

**An Organization of Global Repute  
The Ibero-American Research Seminar:**

*A new, precious, shimmering pearl in the time-honored oyster shell of Leipzig's Romance Studies*

On Friday, June 20, 2014, the hallowed Old Senate Hall filled with experts from the sciences, culture, politics, and international relations; and other friends of the Ibero-American Research Seminar, who gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of its founding on January 18, 1994 (a date that qualifies the IAFSL as the oldest organization in the Philology Department since its rejuvenation). All of the speakers – including Prorector Matthias Schwarz; Dean of the Philology Department Dr. Beat Siebenhaar; the Mayor of Leipzig Burkhard Jung; Director of the European Forum of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Dr. Ruth Fine; and the tribute speaker, Director of the Institute of Romance Studies of the Humboldt University and longtime Chairman of the German Association of Hispanists, Dr. Dieter Ingenschay – were in agreement that the IAFSL would constitute an exceptionally important organization for both the University and the City of Leipzig. Dr. Ingenschay and Dr. Fine attributed the IAFSL with the status of a world-renowned research institution with an exemplary character in three core fields: research, internationalization, and supporting young scholars. In addition, according to Mayor Jung, the IAFSL is a cultural and political organization that has deep roots in the city of Leipzig.

In research, Dr. Ingenschay emphasized the IAFSL's research and theory activities, describing them as hardly to be exceeded: "the accomplishments of this institute – a '*new, precious, shimmering pearl in the time-honored oyster shell of Leipzig's Romance Studies*' – could hardly be greater". This is clear "from the multitude of conferences, congresses, and symposia on the most current topics, but especially from the enormous number of relevant publications in the applicable fields of theory: post-modernity, post-colonialism, hybridity, gender issues, transmediality, and intermediality", the core fields of German and international Romance Studies. Thus, "Leipzig's IAFSL has earned a reputation as an organization of the highest quality on an international scale" to which the "overused seal of excellence must nevertheless be duly applied". Even today, the IAFSL is a pioneering organization, declared Dr. Fine, while the tribute speaker emphasized its independent interdisciplinary and international character, thanks to which "this seminar already met all of the applicable requirements of current scientific management for networked cooperation 20 years ago, before they were even in place". Added to this is the enormous number of externally funded international conferences (one or two per year) that contribute to a diverse global network and visibility.

All speakers emphasized the three *peer-reviewed* series of publications created by the IAFSL, each with its own international Board of Editors made up of members from elite universities, as acting as a window to the world. According to Ingenschay, these, especially the series *Theory and Criticism of Culture and Literature*, offer "an overview of up and coming topics and people in recent Latin American Studies". There is "no other series worldwide that has tracked and influenced the development of culture theory on Latin America with such consistency or nearly the same intensity". Ingenschay describes the reach of this series with an analogy: "*The Little Red Book* has taken on a new meaning; no longer does it designate the bible of Mao, as my generation knew it, but rather the latest volume in the TCCL series". According to Ingenschay, these nearly 100 published volumes are now available "in the libraries of every North and South American institution of higher education". This speaks "not only to the expanse of the publishers' network, but also to the quality of these publications". Referencing Borges' *The Aleph*, Ingenschay expressed conviction that "Leipzig was clearly in possession of the Aleph. All aspects of culture theory development were concentrated in this institute just as the seas, the pyramids, the cities, and the ruins were concentrated in the Aleph, in the basement of the house in the calle Garay".

As an example of this global network, Ingenschay and Fine noted exceptional research projects, like that funded by the DFG, the large-scale project called *Diversity of discourses. Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Communication in the Context of Post-Modernism and Post-Coloniality* carried out from 1997 to 2003. More than 100 scholars took part in it, and 11 volumes were published. They also cited the fruitful cooperation with the Hebrew University that has taken place since 1999 and contributed to many projects, including the BMBF Diaspora Project (2010-2012) and a project currently in the application phase designed for the EU program *Horizon 2020 – European Societies after the Crisis* with the topic *Migrations and Diasporas: Construction and Representation of Performative-Hybrid Identities, Gender and Cities in Global Societies in a comparative Perspective*. This project will be completed with new partners from Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey with a budget of 2.5 million Euros. Prorector Schwarz emphasizes the importance of such projects to the internationalization of the University of Leip-

zig, which is among the top ten Universities in this area. According to Dean Siebenhaar, internationalization is a must for the Philology Department, and IAFSL achieves it expertly. The project on cultures of memory with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago de Chile, in which the Universidad de Buenos Aires and other North and South American universities also took part, was another milestone in Latin America research. From their own experience, Ingenschay and Fine emphasized the immense influence of the IAFSL's research in Europe, the Americas, and even in North Africa and the Middle East, which has earned it a reputation as one of the world's best, most esteemed, and most renowned research organizations.

