

MOST The Bridge

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THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić



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Hrvojka Mihanović-Salopek

ADDRESS

Trg bana Josipa Jelačića 7/I, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

TELEPHONE +38514816931, +3854883580

FAX +3854816959

e-mail: most@dhk.hr

EDITORIAL BOARD

Davor Šalat (Editor in chief)

DESIGN, LAYOUT AND PREPRESS

Neven Osojnik

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Photo by Ante Brkan

THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS
TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOŠNIĆ

SANJA KNEŽEVIĆ ■ THE ARTISTIC PORTRAIT OF TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOSNIĆ

Writing about the artistic portrait of Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić (1947) is a challenging task, given that he has distinguished himself throughout his life as a writer, poet, novelist, essayist, columnist, travel writer, children's author, publicist, painter, and fine art photographer. It seems that who we have before us is a living image of a Renaissance *homo universalis*.

The diversity of his artistic oeuvre, both thematically and technically, is undoubtedly one of the unique stories in Croatian art and culture. Equally unusual, extraordinary, and almost cinematic is Bilosnić's path in both life and art.

Bilosnić was born in the village of Zemunik in the region of Ravni Kotari near Zadar. The Arcadian lyricism of the place that he grew up in is quite recognisable in his literature, particularly in his columns that centre on history. Later, during his schooling, Bilosnić moved to Zadar, to which he remains permanently connected. It could be said that, for him, Zadar is both a blessing and a curse. This is probably why he retreated to his Arcadian, native Zemunik several years ago, to live and write in peace and quiet. Given the image of his leaving and returning to his native, gentle flatland village, we can view Bilosnić's life path in a simplified, cyclical way. In the same vein, we could view his artistic path as a rounded off image as well. In other words, as his life path is symbolically reduced to the Zemunik – Zadar – Zemunik route, but with countless longer and shorter stays and journeys to the most diverse parts of the world and cultures, the same could be said about his art. Its essence, or his artistic credo – the fundamental “brush-stroke of his life and art” – is rooted in his homeland, and all the different travels and rich literary experience seem to build upon this fundamental axis with their diversity of motifs and formal challenges. Interestingly, both in the literary and visual segments of his artistic expression, Bilosnić has been recognised as an artist in constant search of the new. Undeniable evidence of this is the oeuvre he has created so far – more than a hundred published books and nearly eighty solo art exhibitions.

His fateful and destined attachment to Zadar, and indeed to his homeland, has developed another specificity in Bilosnić – creating outside the mainstream; working outside the metropolitan centre, which produces trends and sometimes fads, has ensured a certain self-grown and wild originality in his artistic brushstrokes. The finest example of his originality yet simultaneous cosmopolitanism is Bilosnić's collection of poetry *Tigar (The Tiger Is the World)*. Created during 2001 and 2002 in seclusion from public literary life, in a period that could be described as unfavourable for poetry, while he was serving as the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Zadarski regional*, this collection brought Bilosnić back into the spotlight of Croatia's national literature and opened the door to international reception. Today, a full fifteen years since *The Tiger Is the World* was written, interest in this collection has not waned, indicating that Bilosnić recognised the *kairos* of his own artistic being and, almost completely isolated from the literary world, penned a collection of poetry that placed him at the very centre of Croatia's national poetic narrative. Always set apart from schools of thought and generations, Bilosnić took longer to break through reception barriers, but when his time came, he showcased the full richness of his work. Accordingly, with this review, we will strive to encompass the entirety of Bilosnić's creativity.

Literature is undoubtedly Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić's vocation and passion in life, and we could freely say – the very essence of life. Although he has tried his hand at all the genres, lyric poetry remains the centre of his oeuvre.

Bilosnić made his literary debut with the collection of poetry *Senza luna (Moonless)* in 1968. However, the poetics pointed to in this collection did not indicate the diverse poet he would later become. In the mid-1970s, Bilosnić published a collection of blues poems of sorts under the title *Pred zavjesama (Before the Curtains)*. From today's perspective, we see that this was a certain retreat towards pop poetry of a beatnik spirit. Critics of the time received it very favourably. Just five years later, he published a sequel of sorts to this collection, developing almost an identical poetics in the collection of poetry *I društvo koje ostaje (And the Company that Remains, 1979)*, which paved the way for his realist poetry. Interestingly, his themes were already tinged with a concern for civilisation and Western culture on the decline; we could almost talk about the ecological and eschatological dimensions of his poetry. In the 1970s, Bilosnić also experimented with post-structuralist language in the collection *Apsolutni labudopjev (Absolute Swan Song, 1976)*, a type of poetry that he later never returned to. Love, nature, and humanity became the central themes of his poetry. With his collection *Sužanj-riba u vodi srca (Captive-Fish in the Water of the Heart, 1977)*, Bilosnić heralds poetry

centred on human beings with all their great themes in life, such as birth, death, and love. This is lyric poetry whose verses are psalmodic, whose expression is elliptical, and whose metaphors are striking, even hyperbolic at times. With this collection, Bilosnić indicates the future poetics of his poetry as a whole. Besides the major themes related to the essence of humanity, Bilosnić here also shows himself as a poet of space (i.e., a poet of landscapes), as well as a true postmodern advocate of the values of (pre)civilisation (i.e., naivety and wonder at the beauty of the world and its fundamental mysteries – genesis and death). With this collection, Bilosnić also opens his intertextual dialogue with the poetry of African peoples, which he later elaborated from a post-colonial perspective in his almost iconic collection *Afrika (Africa)*, (2011).

His relationship with nature and fundamental human values is the thematic framework of his collection of poetry *Približavanje ptica (Approaching Birds)* from 1980. In this collection, Bilosnić cultivates a psalmodic tone in his poems, some of which he even calls psalms. He remains faithful to striking metaphors, vivid imagery, and the form of biblical verse.

In the 1980s he published three collections of love poetry, in 1984, 1985, and 1988. In the collection of poetry *Krilati kozorog ili ponoćne prijateljice (The Winged Capricorn or Midnight Friends)*, love is depicted as a myth. The collection *Ljubavnici iz Aleksandrije (Lovers from Alexandria)* is an Anacreontic book of love, poetically transported to a mythical ancient time and place. With the collection *Rika jelena (The Deer's Roar)*, Bilosnić in a way returns to his motifs from the collection *Captive-Fish in the Water of the Heart*, observing and singing about love and life as dimensions inseparable from nature and the landscape. In all three books, Bilosnić emerges as a poet of space (of the Mediterranean, both mythical and real!) who cares about grand themes, such as love, the world, and the nature surrounding him. His poetry often turns to myth as a type of supra-reality of the mundane life.

In the 1990s, during Croatia's War of Independence, in which he himself participated as the leader of the Independent Artists' Platoon in Zadar, Bilosnić published a collection of realistic-ironic-blues poetry titled *Znaci za uzburanu (Alarm Signals)*, (1993). By his own admission, the war rendered him helpless in terms of writing and artistic activity in general. This collection is anti-martial by nature, but it also carries all the bitterness, pain, fear, irony, and decline, i.e., the full spectrum of human transformations that wars induce in a person.

After the war, Bilosnić entered a period of several years of poetic dormancy and non-writing. However, during this period, he was involved in initiating various

cultural events in the city of Zadar, particularly on Zadar's media scene. Bilosnić is one of the founders and the first editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Zadarski list*, and was the director of the former festival of popular music *Zadarfest*, as well as of other cultural events in both Zadar and the Zadar County.

He returned to writing poetry in the early 2000s. In 2001 he wrote the collection of poetry *Odisejeve pjesme (Songs of Odysseus)* published in 2007, followed by the iconic collection *The Tiger is the World* published in 2003, which was extraordinarily well received, and indeed proved to be a major event in contemporary Croatian poetry. There are six foreign editions of the collection, published in its entirety: the English *The Tiger Is the World* published in New Mexico, the Spanish *El tigre* in Salamanca, the Romani *Tigre* in Skopje, the Macedonian *Tigri* in Skopje, the Albanian *Tigre* in Tirana, the Romanian-Spanish *Tigrul* in Bucharest, and the Italian and German editions in the form of a book. The Italian translation was published as an art portfolio with illustrations by Ugo Maffi, and the German version with Bilosnić's illustrations from his cycle of paintings *Povratka tigra (The Return of the Tiger)*. Esteemed writers and translators translated *The Tiger Is the World*: Karl Kvitko and Đurđa Vukelić Rožić, Željka Lovrenčić, Mustafa Spahiu, Risto Jačev, Sulejman Sulejmani, Daniel Dragomirescu, Alessandro Salvi, Ute Karlavaris Bremer. Bilosnić received two international literary awards for this collection, the *Ilinden* award in Macedonia, and the Red Rose of Elbasan award (*Crvena ruža Elbasana*) in Albania. Additionally, literary historian John Taylor included Bilosnić's American edition among the eighteen collections of poetry recommended to the readers of the American literary website Seagull in 2012. Taylor later included his review of Bilosnić's *The Tiger Is the World* in the book *A Little Tour through European Poetry*, in which this collection represents contemporary Croatian poetry.

Following these two collections, and particularly after *The Tiger Is the World*, Bilosnić began a new, more mature phase of writing poetry. This is especially noticeable in his collections *Molitve (Prayers, 2009)*, *Kuća (The House, 2010)*, *Afrika (Africa, 2011)*, *Ogledalo (The Mirror, 2012)*, *Odisej (Odysseus, 2013)*, *Vrt (The Garden, 2014)*, *Sto pjesama o tijelu (One Hundred Poems about the Body, 2017)*, *Havana blues (Havana Blues, 2019)*, *Naranče Federica Garcíe Lorce (The Oranges of Federico García Lorca, 2020)*, *Vidio sam Borgesove oči (I Saw Borges' Eyes, 2022)*, *Od jantara i od sunca (Of Amber and of the Sun, 2022)*, *Četrdeset ljubavnih i jedna nenapisana (Forty Love Poems and One Unwritten One, 2023)*, *Četrdeset prosinačkih i jedna zaboravljena (Forty December Poems and One Forgotten One, 2023)*.

In his new collections of poetry, the author turns to reflective-symbolic lyrics. Each of these collections forms a compositionally and thematically rounded whole. While the verse is more reduced, Bilosnić's poetry is still rich in poetic images and surprising metaphors. His thought is now deeper, his symbolism imbued with a wealth of layered meanings. It is not surprising, therefore, that he won the prestigious national Tin Ujević Award for the collection *Prayers*, the Vlado Puljić Award in Mostar for his *Africa*, The Fra Martin Nedić Award in Tolisa for his *Odysseus*, and the Neretva Olive Award in Metković for his collection *The Garden*. Bilosnić's collection *Prayers*, a book of pure spiritual poetry, was translated into Slovenian by the poet and philologist Brane Senegačnik, and published in Ljubljana in 2017.

Contemporary literary critics have also been following Bilosnić's latest work, writing exceptional essays and studies about his collections. Here we would like to highlight the essays and studies written by Igor Šipić, Davor Šalat, Mate Nedić, and Đuro Vidmarović, stylistic readings by Tin Lemac, as well as studies by foreign authors Alfredo Pérez Alencart, John Taylor, Nuri Plaku, Brane Senegačnik, Enrique Viloría Vera, David Cortés Cabán, Tatiana Radulescu, Risto G. Jačev, Hristo Krstevski, Arian Leka, Demir Sulejman, and others.

Overall, Bilosnić's lyrical work represents a rounded whole of poetic expression centred on primordial themes: humanity, love, God. In the manner of Mediterranean postmodernism typical of his generation, one can recognise the characteristics of Bilosnić's creativity in the ease of his free verse (biblical verse), lush metaphors, and symbolically and perceptually rich and detailed poetic images. His poetry sometimes astonishes with the audacity of his poetic expression when talking about set thematic cycles, thus making the rounding off of thematic and motivic units a recognisable poetic hallmark of Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić.

Since the beginning of his artistic activity, Bilosnić has, alongside long and narrative poems, also been writing haiku (i.e., the shortest poetic form). Despite the differences between these two poetic forms, they share the common theme of space. On the one hand, there is the Arcadian Mediterranean landscape of Zadar with its surroundings and islands in haiku, and on the other, the history and heritage of that same space in his elaborate and long poems.

Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić published his first haiku collection *Zario ruku u srce* (*Plunging His Hand into the Heart*) in 1979. He had, however, started publishing haiku poetry in magazines even earlier, and we can say that he is, along with Vladimir Devidé, Tonči Petrasov Marović, and a few other poets, one of the pioneers of this now popular poetic form in our region. Following the col-

lection *Plunging His Hand into the Heart* came out the books *Potez mača* (*Sword Stroke*, 1984), *Iž* (*Iž*, 1985), *Kalendar sna* (*A Calendar of Dreams*, 1995), *Čajni pribor* (*Tea Set*, 1995), *Planina* (*The Mountain*, 2002), *Velebit* (*Velebit*, 2003), *Osamljeno drvo* (*A Lonely Tree*, 2011). The last two were published in bilingual Croatian-English editions. Bilosnić is a multi-award winning haiku poet, especially on the international scene. In fact, haiku was the first to open the doors to the world for him. For example, in the 1990s Koko Kato included his work in the world haiku anthology *Four Seasons*, Japanese magazine *Ko* regularly published his works, and so did the American magazine *Modern Haiku*, whose editor-in-chief Charles Trumbull became Bilosnić's not only collaborator, but also friend. His poems have also been published in other haiku anthologies, such as *World Haiku*, *Haiku*, *Meguro International Haiku Circle*, and *Haiku Anthology of the European Union*, even before Croatia became a member country. Japanese national television paid exceptional attention to Bilosnić while filming the documentary *Stazama hrvatskog haiku* (*Along the Paths of Croatian Haiku*), and there is an interesting anecdote related to it. After having watched the film, the businessman and rice farmer Mitsunabu Aonashi visited Croatia, and showed Bilosnić's photograph at the Kolovare Hotel reception in Zadar, asking for a way to contact the poet. Upon meeting him, Mitsunabu Aonashi admitted that Bilosnić was indeed his haiku teacher. Among the notable haiku awards he received, worth singling out is the Japanese A-Bomb Memorial Day Award, which Bilosnić received for a poem dedicated to René Matoušek, another Croatian haiku poet and Bilosnić's close friend who died tragically in Vukovar in 1991. For the poems from his African cycle, later published in the collection *A Lonely Tree*, Bilosnić received Honourable Mentions at the international Mainichi Haiku Contest in Japan in 2009 and 2012. His collections *Velebit* and *A Lonely Tree* were also published in Albanian, both in Tirana and Elbasan. Additionally, Bilosnić's haiku has been translated into Japanese, Macedonian, Slovenian, and Dutch. One of the specificities of Bilosnić's haiku is that he often strictly adheres to the haiku form (5-7-5 syllables), but allows thematic freedom within the poem. In that regard, his haiku prayers from a separate cycle of the collection *Prayers* from 2009 are particularly interesting.

Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is one of few Croatian poets who has remained faithful to the form of the narrative poem, consistently writing it alongside his classical lyric poetry since the mid-1980s. He published his first narrative poem *Čelo za metak* (*The Bullet Forehead*) in 1985, where he developed an intertextual dialogue with the poetry and the life of V. V. Mayakovsky. He writes this poem as

an avant-garde poetic experiment, filled with rebellion, anger, disharmony, and explosiveness. All of Bilosnić's later narrative poems are exclusively tied to the theme of local and national heritage, and history. The poem *Štit(i) slovo hrvatsko* (*Shield(s) the Croatian Letter*, 1993) thematises heritage through an intertextual and citational dialogue between the Mediterranean and Slavic mythologies, the historical chronicles of the Crusaders' destruction of Zadar in 1202, Miroslav Krleža's essay *Zlato i srebro Zadra* (*The Gold and Silver of Zadar*), and finally Petar Zoranić's novel *Planine* (*Mountains*). This is one of Bilosnić's most intriguing works. After the War of Independence in 1995, Bilosnić wrote the poem *Hrvatska ogrlica* (*Croatian Necklace*), part of which was published in the anthology of Croatian patriotic poetry *Mila si nam ti jedina...* (*Only you are dear to us...*). He published it as a separate book in 2006 under the title *Ogrlica* (*Necklace*). In 2001, he wrote and published the neo-avant-garde poem *Krik* (*The Scream*). The publication of this book and of *The Tiger Is the World* at the beginning of the 2000s marked a rebirth of sorts for the author. Bilosnić later published all his poems on national themes in a joint book *Croatian Necklace* in 2010. In this period, he returned to African themes but now from a post-colonial perspective, viewing the state of his homeland from almost the same positions. This poetics is also recognisable in his poem *Crno je crno* (*Black Is Black*) from 2011. In the same year, he published the poem *Vukovar* (*Vukovar*), a poem about the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Vukovar. Both poems are filled with painful cries, avant-garde metaphors, and lyrical imagery. From these verses, Vukovar truly emerges as the Croatian Holocaust, as the national holy sacrifice, and as the altar of suffering. Bilosnić thoughtfully links his discourse on Vukovar to the universal images of 20th-century evil, among which Vukovar stands as the finale of the bloody orgy of that bloody century.

In the corpus of Bilosnić's longer lyrical forms, one might also want to pay attention to his collection *Križni put* (*Stations of the Cross*, 2011), in which he continues the rich tradition of artistic visions of Christ's passion, written with the help of the fourteen lyrical stations of the cross. For *Stations of the Cross* Bilosnić received the Passion Heritage Award (*Pasionska baština*) in 2010.

In addition to poetry, Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is a highly intriguing prose writer, particularly as a novelist. In his novels, he often writes about the fate of the individual within a rigid social system that does not recognise individuality, intimacy or freedom. His first neo-existentialist novel *Ispovijed isuvišna čovjeka* (*Confessions of the Undesired Man*) from 1985 is one of the first political fantasy novels in Croatia, a roman-à-clef portraying the life of a persecuted young art-

ist during communist totalitarianism following the breakdown of the Croatian Spring. Many characters in the novel are from the author's real life, but here under code names (albeit easily recognisable ones), so the novel soon faced legalised censorship; the authorities simply ordered its withdrawal from sale.

Given that Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić experienced trial and imprisonment in his youth as a participant of the Croatian Spring, he published a short novel about prison life called *Tijesni prostor* (*Tight Space*). This is a classic work of Croatian prison literature, in which he continued to explore the problem of existence. Unfortunately, since the novel was published just before the War of Independence was started in 1990, it failed to receive appropriate attention, and is a work still awaiting to be properly read.

In 2001, Bilosnić also published a short novel *Ljubavni slučaj pisca* (*A Writer's Love Affair*), in which the artist's existential fear is revealed through an unnatural love relationship. This novel uses the prism of midlife crisis to examine fundamental human relationships: love, marriage, and the literary calling. Bilosnić's writer experiences a crisis of writing, of marriage, and of social values as a whole. Renouncing these values seemingly gives him a new zest for life, but only briefly, as every escape, in fact, turns out to be an act of cowardice.

Bilosnić returned to the theme of prison life in the novel *Kolac u rijeci Zrmanji* (*A Stake in the River Zrmanja*, 2007), set during the War of Independence and the immediate post-war period. He focuses all the events of this war on two opposing characters, two human fates brutally played with by the force of war. Bilosnić elevates war to the level of an archetypal, fratricidal Cain conflict.

However, Bilosnić's most famous work on the topic of war is undoubtedly the novel *Listopad* (*October*) from 2008. The author refined the poetics of his anti-martial narrative, this is his artistic pinnacle. In *October*, the story is set within 24 hours of some of the fiercest attacks on Zadar. Through lyrical reflections on man and his fate, Bilosnić resists the evil and horror brought by the events of war, thus making the war itself be secondary in the novel, and making the human consciousness his true essence. Alongside his *Confessions of the Undesired Man*, this is Bilosnić's most significant novel. It is a stream of consciousness novel full of symbolism and lyrical sentiment that explores the 5th and 6th of October 1991, the days when Zadar endured the most brutal attacks. Its composition operates on two levels. On one, we follow the events of the attack itself, hour by hour. On the other level, the author's stream of consciousness reveals the destruction through symbolic images of the sun, air, water, stone, gold, cat, and sleep. For this novel Bilosnić received the Dubravko Horvatić Award for prose.

In addition to fictional prose, Bilosnić also published a collection of short fantastic stories *Hodajući preko vode* (*Walking on Water*) in 1989. Because of the year in which it was published, this collection is relatively unknown in Croatian literary circles.

Since his early days, Bilosnić has also been an intriguing children's writer. As early as 1972, he published the collection of poetry *Hoće djeca da ulove zeca* (*Children Want to Catch a Rabbit*). Some poems from this early collection are part of almost all contemporary anthologies of Croatian children's poetry and, since recently, of primary school textbooks, too. However, this collection, like the author himself, were banned in 1972. After Bilosnić was indicted for what was called a 'verbal delict', i.e., "for undermining brotherhood and unity, and the achievements of socialism", which was supposedly identified in his newspaper articles, this collection was banned and burned in the courtyard of the offices of the *Narodni list* newspaper in Zadar. Notably, the lines "guska je glupa pa je skupa" ("geese are stupid, and therefore expensive") from one of the poems supposedly alluded to certain well-known individuals. Despite the ban and the burning, the poems from Bilosnić's early collection continued to live on.

In the late 1970s, Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić wrote the script for the puppet TV series *Pustolovine morskog konjica* (*The Adventures of a Seahorse*) at the invitation of writer Mladen Bjažić, editor of Zagreb Television. The author later made his script into a children's novel of the same name (1988, and the second edition in 2006). In 2001, Bilosnić published a book of children's stories called *Piće* (*Piće*), and a children's novel *Iški kralj* (*The King of Iž*).

Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is well-known for having travelled almost the entire world. From almost every journey, along with an indispensable series of fine art photographs, he brought back notes for his travelogues. The travel genre holds a special place in his rich literary oeuvre. Bilosnić's pen records even the smallest details, as if it were a well-trained photographic eye, while his descriptions are rich and dynamic like a painter's brushstrokes. For several consecutive years, Bilosnić has received awards for his travel writing at The Days of Franjo Horvat Kiš festival in Lobar. The distinguishing features of his travel writing are short and simple sentences, a wealth of information about the place he visited, and an engaging and fluid narrative, while the most beautiful dimension of his travel writing is certainly its lyricism. From every observation he makes, it is clear that this is a poet who is touring the world. When seen through his eyes, the things, people, and customs that he writes about always burst into ever-fresh wonders. He has published the following travelogues: *Put za Casablancu* (*The Road to Casa-*

blanca), *Put za Barcelonu* (*The Road to Barcelona*), *Mediterranski putopis* (*Mediterranean Travelogue*), *Put u Europu* (*The Road to Europe*), *Put u Kotare* (*The Road to Kotari*), *Put u Uzbekistan* (*The Road to Uzbekistan*), *Put u Havanu* (*The Road to Havana*, 2022), *Put u Andaluziju* (*The Road to Andalusia*, 2023).

Bilosnić's nonfiction prose and feuilletons are simple and easy to digest. He knows how to intrigue the reader with his rich repertoire of diverse themes and motives. His chronicles of the region of Zadar, his historical and popular feuilletonism, and feuilletons on the mythology of popular culture are equally interesting. Bilosnić has authored thousands of feuilletons and reportages, which is not surprising considering the fact that most of his life he has either been striving to be a journalist or indeed was one, especially after launching the daily *Zadarski list*. There are two main cycles of his nonfiction prose: feuilletons from everyday life and newspaper reports, and historical feuilletons.

His notes on environmentalism collected in the book *Okrugla kanta za smeće* (*A Round Rubbish Bin*) belong to his books of feuilletons on everyday life, and the notes on the mythology of everyday life can be found in his two books *Od Homera do oglasa* (*From Homer to Advertisements*) and *Kontejner* (*Container*). It is worth highlighting that Bilosnić was among the few in former Yugoslavia to deal with environmentalism.

In the field of historical feuilletonism, Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić has performed a small miracle. It seems near impossible that one single person would undertake a project of such magnitude. In a period of about fifteen years, he published around twenty books of historical feuilletonism. The cycle *Kroz Ravne kotare i Bukovicu* (*Through Ravni Kotari and Bukovica*) alone consists of fifteen books, in which Bilosnić writes the history of his homeland, covering village after village in Zadar's surroundings and hinterland, including places such as Arbanasi, Puntamika, Diklo, Bokanjac, Briševo, Zemunik, Kožino, Petržane, Zaton, Privlaka, and Stankovci. Featured books in this cycle are *Stara Liburnija* (*Old Liburnia*), *V Hrvateh* (*V Hrvateh*), and *Hrvatski knezovi i kraljevi* (*Croatian Princes and Kings*). Bilosnić was the first to write a book (or sometimes even a two-volume work, as in the case of Zaton, Petržane, Privlaka, and Stankovci) about their history, after their histories had been neglected for centuries, during which the histories of these places existed only as encyclopaedic entries not longer than one-two sentences.

The second cycle of his historical feuilletonism consists of books on archaeological themes, gathered under the title *Troja, mit i stvarnost – od Nina do Knina* (*Troy, Myth and Reality – From Nin to Knin*). In these books, Bilosnić brought

together various interpretations of ancient history in the region of Zadar, giving equal space to official history and the history outside the framework of official history, i.e., to amateur historians and researchers whose work is driven by passion and love. This cycle includes books, such as *Nin u središtu mitskoga carstva* (*Nin at the Heart of a Mythical Empire*), *Caska – dio Atlantide* (*Caska, a Part of Atlantis*), *Odisej sa zadarskih otoka* (*Odysseus of Zadar's Islands*), *Polifem iz Manite peći* (*Polyphemus from the Manita Peć Cave*), *Ahilej u virovima Vrtoloma* (*Achilles in the Vortex of Vrtolom*), and *Tajna Apolonova tronošca* (*The Secret of Apollo's Tripod*) which he co-authored with Igor Šipić.

He has also written three historical feuilleton books about the history of Zadar. These are *3000 godina Za dar* (*3000 Years Za Dar*), *Sjaj zadarskoga zlata* (*The Splendour of Zadar's Gold*), and the book on the Crusaders' conquest of Zadar in 1202 *Gledajte tamo onaj grad* (*Just Look at That City Over There*). He had previously published most of the feuilletons from these books in the newspapers *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Zadarski list*, and *Zadarski regional*, mainly during the War of Independence and grenade attacks, thus helping his fellow citizens to restore faith in their identity and their own history.

Bilosnić has also written about more recent Croatian history. He was the first in Croatia to write a comprehensive book about the Croatian patriot and political prisoner Zvonko Bušić Taik. Bilosnić began publishing feuilletons in the daily *Zadarski list* shortly after Bušić's return from a 32-year sentence in American prison, and then in 2010 published them in the book *Zvonko Bušić / Kronika o povratku Zvonka Bušića u Domovinu* (*Zvonko Bušić / A Chronicle of Zvonko Bušić's Return to the Motherland*).

Focusing on Zadar's more recent history, Bilosnić also published the book *Samostalni vod umjetnika Zadar – Čuvari ljepote grada* (*Zadar's Independent Artists' Platoon – Guardians of Zadar's Beauty*). This book is a chronology of the activities of the Independent Artists' Platoon in Zadar, of which Bilosnić was the leader. It is also a valuable document of the difficult and horrible wartime in Croatia, and how its artists, as well as ordinary people, resisted evil with beauty, song, music, and dance.

In 2011, Bilosnić began publishing a new feuilleton series called *Hrvatsko proljeće u Zadru* (*The Croatian Spring in Zadar*) in the daily *Zadarski list* about the 40th anniversary of the Croatian Spring. In September 2012, *Zadarski list* (whose directors at the time were Neven Klarin and Damir Maričić) terminated their collaboration with Bilosnić due to political pressure. The same Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić who was punished for the crime of 'verbal delict' as a young man during

communism, and whose name was banned from public life in Zadar for years, who worked in the degrading position of an assistant clerk for nearly two decades, which earned him a shamefully low pension, was now politically persecuted again, but this time more insidiously, and in free Croatia. And this happened in the same year that his book was selected as one of the eighteen recommended reads on a prestigious literary website in the USA. A local newspaper that he helped launch and that should treasure having such a collaborator, turned their back on this partnership. This is just one of many instances in his professional biography that illustrate why Zadar is both a blessing and a curse for Bilosnić.

In the realm of literary creation, Bilosnić also engaged in literary criticism and essay writing. His literary criticisms are clear, lucid, and honest. He compiled his shorter literary criticisms in two books, *Noćna služba (Nightshift)*, and *Tajni život (Secret Life)*. His essays, literary portraits of Croatian literary giants, are collected in the book of essays *Vrijeme i riječ (Time and Logos, 2011)*.

It has been mentioned that Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is a true Renaissance *homo universalis* of contemporary Croatian art. He could have earned this title based on the factual overview of his literary interests alone, but alongside literary recognition, he is equally esteemed in the fields of painting and photography.

Discussing the visual artistic oeuvre of Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is no less challenging than defining the entirety of his literary work. He often notes that, with each new book, he tries to solve a new artistic problem, and the same can be said of his visual art. There is almost no painting technique that Bilosnić has not tried. Bilosnić appeared on the visual art scene as early as he did in literature. In the late 1980s, he won an award for his cartoons, and he illustrated his first book of poems *Moonless* with his own drawings. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, he experimented with the monotype technique, capturing biographical and autobiographical “faces and masks” in black-and-white and in colour. Judging by the materials he used for printing these monotypes, it is clear that Bilosnić resorted to this demanding technique because he lacked art supplies. The most prominent characteristic of his monotypes is therefore rebellion, evident in his quick movements, the rhythmic fluidity of his portraits, and a playful colour scheme. In his mature phase, he mainly worked with dry pastel, a technique that dominates his entire artistic expression. Many of Bilosnić’s dry pastel landscapes are in the cycles *Mediteranski pastel (Mediterranean Pastels)* and *Cvijeće ravnokotarskih vila (Flowers of Fairies from Ravni Kotari)*. In his first solo exhibition in Zadar, he presented his pastels, and pastel continued to characterise his work in the 1990s.

