

KONRAD KREZ: POET BETWEEN CONTINENTS

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“Spät erklingt, was früh erklang,
Glück und Unglück wird Gesang.”
Goethe

To sing of man's afflictions has always been the mission of poets. Immigrant poets in particular have embraced the sentiments of both joy and sadness and perpetuated these ageless companions of man. The dualism of their muse is cultivated by a sadness at being separated from one's native soil and emboldened them to pay homage to their new canton.

German-American poetry¹ is but one of the many artistic dualities which display an abundance of divided loyalties, the manifestation of which is most prominent among those talented German writers who through their participation in the 1848 revolutionary movement were forced to flee their homeland. While some of these exiles brought their battle to America and continued it through the so-called “politische Presselyrik,” others reaffirmed their unshaken patriotism in their writings in which they sought an almost mystical affinity with the land of their birth.²

Konrad Krez (1828-1897) was one of the latter poets. Because of his participation in the 1848 insurrection movement he was sentenced to death, but escaped to Switzerland and from there to France. In 1850, he came to America and at first settled in New York where he became a lawyer. Four years later he moved to Sheboygan, Wisconsin and assumed the office of District Attorney until the outbreak of the Civil War. He participated in the war and reached the rank of Brigadier General. Krez then settled in Milwaukee where he passed away on September 9, 1897.

Like most German-American poets Krez's works are sentimental and romantic, and display a deep and sensual love for nature. In his poetry he recalls the traditional values of his homeland; his baroque conservatism serves as the mystical link between his newly found home and his unreachable birthplace. Most striking in Krez's poetry is the immutable link to the past and the emergence of an intimacy with his adopted homeland. *Aus Wisconsin* (1875) displays the dual sentiments of the immigrant and the continuous growth of the poet and stands at the forefront of German-American creative literature.

Although Konrad Krez found a new and concordant life in America, his incessant patriotism enticed him continually to laud his lost homeland. *Aus Wisconsin* contains some of his most soul-stirring poetry appurtenant to this affaire de coeur.³ In “Heimweh” Krez sings not only of the far-away land, but also of his spiritual dependency upon his native soil. The poem's mixed trochaic and dactylic pattern is an old Germanic scansion which Opitz abolished as barbaric.⁴ It is, however, this old Germanic folksong rhythm which gives the poem its suscitation and emotional appeal.

HEIMWEH

Meiner Seele Feuer erlischt, der Tränen
Strom versiegt, es glüht das Gedächtnis, und die
Lust am Leben flieht, wenn ich deiner denke,
Heimischer Boden!

As can be seen in the first stanza of “Heimweh,” the poet truly sings, for the words and their part regular and part irregular rime create not only passionate emo-

tions, but also a soul-stirring melody. The poet-musician harmonizes thought, sound and rhythm in order to communicate universality. To be sure, it is Konrad Krez the poet who sings of his native soil, but through his metaphorical device he also expresses the universal lament of all men who suffer expatriation.

A truly personal poem, however, is "An Mein Vaterland." Here Krez sounds his intimate patriotism and esoteric nostalgia.

AN MEIN VATERLAND⁵

Kein Baum gehörte mir von deinen Wäldern,
 Mein war kein Halm auf deinen Roggenfeldern,
 Und schutzlos hast du mich hinausgetrieben,
 Weil ich in meiner Jugend nicht verstand
 Dich weniger und mehr mich selbst zu lieben,
 Und dennoch lieb ich dich, mein Vaterland!

Not only does the poet cast a longing and lingering look at the land of his forefathers, but he also recalls the days of his youth and the aching void of his past. It is a most sombre and solemn vociferation of love, glory and sacrifice. Most notable is the rhythm pattern of his verse, for Krez uses a five-beat iambic verse with feminine cadance, which is similar to the English heroic verse or heroic couplet. The verse is similar to that in *Faust*, but unlike *Goethe*, who employs part regular and part irregular rime, Krez uses pure rime only.⁶ The accented metre of the stanzas of this patriotic song serve to unite sombre thought with emotional rhythm.

