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# Gerhard Schulz FAHA

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1928 – 2022

Gerhard Schulz, Professor Emeritus of Germanic Studies in the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne, died in the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2022. The leading Germanist of his generation in Australia, Professor Schulz in his day was one of the most highly regarded scholars of German Studies in the world. His many contributions to what Jürgen Habermas once called Germany's most significant intellectual achievement, namely German Romanticism, placed him at the forefront of global scholarship in the field of German Studies. His dedication to scholarship sustained this eminence over several decades. In an article drawing attention to the importance of Professor Schulz's work immediately after his death, Germany's most influential daily newspaper (the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) called Professor Schulz "the most intelligent friend of Romanticism". At a time in the post-war period when German Romanticism had come under suspicion, Professor Schulz disambiguated the movement for a wide range of readers in Germany and abroad, assessed the contribution of both its most notable and its lesser-known proponents, and outlined the relevance of the movement for intellectual and social life today. He did so in a series of eloquently composed works of the highest quality. He was indeed "the most intelligent" among the cognoscenti of this literary movement anywhere in the world.

Born in the eastern German town of Löbau in 1928 during the last years of the Weimar Republic, Gerhard experienced at close quarters some of the most momentous geo-political events of the past one hundred years. These events left their imprint on his life and ensured that it would not wholly resemble the ivory tower existence of the popular imagination. He came to intellectual maturity in the early years of the German Democratic Republic, receiving his doctorate in German literature from the University of

Leipzig in 1958, three years before the erection of the Berlin Wall. Soon after the degree was awarded, Gerhard, his wife Christel and their two young children, Dorothea and Christoph, escaped across the border to the West, Christel distracting attention from their true intentions by washing the windows of their upstairs apartment on the day of her departure with the children, Gerhard following a few weeks later. Gerhard's work on German Romanticism had already come to the attention of Richard Samuel, the incumbent Chair of Germanic Studies at the University of Melbourne, who, an emigré himself, assisted the departure of the Schulzes with an offer of employment in Australia. Gerhard was to become Samuel's successor in the Chair of German at Melbourne within a decade. Before that elevation occurred, Gerhard held research and academic appointments at Melbourne, Adelaide and the University of Western Australia, the latter in 1965 in the role of inaugural Chair of German Studies. Gerhard took up the appointment of Chair of Germanic Studies at Melbourne in 1969, a position he held until his retirement from the University in 1993.

During his 24 years as Chair of Germanic Studies, Gerhard continued Richard Samuel's legacy, cementing Melbourne's reputation as a leading department of German Studies in Australia and far beyond. His personal contribution to this reputation was, of course, overwhelming. Among a great many distinguished publications, Gerhard's magisterial two-volume study of German Classicism and Romanticism under the title of *Die deutsche Literatur zwischen Französischer Revolution und Restauration* ranks as the most significant. The two books that make up this study – *Das Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution 1789–1806*, published in 1983, and *Das Zeitalter der napoleonischen Kriege und der Restauration 1806–1830*, published in 1989, both with the esteemed publisher Beck in Munich – are still considered landmark studies of this period. While these were sustained works of literary-critical accomplishment, they revealed only one of Gerhard's many talents as an author. Among other strings to Gerhard's bow was a capacity to render a complex argument intelligible in the short form known in German as the "Feuilleton". In 1974 Gerhard was approached by Marcel Reich-Ranicki to write for the literary section of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), a task he took on with enthusiasm. Over the next four decades, Gerhard penned more than 250 short pieces on current German literature, many of them masterpieces of wit, eloquence and erudition that were to provide a post-war generation of readers in Germany with guidance about the worth of a literature shaped by the German cultural project known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("dealing

with the past"). Not for the first time did it prove advantageous to Gerhard to communicate his insights from "distant Australia". This distance afforded Gerhard the opportunity to write from conscience, at a remove from Germany's problematic past yet also deeply informed about it, at liberty to share his understanding of worthy literature and to point out literary excesses. It might be too big a claim to say that Gerhard became a household name in Germany as a result of these articles. Nevertheless, it must be noted that his 90th birthday represented a cause for celebration in the literary pages of the FAZ, just as his passing was recorded as an event of significance most recently.

