

Katie Utne

11.05.15

Undergraduate Research Project

Translation of the First Five Chapters of *Bruno* by Gerhard Falkner

“Don’t divide the bear’s skin before he has been killed.” –Indian Proverb

## Chapter One

I am here. That I read in the newspaper.

The newspaper says that I should have arrived in Leuk.

Leuk is a place in Valais.

Valais is a canton in Switzerland.

Switzerland is a small country in the heart of Europe made out of granite.

At least I know how I look because of the notice in the newspaper.

Although I’ve never wanted to look the way this picture so apodictically depicts me, perhaps I can use it to help me find what it’s picturing.

Even if it only shows the front of the head, like a license so to speak, the image on the front of that fleeting magazine tells the people that I am on the trail.

Perhaps this picture won’t help me at all.

It shows nothing more than a face in nothing more than a newspaper.

So basically nothing.

Since my arrival, this face that I brought from Berlin, now looks quite different, but this one has the added intention to be surrounded by mountains.

This face sees itself surrounded by mountains, whose peaks are still covered with ice and snow even though it is in the beginning of June.

Floating sails flash through the silver blanket over the top of the peak as long as the sun shines. At the moment, not even a stone’s throw from my window, the cerise glow of the sun reflects off an old burlesque cherry tree and grape vines that have already grown into flawless rows like school children standing in a line.

I probably reflect the changing temperature pattern. The heat stays downward and as I travel into higher surroundings, it gets chillier.

While in a particular region the way of thinking in which clarity and cold support each other thrives, a craving growls on the inside, a desire churning in the stomach with flames licking at the feet.

Directly across from my face and my view of the alarmingly high and looming peaks of the main alpine ridge whose names must also end with “horn,” rises Illhorn.

Behind the foot of Illhorn, the nearby Gorwetschgrat, and the descending mound of loam and rubble, winds a broad, light green river through Pfywald in Rhonetal.

The window of a former grain silo overlooks the rushing river of the light green Kierferwald. On its edges, the sweet robins build their nests and on the northwest side a natural bed of tourmaline clay from the river constantly shimmers.

Like the chalets in the Alps that are still isolated in the mountain region for a few more generations, the storehouses are built from strong larch trunks that have been baked black by the sun.

The wood is cracked because of the frost and sealed with the sap of the mountain trees. Above the old bishop castle in the city of Leuk, looking toward Martigny, is a view of the vast valley.

In the evening as I arrive, the finely lined shadow climbs Illhorn and reaches the snow border around nine o’clock.

While the dull colors of the effluent forest and those of the water streaming from the cliffs into the dark green valley moss begin to melt, the peak offers the picture of one more three-cornered sail made of ice.

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For some time the bases of the surrounding mountains have appeared as if they were turned against me in order to cover the monstrous night lurking behind them.

Now however, where mountains burst forth and blackbirds have taken over the darkness through tireless singing, my tiny flames begin to flicker. Although the lit-up radius is not worth mentioning, it illuminates the vicinity just enough to provide an outline to recognize.

In this outline, I see a mountain to stumble upon. While the forest goes up in flames behind me, someone, who has already figured out the way, but doesn't have it quite all together, is gasping, chasing something that I have only seen a trace of.

At about 10 o'clock, the top of the peak is extinguished with a short afterglow, like the top of a burned-out match.

Then the damp cliffs will be as pale as ashes, like the disappearing smoke behind the clouds.

The blackbird's voices quiet.

The peace drapes over the land.

The breeze refreshes the mountains.

Then it is night.

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## **Chapter Two**

I know the bear is there because I read it in the newspaper.

The newspaper said that he had been seen in Wallis.

Wallis is a canton in Switzerland, a small but famous country in the heart of Europe where I arrived last night.

Because the newspaper provided a photograph, I know what the bear looks like.

He is young and strong and the features of his head are well proportioned with lively, dark brown eyes containing honey-gold irises.

People like me only wish they could look like this bear.

His face is without unnecessary sorrow or resentment; it doesn't have the eccentricity of irritability or mockery. He displays a noble impudence on his gentle countenance that each of the beasts of prey (eagles, lions, bears) have when they are pictured on the coat of arms of countless rulers and noblemen.

As an explanation for his disquieting und broad rambling, the newspaper stated that he wanted to mate.

What a crazy and unsettling notion that this bear, night after night, would amble with his scooping bear trot and pillow padded paws circling and crossing the Alps going through soft moss and finally resting on the sharp edges of the rocky cliffs, just to find a mate.

