

Encompass

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Remembering Horst Frenz, founder and innovator

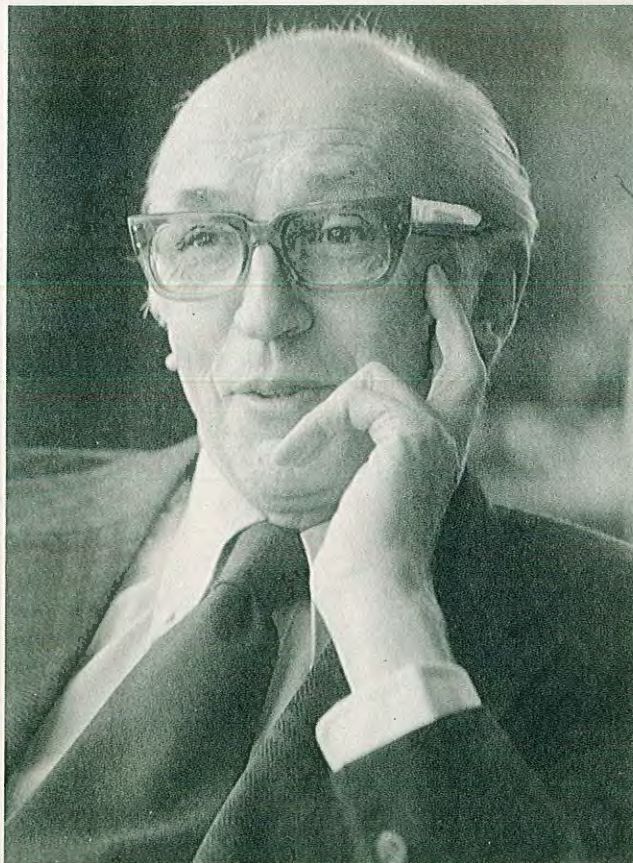
Most people look up at the night sky and are impressed with how many stars they see. A very few scan the firmament and wonder how many stars they *don't* see. There are many who are impressed with all that is known, but there are others who are more impressed with how much there is still to know, and how much we should know and don't. Horst Frenz belonged to the second group, whose gaze is fixed on the empty spaces in the firmament.

Horst Frenz was the product of the best European pedigree, from a culture that regarded itself as the apex of human civilization. Born in Oberlaurigen in northern Bavaria, he studied English, French, and Classics at the University of Breslau, the University of Heidelberg, and the University of Göttingen, where he was awarded a PhD in 1936.

Horst Frenz came of age during the Weimar Republic and left Germany during the Third Reich. His curiosity and his instincts impelled him to look elsewhere. He went to the University of London to study English literature, emigrating to America to attend Allegheny College to pursue his studies. Then, at the University of Illinois, he earned a master's degree in American literature.

He had a lifelong love affair with the United States of America, which was symbolized by his marriage to Evelyn Haerting of Illinois in 1939 and reflected in his abiding interest in Eugene O'Neill. He was always the urbane European, even after he became a

naturalized citizen in 1948, but his love and admiration for this country was boundless. Outside Germany, he rarely spoke German: his pride in being an American was evinced not only in a loyalty to American English, but also



Horst Frenz

by his dedication to the study of American literature.

When American literature was scarcely recognized in America, much less abroad, Horst Frenz was one of the first Continental scholars to take notice. When translation was regarded

as a mere footnote in literary history, an avocation rather than an art, Horst took it seriously as a viable subject of academic study. When the literatures of East Asia were a closed book to most Americans, he insisted that—difficult as it was to master the languages in which these literatures were written—there was no justification for ignoring them. He was, in short, fascinated by what Wallace Stevens characterized as “the nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is.” When he saw lacunae—the nothing that is not there—he tried to fill them; when confronted with empty institutional posturing—the nothing that is—he saw through them.

He started Indiana University's Comparative Literature Program on what he delighted in recalling was a request for pens and pencils. The acorn for that oak was a “supplies and expenses” budget, which he asked for and received in 1949. He started out calling that academic unit a “program”—cannily assuming that the fledgling enterprise would fare better if it posed less of a threat to the traditional departments. He insisted on retaining that title even when the program acquired all the perquisites and

the status of a department—a separate office, its own budget, its own faculty, a PhD-granting authority. The word program represented not only the humble origins of Comparative Literature at Indiana University, but it was

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Our history: A conversation with Henry Remak

With the recent death of Horst Frenz and the retirement of Ulrich Weisstein, I thought it was time to take a look back on the history of our program. So one morning I asked Professor Henry H. H. Remak to tell me about the formation and the development of comparative literature here at Indiana University. This is some of what he had to say.

