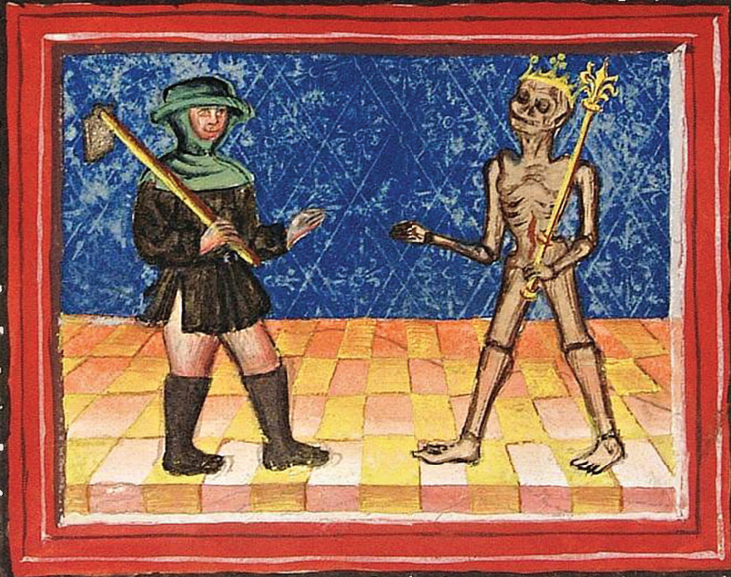


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WHEN THE TIME COMES

JOSEF WINKLER

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WHEN THE
TIME COMES

JOSEF WINKLER

Selected Other Works by
Josef Winkler

Mutter und der Bleistift

Wortschatz der Nacht

Roppongi: Requiem für einen Vater

Natura Morta

Domra, am Ufer des Ganges

Friedhof der bitteren Orangen

Die Verschleppung

Das wilde Kärnten

In English Translation

Flowers for Jean Genet

The Serf

WHEN THE TIME COMES

JOSEF WINKLER

TRANSLATED BY
ADRIAN WEST



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INTRODUCTION

JOSEF WINKLER WAS BORN IN KAMERING, a small farming village in the mountains of Austria's southernmost province of Carinthia, a mostly rural area slightly smaller than Los Angeles County that has given birth to a long list of writers of international stature, among them Robert Musil, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Peter Handke. His father, the Plowman, as he calls him in other works, with reference to the dialogue between Death and the Plowman by the Medieval German writer Johannes von Tepl, seems to have devoted himself single-mindedly to his estate, his crops, and his livestock, showing little regard for his bookish, anemic son, to whom he would one day bellow, as the novel *Roppongi* recounts: "When I'm no longer around, I do not want you to come to my funeral." Among the few phrases he attributes to his mother, who was left speechless by the deaths of her three brothers in the Second World War, & whose desolate resignation is the subject of Winkler's most recent work, *Mutter und der Bleistift*, is the admonition: "We've got no money for books!"

Thus, as is so frequently the case in Austrian literature, his writing is a writing-against: a deflation of the clichés of pastoralism, an unveiling of the cruelty and

corruption moldering beneath the serenity of the alpine countryside, and a reprisal on behalf of the neglected and repressed against that nation's "Catholic National Socialist spirit ... which is in fact a negation of the spirit," in the words of Thomas Bernhard. His vehemence has carried over into his articles in the popular press, where he has been ruthless in his attacks on the venality of the Austrian political establishment. Yet in spite of his well-known intransigence, the label of *Nestbeschmutzer* or gadfly hardly exhausts the range of his work.

Winkler's autobiographical novels, based on true events and incorporating living persons, skirt the outer limits of the genre: their art lies not in the fabrication of scenarios, but in a painstaking rendering of visual detail and an attention to the musicality of phrases that often extend over entire pages. His approach is the precise opposite of the fervor for novelty characteristic of so much of contemporary literary culture, where authors become brands and must keep current through an increasingly perverse prostration to the whims of the literary market or risk their work's being remaindered and forgotten: in general, his books are meditations on the same limited number of motifs from his childhood and youth, seen now from one angle, now from another, picked up, caressed, and set back down repeatedly, like the tatter of rope that sits on the desk of Maximilian in the present novel, having previously

held the bodies of the suicides Jonathan and Leopold dangling over the floor of the parish house barn.

