

Laudatio for Klaus Lubbers

Ladies and Gentleman, dear colleagues and friends,

it is both an honor and a pleasure to comment on the distinguished career of Klaus Lubbers, who, like Winfried Herget, celebrated his eightieth birthday this year. And we celebrate it with both of them to-day.

The city of Mainz and its university early became, and still are, the center of Klaus Lubbers's life. He came here in the mid nineteen-fifties to study the Classics, English, and German, graduated in 1960 with a State Diploma in English and Latin, began teacher's training, also completed his doctorate in American Studies within a year in 1961, and took the postdoctoral degree, the Habilitation, within the next few years in 1967. Only a year after having become eligible, he received and declined a call to the University of Graz, Austria, which enabled him to accept the call to the newly founded Chair of American Studies plus Recent, or Most Recent even, English Studies (Amerikanistik und Neueste Anglistik) at Mainz, which he held for over thirty years between 1970 and 2003.

This may sound extremely fast, focused and localized, and it is: a full-fledged academic career from Mainz University freshman to full professor within fifteen years between age 20 and 35. But then Klaus Lubbers was also born under the zodiac sign of gemini, suggesting complexity in addition to directedness. The path to the Mainz-centered academic career led past what Robert Frost famously called roads not taken. Unusual for a youth from the Northern part of Germany, Klaus Lubbers became early interested in the Alps and in mountaineering – even to the point of considering a career as a professional mountain guide, had it not been for the apparently even stronger fascination with the English-speaking world, which study-abroad stipends for Birmingham University in England and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and, still later, an ACLS Fellowship for Amherst College in Massachusetts expanded and deepened. While in Amherst for his postdoctoral thesis on Emily Dickinson, he even considered leaving Germany and joining the faculty of Amherst College, which appeared an option at the time. Later and closer to home he declined calls to Stuttgart (1973), Salzburg, Austria, (1978) and the

then newly founded Catholic University of Eichstätt (1979), meanwhile Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, and accepted a Visiting Professorship at Georgia State University, Atlanta, a Mainz partner institution, especially in American Studies. Thus, his career is marked by both the local and the global, systolic regional grounding and diastolic openness.

At Mainz he was instrumental in strengthening further the already strong reputation of the American Studies Division; for instance, by serving on appointments committees, which hired eminent colleagues and excellent scholars such as Hans Helmcke, Winfried Herget, Alfred Hornung, and Renate von Bardeleben in Germersheim. He was twice Dean of Humanities and Senator of Mainz University (1973-1975, 1986-1988). For ten years, between 1971 and 1981, he was review editor of *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, whose editorship has hardly left Mainz since, except for the important phase when Gerhard Hoffmann edited the journal in Würzburg. Then, for a long period of time, Alfred Hornung, Udo Hebel from but not in Mainz, and meanwhile Oliver Scheiding have continued the good work. Between 1981 and 1984 Klaus Lubbers served as President of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS) and, later, as both evaluator for the German Research Foundation (1988-1992) and as Head of the Literary and Cultural Studies section of Görres Society, one of the leading German interdisciplinary scholarly societies (1992-2003).

Both Klaus Lubbers's teaching and research reflect the complexity of his diverse interests. The recent redefinition of Mainz American Studies as the Obama Transnational American Studies Institute excellently fits his interdisciplinary and transnational approach. The addendum *Neueste Anglistik / Most Recent English Studies* in the denomination of his American Studies Chair expressed his interest in the larger picture. He never saw American Literature and Culture in isolation but always embedded in larger contexts. So did Winfried Herget, as we heard this morning. In a sense, the new appellation of the institute raises to a new plateau what was already implied and understood before. Klaus Lubbers's numerous publications and seven authored books between the nineteen-sixties and the present also reflect major changes in his own intellectual development as well as in the discipline's methodology.

The first of these books, his dissertation on the function of the death scene in the short stories of Edgar Allen Poe, published in 1961 [*Die Todesszene und ihre Funktion im Kurzgeschichtenwerk Edgar Allan Poes*], led to the acceptance of an article in *American Literature* in 1967 on Poe's poem "The Conqueror Worm," which is also part of the story "Ligeia." At the time, such appreciation for his work by a major US journal was a truly unusual achievement for a youthful German American Studies scholar. Klaus Lubbers's ongoing interest in the genre of the short story culminated in the publication of his both fundamental and influential *Typology of the Short Story* in 1977 (second edition 1989) [*Typologie der Kurzgeschichte*].

