



## Wolfgang F. Michael

### Professor Emeritus

### In Memoriam

Wolfgang F. Michael, right, directed 40 German plays during his time at UT. George Schulz-Behrend, left, was business manager for the productions.

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Professor Wolfgang F. Michael, who taught German at the University of Texas since 1946, died Saturday evening, July 9, 1994.

He was born February 23, 1909, in Freiburg, Germany, into what he described as a hopelessly "academically polluted family." His father was a professor for English history at Freiburg University, and his mother was a schoolteacher.

But UT's Dr. Michael didn't want to teach. He wanted to act. He and his siblings wrote family plays for family occasions, but Wolfgang branched out into public amateur performances in both German and English. His parents suggested a doctorate might provide a fallback position if an acting career faltered. He received a doctorate in theater history in 1934 and spent two years in intensive theatrical training in Berlin. He passed the state examinations to qualify as an actor and confidently pointed out that the 30% successfully completing the exam "can expect immediate appointment as actors on the German stage." But it was 1936 and a curriculum vitae written in England explains his venue change: "The recent German laws regarding non-Aryan extraction debar me from a career in that country."

In England he had more success finding teaching jobs than acting jobs, and he went to America and married Hadassah Posey of Philadelphia, whom he had met in Europe. Towards the end of the war he translated captured Nazi documents about V-2 rockets and taught army counterintelligence agents German. He taught German classes at Chestnut Hill College and Bryn Mawr.

He thought Hitler would be an interlude and he would return to Germany, but things didn't turn out that way. By the time the Hitler interlude ended, he had set down deep roots in America. He came to Austin in 1946 to teach at the University of Texas and taught continuously through the spring semester of 1994, with plans to teach a conversation course in the fall. The year he arrived, the chairman suggested that German

plays might stimulate interest in language, and the frustrated actor finally had an outlet. In college in Germany he had acted in and directed English plays. In Texas he directed plays in German with his students for 40 years. He also gave students a chance to practice German in a friendly atmosphere at a weekly coffee session and five times a week at a German table in a UT cafeteria. In 1953, he [co]founded the Texas Association of German students for high school, middle school, and college students, which encouraged mastery of the language through a small newspaper and yearly conventions with academic and artistic contests.

But he also wrote many books and articles about the Renaissance, Thomas Mann and medieval German drama. It never occurred to him that a professor should choose between scholarship and teaching and extracurricular activities. He did them all with unabated passion for 48 years. It was this multifaceted zeal that earned him two of Germany's highest honors (the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic and the Goethe Medaille) and UT's *Pro Bene Meritis* Award, given by the Liberal Arts Foundation Advisory Council.

Two days before he died, he was looking forward to teaching in the fall semester. He, who had once said he would never teach, said, "I love to teach. I love students."

He is survived by his wife, Marian; two daughters and sons-in-law, Hadassah and Tom Hiscott of Pine Plains, NY, and Dorothea and Jesse Barth of Worcester, VT; a son and daughter-in-law, Felton and Maime Michael; 10 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

Those who may wish may contribute to the Michael Scholarship Fund.

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#### **Other Professional Information**

- taught graduate courses in the late Middle Ages and Reformation periods, Lessing, German Classicism, Thomas Mann, and the German novel
- supervised 14 doctoral dissertations and 31 masters' theses
- written numerous essays for journals like *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, and others

#### **Major Book Publications**

- *Die Anfänge des Theaters zu Freiburg im Breisgau*. Freiburg, 1934
- *Die geistlichen Prozessionsspiele in Deutschland*. Baltimore, 1947
- *Frühformen der deutschen Bühne*. Berlin, 1963
- *Das deutsche Drama des Mittelalters*. Berlin, 1971
- *Das deutsche Drama der Reformationszeit*. Bern, 1984
- *Thomas Mann auf dem Weg zur Politik*. Bern, 1985
- *Ein Forschungsbericht: Das deutsche Drama der Reformationszeit*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1989.

