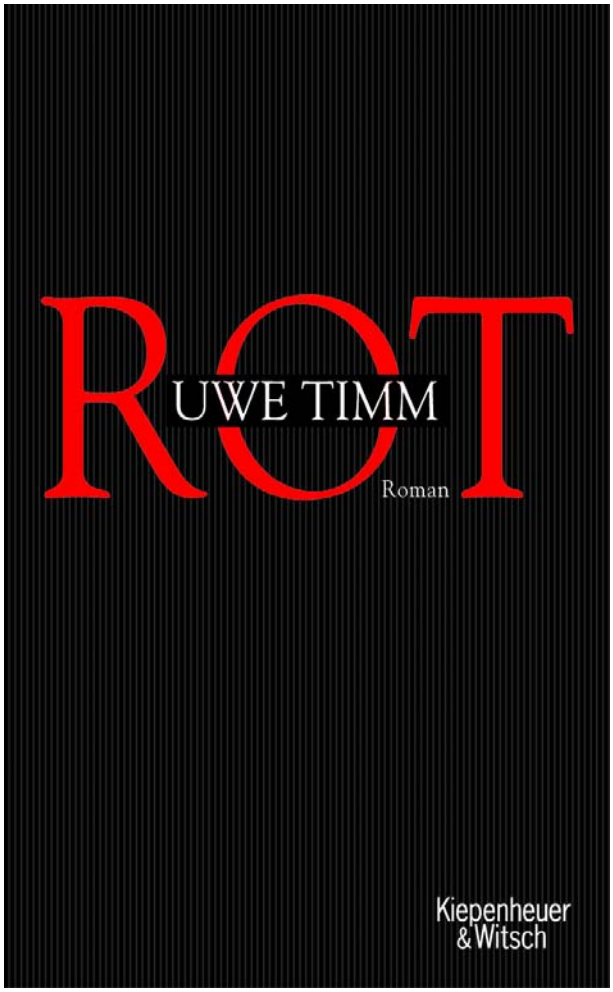
Sample translation

Uwe Timm: Rot

("Red")
Novel
Translated by Jeff Davies



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I'M HOVERING. From up here I have a good view of the cross-roads, the streets, the sidewalks below. I'm lying down there. Traffic is at a standstill. Most of the drivers are out of their cars. Curious people are standing around, some near me, someone is holding my head, very gently, a woman kneeling beside me. A car crashed through the window of a watchmaker's shop, I can't tell what make of car from up here, but I never was much good at car makes. Houses, trees, clouds, people, sky are reflected in fragments of the large display window that flew apart like a glittering cloud and now lies strewn across the road; one big puzzle from up here, but all in black-and-white. Strange, there is no colour, strange too that the one down there feels no pain. His eyes are open.

I hear voices, calling for an ambulance, curious people asking how the accident happened, someone says, he crossed the road on red, another says, the driver tried to avoid him.

The driver is sitting on the kerbstone, holding his head in his hands, he's trembling, trembling all over, while I lie there, quiet, no pain. Strange, but the thoughts flit back and forth and everything I think is clearly pronounced by an internal voice. That's good, because talking is part of my job. My briefcase is lying in the road, three or four yards away from me, it flew open, of course, an old leather briefcase. The small parcel of explosives flew out, as did my notes and record cards, no one bothers as the pages blow across the road. And I think, lets hope they'll be careful. I want to say, be careful, that's explosive. But I can't do it. Speaking is difficult, very difficult, especially that word. Strange, because I can think it and hear it so easily. So I say nothing. Silence. All hell has been let loose in your life. The things that go through one's head. We'll get

your company fighting fit with private coaching. If I could close my eyes now, I think, there would be peace. And something else, I can clearly hear Charlie Parker playing the opening of his solo from *Confirmation.*

I had just left her and was, maybe this will be important for the insurance later, on my way to my client.

