## German-American Literary Reviews

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**Pictorial Conversations: On Margot Scharpenberg's Iconic Poetry.**
*By Reinhold Grimm. Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Occasional Papers in German-American Studies, 2006. 16 pages.*

Reinhold Grimm's essay "Pictorial Conversations: On Margot Scharpenberg's Iconic Poetry" presents an examination of Scharpenberg's poetry not only within the sub-genre of iconic poetry itself, but also within the context of modern German poetry, which Grimm sees as excelling worldwide in two specific areas; that of prose poetry and of iconic poetry. Thus Grimm begins his analysis by presenting some of the most significant German language poets within these sub-genres, specifically Holger Teschke, Ernst Jandl, Beat Brechtbühl, Günter Kunert, and most particularly Walter Helmut Fritz, in whom Grimm sees a prose poetry pendant to Margot Scharpenberg's iconic poetry.

Margot Scharpenberg, a part-time resident of both New York and Cologne, is a prolific writer, having published more than twenty volumes of poetry and three volumes of prose. Her specialty is iconic poetry and her poems themselves are considered exemplary of the genre, following the rules of that genre meticulously, as Grimm informs us, to the point that her poetry could be viewed as "classical." Scharpenberg's interest in the graphic arts preceded her interest in iconic poetry, which developed late in life. As Grimm notes, the majority of her works have contained illustrations, often reproductions of contemporary artists. With her move towards iconic poetry, however, her use of illustrations became more integral to her works, often depicting the object of her contemplation in the poem. Thus, her use of illustration in connection with that poetry has evolved so that her poetry acts as an exegesis to the images presented.

Scharpenberg has produced ten volumes of iconic poetry alone, and these volumes are the focus of Grimm's article. Many of the volumes describe works of art in specific museum collections. Grimm divides these works into two categories: those dealing with graphic and plastic arts, and those dealing with objects "of nonartistic provenance" since, as Grimm informs us, these volumes of poetry describing works of art are interspersed with descriptions of artifacts such as a *Faustkeil*, a bell, a gargoyle and a church nave (the latter three items found at the Cathedral in Cologne).

In addition to the close connection of Scharpenberg's work with museum collections, Grimm notes that one of the most unique features of her poetry is her inclusion of scholarly *Sachkommentar* (expert commentary), something that is almost unheard of in the world of iconic poetry. Only one of her works, *31 x Klee*, dispenses with these commentaries (which Grimm observes are often lengthy, very scholarly and

may irritate the reader), therefore returning to the traditional format of iconic verse. Grimm notes that each of the volumes offerings is structured much like a sixteenth and seventeenth-century emblem, with a heading or motto, illustration and exegetic poem. (This tripartite structure differs, as Grimm tells us, in that an emblem is arranged vertically, whereas the submissions in *31 x Klee* are arranged horizontally.) Grimm reproduces two poems from the volume with their attendant images, one describing Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's "Fünf Frauen auf der Straße" (1913) and Paul Klee's "Ansicht nach Kairuan" (1914).

In his conclusion, Grimm suggests that Scharpenberg's poetry is innovative in respect to the introduction of scholarly commentaries to her poems as well as the images of the objects these poems describe, and in the use of objects that do not fall under the category of pictorial art or even art itself. At the same time, unlike Walter Helmut Fritz with whom he briefly compares Scharpenberg, the poetess has made no concerted effort to expand the form of iconic poetry by including subject matter such as Fritz' African masks, nor revolutionized the domain of poetic ekphrasis as Grimm views Kunert as having done. Instead, Grimm concludes that Margot Scharpenberg's poetry can safely be categorized as classical; an "overabundance of more of less traditional iconic verse." Still, in the sheer volume of work that she has produced and in what he calls a "surfeit of high standards," Grimm ultimately sees Scharpenberg's poetry turning "imperceptibly" towards historical quality.

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**Hilters unwilliger Soldat: Memoiren eines jungen Deutschen vor und während des Zweiten Weltkriegs**

*By Konrad Kircher with Andy Kircher. Allgäu: Sequenz Medien Produktion, 2003. 119 pages.*

With his memoir, *Hitlers unwilliger Soldat*, Konrad Kircher (together with Andy Kircher) offers the reader an intimate portrait of life in Hitler's Germany. The book, while perhaps of greatest interest to someone with ties to the Lauingen area, is likely to be of interest to anyone with an interest in the history of the period. Told as a series of short, episodic snapshots of his experiences, Kircher's memoir takes us from his early childhood and the rise of Hitler to power through the end of the war, with a short epilogue. While some historical events are presented as a frame of reference for the narrative, the majority of events that Kircher describes are personal, naturally focused on the effects of the political climate on his life as a child and on his family.

