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Gift of the Gods or Creative Lab?

HOW TO TEACH LITERARY WRITING
IN EUROPE

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I made my first experiences in teaching literary writing at Vienna poetry school fourteen years ago, when the school had just started to set up Internet classes. This way I was able to instruct students from Vienna while living in Chicago and New York. Later on I was part of a team developing the first university-based writing program in Austria and became one of its first professors. Additionally I have been teaching literary writing at Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig since 2007. Two years ago I organized a meeting of university-based institutions inviting teachers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland to discuss programs, experiences and perspectives of teaching literary writing in the German-speaking countries.

THE GENIUS PROBLEM

As my title says one of the main problems in establishing these writing programs was and is the belief in the genius of literature that was held up for centuries in our region. Although there are academies for art, music and theatre all over Europe, the notion of literature as a discipline that could be studied was met with fierce resistance. God-given talents, Immaculate Conception without the intervening of earthly craft and a portion of chance were considered as the main ingredients of writing good literature. Up to now this mistrust in the teachability and learnability of literature has not disappeared. Lots of self-taught writers are belittling and despising graduated writers maybe out of fear. Critics are lamenting about uniform writing styles and plots. So before we could even start our program in Vienna there was the huge problem of finding allies and financial support. Sometimes, when I heard colleagues from Spain and France talking about the same hurdles I even thought that this rejection was connected to Catholicism. Only the trust in the unfailing Master could create such conservative principles.

So this was not an easy start. I still remember the TV reporter's cynical smile when the evening news reported about our writing program and after trying to explain what we were about to do, this report ended with the interview of a well-known Austrian author who was confirming the uselessness of our future efforts. So we are still far from having the experiences that were made in the US over the last decades. We are a long way from reflecting the effects of such programs on the aesthetic and political outlook.

At the moment we Europeans – as I know from different schools that are organized in the European Network Of Creative Writing Projects - are confronted with practical questions, like the need for a systematic approach to free floating poetics by different authors-teachers, and on the other hand we are struggling to gain respect and credibility within the rationalization of university education, like the Bologna-System, and economic problems that are always an excuse to cut the funds for humanities at large.

But European institutions provide something extraordinary compared to the English speaking countries: our bachelor and master programs offer full time education in creative and literary writing. They are not complementary to other fields and often associated with academies for arts. Therefore some of us are using the term literary writing instead of creative writing in order to clarify our objective as we are not teaching how to become a better scientific writer and not doing any biographical or therapeutic writing. Our students are entering these programs because they want to be literary authors. Quite often they find out that they are more interested in writing about literature or editing or translating or even teaching literature or organizing literary events. Everything that is enriching the literary field is welcome. Apart from graduating, becoming a writer takes time and the outcome can never be sure. But that's characteristic of a profession that is deeply connected to personal development.

ON CREATIVITY

Writing literature is a complex process, combining irrational and rational aspects, researching facts and using emotional competence, organizing knowledge and being able to dive into the subconscious, learning rules and destroying known concepts to find surprising solutions, in short: being able to juggle contradictory movements. To teach literary writing you have to know about this creative process, you have to understand the difficult interactions of doing, undoing and redoing. What you cannot provide as a teacher is the student's ability to deal with time, with unruly events, with conditions of openness, awareness and the fragile requirements of the student's psychological progression.

Looking at creative processes and analyzing them from the outside is a very difficult task. Why? First, the writer who is too much aware of what he is doing can lose his fresh approach and stop writing. Second: as he is the one who is telling the researcher about the process the result is prone to speculation and self-aggrandizement or even self-promotion. And again, it will not be enough to report about daily writing, because the pace of internalizing and processing knowledge is differing from writer to writer. So the observation of creative processes - as it has been done in several scientific studies - depend on approximation and subjective evaluation.

Nevertheless, as a teacher you have to be able to perceive those conditions and talk about it. The writing class can provide a collective process of introspection for the author. Therefore the university seminar should offer a pro-

tected space, a room to move, a simulation somehow of the requirements of the outside world, a lab at its best. But let's not forget that we are dealing with individuals that are working inside an institution while their aim is to become independent from institutions. So while providing this protected room you will have to deal with dissatisfaction and rebellion as well. And not all personalities are made for collective programs for such a long period of time that it takes to complete a bachelor's degree. Some students on the other hand find it difficult to leave the institution and step into the unknown.