Whether in the context of the twelve Latin America / Iberian Peninsula Research Days that have taken place to date and that have become a fixture of German Ibero-Romance Studies, or in the context of individual support efforts, or in that of cotutelles, supporting young scholars is praised worldwide "as exemplary and as a model for excellence" (according to Fine). Fine and Ingenschay asserted that many young scholars' careers have been set in motion in Leipzig.

According to Mayor Jung, the IAFSL contributes to the internationalization not only of the University of Leipzig, but also of the city of Leipzig, by "acting as a professional intermediary to South America, the Maghreb, France, Spain, and Portugal"; thus it continually promotes Leipzig's reputation as a city of global orientation. Here, the speakers mentioned IAFSL's political activities, the effects of which, according to Jung, "have been unforgettable for Leipzig". These include a visit by the "former President of Chile Ricardo Lagos and the current President of Chile Michelle Bachelet, politicians that have come to know Leipzig through the IAFSL". The contribution to the Leipzig Book Fair by the IAFSL and its cooperation with the Haus des Buches were also mentioned, as well as the fact that IAFSL has become a fixture in Leipzig's relations with agents of diplomacy as "this evening shows", in Jung's words, who ended his speech with: "In a word: Here [at IAFSL], a passion for scholarship meets a keen interest in community in an exemplary manner. Through the work of the IAFSL, Leipzig has developed the character of a place of contact with Romance cultures".

Prorector Schwarz did not fail to note the criticism of the plans for cuts to the Institute of Romance Studies that are still on the rectorate's agenda. These, all speakers agreed, would have dire consequences for the institute, the IAFSL, the draw of the University of Leipzig as a whole, and for its status as a hub for Romance Studies in Saxony. The speakers, Mayor Jung, Dr. Fine, and especially Dr. Ingenschay had a clear message regarding this development. While Mayor Jung talked of the many letters of protest from all over the world and the serious potential threat posed by the current planned cuts, Dr. Fine made it clear that successful organizations like the IAFSL and the Institute of Romance Studies had earned the right to be strengthened and supported by the rectorate instead of weakened, and that it was in the university's and Saxony's own interests to see to it that this would be the case.

Prof. Ingenschay, an experienced scholar of Romance and Hispanic Studies, accused those responsible for the cuts of "'fundamentally shrinking' Romance Studies in Dresden and now threatening to bring Romance Studies in Leipzig to the limits of its operability". This risked making the Free State of Saxony into a "pretentious, 'Romance Studies-free zone' watching its own center diminish away". Ingenschay referred to the professorship in Spanish and Portuguese Language Studies as well as the interview with the Portuguese Ambassador in *Die Zeit* Nr. 13, 2014, saying that this was "not at all about Portugal, but about *Germany*, which needs this expertise, and about Leipzig, where the highest standards must be maintained and defended". Referencing Dr. Gerhard Besier, Ingenschay condemned the scientific and political speaker for the Left in the Saxon Parliament, saying that "those responsible in the government and at the University of Leipzig issued cuts without 'standards of quality'" that took into account the fact that "breaking off whole fields (like Portuguese Studies within Linguistics and Francophone Studies within Romance Culture and Literature Studies) opens voids that not only have the power to hobble a dynamic discipline and shake a world renowned and envied institution like the IAFSL to its core, but that also significantly reduce Leipzig's draw as a university city. In short: If you cut Leipzig's Romance Studies to death, you destroy a discipline with future potential that extends beyond teacher training, and you do damage to an entire university from which it will take decades to recover". Here, Ingenschay supported the long and recurring demand on the part of Dr. de Toro "to evaluate fields using *objectively applicable criteria*". Dr. Ingenschay expressed himself particularly clearly with the medical analogy often repeated in the media by Rector Schücking: "In medicine, you don't just amputate a healthy limb, so why do people think to do so when, instead of in medicine, they work in the administration of an institute of educa-

tion?" Here, he meant that organizations like the IAFSL are important components of the Institute of Romance Studies that "serve an educational and sociopolitical purpose" and thus "cannot be delegated away", or amputated.

