

IF BERLIN

By Steven Augustine



notes

Late in the year 2007 I began work on a cycle of narrative pomes following six characters around Berlin for six months (it was originally to be a year but I ran out of time; this thing was consuming my Life). The simple rules: 1) a pome every week 2) develop some characters. I did this originally for the website of a famous Anglophone bookstore.

The characters are: a male couple (**Dante and Ted**), a female student-type from Chile (**Malena**), a wealthy Art Couple (**the von Bredows**) and a retired American expat with a blog (**Val**). The wealthy Art couple are the only Germans and Dante is the only Brit. The retired expat is *not* my mouthpiece. This work isn't in the mode of what I call (with a sneer), "American Confessional". These aren't precious observations wrapped in abstract language with the print-to-white-space ratio of a business card: these are stories following carefully-argued characters in a medium of persuasive rhetoric. Poetry is Fiction and proper Fiction should present an intelligence-intensified field of language built on the page. The field should shimmer and hum like a charged metal sheet. Picasso once wrote that he painted smoke one could hammer a nail through and that stuck with me. Nailing the smoke should feel good.

Dante and Ted date, fall in lust, co-habitate for a while, then break things off. Black-haired Ted is bisexual and eventually leaves Dante for black-haired Malena. The von Bredows never interact with the other key actors (the seventh character they do interact with is a nameless sex-slave/assistant they acquire) but Val-the-retired-expat interacts with Malena twice: first as her client (she's a waitress) and later when he finds himself across an U-Bahn wagon's aisle from Malena and Ted who are making out. Val, who runs a blog that publicizes all of his sins, considers stealing a tabloid-hidden orgasm from the image of beautiful Ted and Malena as they raunch it up among the commuting Lutherans. He is being driven by his blog (Confessions of a Pedant) to do things he wouldn't otherwise dare do... it begins as a record and escalates into a constant dare... perhaps by the end (off-screen) he'll kill someone. His blog is his Tempter/Exposer/Liberator/Lucifer the way TV cameras were, for people new to them, two generations before. He is an old wolf. (I named him after Henry Valentine Miller but he'd be a "respectable" Henry as a retired businessman or academic).

I didn't map-out the plot of this soap opera. It grew like a crystal. I enjoyed writing people who are *nothing like me*. I enjoy this antidote for solipsism. I still, strangely, feel close to some of the characters: The Widow, Malena and Ted, especially. Some of the metaphors are my favorites, ever: the foxes on their hind legs = hung partisans... skinning a rabbit = inverting an inverted glove... swallows = record-platters smashed and heaved over the treetops...

The story stops at the height of the campaigns for the last American Presidential election. I included other current events and during the writing of the last pome there was an unusually damaging storm, in Berlin, which killed several people. The dead show up near

the end of that pome. I've edited out the pomes that were written specifically for long-term Berliners to chuckle over... you'd never get them.

Poetry, in my opinion, should be the Fiction that is compressed to a supreme limit. This cycle is a novel. Or a film.

It begins with a (crappy) meal and ends with (a fancy) one.



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Saturday, 6. October 2007

dante eats out

22:23h

it feels like a punishment he long ago adjusted to, if he
does not cook there won't be food, and it's
never even good, or not in terms
that real cooks use, though in a way
it's a sign of hopefulness he never cared
to master this, for the men he knows
who cook so well are invariably
betterhalfless, they learn
by force the indelible diagonal of
sleep across that bachelor bed and
never change but
grind-away at
raincolored sheets and underwear making
relic filaments
instead. they play

at cards in clouds and suckle hard
cigars in luciferous bars called
things like Hairy's Pear, or
The Bear, trading
vagina jokes for pokertips with
dante-aged blokes (with their
(halos of smoke and)
(intestate dread over)
(eye-bald)
(heads)

2.

