

## BLACK RED GOLD

Einar Schleef

October 7th. The anniversary of the Republic. She jumps out the window. A sea of flowers. Thousands cheer. The ambulance doesn't arrive till two hours later. It was held up by the demonstration.

If when why.

Portraits float by. Those portrayed hail their own youthful faces as they slosh up against them out of the stream rolling past between the rows of buildings. Advancing floodwaters whose existence is not concealed. A flag escort.

On the operating table, her autopsy is under way. After the funeral, YELLOW, her husband, is no longer allowed to see the suicide. She'd always been in danger. She'd always been at the brink. She didn't fit in here. WHITE and YELLOW don't mix. Naples yellow is the color of the sun in Capri, but never over Berlin. WHITE-YELLOW, the child, will forget his mother. The yellow slit-eye weeps, the white eye is closed. A giant scar runs round her throat and head, as if she'd been hung, sings a voice from under water. Images of the bigwigs on the rostrum float by. Those portrayed hail their images that slosh off in marching columns until they resurface, a new cordon waving, a new flag division, a new marching unit, a new combat brigade, and they all want the same thing: to go under. Like an ancient king, the master on the rostrum casts his ring down into the depths. That's when the state cattle, that 99% pro GDR voting cattle, hurl themselves downwards. That's when the woman jumps. That's when fortune returns. The jumper, the swimmer, the diver, the People spit up the ring. Polycrates, clad in a light suit, raises his hand, takes back the ring, that token of his being wed to the stream that holds up his mirror image a thousand times over, while below the one falling remains silent. The voting cattle cry out, thousands strong: hurrah. Long live the GDR.

Tired of their images, the leaders turn round to reassure each other of their ageing, of their loneliness, lodged in wallpapers, armchairs and slipcovers, as if these lifeless objects were living, as if they knew an end were imminent. Dies irae dies illa solvet saeculum in favilla resounds from beneath the earth. As if these gods wanted their rostrum back. As if the power struggle on the rostrum were just a passing phase, as if a much larger one were in the making. Overaged and outdated, flatulent and filthy, the flesh inside their suits stinks. The anti-fascist protective rampart is holding up fine. GDR cement lasts 1000 years. The New Reich will celebrate 1000 years, the Old Reich didn't even celebrate 50. Millions of

corpses laid its foundations.

As she gets ready and waters the plants on the balcony of her apartment in the prefab housing estate, the New Reich bigwigs step onto the rostrum and their images assemble in columns. As she combs her hair, walks back into the bathroom, puts down the glass, they form lines. As she gives up on everything, the party activist puts on perfume. 2 women looking into a mirror, their names: Cull and Quality Control. By the time Cull opens the window, Quality has left the state-owned car and unrolled the flag she ironed and brought along. Brandishing her own party pennant, Cull is now ready to plunge from the 8th floor. An anniversary salutation. An offering for sins. A woman who doesn't belong here. YELLOW is somewhere under way, WHITE-YELLOW is playing with children who are excitedly getting ready for the demonstration. WHITE can't stand it and has to go down. To the concrete. To the street. The battleground of the proletariat. A magnificent morning. As she falls she twists and throws her arms up, as if she wants to grab the air, as if there might still be a hold, a bough, a rock, a ledge. Then she lowers her arms, like she once learned to do from the diving board, and the woman falling becomes a jumper, now conscious of the contact. Right before impact her body turns on its side. Shrubs and low trees manage to cushion the jump. Yet due to her body turning, the gift is delivered on the concrete. The wee bit of blood does not need to be wiped up. For months YELLOW and WHITE-YELLOW continue to walk over these slabs. YELLOW holding WHITE-YELLOW's hand. In a shed, the images are reshuffled. The anniversary is followed by a new ceremony. It's slowly getting cold. The People stoop, crouching in trains, dining halls, cinemas, tenement houses and theaters. Chewing and chewing, shitting and shitting. Gulping down their unrest. A heavy greasy mash paralyzes every thought. A glimpse, flying over the Wall. Very few are still prepared to jump. In his room, a madman practices crossing the Baltic Sea in a faltboat and is arrested. The crew of a hot air balloon practice, too, and then meet again years later in Hollywood. What if you had crashed. We were braced for the worst. Instead of going down, we were on our way up.

