

Das Blatt

The American Goethe Society's Electronic Newsletter

Barbara W. Alsip, Editor

August 2008

This issue of Das Blatt marks the end of Irmgard Wagner's term as AGS president and the beginning of that for Erika Joyce (president) and Sharon Higgins (vice president).

The Vision of Irmgard Wagner for The American Goethe Society

When Irmgard was elected AGS president in 2004, she began her tenure in May. At that May business meeting, there were only 13 people present of 24 members, and not all of attendees were yet members and one or two opted not to stay as members.

You must understand that prior to 2004, the American Goethe Society consisted of area German professors. They met once a month during the academic year for a lecture in German and for refreshments. That was it.

Think of it: There were no book conversations, no *lyrik* lunches, no drama readings, no Classical Oktoberfest, no annual lectures on art and philosophy, no Web site, and no newsletter. In effect, Irmgard literally re-invented a moribund organization. Trautlieb Hülz, Cultural Attaché at the German Embassy until her retirement in June 2007, told me that the best thing that Irmgard had done for the health and growth of the society was to have some events in English. That decision opened the horizons of the membership to where it stands today—nearly 100 members strong and a 4-year history of 16 book conversations, 10 *lyrik* lunches, 11 plays (with each act read at a different session), 3 art and 4 philosophy lectures, and 4 Classical Oktoberfests.

Although I have known Irmgard 29 years, I have nonetheless been delighted and amazed at the choices she has made for AGS programs. You only have to think of the authors selected for book conversations (Grass, Sebald, Mann, Jünger, Jelinek, Kehlmann, among others); the playwrights for the drama readings (Lessing, Kleist, Dürrenmatt, Tieck, Schiller, Brecht, to name but a few); the lectures on Kant, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer; the art lectures on Caspar-David Friedrich and Paula Modersohn-Becker, to cite but two; the themes for the *lyrik* lunches (including love poetry, winter, cities, farewells, river, lake and ocean); and, above all, those remarkable Oktoberfests. To fully appreciate those, you had to have been there!

With her formal background in German literature, and her knowledge of German history, art, music, politics, and philosophy, she has done a splendid job in bringing these elements together in a cohesive and vibrant society. Importantly, now that Irmgard is president *emerita*, she has built for us all a foundation that will stand AGS in good stead for many years to come.

--- Barbara W. Alsip

Erika Joyce, AGS President

A native of Hamburg, Germany, Erika studied history, English, and philosophy at Hamburg University under Professors Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker and Fritz Fischer, among others. Her thesis for the Magister degree was on Edmund Burke. After marriage to an Englishman, she moved to England and, with her economist husband and three children, lived in many parts of the world: Colombia, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Thailand, Greece, Indonesia, Uruguay, and Chile. In 1981 the family moved to Washington, where her husband became an official at the World Bank. Erika served as a docent at the National Portrait Gallery, diction coach at the Cathedral Choral Society, and translator of German and Medieval Latin for the Bach Consort. From 1994, Erika and her family spent several years on World Bank missions in Costa Rica and India.

After returning to the United States, Erika lectured on early Ecumenical Church Councils and on the Crusades at St. Michaels, Eastern Shore. Following her husband's death, she moved back to the Washington area in 2005 and joined AGS during the 2005 Oktoberfest. She has been the main hostess at AGS events and a member of the 2007 Oktoberfest Committee. At our February 2008 Book Conversation, she presented the introductory lecture on the history of German immigration.

Sharon Higgins, AGS Vice-President

Sharon is a native of Miami, Florida, whose mother came to the United States in 1938 from Chemnitz, Germany. A graduate of the School of International Service at American University, Sharon majored in Western European Area Studies and did postgraduate work in International Law. She worked as an on-the-air promotion writer for the ABC-TV affiliate in Miami and was an intelligence analyst in Washington.

Her husband's job took her to Dallas in 1974, where she started and managed a specialty food company for which she imported kitchenware from Mexico and

packaged it with original seasoning mixes for Texas-style chili, barbecue sauce and gumbo of her own creation, overseeing all aspects of their development. Her products were sold nationally and internationally and had the honor of representing President George H.W. Bush's Texas lifestyle in the 1989 Presidential Inaugural Catalog.

After returning to the Washington area in 1983, she founded and ran the American University Dallas-Fort Worth alumni chapter and received the AU Alumni Award for Distinguished Service. An avocational historian, her inquiry into origins of the Greater Miami Youth Symphony is in the collections of the University of Miami School of Music and the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

Schopenhauer's Theory of Morality

(Dr. Dale Snow, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Loyola College, Baltimore, Maryland, presented the annual philosophy lecture at the Goethe-Institut on Thursday, May 8. Dr. Snow received her PhD from Emory University in 1984 and has been on the faculty at Loyola since 1987. Below is a condensed version of some of her remarks.)

