

7 Encouraging literary dialogue: The story “Die Fabrik” by Saša Stanišić in Upper Secondary Education read from a students’ perspective

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Introduction

Dialogic approaches to literature are considered not only promising but also essential with regard to key aims of literature education in our context: students should be enabled to develop their own perspectives on literary texts, to follow experiences of surprise, ask questions and reconsider their perceptions – both in the light of the text and in the light of what others would sense and argue for. The respective abilities link to practices of habitual readers of literature far beyond school: tell others about reading experiences, join discussions on how to understand particular texts and appreciate the respective forms of participation. Formal education in literature can serve as a place where students are introduced to the respective practices via the curriculum (see Kepser & Abraham, 2016).

As Janssen (2009) states developing questions on literary texts that foster understanding and interpretation can be demanding. Yet, it is certainly worthwhile to face the challenge, since it helps avoiding a well-known pitfall: though literature education aims at an independent and competent approach to literature, even well-designed literature lessons may propose routes to the text that are experienced by learners as narrowing and even as excluding their perceptions. The approach Janssen has developed thus fits the German discourse around the literary dialogue (“literarisches Gespräch”) that has been a constant feature of German “Literaturdidaktik” since the 1980s and that is particularly bothered with the quality of classroom discourse about literature (Heizmann, Mayer, & Steinbrenner, 2019). Traditionally, the role of dialogue in German literature education is strong – and still, arrangements may not always be truly dialogic. What we consider particularly innovative and promising within this context is the way peer interaction is encouraged by Tanja Janssen’s work. For the story in our context we suggest a three-step-design, starting with individual work, moving on to a structured group work and culminating in a plenary discussion.

About the story

The story *Die Fabrik* (*The Factory*) forms part of the anthology *Fallensteller* (*Trapper*) by German author Saša Stanišić, published in 2016 and a bestseller. The author can be considered a strong voice in current German literature. His novels were all well received and translated into many languages, including Dutch. Stanišić's way of narrating is appreciated as a particularly original way of storytelling, influenced by his bilingual and multicultural background: born in Višegrad, now Bosnia Herzegovina (former Yugoslavia), he is of Bosnian (mother) and Serbian (father) origins. His family fled because of the war in 1992 when he was fourteen years old. In his books his biographical roots often show through. Depending on the readers, some of these roots might resonate. When reading the story *Die Fabrik* with university students we experienced that students with family-backgrounds from former Yugoslavia could trace the location and elaborate on the atmosphere.

The title of the anthology, *Trapper*, already alludes to a program of putting traps to the readers: *Die Fabrik* is certainly a weird and enigmatic story. Like a short story it starts 'in medias res' with a car accident in the snow. However, it does not tell a story from everyday-life. Rather, the scenery alludes to fairy tales and fantasy and may be experienced as dreamlike: a strange encounter of a first-person narrator with a group of shepherds characterized by small hands and bad teeth, wearing tracksuits by the Puma label and furrows from wolves shapes the story. They have come to the driver's (narrator's) rescue and seem to draw him into their strange lives, first by feeding him chocolate ("Mars") and tea, then by taking him to a factory that has been given up by the EU and is now growing plants. It also serves as a strange part-time-residence of the shepherds who play cards there and do gardening. While it is winter outside, there is heat in the factory. The factory also seems organic: it has "cleared its throat" (l. 19) and now it "hesitates" (l. 28). Located in the Romanija, mountains in Bosnia Herzegovina, the scenery is highly evocative. Time seems frozen though history is hinted at: the winterly landscape is rural and pre-modern on the one hand (shepherds, also from Illyria) and shows traces of connecting to the modern Western world on the other (a factory planned and given up by the EU). Political history comes in via the stories the shepherds seem to tell on the EU, a corrupt sheriff and the partisans in World War II. It is unclear whether or how the narrator gets out of his initial trouble after the breakdown of his car. Moreover, what the first-person narrator is telling becomes more and more doubtful, since he hints at discrepancies between his story-telling and what the shepherds say

(l. 122-123). The story cumulates in his statement that he has been given up on and that though he speaks their language he does not understand what they understand (l. 162-163). At the end (l. 164-169) the narrator sums up what he has “heard”. It is no longer certain he has even seen the factory, but the factory is said to have produced modest dreams, it has been listened to clearing its throat and its hesitation is now guarded by the shepherds who thus seem to hinder change. Particularly, the ending of the story suggests an allegorical reading: the story evokes a standstill that reaches from the natural environment to the socio-political context and may point to the question of who gave up whom. Also, the experience of not being able to relate and of estrangement is evoked: an estrangement that cannot be crossed via the same language but that can be articulated via the story itself.

