



Michael Krüger

In the Forest, In the Wooden House

Poems

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1

March 2020, in quarantine.

All that I can see through my window:
an idyllic Sunday under blue skies,
kids in sheep's clothing giving sugar to the horses
which once was strictly forbidden.
A merry-go-round, an easy ride,
Death rides out bareback, unbridled.

I must speak softly, so that the flies
can hear me. They cast a white shadow
that flutters fearfully over my window.
Now the first butterflies fall from nowhere
upon my tilted window, the birds follow.
The sun bleaches the books on the window ledge.

Many of the greatest follies have,
sooner or later turned out to be wise,
a sage once said. But who could it have been?
My memory is a heap of shards:
it can no longer take shape.
I pick out a piece and hold it up
against the window, in the light, and wonder
at the richness, the gloss, the pomp.
But there's no connexion, no continuity,
no »picture«. Our worldview, a guileless construction,
is just beginning to crumble.
I'm stuck in quarantine.
My immune system has seen better days.
I must learn new words every day;
today: herd immunity. We'll see how long it holds up.
No one says firmament anymore.

Enough of this naivety, this unfathomable grief!
I must patch up the fence, before I die.
There, where it's not held together by the ivy,
the reeds are broken. The shocking blue
crocus strewn fields look like a case of eczema.
With much effort I am returning to that simple state,
to prize the weeds, those useful idiots
that keep things turning over in the garden.
That stuff about the follies...my grandmother said it.
Wittgenstein must have borrowed it from her.
I don't blame him.

2

End of March, 2020, in quarantine.

At the first of the steps that fall towards the west
the water stands, waiting for the gnats
who will plan their campaign from here, later in the year
When Helios has charge. As yet reigns Hades,
but he prepares to cede command to Zeus
who's walked these fields over once before
to be certain that the earthlings know their rightful place.
I must rescue the snails' graveyard
where they've sloughed off their houses at the foot of the steps.
Here they died, without my ever seeing,
and I always wished to rehearse with them
the effectiveness of silence. Always four
snail shells lie together side by side,
resembling the four wheels of God's chariot:
Discernment, Insight, Memory and Joy.
Monuments that have not crumbled in my lifetime.
Now is a good time to bone up on theology,
that old pneumatic enthusiasm to revitalize.
Because the road is still barred, the door bolted,
the world must muddle through, unpeopled.

Fortune and Fate, the disparate twins: they have the Word.

3

A view from my window

On the eastside, just before the way to Bismarck's tower,
they've felled the trees, four mighty beeches,
each older and wiser and handsomer than the new Good Burghers
who wished for a line of sight, a clear view.
Obliged, as they were, to cough up the horrendous price,
they expect to be able to see just how their chubby daughter

rides upon her pony to the tower, where the lads hang out
who have no desire to inherit their parent's farms.
The bright wreaths of sawdust they've left lying there,
and the stumps, poking out from the scratched-up earth
look like the crowns of three sunken kings.
The hillside soil is dry and not so dark.
On the way to the tower one occasionally saw a fox
in the gloaming, stealing through the village like a thief,
but since the last five hens disappeared behind
barbed wire, he's withdrawn himself to the woods
where he snaffles up an old bird now and then.
The eagle on the Bismarck tower looks on unperturbed,
at how the village has changed. He knows, of course, precisely
what the boys are interested in: we do not.
All we know for sure is that they'll sell the lot
the minute the folks are under the sod. There's no graveyard
in the village, but one can scatter the ashes.

March 2020, in quarantine.

4

A Log Cabin in the Woods

Just before sunset, about six, we're allowed
to stretch our legs, around the block. I take the chance
to polish up or enlarge upon the stuff my eyes
have stored away, or wrestle a few particular words
out of my head, e.g. Mortality Rate,
which I can now utter without hesitation.
We stumble down the path to the lake
without caring that we'll have to climb back up,
which will be torture for my lungs.
You must duck under the overhanging branches
so as not to don a coat of droplets.
Here lingers a most particular smell,
a vestige of winter, I fancy: watch out
for the roots, they're slippery, and you mustn't fall.
Nobody bothers anymore to trim the bushes;
they've formed a crypt from which you step into the light
and, all at once, before you is the lake. You should wash
your hands: that's as much as I can fathom.
Over the lake plays a blueish light, very softly,
which then turns garish red, like rouged cheeks, and
out of this frenzy of colour the birds are shrieking;
great crested grebe and ducks, most probably with joy
that we can't see them and they can't see us,
we, on the riverbank, who lean against the trees,
with the rain darkened bark, that also lend us shelter.
Not one of these almost black trees would be happy
in the city. And I would love to know: how can we feel Time,

as we can feel a storm, and heat, and water?
How can we feel Time?

