



Marcel Beyer
Demon Removal Service
Poems

(Original German title: Dämonenräumdienst. Gedichte)

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Sample translation by Shane Anderson
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There is a performance at the trashy theatre. Hildegard Knef gets in a car. Rudolph Moshammer carries his Yorkshire Terrier around Munich. S. T. Coleridge makes a joke about Cologne. Works of art disappear. Something is rattling the window. Morning, noon, night. The Blackbird Pope. The people are starting to talk things. Music plays at the waste collection point. Elvis sweeps the driveway once more. I only read horse crime novels now and look for language in the grey area. The sleep laboratory at Potsdamer Platz. Hawthorn, marjoram, gorse...

Outrageous things happen in Marcel Beyer's long-awaited new poems. In each of the poems comprised of precisely forty lines of verse, another character takes any liberty the strict limitations grant it, tells stories, paraphrases translations, creates sequences – in short: there is commotion, sometimes mayhem, so much so that ultimately, it has to be said: It's getting serious! It's time to call the Demon Removal Service.

»It's [...] the free flow of forms that makes this so appealing.«
Andreas Platthaus, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

»... a masterpiece of authorial poetics, humour and analysis of society.«
Helmut Böttiger, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

»... a density that only a very few are in the
overcrowded realms of contemporary poetry able to create.«
Gregor Dotzauer, *Der Tagesspiegel*

»[...] inscrutable, crafty and entertaining. To stick with the demons: eerily good.«
Martin Oehlen, *Frankfurter Rundschau*

»Marcel Beyer creates [...] expressions that are as light as feathers«
Carsten Otte, *taz. die tageszeitung*

»Beyer succeeds in confronting the grimacing language demons. [...] Reading these poems sparks great joy, because Beyer's mockery is accomplished and he responds to terror with ridicule.«
Michael Opitz, *Deutschlandfunk*

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

In my father's house are many mansions. I don't want to see any from the inside. On the ground floor, marzipan goes up to your ankles.

You sense that this was a home for bones for the longest time. You'll keep going with feet that have broken off. The carpet on the stairs feels—

it's difficult to say:
like a soaped-up Labrador,
a hip fracture with guinea pigs
after work. Something

grabs your crotch on the second floor.
Nothing visible—a
drop in temperature, ever so slight.
At the end of the hall, Sylvia Plath

makes a move on a young, pale
Nazi every day at lunch. There's only
bunk beds and light sand on the third. Even
more bunk beds. Seashells.

Flint. The boys' choir sings a
canon, day and night. Behind
the wall. Behind the wall. Behind
the wall. Halfway up the stairs there's a

shed, a dental laboratory. Stored there
are the teeth of chain smokers, deceptively
real. In the fourth, there's the vacated
strip mall, the biggest in

the town. Still in use is the
car wash for my father's
car, the small Benz that
Yoko Ono died in. The two of them

had just fallen in love.
In the attic, a snap trap with
prizes every child sticks
out their right hand for—seashells,

bones, teeth, Benz, Labradors,
bunk beds, guinea pigs
out of marzipan. In my
father's house are many mansions.

MODEL

I've sat for Damien Hirst
a good deal, I was a shark
long before bony fish existed,
I was a very ordinary one,

a middle-aged man masked
with mint. I was the lamb
complete with its broad white
frame, I came as a cow head

and left as an ancestor. Like I've
already said, I've sat for
Lucian Freud a good deal
with my English, with my

glassy, with my rain-wet
skin, a landscape of heather.
Hour after hour I have
feasted on the cold light as well

as on the air in the studio, I've
had pigment in my navel,
solvent flows through my
veins, and I've seen

everything that he has also
seen. I know every one of my
colors, every scratch, no one
can blackmail me with naked

photos. Disguised as
a burglar, I was a part
of your world too, until one night
the painter awoke from his sleep

with a start, a whiff of mint
blew in from the window,
a whiff of mint drops, with
which to conceal fear,

so that someone sleeping can smell
it—until he stuck out
his hand and took the spade
that's always standing next to his bed

just in case he needs it. It's me.
The skin that's floating in the pale
solution. I
am the heather. I am the shark.

THE BLACKBIRD POPE

I saw the blackbird pope, you couldn't
really miss him, I
spoke a hurried prayer, but it was
too late for me. I

saw the blackbird pope at the window,
he seemed to be bowing
very quietly to the day. The
deep breaths, the blackbird legs,

which no human is allowed to feel,
hear or see, violently pulled me in.
The blackbird: a morning robe. The
blackbird's voice: a nakedness.