Despite the "current crises" that cast a dark shadow over the sciences in Leipzig, according to Burkhard Jung, "we in Leipzig should consider ourselves lucky to have such an esteemed multicultural and multilingual center in our city as the IAFSL". Ingenschay adds that, "all of us, the Hispanists and Latin Americanists of Germany and the world, have benefited from the networks that you [the IAFSL] have forged and the issues that you have explored". For this reason, "we hope for the IAFSL that the decision makers are smart enough to guarantee the inner and external conditions necessary to its continuation, not just in our interest, but also in their own". According to Dr. Ingenschay, the fact that "Leipzig has become a point of reference is thanks to the tireless efforts of this seminar". Thus it goes without saying that the University of Leipzig ought to be extremely proud of this organization, and that it should provide it with all possible support for the present and the future and suppress all plans to issue cuts for this organization, one that has, to its credit, brought in 1.2 million Euros since 1997. Ingenschay added that, "in the field of medicine, that may be *peanuts*, but for the humanities, 1.2 million in acquired funding is a huge success".

Dr. Fine considers it a privilege to work with the IAFSL, and the Hebrew University is proud of this relationship as well. According to Dr. Fine, it is not only the University of Leipzig, but also the entire German academic world that should be proud of the IAFSL's excellence. Without a doubt, its outcome and contributions are an example of masterful teamwork that has especially prospered from its long-standing director, who has opened and developed theory for many research areas.

To conclude, Dr. de Toro spoke in his speech of thanks of the indomitable team spirit at the IAFSL, saying "we have stood together behind goals and, dare I say, visions, pursuing our ends with the utmost professionalism and alacrity". He also talked about high points in the work of the IAFSL during the two periods under Rector Dr. Franz Häuser and in cooperation with the City of Leipzig under the aegis of Burkhard Jung, the Director of the IAFSL, and the Institute of Romance Studies, calling all this "an exemplary history" that "has and continues to beautifully demonstrate how university and city, how science and politics, should not be considered opposites, but can perfectly complement one another". He also mentioned the many people, institutions, sponsors, and supporters who have helped the IAFSL over the last 20 years.

In reference to the cuts planned for the Institute of Romance Studies, Dr. de Toro thanked Prorector Schwarz for his attendance at this difficult time and for his words of recognition. As a representative of the rectorate, he also appealed to him to distance himself "from the plans for cuts that are once again on the table, especially for the successful areas of Hispanic and Portuguese Studies. The current insistence on the abolition of the professorship for Hispanic / Portuguese Language Studies and the removal of teaching staff from the institute, as well as the abolition of successful profiles like that of Maghreb research, would put an end to the Romance Studies' continuation as an autonomous institute – with dire consequences that would have incalculable effects on the IAFSL, the research subject of which is Hispanic and Portuguese Studies in the research areas of language, literature, and culture."

The climax of the evening was the presentation by Dr. Klaus Meyer-Minnemann, Emeritus of the University of Hamburg with the title *Rubén Darío's Sonett "Caracol" und Mallarmés "Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx"*, with which he was able to elate the public with his work in literature. At the same time, he showed the heights to which literature studies, thought unjustly by some to have become obsolete, can soar, and demonstrated that their place in our department should remain uncontested.

The colloquium that took place on Saturday, June 21, 2014 on *Challenges in Literature and Culture Studies in the Context of IAFSL Research: 1994-2014*, drawing both renowned experts and young scholars and possessing the character and atmosphere of a research conference, was able to provide significant insight into current Latin America and Hispanic research as well as a range of new initiatives that culminated in an idea for a new research project. This will be set in motion with an international conference and publication, and will be carried out in cooperation with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Responsible: IAFSL