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## IN MEMORIAM WILLIAM H. McCLAIN 1917 -1994

This issue, the forty-third, of *The Report* is dedicated to the memory of Professor William H. McClain, who lost his life under tragic circumstances, the victim of a criminal attack, on May 16, 1994.

During his long and successful career as a scholar and teacher, Bill McClain always generously shared his profound knowledge of German literature, culture and history with his colleagues, friends and countless students, and he dedicated much of his time to serving professional organizations.

In 1939 Bill began his studies of German at Case Western Reserve University in his native Cleveland. He did his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, where he received his doctorate in 1943. His first post was as an instructor in German in the Army Specialized Training Program at Wisconsin. In the spring of 1945, he was assigned to the staff of Robert Murphy, the U.S. political advisor to General Eisenhower, and was afterwards attached to the Consular Office in Frankfurt am Main. After his service abroad he began his academic teaching career at Harvard University (1946-1952). He then taught from 1953 to 1982 at the Johns Hopkins University, where for seven years he served as the chairman of the Department of German.

As a teacher of German, Bill devoted part of his time to the instruction of undergraduates. His classes were extraordinarily popular, attracting students from various fields, many of whom would perhaps not have studied this subject, an elective for most of them, if it had not been for the contagious enthusiasm with which Bill taught the masterworks of German literature. His graduate seminars were also well attended, inspiring and highly informative, and, as an advisor of doctoral candidates, Bill guided nearly thirty dissertations. Most of his students are still following his excellent example, teaching German language and literature to young Americans, thus keeping the tradition very much alive. In a letter of appreciation, presented on the occasion of Bill's

65th birthday, one of the students who wrote a doctoral thesis with him expressed his gratitude by saying that one of the best things he had received from Bill and which he sought to emulate in his own work, was "a style of teaching and scholarship that actively elicits participation of students in real discussions and treats literature as a thing of deep human interest—not merely as 'material' to be categorized, catalogued and transported to the consumer or as mere exemplification of more important philosophical ideas or structural schemes."

Bill McClain's excellence as a teacher earned him numerous awards, among them a special citation from the Hopkins administration, the Lindback award for distinguished teaching, and the student council's Gilman Award. An honor of a different kind was the Distinguished Alumnus Award from his alma mater in 1967; and, in 1981, the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association honored him with its Heritage Award for exceptional service to the University.

As a scholar widely known and respected in his field, Bill McClain has enriched Germanistic studies with important contributions of lasting value to Romanticism, Realism and contemporary literature. He treated the writings of Goethe, Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Otto Ludwig, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Thomas Mann, in each case expanding our knowledge of the author and the works he discussed.

He also made significant contributions to the study of German-American literary relations, revealing and delineating far-reaching crosscurrents. He co-edited the letters of Gerstacker, Bodenstedt, and Muhlbach and published articles on the importance of their works for the American audience and on the reception of their American novels and *Reiseberichte* among German readers, whose image of the United States was profoundly influenced by these writings.

Bill McClain wrote many reviews for the Baltimore *Sun* concerned with the works of prominent German writers, among them Kleist,

Heine, Mann, Kafka, Frisch, Dürrenmatt, and Nelly Sachs, addressing the general public, conveying stimulating information which may well have encouraged many a reader to acquire these books.

Active as an officer in several professional organizations, Bill founded the Maryland Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German and was for many years (1954-1972) faculty advisor of Delta Phi Alpha, the national German honor society, of which he established a chapter at Johns Hopkins. For a number of years he served as President of the American Goethe Society, which at its monthly meetings introduced many national and international scholars to the Baltimore community.

The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland owes Bill McClain an immeasurable debt. From 1955 to the present he served on the Executive Committee, from 1983-1987 as Second Vice President. A member and, most recently, chairman of the Editorial Committee of the *The Report*, he was substantially involved in the planning and preparation of various issues of our journal. The articles he published in *The Report* are evidence of his fascination with the history of German-American relations in Maryland. His series of "Salutes" to the German-American business enterprises of Baltimore, beginning in 1990, is being concluded in the present issue. His very last article, on Jacob Gross, superintendent of the Stieff Piano

Company, is in many ways characteristic of Bill's versatility. He was, of course, consistently interested in the academic study of great German writers and the elucidation of their famous works, but he also treated more mundane matters for the enlightenment of the general reader. He enjoyed working with others and in the process continued to make new friends with whom he then collaborated, congenially and effectively, on these projects.

Bill McClain's sudden death has saddened many. He is mourned here and abroad with deep sorrow. His friends will miss his kind and gentle ways and the eagerness with which he shared his interesting experiences with them, often with a wonderful sense of humor; his graduate students have lost a fatherly friend to whom they could always turn for advice and encouragement; the many undergraduates he taught and counseled long into his retirement will fondly remember him because of his genuine concern for their welfare and development; and our Society has lost an active and ardent supporter. All of us will often think of Bill with appreciation for his friendship and loyalty, with great esteem for his excellent scholarly work and with gratitude for his dedicated participation in our continuing contribution to the study of German-American relations.

— Lieselotte E. Kurth  
The Johns Hopkins University