

Translated excerpt

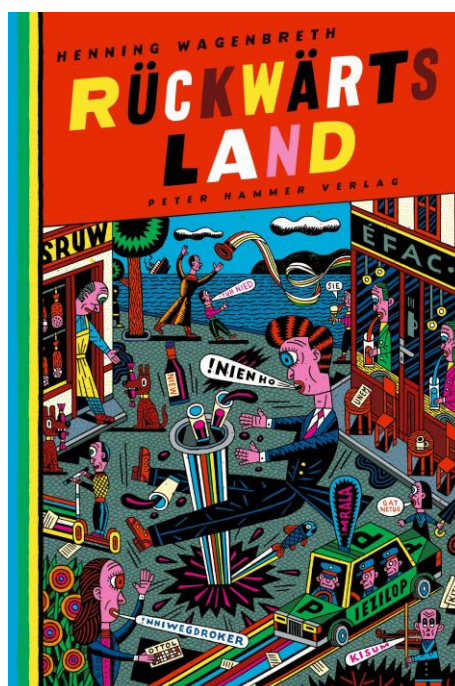
Henning Wagenbreth
Rückwärtsland

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Henning Wagenbreth
'Backwards-Land'

Translated by John Reddick





Have you ever, a hopeless sloven,
Forgotten your supper in the oven?



Not remembered to take your coat
and as a result been thoroughly soaked?



Snagged a sleeve on the kitchen door
and smashed your best china on the floor?

Slammed your front door,
then in stockings feet
without keys or your phone
stood shivering in the street?



Or chosen a course you should have refused
that left you bored and very confused??



Have you smoked to great excess
leaving your health in a terrible mess?





Did you sometime in the distant past
run over a rabbit while going too fast?



Light so many candles your friends to amaze
that your family's house was soon ablaze?



Or vote for the party that later chose
to torture and murder its so-called foes?

Has cheating people been your pleasure,
then lying too, for sheer good measure?



With hateful words, too rashly spoken,
left a dear friendship badly broken?



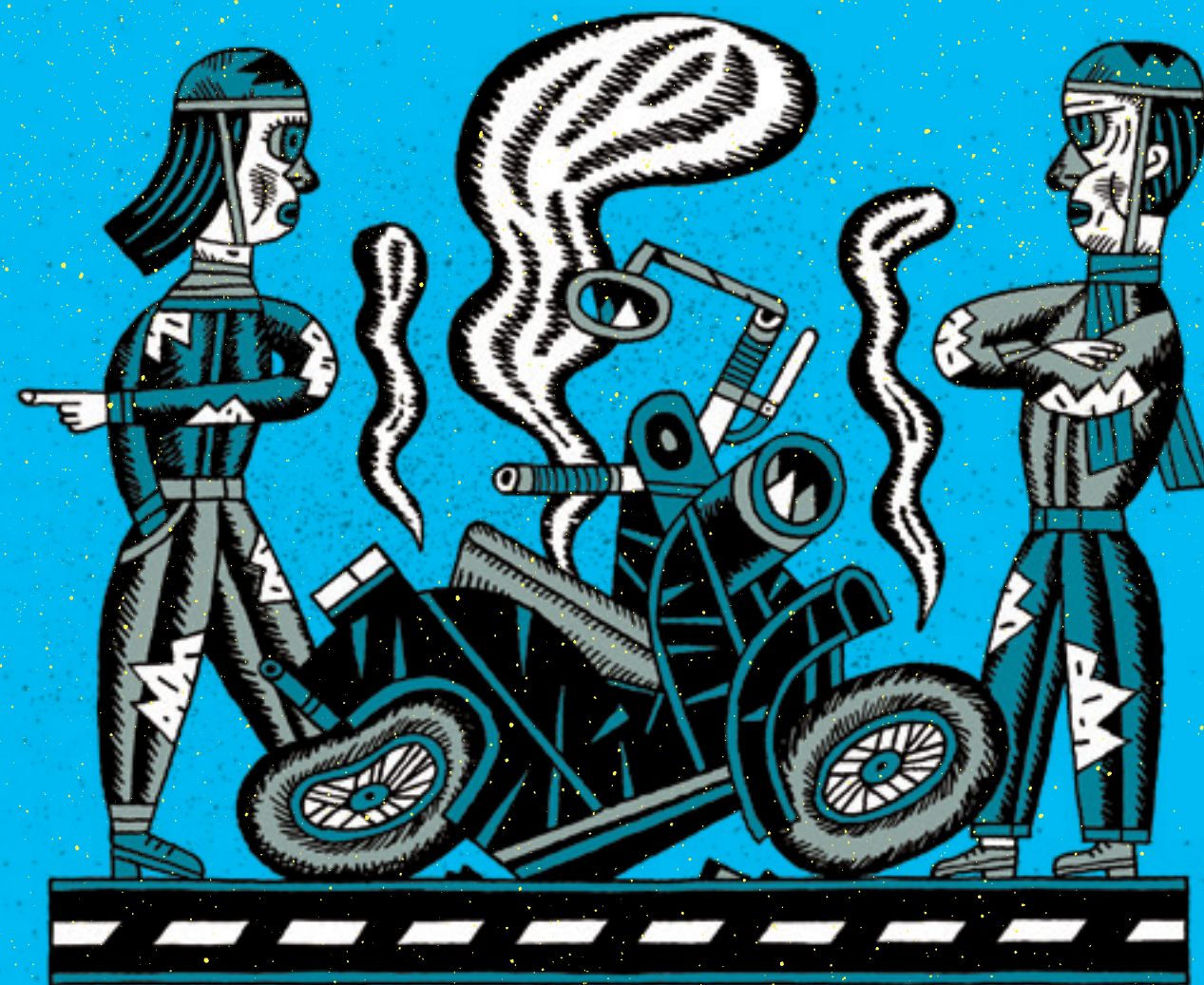
All these things you now regret.
– If only time could be re-set,
put back to front and thus refashioned
as if this stuff had never happened.

