

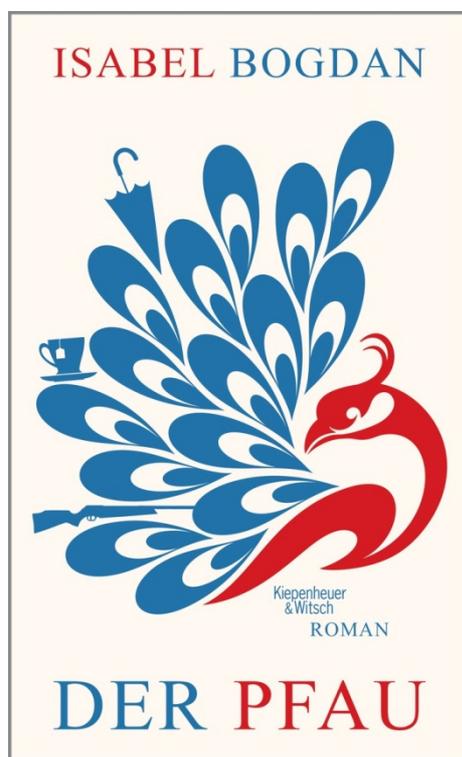
Sample Translation (pp.7-23 and 36-40)

THE PEACOCK

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Publication: February 2016 (Hardcover)

256 pages

ISBN: 978-3-462-04800-1

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[pp. 7-23]

One of the peacocks had gone mad. Or maybe he just didn't see so well but the bird suddenly began to treat everything that was blue and shiny as competition in the marriage stakes.

Luckily, up there in the little glen on the edge of the Highlands, there was barely anything blue and shiny. There were meadows and pastures and trees and masses of the usual greenery. And there was the heather. And any number of sheep. The only gleaming blue items occasionally straying into view were cars belonging to the holiday guests. Lord and Lady McIntosh had had the old farm buildings, barns, anything deemed remotely suitable which was part of their estate, converted into holiday cottages so that the old pile could go at least half way towards bringing back in the money it swallowed up. The oldest parts of the manor house probably dated back to the seventeenth century and various extensions and outbuildings had subsequently been added. There'd never been enough cash for ongoing improvements and that was still the case. The house was costing an arm and a leg. If it wasn't flaking external plasterwork needing repair, then it was a burst water-pipe, and then there was the roof to be replaced. Her Ladyship mostly did the electrics because these days hardly any electrician knew how to handle 110 volts or deal with old fuses. The heating costs regularly brought the McIntoshes out in a cold sweat, something which couldn't be blamed on the indoor temperatures. The ground floor had stone flags and just didn't get warm, even in a really hot summer. And a hot summer was rare. In winter it was even colder. There was a central heating system wholly unworthy of its name and so every room was as cold as the next. Only the kitchen gave out a welcoming warmth and this was because the huge Aga was going constantly. His Lordship and his wife would spend

most of the year in front of the library fire, reading, working or watching DVDs. During the winter they sometimes wore woolly hats in bed. It didn't bother them at all. They were used to it. If they were frozen to the marrow, they'd get warmed up in the bath or in the hot tub out on the spacious lawn.

His Lordship would sometimes joke he might as well try insulating the house with banknotes. He was a classical scholar and understood little of construction. She was a trained engineer and so knew rather more, even though she worked at a wind power company. Both had a strong grasp of the basic arithmetic. They were not poor, had enough to live on, but not enough for extensive refurbishment of their old property.

The cottages were only slightly better equipped but were better insulated, had carpets and low ceilings and so were far easier to heat. And, of course, there were electric blankets on all the beds. The former gatehouse, around a mile and a half from the manor house itself, was quite cosy, as was the gardener's cottage beyond the burn, the old laundry half a mile further up the glen, the old stables behind the copse and the other cottages scattered further afield and reached by unmetalled roads or dirt tracks leading nowhere. The nearest neighbours were visited only by car and on the way home it didn't matter too much if you'd had one too many because there were no other vehicles and no police checks to deal with. If you ended up in the ditch, there were enough tractors around to pull you out. There was something known as the village which comprised a handful of houses, a tiny church and a telephone-box, untouched for years.

The holiday cottage side was going quite well. People liked the peace and the countryside. Getting away from it all, no mobile phone signal, no television reception, only the babble of the burn. They came mostly in the summer, often middle-aged couples with hectic daily lives, who

came here just for the walking, or families with young children. The pace of life was slower here and the nearest place of any size was twelve miles away.