The genuineness of the exiled poet is avowed in "An mein Vaterland." Unlike Krez, Gottfried Keller and Hoffmann von Fallersleben employ trochaic metre in the four line stanzas of their patriotic poetry. Keller makes use of dissyllabic anacrusis in order to lift the beat of his hymn.

AN DAS VATERLAND

O mein Heimatland! O mein Vaterland!
 Wie so innig, feurig lieb' ich dich!
 Schönste Ros', ob jede mir verblich,
 Duftest noch an meinem öden Strand!

Although this hymn displays the fierce love of the poet for the fatherland, it lacks the reverence of Krez's poem. Keller's poetry grows out of everyday reality and is rooted in post-romantic realism. Keller (who was not compelled to emigrate) is the naive lover who sings his emotions to his ever faithful beloved. Although Fallersleben was arrested for his "lyrical agitation" and sympathy with the cause of The Forty-Eighters, his punishment was less severe than that of Krez, for he was merely dismissed from his post at the University of Breslau. The patriotic overtones of Fallersleben's "An mein Vaterland" are strikingly similar to those of Krez's poem:

Treue Liebe bis zum Grabe
 Schwör ich dir mit Herz und Hand;
 Was ich bin und was ich habe
 Dank' ich dir, mein Vaterland!

Nicht in Worten nur und Liedern
 Ist mein Herz zum Dank bereit:
 Mit der Tat will ich's erwidern
 Dir in Not, in Kampf und Streit.

In der Freude wie im Leide
 Ruf ich's Freund' und Feinden zu:
 Ewig sind vereint wir beide,
 Und mein Trost, mein Glück bist du.

Treue Liebe bis zum Grabe
 Schwör' ich dir mit Herz und Hand;
 Was ich bin und was ich habe
 Dank' ich dir, mein Vaterland!

It is apparent that the theme and the sentiments of these three contemporary poets are concordant, but the metric pattern of Krez is different from that of Keller and Fallersleben. To be sure, Krez does very much favor the trochaic and dactylic line in his other works, but it is here, in "An Mein Vaterland," where he bolsters his pathos with the monotonous supportance of the five-beat iambic line.

It is characteristic of German-American poets that they reveal their divided loyalties in their works. Konrad Krez, like others, engaged in a continuous versification of his past, illuminating his eterne dependency upon his native soil as well as his great love for the land in which he was born.

However, like other immigrant poets, Krez has adopted his new country with the equal empressment with which he venerates Germany. Most notable perhaps is the new form in which he poetizes America. No longer does he adhibit to the measured rhythm of accented and unaccented syllables, but instead moves to the free form of the elegy and rhapsody. This metastasis is so lucid that one could conclude that the country which gave new liberty and independence to the man, also emancipated the poet. No longer bound by rime and rhythm, the poet uses unchained language in order to freely laud the treasures and sentiments of this pubescent, abundant and beautiful land.

But despite the new form and new theme, his love for nature remains singularly adamantine. In "Frühling bei New York" Krez offers a poetic view of an island having intercourse with surrounding green hills and clear water, crowned by a rejoicing sky. The language is fertile, the coinage uberous.

FRUEHLING BEI NEW YORK

(1854)

Lachend hat sich der Himmel gelagert über das Eiland,
 Um das in Liebe vereint Hudson und Meer sich geschmiegt,
 Schöner kann nicht der Äther gewölbt sein über Neapel,
 Sonniger legt sich kein Strahl über das goldene Horn.
 Frisch sind mit Gräsern bedeckt die Hügel am Ufer der Inseln,
 Und es schmückt sich die Salzwiese mit saftigem Grün.
 Zwischen dem Hickorylaub und Gewind wildwachsender Reben
 Blicken die schimmernden Landhäuser am Ufer hervor.
 Da ist ein Busch, so laubig und kühl, und dort eine Hecke,
 Heimlich und blütenbedeckt, aber die Nachtigall fehlt,
 Um Gefühl in das Herz des lauschenden Horchers zu flöten,
 Aber alles ist stumm, stumm wie das schweigende Grab.
 Lerche, wo bist du? Hast du dein Lied hier verlernet?

