

Speech Prof. Ingenschay

(Prof. Dr. Dieter Ingenschay is the (Director of the Institute of Romance Studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin and longtime Chairman of the German Hispanists' Association)

Laudatio in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Ibero-American Research Seminars at the University of Leipzig

June 20, 2014

Vice-rector Matthias Schwarz,

Academic Dean Beat Siebenhaar, representing the Dean of the Faculty of Philology,

Lord Mayor Burkhard Jung,

Professor Ruth Fine, Director of the European Forum at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,

Professor Emeritus Meyer-Minnemann of the University of Hamburg,

I welcome the ambassadors from the Latin American Embassies.

Esteemed colleagues Alfonso de Toro and Claudia Gatzemeier, friends of the Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the foundation of this Ibero-American Research Seminar with you today. This event is indeed a joyful one, as over the past 20 years, this organization, the creation and progress of which I have been able to witness firsthand, has become an established scientific institution in German and international research on Latin America, and achieved a secure position in high regard.

Founded on January 18, 1994 by Alfonso de Toro, his staff, and colleagues from the Institute for Applied Linguistics and Translatology and elsewhere, IAFSL strives to continue a tradition established in the 19th century: the scientific exploration of Iberian and Latin American cultures. Based in Leipzig, IAFSL first sought to collect and unite the findings of this research, and to bring them to new shores in light of current perspectives.

This goal is clearest in both its inter- and transdisciplinary orientation, and its specific focus on theory building in literature and culture studies. The **first** aspect, interdisciplinary character, has been visible from the start: 20 years ago, this seminar met all of the applicable requirements of the current academic management for networked cooperation, before these had even been established. Now, as then, it generates fruitful cooperation with entities in linguistics, history, culture, theater, sociology and political science, to name only a few.

The seminar's track record with regard to the **second** aspect, developing theory, could hardly be better: frequent conferences, congresses, and symposia on cutting-edge topics and especially the enormous volume of highly relevant publications in different fields – including on postmodernity, post-coloniality, hybridity, gender issues, and trans- and intermediality – have earned IAFSL an international reputation as an organization of the highest order, for which the seal of excellence, though it be overused, is wholly deserved in this case.

If Leipzig has become a central location for national and international research on Latin

America, it is thanks to the tireless efforts of this seminar.

So allow me, dear guests, to give you a closer look at its **activities**. Though it is subjective, my report is based on continual close work with the seminar, of which I have been a trustee for many years.

Let me begin with its **publications**. Of its three *peer-reviewed* series, each with its own international *Board of Editors*, I would like to begin – and to beg your pardon for the bias behind my choice – with the 55-volume series "TKKL/Theory and Criticism of Culture and Literature". Its list of titles looks like an outline of the leading innovative topics and people in recent Latin American studies. It deals with central themes in the newer theoretical debate, from the new historical novel to migration, from models of hybridity to gender issues, and from globalization to otherness. Its focal point and defining feature is Borges, and entire years (for example, 1999) deal with this subject. I do not believe that any other series worldwide has traced and influenced the development of Latin American culture theory as consistently or nearly as intensively.

"The red book" marked a significant turning point experienced by my generation early on. This phrase no longer refers to the bible of Mao, but to the newest volume in TKKL! If you have ever known the daily grind of an editor, one that is sometimes arduous and often thankless, you will admire to learn that over the past 20 years, this institute has published nearly 100 volumes in the course of these three series! These are now available at every institute of higher education in the Americas, a fact that speaks not only to the network of their publishers, but also to the quality of their content.

Two key factors have shaped the development of the TKKL series: Jorge Luis Borges, whom you introduced not only as a predecessor of rhizomatic and postmodern modes of thought, but also as an innovator in imaging virtual worlds. This echoed brightly in many of these volumes as they sought to enable a return to historically significant events, though without the discursive detail: events like the Conquista, called the discovery of America, the 500th anniversary of which heightens our awareness of the potential for cultural contact and conflict.

Among IAFSL's many activities, I naturally cannot omit the numerous **conferences** and the largely international **research efforts** realized here. I will focus on two projects that I have witnessed closely. I recall one large project that was supported by the DFG and ran from 1997 to 2003, called *Diversity of discourses. Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Communication in the Context of Post-Modernism and Post-Coloniality*. More than 100 scholars took part, and 11 volumes were produced (if I remember correctly, my publication on *Cultura gay y lesbiana en Latinoamérica* was the last of these).

The second research project supported by the DFG that is accompanied by conferences is the Archivos de Memoria, or the "archives of memory". This project was carried out in cooperation with the Pontificia Universidad Católica, Santiago, and with Argentine and U.S. scholars. It dealt with the recent scientific paradigm of memoria cultures from a transdisciplinary perspective, focused on Latin America, and uniting us not just in Leipzig, but also in Santiago de Chile.

We, Alfonso, have also had to endure a few setbacks in the course of the last two decades: a few declined projects, a few research networks that went unfinanced – but that is history, part and parcel of managing conditionalities in academia today. It certainly did not rob you of your confidence and courage. Nor did it discourage the researchers from nine internationally

renowned institutes, including e.g. the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, represented here by Professor Ruth Fine; the University of Barcelona, represented by Professor Marta Segarra, and the Sabancı Üniversitesi Istanbul; from working on a large-scale project within the EU's program, Horizon 2020 – European Societies after the Crisis. This project bore the name *Migrations and Diasporas: Construction and Representation of Performative-Hybrid Identities, Gender and Cities in Global Societies in a comparative Perspective*. I hope that this international, academically sophisticated, and high-potential project with a budget of 2.5 million euros will be approved and carried out; it would once again focus the attention of our colleagues on Leipzig. Good luck, and I will keep my fingers crossed as we move toward the final decision.