5

Five metres wide is my window, four metres high;
the colour balance is always set the same.
The woodpeckers arrive at five and hack
their monotonous text in the soft attic planks.
They avoid the thinning linden with their Piranesi
designed thatch of twigs. And so can the littler birds breakfast:
tits, blackbirds, warblers and even tinier, those that from afar
look like butterflies. I see the wind,
as the grass abruptly gathers itself
desiring to regain its shape, and as the little birds
shivering in the air stand still,
watched by an inscrutable buzzard
there on a post, waiting for his entrance.

But that's only half the story.
For I can see, quite naturally, in the afternoon
how the shapes recede: those boundaries that
can't be discerned, if, at the same time,
One's reading up on how to lead a blameless life.
Life is not for us to understand.
How I should be seen by others: that's all over.
All paths are breaking up, even the horses are walking
wearily out of the picture, to the right, towards the Alps
where they ought to be, if the scene that's framed
by the kitchen window is correct.

I see too how the fields grow greener every day.
This, the man need not explain to me, who does the
»National Death Register Inventory«.
By the way, whoever watches the film twenty times
gets to meet the director. As a reward.

6

With the sun the insects too have come
Dayworkers that disappear with the sun when evening falls;
among them, lazybones that sit upon the tufts of grass
and let themselves be swayed by the wind, still blowing from the east.
They won't hold a grudge if you flick them with a finger
from their high seats. One must learn to be good.
I'm busying myself with old stuff, with faded papers
because it's proper not to let them lie about: loads of beginnings
of novels that should have changed the world;
shameless letter drafts, an essay about »trust« that I
threw in the stove today, although paper doesn't belong in the stove.

All talk of these holy words, this God of all
the moralistic words that lie bitter in the mouth.
Be trusting and trustworthy, dear God!
Meanwhile I swallow my multi coloured pills, whose names
remind me of the Aztec gods, Venclyxto or Venetoclax
and I trust that they, like the gruesome Aztecs
who massacred everyone in a conquered town,
will all malign bacteria and viruses exterminate. In the past
it paid off to curse God when injustice was seen to be done.
What's more the gnats are back; the squirrels, however, not.
For two years they've plundered my walnut trees,
now they're keeping a low profile in the hope
of getting a second chance. Forgiveness, also a
holy word. Trust and Forgiveness, written small and large
should not be used for a while.
These dead, empty words drive me crazy. But what I want
has no part to play. Beings and things carry on,
they develop. I take a turn around the house, the key
I leave under the mat. On the horizon cars drive by.
I have been sought, but not found; not even the grass
knows if I'm still alive. That awful want,
that wish to be all and everywhere, was broken long ago.
But the squirrels can come back,
to give at least the magpies grounds to cry.

7

The blood pressure's fine, it's just the rest that could be better
nobody knows where the noise comes from, the crackle and the creak
that whizzes in the morning through the heart, the bubbling juices,
and if you pass the looking glass and spot the stony glare,
that's the truest diagnosis. Even so I go on up
to the attic, where my writing table stands waiting for me.
It's getting greener every day, and the swallows are back
and there's an aeroplane to be seen, as someone needs weapons
in the sandy countries: they must defend themselves
against proud have-nots with oil besmirched hands
who all believe in the One God who has forsaken them.
Since the trees were felled I have a view
over the plane of silence, the acres of discretion
although the borders are closed and the shadows
have clawed into the walls of the barn across the way.
One never knows what one should think, the will to speak
the truth, is no longer there; it's best to sit it out.
Why do you write the whole day long, asks a bird
that must have its nest nearby. It has the size of a tit,
a face like a mask, a tight-fitting doublet
and wings that look like short swords.
Stupid question, says I, only idiots look for an answer.
Let me gaze over the landscape, this white paper before me
That's slowly curling itself up at the edges like a dry leaf

under the sun. The bird with the big glistening eyes
and the self-satisfied pose sits on the window ledge
like an actor of old that knows the truth.
You belong to history, I call to the bird, and
you can't touch history, as Robert would have us know
so bugger off! We're sentenced to oblivion, basta.
But I go outside, lay myself down in the meadow, Hölderlin
In my pocket, and listen to the beetles, the innocent wanderers
that need no tablets on their stumbling path
into the beak of a bird.