When the Time Comes is Josef Winkler's ninth book. Many of the events it examines — the aforementioned double suicide, the drowning of the maidservant who paints her face with menstrual blood, or the author's aunt holding him over his grandmother's coffin and enjoining him to look down at the lifeless face below — appear in his earlier novels as well, particularly in the trilogy *Das wilde Kärnten*. "Death," Winkler has said, "is my life's theme." There can therefore be no question of *moving on*, as the cliché goes. "I am happy," he says elsewhere, "among the dead, they do me no harm, & they are people as well." Winkler often gives the impression of being alive only reluctantly, by compulsion or in deference to others, and seems even to resent the vitality that separates him from the cadavers that haunt his dreams.

If the characters and incidents related in *When the Time Comes* are not new in Winkler's work, their treatment here is nonetheless unique. Less novel than poem, it revolves around the central metaphor of the bone cooker who brews a black stock that is painted on the horses of the farmers in the village to ward off insects: the bone cooker becomes the chronicler of the village's dead, recounting the story of their disastrous ends before laying their skeletons in a clay vessel, one atop the other. His ominous narration is interlaced with verses from

Catholic songbooks and the stanzas of Baudelaire's "Litanies of Satan," and follows an architectural motif based on the cruciform village of Pulsnitz, at the center of which lies a calvary where a painting by the parish priest, depicting a sinner laid out in torment on the floor of Hell, consigns the residents to their doom. Like Homer in the Catalogue of Ships or the Trojan Battle Order, Winkler enumerates the bloodlines of the benighted families that populate the town, their relations devoid of warmth and serving only to pass on the inheritance of extinction. As Thomas Wirtz comments, reviewing the book for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Winkler's genealogies are forced death institutions." Carinthia comes to be seen as a kind of House of Atreus writ large, its inexorable decadence symptomatic both of the suffering and solitude of the author's childhood and of the longing for symbolic vengeance thereby inspired.

My first encounter with Winkler's work was in 2011, when I purchased a pair of books that had been issued by Ariadne Press some fifteen years before: his fourth novel, *The Serf*, and the short meditation *Flowers for Jean Genet*, translated by Michæl Mitchell & Michæl Roloff respectively. The first, composed after a long absence from his home village, is a reframing of the tale of the prodigal son inspired by the words of the baroque dramatist Jakob Ayrer: "I am the serf of death / It cannot but be so." The second is representative of a type of

narrative Winkler would return to in *Domra: am Ufer des Ganges*, and the astonishing book of short fiction, *Ich rei mir eine Wimper aus und stech dich damit tot*, a hybrid of travel writing & capsule biography in which Winkler examines foreign landscapes through the lens of his totem writers and the recollections their words dredge up. These books impressed me deeply: only rarely does one encounter an artistic vision of such singularity married to a style so elegantly wrought and resolute; and I was dismayed to find, after I had finished them, that nothing had been translated into English since, nor anything written save the odd scant reference in surveys of German-language literature, an academic article or two, & a single book review in *World Literature Today*; a fact that, while much to the credit of the latter publication, highlights the dismal but widespread tendency to emphasize the exoticism of the allegedly foreign at the expense of its individual æsthetic virtues, so that the reading of writers from beyond the Anglo-American sphere comes to be seen at best as a curious diversion, like *ethnic* cuisine, and at worst as an obligation to qualify for that most contemptible of modern virtues, *well-roundedness*.

Josef Winkler's standing in the German-speaking literary world is beyond question: from the Special Jury Award at the 1979 Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for excerpts from his second novel to his recent election as President of the Austrian Arts Senate, his career has comprised

an uninterrupted succession of accolades & recognitions, the most notable of which was his being presented with the Büchner Prize in 2008. His writing has been acclaimed by the eminent critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, by W.G. Sebald, by the Nobel Prize winners Elfriede Jelinek & Günter Grass. For these reasons alone, his near-absence in the literary consciousness of English-speaking readers strikes me as unconscionable. It was with the wish of remedying this omission that I began to translate Winkler's work in the spring of 2012, at first with short pieces in *Asymptote* and *Friction: Review*, and then with a serialization of the present text, in a somewhat different version, in the *Brooklyn Rail*. As more publications followed, it became clear that there was a broad interest in seeing more of Winkler in print & that, thanks in part to the wave of independent presses willing to take risks to shed light on underrepresented writers, and in part to the communication among readers facilitated by such online outlets as *3:AM*, *Words Without Borders*, and *The Quarterly Conversation*, the audience for fiction in translation had grown immeasurably in the decade and a half since Winkler's first appearance in English.

