

In Honor of Brian McGuinness

Josef Mitterer

My relation to Brian McGuinness is the respectful relation of a younger colleague and -- many years back -- the relation of an admiring student who met him in Graz where he became an honorary professor in 1988.

The achievements of Brian McGuinness have been praised so often and by so many that it is not easy to say something new, to find new praise which has not been offered already by someone else.

The basic data:

Brian was born 90 years and 4 days ago -- he studied at Oxford university and spent 35 years a Tutor, as a Fellow and a University Lecturer at Queens College. From 1989 to 2002 he was a Professor of History of Scientific Thought at the University of Siena.

From the list of universities where he taught as a guest professor: Stanford, Princeton, Beijing, Rome, Leiden, Graz ...

Brian McGuinness has authored and edited more than 30 books.

They include a new translation of the Tractatus, the edition and translation of the Prototractatus -- both together with David Pears -- and together with Joachim Schulte he published the definitive edition of the Tractatus, one of the most influential philosophical books of the 20th century.

It is safe to say that nobody in Academia has done as much for the recognition of Wittgenstein in particular and of Austrian Philosophy in general as Brian McGuinness in the course of 60 years of writing and lecturing.

The academic world is inhabited by a variety of species. A very rare one is that of the geniuses who publish very little in their lifetime but fill notebooks, journals and "Zettel" with ideas -- (nowadays more likely hard discs or memory sticks)

which are then left to hardworking academics who clear up the mess and edit collected works which establish the lasting fame and influence of those thinkers. Who would Ludwig Wittgenstein be in philosophy without Brian McGuinness, without von Wright, Elisabeth Anscombe or, to begin with, Bertrand Russell, Ogden and Ramsey?

What status would Friedrich Waismann and other Austrian philosophers of the Vienna Circle have without the tireless editorial work of Brian McGuinness spanning more than six decades?

He edited --- and let's emphasize: these are not the usual editions of conference proceedings with papers hardly anybody ever reads --- he edited works by Friedrich Waismann, Otto Neurath, Hans Hahn, Ernst Mach, Frege, Schächter and of course Ludwig Wittgenstein -- and add to these volumes a large number of articles on problems and issues related to these authors.

To single out one seminal book he wrote: "Wittgenstein a Life: Young Ludwig" was first published in 1988 and it is still in print in many languages including Japanese.

Some reactions on this book which has become the standard biography on the young Ludwig Wittgenstein:

A. J. Ayer:

"His account of the mutual impact of Wittgenstein and his Cambridge friends and mentors, particularly Russell, is uniformly brilliant ... McGuinness's book is indispensable reading."

Michael Dummett:

"The first life of the philosopher to be worthy of its subject ... It must have been an intensely difficult task, which has been magnificently accomplished."

Anthony Storr:

"Will obviously become the standard biography in English ... a vivid picture of an extraordinarily interesting human being."

Simon Blackburn:

"His 1988 biography, "Young Ludwig", is a fascinating account of Wittgenstein's life and also provides one of the best introductions to the ideas and the style of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus."

Brian McGuinness has transferred his scientific papers and research materials to the Brenner Archive at the University of Innsbruck.

This is by any standard a scientific treasure: Like no one else Brian McGuinness has searched for documents and other materials on the life and work of Ludwig Wittgenstein -- the most extensive collection there must be -- and these papers include an enormous amount of correspondence between Brian and friends and family of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Just one example may be the voluminous correspondence with the eminent Chinese philosopher Tscha Hung who did his PhD with Moritz Schlick in Vienna. There is no doubt that his *Vorlass*, his research papers will provide the basis for future research projects and editions.

I have spoken to philosophers from Britain, Germany and the USA who already plan to come to Innsbruck to inspect the materials of Brian McGuinness on Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.

There are friends and collaborators of Brian McGuinness who could not join us today -- some of them have sent short messages.... These friends are younger than Brian and this should be a strong indication that his achievements will continue to have an impact on the academic research and discourse.

