

# Ghosts Are Only Human

Katja Brunner

Drama

German



*The two spoken texts by Katja Brunner are both drama and word performance. They are just as suitable for the theatre stage as for private reading. In "Ghosts Are Only Human", she furiously tells of the powerlessness and vulnerability of people on the margins. Katja Brunner loves direct, unadorned language, which she sometimes drives forward in rapid gestures with loud majuscules, sometimes haltingly, stuttering with sentence stubs and snippets of dialogue. Her text is "like the turning of a creaking merry-go-round", she writes. With a cutting view of all things human, she creates little dramas without an actual plot.*

*"possible purpose*

*To change the aggregate state of one's own grief"*

*"Everyday actions are meaningless ornaments of a suffering that I squeezed out of my body between my legs and that found form in you"*

## Title

Ghosts Are Only Human

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## Author

Katja Brunner was born in Ticino in 1991. Her plays have won several awards, have been translated into many languages and have been performed on numerous stages around the world. She often works with other authors, including Martina Clavadetscher. With her musician Sophie Aeberli, she performs as LORETTA SHAPIRO in various contexts of the German-speaking literary landscape.

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Ghosts Are Only Human

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Excerpt translated by Jen Calleja

Possible purpose

To change the aggregate state of one's own grief

is it solid, is it a stone in your stomach, hanging from  
your heart into your gut, that makes the heart heavy,  
stretching it longer than it would like

is it gaseous,  
is the grief in fact not in the body,  
but in the air.

is it liquid, does it abide in the blood and spread every-  
where, does it penetrate capillaries without restraint,

veins, etc.

right up to the deepest and most feeble blood-supplied  
recesses of the body

As if one could pan/eavesdrop this way and that –  
a panorama of a village that lies there cast in language.

Become aware of streamers-by, an oldling, a childling,  
the fox, the mum, maggots and their larvae, of Death  
and sisters.

And somewhen  
The suspicion creeps up on you  
Quickly  
Or more leisurely  
It takes hold of you clearly  
Or vaguely:  
It is debatable whether or not the dead are actually  
dead.

## FUNERAL SCENE I

- He set things in motion triumphantly
- With his passing
- Yes, look closely, his passing pours oil on the troubled waters of the baggage-laden family, who normally act like they aren't on first name terms
- Can you also see, there, how the ruptures that had traditionally opened up these kinds of chasms within the family, yes, how these ruptures are now sewn together, joined seam to seam, one word: one stitch, one gesture: one stitch, one touch: two stitches, one compliment: three stitches.
- The ruptures seem to gradually go the way of all flesh that he has already gone
- So great are the wounds of familial distance, I'll call it what it is, FEUD, that the aunt, the sister of the mother of the deceased, had probably never touched the niece, let alone thought of it, let alone entertained the idea, because they have chosen silence and are certainly not enthralled to ideas

- Thus the niece hadn't ever seen that the aunt has exactly the same shimmer in her left eye that she herself has, the family ruptures were to such a degree, there was too much distance between them for them to leverage such resemblances
- That, indeed, a high degree of connection could have been immediately and spontaneously felt because of a bit of refracting light
- But they nevertheless or in spite of this like to put on a happy face. One sees the preservation of faces when entering the church
- You mean the preparation
- Yes, oh yes, the preparation
- Which - once painstakingly modelled - one no longer takes off, once you have decided on it, you stick with it
- Once selected, there is a facial loyalty to be followed
- Well, now even we aren't going to be discussed in our entirety comprehensively after all of our demises evidently no wreaths will be woven for us
- Obviously nobody's writhing for my sake
- Nobody's squirming before the task of manifesting dead overwhelming small talk and in an excellent, come off it, velvety and officious minor key because of us
- MY HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES, I am so sorry for you all, I extend my sympathies
- Just a brief question: What pain should we share
- The one about a loss that leaves a bald spot in all of us. Bald and barren
- But indeed, where every shared family hangover carries around with it a pain that is its very own, which is neither contingent on nor touched by the pain that they are now turning outwards in the parish hall
- No, that's a completely different one
- Well, what kind then
- It's the one that releases an enzymatic right to remain silent in their digestive tract, at most

- Which is not to be confused with my pain
- Where they *actually* have a pain  
a pain that hangs in their flews  
gives them that piquant skin tone  
that those of one sex have skilfully painted over,  
where I can now understand, where I'm standing  
in the musty, damp church smell
- There is nowhere for us to come together and  
discard our sensitivities into a fire LOOK AT THE  
KINDLING AS IT CRACKLES IN THE WIND and among  
the logs our holy inadequacies melt away
- A kind of cremation of the sensation of pain, to put  
it one way, does not unite us, the carbon monoxide  
that rises does not take away any grief that entered  
us with its demise
- Where I can assume, it doesn't exist, YES, where  
there's a pain that's one's own,  
and has not, that is, got absolutely anything to do  
with the person laid out
- It is simply desperately refreshing to have found  
an occasion *finally*, to *finally* utilise what is painful,  
to *finally* evaluate what is painful in others
- Uh, oh yes, my handwriting is no longer what it used  
to be, how do you say that again, hmm, I looked it  
up at least: "Death puts out the light, but never the  
light of love."
- Just no, to have *finally* found an occasion that  
officially qualifies you, namely
- To bear the inside out
- That bring the sacred environment with it right  
away, to turn the almost inactive intestinal flora  
outwards, to scrape off the mould on the stomach  
barriers, on the pews, with the requirement of  
absolute participation
- LOOK HOW MY TEARS PLOP AND RUN DOWN MY  
TIGHTS INTO MY SHOES, LAUGHTER AT MY FEET  
  
LOOK HOW MUCH I'M EMOTING
- Whereas one actually stares into the front row while  
giving their send-off
- Admit it, that's how you stare
- And looks and tries to count the flakes of dandruff  
on the shoulder of the bereaved sister

- One, two, three, four, five, ...
- In order to make sure that they would seek you out at the wake, to count whether there's roughly the same number flake-wise on the left and the right
- Is she populated by a feeling of guilt that makes her scalp chapped and dry
- You mean the eternal questions WHY DIDN'T I NOTICE WHEN HE ASKED ME HOW DOES SUCH A BIG GRANDDAD FIT IN SUCH A SMALL URN, WILL WE COME TO REST BESIDE GRANDDAD AND THEN WILL WE STILL BE ABLE TO TELL TALES
- We don't think that out loud, no
- Right now it's enjoyable, because it's nice to put the stomach barrier close to the two-piece suits of others
- To have finally found an occasion to soil one's two-piece suit and proudly wear the filthiest one all through the nave
- Maybe re-model that long face
- For example, to change the eyes from inexpressively broken to those of someone who suffers freely
- Where exactly this kind of contentment is at stake