
David Benseler, Craig W. Nickish, Cora Lee Nollendorfs, eds. *Teaching German in Twentieth Century America*. *Monatshefte* Occasional Volume 15. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. 294p.

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The end of the 20th century provides the occasion for this collection of essays on the history of German in the American academy. Its audience, however, will more likely locate the volume's timeliness in the fact that German (whether labeled as *Germanistik*, Germanics, or German Studies) currently finds itself in a persistent state of diminishment as a field of study. This volume sets out to revisit the field's history, with the threefold aim of contextualizing the current situation in terms of the past, identifying current trends, and, to a much lesser degree, suggesting remedies that might come to the aid of Germanists in the future. This volume has its predecessors, all of which are mentioned in a useful bibliography devoted to the past and present of the discipline. But rather than simply summarize these previous efforts, this anthology seeks to move beyond the standard narrative of the field's past that has emerged, particularly over the recent decades, as the field has sought to redefine itself as German Studies. In his preface to the volume, Peter Uwe Hohendahl suggests the time has come for a history focused less on taking comfort in the past than effectively addressing the unique dynamics of today's institutional pressures. If we are to survive declining enrollments and the downsizing of departments, then German Studies "must shift [its] focus from a narrative based on events to an analysis of structural problems, particularly those at the micro-level" (13). Having set the agenda at the volume's beginning, does this book live up to Hohendahl's proposal?

On balance, the answer is yes. The initial essays by Arthur Tilo Alt, Frank Trommler, Theodore Ziolkowski, Clifford Albrecht Bernd, and Jost Hermand offer a useful review of the disciplinary history from its beginnings in the late 19th century, through the familiar turning points of the two World Wars up to the present. These essays engage in the kind of narrative of events Hohendahl wishes to move beyond, but the perspectives they offer suggest that this narrative is in need of further refinement. Ziolkowski's essay offers a refreshingly skeptical view of the standard history of the field by suggesting, for example, that the crisis dur-

ing World War I, although serious, has been overplayed. At the same time, his piece advances an agenda calling for the return to the centrality of the literary text, in contrast to the current trend toward the multiple objects of study called for by German (Cultural) Studies. Needless to say, many will view such an agenda as reactionary rather than reformative.

After an optimistic assessment of developments in the emerging field of German-Jewish studies by David Brenner and Michael Berkowitz (more essays on this topic would have been welcome), the volume offers several articles on the contributions made by women in the field, particularly the impact of feminism and gender and women's studies within the discipline. These pieces review of feminism's impact in shaping a distinctly American field of Germanics, particularly through the Coalition of Women in German (WiG). The narrative that emerges is that the impact of feminism is one of the success stories in the discipline's history, but given the current state of crisis, the authors are careful not to overstate that success. Gisela Hoecherl-Alden's article on immigrant women in the profession is worth special mention, as it focuses attention on contributions to the discipline by immigrant women in the first half of the century, a group usually omitted from the typical narrative of the field's history because of their less visible positions within the American academy compared to their male counterparts.

It is not until one reaches the final third of the volume that the essays engage most directly in the kind of structural analyses called for in Hohendahl's preface. These pieces examine the institutional dynamics of German departments, the changing climate of publication in the age of the Internet, the historical role of the federal government in fostering foreign language and culture study, and, finally, the curriculum itself. It is in these final essays that one at last encounters explicit calls for action. Helmut Ziefle's well-documented article on trends affecting German Departments at small liberal arts colleges provides instructive examples of decisions made by individual departments and their results, but he does not overgeneralize the applicability of these instances to other settings. Janet Swaffar outlines a program for rethinking a German studies curriculum from first-year language acquisition through graduate studies in terms of teaching cultural literacy at the outset. Like Ziefle, she also calls for greater coordination among German departments beyond institutional walls. Of course, proposals such as these have been heard before, and the structural barriers that have hindered them in the past will no doubt reassert themselves.

The strengths of this new contribution to the identity of German as an American discipline are considerable. Despite the unique focus of each essay, the volume's

overall coherence is considerable, and for that the editors are to be commended. More articles focusing on current curricular developments, such as the willingness or reluctance of German departments to engage with post-colonial topics, particularly at the undergraduate level, would have strengthened the volume. But as Hohendahl states in his preface, this volume seeks to engage more scholars of German in serious self-reflection, and thus offers a beginning. In that sense especially, this volume succeeds admirably. ❀