

## EUROPÄISCHER MÄRCHENPREIS 2012 TO WOLFGANG MIEDER

On September 13, 2012, Wolfgang Mieder, professor of German and Folklore at the Department of German and Russian at the University of Vermont (Burlington/VT), received the Europäischer Märchenpreis (European Fairytale Prize) for his life's work.

This prize worth 5,000 €, together with the Lutz-Röhrich-Preis (Lutz-Röhrich-Prize) for folkloristic historical-comparative narratology to support junior scientists and the Anerkennungspreis (Appreciation Prize)<sup>1</sup>, has been awarded annually since 1986 by the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn (Fairytale Foundation Walter Kahn) to individual people or organisations, who have advanced their mission to explore and preserve traditional European fairytales and legends. Previous prize winners of the Europäischer Märchenpreis were, among others, Max Lüthi (Zurich, 1988), Isidor Levin (St. Petersburg, 1989), Helmut Fischer (Hennef, 2002), Hans-Jörg Uther (Göttingen, 2005), Dietz-Rüdiger Moser (Munich, 2009), and Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (Freiburg, 2010).<sup>2</sup>

Since 2006, the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn organizes the Märchentage (Fairytale Days) around the presentation of the prizes, which devote themselves to the propagation of fairytales and research to teachers, educators, scientists, as well as friends of fairytales. In 2012, the conference "Wo hinaus so früh, Rotkäppchen?": 200 Jahre *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* der Brüder Grimm (Where to out so early, Little Red Riding-hood?: 200 years of *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm) was held on September 12–14 in Münsterschwarzach to commemorate the publication of the first volume of this fairytale collection.

The presentation of the prizes took place at an evening banquet in the historical Schelfenhaus (Schelfen House) in Volkach, since 2002 the location of the office of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, and was musically enhanced by parts of the fairytale opera *Hansel and Gretel* (1893) by Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921).

The introduction in Wolfgang Mieder's honour was given by his friend of many years, the renowned narratologist and paremiologist Siegfried Armin Neumann, former head of the Wossidlo-Forschungsstelle (Wossidlo Research Institute) in Rostock, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1999.<sup>3</sup>

Siegfried Neumann first talked about the very successful academic career of Wolfgang Mieder, who was born in Nossen (Saxony, Germany) in 1944, raised in Lübeck, and who went to the United States of America when he was only 16 years old. After attending high school, he began his studies in French and German, which he finished in 1966 with a BA, and then in 1967 with the MA. His dissertation *Das Sprichwort im Werke Jeremias Gotthelfs: Eine volkskundlich-literarische Untersuchung* (1970) at Michigan State University (East Lansing/MI) seemed to already indicate his future research field.<sup>4</sup> After a short time as an Assistant Professor of German at Murray State University (Murray/KY), Wolfgang Mieder went to the University of Vermont in 1971, became Associate Professor of German in 1975, and in 1978, at the age of 34, he became a full Professor of German and Folklore. Already one year before that, he had been appointed Chairperson of the Department of German and Russian.

Siegfried Neumann then outlined the different fields and results of Wolfgang Mieder's scientific research as evidenced by his unprecedented activity in publishing. In the centre



Wolfgang Mieder.

of his work is proverbial language, which he tries to grasp in all its facets.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the traditional formulaic language, he also pays attention to its variations, and he has coined the term ‘anti-proverb’. Even the thus far neglected literary forms of the proverb poem and the proverb story received more attention because of his studies. It was always of great significance for Wolfgang Mieder to reprint old proverb collections and proverb studies in order to make them available again for proverb scholarship.

Siegfried Neumann especially emphasised the awe-inspiring bibliographical work for paremiology done by Wolfgang Mieder. After his massive four-volume work *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (1982–2001), a range of extensive special bibliographies, followed another up-to-date large two-volume *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology* (2009) and, for the first time, an *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms* (2011).<sup>6</sup>

Even essential requirements for a modern Anglo-American proverb scholarship, said Siegfried Neumann, were provided by Wolfgang Mieder by editing several large, as well as regional proverb collections.<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Neumann also pointed to Wolfgang Mieder’s

great interest in the proverbial diction of leading American and English politicians (Lincoln, Truman, Obama, Churchill, etc.), which has led to several large monographs.

