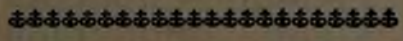
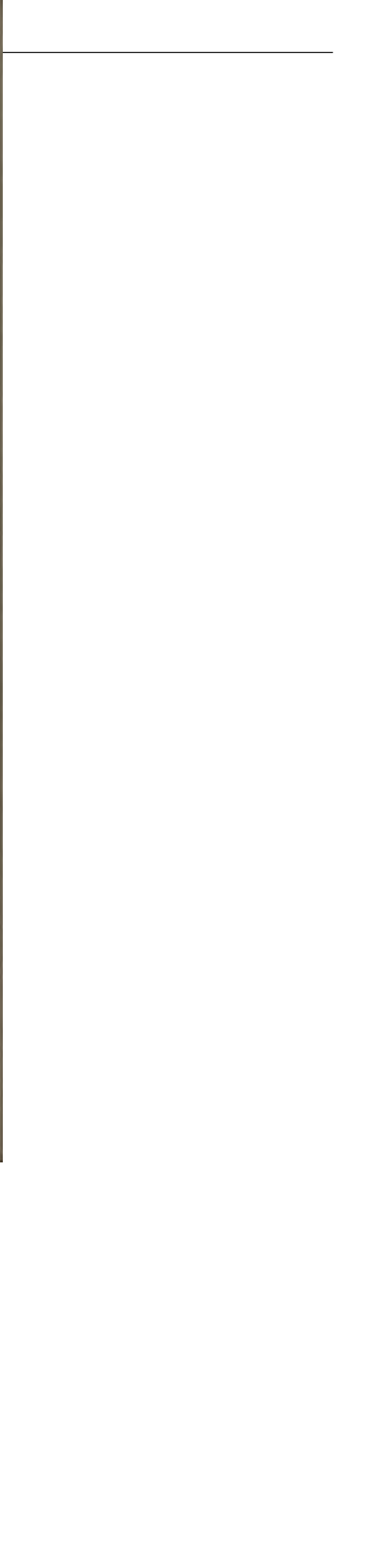
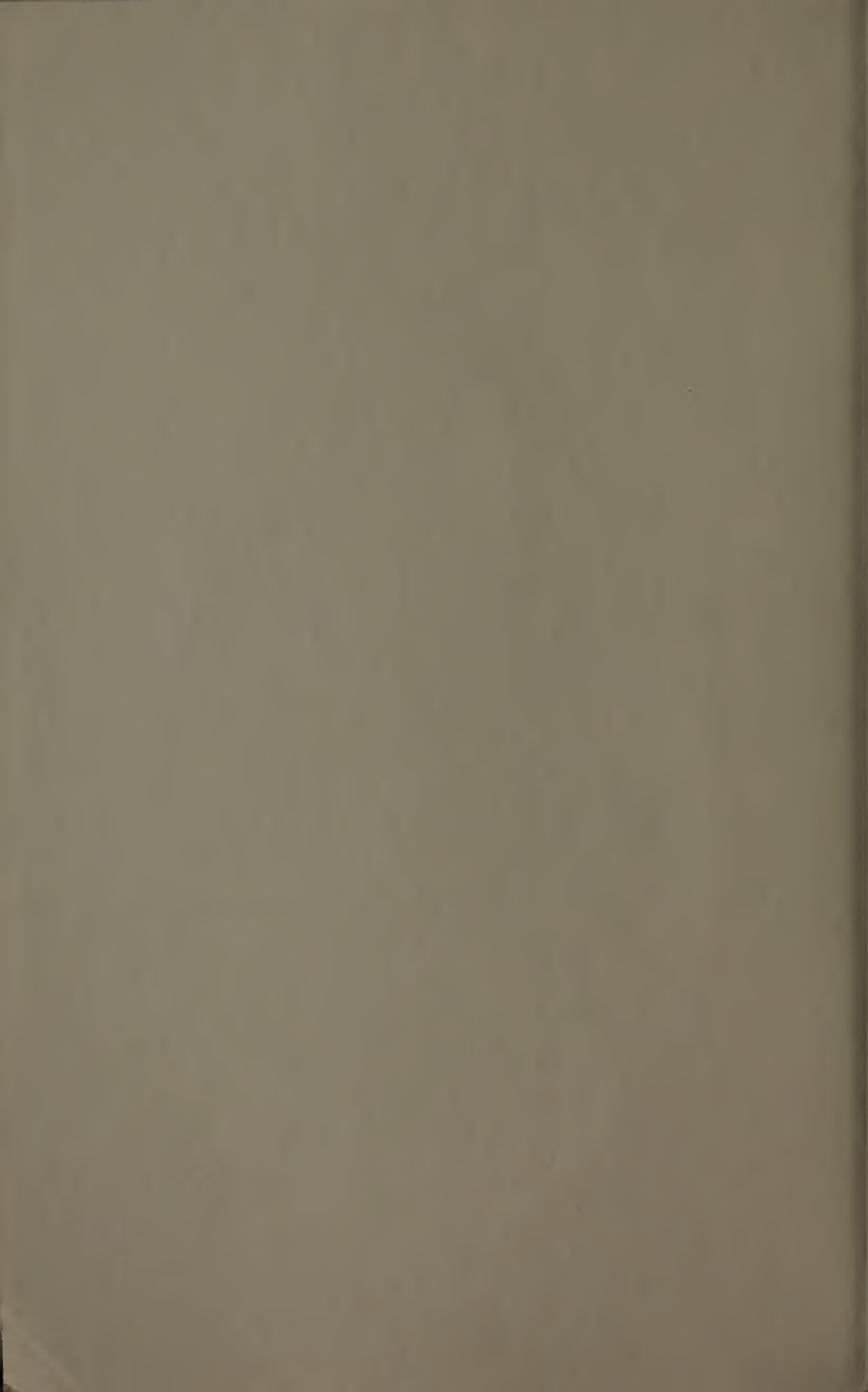



