

POEMS

LUTZ SEILER

**TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
BY ANDREW DUNCAN**

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SOME OF THESE POEMS FIRST APPEARED, IN DIFFERENT VERSIONS, IN THE SUMMER,
2002 ISSUE OF CHICAGO REVIEW

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ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY DURATION PRESS IN 2005 AS DURATION NUMBER 26.

DURATION PRESS
JERROLD SHIROMA, EDITOR
[HTTP://WWW.DURATIONPRESS.COM](http://www.durationpress.com)

POEMS

SIXTY-NINE, OLD CENTURY

the steps dreamed up the dark, the pause
on the hour in the wood, the ringing over the staircase, the blows
the memory-salt for the substantive, crouching
& numbed behind the ears, time was stalled, from

first years on something was
ready for later, from untold
times the sentence was true
longer and sooner
is a salt
of broken birds behind the ears, that

the benches had not been
able to outlast us, the inks, pale
the curses and grimaces drooped
the hatred was stored in salt
for ready, ever ready, the cracks
began over the ground course, the rivers

and industrial zones, before the Urals
decay products of mortar
wiped over with oil, after them
Kamchatka, hardened, calcified, by

Sakhalin I was standing
in the corner, that
Amu-Darya and Syr-Darja flowed, described
the tears of Djamila, explain
how you
would have cried & what the plough is, it's
the true weight of the apparent theory
the Sholokhov horse-collar
only a cloth around my neck

I am the virgin land
you are my curse, anvil

or Korchagin, the ill
and the freezing hand was the skin
on the wall & the chalk & the gravity
pressed on my lips, alone & whispering:
dear wire dear god mrs
Bakuski give over, please let it, a crying

goes off
into the stoves, off
through the wall, off
into the ashes across the yard, but
what is crying, gravity
failed, the light
misted into counterlight, the stars

climbed on the tank chassis over the glass
on the stuck panes of the windows
out into the airspace
above the pact

sleep stood
for ready, ever ready & the Me
stood against the wall, the ground course
was cool against my lips
burnt out, only
the ones who had got away
were expelled, now they came
silently back off the ships
up the table legs
to their barracks
in Salzgitter, completed

the platform, the oil and abroad

with their burden, completed
the process of things, the waiting
with stupidity, the thaw
with gazes out
into the darkness and clods
with shame, who

finally burst
under the tread
over the light shaft
under the dissembling
hope too stood ready, ever ready, an
iron handrail

circled the yard, the chestnuts, at the blow
the heads flew
back into the postwar era
the sour cream with steamed
potatoes back into the first
call to arms, betrayer of the plough: we walked

in a circle, we
circled the milk
in vessels of walking
our steps formed a scab
the corridor
of a coarse, adjusted dark

closed off the dome, passed
down on the fabric of an army bunk, that
was the midday, sleep
lay blinded on our hands, bandoliers
of sweat:

they had remembered to cut down the wick.
came in.

quenched the light
between their fingers; washroom, entrance
and waking dream of the figures of speech; steps to the window &
twitching
the lace of all the curtains, mrs
Bakuski must die, oha, mrs Bakuski
...blindness and silence under the blanket

coloured the shadows
above my eyes, a
childish pus, the real
blue stayed closed in the corners,
didn't shame stand ready, ever ready
in the changing of time
white chestnuts ripen in your pockets, the lark

stabs Lark Sunday to death, the lamp
in the gravel, the costumes
of the drinkers & their terraces & bottles
ripened in their pockets, the stone

is a promissory note: the bird
that dies in flight, its eye
stares at the sky & in
solitary orbits

the dead nursery school teacher circles, sleep, hypnos
bitter shoe & satchel circle, bag & tin, the
breadbag circles, the gym bag
is circling out there, sleep, hypnos, circles

of the depressions carried away, set off
by the coffee grounds, in the washbasin row
in the laughter of the sheep
seventy
more stone huts grew, meat

crates over the hills
at the edge of the night, is

the sleep child ready now, ever ready
it is leaning out there, Lawede
in his broken fence
in his
walking frame behind the moon, half

in spew & half in death, strikes up, song run-through, I am
ready:

*the father pulls back his left
punches pulls back his right
punches dropped
the child out of the
head its mother
shakes it dreamling
bloody out of the treeling, look at
me and me, I'm talking to you
mixed with tears, mixed
with creation in the blood
& all
the bitten off points of its crown*

(Korchagin: hero of awful 1920s Soviet propaganda novel. he is very young, has TB, joins the political police, and then dies. We are terribly happy.)