In the hall of Charité Hospital, the husband of the woman being autopsied waits. There she lies, whether he actually saw her, he can no longer remember.

When the People sing, there's singing on all channels, of downfall, of the homelands, of the New Banana. While behind the Wall, other Peoples discuss how to raise the banana's low price. Not yet. But soon. State-manufactured cement does not last forever. GDR radio reports: Progress Future Progressive Decay. New columns form. State cattle are exhausted. A roar comes from the open stables, from BBQ refuges. Portraits prick up their ears, cracking the paint. Stretching their frames. New brigades, ready for deployment, ready for combat. Submachine guns cocked. The former state-owned intelligentsia tries to turn things around. Out of the gray-in-gray, trot gray faces. Open stables are emptying, factory

halls. Now flooding is on the agenda and the state ship goes under. State-owned artists become people's tribunes. A theater rebellion. So far, it's been an unbloody June 17th. While the anniversary gift rots in her coffin and the sign lies beneath earth. No. Seats fill. Nobodies want to assemble. The head wants to bang against the wall. Bust or fall. It breaks. Collapsing from within. In just one night. It's getting cold. Grays dance in the streets. The night shimmers in all colors, full of smears and molding bones. Flies and all creatures, one night commemorates the corpse. You are the keystone, the foundation stone. An iron night revives the city.

Portraits burn and those portrayed in granite, clay and porcelain topple, many stories deep. Stacks of papers spill out of libraries, lecture halls, control centers and casemates, where the masses, the crowd, people, make a clean sweep, ultimately assuring themselves of their own past in the mounds of files that the portrayed kept on those who were portraying them, so that they carried the portraits all the more erectly past the rostrums of those portrayed. Narcissus saw himself and was punished. With his level hand he scooped his portrait off the water, saw it dissolve in his hand, with nothing but the sunlight refracting between his fingers. Trying to slurp it up, he now bends over, but as he nears, his flesh blurs, his hair, already afloat, drifts across his nose and eyes, now he touches the water and drinks. Too late. Punishment has been set. Front garden plots don't help, streets lined with villas, armed police, columns of vacuum cleaners. No one. He is alone. He plunges into the water. He licks his belly, his armpits, his shoulders. He can tell from his own smell, he's still alive. He forgets about it. Thousands of pages tell his story, thousands of sculptures and pictures tell of his life. The anniversary gift thrust her mirror image between concrete slabs, coarse gravel, saltbush and sorrel.

As a mother, can you account for getting into bed with a YELLOW amid all that gray. In his eyes, your image shines in columns. Every day of your love. In black and white or color. Bright between the sheets and loins. Yet the gaze darkens, unable to bear the gray. Buckles, topples, dies. The anniversary gift eats, drinks, goes to the toilet. An exemplary mother of a boy, whom she abandons. A raven beast who wanted to fly. As Icarus knew already, you have to go up on your way down.

RED

How can I grieve.

Can a griever do justice to the person he grieves for. Your wife jumped, my wife ran against the Wall. Cold is the cement, the concrete slab. Flocks of crows fly over Berlin, from roosts

in the West to feeding grounds in the East. Every morning, every evening, every winter. Via Stalin Avenue to the Brandenburg Gate to the Boulevard of the 17th of June. Sleeping. The dead are sleeping. In the warm air stream of power plants, the invisible band stretches over Berlin, accessible only to birds. The air stream joins 2 parts. It's called the West-Eastern Route.

In prefab towns, anniversary gifts are scythed. The strangler is still on the loose, sing poets armed with passports, who are permitted to leave the gray but may never return. Neither in their thoughts nor images. Forget it. The rostrum remains silent: never permitted again.