In my eyes sleep. I saw the
blackbird pope, he appeared to be
a tired, an overbearing, spent
morning catcher, he spoke with

someone I didn't know, with
his neighbor, his
enemy, with his servant, his
master, with his cold larder cook

or then finally with me, his
course-skinned governess.
I saw the blackbird pope, I was lying
in bed like I was stuffed and behind

glass, what was I supposed to
do, quite frankly I didn't have
the countenance. And the sun stood
askew, and from the windowsill

he was peering at leftovers, and there
was a light in his back like
in the industry of raw footage.
His plumage lay flat on his body

that was as big as a fist. He didn't
move. The moon went down
in the west like in some dreary
landscape photography. I looked,

he slept. He got carried away.
I saw the blackbird pope.
The morning kept getting longer. Now
it practically lasts a full day.

LETTERS

Tell me what letters are.
The trees gape incessantly
through the window. An ash. An
oak. A yew. Don't write

anything down. Stay out of everything.
Don't send any dispatches. Call
the mortician twice a week.
At night, it gets lighter. You

can beat people to death just as easily
with wood as with plastic. Tell me
what letters are. You need
a place to stay. Wait

for the detective. Society is a sign
of weakness. Wait
for the being that rummages through your
drawer. Get worried.

Why do you need a spade. You
have two healthy hands
for digging. Even fruit you do
not need. You're not a chanteuse.

Wait and see. Wait until tomorrow. Let
the trees out there gape
at you. They'll see.
Don't write. Just tell me

what letters are. It might be that a
tree beats another one
to death. Clear the field. Leave the
garbage where it is. Leave the coastal wind. Leave

your brittle bones. Persevere. The
son is the father, the father
a ghost. Don't taste of the ash,
the oak, the yew, but tell me

what letters are. Break free from
your templates. Speak faster.
No one here needs to understand
what you're saying. Who here would

get you a gun. Don't ask whether you
are welcome. What's singing
within you is nobody's business.
The letters are gaping. Stay.

ONE DAY

One day, I'm going to get up
really early, earlier than ever before
and earlier than all of you, and for me
it will be like I were a visitor in

some distant place, for I feel no
pain, and I have work to do,
and I will walk back and forth for
a short while, as if I needed to

decide between sleeping and
waking. For I hear
the young sparrows calling me,
and I will split walnut kernels

into pieces, and I will feed the
titmice earlier than ever before. I'm
sitting here on the third floor at
the kitchen table, knowing that soon

I will be travelling to the other end
of the courtyard. In my head I can
cook and bake and read and
write. I won't wait for anyone

because you're all asleep, because
everyone's asleep, and I will
scratch here at the kitchen table, and
I will split the table with a light hand

underneath the nearby calls of the
sparrows, underneath the far off
calls of the titmice, and I will
face this life

at the other end of the courtyard. One day,
I'm going to get up really early,
earlier than ever before, I will look
at the stove as if I needed to

decide between warmth and
cold, I will rise in the
morning sunlight, I
will praise you, and I will

envy you, I will eat you up
like tiny cut-up nuts,
and I will mourn for you at
the other end of the courtyard.

HÖLDERLIN DAYS

A light mist up above,
beautiful scattered light too.
I'm reading a book of the
nights. A book of the day.

My left hand's already heading
to hell again. It
doesn't like my monologues,
on the edge of the chair,

always tilting, incessantly
snipping, clipping
everything, hoarse and
mute. My right hand

leaves me alone. My
right hand goes on
a journey, into this stony
Greece that's everywhere

around us, where we bite
into the laurel.
With its mean spirited, with
its revolting,

its awesome scent.
The shallots are blooming
this year for themselves alone. For
them, there's nothing to it.

You too need to pay attention to it.
Say it. And don't turn
around. These are the
Hölderlin days. Your nerves

are shot. Everyone marches
to their own drum. You want to know
where the vineyard slope
where the eternal rainy slope

is. But I'm wondering
what should we do
right now with flamingo piss
in a German poem.

A light mist up above,
beautiful scattered light too.
I'm reading in the book of the
networks, in the book of the day.

MY VOICE OF INK

You have to wash your hands
with ink, you have to gurgle
with ink. The lips
are black, are purple,

are blue. The teeth behind
the writing. I dip
my tongue deep into the inkwell,
I dip my hands

into my mouth. I throw the
snippets down my own
throat. There's still space
behind the writing, behind

the writing there's still some
space. In the pouch
of my cheek, ink is
collecting, collecting is

the quivering, the foaming
black writing is
collecting. I need to open
this space, otherwise the

paper scraps will stick
to my cheeks again
like old swill, as if chewed
up and thrown on top and

chewed up again. Once again,
I've just barely
gurgled past the old
inkwell, you know

it, at the ink swill. Writing
and iron, writing and
cuckoo flower foam. My gums
are turning blue

from all the writing.
And you, stop it,
stop it, writing, snippets,
throat, rust and

tooth and leaves. Let the tongue
be a tongue. My
voice of ink aims below,
it aims with precision.