

DAVID PRATER

ABENDLAND



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TWENTY-ONE POEMS

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YO LA TENGO
WALT WHITMAN SERVICE AREA
FIR
MNÁ
18 FIELDS
GORAŽDE
DEATH IN DUBROVNIK
THE TWO FACES OF ZLATYU BOYADZIEV
MIT GAS!
PIGTAILS
BAUDELAIRE IN BRUXELLES
PINK CITY
KÄTHY KRUSE
ABANDONED YOUTH CAMP
DÜRER: INNSBRUCK 2005
DACHAU
LANDSCHAFT (MIT GERHARD RICHTER)
ANOTHER DEATH STAR
ABENDLAND
KUNST-WET
ALONE IN AN AIRPORT

for Sarah

YO LA TENGO

Ira Caplan's sonic squall rips
New York's fourth of July gulls
from the captivities of silence
like a chainsaw down a bough
of glass, or chalk on yesterday's
pavement. A soul possessed by
demons determined to explode.
Indices Richter-scale on Jersey's
fret board: blinding sounds erupt
then ribbon out—dangling notes
along the blue-green themes in
a park for homeless evangelists.
Shredding civic programmes deep
in the feedback dream (blooming
into atonal squiggles of sound—
an express blast of manhole heat),
peace bombs dropped on America
heave in a swollen thrashed loop
of pure non-violence & entropy,
each firework of snarls & stripes
tearing the sky a new asshole.

WALT WHITMAN SERVICE AREA

I sing the throbbing pains of
your great nation's bad coffee!
Hot plates keeping the entropy
warm. Out along the turnpike

your name is dissected by the
moon-like stares of motorists.
Stupefied in the concrete glare,
I sing the car electric! May it

render your oil wars useless!
Though to be truthful, Walt,
these you never did envisage.
May the worn hands of peace

close together over industries!
Radios play *The Turnpike Down*.
Rock us into that gentle sleep
in each of our final rest areas.

FIR

Not the tree but the man.
Not the fire but the boys.
Not the emergency plan.
Not the silence nor noise.

But the swan or the glass.
But the time or the dream.
But the elegant trespass.
But the wings and the stream.

And the wind not the boat.
And the blood not the bay.
And the soundless float.
And the voice but the day.

Or the nail nor the wishes.
Or the tray but the ball.
Or the unwashed dishes.
Or the men but the all.

MNÁ

Nor the key and the woman.
Nor the girl and the moon.
Nor the blindingly human.
Nor the shard for the tune.

And the hill for the crescent.
And the pond for the scale.
And the continuous present.
And the smile save the Braille.

In the table save billows.
In the mirror save clouds.
In the triumphant pillows.
In the bib it's the shroud.

It's the same now the ebbing.
It's the time now the most.
It's the estuarine webbing.
It's the girl and the ghost.

18 FIELDS

- 18 fields (sites, battlegrounds)
- 17 banners (standards, uniforms)
- 16 bands (spartan, militaristic)
- 15 ribbons (loose, fluttering)
- 14 sashes (bright, coloured)
- 13 clouds (grey, foreboding)
- 12 drums (clipped, regimental)
- 11 fires (effigies, crackers)
- 10 rows (deep, breasted)
- 9 steps (slippery, barnacled)
- 8 hours (waiting, working)
- 7 days (blessed, counting)
- 6 rounds (fired, targetted)
- 5 friends (rioting, missing)
- 4 slogans (graffitied, shouting)
- 3 leaders (inspired, pathological)
- 2 winds (changing, dying)
- 1 blow (kingdoms, coming)

GORAŽDE

Who will give colour to Joe Sacco's
black & white cartoons of Goražde
safe haven—& who will go there
is it needed are the people safe?

When will the mist shrouds on
the mountains give up their secrets
these criminals, those war dead &
weary—which daughters, sons?

How are we to read the inverse
Braille of bullet-studded buildings
riverside mosques that pierce the sky
the river itself a great onward flow?

What happened to the generators
the flywheels paddle steamers hydro-
power creators that fed the people
juice to watch war movies in the dark?

& where do you go Joe Sacco in your
dreams—is it black & white or do
colours invade that paper-thin canvas
& bleed the edges of your stolen sleep?

