

*[Speech held in German language]*

**Welcome by City of Chemnitz Mayor, Barbara**

**Ludwig, at the award ceremony for the International Stefan Heym Prize on 10th April 2013**

*As delivered.*

Mr Hein,  
Mrs Husmann-Hein,  
Mrs Heym,  
Members of the Bundestag, the Saxon State Parliament  
and of Chemnitz City Council,  
Members of the Award Committee,  
Mr Schulze,  
Mayors and Mayoresses,  
Professor Hahn,  
Mr Rotstein,  
Mr Magirius,  
Professor van Zyl,  
Mr Ćosić,  
Dr. Uhlig,  
My dear fellow residents of Chemnitz,  
Honoured guests of this celebration,

Literary awards are dedicated to the positive power of freedom of expression.

They allow us to pay tribute to writers whose work reaches beyond itself, whose poems, plays, novels and stories stand the test of time.

This is especially true for authors who have, through both their works and their lives, fought injustice.

I'm thinking of Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich Mann or Kurt Tucholsky.

The man whose work we are honouring with this award has earned his place amongst this array of eminent writers and individuals, and today we celebrate his 100th birthday: Stefan Heym.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to welcome you all this evening and to be with you to celebrate the climax of this Stefan Heym Week.

Mr Hein,

Thank you so much for joining us in Chemnitz this evening. It is a great joy and honour for us to present you with this prize.

My thanks go to the Award Committee for the City of Chemnitz International Stefan Heym Prize. They carry a heavy responsibility.

Their decision is an interpretation of how we encounter Stefan Heym today. And how he would encounter us.

I am particularly grateful to Mrs Heym for her wise guidance of our work.

We have consciously departed from our schedule to award the prize this year to mark the 100th birthday of the author whose name it bears.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Stefan Heym was, if I may say so, a notorious spoilsport – in the very best sense of the word. Whether he was a pupil in a country overboiling with nationalism, a soldier in the US Army, a writer in the GDR or president by seniority of the German parliament, the Bundestag, in a reunified Germany.

As an 18-year-old schoolboy in Chemnitz, he wrote,

“It’s murder we teach! Murder we spew!  
Murder’s our export, we do quite a few!”<sup>1</sup>

These lines come from his poem “The Export Trade”. An anti-war poem in a country less than two years away from the National Socialists assuming power.

What drives him? He comes from a Jewish family. Is he reckless or courageous? This is an existential question.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation taken from:  
Peter Hutchinson: Stefan Heym: The Perpetual Dissident, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 10

He first fights as a soldier in the US Army against Nazi Germany. However, stationed in the American occupied zone after the war and working as an editor, Heym refuses to write an anti-Soviet article.

His refusal means he has to give up his job as an editor and leave his homeland. He is sent back to the USA.

Later, as a writer in the GDR, he writes books whose banning is inevitable. He publishes in the West and accepts the penalty for this.

The SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) regime temporarily lifts its publication ban on Heym. Perhaps as an offer of a kind of coexistence.

His response to this offer is to sign a letter of protest against the expulsion of Wolf Biermann.

And fortunately he learnt nothing new in his later years. His call for the reunification of Germany to not be merely political, legal and financial, but also to be understood as a great cultural undertaking disturbed the image of a flourishing landscape.

Choosing the easy path was never his way. And he also bars this path to his readers, and perhaps his admirers, too, and does so with a vehemence.

In his writings he seeks to corner the fellow traveller, to tear him from the protection offered by institutions and abstract structures.

He contrasts this with the responsible, free and freely speaking individual, a member of a society that is characterised in equal measure by what is right and what is just.

Heym doesn't just demand this responsibility and then entrench himself behind his work. It is the way he led his own life that removes every alibi we have for not acting in accordance with our conscience.

"Sometimes I'd like to shout at people, 'Don't look at me like that, I'm no wiser than you are,'" he once said in an interview. People believed him.

It is sentences like these that make people afraid that one individual can possess so much courage. Heym sharpens the point of his rigorous demands with the insight that no one is born a hero.

Yes, people can make mistakes. Yes, we should not, must not, turn our own opinions into rigid doctrines. But the values and principles that are the foundations of our perception and judgement, they must remain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Heym somehow triggers the human need to categorise, to classify.

In a 20th century so marked by ideological, territorial and moral front lines, where black and white have long been the defining colours, he uses a whole range of nuanced shades. He liked to fall between the stools of East and West, capitalism and socialism.

His service for the USA despite his socialist convictions, the fact that he remained in the GDR, his seat in the PDS parliamentary group in the Bundestag. He sometimes seems almost irrational. On closer inspection, though, Heym's actions were guided by reason. He saw the boundaries, the injustice, the barriers, even in a reunified Germany.

His time as a politician also ties in with this. He was not frightened of starting or ending this period.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We should not make the mistake of reading Heym simply as an author or as a figure from the recent history of East and West Germany.

It's tempting to do so. After all, the face of the world has fundamentally changed in the last 20 years.

Heym always homed in on the individual and illuminated the potential of the individual, the ability to make a difference in a wider context.

In a globalised world, this wider context can seem very wide indeed. And the individual smaller, and the difference we can make seems smaller, too, and hence the responsibility we bear can seem diminished.

Conversely, a chapter in the great textbook that this year has been shows us that, ultimately, the structures and institutions we live in all depend on human beings and the decisions they make.

Because who wants to have to decide whether it's those who bet on countries going bankrupt who are guilty, or the system that enabled them to do so?

Mr Hein, your books also discuss how the individual thinks and acts within our systems of social, judicial, political and not least interpersonal rules.

But your links with Stefan Heym go far beyond this. You, too, have written from life, as you have come to know it from the most varied perspectives, as an assembly worker, a waiter, a translator and not least as a playwright and storyteller.

And like Heym your literary talent and the success that went with it meant you developed a certain invulnerability that the GDR simply had to permit.

But to allude to the alternative title of your famous book, you did not bathe in dragon's blood, either. And so you gambled with your fragile security by criticising GDR censorship, for instance.

Along with Stefan Heym, you took the opportunity in 1989 to speak freely and openly. I'm sure you will have shared the feeling that Heym expressed in the now famous image of a window forced open.

Later, too, as the Chairman of the PEN Club in reunified Germany or as the co-editor of *Freitag*, you were committed to freedom of speech and the expression of opinions.

Perhaps a society like ours, in which enjoying fundamental rights and freedoms seem so self-evident that we risk forgetting how to use them, needs commitment like yours.

Honoured guests of this celebration,  
we are today awarding the City of Chemnitz International Stefan Heym Prize for the third time. In doing so, we are honouring both a great son of our city and the prizewinner, Christoph Hein.

I am now delighted to ask Ingo Schulze to speak.