dante exhales the
sound of the wine he follows
to ted

Saturday, 20. October 2007

dante and ted

18:16h

dante and ted hire bikes, buy
cheap wop wine, pedal hard for
Wannsee through miles of kilometers sleeked
by fog's drugged
sneeze of light, slimey-soft, a
convoluted cloth wiping
thoughts on their bright brown, dark blue
eyeglassed eyes; thoughts
soon lost to the night traffic of
Friday: time and its tired
crisis, the thirty-niners and their
out-sourced inner
lives. they glide
on lamplit awe around the
unwrinkled face of the
lake, joke and brake
at a moon-smashed copse,
splurge in turns over shivers of
warmth-raped gentian gasping
oh my god.

after which they re-embark,
wobbling on. they see

battery-lit foxes rear up
along the tarmac like hung
partisans; see
swallows sharp as shattered
gramophone platters heaved
over the treetops in a feat
of strength. they park

where the bike path rises
to a sudden rail crossing and
need the drink.

(dante for his shyness and ted)
(to think)

Saturday, 27. October 2007

seasonal meditation

20:39h

1.

every year this time old von bredow goes, already
twig-thin and shaves
his head, dresses in striped pyjamas shambling
behind the trickles of kids tricker
treating the streets behind
Kaiserdamm but only
intellectuals ever giggle or yell
to go to hell

2.

admitting we have somehow
outgrown god and remembering
that odd equation (god is love) isn't it love's
novembering time now to
go? honestly what
does love when it's being done
do? all those midnights at home in
unbroken-in shoes! so much heat and no
light and even the heat is
far less red than
blue, rhetorical, for

Lust, not love, calls forth that fool
Euphoria, her
several-second duty of
nil's oracle, the
propulsive stutter of goo's stuck
ventricle. von bredow
does his widow and knows
it's true: what does who loves
when doing it
do?

anyone with fists can say Hate's use: that
ten-times blacker coal fuels
rococo locomotives toward
smoke-stacked suburbs of
All Souls (and)

(its lucrative piles of
(teeth and shoes). Hate is really
something, it
gets things done, it's
not obtuse. Fear adheres
to everything; Sadness is as Gladness was; Hope
the opiate of the masses and
Compassion a simple sop to, or
giving up of, callow
youth. but
love?

admitting we have outgrown god and remembering
that odd equation (god is love) he thinks
it's time to punish the two for
being so aloof; for both words mean
their opposites the
minute after
screwing

3.

(the widow complains strange)
(gummi bears are)
(harder for chewing)

Saturday, 3. November 2007

the recurring thing

20:06h

the recurring thing, sometimes
a dream, shows
So Cal's fruits like fairy lights ted's
dreambody spools low over, and
platoons of plucking
mexicans planted in
fudge-rich irrigated earth like
fragile gold forms, in molds, like
complex football-field-sized
pendants, water stolen
from the north and
sold above worth
to the children of the
water's thieves as
juice. these

dreams increase as years here reproduce
to root-split beds of German
stone, his
headlong dreambody nostalgia-blown through

mooncanyons overgrown with
coyotes the color of playwright's
beard and carpeted in dawn's blue
loam, torched brush and
shriveled riverbed
trojanfish amidst
wetback-bones blonde
headphoned paralegals learning
mexican carefully
hike over: la rabia,
el deseo,
el miedo,
el desamparo

born in '68, adopted a year
later and raised
on the old pacific highway
road in a stucco bungalow a young
joni mitchell once considered

buying on the cusp of fame, ted came
to view all pool-blue skies, heaven weather and
mel tormé records with an orphan's
lupine eye, growing
into his resentments with a muscly
black-haired thrust his
legal mother cried out
for years in the pain she'd thought
to elude through
adoption: la rabia,
el deseo,
el miedo,
el desamparo

even asleep with dante in
bed ted considers
his options, the
recurring thing will
continue
without him:

la rabia,
el deseo,
el miedo,
el desamparo

Saturday, 10. November 2007

two monologs in verse

21:29h

1. The Customer (middle-aged, North American, reasonably well off, lost):

berliners are terrible
tippers, no? today she bore
her ten-thousandth tray of beer
and coffee, still
they settled the bill awfully
precisely. straight-spined as ever, when
her studies finish and
home reclaims her i'm sure
it is she who
will be served. but where is home? some