In the early 2000s, Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić introduced a new and different style of painting with powerful cycles of oil on cardboard. With the postmodernist citation cycle called *Pollockova svjetlost (Pollock's Light)*, Bilosnić made an absolutely new, avant-garde turn in his painting. By emulating Pollock's work, he revealed his own artistic essence. *Pollock's Light* carries the strength of his poem *The Scream* and the philosophy of his poetic cycle *The Tiger Is the Word*. Bilosnić's colouristic power and the disciplined wildness of his gestures in this painting phase announced a new turn in his artistic quest. The phase is a dialogue with the American painter Jackson Pollock and his technique of drip painting. Bilosnić later refined this technique in his cycles of oil on cardboard *Duhovi sa zadarskog Foruma (The Ghosts of Zadar's Forum, 2009)* and *The Return of the Tiger* from 2012. By birthing a new local mythology hidden in ancient proto-Liburnian genetic remnants, Bilosnić formed intimate patterns of new archetypes, symbols, and visionary depictions. The essence of his artistic creation could indeed be summarised by the final sentences of Ivo Šimat Banov's observations on Bilosnić's *The Ghosts of Zadar's Forum*: "In this, as in everything else, for Bilosnić half-heartedness has always been and still remains the greatest weakness that one can have. Nothing can be done without passion. Nothing can be done without madness. A normal individual creates nothing." The cycle inspired by the Stations of the Cross (in pure abstraction), and his cycle of inks *Križni put (Stations of the Cross)* published in his book of the same title in 2011 are also noteworthy works from this period.

So far, Bilosnić has published several intriguing painting monographs and art portfolios. He collected his pastel painting cycle in the monographs *Mediterranean Pastels* and *Flowers of Fairies from Ravni Kotari*, his cycle of coloured drawings in the monograph *33*, his cycle of drawings in *Metamorfoze (Metamorphoses)*, his oils in *Pollock's Light* and *The Ghosts of Zadar's Forum* (together with his lyrics). He created art portfolios in collaboration with poets Zlatko Tomičić and Ante Stamać, illustrating their poems with his pastel cycles. Esteemed Croatian art critics, such as Ivo Šimat Banov, Tonko Maroević, Milan Bešlić, Iva Körbler, Đuro Vandura, Nevenka Nekić, Vinko Srhoj, Ervin Dubrović and others, have written about Bilosnić's visual artistic oeuvre.

In addition to painting, Bilosnić has been very successful in fine art photography, which he approaches with the same passion as he does painting. His fervour is directed towards framing the landscapes of his homeland with exceptional compositional refinement. Details of the natural world, such as flower petals, thistle thorns in close-up, the play of light and shadow, and portraits, define him

as a keen observer of moments. Bilosnić's camera shutter knows when to halt the flow of the hourglass, just as he knows when and how to forcefully wield oil paint, leaving behind traces of the fluidity of life. His significant photography cycles include *Simboli Nina (The Symbols of Nin)*, *Skriveno kameno blago (Hidden Stone Treasure)* with photographs of the hillforts, fortresses, and castles of the region of Ravni Kotari and Bukovica, *Četiri godišnja doba (Four Seasons)* with micro landscapes, *Snijeg u Zadru (Snow in Zadar)* and *Karneval je život – život je karneval (Carnival is Life – Life is a Carnival)*. Bilosnić regularly participates in the exhibitions organised by the International Federation of the Art of Photography (FIAP) called *Otok i more (Island and Sea)* in the village of Kukljica on the island of Ugljan. He received a Golden Plaque at this exhibition, and several commendations. Renowned photography experts, such as Antun Travirka, Abdulah Seferović, Ante Jaša, Miljenko Mandžo, Ivo Fadić and others, have also written about Bilosnić's photography.

The fortunate aspect of this portrayal is the fact that it is still ongoing. Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić continues to create, write, and dream tirelessly. Of Mediterranean temper, he does not concern himself too much with the disparity between the society around him lacking civility and culture, and his own life and artistic zeal and passion. He continues to strive for the virtues of diligence and dedication, believing that his work leaves a most noble legacy, both for his people and for his loved ones. In recent years, Bilosnić has set up a place where he works and socialises in his secluded retreat in Zemunik, where he continues, in the manner of a young man, to plan new projects, without worrying about their implementation. His deep faith in what he does, including the detours he has been encountering in life, seem to be his source of vitality and artistic freshness. The future will undoubtedly bear witness to and reveal just how much Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić has contributed to his city, his region, his country, and to those of us who surround him and follow his artistic work. Let us hope that this extraordinary, versatile, and unbounded artist will finally be shown at least some gratitude from his community, as his rich oeuvre is a true treasure trove for future generations of readers.

Translated by Maja Kukavica

TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOŠNIĆ ■ POETRY

Translated from the Croatian by Roman Karlović

BEFORE THE CURTAINS

PRED ZAVJESAMA, 1974.

BEFORE THE CURTAINS

PRED ZAVJESAMA

I like being alone like this, in my tiny attic room.
That's the only certainty left.
I'm going to turn on my portable TV,
light the John Player Special cigarette they gave me,
and find some way to pay off the books
I keep on my shelves.
I stand before the curtains. I'll draw them down—
I refuse to look out of the window
at the world.

Morning come, I'll live through another day.
At noon, I'll head back to night's safe sanctuary.
I'll get drunk like a car thief in the evening.
I'll waste my time in abominations in the night.
Bombing the peace is a form of social therapy for me,
and I'd love to dream of vineyards,
but dreams won't do.

Would that I felt a hoof hit me on the head!
I'd close my eyes and clear my thoughts,
while the community had sweet dreams.
Nothing is there, nothing at all,
you just grow a day older
and dream, every once in a while,
you won't be summoned behind the curtains.

THE CITY

GRAD

If it glares at me, I'm going to scream—
should this huge building, bare and filthy, bottle me in.
A small house, a big house,
no complaining about the concrete and aluminum,
and the one that's supposedly healthy is all glass.
No old trees, no dead leaves, no trodden grass,
just armless neon—just neon and white poverty.
So night will fall and nothing will change.
The environs are all voidly full, no sky, no earth,
just human corpses like silt,
and a universe of frightening rocks.

A DEBT-RIDDEN MAN

ČOVJEK S DUGOVIMA

The man has lost weight—he has debts.
He's done nothing but try to keep back the wind
and pick grass flames with his hand;
he just sang, ate his bread, and went
further down in his boat.
The large sums and bills are
termites and scorpions.

I have debts that grow and live long,
sprouting everywhere like litter.
Seven hunters are after me:
I hear their guns resounding.
There—take the TV set, the shoe stand, the stool;
the trunk is up there.

The man has debts
and looks like a withered well.
He can't even cry.
Hiding under the wall, he paints his own face.
I'm going to buy a light silken rope
and make a noose.

LOVE POEM

LJUBAVNA

You've combed your hair so nice, smooth and shiny,
its hue is truly amazing.
You woke me, helped me rise,
gave me three wheat ears as a present.
You're a magic girl today.
(I must carry you over the Vrbas once again.)
My force will grow as we listen
to the blues in your bedroom.
Our journeying souls bend in the candlelight.
Let us drive to the airport, where the air
is all quivery. We might soar
into the evening dusk.
O sweetheart, come and show me the way.
I'll put the pedal to the metal like black mist.
I see new life on your face.
Am I a dead man lying at your feet,
the trunk of a thing horribly sundered
you must apprehend?

Pick something for my body from your vanity case,
rub it in and drive the spirits away.
Get in the car, let's set off for the airport.
We may still wreck the sky with our bodies today.

MOVIES

FILM

Where's this woman come from,
so wasted and tattooed?
Lie down, I'll rest at your side—
I won't rise like *The Children Of Europe*.
I don't know how long to the end,
but three dead in one minute...
I'll shake off the blues later: *Duel* is playing next.
But he is holding black feathers in his hands,
they are burying him alive in the earth,
the vegetation will drink him up:
these are ghosts in a funhouse.
A ticket, please. And she lets the years go by
as she smooths her hair
and strong boys take her like a comb.
Let us be friends—we're going to film you!
Of course, you have to die on screen, exactly,
by the book. It's all in the script, don't worry.
Go on! Come on!

AND THE COMPANY THAT REMAINS

I DRUŠTVO KOJE OSTAJE, 1977.

THE LADDER BEFORE THE CURTAINS

LJESTVE PRED ZAVJESAMA

SOMEONE PUT A LADDER before the curtains,
they are calling me out. I'm not coming down—
they'll give up all right, and disperse.
I'll keep to my tiny attic room.
The mob is gathering,
the firefighters have the mattresses ready.
What if he jumps—they ask.
The TV is still blurry, the picture has crumbled away.
Is it together with them I should cheer
the beak-horned guy from *The Top 20*?
I'd rather go into the night like a rat,
and keep quiet, and stay silent forever.
Love's wisdom has conquered my heart
with its minutiae, a clear mind and sound sayings.
From now on, I'll store my memories
in the John Player Special black pack;
from now on, I'll mark on it
every August that goes by,
all the goings-on in Trogir, by Radovan's Portal.
Make room under the window—
I'm going to jump down on the clean concrete,
and fall alone.

I'm reading Menart's *Clown* for the umptieth time.
I wrap up in a Terry Jacks song:
He's singing on a plastic mountain, as if on a bear hunt.
This is my Texas leather drum,
this the pollen of a Tuškanac night.
'What day's today?', I ask you with Jacques Prevert.
O my love, loneliness is getting nice,

and you are nothing but smoke.
Still trying to beat the boredom in my body's disco,
waiting for the projector so I can play the movie.
I just want to see *The Aristocats*,
and *Cabaret* one last time: Money, money, money...

MY LITTLE GIRL HAS CHANGED
PROMIJENILA SE MOJA DJEVOJČICA

Spirally you rise, walking like the tired ones,
with evening's pale blue light falling on your hair,
protecting you.
Which synagogue saw you turning into a
kangaroo's schizophrenic tail, trailing in the tar?
I whispered your name, I—dweller of the plasticosmos.
What can I do for your gas-like figure,
when I'm one who collects
smoky, blinded, thorny stars
forever, in order to dodge—
in my final fall—that tiny plastic box
with the artificial heart and kidneys.
I'm a glazed mandola dancer. But, when I behold you,
blessed with water by fate's capricious finger,
when I behold you, like a brass band from head to toe,
wearing deodorant, with a dead man lying...
After the funeral, the shadows turn dark blue.
All exit, broken-hearted, mute, draped in lime.
'What are you selling, boy?' they ask me now.
I gape at them, like a magician with a broken wand.

THIS LIFE OF MINE

OVAJ MOJ ŽIVOT

A swerving neon landscape flows from my eyes.
An extraterrestrial's voice in my ears preaches
the history of the flight control panel.
My fingers are rubber dolls on the high windows
of the sky-opener.
Deep within the brain, despair travels so absolutely
in the last gear. I clutch nonetheless
at my life, as if it were an electric guitar.
I have fought my way up since childhood
avoiding the periphery,
but the center is still out of my reach.
How strange, this life of mine,
almost like a fantasy wallpaper:
I couldn't see the flower on the meadowsphalt,
I loved the kerbgirl from the poster
and got coated with aluminum plates.
I tried to sing a song, too,
ignorant of all but the news in the newspaper.

A NEW POEM, MADE OF AN OLD ONE

NOVA PJESMA SAČINJENA OD STARE PJESME

Their time bursts like a weightless moonbeam,
nothing else is there. Everything blurs into soap.
O boys, women admire your fossility.
O girls, walled up in your makeup.
Sheep in a dollhuman flock.
Speeding down the highway,
raping someone along the way,
stealing a pack of good cigarettes,
inhaling with force.
Climbing the heavens on an airplane

to see if God's there,
and flying, and flying, and flying as always
rubbing shoulders with death
and all for nothing.

I WANT TO WIN YOU OVER SOMEHOW

ŽELIM TE NEKAKO NAGOVORITI

Come to my place for a minute,
and your beauty won't be just a print
as on neon streets, or in suburban shacks.
You're so graceful you don't need faith.
The world belongs to you and them,
your debts are the same.
There are no catchwords in this lovely old field,
nor do friends gather in teams.
Forget the car speeding across your head,
the gift from the manager.
Here, music is hopeful: Some dance, some play tricks.
Out of millions of people, no two are alike.
Your graceful face is not yet that of a puppet.
Gathered from a hundred broken
ancient Greek statuettes,
I want to keep that grace furtively,
so I don't have to visit museums.

DON QUIXOTE ON FIFTH AVENUE

DON QUIJOTE NA PETOJ AVENIJI

He's come in the moss to this darkness, to seek
an aluminum guiding star; to this wilderness, to lament
the modest harvest of cans on the Mississippi River.
I'm not sure that a lasting folly can be produced

at a fun-fair, the holy alliance of castleheads.
Schism and oil haunt the old ruler's new empire.
Shells, now shut and peaceful,
keep their price on the market.
So let me tell you about Miss G., then:
Only she considers you a young man
and believes in your strength.
The Knight of the Woeful Countenance
walks down carpeted stairs,
the others chew death like Bubblegum.
Such beautiful monsters: plastibloods, vitraquaea ...
Ornamental statuettes on the altars
of green Martian grasshoppers,
celluloid actors, highly inflammable, from show
to show, where reality has exceeded imagination,
mechanical owls, technological foxes,
guests of honor of the monkey-shaped stuffed god—
nothing can ever surprise them.
With music roaring on plexiglass hills,
the world's rotative balloon heads for exhaustion.

**THE FOUR SIDES OF THE WORLD
DRIFTING AWAY**

RAZMAK STRANA SVIJETA

I turned around and saw funny details—
people strolling without body parts,
acrobat-like but clear.
What sort of world is one tautened by turning?
Up on a hill, a lonesome little girl
looks down on how times change:
plastic dogs sniff a nuclear trail everywhere.
Regarde, ils reviennent; ah, regarde la tentative.
It seems we are beautiful and damned,

we all but grow roots in this carving corner,
in a time when we exchange our pasts
on the last diesel train station.
So I turn around, and see
the four sides of the world drifting away,
the trees foliating by now, poorhouse-like, in the smog,
and there's no river, just the road,
just the West, just the East.
Young people now go fishing on the river like pensioners.
Goodness is killed in this savage night.
Too bad it will never happen again: the clowns flutter
down the streets, clear as white ghosts,
and we follow them carefully.

IN THE ABSTRACT

U APSTRAKTNOM

A lady with a poodle styled like a lion
walks, melancholy, down the street.
She's just an ex-life with a double
world experience. All over her heart, loneliness
has spread an endless plate.
On her face are poignant intaglios.
Her daughter is confined to bed
for weeks on end, lacerated
in a plane crash.
Hapless dame, what will you do today?
What will you say, or sing,
you desperate, perfumed hag,
now that your heart is aged?
Grey and boring is the world,
where fear and hatred compete with a tiny lap dog.
Her daughter was knocked down from the sky, horribly.
The real has merged with the imaginary.
And she can't find her way there, in the abstract.

WHY I WRITE POEMS

ZAŠTO PIŠEM PJESME

Last night, some trifles kept me awake.
But for this, I would have played this morning
as all boys do.
Was there ever a time not crucifying the purest
spirit, as the wind does to ghastly cloths
on balconies? Has knowledge always had
to be substantiated, and a poor man to search
for words in the silence,
arranging them like dominoes?
That's what troubles my mind today,
as the clock cuts a trail, stealthily, like a prayer.
I wrote a poem, broke down my thoughts,
bringing the words to a mirage.
Afterwards, I cried for a long time—
I was helpless as before.

BIRDS COMING CLOSE

PRIBLIŽAVANJE PTICA, 1980.

DON'T TOUCH THE BIRD

NE DIRAJTE PTICU

1

The ominous iron sheet
has shrouded the nest, and all's agape
like a ruin.
With the white bird gone, the silence within us
is a never-ending chirrup.
The woods open their mouths at evening.
No chants are left, no live images:

the clear tree is gone that was so fragrant,
so fragrant and calm. The chaste little hills
have begot verticals—mysterious houses.
There are signs of things past in our blood.
And the harried blue birds there, where the sky
is clear, resemble nothing.

2

A machine howl emerges from the bird twitter.
Lost crowds ramble along the sidewalks,
watching the bronze bird on the belfry.
Between two atoms is Man, now Christened.
Moving powerless along the curve, my hands
have not retained the slightest form of poplars.
Don't touch the golden bird like altars of man.

3

Lightning slit the sky between us.
And many a chant is electrified,
many a smile polished,
many a pain sealed,
and I quiver on the cable
next to utterly indifferent passers-by.
As if leaving a morgue,
people have no illusions, calm like porcelain,
while I set my fire ablaze
shamelessly.

4

I take a lonesome walk through ghostly spaces
carrying my life like one last lie.
So, it's true—worlds devour each other

like beasts, no less,
and bleed alike.

The continent turns like a clock wheel
and everything's a clear-cut shipwreck, and silence,
and everything's a poisoned dog's desperate bark.
Don't touch the bird
shrouded in thick fog.

5

Someone inside me switches hope on, spinning
the darkness; deep inside me, volcanoes growl,
technology's cubs play a wild game.
A blizzard of fear all around, curses streaming:
Death is come, now—the final, painful scream.
Can the crucified clouds, then, can the flame winds,
the rubbish heaps, the wagon loads of rotten fruit,
can they, oh, can they raise from the dead
a little wounded bird,
a chaste songbird?
Steeped in matter at last, flooded by forms
on my brain map, I'm madly ablaze.
Black birds are falling like plastic airplanes,
people are falling like raindrops.

6

I follow a glistening bird
like a man remembering his dead love,
a love long gone but so victoriously alive.
The white bird is a dream bird, the golden bird,
the blue bird of prayers, the black bird of solitude;
all my hopes are on the wane.
I'll journey, melancholy, to the stars tonight,
I'll watch the eyes of planets secretly tonight,
and be a most wounded man.

ONE LAST POEM ABOUT THE MOON

POS LJEDNJA PJESMA O MJESECU

The inner blue of my body
asks for one last poem about the moon.
The soul's geography regenerates,
surging wildly.

I will write the simplest verses
as they spring to my mind.
As the third shift takes over the heavy machinery,
I listen to the sea under the window
rising,
I listen to the sea and think of love.

The moonlight, stronger on my face,
licks it, cold and gentle.
I'm pale like a monument,
and you wonder
what's the matter with me.

In the morning, when I'm across town,
time will waken your room
and you'll glance at the street from the window.
Passers-by are such an elementary view!
But you thought otherwise at midnight,
when I, all dreamy, haunted the sea,
carrying my body to the moonlight
so it would make it visible.
So now I can tell
my last poem about the moon,
filled with nocturnal life:
the moonlight sprouts and resides on my face,
and my soul flashes and pales.

WORDS

RIJEČI

Doesn't a word decompose
in spirals
so its mind could materialize for a second,
like a frozen bird on the power line?
There's no point in reviving the stubborn magic.
Man's been stumbling from the beginning:
bring a wooden whistle to your lips,
check out how the sounds wriggle
and each asks for an image of its own.

ALARM SIGNALS

ZNACI ZA UZBUNU, 1993.

BALKAN BLUES

BALKANSKI BLUES

I don't care about abstractions, biochemistry,
fear and fortune-telling.
I have no idea what I want,
but I know how to get it with a penknife.
My brothers are all poppy pickers, killers,
with such a big heart you could drown in it.
I'm the runner type—always galloping—
but not a horse: I let nobody fuck with me.
I live on lies
and break on clouds.

KID, GIVE ME A MORPHINE INJECTION

DIJETE, UBRIZGAJ MI MORFIJ

My journey was over, it was morning and warm.
I wriggled with a bullet in my chest.

Came back chemically
in a spray
a hundred thousand years on.
Will I manage to squeeze through
the two stars unhurt,
or do I kill their glowworms?

They've turned on the TV and the infusion pump,
and my tongue tastes like metal.
Kid, give me a morphine injection
so I can sleep some more.
I'm numb to the things around me,
don't understand them at all.

SMOKING DORSET

DOK PUŠIM DORSET

We're building a bunker—Mefisto, Goethe and I.
There's no difference.
Our headphones are ablaze.
We have laboratories in our mouths.
Life grows like a mushroom,
swallows bang into our heads.
What's the matter with us? The saviour approaches,
and we have nowhere to return
once we break into flight.

The sun has soaked in
the nacre from one of the skulls.
There's a pair of shoes, and a shirt, too,
to protect us from the bullets.

WAR IS NO MIRACLE

U RATU NIKAKVOGA ČUDA NEMA

Everything is clear-cut and glittery.
On the sidewalk, a dog is going nuts,
he has nowhere to pee.
A man walks down the street
with a uranium vessel in his hand.
In the night, he's still standing under the poplar
and he can see the stars.

LOVE INK

TINTA ZA LJUBAV

I have used a whole bottle of ink
to write just one word—
love.
It's my farewell letter.
She'll be waiting for me somewhere all right,
before I suffer any harm—
in the crowd, in the neon glow,
in the radiation zone
where the sun, full of fat,
will be melting away.
She will interpret my dream,
offer me a sanctuary.
The sponge has soaked in the ink light
full of old sea urchins.
The moment I touch it,
my palms get all sweaty,
filled with pearls.

BLOK AND WHITE STAINS

BLOK, BIJELE MRLJE

Blok sits on a cement block.
He looks at his notebook, crying.
There are horsemen in the mist,
a procession moving in the mist.
Christ is dead—
that's a necessity of life,
the truth about the last man,
the guy who survived
asleep on a mat.
So Blok sits and crams
the small stove with lumps of book paper,
crams it the whole night long—
so he can warm up
once the light's delights have seduced him,
once the carbon has consumed the air.
The Central Committee has adopted a new faith,
but Blok keeps reading,
munching seeds.
He is motionless,
happy and bored.
That's all he can do, anyway.

AN OPEN LETTER

OTVORENO PISMO

Speak a new language,
an inner language
with in-built salt.
Let blood be the voice
waking children that are still asleep.
Let it be the voice of all the secrets,
the voice of fresh air—
a woman's voice in a seashell.

Don't let our words meet
like mute passers-by,
careful to dodge each other,
scanning the distance between the shadows.

Above the crowd, there are eyes speaking—
the dictator's speech is a done job.
Here, I am willing to accept
and believe
what you're saying.
Man & war.
A good woman and a boxing ring.
Flies and love.
Stuff that puts me to sleep,
things I don't give a shit about.

I wonder why I've spent so many words,
aware of the need for bread and wine.
I could write a poem using knives, too,
instead of words,
but what's the point
if nobody will ask how I'm doing.
Is everything okay, Bilosnić?
What's the matter with you, mate? That, too.
I feel guilty, 'cause I can't respond:
I'm cool.

Why do the words we've retained,
the love letters, contracts and poems
end up in cardboard boxes,
why have we shoved them under the bed,
listening to them like we listen to crickets
as we lie awake.

**EVEN SOLITUDE WALKING WITH US
IS BETTER THAN BEING ALONE**

I SAMOĆA DA HODA S NAMA BOLJE JE NEGO DA SMO SAMI

All day long, just pangs
in the cerebellum region,
in the temples,
down the whole spine.
Hard times are upon us,
let us say farewell to each other.
Let us say 'So long' and part,
let us find a quiet place
where we can die
before dawn.

Every job we do makes us sick.
We can't even talk
without a drink,
we feed on our raw flesh
in great solitude.
We stare each other in the eye,
like people made of water.

We try to catch
the bustle of our shadows,
to follow their dazzle
and uproar.
But we don't care about that, either:
listless, we look for a free bench
so we can lie down
and fall asleep.

Nobody sees us.
This is the Blind People's Big Day.
Sweetheart, stay for another moment,
let us hold hands like children.
Even solitude walking with us
is better than being alone.

THE TIGER
TIGAR, 2004.

THERE'S A TIGER NOW
ON ZADAR'S TREATY STREET
U ULICI ZADARSKOG MIRA POJAVIO SE TIGAR

Where Zadar's Treaty Street begins
there's a tiger now
the stubbornest tiger ever
Such a rare creature in today's world
So rare it's hard to believe
No one believes he's really there
even though kids bring him little presents
and the girls from the suburbs come to see him
thrilled by the best of the best
They all watch him from a respectable distance
turning their eyes, unbelieving, to the sky
that hovers over the tiger and is just as silky
With great leaps, the tiger jumps over the buildings
afraid he'll get killed on the street
by those who pretend they dislike him,
yet cry after him: He's a beauty,
like the high white waves from the South
that have perspired over the city for days on end
The tiger has no inkling he's trapped
in the pit they've dug for him, for years now
smiling gently at his sudden appearance

MY TIGER NAME

MOJE TIGROVSKO IME

People are brothers to tigers
they bond with the tiger
with him, they've experienced dreams
they had never dreamed of
Unbeknownst to my beloved ones
I'm going to fetch my tiger name
I'm off for my courage test now
and I cover my trail thoroughly
My family's anxious to hear what I've resolved
people who love me wait for a sign
in the vast skylight
The end of my temptation
is a bond with the creator of all life
Now I'm the one who brings salvation
and nobody's going to catch me
I'm the new warrior
the new tiger man
The pristine brotherhood is once again restored
as the song of the jungle reaches my ears
My transfiguration is done
my journey over
and no one but myself knows what has happened

**A TIGER BETWEEN THE HARD COVERS
OF A BOOK**

TIGAR MEĐU TVRDIM KORICAMA KNJIGE

A tiger has crept into my library
A tiger has entered my books
A tiger has made his home
between the hard covers of a book
He can't stand anybody's words

He can't even stand his own mind
The tiger has started a war with the writers
won't let them write a single poem
he deems all phrases unworthy
He feels every word is a thorn in his body
My library is full of horrors
The tiger's sick of the writer's demands
he's entered the book like a supermarket
and devoured all that came in his way
Now just one book is complete
now just one book is perfect
the hardcover
where the tiger sleeps, dreaming of India

FEEL THE TIGER

OSJEĆAJ TIGRA

The tiger is his own source
The tiger is his own goal
The tiger makes his own self
The tiger is his own work
The tiger is the order of life
its mystique
The tiger is power
when he is—he is
when he appears—he appears
when he exists—he exists
if he vanishes—there's no tiger any more
The tiger is every feeling
The tiger is every sense
The tiger is every value
he's my self

A TIGER IN MY HEART

TIGAR U SRCU

When I open the earth's hot womb
there's a tiger in there
When I open the great body of Mars
there's a tiger in there
When I open the sunlight
there's a tiger in there
Any star I open
there's a tiger in there
When I split a nutshell
there's a tiger in there
I peer into my heart
and find a tiger in there, too

A TIGER IN THE SNOW

TIGAR U SNIJEGU

The white cloaks have made the mountains into lime
the snowflakes shade the forests with their light
the storm has frozen with pallour
only the tiger, with his pontifical silence,
unfurls in the snow festival
as its sunflower-patterned cover
as the last orange glow in this world
The tiger wakes the snow's lust
The tiger wakes the lust of whiteness's private parts
stretched over it like a carpet, sound asleep
His presence announced by the snow
the snow has embraced the vagrant
reflected in it
as the one warm bush
the blanket enfolding those who still
are to be born innocent

A SKINNY TIGER

MRŠAVI TIGAR

A skinny tiger is chewing a star
fuming like hot rice
He swings from the moon's shoulder
the moon's pale red sickle slices the sky
with more precision than a chain-saw
The sky, dark blue like raisins,
stretches over a dizzy morning,
over its foliage—with the tiger underneath
slicing a leaden star like a toast
Dawn has made him dark blue, like Shiva
the skinny tiger in the Asian sky
exterminates the distant stars
like rare birds of the jungle

THE TIGER COMES OUT OF THE WOOD FOUR TIMES

TIGAR ČETIRI PUTA IZLAZI IZ ŠUME

The tiger knows Siddharta well
The tiger knows what life's all about
The tiger is a prince
The tiger comes out of the wood four times
The tiger wants to see
the other face of the world, too
he can't stand captivity
The tiger meets an old man and learns from him
The tiger meets a sick man and admires him
The tiger meets a dead man and envies him
The tiger meets a vagrant and follows his example
That's why the tiger is homeless
he's a stranger everywhere
going from place to place
Nobody's a stranger to the tiger
there's nothing he doesn't know

LEGEND OF A NYMPH

LEGENDA O NIMFI

Alphesibea came to the river
Alphesibea couldn't cross the river
Dionysus morphed into a tiger
Dionysus seduced the Asian nymph
The tiger carried Alphesibea across the river
The Sollax then changed its name to Tigris
That's how Plutarch explains the river's name
That's how Plutarch tells the story
but no one mentions how
the tiger and the nymph became one
Not even their son Medeus mentions that
Not even the hero tells it
who gave Medeus his name
All those who would unearth that story
still sit at the Mesopotamian river's shore

A TIGRESS WAITING FOR THE TIGER

TIGRICA ČEKA TIGRA

This can happen
to just one tigress
These days
just one tigress is waiting for a tiger
The whole world is anxious to see
what will happen
will he eventually arrive
Something like that happened far, far away
and a long, long time ago
no one knows what happened any more
Was the tiger killed
with a sharp knife
or did the tigress live on

with the king, tending his son
A long, long time ago
all kinds of strange things happened
so no one believes any more
that the tigress is still waiting for the tiger
that her heart will rather break
than weary of waiting

ODYSSEUS IS A TIGER

ODISEJ JE TIGAR

Odysseus is a tiger roaming
reaching for ripe apples
Clearly, he owns nothing
not the land, not the sea
not death visiting him daily
not the stars that have gorged on the Sun
not the life in the sea's tresses
All along, the tiger has fled his birth
All along, Odysseus has whipped up the wind
All along, the tiger and Odysseus
have forsaken their homeland
forgetting all the names
every seed
every woman
the water heavy with fat
The tiger is Odysseus
made of star-filled eyes
a roamer living on roaming alone
a hero so ill with fame
that he conjures up towers and gods
and syrens capturing all worries

SONGS OF ODYSSEUS
ODISEJEVE PIJESME, 2007.

ON A GREAT WHITE ISLAND
NA VELIKOM BIJELOM OTOKU

“I am the first vine, and my Father is the vineyard”¹
Each tendril is your eyebrow, and your eye beneath it
a darkened cluster with a nipple.
Your body, that of a well-tended vineyard, is sunlit
fiery, luminous spirally
your white shoulders teem with fireflies.
The vineyard’s scent fells bees and spiders
and butterflies and – with a basketful of cicadas – the moon.
Your hands try playing on the tendrils of my face
as on a piano keyboard
while I, poetically obsessed with words,
describe the eyes of stars, the lips
like rings, enveloping our bodies.
On the great white island
the vineyard’s there for real,
our ancient home’s scaffolding,
each tendril an image of your shadow
a query on when the wine will grow into the sweetest night.