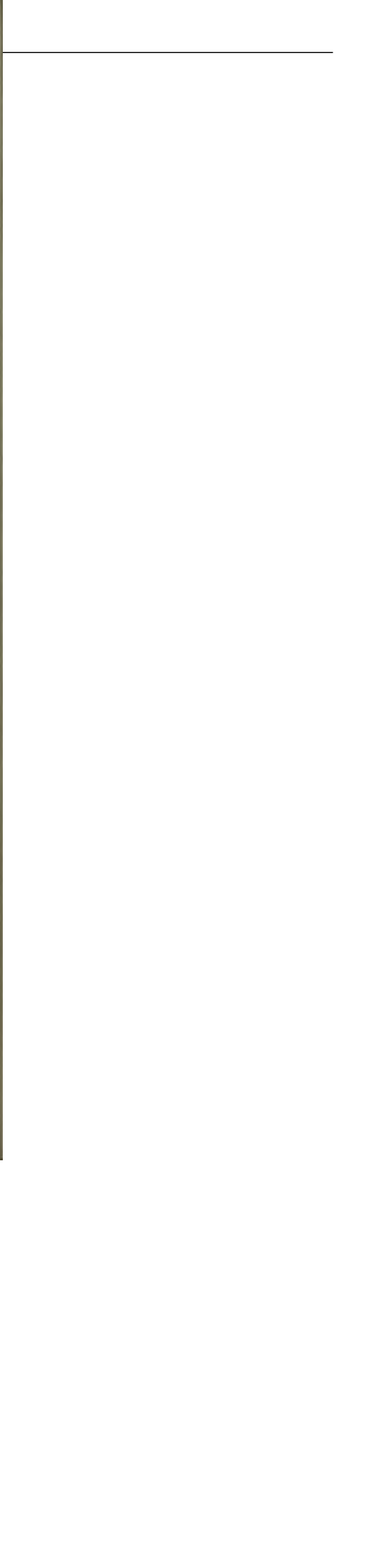
HEINZ PIONTEK



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Deutsche Gedichte seit 1960, 1972

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HEINZ PIONTEK

*Alive or Dead*

*Translated by Richard Exner*

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was originally published, in its entirety, in Germany in 1971  
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and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany; it is  
issued by Unicorn Press for the occasion of the fiftieth birth-  
day of its author, Heinz Piontek, as Volume IV in the Unicorn  
German Series.



