

Elmar Kuiper

10 Poems from *Hertbyt*

&

8 Poems from *Ut namme fan mysels*

Translated by David Colmer

From: *Hertbyt*; Leeuwarden, Bornmeer, 2004

Conversation

That mouse made me strong
says a bird of prey.

That mouse gave its life
says a boy.

For a good cause
says the bird of prey.

For a good cause?
asks the boy.

Thus far this brief conversation.
For the record:

The bird of prey has a good name.
The bird of prey earned its prize.

The boy loses.
The bird of prey wins.

I say this
for a good cause.

By human standards
a wolf howls,
a cow gazes.

Who plumbs the depth of the howl?
Who fathoms the cow's otherworldly gaze?

The rational wolf says,
I answer the night wind, warning
my prey with a mighty yowl.

The mad cow thinks,
I ask the bipeds, the disconsolate gazers,
for the saltwater from their eyes.

Does anyone remember
the frightened hare
crouched waiting

night after night
in its cold lair
ears pressed to its body?

Does anyone
have the heart to say,
I squeeze my eyes shut, numb my senses?

Does anyone honestly think,
where do these animals get the nerve
to act so much like people?

For God's Sake

They pinned down a bird
gave wings
to a horse and a dog.

They interrogated
a bird
listening

until the sound

died away.

They passed sentence
saying for God's sake horse
 for God's sake dog

sing

like a bird

whistle

now you can fly.

What does the foreigner see:

A few square metres of earth?
The sky within his field of vision?
The cosmos he reads as the signs of animals?

What does the local think:

I'll turn my back on my native
wilderness book my holiday
abroad.

What does my confidant whisper:

Teach foreigners to forget their borders.
Teach locals to celebrate homecoming.

Am I doing my clairvoyance justice?

And seeing the big picture
And seeing the fata morgana
for what it is

really, what do I do
as an inquisitive visitor?

My knife parts the river and the sea
I take

a square from the left
a square from the right

It doesn't really pay:

A piece of river land
fits
in a piece of seabed

The river's waterline
runs level
with the sea's

and water
flows
without resistance

but
fish mouths
gasp for air

freshwater fish die in salt water
saltwater fish die in fresh water.

The hand made
an expensive mistake
when it cut out the squares.

Does the shot turn the man falling
the bullet hitting him in the chest

wounding himself?

Or does the bullet break the habit
of flying straight at a man who tugs

at his weeping breast because death
from a barrel ends life.

Does the lead cry, Killer?

Does the whistling bullet on its way
think for a living second

of the man?

Don't Let the Pigeons Down

Get in early

fashion early birds cooing corn peckers
throw fired clay warblers into the air.

Clean the barrel for the creation hunt
shoot clay pigeons out of the sky.
Get the dogs! Get the dogs!

Watch out!

They'll break their teeth on
the pigeons the loudly cooing pigeons.

Fire a warning shot in the high corners
let your calculating hand slip
but don't let the pigeons down!
don't down the flying pigeons.

Hurry!

Fashion a dog throat
fashion a dog throat
throttle the throats

Do it on time!

Statues

Let statues
tumble over each other
like playful dogs
let statues bark up alleys

Let loads of statues in woollen coats
bead and sweat
like swaddled sheep in the summer sun

Grab that Rottweiler in the alley first
then squeeze the big lump's tail
continue with statues burnt statues
continue with charred dogs in alleys.

Go on

sweep up dog remnants brush and pan
four victories at the dog monument

say: we statues are made of marble
and didn't want this
but our frisky yappers will go on
no stopping them.

Loud trucks full of statues: sheep statues
but let statuesque sheep loose on the green grass
and forget statued sheep
forget those bashful bleaters.

Call the Rottweiler!
Call the model dog!

Muzzle his mouth
say good boy heel

let the big lump rest.

Earthskin

Earthskin breathes a spade cuts
who throws me on the shovel?
Earthskin steams a shoveller sweats
is the earth crying?

Listen one busy morning
as a centipede,
cut off from lightness

cut by cut
loses all
its legs
one by one

wriggling a second longer.

Waking from the skin
of the ground dweller
I get up.

I earth-turner
wipe the sweat from my brow
rub the sleep out of my eyes
with grimy hands.

I open the air vent:
listen, the subterranean weeping
of an early morn.

Olitski

Olitski is a fisherman.
He casts his line into the purple sea.
Bait

thrashes on the line
a poet's mouth
bites.

Even if you eat him up with shark's teeth
even if he's swimming in your purple poet's belly
Olitski's still an ordinary fisherman.

A ventriloquist voice whispers:
Olitski, I am your sub-Olitski
I let angry heads roll and furious
waves break on your skull.

