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Josephine Kenworthy

The topsy-turvy World

In order to see the things of
this world correctly, you have
to look at them all
upside down

Balthasar Gracian, 1601-1656

Initiating discussions on the theme of 'Ordo Inversus' within the inter-university working group, Professor Jürgen Söring drew attention to the wealth of material yet to be examined, not only among the great literary examples which spring to mind, Pantagruel, Don Quijote, Gulliver and the illustrative arts inspired by them, but also to a host of other sources seeking in different ways to overturn the values and multiply the perspectives on and of this world. Echoing Günter Böhmer in his introduction to the Goethe Institute's 1985 Exhibition, 'The Topsy-Turvy World', researchers were admonished to further enhance understanding of the often 'grotesquely bizarre, yet provocatively inventive which maintains a knife-edge balance between nonsense and moral criticism'.

Each of the articles assembled in this volume seeks in its own way to do just that; collectively the papers go a long way in answering the initial call to research the conceptual borders of the theme at hand. The first seven papers collected here represent the culmination of the year's work on 'Ordo Inversus' and were presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Comparative Literature Society in Yverdon on June 26th & 27th, 1998, complemented by two key research papers discussed during the year's working group sessions – 'Die verkehrte Welt als ironischer Blick des Erzählers auf die richtige in *Lalebuch* (1597) und *Don Quijote* (1605/1615)' by Rupert Kalkofen of the University of St. Gallen and 'Ordo inversus chez Daniil Harms. A la recherche de l'ordre perdu' by Andrei Dobritsyn of the University of Fribourg.

Further introduction or discussion at this juncture would intrude both upon the precious space allotted and on the reader's patience. The essays in this volume speak for themselves, providing a kaleidoscope of perspectives – not just upside down – and a feast of intellectual delights.