Let us return to the past: IAFSL boasts an impressive list of experts who have worked with it, and can look back proudly on an excellent history of supporting new scholars; for example, in twelve research conferences held specifically for them. These have their center in Leipzig and are a solid, recognized component of Ibero-Romance studies in Germany. Parallel to these conferences, Leipzig's Latin American Studies cooperates with local, national, and international organizations like the Leipzig Book Fair (and, a few years ago on the topic of Argentina, with the Frankfurt Book Fair as well); several meetings of ambassadors from South America and the Caribbean have taken place in Leipzig; and heads of state like the Chilean President Lagos and Michele Bachelet have visited this university and this institute. These facts demonstrate the exemplary character of this organization. I, from the perspective of an onlooker from Berlin, have always had the impression that the University of Leipzig, so rich in tradition, knows that a *new pearl now shimmers in the craggy and distinguished oyster shell* that is our Romance Studies. More than once, I have congratulated Alfonso de Toro on the solidarity and collaboration with the management of his university regarding his plans; for example, in assisting with the grant application. I was reminded of Borges' story *The Book of Sand*, that always produced new pages, just as IAFSL produces new publications. I was also reminded of the humble protagonist from the story *The Aleph*, named Borges and positioned, envious, alongside the brilliantly successful poet Carlos Daneri. It was clear that Leipzig had found the Aleph. All elements of culture theory were concentrated in this institute, just as seas, pyramids, cities, and ruins were concentrated in the Aleph in the basement of the house in the calle Garay. What I did not know then was that Borges really meant for the Aleph to appear in the post-1984 area, containing our emails and the Chancellor's telephone conversations, and known not as IAFSL, but as the NSA.

Recently, however, we have had disconcerting news that has affected even those whose age and experience has given them a relaxed attitude toward the more or less productive theatrics at institutes of higher education. Cuts on an unimaginable scale – due to the euphemistically designated "fundamental reduction" of the Romance Studies in Dresden – that would now cut Leipzig's Romance Studies to the quick, the absolute operable limit, potentially rendering Saxony a narrow-minded and square "Romance Studies-free zone". We have all seen the numerous forceful and impressive protests against the prescribed spending cuts. From our own field up to the parliamentary level, sustaining effective operations in Romance Studies has been so clearly recognized as a necessity that I need not repeat the arguments in its favor now. At my age, I am in a position to draw parallels with cases like that of the Lower Saxon capital, which first plucked Romance Studies out, only to be reconvinced of this field's potential (especially in the realms of teacher training, translation, comparative studies, and culture theory) just a decade later. At that point, they saw the influential role played by Romance (Spanish, Latin American) disciplines in the context of an increasingly globalized and networked world. Significant financial resources and logistical efforts were poured into starting from scratch, and a Spanish professorship was established in Hannover. May **Saxony**

learn from the mistakes of **Lower Saxony!** In an interview in *Die Zeit* Nr. 13, 2014, the Portuguese ambassador correctly emphasized that it is not about Portugal, not about the Portuguese language, but about **Germany**. It is here that this knowledge is needed – in Leipzig, where the high standards that have been established must be maintained and protected. When Professor Gerhard Besier, political and academic speaker for the Left in the Saxon Parliament, says that "standards of quality have played no role whatsoever [in the impending cuts]", and when the Saxon Minister for Science and the Arts finds it **difficult** to "use the word **emergency**", they overlook the fact that breaking off whole fields (like Portuguese within linguistics or Francophone Studies within Romance Culture and Literature Studies) rips open holes that not only hobble a dynamic research sector and critically endanger internationally renowned and esteemed organizations like IAFSL, but also significantly diminish the draw of Leipzig as a university city. In short: If you cut Leipzig's Romance Studies to death, you destroy a discipline with great potential that goes beyond teacher training, and you strike a blow to the university as a whole that will take decades to recover from.

I do not by any means wish to contradict the Rector when she emphasizes again and again the pressing need to save funding, but I do insist, as Alfonso de Toro has explained in detail, on the application of **objective criteria**. In medicine, we do not amputate healthy limbs, so why should we do so when managing a university? The "number of the day", an exceedingly impressive one in our field, is realized in IAFSL's third-party funding: Between 1997 and 2013, this amounted to no less than **1,184,327** euros (I'll spare you the cents). Perhaps in medicine that would be *peanuts*, but for the humanities, an acquisition of 1.2 million is a huge success. It goes without saying that the University of Leipzig should be extremely proud of this organization, that it should provide it with every possible form of support in the present and for the future, and that it should stop any losses due to cuts.

The expertise of those who have joined the protest against the disposal, endangerment, or curtailing of this field or its sub-fields speaks for itself. May it fall upon listening ears and clear, rational minds. Borges' protagonist in *The Aleph* understands that the work of the poet lies not in writing poetry, but in inventing reasons why poetry should be admired. May those in charge find reasons not only to admire IAFSL, but to recognize that it serves an educational, social, and political purpose that cannot be delegated elsewhere.

I wish to thank IAFSL, Alfonso de Toro, Claudia Gatzemeier, René Ceballos, and all other members for their tireless and extremely successful efforts over the last 20 years. We all, Hispanists and Latin American experts of Germany and the world, have profited from the networks you have created and the questions you have raised. And if, in that time, we could finish one conference or another with a Gondola ride along Leipzig's canal, that was just the icing on the cake. At this pivotal moment, we hope for IAFSL that the decision makers will prove clever enough to help preserve its internal and external conditions in order to guarantee its continued operation, not just for our benefit, but for their own. And so I say to you *ad multos annos!*