

50 Years of German Studies in Newcastle: Join the Celebrations!



For further information, please contact
Sheryl Thompson <sheryl.thompson@ncl.ac.uk>
School of Modern Languages
Old Library Building
Newcastle University
NE1 7RU Newcastle upon Tyne
+44 (0)191 222 7441



<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sml/german>

Programme of Events

Wednesday, 13 May, Sage Gateshead

- 18.30 Pre-concert talk with
Prof. Henrike Lähnemann
- 19.30 Concert with Thomas Zehet-
mair and Northern Sinfonia:
Mendelssohn's "A Midsum-
mer Night's Dream",
Tchaikovsky and Mozart

Thursday, 14 May Old Library Building

- 15.30 Guided tour through the Exhi-
bition in the Open Access
Centre: "Friedliche Revolu-
tion und Deutsche Einheit" by
Dr Beate Müller
- 17.00 Celebratory Lecture in the Re-
search Beehive, Room 2.22:
Prof. Frank Finlay: "What's
Kate [Winslet] got to do with
it? Mapping the Literary
Landscape of the 'New' Ger-
many"
- 19.00 German Dinner in the Court-
yard Restaurant

Friday, 15 May Hatton Gallery

- 14.00 Workshop: "Dada in Action"
in front of Kurt Schwitters'
Merz Barn
- 19.00 Reception and Reading:
Dr Angelika Overath
'Flughafenfische'

German@Newcastle

Edited by Helen Ferstenberg

May, 2009

School of Modern Languages, Newcastle University

Celebrating 50 Years of German Studies at Newcastle University

by Professor Henrike Lähnemann, Head of German

Herzlich Willkommen! A very warm welcome to all those reading this newsletter and joining in some way or other in our festivities to celebrate 50 years of German Studies. It all started in 1959 when Duncan Mennie was appointed as the first Professor of German Studies (although, as you can read further on in the newsletter, there had been quite a few activities before that!); in 1974, Alan Menhennet, the eminent scholar of Baroque poetry, took over. Then in 1998, a completely new and modern view on German Studies was taken by Colin Riordan whose re- search project on "Nature and Environment in Modern German Literature" put ecological thoughts and politics for the first time on the agenda of German Studies. In 2005 Colin was appointed Provost of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; from there he has moved on to the eminence of being Vice Chancellor of the Univer- sity of Essex.

So in 2006 I replaced him as the current Chair of German Studies, a hugely enjoyable position to be in! I like teaching literature and culture in a town with an impressive history

Inside...

- ♦ 20 Years since Germany's Peaceful Revolution...2
- ♦ A Fantastic Year Abroad.....3
- ♦ Writer in Residence Angelika Overath.....4
- ♦ Life as a Student 50 Years Ago.....6
- ♦ Celebrating Ger- man Schedule...8

but a very contemporary feel to it; to have a close group of colleagues with a range of inspiring research topics; and to engage with students coming from all over England, from seven German Univer- sities (via the Erasmus ex- change with Tübingen, Halle, Bochum...) and from all over the world for the interna- tional MA programmes run- ning in the School of Modern Languages. I hope some of this buzz comes across in the programme of events for the 13 to 15 May (full details on the back of the newsletter); what with German music, the celebra- tory lecture by our alumnus Prof. Frank Finlay and the opportu- nity to plunge into some creative writing with our Writer in Residence, there should be something for everybody in this re- gion interested in German Studies. See you there – **bis bald!**



Prof. Henrike Lähnemann

‘Flughafenfische’: Writer Angelika Overath to read from her new novel

Dr Angelika Overath has twice been writer in residence at Newcastle and has conducted writing workshops for students here. She returns to Newcastle for the 50th anniversary celebrations to give the first public reading from her new novel ‘Flughafenfische’, which is set in the transit lounge of an airport and describes three very different people.

Read an extract from ,Flughafenfische‘

Das Flugzeug war pünktlich gelandet und zu seiner Parkposition ausgerollt. Wie die anderen Passagiere war auch sie aufgestanden, steif, hatte sich unwillkürlich und dann möglichst unauffällig gestreckt. Sie hatte ihr Gepäck aus der Ablage gezogen, den Mantel genommen und sich in den Gang zu den bereits Stehenden eingereiht. Willenlos war sie den fremden Rücken gefolgt, zielstrebig zur Kabinentür an den Stewardessen vorbei, die ihnen nun zum letzten Mal konturiert entgegen lächelten. Sie hatte sich dabei ertappt, wie sie versuchte, einen Blick ins Cockpit zu werfen, eine Gewohnheit aus vergangenen Zeiten. Und schon glitt sie mit den Reisenden weiter in den grauen Faltschlauch, durch den die Passagiere umstandslos in das Flughafengebäude geschleust werden sollten. »Finger« hießen die beweglichen Ziehharmonikagänge in der Pilotensprache, das hatte er ihr noch erzählt in den Tagen, da er ihr noch erzählt hatte von seinem Beruf, um den sie ihn immer beneidete. Ich habe ihn, hatte sie später manchmal gedacht, um sich zu trösten (indem sie ihm seine Einmaligkeit nahm und sich das Besondere des Verlusts), ich habe ihn nur geliebt, weil er ein Pilot war. Ich habe nicht ihn geliebt, nur dieses Fliegenkönnen und vielleicht den Mut zur Verantwortung für so viele Menschen, und dann habe ich geliebt, wie er davon erzählte.....

