

The image features a solid yellow background. A series of white vertical lines are spaced evenly across the width of the page. A single white diagonal line starts from the bottom left and extends towards the top right, intersecting the vertical lines.

European stories



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE



European Stories

EUPL winners write Europe

Organised by



Creative
Europe

2018
EUROPEAN YEAR
OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE
[#EuropeForCulture](#)

Printed by Bietlot, Belgium

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Foreword

Writing Europe – how literature helps us build communities

Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity is a tremendous asset. Yet, this diversity makes it difficult for cultural works to circulate across borders, and this is especially true for literature. This is why, in 2009, the European Commission decided to launch the European Union Prize for Literature to support outstanding works of fiction by new and emerging authors writing in their national languages. In the past nine editions, we have recognised 108 talented authors from 37 different countries. We are very proud to have such a great number of excellent laureates, who represent Europe in their diversity.

2018 is a very special year: we are celebrating the European Year of Cultural Heritage, as well as the tenth anniversary of the European Union Prize for Literature. To mark this occasion, we organised a specific contest "A European Story: European Union Prize for Literature Winners Write Europe". This is a unique competition for short works of fiction, exclusively open to previous winners of the prize, to celebrate the wealth and creativity of Europe's contemporary literature.

36 winners from a total of 26 different countries decided to participate in this contest and share their European stories. Each of these texts, which were written in 23 different languages, has a distinct perspective, style and syntax, but they are all telling a European story. They are a great example of how cultural and artistic expression can help us strengthen our European identity and build a community of communities.

For authors, translations are not only a great recognition of their works, but a way to reach audiences beyond their home country and to achieve pan-European or even global success. European literature, especially literature written in less-used languages, needs transnational promotion and increased visibility.

Authors who have been awarded the European Union Prize for Literature can benefit from the EU's Creative Europe programme and receive grants for literary translation of the winning book into other European languages. Between 2014 and 2017, the programme has already helped finance a total of 1679 translations from and into a range of European languages, including 461 translations of books that have been recognised with the European Union Prize for Literature.

This publication contains all the entries received for this year's special writing contest, in both the original language and English translation. I hope you enjoy these European stories!

Tibor Navracsics,
*European Commissioner
for Education, Culture,
Youth and Sport*



Cyprus

Myrto Azina Chronides

Μια Ευρωπαϊκή ιστορία

A European Story

EUPL laureate 2010: *To Peirama* (Armida Publications)

BIOGRAPHY

Myrto Azina Chronides was born in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 1961. Since her early years, she has written many essays and poems. She won several literary prizes at the Pancyprian Gymnasium for poetry and prose, and published her first book, *Hemerologion*, at the age of fifteen. After graduation, she specialised in general medicine at the academic hospital of the University of Bonn in Euskirchen. Since 2007, she has been working in Cyprus at the Department of Medical and Public Health Services. She has received positive critical reaction for her modern and unconventional writing style, while her short stories have featured in many literary magazines and in two national anthologies.

Μια ευρωπαϊκή ιστορία

Myrto Azina Chronides



Έρχεται ακόμη ένας! Έρχεται!

Το νιώθω από το ελαφρό τρεμούλιασμα. Το σώμα μου τον νιώθει και τον υποδέχεται με φρίκη. Μια τάση φυγής, ένας φόβος, τα άκρα παγωμένα.

Έρχεται ο πόνος — η ωδίνη. Ξεσχίζει την πύελο, τους λαγόνες, η μήτρα κουβάρι από σίδηρο.

Τον βιώνω ολόκληρη. Απλώνεται ακόμα και στα νύχια μου. Το κεφάλι μου αδειάζει και συμπιέζεται σαν ακορντεόν που εκπνέει.

«Πάω να φέρω τη μαία», μου λέει και σκουπίζει το πρόσωπό μου απ' τον ιδρώτα με το μαντήλι του.

Με φοβάται. Βλέπω στο βλέμμα του πως με φοβάται. Ίσως είναι η εξουσία που έχω αυτή τη συγκεκριμένη στιγμή: Γεννώ το παιδί του.



Περπατούσαμε με τη μητέρα πάνω στο χιόνι. Ο άνεμος σφύριζε και διαπερνούσε τα πάντα.

Οι κάλτσες μου ήταν τρύπιες και τα παπούτσια με λεπτές μισοφαγωμένες σόλες. Δυσκολευόμουν να περπατήσω, μάλλον γλιστρούσα πάνω στο χιόνι.

Η μητέρα βιαζόταν. Με τραβούσε από το χέρι σαν να 'θελε να με απογειώσει.

Ξάφνου σκόνταψα πάνω σε κάτι κι έπεσα μπρούμυτα. Στο μισοσκόταδο μου φάνηκε ένας μπόγος. Η μητέρα με σήκωσε πιάνοντας με απ' τις μασχάλες ελαφρά και αμέσως μου' κλεισε, με τα χέρια της, τα μάτια.

Πολύ αργά! Ανθρώπινο κουφάρι. Πρόλαβα και είδα τα παγωμένα χέρια του.

Κι ύστερα ήταν πια μόνο ένα παιχνίδι. Τώρα που γνώριζα, τα αναγνώριζα.

Πολλές φορές κρύβονταν σε βουναλάκια από χιόνι. Άλλοτε πάλι, γυμνά από χιόνι, ξυλιασμένα σαν πτώματα της Πομπηίας.

Η μητέρα βιαζόταν. Πηγαίναμε για αυγά. Κάποιος της τα έταξε. Κρατούσε λίγο λαρδί, στ' αριστερό της χέρι, να το ανταλλάξει.

Άρχισα να κλαίω κι έτσι σταματήσαμε απότομα. Με σήκωσε στα χέρια και μ' έστησε σ' ένα πεζούλι, κοντά στο σταθμό των τρένων. Τα κεφάλια μας αλληλοκοιτάζονταν σαν σε καθρέφτη.

«Μην κλαις! Τώρα είμαστε φτωχοί και πάνω απ' όλα, το είδες, είμαστε θνητοί.

Να μεγαλώσεις να βρεις έναν αθάνατο να σμίξεις. Δεν κυκλοφορούν πολλοί στις μέρες μας, αλλά όταν τελειώσει ο πόλεμος θα ξεφυσήσουν απ' το πουθενά. Να κάνεις μαζί του παιδιά, να τ' αλλάξεις όλα! Όλα!»

Ήταν τα χρόνια που οι φούρνοι δεν έψηναν ζεστό ψωμί αλλά κατέστρεφαν ανθρώπινη σάρκα. Που οι άνθρωποι φορούσαν ένα αστέρι στο στήθος για να ξεχωρίζουν. Που τα τσιγγανάκια κι οι ασθενείς άξιζαν λιγότερο από ένα σκύλο που τον έλεγαν Blondi ή Muckl.

Να αλλάξω τι μαμά, σκέφτηκα.

Βέβαια η αλλαγή επήλθε άμεσα, αλλά δεν την επέφερα εγώ.

Η μάνα πέθανε: Μια Εβραία στο Αουσβιτς, μια Εγγλέζα στους βομβαρδισμούς, μια Ελληνίδα στη Γερμανοκρατούμενη Αθήνα, ή μήπως μια Trümmerfrau στη Δρέσδη που επέζησε της φρίκης και στο τέλος χάθηκε στα συντρίμια του πολέμου, μια Πολωνή μια ...

Πάντως πέθανε. Κι έμεινα μόνη μου.

Ο πατέρας έτσι κι αλλιώς παρήλαυνε από πόλεμο σε πόλεμο. Ποιος τον είδε; Ποιος τον ήξερε;

Άγνωστος στρατιώτης, άγαλμα σε μια πλατεία ή μια χιονοστιβάδα κόκκαλα να κατρακυλά στα τάρταρα.



Έρχεται πάλι! Πρέπει να φέρει γρήγορα τη μαία. Δεν θ' αντέξω! Ένας πόνος οδοστρωτήρας. Χτυπάει μέσα στα αυτιά μου τα ταμπούρλα του: Μπαμ Μπαμ Μπαμ. Όπως οι στρατιώτες με το βάδισμα της χήνας που μπαίνουν στο Παρίσι θριαμβευτικά.

Κι αυτός παρελαύνει στο σώμα μου, ξεσχίζοντας τα σπλάχνα μου σε ένα ρυθμικό μπαμ μπαμ μπαμ. Η Αντίσταση αναδιπλώνεται.



Ήταν ένα καλοκαιριάτικο απόγευμα. Με μια φέτα καρπούζι γύριζα στην ακρογιαλιά, μετρώντας τα δελφίνια που φαίνονταν στο βάθος του ορίζοντα.

Αν κάνω κάποτε παιδιά, σκεφτόμουν, θα μάθουν να ονειρεύονται και να μιλούν. Να μιλούν με τους άλλους γι αυτό που νιώθουν και πώς το εννοούν. Να υιοθετούν μικρές ιδέες και να τις μεγαλώνουν στα κεφάλια τους, ευρύχωρα πανδοχεία, για το καλό, το δίκαιο, την ισότητα, κι ύστερα να τις στέλνουν ταξίδι στα χέρια τους και να τις κάνουν πράξη.

Κι ενώ σκεφτόμουν όλα αυτά, τον είδα να έρχεται από μακριά.

Και το σώμα μου αποσχίστηκε από τη λογική μου. Άγρια, αρχέγονα ένστικτα ξύπνησαν. Κι η λογική έγινε από πρωταγωνιστής, κομπάρσος. Παντού απλώθηκε η μυρωδιά του. Μόλις που πρόλαβα να σκεφτώ τα λόγια της μάνας μου:

«Βρες έναν αθάνατο!»

Κι ήταν αθάνατος.

Φορούσε μια φανελίτσα που έγραφε επάνω: «White Bull» κι ήταν ο Δίας, ο πατέρας των Θεών και των Ανθρώπων.

«Είμαι η Ευρώπη», του ψιθύρισα, «και σε περιμένα».

Με πήρε στο άσπρο του σπορ αμάξι και φύγαμε πέρα από τη θάλασσα, πέρα στα χαλυβουργεία και στα ορυχεία άνθρακα.

«Jean», του είπα ένα πρωί, «Konrad, Charles, Winston, Altiero, Robert, μεγάλε Δία, γιατί ξεκινάμε την ιστορία μας από τα λεφτά; Γιατί να μείνουμε σ αυτό το άθλιο ορυχείο άνθρακα;»

«Γιατί οι ιδέες θέλουν χρόνο να ωριμάσουν», απάντησε κι «χρόνος είναι χρήμα, μου' λεγε ο πατέρας μου ο Κρόνος, ενώ το ψωμί γεμίζει αμέσως το στομάχι.»

Το δέχτηκα. Ήξερε πάντοτε τι έλεγε, αλλιώς το σόι αθάνατος λογαριαζόταν;



Πονώ, πονώ τόσο που ξεχνώ τον έρωτα και τ' αγκαλιάσματα, τα όνειρα για το μέλλον.

Το μόνο που μετρά τώρα είναι η αίσθηση του αγνώστου. Τι θα γίνει με το σώμα μου;

Θα με προλάβουν, θα επιβιώσω ή θα σχιστώ στα δυο από τη ξυλοσχιστική του πόνου που ακουμπά στο σώμα μου όλο και συχνότερα και δυσχεραίνει την ανάσα μου;

Βυθίζομαι, νιώθω πως γλιστρώ κάπου και χάνω τις αισθήσεις μου. Όλα γίνονται κόκκινα γύρω μου. Επιπλέω σε άσπρα και χρυσά σύννεφα. Βαθειά, στην άκρη του ορίζοντα, σε μακρινό λόφο, χιλιάδες στρατιώτες υψώνουν ταυτοχρόνως τις σημαίες τους. Δεν είναι λάβαρα πολέμου. Είναι γεμάτες μπλε ουρανού και κίτρινα αστέρια: Ενότητα, αλληλεγγύη, αρμονία. Λιώνω μέσα σε συναισθήματα απόλυτης γαλήνης.

Και στη μέση του κόκκινου λιβαδιού, γεννιέται ένα δέντρο. Πλησιάζω διστακτικά: Το δέντρο της γένεσης και πάνω ένα μήλο. Ερχομαι ακόμη πιο κοντά. Μα δεν είναι ο καρπός της Γνώσης, σκέφτομαι.

Είναι το μήλο που πρόσφερε στον Πάρη, το βασιλόπουλο της Τροίας, η Έριδα και γράφει επάνω αντί «τη καλλίστη», «τω βελτίστω ή τη βελτίστη». Αναστατώνομαι.

Ευπνώ.

«Αγάπη μου, γεννάς!», μου λέει ο Δίας.

Τελευταία ουρλιαχτά, μικρά διαλείμματα, τρία απανωτά ουρλιαχτά: Τα τρία μου πρώτα παιδιά στον κόρφο μου. Δεν είναι όμως ο Μίνωας, ο Ροδαμάνθης και ο Σαρπηδώνας, όπως λέει η μυθολογία.

Είναι τ' αγόρια μου που θα κερδίσουν τα ονόματα τους, ανάλογα με τα χαρακτηριστικά του καθενός, τις συνήθειες και τα πιστεύω τους.

Νάτα τα αγαπημένα μου! Ξαπλώνουν με μισόκλειστα ματάκια, σαν ποντικάκια, και τα θηλάζω ανάλογα με τις ανάγκες τους. Πιο πολλές φορές τον αδύναμο, όσο να χορτάσει τον πιο παχουλό.

Αύριο θα χαίρονται τη ζωή και τον ήλιο. Οι φούρνοι τους θα ψήνουν ζεστό ψωμί κι ο καθένας θα χτίσει το δικό του σπιτικό, κατά το γούστο του. Και θα' ναι ανοιγμένα διάπλατα τα παράθυρα.

Κι άμα έρθει ο όφιος να τους δώσει το μήλο, όχι το μήλο του Παραδείσου, αλλά αυτό που μπορεί να σπείρει τη διχόνοια, θα'χουν για ασπίδα τις φρικτές αναμνήσεις μου και για όπλο τα υπέροχα όνειρά μου και θα μεταμορφώσουν την ανταγωνιστικότητα σε ευγενή άμιλλα.

Έτσι όπως τα κοιτάζω που κοιμούνται στη θαλασσινή κούνια τους, στολισμένη με δώδεκα ολόχρυσα αστέρια, σκέφτομαι πως κάποιον απ αυτά θα τον ονοματίσουν Ασλάν, Φοίβο, ή Δον Κιχώτη, αλλά ίσως και Κάιν και Ορέστη και Ιούδα...

Αύριο... Αύριο... ξημερώνει. Ξημερώνει μια θάλασσα από λόγια, έργα, μουσικές και δημιουργίες μέσα στα χέρια σου Ευρώπη...

A European story

Myrto Azina Chronides

Translated from Greek by Despina Pirketti

There's another one coming! He's coming!

I can feel it from the slight tremble. My body can feel him and welcomes him in dread. An urge to leave, a fear, my limbs freeze.

The pain comes – labour pain. It tears the pelvis apart, my loins, my uterus a ball of steel. I can feel him throughout my entire body. He spreads all the way down to my nails. My head empties and compresses like an accordion exhaling. "I'll go get the midwife" he tells me and uses his handkerchief to wipe the sweat off my face.

He's scared of me. I can see it in his eyes – he's scared of me. Perhaps it's the power I have at this very moment: I'm delivering his child.



Mother and I were walking in the snow. The wind hissed, cutting through everything.

My socks were tattered; my shoes had worn, shabby soles.

I was having a hard time walking; in fact, I was sliding on the snow. Mother was rushing. She pulled me by the hand as if to lift me up.

Suddenly I tripped upon something and fell flat on my face. In semi-darkness I thought I saw a bundle. Mother picked me up, holding me lightly under the armpits, then made to close my eyes with her hands.

Too late! A human corpse. I glimpsed its frozen arms.

And then it was merely a game. Now that I knew, I could recognise them.

Oftentimes they were hidden under piles of snow. Other times, snowless, they were petrified like Pompeii's victims. Mother was in a hurry. We were on the way to fetch eggs promised to her by someone. She held some lard in her left hand to trade.

I broke into tears and so we stopped in our tracks. She took me in her arms and had me stand on a step near the train station. Our heads turned, our faces mirroring each other. "Stop crying! Now we are poor; but above all, as you have seen, we're mortals." "Make sure you grow up and find an immortal man to couple up with. Not many of them are around these days, but once the war is over they'll sprout out of nowhere. Have children with him, change everything. Everything!"

Those were the years when furnaces did not bake hot bread, they ravaged human flesh. When men and women wore a star on their chest to stand out. When gypsy children and patients were worth less than a dog called Blondi or Muckl.

Change what, mother? I thought to myself.

Of course, the change came suddenly, but not because of me.

Mum died: a Jewish woman in Auschwitz, a British woman during the Blitz, a Greek woman in German-occupied Athens or perhaps a Trümmerfrau in Dresden, who had survived the horror and perished amidst the ruins of the war, a Polish woman, a...

Anyway, she died. And I was left on my own.

Father, after all, paraded from one war to another. Nobody saw him. Nobody knew of him.

The unknown soldier, a statue in a square or an avalanche of bones plunging into Tartarus.



Here it comes again! He must bring the midwife quickly! I won't make it! The pain is like a juggernaut. It's beating its

drums into my ears: Bam Bam Bam! Like the soldiers marching triumphantly into Paris with a massive goose-step.

And he's parading across my body, tearing my entrails asunder in a rhythmical bam bam bam. The Resistance falls back.



It was a summer afternoon. With a slice of watermelon in hand, I wandered along the seashore, counting the dolphins sketched out against the horizon.

If I ever have children, I told myself, they'll learn how to dream and talk. Talk to others about what and how they feel. Adopt small ideas and nurture them in their heads, roomy inns, on goodness and fairness, on equality, and then send them on a voyage along their hands to become deeds.

While I was thinking of all this, I saw him coming from afar.

My body broke away from my reason: wild, primal instincts awoke. And reason was reduced from a protagonist to a stuntman. His scent was all-encompassing. I barely had time to ponder mother's words:

"Get yourself an immortal!"

And he was immortal.

He wore a T-shirt that read "White Bull" and he was Zeus, father of Gods and Humans.

"I'm Europe," I whispered to him, "and I've been expecting you." He led me to his white sports car and we left beyond the sea, far away to the steelworks and the coal mines.

"Jean," I said to him one morning, "Konrad, Charles, Winston, Altiero, Robert, Great Zeus, why do we begin our story with money? Why stay in this miserable coal mine?"

"Because ideas need time to mature," he replied and "time is money, my father Cronus used to say, whereas bread will fill your stomach instantly." I went along with it. He always

knew what he was talking about; after all, what kind of immortal was he?



I'm in pain; I'm in so much pain that I forget about lovemaking and cuddling, the dreams for the future.

The only thing that matters now is this dread of the unknown. What will become of my body?

Will they save me on time, will I survive? Or will I be torn asunder by the woodcutter of pain that rests upon my body all the more frequently, restricting my breathing?

I'm sinking; I feel that I'm sliding somewhere until I lose consciousness. Everything around me turns red. I float upon golden white clouds. Far away, at the edge of the horizon, upon a distant hill, soldiers by the thousands are hoisting their flags simultaneously. They're not war banners. They're filled with blue skies and yellow stars: unity, solidarity, harmony. I melt within feelings of utter serenity.

And in the middle of the red meadow, a tree is born. I tentatively approach it: the tree of life carrying an apple. I come even closer. But it's not the fruit of Knowledge, I tell myself.

It is the apple offered to Paris, prince of Troy, by Discord, and instead of "for the fairest" it reads "for the best". I'm devastated.

I wake up.

"My darling, you're in labour!" Zeus tells me.

Last howls, small breaks, then three final consecutive howls: my first three children in my bosom. But they're not Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon as mythology says.

They're my boys and they will earn their names, each according to his own features, habits and beliefs. There they are, my precious ones! Lying with their eyes half open, like little mice, and I breastfeed them according to their needs: the weak one more often, just enough for the plumpest. Tomorrow they'll rel-

ish life and the sun. Their furnaces will bake hot bread and each of them will build his own house just as he likes it. And their windows will be wide open.

And when the serpent comes to give them the apple, not the apple of Paradise, but the one that may sow discord, they'll have my own atrocious memories to use as a shield, and they'll have my wonderful dreams as weapons to transform competitiveness into good sportsmanship. Just as I look at them sleeping in their sea-crib, adorned with twelve golden stars, I'm thinking that one of them will be named Aslan, Phoebus or Don Quixote; or even Cain, Orestes and Judas...

Tomorrow... Tomorrow... day breaks. A sea of words, works, melodies and creations rise within your palm, Europe...



Slovenia

Gabriela Babnik

Ida

EUPL laureate 2013: *Sušna doba* (Beletrina Academic Press)

BIOGRAPHY

Gabriela Babnik was born in 1979 in Göppingen, Germany. After finishing her studies at Ljubljana University, she spent some time in Nigeria before working on a master's degree on the modern Nigerian novel. Since 2002, she has regularly contributed articles to all major daily and weekly publications in Slovenia. In 2005, Babnik graduated in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Ljubljana. Her first novel *Koža iz bombaža* (*Cotton Skin*) was published in 2007 and was awarded the Best Debut Novel by the Union of Slovenian Publishers at the Slovenian Book Fair. In 2009, her second novel *V visoki travi* (*In the Tall Grass*) was published, and was shortlisted for the Kresnik Award in 2010. Babnik lives with her family in Ljubljana.

Ida

Gabriela Babnik



Ida se ponoči ni več zbudala zaradi nekdanje lastnice stanovanja, v katerega se je pred kratkim preselila, ni se ji več prikazovala v rdeči, sprani obleki, pač pa se je zdaj zbudala, včasih tudi prepotena, zaradi vitkega telesa temnopoltega moškega, ki je spal, če je spal, eno nadstropje nad njo. Včasih se ji je zdelo, da sliši vzdihljaje ljubljenja, včasih so se z ljubljenjem premikala tudi okna. Nosilo jih je od enega konca do drugega in Ida se je v takšnih trenutkih oprijela postelje. Z eno roko, z drugo si je segla v mednožje, razprla sramne ustnice, se pogreznila v mehko meso, v notranjost. Medenična kost se ji je vedno zdela mehka, že na meji krhklega. Ko se je Leo zibal v njej, ko se je še zibal, se je zdelo, da ta kost lahko zdrži vse, nenadoma pa je čutila, da bi jo temnopolti moški, katerega imena si ni mogla zapomniti, saj ji je povedal, pa je pozabila, rekel je nekaj na M. ali T., zdrobil.

Vedela je, da je včasih opazoval njene noge in njene široko spete lase, s figo na vrhu, kot je bilo moderno, morda je svoji partnerki celo rekel: „Ida je drobna, vendar ima močna meča,“ čemur pa ta po vsej verjetnosti ni namenjala nikakršne pozornosti.

Tudi zato, da se ne bi izdala, je prvič, ko je bila pri njih na obisku, ko je prišla, da bi se opravičila, predvsem zaradi Lizikinega večurnega tuljenja, zrla v brazgotino na njegovi roki, ki se je nahajala na najbolj mesnatem delu roke, na notranji strani podlahti. Pripravljal je čaj v belih skodelicah, s finimi prsti odpiral čajne vrečke in jih potapljal v vrelo vodo, ter govoril

nekaj o tem, da Afričani ne prihajajo v Evropo izkoriščat socialnega sistema. Njegova partnerka je v sosednji sobi previjala otroka. Idi se je zdelo, da vonj po vreli vodi samo prekriva vonj po urinu, toda potem je pomislila, da je njun sin prevelik za plenice. Iritirano je dejala, „Ali Afričani ne prihajajo v Evropo, ker iščejo varnost?“

Zdelo se ji je domiselno, da ostaja pri izrazu, ki ga je on sam uporabil – Afričan, dokler se ni zasukal proti njej in dejal: „Ne, ne bi rekel.“ Skodelico je položil prednjo malodane s tleskom. Njegove partnerke še vedno ni bilo od nikoder. Idi se je zdelo, da jo nekako že pozna, da ji je manj tuja, kot ji je bil tuj on, in kljub temu, da se ji je zdela njegova polt, ali pa je bilo to samo zaradi spuščajočega se popoldneva, svetlikava.

„Kar je praktično eno in isto,“ je bleknila, ko ni bilo več upanja, da bo ona s svetlimi lasmi še kdaj stopila v prostor. Potem se je pojavil njun otrok z lasmi v barvi ingverja.

„Ti bom povedal štorijo iz Belgije. Zgodilo se je v trgovini. V izložbi sem zagledal moški plašč. Na rokah je imel našitke, govejo kožo na robu in rdečo črto na prsnem delu. Res je bil lep. Sedemdeset odstotkov znižan in še tedaj je stal nekaj čez tisoč evrov. Ženski v trgovini sem dejal, da ga ne morem kupiti, da imam družino. Ni to, da ne bi imel denarja, pač pa, da sem si takšen luksuz lahko privoščil v prejšnjem življenju, zdaj pa imam odgovornost. Prodajalka, ki se zlepa ni hotela vdati, mi je dejala, da tovrstne ekskluzivnosti kupujejo Afričani. Kamerunčani, Nigerijci, Južno-Afričani. Enako je s čevlji, srajcami, parfumi. Afričani investirajo v telo. Belec, ki preveč da nase, ni pravi moški. Ampak pri nas je negovana koža znak možatosti. Ne vem, če razumeš?“

Ko je Ida dvignila skodelico k ustom in preden je naredila požirek, se je spomnila, da ji zvoki ljubljena tega para, ki se zdaj sicer ni kazal kot par, ali pa se je njuno parjenje kazalo samo na način otroka, ki je napol gol švignil v kopalnico, ni

šlo na živce, na živce so ji šli le sosedini kriki, vzdihljaji, njega pa je slišala predvsem na način premikanja postelje ali tistih lebdečih oken. Včasih si ga je predstavljala miže, kako tik pred vrhuncem vzdihne, in kako se s svojim dolgimi nogami odrine od postelje.

Hotela je reči, da vse razume, še posebej o manjvrednostnem kompleksu temnopoltih, toliko je že prebrala, vendar je raje molčala in se pretvarjala, da se razgleduje naokoli. Bele zavese, bela tla, bela kuhinja in črna miza. Pod mizo je čutila nevidno prisotnost igrač.

„Ni mi mar, ali je zdravnik zastonj, ali napol zastonj, hočem samo, da me pozdravi. Denar je zato, da ga trošiš, ne da ga držiš v omari. In mi, ki smo nasedli tu, tudi trošimo. Trošimo več, kot si mislite.“

„Očitno nisi preživel nobene vojne,“ je rekla Ida. Ni vedela, zakaj je šla v konfrontacijo, zakaj je vztrajala.

Tedaj se je na vratih pojavila partnerkina silhueta. Zdela se ji je povsem drugačna, kot na tisti zabavi. Skozi nezlikane lase, ji je sijalo sonce in bila je bosa. „Priti od Afrike do sem, je vojna,“ je dejala, kot da govori z njegovimi usti. Ida se je obrnila, morda da bi preverila, ali je prav slišala.

„Moj oče je bil pripadnik francoske letalske enote. Ko je bila akcija, so bili temnopolti vojaki vedno v ospredju, ko pa se je gobcalo o herojskih akcijah, so bili Francozi tisti, ki so se šopirili. S Sito sta se v nekem trenutku odločila vrniti v tedanjo Zgornjo Volto. Oče je slekel vojaško uniformo in v Bobo Dioulassoju odprl pekarno. Ni šlo za to, da s Sito ne bi mogla ostati v Marseillu, preden sta bila moja starša državljana Burkine Faso, sta bila najprej francoska državljana, toda rasizem v njunem času je bil nevzdržen. Ne pravim, da so se stvari v globalu zares spremenile, predvsem kar se tiče forsiranja belosti,

ampak, da Afričani moje generacije postajamo vse bolj in bolj ozaveščeni in da smo se odločili za drugačen pristop.“

Ida ga je hotela vprašati, zakaj svojo mater kliče po imenu, toda zdelo se ji je, da bi s tem zgolj poglobila napetost, ki je zavladala. Sklonila se je in izpod mize privlekla igračo. Modrega slona z zvonci na ušesih je narahlo stresla. Deček je pri tem skočil iz kopalnice, obstal, nepremično gledal vanjo, poskušala se mu je nasmehnuti, vendar neuspešno. Koža se mu je svetila, očitno ga je mati pravkar namazala s kremo, in se zazrla v tisto njegovo ingverjevo barvo, ki se je, drugače od njegove matere, izmaknila soncu, čeprav se je še vseeno zdelo, kot bi ga obdajala avra.

„Hočem ti reči le, da ne prihajamo sem zaradi zdravstvenega sistema ali socialne, še posebej ne v Slovenijo, pač pa, ker hočemo nekaj drugega v življenju. Ali ni to človeško?“

Idi se je zdelo, da se hoče s to vprašalno obliko opravičiti, nenazadnje je bila njihova gostja, čeprav se je sama povabila, in sicer z vedrom sadja z Obale.

„Ampak še vseeno prihajate, ker tu zaslužite več kot doma?“

Ida ni vedela, zakaj natanko je to izrekla, morda ker je v njej raslo obrežje menstrualne krvi in ko je raslo, je bila ne samo živčna, pač pa tudi potrebna.

„Res se vidi, da si od tu.“ Ko je to izrekel, zdaj se je končno spomnila njegovega imena, Muhamed, je rekel, ter ji ob prvem srečanju v dvigalu nežno stisnil roko, je otroka, še vedno napol golega, vzel v naročje, in se ga dotaknil s čelom, kot da hoče zakriti tisto, kar bo sledilo. Med njima je zaznala posebno bližino, sprijetost, morda celo zavezništvo.

„Zdaj pa bi se že lahko počutila užaljeno.“

„Ne, Francozinja tega ne bi nikoli izrekla. V Burkini imamo pekarnе, ki so jih ustanovili belci, v pristanišču v Lomeju

lahko najdeš horde belcev, ki prodajajo rabljene avtomobile. Če kje, potem v Afriki lahko iz nič zaslužiš denar. Tisti kupci tri in nekaj tisočevrskega plašča so fizični delavci, varnostniki v supermarketih. Verjamem, da so doma zmožni zaslužiti enako vsoto kot tu, z dostojnejšim delom, vendar so v nekem trenutku hoteli iz ozkega lokalnega bazena. V Burkini imamo pregovor: potovanje te lahko obogati, kot te ne more nič drugega.“

Ida se je poskušala spomniti barve zraka zjutraj, ko je ta pronical skozi žaluzije. Zagotovo je vedela le, da se je nebo, ko je odprla oči, v celoti in popolnoma preobrnilo. Hotela je vstati, toda iztrebljena tišina je s paraliziranimi krili padla nazaj nanjo. Razkoračena, razglajena, se je začela jokati.

„Govoriš precej na splošno, milo rečeno posplošuješ,“ je zašepetala nekam predse. Otrok se je pomaknil bliže k njej, ali pa samo bliže materi, ki je odprla velik, samostoječ hladilnik.

„Vedno obstajajo izjeme, ampak zdaj pač branim svoje sestre in brate, ki jim njihove želje po odhodu, in še posebej spričo tega, kar se dogaja doma, v Afriki, ne smeš zameriti.“

„Slišala sem, da znajo biti Afričani strašni rasisti,“ je rekla partnerka, ob čemer so se vsi, tudi otrok, ozrli proti njej.

„S tem pa se moram na žalost strinjati,“ je odsekano dejal Muhamed, in izginil v kopalnico. Ko se je vrnil v dnevni prostor, je iztegnjene dlani dvignil k obrazu, ter tako nakazal, da se odteguje pogovoru in da je čas za molitev.

Ida je hotela še marsikaj dodati, na primer, da ne verjame, da je njena Lizika po več ur bevskala, da nenazadnje tudi njun otrok po več ur preždi na balkonu in joče, ko pa bi ga nekdo lahko vzel v roke, toda namesto visokega donenja besed je vstala, pokukala proti spalničnemu prostoru, kjer je Muhamed klečal za posteljo na tleh in glavo izmenično polagal na tla, nato pa je dečka pobožala po laseh. Nič slabega ni mislila, hotela je le občutiti gmoto puha. Ker se ji je odmaknil, je njena roka obvisela

v zraku; za hip je moralo izgledati[bilo videti], kot da si šiva krila.

„Črta učimo, naj se ne pusti dotikati tujcem,“ je dejala dečkova mati in si ga, obrnjenega proč od nje, prižela k telesu, nato pa dodala, „to še posebej velja za božanje las.“

Ido je razžiralo od razočaranja. V tem paru je videla potencialna zaveznika v večstanovanjski hiši, vendar sta se očitno vklopila v večinski jezik. Krivdo je zvalila nanjo, saj je nanj ni mogla, nenazadnje se soseda iz drugega nadstropja ni tako zelo motila, odgovornost je bila na njej, ona je bila tista, ki je pripeljala Muhameda v ta prostor. Brez nje se nikoli ne bi srečali, ali kot ji je dejal sodelavec Ilija v enem izmed njunih telefonskih pogovorov: *v naključnih družbah, v katerih se naključno nahajam in znotraj katerih nas veže naključno preživljanje ...* Ozrla se je proti vedru sadja, ki je stalo na tleh. Želela si je, da bi ga vzela nazaj, da ga sploh nikoli ne bi prinesla. Morda jo je jeza pognala k drznosti: „Ali lahko nekaj vprašam? Kje sta se spoznala ...?“

Deček se je ozrl proti materi, ki so ji ramena nemirno podrhtevala.

Ida je zardela, in si, da bi prikrla zadrego, popravila lase. „S tistim drugim, ne z Muhamedom, mislim ...?“

Besede, ki so prišle iz sosednih ust, „Če boš samo besedo črhnila Muhamedu, kaj si videla takrat, ti bom razbila gobec, si razumela?“, verjetno nikoli niso bile izrečene, saj so razkrivale razliko med tem, kakrna naj bi ta njena soseda bila, in za kakršno so si drugi predstavljali, da je.

Ida

Gabriela Babnik

Translated from Slovene by Rawley Grau

Ida was no longer waking up at night because of the former owner of the flat she had recently moved into – the woman in the faded red dress was no longer haunting her; now she was waking up, sometimes soaked in sweat, because of the lithe body of the black man who slept, if he slept, one floor above her. Sometimes she seemed to hear the moans of lovemaking, and sometimes, with the lovemaking, even the windows would move. They would be carried from one end to the other and at such moments Ida held on to the bed. With one hand. With the other she reached down to between her legs, parted the folds, sank into the soft flesh, and went inside. The pelvic bone always felt soft to her, almost frangible. When Leo would rock back and forth in her, when he was still rocking in her, that bone seemed able to withstand anything, but now she suddenly felt that the black man, whose name she couldn't remember – he had told it to her but she had forgotten; he'd said something with an M or a T – he would shatter it.

She knew that he sometimes noticed her legs and her hair, done up loosely in a bun at the top, in the modern style, and maybe he had even told his partner: “Ida is small, but she has strong calves,” which the partner had probably never paid any attention to.

It was partly so she wouldn't betray herself, on that first visit to their flat, when she came to apologise especially for Lizika's hours-long wailing, that she had gazed at the scar on his arm, on the meatiest part of the arm, the inner forearm. He was making tea in white cups, his elegant fingers undoing the teabags and submersing them in the hot water, and was

saying something about how Africans didn't come to Europe to take advantage of the social system. His partner was in the next room changing the baby. To Ida, the smell of the hot water seemed merely to cover up the smell of urine, but then it occurred to her that their son was too big for nappies. In an irritated voice she said, "But aren't Africans coming to Europe because they're looking for safety?"

She thought it was clever to repeat the same term he had used – Africans – until he spun around to face her and said, "No, I wouldn't say that." When he put the cup down in front of her it almost clinked. There was still no sign of his partner. Ida felt as if she already knew her somehow, that she was less foreign to her than he was, even though his skin seemed (or was it just the waning afternoon?) to glisten.

"Which is practically the same thing," she blurted, having given up hope of the fair-haired woman ever entering the room. Then the child appeared, with hair the colour of ginger.

"I'll tell you a story from Belgium. It happened in a shop. I saw a man's overcoat in the window. It had patches sewn on the sleeves, a cowhide trim, and a red stripe across the chest. It was really beautiful. Seventy per cent off, and even then it cost more than a thousand euros. I told the woman in the shop that I couldn't buy it, I had a family. It wasn't that I didn't have the money, but whereas in my previous life I might have allowed myself such a luxury, now I had responsibilities. The sales lady, who wasn't giving up so easily, told me it was Africans who bought these exclusive items – Cameroonians, Nigerians, South Africans. It was the same with shoes, shirts, colognes. Africans invest in the body. A white man who sets too much store on his appearance is not a real man. But with us, skin that's well cared for is a sign of masculinity. I'm not sure you understand."

As Ida lifted the teacup to her lips, and before she took a sip, she realised that it wasn't the lovemaking sounds of the couple – who were not now presenting themselves as a couple, or rather, their coupling was presented only through their child, who had dashed half-naked to the bathroom – that's not what got on her nerves; what got on her nerves was only the woman's cries, her moans, while him she heard mainly in the shifting of the bed, or those floating windows. Sometimes, closing her eyes, she would imagine him just before he climaxed, his release of breath, how he'd push himself off the foot of the bed with those long legs of his.

She wanted to tell him that she understood everything, especially the inferiority complex black people had – that much she had read about – but instead she said nothing and pretended to look around the room. White curtains, white floor, white kitchen, black table. Beneath the table she felt the unseen presence of toys.

“I don't care if the doctor is free, or half-free. I just want him to make me well. Money is for spending, not for storing in the cupboard. And those of us who've ended up here, we spend it. We spend more than you think.”

“It's obvious you haven't been through any war,” Ida said. She didn't know why she wanted to confront him, why she persisted.

That's when the silhouette of the partner appeared in the doorway. She looked completely different than at the party. The sun was shining through her unironed hair and she was barefoot. “Getting here from Africa is a war,” she said, as if she was speaking through his mouth. Ida turned around, perhaps to make sure she'd heard correctly.

“My father belonged to a French air squadron. Whenever there was action, the black soldiers were always in the front lines, but when it came to bragging about feats of heroism,

the French stole the show. So eventually he and Sita made the decision to move back to what was then Upper Volta. My father took off his military uniform and opened a bakery in Bobo-Dioulasso. It wasn't that he and Sita couldn't have stayed in Marseilles. Before they became citizens of Burkina Faso, my parents had been French citizens, but the racism was unbearable in their day. I'm not saying things have seriously changed on the whole, especially when it comes to privileging whiteness, but Africans of my generation are more and more aware, and we've taken a different approach."

Ida wanted to ask him why he called his mother by her first name, but she thought this would only increase the tension in the room. She bent down and picked up a toy from under the table: a blue elephant with bells on its ears. She gave it a little shake. At once the boy bounded out of the bathroom, stopped, and looked at her, motionless; she tried to smile at him but with no success. His skin was gleaming – his mother must have just put cream on him – and she gazed at that ginger of his, which, unlike his mother, had moved out of the sunlight, but even so he seemed to be bathed in an aura.

"All I want to say is that we don't come here for the health-care system or the social benefits – especially not to Slovenia. We come because we're looking for something different in our lives. And isn't that just being human?"

Ida felt that by phrasing this as a question he was trying to apologise. She was their guest, after all, even if she had invited herself here – and she had brought them a bucket of fruit from the coast.

"But still, don't you come because you can make more money than at home?"

Ida didn't exactly know why she said this; maybe it was the rising tide of menstrual blood within her, and when it rose she became not just irritable, but randy.

“It’s really obvious that you’re from here.” When he said this, she finally remembered his name. Muhammed, he had told her, and on that first meeting in the lift, he had gently squeezed her hand, took the boy, even then half-naked, into his arms, and touched him with his forehead as if wanting to conceal what would follow. She had detected a special intimacy between the two of them, a bondedness, maybe even an alliance.

“Now I might feel offended.”

“No, a Frenchwoman would never say that. In Burkina we have bakeries that were started by white people; in the port of Lomé, you can find hordes of white men selling used cars. If there’s any place a person can make money from nothing, it’s Africa. Those Africans who buy coats for three thousand and something euros – they’re manual labourers and supermarket security guards. I have no doubt they can earn the same amount at home as they do here, and have more dignified jobs too, but at a certain point they wanted to leave the narrow local pool. We have a saying in Burkina: nothing makes you rich like travelling.”

Ida tried to remember the colour of the air that morning as it seeped through the Venetian blinds. All she knew for sure was that when she opened her eyes, the sky had completely and thoroughly changed. She wanted to get up, but the shattered silence with its paralysed wings fell back on top of her. Her legs spread wide, her body exposed, she started to cry.

“You make such sweeping statements – you’re generalising, to put it mildly,” she whispered into the air. The child moved closer to her, or closer to his mother, who had opened the big, free-standing refrigerator.

“Well, there are always exceptions, but right now I’m defending my sisters and brothers, who you shouldn’t blame for

wanting to leave, especially considering what's happening at home, in Africa.”

“I've heard that Africans can be terrible racists,” his partner said, and everyone, even the boy, turned to look at her.

“Unfortunately, I must agree,” Muhammed said tersely and disappeared into the bathroom. When he returned to the living room, he lifted his open palms to his face, to signal that he was removing himself from the conversation and it was time for prayer.

Ida still had a lot she wanted to add, for instance that she didn't believe her Lizika had been barking for hours on end, and anyway their child would sit on the balcony and cry for hours when somebody should pick him up and hold him in their arms – but instead of a shrill cascade of words she stood up and peeked over towards the bedroom, where Muhammed was kneeling behind the bed and alternately raising and lowering his head to the floor; then she stroked the boy's hair. She didn't mean anything bad by it, she just wanted to touch that mass of fluff. He pulled away from her, so her arm was left suspended in the air, and for a moment it looked as though she was sewing herself wings.

“We're teaching Ārtomir not to let strangers touch him,” the boy's mother said and, turning away, pressed him to her body. Then she added, “This applies especially to patting him on the head.”

Ida felt the gnawing of disappointment. She had envisioned the couple as potential allies in the building, but clearly they had adopted the language of the majority. She blamed the partner since she couldn't blame him. The third-floor neighbour had not been so wrong after all: the partner was responsible – she had brought Muhammed into the building. Without her, they would never have met each other; it was like what her co-worker Ilja had said in one of their phone

conversations, about “random groups in which I randomly find myself, where we are all connected by random experiences.” She looked at the bucket of fruit on the floor. She wished she could take it back, wished she had never brought it. Maybe it was anger that drove her to the audacity of: “Can I ask you something? Where did you meet him?”

The boy looked up at his mother, whose shoulders were nervously quivering.

Ida blushed and, to hide her discomfort, adjusted her hair. “The other one, I mean; not Muhammed...”

The words that came from her neighbour’s mouth – “If you breathe even a syllable of what you saw that day to Muhammed, I will smash your face in, understand?” – were probably never spoken out loud, for they revealed the difference between the sort of person this woman most likely was and what others imagined her to be.



Luxembourg

Jean Back

Europäesch Wolleken

European Clouds

EUPL laureate 2010: *Amateur* (Ultimomondo Editions)

BIOGRAPHY

Jean Back was born in Dudelange, Luxembourg, in 1953. After finishing his secondary education in Esch-sur-Alzette, he became a civil servant, first at the Ministry of Family, then at the Ministry of Culture. Between 1989 and 2016 he was in charge of the Centre national de l'audiovisuel (CNA) in Dudelange. In 2003 he turned to literature with *Wollekestol*, a tribute to his hometown and its steel industry. This was followed in 2007 by *Mon amour schwein*. *Amateur* was published in 2009, won the EUPL Prize in 2010 and has since been translated in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Albania, Macedonia, Hungary and Serbia. Back published *Wéi Dag an Nuecht* in 2012 and the novel *Karamell* in 2014, followed in 2015 by *Zalto Mortale* (Kremart Edition). *Zalto Mortale* was shortlisted for the Luxemburg book prize. In 2017 he published *Trakl Blues*, a novel in German about the amateur film *Die junge Magd* (*The Young Maiden*), based on the poem by Georg Trakl, and *lesel* (Editions Binsfeld), a Luxembourgish novel about the relationship between a banker and a donkey.

Europäesch Wolleken

Jean Back



Match, Matsch, Mätsch: den Diddelenger Supermarché. Märginn an de Mätsch, mer brauche Wuere fir ze grillen, matsch, mitsch, haut ass schéi Wieder, keng Wollek um Himmel. Fir ze laachen, esou schéin!

„Bréng e puer marinéiert Kotelette mat, eng Fläsch Wäin, keen ze deieren, héiers de?“

Ich höre. Ech fueren. Lauschtere Musek. Parken *ënnert de Beem*.

De Matsch, e grot Zillegebai, e banalen Zweckbau mat Knätsch-tëppele virum Agank a Kaddieën un der Staang. Mat Dauwen um Daach: „*guru guck, guru guck*“. Mam Auto op zwou Minutte vun doheim. Banal, awer praktesch, dee super Maart. Gutt. Et ass e kloeren Hierschtdag. Esou een, wéi den 11.9. zu Manhattan, mueres um aacht Auer. Virdrun hat d’Sonn geschéngt. Wéi elo, hell, ouni ze wiermen. Ech trëppele laanscht d’Regaler, sichen, fannen, dixé meng Wuere duerch d’elektronesch Kees. Et piiipst, de Wäin, d’Koteletten, piiips, d’Oliven, piips, eng Drëpp, piiips, de Jus, piiips, e Pak Youghurtsdëppercher, 0% Fett, piiips, piiips, d’Keessiäre sinn ofgeschaf, nëmmen eng Oppasserin huet iwwerlieft, waart, dass ech net eens gi mam piiipsen. Ech ginn eens, et piiipst eng leschte Kéier, d’chroméiert Staang gëtt no, ech rulle mam volle Käddi op de Parking. En eelere Mann steet um Dauwendreck. Spillt Akkordeon. Ech klaken d’Mall zou. De Schlëssel läit bannendran! Nieft de Wuere. Esouguer d’Blieder un de Platane schéngen ze laachen. Ech sti wéi en Dabo virum zouenen Auto a muss waarden. Bis eise Jéngste mer

den Ersatzschlüssel bréngt. Dat kann daueren. Ech kinnt bis heem trëppelen. Zréck kommen. Fënnf Minutten héichstens, géing ech brauchen. Ech loosse laang schellen. E schléift nach. Oder en huet den Handy aus. Dat kann net sinn! Awer ech hunn Zäit. Aus purer Lidderegkeet bleiwen ech nieft dem Luuchtepotto stoen a kucken a waarden a lauschteren dem Mann mam Akkordeon no, well ech Akkordeonsmusek gär hunn, well déi Zort Musek mech un de René de Bernardi erënnert, am fréieren Dancing *beim Heuertz*: Baler, Thé dansant, knutsch *slow* an Trëppelwalz. Och un den Astor Piazzolla erënnert. Elo Kitsch spillt de Mann, Herz und Schmerz: *Junge komm bald wieder, Caprisonne, Lili Marleen, duerno d'Donauwellen*. Am Schiet vun der Zillemauer vum Matsch sëtzt eng Fra um Buedem an hält d'Hand op.

„Et ass eng Rumänin, kuck dach emol.“

„Knaschteg Rumänen. Voller Lais a Fléi! Klauen eis Autoen! Houer Drecksäck!“

„Si sinn an der EU.“

„D'EU mécht faillitte. Sollen doheem bleiwen. Lauter Zigeiner!“

E Gespréich a mengem Réck.

„Deslescht, si haten *open air* kino, an deem Kulturzentrum do. Owes. D'Musek war esou haart, mäi léift Kand, dass ech deem Direkter vun deem Knascht ugeruff hunn. Ech hunn de Fernseh net méi héieren, esou haart wär den *open air*, sot ech zu him. An ob en nees Filmer fir d'Portugise géing spillen? Du sot en zu mer, den Direkter, haut géinge s'en italienesche Film spillen. Aarschlach, sot ech zu em, an hunn agehaang.“

„Waat?“

„Ma, et ass dach wouer!“

D'*open air* Madame ass Mëtt fofzeg. Roude Brëll, gringe Präb-
beli. Hir Frëndin ass héichgewuess. Ugangs siechzeg. Platt
Schung. Mofe Schal. D'Heeschefra spillt elo mat hire Kanner.
Ech geheien dem Mann zwee Euro an den Hutt. D'Fale vum
Akkordeon zéien sech zesummen, doen sech auserneen. *Ma-
rina, Marina, Marina*. E puer Wolleke segelen am héije Bloen.
Wat fir eng Nationalitéit hunn d'Wolleken? Si se franséisch,
wa s'iwwert dem Elysee schwiewen? Spuenesch, wa s'iwwert
Sevilla hänken? Wéi gesäit eng Schwäizer Wollek aus?
Eng Belsch? Sinn d'Wolleke portugiesesch wa s'iwwert Didde-
leng schwammen? Lëtzebuergesch, wa se zu Porto ukommen?
D'*open air* Madame hat sech als rengrasseg Rassistin z'erken-
ne ginn. Ongewollt. Hat sécher gemengt, ech géing d'Lëtzebu-
erger Sprooch net verstoen, well ech eng Kap vum F91¹ um
Kapp hat. Mam Stuerz a mat der Schrëft no hannen. D'Beem sti
riicht ronderëm d'Plaz. De Wand mellt sech net. Eise Jéngsten
ass nach ganz verschlof, wéi en endlech ophieft.

D'Heeschefra verléisst hir Plaz. D'Kanner lafen hannendrun.
Schloen d'Rad. Zéien sech um Plower, kickelen, rolsen iwwert
dem Virугоen. Den Akkordeonsmann spillt *When the wind
whispers over the plains*. Den Ersatzschlüssel segelt aus der
Fënster vu menger Fra hirem Auto: „*So long, daddy*.“

An zwou Woche si Walen. Praktesch, quadratesch, demokra-
tesch Gemengewalen. D'*open air* Madame an hir Frëndin sinn
am groen Zillegebai verschwonnen.

Haut de mëtteg, mat um Grillmenu: dräi Fläsche Chianti, zwee
Päck Oliven aus Portugal, eng rumänesch Drëpp an um fënnef
Auer spillt Barça géint Red Bull Salzburg. Olé!



¹ Diddelenger Fussballclub. Déi éischt Equipp ass meeschtens besat mat internationale Spiller

European Clouds

Jean Back

translated from Luxembourgish by Sandra Schmit

Match, Much, Match: the supermarket in Dudelange. We are going to Match, we need goods for a barbecue, mitch match, today the weather is beautiful, not a cloud in the sky. Makes me want to laugh, so beautiful!

“Get me some marinated pork chops, a bottle of wine, but not the expensive one, you hear?”

I hear. I drive. Listen to music. Park under the trees.

Match, a grey brick building, an ordinary functional construction with chewing-gum dots near the entrance and shopping carts on a bar. And pigeons on the roof: “*coo rook, coo rook*”. Two minutes from home with the car. Ordinary, but practical, that supermarket. Good. It is a clear autumn day. Just like on 9/11 in Manhattan, at eight o'clock in the morning. The sun had been shining just before. Like now, bright, but not warm. I walk along the aisles, searching, finding, flipping my wares through the self-checkout. A beep, the wine, beep, the pork chops, beep, the olives, beep, the brandy, beep, the juice, beep, a package of yoghurt tubs, 0% fat, beep, beep, the cashiers have been abolished, only one overseer has survived, waiting for me not to manage the beeping. I do manage, there is a final beep, the chromed rod gives way, I push the full cart into the parking lot. An elderly man is standing in pigeon droppings. Playing accordion. I slam the boot shut. The key is inside! Next to the purchases. Even the leaves on the plane tree appear to laugh. I am standing like an idiot next to my locked car and have to wait. For our youngest to bring me the spare key. That will take a long time. I could walk home. Come back.

I wouldn't need more than five minutes, tops. I keep the phone ringing. He is still asleep. Or his cell phone is switched off. That can't be! But I have time. Out of sheer laziness I stay next to the lamppost, looking and waiting and listening to the man playing the accordion, because I like accordion music, because that kind of music reminds me of René de Bernardi, at the erst-while dancing club Beim Heuertz: dance parties, *thé dansant*, smootch slow and English Waltz. And also reminds me of Astor Piazzolla. Now the man plays kitsch, love and heartache: a Freddie Quinn song, *Capri*, *Lili Marleen*, after that *Waves of the Danube*. In the shade of Match's brick wall, a woman is sitting on the ground, holding out her open hand.

"It's a Romanian, just look."

"Dirty Romanians. Full of lice and fleas. Stealing our cars. Fucking bastards."

"They're in the EU."

"The EU is going bankrupt. Should stay home. Gypsies, the lot of them."

A conversation behind my back.

"Recently, they had an open-air movie in that culture centre. In the evening. The music was so loud, I'm telling you, I called the director of that shithole. I couldn't hear the telly anymore, that's how loud your open air is, I told him. And whether they were playing these movies again for the Portuguese? And there he told me, the director, that this time it was an Italian film. Asshole, I said, and I hung up."

"What?"

"What's right is right."

The open-air lady is in her fifties. Red glasses, green umbrella. Her friend is tall in stature. Early sixties. Flat shoes. Violet scarf. The beggarwoman is now playing with her children. I throw two euros into the man's hat. The accordion's bellows contract and expand. *Marina, Marina, Marina*. A couple of clouds are sailing high up in the blue. What nationality are the clouds? Are they French, when they're hovering over the Elysée? Spanish, when they're hanging over Seville? What does a Swiss cloud look like? A Belgian one? Are the clouds Portuguese when they drift over Dudelange? Luxembourgish, when they arrive in Porto? The open-air lady outed herself as a purebred racist. Inadvertently. She probably thought that I didn't understand Luxembourgish, because I was wearing an F91¹ cap on my head. With the visor and the logo to the back. The trees are standing still around the square. The wind is keeping quiet. Our youngest is still half-asleep when he finally picks up the phone.

The beggarwoman is leaving her spot. The children are running after her. Turning cartwheels. Yanking each other's pull-overs, giggling, larking about as they pass by me. The accordionist is playing *When the wind whispers over the plains*. The spare key is gliding out of the window of my wife's car: "So long, daddy."

In two weeks, we'll have elections. Practical, square, democratic local elections. The open-air lady and her friend have disappeared into the grey brick building.

Also on today's barbecue menu: three bottles of Chianti, two packs of olives from Portugal, one Romanian brandy and at five o'clock there's Barça playing against Red Bull Salzburg. Olé!

¹ Football club from Dudelange. Their first team is most often composed of international players.



Montenegro

Aleksandar Bečanović

Europa: A Rape-Revenge Story

EUPL laureate 2017: *Arcueil* (Nova Knjiga)

BIOGRAPHY

Aleksandar Bečanović, born in 1971, is a Montenegrin writer, film critic and screenwriter. He is the author of five poetry books, *Ulysses' Distance* (1994), *Being* (1996), *The Pantry* (1998), *Places in the Letter* (2001) and *Preludes and Fugues* (2007); two short story collections, *I Am Waiting*, *What Will Happen Next* (2005) and *Obsession* (2009); and two novels, *Arcueil* (2015) and *Disorder* (2017). He has also published two books of film criticism, *Genre in the Contemporary Cinema* (2005) and the 900-page long *Lexicon of Film Directors* (2015). He received the Risto Ratković Award for the best book of poetry in Montenegro in 2002. He writes film reviews and essays for Montenegrin daily *Vijesti*, and is one of the contributors to the books *501 Movie Directors* (2007), *501 Movie Stars* (2007), *101 Horror Movies You Must See Before You Die* (2009) and *101 Sci-Fi Movies You Must See Before You Die* (2009).

Europa: A Rape-Revenge Story

Aleksandar Bečanović



Koliko li je mogućnih sreća čije ostvarenje
čovjek tako žrtvuje zbog nestrpljenja pred
jednim neposrednim zadovoljstvom!
Marcel Proust – *Un amour de Swann*

Tog jutra, kada započinje ova kratka priča u donekle isповjednom tonu, morao sam ustati ranije nego inače. Najradije sam htio opet zagnjuriti glavu u jastuk, ali obaveza je bila isuviše krupna da se mogla prostodušno ignorisati. Podigao sam se na laktove, no inercija je i dalje bila jača: možda sam uveliko ušao u ono doba kada snovi samo donose umor. Pričekao sam još nekoliko trenutaka prije nego sam protrljao oči. A onda sam se – kako to i biva po već ustaljenom literarnom mehanizmu koji zamjenjuje naše normalne instinkte – prisjetio moje rane mladosti, jednog skoro zaboravljenog rituala koji je osmišljavao moja nevesela buđenja.

Ovo kunjanje, mlitavo pokretanje utrnulih udova i hvatanje vazduha kao da je razdvajanje od kreveta najveći podvig koji ću danas učiniti, vratili su me na početak mojih dvadesetih kada sam se namjerio, u mješavini samoobmanjujuće pretencioznosti i iskrene želje, da pročitam *U potrazi za izgubljenim vremenom*, pošto sam već bio tako čvrsto usidren u dokolici. Prve stranice romana su mi dale ideju koja je bila ne samo estetski ispravna, nego i praktično korisna (čime sam bio gotovo sladostrasno

oduševljen, jer su moje zamisli obično lako padale pred zahtjevima strožije pragmatičnosti): roman koji je počinjao zaspivanjem, stanjem koje još uvijek ne razlikuje san od jave, valjalo je isključivo čitati rano ujutro, ne napuštajući još zadugo najudobniji horizontalni položaj. Jasno, roman koji je napisan u krevetu upravo se i morao čitati u krevetu, ako se već htio postići najbolji interpretativni efekt. Takva metodologija mi se činila i tada i sada kao najprimjerenija: dok autor neminovno tone u san, zajedno sa svojim prisjećanjima i žudnjama, čitalac mora da se razbuđuje, iako ga i dalje opsjedaju ostaci prošlih i budućih košmara i fantazija. Tako su oboje samo naizgled na različitim obalama svjesnosti.

Što bih sada dao za takav luksuz – a svaki luksuz je prefinjeni izraz dekadencije, kako bih se sada prepustio užitku izgubljenog čitanja! Ali, avaj, mene su čekale obaveze, i najteži korak je bio da se konačno iskobeljam iz kreveta koji je najednom postao, u mojoj novopridošloj melanholiji, objekt najdublje nostalgije, skoro pa kao predmet iz djetinjstva koji smo, mnogo godina poslije, slučajno našli, pa smo bezrazložno opčinjeni pred tom koincidencijom. Još jednom sam pogledao na sat, prikupio snagu da odem do kupatila, gdje sam se umio i obrijao. Moje lice u ogledalu je izgledalo umjereno pristojno: u ovim godinama, nečem boljem se nisam ni mogao nadati. Odabir odijela je otkrio da je priroda mog dogovorenog sastanka čisto poslovne prirode. Još ranije sam odlučio da ću na putu – kroz podgoričke ulice trebalo mi je desetak minuta do odredišta – već nešto smisliti sa čime ću se pojaviti pred gospodina Pekovića.

Mlad i ambiciozan, sa dobrim vezama, gospodin Peković – za prijatelje Peck, oslovljavanje kojeja ja, međutim, još nisam bio ovlašten da koristim – trenutno je najperspektivniji crnogorski filmski producent. Nekoliko njegovih posljednjih filmova bili su vezani za donekle patetičnu socijalnu problematiku, zbog čega su uostalom imali popriličnog uspjeha, pa se Pekoviću

učinilo da je majstorski spojio ugodno sa korisnim: nikada nije na odmet kada se gorljiva tema fino uklopi u generalni biznis plan.

Uspjeh se mora urgentno obnavljati, a znajući da će, u trenutku kada bi trebao da iskoristi momentum, ugledni producent nediskriminativno tražiti na sve strane ideje na sve strane koje bi se neometano uklopile u njegovu provjerenu dobitnu kombinaciju, na jednoj privatnoj zabavi sam mu prišao, gotovo skrušeno se predstavio, pozvavši se pri tom na neke zajedničke poznanike, i predložio – popis mojih ranijih scenarija svakako nije bio impresivan, ali je makar spriječavao sumnju u diletantizam – da mu dostavim sinopsis za film koji će zadovoljiti i estetske parametre, dakle, društvenu relevantnost, i finansijsku plauzabilnost, to jest „prohodnost“ na konkursima. Iako je gospodin Peković bio više zainteresovan za visoku brinetu sa kojom je došao, što mu niko ne može zamjeriti s obzirom da se očigledno radilo o šarmantnoj družbenici, nepogrešivi biznis instinkt već iskusnog producenta – čak i u jednoj takvoj situaciji, kada se moj nastup mogao razumljivo protumačiti i kao neumjesna distrakcija - nije bio ugušen, te mi on reče da mu donesem, za četrnaestak dana, detaljan opis filma. Insistirao je da mu ne šaljem nikakve mailove, nego da mu lično dostavim, u njegovoj kancelariji, hard copy verziju sinopsisa. Čim sam dobio ovaj prijedlog, taktički sam se udaljio i prepustio producenta da nastavi prekinuti razgovor (skoro sam napisao: koitus) sa nadasve zanimljivom brinetom.

I tako, četrnaest dana je prošlo, išao sam na zakazani sastanak, ali nisam sa sobom nosio kompletirani sinopsis. Ne radi se se samo o tome da sam patio od neizbježne savremene boljke zvane stvaralačka blokada: riječ je i o posebnoj spisateljskoj strategiji. Naime, ono što je potiskivano, mora u nekom traumatičnom trenutku isplivati na površinu. Pošto anksiozni susret samo što se nije desio, u stanju najveće napetosti, u

ovom ćorsokaku gdje sam sebe namjerno stavio, a taman pred deadline, postojala je određena šansa da će me, nakon svega, ipak pohoditi inspiracija. U stvari, inspiracija bi ovdje – ne samo zbog njene anahronosti – bila neodgovarajuća riječ, ali u trenutku kad sam ušao u zgradu gdje su bile smještene nove kancelarije gospodina Pekovića, posjedovao sam kakav-takav plan. Naravoučenije: sve može da vas izda sem vaša vlastita anksioznost. Ostalo je samo da se vidi hoće li će producent pokazati makar minimalni entuzijizam, mada je bilo lako za pretpostaviti da će prvi utisak, kad mu ne podastrem sinopsis crno na bijelo, biti zacijelo negativan.

Dočekala me je robotski ljubazna sekretarica. Rekla mi je da pričekam, jer je gospodin Peković imao još jedan sastanak u toku. „Vrlo važan“, dodala je, mada nisam tražio dopunsku informaciju. Sjeo sam na stolicu i u glavi prevrtao tek začetu ideju koja se, sa svakom novom implikacijom, doimala sve dalje od potencijalne filmske realizacije.

To me nije spriječilo da uđem, kasnije, u kancelariju sa hinjenom samouvjerenošću, što je posljednja odstupnica luzera. Peković me je dočekao sa podjednako lažnom ljubaznošću. „Petre“, prvi put me je oslovio po imenu, „da provjerimo kako napreduje naš mali film. U žurbi sam, pa da što prije to odradimo. Da vidim kako izgleda sinopsis.“

Progutah pljuvačku. „Nisam ga još donio, htio sam prvo sa vama da isprobam bazičnu ideju. Ako je ideja dobra, onda je pisanje sinopsisa najlakša stvar“, i samog sebe sam iznenadio kako sam bestidno izrekao laž.

Ali, Peković se nije dao smetnuti mojim jadnim retoričkim manevrom. „Nismo se tako dogovorili“, rekao je i malo otpustio kravatu. Već sam tada mogao da naslutim da ga nikada neću zvati, onako drugarski i srdačno: Peck.

„Znam da ovo zvuči neprofesionalno“, pokušao sam da preduprijedim pripremljen napad nervoznog producenta, „ali sam htio prvo da se konsultujem oko ideje-vodilje, koja može biti ponešto riskantna.“

„U kom smislu: riskantna?“ rekao je uveliko sumnjičavi Peković.

„U smislu promjene žanra. Uzmemo jednu etabliranu temu, samo joj damo niskožanrovsku obradu. To je najriskantnija stvar, ali sa druge strane, umjetnička svježina je često dolazila sa dubiozne periferije.“

„A koja je tema u pitanju?“

„Tema Evrope, heroine po kojoj je naš kontinent dobio ime. Velik mit je zaslužio da se ispriča iz drugog ugla.“

„I to ti je ideja?“ Peković je sada bio vidno razočaran.

„Zašto ne bismo“, pokušavao sam i dalje da glumim samouvjerenost, „priču o Evropi i Zevsu tretirali kao rape-revenge priču. Uostalom, što je Zevsova otmica, ma šta nam govorili Tizian i Goya, nego primjer brutalnog silovanja. U našoj verziji, Europa neće bez protesta prihvatiti vlastitu sudbinu, nego će žestoko uzvratiti. Njena čast će biti osvećena onda kada preuzme stvar u svoje ruke. Estetika mora biti i etična.“

Izgled Pekovića nije obećavao ništa dobro, pa požurih da nastavim: „Priču ćemo smjestiti u današnje vrijeme, Zevs bi, recimo, mogao da bude nabusiti i antipatični direktor neke korporacije u kojoj Evropa radi. Ovaj narativ može pogoditi u živac sve glavne ideološke grupe: ljevičari će tekst čitati kao alegoriju protiv eksploatacije, i to baš unutar jednog eksploatacionog žanra, feministice će ionako principijelno pozdraviti svaki slučaj gdje je muška moć pravedno kažnjenja, a desničari će, dakako, u svemu vidjeti snažnu metaforu

o napastvovanju Evrope i njenog identiteta koji se svim sredstvima mora braniti. Imamo *win-win-win* situaciju.“

Peković me je ošinio hladnim pogledom; bez opširnijeg obrazloženja, zamoljen sam da napustim njegove puritaniističke prostorije u kojima, eto, nije bilo mjesta za bilo kakvo flertovanje sa umjetnošću B filma.

Pomalo snuždeno, nogu pred nogu, išao sam se istim putem nazad. Nije mi preostalo ništa drugo nego da se vratim ravno u krevet: sreća što je bio raspremljen. *Dugo sam, nekada, legao rano.*

Veliki Hawks je govorio kako je dovoljno da jedna-dvije scene budu dobre, pa će i cijeli film biti dobar. U našem vremenu, vjerovatno se nečem boljem i ne možemo nadati. Ne znam ni sam je li moja ideja uopšte bila svrsishodna, ali bi se film svakako mogao opravdati – recimo, kad bi se našao vizuelni ekvivalent za dugačku prustovsku rečenicu – ako bi se ta ključna scena lijepo stilizovala, E. stoji pored cvijeća dok se, u dubini prozora, mreškaju platani i more, ona osjeća da joj neko prilazi sa leđa, krupni Z. sa tamnim naočarima i bronzanom kožom, nadmeni direktor u njenom preduzeću koji joj je već nudio skupocjeni nakit, njegov dah je na njenom krhkom vratu, kada se okrene on sa bikovskom snagom jurne na nju, cvijeće na prozoru se ruši, E. bi da vikne ali glas jednostavno ne izlazi, svejedno, Z. stavlja šaku na njena usta, sve je jače pritiska, ona pokušava da odgurne njegovo teško, masivno tijelo koje miriše na odurni šafran, tada se u njenom razrogačenom oku javlja vizija, ona će roditi Z.-u tri sina, njen život će postati sređen, čak će i kasniji razvod proći bez trzavica a njeno ime će zauvijek biti zapisano u brendu kompanije, odjednom se trgne iz polusna, stvari najednom izgledaju sasvim jasne, Z.-ovo tijelo postaje nepodnošljivo dok prodire u nju, ona sada odbacuje nasilnu budućnost ma kakve benefite donosila, njeno oko se ponovo širi ali ovaj put na drugačiji način, u njoj

se rodila odluka, ona dohvata makaze, baš kao Grace Kelly u *Dial M for Murder*, koje su bile odbačene pored nje i direktno ih zabada u Z.-ov vrat, oslobođena krv odmah štedro šikne, on uzaludno pokušava da zaustavi taj spektakularni krvoskok, njegov pogled je u nevjerici, jer oči terora ne mogu da shvate da im se neko može usprotiviti, on više ništa ne može ni da kaže, samo glasno krklja, E. ga odgurne sa sebe pa se podigne, posmatra ga dok se oko njega uvećava grimizna lokva krvi, namjesti pocijepanu haljinu, nakit koji joj je dao mu baci u mrtvo lice, posmatra ga još koji trenutak, a onda se sa prezirom okrene i zaista odlazi ravno u legendu.

Europa: A Rape-Revenge Story

Aleksandar Bečanović

Translated from Montenegrin by Will Firth

How often we sacrifice the fulfilment of a possible happiness to our impatience for an immediate pleasure.

Marcel Proust – *Swann in Love*¹

The morning this short story begins in a rather confessional tone, I had to get up earlier than usual. I would vastly have preferred to bury my head back in the pillow, but the commitment I had made was too big to simply be ignored. I raised myself up on my elbows, but inertia still had the upper hand: perhaps I was well into the age where dreams only bring weariness. I waited a few more moments before rubbing my eyes. And then – as happens with the well-established literary mechanism that supplants our normal instincts – I remembered my early youth and an almost-forgotten ritual that gave meaning to my sad awakenings.

That dozing state, the languid rousing of sleep-benumbed limbs and drawing breath as if separation from the bed was the greatest exploit I would perform that day, returned me to my early twenties when I intended, in a mixture of self-deceptive pretentiousness and sincere desire, to read *In Search of Lost Time*, seeing as I was already so firmly anchored in idleness. The first pages of the novel gave me an idea that

¹ Translated by Lydia Davis, Viking Adult (2003).

was not only aesthetically sound but practically useful (and enchanted me in an almost sensual way because usually my imaginings fell before the demands of strict pragmatism): a novel that began with falling asleep, a state that does not yet distinguish dream from reality, ought to be read exclusively in the wee hours, with the prospect of a long sojourn in a comfortable, horizontal position. A novel written in bed is virtually predestined to be read there too in order to achieve the best interpretative effect. This methodology has always seemed most appropriate to me: while the author inevitably sinks into slumber, taking along reminiscences and longings, the reader has to wake up, despite still being haunted by remnants of past and future nightmares and fantasies. Both are thus only seemingly on different shores of consciousness.

What would I give now for such luxury – and every luxury is a refined expression of decadence! How I would now abandon myself to the pleasure of forlorn reading! But, alas, duty called, and the hardest part was to finally extricate myself from bed, which in my new-come melancholy suddenly became a point of the deepest nostalgia, almost like a childhood object that we find by coincidence many years later and are groundlessly fascinated by that coincidence. I glanced at my watch once more and gathered the strength to go to the bathroom, where I had a wash and a shave. My face in the mirror looked moderately respectable: I couldn't have hoped for anything better at this age. The choice of suit revealed that my meeting was of a purely businesslike nature. I needed about ten minutes through the streets of Podgorica to my destination, and I had already decided that I would devise something on the way to present to Mr Peković.

Young and ambitious, with good connections, Mr Peković – “Peck” to his friends, a form of address I wasn't yet entitled to use – is currently the most promising Montenegrin film producer. Several of his recent films touched on social issues

with a dash of pathos, which definitely helped make them successful, so Peković felt he had masterfully combined the pleasant with the useful: it never hurts when an ardent topic fits nicely into the general business plan.

Success has to be constantly cultivated, and since I knew that the eminent producer would want to exploit his momentum and indiscriminately seek ideas left, right and centre that would fit neatly into his tried and tested, winning combination, I chose the right moment to go up to him at a private party. I introduced myself almost penitently, mentioning a few common acquaintances; the list of my completed scripts was far from impressive but at least prevented any suspicion of diletantism. And I suggested I could provide him a synopsis for a film that would also satisfy aesthetic parameters – the right blend of social relevance and financial feasibility that would make it eminently fundable. Although Mr Peković was more interested in the tall brunette escorting him – which no one could blame him for, since she was obviously a charming companion – the unerring business instinct of an already-experienced producer shone through even in that situation, when my approach could have been considered undue and indiscreet. He told me to bring him a detailed description of the film in a fortnight. He insisted that I not send any emails but deliver a hardcopy version of the synopsis to his office in person. As soon as I received that proposal, I tactfully withdrew and allowed the producer to continue his interrupted conversation (I almost wrote: coitus) with the engrossing brunette.

And so, fourteen days later, I went to the appointment, but I didn't have a finished synopsis to take with me. Not only did I suffer from the unavoidable contemporary ailment known as creative block, but it was also a particular authorial strategy. Namely, something that is repressed must come to the surface at some traumatic juncture. Since the anxious

encounter was looming, in a state of the greatest tension, in that dead end I had intentionally put myself into, just before the deadline, there existed a certain chance that I would be visited by inspiration after all. “Inspiration” might not be quite the right word here – not only because of its datedness – but the moment I entered the building that housed Mr Peković’s new offices I had the rudiments of a plan. The moral: anything can betray you except your own anxiety. I just had to wait and see if the producer would show a modicum of enthusiasm, although I imagined his first impression was bound to be negative if I didn’t present him a synopsis black on white.

I was met by a robotically polite secretary. She told me to wait a little while because Mr Peković was in a meeting. “It’s very important,” she added, but I didn’t ask for any more information. I sat down on a chair and turned my freshly conceived idea over and over in my mind, but every new implication made it seem further from any hope of cinematic realisation.

That didn’t prevent me from entering the office later with feigned self-confidence – the last refuge of a sucker. Peković greeted me with equally fake friendliness. “Petar,” he said, calling me by my name for the first time, “let’s see how our little film is coming along. I’m in a hurry, so let’s get this done as quickly as possible. Let me see how the synopsis looks.”

I swallowed audibly. “I haven’t brought it yet, I wanted to sound out the basic idea with you first. If it’s good, writing the synopsis will be plain sailing,” I surprised myself how unashamedly I uttered that lie.

But Peković was not to be fooled by my paltry rhetorical manoeuvre. “That’s not what we agreed,” he said and loosened

his tie a bit. I had a premonition that I would never be calling him “Peck” in a hearty, affable way.

“I know it doesn’t sound professional,” I tried to forestall the nervous producer’s gathering attack, “but I wanted to consult with you first about the guiding idea, which could be a little risky.”

“In what sense ‘risky?’” Peković asked, now noticeably distrustful.

“In the sense of a genre switch. We take an established theme and just recontextualise it in a low genre. That’s the riskiest thing, but, on the other hand, artistic vim often comes from the dubious periphery.”

“What’s the theme?”

“Europa, the heroine that our continent is named after. The great myth deserves to be told from a different angle.”

“And that’s your idea?!” Peković was now visibly disappointed.

I continued with my best put-on self-confidence: “Why shouldn’t we treat the tale of Europa and Zeus as a rape-revenge story? After all, what is Zeus’ abduction but a brutal case of rape, whatever Titian and Goya have told us? In our version, Europa won’t meekly accept her fate but will strike back. Her honour will be avenged when she takes things into her own hands. Aesthetics also have to be ethical.”

Peković’s glower left little room for promise, so I pressed on: “We’ll set the story in the present. Zeus, for example, could be the narky and dislikeable manager of a corporation where Europa works. This narrative can hit the nerve of all the main ideological currents: leftists will read it as an allegory against exploitation, and what’s more within an exploitative

genre; feminists will support every case in principle where male power is justly punished; and rightists are sure to see a potent metaphor of the ravishing of Europe and its identity, which must be defended at all costs. We have a win-win-win situation.”

Peković lashed me with a cold glance. Without further ado I was asked to leave his puritanical premises, where, as we see, there was no place for any flirting with the art of the B-movie.

A little dejected and very slowly, I returned the way I had come. There was nothing left for me to do but to go straight back to bed: luckily it was made. *For a long time, I went to bed early*².

The great Hawks once said that it was enough for one or two scenes to be good for a whole film to be good. That’s probably the best we can hope for in our day and age. I’m not sure myself how practicable my idea was, but the film could certainly be justified – if it found a visual equivalent for one of Proust’s long sentences, for example – if the key scene was well stylised. Imagine E. standing near flowering pot plants in the embrasure of a window, with plane trees and the sea rippling beyond; she feels someone approaching from behind, burly Z. with dark glasses and bronzed skin, the arrogant manager of her company, who has already offered her expensive jewellery, his breath is on her delicate neck, and when she turns he lunges at her with bullish force, smashing the plants at the window; E. wants to yell but her voice fails her, Z. puts his hand over her mouth all the same, he presses against her ever harder, and she tries to push away his massive, heavy body that smells repulsively of saffron; then a vision appears in her wide-open eye – that she could bear Z. three sons, her life would become settled, even their later divorce would pass without trouble, and her name would for-

² Also from Lydia Davis’s translation.

ever be inscribed in the brand of the company; but all at once she wrenches herself from her daydream, suddenly things look much clearer, Z.'s body becomes unbearable as he penetrates her, and now she rejects that violent future, whatever benefits it might bring; her eye spreads again, but this time in a different way, a decision is born in her, and she grabs a pair of scissors lying nearby, just like Grace Kelly in *Dial M for Murder*, and stabs them right into Z.'s neck; the liberated blood immediately spurts in copious amounts, he tries in vain to stop the spectacular sanguine fountain and gazes in disbelief because his eyes of terror cannot conceive that someone could resist them; he can no longer speak, he just gurgles loudly; E. pushes him off and raises herself, and she watches as the crimson pool spreads around him; she adjusts her torn dress, hurls the jewellery he gave her at his dead face, looks at him for a few moments more, and then turns away with contempt and departs straight into legend.



The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Lidija Dimkovska

Кога заминав од „Карл Либкнехт“

When I left “Karl Liebknecht”

EUPL laureate 2013: *Резервен Живот* (ILI-ILI)

BIOGRAPHY

Lidija Dimkovska, born in 1971 in Skopje, Macedonia, is a poet, novelist and translator from Romanian and Slovenian into Macedonian. She has published six books of poetry and three novels, translated into more than 20 languages. For her poetry she has received the Macedonian debut award for poetry, the German Hubert Burda prize, the Romanian Poesis and Tudor Arghezi prizes and the European Petru Krdu prize. Her two novels *Hidden Camera* (2004) and *A Spare Life* (2012) each received the Writers’ Association of Macedonia award for the best prose book of the year. *A Spare Life* also received the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013 and was long-listed for the Best Translated Book Award 2017 in the USA. In 2016 she published her third novel *Non-Our*, which was shortlisted for the Writers’ Association of Macedonia award for the best prose book of the year, and for the Balkanika international literary award.

Кога заминав од „Карл Либкнехт“

Lidija Dimkovska



Во спомен-домот на Карл Либкнехт во Лајпциг, Германија, шестмина луѓе од разни националности седат околу канцелариската маса, со преведувачи зад нив, и навидум се како на состанок, а всушност се на несекојдневна средба. Имено, учествуваат во пилот-проектот на Здружението на почитувачи на Карл Либкнехт од Лајпциг коешто на 19 јануари 2018 година, по повод 99-годишнината од смртта на големиот германски левичар и соработник на Роза Луксембург, Карл Либкнехт, ги покани како емигранти кои пред да се преселат живееле на адреси што го носат неговото име. Повикот беше јавен, а интересот огромен, но најпосле беа избрани само неколкумина. Пред обиколката на спомен-домот, ги замолија да раскажат кусо за тоа како ги обележала адресата „Карл Либкнехт“.

*Виталие, 32, Тираспол, Приднестровие, Молдавија –
Букурешт, Романија*

До мојата 20-та година живеев на ул. „Карл Либкнехт“ во Тираспол, главниот град на Приднестровие. На 13 август 2006 год. околу два попладне се враќав со тролејбус од заболечкар. Горната усна ми беше отечена од анестезијата што заболечкарот ми ја стави за да ми го извади забот, само затоа што му беше пријател од детството на татко ми. Наеднаш тролејбусот буквално експлодира и како

да полетавме во воздух. Потоа не се сеќавам на ништо. Се разбудив во болница, со повеќе новинари околу постелите, одошто медицински персонал. Дознав дека сум еден од десеттемина повредени патници. Добро што не бе еден од двајцата загинати. Тоа не беше единствената експлозија во Тираспол. По несреќата од која ми остана лузнава на челово, роднините ми помогнаа да купам билет за Букурешт.