The title of Schopenhauer's main work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World as Will and Representation)*, is well chosen. He depicts the human being as a complex unity of willing and knowing. Yet, the world as will and the world as representation are not two different worlds with nothing in common; they are the same world viewed from two different perspectives. Similarly, the human mind and the human body are different aspects of the same reality.

"The subject of knowing" experiences the world in terms of space, time and causality; and "the subject of willing," is an inexhaustible source of desires, volitions, and striving. He refers to the knowing or representing self as "the view from outside," and the willing self as "the view from inside." The imagery of inside and outside illustrates his basic conviction that the intellect remains at the surface of things while it is the will which is their innermost reality. The priority of willing over thinking is recast as the priority of the world as will over the world as representation." (Zoller, 543).

The elevation of will above reason is the well-spring of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Our real motivations are hunger, sexual desire, the need for shelter and security, and all are blind desires, many of which can be accomplished only by depriving other of their desires. Reason then descends to the function of rationalization; it is the window-dressing of our naked hungers.

In most of the world, unconsciousness is the predominant state; plants have at best an extremely feeble analogue of consciousness, the lower animals a highly limited and specialized form of consciousness. Even at the highest level (man), unconsciousness remains reason's foundation, as can be seen in the need for sleep and the many imperfections of its function, imperfections indissolubly tied to physical embodiment. This purely instrumental view of reason demotes it to sophisticated survival technique.

Schopenhauer's view of reason is a pivotal departure from the Enlightenment context and from the history of philosophy more generally: Plato believed in the tripartite theory of the soul, in which reason rules in the well-ordered soul, at least, and likens the theory to a charioteer and two horses. Descartes declared, "Cogito, ergo sum" as the touchstone of truth, and Kant spoke of faith in the possibilities of the public use of reason. For Schopenhauer, though, reason was a sighted dwarf riding on the shoulders of a blind giant.

Whereas Kant had declared "I have had to limit reason in order to make room for faith," Schopenhauer cuts reason even further down to size: "Human intellect is only a higher degree of animal intellect, and just as this animal intellect is limited entirely to the present, so also does our intellect bear strong traces of this limitation. Therefore our memory and recollection are a very imperfect thing! How little we are able to recall of what we have done, experienced, learnt or read!" (II, 142)

It is not reason but "the will, as the thing-in-itself, [which] constitutes the inner, true, and indestructible nature of man; yet in itself it is without consciousness." (II, 201) Here Schopenhauer anticipates Darwin in his unsentimental understanding of human beings as one animal among animals: "In all animal beings the will is the primary and substantial thing; the intellect, on the other hand is something secondary and additional, in fact a mere tool for the service of the will.

And yet it is not just man's whose essential nature is will: *der Wille zum Leben* the will to live (what later is called the survival instinct) is "the only true description of the world's innermost nature." (II, 350)

Schopenhauer speaks mockingly of the struggle to prolong life, even if by only a few minutes of all living things, since it is central to his view that full of suffering as it is, [human] "life is a business that does not cover its costs." Doomed by the will-to-live, which constitutes our essence, we are destined for a life of brief and incomplete satisfactions, many and lasting

disappointments, crowned by the final bitterness of our unavoidable deaths.

Rather than try to explain suffering away as part of a greater good or God's plan for us, Schopenhauer stressed its horror and unrelenting reality, a view he thought only possible for the few among us to accept. "Undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world. If our life were without end and free from pain, it would not occur to anyone to ask why the world exists, and why it does so precisely in this way . . ." (II, 161)

Indeed, Schopenhauer refers to religion as "the metaphysics of the masses." Like Loyola before him, Schopenhauer adds that regardless of the content of a religion, its dogmas must be "impart[ed] to people at a very early age, before the power of judgment has been roused from its morning slumber, and hence in earliest childhood; for every dogma implanted then, no matter how senseless it may be, sticks for all time." (II, 162) The vast majority, then, satisfy their need for metaphysics with doctrines of faith, which for Schopenhauer are at best true allegorically; however, those with sufficient intellect have access to doctrines of conviction, ideas true in the strict sense.

Therefore it will not be surprising that much of Schopenhauer's thought was devoted to exploring ways to achieve emancipation from the tyranny of the will and thereby escape or at least reduce suffering. One of the best known of these escapes is the power of art; Schopenhauer held that the will could be at least temporarily detained from its ceaseless striving by the contemplation of beauty. His aesthetics, with the tempting thought that beauty alone releases us temporarily from the suffering of life, was quite influential on Richard Wagner.