equatorial city; bourgeois terraces above
the tear-weathered stones of
la favellah; packed
traffic like a split gut aflame
with hot necklaces? i imagine the weight of the green
floods the mountain's dark
body, cocoa-leaves consuming
the breakfast of the earth and blooming
like a delicious fire. and the erogenous smoke. and the scent of the
indigene for hire. did her childhood mingle with

music in festival
streets where every third face greeted
was a christ and the mud so fat it tingled
with that secret vitamin the
too-rich spice of ideological
blood? was she touched, or buoyed as in a flood

at market by
fingertips black
as beans, jostled
by the magistrate's mocha
elbow in line to
purchase manioc, molasses, shell-fish or
plantain? i'm certain
she wore white dresses for
sundays, shining

against the novelistic sky
like an offering. is there any truth
in my imagination? conversation
would enlighten, but as yet i
only have courage to

overtip

2. The Waitress (young, “foreign”, sure of herself):

how can i bear this
cold country, the
lunar stares they bare
to curiosities? i, the
sapid black of heliologic
scarring, most of all suffer
breathing the dark air of
their language. did i immigrate
to apply the mercy of my questionable beauty to
the aesthetic wound of
this city? or was i
driven by premonitions of
hunger or
political violence or just
escaping the luxurious green cancer of
equatoriality; the
too-real sun; the
chaos of the market; the
life-threatening excellence of nature’s stupidity? (even the graves)
(stay obscene with)
(fertility). perhaps
after all i came
to improve myself through
sacrifice, denied even
the occasional relief of
merely belonging. you, too, know

the weird lure of berlin, her native race
of Beamtendeutschemenschen,
hungering for
(yet set against)
everything
in us
un-german

3. A moment of Loudness (for Mailer):

Sunday, 18. November 2007

Pflicht und Neigung

12:13h

today the north american rehearsed his imminent
december in earnest in churlish old
berlin, slippered
and robed in the sublet
kitchen, shivering a
prayer for the errant
heat. sleet flicked
the windows like
mean-spirited fine print, fall's premonition
of winter's predicament. Val brooded over

eggs (his humble use
of the birds' unlived-in truth), juice,
homeopathic fad pills and Al
Camus' American Journal, a
moody notebook
posthumously fobbed off as
lit (edited by friends)
(he's sure they kept)
(the screwing out of it), the
whole long day ahead of him to
fritter as his divorce-diminished
bank account saw
fit, the dishes tombed amnesia-clean in
kitsch-infested cabinets to
rest. the sky became

not luminous, nearly
temperate, muddled as a
puddle reflecting it, he dressed all gray
to honor this and met
the sun's sharp glittering
glass amidst rainsick grass at the
Gendarmenmarkt's
benches. from which

he stared at scary
Schiller and Schiller's musey mass
of wench's thick
at the base of his

plinth, each so cruelly
Presley-lipped, Hera-hipped and
toothsmashing stone-
breasted big and vivid enough to
lumber down suddenly shattering
a path across the pavement stones like
derailed trains to shoo
the shitty pigeons and snap
the tourists'
necks. he respects
the quasi-autistic bluntness of
the populace, for far more truth inheres
to insult than to 'Murrican-style
blandishment. his third wife, from

Minneapolis, trafficked
in that language-unraveling style of
viral euphemism; for perma-smile Liz
fat was full-figured,
crippled: mobility reduced,
and the optically challenged with their
swinging sticks and elevated
chins were never just
blind. the Germans frankly speak
of the "geistig zurückgeblieben" and he is sure
the fatherland's retarded
don't mind.