The story can be considered demanding for less experienced readers since it does not offer a plot that proposes a conflict to be solved. It is also not driven by suspense and speed. Rather, the story has the potential to evoke a strange and fascinating world. It provides occasions for experiences of disturbance. Readers may develop questions about the socio-political background of the spot. Thus, it seems sensible to provide some background information such as a map and information on the region (see pictures) and the author. Also, the story offers opportunities to reflect on language and on understanding within and beyond linguistic communities. This can be particularly enriching when taking into account multicultural contexts. We consider this story as adequate for advanced readers in upper secondary reaching beyond level 4 of the Literary Framework for Teachers in Secondary Education, LiFT-2 (2012). It will be important to tolerate less transparent story-arrangements and multilayered meanings. Also, an interest in working out routes of interpretation and consider different readings is helpful. However, such proficiency of literary readers can also be developed via a fruitful encounter with the story.

The story can be rewarding in a Foreign Language classroom of German in the Netherlands, too: though linguistically not very easy, it is short enough for a thorough encounter. Prior to reading teachers should draw attention to the location, features of the landscape and the atmosphere. Some of the words in the final part of the story may not even be familiar to German readers, but may receive more attention in an FL-class (“Karstklotz”, “Kalkstollen”, “Hügelgräber aus Klaubsteinen”, p. 62).

We had the opportunity to work with the story in an upper secondary class, grade 12, specializing in German language education (a “Leistungskurs” of 13 female students).

Adapting the concept

The dialogic approach Janssen suggests addresses students as competent readers, whose perspectives on the text are equally important as the teachers' or experts' ones. Rather than structuring the lesson via a fixed learning outcome, the lesson plan builds on supporting students in their ability to communicate with the text and to enter into dialogue with other readers about the text. We found three features of the approach to be essential: first, the structuring of the process of text reception (dialogue with the text) and the group discussion (dialogue with others arranged around specific roles); second, the selection of key questions that are of interest to a majority and that should be answered together; and third, the addressing of the students as individuals whose authentic questions are of interest.

Our students were rather experienced readers: familiar with self-reliant work and the demand to elaborate on their perspectives and to argue based on textual evidence. Thus, we put less emphasis on the training of each of the above mentioned steps, but made room for a plenary discussion of one key question in the end. The aim of the plenary discussion was threefold: to provide room for students to present the results of their group work to the course, to bring together the different perspectives and to reach out to an enriched interpretation – with the teacher supporting the dialogue via structuring, rephrasing and linking the different answers.

Also, the teacher presents herself as an authentic reader who has questions regarding the text and is interested in the perceptions of other readers. Thus, the teacher not only encourages a literary dialogue among students, but also forms part of the community of readers. This professional stance is important throughout the lesson and most obvious when introducing the text and the theme.

Students experience and perspectives on the text: “a rollercoaster of emotions”

The approach, which was open in terms of content but methodically pre-structured, proved to be very fruitful in relation to the text and the learning group. In the groups, different aspects of the text and levels of understanding were addressed, which, when viewed together, resulted in a rich and comprehensive understanding of the text. The questions of the

students addressed the plot and some special features (What is the meaning of the accident at the beginning of the story? Why do the shepherds eat “Mars”? What role does the little shepherd play?), the narrative level (What role does the narrator play? What is his intention?), and symbolic aspects of meaning in the text (concerning the factory and dreams). In order to grant the plenary discussion was also “student-owned” (Resnick et al., 2018, p. 326) the question to be tackled in this final phase was chosen by vote. Students opted for the role of the narrator, which in the end demonstrated the concept of the key question. Different observations could be connected and central features of the text were further explored: The contrast between the archaic and the modern world with the resistance of the shepherds’ world against modernity; the simultaneity of the experience of foreignness and the link to one’s own traditions and stories as well as the invocation of myths and places that refer to a common history of the different ethnic groups and their socio-political context. The narrator’s self-reflective approach to the myth- and legend-making was brought back to conceiving of the narrative voice as unreliable.

