Jerry Glenn

Recent German-American *Belles Lettres*

Von der Ringstraße zur 72nd Street: Jimmy Bergs Chansons aus dem Wien der dreißiger Jahre und dem New Yorker Exil.
By Jimmy Berg. Edited by Horst Jarka. Austrian Culture, 17. New York [etc.]: Peter Lang, 1996. 318 pages, illustrated.

German Poetry in War and Peace: A Dual-Language Anthology: Poems by Karl Kraus and Georg Trakl with Translations, Paintings, and Drawings by Albert Bloch.
By Albert Bloch. Edited by Frank Baron. Lawrence, KS: The Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, 1995. 303 pages, illustrated.

Gras und Omega: Gedichte.
By Alfred Gong. Edited by Joachim Herrmann. Texte aus der Bukowina, 5; Schriften der Alfred Gong Gesellschaft, 2. Aachen: Rimbaud, 1997. 79 pages, illustrated.

Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany.
By Norbert Krapf. St. Louis: Time Being Books, 1997. 125 pages.

Verse eines Amerika-Deutschen: The German and English Poetry of Gerhard Rudolf Schade.
By Gerhard Rudolf Schade. Edited by Richard E. Schade. New German-American Studies, 8. New York [etc.]: Peter Lang, 1996. 188 pages

Gegengaben und Widerworte: Fünfundsechzig Gedichte mit sechzehn Collagen und Umschlagbild von Annegret Heinl.
By Margot Scharpenberg. Duisburg: Gilles & Francke, 1995. 128 pages, illustrated.

When the decision was made to include a separate review essay covering recent contributions to German-American literature, I had no idea that such an interesting and diverse selection of books would be represented. It is indeed a pleasure to be able to introduce them to our readers. The number of new

volumes of poetry by contemporary authors is perhaps not as great as it has been at certain times in the recent past, but the numerous poetry readings held by German-American authors in the past year or so—which cannot be reported on here—testifies to the vitality of German literature in 1997 America.

Jimmy Berg

Not inappropriately, the editor's substantial introduction is entitled "Wer war Jimmy Berg?" As Jarka painfully documents, Berg is all but forgotten; even major reference works scarcely mention him. Readers will already have a general idea from the book's subtitle, but after reading the introduction, they will feel like they have acquired a new friend. The style is lively, and the information on Berg—meticulously assembled on the basis of interviews and documents in his posthumous papers—is extensive. Illustrations are plentiful and appropriate.

Berg was born in Vienna in 1909 and became a popular performer in the Viennese (and, in general, European) cabaret in the 1930s. As a Jew and open opponent of Hitler he fled on the night of the Anschluß. He arrived in New York in November, 1938, as an exile. He became an American citizen and remained in New York until his death in 1988. Like the vast majority of his peers, Berg initially did not have an easy time in America. He continued to write songs and regularly performed in various New York German-American clubs, but was forced to take a job in a factory to earn a living. Not until 1947 did he find a more suitable position: as a "disc jockey" for Voice of America programs going to Europe.

The texts themselves—encompassing more than 200 pages and for the most part previously unpublished—are divided into two main sections, "Zwischen den Kriegen" and "Im Exil," and the latter, in turn, is subdivided into four sections according to the general theme. Some of the pieces are biting social criticism, others are more lighthearted. A significant number of the songs are parodies, of various sorts, and these are in my opinion among the strongest. Among the texts from the 1930s, for example, we find "Lorelei—aufgenordet," the first and last stanzas of which read: "Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, / Daß ich so unruhig bin. / Das sind wohl die neudeutschen Zeiten, / Die lasten auf Magen und Sinn. / . . . . / Doch trotz Lore und trotz Doktor Ley / Werd' ich nicht viel jammern und trauern. / Es wird sie ja doch überdauern / Die Lorelei" (47-48).

Many of the songs of the first exile section are lighter, often dealing with the awful American language: "Meine Lage, die ist wirklich äußerst difficult, / Und dran ist der Trouble mit den Sprachen schuld. / . . . . / Yes, I am in a hell of a fix, / Weil ich Englisch und Deutsch stets vermix!" (98-99). Parodies continue to be prominent among the anti-Nazi songs of the war years, as in "Lili Marleen: Neue Version" (again I quote the opening and closing lines): "Heil! Sprach der Führer / Und erklärte Krieg. / Heil! Sprach der Führer, / Bald winkt uns der Sieg. / . . . . / Erst wenn die Nazis man verbannt, / Wenn wieder Frieden ist im Land, / Kann ich Dich wiederseh'n / Wie einst, Lili Marleen!" (171-72).

