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Special Issue on
Contemporary German Poetry
Guest Editor
James Rolleston

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Introduction

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Writings from the Margins: German-Jewish Women
Poets from the Bukovina

Amy Colin

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Abstract. Emerging at the crossroads of heterogeneous languages and cultures, German-Jewish women's poetry from the Bukovina displays the characteristics of its fascinating multilingual contextuality, yet it also bears the stigma of a double marginalization, for its representatives became time and again targets of both anti-Semitic attacks as well as gender discrimination. The present essay explores the untiring struggles of German-Jewish women authors from the Bukovina for acceptance within the Jewish and non-Jewish community. It analyzes their attempts to cope with social barriers, prejudices, and their difficult situation as both women and Jews. The essay also sets their poetry against the background of their multilingual contextuality. It is the Bukovinian biotope, where Ruthenians, Romanians, Germans, Jews, Armenians, Magyars, Poles, Lipovanes, and Hutsuls peacefully coexisted for many centuries, producing a variegated Romanian, Ruthenian, Austro-German, German-Jewish, and Yiddish literature as well as poets who were

Between Ideologies and a Hard Place: Hans Magnus Enzensberger's Utopian Pragmatist Poetics

Jonathan Monroe

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Abstract. The marginalization of poetry in North American culture makes it difficult to appreciate fully on this side of the Atlantic the importance of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's literary and cultural contributions over the past four decades. Working against familiar cultural encodings that would align poetry uncritically with the "personal" and prose with the "political," his oeuvre makes a strong case for poetry and critical prose as vitally complementary activities. In his 1991 collection of poems, *Zukunftsmusik* (Future Music) and his 1993 prose collection, *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*, Enzensberger renews his longstanding commitment to "the process / of becoming human." Taken together, the two collections suggest the importance of maintaining connections across genres and their constituencies. In the context of the chaotic civil wars and "great migrations" that have shaped global culture since 1989, Enzensberger's thoroughgoing attention to internal differences within language and culture offers a model of hopeful resistance to an increasingly unreflective culture. His recent writing calls us to look carefully into what poetry will become, and for whom, in the wake of 1989. (JM)

. . . und . . . Fried . . . und . . . : The Poetry of Erich Fried and the Structure of Contemporaneity

Nora M. Alter

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Abstract. This essay looks at the poetry of Erich Fried in the context of tensions within contemporary cultural studies. Fried's contemporaneity is linked to his status on the margins of various cultures, media, and ideologies—thus making both his life and his works appear as exemplary paradigms for the postmodern condition, with its various theoretical celebrations of "exile," "border crossing," "transgression," "deterritorialization," and so forth. Yet, at the same time, seemingly in contrast with his labile identity is Fried's rigid Marxist political ideological core which surfaces in his political poetry. Focusing, in particular, on Fried's poems directed against the Vietnam War, this essay seeks to situate the tension between these two positions as a deep structure already in his work. (NMA)

Modernism and Metamorphosis: Karin Kiwus' *Das Chinesische Examen*

James Rolleston

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Abstract. A Chinese examination requires one to record everything felt or recalled within a given time frame. It “tests” an entire life. Karin Kiwus’ poetic tools for taking the exam are monumentality, the freezing of imagined history into the dimension of a statue—that then crumbles back into time; and metamorphosis, the subjection of moments and personae to quasi-musical structures of ceaseless variation. (JR)

A Poetics of Place: Günter Kunert’s Poem Sequence “Herbstanbruch in Arkadien”

Leonard Olschner

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Abstract. Kunert’s volume of poetry *Fremd daheim* (*Foreign at Home*, 1990) defines a poetics of place, a poetics that demonstrates continuities in Kunert’s lyric texts that reaches from his last years in the GDR, through his years in the old Federal Republic and beyond the *Wende* of 1989. Here he attempts to determine where the lyrical subject (or voice) is situated with respect to its origins and to trajectories into a future. Some poems thematize a return to the self as a homecoming, since no other homecoming is conceivable, while others commemorate travel and places abroad. The latter become metaphorical excursions into the self as well. The essay concentrates on the first sequence of the volume, “Herbstanbruch in Arkadien.” (LO)

New Poems

Günter Kunert Translated by Leonard Olschner

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“An Affair on Uncertain Ground”: Sarah Kirsch’s Poetry Volume *Erlking’s Daughter* in the Context of Her Prose After the *Wende*

