

THE DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A BRIEF HISTORY

Formal instruction in German language and literature began at Harvard College with the appointment of Karl Theodor Follenius in 1825. Follenius (1796–1840) was born in the German state of Hesse-Darmstadt and enrolled at the University of Giessen to study theology. In 1814, together with his brother August Wilhelm, he volunteered to fight in the Napoleonic Wars, before succumbing to typhus. He went on to earn his doctorate in civil and ecclesiastical law at Giessen and became an active member of the Giessen Burschenschaft, which expressed radical Republican ideals. Upon moving to the University of Jena, Follenius continued to pen incendiary political pamphlets against the monarchy. In 1819, he was arrested as a suspected accomplice in the assassination of the conservative diplomat and dramatist, August von Kotzebue, and subsequently fled to Paris, where he befriended the liberal journalist, Charles Comte, and the Marquis de Lafayette, who fought alongside George Washington in the American Revolutionary War. Follenius soon fell under suspicion again in connection with the assassination of Charles Ferdinand d'Artois, the youngest son of the future King of France, Charles X, and took refuge at the University of Basel, where he lectured on metaphysics. Ultimately, facing a warrant for his arrest, Follenius emigrated to the United States, arriving in New York in 1824 and anglicizing his name to Charles Follen.

Lafayette put Follen in touch with George Ticknor, who had studied at the University of Göttingen, before being appointed the Smith Professor of French and Spanish Languages at Harvard University. Deeply impressed by the German university system, Ticknor advocated the creation of academic departments at Harvard in order to accommodate the study of modern European languages and cultures in addition to the study of Classics.

At Ticknor's recommendation, Follen was offered

a lectureship at Harvard and would eventually be appointed the first Professor of German in 1830.



Charles Follen

Here, he taught courses on German Romanticism, Biblical Hermeneutics, and Kantian Philosophy, and spoke regularly at Cambridge's Transcendental Club, whose members included Frederic Henry Hedge and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had graduated from Harvard College in 1821. Follen who, incidentally, inspired the tradition of the domestic Christmas tree in New England, was a frequent contributor to the Transcendentalists' journal *The Dial*, edited by Margaret Fuller, whose literary salon in Cambridge introduced many 19th-century German writers to an American audience.

In 1835, University President Josiah Quincy revoked Follen's professorship for his outspoken opposition to slavery and his unshakeable support for abolition. Nonetheless, the study of German Literature continued at Harvard under the directorship of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who began teaching courses on Goethe's *Faust* and on the History of the German Language in 1838, and James Russell Lowell, who lectured on centuries of German poetry. Longfellow also actively promoted the study of Scandinavian languages. By the 1860s, German was mandatory for all sophomores. A graduate program in German was organized in the 1870s, with the first

PhD granted in 1880. The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures was subsequently established in 1897.



Kuno Francke

The Department flourished with the arrival of Kuno Francke in 1884. Francke (1855–1930) was born in Kiel, Germany, and earned a doctorate in Medieval Folklore and Poetry from the University of Munich. Through a close association with Charles William Eliot, then Harvard University President, Francke was appointed as an assistant professor in German in 1887 and promoted to Professor of German History and Culture in 1896. In 1902, through a generous donation from the brewer-philanthropist Adolphus Busch, Francke oversaw the creation of Harvard's Germanic Museum in Adolphus Busch Hall at 27 Kirkland Street. The museum was the first and only institution in North America devoted to the study of art from German-speaking countries. William James gave the dedicatory speech at the museum's opening celebration. Over the decades, the Germanic Museum evolved into the Busch-Reisinger Museum, featuring a comprehensive collection of artworks from the Austrian Secession, German Expressionism, and Bauhaus, not to mention its extensive holdings in postwar German art.



Adolphus Busch Hall

Before the outbreak of the Great War, German culture thrived at the University. In 1909, a performance of Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* was held to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth, starring Maude Adams together with a cast of 1,500 actors before an audience of 15,000 in Harvard Stadium. A special electric light plan was installed, illuminating a giant cathedral façade beneath the night sky. Alphonse Mucha's original poster for this gala event would go on to adorn New York's Empire Theater, where Adams regularly performed.



Alphonse Mucha: Maude Adams as Joan of Arc

Following the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, a number of émigré scholars accepted positions in Harvard's German Department, including Karl Viëtor, Heinrich Schneider, and Bernhard Blume. Viëtor (1892–1951) is best known for his pioneering work on the "History of the German Ode" (*Geschichte der deutschen Ode*, 1923), his studies on Friedrich Hölderlin and Georg Büchner, and his monumental study, *Goethe: Dichtung, Wissenschaft, Weltbild* (1949). Schneider (1889–1972) studied Theology and German Literature in Tübingen, Leipzig, and Giessen, before emigrating to the States in 1936. While teaching at Harvard, he published his critical biography of Lessing (1951).



Karl Viëtor

Blume (1901–1971) began his career as a dramatist and stage-director at the Landestheater in Stuttgart, before emigrating to the United States in 1936. Following teaching positions at Mills College and Ohio State University, Blume was appointed Professor of German in 1956. In addition to writing on a broad array of modern German authors, Blume published his definitive study of *Thomas Mann und Goethe* (1949).

