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The Sound Valley

By Peter Waterhouse

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Translators' Preface

I first heard the words 'Klangtal' and 'The Sound Valley' in 2012, at the University of Luxembourg, during a symposium on multilingualism and philology. I heard them for the first time when Dr. Giulia Radaelli (University of Bielefeld) presented a talk on Peter Waterhouse, a British German poet, translator, and professor at the University of Vienna who claims that "translation only becomes interesting when it gets out of control."¹

On the long flight home to Arizona, after hearing Giulia share her work on Waterhouse's 2003 prose poem, I gradually came to discover how much I wanted to work—slowly, attentively—with this text, in whatever capacity and for however long it would allow. "The Sound Valley" was a text I did not quite understand yet and could not locate philologically, but one that offered its readers a necessarily wild ride into the affective life of "the multilingual subject."² As a narrative, "The Sound Valley" seemed to swerve instinctively around the pedantic pitfalls of self-fashioned multilingual writing, the temptations of Neo-Orientalism, the lugubrious predicaments of metropolitan elites, and the alluring auras of Romantic universalism in a way that I found unprecedented. I found the gentle, unrelenting way Waterhouse rebuffs the linguistic monism of both the nineteenth- and the twentieth-century fin-de-siècle "crises of language" important and instructive—for twenty-first-century translators, language learners, literary historians, and transnational critics alike. I found the text's politics—and its politics of translation—fresh, untopical, and agnostic, while its gestures towards "translatability" seemed at turns uncalculating and deceptive, easy and dodgy.

Consider, for instance, what this line might be saying about translating: "If you want to be fast, the dream will activate slow-motion mode and watch you move in slow motion. Not to make it more difficult for you, but to make fast and slow equal."³ Suppose 'fast' and 'slow' here mean 'domesticating' and 'foreignizing', in Lawrence Venuti's critical lexicon of translation practice. To whose linguistic domicile, to whose orate itinerancy would these terms then be keyed, given that we are speaking of a twenty-first-century German-language prose poem about a seventeenth-century English letter, written in nineteenth-century Austrian and published in a turn-of-the-century Berlin journal, which is being read aloud in mid-twentieth-century

¹ <http://medienportal.univie.ac.at/uniview/studium-lehre/detailansicht/artikel/uebersetzung-wird-interessant-wenn-sie-ausser-kontrolle-geraet/>

² Claire Kramsch, *The Multilingual Subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³ "Willst du schnell sein, sofort schaltet der Traum die Zeitlupe ein und betrachtet dich unter der Zeitlupe. Nicht um es dir schwer zu machen, sondern um schnell und langsam gleich zu machen."

Malaysia—all in a prose poem written by a bilingual English-German translator of Italian poetry? Out of control, indeed.

Believing, as I often do, that my undergraduate German majors have intuitive answers to many such questions when I do not, I thought: let's translate this text together as a class, and let the students tell me what this is all about. I wrote to Peter Waterhouse, who quite liked the idea of his prose poem being translated not only from German into English, but German into Chican@ Spanish, just a few miles north of the US-Mexico border (though only the English is presented here). Together with my 24 students in "German 450: The Task of the Translator" at the University of Arizona, we set out to collaboratively analyze, enjoy, translate, and edit this odd, inviting, and Rousseauian poem. We formed five translation "agencies", all of which developed their own agency philosophy, organizational management structure, and stylistic conventions. While some agencies sought to offer the most technically equivalent translation possible, others treasured the paratactic, assonant lyricism of the text so much that they would turn the text inside-out and upside-down. Others, still, thought the text was fundamentally a meditation about translanguaging practice and intercultural being, and accordingly stoked and magnified its code-mixing sensibilities to the limits of normative publishability. Out of control, indeed.