Татко ми ми рече да го заборавам зборот Приднестровие, како никогаш да не постоел, и да се претставувам од Молдавија. Во Букурешт добив стипендија за „Романци вон границите на Романија“ и одново почнав да студирам медицина. Сега сум најмладиот општ лекар во амбулантата за студенти. Татко ми почина пред две години и затоа ја доведов мајка ми во Букурешт. Нормално дека пишувам на романски јазик со латинично писмо, но на мајка ми ѝ е тешко да чита романски весници и субтитлови на романската телевизија. Вели дека буквите во нејзината глава се само кирилични. И јас кога одам во продавница сфаќам дека списокот сум го напишал на кирилица. Тоа е сè што ми остана од Тираспол. Понекогаш ми недостига Днестар, на само дваесетина минути од зградата кај што живеевме. Сфатив дека животот во странство, иако Романија поради јазикот и не е сосема странство, е планирање и сеќавање, иднина и минато, ама не сегашност. Пред некој ден на излегување од метрото, истураше дожд и едно Ромче потрча по мене со чадори во раката. „Купи еден, купи еден!“ – викаше. „Блиску сум до дома“ – викнав заштитивајќи ја главата со актовката, а Ромчето неколкупати зад мене извика „Далеку си, далеку!“ . Влегов дома накиснат до коски, до душа. Мајка ми во кујната ги препишуваше на латиница кириличните букви на нашиот јазик.

Ања, 43, мостот „Либкнехт“, Берлин, Германија -
Чикаго, САД

Беше ноември 2015 година, истураше студен дожд, но таксистот кон аеродромот Тегел ги отвори прозорците. „Извинете“ – рековме и јас и тој во речиси ист глас, тој затоа што дозволи студот да шибне во внатрешноста на таксито, а јас затоа што бев причината за тоа – имено, смрдев од глава до пети, корнев и однатре и однадвор, небањата со седмици, со себе ја носев реата на мостот „Либкнехт“ врз чиишто коцки и под чиишто аркади ми поминаа последните три години. Како стигнав до таму? Од нормален живот, во брак со директорот на терариумот во Берлин, со огромен стан зад трговскиот „Берлин Каре“ на „Карл Либкнехт“ бр. 13, бевме имотни и маж ми очекуваше само да готвам, а да немаме деца, зашто и онака, велеше, се немало мир од нив во зоолошката. Хоби ми беше делкањето дрворези. Кога мажми почна сè повеќе да се здебелува, лекарот ми рече дека еден ден нема веќе да може да станува поради тежината, па ќе морам да се грижам за него и така се запишав на курс за негувателки. Еднаш донесе од работа змиска кожа и ја стави во нашиот фрижидер. Рече: „Сонував дека во кожата е душата на мајка ми. Биди среќна што не ја донесов змијата, па ќе имаше и свекрва“ – аи јас повеќе не можев да го отворам фрижидерот. Поради тоа настанаа многу проблеми во нашиот брак, од навреди и солзи до тепања и молби, ама ниту тој не ја отстрани змиската кожа од фрижидерот, ниту јас го отворав, па затоа и не готвев. Се разведовме, јас се пријавив за негувателка во еден хоспис, бидејќи нудеше и сместување. И еден ден, кревајќи една старица в раце за да ја префрлам во фотелјата и за да можам да ѝ ја сменам постелнината, ми падна на подот и издивна. И ме отпуштија. Небаре старицата немаше и онака да умре. И ми напишаа „препорака“ никогаш и никој повеќе да не ме прими на работа како негувателка. Така завршив

на мостот „Либкнехт“, каква иронија на судбината. Три години под него спиев, а на него просев, мрзнев, плачев, потоа почнав да собирам штички и да ги делкам во дрворези, им ги продавав на туристите на мостот, така собрав пари за билет, во авионот патниците околу мене си ги пикаа носовите во кебињата за покривање, стигнав во Чикаго, влегов во првиот хоспис кај што ми дозволија да се избањам, и еве, таму работам веќе три години. Во близина е Уметничкиот институт, и кога ми недостасува Берлин - чекам да дојде четврток навечер и влезот да биде бесплатен, влегувам внатре и некоја непозната сила ме влече кон дрворезот на Кате Колвиц „Спомен-лист на Карл Либкнехт“. Судбина.

Дона, 47, Скопје, Македонија – Љубљана, Словенија

Кога се преселив во Љубљана пред 17 години, од автобусот видов како на еден балкон некоја жена простира алишта. Си помислив – којзнае каков живот води, што ѝ се случува, што ја мачи, што ја усреќува. А денес, можеби некој друг преселник се прашува истото за мене. Презимето на маж ми не го зедев, ги зедев само него и адресата. Затоа во мојот пасош ја нема повеќе „Карл Либкнехт“ 67/1-11, 1000 Скопје, Македонија. Сега нашата двојазична ќерка ја пишува на честитките за Нова година до баба ѝ и дедо ѝ. Маж ми е воодушевен што на периферијата на Скопје постои улица на таков слободомисленик. Веројатно мојот космополитизам потекнува токму од Карл Либкнехт. А како и уште стотина писатели-имигранти во Словенија, и јас живеам во дом-дводом-без дом. Сè што само по себе беше разбирливо во присуството, стана прашање за идентитетот во отсуството. Како што бебињата лазат назадечки, така и ние, писателите-имигранти ползиме назадечки, со нозе што сè повеќе забраздуваат во она што било, иако погледот ни е свртен напред. Без минатото во сегашноста и во иднината не знаеме да одиме, нема

за што да се фатиме, неуки сме и беспомошни. А како што телото го одбива туѓото телце од својот устрој, како моето леќите, така и секоја национална книжевност го одбива писателот кој не пишува на нејзиниот јазик. И словенечката. Знам повеќе јазици, ама само на еден знам дараѓам литература. Секоја судбина е и политичка одлука. Всушност, отсекогаш верував во светската книжевност. Можеби европската е нашиот спас? Повеќе јазици – една книжевност? Ама, добро, да не филозофирам премногу.

Олег, 25, Минск, Белорусија – Виена, Австрија

Ах, јас немам живеено на „Карл Либкнехт“, ама таму ми го спасија животот, тоа го наведов и во пријавата. Знаете, во Минск на „Карл Либкнехт“ бр. 68 е седиштето на Хелсиншкиот комитет каде што најдов спас по четвртото тепање во влезот на мојата зграда, истата 2011 год кога како матурант учествував на протестите против владата на Лукашенко. Ги познавам оние што ме тепаа, врсници ми се, близнаци, живеевме во иста зграда, целото семејство е про-Лукашенко. По последното тепање не гледам добро на левото око. Татко ми од болница ме однесе во Хелсиншкиот комитет за којшто имаше чуено од некого. Таму свртеа неколку меѓународни броја и на крајот рекоа дека заминувам уште истиот ден за Виена. Со мајка ми не стигнав ни да се поздравам. Во Виена добив меѓународна заштита, стипендија за студии по социологија, потоа и за мастер, а сега сум на докторат. Ама што потоа? Во Белорусија нема повеќе враќање. А имам и девојка, Австријко-Хрватка. Се родила во Виена, мајка ѝ починала, татко ѝ, Хрват, се преженил со друга, а неа ја однел кај роднините во Задар. На 18-годишна возраст се закалуѓерила, ама по пет години си заминала од манастирот поради лоши односи меѓу калуѓерките, без дозвола од бискупот, бидејќи

никогаш не ѝ одговорил на молбата да ја расчини. „Во манастир е полесно да се сака човештвото, одошто човекот“ – вели. А и во светот. Почнала да работи во бутик во Задар, ама ја влечело назад и лани во февруари се вратила и сега работи во болница како чистачка. Се запознавме кога лежев таму поради компликација со оково, ме привлече нејзиниот словенски акцент. Не е образована, но ја сака уметноста повеќе од сè. Пред некое време бевме на изложба во Кунстхале и занемевме пред една уметничка фотографија на која човек седи и пуши во автомобил, чекајќи да се испече свињата закачена на ченгел за тркалото. Со Лана живееме во гарсоньера што гледа на поранешната железничка станица од каде што нацистите ги депортирале Евреите во Аушвиц. Наоколу талкаат бездомници и бегалци од Сирија, но населбата е во завет на молк, ни мува не се слуша.

*Тарас, 68, и Цамила, 66, село Либкхнетовка, Крим –
Прага, Чешка*

Извинете ако нашата пријава звучеше како уцена – дека ќе дојдеме или заедно или никако, ама од 2016 кога заминавме со синот за Прага однашето село Либкхнетовка на Крим, ние со мажот се немаме одвоено. Заради Исмаил и заминавме на стари години. Тој одамна се беше преселил во Симферопол, велеше дека петте улици во нашето село не му стигаат за живот, а таму беше заангажиран во „Меџлис“, претставништвото на нас, Татарите на Крим. Чекај, Цамила, јас да кажам: Кога Русија го присвои Крим, го забранија Меџлис. Какви сè набедувања не бевме чуле, наеднаш, за сè на Крим виновни станавме ние, Татарите. Исмаил рече дека главниот на Меџлис Русите го затвориле во лудница, откако на ТВ изјави дека Крим треба да ѝ се врати на Украина. Го пуштија пет дена пред Курбан Бајрам. Исмаил дента пред празникот си дојде

дома, ни рече да се подготвиме, и на 12 септември 2016 год. со возило на брза помош, заминавме од Либкхнетовка. „Подобро во странство, рече, одошто во лудница“. Да, Тарас, нели до аеродромот нè возеше болничарот што го бевме потплатиле, а јас го бодрев: „Алах да те чува, синко, на секое тркало да ти стои по еден ангел и да те варди од зло“. Сега живееме во едно станче на периферијата на Прага, добиваме социјална помош, ама барем Исмаил пак се бори за татарската кауза, зашто во Прага е седиштето на меѓународната организација што ги поддржува Татарите. Сè уште чекаме да се ожени и да имаме внуци, инаку животот ни остана во Либкхнетовка. Ама кај се пушта единец сам во светот. Само што по цел ден го нема дома, чмаеме сами. Спроти нас живее една стара вдовица, Полјачка, само таа знае руски од зградата, а татарски никој. Ама чудна жена, Исмаил вели дека е подобро да не ја викам на кафе. „Гледаш дека е националистка?“ – вели. Па, да, Џамила, има право. Замислете, се родила во Гдањск и кога имала осум години низ градот марширале војници во црни униформи со кукасти крстови, а потоа го урнисале градот и помни дека нацистите го однеле кубето од базиликата во Хамбург, а сега ја поддржува власта во Полска и ги колне бегалците од Сирија. А живее во Чешка 60 години! Исмаил вели дека ништо не научила од историјата. Не знам ни дали ние нешто ќе научиме.

Би било интересно да се слушнат што повеќе приказни и од поранешните и од сегашните жители на „Карл Либкнехт“ низ светот. Но, оваа средба е само проба за многу помасовната што ќе се одржи на 19 јануари 2019 год. по повод 100-годишнината од смртта на Карл Либкнехт во вид на протест по улицата со негово име, овде во Лајпциг, за правата на работниците-мигранти во Европа. Со векови човекот не престанува да се бори за своите права. Историјата барем во нешто е добра учителка.

Сите ликови се измислени.

When I left “Karl Liebkecht”

Lidija Dimkovska

Translated from Macedonian by Christina E. Kramer

In the Karl Liebkecht House in Leipzig, Germany, six people of different nationalities are seated around an office table, interpreters behind them, and although it looks as if they're at a meeting, it's not, in fact, an ordinary meeting. They're taking part in a pilot project organised by the Society of Admirers of Karl Liebkecht of Leipzig, which on 19 January 2018, in recognition of the 99th anniversary of the death of Karl Liebkecht – the great German leftist and colleague of Rosa Luxemburg – invited them, all migrants who had lived at an address bearing his name prior to their emigration. The initiative was publicly announced, and it generated a great deal of interest, but in the end, only a few were selected. Before touring the House Museum, they were asked to speak briefly about the impact their Karl Liebkecht address had had on them.

Vitalie, 32, Tiraspol, Transnistria, Moldova – Bucharest, Romania

I lived on Karl Liebkecht Street in Tiraspol, the main city in Transnistria, until I was twenty years old. On 13 August 2006, at around two in the afternoon, I was on a trolleybus heading home from the dentist. My upper lip was swollen from the anaesthesia the dentist had given me for my tooth extraction, and that only because he was a childhood friend of my father's. Suddenly the trolleybus exploded, literally, and it felt like we were flying through the air. I don't remember anything after that. I woke up in a hospital, where around our beds there were

more journalists than medical personal. I learned that I was one of dozens of wounded passengers. Fortunately, I wasn't one of the two who died. This wasn't the only explosion in Tiraspol. After that incident, which left me with a scar on my forehead, my relatives helped me buy a ticket for Bucharest. My father told me to forget the word Transnistria, as though it had never existed, and to present myself as from Moldova. I was given a stipend in Bucharest for "Romanians from outside the borders of Romania," and I began once again to study medicine. Now I'm the youngest general practitioner in the student clinic. My father died two years ago, so I brought my mother to Bucharest. I, of course, write Romanian with Latin letters, but it's hard for my mother to read Romanian newspapers and subtitles on Romanian television. She says the letters in her head are all in Cyrillic. When I go to a store, I realise I've jotted down my list in Cyrillic. That's all I have left from Tiraspol. Sometimes I miss the Dniester, which flowed twenty minutes from the building where we lived. I understand that life in a foreign country – although Romania, because of the language, is not completely foreign – is about making plans and remembering, a future and a past, but not a present. A few days ago when I was leaving the subway, it was raining, and a Rom kid ran up to me carrying umbrellas. "Buy one, buy one!" he shouted. "I'm almost home," I said, covering my head with my briefcase, but the kid shouted after me several times, "You're far, far away!" I went into my house soaked to the bone, drenched to my soul. My mother was in the kitchen transcribing the Cyrillic letters of our language into Latin letters.

Anya, 43, Liebknecht Bridge, Berlin, Germany – Chicago, USA

It was November 2015, there was a cold rain falling, but the taxi driver taking me to Tegel Airport had opened the windows. "Excuse me," we both said in almost the same voice, he, because he was letting the cold inside the taxi; I, because

I was the reason for it; I stank from head to foot, I was torn apart inside and out, had not had a bath for weeks, and carried with me the smell of Liebknecht Bridge, on whose pavement and under whose arcades I had spent the past three years. How had I gotten to that point? Starting from a normal life, married to the director of the terrarium at the Berlin Zoo, with a huge apartment behind the Berlin Carré shopping centre at 13 Karl Liebknecht Street; we were rich, and my husband's only expectations were for me to cook and for us not to have children, because, he said, he had enough of them at the zoo. My hobby was woodcarving. My husband, a man with gourmet tastes, began getting fatter and fatter, and the doctor told me that the day would come when he wouldn't be able to stand up any longer because of his weight, and I would need to take care of him, so I enrolled in a nursing course. One day he brought a snakeskin home from work and put it in our refrigerator. He said: "I dreamt that my mother's soul was in the skin. Count yourself lucky I didn't bring home the snake, because then you would've had a mother-in-law as well." After that, I would not open the refrigerator, which led to many problems in our marriage, from accusations and tears to beatings and entreaties, but he wouldn't take the snakeskin out of the refrigerator, so I wouldn't open it, and I stopped cooking. We got divorced, and I applied to be a caregiver in a nursing home, since they also offered housing. But one day, while I was lifting an old woman to shift her to an armchair so I could change her bedding, she fell on the floor and died. They fired me. Even though the old woman couldn't have died just because of that. They wrote me a "recommendation" that no one should ever hire me again as a caregiver. So I ended up at the Liebknecht Bridge. What an irony of fate. I slept under it for three years, and on it, I begged, froze, cried, and then began to collect wooden rulers and turn them into woodcarvings, which I sold to the tourists on the bridge; I made enough money for a plane ticket. On the plane, the passengers around me tucked their noses into their blankets. I arrived in Chicago, and went into the first hospice I saw,

where they let me shower, and I've now been working there for three years. The Art Institute is nearby, and when I miss Berlin, I wait for the fourth Thursday of the month, when entry is free. I go inside and some unknown force pulls me toward the woodcut *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* by Käthe Kollwitz. Fate.

Dona 47, Skopje, Macedonia – Ljubljana, Slovenia

When I was moving to Ljubljana seventeen years ago, I caught sight of a woman from the bus window spreading out some clothes on a balcony. I thought to myself, I wonder what kind of life she leads, what has happened to her, what torments her, what gives her happiness? And today, maybe some other migrant is asking the same thing about me. I didn't take my husband's name, I just took him and his address. My passport no longer has written in it Karl Liebknecht 67/1-11, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia. Now our bilingual daughter writes it on the New Year's greetings she sends to her grandma and grandpa. My husband is enchanted with the idea that on the periphery of Skopje there is a street named for such a freethinker. My cosmopolitanism probably flows directly from Karl Liebknecht. And just like hundreds of other writer-immigrants in Slovenia, I have a home – double-home – no-home. Everything that was only understandable in its presence has become a question about identity in its absence. Just as babies crawl backward, we writer-immigrants creep backward, our legs furrowing more and more into what was, while our gaze is turned forward. Without our past in the present and the future, we don't know how to move, there's nothing for us to take hold of, we are incompetent and helpless. And just as the body rejects a foreign body from its organism, my contact lenses, for example, so every national literature rejects the writer who does not write in its language. Including Slovenian. I know a number of languages, but it is only in one of them that I know how to give birth to literature. Every destiny is also a political decision. I

have, in fact, always believed in a world literature. Perhaps a European one is our salvation? Multiple languages – one literature? OK, I shouldn't philosophise too much.

Oleg, 25, Minsk, Belarus – Vienna, Austria

Well, I haven't lived on "Karl Liebknecht," but my life was saved there, that's what I put in my application. You know, at "Karl Liebknecht" number 68 in Minsk is the headquarters of the Helsinki Committee where I was rescued after the fourth beating I received at the entry to my building, the same year, 2011, when as a high school student I took part in protests against Lukashenko's government. I knew who beat me, they're the same age, twins; we lived in the same building, their whole family is pro-Lukashenko. Since that last beating I can't see very well out of my left eye. My father took me from the hospital straight to the Helsinki Committee, which he had heard about from someone. They made some international calls, then told me that I was leaving for Vienna that same day. I didn't even manage to say goodbye to my mother. In Vienna, I was given asylum, a stipend to study sociology, then one for my master's degree as well, and now I'm completing my doctorate. But then what? There is no returning to Belarus. I also have a girlfriend, she's Austro-Croatian. She was born in Vienna, her mother died and her father, a Croat, got remarried, and took her to some relatives in Zadar. At eighteen she joined a convent, but five years later, because of the bad relations among the nuns, she left the convent without the bishop's consent, since he never responded to her request to be released from her vows. "In a convent, it is easier to like humanity than a particular human," she said. Out in the world, too. She began working in a boutique in Zadar, but she was drawn to Vienna, and so she returned last February and now works as a cleaner in a hospital. We met when I was in the hospital because of complications with my eye. I was

attracted by her Slavic accent. She's uneducated, but she loves art more than anything. A while ago we were at an exhibit in the Kunsthalle and we fell silent in front of an art photograph in which a person is sitting and smoking in a car, waiting for the pig hanging on a hook by the wheel to finish roasting. Lana and I live in a studio apartment that looks out on the former railroad station where the Nazis deported the Jews to Auschwitz. There are homeless people and Syrian migrants hanging around everywhere, but the neighbourhood has taken a vow of silence, you don't even hear a fly.

Taras, 68 and Jamila, 66, village of Libknehtivka, Crimea – Prague, Czech Republic

Forgive me if our application sounded like a threat – we'll either come together or we won't come at all – but ever since 2016, when we came to Prague together with our son from our village, Libknehtivka, in Crimea, my husband and I haven't been apart. It was because of Ismael that we left in our old age. He had been living a long time in Simferopol; he told us that the five streets in our village didn't provide enough life for him, and he was hired there by Mejlis, the organisation representing us, the Crimean Tatars. Wait, Jamila, let me tell: when Russia seized Crimea, they banned Mejlis. What lies and slander we heard; all of a sudden, we Tatars were guilty of everything in Crimea. Ismael told us that the Russians had the head of Mejlis locked up in an psychiatric hospital after he announced on TV that Crimea must be returned to Ukraine. They let him out five days before Eid al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice. Ismail came home the day before the holiday and told us to get ready, and on the twelfth of September 2015 we left Libknehtivka in an ambulance. "Better a foreign country than an insane asylum," he said. That's right, Taras, and remember how I said to the paramedic that we bribed to take us to the airport, "May Allah protect you, son, and may he set an

angel on each of the wheels to protect you from evil.” Now we live in a small apartment on the outskirts of Prague, we get social assistance, but at least Ismail is fighting again for the Tatar cause, because Prague is where the international organisation that supports Tatars has its headquarters. We’re still waiting for him to marry and give us grandchildren; still, our life remains in Libknehtivka. But how can you let your only child go off alone in the world? Even so, he’s not home all day, and we putter around the apartment by ourselves. There’s an old widow living across from us. A Polish woman, the only person in the building who knows Russian; no one knows Tatar. But Ismail says she’s a strange woman, and it would be better if I didn’t invite her for coffee. “Can’t you see that she’s a nationalist?” he says. Well, yes, Jamila, he’s right. Just think, she was born in Gdańsk, and when she was eight years old, soldiers in black uniforms and swastikas marched through the city; they destroyed the city. And she remembers that the Nazis then took the bells from the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Hamburg, but this woman now supports the government in Poland and curses Syrian refugees even though she’s been living in the Czech Republic for sixty years! Ismael says she hasn’t learned anything from history. I don’t know whether we will learn anything.

It would be interesting to hear more stories from former and current residents of places named for Karl Liebknecht throughout the world. But this meeting is merely a pilot project for a much bigger meeting that will be held on the nineteenth of January 2019, the hundred-year anniversary of Karl Liebknecht’s death, when there will a protest on the street bearing his name here in Leipzig for the rights of migrant workers in Europe. For centuries, people have not stopped struggling for their rights. History is a good teacher for something, at least.

All characters are fictional.



Albania

Rudi Erebara

Petit beurre

EUPL laureate 2017: *Epika e yjeve të mëngjesit* (Ombra GVG)

BIOGRAPHY

Rudi Erebara was born in 1971. He is a poet, novelist and translator. After graduating in 1995 from the Academy of Fine Arts, he embarked on a career as a political analyst, as a journalist in several national newspapers and as an editor in chief. He is the author of two books of poetry, *Fillon Pamja* (*There Begins the View*), 1994, and *Lëng argjendi* (*Silver Juice*), 2013. His two novels are *Vezët e thëllëzave* (*Eggs of the Quails*), 2010, and *Epika e yjeve të mëngjesit* (*The Epic of the Morning Stars*), 2016. Rudi Erebara won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2017.

Petit beurre

Rudi Erebara



Në maj të 2017 më bëheshin 15 vite që nuk kisha dalë jashtë Shqipërisë, kjo pas 7 vjetësh emigrim në Nju Jork. Dola nga shtëpia më 2 të natës. Nuk më mori gjumi fare. Poshtë nuk më shkante asgjë, hëngra një kafshatë me pak gjalpë sa për cigaren. Në jetën time bashkë me të tanishmen, bëheshin 2 herë dalje në Europë, një herë në Amerikë. Në Evropë ishte zor i madh të merrja vizë që të shkoja kur isha i ri e kisha dëshirë të dilja, të shihja dhe të rroja atje. Pastaj, kur u hoqën vizat, nuk isha më i ri e jeta ishte më e ngatërruar. Avionin për në Bruksel e këmbeva në Vjenë. Kalova kontrollet siç nuk kisha parë as në ëndërr, thjesht me pasaportë në dorë dhe dola në dritaret e mëdha të portës nga ku nisej avioni. Jashtë ishte gri, shi dhe erë. U ula pranë dritares, fola me fëmijët dhe gruan në Tiranë, falas. Wireless. Nga Amerika vetëm 20 vjet më parë, flisnim me telefon me tel, 3 dollarë minuti. Ishte viti 1997, për Shqipërinë një vit i zi.

20 vjet më pas dilja në Europë i ftuar nga Bashkimi Europian, për të marrë një Çmimin Evropian të Letërsisë. Pashë rrotull nëpër aeroport. Bota ishte ndryshe nga sa e kisha lënë 15 vjet shkuar. Shumë njerëz me uniformë. Frikë nga terrorizmi. Dekada e dytë e një shekulli tjetër. Pasagjerët nëpër stola hiqnin këpucët për t'u çlodhur, sytë në ekranet e celularëve. Unë sigurisht jo. Asnjë prej shqiptarëve që prisnin avionin drejt Brukselit nuk e bënte. Kjo na dallonte nga të tjerët. Duam ende ta shohim botën me sytë tanë, në heshtjen gri

që mbanim me sytë kthyer nga dritaret, ku mëngjesi vjenez ishte si fillim nate në vendin tonë. Terr. Aq terr sa pashë fytyrën time të pasqyruar në xham një çast, pastaj ia dha një rrufe si për dimër. Bardhezia e njohur më solli një kujtim, të cilin nuk e kuptoja përse më vinte tani. Pastaj mu kthye pjesë-pjesë, sikur shquaja tiparet e mia në xhamin e aeroportit, sa më e thellë bëhej errësira e stuhisë në anën tjetër.

Mendja më ktheu pas në një vit edhe më të largët. Viti 1989, fillim tetori. Nxënësit e shkollës së mesme ishin në fabrikën e konservimit të perimeve. Përvit na çonin të vilnim misër për 2 javë, këtë vit kishim 2 javë punë në fabrikë. U hiqnim farat specave për turshi, në ndihmë të shtetit. Punë vullnetare, si në gjithë vendet komuniste. Kudo flakëronin togje specash të kuq lëkurëtrashë. Dukej sikur kishim mbledhur plagët e Revolucionit të Tetorit. Biseda bëhej gjithkund nën zë, vetëm me shokët më të besuar.

Temë e ditës ishte filmi “Tango e fundit në Paris”, shfaqur një natë më parë në kanal 2 të Beogradit në 2 të natës. Pas maleve të specave, diskutimi bëhej kokë me kokë. Temë me spec. I treti mund të qëllonte spiun. Filmin unë e kisha parë ashtu si të gjithë, në televizor bardhë e zi, me subtitrim serbisht, në shkelje të ligjit të shtetit dhe rregullit të familjes. Një akt kriminal. Në Shqipëri filmave të huaj u priteshin edhe skenat me puthje. Lakuriqësia lejohej vetëm në planet me plazh. Nga larg. Çdo gjë me seks dënohej me burg.

Kur ngrita një arkë me speca të pastruar në konvejerin që i fuste në larje, dëgjova dy punëtorë të fabrikës të flisnin për filmin. Isha pas një vargu me arka plastike. Bëhesha numri 3.

“Margarinë,” dëgjova të thoshte njëri. “Gjalpë,” kundërshtonte tjetri. Pasi një heshtje edhe i dëgjova të dy të përcillen. “Margarinë,” nguli këmbë i pari, “nuk e harxhon njeri gjalpin kot.”

-Në Francë ka gjalpë sa të duash,- tha tjetri, -jo si këtu që ngelëm me 200 gr., në muaj për familje me 5 vetë. Marlon Brando po hante gjalpë me një copë bukë. E pe vetë.” Heshtën. U përcollën. Edhe unë u përcolla me njëfarë frike të çuditshme. Të tre po bënim diçka të dënueshme me burg. Agjitacion dhe propagandë, 8 vjet burg me punë të detyrueshme në minierë.

-Epo ai është film. Është Marlon Brando ai. Mos ia fut kot,- i dha drejtim partizani i margarinës. -Sado mirë të jenë në Francë, nuk e harxhon njeri gjalpin kot. Le që gjalpi është i ngrirë.

Tjetri e kundërshtoi aty për aty: “Ai po hante bukë me gjalpë, nuk e pe ti? Vetëm gjalpi i ngrirë hahet me dorë. Po të ishte margarinë do ta merrte me koren e bukës.”

-Margarina në Francë është si gjalpi në Shqipëri. Nuk e ha më njeri gjalpin andej. Vetëm ne që jemi mbrapa botës. Njerëzit përdorin margarinë. Edhe filmi ishte modern. Nuk e pe sa ishte pakoja. Gjysmë kile me siguri. Film francez. Film i madh. I fundit fare. Ja, jugosllavët e japin në televizor në 2 të natës. Tek ne i heqin korrentin në orën 8 kur flenë pulat.”

-Do pyes njërin që di frëngjisht,- i tha ky i gjalpit.

-Po sikur margarinës t’i thonë gjalpë në frëngjisht?!- ia ktheu tjetri.

-Si mund t’i thonë margarinë gjalpit, o i çmendur?!- u hodh ky i gjalpit pasi u përcoll. Pyet cilin të duash, gjalpë do thotë.

-Margarinë ka qenë, margarina rrëshqet se e nxjerrin nga nafta, si vazelina. Ata atje matanë po bëjnë sot triko me pras. Margarinën nuk e mban njeri në frigorifer se nuk prishet.

Me afrimin e një të treti tjetër ata heshtën. Ngela në vend derisa të bëhej një zhurmë, që të mund të largohesha.

-Hë, - tha i sapoardhuri. -E patë si ia futi me gjalpë? Ata kanë gjalpë të lyejnë pallën ne nuk kemi të lyemë bukën. - Nuk i kthyen përgjigje. - Bukë e gjalpë e seks, - tha ai, pastaj qeshën të tre me të madhe dhe unë ika pa zhurmë. Nja 2 orë më vonë, kur erdhi ora e drekës, shkuam me një shok fëmijërie që punonte në fabrikë që 16 vjeç, me shpresë të merrnim bukë të freskët nga fabrika e bukës. Ai dinte nga të futej, që të mos na shikonin rojet dhe spiunët e partisë. Rrugës më tha: "shkojmë se mos marrim ndonjë gjalpë andej nga ambalazhimi". E pat me të qeshur. Kishte parë filmin. "Hë, se ti ke bërë frëngjisht në shkollë," më tha, "gjalpë ishte apo margarinë, se ka plasur basti." Nuk e di, i thashë, se e pashë filmin pa zë.

-Si të gjithë e pe edhe ti?- më tha me të tallur.

-Pse si ta shikoja? - i thashë si i habitur.

-Yt atë është regjizor filmi. Thashë mos e pe me zë e me përkthim.

-Je i çmendur ti? - i thashë shumë seriozisht. - Pse filma me seks do shikoj unë me babanë? Ik se po kthehem tek specat!

Megjithatë shkuam bashkë tek ambalazhimi i gjalpës. Hyri e doli me të shpejtë. Pakoja e ngrirë e gjalpës i dukej në xhep, me qoshet e mprehta katrore. "Vetëm një të ngrirë më dhanë," më tha edhe shkuam andej nga erdhëm duke u fshehur pas radhëve të pafund me arka boshe. Edhe ai ishte partizan i margarinës. "Nuk rri gjalpi në letër po u shkri. Margarinë e kishte Marloni." - nguli këmbë. Nuk e hoqi dorën nga xhepi, edhe për rojen edhe se pako e gjalpës ishte e ftohtë akull.

Kur avioni u bë gati të nisej drej Brukselit, shiu rrahu llamarinën sikur të ishte breshër. Më kapi një frikë e lehtë, sikur diçka do të më ndalonte në vend dhe do të më kthente pas në kohë. Në atë kohën kur Europa ishte një ëndërr që nuk guxonim as ta shihnim.

Frika shkriu kur avioni doli mbi re. Në aeroportin e Brukselit më priste një mik i vjetër i shkollës, të cilin kisha 27 vjet pa e takuar. Iku, në shkurt të 1990 pas protestës së parë antikomuniste në Tiranë. Zoti e shpëtoi që nuk e vranë në polici. Ka një jetë që rron në Bruksel me familjen. Kur dola nga aeroporti, ishte në radhë me europianë të tjerë. Ishim plakur, por jo aq sa të mos njiheshim. I thashë për kujtimin. Për “Tangon e fundit në Paris”. Për frikën që kisha tani, vetëm se isha në Europë.

-Të vjen ngaqë e ke ëndërruar shumë dhe ke pritur shumë gjatë. Gabim. Të vije tek unë të rrije ca kohë. - më tha.

-Nuk nxirrja dot vizë, - i thashë edhe ai nuk e zgjati.

Folëm për Marlon Brandon, Maria Schneider. Ai besonte se ishte gjalpë. “Nuk përdorte njeri margarinë në Paris në 1972”, tha me bindje duke kthyer timonin e makinës nëpër rrugët e përdredhura.

Për pak vinte dreka dhe drita e ditës në Bruksel sikur zbehej nga pemët dhe merrte te një hije të pakuptueshme. “Kështu është gjithmonë,” më tha miku im. “Nuk është si në Shqipëri. Është dritë e qetë që zgjat shumë.” Heshti pak pastaj u kujtua. “Ai djali që punonte në kombinatin ushqimor mbaroi liceun për pikturë nja dy vjet para nesh. Atje tek amballazhi i gjalpës ishte një parullë e madhe, “Gjalpi ynë çan bllokadën imperialiste dhe revizioniste! E mban mend? Ai i shkruante parullat në kombinatin ushqimor.”

Me germa blu dhe të kuqe, i thashë. Ndeza një cigare, ai tymosi një nga këto elektroniket. Përcollëm tymin, pastaj qeshëm.

-Tangon e fundit e pashë në 1998 kur bëja shkollën e filmit, - më tha miku im. – Është një histori dashurie me fund tragjik. Ti e ke parë më?

-Jo, - i thashë.

-Po si t'u kujtua filmi?

-Ne marrim gjalpin tek një fshatare që e bën në shtëpi, - i thashë. – Kam pirë 2 kafe edhe ende e kam shijen në gojë.

-Gjalpë i vërtetë, - tha miku im dhe psherëtiu. – Atje i keni akoma të gjitha drejt nga natyra. Me ka marrë malli për një byrek me gjizë, një bukë të thekur me gjalpë.

-Pse nuk keni gjalpë ju këtu? – i thashë unë me të tallur.

-Ka sa të duash. Edhe margarinë. I kemi të gjitha. Por ja dritë dhe byrek me gjizë si në Shqipëri, nuk kemi.

-Ne e kishim gjalpin bardhë e zi si Marlon Brandon, - i thashë unë.

-Po, - më tha. Ndaloi makinën. – Kjo është shtëpia ime.

Zbritëm. U përqaftuam fort, fort jo formalisht si europianë kur ishim në aeroport, sapo erdhi bashkëshortja e mikut, në një rrugë krejt bosh, që më ngjante si një Brooklyn i mirëmbajtur. U përqaftuam në Bruksel. Kishim 27 vjet që nuk ishim parë me sy. Ai përmendi byrekun dhe gjalpin që kisha ngrënë unë në mëngjes në Tiranë.

-Alkool nuk kam, - më tha miku, - se kam pirë shumë deri përpara një viti. Nuk e mbaj më në shtëpi se kam frikë se e pi. Po deshe të nxjerr krem uiski.

Mbushëm filxhanët me kafe, i hodhëm nga pak krem uiski brenda.

-Paska si shije gjalpi, - tha me seriozitet nordik miku im.
-Sot është 22 maj apo jo? – edhe shtyu drejt meje diçka që solli e shoqja.

-Po, - thashë. “Tangon e fundit” sigurisht që nuk e përmendëm më dhe bëmë mirë.

Në tryezë si pakuptuar qe shfaqur një pako biskotash “Petit beurre”.

Petit beurre

Rudi Erebara

Translated from Albanian by Elsa Lici

On May 2017, I had not been abroad for 15 years, and that had followed a 7-year emigration period to New York. I left home at 2 a.m. I had no sleep. I could not force anything down my throat, but I ate a bite of bread and butter because I wanted to smoke. Including my present trip, I had been twice to Europe and once to the US all my life. It was really hard to get a visa and travel to Europe, when I was young and still had the craving to travel, to visit places or to live there. Then, when we got visa-free travel I was no longer young and life had become more complicated. My flight to Brussels included a stop in Vienna. I went through security check like in a dream with just my passport in hand and I headed for the great gate which would take me to my plane. The weather was grey, rainy and windy. I had a window seat, I talked to my wife and kids in Tirana for free. Wireless internet! Barely 20 years ago we could talk from America over the phone at \$3/minute. It was 1997 back then, an accursed year for Albania.

Twenty years later, I was travelling to Europe, invited by the European Union to receive the European Prize for Literature. I had a look around at the airport. The world was different from the one I had witnessed 15 years ago. So many officers in uniforms! The fear of terrorism. This was the second decade of the new century. Passengers in their seats were taking off their shoes and making themselves comfortable with their eyes glued to their mobile screens. Not me. And none of the Albanians travelling to Brussels was doing that. This was what set us apart from the others. We still wanted to experience the world through our own

eyes. With the grey silence we cherished in our eyes facing the window panes, the Viennese dawn felt like dusk in our country. Dark. So dark that for a moment I saw my face reflected off the windowpane and then a flash of lightning, to remind us of the winter. The sharp black-and-white contrast triggered a veiled distant memory, the timing of which I could not fathom. Then, bit by bit, it came back and grew clearer, much like I could make out ever more distinctly my own features on the airport windowpane, the darker and deeper the darkness of the storm grew on the other side.

My mind plunged back into the distant past. It was beginning of October 1989. All the high-school students were stationed in the tinned-food factory. Every year for two weeks we used to go to the farm fields to pick corn, but that year it was two weeks' work in the factory. We were supposed to remove the seeds from the peppers that were to be made into pickles, all to help the State. This was voluntary work as in all other Communist countries. Red piles of plump peppers were all over the place and looked like red wounds of the October Revolution. The talking was done in a quiet voice and only to trusted friends. The talk of the day was about the movie *Last Tango in Paris* which had been on at 2 a.m. on Channel 2 Belgrade. The conversation went on sotto voce behind piles of peppers. It was a dangerously tricky topic. The third member of the group could be an informer. I had watched the movie like everybody else, on a black-and-white TV set, with Serbian subtitles and in violation of the state laws and family norms. That was a criminal offence. In Albania, foreign movies were carefully purged even of kissing scenes. Nakedness was only tolerable in beach scenes. Even that not in close-ups. Sex-related materials were punishable by prison terms. When I was carrying a crate full of seed-free peppers to the conveyor belt taking them to the washing section I overheard two workers talking about the movie. I was behind a row of plastic crates and inadvertently became the third member of the group.

“Margarine,” I heard the first one say. “Butter,” protested the other one. A moment of silence followed and I could hear them swallow. “Margarine,” insisted the first one. “No one would waste the butter like that.”

“There’s plenty of butter in France,” replied the other. “It’s not like here. We have to make do with the 200-gramme ration for a family of five. Marlon Brando was eating a piece of bread with butter. You saw it, didn’t you?” They fell silent and swallowed. I swallowed too and felt a strange fear seize me. The three of us were doing something illegal and punishable with imprisonment. Agitation and propaganda article, 8 years’ hard labour in a mine.

“That’s just a movie. And that’s Marlon Brando. Don’t talk nonsense!”, went on to explain the supporter of margarine.

“It doesn’t matter how good they are having it in France. No one would waste butter like that. And that was frozen butter.”

The other one objected right away. “He was eating bread and butter. Didn’t you see that? Only frozen butter can be eaten like that, with your hands. If it had been margarine, he would have used a bread crust to eat it.”

“Margarine in France is like butter in Albania. No one eats butter there. It’s only us over here, at the edge of the world, who eat it. People use margarine. Besides, the movie was recent. Didn’t you see what a big packet of butter it was? Certainly, a one-pound packet. French movie. Great movie. A recent one. Didn’t you get it? Even the Yugoslavs broadcast it at two hours after midnight.” Here they switch the power off at 8, much sooner than the chickens huddle for sleep.

“I will ask someone who speaks French,” said the butter supporter.

“What if they call butter margarine in French?” asked the other one.

“How can they call butter margarine? Are you crazy or what?” reacted the butter guy after swallowing. “Ask anyone you want. That was butter.”

“That was margarine. Margarine is slippery, because it is made from oil, like Vaseline. People over there, on the other side, are now making cloth out of leek. No one keeps margarine in the fridge. It does not go off.”

Feeling the approach of a third person they fell silent. I remained immobile waiting for someone to make a noise so that I could leave unobtrusively.

“Hey!” exclaimed the newcomer. “Did you see how he was eating butter? Over there they have enough butter to spread on their dicks, over here we don’t have enough to eat.” The two others did not say anything. “Bread and butter and sex,” continued the newcomer and the three of them laughed out loud while I made off noiselessly.

Two hours later at lunchtime, together with a childhood friend of mine who had been working in the factory since he was 16, we went to the bakery in the hope of getting a fresh loaf of bread. He knew every nook and cranny of the place and thus avoided being spotted by security guards or Party stool pigeons. “Let’s go to the packaging warehouse. Maybe we can grab hold of a packet of butter over there,” he told me on the way. It was meant as a joke, as he had also watched the movie. “What do you think? You took French classes at school,” he remarked. “Was that butter or margarine? The bets are on, you know?”

“I have no idea.” I replied. “I watched the movie with the volume turned down.”

“Oh, then you too saw it like everybody else,” he teased me.

“How should I have seen it?” I asked in a surprised tone.

“Your father is a film director. I thought you might have watched it with the volume turned up and with the proper translation.” “Are you out of your mind?” I replied in a serious manner. “I don’t watch sex movies with my dad. Will you stop it or shall I go back to the peppers?”

We went together to the packaging warehouse anyway. He went in and came out really quickly. I could spot the rectangular packet of frozen butter with its sharp-pointed edges in his bulging pocket. “They only gave me a frozen one” he said, and we retraced our way back, hiding behind the endless rows of empty crates. He was a supporter of margarine too. “Butter does not stay on paper like that when it melts. Marlon was eating margarine,” he insisted. He kept his hand in his pocket because he didn’t want the security guard to spot his frozen packet of butter.

As the plane took off heading for Brussels the rain beat the fuselage with a clatter as if it were hailstones. A slight growing anxiety seized me and I feared that everything would stop and I would go back in time. At that time when Europe was a dream we had no courage to dream about.

The anxiety dissipated when the plane shot over the clouds. An old school friend of mine, whom I had not met for 27 years, was waiting for me at Brussels airport. He had left the country in February 1990, shortly after the first anti-regime protest rally in Tirana. He had been lucky they did not kill him in a police station. He has been living in Brussels with his family ever since. When I came out he was waiting for me, as so many other European citizens were doing. He had grown old, but not so old that I could not recognise him. I told him about my recollection about *Last Tango in Paris*, about the fear I felt, just because I was in a European country.

“That’s because you have dreamt about it for so long and waited for it so long. That was your mistake. You should have come at my place and stayed over here for some time,” he explained.

“I couldn’t get a visa,” I replied, but he added no more to it.

We spoke about Marlon Brandon, Maria Schneider. He believed it was butter. “They didn’t use margarine in Paris in 1972,” he told me while turning the steering wheel through the curving road. In a short time, it would be lunchtime and, in Brussels, daylight grew dimmer, perhaps because of the trees. It had an imperceptibly shadowy quality. “It’s always like this,” my friend explained. “It’s nothing like in Albania. It is a quiet daylight that lasts much longer.” He kept silent for a while and then he remembered. “That guy who was working in the food factory graduated in painting from the Arts High School just two years ahead of us. At the packaging warehouse there was a giant slogan: ‘Our butter breaks the revisionist and imperialist blockade!’ Do you remember that? He used to write the slogans in the food factory.”

“In blue and red letters,” I added. I lit a cigarette while he was smoking an electronic one. We puffed out the smoke and laughed.

“I watched *Last Tango* in 1998 when I was studying at the film-making college. It’s a love story with a tragic ending. What about you, have you watched it again?”

“No,” I answered.

“How did that movie pop in your mind?”

“We buy our butter from a village woman who churns it out on her own at her place,” I explained. “I have already had two coffees but I still have the taste of butter in my mouth.”

“That’s real butter,” said my friend with a sigh. “Over there, all the products are still organic. Straight from nature. I really miss the cottage-cheese pie, a slice of toast and butter.”

“Why is that? You don’t have butter over here?” I asked jokingly.

“There’s plenty of butter. Plenty of margarine also. We have everything. But no daylight and cottage-cheese pie like in Albania.”

“Our butter was black and white, like Marlon Brando’s,” I retorted.

“Yes,” he said and brought the car to a halt. “This is my house.” We got out of the car. We hugged each other again properly and long, not in the formal European way as we had done at the airport. My friend’s wife came over the empty street, which looked like a well-taken-care-of Brooklyn. We hugged in Brussels. It had been 27 years since we had seen each other. He mentioned the pie and the butter I had eaten in the morning in Tirana. “I don’t have alcoholic drinks,” he told me. “I used to drink a lot of it until one year ago. I don’t keep any at home as I am afraid that I can’t resist the temptation to drink it. Would you like some cream liqueur?”

We poured coffee into the cups and poured some cream liqueur in it.

“It tastes like butter,” said my friend with Scandinavian seriousness. “It’s the 22nd of May today, isn’t it?” he asked, and pushed towards me something that his wife had brought. “Yes, it is,” I said. We made no more mention of *Last Tango*, and it was better that way.

On the table lay a package of “Petit beurre” biscuits.



Romania

Claudiu M. Florian

Die Erbschaft

The Inheritance

EUPL laureate 2016: *Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății.*
(Cartea Românească)

BIOGRAPHY

Claudiu Mihail Florian was born in 1969 in Rupea, Romania, and left his home town for Bucharest at the age of 11. After graduating from secondary school in 1988, he did his military service, where he witnessed the upheaval in his country in December 1989. He went on to study German studies and history in Bucharest, Bielefeld and Munich. As a student he translated several English and German authors into Romanian, including Hermann Hesse. From 2002, he worked as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, moving on to become cultural and press attaché at the Romanian Embassy in Berlin, then envoy at the Romanian Embassy in Bern, Switzerland. Currently, he is the Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Berlin. His first novel, *Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății*, translated into Romanian by the author himself, won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2016.

Die Erbschaft

Claudiu M. Florian



Schon einmal in seinem Leben hat Adamovicescu eine Situation meistern müssen, die ihm, trotz seiner hohen Bildung und seines ausgeprägten eigenen Denksystems bis heute ein Rätsel bleibt.

Nicht wahr, Ihr würdet sie jetzt gerne erklärt haben, diese Situation? Er auch.

Als deren Folge hat er, ein Dozent mit vier Dokortiteln, einen Schlaganfall erlitten. Ein Berliner Gauner fiel ihn an und versetzte ihm einen Schlag. Danach fand sich Adamovicescu in der Lage, Berlinerisch mit einem Hauch von Gaunersprache zu quatschen.

Und nun spielt ihm das Schicksal den zweiten Streich:

Er spaziert einsam hoch oben auf dem Bergkamm, unweit der karpatischen Sphinx, gedanklich beschäftigt mit dem Abschluss seines eigenen Denksystems, ein ökonomisch-philosophisches Gebilde an dem er seit Jahren herumtüftelt, ein Abriss aus Physiokratie und Dekonstruktivismus. Er nennt es Kaputtmunditismus. Und ausgerechnet jetzt, heute, hier, seinem Ziel so nahe, die Fäden, an deren fernen Enden Quesnay und Derrida noch zappeln, gedanklich schon alle fest zugeschnürt, muss diese traurige außerirdische Gestalt vor ihm auftauchen und ihn nach dem Befinden ausfragen. Dass es sich dabei um einen Außerirdischen handelt, liegt auf der Hand, denn aussehen tut er unbeschreiblich.

In allem Missgeschick ist auch eine Spur von Glück enthalten – weiß Adamovicescu, ansonsten ein Mann von zynischer Lebenshaltung. Er hätte wieder in eine Razzia geraten können – in solch unsicheren Zeiten muss man stets damit rechnen! - und wieder einmal hätte er Schwierigkeiten haben können, die Beamten von seiner tadellos legalen Existenz zu überzeugen, als Sohn einer Neuseeländerin und eines Südafrikaners, mit jeweils einem indischen, arabischen, jüdischen und nativ-amerikanischen Großelternanteil, einem chinesischen Halbbruder und zwei grönländischen Tanten, geboren in Río Grande, Feuerland, und mit rumänischem Reisepass.

Als er einmal versuchte, seinen Stammbaum aufzustellen, endete das mit einem Studium in Universalgeschichte, mit Promotionsabschluss. Als er dann die eigene Hochzeitsparty managte und zu telefonieren hatte mit allen Familienangehörigen seiner zukünftigen Frau, deren Herkunft weniger eindeutig ist als seine, schuf er ganz nebenbei das Doktorat in Linguistik. Als nach dem Treffen er den Sinn aller von ihm während des Festes auf Servietten notierten Trinksprüche, Schimpfwörter und Segensformeln entschlüsseln wollte, erlangte er daraufhin kurzerhand den Dokortitel in Religionswissenschaften, und als etwas später ein alter Bekannter ihn fragte, ob er seine Zeit als Junggeselle nicht vermisse, übte er sich mit erfolgreichem Abschluss in seiner bisher letzten Promotion, in Philosophie. Den Lehrstuhl an der örtlichen Universität kriegte er daraufhin regelrecht hinterhergeworfen.

Somit gibt es Schlimmeres als dieses Treffen. Trotzdem, hätte er bloß die Zeit, sein eben ausgetüfteltes Denksystem niederzuschreiben! Ob der Außerirdische so lieb ist und mit seiner Kontaktaufnahme solange wartet?

Der jedoch, wie jeder Tourist, möchte lediglich ein paar Hinweise.

Was sein Sinn des Lebens?

Adamovicescu hat vor vielen Jahren einen Kollegen gehabt, der im Philosophieunterricht das gleiche hat wissen wollen. Sie sind im Kontakt, er ist immer noch Student.

- Eee, Bruder, ick verkauf Euch keine neppen hier! Hauset ihr selber mal tausend Jahre lang uf dieser Kugel und lasset dann weiter spannen.

Aus Lebenserfahrung weiß er, manchmal macht es Sinn auf eine konkrete Frage evasiv zu antworten.

- Tausend Jahre. Was das?

Der Außerirdische verfügt über Googletranslator, somit läuft die Verständigung problemlos, von der Orthographie abgesehen.

- Potz Sakrament! Noch nie was von Diachronie gehört? Woher dann Eure Frage von Sinn und Leben? Man kann doch nicht nur in Synchronie herumlungern. Möcht' gern mal wissen wie Ihr dort oben so lebt!

- Später. Jetzt mir sagen was euch machen aus, euch Blaukugelzapfen?

Adamovicescu gibt sich rasch Rechenschaft: Aus dem All betrachtet ist die Erde eine blaue Kugel, und von Nahem betrachtet ist jeder Mensch darauf so gesehen in der Tat ein Wanderzapfen.

- ‚Später‘ deutet auf Zeitverständnis, Bruder! Von Euch weiß ich's nicht, aber für unsereinen is' Zeit ziemlich wichtig. Seit du reingefaselt kommst und bis du abkratzt. Ungefähr det macht uns aus.

- Wo Zeit? Will sehen.

- Zeit kann man nich' sehen. Es gibt sie. Det zu wissen is' schon alles.

- Sprechen verständlicher. Alle ihr reden so nix sagend?

Der kritische Sinn des Fernverkehrers amüsiert Adamovicescu.

- Ihr gefällt mir, Bruder! Da habt's Ihr schomma Recht, gell?

Die Lichter des Außerirdischen, die auf sowas wie Augen hindeuten, beginnen sich unsicher zu drehen. Ist das jetzt eine Frage an ihn gewesen?

- Vielleicht... Was sein Zeit?

- Ick liege wohl richtig in der Annahme, Ihr habt's Heidegger nich' jelesen. ‚Sein und Zeit‘ und so ...

Adamovicescu hält am Höflichkeitsplural fest. Der Mensch ist noch nicht so weit, einen Außerirdischen zu duzen.

- Du liegen überall richtig. Sprechen.

Der Erdling hält kurz inne: ist das jetzt eine Ironie gewesen oder nicht?

- Also, mir Blaukugelzapfen, mir Menschen – det da, so wie ick, heißt Mensch! (er deutet mit dem Zeigefinger auf sich) leben uf die Erde. Also uf dem wat is'. Det da, det is' Erde!– und Adamovicescu tritt ein paarmal fest mit dem Fuß in den Boden.

Der Fremde verfolgt dessen Zeigefinger und Fuß.

- Mensch – is' – Erde!

- Er hat's geschnallt! Ick werd' verrückt! Jetzt nur noch schnell Verbindungen herstellen! (In der Hoffnung, sich bald wieder seinem gedanklichen Konstrukt über Dekonstruktion widmen zu können, beginnt Adamovicescu schnell zu reden): Also, mein Herr – oder seid's keen Herr, seid's 'ne Dame? Ejall! – passt's uff: die Erde kann ohne den Menschen nich'... Naja, können kannse schon, s' kann sogar besser, aber dann würde s' nich' Erde heißen. S' würde gar nich' heißen. Alles klar bisher?

Die Augenlichter des anderen drehen sich wieder ganz fleißig.

- Erde... heißen.

- Richtig, heißen. Ohne Mensch keine Erde. Der Mensch pflegt alles um sich herum fest zu benennen. Für uns muss alles irgendwie heißen. Es heißt zwar (na bitte!) ganz am Anfang, als es noch gar nichts gab, war das Wort. Aber das brauchst du jetzt nicht wissen. Meine These dazu ist eh: am Anfang war das Wort, am Ende ist es nur Quatsch. D'accord?“ (Die Augenlichter des anderen rotieren schneller, auf der Suche nach einem festen Anhaltspunkt, um die Welt in die Angeln zu setzen.) – Seid's Ihr Atheist?

Die Lichter heben gleich ab.

- Vielleicht... Base Athena...

- Ach was, bleiben wir auf der Basis der Tatsachen. Erde ist das da! – und er stampft erneut in den Boden.

- Blaukugel.

- Richtig. Blaukugel.

- Blau von oben! – der himmlische Tourist deutet aufwärts.

- Ja, ick weiß vom Himmel her sieht's blau aus. Aber nicht nur von oben kommt blau. Auch vom Wasser.

- Wasser!

- Jasses Herr, wie erklär ick dem jetze Wasser! Erneut klopft er sich auf die Brust. „Ich bin aus Wasser. Achtzig Prozent. Ohne Wasser könnte nix leben. Leben is' Wasser und kommt aus Wasser. Wasser trennt und verbindet.

- Du sein blau?

- Meene Jüte! Ick bin nich' blau bloß weil ick aus Wasser bin. Und jesoffen hab ick auch nich'. Komisch, wa? Ihr aus dem Himmel seht uns blau, für uns da unten is' der Himmel blau. Dabei is' nix blau, weder Wasser noch Himmel. Alles Täuschung, alles bloß ein Lichteffect.

- Nix blau? Blau nicht geben?

- Tja, so sieht's aus. Paar Blumen, Vögel, Schmetterlinge, Augen... Lauter Artikel mit reduzierter Haltbarkeit. Recht wenig Blau uf die Welt, eigentlich ... Grün hingegen, Schwarz, Braun, Rot, Gelb, Weiß und Grau jede Menge, zum Anfassen... Allein reines Blau ist meist 'ne Illusion. Von wegen ,der Blaue Planet'! Dafür aber holt man sich's umso mehr uf die Fahnen.

Der Fremde starrt prüfend, trotz fehlender Augen. Er scheint sagen zu wollen: du bestehst aus Wasser, bist aber kein Wasser, Zeit ist für euch wichtig, aber nicht greifbar, Blau ist überall, aber existiert kaum. Was ist bei euch denn echt?

- Erde... Erde wirklich geben?

Adamovicescu gibt sich plötzlich positiv.

- Erde is' alles. Ohne Erde sind wir nix. Nur Seele. Aber Seele ohne Erde is' wie'n Furz ohne Arsch.

Die Lichter des Fremden quirlen wie verrückt vor dieser Demonstration puren Kaputtmunditismus.

- Seele... Seele wirklich geben?

- Seele is' alles. Ohne Seele sind wir nix. Nur Erde. (Die Oberbelichtung des Anderen wird zur Discokugel.) Erde is' nicht nur die Blaukugel. Is' och Festland. Mit der Erde ist's wie mit dem Brot: am besten schmeckt die frische Rinde. Ick vermute Ihr seid's sowas wie Veganer, *Brot* muss ick Euch nich' erklären.

- Ich nicht von Vega.

- Meinetwega! Also die Rinde. Wir Kinda' der Erde streiten schon seit eh und je um deren Rinde.

- Warum streiten?

- Weil mer eben noch Kinder sind ... Das is' so verteilt, das Festland, dass eigentlich für jden jenug da is'. Ein Drittel Rinde, zwei Drittel Wasser. Sonst ist's zu trocken und

- bleibt im Hals stecken. Nich' so kieken, das war jetze nur 'ne Metapher.
- Meta... Hmm! Ich kennen Meta. Opa immer von Meta reden.
 - Kiek an, 'nen Opa habt's Ihr och! Meta kommt vom Griechischen...
 - Griechischen! Ich kennen griechischen! Auch Opa...
 - Da kannste sehn! Keenen blassen Schimmer von Erde und Mensch, aber von Griechen hatter jehört! Wees der Kuckuck wo Ihr Außerirdische Eure Bildung so herhabts'! ...
 - Wollen wissen Erde. Was mit Erde?“
 - Diese Erde besteht aus sieben Teilen.“ Aus der Westentasche holt Adamovicescu ein kleines Notizbuch hervor und schlägt hinten eine doppelseitige, bunte Weltkarte auf.
 - Blau!, lässt der Fremde verlautbaren, froh wie ein Kind über seine Entdeckung, und deutet aufs Weltmeer.
 - Ja, Blau uch ...
 - Aber Blau nicht geben!
 - Akzeptieren tut man's scho' in der Zeichensprache der Kartographie.
 - Karto...
 - Vergiss es! Der Erdbewohner beschließt, dem Gast unnötige Neologismen zu ersparen. Also hier hammerse – sein Zeigefinger hüpft spatzenhaft von einem Kontinent zum anderen – das sind Erd-Teile! Das da! (stampft mit dem Fuß in den Boden). Rinde. Festland. Wo Menschen leben. Det wie'n Schädel is' Affrika, dort hat och der älteste Mensch seinen Schädel her, det verwehte Ballettpaar uf Zehenspitzen heißt Jammerika, der Dicke da is' der Orient, das mystische, hochreligiöse Aasien, dieser Scherbenhaufen Jojoropa, die Meerkatze dort is' Ostralien und dieser am Südpol tanzende Derwisch is' die Antarktis.“

Der Fremde starrt auf das winzig bunte Rechteck, das eine Kugel von der Dimension eines Planeten ausmachen soll und deren überwiegend blaue Farbe es eigentlich gar nicht gibt.

- Dafür streiten? Warum streiten?
- Wartet's mal ab bis Ihr uns Menschen kennenlernt's. Unseren Hunger für Habe, Rohstoffe, Genuss. Der Physiokrat in ihm regt sich allmählich. Auf. Früher hieß sowat Imperialismus und Sklaverei und Kolonisation. Heute gibt man sich anständig, heute nennt sich det Globalisierung. Habt's Ihr was zu bieten, dort bei Euch zu Hause? Dann tötet Ihr gut, Euren Himmelskörper würfelförmig zu gestalten, nicht dass wir am End' Euch den och noch globalisieren.

- Du sein böse auf deine eigene Art?

- Det is' nicht meine Art. Is' nur meine Spezies.

- Du sprechen komisch. Was du sprechen für Sprache?

Adamovicescu überlegt kurz. „Indogermanisch“ klingt ihm zu völkisch.

- Indojozoropäisch.

- Ind... jojo...?

- Von Indien – da – und Jozoropa – da.“ Adamovicescu deutet nochmal auf die kleine Karte.

- Erzähl Jojo...

- Jozoropa is' groß. Jozoropa is' wichtig. Jozoropa hat die Welt mit ihrem Atem befruchtet. Obwohl Babylon und Mesopotamien – da – als Wiege der Zivilisation jelten, jelang es Jozoropa vor lauter Vitalität älter als die Alten zu werden. Schon mal was vom Alten Kontinent gehört? Uf dem leben lauter Jozoropäjer. Naja, fast ...

- Aber... Jojo geben gar nicht.

- Wie, Jozoropa jibt's nich'?

- Na wie? Alle Erd-Teile sein klar umrissen, von dort bis dorthin und dann Blau. Nur Jojo nicht, Jojo nur hängen an allen Nachbarn. Mensch kommen aus Afrika. Sprache aus Asien. Große Religionen alle aus Orient. Was Jojo selber geschaffen? Was Ursprüngliches?“

Adamovicescu hat plötzlich das komische Gefühl, es hier mit jemand ganz anderem zu tun zu haben als ursprünglich vermutet, mit einem Corporate Raider der übelsten Sorte, der fremdes Produkt schlechtreden will. Seine kontinentale *Amor Proprio* ist verletzt.

- Ich seh schon Ihr seid's janz genau vorprogrammiert! Von wegen Sein und Sinn des Lebens! Dann lass ich Euch schomma' janz konkrete Frage stelln: was habt's Ihr hier zu suchen?

- Das Erbe von mein Großvater.

Die knappe Antwort überrascht Adamovicescu mehr als die gesamte Erscheinung des Außerirdischen.

- Wat für'n Erbe? Was is'n der Opa jewesn?

Der Fremde überlegt kurz. Sein Übersetzungsprogramm scheint nach einem bestimmten Begriff zu suchen.

- Heute Ihr nennen ihn hier auf Erde wie Elektriker.
- Elektriker! Ihr platzt aus dem Himmel um die Erbschaft eines Elektrikers zu kassieren?!
- Eigentlich Erbschaft auf Namen von Großmutter sein übertragen ...
- Phantastisch. Der Welt wird staunend sich verneigen ...

Aus dem leichten Flattern seiner Scheinwerfer könnte man meinen, der Weltenwanderer hat die Ironie mitgekriegt. Doch er erzählt gelassen.

- Vater König, und noch einer in Sippe sein mit gleichem Namen. Es geben Streitigkeiten in Sukzession.

- Det hört sich an wie uf die Erde. Jibt's auch im Himmel Erbschaftsstreit?
- Nicht immer. Nur seit ihr hier auf Blaukugel.
- Ne halbe Ewigkeit. Det jeht ja noch. Und weiter ?
- Vater wollen König werden allein und haben Posi-Onkel um Hilfe bitten. Dann Posi-Onkel haben schicken großes Tier.
- Hmm... Wo hab ich schomma wat ähnlichet jelesen?
- Oma gar nicht Stiefmutter können leiden. Oma sagen Stiefmutter – biiip, – weil mit Biest von Posi-Onkel Halbbruder zu Welt bringen, unterhalb det da wie du, Mensch, oberhalb Biest.
- Was Ihr nich'sagt's! Det erinnert mich an was. Wohnt Euer Posi-Onkel womöglich im Meer?
- Richtig. Oma sagen zu Stiefmutter „Stiermutter“, die sagen zurück „selber Stiermutter“, denn auch Oma haben sich von Stier verführen lassen.
- Det is' aber ne' tierliebe Familie! Und der Opa, der Elektriker..., hat der's vielleicht mit Blitzen zu tun?
- Richtig. Manchmal Menschen die ihn machen böse er nehmen als Blitzableiter.
- Sieh da! Der Alte wirft mit Blitzen rum, und Ihr seid da, um die Erbschaft von Eur' Oma zu kassieren.
- Richtig. Erbschaft auf Name ihre. Wie Nachbar sagen: *res-titutio in integrum*.
- Auf ihren Namen... Opa hat's wohl sehr lieb jehabt, det Blitzmädel. Wie hat er's denn jenannt, Eur'Opa?

(Fortsetzung folgt)

The Inheritance

Claudiu M. Florian

Translated from German by Alice Tetley-Paul

Once before in his life, Adamovicescu had to deal with a situation that, despite his high level of education and his own elaborate system of thought, remains a mystery to him to this day.

You'd like to find out more about this situation now, wouldn't you? So would he.

As a result of it, he, a lecturer with four doctorates, suffered a stroke. A thug from Berlin attacked him and dealt him a blow. Afterwards, Adamovicescu found himself gibbering in Berlin dialect with a touch of slang.

And now fate deals him a second blow:

He's taking a walk on his own, high up on the mountain ridge, not far from the Carpathian Sphinx, intellectually occupied with the completion of his own system of thought, an economic and philosophical construct he's been fiddling around with for years, an amalgamation of physiocracy and deconstructivism. He calls it kaputmunditism. And now, of all times, so close to his goal, with the threads – on whose distant ends Quesnay and Derrida are still thrashing around – already tied up tightly in his mind, this sad extraterrestrial figure has to pop up in front of him and interrogate him about the status quo. The fact that it's an extraterrestrial goes without saying, because you can't describe it in words.

All misfortune contains a hint of good fortune, Adamovicescu, usually a man of cynical disposition, knows. He could have ended up in a raid again – you always have to expect that kind of thing in uncertain times like these! – and he could

have run into difficulties again trying to convince the officials of his impeccably lawful existence, as the son of a New Zealander and a South African, with Indian, Arab, Jewish and Native American grandparents, a Chinese half-brother and two Greenlandic aunts, born in Rio Grande, Tierra del Fuego, and with a Romanian passport.

When he once attempted to draw up his family tree, he ended up studying world history, culminating in a PhD. When he then arranged his own wedding party and had to telephone all the relatives on the side of his future wife, whose heritage is even more confusing than his own, he just so happened to gain his doctorate in linguistics. When, after the party, he wanted to decipher the meaning of all the toasts, swear words and blessings he'd jotted down on napkins, he gained a doctorate in religious studies just like that, and when an old acquaintance later asked him if he missed being a bachelor, he turned his hand to philosophy and successfully completed his most recent doctorate to date. After that, the professorship at the local university was offered to him on a silver platter.

So from that point of view, there are worse things than this meeting. Nevertheless, if only he had the time to write down his system of thought he'd only just got his head around! Could the extraterrestrial not be so kind as to wait until then to make contact?

Yet he, just like any other tourist, only wants a few pointers.

- What being meaning of life?

Many years ago, Adamovicescu had a colleague who'd asked exactly the same thing in philosophy class. They're in contact, he's still a student.

- Hey, mate, I don't wanna lead ya down the garden path!
Try living on this ball yerself for a thousan' years 'n' then we can have another chinwag about it.

Life experience has taught him that it's sometimes sensible to answer a specific question evasively.

- Thousand years. What that?

The extraterrestrial has Google Translate; as such, communication is trouble free, aside from the spelling.

- Blimey! Ain't heard of diachrony? Where'd ya question of meaning 'n' life come from, then? Ya can't just hang around in synchrony, after all. I just wanna know what life's like for ya up there!

- Later. Now telling me what defines you, you blueballpins?

Adamovicescu is quick to figure it out: from outer space, Earth looks like a blue ball, and from up close, every person on it does indeed look like a walking pin.

- "Later" indicates an understanding of time, mate! I dunno about you lot, but for the likes of us, time is rather important. From the moment ya pop out until ya snuff it. That's more or less what defines us.

- Where time? Want see.

- Ya can't see time. It's a thing. That's all ya need to know.

- Speaking more clearly. All you talking so meaningless?

The long-distance traveller's critical nature amuses Adamovicescu.

- I like ya, mate! Ya ain't wrong there, are ya?

The lights of the extraterrestrial, which are suggestive of eyes, start rotating unsteadily. Was that a question he was just asked?

- Maybe... What being time?

- I'm probably right to assume ya ain't read Heidegger. Being 'n' Time 'n' all that...

- You entirely right. Speaking.

The earthling pauses for a moment: was that ironic or not?

- So, we blueballpins, we humans – this, like me here, is called a human! (he points to himself with his index finger) live on Earth. So, on this, here, this is Earth! – and Adamovicescu stamps his foot on the ground a few times.

The alien follows his index finger and foot.

- Human – is – Earth!
- He's cracked it! What are the chances! Let's just quickly connect the dots now! (In the hope of being able to dedicate himself to his theoretical construct of deconstruction again soon, Adamovicescu starts talking very quickly): – So, sir – or are ya not a sir, are ya a madam? Whatever! – listen here: without people, Earth can't exist... Well it could, 'n' a good deal better too, but then it wouldn't be called Earth. It wouldn't be called anything. So far so good?

The other's eyelights start spinning vigorously again.

- Earth... called.
- Correct, called. No Earth without humans. Humans tend to give everything around them a fixed name. For us, everything has to be called something. It's said that in the beginning, when there was nothing, was the Word. But ya don't need to know that now. My theory on this is: in the beginning was the Word, at the end is just nonsense. Gottit? (The other's eyelights rotate more quickly, searching for a fixed point of reference to make sense of the world.) – Are ya an atheist?

The lights are about to take off.

- Maybe... Base Athena...
- Heck, let's stick with the facts. Earth is this here! – and he stamps on the ground again.

- Blue ball.
- Correct. Blue ball.
- Blue from above! – the celestial tourist points upwards.
- Yeah, I know it looks blue from above. But blue doesn't only come from above. It also comes from water.
- Water!
- Jesus Christ, how on earth do I explain water! – Once again, he taps on his chest. – I'm made of water. Eighty percent. Without water, nothing can live. Life is water 'n' comes from water. Water separates 'n' connects.
- You being blue?
- My goodness! I ain't blue just coz I'm made of water. I ain't down in the dumps either. Funny, eh? For you up in the skies above, we look blue, for us down here, the skies are blue. Yet nothing is blue, neither water nor sky. It's all an illusion, merely a light effect.
- Nothing blue? Blue not real?
- Yeah, that's how it is. A couple of flowers, birds, butterflies, eyes... all items with a limited life expectancy. Hardly any blue in the world, really... Green on the other hand, black, brown, red, yellow, white 'n' grey, loads of it, ya can touch it... Just pure blue is usually an illusion. "The blue planet" my left foot! Yet people make such a song 'n' dance about it.

The alien stares sceptically, despite not having any eyes. He seems to be saying: you're made of water, but you're not water, time is important to you, but it's not tangible, blue is everywhere, but it barely exists. So what is real then, with you?

- Earth... Earth really real?

Adamovicescu suddenly turns positive.

- Earth is everything. Without Earth, we're nothing. Just souls. But a soul without Earth is like a fart without a bum.

The alien's lights spin around like crazy at this demonstration of pure kaputmunditism.

- Souls... Souls really real?

- Soul is everything. Without souls, we're nothing. Only Earth. (The other's overhead lights turn into disco balls.) Earth ain't just the blue ball. It's also mainland. The earth's like bread: fresh crusts are best. I suspect you're vegans or something like that, I don't need to explain bread to ya, do I?

- I not from Vega.

- Fair enough! So the crusts. We children of the Earth have been fighting over its crusts since the dawn of time.

- Why fighting?

- Because we're still just children... It's divided up, the mainland, so there's actually enough for everyone. One third crust, two thirds water. Otherwise it's too dry 'n' gets stuck in yer throat. Don't look at me like that, it was just a metaphor.

- Meta... Hmm! I knowing Meta. Grandpa always speaking of Meta.

- Whatcha know, you've got a grandpa too! Meta comes from the Greek...

- Greek! I knowing Greek! Grandpa too...

- I'll be damned! Not the faintest idea of Earth and humans, but he's heard of the Greeks! Goodness knows where you extraterrestrials getcha education from!

- Want knowing Earth. What with Earth?

- Earth is made of seven parts. – Adamovicescu takes a small notebook out of his waistcoat pocket and opens up a double-page spread of a world map, in full colour, at the back of it.
- Blue! – the alien proclaims, as happy as a clam about his discovery, pointing to the ocean.
- Yes, blue too...
- But blue not real!
- No, but it's accepted in the language of cartography.
- Carto...
- Forget it! – The earthling decides to spare the guest unnecessary neologisms. – So this is them (his index finger hops like a sparrow from one continent to the next): these are continents! This here! (stamping his feet on the ground). Crusts. Mainland. Where people live. This one that looks like a skull is Africa, that's also where the oldest person's skull was found, this windswept pair of ballet dancers on their tiptoes is called America, the fat guy there is the Orient, the mystical, extremely religious Asia, this pile of rubble is Europe, the monkey there is Australasia, 'n' this Whirling Dervish on the South Pole is Antarctica.

The alien stares at the tiny coloured rectangle, which is supposed to represent a sphere the size of a planet, and whose predominantly blue colour doesn't actually exist at all.

- Fighting for this? Why fighting?
- Just wait 'til ya get to know us humans. Our hunger for possessions, resources, pleasure. (The physiocrat in him gradually comes to life and starts getting all worked up.) That kinda thing used to be called imperialism 'n' slavery 'n' colonisation. Today people make out like they're decent, so now we call it globalisation. D'ya have

anything to offer, where ya come from? If so, you'd do well to make yer celestial body cube-shaped, so we don't end up globalising that too.

- You being angry at your own kind?
- It's not my own kind. It's just my own species.
- You speaking funny. What language you speaking?

Adamovicescu thinks for a moment. "Indogermanic" sounds too racial too him.

- Indoeuropean.
- Ind...euro...?
- From India – there – 'n' Europe – there. (Adamovicescu points to the small map again.)
- Explain Euro...
- Europe is big. Europe is important. Europe fertilised the world with its breath. Although Babylon 'n' Mesopotamia – there – are considered the cradle of civilisation, Europe had so much vitality that it managed to become the oldest of all. Ever heard of the Old Continent? It's all Europeans living there. Well, almost...
- But... Euro not real.
- Whatcha mean, Europe ain't real?
- Well how? All continents being clearly defined, from there to there, and then blue. Only Euro not, Euro only attaching to all neighbours. Humans coming from Africa. Language from Asia. Big religions all from Orient. What Euro made itself? What original?

Adamovicescu suddenly has the strange feeling he's dealing with someone quite different to what he originally suspected, with a corporate raider of the worst kind, set out to badmouth alien product. His continental *amor proprio* is wounded.

- I see how it is, you're completely preprogrammed, aren't ya? Being 'n' meaning of life my left foot! Then I'll ask ya a very straightforward question: whatcha doin' here?

- The inheritance of my grandfather.

The curt answer surprises Adamovicescu more than the entire extraterrestrial visitation.

- What kind of inheritance? What did yer grandpa do then?

The alien thinks for a moment. His translation program seems to be searching for a specific term.

- Today you calling him here on Earth like electrician.

- Electrician! Ya fall from the skies to cash in the inheritance of an electrician?!

- Actually inheritance being transferred in the name of grandmother...

- Fantastic. The world'll bow down in awe...

The slight flicker of his headlights suggests the irony hasn't been lost on the world wanderer. But he explains calmly.

- Father King, and another in kinship with same name. There being disputes about succession.

- That sounds just like on Earth. Are there also disputes about inheritance in space?

- Not always. Just since you here on blue ball.

- For half an eternity. That ain't so bad. Continue!

- Father wanting being King alone and asking Posi-uncle for help. Then Posi-uncle sending big animal.

- Hmm... Where've I read something like this before?

- Grandma not standing stepmother. Grandma saying stepmother – beeeep, – because bringing half-brother to world

with beast of Posi-uncle, lower half that there like you,
human, upper half beast.

- No way! That reminds me of something. Does yer Posi-uncle live in the sea by any chance?
- Correct. Grandma calling stepmother “bullmother”, she saying back “bullmother yourself”, since grandma also seduced by bull.
- Well that’s certainly an animal-loving family! And grandpa, the electrician... has he by any chance got something to do with lightning?
- Correct. Sometimes people who making him angry he taking as lightning conductors.
- Well, well, well! The old codger goes around throwing lightning about ‘n’ you’re here to cash in yer grandma’s inheritance.
- Correct. Inheritance in her name. As neighbours say: restitutio in integrum.
- In her name... grandpa must have been quite fond of her, the lightning girl. What did he call her then, yer grandpa?

(To be continued)



United Kingdom

Adam Foulds

The Saviour Of The World

EUPL laureate 2011: *The Quickening Maze*
(Random House, Jonathan Cape)

BIOGRAPHY

Adam Foulds was born in 1974, went to Bancroft's School in London, read English at St Catherine's College, Oxford, and took an MA in creative writing from the University of East Anglia in 2001. He lives in south London. His first novel, *The Truth About These Strange Times* (2007), won the 2008 Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award and a Betty Trask Award. This was followed by the long narrative poem *The Broken Word* (2008), about Kenya's Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s. It was shortlisted for the 2008 John Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial Prize and the 2009 Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award, and won a Somerset Maugham Award and the 2008 Costa Poetry Award. *The Quickening Maze* (2009) was his second novel. A powerful fictionalised account of the poet John Clare's incarceration in an asylum in 1840, it was shortlisted for the 2009 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. In 2010, Foulds was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

The Saviour Of The World

Adam Foulds



In the darkness of the little room, (the lighting carefully calculated to do no harm), she looked at the drawing. The subtle, sacred faces turned to each other and smiled and Patricia gazed. Jetlagged still after her return from New York, this was a good place to be to recover, the best place. Tourists came in one door, looked for a while and read the label and maybe took a photograph on their phones or sat down next to her on the small bench, then left by the other door. After a while, they made her think of figures on an eighteenth century clock, appearing, stiffly traversing to a little chiming tune, disappearing. They kept the hours while Patricia, not moving from where she was, heavily seated but inwardly afloat in her tired but sleepless state, in the twilight of this room that was, she thought, her favourite place in the world. She was back with the real thing, beyond all doubt, and she was happy.

In the auction room there had been a strange aroma, compounded of aftershave, perfume, the best cosmetics, and the animal pungency of sweat soaking in patches through expensive shirts. (Something had brought it back to her. What? Perhaps the flustered woman who'd just come in with her coat tied by its sleeves around her waist and an audio-guide held to her ear). In New York, Patricia had seen the shine of perspiration spreading down from the hairlines of excited men holding up their camera phones at the auctioneer who said to the agents penned in their boxes, "It's not yours at the moment.

Give me a bid. Still with François. It's still with François." The agents stared blindly in all directions, one or two holding up a delaying hand, as they squeezed against their phones and listened for instructions from their distant clients. At a bid of three hundred million dollars, cheers and applause broke out. Patricia turned to a fellow journalist standing beside her who laughed and said something inaudible in the din, shaking his head, his eyes sparkling with the infectious madness that had taken hold of the room. Increments of five million dollars, sudden leaps of ten or more. At each jump, more laughter and applause and a strange giddy weightlessness. And why stop? The market was moving, a surging tide of money, and who cared if certain experts, Patricia included, thought that the *Saviour of The World* was not a Leonardo? An image of the painting, not the painting itself, stared out over the crowd from a large screen, hand raised in blessing. Seeing it there again confirmed her opinion. Perhaps it was produced in his studio, but Patricia doubted even that. To her, it had the signs of a Boltraffio. The Christ had the same repetitiously corkscrewing hair as Boltraffio's *Girl With Cherries* as well as the flat frontal presentation of a Boltraffio portrait, found in no Leonardo. In the auction room, this all meant nothing. People believed sufficiently, choosing certain experts over others, to allow this wild surge of investment, this lunge at authority and prestige.

In the National Gallery's drawing of *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John The Baptist* everything was right, fitting together convincingly despite the complexity of the composition, with the Virgin oddly seated half on St Anne's lap, the Christ child leaning across their overlapping thighs to bless little St John. In *The Saviour of The World* even the blessing arm didn't look correct; the angle implied an impossible elbow half way towards the wrist.

But how could you ever fully absorb the wonder of this drawing? How could you see it enough? Over this large page, hanging now a few feet in front of Patricia, Leonardo's hand had moved, his subtle pencil creating the solemn fall of the drapery, the softness of hair, the shadows that defined light along an arm or falling with an almost sentient tenderness on the sacred, smiling faces. Patricia felt she could almost hear the rhythmical, whispering contact of graphite and paper, the rush of Leonardo's hand to a new area to work on. Her eyes moved among the four faces and down through the strong solidity of their bodies to the unfinished feet, evaporating to empty outlines. St Anne's hand was the same kind of absence, the shape of a hand only, pointing upwards to heaven.

Some of the visitors to the little room saw the wonder of it. Patricia watched them slowing to a standstill in its presence, their mouths opening with an exhalation of pleasure, the 'ah' of an unexpected happy meeting as they realised the great good fortune of being there. Perhaps they felt relief, as Patricia did, the relief of real connection. Patricia was not looking forward to getting up and leaving this place.

