



Claudio Magris eulogy in honour of
Michael Krüger – Nonino International Prize 2025

Einmal einfach, one way only, the title says; there is no return ticket for the poems of Michael Krüger, one of the great poets, certainly not only of Germany. A strong and intense poet, discreet and perplexed in front of life and even more of History, who sometimes seems to leave us stranded before leaving. It is hard to say whether the poet is less ready than others to get on the train or the most uncertain. In another collection, *At Night, Beneath the Trees*, wonderfully translated by Luigi Forte, History leaves the man behind, overtaken by its speed, who can see only its rear lights, because reality leaves him further and further back and far.

Without pathos or fear but with perplexity Michael Krüger seems to sense the transformation of the world as a mutation of the species, even if sometimes it is hidden under the decorations of a Christmas tree, which slow down the perception of change, of a History that has become other. The self, in Krüger's work, does not close its eyes, but tries to look away. Changing the time, as the title of another collection says, might be another way of taking time.

We have been friends for many years, since my first teaching course in Munich, and our friendship has become more and more alive. Years of friendship, collaboration and playful frequentation. Magazines, books, the annual party in Munich of the Hanser publishing house, meetings and evenings when Elias Canetti or Max Frisch met, the dives in the nearby Starnberg lake, in which Ludwig, the mad king of Bavaria, had died in his time.

In Krüger's poems, the lyric self is neither nostalgic nor polemic; maybe it doesn't recriminate but it doesn't conceal a dry weariness. The wheel of time turns fast, but his poetry - which touches, without having the air of doing it, on minimal and essential things, time, morals, loneliness - lives in this fleeting space between the world and its perception, between memory and its fading away. Krüger is a master of some mighty metaphors, the flies buzzing on the slab etching funeral songs or the mirror that knows more about who is reflected in it than the latter knows, namely the author.

Krüger's poetry captures the transition we are experiencing on our one-way trip with only one still traditional baggage of feelings, values, culture, but a baggage that the shocks of the carriage jolt, making fall out of the window so many shattered things that however we would still need, feelings and views of the world out of use or nearly so, like old-fashioned telephones.

Krüger is alien to any nostalgic or apocalyptic pathos; he has a keen sense of reality, as a protagonist who would like to appear a quiet spectator. He has written also incisive novels - I mention only *Warum Peking*, *Himmelfarb A Novel*, *The Cello Player*, the beautiful tales of *The God behind the Window*. He is a reference point in the cultural debate. Until a few years ago he ingeniously directed the Hanser publishing house of glorious tradition, bringing it to prominence. Despite the confidence between us, I have never asked him which of his characters he would like or fear to resemble.

Claudio Magris

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