In a fit of enthusiasm Lord McIntosh had one day bought five peacocks, three females and two males. He thought the males such a pretty sight, and imagined them strutting about proudly on the huge lawn in front of the house, displaying their tail plumage. The rather less striking females were expected to keep a respectable distance and unobtrusively give the males a reason to vie with one another by fanning their tails. That's how Lord McIntosh had imagined it all. Lord McIntosh was generally very fond of animals but knew very little about them. He hadn't reckoned on the peacocks going so free-range as to make themselves invisible. Nor had he reckoned on this increasing their audibility, their cries echoing far through the glen and lending it the qualities of a primeval forest. But the McIntoshes got used to this and the peacocks were left very much to their own devices and went their own way. And they fanned their plumage only in spring in the mating season, then shed long tail feathers. These grew back the following spring, something which Lady McIntosh marvelled at every time. Nature really was full of miracles. Once a year the peacocks would lay eggs somewhere in the woods and had young, most of whom did not survive. Each year maybe one or two would pull through. By now there were at least four males and six females but nobody knew the exact number. His Lordship fed the creatures only occasionally, usually in winter when there was little food for them to find themselves. Sometimes one of them would freeze to death out in the woods and the McIntoshes didn't really know why because in winter the peacocks would gather together in the barn behind the house where they would be fed and obviously kept warmer. The peacocks adjusted to the two dogs, Albert and Victoria, or

vice versa. Albert had at some point understood that peacocks would first of all defend themselves and, secondly, would not be used as playthings. Victoria was too small and too old to entertain anything of the sort. With the grumpy old goose, too, they had at some point agreed on a few manners and social niceties like sharing the feeding dishes, and after a while all the animals got on fine and largely left one another alone. They lived peaceably side by side and the holiday visitors were, one way or another, enchanted.

That is until one of the peacocks went mad. Or wasn't seeing so well. Of course, after the event nobody could work out what it was or when it had started. In any case, when Mr and Mrs Bakshi arrived at the end of August, nobody could see it coming. The Bakshis had rented one of the cottages for three weeks, took up residence and found it enchanting, adorable and repeatedly said how fortunate they were and how absolutely charming everything was and what a stroke of luck that they'd ended up there. In all honesty, the cottage wasn't exactly luxurious. There was no shower and only an uninsulated bath in which the water rapidly went cold. The kitchen floor was so uneven the Bakshis felt for the first few days as if they were on board ship because with every step the surface seemed not to be quite where they expected it to be. But it didn't take long for them to get used to the water in the sink not running away properly because of the drain not being at the lowest point, and Mrs Bakshi could cope with the cooking oil going all to one side of the frying pan for similar reasons and thought it enchanting and delightful. Then at some point they even found it rather handy that every grape they dropped would roll into the same corner.

Once a day, Mr Bakshi sprayed the flagstones outside with the garden hose to wash away the goose muck. For some inexplicable reason, the goose enjoyed best of all stopping right outside their front door and Mr Bakshi marvelled daily at the amount of excrement produced by just one goose. Lady Fiona found it rather unpleasant that the goose had expressly sought out this new place by the old laundry front door but the Bakshis reassured her it didn't bother them in the slightest. It's true that a goose like this was never destined for solitude, said her Ladyship, that wouldn't be good for the bird, but on the other hand we don't want constantly to be getting more new geese just to stop one of them being lonely. So perhaps the goose was simply looking for a bit of company.

The Bakshis spent the three weeks doing pretty much nothing at all. They went for plenty of walks, down towards the entrance, past the pretty gatehouse and through the village, across a meadow where, bizarrely, two alpacas were kept, and over the small footbridge across the river, then back along the other side of the river to the next bridge but one, and from there back to the house. Or they walked behind the house and up to the left, past the ruined chapel beside the pathway, almost hidden beneath dense foliage, across a pasture full of cows and round in an arc to the entrance, then back. On the way they would pick blackberries or just stand and enjoy the hilly landscape and the views to the Highlands further to the north. They opened gates and trod in cowpats, climbed over fences and trod in sheep droppings, rinsed off their shoes and then washed their hands in the burn which gushed through the glen. They marvelled at the sheer number of rabbits, observed various birds and once even saw a magnificent stag. One particularly warm day Lady McIntosh showed them a hidden spot beneath trees at the back of the cows' field, a spot where the burn widened and created a natural pool for swimming in. It was cold but

heavenly to have a relaxing swim against the current and not make an inch of progress. The Bakshis laughed delightedly, dried themselves off afterwards and got dressed.

