

In Memoriam Karl Heinz Göller (May 13, 1924 – April 22, 2009)

Thou art not, PENSURST, built to envious show
Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row
Of polish'd pillars, or a roof of gold: [...]
Thou joy'st in better marks, of soil, of air,
Of wood, of water ; therein thou art fair.
Thou hast thy walks for health, as well as sport:
Thy mount, to which thy Dryads do resort,
Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made,
Beneath the broad beech, and the chestnut shade;
That taller tree, which of a nut was set,
At his great birth, where all the Muses met. [...]

Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst"

Perhaps I am not exactly following established academic custom here, but I think I should start this eulogy by stating upfront that I would not be who and where I am as a scholar without the teaching and support of Karl Heinz Göller. When news of his passing reached me some days after April 22, 2009, I dug out my old "Studienbuch" of Regensburg University and began to thumb through it.

Although I had heard of the famed Chair of "Anglistik" during student orientation which, unbeknownst to me at the time, I received from his daughter, Bärbel, my first 'real' encounter was in his lecture course on "Geoffrey Chaucer" in my second semester. When I heard him recite and expound the "General Prologue" to the *Canterbury Tales*, and when, armed with that experience, I devoured the bilingual Reclam edition of the *Tales*, I began to form an attraction to the study of Middle English texts and to Medieval literature in general that has continued every since. Some years later, after I had taken his graduate seminar on "Arthurian Mythology in Twentieth-Century English Literature," he offered to recommend me to colleagues at Williams College as a Teaching Associate of German, an opportunity that became the first step toward my career in the United States. After my return from Williams College, he invited me to his "Oberseminar," a graduate seminar in the slowly vanishing German tradition of the "Privatissimum," became my thesis advisor, and then recommended me again, this time as a newly minted Dr. phil., first to *Anglia* so that I could write and publish my first scholarly review, then to the University of Northern Iowa, where I found my first tenure line appointment.

If this sketchy description of his role in my scholarly *vita* sounds like what most "Doktorväter" do for their students, please consider that Karl Heinz Göller advised and mentored another 35 doctoral students as well as nine scholars who wrote their post-doctoral dissertations ("Habilitation," or "second book") under his supervision. He was able to help them and me because he had established a record of excellence for himself that conveyed much needed delegated authority on all his students and collaborators. Seven book-length publications, most notably his 1963 monograph on the role of *König Arthur in der englischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters*; eight (co-)edited essay collections, among them the influential *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem* (1981); more than 115 scholarly articles and essays; and over 60 book reviews. After an initial appointment as Chair in Göttingen, Göller followed the call to a Chairship at the newly-founded University of Regensburg, serving as founding Dean of the Philosophical Faculty from 1967-1968. He also served as President of the German Association of University Professors of English ("Anglistenverband," 1973), host of the 12th International Arthurian Congress (1979) and the Fifteenth Century Symposium (1982),

International Secretary of the New Chaucer Society (1979-1984), co-founder and first president (later honorary president) of the Association of German-speaking Medievalists (“Mediävistenverband,” 1983), and Vice-President of the Société Internationale Arthurienne (1984). When I took his lecture course on “Chaucer” in the summer term of 1982, he was one of the best-known Anglicists in Germany and an internationally recognized medievalist, the kind of scholar invited to present a plenary lecture (“King Arthur as a Medium for Political Action”) at the International Medieval Congress at Western Michigan University, where I now serve as the Chair of the Department of English. The first time I became curious about the Congress and Western Michigan University was, of course, because of his involvement as speaker in 1983.

