

The Awakening by Ernst Stadler

Translated by Richard Sheppard

Biography

Born 1944 in Weymouth, Dorset, Richard Sheppard taught German and European Literature at the University of East Anglia, Norwich from 1967 to 1987, and then taught German at Magdalen College, Oxford (Fellow and Tutor) and Christ Church (Lecturer). He is the author of *Ernst Stadler (1883-1914): A German Expressionist Poet at Oxford* (1994) and *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (2000).

Keywords

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The Awakening

Already once have trumpets calling ripped my restless heart to bloody shreds,
That it, uprearing like a steed, might tear its teeth enraged on bridling girths.
Then drumbeat called us to attack on every front,
And bullets raining down for us was earth's most glorious sound.
Then, of a sudden, life stood silent. Paths pointed us through woods of ancient trees.
Chambers enticed. And sweet it was to linger and lose oneself,
To free the body from the world's imprisoning chains as though from dust-drenched
armour,
To sink ecstatic down amid soft quilts of dreaming hours.
But came a morning when the bugles sounded, rolled their signals through the mist-
filled air,
Metallic, sharp, and hissing like a striking sword. It was as when in darkness sudden
lights beam out.
It was as when across the tents at dawn the trumpets rattle out their blasts,
The sleeping soldiers start up, strike their tents and saddle up their horses.
I was railed in by ranks, which pushed forth into morning, fire over helm and hand-
guard,
Onwards, in eye and blood the conflict, reins held forwards.
Perhaps at evening victory marches would console us with their touch,
Perhaps we would lie stretched out somewhere under corpses.
But before our seizure and before our sinking down
Our eyes ablaze would drink till satiate with world and sun.

Der Aufbruch

Einmal schon haben Fanfaren mein ungeduldiges Herz blutig gerissen,
Daß es, aufsteigend wie ein Pferd, sich wütend ins Gezäum verbissen.
Damals schlug Tambourmarsch den Sturm auf allen Wegen,
Und herrlichste Musik der Erde hieß uns Kugelregen.
Dann, plötzlich, stand Leben stille. Wege führten zwischen alten Bäumen.
Gemäcker lockten. Es war süß, zu weilen und sich versäumen,
Von Wirklichkeit den Leib so wie von staubiger Rüstung zu entketten,
Wollüstig sich in Daunen weicher Traumstunden einzubetten.
Aber eines Morgens rollte durch Nebelluft das Echo von Signalen,
Hart, scharf, wie Schwerthieb pfeifend. Es war wie wenn im Dunkel plötzlich Lichter
aufstrahlen.
Es war wie wenn durch Biwakfrühe Trompetenstöße klirren,
Die Schlafenden aufspringen und die Zelte abschlagen und die Pferde schirren.
Ich war in Reihen eingeschient, die in den Morgen stießen, Feuer über Helm und
Bügel,
Vorwärts, in Blick und Blut die Schlacht, mit vorgehaltne[m] Zügel.
Vielleicht würden uns am Abend Siegesmärsche umstreichen,
Vielleicht lägen wir irgendwo ausgestreckt unter Leichen.
Aber vor dem Erraffen und vor dem Versinken
Würden unsre Augen sich an Welt und Sonne satt und glühend trinken.