Today was one of the rare occasions when Patricia had to go to the newspaper's office. She sank down inside herself at the thought of the loud, rocking journey on the London underground and the long walk through the tunnels at King's Cross. After her travel, Patricia was still full of the drifting sensation of motion, her body destabilised by the taxi ride, the hours of flight, the moving walkways, the lights, the security, the airport retail. She hated the retail, in particular that compulsory twisting path through perfumes and chocolates and alcohol that seemed to be in all airports now, designed to prolong your confrontation with these products and the glazed, dead-eyed, apparently enviable models in their advertisements, lips parted in expressions of exhausted sensuality, gold shimmering on their cheekbones. They meant nothing.

In the past, Patricia had enjoyed her infrequent visits to the office. Riding up in the elevator, she exited into the buzz of significance in that place, the chattering keyboards and ringing phones and rush of live information. But these days the news was so lurid and sad. Trump and Brexit. Trump and Brexit. Like everyone else Patricia had grown used to the words being endlessly in her mind, interrupting her thoughts. Everybody knew the words and repeated them and discussed what they meant as the world became at the same time urgent, boring and unreal. The bloated and bitter faces, the updates, all of them played all the time on the myriad screens on walls and desks and in people's hands. At times, these unfolding stories were interrupted with terrible news from the rubble of Syria or from the Mediterranean where more refugees had drowned. And in other sections: arts, sports, money, property, technology, something about veganism, about a TV show, about a royal couple. She had already added her own contribution to the noise, emailing an article about the auction of *The Saviour of The World* shortly after the final, shocking price had been reached and celebrated in an ecstatic rush of flash photography. If only she could stay in this dim little room in the National Gallery until the twilight outside matched the twilight inside. She could get up then and find her way home in silence. She could take with her the silence of the drawing, the silence of Mary and Anne's faces so close together, breathing the same air, knowing one another, the silence of the deepest solidarity, the kind that doesn't ever need to say its own name.



Slovenia

Jasmin B. Frelih

Klin

Bill

EUPL laureate 2016: *Na/pol* (Cankarjeva Založba)

BIOGRAPHY

Jasmin B. Frelih was born in Kranj, Slovenia, in 1986. He studied comparative literature, and literary theory and history, at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. His first novel *Na/pol (In/Half)* was published in 2013 by Cankarjeva Založba to considerable media attention and critical acclaim. It received the best literary debut award at the annual Slovenian Book Fair, was shortlisted for the novel of the year and book of the year awards, and was showcased as the Slovenian entry for the 2014 European First Novel Festival in Budapest, Hungary. His short story collection *Ideoluzije (Tiny Ideologies)* was published by LUD Literatura in 2015. In his five years as a prose fiction editor for the literary review *I.D.I.O.T.*, he worked with some of the best writers and poets of the new Slovenian literary generation. His short fiction, essays and translations of American authors appear in the leading Slovenian literary reviews *Sodobnost*, *Literatura*, and *Dialogi*. His translations of Slovenian poetry into English have been published in *Banipal*, *Versopolis*, and international anthologies of the *I.D.I.O.T.* literary review.

Klin

Jasmin B. Frelih



Sem svoboden? se zdaj že nekaj let vprašam vsako jutro, ko v hladni svetlobi svita, modrikasti in le za odtenek omehčani s temno rdečim sojem usihajoče žerjavice v kaminu, z bombažno krpo, ki jo odsotno vrtim v posodi mlačne vode in ožemam med zaspanim strmenjem v ostre oblike njegove sobe, brišem njegovo negibno telo. Vprašanje me več ne vznemirja, kot me je vznemirjalo nekoč, ko svobode nisem niti najmanj razumel – pa sem je imel menda največ v življenju – zdaj je postalo, kot vse, kar še počnem, del jutranje rutine, ki služi počasnemu, gotovemu, s silo spomina obarvanemu vstopu v nov dan.

Obrnem ga na bok in dodam odgovoru na vprašanje z vsakim potegom krpe nov stavek, novo misel, ki bo morda vztrajala, če je vredna, da obstane – že dolgo nazaj sem se nehal spraševati, v čem natanko je njena vrednost, nekako sem se sprijaznil s tem, da je njeno preživetje odvisno od trenutnega razpoloženja, od njenega morebitnega sozvočja z barvo, vonjem, ali zvokom trenutka, v katerem je nastala – in ponavljam obrazec tistih misli, ki so skozi leta, kot homerski ep, po svojem pomenu in obliki ostale nespremenjene. Njegovo telo je starejše od mojega in zaradi vsakodneвне pozornosti ne opazim na njem nobenih sprememb, vem pa, da bi me leto dni stara fotografija šokirala. Zato fotografij v hiši ne trpiva – svetloba mora teči, ne pa viseti v okvirju kot tanka rezina drevesnega debla.

Na poti do najine svobode sva morala najprej ubiti razum. Le nekaj trpežnim, čeprav zelo zgrešenim vijugam zgodovine sva

se imela zahvaliti, da je Horacev vzklik *sapere aude* – drzni si misliti! – po posegu nekega trdovratnega idealista postal zvezan s prisposodobno razsvetljenstva, ki je prav tako očarljivo zmoten pojem, postavljajoč enačaj med delovanjem človekovega razuma in prostem gibanju v luči sonca. Nič ne bi moglo biti dlje od resnice. Okrépi sončni žarek in človekov razum bo sam od sebe razbiral v svetu neskončno pogojev svoje ujetosti, se najprej zgražal nad njimi, nato jih malikoval, pa jih moledoval in jim na koncu grozil, dokler se ne bo pretvoril v še poslednji obrat ključa za kletko človeške podreditve. Ugasni ga in grozno tuljenje vseh organov človeškega telesa – tu vedno pomislil na izbruh baročnih orgel, kjer se potlačijo vse tipke – bo morda pretreslo kakšno šibko dušo, a v temi je vsak ugovor vesti brez oblike, prav tako enak strastnemu poljubu pod odejo kot zahrbtnemu sunku noža.

Najina taktika – taktika, ne strategija, on, ki je rad bral knjige, je vedno citiral kitajskega generala, da je strategija brez taktike najpočasnejša pot do zmage, medtem ko je taktika brez strategije samo trušč pred porazom – je bila preprosta. Kadar bo sonce, naj tako pripeka, da bodo robovi vseh stvari nedvoumni kažipoti razumu v labirint resničnosti, na vhodu obljubljaajoč čudovito izkušnjo, znotraj pa – nekateri so temu dejali mlin, drugi tunel – vse hitrejša pot v vedno ožjo točko horizonta, kjer zmanjkuje sape, kjer voda hlapi in kjer sence puhtijo, in kjer človeški razum, bojda tak ljubitelj svetlobe, najde red atomov in red galaksij v vsaki stvari in se pred vsako stvarjo počuti kot gora, ki drobi, in obenem kot mravlja, ki bo zdrobljena. In kadar bo tema, naj bo tako gosta in nepredirna, tako sovražna do vsake točke razlike, da bo že vžig ene same slabotne vžigalice pritegnil nase poglede celotnega sveta. Tu vedno pomislil na globokomorske plenilke, na fosforescenco, na plankton in morsko gladino, tako mirno, da služi za ogledalo svodu zvezd in lune; spomin, ki se ga nočem otresti. Vse, kar pride, naj bo ekstremno – če počl cev, naj se dvigne plima, če se sproži plaz, naj bo potres, če se vžge plamen, naj bo požar. To so imenovali

z mnogimi imeni; klimatske spremembe, duhovne premene, pritisk umetne inteligence ... toda bila je samo najina pot do svobode.

Presenečena sva bila, kako hitro je delovalo. Sprva je skorajda odneslo tudi mene; naokrog sem hodil kot odbojna prizma, ki lovi fenomene stvari, jih lomi na osnovne delce in projicira nazaj predse v najbolj fantastičnih, neznosno privlačnih barvah. On se mi je smejal in mi vztrajno ponavljal svojo maksimo svobode; dokler ne veš, ignoriraj. In samo enkrat dodal – in uživaj, saj, ko boš vedel, ne bo več tako lepo – kar sem si za večno zapomnil. Čeprav sem se z veliko mero discipline utegnil obdržati nad gladino – zapiral sem oči, se osredotočal na dihanje, ponavljal njegovo mantra – in sem bil nekoliko nejevoljen nad oblastjo, ki jo je tako zadovoljno držal nad mano, mi ni preostalo drugega, kot da mu zaupam. V mislih sem si zgradil neprebojen bunker, kamor sem se lahko zatekel s svojo samopodobo, ko ni delovalo nič drugega.

Najtežje pri vsem skupaj je bilo prenašati bolečino, ki se mi je naselila v srce, ko sem gledal, kaj počneva ljudem, ki so se morali s tem soočiti povsem nepripravljeni. Ampak to je bil del njegove – najine? – taktike. V sanjah so me preganjale podobe duš pod pritiskom, ranjenih obrazov, avr, ki so med sunkovitim tavanjem od telesa do telesa zbegano preizkušale svoje gostitelje in povsod naletele na zaprta vrata, zenice očes, ki so spreminjale obliko, samo da bi lahko videle, pa niso videle ničesar ... Moje sanje so se kmalu razletele po mestu in vsak sprehod je postal le mučno nadaljevanje nemirnega, vročičnega sna.

Ne spominjam se več, koliko časa je to trajalo – morda leto dni, ali pa še to ne – preden sva dosegla cilj. Razum je bil ubit. Ljudje so pričeli komunicirati s primitivnimi oblikami – samo njim so še zaupali, da bodo znale nositi pomen. Besede so postale kot ogromna sita, kjer so vsaka podrobnost, vsaka ostrina argumenta, vsak izraz zaupanja, padli skozi luknjo v prazno,

na njih pa je uspelo obstati le ogromnim, amorfnim sklopom nagona ali protislovja. Skupnost razuma, edina skupnost, ki zmore vsakega človeka očrtati kot človeka, je razpadla. Zamenjala jo je skupnost organskih oblik, nadvse odzivnih na vse vrste dražljajev, kot čreda enoceličnih organizmov v kapljici vode na dnu steklene čaše. Dodaj še tako drobno – lahko tudi homeopatsko – mero sladkorja, in vse bo drlo k njej. Razpršiš jih z amonijakom.

Obrnem ga na drug bok in poslušam piš suhe sape, ki mu uha-ja iz nosnic. Gledam, kako mu upada prsni koš. Ko je na najnižji točki, lahko na zaplati kože vidim utrip njegovega srca. S krpo mu grem čisto nežno po rebrih. Spominjam se barve in tona njegovega glasu, tega krepkega, milozvočnega glasu, ki je na svojo frekvenco uspel ujeti toliko stremljenj ljudi ... Samo, da bi bil lahko nato on sam svoboden. Roka mi za hip zastane – vedno na tej točki, ko je svetloba v sobi že močnejša, a tik preden se sonce dvigne nad obzorje dreves in strelovodov in naju zalije z žarom dneva, gledam tok kapljic, ki mu v vijugah statične elektrike polzijo vzdolž prsi. Žerjavica v kaminu je že skoraj čisto ugasnila, tihih pokljajev oglja ne ločim več od pokanja kosti v mojih rokah.

Druga faza je bila neizmerno sadistična in zdaj lahko že povsem neprizadeto opazujem šibkost svojega karakterja, da se mu takrat nisem uprl – to zavedanje pa me je takrat še vrsto let držalo ujetega v predstavo sveta, ki sva ga drugim nepovratno izbrisala. Množico ljudi, ki sva jo s psihološkim nasiljem tako oropala razuma, je bilo treba nekako spet spraviti v red. Zamislil si je – ne spomnim se več točne številke; na številke se, vse odkar sem videl, kako grozovito orožje nad človeško samobitnostjo so, trudim misliti čim manj – nekje okrog ducat (zdi se mi, da je navdih našel v številčnici ure, vendar mi tega ni nikoli priznal) različnih, čemur je dejal, sob obstoja. Vsaka s svojim spiskom popolnoma poljubnih, a izredno kompleksnih pravil, ki so obstajala samo v njegovi glavi, ljudem pa so bili na voljo

samo njihovi obrisi, vsaka s svojim načinom vstopa in izstopa, z neprestano spreminjajočimi se zaveznitvi in antagonizmi med sobami, in te sobe obstoja so skupnost, ki je izgubila možnost, da bi se določala z razumom, in je v svojem primitivnem stanju vročično hrepenela po kakršnikoli vrsti strukture, ob kateri bi lahko izrazila svojo usihajočo človečnost, zapeljale v neke vrste igro, v kateri so lahko sodelovali vsi njeni člani.

Zmage in porazi, ki niso pomenili ničesar, so bili dovolj za tešitev zahtev telesa in srca, nejasnost pravil in odnosov med sobami pa so vztrajno črpali vsak zametek razuma, ki bi lahko koga spravil do zavedanja, v kakšni groteskni ječi se je znašel. Sva bila boljša od pošasti preteklosti, ki so svojo svobodo gradile na mesenih truplih, midva pa na kadavru razuma? Mar je odvzeti življenje slabše kot odvzeti možnost resnične zavesti?

Ko pridem do te točke svojih stavkov moji potegi s krpo vedno postanejo trši. Sonce je iz sobe že napravilo igrišče senc. Ko krpo ožemam in prah na gladini vode valovi v sekajočih se koncentričnih krogih, stiskam pesti in se prepričujem, da ni krivda – ali katerokoli drugo čustvo – tisto, kar me žene v stisk, temveč je tisto, kar iztiskam. Po naporu, ki sva ga prestala, da bi si zagotovila svobodo, bi bilo žalostno, da bi dneve preživljal v čustvovanju – tega nisva nikomur odvezla. To lahko tudi danes počnejo vsi. Zato pa imam dolžnost – je dolžnost čustvo ali odločitev razuma? – da mislim.

Vstanem. Naslednji odstavek še ni bil tolikokrat ponovljen, da bi ga jemal kot nujni del odgovora na vprašanje – povsem možno je, da se bo še spremenil v letih, ki so mi ostala, ali pa ga na koncu sploh ne bo. Krpo vržem v posodo. Njegovo čisto telo prekrijem z rjuho in mu s prsti odprem oči. Veke so kot usnje izumrle živali. V očeh sicer že dolga leta ni več videti iskre, ki sem jo videl nekoč, toda vem, da je on še vedno za njimi, sicer – domnevam, prepričan ne morem biti – najine resničnosti ne bi bilo več. Ne vem zakaj, toda tu se moram vedno upreti, da ga ne poljubim na čelo. Namenim mu samo dolg, brezizrazen

pogled, v katerega je položena moja zaveza do sveta, ki sva ga ustvarila. Vem, da razume. Pomaknem se k oknu.

Sem svoboden? je trapasto vprašanje, tik preden se potopim v domišljijo, toda naučil sem se skepse do velikih vesolij. Kdo ve kakšna bitja uravnavajo rast stolpnic pred menoj, mero neba in zemlje, razdaljo med menoj in okensko polico, ulično svetilko, hladnim robom pomola, in koliko in na kakšen način stvari, ki jih ne posedujem, narekujejo to, kar se meni zdi svoboden tek domišljije mojega ustvarjanja. Moji so samo ljudje. Morda bom nekoč, če si bom kdaj znal pravilno odgovoriti na vprašanje, lahko tudi prosto razpolagal s svetlobo, ki mi riše svet na okensko steklo, in takrat bom najbrž moral premagati tudi svoj odpor do fotografij. Do tedaj pa naj kar teče.

Bill

Jasmin B Frelih

Translated from Slovene by Jasmin B Frelih and Jason Blake

Am I free? It's a question I ask myself each morning, in the cool light of daybreak softened only by the dark red glow of embers in the fireplace, as I vaguely rinse a cotton cloth in a bowl of lukewarm water, wringing it out while I stare drowsily into the sharp forms in his room before wiping down his motionless body. The question no longer disturbs me the way it used to back when I had no idea what freedom was – even though back then I was almost certainly as free as I would ever be – and now the question has become just another part of my morning routine, serving the slow, steady entrance into a new day with the force of an embellished memory.

I turn him onto his hip and with each stroke of the cloth add a new sentence to how I answer that question, add a new thought that will perhaps endure if it is worthy of enduring – I have long since ceased to query the exact nature of the thought's value and I have somehow come to terms with the fact that its survival depends on my particular mood or on its possible parallels with the colour, fragrance, or the sound of the moment in which it was conjured. And I repeat the block of those thoughts that over the years have, like some Homeric epic, solidified in meaning and form. His body is older than mine and the daily attention I devote to it means I don't notice it changing, though I am well aware that a year-old photograph would shock me. That's why we don't tolerate any photographs in the house – light must flow, not hang in a frame like a thin slice of a tree trunk.

On our path to freedom we first had to murder reason. We had a few durable, albeit extremely misguided, turns of history to thank for Horace's exclamation *sapere aude* – dare to

know! – chaining itself, through the intervention of that stubborn idealist philosopher, to the metaphor of Enlightenment, another charmingly deluded idea which proposed equity between the workings of human reason and free movement in the light of the sun.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Turn up the rays of light and human reason will of itself begin discerning endless conditions of its own captivity in the world. First it will be appalled at them, then it will venerate them, then it will beg, and finally it will threaten them, before it will, having failed, become the final turn of the key to the cage of human submission. Turn off the sun and the horrific howling of all the organs of the human body – and at this point I always think of the eruptions a Baroque organ emits when you press all the keys – will perhaps unsettle a weak soul, but in the dark every objection of consciousness is without form, resembling a passionate kiss under the sheets as much as it resembles the stealthy thrust of a knife.

Our tactics were simple – tactics, not strategy, for he, who liked to read books, was always quoting that Chinese general and saying *strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory, while tactics without strategy is just the noise before defeat*. If the sun were to shine, it should be hot enough to convert the edges of all things into unambiguous signposts that would allow reason to follow them down into a labyrinth of reality, promising a wonderful experience at the entrance, while inside – some called it the mill, others the tunnel – it turned into an ever quickening path leading to an ever narrower point on the horizon, where you're running out of breath, water turns to vapour and shadows turn to mist, and where human reason, that purported lover of light, finds the order of atoms and the order of galaxies in each thing, and before every thing it comes to feel like the mountain that will do the crushing and at the same time like an ant that will be crushed.

And if darkness were to descend, it should be so dense and impenetrable, so hateful to every point of difference, that the lighting of a single weak match would attract every last gaze in the world. At this point I always think of deep-sea predators, of phosphorescence, of plankton and of a sea surface so placid it serves as a mirror to the vaults of the stars and the moon; it's a memory I do not want to let go.

Whatever was to come, it had to be extreme; if a pipe burst, there had to be a flood, if there was a landslide, it had to trigger an earthquake, if there was a flame, there had to be an inferno. They found many names for these events: climate change, spiritual shifts, the pressure of artificial intelligence ... but it was all just our path to freedom.

We were surprised at how quickly it worked. At first it almost carried me off as well; I walked around like a prism that catches the phenomena of things, breaks them down into their basic particles and projects them back in the most fantastic, unbearably attractive of colours. He laughed at me and constantly kept repeating his freedom maxim: *as long as you know, ignore*. And only once did he add, *and enjoy, since, once you find out, it won't be so nice anymore*, which is something I remembered forever. Even though I, through great discipline, managed to remain above water – I closed my eyes, focused on my breathing, repeated his mantra – and even though I bristled at the authority he so blithely held over me, there was nothing to do but trust in him. I built an impenetrable mental bunker where, when nothing else worked, I could retreat with the image of who I believed myself to be.

The hardest thing was to bear the pain that had settled into my heart when I saw what we were doing to people who had to face this completely unprepared. But that was part of his – of our? – tactics. In my dreams I was persecuted by images of souls under pressure, wounded faces, auras that during fitful wanderings from body to body were confusedly testing

their hosts and were immediately evicted, the pupils of eyes changing shapes so they could see, yet not seeing anything ... My dreams soon scattered themselves about the city and every walk became just a tortured continuation of my troubled, feverish sleep.

I no longer remember how long this went on – perhaps a year or maybe not even – before we reached our goal. Reason was murdered. People began to communicate through primitive forms – only these could now be trusted as bearers of meaning. Words became like enormous sieves where every detail, every sharpness of argument, every expression of trust, fell through the holes into a void, and only the enormous, amorphous compounds of instinct or contradiction managed to remain. The community of reason, the only community that can betoken every human as human, collapsed. It was replaced by a community of organic forms that was highly responsive to all sorts of stimuli, like a herd of single-celled organisms in a drop of water at the bottom of a glass. Add a mere – even homeopathic – dash of sugar and they will all rush to it. You use ammonia to disperse them.

I turn him onto his other hip and listen to the gusts of dry breath escaping his nostrils. I observe his chest dropping. When it sinks to its lowest point I can see the beating heart through the layer of skin. I run the cloth ever so gently over his ribs. I remember the colour and tone of his voice, that strong, mild voice whose frequencies managed to capture so many people's longings ... Just so he could then become free. My hand pauses for a moment – always at that point when the light in the room becomes stronger, but just before the sun rises above the horizon of trees and lightning rods and pours the rays of day upon us, I observe the flow of drops that slide down his chest in curves of static electricity. The embers in the fireplace have almost completely extinguished, and I can no longer separate the quiet crackling of charcoal from the bony crackling of my hands.

The second phase was unfathomably sadistic, and today I am able to note with lax indifference the weakness of my character, which did nothing to resist him – but back then guilt had long held me prisoner within the image of the world we irrevocably erased for others. Those masses of people we robbed of their reason through psychological violence had to be somehow put back in order. He imagined a dozen (I think he found inspiration in the dial of a clock, though he never admitted that to me) – I can't remember the exact number; ever since I first recognised what a terrible weapon over human independence numbers are, I try to think of them as little as possible – or somewhere around dozen variations on what he called rooms of existence. Each with its list of completely arbitrary, albeit extremely complex, rules that existed only in his mind, while only their outlines were available to the people, each with its way of entering and exiting, with constantly changing alliances and antagonisms between the rooms, and those rooms of existence led the community – which had lost the possibility of determining itself through reason and, in its primitive state, feverishly yearned for any type of structure in which it could express its dwindling humanity – into some kind of a game in which all its members could participate.

Meaningless victories and meaningless defeats sufficed to satiate the demands of the body and the heart, the murkiness of rules and relations between rooms, meanwhile, persistently siphoned off every inkling of reason that might alert someone to the grotesque prison he'd ended up in. Were we any better than past monsters that built their freedom on fleshly carcasses, simply because we built ours on the cadavers of reason? Is taking away a life any worse than taking away the possibility of real awareness?

When I get to this point in my sentences, my caresses with the cloth always become rougher. The sun has already turned the room into a playground for shadows. When I wring out the cloth, and the dust on the surface of the water ripples in inter-

secting concentric circles, I clench my fists and convince myself that it's not guilt – or whatever other feeling – that drives me to squeeze it, but it is what I am squeezing out. After all the effort that we sustained in order to ensure our freedom, it would be sad to spend our days wallowing in emotion – that's something we did not take away from anyone. Even today anyone can wallow. But that is precisely why I have the duty – is duty an emotion or a matter of reason? – to think.

I rise. The next paragraph has not been repeated so frequently as to be taken as an essential part of the answer to the question – it's entirely possible that it will change over the years left to me, or that in the end it won't even exist. I throw the cloth into the bowl. I cover his cleansed body with a sheet and open his eyes with my fingers. His eyelids the leather of an extinct animal. Of course, it's been years since I've seen anything of the spark those eyes used to contain, but I know that he is still there behind them, otherwise – I suspect, I can't be certain – our reality would no longer exist. I don't know why, but at this point I must always resist the temptation to kiss him on the forehead. Instead I give him a long, expressionless look that is invested with my commitment to the world we have created. I know he understands. I go over to the window.

Am I free? is a stupid question to ask just before delving into imagination, but I've learned to be sceptical about large universes. Who knows what kind of beings regulate the growth of the skyscrapers before me, the measure of the sky and the earth, and the distance between me and the windowsill, and the street lamp, and the cold edge of the pier, and how much and in what ways do things I do not possess dictate what I believe to be the free flow of my imagination. Mine are just the people. Perhaps someday – if ever I come to know how to answer the question correctly – I will also have at my disposal the light that is painting the world onto the window pane, and then I will probably also have to overcome my dislike of photographs. Until then, let it flow.



Estonia

Meelis Friedenthal

A European Story

EUPL laureate 2013: *Mesilased* (AS Varrak)

BIOGRAPHY

The Estonian writer **Meelis Friedenthal** (b.1973) wrote a doctoral thesis at Tartu University on a 13th century philosophical-theological treatise about seeing and vision. Friedenthal previously worked as lecturer in the Faculty of Theology and History and now works as a senior researcher in Tartu University Library. His current research topic is the intellectual history of the 17th century. Friedenthal has earned a reputation as a speculative fiction writer. His first novel *Golden Age* is about the role of history in shaping our identity and won third place in a national novel competition in 2004. The following year, his story 'Nerissa' won an Estonian science-fiction prize. He is also a member of the editorial board of the webzine *Algernon*, which publishes science-fiction stories, news and articles. His latest novel *The Bees* depicts the end of the 17th century and is a bleak vision about the voyage and encounters of a student who has come from Leiden to Tartu. Friedenthal has also written an extensive postscript about the historical context of the events described in the novel.

A European Story

Meelis Friedenthal



Meil ei olnud üldse raha, aga see polnudki oluline. Me olime veendunud, et raha ei ole ega tule, aga süüa ja juua, luulet lugeda, reisida, arheoloogilistel kaevamistel käia, seda kõike oli vaja teha tingimata. Praegu vahel mõtleme, et see on isegi kerjamise moodi, seisad tee ääres, tõstad käe, sind võetakse peale ja küsitakse, kas te söönud olete midagi. Ei ole, muidugi me ei ole. Meile pakutakse toitu, me sööme nii, et pärast on paha olla, istume teeveerel tolmus ja naerame oma õnnetuse üle. Liiga palju süüa. See oli Poolas, kui entusiastlik väikeärimees võttis meid oma läikivmusta auto peale, uuris, kas me oleme näljased, ja pakkus siis kohalikus bensinijaama restoranis eelroaks maosuppi. Me rääkisime saksa keeles ja ei saanud päris hästi aru, mis asjaga on tegemist. *Magensuppe*. See oli pruunikas leem, mille sees ujusid ribadeks lõigatud loomamao tükid, need olid libedad ja justkui karvased, vaatepilt võttis kõhust õõnsaks. Üsna jäle. Ometigi oma eesti kodudest kaasa saadud viisakusega sõime kõik kausid tühjaks, sõime peale ka keedetud seakintsu ja hapukapsast, südasuvel, võdisevat keedupekki. Me olime just siis Prantsusmaalt tulnud, muidugi jällegi häälega, söönud kuu aega saia, kivi- ja juustu ja moosi. Hea, et me rabandust ei saanud selle lihakoguse peale.

Euroopa avanes meile just niimoodi, läbi inimeste ja teede, juhuslikult. Muidugi olime teadlikud Euroopa olemasolust ka enne, aga see kõik oli müütiline, peaaegu ajalooline ja

täiesti ligipääsematu maailm. Me olime üles kasvanud kindla teadmisega, et me ei saa mitte kunagi sinna, lastena selle veendumuse kuidagi üles korjanud, keegi ei olnud ju meile seda seletanud ja põhjendanud, aga me lihtsalt teadsime – me ei saa sinna. Praegu vahel katsume meenutada seda tunnet, kuidas oli elada üksikul saarel ilma paadita, kuidas on olla Robinson Crusoe lapsed, kes teavad, et terve maailm on olemas, aga mingisugusel nendest täiesti mittesõltuvatel asjaoludel on nad nüüd siin – saarel – ja ei saa sealt mitte kunagi ära. Kui Robinson Crusoe oleksid olnud saarel lapsed, oleksid nad täpselt sama moodi mõelnud Euroopast, nagu meie mõtlesime Euroopast. Lugude kaudu, raamatute kaudu, olid ju Robinson Crusoe'gi laevahukust päästetud navigatsiooniraamatud läbi ime kätte sattunud. Ja siis – ühel hetkel lähivad teed lahti, võõras laev randub. Tunduks ju hullumeelne küsida, kas teil raha on? Teed on ju lahti, väravad on avanenud. Kes iganes paneb nüüd käe adra külge ja tagasi vaatab, olgu see neetud.

Lihtne oli minna, teed olid täis meiesuguseid hääletajaid – Lätist, Leedust, Tšehhist. Vahel harva oli mõni lääneeurooplane või ameeriklane ka, aga me ei rääkinud kunagi kellegagi liiga pikalt, uurisime, kuidas olud on, kuhu nad lähivad. Aasta 1993 suvel jagunesid noored Ida-Euroopa hääletajad kaheks – ühed läksid Pariisi, teised Amsterdami suunas. Me ise läksime täiesti umbropsu, esimestel kordadel ei tulnud me isegi selle peale, et silte valmistada, ja ütlesime lihtsalt suuna, kuhu me soovime minna. Pariisi. Tundub täiesti sõge, aga oma esimese – siiamani alles – „Euroopa teede autoatlase“ hankisime me endale alles Tšehhis, tuhat kilomeetrit juba mindud. Mingi raha meil pidi siis järelikult ikkagi olema, aga vahetuskursist polnud meil aimugi, rääkimata sellest, millised Tšehhi rahad välja nägid. Vahetasime hea kursi lootuses tänaval (tõelised lollakad) kaasavõetud Soome

markasid Tšehhi kroonide vastu ja alles siis, kui me kohvikus hakkasime selle vahetatud rahaga maksma, öeldi meile, et tegemist on valerahaga, meile oli vahetatud Poola zlotte, mis olid umbes sada korda kehvema vääringuga. Pastakaga viletsalt võltsitud rahatäht. Selleks hetkeks oli meil vist alles umbes 40 Saksa marka. Viskasime valeraha tuhatoosi ja põletasime ära, korjasime taskutest kokku viimased allesjäänud Tšehhi sendid ja maksime oma tee eest. Me tellisime igal pool teed, sest olime harjunud, et see on kõige odavam jook, mida saab kohvikust osta. Alles hiljem Prantsusmaal saime aru, et tegelikult on õlu sageli umbes sama hinnaga. Nõukogude Liidus ei maksnud aga tee peaaegu mitte midagi.

Aga meil oli nüüd kaart, magamiskotid ja seljakottides kodus kaasa võetud pakisupid. Me ööbisime Tšehhi puuviljaaedades lageda taeva all ja hommikul üles ärgates vaatasime, kuidas inimesed tööle ja poodi lähevad. Me sõitsime Saksa kiirteedel 210 kilomeetrit tunnis, ööbisime Frankfurti lähedal kooliõpetaja korteris, kelle lapsed olid kusagil ära. Auto- teed olid nagu hoovused, mis meid kandsid, tuul puhus ja me läksime sinna. Selline vabadus on muidugi vaid näiline, kui on hea tuul, kui autojuhil on pikk maa sõita, siis ei saa niisama maha minna ja peatust teha. Itaalias vaatasime autoaknast välja küünitades Assisi torne, mingil põhjusel oleksime tahtnud sinna väga minna, aga samas – autojuht läks edasi lõunasse, täiesti Napoli juurde. Ei saanud ju nüüd maha minna, mine tea, kuidas pärast õnnestub. Me olime enne seda just sõitnud kahe täiesti pilves (kanep?) selli kabrioletis, kolmekesi kitsal tagapingil, seljakotid süles. Kui need sellid ei oleks nii põhjalikult ebaadekvaatsed olnud, poleks nad elu sees selle peale tulnud, et kolme hääletajat peale võtta, ka meile endale tundus peaaegu võimatu, et me mahuksime sinna kitsasse pilusse koos kõige oma kodinatega. Me aga mahusime ära. Veel enne seda olime mitu tundi passinud kohas,

kus meid keegi peale ei võtnud, ei saanud nüüd ju ometi selle pärast peatust teha, et oleks tahtnud kuulsat kohta näha. Juht oli kaine ka, muusika mängis, pikk sõit oli ees.

Nädal aega varem olime Pariisis, see oli nagu ime – nägime Eiffeli torni, muruväljak oli täis inimesi, kes niisama pikutasid ja veini jõid, me pikutasime seal samamoodi oma magamiskottidel ja jõime odavat plastpudelitesse ümber valatud pakiveini. See oli uskumatu, mitte küll päris see, mida me olime ette kujutanud – mina teadsin Pariisi nagu d'Artagnan teadis Pariisi, nagu Dumas oli seda kirjeldanud, nagu see linn oli Rodini eluloos, mida ma olin äsja lugenud. Kui meie käest küsiti, kuidas teile siin meeldib, siis vastasime kohe, et Pariis on väga räpane. Küsijad solvusid, olid pettunud ja pahased, aga meie ei saanud midagi aru. Pariis oli tõesti räpane võrreldes sellega, mida me lugudest olime lugenud ja mida endale ette kujutanud. Siin tuli jalge ette vaadata, et mitte mahlaka ja jämeda koerajunni otsa astuda. Kõik ju teadsid, et Nõukogude Liit on räpane ja sitane koht, vaba maailm aga on puhas, tundus, et selles idealiseeritud muinasjutus oli lihtsalt võimatu, et kunstnike linn oleks räpane. Aga ta oli ja me panime seda imeks, see oli meile kõige suurem avastus Pariisiga seoses. Sest räpasus on paratamatu, see on tegelik ja võibolla alles selle kaudu saime me tõeliselt aru, et sa oled Pariisis päriselt kohal, mitte mingisuguses ettekujutuses. Tundus ju küsijatele tarbetu seletada kõike seda, mida me olime Pariisi ja Rooma ja Londoni kohta lapsepõlves kuulnud ja unistanud, mida kõike me lootsime näha ja nägimegi. Nad olid ju pariislased, nad teavad seda ju isegi, nad elavad siin iga päev. Siin on pööraseid pidusid koos kunstnikega, uljaid musketäre, tõelist vabadust. Meil ei olnud raha, me muretse-sime selle pärast, et kus me ööbime, meil polnud aimugi, kust me süüa saame. Varastasime poe ette pandud puuviljaletilt ühe tomati, jooksimise, see käes, mööda tänavat, end seejuures

hingetuks naerdes. Kükitasime betoonplatsil koos kodutu- tega (olime ju isegi kodutud), kuulasime, kuidas nad mängi- vad kitarrri, ja magasime raudteejaama ees väljakul, selja- kotid pea all, et õhtune seltskond meid paljaks ei varastaks. Järgmisel päeval lipsasime kuidagi sisse Louvre'isse – me teesklesime kunstitudengeid, kellele oli sissepääs tasuta, – ja hulkusime seal ringi, otsides Mona Lisat. Me olime lugenud Leonardo Da Vinci elulugu, me teadsime tema kohta kõike, kinnitasime endale, et Mona Lisa on ülehinnatud, aga ikkagi otsisime just seda pilti. Mona Lisa on sümbol, Picassot ei saa ju süüdistada iga suvalise pildi varguses. Trügivate ja pildis- tavate jaapanlaste grupi tagant nägime silmanurgast väikest maali, see mõjus loomulikult pettumusena. Aga just see pet- tumus juhatas meile sisse kunsti, mis oma silmaga nähtuna on nii teistsugune reproduktsioonilt vaadatuga võrreldes. Tegelikkus on tihti tihedam, sageli häirivam, mõnikord pet- tumust valmistav, vahel väike. Pompidou keskuse ees tegi- me 72 selfit, mida keegi veel nii ei nimetanud, mustvalgele filmile, sellise kaameraga, mis jagas normaalse kaadri veel omakorda pooleks, nii et ühele rullile sai teha topeltarv pilte, servad jäid udused. Need pildid on siiani alles.

Me olime jälle Itaalias, sõitsime, Mia Martini kassett automa- kis, peadpööritava kiirusega üle mägede, noor naine roolis keeras end meie poole ja kordas uhkelt, et ta on siin linnas üles kasvanud, ta tunneb kõiki neid mägiteid, aknast paistis kottpime taevas ja kusagil kaugel all linna tuled nagu jaa- niussid. Me ei kartnud üldse kõrgust, me ei kartnud kiirust, vaatasime elus esimest korda serpentiinilt alla Vahemerele. Pärast südaööd jõudsime linna pärale ja meile kõigile pisteti pihku suur tops latet, mis ulatati meile juba ametlikult kinni olevast kohvikust, kus aga ikka inimesed sees passisid, ukse- võre juba pooleldi alla tõmmatud. Meie juht jäi sõpradega jut- tu ajama, läksime randa. Paksuteralise liiva sees kõndisime

edasi, rannariba oli täis lamamistoole, peaaegu merepiirini, paistsid purjekate mastid. Võtsime ööpäev jalas olnud kingad ja saapad ära, katsusime soolast vett, jõime kohvi. Õhk oli soe, meil ei ole mitte kunagi öösiti õhk nii soe. Me olime Vahemere ääres, me ei olnud peale Läänemere ühtegi teist merd veel näinud. Must meri ei tule arvesse, sest see oli kunagi ammu lapsepõlves, me ei mäleta sellest suurt muud kui suuri laineid ja kiviklibust kallast.

Kui me lõpuks koju jõudsime, tundsim end nagu pärast esimest armastust, me olime väsinud, rãpased, mäletasime vähe, sest nii paljut oleks mäletada, aga me naeratasime.

A European Story

Meelis Friedenthal

Translated from Estonian by Tiina Aleman

We had no money at all, but that was not important. We knew there was no money and that none was coming, but to eat and drink, read poetry, travel, go on archaeological excavations, those things definitely needed to be done. Sometimes it seems like begging; you stand by the side of the road, with your hand out, someone picks you up and asks if you have eaten. No, we haven't, of course we haven't. We are offered food, we eat so much that afterward we feel sick, we sit in the dust on the side of the road and laugh at our misfortune. We had too much to eat. Once in Poland an enthusiastic little businessman picked us up in his shiny black car, wondered if we were hungry and then, at the restaurant in the local petrol station, he offered us an appetiser of tripe soup. We spoke German and we did not quite understand what was going on. *Magensuppe*. It had a brownish broth, in which pieces of tripe that had been cut into strips were swirling; they were slippery and also seemed to be hairy, the sight of it made our stomachs turn. It was quite repulsive. However, with the good manners learned in our homes in Estonia, we ate every bite, and then we ate baked ham and sauerkraut, and in the heart of summer, some quivering cooked bacon fat as well. We had just come from France, hitchhiking again, of course, where, for a month, we'd been eating bread, biscuits, cheese and jam. Luckily no one had a stroke after all that meat.

Europe revealed itself to us, through people and roads, by chance. Of course, we were aware of the existence of Europe, but it was all mythical, an almost historical and completely inaccessible world. We had grown up with a firm knowledge that

we would never get there, as children we had somehow picked up this certainty, and even though nobody had explained it or told us why, we just knew – we would never get there. Now, sometimes, we try to recall the feeling of how it was to live on an island without a boat, how it would have felt to be the children of Robinson Crusoe, who knew that a whole world exists, but because of some totally random circumstances, they are here – on the island – and can never leave. If Robinson Crusoe had had children on the island, they would have thought exactly the same way about Europe as we thought about Europe. Through the stories, through the navigation books, that by some miracle survived the shipwreck and found their way back to Robinson Crusoe. And then – in a moment, the roads open, an unknown ship puts to shore. It seems crazy to even ask: do you have any money? The roads are open, the gates are open. Whoever now puts his hand on the plough and looks back, be damned.

The going was easy, the roads were filled with hitchhikers like us, from Latvia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic. Occasionally, there were a few western Europeans or Americans as well, but we never talked too long to anyone, we might have asked how things were going and where they were headed. In the summer of 1993, young eastern European hitchhikers split into two groups – one went to Paris, the other to Amsterdam. We started out with no plan at all; at first, it didn't even occur to us to make signs, and we just said the direction we wanted to go. Paris. It seems totally foolish now, but we didn't get our first "European Road Atlas" (which we still have) until we got to the Czech Republic, which was after we'd already gone about a thousand kilometres. So we must have had some money, but we didn't know anything about exchange rates, let alone what Czech money looked like. We exchanged our Finnish marks for Czech crowns on the street with the hope of a good exchange rate (true fools), but then in a cafe when

we started to pay using the exchange currency, we were told that it was counterfeit, and that we were given Polish zlotys, which were worth about a hundred times less. One banknote was badly counterfeited with a pen. At that point, we probably had about 40 German marks left. We tossed the counterfeit money in an ashtray and burned it, we collected the last remaining Czech coins from our pockets and paid for our tea. We ordered tea everywhere because we were accustomed to it being the cheapest drink you can buy at a cafe. It was only later in France when we realized that in fact beer is often about the same price. In the Soviet Union, however, tea cost almost nothing.

Now we had a map, sleeping bags and dried soup packs brought from home in our backpacks. We spent the nights in Czech fruit groves under the open sky and waking up in the morning, we watched as people went to work and to the shops. We travelled on the German motorways at 210 kilometres per hour, we stayed near Frankfurt in a school teacher's apartment, whose children were away. The roads were like currents that carried us, the wind blew, and we went with it. This kind of freedom, of course, is only an illusion; if there is a good wind and the driver has a long drive ahead, then you can't just make a stop whenever you'd like to. In Italy, we looked with longing out of the car window at the Assisi towers; we really would have liked to go there, but the driver headed south to Naples. We couldn't just get out, who knows how our luck would be later. Before this we had been riding in a convertible with two completely stoned journeymen, the three of us in the tiny backseat with our backpacks on our laps. If the journeymen hadn't been so out of it, they would never have thought to pick up three hitchhikers, and it seemed almost impossible to us that we would fit in that tight space along with all our stuff. But we did fit. And before that, we had been standing for several hours at the side of the road

and nobody stopped to pick us up, so now we couldn't make a stop just because we wanted to see a famous place. The driver was sober, music was playing, and there was a long drive ahead.

A week earlier we were in Paris, it was like a miracle, we saw the Eiffel tower, there was a lawn that was full of people laying out on the grass and drinking wine, we were also laying out on our sleeping bags and drinking cheap boxed wine that we'd poured into plastic bottles. It was incredible, not quite what we had imagined – I knew Paris as d'Artagnan knew Paris, as Dumas had described it, as the city was in Rodin's biography, which I had just read. When asked if we liked it here, we immediately replied that Paris is very dirty. Those who asked us were insulted, disappointed and angry, but we didn't understand why. Paris really was dirty compared to what we had read in stories and what we had imagined. Here you had to watch where you were walking to avoid stepping in a big fat dog turd. Everyone knew that the Soviet Union was a filthy shitty place, and that the free world was clean, and it seemed that in this idealised fairy tale it was simply impossible that this city of artists could be so dirty. But it was, and we were amazed; it was our greatest discovery about Paris. Because the dirt is inevitable, it's real, and perhaps only through it did we truly realise that we were actually in Paris, and not in some imaginary place. It seemed unnecessary to explain to those who asked after us all that we had heard and dreamed about Paris and Rome and London, and in childhood about all that we hoped to see and in fact now saw. They were Parisians, they know it themselves, they live here every day. There are wild parties with artists, and gallant musketeers; there is true freedom. We had no money, we worried about where we would spend the night and it had been quite a while since we had anything to eat. We stole a tomato from the vegetable stand in front of a

store, we ran along the street with it laughing ourselves silly. We squatted in a concrete plaza with the homeless (we were homeless ourselves), we listened to them play the guitar and we slept in a square in front of the railway station with our backpacks under our heads so that the evening crowd could not rob us blind. The next day, we managed to slip into the Louvre – we pretended to be art students for whom entrance is free of charge – and we wandered around looking for the Mona Lisa. We had read Leonardo da Vinci's biography; we knew everything about her, we acknowledged that the Mona Lisa was overrated, but we were still looking for that particular painting. The Mona Lisa is a symbol; Picasso can't be blamed for the theft of every single image. From behind a group of jostling Japanese tourists who were taking pictures, we saw a small painting from the corner of our eyes; naturally we were disappointed. But it was this disappointment that brought us closer to the art; seeing it with our own eyes was so different from looking at a reproduction. Reality is often more intense, often disturbing, sometimes frustrating, sometimes small. In front of the Pompidou Centre, we took 72 selfies, which weren't called that back then, using black and white film with a camera that split the normal frame in half, so that we got double the number of pictures from one roll, only the edges of the pictures were blurry. We still have those pictures.

We were in Italy again, riding along with a Mia Martin cassette in the tape player, going at a head-spinning speed over the mountains. The young woman who was driving turned to us and said proudly that she had grown up in this town, and that she knew all these mountain roads, from the window we saw a black night sky and somewhere in the distance below we could see the town lights like glow worms. We were not afraid of the altitude, we were not afraid of the speed, we looked down and saw for the first time, – the Mediterranean-

an. It was after midnight when we arrived at the town and we were all handed large lattes from a café that was already officially closed, but still had people hanging around inside, even though the door grate was already halfway down. Our driver was talking to friends, so we went on to the beach. We walked on the sandy beach, which was full of lounge chairs; the masts of sailboats could be seen almost all the way to the horizon. We took off the shoes and boots we'd been wearing day and night, we walked in the salt water, we drank coffee. The air was warm; at home the air is never this warm at night. We were at the Mediterranean, we had never seen any other sea except the Baltic. The Black Sea doesn't count because we saw it a long time ago when we were children; we do not remember much other than the big waves and a stone shingle beach.

When we finally arrived home, we felt the way you feel after first love; we were tired, dirty, we remembered little, because there was so much to remember, but we smiled.



Cyprus

Antonis Georgiou

Αξιομνημόνευτες περιπέτειες

Memorable Adventures

EUPL laureate 2016: *Ένα Άλπουμ Ιστορίες* (To Rodakio)

BIOGRAPHY

Antonis Georgiou was born in Limassol, Cyprus, in 1969. He studied law in Moscow and works as a lawyer. He published a book of poetry, *Πανσέληνος παρά μία* (*Full Moon Minus One*), a book of short stories, *Γλυκιά bloody life* (*Sweet Bloody Life*), which was awarded the State Prize for Short Stories and a novel, *Ένα Άλπουμ Ιστορίες* (*An Album of Stories*) which was awarded the State Prize for a Novel and is being adapted and presented on stage in 2016. He has also contributed to several short story collections. Georgiou also writes plays, some of which have been performed by different theatre groups in Cyprus. His play *My Beloved Washing Machine* won the Theatre Prize of the Cyprus Theatre Organization and was included in its repertory. Antonis Georgiou is also the writer of the plays *The Disease*, *At the out-post*, *Our Garden*, *La Belote*, *I Was Lysistrata* and *Uncle Yiannis*.

Αξιομνημόνευτες περιπέτειες

Antonis Georgiou



**Όπου περιγράφεται τι έκανε εκείνο το πρωινό η
Δόνα Mary Doyle από το Κέιμπριτζ όπως και άλλα
περιστατικά άξια να ειπωθούν και να γραφτούν***

Η κυρία Mary Doyle ξύπνησε πρωί, έβαλε την πανοπλία, πήρε το κοντάρι από τη γωνιά του τοίχου, το κράνος το άφησε πάνω στον Δον Κιχώτη που διαβάζει αυτές τις μέρες και, παρά το κρύο, με ανήκουστο θάρρος* βγήκε έξω, την πονούσαν πολύ τα πόδια της, τα κατάφερε όμως να πάει στο κομμωτήριο, έβαψε τα μαλλιά της κάτι ανάμεσα σε ροζ και καροτί, όταν γύρισε ξεκουράστηκε για λίγο στην πολυθρόνα, λόγω της περιστασης έφαγε στο μεγάλο τραπέζι του σαλονιού, έβαλε και ένα φόρεμα που πολύ αγαπάει, λουλουδάτο, κοντό, πάνω από το γόνατο, ήπια κι ένα λικέρ καφέ στην υγεία της, μετά κάθισε μπροστά στη μοναδική πια συντροφιά που έχει, την τηλεόραση, να δει ακόμα ένα τηλεπαιχνίδι, ογδόντα πέντε χρονών κλείνει σήμερα, χήρεψε στα εβδομήντα και από τότε μένει μονάχη, έχει μια κόρη που ζει στη Γλασκώβη και τη βλέπει σπάνια, αναρωτιέται κάποτε γιατί παντρεύτηκε, γιατί έκανε παιδί αν είναι να μένει σε ένα άδειο σπίτι, αν είναι να πεθάνει αντίκρυ σε μια οθόνη, χωρίς ένα βλέμμα αγαπημένο, γιατί έζησε αν είναι να μη λείψει, έστω για λίγο, σε κάποιον· οι χαρές του κόσμου περνούν σαν σκιά και σαν όνειρο, ή μαραινονται σαν τα λουλούδια των αγρών*, είχε τουλάχιστον αγαπήσει αληθινά η Μέρι, έστω μόνο μια φορά, ήταν δεν ήταν

δεκαεπτά, Δουλτσινέα της η γλυκιά Σαμπρίνα από τη γειτονιά, με ομορφιά χωρίς ψεγάδι, όμορφη στον υπέρτατο βαθμό, με σοβαρότητα χωρίς έπαρση, αγαπητή για την ευγένειά της*, όμως ο διαβολικός Μέρλιν*, άλλες εποχές τότε, τις μάγεψε, δεν απέκτησε ποτέ την Κυρά της*. σήμερα, μετά το κομμωτήριο, επιστρέφοντας σπίτι, είδε τη Σαμπρίνα, μετά από πολύ καιρό στη βιτρίνα του μικρού μπακάλικου, να την κοιτάζει σε ένα αγγελτήριο κηδείας

Όπου ο Δον Αντρέας από τη Λεμεσό πήγε να κολυμπήσει, μίλησε στο Skyre με τον γιο του και όπου αναφέρονται πράγματα σχετικά με αυτή την ιστορία κι όχι με κάποια άλλη*

Ο Αντρέας, αφού όλη νύχτα είχε αξιομνημόνευτες περιπέτειες και απίθανα περιστατικά*, ξύπνησε, τεντώθηκε, έβγαλε την πανοπλία και το κράνος, ακούμπησε το κοντάρι στη γωνιά του τοίχου, ντύθηκε, και βγήκε, αν και Σάββατο δεν πήγε για ψώνια, τώρα που η Άννα έλειπε για μια βδομάδα στις Βρυξέλλες στο Μάριο, το γιο τους, άλλαξε το πρόγραμμά του, πήγε απευθείας θάλασσα, ελάχιστοι στην παραλιακή καφετέρια που συχνάζει, Δεκέμβρης μήνας, οι περισσότεροι σταματούν τα μπάνια από τον Αύγουστο, εκείνος συνεχίζει, έρχεται εδώ κάθε Σάββατο, για είκοσι πέντε τόσα χρόνια, σχεδόν ανελλιπώς σε αυτό το σημείο, το καταφύγιό του θα μπορούσε να πει, το μόνο αληθινά δικό του μέρος, εδώ η θάλασσά του, ο ορίζοντάς του, λες και οριοθέτησε μια γωνιά στον παράδεισο δική του.

η ζωή του όλα αυτά τα χρόνια ήταν ένα οχτάωρο αριθμούς, αρχικά στην τράπεζα όπου δούλεψε για είκοσι χρόνια, μετά τον απόλυσαν λόγω της «οικονομικής κρίσης», άνεργος τρία χρόνια, και τώρα σε μια εταιρεία να φτιάχνει λογιστικά βιβλία κλεισμένος σε ένα γραφείο με ένα παράθυρο να βλέπει άλλα παράθυρα, δουλειά, σπίτι, γάμοι, βαφτίσια, κηδείες,

κανένα βράδυ έξω, σεξ με τη γυναίκα του κυρίως, δεν ήταν ωραίος και δεν είχε την αυτοπεποίθηση να επιδιώξει κάτι όταν ίσως ήθελε, μετά απλώς δεν ήθελε, την απατούσε μόνο με καμιά μαλακία, η μόνη στιγμή που αφηνόταν στις φαντασιώσεις του, σε όλα τυπικός και κύριος, πάντα πρώτα οι άλλοι, είχε όμως κάτι ολοδικό του, είκοσι πέντε χρόνια ερχόταν εδώ, αυτό το αγνάντεμα ήταν ό,τι τον έσωζε και το μπάνιο, ειδικά όταν κόπαζαν τα πλήθη του καλοκαιριού και βουτούσε σχεδόν μόνος στην κρύα και καθαρή θάλασσα, ακόμα και το νερό μύριζε αλλιώς, με το που βουτούσε τον πλημμύριζε εκείνη η ωραία ψευδαισθήση, από τις λίγες ισάξιες μιας αίσθησης, πως, όπως τη λαχτάρα σου, ρίχνεις στο νερό μια σταγόνα του πώς είσαι, πως αν θελήσεις θα φτάσεις εκείνο, το σαγηνευτικό έλα που όλο απομακρύνεται· όταν μεγάλωσε λίγο ο Μάριος τον έφερνε μαζί του, τον έμαθε να βουτά μέχρι Δεκέμβριο, μετά άρχιζε η Άννα «θα αρρωστήσεις το μωρό» και σταματούσαν, το μωρό μεγάλωσε, πεθυμά τη θάλασσα τώρα που λείπει, δεν είναι το μόνο που νοσταλγεί, δεν το παραδέχεται αλλά δεν του έκατσε το «έξω» και ο Αντρέας νιώθει ενοχές, η απόλυσή του από την τράπεζα συνέπεσε με τις σπουδές του Μάριου, στριμώχτηκαν οικονομικά και ανατραπήκαν όλα τα σχέδιά τους, η δουλειά στο εξωτερικό δεν ήταν τόσο επιλογή όσο ανάγκη, «αντί να σου φταίξουν όσοι τα φάγανε, τα αφεντικά σου στην τράπεζα που τα διαλύσανε όλα, τα βάζεις με τον εαυτό σου», του έλεγε η Άννα, που τον έβλεπε να μαραζώνει, ειδικά όσο ήταν άνεργος, πώς να της εξηγήσει, κάποιες αντιλήψεις έχουν εμποτιστεί τόσο στο αίμα, στη σκέψη μας, μάγια και δίχτυα γερά, να μας δένουν, με αυτά πορευόμαστε και παλεύουμε, ένιωθε υ-πεύ-θυ-νος! έτσι είχε μάθει να νιώθει, δεν απαντούσε, προσπαθούσε να της χαμογελάσει για να μη στενοχωριέται, έβλεπε την αγάπη, τη ζεστασιά στα μάτια της, αχ τυχερός που την είχε βρει, που την είχε στις μέρες του, που κοιμόταν με τη γλυκιά του Άννα κι ας μην είχε την *απαράμιλλη** ομορφιά της Κυράς από

το Τόβοσο, που όμως ο κακομοίρης ο Δον Κιχώτης δεν μπόρεσε καν να συναντήσει, μια ιδέα, ένα όνειρο, μια χίμαιρα, ένας καημός ήταν η Δουλτσινέα·

χτύπησε το σκάιπ, ήταν ο γιος του, «είσαι στη θάλασσά μας;» ήταν η πρώτη του κουβέντα, χάρηκε που τον είδε γελαστό, «κανόνισε να αρρωστήσεις» άκουσε τη φωνή της Άννας και εκείνη χαρούμενη, πώς να μην είναι; «στα καλύτερα την έφερα» του είπε ο Μάριος και έκανε ένα γύρο το τηλέφωνο να δει την Grand-Place, κόσμος πολύς να ποζάρει μπροστά στα πανέμορφα κτίρια, είδε και την Άννα που καμάρωνε σαν παγόني, κρύο θα ήταν, όλοι ντυμένοι ζεστά, του έδειξε και έναν περφόρμερ, από αυτούς τους «χρυσούς μάγους» που τάχα αμέριμνοι αιωρούνται στο δρόμο, ξέρει πως ένα τρικ είναι η αιώρησή τους αλλά και η περίφημη αταραξία τους, δεν υπάρχει στον κόσμο πια τέτοια γαλήνη, «θα πάμε για καφέ, μετά βέβαια θέλει ψώνια», «εγώ δεν θέλω τίποτε», την άκουσε να διαμαρτύρεται με νάζι, «εσύ πότε θα μου έρθεις;», «έλα εσύ τα Χριστούγεννα και βλέπουμε» του απάντησε για να ακολουθήσει μια παύση βαριά και ένα «να δούμε»· πριν μέρες σε ένα τηλεφώνημα του είχε αφήσει να εννοηθεί ότι ίσως να έμενε Βρυξέλλες τις γιορτές να δουλέψει, δεν κατάλαβε καλά πού, αλλά θα είχε «καλά λεφτά» και αφού τα «έχουν ανάγκη»· ο Αντρέας ένιωθε πάντα ανήμπορος μπροστά σε αυτή τη λέξη: «ανάγκη», αν χρειαζόταν ακόμα και με ορδές *Βριάρεων και Γιγάντων** θα τα έβαζε αλλά μπροστά στην «ανάγκη» δείλιαζε, μόνο ένα «δηλαδή;» ψέλλισε και πάλι μια γεμάτη σιωπή, «δείξε μου θάλασσα» του φώναξε ο Μάριος, γύρισε αμέσως το τηλέφωνο να μην έβλεπαν τα μάτια του πώς γυάλιζαν, ο ορίζοντάς του, πάλι βασανιστικά σιωπηλά ταξίδεψε μέσω του σκάιπ μέχρι τη Μεγάλη Πλατεία, «γεια!», «γεια!», θα τα λέγανε το βράδυ, άνοιξε το βιβλίο του·

τον καιρό της ανεργίας του άρχισε να διαβάζει ξανά λογοτεχνία, με τις ώρες, συνεχίζει όσο μπορεί, αυτές τις μέρες

διαβάζει τον *Δον Κιχώτη*, την πλήρη έκδοση σε δύο τόμους, η Άννα τον πειράζει, «μετά τι; τον *Όλιβερ Τουίστ*;», «μπορεί» της απαντά, διαβάζει και σκέφτεται πως ο ίδιος δεν θα μπορούσε ποτέ να βγει στους δρόμους πλανόδιος ιππότης, αληθινός βοηθός και σίγουρος προστάτης όλων των αναγκασμένων του κόσμου*, θα ήθελε, έστω για λίγο, να έφευγε απ' όλα, αλλά στα πενήντα του γνωρίζει πια ότι πολλά από όσα επιθυμεί δεν θα τα κάνει και η γελοιοποίηση του εαυτού μας είναι από τα δυσκολότερα για να το τολμήσει, κατά βάθος ελπίζει μόνο ο Μάριος του να πει κάποτε γι' αυτόν ό,τι είπαν και για τον Δον Αλόνσο Κιχάνο από τη Μάντσα πως, ο παπάς μου, αν δεν κατάφερε μεγάλα πράγματα, πέθανε τουλάχιστον από λαχτάρα να τα κάνει*

Για τη Δόνα Σαρλότ από το Σταλινγκράντ του Παρισιού που παλεύει με τους δαίμονές της και που μιλά στην αδελφή της για τη βαθιά σπηλιά του Μοντεσίνου

Η Σαρλότ μένει στο Σταλινγκράντ του Παρισιού κοντά στο κανάλι, είναι καλλιτέχνις, ζωγραφίζει κάτι περίεργα όντα, ανάμεσα σε φανταστικούς δαίμονες και άγρια ζώα, άνεργη για καιρό, ευτυχώς τον τελευταίο χρόνο ενοικιάζει ένα δωμάτιο του διαμερίσματός της μέσω του Airbnb, ήταν τυχερή να μένει δίπλα σε στάση του μετρό και σχετικά κοντά στο σταθμό των τρένων που ξεφορτώνουν τουρίστες στην πόλη, και φυσικά που ήταν Παριζιάνα, από τις λίγες φορές που εκτίμησε αυτή την ιδιότητά της· φιλοξενούσε όσους έψαχναν μια φτηνή και βολική λύση για να δουν την Πόλη του Φωτός, όταν έφταναν η Σαρλότ τούς παράδινε το κλειδί, τους έδινε άπειρες πληροφορίες, χάρτες, τουριστικά έντυπα, ό,τι εκπρωτικά κουπόνια είχε, για ίντσες και μουσεία, τους πρόσφερε και ένα χυμό μήλου για το καλωσόρισμα, ήθελε βέβαια τα καλά reviews τους, της άρεσε όμως και να παρατηρεί τον ενθουσιασμό του ταξιδιού στα μάτια τους, μετά ίσως να

μην τους έβλεπε ξανά· εκείνοι θα έβγαιναν πρωί- πρωί και αποφεύγοντας να κοιτάξουν τους άστεγους κάτω από τη γέφυρα, τους ζητιάνους, τα κουρασμένα πρόσωπα στο μετρό, θα έτρεχαν να ποζάρουν μπροστά στο Παρίσι της φαντασίωσης τους, το βράδυ θα έβγαιναν ξανά ή θα κλειδώνονταν στο δωμάτιό τους, δίπλα τους η Σαρλότ έβαζε την πανοπλία και το κράνος της, έπαιρνε το κοντάρι της και πάλευε όλη νύχτα με τους δικούς της δαίμονες, διαβάζοντας, σχεδιάζοντας ή απλώς αναστενάζοντας ρυθμικά ενώ χάιδευε τα τρυπημένα χέρια της, οτιδήποτε για να μην κυλήσει πάλι, της έκανε καλό να νιώθει κάποιους, έστω άγνωστους, έστω περαστικούς, να ανασαίνουν πίσω από τον τοίχο, αν τύχαινε να ήταν εντελώς μόνη και ένιωθε πολύ αδύναμη μπροστά στην κλειστή εξώπορτα, τις σκιές του φωτιστικού ή την πηχτή σιωπή, φώναζε την αδελφή της να έρθει, η Αμελί πάντα πρόθυμη ερχόταν, πάντα φλύαρη και ανήσυχη, μαγείρευαν, έτρωγαν, κάθονταν μετά διαβάζοντας ή κουβεντιάζοντας, όταν η Σαρλότ τής διηγήθηκε για τα θαυμαστά πράγματα που ο ανεξάντλητος Δον Κιχώτης είπε πως είχε δει στη βαθιά σπηλιά του Μοντεσίνου, και που φαίνονταν τόσο απίθανα και μεγαλειώδη* η Αμελί σαν άλλος Σάντσο ήθελε να της πει ο Θεός να με πάρει, ήθελα να πω ο διάβολος — αν πιστεύω τίποτε* από όσα είπες και, σίγουρη πως έπεσε πάλι στην ηρωίνη που της έχωσε στο μνημονικό ή στη φαντασία όλα όσα της διηγήθηκε*, την περίμενε να κοιμηθεί για να ψάξει όχι για ενέσεις αλλά τη μαγεμένη σπηλιά στο βιβλίο, έτσι τη βρήκε η Σαρλότ το πρωί να κοιμάται με τον Δον Κιχώτη στο στήθος ήσυχη και άνενοια, σχεδόν σαν να χαμογελούσε, πήρε προσεχτικά το βιβλίο μην την ξυπνήσει, το άνοιξε στη σελίδα 226 που έμεινε, μιλούσε ο Μοντεσίνος: *πρέπει να πιστέψετε ότι αυτό που λέγεται Ανάγκη εξαπλώνεται, ανακατεύεται, τρυπώνει παντού και δε χαρίζεται ούτε στους μαγεμένους**

**Για τη σοφή και χαριτωμένη απάντηση που ο Σάντσο
Πάντσα από την Μάντσα έδωσε στην οργισμένη
παρατήρηση του Δον Κιχώτη επειδή άφησε μια πορδή
μπροστά του**

Να μου επιτρέψει η ευγενία σας να σας πω πως ό,τι μέλλει δεν ξεμέλλει και άλλα τα μάτια του λαγού και άλλα της κουκουβάγιας, ο διάβολος Αφέντη μου έχει πολλά ποδάρια, μπορεί η εξοχότητά σας να έχει διαβάσει του κόσμου τα βιβλία αλλά εγώ λέω κάλλιο πέντε και στο χέρι παρά δέκα και καρτέρει, ξέρετε τόσα και δεν ξέρετε ότι ακόμα και οι βασιλείς κλάνουν, δηλαδή πορδίζουν, να το πω όπως το θέλει η αφεντιά σας αν αυτό σάς κάνει να νιώθετε καλύτερα, όπως και να το πω όμως οι βασιλείς το ίδιο θα κάνουν, μέχρι και ο πάπας, δεν τους άκουσα, αλλά ξέρετε πως έτσι είναι και είστε αρκετά έντιμος να το παραδεχτείτε, επειδή σας βλέπω όμως πολύ θυμωμένο θα αποφεύγω άλλη φορά να... ξέρετε τι, μπροστά σας να μην... ξέρετε τι, αφού έχετε τόσο ευαίσθητη ψυχή, όπως και αυτιά και μύτη μάλλον, θα προσπαθήσω να μη σας ενοχλήσω ξανά με την πορδή μου αλλά δεν μπορώ να σας υποσχεθώ, διότι *από τώρα ίσαμε αύριο το πρωί είναι πολλές οι ώρες και μέσα σε μια ώρα ή σε μια στιγμή γκρεμίζεται και σπίτι** κι αν τύχει κάποιος δαίμονας από αυτούς που σας κυνηγούν να μαγέψει τα έντερά μου; δουλειά δεν είχε ο διάολος κι έδερνε τα παιδιά του θα πείτε μα εγώ έφαγα ήδη αρκετό ξύλο από τα κατώματά σας, δεν θέλω άλλο και να με συγχωρεί η ευγενία σας αλλά θα πω και τούτο: νομίζω στον κόσμο μας γίνονται πολλά χειρότερα πράγματα από μια πορδή και δεν μπορώ να καταλάβω το θυμό σας, θα έπρεπε να είσαστε χαρούμενος που πόρδισα μπροστά σας, είδατε έμαθα να το λέω σωστά κι *ας μη μεγάλωσα στην Αυλή του βασιλιά ούτε σπούδασα στη Σαλαμάνκα για να ξέρω να βάζω ή να βγάζω κανά φωνήεντο από τις λέξεις μου**, ευτυχισμένος να 'στε διότι για να πορδίσει κάποιος μπροστά σε κάποιον άλλο είναι επειδή νιώθει άνετα μαζί του, χαλάρωσε στην παρέα του και... πουφ ή μπουμ, αναλόγως πορδίζει, δεν λέω να με ευχαριστήσετε γι' αυτό αν

δεν το επιθυμείτε, εγώ πάντως την πρώτη φορά που άκουσα την Τερέζα μου να πορδίζει την αγκάλιασα από χαρά, εκείνη κοκκίνισε, έτσι της έκλασα και εγώ για να της δείξω πόσο την αγαπώ, και την αγαπώ γιατί είναι καλή γυναίκα, κι αν δεν ήταν ζηλιάρα, δε θα την άλλαζα ούτε με τη γιγάντισσα Ανταντόνα, που, καταπώς μου είπατε, ήταν πολύ μυαλωμένη και άξια γυναίκα*, αν λοιπόν κάποια στιγμή τα καταφέρετε και βρεθείτε με τη Δουλτσινέα σας, χωρίς τα μάγια όσων σας κυνηγούν, εσάς και μένα που δεν φταίω σε τίποτε αλλά μαζί με τα ξερά καίγονται και τα χλωρά και επειδή σας βλέπω πως πάλι χωρίς λόγο ανάβετε, αυτό μόνο θα πω και σταματώ: αν βρεθείτε ποτέ ολομόναχος με την Κυρά σας, που όπως λέτε ομοιά της δεν υπάρχει στον κόσμο, και είναι ωραία νύχτα σαν απόψε με το φεγγάρι μεγάλο σαν πεπόνι ζουμερό, να είχαμε ένα τώρα να τρώγαμε, πεπόνι όχι φεγγάρι, σας εύχομαι λέω όπως θα βολτάρετε οι δυο σας να της ξεφύγει και να σας προσφέρει μια πορδή, θα πει ότι επιτέλους είναι πια δική σας

* Μιγκέλ Ντε Θερβάντες, *Δον Κιχώτης* (μετάφραση Δημήτρης Ρήσος), Εκδόσεις Γράμματα, 1997

Memorable Adventures

Antonis Georgiou

Translated from Greek by Yiola Klitou

Of what Doña Mary Doyle of Cambridge did that morning and *other occurrences worthy to be fitly recorded* *

Mrs Mary Doyle woke up one morning, put on her armour, took the lance from the corner, left the helmet on *Don Quixote* that she is reading these days and in spite of the cold stepped outside *with unexampled courage*, her feet hurt a lot but she managed to go to the hairdresser's, dyed her hair something in-between pink and carrot colour, when she came back she rested for a while in the armchair, to honour the occasion she ate at the big table in the dining room, put on a dress that is very dear to her, floral, short, above the knee, she even drank a coffee liqueur to her health, then sat in front of her only companion these days, the television, to watch another game show, she turns eighty-five today, she became a widow at seventy and ever since she has lived alone, she has a daughter who lives in Glasgow whom she rarely sees, she sometimes wonders why she got married, why she had a child, if she is to live in an empty house, if she is to die in front of a screen, without a loving gaze, why did she live if she won't be missed even for a little while by someone; *all the pleasures of this life pass away like a shadow and a dream, or fade like the flower of the field*, Mary had at least loved truly, even if it was just once, she was hardly seventeen, her Dulcinea was sweet Sabrina from the neighbourhood, *beautiful without blemish, dignified without haughtiness, tender and yet modest, gracious from courtesy and courteous from good*

breeding but the diabolic *Merlin*, times were different then, bewitched them, she never conquered her *Lady*; today after the hairdresser's on her way home she saw Sabrina, after a very long time, at the window of the small grocer's shop looking at her from a funeral announcement;

**Of Don Andreas of Limassol who went for a swim,
talked to his son on Skype and *which deals with matters
relating to this history and no other***

Andreas, who *had memorable adventures and amazing occurrences* all night, woke up, stretched, took off the armour and the helmet, put his lance in the corner, got dressed, and went out, and even though it was Saturday he did not go for shopping, now that Anna was away for a week in Brussels, visiting Marios, their son, he changed his schedule, went directly to the sea, very few people were at that seafront café he often goes to, it's December, most stop swimming in August, he continues, comes here almost every Saturday, for twenty-five years now, at this place, his refuge he could call it, the only place that it is truly his, here is his sea, his horizon, as if he marked a corner in paradise as his own;

his life all these years was an eight-hour day full of numbers, initially at the bank where he worked for twenty years, then he was fired because of the "economic crisis", then unemployed for three years and now at a company as a bookkeeper shut in an office with a window that overlooks other windows, work, home, weddings, christenings, funerals, an evening out, sex with the wife mostly, he was not handsome and he did not have the self-confidence to pursue something when perhaps he wanted to, then he just didn't want to, he only cheated on her by wanking occasionally, the only moment he let himself go in his fantasies, proper and a gentleman in everything, always putting others first, but he

had something that was all his, for twenty-five years he has been coming here, this view and the swimming were what saved him, especially when the summer crowds ceased and he dove almost alone in the cold clear sea, even the water smelled differently, the minute he was under he was filled with the beautiful illusion, one of the very few that equals a sense, that, just like your desire, you drop in the water a drop of how you are, that if you want to you shall reach that enchanting *come* that keeps moving away; when Marios was a bit older he brought him with him, he taught him to swim until December, then Anna would start with “you’ll make the baby sick” and they would stop, the baby grew, misses the sea now that he’s away, it’s not the only thing he misses, he doesn’t admit it but “abroad” does not agree with him and Andreas feels guilty, his dismissal from the bank coincided with Marios’ studies, they were in a tight corner financially and all their plans were overturned, working abroad was not so much a choice as it was necessity, “instead of blaming those who put their hands in the cookie jar, your bosses at the bank who made a mess of everything, you are blaming yourself” Anna would tell him seeing him pining, especially while he was unemployed, how could he explain to her, certain perceptions are so instilled in our blood, in our thoughts, spells and powerful nets, holding us tight, we walk on with these and struggle, he felt responsible! this is how he was taught to feel, he did not answer her, he tried to smile at her so that she wouldn’t be sad, he saw the love, the warmth in her eyes, oh how lucky he was to have found her, to have her in his days, to sleep with his sweet Anna even if she did not have the *unequaled* beauty of the Lady from Toboso whom, however, poor Don Quixote was not even able to meet, an idea, a dream, a chimaera, a yearning was Dulcinea

Skype rang, it was his son, “are you at our sea” was his first question, he was happy to see him smiling, “make sure you get sick now” he heard Anna’s voice and she was happy too, how could she not be? “I am giving her the VIP tour” Marios said and turned the phone around to show him the Grand Place, filled with crowds posing in front of the beautiful buildings, he saw Anna proud as a peacock, it must had been cold, all were dressed warmly, he showed him a performer, one of those “golden magicians” suspending supposedly nonchalantly in the street, he knows that their suspension is a trick but also their renowned composure, there’s no such peace in the world anymore, “we’ll go for coffee, and of course afterwards she wants shopping”, “I don’t want anything” he heard her protesting whimsically, “ when are you coming over?”, “you come for Christmas and we’ll see” he replied and a heavy pause followed and a “we’ll see”; days before during a phone call he had implied that he might stay in Brussels for the holidays to work, he didn’t really understand where but it involved “good money” and since they “need it”; Andreas always felt helpless before this word: “need”, he would fight hordes of *Briareuses and Giants* if necessary but before “need” he shrank, he only mumbled “meaning?” and then a pregnant silence, “show me the sea” Marios shouted and he turned the phone away so that they wouldn’t see his glistening eyes, his horizon, torturously silently he travelled again via Skype to the Grand Place “Goodbye!”, “Goodbye!” they would speak again in the evening, he opened his book

in the time of his unemployment he started reading literature again, for endless hours, he keeps it up as much as he can, these days he is reading *Don Quixote*, the complete edition in two volumes, Anna teases him, “and then what? *Oliver Twist* perhaps?”, “perhaps” he replies, reading and thinking that he could never go out on the road a wandering knight, a

true helper and protector of all destitute and needy vagabonds, he would like, even if it was only for a little while, to leave from all these but in his fifties he knows now that many of his desires will not be fulfilled and ridiculing ourselves is one of the most difficult things to venture, deep down he hopes that only his Marios will someday say about him what was said about Don Alonso Quijano of la Mancha that if my father did not achieve great things, he died in attempting them;

Of Dona Charlotte of Stalingrad of Paris who fights her demons and speaks to her sister about the profound cave of Montesinos

Charlotte lives in Stalingrad of Paris near the canal, she is an artist, she paints some strange beings, something between fantastic demons and wild animals, unemployed for a long time, fortunately in the last year she rents a room in her apartment via Airbnb, she was fortunate to live next to a metro station and relatively close to the train station that unload tourists in the city, and of course to be a Parisian, one of the few times she appreciated this quality of hers; she hosted those in search of a cheap and convenient solution to see the City of Lights, when they arrived Charlotte gave them the key, gave them endless information, maps, tourist leaflets, whatever discount coupons she had for pizza and museums, she also offered them apple juice as a welcome drink, she wanted of course their good reviews, but she also liked to observe the excitement of the journey in their eyes, afterwards she might never see them again; they would go out early in the morning and while avoiding to look at the homeless under the bridge, the beggars, the tired faces in the metro, they would run to pose in front of Paris of their fantasies, in the evening they would go out again or lock themselves in their room, next to them Charlotte would put on her armour and helmet, would take her

lance and fight all night long with her own demons, reading, drawing or just rhythmically sighing while stroking her needle-marked arms, anything not to relapse again, it was good for her to feel the presence of some people, albeit strangers, albeit passing by, breathing behind the wall, if it so happened and she was completely alone and felt too weak in front of the closed front door, the shadows of the lamp or the thick silence she would call her sister to come, Amelie, always obliging, she would come, always chatty and restless, they would cook, eat, then sit down reading or chatting, when Charlotte recounted *the wonderful things the incomparable don Quixote said he saw in the profound cave of Montesinos, the impossibility and magnitude of which cause this adventure to be deemed apocryphal*, Amelie, like another Sancho wanted to tell her *may God take me – I was just going to say the devil – if I believe a single particle of what you said and certain that she relapsed again on heroin that stuffed in her imagination or mind all this rigmarole she has been treating her to* waited for her to sleep in order to search not for needles but for the enchanted cave in the book, that is how Charlotte found her in the morning, sleeping with *Don Quixote* on her chest peaceful and untroubled, almost as if she was smiling, she prised the book carefully not to wake her, opened it on page 226 where she had stopped, Montesinos was talking: *believe me that which is called need is to be met with everywhere, and penetrates all quarters and reaches everyone, and does not spare even the enchanted*

Of the wise and charming reply of Sancho Panza de la Mancha to the angry remark of Don Quixote for passing gas in front of him

May your worship allow me to say that what matters does not stop to matter and it takes all sorts to make a world, the devil my Lord is everywhere and your excellency may have

read all the books in the world but I say a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know so much and you don't know that even Kings fart, that is, pass gas, to put it as your lordship would like if that makes you feel better, but no matter how I say it Kings will do the same, even the Pope, I have not heard them, but you know that it is so and you are honest enough to admit it, but since I see that you are very angry I shall avoid to ... you know what ... in front of you again since you have such a sensitive soul, and ears and nose I suppose, I shall try not to disturb you again with my farting but I cannot promise you, because *there are a good many hours between this and to-morrow, and any one of them, or any moment, the house may fall* and what if one of the demons that chase you enchants my gut? the devil finds work for idle hands you will say but I have already been beaten enough by your doings, I want no more and excuse me but I shall say this too: I think that a lot worse things are happening in our world than a fart and I cannot understand your anger, you should be happy I passed gas in your presence, see I know how to say it properly, *for you know I have not been bred up at court or trained at Salamanca, to know whether I am adding or dropping a letter or so in my words* you should be happy because for someone to pass gas in the presence of someone else it's because they feel comfortable with them, relaxed in their company and ... poof or boom, they pass gas, I am not saying you should thank me for it if you do not wish to do so, but when I first heard my Teresa passing gas I embraced her with joy, she blushed, so I farted too to show her how much I love her and I love her because she is a good woman *and if it was not for her jealousy I would not change her for the giantess Andandona, who by my master's account was a very clever and worthy woman*, so if, at some point, you succeed in meeting your Dulcinea, without the enchantments of all those who are after you, you and me who I am to blame for nothing but the innocent often pay

along with the guilty and because I see you getting hot under the collar again for no reason I shall say just this and stop: if you ever find yourself alone with your *Lady*, who, as you say, has no equal in the world, and the night is as beautiful as tonight with a moon as big as a juicy melon, I wish we had one to eat right now, a melon, not a moon, I wish for you that as you stroll about she'll lose control and offer you a fart and that will mean that she is yours at last

* *All phrases in italics are excerpts from the English translation of Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes translated, in 1885, by John Ormsby (1829-1895)*
http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/



Luxembourg

Gast Groeber

**Aktuelle Wetterwarnung:
überwiegend dichter Nebel**

Current weather warning: predominantly heavy fog

EUPL laureate 2016: *All Dag verstoppt en aneren* (Op der Lay)

BIOGRAPHY

Gast Groeber grew up in Hollerich, Luxembourg, where he went to primary school. After graduating from high school in 1980, he studied primary education at the Institut Supérieur d'Études et de Recherches Pédagogiques in Walferdange, Luxembourg. From 1982, he taught at a number of primary schools in Luxembourg City. Since 2007, he has been head of the Centre Technolink in Luxembourg City, a division of school administration, which is in charge of equipping schools with computers, internet and new technologies. Gast Groeber won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2016 for his novel *All Dag verstoppt en aneren* (*One Day Hides Another*).

Aktuelle Wetterwarnung: überwiegend dichter Nebel

Gast Groeber



Der Fahrtenschreiber leuchtet auf, schluckt die Karte.

Erki wartet das Surren ab, tippt die nötigen Informationen ein, lehnt sich in seinem Sitz zurück, drückt den elektronischen Starter. Er genießt das leise Klicken, das Schnurren des Zünders und dann das sanfte Rütteln der Kabine, das kraftvolle Raunen des Motors.

Schwarzer Qualm wird aus den blanken Auspuffrohren quellen, in den Nebelschwaden zerstäuben, die reglos den Parkplatz der Tankanlage belagern.

Wischerblätter fegen die dichte Morgentauhaut von der Scheibe, Seitenfenster summen runter. Kalte, schwefelige Morgenluft dringt in die Kabine ein, von überall schallt das Wachbrummen der Maschinen herüber.

Er atmet einmal tief durch, schließt sich wieder ein – rundum klare Scheiben. 5.30 Uhr.

Lichter einschalten, Automatik regeln, Feststellbremse lösen, Blick nach links, Gas geben. Er hört ein Horn, sieht Scheinwerfer im Rückspiegel aufleuchten.