#### **Edited Volumes**

- Thomas Brunner. *Tobias* (edition, with Donna Reeves). Bern, 1978
- Thomas Brunner. *Die schöne und kurtzweilige Historia von der Heirat Isaacs vnd seiner lieben Rebecca* (with Hubert Heinen and Barbara Kommecker). Bern, 1983
- Johan Narhammer. *Historia Jobs* (edition). Bern, 1983

- Andreas Pfeilschmidt. *Esther 1555*.(with Barbara Köneker) Bern: Peter Lang, 1986.
- Johannes Sapidis. *Anabion (1540): Text, Lateinisch und Deutsch*. Ed. and Commentary by W.F. M. and Douglass Parker, 1991
- *Die Nürnberger "Susanne": Ein Spiel aus dem frühen 16. Jahrhundert* (Faksimilie und Kommentar), 1994
- Hans Sachs, *Werke in der Reihenfolge ihrer Entstehung* (WFM and Roger A. Crockett, eds). 3 vols. Bern: Lang, 1996

The Official Faculty Council Memorial Resolution  
was prepared by a special committee consisting of  
Professors Hubert Heinen (chair), Walter Wetzels, and Peter Hess.  
<<http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2000-2001/memorials/Michael/michael.html>>

See also  
<<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/germanic/about/archive/germanplays.pdf>>  
for a history of the plays produced at the Department of Germanic studies.

## By George Schulz-Behrend

Dear Fellow Mourners,

there existed between Wolfgang and me much similarity of background: both of us had attended the German Gymnasium; we had learned the same foreign languages and had absolved practically identical required readings. Such an education is sometimes resented by the ones subjected to it. Not so by us. The ones most disappointed by it were (and are) those who have wondered why this thorough grounding in "humanistische Bildung"/classical humanistic education did not do more for the German nation when Adolf the Anführer and his many mis-leaders came along and re-arranged much of central Europe. To discuss this problem would require a conference in comparison with which the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America would be child's play. Wolfgang and I discussed it, but we found no way out of this quandary.

Suffice it to say, we shared a treasure of intellectual, cultural, and poetic heritage; and I venture to suggest, if the roles were reversed at this moment, the other might well think of the same quotation; it comes from Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*, where in Act III Lionel is bidding farewell to his dying friend Talbot as he returns to battle: "Kurz ist der Abschied für die lange Freundschaft." It is a brief farewell for such a lengthy friendship.

For me to give even a glimpse of 48 years of teaching and writing together at the University of Texas at Austin is a daunting assignment and I need to foreshorten the perspective to even come close. We both arrived here in 1946, I in June, Wolfgang in September. Almost at once Wolfgang became the undergraduate advisor of the Department of Germanic Language. Of course, there are advisors and advisors. Wolfgang was one of the best ever and he stayed that until his retirement. Students seemed to

sense that for advising they had come to the right person, one who occasionally bent the rules a little in order to accommodate a deserving student.

But instead of going into the résumé of Wolfgang as he came from Villanova College in Philadelphia, let me indulge in a personal anecdote or two. No sooner had the fall semester started in 1946 than Robert Clark, Chairman of the Graduate Council, asked us if we did not want to participate in the meeting of the South-Central Modern Language Association in Gulfport, Miss. We submitted our research papers in the nick of time and set out together in my sky-blue Studebaker. East of New Orleans the road took on an ugly appearance -- few places of human habitation, few filling stations, not a single repair shop. I began to notice a grinding, scraping noise somewhere in the car. This in a landscape recently ransacked by flood and destruction caused by one of those Gulf coast weather disturbances that always occur when you don't need them. The noise made me increasingly nervous and I pulled off the road. I lifted the hood, looked at the brakes, and together we looked for what might be wrong. I had owned a motorcycle, but that didn't seem to help me now. Wolfgang didn't look much like a mechanic, either. The engine was still running, but the noise had stopped. We cogitated about that and then Wolfgang came up with an ingenious solution: the noise must be produced by something that . . . Of course, the speedometer! Where was the cable leading to the gadget behind the dashboard? I got out the pair of pliers and on Mike's suggestion disconnected the cable from the dash-board mechanism. We didn't know how far or how fast we were going, but we got there. I asked Wolfgang how he had known what to do. He shrugged his shoulders and in a matter-of-fact voice said: "Ein Humanist kann alles."

