

Laudatio for Winfried Herget

Lieber Herr Professor Herget, liebe Frau Herget, lieber Herr Professor Lubbers, liebe Frau Lubbers, dear professors, assistants, students, staff members, Hiwis, colleagues and friends of our guests of honor,

[SLIDE 1] I am both **thrilled** and **terrified** to stand here before you to honor the professor, teacher and academic mentor to whom I and so many students, teachers, assistants and professors owe so much.

I am **thrilled** and **terrified** in face of this task, and I realize that I learned to conceptualize this sensation from Winfried Herget: **the sublime** – perfectly exemplified in America's wild nature: vast and powerful, inspiring terror and awe. Winfried Herget taught us about the importance of the **sentimental**, about the **Pastoral** and the **Sublime**. [SLIDE 2] The Sublime is magnificently represented by Cole and Bierstadt. Bierstadt in particular, in a generation when the West was opening up to travel, sums up the new attitude of appreciation for the vast, untamable reaches of the wilderness. Professor Herget referred us, his students, to Edmund Burke's contemporaneously revived and adapted paradigm of the 'aesthetics of the sublime,' a theory that defines artistic impact with regard to its effect on the viewer or reader. Burke carefully distinguished the sublime from the beautiful and associated the feeling of terror with it, leading to enjoyment, received from the paradoxical confrontation. Terror and awe transformed to bliss and enjoyment.

We live in a culture which maintains the pleasant custom and academic tradition of particularly honoring birthdays with well-rounded numbers. And as a scholar of memory culture I am immediately curious. Anniversaries are some of the most potent memory triggers. Round numbers may be reassuring, but – most importantly – they provide a reason to recollect experiences – which is what I intend to do.

I also wish to express my deep-felt gratitude to Winfried Herget. I would never have traveled the path down memory studies lane, had it not been for him. Winfried Herget not only expertly supervised my Master's thesis on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial but introduced me to this rich field of study in the first place. As editor – together with Renate von Bardeleben – of the *Mainzer Studien zur Amerikanistik*, Winfried Herget offered me to publish my thesis, which was a novelty at the time. Besides his excellent work in the fields of sentimentalism, of the sublime and of cultures of memory, Winfried Herget's major interest and special field of study are Puritan Literatures and Cultures. Who would forget Winfried Herget's sermon, pardon me, key note lecture on Puritans in the Wilderness, delivered in Wittenberg's *Schloßkirche* ("Castle church") on whose doors Luther nailed his 95 theses in 1517.

In 2002, the forty-ninth annual conference of the German Association for American Studies was held in Wittenberg, and after some serious Bach was played on a serious organ, Winfried Herget talked about the Puritans in the wilderness in the way – pardon me Professor Hall – only he can. Long before the buzz of the transnational turn in American studies Winfried Herget had internalized this turn with his Anglo-American or Atlantic studies of Puritanism.

Those who studied under Winfried Herget know that his formative induction into the study of American culture has been through his experience as an exchange student [SLIDE 3] at Fort Dodge Senior High School, Fort Dodge, Iowa in 1952/53. Following his studies of English and American Literature, political science and philosophy under Adorno at Frankfurt and at the Sorbonne, Winfried Herget completed his dissertation on the young Joseph Conrad in Frankfurt under Willi Erzgräber. His postdoctoral studies led him to Cambridge and Saarbrücken. From 1978 to 2004 he was Professor and Chair of American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz.

He brought to Mainz a professional expertise of American Studies that relied on the subject's truly interdisciplinary nature, based on a combined reflection on the culture, power, and space of the United States. Winfried Herget's major interests in research, writing, and teaching range from the political culture of the United States, in particular the role of rhetoric, to transatlantic German-American relations from the 19th to the 21st century, including the impact of the American military presence in Rhineland-Palatinate. He has published on American literature up to the present, as well as in the field of American Theater Studies (from melodrama to the one-act play).

His studies in rhetoric range from revolutionary speeches to contemporary presidential rhetoric. In his wonderful article "Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung – Martin Luther Kings Rhetorik des Protestes in 'I Have a Dream'" he combines rhetorical studies with African American scholarship. He has contributed several articles to the *Historical Dictionary of Rhetoric*. In his entry on „Barock“ he showed how Cotton Mather already deviated from a mere plain style.

When Winfried Herget came to Mainz in 1977 he took his very first student assistant on a journey through Germany's America. The student would faithfully accompany Winfried Herget to the central library every Friday morning where they would work their way through the new books that had arrived via interlibrary loan. [SLIDE 4] The task was to compile a bibliography of every German publication about America in the 19th century. It was based on the German Americana collection of Harold Jantz of Duke University, whom Winfried Herget had met during his time at Harvard between 1968 and 1970.

The student was infected by the virus of archival research and cultural studies as his teacher put special emphasis on the prefaces to uncover the cultural historical value of many of the works. And maybe both are still searching for the first edition of *Der Weiße Sklave* by **Richard Hildreth**

Winfried Herget also pursued European-American relations actively by traveling and teaching in Croatia, and by keeping close relations with colleagues there. He travelled to Zagreb frequently and his two-week seminar was organized in Dubrovnik as a Neckermann package deal in 1987. [SLIDE 5] Cultural exchanges are important to Winfried Herget. As a student in the 1990s I cherished the opportunity that the American Studies Department offered about a dozen exchange programs with US universities. The advertising, application and selection process was administered by Winfried Herget and his assistants.