Sunday, 25. November 2007

dante commences clinging

14:34h

with love it's the irrational that means
the most, feelings we can explain aren't
worth the heart's extortionate
costs, feelings
which confuse, shame, addict, dement, explode or
transform the soul with
magnificent disregard for the results are most
real. they are cold-welded
to the species, beyond
control, the inherited gene jewelry from
elephant-killing poets paleontologists call
old. dante is strong
in his passion's clarity but
weak in its need. his dip
in the infinite rips his
emotions' skin
bleeding. masochistic
distraction or
fundamental
need? but that's what
love is, dante thinks:

a regimen of poetic
beatings we clamor like the Mecca-mad
to meet until
repletion. a tedsent postcard comes

from the Aegean sea: a
gnomic joke on wellhung
Cretans

Saturday, 1. December 2007

the fine arts in berlin

15:34h

old von bredow and his widow in apparent
years sufficient but too
meticulous in their pleasures to ever be
grandparents, somber-slim and softly
rich as becketts, are again in the market
for a girl to cook, polish, launder, drive, pose for his
sketches and comply without kvetching to
the importunities enticed by ripening
youth. evidence of a recent
bloodtest, a signed declaration of
boyfriendlessness, sweet
breath and high
breasts to be presented in
that order at the
interview. the list of alumnae tallies a

fine-arts-in-berlin who's who: the tooth-sculptress, the
pain artist's muse, the longterm girlfriend of two
married antiquities dealers and the wife
of a brewery-inheriting collector of
restoration erections, plus
the headmistress of a faux-french trompe l'oeil atelier of
ill-repute. all have done well for art
students. the first in the series, the

widow herself in
1962, 18 to von Bredow's
30: blackplumed, supple, striking
as a horsehair whip
(father a)
(cinematographer at Łódź)
(one of the chosen)
(few aryans slain by a)
(jew in that era in a)
(duel over a pupil's)
(paramour)
she'd mix
von b's patented lacquers, gesso/sand/re-gesso/re-sand his

grander canvasses; photograph, crate-up, ship-out each
piece of his gigantic oneiric
maps from the studio overlooking
the Lietzensee and its petit bourgeois
paths. later she even came
to finish certain works and worse
paint others ab
ovo usque ad mala whilst the maestro
napped. her man can live for what feels like years

without urges regarding the
pinkerparts of the
people. it's the widow herself, blackwings
turned a pearly bob, cupped breasts white as
dresden pots in timebrowned
hands who relishes the
entering of that room kept sternly
lockless, its unblocked
view of three steeples, not even
knocking. an applicant/supplicant buzzes

breathless down at front, the widow sips
her salted coffee, walks
the atrium with numbered
steps, stops to stoop to pocket a
foilship of gumwrap off
the cloud-reflecting
koi pond feeling

deathless

Sunday, 9. December 2007

xmas in berlin part one

00:41h

the down-angled pews of the u-bahn packed
as a requiem mass for the xmas
rush, black in its cladding the
congregational hush plus invisible
choirs of grinding rails and
hacking coughs. every station admits
more scowly hum to the
crowd's dark optical
push. yon mendicant bitch, thin
as the cold air itself, guilting face a
hatchet chopping chips of
loose conscience for small
pelf, fronttoothlessly blocking
the aisle while nearby noses
sting, stalks off the next stop in her
wealthless huff, mad
as the newly deaf's doorbell
ringing.

the foreign girl follows the beggar up
hauptstrasse through bruise-blue veils of
daemmerung, red sale signs and
christ-lights in low-slung flurries over overcoated,
headscarved foot-
traffic and then headlit rivers
of cars. the beggar hurries
flight-catching-fast in nothing
but ashram pants, hugging that
titless t-shirt with all
but embraceless
arms, nearly
funny. later

Malena will wake, chided by dreams
of the running

Saturday, 15. December 2007

xmas in berlin part two

15:59h

Malena the foreign girl rents
from the woman who rents from
the man who owns the
bathless flat at
zionskirchplatz. notification by
postcard came with the fact
that a week before xmas, the man's
son, cramming informatik at
tuebingen, will come
to stay until the day
after day one of
next year. with 72 hours left
to find a new bed she suffers
giddy-but-desperate despair but
makes herself up, does her highgloss
hair, wears
her very best amongst
macintoshes at sankt oberholz in hopes
of meeting a decent
English-speaking
student. but they're just impudent

brats, not men, the effeminate
offspring of America's tourist
classes, chatty-immature and
porno-crass, unearned
smirks illuminated by flashy
nonsense from week-old
screens, she thinks
you'd never even
survive a week of
Pinochet. Malena pays three
milchkaffees and
leaves to walk her
bad dream along the
Spree trailing
smoke from the
café. she makes her way

through the superfluous
xmas markt behind the obligatory
museum towards friedrichstrasse, from there
to hallesches tor in
kreuzberg where joke santas hang
from windows like hung
partisans and startled
pigeons mount heaven like
notes torn from throats of
muezzin