THE LAST OF MY LOVES
ZADNJA OD MOJIH LJUBAVI

“You recline on soft grass, in the circle
we hold dear, in the shade of branchy trees”²
on the Flatlands flats, while I keep watch watchfully
by your bedchamber, furtively craving.
Our life morphs daily

¹ John 15:1

² Titus Lucretius Carus

from vine to bare stone, cloud, or milky straw,
or to a sky where birds disperse our tears worldwide.
Because you touch me as if ants crawled over me
I know that, of my loves, this one's the last.
And I fathom, finally: bygones
are forever gone.
If you never mention me again, it's fair enough.
See the moon hug the night after all the strain, thirst, and swelter,
the birds' nightly song – a reminder of a bliss long gone.
My ring will show my resting place
the place where dawn will find you.
In the soft grass, our souls flicker, flutter in the north wind in March
as the grass and the flowers overwhelm my body
in the north wind that unfurls from the Velebit mountains.
Will the wind blow away your firm commitment
will the earth engulf your promises?
In this communion of love, asleep on pastures, we are captives
amid the stars, our affection's keepers.
So, are there darker stars, and crueler,
whose light recedes in the distance like this?

SEASHELLS FULL OF SEA NIGHT
ŠKOLJKE PUNE MORSKE NOĆI

“Who says I won't be there
and my heart won't stand there, by the side”³
by our white dwelling's white wall, a white flame
earth-scented white bread.
Like a cluster of grapes is my clenched fist as I sob, alone
beyond the reach of swallow nests
scrutinizing the grasses, the trees, the drifting of clouds
the stars with moist nostrils.
My friends are on ships
and never descend on the shore, on the sand

³ Aimé Césaire

among seashells full of sea night.
Goats told the village our secrets
when you tossed the gold coin down the stairs
when a voice resounded with a single word
that was fuller than light.
Out at sea, mountains – hunched
from the waiting – rise to the heavens.
How did it come to this, that we chanced upon each other
like the blind, on a deserted road
where my heart could not remain?

TURNING THE SUN INTO WATER DROPLETS
PRETVARAJUĆI SUNCE U KAPLJICE VODE

“I got a visit by all the stars tonight.”⁴
Tiny, grainy angels strewn by the shore
the hearts of women I’ve met in conquered cities.
So small was I then, when I saw you
that you’d hardly notice me amid sea urchins
that eat the sun brazenly, and turn it into water droplets.
At the thought that I am nothing but a human
out at sea, a storm enveloping my body
barely bearing my head high, shaken by dreams
that devour my waking hours noisily – I froze.
The sky, with jelly-laden fireflies, leans
on the deep sand, my devastated land.
The sea, meanwhile, creeps upon the ship
until the salt-skulled southern riders
sweep past me as if driven by a blaze.
Somewhere far off you hide, and the oxidized moon’s eye
can’t see you as at bedtime you unbraid your mane
to spill the pitch-black darkness, blacker than burnt stone
and bloated with hearkening for news while the bells
complete the chain of alarm, and I untangle the necklets of stars
around my neck so they don’t smother me as I repeat your name.

⁴ Jiří Wolker

LIKE THOUSANDS OF WHALES BREATHING

KAO DA TISUĆE KITOVA DIŠE

“Traverse that life as one huge cry
of fire on dry leaves: you’ll walk through like an island’s single step”,⁵
the island itself shipwrecked on the delta of the North Star’s light.
I hear you sigh like thousands of whales breathing
each breath spawning a necklace of storms
your teeth – a snowy cavalry far off.
Your eyes drip grape clusters of stars onto the ocean’s face
as the glowworm on the sails renews your distant gaze.
The waves alongside my boat collapse like waterfalls
into peace, this side the sea horizon’s curvature.
This is not the wind nor the water whipping, but death’s blows
crawling cruelly through the virgin’s bloodstream
as she, lizard-like, sluggishly, draws near.
It is our naked women porters with uplifted hearts
descending – flaming sun peaks – into the ship hold’s gloom
where I lie, made stronger by defeats, by wanderings and wounds.
Yet, as the lewd face of the north wind cuts the water
and a deluge heaves the great blue’s crests,
I hear the fragrance of my native meadows, of the palms of your hands,
and I see the ease wrapped around your shoulders.
From within the silence, my loving voice
is burning on the hearth with you as its keeper.

THEY TELL ME THAT THOSE TIMES ARE GONE

KAŽU MI DA TOGA DOBA VIŠE NEMA

“Be quiet, my heart, because the universe can’t hear you.”
Be quiet, my heart, as you turn windward,
because my soul is made of clouds, of tears,
as we sit, amazed, amid the stars as amid the candlelight
as the sky melts all over us, waxlike, tenderly.

⁵ Aimé Césaire

Be quiet, my heart, as I keep thinking of Troy
and see the road to my town cut into the ring on her finger
far, far off at the end of the sea whose tails are chased
by stray dogs that make the seagulls dart madly
like the leaves falling from my childhood's trees.
Am I getting old, my heart, when in butterflies I see burst water
remembering her hair like tendrils on the vine?
They tell me that those times are gone, the towers too
she sang on for me, and the horses
waiting for me with a silk load for her gowns.
In vain I lift my heavy head and search the distance
for the shore, the hills of Ithaca that sprawl
to the four winds full of lichens.
You're not as skillful yet to open seas for me,
but good enough to make them tranquil, green
like meadows where you pasture my young lambs.
The crackling fire illuminates your bedchamber by the wall
on which silvery, winged angels leave the airy trace
of my voyage, followed by your deep blue satin trail.
Be quiet, my heart, as we fell the flowering tree crowns
like headstrong kids expressing our envy
of all who have leisure and whose days are boring
more than themselves, the aimlessly ambling that diss us
on the streets where, love-struck, we hide.
Here, out at sea, I saw you take the warm bread out
of the oven, with the barefoot children singing,
I saw you walk with a bucket of water from the well
where our tiny sheep will gather, panting.
The setting sun will coat our roof with copper
so that our shack will be a castle, a steep cliff

my ship steers for in fear.
Be quiet, my heart, as the storm wind
splatters seawater from oar to oar.

OLIVES THAT FEED US OIL FROM SCATTERED STARS
MASLINE KOJE NAS HRANE ULJEM RASUTIH ZVIJEZDA

“My father’s vineyard is crowned with a green
olive wreath”.⁶ Like a pair of doves, you lift your eyes
from my Ithacan vineyard, in fear of the sea,
of the salt that keeps me awake like the moonlight’s spirit:
the eyes of our ancestors, their hearts, the tiny buds
of the olives that feed us the oil of scattered stars
in a sky whose grape clusters have sunk into cosmic gloom.
Anointed with scented oil, we – now separate – inseminate the earth
we’ve dug, bedecked with treetops full of anthills.
The beauty of the olive tree stabs each heart like lightning.
A flight of swallows on dawn’s masts
brings to mind the black lambs you pasture on our meadows
waiting to tell me of these ten long years:
the undisclosed eternity within the vineyard with the olive
wreath. Treacherous, my tears morph into oil
an amber mask imbued with hope and comfort, the lull
of sitting at the table of your swarthy bosom
of lying down on a bed made of the black nipples
of olives with your face as it leans against the cloud mounds.
An olive tree is a swarthy woman, the black earth
surrounding the house amid sunbeams of shale.
My own, and my father’s, vineyard brims with your
finger pads, the olive trees that close their eyes over me
before they see my heart amid the sea waves
melting alongside its own stars.

⁶ Vladimir Nazor

AND I THINK NOW OF THE WAY YOU ONCE WERE

UISTINU, SAD MISLIM: KAKVA SI PRIJE BILA

“My God, what was she really like?”⁷

What she was like – the one roaming the memories, restless,
and I forget the time, the place,
and how she walked nude among the crowds,
and the moment she remained encapsulated forever in summer
down to the shadow of the dress she’d tossed among the shrubs.

Only the shimmer: the glow, the pearls, the star-strewn abyss
the ancient sky and you, sweeter than the thrill of sailing.

The summers have ceased forever, and stoked the sea’s pride,
the wave’s frills, the grace of roses.

The wind’s flapping tears my heart apart, the sound
of your lips that feed me like fish.

Only the sea’s depth reveals the rapture and the body’s
true smell, a young woman’s smell, a hazy mirage
that hurts like salted wounds.

And I think now of the way you once were
and what you’re like as the world sleeps and the skies freeze
what you’re like in July’s echoes and how much of you is left
on my fingertips.

Last night, as I saw you again
you seemed an oar, the wind’s smile.

Like a sea without end, there stretched a cloud
resembling you, its shadow visible, likely,
in Ithaca’s vineyards.

For a moment I thought it was our home,
your round hips pushing its walls to the shore,
but then I saw them too, circling the house
toying with the apples

as I sail on, steer on

asking myself: My God, what is she really like now

and is she still the way she was

a shadow’s daydream ever morphing out at sea.

⁷ Juan Ramón Jiménez

NOT EVEN THE WAVES RECALL SUCH WORDS

OVAKVE RIJEČI NE PAMTI NI VALOVLJE

“A young man will not write a treatise like this.”⁸
A storm cannot smash this word I ready for you,
hung on the cross of the sky’s azure nets.
No map matches its make,
and once uttered, you’ll know the point I’m at
and how soon quick fishes will fetch it.
As the sea burned, heart-like, I spoke to the dark waters:
not even the waves, nor the grains, recall such words
nor do crowned heads coo them, but people windswept
for ages, who conceal the sea under the pillow.
Where I’m at I sleep and dream and speak
this treatise without laurel or myrtle,
with just an orange in my hand as an inscrutable puzzle.
Every word I utter in your name
exudes the freshness of freshly plucked peaches.
Out at sea, hail ruptures the pitcher brimming with holly oak powder
that, like a spider web, weaves a wreath with words
similar to those when I last saw you,
when you spun white wool, with a spindle in your lap.

SO, I LIVE HOLDING A SECRET TIGHT

ZAGRLJEN ŽIVIM S TAJNOM

“The ocean’s secrets are forgotten on shore”.⁹
The secrets from out at sea are unforgotten.
Here all is shadowless as in vast deserts,
here every morning pain starts anew.
Cruelly, it revives each time I dream
of you searching for me in the sea.
You dig out the shore to peer deeper into the sky
as ships of solitude sail in.

⁸ Czesław Miłosz

⁹ Kostas Ouranis

Only because you're sad do you forget the secrets,
thinking that the sea vanishes in the light.
I steer through the waters as through our breathing,
I know the waters both when they collapse and heave
like I know you when you undress by the bed.
So, I live holding a secret tight.
It restores my youth like a cozy tavern's wine.
It is open like your eyes, that follow me
and gently touch me amid the seas like a droplet
of blood that landed on our first kiss.

LILY-STREWN OARS

VESLA PUNA LJILJANA

“Close to you, stormy winds don't howl”.¹⁰
Close to you is waiting and hearkening, and peace
deathlike, stark naked, and ripe
like autumnal shadows.
Lily-strewn oars steer me to islets
I see as your breasts.
The flowers on top ripen in blue winds.
I grow silent: not even my breath should
blanket your bare flesh in the crevice on the shore,
but the storm stripping your grace will suddenly rise.
I wonder if it's the sea or my tongue howling
or my weapons rattling, whistling
like the dolphins following me in the dead calm.
And I'm erasing every memory in my memory
to make new room for you in the blood
that elates the years of our separation.
Like the evening star, you seek a sea
to dip your orange flower color dress in.
Nothing but water soothes our bodies any more
as it opens its oysters in peace –
and when the storm winds rage.

¹⁰ Maria Polydouri

ONCE AND FOR ALL, WE'LL LIE TOGETHER

JEDNOM ZAUVIJEK LEŽAT ĆEMO ZAJEDNO

“I then stayed in your great white body.”¹¹
I stayed on the white island, amid Ithaca’s silver
where the light had burned the field.
You know that place that never talks nor can be ever
talked about. In the vineyard, we swore
to keep quiet about our business.
Once again, you’ll say you love me
Once again, you’ll kiss me, young like an apple in September,
naked and wet like the earth.
There will be no need for words.
Noises, shadows – they won’t reach us any more.
Once and for all, we’ll lie together
lying low in bed, out of the day’s reach.
We will be that great white body
the last island to defeat the sea.
None but children will name Ithaca at play,
the rest will think it was a sham
a tale, nothing more, spread by the wind.

PRAYERS

MOLITVE, 2009.

AS I PRAY

DOK JA MOLIM

As I pray, the stars shatter
In each star there is a thousand angels
and they waft around me as leaves do
as everlasting life
As I pray, stars land on my palm
lounge in my fist
tangle in my fingers

¹¹ Vinicius de Moraes

Like the white-hot moon's mane
my eyes encompass them
As I pray, the wind lifts me towards you
briskly through deep space
and shoves the stars in verses

MY GOD, DO SOMETHING FOR ME TOO
BOŽE, UČINI NEŠTO I ZA MENE

My God, if you can, do something for me too
Tell those I love to be forbearing
You know I won't neglect them if I leave them

My God, the burden broke my back
And now I hand my load to you
that I may heal and ambulate again

My God, as my dream, increasingly, turns into earth
Dispatch the singing angels to me
Let them waken my voice too

My God, as your face reposes in my eyes
And your utterance consumes my heart
Display a living space for me

My God, will you not unlock a new enjoyment for me
Fresh with childhood's dew
With roosters crowing to each other

My God, I still swagger in your name
Even when I hearken to my dead
Who know your awesome gift by now

My God, can you look at me once more
Can you awake your land in me
That my perpetual hellfire may abate

A WORD TO ADAM

RIJEČ ADAMU

You are God's first image
The first man
The first sob
The first utterance
The first responsibility
and the first sin

Born first
you were the first to die
The first to be hallowed
and the first dust

Your impenetrable wisdom
fell and scattered
when you strove to rule
the world

You're the oldest
and the youngest
You're the father
and the son
The cosmic man
and man of clay
In you, water
is made blood

MY CROSS

MOJ KRIŽ

I fear my cross is not robust enough
As if it quivers
and is frightened more than my affliction is

and it's gotten thinner
turned into a rope
into the sob of one hanged to the wind
and, next to me, has turned into a shadow
that will fade out as I fall asleep

My God, you know all the enigmas
let a cross emerge within this wilderness
with my face on it
of this world
and let it speak my tongue

THE KORNATI PRAYER
KORNATSKA MOLITVA

My God, you are the fire overhead
the wisdom that's aflame
the burning stake on my frail body!

O God, you are identical with fire
with the soul that, roaming
fights its way through flames
through flares that are the tongue of love
the language of undying roses.

O God, you step into the fire
dazzlingly, you wash me
crush me feverishly
into death pearls sinking to the ocean floor
that tear the depths apart.

My God, nothing that has happened
can be properly described
The tiny ember beings cannot fathom it
nor can the unseen beings of light

The fire in us, caught unawares,
is an oppressive firmament.
They are off to bring report of us.

Cloaked in the red mantle of the living God
they cross the flames
the New Firestorm
like, on the eve of sowing, a scorched earth.

I have seen young roosters' combs burn
and butterflies' many-hued wings vanish, shadow-like
I've seen the conflagration of fish fins
and, in the petals of a rose, an octopus's tentacle
and, comet-like, a weasel's tail.

I have seen ant bodies flaring
birds' hearts ablaze.
My God, I've seen an angel's silver wings
turn into roses in the island sun
into parapets on gasping mouths.

I have seen the foam give birth to seas
awash with phosphorus.
I've seen the Kornati in young men's voices
and in them, a uranium quail.
I have seen stars
turned into hearths
and shirts hung there to dry.

From cool fountains, angels soaring skyward
in a flood of fiery feathers
the apostles too, for us to look up to
the Twelve will soar
in the service of a breath.

Behold, here's Blok, twelve people walk
twelve fiery wheels
shone on by the flame, a flame of stone.

O God, our fantasy is void
we'd holler, but the buzz of words will hush us
our low-key wits are drumming
like a thousand comets
that eclipse the sun
the summer-stifled isle.

O God, this fire has not burned us
this is your voice of light
with it we live, and with it we die.
This flame is for us to look up to
the burning bush that births anew
the air, the grass, the animals
and people with a key to the sun's youth.

The fire trek made us fit for You.
O God, the holy nights of Easter!
My God, with a corner of your mouth you soak us in
and you become the homeland of our dreams.

In the sky-tops I hear thunder
deep inside I spot a stealthy sun
an island that, at once, is by the universe
an island that, by now, is our God's hearth
a burning coal the gathered people eye
the Christ who loves us so
to whom, so fast, we grew so close.

Glorious flame, you are the everlasting light
the fire in which our aching fancy wails
God of our salvation
God above the helichrysums
and above the reddish firmament
above the silver and the gold of stars
God of these spark-grasses
crow heads are jet black
the dust that glints like human lust.

O High and Exalted One, with such hot kisses
you're the holy face of Christ in August
a bodily oblation midpoint in the naked sky.
Waterfalls of salt
pour down our eyes
our sinless youth undressing on the world's horizon
in an attempt to free our speech
of each harsh letter in the tongue that's after us.

Girls lean their brows against the sky's black garb.
And clumps of fiery grapes
dribble in the spinal cords.
Scorched by the sun, only the sun,
and nothing but the sun.
Scorched flowers in the courtyards.

Scorched, searing hands of withered mothers.
Scorched stone on visages of fathers,
the Milky Way – scorched, too.

O God, none but You perceives the life of flames
and of those who tame the water snakes.
You are in the howl
and in the yowl
as boulders fracture
and the air fragments.
Your heart will bake our bread.
Your face will light our tears.

O God, as we ascend towards you from the deep
our youth will fade out from our eyes, irradiate the sea.

A PRAYER BEFORE THE RAIN

MOLITVA PRED KIŠU

Let paradise return to earth from out of clouds
let raindrops swell
like clumps of grapes
Draw nigh, Most High
in the mercy of the blades of grass
Draw nigh to us, us who are dust, on the south wind
sweet like wet apples
kind like a pasture in spring
Draw nigh to us, Most High
draw nigh, infuse our roof
draw nigh to knock on doors and windows
to pour over our all-fertile yard
Draw nigh to us now, drop by drop
draw nigh like earthen gold
Descend on clouds as you play music
falling from the sky
gently, like a dewy cherry leaf
Draw nigh as yearning for the waters wakens
as brow and throat now thirst
as does the sun with its warm heaven-bed

SAINT PETER

SVETI PETAR

For him, life means to go a-sailing
up rivers
down waters
across the seas
around the oceans
And catch fish
he will, by casting nets
and shall deny them thrice

Jittery, he hearkens for the rooster's crow
and tries to swing from the first sunbeam
He leaves the last feast thrice
and thrice forsakes his fellows
in a fish disguise

He lives like a rock
that is the throne of the eternal home
and wants no other brickwork
for his wall
to chant before it thrice
and thrice to pray

HOME
KUĆA, 2010.

HOME IS MOTHER
KUĆA JE MAJKA

A home grants all your wishes
if it is your waking mother
shouldering a stone instead of you
carrying the sun within her bosom
lead and gold atop her nipples
A home is mother's silence as you dream
the want in which all use the selfsame tongue
her progeny disperses
worldwide from within her
Home and mother truly are a single body
which is but the bud of their own life
its top sky-bound

THE ISLAND HOME

KUĆA NA OTOKU

a conch within a conch
a pearl within a pearl
in the sea
an island home
invisible
and deep
a lonely rose
shows up
as a star
shut
like a seed
sheltered from the wind
it sleeps
an island house
a cicada's shell
an ant-city
a full-moon conch
a blade of grass
locked in rock
in a pebble
in a puzzle
pearl into swallow
transformed
into an egg in the nest
the island home
opens
and shuts
until the pearl
becomes the moon's eye

THE HEART-HOME

KUĆA SRCE

Your home is a wall
it stops no one
from entering
This is my dream
in it
you are safe
my son
Your home is a heart
a place that can't be seen
on a picture
just like God
Don't look at the wall
it wasn't built with love
it has no imagination
it's material
and like a thousand others
Listen to the heavens the music
Look at the world
similar to itself
at the star
whose wall dissolves
in your eyes
into tiny particles of gold
that are like you
a lofty home
Stay
here where unseen walls
touch you with their warmth

THE ROTUNDA
OKRUGLA KUĆA

A rotunda, ever turned towards the sun
is like silk yarn
like moonlight
ringed by a round moat
shaped like a water ring
Children will inherit a rotunda like the land
those who journey will inhabit it
anxious not to stir the ancestors
in its foundations
A rotunda is the clear firmament
a tabernacle
a pot
a skull
with a steam vent
Should you ever lodge in a rotunda
before you turn around 360 degrees
in an attempt to hold the stars in sight
think of what I jotted down right here
and then kindle with it right away
a fire on the rounded hearth
resembling a maternal breast
A rotunda is the body's home
that seeks a stopgap shelter
as it morphs into the smoke
that seeps out skyward from the smokestack
to rain back from heaven
and to ooze into the house's well
that what is left might be
preserved from the unbounded world

POETS AND HOME

PJESNICI I KUĆA

A home cannot be sketched
nor happiness spelled out
a pearl does not turn on the light inside a shell
The chosen place cannot be fixed
our fondness for it makes it true
its flesh is hallowed
in but one corner of the world
A home cannot be fathomed
and its truth is like the universe
akin to our frugal lodgings
whose exiguity belongs to all
who truly dream of astral things
A home cannot be sung
and poets do not dwell therein at all
their absence is their only weapon
That is why no poet is a traitor to his home
for poets dwell in heaven rather than on earth

ŠOP'S HOME IN JAJCE

ŠOPOVA KUĆA U JAJCU

In Pliva's blue swirls, a house of silence
in it, unseen mute guardian angels
alongside sinners in the chambers
wait for midnight
when dinner is served

A young Jesus strides into Šop's house
and scans the baubles
on the walls
on beams that germinate from time
The universe wafts quietly

descending from its heights
and knocking on the door

In his house in Jajce, Šop
will speak
minutely of the shutters
and the doors and locks
of a Croatian home
till Jesus falls asleep

In this home, they drink and smoke
and read newspapers too
but in it, the Creator listens to the Poet
singing with his baby sister

THE HUT
KOLIBA

I will build a home
of dreams and reeds
just like the field hut
from my youth

I'll build the hut in June
amid the grapevines
I will leave an open door
that it not remain alone

Seeping through that shade the color of emotions,
the cool will hug me with a lover's hand
composed of summer's eyelashes
that steal the vigor of the sun

In lavish solitude
transfigured into dust

I generously proffer room to stars
Caringly, they lie down beside me
wrap me in a cloak of miracles

Now the sky has seeped
into my hut
my hut becomes the sky

AFRICA
AFRIKA, 2011.

THE BLUE-EYED AFRICAN
CRNAC PLAVIH OČIJU

Africa is ever new
between the lightning and the thunder
the Africans

Here all the changes happen fast
like billiard balls upon a table
here the stars are huge
but crumble under human hands
Each man is from another tribe
each staring at his shadow
see-through, even
prior to glass-making

Ever bound for Africa's
the ring
made for the dancing women
for the stars, dew-drenched and fresh
The leaves of grass, the live eels
turn the women dancers
into termite mounds
begetting gold

God is happiest
when his offspring are at play

From afar, these folk have
trailed the sun
fashioning it into hair ties
life
blended
with gray ashes

Life brims with wee surprises
that bring along new death
like the mystery of language
Africa is ever new
an African
will look into a looking glass
and notice the blue eyes

HUMANS ARE AFRICA
ČOVJEK JE AFRIKA

Humans are Africa
doomed to be spellbound
So fleeting are they
that they perish on the spot
This life just drags along
Humans are a mummy
that exerts its power over sands
Salt is their lifeline
Black bugs are cast along with them
into their graves
like hallowed stones
Humans are so dark
they can't awake
not even to converse with God

Their bones are
scattered moonlight
a visor
kissing ebony

Humans are Africa
a giant footprint
time
detached before it started

AFRICA'S CHILDREN

DJECA AFRIKE

Africa's children
work the metal
on Adam's anvil
iron pollen
flickers
in the flaring night

Africa's children
peel
the flesh off the apple
that Eve lost
forever
in the garden
that entwines the night
with daybreak

Africa's children
ramble
on celestial paths
in the primeval forest
Rambling starving
raped

child soldiers
witches

As in boats
of hollow tree trunks
they rush down
Hell's Gate
they can't
change
Africa
nor do their prediluvian
eyes
perceive it
But will
Africa
change them
with its rain-bread
and its moonlight-flour
Can innocence
absolve creation

The last
grain
of corn
is squeezed
from the guts
of Africa's children
In the nights,
awake,
they clutch
the firewood
to shroud
the all-important things
in shadow

Africa's children
right in the sun

their bared heart's
blood vessels aflame
with fireflies
in their eyes
in the dust

THE KINGDOM
KRALJEVSTVO

Which way is Ethiopia
and where it lies
mused the writers of antiquity
and officers of Rome

Where is its king
the fire-armoured one,
and: Is the crown
on his heart visible
inquired the Crusader knights of Europe

Ethiopia – it is
black people's land
beyond the Mountains of the Moon
southbound from the Sahara

The king, who has outlived
all memories
dimmer than the fogbound dreams
has powers that absolve
the sins

Yonder dwells
Prester John
quoth the Spanish friar
so says

the Book of Knowledge
of all Kyngdoms
Lands
and Countryes of the Earthe

All this occurs in Pygmy land
the cannibal folk's haunt
Gog and Magog
horned people
one-eyed in the front
three-eyed at the back
lion-killing
unicorns
Amazons
and Centaurs
ants
jackal-sized
leopard-skinned
eagle-winged
wild-boar-tusked
hoarding golden treasures
in their anthills

In the royal palace stands
a weighty golden sphere
no hand
or tool
has cast
or forged it
it was shaped
by Providence alone

In the golden royal city
two-headed serpents hatch
ram-horned
and owl-eyed
Pliny yet knew

the manticore dwelled there
thick-toothed
its jaws comb-like
and thrice-ranked
man-faced
lion-bodied
scorpion-tailed
its snarl the flute of a faun
braided with a bugle blast
The manticore delights in human flesh
and feasts on those
not quick enough
the dimwitted multitude

This mighty Christian king
the king of kings
the primal kingly progeny
of kings who came
to worship Jesus
is the justest of all kings
the seventy and seven kings
who bow to him
and offer tribute

The king commands
a nation black
their daily wear is sewn
of salamander silk
in the kingdom
of all the beasts
that ramble
under heaven
not a frog
disturbs the nightly peace

Across the kingdom
flows a stream

from paradise
emerald-pebbled
sapphire-paved

Before the palace
soars a thirteen-storeyed tower
with a looking-glass
atop it
mirroring the world from end to end
Before the royal court
the fount of youth cascades
whoever therein bathes
be he a hundred
or a thousand years of age
shall risen from the water be
a man of thirty-three

The king's abode is roofed
with ebony
its tympana of gold
the door is sardonyx
inlaid
with serpent horn
The windows are pure crystal
the courtyard – onyx-paved
the pillars – ivory

By his admission
– John's,
the king and priest's –
the black king
at his table
serves full seven kings
and sixty dukes
with three hundred five-and-sixty
dignitaries more
The table made of emerald

with amethyst-encrusted legs
daily hosts
and feasts
six-and-thirty thousand
folks

Such a king they sought
for centuries
just as, for centuries on end,
they sought
the golden fleece
and holy Grail
No wonder
that a perfect prince
was thus procured
for the Kingdom of Kongo
But I wonder
why the quest
for Prester John
remained bereft
of the benighted
Jorge Luis Borges

AN AFRICAN IS GIVEN RUM
CRNCU DAJU RUM

An African is given rum
the blood
of his foes

There are no prisoners of war
an African is given
free rein
the power
to trade
and make war

An African is given a small gourd
for the brandy
a sack of coal
to grill
chevon

For his actions, arms in hand,
an African will not be held to task
his everyday life he dubs
a tragedy

An African is given to drink
the eruption
of the Nyiragongo volcano
weaklings have no chance
they leave
for the war
and don't return

AN AFRICAN IS TAUGHT TO GROW COTTON
CRNCA UČE SADITI PAMUK

An African is taught to grow cotton
white cotton
An African is taught to reap the cotton
the white cotton
An African is taught to spin the cotton
the white cotton
An African is taught
to sew a cotton
white shirt
An African knows what nudity is about

JANUS-FACED AFRICA

JANUSOVO LICE AFRIKE

The same water of the Niger
washes no one twice
This is what Plato says
the selfsame river
can't be twice stepped in

The same water of the Congo
no one has sipped twice
This is Heraclitus's theory
the same water streams are fed
from other waters

The same water of the Nile
hasn't irrigated twice the grain
This is Ptolemy's conclusion
six sources feed
the water of two lakes
while Livingstone keeps looking for
the sources of Herodotus

In Africa the same occurrence
hasn't been seen twice
From one shadow to the next
every second
all's transformed
not once the same in shape
or in same venues
Janus-faced
Africa lacks just
a visage to enfold
the moment that ensues

THE MIRROR
OGLEDALO, 2012.

I SEE A TIGER IN THE MIRROR
U ZRCALU VIDIM TIGRA

I see a tiger in the mirror
as he abjures a world of silence
and I see the sun
between two ink-black nights
In the mirror, snakes
seek the old Adam
the last living natives
the fossils of archaic humans
The mirror is like a salt lake's brim
only tigers are akin
to bloodshot moons
A tiger is a mirror
where the sky's church organ thunders
A tiger is a mirror in the tongues of fire
that swallow their own searing sweat
pure gold
black coal
I see a tiger in the mirror
spreading its wings skyward
to become a black line in an instant
in the sun

WHAT I SAW IN THE MIRROR
ŠTO SAM VIDIO U OGLEDALU

I used to see all things in the mirror
minerals in pain
and matter morphing its own body into breath
the resurrection

of a being whose head becomes the mirror
In the mirror I saw dazzling fires
and the death and resurrection of the elements
the blend of sulfur and mercury
of bodies made of gold
I saw a suffering rock
turn into a fluid
formless state
all that is born of water
and that water has destroyed
In the mirror I saw a prophetic bowl
with those yet to be born
a godly tincture
flowing from the source
and back
to the beginning
And now the mirror
is all but a shadow
and a fog engulfing the sharp edges
The mirror penetrates itself
and little can be seen
and none of it with clarity

A MIRROR SUBMERGED

U VODU URONJENO ZRCALO

In the baptismal font, the mirror
is a fixed
star in heaven
and the being in the mirror, being born
is a star too
a wandering one

A mirror submerged
is a submerged star

regenerating
to diverge
from all

The image in the mirror
trumps him whom it represents
it is a star
that's assayed in the water
a water mirror
purified
of falsehood and deceit
in fire

ODYSSEUS
ODISEJ, 2013.

