

Ard Posthuma

A swallow by the name of Jeldican

Written after spending May to August 1999
as Hermann Hesse Writer-In-Residence in Calw.

Those who, like I, were repotted to Calw for three months soon develop a tendency to consider their new surroundings as if seen through a microscope. This is something virtually all Hesse writers-in-residence to date have experienced, which make things a little difficult for me: in their accounts, virtually everything to be seen, experienced, or missed in Calw has been depicted at length in loving, succinct, witty fashion, with not even the graffiti in the lift or the foot-friendly floor of the attic flat having eluded their urge to describe. The busker with the clarinet, the cooing of the pigeons on the roof, the two Hesse cats - they pop up in all of the reports, and are caressed or cursed according to individual temperament. The same is also true of the other topographical features: the half-timbered houses, the view out on to Badstraße, the spruce on the neighbouring roof terrace, the goldfish in the market fountain, the "Verlobtenweg," the lonely walks in the woods - there is nothing my predecessors failed to notice. Even the station kiosk, which is not the slightest bit different to any other station kiosks, was worthy of mention. That makes things a little tricky for me: I am not good enough at the art of variation, and do not see myself in a position to put a new gloss on old polish. All I would manage would be a few miserable marginalia. The fact that the clarinetist was less off-key during my stay, that the pair of cats had got fatter, and the spruce had grown a little taller - who is likely to be interested in that? And the sole thing my predecessors definitely did not see, because it - to wit, the total eclipse of the sun - was only to be seen in 1999, was something I myself witnessed only indirectly due to the overcast sky. To my great fortune, I should add, because all the protective glasses had sold out weeks before. So there I then stood in broad daylight in front of the Hirsau monastery, waiting to cross the road to get to the entrance gate, when the sky turned increasingly sombre; suddenly, there was no gate to be seen any more, the street lamps came on, an eerie calm descended; and then the event was over once again; a blackbird could be heard, the end of the world had not taken place.

And Hermann Hesse? He grew a little closer to me, although that really wasn't necessary. Like the maestro himself, I did, after all, spend ten years living in Basel's St. Alban suburb, and later on Spalenring, where his parents spent the happiest years of their life. And if, during the hippie era, I hadn't had to write an urgent seminar paper on Plato's parable of the cave, one would today still have been able to see me in STEPPENWOLF, which was shot back then in Basel. As an extra, of course. The film, incidentally, was a flop, driving the director to suicide. Right now, that is all that occurs to me on the subject of Hesse.

No, my thanks to the town of Calw in general, and to the Hesse-Stiftung and the Kreissparkasse in particular, can, for a translator of lyrical poetry, be expressed in my own way only, i.e. in lyrical form. And there is a lot to be grateful for: Calw is the ideal place in which to work on my Dutch translation of Goethe's Faust in peace and quiet, being for the first time on close terms with his historical model, the magician-charlatan from Knittlingen. My token of thanks is a basketful of lyrical poetry: a handful of poems that I have translated from my mother tongue into German. Learn them by heart! In making this selection, I was thinking in undiminished manner of Calw, and that brought forth in me all kinds of memories, impressions and images, with which I prefaced the poems, giving the entire package the shape of a multi-layered sandwich. It may well be that the utilitarian value of lyrical poetry is currently not rated all that highly. As if fashioned specifically to address this contemporary circumstance is, in fact, the distress call voiced by Lucas

Moser, which I came across, in the course of my Swabian study tour, on the Magdalene Altar in Tiefenbronn:

Schri. kunst. schri. und. klag. dich. ser.
din.begert.iecz.niemen.mer.so.o.we. 1432.

Applied to poetry, and freely translated:

*Poor poet, why not call it a day
Not a blessed soul will read you anyway!*

Yet such prophecies of doom leave me cold. Standing in front of Lucas Moser's altar, we are amazed even today - never before did I see such beautifully rippling waves and such a translucent sea as around the raft of his Maria Magdalene - and good poems are still essential forms of spiritual nourishment. That is evidenced by the attractively sparkling glass bead that I was the first to pick from the treasure trove of Dutch poetry. In this modern ballad, Leo Vroman (born 1915) describes a quest for the Holy Grail: Jeldican - little dog, hunter, jester, and poet all rolled into one - goes out into the world with a swallow net in order to catch "the word," which one apparently has to imagine as a winged object.¹ And he is successful! Woe betide anyone who dares to take it away from him, for the word is more important to him than all else. If his "Weibel" had known that, she certainly wouldn't have swapped it for a loaf of bread! This witty poem, which could certainly serve as model for a wonderful children's book, was written by POW Vroman in 1943 in a place of fear - a Japanese concentration camp.

The "Dichterklause" in Calw has neither garden nor terrace. Occasionally, it got very hot in there. I therefore always left the window wide open and stuck my head out from time to time. Thus it was that, one sunny morning, I was watching a white butterfly fluttering off in the direction of Badstraße. It soon got company in the shape of a swallow, which accompanied it over a longer distance in a corkscrew flight. Just before the Sparkasse, it pounced.

Jeldican und das Wort

Über die Heide
schlich Jeldican,
Schwanz zwischen beide,
Stummel voran

Auf Glühohren trug er
einen Glöckelifez
zwischen zwei Fingern
das Schwalbennetz.

¹ *Translator's note:*

The German term "geflügeltes Wort – literally: "winged word" - is an expression used to describe a popular saying or familiar quotation.

I have not endeavoured to render this poem into English, and trust that readers will, with the help of the summary provided above, be able to navigate their way through Ard Posthuma's excellent German rendition.

All subsequent English translations of the verses to be found in this article, each of which follows the German version, are but feeble attempts to capture the metre, rhymes and other devices employed by Posthuma.

Rock um das Rümpfchen
im Schottenwurf
Weibels Blaustrümpfchen
und Klingelschlurf.

,Rot wie ein Appel
in Kegelzypress
preußblau die Pappel
zu Palfriness.

wo kann ich fegen:
es pfeift unter Gott
es fliegt allerwegen
flügelflott.

Äugt es im Flattern
an Schnupperschnur?
Das Liebtwort ergattern
wie kann ich das nur?'

Da klapperts im Wirrkraut,
Goldginster wankt,
ein Jauchzpick, ein Schwirrlaut;
Jedican bangt.

Nie hört er so volles
Tralieten wir dort –
so baffmachend quoll es:
war dies das Wort?
Bumsbäuchlein lodert
ein Glücksgebet ab ...,
jaaat! fiept das Schwingnetz
Gackelischnapp!

O, Federn zu frönen!
Das Wort, brustgedrückt,
wie hat es mit Tönen
ihn lauter beglückt.

,O Schönheit, o Heide
ihr Pappelchen dort!
Nie öasse ich mich scheiden,
Herr, von diesem Wort.

Fix, auf nun zum Weibchen,
witwengeschwind,
lass stürmen das Leibchen,
Blauband im Wind!'

Voll Plauder, allein
eilt Jeldican.
Hals über Beine,

so purzelt er ran.