Sunday, 23. December 2007

xmas in berlin part three

19:04h

the desert god comes in
borrowed armor of sword-hard ice,
the sky's corpsetower of nine billion spirits burned
crytal-water white, His flesh-cutting sirocco of
sleet turns giant wheels to the highstreets of
candle-lit Europe, grinding souls
like minuscule diamonds for
xmas stalls while
the hawk-faced, kohl-eyed
deity of djins sings
madrigals

O superbest dissembler! O mask
on a mask in a veil on a doll
vast beyond any sane maths yet conceivable
thine sunsmashing fist
of rain-pregnant adamantine, thine
pavement-cracking snowfoot,
thine regenerative organ: seven miles of hard
black wind on these bare
lindens, mere hairs
under thine godweight
bent

Sunday, 30. December 2007

xmas in berlin part four

12:28h

of all the christmasses dante has seen and
survived, this, perhaps, will matter better
than the rest, the year he watched It's a
Wonderful Life without sneering or
crying, ted's
face in his lap, both still laughing
over the fact
ted had backed into the bedroom to
the tune of Bing singing, his head
in one red ribbon wrapped, tacky
card affixed to his hard-waxed
chest, best promise of a new
year's happiness, whether
or not the promise
can possibly
last.

he sees castouts on the snowbald, whorecold
street: red-eyed ingenues, feud-ruined
uncle-drunks and thinner-made, festivityless
leather-blacks for whom republicans
pay taxes, those
shell-boned refugees, dressed
for sheep, each at his own
indicative velocity, though
dante's just out
for a little blue air while
ted makes dinner
autistically. the street's
aglimmer-black horn in the
twilight's velvet
case, straight and weighted
tight to the evening's queer
lydian ache, the antediluvian tune of
cold comfort, warm
harm. dante sees

the seal-haired waitress from their
favorite café, singsongs the
obvious greeting and she breaks
like an egg on his
arm.

he invites her to the feast and ted
finds the poor girl
charming

Sunday, 6. January 2008

Malena's Good Luck New Year's Rabbit Stew

12:35h

-Cada uno lleva su cruz-

1.

skinning the rabbit, ted inverts
the inverted glove until the long
hand of muscle falls from its grip
of loose blood, clutching the grin
of this morning's funniest
execution. slain by the sling ted'd made
of malena's old hose, the bunny tumbled
with its fate-stone thrown
clear through dark bush to
headlighted street, ted waving
traffic to a halt to retrieve it
by deafwarm ears to malena
and dante's cheering as for
a goal. the dawn dome
of planetarium rose
to a glow by sun's flush
hole as they bore the corpse
like some world-leader with
eyes struck open
home.

ted knifes the belly, scoops
its coils and jellies in a system
to the sink, the other two toasting
long life/short death as ted
decouples the head's last
permanent
link. dante jumps

(he will always claim)
(the thing)
(blinked)

2.

the candled air of the whole long flat
rubs the windows with its sweat:
ginger, clove and cardamom escaping the pot
towards the black rhyme of ted and malena's hair
ted's elbows on the table and dante's perplexing
stare in the ruby swirl of wine malena's got
she tells of the trouble with men and dante says
we know a willing lesbian
she shakes her head: i need something i can sink
these teeth into (with a wink)
hefting her breasts in the low-cut dress she jokes
what about these? don't you ever miss them
on a winter's night?
dante frowns i swear i even eschewed huge dugs as a whelp
i would not suck at mother's milk
and father's mams were black with glossy felt, he giggles
at ted who growls: not while i'm eating
malena says Cocho kept peacocks when i was thirteen
they would not breed, which made them twice
precious, bleating in the courtyard even earlier
than those ugly cocks, casting spectacular shadows like
beardsley engravings on the opaline gravel around
the villa, occasional prey to a fox our indian shot
presenting it to mother who wore it
to the opera like a (draining her wineglass)
(with seductive indolence)
queen