Wolfgang Mieder's greatest concern is seen by Siegfried Neumann in his idea of an internationally oriented, interdisciplinary proverb scholarship, for which in 1984 he established a prerequisite to present new approaches and results of research by publishing the proverb journal *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.

Because of his leading role in paremiology, Siegfried Neumann stated, Wolfgang Mieder's importance for narratology is often overlooked. Here it is especially the questions of a modern reception of fairytales and the relationship between the fairytale and the proverb, which have scarcely received attention by scholarship so far. Wolfgang Mieder has shown, based on a large number of examples, that especially the *Children's and Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm (1812 and 1815) are nowadays handed down very often no longer in their original version, but changed in form and content. His particular interest was also in the proverbs of the Grimms' fairytales, as well as their proverbial and aphoristic 'Schwundstufen' (reduced forms). Into the same direction aimed Wolfgang Mieder's studies about other genres of folk poetry, such as the fable, the legend, and the funny tale or the folk song, where he always presented an informative picture of the reception of their motifs in today's world.

The variety and significance of his research, summarized Siegfried Neumann, made Wolfgang Mieder a worldwide highly esteemed scholar, his work made him an immensely popular university teacher, and his help and advice a guiding spirit of international proverb scholarship. Folklorist Lutz Röhrich (1922–2006), one of his best friends, and laureate of the Europäischer Märchenpreis 1991, had once said about him: "Er ist einfach ein 'Gutmensch', dem es ein Herzensbedürfnis ist, ständig für andere da zu sein" (He is simply a good human being whose heart's desire is to always be there for others).

At the beginning of his words of thanks,<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Mieder emphasised in his own humorous way the importance of his wife Barbara, standing lovingly by his side for now already 43 years, in his being awarded with the Europäischer Märchenpreis.

He was absolutely surprised, Wolfgang Mieder said, when the enormous and incredible news had reached him, that he was honoured for his life's work in narratology and proverb scholarship, because he always did only his best for science and his students, just like so many others do too. This appreciation would give him the courage and strength to continue with his work for quite a few more years in order to fully deserve the Europäischer Märchenpreis, he said.

A passage from Wolfgang Mieder's letter to his friends made clear how much it meant to him that his native country granted him such an honour, although wistfulness resonated that his friend Lutz Röhrich was not able to witness this anymore. – Certainly he would have been proud of "his little friend Wolfgang". (Author's comment)

Wolfgang Mieder then explained that he was not the first paremiologist and scientist of fairytales who went from Germany to the United States of America. He mentioned the expatriate Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander (1803–1879), the emigrant Karl Knortz (1841–1918), and the married couple Carl Zuckmayer (1896–1977) and Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer (1901–1991), who spent their exile from 1939 until 1948 in his own adopted home Vermont. He also named Günter Grass (1927) and his friend Lutz Röhrich, who, as well as the two before mentioned, had used their impressions of rural Vermont in their writings.

Two persons, said Wolfgang Mieder, had been incomparable mentors and best friends for him to this very day: Lutz Röhrich in Germany, and the no less renowned folklorist Alan Dundes (1934–2005) in the United States of America.<sup>9</sup> They were and still are his fairytale falling stars, who together with their families had given him, as in his favourite fairytale *The Falling Stars*, the most beautiful gifts of life. Supported and acknowledged by them, he had learned the enthusiasm for joyful scientific work, emulating them in high spirits, grateful every day to stand on the broad shoulders of his heroes, to whom he owes the majority of his success. Not unmentioned were many more dear colleagues and friends on both sides of the Atlantic, the two scientific souls of his German-American conviction, said Wolfgang Mieder, who were joined by numerous internationally renowned folklorists and paremiologists. Together they form the falling stars of a ‘gay science’, an expression already used by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and later by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), to which Wolfgang Mieder has devoted himself wholeheartedly: interested in everything and tireless in his endeavour, just as the two great philologists Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). To put it with Wolfgang Mieder in an (anti-)proverbial nutshell, the ‘gay science’ is an eternal “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7, 7) and a new “Find and you will seek!”