For me, the importance of Josef Winkler lies in his radical insistence on the priority of lived experience against the allegedly artistic, but actually merely commercial, imperative to innovation; not to mention his categorical refusal of decorum or compromise. There are

stories that Winkler has told a dozen times in his books; but these stories are never over, he stresses, their figures will not stay in their graves, and we are wrong to try to push them away. Not only does one have the sense, in Winkler's work, that there is something morally higher than the esthetic proscription of repetitiousness; we also feel that his concern for the effects of obsession on the course of a life — he has now been writing for thirty-five years, without ever averting his gaze from the catastrophes of his Carinthian childhood — is something nearly unprecedented in scope and originality.

WHEN THE
TIME COMES

The bone stock, said the ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache and the trimmed eyebrows, was brewed in the village by a little man who lived in miserable circumstances. He used to gather up the bones from the slaughter and lay them in a clay vessel, which he placed in a hole in the ground over glowing coals and covered up with dirt & clumps of grass. He would let the bones simmer down to a greasy, viscous brew, called "Pandapigl" in the dialect of Carinthia. The bone cooker would wrap the small smoking furnace made of boards in barbed wire, and he had it guarded by a dog that crouched there day and night. From time to time, as a child, the now ninety-year-old man would take an empty beer bottle to the bone cooker and have him fill it with the bone stock and pay him a few cents, or in kind, with a bit of meat, sausage, bread or milk. Amid the heat of summer, the farm people would take a crow's feather and smear the dense, black liquid on the horse that pulled the hay cart, around the eyes and in the outer ears, and on the nostrils and the belly, because the putrid-smelling stock warded off the insects that used to pester the cart horses, above all on the hot summer days, so vexing them at times that they would take off through the fields, kicking and jerking their heads, and crash with their carriages on the shores of the Drava.

“Let us note in passing that the Christian’s attitude in prayer, head and eyes lowered, is unfavorable to meditation. It is a posture conducive to a closed and submissive intellectual disposition, & it discourages spiritual audacity. If you choose this position, God may come, swoop down on the nape of your neck, and leave his mark there, where it may linger a long time. In order to meditate, you must find an open attitude — not defiant — but not prostrate before God. You must proceed cautiously. A bit too much submission & God will bestow his grace upon you: then you’re fucked.”



IN THE VERY BOTTOM of the clay vessel where the putrid-smelling bone stock was rendered from the bones of slaughtered animals, to be brushed on the horses with a crow's feather around the eyes, on the ears and nostrils, and on their bellies, to protect them from the flies, the horseflies, & mosquitoes, lie the arm bones of a man, torn from his body in a trench on the battlefield, who dragged a life-sized statue of Jesus through the forest before the Second World War and threw it over a waterfall. Even after days of searching, they couldn't find Jesus' arms, broken off from his body in the fall — the pastor, Balthasar Kranabeter, wandered for nights on end through the forest, with a flashlight and a prayer card hanging around his neck, praying loudly Holy God, we praise thy name, Lord of all, we bow before thee — but in retribution, according to the priest, the blasphemer lost his own arms in Hitler's war, spent the rest of his days with a wooden prosthesis to which iron hooks were affixed, and had to be fed by his wife and children. Before meals, he would make the sign of the

cross over his forehead, lips, and breast with the iron hooks affixed to his prosthesis, and pray, Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and bless what thou hast bestowed. Since then, the village priest & painter of prayer cards used to say, lifting his index finger menacingly before the wide eyes of the children of the landowners and peasants seated before him for their religion lessons, that town built in the form of a cross, which had already been burned to the ground at the turn of the century, is encaged in an image framed left to right, top to bottom, by fire, and the profaner of Christ lies within it, his hands aloft among the red and yellow flames darting upward from the floor of Hell, his naked torso bound by a green serpent as thick as a man's arm. Red-winged Lucifer leans over the sinner and spills a cup of gall into his mouth. *Ô toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges, Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges, Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!*