Das wird wohl der Ivano gewesen sein, zum Abschied sozusagen.

Gestern Abend noch hatten sie zusammen bei einem Teller Gulasch im Raststättenrestaurant gegessen, dabei Erinnerun-

gen an ihre Fahrten, ihre sporadischen Begegnungen an Europas Straßenadern ausgetauscht. Ivano hatte ihn nach seinen Plänen befragt, wenn diese letzten Fahrten denn nun zu Ende sein würden. Er hatte vom Lesen geschwärmt und vom Reisen mit seiner lieben Frau, an all jene Orte, die er bislang nur aus Büchern oder von Straßenschildern kannte.

Erki wirft einen Blick auf das Foto seiner Jana. Ja, bald würde es soweit sein!

Er schaltet das Radio ein. Ganztags trübe Wetteraussichten! Der Sprecher vertröstet seine Zuhörer mit Musik: *Good day, sunshine.*

Die Nebelscheinwerfer beleuchten vorsichtig die Auffahrt, auf der Autobahn tasten sich im Moment noch recht wenige Fahrzeuge durch die dichte, schwer durchdringliche Brühe. Der Sattelzug beschleunigt auf die freie, rechte Spur.

Erki schreckt auf, als sein CB-Funk plötzlich pfeift. Ivanos Stimme scheppert aus dem Kasten und bittet ihn zu kommen.

Was will der denn nun?

Erki dreht an den Knöpfen seiner Station. Sein Kollege gibt ihm nur knapp seine Nachricht durch.

„Hallo, vielleicht nicht richtig gesehen – Nebel, du weißt! Aufpassen – womöglich illegale Fracht bei deiner Abfahrt zugestieg, auf dem Sattelzug. 55. Over!“

Wie bitte? Illegale Fracht! Ein blinder Passagier? Ganz und gar unmöglich!

Bei der Abfahrtskontrolle hatte er doch noch alles genauestens überprüft, auch die Umgebung abgecheckt!

Aus dem Radio plärrt *Sunny*.

Wenns und Abers stülpen sich über sein Hirn.

Soll da tatsächlich einer hinter der Kabine hocken? Einer oder eine? Und überhaupt – bei dieser Kälte! Knapp drei Grad, liest er von der Anzeige unterm Tacho.

Wenn der da runterkippte! Oder die? Dann hätte er ein Menschenleben auf dem Gewissen! Dabei war er bis heute diese paar Millionen Kilometer quer durch Europa unfallfrei geblieben! Oder aber, wenn die Kojaks ihn mit dieser „Fracht“ erwischten! Ausgerechnet vier Tage vor Schluss noch verdammte Schwierigkeiten!

Er muss am nächsten Rastplatz raus, überprüfen, was los ist. Das kostet dann natürlich wieder Zeit! Mist! Wo es heute doch sowieso schon langsamer vorangeht!

Die Tachonadel steht bei 70 km/h, mehr geht nicht bei diesem Wetter. Vor sich erahnt er die Schussleuchten eines anderen Lasters. Aus sicherer Distanz taucht er ihnen hinterher, an undeutlichen Wäldern und Wiesen vorbei.

Der Radiosprecher warnt vor niedriger Sichtweite auf allen Straßen, informiert tröstend, dass aktuell noch keine Staumeldungen vorliegen, und legt, lustig und Sonnen beschwörend, den *Sunshine Reggae* auf.

Erki wiegt den Kopf nervös im Rhythmus, summt den Refrain.

Ein Hinweisschild: Rastplatz!

Sein Gefährt rollt von der Autobahn. Ein einziger Lastzug steht neben dem Bordstein, die Gardinen in der Kabine sind noch dicht zugezogen. Der Laster rollt aus.

Erki zieht die Bremse, schaut in die beiden Rückspiegel. Den Motor lässt er drehen, greift nach seiner Stablampe, öffnet die Seitentür, springt hinaus und hastet zum Spalt zwischen Zugmaschine und Anhänger. Der Lichtkegel seiner Lampe sucht die Kabinenhinterwand ab. Da! Eine Gestalt, zwischen den Versorgungsleitungen hockend, in dunkler Kleidung, mit dunklem Haar, die Hände hinterm Rücken, das Gesicht zwi-

schen den Knien versteckt, fast übersehbar! Er schreit sich den Schreck aus den Gliedern:

„He, du! Nun aber mal! Komm runter! Los, mach schon!“

Zögerlich heben sich dunkle Augen über die Knie, starren Erki an, und dann, auf seine Handbewegungen hin, richtet sich die Gestalt vorsichtig auf.

„Ach du meine Güte, Junge, du bist ja noch ein Kind!“

Mit einer unmissverständlichen Geste gebietet Erki dem Kleinen, an der Stelle zu bleiben. Er erklimmt den Sattel, versichert sich, dass noch alle Leitungsverbindungen festsitzen, reicht dem Jungen die Hand und hilft ihm dann auf den Boden. Die kleine Hand fühlt sich eiskalt an.

Das Zittern am schwächtigen Körper, rührt es von der Kälte oder von der Angst her?

Mit seinen Händen reibt sich Erki die Arme, grunzt „Brrr“ und schaut dem Jungen in die Augen. Der nickt und lächelt verlegen. Er nimmt ihn wieder an der Hand, öffnet die Beifahrertür und hebt das Kind in den Sitz. Dann schlägt er die Tür zu, geht zur Fahrerseite, versichert sich, dass ihn niemand beobachtet hat und steigt ein.

„So, hier sitzt du erst einmal warm! Ich muss überlegen, was ich jetzt mit dir anfangen.“

Natürlich versteht sein kleiner Beifahrer kein Wort, starrt ihn nur ängstlich an.

Irgend etwas möchte Erki aber erfahren. Er richtet den Zeigefinger auf seinen Brustkorb und spricht deutlich *E-r-k-i*. Der Kleine schaut ihn an, nickt mit dem Kopf, zeigt auf sich

und antwortet heiser *Krieg, War*. Erki schüttelt den Kopf. Dann fällt ihm sein Notizblock ein, den er oben unter der Schlafliede festgeklemmt hat. Er nimmt ihn samt einem Kugelschreiber hervor, zeichnet mit ein paar ungeschickten Strichen und Kringeln einen Lastwagen, daneben ein rundes Männchen. Nun tippt er mit dem Finger auf die Figur, danach abermals auf seine Brust und wiederholt seinen Namen. Der Junge nickt und wiederholt *Erki*. Dann klopft er sich gegen seinen Körper und artikuliert vorsichtig *Burhan*. Erki nickt zufrieden.

„Na also, Burhan! Verständigen können wir uns ja schon!“

Er zeichnet nun ein kleines Strichmännchen aufs Papier, zeigt es dem Kleinen und wiederholt dessen Namen. Daneben kommen zwei größere Strichfiguren, eine davon mit langem Haar. Er zeigt Burhan nun auch dieses Bild, deutet auf die Figuren – Burhan, Mama, Papa. Der Kleine schüttelt den Kopf, fährt mit zwei Fingern unter seiner Kehle vorbei. *Krieg*, wiederholt er. Erki seufzt, nimmt den Kugelschreiber, zeichnet weitere, kleinere Figuren, fragt nach Brüdern oder Schwestern. Burhan zeigt auf eine weibliche Strichfigur, nennt sie *Loyal*, dann ergreift er den Schreiber, zeichnet ein Auto, mit einem Blaulicht auf dem Dach und einen Pfeil, der von Loyal zum Auto führt.

Erki schnaubt.

Ein kleiner Flüchtling also!

Den muss er doch bei der Polizei abliefern!

Bilder aus Fernsehberichten fallen ihm ein: Flüchtlingslager – notdürftige Planen, in glitschigen Schlamm hineingepflanzt.

Sowas ist doch kein Ort für einen so kleinen Kerl!

Er sieht zu Burhan hinüber, der erwidert den Blick nur zögernd.

Erki atmet einmal tief durch. Ihm wird erst jetzt dieser stechende, unangenehme Geruch bewusst. Er betrachtet den Jungen genauer.

Wie lange der wohl diese alten Klamotten trägt? Und wann soll der zuletzt ordentlich gefuttert haben?

Hinter dem Rücksitz kramt er zwei Bananen hervor und reicht sie seinem Beifahrer.

„Du, Kleiner, jetzt iss erst mal! Und, naja, wie soll ich's sagen?“

Er schaut zum Kleinen, drückt sich seine Nasenflügel mit Zeigefinger und Daumen zusammen und zieht eine Grimasse. Dann nimmt er nochmals den Notizblock und zeichnet eine Dusche, einen Pulli und eine Hose.

„An der nächsten Raststätte!“

Burhan nickt gehorsam mit dem Kopf, pellt die erste Banane aus der Schale und beißt gierig hinein. Erki räumt den Notizblock zur Seite, schaltet die Automatik ein, löst die Feststellbremse und gibt Gas. Eigentlich sollte er nun die Polizei verständigen!

Aus dem Radio erklingt gerade *Sunrise*. Der dichte Nebel belagert den Asphalt noch immer.

Langsam beschleunigt der Lastwagen wieder auf die Autobahn. Der Motor brummt gemütlich, die Lichtkegel scheinen trüb in den Morgen hinein. Leichter Nieselregen weckt die Scheibenwischer, Straßenmarkierungen werden erst im letzten Moment sichtbar.

Irgendwann fängt Erki an, drauflos zu reden, erzählt von seiner Heimatstadt in Russland, nur einen Steinwurf von der estnischen Grenze entfernt, und davon, wie er sie, nach dem postsowjetischen Schisma, verlassen und nie wiedergesehen

hatte. Tallinn war sein Ziel gewesen, weil dort diese Gerüchte umliefen, man gehöre bald zu Europa. So viel hatte er bis dahin schon von diesem Europa gehört! Sicher, das war ein Wirtschaftsprojekt, – aber doch auch eine grandiose Friedensidee! Europa denke sogar daran, Grenzen aufzulösen, diese in älteren und neueren Verträgen, auf Papier gezeichneten Linien, die mitten in einem warmen Pinienwald oder in einer vom Wind durchwehten Wiese, doch ganz und gar sinn- und gehaltlos sind! Deren Existenz, neuerdings, verschiedene scharf gespitzte Stifte wieder stramm einritzen möchten!

Als er zu seinem jungen Gast hinüberblickt, merkt er, dass der schläft.

Naja, der soll sich ruhig mal ausruhen! Bis zur nächsten Raststätte bleiben noch gut anderthalb Stunden. Er will gegen das Lenkrad schlagen, lässt es aber sein.

Verdammt! Dieser aufgegabelte Flüchtlingswinzling, der sollte doch eine Schule besuchen, Lesen und Schreiben lernen, nicht an irgendeiner Raststätte herumlungern, um auf einen Lastwagen aufzuspringen! Gänsehaut – diese Geste an der Kehle!

Grenzen sind überschritten, jedwedes Augenmaß für Menschlichkeit ist auf der Strecke geblieben! Wenn er den Kleinen hier ausliefert, dann kommt der in eins dieser Lager!

Erki starrt auf die Fahrbahn.

Die Menge der roten Schlussleuchten nimmt zu, an jeder Auffahrt drängen nun immer zahlreicher Fahrzeuge auf die Autobahn.

In all diesen Blechkonserven sitzen in Hetze eingelagerte Menschen. Manche ignorieren ihn, manche nicken ihm freundlich zu, andere geben Lichthupe oder zeigen ihm den Stinkefinger, weil sein Laster eben nun gerade nicht auf diesem wichtigsten Weg ihres Lebens passt, jenem zur befreienden Arbeit. Und

dabei ist er doch nur ein grenzüberschreitender Bote, der jene Waren an ihre Bestimmung bringen wird, die sie mit ihrem hart verdienten Geld kaufen wollen werden.

Der Radiosprecher meldet einen ersten Unfall auf der A8. Hilfe sei unterwegs, versichert er, und legt weiter unbeirrt auf: *Let the Sunshine in.*

In Erkis Kopf dreht schwindelerregend eine Frage Schleife: Was soll er nur tun? Schließlich kann er diesen Kleinen ja nicht ewig durch die Landschaft kutschieren! Er möchte ihm irgendwie helfen.

Aber wie?

Halt! Da gab es doch in einem Bericht dieses Anwaltsehepaar zwei Grenzen weiter, das Flüchtlingskindern hilft!

Aber Schnapsidee! Er erinnert sich ja nicht mal an deren Namen!

Vielleicht sollte er das Ganze mit Jana besprechen?

Er wirft einen Blick auf den Beifahrersitz, der kleine Stinker schläft noch immer fest.

Eine halbe Stunde zögert er, dann wählt er die Nummer, lässt seinen Anruf in der Tallinner Wohnung klingeln. Dort ist es nun Viertel vor neun.

Jana freut sich über den Anruf. Erki berichtet von seinem aufregenden Tagesbeginn, beschreibt Burhan, dessen Zeichnungen, teilt ihr seinen Plan mit.

Sie klingt besorgt, als sie ihm verspricht, ihr Möglichstes zu tun.

An der Raststätte angekommen, und eingeparkt, bittet er Burhan, sich auf dem Kabinenboden vor dem Sitz zu verstecken. Der Junge schaut ihn zitternd an. Erki nimmt den Straßenatlas aus dem Handschuhfach und zeigt ihm, wo sie sich gerade befinden, dann fährt er mit dem Finger an der Route entlang, die er in den nächsten vier Tagen noch zurücklegen soll.

„Europa?“, fragt der Knirps.

Erki tippt auf sein Reiseziel.

„Ja, Europa.“

Burhan beruhigt sich und während er vor dem Sitz in die Hocke geht, krempelt Erki seinen Pulli schnell einmal um, merkt sich die Größe und verlässt seine Kabine.

Im Laden findet er Kleider, die passen müssten, kauft auch noch Seife und holt Burhan dann ab.

Im Duschaum zickt der Kleine rum, will seine Unterhose nicht ausziehen. Erki kann sich hier keinen Aufstand leisten, also entleert er die Duschseife über dem Winzling, schubst ihn unter die Brause, legt ihm Tuch und Kleider bereit und wartet draußen.

Auf seinem Smartphone entdeckt er Janas Nachricht.

Sie habe Informationen gefunden und versuche, Kontakt aufzunehmen. Aber, bitte, er solle vorsichtig sein, und an sie beide denken, an all das, was sie noch vorhaben!

Erki tippt seine Antwort auf den Schirm: *Victor Hugo: Vous voulez la paix: créez l'amour!*

Zwei Tagesfahrten Entfernung! Er muss es versuchen!

Erki lacht, nimmt Buhran an der Schulter. Sie steigen wieder ein. Der Junge grinst:

„Europa?“

In der Kabine duftet es nun angenehm nach Duschgel.

Current weather warning: predominantly heavy fog

Gast Groeber

Translated from German by Carla McGinty

The odometer lights up, swallows the card.

Erki awaits the buzzing, types in the necessary information, leans back in his seat and presses the electronic starter switch. He enjoys the muted clicking and purring of the ignition, followed by the gentle shaking of the cabin, the powerful hum of the engine.

Black smoke will be welling out of the bare exhaust pipes, dispersing in the plumes of fog that motionlessly besiege the petrol station's parking lot.

Windscreen wipers sweep the dense film of morning dew off the screen, side windows buzz downward. Cold, sulfuric morning air invades the cabin, the droning of machines awakening reverberates over from all around.

He takes a deep breath, shuts himself back in again – surrounded by clear screens.

5.30 a.m.

Switch on the lights, sort out the automatic transmission, release the hand brake, glance left, accelerate.

He hears a horn, sees headlights flash up in the rear-view mirror.

That must be Ivano, a sort of goodbye.

Just last night they had sat together in the service station restaurant over a plate of goulash, exchanged memories of

their trips and of their sporadic encounters on Europe's major connecting roads. Ivano had quizzed him about his plans and when these last trips would be finished. He had enthused about reading and traveling with his beloved wife – to all those places that he had so far only known from books or road signs.

Erki glances at the photo of his Jana. Not long now!

He turns on the radio. All-day dreary weather conditions forecast! The presenter appeases his listeners with music: *Good day, sunshine.*

The fog lights carefully light up the slip road; at the moment there are relatively few vehicles on the motorway, feeling their way through the dense, nearly impermeable, murkiness.

The articulated lorry accelerates onto the empty right lane.

Erki startles as his CB radio suddenly whistles. Ivano's voice rattles out of the box and asks him to come in.

Now what does he want?

Erki twists at the knobs of his station. His colleague only transmits a brief message.

“Hi, maybe I didn't see properly – the fog, you know! Careful – it's possible that illegal cargo got on during your departure, on the lorry. 55. Over!”

What? Illegal cargo? A stowaway? That's impossible!

He had inspected everything so thoroughly during the departure checks, had even surveyed the surroundings!

From the radio blares *Sunny.*

If and buts are swirling in his mind.

Is there actually someone cowering behind the cabin? A he or a she? Really – in this chilliness? Barely three degrees, he reads the display under the tachometer.

What if he fell off! Or she? Then he'd have a human life on his conscience. And to think that until today he had managed to stay accident-free over a couple of million kilometres all across Europe! Or what if the Kojaks nab him with this "car-go"! Of all times, now, just four days before the end, some damned trouble!

He must get off at the next service station, check what's going on. That will, of course, cost time again! Crap! Especially as things today are already moving slower!

The tachometer needle stands at 70 km/h; in this weather it's not possible to go higher. He surmises the tail lights of another lorry in front of him. From a safe distance he dives after them, passing indistinct forests and fields.

The radio presenter warns about low visibility on all roads, consolingly informs that, as yet, there are no reports of traffic congestion and then, conjuring the sun, he cheerily plays *Sunshine Reggae*.

Erki nervously sways his head to the rhythm, hums the chorus.

A sign for services!

His vehicle rolls off the motorway. A sole tractor-trailer stands next to the curb, the curtains in the cabin are still pulled closed. The lorry rolls to a stop.

Erki pulls the brake, looks into the two rear-view mirrors. He leaves the engine running, grabs his torch, opens the side door, jumps out and hurries to the gap between cab and trailer. The light beam of his torch scans the back wall of the cabin. There! A figure is hunkered down between the supply lines in dark clothes, with dark hair, hands behind their back,

face hidden between their knees, easily overlooked! Shocked to the core, he screams:

“Hey! You! Come on now! Get down! Go on!”

Dark eyes hesitatingly appear over the knees, stare at Erki and then, obliging Erki’s motioning hands, the figure slowly straightens up.

“Oh my gosh, lad, you’re still a child!”

With an unmistakable gesture Erki motions the kid to stay put. He scales the saddle, ensures all supply lines are still intact, reaches his hand out to the boy and helps him onto the ground. The small hand feels freezing cold.

The slim body is trembling. Is that out of fear or from the cold?

Erki rubs his hands over his arms, mutters “brrr” and looks the boy in the eyes. The boy nods and smiles shyly. Erki takes his hand again, opens the passenger door and lifts the child into the seat. Then he slams the door shut, walks to the driver’s side, makes certain that no one had watched them and climbs in.

“Ok, you’ll be warm here for now! I have to think about what to do with you.”

Of course, his little passenger doesn’t understand a word, just stares at him with frightened eyes.

However, Erki wants to find out at least something. He points his index fingers at his chest and clearly states *E-r-k-i*. The kid looks at him, nods his head, points to himself and whispers hoarsely *war*. Erki shakes his head. Then he remembers the notebook he keeps stuck under his sleeping berth. He fetches it together with a pen, inexpertly draws a lorry out of a few

lines and doodles, a plump figure next to it. He taps on the figure with his finger, then again to his chest and repeats his name. The boy nods and repeats *Erki*. Then he pats his body and carefully articulates *Burhan*. Erki nods happily.

“Alright Burhan! We can communicate!”

He then sketches a small stick figure onto the paper, shows it to the kid and repeats his name. Next to the figure he adds two larger stick figures, one of them with long hair. He shows Burhan this picture, points at the figures – Burhan, Mom, Dad. The kid shakes his head, slides two fingers across his neck. *War*, he repeats. Erki sighs, takes the pen, draws several more smaller figures, asks about brothers and sisters. Burhan points to a female figure, calls her *Layal*, then grabs the pen, draws a car with a blue light on the roof and an arrow that leads from Layal to the car.

Erki snorts.

A little refugee!

He should turn him in to the police!

He remembers images from news reports on TV: refugee camps – makeshift tarp, planted into slick mud.

That’s no place for such a little guy!

He looks over at Burhan who only reluctantly meets his gaze.

Erki takes a deep breath. Only now he becomes aware of a piercing, unpleasant smell. He looks at the boy more closely.

How long has he been wearing those clothes?

And when was his last decent meal?

He digs out two bananas from behind the back rest and hands them to his passenger.

“Ok, kid, now eat something! And, well, how shall I say it?”

He looks at the kid, presses his nostrils together with index finger and thumb and pulls a face. Then he grabs the notebook again and sketches a shower, a jumper and some trousers.

“At the next services!”

Burhan obediently nods his head, peels the first banana and takes a greedy bite.

Erki puts away the notebook, switches on the automatic transmission, releases the hand brake and accelerates.

Really, he should be notifying the police!

The radio is currently playing *Sunrise*. The tarmac is still under siege from thick fog.

Slowly, the lorry accelerates back onto the motorway. The engine is humming comfortably, the light beams shine dimly into the morning. Light drizzle awakens the windscreen wipers, road markings become visible only at the last moment.

At some point, Erki starts to talk. He recounts his hometown in Russia, just a stone's throw away from the Estonian border, how he left after the post-Soviet schism and never returned. Tallinn had been his destination because rumours abounded that it would soon be part of Europe. He had already heard so much about Europe by that point! Sure, it was an economic project – but it was also a terrific idea for peace! Europe even contemplated dissolving borders, those lines drawn up on paper, in older and newer contracts, meaningless and groundless when they cut through a warm pine forest or a windswept meadow. Recently, various sharpened pencils have been wanting to carve them in tightly again.

When Erki looks over to his young guest, he notices that he's sleeping.

Ok then, he should go ahead and rest! It's a good one and a half hours until the next services.

He wants to bang the steering wheel but stops himself.

Damnit! This picked-up refugee pipsqueak, he should be going to school, learning how to read and write, not lolling about at some services, waiting to hop onto a lorry!

Goosebumps – that gesture with his throat!

Borders have been crossed; any measure of humanity has been left by the wayside.

If he hands in the kid here, he will go straight to one of those camps!

Erki stares at the road.

The number of red taillights increases; at every junction more and more vehicles crowd onto the motorway. In all these tin cans people sit, embedded in agitation. Some ignore him, some give him a friendly nod, others flash their headlights at him or show him the middle finger because his lorry is not convenient for this most important path of their life, the path to liberating work. And all this despite him being only a border-crossing messenger who brings products to their destination so that these people can buy them with their hard-earned cash.

The radio presenter announces the first accident on the A8 motorway. Help is on its way, he assures his listeners and unperturbed puts on: *Let the Sunshine In*.

Erki's mind revolves around one dizzying question: What should he do?

After all, he can't ferry this kid indefinitely through the countryside!

He wants to help him somehow.

But how?

Wait! Wasn't there that report about a lawyer couple two borders away who helps refugee children!

But that's a crazy idea! He can't even remember their names!

Maybe he should talk the whole thing through with Jana?

He throws a glance at the passenger seat; the little stinker is still sleeping soundly.

He hesitates for half an hour, then he dials the number, lets his call ring in the flat in Tallinn. It's quarter to nine there.

Jana is pleased about his call. Erki tells her about his eventful start to the day, describes Burhan, his sketches, shares his plan with her.

She sounds worried as she promises him to do her utmost.

Once they're parked at the services, he asks Burhan to hide on the cabin floor in front of the seat. The boy looks at him, trembling. Erki takes the street atlas from the glove compartment and shows him where they are, then runs his finger along the route they plan to cover over the next four days.

"Europe?" asks the kid.

Erki taps at the destination.

"Yes, Europe."

Burhan calms down and while he squats down in front of the seat, Erki quickly turns over his jumper collar, notes the size and leaves the cabin.

He finds clothes in the store that should fit, also buys soap, and then collects Burhan.

In the shower room the kid fusses, he doesn't want to take off his underwear. Erki can't afford to make a scene here, so he empties the shower gel over the pipsqueak, nudges him under the shower, lays out towel and clothes for him and waits outside.

He sees Jana's message on his smartphone.

She's found details and is trying to establish contact. But, please, he should be careful and think about them both, about their plans for the future!

Erki types his answer onto the screen: *Victor Hugo: Vous voulez la paix: creez l'amour!* (*You want peace: create love!)

Two days' worth of driving! He has to try!

Erki laughs, grabs Burhan by the shoulder. They climb back into the lorry.

The boy grins:

“Europe?”

In the cabin, there's now a pleasant scent of shower gel.



Turkey

Çiler İlhan

Saçınızı Soldan Ayıralım

Parting on the left

EUPL laureate 2011: *Sürgün* (Everest Yayınları)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1972, **Çiler İlhan** studied international relations and political science at Bosphorus University and then hotel management at the Glion Hotel School in Switzerland. Having worked as a hotelier, a freelance writer (*Boğaziçi*, *Time Out İstanbul*, etc.) and an editor (*Chat*, *Travel+Leisure*) at different periods of her life, İlhan, based in İstanbul, later worked as the public relations manager of the Çırağan Palace Kempinski hotel. She is currently the editor-in-chief of *Condé Nast Traveller Turkey*. In 1993, she received a prestigious youth award for a short story. The award was a tribute to the memory of Yaşar Nabi, a leading publisher and writer. İlhan's stories, essays, book reviews, travel articles and translations into Turkish have been published in a variety of journals and newspaper supplements.

Saçınızı Soldan Ayıralım

Çiler İlhan



Köpürmüş vaziyetteydim. Neden mesajlarıma hiç cevap vermiyorsun dedim. Sana söyledim Prenses, gözlerimden yedi kez ameliyat oldum, cep telefonu kullanırken zorlanıyorum dedi. Sakinleştirdim mi hayır.

Köpek gibi aşığım dedim Hale'ye. Ne güzel darısı başıma dedi. Ama nereden çıktı ki bu dedim. Hiç görmedim geldiğini. Kızım salak mısın aşk bu, randevu mu alacak senden. Gelir çarpar dedi.

İngilizcemi ilerleteceğim ve Facebook hesabı açacağım Prenses, dedi. Senin için.

Hiçbirini yapmadı.

Aslına bakarsanız onu değil hükümetini suçluyorum. Hollanda'nın devlet adamlarından feyz alıp yetişkin adayını henüz mini mini bir çocukken İngilizce derslerine başlataymış okulda, bana yazdığı şiiri kendi elleriyle İngilizceye çevirirdi, ben de böylece Google efendinin fail-i muhtar tercümesine minnet etmek zorunda kalmazdım.

Saçlarınızı soldan ayıralım dedi, Den Haag'a Fas'tan uçmuş bir leylek ailesinin ikinci kuşak akıllı kızı. Sol tarafınız daha güzel. Sol tarafıma ilk defa alıcı gözüyle baktım. Bana da güzel gözüktü. Sonra oturup şu cümleyi yazdım: "Acı çeken tarafımın sol tarafım olmasına rağmen yüzümün sol tarafından daha güzelim." Aynı cümlede müsrifçe kullanılmış

“taraf” kelimesi kulağında nahoş bir tat bıraktı, dudaklarını durumu asla tasvip etmez bir duyguyla büzdüm. Lakin sonra şu cümleyi yazınca, sende hala iş var dedim kendime: “Demek acının insanı güzelleştiren bir tarafı var.”

Ama Amal’ın yaptığı saç bir gün güzel oldu, bir daha olmadı. Seyit’i bir kez daha aradım. Telefonla değil, içimden. Evimden yürüye yürüye üç dakikada varırdım, saçlarımı taraf gözetmeden öyle bir keserdi ki üç-beş ay, daha dün kesilmiş gibi olurdu. Belki de İstanbul’un kendisinden çok, Seyit’in saçlarımı kral gibi kesivermesini özlüyorum. Olabilir. Normal biri değilim.

Ama kocam, saçların güzel böyle, diyor. Çok tatlıdır. Beni hep beğenir. Gerçi ara sıra onu sohbet esnasında masanın altından tekmelemem gerekiyor. Bin defa tembihlememe rağmen hep unutuyor, hiç o taraklarda bezi yok. Türk-İsveç karmasıym demek yerine alışmış ağzı, “Türküm” deyiveriyor. Sanki ardından devam edecek: “Doğruyum. Çalışkanım, yasam...” Halbuki Avrupalı atalarından bahsedince açılıyor kapılar. Şenleniyor ortamlar. Birden “biz” oluyoruz hep beraber. Parti havası. Benim kara saçlarıma, kara kaşlarıma, kırık dökük Hollandacama artık ses etmiyorlar. Evimizi bile kocamın Avrupalı genlerine borçluyuz. Yeni evimizde yaşaya yaşaya bir gün güzelce anladım, memnuniyetle söyledim: Aman da Avrupa’da olmak ne hoşmuş, dedim Hale’ye. Krakow’a uçtum, yurt içi fiyatına. Paris’e, Brüksel’e, Berlin’e Amsterdam’dan tren var. Atla git. Güzel tabii yeni mi anladın, hiç Avrupa yüzü görmemiş gibi konuşuyorsun dedi. Şaşırdım yüzüme baktım acaba niye böyle davranıyor.

Bir de dil kursundaki o kıza şaşıyorum. Beni devamlı zehirlemeye çalışıyor. Bu hoca iyi görünür ama ırkçıdır, bana niye Hollandalıyla evlendin dediği bir gün, dedi. Şimdi. Kızı tanımasam inanacağım. Dinle törenle işim yok deme-

me rağmen bana bayram şekeri getirmiş. Sonra da diyor ki benliğinden, kimliğinden utanma, gurur duy. Gülüm, üç yıldır bu memlekettesin toplam iki defa sinemaya gitmişsin, seni sevmeyen görümcenden (haklı) başka hiç arkadaşın yokmuş, elini sallasan 7'den 70'e gönüllü çalışan arıyorlar her yere, evde canım sıkılıyor diye sızlanıp duruyorsun. Ama! Bu hükümet daha ne yapsın? Bak Hollandaca öğren diye ayda beş kuruşa bu kursu açmış. Bir yandan bizlere Hollandaca öğretmeye çalışıyorlar, bir yandan da her gece televizyonda tartışıyorlar. Neyi? “Hep beraber nasıl daha uyumlu ve mutlu yaşarız”ı. Kimlerle? Üçte biri suyun altına kurulmuş bu ülke henüz üzerinde güneşin batmadığı bir imparatorlukken itinayla sömürülen kolonilerden gelen ya da getirilen süvari yerleşiklerle; Faslısı-Türkü-Polonyalısı 20. yüzyılın ortasında iş-güç sevdasıyla buraya göçmüşlerle; Ortadoğu çölleriyle Afrika kıyıları son zamanlarda (yeniden) darmaduman edilince canlarını zor kurtarıp sınırdan geçenlerle. Ne yapsın Hollanda, Yahudilerinin çoğunu bir zamanlar kendi elleriyle Nazilere teslim ettiyse. Afrika'ya dilini ithal edip oralarda dünya aleme örnek nizamda gettolar kurduysa. Biz de dininden mezhebinden dilinden dolayı baya insancık astık kestik; vergiyle öldürdük olmadı sürdük öldürdük, yürüttük öldürdük olmadı köyünde topa tuttuk daha olmadı dağda öldürdük; yetmedi otellerde yakıt yetmedi en taze ölülerini gömdükleri cenazelerde vurduk. Gıkımız çıkıyor mu. Bizden masumu yok. En azından şimdi uğraşiyor yargısız, tarafsız olmak için bu Hollanda insanları. Deniyorlar. Belgeler eşliğinde utanıp anıtlar eşliğinde özür diliyorlar. Hiç yoktan iyidir.

Zaten bu Avrupa dediğin tek dilli tek belli bir topluluk mu? Çeklerle Slovaklar, Slovaklarla Macarlar, Macarlarla Rumenler, Polonyalılarla Litvanyalılar, Belçikalılarla Hollandalılar, Hollandalılarla Almanlar, Almanlarla Avusturyalılar, Nor-

veçlilerle İsveçliler mesela, birbirini pek sevmez. Onlara sor-san Fransızlar kimseyi sevmez. (Ve Fransızları kim sevsin, derler. Ben severim. İnsan ayırmam.) Sordum bir gün Şair'e. Şimdi senin dilini şu eskiden bir olduğunuz komşu ülke anlıyor mu? Anlınız birbirimizi dedi. Peki dedim bölündünüz iyi mi oldu? Sanki cevap oradan gelecekmiş gibi, ucu o yaşta bile yerçekimine yenilmemiş hokka burnunun ucunu kaşdı. Omuzlarını silkip, iyi restoranlarla otellerin çoğu Çeklerde kaldı, dedi. Biraz buna sinir oluyorum.

Ama mesela dedim Hale'ye bir gün, yine sanaldan konuşuyorum, markette kasa sırasındayken kimsenin soluğunu enseme de duymamak, maaşın kaç lira, İstanbul'un neresindensin, niye tek çocukla kaldınız yapaydınız bir tane daha, kardeş lazım bu kıza, gibi gibi sorguya çekilmemek iyi geliyor insana. Varsın herkes devamlı havadan şikayet etsin. Suçsuz müvekkillerini savunan suçsuz avukatları işlerini yapıyorlar diye içeri atmıyorlar en azından bizim gibi; bu aralar İstanbul'da en popüler spor. Diyelim ki burada bisikletinle, birkaç milimetre yanlış yere çakılmış bir trafik işaretine çarptın; belediyeden tazminatını güzel güzel alırsın. Bizde tazminat, işkence sayesinde kemiklerin kemiklikten aklın akıllıktan çıksa bile hayal. Bizim oralarda mahkumlar kendilerine zarar vermeye bayılıyor nedense! Kendini merdivenden atmayaydın. Kafanı duvarlara çarpmayaydın. Ayaklarını falakaya yatırıp hayalarını elektriğe tutmayaydın. Kollarını ters çevirip organla o tavana asmayaydın ey mahkum efendi!

Suçtan suçsuzluktan konu açılmışken. Bir gün bizim kız çok ağladı. Normalde ağlar geçer, babası gibi hafif ruhludur, pek bir şeye takılmaz (bana çekmemiş şükür). O gün ağla da ağla; ne ağrı kesici ne bir şey, fena bu diş olayı. Korktum. Yandaki komşu bir şey zannedip polise haber verir de çocuğumu elimden alıverirler diye. O panikle artık nasıl bir şaklabanlık yaptıysam sustu uyudu minnoş. Kelly bana bugün diyor

ki arabada; “Ne yazık ki burada çocuğuna kötü davranan çok aile var. Komşum galiba kokain kullanıyor, emin olursam Çocuk Koruma’ya haber vereceğim, kızını çok zayıf ve mutsuz görüyorum kaç aydır.” Soruyorum: “Çok, ne kadar çok? Mesela bizde kadın derneklerinin güç bela polis raporlarından, onlara ulaşabilen şikayetlerden, üçüncü sayfa gazete haberlerinden derleyebildiği kadarıyla her gün bir kadın öldürülür. Sanırsız ki her üç çocuktan biri istismara uğramaktadır. Kayıtlara geçmeyen ve aile, mahalle, hastane, okul, yurt, köy, kasaba içinde imeceyle sümen altı edilen vakaları bilmeyiz bile. Tecavüze uğrarsın suçlu yine sen olursun. Şu an bir çocuk kaç yaşında evlenebilir, kaç yaşında hamile kalabilir onu tartışıyoruz.” Ağzı şaşkınlıktan açık kalıyor Kelly’nin. Ya, diyorum, kolay mı gelişmekte olan bir ülke olmak. Bazen gelişmez, geri gidersin. Siz havadan sudan yakının durun.

Sonra, dedim ki Hale’ye, yahu şeker, burada nanny¹ yok. İnanılmaz bir şey ama herkes kendi çocuğuna kendi bakıyor! Anneler, babalar, oma²’lar, opa³’lar, el birliğiyle sabah çocuğu okula bırak, öğleden sonra gel al, gerekirse dansa, gerekirse yüzmeye, gerekirse arkadaşına bırak, sonra yine git al, sonra koştur koştur eve gel akşam yemeği yap, sonra da çocukları temiz pak, mutlu mesut aynı saatte erkenden uyut. Bizdeki gibi restoranlarda kucakta, pusette, sandalyede yorgunluktan bayılan ya da ana babalar “haydi şimdi eller havaya!” nümayişi yaparken aslında onun için sokakta karşılaştığı X kişisinden hiçbir farkı olmayan bir Filipinli ya da Moldovyalı kadıncağzın elinde uyumaya çalışan çocuk yok. Ağlamıyor buradaki çocuklar. Çocukluğun her türden keyfini çıkarıp bir de üstüne adam yerine konuyorlar, diye ekledim. Ağlayan çocuk gör, yüzde doksan altı buçuk göçmen çocuğudur. Sen de mi insan ayırıyorsun, kocandan mı geçti, dedi. Yok dedim, istatistiki bilgi bu. Bilirsin gözlemciyimdir. Üşenmedim saydım. Ne yapayım normal biri değilim.

Evet normal biri değilsin, dedi Şair. Bizim evde de ayna var.
Nereme aşık oldun.

Gözlerine belki dedim. Belki ellerine. Ellerin tam sevdiğim
gibi, uzun ve kemikli.

Hep böyle kıskanç mıydın sen dedi. Kıskançlık değil bu de-
dim. Ne peki o zaman dedi. Köpürdüm yine. Köpek gibi özle-
yeceğimi bile bile. Çekip gittim.

Endnotes

1 İngilizce, dadı.

2 Hollandaca, büyükanne.

3 Hollandaca, büyükbaba.

Parting on the left

Çiler İlhan

Translated from Turkish by Feyza Howell

I was foaming at the mouth. Why do you never reply to my messages I asked. I've told you Princess, he said, I've had seven operations on my eyes, I find mobile phones a struggle. Did I calm down? Did I hell.

I told Gamze I was madly in love. Fabulous, me next, she said. But where did it come from anyway I asked. Never saw it coming. Don't be daft, this is love, not gonna ask for an appointment, is it? It'll just come and hit you she said.

I'll improve my English and get a Facebook account Princess, he said. For you.

Did neither though.

To be honest it's not him I blame, it's his government. If only they'd looked up to their Dutch counterparts and introduced teeny tiny tots to English with a view towards the future, right, he could have written a poem for me in English, thereby sparing me from gratitude for Mr Google's self-appointed translation tool.

Let's part your hair on the left, said the bright second-generation stork who had migrated from Morocco to Den Haag. *Uw linkerkant is mooier*. I examined my left side. She was right. It did look prettier. So I sat down and wrote: 'Although it's my left side that suffers, I'm prettier than my left side.' The profligate use of 'side' in a single sentence left a nasty taste in my mouth; I curled my lips disdainfully. After writing the next

one, however, you've still got it, I said to myself: 'So pain has a beautifying side effect.'

But Amal's style lasted no more than a day. I missed Seyit once again. Really missed him. A three-minute walk and I'd get to his salon, he'd give me such a lovely cut – one that worked on either side, by the way – that looked fresh for several months. Perhaps it's Seyit's effortlessly fantastic haircut I miss more than Istanbul itself. Whatever. I'm not normal.

But my husband says your hair's lovely. He's such a sweetie. Always flatters me. Must confess, though, he needs a kick under the table occasionally. If I told him once, I told him a thousand times, yet he still forgets. Instead of saying I'm half Turkish, half Swedish, he blurts out, 'I'm Turkish.' As if he'd burst into a patriotic chant next. Yet mention his European ancestors, and the doors burst open. Suddenly it's all smiles. Suddenly we're all 'us' together. A party mood. My dark hair, dark eyebrows and halting Dutch no longer stand out. We owe even our home to my husband's European genes. I enjoy living in our new home, and chirped one day: How lovely it is to be European, I exclaimed to Gamze. I flew to Krakow at a domestic fare. You can hop on a train to Paris, Brussels, and Berlin from Amsterdam. Of course it's lovely, she replied, just twigged, have you? Like you'd never been to Europe before! I stared in shock, whatever had brought that about?

Then there's the shocking girl on the language course. Constantly trying to poison me. This teacher looks OK, but he's a racist, once he asked why I'd married a Dutchman, she said. Right. I might have believed her if I didn't know her. Brought me festival sweets even though I'd made clear I hold no truck with religion or customs or anything. Then she goes and sez, don't be ashamed of your identity, be proud. Hunny, you've been here three years, only been to the flicks twice,

got no friends other than your sister-in-law who doesn't like you (and with good reason), they're looking for volunteers of all ages wherever you look, yet you whinge you're bored sitting at home. Well! What more should this government do? Look, they've launched this course for tuppenny-ha'penny so you could learn Dutch. They're not only trying to teach us Dutch, but also air nightly TV debates on *samenleven*. How to live more harmoniously and happily together, that is. With whom? With the early settlers from colonies methodically exploited when this land – a third of which lies below the sea – was an empire on which the sun never set, settlers brought in or arrived of their own accord, with the mid-20th century guest workers who'd flocked in from Morocco, Turkey or Poland, and with the refugees who'd escaped by the skin of their teeth from Middle Eastern deserts and African shores recently (once again) devastated. So the Netherlands once handed over the majority of their Jews to the Nazis? So they exported their language to Africa and founded exemplary ghettos there? We, too, have hanged and killed so many due to their religion or sect; we taxed them to death, didn't work, exiled them to death, didn't work, marched them to death, didn't work, shelled their villages, didn't work, killed them on mountains, didn't work; torched them in hotels didn't work shot them at funerals as they buried their latest dead. Hear us complain? Washed with driven snow we are. At least the Dutch are making an effort now to be objective, to be impartial. They're trying. Ashamed by monumental evidence, they apologise as they erect monuments. Better than nothing.

This thing you call Europe, anyway; it's not exactly a singular society with a single language, is it? There's not much love lost between Czechs and Slovaks, Slovaks and Hungarians, Hungarians and Romanians, Poles and Lithuanians, Belgians and the Dutch, Germans and Austrians, or Norwegians and

Swedes, for instance. And they all agree that the French like no one. (No one likes the French anyway, they add. I do. I don't discriminate.) I asked the Poet one day. The neighbouring country, the one that used to be part of yours, do they understand your language? We understand one another, he said. All right, I asked, was there a point to breaking up? He scratched the tip of his upturned nose that still defies gravity as if the answer lay there. Shrugged his shoulders and said the Czechs got most of the good restaurants and hotels. It's a bit annoying actually.

But like, I said to Gamze one day, we were on a video call as usual, it's great not to have someone breathing down my neck in the supermarket queue, or parry questions like how much is your salary, whereabouts in Istanbul do you live, why did you stop at one, your daughter needs a brother or sister. So what if everyone constantly moans about the weather? At least they don't bang up innocent lawyers defending innocent clients for doing their job like we do; that's the most popular sport in Istanbul at present. Say you crashed your bike into a traffic sign planted a few millimetres out of true: you'll get your compensation from the city council just like that. Compensation in Turkey, on the other hand, would be a dream even if your bones and your mind were tortured out of all recognition. Our convicts have a weird penchant for self-harm! Shouldn't have thrown yourself down the staircase. Shouldn't have smashed your head against the wall. Shouldn't have placed your feet in a bastinado, or passed electricity through your testicles. Shouldn't have fastened your hands behind your back and hung from the ceiling oh Mr Convict, should you?

Talking of guilt and innocence. One day our daughter cried a lot. She rarely cries for long, like her dad, she's quite easy going (thankfully doesn't take after me.) But on that occasion

she cried and cried, painkillers were useless, toothache is awful. I was scared. What if my next-door neighbour misunderstood and called the police and my daughter was taken away? Thankfully my little angel finally settled down, my panicked clowning worked. Kelly says in the car today, 'Sadly so many families mistreat their children. I think my neighbour's on cocaine; I'll inform Child Protection once I'm sure. Her daughter's looked too skinny and unhappy for months.' I ask: 'When you say so many, how many? With us, for instance, based on what women's associations can eke out from police reports, complaints that reach them and page three items, one woman is killed every day. One in every three children is believed to be a victim of abuse. That's excluding the incidents collectively brushed under the carpet in families, neighbourhoods, hospitals, schools, lodgings, villages or towns. You're the guilty party if you're raped. Right now we're debating the age a child can marry or fall pregnant.' Her jaw drops. See, I say, it's not easy, being a developing country. Sometimes you even regress instead of develop. Carry on grumbling about the weather.

Then, I said to Gamze, darling, no one has a nanny here. Incredible, I know, but everyone looks after her own children! Parents, *omas* and *opas* all pull together to drop them off at school in the morning, collect them in the afternoon, take them swimming or to their friends, then go back and collect them once again, then rush around to go back home and cook dinner, bath the children and put them to bed early in the evening. Everyone's happy. None of this letting them fall asleep on laps, in pushchairs or chairs in restaurants – or even trying to fall asleep in the arms of some hapless Filipina or Moldovan (who is no closer than some nondescript passer-by) as the parents clown around. Children don't cry here. They get to enjoy their childhood and they matter, I added. If

you see a crying child, you can be ninety six and a half per cent sure it's a migrant child. Are you discriminating now, something you got from your husband, she asked. No, I said, it's statistics. You know how observant I am. I took the trouble to count. I'm not normal, remember?

That's right, said the Poet, you're not normal. I got mirrors at home. What part of me did you fall in love with.

Your eyes perhaps I said. Perhaps your hands. They're just how I like them, long and bony.

Have you always been this jealous he asked. It's not jealousy I replied. What then he said. I was foaming at the mouth again. Knowing full well I'd miss him. Madly. I stormed off.



Latvia

Jānis Joņevs

Glābšana

Rescue

EUPL laureate 2014: *Jelgava '94* (Apgāds Mansards)

BIOGRAPHY

Jānis Joņevs is a Latvian writer. He was born in 1980 in Jelgava, Latvia. After studying at the local Gymnasium in Jelgava, he went to Riga for his higher education and earned a master's degree from the Latvian Academy of Culture. Has worked as a literary critic and a translator. Joņevs is best known for his debut novel *Jelgava '94* which was a bestseller upon its release in 2013. The book later won the EU Prize for Literature in 2014. So far the book has been published in France, Norway, Slovenia, Croatia, Estonia and the UK. He has been engaged in writing for the theatre and is currently also working on a short story collection.

Glābšana

Jānis Joņevs



Pieturā uz soliņa sēž četri, laiž apkārt pudeli. Nav patīkami uz viņiem skatīties. Vai ir izveidojusies cita rase? Viņiem ir kāds pavisam citas kategorijas vecums, visi maza auguma, tumšām sejām.

Tie, kas apkārt stāv, nav diez ko labāki, kurš grīļojas, kurš spļaudās, kurš vemj. Pensionāri atkāpušies patālu. Lauris stāv pusdistancē. Kāpēc šādā vietā viņam jāgaida trolejbuss? Bet nekas, viņš nav lepns. Tur ir arī viens tīneidžers, tāds no normālās pasaules, pagaidām. Tagad viņš te dīdās, čakarē savu telefonu. Muļķis. Protams, ka no zemes, no tuneļa tūlīt izlien drebelīgs, bet būdīgs radījums un piesienas jaunulim.

— Kas tas par telefonu? Jauns? Tas ir aifons vai tas nav aifons?

Īpašnieks atbild klusi, nemaz nepriecājas, ka līdzcilvēku interesē viņa jaukā manta.

— Baterija tur visu dienu?

Īpašnieks sāk stāstīt, pats sev līcis noticēt, ka te ir tehnoloģiju forums.

Tad pazemes cilvēks ķeras pie lietas:

— Iedod piezvanīt!

Tīneidžers negrib dot. Kā tā, viņi taču tik draudzīgi tērzēja. Žēl iedot uz minūti piezvanīt?

— Tu kas, baidies?

Nē, nebaidās viņš necik. Bet viņam jāiet divus soļus tālāk. Liekais nāk līdzī.

— Es tev ķīlu dodu!

Un dod savu keponu. Slima vārna tur pārkli netaisītu, nē, tā nav laba ķīla. Bet darījumam ir jānotiek, liels runā arvien uzstājīgāk, un telefonu jau tur divas rokas, liels rauj, bet saimnieks vēl neatlaiž. Apkārt ir pilns ar cilvēkiem. Taču visi skatās prom. Kurš pēta stacijas pulksteni, kurš sava delīrija ainas. Tomēr nē, ne visi. Lauris skatās uz telefona incidentu. Viņš sev saka: “Kas tad ir? Nekas. Vai tad tiešām nevar iedot piezvanīt. Cilvēks iedzēris, bļautīgs, kas tur.” Telefons jau ir nonācis pie lielā. Viņš saka, tūlīt atdošot, bet tīneidžers pieķeras viņa rokai, viņam nepatīk šī situācija. “Gan jau tūlīt atdos. Abi taču bezmaz sadraudzējās. Ja kas, es skatos.”

Viņiem pievienojas vēl kāds. Tas ir no tiem, kuri sēdēja uz sola. Viņš ir augumā mazāks par tīneidžeru, virs melnās jakas apkakles zvārstās žurkas profils. Viņš saka lielajam:

— Atpisies no viņa.

Un tas momentā atpišas. Atdod telefonu, tēlo vēl piedzērušāku:

— Ko es? Ko es?

Un aizvāžas projām. Viss, incidents beidzās.

Kopsavilkums. Tīneidžers ir liksms, telefons kā no jauna. Lielais ir visu jau aizmirsis, tikai sirdī palicis kāds mīklains aizvainojums, taču tā ir katru dienu. Mazais pieturas valdnieks ir apmierināts, viņš ir savā vietā, savā dzīvē. Tikai Lauris ir nelaimīgs.

Tai vakarā viņš devās mājās un domāja: “Es esmu glēvulis.” Viņš būtu varējis aizstāvēt to puiku. Viņš taču atcerējās, ka kādreiz – vairākkārt – viņam bija tieši tāpat, viņš zināja, kā tas puika jutās. Viņš taču gandrīz iejaucās. Viņš būtu iejaucies, ja liels tiešām neatdotu. Taču pieturas bandīts bija ātrāks par viņu. Kas tam uznāca par taisnīguma atavismu? Nolādētais, drosmīgais žurkcilvēks. Viņš padarīja Lauri par glēvuli.

Mamonovs teica, dažādi ir ceļi uz debesīm. Piemēram, jaunākais virsnieks, šāds un tāds, bet metas uz granātas, lai glābtu savus kareivjus. Pa taisno uz debesīm!

Virsnieks, iespējams, mēdza lamāties un reiz nozaga trīs galošas. Bet uz granātas viņš lēca nedomādams.

Mēs nelamājamies, apnicis. Un nezogam praktiski nemaz. Varbūt grāmatvedībā kaut kas nav tīrs, bet mēs neko, mēs tikai tīrām viņiem šautenes. Mēs esam normāli, un tas nav maz. Taču kur ir mūsu granātas? Varbūt mēs nemestos nedomādāmi, mēs mazliet padomātu, bet tad gan mestos!

Nē, lūdzu, nepārprotiet tur, augšā! Nevajag karu. Mūsu rāmā daba, mūsu šaubas ir uzvarējušas karu. Tas ir mūsu nopelns. Bet kā lai mēs zinām, kas mēs esam? Vai mums tomēr nevajag kādas mazas, rāmas granātas? Kādu mazu iespēju būt drosmīgam?

Tai pašā vakarā bija kāda svarīga balle. Sen nesatikti un svarīgi draugi, nezināmi cilvēki, kas noteikti jāiepazīst.

Lauris tikai precīzi nezināja, kur jāiet, norādes bija aptuvenas. Viņš mētājās apjucis no nama uz namu.

Pie kādām durvīm stāvēja džeks, kurš Laurim likās ne ta kaut kur redzēts, ne ar kādu citu saiti vienots... Varbūt tā lika domāt ilgošanās deformētie vaibsti. Lauris viņu uzrunāja:

— Lai veiksmīga diena! Vai šeit ir lielie svētki?

Džeks neskatījās uz viņu, tikai pateica:

— Aizvācieties, ļauj man domāt.

“Tāds rūgulis,” nodomāja Lauris un gāja iekšā, it kā būtu saņēmis apstiprinošu atbildi. Tikai ceturtajā stāvā Lauris atjēdzās: “Viņš man uzbrauca!”. Apstājās analizēt. “Kā viņš teica? Atpīties? Nē, ne atpīties. Drīzāk: “Kā lai es zinu ...” vai pat “Atvainojiet, man citas darišanas”. Bet tas “atvainojiet” bija pavisam

kluss. Lauris pagriezās un kāpa atpakaļ, viņš vēlreiz uzrunās svešo, lai saprastu, ko tad tas īsti gribēja teikt, ko īsti no sevis iedomājas. Jo zemāk viņš kāpa, jo skaidrāk apzinājās, ka svešais jau būs aizgājis, un jo vairāk viņu ienīda. Atkal. Piepildījās viņa lūgšana, bet viņš to atkal palaida garām. Tas ērms viņu pazemoja un aizgāja uzvarējis. Ak, kad es viņu kādu dieņu noķeršu...

Ērms stāvēja pirmajā stāvā, durvīs. Ieraudzījis Lauri, viņš teica:

— Es ļoti atvainojos!

Bet Lauris teica:

— Ko jūs! Par ko jūs vispār runājat?

Un uzcienāja svešo ar cigareti, kāpēc viņš te nokāpa, taču jau uzpīpēt. Svešais džeks jautāja:

— Te šovakar ir tā lielā balle?

— Kur tad citur. Te.

— Septiņpadsmitais dzīvoklis?

— Kurš tad cits.

Lai pierādītu savu legalitāti, Lauris tomēr atvēra aicinājuma īsziņu.

— Nē, tas ir, divdesmit trešais dzīvoklis.

— Jā, jā, tieši tā. Divdesmit trešais,

Svešais mīļuprāt piekrita.

— Tad jau tiekas!

— Noteikti.

Viņš likās tik redzēts, ka Lauris kautrējās iepazīties. Vai varbūt tomēr neredzēts. Vēlāk sapratīs. Lauris kāpa vēlreiz augšup, bet svešais palika, laikam vēl kādu gaida.

“Bet es vairs neko negaidīšu,” sev apsolīja Lauris. “Tūkstošreiz es esmu gaidījis. Tūkstošreiz ir bijusi šī sajūta, ka kaut kas pavisam noteikti notiks. Viss. Pietiek paranojas. Pietiek spļaut dzīvei acīs. Es vairs neko negaidu, es vienkārši dzīvoju, un šovakar es normāli socializēšos.”

Nevarēja ieraudzīt nevienu pazīstamu. Lauris nolika savu burbonu uz dzērienu galda un gāja meklēt savējos. Nevienu neatrada, sāka šaubīties, vai viņš vispār ir īstajā ballē, vai tas vispār ir viņš, kas te atnācis.

Aiz loga vakars krita pār pilsētu, jumti, dzegas, skursteņslauķi, pazuda viss, kas nupat vēl bija redzams, bet meitene palika pie loga un skatījās. Lauris skatījās uz meiteni, ne jau acīs – kā gan viņš to varētu, ja viņa skatās pa logu. Domas aizklīda un pazuda, bet pēkšņi viņš bija iekūlies sarunā un kāds teica:

— Es ar tevi runāju! Kur ir normālā kola?

Lauris paskatījās uz galdu, tur stāvēja divas divlitrīgās kolas pudeles.

— Tās ir parastās! Man vajag zero!

Lauris paskatījās uz runātāju un nodomāja: “Par vēlu, vecais!” Tas bija kāds aptusis teftelis, pikts, jo rokā viņam bija glāze ar brūno, bet, lūk, trūka ar ko atjaukt. Viņš nenomierinājās:

— Tu izdzēri visu zero kolu, lempi?

Tas bija kas traks! Visi šovakar gānīs Lauri? Viņš ieskatījās tušņa sejā. Patiešām, tas bija Herberts no Laura skolas! Tikai labi uzpampis, buržuazējies līdz nepazīšanai, tomēr nenoliedzami viņš.

— Kam tev kola? Tu agrāk krutkai uzdzēri Lielupes ūdeni.

Un ko tikai vēl Herberts nedarīja. Ejošā vilcienā pārlīda no loga uz logu, tāpat vien, ponta pēc. Tagad viņš vilies nolika glāzi, paņēma granātābolu, sāka to mīcīt.

— Tāpēc jau cilvēks aug. Tev arī vajadzētu.

Lauris gribēja apskaut Herbertu par šo jaunības apliecinājumu, bet nebija drošs, vai pietiks roku garuma.

Meitene pameta logu, pienāca pie dzērienu galda, ko mūsu kungi nepameta ne brīdi, un teica:

— Tur ārā uz jumta kāds ir.

Herberts, tā arī neko neiesācis ar granātābolu, pameta to Laurim, paņēma savu glāzi bez visas kolas. “Izrādās! Tāds vecis, dzer tīro! Izrādās meitenei!” uzreiz nodomāja Lauris. Sacensības dēļ arī viņam meitene uzreiz iepatikās. Viņš pabeidza savu kokteili un ielēja sev arī tīru. Neviens no abiem neieklaušījās meitenes vārdos, un viņa sāka pētīt savu telefonu.

— Ai, gadi, gadi, ko ne, vecais?

Tā Lauris.

— Kas ar gadiem?

Pretī jautāja Herberts.

— Tad tev nekādu kolu nevajadzēja! Toreiz mēs ar cirvjiem sitām zivis un jēlas leksējām!

— Tu jau toreiz nebiji!

Patiešām, Lauris bija piemirsis, ka par šo piedzīvojumu bija tikai dzirdējis. Bet kāpēc Herbertam vajadzēja tā teikt. Viņš saskuma un teica:

— Agrāk bija dzīve.

Viņš nebija pamanījis, ka blakus stāvēja kāds nepazīstams bārdainis, un tagad šis jaucās sarunā:

— Es joprojām esmu dumpinieks! Redzat, es valkāju armijas bikses! Un es nevairoš kāpt peļķēs!

Tas ieinteresēja Herbertu:

— Tiešām kāp peļķēs?

— Jā, gadās!

— Tu esi kreizī džeks! Varbūt par daudz tomēr riskē?

Meitene telefonā bija atradusi ko tādu, ar ko gribēja dalīties:

— “Latviešu vīriešus dzen pašiznīcināšanās instinkts.”

— Tas par tevi!

Herberts piebakstīja bārdainim. Meitene lasīja tālāk:

— ““Adrenalīns, vēlme sajust, ka esi dzīvs,” skaidro psihoterapeite Ašmane.”

Neviens nezināja, ko īsti teikt. Meitene atkal piegāja pie loga, atkal skatījās. Kaut kas tur bija, un viņa vēra logu vaļā. Meitene izliecās ārā, tālu, svārku mala pacēlās un atklāja zeķu mežģīnes, bet meitene teica:

— Tur ir kaķis!

It kā tas kādu interesētu, tūlīt pie palodzes savācās ļaudis.

— Kur tad ir? Nav.

Bet tiešām, tumsā, ja skatījās tik ilgi, ka jau apnika, bija redzamas divas zaļas acis. Kāds praktiskais prāts pagrāba deju atmosfērai paredzēto prožektoru un pagriezta uz ārpusi.

— Jā!

Meitene rādīja ar pirkstu. Uz stikla jumta pusstāvu zemāk varēja saskatīt pelēku kumšķi. Vai tad kaķi ir tik mazi?

— Pavisam mazs kaķēns! Kā viņš tur gadījies?

Bārdainis bija no tiem, kas visu zina:

— Tie tādi kaķi, kas dzīvo uz jumta. Ir tādi.

— Bet tik mazs!

Jumta kaķis sakustējās. Lūk, viņš spēra soli, bet nemācēja vēl jumta kaķu trikus, paslīdēja un uz vēdera nošļūca vienu jumta posmu zemāk. Tas viņam pašam varbūt šķita amizanti, taču tā viņš pietuvojās jumta malai, aiz kuras četri stāvi tukšuma un tramvajs. Meitenes ievaidējās.

— Kaut kas ir jādara!

Tā viena bija pa īstam satraukusies. Kaķēnam sametās garlaicīgi un viņš nošļūca vēl metru uz leju.

— Jāsauc ugunsdzēsēji!

Bārdainis štukoja:

— Ugunsdzēsēji atbrauks pēc pusstundas, labi, ja. Sastrēgumi. Un pagaidām kaķis iet lejā ar ātrumu, mhn, metrs trīs minūtēs. Līdz malai palicis... nepaspēs! Tas ir droši.

Herberts viņam teica:

— Tad ko? Tu taču pat no peļķēm nebaidies.

Lauris sajuta, ka tas atkal ir klāt, kāds cits, vai bārdains vai kāds, būs tur, kur ir jābūt viņam. Viņš bija lūdzis šo situāciju (varbūt ne gluži tādu, bet ok). Viņam atkal grib to atņemt. Nē, šis nav par kaķi vai sacensību, šis ir personisks vēstījums tikai viņam vienam.

— Nē, es pats!

Viņš iesaucās, it kā viņš tiešām būtu nometis šo kaķagabalu uz jumta.

Lauris izspraucās caur mazo drūzmu un hop! – izlēca pa logu.

Nekāds lielais lēciens tas nebija, kājas vien jāpārmet pār palodzi. Tepat bija tas jumts. Vakara gaiss ieplūda Laurī, un viņš sajuta, kā mirkli iedarbojas viss izdzertais burbons. “Tieši tas, kas man šobrīd vajadzīgs,” viņš nočukstēja un spēra pirmo soli. Jums bija diezgan slīps. Šis ir tas mirklis, par ko viņš ir sapņojis, viņš ir varonis prožektora gaismā, tagad nav istā reize pielaist bikses. Domāt tikai par nākamo soli.

Kaķis bija jau pavisam klāt. Plaukstas izmēra, pūkains. Jau var ieskatīties acīs, tur ir bailes un nekaunība. Lauris izstiepa roku –

Kaķis pieauga sekundes laikā, tas ir, ne jau izmērā, bet veiklībā. Izvairījās no rokas un aizjoza augšup, sākumā vēl pāris reizes nospolēja, bet tad aiztesās smieklīgiem lēcieniem svētku loga virzienā.

— Kaķi, kaķi, kaķi!

Meičas spiedza kā Hosielas koncertā.

— Uzmanies –

Laurim izlauzās kāda vēl nebijusi emocija. No loga skanēja meitenes balss:

— Noķēru! Ā – viņš mani apčurāja!

— Viņš ir lielisks,

atzina Lauris, un kratījās apbrīna smieklos. Viņš neatcerējās, kad būtu tik labi juties.

Viņš redzēja, kā cilvēku murskulis ar kaķi vidū pārceļas dzīvokļa vidienē.

Nē, viņi vienkārši mani aizmirsu. Ģeniāli. Viņiem nevajag varoni.

Tāpat kā es neesmu jūsu. Viņš nemaz negribēja iet atpakaļ. Lauris paskatījās apkārt, lejā. Upe tecēja, un tramvajs tecēja, un cilvēki tecēja. Tikai viņš viens bija izkritis no eksistences, nekustīgs universa centrs.

Troksnis iedūrās kā adata, tas tiešām izklausījās kā šāviens. Un spiedienu koris. Nē, gulētāja istabā nekas nemainījās. Saļūts? Lauris paskatījās uz balles logu. Tur skaidri bija redzams siluets, viņš pazina šo profilu, tas bija nervozais džeks, ko viņš satika lejā. Viņa roka bija pavērsta uz griestiem, un tajā bija pistole. Viņš izšāva vēlreiz, bira apmetums, un viņš kļiedza, vārdi krita asi un noteikti. Neviens neatbildēja. Svešais pagriezās un devās prom. Klusums.

“Kāpēc atkal?” gribēja jautāt Lauris. Bet nē. Viņš saprata. Kaķis bija viņu izglābis no nāves vai no glēvulības.

Rescue

Jānis Jonevs

Translated from Latvian by Kaija Straumanis

Four guys sit on the bench, passing around a bottle. They're not easy on the eyes. Are they the dawning of a new race? They're of indeterminate age, all with short builds and dark faces.

The others standing by them aren't much better; staggering, spitting, vomiting. The elderly people waiting at the stop keep their distance. Lauris stands between the groups. Why does a tram stop like this have to be his stop? No matter, he's not arrogant. There's a teenager waiting, too, a kid from the normal side of things, for the time being. The kid is fidgeting and playing with his phone. Idiot. Of course, a jittery, but large figure emerges from the underground passage and approaches the kid.

- What kind of phone is that? Is it new? An iPhone, or something?

The kid replies in a quiet voice, not at all thrilled that this guy is interested in his fancy toy.

- Does it stay charged up all day?

The kid starts to tell him about the phone, as if convincing himself that this is a forum for technology.

Then the guy cuts to the chase:

- Let me make a call!

The teenager doesn't want to give him the phone. But why not, they were getting along so well. Can't he just let the man make a quick call?

- You afraid or something?

No, the kid isn't afraid. But he takes two steps back. The big guy follows him.

- I've got collateral!

And he hands the kid his hat. A diseased crow wouldn't build a nest in that thing, no, it's not great collateral. But the transaction has to happen, the big guy keeps insisting, and now there are two hands on the phone; the man is pulling on it, but the kid isn't letting go. They are surrounded by people. But all of them are looking away. Checking the station clock, daydreaming. But not everyone. Lauris is watching the incident with the phone. He says to himself: "So what. Big deal. Just let the guy make a call. He's drunk and loud, nothing more." Now the big guy has the phone. He's saying he'll give it right back, but the teenager grabs his arm, he doesn't like where this is going. "He'll probably give it right back. They're practically friends. Worst case, I've got my eye on them."

Then someone steps in. It's one of the guys who had been sitting on the bench. He's shorter than the teenager, the face above the collar of the black jacket has the profile of a rat. He says to the big guy:

- Piss off.

And he does. He gives the phone back to the kid, and pretends to be even more drunk than he is:

- What'd I do? What?

And he wanders off. That's it, it's over.

In short: the teenager is happy, he has his phone back. The big guy has already forgotten it all, leaving with only a foggy awareness of feeling offended, but that's how he feels every

day. The squat ruler of the tram stop is pleased with himself; he's in his place, his life. Lauris is the only unhappy one.

That night Lauris went home and thought: "I'm a coward." He could've defended that kid. He could remember – on multiple occasions – finding himself in that same situation, he knew how the kid had felt. Lauris had almost stepped in. He would have stepped in, if the big guy hadn't given the phone back. But the tram-stop bandit was quicker than him. What had sparked that atavism of social justice? Goddamn ballsy rat-face. He had made Lauris a coward.

Mamonov said there were several roads to heaven. For example, a junior officer, just your average guy, throws himself on a grenade to save his soldiers. A straight ticket to heaven!

Or maybe the officer had a tendency to curse and once stole three galoshes. But he threw himself on that grenade without so much as a second thought.

We don't curse; we're tired of it. And we barely ever steal. There may be a few issues with the bookkeeping, sure, but that's not on us – we just clean their guns. We're normal people, and that's saying a lot. But where are our grenades? We may not throw ourselves on them without thinking, we'd mull it over a bit, but we'd throw ourselves on them all the same!

No, please don't misunderstand, you up there! We don't need a war. Our serene nature and our doubts have won the war. That's our reward. But how are we supposed to know who we are? Don't we need a small, peaceful grenade? One small opportunity to be brave?

There was an important party that same night. Friends he hasn't seen in a while, influential friends, and new people whom he definitely should get to know.

Only Lauris didn't know where exactly to go; the directions to the party were approximate at best. So he wandered from building to building.

By the door to one of the apartment buildings stood a guy Lauris had never seen before, but felt like perhaps he had ... Maybe it was the guy's expression, distorted by frustration, that made Lauris think that. Lauris addressed him:

- Hope things are well! Is this where the big party's at?

The guy didn't look at him, but replied:

- Fuck off, let me think.

"Someone's grumpy," Lauris thought, and went inside, as if the guy had answered in the affirmative. It wasn't until the fourth floor that it hit Lauris: "He told me to fuck off!" Lauris stopped to think. "What did he say again? Fuck off? No, not fuck off. Rather: 'How should I know ...' or even 'Sorry, I have somewhere to be.' But the 'sorry' had been half-whispered." Lauris turned to go back down, he'd confront the guy, ask him what, exactly, he had meant to say, who he thought he was. The further downstairs he went, the more he realised the guy would already be gone, and the more Lauris hated him. Again. Once again his wish had come true, and once again he had let the opportunity slide. This ass had made a fool of him and left triumphant. Man, if I ever catch that guy.

And there the guy was, standing in the doorway on the ground floor. He saw Lauris and said:

- I'm so sorry!

But Lauris said:

- No worries! What are you even on about?

And he offered the stranger a cigarette, which is why he came downstairs, to smoke. The guy asked:

- Is this where the big party is tonight?

- Yup. Where else.

- Apartment seventeen?

- Of course.

To prove he was legitimate, Lauris double-checked the invitation text message.

- No, wait, it's apartment twenty-three.

- Right, right, yes. Twenty-three.

The guy eagerly agreed.

- Then see you there!

- Absolutely.

He seemed so familiar that Lauris was too embarrassed to introduce himself. Or maybe they really hadn't ever met before. He'd figure it out later. Lauris headed upstairs once more, but the stranger stayed out front, possibly to wait for someone.

"But me, I'm not waiting anymore," Lauris told himself. "I've waited a thousand times over. A thousand times it's felt like something is just about to happen. But enough. I'm done with the paranoia. Done with spitting in life's face. I'm not going to wait for anything anymore, I'm going to live, and tonight I'm just going to hang out."

He didn't see anyone he recognised. Lauris set down his bourbon on the drink table and went to find his friends. When he couldn't find them, he started to question whether he was at the right party, whether he was even really *there*.

Evening settled down over the city, the roofs, the eaves, the chimney sweeps, everything that had been visible until then now disappeared – but the girl staring outside stayed by the window. Lauris looked at the girl, but not in the eyes, how could he when she was looking out the window? His thoughts wandered and then dissipated, but then he suddenly found himself in conversation with someone who was saying:

- I'm talking to you! Where's the Coke?

Lauris glanced at the table, where there were two two-litre bottles of Coke.

- That's regular Coke! I need Coke Zero!

Lauris looked at the speaker and thought: "Too late, buddy!" It was some half-drunk partygoer who was pissed because he had a glass of liquor in his hand and nothing to mix it with. He didn't back down:

- You drink all the Coke Zero, jackass?

What was this! Was everyone going to get on Lauris's case tonight? He took a closer look at the guy. It was, it was Herberts, from Lauris's school! He was bulked up now, dressed to the nines and unrecognisable, but it was Herbert.

- What do you need Coke for? You used to chase moonshine with water from the Lielupe River.

What hadn't Herbert done back then. He'd climb out of one window and back into the next on a moving train just for laughs. Now he put down his glass in frustration, picked up a pomegranate, and began to knead it.

- That's why people grow up. You should try it.

Lauris wanted to hug Herberts for this acknowledgement of their youth, but he wasn't certain his arms could reach all the way around him.

The girl stepped away from the window and approached the drink table, where Lauris and Herberts were still standing, and said:

- Something's out on the roof.

Herberts tossed the pomegranate to Lauris and picked up his glass, sans Coke. "He's showing off! A real man, drinking liquor straight! He's showing off for the girl!" Lauris thought. Suddenly Lauris liked the girl too, for sake of competition. He downed his cocktail and poured himself some liquor. Neither of them had heard what she had said, so the girl turned her attention to her phone.

Lauris spoke:

- Ah, the years, the years, you know, man?

Herberts asked in reply:

- What about them?

- You didn't need any Coke back then! Back then we'd bludgeon fish with axes and then swallow them raw!

- You weren't there for that!

It was true, Lauris had forgotten that he'd only heard about this incident. But why did Herbert have to point it out. Lauris grew sad and said:

- Those were the days.

He didn't notice the bearded stranger standing next to them who had joined them. Now the newcomer interrupted their conversation:

- I'm still a rebel! See, I'm wearing cargo pants! And I don't avoid puddles!

Herberts found that interesting:

- You really walk right through puddles?

- Yeah, it happens!

- Well, you're just bad news! Maybe you're taking too many risks?

The girl found something on her phone that she wanted to share with the rest of them:

- "Latvian men are driven by an instinct for self-destruction."

Herberts elbowed the bearded guy.

- That's you!

The girl kept reading:

- "Adrenaline, the desire to feel that you're alive,' explains psychotherapist Ašmane."

No one knew what to say. The girl went back to the window, stared out of it again. There was something out there, and she opened the window. She leaned out, far out, and the hem of her skirt rose to reveal the lace of her stockings. The girl announced:

- There's a cat out there!

A group of people drew toward the window as if it were something really exciting.

- Where? I don't see it.

But if you stared into the darkness long enough, until you were about sick of it, you could make out two green eyes. One practical-minded person grabbed the spotlight intended to lend the party some atmosphere and pointed it out the window.

- There!

The girl pointed. They could make out a small, grey shape on the glass roof half a story down. Could a cat really be that small?

- It's a tiny kitten! How did it get there?

The bearded guy spoke, apparently a know-it-all:

- There're cats like that, that live on roofs. Roof cats.

- But it's so small!

The roof cat moved. It took a step, but hadn't yet learned the tricks to being a roof cat, and it slipped and slid down the roof a ways on its stomach. The cat may have found it fun, but it was nearing the edge of the roof, beyond which was a four-storey drop and tram tracks. The girls wailed.

- Someone do something!

The first girl was really upset. The kitten grew bored, and then slid another metre down.

- We should call the fire department!

The bearded guy mulled this over:

- The firemen would get here in half an hour, if even. Traffic. And the cat is going down fast, say, one metre every three minutes. By the time it hits the edge ... they won't make it in time! That's for sure.

Herberts said:

- So then what? You're the one who's not even afraid of puddles.

Lauris felt that this was it, that someone, the bearded guy or someone else, was going to be where he was supposed to be. He had wished for this moment (well, maybe not this exact

one, but okay). And again it would be stolen from him. No, this wasn't about a cat or a competition, this was a message for him and him alone.

- I'll do it!

He shouted this as if he had been the one to throw the kitten out onto the roof.

Lauris pushed his way through the small crowd and there! He jumped out the window.

It wasn't far to jump, he just had to swing his legs over the windowsill. And the roof was right there. The evening air flooded into Lauris and for a moment he felt the effects of all the bourbon he'd consumed. "Just what I need right now," he whispered to himself and took a step. This was the moment he'd been dreaming of, he was the hero in the spotlight – this was not the time to piss himself. Just think about the next step.

He had almost reached the kitten. A fluffy mass, big as his hand. He could see its eyes, filled with fear and impishness. Lauris reached out his hand –

The cat grew in a second, not in size, but in agility. It dodged him and scrambled upward; it slid down a few more times, but then galloped awkwardly toward the window and the party.

- Kitty, kitty, kitty!

The girls squealed like they were at a *Hospitaļu iela* concert, chanting for the band to sing its song "Cat".

- Watch out –

An unknown emotion blossomed in Lauris. A girl's voice came from the window:

- I caught it! Gah! It peed on me!

“Good cat,” Lauris thought, and started to shake with laughter. He couldn't remember the last time he felt that good.

He could see the crowd of people surrounding the cat migrate to the centre of the apartment.

No, they all forgot about me. Awesome. They didn't need a hero.

And I'm not your hero. He didn't want to go back in. Lauris looked around, down. The river flowed along, the trams moved along, the people walked along. He was the only one who had fallen out of existence, the immovable centre of the universe.

The sound pierced him like a needle, it sounded exactly like a gunshot. And then a chorus of screams. Fireworks? Lauris looked up at the window he'd climbed out of. He could clearly make out a silhouette; he knew that profile, it was the cagey guy whom he'd met out front. His hand was pointed at the ceiling, and it was holding a gun. He fired again, plaster rained down, and he was shouting, the words falling sharp and precise. No one answered. The silhouette turned and left. Then, Silence.

“Seriously, again?” Lauris wanted to ask. But no. He understood. The kitten had rescued him, be it either from death or from cowardice.



Serbia

Jelena Lengold

Jasmin i smrt

Jasmine and death

EUPL laureate 2011: *Vašarski Mađioničar* (Arhipelag)

BIOGRAPHY

Born on 15 July 1959 in Serbia, **Jelena Lengold** has published fourteen books: seven books of poetry, six books of short stories and a novel. Her books have been published in the UK, the USA, Italy, Bulgaria, Denmark, Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Albania, Slovenia and Poland. She worked as a journalist and an editor on the culture desk at Radio Belgrade, and later worked as a project coordinator at Nansenskolen Humanistic Academy in Lillehammer, Norway. Since September 2011 she has been a freelance artist, dedicated to writing as her only profession. She lives in Belgrade, and has received many awards in Serbia. She received the European Union Prize for Literature in 2011 for the short-story collection *The Fairground Magician*. Her new novel *Giving Up* will be published in 2018.

Jasmin i smrt

Jelena Lengold



Kao san koji odbija da me napusti čak i onda kad sam već odavno budna, takva je ta misao o njemu. Lagani doručak, kakav uvek spremam pred let avionom, zvuk koji ispušta toster dok poletno izbacuje krišku hleba uvis, miris čaja koji ispunjava malu kuhinju, u kojoj još vlada polumrak, jer svanulo je tek sa druge strane zgrade, pogled u frižider, hoću li bilo šta da stavim na tost, ne, ipak ništa, suviše nestrpljiva čak i da bih sažvakala zalogaj, samo progutati taj hleb, samo ga zaliti čajem, tek toliko da mi ne bude muka. Pa ipak, sve vreme dok to radim, i dalje sam u snu. Nisam se probudila i neću se probuditi.

Prošlo je skoro mesec dana otkad smo ležali u njegovom krevetu, tamo na četvrtom spratu, u sobi sa malim krovnim prozorima, zbog kojih izgleda kao da spoljni svet i ne postoji. Samo nebo, kiša, zvezde. Vetar koji ponekad noću prelazi preko stakla i daje nam opravdanje da se stisnemo još više jedno uz drugo. Negde dole, daleko ispod nas, u svetu koji ne vidimo, grad živi svoj život, koji i liči i ne liči na ostatak Osla. Uvek obećavam da ću jednom sići i kupiti velike plave patlidžane, strukove celera i peršuna, i napraviti neko neobično jelo koje Karsten nikad nije probao. Ali za to ne bude vremena. Vodimo ljubav, jedemo pahuljice u mleku, i onda opet vodimo ljubav. To je taj san iz kog se ne budim. Ruka koja ređa zrna suvog grožđa po meni, kao dugmad na Deda Mrazu. Zatim ih pojede, jedno po jedno, odozgo na dole. Dok se

zvezde u prozoru rastapaju i objavljuju dan. Uvek suviše brzo. Ponekad, ipak, odlučimo da pogledamo kako izgleda svet, pa sidemo zavojitim stepenicama, izađemo na ulicu, utopimo se u masu, hodamo između turista, biciklista, šetača pasa, žena u burkama koje vode decu za ruke, obilazimo trotoare prepune tezgi sa voćem i povrćem. Ovaj grad mi uvek izgleda drugačije kad hodam pored tebe, kaže Karsten. Iako sam u njemu proveo čitav život. Smejem se. Šta je drugačije? Boje, kaže on, boje! Nekako, uopšte nisam svestan svih ovih boja kad idem sam. I zaista, iznad prenatrpane piljarnice okačena je zelena reklama za pivo, odmah kraj nje, na prvom spratu, dve žardinjere pune crvenog cveća, mnogo šarenih suncobrana ispred svake radnje, prugaste tende iznad robe, čistač ulice u jarko narandžastim pantalonama, hrpe banana i dinja u svim nijansama žute, starica divne srebrne kose koja bira jagode. Ovaj kvart ima svoje boje, mirise koji su drugačiji na svakom uglu, svoj zvuk koji je mešavina dečije cike, kombija koji uvek nešto čekaju upaljenog motora, pulsiranja semafora, zvonca bicikala, kolica koja se kotrljaju po pločniku natovarena svim i svačim, ljudi koji pričaju u slušalice okačene na ušima, obično na jezicima koji su mi nerazumljivi. Držim ruku u džepu Karstenove jakne, čas prepletemo prste, pa onda opet celu moju šaku obuhvati svojom. I tako do kafea. Tamo naručimo espresso i grickamo plastične kašičice. Onaj svet je i dalje na ulici i mi se pretvaramo da mu pripadamo. A nešto dalje, u zgradi, na četvrtom spratu, čeka nas jastuk koji čuva oblike naših lobanja, čak i kad mi nismo u sobi. I čaršavi koji mirišu na dve prethodne noći. To je taj san.