Furthermore it is not the writing process itself we are studying in our classrooms, it is the product, the text that we get to examine. Like Roland Barthes wrote about in his "Preparation of the Novel" we will rarely ever witness the immense work of preparation and ritualization that is happening before even one word is written. What we work with in the classroom is a text in the making and we try to find out if it meets our and the author's intention and expectations. We will initiate a collective reading process. We will examine it for perspectives and poetic qualities and try to learn why it is difficult for us to follow it, to like it or why there is a great risk that we dislike it. We will discuss and give feedback to the author, and maybe we will help the writer getting closer to its original idea about the text, clearing it from the dusts of uncertainty.

As we can learn from movies about writers it is nearly impossible to depict the creative process in an interesting way. For the viewer the writer's main work is quite boring to look at: A person sitting somewhere, staring at walls, papers, screens, sometimes moving fingers over a note book

or a keyboard. It is all happening inside the writer's body and even the colorful images of brain scans are nothing more than surfaces proving that something is going on. But what that is, we are never to know. We just observe. But we can help to get those young writers in our classes moving towards finding solutions, to use tools, to get deeper into problems, to redefine and concentrate. For me as a teacher this is the challenging task of working with the conscious and unconscious, of producing awareness for literature on various levels.

PROGRAMMES

Next I will give you an overview on institutions in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and their differences concerning program, setting, endowment, and financial background.

Leipzig

The Deutsche Literaturinstitut Leipzig, short DLL or in English: German Literature Institute Leipzig, is the oldest university institution founded by the communist party in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic) by means of which was to produce literature that would meet the needs of a proclaimed nation of workers and farmers. In the beginning it was meant to teach working class students how to write literature and tell the masses about their conditions and dreams. Part of the program was an internship at a nearby coal mine once a year to get a closer look at

the proletarians. Lots of quite famous writers of the former GDR attended classes there, a past that the research team at the contemporary Leipzig institute is now busy to analyze.

After the end of the GDR some representatives decided to reopen the school and it started with a new curriculum around the mid-nineties. It is providing a Bachelor and a Master Program. There are three full-time male professors and a changing staff of guest professors, all of them quite known authors of the German literary establishment. The curriculum for the bachelor's degree is a mixture of workshops and lectures focusing mainly on learning by doing than repeating knowledge about literature. After the first year which is spent to acquire basic structures and working on shorter texts, students choose between different genres, like poetry, play writing, essays, short story, prose and cross-genre projects. A lot of additional information is provided, like themes, types, techniques of narration, poetics, stylistics, aesthetics, cultural theory and theory of language, history of literature and contemporary literature. A reading class is mandatory to prevent the tendency that students who want to become writers often don't want to read other writers. All above classes are considered to take up only 20 percent of the students' time; the other 80 percent are reserved for writing on their own. To prepare them for the literary field, they attend classes in literary criticism, book business and are obliged to make an internship of 3 months in institutions in and around the literature business.

As there are just 15 to 20 student places in the bachelor program each year the task to select the best students out

of more than 600 applications is a hard one. Four groups consisting of three teachers (one for prose, one for drama, one for poetry) and a student are reading all texts, choosing up to 45 candidates for an extensive interview. These conversations are held by different groups of teachers and students to avoid preconceived opinions and judgments.

The master program is open to students of all faculties as far as they can submit an interesting concept for a longer text, eg. a novel, a play or a collection of poetry and a large amount of writing examples. Only 4 to 8 candidates have a chance to start this program of 4 semesters. They attend group workshops designated to their literary project, and some classes about methods, poetics and aesthetics of literary writing, which is especially necessary for those who are not coming from another literary or cultural studies program.

As I mentioned before it has become important for the institutional legitimation of such university-based literary writing schools to have research projects connected to the institute. At the moment the DLL research group is concentrating on the historical aspects of teaching literary writing, as they happen to have this big archive of former activities during the GDR.

The list of graduates who succeeded at publishing their work and becoming literary stars in Germany is very impressive. That's why the Institute in Leipzig is by far the most known, the most praised and the most hated. Some of you might have heard the term *Leipziger Schule* by which is described a certain type of painting after the German Unification following the style of Neo Rauch who studied and taught at the Leipzig Academy for the Arts.

