Pitch & Glint
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Lutz Seiler

Translated from the German by Stefan Tobler
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Everyone has only one song.

Paul Bowles
mechanics of the pictorial world

taking down the swing
in autumn & putting it up
in April. day after day

the suburb commutes under
the trees and hour after hour
from the sky above courtyards

pulverised swallows fall & neatly
stuffed ones come up: the
gravity in their eyes hangs

raw as an egg
over the globe over
the man at the next table

(in sleep he leans his face
against the lamp) and over
the slender animals here

that each evening
creep down the avenue
& murmur

*ev’nin* into the dark as
if tucking the greeting away
in their warm almost

sleeping bodies
latrine

once, it was said, the root of her cough
shone down the narrow
stairs on us, feeble children
   with cold
   piss, butcher's grandchildren in the night, who

loved the light in the radio & the clockwork's
proclamations, eiderdown kids, steaming
   birds, all that had been
her house, her tiredness too, if
it rained, was that the courtyard and that
the dog and
   it was the butcher's rope with

mother quiet   the vertebrae
cracked apart, I was still
standing in the kitchen
behind her cupboard
and didn't know if,
where I was, I could ever
be found again or
if I was already dead or was it
the others outside who had died
mother, father, Gagarin & Heike or

mother ahead standing ready not quiet
too tired for the humidity in the air &
er her hand raised, as if
the animal was wanting
   one last time to be
soothed by her, and yet
she had done that too and
had become even more lonely
   with the road to the pass at her back
   a bread van in the courtyard, the
   opening & closing of tears . . .
there was a kinship between our houses

there were ducks on duckweed
and, miss, your seamstress
between the silver heads of willows, there was

your basil laugh with sewing machine
with measuring tape and a couple of dummies. what
was there to laugh about? there was

nothing to laugh about, there was, sorry,
also nothing to talk about, there
were ducks on duckweed

and, miss, your seamstress
I walked through snow with all the nervous
post-war whip-cracked lamps behind my neck
across Vienna’s Mozart bridge and there
a tired Irish setter was still sitting
tethered he

was dead and waiting for me
I mean I untied his rope
from the railing base and began
to swing the creature a little
to and fro skin & bony light
the bells are ringing a flurry of snow
started I sang

a little song about the Danube over
and over (I was a child) the dead
setter circled now at the end
of my arm above the lovely
balustrade he curved
light and large into the nervous
post-war lamplight a rip
widened at his throat a whistling

got up and the rigid
skins on his eyes clicked
tiredly open and closed: oh, you’d

have loved the mechanics of the blink
and would have been lonelier still
above the snow, the bridge & the old song
Greater Berlin, one

the smell of the last allotments & heavy
lifting at the huts: some
hung sleigh bells on
pockets bulky and hard, late-
returning POWs’ greatcoats, we
still had tinsel, net curtains in
the cherry trees, bottles, wherever you stepped, onto
their short, brown necks. there

we perched at the table with splayed-
out partings, a couple of
pounds of puppies under eyelids: lattice
fences, asbestos roofs 4ever or
some he-won’t-bite pit bull in the pimps’
racket & crystal-
clear bottles, first off heavy
and hard to let go, then empty
buried in rats’
holes, their necks whistling
towards the Western moon. how good
that rat-bashing felt in the
northwester & what
we here now always have: this

patrolling beyond the tips of the skull, by day
when reverie carefully beds its temples
in layers of air, raw
nerves on bark, on cortex, when
in early light the head
& life of a bird smack
into each other
we’re talking physics here: incidents, apparent lifelessness, mineshaft temples suddenly purple; spoilheap glow was a drinkable liquor, duty-free for cave-dwellers, but: ‘on Labour Day, out on the street’.

and evenings the acrylic jacket, in the stalls for stone-age operettas, cattle in the outbuilding, evenings the Easter bunny’s twitching; a bundle hanging draughty on a beam compare to rabbits, mange-eaten: when first your feet lose their sight, then the slow vanishing of your eyes; white

like how in my lamp’s cone survival leaps in furs, furrows, down country roads’ inner walls: you loved it when the sheep undulated, their lousy twitching in their sleep, the little spasm in Glück auf! – it all reminds you of something under shavings, under-mined a wind

spoilheap glow
at eye level
rises out of the past; with every look
the sides are changing, every blink is digging
you a cave in time
scissors knives and matches

I was walking up to my knees with the current, so corpses overtook me, a soft white shoulder bashed horizontal into the taut throat of my knee I swayed forward,

side, together, tap with a water waltzing step to let a great dead swimmer slip lengthwise past me but straight away another water-head was pushing between my legs, so

I stumbled, I did, no, not quite I danced that next quarter twist of my leg to the left, back, side, together, tap the dead, their way free, continued stiff as pigs who swim between islands down the boulevard, where to, I

don’t know, it was raining I was dancing in the giant heaving swell until the evening threw down a shimmer for scissors knives and matches under thinly glazed fontanelles