Over the course of six weeks from January to March 2013, we peer-reviewed and reconciled each others' translations, all the while intensively debating what translating had to do with understanding, what Austria had to do with Malaysia (and Arizona), and why the most miniscule details of style and usage *matter*—not just for this text's translators, but equally so for its five-year-old narrator, who knows no meaningful difference between abstraction and materiality, oracy and literacy, Europe and Asia, here and there, English and German. His mother complicates, or simplifies things further for him: "Crossing the street is crossing the equator, crossing the equation, across the equating."⁴

In April 2013, the class got together at the Scented Leaf Teahouse in Tucson to offer a staged reading of "The Sound Valley / "Das Klangtal" / "El Valle de los sonidos" in three languages, as part of the traveling "Fisch out of Water" salon, begun by my friend Yvette Robertson some ten years before in Berlin. The class had divided parts of the text beforehand, and—without much rehearsal—we read the text aloud, each reader standing up unannounced from somewhere in the crowd, reading his/her portion in whichever of three languages s/he had chosen, and then ceding the sound-space to the next reader. At one moment in the reading, an indefinite silence ensued, and we were all momentarily unsure who was to read next. Eventually this silence reminded us that it, too, was part of the textuality: "The Valley we are looking into now is called Sound. It is the Sound Valley. All the sounds are true. As are all the screams there, and singing, squeaking, scratching, croaking, knocking, shouting, bellowing."⁵

Though all 24 students participated in the translating and editing of the text, those named above opted to be acknowledged as co-translators.

—David Gramling, University of Arizona

⁴ "Über eine Straße gehen ist über den Äquator gehen, über die equation gehen, über die Gleichung."

⁵ "Das Tal, in das wir jetzt sehen, heißt Klang. Es ist das Klangtal. Alle Klänge sind wahr. Alle Schreie dort und Singen, Quietschen, Kratzen, Krächzen, Klopfen, Brüllen."

The Sound Valley

First published as "Das Klangtal" (2003)

I first heard the words 'Austria,' 'England,' 'Europe,' 'London,' 'Vienna' in 1962, on one of our outings to the hills right outside the city, to the forests and animals. I heard them for the first time when my mother read a letter—read it aloud, because she liked to hear the language in the letter, aloud because it was an English letter that wasn't written in English, maybe because she liked to hear this Other-English, or maybe so I could hear it. It seems it was a letter about a child named Katharina and a fish. "I'll read the English letter aloud," said my mother, and then she read in German. And so, her child became certain that English and German are one. The trees, the shadows beginning above, the oncoming darkness high in the trees, beginning high above at a joyful height. The city became happier at its outskirts, the clicking of bike chains more clearly clicking and the click was like happiness and there was the ringing of the bells and starting up of tractors, taxis, delivery trucks, all of the vehicle doors were open, people were eating on the street, roasted things were handed in through the car window to the child, strangers ran alongside the car and held onto the door handles, I reached out and held onto the runner's hand, caressed it, cyclists who had collided and fallen lay on the street, talked to each other and laughed, nestled their heads on each other's chests, exchanged rings, gave each other watches, or dabbed at blood with the handkerchiefs they wore on their heads, the four corners of the cloth tied into small knots. The handkerchiefs, always blue- and white-striped, were given to the child, handed in to him through the car window, already with the four little knots. The child's pant pockets were full of blue handkerchiefs. It was nice to tickle the tip of his nose with the knot. His nose was fruit—that is, a bud, fruit: his nose traced the fruit that lay along the street for sale or for taking, but his nose was itself the fruit. Pineapple, Malayan nanas, wafted out, and his nose was pineanose. The child tickled his nose, the tickling was like tasting, it was a tickling 'tasten'; it was like the English 'to taste.' In German the child swept his nose with a handkerchief corner, or 'touchcloth,' but in English it touchclothed also. But weren't the fingertips like fruit? Wrong word, 'fingertips,' there were no tips, there were small cheeks, apples, berries. 'Eating with your fingers,' one of the child's favorite sayings, wasn't the opposite of eating with fork and knife, but rather the opposite of eating with your mouth. Eating with your fingers, not biting but tasting, unhindered tasting, tasting without pain, not tasting good or bad, not tasting differences, but—, but tasting not-differences, just unions. 'Unions,' a word later reassembled in math class, at first in an English primary school as the word 'units,' not unions, but—not-unions, just units. In those days the child composed a fairytale title for himself and recited it over and over, again and again before going to sleep. The same material as in Malaysia. They were words for going to sleep by, in the darkness. On many evenings the child said to his father: Tell the words to me, and these words guided him away from differentiations and into sleep. But perceiving was also a form of sleep: the things were alike, the booths along the street resembled one another, the varieties of fruit wafted and shone and resembled one another, the spicy and sweet odors drifted out of the snack stalls resembled one another. One time I saw two bicyclists crash at an intersection, they were thrown back into the air in other directions, and then lay on the street all at once, recovering. Then I saw them jump up, run toward one another and greet each other with a bow of the head. No one gawked at the incident, though I saw the passers-by smirk a bit. A little more joy took hold. "And now we are driving over the Johore Strait", said my father, and I looked out the window at the sea. In this instant,