Srećan put, kaže vozač taksija iznoseći moj mali kofer na pločnik, i to je prvi i poslednji put da čujem njegov glas. Mahnem mu kao starom znancu i on se nasmeje kao da zna gde idem. Žene koje žure i koje su u rano jutro već tako razdragane. Taksisti uvek znaju. Vidim ga levim okom kako

stoji kraj automobila i gleda za mnom. Ispravljam leđa i ulazim u aerodromsku zgradu. Moje potpetice odzvanjaju sve dok me kružna vrata ne ubace unutra, u sveopšti žamor.

Jedan tamnopusi čovek je stajao u redu, tačno iza mene. Visok, u običnoj beloj košulji. Opoljeni konopcima išli smo ka čekiranju i napredovali sporo, korak po korak. Svi osim njega nešto su proveravali po svojim torbicama, dovikivali se međusobno, nestrpljivo gledali na sat, samo je on stajao mirno, kao da nigde nije žurio. Kad god bi se red pomerio, on bi mirno napravio još jedan korak. I tako sve do žute linije, koju sam prešla pre njega i predala svoj kofer. Zatim sam ga zaboravila, onako kako zaboravimo lice prodavca novina u nepoznatom gradu. Probijala sam se kroz masu ljudi, nisam ni morala da pratim slova i strelice, znala sam ovaj put napamet. Već šesti put idem kod Karstena. Uvek istim letom, uvek sa istog gejtta.

Kraj mene je prošlo nekoliko kosookih stjuardesa koje su za sobom kotrljale svoje ručne prtljage. Bile su nestvarno lepe i istovetne. Njihove crvene marame bile su vezane na isti način. Čvrsto stegnute punde ispod malih sivih kapa stajale su isto. Bezbroj očiju na aerodromu za trenutak je pogledalo za njima, a zatim je ta ledeno elegantna lepota nestala niz hodnike.

Bilo je još vremena do polaska. Ušla sam u radnju s parfemima i njuškala bočice. Prinela sam jednu od njih svom vratu i nameravala da prsnem. I tada sam ga ponovo ugledala kraj sebe, onog tamnopusog muškarca sa čekiranja. Mora biti da je imao veoma nečujan hod, jer nisam shvatila da je došao do mene, dok nije progovorio. Obratio mi se kao da se već odavno znamo. Ne taj parfem, rekao je. Ako ćeš već sedeti do mene, voleo bih da mirišeš na jasmin. Kako je mogao znati da ću sedeti do njega? Nisam to ni stigla da ga

pitam, jer mi je dotakao lakat, odveo me do sledeće gondole i pokazao jednu bočicu. Zaista bih voleo da tako mirišeš. Ja sam Ahmed, kazao je, i pružio mi ruku. Sada ćemo ti i ja proći kroz baštu jasmína, rekao je.

Malena prodavačica, sa drugog kraja prostorije, pomalo zabrinuto je gledala u nas dvoje. U mene, koja ćutke radim ono što Ahmed želi, i u njega koji uzima bočicu, rasprsné polukrug po vazduhu i kaže, evo, sad ćemo proći kroz ovo i miris će ostati na nama. Ukoračili smo u jasmín. Udahni duboko, rekao je Ahmed. To je miris koji sam, kao dete, osećao pod prozorom svako jutro kad bih se probudio, a danas bih želeo da taj miris stalno bude oko mene.

Komadić straha skliznuo je iz mog mozga negde u grudí i tu je zastao, zbunjen. Želela sam da se okrenem i pobegnem, da se vratim putem kojim sam i došla, nazad do carinika, pa u taksí, pa u bezbednost svog stana. I istovremeno, želela sam da pogledam ravno u najtamnije oči koje sam ikada videla i da upitam Ahmeda ono što mi se tog časa činilo sasvim izvesnim: znači li to da ćemo danas umreti? Zašto baš sa mnom? Zašto na ovom letu? Zar ne shvata da Karsten verovatno baš sad zateže čiste čaršave na krevetu i nestrpljivo provlači prste kroz kosu?

Čulo se kako iz zvučnika pozivaju putnike za naš let. Hodali smo jedno kraj drugog, Ahmed i ja, i službenici koji su pregledali naš ručni prtljag i propustili nas kroz metalnu kapiju najverovatnije su mislili da smo par, neobičan, ali par. Čekala sam dok je Ahmed vraćao svoj kaiš na pantalone i vezivao pertle. Carinik je gledao u mene, pomno i prazno, istovremeno. Uzvratila sam mu pogled, ravno u oči, a zatim nekoliko puta brzo pogledala u pravcu Ahmeda. Ništa. Carinik nije ni trepnuo. Uzalud očekujem neku pomoć od njega. Zbogom dakle, ni tebe više nikad neću videti, baš

kao ni taksistu, baš kao ni prodavačicu parfema, zbogom svima vama koji ne umete da razumete moj pogled. Na ovom svetu je previše ljudi koji olako prelaze preko tuđih pogleda, pomislila sam. Pa kad je već tako, onda zbogom. Ništa nisam rekla, ušla sam za Ahmedom u avion. Bledi oblak jasmína išao je za nama, kao nečujni korak neizbežnog. Motori Boinga su zaurrali, točkovi su dobili ubrzanje, zemljina teža nas je na tren prikovala za sedišta i to je bilo to. Leteli smo. Niko oko mene nije ni slutio koliko visoko smo poleteli.

Šta se desilo sa žbunovima jasmína iz tvog detinjstva, pitala sam Ahmeda, kad je avion konačno dostigao željenu visinu. Tamo nema više ničega, odvratio je, ne gledajući u mene. Samo smrt. Tamo se sada oseća samo miris trulih ljudska tela i bolesnih životinja. A kuće, šta je s njima? Nema ni kuća. Ni dvorišta. Tamo gde su bile cvetne leje, sada leže limeni krovovi, doleteli sa srušenih kuća. Tenkovi su prešli preko ograda i povrtnjaka. Samo suva zemlja i kosti. Rupe u zidovima, kao rane koje ne zarastaju. I mršavi psi koji lutaju, to je sve.

Leteli smo gotovo bešumno iznad belih, savršenih, oblaka po kojima je sunce crtalo najlepše prizore, kao iz dečijih snova. Pogledaj, rekoh, vidiš li labuda! I dva polarna medveda! Eno ih, eno ih, upravo smo prošli kraj njih! Ahmed je za trenutak držao ruku u vazduhu, kao da se dvoumi, a onda me je pomilovao po obrazu. Osetila sam kako mi naviru suze, mada nisam znala odakle tačno. Bilo je besmisleno da ga zamolim da odustane, znala sam to. Ahmed je imao najcrnje oči koje je iko ikada video.

Ćutao je nekoliko minuta, sa ramenom sasvim pribijenim uz moje. Učinilo mi se da negde iz dubine njegovog tela osećam neko tiho, ugušeno drhtanje. Ili je to dolazilo iz mog tela, ko bi ga znao. Onda je naglo ustao i rekao da će otići do

toaleta. Dakle, to je to, pomislih. Sad će se desiti. I sve ovo će nestati, ovi oblaci, ovaj miris, lampica koja svetluca iznad naših glava, i ona će nestati. Nisam se plašila, čudnovato. Bila sam pomirena i tužna, zbog njega, podjednako kao i zbog sebe. Negde dole, duboko ispod nas, život je možda mogao nešto da nam pruži, samo da su ljudi umeli da razumeju tuđe poglede. Provukao se kraj mene i pošao, ali sam ga povukla za rukav. Čekaj, rekoh, moram nešto da ti kažem. Ahmed je stao. Jedan čovek me čeka u Oslu. Zbog mene je naučio da pravi kolač od šljiva i napunio je stan cvećem. Mislim da je došlo vreme da ga zaboraviš, kazao je Ahmed tiho i nasmešio se, više očima nego usnama. Čekaj, rekoh opet, priđi, moram još nešto da ti kažem. Ahmed je spustio uho do mojih usana. Večeras želim da vodim ljubav, čuješ li? Gledao me je kao da razume. Gledao me je kao što me niko nikada nije gledao. Kakva šteta, kakva nepovratna šteta, pomislih. A onda je otišao niz redove sedišta i zauvek nestao iza zavese. Oblak jasmína raspolutio se na dva dela.

Sedela sam i čekala. Začuđujuće mirna. Setila sam se jedne svoje tetke koja je nedeljama umirala u bolnici. Setila sam se njenog tela koje je kopnilo i lica koje je iz dana u dan bivalo sve više žuto, dok napokon nije dobilo boju zemlje. Sve je bolje od toga, pomislih. Nije valjda ovo poslednje na šta ću misliti? Ne, moram misliti na nešto lepše, brzo, brzo, ona jutra sa udaljenom bukom sa ulice i suncem koje se probija ispod roletni, Karsten se budi i kosa mu je na očima, koža mu je vruća ispod pokrivača, moram misliti na to, ili možda ipak na zvuk petlova koji nisam čula toliko godina, zaista bih volela da mogu da ih čujem barem još jednom, neću valjda misliti na petlove u poslednjem trenutku svog života, ipak zašto da ne, gle, jedan oblak izgleda upravo kao veliki beli petao...

Odjednom shvatih da se Ahmed vratio i da stoji kraj mene, čekajući da ga pustim da prođe. Videlo se da je mokrom rukom prošao kroz kosu. Živi smo, rekoš, kad je ponovo sedeo kraj mene. Jesmo, klimnu on glavom. Ponekad i meni izgleda nestvarno, ali eto, još uvek sam živ.

Iz zvučnika su javljali da se vežemo, za trenutak se sve zatreslo, avion je izbacio točkove i onda se pod nama ukazao šareni grad. Mirisalo je na jasmin. Nisam znala kuda idemo dalje, kad jednom dotaknemo zemlju, Ahmed i ja.

Jasmine and death

Jelena Lengold

Translated from Serbian by Zoran Paunović

The thought of him is like a dream that refuses to leave me on my own even when I have been awake for a long time. A light breakfast, of the sort I always prepare before a flight, the sound of toaster when it energetically pops a slice of bread up, the smell of tea that fills the small kitchen, in which semi-darkness still reigns, because the dawn is still on the other side of the building, a look at the fridge, should I put anything on the toast, no, nothing, I'm too impatient even take a single bite; just swallow the bread, just pour some tea after it, only to avoid being sick. Nevertheless, while doing all that, I am still asleep. I have not woken up and I will not wake up.

Almost a month has passed since the last time we were lying in his bed, there on the fourth floor, in that room with small roof windows, which make the outside world seem non-existent. Only the sky, the rain, the stars. And the wind that sometimes blows across the windowpanes at night, giving us an excuse to cuddle into each other more tightly. Somewhere down there, way down below us, in the world that is out of our sight, the city lives its life, which is at the same time similar to and dissimilar from the life of the rest of Oslo. I keep on promising that one day I will go down and buy big aubergines, clusters of celery and parsley, and then prepare some extraordinary dish that Carsten has never tasted. But there is never enough time for that. We make love, we eat cereals with milk, and then we make love again. That is the dream I never wake up from. The hand that puts raisins upon my body, like buttons on Santa Claus. Then he eats them, one by one, from top to bottom. While the stars are melting on the windowpane, announcing the day. Always too soon. Sometimes, nevertheless, we decide to take a

look at the world, and then we descend the winding stairs, go out in the street, merge into the crowd, walk among tourists, cyclists, dog-walkers, women in burkhas taking their children by the hand, we stroll along the pavements full of stands with fruit and vegetables. This city always looks different when I walk with you, says Carsten. Although I've spent my whole life in it. I laugh at that. What is different? Colours, he says, colours! For some reason, I am completely unaware of all these colours when I walk alone. And indeed, above the crammed grocery store there hangs a green beer ad; right beside it, on the first floor, two jardinières full of red flowers, a number of multicoloured parasols in front of every shop, striped awnings above merchandise, the street sweeper in his bright orange trousers, heaps of bananas and melons in all nuances of yellow, an old lady with beautiful grey hair, picking strawberries. This quarter has its colours, its smells that are different at every corner, its sound that is a mixture of children's yelling, of vans that always wait for something with their engines on, of pulsing traffic lights, of bicycle chimes, of the wheels that roll over the pavements loaded with all sorts of things, of people who talk with headphones on their ears, usually in languages that I can't understand. I keep my hand in the pocket of Carsten's jacket: one moment our fingers are entangled, the next his hand enfolds mine completely. And so we get to the café. We order espresso there and nibble plastic spoons. The world is still in the street and we pretend to belong to it. Not far from there, in a building, on the fourth floor, a pillow is waiting for us, keeping the shapes of our skulls, even when we are not in the room. And the sheets that smell of two previous nights. Such is that dream.

Have a nice trip, says the cab driver, putting my little suitcase on the pavement, and I hear his voice for the first and last time. I wave to him as to an old acquaintance and he smiles as if he knew where I am going. The women hurrying along, so delighted so early in the morning. Cab drivers always know. I see him with my left eye, standing by the car and looking at

me walking away from him. Straightening my back, I enter the airport building. My heels echo until the revolving doors eject me inside, into overall clamour.

A dark-skinned man stood in the line, right behind me. Tall, in a plain white shirt. Surrounded by ropes we were going towards check-in counters, advancing slowly, step by step. Everybody except him was checking something in their bags, shouting to each other, impatiently looking at their watches, but he just stood calmly, as if he was not hurrying anywhere. With each move of the line, he would make another step. And so we went right to the yellow line, which I passed before him, and handed my luggage in. Then I forgot him, just like we forget the face of the man at the newspaper stand in a strange city. I pushed my way through the crowd, without having to follow letters and arrows, because I know that path by heart. It was the sixth time that I had gone to visit Carsten. Always on the same flight, always from the same gate.

Several slant-eyed stewardesses passed by me, rolling their hand luggage behind them. They were uncannily beautiful and identical. Their red scarves were tied in the same way. Their tight buns under small grey caps all stood in the same way. Innumerable pairs of eyes looked at them for a moment, and then that icily elegant beauty disappeared down the hallways.

I still had some time to wait before the departure. So I entered the perfume shop and started sniffing the bottles. I raised one of them towards my neck, intending to spray the perfume. Then I saw him beside me again, the man from the checking line. He must have had a very silent gait, for I had not realised that he had approached me until he spoke. He addressed me as if we had known each other for long. Not that perfume, he said. If you are going to sit beside me, I would like you to smell of jasmine. How could he know that I would be sitting next to him? I didn't have time to ask him, for he touched my elbow, led me to the next stall, and offered me his hand. You and I will now pass through a jasmine garden, he said.

A small saleswoman, from the other side of the room, was looking at us somewhat worriedly. At me, doing silently what Ahmed wanted, and at him, taking the bottle, spraying a semicircle in the air and saying, you see, now we will pass through this and the odour will stay upon us. Inhale deeply, said Ahmed. That is the odour that as a child I smelt under my window every morning when I woke up, and today I would like that odour to be around me constantly.

A tiny bit of fear slid down from my brain to somewhere in the chest and stopped there, perplexed. I wanted to turn and run away, to go back along the path that led me there, back to the customs officers, and then to the safety of my apartment. And at the same time, I wanted to look straight into the darkest eyes I had ever seen and ask Ahmed about something that seemed quite inevitable for me at that moment: does that mean that today we are going to die? Why with me? Why on this particular flight? Doesn't he know that probably at this very moment Carsten is spreading clean sheets upon the bed and impatiently running his fingers through his hair?

An invitation to the passengers for our flight was heard from the loudspeaker. We were walking by each other, Ahmed and me, and the officers who checked our hand luggage and let us pass through the iron gate probably thought us to be a pair; an unusual one, but a pair. I was waiting while Ahmed was putting his belt back on his trousers and tying his shoelaces. The customs officer was looking at me, intently and vacantly at the same time. I looked back at him, straight into his eyes, and then I cast several quick glances at Ahmed. Nothing happened. The officer didn't even raise an eyebrow. I could not expect any help from him. Goodbye then, I will never see you again, just like I will never see the cab driver again, nor the saleswoman, goodbye to all of you who cannot understand my glance. There are too many people in this world who neglect other people's glances, I thought. Well then, goodbye to all. I didn't say anything, I just boarded the plane after Ahmed.

A white cloud of jasmine was following us, like an inaudible footstep of the inevitable. The engines of the Boeing roared, the wheels gained speed, the force of gravity nailed us down to our seats for a moment, and that was that. We were in the air. Nobody around me could not even have a vague idea about how high we were to go.

Whatever happened to the jasmine bushes from your childhood, I asked Ahmed, when the plane finally reached the scheduled height. There is nothing there any more, he replied, not looking at me. Just death. There is only the smell of rotting human bodies and sick animals. And the houses, what happened to them? There are no houses. No yards. Where the flowerbeds used to be, there are tin roofs now, fallen down from the ruined houses. The tanks rolled over the fences and orchards. Only dry land and bones are there now. Holes in the walls, like wounds that cannot heal. And lanky dogs wandering around, that is all.

We were flying almost without a sound above white, perfect clouds, on which the sun was drawing most beautiful scenes, like those from childhood dreams. Look, I said, do you see the swan! And two polar bears! There, there they are, we have just passed by them! Ahmed held his hand in the air for a moment, as if in hesitation, and then he caressed my cheek. I felt an upsurge of tears, although I did not know where they were coming from. It was pointless to ask him to change his mind, I knew that. Ahmed had the darkest eyes that anyone had ever seen.

He kept silent for several minutes, with his shoulder tightly pressed to mine. I had an impression that somewhere from the depth of his body I felt some quiet, suppressed trembling. Or perhaps it was coming from my body, who could know? Then he slowly got up and said that he was going to the toilet. So this is it, I thought. It is going to happen now. And this will all disappear, these clouds, this odour, and the little lamp that blinks over our heads, it will also disappear. Strangely enough, I was

not afraid. I was resigned and sad, because of him, as much as because of me. Somewhere down there, deep down under us, life may perhaps have given us something, if people only had been able to understand other people's glances. He slid by me and wanted to go, but I tugged at his sleeve. Wait, I said, I have to tell you something. Ahmed stopped. A man is waiting for me at Oslo. He learned to make plum cake because of me and filled the apartment with flowers. I think that it's time for you to forget him, said Ahmed silently, and smiled, more with his eyes than with his mouth. Wait, I said, come over here, I have something more to tell you. Ahmed lowered his ear to my lips. I want to make love tonight, do you understand? He was looking at me as if he had understood. He was looking at me as no one had ever looked at me. What a pity, what an irrevocable pity, I thought. And then he went down the rows of seats and disappeared behind the curtain forever. The cloud of jasmine was split in two.

I was sitting and waiting. Astonishingly serene. I remembered an aunt of mine, who had been dying in a hospital for weeks. I remembered her declining body and her face becoming more and more yellow from one day to another, until finally it acquired the colour of the earth. Anything is better than that, I thought. Is it possible that this is my last thought? No, I have to think of something more beautiful, quickly, quickly, of those mornings with distant noise from the street and the sun peeking through the blinds. Carsten wakes up and his hair falls over his eyes, his skin is warm under the bed sheet, I have to think of that, or maybe the crowing of roosters that I have not heard for years, I would really like to hear it again, no, I don't want to think of roosters at the very last moment of my life, then again why not, look, one of these clouds looks exactly like a big white rooster...

All of a sudden I realised that Ahmed had come back and that he was standing beside me, waiting for me to let him pass. It was obvious that he had run his wet hand through his hair. We

are alive, I said, when he sat beside me again. Yes we are, he nodded. Sometimes it looks fantastic to me too, but nevertheless, I am still alive.

Through the loudspeaker, they were telling us to fasten our seatbelts, everything trembled for a moment, the plane put out its wheels and the multicoloured city appeared below us. It smelt of jasmine. I did not know where we would go next, when we touch the earth, Ahmed and me.



Sweden

Sara Mannheimer

Gästerna

Guests

EUPL laureate 2012: *Handlingen* (Wahlström & Widstrand)

BIOGRAPHY

Sara Mannheimer, born in 1967 in Sweden, left Gothenburg in 1986 to study creative writing in Colorado, followed by glassblowing in New York City and the Czech Republic, and completed a BA at Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam before settling down in Stockholm in 1998. Besides writing, she has taught glassblowing and produced functional glass in small series. Her debut novel *Reglerna* (*The Rules*), from 2008, was nominated for the August Prize and won the prestigious Borås Tidnings Debut Prize. *Handlingen* (*The Action*) was awarded the 2012 European Union Prize for Literature. *Urskilja oss* (*Ununifying Us*), published in 2016, is Mannheimer's latest novel, and was awarded the Bonniers writers' stipend and nominated for the Svenska Dagbladets literary prize. Mannheimer has written several screenplays, along with short stories for Swedish Radio, and has published poems and essays in various literary magazines. She has translated a book of poems from Arabic by the Iraqi poet Rasha Alqasim in close cooperation with the author. The translation rights for her previous novel have been sold in nine countries.

Gästerna

Sara Mannheimer



Vi har varit på väg länge nu. Över haven. På väg mot det okända. Vi går i land, vi kommer till en by, vi vet inte var vi är. Är det där en invånare? Ska det föreställa en människa? Eller är det ett djur? Underliga rörelser, besynnerliga kläder, så märkvärdiga färger, fränstötande lukter, oroväckande läten. Vi skjuter allt som rör sig, annars blir vi själva dödade. Du tror att vi är på besök? Men vi har nog kommit för att stanna. Det beror på vad du har i hyddan, i jorden, i skogarna. Vi tar det vi vill ha. Territorier. Råvaror. Kroppar. Din kokkonst och din klokskap kan du stoppa upp någonstans där vi inte ser den. Vi ska döda dig eller lära dig det du behöver veta. Du är vår alldeles egna lilla vilde och nu bestämmer vi att du lyder. Bra.

Vi träffades som hastigast på ett tåg i somras, jag rycktes med i deras bedrövliga livsberättelse, deras flykt från ett land med skyhögt arbetslöshet och ett korrupt utbildningsväsende, vi utbytte adresser. Jag gjorde det kanske i första hand av plikt, eller av bara farten. Jag ville leva upp till förtroendet mina medresenärer var så snabba att visa mig. Och vi var, medan tåget sprängde fram genom det bördiga landskapet, rörande överens om vilken fruktansvärd otur, vilka urusla förutsättningar de haft, omständigheter vilka osökt ledde till slutsatsen att jag å min sida på godtyckliga grunder begåvats med en lika sanslös tur.

Vi var bland de sista som fick komma ombord, hälften dog. Landet är förlovat. Befrielsen är nära. Vi kan inte tro att det är

sant, apelsinerna, solen. Vi ser ut som skelett. Vi spottar blod. Vi är framme!

Nyckeln ligger i krukans under trappan. Kaffet i blå burken på hyllan till höger i skafferiet. Sängarna är bäddade.

Jag vidhåller att det är min, ja inte bara min, utan alla människors förbannade skyldighet att åtminstone i någon mån bidra till en bättre värld. Jag bryter inte löften. Jag ångrar mig inte, jag bara våndas en smula, våndas för att dessa främlingar med sina behov, sin utsatthet, sina dofter, tankar, erfarenheter när som helst kan vara här: mitt hem är min kropp.

Så vacker bakgrunden är, så het solen är, så mycket snö ni har, vilket gåtfullt landskap. Vi ska hämta hit våra vänner och vi ska beundra ditt hantverk, dina verktyg, dina kryddor, vi är nyfikna, du ska vara tyst, jag förstår inte vad du säger. Rör dig inte då skjuter jag. Ge mig mat. Vår äventyrlighet är omättlig, vi rör oss djupare in i landet, in i terrängen, i närkamp med tillgångarna, vi kommer att bli rika. Rikare. Skjut. Och saml upp frukterna, guldet, köttet, Gud ser dig, Gud hjälpe dig, Gud vare med dig. Du ska dö. Jag ger dig Gud om du ger dig.

Det kan komma någon. Det är han som har vakten. Han står stilla som en ödla, kamouflerad, lamslagen. Nu. Snart. Sedan. Förut. Det kommer någon. Ingen. En sten som tiger, ringmuren, en hydda, ett skydd mot vinden, vinden kan komma, snön, ökensanden, parasiterna, nu kommer de. Det är tyst. Ingen viskar, vem där?

Älskade lilla hjärtat, du stör inte, du stör aldrig, hur kan du tro något sådant? Kom du bara, ska jag sätta på te, tappa upp ett bad, du är väl hungrig kan jag tro? Lite kallrökt lax kanske, ett glas Chablis, en sallad med babyspenat och rostade pinjenötter? Kom bara, jag väntar, kör försiktigt, du behöver inte säga exakt, du kommer när du kommer, jag finns här, jag går ingenstans, min skatt.

Du förstår inte vad du får. Du förstår inte. Vi ritar om kartorna, gränserna, vi sätter ner flaggorna, vi lägger oss på rygg med ett grässtrå i mungipan, vi stämmer upp i sång, refrängen svänger, du samlar ved till vår eld, vi ligger med dig, du låter annorlunda, du är äcklig och läcker på samma gång, dina läten eggjar oss, kom hit med något att dricka. Det är skönt här, det är märkvärdigt men vi känner oss redan som hemma.

Känn er som hemma, kära vänner, gör precis som ni vill och ta det ni behöver i köket, höjden av gästfrihet i många kulturer, också i min. Men det är väl ingen som tror att det ska tolkas bokstavligt? Jag vill absolut inte att ni, oavsett om det bara är ett uttryck för hjälpsamhet, ska stoppa huvudet i kylskåpet och fingra på gamla syltburkar eller hjälpligt emballerade ostkanter – som om skillnaden mellan oss inte fanns där. Jag vill vara värd, skämma bort er, imponera på er, intressera mig för er. Jag vill inte belasta er med ansvar eller avkräva er några motprestationer.

Denna godtyckliga orättvisa, för det var så våra öden stod fram där i tågkupén, gjorde mig minst sagt obekvämt, ja, skuldens bakterier tog över, svällde upp i mig som en influensa, som ett motgift, ja, och i hopp om att kunna kompensera mitt skamliga privilegium kläckte jag ur mig att mitt gästrum stod till förfogande närhelst de hade vägarna förbi.

Hur ska jag kunna tacka dig, hur ska jag någonsin kunna tacka dig tillräckligt, du har räddat mitt liv.

Han kommer med ett blödande sår till lektionen, en skada från svartjobbet på flyttfirman, hon tar in honom i lärarrummet, tvättar och förbinder såret, en lång blick blir en lång kyss, några månader senare får han träffa hennes barn, han flyttar in i trerummaren, bakar bröd, rensar avloppet, skruvar upp en hylla i hallen, något pass har han aldrig ägt, orsakerna härtill är en lång historia. En morgon är han försvunnen.

Vi ringer och säger att vi är vid gränsen, hon hör först inte, jag upprepar att vi fastnat i en gränskontroll, att vi inte har de papper som behövs ... linjen bryts.

Det enda jag egentligen längtar efter är att få vara ensam, slippa all hänsyn, alla krav, alla sociala konventioner. Det är bara när jag är ensam jag kan vara mig själv.

Jag njuter av att sakerna har sina platser och att platsen har sin sak. Mer begär jag inte. Är det så mycket begärt?

Grillen och cyklarna finns i boden. Extraelement finns i boden. Nyckeln till boden ligger under stenen på östra sidan om boden.

Han ber om en bit bröd. Berättar om modern, om elden, om uppenbarelsen, om fördrivningen, om hungern, han går ner på knä, han kysser marken, hur länge, hur länge ska du överge honom?

Res dig upp. Gör något. Varför sitter du bara där, viskar? Beter dig kufiskt. Vad är det du viskar? Känn er som hemma. Du känner dig inte som hemma längre? Du känner dig främmande? Främmande för dig själv? Du är lättad över att dina gäster sannolikt inte kommer att ha möjlighet att ta sig över gränsen. Du skäms för att du är lättad.

Han går nyvaknen ut på balkongen, sänder sina blickar över fälten och fåren som betar där, slår generöst ut med armarna, rösten är full av tillförsikt: ni får äta så mycket ni vill.

Naturen tar emot, bryter ned, vi vandrar i timmar, sätter oss på en sten och äter varsitt äpple, får syn på en skalle i marken, ytterligare ett, revben, kotor, lavan, mossan, insekterna skiftar som silver över massgraven, naturen sväljer våldet avsiktslöst, men blottar det lika avsiktslöst. Vi viger våra liv åt att identifiera de obegravda, trettiotusen hittills, vi får inte glömma.

Glöm inte att du alltid kan dra ett skämt, du kan alltid dra den om Moshe och Natan: Moshe: Nu har vi redan talats vid i tio minuter och du har inte ens frågat hur jag mår! Nathan: Du har rätt Moshe, käre vän, hur är det med dig, hur mår du nu för tiden?! Moshe: Fråga inte!

Vad är det för gränser som måste upprätthållas? Varför överöser hon mig med hycklande artighetsfraser så fort jag stiger innanför dörren? Sitt ner kära du, sitt. Varför begär hon att jag med devota blickar ska studera hennes flinka fingrar och med stråk av den sysslösas skuld tacksamt och smackande ta emot dessa eviga kycklinggrytor. Hon utövar alltmer brutala härskartekniker och skyltar med dem som gästfrihet, generositet och godhet.

Vi håller ihop, vi har fem barn, ett sjätte är på väg, vi bor i parker, på härbärgen, på madrasser bakom järnvägsstationen, smugglarna tog våra pengar, polisen tog våra smycken, men havet tog inte våra liv. Gud är med oss.

För Guds skull, stressa inte älskling, jag håller mig vaken tills du kommer. Har du allt du behöver, pengar, ska jag swisha?

Du hatar ditt land, det luktar ruttet, det är dags att dra upp rottrådarna, det är dags att kontakta högre höns, göra upp med dessa omänskliga regelverk, dessa murar mellan länder, det är dags att skulden placeras där den hör hemma, du kokar av ilska, så här får det inte gå till.

Ni ödmjukar er, parerar minsta obalans, anstränger er för att vara till lags, lystrar, tassar, bugar, lismar, ni hamnar i hjärtslitande hövlighetsdanser, ni rör er mellan blygsamhet, underdånighet och självutplåning. Så här kan ni inte ha det. Ni måste sätta ner foten, ni måste sätta gränser.

Hon betraktar ett fotografi, det är normalt, det är så det blir, klenoder, kläder, skor, det som finns kvar. Hon går fram till fönstret, för gardinen åt sidan, inte mer än att blicken kan

registrera gatan, den motsatta fasaden, en flik av himlen, samma outhärdliga röster i trappan och den där hunden, utsiktslös väntan spränger ännu en dag.

Jag är rädd att våra samtal kommer att flyta trögt och mynna ut i långa, alltmer plågsamma tystnader. Jag är rädd att de är helt ointresserade av konst och litteratur, eller ännu värre excentriskt självlärda, brådmoget överlägsna av sina tunga erfarenheter. Jag vill inte att de ska betrakta mig som småborgerlig, eller eurocentrisk.

Allt praktiskt är redan förberett; sängplatsen, lakanen, nattlamporna, garderoben, galgarna och förlängningsdosan med dess prydliga rad av lediga uttag, sådant jag själv uppskattar, att slippa ligga på alla fyra med laddaren på jakt efter el.

Det är hon som ringer. Säg att vi inte kan komma. Säg att vi träffade Hermes vid gränsen, att Aris jagar oss, att vi drar ner till kusten, till Kyrene, Xenia väntar på oss, säg att vi är tacksamma, att de har tagit alla våra saker, inklusive Pandoras ask, säg som det är bara.

Tänk om de inte alls finner det problematiskt att du passar upp dem stup i kvarten? Tänk om de istället utvecklar en allt vräkigare stil i vilken du figurerar som en naturlig förutsättning, ja, om de helt enkelt börjar betrakta dig allt mindre som värd och allt mer som hushållerska, tjänarinna, ja, börjar utnyttja dig som en slav?

Handdukar hittar ni i garderoben i hallen. Lösenordet till det trådlösa nätverket:

solenskiner. Hoppas ni får sköna veckor.

Varannan vecka har han tillstånd att ringa henne från häktet. Tio minuter får de tala innan vakten bryter. Han ber att hon ska berätta något roligt. Hon kan inte komma på något i stunden, inte på beställning. Beslutet om tvångsutvisning ...

Slav? Hur skulle det vara möjligt? Det är vi som bor här, det är vi som när som helst, om de inte uppför sig har rätt att be dem dra dit pepparn växer, öppna dörren och villkorslöst peka ditåt, mot friheten. Och skulle de låtsas som om ingenting har hänt, titta åt ett annat håll, kanske återigen lägga upp fötterna på bordet och be om en öl, få duken att skrynkla sig på ett sätt som retar gallfeber på oss, eller ställa sig och halsa direkt ur mjölkpaketet, ja, kort sagt, om de vägrar ta hänsyn till de få men rimliga regler vi rest för vår gemensamma trivsel, blir vi tvungna att handgripligen slänga ut dem.

Alla drunknade, tjugotre kroppar har plockats upp av kustpolisen, ännu oklart hur många som saknas.

Känn er som hemma, nu viskar du igen, har du börjat längta efter dina strandade gäster? Känner du att du inte kan leva utan deras berättelser, utan ljudet av deras röster, utan deras rörelser i rummen, utan dofterna av maten du skulle lagat? Du längtar så det värker, du längtar med lidelse, du längtar för att slippa känna tomheten, tankarna som går i cirklar, som mal sönder dagen, ångesten som gått i arv.

Jag ringer henne och säger som det är, jag säger att vi är på väg, att vi har varit på väg länge nu.

Guests

Sara Mannheimer

Translated from Swedish by Linda Schenck

We've long been on our way now. Across the seas. On our way to the unknown. We make land. We arrive at a village, not knowing where we are. Is that an inhabitant? Or is it an animal? Strange movements, peculiar clothing, such striking colours, repulsive odours, alarming sounds. We shoot everything that moves, so as not to be shot ourselves. You think we're visiting? No, we've come to stay. It all depends on what you have in your hut, in your earth, in your woods. We take what we want. Territories. Commodities. Bodies. You can stuff your culinary arts and your wisdom up someplace where we won't see it. We'll kill you or teach you all you need to know. You are our very own little savage and now we order you to obey. Fine.

We met briefly on a train last summer, I was drawn to their lamentable life story, their escape from a country with sky-high unemployment and a corrupt educational system, we exchanged addresses. I may have done it primarily from a sense of obligation, or simply in the course of conversation. I was trying to live up to the trust my fellow travellers were so quick to place in me. And we were in touching agreement, as the train tore across the fertile plains, that they had been terribly unfortunate and had a very poor starting point, which naturally led to the conclusion that I, on the other hand, had been blessed for no ostensible reason with an equal measure of good fortune.

We were among the last to be taken on board, and half died. It's a promised land. Liberation is at hand. We can't believe it's true, the oranges, the sunshine. We are skin and bones. We vomit blood. We've arrived!

You'll find the key in the flowerpot under the front steps. Coffee in the blue tin on the right-hand shelf of the larder. There are clean sheets on the beds.

I maintain that it is my – well, not only my but all human beings' – damned duty to make at least some small contribution to world betterment. I don't break my promises. I don't have second thoughts, I only have minimal angst, angsting about how these strangers – with their needs, their vulnerability, their odours, their thoughts and experience – might be here any minute: My home is my body.

The backdrop is lovely, the sun is hot, and all this snow, what an enigmatic landscape. We will bring our friends and we will admire your handicrafts, your tools, your spices, we are curious, you keep quiet, I don't understand you. Don't move or I'll shoot. Give me food. Our sense of adventure is insatiable, we move deeper into the landscape, into the terrain, battling with the natural resources, we'll get rich. Richer. Shoot. And gather the fruits, the gold, the flesh, God sees you. God help you. God be with you. You will die. If you give up, I give you God.

Someone might come. Him, he's the guard. He stands still as a chameleon, camouflaged, petrified. Now. Soon. After. Before. Someone's coming. No one. A silent stone, a town wall, a hut, shelter from the wind, the wind might come on, the snow, the desert sand, the parasites, here they come. There is silence. No one is whispering, who's there?

My dear, you're not bothering me, you never bother me, how could you imagine you would? Just come, I'll make tea, draw a bath, you must be hungry. A slice of smoked salmon, a glass of Chablis, a salad with baby spinach and toasted pine nuts? Just come, I'll be here, drive carefully, you don't have to let me know exactly what time, come whenever you come, I'll be home, I'm not going anywhere sweetheart.

You don't understand. You don't understand what you'll get. We redraw the maps, the borders, we set up the flags, we lie on our back sucking on a blade of grass, we raise a song, a cheerful refrain, you gather wood for our fire, you're disgusting and leaky, you sound different, your cries urge us on, bring me something to drink. It's nice here, it's remarkable how we've already made ourselves at home.

Make yourselves at home, dear friends, *do precisely as you please and take whatever you need from the kitchen*, the ultimate words of hospitality in many cultures, including my own. Hopefully no one is likely to think those words are to be interpreted literally. I definitely do not want you sticking your nose into my refrigerator and your fingers into old jars of jam or loosely wrapped bits of cheese, even in an effort to be helpful – as if the difference between us was not there. I want to be your host, spoil you, impress you, show an interest in you. I don't want to burden you with responsibilities or demand anything from you in return.

This arbitrary injustice, which was how our different destinies appeared when we met on the train, made me uncomfortable to say the least, in fact the bacteria of guilt infested me, swelled up in me like the flu, and so as an antidote, yes, and in hopes of compensating for my shameful privileges, I mentioned that my guestroom would be at their disposal whenever they were passing.

How will I ever be able to thank you, how will I ever be able to thank you enough, you've saved my life.

He arrives in the classroom with a bleeding wound, an injury from his untaxed job with a moving firm, she takes him into the staff room, cleans and bandages the wound, a long gaze turns into a long kiss, a few months later she introduces him to her children, he moves into their two-bedroom flat, bakes bread, cleans the drains, mounts a shelf for the hall, he's never had a passport, it's a long story. One morning he is gone.

We phone to say we're at the border, at first she can't hear me, I repeat that we are being held up by the border guards, that we don't have the right documents ... the connection is broken.

The only thing I'm really wishing for is to be alone, not have to take anyone else into consideration, not to have to satisfy demands, obey social conventions. Only when I am alone can I be myself. I love the fact that there is a place for everything and a thing for every place. I don't ask for anything more. Is that too much to ask?

The barbecue and the bicycles are in the shed. The extra space heater is in the shed. The key to the shed is under the stone by the east side of the shed.

He asks for a bit of bread. Talks about his mother, about the fire, about the revelation, about the expulsion, about the hunger, he falls to his knees, he kisses the ground, how long, how long will you abandon him?

Stand up. Do something. Why are you just sitting there whispering? Behaving like a misfit. What is it you're whispering? *Make yourself at home*. You don't feel at home anymore? You feel like a stranger? A stranger to yourself? You're relieved your guests probably won't manage to cross the border. You're ashamed to be relieved.

He goes drowsily out onto the balcony, dispatches glances across the fields and the grazing sheep, extends his arms generously, his voice ever so assured: *feel free to eat as much as you please*.

Nature embraces and breaks down, we ramble for hours, sit down on a rock and have an apple, catch sight of a skull in the ground, of another, of ribs, vertebrae, the lichens, the mosses, the insects shifting silvery over the mass grave, nature swallows violence unintentionally but exposes it just

as unintentionally. We devote our lives to identifying the unburied, thirty thousand to date, we must not forget.

Don't forget you can always crack a joke, you can tell the one about Moshe and Nathan:

Moshe: Nathan we've been chatting for ten minutes already and you haven't even asked how I am.

Nathan: True. Moshe, my dear friend, how are you, how are you doing nowadays?

Moshe: Don't ask!

What are these boundaries that have to be maintained? Why does she heap polite phrases upon me the moment I walk through the door? *Sit down, my dear, sit.* Why does she expect me to watch her deft fingers with respectful eyes, with a strain of idle indebtedness and, smacking my lips, to accept her eternal chicken casseroles? She exercises increasingly brutal techniques of domination, dressing them in the guise of hospitality, generosity and goodness.

We stick together, we have five children and a sixth on the way, we live in parks, at hostels, on mattresses behind the railway station, the smugglers took our money, the police took our jewelry, but the sea spared us our lives. God is with us.

For God's sake, darling, don't rush, I'll wait up until you get here. Do you have everything you need? Money, want me to wire some?

You hate your country, it stinks, it's time to pull up roots, it's time to contact the high honchos, come to terms with these inhumane regulations, these walls between countries, it's time to put the guilt where it belongs, you're seething with rage. This is not acceptable.

You humiliate yourselves, fending off every little imbalance, extending yourselves to please, obey instructions, tiptoe

around, ingratiate yourselves, you find yourselves doing heartrending, respectful dances, you vacillate from diffidence to obsequiousness to self-effacement. You can't go on like this. You will have to put your foot down, you will have to set your boundaries.

She gazes at a photo, that's normal, that's how it goes, heirlooms, clothing, shoes, all that remains. She walks to the window, pushes the curtain aside only enough for her eyes to register the street, the façade on the other side, a patch of sky, the same intolerable voices in the stairwell and that dog, futile waiting decimates yet another day.

I fear our conversation will be stilted and peter out into long, increasingly torturous silences. I fear they will be utterly uninterested in art and literature or, even worse, eccentric autodidacts with precociously superior attitudes owing to all they have been through. I don't want them to consider me bourgeois or *Eurocentric*.

All the practicalities are taken care of: where they will sleep, the sheets, the nightlights, the closet, the hangers and the extension cord with its tidy multiple row of unoccupied plugs, the things I myself am pleased to find in a new place, not to have to crawl around on my knees holding my charger, looking for an outlet.

That's her calling. Say we can't come. Say we met up with Hermes at the border, say Aris is tracking us, say we decided to go down to the coast, to Kyrene, where Xeneia is expecting us, tell her thank you, say they've taken all our things, including Pandora's box, just tell her the truth. Just tell her.

What if they don't consider it a problem at all that you wait on them hand and foot? What if, instead, they work up an increasingly flashy lifestyle in which you figure as a natural prerequisite, if in fact they quite simply begin to consider you as less and less a host, and more and more their housekeeper or serving woman, or even start to exploit you as a slave?

You'll find towels in the cupboard in the hall. The password to the wireless network: *sunshine*. I hope you will enjoy your weeks.

Once every two weeks they let him phone her from the remand prison. They can talk for ten minutes before the warden breaks in. He asks her to tell him something that will cheer him up. She can't think of anything on the spur of the moment, can't think on demand. The decision concerning compulsory deportation –

A slave? How is that possible? I am the one who lives here, I am the one who can, at any moment, if they do not behave appropriately, tell them to get the hell out of here, open the door and point unconditionally out, toward *freedom*. And should they pretend nothing has happened, avert their eyes, maybe once again put their feet up on the table and ask for a beer, crease up the tablecloth in a way that drives me mad, or stand there drinking right out of the milk container, yes, in fact, if they refuse to comply with the few but reasonable rules I set for the general well-being of all, I'll just have to throw them out forcibly, with my two hands.

They all drowned. Twenty-three bodies were recovered by the coastguard, as yet no one knows how many are missing.

Make yourselves at home, you're whispering again now, are you wishing your stranded guests would arrive? Do you feel unable to live without their stories, without the sounds of their voices, without their movements in the rooms, without the smells of the food you were going to prepare? You are wishing so hard it's painful, you are wishing passionately, you are wishing in order to spare yourself that sense of emptiness, your thoughts that go around in circles and pulverize your days, your inherited angst.

We'll call her, we'll tell her, we'll just tell her the truth. We'll say we're on our way, that we've been long on our way now.



Spain

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Nebulosa de ciudad

City Nebula

EUPL laureate 2010: *Sombras de unicornio* (Algaida Editores)

BIOGRAPHY

Raquel Martínez-Gómez was born in La Mancha in 1973. She has a PhD in international relations from the Complutense University of Madrid and an MA in modern and contemporary literature, culture and thought from the University of Sussex, UK. She has published four novels: *Los huecos de la memoria* (*The Holes of Memories*), *Ceniza de ombú* (*Ashes of Ombu*), *Sombras de unicornio* (*Shadows of the Unicorn*) and *Del color de la lava* (*The Colour of Lava*). *Sombras de unicornio* was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature and the Young Ateneo de Sevilla prize (2007), and has been translated into seven languages. *Del color de la lava* won the City of Mostoles Prize. She is currently living in the mountains of Madrid, where she has finished a book of short stories (*Las grietas del cuerpo*) and started her sixth novel. She combines her writing with her work, specialising in the field of sustainable development. Prior to this she lived in Uruguay, the United Kingdom and Mexico, and participated in university programmes in Argentina and Cuba.

Nebulosa de ciudad

Raquel Martínez-Gómez



Camino al aeropuerto mis manos todavía olían a sardinhas. El chófer de la Cámara Municipal de Lisboa señalaba el puente que atravesaba el estuario del río Tajo, construido en la época del dictador Salazar y que después pasó a llamarse 25 de abril. Sus palabras desplazaron momentáneamente mi obcecación con aquel olor prendido a la punta de mis dedos. Muchas españolas admirábamos la Revolución de los Claveles y también que el país no recuperara su monarquía, esa casposa imposición que en el otro trozo de Península alimentaba nuestra masedumbre y cutrez. Miré el perfil de una Lisboa oceánica mientras mi mente construía un collage superpuesto de otras revoluciones. Caían todas en cascada: volví a la sonrisa del museo, esa sonrisa que se difuminaba entre mis dedos. Flashes de utopía y distopía de ciudad, el ritmo de las pulsaciones de un corazón que hacía tiempo que no palpitaba desbocado por la sobredosis de burocracia. El azul de los ojos del padre enmarcado en sombras ojeras que agudizaba el jet lag y los cuidados nocturnos. Escuchamos las historias del racismo en el Padrão dos Descobrimentos: esclavitud y antropofagia, conversiones forzosas de judíos, imágenes de santos subidos sobre personas de otro color. Imaginería mexicana de iglesias de mis itinerarios de otros tiempos. Despertó un sentimiento que me conducía a lo que había sido. Virreinato, conquista, blancos, mulatos. No, los indígenas no contaban. El olvido. El relato de una evolución que permitió la reproducción de cristos negros. Y otra vez la pulsación de aquellas imágenes de un futuro que estaba por venir, que nos hacían soñar con aumentar las fron-

teras naturales de la ciudad: plataformas en el mar, enjambres de edificios que extraerían su energía del agua. La escuela de arquitectura donde aprendió sobre maestros que retorcían sus edificios en redondeces. La UNAM que también era mía. Algo se movía en mi interior. El convulso latir de pedazos de ciudad que en pocas ocasiones dejaban vislumbrar espacios verdes: fábricas, rascacielos, lugares donde amontonar desechos, basura radioactiva. Los relatos llegaban en cascada. Fascinación compartida que sorprendía a nuestros ojos. Veía volver México y sus experiencias. Durante mucho tiempo quise ignorar todas las convulsiones que me provocaba. Siempre me abría en canal. Premonición todavía incomprensible. Otra vez cerca, recordándome que de cierta forma no me había ido.

En el coche del municipio, camino al aeropuerto, saqué la servilleta húmeda que guardé prudente algún día en mi bolso. Me limpié los dedos celebrando esa sensación que recorría mi cuerpo, que todavía no se ha ido. Mis manos necesitan tocar algo que desapareció. El chofer se refería en esos momentos al acueducto romano, pero su portugués se me hizo espeso y no logré descifrar todas las palabras. El Atlántico chocaba con mi mirada. Era demasiada agua la que nos separaría. La grieta a la posibilidad que es suave, como las transiciones arquitectónicas de esa escuela portuguesa. Nada tiene que ver con la pulsación, con ese ritmo exagerado imposible de eliminar con una toallita húmeda, por más que lograra disminuir el fuerte olor a sardinhas.

Seguimos a Max Aub, Remedios Varo, Diego Rivera, Siqueiros, Trotsky... Pulso que saca corazones por la boca. El arte es así, como las revoluciones. Lisboa parece ahora más cerca de América. Se enreda la cubana a la conversación: la guerra de la Independencia, la lucha contra Machado o Batista... El deber de añadir martiano. Hay vidas que no caben en las manos. La huida a México, la abuela francesa que fue el origen de unos ojos claros. El descubrimiento en Palenque de la tum-

ba de quien quizás había sido K´inich Janaab Pakal. El relato se mueve y suena el océano, siempre abriendo posibilidades, aportando cadencias al ritmo de estas letras. Luchas contra metrópolis que son también la mía. La inteligencia renuncia a las simplificaciones. Española, mexicana, cubana... No hace falta hacerlo explícito. Lo entiendes sin necesitar que medien mis palabras.

¿Madame Bovary? El repertorio azaroso de los nudos de la emoción. Desde el taxi te imaginé terminando el almuerzo y mirando al mar. Pronto recorrerías las estancias de otro museo. Máscaras. Me acuerdo de la careta cuando cae. Es solo un cuadro. Quizás sentías mi ausencia o buscabas otra escuchante. Pero era más que probable que no encontraras el ritmo de esta pulsación. Suena indistinguible en mi bajo vientre, permanece intacta. El reconocimiento de un mundo comprendido, libros que se subrayan en los mismos párrafos, que se reivindicán en los márgenes. Coordenadas compartidas de un universo vasto e inasible. El ritmo de las tildes sobre los glifos mayas. La arqueología que también provoca revoluciones. La figura del padre que te hace temblar; la del mío que todavía me emociona. El roast beef sangrante. Sí, me gusta sangrante, aunque sé que pasados los días la sangre se seca. ¿Has visto? Mejor no mirar otra vez. Hay cuevas que no dicen buenas noches. Casi están pidiendo seguir en el pasillo. Saco uno a uno los objetos de mi bolso en busca de mi llave. Por fin la encontré. Ahora sí, mejor voy a dormir. Cierro la puerta y en la oscuridad vuelve la fusión del verde y el violeta. Una nebulosa que surge de la explosión de un edificio. Hay un niño que llora por la noche. Te imagino encendiendo la luz en una casa de La Condesa. (La casa que después tiembla con el sismo, que se mueve con toda la ciudad). La nebulosa sigue inextinguible a tu regreso y en la oscuridad también sientes el pulso del corazón cuando la criatura deja de llorar. Cabezas mayas de un templo sagrado. El Templo Mayor. El Museo Nacional de Antropología donde llueve toda el agua del océano. No tenía excusa

para no volver. Es como tener que aprender lo esencial de nuevo. La imposibilidad de los besos. Todo vuelve a su lugar en Tenochtitlán mientras Lisboa va difuminándose, reduciéndose a esa nebulosa verde y morada. “No, no, ese no es el fracaso de la arquitectura moderna; es el fracaso de un proyecto social que no hizo las políticas adecuadas”. Toltecas, olmecas... Los mayas se extinguieron porque supieron rebelarse contra sus sacerdotes. ¿El fracaso fue no mirarnos? La distancia diagonal impide la concentración. Ritmo cardiaco que fluye y que no puede acoplarse a ese estadio que va detrás.

Teatro o música. No hay coincidencia. Salir de Flaubert deja estelas en los zapatos. Estás visible, pero no quiero saber más. La representación se nos ha quedado en la mirada. Hablo con mi grupo: alguna confusión, sintonía. Os veo sonreír. Noto el contagio colgado de vuestras entonaciones. Castillo de San Jorge y el atardecer que regala toda la vista de la Alfama. Las torres árabes hilan relatos que, de igual manera, despegan nuestra voluntad. No quiero forzar los encuentros. Respiro y trato de apartarme para entender qué está pasando. Esperamos una cena que destila música. Me rodeo de relatos centroamericanos. El náhuatl quedó en mi paladar, junto con las sardinhas. El olor de esa noche es el que todavía conservo entre mis dedos, el que persistía cuando dejé la ciudad. Los puentes sobre el Duero no llegan hasta las ruinas mayas. Se me escurre de las manos una asepsia que empezaba a aburrirme. Desconocía a esa mujer. “Nous sommes tous des Madame Bovary”, pensé que diría el actor que encarnaba a Flaubert. Pero la obra acabó con estas palabras: “Elle va mourir, et toi, et toi...”. Nos señalaba con los dedos. “Mais Madame Bovary vivra toujours”. El mensaje llegaba claro y fuerte, como de tan lejos y tan cerca. Tomás Moro había sido juzgado. Fotografíe compulsivamente. Tu mirada se veía de lejos. Encontraba indefensión en aquella luminosidad. Así que podíamos entender por qué España rompía su camisa. No tenía museo de la memoria. Tantos años de amnesia... El teatro Colón porteño resonaba y no escuché a

los pájaros en la ciudad. La estética de Tokio era bradburiana y nos miramos otra vez dándonos cuenta de que había una extraña coincidencia de lenguaje. Casi preferí no interrumpir ese momento, sabía que mi vuelo no iba a transcurrir en paz. La adolescencia. Mucho mejor sin corbata. Me topé con ella el primer día, se antepuso como un escudo a mi pregunta inocente. El ascensor sube y baja. Espera. La otra noche se evaporó. “Tú no te diste cuenta si bailé o no —me dijiste—, no me veías”. No, yo solo comía sardinhas y escuchaba las historias de otras ciudades. Demasiada vida montevideana todavía por diseccionar. Nos hemos despegado. Ir al museo era casi una necesidad, buscaba metáforas como una hambrienta. Regresasteis. Ninguno sospechábamos que la utopía y la distopía nos hablarían esa tarde. Hay un parque dentro del museo. La idea de que así será el futuro me espanta. Quizás el edificio art déco que tendría que estar aquí era solo una alucinación. Poco importa. Madame Bovary ha vuelto. Si solo fuera un gesto inocente el que me pone la vida entre estas manos que ya no son jóvenes. He visto las hojas de Flaubert volando sobre mi cabeza. No me sorprende que las actrices nos interpelen. También las imágenes de la exposición eran de ciudades reales. Verlas, colgadas en la pared, nos ayudó a entender la irrealidad de lo real. Así vivimos, pero lo único que le interesa a Bovary es el ritmo frenético de esa pulsación. No hay manera de juzgar. No hay dimensión. Rasga la guitarra, suena a fado. No, no me llega el sonido ahora. Hay una máscara que es difícil de sostener. Es más fácil escribirlo. Revolución. Hemos fusionado la historia. Los desechos culturales también provocan resistencias. Conocemos las ruinas. No hay posibilidad de hacerlo sobre cenizas. Todavía están calientes los pasos sobre ese parque artificial.

Pasé a la sala oscura de las pulsaciones de ciudad. Un escenario perfecto para empezar la puesta en escena. Me había aislado. No había nadie más. Lo percibí. Era bastante obvio que ibas a llegar. Te dejé como quien huye de lo inevitable, pero el museo marcó el itinerario. No, no había fracaso en esas construccio-

nes, repito. Era esa enorme desigualdad lo que oscurecía los proyectos. Entonces, ¿por qué habían peleado nuestros abuelos si las distopías de aquellas sociedades llenaban las paredes del museo? La provocación de lo que pende de los muros. Después me enseñaste la diferencia entre los edificios que dialogaban y aquellos que luchaban entre sí. También a diferenciar otros cuyos espejos ocultan lo que son. Nuestra acompañante quiere conducirnos a ver los planos de Brasilia, pero mientras observamos esa perfección artificial, el referente vuelve a ser Ciudad de México. Los dos preferimos el caos. Una pasión inextinguible. No sé qué quise decir con el mensaje. No sé si se entendía. No hay posibilidad de saber por dónde deshilar la ambigüedad cuando la intencionalidad es confusa hasta para quien la plantea. No acabaremos con ese pulso de una trazada. Explota el proyecto moderno. Alguien decidió demoler el edificio. Solo queda la nebulosa verde y morada. Es lindo el pelo rojo de Mariana. Es como una llama en medio de una sala de teatro vacía. Mejor te fuiste a escuchar música. Ya te habías dormido por la tarde. Cultivas la proyección internacional de la ciudad sin ocultar sus carencias. Revoluciones que no apagan toda el agua de ese océano inmenso. El temblor de la tierra hizo emanar las letras. Relatos desgarradores sobre la humanidad. Lo mejor y lo peor siempre han ido de la mano. No sé cómo envolveré las preguntas que te llegarán de lejos. Sé que me las responderás y sentirás de nuevo el desplome del edificio moderno. Ser feliz e infeliz al mismo tiempo. Todavía no logro extirpar ese olor a sardinhas de entre mis dedos. Es el pulso de este corazón el que salpica letras y, aunque no me moje, añoraba esta cicatriz: es como volver a una casa de la que nunca había salido. Como las inundaciones del verano.

City Nebula

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Translated from Spanish by Peter Bush

On the way to the airport my hands still smelled of *sardinhas*. The Lisbon Municipal Chamber's chauffeur pointed to the bridge spanning the Tagus estuary, built in the era of Salazar the dictator, later to be called *25 de abril*. His words momentarily distracted me from my obliviousness to the smell from my fingertips. Many of us Spanish women admire the Carnation Revolution and also the fact that the monarchy wasn't restored, that shabby burden feeding our inertia and dross on the other side of the Peninsula. I reviewed the profile of a Lisbon open to the ocean while mentally I constructed a layered collage of other revolutions. They all dive-bombed rapidly: I returned to the smile in the museum, that smile diffused between my fingers. Flashes of city utopia and dystopia, the rhythm of a pulsating heart that hadn't stirred for ages rendered lethargic by an overdose of bureaucracy. The blue of paternal eyes framed by dark rings that heightened jet lag and night-time caring. We listened to stories of racism in the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*: slavery and cannibalism, enforced conversions of Jews, images of saints raised over people of another colour. Mexican images in churches from my journeys to other eras. It aroused a feeling that led me back to what I once was. Vice-royalty, conquest, whites, mulattoes. No, the indigenous didn't count. Oblivion. The recounting of an evolution that allowed black Christs to be created. And once again the pulsating images of a future that had yet to come, that made us dream of expanding the city's natural frontiers: sea-platforms, swarms of buildings that would extract energy from water. The architecture school where he learned about maestros who twisted their buildings into the round. The Na-

tional Autonomous University of Mexico that was also mine. Something stirred inside me. The convulsed throb of pieces of city that offered scant glimpses of green spaces: factories, skyscrapers, places to accumulate refuse, radioactive rubbish. The stories cascaded out. A shared fascination surprising in our eyes. I saw Mexico again and its experiences. For ages I tried to ignore the convulsions that brought. It always sliced me open down the middle. A premonition that was still incomprehensible. Close by again, reminding me that in a way I had never left.

In that municipal car, on the way to the airport, I extracted the damp napkin that one day I had prudently put in my handbag. I cleaned my fingers, celebrating that sensation coursing through my body, that I still hadn't left. My hands need to touch something that disappeared. At that precise moment the chauffeur mentioned the Roman aqueduct, but his Portuguese was a blur and I couldn't decipher his words. The Atlantic clashed against my gaze. There was too much water that would separate us. A chink open to gentle potential, like the architectural transitions in that Portuguese school. It is quite unconnected to that throb, to that exaggerated beat a wet tissue can't eliminate, however much it reduces the strong smell of *sardinhas*.

We follow Max Aub, Remedios Varo, Diego Rivera, Siqueiros, Trotsky... A throbbing that drags hearts from mouths. Art is like that, like revolutions. Lisbon now seems closer to Latin America. The Cuban revolution gets embroiled in the conversation: the war of Independence, the struggle against Machado or Batista... José Martí's call to go beyond. There are lives that don't fit in our grasp. The flight to Mexico, the French grandmother who was the source of some bright eyes. The discovery in Palenque of the tomb of someone who had perhaps been K'inich Janaab' Pakal. The story shifts and the ocean booms, always opening possibilities, bringing cadences to the rhythm

of these letters. Struggles against the metropolis that are also mine. The intellect rejects simplifications. Spanish, Mexican, Cuban... No need to make it explicit. You understand without the mediation of my words.

Madame Bovary? The haphazard repertoire of knots of emotion. From my taxi I imagined you finishing lunch and looking at the sea. You would soon be visiting the rooms in another museum. Masks. I remember the mask when it drops. It is only a painting. Perhaps you regretted my absence or were looking for someone to listen to you. However, it's more than likely that you won't find the rhythm to this beat. It resonates, indistinguishable in my lower belly, it remains intact. The recognition of a world that is understood, books with the same paragraphs underlined, that are highlighted in the margins. Shared coordinates of a vast universe beyond our grasp. The rhythm of tildes over Mayan hieroglyphics. Archaeology that also triggers revolutions. The father figure who makes you tremble and mine who still stirs me. The *saignant* roast beef. Yes, I like it *saignant*, although I know the blood dries after a few days. Have you noticed? Better not look again. There are caves that don't say goodnight. They are almost insisting I continue along the passage. I take the things from my handbag one by one as I look for my key. In the end I find it. Now I shall probably sleep. I shut the door and the fusion of green and purple returns in the darkness. A nebula rising from a building that is exploding. A child cries in the night. I imagine you switching on the light in a house in La Condesa neighbourhood. (The house that later shakes with the earthquake, that moves with the whole city.) The nebula is still there when you return and in the darkness you too feel the beat of the heart when the child stops crying. Mayan heads from a sacred temple. The Main Temple. The National Museum of Anthropology where all the water from the ocean rains down. I had no excuse not to return. It's like being forced to relearn the essentials. Impossible kisses. Everything returns to its place in Ten-

ochtilán as Lisbon becomes diffuse, is reduced to that green and purple haze. “No, it isn’t the failure of modern architecture; it’s the failure of a social politics that didn’t create adequate policies.” Toltecs, Olmecs... The Mayans were wiped out because they succeeded in rebelling against their priests. Did we fail because we didn’t look at each other? Diagonal lines get in the way of concentration. A cardiac rhythm that flows and cannot sync with that stadium that lays behind.

Theatre or music. There’s no point of contact. Leaving Flaubert leaves traces on your shoes. You are visible, but I don’t want to know any more. The performance has lodged in our gaze. I speak to my group: some confusion, some empathy. I see you smile. I note your infectious intonations. St George’s Castle and a twilight that gifts us sight of the entire Alfama. The Arab towers weave stories that stretch our wills in like manner. I don’t want to contrive encounters. I take a breath, trying to distance myself in order to understand what is happening. We are anticipating a dinner that distils music. I am surrounded by stories from Central America. Nahuatl stayed on my palate, with the *sardinhas*. The smell from that night is what I still retain between my fingers, what lingered on after I left the city. The bridges over the Duero don’t reach as far as the Mayan ruins. An asepsis that was beginning to bore me slips from my hands. I didn’t know that woman. “*Nous sommes tous des Madame Bovary*,” I thought the actor playing Flaubert would say. But the work concluded with these words: “*Elle va mourir, et toi, et toi...*” He pointed his fingers at us. “*Mais Madame Bovary vivra toujours.*” The message came strong and clear, whether from so near or so far. Thomas More had been sentenced. I took photos compulsively. Your gaze was visible from afar. It met defencelessness in that luminous light. That way we could understand why Spain ripped its shirt. It didn’t have a museum of memory. So many years of amnesia... The Colón Theatre in Buenos Aires resounded and I didn’t hear the birds in the city. The Tokyo aesthetic was Bradbury through and through

and we looked at each other and realised once again that there was a strange language connection. I almost preferred not to interrupt that moment, I knew that my flight wouldn't be peaceful. Adolescence. Much better without a tie. I bumped against it on that first day, erected like a shield against my innocent question. The lift goes up and down. Waits. The other night evaporated. "You didn't notice whether I danced or not," you told me, "you couldn't see me." No, I only ate *sardinhas* and listened to the stories of other cities. Too much Montevidean life still to dissect. We have taken off. Going to the museum was almost an obligation, I was hungry for metaphors. You returned. Neither of us suspected that utopia and dystopia would speak to us that afternoon. There is a park inside the museum. I'm frightened by the idea that the future will be like that. Perhaps the Art Deco building that should be there was only a mirage. It hardly matters. Madame Bovary is back. If only it were an innocent gesture that places my life in hands that are no longer young. I have seen Flaubert's pages flying above my head. I'm not surprised that the actresses interrogate us. The images in the exhibition were also of real cities. Seeing them on the wall helped us understand the unreality of the real. That's how we live, but Bovary is only interested in the frenzied rhythm of that pulsating beat. There is no way of judging. There is no perspective. The guitar strikes up, sounding like *fado*. No, I can't hear the noise now. There is a mask that's hard to sustain. It's easier to write it down. Revolution. We have fused history together. Cultural rejects also trigger resistance. We know the ruins. It can't be done over ashes. The footsteps through that artificial park are still warm.

I entered the dark room that pulsed with the beat of the city. A perfect scenario to begin the production. I had isolated myself. There was nobody else. I realised that. It was fairly obvious you were going to come. I left you as someone flees the inevitable, but the museum prescribed the itinerary. No, I repeat, those constructions weren't failed. It was that huge

inequality that cast its shadow over the projects. So then, why had our grandparents fought if the dystopias of those societies covered museum walls? The challenge of what hangs there. Afterwards you showed me the difference between buildings in dialogue and buildings in conflict. And how to distinguish others the mirrors of which hide what they are. The person accompanying us wants to take us to see the plans for Brasilia, but as we contemplate that artificial perfection, the reference point again becomes Mexico City. We both prefer chaos. A passion that can't be extinguished. I don't know what I meant by the message. I don't even know if it could be understood. There is no way we can know strip back ambiguity when intentions are confused even for the person voicing them. We won't end that pulsing beat at a stroke. The modern project explodes. Somebody decided to demolish the building. Only the green and purple nebula remains. Mariana's red hair is pretty. It's like a flame in the middle of an empty theatre. It was all for the best that you went to listen to music. You'd already had a sleep in the afternoon. You cherish the city's international profile but don't hide its shortcomings. Revolutions that don't extinguish all the water in that immense ocean. The quaking earth caused the letters to surface. Searing stories about humanity. The best and the worst have always gone hand in hand. I don't know how to frame the questions that will reach you from afar. I know that you will respond and once again you will feel the modern building crash down. Being happy and unhappy at the same time. I still haven't got rid of the smell of the *sardinhas* from my fingers. It is the beating of this heart that splashes over letters and, though I don't get wet, I longed for this scar: it's like returning to a house one had never left. Like the floods in summer.



Malta

Immanuel Mifsud

In-nies ta' maċ-ċint

The people on the fence

EUPL laureate 2011: *Fl-Isem tal-Missier (tal-iben)* (Klabb Kotba Maltin)

BIOGRAPHY

Immanuel Mifsud was born in Malta in 1967, the youngest in a working-class family of eight children. He has been active on the literary scene since the age of 16, when he started writing poetry and co-founded the literary group Versarti. He later founded several drama groups and has also directed plays written by himself and by a variety of famous playwrights. He is a leading contemporary poet and fiction writer, and some of his works have been translated and published in various European countries and the USA. His 2002 short story collection *L-Istejjer Strambi ta' Sara Sue Sammut (Sara Sue Sammut's Strange Stories)* won the Malta National Literary award, and the same book was later nominated for the Premio Strega Europa prize. He has participated in prestigious literary festivals across Europe. Mifsud is a lecturer at the University of Malta, where he teaches modern Maltese poetry and theatre.

In-nies ta' maċ-ċint

Immanuel Mifsud



Hi Sandra. Ilek ma tiġi 'l hawn. Meta?! Fid-disgħa? Ta' filgħaxija? Allura għax ma ċempiltx, belha? Ara tiftaħlix kotba. B'dawn lanqas toħroġ naqra ma tista'. Kont immur jogging filgħaxija m'għadnix immur. Mela x'nagħmel daqskemm huma koroh u bil-lejl lanqas tarahom, tispicċa tidħol f'xi wieħed minnhom, jaqq! Xi trid jaqbeż xi wieħed fuqek? Saħta għandna hawn. Jien il-kruha ddejjaqni Sandra, qalbi, u l-ħmieġ iktar u iktar. Imorru xi mkien ieħor hux. Jew imorru lura mnejn ġew, ħadd ma baġhat għalihom. Lanqas noħroġu ftit passigġata ma nistgħu. Hi jien għandi żewġt ibniet u moħħi jkun il-ħin kollu għaddej. Anki filgħodu, aħseb u ara filgħaxija. Hekk għidtlu lil Renzo: ibdilli dik is-serratura!

Dik ommi. Qiegħda fuq it-telefown ma' habibitha. Sandra kienet taħdem magħha u ġieli ġiet hawn, jieħdu kafè u jitkellmu. L-iktar ħaġa li jafu jagħmlu hija li jgħidu fuq in-nies. Sandra tal-flus, taf. Fis-sajf marru tour fuq vapur. Aħna ma mornieħ. Krejna jumejn dar bis-swimming pool. Ommi bilkemm misset mal-ilma. Qagħdet tixxemmex u missieri jdur 'l hemm u 'l hawn ma' xi ħbieb. U jien qgħadt fil-pool u filgħaxija ħriġt m'oħti. Ma naħsibx li oħti se tiġi magħna dis-sena.

Naħseb se titlaq mid-dar.

Kont inqast aktar minn ten kilos Sandra, imma issa ħi... Heqq kont immur jogging kuljum, imma issa b'dawn ma' saqajna nibza'. Mela int ma tismax aħbarijiet? Le, ma tarax! Hemm aħna, 'habba fihom ergajt żdidt. Ġieli naħsibha imma min jafkemm tiġik eh biex tmur il-gym?

Din tal-jogging m'hijiex vera. Ommi qatt ma marret jogging. U ma nafx meta naqset b'ghaxar kilos lanqas. Mhux ghax hi hoxna, imma din tal-ghaxar kilos esagerazzjoni. Jekk forsi naqset ftit meta mietet in-nanna ghax it-tabib qalilha li n-nanna kellha hafna kolesterol u allura ghamlet zmien tibza' ftit u ma baqghetx tiekol bhal qabel. Imma jogging qatt ma marret.

Missieri fil-kamra tal-imbarazz. Idoqqlu l-mobile.

Aw, Frans, x'inqalaghlek? Le hi ma nistax ta. Ghandi bicca xoghol u zgur ma llaħhaqx. Int kemm-il kamra ghandek? Dar? Fuq u isfel? Heqq, x'nista' ngħidlek? Kellem waħda 'l Piju. Għidlu jghaddi s'hawn bil-vann, jigbor xi tnejn minn dal-liba li jkun hawn u jtihom x'jagħmlu. Hekk jew b'hekk toħroġ bl-irħis. Dak tihom xi haġa u ibghathom jitnejku. Tihom għoxrin ewro u barra bid-daqq. Kieku stajt kont niġi Frans imma msallab.

Qatt ma fhimt ezatt x'xogħol jagħmel missieri. Li jahdem hafna naf, imma x'jagħmel ezatt m'ghandix idea. Meta jistaqsuni l-iskola ngħidilhom self-employed. Hekk qalli ngħidilhom. Ftit ilu staqsietni Miss Galea tal-guidance u ghidtilha "self-employed". Staqsietni kienx ibigh għand tal-ħwienet u ghidtilha iva ha nehles minnha. Ma nafx x'jagħmel. Ġieli bil-kemm narawh. Ma tantx jitkellem magħna hlief meta jkun irrabjat u jaqbadha fuq dawk li lanqas ommi ma taħmel wisq. Missieri aktar ma jahmilhomx. Id-darba l-oħra kien qed jara l-futbol fuq it-telewixin u tghidx kemm dam jghid li mhux sew li team Ewropew ikun mimli bihom.

Jien narahom kull filgħodu meta nkun sejra l-iskola. Narahom maç-çint. Ringiela, jistennew. Xi ftit minnhom iżommu basket jidher vojtt, oħrajn ma jkollhom xejn. Ikunu qegħdin jistennew u jien mill-private inħares lejhom. Sakemm jibqgħu jidhru nibqa' nħares lejhom. Šhabi jidhqu bihom u xi kultant jghadduhom biż-zmien. Perezempju din Kristle li qieghda titkellem:

Qegħdin sew! Insiethom fuq in-nar ommhom u ħarqu l-ġilda!

Kristle kulhadd jibza' minnha. Meta tgħid xi haġa kulhadd jaqbel magħha. Din Shania qieghda tgħajjat minn ġol-private:

Aw Blackie! Ejja Blackie!

Jien ma nidhaqx. Hemm ġranet meta nidhaq imma. Jekk ninzerta bilqieghda viċin Kristle jew Shania, ikolli nidhaq. Id-darba l-oħra Kristle qabbitni ma nidhaqx wara li bdiet tgħajjat “nugrufun”, qamet mill-bank fejn kienet u resqet lejja:

Aw int, mela tħobbhom lil dal-ħmieġ? Tridx inqabbadlek lil dak tat-tarf, dak ta' xufftejh ħoxnin bħal kuxxtejk?

Kollha jħarsu lejja u jidhqu. Kristle tistennieni ngħidilha xi haġa. Naraha tħares lejn kuxxtejja u mbaġhad tinfaqa' tidhaq hija wkoll u għajnejja jimtlew bid-dmugħ. Inħares 'il barra mit-tieqa u l-karozza jkollha tieqaf u narahom hemm, ringiela twila jistennew maċ-ċint u mbaġhad jaqbizli d-dmugħ għax niftakar f'oħti u għax veru għandi kuxxtejja ħoxnin.

Bangawanga, hawn xadina ħoxna tridha?

Dik Raissa kienet. Trid iddaħhaq ftit hija wkoll. Dakinhar qaltilna li l-għarus tagħha għandu ħuh jaħdem security fi klabb u raw wieħed minn dawn jipprova jidhol u tgħidx kemm tawh. Raissa tpejjep hi u tistenna l-private. Anki oħti qieghda tpejjep. Tisraq xi sigarett 'l ommi u dik tant iddaħhan li lanqas tinduna. Dan l-aħħar qieghda tpejjep aktar mis-soltu u issa qieghda tixtri l-pakketti. Oħti nbidlet. Ma nagħtihieq tort, l-aktar wara li tisma' lil missieri:

Kieku kollha nknishom minn hawn. Naqbad gaffa u nixkanahom wieħed wieħed. U l-airport bil-gaffa noħodhom u l-ewwel ajruplan li nsib nibgħathom miegħu imqar l-infern, forsi anki x-xitan idejquh u jibgħathom 'il barra wkoll. Min ġabhom 'l hawn? Aqqas toħroġ naqra ma tista' għax iwerwruk. Mhux lili ta, lili ma jwerwrunix. Imma lill-mara jwerwruha. Allaħares naqbad lil xi wieħed iħarisli lejha għax inbiċċru.

Imbagħad idur lejn Noelene, oħti, u jkompli:

Ara tkun fuq tal-linja jew ġejja hawn u jkun hemm xi harraj minnhom iħares lej. Qis li tgħidli, fhimt? Ha nkissirlu għadmu waħda waħda.

Inħares lejn Noelene u hi tħares lejja u ma tiftaħx ħalqha imma nifhimha xorta waħda.

U int ukoll, Svetlana, fhimt? Ara jekk ikun hemm xi ħadd minnhom iħares lej, mhux ikellmek ta qed ngħidlek, iħares lej, qis li tgħidli.

Noelene tħares lejja u tbaxxi rasha u missieri jqabbad sigarett, jonfoħ id-duħħan f'wiċċi u jaqtagħli l-aptit u ma nkunx irrid inkompli niekol.

Ma nifhimx għala jaqblu daqshekk ommi, missieri u Kristle l-bniet l-oħra li naf. Malli ninzel mill-private wara l-iskola u mmur lejn id-dar, ikunu hemm, min jilgħab bil-ballun, min iparla, min lanqas jaf x'se jaqbad jagħmel. Naralhom il-lożor minxurin u l-ħwejjeġ imdendlin mal-ħbula. Qishom xi belt għalihom. Ħadd minna ma jitkellem magħhom.

Noelene għandha sittax. Ħarġet mill-iskola u taħdem. Ġimagħtejn ilu missieri u ommi kienu barra. Konna fil-kamra u qaltli nismagħha u ma ngħid xejn:

Jien se nitlaq mid-dar Svet. Issa xi darba mmur għax-xogħol u ma nergax niġi. Ara ma tiftaħx ħalqek. Qed ngħidlek għax inti oħti u nħobbok ħafna. Taf għalfejn sejra?

Noelene tarani nibki u tibda tibki hija wkoll.

Sejra għax għandi għarus. Imma dal-għarus żgur ma jħobbux il-pa u l-mummy. Anzi jekk ikunu jafu l-pa joqtolni żgur.

Oħti thobbu ħafna lill-għarus. Jamal. Jekk jarah missieri jagħmel storja, u storja oħra ommi. Allura Noelene se tmur xi mkien imma ma nafx fejn. Ma tridx tgħidli għax għalkemm tafdani ma tafdanix f'kollox. Taf li malli jsiru jafu se jduru

fuqi. U tibza' li taqbizli xi kelma. Ili minn dakinhar nibza' u ma nikolx. Il-mummy qaltli sewwa nagħmel innaqqas għax għandi kuxxtejja ħoxnin.

Din Clodienne, il-ħabiba ta' oħti, l-aħħar li giet għandna:

Tħobbu lil Ja Rule? Cool hux, imma veru ikrah jaqq. Qisu xi xadina minn daw' li għandkom haw'.

Ma nifhimx għala anki Clodienne taqbel ma' ommi u missieri u Kristle u l-kumplament tal-klassi. Ma nafx għaliex ma naqbilx magħhom jien ukoll. Ma rridx naħseb fuq hekk. Imma nibza' li jekk jaqbd u 'l oħti ma' Jamal jagħmlu storja. Sirt meta nkun sejra l-iskola u Kristle tibda tgħajjat *Bongowongo* jew *Xadina hawn banana* niftakar f'oħti u nkun se nibda nibki.

Din Miss Galea issa:

Illum nixtieq nitkellmu fuq id-differenza. Kemm hi xi haġa sabiħa li d-dinja tagħna fiha ħafna affarijiet differenti, hux? Immaġinaw ftit, girls, kieku kollox kellu l-istess daqs, jew l-istess għamla. Xi dwejjaq kieku, veru? Kollox ikun l-istess. Dan hu s-sabiħ tad-dinja li ngħixu fiha, girls: id-differenza. Għandna lingwi differenti, tradizzjonijiet differenti, użanzi. In-natura għamlitna differenti. Heqq, allahares konna girls biss hux veru? Le, Kristle?

Kristle iddum ftit biex tiddeċiedi tihux gost biċ-ċajta jew le. Kulhadd jaf li ma' Kristle it-teachers jimxu differenti. Joħduha aktar bil-hlewwa għax jafu li taf taqleb kull m'hawn. Jibzghu minnha speċjament mindu sawtet lil Miss Fava u fethitilha xufftejha ktieb. Kristle tiddeċiedi li ma tidhaqx, lanqas titbissem u minflok tħares 'il barra mit-tieqa. Miss Galea:

Allura, girls xtaqt li illum nitkellmu fuq id-differenzi ta' bejnietna. Tridu tgħidu xi haġa fuq is-sugġett? Isa, għiduli xi ftit mid-differenzi ta' bejnietna. Digà semmejna ftit minnhom.

Ħadd ma jgħid xejn. La ma tgħid xejn Kristle ma jgħid xejn hadd. Dejjem hekk f'dil-klassi: noqogħdu nistennew lil Kristle u skont ma tagħmel hi nagħmlu aħna. U illum Kristle ma

tantx aħna. Anki fil-private kienet kwieta u lanqas biss ħarset 'il barra mit-twieqi bħas-soltu. Naf għaliex għax il-bierah smajthom l-aħbarijiet. U iva, ikolli nammetti li ħadt gost b'dak li smajt.

Ħadd ma jgħid xejn u Miss Galea tistenna. Nixtieq nitkellem fuq id-differenza. Għal darba Miss Galea tkellimna fuq xi haġa sura. Naħseb f'Noelene u Jamal. Noelene u Jamal differenti. Nixtieq ħafna nitkellem fuqhom u fuq dawk li jkunu qegħdin jistennew maċ-ċint u joqogħdu f'dik il-biħa l-kbira ma jafux x'se jagħmlu. Imma nibza' għax Kristle u l-oħrajn min jaf x'jgħidu u min jaf kemm jidhqu bija kieku, u min jaf kemm jidhqu b'Noelene. Inħares lejn Miss Galea u naraha tħares lejja u titbissimli:

Svetlana trid tgħidilna xi haġa donnha. Hux veru, Svet?

