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Photographs

Stefan Jäggi and Peter Wüthrich

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Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Flugtag", 2003

Renato P. Arlati

Letters

Sometimes only
the letters remain –

A book left open
by this window –

And time
slips away in fear –

The pages
that regard you –

Nothing left
but the words –.

How is the letter to observe you
but as an unknown mournful something
which a stranger once set down?

He himself
became a stranger
and wanted to depart

And has remained –.

Translated from the German by Rafaël Newman

Renato P. Arlati was born in Zurich in 1936. With his short, soft-spoken poetry and prose works he was never one of the country's louder voices. He was a master of quiet significance and few words – and of the vast spaces contained within them. The verses reproduced here appear in *An E. (To E.)*, a volume of his collected poetry published by Verlag Urs Engeler, Basel, in 2005, not long after Arlati's death in Baden.



Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 2000



Interesting Times

New challenges for the Swiss book industry

Josef Trappel

The transformation of the book trade may seem unspectacular, but its consequences are far-reaching. As the industry changes, the need for viable cultural policies becomes more urgent. Media expert Josef Trappel provides an overview of the situation |

The Swiss book industry has seldom attracted this much public attention. During the past few years, it has managed to galvanize all concerned – from small bookshops and the various interest groups within the industry, to federal offices and parliamentary commissions, right up to the Federal Court and even the Federal Council. What has happened, for such a well-established institution with a literally centuries-old tradition to cause this much of a stir?

Books are such a self-evident part of everyday life and culture that their existence is often taken for granted. For generations, books have played a tried-and-tested role in every possible sphere of life. There seems no reason to doubt the stability, equilibrium and functioning efficiency of this oldest of mass media. Yet appearances are obviously deceptive: why otherwise would all those public institutions have concerned themselves with books?

Structural shifts in the book trade. Anyone who looks at the book industry more closely immediately notices a number of special features. Books are both retail commodities and cultural artefacts. They are repositories of knowledge and provide long-term evidence of what preoccupies a particular society. Books mark and structure intellectual life and scholarship. Books are closely bound to their language of origin, but within a specific language they circulate across borders. Books are unique: financially and culturally successful titles cannot be multiplied at will. Books are diverse and heterogeneous; their external form varies; their content covers all spheres of life without restriction.

These particularities are reflected in specific production and distribution structures that are remarkably effective. Every year, over 100,000 books are published in the German-speaking countries. These new releases, as well as titles from the past few years, can be obtained by booksellers upon a customer's request within twenty-four hours. According to figures from the National Library, over 10,000 titles are published in Switzerland every year by about 450 publishers and offered for sale by about 600 bookshops. Publishers and bookshops each provide over 3,000 jobs; in 2005 the total was 6,885 jobs. Altogether, book publishers and booksellers generated a total turnover of just under a billion Swiss francs; in 2004 the exact figure was 974 million francs.

This quantitative sum total is achieved in Switzerland by a highly heterogeneous book industry that for years now has been undergoing a process of structural change as unspectacular as it is inexorable. While some publishers and bookshops are closing down, others are expanding, and new players are entering the market within Switzerland and from abroad. Both industry insiders and politicians with a special interest in cultural policy observed the direction of this structural change with increasing concern. In December 2004, a group of MPs led by Vreni Müller-Hemmi submitted a formal request to the Federal Council to commission a report on the state of the book trade. The report was to examine new developments and analyze the causes of the precarious circumstances in which well-known firms now found themselves. The Federal Office of Culture mandated the IPMZ transfer offices at the Uni-

versity of Zurich with the task, and the report was submitted in June 2006. In addition to collecting the relevant data, IPMZ transfer carried out a qualitative study involving publishers, bookshops and writers. The results painted the picture of an industry shaken to its very foundations, facing the threat of an unspectacular but consistent decline.

Faltering cycle. The book industry can be depicted in the form of a cyclic diagram illustrating how the most important players and categories relate to each other. Through the respective stages, the elements of the cycle may be distinguished: the authors, the publishers, the wholesale and retail book trade, and ultimately the readers. Adjacent categories are closely linked in relationships shaped by internal and external factors. Ideally, writers produce manuscripts that are processed by publishers into sellable books, which are then sold by booksellers to readers, who read the books they have bought and thus signal their appreciation to the writers.

Concentrated market power. The most striking and momentous change in the last few years has

been in the relationship between publishers and booksellers. The number of bookshops decreased by 5 percent between 1998 and 2005, the number of publishers by 9 percent. At the same time, the market share of the large bookshops increased in all regions of Switzerland. Smaller, medium-sized and even large bookshops either joined forces to form chains (Lüthy Stocker Ballmer is one example), were bought up by larger retail concerns (Jäggi in Basel and Stauffacher in Berne by Thalia), or closed down. Large bookstores reinforced their presence in the Swiss market (Payot in French-speaking Switzerland; Orell-Füssli's take-over of regional bookshops) and thus increased their competitive market power. The booksellers profiting from these structural changes are those that can demand better conditions from their suppliers, i.e. the publishers, due to their purchasing power. For medium-sized and smaller bookshops, on the other hand, the discounts have not changed. All publishers are being confronted with demands by the big booksellers for higher discounts, while at the same time facing increased demands to provide additional services and special conditions (such as contributing to advertising expenses, and window and table displays). Publishers thus have to bear higher costs for marketing their products, but at the same time their profit margins are decreasing as a result of these structural changes to the industry.

Illustrative diagram of the book industry as a cycle, from the perspective of cultural policy



Source: IPMZ transfer

A new development: the shop sets the price. The already strained relationship between publishers and booksellers is being destabilized further as a result of the abolition of fixed retail prices for books in German-speaking Switzerland, which was ruled by the Swiss competition commission and upheld by the Federal Council at the beginning of 2007. While in Germany and Austria a price maintenance law ensures that books are sold at the same price everywhere,

bookshops in Switzerland are no longer bound by the prices set by the publishers. At the beginning of May 2007, the Federal Council refused to make an exception to the laws forbidding monopolies, and to allow fixed pricing for books in the interests of cultural policy. As a result, profit margins for smaller bookshops especially have come increasingly under pressure; larger booksellers can continue to extract higher margins from the publishers, but may now also pass this cost advantage on to the readers, while smaller bookshops, which are in no position to recoup profits through bulk sales, are placed at a grave disadvantage. New online competitors are an additional factor. Amazon can deliver any title in its inventory to customers in Switzerland, without maintaining an actual bookstore. Personalized customer service is replaced by computer-generated customer profiling. Amazon usually delivers book orders by post from abroad, which makes the books marginally cheaper because of the lower VAT rates in Switzerland. Apart from that, the same rules as for other bookstores also apply to Amazon – such as fixed prices in Germany and Austria. Amazon does not disclose the turnover it generates in Switzerland. Industry estimates consider a figure of between 5 and 10 percent to be realistic. The classic retail book trade's market share is thus reduced, without a radical change in structure. The online book trade is to be seen as an additional factor that is changing the book industry slowly but steadily. The changes in the relationship between booksellers and publishers also affect the relationship between publishers and writers. The publishers' readiness to take risks is declining rather than increasing due to the difficult economic climate, which leads to more difficult access conditions to publishers for writers. Support from a publisher is vital for young, up-and-coming authors, but is also an essential condition for a continuing writing career.

Read a book? Rarely, if ever. The second important relationship for writers – namely, that with the public – is strained by the generally lower level of interest in books. The number of Swiss who pick up a book less than once a week has risen from 38 to 49 percent in the past twenty years. At the same time, the number of people who read a book more than once a week has gone down from 40 to 21 percent (figures for the period between 1986 and 2006; source: Univox Studien). These reading habits are also reflected in household budgets: between 1998 and 2004 the annual expenditure on books in Switzerland went down by 13 percent to 250 Swiss francs; in French-speaking Switzerland it went down even further, by 23 per cent (source: Federal Statistical Office). The reading habits of the population call into question society's backing for writers. Less support and less public notice also mean that it is becoming more difficult to gain access to grants, prizes or other financing – important and often vital sources of income for writers. Not only public backing is affected, but also sponsorship by private foundations and patrons. In the future, the attractiveness of a professional writing career, particularly in literature, will be characterized by even more insecurity than has always been the case.

Electronic books? The book industry does not only consist of fiction and poetry. Non-fiction and specialist literature form the largest share of books sold. In this segment, the digitalization of material that was previously available exclusively in printed form heralds a real revolution. Particularly in the field of specialist scientific literature, traditional publication forms meet the demands of the science world less and less. The electronic availability of texts demands that publishers redefine their intermediate role between writers and (specialist) readers. New players have already

identified the niche in the market, as Google's digitization of entire libraries indicates. In comparison to this change, the first signs of which are already perceptible, there is still no evidence of the electronic reading devices that the hardware industry imagines will one day replace books entirely. The screens which are to show the content of the books are to be flicker-free and easy on the eye, and easily readable even in sunlight. Technical shortcomings, lack of agreement between hardware and software producers, and unclear copyright issues for content have halted the high-flown plans for the e-book thus far.

New structures, new cultural policy? Taken together, these changes call into question the customary and longstanding stability of the book industry, thus extending the field of potential intervention for cultural policy. Above all, questions should be asked about valuable cultural contributions which can (no longer) be provided by the book industry alone because of the changes in its structure. What is needed are new cultural policy concepts that specifically identify such deficits and seek to redress them. The more strongly the book industry is put under pressure to be increasingly profitable and efficient, the greater the challenge for cultural policy. Up to now, public sponsorship has consisted of subsidies to writers, in the form of financial contributions or grants, and to publishers, in the form of printing subsidies or book purchases. In 2004 the total amount of sponsoring by the federal, cantonal and municipal governments combined was, at 11.3 million francs, somewhat below the levels of Austria and Sweden. In future there will be new responsibilities. The cyclic diagram can be used as a starting point for analysis to identify possible fields of intervention for cultural policy. The consequences of shifts in market power, the squeeze on profit margins, digitization, the wan-

ing of interest in reading, and now also the abolition of fixed pricing for books can be localized in the cycle diagram. The question that should be posed is: which relationships between the stages of the cycle are affected, and which results can be achieved better, worse or not at all? From the point of view of cultural policy, the question of the loss to culture if books are no longer written, published, sold and read, is particularly sensitive. After all, unwritten books cannot be counted, so they are not included in the quantitative statistics that figure so prominently in the arguments of many culture policymakers.

Given the changing structures, the first cultural-policy challenge consists in shaping the conditions governing the production of culturally valuable books so that the cyclical process represented here gathers momentum and picks up speed. Book and literary policy can only be regarded as successful, however, if a varied and dynamic book culture is part of this cycle – and not just if the participants are making increased profits. ─

Translated from the German by Joyce Bachmann-Clarke

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The report *Buch- und Literaturlandschaft der Schweiz* by Josef Trappel and Caroline Uhrmann (IPMZ transfer, June 2006; commissioned by the Federal Office of Culture) is available online (in German only) at: www.ipmz.uzh.ch/forschung/ipmz_transfer



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Camper", 2004



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Centovalli", 2005

The Forecast from France “Livre 2010” looks at the years to come

Isabelle Rüf interviews Marc-André Wagner

In 2006 the French Ministry of Culture commissioned an innovative study on the current state of the book sector and the prognosis for the near future. Marc-André Wagner, deputy head of the Ministry’s books and reading department, summarizes the main results of “Livre 2010” and the work still to be done |

Isabelle Rüf: What is unique about the Livre 2010 project?

Marc-André Wagner: The big question right now is clearly the fundamental shift caused by digital technologies. This theme runs through the eleven roundtable discussions and the February 2007 symposium. Previously, there had been a great deal of dialogue about libraries, for example, or the French “*droit d’auteur*” copyright system. What is original about *Livre 2010* is that it takes into account everything we call the “reading chain”, from the author to the reader. The 2010 deadline was chosen because it is the near future: a longer-term forecast would be too uncertain.

An Estates General of publishing, in a way?

Yes, although we are not exactly in a pre-Revolutionary crisis situation; the conclusions drawn by the roundtables are not registers of grievances à la 1789! Book publishing is not as problematic as music, for example, and neither of those sectors faces the problems of the performing arts. The book industry is not about to collapse. But digital technologies are introducing real change. We can’t just let it happen; we need to take the long view of things. That said, we are also attempting to protect the part of the market that has cultural value, to help maintain the diversity and quality of what is out there, not just production for production’s sake.

Is it possible to make an overall diagnosis?

We can already foresee that certain sectors which fall within the domain of what we might call ‘homework’ reading – how-to and technical books,

reference works and professional publications – will have to rethink their approach within the digital context. On the other hand, ‘pleasure’ reading will probably continue to exist in paper format. There is no need to be alarmist, but we must be realistic. By 2010, we will have to reckon with rapid progress in the availability of texts on the internet and the downloading of copyrighted texts, as is already the case with the press.

What main points emerged from Livre 2010?

During the roundtable discussions we heard general, theoretical, and philosophical comments, but also extremely practical proposals – for the bookselling sector, for instance. In France, there is a dense network of independent booksellers. They play an important role in the distribution of so-called ‘highbrow’ books, including literature and scholarly works, but their situation is often difficult, in particular for the smallest among them. Since 1981, we have had a law on book pricing that contains certain measures which must be more effectively enforced. According to Article 2 of the law, quality bookshops have the right to a discount based on the “*quality of services rendered*”, but that measure is too infrequently applied. One option could be a labelling system for bookshops similar to the one in place for art cinemas, which receive specific subsidies and tax reductions. It would be necessary to establish criteria for quality, like the volume of reference works in stock, the proportional costs for qualified staff, and so on. In addition, how might we correct the inequalities between independent booksellers and big retailers? As long as the measures relating to

quality discounts are not applied, booksellers hesitate to assert their rights. Legal proceedings are costly and uncertain, all the more so since there have been few precedents. One solution, which has been talked about before, is to appoint a mediator to resolve these kinds of conflict – as is already being done in the film sector. The question is what authority that mediator would have. In addition, quality bookshops could be allocated more generous subsidies, as well as tax advantages.

What about the publishing sector?

The goal is always to maintain the diversity and quality of the product. A resource and advice centre could be of help to those starting out in publishing. In addition, more support is necessary for French books abroad – in other French-speaking countries, but also in other languages. The CNL can finance the translation of entire chapters of certain works, not only in the natural sciences but also in literature and the social sciences, in order to encourage foreign publishers to acquire the rights. In English in particular, there are no longer many French books being translated.