Then you could do things over again,
and very much better in the main.
No longer normal, our world instead
would appear to be standing on its head.

These illustrations now will show
how in this world such things would go:

So come, I'll take you by the hand
and introduce you to

BACKWARDS LAND



Written in his night-time bed
by the artist Henning Wagenbreth

Translated by John Reddick

XXXXXX Publisher



It's not that far to Backwards-Land,
you'll quickly see it's no big deal:
you simply turn round on your heel
right on the spot where now you stand.



And in a flash it's not quite seven,
though moments earlier the clock said eight,
while the breakfast roll you're still demanding
is already sitting on your plate.



We set the alarm for early dawn,
as that's the time we hit the sack.
Retracing our steps to the baker's shop
we give the breakfast rolls straight back.

In the early evening we wake up tired,
but dance and sing, drink more and more,
then, to ensure we don't get fired
leave for work at roughly four.



Rain falls upwards to the clouds,
uphill rivers here abound,
it's thanks to the current from our houses
that turbine blades whizz round and round.



Men with chainsaws in their hands
get tall, old trees once more to stand,
and then on Sundays, doing good,
we plant out mushrooms in the pristine wood.



When you go to a foreign land try your best to understand:

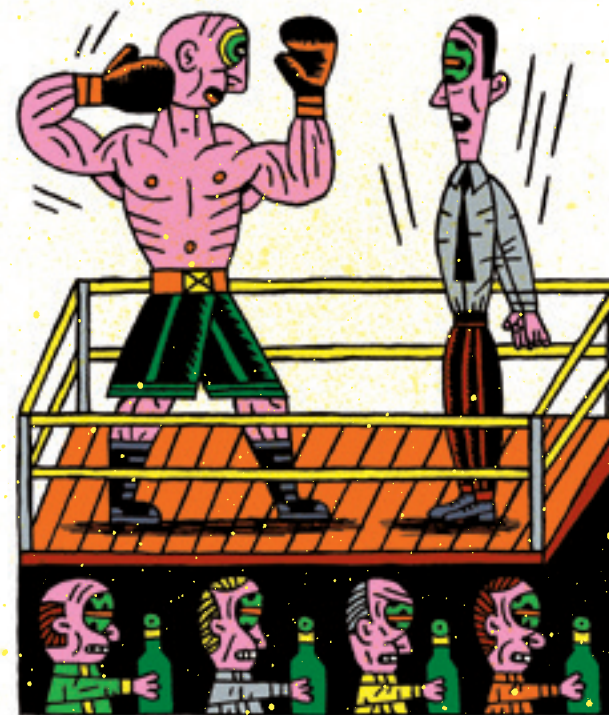


Being abroad can be quite scary, unless you know their vocabulary:

Cyclists racing just for larks
through narrow streets and quiet parks
are first stopped short by cops in line
and handed money to pay their fine.