GERA

you do not speak
of the valleys and mountains the light
speaks of the Elster: but out there too
was something like inside
under the window down the street
waving songs... I had

a room with a group
of fluteplayers angels in pigskin rushed through
the treetops into the beams *a rope*
lashed back in the airs; if

we had not existed
we would have invented
ourselves in the morning before starting out
& daily registered
the paper for the stiffness
of the points of our caps: *on the inside*
dreaming in feet & on the outside if we didn't

exist
the ebb would grow in the rain the waters
would rise the swamps
would blacken the black game in the evening
the blackness of the smuts would lie in the streets &
black elder of the certain
blackness piled on the awns, the cracks
looked for and found: we would have

tied our legs to the time

(*black game*: hunter's jargon for wild pigs)

A FORTUNE IN PITCHBLENDE

what blew at us out of great populated trees
was from its outset plunged
in the time of conversations, tree language
was tree cake and lay
heavily at home, like a rested bone, which
as we children often cried had been on its way
before your time, which had strode through the fields

and breathed on them, which we could now
praise long and willingly, and saw
that father too was good to it, called it
a prop for memory, a signal box
of his heart and seeds
of walking on feet which were really out of date, of tracked
vehicles, of ores and oil deposits, broken out

of the barrack of his walking, far behind
the roads of Culmitzsch, torn far out
of a rare job near Selingstädt
with Russian ores and oil deposits. and although
we ourselves should have been asleep long ago
we rushed down to mother, when father

went around at night crying
the bone the white was the bones
with Russian oils and ores
so we said to ourselves, he smells the ore, it is the bone, he

had actually climbed up the slagheaps,
known the world of mines, the rides on tracks, the water, the schnapps,
so he slid homewards, inventor of the dump,
we hear it ticking, it is the watch, it is
his geiger counter heart

SLAGHEAP GLOW

meant physically: accidents, looks dead, temples suddenly
purple shafts; *slagheap glow*
was a brandy, bootleg
 for cave-dwellers, then
“all out for the First of May”.

 and in the evening
the polyester bag, in the cross-seat the stone age
operettas, the livestock
in barns, in the evening
the easter bunny twitching; flexibly

compare the bundle on the beam
with mange-erased wild rabbits: *when*
first your feet go blind, when
your eyes slowly disappear; know

how in the lamp, the cone of my light,
survival leaps in
the pelts, folds, on
the walls the walls, inside,
ahead of the highway: you

 loved it when
the sheep quivered, their lousy
twitching in their sleep, the gentle
spasm in the *cheers!* -it all

reminds one of something
under woodshavings, an under-
mined wind
 rises to eye-level
out of the past; with every look

the pages change, every closing of the lids scoops out
your cave in time

BORN '14, NAME GENDER

and date of retirement, please
record this, I counted, the hooch, the
 braced shoe, thus she broke
the sheep's shortage of laughter, dancing, as
fly-ash rose from hot-

plate of Sunday best rooms, she rubbed an echo
in her apron pockets, dust and scree
of insects, in the dark, the fist
 at hand, the rhyme
written on the wall, *her wandering began*, the
embankment began
the setting of questions in the ballast: what

turns round at the steps, a nodding
and swaying of the body to where,
over ship's pianos, Märklin railways and
novels, quotes
from the postwar era, like plagues, *the path
of the ape to humanity*, import
export of raisins
bombers and Colorado
beetles out of the air: *everything*

had to be made up/ upright, as a bird
swivels its head,
 dangling she took
perched steps
that still pointed and led from the main body
of the house into the wings, over
the dividing ceilings of her children's bedrooms, animals and
 garages, from right out of
the touch of time