She had called me in the cafe. The sun had just risen over the roofs of the houses and the tables still lay in the shade of the trees. It was already warm, hot even. It had hardly cooled down overnight. I smoked, drank coffee and tried to at least come up with an opening for the speech I have to give tomorrow. I had never put off a speech for so long. I was pressed for time. It is often one sentence that draws the rest after it, a beginning that contains everything else. I had written down a few key words: The angel of history. The red crystal within the white blossom proclaims the fruit. Changing names. Jonah in the whale. The victory column. The letter of confession.

Then the call came. The tweeting of the mobile phone.

Her voice was difficult to hear through the electronic crackle: You should come.

I'm working on the speech. You know that.

Yes. But you should come, please.

Where?

To me. Now.

I finished my cigarette, paid, put the sheets and record cards with the famous last words into my briefcase and went to the bus stop. What did she want? Why

this hurry? I was afraid, no, I was terrified that Ben had found out. Or perhaps all the secrecy, the hiding, withholding, covering up had just become too much for her. Confessions with unforeseen consequences are often made for the most trivial of reasons. Lying is revolting, she said – and in recent weeks she had had to lie a lot. Or perhaps someone had said something to Ben, maybe one of his friends with small children had seen us at the zoo, yes, at the zoo, we often met there. Or perhaps Ben became belatedly suspicious after discovering us in the apartment.

Only once, just after we met, had we slept together in her apartment, and on that occasion it almost blew up in our faces. After that I only visited her in the presence of others, for Sunday brunch, for afternoon cocktails, for one of her monthly dinner parties, and, of course, after her last varnishing day. An entrance hall like Versailles, mirrors on the walls, elves, strewing petals, plaster cast butterflies, bronze lotus-blossom lamps, one closes the wrought-iron lattice of lilies and with a quiet groan the mahogany elevator lifts one to the second floor, an apartment door as big as a barn door, wooden angel heads joyfully greet the visitor, a hallway, a suit of four rooms, double doors, and behind them the inexpressible, not a trace of cool silence or austere white emptiness. I thought I had walked into Makart's studio. A crimson tassel sofa with a gold embroidered meander frieze, two tiger patterned armchairs, on the floor a polar bear skin with a stuffed head, glass eyes looking greedily up, sewn-on round ears, white teeth, black-painted lips, grinning lecherously at the legs of the women who walk over his fur. A taxidermical master piece, this horny polar bear stare. On two consoles stand bombastic vases that Wilhelm the Second

would have been proud of, blue, with heavy breasted pink graces, but this piece is new, a sideboard, no, a unit, no, an installation, a steel, glass, plastic, rose wood sculpture integrating the television and stereo systems, tropical green wallpaper, two mirrors in bulging gold frames, two oil paintings, grazing sheep on the one, a young saint gazing fervently up to heaven on the other, and everything dramatically illuminated by laser-like spotlights, the extra large sports-field bed with its grass-green cover, the library with a velvet couch bathed in red light, the bathroom like a Ludwig the Second grotto. I have visited many apartments in recent years, but the last time I saw anything to compare with this was at my great-aunt's. I had to stop myself running around like an ignoramus going Oh and Ah, but not in appreciation, rather because she is the last person I would have expected to have an apartment full of such mismatched bombast. She is ahead of her time.

I live in white empty rooms, without ballast, somewhat old-fashioned, as she immediately commented. Two empty rooms in an attic flat, everything white. Otherwise lots of grey and black. My working clothes, worn, but good quality, things that one can wear even when they are frayed or holed: cashmere, cotton, silk. Coat, suit, hat, Borsalino, a present from a valued colleague, a piece from Alexandria. No books, with the exception of the book of books. One can only learn from the competition. I only ever buy one book, read it, give it away or leave it at the post office. I keep my belongings easily transportable, like my portable typewriter, an Adler VIktoria. I'm one of the remaining few who still toil on a mechanical machine. But I don't have to write novels. I have my extended fingers like narrow steel joints before my eyes and the mechanics in

my ear, the solid impact. I like to see the characters striking the paper as I write. I make notes with a fountain pen, sometimes with the feeling that my soul is flowing through my fingers. All the cards are filled out by hand, the closing words, the important maxims. The reason I stick to this old-fashioned form of writing, I sometimes remind myself, is not inflexibility, not fear of computers, it's just more fun for me to hear the mechanics, or when I'm writing with a fountain pen to watch, in hesitant reflection, the transformation of the shiny deep black fluid into grey black matte.