I think that the DLL made a big effort to professionalize contemporary literature and provide publishers and readers with fresh perspectives, as did the Leipziger Schule for Contemporary Arts.

Hildesheim

The second most important writing school is based in Hildesheim. It was developed by the German Studies Department in 1999 and its program differs from Leipzig. As its name, “Kreatives Schreiben und Kulturjournalismus”, signifies, it is a combination of practical, journalistic and theoretical studies of literature.

One full-time professor, male, several assistant professors and a group of instructors are teaching a bachelor and a master program. Applicants for the bachelor program have to submit 20 pages of literary texts and have – if chosen – to undergo an interview, first about their own work, and second, about one or more examples of contemporary literature.

Students learn to write their own literary texts and writing about literature so the field of future professions for graduates is more widespread than in Leipzig. In addition, classes include a minor research project for students that is focused mostly either on the material turn, i.e. about the material conditions of writing, or the digital turn, i.e. the influences new and social media have on conditions of reading and producing texts. Compared to Leipzig the Hildesheim program offers a more functional approach and a discussion of the implications of the digital era on

the literary field. Students also have to work as interns at cultural institutions, in the media or event business, like publishing houses, literary festivals, newspapers or radio stations to learn about their structures and confront themselves with various aspects of the cultural field. This makes it easier to decide which professional way to choose after graduation.

To extend those practical involvements furthermore the teachers at Hildesheim established lit-radio, a web radio station completely run by students. Here they learn to produce features, work with words and sounds, write and realize radio plays. They are recording and documenting readings by known authors, interviewing representatives of the literary business and so on. The very important point of these options is that the conflict between the old-school-narrative-literature-and-analog-book-business and the e-book-publishing-and-using-digital-tools-as-inspiration-and-medium is not an issue. You are allowed and even encouraged to explore both.

As it is always hard to use conventional grading systems for creative work we should have a look at their evaluation system. In Leipzig it is done by combining attendance, contributions to the group discussion and for the major part the evaluation of the student's text production. Still a spectrum of 6 to 8 grades is used.

In Hildesheim attendance and continuity are important as well, but the student's text is evaluated in an extensive face-to-face-discussion with the teacher. So the student will be informed about the qualities and flaws of the text and is able to rework it.

In addition to workshops and seminars where group

work is necessary another way of teaching literary writing is promoted in Hildesheim: the so called mentoring. This teacher-student-relationship is very intense and demanding so in Hildesheim it is only offered to students on a higher level who already have a clearer understanding of their intention and more insight into the writing process. For students just starting their studies mentoring could be overstraining, and even hindering, too much information, too much input could produce stress, writer's block, and rejection, even when the mentor just advises to keep a journal or taking notes.

The diversification of the Hildesheim program is increased by four different types of master programs: you could attend either a program concentrating on cultural management (where you have the possibility to participate in a bilingual program, that is held in cooperation with Marseille) or you choose to concentrate on literary writing, or on the theoretical side writing about philosophy of arts and media, or you select a master program that focuses on the performative aspects of the arts.

Applicants have to prove that they are already experienced in producing literary texts and submit a proposal for a literary work and a research project as well. In an interview they have to persuade a group of teachers of their intention to concentrate on this work over a period of two years. The evaluation of this interview is even more formalized than in Leipzig.

Other special features that define the profile of the literary writing institution in Hildesheim are:

1. A literary magazine produced and written by students

that is well known in Germany's literary scene and read also by literary agents and editors.

2. A small publishing house organized by students and teachers to give them the possibility to edit their own books

3. A festival for young contemporary authors organized by students with readings, discussions, performances and a literary competition that is held once a year

4. Poeticon – an online-platform for poetics hosted by a professor and some students based on the notion of doing literature, i.e. process-orientated. This concept is influenced by the French theory of “critique genétique” i.e. the reconstruction of literary processes in historical texts in order to learn about the material and the medial qualities of communication. That's why poeticon does not describe rhetoric or aesthetics as abstract nouns but in form of verbs describing possible strategies of writing, for example: to improvise, to collect, to copy, to omit, to visualize, to quote etc.

