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CALLAHAN COUNTY

STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

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American Life In Poetry

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Memories form around details the way a pearl forms around a grain of sand, and in this commemoration of an anniversary, Cecilia Woloch reaches back to grasp a few details that promise to bring a cherished memory forward, and succeeds in doing so. The poet lives and teaches in southern California.

Anniversary

Didn't I stand there once, white-knuckled, gripping the just-lit taper, swearing I'd never go back?

And hadn't you kissed the rain from my mouth?

And weren't we gentle and awed and afraid,

knowing we'd stepped from the room of desire

into the further room of love?

And wasn't it sacred, the sweetness

we licked from each other's hands?

And were we not lovely, then, were we not as lovely as thunder, and damp grass, and flame?

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The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Sounds In Literature

Part of what makes literature, is the craft of writing where sound plays and important part of the presentation. This occurs in all language, but authors of the more artful parts of the language use it with more design. Poets use the musical part of language as an end to it's own, usually along with a good theme as well. Rhyme is the most ancient and common notion of this. It is the repetition of sound, used by poets for centuries to create a melodic texture to the language. Rhyme does not have to occur at the end of the line, although that may give it's most forceful

effect, utilizing the stanza to accentuate the sounds. Another effective use of repetitive sound are the twin devices of consonance and assonance. Assonance is the use of vowel sounds that are identical, in several words. "Once we had one of woven colored willow branches. The "o" sound is used a lot. A version of consonance could be, "The Fall lawn was filled with fallen foliage," where constant sounds are repeated. These all are wonderful tools the writer has to make his or her poetry or stories, or even nonfiction zing with zip!

- Patrick Ready

Memory Has No Real Estate

German poet Durs Grünbein offers candid and chilling versions of history.

By Helen Vendler
Poetry Media Service

Ashes for Breakfast: Selected Poems, by Durs Grünbein. Translated by Michael Hofmann. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$16.00

Although some poems by Durs Grünbein had been published in journals here and in England, it was not until the appearance of this volume, crisply and colloquially translated by Michael Hofmann, that an English-speaking reader could approach Grünbein's coruscating writing. Grünbein was born in Dresden, in East Germany, in 1962, and moved to East Berlin as a young adult. "I was happy in a sandy no-man's land," the poet wrote in 1991, evoking his student life in the East by casting himself, in his devastatingly ironic sonnet sequence "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Border Dog (Not Collie)," as a patrol dog "in the suicide strip, equidistant from East and West." With the fall of the Wall in 1989, with even the "two or three names for the place of separation" vanishing into oblivion, "nothing is left to recall the trick/By which a strip of land became a hole in time."

"Being a dog," says a defining poem early in "Portrait of the Artist," "is having to when you don't want to, wanting to/When you can't, and always somebody watching." The frustration of being restricted in will and placed under surveillance emerges in the iron grip of Grünbein's epigram. The young poet left the East as soon as possible, only to discover the vices and the disappointments of the West. Although he became permanently ill at ease with respect to place, he is supremely at home in language. There is hardly a page here that does not contain a real poem, out of Grünbein by Hofmann, a poem "real" enough--in emotion, in cadence, in imagination--to make a reader's hair stand on end.

The frequent criticism, by others, of Grünbein's bleakness is embedded in his

"Memorandum":

Poets, so they tell us, are awkward customers

Not up to much. Even laughter has a keener, full-throated edge

When they're not around. They're not very amusing.

No, poets are not very amusing. The discontented demand by some readers that poetry should be "healing" or "uplifting" or "optimistic" or "humane" (or "accessible") re-affirms the truth of Eliot's observation that "human kind cannot bear very much reality." Yet it is, in fact, an optimistic act to write any poem at all: the act implies the trust that another mind will meet the poem half way, and an even deeper trust that language can become adequate to a human predicament.

There are even, for Grünbein, disheartening moments "when the books close ranks and it transpires they don't speak." Here the poet, speaking in the lyric first person, is the man of letters who looks for a sustaining word in the daily paper and finds none. The muse of history, Clio, will not reveal any significance in current events:

I have breakfasted on ashes, the black

Dust that comes off newspapers, from the freshly printed columns.

When a coup makes no stain, and a tornado sticks to half a page.

And it seemed to me as though the Fates licked their lips

When war broke out in the sports section, reflected in the falling Dow.

I have breakfasted on ashes. My daily bread.

And Clio, as ever, keeps mum.... There, just as I folded them up,

The rustling pages sent a shiver down my spine.

And yet Clio, for all her intermittent silence, is Grünbein's principal muse. He came to consciousness within the disastrous history of twentieth-century Germany and has had to re-imagine that history for himself, to meditate on the fire-bombed Dresden where

Submissions sought to:

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Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or liable material.

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Sail Away

Bring to me this

The tenderness of a mother's smile
Compassion from a departing son
A farmer's sigh at the end of day
A soldier's thanks when battles won.

Bring to me

Blessed calm as yon Ganges banks
And the task of a honey bee
Bring the light touch of tender hands
And days of quiet serenity.

Add this

To all which you may bring to me
Days of laughter and nights of love
This blessed life may then be ended
To sail away as a peaceful dove.

-Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas

Words To Use:

Comate: A hairy dog can be described this way, like a Chow or Eskimo or Pekinese. Those dogs or humans that can't see well because of hair, can be said to be comate.

Drumlin: A hill that is long, not like most of those at Dublin, Texas.

Frenetic: Here is another word for a person or chicken that is frantic, berserk, unnerved. They needed another word for crazy, disoriented, deranged, bothered, agitated, uncomposed.

Hogmanay: This unusual word designates a gift or a cake made on New Year's Eve. It's a nice word to know for next year.

Ignavy: It is good to know that when someone is lazy, you have this word to describe them. You would rarely use it to describe yourself, except in a joking manner.

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:
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A small town scene Photo by Patrick Ready

he was born, and to judge the unified but invisibly divided Berlin where he now lives. It must give a shiver to citizens of Berlin to see their contemporary city-sites given sharp definition by Grünbein, with his perpetually simmering sense of an imperfectly buried past.

It is in the formidable 1994 eleven-poem Dresden sequence, "Europe after the Last Rains," that we see the most melancholy (and angry) Grünbein. He returns to the place of his youth, but it has disappeared. "Memory has no real estate no city / where you come home and you know where you are." Remembering the World War II firebombing of the city, Grünbein asks, "Is it the same city in the valley/as the pilot saw in its phosphorescent glory?"

its chronicles written and rewritten, just as the later twentieth century, with the Russian and American occupation, the Wall, the airlift, and the fall of East Germany, has had its own distinct forms of retrospection. One candid and chilling version of this history has been, and is being, told by Germany's poets. Durs Grünbein's account stands as an illumination and corrective to the more impersonal accounts of historians and scholars.

Helen Vendler is a contributing editor at The New Republic. This article first appeared in The New Republic. Distributed by the Poetry Foundation at www.poetryfoundation.org.

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