Otherwise they read a lot, looked at the goose and watched the peacocks strutting across the huge lawn. Mr Bakshi determinedly stalked the peacocks in attempts to get photos, something which proved to be puzzlingly difficult, and Mrs Bakshi crocheted a blanket for their first grandchild whose birth was imminent.

They were so enthusiastic about everything that for their last evening they invited the McIntoshes to the old laundry and Mrs Bakshi served up a spectacular chicken curry for his Lordship and her Ladyship. To be honest it really wasn't the done thing to call on paying guests in their cottage but, since the death of the previous Lord a few years earlier, Hamish and Fiona had done things rather differently.

Lord McIntosh, however, wanted first and foremost to get a few formalities out of the way at the beginning of the evening. The Scottish National Tourist Office was carrying out a survey which all holidaymakers were expected to complete. Questions included how long they were staying in the area, how often they had been there before, their age, accommodation choice and so on and so forth. This questionnaire was so interminably long that Lady McIntosh would often complete it herself, Lord McIntosh related to the Bakshis, rather than troubling the guests with it. Where necessary she would just make something up. His Lordship had no time at all for this process but said there was no stopping his wife in her creativity.

I'll have a look, said Mr Bakshi, and took the questionnaire from him. Mrs Bakshi said nobody could complete it more faithfully than her

Ladyship and he was not to worry about it. She herself would in any case just put a cross next to the most amusing answer or write in any old rubbish. Lady Fiona considered this to be very sensible. The women were in agreement.

Mr Bakshi read out the questions and asked his wife why they'd come here and what they'd done. She replied by asking what the options were. There you are, she said, *wildlife watching*, that sounds super, that's why they were here. And they had actually seen an owl one evening. Yes, said his Lordship, you often see them here. And then this one sounds good, too, said Mrs Bakshi, *action and adventure*, go on, put a cross against that one. Indeed, Mr Bakshi was saying to the McIntoshes, that very morning they'd both had plenty of *action and adventure* with the *wildlife* right here in their cottage.

They related how they had been woken early by a strange noise. Mrs Bakshi thought it must be birds having a frolic outside on the window ledge and well, er, making baby birds, beating their wings against the window in the process. The couple had got up, cautiously pulled back the curtain and, for sure, there was a blue tit. But inside, not outside. It was flapping against the window because it wanted to get out. The Bakshis wondered how on earth it had got in because all the windows had been closed overnight. Not so much for fear of birds but of midges. His Lordship said birds did sometimes fall down the chimney and made a terrible mess with all the soot they brought with them. But the Bakshis said the blue tit had looked very clean and, well, it was in any case there inside their bedroom. Mrs Bakshi had pushed up the sash-window, the blue tit had quickly understood what was happening, had fluttered out onto the ledge and then into the woods. Mrs Bakshi had gone back to bed and left the window open to let in a bit of fresh air.

Not an especially exciting story but the same noise woke them just one hour later. Stupid animal, Mr Bakshi had groaned into his pillow, fancy coming straight back in. But it turned out to be a swallow which had tragically got trapped between the two layers of the open sash-window and they said they'd have had trouble easing it out because the creature was in a state of panic and each time they'd tried to shift the window it had simply got its wings more tightly wedged. In the end it took the handle of a kitchen ladle somehow to nudge the distraught bird up between the panes and Mr Bakshi managed to get hold of it, placed the creature on the window ledge and it flew into the outdoors, fortunately not injured. They said how peculiar it was for two birds to behave in the same, unusual way on one and the same morning and that they didn't normally do things like that, just flying into people's homes like that.

His Lordship related how a pair of eagles had been living for some time up in the mountains nearby and that occasionally they could be spotted from here, mostly flying high and some distance away. He said it could be that if they came closer, the birds in the glen would be driven mad. This may have been the case this morning because for a blue tit to get inside the house in this strange fashion and then for a swallow to get itself stuck between the window-panes like that, well, birds did not normally behave so oddly.

And so the conversation meandered along like this and they conversed about birds while eating Mrs Bakshi's magnificent chicken curry. Mr and Mrs Bakshi found everything incredibly interesting and it was heavenly to be so close to nature and Hamish and Fiona were so pleased their holiday visitors were happy.

It was at the end of the evening that the peacock displayed the first signs of madness. Mr and Mrs Bakshi were showing the McIntoshes out,

opened the front door and the lights of the cottage fell on the Bakshi vehicle. It was metallic blue, gleamed as the light caught it but wasn't exactly top of the range. They were all standing at the front of the house, exchanging pleasantries when, completely out of the blue, one of the peacocks suddenly flew at the car and started to attack it with wing beats and loud shrieks, audibly pecking at the bonnet, frightening and puzzling the McIntoshes as much as the Bakshis. Nobody wants to start a fight with a raving peacock and this one was pretty angry, that much was clear. The ladies fled into the cottage while the men dragged out a rug to wave in front of the peacock and yelled at the bird, too. This clearly had sufficient impact and it fluttered away.

