

My Language and I

My language is one that tends towards foreign words. I choose them, I retrieve them from far away. But it is a small language. It doesn't reach far. All around, all around me, always all around and so forth. We advance against our will. To hell with us, I sometimes say to it. It turns, it doesn't answer, it lets us happen. Sometimes Customs officers appear. Your passports? We pass, they let us pass. My language didn't say anything, but I did, I nodded obligingly, I did them this favour. One person, and something around him, unsuspicious. But what was around him? A coiled spring. No, smoke. There is something around everyone, don't you know this? These poor boys, I honestly feel sorry for them. Honestly. Now you're babbling. What do they have or not have that makes you feel sorry? They're young, that's all—what's there to feel sorry about? They'll grow, that's inevitable. They will get powerful and they will become a force. While we remain stuck in the ink, like a farce, slaving away, pretending to be cheerful—while we're losing our cheerfulness. Honestly. Who is that, who says that? Me. This cracks me up. This always reminds me of the one who said Me!, when he arrived too late at his own house and wanted to be let inside. I am reminded of him, what was his profession? Custodian, I believe. Yes, custodian. Are you hungry? Because I definitely am. But I have this habit of always omitting one hunger. First one, then two, then three. But then there will be a meal, I swear, where nothing is omitted, where everything will be on the table, spread out before me. Then they all cavort around, all around me, and then I have it. Sleepy? Well sleep, go ahead and sleep. I'll keep watch for you.



This is where I sit with my language, only 3 metres away from the people who talk like that. But we made it through, we have passed, we can take a rest when we are out of breath. There are plenty of empty spots, put a blanket down, the sun shines everywhere. My language and I, we don't talk to each other, we have nothing to say to each other. I know what I have to know—it likes cold food better than warm food, not even the coffee should be hot. This can really keep you busy. It's a lot of work, laying out the plates, cutting the food, measuring the cold, letting the warmth dissipate. While my language stares out at the sea. It's easy for



my language to stare, because I do everything. I don't rush like I used to, I now calmly smooth the blanket, I calmly weight it with stones when it gets windy, but it's true: I work and it stares. It doesn't even express wishes. This wouldn't be the utmost one could ask of it, but it would be something. A good deed, a service to me, a way to help me progress. But my language doesn't care, that much I understand. It only stares or listens to the surf, my language. I make sure that we are always near the sea. I, not it. I would like to know what would happen to my language if one day I walked inland, if I simply took a turn like other people do, picking a stone table for us between the hollows, the shaved pines. What would it do then—would it come with me? The coastal wind is bad for my ears, this much I know. Sometimes I begin to sing, or to bang the silverware, then everything becomes quieter. Even though our kind of food doesn't require utensils, I unpack the silverware, the plates and glasses, too. I hold up a knife and then I let it fall, carefully, on the plate, always from the same height. For five weeks now everything has been getting quieter. Recently I tried to let the knife fall on the plate from a slightly higher distance. It banged loudly, I heard it clearly, but the plate broke. My language remained calm, its gaze pinned on the sea, always, I believe, on the same spot. It seems to be the opposite of certain paintings where the gaze follows you everywhere—its gaze follows no one. Sea monsters and fishing boats would be equally lost on it. And none come anyway. At some point I begin to set out our cold meal, I pour the cold coffee, but in vain. Carefully I've set everything on our blanket, I even placed a coastal flower in the middle or right next to its plate. But my language doesn't turn around. I then put the plate in front of my language—right between it and the sea foam. My joy is gone, the hearing test has dampened my spirits, and the sea annoys me. My language used to have a lavender shawl, but it's gone. I fear we might ruin our health in this place. If my language loses its voice, then it has one more reason to stop talking to me. While I continue to besiege it with questions and offers—whispering, coughing. The lavender shawl looked good on my language, it covered its overly long neck and gave its unspoken appearance both gentleness and resoluteness. Now all of that's gone and my language doesn't even turn its collar up. The way it looks now, it sometimes reminds me of a mature swan but very dull in colour, as if its maturation were still ahead of it. But it shouldn't flatter itself. From afar I hear the voices of the Customs officers. They talk and talk, or at least one of them is always talking. It wasn't my idea to settle down so close to

the Customs booth, but my language refused to go further. The fourth country has ended, I shouted in its ear, the fifth is right over there. It followed me reluctantly—and no further than right here. The truth is, we might as well be Customs officers. Among them, only one does the talking, too—about food and youth while the other sleeps or stares at us through the windows, like right now. Earlier, when I searched for our passports, he was sleeping. I don't let my language carry our passports any more since it lost its shawl, I have them now.



