

dr. hans marte:
opening speech at the september academy 94

(dr. marte was director of the austrian national library from 1993 until 2000)

ladies and gentlemen!

when, yesterday evening, ernst jandl invited me to say a few words today at the opening of the september academy 94, i spontaneously agreed, firstly as a favour to ernst jandl, for whom i would do anything, and then, i must admit, out of pure curiosity, in order to hear how this bold experiment, this laboratory of poets, may be faring after three years, and without reflecting on what a librarian – i view this profession, without any irony, as the peak of my career as a civil servant to date – could possibly contribute to the occasion, with the exception of satisfying an additional curiosity, namely that of discovering how that literature is produced which, if it is put down on paper, will one day inevitably end its days in the national library as presentation copies.

the last time i had anything to do with a school of literature was at the gorki institute in moscow at the end of the 1970s. i had enticed prof. schmidt-dengler there, and when we bade farewell the situation was almost like that of johann georg fischer taking his leave from hoelderlin after visiting him for the last time in 1843, on which occasion he begged him for a few verses. the reply: "as your holiness orders, but should they be on greece, spring or the spirit of the age? friends whispered 'spirit of the age' and so i proffered the same."

please pardon this traditional 'old european' reaction, as ide hintze would probably call it. of course, i can well imagine that things are not done in the same way at academies such as these as they were at that time in moscow, or at its branch in leipzig. yet what is the reason for the exceptional success of this project, which is so unique in the german-speaking countries?

since then, it has become clear to me. it is probably a combination of ideas that may seem obvious, but which are rarely encountered for precisely that reason, namely that of bringing together people who have something to say, an openness that is frequently taken for granted (and therefore often misunderstood), together with a considerable portion of professionalism. for austria a highly unusual, but explosive, mixture.

i believe that i am able to appreciate this experience of a young author meeting a great colleague, since i was once lucky enough to travel through poland with ingeborg bachmann for 10 days. that was not without its shocks, for example the shock triggered by her reply to my question as to why she no longer wrote poetry. "because i know how to do it", was her toneless answer. and i still have the sound of her voice in my ear as she read 'bohemia lies on the sea'. i offer my sincerest congratulations on the idea of multi-lingualism, and that you are bringing in the russians. very important! i offer my congratulations on the idea of holding the next academy in kasachstan, in order to cater for the german minority there – finally someone from austria!

at last someone is deliberately attending to the language that we actually speak. we cannot leave it up to our reunited big neighbour (Germany). after all, we are not a lower-bavarian variation, as one may read in the *berliner morgenpost*. nor, incidentally, can we leave it up to the german scholars.

attracted by the idea and convinced that the direction taken is the right one, i would like to use this occasion to invite the schule für dichtung in wien to co-operate with the national library, and of course also to offer it the use of our rooms, where so many great literary colleagues and their estates live on, and often take on a surprising new lease of life. w. faulkner was right when he said that "the past is never dead, it is not even past." i am glad to propose this co-operation with the national library, especially since it differs from other libraries precisely in the multi-lingualism and multi-culturality of its stock of books, and for which this quality remains an obligation to this day. after all, it was grillparzer who found his inspiration for *the jewess of toledo* in our spanish library. literature is usually an act of resistance, a fact that you know better than i do. a library is accumulated resistance.

with regard to the prospects of a "marriage between poetry-making and policy-making" announced by anthony judge, i would finally like to convey to you, as requested, the greetings of vice-chancellor erhard busek, who continues to follow the activities of your association with interest.

the september academy of the schule für dichtung in wien is hereby officially opened. i wish it the greatest success.

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