

Cork Poetry Lectures 2025 with Peter Waterhouse

“without mediation; only language, only being present”¹

Attentiveness, Contemplation, and Deliberation: Peter Waterhouse’s Approach to Observing the World by Means of Language

The work of Peter Waterhouse is notable for its unique aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical approach to literature, which itself flows from and through language. His method of attentively and empathically listening to language; his means of perceiving the world around him, which is itself sensitive to language and constantly engaged in the act of translation; his ruminations on languages and linguistic phenomena; and his approaches to human and greater-than-human worlds of experience, memory, feeling, and thought are what make his work so distinctive.

In his novel published in 2006 (*Krieg und Welt*) Waterhouse sounds out forms of representation, narrative styles, and translations by foregoing an exploratory writing process. He instead strives “for another form of knowing,”² which develops from a writing process imbued with reflections on language and an awareness of the “transmutability [...] of words.”³ Circular movements of thinking, writing, and translating emerge from the perspective of a narrative voice that continually questions itself and searches for forms of expression through language. His attentiveness to language does not rely on a “pre-structured[...] and categorized[...] level;”⁴ he recontextualizes words, eschews straightforward interpretations and conclusions, and pursues an ethical *modus operandi*. This approach also characterizes Waterhouse’s translation work and his essays. Reflecting on his translations of Michael Hamburger’s poems (2005), Waterhouse contemplates the human perspective on plants, expounding his thoughts on perception as moments of not passing immediate judgement on that which is being seen. It is “a way of seeing that forgets,”⁵ which opens up when one disregards and goes beyond the act of simply classifying the objects within one’s purview:

“We do not observe in this sense; it is more like attention is being given – we give more than we see.”⁶

¹ Peter Waterhouse: (*Krieg und Welt*). Jung und Jung, Salzburg/Wien 2006, 345.

² Dichtermut und Blödigkeit. Zweifels Reflektorium mit Peter Waterhouse am 30. Mai 2012, Burgtheater Wien. In: Christine Ivanovic (Hrsg.): *Darstellung als Umweg. Essays und Materialien zu (Krieg und Welt) von Peter Waterhouse*. LIT Verlag, Wien 2020, 309-325, hier 321.

³ *Die Nicht-Anschauung. Versuche über die Dichtung von Michael Hamburger*. Folio Verlag, Wien/Bozen 2005, 69.

⁴ Waterhouse, Peter: ...und in den Worten kleine kleine Mikrophone. Hörstück von Ulrike Janssen und Norbert Wehr. 15.07.2004. In: Christine Ivanovic (Hrsg.): *Darstellung als Umweg. Essays und Materialien zu (Krieg und Welt) von Peter Waterhouse*. LIT Verlag 2020, 251-278, hier 256.

⁵ *Die Nicht-Anschauung. Versuche über die Dichtung von Michael Hamburger*. Folio Verlag, Wien/Bozen 2005, 39.

⁶ Ebd. 19.

Moments of reorientation, contemplation, and attentiveness combined with a “language that shifts attention to multiplicities of meaning”⁷ underpin the literary work of Peter Waterhouse, and take on an immense significance in our current era – one that is marked by a distinct sense of precarity.⁸

Peter Waterhouse will be speaking to literary scholar Barbara Siller from the Department of German at University College Cork at Cork Poetry Lectures 2025.

Peter Waterhouse was born in Berlin in 1956 and grew up in a British-Austrian family. He studied German and English literature at the University of Vienna and University of Southern California, Los Angeles, earning his doctorate in 1985 on the work of Paul Celan. He is a writer and literary translator.

Selected Literature:

MENZ. Gedichte. Droschl Verlag, Graz 1984.
Passim. Gedichte. Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1986.
Sprache Tod Nacht Aussen. Gedicht Roman. Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1989.
Verloren ohne Rettung. Prosa und Dialog. Residenz Verlag, Salzburg 1994.
Die Geheimnislosigkeit. Spazier- und Lesebuch. Residenz Verlag, Salzburg 1996.
Im Genesis-Gelände – Versuch über einige Gedichte von Paul Celan und Andrea Zanzotto. Urs Engeler Verlag, Basel 2001.
Prosperos Land. Jung und Jung, Salzburg 2001.
Die Nicht-Anschauung. Versuche über die Dichtung von Michael Hamburger. Folio Verlag, Wien/Bozen 2005.
(Krieg und Welt). Jung und Jung, Salzburg/Wien 2006.
Der Honigverkäufer im Palastgarten und das Auditorium Maximum. Jung und Jung, Salzburg 2010.
Die Auswandernden. Illustrationen Nanne Meyer. starfruit publications, Fürth 2016.
Equus. Wie Kleist nicht heißt. Matthes & Seitz, Berlin 2018.
Z Ypsilon X. Matthes & Seitz, Berlin 2025.

Selected Translations:

Lichtbrechung. Andrea Zanzotto. Übersetzung gemeinsam mit Donatella Capaldi und Ludwig Paulmichl. Mit einem Kommentar von Stefano Agosti. Droschl Verlag, Graz 1987.
Baumgedichte. Michael Hamburger. Zeichnungen von Gotthard Bonell. Folio Verlag, Wien/Bozen 1997.
Das Überleben der Erde. Gedicht. Michael Hamburger. Zeichnungen von Gotthard Bonell. Folio Verlag, Wien/Bozen 1999.
In Memoria. Der Wind der Ewigkeit wird stärker. Biagio Marin. Übersetzung gemeinsam mit Riccardo Caldura und Maria Fehringer. Mit zwei Aufsätzen von Pier Paolo Pasolini und Andrea Zanzotto. Herausgegeben von Urs Engeler. Basel 1999.

⁷ Ebd. 64.

⁸ This text has been translated into English by Sonja Rohan.

La Beltá. Pracht. Andrea Zanzotto. Gedichte. Italienisch-Deutsch. Band 1. Übersetzung gemeinsam mit Donatella Capaldi, Maria Fehringer, Ludwig Paulmichl. Urs Engeler und Folio Verlag, Basel 2001.

Gerard Manley Hopkins. Journal. Jung und Jung, Salzburg 2009.

Selected Awards:

1989 manuskripte Prize

1993 Prize of the City of Münster for European Poetry

1994 Christine Lavant Prize for Lyric Poetry

1997 Heimato von Doderer Prize for Literature

2002 Austrian State Prize for Literary Translation

2004 H.C. Artmann Prize

2007 Erich Fried Prize

2012 Grand Austrian State Prize

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The Lectures on the 19th of November (begin at 9am) can be followed online:

[Peter Waterhouse: Corker Poetikvorlesungen III, 2025: Poetikstatement und Dialog | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)