

**‘Leaping from the Edge of the World’:
A Symposium on the Work of Ulrike Draesner**

Anke Biendarra (University of California)

(Re)Generating Europe

The essay analyzes Draesner’s 2014 family novel *Sieben Sprünge vom Rande der Welt* as a narrative site of memory (Erinnerungsort) of not just the German, but the *European* experience of war, displacement, and trans-generational trauma. Draesner uses eight different voices to illustrate how historical memory is constituted and inscribed into the respective characters. I am particularly interested in the literary creation of postmemory (Hirsch), i.e. the creative and integrative writing of trauma. Does it lead to overcoming the fragmented pasts of a nation of German perpetrators in the older generation? How - if at all - does the novel render ideas of European identity and integration in the younger generations?

Michael Braun (University of Cologne)

Metamorphosis. Ulrike Draesner’s Poetics of Adaptation

Writing between the cultures, poeta docta Ulrike Draesner uses postmodern strategies in order to transform scientific knowledge and cultural tradition in literary texts. Pastiche and ‘Kontrafaktur’, hybrid writing and postromantic irony are means to revise literary fiction as well as neurobiological facts. My essay examines these strategies in Draesner’s poems and stories – up to the new volume *subsong* (2014) – and gives a draft of the underlying poetic structure of her work.

Mary Cosgrove (University of Warwick)

Space and Place in Ulrike Draesner’s Hiddensee

Abstract TBC – on nature poetology and reflection

Tobias Döring (University of Munich)

‘Sprites’: Draesner’s English Inspirations (Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, Lewis Carroll...) ‘Sprite’ refers to the epigraph Draesner contributed last year to a collection of Shakespearean poems, her choice focussing on Puck and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: I would use it as a starting point to trace English literary interconnections in and through her work.

Anna Alissa Ertel (University of Freiburg)

Who is the Ape? Human-animal Relationships in Ulrike Draesner’s novel *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt*

Ulrike Draesner’s latest novel (2014) presents us with a story of flight and expulsion and their long-lasting traumatic effects across generations. Interestingly, the two main characters, father and daughter Grolmann, are both keen primatologists exploring the boundaries between men and primates. Part of their fascination with primatology seems to arise from its mirror function: by exploring primates’ behaviour one hopes to learn more about human nature and its origins.

Throughout the novel, however, the boundary between animal and human animal gets blurred. The novel plays with these concepts on a number of different levels: it confronts us with human traits in primates, such as empathy; and animalistic traits in humans, such as aggression. What is more, the identity of the main characters is deeply influenced, even threatened, by their scientific endeavours. Moreover, there are a number of interesting images of the animal throughout the novel that serve as a leitmotif in the characters’ memories. In my contribution, I want to explore both the science-driven human-animal relationship and the images of the animal in the novel, allowing me to trace a further twist in Draesner’s complex and intensive reflection on science throughout her work.

Iain Galbraith (Wiesbaden)

'Why believe in an image, not/ in another thing?' Breaking the Code for Ulrike Draesner

Ulrike Draesner's poetic language, recorded where breath and script inter-translate, unvoices conventional reading modalities and comforts: its orthography refuses to capitalize; its punctuation – if the stops and starts may be called that – is rarely executed by comma or period; its sequentialities, shunning the reliability of bespoke narrative, queering the common sense of marching lines and subaltern clauses, are born at the intersection of worldly impulse and bodily pulse, vulnerable to the loops of memory. Her writing favours an innovative reading experience, an exchange that explores the process by which our various modes of encountering the world cut, merge and elide to form the sociable space of a poem. Her work is charged with a delicious, inquisitive restlessness: it is conscious of provisionality, aporia, and process. Visually acute, her poems are keen to discover, reflect on, and body forth the complex blendings of thought, sound, smell and image, delivering a revealing diffraction (an echo of broken aptness) to the reader's ear. The present article will use reading and research generated by translating Ulrike Draesner's poetry to contextualize her idiom among 'experimental' English-language work that answers Julia Kristeva's injunction to search for a 'discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract'.

Silke Horstkotte (University of Leipzig / University of Warwick)

'wo wir aus bildern sind/where we are from images': Photography, Bioaesthetics, and the Post-human in Ulrike Draesner

Just before the digital revolution of photography, a number of German novelists used photography in order to explore an ambivalent relation between documentation, imagination and memory. Influenced by theories of photography from Benjamin to Barthes, these writers, including the much studied W.G. Sebald but also Marcel Beyer or Monika Maron, exposed photographic objectivity as a myth. Ulrike Draesner's photographic discourse has so far escaped scholarly attention. However, my paper will show how Draesner's work, too, consistently engages photographic thinking and practice, especially in the context of debates about bioaesthetics and the post-human. A main focus will be on Draesner's novel *Mitgift* (2002), where photographic practice and the consumption of images play a central role in mediating the characters' relation to each other and to their environment.

Emily Jeremiah (RHUL)

'Just Hanging in There': Reproduction, Humanity and Ethics in the Work of Ulrike Draesner

This paper examines the depiction of reproduction in Draesner's texts, especially the short stories 'Gina Regina' and 'Süße Kaverne', exploring its ethical implications. Draesner's complex, posthumanist view of reproduction involves a challenge both to conservative, (hetero-)normative views of the matter and to a 'postmodern' model involving marketisation and (potentially) exploitation. Draesner consistently in her work explores the nature and status of the human subject, suggesting new ways of framing both humanity and morality.

Karen Leeder (University of Oxford)

Subsongs: Ulrike Draesner Poetry and Voice

This chapter will examine voice in Draesner from her early essays about bilingualism and body and voice to her most recent collection *subsong* (which uses the analogy with patterns of birdsong to say something about human experience). It will further draw on Draesner's work in Oxford during her stay in residence in 2015-16; an experimental take on bilingualism and identity which takes its cue from her 'SoloSwim/Der Kanalschwimmer' (on channel swimming). It will demonstrate how the construction of poetic voice works, and further how it impacts on, and indeed creates, identity.

