

Goethe and Schiller and Me: Reflections on Figuring out Literature While Teaching Others about It and Life Too in a Language They Don't Talk Very Good Yet

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My name is Bill. I am a recovering Germanist. I have followed a winding path, from a personally fulfilling but rather ordinary undergraduate study of German literature, into graduate study of German, through a dissertation about German science fiction, on to new-hiree language-teaching duties, and thence to a career in second-language pedagogy and educational software. My fiftieth birthday (1998), the 250th anniversary of Goethe's birth (1999), the new millennium, and an invitation from a journal to contribute an article about the Goethe-Schiller friendship gave me occasion to sum up the results of a process of personal and professional *Bildung*. I aim to formulate what the Greats of Weimar mean to me now and what they meant to me half my life ago and more; to limn what that personal comparison tells us about our culture; to suggest what we might do when we engage in teaching languages and literature; and to offer some thoughts about the shape of American *Germanistik*.



Ewald Did Not Die for Our Sheepskins

Sometimes he spent hours together in the great libraries of Paris, those catacombs of departed authors, rummaging among their hoards of dusty and obsolete works in quest of food for his unhealthy appetite. He was, in a manner, a literary ghoul, feeding in the charnel-house of decayed literature.

—Washington Irving, “The Adventure of the German Student,” 1824

I received my copy of the Goethe–Schiller correspondence as a prize when I was majoring in German. Forthwith I read the first several hundred pages of the 860-page volume. I was shocked. Although Goethe and Schiller wrote to each other about literature for pages on end, they did not write or, apparently, think about literature in the way I was doing then. As good New Critics, we had all learned to analyze The Text with a minuteness of inspection and a preoccupation with form that were the intellectual equivalent of how I removed my glasses to focus at about six inches from my nose whenever I was doing close work on wood or words. Goethe, the poet and the investigator of physiology and optics, would not have missed the humor here.



I was a Yale undergraduate, so the Big Insight came to me soon. Goethe and Schiller only very seldom had need to address what was my chief preoccupation, the fine points of meter, metaphor, imagery, and so on, because they were indeed Great Poets and knew they could pretty much be counted on to handle that stuff without help. But was I, then, not learning what was actually important about literature?

I was intrigued that Goethe's and Schiller's letters included snippets about daily life. Goethe chatted about wallpaper. Schiller would mention the child-birthings of his wife or the illnesses of his children, and his own. Both writers regarded holidays as fair opportunities for a few stolen quarter-hours of writing, as I learned to do after my own kids were born and I had my own books to write.

Even at twenty I “knew,” of course, that the Great Poets had real lives. I just had not expected that they would pay much attention to them. How, though, was Life related to Literature? I learned that one and the same person, Ewald von Kleist (1715–59), could daintily patter out so much pastoral poetry, and yet was a Prussian army officer who would die in battle. He saw so much more bloodshed than I was ever likely to see, even if I were to fail to ward off my draft board's determination to enlist me a soldier in Vietnam.



It got only more puzzling. I was deep into *Faust*, sure that intellectual depth could happen even to non-Germans, at least if we read enough *Faust*. Faust, the lover of the Eternal but also the Very Real Feminine, had already spoken a lot to me as I was progressing from the Ideal to the Real in other realms of my life. But I had not troubled much yet over the nub of the “Gretchen-Tragedy”: the baby fathered in lust, conceived with love, and disposed of in haste (though not without deep pain, to Gretchen at least). In my reproductive ethics I espoused then what around me passed for Enlightenment.

Drop hyphen in Gr-Trag?



Perhaps it was a newspaper report that a dead newborn, child of an unwed mother, had been found in a New Haven garbage can. Or maybe it was the disgust I felt when a classmate “knocked up” a “townie,” and then invited a Seven




Sisters girl down for a big campus weekend while the “townie” was off in Puerto Rico alone getting an abortion. Whatever it was, right there outside the graduate seminar room, I was struck and stricken and enlightened with the closeness of life and literature, even the literature so elegantly captured in the fine editions in Sterling Library. So it was not true that the worlds of literature were different from our own, though perhaps I had been attracted to literary study through that misconception. I would have to change the way I anticipated teaching *Faust*, not so much to convey a moral point but just to do my intellectual duty as a teacher of German literature. As for my views then about teaching the German language, I had not even begun to examine them. Where I was, in my development and environment, the subject did not seem to be complex, controversial, or even important.

Was I really so stupid or ignorant or naïve? Yes and No. Even then, just as I would have claimed to “know,” of course, that poets were real human beings, I did know that there was misery and sin in the world around me. I would have avowed that, yes of course, great literature arises from deep experience of life, the “tragic vision” we liked so much to perceive in the great artists and even within ourselves, we coddled young Boomers. I might even have differentiated my literatures. German and perhaps British literature dwelt in pristine realms. American writers—Twain, Dos Passos, my favorite science-fiction authors, people who lived in my own culture—were real people who had real lives and wrote about real worlds, which was all right in their case, I supposed.

Somewhat later I might have borrowed the terms Schiller used in the monumental essay that he and Goethe discussed at length in the letters I was reading. I was “sentimental,” as opposed to “naïve,” one who learns about the world by conceptualization and reflection, rather than by experiencing it directly and from the inside. Much later, I can apply the terms I have found in language pedagogy. Back then, my relation to life and literature was one of “knowledge,” rather than “acquisition.” And there is no other way truly to acquire proficiency in language or life than by personal experience and the effort to apply the skills you are attempting to learn. As for being “proficient” in literature, I figured out pretty early, and with only slightly bitter humility, that I was not going to be a Goethe or a Schiller or anything else remotely great. But I lacked the temerity or effrontery to join others in beginning to claim that critic and criticism are of a higher order than author and text.

Of Goethe and Goebbels, of Disneyland and Deutschland

Woody Allen once proposed a “line” to be used when one wishes to be considered very intellectual: just remark offhandedly that “all of modern literature is but a footnote to *Faust*.” It was 1969 when the world and Allen were young and I got my B.A. and started my Ph.D. Now Schiller, and even Goethe, are not the names to conjure with that they still were thirty years ago. They would be astounded and probably horrified that their presence in American culture today consists largely of two popular icons whose sources are known almost solely to Germanists. As the old joke has it, an intellectual is someone who hears the “Lone Ranger” theme but thinks first of Rossini’s *William Tell Overture*; seldom is the piece linked with Schiller’s play. And precious few now know that “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” in Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940) is ultimately based on Goethe’s poem “Der Zauberlehrling” (1797). Today we cannot expect even our colleagues in the humanities, if they are non-Germanists, to have read anything by either Goethe or Schiller. 

