

Fact sheet: Hinrich-Schmidt Henkel (born 1959)

Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel (born 1959) is a leading German translator. He studied German and French at the University of Saaland in Saarbrücken, Germany. Since 1987, he has translated a wide range of literary works, including novels, plays, poetry and books for children and young adults, from Norwegian (both Bokmål and Nynorsk), Danish, French and Italian into German. He served as a member of the board of the German society of literary translators VdÜ from 2008 until 2021, acting as the organisation's president for the first nine years.

Schmidt-Henkel has translated a number of Norwegian authors, including Kjell Askildsen, Jon Fosse, Henrik Ibsen, Cecilie Løveid, Tarjei Vesaas and Ruth Lillegraven. He has played a key role in bringing Jon Fosse to an international readership by translating almost all of his works. He has also helped to rekindle the German public's interest in Tarjei Vesaas through his translations of *The Ice Palace (Is-slottet)* and *The Birds (Fuglane)*.

Schmidt-Henkel is famed for the high literary quality of his translations. In addition to his translations, he has been an important ambassador for Norwegian literature in Germany. He has organised literary events, been an active communicator in the German publishing and theatre sector and helped to strengthen cultural exchange between Norway and Germany. He has also served as an adviser to and spokesperson for Hamburg's Senator for Culture, Christina Weiss (1991–1993). Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel currently lives and works in Berlin.

See attached CV including a list of all Schmidt-Henkel's translations.

Awards and nominations

Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel has received a number of prestigious awards and distinctions for his work as a translator. Here is a selection:

- The Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, Knight 1st Class (2018)
- *Preis der Stadt Münster für Internationale Poesie*, along with Jon Fosse, for Fosse's poem *Denne Uforklarlege Stille (Diese unerklärliche Stille)* (2017)
- *Übersetzerpreis der Theaterbiennale „Neue Stücke aus Europa“* for Matias Faldbakken's *Kaldt Produkt (Kaltes Produkt)* (2008)
- *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* for his translation of Jon Fosse's *Søster (Schwester)* (2007)
- For his work on French texts, he was awarded the *Straelener Übersetzerpreis der Kunststiftung NRW* with Frank Heibert for their retranslation of Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style (Stilübungen)* and both translators' collected works (2017). He was named a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 2014 and received the Paul Celan Prize in 2004.

In addition, Schmidt-Henkel has received numerous artist grants and residencies. He has been nominated three times for the Leipzig Book Fair Translation Prize, most recently in 2021 for his retranslation of Tarjei Vesaas's *Fuglane (Die Vögel)*.

Winner of the Fosse Prize for Translators 2025 – the jury's statement

The prize winner has been exceptionally important for Norwegian literature abroad. Since Henrik Ibsen's day, the German language area has always been the most important gateway to the world for Norwegian authors. Ibsen's contemporary dramas were published in German almost immediately

after they became available in Norwegian. The German book market is one of the largest in the world, and the most important door-opener to the rest of the world. The impact of Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel's outstanding translations therefore ripples out far beyond the 87 books he has translated from Norwegian into German since 1987.

Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel has translated a large number of Norwegian authors and playwrights into German, including Kjell Askildsen, Cecilie Løveid, Henrik Ibsen, Tarjei Vesaas, Ruth Lillegraven and Jon Fosse. His translations maintain an exceptionally high literary standard, not only in the way they are crafted, but also in the choice of works. He has built an impressive and diverse bibliography spanning prose, drama, poetry and children's books.

He has been widely praised for 'discovering' Jon Fosse's oeuvre at an early stage – as far back as 1995 – when he saw one of his plays in Bergen. Schmidt-Henkel contacted the author directly and embarked on a series of translations. These had been completed before Fosse's breakthrough as a playwright in Germany, which was a huge advantage when German interest in Fosse's works increased. It meant the first productions of Fosse's plays in Germany could have their pick of the best directors. Jon Fosse's success in Germany, and France as well, has contributed substantially to his works gaining worldwide attention.

Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel's translations of Henrik Ibsen have also been embraced by theatre directors in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

One of his German publishers put it simply: "No one speaks more beautifully about the books they translate than Hinrich, and no one else makes the linguistic richness of both the original text and the translation more concise and visible." His retranslations have "made Tarjei Vesaas more accessible for German readers through translations that are overwhelmingly beautiful, precise and contemporary, as well as through tireless efforts at book launches and a variety of events".

The prize winner has been an exceptional communicator of and ambassador for Norwegian literature in Germany, as both the organiser and moderator of literary events and as a dedicated participant in various parts of the sector, including the German publishing industry and theatre world, in addition to the field of translation. He has been responsible for countless readings and presentations of Norwegian authors, both those he himself has translated and others. Furthermore, he has for decades been at the forefront of the struggle to promote translators' rights and raise their profile, through important positions in the German literary translators' organisation.

Early in his career, Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel wrote articles and radio programmes about the wealth of Norwegian literature for children and young adults. In 1994, he organised the *Nordische Literaturtage* festival at the Literaturhaus in Hamburg. In 2019, when Norway was the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, he contributed to more than 50 events, both during the fair itself and elsewhere during the year – at festivals, literature centres, bookshops and the Norwegian embassy in Berlin.

The jury, on this basis, awards the prize to Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel for his significant work in translating Norwegian literature and drama into German, emphasizing his entire body of translation work and his substantial efforts in promoting Norwegian literature and culture.