WITH THE STATUE of Saint George, patron saint of horses, which was brushed in the early morning, while the dewdrops still glistened on the periwinkles growing along the church's outer wall, with the black bone stock, smelling of decay, around the eyes, nose, mouth, and halo, the townspeople, among them Maximilian's then eight-year-old father, walked the four kilometers from Pulsnitz to Großbotenfeld at seven in the morning, led

by the sacristan carrying a cross. With the life-sized statue borne by four men, the faithful would take the outstretched right arm of the village rebuilt in the form of a cross — fifteen years before, some children playing with fire had reduced it to ashes — and slip between the cramped fingers of the crucified right hand, praying their Hail Marys and Our Fathers until they had passed over the palm pierced by the nail and then falling quiet as they arrived at the dank Ponta forest, where to this day thousands of snowdrops still blossom in the springtime. The Ponta forest was also called Galgenbichl, where the criminals were hanged, Maximilian's ninety-year-old father said, and as a child, when he would go on foot to Kindelbrücken to take a message to his grandfather or bring him his mail, he used to pass by there as quickly as possible, in dread. The murmuring of the procession only rose again when the pilgrims had turned toward the neighboring township of Nußbach, likewise built in the form of a cross, and had left the Galgenbichl behind. After a mass held in a clover field in Großbotenfeld, paid for year after year by Maximilian's grandfather, Florian Kirchheimer, a horse-breeder esteemed far & wide, the Saint George procession would disband. The pilgrims visited their friends and family, the taste of the host still in their mouths, or went to the inn, or sauntered home on the field and forest paths. The statue was lifted onto a calash and pulled back to Pulsnitz, where it took up its place in the church, by two horses accompanied by

the priest and Maximilian's grandfather, and running girls would follow behind them, daisy wreaths woven with horsehair into their hair. *Let the scent of this sacrifice rise to thee, Lord, and our words not be ignored. We have slain not calves, but thy sacred heir, who shall lead us away from despair.*

IN THE CLAY VESSEL where the pandapigl was rendered, to be brushed on the horses with a crow's feather around the eyes and nostrils and on the belly, to protect them from mosquitoes and horseflies, Maximilian, the bone collector, lays atop the arm bones of the blasphemer, who threw a life-sized statue of Jesus over a waterfall before the Second World War and lost his own arms on the battlefield — That was a punishment from God! the priest would scream over and over from the pulpit —, the bones of his great-grandmother, Paula Rosenfelder, who lost a son in the First World War and took her own life, it was said, because she feared her pregnant daughter, who lay in bed with an infection, would fall ill with the Spanish flu and succumb to death, as so many other young women in the village built in the form of a cross had done. Her husband, August Rosenfelder, Maximilian's great-grandfather, came back home from the cattle market, looked for his wife in the kitchen and stable, went into his pregnant daughter's bedroom & asked after her mother. Throwing the quilt

back from over her head, his flu-sick daughter whispered hoarsely: She's gone back up to the attic! The bone collector's great-grandfather climbed the steep attic staircase and saw, before he had reached the last step, his wife's head hanging modestly over her breast. He approached the corpse, strangled with a calf halter, and cried: But mama! But mama! It seems Maximilian's grandmother, Leopoldine Felsberger, pregnant with Maximilian's uncle, Kajetan Felsberger, at the time of her mother's suicide, kept the incident long concealed, and only spoke of it during the Second World War, after hearing that her son Michæl — the third to have done so — had fallen in Russia, in the vicinity of Nevel. She fainted in the garden and was carried into the house by her husband, his legs quivering. When she came to, she lit a candle and prayed more than an hour for the souls of her three fallen sons, & then, in tears, she told of her mother's suicide for the first time.

AUGUST ROSENFELDER, Maximilian's alcoholic great-grandfather, was often mocked and jeered at by the fourteen-year-old Rupert, a schoolmate of the now ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache and the trimmed eyebrows. When the young man had once again aped his bandy-legged gait, the drunk struck him in the face with a switch of hazelnut. The fourteen-year-old stood crying with a broken nose and

blood-smearcd face before the shouting old man brandishing his switch. His daughter-in-law, who wanted to limit his alcohol intake, filled his empty schnapps bottle with bleach. The bleach corroded his throat and pharynx so badly that he could hardly nourish himself and only ate and drank with unbearable pain. In his eighty-first year, soon after this grievous injury, he tied a black rosary around his wrist, went into the stable, unfastened the hemp cord from one of the calves crouched at the feeding trough, wound the rope around his neck and hanged himself from the doorframe of the stable.