ODYSSEUS IS THINKING UP A HORSE
ODISEJ SMIŠLJA KONJA

Odysseus is following a cloud
a cone-shaped wind
a shadow over Troy
As the sun rises
the shadow throws open
the stone gates of Troy
and our wooden vessels
will be famous until the end
Odysseus is thinking up a horse
but keeps its soul to himself
that sun-ribbed flame
In the plinth stone's blood
Odysseus is following the sea
the city's ebb and flow
the tree's capillaries that are to swallow him
On a wooden horse
Helen will return

TROY

TROJA

The eyes of Troy are in the center of the world
in a bowl of starry heaven
agape like the dumbfounded mouth
of immortals' souls
Here, come summer or winter, the sundial casts no shadow
and noon overlaps the midnight star's bearing,
in it are the king and queen's blood
all three wars
haplessly begun

I see Troy
the invulnerable stone of enlightenment
The besieged city is an ellipse
with a tunnel deep into the earth
to the woman that feels like distance itself
like the light that courses through the city's wedges
In the shade, like a threefold person, the grain seedling
dreams of lands, seas and skies
the city both kick-starts and ends time
surviving the story
taken over from geometric shapes

A myth dwells in Troy, even as it recedes
into the corners, into agelong pain, a thirst
for strength, light, knowledge
the flame on which I forge a triangle
a shield of cloverleaf
the threefold wall
of the watery abyss that leans against the sun wall

I see Troy, the stone
that is the perch for ravens
pecking at the ocean's innards

ATLAS

ATLAS

The sea is a blue cliff
the sea is earth's blue set of teeth
a blue boat with ultramarine shrieks

Blue is all that is not buried
every naked body
Souls are laid to rest in blue

Atlas is blue
holding on his shoulders
the blue pillars of the sky
the graveyards of seafarers
Marble wreaths
on the gates of paradise
On the blue waves of the carpets
is a blue heavenly table

Sitting on one chair is the Sun
with a sword
that poets will hymn
on the other sits the Moon
the king of sleep
with Venus at his side
who, frightened by desires
has shut her eyes

Saturn, shackled by the dawn
observes
the whole blue kingdom
of Atlantis
from his pillar
Mercury in his dark blue and golden bedchamber
tells his sons of libraries
that Mars will wreck the moment when

it dawns on the ocean's giant
how grim it is to be a slave
even a heavenly one

POSEIDON

POSEJDON

I have a rough time with Poseidon
his hatred catches up with me
in subterranean waters too

He's after me without reprieve
and spurs his progeny to it
he hides his weapon in the Triodontidae
his secret resides in the dolphin
the water horses spreading it around
I have nowhere to flee

He hurls a storm onto my crew
and drowns my horses in the sea
his acts I cannot fathom
he believes in nothing

He foists a monster on the Trojans
and delays my journey back to Ithaca
using corals and gems
to seduce the virgins
In Zadar too he lay with one
when I was sent to sea
And he left his offspring, Polyphemus
amid the shepherds on Mount Velebit

He hates me
he would give my eye back to the Cyclops
to beget a new sea in it

a new enchanted way
a blind knife in the forehead

I have a rough time with Poseidon
he dispatches me to novel seas
towards new islands
he rolls the sea, the ship and islands
driving wedges undersea
he shakes, he shackles the whole world

A PRAYER TO ATHENA

MOLITVA ATENI

Behold me, Virgin, as I build, just like your sibling
an altar made of snow and gold
unskilled in language
and unskilled in smithwork
I offer as libations
a flake-clad summer
and the snake-shaped cakes

May the snake protect my son Telemachus as well
him with his apples
Light appears, and you awake
and like a bird that quits its nest
you spring out of the crown of Father's head
out of this world's skull
axed in half

With no secrets, in all colors
simple yet puzzling
like all women that are loved
protect my child Telemachus
let him not fear Heaven
nor Earth

as you cheer eternity
Watch over him as your lance breaks up the clouds
that trail along his years

Behold, Goddess, on the Aegean
the Ionian
and the Kvarner Sea
my strength cares no more for abundance
rust eats through my fighting gear
history transforms within ourselves
like distance
truly quelled is only what is captive of the heart

Watch over Telemachus, who is still soft-voiced
like spring grass
like the dawn in the gardens of Arcadia
let honey douse
his every word
from star-hives
and may he speak of me like this

FAR FROM OLYMPUS

DALEKO OD OLIMPA

They say my journey holds no joys
and that I shouldn't even name you, my Penelope
not even when the wine engulfs my eyes
not even when the nymphs sing on my lips
not even when I live as gods do
As if there could be oblivion
as if isles and ships alike
are not seen from Olympus
like each yarn your breathing spins
The endless journey weighing on me
far from the peaks of prophets

from crystal parks and palaces
lashed by seas like mountain rocks
by gaping storms that lurk around my flaws
I think of Ithaca
of you among the sacred animals
as traps are laid for them
A blade cuts through my words
a noose of pain
of violet fog
Do not scold the skipper if he stares into the belly of the ship
My besiegers do not know me
but they do know of my weapon
and I must keep it from their reach

HELEN
HELENA

The woman that her lovers lost
a comet like a painted egg in evening skies
her locks like wind in stone pines
A cruel, selfish woman
her suitors hot on her heels
Odysseus had courted Helen too
to keep their pain intact
That is all that's known of Menelaus
of his eyes that see the night
as talk of traitors thickens
All her would-be ravishers
were shackled by the snakes around her table
she was damned despite her love
can she betray if she has loved
Following Paris's motionless gaze
in the nights she spent in his arms
she's ready for all that ever was to happen
to happen right away

APOLLO

APOLON

Avenge me, Avenger
avenge me, Archer Apollo,
make the memories of warriors go away
my thoughts are headed home
drooping like the vine leaves in my vineyard
When, in your gleaming chariot, you race the sky
can you see Penelope's sheepfold
can you see the ram among the sheep
What about the shepherds
what about the beasts that ambush them
For the sake of the sunbow
remove the algae from the soles of my ship
and hit my masts like lightning
there has been no fear within my heart
since I have given thought to laws
to temple walls
and you who sit on their navel
Avenge me, broaden your freedom
hallow the threads of my family's souls
heal those wounds
we chugged blood from in one go
I have sailed seven seas in seven circles
circling seven isles
calling on you seven times
locked away behind seven doors
Release me from the cave
from the black raven's eye
avenge me in the tiger's heart
in Scythian grasses
make the never-ending wandering stop
make the yelping of the mice in the ship's hold go away
Return me to my wall-less house
return me to the sun
that my hand reaches
on my bedroom's window sill

ACHILLES

AHILEJ

Achilles' battle knows no end
he won't be spared the grief for his Patroclus
When he heard that new life was beginning
many were already dead
In vain will girlhood hide him
his sword is his clock-hand
approaching, ruthlessly, the dying.
His steed's mother is a heavenly mineral
who knows how blessed it is to see and not forget
On the funeral pyre, four mares
they will scatter the persistent dark
and take Patroclus up to paradise
across the street from memory
Mare and woman and bird mimic the thunder's rumble
Achilles' attack on Troy
the fight that delights his body
He will grind Hector into flour for Priam's bread
weld his fate to his own shield
the heel his mother held him by
his human gloom the sole soft spot
Tripping on his father's strings
he lasts forever, like man's fight for immortality

ODYSSEUS

ODISEJ

If this time I'm not purified
if I'm not purified by my wandering to death
what will redeem me
I have grabbed everything that lust has made
I have chewed the sea itself
to master knowledge

Now I ignore
what looms ever closer
God or abyss
or Greek bright spirits, dimmer after many centuries
A stricken, sightless sailor
whose being lost is called a journey
If this oneness with the sea
doesn't make me worth my salt
if the distance
that I cannot name nor gauge
doesn't coach my singing
to sing Ithaca back
nobody will ever know of me

CIRCE

KIRKA

This isle is easy on my eyes
a hawk's eye
an eye for trysts of prey
She dwells in a wandering water castle
with all those she has chosen
and magicked into helpless foes
A lady hawk halfway across the sun
the spread wings
of my ship's cross
the water castle in the beast's eye pupils crumbles
in the tiger's steam
that wipes the isle's coast
in the wolf's breath
that rises like a moth of the stars
over my fellowship
magicked into shaggy boars
(fellows do get boarish anyway)
My frenzied paramour

regales us with a feast
stirred by our grunts
she fetches us black grasses
swathed in the prophet's beard
alongside me, she falls over the night's soul
into the chasm of my arms
year-round, she is water
year-round, I am fire
the whole year round, the starving boars
gobble up leftovers of our perspiration
its outflow of our strength
Everybody thinks there is no isle
that water was replaced by time
everybody thinks the road has gone astray
that nothing but a hug is left of the harbor
But the road was love-made
all that happens in this world
is on it
This isle is easy on me
it will itself drift away
The isle has woven a road to Ithaca
a road over the roving rocks
a road that cuts through the loving woman's heart
whose love makes even boars obliged

NAUSICAÄ
NAUSIKAJA

Nude, I swam to her
and she was young
as if not there
Nude like fate before her
like hope
freed of all doubt
and she, goddess-like

like a great unswerving star
far off
Nude between the water and dry land
nude on dawn's spread bed
nude on the isle
and she, white-clad
sad
she hadn't lost her garb
Nude as wandering is nude
and she would wed me
both brazenly and furtively
She unfurls her bareness like a sail
and picks a starry lair for us
she knows she'll lose me
Nude, she takes me to her father
nude, she sits me in her home
that I may be rescued from the desert
that I may wrench this Ithaca
from my naked heart

GOING BACK HOME EVERY DAY
SVAKODNEVNO VRAĆANJE U ZAVIČAJ

As evening quavers in rimmed glens
on my memory's rocks I sigh as if you're gone
in caves that run along the moss
the rock's distress weighs on my body
Lambs use the road to go back home every day
with us and exiles on their heels
we stop one step before the threshold
The threshold that rolls down to the shore
turns into shipwreck gravel
Memories of home recur
in everything I've shunned so much
Without compunction, I descend among the ruins

among the cliffs that brim with juicy haws
The childhood home is now remote
it veils the setting moon
The rock's bare floor now shimmers like a sage leaf
with a naked moon, the mirror of your face

TROY, THE ONLY CITY THAT ISN'T THERE

TROJA JE JEDINI GRAD KOJEGA NEMA

Now that, on my water horses, I have left the fight
I will write you a song
a love song
to explain the blood that leaves its trace behind me
on the cloudy heavens of your tears
The palm of my hand, in lieu of sword, I lay on my hip
and I gather you desired to hear me
shout that Troy's the loveliest city
Troy's the only city
that isn't there
Troy's a story of primeval gloom
Troy is made entirely of hexameters
of the unseen
Troy is the round warm bread
a barrel of wine
where you once dwelled with me
long, long before we knew ourselves

LIKE WHEN I LED TELEMACHUS

KAO KADA SAM VODIO TELEMAHA

In my thoughts, I see a strong and sprightly boy
recall a king
Leaving home to count his sheep

he checks the mirror for the sea it held
And as I squeeze Alcinous' hand
like when I led Telemachus
I know that I will stand head bowed
before him always
I sense him by me
like a rib
a milk tooth
a navel
like this story's first word
Don't turn your backs on him
and do not touch him
do not let a herald name him
Let him remain as he was thought of
this prince we know not much about

WHERE IS MY FACE?

GDJE JE MOJE LICE

Where is my face from before Troy
my face from before there were seas
the face that wasn't hung like laundry
on the cables of the Hellespont
To me *belongs the face*
of anguish, of adversity itself...
For without a name among the people
one isn't there
Where is my name from before the names
of father and mother
the name to return the Judge's greeting
The name with gifts
of the land, the people, and the city
that which was life itself
before all breakthroughs
The name and face of Ithaca

the grubhouse groves in which the space
between me and the ocean shimmers
where guests are welcome
and gods feared

**IF THE SUITORS FLUMMOX HER,
LET HER NOT SAY A WORD**
AKO JE PROSCI ZBUNJUJU NEKA NE
IZGOVORI NI JEDNU RIJEČ

If the suitors flummox her
let her look around her home
and see the footprint
not covered in dust
the shadow that moves
spurred on by gloom
Let her fling open the gates
that the suitors may leave
let her rebuild her residence
far off from this reality
Let her proffer wine to the strangers
that in it they may glimpse
my eyes
Let her flaunt my lance before them
once she yanks it out
of their bodies
If the suitors flummox her
let her not say a word
of those she ever spoke
let her offer them her woes
a meal spicier than death
to choke their lust forever
Should she see a suitor nonetheless
let her glance with his eye
at the child

AND I SAW THE LAST DAY OF THE WORLD

I VIDJEH POSLJEDNJI DAN SVIJETA

I gave Troy my horses
gave the sea my fellows and my dues
I gave the wind my oars and ships
as custom has it
I bequeathed the seasons to Penelope

And I saw the last day of the world
the sea abandoning us
and a beast emerging from the sea
the mountains that will never be reborn
And I saw the ground bereft of magic
the sky all smoke and ashes

I ignored the why and whereto of my journey
and what to make of my heroics
I did not anticipate the journey's end

I paved the ocean with the stones of Polyphemus
hid nymphs beneath the wings of crows
poured wax in my companions' ears
and turned my legs into a mast

And I saw a bridge drifting away from shore
on my last day in this world

THE LEG SCAR

BRAZGOTINA NA NOZI

Along the scarred leg gash
Penelope set out for my lovemaking

ODYSSEUS' BOW

ODISEJEV LUK

Like all women, Penelope
sees her husband's taut bow
bent like a far-off mountain roof
Let others draw it too
as best they can
and hurl it heavenward
Let them run the arrow
through twelve needle's eyes
or hit an ant's heart as it scurries on their garb
Let them joust
Let them tallow the bow
and heat it
that its string may ring
as they pluck it
Let them look up to the rainbow
and the crimson thunder
but they will not hit
what Odysseus did

TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOŠNIĆ ■ GREY
(a chapter from the novel *October*)

9

Grey was looking at me with his emerald green eyes, round like unripe almonds. In haste, I thought I saw both the midday sun and a terrible, threatening storm reflected in them at once, it was the image of mercury turning into steam. I'm no longer certain whether what I felt on my forehead and temples were large beads of fear-induced sweat or if Grey's pupils turned into two drops of dew, which in the bright light narrowed into a fine slit on my skin, into a blade that dissected my actions.

His feminine face on his short, heart-shaped head had already been worn-out by the unexpressed questions of what was actually happening, it looked like the typical face of a cat exhausted by an eternally insatiable hunger. He no longer had one, but one hundred different faces showing just as many feelings and thoughts, faces that moved over one another at frame rate, so that it became impossible to see his real face. What I did understand was that Grey had long since intuited the essence of what was happening, and that it stirred up real eruptions of fear in him, as well as me, covering us both, from one moment to the next, with its hot lava. What he may not have known was that this was war, and that all this was happening to him and me because of war. Still, it in a certain way, Grey did understand. What he didn't understand was why we were separating, why I don't hold him now and take him with me. I could use his warmth, too.

I haven't stroked his short, refined, silk-like fur for days, and you could clearly see that it was starting to lose its silvery sheen. Stroked both ways – both against the grain and with the grain – it never went frizzy, but now Grey's fur hung like a worn-out uniformly blue-grey fur coat.

Accustomed to order, discipline, cleanliness, and comfort, this Russian Blue couldn't get used to the fact that his peace had been disturbed. Indeed, it was evident that everything was descending into utter chaos. Blaring and roaring unbearably, everything began to fall apart. It was clear to Grey that these spirits

that had abruptly arrived were seizing everything – space, air, and light – tearing the life of all creatures and all things apart. Wicked and ungodly as they are, they don't persecute those who're like them, but frighten the good instead, sensing their presence becomes intolerable, even though no one really sees them. You can only hear their howling, muttering and growling, crashing and banging, hissing and whistling, you can smell their arson and rot, sulphur and ammonia. In Grey's glassy eyes, as if in mirrors, they transformed into a pack of rabid dogs growling and howling, dogs whose madness turns them into death's primeval shadow itself.

Grey also saw that I no longer write, and that used to be his main daytime entertainment. In fact, much more than that. Much more, I guess, than even I can understand. I could easily co-attribute – if not fully attribute – some of my texts exactly to him. This isn't because some of my characters have cat traits, but because Grey's claw marks were the first signs of what I would later write. Many of my penned words had emerged directly from the metal of his eyes, and many of my feelings had been stirred by the touch of his lithe back and enraptured head.

As soon as I sat down at the desk, Grey would instantly position himself by lolling on the blank white sheet of paper that I had readied to write on. He loved whiteness more than anything, especially if it was tinged with the azure of the sky the way that pure, innocent snow is. To insert the sheet of paper into the typewriter, I had to first pull it out from under Grey. Such warm sheets of paper, akin to a letter from an enamoured woman with traces of her kiss and tears, were already calligraphically marked with the hairs of his fur. Meanwhile, before I typed a single letter, my thoughts and ideas had already been interrupted a hundred times by Grey's tail which he paraded before my nose. And when I'd strike a key with my finger causing the letters to thrust at the sheet of paper like spears, leaving their bloody trail of ink on it, Grey would accept it as a jousting tournament. He'd lithely turn his head to one side then the other, in sync with the speed at which the keys flew, so as to ready himself for his engagement in fencing. The expression on his face, with his whiskers pointed forward, reminded me indeed of a musketeer deftly and cleverly preparing to deliver his last yet virtuoso blow. As the keys flew, his wide and rounded yet short paws tensed strongly, revealing his claws, so the muscle that pulls the lower tendon stretched his leg in a fit of rage, turning it into a dangerous weapon, into a crown of swords, which blocked the bars onto which the letters are attached. Exactly halfway between the keyboard and the sheet of paper, the bars would be stopped by the five swift swords of Grey's claws.

From a refined and slender, elegant cat with a long and pointed tail, sweet and placid in nature, Grey turned into a wild and scared cat.

During the course of these few days in a row of air-raid sheltering, while he remained alone and locked in the flat, he seemed to have grown in some odd way. In fact, he began to bloat. It was manifest that his muscular body was filling with air and deforming. His head grew in size, and both his body and his head began to round. He was progressively turning into a barrel-shaped animal with the same, but much smaller head, a mirror, which thundered at the slightest of movements like ice-cold water that is set in motion suddenly and abruptly by the flashing of the sun that had just broken through from behind the clouds. Grey's tail started to increasingly resemble a heavy club ready to strike.

When I started for the shelter in a panic at the sound of the sirens, Grey stayed in my white room, sitting in the middle of my French bed covered in white bedding. For a split second, he looked like a small bluish stone statue that was placed on an imperceptibly large, wide and cold white marble plinth. Everything but him seemed obscure and absent. As if this damn day would end right there, on that bed, in which I hadn't slept for days. Horrified, I thought the bed was a bier, and Grey's motionless sphinx-like posture only reinforced this impression. Maybe this really is reality, which I am becoming aware of just now. Maybe the planes have already killed somebody, someone I'm scared to see lying on a bier. Maybe the bombs blew up many. Given this much thunder and roar, it's impossible that no one was killed. Why else would I be fleeing, like a mouse, into secret, musty holes inside woodsheds full of cobwebs if not from the rising smell of the blood of those who'd already been killed?

As I was fleeing, Grey's gaze had already sharpened and turned wild, utterly alien, it looked like the gaze of an elf that had been tortured in night-time fires. He, too, was now giving off a repulsive smell. He didn't expect a single word, nor a reproach, nor any understanding. We had both forgotten how honey-mouthed I had been until just recently. He had already forgotten the last time that I petted him, playing with the light in his fur, which made him as bright as the sky at noon. September passed, today is the fifth day of October that Grey hasn't snuggled in my lap or brushed against my trouser leg, as I've been taking shelter in the city's secret dens to save my neck from the murderous, fiery metal rain that has been showering us for days from the clear autumn sky. His teeth, too, got stronger. His gentle purr, his melodious meow of yesterday turned into a grim growl. His steady movements display only strength, and no longer any delightful dexterity. He's still on high alert and stealthy, true, but he no longer runs, he no longer makes sudden jumps. He seems to have turned into an ear that listens to the quietest of steps, more intently to those which take me away from him hur-

riedly than those which being me back to him insecurely. Every rustle is his, even the faintest sound signals to him what is yet to come, it's as if he hears prophetically everything that's unfolding far outside the city, on the front lines. Between his eyes, four dark parallel shadows creased like on an Indian on the warpath.

I knew that I was no longer to approach him, that he doesn't recognise me. We, too, have now split into two opposing, hostile, belligerent sides. There appeared a tense dividing line between the two of us as well, it was only a matter of time when one would charge at the other, launch without warning. The war has crept into us, too, into each of our blood cells, straining our veins like bursting balloons, whose pop extinguishes everything slowly, filling the space with a creeping darkness. And here, it seems to me, Grey has an advantage, his pupils dilate in the darkness into the flawless circle of the full moon. He can follow me even though he has rejected me, just as I have abandoned him. How can I justify this stupidity to him now when we no longer recognise each other? He no longer knows my smell, my voice, my body language, everything in me is infused with fear, and I look at him completely transformed in the storm of war. How can I explain to him that all I did was follow the instructions given by crisis management centres that pets are not allowed in shelters during air raids and other emergencies?

Having to stay alone in the flat while everyone else was in a state of panic and trying to reach a shelter as quickly as possible turned Grey into a god of fear. Sensing that everyone around him was now running a fever, that all are wrapped in unfamiliar smells, noticing unknown dark shadows in their eyes, watching things and people be camouflaged, Grey took it as a sign of personal threat, as something that would cost him dearly, too. Insidiously, his mind, too, began to darken. He even began retreating to the shadowy part of the room, especially if I stayed near him for longer periods. The corner behind the closet was his safe haven. He obviously hid there when the shells started dropping, when the walls rattled and cracked, when glass shattered, when the furniture and branches in the yard broke, when everything was buzzing and humming as if thousands of dental drills rose under the sky, piercing the very fabric of the universe, the bare bones of the stars. I don't believe that in those moments Grey could sit as calmly and defiantly on my unmade bed as he has just a second ago. I'm more inclined to believe that he did so only in moments when we had to look each other in the eye, during our meetings and partings, before and after the air-raid sirens were sounded. But during air-raids, Grey must have slyly protected his back by turning it to the wall, he must have silently and cautiously pussyfooted around while pressing his back against the wall as if gliding just above the ground. As his

legs were getting shorter and his body slimmer, this act of his was a serious act of war, as were all the things that the rest of us did. He, too, knew how to be still, positioning himself always against the draught coming from the open window, so that he could better sniff the smell of rot and decay that came from outside and filled the entire house, penetrating the walls, the wardrobes, creeping under the tables and the bed, descending on the chairs, and filling the pantry. It was the smell of rotting flesh, the smell of gangrenous bones, the smell of war that cats cannot stand without sheltering and repulsion.

The firing resumed at exactly one o'clock in the afternoon. At exactly that moment, a MiG 21 jet fighter flew over the buildings in the very centre of the city, swooshing above the roofs at an altitude of only ten metres or so. As the jet fighter came from the sea, I thought I saw it enter my flat through the window. The altitude that the jet fighter was at was such that I could clearly see the pilot. At that moment, the city split open like the hull of a ripe almond. The wail of the air-raided sirens collided with the jet fighter's sonic boom. My old neighbour fainted on the staircase. The pregnant woman from the fourth floor rammed into her, rolled down the stairs of an entire floor, and suffered a miscarriage. When they took her out, the trail of blood led straight to the basement, to a makeshift shelter.

I caught myself not paying any attention to anyone at that moment, I only ran after the others. Everyone took care of only themselves and the bag they had previously prepared, which held a small torch, an even smaller battery-operated radio, and bottled water. That entire group looked, to me, like an audience watching the hanging of thieves while stealing from each other. Being in mortal danger made you look out for your life as if it were eternal. We were all infected with a material, bodily disease of sorts. They cared about their possessions, wealth, money, but not about the lives of others. I left Grey unprotected, while a next-door neighbour, who came running with an entire suitcase of his belongings, left his old mother locked in his empty flat.

What followed was horror music, woven from explosions, detonations, blazes, and demolitions. As if this wasn't reality. To those who befriended the world of literature, this banal, crazy thing called war, its scenes in fact, seemed like a barely comprehensible description of one of the circles of hell. As the planes pounded the churches, a deadly rain of artillery showered the houses and streets. What promptly ensued were mortar attacks, tank platoons, multi rocket launchers, and artillery shells. Hundreds and then instantly thousands of killer missiles were strewn from the disintegrating sky, collapsing the entire star system to the ground.

I wondered who it was that was shooting from the other side of town, that was tearing other people's houses down, and killing innocent people. Does he do it alone while hiding from the eyes of others or does he brag about what he has done to everyone around him? Does he do it from right outside his house, from his yard, or does he lie somewhere camouflaged in the bushes, in the brambles, in a wolf's den of sorts? Do his mother and father, his wife and children know about every shot he's fired? What do they say to him while they watch him do what he does or do they support him in it, too? Do they have a cat, and what's its name? What do these people even look like, do they have eyes, do they have ears, do they see and hear, do they feel anything? Do they know how to speak, do they know how to think, or do they simply die from the strain that the effort to speak and think places on them? If only I could see their human-looking heads without anything human about them.

Can any sense be made of humanity in this crazy time? Can any sense be made of life? Does the fact that I left Grey without having looked at him at all as the jet fighter swooped down, just before the bomb exploded, make any sense at all? If it does, then I wonder what war can save a cat. Who cared about the meowing of my cat that wept alone like a hungry, naked and abandoned child, like a being that lacks consciousness, but has nevertheless come to the utterly terrifying realisation that those who find him won't bathe him, won't swaddle him and won't feed him, but will instead cut him up and slice him like meat in a slaughterhouse, and then distribute him to all the butchers now that he's chopped into pieces, so that all those who decide the fate of the world could see what they're capable of doing. And just how well.

If cats were venerated in ancient Egypt as the animal that cuts off snake's heads with a sword, then isn't this war more Grey's than mine? His job is to kill the snake, to destroy the underworld that blocks the path of the sun. This perhaps transcends the limits of reality, but war is not limited by it either. The world today is awash with snakes and cats, both of which always move about near people. Who will now be the first to go for the enemy's jugular, who will lose the role of deity and mighty helper? Can Grey intercept the shooters, ambush them, go for their jugular, tear their cheeks, and gouge their eyes out? Will he, if he overpowers them, rip them open and pull their guts out with his claws, and knot them across every pit dug by their grenades? Can a domesticated house cat cut in half, with its sword, a snake that is so tough-skinned that it has long since lived in high towers and feeds on rubies of human blood and pearls of human tears?

Irritated by the fact that I'm crammed in with people in the shelter like in a mouse trap of sorts, I first started fidgeting, turning around, shifting the weight of my body from one leg to the other, and then using my hands and elbows to push and shove the others, I may have pinched, stepped on and pressed someone against the wall in the dark, panting and gasping for air in this damp den. I didn't feel like talking to anyone, and I wasn't allowed to light a cigarette. How could I talk to anyone when I didn't even know who was standing right next to me, to identify them I'd have to turn on my torch, which I didn't feel like doing, and the fact that every few seconds others shone their torches at me like radar reflectors also got on my nerves. News about the enemy's attack and the response of our forces was repeated minute by minute, and if someone didn't turn their battery-operated radio on, then they themselves would give an exhaustive report on what was happening on the battlefield without anyone asking them when and where they had heard all this, where they had been getting all this information from. But, when everything was put together in a logical sequence, it seemed that nothing had been happening for days, and that both the entrenched enemy and our fighters were only randomly firing shells every day, each into the territory of the other, at the other side.

Today, however, everything looked different, what was talked about was that it was only a matter of time when those who have human-looking heads without anything human about them would enter the city and destroy it, just as it had been destroyed many times before. The firestorms were getting closer, they completely surrounded the city. The attacks were so violent, and everyone knew that if the attackers entered the city, our death would be their only objective. I remembered Grey, but in my thoughts I was aware of the fact that I'd slaughter him, shed his blood, commit a crime, any of the crimes on the scale of thousands of diluvial and cannibalistic human transgressions that have long since been known, just to get out of this mouse hole, to have my lungs get hold of some fresh air infused with the smell of the sea and autumn leaves, which is, in truth, the only true and ultimate freedom. But I couldn't choose that right unless I chose death along with it. So, who's the human here, and who's the brute, an animal, who could so readily say goodbye to all that is peace and quiet, to all that is normal life, who left their warm house, warm food, tenderness and love, music and drinks, the cat or I? Grey would never do anything that could disturb his independence, nor would he ever covet the space of any of the cats in the neighbourhood. He'd never seek his solitude and my company on another's territory, however neutral it may be, he considers my bedroom, my study, the living

room, even the bathroom to be his territory, and he guarded and visited only those spaces, regularly and every day, according to a schedule of his own that I haven't even been able to work out. Now that he could no longer adapt himself to my habits that kept on changing depending on the air-raids sounded both in the daytime and at nighttime, he got lost in the changed circumstances of life. My exceedingly frequent and entirely unpredictable, sudden absences, interrupted by short, nervous returns, were decisive for the rift in our mutual understanding. Grey rightly felt that he was to me what I was to him, the most important part of his life.

But what could I do, locked in a shelter underground, left to the same fate myself? I am as stunned as he is, isolated and distraught. Alone. As if I know what is happening, not even my mind can understand how man can be inspired by the idea of killing. I'm undecided even about the goal of destroying the enemy, for don't they, too, have a human-looking head? Like a mouse amid fir and oak logs, on a damp concrete floor strewn with straw, I wonder if this is what the enemy thinks of as victory, or whether it's just a transitory, banal and permanently stupid game of cat and mouse, a game played by those who never did anything other than hunt everyone and everything around them, from fleas and lice, through rabbits and lambs, all the way to humans, their first neighbour, best man and friend.