And as Wagner noted, it is music, alone among the arts, which comes closest to truth and to beauty: "The effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence."

Yet the respite provided by aesthetic contemplation is always only temporary; the suffering of life remains, and demands a morally adequate response. Schopenhauer held that suffering is overcome at the same time and to the same extent as the illusion of individuality is overcome. Short of that lofty goal, compassion is the basis of all morality. What does Schopenhauer mean by compassion? It requires us to

be capable of a sudden shift of perspective: "By looking inwards, every individual recognizes in his inner being, which is his will, the thing-in-itself, and hence that which alone is everywhere real. Accordingly, he conceives himself as the kernel and center of the world, and considers himself infinitely important. On the other hand, if he looks outwards, he is then in the province of the representation, of the mere phenomenon, where he sees himself as an individual among an infinite number of other individuals, and consequently as something extremely insignificant, in fact quite infinitesimal To this, therefore, is due the great difference between what each one necessarily is in his own eyes, and what he is in the eyes of others, [that is] *egoism*, with which everyone reproaches everyone else.

In consequence of this egoism, the most fundamental of our errors is that, with reference to one another, we are not-I. On the other hand, to be just, noble, and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into actions." "All genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings." (II, 600,601) This is as possible for the feeblest intellect as any other, which is why one often finds excellent character in persons of quite limited understanding. Thus is *sympathy* to be understood as the empirical appearance of the will's metaphysical identity.

Schopenhauer's claims to be Kant's one true heir have fueled debate for decades; but certainly in his emphasis on the freedom of the will the influence of Kant is evident. Kant insisted on our ability to recognize the moral law, so too Schopenhauer says: "My philosophy is the only one which grants to humanity its complete and entire rights; for only if the true nature of man is his own will, consequently only if he is, in the strictest sense, his own work, are his deeds actually entirely his and attributable to him. On the other hand, as soon as he has another origin, or is the work of a being different from himself, all his guilt falls back onto this origin or originator." (II, 589-590) We who would be free must recognize that the price of that freedom is recognition of the illusion of individuality and the egoism which flows from it.

The Goethe Prize

The task for this year's competitors was to compose a new prank for Max and Moritz. This year's winners were from Woodson High School, Fairfax County. Myra Hillburg is their teacher. Winners: 1st prize: Alexandra Nguyen; 2nd prize: Sarah Haight; 3rd prize: Glynis Mattheisen; Honorable. mention: Zach Wester. The prize winners received a certificate and

check. A copy of *Max und Moritz* was given to all participating winners and to Geoffrey Trebing. (Photographs were taken during the award ceremony and may be found on the AGS Web site.)

Remarks of Myra Hillburg

(Myra Hillburg, German teacher at W.T. Woodson High School and teacher of this year's Goethe Prize winners, had wonderful things to say about the contest and the American Goethe Society. We incorporate her remarks here.)

It is a great honor to be here tonight at the Goethe-Institut, representative of German culture abroad, and to attend a meeting of the American Goethe Society of Washington, a society committed to supporting the study of the German language and to stimulate thinking and talking about German literature and culture.

I want to express my thanks to AGS for organizing the Goethe Prize contest for high school students. This year's topic was a wonderful challenge for my students to test their German writing skills. The topic motivated them to get acquainted with *Max und Moritz* and their pranks. An American *Max und Moritz* edition for students exists, but our school could not acquire it for us. Fortunately I found a University of Virginia site on the Internet with a complete *Max und Moritz* edition, including exercises for textual comprehension.

So, my students' homework for Easter break was to study *Max und Moritz* on the Net, together with the exercises, and then to compose a new prank on their own. All of them worked creatively and put a lot of effort into German grammar.

These new pranks were written by students who learned their first German words in an American school. We all know that German is a difficult language. I am proud of my students for having chosen German as their foreign language, for it shows that they are willing to accept a challenge. They are still learners of German, most of them in their fourth year of study, and of course their German is not flawless. – If I may quote Goethe here: “Es irrt der Mensch, so lang er strebt.” [Man errs as long as he strives.] Having their efforts recognized by AGS is a wonderful reward for them and a great encouragement to continue their study of German.

Above all, I want to thank AGS for their support of German teachers and their efforts. It is anything but a matter of course that German is offered in American high schools. We are continually required to justify the retention of our teaching positions. We have to recruit

students and principals for the German language. Our teaching positions are often more than full-time jobs but often get paid only as part-time. We therefore highly appreciate the recognition we receive tonight from AGS and the Goethe-Institut.