As soon as we had got to Gulfport Wolfgang was appointed chairman of the group where I was reading my paper. Soon the program called for the business meeting. A discussion ensued and when the group got tired of dissension and debate there were calls for "Question, question!" But Wolfgang, who apparently had not presided over many business meetings, wondered out loud what the question was and became flustered. I sidled over to him and explained sotto voce that the group wanted to VOTE on the question. This was done and the meeting returned to the remaining scholarly papers. After it was all over Wolfgang asked me how I knew that question meant vote. I put in a moment's hesitation/Kunstpause and said: "Ein Humanist weiß alles." So we learned from each other and became friends in the process.

Soon after we returned from Gulfport Professor Cecil V. Pollard was wondering out loud in a departmental faculty meeting who the Department might be able to establish closer relations with the Texas Germans. Perhaps we could revive a tradition of many years ago and take a simple German play to towns like New Braunfels and Fredericksburg. At this point the most recent arrival in the faculty jumped up and informed one and all that he "had been trained as actor" and would be happy to undertake the project, provided the Department would support him. The first "simple" play was Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann*. In Hogg Auditorium, on two consecutive evenings. Dozens more followed, among them Goethe's *Faust*, Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* and *Emilia Galotti*, Hauptmann's *Versunkene Glocke*, but also modern plays by Günter Grass, Borchert, and many others.

I had volunteered to help and in due time I received the title of production manager. As such I was in charge of buying supplies, reserving rehearsal space and stages, correspond with agents and authors, renting costumes and wigs, etc., etc. One fine year Herr Direktor asked me to find him a volunteer seamstress. I asked the students in my third-semester German class where a fine lissome lass was willing to try

her skill in sewing a costume or two. She proved to be a top-notch designer of stage sets and a creator of the most outlandish props and coiffures; she also was good with photography, publicity and arranging for interviews, criticism and make-up. But her crowning achievement was that she married the Herr Direktor. For whom she became an excellent helpmate. I mean, of course, Marian Pendergrass.

I could go on with anecdotes and stories, all of them having become possible because Wolfgang made them to happen. His energy was boundless, not only in matters theatrical, but just as much in scholarly production: he has a wheelbarrow of books to his credit and was a world-renowned scholar, honored by the German Republic with the Order of Merit, and by his colleagues, students and friends with a Festschrift. He "mentored" more students than anyone has cared to count; as long as any of those live his name will not be forgotten.

Ave atque vale, pia anima.

G. Schulz-Behrend

July 10, 1994

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## By Dr. John Silber

(ex-Dean of the College of Humanities, University of Texas at Austin;  
ex-president of Boston University)

Those who have spoken previously enjoyed a relationship with Wolfgang Michael which I did not share, for I lacked the knowledge of the German language and literature that would have made me a worthy colleague in the areas in which they worked. Our relationship was of a substantially different sort.

I knew of Professor Michael long before I ever met him, for in 1948 when I was a student here in the law school, the talk on campus centered around his student production of *Jedermann* in the original German. Our friendship began in 1955 with our first meeting and deepened steadily through the 39 years that followed.

Pül's interest in Kant's aesthetics and mine in the German language established an immediate communality of interests. It wasn't long before I sat in on one of his classes, became a visitor to his *Stammtisch*, a guest at the department's *Weihnachtsfest*, reader of and occasional contributor to TAGS and a frequent reviewer of the German play for the *Austin American-Statesman*.

Pül and Marian brought Kathryn and me into their lives and into their circle of friends.