While his wide range of knowledge certainly impressed me as a student, it is only now that I can fully appreciate his exceptional versatility. Karl Heinz Göller was educated in the tradition of the typical German professor of English literature, which implied that scholars have in-depth knowledge and teaching experience in at least two literary periods and more than one literary genre. Göller’s doctoral dissertation on James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730), one of the earliest and longest nature poems in the English language, grounded him in the eighteenth century as well as in poetry, and his “Habilitation” on King Arthur established him as an expert in late medieval poetry and prose (esp. Malory’s *Morte Darthur*). However, Göller went much beyond the two systemically mandated areas. Based on his broad and thorough education at the University of Bonn and the work with his advisor, Walter F. Schirmer, one of the founding fathers of post-WWII German Anglistics, Göller edited essay collections on English poetry, the English and American short story, and wrote a monograph on the beginnings of the English novel. He published on Old English elegies, Chaucer’s “Squire’s Tale” and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Percy Bysshe Shelley, T.S. Eliot, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, utopia, the metaphorical prison, the *imago pietatis*, the emancipation of women in eighteenth-century verse, nursery rhymes, science fiction, the detective novel, the Dime novel, ecological poetry, Sir Hugh of Lincoln, Thomas More, *Sir Tristrem*, ballads, and Alexander and Dindimus. And he never missed an opportunity to link his research with the many-splendored history of the city of Regensburg, as when he wrote on the medieval *Dollingerlied*, Sir George Etherege’s stay in the city as English ambassador to the Imperial Diet, or the Jesuits’ Theater.

As students, we profited immensely from an instructor and advisor with such a broad range of interests and profound knowledge. Göller’s lecture series, for example, offered well-devised semester-long surveys on English poetry from *Beowulf* through the Beatles (“The History of English Poetry”), “Geoffrey Chaucer,” “Pre-Shakespearean Drama,” “Shakespeare I & II,” “British Drama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century,” and “The Modern British Novel I & II,” and my “Studienbuch” lists graduate seminars on “Edmund Spenser’s *Fairie Queene*,” “Love, Marriage, and Family in Late Medieval Literature,” “Modern English Poetry,” “Contemporary English Poetry: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath,” “English and American Poetry after 1945,” “Ecological Poetry,” and “Recent Research in Medieval Studies.” In his teaching and mentoring, Karl Heinz Göller was a traditionalist, which had almost always positive consequences. For all his lectures and seminars, for example, he obliged students to produce minutes, which had to be submitted to him (or a research assistant) for correction and approval before they would be distributed. These “authorized” versions of his lectures and our discussions in seminars have accompanied me as trusty teaching aids throughout my work as academic instructor.

Göller's seminars were well orchestrated performances, in which certain participants played certain roles not unlike those in a medieval morality play. Students, depending on their status, progress to degree, and current relation to Göller (e.g., thesis advisee, research assistant, staff member), had an unmistakable sense of which kinds of rhetorical utterances they were supposed to make, but the amount of learning that took place despite, or perhaps because, of these relatively strict unwritten 'stage instructions' still amazes me today. Göller was always supremely well prepared, introducing the subject and various approaches to it at the beginning of each class and providing excellent summaries at the end. He would first apply the foundational skills of philological analysis to texts and then nuance his results with aesthetic and cultural considerations. He was not always tolerant of dissenting views in class, leaving no doubt as to who was in charge, but more often than not he redirected such views in pedagogically productive ways or cloaked any residual disappointment about wayward students in ironic teichoscopy.

Karl Heinz Göller was also an incredibly gracious host to his students and colleagues. To him, the academy was a markedly social institution that needed rituals, traditions, and regular events that would extend our interest in literature and language study beyond the library and the classroom. The weekly "Kaffeeklatsch," which proceeded the "Oberseminar" (always held on Thursday afternoons, following the Schirmer tradition), was an occasion for graduate students, employees, and chair to converse on recent events in the field. Even more important, however, were the regular conference-like gatherings ("Wissenschaftliches Wochenende") at his country house in Kirn, Göller's private 'Penshurst.' These two-day events, which usually included presentations by graduate students and invited guests and scholars from all around the world (I remember Maureen Fries, Hans-Jürgen Diller, and Derek Brewer in attendance), beautifully interwove work with pleasure in a pastoral setting and provided many of us with a training ground for delivering and defending our scholarship for the first time at a semi-public event. Both events also enabled us to develop a sense of a cohort and to 'nest' in our department and university. Small wonder, then, that Karl Heinz Göller was honored, in his lifetime, with three Festschriften edited by various students, colleagues, and friends who experienced his hospitality as well as his mentorship. A conference section in his honor is scheduled to take place at the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo in May, 2010.