What about the writers, who are the most directly affected?

There was some discussion of establishing a Ministry Prize, but that would only add one more to the 3000 that already exist. Other, more technical questions were discussed, like social security coverage for the 2000 to 2500 individuals who live from their writing. Their situation cannot be handled in the same way as that of performing artists, since we cannot speak of writers as employees, or unemployed. But we can imagine ways of accounting for their public appearances – such as readings or writing workshops – and consider creating tax exemptions in their favour, as is the case for journalists. And for all writers, the code of practice shared by the publishers' federation (*Syndicat de l'édition*) and the writers' union (*Société des gens de lettres*) must be updated to take into account the numerous legal changes over the years. The current code of practice is more than twenty years old and no longer covers the ensemble of today's practices.

Isn't copyright particularly endangered?

There will be changes to royalty schemes and to the legal protection of creative work, but the French copyright system, known as *droit d'auteur*, will clearly remain a fundamental principle. *Droit d'auteur* was voted into French law on 1st August 2006. To adapt to new practices of online reading and electronic books, publishers will have to create a pay-per-use system for accessing copyrighted texts beyond simple excerpting. But this problem must be solved on a worldwide scale. The CNL received ten million euros to finance the

Livre 2010: The future of the book

The future of the book in the digital age is currently being discussed throughout Europe and indeed worldwide. France, a country with a long literary tradition where every minister seems to have published at least one or two books, has created two institutions dedicated to publishing and reading: a department of the Ministry of Culture responsible for books and reading (*la Direction du livre et de la lecture*), and a National Centre for Publishing (CNL or *Centre national du livre*). It comes as no surprise, then, that France has initiated an in-depth study into the problem: the *Livre 2010* project. In 2006, then-minister of culture and communications Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres asked the director of the ministry's books and reading department, Benoît Yvert, to launch an enquiry into the future of the book. Sophie Barluet, a publishing specialist, was put in charge of the project, which was to take the form of a series of round-table discussions followed by a detailed report. At the end of June 2007, the final report was presented to the new Minister of Culture, Christine Albanel, together with about fifty recommendations.

From September 2006 to February 2007, eleven round-table discussions took place, followed by a summary symposium. The 11 main themes were:

- Providing widespread access to the literary heritage
- Promoting reading among all sectors of the population
- Developing new economic models for books in the digital age
- Books and access to knowledge
- Potential venues and new strategies for promoting books
- Distribution strategies to guarantee the widest range of choice
- Current conditions and future perspectives for authors and writers
- The future of libraries
- Encouraging young readers
- French books in an international context
- Potential political measures and cooperation within the sector

In late February 2007, a symposium entitled *The Future of the Book* summarized the results of these discussions. The proceedings are available online:

<http://www.centrenationaldulivre.fr/-Livre-2010-.html>

French contribution to a European digital library. Various options are being explored in France: the French National Library (*Bibliothèque Nationale de France* or BNF), the municipal library in Lyon, which is working with Google, the National Centre for Scientific Research (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* or CNRS), and various local authorities are all approaching it differently. But what is needed is a unified approach, perhaps for the whole of the French-speaking world.

On some specific points, there are concrete measures to put into place. The recent law, for instance, provides for free access to publishers' original data files for associations for the handicapped. For example, in the case of the visually impaired, the publisher would entrust the data file of a work to a depository organization that would be responsible for redistributing it to approved associations for translation into Braille. The criteria for approval as well as the technical protocols have to be defined: an enormous undertaking.

What is foreseen for public libraries, which are after all an essential element?

The biggest challenge is to reach all levels of society, beyond the cultured middle classes that regularly use libraries. That is the spearhead of democratization. The previous minister had recommended a law on libraries to modernize the legislative framework of their activities. Local authorities are subject to intellectual property laws, and they preserve written heritage. The next step would be harmonizing the laws, tidying them up, reasserting the principles. The BNF preserves written heritage, but so do the municipalities: there is an enormous job to be done classifying, developing, educating. In addition, cooperation among schools, universities, and libraries needs to be reinforced, especially with regard to opening hours. Libraries are open an average of only twenty

hours per week. By employing students, for example, opening hours could be extended to include evenings and weekends. Multimedia libraries could be involved in other services, like job-seeking, which would lead to better integration within the community.

What was the response to the roundtable discussions?

Reactions were numerous and the sectors concerned were very interested. Many key figures participated in the February symposium, including publisher Antoine Gallimard, and Pierre Nora and Marcel Gauchet, editors of the social-science journal *Le Débat*. The mobilization was quite impressive, and was reflected in the media coverage and a wide variety of weblogs. But, of course, the professional sector is now waiting to see how the main public and private players in French publishing will take up the *Livre 2010* proposals.

Do you know of similar initiatives in other European countries?

Italy and the United Kingdom have organized colloquia on libraries. There has been isolated thinking, here and there, on copyright/*droit d'auteur* or on publishing – such as the *Vollsuchtext* online project in Germany. As I mentioned at the start of this interview, the originality of the *Livre 2010* approach was to examine the entire chain over a short-term period. ─

Translated from the French by Jennifer Gay

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Isabelle Rüf, born in Montreux in 1943, is a journalist covering literature for the magazine *L'Hebdo*, for Radio Suisse Romande, and since 2000, for the daily newspaper *Le Temps*. She is a member of the Pro Helvetia Board of Trustees.



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Portrait 2", 2005

Free Market versus Cultural Policy

Book price maintenance under debate

Sandra Leis

Book price maintenance has long been a controversial topic. Fixed prices for books have been illegal in Switzerland since May 2007, but the discussion is far from over!

Price maintenance for books is no longer permitted in Switzerland. The French- and Italian-speaking regions never had a formal system of price maintenance: conditions are dictated by France and Italy respectively, with francophone Switzerland suffering the most from the artificially inflated Swiss franc prices, which tend to be 25 to 35 percent higher than in neighbouring France. In German-speaking Switzerland, the practice of price maintenance for books was stopped through a decision made on 2 May 2007 by the federal government. The Federal Council rejected a petition put forward by the Swiss Booksellers' and Publishers' Association (SBVV) to make an exception and uphold price maintenance as an act of cultural policy. The Federal Council's decision is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, fixed book prices are standard practice in all of Switzerland's neighbouring countries – France abandoned book price maintenance in 1979 only to reintroduce it two years later – and secondly, the Swiss parliament is currently working on incorporating the practice into law.

For eight years booksellers, publishers and writers have campaigned for the preservation of price maintenance. Their main argument is that without it, product range would be narrowed, as publishers would become less prepared to take risks and tend to focus on books more likely to generate higher profits. Bestsellers would become cheaper, but all other books more expensive. The death of the small bookseller would be accelerated and smaller publishers swallowed up by large publishing groups.

The competition commission initially challenged the book cartel in 1999, but book trade representatives were able to delay a decision by appealing to a federal court. In 2001 the Federal Council commissioned a study, from the independent consulting institute Prognos, on the Swiss book market and the potential effects of liberalization. The report concluded that the disadvantages of removing price maintenance would outweigh the advantages. In 2002 the Supreme Court overturned the previous appeal and referred the matter back to the competition commission; three years later

the commission again declared price maintenance illegal. In early March 2007 industry representatives appealed once again to federal high court, but this time without success. Shortly afterward the Swiss Federal Council did away with price maintenance.

Retailers reacted the same day: Weltbild slashed the price of 20 of their bestsellers by 30 percent, Ex Libris offered 25 titles at 30 percent discount, Orell Füssli knocked between 10 and 30 percent off 30 selected bestsellers and the Lüthi-Balmer-Stocker Group introduced a scaled discount system for their customers. Amidst the discounting frenzy by the major bookselling chains, only market leader Thalia chose a more reticent approach. *“Short term and over-hasty price promotions are not to be expected from us. Discounts offered on bestsellers must be recouped by other titles, and that is not in our customers’ interests,”* commented András Németh, head of communications for Thalia Switzerland. However, Thalia is clearly keeping a very watchful eye on market developments and may well offer targeted promotions in the future.

Relief at the fall of price maintenance can be found amongst academic and specialist booksellers. *“Of course we would welcome fixed pricing, but it only makes sense if it is closely based on the recommended euro prices,”* said Walter Brunner, general manager of Huber & Lang, Switzerland’s largest specialist bookseller. *“The policy of price maximization has seriously damaged the specialist. Many of our customers, including libraries, have left us to buy their books either in the euro zone or via the internet. Now we have a chance to try and win some of them back.”*

Federal price monitor Rudolf Strahm (a Social-Democratic Party MP) proposed a plan in 2005 which was welcomed by specialist booksellers. This so-called minimum-price model was based on a concept whereby the publishers’ recommended euro price would serve as a minimum retail price, leaving it up to retailers to set higher prices depending on their individual cost structures. *“This way there is scope for competition and a minimum price is defined – and price dumping will still be prevented,”* said Strahm. The SBVV dismissed the proposal at the time. Today the association puts its weight behind a so-called “bandwidth model” which determines maximum and minimum retail prices.

Neither of these models has yet to be taken up. A new law for a Swiss-wide price maintenance agreement, currently being worked on by the Swiss parliament, will not be ready until 2009 at the earliest. Until then it’s up to booksellers to set retail prices at their discretion. The Swiss Society of Independent Booksellers (VUKB), founded in 2005, is ready to come out fighting: around seventy shop owners would like to band together as pur-

chasers in order to obtain better conditions from wholesalers. According to president Urs Heinz Aerni, VUKB is now looking for a chief supplier, and currently negotiating with the Swiss Book Centre in Olten. Entrepreneurial skills are urgently called for; the SBVV is offering its support, including help with calculation models. Martin Jann, SBVV general manager, also emphasizes the importance of promoting customer loyalty: through well-trained staff, competent customer service, and additional strategies such as frequent-buyer cards.

The consequences of free pricing can only be speculated upon. Yvonne-Denise Köchli of publisher Xanthippe states bluntly: *“Any book that doesn’t achieve sales of at least 3,000 copies will generate a loss, regardless of how it is priced.”* She sees overproduction as a key problem which makes it increasingly difficult for individual titles to make their mark. A sore point for most publishers is the fact that booksellers are permitted to return all unsold copies for full reimbursement. Publishers are unwilling to contest this right, however, for fear that booksellers will buy more conservatively, ignoring some titles altogether. Meanwhile, the process of concentration in the Swiss book trade continues unopposed. Price maintenance would not have prevented these structural changes, but would have slowed them down.

With the removal of price maintenance, an important and cost-efficient tool for promoting the printed word has been lost. The question remains whether direct government subsidies would make sense, as a form of compensation. According to liberalizers’ dogma, this is a logical option which works passably, for example, in agriculture. However, if a similar strategy is to be applied in the world of literature, two questions remain unanswered. Firstly, where will the money come from? And how much should it be? Secondly, according to what criteria will subsidies be awarded? Are intellectually challenging novels the only type of prose worth supporting? Or does a cookery book promoting healthy eating deserve support, too? Thorny questions, which will have to be solved by both parliament and the Federal Council through intelligent cultural policies – if they remain unwilling to consider a legally binding price-maintenance agreement. ─

Translated from the German by Andrew Rushton

Sandra Leis is a literary critic and head of the culture section at the daily newspaper *Der Bund* in Berne. She is also a frequent contributor to the German-Swiss radio DRS2 and a member of the board of the Swiss Schiller Foundation.



Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 1996



Innovative Partnerships

Reshaping federal policy on books and reading

Jean-Frédéric Jauslin

A proposed new law for the promotion of culture also includes changes to the federal government's support for literature and publishing. Jean-Frédéric Jauslin, director of the Federal Office of Culture, outlines the new approach and invites the book sector to join the debate |

With an annual turnover of more than 413 million francs (amounting to over 10,000 published books), the book publishing industry in Switzerland represents a cultural market of considerable economic importance. Among public cultural institutions, libraries are the most numerous (around 6,000), boasting a total of more than 810,000 visitors per year. The book sector creates jobs for 9,400 people employed in publishing, bookshops and libraries. And yet, the book is more than a simple commodity. It has always been the seedbed of knowledge and imagination; in other words: culture.

But the book no longer remains unchallenged on the battlefield. For years it has been confronted with increasing competition from other forms of culture and knowledge, and now finds itself on the verge of an unprecedented historical shift. The digital revolution, with the development of new information and communication technologies, poses a serious challenge to the book sector in its current state. This unstoppable evolution comes on top of the difficulties the book industry has already been facing. As a tool for reflection, the book is falling victim to accelerated rates of change and mediatization. The life cycle of individual books is now shorter, forcing publishing houses to produce more and more novelties. At the same time, channels of distribution are also undergoing a profound shift. On the one hand, booksellers are experiencing a progressive erosion in market share; on the other hand, new and diversified points of sale are springing up. While the emergence of new sales channels helps guarantee the survival of independent publishers, the risk of "bestsellerization" has also sharply in-

creased. In fact, the increasing centralization brought about by the large chains – whether multi-media megastores, supermarkets, or other players such as the Post Office – may have a negative effect on the scope and diversity of products available. In addition, there is the reading crisis among the youth, who tend to prefer computers, magazines and video games: habits which will affect book sales dramatically in the long term.

Systematizing government support. Through its policies on books and reading, the federal government is committed to promoting the diversity of publishers' products and to guaranteeing access to those products for the largest possible number of readers. It supports the book sector with just under 7 million francs per year, not counting the operating costs of the National Library, which total more than 23 million annually. Reduced VAT (2.4%) for books is a further – indirect – form of aid, amounting to the considerable sum of 40 to 50 million Swiss francs a year.

During the summer of 2007 the Federal Office of Culture, in co-operation with Pro Helvetia and the cantonal and municipal governments, drew up an inventory of current measures in support of books. It is important to know whether the government funding invested in the book sector effectively supports not only diversity and access, but also the further development of the industry. In response to the multiplicity of support channels, it is a declared goal to simplify and systematize the procedures for the public funding of books. The new law for the promotion of culture (*Kulturförderungsgesetz* or *loi sur l'encouragement de*

la culture) proposes putting the emphasis on aid to distribution. The result would be a logical redistribution of support to the book sector. The cantons and municipalities would support authors and works – essentially a local task – while the federal government would focus on the crucial and timely work of distribution.

