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Ursula Krechel (1947-)

[Amy Kepple Strawser \(Otterbein University\)](#)

Poet; Essayist; Journalist; Literary Critic/ Historian; Playwright / Dramatist; Story-writer.
Active 1972- in Germany; England; Italy; United States

One of the most prolific German writers today, Ursula Krechel was born on the 4th December 1947 in Trier. While a student of German literature, theatre, and art history at the University of Cologne (1966-72), she worked as a journalist and drama adviser, creating theatre pieces with imprisoned youths in Dortmund (1969-72). She received a doctoral degree in 1972, with a dissertation on the film and theatre critic Herbert Ihering.

Krechel, a free-lance writer of poetry, plays, radio plays, fiction, and nonfiction, lived for many years in Frankfurt am Main and currently resides in Berlin. A member of PEN in Germany since 1982, she has been the recipient of numerous literary grants, awards, and prizes. She has worked as writer-in-residence and visiting professor at the following universities and literary institutions: Giessen, Essen, Leipzig, Hamburg, Edenkoben and Berlin in Germany; Warwick, Coventry, England; Casi Baldi, Olevano Romano, Italy; and Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

Krechel's first published work, *Erika* (1974), has been translated into six languages. As much of her early work, the drama centers on the relationships and concerns of a young woman, who is separated from her husband and learns how to handle her independence. Her first poetry collection, *Nach Mainz!* [*To Mainz!*, 1977], contains several noteworthy poems about the dilemmas and realities of women's lives. "Meine Mutter" ["My Mother"] opens the collection as an elegy to the narrator's late mother with a moving dream sequence and the transformation of the maternal figure into a youthful revenant whose fleeting appearance arouses feelings of longing and loss. "Hymne auf die Frauen der bürgerlichen Klasse" ["Hymn to the Women of the Middle Class"] functions as a parody of the genre of religious song, as well as a poem of satirical envy, about the privileges and frustrations of bourgeois housewives, which transcends Krechel's own time and country and applies to most Western cultures. The tour de force of the collection is the title poem. "Nach Mainz!" relates a utopian fantasy or dream sequence about the journey of the first-person narrator, Angela Davis, and the Virgin Mary from a Düsseldorf hospital, where they each have delivered a baby, to the city of Mainz, where all socialists have been exiled:

[...] Zweite deutsche Teilung.
Alle Sozialisten nach Süddeutschland verbannt.
Demarkationslinie ist der Main.
Wir springen aus den Betten. Nichts wie nach Mainz

den Rhein hinauf. Wir umarmen uns, lachen
rennen barfuss durch die Altstadt zum Rhein.
Die Kinder, ruft Maria an einer roten Ampel.
Wir kehren nicht um. Die Nachkommen gehen eigene Wege.

[...] Second German Partition.
All socialists banished to South Germany.
Line of demarcation is the River Main.
We jump out of bed. We must get to Mainz fast
up the Rhine. We embrace and we laugh
and run barefoot through old town to the Rhine.
The children! cries Mary at a red light.
We don't turn back. The offspring will go its own
way.]

The empowering heroines proceed toward their goal by swimming the river, to be welcomed by the “Rote Hilfe” (the leftist equivalent of the Red Cross). This poem is emblematic of the convergence of the liberal ideals of the late 1970s in Germany with those of the then burgeoning feminist movement there and abroad.

Her many volumes of poetry include *Verwundbar wie in den besten Zeiten* [*Vulnerable in the Best of Times*, 1979], which can be argued to situate her work within the arena of the New Subjectivity of that era. *Rohschnitt* [*Raw Cut*, 1983] is an extended lyrical treatise of a three-person female figure which uses experimental poetic devices borrowed from film technique. *Vom Feuer lernen* [*Learning from the Fire*, 1985] contains esoteric poems with allusions to and quotes from modernist philosophers and artists. *Kakaoblau: Gedichte für Erwachsene* [*Cocoa Blue: Poems for Those Growing Up*, 1989] is in a completely divergent format as a collection of poems of word play and nonsense syllables. Five more collections of poems from the 1990s comprise Krechel's lyric oeuvre: *Technik des Erwachens* [*Technique of Awakening*, 1992], *Äusserst innen: Gedichte zu Radierungen von Irmgard Flemming* [*Utterly Inside: Poems for the Etchings of Irmgard Flemming*, 1993], *Landläufiges Wunder* [*Customary Miracle*, 1995], *Ungezürnt* [*Not Angered*, 1997] and *Verbeugungen vor der Luft* [*Bowing before the Air*, 1999].

As in the early collections, the more recent poetic works of Krechel are well-crafted, highly intelligent forays into the spheres of language, literature, philosophy, and art. She often quotes or references seminal writers such as the German Romantic poets Novalis, Eichendorff and Hölderlin, the realist playwright Georg Büchner, and modernist poets Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Celan and Anne Sexton.

Krechel has also written and published in the genres of drama, prose fiction and nonfiction. Her numerous radio plays have been produced and broadcast in Germany since the mid-1970s. The first major nonfiction publication of the author, *Selbsterfahrung und Fremdbestimmung: Bericht aus der Neuen Frauenbewegung* [*Experience of Self and Definition of the Other: Report from the New Women's Movement*, 1975], was a groundbreaking text in feminist writing at that time. Other essay collections, which focus primarily on the writing process and literary-critical interests, include: *Lesarten: Von der Geburt des Gedichts aus dem Nichts* [*Ways of Reading: On the Birth of the Poem Out of Nothingness*, 1982], *Mit dem Körper des Vaters spielen* [*Playing with the Body of the Father*, 1992], and *In Zukunft schreiben: Handbuch für alle, die schreiben wollen* [*Writing in Future: Handbook for Everyone who Wants to Write*, 2003].

Krechel has an authoritative voice as an essayist, and her nonfiction is often fascinating to read. She is an adept writer in multiple genres, including fiction. Her stories and short novels have all garnered critical attention and interest in their reception, beginning with *Zweite Natur: Szenen eines Romans* [*Second Nature: Scenes of a Novel*, 1981], which deals with the relationships and crises of several young people in a shared-living

community. *Sizilianer des Gefühls* [*Sicilian of Feeling*, 1993] similarly deals with the psychological and emotional dimensions of interpersonal relationships. Here the main character is in dialogue with a counselor about the impact of family history on his life. Krechel's most recent work of fiction, *Der Übergriff* [*The Assault*, 2001], delves into the realm of violence, its causes and repercussions. Her fiction, like her nonfiction and poetry, is dense, complex, and very tightly constructed.

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