These brief insights may demonstrate that students developed a highly differentiated perception of the text. When asked to evaluate the procedure, one student described her experience of coming to terms with the text as a “rollercoaster of emotions” – from the experience of complete strangeness to a feeling of being overwhelmed. Another student explicitly appreciated the three steps of individual work, group work and plenary discussion as a way to the text. Thus, it can be assumed that the arrangement was experienced as a rewarding way of dealing with *Die Fabrik* not only by the observers.

The lesson plan that presents our approach counted on a high level of student expertise. For less experienced readers, we suggest to extend the work on *Die Fabrik* to three lessons. This would allow to practice the procedure of setting questions with an example and allocate more time to individual text work. Group work and plenary discussion could be extended, for example by coming back to the presentation of group work in a third lesson and start the plenary discussion from there.

References

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Lesson Plan Dialogic Literature Teaching – Saša Stanišić: “Die Fabrik”

Structured text reception: Reading & listening Ask questions 15 min	Prompts I will now present the text to you read by the author himself. After each section I will pause. During this pause, write down one or more questions that come to your mind as you listen. Explanation “Key questions” Basically, you can write down any questions that come to mind about the narrative. The aim is to identify key questions about the text: e.g., questions about the progress of the story, questions about the actions of the characters, about the structure of the text, or about the context of the story. For example, maybe something puzzles you about the story, then jot this down. The teacher plays the text and pauses so that the students can write their questions. Prompt: Now choose two questions that remained open for you at the end of the text and that you would like to clarify. Prompt: Read the text again in its entirety and mark passages that catch your attention. Do you have another question after the second reading? If so, write it down on another card. Then write down a sentence that you find central to the narrative that has stayed stuck in your memory or that is puzzling.	Reading of the text by the author (audible file/compact disc) WS1, WS2	The students’ questions should be authentic questions. Therefore, the concept of “key questions” is not emphasised too much. The focus should not be that the students ask the right questions, but that they ask their own questions. Structuring the individual reception by playing and pausing (delayed reading) promotes accurate text perception. Students evaluate their own questions and assess their relevance for a problem-focussed approach to the text. Students perceive the text as a whole and take notes in the text.
Choose questions 5 min	Prompt: Write down both questions on the cards, one question on each card.	Blank cards	Students evaluate their own questions and assess their relevance for a problem-focussed approach to the text.
Free reception of the text 10 min	Prompt: Read the text again in its entirety and mark passages that catch your attention. Do you have another question after the second reading? If so, write it down on another card. Then write down a sentence that you find central to the narrative that has stayed stuck in your memory or that is puzzling.	WS2 Index cards	Students perceive the text as a whole and take notes in the text.
Discussion of questions in small groups 8 min	Impulse: Get together in groups. Selecting questions in the group 1. Lay out your cards with the questions on the table. 2. Read each other’s questions about the text. 3. Arrange the questions according to the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic of the question - Does the question highlight a problem that the text raises? Is the question a key question? 	Whiteboard: Tasks for group work	By noticing each other’s questions, students enter into a dialogue with others about the text: different perspectives on the text are noted. Through the subsequent selection of a key question, on the one hand the questions are assessed according to their relevance, and on the other hand a common interest in the text is formed. The role cards structure the conversation and ensure that all group members are involved in the exchange about the text. The individual written formulation of an answer gives them the space to articulate their own position and to look for possible reasons in the text. The subsequent exchange on the text can promote the development of interpretative approaches and enable a first approach to the text.
17 min	2. Then choose one or two questions that you think are important and that you will discuss together in the group. Discussion of questions in the group 1. Now distribute the role cards in the group. 2. Write down one answer to each question (on your own) and think about how this answer can be justified in the text. 3. Discuss the question together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The discussants present their answers. - The moderator checks whether the answers are comprehensible, asks follow-up questions and asks for explanations. 	Role cards	