A suit-case and a bag make up my belongings. I can move on at any time.

She didn't believe it, and once she did what she normally refuses to do, she came home with me, to this attic flat, two rooms, a bathroom, kitchen, a table, two old kitchen chairs that somebody threw out, a Japanese futon on the floor, a faded red kilim for a cover, a piece from the last century, a present from a client whose tears I spared, and an armchair, leather, steel frame, Swiss made. On the wall a Japanese scroll, a few black painted symbols on light brown rice paper, a calligraphy that a Japanologist once translated for me: words reflecting on words.

If I had to pack my things for a quick getaway there are only three items that I would regret having to leave behind: the armchair, the kilim, woven in fine gradations from carmine to fire red, and the scroll. I would try to store the kilim and the armchair with the young author who moved into the adjacent attic flat two months ago. Sometimes I hear him talking to his furniture. A dialogue: when he is speaking to it and when he is silent. I can clearly hear when he is listening to its replies, which, unfortunately, I cannot understand myself. Come on, you

can't tickle me, he says, probably to the chair, and when he says, now you stand still, damn it, I assume he's speaking to the table.

She heard him talking that day too, but thought he was just talking to himself.

No. You only have to listen through the wall.

But who can do that?

Me.

She laughed at that, and when Iris laughs the sky over Berlin lights up. She begins quietly, as if someone is lightly tickling her, opens her lips, full lips, encircling and highlighting their opening, she wears a deep red lipstick, her teeth, even white teeth, except for one incisor inclining slightly out of alignment, the glistening pink and, as I know, firm gums, this tender red ribbed throat – she laughs, smearing her eyeliner, she laughs as others cry. People around her stop talking, they look up, irritated at first, then they grin until they start laughing too, without having the slightest idea what it is they are laughing about. This laughter is what I love about her most. It wipes all sadness away, and no doubt that is the underlying reason for her success. Of course, other things play a role too: her legs, her hair, and above all her eyes, or rather their sensitivity to light. That's why she usually wears her Audrey Hepburn sun glasses, and only when she wants to determine the shadow exactly does she take her glasses off, the half shadow, hard, soft, deep shadow. Then she can say, there's too much white in it, it needs a touch of pink. That's what she said in my attic flat. The rooms were so empty for her, so cold. She had recently visited the apartment of a poet, gruesome, as empty as it was boring. Sterile. And, of course, that's the way he writes. She is convinced that the surrounding environment, the rooms

and, above all, the light has a deep effect on our sub-conscience and therefore on our thoughts and actions – and yes – our fantasy. Something is only fantastic, she says, if it is seen in the right light. Like this whale tooth, a skrimshaw, lying on my table. The ivory is surprisingly heavy in the hand and the highly polished surface lets the growth of the deeper layers shine through. A sailing boat and the portrait of a woman have been etched into the ivory, framed in a stylised rope, and beneath, in eccentric lettering, the inscription Rebekah 1851: perhaps alluding to a woman overseas, perhaps to a ship.

I didn't even know whales had teeth.

Sperm whales do.

She also liked the picture I had hanging in the kitchen, the only picture in the flat.

Beautiful, a Horch. That must have cost a fortune.

No. I was given the picture for a speech. In my line some people still pay in kind. The Horch is not a picture in the conventional sense. What one sees framed and somewhat raised beneath the glass is typewritten pages, some carefully folded, some crumpled into shape, like the winding of the brain, and lying in the midst of this paper landscape the stamped time card of a construction worker, soiled with bootprints, all bric-a-brac, but everything unearthed for a purpose, and that is the point. The appeal of these pages, on which just small scraps of words are legible on the folded edges, unrelated, haphazardly thrust together, only derives from the fact that Horch, with the tenacity of a detective, tracks down the cleaning ladies of Berlin poets and asks them, or occasionally bribes them, to collect manuscript pages from the poets'

waste-paper baskets and give them to him. After making seven such pictures the Berlin reservoir dried up. He found the other Berlin writers so miserable he didn't even want to put their manuscripts pages into his pictures.