5. Editors' conference: once a year editors of well-known German publishing houses meet on university grounds to discuss new trends in contemporary literature and the publishing business. Students organize it as well and there are complementary workshops about editing held by the invited professionals. So this is another way for students of getting connected to the literary business.

6. Last but not least, the already mentioned web radio: a multi-media-pool about contemporary literature and a very lively platform. Students learn to handle video

and audio tools, software, combining their data with the possibilities of the web, using elements of content management systems to explore new ways of distributing literature and documenting cultural life.

I think this very practical approach allows students of Hildesheim to react and participate directly and form connections all over the literary field. This is the unique feature of the Hildesheim university program for literary and journalistic writing.

Biel

The literary writing program in the Swiss city of Biel was established in 2006. From the beginning it offered a bachelor and a master program. As the Schweizerische Literaturinstitut is part of an academy of arts students have the opportunity to cross over to other art forms such as theatre, performance, music, dance, and develop unknown combinations, like dancing poetry etc.

The Director, female, is orchestrating a team of tenured mentors, teachers, and guest professors, many of them bilingual or even trilingual. On the one hand this program was always meant to mirror the multilingual environment of Switzerland, but on the other hand Biel's geographical closeness to France made it logical to establish French and German as working languages in seminars and workshops. Like in Leipzig, experienced authors mostly teach literary writing classes. The theoretical side of the program, like literary theory, analysis of texts and drama, literary criticism is carried out by professors of literary studies. Students are

encouraged to participate in transdisciplinary projects. In so called toolboxes the students acquire abilities in other disciplines like using the media lab, learning to draw or combining their written work with conceptual art. Up to fifteen students are chosen to start these studies each year. As you can see besides literary talent, studying in Biel requires openness to all arts and the commitment to work on an individual outcome. By completing their bachelor studies students should be able to work on a text from research, writing, reworking, to editing, publishing, promoting and performing it. They are taught to establish a literary and cultural network. Like Leipzig and Hildesheim, many graduates from Biel get publishing contracts and literary prizes. Not because they are trained to conform the literary market as critics like to complain, but because those literary writing teaching institutions are doing the work that was done by the editing houses themselves in former times. Publishers cannot afford discovering and mentoring young talents any longer, often because this takes time but moreover because the publishing business has changed a lot. The old traditional structure of a publisher patriarch leading a house, knowing all authors and dealing with them for a decade or more, is gone. Editors don't have enough time and are thankful for the professionalization of young authors that are or were students at university institutions. So are also literary agents who enjoy fishing in a pool of fresh approaches to writing.

To continue their studies in Biel, students can attend a master program of contemporary arts practice that is defined by a transdisciplinary curriculum in which they mix classes in literature, music, media arts, fine arts and per-

formance art to achieve a wider spectrum of artistic education. Students who want to concentrate on the textual components can choose a more text-orientated project to complete their master or even cooperate with translators.

But the very special feature besides its transdisciplinary and bilingual approach in Biel is the extensive use of mentoring. Because of the variety of artistic expressions, languages and personalities face-to-face-meetings between mentor and his protégé proved to be a better way of dealing with the student's needs. And mentoring means even more than just talking about examples of the student's literary production. As creativity cannot be thought without the personal and psychological preconditions of writing these aspects are dealt with as well. The mentor is helping the student to find out more about his intention, his personal writing style, his flaws and strengths. The line between the professional and the personal relationship is thin. At its best it could be an exchange not only about the student's text but also about questions of literary aesthetics, dreams, utopias. As there is no formalized education for Swiss mentors the process and outcome of this method is depending on the teacher's subjective disposition. Therefore the institute is doing research in the field of mentoring. By starting out with this teaching method known since antiquity the research project is meant to explore ways of transmitting experience and knowledge outside the theoretical or philosophical or pedagogical standard to find new perspectives on this dialog between generations of writers.