Promoting books in the digital age. As you know, budgets for culture are not infinitely expandable. They force us to be innovative and to form new partnerships. Thanks to the new law for the promotion of culture, we may depart from established funding schemes and reconsider the role of each partner. Two distinct paths seem to emerge here: on the one hand, anticipating and accompanying the changes ushered in by the digital era; on the other hand, supporting those engaged in promoting the book.

Until now, books have remained in the background of debates on the new digital technologies and their effects. In the case of the book – unlike cinema or music – its physical form plays a very important role in the way it is consumed. However, new developments in electronic ink provide new perspectives; some more positive than others. That is why I maintain the importance of upholding copyright, the guarantee of creative freedom. On the positive side, I think the digital revolution opens up new markets, improving access not only to existing publications but also to knowledge as a whole. In addition, the internet is a fantastic tool for promoting the treasures of Swiss literary and cultural production. For these reasons, the federal government must encourage the creation of conditions favourable to establishing digital libraries. The publishing sector, too, should consider developing a shared platform for the legal distribution of texts in digital form. In this way, it would assume control over the virtual circulation of contemporary works.

Promoting literacy and reading. Illiteracy and lack of education are a threat to books and reading. I would like to thank the teachers, libraries and associations committed to the pleasure of reading. The Federal Office of Culture recognizes the importance of promoting books, which is why it supports the Bibliomedia foundation as well as the associations for children's and youth literature. These organizations play an essential role by opening up new paths toward reading, beginning with a young reader's first stumbling encounters with the written word. Initiatives range from the "Born to Read" programme in collaboration with pediatricians, or the "Bookworm" primary school project, to the "Reading Bug" for older children and the "Swiss Storytelling Evening" for readers of all ages. Young readers from other linguistic backgrounds may cultivate their own lan-

guages thanks to intercultural libraries. The Federal Office of Culture also supports the Swiss federation for reading and writing (*Fédération Lire et écrire/Dachverband Lesen und Schreiben*), which fights illiteracy. I would like to pay homage to all those who spread the skills and the pleasure of reading to those in need, and I am committed to supporting their essential work. More than ever, we depend on mediators to channel the flow of information. Journalists, literary critics, juries for literary awards – all play an invaluable role in helping us make reading choices and pushing us to discover new authors.

The federal government, together with the cantons and municipalities, is working on developing innovative partnerships to support the book. On 24 October 2007 we invite all those involved in the book sector to join us for an in-depth discussion and to help sketch out new future-oriented policies for books and reading. ─

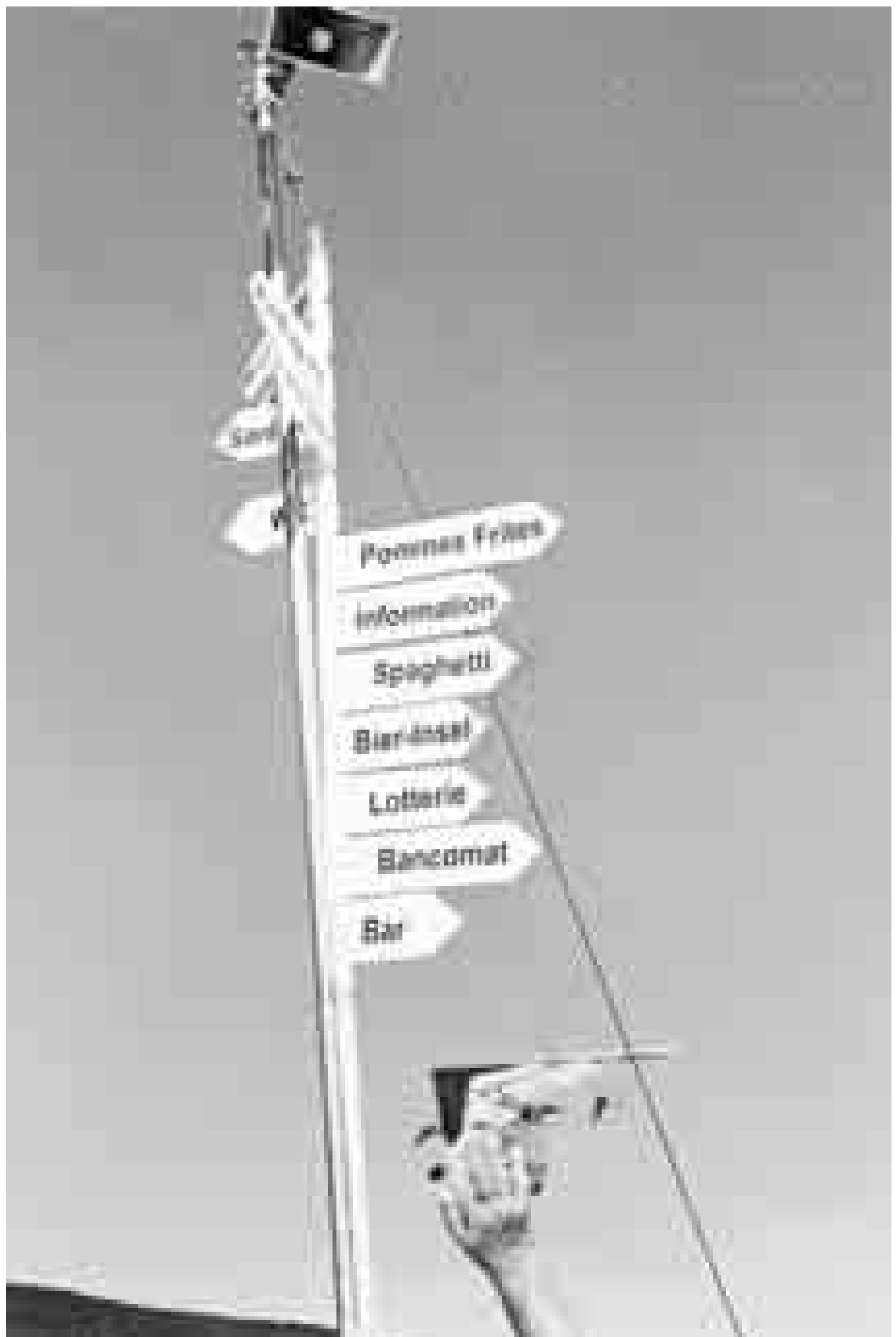
Translated from the French by Marcy Goldberg

Jean-Frédéric Jauslin originally trained as a mathematician and computer scientist before taking his doctorate at the Federal Polytechnic Institute in Zurich. From 1990 to 2005 he was the director of the Swiss National Library. From 1995 to 2005 he was president of MEMORIAV, the Swiss association for preserving the audiovisual cultural heritage, and from 2002 to 2005 he was president of the Conference of European National Libraries (CENL). Since April 2005 he has been the director of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture.

For more information about the Federal Office of Culture and the proposed new laws: www.bak.admin.ch



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Flugtag", 2003



Downloads and Updates from the Future

Reading, writing and funding in the year 2018

Beat Mazenauer

Blending utopia and nightmare, Beat Mazenauer imagines a not-so-distant future for books, reading and cultural policy. Some of what sounds like science fiction might turn out to be accurate industry analysis |

Startling things are happening. On the first of June this year, 2018, the Bilateral IV agreements came into effect, confirming Switzerland's membership in the *Cultural Diversity Programme 2014-2020* of the European Union. Only a few days later, the newly appointed Federal Council issued a surprising statement, consolidating the change in cultural policy. Swiss literature – along with art and music – has finally become part of Europe; the barriers obstructing cross-cultural exchange will be eliminated; and, at long last, guidelines have been set out that explicitly promote cultural diversity. These changes will have an important effect on literature in Switzerland.

Culture and Politics. “Cultural compatibility” is the key concept in the *Cultural Diversity Programme 2014-2020* as well as in the Federal Council's official announcement. In the future, the cultural consequences of political decisions will be under scrutiny, in order to passively protect diversity on all levels of cultural life and actively promote it as required. The Federal Council has already passed the first test by arguing that it is in the interests of cultural diversity to reinstate price maintenance for books and to assign the Federal Office of Culture and Pro Helvetia once again the task of supporting literary production.

These two measures demonstrate the government's awareness of substantial changes in the field of literature in recent years; they also correct the disastrous political strategy instituted a decade ago due to the former Federal Council's blind faith in the market. The decisions taken at the time led to a speedy and drastic drop in the income of literary practitioners. On one hand, there was a decline in royalties on book sales, and on the

other, bookstores began functioning increasingly as marketing agencies. In consequence, writers no longer received remuneration for readings but were, at best, offered a free venue to market themselves. And finally, the regionalization of literary promotion led to curtailed funding because the cantons had no intention of shelving plans to lower taxes in order to foster literary output.

These developments will be reversed this year. As confirmed in the statement issued by the Federal Council, “*The imaginative power of literature represents vital and still-underexploited potential for the ongoing development of Swiss society.*” The statement goes on to say that, in addition to hydroelectric power, creativity is one of Switzerland's most abundant natural resources.

The media are almost unanimous in their enthusiastic reception of the change in cultural policy, despite the occasional hint of scepticism regarding the recognition of writing as a profession or the introduction of royalties for borrowing library books, for which a repayment scheme still has to be negotiated. Special note has been taken of the fact that the Federal Council accounts for its change of course by arguing that great efforts have recently been made by cultural practitioners themselves. The private sector has pioneered innovative strategies in the attempt to overcome existing problems.

Digital Text Library. One initiative is particularly noteworthy in this context: the Web 2.5 platform *i-text – One Stop Shop for Writers and Readers*. Established by visionaries 10 years ago in the summer of 2008 and developed with the help of public funding, *i-text* has become a powerful tool for the literature industry. The objective of *i-text* is to

provide new channels of information and distribution for both writers and their readers.

Structurally the platform is organized as a modular system including a wide variety of websites and web features, all optimally linked. *i-text* defines itself as a competence centre for literature, offering either its own services or carefully vetted links to related sites to satisfy every conceivable literary requirement. A useful introductory website is www.readme.cc, a project launched back in the early days of internet communities. Established 13 years ago in 2005, *readme.cc* continues to serve as a playful multilingual forum which crosses linguistic borders and fosters the exchange of opinion among readers. The site's simple slogan, "Show me what you read," encourages users to post a photo of themselves holding a book, in addition to commentary on it.

The forum is a communicative centre leading via just one click to a variety of service modules: book lending and sales, information on writers, announcements of events and audio options. Most significantly, the modules are two-way interfaces between the internet and reality. Users can download material from the net as well as offering their own literary products. Both writers and readers are served by the system, given that readers often write and writers also read. The appeal of *i-text* lies in the fact that the usual barriers have been eliminated without impinging on the core of the matter: the quality of the texts.

From the point of view of producers, i.e. writers, *i-text* is above all an efficient means to reach readers and stimulate debate on their work. The core of *i-text* is a substantial and steadily growing library of texts, accumulated through a wide variety of channels and available for downloading on demand. Thanks to digital distribution, texts can be offered at low cost, in particular those that have long been out of print. Alongside the usual book-on-demand publishing services, *i-text*'s own

imprint is gradually becoming the centrepiece of the project. This imprint, established by writers, combines efficient internet distribution with the quality ensured by excellent editing.

The great diversity of items in this text library is based on one common denominator: books are no longer produced in runs but printed only on demand. The book is ordered today, printed tomorrow and delivered the day after. This form of distribution means that books can also be 'made to measure'. Readers are able to select the content of an anthology to suit their own tastes and, for instance, make a Christmas gift of their one-off publication. Such customized books, as they are called, are becoming increasingly popular in the field of secondary literature because academics can select precisely those papers or articles required for their research.

Embedded in international contexts. The Bilateral IV agreements of 2018 have finally broken down the barriers that previously prevented the system from functioning across borders. The declared goal of *i-text* is the One Stop Shop, through which both buyers and sellers can conduct all of their transactions on one platform and above all through one single authority. A collecting service run by the United European Collecting Societies settles accounts with each author and handles copyright issues. New regulations have recently been introduced allowing writers to offer their work on the net under a CC-license (some rights reserved) with the support of Pro Litteris and its partner organizations. In this respect *i-text* offers pioneering services that will soon include picture and music libraries, with the goal of integrating them into the One Stop Shop.

These are the additional services currently available on *i-text*:

- a wide variety of writers' websites with information and direct links to the text library;

- intelligent links available for book searches, referring to bookstores and libraries in the user's vicinity;
- direct acting tools for online presentations;
- a literary text radio and critical forums.

Finally, we must not forget *SLurl*, the direct link to the *i-literaryinstitute* on *Second Life*. This virtual world expands the radius of action and offers new opportunities, such as transmitting literary readings and discussions from virtual space to reality and, conversely, using virtual means to spread real events all over the world.

This transfer between first life and second life, between real world and virtual world, is a central feature of the *i-text* platform. “Think about the first life, but don't forget the second!” The linked modules keep the interfaces between real production and virtual distribution, between virtual discussion and real product, open all the time. *i-text* is excellent proof of the fact that the two spheres need not be mutually contradictory, but actually function as ideal complements. Digital media allow optimal exploitation of economic niches with a relatively low output of resources.

Pro Helvetia in Second Life. Although operations are ultimately self-sustaining, creating a modular platform of that nature does need cultural support and funding. Especially during the early years around 2010, the newly established subsidiary of Pro Helvetia in *Second Life* did an excellent job. In return, all newly-developed programs are now available as free open source software. However, *i-text* has not yet been able to compensate for the decline in writers' income, an issue that is also addressed in the Federal Council's statement of 1 June 2018. The efforts made by the literary sector itself to promote literature will be acknowledged: firstly, by recognizing intelligent software as an important cultural tool and secondly, by once again making it the federal gov-

ernment's task to encourage literary production, thus adding support to cantonal and municipal programmes. The Federal Council considers both strategies to be meaningful, important contributions to cultural diversity in Switzerland, given that, in a globalized world, the cultural future belongs to the niche vendors. ┐

Translated from the German by Catherine Schelbert

Beat Mazenauer is a freelance writer, literary critic and networker based in Luzern and Zurich. He is a co-founder of *p&s netzwerk kultur* and has been involved in numerous internet projects. Recent publications: with S. Perrig, *Wie Dornröschen seine Unschuld gewann. Archäologie der Märchen*, Leipzig 1995; with W. Grond (ed.), *Das Wahre, Falsche, Schöne. Reality Show. Essays*, Innsbruck 2005.

