

VERSOPOLISTWOLEDBURY
TWENTYTWENTY-THREE



Ulrike Almut Sandig

Translated by Karen Leeder

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VERSOPOLIS TWO



Ulrike Almut Sandig

Translated from the German
by Karen Leeder

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VERSOPOLIS
*is a unique, Europe-wide platform.
It gives emerging European poets
the chance to reach an audience beyond
the boundaries of the language they write in
by translating and publishing their poems
and inviting them to perform at festivals.*



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Born in rural East Germany, ULRIKE ALMUT SANDIG now lives with her family in Berlin. The performance poet started publishing her poetry by pasting poems on to lamp posts in Leipzig and distributing them on flyers and free post cards. After completing her studies in Sociology of Religions and Modern Indology, she graduated from the German Creative Writing Program in Leipzig. Volumes of short stories, pop music albums, radio pieces, poetry collections and her novel *Monsters like us* (Seagull Books 2022) have been published to date. She has been awarded many prizes, most recently the Roswitha-Prize (2020) and the Erich-Loest-Prize (2021).

For her poetry performances Sandig works with musicians, sound and performance artists from around the world, such as Hinemoana Baker (New Zealand), fusion rock band Alif (India) and poet and blogger Ahmad Katlesh (Syria). She is frontwoman of the poetry collective Landschaft, with Grigory Semenchuk (Ukraine) and Sascha Conrad (Denmark), which combines poetry, film and loop-based electronic music. Her CD album LANDSCHAFT appeared in 2018 and was followed by five digital single releases and numerous poetryfilms since then.

Her new poetry volume *Leuchtende Schafe* (Shining Sheep, 2022) brings together powerful visual poems that resonate in the ear and appear as filmic image explosions. She uses speech software to bring the legacy of Romanticism into the present and captures its colonial other in exquisite anagrams. Above all she creates 'worlds full of mythic images that embed themselves deep in your soul' (Matthias Ehlers, WDR).

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Murmurations. Small Choral Piece with Braces

This concrete poem is a commission for the composer and overtone singer, Jan Heinke. The premiere of 'Starlings', his choral piece based on it, was held in Autumn 2020 in the Dresden Annenkirche, and sung by the Jungen Ensemble, Dresden.

Open Arms

The poem is dedicated to the crews of the rescue ships off the Italian coast.

Lamentations in VI rounds

A few years ago, I managed to leave my EC-card (yet again) in a ticket machine on the Berlin underground. A young man from Afghanistan got in touch via Facebook saying he had found it. Since then, I have remained in contact with him and his large family, who live in Berlin as failed asylum seekers. The stories I was told by them formed the basis of 'Five Lamentations', which I completed some time ago.

After the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021, I added a sixth poem that deals with a translator left behind after the evacuation. وروړه [worôra], Pashto for Oh Brother!, بابابه جان [bāba jān], Pashto/Dari for Dear Father.

From the Water

The poem is dedicated to the climate activist movement Fridays for Future.

The final circular poem is adapted from the cycle *The Songs of the Radio Tower*.

Murmurations. Kleines Chorstück mit Flügelklammern

h h
h h
hör
hör r r r r
hör r r r r zu
zu u u u u
zu u u u u was
was s s s s
was s s s s murmeln die
murmeln die ie ie ie ie
murmeln die ie ie ie ie Stare
hör zu, was murmeln die Stare über den Feldern
mit aufgespannten Federn schreiben sie sich
ins offene Jahrbuch des Herbstes hinein
schau, wie sie (nicht) formulieren: (nicht) ich
bin (nicht) du bist wir alle sind
((((niemals niemals nie nie
ma ma mals))))
allein a all
alle alle
in in
n n

Murmurations. Small Choral Piece with Braces

c c
c c
can
you hear r r r r r
hear r r r r r it
it t t t t
it t t t t what
what t t t t
what t t t t they murmur
they murmur the e e e e
they murmur the e e starlings
can you hear what they murmur the starlings across the fields
with their outstretched wings they write themselves
into the open pages of the yearbook of spring
see how they formulate (not): i am (not)
you are (not) we all are
((((never never ever ev ev
ev ev ever))))
alone a all
all one
ne ne
n n