By the time I had read some of his articles and books and observed him in his many activities with students and colleagues, I recognized in Pül a splendid exemplar of the teacher-scholar. Where, speaking as a university administrator, would one look today to find a person with his knowledge of languages, archives, literature, religious drama, Thomas Mann and Hans Sachs? In whom does one find, in addition, Pül's knowledge of theater from the Middle Ages to the present and his professional competence as an actor, his patience and impatience and clarity as a director, and his skills as a producer who elicited, in the absence of money, the cooperation of talented volunteers? And in whom does one find on top of all these talents and achievements a spirit so selflessly and tirelessly devoted to teaching in all its forms and in all its contexts? As a teacher -- whether in class, at *Stammtisch*, in the production of plays, or wherever -- he combined

gentle and harsh encouragement with rigorous expectations. Just think of the hours of individual tutoring he gave to English-speaking students who were attempting roles in the German plays.

When our daughter Rachel had to recite a poem in her German class at Austin High, she went to Pül for help. After coaching her in "Der Erlkönig," she recited it with moving effect. After I received Marian's call last Sunday and learned that Pül had died, I listened to the recording I made some 25 years ago of Rachel's recitation, and in her voice I could still hear quite clearly Pül's voice and cadences. His was a beautiful, commanding voice. It was an unforgettable voice.

The German play provided the area in which Pül's mastery as a teacher was most clearly and, one might say, dramatically revealed. In the rehearsals and performances of many plays, including *Die deutschen Kleinstädter*, *Draußen vor der Tür* and *Maria Stuart*, I was witness to the remarkable partnership of Mike and Marian. Marian brought to the production her own gifts as artist and teacher. God had nothing on Marian when he created the world *ex nihilo*. The costumes and sets she created from almost nothing -- and most certainly little or nothing from the university budget -- were miraculous.

And her strength and enthusiasm kept Pül producing plays several years longer than he could have without her. We celebrate then this morning not only a great life lived well, but also a great marriage and a loving wife. Pül and Marian's marriage was a symbiosis as each magnified the other.

I will not linger on Pül's ineptitude (feigned or genuine) in making repairs to his home, but *Laurel and Hardy* could not successfully compete with Pül and me when, with his alleged assistance, I attempted to repair leaks in his roof and replace gutters on his house. *Wenn Herr Professor will, ohne das Kompetenz, seine Arbeitsfähigkeit zeigen, ist es wirklich lächerlich -- aber mit Pül herrlich auch!*

And I must relate how Pül taught me the virtue of tolerance. Or more precisely -- since Socrates doubted that virtue could be taught -- let me tell you how Pül elicited in me, by *amanuensis* or whatever means, the virtue of tolerance.

It was this way. In the winter of 1959 Pül and I read Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*: he sought my help on philosophical issues; I sought his on Heidegger's German and his astonishing etymological derivations. Into this partnership a stray Manx cat intruded. It was instantly adopted or kidnapped (in increasing order of probability) by Pül and Marian. Needless to say, the Master Punster instantly named this singularly unattractive, bob-tailed beast "Heidegger"! And Heidegger by virtue of his name took charge over all future sessions, inserting his hair, his odor and his *und so weiter* into our discussion. But we read on as best we could.

From time to time Pül became hysterical in his outrage over Heidegger's bogus etymology. It is clear, then, that I did not acquire the virtue of tolerance by observing him. Nevertheless, he deserves the credit, for he forced me as a condition of our collaboration to suffer the intrusive presence of that obnoxious cat. My interest in penetrating the linguistic thicket of *Sein und Zeit* forced me at least to feign a virtue though I had it not, and for a few weeks I was the most tolerant of men.

I was deeply honored when Pül dedicated one of his books to me, a mark of friendship which I deeply cherish.

Pül introduced Kathryn and me to his beautiful and beloved Freiburg and one summer we climbed the *Feldberg* together where for the first time I heard his magnificent knock, his personal signal that could be heard for more than a quarter mile.

Through all the years of our friendship, I, like all of you, suffered or occasionally delighted in Pül's relentless punning. If Pül had written Descartes' Discourse on Method, he would have said, "I pun; therefore I am." And the argument would still have been valid.

On this occasion of summing up, I think of how much Kathryn and I owe to the intersection of our lives with those of Pül and Marian.

Pül was the source of much insight and intellectual stimulation.

