“My dear Li!” Correspondence 1937-1946

“Meine liebe Li!” Der Briefwechsel 1937-1946

by Heisenberg, Werner, Heisenberg, Elisabeth, Edited by Anna Maria Hirsch-Heisenberg
Residenz Verlag
August 2011 / 352pp
Non-Fiction

The Goethe-Institut supported the English translation of this book.

review

Published partly as a result of Michael Frayn’s Copenhagen, a play which re-opened the discussion about Werner Heisenberg’s role in World War II, and partly in an attempt to bring closure to the controversy surrounding his wartime activities, *My Dear Li!* is an extremely important document for historians, biographers, and physicists alike. The book comprises the correspondence between the Nobel Prizewinning German physicist Werner Heisenberg and his wife Elisabeth during the years 1937 to 1946, introduced by their eldest daughter, Anna Maria Hirsch. The letters are largely left to speak for themselves, apart from those from 1945, where the corresponding chapter includes Werner’s diary entries for the last fourteen days before his arrest at the end of the War.

Three important strands run through the letters. First, they are a testimony to the period in terms both of what is said and of what could not be said for fear of the censor. They portray the stark realities of everyday life with all its difficulties throughout the wartime period. Second, the letters help to clarify a number of the questions that have arisen in connection with Werner Heisenberg. Why did he not leave to go to America when he had the opportunity? The letters make it clear that he felt duty-bound to continue to support the development of science in his country beyond the end of the war, which he was

convinced Germany would lose, and to work thereafter in the interests of the New Europe. At the same time, he was not happy with his work on the uranium project, which he saw as meaningless; however, the project allowed him to prevent himself and his colleagues from being sent to the Front. He perhaps underestimated the dangers of this route and always focused on the peaceful exploitation of atomic energy after the war, rather than the realities of creating the atom bomb for Germany. Always on his guard to appear loyal, his letters reveal his growing exhaustion and his longing to be at one with nature. Elisabeth's responses are thus always of great comfort to him. This leads to the third strand running through the letters, namely the strengthening of the relationship of the couple and how they manage to help each other through the stormy period.

Meticulously edited, the letters provide precious, rich and vivid images of the lives of Werner and Elisabeth Heisenberg.

about the authors

Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) was one of the most prominent figures in Theoretical Physics and Quantum Mechanics. In 1932 he received the Nobel Prize in Physics for the formulation of his Uncertainty Principle. He stayed in Germany between 1933 and 1945, which led to much animosity against him. From 1939 onwards he worked on the development of nuclear power plants, was detained in England in 1945 and released a year later to help to develop an institute for Physics in Göttingen. From 1958-1970 he was head of the Max Planck Institute for Physics in Munich.

Anna Maria Heisenberg, the eldest daughter of Werner and Elisabeth Heisenberg, was born in 1938. She studied Music and Psychology and worked as a teacher in Bonn. She lives near Munich. In 2003 she published letters sent to her parents up to 1945, entitled "Liebe Eltern! Briefe aus kritischer Zeit 1918-1945".

Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) was one of the most prominent figures in Theoretical Physics and Quantum Mechanics. In 1932 he received the Nobel Prize in Physics for the formulation of his Uncertainty Principle. He stayed in Germany between 1933 and 1945, which led to much animosity against him. From 1939 onwards he worked on the development of nuclear power plants, was detained in England in 1945 and released a year later to help to develop an institute for Physics in Göttingen. From 1958-1970 he was head of the Max Planck Institute for Physics in Munich.

Anna Maria Heisenberg, the eldest daughter of Werner and

Elisabeth Heisenberg, was born in 1938. She studied Music and Psychology and worked as a teacher in Bonn. She lives near Munich. In 2003 she published letters sent to her parents up to 1945, entitled “Liebe Eltern! Briefe aus kritischer Zeit 1918-1945”.

Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) was one of the most prominent figures in Theoretical Physics and Quantum Mechanics. In 1932 he received the Nobel Prize in Physics for the formulation of his Uncertainty Principle. He stayed in Germany between 1933 and 1945, which led to much animosity against him. From 1939 onwards he worked on the development of nuclear power plants, was detained in England in 1945 and released a year later to help to develop an institute for Physics in Göttingen. From 1958-1970 he was head of the Max Planck Institute for Physics in Munich.

Anna Maria Heisenberg, the eldest daughter of Werner and Elisabeth Heisenberg, was born in 1938. She studied Music and Psychology and worked as a teacher in Bonn. She lives near Munich. In 2003 she published letters sent to her parents up to 1945, entitled “Liebe Eltern! Briefe aus kritischer Zeit 1918-1945”.

rights information

Residenz Verlag
Gutenbergstr. 12,
3100 St.Pölten, Austria
Tel: +43 2742 802 1411
Email: r.anderle@residenzverlag.at
Contact: Renate Anderle
www.residenzverlag.at

Residenz Verlag was founded in 1956 in Salzburg, initially concentrating on fine art and non-fiction titles. During the 1960s a fiction list was added, and leading Austrian authors including H.C. Artmann, Thomas Bernhard, Barbara Frischmuth and Peter Handke published their first work here. German and Swiss writers were gradually included and followed, in the 1980s, by international authors in translation. The non-fiction list includes books on contemporary history as well as monographs of nineteenth and twentieth century artists and books on music, theatre and architecture. Since 2001, in its Nilpferd imprint, it has also been publishing literary and artistic picture books and fiction for young readers.