folge den Aufforderungen: nimm teil.
sei Teil eines Rauschens. sei hörbare Regung im Sendegebiet.
sei das Kreiseln eines Schiffes unter den Satelliten.
breite die Arme weit aus. sei **Open Arms**. halte Position.
halte diese Position. halte diese Position aus.
benutz deine Hände. teil Trinkwasser aus, Formulare und Trost.
teil mit offenen Händen den Strand deiner Kindheitsurlaube.
teil, was dir zwischen den Fingern zerrinnt. teil, was du nicht hast.
halt ab die Springer vom Springen. halt Kindern die Hände.
nimm sanft der Mutter ihr Kind aus dem Schoß. verstau es im Kühlfach.
halt kurz die Hand vors Gesicht. geh wieder in Position.
halt Menschenrecht vor Gesetz. das Geheul der Sirenen halt aus.
hol dir Rat von den Ratlosen. hör den Ertrunkenen zu.
hör nicht auf die Stimme in deinem Kopf, die sagt: streiche die Segel.
schwanke vor Lampedusa. glaub ihnen nicht.
leiste den Aufforderungen nicht Folge.
auf einen Hafen nimm Kurs. steuer ihn an.

follow the instructions: take part.
be part of the noise. be an audible disturbance in the transmission field.
be the spinning of a ship below the satellite.
spread your arms out wide. be Open Arms. hold your own.
hold this position. hold out in this position.
use your hands. share fresh water, documents and comfort.
share the beaches of your childhood holidays with open hands
share what runs away between your fingers. share what you don't have.
hold the jumper back from jumping. hold the hands of children.
gently take the child from its mother's lap. stow it away in the fridge.
hold your hand in front of your face for a moment. return to your position.
hold human rights before the law. hold fast against the screaming of sirens.
take help from the helpless. listen to the drowned.
do not listen to the voice in your head that says: strike sail.
hold your ground here off Lampedusa. don't believe them.
don't accede to their demands.
head for a harbour. set your course.

KLAGELIEDER IN VI RUNDEN

I. Runde

der kleine Mann in meinem Kopf heißt Omid.
er zieht seine Runden durch alle Wunder
meines Gehirns, im verhaltenen Run der Gejagten
die das Gejagtsein gewohnt sind.

meine Wunder lassen ihn kalt. der kleine Mann
in meinem Kopf geht immer rennen, niemals
reisen. er trägt eine Nummer im Pass, die ihm noch
das Scheißen verbietet. er nennt sie sein „Aufeintal . . .“

sein Aufenthalt schlägt als Phantomherz im Hals
eines Läufers, der Schmerzen gewohnt ist.

LAMENTATIONS IN VI ROUNDS

round I

the little man inside my head is Omid.
he makes his rounds through all the wonders
of my brain, running with the wariness
of the hunted, who are used to being hunted.

my wonders leave him cold. the little man
inside my head is always running, never
on his way. a number in his passport even
forbids him from shitting. he calls it his ‘eftetherain . . .’

his ‘leave to remain’ beats as the phantom heart
in the neck of a runner who is used to pain.

II. Runde

der kleine Mann besitzt eine Frau, die Schmerzmittel
braucht. die Frau des kleinen Mannes bewohnt
seinen Kopf, denn Frauen wie sie entkommen
der Herzregion und ihren irren Wunderkammern

niemals allein, sagt Omid. sie misst seine Hypophyse
fürs neunte Kinderbett aus. sie isst Tabletten
gegen Herzschwäche und gegen den Birnbaum
in ihrem Kopf, der rauscht wie der Birnbaum früher

im Hof. seine Blätter füllen sie aus. sie füllt Omid aus.
Runde um Runde zieht er durch mein Gehirn.

round II

the little man has a wife, who sometimes
takes pills for the pain. the little man's wife lives
inside his head. women like her never escape
singly from the regions of the heart, its strange

chambers of wonders, he says. she measures his
pituitary ready for the ninth cot. she swallows
tablets for her weak heart and for the pear tree
in her head that rustles like the pear tree in the yard

at home once did. its leaves fill her up. she fills
Omid up. round and round he runs in my brain.

III. Runde

der kleine Mann in meinem Kopf, er hatte
sieben Söhne. der erste stand an der Bushaltestelle
als eine Drohne einschlug. der zweite sprengte
sich selbst in die Luft. der dritte zählte bis tausend

als jemand dem Lehrer die Kehle durchschnitt.
der vierte blieb an der Küste für einen Job beim Schlepper
der eigenen Leute. der fünfte Sohn fiel aus dem Boot.
die jüngsten verstehen die Wörter des kleinen Mannes

nicht mehr. sie spielen an meiner Aorta, Omid.
sie lachen im Schlaf. die sind dir geblieben.

round III

the little man inside my head, he had
seven sons. the first was at the bus stop
when a drone attacked. the second blew
himself up. the third counted to a thousand

as the teacher's throat was cut. the fourth
stayed at the coast, took a job smuggling
his own people. the fifth fell out of the boat.
his youngest sons don't understand the words

of the little man, they play on my aorta, Omid.
they laugh in their sleep. the only ones left to you.