—Colin Landrum

World War II and the events that preceded and immediately followed it were the main cultural factors in Horst Frenz's shepherding the Comparative Literature Program into existence in 1949. The rule of dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Spain in the 1930s and the war in the 1940s impelled some of the finest scholars of those countries to come to the United States. Their humanistic education brought a new international perspective to American academia. Mr. Frenz, an anti-Nazi, was one of them. After spending a year here as an exchange student in the mid-1930s, he decided that he wanted to work and live in America. I arrived, as a student, at Indiana University from the same direction in 1936; Ulrich Weisstein arrived about ten years later. Agapito Rey, another founder of the program, was an ardent Spanish democrat who didn't want to go back to Franco.

The war did have some long-lasting positive aspects. It internationalized many Americans who otherwise would have had no contact with Europe. A lot of GIs came back with European wives. American isolationism, still very strong in the '20s and '30s, had been unable to insulate the U.S. from the European turmoil. The U.S. became internationalized willy-nilly.

Why did we succeed in getting a long-lived program in Indiana? First, because we found ourselves in a large upcoming university with many resources, but also because Bloomington was small enough that it was easy to get people together. In universities located in larger cities, people live too far from one another to facilitate easy interaction.

The personality of Mr. Frenz also had much to do with the formation of the program he was to head for the next 29 years. Those were the days before the '60s and '70s when democracy had not yet penetrated academia to the extent that it has today. Now every new idea has to be debated by



Henry Remak

committees in a process of formal actions, step by step. In those days, a strong and influential chairman could have his way locally, and through the "Old Boys Network" nationally. Although that term usually has a derogatory connotation, it got things done, sometimes good things. Mr. Frenz was an extremely urbane gentleman, a diplomat of the first order, a person you couldn't say "no" to.

Many universities in the '50s and '60s established Comparative Literature curricula because it was the going thing. We were able to form one because we had scholars on hand who had already done comparative work on their own. Their natural tendencies and personal experiences took them in the direction of bi-national, bi-cultural perspectives. The beginning crew came from national literature departments and from philosophy, still very active today. The first phase of our program was historical and supra-national. The first brochure shows that we still had the idea of extending the national literatures. Mr. Frenz worked on and taught American-German relations, Mr. Rey in Hispanic-American relations, Mr. Pratt in Graeco-Roman relations, Mr. Seeber in Anglo/American-French relations, and I in Franco-German relations. The other extension was supra-national historical movements and in genres. We had courses in Enlightenment, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism and so forth, in the drama, in lyrics, in the novel, etc. Our collaborative book, *Comparative Litera-*

ture: Method and Perspective (1961; revised ed. in 1971) put us on the map as the "Indiana School" nationally, and internationally.

That was the way things went until the late '50s. Even then Mr. Frenz had an eye on the future which showed up in two ways. He saw that East-West studies were going to emerge as a major category. I think our first East-West conference took place as early as 1957. The other new direction was in Literature and the Arts. Mr. Frenz himself did not work principally in that area but encouraged Mr. Weisstein and Mr. Clüver to pursue it.

We got into "literature and . . ." the interdisciplinary dimension to comparative literature, somewhat pragmatically because of the number of scholars who were interested. We didn't start out with an abstract notion. People were interested and it went from there. Mr. Stallknecht had long studied the history of ideas. He was interested in the study of literature and philosophy. He had written a widely recognized book on the philosophy of Wordsworth before he came to Indiana. Herbert Muller was a distinguished cultural historian and a member of the Department of English. He offered a course on literature and society.

"Literature and . . ." became the Indiana trademark. It was controversial because the New Criticism was trying to rehabilitate the study of literature as literature—not as a social, religious, political, or philosophical vehicle. New Critics thought they should be for literature what a physicist was for physical phenomena. Physicists didn't talk about physicists' biographies or the social or philosophical implications of their work—they talked about physical phenomena. The New Critics focused on the text. This had a very positive impact on teaching because American students were notoriously deficient in history. When the classroom discussion focused on the text—and not so much on its historical setting—the teacher and students were able to discuss on a somewhat equal basis. When a teacher talked about a text, the students, with their intelligence and natural flair, could challenge him on the basis of what they have read.

Though many of us believed—and still believe—that the literary text has

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Alumni notes

Margaret E. Meyer Irvin, BA'55, of El Cerrito, Calif., works at a junior high school as an education assistant. She published a book of poetry, called *Full Circle*, in 1989.

Amy L. Sheldon, BA'64, MA'65, was a fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., in 1988-89. She has done research on the ways children's conversations are gendered.