Here, I really am surrounded by mice, from those with teeny-tiny eyes that look like rain-washed hawthorn berries, to rats that besiege basements, woodsheds and city sewers. Women scream as hysterically at their squeaks as they do at bomb explosions. Why do women get far more excited and terrified at the mention of a mouse, when they hear and see one, than men do? This was the thought that began to preoccupy me at the shelter. Can this be traced back to a story that I had heard somewhere a long ago, a story that had entered the subconscious of our women in who knows what period in human history, according to which mice were once fed the clitorises of circumcised girls? Or is it because a mouse can sneak into any place unnoticed and so find out everyone's secret?

The rat that appeared between our legs, albeit in the dark, didn't manage to remain unnoticed. Dozens of torches, attended by screams that sounded like a cave dance before a hunt, spotlighted this little confused monster. While it was scamp-ering from one end of the shelter to the other, I tried to jump on it with both feet, to pin it to the floor, and the women continued to scream. Eventually, after a long hunting dance, the rat's intestines burst open under my feet. It squeaked briefly before its insides burst. Its blood splattered across the faces of those who

crouched, believing that they'd be protected from everything by crouching. The gruesome image of the rat's blood on the women's faces was accentuated dramatically by erratic beams of light that was shone carelessly in their direction by someone holding a torch in their hand. This was my defiance, my revenge, bloodshed brought about by my murderous will. I demonstrated that I, too, can kill, and effectively. Instead of Grey, I took care of the rat.

Can this be the end? What will the end look like when the war is over, when we all count the victims, both our own and the other side's. Once all the bombs fall to the ground yet again, not only will all the stars still be in the sky, but everything else will also remain the same, unchanged. As if nothing has actually happened, people will only note in passing the fact that some are missing, and move on, forgetting them only because they can no longer count on them. Those who waged the war will show strength, they'll amaze everyone around them, including themselves, by their power and determination, but in the end, they'll never be able to win the war. This crossword puzzle has long since been solved, and its answer lies in the story of the logic of mousetraps – a mouse can indeed be a genius, but if it's trapped, it's finished. The aggressor and the victim will both forever remain entrenched in their starting positions, with the caveat that the attacker will always walk into the mousetrap first, and therefore die first, too. It seems to me that this is how my people have survived, like cats, only because we never waged wars, because we always waited, because we purred under other people's feet, because we cuddled in other people's arms, until we – when all this reached the limit of our mercurial endurance – started scratching, clawing and biting, defending ourselves like wild cats, like lynxes.

There came one more round of powerful explosions carried out by multiple shells, dropped at once, but this time, it seemed to me, that they hit the very foundations of our shelter, the building itself, the impact force shook the building above us. Is this fierce, repeated attack a sign that this is just the beginning, or that this evil is nearing its end? Isn't this ferocity just a desire to end everything quickly? The only question is who will survive this, those who've launched the attack, who've thrown red-hot metal, lead and steel at us, or we who've defended ourselves against cannon seeds that shower us with a cornucopia of fruits. Who dies and who lives is the only question that arises reflexively in circumstances such as this one, given that in war everything becomes so complicated and secretive, except for life. How can anyone know the true meaning of shrapnel, cannonades, the roar of the tools and weapons of war if they haven't got at the very least a cat trapped under a rain of bullets?

These people in the basement, in the shelter, in their woodsheds of yesterday, where they stored firewood, coal and discarded, unwanted things, and where they now store themselves and their bare lives, are practically a litter of cats in a den. They meow and whine, they bite rats. Without protection, without electricity and water, without light and fresh bread, without the possibility of leaving and escape, with nothing in their hands to defend themselves, the one thing that they can still believe is that white mice will bring them good luck because, in this story, they, unlike other cats, haven't got nine lives, they've only got this one life of uncertainty. They will die without ever having tried to hunt, they will die praying and swearing, expecting eternal life even in death. The women who tremble at the mention of the names of enemy soldiers are cattish and cuddly, but ready to launch a swift and sudden attack on anyone who poses a threat to them.

The terrible rumble continues, it's as if the very bowels of the earth are boiling, the hands of clocks seem to stop as the shells whistle past. The passage of time is measured only by asking the same stupid questions, to which no meaningful answer is ever given, although even a stupid one would suffice. Why are they shooting?! Why are they destroying everything?! Why are they tearing everything down?! Why are they burning everything?! Why are they killing?! Why are we their adversaries when we haven't even moved from this urine-marked shelter? Why are we their enemies, is it only because we haven't submitted to their will? Do they know that Grey can't go anywhere from the flat, that, should he jump, the sea is right below the window? Not even his meow can be heard, he, too, has fallen silent before the roar of projectiles. Grey has gone mute as has everything but the explosions and gunfire. Not even the whistle of the wind through October's fallen leaves can be heard, it has quietened down. Not even the sound of the sea can be picked up, it's as if it no longer nears the shore. Not even the sound of breathing of people huddled together in one terrified body can be detected. Everything has been muted, everything has been silenced.

Once the explosions have finally fallen silent, too, I put off going upstairs to see what has happened to Grey, to check if he is still breathing, if he can still make a sound, if he is still alive. I know, it's dangerous to go upstairs. And uncertain. I also know that any hesitation in wartime is dangerous, any delay, including delaying the climbing of the stairs to my flat, where I abandoned Grey at the first sound of the air-raid sirens. He may now be standing motionless by the window with his ears raised above his head, listening, hunting for noises and signals, catching distant sounds to work out what's coming next. He knows exactly which direction a sound is coming from and how loud it is. If our fighters were

to surveil the exceptional mobility of his ears, where and how he directs them, they would know exactly where the danger is coming from.

At a loss as to what to do, I could again pick up the echoes of grenades that were now thrown somewhere in the far distance, meowing like starving cats looking into the mouth of a man who's eating, warning him about their presence and begging him for food, or else they'll jump and claw the food from his mouth. Well, I had no more time to lose, I set off to see Grey in spite of all the danger.

As I got upstairs, I saw another jet fighter in the window of my flat. Who is it looking for, who is it targeting, and what is it hitting? Is it after this poor and abandoned cat, my Grey, who's been suffering as has everything today? The air, too, is a source of our suffering. Window panes suffer from the light and the flashes that pierce them, the stone and lime suffer, the concrete in the walls that delaminates and rots, becoming dusty and impure, everything in the house suffers, the forks and spoons, the plates that make music like wild horses at full gallop.

The rumbling of my bowels drowned out the rest of the noise. My entire insides moved, my intestines sounded as if underground lava moved through them after it first came into contact with groundwater surging from everywhere. Everything inside me was moving, pressing and straining me. I started to feel disgusted by my own stench, I convulsed and had to use the toilet. I didn't even manage to look for Grey, nor did he show up, and I had to relieve myself. I didn't empty just my bowels, I also emptied my soul. It, too, reeked of ammonia, of sulphur, of decaying food and decaying flesh, of all the poisons of the world. It all came out of me, including my intestines. My strength, and all that was left of me, bled out of me. It was a sin that I felt incredibly strongly without knowing its source. Impurity was spilling everywhere, in it I found traces of my cowardice, my indecisiveness, the germ of a disease that prevented me from picking up a rifle and going into open battle, from joining the defence forces. I was drained of my strength and love for my family, for the homeland, for the people, for humanity, for Grey, for everything that's consumed by flames and covered in ashes today. All that I am was there in that excrement, my food and my strength, my life that only flies find interesting.

Grey was nowhere to be found to see me, to meet me face to face, to smell me. It wasn't until I dragged myself to the open bedroom door – completely drained and flushed, intending to lie down and fall asleep forever, for that was the kind of sleep I needed at that moment – that I saw Grey sitting still on my bed, looking like a bronze statue from Thebes, over which a millennia-old layer of patina

has settled. When he saw me, he didn't even move, he didn't even blink his eyes, which were no longer green. He was looking somewhere into infinity, through me.

All of a sudden, right before my very eyes, he began to change, to transform, or so it seemed to me, but he began to take the shape of a sphere. Round as he was, he appeared to be rolling on the bed, from its middle towards the edge. In any case, he was no longer still, he was no longer frozen. His breathing sounded like the hissing of a land mine whose fuse had been pulled. The air was charged, electric, it was pure gas which was about to explode. I wondered whether I had enough time to get to know this new beast that Grey had transformed into, his new anatomy, his new colour, the new abilities of this insidious and strange creature, which had been a loyal friend of mine until very recently. I wasn't afraid of the explosion, of the blast, indeed, only an empty shell remained of me, I was afraid of Grey himself, I was afraid of the possibility that he, being so round, might capture me, grab me, tame me, and even transform me.

However, the very opposite happened. Before my very eyes, Grey started to age, decompose, disappear, shed his beautiful fur that was falling out, his whiskers got thinner and sharper, but not deadlier, and fragile like dry, parasite-infested wheat awns. And when he was almost gone, when he no longer visited my bed, I saw him do the unthinkable. He punished me. He showed me how he felt about me leaving him behind, about not holding him and carrying him in my arms with me, even though I knew he'd bother no one. It was as if he asked the question: How come I can be with you inside the house, in the bed, but not in the shelter? He understood that I had sacrificed him, that by leaving him behind and alone at the stake of war, I had actually offered him as a sacrifice to the attackers. That is why he vanished, evaporated.

On the white sheet of my unmade bed, all I saw was cat stool the colour and size of a water lily leaf in a puddle of urine that smelled of wax.

Translated by Ana Janković

TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOŠNIĆ ■ A TRAVELOGUE

Apart from admiration, there is no room for any other feelings
(*Memories of the Alhambra*)

I walked around the Alhambra not following the itinerary outlined in the guidebook, but allowing my eyes to steer me and my feet to carry me wherever they wanted to, and I walked as if in a dream, feeling neither fatigue nor the heat. I continued the exhilarations that were accompanied by conversations with Fairy Croatica and the young Prince with musings, reveries in solitude, which suited my surroundings. At times it seemed to me – who knows how many times so far – that each of us was floating on a magic carpet of our own, that what held us together was the ripe air and the ring of the Alhambra's walls; and not only us, but everyone around us roaming about the gardens, and in my innermost self, I sensed that the same ring of air also holds all those unknown people who once strolled here in olden times, for I tell you, they, too, often emerge from the haze and the greenery that relieves it.

Besides admiration, there is no room for any other feelings in the Alhambra, any thoughts other than how many more days you will spend pondering questions about what creative joys drove the builders of these edifices, those wizards, to build something that would never be repeated, and I also think that it was exactly with this intention in mind that the Alhambra was built in the first place. I had the same thought repeat itself in my mind later in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, another instance of a wonder where the old tree of life bore new fruits.

Walking from door to door, from garden to garden, from palace to palace, from the water in the streams to the fountains and pools, from clusters of lilacs to bouquets of roses, it seemed to me that I always took a different path, and that this journey would never end. It seemed to me as if this labyrinth of paths in the parks, of streets in the urban parts of the Alhambra, of rooms and halls in the castles and towers was stringed, stretching somewhere into infinity and getting lost in eternity.

Both what human hands built here, and what boundless nature has created and taken, everything here resembles life, which absolutely nothing on earth has managed to subjugate, not people, not the birds with their chirping, not the insects with their buzzing, not the flowers with their fragrance, not history, not time, not the murmur of streams. Neither knowledge of geography, which was once more of a faith here than knowledge, nor dreams of heaven and the realm of stars, no life experience, nothing in the Alhambra can reach and touch the poetry, in which lives, experiences, loves and pains fuse and transform into divine states and moods. The Alhambra, it seems to me, resurrects in each of its visitors dreams of heaven where we will all be held in the arms of stars.

Now, as sweat runs down my nape and spine, just like when lightning splits the sky from the end of light, and now when, here today, every sunbeam is, for me, a flash of a sword, everything I see seems to be made of some enchanted matter, everything's teeming with silk and cotton, and the colour crimson obtained from marine molluscs; shop after shop, wheelwrights and armourers, silversmiths and coppersmiths, tanners and carvers, goldsmiths and those panning gold in the Darro River, all this is but a reminder of the faces of yore that once glowed here, that lived in one thousand and one guises, people in black, and you don't know whether they're made of the sun or cotton, multitudes in garments of all kinds, a universe of fates, as was the fate of the tragic Sultan Boabdil, who fled the Alhambra from the Christians on horseback, weeping and despairing. Only a few steps later, when I quench my thirst in the shade with water, in an instant everything becomes so serene as if no one and nothing is there, and never has been.

– In the Alhambra, one realises quickly and easily that the world is a strange place, what you have you quickly lose – I tell my Fairy, but she pays no heed to what I am saying.

Neither history, nor facts, nor anyone's experiences can break the spell that the Alhambra casts on you and what your eyes have seen. The Alhambra leaves a mark deeper than history. Regardless of what brings you here, in the Alhambra each of your hopes is transformed into beauty.

One of the most famed Moorish military fortresses ever to have been built on European soil is the Alcazaba, a fortress on a deadly mountain peak. The Alcazaba was the first structure to have been built in the Alhambra. There, I've come back to witness this architectural feat for the second time, wondering what my grandfather Mijat, a builder who knew how to build towers and walls around them, would say about all this. And as I'm roaming the remnants of armouries and military quarters, kitchens and baths, stables and storehouses, as well as

prisons, I see my grandfather inspecting the fortress and counting the number of baked red bricks built into the towers and walls, and I hear him telling me:

– It’s mighty! Both on the outside and the inside.

It’s mighty indeed, so much so that it left absolutely everything behind. The skeleton of the Alcazaba, its ruins and crumbling walls, all that hasn’t moved for hundreds of years, surrendered to the Andalusian heat, all those lives that have vanished from here like water that has unexpectedly retreated into an abyss, nothing in the Alcazaba seems lost, but only a way of life and what was inevitable.

I believe that this is why the Alhambra is, as a whole, fascinating not only to architects, but to artists, builders, mathematicians, graphic artists, and all other *bel esprits* as well. M. C. Escher, who was preoccupied with impossible constructions, visited this space and studied the Moorish use of symmetry in the tiles of the Alhambra, which he termed “the regular division of the plane”. If I understand it, even if only a little, this is what a mathematician would say: “The tiles of the Alhambra are extraordinary in that they contain all or almost all of the seventeen plane symmetry groups. This is a remarkable achievement in world architecture.”

I will remember the Alhambra all my life, but I fear that whatever I tell you about it will be insignificant, it’ll only be trifles. So much has been said about it that I want to avoid repeating the widely known tales and legends of the Alhambra, so to tell you what has remained of it and what it looks like today, I’ll repeat what I’ve already written elsewhere, such as the scene that follows. Upon his visit to the Alhambra, as he saw a blind beggar begging at its gates, the Mexican poet Francisco de Icaza inscribed the following words in one of the towers of the Alcazaba: “Give him alms, woman, for there is nothing in life, nothing, so sad as to be blind in Granada.”

But even beauty tires, exhausts, especially the kind that never dims. I don’t know who here is more relentless in their brilliance, the Alhambra or today’s sun. Both refuse to release me from their embrace. It glares as if every blacksmith who had ever forged here were at work with their trembling hands, in the air I sense the scent of anvils, the smell of the searing summer, and so like a weary gardener who lays down his tools, I take the camera from my neck and set aside my notebook, signalling to the Fairy and the Prince to come, to join me beneath the canopy of a solitary chestnut tree.

On this plateau, you could happen upon rulers, builders, and guards, seemingly without arrangement or intention, because this space – without the fountains, waterfalls, streams, and colourful flowers, with just one kiosk in the corner

offering chilled drinks and ice cream, reminiscent of every square in a medieval citadel – is actually a neutral and free part of the paved triangle, whose sides are lined with and separated by stern military towers from both its urban spaces and the grand palaces where people lived with such power that they could make water well in every garden on this rocky hill. And much, much more.

At one point, we became so engrossed in sharing our impressions and conjectures that I quickly realised that our verbosity and loquacity merely inaptly mask our impotence to articulate anything coherent about what we were seeing and experiencing. The Alhambra, in its entirety, is truly so beautiful and therefore simple, brimming with organic harmony, that it cannot be put into words. Each new scene reveals itself and unfolds, unravels as if by magic, only to finally burst forth in the sunlight with all its enchantment, or better yet, with a detail that leads us who're knowledgeable about fairy tales to think that nothing so extraordinary could exist without magic. To avoid tormenting myself further, I went to the kiosk, bought a beer for myself and ice cream for the Fairy and the Prince, and we sat next to each other, closing our eyes, savouring the moment.

Refreshed, with new strength and old thoughts, I wandered back to the beginning of this pilgrimage, to the first image, the first thoughts that besieged me already at the gates of the Alhambra, thoughts I had uttered and penned in vain many times, in many places, and on other occasions. The Alhambra is indeed magnificent at first glance, and I thought that here lies the whole truth about this city. But with each subsequent step forward, I strayed from the truth, even when the images of what I saw and what was real overlapped. In other words, when everything interlaces, when everything locks in an embrace and merges – the towers and castles with the city walls, the gardens and courtyards, the trees and shrubs, the colours and scents, the water and flowers, the play of light and blue shadows – it all dissolves and vanishes at once into the haze rising over Granada, transforming into the whiteness of snow on the Nevada.

At that moment, the Sierra Nevada brought me back to the Dinara, and the Alhambra to King Zvonimir's fortress in Knin. The city of King Zvonimir reminds of the Alhambra in some of its details, primarily its layout and position, though turned 180 degrees, so Medina would be where the Croatian tricolour flies on the Knin Fortress, to the west is the military fortification, instead of the Sierra Nevada, Knin is surrounded by the Dinara, while the Darro River encircling the bulwark at the base irresistibly reminds of the Krka. Only there are no palaces, no gold, no silver and ceramics, no water, no fruit trees, no flowers, no stories. And yet, if Zvonimir's city were fully restored and raised, it would be as

white as the Alhambra once was, which today reddens like our faces scorched by the sun and burning with shame.

Surrounded by such splendour, how could one not think of the sad fact, romanticised as it may be, that each of our Croatian fortresses – I'll only mention Bribir and Vrana – is today reigned over by wilderness, sun-scorched grass where snakes slither and reptiles run, and where everything is ruined, made soulless and without authority, and they're gone, as if someone had stolen them. At that moment, I heard a sigh, it seemed to have been coming from the very bowls of the earth, or so it seemed to me, because it came from olden times and was barely audible.

Like water in one of the streams here, words babbled without pause or interruption, neither their rhythm nor tone was ever raised or lowered, words flowed both smoothly and monotonously, like water and breeze disappearing in the sunlight, and I understood nothing, neither the words nor the apparitions. I didn't even try to grasp their meaning, but rather enjoyed their flow, the babbling of a distant, invisible, and nebulous stream. In the Alhambra, giant colourful butterflies fluttered before my eyes, landing on my face and tangling in my hair. I looked to see if Fairy Croatica and the young Prince saw it, but they were engrossed in their own stories and activities.

Fairy Croatica had already emerged from the shade and started off, she'd like to visit the Generalife Gardens once more, may Medina continue to sleep, may the warriors never leave the towers again, and may everyone else remain by the wells, in the fragrant gardens, in the halls where the sun never sets. At that moment, light flashed above her head like gold and rang like music. It was a hairpin playing in her hair. The dance of the sun.

And so, the game could begin, legends and memories, the songs of birds, and what I could no longer hear, the songs of roses, and the rustling of the remaining flowers' banners, sounds appeared in my ears, the music of times, which arose like the rustling of silk from the green canopies of trees proudly growing on this hill that not even the sun can scorch. Believe me, I sank and listened to *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* by Manuel de Falla, and watched Lorca repeat after him: "The weeping of the guitar / begins. / Impossible / to silence it. / It weeps monotonously / as water weeps / as the wind weeps / over snowfields. / It weeps for distant / things...".

Talking of music, for those who don't believe me, I'll only mention a few of the musicians whom the Alhambra inspired, whom the Alhambra stirred, whose notes and exclamations it spurred, whose creative soul it ignited, the sounds and

the ballad of this horizon – as untamed as any beauty – that it set in motion. Not even Claude Debussy could resist the Alhambra and Albaicín, Granada, and Iberia in general. *Lindaraja*, originally written for two pianos, suites and preludes, subtle, elegant and bursting with the colours of a symphony orchestra in his other Andalusian works, drawn from imagination, as if speaking to heaven, speaking to what “whirls in the air, approaches and recedes”, romantically as befits a place over which both the Sun and the Moon linger the longest in Granada, so that even the musicians here are always awake. Musical gazelles roll like oranges in the Generalife Gardens, where at the Lorca and Granada Festival “like the bow of a viola / the cry has made the long / strings of the wind vibrate. / Ay!”, composers Ruperto Chapí from Villena and Tomás Bretón from Salamanca, both virtuosos, and guitarist Andrés Segovia from Linares, they’re all here, I sense them in the scent of these gardens and listen to the sounds that easily escape. The truth is that all my knowledge of music comes from listening, especially here where music is easily heard, and just as the beat of the orchestral *Alhambra Fantasy* by Julian Anderson hammers, “the ellipse of a cry”, too – in two opposing aspects with turbulent contrasts and the dominance of all percussion instruments imaginable – “travels from mountain / to mountain”, celebrating art and architecture like modern Lorca.

Here, McKennitt, a Canadian pop and folk singer, sings under the stars at night in the Alhambra. Her compatriots, the rock band The Tea Party give a multimedia performance of four “intricate” acoustic songs themed around the Alhambra, but accompanied by exotic instruments.

Aa a theme, the Alhambra is inexhaustible. She’s like a woman, like love, or pain, it doesn’t matter, full of harmony, full of drama, full of air, full of dust from all that has happened to her, and as I am writing this, between the chirping of swallows and the cooing of turtledoves alternating in my courtyard in Zemunik, I’m listening to a song that no human vocal cord and no human hand could create, I’m listening to the romantic Francisco Tárrega’s fingerpicking of *Memories of the Alhambra* on the guitar. These are truly pure memories of a world that you can feel only at the core of your being, and when you want to say something about that world, it’s as if you have neither heard nor felt it, as if you haven’t seen a single sight of the Alhambra, but only veils, only infinity, dreams, lights into which one cannot enter.

Who knows how many times the play of the sun, the dance of light and shadow, and music in the Generalife, the summer palace of the sultans of what was once the Emirate of Granada, have cast light on the edifices, the flowers and water, the gardens, the ceramics and calligraphy, every drop of water and every flame, the tranquillity, and the clamouring carriages of life of bygone times, today its motionless walls, or only their foundations from which cypresses grow, spiralling into low white woolly clouds. Now that I know that the Moorish rulers' summer residence was also where the king's son was held in confinement, I wonder how it was possible to be imprisoned in paradise, surrounded by earthly vibrancy and heavenly blueness. In this casemate, anguish was impossible. This was evident to Napoleon's soldiers, too, when they broke into the Generalife, and despite their plundering, devastation and arson, not a single flower here has changed.

The Generalife continues to flutter in the greenery on the Sabika Hill. In keeping with the original architecture, Francisco Moreno succeeded in restoring the splendour and beauty, the harmony and compositions of the Moorish builders.

On the high ground, on the southern slope of the hill lies the Villa of the Martyrs, or the Stone of the Martyrs – take whichever is easier for you to understand – with a large garden full of pits and dungeons in which Christian martyrs lived. Everything is deep beneath it. On top of the Monte Mauro ridge, the Villa de los Mártires literally “marks the Christian slaves”, those who worked and built the Alhambra, living here in underground cells, where later the mystic Saint John of the Cross would voluntarily reside when the Carmelite monastery was founded on the foundation stone of the Villa of the Martyrs. Night here is light, the pupils of the sun play with the fan of darkness. Torres Bermejas, a barracks and prison, named after the reddish colour of its guardhouse walls, is an artillery bastion and originally part of a fortified castle with underground cisterns, stables, and accommodation for people. Today, its three stone towers rise into the azure sky and watch, like a cross, over the bones of those who fed on their own lives.

Or are they just the shadows of those who negotiated publicly in the Alhambra, and secretly in the Generalife, the intimate dramas of the sultans and their concubines, harems, soldiers and servants, nobles and ragtags, those from the sea and the Maghreb desert, and those from the dark forests of the north. I wondered about what had happened to those who were less fortunate, where had the grimness hiding in the depths of the dark past of these buildings, palaces and castles vanished, not understanding from where this deep innocence of the Alhambra arises if not from the faces of its facades, walls, doors and windows, the merging of water and light, the passion with which the details of its marble, stucco, brick

and wood were laid, their eternal wonder, its floral avenues and paths, on which I tread as if guided by the gentle forefinger of an angel.

I closed my eyes and surrendered my senses to other parts of my body, my temples, ears, nose, hands, legs, and especially my feet, for (see!) even after more than ten thousand steps, strength did not abandon me, nor the desire to keep moving forward, expecting to meet Adam and Eve themselves. Not even the sun bothered me, although it kept kindling fire under my heels all day. Nor the hustle and bustle of life. Even though a multitude of people from all over the world moved around us, speaking in all tongues, all I heard and noticed came from the rose garden, which disappears when you watch and smell it. You can feel this space, just like any other, only when you merge with it.

At that moment, I felt like *Palle* alone in the world. Amongst all the people surrounding me, I knew no one, I was close to no one, no one was familiar. All were distant, unfamiliar to my ears and eyes, in some other worlds, even those closest to me with whom I had arrived here. I couldn't find *Fairy Croatica* or the young Prince, even though this was happening as I was looking for them, and called out to them, having felt the need for them, the need for serenity which we would share. Solitude is, I guess, the moment one understands this space, from which only those close to you can rescue you. In the searing summer, the Alhambra melted and diffused before me, turning into gold, into which everything wanted to be transmuted.

The zenith heat forced me to sit down again, to seek respite on the first empty bench. And it was pleasant in the shade. Shapes and images, voices and music, the scents of bodies and flowers, the mysterious and the observable alternated and mingled, it all circled in my thoughts and feelings as it does in the heavens, and I began to wonder when and how long it would take me to arrange all this, to arrange what I had discovered, written down and recorded in Medina, the Alcazaba, the Generalife, all those vast and tiny spaces, the passages between them, the terraces; which windows and doors I am yet to open, which stairs I am yet to take, between which colonnades I am yet to meander, and onto which rooftops I am yet to step, into which workshops I am yet to peek where swords, shields, battle axes, and halberds were forged, all those weapons that were used for cutting off heads, pantries where milk was curdled, cheeses and kefir made, blacksmiths where horses were shod, butcher's and pastry shops, and all those things which we have lost knowledge of today, which we can give shape to only in our imagination.

While feeling this way, but actually aware that I had only breathed in some air under the skies of the Alhambra, I wondered what it must have been like for

those who lived, ruled and feasted here, those who drank its water and trod on its flowers, those who got drunk on time and the fruits of the Alhambra, those who walked the world that was part of them, and I finally understood Sultan Boabdil's mother, who, in the distant hills, told her son, his cheeks tearstained as he was abandoning the Alhambra: "It serves you right to weep like a woman now, for you could not defend it as a man."

– God, is there no justice?! – my loud question ensued.

The south Gate of Justice, set against a backdrop of greenery bathed in the scent of myrtle, is the original entrance to the Alhambra. On the gate are two symbols, a hand and a key. The gate looks like the gateway to Heaven, one of the pearly gates, but featuring Quranic verse inscriptions and a Gothic figure of the Virgin and Child. In effect, the gate itself, with what is depicted on it, touches its very history. It was through this gate that one entered the Alhambra, and sometimes oneself as well. The gate is tall and shaped like a horseshoe, no Moorish guards there today. In the Alhambra's heyday, it was customary for judges to dispense justice at this gate, and only those who were born lucky could pass through. And those whose hearts were brave, who lived courageously, truthfully, regardless of the possessions and the world around them. There is mention of this in the Bible, too. Through the prophet Zechariah, God proclaimed: "Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace."

Lost on the Royal Path, I walk through a narrow passage on one side, and into another wide-open space that separates the Alcazaba from the palaces of the Moorish rulers, and I think how nice it would be to have a horse here, Moorish or Castilian, it doesn't matter, to gallop towards the palaces and gardens, and the many things I would find there that were built during the Nasrid Dynasty, the time when the Moorish story began in Granada. I wonder, how much time did it take the rulers to turn these rocks into castles more beautiful than any other? The appearance of the palaces and their parks changed with their rulers, but they'd never touch their original beauty. The Alhambra may indeed have a hundred different faces, but every time I look at her, in my eyes, she, just like my Fairy, never changes. She's entertained by enchanting me, by making me not see any other face.

In the north-eastern quadrant of the Alhambra, in the royal quarter, records say, a complex of six palaces was planned, a royal domain consisting of three central complexes – the Mexuar for the council of ministers, the judiciary and administration; the Serallo, the sultan's residence with pools and mirrors; and the Harem with impressive baths adorned with decorations that send shivers down your spine, make you tremble and heave a sigh.

All that illuminates my arrival amongst the palaces confuses me, and I'm no longer certain whether what I see is real or if it's a story that I'm creating myself. The Nasrid Palaces, the red rooms and three monumental complexes, the Mexuar courtyard, the yellow rooms, the Comares Palace residence, whose rooms are also red, and the green rooms of the Court of the Lions. The Alhambra rests on the number three, which is here both magical and religious in nature. The Moors saw absolute perfection in the number three, so here, in these palaces, many things come in threes: Quranic inscriptions, entrances, windows, rooms, carpets, fountains, paths, flower avenues, and other aspects of life. They, too, were familiar with moral trinity because of the extent of beauty here.

The Mexuar, with its brightly coloured interiors, is the oldest amongst the royal palaces in the Alhambra, and was used for public administration. Long discussions took place here under its highly decorative ceilings, and its audience chamber was used as a reception hall, where those who came to conduct business, seek advice and justice, envoys and other guests were officially received. The sultan sat on an elevation in the central chamber hidden from public view, like women in a harem, behind dark wooden grilles that are fixed to white plaster walls, so that those who addressed him couldn't see him. He was both light and essence. I doubt he listened to anyone, although the inscription at the entrance had read: "Enter and fear not ask to ask for justice, for you will find it." The Christians turned the palace into a church, so when people came, they came seeking divine justice, while priests heard their confessions behind the same wooden grilles. The walls are still adorned with ornaments and inscriptions, whose motto is "Only God is victorious". The carved wooden frieze features verses by Ibn Zamrak dedicated to the palace and the Nasrids. One room, whose ceiling looks like lace, is draped in a muqarnas frieze, painted during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs. It is not without inscriptions either, here the conquest of Granada is celebrated. All are gratified, as the palace belongs to both.

The Mexuar was connected to the Comares Palace, the sultan's official residence. Like any palace, this one, too, consists of a series of rooms, passages and courtyards, shaded gardens, and marble fountains. Everything is somehow magical. If you saw the door through which you entered, you couldn't see the door through which to exit. The sultan's wives lived in rooms to the east and west, and the concubines to the south.