Istja, kif indunat?! Inħares lejha u nara li għadha titbissimli. Lanqas niftakar li qatt tbissmitli daqshekk. Forsi taf b'xi haġa Miss Galea, jew rat lil Noelene ma' Jamal.

Girls, ħa naraw fuq liema differenza se tkellimna Svetlana. Isa, Svet.

Isa, Svet, tagħtik kas ta' Kristle u tal-oħrajn. Isa Svet.

Miss, taf fuq xiex nitkellmu? Ħa nitkellmu fuq id-differenza bejn is-suwed u l-bojod.

U din Kristle, minn wara nett:

Jja, Miss, eja nitkellmu fuq ix-xadini għax hekk qishom.

U issa kollha jitkellmu l-oħrajn. Kollha jidhqu. Miss Galea tipprova twaqqafhom imma għalxejn:

Girls, please! Aħna lin-nies ma ngħajruhomx. In-nies li m'humieħ bojod ukoll huma bnedmin bħalna.

Issa Kristle trid ittellef u allura tkompli tgħajjat minn wara. Nibza' minnha. Biex tagħtik xi daqqtejn ma tridx wisq. Sa lil

Miss Fava wegġgħet. Damet xi xahar ma tersaqx lejn l-iskola u mbagħad reġgħet tfaċċat. Għall-ewwel ftit jiem kulhadd ħaseb li rabbiet l-għaqal sakemm darba qabdet ma' tifla iżgħar minnha u reġgħet bħal qabel. Kristle ma tghixx m'ommha, u missierha, kif rajt fl-ahbarijiet tal-bieraħ, fadallu ftit mhux ħazin biex jerġa' jmur id-dar.

Naħseb f'Noelene u f'Jamal. Inħobbha lil Noelene u dejjem xtaqt li tibqa' miegħi. Issa, minħabba ommi u missieri, u minħabba nies bħal Kristle u l-oħrajn, Noelene se titlaq mid-dar. Miss Galea tkompli tipprova, imma Kristle ma tridx taf.

Aħna xi ġuvni sexy rridu mhux suwed. Mela le ma noħroġx ma' iswed! L-ewwel nett jekk noħroġu filgħaxija ma nibdiex narah, u t-tieni – jaqq – jekk m'għandix, ikolli baby iswed. Jaqq!

Daħq. Miss Galea ma tidhaqx imma hadd m'hu jagħti kasha. Lanqas jien. Shania qieghda tghidli li għandi kuxxtejja ħoxnin u jmissni nsib xi wiehed minn dawk li jistennew u jkolli baby bħalu. Nixtieq ingebbdilha xagħarha u ntiha ġo wiċċha imma ara kif jaqbzu fuqi kieku. Allura, mingħajr ma ngħid lill-Miss, naqbad u mmur it-toilet, nissakkar u nibki. Min jaf x'se jagħmluli fuq il-private. Jekk nara li se jagħmluli xi ħaġa naqbad tal-linja. X'jimpurtani jekk ikun hemm xi hadd mill-ħbieb ta' Jamal u joqgħod iħares lejja. Mhux għajnejn għandu f'wiċċu? Iħares. Sinjal li nogħġbu jekk iħares.



Xahar ilu qgħadt nistenna lil ommi titla' torqod ħa nixgħel il-kompjuter. Ħadt email mingħand Noelene u qaltli li tinsab tajba. Bagħtitli ritratt tagħha ma' Jamal. Kemm huma ħelwin. Kieku nista' niprintjah u ngorru miegħi imma nibza' li ssibu ommi u tistaqsini fejn qieghda Noelene. Iktar nibza' li tistaqsini fuq Jamal u tagħmel xi storja ikbar minn dik meta sabet l-ittra t'oħti fuq il-frigġ. Il-pulizija għadhom ifittxuha u lili staqsewni ħafna mistoqsijiet imma veru ma nafx fejn qieghda.

Il-bieraħ filgħaxija mort hdejn dik il-bitha l-kbira. Kellhom xi festa għax bdew idoqqu t-tnabar, jiżfnu u jkantaw. Qgħadt moħbija biex ma jarawnix u qgħadt nieħu gost nismagħhom idoqqu, ikantaw u jiżfnu. Xi ftit minnhom kellhom wiċċhom miżbugħ bl-abjad u b'kuluri oħrajn, u bdew iqassmu l-ikel. Qatt ma rajthom hekk u qatt ma smajthom idoqqu. Kienet festa sabiħa. Ridt noħlom li anki jien, xi darba, inkun bħal oħti. Forsi xi darba nitlaq jien ukoll. Ma' Noelene u Jamal, man-nies tal-iljuni, it-tigri u x-xadini. Man-nies tat-tnabar. Għax dawn nies sbieħ — suwed u sbieħ. Bħal Jamal. Bħal dik it-tifla li Kristle kienet tgħajtilha Chimpny u tniggizha bil-kumpass. Xi darba mmur jien ukoll halli missieri u ommi jkollhom għax jiddispjaċihom. U nitgħallem indoqq it-tnabar tagħhom u niżfen bħalhom u nitgħallem hafna affarijiet minn tagħhom.

Dan kif jispicċaw l-emails sigrieti ta' Noelene: *Ara ma taqbizlekk xi kelma, qalbi.*

Imma jien irid nitkellem u nitkellem hafna. Għax issa ddejjaqt noqgħod kwiet, u ddejjaqt nibza' u nidhaq meta jidhqu Kristle u l-bqija. Ma rridx nibza' ngħid li l-iswed sabiħ ukoll — bħal Jamal u bħal hu u bħal oħtu u bħal ommu. Xi darba mmur f'dik il-bitha, nidhol hdejhom u ngħidilhom jgħallmuni t-tnabar u ż-żifniet tagħhom. Ngħidilhom li għandi oħti Noelene u l-għarus tagħha jismu Jamal u nistaqsihom kollha jekk jafuhx.

Xi darba se nagħmel dan kollu, u anki iktar minn hekk.

The people on the fence

Immanuel Mifsud

Translated from Maltese by Mark-Anthony Fenech

Hi Sandra. Long time no see. When?! At 9? In the evening? Why the hell didn't you call, idiot? Don't get me started. I can't even go outside, no thanks to them. I used to jog in the evening, I don't go anymore. Over my dead body, they're bloody hideous and you can't see them at night, you'll end up bumping into one of them, ugh! You want to be raped by one of them? We're cursed here. I bloody hate ugliness, Sandra my dear, and I bloody hate filth even more. We'll have to go somewhere else. Or they can go back to their country, no one asked for them. We can't even go for a walk 'cause of them. I have two daughters and my mind would be abuzz. All the time, even during the morning let alone during the evening. That's why I told Renzo: change that lock!

That's my mother. She's chatting with her friend over the phone. Sandra used to be her workmate. Every now and then she would come over for a cup of coffee and a dollop of idle chatter. Their gusto for gossip was something to behold. Sandra was well off, you know. They went on a cruise during the summer. We didn't. We rented a house with a swimming pool for a couple of days. My mother barely dipped her toes in the water. She lay on a deckchair, sunbathing, whilst my dad went out with some friends of his. And I stayed in the pool and went out with my sister in the evening. I don't think my sister will come with us this year.

I think she's going to leave.

I lost more than ten kilos Sandra, but now heh... Well I used to jog every day, but now, with these louts all over the place, I'm afraid. Don't you listen to the news? Good heavens no! See? I put on weight, no thanks to them! The thought did cross my mind but God knows how expensive a gym membership will be.

This jogging thing isn't true. My mother never jogged. And I can't recall when she lost ten kilos either. It's not that she's fat, but this whole ten kilos thing is an exaggeration. She might have lost some weight when grandma died because the doctor said that grandma's cholesterol levels were high so she was cautious for a while and changed her eating habits. But she never jogged.

My dad is in the box room, amongst the bric-a-brac. His mobile phone rings.

Hey, Frans, what's up? No mate, I can't. I'm working on something at the moment and I won't be able to. How many rooms do you have? A house? Two storeys? Well, what can I say? Speak to Piju. Tell him to come here in his can, pick up two of those fuckers roaming about and give them something to do. It will be cheap overall. Give them something and then tell them to fuck off. Twenty euros, no questions asked. I would have come myself if I could Frans but I really can't.

I never quite knew what my father did. I knew he worked a lot, but I have no idea as to what he did. When they ask me at school I tell them he's self-employed. That's what he told me to say. Miss Galea, the guidance teacher, asked me about this and I told her "self-employed". She asked me if he was a sales agent and I said yes so that she would leave me alone. I have no idea what he does. Sometimes we barely see him. He rarely speaks to us except when he's angry and starts venting his spleen at "them", the ones even my mother doesn't like at all. My father hates them even more. Last time he was watching a football match on TV and he went on and on about how it was not right that a European team would be teeming with such people.

I see them every morning on my way to school. I see them on the fence. Waiting, in a line. Some of them hold a seemingly empty bag, others would have nothing at all. They would be waiting and I would watch them from the school bus. I keep on watching them until they disappear. My schoolmates find

them funny and sometimes take the mickey out of them. For instance this is Kristle:

What a bunch of wankers! Their mum must have forgotten to turn off the oven and they got burnt to a crisp!

Everyone is scared of Kristle. Her word is law – everyone agrees with her. This is Shania hollering out of the school bus window:

Hey Blackie! Come on Blackie!

I don't laugh. Though there are days when I *do* laugh. If I end up sitting near Kristle or Shania, well, I *have to* laugh. Last time Kristle was shouting "sooty" at them and pounced on me when I was not laughing. She got up from her seat and approached me:

Hey you, you like this riffraff? Do you want me to hook you up with the one on the right, that one, with the fat lips, fat like your thighs?

They all look at me and laugh. Kristle is waiting for me to say something. I see her looking at my thighs. She bursts out laughing too and my eyes start swelling with tears. I look out of the window and the school bus has to stop right there, and I see them there, waiting in a long line on the fence, and then I start to cry because I think of my sister and because my thighs really are fat.

Bangawanga, do you fancy this fat ape?

That was Raissa. She wants to be funny too. Last time she told us that her boyfriend has a brother who works as a bouncer in a club and they saw one of them trying to get in. They trashed him. Raissa smokes as she waits for the school bus. Even my sister smokes. She steals a cigarette from my mother, who smokes so much that she can't be arsed. Recently her habit has picked up the pace and she's buying whole packets now. My

sister has changed. Can't blame her, especially after you hear my father venting his anger:

If it was up to me I'd clear them out. I'd get a bulldozer and frack them off, one by one. And I'd bulldoze them all the way to the airport and shove them on the first plane I find, even send them to hell, who knows, maybe the devil won't stomach their presence and will chuck them out as well. Who sent for them? You can't even go out, people are afraid of them. Not me of course, they don't scare me. But my wife is afraid of them. God knows I'd tear them to pieces if I caught one of them looking at her.

Then he turns to my sister, Noelene, and goes on:

If you're on the bus or coming back home and there's one of them fuckers looking at you, you tell me straight away, understand? I'd break his bones, one by one.

I look at Noelene and she looks back at me and doesn't say a word but I got the drift all the same.

And you too, Svetlana, understand? If there is one of them looking at you, I'm not saying speaking to you, just looking at you, you come and tell me.

Noelene looks at me and lowers her head. My dad lights up a cigarette and exhales the smoke in my face. I lose my appetite and push the plate away.

I don't know why my mum, my dad and Kristle and the other girls I know agree so much on this. When I get off the bus after finishing school and walk home, they would be there, some playing football, some talking, others looking lost. I see their bedsheets and clothes hanging up to dry. It's like another city. No one speaks to them.

Noelene is sixteen. She left school and started working. Two weeks ago my father and mother were out. We were in our room, and she asked me to listen and not repeat a single word:

I'm leaving home Svet. One day I'll leave for work and won't come back. Don't say a word. I'm telling you because you're my sister and I love you very much. Do you know why I'm leaving?

Noelene sees me crying, and she starts to cry too.

I'm going because I have a boyfriend. But dad and ma won't like my boyfriend, not at all. Da would kill me if he knew.

My sister really loves her boyfriend. Jamal. My father would create a scene, and my mother too, if they ever saw him. So Noelene is going somewhere but I don't know where. She doesn't want to tell me because although she trusts me she doesn't trust me fully. She knows that when they get wind of her escapade they'll turn to me. And she's afraid that I'd let a word slip. Since then I've been afraid. I haven't been eating. My ma said it's better if I reduce my intake because my thighs are fat.

This is Clodienne, a friend of my sister, the last time she was home:

Do you like Ja Rule? He's cool, but he's so ugly. He's like of those apes you have scurrying about.

I don't understand why even Clodienne is in agreement with my mother and father and Kristle and the rest of the class. I don't know why I'm not in agreement too. I don't want to think about this. But I'm afraid they'd cause a ruckus if they found my sister with Jamal. Every time I go to school and Kristle starts hollering *Bongowongo* or *Hey ape here's a banana*, I think of my sister and am on the verge of tears.

This is Miss Galea now:

Today I'd like us to talk about diversity. Isn't it beautiful that our world is so varied? Imagine this, girls, if everything was the same size, or cast from the same mould. That would be sad wouldn't it? Everything would be the same. Girls, this is what makes our world beautiful: diversity. We have different languages, different

traditions, customs. Nature has made us diverse. Well, God forbid we were only girls right? What do you think Kristle?

Kristle takes a while to decide whether to take the jibe in her stride or not. Everyone knows that teachers use a different yardstick with Kristle. They are more gentle with her because they know she'll raise hell. They're scared of her, especially since she beat up Miss Fava and split her lip. Kristle decides not to laugh, doesn't crack a smile. Instead she looks out of the window. Miss Galea:

So, girls, today I wanted to talk with you about our differences. Would anyone like to say something about the subject? Come on, tell me about some of our differences. We have already mentioned some of them.

No one utters a word. If Kristle keeps her mouth shut then everyone keeps their mouth shut. It's always like this in our class: we wait on Kristle and follow her lead. Today Kristle seems under the weather. She kept to herself during our trip to school and she didn't look out of the windows like she usually does. I know because I heard what happened yesterday. And yes, I'll admit that I got a kick out of what I heard.

No one utters a word and Miss Galea waits. I wish to speak about diversity. For once Miss Galea broaches an interesting subject. I think of Noelene and Jamal. Noelene and Jamal are different. I really wish to speak about them and those waiting on the fence and who live in the big yard looking lost. But I'm afraid of Kristle and what the others would say and how they would laugh at me and make fun of Noelene. I look at Miss Galea and I see her looking at me, smiling:

It looks like Svetlana wants to tell us something. Isn't that right, Svet?

Jeez, how does she know?! I look at her and see that she is still smiling. I don't recall her smiling at me this way before. Maybe Miss Galea knows something, or she saw Noelene with Jamal.

Girls, let us listen to what Svetlana has to say about diversity. Come on, Svet.

Come on Svet, ignore Kristle and the others. Come on Svet.

Miss, do you know what we should talk about? We should talk about the difference between black and white people.

And this is Kristle, from the very back:

Yeah Miss, let's talk about apes because that's what they're really like.

And now the others take her cue and start blabbing. They all laugh. Miss Galea tries to make them stop but it's a lost battle:

Girls, please! We don't insult people. People of colour are people like us too.

Now Kristle wants to cause a disturbance and so she continues to holler from the back. I'm afraid of her. She wouldn't hesitate to beat you up. She even hurt Miss Fava. We didn't see her for a month before she came to school again. Everyone thought she would start behaving until she started picking on a younger girl and went back to her old ways. Kristle doesn't live with her mum, and her father, according to yesterday's news broadcast, won't be back home anytime soon.

I think of Noelene and Jamal. I love Noelene and I always wished she would stay with me. Now, because of my mother and father, and because of people like Kristle and the others, Noelene will have to leave home. Miss Galea tries to reassert control but Kristle is relentless.

We want a sexy hunk not a black man. Of course I won't date a black man! First of all if we go out in the evening I won't see him and secondly – ugh – having a black baby? Hell no!

Laughter. Miss Galea doesn't laugh but no one seems to take notice of her. Not even me. Shania is telling me that my thighs are fat and that I should find one of those waiting on the fence

and have his baby. I wish I could pull her hair and punch her in the face but they'd pounce on me in an blink. So, without telling Miss Galea, I get up and go straight to the toilets where I lock myself up and cry. I shudder to think of what they would do to me on the school bus. Why should I care if there is one of Jamal's mates staring at me. He has eyes, doesn't he? Let him look. It means that I am to his liking.



A month ago, I waited for my mum to go to bed so that I could switch on my computer. I received an email from Noelene where she told me she's well. She sent a photo of her with Jamal. They're so sweet. If only I could print it and carry it with me but I'm afraid that my mum would find it and ask me where Noelene is. I'm more afraid that she'll ask me about Jamal and cause an even bigger scene than the one she caused when she found my sister's letter on the fridge. The police are still looking for her and they asked me a lot of questions but I really don't know where she is.

Yesterday evening I went next to that big yard. They seemed to have some sort of feast going on because they were playing the drums, dancing and singing. I stayed hidden so that they wouldn't see me and had fun watching them playing music, singing and dancing. Some of them had their faces painted in white and other colours and were handing out plates of food. I'd never seen them like this and I'd never heard them play music. It was a beautiful feast. I wanted to dream that one day even I would be like my sister. Maybe one day I'll leave home too. With Noelene and Jamal, with the people of the lions, of the tigers and of the apes. With the people of the drums. Because they are beautiful people – black and beautiful. Like Jamal. Like that girl Kristle used to call Chimp and prick with her compass. One day I'll leave so that my father and mother will get what they deserve. And I would learn to play their drums and dance like them and learn so much from their culture.

Noelene's secret emails end like this: *Don't say a word my dear.*

But I want to speak and speak a lot. I'm fed up of keeping quiet, and I'm fed up of being afraid all the time and of laughing when Kristle and the rest laugh. I don't want to be afraid to say that black is beautiful too – like Jamal and his brother and his sister and his mother. One day I'll go to that big yard to meet them and ask them to teach me to play the drums and their dances. I'd tell them about my sister Noelene and that her boyfriend's name is Jamal and ask if they know him.

One day I'll do all this, and so much more.



Malta

Walid Nabhan

Destinazzjoni

Destination

EUPL laureate 2017: *L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji* (Klabb Kotba Maltin)

BIOGRAPHY

Walid Nabhan was born in Amman, Jordan, in 1966. His family fled Al-Qbeybeh, a small village on the outskirts of Hebron, Palestine, after the 1948 war that established the state of Israel and resulted in the first Palestinian Diaspora. Nabhan studied at United Nations schools in Amman. He arrived in Malta in 1990, where he studied laboratory technology. In 1998, he graduated in biomedical sciences from Bristol University in England. In 2003, he gained a master's degree in human rights and democratisation from the University of Malta. He has published two collections of short stories in Maltese (*Lura d-Dar u Ġrajjet Oħra li ma Ġrawx* in 2009 and *Leħen tal-Fuħħar u Stejjer Oħra* in 2011) and one novel (*L-Eżodu taċ-Ċikonji* in 2013), which won the National Prize for Literature in 2014. He also published his first collection of poetry, *Fi Triqti Lejha*, in 2014. His poetry and articles have appeared in several papers and periodicals. He has also translated contemporary literary works from Maltese into Arabic.

Destinazzjoni

Walid Nabhan



“Int huha?”

“Iva”

Jiddispaċini. Ma nistghu nagħmlulha xejn iżjed”.

F’daqqa waħda hass l-art titmermer minn taħt riġlejh u tinfetaħ f’bokka bla tmiem. Is-saqaf u l-ħitan ikkrollaw warajh ġol-ħofra mudlama bla qiegħ.

“Hudu hsiebu. Miskin ma felahx l-aħbar t’ohtu. Sadattant ibagħtu għal Dr Akram, dak Palestinjan bħalhom”.

Lampedusa reġgħet għamlitha. Mingħajr ma kellha l-intenzjoni, u lanqas il-ħtija. Mingħajr ma kellha l-iċken farka ta’ tħassib ta’ min seta’ ħabbtilha f’nofs ta’ lejl. Hargħet bi ħgarha bħal kull darba, bil-papoċċ u l-libsa tas-sodda, u l-kutri lesti fl-intrata biex tilqa’ l-mhux mestidnin tal-baħar minkejja t-twissija wara twissija ta’ Ruma. Taf li ħa jċanfruha. Taf li ħa jmaqdruha u jgħajruha u jiġbdulha widnitha u jħalluha mingħajr il-fatra bikrija.

“Reġgħet għamlitha din il-qahba perfida. Issakkarha kemm issakkarha, u torbot kemm torbtilha saqajha terġa’ tiftaħhom beraħ. M’hemmx ħlief li ssewwiha, inkella ħa tibqa’ tħammrilha wiċċna ma’ Caligula u Bismarck, u n-nies tat-Tramuntana”.

Għal Amàl, li isimha jfisser tama, ma kienx fadal qatra waħda amàl wara li l-militanti u l-armata, u s-Sukhoi Russi gabu fix-xejn il-klinika fejn kienet ilha ’l fuq minn tletin sena tqassam it-tama bħala infermiera mal-UNRWA fil-kamp tar-

refuġjati Palestinjani tal-Yarmouk. Qatt ma kienet semgħet b’Lampedusa u lanqas kienet taf fejn kienet fuq il-mappa. Kienet tieħu ħsieb il-familja tagħha u l-familja kbira fl-akbar kamp tal-psewdokreaturi minsija minn Alla u l-gvernijiet tad-dinja.

Għall-bidu kulhadd kien qal li mhux se jdeffsu lir-refuġjati Palestinjani fl-olokawstu tas-Sirja, għax ma kinux parti mir-riċetta vulkanika li hadd mhu jifhem fis-Sirja. Però meta n-nar jieħu ma jibqax jiddistingwi bejn ħatba u ohra. Anzi, l-ewwel u l-aktar ħatba li tieħu hija dik imqarqċa. Allura f’kemm ilna ngħidu l-kamp tal-psewdokreaturi žvijati mtela bil-ġellieda bid-daġna u mhux bid-daġna, kulhadd jispara fuq kulhadd u hadd mhu jifhem x’inhu jiġri.

“Skuzani Dr Akram, qgħadt naqilgħek. Kelli nibgħat għalik għax ninsabu quddiem sitwazzjoni daqxajn delikata. Il-pazjenta klinikament mejta, wara emorraġija akuta fil-medulla oblongata, u ħuha li baġtu għalih minn Malta mhux f’qagħda li tkellmu. Donnu daħal f’delirju u l-ħin kollu jhewden u jreden li qatilha hu!”

“Fhimtek. X’kienu ċ-ċirkostanzi mela? Moħħi mar fuq is-soltu ta’ każijiet li nirċievu; asfissija u anossija ċerebrali”.

“Sfotunament le. Amàl qabzet fil-baħar minn fuq il-lanċa, u xi hadd qabeż fuqha fid-dlam u laqatha f’rasha”.

“X’inhi sfortunata miskina. Salvat minn taħt il-kanuni biex tmut taħt żarbuna! Kollox absurd f’dan ir-regjun miġnun. Issa nara nikkalmax lil ħuha u naraw x’nistgħu nagħmlu”.

“Lampedusa fil-għoli. Bħall-ikħal ta’ fuq il-muntanji tal-kosta Sirjana. Bħal dielja opportunistia tixxabbat ma’ ħitan is-Sultan. Jien u int tlajna fuq qawsalla biex bil-kuluri tagħha niktbu l-ismijiet tal-affarijiet żgħar li nħobbu. Ma tkissirniex bl-ekujiet li ttarrax kif jiġri fit-traġedji kbar. Izda bħar-raġġi tax-xemx fuq blat lixx fejn qatt ma nxterdet qatra demm, ma

qgħadniex inwerżqu fuq il-quċcata, għax ma kien hemm hadd biex jismagħna.. Lampedusa.. Ma ggwidani lejk l-ebda minaret, l-ebda fanal, u l-ebda xewqa ta' skarpan biex immis saqajn il-Prinċipessa. Iggwidatni għasfura salvat minn taħt l-irmied Għarbi, u telgħet fuq qawsalla biex tippriedka t-tama”.

Kienet baqgħet sal-aħħar ġurnata tippersisti u thawtel, u tirriskja ħajjitha taħt il-ħbit tal-bombi u l-irxix ta' balal li ma jaqtgħu b'xejn, biex iddewwi l-midrubin bil-ftit spirtu u tajjar li kien fadlilhom fil-klinika midruba aktar mill-feruti tal-battalja. U ma kienet tagħmel l-ebda distinzjoni bejn ferita u ferita. Il-pjagi għaliha kollha kienu pjagi li jweggħu. U kollha kienet tarahom bħala falliment faħxi li qed jibla' lill-pajjiż shiħ quddiem għajnejha. Għalhekk hi u sħabha, qatt ma rriffjutaw li jddewwu lil xi hadd, bid-daġna u mhux bid-daġna. U abbli li għalhekk il-klinika tagħhom sfat fil-mira ta' kulhadd, bid-daġna u mhux bid-daġna.

Fl-2012, wara sena mir-rivoluzzjoni Sirjana li suppost kellha tkun paċifista u ma tinvolvix il-Kamp tar-refuġjati li kellu jinżamm newtrali, il-Kamp safa arena ta' ġlied qalil bejn fazzjonijiet ġellieda u milizzji ambigwi wħud minnhom pupazzi Palestinjani, kemm tiġbdilhom il-ħabel. Ir-reġim irnexxielu jhallat il-karti b'mod sataniku li ma jhalli lil hadd barra. Alawiti u Sunni u Xiti u Durzi u Ba'tisti u Nazzjonalisti u Salafisti sakemm intilfet il-kawża ġusta ta' poplu ilu għexieren ta' snin maħqur u kulma ried ftit riforma. Imma r-riforma għal reġim daqstant xieref kienet tfigħer haġa waħda biss, il-waqgħa.

Aktar 'l quddiem dahlu l-qawwiet kbar u ġabu magħhom aktar nases għall-udjenza fjakka bil-ħmura tat-teatru. Kulhadd bl-aġenda tiegħu li m'għandha x'taqsam xejn mat-talbiet ġusti tal-poplu Sirjan li sadattant, lahaq dahl f'dilluvju nazzjonali. In-nisġa soċjali tqattgħet u dak li kien jiffirma tessut sabiħ biswit id-deżert Għarbi malajr iċċarrat

u l-ħjut tiegħu nħallu u reggħu ngħaqdu f'kull tip ta' bejta ta' għanqbut mqit.

Amàl intant, bdiet tiflef il-fidi u s-sabar, u kull tama li kellha li xi darba johorġu minn dak il-labirint mdemmi bdiet tisfuma fix-xejn. L-aktar wara li bdiet tircievi każijiet strambi ta' avvelenament bi ħxejjex velenużi li n-nies tal-kamp, assedjati minn kull naħa, bdew jieklu wara li spiċċatilhom l-aħħar loqma ta' kull haġa li tista' tittiekel. Però l-aktar haġa li kexkxet u ħattet lil Amàl għalkollox kienet meta l-istess nies bdew jieklu l-ħmir u l-klieb u l-qtates u l-ġrieden u għal naqra mhux lil uliedhom! Għallinqas imxew b'gerarkija li tirrorispetta l-ordni tal-ħajja! Aktar tkexkxet u kienet irrimettit meta saret taf li dawn in-nies kellhom *fatwah* biex isiru kannibali.

Fl-aħħar huha beda jiġi f'sensih iżda iktar beda jredden u jieħu l-ġuramenti li kien hu li qatilha. In-nefroloġista Palestinjan, minkejja l-kalma naturali u l-paċenzja professjonali, qabditu ċertu kurżità biex jifhem kif ġraw l-affarijiet ħalli jara jgħaqqadx il-biċċiet f'sekwenza li biha jista' jsabbar lil din il-familja mifluġa. Mill-informazzjoni li kellu quddiemu, Amàl ġiet identifikata, kif jgħidu l-karti ta' tagħrif li nstabu fuqha, bħala infermiera li kienet taħdem fiċ-Ċentru tas-Saħħa tal-Kamp tar-refuġjati tal-Yarmouk, u isimha mnizzel fir-registru kemm bħala refuġjata bin-numru serjali, u kemm bħala impjegata fil-qasam paramediku tal-istess Aġenzija li kienet tiehu ħsieb ir-refuġjati fil-Vant Nofsani.

Kellu wkoll tagħrif inizjali, li d-dgħajsa li waslet fuqha x'aktarx telqet minn Lixandra fl-Eġittu. "*Imma għalfejn l-Eġittu?*" Mistoqsija vaga li lanqas hu ma seta' jifhem għalfejn ħaxknet daqshekk lil rasu!

"U għalfejn qed taħseb li qtiltha int?"

"Għax jien qtiltha!".

"Kif stajt qtiltha meta lanqas biss..?"

“Għax jien ġennintha biex titlaq..Jien ġibtha”.

“Id-destin ġabha!”.

“Id-destin jien”.

“*Imma d-destin x’jaħbat?*”. Tħasseb Dr Akram. Din ma kinitx l-ewwel darba li ħaseb fuqha, kien ilu karriera shiħa jistaqsi. Kwazi kull darba li kien isib ruħu quddiem kilwa falluta. L-iskalpelli stess kienu jaffrontawh wara kull operazzjoni mingħajr suċċess. “*Id-destin x’jaħbat? Li tkampa kilwa u oħra le? Li tibrilla spatula u oħra le? Jew li tiggranfa qalb mall-ħajja u oħra le?*” L-imġieba ta’ iġsma li ltaqa’ magħhom matul il-karriera, ġeġħluh jikkunkludi li minkejja l-fizjoloġija kumuni bejn il-bnedmin, kull ġisem huwa storja għalih. Li jgħodd għal dan ma jgħoddx għal dak, u li jaċċetta dak ma jittollerax l-ieħor. Min jaf kemm-il darba fejjaq pazjenti bin-nefrite bil-penicillina li ma għamlet xejn ma’ pazjenti oħra. Din is-suxxettibilità dejjem fissirha, għallinqas lilu nnifsu, bħala l-“marka tas-swaba’ ġenetika li tagħmel lil kull individwu entità individwali unika. Pero dak il-ħin, aktar kien imħasseb x’jista’ jagħmel lil din il-familja milli x’destin kiefer” ġab lil din il-povra mara.

“Jien ġennintha biex tiġi”, lefaq huha b’wiċċ mittiekel bl-uġiġh. Fl-aħħar mill-aħħar kif se taħrab mir-realtà jew mid-destin potenti li ilu jittormenta lil Dr Akram karriera shiħa, mingħajr ma qatt sab irkaptu.

“Minn Lampedusa ħsibna li aktar faċli biex tibqa’ tielgħa’ sal-Isvezja”, kompla jilfoq b’vuċi mtaqqla bil-ħtija u n-niket personali.

“*U għalfajn l-Isvezja?*”, staqsa in-nefroloġista ftit konfuż. Kien jaf li l-Italja mhux l-aħjar post fejn titlob kenn politiku, tkun kemm tkun il-kawża tiegħek ġenwina. Forsi tant raw gideb ta’ kull tip, li ma baqgħux jemmnu aktar f’kawżi ġenwini. Ħafna mir-rakkont ta’ dawk l-immigranti mttertqin

kien jikkontradixxi lilu nnifsu malli jisbaħ, u qatt ma tkun taf fejn qieghda l-verità magħhom. Hu stess kemm-il darba sab lilu nnifsu mdeffes f'taħwid bla tarf meta ġieli bla ma jaf, sab ruħu interpretu bejn xi pazjenti immigranti u l-awtoritajiet. L-ghada kienu joħorghuh giddieb.

Ma jafx għalfejn reġa' qed jistaqsi fil-vojt meta hu stess kien jaf li l-Iskandinavja tinsab eqreb mill-Peniżola Għarbija. U l-iżbirri tagħha bil-qabda eħnen mill-ghassiesa tar-ramel. Mekka saddattant, ma ħaditx refuġjat wiehed. U al-Madīnah, ma ħarġet xejn biex tilqa' lill-pellegrini tagħha bil-ghana u l-palmi.

Amàl klinikament mejta. Mhi se tqum mill-ebda raqda għall-ebda rizuxxitazzjoni. Buttuna elettrika waħda żżomm l-organi fragli tagħha milli jarmu x-xugamani għalkollox. X'jiġifieri li tkun mejjet ħaj? Jista' jkun li l-ħajja magħmula minn bċejjeċ ta' ħajjiet independenti li jirriffjutaw il-mewt wara l-mewt proprja? Qishom qed jipprotestaw mal-moħħ li mhux ġustizzja li jaqbad u jiddecidi għalihom. Speċjalment meta jkunu fil-fjur ta' ħajjithom bħal ta' Amàl. "*Minn daqshekk*", tħasseb Dr Akram, "*x'differenza hemm, fuq livell ta' tirannija, bejn il-moħħ bijoloġiku u r-regim Sirjan li jibqa' jsostni Jew l-Assad jew lil ħadd?*".

"*Jekk il-ħajja magħmula minn bċejjeċ tal-ħajja, għax ma naqbdux u nsalvaw lil dawk il-bċejjeċ li jridu l-ħajja?*", redden Dr Akram bejnu u bejn ruħu huwa u jifli l-wiċċ eżawrit ta' ħuha mifni bil-ħtija. Mingħalih li ġab oħtu lejn mewtha. Bħallikieku fis-Sirja ma kinitx tmut. Jekk mhux bil-bombi bl-inkapaċità u l-ħasra. Min jaf! Wara kollox x'inhi l-ħajja ħlief sensila ta' evażjoni kontinwa tal-oppost tal-ħajja? Imma din il-mara sfortunata, ma setgħetx tevita l-oppost kollu tal-ħajja. Għalhekk stenduta hawn. Il-ħajja ttraditha fl-aħħar minuta, l-istess minuta meta kellha tiftaħ pagna ġdida.

X'riedet tgħid Amàl lil ta' madwarha b'dik it-temperatura delikata li baqgħet iżzomm fl-organi tagħha? X'tip ta' messaġġ riedet twassal minkejja l-mewt tagħha? Għalfejn ma mititx f'salt kif jafu jagħmlu tajjeb dawn l-immigranti illegali? Għalfejn ma niżlitx f'qiegħ il-baħar dak il-ħin u helset lill-Lampedusa u lill-Ewropa minnha!

Lampedusa! Mid-dehra kelli l-appuntamenti miegħek. Hawnhekk, fil-beraħ tas-sinjali u l-bxara tas-Slaten. Ilbist qalbi u l-ansjetajiet ġodda u ġejt għall-appuntamenti miegħek. Tgħid nasal? Jew se nerga' nitgerbeb mas-srab u ħa jerga' jgħidli li l-art għandha art oħra? U li l-art oħra mgħassa b'aktar srab, mill-ewwel profeta sal-aħħar tirann!

Lampedusa! La jien u lanqas int ma konna skuża ta' għajbien. Izda tgħannieqa posposta. Bsart li ħa nsib delli u dirgħajk miftuħa. Izda ma bsartx li bejn dirgħajk, ħa nsib id-distanza bejn dak li huwa reali u dak li mhux reali, bejn it-temporali u l-ispiritwali. Bejn il-benniena u l-qabar.

Is-sitwazzjoni kompliet tikkumpliika ruħha u kollox iddeterjora minn ħażin għal aghar, kemm fil-Yarmuk, kemm fl-Isptar Ġenerali ta' Lampedusa, u kemm f'ras in-nefrologista mħasseb. Minn hawn u ffit siegħat oħra ħa jkollhom jitfu l-magni li jzommu lil Amàl mejta ħajja. Wara kollox, minkejja l-ingwent u t-tidlik u s-suppożitorji kollha, xejn mhu pragmatiku u xott daqs il-medicina konvenzjonali meta tħabbat rasha mal-ħajt. Hu x'inhu għal din il-medicina Amàl kienet mejta, u qed tokkupa sodda mill-aktar bżonnjuża għal ħaddieħor li forsi għandu aktar ċansijiet realistiċi għall-ħajja. Fil-fatt Dr Akram jaf b'dan il-ħaddieħor, mhux wieħed u tnejn, iżda lista twila ta' ħaddieħor li ħajjithom tiddependi minn kilwa, jew biċċa fwied.

“Isma’, sab lilu nnifsu jgħid lil ħuha b'vuċi ħarira awtorevoli, “minn hawn u ffit ieħor ħa jitfu l-magni minn

fuq Amàl, għalli jista' jkun ħsibtu għall-arrangamenti u fejn ha tidfnuha?"

L-iehor inħasad donnu qed jisma' l-aħbar t'oħtu għall-ewwel darba. Bilhaqq fejn ha jidfnuha? Mistoqsija x'aktarx, b'ħafna konsegwenzi legali. Meta baqa' mbikkem it-tabib induna li forsi għaġġel ftit u li l-iehor ma kellux moħħ jaħseb fuq arrangamenti jew x'se jagħmel bil-kadavru t'oħtu.

"Ridt ngħid li hemm naqra procedura... peress li oħtok dahlet klandestinament".

"L-aħjar neħodha miegħi Malta", lefaq ħuha mbikkem, mingħalih li sab is-soluzzjoni.

"Ukoll hemm problema. Li japplika fl-Italja japplika f'Malta. Trid viża u permess mill-awtorità".

"Anki għall-mejtin?"

"Anki għall-mejtin aktar mill-ħajjin. Jiġifieri oħtok ha tinzamm fir-refrigeratur sakemm toħorgulha l-karti neċessarji. U m'hemmx garanzija li se johorġu kif tixtiequ intom. Inkella min jaf kieku..".

"Kieku xiex tabib? Tgħidx ha mmur lura Lixandra bil-kadavru tagħha!"

"Min jaf kieku Amàl tagħti l-organi tagħha.

"Audzubillahiminasyaitonirrojim! Astaghfirullahaladzim! Taf x'int tgħid?"

"Ma jien qed ngħid xejn ħazin. Dan li qed ngħid m'għandux jaqsam mad-difna t'oħtok. Abbli xorta ha jkollok tithabat mall-burokrazija Ewropea. Dan li qed ngħid aktar għandu x'jaqsam ma' dmiri bħala bniedem qabel kollox, li bħala professjonista dmiru itawwal il-ħajja. Tkun ta' min tkun. Jiddispjaċini ħafna għal Amàl, talli ma stajna naghmlulha xejn, la fil-Yarmuk u lanqas hawnhekk f'Lampedusa. Fil-verità hi tista' tagħmlilna

u mhux aħna lilha. Tista' tagħti l-ħajja lil ħaddieħor, u lilha nnifisha permezz tiegħu. Tista' tibqa' magħna permezz ta' dak ix-xi ħadd li ħa ttih il-ħajja”.

“X'int tharraf tabib! Jaqaw trid issir popolari minn fuq il-fdalijiet ta' refuġjata? Kif kollox għalikom merkanzija! Tridhom jgħidu, li biegh l-organi t'ohtu?”

“Min hu f'sensih ħa jgħid li xtara bl-organi t'ohtu l-ħajja u l-mħabba u r-rispett, u akkwista qraba ġodda”.

“Taf sew Dot li din il-biċċa mwiegħra u tmur kontra x-Xarija”.

“Mhux vera. La l-Islam jaċċetta t-trasfużjoni tad-demmm għandu jaċċetta t- trapjant tal-organi”.

“Mela tridha ta' ġurista wkoll. Ħa nċempel lir-raġel tagħha u hutha u qabel kollox, lill-Imam tal-moskea f'Malta. Din affari kbira”.

Wara ftit ġranet Amàl ittiehdet Malta għad-difna wara l-intervent tal-Prim Ministru. Warajha ħalliet tliett qlub Taljani ferħana, tnejn bil-kilwa li rċevew, u ieħor qassis, b'qalbha Musulmana thabbat f'sidru Kristjan.

Destination

Walid Nabhan

Translated from Maltese by Clare E. Vassallo

“Are you her brother?”

“Yes.”

“I’m very sorry. There’s nothing more we can do for her.”

He suddenly felt the ground trembling beneath his feet dragging him down to a bottomless pit. The ceiling and the walls crumbled on him into the dark endless void.

“Take care of him. Poor man, he couldn’t bear the news about his sister. In the meantime, could you call Dr Akram? He’s Palestinian like them.”

Lampedusa yet again. Without intention, without guilt. Without having the faintest inkling of who could possibly be knocking in the middle of the night. She rose to the occasion as she always did, in her slippers and nightdress, with warm blankets at the ready, to welcome the uninvited creatures emerging from the sea, regardless of the repeated warnings from Rome. She knew that she would be scolded, mocked and called names, punished and deprived of her loaf.

“This perfidious whore has done it again. No matter how much we lock her up or chain her legs she still forces them wide open. We have no choice but to stitch her up, otherwise she’ll carry on shaming us in front of Caligula and Bismarck, and the people of the North.” For Amàl, whose name signifies hope, there wasn’t a single drop of hope left after the militants and the army, and the Russian Sukhoi destroyed the clinic where she had spent over thirty years dispensing hope as a nurse with

the UNRWA at the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp. She had never heard of Lampedusa nor had she any clue of its coordinates on the map. She took care of her family and the extended family of pseudo-creatures at the camp, forgotten by Allah and all governments of the world.

At first, they all said that they wouldn't involve the Palestinian refugees in the Syrian holocaust, since they didn't form part of the volcanic recipe that no one understood in Syria. But once a fire starts it doesn't distinguish between types of wood. In fact, the dry and brittle wood starts burning first. And in no time the camp of derailed pseudo-creatures, crowded with bearded and shaved fighters, had begun to fire at each other with no one understanding what on earth was going on.

"Excuse me for disturbing you, Dr Akram. I had to send for you because we're facing a rather delicate situation. The patient is clinically dead following an acute haemorrhage in the medulla oblongata. Her brother, who was summoned from Malta, isn't in much of a position to communicate. He seems to be a little delirious, moaning and raving that he killed her himself!"

"What happened? Was it a case of asphyxiation or cerebral anoxia? These tragedies happen too often."

"Unfortunately not. Amâl jumped off the boat into the sea in the dark, and someone jumped on her, and landed on her head."

"Tragic. She survived the perdition of guns to succumb to a frightened foot! Everything is absurd in this hysterical place. Let's try to calm her brother down and then we'll see what we can do."

"Lampedusa is high in the skies. Like the blue above the hills on the Syrian coast. Like an opportunistic vine, we climbed the

Sultan's walls together, and together we rode the rainbow and wrote the names of the little things we love in its vibrant colours. We weren't destroyed by the deafening echoes of the dead. Instead, we shone like the rays of the sun on distant zeniths, on which no blood was ever shed. We didn't scream, because there was no one to hear our screams. Lampedusa. No minaret or cross led me to your bosom. No lighthouse or compass, nor a shoemaker's longing to touch the feet of his beloved princess. I was steered to you by a butterfly saved from beneath the Arab ashes, which flew on the rainbow to preach hope. "Amal persisted and persevered in her mission until the very last day, risking her life under the bombs and the unstoppable spray of bullets. She treated the injured with the last drops of surgical spirit and remaining bits of cotton wool in the clinic, which was more seriously wounded than its patients injured in battle. She never distinguished between one wound and another. In her eyes, every injury caused suffering and all this pain contributed to the overwhelming failure that was swallowing up the whole country in front of her.

In 2012, a year into the Syrian revolution, the refugee camp, which was supposed to be spared the violence, became the arena of intense battles between factions of fighters and ambiguous militants, some of whom were Palestinian puppets manipulated by others. Somehow, the regime managed to shuffle all the cards in such a satanic way that no one was left out. They dragged Alawites, Sunni, Shiites, Christians, Druze, Baathists, Nationalists and all Salafists onto the battlefield until the just cause of a nation which simply longed for some reform was completely lost from sight. Reform for such a rigid regime only meant its downfall.

Later, the Great Powers entered the fray with deadly traps intended for a starving audience waiting behind the blood-stained curtains. Each having its own agenda which had nothing to do with the cries of a people on the verge of a pain-

ful national collapse. The social fabric, which had previously formed the colourful weave reflecting the vexing Arab desert, was quickly ripped to shreds, and its fibres were re-woven into all kinds of traps and poisonous webs.

Amal gradually began to lose faith and patience. All the hope she'd had to emerge from that bloody labyrinth began to fade away. More so when she started facing strange cases of poisoning from venomous plants which the people in the camp were forced to eat when the last edible morsel was gone. She was frightened to the core when those people resorted to eating donkeys, dogs, cats, rats and almost their own children! At least they followed a certain pattern that respected the hierarchy of life! She felt dizzy and vomited when she learnt that a *fatwah* was issued for them to behave like cannibals.

After a while, her brother came to his senses, but kept moaning and taking oaths that it was he who had killed her. The Palestinian nephrologist, despite his natural calm and professional patience, became suddenly concerned with understanding what had happened, with piecing the events together in order to find the suitable words to comfort this grieved family. From the identification papers which were found on her, he discovered that she worked as a nurse at the Health Centre of the Yarmouk Refugee Camp. Her name was down in the register as both a refugee with a serial number, and an employee in the paramedic sector of the same Agency that took care of the Palestinian refugees in the Near East.

He also had learnt that the boat she came on had probably departed from Alexandria in Egypt. 'Why Egypt?' A bizarre question which attacked him, he wasn't sure why.

"Why do you think you killed her?"

"Because I killed her!"

“How could you have killed her if you weren’t even...?”

“Because I persuaded her to leave... I drove her here.”

“Destiny brought her here!”

“Then I was her doomed destiny.”

“But what is destiny?” Dr Akram wondered for the thousandth time. He’d spent a whole career asking the same acute question. Almost every time he was defeated by a failed kidney, or after every abortive surgical intervention. His own scalpels would echo his thought. *“What is destiny? Why does one kidney make it while the other doesn’t? What makes a spatula more efficacious than another? Why does one heart hold on fiercely while another succumbs?”* The behaviour of the bodies he’d encountered throughout his career had driven him to conclude that despite the common anatomy and physiology, each human body is a unique story in and of itself. What counts for one body does not work for another, and what one body can tolerate is fatally rejected by the other. So many times he’d managed to cure patients with nephritis with antibiotics that then had no effect at all on other patients. He always attributed this susceptibility to genetic “fingerprints” which make each person a unique individual. However, at that moment he was more concerned with what he could do for this family than what cruel fate had driven this poor woman to her tragic destiny.

“I insisted that she leave,” he sobbed, his face eaten up by pain. “We thought it would be easier to make it to Sweden from Lampedusa after Turkey shut its doors,” he carried on in a tormented voice loaded with guilt and sorrow. *“And why Sweden?”*, asked the nephrologist, confused. He well knew that Italy wasn’t the best country in which to ask for political asylum, no matter how genuine your case might be. They’d encountered fabrications of so many kinds that they’d

stopped believing in genuine cases. Many of the stories told by shivering immigrants in the dead of night would be contradicted the next morning so you never found out the truth. He'd found himself countless times involved in awkward situations when, often without him even realising, he'd acted as an interpreter between immigrant patients and the authorities. The next day, they'd accuse him of having lied. He didn't really know why he was suddenly regurgitating pointless questions when he knew full well that Scandinavia was closer than the Arab peninsula. And its police are more merciful than the guardians of the sand. Mecca meanwhile had not taken in a single refugee. And al-Madīnah had not welcomed any pilgrims with songs and palm fronds.

Amal was clinically dead. She wasn't going to wake or be resuscitated. There was just a single electric switch that kept her fragile organs from throwing in the towel. What does it mean to be functionally dead while hosting live organs? Can it be that life is made up of smaller independent lives that refuse to die upon death? As though they protested the tyranny of the brain that decides their fate. Especially when they were still in the prime of life as Amal was. *"After all,"* thought Dr Akram, *"what difference is there on a tyrannical level between the biological brain and the Syrian regime that insists on 'Either al-Assad or No One'?"*

"If life is made up of minor lives, why don't we save those lives that still desire to live?" mused Dr Akram as he observed the exhausted and agonised face of her guilt-racked brother. He believed he'd brought his sister to her death. *"As though she wouldn't have died in Syria, if not under the bombs, then with the futility and helplessness! Who knows? After all what is life if not a series of continuous evasions of its opposite? But this unfortunate woman couldn't evade all of life's opposites. That's why she's laid out here. Life betrayed her at the last minute, that same minute it was supposed to open a new chapter."*

What did Amàl wish to convey by keeping her organs alive at that delicate temperature? What kind of message was she trying to pass on despite her death? Why didn't she just die immediately as these illegal immigrants normally do? Why didn't she just sink to the bottom of the sea instantly and rid Lampedusa and Europe of her!

“Lampedusa! It seems I had an appointment with you. Here under the vastness of the stars carrying the Good News to the Kings. I wore my heart and its anxieties and came to my appointment. Will I make it? Or will I fall at the feet of the mirage which will tell me yet again that my homeland is another phantom guarded by other guards, from the first prophet to the last tyrant!

Lampedusa! We were condemned a postponed embrace. I foresaw I might trace my shadow beneath your open arms. But I didn't predict that in your arms I'd find the space between the real and the unreal, between the temporal and the spiritual, between the cradle and the grave.”

The situation became more complicated and everything deteriorated in Yarmouk, as in the General Hospital of Lampedusa, as well as in the mind of the tormented nephrologist. In a few hours' time they would have to switch off the machines that kept Amàl alive in death. After all, despite all the potions and lotions, nothing is as pragmatic as conventional medicine when it faces a dead end. Whichever way you looked at it, for this kind of medicine Amàl was dead, and she was occupying a bed which was desperately needed for someone else who may have a more realistic chance of life. In fact, Dr Akram knows about this 'someone else', not one or two, but a lengthy list of 'someone elses' whose lives depended on a kidney or a sliver of liver.

“Listen”, he finally found himself telling her brother in a slightly authoritative tone, “in a little while they'll have to

switch off Amàl's machines, have you thought of the practical arrangements for her burial?"

The brother was shocked, as though he were receiving the news of his sister for the first time. Where would they bury her? A question with a lot of legal implications. When he kept quiet the doctor realised that perhaps he'd rushed a little and the other didn't have the presence of mind to consider what to do with his sister's body.

"I meant to say that there are some procedures to deal with, seeing that your sister entered illegally." "I'd better take her back with me to Malta," her heartbroken brother replied as though he'd found the solution.

"That's also a problem. What applies in Italy also applies in Malta. You'll need a visa and a permit from the authorities." "Even for the dead?"

"Even for the dead. Perhaps even more so than for the living. This means your sister will have to remain in the morgue until you sort out the necessary paperwork. And there's no guarantee you'll get what you're asking for. Alternatively, who knows if..." "Alternatively, what, doctor? Do you expect me to take her body back to Yarmouk or Alexandria?!"

"What if Amàl were to donate her organs..." "What!! A'uzu billahi minashaitanir rajim! Astaghfirullahaladzim! Do you know what you're saying?"

"I'm not saying anything wrong. What I'm suggesting has nothing to do with your sister's burial. It probably won't make any difference to European bureaucracy. What I'm saying has to do with my duty as a human first and foremost, and that as a professional whose primary duty is to prolong life, whoever it may be. I'm terribly sorry for Amàl, that we couldn't do anything for her. The truth is that she can do

something for us. She can give life to others, and to herself through them. She can live through that someone.”“What, are you crazy Doctor! Are you trying to make a name through the remains of a refugee? How come everything for you is just business! Do you want them to say that he sold his sister’s organs in Italy?”

“On the contrary, those in the right frame of mind will say that he bought life, respect and love, and acquired a new family with his sister’s organs.”“You know well that this goes against Allah and Sharia.”“Not at all. Once Islam accepts blood transfusion it should also accept organ transplants.”“- So, you’re a Mufti as well. Listen doctor – we’re talking about donating organs to non-Muslims. This is a major issue and could be haram. I need to call her husband and relatives and before any of them, the Imam at the Mosque in Malta.”A few days later, Amàl was flown to Malta for a dignified burial after governments intervened. She left behind her three appreciative Italians, two with the kidneys they received, and another, a priest, with a Muslim heart throbbing in his Christian chest.



Montenegro

Andrej Nikolaidis

Ono što je veliko

Greatness Will Have its Due

EUPL laureate 2011: *Sin* (Okf Cetinje, co-published with Durieux)

BIOGRAPHY

Andrej Nikolaidis was born in 1974 in Sarajevo, to a mixed Montenegrin-Greek family. Until the age of six, he lived in the city of Ulcinj, where he returned in 1992 after the war in Bosnia erupted. Since 1994, he has written for regional independent and liberal media, as well as for cultural magazines. He is considered by many to be one of the most influential intellectuals of the younger generation in the region, known for his anti-war activism and for his promotion of the rights of minorities. Nikolaidis has also publicly defended the victims of police torture, which has resulted in his receiving many threats, including a death threat during a live radio appearance. He has often stated that he considers freedom of speech to be the basis of freedom. He has worked as a columnist for the weekly magazine *Monitor* and for publications including *Vijesti* (Montenegro), *Dnevnik* (Slovenia), *Slobodna Bosna* (Bosnia-Herzegovina), *E-novine* (Serbia) and *Koha Ditore* (Kosovo). Since 2010, he has been employed as an advisor for culture and free society in the parliament of Montenegro.

Ono što je veliko

Andrej Nikolaidis



Okrenula je ključ u bravi. Isto „klik“ čuje se i kada otključaš i kada zaključaš, kvaka se jednako spusti kada je zatvoreno i kada je otvoreno, pomislila je dok je ulazila u stan. Teško je reći razliku između onoga što te je zatočilo i onoga što te može osloboditi. Ne znaš dok ne gurneš vrata, pomislila je dok je prala ruke u kupaonici.

Svjetlana neće iz škole za još barem dva sata. Ima dovoljno vremena da im spremi lijepu večeru.

Voljela je da kuva. To je smirivalo. Ne i danas. Dok je rezala luk, dok je rendala mrkvušargarepu, dok je tucala meso, mislila je samo na jedno: na jutrošnji razgovor.

„Sjednite, sjednite... Da, možete tu. Vi, pretpostavljam, znate zašto ste ovdje?“

„Ne, bojim se.“

„Hajte, Jelena, molim vas...“

„Ne, zaista...“

„Tako znači... Tako... Gledam vas, Jelena, pa iako znam da izgled često vara, rekao bih da ste žena koja nije od mnogo riječi.“

„Obično mi kažu da sam tiha.“

„Vi ste povučena osoba?“

„Mislim da jesam.“

„To smo, vidite, mislili i mi.“

„Vi?“

„Da, mi. Mislili smo, još, i da niste glupa žena.“

„Mislim da nisam.“

„Uprkos svemu, to i dalje mislimo i mi. Ali još ne znam je li to za vas olakšavajuća ili otežavajuća okolnost... Htjeli ste nešto reći?“

„Ne, ne...“

„Tako znači... Pretpostavljam da sada znate zašto ste ovdje?“

„Ne.“

„Ovdje ste, Jelena, zato što ste se, uprkos tome što smo mi mislili da ste pametna žena koja ne priča mnogo, ponašali kao neko ko to nije.“

„Bojim se da ne razumijem.“

„Čega se bojite? Koga se bojite?“

„Ne bojim se. Nego se bojim da ne razumijem. To je samo fraza.“

„A, sad razumijem. Izgleda da ja nisam osobito pametan.“

„Nisam to htjela reći.“

„Znam da niste. Ali vidite kako, ponekad, ispadne kako smo rekli nešto što nismo htjeli reći?“

„Da.“

„Stoga je najčešće najmudrije ne reći ništa. Jer ono što nismo rekli niko ne može pogrešno shvatiti. Razumijete?“

„Razumijem.“

„Nego kako. Pametna ste vi žena, rekoh ja. Ali zašto ste onda, Jelena, govorili ono što je bolje ne reći?“

„Bojim... Ne razumijem.“

„Pomoći ću vam. Juče ste razgovarali sa sestrom Mirković?“

„Jesam.“

„Šta ste sestri Mirković rekli?“

„Ništa posebno. Uobičajen, svakodnevni razgovor. O djeci, školi, životnim stvarima.“

„Pokušajte se sjetiti: možda ste joj rekli još nešto? Možda ste joj se na nešto požalili?“

„Moguće. Ali se toga ne sjećam.“

„Probajte se sjetiti, ipak?“

„Ne sjećam se.“

„Niste se požalili na svog pacijenta?“

„Ne. Možda jesam.“

„Jeste, Jelena, jeste. Hajte, molim vas, sada se meni požalite. Vidite, sve što kažete meni, ostaje među nama. Ali ono što kažete sestri Mirković, ili nekoj drugoj bliskoj vam osobi, moglo bi dospjeti do drugih ljudi. Sestra Mirković mogla bi ono što ste joj rekli u dobroj vjeri prenijeti nekom drugom, opet u dobroj vjeri. Ne kažem da jeste, ali mogla bi. Taj neko mogao bi, opet, to prenijeti nekom drugom. I dok dlanom o dlan, to što ste rekli moglo bi dospjeti do nedobronamjernih ljudi. Koji bi to što ste rekli mogli zloupotrijebiti. Ako bi se to desilo, postalo bi nebitno što ste zapravo mislili kada ste se požalili sestri Mirković. Vi ste se, rekoh, požalili bez zle namjere. Ali kada bi vaše riječi dospjele do nedobronamjernih ljudi, vaše namjere više ne bi bile bitne. Vaše riječi više ne bi bile vaše. Bile bi njihove. Bile bi oruđe u rukama ljudi koji ni nama ni vama ne misle dobro. To, siguran sam, ne biste željeli.“

„Ne, naravno.“

„Vidite: zato je ćutanje zlato. Od onoga što niste rekli ne može vas zaboljeti glava. Ni vas, ni nas. Razumijete?“

„Razumijem. Ali i dalje ne znam šta sam pogrešno rekla.“

„Ako vi ne znate, kako bih ja to mogao znati?“

„Ne znam.“

„Šalim se, Jelena.“

„Razumijem.“

„Vidite, Jelena, kada smo odlučili da brigu o njemu povjerimo vama mislili smo, pravo da vam kažem, da vam time činimo čast.“

„Razumijem.“

„Nismo mislili da će vama to tako teško pasti. Nismo mislili da ćete o tome govoriti sestri Mirković. Ili bilo kome drugome. On je, ipak, teško bolestan čovjek. A vaš posao je briga o bolesnima. Uz to, on je veliki čovjek“.

„Jeste.“

„Jeste, nesumnjivo. Koliko ste nobelovaca njegovali?“

„Samo njega.“

„Razumljivo. On je naš jedini nobelovac.“

„Da.“

„Time što smo njegov život, zapravo njegovu smrt, jer i mi i vi znamo da on živ iz ove bolnice neće izaći, stavili u vaše ruke, na vas smo prenijeli veliku odgovornost. Koje ste, držali smo, dostojni.“

„Hvala vam.“

„O njemu ste dobro brinuli.“

„Vjerujem da jesam.“

„Jeste. Ali niste brinuli o njegovom ugledu.“

„Nisam ništa...“

„Niste brinuli, Jelena. Da jeste, ne biste se požalili sestri Mirković. Da jeste, ja danas ne bih bio ovdje.“

„Razumijem.“

„Njegov ugled je i ugled naše kulture. Ugled našeg jedinog nobelovca je i ugled naše države. Složit ćete se?“

„Slažem se.“

„A ugled naše države je važna stvar, slažete se?“

„Slažem.“

„Važnija od nelagodnosti koju vi možete osjetiti. Slažete se?“

„Da.“

„Zašto ste se, Jelena, onda požalili sestri Mirković?“

„Samo sam rekla da...“

„Nema tu „samo“, Jelena. Ono što vama izgleda kao „samo“ moglo bi biti „čak“, možda i „sve“. Razumijete?“

„Mislim da razumijem.“

„Razumijete, naravno. Ali ja i dalje ne razumijem čemu, onda, razgovor sa sestrom Mirković.“

„Razumijem.“

„Naravno da razumijete. On je veliki čovjek, Jelena. Ali on je i star i bolestan čovjek.“

„Vi ne znate kakve sve vulgarnosti on meni govori.“

„Mi to, naravno, znamo.“

„Ne znate šta mi je sve radio. Sve te gadosti iz njegovih usta. Njegove ruke...“

„I to, naravno, znamo. Znamo šta je radio svojim, naglasiću, starim i bolesnim rukama.“

„Znate da mi je govorio stvari koje me je stid da ponovim pred vama?“

„Ali vas ipak nije bilo stid da to povjerite sestri Mirković?“

„Znate da me je više puta pljunuo?“

„Znamo.“

„Znate da se više puta namjerno pomokrio po meni, dok sam ga presvlačila?“

„Šta mislite, znamo li? Nemojte plakati, Jelena. Nemojte plakati... Vi ste jaka žena. Kroz šta ste sve u životu prošli... Vidite, i ovo će proći. On je na smrti. Gledajte na to ovako: on više nije on. Bolest i blizina smrti mijenjaju čovjeka, slažete se.“

„Da. Neke ljude, da.“

„On više ne vlada sobom, Jelena. On je čitavog života bio istinski gospodin. To zbog čega plaćete nije vam učinio on, nego bolest i smrt. On je veliki čovjek, Jelena. Razumijete?“

„Da.“

„Jedan od najvećih koje smo imali.“

„Razumijem.“

„On nije zaslužio... Naša zemlja nije zaslužila da uspomena na njega bude ukaljana.“

„Razumijem.“

„Jeste li se obradovali njegovom Nobelu, Jelena?“

„Jesam.“

„Imali ste osjećaj da je taj Nobel, nekako, i vaš?“

„Ne znam.“

„Jeste, Jelena. Zato me dobro slušajte. Njegova sramota bila bi sramota svih nas. Jelena, pogledajte me. Slušajte me. Sad ćete se smiriti. Ovaj razgovor će ostati među nama. Sve što se desi u njegovoj sobi ostaće među nama. O tome ništa više neće

saznati ni sestra Mirković niti bilo ko drugi. Uprkos svemu, vjerovaćemo vam, Jelena. A vi nas nećete razočarati.“

„Mama“, čula je i osjetila Svjetlanin poljubac na svom obrazu.



Dok su večerale, Svjetlana je povremeno gledala u televizor na kojem su se smjenjivale slike bez tona.

„Učili smo jednu njegovu priču“, rekla je Svjetlana.

Na kćerine riječi se osvrnula i na ekranu ugledala crno-bijelu fotografiju: on u mladosti.

„O čemu je priča govorila?“

„O maloj ptici koja dan i noć pjeva pred orlom. Ptica se nada će joj orao poštediti život. Da neće pojesti nekoga ko tako divno pjeva.“

„Šta bude na kraju priče?“

„Orao je pojede.“

Ustala je i pojačala ton. Spiker je, prije prije nego je prešao na sljedeću vijest, rekao da će komemoracija biti održana sutra, sahrana dan poslije.

Sjela je i nasmiješila se Svjetlani.

Mislila je o tome kako bi trebala osjetiti olakšanje.

Ali nije.

Jer svijet je, znala je, bio pun velikih ljudi koji bi, sa svojim rukama na njoj, sutra mogli umrijeti u njenim rukama.

Greatness Will Have its Due

Andrej Nikolaidis

Translated from Montenegrin by Will Firth

She turned the key in the lock. You hear the same “click” when you unlock the door as when you lock it, the handle turns the same way when it’s closed and when it’s open, she thought as she entered the flat. It’s hard to tell the difference between what holds you captive and what can set you free. You don’t know until you push the door, she thought as she washed her hands in the bathroom.

Svjatlana wouldn’t be home from school for at least two hours. She had enough time to cook a nice dinner for them.

She liked to cook. It calmed her. But not today. All the while as she was chopping the onion, grating the carrot and tenderising the meat, she could think of only one thing: the “conversation” that morning.

“Please take a seat... Yes, you can sit there. You know why you’re here, I suppose?”

“I don’t, I’m afraid.”

“Come on, Jelena, please...”

“No, really...”

“I see... Alright... I look at you, Jelena, and although I know appearances can be deceptive, I’d say you’re a woman of few words.”

“People tell me I’m quiet.”

“Are you shy?”

“I think I am.”

“We thought that too, once.”

“You?”

“Yes. We also didn’t think you were stupid.”

“I don’t think I am.”

“Despite what’s happened, we don’t think you are either. But I still don’t know if that’s a mitigating circumstance or an aggravating one in your case... Did you want to say something?”

“No, no.”

“I see... I suppose you know now why you’re here?”

“No.”

“Then I’ll tell you, Jelena. Although we thought you were a sensible woman who doesn’t talk much, that’s not how you’ve been behaving.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“What are you afraid of? Who are you afraid of?”

“I’m not frightened of anyone. I’m just afraid I don’t understand – it’s an expression.”

“Aha, now I see. It seems I’m not particularly sensible.”

“I didn’t mean to say that.”

“I know you didn’t. But sometimes things turn out in ways we don’t mean them, you see?”

“Yes.”

“Therefore it’s often wisest not to say anything. No one can misconstrue what we haven’t said. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Of course you do. You’re a sensible woman, I’ve always thought so. But why then, Jelena, did you say things it’s best not to?”

“I’m afr... I don’t understand.”

“Let me help you then. Did you talk with Sister Mirković yesterday?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What did you tell Sister Mirković?”

“Nothing special. It was an ordinary, everyday conversation. About the children, school, mundane things.”

“Try to remember: did you tell her anything else? Maybe you complained to her about something?”

“Possibly. But I don’t remember.”

“Try to recollect, all the same.”

“No, really...”

“You didn’t complain about your patient?”

“No. Or maybe I did...”

“You did, Jelena, you did. Come on, please, now you can complain to me. Everything you tell me stays between us, you see. But what you tell Sister Mirković, or another person close to you, could reach the ears of others. Sister Mirković might convey what you tell her in good faith to someone else, again in good faith. I’m not saying she did, but she could have. That someone, in turn, could pass it on to someone else. And, in a flash, what you said could reach ill-intentioned people. Who could then misuse what you said. If that happened, it would be immaterial what you were really thinking when you complained to Sister Mirković. It was without malice, I grant you that. But if your words made their way to ill-intentioned people, your own intentions would no longer matter. Your words would no longer be yours. They would be theirs. They would be tools in the hands of people who don’t mean well for us or for you. I’m sure you wouldn’t want that.”

“Of course not.”

“You see, that’s why silence is golden. What you don’t say can’t cause headaches for anyone. Neither for you, for nor us. Do you understand?”

“Yes. But I still don’t know what I said wrong.”

“If you don’t know, then how can I?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’m joking, Jelena.”

“Alright.”

“You see, Jelena, when we decided to entrust his care to you, we honestly thought it would be an honour for you.”

“I understand.”

“We didn’t think you’d find it such a burden. We didn’t think you’d talk about it with Sister Mirković. Or anyone else. He’s gravely ill, after all. And it’s your job to care for the ill. In spite of that, he’s a great man.”

“He is.”

“He is, undoubtedly. How many Nobel Prize winners have you nursed?”

“Just him.”

“Very understandable. He’s our only Nobel Prize winner*.”

“Yes.”

“By putting his life in your hands – actually his death, because we all know he won’t leave this hospital alive – we placed great responsibility on you. Which we considered you worthy of.”

“Thank you.”

“You’ve cared for him well.”

“I think I have.”

“You have. But you haven’t devoted the same care to his reputation.”

“But I...”

“You haven’t cared for that, Jelena. If you had, you wouldn’t have complained to Sister Mirković, and I wouldn’t be here today.”

“I understand.”

“His reputation is also the reputation of our culture. The reputation of our only Nobel Prize winner is also the reputation of our state. You agree, I trust?”

“I do.”

“And the reputation of our state is an important thing, don’t you agree?”

“I do.”

“More important than any dissatisfaction you might feel. Do you agree?”

“Yes.”

“Why then, Jelena, did you complain to Sister Mirković?”

“I only told...”

“There’s no ‘only’ here, Jelena. What seems a harmless ‘only’ to you could become a scoop or a scandal. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

“Of course you do. But I still don’t understand why the conversation with Sister Mirković.”

“I understand.”

“Of course you do. He’s a great man, Jelena. But he’s also old and sick.”

“You don’t know all the vulgar things he says to me.”

“We know, of course.”

“You don’t know all that he’s done to me. All the obscenities from his mouth. His hands...”

“We know that too, of course. We know what he’s done with his – let me emphasise – old and sick hands.”

“Do you know that he’s said things to me that I’m ashamed to repeat in front of you?”

“But you weren’t ashamed to confide that to Sister Mirković?”

“Do you know that he’s spat on me several times?”

“We know.”

“Do you know he’s intentionally urinated on me several times while I changed him?”

“What do you think? Do we know? Please don’t cry, Jelena. Don’t cry... You’re a strong woman. All the things you’ve been through in life! You see, this will pass too. He’s at death’s door. Look at it like this: he’s no longer himself. Illness and the proximity of death change a man, you’ll agree.”

“Yes. With some people, yes.”

“He’s no longer in control of himself, Jelena. He was a true gentleman all his life. What you’re crying about isn’t something he did to you, but illness and death. He’s a great man, Jelena. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“One of the greatest we’ve had.”

“Yes.”

“He doesn’t deserve... Our country doesn’t deserve his memory to be sullied.”

“I understand.”

“Were you happy when you heard about his Nobel Prize, Jelena?”

“I was.”

“Did you feel the Nobel Prize was, in a way, also yours?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Well, it is, Jelena. Now listen to me. If he is dishonoured, all of us will be dishonoured. Look at me, Jelena. Listen to me. Calm

down now, calm down. This conversation will stay between us. Everything that happens in his room will remain between us. Neither Sister Mirković nor anyone else will find out anything more. Despite everything, we're going to trust you, Jelena. And you won't disappoint us."

"Mama," she heard, and felt Svjetlana's kiss on her cheek.



While they were eating dinner, Svjetlana looked up from time to time at the flux of images on the television, with the volume turned off.

"We read one of his stories in class," Svjetlana said.

Her daughter's words made her turn, and she saw a black-and-white photograph on the screen: the great writer in his youth.

"What was the story about?"

"A little bird that sings day and night before an eagle. It hopes the eagle will spare its life, that it won't eat a bird that sings so beautifully."

"What happens at the end?"

"The eagle eats it."

She went and turned up the volume. Before moving on to the next news item, the announcer said that the commemoration would be held the next day, and the funeral the day after.

She sat back down and smiled at Svjetlana.

She thought she ought to feel relieved.

But she didn't.

Because she knew the world was full of great men, who could grope and grab – and die in her arms tomorrow.

* This is a reference to Ivo Andrić (1892-1975), best known for his novel *The Bridge on the Drina*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961.



Liechtenstein

Armin Öhri

Katzenvirus

Cat Virus

EUPL laureate 2014: *Die dunkle Muse* (Gmeiner-Verlag GmbH)

BIOGRAPHY

The Liechtenstein author and editor **Armin Öhri**, who was born in 1978, lives in Grabs in St. Galler Rheintal and works in the educational field. His story *The abduction* (*Die Entführung*), which tells the story of an attempted kidnapping in 1930s Liechtenstein, attracted a lot of attention. Öhri received the European Union Prize for Literature in 2014 for *The Dark Muse* (*Die dunkle Muse*), the first part of a chronological series of Berlin crime novels centred on the young Julius Bentheim, a draughtsman for crime scenes. His works have been translated into various other languages. Armin Öhri is founding member of the Liechtenstein Literature Salon and is president of the Liechtenstein Authors' Association "IG Wort". His most recent work *Liechtenstein – novel of a nation* (*Liechtenstein – Roman einer Nation*) is being described as "exceptionally thrilling" and "a wonderful reading pleasure".

Katzenvirus

Armin Öhri



(Inspiziert durch Fabeln von Äsop und Jean de La Fontaine sowie durch Werke von Annie M. G. Schmitt und Paul Schrader)

I

„Sie haben einen Virus.“

Mitleidig sah der Computerexperte, einer dieser berufsju-gendlichen Apple-Jünger mit zerzaustem Haar, an diesem Ap-rilmontag den Kunden an.

„Das dachte ich mir schon“, meinte dieser kleinlaut. „Deshalb bin ich ja zu Ihnen ins Geschäft gekommen. Was kann man dagegen tun?“

„Halten Sie Ihren Computer mit Updates auf dem neuesten Stand?“

Herr Karl nickte freudig.

„Hm, haben Sie irgendwelche Knöpfe gedrückt? Irgendwas angeklickt? Irgendwelche Mails von Unbekannten geöffnet?“

„Nur das mit dem Katzenvideo.“

„Aha.“

Es klang irgendwie anklagend, dieses „Aha“, weshalb sich Herr Karl zu einer Richtigstellung bemüht fühlte: „Ich dachte, das wäre mein Enkel, der mir das Video schickt. Es war aber auch wirklich goldig, das Filmchen. Wissen Sie, mit so einem süßen Katzenbaby.“

„Tja, und jetzt haben wir den Salat. Oder besser gesagt: den Katzenvirus.“

„Jammerschade, in der Tat. Ein Katzenvirus also. Was es nicht alles gibt ...“

II

Zwei Wochen später – es war Mai geworden – stand Herr Karl im Bad vor dem Spiegel und rasierte sich. Tief in Gedanken zog er mit dem Handrasierer Bahn um Bahn auf seinem zerfurchten Gesicht. Mit alkalischem Rasierschaum hatte er seine Bartstoppeln aufquellen lassen und nun spannte er mit der freien Hand die Haut seiner rechten Wange. Mit einem Klingewinkel von 30 Grad setzte er zu einem ersten Rasiergang mit dem Strich an, spülte mit warmem Wasser, bevor er mit dem zweiten Rasiergang gegen den Strich weitermachte.

Herr Karl straffte die Haut am Wangenknochen, sodass sich dort die Härchen aufrichteten, und fuhr mit der Klinge wie ein Mini-Mähdrescher über ein mikroskopisch kleines Ährenfeld.

„Au! Verdammt!“

Ihm schwindelte plötzlich. Die Klinge fiel zu Boden, Herr Karl stolperte nach hinten, und es war ihm, als hätte er mit einem Mal seinen Gleichgewichtssinn eingebüßt.

III

Am 6. Juni – seine Oberlippe war inzwischen von einem nicht mehr zu übersehenden Schnurrbart geprägt – spürte Herr Karl eine Veränderung des Luftdrucks. 24 grau-braune Härchen, zwölf auf jeder Gesichtshälfte, sich verdickend und borstig seitlich abstehend, ließen ihn zum Himmel schauen.

„Ein Sturm zieht auf“, bemerkte er, „ich hol‘ mal die Blumentöpfe rein.“

IV

Am 15. Juni kaufte sich Herr Karl eine handelsübliche Sechserpackung Kuhmilch aus dem Supermarkt. Von Wein und

Bier war ihm neulich übel geworden, und so leerte er voller Inbrunst einen Tetra Pak nach dem anderen.

Zwei Tag lang plagte ihn sein Darm. Fieberschübe und Durchfall ließen Herrn Karl nicht schlafen, und als er halbwegs genesen war, fuhr er zur nächsten Zoohandlung, um dort laktosereduzierte Katzenmilch zu erstehen.

V

Verstohlen betrachtete der Inhaber des Supermarkts den kauzigen Kunden, der in der Fischabteilung um die Gestelle schlich. Irgendwie schien er sich an der Auslage zu reiben. Den Kopf gesenkt, bis die Wange an den Aluminiumprofilen der Regalbretter schabte, durchstreifte der Mann die Verkaufsfläche.

VI

Am 3. Juli schlief Herr Karl zum ersten Mal in einer mit Zeitungspapier ausgelegten Kartonschachtel. Zunächst hatte er daran gedacht, mehrere kleinere Boxen zusammenzukleben, doch dann entdeckte er in der regionalen Wiederverwertungsanlage die XXL-Verpackung eines 75-Zoll-Breitbildfernsehers.

Die Styroporkugeln darin, ein Überbleibsel des Transport-Verpackungsmaterials, machten ihn stundenlang irre. Mitunter kam es vor, dass seine Nachbarn Herrn Karl das Haus verlassen sahen – die Kopfhare und den Bart voller elektrostatisch aufgeladener weißer Kügelchen.

Frau Müller, die gleich nebenan wohnte, schwor Stein und Bein, der Nachbar, der neuerdings ein wenig eigen sei, habe angefangen zu schnurren.

VII

Am 5. August war Herr Karl bereits um ganze 30 Zentimeter geschrumpft. Wenn er auf dem Boden saß, das linke Bein ausgestreckt über den Hals geschlungen, konnte er knapp ober-

halb seiner Hinterbacken einen kleinen runden Knubbel erkennen.

Jeden Tag wuchs er, wurde größer, länger, haariger.

VIII

29. August. – Durch eine unbekannte Täterschaft kam es in den vergangenen Tagen zu drei Einbrüchen in Geschäftsobjekte. Die Täterschaft brach dabei mehrere Türen auf und schlug eine Scheibe ein. Aufgrund eines akustischen Alarms in einem der Objekte verließ die Täterschaft das Unternehmen. Was genau entwendet wurde, ist Gegenstand der Ermittlungen, es entstand hoher Sachschaden.

Ein weiterer Einbruchdiebstahl ereignete sich im Zeitraum von Samstagabend bis Sonntagmorgen in das örtliche Tierschutzheim. Dabei wurden bei einem Gebäude eine Tür und bei einem weiteren Gebäude ein Fenster aufgebrochen und die Räumlichkeiten durchsucht. Laut Auskunft des Tierschutzvereins-Vorsitzenden sind mehrere Kartons Katzenfutter entwendet worden, wobei einige noch vor Ort geöffnet und dem Anschein nach auch verspeist wurden. Es entstand ein Sach- sowie Vermögensschaden in noch unbekannter Höhe.

IX

Vermisstenanzeige: Vermisst wird seit Donnerstag, 28. September, ab seinem Wohnort in Dahlstatt der 62-jährige Peter Karl (Vorname: Peter; Nachname: Karl).

Er verließ seinen Wohnort und kehrte bisher nicht zurück. Gemäß polizeilicher Ermittlungen wurde er am Freitag, den 8. September, nachweislich in seiner Heimatgemeinde angetroffen. Seit diesem Zeitpunkt gibt es keine weiteren Anhaltspunkte über seinen Aufenthaltsort. Peter Karl ist zirka 172 cm groß und von athletischer Figur. Er hat braune Augen und dunkelbraune kurze Haare. Über seine getragenen Kleidungsstücke bestehen keine Informationen.

Personen, die Angaben über den Aufenthaltsort des Vermissten machen können, werden gebeten, sich mit der nächsten Polizeistelle in Verbindung zu setzen.

X

Ohne zu ahnen, dass in der Nacht zuvor ein Marder die Zündanlage ihres Autos angeknabbert hatte, setzte Emma Marquart mit ihrem Peugeot zurück, drehte das Lenkrad, legte den Vorwärtsgang ein, um gemächlich anzufahren, als ihr Auto zu ruckeln anfang, als ob sie kurz davor wäre, die Zündung abzuwürgen.

Der Peugeot Expert, ein grauer Kombi, machte einen Satz nach vorn. Der metallisch-blecherne Klang, ein Geräusch wie von einem Aufprall, ließ Emma sofort anhalten.

Sie stieg aus, um nachzuschauen, was passiert war, und die grässlichen Laute, die die überfahrene Katze von sich gab, ließen ihr das Blut in den Adern stocken. Das waren keine Katzengeräusche, so viel war Emma klar. Kein Miauen, kein Fauchen. Es klang eher ... menschlich. Abstoßend menschlich.

Das Viech wimmerte, als es versuchte, wieder auf die überfahrenen Beine zu kommen. Ein Knacken wie von brechenden Zweigen ließ Emma die Hände vor die Ohren halten.

Noch immer war das Geschrei der Katze zu hören. Anhaltend, vorwurfsvoll, entsetzlich. Und immer noch klang es wie ein Mensch, wie ein älterer Mann.

Panisch sah sich Emma um. Ein paar Meter weiter stand das Regenfass. Seit dem letzten Niederschlag war es noch immer fast bis zum Rand gefüllt. Mit einer wilden Entschlossenheit, die sie sich in ihren kühnsten Träumen nicht zugetraut hätte, kniete Emma nieder, packte das Tier am Hals und trug es zum Fass.