Phase/ Duration	Teacher-student-interaction		Media / Panel	Methodical and didactic explanation
Lead-in 10 min	<p>Explanation of the methodological approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Text as problem - Student questions take centre-stage - 3 phases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Dialogue with the text o Dialogue with other readers o Plenary discussion <p>Brief information on the author, on the text and justification for the choice of the text</p> <p>Saša Stanišić</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Born in 1978 in Bosnia in Višegrad, then still Yugoslavia, a state with many different regions and ethnic groups and major conflicts - During the Bosnian war, the family fled to Germany in 1992 (he was about 14 at the time) - Has even anonymously reattempted the <i>Abitur</i> himself once when already a well-known author (and well-equipped with an <i>Abitur</i>). The topic was his own novel <i>Vor dem Fest</i> (<i>Before the Feast</i>). While he didn't do so badly, he didn't get a perfect score. - Deals with current socio-political issues and developments in a humorous and indirect way— modern classic storytelling 		<p><u>Whiteboard</u></p> <p>Overview of task phases</p>	<p>Framing the lessons separately and explaining the methodological approach can help to establish a non-hierarchical communication space and support the role change to be carried out by the teacher and the students. It is important to establish a respectful atmosphere and to signal interest in the students' questions.</p> <p>The overview of the teaching phases provides an orientation and makes the teaching process transparent.</p>
Input teacher	<p>The text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short story from the story collection <i>Der Fallenteller</i> (<i>The Trapper</i>) (2016) - Set in the Romanija, a mountainous region in the east of Bosnia and Herzegovina, marked by the many conflicts in the region - This mountainous region already played a decisive role in the Second World War, when Tito's partisan column withdrew from the siege in a legendary march through the neighbouring mountains (Mount Igman). - Before the Bosnian War, mixed settlement (Bosnians, Serbs, Croats), majority Bosnian; since the end of the war majority Serbian settlement - The author's area of origin <p>Why this text?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - e.g., I like how the short story interweaves a current political conflict and a personal approach to the subject - e.g., I also like the humorous way in which the story is told and the many questions that the text raises: after reading it, I had many questions concerning the text itself, but also in relation to the region and its history <p>Hand out the materials (Worksheet 1, Worksheet 2, 3 blank cards)</p>		<p>Photo Saša Stanišić</p> <p>Book cover</p> <p>Map Romanija and Bosnia & Herzegovina</p> <p>WS1, WS2</p> <p>3 blank cards</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The group's answers to the question are recorded by the spokeswoman of the group. - Compare the questions and answers with the sentences you have written down. Can a connection be made? 		
Collect & select questions in plenary 5 min	<p>Prompt: First, I would now be interested in what questions you had about the text: Which questions did you mark in the group as important questions about the text?</p> <p>Teacher notes questions and arranges the questions according to thematic aspects.</p> <p>Vote:</p> <p>Which of these questions do you want to discuss together? Raise your hand on one question at a time that interests you.</p>	Whiteboard	Focusing on one question has proven to be a motivating factor in text work.
Plenary discussion on the text 20 min	<p>Prompt to the spokeswoman of the respective group:</p> <p>In the group you have already talked about the question, were you able to clarify the questions? Did anything remain open? This question first goes to the spokeswoman of the group.</p> <p>Open up the discussion:</p> <p>What do the others think?</p>		At this point, the perspectives and answers can be structured and moderated by the teacher. Essential aspects of the text can be highlighted and related to each other. A jointly negotiated understanding of the text can be highlighted by the teacher.
Conclusion	Thank you very much for your cooperation! At the end, I would be interested to know how you liked the text.		

Lesson materials

1. Listen to the story “Die Fabrik”. After each section, write down a question you have regarding what you have heard so far.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

2. Choose two questions that remained open at the end of the story and that you would like to clarify. Write these two questions on the index cards.
3. Read the story again by yourself (WS2). Do you have another question about the text? If so, write it down on another index card.
4. On the second worksheet, underline a sentence that you find important for the story, that you have noticed or that you find puzzling. Write down the line number here:

Role cards

Moderator

You are the host of the discussion group and organise the discussion room: you allocate the right to speak, take care of time management, check the contributions of the discussants for comprehensibility and persuasiveness and ask questions if necessary. By asking questions about the content of the discussion, you move the discussion forward; your organisation of the discussion ensures that the discussion is objective, fair and goal-oriented.

