

Jürgen Barkhoff, Siobhán Donovan, Leesa Wheatley

Introduction

In this volume of *Germanistik in Ireland*, friends and colleagues of Florian Krobb have come together, on the occasion of his recent retirement as Professor of German from Maynooth University, to mark his most distinguished career in German Studies and to honour a man, whose wide scholarship and unwavering presence in German Studies in Ireland and beyond has had a substantial influence on our discipline over the last thirty years. In this *Festschrift*, colleagues from Ireland, the UK, the three German-speaking countries and South Africa present *Explorations in Literary History* that engage in various ways with Florian's extensive range of scholarly interests.

Florian is, quite simply, a giant within Irish and international Germanistik. An extraordinarily prolific scholar, since his retirement Florian's research output is only gathering apace. He continues to serve on advisory and editorial boards, present at and organise international conferences, keep on writing and producing high-quality research. This he seems to do effortlessly, nonchalantly, almost "nebenbei", while always finding plenty of time for family commitments, hiking trips, travels to Germany, the South of France and South Africa, and to keep up his and Sabine's long tradition of hospitality and conviviality – interrupted only temporarily by the pandemic.

His long and diverse list of publications reprinted in this volume (excluding his over hundred review articles – more on these below) is nothing short of staggering, especially when considering the wide variety of topics, starting with the Middle Ages and going right up to twenty-first-century German-speaking literature – with everything else in between: most notably, German-Jewish writing, German classicism, the Wallenstein complex, German Realism, literature of the Weimar period, Austrian literature, literature dealing with youth and adolescence, and, of course, his special interest in the German discourse on Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In its characteristic mix of philological and historical perspectives, of careful textual interpretations and multiperspectival contextualizations, Florian's scholarship is profound and engaging, stupendous in its breadth and depth, and highly influential.

Florian is still adjunct professor at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and the African continent holds a special place in his heart. Since his two most recent (African) books from 2021, Florian's list of monographs has now reached double digits. He has published over 125 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and penned handbook and encyclopaedia entries. Florian is, of course, also an unparalleled editor, who has collaborated with umpteen colleagues from all corners of Ireland and the world (many of whom have contributed to the

current volume), to produce no fewer than nineteen volumes (literary editions, translations, collections of essays, conference proceedings and handbooks), and many special or thematic editions of the three yearbooks of which he has been co-general editor.

One of these, is, of course, our own green yearbook, *Germanistik in Ireland*. Many of us in Irish Germanistik remember very well the seminal meeting in the Goethe Institute in 2004 where Florian was instrumental in setting up the German Studies Association of Ireland, initially called the Association of Third Level Teachers of German in Ireland, and at which he also proposed establishing a yearbook or journal to showcase the work being produced by Germanist*innen on the island of Ireland. Together with Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa, he edited the first four volumes, and has contributed to many others since then, either with articles, with reviews, or with general advice. Not long after Florian stepped down from his position, Sabine, his co-author and collaborator on many other projects, took it on for many years. We could rename it the “Krobb Yearbook”, and it is most fitting that our tribute to Florian is housed in this year’s green volume.

Its first four articles form a cluster around Africa themes, reflecting the focus of much of Florian’s work for the last decade. After that the contributions are grouped chronologically, speaking to many of Florian’s scholarly preoccupations such as German-Jewish writing, Schiller and the classics, Raabe and realism and contemporary Austrian literature, thus picking up in a variety of ways Florian’s manifold *Explorations in Literary History*.

* * *

The scholarly community as a whole has access to and profits from Florian’s research, but not all of us have had the privilege of being taught by him. To capture his genuine passion for teaching and his extraordinary talent as a pedagogue, so inseparable from his scholarship, here are a few reminiscences from Leesa Wheatley, co-editor of this volume, and a former student of Florian’s.

“It was a great pleasure for me to be invited to co-edit this *Festschrift* dedicated to Florian, who has been an academic mentor to me for many years now, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and beyond. Florian was very actively involved in the teaching programme in German Studies in Maynooth during his long career there. He taught a wide range of courses, from language classes at all levels to courses on literature and society dealing with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He also taught modules on modern German and European history, contemporary writing from the German-speaking countries and translation studies and practice, while his elective modules encompassed subjects such as medieval studies. Indeed, as an undergraduate, I took this elective module, and I can still vividly remember sitting in Hall D in the Arts’ Building on a Wednesday morning, tapping away to the rhythm of the text, figuring out bar lines, upbeats and stresses as Florian introduced us to ‘Metrisierung’. Florian was often so absorbed in such

topics that he easily captured his audience's attention – his enthusiasm was as palpable as it was infectious. He equally strove to involve his students in discussions and debates, and there was never any doubt that Florian loved and was dedicated to what he did. Moreover, he was always understanding and encouraging, giving his students a little push here and there when needed.