everything was a strait; the sky a blue strait, a tree a vertical strait, my arms reached outwards, the rice fields were no longer rice fields, the gas station became a gas station, the fluidity of the Johore Strait had a changeling power, a kinship strength. I thought about how ants built ant straits, the tigers in the forests went on tiger straits, the lions went on lion straits, and snakes snaked as the straits and roads snaked; on all sides, snake-like, moving. The land we were driving into began to snake like a country road, stretching heaven- and Himalaya-ward. On one of the hills on the mainland there was a half circle of cottages. English families on holiday came here to get away, play football and tennis and badminton, readers sat amid them and read *The Times* and *The Daily Mirror* and crime novels and Malaysian-English dictionaries. “Listen here, I’ll read you the letter from Austria, bit by bit.” Austria? Austria? “Yes, it is a country far away in the middle of Europe.” Europe? Europe? “Yes, it’s a collection of countries, a kind of Asia, where we are.” Who sent you the letter? “Nobody sent it to me. The letter was meant for Francis Bacon in England, many hundreds of years ago.” Who wrote to him? “That I don’t know. A man by the name of Philipp Chandos, I don’t know who he was. I only know of another Chandos named Grey, 5th Baron of Chandos. In London there are many Chandos addresses: Chandos Square, Chandos Place, Chandos Street, Road, Avenue, Drive, The Chandos Inn, not far from Trafalgar Square.” Was your letter sent from London? “No. The letter was sent from Austria. But it was never sent. It’s not a letter at all. It is *a letter*. ‘This is the letter that Philipp Lord Chandos, the youngest son of the Earl of Bath, wrote to Francis Bacon, later Lord Verulam and Viscount St. Albans, to apologize to his friend for his complete abandonment of literary activity.’ This Philipp Chandos did not write the letter. Now I will read to you from the Katharina part of the letter. Listen, it is from Austria, listen to it, do you know what I mean by listen to it? What is this, it comes from Austria, it reminds me, makes me a little sad, but listen to it. It is as if the Vienna Boys’ Choir came to sing here in Singapore on their winter tour. Can you hear the word ‘Singapore’ change with singing? But it is something else still. Listen. “At first I grew by degrees incapable of discussing a loftier or more general subject in terms of which everyone, fluently and without hesitation, is wont to avail himself. I experienced an inexplicable distaste for so much as uttering the words ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, or ‘body’. I found it impossible to express an opinion on the affairs at Court, the events in Parliament, or whatever you wish. This was not motivated by any form of personal deference (for you know that my candour borders on imprudence), but because the abstract terms of which the tongue must avail itself as a matter of course in order to voice a judgment—these terms crumbled in my mouth like mouldy fungi. It occurred to me that I had rebuked my four-year-old daughter Katherina Pompilia for a childish lie that made her feel guilty. I wanted to lead her to the necessity to always be true. All the while, the words came into my mouth suddenly and appeared as shimmering pictures of an assumption that flowed over other thoughts. I sputtered out my sentence as well as I could, as though I was ill, even becoming pale and feeling pressure on my forehead; I left the child alone, closed the door behind me, and just went to my horse, taking a good gallop on the lonely pasture again to gain back my constitution.” That is Austria, far away, my little son Heinrich. And that’s where I come from, from there to Malaysia. These words, ‘affairs,’ ‘occurrences,’ ‘discomfort,’ ‘sputtering,’ ‘reflection’ sound like home.” The child: Is your house far away? His Mother: “No, my house is near. Listen to it, the incoming words, the dazzling colors, the merging into each other. Austria. And the word ‘pasture’ there. So what’s a pasture then? That’s not an Austrian word, there, the Austrian word is indeed written there, but it isn’t an Austrian word. The writer Lord Chandos is in

