

ELKE ERB

HASTE MAKES WASTE

TRANSLATED BY ROSMARIE WALDROP

He was only five when they expelled him from school, kicked him out really, how come, who did, one never knows enough about these things, ever. March-garden-early, early-spring-early, abysmally early, refused him the red kerchief that signaled the pupil in good standing. He had once slyly untied one from the neck of one of those Bernhards — in an excursion bus, kneeling on his mother's lap, bending forward, he was still in kindergarten then.

Prose is a cross between sun and haze, as in early spring, or sometimes in fall, mile, scarp edge, the bus went out into the country as intended in that form of time, of tours, of busses to mountain pastures, distinct from the ways — praise the Kaiser — the ways of cars, not to mention trucks,

distinct from the gulleys along the road, perhaps tactful blackberry brambles, a mental tangle of forelocks, potato plants in rows (and the broad tailored expanse collapses, A shrinking to a field for unarmed eyes, B to a leap of dammed-up sums, rows) or a subjunctive ripening into a mass of corn cobs bright maize-green on the shoulder of the road.

If they were tactful, the bushes along the road that we don't question as our eyes shift to the shoulder subjunctive, would it be their poise that distinguishes, objectively, the busses' form of time and tours from the ways praise the Kaiser of cars trucks combines and steam shovels? Mountains overlook it. Cherry trees contribute nothing, no doubt, or nothing that language can grasp in its simplicity.

Alongside, mile after mile derives waste from haste, the time in the tour bus while one of those Bernhards in the seat before him still has his red kerchief around his neck and time enough, a very eternity in his later life, always remote, a residue, when for example he, I mean Bernhard, just this one

example, later stands before the registrar's desk with a woman, and marriage takes place, a decision where he — summoned by and only by the situation — for a moment imagines god-knows-what, his own fleeting future, as if summoned: this is truly a unique moment, even repeated it is unique again and again, who could gainsay it.

Someone or other carries his neck the way he writes, with arms stretched out in front, levered from the elbows, his hands beginning, with all the signs of expertise, to put their fingers on the material as if on chopsticks, should he write with both hands, prose is a cross between sun and haze,

dreamlike unreal, a timepiece like glass, praise the Kaiser, like freedom — a pine tree chockful of nuts all over — or like a fresh wind rising to see what part of the past was whiled away or thought filed away, or had never been.

Glides through the like of it, the bus — its merry glass panes almost bulging out of the

frames (in the old days they glared more wretchedly out of their grid, frame, crosshatch, just like the starving red republics, right?). Looks like a goggle-eyed insect, the bus, bumble bee, head of a dragonfly almost, though more prudent and portly —

its fair portly glass sheen is in its way praise the Kaiser a bit like the body-build of the contemporary chump VIPs, the way they sit on their asses at dinner or desk, motionless, mastering haste makes waste in a nimbus of achievement that seems nimble in its nimbus — must be those fortified juices.

When the bus retraces the serpentines down the mountain you see it approaching a strip of land some ways from the mountainside, a flat strip of meadow where, perpendicular to the route of the bus, you make out a blazing blue river straight as an arrow,

and it seems, without rhyme or reason, that the narrow perpendicular blue streams straight from your heart, straight as an arrow, streams, unswerving, out and away, like happiness. As if it were happiness. As if happiness were what streams away, crossbolt. And filled with happiness what streams away. Blue within the green. Narrow. This sensation knows what it's about, more precisely than usual, and will swear to it.

Somewhere then there is a bridge, memorable as expected. Unspannably wide seen from above, it could be in Georgia, near the Black Sea, abstracted, a residue, haste makes waste, one of those Georgian barely-still-mountainbrook-bridges.

The old-timer bus or excursion-truck — hurrah for the rows of sun dresses and parasols on board — that in its way (minutes per haste, praise the Kaiser) competes with mountainroad-climbs and mountainroad-miles,

thunders across — barely leaving the bridge intact — and, whoosh, by our ears the jolt of planks above the rocky turbulent torrent and tourist shrieks.

There is no comparison: where the plains spread, the bridges are wiser, sedate, politely offering piers and railings. Remains the question, prose is a cross between sun and haze, march-garden-early:

is a river of such hearty arrow-straight blue fit to be crossed by a bus merely imagined, by no means its equal, the bus described here? I, if I were the bus, would be stumped. This question, with its charmingly immature attempt at textual theory, we'll now simply leave standing here, a question of manners.

But where has the boy gotten to? It all happened so fast!

A quarrel about time. This bulging-glass-eyed bus hogs all the attention? When it seems to run so regularly, run tours, pass periodically by brainy brambles, potato fields? What

— is someone getting fucked —is this all about?

Him they had already. Hold on, what's important here? Expelled. (The kerchief was stolen anyway.) Who had? They. Had expelled him from where? From school. Why?

He simply was no longer there. And the school? The school still stood, they were there. That's how it is. Well in that case. And why had they done it? They were agreed. Or not. But one — does what one can. You understand?

If he was already in school at five — early-spring-early, march-garden-early, abysmally early — then to expel a five-year-old against all custom — haste makes waste, who knows — is more abysmal yet. In their own native-son way praise the Kaiser, they overtake: a headstart.

Born, forlorn, as sown among thorns.

If I had seen — what? A moment on the ground — just curves, hollows, like car hoods, I'd think, raised to the vertical where (ghosts I suppose?) behind their villa walls the alibis tell lies. Above, dust on the eaves, below, blowing leaves. Ten tender toes, soles peeled off the walk and flew. Don't bother your head with what's been said.