DEATH IN DUBROVNIK

you dispense with direct emotion/
experience & become the second
person the observer—it's safer
here you see & as for your reader
well she's gone her own way she'll
meet you later in the old town—
for now be content to sit & watch
as tourists wait impatiently for
their boat to arrive a three island
cruise you suppose—it's late & the
harried salesgirl repeats in three
or four languages—one more hour
seven more minutes five more now
then someone challenges her in
Italian—that was ten minutes ago!

she raises her hand as if to hit
the sky & the Frenchman looks at
his wife—at his command she rises
—he flashes his ticket at the brown
girl & demands the expected—a
refund & while she's off to fetch it
you see the look on the woman's
face & sensing a small part of your
self there you close your eyes to the
Adriatic sunshine & for that moment
of shame you cry & you want to die

THE TWO FACES OF ZLATYU BOYADZIEV

(1)

crystal: dignitary portraits
his men clean-shaven the women
stern children on sleds if you
remember rightly panoramas
of coal mine towns silly dogs
chins pointing to the future
the sun—gold haloes spirits
with whiskers window frames ...

(2)

crumpled: just out of bed
or home from a long night of
drinking all traces of artifice
stripped away peasant loves
more silly dogs the omnipresent
minarets Bulgarian eternities
lifeless eyes trembling brushes
a grandmother in every canvas ...

MIT GAS!

could you be flirting with me (tiny periwinkle of a trip-hop
soundtrack? was that a smile (pretty vacuous air bubble at
the bottom of my glass? come here & slide down my throat
(abstract freckle of a thirst quencher hobo of the backwash
past (reboot the soda stream of our invisible passions (poet
of the cafe bar menu (lifeguard of the frozen bottle (remove
yourself from this moment (stolen password of my internet
identities (echo chamber of that dream lover's rehearsals
refill this loneliness (unbranded apple flavoured cinnamon
doughnut of a daydream (me wearing sunglasses (crucial
sunshade of a postcard meeting (intern of hotel romancers
change my channel (aqua blue invisible shapeless nomads
of my early morning coffee headband greeting (effervesce
my face (pigtail non-plussed crude translation of a mineral
(once more mit gas (repeat mit gas (kiss your aerated body
(pump the spray (ignite the liquid gel of these silhouetted
traces in the neverending (nitrous of our emissary specks!

PIGTAILS

she emerges from the bobble-cordoned bathing area with her pigtails wet & sticking out like unicorn horns from the back of her head—instantly she's a girl again the shining happy memory of herself as a swimmer a dancer & singer all at once like a sea monkey queen reacting with water swirled & sequined in the jar for all to see—i've been reading too much Murakami not to understand what does drive the mind growing old what cues the eye interprets as 'summer holidays': chipped nail polish lines of a different bikini beneath the new pair we stretched our legs on a gaudy beach towel airport novel open at a random page left there like the roof of a Swiss house sometimes i forget that i can't speak Japanese & this book's just a translation its Americanisms irritating as the endless parade of Paris Hilton stunt doubles along the beach—vacuous stares hidden from view by designer fly or wasp sunglasses ... they couldn't ever hold a candle to this girl in pigtails emerging like reality TV from the water

BAUDELAIRE IN BRUXELLES

a silent cartoon wanders
the non-descript chaussee
over bridges it casts its
chisel comic-book shadows
illuminated by a passing
policeman's truncheon light
as air; that withered stare
turns flowerboxes to stones
or the dogs to barking fruit
stalls there in the internet
cafe glare Baudelaire calls
Burundi for twelve cents—
resenting the booth's semi-
privacy (one hand in pocket
jiggling ... hear the retort
of someone's little gun (as
though he's not there & the
women are all black now in
this frame; thought bubbles
crammed with grammatical
marks suggesting curses in
parlour rooms or else that
unbearable harpsichord &
he sees in this zone between
falling empires the rest of his
days collapse like a cloak on
a corpse (Nina Simone sings
run to the river (to the rock

PINK CITY

bad boy scouts wearing red
bandannas & hiking boots prowl
the outdoor bars bringing alpine
airs to Ljubljana—i won't be
climbing the steps to the castle
won't conquer what's not even
there (the view the haze) instead
i'll walk around photographing
pink buildings for you ... do you
remember that cold afternoon at
Scheherazade after the Mallarmé
gig? i can see why you liked it
here where the boys ride bicycles
& sit by the river smoking long
whites joints—& sparrows bum
cigarettes from strangers for
a lark—i missed Primož by two
weeks but there's poetry here in
the inventiveness of the street
performers or the flowers on the
cobblers' bridge ... i know that
somewhere here there's a boy you
once loved if even for that one
short visit—it's summer & all
the pastel's aglow despite the
crumbling flaking skins i can
hear you & only wish these few
photographs could capture their
audible decline—the boys whose
hair alone makes me feel so much
older so much younger than even
this breathless poem ever could

