One of the great aspects of European Studies as an undergraduate major is that the language requirement is simply taken care of by study abroad—providing that the study is in a country that speaks a language other than English and that the students take classes in the foreign language. This is simply a wonderful thing. In nearly twenty years of teaching, I have only met one student who did not really like his semester abroad, and that student went on to take another semester abroad, which he then loved; in fact, it changed his life. One cannot say this about most classes, not even EUS classes. Some are great, some less so, but it is rare for a single class to transform students whole outlook on the world. Why is this? Are the classes at the University of Regensburg or in the University of Aix-en-Provence so much better than the classes here? Not at all. Are the professors better? Probably not. Is it so remarkable to see Europe’s great works of art and architecture in their full authenticity? This is certainly part of it. Does derailing the routine of American students, now in the equivalent of fifteenth grade, force them into a liminal space that fosters genuine creativity at the personal level? Now we are getting closer. Being somewhere else, outside of routines, including language routines—this is what makes the difference, and makes study abroad the second best way to discover Europe.

But what is the best way to discover Europe?

By walking, of course. It’s a bit of a seditious idea. You pay no tuition, and no rail fees. No one makes money, except the bakers and wine merchants en route. And you slow down. Patrick Leigh Fermor recounts such a walk across Europe in his *A Time of Gifts*. The time was Spring, 1933.

Fermor begins by describing his English school life, which he detested. Then he goes to Holland, which he had already seen by proxy, having viewed its painted landscapes in “a hundred mornings and afternoons in museums and picture galleries and country houses.” From Holland he goes to Germany, where he knows the language only by recitation of Goethe.
poems. He can buy cigarettes easily enough, but when a shop-keeper asks 'Wollen Sie einen Stocknagel?,' he is already in trouble. The German towns along the Rhine are bedecked with Nazi flags; the inns spot pewter-lidded beer mugs, prints of Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Hindenburg, and, depending on the inn, Adolf Hitler. There were conversations about Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and there was a great deal of singing. Predictably, there was the standard outcome of mixing beer with schnapps on an empty stomach; there was the calamity of a lost rucksack; and of course, there were girls, Lieselotte and Annie. Where there are girls, there is also, of course, the bumbling pick-up line-- "I'm a student," "We too, Wunderbar," all of which led naturally to more singing.

Femor walked on to Vienna, and into southeastern Europe, all the way, in fact, to the Bosporus, sometimes taking a detour, as when he left Bratislava for Prague because someone told him he had to see the Zlaté město, the golden city.

What did he get out of it? I'm not sure. But in A Time of Gifts one finds remarkably nuanced analyses of German life and politics at the beginning of the Nazi regime, and arresting brilliant depictions of German culture, especially its art, with a keen liking (which I share) for Albrecht Altdorfer, “a lyre-bird among carrion crows.” Femor also hones in on the nature around him, including flora and fauna now extinct in the region. He also learned German.

The book is the book of a sixty-year old man. His youthful diaries had been lost, and later found in a castle in Romania and returned to Femor. The book is not just a republishing of the diaries, however. It is instead a reflection in prose that uses the diaries to recapture the experiential immediacy of the eighteen-year old walking across Europe, initially with nothing but the Oxford Book of English Verse, Horace’s Odes, and some clothes. Not many times claim one’s attention in later life, when one is busy with a hundred other things and consumed with other ambitions. But a walk across Europe—that’s a gift that stays.

I am told that the number of students at Vanderbilt who want to go abroad is now higher than ever. Students are more and more excited about the possibilities that “being there” brings to their education and to their life. European Studies, as all the international programs, are unique in encouraging study abroad, and in integrating this study into the curriculum. When asked—“Why European Studies as a major?”—this reason, intangible, not necessarily useful for a career, is very high on my list. Those who go to Madrid, or St. Petersburg, Regensburg, Copenhagen, Siena, or Aix-en Provence, receive a remarkable gift. I would only say to these students: slow down, talk to people, and yes, walk.

-Helmut Walser Smith


Graduate Student Research Grants

The Max Kade Center for European and German Studies announces a new program in graduate research support.

Graduate students in European fields are invited to submit applications for research support up to $2000.

The Max Kade grants are intended to help defray costs of research travel, archival work, and language acquisition in pursuit of the Ph.D. They are not intended to fund travel to, or attendance at, conferences.

The application for the Max Kade Grants consists of a C.V., a letter describing the rationale for the expense, a budget and a timetable for use of the funds, and a short recommendation from either the dissertation supervisor or the Director of Graduate Studies. Proposals that provide evidence that the candidate has applied to outside sources will be given priority.

