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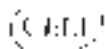
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Focus on German Studies

Volume 12

2005

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From the Editor

A few weeks ago, my curious self dug deeply into the *Focus* past and found what appeared to be the perfect relic for the opening paragraph of this volume: as one of the founding fathers, Dr. David Coury (now Associate Professor of German and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay) shared with me in an email, the journal was originally the idea of Dagmar Schulz (now Hagenkötter), an exchange student from Hamburg. According to David, the original title *Focus on Literatur* - was actually a typo: “We thought about calling it *Focus*, but the German journal of the same name had just appeared. So we thought about *Focus on Literature*, and when Dagmar wrote it, by habit she left out the final “e” in literature, giving it the German spelling! We all liked the idea as it signaled a mix of German and English scholarship in the title, which was one of our goals.”

Since then, three main changes have occurred. After eight years, the “typo” was finally corrected, *Focus on Literatur* became *Focus on German Studies*, “reflecting,” as former editor Silke Schade put it, “a shift within German departments internationally.” Published semiannually until 2000, the journal appears now annually. The third change concerns the book review section, which used to only publish reviews on primary works. Reflecting the broadening scope of the journal, it now also includes reviews on secondary literature. The main aim, however, has remained the same: founded twelve years ago by graduate students in the Department of German Studies at the University of Cincinnati, the journal is still solely run by graduate students whose main aim is to promote other students and their research in the field of German Studies. *Focus* has remained faithful to its original goals while becoming more and more professional over the years. It has established its reputation as a stepping stone for both graduate students, many of whom publish their very first article with us, and editors, who get the chance to oversee the publication process. With an ever-growing number of subscribers, an ever-increasing number of submitters and more copies sold every year, it is safe to say that *Focus* can look back at what I would call a success story. An anecdote serves to underline this observation: Last year, while overseeing the book review section of Volume 11, I was approached by two professors who offered to write a book review for *Focus*. I took this as a sign that the journal is indeed taken seriously in the hallowed world of academia. This year, a professor sent us an excellent manuscript and was disappointed when we turned it down. As one of two publications in the country, *Focus* continues to only accept students’ work. So while feeling flattered that professors would want to contribute their work to our journal, I also realized what lies ahead of us, the students, who work on *Focus* as editors and reviewers, as well as the authors, who, with their contributions, have made this journal

possible for the past twelve years. What had been an inkblot last year, became a crystal clear fact during my editorship this year: writing a good academic piece is hard. To get it published, even harder. By the way, *Focus*' dedication to quality students' work was recently rewarded by a renowned publisher's request to reprint two *Focus* articles on Günter Grass.

Since 1995, we have also organized and held a *Focus on German Studies* conference with the goal to provide an outlet and discussion forum for the work and research of graduate students. The 9th annual conference entitled *Forgetting and Remembering – Memory Discourse in German Literature* opened with Dr. Friederike Eigler of Georgetown University and her keynote address "Writing (in) the New Germany: Cultural Memory and Family Narratives Since 1989." We also welcomed graduate student speakers from as close as Bowling Green, Ohio to as far away as Toronto, Canada.

Another of *Focus*' aims is to cooperate with other institutions and organizations which share its interests and goals. Like my predecessors, I took this aim to heart: I mentioned *Focus* at every conference I attended and informed other participants of their chance to have their work published in one of only two student-run journals in the field of German Studies in the country. As a result we almost sold all our Volume 11 copies and received a record number of 29 submissions for the current issue. Students from within the United States, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Australia submitted their articles, all of which were carefully reviewed, selected by graduate students at the University of Cincinnati and then sent on to faculty referees on our board of reviewers.

The contributions in this volume explore a variety of themes and topics. The first four articles focus on aspects of language, while the second half sheds a light on literature in a number of different contexts. Volume 12 begins with Alexandra Clarke's insightful article in which she traces the genesis and translation of Güneş Dal's first novel. By examining the changes to the structure and title made by the translator and by discussing in detail passages that, through their (mis)translation, have altered the impact of the text, Clarke argues that many of the more interesting aspects of the novel have been disguised or diminished in its German incarnation. In the second article, Angela Holzer examines Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus* in the light of recent theories of ritual. The reading proposed suggests the adaptation of the myth as a means to achieve and present a purification of language for artistic purposes. The third article in this volume by Andrea Némedi analyzes the short story „Ferngespräche" ("Long-Distance Calls") by Marie Luise Kaschnitz. Methodologically supported by media theory and conversation analysis, Némedi discusses the narrative form of the short story with regard to its thematic function. Richard J. Whitt's contribution traces the

development of the modal verbs *sollen* and *wollen* since Proto-Germanic times, and examines how grammaticalization is responsible for shaping their current uses.