Nice, the picture, really nice.

Do you want it?

I'd love it. Of course. But how would I explain it to Ben, he knows Horch, and he knows that Horch doesn't usually sell his pictures, and when he does, only at ridiculous prices. No, impossible.

And you don't think Ben noticed anything?

Nothing.

I mean, he's not, how shall I put it, suspicious?

No.

Now that surprises me, because he is a controller by profession, at a car company. I thought these people were equipped with a highly developed sense of distrust and constantly on the alert. But Ben has noticed nothing so far, not even on that afternoon when he came home unexpectedly and Iris went to him with a bright red face, wearing her skirt inside out, the seams and hem clearly visible. Perhaps he thought it was the latest fashion to wear skirts with seams on the outside. And the redness in her face? Her cheeks glowed. He *had* to see that, her hair sweaty on her brow as if she had run up ten flights of stairs to greet him, a black lace handkerchief grasped in her hand, her slip. Ben did not see anything, not even the bare feet in my black slip-on shoes. I came out of the guest toilet, had cooled my face, washed my hands, dressed myself, I had, however, as I fled to the toilet, forgotten my socks, they were still lying beside

the grass-green marital bed.

He brought me some material on the philosophy of light, she explained my appearance to Ben. For an instant I was afraid he would lash out at me. We were standing in the wide hallway right next to his golf clubs. But he just said, Hello, pleased to meet you, and shook my hand. I found your speech very good, and you know what particularly impressed me – the musicality of your speech, not at all halting, apart from that, I really liked that bit about the tears. I thought you were singing, that you must be a singer.

No, I said, I can't sing, I play the piano, I play jazz sometimes. I told him about the band I play in every Sunday morning, an old timers band, in an attempt to divert him from the bare feet in my shoes. I never talk about it otherwise, not even to friends, although we play in public. There are things that one should do, dear mourners, but not talk about, so that they remain pure to us, not misused to make oneself important or for social climbing. For the sake of Iris, I broke this resolution.

The next day I didn't dare ask her which of them had cleared my socks away, good anthracite socks, a colour, no doubt, also favoured by controllers. She didn't want to be reminded of it, found the whole scene embarrassing, ghastly, disgusting even. She could not, as I could, laugh about it.

Dreadful, she said, I wanted to sink in the ground. Appalling. It violates his dignity.

Yes, it's idiotic and ridiculous – for us, but not for him, no, in a state of innocence dignity is inviolable.

Rubbish.

She was close to crying. As she looked up she gazed straight past me and made a movement of her head as if she wanted to shake everything off. I don't know why she didn't finish it there and then. It would have been the simplest and most sensible thing to do.

I met her at a funeral. She sat in front of me in the first row, the hall was full, as is usually the case when young, professional people die.

I had discussed the procedure with Thomson. The coffin was hardly visible beneath the mass of garlands and wreaths, it smelled like a garden, of freshly cut flowers, of boxwood, and on top of this the smell of perfume. It was noticeable how many young people were among the mourners. The deceased had worked for a film company. She had reached the age of 32. It was her sister who told me about her. Her mother could not. Her partner would not. I don't know why.

She died quickly, unbelievably quickly, said her sister. From the diagnosis, cancer, to her death it was only three weeks.

I went outside again into the summery hot spring day. The buds on the trees had exploded in light green. The people stood in small groups before the chapel of rest, elegantly dressed in black suits and dresses, some were smoking.

Here I saw her for the first time, a young woman with blond, remarkably thick neck-length hair, her scantily cut black trouser suit, the waist-length jacket with a deep V neck, did not immediately make one think of mourning. She stood with others in a circle as if they were talking, but all were silent, looking straight ahead. Those are the sort I like best. Far more pleasant than the lively ones

who communicate by tone and volume that life still goes on, folks. Those are the worst, worse than the melodramatics or the drunks or the self-conscious who whisper through crooked mouths.