ALMOST STILL GRIPPED BY FROST, YET

from under the tar
sheathes of the telegraph poles
the fresh scarabs grope into light. legs braced
the birds are on them, the

consumer majority, one stumps out
in that way, at midday, the quiet
in the air mass, the curtains, the spy-slit and
the noise of crockery/ the whole

perforated existence in April. even
from thick undergrowth still new spesces
now spurt and grow. small
and mean prevails the silence
of the eaten animals. above all

little leads to the poem from here. perhaps
when the butcher's van rings its bell. or
a man arises, who while walking
vaporises again, over the street, and
the light salts
he exhales drift

up. *like*
a boat circling adrift
is his fall into prayer, o jesu that
I also quickly take a look behind, whether
you still exist at this point...

SUBURBS OF BERLIN, A LAST ALLOTMENT

smell and bodily effort in the gardens: many
sleighbells hung up, greatcoats of late returning POWs
fist-bashed pockets and bulked out,
we had tinfoil too, maybe curtain-net on the cherries,
bottles wherever you set your feet, on
the stubby brown necks. there

we squatted at the table with over-
stretched skulls a few pounds of eyes puppies
under their lids: hunters
fences, corrugated asbestos for everlasting or
he-wont-bite pitbulls in the mob
of skinheads and crystal-

clear bottles, hard
to detach, first from their body, but still
buried empty in the ratholes,
the whistling necks pointing
at the western moon. how good

it felt to hear the rat-gabbling in a
northwester & what we
always have here: this
prowling beyond the jags of your skull,
by day when our thought carefully beds
its temples in the slats, air, shining
nerves on the cortexes, when

in the early light head
and life of a bird knock
together

attraction of gravity

after a while

firmer signs emerge. your leg

twitches in a dream, you hear

the leaves on the street, insects
on feet of clay. the old

leadership vanishes, overturned, just

a twitch *inside the apparatus*, the reeds

find a sound level; tomorrow

the queues will be straightened.

every poem moves slowly

from above to below, from below

to above. it keeps

its dour nature, which continually

turns its burnt-out flowerheads

towards the sun. the I

incarnates itself, when it

throws back the blanket

it grasps the mummy's heart

without twitching. every poem

travels on ant paths

through the sound realms of its bell.

in the evening we come back tired.

the spider's leg

is still twitching, knocked far out

from the limping rest. a trickle

on the windowpane and the robinia flocks,

already turned to stone in the crack, seal

everything up with shadows. the wind

is all around us in the house, as we sleep. while we,

rolled up, knees drawn up,

crawl back into
the prehistoric shapes and what
still shoots out onto the snowed-up routes
over our curved backs. someone

wanted to check the water again, someone
read the gas. the I
reads the iron meter, which
is hung in your veins: every poem
gnaws at the singing bone, it
is worn down at child height
and tells a story

WATER OF LIFE

:dolphin or butterfly –
what associations thought out, dreams
from the hard rubber of the bathing caps: name
class, capital
letters, already rubbed out
the ballpoint lettering squashed down
over the crown of your head... you

were this: pale
bait in the darkness of the cubicle, then
distant the roar, deaf, ears
pressed tight, hair

stuck fast in the cap
:dolphin or butterfly –
how did it happen that
you felt cold, how the
fluttering of an albatross's heart
under your pigeon chest? strokes
neat, turn quick, only

a tight shut moment
with tiled bottom and chlorine, chin out, torso reared high,
head towards god, with spastically
short thrusts, then

you were this too: a soft toy, talentless,
swimming 50 meters to save its life,
buoyancy nil, displacement
good: where your body was
someone else's could be too and what
you thrust aside ahead,
flowed behind into the weight

of your legs

:dolphin or butterfly –
a swimmer will tell of how his life
migrated to land: *bones shrink*
flippers become spiders' legs
in the evening, and in
the shiny threads of the trees: but

what once swims hard to the point
of vanishing, remembers: every
swimming-pool supervisor had poles, duties,
and the deep end – *will*
those who made it please report in
now the files are being closed