There are a lot of questions for a start. Like: What is mentoring in an artistic context? Does it mean to accompany, to support, and to give feedback to a student and

his writing? How does mentoring work? What does it take to be a successful model for both sides? Does it require sympathy, trust? What kind of experience is made in the exchange? Should the mentor be a mirror? Or should he concentrate on providing writing tools only? How does the feedback the mentor gets, influence his mentoring style? On the one hand mentoring is a very individual approach to the student's needs, on the other hand it is running danger to become too close, too exclusive; misunderstandings or even conflicts arise. How to deal with it? Is mentoring some kind of institutionalized friendship? How about the conflict between the artistic preferences of the mentoring author vs. his duty to offer a service to the student? Is the experience as a writer enough to become a mentor? Or: can experience be transmitted to a younger colleague? Will he feel spoon-fed? Fed up? Overwhelmed? As we have heard the creative process is a tricky one and mostly the very important steps happen at moments when you are just not too attentive, not too concentrated. So this is nearly impossible to recreate in a mentoring situation. That's why the mentees are advised to keep journals about their writing and thinking habits that will be analyzed then weekly or every two weeks with the mentor.

For the moment the director of Biel decided to employ different approaches by hiring experienced writers and recently graduated writers that are closer to their students by age.

The downside of mentoring is its huge financial burden for the institution. Mentors cannot be in charge of more than 4 to 5 students per semester. So the student-professor-ratio is very low. The Schweizerische Literaturinstitut

gets sponsoring for its mentors by the Swiss federal government. Otherwise it would not be able to maintain this effective but expensive way of teaching young writers.

Vienna

As I told you I got involved in teaching literary writing by working for the Vienna poetry school, that was initiated as an independent artists' project in 1991. Its founders had spent time at the Jack Kerouac School for Disembodied Poetics and met the poet Allen Ginsberg there. They were inspired to bring this concept and some of its teachers to Europe. So from the beginning this school was meant to be bilingual and when they started inviting teachers from Spanish- and French-speaking countries even multilingual. The Vienna Poetry School views itself as a "laboratory for inspiration," a place where people interested in writing can discuss possibilities and techniques of writing with artists, authors, and musicians.

In 1992, the first classes and an international symposium on the topic of the "teachability and learnability of literature" were held, a subject that was totally new in Europe at that time as formulated in a statement:

Literature is just as hard and just as easy to teach as music and the fine arts. Of course, the only thing you can't teach is talent. Talent is the prerequisite () (...). As in music and the fine arts, what you can teach in poetics is material experiences and approaches, questions of form as treated in poetics, aspects of linguistics and the psychology of language. Excursions into the

neighboring arts, intercultural comparative poetics, and - what to me appears absolutely essential - the critical examination of poetic tendencies and traditions." (Rühm, in Hitze/Trauner: Über die Lehr- und Lernbarkeit von Literatur, Vienna, 1993, pp. 27 ff.)

With these considerations and an expanded understanding of literature in mind, the variety offered at the Vienna Poetry School is not surprising: Classes by the Mongolian voice artist Saymko Namtchilak, even by pop stars like Nick Cave, Falco, and Blixa Bargeld were available alongside studies of Buddhist connections between meditation and writing held by Allen Ginsberg, underwater poetry, translation classes for comics into Viennese dialect and so on.

After the swearing in of the new coalition in spring 2000, in which the far-right-wing party came to participate in the Austrian government for the first time, classes of the Vienna Poetry School were cancelled out of protest against the anti-immigration position of this party and had been conducted exclusively over the Internet: "We said, 'we'll go into exile. But we'll go into exile on the Internet,'".

Since then it has also expanded the media possibilities of literature and language. But the Vienna Poetry School is more or less an institution with temporary workshops. Therefore it always wanted to bring this education on to a higher level and establish a university-based writing program in Austria. That's where we, a group of authors started out around 1999.

After years of discussion what a university program should include, of extensive meetings with politicians and university people, of overcoming mistrust and disdain we

finally found a university willing to cooperate. Like in Switzerland it was an academy of arts that wanted to extend its program and contribute to the tradition of experimental writing in Vienna, a tradition that in this city was and is livelier than in monocultural and monolingual Germany. Now the meetings with organizers inside the university institutions started. And it was a long way to come to terms with the needs of bureaucracy and moreover the severe strings that are attached to establishing a curriculum for creative work within the European Bologna-System.