Parodies are perhaps even more prominent among the postwar songs, ranging from a number of medleys mixing popular German and American songs to Faust, who reacts to his first sight of Gretchen, and his plans for seducing her, as follows: "Beim Himmel, dieses Kind ist schön. / . . . / Den *Aufbau* hab' ich abonniert, / Als Jude bin ich reformiert, / Ich wechsle Hundert-Dollar Bills / Und hab' ein Haus in Forest Hills" (262).

An appendix contains German translations of four "Negro Spirituals," several pages of "Texte und Noten," some editorial comments, and notes on individual words in the texts, for the most part explanations of Viennese dialect words and historical references. In summary: a highly welcome introduction to a fascinating forgotten Austrian-American.

Albert Bloch

As was the case with Berg, the subtitles of this collection give a good general description of the contents. The introduction, however, does not answer the question "Who was Albert Bloch," but rather seems to assume that the reader knows who he was, which may or may not be a valid assumption. Bloch is certainly better known for his painting than for his writing. The introduction does not neglect this activity, and several illustrations of his works, the quality of which is remarkably high, are scattered through the book. But the primary emphasis is on poetry translations, primarily from Karl Kraus and Georg Trakl, but also including Goethe and a few other poets. Would a comparison of Bloch's technique as a painter and as a translator be feasible? I do not know. The following aphorism, quoted in the introduction, does make one curious: "A picture that is not a poem is not a picture. / And a poem that is not a picture is not a poem" (xii).

The selections from Kraus (pages 50-166) offer a good introduction to this fascinating figure; these were previously published, in 1930 and 1947. The translations are quite successful, even when rhyme and meter are retained. The following epigram is not atypical: "Whoever attacks with club in hand / is no artist, merely a pest. / Satires which censors can understand / Deserve to be suppressed" (135).

The Trakl translations, however, are surely the most interesting component of this book. This poet remains popular with a wide readership, including many with no knowledge of German. New English translations are accordingly most welcome. It is worth noting that with few exceptions Bloch selects poems with traditional meter and rhyme. The example quoted above should suffice to demonstrate that he has a true talent for this neglected art. The essay on translating Trakl is also interesting, both for his comments on Trakl and translation, and for the three English poets whose banality is contrasted with Trakl's depth: Edgar A. Guest, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and T. S. Eliot.

Alfred Gong

Although we are now moving closer to contemporary German-American literature, we are not quite there. *Gras und Omega* was originally published (in Germany) in 1960, and has now been reprinted with the correction of a few typographical errors and the addition of a brief, but helpful, afterword by Joachim Herrmann. Nevertheless, this collection deserves our serious attention. It was one of the first collections of poetry published by the young generation of exiles from Nazi Europe. Furthermore, the original book is virtually unknown in the United States: only five copies are listed in OCLC.

The vast majority of these poems were written in the United States, and they could be used as one half of a test-case study of "What is German-American literature?" According to some definitions, they would not qualify, since few of the poems address a specifically German-American theme. Gong's second collection, *Manifest Alpha* (published in Austria in 1961), might well constitute the second half of such a comparison: in this collection both Gong's Jewish roots in Eastern Europe and his experience in New York are central themes.

A number of Gong's most frequently anthologized poems are to be found here, e.g., "Mars" and "F. Garcia Lorca." Like all of Rimbaud's books it is attractively produced. Seven impressive artistic illustrations by K. O. Götz are reproduced.

Norbert Krapf

[I have no expertise in poetry written in English, however much it may qualify as German-American. Accordingly, I asked Greg Divers of St. Louis, Missouri, to write the following review. I would like to express my sincere thanks for both his willingness to comply and the thoughtfulness of his review. J. G.]

With *Somewhere in Southern Indiana: Poems of Midwestern Origins* (1993) Norbert Krapf commemorated his German-Indiana heritage. *Blue-Eyed Grass* continues this tradition with poems of Germany both present and past. In this collection of poems Krapf does not so much celebrate as confront his German roots. The poet maintains pride in his German ancestry by questioning, examining, and investigating the very culture and history whence he came. Krapf relies heavily on travel poems thus lending a strong sense of journey and place to the collection; moreover, the poet demonstrates how the inherent learning process associated with the travel poem leads to knowledge not only of people and places but also the self.