This was the struggle that Hannibal, Caesar and Napoleon took upon themselves and all three found great victory, while the bear is running through empty region, in which he is exterminated, and where he smashes innocent bee hives on the edges of secluded villages in order to stay alive because female bear would never give him satisfaction. As it appears in the short newspaper article, the bear had presumably migrated from Trentino, Italy toward Bavaria, and during his raid, he tore the stomachs out of more than a dozen sheep.

Displayed in rows for the photographs, the sheep's bodies lay in the paddock, covered with wounds, just like the victims in Haditha, Iraq were after the American massacre that appeared in the same newspaper a few pages later.

The bear should be shot for his action; the American president, not.

But the bear eludes his initial execution—which would be exchanged to a life-long imprisonment due to public protests—by escaping.

He sidesteps the cages from Canada, the rubber bullets, the electric fences and the tranquilizers and makes his way through Kufstein, Austria toward Tirol.

From there the bear must have found his way into the Swiss Canton of Valais.

Presumably, he will have crossed over Vorarlberg as he approaches Lichtenstein and wanders through the Rhine Valley.

As he travels evasively through the mountains, he will have followed the Furka Pass that people have used for centuries to travel from the north to Valais.

Including Goethe and his friend, the Grand Duke Karl August of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach.

Finally, he will have proceeded down the Rottental until he comes into this region, which is just before the Rotten becomes the Rhone.

Since I have been here and known that he is also here, I cannot stop thinking about why I am here and why, an individual like me ended up in the Bavarian Alps. An individual almost exactly like this bear (who came from such a special region like the Italian Adamello, took an enormous detour, and conducted raids through Bavaria). I also hail from there, even though this time I flew from Berlin to Zurich, and continued my journey into Valais by train. And why this bear, which at this time must be regarded as

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the only bear in Switzerland, of all things ended up in this tiny piece of land that is no bigger than an imprint of a fingernail on a Swiss map. And here I am, too, as the last living example of my own self, an instance of threatened extinction who was formerly in a healthy population of presently, unruly existence.

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### Chapter Three

In the mornings, when I leave my cabin, my gaze collides with a thick pillow of blooming white saxifrage that is descending down the side of the stone wall that is across the yard.

A bit beyond that wall, rises another *dry stone wall* that contains a terrace with grapevines hanging down the side.

Using the petals of the saxifrage, I can judge the intensity of the sun without even having to look at the sky.

The brighter the white, the stronger the sun.

When I leave the house in the mornings, I usually go to the middle of the town with a set plan to buy the Swiss newspaper *Walliser Bote* and the tabloid *Blick*.

Not even *Blick*, despite all of its efforts to make sex and sensation the headlines, can hide the fact that I am in an organized and civilized country.

*A country in which the firm healthy core occasionally exposes its culture after areas of production incite perhaps an exaggerated color application.*

I actually don't read the newspapers because otherwise I would subsequently regret belonging to the human race.

At the most, if I am traveling by train, I sometimes buy the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* because the pages crackle better than any other newspaper.

I only buy *Blick* and *Walliser Bote* to see if there is any new news about the bear or me. Usually there is absolutely nothing about one or the other.

For lack of more newsworthy events or due to days on end of nothing except small infractions, the space between the daily politics, local news, and sports is filled with colorful descriptions about the cave-dwellerish, loud, and ugly music with grimaces, grueling riffs, and creepy whispers of blood and guts lyrics. Heavy metal bands, like Messiah or Celtic Frost.

The bands' fierce appearances like to evoke the Swiss memories of the elemental forces of the *channels* and the destruction, and while the distant bear dwells in the caves of the mountain, their eerie tattoos reveal the transformation of horror through the guise of pop art.

To return back to my explanation. Yesterday, as I was on my way to get a newspaper, I met a man, who approached me and asked me if I couldn't give him a little insight into my thoughts.

He had seen my picture in the newspaper and wanted to know, for what reason, a man then known as a German author, would come here to the mountains.

Judging by his age, the man could have been my father.

I told him, that is not so easy to answer, because my thoughts seldom emerge in printed form and with clear contours. But rather thinking is a continual system of multiple intellectual starting points and conditions that have many different characteristics and manifestations.

They lay there, I said, my thoughts, like lights in a city that guide pilots at night. They blink, sometimes lighter, sometimes darker, flickering or pulsing, but as individual lights, so to speak, they give hardly any information about where they are. But together, as adjacent and reciprocal lights, they illuminate the sky.

First, the situation appears, for example that it is first about a city, and if possible, we would know which one.

This is complete nonsense, said the man.

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The individual thoughts could be seen as a mountain or a peak, which has more details and meaning than a chain of mountains. The mountain chain, with its size and complexity, engulfs the single peak, but it doesn't reduce or exceed it.