*Horseman, pass by!*

W. B. Yeats

## CONTENTS

*Introduction by Richard Exner*

Im Wasser	10	
Submerged		11
Ankommen	12	
Arrived		13
Totenlitanei für von der Vring	14	
Litany for the Dead Poet . . .		15
Nachtwind	16	
Nightwind		17
Merkwürdig	22	
Worth Noting		23
Unter den Alpen	24	
Below the Alps		25
Schreiben	28	
Writing		29
Nach Jahren	30	
Years Later		31
Zu alten Gedichten	32	
Concerning Old Poems		33
Vor dem Gewitter . . .	34	
Before the Thunderstorm . . .		35

Utopische Gedichte	36	
Utopian Poems		37
Bäume	40	
Trees		41
Singen	42	
Song		43
Madrigal	44	
Madrigal		45
Fliegendes Blatt	46	
Flying Leaflet		47
Einfache Sätze aus dem Jahr 68	48	
Simple Statements Made in '68		49
Ich, Anton Pawlowitsch	54	
I, Anton Pavlovich		55
Nicht mehr gewillt	58	
No Longer Willing		59
<i>aus</i> Neue Parolen	60	
<i>from</i> New Passwords		61

*Biographical Notes*

## Heinz Piontek

Piontek's bibliography speaks for itself. If one adds the collections which he assembled and introduced one can summarize: a writer of great distinction, primarily a poet, an inspired artificer whose command of language, metaphor and symbol is astonishing; an author whose every new book opens new linguistic and mental territory, a free-lance artist who has created an audience for himself, a fashioner rather than a follower of tastes. Puzzled critics have called him a "modern classic"; for the time being, he is himself and believes that man's estate must constantly be delineated, defended, summarized and praised, lest it be brutalized or wasted. The writer, also, as magician: while the spell lasts, we exist in decency and responsibility; afterwards, a metaphor, a sentence, a landscape may remind us that if we do not write our own code of human conduct, no one else will.

Twelve years ago, Piontek wrote: "I am sometimes called a loner. This is correct inasmuch as I have not joined any 'school'. But this fact should be used neither to judge nor to recommend me. To be by myself is a matter of personal make-up, of predilection, of temperament. I feel a sense of community, through admiration and consent, with many dead and some living poets."

The collection ALIVE OR DEAD, from which the contents of this book have been chosen, is Piontek's sixth volume of poetry. His earlier poetry seems to lie far behind despite similarity in theme and attitude. He X-rays his era, its slogans and ideologies; he states some unpleasant truths. He is eloquent but not wordy. He has become a master at cutting his own poems to the bone. His vocabulary of essentials and essences is distilled from a vast repository of poetic language, informed by tradition. Pathos is rare; during the last years there is increasing evidence of a benign scepticism, of measured irony. Yet, when a remembered landscape, for example, pushes his visions into the truth, he does not need a long hymnic line to express praise.

Heinz Piontek is, as this volume of originals and translations shows, an extraordinarily conscious poet, awake and conscientious; to him, his accomplished craft is neither routine nor sullen.

*Richard Exner*

## Im Wasser

Unter Badenden  
bin ich als Schiffbrüchiger  
nicht kenntlich.

Wo bleibt meine Zukunft?  
Über mir, unter mir  
nichts.

Mit letzter Kraft forme ich Worte.  
Von meinem Mund  
ist nichts abzulesen.

Ein halbtoter Fisch,  
der zu schreien versucht,  
das sieht lustig aus.

## Submerged

Among bathers  
I am not noticed  
as shipwrecked.

What about my future?  
Above me, below me  
there is nothing.

With ultimate effort I mouth words.  
My lips reveal  
nothing.

A half-dead fish  
attempting a scream;  
that is hilarious.

## Ankommen

Windgeplagt,  
mit Schneehöhlen im Gesicht.

Ausstemperatur  
ein Minus-Wort.

Endlich das Blut klopfen hören,  
aufstampfen,

wenn Schloss und Angel  
die Sicht freigeben:

auf breitgetretene Asche  
toter Öfen,  
das Gespenst des Feuers.



Arrived

Windtormented,  
snowcaves in the face.

Outside temperature  
a minus word.

Finally to hear the blood pound,  
to stomp,

when lock and hinge  
bare the sight:

flattened ashes  
of dead furnaces,  
the spectre of fire.