As art and as a mass success, *Fantasia* is a precipitate of German culture in the America of a bygone time. Disney’s background in the heavily-German Midwest and his penchant for fairy-tale landscapes are amalgamated with the “old” German culture of immigrants to the American heartland, the Germanophilia of non-German writers and scientists, and the contributions of recent émigrés, highly cultivated and very German in their cultural orientation, who were finding refuge from Hitler, so often and not wholly incongruously in Hollywood.

To be credible now to the general public or even some academics, the claim of a close link between Goethe and Schiller and American popular culture would require an elaboration that would not have been necessary a generation ago. Every American Germanist knows, though fewer and fewer other Americans do, that German language and culture were once not truly “foreign” in America, as other languages and their cultures largely have been, at least until recently. Let us rehearse the facts: German was spoken as a native language by millions of immigrants or early-generation Americans, on the farm, in the factory, and—here the comparison with Spanish today fails—among the intelligentsia. Almost every sizable city had a German-language press. Public schooling conducted in German was not a rarity. At one time the percentage of high-school students taking German exceeded even that of those studying Spanish now. The German presence in the cultural world, highbrow or lowbrow, was so pervasive that in New York at the turn of the century Italian operas often were sung in German. “Bei

mir bist du schön” needed no explanation anywhere. Even intellectuals who were not German-American knew German and looked to the German world for music, literature, philosophy, science, technology, and doctoral degrees.

All this has virtually disappeared from our cultural landscape, though we American Germanists still try to live off it. Ghosts of the formerly giant German cultural presence are to be found in the worn inscriptions on city churches that now bear bigger and brighter signs in Korean; in the names of companies displayed in faded paint on century-old buildings in city downtowns; on old maps that bear the original names of streets which were renamed during World War I; and in the names of Goethe, at least, and sometimes even Schiller inscribed on older library façades or surviving occasionally on street signs (WWW¹). There was a time when Goethe’s name was frequently associated with Shakespeare’s and Dante’s, as in busts prominently decorating one of the main lecture halls at Yale. Now, a generation later, Woody Allen’s bon-mot about *Faust* would not so effectively skewer cultural pretentiousness, because an understanding of its bite and even its referent can no longer be taken for granted among intellectuals and their wannabe fellows. The setting of our American *Germanistik* has changed, even if our discipline has not, at least in its overall structure and implicit assumptions. It is no wonder that our “line,” like Woody’s, does not work so well any more.

We know how it happened. World War I practically destroyed the German language in America, and with it German-American ethnic identity. Still, the imposing German cultural presence was not yet gone, as the 1940 date on *Fantasia* shows. But ultimately the legacy of the Third Reich—horrific and yet sometimes, in the popular culture, comic—devastated the German cultural heritage in the United States. The Holocaust worked together with Hollywood. Hitler and “The Führer’s Face” (Disney, again, along with Spike Jones), helped later by “Hogan’s Heroes,” made German culture “socially impossible” when it was not simply ridiculed.

True, German cultural influence was kept alive among the intelligentsia for one more generation by an infusion of émigrés. These were not the rural and proletarian immigrants who earlier settled in the middle part of the country, from Milwaukee to Texas, but rather the cultivated and culturally progressive elite, not infrequently Jewish, which came to such prominence in Hollywood, New York, and the universities. Brecht, Thomas Mann, Hesse, Kafka, and of course Goethe and Schiller were much honored and quoted, and sometimes even read, as certainly were Hesse and Kafka later by the youth of a few decades ago. Mann has ridden a roller-coaster of fates in academia, as a hero of democracy, a suspected rightist and cultural elitist, and now again as a gay hero (closet then, outed

now). We might note with irony that only Nietzsche, of the German Greats, has maintained a quasi-mass popularity through it all, now most notoriously among unstable teenagers with access to firearms and to terrorist manuals on the Internet.

Here is an initial pointer toward why we must redefine our discipline and our purpose, and it is not just a matter of dwindling enrollment or fewer American graduate students with strong German family backgrounds. There is good news and bad news in this change. In our very post-modern era we have reached a stage which is not merely “anti-German,” or even “post-German,” but rather “non-German” in its response to things German. German-American ethnic identity has virtually disappeared, or at least knows it is not fashionable in the rainbow or salad-bowl of cultural diversity. The “Dichter und Denker” are no longer familiar, whether to the de-Germanicized German-Americans, the academics, or much less the person-in-the-street who can summon up an exposure to German by at least reciting “der-die-das,” like Ernest Borgnine in the film *Marty* (1955). Our students, of course, are most usually innocent of Goethe, Schiller, and even Hesse. Most also lack a visceral sense of the Holocaust. They have learned of it in school, but they do not seem to associate it with today’s Germany and Germans. They are fairly open to learning German as a sort of second-choice language that is not as tinged with ordinariness, as Spanish is for many, but may still be of use, sort of like Japanese though not quite so exotic.

I will shortly discuss what these changes imply for our discipline internally. In terms of external relations, of how we approach the outside world, what is left now for the teacher of German language and literature is a sort of level playing field, an opportunity to offer Goethe and Schiller (or other selections from the rest of yesteryear’s pantheon, or today’s darlings) as cultural artifacts like any others. But we must do that in a world where literature is less privileged than before and German no longer has the cultural wind at its back. German is now, in effect, an LCT, a Less Commonly Taught language. And, as we language-teaching specialists have found out and begun to say with some effectiveness to our colleagues the literature specialists, the language proficiency which we can expect students to gain in their few allotted years of study is quite modest.

Actually, though, it is only about as modest as it often was in the past when students were, as I was then, far more willing to stand under “die kalte Dusche” (what my own third-year German professor called grammar study), plow through Goethe and Schiller at a ridiculously slow reading pace, write term papers in a fractured German that consciously imitated and unconsciously travestied its models, and quickly lapse into embarrassed silence whenever whatever opportu-

nity might come up in class to speak about our reading. I prefer the honest, “lean and mean” environment of the present to the semi-false luxury of the past.

Canon Fodder and Caviar to the Multitudes

One can be gifted in language and use that gift to write great verse, as did Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, or to foment hatred, as did Joseph Goebbels.

—Howard Gardner, *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1999, 66

Even in my earliest years of teaching, I attempted to lessen the remoteness of the Age of Goethe to my students by asking them to work out parallels between Goethe and figures prominent in American cultural history, and not just poets. One comparison I always hoped for, but seldom got, was that with Jefferson, to reveal how multi-faceted Goethe’s mind and life were, and how Germany’s greatest poet was also a political administrator and statesman, though of course not of Jefferson’s importance. As we seek other comparisons, it is impossible to avoid the match-up of the literary Greats, Goethe and Shakespeare, which was obvious also to the decorators of last century’s lecture halls and public libraries.