3.

driven by the spirit of the rabbit or by
the devil possessed, ted proposes a
contest: whoever kisses best
will follow ted to bed whilst the other
does dishes. dante hisses
you bitches and kisses
malena on the mouth, vomiting
chilean flags and
passing
out

Sunday, 20. January 2008

a wolf on the underground, part one

23:46h

with his back to the window of the
orderly flat overlooking Schiller's golem at
Gendarmenmarkt he
writes his blog, the content of which
is all his sins, from the unconscious
nosepicking he once glanced to catch
reflected in the u-bahn's black
glass to pulling a long one off
on the pic his memory took home
of that cigsucking schoolgirl who brushed his arm
on his way out of a news agent, Spiegel rolled tight
in its burberry crook, her platinum fringe
cinched to his fist on his
belly in the daydream later like a bobbing
light. regret floods in (sin's twin) as the pleasure
ebbs, a grim shade shaking its head
over the shock of the copious, the
downright hale in a
drib's stead, the heady
wipe-up job, all of it gone
into the blog. Confessions of a Pedant in the
Autumn of his Life draws a respectable
village of hits every
night, an audience delighting
in foibles so nobly limned
as to render, eg, his borgia fart
at a christening (way back when) almost
charming. logging off,

it's out
into the warm winter's low-ceilinged
bunker of sundown, hotel lobbies and
monocustomered coffee shops as rundown blocks
of yellow in the purpled armature of the
pauline disbursement of converted
light, the North American pursuant
of darkling maps of
homelylessness, his
curiosity's pickily feline
lonelinesslessness on Jaegerstrasse fraught

with clotting silhouettes, circumspect outbursts
of halfchatter and horny
mirth, a Geschaeftsmanner invasion from
Duesseldorf platooning through, the
brotherly violence of so many
at march in a beerblind
line against the baroque blue
horizon. he sees one drop

a wallet like the pigeons'
kingsized tip; can't wait

to write the post on
spending it

Monday, 28. January 2008

a wolf on the underground, part two

00:01h

the wallet is warm, ruddybrown, fleshily complex
as an arrant organ or suave soft
coprolite, baklava of the middlemanager's
luther-ordered life, clean
as bleak boredom yet
implicit sins are packed wherein
a condom abides in a compartment beside five
photos of lost kids, the cats,
old boat, fat wife, a crescent worn through
on the royalblue foil
wrapper like islam's caliper moon plus
three hundred eighty nine euros the first two
of which go to the purchase of a BZ screaming
"wolf sighted on the outskirts of Berlin" plus
a Ritter Sport savoring richly of
sin he'll eat on the Underground while
reading it. underlit

as though by klieg light by
welders he descends, chewing, the
operaset of the stairsteps at the Friedrichstrasse stop to
accomplished Bach on a Slavbusker's pearl-mullioned
accordion, the brown cascading fingers on
toccataworn keys the North American tips
with a fifty at which gypsy kicks free
of stool, stands to switch to a pumping
Lohengrin, the platform whelmed black
in overcoats, sorrel furs, hell-blue
veins, red chins, gold helms of Wagnerian
hair raked by the tunneling
winds

Friday, 1. February 2008

a wolf on the underground, part three

14:40h

the paper explains how the wolves are driven
from natural environs by dms and poison
of compulsion's development, the bipedals' greedy encroach
at epochgreen level of forest floor to force growling
dreambrothers to bound from the brush, dogshaking
oddments, needle and leaf, from toothcolored coats, noses
to the road, after time long (as the cooling of new diamonds) in
exile. a floss-haired child of Siemens'
managerial class reports being sniffed by creatures
too cool to be dogs, too rank
to be phantasms, in
their country garden, l'heure bleue, late
june, case two: retired insomniac
circumnavigating a private lake on a bike
costing twice what equivalent Romanians take
home in a year was paced
for what seemed like hours by loping blurs
so rich in odor he fainted, waking shoeless, bent-biked in
gentian.