,Meine Weibel, erkoren,
hier ist das Wort!
Doch sie, tauber Ohren,
sprach, fehlstens am Ort.

,Aai, Vogeli, Dickwulst,
wie nützlich und nett,
was immer ins Netz pulst,
macht Beutelfett.“

Sie tat, was sie meinte
und tauscht' es für Brot,
doch Jeldican weinte
und schlug sie tot.

In the darkest of forests

The clarinet is the saddest of all instruments. Just take a listen to Carl Maria von Weber, listen to any klezmer group or, better still, listen to the busker in Calw. Whenever it got to be too much for me, I fled down Salzgasse, climbed up the hill at Stadtgarten, and the Black Forest was suddenly mine alone. These walks are something I have especially fond memories of. Never knew that the trees could rise up so high into the sky. Was never before able to watch young woodpeckers flying out of the nest. Gimpelstein, Verlobtenweg, Schafott, the fairytale-like path along the Rötelbach, where the fish dart through the water like little black torpedoes, the indescribable green of a glade, the huge fungi on rotting tree stumps. And never a soul to be seen. Out on the woodland nature trail, the trees even speak to one direct. Woe betide anyone who calls them by the wrong name! "I am a spruce fir, though they also call me Norway spruce," they then whisper, so quietly that the competitor (the silver fir) does not hear it. Others really lay it on thick: "I am an oak. I have already looked down on seven generations, and I can survive for another seven generations. It was by such venerable old trees that your ancestors erected their "Holy Places."

It is of clarinet and oak that the following poems tell. The strange-sounding name Piet Paaltjens is, of course, a pseudonym. His real name was François Haverschmidt (1835-1894) and the poet is, on account of his romanticism tinged with self-irony, considered the Dutch Heinrich Heine. The only difference being that he was immeasurably more delicate, and thus also more defenceless. The volume of verse that has made him popular up to the present day was written during his student days in 1867, when the world was still a cheerful place. In the very title itself, however, one hard to translate, the first snag is already to be encountered : Snikken en grimlachjes ("Schluchzer und Grieflachen," suggests my friend in the flat tongue of Pomerania).

After studying theology in Leyden, he became a priest and far unhappier even than Eduard Mörike. In his rainswept parish between silent Friesian farmers, his smile deserted him for ever. Finally, he saw no other way out than that of the desperate man in the grotesque, which was what made him famous.

Even today, *Der Selbstmörder* (*The Suicide*) is the ideal poem to tickle a somnolent group of partygoers back into a waking state. Turn the light off unexpectedly, light a candle, declaim in a loud voice, and let the verses rattle like hollow bones. That heightens the effect no end!

Der Selbstmörder

Tief im finsternen Wald
(es war Herbst und recht kalt)
lief ein Herr mutterseelenalleine.
Ach, sein Blick war gehetzt
und sein Rock war zerfetzt,
und er stöhnte, als wälzte er Steine.

Hach! so rief er voll Wut,
welche Giftschlangenbrut,
welchen Drachen nähr ich an der Brust hier!
Und er tritt mit Gewalt
in den Matsch, dass es hallt
und der Kot ihm den Kragen verschmutzt schier.

Und schon findet sein Blick
einen Eichenast, dick
genug, seinen Körper zu tragen;
und er klettert hinauf,
nimmt ein Seil, hängt sich auf
und verschmutzt sich nie wieder den Kragen.

Es ward stiller im Wald
und gleich zehn mal so kalt,
denn die Winterzeit kam. Aber wehe!
immer noch trug der Ast seine traurige Last
zum Erstaunen von Elster und Krähe.

Doch der Winter verschwand,
denn der Lenz kam ins Land,
den anschließend der Sommer begrüßte.
Da erschien (es war warm)
in dem Wald, Arm in Arm,
frisch ein Pärchen, doch, oh, wenn es wüsste!

Denn als unter dem Ast
es sich zärtlich umfasst'
und dachte: hier liebt es sich munter!
da erblickt' es (igitt!)
einen Stiefel: der glitt
vom schon längst morschen linken Bein runter.

Herrgott! riefen die zwei
und wes Stiefel das sei
und sie schauten hinauf, was passiert war,
denn dort hing noch am Strick

jener Herr, einst so dick,
dessen Fleisch nun schon längst konsumiert war.

Auf dem grinsenden Kopf
stand der Hut wie ein Topf,
denn es fehlte der Rand. Alles Linnen
war zerknittert und fahl,
aus den Ärmeln zumal
blickten Ameisen, Würmer und Spinnen.

Ausgetickt war die Uhr,
blind die Brillenmontur
und das einzige Glas war beschlagen.
Auf dem Westenrand saß
eine Schnecke und fraß
sich still-schleimig voran ohne Fragen.

An ein Liebesspiel war
nicht zu denken, das Paar
harrte sprachlos im Schatten der Eiche.
Es glich, weiß wie der Schnee,
einem Leintuch, das eh'
schon zu lange sich sonnt auf der Bleiche.

Das Geheimnis
Wir waren am Plaudern,
da erklang zum Erschauern
von den Hügeln ein Triller es
war Ludwig Hiller:

der begabte Künstler,
der mit Leid Bedachte,
der so seine Klarinette
zum Trillern brachte.

Nie entfuhr meines
Wissens unterm Firmament
ein so kläglicher Ton
einem Blasinstrument.

Es war echt erstaunlich
und sonderbar,
wie grauslig der Mann
da am Blasen war!

Wir aber staunten
nimmer und nie,
denn wir kannten den Grund
seiner Melancholie.

Ja, einer zumindest
wusste bestens Bescheid

über des Klarinettenisten
entsetzliches Leid!
(...)

[The Suicide

*Deep beyond the darkest of glades
(autumn so cold it cut like a blade)
Walked a gent so all on his own.
His countenance so drawn and careworn
His coat so ragged and torn,
And he groaned as if heaving stones.*

*Aargh, he called full of wrath,
What brood of vipers hath
Nested here in my breast,
What ugly beast doth consume my toil!
Into the mire he trod down so firm
That the sound echoed out and made him squirm,
And the mud splashed up and his collar did soil.*

*And thus it is that his gaze does alight
Upon a branch of oak, just right
And solid enough to bear his frame;
And up onto the bough he clambers,
Takes out a rope and from it does dangle,
Never to soil his collar again.*

*A quieter calm on the forest did descend
And the cold by tenfold did downward trend,
For winter was approaching. Yet, oh, what terrible woe!
Its sad burden the branch still bore,
To the wonderment of magpie and crow.*

*Yet winter did then depart,
Bringing spring to these parts,
Which in turn to summer did give way.
And thus appeared (it being warm)
In the forest, walking arm in arm,
A fresh young couple, so unawares, they!*

*For as beneath the finest foliage
In tender embrace they do engage
Thinking: what pleasanter spot in which a-wooing to be made!
They caught sight (shake, shudder and shiver)
Of a boot which downward did slither
From a left leg already long decayed.*