The comparisons to Jefferson and Shakespeare suggest something far deeper about differences in cultural history, and can tell us something about today’s culture and canon wars. The Goethe–Schiller correspondence provides a clue. In Shakespeare’s own hand, from the person commonly regarded as the greatest writer in English, there exist but a few scraps of writing, and there is virtually no reliable biographical information. We have absolutely nothing of his views about life, art, or anything else, except as he may have chosen to put those thoughts into the mouths of his characters (but which?), or to confide to us in—to mention a notorious example—the Sonnets. Unless we choose to condemn all Dead White Men, Shakespeare can be our Man for All Seasons and Reasons. My generation of undergraduates did very well with Shakespeare as Freud or even as Oedipus himself. Currently Shakespeare the Gay is still doing quite well.²

But in a larger sense none of that really matters, because to most people the literary canon itself, whatever it is and whoever defines it, simply does not matter. The reason is not that America is a society without a culture, that American culture has always been ambivalent about its English roots, or that the American intelligentsia now studiously downplays or outrightly rejects its DWM heritage—however true or false we consider those three propositions to be. Rather, the open dominance of mass popular culture and the increasing prestige enjoyed by areas of knowledge outside the humanities have made much literary criticism as immaterial as the canon itself.

Au means
Ben Jonson
(16th-17th
C), not Ben
Johnson
(20th C).

Not so Goethe and German culture and society, though we should not idealize, as we have learned from studies of mass German reading preferences. There are, to begin the inventory, the hundreds of pages of the Goethe–Schiller correspondence. Imagine having that from an equivalent friendship, chronologically impossible of course, between Shakespeare and Milton. We would be glad enough to find even a few such hypothetically possible letters, whether substantial expressions of artistic principles or mere anecdotes about childbirth and illnesses, from a correspondence between Shakespeare and his contemporary Ben Jonson, or between him and that other Elizabethan mystery man, Christopher Marlowe.

The Goethe–Schiller correspondence, though, is the tip not of an iceberg but of an entire continent, as I learned in my study of *Germanistik*. There are correspondences of similar magnitude between Goethe and other cultural figures both great and small, and also between Schiller and these same figures. We have, furthermore, countless letters and other writings about Goethe and Schiller by their contemporaries. As for primary works, on the one hand we have by Shakespeare a few dozen poorly transmitted plays and a couple slim volumes of poetry. Goethe’s collected writings, largely edited by himself late in life, amount to around 143 thick volumes in one of the standard editions. Among his many non-fiction writings are several lengthy autobiographies. His daybooks and similar sources permit tracking his activities, associations, and thoughts down to small fractions of countless days. The equivalent of Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe* would be a *Life of Shakespeare* by some Elizabethan Boswell.

Among the many actual likenesses we have are silhouettes of the young - Goethe, a death mask, and a deathbed drawing, facsimiles of which I bought in a collection of Goetheana sold as surplus by the Yale Library. There is also Tischbein’s painting of *Goethe in the Campagna*, of course. It is an icon universally recognized in German culture, as proved by ready use of parodies of it in cartoon and postcard humor (WWW). The “iconic” Shakespeare image, the one with the imposing but oddly domed forehead, may not be a close likeness at all. Sacred among the Goethe relics and stories in the attic shrine of *Germanistik* are the “Wanderers Nachtlied” inscription and the story of Goethe’s return to the spot in his old age. In comparison, Prospero-Shakespeare breaking his staff-pen in the *Tempest* simply lacks any sense of realism.

This is far too much information and vivid presence to overlook or dismiss conveniently when one mounts a canon-war campaign. Beyond that, the German-speaking world is still more “literary” than is America in the English-speaking world, in the sense that non-intellectuals will at least perfunctorily tip their cultural hats to the pantheon. And the German cultural realm, for all its ideologically disputatious intelligentsia and its competing interests groups, is less diverse



than the American. There is no coalition of minorities that could mount a meaningful ethnic, ideological, or aesthetic challenge to the “official” German canon. Certainly the German canon is being discussed and redefined, but deposing Goethe from its peak, much less removing him from it entirely, is not an option. It was not thinkable even in the former East Germany, which instead recast Goethe to suit its own needs, as had the Nazis, the Weimar Republic, and the Prussian empire before. Beyond all those other reasons, though, it is still necessary to have Goethe as the Good German. In this respect the Goethe–Jefferson comparison has changed greatly over thirty years. Jefferson is not welcome in the PC canon, and others will argue that the Republic is not so weak that any single figure is indispensable in the pantheon.

To a German teacher in America, however, those matters are of less importance than the fact that, no matter what else we teach, familiarization with German culture, even on a relatively modest level, must involve an acquaintance with Goethe and other literature at the heart of the canon. I would even go so far as to claim that the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines demand the same and more of speakers who are to attain the higher levels. But how are we to deliver literature to our students, while at the same time dealing with their needs for language skills? And how does the teaching of literature, primarily through reading, relate to development of skills in other language modalities, and to improvement of reading skills as they are applied to other kinds of text, including everyday realia? These are problems that can be posed and, at least at the individual level, attacked without major new funding and organizational upheaval in our profession. A survey of syllabuses and resources already available over the Internet turns up inspiring examples of all kinds, which I will describe later.

Here I would like to discuss the specific topic of approaching the German literary canon in the language program. It is not that I believe the canon, or any sort of literature, should be the only focus of the language program, or that everyday (“small-c”) culture should be neglected. My own textbooks for introductory German and Spanish virtually ignore literature. But the traditional canon is a crucial test case for whether the study of literature can be integrated with (or into) the learning of language as conducted according to best informed current practice; it is undeniably a significant part of German culture; and it offers an insight into how language competence can relate to cultural competence and the idea of liberal education.

Of the Care and Feeding of Language Learners

Ich könnte schwer den Schnabel zählen. (literally: “I would heavily be able to count the beak.”)

—written by a second-year Yale German student, 1970,
as an attempt to express “Ich konnte die Rechnung
kaum bezahlen” (“I was hardly able to pay the bill.”).

While canon wars and various other literary ghoulishness have held the attention of our literary colleagues, language-teaching specialists have been working to re-establish the teaching of second languages on the basis of proficiency. The familiar *ACTFL Guidelines* have been around for almost twenty years. We have the National Standards, and now also some modern standards for K–12.³ Development of materials, redesign of courses, training of teachers, and creation of assessment tools have been funded through large grants.⁴ Though the transformation of curriculum at the first- and second-year college level is scarcely complete, the next important phase is now just beginning in earnest. That is the renewed attempt to reformulate the upper-division curriculum, including the traditional major’s main focus on literature, in order to serve the needs of language learners as they really are, not as we assume or wish they might be, or remember ourselves to have been.