8

Through the thinning twigs I can see the flashing lake
that under the sun looks like a great barrel of mercury
that's almost sloshing over. The sky is empty now, at last,
since they've banned the planes from flying; in the past one said:
God's Hour is come. There is one exception:
namely the fat windowless khaki bumblebees
that either fly above my head to check
if I am still sitting at my writing desk, or are on their way
to poorer parts, their heavy weapons to deliver,
wherewith some Africans or Arabs can lead a happy life:
to realise their own ambitions they of course require
some lethal gear. They behave themselves
like children. And some new birds have just arrived
who haven't introduced themselves. They stalk about
forlornly over the fields as though they must rehearse the Word on Sunday.
Right near here, in Aubachtal there are still some peewits,
the head waiter among the birds, but nobody will take them anymore.
Yes, God's Hour is come, of that there is no doubt.
The flowers are so tiny this early in the year
that even the first bees fly past them.
Aquilegia vulgaris, the columbine, that my grandmother
used to call »die Akelei« is scarcely to be seen; the anemones
and violets comport themselves to creep over the earth. I can't
understand their talk, but I know what they're saying: you must
bow down to us and not like the liberal elite
look down upon us. And so I will lay myself down on the earth
small as Tom Thumb, lay myself by buttercups
and bellflowers and bide my time unrushed, unhurried
for God to use His Hour or maybe use it not.
In any case, I have to say, I am prepared.

[...]

The cuckoo is back, the long-haul flyer, still a little weary
 from his nightly trips through Spain, France, the Alps,
 but I heard him this morning, after the news, as I stood
 before the mirror and asked myself if it was still worth shaving,
 and I greeted Cioran, Canetti and Blumenberg who have all
 posed this same question after the news, and the world has,
 nevertheless, each year, squeezed out another spring for them
 even if there's always something missing, something irreplaceable,
 the maybugs, for instance, who are only in this world
 to serve as dinner for the cuckoo. When it comes to cuckoos
 naturalists talk of massive population losses,
 and the same goes for the hare, that solitary fellow,
 my friend. I'd rather not mention at all the nightingale.
 Since she's turned away from us or let herself be changed
 into a barren switch, the heartless question
 of whether a shave is worth the candle presses harder.
 Best to turn the mirror and only glance, in the evening
 when dusk falls, in a windowpane or lake.
 Hares can move their ears independently. The cuckoo
 has returned and searches for an apt repository for her eggs,
 she reckons with the dullness or the questionable tolerance
 of other birds. Please, let it be as it once was, before the crises,
 when the grey-backed shrike and goatsucker obligingly
 shut their beaks as the nightingale began to sing
 and the hare high-barred over its furrowed field
 and histomoniasis didn't plague the ducks and I
 could pass unquizzically a mirror in the morning.
 It is, however, not so, and will be never so again.

[...]

for Axel Tangerding

The little theatre before my window: a mouse caught in the spotlight
 flits over the outhouse hot tin roof, her first appearance
 this summer; the blackbird's satyrscene and the burbling of the doves;
 on the backdrop two horses chase across the meadow
 but if this has a deeper meaning, no one knows.
 Yesterday, sometime before the storm I saw twelve hillside cattle;
 three of them were turned towards the North, three to the West,
 to the South, three, and three to the East, with all their hindquarters
 turned inwards. The sea, however, lay above;
 its shore formed like a beaker's rim, like a lily in full bloom
 with two thousand pails of water in. The piece was called, »The Brazen Sea«
 It opened as the sun was at its zenith and things had lost their shadows

in the bright vertical mid-day light that on the outhouse fell.
Before the tin shed stretched a washing line, clothes pegged out,
shirts and trousers hanging there until the sun goes down
in horizontal light, in the sweet sorrow of parting.
When all is dark, and it is hereabouts by nightfall very dark,
a pair of reeling fireflies guide me in the lawless, sleeptime shadowland
of the little theatre.
The Brazen Sea becomes perturbed, on the troubled water dance
reflections; brief auspicious intervals for me,
and then the stagehands shove aside the dark bulky masses
of the clouds to set the entrance of the moon
in another piece from the Outsider Books:
Death is no Solution. Every night the same play, en suite,
now and again a change of cast. If clouds gather in the West,
says the old man with the stick, it will rain.
And indeed it does. Of course it does; it must, to keep it up,
day after day, night after night, out of the airthin formations
slipsliding across to dissolve into the yet unformed,
all summer long, till the leaves fall in my dreams
in my theatre.