Blue-Eyed Grass is a tightly structured collection of poems. "Flax: A Prologue" sets the tone and introduces Old World traditions by means of a New World voice. Here Krapf acknowledges his Franconian forefathers and proclaims his own role in carrying on the family legacy. Part One consists

primarily of conventional travel poems. "Waking in Europe," the title poem of this section, begins by transporting the poet over the Atlantic Ocean to Amsterdam and Cologne. This poem works as a second prologue and finds the American poet reacting to the basics: a new time zone, a guttural language, cobbled streets, and gothic architecture. Other poems in Part One include a walking tour of "Freiburg im Breisgau," the rustic portrait of "A Swabian Scene," and a series of poems capturing the magic, mystery, and legends of the Black Forest. In keeping with the travel poem genre Krapf demonstrates a tourist's double-take attention to detail: from sights and sounds to age-old traditions and culture.

The poems of Part Two, "Landscapes of the Masters," are tributes to European artists. The first poem of this section is "Rural Lines after Brueghel," a long poem in five sections with each addressing a specific work by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder: "Returning from the Hunt," "Making Hay," "Harvesting Wheat," "Bringing Home the Herd," and "A Gloomy Day." Krapf follows the tradition of poems based on paintings, specifically William Carlos Williams and his *Pictures from Brueghel*. However, unlike Williams whose inventive syntax plays off an idiomatic voice so that images blend like colors on canvas, Krapf is reportorial in both language and tone. Furthermore, while Williams concentrates not only on the scene but also the artist and his technique, Krapf makes no reference to painter or painting. Instead, Krapf concentrates on describing particulars in the life of common folk in sixteenth-century Flanders and then speculates on their thoughts, dreams, and desires. In addition to Krapf's homage to the woodcarver Tilman Riemenschneider and painter Lukas Cranach, the key figure in Part Two of this book is the German artist Albrecht Dürer. "Lines Drawn from Dürer" is a biographical sketch in verse. The fifteen poems in this series trace Dürer's life from birth to death, highlighting his apprenticeship and *Wanderjahre*, documenting specific works as well as career developments, and relying on quotations from Dürer's journal entries for an inside look at his personal life. For the reader with only a passing knowledge of Dürer, these poems serve as a primer on Germany's best known artist.

Part Three, "Stones for the Dead," can be read within the context of Norbert Krapf, German-American, and his own personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Here the reader learns of how a man intensely proud of his German heritage comes to terms with the Holocaust. As in Part One Krapf uses the travel poem as his vehicle, but now the purpose is to document a personal quest. Although the first poem of this section, "A Hill Near the Rhine," recounts the poet's journey to the spot where his uncle, a soldier in the US Army, fell during the final months of World War II, the central figure in the final group of poems is Klara Krapf —"no blood relative, / but kin nonetheless" (121)—who died in Theresienstadt in 1943. In "The Name on the Wall" Krapf reports on a visit to the exhibit "The History and Culture of the Jews of Bavaria" at the Bavarian National Museum in Nürnberg, January 1989, where he comes across the name Krapf, Klara. "This familiar / yet strange name" (93) raises

questions, inspires research and a genealogical search resulting in the poems "To the Brothers and Sisters of Klara Krapf from Wonfurt" and "To Babetta Reinstein from Gochsheim." Here the reader learns what the poet learned about the ancestral background of Klara Krapf. Tributes in the truest sense of the word, these poems convey the profound respect Norbert Krapf holds for his subjects, and the titles reinforce how the poet speaks to, not for Klara Krapf's family members. In the final poem of *Blue-Eyed Grass*, "Franconian Vision: An Epilogue," Krapf speaks directly to Klara Krapf. He imagines a nineteenth-century meeting of their ancestors: two men, one Catholic and one Jew, who share a common name and friendship. The poet relates how members of both families later emigrated to America but how one, his addressee, stayed behind presumably to care for aging parents and then to meet her fate in a death camp. The epilogue, then, transcends the lack of blood ties between the two Krapf families, and the lasting message of *Blue-Eyed Grass* is that "we must all adopt one another" (124).

The poetry of Norbert Krapf bears a distinctive mark of the American tradition: a spiritual link between people and place. As a German-American he expands the connection to include two homelands, relying not only on spiritual but also ethnic or ancestral, artistic, and linguistic matters to cement the bond. Although the title *Blue-Eyed Grass* suggests inventive imagery and poetic turns of phrase, language is not Krapf's strong suit. Imagery, syntax, diction—all that separates poetry from prose—are subordinate to personal feelings, ideas, history, and ancestry. Nonetheless, *Blue-Eyed Grass* is important as a document of two Krapf families from Franconia and, when paired with the earlier publication *Somewhere in Southern Indiana*, provides a valuable contribution to German-Americana. In Norbert Krapf we have a poetic voice both in search of and in touch with German heritage. The Klara Krapf cycle of poems is the fruit of genealogical research, and in this regard his poetry can be read as a creative companion piece to the scholarly side of German-American studies.