Here I offer two examples drawn from the heart of the German literary canon. If some of my sample texts are hoary to the veteran German teacher, so be it. They are still at the core of German culture. Our students will find them new and of lasting value; it is their needs and interests that should drive the curriculum, not our own boredom or our specialized literary interests, often in obscure areas.

Stalwarts or key turning-points of the undergraduate German curriculum have been the third-year courses, often treated as the “trinity” (Mittman 481) of language course, culture course, and survey of literature. This is the level, too, where alarms are sounded about how the lower-level language sequence has not prepared the students for “serious” work in the upper-level literature courses, which was supposedly the purpose of the instruction. It is also not surprising that this is the upper-level fault line of attrition. Many students who will (or would) take the third-year language course want nothing to do with the literary survey and perhaps not even the culture course.

A linguistic reality check at this level can help us avoid (or rather, correct) more disastrous errors in courses still more advanced. The estimates of proficiency I introduce here agree with those reported in the professional literature,

and I do not think the acquired skills of learners with the same coursework will vary much between selective and non-selective institutions. Academic intelligence, my chief personal source of pride as a student, obviously is important to many kinds of learning. But it may not be as important to the acquisition of proficiency in language as it is to mastery of conscious grammar and memorization of vocabulary lists.

Motivated and capable learners whose acquisition of the language derives from two years in the college classroom, even in a proficiency-oriented program of high quality, will still only rarely rate above ACTFL Intermediate-High for speaking or writing in a near-cognate language such as German. Whatever intellectual knowledge they have of the language, including especially its grammar as traditionally understood, is not an accurate indicator of their proficiency. When they encounter the task of real-time communication, without cueing for grammar and vocabulary, they produce—and only with difficulty—clusters of a few sentences about the everyday world. They still struggle with time and tense, word order, and object pronoun choice and case. Learners whose background includes more of the still conventional explicit grammar instruction may be even less proficient. It is folly to ask such students to use the target language to discuss the intricacies of plot, style, aesthetics, or social context, even where the student has the reading skills to detect those features and the cultural background to understand the concepts and terminology in any language.

The reading skills of entering third-year students, unless they have had considerable exposure to the language outside their two years of coursework, are not likely to be much above ACTFL Advanced. That is sufficient for them to read, say, a straightforward narration of several paragraphs, but not in anything close to their speed and comprehension in the native language. (Listening skills are often shockingly lower than that.) To read even a short story in the target language is a matter of many hours of labor instead of the one pleasurable sitting envisioned by Poe. Students in traditional literature courses have confided to me that novels are customarily read in English translation, though assigned and ordered for the bookstore in the target language. As for writing, the traditional term paper is a genre that ranks well up into the ACTFL Superior range. That manifestly exceeds the actual proficiency of almost all exiting language majors. Faculty who assign term papers that are to consist of academic research presented in the target language, using appropriate register, are suitably punished by having to read them. I have been on both ends of that hallowed, hollow rite, which I did once love as a student, so I know.

Do we have to abandon literature in our programs, even or especially in those which are proficiency-oriented and realistic in their estimate of likely levels of stu-



dent capability? Are we right in condemning the age and the society as hopelessly uninterested and uninterestable in literature, and incapable of thoughtful self-expression? No. Anyone who has listened to office workers on a public bus as they discuss their own lives and those of the characters they follow in their romance novels, soap operas, and prime-time shows can hear that the average citizen is both willing and able to go on about something like literature forever, and with verve, at the ACTFL Advanced level. That is in English, to be sure, but it is not unrealistic to ask college-level learners of a second language to do much the same in that second language, if they have reached the Intermediate-High level. The right text must be brought to the student through appropriate activities.

This does not represent a dilution of content and lowering of standards. It is equivalent to asking the student to behave not like a professor *manqué*, but like a member of the target culture who sometimes reads for pleasure and personal inquiry, talks about entertainment with friends, attends concerts, movies or plays and discusses them after (or during) the show, and tries to understand individual cultural artifacts within larger social and historical contexts. Such people may write e-mails, letters, and even diary entries about their cultural experiences. They do not write term papers, any more than they spontaneously engage in academic discussions of literature on each Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 2 to 3pm. That a focus on what could be called a citizen's rather than a scholar's experience of culture can be enjoyable to both learner and teacher should not count against it; that it contributes more appropriately to language learning than does traditional literary interpretation should count for it. The conjecture that it might even make for a better, longer-lasting liberal education should not be discounted.

As an example I will describe activities I developed to accompany Goethe's ballad "Erlkönig" and a scene from *Faust* for use in a proficiency-oriented third-year German course (WWW).⁵ I choose these texts—I repeat the point—not because I know no other literature to use. Rather, they represent the core of the canon that a student of German culture must not fail to encounter; as a cultural icon "Erlkönig" ranks, among Germans, only somewhat below *Faust*. And all of us know how the two texts have often been taught conventionally. In my subsequent Internet check of syllabuses for courses about German literature I have been delighted to see examples of similar approaches, either to canonical texts or to "fresher" examples of literature.

I introduce "Erlkönig" at the end of a two-week unit (WWW) about illness and accidents, late in first quarter. Typical student language proficiency is still on the weak side of Intermediate-High. Communicative functions of the unit are description of physical condition and narration of health history: prime examples of the ACTFL Advanced. Target structures include time phrases ("two years

ago”), reflexive verbs (often used in expressions of illness and injury), resources for expressing simultaneity (“while,” “during”), simple formulations of past subjunctive (“I shouldn’t have ridden so fast.”), and adverbs (“suddenly”). The students may well have been required to attempt those structures in earlier courses, since many first-year textbook packages and probably most mainstream second-year texts still systematically include them. Even so, these structures will not yet have been acquired for more than partial mastery, at most. This is the nature of Intermediate status, rather than the consequence of some sad deficiency of “poor” learners or the “lowering of standards” in proficiency-oriented courses. I was taught (but did not really learn) German by the audio-lingual method and relentless grammar-hammering during three years of German in high school, and I too was not an Intermediate-High in spoken German at that point in my junior year at Yale after two years of study that had begun with a survey of literature in my freshman year.⁶

After warm-up conversational activities about their own injuries and illnesses, the students encounter a rather grisly ad about the dangers of motorcycling. They tell about their own vehicular accidents and speculate how the one simulated in the ad occurred. At other points in the unit, before the Goethe poem is tackled, the learners prep key vocabulary at and above level (“to feel,” “clumsy,”), try to express by circumlocution entities for which German may not have words (“poison ivy”), listen to a staged interview of a visit to a doctor, and write a nanny’s note about a sick child.