When I finished reviewing the epic list of Göller's publications, I noticed that the final title happened to be a concise bio-bibliographic entry on his own teacher and mentor, Walter F. Schirmer, for the *Neue Deutsche Biographie*. In this entry, he mentions that his teacher was "one of the first [German] Anglicists who seriously engaged with medieval studies." I can state with similar conviction that my own teacher, Karl Heinz Göller, continued on and broadened Schirmer's path. In my view, he deserves to be remembered as one of the pioneers who managed to reconnect English Studies and Medieval Studies in Germany with the international scholarly community after the long hiatus from 1933 through the post-war years. Among his other great achievements are the strong bonds he established with Central and Eastern European colleagues and institutions before and after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The Polish Association of University Teachers of English as well as Jagiellonian University in Cracow gratefully acknowledged these efforts through a publication and a prestigious award in his honor.

Göller's legacy lives on in his scholarship and in those he taught and encouraged to become teacher-scholars themselves. I am happy to count myself among them.

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Bibliographic Information:

Full bibliographic information about Karl Heinz Göller's publications as well as the titles of doctoral dissertations and "Habilitationen" he supervised were compiled by Rolf Breuer, "K.H. Göller: List of Publications" [1951 through 1988], in *The Living Middle Ages. Studies in Mediaeval English Literature and Its Tradition. A Festschrift for Karl Heinz Göller*, ed. by Uwe Böker, Manfred Markus, and Rainer Schöwerling (Stuttgart: Belser, 1989), pp. 373-82, and "Karl Heinz Göller at 80," in 'Of Remembraunce the Keye: ' Medieval Literature and Its Impact Through the Ages. Festschrift for Karl Heinz Göller on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday, ed. by Uwe Böker (Frankfurt: Lang, 2004), pp. 9-16 [1989-2003]. Since 2003, Göller published the following essays:¹

- "The Legend of King Arthur's Survival and Its Political Impact," in *The Legacy of History*, vol. 1, ed. Teresa Bela and Zygmunt Mazur (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2003), pp. 74-93.
- "Nomen atque omen: A Tribute to Rainer Schöwerling," in *The Corvey Library and Anglo-German Cultural Exchanges*, ed. by Werner Huber (Munich: Fink, 2004), pp. 187-96.
- "The Importance of Nursery Rhymes for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language," in *Papers on Language, Culture and Literature*, ed. Wladislaw Witalicz (Krosno: P. Wyzszej Szkoły Zawodowej, 2004), pp. 9-16.
- "G. Chaucer: *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. into English by N.H. Kaylor," in 'Of Remembraunce the Keye: ' Medieval Literature and Its Impact through the Ages, ed. Uwe Böker (Frankfurt: Lang, 2004), pp. 17-45.
- "Thomas More's Utopia: A New Perspective," in: *Ways of Looking at a Blackbird. Essays in Honor of Prof. Irena Przemecka*, ed. Grazyna and Andrzej Branny (Kraków: Instytut Filologii Angielskiej, 2004), pp. 279-88.
- "Krakau – eine Freundschaftserklärung," in *Literary Views on Post-Wall Europe*, ed. Christoph Houswitschka (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2005), pp. 13-33. [with Jutta Göller]
- "Für und über Rolf Breuer," in *Self-Reflexivity in Literature*, ed. Werner Huber, et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. III-VIII.
- "The Jesuits' Theatre in Regensburg," in *Comedy and Gender. Essays in Honour of Dieter A. Berger*, ed. Helge Nowak (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007), pp. 15-30.
- "Schirmer, Walter Franz," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 23 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2007), pp. 8-9.

¹ I am indebted to Jutta Göller for her kind assistance with compiling the bibliographic information in this section.