*Oh God! cried he, Oh Heavens! exclaimed she,
Whose boot might this then be?
And up to behold the worst did they stare
For up there from the noose on high*

*Swung the gent once so plump of thigh,
Of his flesh the bones now long since stripped bare.*

*On the head of grinning aspect
Sat like a pot the erstwhile gent's hat,
For of brim it was now devoid.
Crumpled and colourless his attire,
And peeping from the sleeves were to be espied
Ants, worms, and many a creature arachnoid.*

*Long run-down the timepiece he once owned,
Blind the spectacles perched on his nose,
Over the sole remaining lens mist abounding.
While on the edge of his waistcoat did leave a trail,
Moving slowly and slimily, a solitary snail,
Munching its way forward, oblivious to all surrounding.*

*Of canoodling there could be no talk,
At that thought the couple did now balk,
Frozen speechless in the shade of the oak.
Standing as pale as a shroud,
Afraid to breathe a word out loud,
They stand and do the crows hear croak.]*

[The Secret

*There we were our chins just a-wagging
When a sound fit to set one a-quivering
From over the hills did come a-trilling -
'Twas, I swear, the sound of Ludwig Hiller:*

*An artist so munificently endowed,
A man so given to grief
Who thus his clarinet
Did make yowl and wail beyond belief.*

*Never to my knowledge
Was in the entire firmament
A sound so wretched
Brought forth by winded instrument.*

*Little short of astonishing
And strange it was to behold
How dreadfully said man
His instrument did punish and scold!*

*Yet never ever were we to
Be astounded or distressed
Knowing as we did the cause of
This man's melancholic access.*

*Verily, one at least did know
What gave him this awful bent,
And what lay behind the clarinettist's
Most appalling sense of torment!]*

Pallaksch

The evening in Tübingen had style: songs and texts by Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan, an impressive singer, accompanied by piano, trombone and tuba. The baritone sang, the piano player did his bit, and the two brass instruments heightened the tension further by not blowing at all for a long time. Just as one was beginning to fear they were intended merely as extras, they blasted off a few infernal salvos, only to revert into total motionlessness once again. The word "Pallaksch!" shouted out twice by the singer marked the end of the composition. Thunderous applause.

From my seat, I has been able to watch a friendly little gentleman who had been silently following the sung text with his lips. He was, as it later transpired, the composer. I got to know him the same evening, during a reception at the house of a retired professor of Slav Studies, whose wife served up a wonderful soup. I got talking to the composer, who assured me he had never written a cello duet, but had produced one for invisible violin and cello, the latter to be played by a performer using two bows at the same time; the whole thing was thus a kind of string trio for two! We had to break off our conversation, which I am able to reproduce here only in grotesquely truncated form, as the retired professor had since risen to his feet and was tapping on his glass with the soup spoon. He stated that he would like to recite (perhaps he said "declaim" but definitely not "read out") a few poems by Sergey Yesenin in honour of his musical guest. It was a moving gesture, which caused the composer some embarrassment. He was afraid he had proffered his well-versed host an all too profane alcoholic beverage as a gift.

The poems that were read that evening sounded beautiful, very beautiful, perhaps a little too beautiful. I, in any case, would have preferred them to be a little less "nice," and a bit rougher in terms of overall tone, a bit more Klaus Kinski and a bit less Rudolf Alexander Schröder, so to speak, for Yesenin's brief life was one shaped by alcohol, women and psychiatric clinics, and something like that does influence what one expects to hear. I have seen a photograph of him on his deathbed or, to be more precise, on the floral sofa of the hotel room in which he took his life in 1925, at the age of just thirty. The day before, he had written a final poem, using his own blood as ink. The caption under the photo, published in a French journal in 1930, read: "Le poète Y. sur son lit de mort."

Gerrit Kouwenaar (born 1923), godfather of modern Dutch lyrical poetry, in 1974 published a volume of verse entitled *landschappen en andere gebeurtenissen* (Landscapes and other Events). In it, there is a little cycle prefaced by the caption as a kind of motto. The next day, I translated the first poem in this cycle. A photo rendered in such perfect poetry will not fade so quickly.

"Le poète Y. sur son lit de mort."

Das zimmer muss man ersinnen, was schwarz ist
sperrt sich der sicht
ist zu ertasten
auf der maschine

und die verdunkelte tapete muss man ersinnen
aus verblichenen erinnerungen
und zum augenblick eindicken

mit all diesem weiß von leintüchern wasserkannen
vergilbten
wahrheiten in schubladen verbandmüll weiß
von augäpfeln speichel weißbüchern, da all dieses rot
grau wurde und das rieseln von schnee totenstill ist

und jawohl die flaschen muss man ersinnen
die vielen flaschen die den ringen
vorausgingen die sie zurückließen
auf zu ersinnenden dingen

und in all diesem pechsschwarzen weiß das diese
stiebitzte habe umgibt liegt endlich überbelichtet
auf dem geschenkten geblühten unsterblichen sofa
die unterschrift -

["Le poète Y. sur son lit de mort."]

*The room you have to imagine, what is black
obstructs itself from view
is to be groped at
on the machine*

*and the darkened wallpaper one has to imagine
from faded memories
and to fuse for the moment*

*with all this white of linen cloths watering cans
yellowed
truths in drawers gauze dressing white
of eyeballs saliva whitebooks, as all this red
became grey and the flurry of snow is as silent as death*

*and, yes, the bottle one has to imagine
the many bottles that preceded
the rings they left behind
on things to be imagined*

*and in all this pitch black white that surrounds
these purloined possessions lies finally overexposed
on the gift of the floral immortal sofa
the signature -]*

The Nagold

has a harmonious s, idyllic look about it. Trout suck inquisitively on my dog-end floating in the water. An unbelievably blue kingfisher is nesting in the embankment. Below, the ducks congregate, and above them: a duck Valhalla, the terrace of the Chinese restaurant. It is

here that crispy Peking members of the very same species are roasted. On the menu, they are given such wonderfully poetic designations as “Black Pearl,” “Floral Dream of the Yellow Phoenix,” or “Duck with the Eight Delicacies.” Oh to be served up there just once in one’s lifetime (the ardent wishdream of all Nagold ducks)!

That the Nagold also has another face to it is documented by photos from the postwar period in Palais Vischer. And the notches on the door jamb of my wine merchant in Lederstraße testify to the fact that wine bottles were already floating about freely back in the Middle Ages. Each century, there have been at least two major floods, the last incidentally six years ago. The little St Candidus church in Kentheim knows a thing or two about the effects of such events. Almost swept away from the bottom of the valley (the floor used to be 1.20 m lower, as can be seen from the door to the left of the side altar), it now carries the water from the last flood disaster still mouldering in its walls, seeking to make the centuries-old frescoes finally disintegrate.