In my development as a teacher who wished to include literature in the language class, the dimension of daily life that caught my attention in writings by the authors of the *Goethezeit* apparently crossed paths with the concepts of level-appropriate function and context found in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*. Intermediate-High learners aiming for Advanced should learn to talk in some detail about health and give non-technical medical histories—not in medicalese (“The patient presented a medial fracture of the tibia”), of course, but rather in everyday language (“I landed in the hospital with a broken leg”). That, in fact, is precisely what “Erlkönig” does: it narrates, in what is essentially everyday language, the deteriorating condition, convulsions, hallucinations, and death of a boy as his father frantically rushes him to care.

But learners should not begin with this theme as an announced given, or as something they can be assumed to understand for themselves, and then be asked to analyze the text literally. Instead, the experience should be personalized and interactive. They should describe their current general health and that of those near and dear to them, acquire the common names of childhood diseases in German, learn the vocabulary used to describe injuries, tell which ones they experi-



enced when, and recollect what their own symptoms and fears were. At my institution I have the fortune of having older students who can tell what it is like to have a sick child. Or there may be a senior citizen auditor who lost a sibling in childhood. In some classes death may have come even nearer than that to a student, perhaps recently, so tears are a risk.

There are many possibilities for ACTFL Advanced-level communicative activities suited to a range of learning styles. Learners can be asked to describe and show how, if alone with a child, they would drive to the emergency room at night and still care for the child, especially if it needed resuscitation during the drive (CPR with TPR?). Language input can be enriched by newspaper clippings or news broadcasts (WWW) about accidents or rare fatal diseases involving children. Similar items in English can encourage willingness to talk and can serve to set up summarizing and informal translation into German, which can be attempted with Intermediate-High proficiency, as some of us have had to do when involved in car accidents or medical problems abroad.

When attention is shifted directly to the text, initial skimming and scanning are useful, of course. Colors and other visual vocabulary can be identified and highlighted to elucidate how setting is evoked, without forcing abstract language or specialized terminology. To reassure learners about the possibility of their comprehending Great Literature, they can be asked to point out the many words in the poem which could be understood immediately by first-year students. It is precisely these words, such as the opening and closing lines especially, which deliver very clearly the action, atmosphere, and sad outcome of the story. All of these activities can then lead, if such is the purpose, to an intuitive approach to the literary features of the text, and also increase receptivity to the poem in its musical setting by Schubert.

Instructors who wish to honor the Goethe–Schiller correspondence and friendship, suggest how the two poets felt “in real life” about the themes they expressed in their poetry, bring to their students experiences of the kind I received from my book prize, and show the two great poets communicating in everyday language, could introduce excerpts from the various letters recording family medical crises. Mention could be made that Schiller had medical training and would have understood all the more the seriousness of his children’s illnesses, and of the thoracic-intestinal condition that slowly and so painfully killed him. Some students may be fascinated by the later exhumation and reburial of Schiller in 1826, during which Goethe kept Schiller’s skull in his house and wrote a poem about, or rather to it.

But to get to the core of the canon: *Faust*. It is one thing to read a few dozen lines of relatively simple German, complete in themselves, and another to com-

prehend the language and absorb the thought of a lengthy world masterpiece known to be “difficult.” I will not try here to take on the fundamental theme of *Faust*, though if I had to do it for a third-year class I would make a stab at it first by eliciting some student anecdotes about mid-life crises in their families, enlisting the help of Nashville (“Middle Age Crazy” [1977] by Jerry Lee Lewis), prepping vocabulary about mental illness and medication from a German-language website,⁷ and rereading privately a few passages from the Dadaist poet Hugo Ball’s *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (1919). A better illustration for my purpose here is the scene where Mephisto uses Marthe to set up a meeting between Faust and Gretchen. No doubt the subject of much chuckling in graduate seminars, the scene can serve both to illustrate learner-centered activities and to furnish some food for thought about the canon.

I use the scene at the end of a chapter called “Familiengeschichten,” which aims to review a standby of textbooks, the family theme, and expand it more toward the Advanced level (WWW). Students start conversations with such openers as “Meine Eltern waren (nicht) streng. Ich durfte (nicht)...” They attempt to express in German their own culture by defining such terms as “grounded,” “deadbeat,” and “significant other,” which is always good practice with circumlocution. An authentic letter, written by a German immigrant in Nebraska about a trip to the old family homestead in South Dakota, encourages them to read between the lines to conjecture about family relationships. We also read and discuss German-language family documents, such as a confirmation certificate and a pastor’s handwritten notes for a baptism.

The “Marthes Haus” passage is then introduced as “A Domestic Sit-Com Scene from the Greatest Work of German Literature,” with a short English presentation of the play’s main theme, an explanation of its cultural importance, and the remark that: “It has been said that all great works of literature have plots that are actually simple or even silly. But TV soap operas and the crime reports in your local newspaper show that not much has changed since Goethe wrote *Faust* two centuries ago.” On the same page is a newspaper clip with the headline, “Woman, 42, allegedly shoots at husband, wounds herself.” The superficially frivolous approach is intended to lower the “affective filter” of the many students in my classes who have acquired negative views of elite literature from their surroundings, whether social or school. The shooting mishap is also calculated to encourage students to speculate about emotions, express hypotheses (how could the woman have shot herself in the hand?), and start remembering that some domestic scenes are not as funny as they seem at first.

Pre-reading activities ask the participants to discuss, in German, some “unusual marriage” familiar to them, and then what a “normal” or “good” marriage

might be, if such exist at all. They tell what they would or would not forgive a spouse, and describe widows or widowers they might know. During the next stage, which is the initial reading (skimming and scanning), the first activity solicits lists of positive and negative expressions used by Marthe to describe her husband. The second asks what weaknesses the husband has, which can also be answered by direct citation from the text. The third asks what weaknesses Marthe has. That can be answered only by closer reading and, more important, by inferencing, which encourages integrative interpretation and also pushes for hypothesizing. Here the subjective use of modals (“She must have been a real nag!”) is encouraged but not demanded, since it is a very high-level structure (though presented in many first-year books). Some participants may feel more comfortable with lower-level resources which carry out the same function, such as “maybe” or “I think....”

We always do a group reading aloud in class, perhaps at this point, if I think that comprehension is lagging. In German we discuss which popular actors might play which roles in a film version (Jack Nicholson frequently gets the nod for Mephisto). We then recruit members of the class for the roles and tell them how they should behave and look. Of course one could introduce the many available audio-visual resources here, whether clips of actual *Faust* productions or excerpts from similar scenes, even from quite other genres, as perhaps soap operas.