The papers tell you (to your sorrow)
what awful things will happen tomorrow:
which cars will collide - and that's no joke;
where a giant gasometer will go up in smoke.



Using the power of hefty punches
a boxer makes black eyes disappear
while down there on the yowling benches
bottles suck back the drunkards' beer.



Clever teams of archaeologists
who'd dug up statues others missed
now take the wonders they had found
and put them straight back in the ground.



Birds that long have been extinct
now fill the skies (the missing link?)
For aeons again on Mother Earth
there'll be dinosaurs of massive girth.



The local rag is full of stories
of babies that are not yet born,
and people hunt for treasured photos
in albums dusty and forlorn.



Down by the river, ivy-clad
stands an ancient gravestone looking sad.
An inscription says 'I miss you so',
but the name of the 'you' went long ago.



But then one day with lowered head
a woman stands lamenting her dead.
Placing a rose for old time's sake
weekly visits she henceforth makes.



And thus before much time has passed
the tomb is a sea of flowers at last.
Exhumed once more by tearful men
the coffin is borne back home again.



Put to bed by his loving wife
the dear deceased is brought to life,
again to have a merry time
and even enjoy a glass of wine.

They've children now and family life,
but back at their wedding there's sudden strife
and blind with anger and in a daze
they decide to go their separate ways.



numbers and letters become a fog
he can't even manage to draw a dog.
walking and talking are also lost,
and his toys are sold regardless of cost.



After forty years of happy marriage
he finds himself right back at college.
Uni makes him much less clever
and school does the same with keen endeavour:



Feeding himself is soon beyond him,
filling his nappy is all he can manage.
The priest baptises him betimes,
and into the womb he happily climbs.



TSEP MET

Suddenly amidst the storms of winter,
close by a reef of blackest rock,
appears a ghost ship all a-splinter,
far from the safety of any dock.



All its masts are smashed to bits,
all its sails are ripped to shreds.
Even the helmsman's having fits
knowing that Death wants to have their heads.



Men emerge from the raging water
screaming Rehtom! Pleh! and 'Dog ym ho!
Their faces tell of pure torture
Sure that back home they'll never go.

The furnishings are all asunder,
every last bottle of rum has spilt.
Barely audible above the thunder
a requiem sounds with a drunken lilt.



Down on their knees the sailors go
when dawn at last begins to show.
By singing sea shanties they try to cope
and soon are filled with a surge of hope.



As if their prayers were somehow heeded
the raging tempest fast receded.
Joyous now in weather mild
they sail back home to wife and child.



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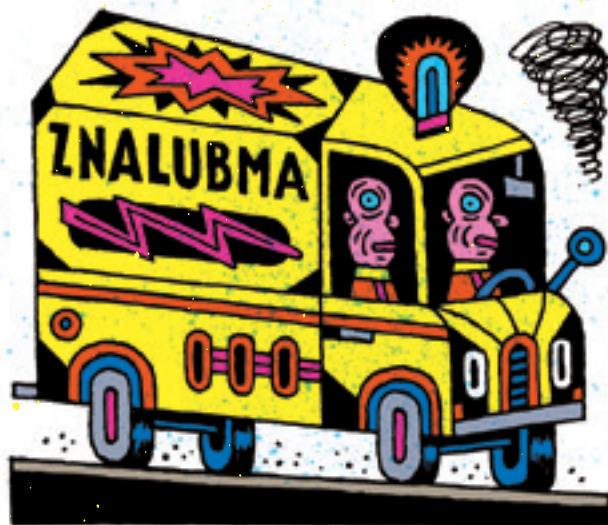


This man here is very ill,
but, thank the Lord, he's breathing still.
His face has turned a bilious green,
with bones all broken he can only scream.



A long two hours of major surgery
and he thinks he's landed down in Purgatory.
It's an absolute must, the medics know:
onto a stretcher he has to go.

Against the flow and blue lights flashing
the ambulance is madly dashing.
Fighting time, they have to rush
and cope somehow with the peaktime crush.