Graceful – with weeping willow and mediaeval chapel – the Nikolausbrücke, on whose corner a projecting “mulestone” once protected “das Reichertsche Haus” from the wheels and hubs of passing carriages. Next to it the sandstone plaque on which Carl Reichert had his jumbled letters riddle engraved. Those who, while it was still legible, considered themselves smart made out the word ESEL (MULE, in the sense of “ASS”) if they managed to come up with the right answer. The merchant was fond of such didactic little jokes. Under the crumbling balustrade of his former business premises, he advises us to look forward and not back. Yet I like to look back, just to see the electricity works and the weir that Rudolf Schlichter painted back in the 1930s and which will, hopefully, as part of the newly planned street lighting system, once again be illuminated in such mysteriously eerie manner, the way he portrayed it in the painting “E-Werk (Abend).” Anyone seeking to discover where the painter stood when painting the picture ends up in the garden of Heinrich Perrot, whose indoor fountain now stands in the Hesse-Museum, because young Hermann is supposed to have applied his file to it during his apprenticeship. (I learn while reading Perrot’s son that the fountain did not work and the goldfish kept jumping out.) Fortunately, Hesse mentioned him in *Glasperlenspiel*. Rudolf Schlichter was, as far as the Perrots were concerned, less grateful. After being bombed out, he and his wife were, during the difficult postwar period, taken in by the cranky clock tower genius yet were, to their chagrin, soon thrown out again. The old man found the painting shoe fetishist to be too eccentric. Destinies! So let’s look forward, after all, to the floating beer garden that – a final look back - is designed to remind us that the rafters once travelled from here right up to Holland. (But how did they get back?)

It is hot on the bridge, inviting one to tarry and dream, as you will have noticed from my digressions. Time for a poet: Jan Luyken (1649-1712). That life is but a dream is something many have asserted. Yet no one as touchingly as he.

Air

Droom is't leven, anders niet,
't Gijt voorby gelijk een vliet,
Die lange steyle boorden schiet,
Zonder ooyt te keeren
d'Arme mensch vergaapt sijn tijt
Aan het schoon der ydelheyd,
Maar een schaduw die hem vlijt,
Droevig! wie kan 't weeren?

d'Oude grijse blijft een kint,
Altijd slaap'rig, altijd blind,
Dag en ure,
Waart, en duure,
Wordvergiyget in de wind,
Daar mee glijt het leven heen,
't Huys van vel, en vlees, en been,
Slaat aan 't kraaken
d'Oogeen waaken,
Met de dood in duysterheen.

[Air

*Dream, life is but a dream,
Like idle foam on past us it does flow
Drifting along by the bank downstream
Floating on by never to return -
Poor human standing there
As at the glitter of vanity you stare,
All that pleases you mere shadow,
Alas! Who its flow is able to restrain?
Old and grey forever a child remains,
Forever dopey, forever blind,
Nothing of substance will endure,
Fame, honour, renown
Are but mere folly in the wind -
Nothing but a feeble foil this mortal coil,
And your house: skin, flesh and bone
Soon around you all will tumble;
Eyes watch on as
Dark death enveloping
Us all doth humble.]*

Station

LOCATION: PERFECT! START YOUR EXCURSIONS IN CALW. BUS ON THE GROUND FLOOR AND LIFT UP TO THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM: THE ZOB IN CALW! Thus reads the blurb promoting the Central Omnibus Station in the tourist office brochure printed on recycled paper. What a good thing that, for the nostalgic with young legs, the old platform is also still there. Stations make one nostalgic. And the one in Calw especially so, yet less the aforementioned, with elevator access on the roof of the multistorey car park, but rather the old, long-abandoned one, a little outside the southern perimeter of the town. It owes the vestiges of life it still ekes out to the stand selling French fries that has set up inside, and whose permanent stream of patrons seem unconcerned that no train able to provide them with conveyance will ever stop here again. Here, in 1904, stood painter/poet Rudolf Schlichter, whose name almost nobody and whose Brecht portrait almost everyone knows. In his autobiography *Das widerspenstige Fleisch* (1932), he describes how he felt when, at the age of fourteen, he moved away to Pforzheim to embark on his unloved apprenticeship as a painter of enamels:

“Decked out in a brand new suit, a little hat with a coquettish feather pressed down on my head, and a greyish black cape hung over my shoulder; thus equipped, I stood one Friday morning, fourteen days after leaving school, with my mother at the C...r station and waited, my heart pounding, for the arrival of the train that was to take me to Pforzheim and my future place of work. (...) Sad and full of gloomy thoughts, I sat next to my mother, who kept trying to lift my spirits that had sunk so low by regaling me with optimistic accounts from the apprentice days of prominent C...r choral society members, recounting encouraging tales of success and fame, although she, feeling such pity for me, was, like I, closer to tears than laughter. From time to time, I pressed my face against the panes of the carriage window in order to soak in, my eyes stinging, the entirety of the so intimately familiar world of my boyhood dreams for a final time. Gradually, the slopes and hilltops known to me so well faded from view, and the scenery became more unfamiliar after just three stations, and once I saw the last range of hills disappear, I was overcome by the desperate thought that I had enjoyed much too little of that beautiful world, that I had failed to do incredible amounts of things, and had wasted too many wonderful opportunities.”

A very similar note is struck by Herrmann Hesse. The train in which sits the hero of his short, largely autobiographical homecoming novel, *Schön ist die Jugend*, is approaching the place where he spent his childhood:

“Painstakingly slowly, the train twisted its way down the hill in broad sweeping curves, and with each twist the houses, streets, river and gardens of the town lying below became closer and more clearly defined. I was soon able to distinguish the different roofs and search out the better known ones, and soon also able to count the windows and make out the storks’ nests, and while childhood, boyhood and thousands of precious memories of home floated up to me from the valley, my bold sense of being a homecominger seeking to impress the people down there slowly melted away, yielding to a grateful sense of wonderment. The homesickness, which had deserted me in the course of the years, now rose up in me powerfully in the last quarter of an hour, each gorse bush on the platform, and each so very familiar garden fence, proving so wonderfully dear to me, and I begged for forgiveness that I had been able to forget and forgo it for so long. When the train passed our garden, somebody was standing in the top window of the old house and waving at me with a large towel – that had to be my father. And on the veranda my mother and the maid were standing with cloths, and from the upper chimney a light blue smoke of coffee fire was flowing into the warm air and out over the little town. All of this belonged to me once again (...).”