Daphne Patai, BA'65, professor of women's studies and of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was a fellow of the IU Institute for Advanced Study in 1986-87 and has returned to the Institute this year as a visiting scholar.

Donna Smyth Dowdney, MA'68, director of the technical writing program at De Anza College, Cupertino, Calif., is co-author of the book *How to Write and Publish Articles in Nursing*, which has been a winner of the Books of the Year Award from the American Journal of Nursing.

Helen C. Fogarassy, BA'72, author of the novel *Mix Bender*, has been writing since 1974 and co-founded On Paper, an artists' cooperative, supplying New York businesses with office, editing, writing, and public relations services.

Linda L. Barclay, MA'73, PhD'75, earned her MA in counseling and human development from Walsh College and is self-employed at Straight Talk Inc., Canton, Ohio.

Robert K. McMahon, BA'74, professor of East Asian languages and cultures, received tenure with promotion to rank of associate professor at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Michele M. Hilmes, BA'75, assistant professor and chair of communication arts at Spring Hill College, Mobile, Ala., recently published *Hollywood and Broadcasting*.

Henry Remak

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to come first, we were under attack for exactly that reason. The New Critics said, "Now wait a minute. If you are studying literature and painting or music or philosophy, you dilute the study of literature." So people like Mr. Wellek—though we always had good relations with him—attacked us for diluting, evaporating things again.

Since the '70s, we have been in a strongly ideological phase. After the student movements in the '60s and '70s, we had a crisis and a real challenge to traditions. We were told that our critical approaches were, in a sense, the handmaiden of what is called the repressive tradition of a conservative mentality, which said: go to the text and forget the political and ideological implications. It almost sounded as if we had engaged in a conspiracy to perpetuate the Establishment. Some of our faculty members have gravitated in that direction. The younger ones especially became very interested in theory with pronounced ideological/cultural overtones and in the basic structure—they would say the hidden structure and purpose—of the pro-Establishment purposes of literature. The interest in theory has very deep ideological roots or motivations. That doesn't mean it hasn't been very interesting and often intellectually brilliant. The fact that some of them like to call their theories "radical" and "subversive" indicates that they have ideological agendas or *ressentiments* in their scholarly work.

But they certainly cannot be accused of petty conspiracy. They question the very essence of the scholarly tradition, and in that their challenge is existential.

But, while influential, they do not dominate our departmental landscape. We are so pluralized and come from so many different directions, one wonders whether "comparative literature" still has a common core. To be recognized as a separate entity, an academic program must have something in common. In the 1990s we must locate and make "the center hold."

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Remembering Horst Frenz

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also a reminder of an attitude that Horst Frenz wished to preserve: an openness to new developments, an unprepossessing and ironic view of oneself, an impatience with divisions of any kind—whether national, cultural, or departmental. No doubt it amused him to see that the “program” he started was bigger than some departments.

It would not denigrate the value of his publications to say that Horst Frenz’s greatest achievement was the creation of the Comparative Literature Program at Indiana University, which he chaired for 27 years. The Comparative Literature Program became, under Horst’s leadership, one of the premier programs in the country, recognized nationally and internationally. He established a spirit of enterprise and open-mindedness, which ultimately resulted in pioneering

curricula developments: in film, in the study of literature and the other arts, and in Asian-Western literary relations. Each of these new directions encountered skepticism and obloquy from more conservative and myopic custodians of culture.

The innovations that Horst Frenz promoted in comparative literature were recognized nationally when the program was awarded a \$133,000, three-year curriculum development grant in 1974 by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Indiana’s leadership in these areas is often cited by those familiar with the history of these developments.

Happily, Horst did not have to wait until his retirement for recognition. He was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1968-69; the University conferred on him the title of Distinguished Professor of English and of comparative literature in 1969; he was elected president of the American Comparative Literature Association in 1971-74 and president of the International Comparative Literature Association in 1973-

76; and he was the recipient of a doctor of philosophy (*honoris causa*) awarded by the University of Szeged (Hungary) in 1979.

In the end, however, Horst Frenz’s most lasting achievement may be the Comparative Literature Program he founded, for the creation of an institution, the establishment of a tradition, will often outlast citations and awards, which fade in the memory. Those whose careers have been made possible by Horst Frenz can say, with particular feeling, “But for him, I wouldn’t be here.” And so, it is only fitting that, so long as we continue to work and to teach and to write, so long as Horst’s vision persists in the works we publish and the courses we teach, the conferences we organize, he will remain with us: he is present among us.

We offer this memorial with our most earnest respects and our deepest condolences to Horst’s family: his wife, Evelyn; his son, Paul; and his daughter, Sigrid.

—Eugene Eoyang

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