The Austrian program started in October 2009 with 15 students who were selected in a 3-step-process out of 340 applications. Additional to the required literary text the applicants have to complete a written test and an extensive interview about their motives, their knowledge about literature, their commitment and writing habits. The students are able to finish their studies within 6 semesters earning a bachelor-degree for literary writing. As I mentioned the special feature the Vienna university program offers is its openness to cross-genre- and transdisciplinary literary forms, like experimental, performance and transmedial literature. The cooperation with other disciplines of art, like printing, painting, architecture, graphics, media art and theory, etc. is possible and encouraged.

Several art projects were accomplished: for example, the production of a literary card play in cooperation with the printing class or an exhibition of art works our writing students developed with their peers from graphic design classes, producing, wallpapers, illustrated notebooks, unusual traffic signs or text sculptures.

Compared to other university institutes for literary writ-

ing like in Biel or Leipzig the Vienna institute has just one full-time professorship that is divided into two half-time positions. Apart from financial reasons we decided to proceed that way to give teachers who are literary authors enough time to complete their own writing. Therefore Vienna depends on temporary lecturers to achieve a variety of teaching. Classes are mostly workshop-oriented that is working and discussing in groups and relying on mentoring to a lesser extent. It is definitely the smallest program compared to the Swiss and German institutions. There is no master program and the institute does not participate in any research projects.

MY TEACHING EXPERIENCES

After establishing this literary writing program in Vienna I could accompany our first student group from their beginning until graduation. Not everything worked out the way we thought it would when following our first curriculum. There were disappointments and misunderstandings. Some students wanted to act independently, some wanted to have more individual time for their own projects, they felt the program did take too much of their energy. Some wanted to write more in class. Some were complaining about too many rules, some were convinced they needed more structure and directives. Some were not satisfied with the topics the teachers provided. Some criticized their disorganized teaching or the different teaching styles they performed. That's why a lively line of communication between teachers and students is extremely necessary.

Most of those different reactions are sparked by the diversity of the student body. Some are coming right out of high school, some have previously finished other study programs, mostly literary or media studies, some already worked for several years as journalists, graphic designers, etc. Therefore their personal, professional and theoretical preconditions are diverging a lot. To balance those contradictory needs with the formal and financial possibilities required a lot of discussions and some changes in the curriculum. Freedom of choice for the students adapting to the severe criteria of the European credit point system was a challenge.

Another important point in the beginning is the learning of criteria about how to talk about texts in group sessions. Those criteria need to be laid out clearly to avoid touchy-feely comments made to harmonize the group or simply ideological contributions to get rid of competitors.

Most of the students' wishes for change happen during the first year when they have to get used to the system and their new role of understanding themselves as writers. Feelings of self-aggrandizement and extreme insecurity are normal reactions.

The artistic ability and certitude that brought them to be accepted in the first place is now questioned and very often shattered into pieces when brought to a test. Some think the solution is to resist these new influences and not taking the second step, some withstand the crisis looking for new impulses. Psychologically the first year is the hardest.

In the second year most of the students find their way of coping with the university and the class situation. Again, this is a problem of time management: you get so much

input, and aside from dealing with social issues, jobs etc. to support yourself, the time to process all those stimulations and procedures is too short. And there is never enough time and energy for reading in addition to the books you are obliged to examine for your classes. Furthermore the reduction of study times that was created to get students faster into jobs might be good for other faculties but not for the artistic fields. Artists and writers need time for detours, idleness, for retreat. If they cannot find a balance between job, social life, psychological growth and literary work their productivity and the quality of their texts might not be satisfying enough.

In the third year when students are focusing on finishing their studies by working on the biggest project they ever undertook they don't care so much about the institution any longer. Working with students on a higher level is what I call the happy year. For the teacher, I mean, because group work now is closer to the ideal situation of exchange. After having received and discussed the concepts for their novels, plays, collections of poetry or aphorisms or short stories in individual meetings we get together in group sessions every two weeks. Talking about connections between horses and teenage girls, about self-exploitation of the digital bohemia in preparation for a theatre play, for example. Or discussing traditions of erotic literature, implications of human trafficking and the limits of researching those fields without getting too much involved, in preparation for a novel. Or analyzing novels constructed by different perspectives or how the achronological narrative of pulp fiction influenced Jennifer Egan's writing and how pollution is so wonderfully depicted in Japanese animes.

As you can see the spectrum is always very wide when a group of creative minds gets together. For me it was a real pleasure to watch those students grow into their abilities over a period of three years.

