there is to the play?"

I have tried to advance arguments that defend the value of artwork aesthetics, not at the expense of contextual information, which is obligatory for interpretive practice, but by recognizing that only artwork aesthetics focuses on what is distinctive about art, including its formal features and its indirection. What differentiates an artwork after all is not

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that it has a production or reception context (realms common to all intellectual products), but that it has distinctive qualities that constitute it as an artwork.

Second, German studies has become temporally narrow. I had always admired the ways in which most American *Germanisten* worked from the Baroque to the present and more or less across genres. I have tried to follow that model. In recent decades fewer and fewer dissertations have addressed the literature and culture of earlier eras.[2] The institutional consequences of narrowing are also evident: Columbia and Yale, despite the latter's magnificent manuscript collection and extraordinary holdings of incunabula, have eliminated positions in medieval German. When we had an open search at Notre Dame, which I always prefer because it widens the pool of applicants and because I have always thought that faculty members can stretch into new areas, one of my colleagues said that we would presumably exclude linguists and medievalists. I argued against that, and we ended up hiring an excellent medievalist.

## II

I turn now to broader humanities issues. When I arrived at Princeton as a graduate student in 1980, theory was in its heyday. One of our charismatic teachers, Stanley Corngold, had been a student of Paul de Man's. After his seminar on Fridays the graduate students would go to the local pub to continue discussing the engaging questions raised in his classes.

Deconstructionists focused on unresolved textual contradictions and so embodied the virtue of attending to texts. Especially interested in the margins of texts, its critics were able to uncover often-unrecognized aspects and tensions of much interpreted works. What gave deconstruction its moral authority was its emphasis on uncovering positions that were falsely taken to be beyond question but were in fact without solid grounding.

But I was also disappointed by deconstruction.[3] With its focus on the margins, deconstruction tended to base interpretation on neglected parts without, however, bringing them back to the whole. Moreover, it tended to fall into self-cancelling positions. Negative positions often presuppose in their argumentation the positive concepts they attempt to negate. I can recall a dissertation defense at Princeton. A more advanced student had initially planned to deconstruct Hegel. But that is not so easy. Over time the student shifted his dissertation to a historical analysis of Hegel's schooling in rhetoric, his use of rhetoric, and his concept of *Bildung*. At the student's defense the most aggressive questions came from the advisor. Didn't the student realize that the most advanced criticism today is undermining notions of progress and of *Bildung*? Toward the end of the hour when students were allowed to participate, I defended the student

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against his advisor. How could the student be criticized for failing to be progressive enough to grasp that progress is no longer a tenable category?

What irked me arguably the most about deconstruction and many other theoretical movements was the cultivation of unintelligibility. One summer another graduate student and I split a research assignment. One of our tasks involved translating an essay from English to German. The essay used words, some of which we knew. It had some awkward stylistic expressions, but it was grammatically correct. Still, the essay, a contribution to theory, was indecipherable. When we brought our German translation to one of our German professors to get an opinion, he said: "Das versteht kein Hund!" (No one can make heads or tails of that.) My colleague and I looked at each another and agreed: we had done a satisfactory job.

While I preferred immanent critique of deconstruction, drawing on arguments I had learned from Plato and Hegel, I was also concerned about the political repercussions of denying truth. In my book on Gottfried Benn I analyzed the ways in which German intellectuals, among them Alfred Rosenberg, inferred from the idea of truth as a mere construction the right to disassociate truth from reason and elevate their own values, in their case the superiority of the Germanic race, the preeminence of the German nation, and the persecution of minorities. The abandonment of truth and the resulting consequences of this abandonment are not without their contemporary parallels.

Theory was at times also an end in itself. Many theorists were not drawn to explore literary or even cultural works. Theory became an internal dialogue among theorists. In Germany as well, I occasionally experienced movement away from literary and cultural works. Here, however, scholars tended to throw themselves not into theory but into the minutiae of historical context as an end in itself instead of it being a necessary means to help us understand works. When my colleague Henry Schmidt and I spoke at a 1987 Büchner conference in Germany, we observed that we were among the very few who were trying to offer new interpretations instead of talking solely about contextual matters, about production and reception aesthetics.