A ventriloquist voice says:
Olitski. I am your sub-Olitski
I know where the great white lives, here close by
between the gold coral under your boat.

Olitski stays Olitski.
He fishes the voices out of the net
he removes wise sounds from his hook
he flashes a shark's tooth in his grin.

Olitski is a fisherman.
He casts his line into the red sea.

From: *Ut namme fan mysels*; Leeuwarden, Bornmeer, 2006

most people die in bed

I fiddle with your hair
push your grey locks aside
the colour of milk and blood

we hold hands
your cheeks are caving in
your nails
will grow a while yet

eyes open spontaneously
that's not unheard of
you said that grass sprouts
on the skin I believed you

strict eyebrows
long lashes
futile powder
bright-red on your nose

no inviting eyes
looking up
I fiddle with your hair
push your grey locks aside

your cheeks are caving in
your nails haven't quite
stopped growing

the grass on your skin is white.

my needle in your skin

you laugh, it tickles a little
I'm making you beautiful
cool animals to decorate your skin.

you'll shout if it hurts?
you can also grit your sweet teeth.

tiger on your belly resting on flesh
wolf fangs burning on your butt
eagle on your shoulder stinking like a corpse.

I'm making you beautiful
my stickler needle
crying in your skin.

your whole body shivers
is everything fine?
you will yell, won't you?

you can also grit your sweet teeth
it's not worth the pain
of hurting you.

I'm making you beautiful
are you laughing now
to keep from crying?

under the sniggering moon

the moon is alert, I don't dare
to look back.

under an old crown we clink glasses,
consider again the question of life
and roar with laughter at ten-year-old kids
playing football with a beechnut.

listen, for you I'll sing an optimistic song

fruit bursts open
children prick holes in chestnuts
and calmly talk to eyeless dolls.

I bury the seed and wait for the outcome
the negative in my head might turn
into a cheerful tree.

come, let's drain the glasses
our descendants laugh
and progress enlarges

how we have it off
under the sniggering moon.

scene

a broken lover cries on the ferris wheel.
a blonde giggles on the merry-go-round.

'action!'

a bullet supposedly hits the cry-baby
he has to bite on a blood capsule
for the dramatic effect.

'action!'

he lisps his inlaid words.
she can't hear him.

the red liquid gushes too much.
they need to do another take.

demonstrative

the human department's closed.

a charming specimen has some kind of need.
her mouth is flawless.

she has the emotions of a doll.
no point in my trying it on with her.

shy a solution?

she is female article such-and-such
her world a moist groin
I am a male special

lugging around a spermsack
shoot some in her hole
now and then.

I am demonstrative
I wash her breasts with laundry soap
I whisper dead words in her ear.

this isn't me
this can't be me
this isn't right

kissing her is inhuman.

I don't want to spoil the atmosphere

my pencil descends from a tree.

I say your name, you step
out of a grey world
and approach me cheerfully.

I cut a bird out of a booklet.
I glue a bird to the red sky.

I ask you:

why does a lark in the sky sing more beautifully
than a sparrow under the eaves?

you say:

'rummage around a little instead, now there's a pox on the bark
and caterpillars are stripping the branches. I'm out of your reach,
even if a hundred thousand trees get a disease in their sap.'

I sing a blithe song
and sharpen my beak on a clear stone.

my pencil descends from a sick tree.

I say your name
your sharp mouth bites into
this scrap of paper.

I sharpen the point.
the point sharpens you.

a cut-out bird smells of glue.
a cut-out bird can't whistle.

are you that bird?
you are that bird.

that answer marks me.

write down a dream

anticipating death
by going heavenbound
in my birthday suit

the idea leaves my cold.

imperturbable yet I see
the hasty warbling of the garden warbler
as a routine job.

yeah, I still occasionally write down a dream
recently I saw a hardluck heron
without wings.

it wanted to quietly disappear
but I definitively
forbade it

its wings
suited my body
so beautifully!

[a daily contemplation is desirable. I cut off the pinions
and have the heron pray for wings for later. in the end
its death doesn't leave me cold..]

under the primeval ceiling

as the days lengthen just bleed.
don't say an ill word about your girl, eat meat off the bone
until early morning. don't drift off

terrible is the real world.

if you secretly
say yes
they might just as well
kill me.

the weather is gloomy
the big bad wolf is eating red riding hood.
sweet girl laps up
fairy tales from your mouth.

just bleed don't say an ill word.
console her with her bear
snuggle up as the days grow longer.

be a man
elmar doesn't live in the sky
where gravity mockers frolic.

a rod-sparer still
needs to find your head.
bastards tear her down.

just say I
deeply
love her.

just say
there's room here
for that.