Calw’s disused railway station may boast that it lives on as an HO-scale model. Hembrug station in the Netherlands, by contrast, has disappeared. In the wonderful language of Kouwenaar, it celebrates its resurrection. For half a century now, this radical renewer of lyrical language has been writing the most beautiful poetry known to me. For him, the poet’s task is that of purging the language in such a way that what has been said a thousand times over is able to stand unique once again, as if it had just been created.

bahnhof Hembrug

Bisweilen sieht man heller was schon dunkel ist
und steckt fast wieder heil in seiner haut, gerodet
ist kein baum, kein wort gefallen, man stellt
die uhr zurück, bahnhof hembrug

der zug hält an, jetzt schon ein leben lang, man hat

die stadt schon hinter sich, auf immer kind, das paradies
liegt greifbar nah, wir schreiben heute, man liest
notbremse mit dem zeigefinger

wie ist die jahreszeit? die jahreszeit ist gut, sommer
und winter hinter einem zaun, frühjahr und herbst
verreisen hand in hand, dies hört nie auf, der zug
in seiner dampfwolke steht wartend da

steht da, derweil man sich mit einem butterbrot
und einer leerzeile die zeit ausfüllt, es dauert
doch noch länger als gedacht, man lehnt
sich nicht hinaus, man pellt ein ei

wörter wie langsam später nach und nach
füllen das rauchcoupé, man schaut durchs glas,
man sieht wicken in kohlengrus, man hört wie's pfeift,
dies ist auf immer, außen schneits, nahezu zeit.

[hembrug station

*Occasionally, you see in lighter hues what is already dark
and feel almost safe in your skin once again, no tree
has been felled, no word fallen, you turn the
clock back, hembrug station*

*the train stops, now a whole lifetime long, you have already
left the town behind, forever child, paradise is almost
within reach, we write today, you read
emergency brake with your index finger*

*how is the season? the season is good, summer
and winter behind a fence, spring and autumn
travel off together hand in hand, this never stops, the train
in its cloud of smoke stands there waiting*

*stands there, while you fill in the time
with a butty and an empty line that fills in time, it is taking
much longer than you thought, you don't lean out,
you shell an egg*

*words like slowly later little by little
fill the smoke coupé, you look through the glass,
and see vetch in the coal slack, you hear how it whistles,
this is forever, outside it's snowing, nearly time.]*

Keep looking ahead, never turn back reads on the bridge the Reichert plaque

that he had engraved on the banks of the river. Yet I did look back briefly when driving out of the narrow parking facility on Lederstraße and failed to notice the senseless protuberance at the exit, with crushing consequence for the front fender. I simply love looking back, though sometimes it can cause pain.

He must have been popular, this Carl or Karl Reichert who, on his gravestone, had himself termed simply "Reichert, the Merchant." He was able to count himself among the educated, as evidenced by a Horace verse ("non omnis moriar"), and a quote from Faust on the beautiful selfsame slab of white marble: "Zu neuen Ufern lockt ein neuer Tag" ("To new shores each new day us does entice."). Yet Faust spoke these words not at the end of his life but – having tired of his desolate ways – as he was about to drink from the poisoned chalice. Had Goethe not come along just in time to have the Easter bells toll, he might even have been buried as a suicidist somewhere outside the gates of the city. Getting back to Reichert, he was a bright one, an original, someone who did not mince his words. The chronology of his life in Calw rests under seal in the municipal archive, for he was never afraid of calling a spade a spade. Let us take, for example, the Daud business. "Nigger Daud," as he is called there, I first encountered in an old photograph in the Hesse-Museum, where, while it was still the house of Dr. Schüz, he spent his eight unhappy years. He is sitting in an uncomfortable pose at a garden table next to his bearded patron; on the other side the latter's two sons, in the middle a private tutor. With a view to performing a service for the mission, Dr. Emil Schüz brought the nine-year-old black sinner back to Calw from his trip to Egypt in 1896, intending to train him to be a missionary. Daud must have created quite a stir. Reichert's pious aunt owned a photograph of him. On the back, she wrote: "The blessedly departed Daud - how he longed to be with the Saviour." And what did Merchant Reichert write about the event generally celebrated as Calw's contribution to the liberation of the slaves?

"A reasonable individual of today will judge that Dr. Schüz might have done something more sensible than to uproot a child from the tropics, even if he did liberate it from slavery (which, according to the above, was not even the case), and let it die here of consumption. The scientific outcome, and the interest of posterity in his trip, one much-discussed at the time, is absolutely zero."

No, Hermann Hesse's mother, with her committed Livingstone studies, did more to abolish slavery, a trade, incidentally, in which the Dutch, who handled transportation to Brazil in the seventeenth century, are known to have earned handsomely. Heinrich Heine really drove it home to us when he had the "Superkargo Mynheer van Koek" pray for the health of his "black merchandise":

"Um Christi willen verschone, o Herr,
das Leben der schwarzen Sünder!
Erzürnten sie dich, so weißt du ja,
Sie sind so dumm wie die Rinder.

Verschone ihr Leben, um Christi willn,
Der für uns alle gestorben!
Denn bleiben mir nicht dreihundert Stück,
So ist mein Geschäft verdorben."

*["For Christ's sake Oh Lord, spare
the lives of the black sinners now;
If they have maddened you, it is only because
They can be as dummy as a cow.*

*Spare their lives, for Christ's sake,
He who has died for us all on the cross!
'Cause if I have less than three hundred left,
My business will be a total loss."]*
[Translation taken from www.articulate.de/heine/skalvee.htm]

Today, Calw is far more exotic than it was in Daud's day. Beneath my window, the languages spoken can, depending on the circumstances, include Swabian, Turkish, Croatian, Romanian, and sometimes even Dutch. Arjen Duinker (born 1956), a very amiable Dutch poet who sent me a fax every day, has a neighbour called Zibes. What language he speaks I do not know but the poem in which he occurs is one I like because it does not reveal his secret. So I translated it. It is taken from the volume *Ook al is het niet zo* (Even if it is not so, 1998).

Zibes und ich

Zibes und ich
Die Brille abgesetzt, als ich vier war.
Resultat: ein schielendes Auge,
Das immer Glück gebracht hat.
Mein Nachbar Zibes
Der sich bemüht, eine Oase zu sein,
Oase für den, der die Tragik der Ferne vergessen will
Und den es nach süßem Gebäck gelüstet,
Dieser Zibes mit seinen Hühnern,
Seinem Gärtchen und kolossalen Herzen,
Hat mich gelehrt,
Mein Glück anzulegen

In wechselnden Fonds.
Ich habe jetzt viele Stadien
Wechselnden Glückes durchlaufen.
Manchmal war ich bis zum Wahnsinn glücklich,
Mitunter nur glücklich, weil ich schlief.
Ich gab anderen ein Sommerhaus, ein Bier, einen Kuss,
Und zum Dank schenkte ich Zibes ein Geheimnis,
Etwas Unruhiges, doch der Ruhe entnommen,
Etwas ohne Willen, ohne Haut, ohne Muster,
Geheimnis, das ich nicht kenne.

[Zibes and I

*Took off my glasses when I was four.
Result: a squinting eye
That has brought me constant happiness.*
[Translation of first stanza taken from
www.stridemag.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/2003/march/stannard.htm]

*My neighbour Zibes
Who is trying to be an oasis,
Oasis for he who wants to forget the tragedy of distance
And who lusts after sweet pastries,
This Zibes with his chickens,
His little garden and colossal heart,
Taught me
To invest my fortunes*

In alternating funds

*I have now passed through many stages
of alternating fortunes
Sometimes I was so happy I was crazy,
Occasionally happy only because I slept.
To others I gave a summerhouse, a beer, a kiss,
and out of thanks I gave Zibes a secret
Something restless, albeit taken from rest,
Something without will, without skin, without pattern,
Secret that I do not know.]*

Into Haus Reichert

I look inquisitively. A sandstone plaque invites me to tarry. C.R. (evidently the “Reichert on the bridge”) instructs me:

Wanderer, bide a while!