I can't remember seeing Ben at the funeral. But he was there.

Thomson, the funeral director, came floating through the congregation, his tread was so light, he did not walk on his heels but on the balls of his feet. His walk is inimitable, and everyone who sees him tries to walk in the same quiet, careful way. If you please! The people stopped talking, entered the hall and sat down.

A string quartet played the first movement from *Fragments - Silence* by Luigi Nono at the request of the partner of the deceased.

I had spoken with the sister and with her colleagues, I had looked at photographs and the films she had worked on, had also had the work of a set designer explained to me. I was well prepared, as always, because I only take on cases that interest me. And so I got to know the deceased: as a baby in her mother's arms, as a girl with a scooter, on a bicycle, on a horse, dark hair in a pony tail, with girls from her class on a skiing holiday, at the beach with friends, she's there, arm in arm with different young men. The photographs revealed nothing about the relationships, just the general happiness, obvious light-heartedness.

The admiration of the younger for the older sister could be seen in the arrangement of the three photo albums she had compiled for her big sister's 30th birthday. I am always amazed how from the stories, the photographs, the mementoes a person gradually emerges, becomes more tangible and ever

more familiar; someone who at the beginning of my inquiries seems to match one's vision of the ideal person, with hardly a moral blemish, always helpful and good, but then, the more photographs, letters and things I see, the more specific my questions to friends and relatives, things come out that were not mentioned at the start. In a box of loose prints were some other photographs, one shows the deceased with her partner in a restaurant garden, she looks sad, her face half turned away from his as he stares aggressively at her. Another photograph shows her on the film set, sitting on a kitchen chair, drained and weary, looking anxiously up at a man – is it the director? – who is waving his index finger in front of her face. Slowly, piece by piece, I made myself a picture of this woman's life.

I went up to the narrow wooden pulpit, laid my manuscript on it, said, dear mourners, mentioned the names of the next of kin, her mother, her brother, her sister, her partner, and only then did I lift my head and look briefly into the crowded hall, found her, the young woman, she was sitting in the front row beside the partner of the deceased, exactly in my line of sight. I faltered for a moment because her stare was so disparaging, hostile even.

For the guests with only a distant relationship to the woman I briefly listed the stages of her life, childhood, school, the academy of art, then her work as a set designer in film production. I had asked the producer what he particularly valued about her work and was told the meticulousness of her drafts and the stringency with which she supervised their execution. I mentioned her passion for travel and photography. Several times she had travelled to Namibia to study and photograph the rock painting of the bush people, photographs, dear mourners,

at which I had marvelled, this attempt to throw light on a culture so far removed in space and time. And light was obviously central to her work, because she used various sources of light to photograph in the cave, even torch light. The figures, animals and people daubed in a reddish earth, now shine out to us in this warm hue, hunters and hunted, coloured shadows on a rock background, pictures that capture with such strange magical power these random incidents that occurred so far away, so long ago. Many photographs, mostly slides, convey a wonder at something so remote, that she was continually striving to understand, and that, at least this is how I see it, she tried to integrate with her work as a set designer, as a search for a background that frees the figures, these shadows in motion, and yet, in a quite extraordinary way, draws them together.

At this point I looked into the hall and immediately met, despite trying to avoid it, the gaze of the young woman. She looked at me curiously, tensely even. She made a peculiar head movement that has since become so familiar to me, she shook her hair over her face, but at that moment I took it as a sign of resistance, of rejection.

I looked at the manuscript in confusion and went straight into the next paragraph: The status of death is paradoxical. It embodies the presence of the absence. That is the incomprehensible, the shock for us. She is still there, this person we know so well and love, the departed, and yet she is no longer there. This young woman, whose laughter, whose seriousness, whose thoughtfulness so touched me when I saw her in the photographs, suddenly exists, in all her potential, in her hopes, fears, her deeds, in the memory only.

The things we still remember. Only those who are forgotten are dead, thus the charming Jewish custom of laying small stones on graves as a visible and lasting symbol of commemoration.