England. What's a pasture in England then?" The child: I know. The Common. "Yes, the Common. The Common does not exist in Austria. There's the *Laaerberg* and the *Jesuitenwiese*. Or this: 'I found it impossible to express an opinion about Parliament.' When this letter was written in 1603, there was no parliament in Vienna. My home is near. You know, space, geography, time, West, East don't exist. We settled here, we've closed the Europe door behind us, and now we stand on the Malaysian pasture, doing our best to pull ourselves back together somewhat. The loud forests are around us, the cries and songs and noises pour out of them, I almost believe the concepts are flowing right to me. The leaves and valleys, the drops and streams shimmer. They need to be real always, every bare shimmer is always real. Do you understand the story about Katharina? The child lied to someone, and the father wanted to explain to the girl that she must not lie, she must always tell the truth. And in that moment Lord Chandos knew: everything was true. There's a necessity to always be true. Here we sit on the Johore Mountains. The valley that we see now is called Sound. It is Sound Valley. All sounds are true. As are all the screams there, and singing, squeaking, scratching, croaking, knocking, shouting, bellowing. No one lies. We have unlying lions, true lions and elephants and jaguars there. The true snakes, true children, true hunters, drivers, lumberjacks, bus passengers, the true village schoolteachers and cooks in the snack shacks. To get to Austria or London someone has to travel for six weeks on a steamship and dock in Trieste or Brighton; from here, Austria lies in outer space or outer land or outer earth. The routes there lead over the Indian Ocean or through Bombay, where the airplanes have their lay-overs, but the route from Asia to Austria is only around a eucalyptus tree and through the trees' shadows and is only a few sandal-lengths long. Or you just need a mobility of body: just as there's a truth need, there's a moveable body need, or to say it like Chandos, a moveable spirit, soul, and body need, a movability like balancing one-legged when putting on and pulling off a bathing suit. It's only that kind of a step, from Johore to Ennstal. You can't get there in an airplane, only in a bathing suit. The meadows and towns and docks and rivers flash and shimmer. The shadow that you cast in the afternoon elongates and stretches out over half the earth and covers Vienna as well. Pulling on a shirt in the morning, your hand and your arm diving in, the sheathing of the back, the three-quarter collar touching lightly, your second hand joining in and your second arm, the second one and the distance it covers, the buttons from heart to navel—a shirt is a land, the various parts of your body take their trips. Your arms take different trips from your legs. Your ears take their trips. Your throat travels upward, is pulled upward and torn, your hands travel horizontally. Crossing the street is crossing the equator, crossing the equation, across the equating. The two hemispheres of the earth resemble one another. The cities in the south resemble the cities in Germany and Austria. Whoever wants to travel from Africa to Venice isn't allowed to travel far, only very little. Maybe it's enough just to pull on a light shirt, to buy a light blue shirt at the market. Carnivals are that kind of place, the carousels turn in to themselves and into themselves, but outwards, the roller coaster spins around and around but away, the Ferris wheel in Vienna turns slowly around the world, which is to say to India and the Pacific and America then back to Vienna. If the Ferris wheel weren't actually a trip around the world, a real one, a limited one, a miniature one, but just a little unidirectional ring, then no one would want to ride it. The Ferris wheel turns, hopeless about any return trip. The giant wheel is a minuscule wheel, it is the opposite of distances. My house is close. My uncle rides his bicycle, a tandem Ferris wheel, here in Batu Pakat. My Viennese grandfather publishes the Little Gazette in Jerantut. And you, do you know your uncles, grandfathers, cousins? There, below, they're