In the clay vessel-where the putrid-smelling bone stock was rendered from the bones of slaughtered animals, to be painted on the horses with a crow's feather in the summer heat, around the eyes and nostrils and on the belly, to protect them from the pricking and blood-sucking horseflies and mosquitoes, lies the skeleton of the hanged August Rosenfelder over the skeleton of his wife Paula, who took her life up in the attic. A thick black braid covered her right eye and the tip of her tongue, which stuck out from between her lips. When the stable doors were forced open, his hobnailed shoes clacked against the wooden floor, and the rosary swung back and forth between the blue tips of his contracted fingers, and the young woman, who had been looking for her father-in-law, and who had burned out his esophagus with bleach, felt the burst of the stall air and saw her father-in-law dangling in the dung-splattered doorway,

his tongue protruding from his mouth. *I hear a call ring out: Brother! wake from thy slumber, the Lord is come to us, night is far, the day is nigh! Eschew all deeds borne of the night! Henceforth may all men bear the arms of light!*

THE FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD LUDMILLA FELFERNIG, Maximilian's mother said, had to work on the Schaflechner farm with peasants and menials who mocked and jeered at her incessantly. Once, the boys were stacking straw bales on the threshing floor of the barn when the girl, to use his mother's words, became unwell. As she bent over the straw bales, the boys made fun of the blood that had seeped through her underwear. In tears, the girl let the straw bale fall and ran down the gangway of the hayloft and down the village street to the calvary, where she knelt, folding her hands in prayer, under the flames leaping up from the floor of Hell. While the menstrual blood ran over her thighs, she sobbed out, with a pounding heart: Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom His love entrusts me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Wedging her hand between her thighs, she smeared blood on her face, on the whitewashed wall of the calvary, and on the devil's horned head, & ran, red-masked, with blood-drenched hands and thighs, past the graveyard, where the crosses stood stiff as life-sized toy soldiers, stretching their thorn-crowned heads, past the church, over the slope

of the pond, down through fields fenced in with rusted barbed wire hung with tufts of gray and brown hair from the grazing cattle, through the narrow, tangled woodlands by the river, and flung herself into the rapids of the Drava. After days of pointless searching, her corpse was pulled out of the river in Villach. Milla got snagged up in the grating on the Drava bridge! Thus Maximilian's mother, the wife of the ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache and the trimmed eyebrows.

In the clay vessel where the pandapigl was rendered from the bones of slaughtered animals, to be painted on the horses with a crow's feather, around the eyes and nostrils and on the belly, to protect them from the pestering mosquitoes & horseflies, the bone collector lays the skeleton of the fifteen-year-old girl, found caught up among the driftwood in the grating and pulled up out of the river, over the skeleton of August Rosenfelder, whose dung-splattered corpse was cut down from the stable door before the cow tails swinging back and forth. Opposite the schoolhouse, in the center of the town built in the form of a cross, in front of the calvary where the blasphemmer, who threw the life-sized Jesus over a cliff, lies among the flames of Hell, holding his hands aloft, while Lucifer, his red wings unfurled, bends over his victim, to spill a cup of gall in his open mouth while he cries out in misery, the funeral train halted, with the black-clothed priest, the acolytes in black & white, the peasants and menials bearing lit candles and

murmuring prayers. With holy water and incense, the priest blessed the bloody handprints the young suicide had left on the walls of the calvary and on the image of Hell that he himself had painted, saying: *Ô Prince' de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort, Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort, Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!*

IN THE DEPTHS OF WINTER, at twenty degrees below zero, when Maximilian's grandfather Florian Kirchheimer used to drive the horse-sleigh laden with milk cans twenty kilometers among the snowdrifts from Pulsnitz to the dairy in Villach, he would put on an ankle-length leather coat with a tufted black lamb's wool liner. For the townspeople, who sent their milk over to the dairy, he was given raw sugar & oil in exchange; wrapped to his ankles in his leather coat, his sleigh hung with icicles, he would pass them out to the townspeople on his return in the same place where he'd picked up the milk. He would draw the oil up out of a jerry can and pour it into glass bottles carried by the townspeople who stood there waiting for him.

Maximilian's father, the ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache and the trimmed eyebrows, said that as a child of five, afflicted with a severe inflammation of the middle ear, he had sat one winter day in the horse-sleigh beside his father in his ankle-length leather coat with the tufted black sheep's wool liner, a

wool scarf wrapped around his head to protect his aching ears, while they carted logs held together by heavy iron chains from Römerhof to Frankenhausen by way of Pulsnitz. While his father was handing over the logs at the sawmill in Frankenhausen — from afar you could hear the blows of the pickaxes against the tree trunks, round, moist, & slippery, crashing against one another as they were dragged from the horse-sleigh — the five-year-old child, suffering from an inflammation of the middle ear, was treated in the office of Doctor Lamprecht.