And that's the difference to my teaching experience in Leipzig where I teach only every other semester. The situation there is always fresh and the group has to learn to interact in a productive way from scratch. But sessions once a week create an intense working situation really fast. As a temporary teacher you will not know that much about the student's personal situation and the group dynamics that took place before you started your class. You can only try to act in an objective and democratic way. After introducing each other and the topics and specifics of the seminar I mostly present additional theoretical and literary material, like in a class about "the uncanny". In the beginning we read some short stories by the French author Marie Ndiaye to learn about her techniques. We read a theoretical text by Tzvetan Todorov about the fantastic and the uncanny. We brainstorm about personal horrors, talk about zombies, and the political messages in contemporary TV-zombie-series. The next step is the presentation of student's texts, mostly one or two per session. When the group is small, like up to 12 persons I want each student to give feedback to the author before we are opening the discussion talking about the following: are we able to tag along the author's intentions? Do we understand what the text wants to transmit? What were its intentions? Did the text achieve what he set out to do? How well are different elements balanced and if not, what is the reason for it? What is too much? Are there any motives to emphasize on? Very often the be-

ginning of a text is more a contemplation what to do next. Sometimes the author could remove parts of it.

Reading the text closely and analyzing it I often compare to detective work. And talking about it in a group situation is some sort of collective reflection that could help the author to get a clearer picture of his text. After the discussion I want the student to rework his text and hand in the final version for grading. If they wish to discuss it with me face-to-face they can do so, but normally they get enough input from the group.

So what we perform in class is intensifying the author's awareness of his doing and his product.

I already mentioned the role of group size in teaching literary writing. My experience is that a group of 8 is perfect but at the university not realistic. A group of 12 is still possible to deal with. 15 persons are too much, but you can always find ways to handle it. However this is the limit. Often students who have problems to articulate themselves are left out in bigger discussion groups, and it is two or three trying to dominate the situation with their views. Then it depends on the teacher's skills to intervene and transform the session into an experience all participants can profit from.

Finally I want to talk about the teachers our institutions have to find, recruit and even to educate. Those very important persons should have a variety of abilities as there are: being a good writer; having the tools, language and intention to reflect writing; social qualities, like empathy, willingness to dive into topics that are not always their favorite ones; engaging a lot but not too much to continue their own literary work; dealing with young people's per-

sonal problems, confronting opposition without getting too authoritarian, and a certain openness to aesthetic concepts the teacher does not always agree with.

At the moment we can distinguish three types of teachers:

1. Authors who are autodidacts and very often approach students in either a very formal or a very personal teaching style.
2. Authors who graduated from literary or cultural or media studies and already have teaching experiences in those fields. They will be able to work in a more didactic way and provide more organized theoretical background information.
3. Authors who graduated from a literary writing program who have knowledge about the student's needs and the procedures of the program from their own experience.

I think a combination of those three types is the most interesting for students. But I also think that a more formalized education of literary writing teachers and mentors would be necessary.

As different as the teacher's approaches are, one thing is clear: In the long run his teaching will be more or less start affecting his own writing, for good or for bad. You never know. In my case I could say that I am reflecting my own writing now more. But the main point for me as a teacher is that I am enjoying the exchange with my students a lot, I like the variety of their thoughts, problems and productions. I like passing on my experience and knowledge to

their fresh minds.

And coming back to the opposition of my title: Gift of the gods OR creative lab: I think, teaching literary writing is to create an environment where the gods and goddesses of inspiration like to visit and give away their gifts unsparingly.

Sabine Scholl

AUTHOR AND TEACHER

Sabine Scholl studied German philology, History and Dramatics from 1978 to 1987 at the University of Vienna. In 1987, she received a Doctor of Philosophy for her work about Unica Zürn. From 1988 to 1990 she was a lecturer at the University of Aveiro in Portugal. Since 1990, she has been a freelance author/writer. In 1992, she took part in the Ingeborg Bachmann Competition (literature competition) in Klagenfurt, in 1996, she was a member of the jury. She has worked as a lecturer and professor in several universities. From 1996 to 2000, she lived in Chicago, from 2000 to 2001 in New York and 2003/04, 2006/07, 2013/14 in Nagoya (Japan). Currently, she lives in Berlin.

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