

Anna Wessely

Report by an Ancient Fellow



Art historian and sociologist. Associate Professor at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Visiting Professorships and Study Grants: 1999–2000 Research Fellow, Getty Research Institute. 1998–99 Associate Fellow, Collegium Budapest. 1992–93 Research Associate, Department of Art History, University of California, Berkeley (ACLS Fellow). Spring 1992 Visiting Professor, Postdoctoral Institute of the Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam. 1987–88 Research Associate, Center for the Philosophy and History of Science, Boston University. 1986–87 Researcher, Accademia d'Ungheria, Rome. – Address: Disz tér 16, 1014 Budapest, Ungarn.

During my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg I tried to work and see as much as could be squeezed into sixty-two days. I have enjoyed talking to the other Fellows, particularly the evolutionary biologists, with whom the conversation tended to slide into the philosophical problems of doing science, the different knowledge interests and methods in the natural and the human or social sciences. Finally, Raghavendra Gadagkar came up with an undefeatable thesis: Scholars in the humanities do not construct models, avoid empirical generalizations and prefer quotations to proofs or novel claims. When I began to think about how to respond to this no less appealing than appalling idea, I thought of Giambattista Vico's notion of the *mental dictionary of humankind* as an adequate description of what we in the humanities are actually after. This would have been, of course, a quote again, proving how right Raghavendra was. In this report, I am trying therefore to live up to the image of the humanities scholar and offer the appropriate citations from the annual report of a very old Old Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I studied his works and their engraved title pages and illustrations designed by Daniel Chodowiecki.

This ancient Fellow was named Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel and he lived in Königsberg all his life except for the *annus mirabilis* spent at the Wiko. I must apologize for his spelling; he had not had the

chance at that time to attend the wonderful German classes of Eva Hund.

Hippel began his report with some general reflections on the advantages of travelling and studying abroad. Mark the scholar's obsession with books and libraries. At that time, the Wiko had no drivers to fetch the books, they had to rely on post horses.

In der Fremde seyn heißt in die Hand Gottes fallen: in seinem Vaterlande ist man wenns hoch kommt in der Hand der Menschen, gemeinhin in der Hand seiner Feinde. – Zu Hause nimmt man sich vieles so übel nicht. Man vernachlässigt sich; thun Sie doch als ob Sie zu Hause wären sagt man. Auf der Reise sind wir auf uns aufmerksamer. Die Welt ist für einen klugen Reisenden höchstens eine Hauptstadt. Er läßt sich das Merkwürdige zeigen: Für einen Gelehrten eine öffentliche Bibliothek er sieht die Tittel. Beide bestellen Postpferde. Plus ultra.

This old Old Fellow evidently appreciated not only the library services but also the common meals. Out of consideration for the public image of Wiko he made no mention of the excellent wines, he merely stressed the unbounded freedom of self-served meals:

Wer auf eine Schüssel mehr oder Sallat, Sardellen, Caviar, Austern und andere Zusätze Leckerbissen und Noten lüstern ist; laße sich anrichten, was ihm gefällig ist und thue was er nicht lassen kann.

On Tuesdays, however, he had to wait to be served. But that was rightly so, for the morning seminars tended to plunge him into such an amazement at the wonders of science that he would have certainly dropped his tray at lunch:

Seelig sind die wissen! Seeliger die thun! Und am seeligsten die wissen und thun! So viel Köpfe so viel Sinnen so viel Alexanders so viel Welten, so viel Planeten so viel Bahnen, so viel Genies so viel Methoden ...

Some Tuesday seminars made him doubtful of the whole scholarly enterprise:

Das wenigste ist Wissenschaft, was wir haben, das weißt' ist Muthmassung, Weg, den man gehen muß um zur Wissenschaft zu gelangen. Es geht mit den Wissenschaften wie mit der Liebe: Die verstohlene ist die angenehmste. Das Handwerk wird einem Jeden so geläufig daß er auf keine Erfindung kommen kann. *Per aspera ad astra.*

For all his doubts, this Old Fellow was well aware what a privilege it was to stay at the Wiko and how importantly this item would figure in the *curricula vitae* he would attach to all later grant applications. But he was no cynic. At the end of his report he even waxed lyrical and said goodbye to the other Fellows by recalling and, indeed, quoting the words of his parents:

Freilich kann man Meister werden ohne gereiset zu seyn allein wer achtet einen Meister der nicht Certificate von fremden Ländern aufweisen kann. Die bekannte *Authentica habita Cod. Ne filius pro patre* welche sich vom römischen Kaiser Friedrich herschreibet saget ausdrücklich *omnibus qui caussa studiorum peregrinantur Scholaribus & maxime divinarum atque sacrarum legum professoribus hoc nostrae pietatis beneficium indulgemus.*

Was ist das? Fragte meine Mutter auf Luthers Art, und mein Vater antwortete dies Privilegium kommt nur gelehrten Wandersburschen zu. Gott geleite sie sagte meine Mutter und bringe sie gesund zu den lieben Ihrigen.

(The quotations are all from Hippel's novel, *Lebensläufe nach Aufsteigender Linie nebst Beylagen A, B, C.* 3 Theile. 4 Bände. Mit 15 Kupfern von Daniel Chodowiecki. Berlin bey Christian Friedrich Voß, 1778–1781.)