Henry Hatfield (1911–1995), who graduated from Harvard College in 1933, was appointed Kuno Francke Professor of German Art and Culture in 1953. Although notorious for his heavily American-accented German, he nonetheless encouraged German populations living under the Nazi regime in a series of radio talks during the Second World War. He was quick to make the point that it was his American accent that made his broadcasts particularly effective, clearly expressed from a non-émigré perspective. At Harvard, he published a number of important studies, including a collection of critical essays on Thomas Mann (1964), *Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature* (1964), and *Modern German Literature* (1966).



Henry Hatfield

Stuart Atkins (1914–2000) was appointed Professor of German in 1946, after serving for three years in the US Air Force, and would go on

to become one of the world's leading Goethe scholars. His colleague, Jack M. Stein (1914–1976), was broadly respected as a scholar of German Literature and Music with multiple publications on Richard Wagner and German Opera, Alban Berg, and a major study on *Poem and Music in the German Lied from Gluck to Hugo Wolf* (1971).

Scandinavian Studies flourished under the leadership of Einar Haugen (1906–1994), who taught in the Department from 1964 to 1975 as the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Scandinavian and Linguistics. In addition to being a leading scholar in Old Norse and Icelandic, Haugen was a pioneer in the field of sociolinguistics and ecolinguistics. His many publications include *Bilingualism in the Americas* (1956), *The Ecology of Language* (1972), and a magisterial history of the Scandinavian languages (1976).

Born in Vienna and fleeing with her family just days before the Anschluss, Dorrit Cohn (1924–2012) earned her PhD in German Literature at Stanford University and, in 1971, became one of the first women to be appointed with tenure at Harvard, eventually as the Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Literature. Cohn's path-breaking study, *Transparent Minds* (1978), introduced narratology to Anglo-American scholars and reflects her long-standing engagement with the work of Käte Hamburger and Gérard Genette. Her subsequent book, *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), demonstrates her deep commitment to Comparative Literary Studies, with chapters on Tolstoy, Freud, Proust and Thomas Mann.



Dorrit Cohn

After receiving his M.A. at the University of Texas and his doctorate at the University of Göttingen, Karl S. Guthke (b. 1933) arrived at Harvard in

1968 and became the Francke Professor in 1973. Among his more than 300 journal articles and more than 30 books, covering the entire range of German literary history, are his influential monographs on English Pre-Romanticism and the Sturm und Drang, on German Tragi-Comedy, and on Lessing, Schiller, Haller, and Traven, as well as a series of comparative literary studies, including: *Der Mythos der Neuzeit* (1983); *Letzte Worte* (1990); *Ist der Tod eine Frau?* (1997); *Der Blick in die Fremde* (2000); *Die Erfindung der Welt* (2005); *Sprechende Steine* (2006); *Die Reise ans Ende der Welt* (2011); *Geistiger Handelsverkehr* (2015); and *Lebenszeit ohne Ende* (2015).



Karl S. Guthke

Throughout its long history, the study of German Literature has been well served by the University's holdings in Widener and Houghton Libraries. The vast collection had an auspicious beginning in 1819, when Goethe himself presented the College with an autographed copy of his collected works. Today, most would agree that Harvard possesses the best research collection in Germanic Literature and Philology in North America, with extensive holdings not only in German but also in Scandinavian, Dutch, Frisian, and Afrikaans. The collection is greatly enhanced by the holdings in Houghton Library, which, in addition to a number of important medieval manuscripts, incunabula, and an extensive collection of 18th-century German plays, contains the posthumous papers and correspondence of major German poets, including Heinrich Heine, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Bertolt Brecht.

Since the 1970s the Department has continued to develop along fresh theoretical and methodological lines, with an increased inclination toward

interdisciplinarity. Narratology and structuralism, *Rezeptionsästhetik*, post-structuralism, and cultural studies have significantly redirected and enhanced graduate work in German and Nordic languages and literatures from the Middle Ages to the present. Today, the faculty remains committed to interdisciplinary research, focusing on a range of areas, including Film and Media Studies, Intellectual History, Critical Theory, Philosophy, Art History, Psychoanalysis, Anthropology, Visual Studies, Musicology, and the History of Science. Specific emphases include Nordic mythology and folklore, (Post)-Colonialism, Gender Studies, Ethno-Poetics, Children's Literature, Ethics, and Body-Poetics.

The Department's undergraduate program enables students to combine advanced work in German and Scandinavian with other concentrations in the Humanities (e.g., Folklore & Mythology, Music, Philosophy, Comparative Literature, Visual and Environmental Studies) as well as in other Arts and Sciences Divisions (e.g., History, Government, Life Sciences), all enhanced by dozens of Work Abroad and Study Abroad opportunities, in addition to frequent social events and student theater performances.

In addition to offering comprehensive training in literary history and theory from the Middle Ages to the present and providing a sound basis in language pedagogy, the Graduate Program features a vibrant series of guest lectures, colloquia, and workshops. Doctoral candidates regularly pursue secondary fields in Film Studies, Critical Media Practice, Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality, Comparative Literature, Music, and Computer Science. Annual workshops connect the Department with the German programs at Brown University and Yale University; and there are occasional joint workshops for the study of medieval manuscripts with Princeton University. The PhD-Network provides the basis for student and faculty exchanges between Harvard and the Humboldt-Universität of Berlin, with similar arrangements at the Universität Tübingen and the Universität Zürich.