They are bored over there. Or maybe they find us suspicious. They find my language suspicious, not me. I am normal, I eat and drink, and when I let the knife fall on the plate it doesn't look to them—at such a distance—like a hearing test, it looks like clumsiness, and that's quite all right with me. But if we stay longer, it will stop looking like clumsiness and will start to look like intent. If only my language talked to me, then I wouldn't need this kind of hearing test, but it does very little to keep us free of suspicion. Not even for my sake. It should really care more about me but I suspect it of only caring about itself. Or not caring about itself at all. Or both—how convenient. My language didn't touch what I put out, it lets sea foam salt its food. Each to his own, I think. I can also take others for my own. Or mistake them. I can become a Customs chef, a Customs entertainer, Customs officer. The two over there will not ignore what I put in front of them. We will talk about Customs, about Customs items, silver and lead and similar things. About card games—I also know card games. And about my language, which I suspect will never move away from here. From its salty meal, its grey gaze. I will do what I can for it. The talking alone will help, the conversations about it, the observations which will soon repeat themselves. In time, no one will want anything from my language. And I will do my part. I will weave in a sentence here and there to make it free of suspicion.

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Meine Sprache und Ich

Meine Sprache ist eine, die zu Fremdwörtern neigt. Ich suche sie mir aus, ich hole sie von weit her. Es ist aber eine kleine Sprache. Sie reicht nicht weit. Rund um, rund um mich herum, immer rund um und so fort. Wir kommen gegen unseren Willen weiter. Zur Hölle mit uns, sage ich ihr manchmal. Sie dreht sich, sie antwortet nicht, sie läßt uns geschehen. Manchmal tauchen Zöllner auf. Ihre Ausweise? Wir passieren, sie lassen uns passieren. Meine Sprache hat nichts gesagt, aber dafür ich, ich habe diensteifrig genickt, ich habe ihnen die Freude getan. Einer und etwas um ihn herum, unverdächtig. Aber was das war? Eine Spiralfeder. Nein, Dampf. Um jeden ist etwas herum, weißt du das nicht? Die armen Jungen, sie tun mir ehrlich leid. Ja, ehrlich. Jetzt faselst du. Was tut dir an denen leid? Was tut dir denn leid? Jung und sonst nichts, was soll einem da leid tun? Das wächst sich aus, das ist unausbleiblich. Erstarkt und wird mächtig groß. Während wir in der Tinte bleiben, uns abrackern, immer mehr abrackern und dabei die Vergnügten spielen. Und dabei das Vergnügen verlieren. Ehrlich. Wer ist das, der das sagt? Ich. Da muß ich lachen. Das erinnert mich immer an den, der ich sagte, als er zu spät ins Haus wollte. Ich bin draußen, ich, ich. An den erinnert mich das, was war er nur von Beruf? Hausmeister, glaube ich, ja, Hausmeister. Hast du Hunger? Ich schon. Aber ich habe so eine Art, immer einen Hunger auszulassen. Erst einen, dann zwei, dann drei. Aber dann kommt eine Mahlzeit, das sage ich dir. Da bleibt nichts weg, da kommt alles auf den Tisch, alles vor mich hin. Da tummeln sie sich, rund um mich herum, da habe ichs dann. Schläfrig? Dann schlaf eben, schlaf nur. Ich schaue für dich.



Da sitze ich dann mit meiner Sprache, nur drei Meter von denen entfernt, die so reden. Aber wir sind durch, wir haben passiert, wir können uns niederlassen, wenn wir atemlos sind. Öde Flecken genug, eine Decke darauf, die Sonne scheint überall. Meine Sprache und ich, wir reden nicht miteinander, wir haben uns nichts zu sagen. Was ich wissen muß, weiß ich, kalte Küche ist ihr lieber als warme, nicht einmal der Kaffee soll heiß sein. Das beschäftigt einen schon. Das hat man zu tun, zu decken, aufzuschneiden, die Kälte zu messen, die Wärme vergehen zu