Changed to
new spell-
ing

Discussion questions (third stage) ask whether participants know a Marthe or someone like her husband; encourage speculation about what Marthe could or should have done long before (with a stab at a higher-level structure, the past subjunctive, although the task can be carried out with “Schade, dass ...” + past tense); and request the partners/small groups to discuss how funny they actually find the scene, and why. That is done in full anticipation that a forthright student will say that the scene is really not funny at all underneath, so why are we laughing at spousal abuse, especially when it is being exploited to set up a seduction that will in turn lead to several deaths? It may well have been Goethe’s intent in the scene to shame us with our mirth and to show us that it is part of human nature (male nature?) that, with a little help from the devil, we will exploit the misery of others to achieve our ends. If so, we can reconcile this depiction of spousal abuse with contemporary sensibilities about gender, if that is a factor in how we regard the canon.

The “Aufgaben für Fortgeschrittene” (fourth stage) can be posed and conducted in either German or English, since a little more English now may yield a whole lot more learning of German later on. One item asks for description of some TV sit-coms, popular films, or comic strips that have to do with family life and problems. Ralph Kramden, *The Honeymooners*, and the threat “One of

these days, Alice, one of these days, . . . ” always come up. Someone always says, “It’s funny only because we know that he will never hit her.” It takes no more than Intermediate German to do that. The final question set is “Liebt Marthe ihren Mann? Was heißt das überhaupt, ‘lieben’?”

Here the boundary between what can be found in literature (if we just look) and what swirls through our own heads and hearts (if we allow it into the classroom) becomes immaterial. The old saw that it is a whole lot easier to write (or speak) when you have something to say applies too. And that is as good a way as any to describe what I want to do with German literature in the language classroom, and maybe in the undergraduate literature classroom as well.

I would be prouder of such insights if I could claim more originality for them. My years of working with K–12 colleagues have enriched my teaching far more than anything I have given to them. I also acknowledge a specific debt to Janet Swaffar, who some years ago conducted a workshop about reading that remains one of the great highlights of my professional education.⁸

My recent Internet survey of syllabuses clustered around the teaching of literature in college second-language courses below the advanced major level also reminded me how much excellent teaching is being done. I found great cheer in specific examples and observed several general features that I would propose as touchstones of appropriate teaching of literature in the language classroom. I am not discovering any new principles, but rather hoping only to reassure us that these principles can be put into practice, and that we need not, and should not, wring our hands waiting for material support because we think we do not yet have sufficient resources.

It appears that innovation is not an all-or-nothing proposition. That is, someone who wants to step outside the paradigm of fitting the language course to conventional literary study need not be, all and at the same time, an innovator or True Believer in a specific content, a new medium, a certain classroom dynamic, or even a fundamental approach to language teaching. It appears that some modest combinations will do, probably because our field is still an inexact science and there is room for individual art and magic.⁹

There is still much that awaits pedagogical resolution and solutions. A crucial question is how to manage large chunks of text, if they are not to be read in English. Even if skimming and scanning works with many everyday texts, would it work with *Werther*, whether Goethe’s or Plenzdorf’s? Does “work” here mean that we can get them to zip through the entire text with a sort of speed-reading technique, as I suspect a few other graduate students than myself have done, to their regret later and maybe even then, when they took, say, the Nineteenth-Century German Novel? Or does that mean that we insist only that super-slow read-

ing (the usual pace) is as bad as super-fast? While all that is being decided, we can ponder our *Guidelines* and *Standards*, learn a lot from the work of colleagues, and make some modest gains by applying the insights gained from student behaviors when they read other text genres.

Some of the teaching is truly a matter of teaching the learner rather than teaching only the language or the text. For example, many students come to us from an educational system that tells them to “begin reading at the top, work your way down, and whenever you see a word you don’t know, use your dictionary.” That may work fairly well when one is reading in one’s native language and the text is properly selected for level. But I suspect all of us have seen the dozens of English words written between the lines of a single page when a student attempts to do so in a second language. We are learning that circumlocution, though it results in less old-school memorization of vocabulary lists, is a valuable strategy in speaking and also weans the student from the dictionary. We should probably encourage its equivalent in reading, as many have already advised.

Lowering the affective filter that many students raise against literature, not so much out of their own malice but the ineptness of their educators, merits anything that shows results. So do strategies that get learners to return again and again to key passages with a clear and genuine motivation of what they want to find out, rather than just telling them—to quote anonymously the injunctions from one syllabus found on the Internet—“Schreiben Sie einen Absatz (5 Zeilen) über den Inhalt von [X],” “Beantworten Sie die Frage: Was ist das Hauptthema von [Y],” “korrigieren Sie Ihren Aufsatz,” and “Lesen Sie Goethe bis zum Ende.”

“Goethe lesen bis zum Ende” und kein Ende — Redefining the American Germanist

Germanist, gelehrter Kenner der deutschen Sprache, des deutschen Altertums oder des deutschen Rechts (Gegensatz Romanist).

—*Meyers Kleines Konversations-Lexikon*, 1898.

My own classroom experiences and the survey of others’ approaches to literature in the language classroom delineate what I wish to say about fundamental professional issues.¹⁰ The issues and key factors are these: money, the nature and quality of our specific “product” (whatever it is), governance (how much the administration pays attention to us), continuity (*Nachwuchs*), articulation between K–12 and postsecondary, and whatever it is that we contribute to the broader education of our students. More simply, we are talking about two realms: program

and profession, each reflected in the other but usefully distinguished to help us understand problems and processes.

The demographic “playing field” is not level, any more than it was a few generations ago when American *Germanistik* had a triple advantage: the resident German-American population to provide enrollment and cultural support; the prestige of German culture among non-Germans; and a general populace docile enough to accept whatever curriculum was offered to them when they achieved the boon of entering college. Now when we deliberate what direction our profession should take, we should consider especially that very large majority of our students which consists of the undergraduate non-majors whose tuition and student-credit-hours are our chief source of sustenance all the way up through the graduate level, at least at our state universities. The same students also ultimately support the doctoral programs at private universities, in that those newly-hooded professors often are hired to teach them.

The 1898 definition of “Germanist” shows that the structure of our profession is not immutable and holy. It mentions language first, and does not even refer to literature. Considering present circumstances and the likely shape of the future, the teaching of language should be given primacy in our own programs and they way we define the profession. That is what the vast majority of our students comes to us for. Some of them want only that, and some of them, given a satisfactory language-learning experience, will entertain the notion of something in addition, for example literature. If we ourselves do not teach language properly we will not be able to teach anything else that is part of our field, either because we will teach it poorly, or because we will cease to exist and will be replaced by programs that work properly. If we do not strongly support K–12 language instruction, and validate it in our postsecondary academic culture, the consequence may be the same.