Guiding questions for you:

- Do I agree with the answer?
- Has the statement been well substantiated?
- Prompts you can give:
- Ask targeted questions
- Ask the other participants for their opinion
- Ask for clarification
- Summarise statements
- Draw a conclusion

Discussant 2

You are here because you are known for your strength of opinion and literary expertise. You take a stand by presenting your observations of the text, feelings while reading and ideas. You weigh up different positions and try to convince others of your perception of the text.

Guiding questions for you:

- What do I find interesting concerning the text?
- What do I find important, what not?
- Which passages in the text do I find relevant to the question?
- How did I understand the text?

Spokeswoman of the group

Your task is to present your team in a positive light to the public. You communicate the group's assessments and positions to the outside world and are available for follow-up questions. While your team is discussing, you keep an overview and note down the most important discussion points.

Guiding questions for you:

- What was discussed?
- Which answers were convincing?
- How were the answers justified?

Discussant 3

You are here because you are known for your strength of opinion and literary expertise. You take a stand by presenting your observations of the text, feelings while reading and ideas. You weigh up different positions and try to convince others of your perception of the text.

Guiding questions for you:

- What do I find interesting concerning the text?
- What do I find important, what not?
- Which passages in the text do I find relevant to the question?
- How did I understand the text?

Discussant 1

You are here because you are known for your strength of opinion and literary expertise. You take a stand by presenting your observations of the text, feelings while reading and ideas. You weigh up different positions and try to convince others of your perception of the text.

Guiding questions for you:

- What do I find interesting concerning the text?
- What do I find important, what not?
- Which passages in the text do I find relevant to the question?
- How did I understand the text?

Die Fabrik

Mein Wagen dreht im Schneetreiben auf der Romanija* eine Pirouette in den Graben, schon klopfen kleine Hände gegen die Scheiben, Männer in Wolfsfellen und Pumatrainingsanzügen, sie zerren mich heraus, dich kennen wir nicht, sagen sie und geleiten mich zu einem Gehöft unweit der Straße, jaja, der Wagen, sagen sie, morgen, mal sehen, sie kochen Wasser für den Tee auf offener Flamme, füttern mich mit *Mars*Riegeln, und der Tee riecht nach Schaf.

Wir sind die Hirten, sagen sie, wir sind es.

Ich sage Dank, mir ist warm, nichts tut weh.

Der Hirten Augen groß, sie wollen nichts wissen.

Vielleicht ist er hier wegen der Fabrik, sagen sie.

Auf Durchreise bloß.

Wegen der Fabrik, sagen die Hirten, hinter den Tannen, dort. Sie zeigen zum Fenster, das Fenster ist beschlagen, und der kleinste Hirte steigt auf Zehenspitzen und reibt mit dem Ärmel über das Glas, und alles, was zu sehen wäre, verweht der Schneesturm.

Die Fabrik, sagen sie, hat sich geräuspert vor Zeiten.

Was heißt das, frage ich, wie räuspern sich Gebäude, ist das ein Witz?

Wir haben es gehört, sagen die Hirten, wir waren da. Im Windschatten der Mauern haben wir Karten gespielt. Sie machen dir gern vor, wie das Räuspern geklungen hat. Schroff und stahl, sagen sie, schroff und stahl, sie schnarren durch den Trichter ihrer Hände, und nichts kannst du dir dabei vorstellen. Der Hirten Lebenslinien voll Erde und Schmutz.

Seitdem zögert die Fabrik, sagen die Hirten. Seitdem wartet die Hochebene, warten der Nebel und der Wind, warten der Schnee und wir, dass noch was kommt. Sie sagen, Wir bringen dich zu ihr.

Zu wem?, frage ich.

Zu unserer Fabrik.

Lieber nicht, sage ich.

Die Hirten tunkn *Mars* in den Tee. Beraten hinter vorgehaltener Hand. Der kleinste Hirte setzt sich auf meinen Schoß. Er singt leise und zupft an meinem Kragen. Ein Kinderlied ist es, eines von den alten, den brutalen, mit Schuld und Strafe, und als ich in den Refrain einstimme bricht er ab und zeigt mir seine Eckzähne.