The scholarliness and historicity of the German critic can work against an existential engagement with literature. I participated in a 2008 conference on tragedy in Weimar and a 2014 conference on tragedy in Boston. Both were wonderful conferences, but subtle differences were recognizable. The German focus tended to be more historical: how did a given thinker or age conceptualize or realize tragedy? In the American setting there was more openness to the questions, what is tragedy universally and why is tragedy a topic worthy of engaging us today?

My first love is the close reading and analysis of artworks: the ideas, the forms, the relation of the two, and the interrelation of parts and wholes.

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Complex and ambiguous works I find especially attractive. My seminars at Princeton offered an ideal atmosphere to pursue this passion. My first publication, which Paul Michael Lützeler was kind enough to publish with Suhrkamp Verlag, gave two opposing interpretations of the narrator's reliability in Hermann Broch's unfinished novel *Die Verzauberung* (The Spell) (Roche 1983). Arguing for one reading and then another opposing reading in one and the same essay became for me a recurring strategy to approach complex works. I weighed the readings against each other, either to strengthen one interpretation against possible objections or to show the work's inherent ambiguity. I have found this strategy helpful in well over a half dozen publications.[4] The method seemed to emerge on its own as I thought through puzzles, trying to argue for one reading even as I tested the limits of that reading. Eventually, I discovered its advantages also in teaching, as students, in arguing for this or that reading, uncover more and more facets of a work and learn to weigh different kinds and levels of evidence. I suspect the method, which I call proleptic interpretation, emerged partly out of a contrarian mindset, partly out of my study of Plato and Hegel, and partly out of the rich hermeneutical back and forth I experienced with my fellow students and in particular with two gifted teachers at Princeton, Stanley Corngold and Ruth Klüger. It was not a method that I had encountered before, certainly not in Germany, but it was not unrelated to the practice of close reading and to one of the virtues of deconstruction.

I have always been drawn to broader questions. After two books on German literature, which interwove intellectual history with close readings of prose and poetry, I turned next to a much broader study of types of tragedy and comedy. The puzzle had arisen in a graduate class I taught on tragedy and the philosophy of tragedy. Hegel had, I thought, the best discussion of tragedy, but his theory had weaknesses. By drawing on, but also going beyond Hegel, I tried to offer a definition of tragedy as greatness that inevitably leads to suffering. I also sought to elaborate types of tragedy by differentiating Hegel's focus on collision. In developing types of comic structures, I pursued a similar path of modifying Hegel. Further, continuing my interest in speculative structures, which involve the unity of unity and difference and which had been prominent in my earlier work on Schiller and Hölderlin, I analyzed a neglected genre, the drama of reconciliation, which combines moments of tragedy and comedy.

Many of my projects have had the goal of drawing on and revising the categories of German idealism so as to make sense of the contemporary world and our obligations in it.[5] My book *Why Literature Matters in the 21st Century* begins with an exploration of the value of literature, including a discussion of normative principles of aesthetics and hermeneutics. It then analyzes prominent categories of the technological age along with the influence of technology on production, artwork, and reception

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aesthetics. Combining the normative and descriptive, I next turn to the possibilities of literature and literary criticism in the technological age. Much as Hans Jonas has argued that ethics must be transformed in the age of technology, so I argued that literature and literary criticism have opportunities and responsibilities unique to this age. Literature does not have its end beyond itself and so lies outside the realm of instrumental thinking; its intrinsic value gains in importance as our society increasingly loses a sensibility for anything but instrumental value. In elevating inexhaustible meaning, literature counterbalances our veneration of efficiency. Moreover, the study of literature helps us develop the ecological virtue of understanding how diverse parts form a comprehensive whole. Earlier works connect us with other ages and cultures, giving us a different relationship to time. The book sought to address the value of the humanities in an age of ecological crisis. I also published a modified German version, adding interpretations of German works that would likely not have interested a broader American public (Roche 2002).

Aesthetics has rarely been a primary branch of philosophy. German idealism represents an exception. For the idealists art is a privileged sphere, one in which deeper meaning comes to consciousness via sensuous material. Art has a profound metaphysical dimension; it makes visible for us the structures of the world and thereby allows us to see reality more clearly. In this context Hegel makes the intriguing claim that a portrait that abstracts from the contingent and reveals the essence of a person's character can be "dem Individuum ähnlicher als das wirkliche Individuum selbst" (more like the individual than the real individual himself; 15: 104).