Greg Divers — *St. Louis, Missouri*

Gerhard Rudolf Schade

Schade's collection is a highly unusual, if not unique, contribution to the corpus of German-American poetry. Born in Silesia in 1906, he emigrated to the United States in 1926. He earned a graduate degree in French and taught various foreign languages in a private high school until his retirement in 1971. What is most interesting about his case is that he has written poetry for more than 70 years, but published his first collection at the age of ninety. (According to the editor's notes, he had circulated some of his poetry in mimeographed form, but there is no record of the presence of these booklets in any library.)

The poems are arranged chronologically (insofar as they can be dated) and thematically. The first section, "Verse eines Amerika-Deutschen," covers the

earlier verse, i.e., up until 1936. Most of these could be called traditional German poems, with rhyme and meter, on the themes of traditional German poetry. One is in English, "First Impression of New York in 1926," and in one of the German poems, "Zarathustra," we first encounter an interesting technique that will later become characteristic: rhyme is absent in the first portion of the poem, only to appear unexpectedly in the last stanza.

The second section contains poems from the following ten years. Geography in general, and the author's New England home in particular, become more important here. Germany is not forgotten, for example in "Mein Schlesien." The poems of the third section, dating from the years 1957-60, become less traditional, although as was noted above, rhyme typically appears in a few lines at the end. There are also a few poems in English in this section.

The final section, "Die neue Heimat," is divided into five thematic subsections, "New Hampshire," "Amerika," "Europa und die alte Heimat," "Personen," and "Betrachtungen." Here, too, the form is less traditional, and English is used more often. Of special interest, because of its high artistic niveau and—for readers of the *Yearbook*—its theme, is "Deutsche Einwanderer 1963 am Idlewild Flughafen." A representative, current, inexpensive anthology of German-American poetry (or literature in general) is a significant desideratum, especially for use in the classroom, and when such a collection is assembled, this poem simply must be included.

The introduction, written by the author's son, Richard E. Schade (Professor of German at the University of Cincinnati), offers a superb overview of the collection and its author. Among the items in the appendix is an article originally published in the *New Yorker Staatszeitung* in 1931. As the title demonstrates, it will be of interest to many readers of the *Yearbook*: "Haltet an eurer Muttersprache fest!"

Margot Scharpenberg

Along with Richard Exner, who has now left us to return to Germany, Scharpenberg is perhaps the most "German" of the German-American poets. She is also one of the most prolific: a note in *Gegengaben und Widerworte* reveals that she has now published twenty-four volumes of poetry and three of prose. And finally, she is one of the most highly respected. Indeed, she is generally treated by the German literary establishment as a "German" poet, without the (often mildly disdainful) hyphenation "-American."

As in much of her work, a strong relationship with the visual arts is established here from the very beginning. The title page informs us of the presence of collages by Annegret Heinl, and we have already seen one of them on the cover. The table of contents leaves no doubt. The titles of the poems are placed approximately in the middle of the page. At the left, we find notes on, or descriptions of, the contents of groups of the poems.

The first poem, "Im Spiel," lacks any notation, but it forcefully sets the tone for the next twelve; the following text accompanies them on the left-hand side: "Gegengaben / 1-12 / zur Ausstellung / Collagen (2) von / Annegret Heinl / (Nov. 1994 in / Köln-Rondorf)." These texts are enormously playful. The lines are very short and the force of the ever-present rhyme is overpowering. We are informed then that a single poem is devoted to another exhibition by Heinl, and that six poems are on paintings out of the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal. A group of twenty carries the baroque description "Schwarz auf Weiß / oder / Graphik und Lyrik / unter sich / Gedichte in beliebiger / Reihenfolge für / Rolf Sackenheim," and this is followed by another single poem on an exhibition, this time of works by E. M. Kentner.

The final two sections are radically different. The marginal explanations are like titles of individual cycles utilized by some poets: "Fragliches" and "Macht und Ohnmacht." As we move forward in the collection, time and mortality become more important motifs, as does the poetic word. The power of Scharpenberg's verse, long recognized by Germany's leading critics, remains undiminished. I will close by quoting a poem with especially effective imagery from the section "Fragliches" (78) perhaps not the most typical poem in the collection, but not atypical, and in my opinion one of the best:

Was ist das: Ich?

Ich bezeuge
wenn ich Schatten werfe
nichts als Licht

nach mir die Lücke
wenn sie bliebe
spräche von mir

mir selber abhanden
sagte ich noch
mit anderer Stimme
jemand war da
und brauchte sich zum Vergessen

wortwerfend
vor aller Augen
ein Ich im Schwinden
das zeugte als Schatten
Licht

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