KÄTHY KRUSE

the hands that made the hands
then passed her to the second set
the hands that plucked the human
hairs & threaded them into a wig
hands sewing on the yellow jacket
passed then to unknown hands that
gave her eyes to see herself mouth
to breathe in cotton hands to hold
her head in until she fell asleep ...
two hands that made her cheeks
pink in case she was called upon
to blush the hands that filled her
belly full of spätzle or gruel hands
that kept her upright while they
sewed her shoes into place & left
her there wobbling but alive alone
but made of human hands of hair
the skirt to hide her girlhood hair
combed platted maybe depending
upon her mood then the hands that
transplanted the still-beating hand-
made heart into her chest covered
breasts & silken brain with which
Käthy produces her first thought:

*their hands have stroked my arms
& legs my doll's face into dreams
my heart beats like a baby drum*

ABANDONED YOUTH CAMP

the planes fly well overhead now
& couples no longer dawdle down
by the jetty where an old dinghy
rises & falls on the fluke waves
of passing powerboats ... & the
cicadas chorale across an empty
bay old pipes protrude from the
muddy shallows & the trees though
blooming still billow untended &
unloved (though the summer & this
giant cross remain drifters are
its only pilgrims—snorkellers
scan the basin for discarded
bikinis or martini glasses (the
old wreck of a hotel still hopes
for a reunion with its past loves
the storms at sunset or the mock
evacuations—shells bursting
underfoot as the guys with their
miniature five string ukuleles
serenade two lovers demolishing
a lobster – all gone to the great
fairground in the sky—packed
up like crates of beer bottles &
shipped off to another island
or another beachside retreat
now i hear the choppers swing
low coming in for their daily
sightseeing pass—dissecting
sea mist like it's cold cabbage
inspecting abandoned futures
like so many real estate agents

DÜRER: INNSBRUCK 2005

Do not throw anything yet, Albrecht;
It is dangerous as well to lean out!
Customs examination of luggage:
Important notice. In winter, steam
Macht (Thomas Mann) mobil. Also ...
Kinder unter 15 fahren gratis. You
Have no claims on the blue-green
River waters flowing backwards to
Trento. This is our Tiepolo. See
Gerhard Richter (19-3 to 13-12-2005)
Run. Informazioni per il Viaggio:
'The most brilliant SF mind on any
Planet' (*Rolling Stone*). Read more
Penguins online. With an introduction
By Venezia, S. Lucia. Penalties for
Improper use. Plus Blake Morris on
The lost art of editing. One Saturday
Poem by David ... 'the art of hint'. (5)

DACHAU

there was no need to be told
of the Jewish custom whereby
rocks are placed near graves
instead of flowers (e.g. lilies

in the place of the barracks
we found an ocean of stones—
larger than a fist smaller
than a child's head just big

enough to force one to walk
more slowly than normal & to
think with each step about
a person who has passed on

nothing is expected of us
except understanding (& an
opening towards knowledge—
like the burgers of Dachau

whom American troops forced
to march through these gas
chambers saying look! look
this happened in your town

rocks grow in every country
this world is filled with
graves—one day they will
return us to the rivers &

smooth our sharp edges over
centuries of soothing (easy
for me to say on windy days
i think of Anton Music who

drew pictures of his living
hell in charcoal & who is
known today as the 'Dachau
artist' born in Slovenia &

a student of fine arts in
Venice arrested & sent here
only for his talents to be
rediscovered it's chilling

but necessary to look upon
his ghost lines of tangled
limbs & to know his words:
'we are not the last ones'