No wonder. Or the way people lived in Central Europe a century ago: the one room, it's raining in, the walls the floor the brazen logs how they blaze in the stove cozy smell of wet planks boards wall to wall the room home warming up now coal.

Don't praise the day before its end.

Traveling: the single red tulip on the raw bare ground of the two-tiered slope between frankly shabby postwar houses when I rode through the Chemnitz Valley back to the hills around Chemnitz, midday-tired. The tulip in full bloom, already beginning to wilt, decay. Shuddered at these people lying in wait for their tulips to bloom, april after april, all their liives. (Daffodils a bit less awful.) Ground, raked.

Praise the Kaiser, look for the group:

FARMSTEAD

The inaccessible farm — locked, abandoned? Sits there, by itself. Nobody's house? No access. What (outbuildings?) makes a farm into a farmstead, (Unapproachable. Locked? Sits

there!) gives hedge, fence, long outside barn wall their now arrested vibration ready to encircle the house: What is needed, what's to be done, for what, with what, and when — once upon? The inside ghostly. A lonely bit of daylight backs up the ghosts. It, the light, acknowledges as sufficient the cracked glaze on the concave fragment, the third of a jug. The rest of the jug carried off by ghostly hands, preserved. The pattern of cracks, typically more jagged toward the edge of the shard, signals the former customary use of the jug come to nought, turns the ghostliness into a murmur, a mumble in the ear: the bells of Vineta. Never will the son find his mother. Never the mother, her son.

I snatch at what's around, at a pointer from Gregor Laschen:

THE EAGLE

*The smithy moans and groans in its sleep.
The young roof reaches up to cloudbank edge,
above it now the eagle, all of the abyss
in his white fangs, king of eyes, warm throat
in free fall, the key word all life long:
the way old clowns drop into the sawdust, laugh
deeply buried in order's noise.
Across the almond cloud, the rape, grape-word
with bloody wings long occupies the frame. The eagle
flies back out to sea and bare as silver
glisten, gleam his feet as he in anger
passes stars and screams while the short lives
below him scatter sparks. Limping,
the old order croaks. Into the green his flight,
red tongue, thin point into my head.*

A different sound of bells: although the walrus mostly feeds on mussels (scallops, heart- & zebra-mussels) which he gets in the shallows by snorting a beam of water into the soft ground, his tusks are useful as a pickaxe for ice or rocky coasts. He heaves, as it's called.

But the big bulls also use their tusks to kill: kill seals, squeezing them, what a scene, with their forepaws. The biggest bull with the longest tusks mounts, in the fight for females, to predominance.

One fine detail: walrus skin reddens in the sun because the sun widens the veins. Europe didn't even know the animal when already straps were cut from its skin. Which the Eskimos made into boats, huts....

When the walrus puffs his neck, there is a sound like distant bells.

Quietly in the dusky air the ringing of bells...

(Hölderlin, *Brot und Wein*)

Roam, rove, make for other parts and distance. The leatherback turtle which looks as if it had snatched back the handbag we had snatched from nature — for its own needs as amply demonstrated by the blunted downward point, the inlaid head (eyes, movable mouth) and front flippers — the leatherback turtle gallivants its slow but steady way through all the seas above twelve degrees centigrade.

The early light of day, my wits sharpened by an allegro reading in Oskar Pastior's books, shows the painstaking farmstead-note above to be scratched into painstakingly smoothed clay:

while the freshly dug up clay, heaped in front of the "house of encounter" in Grosshennersdorf,

mumbled and menaced — in audibly soundless revolt (ear) (indignation, defoliated)

—

the same clay smoothed, wet, sprinkled was already stealing away (its dense gray eying, denying olive-green fraud).

Ubiquitous in the sea, the sea. Languages like roads to everywhere. The word "illusory," cf. fool. Roads all roads from somewhere to anywhere. Nirvana flicker.

Farmers probably came to Central and Western Europe from Central Asia or Northern Iraq in two migrations: one from the Caucasus via the East-European steppes, the other via Asia Minor, North Africa and the Iberian peninsula. The first as early as the Neolithic, the second in the Bronze Age.

We find *the cradle* of crop cultivation in eight places on earth:

In central mountain valleys or tropical and subtropical plateaus, e.g. in Central and Western China, Nepal *the cradle* of certain beans and *the cradle* of Chinese or Peking cabbage
In Central Asia (Hindu Kush, the Northwestern Himalaya, Afghani-, Tajiki-Uzbekistan)

the cradle of garlic, *the cradle* of the finegrained fava bean as well as the small pea, lentil, onion, radish, spinach.

Finegrained or plain beans, cultivated by mutation, what brought you to these rougher zones, ladled you out of your cradles?

Festive hall! your floor is the sea, your tables are mountains.

Verily built for a single use eons ago!

(Hölderlin, *Brot und Wein*)

In the mountainous countries around the Mediterranean stood *the cradles* of the coarsegrained fava bean, beet, chicory, various cabbages, as well as parsley, artichoke, asparagus, thyme, endive and black salsify.

The integral is written this way: ∫, if at all. Where did the text lose the boy? How old has he gotten outside it? And where? Not in death, I hope. Haste makes waste, perhaps he found a way to fly home? Some crops came to us in decidedly adventurous ways, praise the Kaiser. Prose is a cross between sun and haze

like early spring.

...

A stranger in the world, you look for your own, maybe peas and beans. Sit in pods, don't look at one another. You find them entwined in the sod with birch rods near or missing. Rods, riders, haste makes waste.

(December 96/97, fragment)