In Hegel I first encountered a seemingly counterintuitive definition of freedom: "in seinem Anderen bei sich selbst zu sein" (being at home with oneself in the other; 8: 84). Hegel uses it in a strict as well as a looser, almost existential sense. Strictly speaking, freedom consists in grasping that the categories we identify via reason also illuminate reality. The categories of thought have ontological valence, and the world is not foreign to us. On the contrary, it is structured by ideal principles. Hegel's entire project was an attempt to ascertain the complex and interrelated set of categories that constitutes the ideal sphere and to analyze the various realms of reality, which is itself conceptually structured—nature, history, politics, psychology, art, religion, and philosophy—by way of these categories. But Hegel also uses the expression "being at home with oneself in the other" less formally and in the context of social experience. For Hegel the first principle of education is alienation, a principle once quoted admiringly by the US Commissioner of Education W. T. Harris.[6] After passing through alienation, meaningful education culminates for Hegel in freedom. When I first arrived in Germany, I experienced the curiosity of estrangement, but increasingly felt at home there. Most of my early publications appeared in Germany,

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and I obtained funds at both Ohio State and Notre Dame to bring to campus each year a visiting scholar from Germany. When I taught at various German universities—Dresden, Essen, and Halle—I felt at home there. I experimented with the German model of teaching a single work, and I offered some more American-style classes, partly reaching beyond literature, partly covering a topic across time.

Beyond my interest in aesthetic puzzles, I was drawn to still broader questions. In my book *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* I consider three partly overlapping grounds for a liberal arts education: first, its intrinsic value, or the distinction of learning for its own sake, the sheer joy associated with exploring the life of the mind and asking the great questions that give meaning to life; second, the cultivation of those intellectual virtues that are requisite for success beyond the academy, a liberal arts education as preparation for a career; and third, character formation and the development of a sense of vocation, the connection to a higher purpose or calling. In an effort to offer examples within the broader discussion, I address the study of literature as a recurring thread.

These books have given me a much wider audience than my books and essays in *Germanistik* even as they integrate material from German.[7] My first argument in the liberal arts book, for example, captures a principle, the intrinsic value of learning, which has been prominent in Germany ever since the nineteenth-century German university elevated knowledge as an end in itself. Today the humanities remain central in Germany. A much higher percentage of German students enroll in the humanities, arts, and education than in the US, 24.9% compared to 15.3% (Roche 2014, 92). If one wants to understand a country's (or an institution's) vision and priorities, study its budget: in Germany the humanities regularly receive 9% of federal research funding; in the US the figure is 0.1% (Roche 2017, 55). The contrast is also evident in the audiences for our work. Last summer I gave a lecture as part of the *Hegel Tage* in Bamberg. A full house, four hundred people, more citizens than students, listened to lectures by university professors. Where in the US might you get even 40 citizens for such an event? In German society, education has value beyond the academy. Half of the politicians who have led postwar Germany as chancellor or president have had a PhD or its equivalent, that is, a JD with a dissertation. In its entire history America has had only one such president, Woodrow Wilson.

My teaching often takes me into broader areas of the humanities and beyond. I welcome that breadth, which makes me as a faculty member still a liberal arts student of sorts. The course I taught each year as dean was a so-called College Seminar, an oral-intensive course that addressed a great question via the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Every other year I teach a year-long humanities seminar that takes students in the fall from Homer to Dante and in the spring from Machiavelli to Woody

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Allen. It is one of my favorite courses. Partly as a result of this capacious teaching, my writing has likewise developed a broader reach and has led to publications on directors such as John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock and political op-eds in *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*. I doubt I would have developed in any of these directions if I were a German academic in Germany, where moving beyond one's discipline is rare.

My engagement with larger questions has invariably had an anchor in German. My current book project, tentatively titled *Beautiful Ugliness*, analyzes the theory of the ugly from Plato to Adorno, explores seemingly ugly art and literature from the Greeks to the present, and offers a typology of various types of beautiful ugliness. It draws heavily on a German tradition of engagement with the ugly, in theory and practice, that has no parallel in other countries.