Kircher was born in Lauingen in Bavaria. As the son of a local physician, Kircher's life was relatively privileged, and he received a humanistic education at several schools in the region, starting in elementary school in the same year that Hitler came to power. His observations about the effects of the political environment on his education are interesting in that they highlight the difficulties faced by educators who were to mediate (some willingly, some less so) between the state and an upcoming generation. School naturally became Kircher's primary contact point with the official policies of the Nazi

regime in everything from the presentation of current events to the demand that every student become a member of the *Hitler Jugend* (*HJ*).

Kircher began his post-elementary education at St. Stephan's, a Catholic school in Augsburg, where he observed the Gestapo's efforts to gather incriminating information against the priests who ran the school. As per a law passed in 1936, school attendance was made dependant upon membership in the *HJ*, and as a result, Kircher has no choice but to enroll. Nevertheless, he was an unwilling participant, eschewing any promotion in the organization, managing to evade such promotion by claiming that he would be unable to fulfill his duties as an *HJ* leader because he needed to help his father during air raids. This pattern of passive resistance to party involvement is repeated throughout the memoir as both Kircher and his father attempt to avoid active involvement in the Nazi regime while simultaneously avoiding persecution for that resistance.

Eventually Kircher changed schools and began attending a school in Dillingen. Being situated in a somewhat remote location, it was assumed that many of the teachers had been sent to Dillingen because they were politically questionable. Kircher recalls one particular teacher for example, who expressed his opposition to the regime by presenting the regime's goals with certain caveats of doubt such as "*Erlaubten . . .*" and "*Sollten wir den Krieg gewinnen . . .*" Another instructor made open jokes about the Nazis while asking, if Germany's Jews were being "relocated" to settlements in the east, as the Nazi regime claimed, where were they? These various expressions of political resistance, like Kircher's passive participation in the *HJ*, his father's reluctance to enroll in the Nazi party, and the failure of the school leadership to report outspoken educators to the Gestapo paint a variegated picture of everyday life in Hitler's Germany. As the title suggests, although there may have been a superficial impression that everyone was *gleichgeschaltet*, there were many subtle acts and attitudes of resistance.

Some of Kircher's descriptions of events in the book are the result of the essential role his father played in that community as a physician and the unique access he had to the community at large. As the physician in charge of the *Lauinger Schloss*, for example, an institution for women suffering from psychiatric disorders, Kircher's father witnessed first-hand the resistance of the nuns to the Nazi order that the patients be transferred to another facility because that "transfer" was intended solely to allow the "euthanasia" of the women patients. These experiences led Kircher's father to declare that "who wants to see and hear has no doubts about Hitler's plans for the Jews."

Similarly, in perhaps one of the most unique views of an aspect of the Nazi regime not ordinarily accessible to the common citizen, Kircher's father treated the prisoners from Dachau who had been assigned to slave labor at the Ködel und Böhm factory in Lauingen. There, his knowledge of foreign languages allowed him to speak to the prisoners who came to his office hours for treatment of serious illnesses and injuries. As Kircher relates, despite the fact that his father was forbidden to provide pain medication to prisoners whose injuries stemmed from "disciplinary measures," he nevertheless did so by lying about what medications he was administering. Kircher also relates how his mother hid loaves of bread for the prisoners near the outdoor latrine. Ultimately, these efforts to support the prisoners led to Kircher's father being removed as the camp physician and being investigated by the Gestapo. He only narrowly avoided arrest by having surgery. (We never find out why, upon being unable to arrest him at once, the Gestapo drops their case against Kirchner's father.)

