

October 28, 2003

**IN MEMORIAM
REINHARD LETTAU
PROFESSOR OF LITERATURE
1929 - 1996**

Reinhard Lettau, German writer, winner of the Berliner Literaturpreis and the Bremer Literaturpreis, Professor of Writing and German Literature at UCSD from 1968 to 1990, died in Karlsruhe on 17 June 1996 from a lung infection.

Born 1929 in Erfurt, raised after the war in Karlsruhe (West Germany), Lettau received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1960 under the direction of Bernhard Blume, who also later joined the UCSD Literature faculty. Lettau's first prose collections, *Schwierigkeiten beim Hauserbauen* (*Difficulties Building Houses*), and *Auftritt Manigs* (*Manig's Entrance*) catapulted him to literary fame in 1963, while he was teaching at Smith College and working closely with the literary Gruppe 47 in Germany. Active and outspoken in political protest, Lettau, an American citizen since 1957, was expelled from West Germany in 1967, four weeks after the furor caused by his public speech *On the Servility of the Press* at Berlin's Freie Universität. Although the expulsion was later retracted, he accepted a professorship at UCSD. Here, he continued his writing and political protest, and deepened his connection with Herbert Marcuse, who had also emigrated to UCSD. During his tenure, Lettau accepted guest professorships at Essen, Germany and Warwick, England. A beloved teacher, Lettau was probably best known on campus for his political protests, which twice landed him in the San Diego jail.

Internationally, Lettau was highly respected as a writer of prose that only rarely, and then quite directly, addressed politics. All his books are short and highly polished. Fastidious in avoiding lofty themes or emotionality, they celebrate the beauty and strangeness of the quotidian with a mischievous and affectionate wit. Lettau's double interests were shown in the 1971 publication of *Täglicher Faschismus* (*Daily Fascism*, an annotated collection of American newspaper articles on the Viet Nam War), and the 1973 *Immer kürzer werdenden Geschichten* (*Ever Shorter Stories*) and *Gedichte & Porträts* (*Poems & Portraits*). The translation with Lawrence Ferlinghetti of *Love Poems of Karl Marx* (1977) offers the unique appearance of poetry, coupled here with politics, in all Lettau's writing.

German and French stage productions of Lettau's 1977 radio play, *Frühstücksgespräche in Miami* (*Breakfast Conversations in Miami*) followed its recognition as Best Play by the German War Blinded. Lettau published a collection of essays in 1980, *Zerstreutes Hinausschauen* (*Scattered Outside Views*), and saw his earlier work anthologized in East Germany as *Der Irrgarten* (*The Wandering Garden*). German critics greeted 1988's *Zur Frage der Himmelsrichtungen* (*On the Question of the Points of the Compass*) as the return of a major author to the scene: it is a brilliant and hilarious reflection on the paradoxes of direction. The narrative of *Flucht vor Gästen* (*Flight from Guests*), finished in 1993 and read across Germany to avid public acclaim, bears striking similarities to Lettau's retirement from the U.S. and his return to Germany.

In his last years, officially recognized by the cities of Berlin and Bremen, a celebrity in the press, television, and radio, Lettau continued work on a new manuscript left unfinished, *Grammercy Park*. His collected stories were published in Germany in 1998, edited by his widow, Dawn Lettau. Calder has published a number of his works in English translation.

Lettau will be remembered in San Diego as a political activist, a lionized teacher of writing and German literature, and a most generous and convivial host, who, along with Dawn, would regularly gather the most varied and often improbable mixture of guests at their Del Mar and Solana Beach homes for parties that lasted well into the morning. In Germany, Lettau is popularly remembered as a dramatic spokesman for the protesters of the 1960s, and critically recognized as a major twentieth-century prose stylist.

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