For a sick call, the bone collector's father said, you had to seek out the country doctor, in winter with the horse-sleigh and in summer in a calash. Only later did the doctor buy himself a horse and ride out to see the sick and dying. Before harnessing the nag in the summer heat and mounting its shimmering flanks with his brown leather doctor's bag, he would brush the black bone stock, smelling of decay, around the horse's eyes & nostrils, on its outer ears and on its belly, with a crow's feather, to drive away the insects.

On the way back to Pulsnitz from Frankenhausen, the child of five with his head bound up sat again in the horse-sleigh beside his father, who grasped the cracking leather reins, clothed in an ankle-length leather coat lined in tufted black sheep's wool; moaning low to stifle the pain in his ears, he watched the two horses trotting along the spruce forest's edge, the silvery glimmer of their hooves in the sun. The reins still hang today, the

leather dark gray, worn thin by the horses' hindquarters and now cracked and peeling, along with the rusty harness, in the attic of Maximilian's parents' house, under wasps' nests the size of soccer balls.

As a twelve-year-old child, Maximilian's father shoved a hay bale into the chaff cutter in the hayloft. Before the boy could pull his hand back, his brother Eduard spun the wheel of the machine in a circle and cut off one of the child's fingers with the rotary blade. The two brothers ran screaming down the gangway, the younger one holding his right hand in the air, its little finger hanging by a flap of skin, and into their parents' house. The village midwife, lingering in the kitchen & chatting with Maximilian's great-grandmother about the floral decorations for the high altar on the coming Corpus Christi, cut the flap of skin with a pair of scissors and threw the child's finger on the dung heap, where it landed among the roosters and hens, which jerked their heads, cackling in fright, and scratched at the ground. After the midwife had disinfected the child's stump, she smeared a black and bitter-smelling ointment on it, tied a piece of cloth over the wound with a white thread, and washed the blood from his forearm. The mother assembled her six children around the table and lit a candle. The children folded their hands — coarse, chapped, and filthy, the nails chewed away — and prayed to their guardian angel, staring fixedly at the candle's wavering yellow flame.

For two whole summers, when he was five and six, Maximilian's father had lived with his asthmatic grandmother, who was sent to recuperate in a little roadside cabin overlooking a brook in the mountains in Innerkrams, where thousands of sheep, cows, and horses grazed in the pastures. His grandmother would buy polenta and milk from the neighboring farm people and make breakfast and dinner for herself and her grandson at the open hearth. From time to time, his father Florian rode a horse — a bottle of the black bone stock lay near to hand in his saddlebag — the forty kilometers to Innerkrams & brought his son home-baked bread, speck, sausage and potatoes. As classes had already begun in his hometown of Pulsnitz, the six-year-old went to school in Innerkrams for a time. Between his teeth you could still see the yellow grains of polenta as the ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache & trimmed eyebrows grinned, bright-eyed, and told of how the teacher in Innerkrams, from whom he had learned his first letters, used to ride to school on a white horse, trailed by shouting children.

AMONG THE GREEN GRASSHOPPERS leaping left and right, forward and backward like sparklers over his shoes, the boy used to go often in the midday summer heat, through the meadows smelling of herbs and fresh-cut grass, or in the fall through the misted-over fields of

stubble, when the black, mildew-scented leaves from the bushes growing on the forest's edge clung to the bottoms of his hobnailed shoes, but also in the knee-deep new snow or the iced-over fields — the deer would sink down in the snow, their long slender legs breaking through the crust that glimmered in the sunlight — to Kindelbrücken, where his grandfather, Ferdinand Kirchheimer, lived in the Buggelsheim Inn, to bring him a message or his mail. The grandfather would give the child a slice of Reinling with cinnamon-coated raisins baked in, spreading yellow butter and his hand-harvested honey on the pastry. Eat, boy! Eat! He would say as the honey dripped off the bread and ran between the boy's fingers. The boy would lick the honey from his fingers, eating one slice of Reinling after another at his grandfather's side while the latter opened letters and sipped coffee. He observed the old man's gray beard hair by hair. I can still remember his coffee cup very well, it was white, had blue dots, and a dark blue lip. The enamel was chipped in several places: thus Maximilian's ninety-year-old father. When his grandfather died — his skeleton lies in the clay vessel where the bone stock was rendered from the bones of slaughtered animals, to be brushed on the horses with a crow's feather, around the eyes & nostrils and on the belly, to protect them from the bloodsucking mosquitoes and horseflies, over the skeleton of the fifteen year-old Ludmilla Felfernig, whose swollen body, mouth agape, hair soaked and clogged with sand, was

pulled out of the Drava by firemen — the twelve-year-old boy, who used to visit the old man year in, year out, bringing him letters and messages — the old man told Maximilian the story with misty eyes, his dentures clacking — had cried terribly.