His post-doctoral thesis goes into a markedly different direction, as *Habilitationsschriften* traditionally do. It is a comprehensive study of the reception of Emily Dickinson's poetry and the cultural, moral, and aesthetic revisions it manifests over time. *Emily Dickinson: The Critical Revolution* was published by Michigan University Press in 1968. In the German context the book can also be considered part of a critical revolution, as in this period Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss laid the groundwork of a reception-oriented redefinition of literary studies. The book that follows, an *Introduction to American Studies* (1970) [*Einführung in die Amerikanistik*], reflects both Klaus Lubbers's pedagogical interest and the dramatically increasing student numbers at the end of the sixties that warranted such concern.

From the early seventies onwards he began to shift his research focus to Irish Studies. A Hibernian phase began both in his research and with regard to a substantial expansion of the library holdings of Irish materials, including numerous rare antiquarian volumes. Only rivalled by the University of Wuppertal, the library of the Mainz English Department houses one of the best and comprehensive libraries of Irish Literature and Culture in Germany, due to Klaus Lubbers's efforts. A prestigious Academy Grant by the Volkswagen-Foundation in the early eighties facilitated the completion of a history of the early Irish Novel to the end of the nineteenth century published in 1985, the first pioneering and groundbreaking study in a hitherto untilled field [*Geschichte der irischen Erzählprosa: Von den Anfängen bis zum ausgehenden neunzehnten Jahrhundert*].

Academically Klaus Lubbers grew up in the tradition of the New Criticism which saw the literary text as the ultimate autonomous object of study, a Keatsian *Well-Wrought Urn*, as the title of Cleanth Brooks's famous seminal study of 1947 reads. After WW II this politically abstemious methodology fell on fertile ground in Germany. Wolfgang Kayser's *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk* (1948) became the German bible of "textimmanente Werkinterpretation," as it was called. Hans Galinsky, the founding father of post-war Mainz American Studies and Klaus Lubbers's mentor, had sometimes students spell Kayser's name aloud in class to drive home his importance and, of course, also to avoid misspellings. This disciplinary imaginary, to use Don Pease's phrase, influenced Klaus Lubbers's early work with regard to its concentration on the strategies and functions of literary texts. But his subsequent consideration of the sociology of literary reception in the case of Emily Dickinson and very definitely his turn to Irish Studies, and thereby a literature which remains incomprehensible without an understanding of Irish colonial history and politics, changed his view of both literature and culture fundamentally. The advent of the New Historicism in the eighties and Stephen Greenblatt's insistence on not only Shakespearean negotiations of literature and culture, defined as systems of mobility and constraints circulating social energies, confirmed this sea change from stylistic strategies to cultural contexts.

Klaus Lubbers's next research project was devoted to the ways in which Native American oppression is being stereotyped, camouflaged, and distorted in white culture. This study, titled *Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894*, published a century later in 1994, discusses American political texts such as essays and Fourth of July orations together with poems, melodramas, and fiction thematizing Native Americans. The book also includes the visual arts from peace medals to paintings and sculpture from Theodore de Bry to the Hudson River School. Henceforth visualizations of cultural issues also became an integral part of his teaching. Based on his systematic collection of slides of American painting from the beginnings in folk art to the present, his lectures on American culture integrated yet another important dimension. In the introduction to *Born for the Shade* he advances the conviction "that increasing specialization retards rather than advances our knowledge of a culture and that in order to gain insight into its complexities we

should . . . unabashedly give up the traditional departmentalization of our academic orientation and venture afield" (9). From a New Critic of American literature Klaus Lubbers had developed into a cultural analyst of American Studies.

The diversity of his interests naturally translated into his teaching and his influence on his students. Of the students he mentored and supervised who eventually reached the post-doc and professorial level, some concentrated primarily on English Studies like Patricia Plummer, whose doctoral mentor, Wolfgang G. Müller, is also present, and Wolfgang Riedel, some tried to reconcile American and Irish Studies like myself, and some even went into Linguistics like Günther Lampert.

Klaus Lubbers's as yet most recent book publication, *Vom Trotten: Die Kunst des gemächlichen Laufens*, published in the series rororo sport, makes clear that his range of interests transcends the academic sphere altogether. It is a kind of meditation on his jogging in the wood near his home. The book expressly recommends running at a pace slow enough to allow for contemplation, similar to an activity Henry David Thoreau called sauntering in his essay "Walking." Nevertheless, at the time his jogging was not quite as unambitious as it sounds on paper, as it served to get in shape for his annual week-long expeditions to the Austrian and Swiss Alps in the company of a daring, not to say near-suicidal, mountain guide from Trier and, sometimes, myself, a total novice to mountain climbing. Thus he staid true to the Alpine ambitions of his youth. Maybe he did keep the road not taken "for another day," as Frost has it. This may eventually also result in yet another book. The Mainz university homepage lists under his current research interests "the cultural history of mountaineering." From what I hear he is working on it so that today's lecture by Julie Rak is particularly apt and will, I am sure, open up yet new vistas. Again, congratulations, many happy returns, and all the best for the cultural history of mountaineering!

Works Mentioned

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