

Bericht

by Molly Knight

Overall, I felt that our month in Essen went very well. Nearly every detail of our stay worked out for us before we even arrived – our lodging was well-located and very comfortable (especially for Germany – we had our own bathrooms and a mini-fridge), and our course schedule was already mapped out for us. Dr. Vogt even met us at the train station.

During the first week, we attended “Poet in Residence” Friedrich Ani’s creative writing workshop, which was fun and challenging – we even wrote our own short stories in German, and we had plenty of opportunities to talk to Mr. Ani personally. We also went to many of his readings and lectures during the week, which was interesting but got repetitive (partly because Mr. Ani was somewhat unresponsive). The “Poet in Residence” program was one of my favorite things about Essen, and it was a great way to start our month of studying pop literature.

The rest of the month was spent in two special courses: Dr. Ulrike Pospiech’s Akademisches Schreiben and Dr. Hanna Koellhofer’s Literature der Gegenwart. I benefited especially from Dr. Koellhofer, who gave us a relatively solid and comprehensible overview of contemporary German literature, considering the small amount of time we had with her. We listened to some Hoerspiele, her specialty, and read excerpts from various contemporary writers, most notably (for me) Christian Kracht and several other “Popliteraten” – I was so intrigued by these authors that I have continued to read and study their work. The Akademisches Schreiben class was really helpful because Dr. Pospiech gave us lots of practice and feedback on our writing; however, I was hoping for more targeted help with academic papers, but I think the only real problem was the brevity of the class.

Outside of class, we had so many opportunities to see Essen and the surrounding area, its cultural offerings and everyday life, that we weren't able to see it all, but in retrospect I feel like we really took advantage of our stay there. More importantly, we talked to professors and students, casually and formally, and made potentially lasting and invaluable connections; and we really got to know a German university, got to know the system and its pros and cons, and that experience will probably also prove quite useful in the future. I was surprised and delighted at how open and welcoming and eager to help us the professors and students in Essen were, and still are, and I'd recommend the program to anyone studying German at the graduate level, especially if they are interested in contemporary, "living" Germany.

I think the Esseners' stay went well here, too. Their lodging worked out, outside of the bed issue, and their post-apartment stays in our houses were even fun. I hope they got to see as much of Duke, Durham, and Chapel Hill as they wanted to – sometimes I felt like they spent the entire day in the cubicles, but they all said they had gotten a fair amount of work done, and they seemed to like our library as well as the feedback they got from professors. I also wonder if it was more difficult to get around independently than it was for us in Essen – we had our own adventures all the time, but without good transportation they must not have been as mobile as we were. But that is something we can't do much about – all in all, I think we did well in planning for and hosting them.