NB: The scenario of the future outlined above is indebted to many discussions, especially with Adi Blum, Walter Grond, Andreas Kohli und Urs Hofer. Collaborative projects like www.lesenamnetz.org, www.readme.cc or www.encyclopaedizer.net – named one of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books of 2006 – indicate that the future has already begun.



Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 2000

Pro Helvetia Promotes Literature

Books – Translations – Publishers

Erica Benz, head of Pro Helvetia's Department of Literature and Society

The book trade, publishing, and reading practices in Switzerland are undergoing profound changes. Funding and promotion strategies for literature must be adapted to remain relevant in this new context. As an institution that has supported Swiss literature for decades, Pro Helvetia is ideally placed to share experience and know-how, and to build on already-established networks at home and abroad |

Not long ago, the now-defunct Swiss news magazine *FACTS* wrote: *“Pro Helvetia encourages mediocrity, supporting texts which would not stand a chance on the free market of stories and ideas. This is detrimental both to Switzerland and to literature.”* At a panel discussion on the aims and effects of funding for literature in Switzerland, this view was not only reiterated but topped by the disparaging claim that there is no Swiss literature worth mentioning abroad.

These statements seem to imply that good literature catches on and sells itself with no difficulty – not at all the results both Pro Helvetia and publishers have seen over the years. It can take a long time before quality is acknowledged; some writers do not live to see their work achieve recognition.

The claim that Pro Helvetia only encourages mediocrity is inconsistent with another commonly-heard accusation: that Pro Helvetia only funds elitist work, above the heads of the general public. In reality however, quality and broad impact do not have to be mutually exclusive. To name just one example: Pascal Mercier's novel *Nachtzug nach Lissabon* (Night Train to Lisbon) received funding from Pro Helvetia and went on to become a popular success exceeding all expectations.

But journalists and critics are not the only ones with clear ideas of who or what should receive support. As a publicly-funded institution, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia is answerable to the Federal Council, Parliament, the Federal Office of Culture, the taxpayers and last but not least the artists. The challenge is to deal with so many dif-

fering expectations without being crushed by the burden of self-justification. Pro Helvetia has been performing this delicate balancing act for nearly sixty years now, and understands that in a constantly evolving cultural context, funding strategies and instruments must continue to be monitored and fine-tuned.

Starting conditions and goals. Over the past few years the literary scene and the book trade have undergone a number of rapid changes. To name but a few:

- Processes of concentration among publishers, wholesalers and booksellers have increasingly shifted profits to an ever-smaller number of industry players.
- The life cycle of publications has shrunk, with books remaining on the market for a shorter period of time.
- The book market is stagnating; media competition is great, while the future role of the book remains undefined.
- Purchasing patterns and reading behaviour are changing, and the market is becoming oversaturated.
- Copyright, price maintenance and library royalty fees are ongoing discussion topics.

This partial list reveals how many factors influence the development of the literary sector and the work of the funding bodies. Pro Helvetia's goals continue to be these: maintaining a diverse literary landscape, encouraging literary creation, and

strengthening its reception. What means are at the Arts Council's disposal, in order to improve the basic conditions necessary to fulfil these tasks?

Pro Helvetia's mandate is wide-ranging. Today it includes direct funding for writers, support for publishers, and the promotion of literature through grants for translations and the organization of events. In addition, Pro Helvetia operates not only within Switzerland but also internationally.

The broad scope of this mandate poses a great challenge, but it also affords a comprehensive view of the entire production process, accompanying projects from their inception all the way to the end user, the reader.

Funding throughout Switzerland. Work grants are a longstanding tradition for Pro Helvetia. Alongside modern classic authors like Meinrad Inglin, Ludwig Hohl, Max Frisch, Plinio Martini and Corinna Bille, the list of names known outside Switzerland's borders also includes members of other generations: from Peter Bichsel and Philippe Jacquot to Giorgio and Giovanni Orelli, Noëlle Revoz and Peter Weber – to name but a few of the more than 600 authors who have received support over the past 60 years. The fact that the list also includes writers who are no longer known, or who never achieved success, testifies to the Board of Trustees' willingness to take risks. Only subsequent generations can decide whether a work has remained relevant over time.

Many important texts could never have been written without Pro Helvetia's support. Not all cantons and municipalities in Switzerland distribute work grants. Pro Helvetia is able to pursue a policy of allocating funding across Switzerland – independent of regional interests – which also incorporates developments in the neighbouring countries. Emerging talents often make their breakthrough outside the country and are increasingly being published abroad.

The question remains whether it would be possible for another institution – or even a number of separate bodies – to play such an overarching and coordinating role. In any case, the possible redistribution of funding tasks between federal, cantonal and municipal levels, which is currently under discussion, must not be carried out to the detriment of the authors themselves.

From author to publisher. It has become increasingly difficult to find a publisher in Switzerland. The publishing situation is tense, which has a negative impact on Swiss authors. Only a few publishers are prepared to take first novels, although competitions for emerging writers are currently booming and young talents are being hyped before they have published anything substantial.

A special Pro Helvetia programme for French-speaking Switzerland encourages publishers to give young authors a chance. A second book often has an even harder time than the first, after initial media interest has waned. As a reaction to this particularity of the book market, Pro Helvetia also supports a young author's second published title. Tailoring funding measures to a particular context is in fact a specialty of Pro Helvetia's literary policy. In francophone Switzerland Pro Helvetia provides support for a lower-priced paperback series, which reaches a different readership than hardcover books would. In the Romansch and Italian-speaking regions there is also support for individual fiction titles (which is not the case in other linguistic regions), because the small size of the market makes it nearly impossible for sales to cover publication costs. Awards for publishers, which are distributed alternately to the different linguistic regions, should make it possible to invest more in marketing and promotion, allowing books to reach broader audiences and authors to obtain access to neighbouring markets across the country's borders.

Readings and literature festivals. Poor sales for books is not a specifically Swiss problem, although the small size of the domestic market presents an additional difficulty. Publishing concerns, big retailers and bookshop chains dictate the conditions, which make things difficult for small and medium-sized independent publishers.

Today authors play an important role in promoting their books and their publishers. Readings and literature festivals provide publicity and boost distribution. For this reason Pro Helvetia systematically and actively supports such events, providing links between linguistic regions and across national borders. Representatives of foreign festivals, libraries and universities, who play a central role in promoting Swiss literature abroad, are invited to attend literary events in Switzerland – events which themselves receive Pro Helvetia's support. Over the years, a network has developed through such contacts, maintaining interest in Swiss literature in the neighbouring countries, in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the United States. Further key venues for Swiss literature are book fairs (such as those in Guadalajara, Tehran, and Cape Town) and important international festivals (such as the International Poetry Festival in Medellín) which guarantee an interested and lively audience and provide an important platform for lasting professional relationships.

Dialogue within Switzerland and abroad: translation grants. Exchange between Switzerland's linguistic regions and with other countries is a main priority for Pro Helvetia. Translation grants are therefore a central aspect of Pro Helvetia's activities and will receive special emphasis during the next financing period of 2008–2011.

The growing number of books available on the market, the slump in sales particularly for works in translation, as well as debates about fees and copyright for translators, all lead to increased caution on the part of publishers. While translations for foreign markets are flourishing, thanks to targeted support programmes and cooperation with similar institutions abroad, the number of translations from one Swiss national language to another continues to decline.

In Central and Eastern Europe there has been particular interest in Swiss literature since the fall of Communism. By consistently recommending titles of potential interest, providing book shipments, and actively participating in book fairs, it has been possible to set up a network guaranteeing sustainability and continuity in the translation of Swiss literature in these countries. Further examples from Spain and the Netherlands have shown that long-term partnerships with foreign publishers may be actively promoted and maintained.

It is worthwhile to build on this potential using further tools from the arsenal of translation ini-

tiatives. New technologies make it easier to distribute information about new releases and current developments in the Swiss publishing sector. Pro Helvetia's liaison offices abroad provide important contacts to local publishers. Through international translation workshops, such as the one in Leukerbad, new regions may be added to the network.

Active promotion work does pay off – as Pro Helvetia's still-limited success within the Arab world has shown. This market is relatively difficult to penetrate, but thanks to the efforts of the liaison office in Cairo, for instance, Hugo Loetscher has been translated into Arabic.

Measures to encourage reading. Strategies that work well enough in drawing attention to Swiss authors abroad are often less effective within Switzerland. The many recent discussions on this subject have not led to any new solutions, while the number of questions continues to multiply. How are readers to be drawn to Swiss literature, when the subject is hardly taught in schools and underrepresented in teacher-training courses? What strategies can be employed by publishers, so that works in translation are published, and ideally also appear on bestseller lists and in book reviews?

Key concepts are: innovative programmes to encourage reading; changes to course curricula; unconventional strategies in advertising and distribution, and direct targeting of potential readers. Successful strategies do exist, as examples from other countries have shown. It goes without saying that culture and education also benefit from measures to encourage reading, and that efforts to promote them should be coordinated.

New responsibilities. Even a cursory glance at Pro Helvetia's programmes to promote literature reveals that the Arts Council's field of operations is very broad. The question bears asking: does Pro Helvetia have sufficient means to take on new tasks and implement new strategies and measures – such as in the areas of distribution, translation and public relations? Not to mention the increasing number of other institutions, public as well as private, which are also dedicated to promoting literature.

Two proposed new laws – for the promotion of culture, and concerning the activities of Pro Helvetia – offer a unique opportunity to critically analyze the division of responsibilities among public cultural institutions on the federal, cantonal, and municipal levels. They provide the potential for more coherent activities and coordinated forces. By better streamlining areas of support, overlap and redundancy could be eliminated. The means currently available – which are not likely to be increased in the foreseeable future – could be in-

vested more accurately and efficiently. A joint strategy would also make it possible to better adapt the promotion and funding of books and literature to the current situation of the publishing industry, as well as to the needs of writers and artists.

In this connection, urgent questions arise, which can only be solved cooperatively:

- How may the distribution of literary prizes and stipends be better coordinated?
- Is there sufficient education and training for producers and recipients?
- What measures must be taken to introduce literature to new audiences?
- How can programmes to encourage reading become better adjusted and more efficient?

In this process, Pro Helvetia can share the extensive experience it has accumulated through its activities at home and abroad. It continues to play a central role in international activities and translation initiatives, and in future must place even more emphasis on promotion and networking. To this end, Pro Helvetia is collaborating with publishers and event organizers to develop strategies for increased access to new markets and readers, and to enhance the visibility of Swiss literature at home and abroad – which, after all, is one of its declared goals. ─

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

Pro Helvetia Swiss Publishing Premium Relunched

Pro Helvetia's support for quality and diversity within the Swiss publishing scene takes many forms. Following a careful evaluation process, in 2007 Pro Helvetia relaunched the Swiss Publishing Premium for independent publishers with literary ambitions. The newly-conceived award consists of a main premium and a support premium, together worth 100,000 Swiss francs.

With the main premium, Pro Helvetia rewards a publisher's overall literary programme as well as its activities to promote literature.

The support premium is aimed at emerging young publishers who have already put together a distinctive and high-quality programme.

The premiums are awarded alternately according to linguistic region. This year they go to publishers working in Switzerland's Romanic languages. Next year they will be awarded to German-speaking Swiss publishers. An independent jury selects the winners.

The publishing premiums are intended as both recognition and incentive. They aim to help publishers better promote their books and strengthen their distribution network.

The Pro Helvetia Swiss Publishing Premiums for 2007 go to:

Main premium

Edizioni Casagrande SA, Bellinzona

Support premium

Editions Héros-Limite, Geneva

From the jury's statement for the main premium:

“Casagrande has demonstrated its ability to move with the times (including playing a pioneering role in developing online sales strategies). Worthy of special mention is its success in penetrating the complex and challenging Italian market – a daring move which has made it possible for Casagrande to act as liaison between Switzerland and Italy, especially in the area of translation.”

More information about the Pro Helvetia Swiss Publishing Premium can be obtained by writing to: literature@prohelvetia.ch

Passages Special



Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 2000

Pro Helvetia

Work Grants 1946-2007

A

Acklin Jürg
 Aebli Kurt
 Aeschlimann Felix Chr.
 Airaghi Alida
 Alberti Arnaldo
 Allemann Urs
 Alloni Marco
 Amann Jürg
 Amstutz Patrick
 André Paul
 Andry Dumenic
 Arlati Renato P.
 Arnet Edwin
 Aubert Jean-Claude
 Augstburger Ernst

B

Bachmann Dieter
 Bachmann Guido
 Badraun Daniel
 Bächtold Albert
 Bär Willi
 Bärfuss Lukas
 Balanzin Manuela
 Balestra Dino
 Balthasar von Hans Urs
 Barbuiani Zohner Patrizia
 Bardill Linard
 Barilier Etienne
 Baumann Iren
 Baur Margrit
 Bearth Flavia
 Beaujon Edmond
 Becher Martin Roda
 Beeler Jürg
 Beetschen Olivier
 Bellasi Andreas
 Beltrametti Franco
 Benoziglio Jean-Luc
 Beretti Michel
 Berg Sibylle
 Berger Jean-Claude
 Berra Donata
 Besançon Héléne
 Betschart Hansjörg
 Bezzola Clò Duri
 Bianconi Piero
 Bichsel Peter
 Bieri Peter
 Biert Clà
 Bille Corinna S.
 Binder Elisabeth
 Blatter Silvio
 Blum Ruth
 Böni Franz
 Boesch Hans

Bonalumi Giovanni
 Bonnet François
 Borgeaud Georges
 Bouvier Nicolas
 Bouvier Thomas
 Bovard Jacques-Etienne
 Braendle Christoph
 Brambach Rainer
 Brécart Anne
 Brechbühl Beat
 Bregnard Jean-Pierre
 Brezna Irena
 Breznik Melitta
 Brühlmann-Jecklin Erica
 Brun Dominik
 Brun Marcel (Jean Villain)
 Brunner Suzanne
 Brunold Georg
 Bucher Werner
 Buchmüller Christina
 Bühler Michel
 Buletta Aurelio
 Bundi Hanspeter
 Burger Hermann
 Burkart Erika
 Burnod Elisabeth
 Burren Ernst
 Bussmann Rudolf