Teresa Ludden (University of Newcastle)

Bodies and Family Histories in *Mitgift* and *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt*.

The analysis of *Mitgift* focuses on the representation of corporeality, arguing that Draesner's mode of writing highlights the experiencing, mutating body aligned with nature. I link the corporeal themes to the text's treatment of time by tracing how notions of the split self and self-other relations map onto to the representation of the non-coincidence between the past and present and the text's philosophy of history. A key layer of symbolisation connects the central character, Aloe, to her father, Holger, whose war-time experience of 'Flucht und Vertreibung' is re-told at several points in the text. I highlight the paradoxes surrounding the treatment of history where, on the one hand, a somatic and empathetic connection to the past is suggested but, on the other, a Benjaminian philosophy of history is evoked which stresses the interruption of intervening eras and the impossibility of getting back to the past 'so wie es war'. The father-daughter relationship in *Mitgift* can be seen to be a forerunner to relation between Simone and Eustachius Grolmann in *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt* in which the family's experiences and memories of 'Flucht und Vertreibung' are central to the narrative. The representation of this aspect of history as well as the representation of the family's experience of the National Socialist treatment of the physically and mentally disabled through the uncle/brother figure, Emil, will be examined and contextualised.

Lyn Marven (University of Liverpool)

Ulrike Draesner's Short Stories

This chapter will examine Ulrike Draesner's short stories, in the collections *Reisen unter den Augenlidern* (1999), *Hot Dogs* (2004) and *Richtig liegen* (2011) as well as selected standalone texts (e.g. 'Süße Kaverne'). Beginning by placing Draesner's short stories in the context of the boom in German short story writing from the mid-1990s onwards, the chapter will then focus on form and style/language as well as themes such as depictions of body image and modern technology, which link the stories to each other and to Draesner's other prose writings. Draesner experiments with form not only on the level of individual stories, but also in the wider structures of the collections: *Richtig liegen* consists of 'paired' stories ('Geschichten in Paaren', a deliberate pun on relationships which are a key theme in the collection), and Draesner further links texts through shared characters (see 'Gina Regina' in *Hot Dogs* and 'Süße Kaverne'), drawing attention to further facets of shared thematic concerns (in this case with reproduction and technology). As in Draesner's other prose texts, the narrative voice(s) are highly self-conscious and poetic, with frequent word play drawing attention to the language of the text and the *récit* (the narrative or linguistic level) as opposed to the *histoire* (the story or plot, the supposed reality being depicted); this distinctive stylistic aspect marks Draesner's texts out from many other contemporary short story writers.

Julia Schöll (University of Bamberg)

Life as an Essay: Ulrike Draesner's Poetological Work

This chapter focuses on Ulrike Draesner's essayistic work, focusing especially on the volumes *Zauber im Zoo* (2007), *Schöne Frauen lesen* (2007) und *Heimliche Helden* (2013). All three texts deal with the subject of authorship. In *Schöne Frauen lesen* Draesner studies examples of female authors; in *Heimliche Helden* male ones. Her Poetics lectures *Zauber im Zoo* focus at least ostensibly on herself as an author. On the one hand Draesner discloses a good deal about herself while talking about other authors, especially while talking about *female* colleagues. The female Other seems to be a special object of identification to her, but also relating to her male colleagues Draesner writes herself very close *to* and *into* the Other's work and being. Conversely Draesner doesn't reveal very much about herself as an author when she apparently sets out to do so, i.e. in her autopoetic lecture 'Zauber im Zoo'. Instead she focuses on 'Heimat' and 'Herkunft' explaining that these in effect can offer a way in to others and ultimately the self. In *Schöne Frauen lesen* Draesner asks how one can 'tell a life'. The answer given by her essays enacts a poetic credo of sorts as she depicts the author's existence as an essay itself. While describing the life and writing of fellow creative artists as performative acts of autopoiesis, she constructs and presents her own creative identity. Her view of the Other is never naïve, however, as she uses her or him to depict her own portrait while reflecting this process at the same time.

Erik Schilling (University of Munich/Oxford)

Narrating History in Ulrike Draesner's *Spiele*

This paper will examine the intertwining of history and personal story in Ulrike Draesner's novel *Spiele* (2005). The novel's protagonist remembers the historical events of Munich Olympics 1972. While remembering, the personal story becomes part of history, thereby blurring the historical setting with the subjective perspective. A comparison to Draesner's latest novel *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt* will reveal that the novel's major theme is not a postmodern play with history, but enlightening personal questions by putting them into a historical context.

Almut Suerbaum (University of Oxford)

Voices from the Past? Poetic Presence of Medieval References

Ulrike Draesner's first book was published to critical acclaim – but unusually, it was neither poetry nor narrative, but an academic monograph: a study of narrative coherence in Wolfram's 'Willehalm'. References to Wolfram and Gottfried are notable in her early poetry; while these belong to a group of early thirteenth century literature often perceived as strikingly 'modern' in their exploration of subjectivity, her more recent work has turned to the 'Nibelungenlied' – a narrative about the catastrophic failure of civilised society which has been read in very different ways by successive generations of Germans. Draesner's adaptation responds to the troubled history of 'Nibelungenlied' reception by engaging with the notion of heroism, but it also raises interesting questions about the nature of poetic voice – a vexed issue for medievalist interpretations of the 'Nibelungenlied' because of its deliberate archaism and lack of coherence. The aim of the chapter will be to consider poetic strategies of coherence and rupture in the re-voicing of what has often been seen as the epitome of heroic masculinity by a female poet.