Reaching young adulthood in an environment of constant war, Kircher was

eventually forced into the war effort, initially being assigned to work as a *Flakhelfer*, manning the anti-aircraft guns near Lauingen. Moving away from memories centered around his family's struggle to maintain ideological independence, Kircher's memoir focuses on the grim reality of daily life for a young man in a Germany in which every warm body was required for a last ditch effort first to win the war, and then to protect Germany against the advance of the Russians from the east and the Americans from the west. In order to avoid conscription into the SS, Kircher volunteered for the *Wehrmacht*. Hoping to be sent to medical school by the German military, as his cousin had done, Kircher signed up for glider lessons with the *Hitler Jugend*.

Ultimately, as Nazi Germany entered the final phases of the war, Kircher found himself a part of the *Volksturm*, Hitler's last ditch effort to save Germany from invasion. After many efforts to avoid the military police and to make his way to the west, where he hoped to be captured by the American troops rather than the Russian troops, Kircher found himself a prisoner of war. The memoir ends with Kircher's safe return home at the end of the war and a short epilogue outlining the most salient events following the war including his own emigration to Dayton Ohio in 1952, where he worked as a radiologist for many years.

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**Looking for God's Country**
*By Norbert Krapf. St. Louis: Time Being Books, 2005. 142 pages.*
**Invisible Presence**
*By Norbert Krapf. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. 270 pages.*

Norbert Krapf, well-known poet and professor of English at Long Island University, grew up in the Jasper Indiana, an area characterized by its German heritage. Indeed, Krapf's own family immigrated to the region from Lower Franconia. His poetry, which comprises five full length collections, focuses largely on this Indiana region and on his German heritage. With his volume *Looking for God's Country*, Krapf presents the reader with a portrait in verse of daily life in rustic southern Indiana, as well as of historical existence in Lower Franconia. The volume is divided into four sections of what are largely prose poems that take the reader on a journey from the author's life and childhood in rural Indiana, to the life of his immigrant forefathers in rural Lower Franconia (reflections based on photographs of the region), through his musings on the violence and aftermath of the Second World War, and finally back to the author's home and his observations on the transience of life.

Krapf's observations are tinged with a sense of death in life and with the sense that the two are inextricably and naturally intertwined. Thus, amidst imagery of idyllic pastoral scenes that include his mother singing while picking strawberries or memories of playing basketball against the side of an old barn, Krapf depicts events such as the violent death of a neighbor in a baling machine accident, the automobile accident of a high school friend, or even the childhood experience of watching his mother behead a chicken. The tranquility evoked in a poem about measuring the distance between

telephone poles for a summer job is countered by reflections on familial traumas and hardship such as the mental breakdown of his father.

Similarly, his reflections on Germany include both rustic images of baking fresh bread but also the fiery destruction of Würzburg during the fire bombing campaign and the destruction of the library at the Humboldt University in Berlin by the Nazis. In these poems there is no pathos, nor is there a hyperbolic idealization of country life but instead, Krapf paints a picture of life in his native Indiana and ancestral Germany that is at once bittersweet and completely non-pretentious. The reader is left with the sense that Krapf's nostalgia for both his childhood and ancestral home is rooted firmly in a sense of reality and an awareness of the transience of life.

The second volume, *Invisible Presence*, encompasses a completely different kind of collection of poems than that of *Looking for God's Country*. Accompanied by photographs by Darryl D. Jones, *Invisible Presence* offers a collection of iconic poetry that describes and reflects upon scenes and images of rural Indiana. The photographs are manipulated using a technique called Polaroid emulsion manipulation to lend the images the appearance of Impressionist paintings. Accompanying each, Krapf's poems concisely and eloquently describe each image of pastoral Indiana. In contrast to *Looking for God's Country*, the themes in this collection are purely visual, elucidating images that include tree-lined country roads, hay rides, pastures and fields, wild flowers, rustic architecture, farm equipment, weathervanes and the streets of rural towns.

The poetry contained in this collection recalls precisely the experience of traveling through southern Indiana, but beyond that mere imagery, Krapf's poetry evokes the tranquility and spiritual dimensions of being in these landscapes. The poems carry the reader from the initial sensory experience through the emotional reaction, through nostalgic longing or spiritual return to a sense of home that is interior rather than exterior. In this, the poems go beyond their geographic subject matter and craft a universal expression of home that is capable of speaking to any reader, not merely those with an emotional bond to Indiana itself. Krapf's poems transport the reader into the image itself and make the extraordinary visual offering of Jones's photography experiential on a myriad of levels, both sensory and emotional.

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