Vergebens

Seh ich zum Himmel hinauf! Hat dein melodisch Geschlecht
 Keinen Verwandten herüber gesandt, um singend zu flattern
 Über Amerikas höchstenglichten Fluren von Mais?

It appears that the sentiment of "Frühling bei New York" parallels the mood of the works of Klopstock, Schiller and Hölderlin.⁷ These elegiac singers praised the beauty and revivification of nature while mourning a void. Krez also is sorrowing a void for he states "aber die Nachtigall fehlt," and proceeds to ask "Lerche, wo bist du?" Both birds are old world birds and the poet is pained by the lack of familiar enchantment in this earthly elysium.

Krez's lamentation appears to be rooted in the dualism of his love which subconsciously seeks to unite two continents and which at times reveals the veiled collation of the past and the present. Krez's poem "New Orleans" is, however, free of such an apposition. Again, nature provides the theme, and the verse is free flowing and unrestrained by metrical stresses. There are no reservations or past regrets, but only the emotions of love and admiration.

NEW ORLEANS

Herrliche Stadt, du Tochter der See und des Vaters der Wasser,
 Wie die Göttin der Liebe, so spülten die Wellen ans Land dich,
 Wo du gebettet liegst im Schoose des ewigen Frühlings.
 Wie ein Märchen erscheinst du dem nördlichen Fremdling der eben
 Aus den blätterberaubten und schneeigen Ländern herabkommt,
 Wo ein düsterer Himmel auf rauchichten Städten sich lagert,
 Wie verzaubert blickt er hinauf zu den silbernen Wolken,
 Die in der Bläue des Himmels dahinzueh'n, blickt er zur Erde,
 Wo die Strahlen der Sonne das Land und das Wasser vergolden.
 Mitten im Winter begrüsst er das dunkle Laub der Orangen,
 Und bewundert den herrlichen Baum mit den goldenen Aepfeln,
 Den die duftende Blüte, die reife und reifende Frucht schmückt.
 Staunend betrachtet er den vor den Häusern zur Zierde gepflanzten,
 Aus den Stielen des Laubes gebildeten Stamm der Banane,
 Deren Blätter wie flatternde Fahnen im Winde sich wiegen.
 Fröhlich und heiter geniesst hier das Volk in glücklichem Leichtsinn,
 Wie die Vögel im Wald, freiwillige Gaben des Himmels.
 Lieblich ist es hier wohnen, und knüpften nicht Bande, die stärker
 sind als die Gürtel der Erde, mich an das kalte Wisconsin,
 Wo die Ceder wächst und der Zucker träufelnde Ahorn,
 Möchte ich gern in den sonnigen Fluren von Luisiana
 Eine Hütte mir baun, in dem Lande, wo niemals die Rosen
 Müde werden zu blüh'n, wo die Feige wächst und die Myrte,
 Und der spottende Vogel sein Nest ins Granatengebüsch baut.

"New Orleans" is truly an American hymn in which Krez abandons restrictions on form, rime and pattern and his endeavor to coarctate the span of two continents. Konrad Krez the poet has matured and has in fact become an American poet. The lines "Möchte ich gern in den sonnigen Fluren von Luisiana eine Hütte mir baun, in dem Lande, wo niemals die Rosen müde werden zu blüh'n" show perhaps best the deep affection which Krez now feels for his new homeland. No longer does he sing of beauty only, but he unequivocally desires to become a part of this noble culmination.