Tonight's event brings together school, *Max und Moritz*, and philosophy. Maybe we could discuss the deeper meaning of Schopenhauer's words: “Any naughty boy can crush a beetle. But all the world's professors cannot produce one.”

“Deutsch am Mittag”

In September the Goethe-Institut is starting a new program, **Deutsch am Mittag**, under the leadership of our former president, Irmgard Wagner. Once a month, participants will assemble at noon for a brown-bag lunch, with beverages supplied by the Goethe-Institut. During the approximately one-and-a-quarter hour time frame, only German will be spoken. After 20 minutes devoted to eating, a topic of interest from German culture, history, or contemporary affairs will be presented (15 – 20 min), in German, of course. Discussion on the topic will take up the last 20 to 30 minutes of the *Mittagstisch*.

Deutsch am Mittag will meet on the second Tuesday of each month. It is open to all for a nominal fee of approximately 5 dollars. If you are interested in participating, RSVP to Irmgard Wagner at iwagner@gmu.edu prior to each *Mittagstisch* date. We're sure that many of our members will welcome this opportunity to practice their German.

Lunch mit Lyrik – Past and Future!

Lunch mit Lyrik: Saturday, April 26, Cafe Mozart:

We had a good turnout for this luncheon but agreed that poems on the suggested theme 'Hills and Mountains' were surprisingly hard to find. Nevertheless, nearly everyone present had made an effort to search for an engaging poem to read aloud, and we enjoyed our discussions and time together. Special thanks again to Mrs. Roswitha Eaheart-Nitschke, who brought an extra supply of poems for those who did not have a suitable poem to present.

Lunch mit Lyrik: Saturday, June 28, Old Europe:

A small but dedicated group braved the scorching heat to meet for lunch and poetry at Old Europe. To our delight, there was no shortage of poems to be found pertaining to 'River, Lake, and Ocean' - i.e., anything "wet". We presented poems dealing with different regions of Germany throughout the centuries, and everyone present read with gusto. We enjoyed the fact that within our small group setting we were able

to discuss a poem, its author and background in greater detail, almost as though we were giving each other a brief history lesson.

Still to Come Lunch mit Lyrik: Saturday, August 30, Cafe Mozart - Goethe's Geburtstag

This will be our annual celebration of Goethe's birthday, and we hope that many of you will be able to attend this festive event which includes a special birthday cake in honor of our Dichterstürst. The theme is to be 'The traveling Goethe,' which includes not only Goethe's poetry, but any of his quotations, comments, or reflections on his travels that you would like to share with us. You may have just returned from a visit to a place or country that Goethe spoke or wrote about.

Attending any of our poetry luncheons is by no means restricted to native German speakers. Naturally, we read our poems aloud in German, but give the background and context in English. During lunch, our conversation always goes back and forth both in English and in German, with the purpose of getting to know other AGS members and to have a 'jolly time'.

-- Erika Joyce

Dramatic Readings, Spring 2008

Bertolt Brecht, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*
During the spring months, Irmgard guided us in four sessions through Bertolt Brecht's famous play *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, which he wrote in 1939 while in exile in Denmark as a warning against the approaching war. The plot covers 12 years of the Thirty Years War (1618 - 1648), a war that has become paradigmatic in German history and culture. Brecht takes the view of the '*Froschperspektive*,' telling us what war is like for the poor and oppressed. Rather than producing a grim play, Brecht attempts to tackle a deadly serious subject with irony, humor and ready wit. While reading the play, some of us had difficulty at first adjusting to the Bavarian dialect, but in the end we became quite fluent in Bavarian and agreed that *Mutter Courage* is still as impressive and relevant a play as it was at its first performance in Zürich in 1941. Nor have the inserted songs aged one note. Whether *Mutter Courage* represents the heroine of the story or the continued victim of illusion was hotly debated well beyond our second slice of pizza at Ledo's.

Dramatic reading of *Der oest-westliche Diwan* by Claus Hubalek.

On July 9th a surprisingly large number of drama devotees gathered at Pimmit Library for the reading of Claus Hubalek's tragicomical radio-play *Der oest-westliche Diwan*, written in 1954. As the title suggests, this is a reversal of Goethe's title in *Der west-oestliche*

Diwan in which Goethe presented a cycle of poetry as an introduction to Old Persian literature and wisdom.

Our story, however, deals with the odyssey of a double-bed couch that has been erroneously constructed in East Germany and is ready to be transported to the West. The tragic double-bed couch, however, never makes it to its destination and is instead left at the border, split into two useless halves. Throughout the play, the observant double-bed couch acts as a voice and commentary on the political situation of Germany after its partition, a situation that affected every aspect of people's lives.