That is probably true, I answered, surprised by this compelling, philosophical reply. But in spite of that, I didn't know whether it was right to start with the answer or with his question.

Have you already acquainted yourself with the area here, he asked.

Definitely not, as far as I can say, I said.

Do you know then, which mountain is facing us?

That is Illhorn, I replied.

And the crag with the sharply defined ridges as if a part has been torn off on the east flank?

That is Gorwetschgrat and behind that is Illgraben.

Before they built the concrete dam, mudslides would descend like the devil from Illgraben through the stone, bone-colored gully, he said.

Illgraben flushes the avalanches and mudslides into the old runout zone.

Lucky for the river, I said, otherwise it would be just another concrete gully.

Absolutely right, said the old man.

And the gorge with an exit between Leuk and Varen?

That is the Dalaschlucht. The thermal gorge. The one that inspired Goethe.

He drew it when he stopped at Inden for rest.

And the forest, that is behind Leuk and stretches from Albinen to just before here?

That is the Höhwald that changes into the Bannwald just before it gets to Leuk.

Where do these wide aisles of dead trees that create such sharply drawn borders in the forest actually come from, I asked?

That was a forest fire, the old man said.

Three years ago, there was a devastating forest fire that the wind almost brought into Leuk.

Using infrared photographs we could see how the cliffs glowed for months afterward.

While he spoke, he turned to me and suddenly looked directly at me with an astounded look, just as if he could see what was flickering in my eyes.

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#### **Chapter Four**

Naturally I know, that when I write that Switzerland is a small country made out of granite, that it really isn't just a small country, and that it isn't just made out of granite. Switzerland is a central part of the alpine brain. Its especially deep crevices, which are contained in a relatively small space, create a relatively large surface area, so that the Swiss can preserve their personal space, as if they lived in a spread out area instead of stacked on top of each other.

I consider my mention of granite as an example of a part taken for a whole. Perhaps the Swiss who dwell among other stones and geologists will please forgive me for that. Anyway, the massive mountain range contains Paleozoic period and older granite, gneiss and crystal slate, in addition to tertiary granite and diorite compounds. Just like the Ticino Alps, the range overwhelmingly dominates the Valais and stretches to the border with its powerful expanse, completely encompassing the Ötztal and the Stubai Alps and the High Tauern and rising just above the Styrian Alps. In a way, this supports my statement, at least from where I'm standing in Valais, even if I misappropriate the entirety of the geology of the Swiss middle lands or the Bernese Alps.

But if one someone wants to say that I'm temperamental (which he actually can't prove) or that I'm unpredictable, animalistic, monomaniacal, dogmatic, or impatient, and he wants to use one of these traits (or rather weaknesses) as the basis for my character, he also should account for each wonderful and also negative experience of my life that have all worked together to make me who I am. These circumstances are the granite of my existence, so to speak, and they compensate for each other to form my character. For example, my politeness and old-fashioned kindheartedness are balanced by the hardships in my life.

We have also been using this view of the mountain area as model, because we have been seeing ourselves somewhere in the reflection of the landscapes, which we are in and also lay before us. But there is a difference, figuratively speaking, between seeing one's self in the nasty karst, in one's Karawank Mountains with their melting snow, or letting one's self ramble through in the middle of Maritime Alps, which plunge with a stunning brilliancy into the bays between Nice and San Remo with their sparkling colors and pleasant fragrances.

And yet I locate myself in Valais and not in a region where I—as Proust would have expressed—would find myself in a thrilling harmony with the landscape.

Quite the opposite.

This landscape greatly defies my nature, my thoughts, my state of mind, and my customs to move me along.

We situate ourselves across from it, facing it like perhaps only the speculation of the spectacular can achieve.

Two greats, two categories, which go past each other.

*And have possibly stretched themselves over the land, which is capable of creating a desire with its famous blue belt. But without this picture of desire over the land for, not once under the final conciliatory idea of the dichotomy with each other would they have reconciled with each other.*

But I am only just here.

And that's what is now thought in the Alps.

And the bear is also here, like the eye witnesses have reported, although it is not officially approved.

In any case, I am not just here to be here. I am also here to lay a noose around my neck. I am here to bring myself to the edge, to hunt.

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I am here to finally show the hunter, whom he has killed.

For that reason there is also the bear.

And the bear is definitely not an accident.

Right?



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### Chapter Five

In the short time that I have been here, I have become decidedly active at the gloaming. The gloaming pushes me into a feverish and fruitful unrest, whereas the peak of the day or night seems to paralyze me with a narcotic drowsiness.