I conclude this section by noting that my topics have always had for me both scholarly and existential import. Already my dissertation had intellectual and existential origins. I explored the concept of *Ruhe*, or stillness, which has a fascinating history in the German literary and intellectual tradition and rich associations in religion, aesthetics, psychology, and politics. I chose to write a chapter on Hölderlin partly because of the intriguing narrative structures in *Hyperion*, but also because the novel offered a magnificent and existentially significant account of a character's struggle with suffering. A chapter on one of Schiller's philosophical essays offered a rich set of conceptual puzzles but also allowed me to reflect on Schiller's efforts to combine the concepts of contentment and striving. It was similar with later projects. An understanding of tragic and comic structures sheds light not only on drama but also on the world. Art, I have always felt, has not only intrinsic value; it is also relevant for life.

## III

For seventeen of my first eighteen years as a tenured faculty member, I was a chairperson or dean. When I became chairperson at Ohio State, we had some unusual challenges, on which I partly focused, but I was also attentive to what I considered to be the four pillars of a flourishing foreign studies major.[8] First, have meaningful study abroad opportunities, including summer programs so that students can go abroad after their first year: students progress in the language, develop an emotional connection to the country, and gain confidence for longer periods of study abroad. And they almost always enroll in further courses. Second, ensure great teaching. All of our departments are relatively small. Many students are second majors or on the fence in terms of always taking German. One bad teacher in the mix can destroy a program. Good teachers allow it to sing. Third, offer a variety of courses. Students want to continue with the language, but not all are exclusively interested in literature, so

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we need multiple options for them, in German and in English. Here is where German studies becomes especially valuable pedagogically. Finally, foster a distinctive and appealing community of learning. Again and again students who have two majors, one larger major and German, talk about their sense of being at home in German: the community is stronger.

Most of these issues have no analogue in Germany. Humanities professors in Germany, especially Germanistik professors, do not need to attract students. Instead, they are overwhelmed by more students than they can handle. Yet I have often admired the ways in which, though the Germany university as such does not foster community, individual faculty members do. On my first day in Tübingen, the philosophy professor Dieter Wandschneider wrote on the board: “Hinterher plaudern bei Café Pfuderer” (Afterwards informal conversation at Café Pfuderer). At the time I did not know the word *plaudern*, but I went anyway and developed two friendships there that have lasted almost forty years. Today I admire how colleagues such as Wolfgang Braungart in Bielefeld and Christian Illies in Bamberg craft with their students remarkable communities of learning. In the US the institution cares for community; in Germany the responsibility falls on the individual professor.

One of the departmental decisions we made at Ohio State is relevant in the context of transatlantic German studies. When I became chair, we altered our promotion-and-tenure document, stipulating that for promotion to professor the faculty member must have a scholarly presence in both English and German: in English because the American audience is in many ways our core constituency, and, as Jeffrey Sammons said many years ago, we do not want to be invisible; in German because our largest audience is in Germany. We wanted to impact both sides of the Atlantic.

As much as we were German studies scholars, I wanted us to be humanities scholars as well. I can recall a discussion with an Ohio State colleague who was uneasy that one of our assistant professors was writing on Mark Twain. Would that count for promotion in a German department? I defended the assistant, arguing that we are above all humanities professors and should allow faculty the freedom to follow their intellectual interests organically.

American universities and departments are more flexible and nimble than what one sees in Germany, where the disciplines are very powerful. We can thus more easily hire and support faculty in interdisciplinary areas. For us it is also partly a matter of survival. When I came to Notre Dame, I negotiated two additional lines in German with the promise that everyone we hired would also be able to teach general education courses, so that if enrollments were ever to drop, our course offerings could adjust accordingly.

I went to Notre Dame primarily because I was attracted by its distinctive vision. After one year I became dean. Although I preferred teaching

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and research, I realized that I could also be at home in administration. I saw the advantages of working on vision, developing strategies, and helping colleagues and students—even if that meant challenging longstanding practices. Administrative work is more taxing but also more rewarding in the US, partly because one can accomplish more, but also because American academics tend to have a stronger sense of collective identity with their home institutions. Whereas 66% of German faculty say that their affiliation with their current university is not too important or not at all important, in the US the figure is only 18% (Altbach 19). Certainly the work of administration, which involves taking joy in the success of others, fosters collective identity.

The traces of my time as dean are partly evident in the scholarship on higher education that developed out of my administrative puzzles. Thinking about such experiences was enriched by being attentive to models and best practices from elsewhere, including Germany. I wrote two books primarily on vision—on the idea of a Catholic university and on the value of the liberal arts—and two that addressed vision and practices or strategies. The overarching and common thrust to all four books is an interwoven interest in the importance of a guiding vision for higher education and an account of challenges and strategies in seeking to realize such a vision.

