

The long journey of a man and his books !

For me today is a day of honour and joy.

Honour because so many distinguished guests are here today and because the Gniezno European College is such a great place.

Joy because I see my family – his son Gregor and friends – Hubert Schatzl from Austria and Professor Dworacki from Poland, to celebrate with us this beautiful place, this new part of the library to rest, to sit back, to think and reflect and create.

Joy because the tireless search of my husband to find a good place for his books is over. He was very creative in his search for a place for his library - I remember a luxury hotel in Maputo or a castle in Lower Austria. He was a true cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world, he could live anywhere - the only important aspect was to be near his books. There he would find ideas and thoughts of men and women all over the world. He would travel with them to find new spaces, new places, new utopias.

This library could be anywhere but Poland is a very special place. It is the country where my husband was born, where he learned to play piano, where he had his hidden places in the garden of his parent's house. The country from where his thoughts started to wander around and now his books come back here.

Back to the topic "Books and people". Allow me to develop some thoughts regarding the topic – along my husband's biography:

When he was arriving in Germany 16 years old as a poor refugee without the big house, the piano and the bourgeois life style of his parents he had at least a good education. This enabled him to start his own library. He spoke English and could translate between the German population and American and English soldiers. The usual currency in these days – and not only for translation – were cigarettes. In Schwäbisch Hall, the town where the family finally moved was an owner of a bookshop who was very much addicted to cigarettes so he could get many books for rather few cigarettes and he used this possibility a lot. Even exchanging books with an alphabet he could not read – the greek alphabet. And he had to find some other students to get a class for greek together – probably cigarettes again. I do not want to continue the story of cigarettes and literature – it sounds already like an advertisement from a cigarette company.

To understand this situation one has to go back to postwar Germany – after a war which devastated not only Germany but many other European countries including Poland.

The total estimated human loss of life caused by World War II, irrespective of political alignment, was roughly 72 million people. The civilian toll was around 47 million, including about 20 million due to war related famine and disease. The military toll was about 25 million, including about 5 million prisoners of war. There was a disproportionate loss of life and property.

Poland with 27 million people in 1939 lost about 5 million people during war and occupation including the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. That means that nearly 19 % of the population died. I think coming from a country participating in this terrible crime one should never forget this.

The rehabilitation of Germany after World War II was a long process. Germany had suffered heavy losses: the countries' cities were severely damaged from the bombings in the closing chapters of World War II, agricultural production was only 35% of what it was before the war. 7,5 million Germans had been killed during the war, roughly 11 percent of the population.

There was a deep split in the country - millions of people who had supported the regime and gone to war, many of them disappointed but not able to see the terrible consequences of this inhuman ideology. They did not want to analyse and discuss they just wanted to forget. And I know how long this feeling prevailed because we in Austria had a similar situation – just with a different temperament and different excuses.

But there was a generation of young people born in the beginning of the 30th, too young to participate in the war as soldiers but traumatized by the experiences. Not all of them were brainwashed by the Nazis. They had experienced the disaster.

They were premature, the presence of the trauma and catastrophe of the National Socialism was overwhelming.

But at the same time they were self-confident, they could tell their stories, stories of war and survival, stories of being on the run and escaping. Some people here in the room know probably the story of my husband escaping on a lorry with his mother and grandmother and his dog and some chickens and few things. The challenging obstacle was – the lorry had no engine.

This generation was important for the new Germany. Many of them still very much influenced by old ideas and not easily convinced for a new life

in a new democracy. But as well many of them eager to look over the borders, find new thoughts, new people and concepts.

It was the generation who brought modernity to the country.

The new writers, painters, philosophers who became known in these days were exactly this generation. People familiar with German literature will be reminded of the discussion few months ago about the involvement of Günter Grass in the German army and his reaction to it.

It was a generation full of contradiction, a generation at a turning point.

Some of them turned to other countries, researching people they had learned that they were their enemies.

Some of them searched for the democratic past in literature, turned to Thomas Mann and Berthold Brecht.

Some of them turned to the Holocaust looking to the pre war neighbours and colleagues having the ambition to reconcile Jews and Germans.

