Pitch & Glint

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Lutz Seiler

Translated from the German by Stefan Tobler

SHEFFIELD – LONDON – NEW YORK

First published in English translation in 2023 by And Other Stories
Sheffield – London – New York
www.andotherstories.org

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Print ISBN: 9781913505769
eBook ISBN: 9781913505776

Editor: Tara Tobler; Copy-editor: Robina Pelham Burn; Proofreader: Sarah Terry; Typesetter: Tetragon, London; Typefaces: Albertan Pro and Linotype Syntax (interior) and Stellage (cover); Series Cover Design: Elisa von Randow, Alles Blau Studio, Brazil, after a concept by And Other Stories; Author Photo: Renate von Mangoldt.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following, in which some of these translations first appeared: *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *New Statesman*, *PN Review*, *PROTOTYPE*, *Shearsman*, *Sheffield Telegraph*, the *TLS* and *Wet Grain*.

And Other Stories books are printed and bound in the UK on FSC-certified paper by Clays Ltd. The covers are of G . F Smith 270gsm Colorplan card, which is sustainably manufactured at the James Cropper paper mill in the Lake District, and are stamped with biodegradable foil.

And Other Stories gratefully acknowledges that its work is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and the translation of this book was supported by a grant from the Goethe-Institut.

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Everyone has only one song.

PAUL BOWLES

I

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 &
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 seamstressing
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 *seamstressing*

fin de siècle

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

spoilheap glow

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

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