C

Cadruvi Claudia
 Caligari Guido
 Camartin Florentina
 Camenisch Arno
 Camenisch Silvio
 Candinas Theo
 Canonica Ugo
 Candreia Linard
 Cantieni Monica
 Capeder Dumeni
 Capus Alex
 Carigiet Fabiola
 Casé Angelo
 Cathomas-Bearth Rita
 Cavadini Mattia
 Cavelti Gion Mathias
 Caviezel Gion
 Ceresa Alice
 Chappaz Maurice
 Chaponnière Pernette
 Chappuis Pierre
 Charles Paula
 Chatelain Sylviane
 Cherpillod Gaston
 Chiacchiarri Olivier
 Chiquet Pierre
 Claire Regi
 Clavien Francine
 Clavien Germain

Codioli Pierre
 Comment Bernard
 Conod François
 Contestabile Fabio
 Costa Giampiero
 Couchepin Nicolas
 Courthion Pierre
 Cueni Claude
 Cuneo Anne
 Curonici Giuseppe
 Cuttat Jean

D

Dach von Margrit
 Damon Benoît
 Darbellay Claude
 Darms Flurin
 Dean Martin R.
 Debluè François
 Delarue Claude
 delle Piane Emanuelle
 Deplazes Gion
 de Roulet Daniel
 Derungs Ursicin G.G.
 Desarzens Corinne
 Deshusses Jérôme
 Dewarrat Marie-Claire
 Dinkelmann Fritz H.
 Dürr Pamela
 Dumas Luc
 Dupuis Sylviane
 Duval Jean-François
 Duvanel Adelheid

E

Eggimann Ernst
 Ehrensperger Serge
 Ehrismann Albert
 Eigeldinger Marc
 Elias Josef
 Ellenberger Pierre-Laurent
 Emery Nicola
 Engeler Erica
 Engelmann Philipp

F

Facchini Franco
 Faes Urs
 Faessler Hans
 Falciola Bernard
 Farquet Raymond
 Fasani Remo
 Fasciani Vince

Fasciati Romano
 Fassbind Franz
 Faure Gabrielle
 Favre Roger
 Federspiel Jürg
 Felder Anna
 Fichtner Ingrid
 Florescu Catalin Dorian
 Fontana Pio
 Fontanet Jean-Claude
 Franzetti Dante Andrea
 Freidig Marianne
 Frey Eleonore
 Fricker Ursula
 Fringeli Dieter
 Frisch Max

G

Gahse Zsuzsanna
 Galperin Jurij
 Gallaz Christoph
 Gangale-Uffer Margarita
 Gansner Hans Peter
 Ganz Raffael
 Ganzfried Daniel
 Ganzoni Annetta
 Garzarolli Richard
 Gaudenz Chatrina
 Gaudenz Duri
 Gaudenz Men
 Gaulis Louis
 Gaulis Marie
 Geerk Frank
 Gehri Alfred
 Geiser Christoph
 Geiser Katharina
 Geissbühler Rolf
 Genêts France-Line
 Gerig Leonardo
 Gerig Manfred
 Giacometti Guido
 Giger Felix
 Gilliéron G.
 Gir Paolo
 Glogger Beat
 Godel Armen
 Godel Vahé
 Godenzi Giuseppe
 Goetsch Daniel
 Golowin Sergius
 Gracia Giuseppe
 Greising Franziska
 Grobéty Anne-Lise
 Gross Walter
 Gosztonyi Alexander
 Gubser Antonia
 Guex André
 Guggenheim Kurt
 Guidinetti Elda

Guidon Jacques
Guisan Isabelle
Guldemon-Netzer Ursina
Gyalog Renate
Gysi Hans

H

Habersaat Edith
Händl Klaus
Hänny Reto
Haldas Georges
Haller Christian
Halter Ernst
Halter Toni
Hamadani Roswitha
Hamburger Martin
Happel Lioba
Hartmann Lukas
Hasler Eveline
Hauser Walter
Heimann Erwin
Heiz André Vladimir
Hendry Vic
Hiltbrunner Hermann
Hilty Hans Rudolf
Hindermann Frederico
Hofmann Blaise
Hofmann Fadrina
Hohl Ludwig
Hohler Franz
Honegger Arthur
Höner Peter
Huber Leopold
Humbert Jean-Dominique
Huonder Silvio
Huonker Thomas
Hürlimann Thomas
Hutter-Perrier Anne
Hutterli Kurt

I

Imbach Jost Martin
Imbsweiler Gerd
Imhasly Pierre
Incardona Joseph
Inglin Meinrad
Ingold Felix Philipp
Isella Gilberto

J

Jaccard Roland
Jaccottet Philippe
Jäger Hans

Jaeggi Urs
Jaeggi Fleur
Janson Marguerite
Jaquillard Claude
Jeanneret Edmond
Jeannet Daniel
Jenny Matthyas
Johansen Hanna
Jolliet Gilbert
Jost Peter
Jotterand Franck
Jula Rudolph
Junod Roger-Louis

K

Karpf Urs
Keller Christoph
Keller Rosemarie
Keller Stefan
Kelter Jochen
Kempker Birgit
Klainguti Göri
König Roselyne
Könneker Marie-Luise
Koller-Fanconi Mariolina
Konrad Marcel
Kopp Josef Vital
Koster Dora
Krneta Guy
Kretzen Friederike
Kristof Agota
Krohn Tim
Kuckart Judith
Kuffer Jean-Louis
Kuhn Heinrich
Kuttel Mireille

L

Laederach Jürg
Laederach Monique
Lambert Renaud P.
Landry C.F.
Langendorf Jean-Jacques
Lanova Aza
Laplace Yves
Lappert Rolf
Lattmann Silvia
Lattmann Silvana
Layaz Michel
Léger Yvonne
Léonard Marie Sylvie
Lepori Pierre
Leutenegger Gertrud
Lewinter Roger
Liègme Bernard
Lille Roger

Liman Horia
Locarnini Fabrizio
Loetscher Hugo
Lonati Leopoldo
Loos Cécile Ines
Lovay Jean-Marc
Ludwig Daniel
Lüscher Walter
Luterbacher Thierry
Lutz Werner

M

Maccagno Ennio
Mangold Christoph
Mani Curo
Manz Hans
Manzoni Solvejg Albeverio
Marchi Otto
Marsaux Lucien
Martinetti Orazio
Martinez Juan
Martini Plinio
Mascioni Gritzko
Maspoli Sergio
Massard Janine
Mauroux Jean-Baptiste
Mehr Mariella
Meienberg Niklaus
Meier Carlo
Meier Gerhard
Meier Helen
Meier Herbert
Meiltz Eugène
Meng Brigitte
Menthonnex Rudolph
Mercanton Jacques
Merlini Fabio
Merz Klaus
Métral Maurice
Mettler Clemens
Meyer E.Y.
Meylan Elisabeth
Micieli Francesco
Michaud Christian
Michel Markus
Micheloud Pierrette
Milcé Jean-Euphèle
Monighetti Ivo
Monioudis Perikles
Monnerat Roger
Monnier Jean-Pierre
Morgner Peter
Morlang Werner
Mosca Anna
Moser Hans Albert
Moser Milena
Mouchet Charles
Moulin Jean-Pierre
Mühlethaler Hans

Müller Nicole
Münzner, Andreas
Muggiasca Fabio
Mugny Yves
Muralt de Roland
Murk Tista
Musy Gilbert

N

Nadj Abonji Melinda
Naef Sabina
Nembrini Claudio
Nessi Alberto
Netzer Giovanni
Niederhauser Rolf
Nizon Paul
Nolfi Tina
Nuotclà Jon
Nuotclà Paulin

O

Odier Daniel
Ofaire Cilette
Olivier Jean-Michel
Orelli Giorgio
Orelli Giovanni

P

P.M. (Hans Widmer)
Pache Jean
Pagnard Rose-Marie
Pakleppa Fabienne
Paratte H.D.
Pasquali Adrien
Pasquet Fabienne
Pasquet Jean-Marc
Patoocchi Pericle
Péclat Pierre Louis
Pedretti Erica
Pedretti Gian
Pedroli Amleto
Peer Andri
Peer Oscar
Pellaton Jean-Paul
Pellegrini Giorgio
Perrin Hélène
Peterhans Robert
Petrini Ugo
Peyer Rudolf
Pfäffli Stephan
Pfeifer Tadeus
Pfenninger Oskar
Picard Max

Pigeon Gilbert
 Piquet Marie-José
 Planta Armon
 Plouda Rut
 Poitry Guy
 Popescu Marius Daniel
 Potterat Jean-Charles
 Probst Jacques
 Pünchera Elvira
 Pušek Dubravko
 Pusterla Fabio

Q

Quadri Claudia
 Quadri Gabriele Alberto

R

Racine Charles
 Raeber Kuno
 Rajcic Dragica
 Ramseier Markus
 Réal Grisélidis
 Reber Sabine
 Rebetez Pascal
 Rechsteiner Jürg
 Regenass René
 Reichlin Linus
 Reisser Francis
 Revaz Nöelle
 Ricci Lempen Silvia
 Richard Hughes
 Richle Urs
 Rimoldi Elena
 Rivaz Alice
 Rochat Alain
 Roedel Reto
 Rohner Viola
 Roic Sergei
 Romain Jean
 Roman Jacques
 Rossi Antonio
 Roth-Hunkeler Theres
 Rothschild Anne
 Roulet Anne
 Rütters-Seeli Tresa
 Rutishauser Hanna

S

Sachs Ruth
 Sadkowsky Alex
 Safonoff Catherine
 Salah Rafik Ben
 Santschi Madeleine

Sauter Andreas
 Saffi Renzo
 Scamara Elio
 Scaravaggi Fabrizio
 Scanziani Piero
 Schaad Isolde
 Schär Brigitte
 Schaller Hubert
 Scharpf Oliver
 Schenker Walter
 Schertenleib Hansjörg
 Schilling Bea
 Schindler Regine
 Schmid Max
 Schmid Wanda
 Schmidli Werner
 Schneider Hansjörg
 Schneider Hermann
 Schnetzler Kaspar
 Schnider Kristin T.
 Schnyder Bruno
 Schölly Karl
 Schönhaus Cioma
 Schorno Paul
 Schriber Margrit
 Schubert Niklaus
 Schubiger Jürg
 Schumacher Caroline
 Schumacher Hans
 Schwaar Hans Ulrich
 Schweikert Ruth
 Seiler Alexander J.
 Semadeni Leta
 Senser Armin
 Shargorodsky Lev
 Shishkin Mikhail
 Silberstein Jil
 Sillig Olivier
 Simmen Andrea
 Simon Christoph
 Simonett-Giovanoli Elda
 Soldini Fabio
 Sonnay Jean-François
 Spadino Rinaldo
 Späth Gerold
 Spescha Arnold
 Spescha Flurin
 Spinner Esther
 Stadler Martin
 Stalder Heinz
 Stamm Peter
 Stauffer Michael
 Stefan Verena
 Stefano di Paolo
 Steiger Bruno
 Steiger Otto
 Steimann Flavio
 Steiner Jörg
 Steinmann Kurt
 Sterchi Beat
 Storz Claudia
 Stössinger Verena

Stuppan-Rauch Madleina
 Sulzer Alain Claude
 Supino Franco
 Suter Lukas B.

T

Talhoff Albert
 Tambornino Rico
 Tanner Katharina
 Tappy José-Flore
 Théé Pierre
 Theobaldy Jürgen
 Thierrin Paul
 Todisco Vincenzo
 Tornay Monique
 Traber Barbara
 Traitler Reinhild
 Treichler Hans Peter
 Trolliet Gilbert
 Tscharner Gisula
 Tschopp Charles
 Tuccillo Alberigo Albano
 Tuor Leo

U

Uetz Christian
 Urweider Raphael

V

Vallotton Jean-Pierre
 Velan Yves
 Vernay Eliane
 Viala Michel
 Vigne Benedetto
 Villain Jean
 Viragh Christina
 Viredaz Christian
 Voélin Pierre
 Vogel Traugott
 Vogt Walter
 Voisard Alexandre
 Volonterio Guglielmo
 Vuillème Jean-Bernard
 Vuilleumier Jean

W

Walter Daniel
 Walter Hans
 Walter Otto F.
 Walter Silja H.

Wandeler-Deck Elisabeth
 Wandelère Frédéric
 Wang Sabine Wen-Ching
 Weber-Perret M.
 Weber Peter
 Weder Heinz
 Weibel Jürg
 Weideli Walter
 Weiss Mix
 Werdenberg Heidi
 Werner Markus
 Werthmüller Hans
 Weschenfelder Anke
 Wiesner Heinrich
 Widmer Urs
 Wilker Gertrud
 Winnewisser Rolf
 Wottreng Willi
 Wülser Hughes
 Wüthrich Werner
 Wyrsch Jakob
 Wyss Hedi
 Wyss Laure
 Wyss Verena

Y

Yasar Hatie
 Yesilöz Yusuf

Z

Zaech Sylvie
 Zahnd René
 Zahno Daniel
 Zeindler Peter
 Zermatten Maurice
 Z'Graggen Yvette
 Zimmermann Curt
 Zimmermann Heinz
 Zimmermann Katharina
 Zopfi Emil
 Zschokke Matthias
 Züfle Manfred
 Zufferey Jean-Gabriel
 Zumthor-Cuorad Annalisa

A selection of the books published in recent years with support from Pro Helvetia's Work Grants programme:

GERMAN MERCIER, Pascal (*1944) [= Peter Bieri] **Nachtzug nach Lissabon** / novel / Mercier. / OA. Munich: Hanser, 2004. | STAMM, Peter

Aufzeichnungen eines

(*1963) **An einem Tag wie diesem:** novel / Stamm. / OA. Frankfurt/M / S.Fischer, 2006. | SPÄTH, Gerold (*1939)

Fischers (das erste Jahr)

Späth. / OA. / Basel / Lenos, 2006. | STEIGER, Bruno (*1946)

Falsche Filme / novel

/ Steiger B. / OA. / Zurich / Nagel & Kimche, 2006. | HÜRLIMANN, Thomas (*1950) **Vierzig Rosen** / novel / Hürlimann. / OA. Zurich / Ammann, 2006. | VIRAGH, Christina

(*1953) **Im April** / novel / Viragh. / OA. Zurich / Ammann, 2006. | SCHWEIKERT, Ruth (*1965) **Augen zu** / novel /

Schweikert. Zurich / Ammann, 1998. | BINDER, Elisabeth (*1951) **Sommerngeschichte** / novel / Binder. / OA. Stuttgart / Klett-Cotta, 2004. |

LEUTENEGGER, Gertrud (*1948) **Pomona** / novel / Leutenegger. / OA. Frankfurt/M / Suhrkamp, 2004. | SULZER, Alain Claude (*1953) **Ein perfekter Kellner** / novel / Sulzer. /

OA. Zurich / Edition Epoca, 2004. | UETZ, Christian (*1963) **Zoom nicht** / Uetz. / OA. / Vienna / Droschl, 1999. | WEBER, Peter (*1968)

Silber und Salbader / novel / Weber. / OA. Frankfurt / Suhrkamp, 1999. | STEINER, Jörg (*1930) / novella / Steiner, J. - OA. Frankfurt/M / Suhrkamp,

1996. | NIZON, Paul (*1929) **Die Innenseite des Mantels** / journal / Nizon. Frankfurt/M / Suhrkamp, 1995. FRENCH: SONNAY, Jean-François (*1954)

Yvan, le bazooka, les dingues et moi / Ceci n'est pas un roman / Sonnay. / EO. / Yvonand / Bernard Campiche,

2006. | VOISARD, Alexandre (*1930) **Le Mot musique ou L'Enfance d'un poète** / Voisard. EO. - Yvonand / B. Campiche, 2004. | LAYAZ, Michel (*1963)

Les larmes de ma mère / Layaz. / EO. / Carouge-Geneva / Zoé, 2003. | BENOZIGLIO, Jean-Luc (*1941) **La Pyramide ronde** / novel / Benoziglio. / EO.

