

Report of 2001-2002 TLL Fellow

Founded in the closing decades of the nineteenth century by Eduard Wölfflin, the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae now makes its home as a Commission of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in the reconstructed Residenz, overlooking the Hofgarten and (in the distance) the Englischer Garten in downtown Munich. Upon entering the Academy, one is struck by the shining marble floors and the long, circular staircase lined with large paintings of the Academy's former presidents, dating back to its foundation in the early eighteenth century. On the fourth floor, which houses the TLL, its extensive Latin library, and the Zettel Archiv one encounters a kind of lexicographical hall of fame: portraits of Forcellini, Halm, Mommsen, Vollmer, Dittman, Heraeus and others; a bust of Wölfflin; various documents from the early days of the Thesaurus, including the first contract for its publication and a leaf from the edition of the *Aeneid* which Norden excerpted and annotated. Although in recent years, Mitarbeiter have been assigned a computer for composing their articles, some continue to write their articles out by hand, with bottles of ink and blotters near at hand. As scholarly trends and technological innovations have come and gone in recent decades, one has the sense that the Thesaurus has remained largely outside of their influence, hard at work on M, O and for the past 20+ years, P (yes, N has been deferred indefinitely).

For the American stipendiary(in), a year at the Thesaurus offers a number of opportunities and challenges: a first hand experience with German philological scholarship and culture; the excitement of life in a vibrant European city; but also the difficulties of balancing the demands of the Thesaurus work schedule with a long-distance job search, a rather different American academic calendar, and the skyrocketing cost of living in Munich (especially as the dollar continues to lose strength abroad). At a time when it is increasingly difficult to find permanent employment without substantial publications (perhaps even a book) and full-time teaching experience, it raises interesting issues when the APA sends one of its freshly-minted PhDs off to Munich to work a full-time, 9-5 job that provides neither teaching experience nor significant research time for the fellow.

In truth, the short-term costs may well outweigh the benefits: once moving, relocation and travel expenses are deducted, the salary is barely more than a graduate student stipend (although happily this will be somewhat remedied in Fall 2003); it can be difficult and expensive to do job applications—not to mention on-campus visits—from Munich; the computer resources at the Thesaurus are in desperate need of modernization (e.g. there is currently one computer with an Internet connection and CD-ROM which must be shared by the majority of the employees; many stipendiaries are using computers from the early 90s); the housing situation in Munich rivals that of New York City or the Bay Area; one is expected to work a full 12 months, with 2 months of vacation time, rather than the traditional 8 or 9 months (including vacation breaks) of a teaching position. Time taken off for the job search or conferences is counted as vacation time, meaning that the fellow's time of service regularly extends from mid-August into July of the following year. Stipendiaries are required to work only 35 hours/week, but especially in the first few months, one must work many more hours to make any real progress, leaving little time or energy for job applications and interview preparation, much less writing articles and book chapters.

Because this position is seen as an internship in Latin lexicography and not particularly as preparation for an academic career, the Thesaurus makes few allowances for conference attendance. Each employee is given 5 days for conferences, but the American (who is nearly always on the academic job market) generally uses these days for the APA. Thus, if one wishes to attend other conferences, vacation time must be used. Even working after hours is a problem since the Bavarian Academy strictly regulates access to the building (which closes at 6 pm M-Th, 4:15 F, and all weekends and holidays). One may get a key, but there is often keen competition. This is not so much a postdoctoral fellowship as most Americans understand the term (i.e. as preparation for an academic career) as it is a kind of technical training in Latin lexicography.

So what does the American fellow get out of this year? First and most obviously, each dictionary article one writes is published in a fascicle of the TLL. In writing the articles, one works closely with a talented editor (in my case, Dr. Nigel Holmes) and receives detailed feedback on article drafts. The fellow learns to be much more sensitive to the nuances of Latin, as well as to the limits of interpretation imposed by the fragmentary state of our evidence. Because one deals with texts as late as the 6th century CE, the fellow also has the opportunity to develop a much broader sense of the complex history of Latin literature, its reception, and its transmission. In many respects, a good lexicographer is not only a strong Latinist but also a creative problem-solver. One must figure out how to take a mass of raw data, identify patterns, and create a logical structure that explains the relationships of the different word meanings to one another, all in accordance with the sometimes complicated practices of the Thesaurus. It is hard to put a price tag on the development of these skills—especially critical thinking skills—in the short term, but they will pay dividends repeatedly over the course of a career. Even more importantly, a year in Munich is a fortuitous opportunity for a young scholar to acquire a serious facility with the German language and German scholarship. I was very fortunate to meet a young Assistant Professor who shared my interest in late antique epistolography. We spent many an afternoon talking about our research over Kaffee und Kuchen. In addition, the Stabi in Munich is an excellent scholarly resource with an extraordinary collection of primary and secondary materials.

My own experience at the Thesaurus this year has mixed the structural frustrations of the job with the personal, intellectual, and cultural delights of a rich and happy year: fall and spring weekends hiking in the Bavarian Alps; late afternoons at Cinema watching original language films; nights at the Staatsoper and the many other theaters throughout Munich; lunches and dinners with the other Mitarbeiter; the endless supply of museums for rainy Sunday afternoons; weekend trips around Germany and Italy; watching World Cup matches in the basement of the Academy; Biergarten Kultur and Brotzeit. By working on a collaborative project, I have been reminded of just how much the practice of classics is a team sport in which we are all working towards the common goal of a better understanding of antiquity.

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