Perhaps it was the experience of writing for a broad intellectual public that whetted Gerhard's appetite for yet another scholarly form at which he was to show his hand and duly excel. This was the form of biography. In 2007, already well into a retirement that was such in name only, Gerhard published a major work of biography on Heinrich von Kleist, the enigmatic misfit of the Romantic age in Germany. To this impressive work, three years later Gerhard added another biography – this time dedicated to the life of Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, better known under his *nom de plume* of Novalis, a writer of enormous personal significance for Gerhard throughout his life. Gerhard had published an authoritative edition of Novalis's works as early as 1969, a work which saw second and third editions in 1981 and 1987. Though he died lamentably young, Novalis is understood today to have been one of the most profound and philosophically important of the German Romantics. In a poetic idiom Gerhard admired, Novalis sought a hybrid language capable of unifying philosophy and poetry – two realms kept apart by their age-old "ancient quarrel". To appreciate Novalis's ambition to overcome the disjuncture between these realms through a program of "poeticizing the world" is to catch a glimpse of Gerhard's muse as well. This became newly evident to me during one of my last visits to Gerhard's home when I noticed for the first time a large section of his personal library – removed from immediate sight, perched just under the ceiling – which was devoted to the works of Plato. I have no way of knowing the proper significance to attach to this fact since we never spoke of Plato. But it seems to me now that Plato's perfect forms were bound up with Gerhard's most deeply held convictions, just as they were for Novalis and the Romantics.

Between 1989 and 1992, Gerhard served as President of the Australian Academy of Humanities. This was a momentous time in Australian higher

education – the time of the Dawkins reforms, of the abolition of the so-called "binary divide" between universities and technical institutions of higher education, and of the advent of large-scale amalgamations among tertiary institutions. For the humanities in Australia, they were uplifting, but also troubled, times, for the introduction of student fees – another initiative carried forward by Dawkins – inevitably cruelled the pitch against areas of the academy that had no ready defence against the economic rationalist arguments then in vogue. Gerhard's response to these circumstances was to hold a steady course, mindful of the challenge of the times, regularly pointing out the social and cultural importance of the humanities. As a young lecturer, I appreciated Gerhard's advocacy for the humanities in these years all the more because I understood the trials of conducting such advocacy in a second language – one Gerhard had been obliged to become proficient at as a result of his emigration to Australia thirty years before. Though Gerhard could hold his own in English and even attain eloquence, he did not always do well in the rough and tumble of faculty disputation, as became evident to me during several turbulent meetings of the Faculty of Arts at Melbourne at that time. Nevertheless, he made a success of his three years at the helm of the Academy of Humanities, noting of this time at the end of his tenure: "When I was asked three years ago whether I would be prepared to stand for the office of President, and was subsequently elected to it, I was surprised, moved and very worried. Nevertheless, I accepted the opportunity to serve this Academy in its highest office, and then enjoyed this service in an atmosphere of collegiality, mutual respect, and freedom of thought as well as expression. This office has been the greatest honour I have received in my career, and I would like to thank the Fellowship for it."

Gerhard received many awards for his scholarship during his lifetime. These include the Goethe Award in 1974 for service in support of the cultivation of the German language abroad and for the promotion of international cultural cooperation, the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) First Class in 1985, and the Eichendorff Medal in 1988 (Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff was another Romantic writer Gerhard revered). Among other honours Gerhard's scholarship attracted were the coveted Research Prize of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (1995) and two honorary doctorates from the University of Oldenburg (2004) and the University of Leipzig respectively. The latter doctorate, conferred by Gerhard's alma mater, is particularly noteworthy in

view of the controversy surrounding Gerhard's departure from East Germany many decades before. The response of the fledgling GDR state to this precipitous flight in July 1958 had been to strip Gerhard of his doctorate. More than half a century later the award was reinstated in a ceremony that must have held enormous personal significance for Gerhard and his wife Christel. Nevertheless, I heard neither rancour nor vainglory from Gerhard about such matters. Perhaps his adopted country had provided all the nourishment and recognition he needed by that time. Nevertheless, the costs of leaving a country to which there was no return – at least none before reunification in 1990 – were great: Gerhard never saw his father again and only once was able to see his mother during a trip to West Germany in 1965. These, of course, were privations visited upon Gerhard's entire family. One can only imagine the difficulty of raising a family in Australia in these early years without the material support and emotional proximity of a wider family network. Christel, Gerhard's constant companion and devoted wife of nearly 70 years, who doubtless bore much of this burden, died before Gerhard in 2020. Gerhard is survived by his daughter Dorothea, his son Christoph and seven grandchildren.

Gerhard leaves a legacy to international German Studies of inestimable importance. He might not have founded Australian German Studies, but he certainly put it securely on the map. To many younger scholars, Gerhard was a friend and mentor as well as a leader, one who showed by example that a life in literature is a life worth having, a life worth fighting for.

**Tim Mehigan FAHA**

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