

From the President

Welcome back from summer break and travel adventures! To prepare for these travels, we shared poetry on that Ur-German trait of *Wanderlust* at our June luncheon at Café Europa in Bethesda. On 25 August we celebrated Goethe's 258th birthday (on 28 August actually) in style at Café Mozart. The Geburtstagstorte prepared by the pastry chef was a special treat to soothe anyone's Viennese nostalgia. (See pictures on our Web site.) Our members rose gallantly to the challenge of finding Goethe quotes in a wide variety of situations. Goethe, we saw, continues to be useful for all sorts of purposes.

We now look forward to a rich fall season of events. It starts on Wednesday, 12 September, with the first dramatic reading of Max Frisch's *Lehrstück ohne Lehre: Biedermann und die Brandstifter (Didactic Play without a Lesson: The Arsonists)*, in the cozy conference room of the Tysons-Pimmit Library. (See our Web site for details.) On Thursday, 27 September of this Shakespeare Year, we pay tribute to Shakespeare with a book conversation on Gottfried Keller's novella, *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe (A Village Romeo and Juliet)*. (See Web site for more information.) Our 29 November book conversation considers Daniel Kehlmann's international bestseller, *Die Vermessung der Welt (Measuring the World)*. You may find in this humorous historical twin biography a welcome gift for someone on your Christmas list. We conclude the year with our holiday Lyriklunch on 8 December at the Old Europe on a very special theme (see Events 2007 page).

But first there is, of course, our fourth Classical Oktoberfest on the last weekend in October. The enclosed flyer and registration form will give you all necessary information. Those of us who have participated in past years know what an exciting and pleasure-filled Fest awaits, and I look forward to sharing this high point of our year with you.

-- Irmgard Wagner

Goethe Prize in Second Year

The AGS Award for high school students is off to a good start for its second round. We are grateful

to Karen Hecker and Suellen Stover for lending their expertise and effort to the newly formed Goethe Prize Committee charged with all the work involved in making our Award a success. We have expanded our reach to add Prince William and Loudoun County schools to last year's Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax and Montgomery school systems.

We have also revised the award structure. If the quality of entries warrants it, there will be five prizes, at \$500, \$400, \$300, \$200, and \$100. Announcements to all high school teachers of German in the school districts mentioned went out in August. The contest is scheduled to take place in November, and results will be announced by 31 December. The award ceremony will coincide with one of our spring events at the Goethe-Institut. By the way, we still need a third member of the evaluating jury and are hopeful of success.

AGS Drama Reading Group

Once a month the AGS drama reading group meets at Pimmit-Tysons Public Library, located halfway between West Falls Church metro station and Tyson's Corner, in order to read aloud and discuss a German play. Irmgard Wagner chooses the texts and facilitates the session.

The last drama we tackled this season was F. Dürrenmatt's comedy *Die Physiker*. This vivid example of the 'absurd theatre' of the time was first performed in 1962 and reflects the great fear many people felt during the Cold War with regard to the potential destructive power that scientific innovation, especially in the field of nuclear physics and the threat of the atomic bomb, held for mankind. Dürrenmatt deals with the moral dilemma of the scientist, i.e., the need for unhindered research and discovery versus responsibility toward society, in an ingenious and amusing way by putting the main characters into the same wing of a fictional lunatic asylum.

Everyone who attended the three reading sessions clearly enjoyed the play. John Loth kindly supplied us with a complete package of the text as well as an accompanying literary essay on this modern 'morality play.'

We were assigned different roles every few pages of the text, and I found myself representing Albert Einstein one minute, Isaac Newton the next, or simply reading the stage directions. As many times before, a lively discussion, insightful as well as humorous, took place during our reading sessions. We agreed that in today's world the moral dilemma of the modern scientist may have shifted to an extent from physics to the new frontiers in biochemistry and medicine, especially with respect to stem cell research, but that the conflict between pushing the limits of scientific research and being responsible for the welfare of global society, remains as strong as ever.

Needless to say, after two hours of strenuous mental exercise, most of us needed sustenance by way of a leisurely visit to Ledo's restaurant just down the Pike, where we enjoyed pizza and beer and sundry refreshments.

Perhaps you would like to join us in September for the reading of *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* by Max Frisch.

-- Erika Joyce

Oktoberfest Committee Hard at Work

From our first Classical Oktoberfest in 2004, we realized that many tasks—both momentous and mundane—were involved in organizing our Fest. We now have an Oktoberfest Committee, chaired by Treasurer Pehr Pehrsson. The other committee members are Sherie Day, Carlos Hecker, Sharon Higgins, and Erika Joyce. We appreciate their willingness to serve on this committee and to take on the long work of preparation and implementation of our October celebration. John Loth has generously offered to assist the Committee with the rich experience he has gathered in managing our three past Oktoberfests. In the hands of this outstanding team, this year's Classical Oktoberfest is bound to be another resounding success. Our best wishes go to our committed members and we will gladly help them with their efforts should the Committee ask us.

Werther in China

Die Zeit (Nr. 34, 2007) reports that the first literary audio book on CD is just now in production for the Chinese market – and it is Goethe's *Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*) (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*). For

over 80 years, *Werther* has been the best-known work of world literature in China. The story began in 1919 with the "Movement of 4 May," an effort of Chinese intellectuals to promote Western values of Enlightenment, freedom, and individualism against the dominant culture of Confucianism. The Movement of 4 May chose *Werther* as its cult book. What attracted them was Werther's insistence on the right to individual feelings, on absolute love, and on opposition to society's demands. *Die Zeit's* report concludes by speculating what might possibly be *Werther's* attraction for today's Chinese audience.

Book Corner (Just Published)

You will remember, with enthusiasm or critical reserve, Monika Maron's novel *Animal Triste* from one of our book conversations. Maron's new novel, *Ach Glück*, was just published and received a favorable review in *Die Zeit*. It's a sequel to her *Endmoränen* (2002), which Maron considers her "funniest" novel altogether. *Ach Glück* conveys the feeling of surfeit of prosperity among the Berlin academic classes and their various attempts to escape this 21st century version of *ennui*. It is a study in disappointment – disappointment of those who have everything and yet feel the lack of what's most important – and who don't know what *is* most important. – Published by S. Fischer, Frankfurt/ Main. 218 pp, 18.90 Euros.

German in the Hinterland!

On September 14 and 15, the University of Pittsburgh theatre department will present "Outside Inn," by the German dramatist, Andreas Jungwirth. The play interweaves four personal quests across Germany, Africa, Arizona, and Mexico and treats such themes as infidelity, murder, identity theft, and corrupt business deals. Two performances will be in German and three in English. Because there is a large German population in Western Pennsylvania, the department is hoping for a good turnout.

A Personal Note to My Many AGS Friends

There's a reason why this issue of *Das Blatt* is short. On June 9, two days before Dave's mother's 87th birthday, Dave, his mother, sister, and I had a picture-perfect day at a West Virginia state park and a visit to their relatives in the country. On the way home that evening, a car sped toward us on the wrong side of the road and crashed into us. Dave and his sister escaped serious injury, but their mother died instantly. I suffered multiple

pelvic injuries and fractures of the right wrist and upper arm. I spent six weeks in the hospital and rehab center. I've been home a month, slowly recuperating and calling upon my Austrian, Prussian, and German genes to give me the strength to get through the recovery! I'd love e-mail, if you'd care to write:
bkwalsip@comcast.net.