(NOSFERATU)

fritz w. plumpe alias murnau had a fatal
accident in the usa. nikolaus
nakszynski alias kinski was sub-tenant 7
years bonner strasse berlin. I

lived in the country and ate “zetti” from
zeitz for a *goodnight* with a walnut kiss or
stood being hugged at the smoker’s table
with the bronze top. then

already half out, in the hall, a music
grabbed me in my cold tracks and
I looked, through the doorcrack, volume down,

back at the evening film: a thin
dead man, who obstinately, grinding his teeth,
flipped up out of the ground as if on hawsers,

wrapped me in his gaze – so
the door snicked to and I, confused, climbed
the darkened stair to my room: the film
which came on then is still running

HUBERTUSWEG

shedding light on our ramblings, hardwood: the prussian forest
is moraine-mechanics, as if
it could still advance on us, word

for word, when the wind springs up,
cool in the grove with the rain coming on
and its long
leisurely speaking
begins *I was a forest myself*
for many years buried

by day in the light stores
of the trees, by night in the streaks
of the iris – for many years

nothing. I heard this
the battue, the ink in the pelt of its
fist-size flying objects, every
psalm pursued

by psalmody, a smell
that blackened the mirrors in the house,
was the old ones: their trails
which were already running up my spine, their
seeping stride
out of the skin into the forest, out

of the mind into the eyes: playing
blind I lost picture after picture, I saw
my trembling skull pressed

to the headboard, I heard
the ink in the pelt, the under-word
written with quivering scalp, *the forest*.

OLD DEFENCE INSTALLATION

joints positions like blood-soil samples
& all of them only briefly held: I
held my good vein still –
every word's sound was now darkened

at the teeth, put back into its rest... you
weren't there, but absence adapted
and wrote

the combat weary bones back
into place in sleep, all
the pieces, out of

film blood, wood, and stones: "there
was no lack of nostalgia
for his hand, but

the stump already ran out
in a dead arm" – that was it. what's written stays &
the *installation* stores the memory

with flyscreens, gatsby-nights at the
sealed end of the corridor

WE LAY OFF MADAGASCAR AND HAD

lost

the world and the theme: we lay
off gera, off krossen, we were practising

the grassroots, revolution from below, not
bismarck, lenin, insects
came in, smaller
than their sound, but our hands
leaned damp and heavy before us,
on the banks of the ocean, under them

half forgotten the prayer lay,
even further down the field
tin with its drawers, aluminium rolls
from prehistory, above them

copies of space, copies of the air: four
polish tank crew and a simple
dog, a champion at fear and at night
the ticking of its paws
endless, doglike, champion- anything

the places hadn't lost, they had
lost all of: even that
it had been there – the chopping block
in the head, the club foot, the hothouse behind
the redskin thickets, where we
tortured *the slaves*, first nitzold,
then stocklein, strictly

according to *seawolf episode 3*; we had
the plague on board and an abandonedness, that

used to stand, at 6 o'clock, outside on the steps, its soles
delicately stringed, and wait: so we went
outside in the mornings ahead of time so
overshadowed even in thought
forgotten beyond the moon disguised
as anxiety in the deadly nightshade and as sweetness
in the nettle flowers – wasn't the path
clipped to us, waving at the side of the
path? to the traces

of writing, the remaining blackening by the door, to
stocklein in the hammock, his
splitting head-
bang, sounds of air, in the mist, did they say
in the mist gravity is reversed?

stocklein is dead and nitzold
has no change of clothing. only we
still look like something
forbidden, we sing
we jump the song forgotten in the larynx
and the lunchbags whirl on their straps
like madagascan coyotes round our necks