Get a free copy of ,Flughafenfische‘ - send your comments on this extract to: meinemeinung@luchterhand-verlag.de

How Angelika found inspiration for her novel

Es war nicht mein erster Roman. Es war der zweite. Aber mein Debüt „Nahe Tage“ ist, wie viele Debüts, eine Familiengeschichte: Blicke zurück in die Kindheit, die zwar komponiert, doch eng an die Biographie gebunden bleiben, geschrieben „nach der Natur“. Auch der zweite Roman hatte als Initiation eine Erinnerung. Aber sie betraf nur einen Augenblick. Als ich zu schreiben begann, war es gut zehn Jahre her, dass ich auf dem Weg von Hongkong nach Stuttgart, müde und zwischen die Zeitzonen gefallen, ein paar Stunden im Transit des Londoner Flughafens Heathrow überbrücken musste. In der hohen Flughafenhalle stand ich auf einmal vor einem Meerwasseraquarium. Es war, so erinnerte ich mich, ein phantastischer Raumteiler, voller tropischer Fische und Blumentiere. Als ich überlegte, ob ich einen zweiten Roman schreiben könnte, fiel mir diese in sich bewegte Wasserwand im Flughafen ein...

Newcastle MA Student Translating Angelika Overath’s Book ‘Genies und ihre Geheimnisse’

Nick Johnson completed his undergraduate studies in German at Newcastle last year, and is now an MA Student in Professional Translation here. As part of his studies he is translating into English Angelika Overath’s book ‘Genies und ihre Geheimnisse’, a collection of short essays in puzzle form about famous artists and writers—leaving the reader to guess who is being described . Nick interviewed Angelika about her work and sought some advice on how to approach the translation.

Nick: Wie ist das Buch “Genies und ihre Geheimnisse” zustande gekommen?

Angelika Overath: Die “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” plante eine Wochenendausgabe “Die NZZ am Sonntag”. Der Feuilletonchef, Manfred Papst, fragte mich, ob ich regelmäßig mitschreiben wolle und ob ich eine Idee hätte. Ich schlug ihm die “Abgründe” vor, eine Rätsel-Kolumne über die problematischen Seiten von Künstlern. Es ist ja nicht so, dass Menschen, die Erfolg haben, die als Künstler in die Geschichte eingehen, auch privat ein erfülltes, heiteres, einfaches Leben gehabt hätten. Eigentlich ist das Gegenteil der Fall. Aber die Nachgeborenen kennen normalerweise nur die die glänzende Seite des Ruhms.

Die “Abgründe” erscheinen nun seit über acht Jahren wöchentlich. Seit sechs Jahren werden sie auch im Radio gesendet. Von Anfang an arbeiteten mein Mann (der Literaturwissenschaftler Manfred Koch) und meine Tochter Silvia mit. Die beiden recherchieren; ich schreibe. Dann lektorieren sie. Die Rätsel sind also eine Familienproduktion. Der erste Band “Genies und ihre Geheimnisse” wurde ins Italienische und ins Koreanische übersetzt. Im September erscheint ein zweiter Band mit neuen hundert Rätseln.

Nick: Was für Probleme erwarten Sie für mich bei der Übersetzung des Buches?

Angelika Overath: Ich möchte nicht wissen, wie die Rätsel ins Koreanische übersetzt wurden! Nein, im Ernst, es sind sehr, sehr schwierige Wörter dabei, gerade weil der Wortschatz aus den unterschiedlichsten Bereichen kommt und zudem aus 2000 Jahren.

Nick: Haben Sie irgendwelche Hinweise dafür?

Angelika Overath: Viele Künstler kommen aus dem englischsprachigen Raum. Lesen Sie in den englischen Briefen oder Tagebüchern! Auch bei Künstlern, die nicht aus dem englischsprachigen Raum sind, werden Sie Biographien auf Englisch finden. Lassen Sie sich von diesen Texten sprachlich inspirieren. Und im Zweifelsfall: denken Sie an den Künstler, nicht an mich als Autorin der Rätsel. Übersetzen Sie frei!



Angelika Overath

Life as a student 50 years ago

by Anthony Stanforth, former student of German at Newcastle

The year 1959 did not see the start of German studies in Newcastle; the subject had been taught here since before the Second World War. Rather, the date marks the year in which Duncan Mennie was promoted from Reader to the Chair. This happened while I was a third year student spending (intercalating, as the course regulations put it)

my year in Germany. On my return I didn't notice any change beyond the need to refer to Dr Mennie as Prof Mennie. After all, he had been Head of Department since 1945 and had developed his own way of running things which was not likely to be altered by a change of title. However, looking back on my time as an undergraduate fifty years ago the differences between then and now are indeed such as to bring to mind the appositeness of L.P. Hartley's famous dictum that "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." So what was life like as a student of German in 1959 in the days before modularisation, semesterisation and before the demise of individual modern language departments? Inevitably, my memories focus on the extraordinary personality and influence of Duncan Mennie.