Through this situation and pushing myself to lively during this lowly in-between time, I have also learned that the gloaming doesn't stay the same. Rather the gloamings come from a stunning diversity. Even though they are all relatively similar, it grows darker in the evening and lighter in the morning.

The most serious difference is how the evening approaches. It could break from underneath at an unknown time, hanging dreamily over the mountain face. Or it could fall surprisingly from above and by doing so, it condenses the nearly protesting brightness of the valley, until it has engraved the tiny reliefs and crags of the land with light, and suddenly, figuratively speaking of course, the light turns off.

Yesterday afternoon, there was a turbulent, but otherwise extremely pleasant, breeze that increased to a stark tempest during the evening. The wind was so strong that it knocked over the half full wine glasses that stood on a table in front of St. Stephen's Cathedral in the main square. And over night it grew into a dry storm.

I sat in the kitchen with a glass of Fendant and placed a few candles on the table to add to the light from the refrigerator.

Very late, as my concentration no longer allowed me to focus on big things, I thumbed through *Blick* once again, in order to see if I had perhaps glimpsed a news report about the bear.

And yet I stayed stuck to the headlines like: "Whew Uma!: This Chili Peppers are Red Hot" or "Halle's New One (meaning Halle Berry): A Husband like a Rock" and didn't notice that a tip of the newspaper got caught in the candle flames and a fire began to burn.

Seconds later, half of the newspaper was in flames, and I was holding a torch.

For a confused moment, I stared at the fire and experienced a moment of senseless satisfaction.

The fire affected my eyes like adrenaline.

All of a sudden everything in me was awake, hot, bright, and crackling.

At the same time, I tried to shake out the flames, which led to the charred paper detaching from the newspaper in enormous flakes and swirling through the air.

Finally, I succeeded by smothering the burning newspaper with a wet dishtowel and I extinguished the candles.

Then I opened the window and placed the fruit bowl, in which I collect scraps for compost, back on the windowsill next to the full-to-the-brim ashtray. The fruit bowl scraps that I wish to return to nature's cycle contain brewed tea, onionskins, poppy leaves, thyme stalks, egg shells, a few squeezed lemon halves, and three or four dozen slain gnats that were strewn throughout the mixture.

At last I allowed myself to sleep.

The next morning I awoke a while before the sunrise.

The top of Illhorn, which (looking from my bed) filled the entire window with its peak like an upward pointed triangle, was only noticeable by its massive outline.

A gloomy triangle before completely dull gray.

As I got up and looked out, the Rhone Valley lay deep below me, as if it were drowned in its nightly mist. The air, however, was fresh.

When I went into the kitchen to get a glass of water and opened the door, I stopped short.

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The entire tiny room was overrun with cigarette stubs, ashes, compost, and charred flakes of paper.

It looked as if a blaze had traveled through the room and had only just decided not to burn it to the ground.

Only the pair of resilient lemon halves stuck to the plate on the windowsill.

The rest were as if a spray pistol had divided them among the floor, table and walls.

And in the middle of it all, all of my papers that I had lain in a pile on the table had escaped their orderliness, as if to convey the idea that they wanted to be a part of this fiasco too.

As I opened the window before going to bed, I stopped thinking about the storm.

Perhaps because it had given me a while to rest.

Later it must have flared up again and tapestried the kitchen with tea and ashes.

After I picked up and wiped up the grossest parts, I sat down at my desk, pulled out the observations that I made during the gloaming, and abandoned myself to either the fruitful or awful unrest, depending on how you see it.

Shortly after eight, I went into the village in order to obtain copies of *Blick and Walliser Boten*.

After that, I brewed tea, an Indian Tumsong Darjeeling kind that must have found its way here from the United Kingdom in a wonder-filled blue tea chest.

I flipped through the newspapers and suddenly caught by breath.

On page 16 was the headline: Bear Shot.

The "shot," however, was in quotation marks.

Underneath it read: Gluringen, VS (Valais of Switzerland).

"A few people have already seen the bear in the small village of Gluringen in Goms," said the newspaper. And now Haenno Carlen has shot him with his camera. The Goms resident spotted him in the early morning from the window of his bathroom. The bear was on the edge of the public forest, about forty meters from his house, and had just slain a fawn, when Carlen photographed him."

Now he was there, just one or two days away on foot.

Indeed, the photo shows nothing more than a bear in nothing more than a newspaper, but perhaps it helps me. Because I'm searching for the bear in order to find it. And here he is, as if he had waited for the bear, and worse still, as if the bear had waited for him.

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Works Cited

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