

My Teacher Heinrich Leonard Cox (1935–2016)

My teacher Heinrich Leonard Cox (1935–2016) died on September 6, 2016, a few weeks after his 81st birthday. Since far too few obituaries have appeared, I would like to remember him once again.

Heinrich Leonard Cox was born in 1935 in Geleen (Netherlands) in the German-Dutch border area, studied German philology, ethnology, and developmental psychology from 1957–1961 at the University of Nijmegen, from 1961–1963 at the University of Bonn, and from 1963–1967 again in Nijmegen, where he graduated with a doctorate. In the same year he became Professor of Ethnology at Nijmegen and shortly afterwards Professor of German and Literature of the Middle Ages at the University of Utrecht. In 1975, he succeeded his mentor Matthias Zender as Professor of Ethnology at the University of Bonn, where he remained for more than 25 years. He was also Director of the Department of Ethnology and at the same time head of the Department of Rhenish Ethnology at the then Institute for Historical Regional Studies of the Rhineland.

“H.L. Cox not only displayed great charisma as a scholar. In fact, he left his unmistakable mark on an entire generation of scholars as well as on the cultural landscape of the Rhineland and the neighboring regions” (Gunther Hirschfelder, Josef Mangold, Dela-M. Haverkamp. “[Heinrich L. Cox \(1935–2016\)](#),” Virtual Library of Ethnology).

He taught all varieties of ethnology and European ethnology far into the areas of philology and linguistics, as his successful larger German-Dutch dictionary and larger Dutch-German dictionary (Van Dale groot woordenboek Duits-Nederlands and Van Dale groot woordenboek Duits-Nederlands-Duits) from 1983 onwards demonstrates.

“His academic work was influenced by traditional ethnology as well as by modern, decidedly European ethnology. The Germanist and ethnologist Cox consistently pursued a cross-border, national, and interdisciplinary approach, without losing sight of his focus on narrative and linguistic research”. (Ibid.)

He was one of the few who found it good that I also studied ethnology and that I studied cultural anthropology in the USA [see my article “Separated Sisters: Folklore and Ethnology.” *Querschnitte* 2 (1989) 2 (April–June): 27–28] – Today this debate is history, and the newly established Bonner Folklore offers its master together with Bonner Ethnology [see [here](#) and [here](#)]. I also owe it to Cox that I received my doctorate in cultural anthropology in Los Angeles writing about the Rector of the University of Bonn, the Germanist and ethnologist Hans Naumann, and that I transcended the boundaries between cultural and linguistic disciplines. After all, in the first of his seminars I attended, it was Cox who impressively and unforgettably showed me Naumann’s theory of sunken cultural heritage.

Cox was an ingenious organizer and academic manager who edited and kept an enormous number of professional journals running and organized countless small and large symposiums, etc.

Only a few, I among them, experienced Cox’s humorous side when he was in a private, relaxed atmosphere. Sometimes this was also evident in lectures. Cox got a kick out of the fact that my wife and I sat as a married couple in his seminars. Impishly, he basically only addressed us as the “Schirmmacher siblings.”

Many of my later studies conducted were inspired by Cox.

[See my book *Zur Kritik der marxistischen Sagen- und Märchenforschung* and other ethnographic papers. Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1992 1st ed.; 2002 2nd ed.. 227 p. and therein in particular: I. "Sozialhistorische Aspekte der Märchen- und Sagenforschung," (translation of the title: "Social-historical Aspects of Fairytale and Saga Research"), pp. 7–46; II. "Ländliche Nahrung in der Westeifel" (translation of the title: "Rural Foods in the Western Eifel"), pp. 47–62; III: "Heimat und Fremde am Beispiel der Sauerländer Wanderhändler" (translation of the title: "Homeland and Strangers using the Example of Sauerland Traveling Vendors"), pp. 63–73; IV "Bonner Fastnacht im Spiegel des Bonner Wochenblatts (translation of the title: "Bonn Carnival in the Bonner Wochenblatt"), 1808–1843," pp. 74–108; V. "Zur neuesten volkskundlichen Riehl-Diskussion 1977–1985" (translation of the title: "On the latest folkloristic Riehl discussion 1977–1985"), pp. 109–136; VIII "Familie in Deutschland in Geschichte und Gegenwart" (translation of the title: "Family in Germany in the Past and Present"), pp. 186–212; IX. "Miszellen zur deutsche Sprache: Das Wort ‚Geschichte‘ (translation of the title: "Miscellany on the German Language: The Word ‚History‘"), pp. 213–217; "Neues zur Sprache der DDR" (translation of the title: "Something New about the Language of the German Democratic Republic"), pp. 218–221; X. "Kurzrezensionen volkskundlicher Werke" (translation of the title: "Short Reviews of ethnographic Works"), pp. 222–227]



It was no coincidence that Cox, a Dutchman, allowed me unrestricted access to examine the Nazi era files of the Bonner Volkskunde and of the Institut für geschichtliche Landeskunde; his predecessor had not allowed this, let alone had he initiated it. This happened first in the context of an internship during my studies, then also in the context of my cultural anthropological dissertation in Los Angeles about Hans Naumann. I published many of the particulars on Bonn ethnology in the appendix to the dissertation.

[See my book *Der göttliche und der Glaube an Deutschlands Größe und heilige Sendung: Hans Naumann als Volkskundler und Germanist im Nationalsozialismus* (translation of the title: *The Divine Concept of Folklore and the Faith in Germany's Greatness and Holy Mission: Hans Naumann as an Ethnologist and Germanist under National Socialism*. Single volume edition. Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 2000 2nd ed. (1995 1st ed.), pp. 606; on the history of Bonn ethnology, pp. 462–494, 554–556. Important reviews in: *Mitteilungen des Marbacher Arbeitskreises für Geschichte und Germanistik* (journal title translation: *Reports of the Marbach Working Group for History and German Studies*) (German Literature Archive) 7+8/1994 (November 15): 29 and by Esther Gajek in: *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* (journal title translation: *Bavarian Yearbook of Ethnology* 1996: 213–214]

The most frightening information at the time, and up to that point completely unknown, related to the fact that Prof. Joseph Plassmann, Obersturmbannführer of the SS (Schutzstaffel) and department head in the SS Ahnenerbe (the Ahnenerbe was an institute in Nazi Germany purposed to research the archaeological and cultural history of the Aryan race), was appointed director in 1944 (*ibid.*, p. 492). Of course, he never took office, but that does not explain why his name was never mentioned after 1946

and does not appear in the university's annual report and course catalogue. Other persons are also mentioned in the catalogue if they were officially appointed but did not then take office for reasons of war. Plassmann sued in vain for his reinstatement, but he surprisingly, given his past, received a pension. This also meant that the university considered him to be a former co-worker.

Links:

- [An obituary by colleagues](#) (in German)
- A much too short [Wikipedia entry](#)
- [Biography in the obituary](#)

References:

- Biography and bibliography up to 2000: Gunther Hirschfelder, Dorothea Schell, Adelheid Schrutka-Rechtenstamm (eds.): *Kulturen – Sprachen – Übergang. A commemorative publication for Heinrich Leonhard Cox upon his 65th birthday.* Böhlau, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2000, pp. XI–XXVI.
- Katrin Bauer, Lina Franken (eds.). *Räume, Dinge, Menschen: Eine Bonner Kulturwissenschaft im Spiegel der Narrative* (translation of the title: *Rooms, Things, People: Bonn Cultural Studies in the Reflection of Narratives.* Waxmann: Münster, 2015, pp. 31–35, 114–115.