Everything here is connected, interlaced, interwoven like Islamic calligraphy or ivy, Casa Real or the old Royal House, the Comares, the central courtyard of Arrayanes or the Court of the Myrtles, everything has multiple names, Moorish,

Spanish, depending on who ruled where, depending on what purpose it served, or on what it was surrounded by, such as this palace that was erected near a plantation of evergreen, fragrant myrtle, which has clearly been cultivated here since the Alhambra was constructed. The sultan built a new palace here with a pool and myrtle shrubs, whose beauty is unmatched. As in any Islamic house, here in the palace, the court or the courtyard is the epicentre of everyday life. The courtyard is rectangular and features arcades, carved decorative arches, and columns that support its two-storey architecture. Around the courtyard, there are a series of rooms, chambers and pavilions, on each side of the world, including the Hall of the Kings, the famed Sala de la Barca or the Hall of the Boat, and the elusive Hall of the Ambassadors.

Here, however, the word ‘barca’ doesn’t mean ‘boat’; instead, it’s the Arabic word for ‘blessing’, and is inscribed on tiles and lace-like stucco, just as in the Hall of the Ambassadors the inscription reads “There is no victor but Allah”. The aforementioned Comares Tower rises behind the northern portico, and is where the largest, perfectly cubic room in the castle is, whose three walls host nine sleeping chambers, arranged in sets of three. The significance of the number three has already been touched upon, while the number nine clearly refers to the senses, which is how many the human body has.

The Hall of the Ambassadors is an expression of the sultan’s power. Opulence. Shells, flowers, stars, motifs inscribed in cursive and Arabic calligraphy, ornamentation, geometric and vegetal patterns in stucco, ceramic and plaster tiles, shimmering stained glass; a ceiling with seven crowns of stars, the seven heavens through which souls pass before they enter paradise, and the stars move towards the centre of the magnificent wooden dome which depicts paradise, and which is composed of thousands of pieces. Even though they adhered to Islamic prescriptions that man should build nothing eternal, the decorations, inscriptions and embellishments astonish. Penance was performed in golden rooms, and such a room exists here, named after its gilded and sumptuous ceiling. Gold has always been abundant here, both before and after Columbus. The German travel writer Jerónimo Múzer noted at the end of the Middle Ages that, upon entering this room, “you cannot be sure that you are not in paradise”. Sultan Yusuf I of Granada conducted negotiations here with the increasingly powerful Christian army even before the palace was completed. The palace’s splendour provided him with security, strength and authority, dominance in negotiations, but not in sufficient measure to see the palace’s completion, as a deranged slave killed him within its walls.

At the palace's centre, there's a pool, a marble pond, in which goldfish swim, surrounded by myrtle. Its bushes do not rise above the pool's level so as not to distract attention from the water. In the castles of the Alhambra, water is indeed a mirror, reflecting the palace's dual dimension. And the Comares Tower. In the water's mirror, the sky. Images emerge from the water – porticos, columns, pavilions, all uniting in the water. Water is the source, life and its ebbs and flows, the symbol of the Muslim paradise. Two circular fountains, one at each end of the palace, symbolise the circle of life. At one end, water springs forth, is born, and at the other, it whirls downwards, it dies. Between the two ends, the pool brims with life.

Standing here like an emissary, powerless and penniless, before an imagined Moorish master, a caliph, a sultan, it doesn't really matter whom, for neither their powers nor my money can absolve my sins, I wonder whether I'll at least be able to quench my thirst at the source, take a sip of water from the alabaster fountain, inscribed with verses by Ibn Zamrak, surrounded by the twelve marble lions in the Court of the Lions, where no lion is identical to another, nor do they squirt water from their mouths in unison. Water and architecture are integrated, nearly fused into one single form.

Here, in this courtyard of lace-like ornamentation and four streams, each of which leads to one of the four corners of the world, in agreement with the Pythagorean theorem, Christopher Columbus received royal endorsement for his expedition. Later, Charles V furnished both his official and private quarters, known as the Emperor's Chambers, in a Mannerist style without altering the established endless reproduction of forms and trends, flower beds, gardens, roses, boxwood shrubs, climbers, carnations, all in the image and likeness of sacred Muslim texts. The palace was, after all, built during the reign Muhammad V of Granada, who allied himself with Peter the Cruel, King of Castile and León.

The Court of the Lions is magnificent. Muhammad V of Granada outdid his father Yusuf I of Granada and his Comares Palace. It stands as a paragon of Moorish architecture and design, of Moorish stucco decoration and plaster carvings, geometric and floral arabesques, featuring strings of Arabic inscriptions, quotes from sacred texts, and verses by Arab poets praising the palace. Absolute brilliance, beauty and harmony, the luminosity of water and colour, abstraction and geometry. Here, you can indeed experience it all – the sea, the sky, earth, the music of worlds akin to the notes of the arabesques on the walls rising from a dream.

Its courtyard, paved with coloured tiles, is surrounded by columned galleries, resembling a Christian monastic cloister. That is, the courtyard interconnects all

the court's galleries. The colonnades are built irregularly in white marble, and adorned with various leaf ornamentations. Behind the colonnades are decorated halls with windows fashioned in the muqarnas technique, shaped like eight-pointed stars, whose prisms interconnect into geometric forms, serving as the main elements of the arches decorated with "white, blue and golden inserts in the shape of circles, crowns, and stars." Mosaic tiles with mathematical patterns are used, as well as light domes floating above the space, and filigree stucco constellations on walls covered with blue and yellow ceramic tiles at human height, bordered with golden enamel.

These are the Hall of Kings, the Hall of the Two Sisters, the Hall of the Mocarabes, and the Hall of the Abencerrajes. Four rooms, four corners of the world, making it seem as if each door is connected to one of the four elements – air, fire, water, and earth – for only followers of the mystical path passed through them, or those other ones, as was the case with the Abencerrajes, who never returned. According to the story, an ill-fated member of the noble Abencerrajes family of Granada was caught courting the sultan's wife Zoraya, mother of the weeping Boabdil, so the jealous sultan, at a feast held in their honour, beheaded all of the courtier's family members.

In the Moorish palaces, I could spend days contemplating forms, appearances, technology and technique, the ceramic and plaster tile decorations, stucco, wooden inlays, gilded borders, figures, inscriptions, the flow of designs, the leaves and flowers of all the plants in the Alhambra, inscrutable forms, abstraction that language cannot express. Everything visible is entirely dreamlike. I am not sure that calling it a masterpiece of Moorish architecture covers all that I have seen, the lace made of eight thousand "pieces of cedarwood arranged in eight-pointed stars," intertwining in this "intricate pattern on seven levels," architecturally ahead of all times. Like the sky above our heads.

The splendid and massive quadrangular palace of Charles V, the grandson of Isabella I and Ferdinand II, which he built in response to the rebellion of the Moriscos, which is what the Moors were called at the time, who were taxed to raise funds for the palace's construction, was never fully completed. The palace is extraordinary, its architectural structure is simple, it's built in Renaissance style with Baroque details, it includes Italian Mannerism solutions, it features scenes from Greek mythology, and stands in direct contrast to Moorish architecture, as befits the Holy Roman Emperor.

I gaze upon it and think to myself, it seems as though it had been transported directly from Rome and placed within the Alhambra in a fashion that doesn't

disrupt the splendour of the existing palaces, and that ensures that nothing detracts from its beauty. Luxury beside luxury, the finest example of Renaissance architecture in Spain. It's no wonder, for it was crafted by architect and sculptor Pedro Machuca, who learnt from Michelangelo himself.

There is so much more I could mention about the Alhambra. Sala de la Justicia or the Hall of Justice, Patio del Mexuar or the Court of the Council Chamber, Mirador de Daraxa or Daraxa's Mirador, Peinador de la Reina or the Queen's Dressing Room, harems, galleries, halls, rooms, baths, labyrinths, Hispano-Moresque ceramics, plaster, wood and stone carvings, wooden, ceramic, and plaster tiles, sultanate dining vases displayed in niches, impressively angled arches and vaults of various shapes and sizes, floating domes, gardens, interiors adorned with arabesques and calligraphy, floral and geometric ornamentation, rhombus latticework seemingly multiplying into infinity, columns appearing in nearly all spaces and chambers, stalactite decorations on ceilings called muqarnas, vaulted tombs. The Alhambra, particularly the Moorish rulers' palaces, is a matchless museum of Islamic architecture in Europe. But the more I say, you might think that I'm repeating myself. The Islamic weave cannot be unravelled differently.

Architecture here has reached such levels of mastery and artistic heights that its aesthetics may indeed be considered to have been pulled out of a magician's bag. To compare it to luxury would be both accurate and sacrilegious. To compare it to grace would undermine the grandeur of the edifices and the knowledge invested in them. If I call it beauty itself, I'd be correct, but I will have said nothing.

The fate of the Alhambra has proven to be the fate of history and time, not only of Spain but of humankind, the fate of a journey, of the land and stone, of a distant and beautiful dream of every dreamer and pilgrim, every soul entwined with time, a fate that we may not fully fathom, but can only appreciate. For if one glance at a detail in the Alhambra keeps you in doubt, another replenishes your joy of life. The fate of all this splendour, or what remains of it, seems to me like the Darro River that flows invincibly beneath it.

The veracity of all these stories from and about the Alhambra is of little consequence. Everyone can think and speak their own, yet all will ultimately merge into one single story akin to those from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Or the story of Troy. If we look closely, we'll see that similar stories have been woven in all such courts and castles worldwide, and that perhaps their only dissimilarity is the consequence of the use of different threads, different wool, and different colours.

The evening was drawing near, it was time to leave the Alhambra. I turned, longing to see one last time the court, the Nasrid Palaces, the noble houses, the

city of Medina, the defensive towers, the Alcazaba, the royal military guards and their dwellings, the Generalife and the Catholic Monarchs' edifices, their walls, windows, floors, ceilings, columns and corners, all directed towards the sun like candelabras burning with an eternal flame. Yet all I saw was a forest of trees and avenues of flowers, the crimson in the west, and images that I could sift through in my memory, like an embroidered silk cloth, as peculiar as it is bright against a dark backdrop.

For a moment, I tried to compose myself, but nothing was as it had been. There was only the rustle of tree canopies and an evening breeze drifting through them like a spirit, carrying its tune down to the city, to Granada, which had already awakened new feelings in me, feelings that passionate travellers inescapably discover on their journeys – once you've set off from home, do not close yourself to new doors.

I hastened, twilight was falling, while in Granada, all doors were opening.

Translated by Ana Janković

DAVOR ŠALAT ■ A POETIC DIALOGUE WITH SPAIN

Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić: *The Oranges of Federico García Lorca*,
3000 GODINA ZA DAR, Zadar, 2020

The writer Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić is the author of an extensive poetic oeuvre, which has – alongside his prose, essays, criticism, and travel writing – evolved over several decades through several major phases. His latest phase is transcendent-symbolic in character, whose salient poetic features include a focus on transcendence, a somewhat elevated tone, a pronounced harmony across all cosmological levels and layers of the poetic text, a conceptuality of individual collections of poems centred on numerous variations of a central motif, and an intricate figurativeness. In recent years, Bilosnić's poetry has also seen a notable share of travel writing or discourse relying on actual localities that the author, or rather the lyrical subject, has visited, along with micro-narratives and anecdotes, and a pronounced intertextuality. Thus, following the collection of poems *Havana Blues*, which was inspired by his stay in Cuba and other Latin American countries, Bilosnić wrote the collection of poetry called *The Oranges of Federico García Lorca*, whose poems are closely tied to his travels through Spanish cities, and the thematic exploration of great Spanish artists and saints.

The collection is divided into several cycles, most of which are dedicated to a specific city in Andalusia or Castile, as well as to famous personalities associated with these cities. It is well known that Bilosnić is a poet of many different thematic and stylistic personas, that his oeuvre is highly intricate and heterogeneous, so it is natural that – in his poetic exuberance – he is discursively diverse and expressively rich in this collection as well. His stay in Spain brought together some of Bilosnić's fundamental artistic obsessions and greatly inspired him, making his literary imagination tied to these obsessions as significant as the Andalusian and Castilian ambiances themselves, which acted as a powerful stimulus for the poet, each in its respective way. Indeed, Bilosnić seems to follow some of the artistic

techniques of surrealist and abstract painters, who often start from the visible world and references rooted in real life, which they then either reduce to basic – i.e., abstract – elements or fully stylise and incorporate into a surrealistic stylistic texture with the help of imaginative montages.

Bilosnić is inspired by a surrealist approach, particularly in his first cycle called *In That Sleepless Granada*. Thematically, he is entirely focused on evoking the somewhat mysterious, imaginative, and mythical atmosphere of Granada and Andalusia as a whole, largely modelled on the celebrated *Gypsy Ballads* by Federico García Lorca. Bilosnić uses motif indicators, with whose help what he does is offer literary communication, and his Granada and Andalusia are evoked through widely known symbols, making his text a dialogue with Lorca's prototext. This dialogue occurs not only on the level of motifs, symbols and on the broader thematic level, but also on the level of literary method. Bilosnić adopts some features of Lorca's poetic discourse, such as virtuoso and very surprising associativity, saturated metaphoricity that sometimes expands into clusters of metaphors, surrealist montages of disparate micro-themes, juxtapositions of contrasting semantic fields, and various stylistic devices of parallelism that intensify his expression ("In the middle of the night on the street/ a bird cries/ an overheated snake/ In the middle of the night black roses/ on the veranda/ with its hooting/ an owl all of ice/ prepares the dawn for me// The moon all shuddery/ and woolly/ in the palm tree's canopy/ the sound of guitars/ and metal").

The poet generally sets forth from the atmosphere and expressiveness of, for instance, Lorca's *The Faithless Wife* or *Sleepwalking Ballad*, but constructs his poems by using his own original combinations of words and metaphors, with a somewhat different thematic emphasis – what dominates is not the ominous atmosphere surrounding the Roma in Andalusia, but an intense experiential vividness, the abundance of which is expressed through a surreal explosion of imagination ("That Andalusian mystique/ behind whose curtains/ you observe the moon/ hanging like a shield/ on the city walls across the street"). In fact, Bilosnić imaginatively enriches and affirms the ambiances that he writes about, specifically mentioning Granada and its locations, the Alhambra, and Lorca's birthplace Fuente Vaqueros and his family home. These places, associated with a special type of beauty or an inspiring artist (e.g., Lorca, Antonio Machado), serve as a starting point for complete stylisation and imagination, with the help of which he creates a complex poetic reality ("The Alhambra is in the hills/ all in peace, complete/ women's cries, the scent of myrtle/ and clouds that sing/ to a coffin in the red earth/ leaf out in agony and passion/ bodies will, cry of carnations").

For such imaginative transformations, Bilosnić uses the titular motif of the orange, which serves as the objective correlate of the metaphysical and earthly fullness of being and his experience. The orange often accompanies the motif of the sun, both of which represent an epiphany of existence, an image of life's essence. Such emotional elevation results in astonishment at these two motifs and their placement in unusual contexts and combinations ("Only the sun and oranges// The orange tree/ rises and sears/ over low rooftops/ Noon has despoiled everything/ except light"). For Bilosnić, the motif of the orange also serves as a link with his homeland and Croatian literature. His already widely elaborated Mediterraneanism (Sanja Knežević, *The Mediterranean Text of Croatian Poetry*) is thus internationalised, and compares Mediterranean regions, such as Dalmatia – more specifically, his native region of Ravni Kotari – with Andalusia in terms of nature, culture, and art.

Bilosnić thus continues the local tradition of Croatianising Lorca's themes and stylistic manners (i.e., incorporating them into Croatian literature), a tradition whose most notable figures were Drago Ivanišević, Jure Kaštelan, and Zvonimir Golob. By rhyming two similar yet quite distant Mediterranean ambiances, the poet's text becomes thematically more intense, concrete, and personal. This also establishes continuity with Bilosnić's enduring poetic endeavour to fully express the genius loci of a particular region, most often of his native Ravni Kotari, as one of the fundamental determinants of his own identity. Accordingly, a poem in which universal symbolic meanings are activated in connection with Andalusia can instantly be transferred to a concrete ambiance in Ravni Kotari, and evolve into a pronounced autobiographical poetic discourse ("Bleeding, my glass full of wine/ crystal fresh knife in silk/ May you live in that blossom/ in Granada/ home and mulberry/ and our garden's mint/ and Zemunik's turtledoves/ moved with us/ into the streets of moonlight/ in Granada").

As I have mentioned, the motif of the orange – along with other motifs of Lorca's, such as the moon, blood, the horse, the horseman, the bull, the guitar, the scream, the olive grove, the rose, wine, the fig – serves Bilosnić to highlight the considerable parallels between, for instance, Lorca and Kaštelan's poetry. Hispanist Željka Lovrenčić stated the following about these parallels: "Both poets belong to Surrealism. The orientation of both is leftist, and both are socially sensitive. In their poetry, we encounter the theme of death, rebellion, the intertwining of the mythical and magical, folk expression, sensuality, symbolism, and hermeticism." In other words, Bilosnić points to a stylistic unity to which he himself largely belongs in this book, and this stylistic unity is Lorca's version

of surrealism. Unlike Breton's, Lorca's version combined real ambiances and facts with completely free associations that create an open semantic mosaic and sudden montage leaps. Bilosnić has thus clearly indicated the surrealist tradition typical of Croatian literature, which – with the exception of Radoslav Ivšić and his anchor in French surrealism – mainly looked up to Lorca's less radical yet poetically rather potent version.

Interestingly, Bilosnić adapts somewhat to the city and person that he writes about both thematically and stylistically. Thus, his cycles centring on Cordoba and Seville move slightly away from Granada. These are flatland cities, through which the central, relatively calm Andalusian Guadalquivir River flows, so their ambiance as a whole is calmer than Granada's. This resulted in Bilosnić's thematic focus on this literarily mythic river, and on the descriptive details of the two cities and of a number of their famous residents (e.g., Waldha el Ameri, Ibn Hazm, Averroes, Ana Ruiz Hernández, Antonio Machado), which made his style more narrative in nature with less lush and surrealist metaphors. The interest of the text here is not in recreating Lorca's somnambulistic and surreal atmosphere, but in expressing the pleasure and spiritual richness that the lyrical subject experiences while moving about these two cities.

A similar approach is repeated in Bilosnić's cycle dedicated to Málaga, but here – considering that it thematises Picasso, a versatile artist and native of Málaga – Bilosnić again resorts to Andalusia's mythical images, montage cuts, and exceedingly free associations (“Torro, torro, eyes wide open/ in the arena Málaga burns/ that's the image of the Flood/ Blood is older than water/ great silence, sleeping hills/ Black earth, guitar sobs”). In Málaga, too, the lyrical subject experiences a sun-filled epiphany of sorts, a bright Mediterranean vertical axis that colours the ambiance of entire poems in bright colours. In these poems – in wanting to underscore the aforementioned axis – Bilosnić strings together shorter verses, often consisting of a single word. This enhances the intensity of the words that are singled out and accentuated, as well as the intensity of their sequence in the graphic and stylistic vertical axis of the poems, and thematically emphasises Málaga's Mediterraneanism as one of its fundamental characteristics (“Feathers in copper sails/ Noon/ People keep a vigil/ outside cathedral/ doors/ waves have thickened too// Horsemen/ señoritas and priests/ in Málaga/ in the shadows/ raise/ a cross/ to the bell tower/ in mid sun”).

Málaga is also the arena where Bilosnić introduces his enduring motif – or macro-theme – of the tiger, to which he dedicated an entire collection of poems, and which symbolises various ideal projections, including vitality, transcendence,

and his fully developed personality. For Bilosnić, the tiger is, essentially, a metonymy for wholeness of all kinds, so it is only natural that he “walks” the tiger in Málaga alongside Picasso, from whom Bilosnić draws great inspiration, and whom he considers to be an instance of the wholeness of spirit and painting. All this stylistically intensifies through the repetition of the verse featuring the tiger and mentioning Picasso; indeed, it intensifies through an upward gradation that ends in the ultimate circumstances of beginning and end, of Noah’s ark and the sky (“In Málaga I walked the tiger/ when I reached Noah’s Ark/ Picasso tells me/ that the sky is safe”).

The cycle *The Red Horse, the Orange, and the Guitar*, which pays homage to Croatia’s Mediterranean poets, those who share a climate and culture similar to Spain’s, is positioned in the very middle of Bilosnić’s collection *The Oranges of Federico García Lorca*. The cycle contains both anecdotal and biographical details, especially since Bilosnić personally knew some of these poets (Kaštelan, Vučićević, Alfirević, Petrasov Marović, Ivanišević, Črnja, Vesna Parun, Ujević, Gudelj, Anka Petričević). Interestingly, even in these poems he mentions Spanish place names, while the Mediterranean atmosphere evoked by reference to Mediterranean plants and animals brings (southern) Spain and (southern) Croatia closer. Even Croatian tragedies (i.e., Škabrnja) are viewed against the backdrop of Spanish ones (i.e., Lorca’s murder, the bombing of Guernica). Additionally, Bilosnić embeds certain verses by the poets that he writes about in his own texts. Moreover, he evokes and paraphrases them by adopting a style of writing that emulates the style of each. He thus demonstrates that (poetic) tradition, both national and international, is an enormous wealth, with which contemporary poets can continually dialogue, and which is indelibly present in the very language that he uses.

Bilosnić continues his journey through Castile and its major cities, using the same manner of alternating between a more associative and a more narrative style. Castile, unlike Andalusia, has historically been characterised by epic and picaresque literature, that is, social naturalism, so in visiting Castilian cities, Bilosnić’s poems feature more micro-narrations, details from real life, and of course, fictional characters associated with Castile (Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, Dulcinea, Rocinante, Lazarillo de Tormes). The poet identifies with each of these characters, so the lyrical subject either speaks from their perspective (he identifies, for instance, with the *pícaro* or rascal Lazarillo de Tormes) or addresses them (a knight writes a love poem to Dulcinea, the beauty dreamt up by Don Quixote as a common village girl). He adjusts his style accordingly, so in the poem about Lazarillo, the emphasis is on the confessional and manifestative capacity of the

lyrical subject, who sees himself as a *pícaro* or a rascal, including the constant gradational repetition of the personal pronoun 'I', and relatively simple genitive metaphors to describe his own identity ("the pearl of my expectations," "I rode the donkey of my freedom," "knight of all times"). In the poem addressed to Dulcinea, the style is intentionally similar to traditional love poems with a pronounced appellative function ("Dulcinea, my beloved lady, hear your knight's voice... Goddess, my maiden from the age of birds and grain"), inversions, detailed yet metaphorical descriptions of his Beloved ("my dove with eyes quieter than stars," "my queen with golden locks of hair"), and the conventional ambience of troubadour poetry ("while you await me in the castle with towers," "Mistress, I kiss your tender feet").

When Picasso and his famous painting *Guernica* turn up in the Queen Sofía Museum in Madrid, Bilosnić, now particularly inspired, once again resorts to intense metaphors, contrasts, absurdities, montage cuts, thus emulating Picasso's style, including avant-garde cubism, surrealism, and expressionism. However, during his visit to Salamanca and Ávila, the style is calmer, and includes many references rooted in real life, while the end of the cycle from Ávila brings a *Prayer by Teresa of Ávila*, introducing a meditative-spiritual discourse that dominates the end of Bilosnić's collection. After returning to Andalusia one more time, and after writing some truly anthological poems (e.g., *A Few Questions and One Answer*), near the end of the collection Bilosnić dedicates himself to Saint John of the Cross, one of the foremost Spanish poets and the patron saint of poets in general. In the penultimate cycle, the focus is on the saint's birthplace Fontiveros and his birth house, today a church (the poem *In the House of Saint John of the Cross*). Here, Bilosnić seeks to evoke the atmosphere of peace and spirituality that pervades the place, as well as the atmosphere of familial love and closeness that develop on such a foundation. The images are more static and abstract, the stance adopted by the lyrical subject is that of listening to spiritual reality and carefully observing the material traces left by the saint, with the lyrical subject intervening most powerfully at the very end of the poem by turning the poem's tranquillity into an expression which is as expressionistic as it gets ("In the heart, a scream seeming like a sunflower"). Bilosnić observes the barren yet expressive Castilian landscape from the same place of peace and gives its visual details his complete attention, not failing to underscore the lyrical subject's emotional connection to this landscape due to its similarity to his native Ravni Kotari. In other words, in the poem Bilosnić brings to the fore empathy, immersion, and the meticulous recording of experiences with the help of his descriptive and imaginative style.

In the final cycle called *Canticles to Saint John of the Cross*, the poet turns fully to a spiritual-meditative discourse, in which the lyrical subject immerses himself in a spiritual space imbued with the extraordinary spirituality of Saint John of the Cross. Bilosnić emphasises programmatically that he reads the works of Saint John of the Cross (“From night to night I read/ your Dark Night”), that he contemplates them, and immerses himself in their soul. This is a spirituality characterised by what are called *dark nights of the soul*, in which the soul is purified so as to reach a place where it can be more thoroughly imbued with the fire of God’s love. The lyrical subject of these poems retreats into physical (night) and spiritual (turning away from the senses and towards pure spirit) darkness, while experiencing a more intense communion with God and a more pronounced love for others. Bilosnić here focuses on abstract nouns (night, darkness, shadow, love, light, rebirth, contemplation, mind, reason, dissolution, emptiness, memory, will, grace), mostly those used by Saint John of the Cross himself in his works of both prose and poetry. By meditating on these nouns, the poet spiritualises his expression, and integrates his poetry into the rich tradition of spiritual-religious poetry from various religious backgrounds. On the other hand, he poetically functionalises this contemplativeness by placing it in the context of metaphors, antitheses, paradoxes, and oxymorons (“Night is my light,” “Night is my milk, my mother’s breast,” “Night is my fire,” “Tar becomes an oil lamp of light,” “happy hour of dissolution,” “reason that shines in the darkness of contemplation”). By doing so, he largely follows the poetic technique of Saint John of the Cross, who achieved extraordinary poetic intensity precisely with the help of devices that combine words with contrasting meanings.

In general, Bilosnić changes his style of writing in the last cycle significantly because he relies the most on reflexivity which is expressed through his choice of a substantially different language than at the beginning of the collection which is inspired by Lorca. Now, the imaginative transformation of the external world, which is itself imaginative, is no longer the focus. Instead, Bilosnić now focuses on the poetic exploration of inner spaces and relationships with God which are difficult to express. By using somewhat more complex sentences, more complete thoughts, and metaphors with clear ideas, the poet attempts to meaningfully – sometimes even paradoxically – express the experience of retreating into the inner world, and of observing the spiritual and poetic legacy of Saint John of the Cross.

In conclusion, in his collection of poetry *The Oranges of Federico García Lorca* Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić did not aim to write a book that would be entirely stylistically consistent and conceptually completely rounded off, as were some of his

previous collections. However, the collection's powerful unifying ingredients are Spain's regions, cities, and personalities that were a source of great inspiration to Bilosnić, which is what makes this book a meaningful and thoughtful collection of poems. On the other hand, internally, this book is discursively very diverse and varied, it contains opposing stylistic tendencies almost concurrently, and indicates the presence of multiple artistic traditions. Lorca is here just a common denominator of an extremely rich and diverse set of themes rooted in Spain's nature, culture, and art that have long intensely inspired Bilosnić – especially since his stay in Andalusia and Castile – and prompted him to compare them with his native Croatian nature and culture. For all these reasons, this is yet another successful collection by Bilosnić, in which he demonstrates great skill in expressing himself in various styles of poetry, and which makes an exceptional contribution to the literary and cultural dialogue between Croatia and Spain.

Translated by Ana Janković

JOHN TAYLOR (United States) ■ *THE TIGER IS THE WORLD*
BY TOMISLAV MARIJAN BILOSNIC

“Tyger! Tyger! burning bright / In the forests of the night.”

When we first came across William Blake’s lines at school, wasn’t it as if we already somehow knew them? The meter, the rhyme, and the striking nocturnal imagery immediately engaged us; however, beyond prosody, indeed beyond poetry, didn’t they above all confirm the universality of similar specters (or persistent intimations) that had been haunting us ever since a much earlier period? A tiger provides Blake with a vivid representation of all that is utterly different from us. It is man’s ontological predicament to remain at one remove, *en face*. And what we face seems to loom in the form or the shape of all that we are not. Call the tiger God, Matter, Nature, the Cosmos, Death, man’s Animality, one’s Fellow Creature, Love, or even and perhaps especially Life, that Other waits over there, across from us ... Yet this apparently unreachable otherness also lies within us (and remains unreachable, as it were): we formulate the othernesses that we sense by means of language. So it is impossible not to think of Blake when we read “one of the first words is *tiger*,” as declares the Croatian poet Tomislav Marijan Bilosnic (b. 1947) in *The Tiger is the World*, his stimulating collection of 96 poems and prose poems devoted to the animal and its rich philosophical resonance. First published as *Tigar, pjesme* in 2004, the book has now been fluently translated by Karl Kvitko and Durda Vukelic-Rozic.

Even as Bilosnic’s prose poem, “The Tiger in Speech,” states how the word tiger helps him to leave behind the “uprooted” lyrical poems with which he began writing, to seek a deeper and more genuine inspiration, “to return to the first word again,” and thus, in effect, to found a new poetry by forsaking poetry, each piece in this volume focuses on a different aspect of the factual and symbolic beast. For Bilosnic, the tiger is “the world”; that is, everything that the poet is not as well as, sometimes paradoxically, what he aspires to be or actually already is. For some of these poems, one thinks of Nietzsche’s imperative of “becoming what one is” (see the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*) and, even more so, of its Pindarean antecedent: “May you become what you are by learning what it is (you are).” Arranged into five sections, *The Tiger is the World* hints at personal sources and

certainly surges forth from personal necessity, even as it narrates the destiny of the tiger both as an animal and as a multifaceted metaphor that should be — or should have been — useful to us.

The founding act, as recounted in “The Tiger in the Market,” occurs when the poet spots a “plush tiger” when he is an adult, after a childhood in which he had never been given a single toy. Upon the sight of the stuffed animal, he tells us, “the sun I’d forgotten existed shone out from his markings, and instantly I knew I’d experience everything there is to experience in love. He returned me to the refuge of childhood, brought me comfort and restored my optimism. Finally I was able to roar and to sing, to strike out with my pack, to nourish my soul and my body with blood.”