Everyone present entered into the reading of this outrageously witty play with great delight. We burst into near hysterics on a number of occasions, relishing the brilliant dialogue and deft humor. Our laughter continued long after we had been tossed out of the library by 8.45pm and adjourned to Ledo's for sustenance.

Unfortunately Irmgard was unable to guide us through this play as she had just undergone hip replacement surgery. However, since she has been steadily on the mend since returning from the hospital, she will continue to be our moderator for our future drama reading sessions.

-- Erika Joyce

Keynote Speaker for the AGS 2008 Oktoberfest

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers is the president of The Foundation for Landscape Studies. A native of San Antonio, Texas, Rogers earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History from Wellesley College and a Master's degree in City Planning from Yale University. A resident of New York City since 1964, she was the first person to hold the title of Central Park Administrator, a New York City Parks Department position created by Mayor Edward I. Koch in 1979. She was also the first president of the Central Park Conservancy, founded in 1980, to bring citizen support to the restoration and renewed management of Central Park. She served in both positions until 1996.

Rogers is the author of *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (Abrams, 2001). Earlier works include *The Forests and Wetlands of New York City* (Little, Brown and Company, 1971), *Frederick Law Olmsted's New York* (Whitney Museum/Praeger, 1972), *The Central Park Book* (Central Park Task Force, 1977), and *Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan* (The MIT Press, 1987).

In 1996, Rogers formed the Cityscape Institute, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to assisting citizens and public officials in the improvement of public places. Cityscape currently operates as the public outreach program of the Central Park Conservancy. She was the founding director of Garden History and Landscape Studies at the Bard Graduate Center in New York City between 2001 and 2005.

Rogers is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the recipient of several awards both for her work as a writer and as a landscape preservationist. These include the John Burroughs Medal for *The Forests and Wetlands of New York City*, which was also nominated for a National Book Award; the Wellesley College Distinguished Alumna Award; an honorary doctorate in Fine Arts from Miami University; the American Academy of Arts and Letters 2001 Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts; and the American Society of Landscape Architects' 2005 LaGasse Medal. (Above information is taken from Ms. Rogers' Web site, www.ElizabethBarlowRogers.com)

Last Call for Classical Oktoberfest, 26 & 27 September 2008, sponsored by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Goethe-Institut, and the American Goethe Society

Friday event

-- **Reception and Dinner:** German Embassy House.

Saturday events

-- **Illustrated Lecture:** "Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*Elective Affinities*) and the German Romantic landscape," by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, President of the Foundation for Landscape Studies and author of *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (Abrams 2001).

-- **Film Presentation:** (excerpts) of *Elective Affinities* (1996), Italian with English subtitles. Based on Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809): a skeptical fairytale of passion and error in which the building of the garden is central to the story. Introduction by Dr. Irmgard Wagner, Professor Emerita of German (George Mason University).

Please send in your registration as soon as possible, if you have not already done so. The Oktoberfest always sells out, and we will release tickets to the general public after September 5th.

Events Calendar, August through December 2008

30 Aug, Sat	Lunch mit Lyrik. Goethe's Geburtstag, Café Mozart, 12:30 pm. Theme: "The Traveling Goethe." Birthday cake to follow.
26-27 Sept, Fri-Sat	Classical Oktoberfest 2008. Fri, 6:30 pm, Reception and Dinner, German Embassy. Sat, 10:am -3:30 pm, Goethe-Institut, Theme: "Literature and the Art of Landscape Design."
15 Oct, Wed	Dramatic Reading. Georg Büchner, <i>Woyzeck, Part I.</i> 7-8:45 pm, Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library. Social hour follows at Ledo's Pizza Restaurant next door. All in German.
22 Oct, Wed	Book Conversation. Heinrich von Kleist, <i>Das Erdbeben in Chili</i> (<i>Earthquake in Chile</i>) Goethe-Institut, 6:45 pm. Introduction by Erika Joyce. Moderator, Dr. Irmgard Wagner. Refreshments to follow.
12 Nov Wed	Dramatic Reading. Georg Büchner, <i>Woyzeck, Part II.</i> 7-8:45 pm, Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library. All in German. Social hour follows at Ledo's Pizza Restaurant next door.
15 Nov, Sat	Lunch mit Lyrik. Café Berlin, Capitol Hill, 12:30 pm. Theme: "Food and Drink."
6 Dec, Sat	Lunch mit Lyrik. Old Europe Restaurant, 12:30 pm. Glühwein! Theme: "Holiday Poetry."