And it was not easy – many intellectuals mostly jewish who had influenced the German cultural and intellectual life were gone – they had managed either to find a country of exile or they had been killed in one of the concentration camps. Many university teachers were gone as well, they ones who stayed had to reflect their past involvement.

Nearly all German professors for classical philology had emigrated – they could be found at American universities.

And still - with these considerations in mind one of the tasks of young philosophers and also students and intellectuals in postwar Germany was to work in order to maintain or restore the worldwide credibility of thinking in the German language. Alongside with music, philosophy was for a long time a significant cultural export good of Germany. Since Kant, German philosophy has distinguished itself through a basic style of investigation that always ended in a synthesis in answer to questions of principle, limit and life. German philosophy had to respond to the catastrophe of National Socialism.

There was not only the search for the restoration of a certain kind of credibility; there was also from the beginning among some of that postwar generation the ambition to address and clarify the moral disaster of National Socialism. There was therefore not only the attempt to regain the great German tradition in the sense of the Kantian heritage but also to regain or overcome the separation from the Jewish tradition, which was highly specific and extremely important for the whole of German cultural life at the beginning of the century.

Learning from the horrors of the german past was always one important trace in my husband's life. And he turned back to the ancient

philosophers to learn. He was a man of tolerance and humanity believing in an atmosphere where the rights of everybody were guaranteed and could flourish regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

When we were living in Southern Africa we often met one friend who was judge at the Constitutional Court of South Africa. We would have long discussions with him about the horrors of apartheid and how a country could heal these wounds and find a common road to future. Our friend was always quite puzzled how my husband would look to ancient societies to find ideas and thoughts for this modern society. Learning from ancient philosophy was not only a matter of university life but deeply enrooted in his philosophical thinking.

After these years without any information, far away from the cultural development of the time – years without Thomas Mann or Robert Musil or Ernest Hemingway – students had to read .., to travel ..to explore the unknown Germany and other nations. It was the time were students would subscribe in lists in order to read one of these writers at least for some hours. My husband was often telling the story of the sensation when the university library got “The Buddenbrooks” by Thomas Mann. He would chose the time in the night so he had more hours to engulf in this book.

Looking at the titles of his library will show these postwar traces of a new freedom and looking at my husbands list of publications – one will find all these writers and many literary figures accompanying him through his professional life. But his profession was always more than a profession it was a vocation. These characters were friends and partners to share ideas with, to argue with, to find new challenges.

Books were not only objects they were friend and I was always touched by his way to deal with a book in a very physical way –he would take a book out of his shelf and caress it with his regard, then open it and smell at it and only then start to read.

My husband had started writing a book, his memories, called memoirs of an erotician of words – a joyfull play of words itself.

The eroticism of words was a powerfull movens in his work.

The word "eroticism" is derived from the name of the Greek god of love, Eros. Ancient Greek philosophy defines in many ways our understanding of the aesthetic sense in eroticism.

In the Platonic ordered system of ideal forms, eros corresponds to the subject's yearning for ideal beauty and finality. It is the harmonious unification not only between bodies, but between knowledge and pleasure. Eros takes an almost transcendent manifestation when the subject seeks to go beyond itself and form a communion with the objectal other.

The French philosopher Georges Bataille believed eroticism is a movement towards the limits of our own subjectivity and humanity - a transgression that dissolves the rational world but is always transitory.

These thoughts show quite well my husband's approach to literature, to the literary figures, to science and to life.

It was his love for literature, for music, for the intellectual discourse, for philosophy which has formed my husband's life and this library and this discourse and exchange will be alive here. That was his dream and now it is reality. Thank you for making it true.

Allow me to make one more remark: I know that the correct way to talk about my husband would be to say my late husband but he is so alive for me and in this library that I do not want to put such a distance between us and I hope and know that this library will keep him also alive in the memory of many people.

He was an intellectually active man, an international research networker and a jovial and happy human being.

I want to finish with a quotation from one of his books which illustrates his approach to science and art quite well: „The usual way of thinking takes place within closed verbal systems which are already created by language; this is the conventional way within a certain rational system...but it is also possible to think beyond language – in order to find something new which never was found before... to think beyond language is the creative, the ingenious or the brilliant way of thinking!

Let us think beyond language and let us hope that many students will do the same here in this library and this university!