Die Hirten haben die Mützen aufgesetzt, schon stapfen wir durch den Schnee, die Hunde pflügen voraus, die Schafe trotten hinterher, das wärmende Gebimmel ihrer Glocken.

Wind, Wind, Wind, ich stemme mich schräg gegen seine Stirn aus Schnee, die Witterung scheint nur mir etwas auszumachen, die Hirten legen bloß die

Hände an die Augen. Über das karge Hochland ginge immer Wind, lügen sie, darin seien die Atemzüge aller Serben und Bosniaken und Kroaten, die je auf der Romanija geseufzt, geliebt, getrauert hätten, verwoben in alle Ewigkeit.

Die sagen das nicht ganz so, die Hirten.

Im Wald ist es leichter, die Bäume kämmen den Wind gegen den Strich, Tannen, schwarz und unverwundbar wie das Kinderlied. Ich frage die Hirten, ob es hier Minen gibt, und einer wirft mir einen Schneeball gegen die Brust, dass ich mein Herz spüre.

Der Hirten Bärte aus Tannennadeln.

Auf der Romanija hat sich ein Gebäude geräuspert und zögert seitdem, groß und rechteckig ist es, und steht am WaldRand, nackte Betonmauern hinter Drahtzaun, lose Bretter, zwei, drei aufgeplatzte Säcke mit Splitt, eine verrostete Säge, ein löchriger Eimer. Im Schutt schweigt ein Radio.

Der kleinste Hirte rennt über Schnee, als läge keiner, jauchzt, vielleicht vor Freude, vielleicht vor Angst, verschwindet im Gemäuer.

Der Hirten Augenbrauen aus Eiskristallen.

Einer kümmert sich um die Hunde, befreit ihre Pfoten mit Melkfett vom Eis.

Die Hirten erzählen, Wasser sollte hier abgefüllt und verladen werden. Der Sheriff habe in der Nähe zwei Quellen gefunden, habe daraufhin EU-Gelder beantragt und bekommen, für die Grundstücke, für die Brunnen, für die Abfüllanlage, und, und, und. Sheriff, weil er immer den Hut und die Jeans trug, Ami war der, sagen sie, Kroat, sagen sie.

Mit Lady, sagt einer, Busen. Der Hirten Grinsen aus Karies. Kurz nach dem Krieg war das. Bauauftrag ging an eine Firma aus der Region, der Sheriff stellte persönlich Handwerker aus den umliegenden Dörfern ein. Arbeitsplätze, Kapital, Wiederbelebung der Wirtschaft, zählen die Hirten im Chor auf, und während sie zählen und erzählen, schmilzt um uns der Schnee. Satzzeichen schneit es ins unwahrscheinliche Grün.

Und eines Morgens erscheint der Bauleiter nicht auf der Baustelle. Und die Handwerker kriegen keinen Lohn mehr.

Und die Landwirte nicht die versprochene Miete für die Grundstücksnutzung. Die Baustoffhändler, die erst eine klägliche erste Rate gesehen hatten, keine weiteren Zahlungen.

Anrufe nahm der Sheriff nicht mehr entgegen, bald war der Anschluss tot.

Die Hirten spucken, der Hirten Spucke schokoladenbraun.

Einige Wochen nach seinem Verschwinden kam die EU persönlich vorbei, um sich ein Bild zu machen. Die Hirten hatten die Fabrik für ihre Kartenspiele hergerichtet, die Schafe labten sich am Grünzeug, das hier so reichlich gedeiht, als hätte den Boden ein gütiger Gott gedüngt, wo

ihr eigener Gott ihr Land mit Geröll versetzt hat. Sie empfangen die EU gebührend ihre Schafe blockierten die Zufahrtsstraße über Stunden. Die EU lehnte Mars dankend ab und fuhr erschüttert zurück in die EU.

Vier von sechs Raten hatte der Sheriff erhalten, bevor die Auszahlung gestoppt wurde. Die Hirten zeigen die Höhe der Summe an, indem sie mit Zeigefinger und Daumen über das Kinn streicheln.

