

regarding the shadows

Levin Westermann

Poetry

German



Levin Westermann's poetry collection *regarding the shadows* brings together four poem cycles, full of references to contemporary poetry as well as to Greek antiquity. The sound and rhythm, while distinctive within each cycle, is powerful throughout. All four poem cycles pose the question of what remains as shadow after the death of the patriarchy, the person, the culture.

"Overnight / they have replaced the woods / with woods, / the birds / with birds, the fox / with a fox. / And outside / in the dusk / snow is falling, a wrecked / car grows white / on a lake, in the garden / no bees nor / dragonflies and / no child - / We set off. / The last to leave / puts out the fire. / A candle extinguished / is a sun / that dies."

Title

bezüglich der schatten

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Levin Westermann was born in 1980 in Meerbusch, Germany. He studied at the Bern University of the Arts and lives as a full-time writer in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland. *unbekannt verzogen* (address unknown), his poetry debut, appeared in 2012. It was followed by *3511 Zsvetaeva* (3511 Tsvetaeva, 2017) and *bezüglich der schatten* (regarding the shadows, 2019), both published by Matthes & Seitz, Berlin. He was awarded the prestigious Clemens Brentano Prize by the City of Heidelberg in 2020.

Photo: Bettina Wohlfender

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Excerpt translated by Annie Rutherford

An extract from

'The missing heart, the dead
fox, the wind in the trees,
light breaking on a lake
and fainting, gravity, deer ...'

Overnight

they have replaced the woods
with woods,

the birds

with birds, the fox

with a fox.

And outside

in the dusk

snow is falling, a wrecked

car grows white

on a lake, in the garden

no bees nor

dragonflies and

no child -

We set off.

The last to leave

puts out the fire.

A candle extinguished

is a sun

that dies.

You can get used

to anything. It's true.

Thunderclaps, clouds,

the wind. Bodies swing gently

from a tree.

There is nothing

one man will not do

to another.

- Carolyn Forché

We avoid the streets,

stay by the lake,

follow its banks

through the steel

grey light.

And ash

on the water, ash

on our faces,

vast bones rusting

on the land.

Then rain again, then

night again. We sit

amongst the bushes

under tarpaulins. The gas lamps

flicker. Two angels

stuff themselves to bursting

with dust.

And suddenly

explosions - detonations

distress the night, tear

a wound

into the world

in the distance.

The lamps

are put out, the fire is

cold

and we lie

and we listen

and we fall back to sleep,

each person flees

for himself alone,

disappears

into herself -

Heavy fog. The rails

on the trail

in the field.

A deer steps out from the undergrowth,

circumspect

in the face of the train.

Morning. Light

from a white sky

and traces of the previous night

- the tracks of birds

in snow.

Vladislav is awake.

His parka on, he stands

outside the house
and smokes. The air's
bitterly cold.
Above him the dragonflies,
high above the ice, millions
of dragonflies
in the air. Far away
they fly
in formation, follow
their feelers, flee
towards the moon.
Vladislav goes inside,
sits down at the table
and, like every morning,
transcribes, describes
what he sees.
Then he closes the journal,
stands up
and makes himself a tea,
lays wood on the fire,
looks for the cigarettes,
smokes.

We crouch
behind walls
on the dam
and wait. The valley
is quiet. Smoke
from a chimney
in a bombed out town.
As if everything was sleeping, as if there was still life
that was sleeping here.

*Light
and the reverse
of light.*

*Light impaled
on the peaks.*

*Light issuing
from the wind's
open wounds –*

The scouts return.
Their bags filled,
their hands red. We take
what we want, want

what we need
for the journey.
No less,
no more.
For we
are not the bad guys.
We
are not the enemy.

The landscape
– unchanged.
Ash lands lifeless
on skin, breath visible
by noses and mouths.
And we dig
a hollow in the earth
with our hands,
for two of us
are dead –
A break in a bothy,
the dream with the dragonfly,
drones which hum
like bees at night.
We wither, says an old man.
We wither
and the world withers
in us.
The water boils.
We fill bottles,
wash wounds,
wrap ourselves in blankets,
wait for the day.
For we
are not the bad guys.
We

At first they called it
an incident, later
an invasion, and when the towns
burned we ran
from them, fled
like shadows
from the light –
Movement in the trees,

for days now
we've been followed
by a fox.
The wind rises,
cloud mountains, boundlessly
fluid, the remains
of an aeroplane
scattered
across a lake.
Nearby, between
rocks, hands stick up
out of the snow,
stretch their fingers
like blossoms
of flesh.
*The limits of our language
mean the limits
of our world.*
The worst
is over. The worst
is yet to come.