IV. Runde

der kleine Mann in meinem Kopf, er hatte
eine Tochter. er liebte, wie sie das Hackfleisch
zerkochte, er liebte, wie sie widersprach.
er liebte das Wunder ihres Aufeintals in Omid.

für den Gegenwert eines Tickets nach Deutschland
hat Omid seine Tochter verkauft. heute rief sie
ihn an. sie klang, als säße sie in seinem Gehörgang.
dem Birnbaum im Hof ginge es gut. seit Wochen

sei sie nicht draußen gewesen. oh, draußen
sagt Omid in sich hinein, erwartet dich nichts.

round IV

the little man inside my head, he had
a daughter. he loved the way she boiled
minced beef, the way she answered back.
he loved the wonder of her eftetherain in Omid.

Omid sold his daughter in exchange for the value
of a ticket to Germany. today she called him up.
she sounded like she was sitting in his ear.
the pear tree in the yard was doing fine.

she hadn't been outside for weeks, she said. oh outside
says Omid to himself, there's nothing for you there.

V. Runde

der kleine Mann in meinem Kopf, er hatte
einen Bruder. der half den Deutschen beim
Wörterfinden in seinem Land und hat darüber
sein Leben verloren. hast du noch gar nicht

هړه هړه tippt Omid in sein Handy und hängt noch
ein Bruderherz dran. bist doch im Safe House, du
weißt, was das heißt! aber sein Bruder weiß, wie
man Lippenbekenntnis ins Paschtu übersetzt.

fahr jetzt zum Airport, schreibt er als Letztes.
melde mich, wenn ich in Sicherheit bin.

round V

the little man inside my head, he had
a brother. he used to help the Germans
finding words in his land and for that
he lost his life. you haven't lost it yet

هړه هړه Omid types into his phone and adds
a brother heart. you've made it to the safe house
you know what that means! but his brother knows
how to translate 'lip service' into Pashto.

off to the airport now, is the last thing that he
writes. back in touch when i know i'm safe.

VI. Runde

der kleine Mann in meinem Kopf liest Ovid.
er liest ihn in den Blättern des Birnbaums im Kopf
seiner Frau, die die Wörter hier besser versteht
als er, ohne ein einziges schreiben zu können.

Omid liest Ovid im Skype seiner Tochter
die seit ihrer Hochzeit die Hand nicht mehr
stillhalten kann. ich bin am Ende mit meinem Latein
sagt er, und sie ins Handy: بابہ جان ich hör nichts!

Aufeintal folgt ein Berg!, ruft Omids Frau in den Wehen
im Singsang von denen, die Wehen gewohnt sind.

round VI

the little man inside my head reads Ovid.
he reads him in the leaves of the pear tree
in his wife's head. she understands the words here
better than him but cannot write a single one.

Omid reads Ovid in his daughter's skype.
since her marriage she cannot keep her hand
from shaking. this Latin is all Greek to me, he says.
she shouts into her phone: بابہ جان i can't hear you!

eftetherain comes the sun, Omid's wife cries out in pain
with the singsong of those who are used to labour pain.

vom Wasser

kommt alles, das spricht.
das Wasser kümmert es nicht
dass alles, was wir sind
aus Wasser besteht wie Kinder
aus einem kranken Gegensatz
ihrer Erzeuger, der gespenstisch
in seine Bestandteile zerfällt
wie Flüssigkeit in nichts
als zwei Gase. wir werden uns
wünschen, wir könnten
unsere eigene parasitäre Art
im Morgenebel auflösen.
aber Vorsicht mit den Wünschen.
einmal wünschten wir uns
es käme einer, der machte
Wasser zu Wein. dem Wasser
ist es egal. wir werden uns
wünschen, den Jahr um Jahr
höher steigenden Pegeln
zu entrinnen, und sei es
an einem Tag in der Woche
freitags vielleicht

from the water

comes all that speaks.
the water does not care
that everything we are
is made of water, as children
are made of their progenitors'
faulty gene-set that splits
into its component parts, like
the ghost of a fluid returning
to nothing but two gases. we will
wish one day we could
dissolve our own parasitic kind
into morning mist. but
take care what you wish for.
once we wished for one who
would come and turn water
into wine. it's all the same
to the water. we will wish
we could escape the levels
that keep rising year
on year even if only
for one day a week:
a Friday perhaps

dot dot dot dot dash dash dash
dreimal kurz dreimal lang dreimal kurz dreimal



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