As she noticed my words were directed towards her she shook her hair over her face again, but more gently, as if she had noticed my irritation the first time. I spoke once more of the work of the deceased, the preparation for a film due to be made in a few weeks time, a task she had nearly completed, marvellous drafts, that I had seen and admired, but some remain unfinished, like this life that had come to an end at such a young age; at this point the crying in the hall got louder, a suppressed sobbing came from the first row, it was the boyfriend of the dead girl.

Let me now say something about the mourning that follows this first, silent, unspeakable pain. Pain is blind, but mourning can see. It is guided by the memory, the visualisation of the person who's nearness one wished for, looked for, wanted to hold on to, to whom one had opened oneself completely, whom one had loved. Love, if it is not self-centred, calculated, attention seeking, sees the uniqueness, the specialness of the person whom one, often without knowing why, loves. One cannot command love, it is something that must be given away, given freely, and one can never count on love in return. What does it concern you, if I love you, says Philine, that wonderful female character in *Wilhelm Meister*. And that is why the sublime act of letting go is also part of love, to know this is the dignity of the one who loves. Nevertheless, there is no consolation in letting go, one is inconsolable in one's loss, only in mourning does a remembrance begin in which we become aware of ourselves and of the

other.

Suddenly, I felt I had struck the wrong tone, that I had spoken too solemnly. I should have said: No, death is beastly. Basta! I ran my hand over the manuscript and in so doing brushed the last page off the pulpit, it sailed slowly to the floor and came to rest under one of the wreaths. I raised my eyes, looked around the hall, looked into her face. For a moment I hesitated, unsure whether to pick up the page or not, but to start crawling around on the floor now and fish the sheet out from under a wreath would have been highly inappropriate. Moments of intense mourning always run the risk of tipping over into the opposite, into laughter. And so, for the first time in three years, I spoke freely: The physical expression of letting go is crying. In a society which for centuries held out against a frugal nature by means of thrift one is also sparing with one's tears. I admire the Latin countries where tears are allowed free flow. They are the physical expression of the grievance. They let our pain run out. Morality is inseparably bound up with the ability to cry. It is the purest form of communication of all that language cannot say. Why there is death, why suffering, why we know this, is question to which there is no answer. That is what makes this question so momentous. It is the question of all questions, it gives all things and ourselves their significance. To speak of the inexpressible, to talk of the incomprehensible can only diminish its meaning. Thus silence must be eloquent – let us remember the departed.

After the burial, after the flowers, many flowers, had been thrown into the grave, so many that they filled the pit, we walked beside each other to the restaurant. I

liked your speech, she said. Do you do it often?

Yes, now and then.

And otherwise?

I write critiques for the radio, but again only now and then.

What about?

Jazz. I did not say that I also occasionally played piano in a band. I could neither live from playing nor from writing, but at least when asked how I made my living I did not have to say, by making funeral speeches. Although funeral speaking is a job like any other. And the many wasters and alcoholics one finds among ones male and female colleagues one surely finds in other occupations, in editorial and press offices, publishing houses, everywhere where people deal with opinions that are not necessarily their own.

And you? What do you do?

I sell light.

Light?

Yes.

In *Swan,* the restaurant in which the better off mourners congregate for the funeral meal, I was able to sit beside her. We sat at a long table, opposite me the professor, of whom no one really knows whether he is a professor or not. He comes to all the well attended funerals. He nodded to me as to a distant acquaintance.

Among the larger groups of mourners who gather for a small lunch or a meal with several courses, funeral eaters are often to be found. Some I know. Thomson informs the bereaved in advance that the cost of the meal is tax

deductible. This generally leads to unabashed generosity. And at larger funerals such as this, one or two uninvited eaters go unnoticed. Thomson only intervenes when more than three want to join the mourners, or if someone is drunk or reeks of piss. Thomson always lets the professor attend. In contrast to the other uninvited eaters who hang around outside the restaurant he always comes to the memorial service, sits in the hall towards the front, earnest, intently following the speech. An old man, white-haired, with rimless spectacles, he wears a spruce, if worn, black suit, a small rosette on the lapel, maybe the Legion of Honour, maybe a similar looking Finnish order, or maybe its just the emblem of a rowing club. Thomson calls him the professor, but nobody knows what the man really was in former times, perhaps just a student drop-out, perhaps a defunct professor of historical materialism.