As with my broader humanities books, here, too, German influences were present. The book on the idea of a Catholic university, for example, drew on a principle—the unity of knowledge across disciplines—that was strengthened and redefined during the long era of the German university's greatness. The German search for the unity of knowledge was animated by the idealist understanding of knowledge as organically interwoven. Indeed, for generations German philosophers offered lecture courses on the relation of the disciplines and the unity of knowledge. How do the disciplines fit together? How do they support one another? What commonalities and differences exist in subject matter and method? What can they learn from one another? Wilhelm Dilthey, who held Hegel's chair in Berlin from 1882 to 1911, still taught such a course.

The university is characterized by the integration of disciplines and the search for not only specialized knowledge but also the relation of the diverse parts of knowledge to one another. This is what animates the pursuit of ever-more simple but comprehensive theories, and this is why the various disciplines are housed within a single institution. In this sense, the university differs from institutes that focus on individual disciplines, such as the arts, business, or technology, which was the practice in France during the ascent of the German university and which has become increasingly common in developing countries and at for-profit institutions—as unity gives way to isolated applications. The German concepts of the relation of the disciplines to one another and the search for unity, however

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difficult, still belong to the idea of a university. The ideal of an integration of the disciplines is of course not always embodied; specialized projects, for all their value, are rarely seen as part of a larger mosaic. Graduate education, in turn, has become increasingly narrow. As the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre quipped at a Notre Dame gathering to celebrate his 80th birthday, "If you have a doctorate, you must work very hard to become an educated person."

Three years ago I wrote a book on what German universities can learn from American universities and what they should avoid (Roche 2014). Given the recurring conversation in Germany on American universities as a possible model, I thought it would make sense for an American who knew the German situation well and had played an administrative role in the US to offer a differentiated view of our strengths and weaknesses and suggest what might be integrated, what might be improved upon, and what should be left alone or was simply not transferable. German universities have strengths, as I intimated above, but also many unresolved challenges—from woeful underfunding and scant competition, especially for students, to insufficient room for local flexibility and initiative.

Shortly after the book appeared, I published an essay in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on the reverse topic, what American universities can learn from their German counterparts (Roche 2015b). Dialogue should always be reciprocal. Even if dialogue often has, as Plato suggests in the *Laches* and the *Gorgias*, agonistic origins, the ultimate object is to discover the truth. The spirit of combat is to be channeled toward a higher and common goal. In that way one can be truly at home in the other.

## Notes

[1] Publications I discuss more fully in this autobiographical essay are listed under the Works Cited section. Detailed information on those I mention only in passing is available at http://mroche.nd.edu/.

[2] According to the annual *Monatshefte Personalia*, in 1985, 82% of dissertations in German literature and culture dealt at least partly with literature and culture before 1900. For 2015, the figure is 48%. Some change is both expected and welcome. The question is: when does a shift lead to an imbalance or relative neglect of earlier eras?

[3] In *Why Literature Matters*, I try to give a fuller account of the strengths and shortcomings of four interpretive approaches to literary and cultural studies: the sociohistoric and formalist paradigms as well as culture studies and deconstruction.

[4] I refer to my essays on Kafka's *Der Prozeß* (The Trial), Broch's *Die Verzauberung* (The Spell), Benn's *Verlorenes Ich* (Lost I), Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, and Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Proleptic interpretations of Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry)

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and Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker* (The Physicists) are found in Roche 1987 and Roche 2002, respectively. In my emerging book on the ugly I offer a proleptic interpretation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For full references, also to proleptic interpretation as pedagogical praxis, see Roche 2015a, 277.

[5] For a fuller autobiographical account of the ways idealism has animated my work, see Roche 2015a.

[6] Not by chance Hegel entitled a section of his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Phenomenology of Spirit) "Der sich entfremdete Geist: Bildung" (Self-Alienated Spirit. Education; 3: 359). William Torrey Harris, the US Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906 and co-founder of the St. Louis Hegelians, viewed "self-estrangement" as "perhaps the most important idea in the philosophy of education" (27).

[7] If my own situation is representative, books on German literature sell in the hundreds, whereas broader books in the humanities and on higher education sell in the thousands or tens of thousands.

[8] I give a fuller account of strategies for leading foreign language and culture departments in Roche 1999 and Roche 2011.

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