

SPEAKERS & PRESENTERS @ SYMPOSIUM



Erika Eichenseer, born in Munich, Germany, in 1934, was brought up in a teacher's family with a story-telling mother. After studying to become a teacher, she married Dr Adolf Eichenseer, also a teacher, who later became the art director for traditional cultural development in the Oberpfalz (Upper Palatinate), a part of Bavaria. Both Erika and Adolf are storytellers, authors, playwrights and poets, who have dedicated much of their lives to keeping alive the region's traditional culture.

Until 1979, Erika was a teacher in elementary and secondary schools. There she started a school theatre, adapting regional tales, such as those from Franz Xaver von Schönwerth, which fascinated her from the very beginning. Besides putting on plays, she experimented with different and mixed media such as puppets, marionettes, shadow theatre, black-light-shows.

From 1979 on she changed direction to work in her husband's institute for traditional cultural development, specializing in regional literature, documentation and the re-animation of traditional customs and arts. In this function she guided 400 amateur theatre groups in the region, giving them specialized courses, reviewing the value of their playing material, opening up many other possibilities for finding good plays, and she wrote plays herself.

In 1986, the 100th anniversary of the death of Franz Xavier von Schönwerth, the German collector of folklore, customs, myths and legends, who worked at the time of the brothers Grimm and was highly regarded by them, she edited a reader and an educational supplement with his tales for all schools in the region to promote this mostly unknown collector of the complete folk customs and tales of Oberpfalz. This was not enough, however, to launch Schönwerth, who remained unknown.

In 2010, his 200th birthday-anniversary, the newly established Schönwerth-society succeeded in raising his profile. A series of presentations, mainly planned and produced by Dr Adolf and Erika Eichenseer, focused the public view on this extraordinary personality. And "Prinz Roßwifl" ("The Scarab Prince"), a choice of Schönwerth's fairytales, edited by Erika Eichenseer, was published.

In March 2012, an article in "The Guardian" focused international interest on the 500 unknown tales, brought to light in Erika's book and regarded as a "sensational find". Prinz Roßwifl included new fairytales never published before, and they had the great historical value of being in the original oral format they were collected in.

Still to come: A new book of more unknown Schönwerth fairytales, edited by Erika and translated into English by the renowned fairytale expert, Maria Tatar, will be released shortly by Penguin. They are expected to change our understanding so far of German fairytales. And, based on a libretto written by Erika, the fairytale from Schönwerth's collection, "The Flying Chest", will be staged on July 2013 in Regensburg. This will establish Schönwerth's value not only for children but also for adults.