To get over the shock the Bakshis and the McIntoshes had a whisky. Then another. And then no more as her Ladyship was a lady. Before the McIntoshes left, they switched off the cottage lights so as not to illuminate the blue car again or lure back the crazed peacock.

The following morning it became clear the damage done to the car was considerable. Just in that short time the peacock had really made quite an impact: the bonnet was festooned with dents and in places paint had been chipped off. Mr Bakshi said it was not so terrible and that his workshop could soon fix it or he might just do what his wife had been telling him for years and get himself a new car. But Mr Bakshi said he was somehow attached to the old heap.

Now then, said his Lordship, that was precisely why he wanted to sort it out through his own insurance and bear the costs himself, and in any case the Bakshis were invited back for a two-week stay next year, *gratis* and for nothing, in the same cottage if they still felt able to do so after the incident. By then the peacock would certainly have calmed down. Who knows, perhaps it, too, had been upset by the eagles' proximity? But

why it should then go and attack a car was not clear to his Lordship either but who can tell what kind of displacement activity a peacock like that was capable of.

And so both couples parted with all sorts of solemn reassurances that it wasn't that bad after all and that the insurance would be sure to settle and they were in agreement with everything and that Mr Bakshi should in any case send them the bill and it would be a real pleasure to see them again next year.

All this happened in mid-September. In October the peacock ripped to shreds a blue refuse sack and distributed the contents widely across the lawn. It snatched a visiting child's blue toy and carted it all the way to the woods so that nobody could find it, with the result that Hamish had to console the child with a rather larger toy, red this time. After that the bird noisily hacked away at the decorative ceramic spheres that Fiona had placed around the edge of the lake and finished by smashing them to smithereens.

At the beginning of November the smaller of the two dogs, Victoria, died and was buried in the woods. Albert and the McIntoshes were mourning her passing and had more on their minds than the mad peacock. One day the blue plastic water-butt was gashed and slashed so badly that its contents drained clean away and then a friend of the McIntoshes couldn't get his car into the garage quickly enough. Ryszard made safe the blue plastic trampoline, always positioned in a corner of the huge lawn, by fixing a green cover over it. Ryszard, a young Polish chap, was responsible for everything outdoors. The estate ran to thousands of acres, pretty much half the glen itself, and all this land had to be cared for. Ryszard looked after the heather, the woodland and the

meadows, he patched up fences, maintained the electricity supply to the cottages, worked the digger to make ditches, operated heavy machinery to clear away fallen trees and then chopped them up for firewood. On top of this he looked after the lawn in front of the house and did all the manual work that her Ladyship could not manage. Ryszard was a tremendous help to Lord and Lady MacIntosh and a relief after a few bad experiences with his predecessors. Ryszard saw what needed doing, was a good, keen worker and spoke little because his English was still not particularly good even after years in Scotland. Although reserved, he was consistently reliable and affable.

Meantime it became apparent that it was the colour blue and not the eagles that had so stirred up the peacock. The peacock was still young and obviously going through peacock puberty. He had recently got his coat of blue feathers but his train was still not particularly long, and the McIntoshes assumed it was an age-related hormone imbalance. The only shade of blue which did not affect the peacock was that of the other peacocks. And they were the only ones to defend themselves. The mating season was over but the peacock had not been particularly conspicuous during this time. Nobody knew whether he had mated successfully or whether something had gone awry. The McIntoshes decided to sit it out, see whether the problem resolved itself over the winter and ask the vet for advice when the opportunity arose. At the moment they weren't going to have time to think about all that because a rather upmarket visitor was expected.

The investment department of a London-based private bank had hired the west wing of the manor house for a long weekend. The lady head of department would be travelling up with four colleagues, a cook and a psychologist for what was known as 'creative time out and team building'. Hamish chuntered to himself about the 'creative'. Since when

have bankers had to be 'creative'? To fiddle the books, presumably. The McIntoshes knew from the very first telephone conversation with the secretary – who would not be coming with them – that the lady head of department could be rather difficult. But she would bring in money. And so they were now busy with sorting out the west wing which had been positively sumptuous a hundred years ago. But that was a hundred years ago. And it had probably been that long since anybody had turned up with their own cook.

[...]