The passage illustrates the tiger’s autobiographical significance as well as the irony that sometimes lightens poems with serious import. Uniting with the tiger’s being, with a “world” that is no longer a hostile steppe or a menacing jungle but rather a “refuge,” enables the poet to become himself, at least for a while. Diminishing, with the tiger’s help, the various separations that he feels is thus a kind of initiatory rite to self-realization. And Bilosnic traces other aspects of the tiger’s psychological and creative influence on him, including his feelings of helplessness when it is absent. The second section, “The Tiger’s Eyes,” notably relates how the tiger leaves the poet, perhaps for good. Alluding to the creativity spawned by the aforementioned “first word,” Bilosnic notes: “Watching him depart, I feel my tongue fall out. I no longer have a heart: it’s a yellow leaf in the snow. By accident I found myself pushed into this tunnel, into the night, covered by the tiny bristles of a dream through which the tiger came, like a child that screams after being awakened.” The tiger is intimately linked to both life and writing.

Alongside the tiger’s implications for a specific self is its mythic, cosmic, and transcendent character. Drawing on symbolism from various spiritual and philosophical traditions, including Christianity, Bilosnic delineates various metaphysical tigers, as in “The Tiger on a Throne of Snow”:

*The tiger emerges from out of himself
and lies down on the shadow of his love.
The tiger fascinates with the white frost of his whiskers
and looks through the crown of an orange.
The tiger is the judge who judges afresh.
The tiger sits on a throne of snow.
The tiger is the truth of a painted star.
The tiger loves and conceives happiness.*

*The tiger lives as a consolation to time.
To put it in a single word:
The tiger is the world.*

Other poems highlight different metaphysical tasks or responsibilities. The animal takes on additional, sometimes mutually contradictory, attributes in every new poem or prose poem, to the extent that its composite portrait is not so much full-rounded as kaleidoscopic — which is, once again, how Otherness can appear to us. The tiger cannot be captured as a single entity, however complex, and kept in a cage. Probably it cannot be captured whatsoever, except in the most ordinary sense. Still other poems evoke tigers as we know them on this earth, in their animality, their non-humanness:

*He is not interested in impersonal things.
He's devoted to the body.
He's devoted to the game,
during which he thinks about nothing.
For him nothing lasts longer than an instant
in which every shape deceives,
every impression is an illusion,
everything is like a bit of fluff in your palm —
captivating and real.*

Yet the negative comparison in the first line and the simile in the penultimate line show that the very act of describing the tiger-in-itself reveals as much about how we imagine the animal to be as about how it might truly be; and this and other poems suggest that the tiger is essentially an object of our expectations and, arguably, desires. The tiger discloses us, exhibits us, as at the zoo where the poet sees a tiger and is “not impressed.” Intricacies of subjectivity and objectivity underlie these thought-provoking pieces which, moreover, sketch an overarching narrative: as in our real world, mankind ultimately makes of the tiger “something he's never been” and the animal vanishes at the end. The second-to-last prose poem, “We Need the Tiger,” opens up a perspective on this extinction: “Because the tiger does not exist, there is a story about him.” This fine volume should be meditated on and discussed.

John Taylor: *A Little Tour through European Poetry*, Published 2017 by Routledge, London and New York, 109 - 112.

KARL KVIKCO (New Mexico, United States) ■ *THE TIGER IS THE WORLD*

TWELVE YEARS ago Xenos Books received a translation into English of an unusual book of poems. As a small publishing house inspired by the idea of producing alternative literature – alternative to the mass-market best-sellers – we specialized in experimental writing in English and translations of original foreign writers little known in America. By that time we had translations from Spanish, Italian, German, Norwegian, Macedonian, Hungarian and Maltese. This book, with the original title *Tigar, pjesme*, was the first and only submission we received from Croatia. The author was Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić; the translator – Đurđa Vukelić-Rožić. The manuscript contained 134 poems arranged in six sections with texts in both Croatian and English. I started reading casually, just skimming over the short pieces, taking note of the Slavic language I didn't know and comparing it with Russian, which I do know, more or less.

I read about a little boy who had never received a toy, who lived through cold winters and seemed to be moving through life without any purpose or memory. One day, after having grown up, he went in a market to get a soft drink and saw a fluffy tiger. Suddenly the sun shone on his face, his barren childhood filled with warmth and comfort, and he felt a surge of courage and hope for his life ahead. He was awakened, befriended, empowered by what appears to have been a stuffed tiger for sale in the store, but the poet doesn't actually describe what he saw. He leaves open the possibility that the "plush tiger" could have been the real thing, or a vision of the real thing. And there begins a series of illuminations and experiences with the tiger told poem by poem. There unfolds a romance with the most beautiful, powerful and inspiring wild animal in the world.

As a boy who grew up in Washington DC only blocks away from the Smithsonian Zoological Park, I knew something of the magic of the tiger communicated by the author. I visited the zoo so often it was my home away from home. The tiger was my favorite animal, not the lion, and I imagined that if I ran into a lion on the sidewalk he would kill me without a moment's hesitation; but if a tiger, he would understand me; and if he killed me he would have a good reason. That meant he was the superior cat who understood more than the lion.

The reason for the distinction, I think, both for me and the poet, is that the tiger, whether male or female, is a solitary beast wandering great distances through the jungle, the fields, the taiga; whereas the lion is a pack animal, usually lying on the ground among other overheated brutes and shaking off the flies. The tiger has mystery; the lion has brute force. So they appeared even in the zoo, where tigers might be forced to share their cage with others. The lion stares through the bars at you for a long time with only one thing in mind; the tiger stares at you with many things in mind, and usually loses interest in you quickly. The tiger's usually thinking about something else.

My interest stimulated by that first poem, I continued to skim the manuscript, but discovered that this poet ranged far beyond my childhood conceptions. He strives to capture all of the facets of the beast, but not put them into a logical order, or even into a consistent narration. There is ferocity, there is tenderness, there is loneliness, there is spite, there is quiriness, there is pissing backwards, there is humor, there is celestial mystery, there is subterranean force. There are so many moods and aspects of the tiger that the human mind cannot encompass them. Hence in the outpouring of these poems the tiger becomes godlike, sometimes kind and merciful, sometimes not, but unconcerned about the confines of human thinking. Poetically, this is an astonishing feat.

The poet writes:

The tiger is his own source.
 The tiger is his own goal.
 The tiger makes himself.
 The tiger makes his offspring.

The tiger is the foundation of life:
 he is its mystical nature.

The tiger is the power:
 he is what he is,
 he comes when he comes,
 he stays when he stays,
 and he stays when he leaves.

The tiger is every feeling.
The tiger is every faculty.
The tiger is every value.
He is the I of myself.

From poems that assign universal qualities, Bilosnic turns to poems that seek the spirit of individual features:

Unceasingly crystals adorn the sky: these are the tiger's eyes... O Lord, as I dream, the tiger's eyes become stars travelling to the other end of the earth... The sky is full of bright skulls: the tiger's eyes, the creatures moving in the night.

And again:

A tongue of fire: the tongue of a tiger. Big as the morning sun rising at the mountaintop, it pants and licks the irises lining the edge of the sky. It rolls up the blue like a ball, and as it does the tiger head disappears and reappears, as if the old tiger were eating himself up.

Then, heavy from the sky kisses, the tongue suffocates everything around him in its cradle, turns everything into white ash, into thin air.

Among these transcendent images, the relationship between the poet and his companion develop almost naturally, almost like a man with a large and unruly pet; but at other times it takes leave of normal conceptions and defies comprehension. The tiger is ice, he's snow, he's coiling snakes, he's the keys on the typewriter, he's in the blood, he's in the heart, then he's licking the author's face like a big dog. Amusingly, he enters a book on a shelf and criticizes all the poets and novelists, expels them from the book and makes its binding the walls of his lair. He appears in paintings, he appears on the street, he appears in newspaper reports and political speeches, and in this way he is falsified. The point is made repeatedly that the tiger is a god roaming the earth on his own terms, incomprehensible to all lesser forms.

The adoration of the tiger that pours out in this collection is astonishing in itself. It does not hold back: it is here only metaphorical, but there metaphysical; here childlike and innocent, but there deeply personal and disturbing. Above all, it is honest. It says just about everything that a rhapsodic poet could say about a huge and magnificent cat, radiant orange with black stripes, the like of which

there is none other, who drives the poet out of his mind with confused love, awe, worship, need, desire to emulate, gratitude.

Obviously Bilosnić is not afraid of literary critics, not afraid to express feelings that might be considered by an unkind reader as infantile, helpless, mad, because he is certain that he is reaching feelings that other poets have not reached before. What is it that excites you when you see a redwing blackbird suddenly land on a branch, cock its head and emit its unique gurgle? What makes you feel happy when you see the little sparrow skipping, revulsed but fascinated when you lift a board and see a centipede uncoiling? What is so endearing about elephants, the scene of the mother caressing her baby with her trunk? Elephants kill scores of people every year. What is the thrill of wildlife? Why millions of birders, fishers, hunters? Magnify that thrill hundreds of times when you spiritually merge with a Siberian tiger who enters your cabin quietly one evening and jumps up on your couch. It may be a mania, an obsession, the poet may need a psychiatrist, but how else will we get the feel of it?

Needless to say, I was thrilled to have the chance to publish this book. Xenos Books did not have offices on three floors, typists and editors spread out at their work stations across a great hall. Xenos Books, in fact, consisted of myself and my wife, and we had just moved to a very small house in New Mexico, since we could not afford the rent in California. But, thankfully, friends of Croatian literature lent a hand – or rather, eyes, ears and understanding. The original translation was good, but not always vernacular. Rožić had studied in Chicago back in the late 1970s and was fluent in English, but I wanted to rephrase some lines here and there. My attempts to do so – with attention to the original – involved accessing two Croatian dictionaries on the Internet and consulting with Julienne Bušić, Terra Chapek and Sanja Knežević. Needless to say, Croatian is not Russian, so though I may have thought I had a feeling for the original text, I really needed their help. The Croatian Ministry of Culture provided a grant for the translation, and Anton Kikas, another friend of Croatian literature, made a donation to help with the printing, since, as I mentioned, Xenos Books was, shall we say, not affluent.

The manuscript was received in 2010, the Chinese Year of the Tiger. The final version of the work was ready in 2012. In keeping with the theme, it had a more aggressive title: *The Tiger Is the World*, taken from one of the poems. The final ninety-six poems and prose poems are arranged in five parts: I. The Tiger Speaks From My Mouth, II. The Tiger's Eyes, III. The Tiger's Dream, IV. Be a Tiger, V. The Tiger at Midnight. This year, 2022, as we celebrate ten years since publica-

tion and the 75th year of the author, is the current Chinese Year of the Tiger. This must be a good sign.

The book is more than raptures about the big cat, or to put it another way, the raptures of this book make a great deal of sense. What better advice can there be than the following:

BE A TIGER

Be a tiger, be yellow, leave stripes all the way to Transylvania. Find yourself, go wherever you want. Light a fire and don't rely on your previous experience.

Don't be broken by war. Don't expect world fame, but also don't lose a single battle. Be a tiger, divorce yourself from the human race. You don't know what a cage is, you're not weighed down with obligations, you don't have a hat rack or a boot tree.

Put your hope in the grass, the forest, the birds fluttering around, the wound-up buzzing bees. Be a tiger, brassy, no-nonsense, make tracks all the way to India.

Is this advice literal? That's for each recipient to decide. Here is a more mysterious message:

FIVE TIGERS

The first tiger guards the North.

The second guards the South.

The third is in the Land of the Rising Sun.

The fourth is in the Land of the Setting Sun.

The fifth guards the Earth's Core.

Thus five tigers guard the Kingdom.

The first tiger guards the Light.

The second guards Love.

The third is at the Wellspring of Peace.

The fourth is at the Confluence of Secrets.
 The fifth tiger guards the Force of Nature.

Thus five tigers stand at the Heart of the World.

What can this mean in non-poetic, practical terms? Tiger conservationists say that *Felis tigris* is needed because it is the top predator in its ecosystem, and a healthy tiger population ensures a healthy environment for other species of animals, a healthy water table and air for people to drink and breathe. So the tiger guarding the four corners of the Earth is not just inspirational fancy. If proper measures are taken to conserve an ecosystem with such a roaming predator, then that great cat practically, objectively, factually guards all those square miles. And if *el tigre* of South America, the jaguar, is assisted in saving the Brazilian rainforest, which produces one-fifth of the oxygen on Earth, then in fact existentially needed water and air are guarded. And so for all the other natural resources on which all human beings depend: reverence of the wildlife, conservation of the wildlife, of which the tiger is the apex, will work to save massively destructive *Homo sapiens* from destroying itself. The project therefore is how to organize its seven and a half billion specimens in a sensible and mutually beneficial way. And into that category of mutual benefit must go the tiger and all other wildlife.

Yet there is a reverse side to the equation. The tiger, in a sense, is the canary in the coal mine. If the canary dies, there are noxious gasses in the air and people must leave immediately. (*Nota bene*: they can leave a coal mine; they can't leave the oxygen-filled world.) Most of us will never see a tiger in the wild, and maybe we don't want to, but we need to know that it is out there in order for the other beasts to be wild. Tigers, leopards, snow leopards, all the great cats, all the great beasts – they hold the human world together. They hold the history of mankind together. They hold the human mind together. If mankind is so perverse, self-conflicted and worthless that it would hunt down and drive out of existence the one creature it idolizes, the one it once hailed as the king of the jungle, the solar god reigning over the beasts of the earth, then it cannot save anything.

So long as there are tigers in the wild there is a living link to all the stories, paintings, metaphors, poetry, music and movies inspired by tiger-awe, tiger-love, that have flourished since the beast was first sighted as a streak of orange moving through tall green grass. The poems of Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić are a worthy addition to this ancient and modern lore. To my mind they are unique and wonderful, and I am sorry that Xenos Books was unable to publicize them as they de-

served. People on the other side of the ocean probably think that every publisher in America has a building in New York City. No, more often it's a garage in a little town. At the turn of the century, the small presses in America, taken together, did constitute a vibrant movement of original literature, but those days are over. The mass-market entertainment complex has flattened it in the first two decades of this century. We were lucky to publish Bilosnić, Alfredo de Palchi, Bogomil Gjuzel, Imre Oravec, Edvard Hoem, Rachid Boudjedra, Emil Draitser, and in addition translations of Vicente Huidobro, Oliverio Girondo, Antonio Porta and even Dante Alighieri (the first translation of *La vita nuova* into American English). With a big building on Madison Avenue, a pack of diligent publicists and teams of active secretaries, we could have made more than a few of the authors of Xenos publications more famous. But right now our roof is leaking.

In the first four parts of *The Tiger Is the World*, the poems run along like a musical suite with changes of color, tone and mood, but in the last part the poet is obliged to consider the fate of the glorious hero in a world of overpopulation, environmental devastation and poaching of wild animals for the physical acquisition of their supposed magical properties: tigers, lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, bears, pangolins, cobras. Instead of drawing spiritual inspiration from the strength and beauty of the tiger, millions of people stupefied by the superstitions of Traditional Chinese Medicine think that they can gain strength, sexual virility and improved eyesight by consuming the associated parts of its body. Bilosnić contemplates the end, and the last poems are painful to read. Allow me to conclude this tribute to the poet, then, by quoting a hopeful poem before the final set, or perhaps the last poem that expresses the last hope:

FILLING THE WORLD WITH TIGERS

It is time for us to count the tigers,
time for them to expand their bodies
to the size of the full moon.

We could fill the whole earth
with the light of the moon
and complete it with tigers,
or at least with their thoughts.

If we increased the number of tigers,
we might double the art of love.
Then we could put it in a ring
and be forever in its embrace.

Thank you for these visions, Tomislav Marijan Bilosnić!

Las Cruces, New Mexico

17 March 2022

FROM CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN POETRY

MARINA ŠUR PUHLOVSKI ■ POESÍA

Dios mío como disfruto de sí misma

(Bože, kako uživam u sebi)

Dios mío como disfruto de sí misma
No es normal
En la noche
Cuando apago la televisión
Porque soy un maníaco de ella
Me quedo en silencio
Con poca luz
Para disfrutar en sí misma
De lo que soy
El cigarrillo
El vino
Y yo
Única
En todo el mundo

Irrepetible

Aún escribiré un libro de poemas

(Još ću napisati knjigu pjesama)

Aún escribiré un libro de poemas
Ahora
Durante la vejez
Que no es romántica para nada

Porque todo ha mostrado
Qué es
Y cómo es
Todo se ha descubierto
Todas las ilusiones
Que se pudieron cantar
Quedaron tan sólo decepciones
Prosa diaria
Que se burla de ti

Y de dónde entonces se coló el poema
Sin ser invitado
Ni buscado
Un poco vergonzoso
Para esos años serios
Cuando se cuentan
Enfermedades
Y arrugas

Quizás
Se coló del mañana
De la nada

De una futura infancia

El poeta lleva los poemas en el bolsillo
(Pjesnik nosi pjesme u džepu)

El poeta lleva los poemas en el bolsillo
Porque los poemas son como las actrices
Deben aparecer
Tienen que pasear
Hay que admirarlas
Para que vivan

Y los prosistas son como los topos
Hurgan en la oscuridad
Nos los verás
Sueñan en el subsuelo

Poema perdido
(Izguhljena pjesma)

Me molesta
Que un poema se ha perdido
Que fui tan descuidada
Buen poema
Bueno
Si por lo menos fuera malo
Podría dejar de lamentar por él

¿Y por qué no puedo acordarme de él?
Tan sólo recuerdo que era
Triste
No alegre
Quizás por eso
Lo he perdido

Contaba
Cómo me movía
De pared
A pared
Sólo paredes
Sin puertas
Que tiene hasta la cárcel
Hasta la prisión

¿Y dónde está ahora?
¿A dónde se fue
Ese poema olvidado,

Que sin embargo fue creado?
¿Sigue vivo todavía?

¿O no?
Porque no hay ni huella de él
En ningún lado, salvo en mí
Y eso es triste

Como la línea de la plancha en la ropa

Saliendo de la desesperación (Izvlačenje iz beznada)

En el día nublado y lluvioso
Durante la primavera
Prepara panqueques
Quizás te saquen de la
Desesperación

Mira las flores en el balcón
Quizás les viene bien la lluvia
Quizás te saquen de la
Desesperación

O escribe un poema
Sobre la lluvia y la desesperación
Durante la primavera

Cambia la desesperación
Por felicidad
Poética

La vida poética

(Pjesnički život)

Esa vida poética
Es maravillosa
Porque la tristeza,
Mientras se escribe de ella,
Se borra

Como si la tristeza
Escrita
Pasara a otra dimensión
Donde se hace alegre
Siendo tristeza

Es alegre
Porque es comprendida

La loca

(Luda)

Esa loca que busca un lápiz
Porque no lo tiene
Y papel
Porque no lo tiene
Consigo en la calle
Dónde se me ocurrió
Soy yo

Lápices cuántos quieras
Papel cuánto quieras
Pero cuando los necesitas urgentemente
No los hay
Dijo
La vendedora en el quiosco
En el que hay de todo

Quizás huyen de mí
Papeles y lápices
O yo huyo de ellos
Para que no nos encontremos
Unidos dibujando
El mapa del mundo del más allá
Que no nos salvará

Tan sólo así
Nos parecerá

A veces visito mi felicidad anterior
(Ponekad svratim do svoje bivše sreće)

A veces visito
Mi felicidad anterior
Como a la casa del placer
Todavía está allá
Todavía es la misma
Toda hecha de momentos

Que siga así
Que viva
Aunque me ha dejado

¿Porque, qué pasaría
Sí tu tampoco estuvieras
Mi felicidad perdida?

Tan sólo un paseo marítimo
Al final del tiempo pasado

Lo que ya no tengo
(Ono čega više nemam)

Ahora vivo con
Lo que ya no tengo
Y esta es una vida rara

No es infeliz
Porque no sufro
Pero tampoco feliz
He perdido algo

Pero me alegro de lo que fue
Como si todavía existiera
Y ahora que ha desaparecido

El mar
Se extiende en la lejanía
Hasta el Cielo
Con el que se une

Y en medio
Un barco
Y nosotros dos
En él
Él está pescando
Y yo lo miro

Y esto es todo lo que
Necesito

Real e irreal

(Stvaran i nestvaran)

Todavía te veo en la calle
Tu figura
Alargada como una sombra
Estás aquí
Aunque hayas desaparecido

Ahora eres irreal
Pero sigues siendo real
Porque si no fuera así, ¿cómo te vería?

¿Y cómo quisiera lo que
Veo en la calle
Que no eres tú
Pero sigues siéndolo?

¿Cómo se entendería eso?

Por la calle
En la que no estás
Vienes constantemente
Como una sombra
En esa figura alargada
Que es todo lo que deseo

Hasta ahora
Cuando no te deseo

Porque has desaparecido

Encuentro entre las estrellas

(Susret među zvijezdama)

En la pradera nocturna
En la inmovilidad
Encontré las estrellas desde el barco

Ya no hay barco
No hay navegación
Ni el querido
Ni el amor
Pero, las estrellas todavía están aquí
Iguales, en el mar y en la pradera

Y con ellas todo está aquí
 El mar
Y la navegación
Y el querido
Y el amor que ha desaparecido

Y ahora en la noche
En la pradera
Yo la de hoy
Y yo la de antes
Nos encontramos
Entre las estrellas del barco

Alegres

Soñé con el frío final

(Sanjala sam konačnu hladnoću)

Soñé con el frío final
No pueden ni imaginar cómo fue

No hay invierno
En el que es tan frío
En el que todo es tan indiferente
Tan alejado de este mundo
Tan definitivamente insensible

¿Pues, he soñado eso?

Al alma después de la muerte
El alma que se ha ido

Mi querido a mí lado
Transformado
En la nada

La torre en la arena

(Kula na pijesku)

De repente
Todo se derrumbó
Se preparó mucho tiempo
Frente a mí se quebró
Pero cuando cayó
Fue de repente

Insoportable
Horrible

Mientras está parado
Como una torre en la arena
Agrietada
Todavía hay esperanza

Pero cuando se derrumba
Ha terminado

Entonces ves
Como las partes regadas
De nuevo se unen
En una nueva construcción
Nueva torre en la arena

Para ti
Tuya

El vino de la vida
(Vino života)

Bebo mi vida
Como vino
Y de ninguna manera
Puedo terminar de beberla

La garganta está siempre seca
Dirían los borrachos
Entre más bebes
Tienes más sed

De ninguna manera puedo
Emborracharme

Y olvidar

Árbol sagrado

(Sveto drvo)

Del árbol de tilo quedó
Tan sólo un árbol seco
Solamente el esqueleto

¿Quién mató
El árbol de tilo?

Dicen
La vecina de la planta baja
Le cubría la luz
Le quitaba ese poco de sol
Cuando estaba lleno de hojas
Era precioso

Ahora la hiedra
Cubrió el árbol de tilo en el patio
Oculta su cuerpo desnudo
Ya no lo miramos

El árbol de tilo
Es de nuevo verde

Alimenta
Los pájaros
Las abejas
Ese tilo de hiedra

Pero yo
En el balcón
En vano espero junio
Para sentir el olor del tilo

Ya no olerá
Nunca

El último día de la vida

(Zadnji dan života)

Vive cada día
Como si fuera el último día de tu vida
Dicen los sabios

Y yo me pregunto qué haría
En ese último día de mi vida
Qué no hago normalmente
Para agotarla

Una copa de vino
Cigarrillo
La vista desde el balcón con flores
Un poco de comida
Y de recuerdos

Y el poema
Sobre el día
Que no puedo entender

Porque el último día
No existe

Bendita entre las paredes

(Blažena među zidovima)

Los armarios están arreglados
Ropa para el verano
Ropa para el invierno
Lo corto
Lo largo
Lo colgado
Lo doblado

Todo en su lugar
Todo dispuesto

El desorden superado
El peligro
Más grande de lo que queremos reconocer
Por ahora ha sido evitado

Y yo
Muerta de cansancio
Sentada bendita
Entre las paredes

A mi perrito
(Mom psiću)

¿Cómo darle
Más vida
De la qué tiene?
¿Cómo?

Quizás esta es suficiente
Vida para él
Y a mí me parece
Que es poco
Lo que para él es mucho

Me torturo por nada

Tiempo para morir
(Vrijeme za umiranje)

Probé todo
Viví todo
¿Puedo morir ahora?

No digo que lo quiero
Pero quizás es el mejor tiempo
Ahora
Cuando la fruta está madura
Cuando se puede comer

Lo peor es
Cuando se pudre

El libro
(Knjizi)

Saliste al mundo
Y ahora arréglatela
Como puedas

Ya no te puedo ayudar

Te di todo lo que se puede dar
Todo lo que sabía
Todo lo que tenía
Todo lo que viví
Y lo que no sé
También te lo di
Lo que no tengo
Lo que no probé
Eso se añadió

Eso en ti quizá se transformará
En conocimiento
Experiencia
Propiedad
Todo es cuestión de conversión

Nunca sabes que saldrá
De lo que has plantado
Cuando eche raíces
En otro

Adiós ahora
Ya no nos vamos a encontrar
Salvo de paso
Cerca de la estantería

De la antología poética *Neponovljiva / Irrepetible*

Traducción: Željka Lovrenčić

Marina Šur Puhlovski nació en Zagreb en el 1948. En su ciudad natal terminó el liceo y se graduó en literatura comparada y filosofía en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Publicó su primer cuento en 1976, su primer libro en 1991. Continuamente escribe desde 1996 – novelas, cuentos, ensayos, crónicas de viajes, poemas, prosa... Es ganadora de diferentes premios por sus cuentos cortos, ensayos, una novela no publicada... (Ž.L.).

EVELINA RUDAN ■ POESIA

Degli uccelli educati e ogni altro tesoro

(O pristojnim pticama i svakom drugom dobru)

Dunque, allaccia la cintura e avvolgiti in un cappotto di buona fattura
prima di partire, sono cose da fare assolutamente,
in particolare se ti metti in viaggio d'inverno
e se insieme a te partono anche i chiacchieroni.
Portati il termos con un po' di tè caldo
metti i biscotti in un sacchetto,
e prendi per ogni evenienza una matita,
forse il letto curvilineo del fiume, il suo luccichio intravvisto per un attimo ti potrà ispirare,
o forse no.

Dunque, mettiti in viaggio e taci:

indipendentemente dai chiacchieroni dai quali ti sei protetto,
indipendentemente dal dolore che ti provocano gli scossoni,
indipendentemente da tutte le cose che potrebbero spingerti a parlare o a esclamare.
Rivolgì lo sguardo attento a ciò che s'intravede fuori
concentrati, la testa accuratamente rivolta al finestrino
prima o dopo all'orizzonte appariranno gli uccelli educati,
uccelli educati e ogni altro tesoro.

La Terra, la freccia e tutto il resto

(Zemlja, strijela i ostalo)

non un saggio – quelli sono altri
e non un sapiente – quelli sono tutti
non un boccale di birra – quelli sono tristi
e non un fazzoletto – quelli sono rari

sii il sonaglio di un sonnolento sciamano
che ascolta la scura freccia
conficcata nella terra
(lo hanno già detto ma in modo diverso
e mentre lo dicevano erano tristi)
dunque, infilzata nella terra
nella terra di un monte senza neve
e vedi un abete piegato
che si tende
si tende per poter vedere
vedere un cavalluccio marino.

Ars amatoria

Quando mi sdraio e mi sistemo in modo
da incassare la schiena nell'incavo della pancia del mio uomo,
mentre la tetta s'incasta tra i denti appena spuntati del neonato,
accade che i miei fianchi si allarghino, l'arco del corpo si allunghi
e mi sento felice come se stessi in un caldo gomitolino
il cui filo non aggrovigliato le Arienne stentano a sbrogliare
perché in questa storia loro non ci sono
e non ci sono nemmeno il minotauro, il labirinto, né quelle altre cose orribili
che nascono nei libri,
e loro, quei libri, si staccherebbero piuttosto la coda a morsi
che ammettere che sono tette che servono ad allattare
o incavi della pancia che servono a sistemarti
e che questa è una cosa bella
direi che ha un modo d'essere bello rotondo,
e non me ne starei da sola con me stessa,
ma questo non lo scrivo,
perché almeno un libro che non sia un manuale di scrittura creativa,
possa osannare i sancta simplicitas
in senso lato
fino a che ancora può
così calda, le vene allargate e

il sangue fluente perché chissà dietro a quale angolo
si nascondono gli eroi di quegli altri libri che
non mi lascerò sfuggire, ah no.

La barca
(Brod)

quando sarà finalmente finita questa barca che si costruisce per gli amici
io, meno marina o fluviale di lui, costruirò una fattoria e
comprerò dei cavalli
anch'io per i gli amici, i miei amici,
tutti i miei amici impareranno ad andare al trotto e al galoppo o faranno quello che gli pare
potranno semplicemente andare a passeggio insieme ai cavalli bianchi
perché comprerò dei cavali bianchi e li allevherò
sui pascoli si diffonderanno amici e cavalli
alcuni mormoreranno, altri chiacchiereranno, ad altri invece
per via dello sforzo, inizierà a pulsare la vena al centro della fronte,
ma sarà uno sforzo allegro, sudato sotto al sole
che li brucerà e questo sforzo avrà stampato su di sé un sorriso e due occhi
fatti così come li disegnano i bambini delle elementari
quando hanno come tema disegnate l'estate
andrà tutto bene, sia con i pascoli, sia con i cavalli, con gli amici
con me
almeno fin a quando non inizieremo con la semina, e avremo da fare con la casa, le tende
ma c'è ancora tempo fino ad allora
perché neanche la sua barca è finita di costruire.

Dalla raccolta *Pristojne ptice (Uccelli educati)*, VBZ, Zagabria, 2008

Cuocio il pane

(Pečem Kruh)

Cuocio il pane ogni giorno.

Prima lo impasto

E osservo le mie mani affondare nella farina,
nella farina e nell'acqua.

Mentre impasto, schiaccio, rimpasto,
sotto le unghie

si forma una piccola crosta di pasta.

Una sottile crosta di pasta che assomiglia a una sottile mezzaluna

Mi s'infiltra tra la pelle e le unghie

E si accomoda lì finché non la lavo via.

Ho iniziato ad allungare il tempo,

il tempo che passa tra il momento dell'impasto e il lavaggio delle mani:
mi siedo al tavolo della cucina e aspetto.