Florian's reputation as a lecturer is also reflected in the numerous postgraduate theses he mentored: he supervised a total of six PhD theses to completion, ranging in topics from twentieth-century Austrian literature and German-Jewish themes to nineteenth-century travel writing. He also supervised several MPhil theses, more than fifteen minor Masters' theses, and served as mentor for two Irish Research Council-funded postdoctoral researchers.

As a supervisor and mentor, Florian never beat about the bush. He is a meticulous and critical reader, and to this day I still remember the first two pieces of feedback I received after he perused a draft chapter of my PhD thesis: A "quote" is something you get from a plumber, and, "reference, reference, reference properly from the very beginning!" One of the things that stands out the most about Florian is his remarkable breadth of expertise in many diverse areas. He constantly had the bigger picture in mind, always giving generous pointers as to how this comment or that point of view would fit into wider debates and contexts. For many students, this opened up new perspectives and completely new areas of interest that enriched their work and motivated them to delve deeper. Florian treated his students with great respect, and encouraged them where encouragement was needed, be that to give a paper at a seminar or network at a conference. He was always tactful, appreciating and acknowledging not only students' strengths, but also their weaknesses.

Finally, Florian got the job done. Any student who worked with Florian knew and very much appreciated his dedication and reliability, whether he was helping with a funding application, providing progress reports, or, of course, giving feedback on draft chapters and papers; he always delivered when he said he would. For his mentees, this formed a solid basis for their work together.

It has been an honour to work with Florian and to work on this *Festschrift* for him."

* * *

Research and teaching are what really drive Florian, like most of us, but there is of course so much more to the job. Florian also always took very seriously what is generally subsumed under Service – with a capital 'S' – to the institution and the discipline. He was appointed to Maynooth in 1991, following completion of a PhD from Göttingen, supervised by Albrecht Schöne, one of the most respected and most influential Germanists of his generation. He also had a teaching qualification for the German Gymnasium under his belt as well as three years as DAAD Lektor at Oxford, teaching at Balliol, Exeter, Pembroke, Wadham and Worcester Colleges.

Immediately upon arrival in Ireland, he threw himself with gusto into academic life at his new university and within Ireland more generally. Three times he served

as Head of German, invigorating and modernizing the department and providing collegial and transformative leadership for a total of nine years. Florian spearheaded the development of several new and innovative programmes at all levels: BA, MA and PhD. He was instrumental in bringing together the then Departments of French, German, and Spanish to form the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures in 2010, and he served as Head of the newly established School for three years, setting it up for impressive successes in subsequent years. In this capacity he also initiated and saw through the establishment of Chinese Studies as an independent subject in 2011. Florian's commitment to academic self-governance extended well beyond his discipline and his School. He was a member of the Governing Authority of his university from 2000 to 2005 and subsequent to that served on both the Research Committee and the Teaching and Learning Committee of Maynooth's Academic Council.

Florian also involved himself very actively in service of German Studies in Ireland and beyond. He co-organized many international conferences and, in 2003, brought the CUTG, the Conference of University Teachers of German in Great Britain and Ireland – as the AGS was then named – to Maynooth. He served as External Examiner in Ireland, the UK and Switzerland on many occasions and has been a reviewer for countless scientific organisations and funding bodies in Ireland, the UK and across Europe. He was for many years a Trustee of the UK's Modern Humanities Research Association and in recognition of his work became an honorary life member of the MHRA in 2016.

A real mark of Florian's dedication to our discipline is the support of academic journals in German Studies and neighbouring disciplines. He has invested enormous time and energy as peer reviewer for over a dozen prestigious and influential periodicals and as a member of advisory and editorial boards of, for example, the *Publications of the English Goethe Society* and *Recherches Germaniques*. For many years he was joint editor of the *Jahrbuch der Wilhelm-Raabe Gesellschaft* and editor of *Austrian Studies*.

Another aspect of this deep commitment to scholarly exchange has been Florian's tireless work as a reviewer. Over the years Florian has published 120 reviews of new publications in journals such as *Modern Language Review*, *Colloquia Germanica*, *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, *Germanistik in Ireland*, *Austrian Studies*, *Journal for European Studies*, *Germanistik*, *Monatshefte* and many others. His interest in the work of colleagues – young and old and at every career stage – and his respect for their work and their achievements come across so strongly in these reviews, which judiciously balance praise with critical observations, where deemed necessary. As they are too numerous to feature in his list of publications at the end of this volume, they deserve to be called out here.

We all know Florian as a colleague and friend who is down-to-earth and modest, and who dislikes pathos and formality. But we hope he will permit us to say here what needs to be said.

Florian, we are hugely grateful for your exceptional contribution to our discipline in over three decades. Your work in all its aspects has contributed substantially to the visibility, vibrancy and high standing of German Studies in Ireland. We marvel at your undimmed enthusiasm and stamina and we eagerly await your next publications. As you embark on the next phase of your life, together with Sabine, your dear wife and collaborator on many fronts, who has just joined you in well-deserved retirement (from University College Dublin), we include her in our warm thanks and wish you both all the best for the future.