Can the griever cast off his mourning, his mourning clothes, his not-being-able-to-sleep, all the tormenting, hounding thoughts, stick them in a wardrobe or between the pages of a book. Memories: that's you, and that's me with you. This is my yellow family and this, your white grandmother. Just look how deftly she eats with chopsticks, how much she loves her grandchild, WHITE-YELLOW. Soon he'll be running off to the disco, dashing off on his bike, sneaking a smoke between concrete silos. He'll have a girlfriend, whine in bed in the room next door, grown, choke, whimper: do you love me. The anniversary gift consists of grass, wilting, drying, inedible, even the pet rabbit doesn't want to eat it. It balks. Can it smell the blood, death, the lack of sun. It just won't eat, and that's that! Everything has turned out differently. A 5th Reich. An even newer New Reich. When YELLOW now looks in the mirror, yellow's aging. As the man becomes a child, the hull frames break. The ship sags, too full. Now what has to be thrown overboard first. Books, pictures, equipment. In the end, all the portraits are crammed into 3 books and tossed into the water. The anniversary gift just consists of mold, worms, rodents and dirt. Plain humus. Being one with the earth's flesh. I fall. I jump. I scream. Gray in gray, the cloud of cement settles. Oaks blaze brown. Pictures, beastly faces, pressed into suits, ties and collars, the white German, the orderly man. You are a cull, thrown into the trash, between urine and dog muck, you, so pale, so rawboned, you, another person, not me. Are you freezing, do you want to live.

Are you going to return one day. No response. Now that's consoling. Makes up for losing you. The man sorts that out for himself, between being still awake and not yet asleep, his body rears up to you, his fingers touch your breast, beneath them what's already dead lives anew, he smells, he tastes her body, between his fingers her nipple burns, her skin presses into his, as if the invisible air would respond to his pressure, as if his own flesh were hers, his hand moves over himself. Is it really the body that remembers. Do you need another person's skin. YELLOW on YELLOW, WHITE on BROWN-RED or BLUE. Skin on skin. You have forgotten everything, now you're living among us. When you see your shadow, you think you're home, yes, where YELLOW runs up against YELLOW. You ran away, too, you're the only one who knows your husband.

The streets are not unfamiliar, are not a place never reentered. Instead, each corner is familiar, right down to the falling plaster, the crumbling of porous material, stairways, steps, paths merging, this is where I marched past, on my way to school, on my way to my wife, my children, to an affair, the street car between doctors, the corner where, stop, stop remembering. Forget. What I rediscover at these locations. Nothing. A bitter taste, due to nobody clearing matters up with a gun, due to my coming back after so many years. Astonished, I look for the Wall, it has been completely razed, simply forgotten. Germany's white, I thought each winter as I flew in over Berlin and spotted the Wall from above. It was lit up at night as orientation for its innocence. So many years since I'd set foot in the GDR.

Entry denied, I kept my green filing cards. Denied without explanation. The East German police officer in the West. I filled out the forms, twice, humiliated, tired. Why were people pressuring me, why should they grant me an entry permit. After all, others were entering, others told me. Give it a try, I heard Jumped-Out-the-Window say. How many I knew who went ahead and did it. A green-uniformed jackass in defense against fascism at a GDR branch office across from Zoo Train Station: Entry. Passports. The uniformed jackass laughed: hey, you know exactly what we think of you.

The murderer's attracted to the scene, the victim, too.

So I'm roaming through Berlin, incapable of getting my bearings, simply no longer willing to climb over the busted wall. I stayed away. Saw how others seized their memories, wanting to participate, offering their assistance. Down to the end, GDR masters bought outdated GDR flags of mere sentimental value. Plenty of anniversary gifts lying in the streets.