Winfried Herget is an exceptional cultural negotiator. As co-founder of the Interdisciplinary Working Group for North American Studies, IANAS, Winfried Herget organized a conference on “50 Jahre Amerikaner in Rheinland-Pfalz” at Ramstein Air Base. [SLIDE 6] He successfully brought the Camp Lindsey Library from the air force base in Wiesbaden to the university of Mainz. The library massively expanded the American studies holdings of the university. Already in its initial space in the SBII building, it featured the ProQuest Research Library: this was at a time when many German university libraries and American Studies institutes were still waiting for the digital revolution in bibliographical research. Today the *USA-Bibliothek* has its home in the Georg-Forster-Building and holds 72,000 monographs and 2,700 newspapers.

Beyond all this **two** words characterize Winfried Herget: **Responsibility** and **service**. He did not shy away from neither. He served as Dean from 1982 to 85 and from 1994 to 97. From 1987 to 91 he was Chairman of the Interdepartmental Council, and from 1995 to 97 Member of the University Senate. Since he was also in charge of room management, one could say that at one point he held all **key** positions at the Philosophicum.

What I have said so far should not distract from the most important thing that describes Winfried Herget from the perspective of his students: his contagious enthusiasm and passion for teaching, and his absolute devotedness to helping students succeed.

As students we loved his part of the American Studies lecture cycle. Long before “powerpoint” Winfried Herget excellently made use of the mechanical version of this technology, projecting the important names and concepts on transparencies beforehand, and always speaking with just the right pace. Speaking of timing, each semester he informed students new to his always innovative seminars that we will not wrap up at a quarter to eight but at

eight. We stayed happily, not only because we knew that we would be served white wine at our last meeting. To study for all of my final exams I chose the English and American studies library, because I knew that Winfried Herget would wander out of his study and around the stacks from time to time, and he would notice every one of us, offering an encouraging smile, a short wink. Winfried Herget's receiving a teaching award only officially manifested what we all knew, his being an excellent teacher.

To remain in close contact with his object of study, Winfried Herget still travels to Cambridge twice a year. And, I should mention, he travelled to Regensburg at least once in the last 15 years. After he oversaw my defense in July 2005, he, Udo Hebel and my family had dinner at my favorite restaurant and Winfried Herget's favorite hotel. [SLIDE 7] The *Orphée*, a preference Winfried Herget shares with former Secretary of State Joschka Fischer and filmmaker Wim Wenders

More than 10 years after his official retirement he is still present at the University, and there are only two differences: [SLIDE 8] he had to give up his red 2CV, and he is teaching 3 courses instead of 4. He is the „Fels in der (Mainzer) Brandung“ as a friend aptly put it recently.

His legacy is alive. 3 of his assistants moved on to chairs of American Studies in Germany and Austria.

Udo Hebel served as vice president and president of the GAAS and continued to serve as editor for the GAAS publication *Amerikastudien/American Studies*. He is a member of the American Antiquarian Society and currently President of the University of Regensburg. This is also the reason why he cannot be here today. The University of Regensburg celebrates its *Dies Academicus* today with Udo Hebel hosting the event. He sends all his very best regards and well wishes (and you might have realized that he filled me in on some insider knowledge).

Frank Kelleter was the Chair of American Studies at the University of Göttingen and established the DFG research unit “Popular Seriality—Aesthetics and Practice.” He is now Chair of the Department of Culture and Einstein Professor of North American Cultural History at John F. Kennedy Institute, Free University Berlin. With his numerous publications in national and international newspapers Frank Kelleter has become a renowned public intellectual. Currently in New York, he is also sending his very best from there.

Nassim Balestrini holds a professorship in American Studies and Intermediality at the University of Graz, Austria. She is Director of the Centre for Intermediality Studies at Graz and has served as President of the Austrian Association for American Studies. Her interdiscipli-

nary research in adaptation has connected her not only with Americanists, but also with scholars in musicology, opera, and theater studies. Furthermore, she has retained ties to Slavists through her work in Russian-American literary and cultural relations. Unfortunately, she cannot be here today, but she sends her kindest regards and asked me to express her gratitude to Prof. Herget particularly for his openness toward her interdisciplinary research projects and teaching ideas.

Like their advisor and mentor, all of his assistants have taken their political, intellectual, and academic responsibility seriously – and like Winfried Herget – they serve actively **in** and **outside** the university.

Professor Herget's website lists 28 doctoral candidates and close to 500 students who completed PhD, MA, BA or state exam theses with him. And my suspicion is that there are even more, like my thesis, which Winfried Herget supervised as a second reader. His students moved on to fill important positions in regional, national and international contexts. Allow me to point out three of them.

Reiner Smolinski is Professor of English at Georgia State University in Atlanta; **Martin Japtok** is Associate Professor of English at Palomar College in San Marcos, California, and **Martin Brückner** is Professor of English at the University of Delaware and Associate Director of the Center for Material Culture Studies.

I think that I can safely say that all of us in this lecture hall today – friends, colleagues, assistants, students, as well as the people whose lives were touched by him and that are not here today – are happy that we can still rely on Winfried Herget's expertise and his encouraging smile. For those of us no longer teaching or studying at Mainz, we always look forward to the annual meeting of the German Association for American Studies where Winfried Herget is always present to share with us his current research projects and insights from recently supervised theses.

We extend our warmest greetings to our teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend, Winfried Herget on the occasion of his 80th birthday and wish him all the best, health and happiness for the future.

Ingrid Gessner

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