walking down the country road, and the others stand at the bus stop. When your father is off hunting for weeks, sometimes he's standing out in front of our house at the bus stop, with a strange face. Your grandfather, who died in the war, comes to the house next door on occasion, going in and out. The cyclist turns around in the space, but he wheels time too, he Ferris wheels. He changes and re-changes the street. The tire revolves without revolving. How can I explain this to you? The street and the little houses here, and the sky revolve. My siblings are always close-by in my Singapore-Munich. Munich is the neighbor and sister city of all cities in the world. Dying is centimeters away from each life. There are no centimeters, there's only the center. Not space and time, but kinship. You could read the books and newspapers and cross out every noun. You could accept all the adjectives, if there were no more nouns. Bigger—more tender—more ironic—laughing—Muslim—feminine—esteemed—biennial—quieter—friendlier—more spiritual—more soulful—more corporeal—begin to speak with your tongue. Language, that's something without nouns. Not the world, but rather something without nouns. Not horses and pastures and myself, but flexible, nimble, and somewhat fragrant. Not I, but to some extent. 'Taking to my horse, I had a good gallop on the lonely pasture again to regain my constitution.' This tempo, this horse-trotting is the opposite of nouns and concepts, says the letter writer." The child: What do you mean by the Europe door you've slammed shut? "Close the door to Europe, start a tour in Asia. Close the doors, start a tour. I'm a choir girl, not a choir boy. We aren't part of the world here." Where are we, then? "We're in Johore." Is Johore not on Earth? "No, the world-door is closed. Here is the fragrant—aromatic—hot—screaming—wooded—misty—apish—crawling—fleshy—fishy—Indian—Chinese—Malaysian—Tirmanic—pure—Singapore." The child asks: We're not on Earth? "No, this isn't the world. This is the forest. The great—fragrant—swinging—shadowy—inhabited—dark—orchids. It's more than worldly here. The happiest day is here. Love is here. In the trees, ferns grow and frogs jump. Animals don't eat the flowers here; the flowers eat the animals. Flowers as big as meadows, where tigers lie and get eaten. The letter from Austria also talks about animals. Little sparrow, I will tell you, my little mouse. Here in Johore there are no houses, nor cities, no streets, no gardens, no churches, no church keepers, there's no Vienna, no Lower Austria, no castles, no hotels by the lake, no guest rooms, no police, no skiers, no snow, there's no Natural History Museum, no stuffed birds, no dinosaur skeletons patched back together, Nestroy doesn't exist here nor Adalbert Stifter nor Hugo von Hofmannsthal, there's no war, though the same Cold War is being fought here as in Vienna and Berlin, this place is exactly like Vienna and Berlin, and enemy watches enemy, but here the wild little cats of prey roam around, there's no war here, there are little tigers, there's life and death, there's no life and death in war, there's no Peter Alexander or Burgtheater, there aren't any winter and summer and festivals, the tigers lay in the flowers here, the past does not exist here, there are no monuments or famous names, it's not here, I wasn't here, it begins here. Here, the forest gushes out like a spring. There is no cultural life here, no intellectual life, no literary life. There's literary life and death here. There are no cathedrals here. I am reminded of a tin can here, of the sound inside a cathedral dome. The images remain in your eyes here. The sounds stay and flourish here. The beautiful blue vestments are here. Love is here. Here I stay in love. I have a house, not a home. There's no transcendence here, no eternal life. This is where life ends. I have a body, so long as I'm in love. I have a body, so long as I stay. 'Cathedrals', 'monuments', 'streets', 'snow', 'strangers', 'greatness', 'importance', 'internationality', 'world', 'tasks', 'open secrets', 'abroad', 'overtime', 'life', 'hopes', 'Germany', 'courage', 'the truth', 'the