Paris / Editions du Seuil, 2002. | SAFONOFF, Catherine (*1939) **Au Nord du capitaine** / Safonoff. / EO. Carouge-Geneva / Zoé, 2002. | LOVAY, Jean-Marc (*1948)

Asile d'azur / Lovay / EO. / Carouge-Geneva Zoé, 2002. | DUPUIS, Sylviane (*1956) **Géométrie de l'illimité** / poems / Dupuis.

/ EO. Chêne-Bourg / La Dogana, 2000. | ROULET, Daniel de (*1944) **Gris-bleu** / novel / de Roulet. / EO. Paris / Editions du

Seuil, 1998. | DELARUE, Claude (*1944) **La Faiblesse de Dieu** / novel / Delarue. / EO. Paris / Editions du Seuil, 1995. | ROTHSCHILD, Anne (*1943) **Les Arbres**

voyageurs / poems / Rothschild. / EO. Lausanne / Empreintes, 1995. | LOVAY, Jean-Marc (*1948) **Midi solaire** / short stories / Lovay. / EO.

Carouge-Geneva / Zoé, 1993. | MONNIER, Jean-Pierre (1921-1997) **Ces vols qui n'ont pas fui** / novel / Monnier. / EO. Yvonand / Bernard Campiche, 1986.

ITALIAN: NESSI, Alberto (*1940) **Fiori d'ombra** / short stories / Nessi, A. / EO. Bellinzona / Casagrande, 1997. | TODISCO, Vincenzo (*1964) **Quasi**

un Western / Todisco. / EO. / Bellinzona / Casagrande, 2003. ROMANESH: TUOR, Leo (*1959) **Settembrini**

/ Veta e meinis / Tuor [sursilvan]. / EO. Cuera / Surselva Romontscha, 2006.



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Portrait 1", 2006



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Sportschule", 2005

Bookworms and Reading Bugs

Children, media and the written word

Christine Löttscher interviews Christine Holliger

Today children and teenagers have an immense array of media products to choose from. Internet, video games, DVDs and audio books compete with good old-fashioned print books and thousands of new titles each year.

Christine Holliger, director of the Swiss Institute for Children's and Youth Media (SIKJM), talks about how to promote reading in a multimedia context |

Christine Löttscher: Ms. Holliger, as director of SIKJM you oversee the development and help set the focus of projects aimed at encouraging young people to read. What is the current outlook for such projects in Switzerland?
Christine Holliger: In Switzerland there are thousands of projects to encourage reading but SIKJM is the only institution which operates on a national level, and the only one that receives support from the federal government.

What is your organization's role in this diverse and complex landscape? Do you try to bring together individual initiatives, providing guidelines and outlining specific goals? Do you see your role as setting standards for reading projects in Switzerland?

The real question is: are we a think tank that sets out what could be done and how, or do we take a more practical approach? Both are vital, but in the end it is a matter of funding. We have to come up with about half of our funds ourselves. Although we receive financial support on national, cantonal and municipal levels, we do not produce anything that we could sell. Our objectives are idealistic and that makes it very difficult to generate funds. We would welcome more support, because encouraging literacy should be a matter of concern to all of us. People who can't read are excluded from economic, political, social and cultural life.

What sort of projects does SIKJM run? What aspects do you emphasize?

SIKJM has several tried-and-tested projects for

each age group. One of the best known is the "Swiss Story-Telling Evening" (*Schweizer Erzähl- nacht*) organized in conjunction with Bibliomedia and UNICEF. Last year, about 450 events were held in schools and libraries throughout Switzerland. The events are designed to appeal to all age groups. A slogan and materials are developed centrally, but the events themselves are organized locally.

We also run a "Bookworm" (*Bücherraupe*) project for pre-school children. This grew out of the realization that children who are familiar with books learn to read more easily. One of our big successes is a project called "Turn up the sound, open a book" (*Ton ab, Buch auf*) which introduces children to books by playing them a reading of the first part. It is targeted at children who are technically literate but still have to develop a reading routine. Our fourth ongoing project is called the "Reading Bug" (*Lesebazillus*) and is targeted at children in grades five and six. Specifically, it aims to prevent the typical drop in reading that occurs around puberty.

What happens during this phase? Why do boys tend to lose all interest in reading at the same time that many girls are turning into insatiable bookworms?

There is often a first drop in interest just after children start learning to read. All children are keen to learn to read and write when they start school, but many of them give up because they find it difficult and therefore do not enjoy it. The second drop is the phase during puberty when many boys stop reading. One reason is that read-

ing has traditionally been regarded as something for girls, which triggers a negative response in many boys. We need to find ways to prevent this from happening. Firstly, boys must be offered books they find interesting. When they say reading is 'girl stuff', they mean reading novels. However, surveys show that both boys and girls enjoy detective stories, and many boys are interested in comics and more factual books. At the same time, boys need an example to follow. That means fathers, teachers and other male role models who value books and reading.

Does that mean all fathers should immediately start reading instead of watching football?

Many adults never pick up a book. Still, they can make an effort to show their children that reading and writing are valued within the family. Parents need to be aware of their influence in this area. Children from families that read, where reading is not considered a luxury or a waste of time and people are constantly reading things – newspapers, magazines, recipes, shopping lists – find it much easier to learn to read.

Does your organization analyze changing needs and adapt its reading programmes to the latest findings?

Monitoring trends and reflecting them in our programmes are central aspects of our work. For example, Switzerland did not recognize the enormous importance of working with pre-school children until relatively late. The Family Literacy project, which is aimed at families whose mother tongue is not one of the Swiss languages, is really in tune with our times. In urban areas with a high proportion of immigrants, special programmes are needed to make sure all children have the same opportunities.

Are you planning any new projects in the near future?
What is missing at the moment is a project for

youngsters aged 13 and over. Encouraging students at technical colleges to read more is also very important, but they are outside our immediate target group because they are no longer school age. Even so, I think we need to do something for this group.

Will there be any fundamental changes in the focus of reading programmes in the near future?

No. The central task will continue to be the support and promotion of libraries. After all, reading can only be learned by reading, and the development of new technologies will not change that. Once children have mastered the basic skills, they need to read as much as possible to get into the habit, but they will only read if they enjoy it. That means books must match a child's interests, age group and reading abilities. Adults must make it possible for children to set out on that voyage of discovery: giving them access to books they enjoy reading, books that meet the criteria I just mentioned. Libraries play an exceptionally important role there. However, children need parents and teachers to help them discover that books can contain a world of their own, a world they can enter and participate in without interference.

What about schools? Do they do enough to encourage reading?

We believe greater attention needs to be paid to reading when training teachers. All teacher training colleges offer voluntary courses on children's literature, but that is not enough. Reading should be an integral – and by that I mean a mandatory – part of a teacher's training. Reading is not just important for language teaching; it plays a central role in all subjects. And because reading can only really be learned by reading, children's literature is extremely important, and teachers must be well-informed about it. Adults who recom-

mend books to children should not simply draw on their own experience – “I enjoyed that as a child, I thought it was a good book.” They need to keep abreast of new publications. They should try to keep an eye on the children’s book market. Of course it is difficult to do that given the sheer volume of new books being published. To help them, SIKJM publishes a special magazine called *Buch&Maus*, which features in-depth reports, interviews, profiles and – most importantly – a very good review section. The reviews are also available free of charge on our online database (www.sikmj.ch). It is important to mention that the reviews are written by professional reviewers: they are critical appraisals, not publishers’ propaganda.

How do Swiss literacy programmes rate internationally? Has Switzerland made progress since the worrying results of the PISA study?

PISA was a wake-up call, not just to schools, but also to parents and teachers. It made people ask why Switzerland ranked so low compared with other countries. However, the reading problems that have been such cause for consternation in recent years had already been recognized as early as the 1970s; people simply refused to admit the truth. One logical result of PISA would be to provide far more support for libraries. And yet, local libraries are often run on a voluntary basis – usually by women working for free. That should not be the case.

Do books still have a real chance alongside text messaging, computer games, blogs and internet chat forums?
Everyone rails against computer games and the new media used by children. It is frequently maintained that children do not read because they have so many alternatives. However, it has been shown that children who frequently use a wide variety of media are generally good readers. Contrary to popular belief, surveys and statistics

show that children and young people do not spend most of their free time sitting in front of a computer screen. They spend most of their time playing with friends. Many adults are completely ignorant when it comes to computer games. If they were to take the trouble to sit down and play some of them, they would have a different opinion about the supposed damage done by such games. Just because someone reads a murder mystery, he or she does not go out and kill people. Of course there are enormous differences in the quality of the games available. That’s why SIKJM has made new media a special focus of its research. In addition, we believe it is important to provide counselling: we offer courses to help people take a closer look and identify criteria for judging quality.

Would you say that these days books are just one medium among many?

Books are the only way for children to learn to read, so they are exceptionally important. However, books and new media should not be seen as rivals. A vast quantity of different media are available, and children are amazingly good at dealing with them.

Media literacy may be important, but surely your organization’s task is also to promote traditional education and foster the reading of books?

Access to information and knowledge has changed. In the old days, people accumulated vast quantities of knowledge, which they were expected to store in their heads. These days, it is far easier to call up information. I believe it is important to be able to assess the information available, to establish relationships and learn how to use sources critically. We teach in universities and teacher training colleges, where such aspects are discussed. One thing is quite clear: the concept of education is changing, like everything else in our society.

And yet, reading is part of a culture that has to be communicated.

Culture is at the heart of our work. If you take SIKJM as a model, you will see that it focuses on the one hand on research and on the other on promoting reading, with libraries as the key. Our understanding of cultural transfer embraces all of that. One of the best examples is the exhibition we organized last winter at the Strauhof Museum in Zurich entitled *Dear Franz Hohler – An author writes for children, children write to the author*. Two students sifted through the enormous volume of material available and identified patterns in the questions asked by children. To organize the actual exhibition, we had to use library resources. What did Hohler write? Into how many languages has his work been translated? The exhibition included writing workshops for children, which were attended by many school classes. The whole thing was a cultural event. It highlighted the close links between the various branches of our institute, and how theory and practice interrelate. ─

Translated from the German by BMP Translations AG

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Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 1994



The Author as Emissary

On the sorrows of the writer in residence

Matthias Zschokke

Books travel the world, and so do their authors. But is travelling compatible with writing? And what is the real mission of the writer abroad? Matthias Zschokke reports for Passages – from his desk at home |

“How about spending a few weeks in Honolulu? You’d be sure to come up with some new ideas. Wouldn’t that be just the thing for you?”

Why does this person think he needs to help me come up with new ideas? Does he find my writing boring? Does he want to change me?

Goethe travelled through Italy – and only came up with pseudo-intellectual trivia. Eichendorff never went to Italy, and yet his *“good-for-nothing”* protagonist managed to instill in our Northern European heads a longing for the South that continues to blossom to this day. Would Kafka’s *Amerika* have turned out as brilliantly if he had gone there to have a look around? Karl May’s imaginary Kurdistan is certainly wilder than the real one, and Shakespeare was only able to give his Bohemia a coastline because he’d never visited the place.

Fiction-writing has nothing to do with travel. The real world has a more sobering than inspiring effect on the writer. When a novelist is plucked from the dark North and set down in Egypt, the blinding sun prevents him at first from seeing anything at all. Once he has grown used to the bright light, he goggles in amazement at the Pyramids, which render him speechless. In order not to lose his grasp on language completely, he writes his ladylove a postcard: *“Sitting here drinking beer and thinking of you.”* That’s it. Perhaps he also takes a snapshot. Later, back home, he will vaguely remember that it was very hot.

Writing requires staying in one place. To do it, you need a table and a chair. The table and chair you have at home might not be ideal, but you have grown used to them. Once in a while, you

manage to stop brooding about their defects and forget about them. Those are the moments when you may begin to write.

When an author is invited to interrupt his routine for a certain amount of time and fly to Honolulu, his first reaction is irritation. He hopes the offer will vanish in the wind. But it doesn't. It sinks into his brain and begins to stew there. If the author in question is a romantic, he suffers from a fundamental yearning for foreign places. The idea of travelling strikes him as pleasant.

But what exactly is he getting himself in for? He will have to abandon his apartment for several weeks, or even months, and go on a tour of duty. Except that he isn't told what his mission is supposed to be.

Full of misgivings, he finally accepts the offer. He packs his suitcases and goes, arriving someplace where at night the walls whisper to him about 'finding inspiration'. He tosses and turns in bed and suffers from the conviction that in just a few days he absolutely must come up with one hell of a work of art.

And so he tries to force himself into a poetic attitude – an attempt comparable to prying open a flower bud's petals before it is ready to bloom and give off scent. The creative spirit does not blossom on demand, but only in unwatched moments: in the cold, grey, dreary half-light; never during periods of rapture, horror, pleasure or pain.