The deadline for applications is April 14. They should be submitted electronically to Ann Oslin: Ann.oslin@Vanderbilt.edu

www.vanderbilt.edu/euro
Professor Frank Wcislo, Dean of the Commons, Professor of History, and faculty member in European Studies, has written a remarkable new biography entitled Tales of Imperial Russia: The Life and Times of Sergei Witte. Next to the Czar himself, Witte was probably the most important political figure in pre-Revolutionary Russia. He was crucial for the way Russia attempted to modernize and, as Prime Minister in 1905, he issued the famous October Manifesto, which introduced to the Empire constitutional monarchy and its first nation-wide elected body based on qualified manhood suffrage, the Duma. Using the extensive unpublished and published memoirs of Sergei Witte, Wcislo has written a highly reflective, sophisticated, but also exciting and accessible study of one of Russia’s greatest statesmen.

Wcislo shows us a Witte formed by the tradition of the Russian service nobility and hardened by his experiences, especially on the eastern periphery of the Empire. We see a Witte consumed by dreams of Empire and large-scale state projects, most notably the trans-Siberia railway, and a Witte transfixed by the power of capital, which he believed could transform Russia into a modern imperial state, bringing under imperial control vast territories and peoples. Crucial, however, was Witte's attitude towards democracy. For Witte, there was no saving of Imperial Russia without the cautious introduction of representative institutions. Precisely this conviction led to his own undoing, as it was the October Manifesto that caused Czar Nicholas II to dismiss him from office. Wcislo’s multifaceted book can be read in many ways. It can also be read as a cautionary tale. How states navigate the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy, a matter not unrelated to events today, is central to the story that emerges from Wcislo’s pages, with the experience of Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century suggesting that rolling back democracy might bring gains in the short run, but hardly in the long.

For anyone interested in Russian history, or in how one of Europe’s most interesting figures confronted the modern world, this book is a must read!
Lectures

On February 18th, the Max Kade Center hosted Paola Gambarota, Assistant Professor of Italian at Rutgers University, for a lecture on Herder, Vico and Language. Professor Gambarota was this year’s recipient of the MLA’s Aldo Geanne Staglione Publication Award for the best book in Italian literary studies.

On March 29th, the Max Kade Center hosted David Ciarlo, Assistant Professor at University of Cincinnati for a lecture on the transformation of the images of Africans in German advertising. He has just published a path-breaking book, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, according to one reviewer, easily the most important new work on the colonial and racial imagination in pre-WWI Germany in nearly a decade.

On March 31st, the Max Kade Center hosted Barbara Vinken, Professor of Comparative Literature and of French and Italian Literature at the University of Munich for an enlightening discussion on Heinrich von Kleist’s play “Hermannsschlacht.” Professor Vinken is the author of many works on French and German literature, on the history and semiotics of fashion and is well known in Germany for her controversial book, *The German Mother.*

Upcoming Lectures

Coming up on Thursday, April 14, 2011 from 4-7pm the Max Kade Center, in conjunction with the Divinity School will host two lectures. Jonathan Sheehan, Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley will speak a lecture entitled “Providence and the Emergence of a Modern Order,” and Suzanne Marchand, Professor of History at LSU will give a talk entitled “Herder’s ‘Oldest Document of Man-kind and the Problem of Near Eastern Chronology.” This event will take place in the Tillett Lounge at the Divinity School.

Coming up on Friday, April 15, 2011 at 4:10pm, the Max Kade Center will host James Retallack, Professor of History and German Studies at the University of Toronto and one of the leading authorities on German history in North America, for a lecture entitled “Democracy in Disappearing Ink: Suffrage Reform as Coup d’etat: Germany in the 1890s.” This event will take place in Buttrick 201.

Coming up on Wednesday, April 20, 2011 at 4:10pm, the Max Kade Center will host Vanderbilt’s own Jennifer Fay, Professor of History and Associate Professor of Film Studies and English. She will be giving a lecture entitled “Werner Herzog’s Perpetual War.” This event will take place in Buttrick 201.

WORKSHOPS & CONFERENCES (including co-sponsorships)

January 13-March 17
*Bestia contra Bestia”/ “Beast vs. Beast”*
Photos by José Luis Raymond
Exhibition Co-Sponsorship
Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, Cohen Memorial Hall, Gallery 2

Friday, February 4
*Provincializing Secularism: Minorities and the Regulation of Religion* (Jewish Studies)
9:30 a.m-5:30 p.m. Buttrick 123

Friday, March 18 & Saturday, March 19
*(Trans)literation: Exploring Border and Boundaries through Literature and Film*
Keynote Speaker: Barbara Wahlster,
Author and Journalist
Max Kade Visiting Professor
Graduate Student Conference (Department of German)
Buttrick 206

Thursday, April 7 & Saturday, April 9
*Form-Violence-Meaning: Two Hundred Years: Heinrich von Kleist*  
(Department of German)
University Club, Heritage Room and Buttrick Hall 201