misery', 'the real', 'the Volk', 'Mercedes', 'happiness': When I speak words like these, I have no body. I do not stay there. Why do we caress a beloved body, why don't we say to our beloveds 'courage', 'Germany', 'the true,' 'the real'? We breed with our mouths, tongues, hands and skin. The large forest plants me. I want to be added to the flowers. In Austria you say: 'Someone's planting me', that is to say, 'deceiving me', 'falsely praising', 'giving someone a significance he hasn't earned'. I'm planted here too, in the forest, without any false significance. With no significance, planted. Maybe in this case significance and truth are opposites. The truth is non-significance. Do you understand, Heinrich?" The child: No. His mother: "Now I'll read you the part in the letter that concerns animals, more specifically fish. 'And I sometimes compare myself in my thoughts with old Crassus, the orator, it is said that he had tamed a moray eel, a dull, red-eyed fish from his ornamental pond, and it so dearly won over all the masses, that it became the talk of the town...' Crassus, however, was accused of having cried over the death of his fish. That won't do. You can't cry over the death of a fish. Whoever cries over the death of a fish is a fool. What can you cry about? You can cry about the big things in the world, about Germany, about the truth, about the past, about culture, about the death of loved ones. Important death is real death, like Germany and the past; it is the world and world domination. But the Roman Crassus is different. And his crying is different, smaller, more precise. And Philipp Chandos is different. He loves this small, lower, lesser, weeping Roman Crassus. Crassus the ridiculous, the simpleton. Crassus, dumber than a fish. The dumb senator loves the dumb fish. These dumb tears, this dumb love, they are what Chandos dreams of. Tears for a Moray eel. Not for Germany, nor the beginnings of the Berlin Wall, nor Austrian neutrality, not for the spies' betrayal, not for the enmity of West and East, not the danger of the people, but tears for an eel." Then the child saw death—there behind Johore City, in the Johore forest, in his mother's readings—as something small. Not world-dominating, but something completely different from Europe, Germany, London, the past, the world, and courage. 'Tears', 'eels'. The child heard the similarity in these two words from the letter. "Crassus always confronted death, with his tears and his Moray eel." Someone whispered to the child, there in the Johore forest, that the tears flow and then pain flows when you hear a harmony. The child repeated his mother's words: "The Valley we are looking into now is called Sound. It is the Sound Valley. All the sounds are true. As are all the screams there, and singing, squeaking, scratching, croaking, knocking, shouting, bellowing." The harmony was more direct, more fluent, more glowing, more feverish than words. The words 'tears' and 'eels' became sounds. Crying and pain were an immediate, flowing, ringing thing. His mother said: "I traveled here into pain, out of the world, disembodiment, Austria, culture, corruption, states. In fish pain, animal pain, pained screams, tiny pain, body pain, sadness glows and wafts and rings. Not Weltschmerz, but the opposite. Village-schmerz. Path-schmerz. Muscle-schmerz. Tiger-schmerz. Scorpionstings-chmerz. Snakebite-schmerz. Malaria headache. Also snakebite language. Tiger language. Body language. Village language. Bird language. Tongues. Air-and-spit language, non-dictionary language. we are right in the middle of physics here. This morning you played with the children next door. You ran around our bungalow and played tag. And you shouted: the house is the world. We're running around it! We're circling the continents and seas and windows. Look down into Sound Valley. The forests look like dark-green cauliflower. When it hurts, it rings. When a fly bites you, you sing like birds. When a cat scratches you, it makes a sound in your body. Then melodies begin. When the beloved dies, then melodies begin. When we came to Malaysia, melodies began. My forest became loud. My words

became loud. My speaking spoke. Moan, groan, bang, squeak, fizz, kaplop, miaow, uff, bomp, sniffle, pow, wap, urks, ratsch, spin, splash, snarl, scoff, klong, bang, raaah, screech, groar, adieu you beautiful world, haps, hiss, grrr, yelp, boo-hoo, munch, splutter, rapfoooo, I began speaking like Walt Disney's people, hach, faff, kricks, uff, oye, vrrrr, vropp, ah, mommy, ow, oh, crunch, I spoke like that ever-aghast Donald Duck and the speechless things in the comics: What, what, what, bong, zoiing, drop, shhpp, yaps, swupp, I rhymed myself together, I sang myself together, I pulled myself together. Blessed be our house on the Ewe Boon Road 35a in Singapore. If you listen to me closely, Heinrich, if you listen to your comics Mother closely, then you too will be a writer, a Donald Duck poet, one who pulls and rhymes it together. A duck who hears the spoken language and saves Europe." The child: Europe? This is the first time I've ever heard the word Europe. I just know Europe is far away and has a lot of theaters, castles and mountains and churches and courage and snow and skiers and police, festivals, monuments, and wars. What do you mean by 'save'? His mother: "All these equator lines run around the world, all these tiny equators. The equator is a hundred kilometers south of us. The equator is the line that divides the two parts. The southern hemisphere resembles the northern. South America resembles North America. There's an Arabia in the northern hemisphere and one in the southern hemisphere. There's an Austria in one of the halves of the world and an Austria in the other half. There's a London in the North and another in the South. There's an Ennstal in Styria and another in the South. All these equators run between these halves. An equator runs between the two Austrias. There are even two of me, one Ma and one Ma, they're rhymed together and pulled together and the name of my poem is 'Mama'. And the sentence from Chandos is: 'With his tears for his Moray eel'; that is a sentence with an equator, a complete and poetic sentence, Northern hemisphere plus Southern hemisphere, that is not the world, but the world plus the world. So here I am, on this southern tip, this southern apple home, because I have country plus country. And the planet speaks in its own way, because it has two rhyming halves. We can hear the world: it says, 'World and World.' In the Upanishads there was this one sentence: 'Everything that is here is also there; what is there is the same here. There is no difference here. Whoever thinks there's a difference here, is going from death to death.' This is why I believe some ways of speaking are valid, and some others void. That's also why the letter appeals to me. Listen now my little mouse, little bunny, little sparrow: 'I was filled with an inexplicable anger that I hid with great effort when I heard things like these: things are either good or bad; Sheriff N. is a bad man, Preacher T. is a good man; Tenant M. is to be pitied, his sons are squanderers; another to be envied, because his daughters are frugal; one family makes it, another doesn't.' Simply invalid sentences that say nothing. Why don't they say anything? I believe they say nothing because they split 'yes' and 'no': because they separate opposites. If they could, they'd split the planets. One thing 'goes well or 'badly' for someone. I always talk like that, but I'd rather not. One has to put things together. I can't put things together in that I say things like: 'white is white' and 'black is black'. I can only put things together with sentences like: 'White is black'. 'White doesn't resemble white'. 'But white is the same as black'. A sentence like that is called a paradox, I believe. There are also orthodox, orthographic sentences, but the orthodox sentences don't really say anything. In a dream, a gigantic skyscraper and a blade of grass aren't different in height. Whatever is in the blade of grass is also in the skyscraper. Red in a dream is not much different from the blue in it. The ocean in a dream is as small as an eye. A mountain in a dream and a stream running through a valley aren't at different altitudes, and the shallow little stream