20 Sekunden später gelangten keine Luftblasen mehr an die Wasseroberfläche ...

Cat Virus

Armin Öhri

Translated from German by Jonathan Huston

(Inspired by the fables of Aesop and Jean de La Fontaine and works by Annie M. G. Schmidt and Paul Schrader)

I

“You have a virus.”

The computer expert, an Apple disciple with ruffled hair who dressed too young for his age, looked with pity at the customer on this April Monday.

“I was afraid of that,” the customer said meekly. “That’s why I came to see you. What can you do about it?”

“Do you always keep your computer updated?”

Mr Karl nodded vigorously.

“Hmm. Did you press any buttons? Click on something you shouldn’t have? Or open e-mails from strangers?”

“Just one, with the cat video.”

“I see.”

That “I see” sounded somewhat accusatory, so Mr Karl hastened to clarify: “I thought it was from my grandson. But it was just so sweet, either way. With a really cute baby kitten.”

“Well, now we have the culprit. Or rather, the cat virus.”

“What a shame. Who would’ve thought there’s such a thing as a cat virus...”

II

Two weeks later – it was now May – Mr Karl stood in the bathroom in front of the mirror, shaving. Deep in thought, he drew one track after another with the razor along his furrowed face. He had softened his beard stubbles with the alkaline shaving foam, and now he used his free hand to stretch the skin of his right cheek. With a blade angle of 30 degrees, he shaved first with the grain, rinsed with warm water, and then shaved a second time against the grain.

Mr Karl tightened the skin on his cheekbone so that the little hairs there straightened up, and then he drove with the blade like a tiny combine harvester over a microscopically small corn field.

“Ow, damn it!”

The razor fell to the ground, Mr Karl stumbled backwards, suddenly losing his balance.

III

On the 6th of June – his upper lip was now covered with a striking moustache – Mr Karl felt a change in air pressure. 24 little grey-brown hairs, 12 on each half of his face, thickened and stuck out sideways, prodding him to look to the sky.

“There’s a storm coming,” he remarked, “I’ll bring the flower pots in.”

IV

On the 15th of June, Mr Karl bought a six-pack of cow’s milk from the supermarket. Wine and beer had started making him sick to his stomach, so he emptied one carton of milk after the other with great enthusiasm.

His digestion bothered him for two days. Fever and diarrhoea kept Mr Karl awake; when he was halfway recovered, he went to the nearest pet store to buy lactose-reduced cat's milk.

V

The owner of the supermarket took a furtive look at the strange, prowling customer, who sneaked around the fish counter, rubbing against the display. He lowered his head and let his cheek scrape against the aluminium shelf of the counter.

VI

On the 3rd of July, Mr Karl slept for the first time in a box padded with newspaper. First he thought of gluing several smaller boxes together, but then he discovered the extra-large packaging of a 75-inch widescreen TV at the regional recycling centre. The Styrofoam balls in the box, left over from transport packaging, drove him wild for hours. Sometimes his neighbours saw Mr Karl leave the house – the hair on his head and his beard full of white balls charged with static electricity.

Mrs Müller, who lived right next door, swore on her husband's grave that her neighbour – who'd always been a bit odd – had now started to purr.

VII

On the 5th of August, Mr Karl had already shrunk by 30 centimetres. When he sat on the floor – his left leg curled around his neck – he could see a small round stub just above his buttocks. Every day the stub grew taller, longer, hairier.

VIII

The 29th of August. – Over the past few days, unknown perpetrators burgled three businesses. They broke open several doors and smashed a window. They triggered an acoustic alarm in one of the shops and absconded. What was stolen is the subject of investigation; the burglars caused major property damage.

Another burglary occurred between Saturday evening and Sunday morning at the local animal shelter. The door of one building and a window of another were broken open, and the premises were searched. According to the director of the animal shelter, several cartons of cat food were stolen; some of them were opened on site and apparently also eaten. There was damage to property and financial loss in an unknown amount.

IX

Missing person's report: 62-year-old Peter Karl (first name: Peter; last name: Karl) has been missing from his place of residence in Dahlstatt since Thursday, the 28th of September.

He left his home and never returned. According to the police, there is evidence that he was seen in his hometown on Friday, the 8th of September, but there are no clues as to his whereabouts since. Peter Karl is about 172 cm tall with an athletic build, brown eyes, and short dark brown hair. It is unknown what he was wearing at the time of his disappearance.

Anyone able to provide information on the whereabouts of the missing person is asked to please contact the nearest police station.

X

Without realising that a marten had nibbled on the ignition cables of her car the night before, Emma Marquart backed up her Peugeot, turned the steering wheel, put her car into first and slowly edged forward when the Peugeot started to jolt, as if the ignition were about to stall.

The Peugeot Expert, a grey estate, jumped forward. The metallic crunch, the sound of an impact, made Emma slam the brakes.

She got out to see what had happened, and the horrible noises coming from the mouth of the run-over cat made her blood curdle. These weren't the sounds of a normal cat, Emma knew. No meowing, no hissing. It sounded more... human. Repulsively human.

The creature whimpered as it tried to get back on its crushed legs. A cracking sound like breaking branches made Emma cover her ears with her hands.

She could still hear the cries of the cat. Unrelenting, reproachful, horrible. The cries still sounded like a human being, like an elderly man.

Emma looked around in panic. A few steps further on, she saw a rain barrel. It was almost filled to the brim after the last rainfall. With a ferocious determination that she never would have expected of herself, Emma knelt down, grabbed the animal by the neck and carried it to the barrel.

Twenty seconds later, the air bubbles stopped rising to the surface of the water.



France

Emmanuelle Pagano

Le lotissement

The development

EUPL laureate 2009: *Les Adolescents troglodytes* (Editions P.O.L.)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in September 1969, **Emmanuelle Pagano** studied cinema aesthetics and plastic arts. A dozen of her books have been published (novels, novellas, collections of short stories and fragments), mainly by the publishing house P.O.L. She has also published texts in various journals and collective books. Thanks to the European Union Prize for Literature 2009, her books have been or are being translated into more than fifteen languages. Collaborating with artists from other fields (dance, cinema, photography, illustration, plastic arts and music), she was a resident at the Villa Médicis in 2013-2014. Since 2016, she has been engaged in screenwriting. She works and lives in Ardèche, France.

Le lotissement

Emmanuelle Pagano



Dans le bus, il y a quelques sièges très larges, peut-être pour les gros, ou les mamans, les papas avec leurs jeunes enfants. On dirait des sièges d'une personne et demie, l'équivalent du lit 120 cm en position assise.

Je n'aime pas m'y assoir: comme je suis plutôt petit format, taille 12/14 ans, j'ai toujours peur que quelqu'un pense pouvoir s'installer contre moi.

Aujourd'hui un de ces sièges est occupé par deux mamies, toutes de noir vêtues, de vieilles copines à les entendre se comprendre très vite, sans finir leurs phrases, serrées, complices. Rien ne les perturbe, elles sont tournées l'une vers l'autre, leur conversation semble avoir commencé il y a cent ans.

Elles ont à peu près l'âge du père de mon amie à moi, mon amie d'enfance.

Il est mort il y a quelques jours et c'est pour me rendre à l'enterrement de cet homme, le père de mon amie, que j'ai pris le bus. Il traverse toute la périphérie du bourg, un village de l'arrière-pays devenu une cité-dortoir.

Le village fait partie de la ville maintenant, il la rejoint en s'étirant, de lotissement en lotissement. Les lotissements sont sortis de terre à différentes époques, d'abord séparés des vignes et des jachères, aujourd'hui tous reliés entre eux, sans aucune bande de terre vierge, pas même un terrain vague.

C'est dans un de ces lotissements, le premier du village, que nous avons grandi, mon amie et moi, ou plutôt que notre amitié a grandi.

Nous n'habitons pas dans le lotissement, non, mais nous y passions tous les jours. Nous y passions avant qu'il ne sorte de terre. Nous traversions une sorte de semi-garrigue croquée par nos pas.

De part et d'autre de cette friche buissonnante, bordée par la route principale, il y avait nos maisons. C'étaient des maisons collectives, communautaires: celles du métier de nos pères.

J'habitais la gendarmerie, à l'entrée de la commune, au bord de la route. Ma copine habitait un des logements de fonction des professeurs et des instituteurs, au cœur du village, entre l'école publique et le collège.

Nous faisons plusieurs fois par jour le chemin entre nos deux maisons, en réalité deux appartements de rez-de-chaussée dans deux petits immeubles.

Nous allions l'une chez l'autre, et puis nous nous raccompagnions. Mais arrivées à la maison de l'une, nous n'avions généralement pas fini de parler, alors celle-là raccompagnait l'autre, à nouveau. Et ainsi de suite.

Pour raccourcir ce trajet que nous démultiplions à l'infini, nous ne suivions pas la route: nous coupions par les broussailles, où nous avions tracé un chemin bavard à force de passages.

Lorsque nous en avions marre de nous raccompagner l'une l'autre, écrivant nos paroles en boustrophédon dans la lande touffue, nous nous arrêtions au milieu, où nos discussions infinies avaient fini par creuser une petite place.

Le terrain inculte était devenu notre maison, la maison de nos conversations.

À la tombée de la nuit, nous n'avions toujours pas fini de parler. Nous rentrions vite chacune chez soi et, après le repas, après 21 h 30 ou même 22 h 30 le week-end, nous nous téléphonions. En local et dans ces horaires c'était moins cher, mais nous nous faisons reprocher de bloquer la ligne. Oui, nous bloquions la ligne, au sens figuré et aussi au sens propre, parce que nous tirions sur le fil du téléphone à cadran, sur lequel nous claquions la porte de notre chambre. Ce fil coincé menaçait, selon les dires parentaux, de se casser. Qu'avions-nous donc encore à nous dire? Est-ce que nous n'avions pas assez parlé après l'école jusqu'au dîner? Non, nous n'avions jamais assez parlé. Plus nous parlions ensemble, plus nous avions des choses à nous dire.

Parfois, les jours où nous n'avions pas école, nous allions l'une chez l'autre, mais il fallait bien se quitter à la fin de la journée, au plus tard le lendemain quand on avait le droit de s'inviter à dormir.

Dans la maison de ma copine, son père, Alain, prolongeait l'amitié qu'il entretenait lui aussi, avec son voisin et collègue, Gérard, qui habitait juste au-dessus. Ils se connaissaient tous les deux par cœur et passaient beaucoup de temps l'un chez l'autre. Sans avoir à se raccompagner.

Alain, était capable de restituer à la minute près l'emploi du temps de son ami.

Un dimanche où j'avais dormi chez eux, alors que nous petit-déjeunions tous ensemble, Alain a regardé sa montre en disant: «Gérard est en train de lire le journal aux toilettes.» La mère de mon amie a levé les yeux au ciel et on a entendu la chasse d'eau: «et voilà, il a fini.»

Nous jalouisions cette intimité, nous aurions voulu habiter l'une en dessus de l'autre. Puisque ma mère était institutrice (et la sienne, professeur comme son père), logiquement j'aurais pu moi aussi habiter ce petit immeuble.

Mais le métier de mon père primait sur celui de ma mère, car il avait des astreintes. Nous disions qu'il était de garde. J'habitais donc dans la gendarmerie, à l'autre bout du village.

Tant pis, nous défrichions la brande séparant nos deux maisons en parlant dedans, quelques hectares que nous avons à peine dégrossis sur un sentier de quelques centaines de mètres, avec un petit espace central.

L'année de nos dix ans, juste avant notre entrée au collège, des engins de chantier ont commencé à stationner, puis à s'activer sur nos terres de repli.

Creuser comme nous mais en plus profond, et remblayer, aplatis.

Des parcelles ont été délimitées, avec à leurs bords des tuyaux et des canalisations béantes, en attente d'être branchées.

Une fin d'après-midi, nous avons découvert en lieu et place de notre chemin une petite route toute fraîche, à l'asphalte lisse et sombre, encore fermée.

Dès le lendemain, nous avons pris nos patins à roulettes.

Une autre route a été ouverte, puis une autre, et une autre encore, et plein de petites routes et d'impasses circulaires qui élargissaient notre terrain de jeu.

Seuls quelques engins de chantier les empruntaient, tôt le matin et tard le soir. Les ouvriers nous laissaient patiner entre-temps. Ils nous saluaient en souriant. Ils ouvraient une nouvelle route pendant que nous étrennions la dernière-née.

Tout le mois de juin, nous avons patiné là après l'école, les travaux semblaient s'être arrêtés. Nous croisions parfois quelques personnes qui visitaient des terrains, des plans à la main.

Puis les engins bruyants sont revenus, et quelques dizaines de maisons ont poussé sur nos terres. Nous avons assisté à toutes les étapes de la construction du lotissement, qui s'est étalée

pendant notre année de 6ème. Lorsque certaines maisons étaient achevées, d'autres commençaient à pousser.

Lorsque nous nous «tenions fâchées» (se fâcher tout court n'existait pas, se disputer c'était se «tenir fâchées», et demander à l'autre «tu me tiens toujours fâchée?» était une amorce de réconciliation), nous n'allions plus faire du patin à roulettes sur le chantier du lotissement.

Si nous nous tenions fâchées longtemps (mettons une semaine), nous regardions où en était l'avancée des nouvelles maisons au retour de notre amitié. Cette avancée mesurait la trop longue période de fâcherie et de séparation.

Un jour, il n'a plus été possible de faire du patin à roulettes: les routes du lotissement ont été ouvertes aux voitures.

Des camions de déménagement se sont succédé.

Il nous a fallu nous rendre à l'évidence, des gens habitaient chez nous désormais, il nous fallait trouver une autre maison pour nos conversations.

Ma copine et moi avons quitté les logements de fonction de nos parents respectifs il y a des décennies, d'abord pour nos études, puis pour vivre nos vies séparées.

Nos parents aussi sont partis, beaucoup plus tard, lorsqu'ils ont pris leur retraite.

Ils ont déménagé dans un des lotissements qui entourent le village et le prolongent jusqu'à la ville, des lotissements que nous n'avons pas vu se construire, et qui nous surprenaient lorsque nous revenions chez nos parents pour les vacances, rati-boisant les landes et les vignes une à une, jusqu'à former un seul et immense lotissement de village en village et de ville en ville, occupant presque tout le sud de la France.

Les mamies du bus soudain se lèvent, d'un même mouvement enjoué, pour descendre, sans arrêter de parler.

Le prochain arrêt est celui du cimetière.

The development

Emmanuelle Pagano

Translated from French by Jennifer Higgins and Sophie Lewis

Inside the bus there are a few very wide seats, for fat people perhaps, or for mothers and fathers with their young children. They look like seats for one and a half people, the equivalent of a small double bed, only sitting up.

I don't like sitting in them: I'm on the small side, size 12-14 years, and I'm always afraid that someone will decide they can sit there with me.

Today one of these seats is occupied by two grannies dressed all in black. They sound like old friends, understanding each other straight away without needing to finish sentences, heads together, in cahoots. Nothing bothers them, turned as they are to face each other, deep in a hundred-year-old conversation.

They are about the age of the father of my own friend, my childhood friend.

He died a few days ago and I'm going to his funeral, my friend's father's funeral, which is why I caught the bus. It's driving through the outskirts of the town, a country village turned dormitory suburb.

The village is part of the town, now, having linked up by stretching itself out, one housing development at a time. The developments rose out of the ground at different times, separated at first by vineyards and empty patches, now completely connected, without a single strip of open ground, not even a patch of wasteland.

It was in one of these developments, the village's first, that we grew up, my friend and I, or rather that our friendship grew up.

We didn't live in the development but we went through it every day. We went that way before it emerged from the ground. We'd cross a kind of semi-scrubland that crunched beneath our feet.

Our houses lay on either side of this bushy wilderness, with the main road down one side of it. They were apartments for state sector workers, decided by our fathers' jobs.

I lived at the police station, the first building you came to in the village, beside the main road. My friend lived in one of the teachers' lodgings, in the middle of the village, between the primary and secondary schools.

Several times a day we used to walk between our two houses, which were actually two ground-floor apartments in two small blocks.

One of us would come to the other's house, and then that one would walk the first one back. But on reaching the other house, we usually hadn't finished talking, so the first would walk the other back again. And so on.

In order to shorten this journey that we made over and over, endlessly, we abandoned the road: we would cut through the scrubland, our feet marking out a chatty path by force of repetition.

When we'd had enough of walking each other back and forth, inscribing our words, boustrophedon-style, into the unkempt heath, we would stop in the middle, where our unending conversations ended up creating a small clearing.

The uncultivated land had become our home, the home of our conversations.

We hadn't always finished talking when night fell. We would quickly go back to our respective houses and, after dinner, after 9.30 p.m. or even 10.30 p.m. on the weekend, we would phone each other. It was less expensive to call local numbers at that time of day, but we were accused of tying up the line. We did indeed tie it up, in both figurative and literal senses, for we used to stretch out the wires of those old-fashioned phones and then slam our bedroom doors on them. According to parental theory, the trapped wires risked being broken. What on earth could we still have to say to each other? Hadn't we talked enough between school and dinnertime? No, we hadn't talked enough. The more we talked, the more we had to say.

Sometimes, when there was no school, we would go to each other's houses, but we still had to part at the end of the day, or the following morning if we had permission to sleep over.

In my friend's house, her father Alain also used to string out the friendship he enjoyed with his colleague and neighbour Gérard, who lived directly above. They knew each other inside out and spent a lot of time in each other's homes – without having to walk each other back and forth.

Alain knew his friend's habits to the minute. One Sunday when I had slept at their house, while we were all breakfasting together, Alain looked at his watch and said: 'Gérard is reading the newspaper on the loo.' My friend's mother rolled her eyes and we all heard the flush: 'And now he's finished.'

We envied that intimacy and would have liked to live one above the other. As my mother was a primary teacher (and my friend's mother was a teacher, like her father), in theory I could also have lived in that little block. But my father's profession took priority over my mother's because he was often

on call. We used to say that he was on guard. So I lived in the police station, at the other end of the village.

No matter: we forged a path through the heathland between our two houses by talking our way through it, a few acres that we barely made a mark on with our few hundred metres of path and its small clearing in the middle.

The year we turned ten, just before we went to secondary school, construction vehicles arrived and then set to work on our secret territory.

They forged paths as we had, but deeper, and they filled in holes and levelled the ground as they went. Parcels of land were marked out, with pipes and gaping ditches around their edges, awaiting connection.

One late afternoon we found, precisely where our path used to run, a little road, freshly laid with smooth dark asphalt, still closed off to traffic. The very next day we were out with our roller-skates.

Another road was laid out, then another, and yet another, and lots of little roads and curving cul-de-sacs were added to our playground. Only a few construction vehicles ever drove on them, in the early morning or late evening. The construction workers allowed us to skate there in the meantime. They would wave to us and smile. They'd be rolling out a new road while we were the first to set foot on the one they'd just made.

All through June we skated there after school, and the works seemed to have stopped. Sometimes we would encounter people visiting the plots, maps in hand.

Then the clamour of the diggers came back, and fifty or sixty houses sprouted on our territory. We observed every stage of the construction, which lasted throughout our first year at secondary school. As soon as some houses were finished, others

began to grow. When we were ‘out’ with each other (we never said we’d ‘fallen out’, it was always just ‘out’, and asking ‘Are you still out with me?’ was an overture of reconciliation), we’d stop roller-skating together on the site of the development.

If we were ‘out’ for a while (say as long as a week), we would see how far the new houses had progressed by the time we were reconciled. That progress marked the too-long period of silence and separation.

One day, it was no longer possible to roller-skate there: the development’s roads had been opened to traffic. Next came the furniture-removal lorries.

We were forced to admit it: people were now living in our space, and we had to find another home for our conversations.

My friend and I left our respective parents’ professional lodgings decades ago, first in order to study, then to live our separate lives.

Our parents left too, much later, when they retired. They moved into one of the developments that surround the village and extend it right up to the town, developments we did not witness emerging from the ground and which surprised us when we returned to our parents’ houses for the holidays, pilfering portions of the heath and the vineyards, one by one, until they formed a single, vast development from village to village and from town to town, filling almost the whole of the south of France.

The grannies in the bus suddenly stand up, in unison, and get off the bus without pausing their conversation.

The next stop is the cemetery.



Greece

Kallia Papadaki

Ένα σταθερό τηλέφωνο

Landline

EUPL laureate 2017: *Δενδρίτες* (Polis Books)

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1978 in the border town of Didymoteicho, **Kallia Papadaki** grew up in Thessaloniki and studied economics at Bard College and Brandeis University in the United States, and film at the Stavrakos Film School in Athens. In 2010 her short story collection *The Back-Lot Sound* won the New Writers Award from the Greek literary journal *Diavazo*. Her novel *Dendrites* won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2017. Her short stories and poems have been included in international anthologies and literary journals. She works as a professional screenwriter. *September*, her first feature script, won the International Balkan Fund Script Development Award in 2010, received a Nipkow scholarship in Berlin and premiered at the 48th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (official competition).

Ένα σταθερό τηλέφωνο

Kallia Papadaki



Ένα σταθερό τηλέφωνο που χτυπά μέσα στη νύχτα σου κλέβει χρόνια από τη ζωή. Προσπαθώ να θυμηθώ τι έκανα πριν το τηλεφώνημα, η γυναίκα μου με βρήκε λιπόθυμο στο διάδρομο, έξω από το μπάνιο. Κάλεσε αμέσως το ασθενοφόρο κι ευχήθηκε να μην ήταν κάτι σοβαρό. Στη διαδρομή για το εφημερεύον νοσοκομείο ανέκτησα τις αισθήσεις μου, πέφτοντας είχα δαγκώσει τη γλώσσα μου, χρειάζονται ράμματα, ακόμη κι αν ήθελα δεν θα μπορούσα να μιλήσω.

Με την κόρη μας δεν είχαμε καλές σχέσεις, όσο κι αν το προσπαθήσαμε, λίγο ή πολύ, δεν είχε πια σημασία, εκείνη είχε αποφασίσει να τραβήξει το δρόμο της, είχε μπλέξει με ναρκωτικά, έκανε αποτοξίνωση, μετακόμισε σε μια παραθαλάσσια κωμόπολη, συζούσε με έναν νεαρό που δεν μας γέμιζε το μάτι, γέννησε ένα κορίτσι που δεν μας άφηνε να το δούμε, και μια στις τόσες όλο και πιο αραιά μας τηλεφωνούσε, γιατί δεν της έφταναν τα χρήματα.

Είχε πάνω από χρόνο να μας τηλεφωνήσει, τις τέσσερις φορές που επιχειρήσαμε να τη βρούμε, να μάθουμε ότι είναι καλά, απαίτησε να την αφήσουμε ήσυχη, να πάψουμε να ανακατευόμαστε, της είχαμε καταστρέψει τη ζωή, δεν θα έκανε το ίδιο λάθος με τη δική της κόρη, μακριά μας θα έφτιαχνε τον παράδεισο που της είχαμε στερήσει. Πολλές φορές αναρωτήθηκα τι έφταιγε. Η ανάμειξή μου με την πολιτική; Οι εβδομάδες που έλειπα σε επαγγελματικά ταξίδια; Η πίεση που της άσκησα να σπουδάσει; Η μητέρα της ήταν πάντα πιο υποστηρικτική, μέχρι

που της ανακοίνωσε στα δεκαοχτώ της, ότι θα μετακομίσει με μια φίλη της στο Άμστερνταμ, βρήκαν δουλειά σε ένα καφέ με μαγικά μανιτάρια και Καλαματιανή φούντα. Το εννοούσε ή μας δοκίμαζε, να δει μέχρι που βαστούν τα όριά μας;

Είχε πάντα μια έμφυτη ροπή στο ψέμα, έφτιαχνε με το μυαλό της ιστορίες, τη χαστούκισε μια άγνωστη στο δρόμο, της έκλεψε το κινητό ένας αστυνομικός στην κατάληψη στο Πολυτεχνείο, την κακοποίησε ο αδερφός μου όταν ήταν τεσσάρων χρονών, μπορεί να θυμάται ένα παιδί τόσο μικρό τι του συνέβη; Η Άννα έφυγε από το σπίτι μας όταν έκλεισε τα 19, δεν είχαμε δικαίωμα, μας είπε, να τη βασανίζουμε άλλο με τη σιωπή και τη συγκατάβασή μας, σήκωσε με την κάρτα της μάνας της 800 ευρώ, πήρε ένα σάκο, τον γέμισε με ρούχα κι εξαφανίστηκε. Μας ειδοποίησαν ένα μήνα αργότερα, από το ελληνικό προξενείο στο Άμστερνταμ, ότι την βρήκανε παρατημένη σε ένα περιφερειακό κανάλι, ήταν αναίσθητη και έφερε γρατσουνιές, μώλωπες και τραύματα σε όλο της το σώμα.

Δεν ήταν πάντα έτσι αγρίμι, έγινε στην πορεία, όσο της θέταμε όρια τόσο αντιδρούσε, ένα βράδυ καθώς επέστρεφε από το φροντιστήριο, μας έφερε ένα άσχημα χτυπημένο κουτάβι, το είχε στην αγκαλιά της κι έκλαιγε, ξεψύχησε μέσα στα χέρια της αργά τη νύχτα, ήθελε να το θάψουμε στο λόφο του Λυκαβηττού, το πήρα με τα χίλια ζόρια και το πέταξα στον κάδο, είχε μόλις χιονίσει και έξω χάραζε, το επόμενο πρωί με κατηγορήσε ότι είχα σκοτώσει με τα ίδια μου τα χέρια το σκύλο της. Τη χαστούκισα κι είδα μεμιάς τα δάχτυλά μου να εμφανίζονται στο μάγουλό της, δεν αντέδρασε, μάζεψε τα μαλλιά της σε κοτσίδα, πήρε τη σχολική της τσάντα και περίμενε να έρθει το σχολικό να την πάρει στη στάση που έκανε έξω από το σπίτι.

Κι όμως θυμάμαι μια ευτυχισμένη οικογενειακή στιγμή, ένα χειμωνιάτικο βράδυ στο Παρίσι, μετά από μια πολύωρη επιτροπή στις Βρυξέλλες, διασχίζαμε το κανάλι της Πον Ντεζ Αρ

και χαζεύαμε τα χιλιάδες στοιβαγμένα λουκέτα, ένας μικροπωλητής μας πρότεινε δυο τελευταία σε τιμή ευκαιρίας, ένα για μας κι ένα για τη μικρή, «ποιον αγαπάς πιο πολύ, τη μαμά ή τον μπαμπά;», της είπε συνωμοτικά, εκείνο το βράδυ κλειδώσαμε τα λουκέτα στη γέφυρα και ρώτησα την εξάχρονη κόρη μου να μάθω, «είναι μυστικό» μου είπε, «δεν μπορώ να σου πω», την πήρα αγκαλιά κι έκανα πως την πετάω σαν σακί στον Σηκουάνα, έβαλε τις φωνές, τσίριζε, γελούσε.

Τα χρόνια που σπούδαζε στο Βερολίνο γνώρισε τη Σαρλότ, παράτησε τις σπουδές της στην Καλών Τεχνών, για να δουλέψει στο μαγαζί με τα τατουάζ και τα σκουλαρίκια που είχε η φίλη της στο Μίτε. Πήγε η Σοφία να την βρει, οι σχέσεις μας ήταν ήδη πολύ κακές, με τα χρήματα που της στέλναμε σημάδευε το κορμί της, ποτό, ναρκωτικά, τατουάζ, γύρισε η μητέρα της με το πρώτο αεροπλάνο, δεν έχουμε παιδί, μου είπε, ποτέ δεν είχαμε, το 'χάσαμε κάπου στη διαδρομή. Το πήραμε απόφαση, τα τετραγωνικά που μας αναλογούσαν στη ζωή της λιγόστευαν, εμείς θα κάναμε υπομονή για όσο αντέχαμε, θα ζούσε τη ζωή της χωρίς εμάς, για όσο ακόμη ήθελε και μπορούσε, στο τέλος κάποιον θα τον λύγιζε η αναμονή, ο χρόνος.

Στα χρόνια που πάψαμε να την ενοχλούμε, στα χρόνια της διακριτικής μας απουσίας, άρχισε να μας τηλεφωνεί, το πρώτο διάστημα έπαιρνε και δεν έλεγε κουβέντα, όλα τα κατηγορώ της εμπεριέχονταν μέσα σε εκείνη την άχρονη σιωπή, από καταβολής κόσμου και γονέων, δεν είχαμε τι να της απαντήσουμε, οπότε σιωπούσαμε κι εγώ και η Σοφία, και για ένα χρόνο, όσο κράτησαν τα βουβά τηλεφωνήματα, γίναμε και πάλι οικογένεια, η Άννα τηλεφωνούσε πάντα το απόγευμα, συνήθως κάθε Δευτέρα στο τέλος του μήνα. Μέχρι που άθελά της μίλησε και κύλησε πάλι το δηλητήριο, έσταξε κι έγινε μίσος, η Σοφία απάντησε, η Άννα συμπλήρωσε, η Σοφία θυμήθηκε, η Άννα αντέκρουσε, η Σοφία φώναξε, η Άννα ούρλιαξε, και μας κατηγορήσε για την παλιοζωή που ζούσε, κι εγώ δεν είπα κουβέντα, γιατί

προσπάθησα να σώσω ό,τι είχα μέχρι τώρα καταφέρει, να βρω λίγη αγάπη και κατανόηση μέσα στην απέραντη σιωπή.

Δεν τηλεφώνησε ξανά, παρά μόνο για να ζητήσει χρήματα, η κόρη της ήταν ήδη έξι χρονών, δεν γνωρίζαμε τίποτα για τον πατέρα του παιδιού της, ο φίλος της μας πληροφόρησε, ήταν ένας μηχανόβιος που είχε δουλέψει λάντζα στην Αυστρία, έκανε δουλειές του ποδαριού κι έσπαγε την πλάκα του στο δρόμο και στο καφενείο με τους μετανάστες, πάνω της χέρι δεν άπλωνε, δεν τολμούσε, με φοβάται, μας είπε κι έστειλε με το κινητό μια θολή φωτογραφία της εγγονής μας. Ήταν η τελευταία φορά που την άκουσα στο τηλέφωνο πριν από το αποψινό βράδυ, δεν μίλησε αμέσως, το εξέλαβα σαν μια ύστατη χειρονομία συμφιλίωσης, ένα αντίδωρο συγχώρεσης που θα γεφύρωνε όλο τον χαμένο χρόνο, «κανέναν» μου είπε αφοπλιστικά, «κανέναν» είπε κι έκλεισε η γραμμή κι ακούστηκε εκείνο το δυσοίωνα κι επαναλαμβανόμενο τουτ-τουτ-τουτ που κάνουν τα σταθερά τηλέφωνα από το υπερπέραν, όταν ξεμένουν μέσα στη νύχτα από φωνή, μα κυρίως ζωή.

Landline

Kallia Papadaki

Translated from Greek by Irene Noel-Baker

A landline ringing in the night can steal years from your life. I try to remember what it was I was doing when the phone rang. I'd fainted in the corridor outside the bathroom. My wife found me. She called an ambulance at once, praying it was nothing serious. On the way to hospital, I regained consciousness. I'd fallen and bitten my tongue, I needed stitches. I couldn't talk, even if I wanted to.

Our daughter never got along with us, however much we tried. It made no difference any more, she'd gone her own way; gone into drugs, gone to rehab, moved to a seaside town, lived with a boy we weren't impressed by, had a baby girl she wouldn't let us see. And now and then, all the more infrequently, she'd phone us: she had run out of money again.

It had been a year since her last call. The four times we did try to find her, to see if she was alright, she told us to leave her alone. To stop interfering. We'd ruined her life, she wouldn't make the same mistake with her daughter. The paradise we denied her? She'd build it far away from us. I often asked myself: what went wrong? Was it my going into politics? Was it the weeks I was away on business? Was it the pressure I put on her to study? Her mother had always been more supportive. At eighteen, she announced she was moving with a friend to Amsterdam. They'd found work in a café. Magic mushrooms and Kalamata weed. Was it true or was she testing us? To see how much we could take?

She always had an inherent tendency to lie, to make up stories: a female stranger slapped her in the street; a police-

man stole her mobile at the polytechnic sit-in; my brother had abused her when she was four. Can a child that young remember? Anna left our home when she was just 19. She said we had no right to torment her with our silence and disdain any more. She took out 800 euros from her mother's card, packed a bag of clothes, and disappeared. A month later, the Greek consulate in Amsterdam called us to say she had been found beside one of the outer canals, unconscious. There were scratches, bruises, and wounds all over her body.

She hadn't always been so wild. It happened gradually. The more boundaries we set, the more she reacted. One night, coming back from cram school, she brought in a badly wounded puppy. She was holding it and crying. It died in her arms later that night. She wanted us to bury it on Lycabettus hill. I took it from her and threw it in the bins. It had snowed and dawn was just breaking outside. In the morning, she accused me of killing the dog with my own hands. I slapped her and watched the outline of my fingers appearing on her cheek. She didn't react. She just gathered her hair into a ponytail, picked up her satchel, and went to wait for the school bus outside the house.

And yet I do remember one happy, family moment: it was a winter's evening in Paris, after an interminable committee meeting in Brussels. We were crossing the canal at Pont Des Arts, looking at the thousands of padlocks on the railings. A street seller offered us the two padlocks he had left, for a bargain. One for us, one for the little girl. "Who do you love most, Mummy or Daddy?" he asked conspiratorially. We fastened the padlocks on the bridge and I asked my six-year-old daughter what her answer was. "It's a secret" she said, "I can't tell you". I picked her up and pretended to throw her like a sack into the Seine. She started shouting and squealing, laughing.

During her studies in Berlin she met Charlotte, who ran a tattoo and piercing studio in Mitte. She gave up her degree at the art school to work there. Sophia went to see her. We were already getting on very badly. She'd use the money we sent to mark her body. Drinks, drugs, tattoos. Her mother took the first plane home. We've no child, she said. We never had one, we lost her along the way. We came to a decision. We were entitled to less and less in her life yet we would be patient, for as long as we could. She would live her life without us, for as long as she wanted, for as long as she could. In the end, someone was bound to give in to waiting, to time.

During the years that we ceased to disturb her, during our tactful absence, she began phoning us. For a while, she phoned and said nothing, all her accusations sheathed in that timeless silence, since the dawn of time and of parenthood. We had nothing to answer her with. And so we were silent, both I and Sophia. And for a year, as long as the silent phone calls came, we became a family again. Anna phoned always every last Monday of the month, in the evening. Until, unwittingly, she spoke; and the poison poured out again, turned to hatred; Sophia answered, Anna went on, Sophia remembered, Anna denied, Sophia shouted, Anna yelled and blamed us for the shit in her life, and I said nothing, trying to rescue what I'd achieved so far, a little love and understanding within the boundless silence.

From then on, she only phoned to ask for money. Her daughter was six years old already. We knew nothing about the father of her child. Her boyfriend, she informed us, was a biker who had washed dishes in Austria. He went around doing odd jobs, mocking the refugees on the street and in cafes, but he never laid a hand on her. He didn't dare to. He's scared of me, she said, and sent us a blurred mobile pic of our granddaughter. That was the last time I heard her voice on the phone before tonight. She didn't speak immediately. I took it

as a last-minute gesture of reconciliation, a sacramental offer of forgiveness bridging the lost time. “Neither of you,” she said to me disarmingly. “Neither,” she said and the line went dead and you could hear that ominous and repetitive beep-beep-beep that landlines make from beyond, when they run out of voices in the night, but mostly out of life.



Romania

Ioana Pârvulescu

O voce

A voice

EUPL laureate 2013: *Viața începe vineri* (Humanitas Publishing House)

BIOGRAPHY

Ioana Pârvulescu was born in Brașov in 1960. She graduated from the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest, establishing herself as a distinct voice within literary circles. She is currently a professor teaching modern literature at the same faculty. She has coordinated the series *Cartea de pe noptieră* (*Bedside Book*) at Humanitas Publishing House, worked as an editor at the literary journal *România literară* and has also translated from French and German (Maurice Nadeau, Angelus Silesius, Rainer Maria Rilke, Milan Kundera, Saint-Exupéry and Asterix the Gaul by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo). She has published several bestselling books about everyday life in the 19th century, between the two world wars and during communism. She has written three novels, all very well received. Her latest, *The Innocents* (2016), will be published in German by Zsolnay Verlag.

O voce

Ioana Pârvulescu



Pentru Monica L.

Întoarcerea

Avionul de la Paris a aterizat de câteva minute și primii călători se apropie deja de ghișeu. Un fel de șopot ca de apă curgătoare a umplut deodată sala până atunci liniștită. De când s-au deschis granițele, după Revoluția din decembrie 1989, la care am participat și eu, avioanele din vestul Europei sunt pline-ochi, iar noi – la controlul pașapoartelor lucrăm doar doi pe tură – facem față cu greu. Mă ascund sub breton și-n documente, și abia dacă-mi ridic privirea să verific chipul care, pentru mine, e doar accesoriul unui nume și al unei fotografii. Încerc să fiu rapidă, corectă, civilizată. Am îndărătul meu 32 de ani de viață și nici măcar 3 luni de libertate.

O mână frumoasă, tremurând ușor, îmi întinde un pașaport francez. Aparține unei doamne al cărei cap ajunge exact până la deschizătura ghișeului. Atunci se întâmplă două lucruri: văd, în pașaport, anul nașterii – femeia are 67 de ani – și aud o voce care mă electrocutează, pentru că o recunosc: „Bună seara, domnișoară!”

Umerii mi s-au îndreptat brusc. Era să mă înec. Era să strig. Era imposibil. M-am uitat bine de tot la femeia asta, pe care n-o văzusem în viața mea. Mă privea și ea dindărătul ochelarelor cu rame rotunde. Ochii îi erau negri, blânzi și inteligenți. Știam că e strict interzis, dar am sărit de pe scaun, m-am năpustit afară și am îmbrățișat-o cât am putut de tare.

— O, Doamne, pentru asta chiar au meritat toate, a spus hotărât, cu vocea ei ușor răgușită, pe care o știam atât de bine.

Am izbucnit în plâns.



Plecarea

Trenul staționează la granița austriacă, la punctul de trecere aflat între zonele controlate de sovietici și de americani. Soldatul își sughe pe-ndelete măselele. O fixează pe tânăra care i-a dat pașaportul. Scrie acolo că are 23 de ani. E un fir de om și abia îi ajunge până la piept. Are un guler alb, de față cuminte, răsfrânt peste puloverul vișiniu, cu mâneci scurte. Foarte bronzată, ten de creolă, ochi negri ca mătăniile, sprâncene puțin prea dese și buze pline, dintre cele care par să promită tot timpul un sărut, în ciuda expresiei serioase a chipului. Vrea să meargă la Paris. În lumina blândă a după-amiezii, grănicerul studiază îndelung ștampilele, rotind pașaportul în toate direcțiile. Sunt multe și par în bună regulă. Tocmai asta nu-i place: așa ceva nu se obține, cu una, cu două, în 1947. Dacă o să-i ceară cineva socoteală, poate spune că a crezut-o spioană. Coperta bleumarin are coroană regală. Grănicerul urăște regatele, lumea liberă și fetele scunde, cu guleraș alb. Îl interesează poveștile cu violuri, deși el, unul, nu și-a făcut păcate. Se enervează brusc și-i spune răstit, în rusă, că-i lipsește o viză, lucru pe care fata nu pare să-l înțeleagă, își scutură părul negru, buclat, și ridică umerii. Bărbatul îi face semn să-și dea jos bagajul. Se va duce îndărăt în țara ei, asupra căreia veghează armata lui. Îi întoarce spatele și o lăasă în plata Domnului. Trenul a și pornit, pufăind tot mai sacadat, ca un alergător.

Monique, cum îi spun prietenii franțuzindu-i numele, n-are timp să se sperie, deși până atunci viața a răsfățat-o. Trebu-

ie să ajungă la Paris cu orice pre, pentru că a dat toți banii mamei pe bilet: e inflație și a costat-o milioane. Ca toți cei din preajmă (mai ales scriitori, pentru că tatăl ei, Dumnezeu să-l odihnească, a fost un critic respectat, cu vederi liberale, și a ținut timp de 25 de ani un cenaclu), Monique știe că asta e „ultimul tren” spre libertate, țara avea să fie complet bolșevizată. E destul de tânără ca să creadă că lucrurile se vor schimba curând în bine și că se va putea întorce la mama ei, lăsată zălog acasă. Nu bănuiește că n-o s-o mai vadă niciodată.

Încearcă să fie practică. Se îndreaptă, cu o valiză în care are câteva rochii, un pui fript și zece pachete de țigări, către un impiegat mustăcios, bătrân, întinzându-i mâna camaradereste. Un om amărât, vai de capul lui. El a arătat cu un deget noduros spre burta proprie și a spus: Dima. Din cărțile tatălui ei știe că rușii pot fi cumpărați. A deschis valiza și i-a întins o rochie cu buline și un pachet de țigări. I-a spus: *Viena!* și a indicat direcția în care plecase trenul. Dima a făcut semn cu degetul noduros spre puilul fript. Ea a înghițit în sec, el i-a zis *Bolșoe spasibo!* și sub mustașa căruntă părea să fie un zâmbet. Au fumat împreună câte o țigară din rezerva ei, iar bătrânul i-a promis, mai mult prin semne, s-o treacă granița clandestin.

A telefonat la halta dinainte și a cerut ca trenul următor să oprească 45 de secunde la halta lui. Era un marfar cu cărbuni. Dima, cu țigara încă neterminată, atât de repede mersese totul, a ajutat-o pe fata cu guler alb să urce și, cu lopata, a acoperit-o rapid cu cărbuni. Monique nu știa că, puțin mai încolo, trenul va opri pentru un nou control rusesc. Soldații treceau de la un vagon la altul și-și înfingeau baioneta unde se nimerea. A auzit sunetul aspru, hârșâit, tot mai aproape. Fierul a ocălit-o și sunetul s-a îndepărtat. Între timp, primele umbre ale înserării s-au așezat peste cărbunii negri.

La postul de control american a înțeles pentru prima oară că filmele hollywoodiene văzute cu prietenii ei pe Bulevardul cinematografelor sunt o păcăleală. Aștepta ca americanii s-o

admire pentru proba de curaj, s-o sărute pe obrajii murdari de cărbune, să-i zâmbească ca Gary Cooper sau Humphrey Bogart și s-o trimită cu părere de rău către Paris. Ei însă au trimis-o fără părere de rău îndărăt la ruși. Și n-au zâmbit. Toți, au recunoscut că pașaportul e în perfectă ordine. *Why?* a întrebat ea. *What part of illegal don't you understand?* a ironizat-o unul. I-au însoțit drumul cu un jet de raze dintr-un proiector, ca să fie siguri că nu poate fugi. Lumina aia pusă pe spatele ei a jignit-o mai rău decât puștile. Monique uitase pur și simplu că americanii se simțeau, în 1947, aliații sovieticilor.

Iată însă că sovieticii nu erau tocmai aliații americanilor și, se vede că doar pentru a-i scoate din sărite pe „imperialiști”, Monique, care putea nimeri direct într-un lagăr de concentrare, a fost întoarsă aproape cu gingășie la halta lui Dima. Bătrânul a primit-o ca o gazdă pe un musafir drag. A lăsat-o să se spele și să se schimbe cu o rochie curată din valijoară. Puiul ei fript era un morman de oase, dar a tratat-o cu un măr. Și-a dus două degete la buze, inspirând cu ochii închiși. A primit un pachet de țigări. A telefonat iar la halta de dinainte, pentru ca trenul – de data asta unul de călători, verificat deja de grăniceri – să oprească 20 de secunde. Monique abia a apucat să urce în vagonul cel mai apropiat, împinsă de jos de Dima, că trenul a și pornit pufăind spre Viena.

A nimerit într-un compartiment cu un cuplu de tineri care studiau o partitură de Mozart și fredonau frânturi din *Don Giovanni*, cerându-i mereu scuze. Lângă ei, tot ce-a trăit cu o oră înainte pare ireal. Înțelege că e real atunci când bărbatul, care o privea stăruitor, îi spune sfios *Darf ich?* și, cu o batistă de olandă, îi șterge o pată neagră de sub bărbie. Monique simte că roșește și îi vine să-i sărute pe cei doi. Firește că n-o face: a fost crescută foarte strict.

Pe 15 septembrie, la miezul nopții, coboară în Gare de l'Est, cu valijoara în care mai avea un singur pachet de țigări. N-o

așteaptă nimeni. Rămâne în gară, neștiind încotro s-o apuce și neavând nici un franc. Doi polițiști, care o găsesc ghemuită ca un copil orfan, pe o bancă, se îndură de ea și îi dau voie să doarmă într-un compartiment de tren care staționează acolo. O acoperă cu pelerinele lor. Monique știe că li se spune *hironnelles*, pentru că zboară noaptea pe bicicletă, cu pelerina neagră fluturând în vânt, despătată ca o coadă de rândunică. De atunci, de câte ori vede rândunele, Monique zâmbeste.



Întoarcerea

Avionul a decolat de pe aeroportul Orly. Un copilăș de pe un scaun din apropiere întreabă: „*Maman, elles aiment les avions, les hi'ondelles?*” Zâmbesc fără să vreau.

Îmi potrivesc ceasul de la mână cu o oră înainte, dar timpul meu îl dau înapoi. Refuz categoric să intru în închisoarea asta numită bătrânețe și alunec iute pe apele timpului care curge invers, până când sunt plină de viitor, cu toate vârstele mele nesacrificate. Îmi amintesc de sfatul mamei, la plecare: „Când n-o să-ți fiu alături, scumpa mea, poartă-te cu tine ca și cum ai fi fetița ta”. Mă reîntâlnesc cu toți oamenii prin intermediul cărora Dumnezeu m-a iubit și-i ocolesc pe toți cei prin care m-a pedepsit. Regândesc cuvintele în care am crezut, pentru care aș fi putut să mor (era cât pe ce s-o și fac). De mii de ori, așteptând în studio să-mi încep emisiunea, am auzit semnalul: *Aici e Radio Europa liberă!* De mii de ori am rostit: *Teze și anti-teze la Paris. La microfon, Monica ...*

Aveam 5 ani când părinții mei au ascultat, pentru prima dată, în 1928, o voce la radio. Era un miracol, pe-atunci, să auzi deodată, de pe canapeaua ta și în sufrageria ta, un reportaj sau un concert dat chiar în clipa aia la Viena, Londra sau Paris. Părea o vrajă sau o scamatorie. Primul nostru radio era cât un frigider. La Paris, ca să-i ajut efectiv pe cei de-acasă, m-am

transformat într-o voce. Am vrut, cu vocea mea, să distrug zilnic o bucămică din granița invizibilă care a despărțit în toți anii ăștia Europa liberă, în care eram eu, de Europa neliberă, în care era țara mea. Am transformat estetica despre care-mi vorbea tata, în Est-etica despre care el nu m-a învățat, din păcate, nimic. Seară de seară, la radio, am scos cătușele de pe cuvinte, am apărat ceva sau pe cineva.

Poliția politică a reacționat destul de rapid și mi-a transmis că, dacă nu mă potolesc și dacă nu tac, îmi vor omorî mama. Mama mi-a transmis să nu mă potolesc și să nu tac. Am ascultat-o, au omorât-o. Apoi, cum nu mă mai puteau șantaja cu mama, de ziua mea mi-au făcut un cadou: doi bărbați m-au bătut pe stradă. În dimineața următoare eram la radio, și pe vocea mea nu se vedeau vânătăile.

Din țară, unde *Europa liberă*, postul nostru, se prindea clandestin, îmi soseau încurajări: „Tata a murit ascultându-vă glasul”. „Când e emisiunea dumneavoastră, radiourile merg la toate etajele blocului”. „Trăim într-un secol desfigurat de spaime. Ne dați curaj”. „Sunteți vocea adevărului”. „Azi am operat un copil. Când l-am deschis, din abdomenul lui mic au ieșit aburi, atât de frig era în sala de operație. Spuneți asta!” „Vă scriu dintr-o țară cândva senină. Aflați despre noi că, aici, ne-am pierdut vorbele”.

Timpul care a curs îndărăt curge iar înainte, mă duce acasă, iar avionul aterizează. Bărbatul meu a tăcut și el, tot drumul, pierdut printre gândurile lui. Coborâm pe pista inundată de razele apusului și ne uităm cu lăcomie la cerul de sub care am plecat acum 44 de ani.

Fetișcana de la ghișeu are un breton blond, care-i intră mereu în ochi. Fără să mă privească, îmi face semn să mă apropiu. Credeam că mi-am consumat, în viață, toate emoțiile, dar îmi tremură mâna când întind pașaportul și zic: „Bună seara, domnișoară!” Tresare ca lovită când îmi aude vocea și apoi,

nu știu cum, mă trezesc îmbrățișată atât de tare, că mă doare coșul pieptului. Când mi-a dat drumul, plângea. Soțul meu mă privește de la coada alăturată puțin îngrijorat. 40 de ani de radio mă ajută să-mi stăpânesc vocea când îi spun:

- O, Doamne, pentru asta chiar au meritat toate!
- Plâng ca proasta pentru că abia acum am înțeles că suntem liberi, o aud zicând și mi se strânge inima de grijă.

A voice

Ioana Pârvulescu

Translated from Romanian by Mihnea Gafița

Dedicated to Monica L.

Homecoming

The flight from Paris landed a few minutes and the first passengers are already coming towards the Passport-control booths. A gurgling of a sort, like that of a stream, has all of a sudden filled the previously quiet hall. Ever since the borders opened up, after the December 1989 Revolution in which I myself took part, every plane from western Europe is packed to full capacity, and we can hardly cope with it – at passport control there are only two of us working every shift. I hide beneath my fringed hairline and stay buried in the documents – I hardly raise my eyes to check the faces that are no more, to me, than accessories to a name and a photograph. I try to be fast, just, and civilised. I have thirty-two years of life to my account, and not even three months of freedom.

A beautiful, slightly shaking hand holds out a French passport. It belongs to a lady whose head reaches only as high as the opening of the check-booth. Two things happen then: I see the woman's birth year in the passport – she is sixty-seven – and I hear a voice that electrocutes me, because I recognise it: "Good evening, Miss!"

My shoulders straighten up abruptly. I almost choke. I almost shout. It can't be. I look as best I can at this woman I've never seen in my entire life. She looks back at me from behind round-rimmed glasses. Her eyes are black, gentle, and clever. I know it is strictly forbidden, and yet I jump up from my chair,

rush out of the booth, and hug her with as much strength as I'm capable of.

“O, God – she says firmly, with her somehow raucous voice, that I know only so well –, everything was really worth such a welcome.”

I burst out crying.



Going away

The train stations at the Austrian border, at the checkpoint between the Soviet- and American-controlled zones. The soldier draws pensively from between his molars. He stares at the young woman who has handed him her passport. It says there that she's twenty-three. A little wisp of a woman, who barely rises up to his chest. She has a white, good-girl's collar, a turn-down over her sour-cherry, short-sleeved sweater. Very tanned, with a Creole's complexion, eyes black as rosary beads, brows maybe too bushy, and full lips, the kind that seem to always foretell a kiss, notwithstanding the stern demeanour of the face. She wants to go to Paris. In the gentle light of the afternoon, the border guard studies the stamps at length, rotating the passport in all directions. There are many of them, and they all seem to be in good order. This, in fact, he doesn't like: you cannot obtain something like this at the drop of a hat – not in 1947. If anyone calls him to account, he can always say he thought she was a spy. The navy-blue cover has a royal coat-of-arms printed on it. The border guard hates kingdoms, the free world, and white-collared short girls. He is interested in rape stories, although he has not sinned himself. He throws a sudden temper and snaps at her, in Russian, that she is one visa short, which the girl seems unable to comprehend, because she shakes her curly black hair and shrugs her shoulders. The soldier waves at her that she should take her luggage down. She's going to return to her own country, which

is now being watched upon by his army. He turns his back and leaves her to her fate. The train has already pulled away and puffs ever more jerkily, like an exhausted racer.

Monique, as her friends call her, Frenchifying her name, has no time to get frightened, even though life has spoiled her so far. She must get to Paris at all costs, because she has spent all her mother's money on the train ticket – inflation is running high and it has cost her millions. Like everybody around her (mostly writers, because her father, may he rest in peace, was a respected critic, with liberal views, and kept a literary circle for over twenty-five years), Monique knows that this is her very “last train” to freedom, that the country is about to be Bolshevised entirely. She is young enough to believe that things are going to soon change for the better and that she will be able to return to her mother, who has stayed behind under gage. She has no idea that she's never going to see her mother again.

She tries to act matter-of-factly. With a suitcase in which she has a few dresses, a fried chicken, and ten packs of cigarettes, she heads towards an old, moustached dispatcher and extends her hand to him in a comradely fashion. He's a sorry, wretched man. He turns a knobby finger towards his own belly and says: “Dima”. She knows from her father's books that Russians can be bought off. She opens her suitcase, takes out and hands him a spotted dress and a pack of cigarettes, then says: “Vienna!” and points in the direction in which the train is already speeding away. Dima points his knobby finger to the fried chicken. She makes a long face, he says *Bolshoy spasibo!* – “Thank you very much!” –, and a smile seems to flourish beneath his greying moustache. They smoke a cigarette each from her supply, then the old man promises, mostly through signs, to smuggle her across the border.

He makes a phone call to the previous stop and asks that the following train halt at his own halt for a mere forty-five seconds. It's a coal-laden freight train. With his cigarette yet unfinished,

so quickly do things work, he helps the white-collared girl get on and covers her with a few shovels of coal. Monique doesn't know, however, that the train is bound to stop again only a bit further on, for another check-out by the Russians. The soldiers go from one car to the next and stick their bayonets wherever they choose to. She hears the rough, scratchy sound closing in on her. But the steel misses her and the sound moves along. In the meantime, the first shadows of dusk have settled over the black coal.

At the American check-point, she understands for the first time that the Hollywood films she has seen with her friends on the cinemas' boulevard are only humbug. She expects the Americans to admire her proof of boldness, kiss her on both coal-sullied cheeks, give her a Gary Cooper or Humphrey Bogart smile, and regretfully send her to Paris. But they send her back to the Russians, without any regrets and without as little as a smile. However, they admit that her passport is in perfect order. "Then why?", she asks. "What part of *illegal* don't you understand?", one of them scoffs her. They also help her down the track with a bunch of beams from a projector, so they make sure she doesn't go off that track. The light stuck in her back mortifies her more than the rifles pointed at her. Monique has simply forgotten: in 1947, the Americans feel like they are the Soviets' allies.

And yet, the Soviets aren't exactly allied to the Americans, so, presumably just to aggravate the "imperialists", Monique, who may otherwise end up in a concentration camp, is simply and almost tenderly returned to Dima's halt. The old man receives her back as a host might a beloved guest. He lets her wash up and change into a clean dress from the suitcase. Her former fried chicken is but a heap of bones now, but he treats her to an apple instead. He raises two fingers to his lips and breathes in with his eyes closed. She gives him a pack of her cigarettes. He telephones the previous stop once again and asks that the following train – a passenger one this time, that has already

been checked by the border guards – halt for a mere twenty seconds. Monique has barely managed to get on the nearest carriage, pushed from below by Dima, before the train puffingly sets off towards Vienna.

She finds a seat in a compartment where two young people are studying a Mozart score and humming bits and pieces of *Don Giovanni*, apologising all the time for doing it. Sitting there beside them, everything she has lived through over the past hour seems unreal. She finally grasps its reality when the man, while giving her a suspicious look, tells her coyly: *Darf ich?* – “May I?” – and uses a linen handkerchief to wipe out a black stain that has remained under her chin. Monique feels herself blushing and would even kiss her two fellow passengers. She doesn’t, of course, because she’s been brought up very strictly.

On the 15th of September, at midnight, she gets off at the *Gare de l’Est*, with her small suitcase in which a single pack of cigarettes is left. Nobody awaits her. She stays there, inside the station, having no idea where to go and not even one franc in her pocket. Two policemen find her curled up on a bench, like an orphaned child, feel sorry for her, and allow her to sleep in a train compartment, in a carriage stationed there. They even cover her with their cloaks. Monique knows they are called *hirondelles* – swallows – because they almost fly at night on their bicycles, with their black cloaks flapping in the wind, cleft in two, like swallows’ tails. Monique will always smile from now on, every time she catches sight of swallows.



Homecoming

The plane has taken off from the Orly airport. A toddler from a nearby seat asks: *Maman, elles aiment les avions, les hi’ondelles?* – “Mummy, do swallows like planes?” I smile, unwillingly.

I reset my wristwatch one hour forward, but my own inner time I set back. I downright refuse to enter that prison, old age, and let myself glide swiftly on the backward-flowing waters of time, until I'm again all-future, with my ages-to-be yet unsacrificed. I remember my mother's advice, when I went away: "Whenever I'm not beside you, my beloved, treat yourself as if you were your little girl." I revisit all the people by whom God has shown me his love and bypass those by which he punished me. I rethink the words in which I believed, the ones I could have died for (I almost did, for some). Thousands of times, while waiting in the studio for my show to begin, I listened to the introduction: "This is Radio Free Europe!" Thousands of times, too, I spilled out: "Theses and antitheses in Paris. This is Monica..."

I was five years old when my parents first listened to a voice on the radio, in 1928. It was a miracle, back then, to hear a coverage all of a sudden, while sitting on your couch in your own living room, or a concert given that very moment in Vienna, London, or Paris. It seemed like sheer magic, like a trick. Our first radio set was the size of a refrigerator. In Paris, so I could indeed help the ones at home, I turned into a voice. What I wanted to do with my voice was to shatter, piece by piece, day after day, the invisible border that has been dividing, all these years, the free Europe, where I was, from the un-free Europe, where my country was. I turned the aesthetics my father had spoken to me about into the East-ethics about which, unfortunately, he hadn't taught me anything. Evening after evening, on the radio, I uncuffed the words, I defended something or someone.

The political police reacted briskly enough and let me know that, unless I contained myself and shut up, they would kill my mother. Mother called on me not to contain myself and not to shut up. I listened to her, and she was killed indeed. Then, since they couldn't use my mother to gain leverage on me any longer, they made me a birthday present: I was beaten in the

street by two men. The following morning, I was back in the studio, and my voice wouldn't show the bruises.

From back home, where our radio, Free Europe, could be heard only surreptitiously, I got incentives: "My father died listening to your voice"; "When your show is being broadcast, all radios are on, at all block levels"; "We live in a century defaced by fears. You give us courage"; "You are the voice of truth"; "I operated on a child today. When I opened him up, vapours came out of his tiny belly – it was that cold in the operation room. Say that, too!"; "I'm writing to you from a country that was once serene. You should know that we, here, have lost our words."

The time that has been flowing backwards resumes its forward direction, and the plane lands, bringing me home. My husband has been quiet all along, too, lost in his own thoughts. We touch down on the runway bathing in the setting sun's rays and we avidly watch the sky that saw our departure, forty-four years ago.

The missy from the Passport-control booth has a blond fringed hairline that keeps covering her eyes. Without looking at me, she beckons me to approach. I thought that all my emotions in life were exhausted, and yet my hand shakes when I hold out my passport to her and say: "Good evening, Miss!" She winces like smitten, when she hears my voice, and then, before I realise how and why, I find myself embraced with such strength that I even feel pain in my chest. When she lets go of me, I can see she's crying. My husband watches the entire scene, slightly worried, from the adjoining queue. My forty years of radio broadcasting help me rein in my voice, when I tell her:

"O, God, everything was really worth such a welcome."

"I am crying like a fool because only now do I realise that we're actually free," I hear her say, and my heart leaps with concern.



Poland

Magdalena Parys

Człowiek z dywanem

A man with a carpet

EUPL laureate 2015: *Magik* (Świat Książki)

BIOGRAPHY

Magdalena Parys was born in Danzig, Poland, in 1971 and has been living in Berlin since 1984. She studied Polish philology and pedagogy at Humboldt University in Berlin. The Polish-German author regularly contributes to newspapers such as *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Dialog*, *Stuttgarter Zeitung* and *Wysokie Obcasy extra*, as well as *Marianne* in France. Her debut novel *Tunnel* (*Polish: Tunel*) was nominated for numerous prizes in Poland and was awarded the Golden Owl prize in Austria. In 2015, Magdalena received the European Union Prize for Literature for her political-historical thriller *Der Magier* (*Polish: Magik*). The translation rights for her books have been sold to more than 20 countries, including Germany, France, Italy and Hungary. Her novel *Tunnel* (*French: 188 metres sous Berlin*) received a lot of attention in France last year and was nominated for the booksellers' and publishers' prize.

Człowiek z dywanem

Magdalena Parys



*„Europa ist ein Staat, der aus mehreren Provinzen besteht!“
(Baron de Montesquieu)*

*„Jadąc przez wieki umarłem już tyle lat temu
I fantom twarzy wkleiłem w lustra okien.
Mijam tekturowych dróżników, głębokie
dworce bezruchu w ciszy, której nie można przemóc
(Ballada o pociągu, Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński)*

Martwa kobieta na łóżku, jeden but na nodze, drugi obok na podłodze. Gładka porcelanowa twarz, niebieskie żyłki na skroniach, jasne włosy, czerwone paznokcie. Coś na palcu wykręconej dłoni, może pierścionek? Nie. Znak po pierścionku. Ubrana w czarną sukienkę, w czarne rajstopy. Jakby przezornie na własny pogrzeb. Nie widzę krwi, przemocy, tylko wykręconą dłoń, białą twarz. Zwłoki.

Tak. To ja.

Nie żyję. Podejrzewam, że nie żyję. Nie mam absolutnej pewności, bo do tej pory zawsze żyłam i znam tylko jeden stan – stan bycia. Leżę na wersalce w jakimś mieszkaniu, w jakimś mieście. Nie ruszam powiekami, nie uwiera mnie niewygodny but i nie odczuwam bólu w dziwnie wykręconej dłoni, która powinna przecież boleć. Nie czuję nic poza pro-

mieniem słońca na stygnącym policzku. Dziwne odczucie, bo nie wiem, czy jestem już częścią tego ciepła czy jeszcze częścią policzka.

W prostokątnym pomieszczeniu oprócz wersalki położyła ogołoconą z mebli pustką. Na jednej ze ścian zdjęcia kobiety; kiedy była mała, młoda i stara. Na każdym zdjęciu tak samo marszczy czoło i nos. Obok kalendarz bez dat. Tik tak. Tik Tak. Między mną a kobietą miękkość, niezmacony niczym spokój. Kobieta, jej pantofle, ściana, gwar za oknem – kalendarz bez dat nadaje im takt. Tik tak. Tik tak.

Jest wiosna, świat budzi się po długiej zimie. Skąd wiem, że niedawno była zima? Skąd wiem, że ta kobieta to ja? Wielkie drzewo za oknem zastygło w bezruchu jak z obrazka, kobieta z wersalki przyczepiała sobie kiedyś z jego liści tak zwane „noski”. Biegała w kolorowych sukienkach po ulicy tego miasta. Też była wiosna.

Zza okna dochodzi jazgot tramwaju, czyjeś kroki na chodniku. Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! – Powiewają białe czerwone flagi, uderzają o chodnik oficerki. Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! Tłum ludzi ze sztandarami z napisem „Polska” krzyczy „Polska!!!” Jakiś człowiek idzie za tłumem, niesie na plecach dywan. Za nim podąża człowiek z garnkiem na głowie. Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa!

Nagle rozlega się strzał. Tłum trzepocze jak stado spłoszonych kaczek. Tłum biegnie. Garnek i człowiek w kałuży krwi zostają. Tramwaj zatacza koło w zajezdni, przystaje, szturmują go ludzie ze sztandarami. Ktoś siada z przodu na dachu i trzyma flagę wysoko. Tramwaj odjeżdża turkoczając po szynach POLSKA!!! POOOLSKA!!! Człowiek z dywanem przystaje, podnosi garnek ostrożnie by nie zgubić dywanu, zatacza się pod ciężarem i rusza ociężale przed siebie, zaraz zniknie za rogiem placu Bohaterów.

Po drugiej stronie mieszkania jest podwórko. Kobieta jeździła tam na rowerze, jej szlak był monotony, prosty. Jeździła wiosną. Czasem przystawała, rzucała rower i przechodziła przez płot, na którym rozrywała spódnice i bała się potem wracać do domu. Za płotem wielkie boisko, a za nim stara ceglana szkoła, do której chodzili Niemcy. Potem Polacy. Teraz przez to boisko idzie człowiek z garnkiem na głowie i dywanem, za nim grupka ludzi ze sztandarami skanduje: Deutschland!!! Deutschlaaaand!!! Wyglądają jak harcerze. Przyglądam się im. To nie są harcerze. Eins! Zwei! Drei! Eins! Zwei! Drei!!

Niemcy, Polacy. Nazwy pozostały w spadku po kobiecie. Nazwy. Nazwy. Drzewa, podarte spódnice, dywan, sztandar, „noski”.

Kalendarz zgubił kartki. Przestał być kalendarzem. Wszystkie zdjęcia na ścianie zniknęły. Pojawiło się jedno – nowe. Kobieta na wersalce o gładkiej twarzy. Nie marszy czoła, nosa. Leży na wersalce w jednym bucie, obok na podłodze leży drugi. Bezpański.

Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! Polska!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! Polska!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! Polska!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
Raz! Dwa! Raz! Dwa! Polska!

A man with a carpet

Magdalena Parys

Translated from Polish by Piotr Krasnowolski

Europa ist ein Staat, der aus mehreren Provinzen besteht!
(*Baron de Montesquieu*)

*Travelling through the centuries I died so many years ago,
I've pasted the phantom face into the mirrors of the windows,
And pass by cardboard railway guards, and the deep
Stock-still stations smothered in a silence that
you cannot suppress.*
(*Ballad of a Train/Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński*)

A dead woman on the bed, one shoe on the foot, the other one on the floor below. A petite porcelain face with blueish veins around the temples, fair hair, red nails. There is something on a finger of the twisted hand, perhaps a ring? No, a trace of a ring. Dressed in a black dress, with black tights. As if foreseeing her own funeral. I can see no blood or traces of violence, only the twisted hand and the white face. A body.

Yes, it's me.

I'm dead. I believe I'm dead. It can't be absolutely true because I've always found myself alive so far, and this is the only state I know – the state of being alive. I'm lying on a sofa in a flat, in a city. My eyelids are motionless, the uncomfortable shoe doesn't chafe, and I can feel no pain in the strangely twisted hand that should hurt, shouldn't it? I can feel nothing but a sunray on the cheek going cold. The feeling is strange as I don't know whether I am already a part of that warmth or still a part of the cheek.

Other than the sofa, the square room is faded yellow, empty and stripped of furniture. Photos of the woman cover one of the walls: when she was little, young, and old. She frowns with her brows and nose in the same way in all of them. A calendar without dates below. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Between me and that woman – a softness, a peace that nothing disturbs. The woman, her slippers, a wall, the hubbub outside, and a calendar without dates beat a rhythm for them. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

It's spring, the world is waking after a long winter. How do I know there's been a winter recently? How do I know the woman is me? A great big tree behind the window has frozen into stillness, like in a picture. The woman from the sofa used to stick its "helicopter" seeds into her nose. She used to run in colourful dresses in the streets of the city. Also, it was spring.

The groan of a passing tram can be heard outside, steps on the pavement. One! Two! One! Two! – Red-and-white flags are unfurled, riding boots stamp a tattoo on the pavement. One! Two! One! Two! A crowd of people under the banners that read "Poland" cry "Poland!!!" A man carrying a rolled carpet on his back is following the crowd. He is being followed by a man with a pot on his head. One! Two! One! Two!

Suddenly a shot is fired. The crowd flutters like a flock of flushed ducks. The crowd are running away. The pot and the man stay behind in a pool of blood. The tram runs a circle in the depot, and momentarily stops to be stormed by the people with the banners. Somebody sits on the front of the roof and brandishes his flag high. The tram leaves rattling on the rails POLAND!!! POOLAND!!! The man with the carpet stops and carefully lifts the pot, mindful that he doesn't lose the carpet, reels under his burden and heavily lumbers forward, about to turn round the corner of Heroes' Square.

There is a backyard where the woman used to ride a bike on the other side of the flat. Her route was simple and monotonous. She rode in the spring. Sometimes she would stop, drop the bike and clamber over the fence, which tore her skirts and made her afraid to return home. There's a big football ground behind the fence, and an old brick school even further. It used to be attended by Germans. Later by Poles. Now there is a man with a carpet and a pot on his head walking across that football ground. He's followed by a group of people with banners, chanting Deutschland!!! Deutschlaaaand!!! They look like boy scouts. I take a closer look. They are not boy scouts. Eins! Zwei! Drei! Eins! Zwei! Drei!!

Germans, Poles. Names are the inheritance left by the woman. Names. Names. Trees, torn skirts, a carpet, a banner, maple "helicopters".

The calendar has shed its pages. It's ceased to be a calendar. All the photos have disappeared from the wall. One has appeared; it's new. A woman with a porcelain face on a sofa. She is not wrinkling her brow or nose. She is lying on the sofa wearing one shoe, the other one lying on the floor below. Stray.

Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
One! Two! One! Two! Poland!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
One! Two! One! Two! Poland!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
One! Two! One! Two! Poland!
Eins! Zwei! Drei! Deutschland!
One! Two! One! Two! Poland!



Lithuania

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

Ausis

The Ear

EUPL laureate 2012: *Šiņnakt aš miegosiu prie sienos (Baltos lankos)*

BIOGRAPHY

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė was born in 1960 in Panevėžys, Lithuania. After finishing secondary school in Panevėžys, she graduated from Vilnius University in 1983 with a degree in Lithuanian language and literature. After that, she worked for a few years as a school teacher in her native region of north Lithuania. From 1987 to 1994, she worked as a journalist in Vilnius, for family and parenting magazines, and from 1994 to 1998 she lived in the USA. Since 1998 Giedra has lived in Vilnius. Giedra has received several prizes (including the European Union Prize for Literature 2012 and the Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Arts 2015) and is the author of essays and short-story collections (*Planned moments*, 2004, *Tonight I shall sleep by the wall*, 2010, and *Persecution of texts*, 2018).

Ausis

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė



Visi – ir nacionalistai, ir liberalai – keikė šituos metus kaip labai lietingus. Oras, jo prognozės yra vienas iš retų žmones vienijančių dalykų: autoritarinėse šalyse, demokratinėse respublikose, linkusiuose į separatizmą Europos kraštuose, tose valstybėse, kurios dėl ateities yra dar neapsisprendusios, nes ir neapsisprendusios jos gyvena gerai. Lietus nekeikiamas tik ten, iš kur pas mus importuojami šafranas, aistra ir ofšorinių kompanijų pinigų plovimo schemos. Žmonės gali nesutarti dėl makaronų padažo, Nobelio literatūros premijos laureato („A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall“) ar medžiagos, iš kurios privalo būti padaryta mirusiojo artimojo urna, bet tik ne dėl lietaus. Jei lietus pliaupia ne trilerijoje, visi jį vertina vienodai. Kai kas lietingais periodais geria prozaką, zoloftą, ar šiaip... geria. Daugelis bendradarbių mane net stebina, kiekvieną rytą jie aptarinėja orą: stebėjimuisi dėl lietaus kasdien paaukojama maždaug pusantros valandos darbo laiko, skaičiavau specialiai. Kartais atrodo, kad lietuviai yra gimę Kipre, o Lietuvoje apsistojo laikinai, tranzitu. Nes ko dėl lietaus čia stebėtis? Lietus lietuviui turėtų būti įprastas dalykas nuo vaikystės. Kaip melancholija. Kaip prikaltas prie amžinybės liūdnas Kristus.

Bendradarbiai šiemet prisipirko botų. Laikraštis išspausdino nuotraukas, – tėvai ankstų rytą prospektu plukdo į darželį vaikus gumine valtimi. Nuo katastrofų (ir neplanuotų vaikų) net ir XXI amžiuje gelbsti vis dėlto ne informacija, bet guma. Mediniai namų langai ir durys nuo drėgmės išbrinko, nebeatsidarinėjo. Gyventojams kai kuriuose regionuose speci-

aliosios tarnybos maistą atplukdydavo valtimis, nes jie savo namuose tapo kaliniais. Lankomiausias sostinės baras kokteilį „Bloody Mary“ pervadino „Tears of Bloody Mary“.

Bet atsitiko ir du geri dalykai: pirmas – sumažėjo gaisrų, antras – išdygo daug grybų. Tiesa, daug jų ir sukirmijo. Grybauti mėgau visada tik dėl miško. Jis mane ramina taip, kaip kitus zoloftas. Mano bendradarbis Mantas ir jo sūnus Kristupas grybų beveik nevalgė, nebent sriuboj. Grybus mėgo tik Agnė, Manto žmona. Bet savaitgalį praskaidrinti pasivaikščiavimo su jais po mišką buvo malonu ne dėl pragmatiško tikslo. Aišku, mieliau būčiau tiesiog sėdėjusi sodyboj ir niekur nėjusi. Sodybos kiemo krašte atsiveria skardis kaip sapne: kristum, bet neužsimuštum, o po kojomis – erškėtrožės. Kai ten viešėdavau, iš daubos gūsiams atsklindantis biblinis jų kvapas atitolindavo mane nuo bespalvio it vanduo pirmadienio.

Kieme iškračiau grybų krepšį į dubenį beveik jėga, nes daugelis lepšių prilipo prie dugno. Ne kažin kas: du baravykai, paliepė, septyni kazlėkai, iš jų pusę reikėjo išmesti, ūmėdės. Ir dešimt ruduokių. Kol aš darinėjau grybus, Mantas, Agnė, pora jų kaimynų jau gėrė alų ir valgė nuo grotelių pagriebtus pusiau iškepusius kepsnius. Iš pavėsinės sklido „Have you ever seen the rain“. Nukrapščiau nuo grybų galvų šapus, žemę, šliužus ir, paėmusi priešpaskutinę glebią ruduokę, bjaurėdamasi neatplaunamomis savo panagėmis, pastebėjau, kad ji be koto. Grybus pjaunu tik su kotais, nes kotai kartais pasitaiko skanesni nei kepurės. Pajuodavusi pjūvio žymė matėsi ne grybo apačioj, bet iš šono. Tikriausiai paėmiau tą grybą iš godumo tiesiog nuo žolės. Užuoat šveitusi ruduokę į kibirą šiukšlėms, nusinešiau ją į didįjį vasarnamio kambarį ištyrinėti šviesoje. Buvo neaišku, – išmest ar palikt, skanių grybų buvo devyniolika. Stalinės lempos gaubtą laikė fajansiniai erotiški cherubiniai, numestas grybas ant popieriaus paliko trumpą drėgną šliužę... Šviesos rate, ant seno „Literatūros ir meno“ viršelio, gulėjo ne ruduokė... Žmogaus ausis. Tai suvokti man truko gal minutę, gal dvi. Kol patinusios, jau kiek violetinės raukšlės są-

monėje susiliejo į tikslią – kriauklės – formą. Baimė neėmė, net šiek tiek nustebau, kad nenustebau. Buvau savo gyvenime mačiusi pakaruoklį. (Su rubininio kraujo lašu po nosimi.) Mačiau karstą, padėtą penkiaaukščio namo buto virtuvėje ant dviejų baltai dažytų taburečių. Jame gulėjo kūnas, kuris man iš kito miesto skambindavo dar prieš savaitę, klausė, ar geriau jo dovanotą arbatą su jazminais. Keletą kartų iš arti buvau susidūrusi su neteisybe. Tai yra daug baisiau nei iš arti matyti mirusį žmogų.

Pirmoji atėjo į galvą mintis – reikia padaryti taip, kaip padarė mano draugė kliudžiusi – neaišku ką – kelyje, kai vežė tėvuką į sodybą anais metais. Kai tik pagalvodavau apie tą įvykį, asociatyviai prisimindavau knygos pavadinimą „Dienos likučiai“. Tada draugė man paskambino beveik naktį, iš karto po įvykio:

– Kažką numušiau kelyje, atsimeni, sakiau, nejaučiu mašinos iš dešinės. Stoviu šalikelėj. Tėvas mašinoje miega, nieko nematė. Galėjo būti kaimo vaikas. Ko tyli? Klausiu, ar negalėjo būti kaimo vaikas? Bėgo tamsoj per kelią. Paskambinau jam, žinai, tam žmogui... tiek to, tu jo nepažįsti... Jis sako, kai parvažiuosi, paimk skudurą, nušluostyk mašinos priekį, skudurą išmesk į komposto dėžę. Daugiau apie tai negalvok. Lapę nudaužei.

Rytą atidžiai perkaičiau žinias pagrindiniuose portaluose, peržiūrėjau policijos suvestines – kelyje niekas nebuvo žuvęs. Daugiau mes su drauge apie tai nekalbėjom. Apie svarbiausius dalykus su geriausiaisiais draugais nekalbam, nes tada su jais susipyktumėm.

Racionaliausia dabar būtų buvę padaryti taip, kaip jai sakė tas žmogus - panaikinti pėdsakus. Suvynoti supuvusią ruduokę primenančią ausį į popierinį rankšluostį ir įmesti į virtuvės šiukšliadėžę, tuoj pat, čia, tarp tuščių plastmasinių marinuotos mėsos pakelių. Atsidariau spintelės stalčių, radau ruloną folijos. Atplėšiau gabalą, ausis tilpo į maždaug dešimt *comų*.

Šitas žodis mano vonios remontininko leksikone tiesiog ner-
vino: „Ar dešimt *comų* itališkų plytelių jūsų piniginei proble-
ma?“ O dabar žargonas veikė raminausiai. Užvyniojau perlen-
kusi foliją kaip virtinį (su mėsa) ir, pati nežinau kodėl, įsidėjau
į rankinės kišenukę mobilijam.

Kitą dieną, kai važiuojom iš sodybos atgal į miestą, į namus,
jaučiau rankinę ant sėdynės prie savo klubo taip, kaip jaučiu
vaikystės nuodėmę, – ji visada su manim. Priekyje nekalbėda-
mi sėdėjo Mantas ir Agnė, aš – galinėje sėdynėje su Kristupu,
berniukas žaidė telefonu. Pakelėse kaimiečiai stiklainiuose,
krepšiuose pardavinėjo paskutines sezono mėlynės, voveraites...
ruduokes. Mačiau prieky sėdinčio už vairo Manto nugarą.
Kai jis pasigerdavo, imdavo filosofuoti kaip bukas, mokslų
neragavęs kaimietis: žinok, niekas nepradingsta be pėdsako,
mirusieji, užkasami į žemę, savo galias perduoda mums, gy-
viesiems... Keletą kartų – prie „Lukoil“ degalinės, vėliau, jau
kai stovėjom sankryžoje įvažiuodami į miestą – žiojau si pa-
sakyti jiems, ką radau miške, bet nepasakiau. Pritrūkdavau
pirmojo sakinio. Keista, parašiau nemažai sudėtingų tekstų.
Bet dabar neradau minties, po kurios mašinoje nebūtų kilęs
chaosas, nebūtų sustota kur nors pakelės kavinėje, ir man ne-
reikėtų aiškinti to, ko paaiškinti negalėjau. Tikriausiai visi
būtume susierzinę, sunaikinę „dienos likučius“.

Namie foliją įdėjau į šaldytuvą lentynėlėje po šaldymo ka-
mera. Per beveik bemiegę naktį atgaminau atmintyje, kokios
valstybinės reikšmės institucijos yra arčiausiai mano namų:
senamiesčio poliklinika, policijos nuovada, Kultūros ministe-
rija (ji iš karto atkrito), geležinkelio stotis, turgus, šalia – ap-
leistas skverelis, jame ant medinių patrėšusių suoliukų sėdi-
niuoją benamiai arba lenkų turistai. Beveik ir viskas.

Būčiau norėjusi, kad ta istorija baigtųsi tada, kai prasidėjo.
Na, juk yra filmų, kurie prasideda pabaiga. Tačiau viskas vyko
nuosekliai. Kitą rytą poliklinikoje seselė Alina (lapelis su jos
vardu ir pavarde blizgėjo prisegtas ant krūtinės) išlindo iš ka-

bineto, kai tik prisėdau koridoriuje. Ji patikrindavo pacientų pavardes dar koridoriuje ir tik tada nešdavo jų korteles į gydytojos kabinetą, kaip tarnas lordui svečio vizitinę, pagarbiai atkišusi į priekį.