Pül was a model of the teacher-scholar.

Pül was the source of much joy and happiness -- rare gifts in this life that, spiritually speaking, becomes increasingly hard.

Pül infected me with his love of Hans Sachs and Goethe.

And at last, he finds the rest of which Goethe wrote:

Ü:ber allen Gipfeln  
Ist Ruh.  
In allen Wipfeln  
Spürest du  
Kaum einen Hauch;  
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.  
Warte nur, balde  
Ruhest du auch.

Ruhest du, lieber Freund.

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## By A. Leslie Willson

Jeanne and I first met Wolfgang Michael at the University of Texas at Austin almost 46 years ago, in the fall of 1948, when I was a first-year-fourth-year German major and she a new graduate student from Bryn Mawr. In 1949, in accordance with his well-known penchant for type-casting in his play productions, he cast my wife-to-be as the witch and me as God in Goethe's *Faust*. In 1950 Dr. Michael was the director of my MA thesis, which had to do with Thomas Mann and Gerhart Hauptmann. At the time that my wife and I became acquainted with Dr. Michael, theatrically he could rant and rave at colleagues, students, secretaries, actors, and stagehands alike, but the show went on and always bore the stamp of his unique vision and the excellence he demanded.

Dr. Michael became Mike to friends and colleagues only after Marian came along and type-cast him as the essentially sweet-tempered and lovable professor he was. A dedicated scholar, Mike was also a quintessential teacher who loved students and what they could accomplish when challenged and harangued and nurtured. Admittedly, he could be implacable -- he was genuinely independent in his thought -- but he was also generous with his time and his ideas. He came to me one day and, handing me a small slip of paper, said it was something he would never have time to investigate and that I should follow it up. From that selfless gesture came my article on Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*. Mike's genuine Germanic soul got tangled time and again in the brambles of English idiom. Mike's tea time, ever afternoon at four in the Tobin Room in Batts Hall, was a fixture in the Department. One day he confronted me at my desk and

said, "Leslie, come drink tea with me and we can chew the rug." My laughter was spontaneous, as was his echo of it. Of course, I drank tea with him.

What Professor Wolfing Michael accomplished in his long tenure at the University of Texas is easily measured by the surface but impossible to probe at its depths. he was a scholar of international repute, the recipient of medals and awards in recognition of his contributions to the dissemination of German language and culture. But his statewide TAGS, his campus Stammtisch, the annual play, and the countless hours he spent -- both in his office and in his home -- with fiercely loyal students are also part of his legacy, the more vivid part. We'll miss him now, knowing that he cannot be replaced. The memory of him will dwell in the hearts of all who knew him, all those who recognized his decency, his originality of thought, his superb stagemanship, and his devotion to the welfare and enlightenment of students.

Farewell Mike,  
Leslie

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## By Manfred Triesch, Goethe Institute

(from the *Festschrift*; freely according to Hans Sachs)

Als man zählt neunzehnhundert jar  
Und neun weitre jar fürwar  
Nach des herren Christi geburt,  
Er, schuler Michael, gleich geboren wurd  
Februarii an dem dreiundzwanzigsten tag  
Darnach man ihn zu tauffen pflag.  
Zehnjärig darnach anfieng  
In die lateinisch schule gieng'  
Darinn lert er puerilia,  
Grammatica and musica,  
Nach ringem brauch derselben zeit;  
Nichts ist im vergessen seit.  
Als sein lehrzeit vollendet war  
That er seinem handwerck nach wandern  
Von einer statte zur andern,  
Erstlich gen München, dann Bryn Mawr  
Gen Austin zog er sich zurück  
Macht darnach dort sein meisterstück.

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## Wolfgang Michael, 1909-1994

by Douglass Parker

The instances must be quite scarce  
Of macaronic Knittelvers  
Employed as last memorial:  
This spavined, stumbling doggerel,  
This rhyme-determined, slapdash form  
Is hardly, let us say, the norm  
For witness-bearing to a life  
Now just removed from stress and strife  
To ultimate rest, especially  
When, taken in totality,  
Said life was studious and sedate.  
Knittelvers? Too Passionate,  
Too rough-and-ready, really, for  
A gentle, retiring Professor.