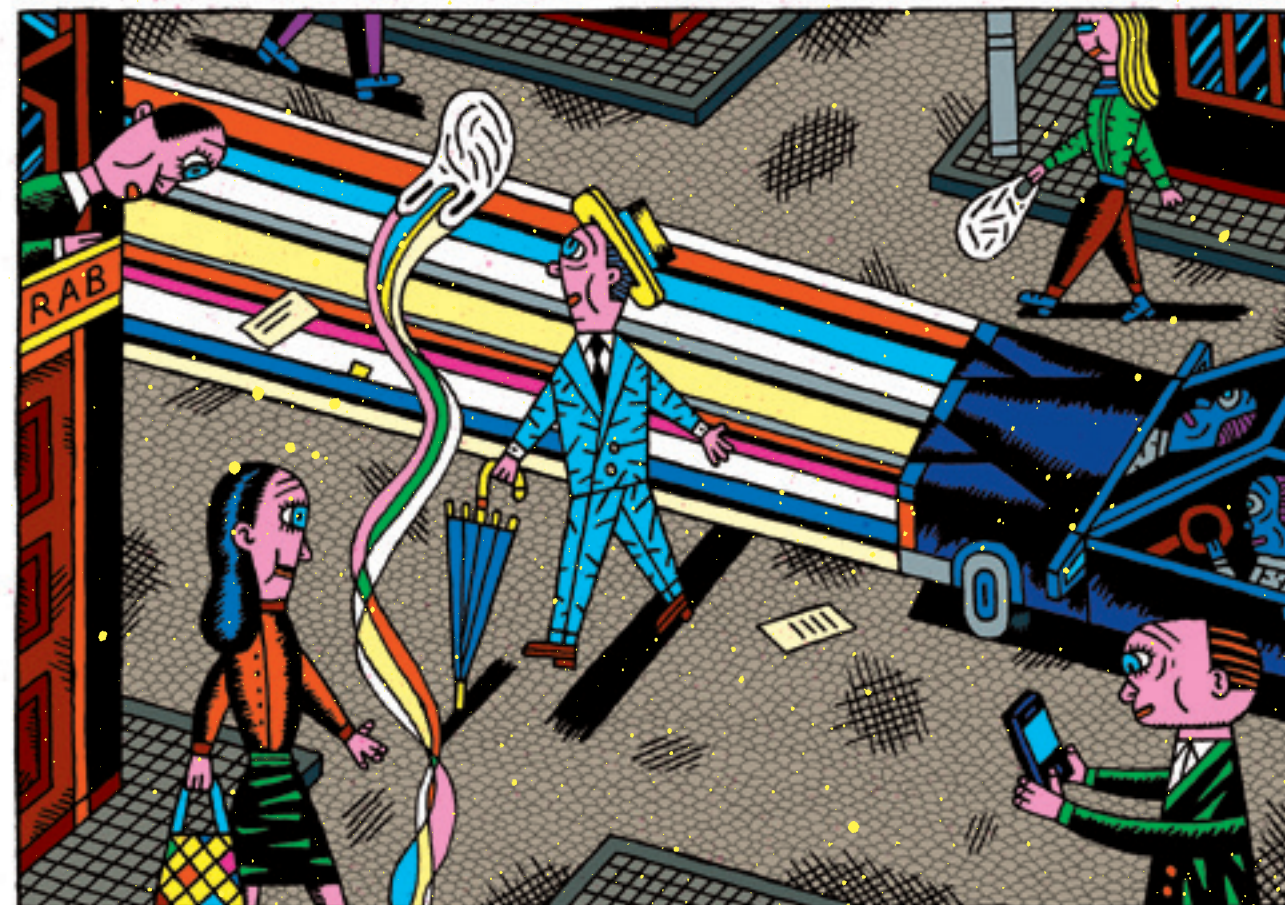
Bystanders gape with horror-struck faces
watching the crew go through their paces.



He's there on the road, the outlook's bleak,
but first of all there's a loud 'beep-beep!'...



...and a big dark car comes roaring along, flattening the man - who'd done no wrong.
Behatted anew he jumps to his feet and rushes off along the street -



this way, that way, without a care, ignoring the traffic as if on a dare.
Whistling a tune he gaily capers around the corner - and shouts „till later!“.