Quindi rimpasto, e aspetto di nuovo
olio la teglia

vi sistemo dentro la pasta

la metto nel forno.

E ancora non vorrei levare quella secca

Piccola crosticina.

Non vorrei levarla perché è lei che si ricorda di me.

Si ricorda di me così come, dicono, ricorda l'acqua,
come ricorda la mattina,

come ricordano le erbe profumate

sulle quali sono giaciuta

coperta da una giacca azzurra.

***Dalla raccolta "Smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano"
(ballata a singhiozzo)***

Smiljko i ja si mahnemo (Balada na mahove)

2.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
 e l'asfalto e il lavoro sbiadiscono
 lui cammina di nuovo poggiando prima il tacco e poi la punta
 (trent'anni dopo mio figlio maggiore camminerà nello stesso modo)
 vedran ed io ridiamo
 e facciamo finta di essere degli indiani che cercano delle vacche seguendone le tracce
 le mucche sono domestiche ed è facile ritrovarle
 ma noi interpretiamo i segni dei rametti spezzati
 le erbe calpestate, la terra rossa,
 interpretiamo e vedran spiega
 gli indiani sono quelli bravi, i cowboy sono cattivi
 sono venuti sulla loro terra, gli hanno portato via tutto
 concordo in linea di massima,
 ma mi soffermo ugualmente a pensare, questi cowboy saranno sì cattivi
 cattivi, ma più carini, a quelli carini io perdono tutto
 meno male che wayne è un cowboy
 e non è affatto bello, e quindi non c'è bisogno che gli si perdoni
 ma a cooper perdonerei sempre
 questo non lo dico però a vedran
 perché abbiamo ritrovato le mucche
 stavano lì dove ci avevano detto che le avremmo ritrovate
 presso stanzie, picelovo, boškić, halusovih parti¹
 smiljko cammina davanti e legge l'oro della fondazione
 (trent'anni dopo andrò a letto con un uomo)

¹ Tutte le poesie 40 poesie della raccolta "*Smiljko e io ci facciamo ciao con la mano*" che formano una sorta di lungo racconto o romanzo in versi, sono scritte nella variante del dialetto ciacavo della piccola località istriana Cere, vicino Gimino (Žminj). Il dialetto è stato arricchito con alcuni neologismi e termini presi in prestito da altre varianti del ciacavo. Le poesie e sono puntualmente seguite da delle note che includono sia il vocabolario delle parole dialettali, sia, a volte, le spiegazioni che diventano a loro volta dei sottotesti, appunti autoreferenziali tendenti ad ampliare, se possibile, il senso di alcuni concetti espressi nei versi. In questo caso l'autrice ricorda nella nota che si tratta di microtoponimi, e commenta: "nel primo luogo si dorme meglio, nel secondo il profumo del fieno risulta più intenso, nel terzo c'è tanta ombra e si sta al fresco".

che sogna i passi di golan trevize)²
ma a quel tempo non lo sappiamo
mio fratello gli saltella dietro³
tutti i nostri cari sono ancora vivi
e ci sgrideranno
chiedendoci perché siamo in ritardo, dove cavolo ci eravamo cacciati
che diavolo ci facciamo in giro a quest'ora

7.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
e solo un attimo dopo
ecco che arriva una lada bianca ovvero una mille e tre
ovvero quel che è, insomma una vettura grande
da cui saltano fuori smiljko e vedran
in calzoncini e calzini bianchi
calzoni corti e maglia con le maniche lunghe
ma chi l'ha vista mai una roba del genere
non s'è mai vista una roba del genere
smettere gli abiti invernali
cominciando a svestirsi le gambe e non le braccia
non diventerò mai una vera donna
non so preparare un dolce come sa fare mia cugina
e non so tenere in mano una scopa come fa la mia vicina
e non so se voglio sposarmi
o diventare suora
ti toccherà portare la gonna lo stesso
sbraita mia madre dalla camera accanto
ah, no, proprio no, le mie suore indossano le brache
smiljko e vedran non sanno che cosa sia una suora
un giorno glielo spiegherò, ora però andiamo

² Nota dell'autrice: "golan trevize – personaggio minore de *L'orlo della Fondazione* e il personaggio che ha dato il titolo a uno splendido brano jazz".

³ Nel testo originale l'autrice usa la parola dialettale ciacava **cuflija** e commenta ad uso del lettore croato: "intraducibile ma proviamoci: sarebbe il modo di camminare di uno che essendo piccolo si muove come se stesse dondolando e saltando nello stesso momento, mentre cerca di rimanere al passo con qualcuno che è più grande di lui per provare a raggiungerlo senza riuscirci".

a raccogliere i funghi
vi bagnerete bambini
sì ci bagneremo
e tutti i nostri cari messi in fila
si metteranno a fissarci vedendoci tornare così tutti bagnati.

8.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
gli faccio segno di venire a prendere un caffè
ride: verrà, verrà
ma un attimo dopo
già lo vedo che se ne sta seduto sul porco
ed io e vedran che ci mettiamo in posa
uno davanti, e uno dietro
ci farà una foto, col porco
io mescolerò il sangue affinché si raffreddi
vedran e mio fratello si sbronzeranno con il vino
e romperanno il vetro della porta
entrambi non capiranno di essersi ubriacati
e a me viene da ridere a vederli quanto sono stupidi loro che sono più grandi
e quanto stupidi rimarranno anche anni dopo
ma quella volta entrambi sono ancora vivi
e noi non ci stupiamo di nulla

9.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
si pianta di fronte al palazzo ed io lo guardo da su
lui mi guarda da giù
gli grido
devo andare a una riunione
mi grida: vai, vai,
gli grido

mi piacerebbe portarmi dietro la gagliarda⁴ perché mi faccia la guardia
mi grida
potatela, portatela
e io mi porto dietro la gagliarda, la lego davanti alla facoltà
e le offro un fascio di erba spagna
la gagliarda è troppo vivace
smiljko le fa:
oh mia cara, sei ancora viva, le dice
viva, viva, dico io, adesso mi farà la guardia
così come era solita fare nella piccola valle giù in mezzo ai campi
e tutti noi siamo la gagliarda paziente, la kiteša orgogliosa, la srnela testa matta⁵
e smiljko e vedran ed io
in mezzo alla grande e alla piccola valle nei campi due aceri
si toccano con le radici si toccano coi rami
i due tronchi insieme fanno una porta
e noi corriamo su e giù
fino al tramonto, fino alle stelle e al cielo
in fondo al tempo e incontro al buio
tutto intorno a noi è caldo e morbido
la terra è nostra il mondo è tutto nostro
e tutti i nostri cari sono ancora vivi

13.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
dai, vieni giù, gli faccio cenno
vengo, vengo, mi fa cenno
e kiteša, e kiterša, chiede
kiteša verrà con me
ma dove, chiede smiljko a gesti
ma dove

⁴ Gagliardo è uno dei nomi tipici che vengono dati al grande bue istriano. Gagliarda, femm. è il nome della mucca della razza istriana.

⁵ *Gagliarda, Kiteša e Srnela (Grigia)* sono tre nomi tradizionali che venivano affibbiati alle mucche istriane a seconda del carattere. Nel verso originale l'autrice si limita a elencare i nomi delle mucche mentre nelle note spiega quale nome corrisponde al preciso carattere di ciascun animale. Nella traduzione abbiamo ritenuto di poter aggiungere nel verso, le note caratteriali dell'animale accanto al loro nome.

a una riunione, a una riunione, spiego io
 ma che accidenti di riunione, fa segno smiljko
 di progetto, di progetto
 torno a fare segni io
 che devono progettare, chiede smiljko a gesti
 non una nave, rispondo io scherzando, non una nave
 le farò leggere andrea dowkin⁶
 pensi che le farà bene, mi fa segno smiljko
 non è una lettura adatta a lei, meglio farla leggere a srnela
 rispondo ridendo
 ma kiteša ha la pelle più calda ed è di color grigio cinerino
 e viene con me dappertutto
 dico, e sono già nei campi
 e kiteša mi lecca la testa
 la saliva gocciola come fosse rugiada, una rugiada pesante
 ho anche le gambe coperte di rugiada
 mi siedo su una giacca, la giacca odora di sigarette
 di sigarette e formaggio
 kiteša mi lecca
 oh mia cara, le dico, oh mia cara,
 ci salveremo io e te
 leggiamo goethe anche rakovac⁷ leggeva goethe
 non con gagliarda
 con kiteša piuttosto che con gagliarda
 con kiteša leggo goethe e tolstoj
 con gagliarda dostoevski e twain
 con srnela ćopić⁸ e kocbek⁹

⁶ Andrea Dowkin (*1946 - +2005) Femminista americana nota per fra l'altro per la sua analisi della portnografia.

⁷ Milan Rakovac (1939), scrittore, poeta, giornalista, opinionista e traduttore croato di origine istriana, promotore, fra l'altro, degli Incontri internazionali di Frontiera Forum Tomizza, che si tengono regolarmente da più di vent'anni, fra Italia, Slovenia e Croazia.

⁸ Branko Ćopić (*1915- +1984) scrittore bosniaco di origine serba.

⁹ Edvard Kocbek (*1904 - +1981) poeta, scrittore, pubblicista, attivista politico antifascista sloveno. Le sue novelle dedicate alla guerra partigiana „Strah in pogun“ avevano suscitato a suo tempo scandalo per le posizioni critiche nei confronti di alcuni episodi poco limpidi della guerra di liberazione dal nazifascismo.

da sola leggo kosovel¹⁰ e balota¹¹
stanno meglio insieme srečko¹² e zvane¹³
ma questo avrò modo di scoprirlo più tardi
andrić¹⁴ da leggere in viaggio e sotto il gelso
per andare per i campi e per i boschi è adatto krleža¹⁵
lungo i sentieri ombrosi crnjanski¹⁶
prever è per quando io sono innamorata, e lui no
lorca per quando lui è innamorato, e io no
trakl per il mattino, rilke per il pranzo
il salmo per la sera
balzac per ogni giorno che ci è dato e il riposo assicurato
vitez¹⁷ come augurio che non ci siano più guerre
chesterton per conservare la ragione
christie per morire, zagorka¹⁸ per l'azione
sienkiewicz idem, scott altroché

¹⁰ Sečko Kosovel (*1904 – 1926) una delle più grandi voci della poesia moderna slovena ed europea. Sperimentatore, dadaista ed espressionista, nella sua breve vita è stato poeta politico che ha resistito all'italianizzazione forzata della popolazione di lingua slovena nelle aree del confine orientale annesse all'Italia nel 1918.

¹¹ Mate Balota, pseudonimo di Mijo Mirković (*1889 - +1963) poeta istriano, membro dell'Accademia croata delle Arti e delle Scienze, viene considerato uno dei maggiori poeti croati del Ventesimo secolo.

¹² Kosovel cfr. Alla nota 10.

¹³ Zvane Črnja (*1920 - +1991) importante poeta, scrittore e pubblicista croato di origine istriana. Si è distinto fra l'altro anche per la sua attività di drammaturgo, sceneggiatore e promotore di eventi culturali.

¹⁴ Ivo Andrić (*1892 – +1975) scrittore e diplomatico bosniaco., vincitore, nel 1961, del Premio Nobel per la letteratura “per la forza epica con la quale ha tracciato temi e descritto destini umani tratti dalla storia del proprio Paese”. Dalla motivazione del Premio. Cfr. The Nobel Prize in Literature 1961, su NobelPrize.org.

¹⁵ Miroslav Krleža (*1883 - +1981) uno dei più importanti romanzieri e drammaturghi croati. I suoi celebri lavori teatrali, che rappresento la crisi della società borghese e dei suoi falsi valori, vengono regolarmente rappresentati e continuano ad essere tutt'ora estremamente attuali.

¹⁶ Miloš Crnjanski (*1893 - +1977) poeta e scrittore serbo e una delle più interessanti voci dell'espressionismo del suo Paese.

¹⁷ Grigor Vitez (*1911 - + 1966) poeta e scrittore per l'infanzia croato. Il riferimento riguarda la sua poesia *Epitaf vojniku koji je pao u času potpisivanja primirja* (Epitaffio al soldato caduto nel momento della firma dell'armistizio). Per questo motivo viene invocato come antidoto contro tutte le guerre.

¹⁸ Marija Jurić Zagorka (*1873 - + 1857) giornalista e prolifica romanziera croata, è stata una delle prime intellettuali ad essersi battuta contro la discriminazione delle donne nella società croata, la prima ad essere riuscita ad entrare nel Parlamento croato di cui ha seguito le sedute in qualità di giornalista. A scandalizzare la bigotta società croata dell'epoca, era anche il fatto che fosse solita indossare abiti da uomo.

e šenoa¹⁹ nello stesso mucchio
 zofka²⁰ perché te la ritrovi in soffitta
 mentre stai cercando qualcos'altro
 kant per una pelle splendente e le stelle d'oro
 agostino per la confessione, orwell per fare attenzione
 tommaso²¹ per quant'è difficile, hugo per essere quella giusta
 e cankar²² lo stesso, nazor²³ per i pantaloni
 eugenio²⁴ per quanto ti senti tanto sola
 villon per quando stai in compagnia
 ma ti annoi, faulkner va bene sempre
 hemingway per il pronto soccorso
 camus conto le malattie
 cekov quando sei stufo e per trovare la frase giusta
 leopardi per quando sei felice, šimić²⁵ per il verso
 giovanni²⁶ per tutti, per tutti giovanni
 e perché in principio era il verbo
 ne ho combinate, ma combinate, racconto a smiljko
 non ho ancora finito di raccontare, che il mattino inizia a odorare di rugiada
 il muretto sa di roccia, la paletta sa di cenere
 io sono sola e finalmente il sole ha raccolto le ombre
 nessuno intorno, e tutto tace, tace
 dico a smiljko, e sono già tornata indietro

¹⁹ August Šenoa (*1838 -+1881) autore di novelle, romanzi storici, drammi. Per la freschezza del suo stile e la novità dei temi trattati, viene considerato il migliore esponente del tardo romanticismo croato.

²⁰ Zovka Kveder (*1878 - + 1926) scrittrice, drammaturga, traduttrice, giornalista e pubblicitista slovena e croata. Viene considerata la prima femminista della letteratura slovena.

²¹ D'Aquino, ovviamente

²² Ivan Cankar (*1876 - +1918) scrittore, poeta, pubblicitista e attivista politico, viene considerato uno dei padri del modernismo sloveno.

²³ Vladimir Nazor (*1876 – 1949) noto poeta, scrittore croato, è certamente uno degli autori croati più conosciuti e studiati. Si è unito in tarda età al movimento partigiano diventando in seguito presidente del ZAVNOH – Il consiglio antifascista del nuovo Stato Jugoslavo.

²⁴ Montale, ovviamente.

²⁵ Antun Branko Šimić (*1898 _1925) scrittore e poeta espressionista croato.

²⁶ Giovanni, in croato Ivan. L'autrice crea un gioco di parole: un doppio riferimento al poeta e scrittore Ivan Salmnig (*1930 - +2001) e a una sua poesia dedicata a Giovanni Evangelista. Lo stesso Slam-nig era particolarmente portato ai giochi di parole.

23.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
io con il righello
lui con l'albero della nave
devo controllare i compiti dei bambini
gli dico, per questo ho il righello
devo partecipare alla regata, dice
per questo ho in mano l'albero
en garde, grido
en garde, grida lui e salta giù
senza l'albero
non abbiamo mai
duellato con le spade, gli dico
non ci siamo neanche mai presi a botte, non ci siamo battuti
gli dico, ma che razza di bambini eravamo,
gli dico, neanche capaci pestarci a dovere,
possiamo provarci ora, fa smiljko ridendo, possiamo provarci ora
ora è tardi, rispondo e tiro fuori un fazzoletto dalla borsa
ora è tardi, abbiamo pestato delle zucche
zucche gialle come zecchini
abbiamo pestato una corte intera piena di zucche
usando una specie di pertiche, vedran tu ed io
i semi volavano sul muro, sulla faccia
sui capelli, sulle magliette, le scarpe
le zucche morivano spaccate a metà e a quarti
e a quinti, a pezzettini
tutte le zucche morirono quel giorno
tutti i i maiali dissero bravi
tutti i nostri cari sbraitarono, sbraitarono
ed erano ancora tutti vivi, vivi

26.

Smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
 ci salutiamo da su e da giù
 smiljko siediti alla finestra al settimo piano
 da quelli d'ingegneria meccanica e ingegneria navale
 siediti alla finestra, sta facendo dei calcoli sul tablet
 cos'è, chiedo, ma che lo fai a fare tutto sto lavoro
 per un diploma qualsiasi, un cavolo di diploma
 uno studente sta scrivendo, controllo
 controllo se ha fatto i calcoli come si deve
 perché la nave non coli a picco
 già, gli rispondo, già, questi giovani sono intelligenti
 vieni giù, che vediamo il canale di suz
 non si può vedere da qui il canale di suz
 dice smiljko
 oh sì che lo possiamo vedere, dico io
 vedi qui nel sottopassaggio è come
 come stare nella pancia della nave con la quale hanno spedito il nonno
 in abissinia e già siamo in mezzo a loro
 si sta stretti qui dentro, non li fanno uscire, devono nascondersi
 la nave fa finta di non essere una nave da guerra
 quale di loro è nostro nonno, lo cerchiamo, smiljko ed io
 spostiamo tutti i soldati, li rivoltiamo
 su e giù, su e giù
 come se fossero sardine
*l'esercito italiano regolare*²⁷ è stretto
 come sardine, sardine
 c'è un'afa, fa caldo, si suda
 senza aria in questa pancia
 qui ci sono mio nonno e un certo radetić
 quello del libro, il nonno di mika
 dico a radetić, gli dico
 io conoscerò sua nipote
 lei riuscirà a salvarsi
 io conoscerò sua nipote

²⁷ In italiano nel testo

saremo compagne di scuola
alla branko semelić, a pola
gli dico
che c'è nonno, che c'è, non sei riuscito a salire
sei rimasto sulla fiumara, perché mi faccia ammazzare
dove andiamo, chiedete, dove andiamo
in abissina andate, in abissinia
perché ci andiamo, che ci dobbiamo fare in abissinia
sarete vincitori, gli dico
sarete vincitori, *anche occupatori*²⁸
chi sono quelli lì, chiede il nonno
chi sono quelli lì
sopravviverò, farò ritorno, avrò figli
li avrai, li avrai, gli rispondiamo smiljko ed io
sopravviverai, farai ritorno, dieci anni dopo
tornerai incolume, senza una ferita
tutto intero
e con le braccia e il naso e la testa e il petto
e perfino con tutti i denti
prima di questo te ne starai nel nord africa
scapperai da tripoli per rifugiarti in una caverna
romel ti darà un calcio nel sedere
rommel chi, ervin, ervin rommel
gli dico, non saprai chi è
lo saprò, risponde, lo saprò
il capo dei capi dei tedeschi
dove andrò poi
poi verrai rinchiuso, in prigione
gli dico, in prigione
darai da mangiare a dei maiali, all'esterno
ti seppelliranno nella sabbia, fino alla gola
nella sabbia calda, fine, fine come lo zucchero a velo
ancora più fine
avrà sete, avrà fame
qualcuno ti salverà, due arabi
ti salveranno, la guerra sarà finita

²⁸ In italiano nel testo ma scritto con grafia croata "anke okupatori"

imparerai lo spagnolo
 il francese e parlerai l'arabo
 e l'italiano, l'italiano
 parlerò l'italiano meglio di adesso
 diventerai un *eccellente parlante*²⁹, gli dico
 leggerai libri e giornali
 arriverai a marsiglia, arriverai a traù
 poi a piedi fino a gimino, zvana ti aspetterà,
 ti aspetterà per dieci anni zvana
 finirai *come un odisseo*³⁰, finirai
 c'erano i proci, questo non si sa
 questo non si sa, e vedrai anche tuo figlio
 tuo figlio per la prima volta
 tuo figlio non ti riconoscerà
 scapperà da te
 avrai figli, gli dico
 vivrai ancora tante esperienze
 capiteranno tante cose anche terribili
 sarà meglio che non te le raccontiamo
 avrai figli, gli dico
 mi rivolgo a smiljko
 ora, stando qua su questa nave, in questo sottopassaggio
 che collega la facoltà di filosofia a quella di ingegneria meccanica
 chi mai potrebbe credere che gli stiamo raccontando queste cose
 smiljko scuote la testa
 nessuno potrebbe credere
 quello che gli stiamo raccontando
 allora stiamo zitti
 e non diciamogli niente
 io e smiljko siamo d'accordo
 facciamo un salto su, su

²⁹ In Italiano nel testo

³⁰ In italiano nel testo

40.

smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano
io dimentico che devo inviare un testo
e smiljko dimentica che deve fare i suoi calcoli per la nave
ci facciamo ciao e comincia a cadere la neve
come quella volta che cadde la neve nella hlanična vala³¹
quando slittavamo seduti su di un sacco riempito paglia
e avevamo i piedi bagnati e le orecchie rosse
e bambini, giocate, giocate, quando giocherete se non adesso
e tutti i nostri cari sono ancora vivi
la neve scende lenta, lenta e noi ci fermiamo per un attimo
e vedran e smiljko ed io
con quel sacco dietro alla schiena
con i piedi bagnati
con quei berretti calati fino alle orecchie
restiamo così
un attimo, un attimo
subito dopo i nostri cari sono già morti
morti come il mar morto
morti come la morte nera
morti come un amen

Estratto dalla raccolta *Smiljko i ja si mahnemo (Balada na mahove)*

(Smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano (ballata a singhiozzo), Fraktura, Zagabria, 2020.

Traduzione: Laura Marchig

³¹ Microtoponimo

Evelina Rudan è nata a Pola nel 1971. Vive a Zagabria. Ha pubblicato le raccolte di poesia *Sve ča mi rabi ovega prolića* (Tutto quello che mi serve questa primavera) (2000), *Posljednja toplu noć* (L'ultima notte calda) (2002, insieme a Slađana Lipovac e Denis Peričić), *Uvjerljiv vrt/Convincing Garden* (Il giardino che convince -formato digitale, traduzione dal croato all'inglese di Hana Dada Banak, 2003), *Breki i čuki* (Cani e gufi) (2008), Premio della Città di Fiume "Drago Gervais" per un'opera inedita (2007), *Pristojne ptice* (Uccelli educati) (2008), *Smiljko i ja si mahnemo, balada na mahove* (Smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano, ballata a singhiozzo) (2020) nonché il libro illustrato *Kraljevićev san* (Il sogno del principe, realizzato insieme all'illustratore Sven Nemet, 2010). Le sue poesie sono state inserite in varie antologie e rassegne dedicate alla poesia croata contemporanea e sono state tradotte in sloveno, ceco, inglese, tedesco, spagnolo, italiano, romeno e olandese. Insegna presso il Dipartimento di croatistica della Facoltà di Filosofia di Zagabria e si occupa di letteratura del linguaggio parlato e dei legami intertestuali (e intramediali) fra scrittura e dizione orale, e lo studio delle nuove forme di letteratura orale. Nel 2017 ha vinto il Premio della Facoltà di Filosofia di Zagabria per il libro *Vile s Učke. Žanr, kontekst, izvedba i nadnaravna bića predaja* (Le fate del Montemaggiore. Genere, contesto, esecuzione e la trasmissione orale di storie sugli esseri soprannaturali, 2016). Per il libro *Smiljko i ja si mahnemo. Balada na mahove* (*Smiljko ed io ci facciamo ciao con la mano (ballata a singhiozzo)*), le sono stati con feriti ben cinque importanti premi nazionali: il Premio "Fran Galović" per la letteratura (prosa e poesia), il Premio biennale per la poesia „Ivan Goran Kovačić“, Il Premio dell'Accademia Croata delle Arti e delle Scienze nella categoria Letteratura, il Premio per la poesia „Tin Ujević“ e infine il Premio „Drago Gervais“ per un'opera edita.

STANKO KRNIĆ ■ VEINTE POEMAS

1

Tú todavía recuerdas que te había besado en el día de hoy,
y desde entonces pasó todo un siglo humano;
mientras tanto ha cambiado cientos de ellas,
ni sabe que existes, solitaria, pero
tú todavía te acuerdas que te ha besado en el día de hoy.

2

Hoy no respiro profundamente; soy cauteloso,
el aire se ha inundado de olores de miedo;
temo inhalarlos y los tuyos con ellos,
esto no lo quiero de ninguna manera:
hoy no respiro profundamente, soy cauteloso.

3

Tocaría a tu puerta, Dios,
pero de ninguna manera la puedo encontrar,
a veces pienso que no es un error;
quizás tendrían que ser ventanas. Sin embargo,
tocaría a tu puerta, Dios.

4

No quieres dar tus manos, de ninguna manera,
y llamas la vida para ir abrazados;
echas anzuelos en vez de las manos,
piensas que la vida es a veces estúpida, por eso
no quieres dar tus manos, de ninguna manera.

5

La pintura es el arte de detener el movimiento,
la vida es el arte de detener las palabras,
esto es así sí lo miras de un lado,
porque la vida es un poema y tienes que cantar las palabras,
la pintura es el arte de detener el movimiento.

6

Alguien ha robado las estrellas del cielo
y las puso en las banderas, en los pechos, en los hombros;
después ha robado también la luna y el sol, los ha cosido en los mismos lugares,
entonces deseamos que vuelva el tiempo cuando
alguien ha robado las estrellas del cielo.

7

¿Qué harás con eso de que ya no me quieres?
¿Es el no querer una divisa con la cual comprarás
la paz, la satisfacción por no soñar o alguna otra cosa?
Cuando sepas la respuesta, de verdad sabrás
que harás con eso de que ya no me quieres.

23 de abril de 2017

8

Mis manos y mi boca están llenas de manzanas,
no te puedo besar ahora y quizás no lo haré ni más tarde,
todo el tiempo las muerdo, no pienso que será después;
estoy cegado en el momento en el que
mis manos y mi boca están llenos de manzana.

22 de abril de 2017

9

Las huellas son testigos de lo que ocurrió,
si no se ven, nadie lo va a saber;
estoy lleno de tus huellas bajo mi armadura
pero nadie sabe echar me un vistazo y
las huellas son testigos de lo que ocurrió.

abril, 2017

10

Un día nos convertiremos en bestias, asesinos,
la peor especie entre sí, lo sé,
tus dedos se deslizaron por mí
y me devolverán a tus manos; sin embargo, pienso:
alguna vez nos convertiremos en bestias, asesinos.

22 de mayo de 2017

11

Quieres que nos matemos, hace mucho que no lo hacemos,
podríamos quizás besarnos, eso lo hemos olvidado.
Y somos tan sólo dos almas desviadas una a otra
tan sólo callamos esperando mejores mundos;
quieres que nos matemos, hace mucho que no lo hacemos.

23 de mayo de 2017

12

Tus manos son la seguridad más bella,
bajo ellas los demonios son tan sólo perritos obedientes;
me quedaría en ellas al menos una eternidad,
ayúdame – sabes que solo no lo puedo;
Tus manos son la seguridad más bella.

24 de mayo de 2017

13

Vaciamos nuestros bolsillos, el izquierdo y el derecho,
los de adelante y los de atrás y aquellos escondidos,
desabrochemos las armaduras y abramos las palmas de las manos,
es tiempo de que ambos sepamos con quién tratamos.
Vaciamos nuestros bolsillos, el izquierdo y el derecho.

24 de mayo de 2017

14

Qué hace la vida de la vida,
como el niño tira sus juguetes,
coronas y laureles, espinas y cadenas,
y alguien agarra y al otro lo golpea,
que hace la vida de la vida.

27 de mayo de 2017

15

Ayer dijeron: “mañana será un lindo día”,
y yo ayer, no sé cómo, dormí todo el día.
Aunque tengo orejas, nariz y ojos, me siento
perdido porque no sé qué dijeron y
ayer dijeron “mañana será un lindo día”.

5 de junio de 2017

16

Todos se retirarán a un lado, no te preocupes;
nada nuevo ocurrirá cuando estés desnudo
y tu piel será ajena para ti y los ojos y la lengua.
quizás y la razón te será extraña entonces,
todo se retirarán a un lado, no te preocupes.

10 de junio de 2017

17

Cuando estoy contigo, no tengo rangos ni órdenes;
a veces me los quito yo mismo, más a menudo tú me desnudas;
somos solamente el tejido alrededor de nuestros corazones,
y así nos queremos más – desnudos hasta la médula;
cuando estoy contigo, no tengo rangos ni órdenes.

10 de junio de 2017

18

Hoy estuve en el jardín zoológico,
bestias y monstruos de un lado, la gente del otro;
los monos se abrazan y besan, sin máscaras;
abran alambres y dejen pasar a algunos pensó, cuando
hoy estuve en el jardín zoológico.

10 de junio de 2017

19

Dame las manos, te enseñaré los pasos falsos,
en las palmas te buscaré los amantes,
te marcaré el lugar donde debería estar
dibujado y no logré encuadernarme;
dame las manos, te enseñaré los pasos falsos.

10 de junio de 2017

20

Pienso dónde podría poner los huesos:
la clavícula, esternón y fémur;
colocarlos junto a los ducados y tus besos,
que haya piedras en algún país;
pienso dónde podría poner los huesos.

10 de junio de 2017

De la antología poética *Sto i jedna mala pjesma/Ciento un pequeño poema*

Traducción: Željka Lovrenčić

Stanko Krnjić nació en Stolac (Bosnia y Herzegovina) el 5 de abril de 1969. Terminó la escuela primaria en Višići (Čapljina, Bosnia y Herzegovina) y la secundaria de medicina en Dubrovnik. Empezó a estudiar en la Facultad de Odontología en Sarajevo en 1989. A causa de la guerra, continuó sus estudios en Zagreb. Se graduó en el 1995. Vive en Župa dubrovačka donde tiene una clínica dental. Escribe poesía, poesía en prosa, columnas de opinión y cuentos. Es miembro de la Sociedad de Escritores Croatas, de la Sociedad de Escritores Croatas de Herzeg-Bosnia, de la Academia Eslava para la Literatura y Arte (Varna, Bulgaria) y de la Sociedad de Escritores de Dubrovnik. He recibido varios premios, entre los que se destacan el premio de la Academia Croata de Ciencias y Artes *Dragutin Tadijanović* y el premio de la Asociación de Escritores Croatas *Tin Ujević*. (Ž.L.).



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