The remaining four contributions offer critical approaches to German literature in the contexts of philosophy, autobiography, (post-)colonialism and music. This section starts with Louise Fairfax' discussion of how twenty first century understandings are grounded in the acceptance and rejection of Enlightenment ideas. She argues that the divergent approaches of Kant and Goethe paved the way for the currently most satisfying solution to Kant's subject-object hiatus – that of functionalist theorist, Niklas Luhmann. In his article, reworked from his original conference paper, Nikolaus Unger takes a closer look at the issue of memory in Stefan Zweig's 1941 autobiography *Die Welt von Gestern*. He argues that Zweig reacted the way he did in 1914 because he was, in his own way, an Austrian German patriot. Tim Grünewald's article examines the use of colonial discourse as metaphor in Urs Widmer's novel *Im Kongo*. Using Chinua Achebe's post-colonial critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a model, he discusses the novel's imagination of the Congo and the Congolese giving special attention to the narrative structure and the narrative voice. The last article in this volume proposes reading new German pop-literature in the context of DJ-Culture. In it, Florence Feiereisen argues that there exists a literary equivalent to DJ music that demands recognition and description. Three German contemporary DJs and 'Suhrkamp' authors – Rainald Goetz, Thomas Meinecke and Andreas Neumeister – serve as examples. Their work demonstrates how techniques like sampling, mixing and remixing can be employed on all levels of a text in order to create a sound that is typical of German pop literature.

This year has been a busy one for my friend and colleague Laura Tráser-Vas, who did a superb job at finding the ideal reviewer for each and every book in our collection. The result of her hard work are 19 book reviews which present a well-rounded selection of primary and secondary works of literature. Primary contemporary works (short prosa by H.C. Artmann, Franz Hohler, Wladimir Kaminer; novels by Katharina Hacker, Siegfried Lenz, Terézia Mora, Martin Walser and Feridun Zaimoglu; poetry by Lutz Seiler) and an edition of Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* are represented as well as secondary literature on artificial human beings in literature, film and art, Ingeborg Bachmann, German, Austrian and Swiss play wrights, Fontane and textgenesis, Goethe and modernity and, once again, Mechthild von Magdeburg. Three reviews on biographies (Else Lasker-Schüler, Stefan Zweig and Iris von Roten) complete this year's impressive book review section.

Focus also accepts and conducts interviews with prominent scholars and German-writing authors. Lucy Macnab thus interviewed three very different writers who rapidly became well established and respected authors: Karin Duve, Malin

Schwerdtfeger, and Julia Franck.

Finally, Laura and I had the great honor of interviewing Liliane Weissberg, Professor of German and Comparative Literature at UPenn, who not only mesmerized us with her charm and wit, but also proved to be an invaluable and incredibly generous source of wisdom. After delivering her Taft lecture on the Berlin Jewish Salon, Prof. Weissberg met with us to talk about her work ethics, her views on the state of journals and publishing, as well as her current projects.

And so another year of *Focus* has come to an end. I have enjoyed this project tremendously. It has given me the opportunity to meet, talk and correspond with talented young writers, great thinkers, prominent German Studies scholars, former editors, and contributors to *Focus* who are now professors themselves.

Taking over the editorship this fall, Laura Tráser-Vas is currently planning the upcoming conference. The 10th annual *Focus* graduate student conference, entitled “Questioning Authority: Traditions, Transitions and Breaks in German Studies,” will take place in the Max Kade German Cultural Center at the University of Cincinnati on October 28-29, 2005.

It is my great pleasure to introduce next year’s two book review editors, Wolfgang Lückel and Todd Heidt, who already dedicated a great amount of their time to the selection and copy-editing process this year.

Volume 12 would not have been possible without the help and support of many wonderful people. Many thanks to department head Sara Friedrichsmeyer and advisor Katharina Gerstenberger for their continued excitement and support. Thank you to the members of our board of reviewers, whose thoughtful feedback strengthened the manuscripts considerably. *Focus* would be impossible without my fellow graduate students, whose enthusiastic support has sustained every editor throughout the years. I very much enjoyed working with this year’s contributors on whose hard and diligent work this volume is based upon.

The past six years are unimaginable without the presence of my best friend, my husband Ron, who assisted me through the actual process of production of the journal and whose resourceful dedication to details enabled me to bring the project to completion. And finally, I am truly blessed to have a son like Leopold, who makes me laugh whenever I take myself too seriously.

Julia K. Baker