Certainly, no account of Krez is complete without citing "Da waren Deutsche auch dabei." This poem lauds the puissant parity of German-American heritage, and the poet's pride of being German is fused with his pride of having become American. It is an account of the gifts of the old world to the new world, and of old world men contributing to the culture and destiny of the still infant land. The theme of this

poem is also the essence of Krez's being. Honor your heritage, embrace your past, but pursue the new dawn.

DA WAREN DEUTSCHE AUCH DABEI

Als Bettler sind wir nicht gekommen
 Aus unserem deutschen Vaterland.
 Wir hatten manches mitgenommen,
 Was hier noch fremd und unbekannt.
 Und als man schuf aus dichten Wäldern,
 Aus öder, düstrer Wüstenei
 Den Kranz von reichen Feldern,
 Da waren Deutsche auch dabei.

Gar vieles, was in früheren Zeiten
 Ihr kaufen müsset überm Meer,
 Das lehrten wir euch selbst bereiten,
 Wir stellten manche Werkstatt her.
 Oh, wagt es nicht, dies zu vergessen,
 Sagt nicht, als ob das nicht so sei,
 Es künden's tausend Feueressen,
 Da waren Deutsche auch dabei.

Und was die Kunst und Wissenschaften
 Euch hier verlieh'n an Kraft und Stärk',
 Es bleibt der Ruhm am Deutschen haften,
 Das meiste war der Deutschen Werk.
 Und wenn aus vollen Tönen klinget
 Ans Herz des Liedes Melodei,
 Ich glaub' von dem, was ihr da singet,
 Ist vieles Deutsche auch dabei.

Drum steh'n wir stolz auf festem Grunde,
 Den unsere Kraft der Wildnis nahm,
 Wie wär's mit eurem Staatenbunde,
 Wenn nie zu euch ein Deutscher kam?
 Und wie in Bürgerkriegstagen,
 Ja schon beim ersten Freiheitsschrei:
 Wir dürfen's unbestritten sagen,
 Da waren Deutsche auch dabei.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an excellent sampling of the various themes to be found in German-American poetry, see Robert E. Ward, *Deutsche Lyrik Aus Amerika. Eine Auswahl*, The Literary Society Foundation, Inc. (New York, 1969).

2. For illuminating insight into the lives and works of the Forty-Eighters, see: Eitel Wolf Dobert, *Deutsche Demokraten, die Achtundvierziger und ihre Schriften*. (Göttingen, 1958); Carl Wittke, *Refugees of the Revolution* (Phila., 1952); A. E. Zucker, *The Forty-Eighters* (New York, 1950; 1957); Gottlieb Betz, "Die deutschamerikanische patriotische Lyrik der Achtundvierziger und ihre historische Grundlage," Ph.D. diss. (Univ. Pa., 1913).

3. Other volumes of Krez' poetry are: *Dornen und Rosen von den Vogesen* (Landau, 1846) and *Gesangbuch* (Strassburg, 1848).

4. Martin Opitz (1597-1639) insists on new forms for poetry in his *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (1624).

5. This poem won the first prize in Leipzig against a thousand contestants. "In justice to the poet, it should be said that he did not compose it expressly for the contest, for it was

the spontaneous, heart-breaking plaint of a political exile, who loved his fatherland despite her faults and cruelty to him." See J. H. A. Lacher, *The German Element in Wisconsin*, (Milwaukee, 1925), pp. 44-45.

6. In *Faust*, Goethe alternates the four-beat and five-beat iambic line. The best example of the five-beat iambic line is the "Zueignung." It is composed of four elegiac stanzas using the Italian form (Octavaria, AB, AB, AB, CC). The verse, however, is five-beat iambic.

7. For bio-bibliographical data, see Franz Brümmer, *Lexikon der deutschen Dichter und Prosaisten vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*, 8 vols. (Leipzig, 1913).

8. See F. Beissner, *Geschichte der deutschen Elegie* (Berlin, 1941), and W. Kayser *Geschichte der deutschen Ballade* (Berlin, 1936).