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From Professor-Student to Collaborators

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From Professor-Student to Collaborators

Abstract

I had not met Michael Ritterson before he visited the Conservation Lab at Special Collections, where he was having a book mended, but I had certainly heard of him. A former faculty member of the German department, Mr. Ritterson is now a German translator, taking on projects from translating the work of a 17th German woman's study of butterflies to the poetry of a Berlin leftist written during the 1968 Movement. And, by previous contact in the mail, he had heard of me. So after Mary Wooton showed him the fully repaired book, we were formally introduced and had the opportunity to discuss his translating projects. It was more than an opportunity to chat with an interesting visitor; it was an opportunity to share talents and abilities. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Fortenbaugh Internship

Disciplines

German Language and Literature | Library and Information Science | Translation Studies

Comments

The Interns at Gettysburg College's Musselman Library captured their internship experiences since the spring of 2011. Over time the blog has featured Fortenbaugh, Smith, and Holley interns. They shared updates on semester long projects, responded to blogging prompts, and documented their individual intern experience.

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Blogging the Library

The Interns @ Gettysburg College's Musselman Library

From Professor-Student to Collaborators

July 21, 2016

By: Jesse Siegel '16

From the "Meine Fahrten Collection", located at Special Collections, Gettysburg College

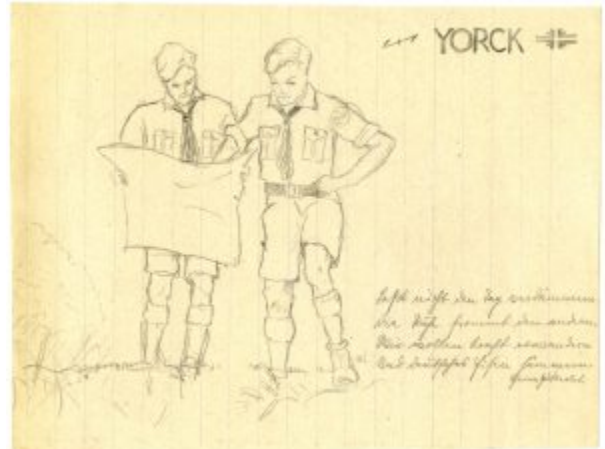
I had not met Michael Ritterson before he visited the Conservation Lab at Special Collections, where he was having a book mended, but I had certainly heard of him.

A former faculty member of the German department, Mr. Ritterson is now a German translator, taking on projects from translating the work of a 17th German woman's study of butterflies to the poetry of a Berlin leftist written during the 1968 Movement. And, by previous contact in the mail, he had heard of me. So after Mary Wooton showed him the fully repaired book, we were formally introduced and had the opportunity to discuss his translating projects. It was more than an opportunity to chat with an interesting visitor; it was an opportunity to share talents and abilities.

In the course of the conversation, we had the opportunity to talk about some of the work I was doing for Special Collections. It was then that I sensed an opportunity for me to ask for his help. Bringing out another box, I showed Mr. Ritterson the "Hitler Youth" photo album, a collection photographs taken on youth hiking trips in the 1920s and 1930s. Also included were two sketches done by the maker of the album, one showing two boys reading a map, another depicting a lively campsite scene on a North Sea island. Both had writing in a flowing German script.

This was where I had suffered a week of difficulty. The script was Suetterlin, otherwise known as German handwriting, created by a graphic artist in Berlin around the turn of the 20th century. Like other cursive scripts it has gone out of style, so I was obligated to use a website to begin deciphering first the script, and then the idiosyncratic hand of the writer. I had puzzled out a few words and phrases, but otherwise was far from understanding the meaning of a long passage at the bottom of one of the sketches.

Mr. Ritterson spent more than a minute staring at the writing. Then he informed me that it was a poem and began to read word for word what it said. Soon, words that had stumped me for weeks became



clear. Even then there were two words that remained unclear. Yet Mr. Ritterson, after his years of work on translating German poetry, puzzled through these words, making suggestions based on the structure of the poem and the context.

An hour later when I was translating the poem into English, the words were a clear hymn to the values of the German Youth Movement, a paean to the life out of doors, nationalistic and independent. The story of the album's maker and the world in which he lived were now more accessible to future researchers.

This new situation of finding collaborators in our fields of choice is not new to us in a liberal arts college. The accessibility of professors has allowed us to build personal relationships outside of the classroom. Mentorship through independent studies and grant projects allow us to work closely with professors in an area of interest during the semester and even into summer break. Most of us are familiar with requiring letters of reference from professors for outside projects, a sign that the relationships we build today do not end when we leave the college.

Yet the dynamic begins to change once we do leave. Mr. Ritterson, while an expert, was not in the position of a professor, in charge of my grade and responsible for judging my work. Instead, he was an expert, visiting in an unofficial capacity. Unlike a student, I had, to some degree, control over the sources I was now showing him. Together, we provided each other with access to material we might have not otherwise seen or understood. In these circumstances, we became collaborators, partners working on a project, if not equal in those skills.

This collaboration has continued beyond my current internship. At the end of our conversation, I mentioned to him a book I was translating into English that included a primary document in a German dialect. He offered to read it and perhaps provide a transcription into High German. A few days ago I received his response. He had translated much of it, but was still uncertain about some of the words. In order to clarify them, he offered the names of several institutions where I might find additional help, but where he no longer knew anyone. This is an opportunity for mutual help for years to come.

<http://blogging.musselmanlibrary.org/2016/07/>