Both common-sense classroom observation and language-acquisition research make it evident that failure is the large-scale result of an upper-division curriculum that attempts to lead students through activities that resemble academic interpretation and discourse, if it is insisted that the second language be the language of expression, or perhaps even always of comprehension. Surveys of students’ interests suggest strongly that they do not want that anyway, although many of them are not irretrievably hostile to literature itself. But better teaching of literature in the language classroom is not enough. Systemic change is necessary. Heretofore our profession, in its largest dimensions, has subordinated language learning and teaching to the study of literature, and the undergraduate study of literature has been subordinated to literary scholarship at the graduate level. The hierarchy is expressed in the way we organize and describe our discipline from the

“lower-level” undergraduate courses to the doctoral level, the way we allocate funds, staff, and rewards, and in the way we validate scholarly activity. That is no secret, but we have yet to deal with its clear implications.

German-Americans no longer exist as a cohesive community, and our post-secondary programs can no longer expect large numbers of students to enter them with K–12 exposure to German. Throughout society the sense of cultural values has shifted, rightly or wrongly. We can no longer bank on society’s reverence for German literature, or for “serious” literature at all. Demanding that the mass of American language learners of our time emulate the activities thought appropriate under the culturally idiosyncratic and elitist conditions of the heyday of American *Germanistik* must be called into question. So must be the use of mass lower-level language programs as a “cash cow” that subsidizes other parts of the course offering and supports teaching assistants whose chief professional interest is not language pedagogy. But the problem extends beyond the language courses. Many of us will assert that using the major and, even more, the graduate program to clone the professoriate of our youth must not continue. No matter what our wishes, it cannot do so indefinitely, given the much-shrunken percentage of language majors compared to a generation ago, the chronically dismal postsecondary job market, and the determination of those who provide our financial resources to impose some sort of reckoning about goals and efficiency.

That the graduate programs in literature, if they cannot change to fit the circumstances, ought to be significantly reduced in number and size is a widely shared view, at least outside those programs themselves.¹¹ Better by far would be redirection at a humane but not glacial pace. An essential element of useful graduate programs will be far better training of all graduate students, whatever their specialization, in language pedagogy. Here I echo Solveig Olsen’s “plea” to the elite graduate programs for job candidates prepared to carry out what is most likely to be their primary duty, teaching language. In any program which offers the Ph.D. at all there should be a full Ph.D. in language pedagogy alongside of or, if lack of resources forces a choice, in place of the literary Ph.D. This would lead eventually to a proper mix of specializations in M.A. and M.A.T. programs as well. At any level, language pedagogy specialists should distinctly outnumber literature specialists, at least in publicly-funded institutions.

If we make such resolute changes, we may survive. If we do not we can expect to be phased out as our administrators create language institutes staffed by language-teaching professionals and transfer surviving literature specialists to other programs, such as English or comparative literature. Appropriate if severe adjustment from within is better than drastic restructuring from outside. I favor

gradualism (Goethe), but I also see why there are forces that favor revolution (Schiller).

External forces are indeed propelling change, and far more than at any time in memory, though still perhaps more in the smaller private colleges, the community colleges, and the more modest state universities than in the most powerful programs in American *Germanistik*. That external motivation seems to be generated by a renewed sense of responsibility to the learner, a practical fear that today's students have a much increased ability to vote with their feet (or their mouse-clicks) about where they obtain their learning, a better understanding of which courses or programs in a department generate income and which are most expensive, and an appreciation of the significant external funding and attendant opportunities for scholarship that have become available to language programs. At least some administrators can be powerful advocates for appropriate and sensible change, even though (or perhaps because) they have no precise knowledge of our discipline and thus its tacit assumptions and self-deceptions. They also understand very well how money and prestige are, by turns, the proof of success and the prize to be awarded for it.¹² Not a few administrators, good or bad, seem also to believe that a German department, a German major, or even a German program are not unquestionable requisites of a legitimate university, selective college, or even liberal arts program. The community colleges and K-12 systems have long since passed that point, whether they should have or not.

From outside we have been offered a stick and a carrot. It should now be clear that our society and the general educational establishment have experienced a process of political, curricular and certainly financial *Bildung* (or at least practical *Ausbildung*) that puts them in a position to call into question some of the basic assumptions of conventional American *Germanistik*. This examination is linked to the larger effort to reformulate and articulate curriculum in all areas and all levels, even as broadly as K-16, rather than just K-12 with postsecondary considered as separate from it. Many of us see the reformation of the German curriculum and governance as essential not only to the survival of our profession and programs (and our own positions), but also to strengthening the society through greater language skill and cultural experience.

While the ACTFL Standards have been trickling down from the federal government through postsecondary and thence, more lately, into K-12, much of the change in language curricula is trickling *up* from K-12 into postsecondary, with the major research programs lagging well behind.¹³ For the while, then, the sources of large-scale progress will be found mostly within the professional organizations and in K-16 cooperation, where language teachers have developed good working relationships that have replaced, in part at least, the earlier mutual

antipathy of K–12 and postsecondary. We can also, individually and course by course, use current pedagogical knowledge to revitalize our teaching of literature and relate it to the teaching of language for proficiency.

What do we gain from all this? or, Mr. Chips Doffs His Tweeds and Tips His Hat

Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity.... [It] breeds a concentration so effortless that the absorbed reader..., who is often reviled as an escapist and denounced as the victim of a vice as pernicious as tipping in the morning, should instead be the envy of every student and every teacher.

—Victor Nell, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*
(Yale UP, 1988) 1

Back to the classroom, the students, and us teachers as we live and breathe as human beings rather than just professors and *Germanisten*. It is sad that much great literature is read in misery and haste, especially by those who are training to read literature as professionals. It is also sad that much literature is taught in frustration and pain. Saddest of all is the mass disconnect that separates the populace from reading literature, reading for pleasure, and even reading at all. Nell's study of "ludic reading" was one more impetus for me to reexamine what I was doing in the literature classroom and to continue further in the direction I was already headed as a language teacher. Another has been the use of phrases like "can read for pleasure" in second-language standards adopted in K–12 programs.

More than a few years before that I had sworn never again to require a term paper. Even before I realized the location of the genre of term paper on the ACTFL scale, I had sensed its pointlessness for all but—perhaps—the Germanist-in-training. Steadily I have moved toward coursework that seeks to resemble activities that occur outside the customary academic environment. If I want students to learn something from a course about Goethe and music, I will ask them to bring their own valued music and tell me and the class, in German, why they like it, when they listen to it, and how they discovered it. Maybe they will watch *Fantasia* and describe what they see and hear before they read Goethe's poem about the Sorcerer's Apprentice. It is easy to develop equivalent activities for writing, and we have so much good advice about how to respond to student writing. Helena Curtain and Carol Pesola tell us in *Languages and Children* that children learn languages best when they are using them to learn or do something else. I will amend that to suggest that all students acquire literature and language

better when they are not thinking so directly about literature and language, but rather about themselves and their world.