One hot summer day, when the brown horses painted with black bone stock stood already harnessed in front of the stable, their heads buried in a trough of oats, before the coffin was brought from the mourning house to the cemetery, the face of his grandfather's corpse, which had been left exposed though it had already begun to rot, swelled so fat that the hairs of his beard poked out like the spines of a hedgehog. The dead man, reeking of decay, oozed a cadaverous fluid that dripped out from the cracks in the black wooden box, down the catafalque draped in black crepe paper, and onto the floor of the mourning chamber. While the coffin containing the swollen body was carried out the door and heaved onto the hay cart, where the two brown horses smeared with bone stock were harnessed, shuddering, shaking their heads and stomping to drive away the flies, Ingo Kirchheimer, one of the dead man's sons, stood at the wide open window on the second floor of the house and let out a cackle over the surrounding mourners, who raised their heads, and over the black-dressed priest, who was lifting his damp gray aspergil for the final blessing. The corpse fluid had dripped onto the brown Carinthian suit of one of the pallbearers, & he vomited beside a funeral

wreath propped up against a garden fence. On its black ribbon, in golden letters, was written A Last Goodbye. *Let all our thoughts be winging, to where Thou didst ascend, and let our hearts be singing: "We seek Thee, Christ, our friend, Thee, God's exalted Son, our Life, & way to Heaven."*

FROM TIME TO TIME — the ninety-year-old man with the gray-flecked moustache and the trimmed eyebrows used this turn of phrase repeatedly when speaking of his childhood and youth — his uncle Ingo Kirchheimer, who stood cackling at the second floor window of the mourning house while his father's body was carried out the door for its final blessing, so that the black-dressed priest, lifting his gaze, let the damp aspergil drop back into the dented copper vessel, would go on foot from Kindelbrücken to Pulsnitz and bang a stone against the iron rail in front of the Kirchheimer estate, presided over by his brother, until a few heads poked out over the crossbars of the parlor window. Then he would vanish without entering the house. After suffering a bullet wound in the First World War, Ingo Kirchheimer, the great-uncle of the bone collector Maximilian, was admitted to the insane asylum in Klagenfurt, & appears only to have left, save for a few minor excursions with his relatives, three decades later, in a coffin. His brother Florian used to visit him now and then in the psychiatric hospital and bring him a package of speck, sausage,



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“Josef Winkler is someone who not only writes, but rather lives to write.”
— Günter Grass

“Josef Winkler’s entire, monomaniac *œuvre* [...] is actually an attempt to compensate for the experience of humiliation & moral violation by casting a malevolent eye on one’s own origins.”

— W.G. Sebald, author of *AUSTERLITZ*

IN THE YEARS before the Second World War, a man throws a statue of the crucified Christ over a waterfall. Later, in Hitler’s trenches, he loses his arms to an enemy grenade. The blasphemer, screaming in agony, presided over by Satan, who pours a cup of gall into his open mouth, is portrayed amid the flames of Hell in a painting by the parish priest that is mounted on a calvary where the two streets in the cross-shaped village meet. Thus begins *When the Time Comes*, Josef Winkler’s chronicle of life in rural Austria written in the form of a necrology, tracing the benighted destiny of a community through its suicides and the tragic deaths that befall it, punctuated by

the invocation of the bone-cooker whose viscous brew is painted on the faces of the work horses and the haunting stanzas of Baudelaire’s “Litanies of Satan.” In a hypnotic, incantatory prose reminiscent at times of Homer, at times of the Catholic liturgy, at times of the naming of the generations in the book of Genesis, *When the Time Comes* is a ruthless dissection of the pastoral novel, laying bare the corruption that lies in its heart. Writing in the vein of his compatriots Peter Handke and Elfriede Jelinek, but perhaps going further in his relentless and aesthetic radicalism, Josef Winkler is one of the most significant European authors working today.



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