He knows that I know who he is, but he has never, ever, given even the slightest hint of looking for tacit collusion.

Once, early on, I was tactless enough to ask him about his relationship to the deceased and he calmly answered that he was just a distant relative. That's also how he introduces himself if asked by one of the mourners: great-uncle, he says, or if the dead person is older: a cousin, but very distant and around a few corners. He says this nasally and with emphasis, offers condolences to the bereaved with a fine delicacy. The mourners then say, Ah, and look at him inquiringly, he says, uncle Christian, I'm uncle Christian, strictly speaking great-uncle. And one sees their faces as they think about it, trying to remember great-uncle Christian, the brother of aunt Mimi they guess. No, her husband's brother.

He looks so intellectual, his oval spectacles twinkle when he smiles and says, the degrees of relationship are not as exactly defined in German as they are for example in Usbeki or Tamili. And then they say: Yes, of course, you're right, slap themselves theatrically on the forehead, of course. Nobody wants this friendly old gentleman to think they don't know who he is, that they have never heard of him.

Aunt Alma also passed away, they say self-consciously.

Yes, unfortunately, says great-uncle Christian.

He takes his place at the dinner table away from those with whom he had discussed his family relationship. He sits and eats quickly, but not too quickly, his head bent slightly over the plate so the fork does not have to travel far to his mouth. He can eat quickly, but he never looks greedy. He tucks the napkin inside his shirt collar, the effect is that of old-fashioned refinement. Fish or venison goulash? Venison goulash please, and the cranberry sauce on a separate plate please. He looks at the wine-list. The Bordeaux please, the *Château le Thil Comte Clary*. What year is it? He is the only one among the mourners who asks the year. 1997. Hm. Good, if you could bring it please.

He was sitting beside a young woman who worked as assistant director on the film. He listened, nodded, told a story about Lil Dagover, whom he once met in Berlin shortly after the war. The wine came, the waiter showed him the label, yes, *Château le Thil Comte Clary*, he read out in a good French accent. The conversation came to a halt as he tried the wine. The others had ordered white wine. He sniffed, tasted, and then slightly wrinkled his brow just above his nose. He looked at the waiter with an expression of mild regret. With hardly a shake of

his head, the merest intimation, he sent the bottle back. The waiter took it away without complaint. Since this had happened at other meals, I assume he wanted the waiters to have a bottle. The waiter brought a new bottle. Again he tasted it, everyone watched him expectantly, anxiously even – he nodded. The waiter poured. So that he did not have to drink the red wine alone I drank a glass with him. The wine was really good. He raised his glass to me: A very impressive speech.

And the dead girl's relatives raised their glasses to us both.

Impressive, he said, because you did not try to smooth over anything. What I particular liked is the way you made the connection between archaic rock drawings and film sets.

I know when he praises me it is never ingratiating, never tactical, he's a connoisseur and he can draw comparisons. He hears the Protestant ministers and Catholic pastors, the non-confessional free speakers, the Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist speakers. When he says, you were good today, then I know I was really good. He can point out the attributes, recognises the work that has gone into the speech. He is a funeral aesthete not to be compare with these other degenerate funeral feast eaters.

It is always the most difficult to say something about people who die young, he said.

Yes, she said, I was really afraid of the hypocrisy, the platitudes. Just ghastly. Your speech surprised me. I liked what you said about mourning and the tears. She spoke about her departed friend, whom she had known since they went to school together. It's hard to handle the unexpected, the suddenness. I called

Rolf yesterday, her boyfriend, to ask him if I should pick him up for the funeral today. The telephone rings and rings, and suddenly she answers, her voice, what a shock: We're not in at the moment, but we'll ring you back if you leave your telephone number; thank you, bye. This bye, do you understand? No. I was totally shattered.