This building was home to the counting house of the “Calwer Compagnie” on its dissolution in 1797. Established around 1550, it was the first venture designed to bring together private means for activity in commerce and industry. The C. C. sold its products to Holland, Austria, Italy, etc. Its illustrious name is still recalled today by Calwer Straat in Amsterdam. In its heyday, it nourished more than 700 souls. Its ample funds enabled Calw to be repeatedly rebuilt after twice being destroyed. By Johann von Werth in 1634, and by General Melac in 1692. The C. C. redounded countless blessing to the town of Calw and the state of Württemberg, and some of the town’s most beautiful houses still bear witness to the affluence it created. C. R.

Well, I know Kalverstraat (that’s the way it is actually spelt) very well. In my youth still a shopping street of some distinction, it is today a rather tacky place, full of discount stores and invisible pickpockets, not at all well matched to Dam-Platz, where it begins and where I, perched on my father’s back, saw newly crowned Queen Juliana appear on the balcony in 1948. Claims that Kalverstraat (“Calves Street”) had anything at all do with Calw were, as was confirmed to me by the municipal archivist, a complete fabrication. Maybe a little joke that Carl Reichert came up with while sitting with his regulars in the “Rößle.” He enjoyed making a fool of other folks. When, on Hitler’s 44th birthday, it was decreed that a picture of the “Führer” was to appear in the storefront windows of the shops in Calw, he managed to get hold of the extremely rare photo that showed the man who was to be glorified wearing grotesque-looking lederhosen. He put it in front of a grey silk cloth, next to it a vase containing a dried-out thistle.

The story of Calverstraat might also have originated with another Calw merchant. Emil von Georgii-Georgenau did, after all, spend his apprentice years in the Netherlands and later

held the post of a Dutch Consul-General. On the façade of the Georgenäum he endowed and bequeathed to the town in 1871, national economist Friederich List flirts with the thirty-year-younger national poet Friedrich Schiller. What the benefactor had in mind was a kind of precursor of the later Volkshochschulen (adult education centres), as can be inferred from the endowment charter:

“In the auditorium, quite particular emphasis shall be given to popular lectures on major and minor craft industries, trade, agriculture, art and science of every kind. Political lectures are the sole type excluded. It is the express wish of the benefactor that all political parties may act in concert on this neutral ground to arrive at a common solution to a task.”

He believed in the ideals of the Enlightenment yet sought to strengthen the “moral fibre” of his fellow men by broadening their knowledge. Forty years after his death (1894), there remained just 81 souls in Calw with the moral fibre and the courage to do the right thing or, rather, to desist from doing the wrong thing. Among them was the highly respected master baker Hermann Schnürle, whom Adolf Hitler’s henchman led through the streets to the beating of drums after hanging a placard around his neck that read “Ich habe nicht gewählt, bin ein Landesverräter.” (“I did not vote, I am a traitor to my country.”). The “vote” consisted of approving the politics of the Nazi regime as an “expression of one’s own beliefs and own will.” Schnürle saw this as being tantamount to seizing unlimited powers by means of fraudulent subreption. He deserves a memorial for having been so upstanding. His son, whose records I was able to examine at the municipal archive, experienced during puberty, in both body and soul, the well-organized perversion of everyday life by the Nazis, and subsequently went on to document this. It was here, too, that I found the anecdote about the lederhosen picture in Merchant Reichert’s shop window.

I am once again standing in front of the plaque memorizing the blessings of the C. C. and have to think of the Dutch VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie). We have it to thank for our “golden” century, the seventeenth, when my ancestors with their ships (whose masts they received from the rafters in Calw) sailed to the colonies to enrich themselves at the expense of the indigenous peoples and to the blessing of the still young republic. To modify C. R. just a little: some of the most beautiful houses in Amsterdam bear witness to the affluence they created.

Another piece about distant countries and peoples is the following monologue of an anonymous sailor who, in 1502/1503, was “the first German” (thus Viktor Hantzsch in his historical study published in Leipzig in 1895) to sail to India with Vasco da Gama. This “first German” was a Dutchman, a Fleming to be more precise. His nine-page eye-witness account took my breath away and inspired me to come up with the following text that is rather wanting in terms of commas:

Der anonyme flämische Matrose

Vasco da Gamas zweite Reise,
Ziel: Ostindien, wo der Pfeffer
wächst und Ingwer, Zimt.
Er, Flanderns rauhe Schale,
war dabei, er schrieb es auf mit
unverstellter Kinderhand.
Im februar dem zwoten 1502
fuhren wir fort aus LISSABON

von da über CANARIA nach KAP
VERDE wo die sonne senkrecht
über unsren köpfen stand dass
nicht ein ding mehr schatten warf
dann: donner hagel blitz KAP
GUTER HOFFNUNG über MOZAMBIK
nach KILOA das wir zerstörten
dann endlich INDIEN in sicht
CAMBAYA GOA CANANOR CALCUN
fremdes gesehen katzen groß
wie unsere fuchse deren drüse
unterm schwanz parfum hergibt
und perlenfischer zapfen
in der nase und die blieben
ehrenwort gut eine viertelstunde
unter wasser das essen war
bei uns an bord na ja zum glück
gabs brave christen in GRANOR
die brachten hühner mit
und ein paar schafe später fingen wir
ein schiff aus MEKKA ab randvoll
dukaten hängten männer frauen
kinder an der großrah auf
und schlugen ihnen hände
füße köpfe ab und warfen die
in einen prahm und ließen den
so voller hände füße köpfe
landwärts treiben denn im handel
ist die konkurrenz neuerdings
mörderisch doch wurde auf der
heimfahrt bald die nahrung
knapp und wieder einmal zeigte

GOTT sich uns gefällig und so
fanden wir bald eine INSEL
und schlugen dort 400 leute
tot ende august zeigte sich
der POLARSTERN wieder und
erreichten wir nach weiteren
sechshundert meilen PORTUGAL.
Von Viktor Hantzsch Historiker
zu Leipzig stammt der Nachweis,
unser wackerer Flame sei zwar
etwas ungehobelt aber immerhin
Hut ab als erster Deutscher
mit dabei gewesen.