The Goethe–Schiller correspondence and my own rather conventional study of *Germanistik* helped me learn about literature and life, although certainly that cannot be only way to do so, or even the best. If my encounter with the very human side of great literature has contributed also to how I teach language, I am the more grateful to it. But being a better teacher is only part of the benefit. The more I have attempted to bring literature and language to students by letting them express in class their own lives and personalities, as part of learning, not a distraction from it, the more I have come to like and care for them. Since I was never much of an ogre in the classroom, this means that in the next decade or so before I retire I may become a real softie. Perhaps as my final professional reward I will be deemed deserving enough to become real: a Velveteen German Professor.

Notes

¹The symbol “WWW” indicates that the named picture or text can be found, at least for a few years after the date of this publication, on my web site: «<http://web.pdx.edu/~fischerw>». Follow links from “Projects and Publications” on the homepage table of contents.

²Recently released is *The Tiger’s Tender Touch: The Erotic Life of Goethe*, by Karl Hugo Pruys (Carol Stream, IL: Quintessence Publishing Co., 1999). An ad blurb (*New York Review of Books*, June 10, 1999: 29), tells us that “[b]y celebrating in his poetry the idea of love between men and women, Goethe disguised his own secret passion for men.” For a different take on Goethe’s sexuality, as it apparently found expression in some supremely beautiful erotic heterosexual poems that sure don’t seem to be screens for homosexuality, see the discussion and lengthy documentation from prurient primary sources in *Roman Elegies and Venetian Epigrams: A Bilingual Text*, translated, with introduction, notes and commentaries, by L. R. Lind (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1974).

³Second-language standards for Portland Public Schools are available at «http://www.Pps.k12.or.us/curriculum/second_language/second_language.pdf».

⁴While this article was being written, my department was awarded a Pew Grant for Redesign of Language Enrollment Courses, which we will use to carry out the redesign of first-year Spanish, with prior redesign of first-year German as the starting point. Further information is at «<http://web.pdx.edu/~fischerw>»; follow links from “Projects & Publications.”

⁵I detected no significant attention to how to teach literature, even Goethe, to students as language learners in the essays offered by the 25 contributors to the volume *Approaches to Teaching Goethe’s Faust*, edited by Douglas J. McMillan. The sub-text of the volume is that teaching great literature is a matter of scholarly interest only when the teacher is not going to be troubled by language barriers, either because the students are well advanced in their study or the course is offered as literature in translation. My acquaintance with several of the contributors, personally or through reputation, will not let me believe that they are indifferent to the needs of the students who constitute by far the majority of learners. Rather, the history of *Germanistik* (and of its sisters in many other language areas) has imposed a conceptual and, often, administrative structure that permits or even encourages literary schol-



ars to ignore language pedagogy. But that is partly why we are in our present mess, and why the “L” in “MLA” rubs many language teachers the wrong way.

⁶For a sadder story, see Joyce Neu. A colleague in Spanish at a nearby institution informs me that he has had difficulty maintaining support for his policy of refusing to award a passing grade in second-year(!) Spanish to students who have not reached Novice-Mid(!) by the end of that year.

⁷Examples: «<http://www.psychiatrie.de/therapie>» or «<http://www.medikamenteninformation.de/smartdrugs>», but «<http://ash.xanthia.com/freitod/archiv2.html>» only with great caution.

⁸For a rich discussion of the foundations of reading in the language program see Arens and Swaffar.

⁹Here are two examples taken from my Internet survey of syllabuses for the teaching of literature in college second-language courses:

- “Rilke – Kafka – Mann,” offered by Frank Borchardt at Duke, (<http://aaswebsv.aas.duke.edu/languages/german/courses/lit/ger126syll.html>) takes a standard set of authors and uses conventional critical tools (metrical analysis, etc.). But Borchardt leads the students to the texts, in the sense that they must actively experience the literature and communicate their experience to more than just the teacher. Individual activities ask them to “write in German six lines of original verse in iambics.” A group activity says “Imagine being a person with some terrible handicap; write in German metrical verse a continuation of the Rilke piece.” Portfolios integrate and publish the semester’s work. This may not be a big change in texts or critical methods, but the progressive pedagogical approach is so much more engaging.
- “Advanced Grammar, Conversation and Composition,” offered by Gary Smith at William and Mary, (<http://www.wm.edu/CAS/modlang/gasmit/ger305/>), represents a more radical pedagogical transformation, which is greatly aided by Smith’s evident technological competence. As the title indicates, there is still conventional instructional material in the course, but Smith gives his students considerable control over (and responsibility for) their learning. Target skill levels are laid out in ACTFL terms (not a rarity any more, of course), and the immediate purpose of the language learning is stated in functional terms: “describing, telling stories, reporting events, . . .” Students are expected to explore the content Smith makes available, with external guidance but also while setting their own tasks and goals. Writing is conducted by stages, with peer review conducted over the Internet, including automated check-off rubrics formulated in German. The procedure provides a nice way to let students feel they are using German on a higher level without making them formulate the language themselves, though that option is there too. Some assignments are customized to the individual student and delivered electronically.

¹⁰Recent scholarship that has strengthened my convictions includes: Barnett; Bernhardt; Weber; and, of course, the two book-length studies, McCarthy and Schneider, and Van Cleve and Willson.

¹¹At the “German Emergency” meeting at the 1995 ACTFL Conference in Anaheim, one participant reported in this way about the situation at one of the most prestigious of the country’s German Ph.D. programs: “The professors are in denial. The graduate students are beyond denial.” For a lighter and more encompassing approach by one of our own, see Ziolkowski.

¹²Just one example of such increased attention to our programs on the part of administrators became evident to me by their ample attendance and eager, informed participation at the “Colloquium on New Goals in Foreign Language Education” held on 15–16 September 1995 at the University of Minnesota under the auspices of the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning.

¹³I was not at all reassured about the future of the German-teaching profession when I made a return visit to the two studies by Lohnes and Nollendorfs and by Benseler, Lohnes, and Nollendorfs. It was déjà vu all over again. One feels that not much progress has yet been made in attacking problems iden-




tified a quarter-century ago. That view is strengthened by the sad remarks of a department chair in “A Plea to Graduate Departments” by Solveig Olsen.

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- «<http://ash.xanthia.com/freitod/archiv2.html>» for German group of organization promoting suicide.
- «<http://web.pdx.edu/~fischerw>» for graphics accompanying this article and for author’s background and projects.
- «<http://www.medikamenteninformation.de/smartdrugs>» for German-language texts about mental health.
- «http://www.pps.k12.or.us/curriculum/second_language/second_language.pdf» for Second-Language Standards for Portland Public Schools.
- «<http://www.psychiatrie.de/therapie>» for German-language texts about mental health. 
- «<http://www.wm.edu/CAS/modlang/gasmit/ger305/>» for Gary Smith’s student-centered third-year German course.