peaks like a cliff. The stream is dreamt like the mountain. The mountain and stream round themselves in the dream. The Earth rounds itself, too, because it's flying in a space dream. All of the planets and stars are round too, I believe, there are no cubed or triangle-shaped ones. If you want to run fast in a dream, run away from something, then you can only run very slowly. That's how space does it too. If you want to run away from a tiger, then your legs barely move and the distance between you and the tiger doesn't get any bigger. If you want to be fast, the dream will activate slow-motion mode and watch you move in slow motion. Not to make it more difficult for you, but to make fast and slow equal. If you try to slow down or stand still in a dream—say, at a beautiful spot by the sea—the dream shifts into rocket speed, lights up the rocket boosters and then there's no slowness to be had. There is, you see, no slowness or fastness. In dreams, rockets are stand-stillers. In dreams, the dead are the living. Whatever happens in the depths of a dream happens right in the foreground. A small room dilates into the sky. A closet becomes house-sized, then mountain-sized, then landscape-deep, then obvious. Narrow becomes wide. An open door is a wall. The door, sie dreht—you can open the dream spaces with two languages next to one another. When someone speaks in a dream, you cannot differentiate between the quiet and the inaudible. In Malaysian 'batang' means both 'tree trunk' and 'stalk.' And do you know what the word 'membaca' means?" The child: Yes it means 'to read.' "And what is its second meaning?" Its second meaning is 'to pray.' "And what does 'halas' mean?" 'Halas' means 'small,' but it also means 'high' and 'large.' "'Hati', that is, the 'liver' and the 'heart'. Sometimes I think that all of our organs have just a single name. The stomach is the heart. The lungs are two hearts. I eat with my heart. I hear with my heart. I speak with my heart. There's also the English 'Malaysian', it is nearly like the Austrian English 'in a letter'. Do you know what 'bas' means?" Yes, 'bus' or German 'Bus.' "Do you know what 'typewriter' is called in Malaysian? Yes, 'mesin taip'. The English word 'number' in Malaysian almost illustrates it: 'nombor'. And in Indonesian it is 'nomor' and that sounds almost the same as 'no more'. In a translation one can change the meanings, almost invert them. Perhaps I can invert myself. In another language words are sometimes dreamier, more ideal or more innocent. Do you know what the Malaysian word 'stesen' means?" Yes, it means 'bus stop,' 'station.' His mother: "Yes, it also sounds different than the English word, not 'station,' rather 'stesen', which is less complicated, perhaps more innocent, more translated, less Latin, it is the second half, first this word 'stesen' completes something that had begun with the High English 'station'. Between the words lies the equator. That's why I read so many small poems, because I find the second half in so many of them. That's why small poems are so much like the Earth, because they have words with first and second halves, so that whole words get made. I know a poem about the cathedral—you, cathedral. And the word 'home' appears in the second half of this poem, and it is the second half of the domes. Deep within us, all the words combine into a whole. Deep within us, maybe other distant countries are combining. In a dream, far is very close, only a step away, but whoever makes the step stretches her leg forward, forward, and forward and a step becomes as large as half the world and is a trip around the world. I read trips around the world in poems. I came with you here to Malaysia in a poem. Thinking needs no concepts, just geography. Not thoughts; but geo-thoughts. Not song; geo-song. Many of the poems I like to read are translations, and they bring two halves together. And the world, I believe, is brought together in rhyme and rhythm. The coastline here undulates rhythmically. 'Rhythm' and 'rhyme' are geological terms. The ocean floor lies in its cadence beneath the waves. The ocean revolves. The landscape streams out. The apes

