

## **Roundtable**

### **“German Poetry and the Challenges of the Anthropocene”**

Friday, March 28, 2020

12.30 am-3pm

Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Matthias Fechner (Trier)

#### **Hoarse whisperers. German-language poetry in the Anthropocene**

Climate change in the Anthropocene has motivated many diverse societal groups to articulate premonitions, distribute blame and offer solutions to probably the most tangible challenge of humankind today. Contemporary German-language poets have responded likewise: Daniela Seel's voluminous anthology “Lyrik im Anthropozän” (2016) gives impressive testimony of an ecological urgency uniting contemporary German-language poets.

And yet, Seel's influential publishing house, Kookbooks, has been struggling for economic survival, while most contemporary German-language poets (and their verse) appear to be unknown, not only to the general public but also to an academic readership. German-language poetry might have achieved an extremely high level of skilled self-reflection; yet, outside their own and hermetic circles, the distinguished voices of Germany's most accomplished poets, have, with a number of notable exceptions (e.g., Durs Grünbein), failed to make themselves heard in the broad societal debates. Metaphorically, their poetic utterances have, judging by their reception, remained nothing but a hoarse whisper.

In my contribution, I would try to delineate the most important causes for the disturbing lack of communication between poets on the one side, and schools, universities, the media, and the general public on the other side.

In conclusion, I hope to sketch feasible solutions, last but not least borrowing from positive examples in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Friederike Reents (Heidelberg/Trier)

#### **Blooming spaces in the Anthropocene**

Starting out with the paradox of the (for the longest time) non-existing environmental humanities in Germany, in a country with a long politically environmental engagement, I want to point out the recently occurring changes within the fields of arts and sciences on behalf of environmentalism. Referring to the narratives of the anthropocene (catastrophe; great transformation; judicial and moral responsibility; nature-culture-interdependence) and introducing the metaphor of the „blooming spaces“ as a link between political phrase and poetological theme I want to show the potential of applying these interdisciplinary narratives

and the poetological framing to deepen philological close readings of contemporary poems. Based on the theory of 'blooming spaces' Ann Cotten offers in her book *Florida-Räume* (2010) I will analyze the poem *großer ameisenbär* (2015) by Sabine Scho and *auf der suche nach dem sagenhaften kleinianischen reich* (2016) by Birgit Kreipe.

Rainer Grübel (Oldenburg)

### **Durs Grünbein's poetry on nature in the context of the Anthropocene**

The talk regards the poetic of Durs Grünbein at first with respect to its concepts of nature and culture. Grünbein work himself has stressed the role of Aristotle's notion of nature for his work. Nature (physis) is seen there as a compound process with regard to its context. The paper defines nature and culture als complementary notions, which involve creativity with different results. The poems of Grünbein show nature as seen by a human being, but, different from Goethe, not any more as created by God to be regarded by the human being. Two Haikus, which testify of Grünbeins contact with Japan, show the continuity of time in nature and its discontinuity in culture. The Lyric Ego of Grünbein's early poems is repeatedly given the shape of a dog, even a border-dog, which involves natural and cultural treats. In a parallel way nature and culture meet in the skull of the human being.

Against the present mainstream, condemning René Descartes as the philosopher who divided the human being from the world, the subject from the object, Grünbein estimates in his epos *In Snow or Descartes in Germany* (*Im Schnee oder Descartes in Deutschland*) the French thinker as the first, who appreciated the human being as a thinking animal, which can make up its own view on the world and which considers the world (and this means also nature) as an item with its own dignity. The poem is regarded as a poetic case in which nature (snow) stimulates thinking and dreaming, who are closely combined with each other.

The following parts show how in Grünbein's poetry nature is threatened by culture, but can also be authentically experienced by the human being which is preserved by culture. Poetic language itself can as well open a creative access to nature as it can open the Poetic subject for a preserving embrace of the world, including its nature.

Henrieke Stahl (Trier)

### **An Answer to the Challenges of the Anthropocene: Aura and the 'World-Open Subject' by Georg Picht and in Christian Lehnert's "Tree Conversations"**

With the help of the notions 'aura' and 'world-open subject', developed by the German philosopher of nature Georg Picht, I will analyse Christian Lehnert's "Tree Conversations". In these poems, the trees pronounce themselves in and through the poet's voice. The speech of

the trees represents, on the one hand, a sublime ecocriticism, a criticism of the living conditions of nature in the Anthropocene: that nature does not represent for man an end in itself as a being, but only an instrument, a function, an object to use and exploit. On the other hand, the poems in “Tree Conversations” embody the counter image to the functionalist approach of man to nature in a performative way. Lehnert’s nature poems embody an auratic approach to nature for which they want to sensitize the reader through the poetic form. It is not so much a question of a new knowledge of trees, their characteristics and problems, but rather of a demonstration of an alternative perception of nature and thus an offer of practice to the reader to change her|his approach to nature from a functionalist, objectifying way to an auratic relationship. Lehnert's poems aim at a transformation of the approach to nature, from which the man-made problems of the Anthropocene can be solved and the human-induced damage healed and avoided in the future.