Duncan Mennie's Department was his own creation, and was unique in that it combined German with Scandinavian Studies. This was not simply an administrative convenience grouping closely

related languages, it informed the tenor and ethos of the Department.

As a student of German I was required to start the study of a Scandinavian language even though my subsidiary subject was French. Given the emphasis placed on Germanic philology in the Department this knowledge of a North Germanic



We dressed differently in those days, as the photograph taken at a German Society party about that time illustrates. We were more formal: men's waistcoats were in, jeans for either sex unknown.

At the party Duncan Mennie and his wife Flora (sitting to his right; on the far left of the front row is Robert Sinclair, his second-in-command) instructed us and the German exchange students in Scottish country dancing. The lady to Duncan's left is Elisabeth Baldus, the senior *Lektorin* at the time.

language was invaluable, quite apart from the practical advantage of graduating with a knowledge not only of German but also Danish, or Norwegian or Swedish. Regrettably, Scandinavian was axed during the cuts of the 1980s.

The physical contours of this 'foreign country' are different, too. In the late 1950s the area to the north of the Hancock Museum had not been redeveloped. German and Scandinavian Studies and Spanish and Latin American Studies occupied adjacent late Victorian premises in Sydenham Terrace, fronting the Great North Road, while round the corner in the rather grander Devonshire Terrace one found the French Department. With the modern language departments grouped physically in this area, each with their own building and their own Head of Department – in those days Headships were permanent appointments – it was almost as though the rivalries that had plagued continental Europe were being played out anew. Certainly as a student of German with French as

my subsidiary subject I was aware of leaving one fiefdom and entering another: it behove one to respect the local customs. Presiding over German and Scandinavian was the fiercely egalitarian Aberdonian Duncan Mennie, bluff, dressed in tweeds and given to singing Lutheran hymns as he moved about his domain, while round the corner in the French Department the august, ascetic scholar Cuthbert Girdlestone, clad always with pre-war formality, represented the refined world of French intellectualism. This clash of cultures had to be negotiated with care: leaving Sydenham Terrace to attend a lecture in the French Department saw us hastily donning our black academic gowns, a prerequisite of entry to that building. Returning to the German Department we had to shed (and hide!) them just as hastily, since Duncan Mennie considered the wearing of gowns disgracefully élitist.

Professor Mennie designed the timetable to ensure first year students had a 9.00 am lecture every day to get them out of bed – and he took note of who wasn't there.

Re-entering the Department you were confronted with anti-smoking posters: "Don't be a nit, quit!" Childless himself, as Head of Department Duncan Mennie was paternalistic to an extent unthinkable today. He designed the timetable to ensure first year students had a 9.00 am lecture every day to get them out of bed – and he took note of who wasn't there. He encouraged us to make the most of the wider cultural life of King's College (Newcastle didn't separate from Durham to become a University until 1963), wanting to know how many of us had attended this or that event and expressing his displeasure at our lack of interest. And although not the snappiest of dressers himself he held very strong views on how students should be attired. Once he threw out a young man for turning up in his study in a shabby raincoat, only

to discover it was not a student but a new colleague from another department. The most famous dress incident, however, was the dress code he gave to all students before embarking on their year abroad – this one made press headlines.

We attended lectures in his large study on the second floor, a huge desk at the back, several rows of chairs in front, and books all round. Such was his passion for philology that an ill-prepared student could easily distract him with a well-timed question on the etymology of this or that word. This would invariably be enough to send him to the bookshelves and with any luck the bell would go, saving the student for another week. He believed in making us learn poetry by heart and teaching us to sing German folk-songs. First year students had a weekly introduction to the geography, culture and institutions of Germany (called by one of my wife's contemporaries "a guided tour of the pubs and churches of Germany"). But he gave real guided tours as well, taking his British undergraduates together with foreign exchange students in the Department along stretches of Hadrian's Wall and by train to Edinburgh, where he would expound on the history of the castle to the annoyance of the official guides. Only official guides may lecture inside the premises, he was told. "Very well, can you do it in German, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian for the benefit of my party?" came the retort as he marched us outside.

Paternalistic, yes, but benevolently paternalistic. He knew all his students personally and was always ready to advise, encourage and to offer practical help. He summed up his philosophy in the closing words of his Inaugural Lecture by quoting from John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*: "I thanked Thomas, and went in with him, and we had some solid conversation together, and I told him it was not so much the pastor's duty to feed the flock, as to herd them well; and that although there might be some abler with the head than me, there wasna a he within the bounds of Scotland more willing to watch the fold by night and by day". And he did indeed live by these words. Another time, and a foreign country. I, and many others, have cause to be grateful to him.

After completing his undergraduate studies in 1960, Anthony returned to Newcastle University in 1965 as a Lecturer, later becoming Senior Lecturer and Head of the German Department here. He left Newcastle in 1981.