LANDSCHAFT (MIT GERHARD RICHTER)

took a photograph of Sunday night
then blew it all onto a wall in paint
something stirs in the brittle light—
abrupt denouement; studio sounds
erupt into white (the power's down)
this wasn't scripted neither were
your forearms' shudders—closing
in on abstract stalks that make a
silhouette in green a single figure
walks on your microscopic moon
but he's a fake the painting's done
on Corsica perhaps in a sun room
or alone at last in a private church
where guardrails keep the *volk* at
bay or catalogue this desperate
silence that makes photorealistic
snow swept the candles gutted or
a chair pushed back like a lock
of black & white hair; poised for
an ironic pose Jackie Onassis is
becoming bored reading newsprint
on the freshly-plastered walls ...
inside an album sleeve notes keep
their peace; & revolutions occur
on a momentary basis swinging on
chandeliers borrowed from the cast
(we all need to eat) in this essay
at last the landscape is given its
due & sleigh bells ring out like
Broadway tunes or stolen dogs &
here finally stands Gerhard Richter

ANOTHER DEATH STAR

I hear Lady Vader's footsteps clang on the stainless steel gangway & look busy attending to my knobs & buttons but the force is so strong in this one that I am forced to switch on the emergency power—a light bleeds across my console & I swivel in my chrome-plated Bauhaus/Ikea captain's chair to face her wrath should it come. “There is another Death Star,” I explain. “It contains no flaw, unlike its predecessor, into whose plans Vader for some reason saw fit to introduce design tics that would make a first year engineer blanch; perhaps he knew even then something of his fate ... were those two hideously greige orbs a metaphor for his own body's penetration fantasy? a slight shudder as the X-wing entered the duct? how else to explain the ridiculous ease with which those rebels identified our killing machines' weakness—other than by referring to that space (in Vader)? But I digress—our plans progress: would you care to inspect?” & with a slight limp she follows me to the docking bays, where our transport awaits. “After you,” I murmur, giving way so as to watch as her plastic skirts sashay, only hinting at the unseen power of that incredibly spherical—

argh— !

ABENDLAND

in Abendland our eyes reflect the windows
of real estate agencies couples roam there
small dogs shit wherever they like everyone
has a bulging belly here in Abendland guitar
music is *de rigueur* words like *de rigueur* are
never used rivers flow & woods are pictures
hung in galleries frequented on Sundays &
feastdays only post offices never close old
audio cassettes remain unavailable sought
after only by newcomers phone calls will be
monitored & can only be made from inside
hastily-assembled booths & there are no
television channels only movies with in-built
& hard to avoid advertisements girls wear
stripes & old boots that make their ankles
look skinny boys maintain a gruff persona
only enhanced by permanent thirty six hour
growths love is an absence or closing time
garbage piles up but no one seems concerned
in Abendland beer comes in bottles that the
homeless can collect & exchange for pennies
or one more beer poetry has not yet been
invented nor cricket which would be absurd

KUNST-WET

two intersecting lines radiate strings of heart beats in four times double the directions secreting small agents into the surrounding streets & lanes transfers of desire stilt-legged voyages hour-burst rambles freshly-bottled smell of the underground random splices of muzac shred the dark corners of an interruption clock's soundless alarm men follow women towards escalators triggered by their muffled boots the station entrance collapsing out into the waffle prints of passing tramline desires meanwhile you're down there stroking tokens that get stuck in the machine above our heads amongst the stars giant pulsing nuggets of steel erupt in longing while the red lights blink delaying our union by variants of minute-long bursts of motion this is the station called silence at which i long to get off with you so as to emerge into some blinding shower of certain life-affirming illuminations as blades of wet rubber hack away at the heads of screen actors we shoot our own minimalist movie under the smurf-blue-on-white of Kunst-Wet this n-dash between breaths where electrons & whole atoms wander aimlessly plotting dotted lines on imagined vertical sheets of glass & of her far-flung snow-bound commune dappled with spots of rain love.

ALONE IN AN AIRPORT

all the concessions have finally closed
the luggage tags likewise now unravel
I've spent the night in an airport alone
even the cleaners have all gone home ...

out on the tarmacs the rain is a canvas
the planes are invisible up in the sky
at every counter the shutters have risen
only perfumes of the flight crews linger

the terminal's redevelopment is complete
now there's nothing left here to expand
& duty-free shops disappeared long ago
inside the food court a fake fern sleeps

departure boards flick like REM dreams
but the gangways are empty of tired feet
the veins of the airport throb in safety
nevertheless I will practice my tai-chi

I use broken glass to create my murals
ticket stubs provide my fire with fuel
I walk naked through abandoned latrines
in arrivals halls I begin planting trees