The Palace of the Republic was clearing things out. Cities were removing images of Lenin and Marx. Streets named the other way round. Barons turned into winners of agricultural cooperatives. His melancholy is as profound as hell is beautiful, said the party activists, on their backs. Lenin is dragged by the arm of a crane over the Square of the Republic, as if he had to atone for some sins. Dangling at the gallows. His 1st portrait. His 1st statue. A sacred GDR icon. Now hidden between the toilet and the corridor to the dining room, looming in the darkness of the stairway. Novels extolled him, reports of perseverance. Now, he's dirt. An ancient Buddha. No material value. Nothing. On the crane early, without company. Swinging towards the National Library on Unter den Linden Avenue where he studied. From secure shelves, classical works, pre-revolutionary works observe his crane ride over the square. Reaction triumphs in the shelves. Thousands strong, millions of book pages celebrate his end. No utopia. No communism. Nothing. The crane places it between cobblestones. The tools of the revolution, its language. Covered with blankets, the bronze figure sways and comes to rest. Lying on his back, the jovial Russian patron of work acts

imperiously. The bronze statue is so near, you can scrape it, smash it, shit and piss on it. Sleep 1000 years till the raven wakes you.

## GOLD

Water gushes out of subway shafts, the flood approaches, washing out foundations, eating away at rows of buildings, all emergency levels exceeded, the flood doesn't seep away but accumulates more water, all kinds of rivers converge, abruptly the geography changes its course. All those not evacuated drown. Berlin merges with the surrounding area, with gale force the Baltic Sea comes closer, aided by North Sea tempests, the big city is no longer safe. Those who are able to remember, know about flooded tunnels, know about the singing of Stalin's organs, know about the will to persevere, know what it means to end. Without pause, the elements join forces, there's no harmonizing or draining or straightening of rivers.

The big city dreams the dream of its downfall, be it by war, the emerging flood, hail or blizzard. A painter's dream, Berlin lying by the sea, surging waters draped between backyards and rubble. Yet in reality the outcasts push off. Wanting to go down, they jump. Bridges, high rises, subway shafts, are all sites of execution. Over the city's ruptured body roll the floodwaters of renewal, not destruction, but reconstruction, of health care, those small amputations, that make the plastic member function equally well, uninhibitedly and fully accepted, the renewed city, in which now one state prevails, one spirit, that of the unification of reconstruction by the grace of Germany. This spirit has conquered the New Reich and will create the very Newest, 5th Reich. German monumental architecture. Though first, much must give way. Nero burnt down Rome. Who did the burning here, who went up in flames. For the new German beginning. Do those who jump count, those who are completely at a loss. Does the woman on the corner count, the swept up blood, the interrupted flow of traffic, an absence due to technical failure. Does the individual count. The city understands itself as a conglomeration, what dominates are crowds, masses, ant trails, a kind of lowly people, without the upright gait constantly demanded of every individual, but unanimously sacrificed to the city, to the swarming hordes, of their own free will. That's the admission ticket.

The S-Bahn takes hours from one end to the other. What can still be called the past today. The GDR nesting stolidly in refurbished Prussian state buildings, as if they contained more GDR than advisable, as if the gold shone, the thin, fine gold, the discount party badges from mass production, a mass production that must be called German, so who wouldn't feel like jumping now. And they do. Incessantly doors are yanked open on balconies, emergency

brakes pulled on trains, and things unearthed in cellars and tunnels. The German state celebrates its perpetual resurrection through change, so that, from their cocoons, German vermin prepare for nosedives. That's what the city dreams of, of destruction in the midst of reconstruction. The one who holed himself up in the crane, high above the building site, is persuaded after several hours of discussion to give up his plan. Once again everything has turned out all right, the evening television community sighs in relief at how much has happened in their city today. That is, if the route hadn't been blocked by guarded re-cording vans and cabling.

What's a reunited city.

Epochs in world history, that turned divided cities into sanctuaries in which hostile religions, hostile states, hostile thoughts collide, that clean their wounds via local border traffic, so that the inevitable pus does not poison the entire organism, so that the necessary amputation, the severing of the infested limb can be successfully carried out.