I start with the message of Antonia Soulez, a philosopher from Paris:

Dear Brian: you have introduced me into the philosophy of Wittgenstein in such a way to understand more than just a philosophy to read. You have helped me to dig out all the best reasons to make a life with discovering step by step the depths of a magnificent thinker that has illuminated my work in its relation to the arts with its musical ramifications. You have been a 'rencontre' in the strong vital-intellectual sense.

Alois Pichler from the Wittgenstein Archive in Bergen, Norway:

Dear Brian

About 15 years ago you said something which I didn't really understand then. You suggested about our Bergen Electronic Edition that it was "an edition for the use of other editors". It took me some years to see that you were, as always, completely clear-sighted and right: Our editorial work and editions mark only new beginnings and not an end to Wittgenstein editing. We at the Bergen Archives are extremely obliged to you for all the comments, help, corrections and guidance we have received from you.

Tusen tusen takk, Brian, og Gratulerer med dagen.

Radmila Schweitzer from the Wittgenstein Initiative in Vienna:

Dear Brian, it is an honour and a privilege to know you and to work with you, and an enormous pleasure to witness your immense culture and sense of humour. Thank you for everything!

The director of the Vienna Circle Archive, Friedrich Stadler, sends his congratulations to the “*Pioneer of Wittgenstein Research*”.

He writes Brian McGuinness is one of the most renowned scholars in contemporary philosophy. His expertise on Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle is an unique and enduring contribution to the scientific community and to intellectual life.

Toni Unterkircher from the Brenner Archives:

Dear Brian,

I have had the honour to work with you on the first edition of the electronic edition of the “Gesamtbriefwechsel”, the complete correspondence of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Through working on and archiving your scientific papers, your “Vorlass”, I am only now starting to understand how you have become through your tireless research of 60 years the most eminent researcher of the life and work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Joseph Wang from the Brenner Archives:

Dear Brian, as a young student I have had the privilege to work with you and Allan. From Allan I got to know the beauty of ideas; from you the true meaning of wisdom. Thank you very much and Congratulations!

Joseph.

There are more personal wishes and congratulations which I am happy to relate: from Walter Methlagl, the founder and first director of the Brenner Archives, from Johann Holzner, his successor from Ilse Somavilla and Michael Schorner, both from the Brenner Archive, and then from Volker Munz in Klagenfurt --- and these include only those to whom I was able to speak to personally.

Yet there is one more congratulant whom I am pleased to mention -- earlier this week I spoke to Christoph Cardinal Schönborn from Vienna. He sends his very best wishes and congratulations to your birthday and to the honorary doctorate.

--- I may add that the sister of the Cardinal worked as an *au pair* for the McGuinness family...

His longtime friend, collaborator, co-editor and translator Joachim Schulte wrote *that the Electronic Edition of Wittgensteins „Gesamtbriefwechsel“ is an indispensable tool of each and every Wittgenstein researcher just as much as the collection of letters and documents „Wittgenstein in Cambridge“*. His research still forms the starting basis of any scientific discussion of Wittgenstein.

Some 25 years ago Joachim Schulte published together with Görand Sundholm a Festschrift for Brian McGuinness, *“Criss-Crossing a Philosophical Landscape”*, where they expressed *“the hope that the community of scholars shall long be able to benefit from Brian McGuinness’ learning and industry.”*

Indeed there is yet a new project Brian McGuinness is working on right now -- A new, revised and expanded edition of the *“Wittgenstein Family Letters”* is forthcoming in English and German editions very soon.

And again it will be as painstakingly carefully edited as any other book he published. He is working on it with all the scrutiny, preciseness and style which are so characteristic for all his works.

The University of Innsbruck honours with Brian McGuinness one of the outstanding academic philosophers of our times – and the honour it bestows upon him is as well an honour for the university.

Brian – the University of Innsbruck which soon will celebrate it’s 350 years anniversary is now your Alma Mater!