Although everyone knows this, the travelling writer, with rising panic, begins to assess everything he encounters in Honolulu as potential material for his creative efforts. He stares at the unfamiliar people, the unfamiliar buildings, the unfamiliar animals. They melt before his eyes into a shimmering broth, and the longer he looks, the wider the horizon opens up in front of him, the more his spirit leaches away into that broth.

He knows he should stop looking. He must forget about Honolulu in order to be able to write, just as he has to forget about his home when he's at home. Poetry means raising your head and discovering with astonishment that you are alive – that's the first entry in his poet's primer. Thou shalt not search, but find – that's the second.

If he manages to forget everything around him for an instant, he might notice a fish, a moment before the thunderstorm breaks, spring up out of the black pond, flash over its smooth glassy surface, and plop back into the water. He might see a schoolgirl in a sopping wet dress meeting a strange man on an arterial road one rainy evening. Or he might see the moon, which has just risen. And the work of transformation can begin.

Of course you do not have to travel to Honolulu to notice such things. But while you are there amidst the brightly-coloured parrots and hummingbirds, it might occur to you that upon your return you should take a closer look at the bluebirds flying

around outside your house. And for that thought it is worth travelling around the world.

A limited engagement as writer in residence always makes me extremely tense. It is tricky to fulfil a mission when you have no idea, up to the very end, of what you are supposed to do. The weeks that pass are strange, somewhat uncanny, mostly sleepless. Since my duty remains undefined, I assign myself the temporary post of cultural ambassador. I tell myself I have to make a good impression. After all, the public eye is focused on me. I must prove myself to be a fine person, showing interest in the customs and traditions of the locals without judging them. It seems to me I bear a great responsibility, representing our culture and way of life. I am filled with heady satisfaction when I travel through foreign parts under the impression that I am considered a decent fellow.

The question remains whether that is really the job of the travelling writer. Many people hold the opposite to be true: artists should be rebellious, carving some scratches in their country's image abroad, just to show what a free and tolerant place they come from. I think that is wrong. The culture I care about has nothing to do with the nation and its tolerance. I consider myself the ambassador of Western culture altogether. The more dignifiedly I represent it, in Russia, America or Asia, the more convincing an impression it makes.

What renders the mission more difficult is the fact that the so-called First World increasingly tends to view its own culture as a product for export only. No one here is interested in consuming it ourselves; we cannot be bothered. Let those people in Honolulu see and hear what our artists have come up with. We just want those artists to leave us alone. Which is fatal. In the First World hardly anyone is interested in the true, the good and the beautiful anymore – unless there is money to be made with them. At the same time, we still want the rest of the world to see us as the descendants of poets and thinkers. Which sometimes embarrasses me and makes me blush in shame. ─

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

Matthias Zschokke was born in Berne in 1954. He is an artist and filmmaker and has been living in Berlin since 1980. His most recent novel, *Maurice mit Huhn*, was published by Amman Verlag, Zurich, in 2006.



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Soap", 2005



Stefan Jäggi: Photo from the series "Ferrari", 2004

Teaching Writing

First-hand reports from the new Swiss Literature Institute

Eugène, Elisabeth Jobin,
Arja Lobsiger, Timo Koch

In the autumn of 2006 the study of Creative Writing – a discipline traditionally taught at Anglo-American universities – was launched in Switzerland. One instructor and three students at the Swiss Literature Institute share their experiences during the first year of this new programme of study |

Once upon a time...

Eugène

In the face of the countless sarcastic remarks and malicious arguments heard in French-speaking Switzerland, I blush to admit publicly to my professional activity in the fall of 2006: leading a writing workshop at the Swiss Literature Institute in Bienne. And there you have it, my coming-out! More concretely, I had sixteen Wednesday mornings at my disposal to make my way through my course programme: “Writing Short Texts: The Short Story and the Tale”. We started out with articles written up in the French-Swiss newspapers, which we set about summarizing in three sentences, in the manner of Félix Fénéon’s witty *Nouvelles en trois lignes* (three-line news items) of 1905. The three lines served to lay bare a story’s structure, consisting of a powerful beginning, a short development and a surprising punchline. We then reworked this tiny account into a three- to five-page detective story, before going on to make a fantasy short story of it. Every week, students were required to write a text and to read an anthology of short stories (Ivan Bunin’s *Dark Alleys*, Julio Cortazar’s *The Secret Weapons*). Whenever called for, I would provide a few key theoretical and historical references.

The biggest worry about the Swiss Literature Institute was that it would hand out recipes for writing. Frankly, if I did have a recipe, do you think I would get up at 6:20 a.m. every Wednesday to disclose it? Of course not! I would be working on my third bestseller and, this very minute, I’d be

on my way around the world, thanks to the royalties flowing in from Hollywood. Obviously there are no recipes. The only thing I have to share is the pleasure of telling stories.

As of January, we tackled tales: from classical tales in a “once upon a time” vein on to modern tales cast in a mould similar to Peter Bichsel’s children’s stories. Tales, detective stories and fantasy genres all imply respect for certain codes.

The Swiss Literature Institute in Bienne/Biel

The Swiss Literature Institute in Bienne/Biel, a branch of the Berne University of the Arts (affiliated with the Berne University of Applied Sciences), offers a three-year bilingual French and German programme of study leading to a bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing. Admission exams for the Institute’s second group of freshmen were held in May of this year, enabling fifteen new students to join the ranks of the first fifteen enrolled the year before.

The core of the programme consists of individual work under the guidance of a mentor. In addition, various workshops and seminars acquaint students with contemporary literature on practical and theoretical levels. And, finally, opportunities for contact with professionals in the fields of literature, publishing and theatre prepare prospective graduates for their future activities in the literary and cultural realms.

Further information on the Swiss Literature Institute at:

www.hkb.bfh.ch/literatur.html and lit@hkb.bfh.ch

These we reviewed and then played around with. We learned how to de-dramatize the act of producing texts – an act that is neither sacred nor trivial, but which responds to an inner need in search of its most suitable form. Week after week, we experimented with various narrative forms. Honestly, had such a school existed when I was twenty, I could have saved myself a lot of time by attending it...

I would leave the workshops with the feeling of having received as much as I had given. That's because the students would inevitably bring along new ideas and surprising suggestions. They fuelled me. I spoke far more about literature during those sixteen Wednesdays than at the Geneva Book Fair where, for some strange reason, everything gets discussed except the contents of the books.

So how does the future look? The Swiss Literature Institute started off with fifteen students; next year there will be twice as many. My dream is to someday come across a book by one of those students in a bookshop: a novel, a monologue, a collection of short stories, a book of aphorisms, or maybe even a surprising new literary form. As the Buddhists put it, "*If the pupil is not better than the master, then the master has done a poor job.*" ┐

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

Born in Bucharest in 1969, Eugène arrived in Switzerland at the age of 6. Following studies in literature at the University of Lausanne, he has devoted himself to writing since 1996. His published works include *mon nom* (Editions de l'Aire, Vevey, 1998), *Pamukalie, pays fabuleux* (Editions Autrement, Paris, 2003), and *Les Mises en Boîte* (Editions La Joie de Lire, Geneva, 2005). He is a contributor to the French-Swiss Radio Suisse Romande and the EPFL magazine *Tracés*, and was president of the Swiss Authors' Society from 2000 to 2002. A description of his youth, entitled *La Vallée de la jeunesse*, is slated for publication by La Joie de Lire in September 2008.

A Long Buffet Table

Elisabeth Jobin

The party is over, and all that remains are an enormous bouquet of pink flowers and a few pieces of paper strewn across the floor. A coloured streamer hangs down from the very high ceiling. Our names are inscribed in blue and orange, next to the numbers of the rooms where we did our readings. A festive scent in the air; staircases spiral right up to the cloudy sky. The doors and windows allow the last streaks of light, the last colours of the day, to enter and spill across the polished wooden floor.

It was a Saturday party in honour of the first 200 days since the birth of the Swiss Literature Institute, a colourful celebration of the end of our first year of study. A chance to stop, look back and take stock of the path covered so far. A path littered with doubts that have, in the meantime, become part and parcel of my studies.

I realize that I have embarked on three years of constant questioning. And I am not all that sure that this will cease once I have that Bachelor's in Creative Writing in hand. Later on as well, the big question will undoubtedly continue to torment me: when all is said and done, what's the use of writing?

The further along I get, the more I say to myself that I write out of a love for books. Their power of fascination over me is so great that this seems like the least I could do for them. Even if, before I began my studies, I made some attempts to write as real writers do, I never seriously contemplated a literary project. Curiosity, too, inspired me to enrol. Books are so full of mystery that my appetite for them is forever being whetted anew.

Indeed, it is my curiosity more than anything that the Literature Institute tends to stimulate. Here is how I picture my studies: like a long table with dozens of dishes – that is, literary delicacies.

A huge buffet table loaded with a variety of hors d'oeuvres, an enormous stuffed turkey bathing in cranberry sauce, and a generous selection of desserts, mousses and ice creams, just sitting there waiting for us, the students. We go from dish to dish, tasting each and then heading for the next. There is no way we can restrict ourselves to any one dish, or writing style. Instead, we slalom our way through poetry, theatre, prose, short story... Each of us lingers a bit longer in front of his or her favourite dish, the better to familiarize ourselves with it, to analyze it. We have three years to make up our minds.

The only problem is that the doubts keep cropping up, like a hair in the soup. Again and again, I feel like calling it quits. But then I see all the books in my library, each a tasty morsel, and I think to myself that if others managed to write, I can too. I have fallen in love with books, and it is not by turning my back on them that I will make any headway: the Institute has made a fighter of me.

At Saturday's party, I had the pleasure of seeing my obstinacy rewarded. The celebration made me realize how much others enjoy my texts when I read them out loud. For one whole day, I was able to sideline my doubts and feel like I am getting somewhere in my writing. ─

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

Elizabeth Jobin, born in 1987, lives in Prêles in the Bernese Jura. She obtained her school-leaving certificate from the Bienne secondary school in 2006. In September 2006, she became a founding member of a reading group (www.havecandy.net). Since October 2006, she has been a student at the Swiss Literature Institute.

The Safety Net

Arja Lobsiger

Writing is a vital need. I never decided to write. It just happened. At some point I laid eyes on a text I had written. I saw letters lined up one after the other, I blinked, and then saw images piled one on top of the other. I never gave much thought to what I was actually doing. Had somebody asked me, I would have said: "I'm drawing." Every letter was assigned an image. "S", for instance, was a swan. If I need an "S" today, I just press a key. If I want fifty "S"s, I keep my finger down on the key. They are no longer swans. I couldn't draw them that fast. But pressing down on the keys is writing too.

While writing, I take myself in hand. A hand I can close if I want to hide myself, open if I'm ready to

take flight, or whose fingers I can spread if I fall. To me, moving with letters means keeping your balance. There are so many edges from which you might tumble.

At the Swiss Literature Institute, I need not do my balancing act alone. The teachers and staff are forever holding out their hands to us, diligently weaving us a safety net. That's what gives us a degree of security and reassurance in what is otherwise more of a lonely, and at times also difficult, everyday writing experience. We students weave as well, so that at the end of two hundred days, a strong, extraordinary and invaluable net has come into being. If I fall, or want to fall, that net catches me. I trust that net. It thinks along with me, accompanies me, lends me support and inspires me to write.

I repeatedly question my own texts and those by other writers. Sometimes they answer me and sometimes they do not. In this fashion, I am gradually getting a feeling for the strengths and weaknesses in writing.

I expect the programme to provide me with inspiration, impetus and space for writing. So far, it has held up its end of the bargain. But I want still more. My writing drives me to keep on writing.

In the search for my own voice, I have always wanted someone to accompany me. And now I do have a mentor, right here beside me. Time and again he shows me the way. Still, I must follow both the path and the detours alone.

During the first two terms I greatly developed my writing, and came closer to finding my voice. To come closer to something is to distance oneself from something else. I feel confident that I can pursue this path at the Swiss Literature Institute. Writing was never a decision. Devoting space to my writing – that was a decision. And a good one too! ─

Translated from the German by Margie Mounier

Arja Lobsiger, born in 1985, lives in Oberwil near Büren. She obtained her school-leaving certificate from Neue Mittelschule Bern in 2005. She participated in the Textstatt Aargau three-month writing workshop in 2004, and won second prize in the Bernese short-story competition of 2005. She writes prose, poetry and stage texts. She has been a student at the Swiss Literature Institute in Bienne since October 2006.

Time to Write

Timo Koch

When asked what I get from my studies at the Swiss Literature Institute, I usually reply: “Time to write”.

However, to me writing does not mean merely sitting at a desk and typing something into an electronic box. In the long run, that only gives me a headache.

Writing means far more.

Writing means thinking things over and thinking them out, keeping on going, coming to a stop, progressing, looking back, rejoicing, lamenting, dreaming, falling asleep, getting up, going for a walk...

That’s why my reply to the original question should be: “Time to live”. And this even if, for the time being, the major part of my life is spent gaining credits for the ECTS (European Credits Transfer System), which in turn involves attending classes, writing and reading literary texts and theory, and participating in interdisciplinary projects.

Then again, all that, too, is life; all that, too, is writing – at least for me.

Everything is cause for writing. That is undoubtedly the first and most important lesson passed on to me by the Literature Institute. Do not wait for the Muse, for rarely will she come sit down next to you. Just write. Write about everything and everybody. What will come out of it is something you can think about, or even worry about, later.

First you have to write. Again and again.

Until now, I was not a particularly productive writer. Now I write significantly more, which is admittedly in part because of the pressure to produce within an institution where people read your texts, comment on them and criticize them.

My personal road to becoming an author was – and probably still would be, were it not for the Swiss Literature Institute – like a perennial dance around writing. I would write, I would not write, I would want to write, I would be unable to write, I would be unable to do anything but write, I would keep pushing writing as far off as I could. And yet, it would always come back, stand before me and tell me straight to my face: “You can’t live without me.” One thing has always been clear: I could do anything, but this is the one thing I really can do. Write.

So here I am, happy to be in a sheltered framework where I can practice rearranging words and sentences until they’re right, or at least as right as words can be, since actually they are never altogether right.

Pursuing studies with other writers brings questions to the fore, elicits insights and provides me with opportunities to experiment in the only realm

in which I’m truly interested. Besides that, I tend to turn off my computer more often now, and just let the Muse be Muse: standing up, pocketing my notebook, and getting out among real people whose stories have not yet been written. —

Translated from the German by Margie Mounier

Born in 1979, Timo Koch wrote his first play *Früher oder später* in 2001, and took it to Hungary’s Interplay Festival in 2002. He has since written several other plays and a short film screenplay.