the North American grins a glance
over his paper at a waif on the long seat facing,
gulpsniffing tears, thumbs mothwingwhite beating
handy's stampsized keypad of vapid
lights, we fears it's
a bad breakup with her Abelard via
texting. beside her to the right
a woman Val recognizes, her
legs entwined with a man's who cannot be
quite twin, but co-lingual
cousin, flicking her lips with slim
tongue in
macho-feminist grace like young
South Americans, black manes fused above
marvelously lupine
brows, then oilspilled down
her shoulders, breasts, jeans folded
over the seat and his bold hands separating
her thighs in futile's best
gesture. hidden by his paper and

coat, the old jester, made
stiff as a goat by the
rutting display, contemplates
taking what they would not freely
give, this sin
of pre-human

intention

Sunday, 10. February 2008

sick in berlin

22:47h

getting sick in berlin
its own black romance
like love in paris
a fling
strangers too close on the metro
fluids exchanged
the essence of nameless kissing
that rheumy-eyed grandfather with
his pre-Euro Aldi bag
his snotrag hard as a
fossil may as well have had his
tongue in your mouth
with a persistent cough
he is part of you
even poetry is humbled by the couple
you have become in fever's
capacity for
regret

Monday, 18. February 2008

twilight on a corner of the ku'damm in february

10:01h

the grey walls of the hinterhof stained
with the previous century's rain under
the drained eye of february's
glaucous light, so like
an asylum: the courtyard's box
of underinterpenetrated
lives in this vast stone machine of
flatblock, drinking
a river each day, flushing rich
waste the other way, sempiternal, thick-
walled, cough-muffling, papered
in little deaths, breaths, sweats,
farts, aerosolized desiderata smelling
of cooked cabbage from
the furtive biomass of
neighbors he has never once
heard laughing or
singing. dante rings
an old friend, dresses to
meet him on a
corner of the ku'damm he hasn't
seen in years. everything, he thinks,
disappears. he never knew
what or why his mother meant in all her
litanies of vague complaint, staring
over his tooth-blond head as she ironed-on patches or
stirred fatty ersatzes into cheap-n-cheerful soups or wiped
the kitchen window of their
lukewarm semidetached in Hounslow with
never-read newspapers existing only
to chronicle America's rough
usage of the world, but now
he grasps her point was only ever
to make herself heard if solely
by him, dante, her son, at
seven, his reason
to exist as though
by invitation. she seemed to inhabit
a fenced sanitarium at the gate
of which they could meet but never

embrace. mother, what are you
so sad about? so
crushed beneath? so
helpless at never-winning?
her newspaper-lined casket still holds the
cold broach of her
enigma-grinning. the friend,

a standard
thirty minutes late mimes
apologies from across the
street, sackladen shoppers watching
the Gay Ausländers meet with
bemused irritation, mocked
to every last light of their city's
radiance

Sunday, 24. February 2008

dante kicks ted and malena out

23:09h

berlin is best for
breaking up; chums with bored disgust aver
they never liked lamented
her: his arrogance; the not so half
to-die-for-ness that he or she
with all love's dumb
encouragement of self
perceived. they whom fortune
in smiling scant months upon you
reeved through burning shrouds of
reflected happiness flock once more
in droves to glooms reborn
thick as spinsters to the perfume
of a miscarriage