Well, now: My halting Deutsch confirms  
A definite shortage in its terms  
Psychophilological:  
My German Wortschatz is quite small . . .  
But even were it Brockhaus-vast  
With all gradations typed and classed  
And connotations sharp, unblurred,  
Still, Leidenschaft would be the word  
For Wolfgang Michael. Not that Passion  
Suffices, but it's the root impression . . .  
And one thing -- to wear my argument out --  
Er leidenschaftlich war about  
Was Knittelvers. So in his case  
In short, it seems the time and place  
To use this chunky verbal box  
For one who edited Hans Sachs.

A funny friendship, ours. Not close:  
We'd go for months without hello's.  
I knew him only latterly:  
Two decades since, I went to see  
The annual Schauspiel, als er frug  
On stage von Kleist's Zerbrochene Krug  
And played the guilty judge. And he  
Reciprocated, watching me  
Bring Shakespeare's Enobarbus low,  
Back when we did these things. I'd go  
To see his yearly German do  
And sometimes write a brief review.  
And that was it, and that was all . . .  
Ten years ago, I got the call . . .

"Professor Parker?" -- a gentle sound;

I didn't know it was Heaven's Hound;  
I didn't know it was Judgment Day --  
"I've translated a Latin play  
written in fifteen-thirty-nine.  
Could you check over my Latein?"  
[He didn't say Latein. The curse  
Of macaronic knittelverse  
Is ceaseless watching out for rhyme.]  
"It won't require a lot of time."  
[He did say that. I'll recall forever.]  
"So please, could you just look it over?"  
An Übersicht? Sure, I could do it:  
The scholar's shuffle: Riffle through it,  
Descend infrequently to quibble  
About a meaning; drop a dribble  
Of learning here, a reference there,  
Three hours max, done and to spare  
-- Of time, it wouldn't cost me much --  
Then hand it back with the proper touch  
Of collegiate geniality:  
"Well, here it is; looks fine to me."  
I answered him by formula:  
"Just check the Latin? Freilich, ja."

One rainy afternoon I spent . . .  
But no, that wasn't what he meant  
It was rather more than the hour hand's twitch:  
I'd signed on for a five-year hitch.

When I returned the manuscript,  
Pronouncing, just before I slipped  
Away, my ritualized "looks fine,"  
Mike said, "Let's go through line-by-line."

Torturous. His Latin lovely; my German execrable.

Why didn't I say NO? I simply couldn't. This was the most important thing in the world for him: there must be something in it somewhere.

Like many academics, I pride myself on many interests, BUT Johann Witz, Johannes Sapidus, dramaturg and scholar and teacher Schlettstadt/Alsatian C. 16 Schulmeister, comedy on Lazarus; not exactly what I had in mind

Through once by 1988. Twice more.

At some time, I became an official collaborator.

Which meant, I had two thorny pieces to write. On Sapidus' meter . . . You see?  
and S and the classics.

Screaming inside I DON'T WANT TO BE DOING THIS, and yet, at the same time, utterly fascinated, both by Sapidus and Mike.

Eventually, the work ended. The book appeared. My prose, dutifully translated in German by Mike.

And life seemed incomplete and pale:  
No Hound of Heaven on my tail.

So when he mentioned last Fall that he was working on ANOTHER reformation Latin play, I WAS THE ONE THAT OFFERED. With something like horror, I would find myself aching for it. I had, somehow, the passion.

How can this meter be the measure  
Keckheit  
ganz und gar  
exemplifying Leidenschaft.  
And yet . . .

Instead of time's least niche,

It's what we do . . .

Arrowsmith, Ramey, Michael.

Sachs und wachsen

Den zieh man Schad gen Schaden ab,  
darmit man Fired in Ehstand hab  
und kein Uneinigkeit aufwachs.  
Das wünschet uns allen Hans Sachs.

We shall not look upon his like  
Again. Goodbye and Thank You Mike.

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