From 2003 to 2006, he took a degree as a primary school teacher. Since October 2006 he has been a student at the Swiss Literature Institute.



Peter Wüthrich: Photo from the series "Imago", 1996



From Reader to Reviewer

Literary criticism in the internet age

Thierry Chervel

In the past, critics told readers what to read. With the growth of the internet, the authority of the newspaper's book review section is giving way to interactive platforms. Readers are becoming reviewers, and young readers especially are turning to online sources for information about what to read next

Imagine a girl, 15 or 16 years old, from a more or less well-to-do family. Let's say she is slight and blond, and single-minded, the way you are at that age. The girl considers the rest of her family to be good-natured morons, she has virtually nothing to say to any of her classmates (with only a very few exceptions), and she thinks boys are hulking philistines. She sits, in a compact slouching posture only girls can manage, in the old wicker chair she wheedled out of her grandmother. Her English teacher has recommended that she read some stories by Carson McCullers, and, although she considers her teacher a fool, she is immersed in that world now, in the peculiar, dusty world of the southern United States.

Anyone reflecting on the future of literary criticism – and of literature itself – would do well to think very carefully about this girl, and about her potential next moves. For girls, after all, are the bearers of the torch of culture. They are the readers of the future, and in future they will constitute the pillars of the literary market, in both its highbrow and middlebrow segments.

A great hunger and little experience. Carson McCullers' stories have one major drawback: they are short. Our young woman requires sustenance. She has a great hunger and little experience. The two shelves in her room are still only half full, children's books she's grown out of, propped up by a teddy bear she no longer plays with. Of course her father, her mother and her grandmother from time to time suggest that she read a particular book, but she is determined to make her own way.

Perhaps she bought herself a little Apple or Sony laptop for her last birthday, with her first babysitting money and a generous subsidy from her immediate family. And of course the household has wireless internet access. So she can sit in her wicker chair, in that same graceful slouch, and surf the internet for hours on end. Everyone knows where she will look first when she starts investigating Carson McCullers and looking for new things to read: Google, Wikipedia, Amazon.

And from there the forks in her path will be endless, and yet always relevant. She will come across a "McCullers Project", enter virtual libraries in which readers hold discussions and post lists of their favourite books, visit forums where she might strike up a correspondence in broken English with a sensitive young man from Madrid, initially on the subject of McCullers before segueing into a consideration of the pros and cons of Zurich and Madrid and the vileness of one's immediate sensory environment. Perhaps he will tell her about Faulkner, and she will reply with comments on Toni Morrison.

When and how will this girl first encounter literary criticism? Her parents may take the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, but the reviews she has read on her infrequent forays into that newspaper are probably too abstract for her, as if they hadn't been composed with her in mind. She doesn't know the authors being discussed; the critics operate in a domain of knowledge and allusion she has yet to become familiar with. At school, too, she has had to deal with criticism, while preparing her reports. But even in that context, the material doesn't exactly seem of great personal significance.

User texts, the latest genre. And yet she reads and re-reads reviews, and works her way through each foreign word, each name. She even reads criticism in English (not that her silly English teacher ever gave her the assignment), enormous essays from the *New York Review of Books*. All in her wicker chair, with frequent help from her father's colour laser printer. Her enthusiasm for Carson McCullers keeps her at it. And all this time she hasn't once opened a newspaper, listened to the radio, or turned on the television. Nor has she ever paid for anything – except maybe for that new McCullers paperback, which her father ordered for her with his credit card after a great deal of nagging. She has come across the reviews via online culture platforms like *Perlentaucher* or *Literaturcafé*, or on the advice of forum participants and literary bloggers.

But of course these reviews do not have a monopoly on her attention, despite the fact that they come entirely free of charge. On the contrary: she is actually quite critical of criticism. She finds it too uninformative, sometimes too superficial, hack work, even though (or perhaps precisely because) our heroine has got to know some contemporary American authors in the course of her research, and is keen to read the most recent reviews of their writing. And indeed, when she is online she is constantly being confronted by a different genre of text, with users' reviews on Amazon, with postings to forums or reading groups. Although such texts are occasionally – though by no means always – less elegantly written than professional criticism, they do offer two significant advantages: they speak directly to the girl's interests, and they are written, as the name suggests, by 'users', that is, by readers, who have paid for their books themselves, who are not routinely flooded with review copies, and who are fired by an authentic passion for reading.

These user texts are a new genre. They have the authority of honesty and personal commitment. And the girl writes such texts herself. In point of fact it is impossible to tell precisely when she began, when a simple e-mail or forum recommendation became a more ambitious contribution to a reading group. The Net is not all about consumption, after all. It demands exchange and personal activity, and rewards contributors with contact to like-minded people. At some point the girl will want to gather together her variously disseminated comments. She will start a blog.

Internet and library. The girl will learn that traditional literary criticism does in fact have a few tricks up its sleeve. The internet does not feature a salaried literary editor, and, without the consideration and judgement provided by literary criticism, literature cannot exist. And yet the new internet readership has little patience for the vanities of

the industry, for its insider games and intrigues. The girl is incorruptible, and the Net has taught her to distinguish thought from twaddle. The main question (and it is an economic question as well) is: how can the traditional vehicles of literary criticism maintain their place while at the same time opening themselves up to the new sphere of the Net?

The girl will also learn that the internet is not enough, that she needs libraries as well as teachers and professors. She will indeed study American literature – with a minor in Hispanic studies and semesters abroad in Madrid. She wants to pass on her love of literature to other literature-lovers. She knows that she has talent: after all, she trained on the internet. She is the future of literary criticism. She has never thought about it, but she is exactly the same age as the Net. And there are a few tough questions she will have to face soon. ─

Translated from the German by Rafaël Newman

Thierry Chervel, born in 1957 in Paris, grew up in Germany. He studied musicology and has been an editor of the *taz* in Berlin (film, music, current events), cultural correspondent in Paris for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Basler Zeitung*, and editor of the Berlin supplement of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. In 2000 he co-founded the internet magazine *Perlentaucher*. He lives and works in Berlin.

“They Want a Literary Policy”

Once upon a time, in the year 2040...

Bernard Comment

In which a soon-to-be-retired culture bureaucrat reflects on the dangers and temptations of literature in the year

2040. Would the Swiss read more, if they were afraid of their writers? I

“The problem, *Herr Direktor*, is that there hasn’t been another Dürrenmatt or Frisch. There is no one to follow in their footsteps.”

“Spare us the history lesson. We need to move with the times. No one today remembers those two, except a few old librarians like you.”

“I am not a librarian.”

“Well then, what do you suggest?”

“It is not my place to make suggestions, *Herr Direktor*. I follow your orders.”

“But what are you getting at?”

“Nothing, sir. The fact is that in making fun of ourselves, or taking a critical look at our country, we generated quite a lot of interest abroad.”

“There you go again with your generalizations.”

“In those days one needed talent to succeed. Take

the cinema, for example. Do you remember? Koerfer, Ammann, Tanner, Goretta, the New Swiss Film movement... We were known around the world. And then – nothing. We had our own Secret Service scandal, but we let the East Germans steal our thunder. We could have made a beautiful film about the Kopp affair, Zurich’s upper crust, spying on our own citizens, a million secret files in a small country like ours – but it was the Germans who made *The Lives of Others* and won all the prizes. And in literature, the same thing. French-Swiss navel-gazing, the poetry of the ineffable, and German-Swiss dogmatic realism. I won’t bother mentioning the other regions.”

“But you know very well that the higher-ups don’t want any more critics washing the nation’s dirty

linen in public. We've heard the message: brighten up our image. The minister has said it often enough. Swiss money should be invested for the good of Switzerland."

"We could bring in foreign authors."

"What would that do?"

"They would describe the country as they see it – positively, because most of them love Switzerland. Look at all the Indian filmmakers who come here to shoot their snow-capped mountain scenes, since they stopped being able to film in Kashmir."

"What's that got to do with it? Anyway, we've always brought in foreigners, and it never worked."

"We need a modern Nabokov. Or a Borges. Or..."

"That's enough! Your nostalgia bores me. I want a plan of action that will satisfy the Federal Council and provide material for a few good speeches. A literary policy. They want a literary policy. Not a lament about the good old days. Let's start from the beginning. Who writes?"

"More and more people. That's the problem."

"And how do they earn a living?"

"Mostly from their day jobs. And a little bit from us – from our stipends, grants, and subsidies. And from the cantons, and the foundations."

"Good. And do they seem to be keeping quiet? No protests, no signs of trouble?"

"They keep absolutely quiet. The system guarantees them a minimum income."

"And? Who sells?"

"Fewer and fewer places. A small number of bookshops, maybe thirty. I can't remember the exact figures, but I believe the francophone regions are holding out a little better."

"And the big chain stores?"

"Finished. No more books, no more music. Not profitable enough."

"What about the press?"

"They sometimes write about authors, but not about ours, and not about books. The editors want big names. You remember how hard it was

for us to place that portrait of you in—"

"That's enough. I understand. We'll continue this talk tomorrow."

It was hot in the streets of Zurich. The imposing dome of the Federal Polytechnic shone in the sunlight. I had missed the train back to Berne and had an hour to wait. It's the year 2040, two more years to my retirement, and I still don't believe in global warming. In my student days it could get very hot too, especially during exam period in June. We used to buy loads of books, we exchanged our impressions, the future seemed so full of promise. And now they are asking for a miracle cure, a "book policy". Maybe too much emphasis was placed on the internet, maybe that's why the younger generations are interested only in short texts, summaries, bare facts. They don't want to read anymore, and no one seems to mind. Not even the politicians, who don't try to hide the fact that they don't read either. They even seem proud not to read, or not to read literature, in any case. In the days when they used to try to write their own novels, people laughed at them, but at least they showed some interest, some respect for the written word.

There is no reason, actually, for me to rush home. I take a seat at an outdoor café not far from the train station. I can decide later which train to take. The forecast for tomorrow is not as good; might as well take advantage of today's fine weather. At the next table, a young woman is reading a book. That's reassuring. She is avidly underlining nearly every line. I can't see the title; she's holding the cover down flat. She keeps on underlining. Occasionally she tears her eyes away from the page with some difficulty, mouths a few phrases, bows her head and continues reading. I am staring at her openly, but she does not see me. Nothing distracts her. Minutes pass, then

hours. I have missed two trains, now three. The sun has gone down. It is a big book. However rapidly she turns the pages, however feverishly she underlines, she is not even halfway through.

All of a sudden she gets up and walks off toward the Old Town. I follow her at a few metres' distance. My heavy briefcase stuffed with papers weighs me down, but there is nowhere I can leave it. You can't check anything at the train stations nowadays. I am more and more out of breath as she picks up the pace of her walk through the night. She moves with her arms held out in front of her, still reading, without making a sound. After hours of steady walking she suddenly turns a corner, crosses the street, enters a building. It is almost six o'clock in the morning.

Dawn is long past, it is now daylight, and the sun is just visible on the horizon. A tram passes. It's not going anywhere near the train station. Too bad. I raise my head and see her at a window on the fifth and highest floor. Is it my imagination, or is she naked? She opens the window and moves back into the room, toward the bed, I suppose. Another tram approaches, this time heading toward the station. She is standing at the window again. I can definitely see her breasts now, beautiful, firm and proud, and the two dark patches under her arms. Something falls. She did not actually throw it. More like dropped it. It bounces, lands on the tracks, and finishes its trajectory under the wheels of an oncoming tram. There is no crushing sound, just something like a sigh. No one at the window now. A curtain has been drawn and flutters gently in the breeze. The tram door opens. I board it, and ride to the next station. The only thing that bothers me is that I haven't shaved. I do not feel tired at all.

Anna has made coffee, watery and nearly colourless, as usual. My colleagues drift into the office and exchange a few words, smiling. The forecast was for rain, but the weather is still fine, a wonderful spring, we can't complain. No, we cannot complain.

The director is surprised to find me already seated at my desk. "You seem to be in a good mood," he says, smiling. Yes, I am in a good mood. It might even be happiness. Everything will continue as before. That is what I tell him. "Everything will continue as before. There is no reason for it to change." I could tell him about my night, the young woman, the book, her strange fervour, and then that gesture. But he would find it utterly depressing, and he never wants to hear anything that might depress him. It would seem depressing to him because I would not be able to tell it properly. But really there is nothing depressing or negative about it. In some ways it was a beautiful encounter. And her breasts, in the morning light,

with the sun coming up. Those free, indifferent breasts. And the book. The director addresses me from his office. Our doors are open to let in the draft; we have to take advantage of the cooler temperatures before the air starts to heat up around ten o'clock. "I've given some more thought to what you said yesterday. But Switzerland wasn't happy in the days of Frisch and Dürrenmatt. The country had a bad conscience, was guilty and afraid. Afraid of people like them. They were successful because they made people afraid. That is the key. We have to make people afraid again. Put together some ideas for me, and a few good phrases." He has risen from his armchair and is leaning in the doorway of my office. "You should move here after the baby is born. It would make things easier. Having babies, at your age..." He shakes his head, with an amused, conspiratorial smile. "We should even ban reading. Not writing, but reading. That would make people interested again. But don't put that in your report."

With a lot of sugar, Anna's coffee is almost drinkable. I leave the office and go up the street to buy a meat pastry. There are none left. The building next door is being renovated and the workmen have already snatched them all. I order fifty grams of air-dried Grisons beef, sliced very thin. It reminds me of the good old days. The committee meeting starts in twenty minutes: "Translation grants". In my entire life I have never underlined a single line in a book, not even a single word. The wind has shifted. There might be a storm on the way. ─

Translated from the French by Marcy Goldberg

Bernard Comment was born in Porrentruy in 1960. After studying literature in Geneva he spent several years in Florence, and has been living in Paris since 1990. A former resident of the Académie de France in Rome, he was head of fiction at the radio broadcaster France Culture from 1999 to 2004 before becoming series editor of "Fiction & Cie" at Editions du Seuil. He has written over a dozen books, which have been translated into various languages. Some original titles: *L'ombre de mémoire* (1990), *Même les oiseaux* (1998), *Le colloque des bustes* (2000) and *Un poisson hors de l'eau* (2004).