[The anonymous Flemish sailor

*Vasco de Gama's second voyage
Destination: East India, where the pepper
grows and ginger, cinnamon.*

*He, Flanders' rough outer shell,
was there, he wrote it all down
in the unfeigned hand of a child.*

*On the second day of february 1502
we set off from LISBON
from there via CANARIA to CAP
VERDE where the sun stood perpendicular
above our heads so that
not a single thing a shadow did cast
then: thunder hail lightning CAPE OF
GOOD HOPE via MOZAMBIQUE
to KILOA which we destroyed
then finally INDIA in sight
CAMBAYA GOA CANANOR CALCUN
seen unfamiliar things cats as big as
our foxes whose gland
behind the tail give off perfume
and pearl fishers with rods
in their nose and they remain
word of honour a good quarter of an
hour underwater the food on board was
well fortunately there were
good Christians in GRANOR
they brought chickens with them
and a few sheep later we intercepted
a ship from MECCA full to the brim
of ducats strung up men women
children on the main yard
und cut off their hands
feet heads and threw them in a
lighter and let it thus
full of hands feet heads
drift towards the land for in trade
competition nowadays is
murderous yet on the return
journey food soon became
scarce and once again
GOD showed himself to be obliging
and we soon found an ISLAND
and slew 400 people there
at the end of august the POLAR
STAR reappeared and
after a further six hundred miles
we reached PORTUGAL.*

*From Viktor Hantzsch, historian
in Leipzig, comes the evidence that
our brave Fleming may have been a
little uncouth but all the same
hats off to the first German
to have made the trip]*

Knight, death and devil

SEEN in Weil der Stadt, a stained-glass window in the town church depicting the Temptation of Christ. We look the Saviour, who is wearing a dark red robe, straight in the eye but he averts his gaze and is making a defensive gesture with his left hand. This is directed at a figure dressed in yellow which – judging by the position of the feet – has crept up on him from behind and is sticking his head out towards him in defiant manner. The hair, the bitter mouth, the ice-cold eyes leave one in no doubt as to the identity of the devilish Tempter: Adolf Hitler. On taking a closer look, one notices that the black line on the upper lip, which one first took to be the moustache, is to be seen as the contour of the nostril. The stained-glass window was produced and installed by Josef Karl Huber in 1940 with the approval of the then town pastor, August Uhl.

SEEN in the cemetery in Calw: a strikingly large bronze memorial with engraved eagle:

Here lies the best and never-defeated
night fighter of the second world war
Major and Geschwaderkommodore (~ Wing Commander)
Heinz Wolfgang Schnauer
1922 – 1950

READ and translated: Vander Mollenfeeste (Of the Moles' Merrymaking), a fifteenth-century *danse macabre*. Of the author, Anthonis de Roovere, a simple man whose poems und ballads were not published until a good eighty years after his death, we know little more than the fact that – unlike the resilient night fighter – he was defeated by death on May 16, 1482 in Bruges:

Von der Maulwurfsfeier

Hört, was ich euch sage, liebe Leute,
ob arm oder reich, egal aus welchem Stand:
jung und alt sind aufgeboten heute,
sich zu verziehen in ein anderes Land,
der mit der Pike wurde euch gesandt,
der Höchste schickte ihn als Boten her.
Nun macht euch bitte fertig allesamt,
hier ist für euch jetzt keine Bleibe mehr!
Wo sich der Maulwurf regt, im Dunkeln,
dorthin habt ihr geflissentlich zu gehen,
dagegen hilft kein Motzen oder Munkeln,
ganz ohne Wirkung bliebe euer Flehen,
denn kommt der Bote, ist's um euch geschehen:
wie immer jung, hübsch, fromm und weise,

der Höchste gibt unwiderruflich zu verstehen:
ins Reich Grabowskis führt nunmehr die Reise!
Der König aller Maulwürfe, Er,
der die Kreatur schuf, jene blinde,
hat aller Welt befohlen ringsumher

- dem Mächtigen wie dem Gesinde -,
zum Fest der Maulwürfe sich einzufinden:
es wurde anberaumt unter der Erde,
wo sich nicht länger Geist an Körper binde
und jeder nach Verdienst gewürdigt werde.
Der Papst samt seinen Kardinälen,
Bischöfe und Legaten, Äbte, Missionare:
keiner darf auf der Maulwurfsfeier fehlen!
Auch Offiziale, Prediger, Kapitulare,
Dominikaner, Franziskaner, Pfarrvikare,
Priester, Skriptoren und Magister weise:
ein jeder schaue, dass er unverzüglich fahre,
Grabowski braucht zum Festschmaus seine Speise!
Auch ihr Kartäuser, Mönche, Regularen,
Begarden und Lollarden, Fratres, Eremiten,
seid euch über das Reiseziel im klaren!
Nonnen, Beghinen, rasch vorangeschritten!
Betschwestern, Bettelnonnen, jetzt zum Dritten!
und wer sich sonst noch zählt zum Heer der
Frommen,
nur zu! Lasst euch nicht länger bitten:
ihr alle sollt zur Maulwurfsfete kommen!
Ihr Kaiser, Könige, Herzogen, Grafen,
Freiherren, Ritter, Junker vorzugsweise
und die da sonst in goldenen Betten schlafen,
haltet es mit der Tugend und seid weise:
es gilt, sich einzurichten auf die Reise
zum Fest der Maulwürfe, unter der Erde,
damit man euer Lob da unten preise
und euch in Ehren dort empfangen werde.
Stadtvögte, Richter, Diener der Kanzlei,
Amtmänner, Schultheiß, Schöffen, seid zugegen!
Item Burggrafen, Königsboten und derlei,
Zahlmeister, Tresler, Wechsler allerwegen,
Hausmeier - die am Hof die Rittersäle pflegen -,
Türhüter, Köche, macht's euch endlich klar!
Sogar dem edlen Seemann sei daran gelegen,
dass bald sein Schiff zur Maulwurfsfeier fahr!
Ihr Städter, die ihr euch mächtig bereichert
und lebt von Pacht und Zinsen und Diäten,
ihr habt auf euren Böden Korn wie Heu gespeichert
und habt die Kisten und die Koffer voll Moneten;
ihr reichen Kaufleute, ihr Tuchmacher mit Knete,
Wolle und andre Waren füllen eure Truhen -
Was soll's! Auch ihr seid alle hergebenen,
im Reich der Maulwürfe euch auszuruhen!
Der Herr läßt weiterhin durch Botenmund bestellen
kraft seiner untergründigen Autorität,

dass auch für Meister und Gesellen
die Arbeit bald zu Ende geht;
euch sei empfohlen, lieber früh als spät

euch zu bemühen um ein Nachtquartier,
denn - dass es bitte keiner mißversteht! -
zum Maulwurfsreigen eingeladen seid auch ihr!
Der Fürst der Maulwürfe läßt weiterhin
nach allen feinen Burschen fragen,
solchen, denen das Wams nie kurz genug erschien,
die gern die Schuhe lang geschnabelt tragen,
und solchen, die sich oft mit Messern schlagen.
Fort mit den welschen Dolchen und Rapiere!
Was ihr zu tun habt, läßt sich nicht vertagen:
jetzt sollt ihr dorthin, wo die Maulwürfe regieren!
Um jedes Fest wäre es jammerschade,
wenn da nicht Jungfrauen und Damen wären,
infolgedessen sind auch sie geladen,
arm oder vornehm, diese Fete zu beehren;
um pelzbesetzte Ärmel müßt ihr euch nicht scheren,
so wie auch Zopffrisur und Schleppe nutzlos sind,
dass Maulwürfe dergleichen nicht begehren,
versteht sich wohl von selbst: sie sind ja blind!
So sei es auch den Mädchen angesagt,
die gern die Fastnacht bei Musik verbringen:
ob Hausgehilfin, Amme oder Magd,
alle, die gern das Tanzbein schwingen,
es gilt, sich anderweitig zu verdingen!
Wie immer jung und hübsch und heiter,
hört bitte auf, zu tanzen und zu springen:
Dort auf dem Maulwurfsball, da tanzt ihr weiter!

