

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Terence Kelso Thayer
(1940-2019)

Terence Thayer lived in Bloomington for nearly 52 years, but his Indiana and Indiana University roots go even deeper than that. Born in Indianapolis in 1940, Terence grew up in the small southeastern Indiana town of North Vernon. His parents were both IU graduates, his mother in journalism and his father in medicine; his brother went on to earn a master's degree in education at IU and his sister in piano performance. The Bloomington campus thus became familiar ground to Terence as he attended the public schools in North Vernon and took part in state scholastic contests. He liked to relate how he got to meet Herman Wells after Wells had addressed visiting contestants in the Indiana Memorial Union and was leaving through the lounge where Terence had opted for a nap instead of a speech. He was seldom caught napping since.

After completing high school in 1958, he enrolled at Oberlin College, where he received the A.B. degree summa cum laude in German in 1962. He spent the following year as a Fulbright scholar in Tübingen, Germany, together with his new wife, the former Diane Weiss, whom he met at Oberlin. Although the two lived in a tiny village where Swabian dialect was spoken, Terence managed to develop his command of the standard language and studied German literary history at the university, while he and Diane began their long hiking and bird-watching career, as well as their lifelong travels together with trips to Germany, Denmark, France, and Greece.

Upon his return to the United States, Terence entered the Ph.D. program at Harvard with the Woodrow Wilson fellowship he had been awarded as a senior at Oberlin. He completed the program four years later with a dissertation on the pivotal

eighteenth-century German author Klopstock. During his last two years, he taught sections in German language and comparative literature, receiving a Harvard Graduate Society Prize for teaching in 1966. In an environment of plentiful academic jobs, Terence was contacted by Frank Ryder at Indiana, and, among other interested programs, the one at Indiana made the best overall impression. He came to Bloomington to stay in September 1967 at the age of 26 as a new assistant professor in the department, then called Germanic Languages. Terence recalls that the decision to return to Indiana to live and work after having moved away was a difficult one, but he still calls it a good one. So do we.

With the exception of a two-quarter visiting appointment at the University of California at San Diego in 1972, a Humboldt research fellowship in Hamburg in 1976, and Fulbright and DAAD summer seminars in Germany in the 1980s, Terence spent his entire career here in Bloomington, teaching for somewhat more than 37 years on the Bloomington campus. Sabbatical leaves were spent working with resources in the Main Library. He was promoted to associate professor in 1972 and to full professor in 1983.

The results of Terence's Humboldt, Fulbright, DAAD, and IU-sponsored research can be appreciated by reading his splendidly written articles published during the 1970s and 1980s. Poetry was his first love and Klopstock clearly the favored object of his attentions; yet, there is a thematic unity that runs through most of his work, which also includes analyses of prose and drama by Kleist, Mörike, Mann, and Böll. In essay after essay, it is fame—that intimation of an "eternal literary afterlife" in the poets who so ardently seek it—that piques Terence's curiosity and exercises his exquisite command of

the English language. And fame, or the effective afterlife that the desire for fame can achieve, might best describe Terence's legacy in Bloomington and at Indiana University.

Kleist, Terence tells us, saw three areas in which one can survive one's own mortality: family, intellectual work, and great deeds. Though grandly successful in one of these areas, Kleist was notoriously unsuccessful in the other two. Not so Terence. In quiet moments on the sixth floor of Ballantine, Terence could transform himself into one half of an intrepid, inseparable, and adventurous couple who explored the tropical rainforest of one of the lesser known Hawaiian islands, or flew to the even less frequently visited natural wildlife refuge that the Midway Islands have become, or traveled the Aleutian Archipelago by supply ship, crossing the Bering Straits to set foot on Siberian soil. Many IU faculty families got to know Diane through her work as a senior program director at the Monroe County YMCA, where she guided the yoga program, among several others, for over twenty years. Terence and Diane's daughter, Gwynn Thayer, is associate head and chief curator of North Carolina State University's Special Collections Research Center and faculty affiliate in the history department. Their son, Alex Thayer, works as an emergency room physician in Los Angeles.

The time Terence cherished with his wife, family, and the wide world was well-earned by doing good deeds, that is, by his teaching and service to the university community. As did most of his faculty colleagues, Terence taught a wide range of courses over the years, extending from elementary to advanced-intermediate German language skills, German literature for undergraduate majors and minors, and German literature in translation to the introduction to graduate study in German literature, eighteenth-century German literature, and German poetry, the last-mentioned his favorite

course. In 1992, Terence received the Graduate Teaching Award conferred annually by Germanic Studies' graduate students. From time to time, Terence was able to teach the great books course in the Honors College curriculum, which involved intensive writing instruction as well. He also designed and taught a Freshman Intensive Seminar on Vietnam War films.

Throughout his years at Indiana, Terence remained steadily active in service roles, primarily on the Bloomington campus. Most noteworthy among these were as Germanic Studies' director of undergraduate studies for two four-year terms, as a member of the College's curriculum and tenure committees in the 1970s and 1980s, and as chair of the Bloomington campus Committee on Retiring Faculty from 1988 to 2004. The last-named committee coordinates and helps prepare the Bloomington provost's (formerly, chancellor's) annual reception in honor of the year's faculty retirees. As committee chair, Terence secured and edited, by his own estimate, some 500 biographical sketches—such as the present one—for distribution at this event. And if there is a great deed to relate, it most surely was his tenure as department chair from 1992–2000. Terence's integrity, professional ethics, sound judgment, and steady and unassuming leadership led the department through the crisis years of the 1990s and preserved its stature as one of the best Germanic Studies departments in the country.

Terence taught his last class—one of the two courses he had taught in his first semester here—during the first eight-week session of the fall 2004 semester and retired at the end of October. He brought to his teaching, research, and administrative duties a subtle, little noticed, but sincere passion. I believe that the attentive reader can discern the quiet fire that illuminates Terence's care and carefulness in the following passage from

an essay on a famous war story by Heinrich Böll. “Who speaks for the dead?” Terence asks. “That is, who will represent them to their future as victims instead of heroes, exposing their sacrifice as passion and exchanging their fame for the mourning of their survivors? History as event, Böll’s story shows, is what killed the dead, and history as narrative will speak not for the dead, but for the event under which the dead are subsumed. The monuments and memorial plaques merely perpetuate the captivity in which their passion originally took place.”

Terence was a good man, a good human being. In truth, more than that can be said of no one.

We request that this memorial resolution be presented to the members of the Bloomington Faculty Council and that it be preserved in its minutes and archives. After its presentation, copies of the memorial resolution should be sent to members of Terence’s family.

William Rasch
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