Der kleinste Hirte schält ein Mars, sein Gesicht zerfurcht wie die Rinde einer Tanne. Er winkt mich zu sich und führt mich durch kein Tor in die Fabrik. Wir betreten sirrendes Summen warmer Luft, Fliegen schwirren umher, die Hirten legen die Felle ab.

Wo ein Fußboden sein müsste, Erde. Kletterpflanzen, wo Rohre sich schlängeln sollten; eine Fabrik steht unfertig auf der Romanija und zögert. Für die Hirten und ihre Tiere ist sie ein Versteck vor dem Sturm, ein Plastiktisch, auf dem sie Romme spielen, etwas Substanz, abgetragen für dieses und jenes Hirtenbauwerk.

Der Hirten Augen: Schau dich, Fremder, um.

Ins Gemäuer haben Zugvögel ihre Nester gestrickt. Eine Eidechse umzirbelt eine Eidechse. In der Mitte der Fabrik stapeln zwei Hirten Steine zu Türmen und kichern dabei wie Verliebte. Oder weinen sie? Ich frage nach, und sie sagen, die ersten Siedler, die von der Hochebene auf die Welt darunter blickten, waren Illyrer, Hirten wie wir, zäh und treu.

Die sagen das nicht ganz so, die Hirten. Sie wiegen die Köpfe auf dünnen Hälsen.

Der kleinste Hirte klettert in meinen Nacken. Wir kennen, flüstert er, alle Quellen. Ein kräftiges Wasser musst du sein, dass du dich durch unseren Stein nach oben prügeln kannst, und ein schlaues dazu, dass wir dich nicht schon längst gefunden haben.

Er riecht so stark nach Schokolade, dass ich ihn heruntersetzen muss. Er nimmt meine Hand, führt mich zu den Rommespielern. Die fächern sich in Unterhemden mit den Spielkarten gegenseitig Luft zu.

Vielleicht haben die Hirten den Schnee geräumt. Aber woher die Hitze? Vielleicht fabriziert die Fabrik Jahreszeiten.

Sachte bimmeln Schafsglöckchen im Wald.

Einer wässert in der Ecke Kartoffeln. Heute vor 73 Jahren, ruft er, ist mein Großvater mit der Ersten Proletarischen Brigade hier oben von den Deutschen umzingelt gewesen. Also ist die Brigade losmarschiert durch Schnee und Eis, über die Hochebene und weiter über den grausamen Igman bei Minus 30 Grad. Eine singende Partisanenkolonne, sagt der Hirte, und ein anderer fragt, woher er wisse, dass gesungen wurde.

Der Hirten Mobiltelefone mit selbstgebastelten Alu-Antennen und vollem Empfang, ich habe keinen.

Und der kleinste Hirte klettert singend auf eine Leiter, er singt lauter als zuvor, die Stimme einer alten Frau, mild und rau:

*In einer kalten Winternacht hoch oben auf der Höh
das Bächlein ist gefroren, es liegt verdeckt im Schnee
Ein Hase sucht das Bächlein, er sucht es überall
Ist es denn verloren? Das wäre ja fatal.
Es weint der gute Hase um sein Bächlein sehr
er weint aus ganzem Herzen, zweifelt immer mehr:
Gab's das Bächlein je? Er fühlt sich so betrogen
Ist es mit den Vögeln gen Süden weggeflogen?*

Der Hirten schnelle Hunde schlitzen einander die Kehlen auf im Spiel, ich muss ihnen ausweichen, auch den Hirten bin ich im Weg, es ist, als brauchten sie mich nicht mehr.

Der Hirten Zähne sommergelb.

Der kleinste Hirte sitzt auf der obersten Sprosse und stutzt Kletterrosen. Man hat mich aufgegeben. Ich spreche die Sprache der Hirten, aber ich verstehe nicht, was sie verstehen.

Ich habe gehört, auf dem Karstklotz namens Romanija, zwischen öden Kalkschollen und Hügelgräbern aus Klaubsteinen, Gräbern für illyrische Hirten und jugoslawische Partisanen, stehe eine Fabrik. Sie hat ein paar bescheidene Träume hergestellt. Die Hirten haben ihrem Räuspern gelauscht und hüten ihr Zögern.



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