Christine Cosentino Translated by James Rolleston

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Abstract. Sarah Kirsch, who in the wake of the Biermann scandal moved from East to West Germany in 1977, is arguably the most

talented living German lyric poet. But she is also a prose writer. It seems that since her break with the GDR in 1977 and the breakup of the GDR in 1989, this particular genre has gained importance in her literary output. Her diary-like prose records and blends intense reactions to events of change or collapse, “German brouhaha”: political, historical, environmental, existential, and personal. Critics have called Kirsch’s prose “lyrical prose” and her latest poetry “more prosaic,” “feeling its way in close proximity to prose.” The prose volumes *Chaff* (1991), *Vibrating Turf* (1991), and *The Simple Life* (1994), as well as her poems in the volume *Erlking’s Daughter* (1992), increasingly evoke the impression of “scattered notes,” of “fleetingness,” deliberate vagueness, or a “calculated lack of structure” in times that are still “unstructured and without character.” Political events, environmental changes, relationships, structures and strivings of whatever kind are marked by the suggestive sign of a meaningless, threatening “affair on uncertain ground.” The thought of formlessness, of the formal destructuring of prose and poetry suggests Kirsch’s uncertainty and pessimism about the possibility of artistically and philosophically restructuring or controlling reality. (CC)

Footprints Revisited or “Life in the Changed Space that I don’t Know”: Elke Erb’s Poetry Since 1989

Barbara Mabee

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Abstract. After the fall of the Wall, the lyrical correspondence of the East German writer Elke Erb with the Austrian experimental writer Friederike Mayröcker proved to be of great significance for Erb’s process of reexamining perspectives and constituting a new poetic self. In a close reading of Erb’s post-*Wende* texts, the article discusses Erb’s reshaping of her poetic craft against the backdrop of her life in the former GDR and literary discourses in unified Germany. The analysis of representative poetry focuses on three areas of Erb’s poetry collections after 1989: critical reflections on life in the former GDR through linguistically playful strategies; unanchored existence in spaces of language that signify a suspicious stance toward language and signification; intertextuality in the form of “text-echoes” with Friederike Mayröcker. This essay argues that Erb’s intense reading of Mayröcker between 1991 and 1994 is a unique model of female reader response. (BM)

Fundamentally Grounded [Gründlich mit Grund]

Elke Erb Translated by James Rolleston et al.

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Abstract. An East German poet examines her own production in the years 1991-1995. Precise images, e.g. of animals and landscapes both primeval and immediate, are correlated with the precise date and manner of their emergence from the poetic unconscious. The poet's self-questioning is autobiographical, professional, and social: What is the correlation between linguistic work and play and the ongoing transformation of a social order? What do intimate moments and enigmatic images tell us about the new realities of a capitalist collectivity? A key to the meaning of wrenching change is found in Erb's intensive involvement with the work of an older poet, Friederike Mayröcker. (JR)

Improved Versions: Feminist Poetics and Recent Work by Ulla Hahn and Ursula Krechel

Charlotte Melin

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Abstract. This essay analyzes how Ulla Hahn and Ursula Krechel in their recent poetry and essays have drawn a connection between feminism and their writing. The feminine/feminist outlook they advance is exemplary for their generation of women authors because they have sought to expand the poetic canon by interrogating assumptions made by modernism. A reappraisal of their poetry suggests that interpretations of their work must take account of the feminist poetics of these authors. (CM)

The Intimacy of Internationalism in the Poetry of Joachim Sartorius

Neil H. Donahue

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Abstract. This article considers Joachim Sartorius in his various cultural and literary activities as diplomat, administrator, editor, translator, and poet as a possible model for the German intellectual after reunification, and links those activities through the concept of "internationalism," which has shifted in meaning from programmatic politics to an understanding of cultural difference and mediation with an Other, whether as public and private spheres, Self and Other, or

Subject and Object. For Sartorius, however, poetry defines most closely or most intimately that notion of mediation, and thus requires ‘close’ reading. That notion distances him from the ‘impersonal’ Modernist poetics of Bertolt Brecht and Gottfried Benn, and links him internationally to W. C. Williams and Pierre Jean Jouve. By examining that connection, this essay defines the international and philosophical base for Sartorius’s poetics of intimacy. (NHD)

Prose and Poetry

Gerhard Falkner, Introduced by Neil Donahue

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Mediamania? Contemporary German Poetry in the Age of New Information Technologies: Thomas Kling and Durs Grünbein

Erk Grimm

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Abstract. The essay examines the preoccupation with information technologies as a dominant theme of German poetry in the 1980s and 1990s. Outlining the historical shift from a critique of mass media to the ironic affirmation of hi-tech media, the investigation seeks an understanding of its driving forces. The analysis of Enzensberger’s polemical essays on the culture industry shows the parallels and the difference in attitude between him and younger poets of the 1980s. A concise account of their publications illuminates the development of an aesthetically demanding poetry that kept aloof from the mass media. In their rejection of a common quotidian or sentimental tone, poets such as Thomas Kling and Durs Grünbein created new idioms and challenging forms while concentrating on hi-tech media as an epochal phenomenon. The sober reflection and technical terminology originate in a materialistic attitude, driven by the desire to regain the power of sophisticated aesthetic expression and to compensate for the loss of experience caused by the simulation of the past. The essay closes with a critical interpretation of the “mediamania” of the 1990s by giving heed to the fashionable remixing of poetic idioms that leaves the false impression of a new school of media poets. (EG)