Sunday, 2. March 2008

supper with weather

14:41h

old von bredow waited
'til his widow came in with
legumes, greens steaming on age-old
silver plates saying to their young
amanuensis at the table i see
they again in your country
prepare to decide upon king
of the planet. as a man he had a thing
for inciting the blush of the bloody au lait
suffusing her face to its roots in that
t-shirt's ruby décolleté; as a german
he had a point to make. everyone on earth
of a certain age not non compos
should be in on this
vote, don't you
think? the widow winked, passing
plantains, though clear as a fake tear von bredow
maintained an expression expecting this
answer. by chance a natural disaster
developed as they ate, god's
corpsecold windfeet kicking
the city with
hatred. rattled windows, the
chandelier shaking lent
drama to the socratic
conversation. handfuls of dead, hair
streaming, were lifted up
despite their sudden waterweight by the fists
of the weather in spate as
the american stared in
nearly sexual inanition at
her Goethe-old, butter-drenched
plate

KEY

1. **Wannsee**: a wooded part of Berlin. There's a very large lake and wild boar and hidden villas out there. Berliners like to bicycle around the water. There are sinister historical allusions (see: "[Wannsee Conference](#)").
2. **Beamtendeutschemenschen**: this is my joke portmanteau German. But can a German word be called a "portmanteau" when so many German words are portmanteaus? Anyway, it translates literally as "German Bureaucrat People". It's a separate race. The bureaucrat-civil servant in Germany is a glum, smug, dull and omnipotent creature with no real equivalent in America (complaints about the DMV notwithstanding). Kafka's work will mean nothing to you before you've lived in a Germanic country long enough to have had several run-ins with those scary German Aztecs and their voluminous paper files and the gray fluorescent light they bathe in to make them look stony.
3. **"Pflicht und Neigung"**: Literal translation: "Duty and Inclination". This is part of Schiller's critique of Kant and the allusion fattens my use of it here but the essential meaning in this poem reflects on the middle-aged expat's urge to *cut to the chase* through both the intellect-deadening effects of American PC culture (hence his interest in the frank rudeness of Germans) and the possibility-restricting expectations of his class and age. His "Pflicht" and "Neigung" are in conflict. Val's only choice is to see himself as a wolf and write a blog about the adventures/pleasures of his post-morality.
4. **Gendarmenmarkt**: a touristy square where you can find the cited statue of Schiller.
5. **Geistig zurückgeblieben**: literal translation: "the mentally held-back". Ie, the retarded.
6. **Łódź**: Roman Polanski's alma mater
7. **ab ovo usque ad mala**: from eggs to apples or "from soup to nuts", ie: from start to finish. Deliberate Latin to reflect the age of the painter, von Bredow, who would have had an upper class, old school education.
8. **Hauptstrasse**: a major shopping thoroughfare in the Schöneberg neighborhood of Berlin
9. **Daemmerung**: twilight (I used the "ae" instead of the "ä" because the website I originally posted these on wasn't capable of handling my *umlauts*)
10. **Informatik at Tuebingen**: like studying "computer science" at UCLA
11. **Zionskirchplatz and Sankt Oberholz**: an unbearably trendy part of the Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood of Berlin and an unbearably trendy cafe in the Mitte neighborhood of Berlin, respectively
12. **Milchkaffee**: the flagship coffee drink of Berlin cafe life; "milk coffee"
13. **Spree**: a river that flows through the Saxony, Brandenburg and Berlin states of Germany
14. **Friedrichstrasse**: major street in Berlin cutting through Checkpoint Charlie and ending in the Turkish ghetto; a few blocks of it (luxury shops and a ritzy department store) are reminiscent of State Street in

Chicago and it at one point is not far from the Brandenburg gate and a very old, culture-heavy, tourist-infested zone of famous museums

15. **Cada uno lleva su cruz:** each has his cross to bear

16. **Geschaeftsmanner:** businessmen

17. **Slavbusker:** my portmanteau: a Gypsy musician-beggar

18: **Siemens:** one of the ruling corporations

19: **pre-Euro Aldi bag:** a shopping bag from a downmarket supermarket, from before the time the Euro replaced the Deutschmark; you do see them around town, colors worn off. Germans are notoriously stingy and like to recycle their shopping bags (which can cost 10 or 20 cents) forever.

20. **Hinterhof:** the part of an apartment-or-office building behind and parallel to the part facing the street; lots of buildings in Berlin have inner courtyards and some have two or three in a series