[Of the Moles' Merrymaking

*Come gather round hear what I have to say,
Rich or poor, no matter what your station:
Young and old are called upon today,
To depart for a realm far distant from this nation,
Now that he with the pike to you has been sent,
He on High despatched him for you all to see
So be prepared, heed what by His word is meant,
That there is no more biding in these parts for ye!*

*Where the mole stirs silent in the gloom,
That is where ye are now bid repair,
For wailing or complaining there is no room,
Unheeded, your entreaties will vanish in thin air,
For when the envoy comes, there is no mistaking your fate:
However young, pretty, pious and prudent,
He on High quite incontrovertibly doth state:
Into Grabowski's domain we ourselves do now betake!*

*The King of all Moles, He who that very mortal,
That blind being did bring forth
Has bidden all from far and near,
Be they masters or but servants mere,*

*The Moles' Merrymaking to attend:
The venue being set deep below the earth,
Where mind to matter do no longer append
And each be judged according to their worth.*

*The Pope with all his cardinals complete,
Bishops and legates, abbots, missionaries:
Not a single one the Moles' Merrymaking may deplete!
Ecclesiastical officials, preachers, too,
Dominicans, Franciscans, vicars, rectors
Ministers, clergyman multitudinous and shrewd:
Each to depart forthwith be urged,
For his merrymaking Grabowski his vittles doth require!
Equally, ye Carthusians, friars, regulars,
Beghards, Lollards, priors, hermits,
Be well advised whither ye be bound!
Nuns, Beguines, not an instant's delay pray do permit!
Churchy ladies, mendicant nuns, hasten to join the throng!
Along with all others that may belong
To the army of the devout and pious,
Pray do not dawdle, pray do not hesitate:
In the Moles' Merrymaking all shall partake!*

*Ye emperors, kings, counts, dukes, earls,
Barons, knights, Junkers, and others of noble descent
And all who in golden beds your toes do curl,
Be attentive to your virtues and wisdom pray do present:
Now be the time for this journey to prepare
Off to the Moles' Merrymaking, I do declare,
Where your merits widely will be applauded
And your noble person ceremony accorded.*

*City provosts, bailiffs, judges, clerks,
Stewards, mayors, jurors, be advised to attend!
Paymasters, treasurers, keepers of the purse,
Ye burgraves, couriers whom kings on missions do send,
Major-domos, who at court the chambers do maintain,
Porters, doormen, chefs, all no longer need fret
Even the noble seafarer suffer not to detain,
And for the Moles' Merrymaking his sail now set!*

*Ye townfolk who such affluence do enjoy
With corn aplenty like hay in your silos stored,
Living off rents, leases, and underlings in your employ
In your strongboxes and vaults your money do hoard;
Ye wealthy merchants, makers of fabrics and cloth,
Under the weight of wool and other wares your coffers do groan -
To no avail, alas! Unto ye, too, the urgent call doth
Ring out to join the Moles and rest up like a drone!*

*The Lord additionally do decree by notices
Carried by messengers proclaiming every and each,*

*That for masters, journeymen, and apprentices
Their labours very soon shall cease;
Be advised to tarry not one moment in illusion
And set about finding quarters for the night,
For let there be neither error nor confusion -
On the Moles' party ye too must set your sight!*

*The Prince of Moles similarly doth deem
That a summons to all men in finery be sent forth,
For whom the doublet never short enough did seem,
And who their shoes with turned-up toe so keenly sought,
And those who with knives so often did engage in fray.
Lay down those daggers, rapiers, and epees!
What ye must now embark on brooks no further delay:
All are bid to repair to where the Moles do spend their days!*

*Any festivity would be but a sorry affair indeed,
Without the company of maidens and ladies fair of face,
With whom we thus earnestly do plead,
Be they rich or poor, this party with their presence to grace;
Yet from fur-trimmed sleeves ye may well desist,
And from plaited tresses and beautiful dresses likewise refrain,
As these are charms moles are well able to resist,
Being blind, for such frippery they have nothing but disdain!*

*Fair lasses and girls we do thus exhort,
Be they servant girl, nurse, abigail or nanny,
Who to the strains of music at carnival do cavort:
And who when tripping the light fantastic are so canny
Now comes the time to dance elsewhere!
No matter how young, pretty, gay or full of mirth,
From dancing and leaping pray do now forbear:
For it is at the Moles' Ball that ye shall dance henceforth!]*

Epilogue

The nine poems presented here were chosen in accordance with the random selection principle. The fact that the oldest poem was written in the late fifteenth century, and the most recent two years ago, is no less a coincidence than the fact that they were all written by men. It is also a coincidence that death is an element haunting virtually all of the poems. A comparison of the poems reveals, however, how essentially different they nonetheless are. The sole thing that counts in lyrical poetry is, after all, the question of How, and not so much that of What. Everything depends on the perspective, which means that even death can be a festival - for moles, for example. Incidentally, three of the poets are themselves already dead.

As a writer-in-residence, one is always a little lonely to begin with. As a matter of necessity, therefore, one often talks to the dead. Above all, of course, with Hermann Hesse, whose *Glasperlenspiel* I have now read after all. Similarly, border-crosser Gertrude Pfeiffli, the "Nigger Daud," Carl Reichert, Rudolf Schlichter, master baker Schnürle, and many others that I was able to encounter only in Calw, were also among my silent

interlocutors. It may therefore be that the quick – as opposed to the dead - are a little underrepresented. Yet I would like to thank them all the more sincerely. Special thanks are due to Anneliese Weinheimer, director of the Hermann-Hesse-Stiftung, for her cheerful manner and willingness to assist with practical matters at all times, to municipal archivist Paul Rathgeber, because he always had everything I wished to know at hand, to Uli Rothfuss for the “Simmersfelder Mord(s)-Spektakel,” and to Mr and Mrs van Beuningen for coming to my reading, and for the books I was able to borrow from them.

A month before I took up the residency in Calw, Professor Dr. Paul Hoffmann, the “poet of reading,” as Cees Nooteboom called him, passed away in Tübingen. The talks with him were something I had been especially looking forward to. It is to his memory that this piece is dedicated.