## Totenlitanei für von der Vring

Hinter den Wasserfarben verregneter Gärten  
hinter Kavaliershäusern Schuluhren Kanälen  
hinter dem Heu und Stroh von Blumen  
hinter Sommer und Herbst

hinter dem Wort Flandern  
hinter den Lippen einer Schwäbin  
hinter blauem Nebel wie der Sage von weissen  
treibenden Haaren und dem ans Ufer gezogenen  
Körper

hinter Starrsinn Wahn Liebe  
hinter dem voll bezahlten Preis  
hinter einem Wall an der Weser

werden dich auferwecken  
die silberkehligen Hörner deiner Gedichte

## Litany for the Dead Poet von der Vring

Behind the watercolors of raindrenched gardens  
behind patrician houses schoolclocks canals  
behind the hay and straw of flowers  
behind summer and autumn

behind the word Flanders  
behind the lips of a Swabian woman  
behind the blue mist as behind the legend  
of white floating hair and the body pulled ashore

behind obstinacy illusion love  
behind the fully paid price  
behind a dike at the river Weser

they will awaken you  
the silverthroated cornets of your poems

## Nachtwind

Hinter uns das Land,  
das wir mit Wörtern furchten.

Ihr und ich.

Geblieden ist die Stoppel.  
Schwalbenkot. Im Dunkel die Gänge  
mit gesenkter Fackel.

Nachtwind, Nachtwind:  
Wie hohl klingen die Tennen!

Wer wird mit mir aufstehn  
störrisch wie ein Maultier, den Kopf senken,  
weitermachen?

Ich rufe vor herabgelassenen Jalousien,  
Türen ohne Schilder.  
Schaue auf gestrichene Segel.  
Ich erschrecke.

Ja, meine aufgescheuchten Schritte, diese Stimme  
eines hartnäckigen Sperlings,  
nicht bereit, sich zu trennen von dem,  
was sie weiss,  
und das getrocknete Salz im Gesicht:

## Nightwind

Behind us the earth  
we furrowed with words.

You and I.

What's left is the stubble.  
Swallow's dung. The passages in darkness  
with a lowered torch.

Nightwind, nightwind:  
the threshing floors resound so hollow!

Who will rise with me  
stubborn as a mule, lower his head  
and keep going?

I cry before lowered shutters,  
before doors without nameplates.  
I look upon struck sails.  
I am frightened.

Yes, my startled steps, this voice  
of a persistent sparrow,  
unwilling to tear itself  
from what it knows,  
the dried streaks of salt in my face:

Sollte, wer übrigbleibt,  
sich nicht lieber verstecken?

Nachtwind, Nachtwind,  
Kurier:

Steht es fest,  
dass ich der Letzte bin?

Da sind sie, unwiderruflich,  
eure falben Lider,  
die sich nicht von selbst geschlossen haben.  
Eure begrabenen Hoffnungen, Schlüssstriche,  
letzten zornigen Atemzüge.

Nein, die Rede von euch soll nicht aufhören,  
nur weil man satt geworden ist  
von eurem Getreide.

Helft mir,  
holt ihre Flinten aus dem Herbst,  
ihre Heimat aus dem Rauch,  
was sie versprochen, verfehlten,  
von unseren Grenzen

und legt alles zu den Jahren,  
zu denen man stehen muss—

should he, who is finally left,  
not rather take cover?

Nightwind, nightwind,  
messenger:

is it certain  
that I am the last one?

There they are, irrevocable,  
your fallow lids  
which have not closed by themselves.  
Your buried hopes, final accounts,  
your last angry breaths.

No, they shall go on talking about you  
even though they have had more than enough  
of the grain you threshed.

Help me,  
get their guns from the autumn,  
their home from the smoke,  
their promises and failures  
from our borders

and add all this to the years  
to which we must be true—

wie der Löwenzahn zum Grummet,  
das Steingut zum Feuer,  
tot oder lebendig.

Aber was weiter?

Äussert die stehengelassene Kiefer,  
was sie zu tun gedenkt  
bis zur nächsten Rodung?

Oben im Dunkel,  
wo sich die Krone verliert,  
im unbeherrschten Geräusch über der Erde

nimmt sie alle Nadeln zusammen,  
damit es nicht abreisst,  
das trockne halblaute Klirren.

Nachtwind, Nachtwind:

Dass wir nichts Besseres versuchen können  
als treusein -

was auch immer das heisst.



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