At the end of his remarks Wolfgang Mieder stressed once again how much the Europäischen Märchenpreis as an appreciation of his life’s work, awarded by his native country, means to him. He offered his warmest congratulations to both younger prize winners, Jasmin Beer and Teresa Maria Müller, and mentioned how it was a good feeling to know that the investigation of fairytales, paremiology, and narratology was in good hands of brilliant up-and-coming young scientists, to whom he also counted the author. Young people like these, said Wolfgang Mieder, give him the energy and joy, to serve the gay science a little bit longer.

In the end, Wolfgang Mieder announced that he will share half of his prize money with four of his folklore students in Vermont and with the author of this contribution, who wants to thank him again sincerely. In this way, said Wolfgang Mieder, his ‘Falling Stars’ Prize, fallen out of the fairytale sky, would not only serve him, but also young people in his native country as well as in his by now quite old adopted home America.

Christian Grandl

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This foundation with headquarters in Munich and a coordination place in Frankfurt was founded in 1985 by a travel agent and enthusiast in fairytales Walter Kahn from Brunswick (see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de), last accessed on March 23, 2013). The foundation has its own journal *Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege*, which has been published quarterly since 1990, and understands itself as mediator between science and the joy in fairytales, with its contributions of well-known experts in fairytale science (see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=2&e2=1](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=2&e2=1), last accessed on March 23, 2013).

The Lutz-Röhrich-Preis worth 2,500 €, which has been awarded since 1994, was given in 2012 to Jasmin Beer for her Master's thesis *Menschenfresser: Zur Anthropophagie im Märchen* (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 2010), and the Anerkennungspreis worth 1,000 €, which has been awarded since 2000, was given in 2012 to Teresa Maria Müller for her First State Examination for the Post of Grammar School Teacher *Lernen mit und von Märchen: Die pädagogische Bedeutung von Märchen am Beispiel des gymnasialen Schulunterrichts* (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2011).

- <sup>2</sup> This year, the *Europäischer Märchenpreis* will be awarded to Germanist, folklorist, Grimms and fairytale researcher Heinz Rölleke (Neuss). For all prize-winners of the Märchen-Stiftung Walter Kahn, see [www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=7&e2=3](http://www.maerchen-stiftung.de/index.php4?e1=7&e2=3), last accessed on March 23, 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> *Europäischer Märchenpreis 2012 für ein großes Lebenswerk: Laudatio anlässlich der Preisverleihung an Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Mieder. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 28–34.
- <sup>4</sup> Published in *Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 1, Deutsche Literatur und Germanistik*, 70 (Bern: Herbert Lang et al., 1972).
- <sup>5</sup> For his more than 400 articles and more than 200 books, see his *International Bibliography of Paremiology and Phraseology*, Vol. 1 (Berlin et al.: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 487–542 (nos. 5575–6028) and his *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 34 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2011), s. v. 'Mieder, Wolfgang'.
- <sup>6</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>7</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>8</sup> *Sterntaler der fröhlichen Wissenschaft: In Erinnerung an meine Eltern. Märchenspiegel: Zeitschrift für internationale Märchenforschung und Märchenpflege* 23/4, 2012, pp. 35–40.
- <sup>9</sup> For the correspondences between Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Best of All Possible Friends”: Three Decades of Correspondence Between the Folklorists Alan Dundes and Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 19 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006), and between Wolfgang Mieder and Lutz Röhrich, see Wolfgang Mieder (ed.) *“Freundschaft ist des Lebens Salz”: Dreieinhalb Jahrzehnte Korrespondenz zwischen den Folkloristen Lutz Röhrich und Wolfgang Mieder*, Supplement series of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, 24 (Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2007).