scream. The tigers roar. The elephant trumpets. The bird flies. The trees dance in the wind. I talk with you and need melodies for that. Rhythms come onto the street, the streets play. There's noise in the air. I hear loud agreements, not revelations—what would those even be?—but rather agreements. In poems, the words agree with one another. I can hear a world language that isn't Latin or English, and I can hear myself in it. Heinrich, yesterday you looked at one of the bungalows and said: Look, this house is big and small. And when undressing that evening you said: Look how big my shoes are; they are too small for me. And I, I tell myself sometimes, I am here in Malaysia and in Ennstal. The creeks and the rivers rhyme. 'Basikal', do you hear what that is, 'basikal', 'bicycle,' 'Fahrrad'. Completely de-Latinized. The second, unforeseeable half. The shadows aren't shadows, they mirror instead. In Malaysian, 'shadow' and 'mirroring' are the same. 'Botol', 'bottle.' A new etymology. I just read an English poem, it was in a London newspaper and it begins with the word 'cold.' It tells a history of a person who murdered, who killed many innocent children and women and men. The poem talks about this person. The whole world has a history. Every country has a history. Every city has a history. Histories about histories. And books about books full of histories. histories in nearly every book. Everyone has stories. In all countries they write literature and all of these literatures are almost only stories, a giant truth, so to speak. Stories about women, men and children, stories about murderers and lovers, families that rise, families that fall, stories about the good and the bad. More world history than the whole world. Suddenly, everything is told, the whole history, all at once everything is told. Done. And then you won't know what it is. Maybe the world is something other than historical. Maybe it makes sounds, more than it is history. So then the poem that I read a few days back in *The Times* does something that has nothing to do with the history of a man whose name is Eichmann. His history is bad. Herr Eichmann is very cold, the poem narrates all the badness, but in doing so it does something else, it is looking for the second word, it seeks the other half and goes, in this way, over the equator. The moment the second word is there, the whole language becomes something else, it quakes. The second word, the second half isn't a discovery; in this moment language becomes something else. 'Cold' at the beginning of the poem, but 'whole' at the end of the poem. From cold to whole, that isn't a history, that is a transformation of the 'C' in 'cold' into an aspirate and of the abrupt 'D' into the long 'L' sound, a long sound that could almost be an endless sound: 'whole'... from cold to whole, that's not a history. That is the other history, written by poetry. There's no villain, just a catastrophic creature. Poetry rather than history. The whole world supposedly has a history, and a past. Each country has its own history. Histories about histories. Every single person has a history, the histories are mixed together and form big novels, and time passes. And everywhere they sit and write great novels. Or it's different, language doesn't become historied, historied writing, not English or Italian or Spanish, but alive, physical, you yourself will be physical and experienced and you will resound, your body educates itself linguistically, you get an education, a school education, but not in the sense of knowledge, rather an education of living arms and hands and eyes and ears, flesh educates itself, the pictures of skin arise, your little feet spread and flex, you feel breath and heart. That is now the history of education. Breaking the code. All the histories are written in code. Education instead. So this year you'll go to school. Are you looking forward to school, Heinrich?" Heinrich: No, I am not. Besides, there are history and literature classes in school. His mother: "No, you are going to a school that doesn't offer history and literature classes. The poem that I found in the paper tried to use no language. It wants to be like you when you are

happy. When are you happy Heinrich?" Her child: I am happy when I have to guess. For example, like when I went to the Indian's little newsstand that had this aroma. And I had to guess what it was. I had to guess, I couldn't see what smelled. I guessed the flowers and cakes and hairspray and the birthday candles. The Indian knew what it was. And I didn't know.

Translators' Note

Quotations from Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's "A Letter" are reproduced according to Tania and James Stern's translation.