They're jumping again, it's hard to wait for them to bail out, like a swimmer, the air parts and the invisible grazes the falling body, the tiniest of particles articulating themselves in a gentle wind, a buzzing noise, altering hearing. Amazing how the water glides over the body, like a caress, a sign of motion, when the sky and the surface come together, the swimmer falling gradually into a trance, as if not he, but another body still unknown to him were making the effort, as if it were carrying him, the one thinking, away, as if he could entrust himself to it, as if he had to enter a state of calmness, push the limit so that, underneath his normal body, this body may become visible, so that normal thinking may calm down and allow the invisible, unthinkable to occur, and then the water takes the body and keeps it afloat. The one swimming escapes this harmony, if he still can, escapes this half-conscious state by moving upright to the shore.

Inability and flaccidity manifest themselves in millions of bedrooms in the city, in sofas and couch sets, in everything that makes an upright gait unnecessary.

The man in the building crane, who is still disputing and assuring us he'll jump, sees the city opening up in front of him, the view from up here, between low clouds, new magnificent buildings and gold that has begun weathering. The city seems to stretch to the horizon, its suburbs are being taken over by the approaching flood. Does he realize that. The police standing below keep on talking, all that poppycock about living meaningfully. Does he even hear what the channels are spitting in our faces and living rooms, a colorful digital mix sloshing over firewalls. Does he hear it. Or rather the noise, the flood, the rising water that is spreading and swallowing up the city, coming from the East, more like some Russian-Asian creature than a civilized person, who bewails a flooded one-family home, where Moika the Cat has to take up a perch on the new living room wall unit. The man on

the crane sees the army getting ready, taking up its positions, increasing its flanks, a storm is brewing, and after the waters retreat, corpses are no longer burned. Sunken cities can afford this kind of thing. In exhibitions touring across continents, their descendants keep mountains of burning bodies ready for clip frames so that historical hardships may survive appeasement policies unharmed. What use are party programs, campaign promises, constitutions, rights and citizens, all the contaminated flotsam and jetsam of an invisible ecological crisis, which youthful managers handle like a business lunch at the Armani Club.

What does the man above the city see at the historical site: construction and destruction and floods. Not as depicted in fairytales or poesy, but on television channels. The sky is a mighty screen, digital and cosmically controlled, fully wired and networked. But against these rising global waters, which a swimmer busily crosses, as the poet says, strengthening himself by parting the warm or warmed-up surface that has the sweet taste and smell of oily debris, clinging to hairs and beard, beads pouring down his temples, lids and lips, blending together again and, far behind him, sealing themselves off in the depths, against these rising global waters camera teams and reporters struggle, ministers and experts debate, in vain. A chancellor, a war minister, a council chairman, a leader, in vain, all party membership, in vain.

For seconds the city is silent, gray beside gray, the noises, which it heaps above itself like walls against each other, subside and for seconds the cosmos jolts, moves, even the animals, which sense all of the earth's movements, are silent and do not budge. Everything is in expectation. Click goes the computer, everyone screams, whimpers and whines. Jumpers fall by the dozens, autobahn bridges ripple, buckle under the weight, loads jamming into each other, the walls of houses breaking all the more quickly in sync with one another, trains wedged together at triple speed, before quiet sets in, things are shifted to a lower gear in which the engine overheats, until trails of smoke line the city. With the swelling waters, they drift towards the horizon and the rising moon, obscuring it, so that it must rise higher to see the extent of the disaster. Is this all due to people who always mean well, and are now rotting somewhere next to their hogs and fishing rods.

What did you see from the 8th floor. Back then. In the days of the GDR. That everything was fall-ing apart. The ambulance took 2 hours, dispatched on a new mission every hour. The final rest house before you crossed the river of death. With chewing gum under your tongue.

What did you see. What was left of you. What did YELLOW take with him, what did YELLOW-WHITE take with him, images, memories branded on their minds, seconds of exposed death, before they depart from your place, before a rubber boat carries them off.

What remains is the city of downfall. Gray beside gray, worker ants, molded into happiness in a burnished angst, spattering acid as they wrench themselves in frantic flight out of the hole that increasingly engulfs them. Having come to a halt, the flood now forms eddies.

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