[pp.36-40]

And then it was Thursday already. The lady head of investment at the London-based private bank and her Irish setter arrived together in a shiny new, metallic blue sports car while the rest of her group had driven up in something sober and black. The head of the investment department's foot had a close encounter with goose muck the very moment she stepped out of the blue vehicle. Of course, she still had smart business shoes on and, of course, did not find this particularly amusing. Inwardly, she was very wound up. Long car journeys were not very relaxing and the ability to relax was, in any case, not one of her strong points. Outwardly she made an effort to remain composed but was, nonetheless, of the opinion that when guests were due any property owner should please ensure no excreta were lying around precisely where one had to park. While she was trying to wipe the worst of it off on the lawn, the goose herself came waddling up at some speed, quacking loudly, her neck outstretched. Overall the goose's welcome was not viewed as friendly. She had never harmed anyone but her aggressive bearing well and truly frightened most people. The goose was, in any case, a better guard-dog than Albert whose barking always greeted guests but accompanied by a happily wagging tail. The head of the investment department wouldn't admit to anyone, of course, that she was afraid of the goose but, to be honest, the attack did little for her mood other than to confirm her reservations when faced with such large birds. It had given her quite a shock, with the attendant adrenalin rush and cold sweat, and now she was frightened, had goose muck on one of her expensive shoes, and it was damned cold on top of all that. What a great start.

The McIntoshes scared off the goose in their usual way and didn't consider the remaining deposits to be so terrible or worthy of further comment, as this was, after all, the country. Whoever came here, came precisely for that. If not expressly for the goose muck. What worried the McIntoshes far more was the lady boss's blue car but they could hardly tell her so as they had already noted that the lady was not so keen on birds although she was making an effort to look friendly. So they gave the lady banker a warm welcome, handing her a hose and kitchen paper so she could remove the infelicity from her shoe. To do this she took a couple of steps to one side and immediately got her next shock by nearly tripping over a dead animal.

The animal was not a live one but a stuffed one which appeared to have been loved literally to bits by Albert and Victoria. Since Victoria's death just a few weeks earlier, Albert had poured out his grief on this toy monkey but the lady head of the investment department could not, of course, be expected to know this. Nor did she know which she found the more disgusting, the dead monkey or the muck on her shoe. Clearly her own dog viewed the stuffed toy with far greater enthusiasm than she did and she kept telling him not to play with it. But the dog took no notice. He was called Mervyn, after the previous head of the Bank of England, something which may have been coincidence but gave the McIntoshes cause to hope that this lady did perhaps have a sense of humour. Her travelling companions, the other bankers and the cook and psychologist stood by, noticeably embarrassed, trying to make conversation about something else.

The McIntoshes asked politely if they'd found the place alright and if the journey had been pleasant and while her Ladyship was showing them everything (and outside Albert showed Mervyn everything, too), his Lordship excused himself briefly and went off in search of Ryszard.

Certainly there'd been no repeat performances from the peacock, and probably everything was all over but it could also simply be that there'd been nothing blue around the place. Better stay on the safe side. And, stupidly, they couldn't invite the boss to put her car in their garage as it was being used to store boxes, crates and smaller items of furniture, all from the west wing.

There was no mobile phone signal so he couldn't just call up Ryszard but fortunately they had already told him what needed to be done that day. First of all, Ryszard had cleared a blocked drain in one of the cottages, then some jobs wanted doing in the woods where the devastation caused by the recent storm had not yet been fully cleared. His Lordship hopped into the car and hoped he'd run into Ryszard down at the cottage but he'd already fixed the drain and left. The young family staying there praised him to the skies for his swift and friendly resolution of their problem, offered his Lordship a cup of tea and were obviously more than ready to chat. Thanking them, he declined and said he really had to find Ryszard, and rather urgently at that. This could turn into a merry dance, he thought, hoping that Ryszard had not already vanished into the depths of the woods. His Lordship didn't have any real insight into what needed doing in the woods, knew only roughly which way to go and was in the saloon car, not the 4 x 4. So he had to stick to the road. The bankers would certainly be wondering why his Lordship had so suddenly gone off in the car instead of giving them a pleasant welcome and showing them round, and apart from that there was a real danger that the peacock could at any moment set about the car belonging to the head of department who had not exactly been delighted with the goose and its excreta. All these things combined to make him extremely nervous. Happily, Ryszard had run into one of the farmers from the glen and stopped for a while on the way, so Hamish came across him still on

the road to the devastated woodland. His Lordship asked him to use food, or something of the like, to entice the peacocks as far away from the house as possible because he had no wish to see them at all in the next few days as madam had arrived in a blue car.

Ryszard promised he'd see to it.

[END OF SAMPLE]