Alina pažvelgė į mane koketiškai papūtusi lūpas ir paklausė: „Jūs, pas mus kaip visada? Dėl įprastų vaistų?“ Taip, tarkim, aš dėl vaistų nuo kraujo spaudimo. Einu į tą polikliniką jau dvejus metus kas trys mėnesiai. Gydytoja, kuri man patiko dėl to, kad nešiojo kelnes, nes jai atrodė, kad jos kojos per storos pėdkelnėms, o aš jaučiu sentimentus kompleksuotiems žmonėms, pažiūrėjo į kompiuterį ir paklausė: „Jums išrašyti trims mėnesiams ar pusei metų?“ „Trims. Bet pas jus atėjau iš tikrųjų dėl ausies...“ „Dėl ausies jūs buvot prieš metus, tada mums užteko otipakso“, – pasakė ji peržvelgdama kompiuterį. „Kas nutiko dabar?“ Koks tada galėjo būti mano pirmasis sakinyš? Norėjau jums pasakyti vieną dalyką, vakar, grybaudama radau ausį? Žmogaus... Turiu rankinėje. Kišenėje mobiliajam telefonui. Gal galėtumėm apžiūrėti. Patvirtintumėt, kad tai tikrai yra *auris*. Kaip kad tikras čia pas jus, poliklinikos fojė, linoleumas, nepasikeitęs nuo Sovietų Sąjungos subyrėjimo. Kaip kad tikra yra palmė, išaugusi iš datulės kauliuko, įkišta jūsų poliklinikoje, irgi sovietmečiu, į žemę rankos, kuri jau irgi po žeme... Poliklinikos rūbinėje moteris, padavinėjanti drabužius, atidėjo į šoną mezgama vąšeliu servetėlę, panašią į apkramtytą snaigę, ir paduodama man paltą tarė: „Na ir oras lauke. Pamatysit, tuoj bus ir pas mus potvynių kaip Vokietijoje ir Prancūzijoje.“

Šalia poliklinikos esančios nuovados stovėjo dvi policijos mašinos. Tuščios. Įėjau pro duris. Koridoriuje keturios merginos su uniformomis valgė spurgas užsigėrinėdamos kava iš vienkartinių puodelių. Spurgų dėžutę buvo pasidėjusios ant seifo. Arčiausiai stovėjusi mergina pažiūrėjo į mane, ir nelaukdama, kol prabilsiu, informavo:

– Pietūs nuo 11.30 iki 12.15. Dabar lygiai 12-ta.

– Negaliu laukti, noriu jums parodyti savo radinį, gal patarsit, kur kreiptis.

Priėjau arčiau. Išvyniojau foliją ir padėjau ausį į spurgų dėžutę. (Tyčia). Viena mergina nosisuko, paėjo tolyn ir paskambino telefonu, kad nusileistų žemyn kažkoks Viktoras, nes „šiandien iš pat ryto nuovadoje renkasi svarbūs liudininkai, nes pilnatis.“ Kitos trys ėmė spurgas, virtuoziškai išvengdamos prisilietimo su praverta folija. Vis dėlto viena neištvėrė:

– Ponia, na ne to čia mes randam. Kai kuriems policininkams radybos taip sekasi, tarsi jie turėtų abonementą, kaip į operhauzą... Kolega paupy pernai rado veltinį. Kartu su koja. Guoda, va, –linktelėjo galva į kairę – pirštą Sodų gatvėj. Vieno naftos magnato užkastos galvos Lietuvos teisėsauga ieško septyniolika metų. Viktoras, jei bus geros nuotaikos, surašys jums aktą, bet kas iš to. Jūs, pridėjusi ausį prie akto, neatkursite to žmogaus kaip *puzzle*. Be to, kinų mokslininkai jau išaugina ausis iš nuosavų ląstelių vaikams, kurie gimsta su neišsivysčiusia ausies kriaukle. Iš pradžių atspausdinama jos matrica 3D formatu, vėliau papildoma chondrocitų.

Grižau namo. Ausį vėl įdėjau į šaldytuvą ir iki vakaro kaip apsėsta skaičiau žinias. Po vilties ir kančių dienos Katalonijos piliečiai laimėjo teisę turėti savo nepriklausomą respubliką. Labradorė, kuri tarnavo CŽV, prarado gebėjimą užuosti sprogstamąsias medžiagas ir ją priglaudė savo namuose vienas iš pareigūnų. D. Trumpas teigia, kad klimato atšilimas, sausros, pietų kraštuose sniegas, liūtys tėra Kinijos paskleista apgaulė. Uraganas „Ofelija“ sukėlė daug keistų gamtos reiškinių, – saulė tapo raudona, o paukščiai ore ėmė sukti paslaptinčius ratus.

Į lauką, gal dėl savisaugos, išėjau tada, kai visiškai sutemo. Prie konteinerių šiukšlių maišą išmečiau iš karto, bet foliją laikiau kišenėje. Tačiau aiškiai žinojau, kad namo jos tikrai nebesinešiu, kas nors atsitiks... Benamis prie konteinerio pasirodė taip, kaip išlenda katės – tyliai, be veislės, iš niekur. Ranką tam

nepažįstamam žmogui ištiesiau beveik instinktyviai. Vyras suėmė mano riešą ir pakėlė delną arčiau akių:

– Ausis?.. Vaiko, vyro? Ar moters?

– Na dar paklauskite, žydo, lenko ar ruso... Koks jums skirtumas?

– Laidojant skirsis malda.

Tada toji būtybė su gal dviem dydžiais per dideliu lietpalčiu įkišo ranką į konteinerį, ant kurio buvo užrašyta „Stiklas“. Įkišo ją taip giliai, kad turėjo ištraukti kruviną. Tačiau benamis iškėlė du butelius, kad nesusipjaustytų apėmęs juos ne plikais pirštais, bet ir lietpalčio rankovės galu. Likusį ant vieno butelio dugno skystį supylė į kitą ir tada pasuko pievos link. Ėjau iš paskos, nors jis manęs nekviatė. Vyras atsistojo prie mokyklos tvoros. Ant jos dieną eidama pro šalį perskaitydavau juodomis raidėmis išpurkštą sakinį: „Gerumo teisės priklauso Bažnyčiai“. Dabar tamsoje užrašo nesimatė, tiesiog žinojau, kad jis ten yra. Mus kiek apšvietė žibintas, stovintis už keliolikos metrų. Benamis ištiesė man butelį ir pasakė: „Paminėsim tą žmogų. Buvo *duša*. Dabar liko *gluchoje ucho*.“ Tada jis ištiesė rankas į šonus, delnus teatrališkai atversdamas dangui, visai kaip Judas Law filme „The Young pope“, ir be garso ėmė vapėti žodžius. Iš dvokiančio jo lietpalčio kišenės kyšojo parduotuvės nuolaidų lankstinukas. Batas atsirišęs. Matėsi kojine. Prisiminiau, kaip popiežiui filme pasiūloma kurti jo įvaizdį, parduvinėti lėkštes su savo atvaizdu. Popiežius atsako: „Aš neturiu atvaizdo, nes esu niekas. Egzistuoja tik Kristus.“

Baigęs kalbėti maldą benamis atsigerė iš butelio, ištiesė jį man. Gurkštelėjau. Be pasišlykštėjimo, du kartus. Tada jis įprastu judesiu, nudaužė butelį į suolą, ir atkišęs užpakalį šuke ėmė kasti pievos žemę. Žemė atrodė minkšta, nes nuo pat ryto dulkė lietus. Folią atidavė man. Dešinėje rankoje laikydamas ausį, kairiąja išvertė kišenę, iš jos iškrito lankstinukas, polietilininis maišelis ir tuščia cigarečių dėžutė. Mačiau, kaip jis at-

sargiai kiša ausį į cigarečių dėžutę ir deda ją į iškastą duobutę. Pasakiau, kad duobę pakastų gilesnę, iš tokios ausį iškapstys šuo, net ir varna, bet staiga, turbūt nuo to mišinio iš butelio, ėmė svaigti, užti galva ir turėjau prisėsti ant suolo.

...Nepaisant to, kad iš visų garsų galėjau girdėti tik lietpalčio šnarėjimą, stiklą, smingantį į žemę, girdėjau ir ką kitą. Pievoje, giliau ir toliau nei gilinama duobė, sujudėjo kurmiai. Iš po lentų krūvos prie mokyklos teritorijoje esančio namo, kuriame jau daugelį metų niekas negyveno, išlindo ežiukas. Šimtai kroku, šį rudenį čia pasodintų mokinių mūsų valstybės šimtmečio proga, svogūnėliuose kaupė maisto atsargas. Geležinkeliu artėjo vakarinis traukinys, gal iš priemiesčio, gal iš kaimyninės valstybės. Vagonuose žmonės paskubom rankiojo daiktus, skambino mobiliaisiais artimiesiems, nes jau juk tuoj išlipti, artėja stotis. Traukinys tranzitinis, stabtels kelioms minutėms ir vėl pajudės. Tikriausiai į Peterburgą. Girdėjau, kaip tame mieste, kambaryje aukštomis lubomis, tokiomis aukštomis, kad jame gerai skambėti galėjo tik *Requiem*, apsirengusi ilga sidabro suknele, eilėraščių rašo poetė: „Vse my nemnogo u žizny v gostiach, / Žyt’ – eto tol’ko privyčka...“

...Banaliausia būna tada, kai teksto pabaigoje paaiškėja, kad pasakotojas istoriją susapnavo. Bet aš, sėdėdama ant suoliuko, miego visai nenorėjau. Net snaudulys neėmė. Nuo senamiesčio sklido akordeono muzika. Matydavau tą seną muzikantą kartais. Jis grodavo tiesiog savo daugiabučio namo laiptinėje, nes tingėdavo išsinešti kėdę į gatvę. Kai muzikantas pamatydavo artėjančius turistus, melodija tapdavo aistringa, o kai gatvė vėl ištuštėdavo, ji nutrūkdavo vidury frazės... Nenorėjau miego. Nors priekyje menkai apšviestu šaligatviu nėjo nė vienas žmogus ir niekas negalėjo sutrukdyti pasnausti. O už mano nugaros juoda, susiliejami su mokyklos tvora pieva plytėjo taip pat be jokio akcento, be įvykio.

The Ear

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

Translated from Lithuanian by Romas Kinka

Everyone – both nationalists and liberals – cursed the year for its rain. The weather is one of those rare things that unites people: in authoritarian countries, in democratic republics, in regions of Europe leaning towards separatism, in states which are still undecided as to their future because even though undecided they live well. The only places in which rain is not cursed are those from which saffron, passion and offshore company money laundering schemes are imported into our country. People can disagree on pasta sauce, the winner of the Noble Prize in Literature (‘A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall’) or the material from which the urn to hold the ashes of someone near and dear to you should be made, but not rain. If the rain isn’t coming down hard in a thriller everyone sees it in the same way. During rainy periods some people take Prozac, Zoloft, or ... they just drink. Many of my work colleagues even manage to surprise me, they discuss the weather every morning: I made a point of calculating that about an hour and a half of their work day is given up to observations about the rain. Sometimes it seems to me that Lithuanians were born in Cyprus and they’ve decided to reside in Lithuania temporarily, on the way to somewhere else. After all, what is there to be surprised about the rain? Rain to Lithuanians is something they should be used to from childhood. Like melancholia. Like the image of the Sorrowful Christ nailed to the cross of eternity.

My work colleagues have bought rubber boots. The newspapers published photographs of parents taking their children to the nursery in the early morning along Gediminas Prospect in rubber dinghies. Even in the 21st century it’s

not information that saves people from catastrophes (and unplanned children) but rubber. The wooden windows and doors of houses were swollen from the moisture and were no longer opening properly. In some regions special services were delivering food to the population in boats because they'd become prisoners in their own homes. The most popular bar in the capital was now calling a Bloody Mary – Tears of Bloody Mary.

But two good things happened: the first is that there were fewer fires, the second – there'd been a spurt in the growth of mushrooms in the forests. It was true, however, that many of them were worm infested. I've always like to go mushroom picking but only because being in a forest has a calming effect on me in the same way that Zoloft does on some people. My work colleague Mantas and his son Kristupas almost never eat mushrooms unless they're in a soup. It's only Agnė, Mantas's wife, who likes mushrooms. But to make the weekend brighter with a walk in a forest was pleasant and not for any pragmatic reason. Of course, I would've rather sat in their summer house and not gone anywhere. At the edge of the yard of the summer house a slope opens up like in a dream: you could fall down it but wouldn't get killed, and underfoot there are wild roses. Whenever I spent time there, their biblical scent wafting in on the air from the valley transports me a long way away from a Monday colourless as water.

In the yard I almost had to use force to shake the contents of the mushroom basket into a bowl because many of the birch mushrooms had stuck to the bottom. What I had wasn't anything to get very excited about: two boletuses, a fleecy milk-cap, seven slippery jacks, half of which had to be thrown out, and some russulas. And ten saffron milk-caps. While I was preparing the mushrooms, Mantas, Agnė, and a couple of their neighbours were drinking beer and eating half-done pieces of meat grabbed from the grill. 'Have you

ever seen the rain' could be heard coming from the shelter. I scraped off the grass, the earth, and the slugs, and taking the penultimate flaccid saffron milk-cap, disgusted by the dirt under my nails which I couldn't wash out, I noticed that it didn't have a stem. I only cut up mushrooms with stems, because sometimes the stems are tastier than the caps. The blackened mark of the cut could be seen not at the bottom of the mushroom but from its side. I'd probably taken that mushroom out of greed straight off the grass. Instead of scrubbing the saffron milk-cap over the rubbish bin, I took it into the largest room in the summer house to examine it in the light. It wasn't clear to me whether I should keep it or throw it out since I already had nineteen tasty mushrooms. The desk lamp's shade was held up by faience erotic cherubim. The mushroom on the paper had left a short damp trail... In a circle of light, what was lying on the cover of an old copy of the periodical *Literature and Art* wasn't a saffron milk-cap but... a human ear. It took me perhaps a minute, perhaps two, to grasp that. Until the swollen, already somewhat violet-coloured ridges merged in my consciousness into the clear shape – of a shell. Fright didn't take hold of me, I was even surprised I wasn't surprised. I had once in my life seen a man who'd hanged himself. (With a drop of ruby-red blood under his nose.) I'd seen the coffin placed on two stools painted white in the kitchen of a flat in a five-storey building. In the coffin was the body which had called me the week before to ask if I was drinking the jasmine tea it had made a present of to me. I have come across injustice close up several times. That's much more terrible than seeing a dead person close up.

The first thought that came into my head was I should do what my friend did when she hit someone or something, it's not clear what, with her car on the highway when she was driving her father to the summer house the other year. As soon as I thought

about that incident, I'd remember by association the title of the book *The Remains of the Day*. It was almost night time when my friend 'phoned me right after the incident:

'I knocked someone down on the highway, you remember I told you I can't feel the car on the right side. I'm standing by the side of the highway. Father's sleeping in the car, he didn't see anything. It could have been a child from the village. Why aren't you saying anything? I'm asking you if it could've been a child from the village. I phoned him, you know, that person... never mind, you don't know him... He says when you get home, take a rag, wipe down the front of the car and throw the rag into the compost box. Don't think about it anymore. You hit a fox.'

In the morning I carefully read through the news on the main internet sites and looked through the police reports – no one had died on the highway. We didn't talk about it with my friend anymore. We don't talk about the most important things with our best friends because we'd only end up arguing.

The most rational thing to have done would've been to do what that person had said – to get rid of any incriminating evidence. To wrap up the rotting saffron milk-cap in a paper towel and throw it in the kitchen rubbish bin, there and then, amongst the empty plastic packs of marinated meat. I opened a cabinet drawer and found a roll of foil. I tore off a piece, the ear fitted into about a ten-centimetre piece. I folded the foil like I would a dumpling (with meat in it) and, I don't know why myself, put it in my handbag in the pocket meant for a mobile.

The following day, when we were driving from the summer house back home to the city, I felt my handbag on the seat next to my hip in the same way that I feel a sin I had committed in my childhood – one that has never left me. Mantas and

Agnė sat in front not talking, I sat in the back with Kristupas, the boy playing with a phone. Along the highway, villagers were selling the last blueberries of the season, chanterelles... saffron milk-caps. Mantas was at the wheel with his back to me. When he got drunk, he'd start philosophising like some obtuse uneducated country bumpkin: you know, nothing disappears without a trace, the dead, buried in the ground, pass on their powers to us the living... There were several times I was about to tell them about what I'd found in the forest – by the Lukoil petrol station, later, when we were at the intersection going into the city – but didn't. I couldn't come up with the first sentence. I found that strange since I've written any number of difficult texts. But now I couldn't find a way to express things to avoid chaos in the car, to avoid having to stop in some café on the way home and for me to have to explain what I couldn't explain. Most probably we'd all have become irritable and destroyed 'the remains of the day'.

At home I put the foil in the refrigerator on the shelf below the freezer section. During an almost sleepless night I tried to remember what state institutions were closest to my home: the Old Town clinic, the police station, the Ministry of Culture (which I dismissed immediately), the railway station, the market, a small run-down square with the homeless or Polish tourists sitting on dilapidated wooden benches. That was about all I could come up with.

I would have liked the story to have ended when it began. After all, there are films which begin with the ending. However, everything happened in sequence. The following morning, as I sat down in the corridor in the clinic, nurse Alina (a badge with her first name and surname was pinned to her breast) emerged from her room. She'd check patients' names in the corridor and only then take their cards to the doctor's room, like a servant taking a guest's calling card to his lord, holding it respectfully in front of him.

Alina looked at me coquettishly with puckered lips and asked: ‘You’re here for the same reason? For your regular prescription?’ Yes, let’s say I’m here for my blood pressure medicine. I’ve already been going to that clinic for two years every three months. The woman doctor, whom I liked because she wore trousers – she thought her legs were too fat for pantyhose, and I have a soft spot for people with complexes, looked at the computer and asked: ‘Do you want a prescription for three months or half a year?’ ‘Three. I no longer plan my life half a year in advance. But I’ve come to you on an ear-related matter...’ ‘What’s happened now?’ What then could my first sentence have been? I wanted to say one thing to you, yesterday, when I was mushroom picking, I found an ear. A human one... It’s in my handbag. In the pocket for my mobile. Perhaps you could have a look at it? To confirm that it really is an *auris*. As real as the lino in the hallway of your clinic, which hasn’t been changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. As real as the palm plant, which grew out of a date pit, put into the earth at your clinic, also in Soviet times, by a hand which is also now lying in the earth... The woman in the cloakroom at the clinic put aside the doily she was crocheting, which looked like a snowflake that had been nibbled on, and, giving me my coat, said: ‘What weather we’re having. You wait, we’ll soon be having floods like in Germany and France.’

Two police cars were parked outside the police station next to the clinic. They were empty. I went in through the door. In the corridor there were four young women in uniform eating doughnuts and washing them down with coffee from disposable cups. They’d put the box of doughnuts on a safe. The young woman standing closest looked at me and, without waiting for me to speak, said:

‘Lunch is from 11:30 to 12:15. It’s now exactly 12:00.’

‘I can’t wait, I want to show you what I found, perhaps you’ll be able to advise me where I should go.’

I came closer. I unwrapped the foil and put the ear in the box with doughnuts. (On purpose.) One of the young women turned around, walked off a little distance and made a phone call for someone called Viktoras to come down, because ‘important witnesses have been coming in from early morning because it’s a full moon today.’ The other three took some more doughnuts, managing like virtuosos to avoid touching the opened-up foil. All the same, one of them couldn’t contain herself and said:

‘Dear lady, we’re always finding all kinds of things. Some police officers are so successful it’s as if they’ve won a season ticket to the opera... A colleague last year found a felt boot by the river. With a foot in it. Guoda, over there,’ pointing her head to the left, ‘a finger in Sodų street. The Lithuanian authorities have been looking for the buried head of an oil magnate for seventeen years. Viktoras, if he’s in a good mood, will take your statement, but what’s the point? If we put the ear on top of your statement, we’re not going to be able to put together the person like a jigsaw puzzle. Besides that, Chinese scientists are now able to grow ears for children born without a fully developed ear out of their own stem cells. Initially a 3D printer is used for the matrix, which is later supplemented with chondrocytes.’

I went home. I put the ear back in the refrigerator and like a person possessed read the news until evening time. After a day of hope and suffering the citizens of Catalonia had won the right to have their own independent republic. A Labrador dog, who’d served the CIA, had lost the ability to sniff out explosives and one of the officers took it into his own home. Donald Trump is asserting that climate change, droughts, snow in southern countries, deluges were all only a decep-

tion perpetrated by the Chinese. Hurricane Ophelia resulted in a lot of strange phenomena – the sun turned red, and the birds in the sky began circling in mysterious ways.

When it was completely dark I went outside, perhaps for self-preservation. I threw out the bag of rubbish by the containers but kept the foil in my pocket. However, I knew quite clearly that I really wasn't going to be taking it home, and something would happen... A homeless man appeared by the container like cats do – silently, out of nowhere and without a pedigree. I stretched out my hand to the stranger almost instinctively. The man took hold of my wrist and lifted the palm of my hand closer to his eyes:

'An ear? A child's, a man's? Or perhaps a woman's?'

'Why don't you ask if it's a Jew's, a Pole's or a Russian's... What difference does it make to you?'

'The burial prayer will be different.'

Then that person wearing a raincoat perhaps two sizes too big for him put his hand in the container with the word 'Glass' on it. He put it in so deep that it should have come out bloody. But the homeless man lifted out two bottles, holding them by the end of the sleeve of his raincoat so he wouldn't cut himself. He poured the liquid at the bottom of one of the bottles into the other and then turned in the direction of the meadow. I followed from behind, even though he hadn't invited me. The man stood by the school fence. During the day when I walked past it I could read the sentence spray-painted in black letters: 'The law of goodness belongs to the Church'. Now in the darkness the writing couldn't be seen, I simply knew it was there. A street lamp several metres away gave us some light. The homeless man stretched out the bottle to me and said: 'We'll remember that person. He had a soul. All that's left of him now is an ear.' He then stretched his arms

out to his sides, with the palms of his hands turned theatrically up to the sky, just like Jude Law in the film *The Young Pope*, and began silently mouthing some words. A leaflet with a shop's discounts was poking out of the pocket of his smelly raincoat. The laces of one of his shoes were untied. I could see his sock. I remembered how in the film the suggestion is made to the Pope that he should create his image and market plates with his picture on them. The Pope answers: 'I do not have an image... I am no one... Only Christ exists.'

After the homeless man had finished saying a prayer, he took a swig from the bottle and offered it to me. I took a sip. And, without feeling any disgust, a second sip. Then with a practiced movement he hit the bottle against the bench, and with his bottom turned towards me, began digging the earth in the meadow with a shard of glass. The earth seemed soft, because it had been drizzling from the early morning. He gave the foil back to me. Holding the ear in this right hand, he used his left to empty his pocket, and the leaflet, a plastic bag, and an empty cigarette pack fell out of it. I saw how he carefully put the ear in the cigarette pack and then in the hole he had dug. I said he should make the hole deeper, a dog, or even a crow, could dig it up, but all of a sudden, probably from that concoction in the bottle, I suddenly became dizzy, my head began to throb, and I had to sit down on the bench.

... In spite of the fact that of all the sounds around I could only hear the rustle of the raincoat, of the glass digging into the earth, I heard something else as well. In the meadow, deeper and further away from where the hole was being dug, moles were moving. A hedgehog emerged from under a pile of wooden boards by a house in which no one had lived for many years next to the school's grounds. A hundred crocuses, planted in the autumn by pupils to mark the centenary of our country's one hundred years of independence, were storing up food in their bulbs. The evening train was approach-

ing, coming perhaps from a suburb, perhaps from a neighbouring country. The people in the carriages were hurriedly collecting their things, calling their nearest and dearest on their mobiles, because they had to get off soon, the station was coming up. It was a transit train, it was going to stop for only a few minutes and move off again. Most probably to St Petersburg. I had heard how in that city, in a room with a high ceiling, so high that only a Requiem Mass could sound good in it, a woman poet in a long silver dress had written the lines: 'We are all on this earth for a while as guests, / To live is only a habit...'

... The most banal thing is if at the end of a text it becomes clear that the narrator had dreamt the story. But I, sitting on a bench, wasn't at all sleepy. I didn't even want to have a nap. Accordion music was coming from the Old Town. I would sometimes see the old musician. He'd play sitting in the entrance to his multistorey building because he couldn't be bothered to carry a chair out into the street. When the musician saw tourists drawing close, the melody he was playing would become passionate, and when the street emptied out again, break off in the middle of a phrase... I didn't want to sleep. Even though not a single person was walking along the dimly lit pavement in front of me and no one could have interrupted my nap. A black meadow merging with the school fence stretched out behind me also without anything out of the ordinary, without anything happening.



Austria

Carolina Schutti

Eine Ankunft

Arrival

EUPL laureate 2015: *Einmal muss ich über weiches Gras gelaufen sein* (Otto Müller Verlag)

BIOGRAPHY

Carolina Schutti was born in 1976 in Innsbruck, where she still lives. She studied German philology, English and American studies, concert guitar and classical voice. After several years of teaching, and following her PhD on Elias Canetti, she taught at the University of Florence, followed by a post as a research assistant at Literaturhaus am Inn. From 2009 to 2013 she was a board member of Brenner Forum in Innsbruck, as well as a member of the board of trustees of Brenner-Archiv. Her publications include essays on literary studies, literary reviews and other texts in literary magazines. She coordinates and moderates literary events and interdisciplinary projects, works as a juror, gives lectures on poetry and holds training seminars in the field of Neue Literatur. Schutti has received a number of awards for her literary work.

Eine Ankunft

Carolina Schutti



Eine Erschütterung. Oder ein Gepolter. Ein Kratzen an der Wand.

Nadjescha sitzt aufrecht im Bett, hört den eigenen Herzschlag, hört ihren Atem. Auf Knien gelangt sie an das Fußende des Bettes, öffnet die Fensterläden des schmalen Fensters. Der Vollmond steht über den Dächern, kühler Wind weht ihr ins Gesicht. Sie reibt sich die Stirn, die Wangen, alles ist ruhig, die Häuser stehen fest auf ihren Fundamenten, die Fenster sind dunkel, Balkone und Terrassen leer. Sie lauscht in die Wohnung hinein, auch hier ist alles ruhig, sie muss geträumt haben, doch ihr fehlt ein Bild, aber vielleicht bestand der Traum auch nur aus einem Gefühl, aus dem Gefühl auszurutschen, zu fallen, wie früher, als ihr Körper noch von Träumen gebeutelt wurde, über die Bettkante rollte und hart am Boden aufschlug.

Nein, es ist nichts, alles ruhig, sie lässt ihren Blick durch das winzige Zimmer wandern. Trotz der dämmrigen Dunkelheit, trotz der Bücher, die sie in einem hohen Stapel auf das Regal gelegt hat, sieht sie im Eck den Pokal, erahnt das weit nach hinten geschobene Foto, den mit Staub bedeckten Rahmen, das Kind im Fußballdress mit den verschwitzten Haaren und den vom Blitz geröteten Augen. Sieht nicht, aber weiß um die Spielzeugfigur hinter dem Foto, um den drehbaren Plastikschwanz, die Munition, die Stacheln oder Hörner oder Giftdrüsen oder Pfeilspitzen. Vielleicht ist sie deshalb aufgewacht, weil sie sich fühlt, als schliefe sie in einem fremden Kinder-

zimmer, obwohl sie es gründlich geputzt, Staub und Haare aus den Schubladen entfernt, die Matratze mit einer dicken Auflage überzogen, ihre Bücher sortiert, ihre Kleidung in die freien Fächer geräumt, gelüftet und ihre Handtücher an die Türhaken gehängt hat.

Es riecht trotzdem nach Daniele Waschmittel, sie nimmt den Geruch überdeutlich wahr, so lange ist sie noch nicht hier, als dass sie sich daran hätte gewöhnen können. Seine Hosen und Hemden in der rechten Hälfte des Schrankes, seine Winterpullover im obersten Fach. Das genüge ihr doch? Eine halbe Kleiderstange, drei Fächer und zwei große Laden? Einen Platz für den Koffer am Boden des Schrankes?

Was hätte sie sagen sollen, dass das merkwürdig sei, ihre Sachen neben seinen?

In seinem Zimmer ist nicht einmal Platz für eine Kommode. So selbstverständlich hatte er sie angesehen, war einen Schritt zur Seite getreten, so selbstverständlich, als sei es normal, sich neben Küche und Bad auch den Kleiderschrank zu teilen, und deshalb hatte sie nichts gesagt, nur genickt, hatte auch die Sachen auf dem Regal nicht erwähnt.

Wann betritt er ihr Zimmer, um sich seine Hose zu holen oder sein Hemd? Lässt er die Türe offen oder zieht er sie hinter sich zu? Prüft er, ob sie das Fenster geschlossen hat, damit der Regen ihr direkt darunter stehendes Bett nicht durchnässt?



Am Tag ihrer Ankunft hatte sie den vom Schweiß in ihrer Handfläche aufgeweichten Zettel mit der Adresse in ihre Umhängetasche gesteckt, während sie die Klingel drückte, den obersten Knopf auf einem eleganten Messingschild, das in merkwürdigem Kontrast zur unverputzten Hausfassade, zur engen, schattigen Gasse, zu den blauen Müllbeuteln an der Ecke und den mit Taubenkot verdreckten Bordsteinen stand.

Doch der polierte Glanz und die elegant wirkende Namenliste in schwarzer, kursiver Schrift ließ sie Hoffnung schöpfen, vielleicht war es das jetzt, endlich, ein Zimmer, in dem sie bleiben, eine Stadt, in der sie ein wenig zur Ruhe kommen konnte. Das Stiegenhaus, das sich mit jedem Stockwerk verjüngt hatte, bis kaum armbreite steinerne Stufen zu einer gut gesicherten Tür führten: Sie klopft, wartet eine Weile, lauscht auf Schritte, wird hereingebeten, ihr erster Eindruck eine angenehme Stimme, ein großer Mann, blumiger Wohnungsduft. Ein kleines, ordentliches Zimmer, eine Kochnische, ein Wohnraum, ein Bad, der Mann gab ihr keine Zeit, sich umzusehen, redete unablässig, als sei er aufgeregt, als habe er noch etwas vor, aber er war freundlich, lächelte, berührte sie leicht am Arm und führte sie weiter durch ein winziges Zimmer hindurch zur Terrassentür.

Quer vor der Tür lag eine Matratze, sie musste auf ihr Fußende steigen, um nach draußen zu gelangen.

Come on. Vai.

Dunkelblau-grau-gestreift. Ihre nackten Zehen sanken ein, sie stützte sich am Türrahmen ab, trotz der frischen Luft von draußen stieg aus der Matratze ein Geruch nach fremder Wärme und fremder Nacht. Ihre Hände fühlten sich nach der langen Reise klebrig an, zum Glück hatte er sie nicht mit Handschlag begrüßt, sondern seine Hände auf ihre Schultern gelegt und die Luft neben ihren Wangen geküsst. Der Bart eines Fremden an ihren Wangen.

Warum Nadjescha?, hatte er gefragt.

Weil Nadjescha Hoffnung bedeutet. Hope, speranza.

Zuerst die Terrasse!, sagte er dann, come on, vai! Die Terrasse sei das Schönste an der Wohnung, hier hätte sie den prächtigsten Ausblick in ganz Florenz. Er lachte.

Er hatte nicht übertrieben. Nadjescha blickte über die roten Dächer, sah die riesige Kuppel des Doms, die Hügelketten am

Rand der Stadt, die im Dunst verschwanden. Das Haus gegenüber glänzte weiß im Sonnenlicht, sie konnte durch die großen Fenster in die Räume sehen, erkannte schwere Möbel, Bücherregale, ein Klavier. Auf einem kleinen Balkon saß ein Kind und spielte mit Wäscheklammern. Spätsommerliche Wärme lag über den Häusern, ein gedämpftes Rauschen drang aus den umliegenden Straßen und Gassen herauf.

Daniele zeigte mit einer Armbewegung auf die Stadt: Firenze. Nadjescha lächelte. Wie versprochen, sagte sie, eine perfekte Aussicht, um die sie jeder beneiden werde.

Hinter ihrem Rücken hörte sie ein Kichern, sie drehte sich um, erst jetzt bemerkte sie den Mann, der zwischen zwei großen Blumentöpfen auf dem Steinboden saß. Sein Gesicht war zur Hälfte von den Pflanzen verdeckt. Lorbeer, Oleander, ein paar hellgrüne Kräuter, die sie nicht kannte.

This is Luca.

Luca winkte ihr zu wie ein Kind, mit flacher Hand, die Handfläche nach außen gedreht, er grinste. Zwischen seinen Händen stieg ein weißer Rauchfaden empor.

Guarda!, sagte Daniele. Seine Armbewegung meinte nun die Terrasse. Much more big than the rooms.

Sie würde rasch Italienisch lernen.

Daniele führte sie um ein Eck herum, zeigte ihr die hinter einem Mauervorsprung versteckte Wäscheleine und einen Klappstuhl.

You can use.

An der Leine hingen Handtücher und Unterhosen.

Er zeigte ihr den Korb mit den Wäscheklammern, rutschte beinahe aus, als er sich zu ihr umdrehte. Die Terrassenfliesen

hinter dem Mauervorsprung waren mit einer schmierigen, grünlichen Schicht überzogen.

Nadjescha bedankte sich, ging ihm voran auf den vorderen Teil der Terrasse zurück, stellte sich an die Brüstung. Daniele setzte sich neben Luca auf den Boden, beide im Schneidersitz, jetzt stieg der Rauch zwischen Danieles Händen auf.

Luca gab Daniele einen Kuss, sie wandte ihren Blick ab, ließ ihn noch einmal über die Stadt wandern. Eine Postkartenaussicht. Sie versuchte auszumachen, wo der Bahnhof war, wo die Universität, wo die Autobahn zum Meer. Daniele und Luca unterhielten sich, als wäre sie nicht da, oder als würde sie selbstverständlich hierher gehören, nach nicht einmal zwanzig Minuten. Sollte sie etwas sagen, bevor sie wieder hineinging? Danke? Bis später?

Sie werde sich jetzt erst einmal einrichten, sagte Nadjescha, sagte es zu leise, die beiden hörten sie nicht.

Die Terrassentür stand noch offen, auf Zehenspitzen stieg sie auf Danieles Leintuch. Die Bettwäsche lag zu einem Knäuel geformt auf dem Fußboden. Das Zimmer war winzig, nicht größer als ein Vorraum, anstelle eines Schrankes gab es nur einen aufgeklappten, großen Koffer, in dem gestapelte T-Shirts und Jeans lagen, daneben stand ein geschlossener Karton. Für Unterwäsche und Socken vielleicht? Zwei Bücherstapel auf dem Boden, ein Leselicht. Sie schloss die Zimmertür hinter sich, merkte, dass sie die Luft angehalten hatte, jetzt atmete sie hastig aus, wieder ein, spürte ihr Herz klopfen, als hätte sie etwas Verbotenes getan.

Aufatmen. Das Wohnzimmer war in Dämmerlicht getaucht, sie musterte das orange Sofa, den Glastisch, Einrichtungs-
magazine, eine gläserne Schale mit Orangen und Äpfeln, den Fernseher. Ein zusammengeklapptes Bügelbrett im Eck neben dem Fenster, eine Musikanlage: Sie dürfe fernsehen und Musik hören, jederzeit, sie dürfe das orange Sofa benützen, am

Glastisch essen, bügeln, die Wohnung sei tagsüber leer, Luca komme nur an den Wochenenden. In ihrem Zimmer habe im letzten halben Jahr ein Künstler gewohnt. Ein ruhiger Mann, der kein Italienisch und kaum Englisch gesprochen habe, der tagsüber mit dem Skizzenblock durch die Stadt gestreift sei und nachts mit gebeugtem Rücken Scherenschnitte angefertigt habe.

Nadjescha durchquerte den Raum, stand einen Moment vor der Tür zu ihrem Zimmer, bemerkte, dass die Messingklinke etwas herunterhing, als sei sie locker. Warum Luca nicht eingezogen war, fragte sie sich, als sie mit ihrer Hand die Türklinke umschloss. Etwas ließ sie zögern, als hätte sie auf einmal Angst davor, die Tür zu öffnen.



Ihr Zimmer, ihr Raum. Vielleicht gibt es Siebenschläfer unter dem Giebel, vielleicht ist im Haus ein Fensterladen zugeschlagen oder eine Tür.

Nadjescha tappt barfuß durch das Wohnzimmer, um in die Küche zu gelangen. Eine fensterlose Nische, ein Kühlschrank, eine Spüle, ein alter Herd, ein schmales Regal, das als Arbeitsfläche reichen muss. Ihre Mineralwasserflasche neben Danieles im halbleeren Kühlschrank, es klirrt etwas im Inneren, als sie ihn wieder schließt. Mit großen Schlucken trinkt sie das eiskalte Wasser, fühlt, wie sich die Kälte im Magen ausbreitet. Von oben her spürt sie einen Luftzug, er scheint aus dem gemauerten Abzug zu kommen. Sie beugt sich weit über die Kochplatten, verdreht den Kopf, entdeckt ein Loch hoch oben in der Wand, kann den Himmel sehen, zwei Sterne erkennen. Einer funkelt, der andere nicht, der andere muss Venus sein. Oder Jupiter? Welchen sieht man um diese Jahreszeit? Jedenfalls findet das Planetenlicht seinen Weg durch die dunstige, gelbliche Lichtglocke über der Stadt, wie in Berlin, denkt sie, wie in London, wie überall, wo sie bisher gewesen ist.

Arrival

Carolina Schutti

Translated from German by Jen Calleja

A tremor. Or a clatter. Something scraping at the wall.

Nadjescha sits up in bed, hears the beating of her heart, the sound of her breathing. Kneeling on the mattress, she reaches towards the foot of the bed and opens the shutters of the small window. The full moon is above the rooftops, a cool breeze blows in her face. She rubs her forehead, her cheeks, all is quiet, the houses are moored to their foundations, the windows are dark, the balconies and terraces are empty. She listens to the apartment, it's quiet here too, she must have been dreaming, and yet she can't recall the dream's images, perhaps the dream came from just a feeling, the feeling of slipping down, falling, like that time before, when her body, still buffeted by dreams, rolled over the edge of the bed and hit the floor hard.

No, it can't have been anything, everything's quiet; her gaze wanders around the tiny room. In spite of the dusky darkness, in spite of the books she has arranged in high piles on the shelves, she can see the trophy in the corner, and make out the photo pushed right to the back, its frame covered in dust; the kid in the football kit with sweaty hair and eyes reddened by the flash. She can't see it, but she knows about the toy figure behind the photo, the moveable plastic tail, the ammunition, the spines or horns or poison glands or arrowheads. Maybe that's why she woke up; because she had felt like she was sleeping in an unfamiliar room, even though she'd thoroughly cleaned it; removed dust and hair from the drawers, covered the mattress with a thick topper, arranged her books and put away her clothes in the empty shelves in

the wardrobe, aired out the room and hung her towels on the hooks on the back of the door.

It still smells of Daniele's washing powder, she can clearly make out the scent, she hasn't been here long enough to have got used to it. His trousers and shirts in the right half of the wardrobe, his winter jumpers in the top compartment overhead. Was that enough space for her? Daniele had asked. Half a clothes rack, three drawers and two large chests? Room for a suitcase at the bottom of the wardrobe?

What could she have said, that it was odd having her things next to his? There's not even enough space for a chest of drawers in his room. He looked at her as if it were normal – he took a step to one side – as if it were completely normal to not only share the kitchen and the bathroom but a wardrobe too, which is why she didn't say anything, just nodded, and didn't mention the things on the shelves either.

When does he go in her room to get his trousers or a shirt? Does he leave the door open, or does he close it behind him? Does he check the shutters to make sure they're closed so that her bed, right under the window, doesn't get soaked if it rains?



On the day of her arrival, she had put the note with the address on – moistened by her sweaty palm – into her shoulder bag while she pressed the buzzer; the topmost button on an elegant brass plate that contrasted strikingly with the unplastered façade, the narrow, shady alleyway, the blue rubbish bags on the corner, and the pavement strewn with pigeon droppings. But the polished sheen and the elegant-sounding list of names in black, cursive script gave her hope that perhaps this was, finally, a room where she could stay, a city where she would be able to unwind for a short while. The staircase became narrower with every flight until it turned

into a set of short stone steps leading to a firmly secured door: she knocked, waited a while, listened to approaching footsteps, was invited in. Her first impression was a pleasant voice, a tall man, a floral fragrance inside the apartment. A small, decent room, a kitchenette, a living room, a bathroom. The man didn't give her time to look around, he talked incessantly, as if excited, as if there was something more to the situation, but he was friendly, he smiled, gently touched her arm, and led her through the tiny room to the patio door.

A mattress was blocking the doorway; she had to climb up onto the balls of her feet to get outside.

Come on. Vai.

Striped dark blue and grey. Her bare toes sank into it; she leaned against the doorframe and, in spite of the fresh air outside, the mattress gave off the scent of someone else's warmth and someone else's night. Her hands felt sticky after the long journey, he had fortunately not greeted her with a handshake, but had placed his hands on her shoulders and kissed the air next to her cheeks instead. A stranger's beard against her cheeks.

Why Nadjescha?, he had asked her.

Because Nadjescha means hope, speranza, she answered.

First the terrace! Come on, vai! He told her that the terrace was the best part of the whole apartment and that it had the most magnificent view of the whole of Florence.

He hadn't been exaggerating. Nadjescha looked out over the red roofs, saw the huge dome of the cathedral, the mountain ridges on the edge of the city disappearing into the mist. The house across the street gleamed white in the sunlight; she could see through the large windows into the rooms, could make out heavy furniture, bookshelves, a piano. A child sat

playing with clothes pegs on a small balcony. Late summer heat lingered over the houses; a muted whooshing surged up from the surrounding streets and lanes.

Daniele motioned towards the city with a wave of his arm: *Firenze*. Nadjescha smiled. Just like you promised, she said, an enviably perfect view. Behind her back she heard a chuckle, she turned around, and it was only then that she noticed the man sitting on the stone tiles between two large flowerpots. His face was half obscured by the plants. Laurel, oleander, a few bright green herbs she didn't recognise.

This is Luca.

Luca waved at her like a child, with a flat hand, palm turned outwards, he grinned. A thread of white smoke rose from between his hands.

Guarda! Said Daniele. His arm motion indicated the terrace this time.

Much more big than the rooms.

She would start learning Italian as soon as possible.

Daniele led her around a corner, showing her the washing line and folding chair hidden behind the ledge of a wall.

You can use.

Hand towels and underwear were hanging on the line.

He showed her the basket and clothes pegs, almost slipping as he turned to her. The tiles behind the ledge were coated with a greasy, greenish sheen.

Nadjescha thanked him, walked back to the front of the terrace, and stood at the parapet. Daniele sat down on the ground next to Luca, both of them cross-legged, now the smoke was rising from between Daniele's hands.

Luca gave Daniele a kiss, she averted her gaze, letting it wander once more over the city. As pretty as a postcard. She tried to make out where the train station was, the university, the road to the sea. Daniele and Luca talked as if she weren't there, or as if she would naturally fit in here, after all of twenty minutes. Should she say something before going back inside? Thank you? See you later? She'd go and unpack, Nadjescha told them, far too quietly; neither of them heard her.

The patio door had been left ajar, she walked over Daniele's mattress on tiptoes. The bedcovers lay balled up on the floor. The room was tiny, no bigger than a reception room, instead of a wardrobe there was just a large, open suitcase with stacks of t-shirts and jeans inside, with a closed box sitting next to it. For underwear and socks perhaps? Two stacks of books on the floor, a reading light. She closed the door behind her, she realised she had been holding her breath; she quickly exhaled, then inhaled, could feel her heart beating as if she'd done something forbidden. Breathe out. The living room was bathed in twilight; she took in the orange sofa, the glass table, interior design magazines, a glass bowl filled with oranges and apples, the television. A folded up ironing board in the corner next to the window, a hi-fi: She was permitted to watch TV and listen to music – any time she liked; she was allowed to use the orange sofa, to eat at the glass table, to iron. The apartment was empty during the day, Luca only came on the weekends. An artist had lived in her room for the last six months. A quiet man who spoke no Italian and hardly any English, who used to walk around the city with a sketchpad during the day, and then hunch over paper cut-outs in the apartment at night.

Nadjescha crossed the room, stood in front of the door to her bedroom for a moment, noting that the brass handle was hanging down a little as if loose. Why hadn't Luca just moved in?, she wondered, as she clasped the door handle.

Something made her hesitate, as if she were suddenly afraid to open the door.



Her room, her own place. Maybe there's a dormouse under the gable, maybe a shutter slammed somewhere in the building, or a door.

Nadjescha pads through the living room barefoot to get to the kitchen. A windowless nook, a fridge, a sink, an old stove, a narrow shelf that they use as a work surface. Her mineral water next to Daniele's in the half-empty fridge, something jingles inside as she closes it again. She drinks the ice-cold water in big sips, feels the cold spreading in her stomach. She feels a draft coming from above, it seems to be coming from the stone-built chimney. She leans over the hot plates, turns her head, discovers a hole high up in the wall, she can see the sky, can make out two stars. One of them twinkles, the other one doesn't; the other one must be Venus. Or Jupiter? Which one of them can be found this time of year? In any case, the planet's beams find their way through the hazy, yellowish bell of light hanging over the city, like in Berlin, she thinks, like in London, like in all the places she has been so far.



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Faruk Šehić

Lullaby for Seiko 5 Day-Date

EUPL laureate 2013: *Knjiga o Uni* (Buybook d.o.o.)

BIOGRAPHY

Faruk Šehić was born in 1970 in Bihac. Until the outbreak of the war in 1992, Šehić studied veterinary medicine in Zagreb. However, the then 22-year-old volunteered for the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he led a unit of 130 men as a lieutenant. After the war he studied literature and since 1998 has published his own literary works. The literary critics regard him as a shining light of the so-called knocked-over generation. His books have been translated into English, Slovenian, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, German, Bulgarian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Arabic and Macedonian. His 2011 debut novel *Knjiga o Uni* (*Quiet Flows the Una*) was awarded the Meša Selimović prize for the best novel published in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia in 2011, and the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013. He works for the respected political magazine *BH Dani* as a columnist and journalist. Faruk Šehić lives in Sarajevo.

Lullaby for Seiko 5 Day-Date

Faruk Šehić



During 1980s my name was Ismael. I did not choose that name. I am from holy land which is not holy anymore. My generation was born like refugees. We have that mark on our faces. It is pity because refugee mark is not some kind of special ability like in Marvel Comics. We do not have any kind of special power. We are powerless.

I would like to convert my refugee mark into special power, like glowing dial on wrist watch in the darkness. My face will glow in the dark. My face will be secret dial for creatures who live in our refugee camp. Sometimes I can see them. Gray shadows flying very fast among branches and the swaying canopy of trees.

Sometimes I sit under the tree, they fall around me in form of glossy painted bubbles. We talk. Creatures in vivid colors also complain to me that life in their realm is not much better than in ours. I wanted to say: «Cry me a river.» I learned that phrase from American movies. But I could not say that to the bodiless creatures using my broken English. Didn't want to insult them.

I became friends with one of them. Creature said to me that they too were refugees. And they were now cursed to live as ghosts between their realm and ours. She did not tell me why they were expelled from their homeland. She only said: «Planet Earth is blue, and there's nothing we can do.»

So I concluded that they were from outer space. Or from some parallel universe, close to us, but invisible.

I called her Gray Leaf because she was tall and very skinny. Gray Leaf do not have material body like we unfortunately have. She can change her size as she wish. Usually she is in leaf form. In case of dangerous situation she just shrink herself and become size of cigarette. Gray Leaf can also completely disappear when she feels some life threatening vibration in the air. She hides in the memory of the air, and comes out when the danger is over.

I would like to have that kind of power. But I am made from mere flesh and blood. It is a curse to be a human. To have a body. To have a brain, senses, nerves, all those unnecessary instruments designed for sadness, sorrow, melancholy.

I want to be a rainbow telescope. Thin and long. To see stars in murky night skies. But I wasn't lucky – when supreme being made us all, she gave me human form. I was guilty even before I was born. Jesus died because of my unborn sins. I think he died in vain. Humans do not deserve Messiah. I feel sorry for Jesus, even my God is different as they told me in school. I forgot to tell you, I do not have parents. One day parents just disappeared. Disappearing was popular in those days. I saw men in long black leather coats, they were responsible for sudden vanishings. Every generation had its own Gestapo.

My story is not sad and pathetic, because I hate that kind of stories. My story is a little bit sad. Who can live in this world and never be sad just for a moment? Nobody, not even Gray Leaf. She has a body made from smoke. I believe Gray Leaf people have origin from ashen hair of Shulamite, from golden hair of Margareta.

Once Gray Leaf took me on a night voyage with her. We was diving deep into something dark and blue, like water of some kind. Blue color was so nice, and I did not have oxygen mask, we breathed normally under water. We were not at the bottom, only shy and endemic sea creatures can swim near the bottom. Like electric jellyfish and odd fish who can glow in the dark, and dead African and Asian refugees as well.

Then we went to the air. We were bodiless, and we could easily move through night sky. We traveled light. And fast. There is no border in the sky. There is no barbed wire in the air, just first layer of thin clouds. We were aware of planes and birds. Our trajectory was safe and looked like one long line, like border between Egypt and Lybia made by golden imperial pencil.

We saw many European cities. They were shining on the Earth's surface. As Russians say: «Europe, Russian illusion of better life.» In the air you can't build nations. Just can fly like wild geese from one pole to another.

One my friend who traveled to the West said that Europe now looks like fortress, not like Hitler's Festung Europa, but almost. I did not know what that means. Festung Europa. Never been in Europe before. To be precise: never been in European sky before. I was only once, in Nazi occupied Poland, long time ago. I live in the memory, that's my last stronghold.

City of Lights, Eternal city, Berlin, Madrid, we saw them all from safe distance. It's safe to be high in the night sky.

Nobody can ask you: «Where are you going?»

(I go to invisible city without name and citizens.)

How long are you going to stay in that city?

(Forever.)

Do you have enough money during your stay here?

(There is no need for money in my city.)

What about visa?

(I have magic visa inside my heart.)

Do you have health insurance?

(I am immortal.)

Are you a terrorist?

(Of course I am. Terrorist of purple dawn. Double terrorist of Aurora Borealis.)

I do not like interrogations, even in childrens plays. I am a child and will be forever child. Children are innocent but can be killed for no reason at all. If you have wrong name and surname, somebody can kill you for nothing. Like certain Gestapo officer Günther killed Bruno Schulz in Drohobycz ghetto. Schulz was also innocent as a bird.

When we flying across Balkans I see lot of glowing from the surface, from dark valeys of Bosnia, that was glowing from phosphorus from the bones of dead people in mass graves. I have that super power to see what other people do not want to see.

Then, in a moment, we are at my home. But I do not have real home, just improvised camp that looks like South African township. Sometimes looks like museum sinked in dust and oblivion.

I know that during pitch black nights my face and my body can glow for Gray Leaf people. Like Super-LumiNova that filled the dial of diver watch.

I am a dark version of Peter Pan. Dark as dark tourism in Germany and Poland. I can't die. Sometimes I die for a moment, then resurrect again and again. First I died in Auschwitz, then in Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia, and finally I died in the Srebrenica genocide. Now my soul is everywhere at the same time.

Once I lived in a holy land that is nowadays photographic negative of itself.

Frontiers are not my prison. I changed my names so often, like in Cohen's song. First time I did not want to die. First time is the worst. After that everything is easy. I live in the memory, that's my last stronghold.

«Look at this», said digger in native language.

«It's a wrist watch», said woman from ICMP¹.

«Seiko 5, very popular among Yugoslavian blue-collar workers during 1980s», said third man. He was local fixer.

Then evening fell on red soil of big hole in the ground full of nuggets of insperable clothes and body remains. In the distance owl hooted. Dew appeared on the grass. Watch showed date 16th and 24 – 36 hours after death of the wearer, when automatic movement usually stoped after power reserve ends. Then Seiko 5 Day-Date started to glow under the lights of the cold celestial bodies.

Disclaimer: The author wrote the story in English, opposed to his mother tongue with the aim of impersonating a refugee from the present Middle East, Eastern Europe during WWII, and the Balkans in the 1990s.

¹ International Commission on Missing Persons.



Iceland

Ófeigur Sigurðsson

Langfeðgatal

Patriline

EUPL laureate 2011: *Jon (Mál og menning)*

BIOGRAPHY

Poet and author **Ófeigur Sigurðsson** was born in Reykjavík on 2 November 1975. He has published six books of poetry and two novels. Ófeigur has tried his hand at a number of things: working as a uniformed nightwatchman at a hotel, pre-packing ham and bacon at a factory farm, exercising his brawn as a dock worker and exercising his brains as a student at the Philosophy Department of the University of Iceland, from which he received his BA degree in 2007, with a thesis on taboo and transgression in the works of Georges Bataille. Ófeigur is at the forefront of a poetic movement of dynamic young creative people who have recently had a hand in reshaping the form of Icelandic poetry. He has translated literature and written for radio on writers including Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Michel Houellebecq.

Langfeðgatal

Ófeigur Sigurðsson



Það borgar sig alltaf að byrja á byrjuninni þegar Guð gerði Adam, en Sæmundur fróði segir að hann hafi verið þrír fjórtíu og þrír á hæð, skapaður eftir líkneskju Guðs í líkams formi, með 248 bein og 360 æðar, úr rifbeini Adams var Eva gerð, en þau gátu Set og Set gat Enos og Enos gat Kenan og Kenan gat Mahalalel og Mahalalel gat Jared og Jared gat Enok og Enok gat Metúsalem og Metús alem gamli gat Lamek og Lamek gat Nóa og Flóð -Nói gat Jafet og Jafet gat Javan, þá Zekkím, þá K íprus, þá Kretus, þá Kelíus, þá Satúrnus á Krít, þá Júpíter, síðan Daríus, svo Eiríkóníus, þá Tróek, þá Ílus, þá Lamíðon, þá Príamus höfuðkonungur, síðan Tróanam prinsessa sem átti Menon konung í Tróju, þá Þór, síðan Hlóriði, svo Eindriði, þá V ingiþór, þá V inginer, þá Móði, svo Magni, þá Sesef, þá Bedúigg, þá Atra, þá Trínan, þá Hermóður, svo Skjöldur, síðan Bjár, þá Goðólfur, þá Burri konungur sem réð fyrir Tyrkl andi (Finnur), þá Burr (Frjáleifur), þá Óðinn ásakonungur eða Vodin Tyrkjakonungur, þá Freyr, þá Njörður, svo Freyr sá er átti Gerði Gymisdóttur, þá Fjölnir Freysson, þá Svegðir og kona hans Vana, þau gátu Vandlanda sem átti Drífu Snjásdóttur, þau gátu V ís burrr, hann Dómalda, hann Dómarr sem átti Drótt Danpsdóttur, þeirra son var Dyggvi eða Tryggvi konungur, þá Dagur konungur, síðan Agni Skjálfarbóndi konungur, síðan A Irekur Agnarsson, þá Y ngvi A Ireksson, þá Jörmundur fróði Y ngvason, síðan Á ni hinn gamli Jör mundarson, allt konungar, þá Egill Tunnadólgur Á nason konungur, þá Óttar vendilkráka Egilsson konungur Svía, þá Aðils að Uppsölum konungur Svía sem átti Y rsu

Helgadóttur, þau gátu Eystein konung Svía, þá er Y ngvarr konungur, svo Braut -Önundur konungur, þá Ingjaldur illráði konungur á Upplöndum sem átti Gauthildi A lgautadóttur, þau gátu Ólaf trételgju konung sem átti Sölfu Hálfdansdóttur, þau gátu Hálfdan hvítbein Upplendingakonungur sem átti Ásu Eysteinsdóttur, þau gátu Eystein fret konung, þá Hálfdan mildi og matarilli, þá Goðröður veiðikonungur er átti Ásu stórráðu, þau gátu Hálfdán svarta konung, þá Haraldur hárfagri konungur Noregs, þá Sigurður hrísi konungur sonur hans, þá Hálfdan konungur, svo Sigurður sýr konungur, þá Haraldur harðráði Noregskonungur, þá Ólafur kyrri Noregskonungur, þá Styrjaldar -Magnús berfættur hinn hávi konungur í Noregi, hans dóttir Þóra Magnúsdóttir prinsessa og hennar maður Loftur prestur í Næfurholti Sæmundsson fróða í Odda, þeirra sonur Jón Loftsson höfðingi í Odda og hans kona Halldóra Brandsdóttir, þeirra dóttir Sólveig og hennar maður Guðmundur gríss allsherjargoði, þeirra sonur Þorlákur Guðmundsson bóndi í Svínafelli í Örfum og hans kona Halldóra, þeirra dóttir Ásbjörg húsfreyja í Skál á Síðu og síðar nunna í Kirkjubæ og hennar maður Helgi bóndi, þeirra dóttir Guðný abbadís á Stað og hennar maður Þórður riddari, þeirra sonur Loftur bóndi og riddari á Möðruvöllum og hans kona Málfríður húsfreyja, þeirra dóttir Ingiríður húsfreyja á Svalbarði og hennar maður Eiríkur auðgi bóndi, þeirra dóttir Margrét húsfreyja á Draflastöðum og hennar maður Benedikt auðgi bóndi, þeirra sonur Magnús bóndi á Espihóli og hans kona Þrúður, þeirra sonur Brynjólfur bóndi og hans kona óþekkt, þeirra sonur Magnús lögréttumaður í Kristnesi og hans kona Helga Brandsdóttir, þeirra dóttir Guðrún húsfreyja í Reykjavík og hennar maður Narfi Ormsson sýslumaður í Strandasýslu, þeirra dóttir maddama Þórný og hennar maður Gísli skólameistari í Skálholti og prófastur í Norður Ísafjarðarprófastsdæmi, þeirra dóttir maddama Kristín á Stað á Reykjanesi og hennar maður Gunnlaugur prestur, þeirra sonur Hannes bartskeri og bóndi í Reykjafirði og hans kona Anna, þeirra sonur Jón og hans kona Hallbjörg í Reykjafirði,

þeirra dóttir A nna húsfreyja sem hvarf og hennar maður Þó rsteinn bóndi Pálsson á Laugalandi í Nauteyrarhreppi, þeirra sonur Ásgeir og kona hans Guðrún á Rauðamýri, þeirra dóttir Kristín og hennar maður Jón, þeirra dóttir A nna húsfreyja og hennar maður Jón bóndi á Skáldstöðum, þeirra sonur Þorlákur snikkari og póstur á Ísafirði og hans kona Jórunn Júlía frá Miðbæ í Reykjavík, þeirra dóttir Elín og hennar maður Jóhannes Carl Klein, kaupmaður og slátrari frá Kaupmannahöfn, þeirra sonur Carl Georg Klein, kjötiðnaðarmaður og kaupmaður, hans kona Þóra Lilja Færseth og þeirra dóttir Ágústa Pálína Klein og hennar fyrri eigin maður var Sigurður Geirmundarson, en ég heiti Ófeigur.

Patriline

Ófeigur Sigurðsson

Translated from Icelandic by Philip Roughton

It always pays to start at the beginning, when God made Adam, and Sæmundur the Learned says that he was three hundred and forty-three centimeters in height, shaped in the likeness of God in physical form, with 248 bones and 360 veins, from a rib of Adam Eve was made, and they begat Seth and Seth begat Enosh and Enosh begat Kenan and Kenan begat Mahalalel and Mahalalel begot Jared and Jared begat Enoch and Enoch begat Methushelah and Old Methushelah begat Lamech and Lamech begat Noah, and Flood-Noah begat Japheth and Japheth begat Japhan, then Zechim, then Cyprus, then Cretus, then Celius, then Saturnus of Crete, then Jupiter, and afterward Darius, and so Erichonius, then Troeg, then Ilus, then Laomedon, then High King Priam, then Princess Troiana, wife of King Mennon of Troy, then Þórr, and afterward Hlórriði, and so Endriði, then Vingþór, then Vinginer, then Móði, and so Magni, then Seseþ, then Beduigg, then Atra, then Trínan, then Hermóður, and so Skjöldur, next Bjár, then Goðólfur, then King Burri who ruled Turkey (Finnur), then Burr (Frjáleifur), then Óðinn, King of the Æsir or Vodin King of the Turks, then Freyr, then Njörður, and then the Freyr whose wife was Gerður Gymisdóttir, then Fjölur Freysson, then Svegðir and his wife Vana, they begat Vanlandi whose wife was Drífa Snjásdóttir, they begat Vísburr, he Dómaldi, he Dómarr whose wife was Drótt Danpsdóttir, their son was King Dyggvi or Tryggvi, then King Dagur, then King Agni Skjálfrabóndi, next Alrekur Agnarsson, then Yngvi Alreksson, then Jörmundur the Learned Yngvason, then Áni the Old Jörmundarson, all kings, then King Egill Tunnadólgur

Ánason, then Óttar Vendelcrow Egilsson, King of the Swedes, then Aðils of Uppsala, King of the Swedes, whose wife was Yrsa Helgadóttir, they begat Eysteinn, King of the Swedes, then there is King Yngvarr, then King Braut-Önundur, then Ingjalður the Deceiver, King of Uppland, whose wife was Gauthildur Algautadóttir, they begat King Ólafur Woodcarver, whose wife was Sölfa Hálfdansdóttir, they begat Hálfdan White-shanks, King of the Opplanders, who married Ása Eysteinsdóttir, they begat King Eysteinn Fart, then Hálfdan the Clement but Stingy of Food, then Guðröður the Hunter whose wife was Ása the Venturesome, they begat King Hálfdan the Black, then Haraldur Fairhair, King of Norway, then his son King Sigurður Hrisi, then King Hálfdan, then King Sigurður Sow, then Haraldur the Hard-Ruler, King of Norway, then Ólafur the Peaceful, King of Norway, then War-Magnús Barefoot, the High King of Norway, his daughter Princess Þóra Magnúsdóttir and her husband Loftur, priest at Næfurholt, son of Sæmundur the Learned at Oddi, their son Jón Loftsson, chieftain at Oddi and his wife Halldóra Brandsdóttir, their daughter Sólveig and her husband Guðmundur Pig, the Supreme Priest, their son Þorlákur Guðmundsson, farmer at Svínafell in Öræfi and his wife Halldóra, their daughter Ásbjörg, housewife at Skál in Síða and later nun at Kirkjubær and her husband, the farmer Helgi, their daughter Abbess Guðný at Staður and her husband Þórður the knight, their son Loptur, farmer and knight at Möðruvellir and his wife, the housewife Málfríður, their daughter Ingiríður, housewife at Svalbarð and her husband, the farmer Eiríkur the Wealthy, their daughter Margrét, housewife at Draflastaðir and her husband, the farmer Benedikt the Wealthy, their son Magnús, farmer at Espihóll and his wife Þrúður, their son Brynjólfur, farmer, and his wife, anonymous, their son Magnús, legislator at Kristnes, and his wife Helga Brandsdóttir, their daughter Guðrún, housewife in Reykjavík, and her husband Narfi Ormsson, magistrate of Strandir District, their daughter Madam Þórný and her hus-

band Gísli, headmaster at Skálholt and dean of the Northern Ísafjörður deanery, their daughter Madam Kristín of Staður on Reykjanes and her husband Gunnlaugur the priest, their son Hannes, barber and farmer in Reykjavík and his wife Anna, their son Jón and his wife Hallbjörg in Reykjavík, their daughter Anna, housewife, who disappeared, and her husband Þorsteinn Pálsson, farmer at Laugaland in Nauteyrar Parish, their son Ásgeir and his wife Guðrún of Rauðamýri, their daughter Kristín and her husband Jón, their daughter Anna, housewife, and her husband Jón, farmer at Skáldstaðir, their son Þorlákur, joiner and postman in Ísafjörður, and his wife Jórunn Júlía from Miðbær in Reykjavík, their daughter Elín and her husband Jóhannes Carl Klein, shopkeeper and butcher from Copenhagen, their son Carl Georg Klein, meat processor and shopkeeper, his wife Þóra Lilja Færseth and their daughter Ágústa Pálína Klein, whose first husband was Sigurður Geirmundarson, and my name is Ófeigur.



Cyprus

Emilios Solomou

Μια ευρωπαϊκή ιστορία

A European Story

EUPL laureate 2013: *Ημερολόγιο μιας απιστίας*
(Psychogios Publications)

BIOGRAPHY

Emilios Solomou was born in 1971 in Nicosia and grew up in his native village of Potami. He studied history and archaeology at the University of Athens. He also studied journalism in Cyprus and worked as a journalist for a daily newspaper for several years. He is now a teacher of Greek and history in a public high school. In addition, he is a member of the editorial board of the literary magazine *Anef*, and he has served as a member of the executive board of the Union of Cyprus Writers. For the novel *An Axe in Your Hands* (2007), he was awarded the Cyprus State Prize for Literature. His novel *Like a Sparrow, Quickly You Passed...* was translated recently and published in Bulgaria. Many of his short stories have been published in literary magazines and some have been translated into English and Bulgarian.

Μια ευρωπαϊκή ιστορία

Emilios Solomou



Δεν είμαι κακός. Τσα ίσα. Πολλές φορές ξαφνιάζομαι με τον εαυτό μου. Μόνο που... πότε πότε... ανάβουν τα λαμπάκια μου. Πώς αλλιώς... Τους βλέπεις... Κοίτα τους... Ακόμα κι εδώ, αυτό το παγκάκι το βρίσκω καμιά φορά πιασμένο. Είναι μια με μαντίλα που κοιτάει μπροστά μ' ένα άψυχο βλέμμα. Έρχεται συχνά. Θα 'θελα να της πω να ξεκουμπιστεί να φύγει, τι γυρεύει εδώ, αυτό το παγκάκι είναι δικό μου. Αλλά είναι αυτή η καλοσύνη μου που μ' εμποδίζει. Να πάω παραπέρα; Έτσι εύκολα αλλάζουν συνήθειες οι άνθρωποι;

Δεν είμαι κακός άνθρωπος. Όχι. Την τριανταφυλλιά στο μπαλκόνι μου τη φροντίζω και με το παραπάνω. Πότισμα κάθε δυο τρεις μέρες, λίπασμα για τη χλωροφύλλη και την ανθοφορία. Την έχω σε μια γωνιά κατάντικρυ στον ήλιο, εκεί που κόβει λίγο ο αγέρας. Το καλοκαίρι μέρα νύχτα την έχω έξω.

Το βιβλίο; Αυτό; Μυθιστόρημα. Μ' αρέσουν οι αισθηματικές ιστορίες, τα μεγάλα βιβλία σαν τα τούβλα που τ' αγοράζω μεταχειρισμένα από έναν πλανόδιο με καρότσι. Πάντα έχω εδώ ένα μαζί μου στο παγκάκι και διαβάζω. Χίλια εμπόδια και δυσκολίες, τα ξέρεις, παρεξηγήσεις ανάμεσα στους δυο ερωτευμένους, πολλές φορές και τρεις, ίσως και τέσσερις. Μέχρι που στο τέλος οι δυο ξανασιμύουν, η αγάπη θριαμβεύει. Στην αγάπη τρίτος — και τέταρτος — δε χωράει. Συχνά με παίρνουν τα ζουμιά κι εγώ δε θέλω να γίνομαι θέαμα στους περαστικούς, καταλαβαίνεις. Κάθε δυο τρεις σελίδες κλείνω το βιβλίο κι απομένω και σκέφτομαι... Έτσι λέω είναι η αγάπη. Και σκέφτομαι συνέχεια. Σκέ-

φτομαι πως είμαι ευαίσθητος. Και ρομαντικός. Μ' αρέσει και η ιστορία. Είναι διδακτική...

Δεν είμαι κακός άνθρωπος. Όχι. Ακόμα κι όταν ο πατέρας μου μ' έδερνε μικρό με τη μαύρη δερμάτινη ζώνη του, εγώ τον αγαπούσα. Ναι, δεν εξηγείται αλλιώς. Και συχνά αναρωτιέμαι, αν θα 'πρεπε να γίνω κι εγώ λίγο πιο σκληρός στη ζωή μου, να πατήσω λίγο περισσότερο κι εγώ το πόδι μου. Έτσι μου έλεγε κι η μάνα μου. Γι' αυτό, έλεγε, δεν είδα χαΐρι στη ζωή μου. Όμως είμαι πολύ ευαίσθητος, για να πατήσω πόδι. Έστω κι αν πάντα, ανεξήγητα, στα παραμύθια, μόνο στα παραμύθια, άλλο η πραγματική ζωή, εγώ έπαιρνα το μέρος των κακών. Από παιδί. Το φαντάζεσαι; Ακόμα και τώρα. Δεν ξέρω γιατί. Αλλάζουν έτσι εύκολα συνήθειες οι άνθρωποι; Πάντα γούσταρα περισσότερο τον Δρακουμέλ από τα στρουμφάκια, τον κακό λύκο από τα τρία γουρουνάκια. Μ' αρέσουν τα κινούμενα σχέδια. Κάθομαι με τις ώρες στον καναπέ και χαζεύω —μ' αρέσουν και τα γαριδάκια. Και πολλές φορές ονειρεύομαι πως μια μέρα ο Δρακουμέλ, μια φορά ο λύκος, θα τα καταφέρουν, μια μέρα, μια φορά φτάνει, να ξεπληρωθούν όλες οι προσβολές.

Τα πρωινά τα βγάζω εδώ στο παγκάκι μου. Ναι, εδώ που με βλέπεις. Όχι, αυτή με τη μαντίλα δεν έρχεται κάθε μέρα. Κάθομαι με τις ώρες και σκέφτομαι και σκέφτομαι. Μ' αρέσει η καταχνιά. Και ο ήλιος —σαν το ερπετό ν' αντλήσω λίγη ενέργεια. Αυτό το πάρκο με τις θεόρατες σημύδες του μου δίνει την ψευδαίσθηση της εξοχής, πως βρίσκομαι σ' ένα δάσος, μακριά από την πόλη· οι γύρω πολυκατοικίες εξαφανίζονται. Ακούω τα φύλλα που θροΐζουν, τα κοράκια να κρώζουν μες στις φυλλωσιές. Βλέπω την ανάσα μου να στροβιλίζεται άναρχα μπροστά μου και έχω την αίσθηση πως χάνομαι στην ομίχλη και στο πυκνό δάσος. Δε σου συμβαίνει κι εσένα καμιά φορά; Πιστεύω πως τούτη η ώρα της ενατένισης και τα διαβάσματα με έχουν επηρεάσει σ' αυτή τη βαθιά στοχαστική στάση που έχω απέναντι στα πράγματα.

Ναι, τολμών να το επαναλάβω, είμαι καλός άνθρωπος... δεν περιαυτολογώ. Σου το λέω εγώ που έχω ταπεινώσει πολλές φορές τον εαυτό μου. Μα είναι κάτι φορές που μ' ανεβαίνει το αίμα στο κεφάλι. Είναι να μην ανεβαίνει το αίμα στο κεφάλι; Τους βλέπεις κι εσύ. Είναι και πολλοί, πανάθεμά τους, κάνουν και πολλά παιδιά, ένα σωρό. Σουλατσέρνουν εδώ κι εκεί άσκοπα, κοπάδι ολόκληρο. Αμ' οι άλλοι; Αυτοί με τα σκυλιά, είναι καλύτεροι; Άλλη φάρα αυτοί. Αντί παιδιά, σέρνουν σκυλιά. Εδώ το πρωί γίνεται χαμός. Και το βράδυ. Τα σκυλιά γαβγίζουν, αγριεύουν, τα λουριά τους μπερδεύονται. Η χάβρα των Εβραίων σου λέω. Ναι, δεν τους πάω αυτούς. Πώς γίνεται, μου λες, να αγαπούν τα ζώα περισσότερο από τους ανθρώπους; Γίνονται αυτά τα πράματα; Όχι, δεν τους πάω. Άσε που αφήνουν τις ακαθαρσίες στο πάρκο. Τι; Όχι αυτοί, τα σκυλιά τους. Κοίτα να δεις χάλι, στη ρίζα της σημύδας, κοίτα... Από χτες είν' εκεί, δεν τα μάζεψε κανείς. Δεν έχουν συνείδηση. Είναι κι ένας στο διπλανό διαμέρισμα, μεγάλη μούρη, που έχει σκυλί. Όλη την ώρα γαβγίζει, δε μ' αφήνει σε ησυχία. Σκέφτομαι να του ρίξω στο μπαλκόνι ένα κομμάτι λιχουδιά με δηλητήριο, αλλά το λυπάμαι κιόλας, πανάθεμά το. Ένεκα η ευαισθησία μου βλέπεις. Ναι, όλους αυτούς δεν τους γουστάρω. Με τους γκέι δεν έχω πρόβλημα. Ούτε με τους παπάδες.

Δεν τους γουστάρω σου λέω. Νά, σαν αυτόν εκεί. Αυτόν που περνάει τώρα από μπροστά μας. Αυτόν με το τριμμένο παλτό, ναι αυτόν. Είναι όλοι οι ίδιοι, πώς να τους ξεχωρίσεις. Τον χαζεύω συχνά. Πάει κι έρχεται, πάει κι έρχεται. Κι αναρωτιέμαι, δεν έχει κάτι να κάνει στη ζωή του; Ας πάει να δουλέψει, γιατί δεν πάει; Έρχονται εδώ, μάς φορτώνονται και... Τελοσπάντων. Συνήθως τα πρωινά κρατάει ένα παιδί, ένα μικρό παιδί, θα 'ναί έξι, επτά; Μάλλον σε κάποιο δημόσιο σχολείο πάει και τ' αφήνει. Με το παιδί δε χασομερά δεξιά κι αριστερά άσκοπα. Βιάζεται. Το πιτσιρίκι το έχουν ντυμένο βαριά, τυλιγμένο μέχρι πάνω, δεν αντέχουν το κρύο αυτοί. Δεν έχω κάτι με το παιδί,

εγώ τους αγαπώ τους ανθρώπους, αλλά τι γυρεύουν εδώ; Δε θα 'πρεπε να τους στείλουν πίσω στην πατρίδα τους;

Όμως... Υπάρχουν και καλοί άνθρωποι ανάμεσά τους. Μια φορά ένας τους σηκώθηκε και μού 'δωσε τη θέση του στο λεωφορείο. Το φαντάζεσαι; Υπάρχουν και καλοί, δε λέω, η αλήθεια να λέγεται.

Σκέφτομαι πως δεν έχω διαφορές με τους ανθρώπους. Σπάνια τσακώνομαι με τους γείτονες. Είναι, όμως, ένας δυο που δεν τους χωνεύω. Βαράνε τις πόρτες, βάζουν δυνατά τη μουσική. Ένα βράδυ πήρα το εκατό. Και λούφαξαν. Ο διαχειριστής της πολυκατοικίας προχτές μου κτυπούσε το κουδούνι, δεν του άνοιξα — ξέρω γιατί ήρθε. Οι από κάτω παραπονούνται πως τα νερά από τη γλάστρα της τριανταφυλλιάς στάζουν στο μπαλκόνι τους. Κι εγώ πεισμώνω, με πιάνει πότε πότε, άνθρωπος είμαι κι εγώ, αδειάζω το ποτιστήρι στη βεράντα και τα νερά τρέχουν σαν καταρράχτης.

Έλεγα, λοιπόν, πως αυτούς δεν τους πάω. Όχι. Χρυσούς να μου τους κάνεις, δεν τους χωνεύω. Με τους γκέι δεν έχω τίποτα και τους παπάδες. Τι; Σου το ξανάπα; Και σκέφτομαι, δε θα βρεθεί κανείς, καμιά μέρα, να τους μαντρώσει όλους αυτούς; Πού θα πάει πια αυτή η ιστορία, δε μου λες;

Τα πάω καλά με τους ανθρώπους, δεν μπορώ να πω. Όπως τώρα που καθόμαστε εδώ και μιλάμε πολιτισμένα. Γιατί να μην είμαστε πολιτισμένοι οι άνθρωποι μεταξύ μας; Τι έχουμε να χωρίσουμε;

Νά τον πάλι, στρίβει στη γωνιά κι έρχεται, τον βλέπεις; Είναι μέρες που δεν εμφανίζεται. Προχτές ξαναπέρασε. Κρατούσε το παιδί σαν να 'τανε σκυλάκι. Και ξάφνου κάτι άστραψε μέσα μου, κάτι μου θύμισε, το φαντάζεσαι; Δεν ήξερα τι. Όλη μέρα με βασάνιζε αυτή η εικόνα. Αυτός μπροστά, το παιδί πίσω πιασμένο από το χέρι του. Και το βράδυ αργά, πετάχτηκα από το κρεβάτι μου. Το θυμήθηκα! Είναι ένα βιβλίο στη βιβλιοθήκη μου.

Έχω πολλά τέτοια βιβλία στη βιβλιοθήκη μου. Για τον Χίτλερ, τον Μουσολίνι, τον Στάλιν. Μ' αρέσουν. Ναι, είναι ένα βιβλίο για τον Κόρτσακ. Τον ξέρεις τον Κόρτσακ; Θα σου δώσω μια μέρα το βιβλίο να το διαβάσεις. Ήταν παιδαγωγός. Λένε πως ήτανε σπουδαίος, δεν ξέρω. Πρέπει να με έχει επηρεάσει, είμαι κι ευαίσθητος, να πάρει η ευχή, δε γίνεται αλλιώς. Ίσως γι' αυτό έγινα κι εγώ τόσο βαθιά ανθρωπιστής. Ναι, το βιβλίο έχει κάτι φωτογραφίες του Κόρτσακ και σε μια απ' αυτές ο Γέρο Δόκτωρ, έτσι τον αποκαλούσαν, σέρνει ένα παιδί, ένα από τα παιδιά του, στην τελευταία φωτογραφία του, καθοδόν για τον θάλαμο αερίων. Ναι, αυτό μου θύμισε. Χα! Το φαντάζεσαι; Νά τον, τώρα θα τον δεις, θα περάσει από μπροστά μας και θα συνεχίσει για το σχολείο. Ναι, ο ίδιος ο Κόρτσακ είναι ο πατέρας. Θα σου φέρω τη φωτογραφία να δεις. Πάντα έτσι τυλιγμένο το έχουν, μέχρι πάνω, το παιδί, το βλέπεις; Σαν κουνουπίδι. Αυτός μπροστά, το παιδί πίσω. Ποτέ δε μου δίνουν σημασία, όλο ίσια τραβάνε. Όμως, χτες το παιδί γύρισε πρώτη φορά και με κοίταξε. Δεν ξέρω γιατί, αναστατώθηκα. Φαινόταν λυπημένο, όπως το παιδί του Κόρτσακ, μα μου χαμογέλασε. Σαν να άστραψε ένα φλας. Το φαντάζεσαι; Θα σου φέρω το βιβλίο να το διαβάσεις. Και ένα άλλο, του Χίτλερ.

A European Story

Emilios Solomou

Translated from Greek by Irene Noel-Baker

I am not a bad person. On the contrary. Very often I surprise myself. It's just that... sometimes... I lose my head. I can't help it... See them... Look at them... Even here, this bench is often taken. There's a woman in a headscarf who just sits staring at nothing. She comes often. I'd like to tell her to shove off and leave, why is she here anyway, this is my bench. But it's my kindness that prevents me you see. Go somewhere else? It's not that easy to change a habit is it?

I'm not a bad person. No. I look after the rose bush on my balcony almost excessively. Watering every two-three days, fertiliser for the chlorophyll and flowers. I keep it in a corner facing the sun, a little out of the wind. In the summer I keep it outside day and night.

The book? This one? It's a novel. I like love stories, big books like door stoppers which I buy second hand from a street vender with a cart. I always have one with me here to read on the bench. Hurdles to overcome and problems of every kind, you know, misunderstandings between two lovers, often even three, or four. Until in the end the couple reunite, love triumphs. In love there isn't room for a third – or a fourth. Often I get carried away and I don't want to be a spectacle for passers-by, you understand. Every two or three pages I close the book and sit thinking. That's what love is like, I say. And I'm constantly thinking. I do think I'm sensitive. And romantic. And I like the plots. They're educational...

I'm not a bad person. No. Even when I was child and my father beat me with his black leather belt, I loved him. Yes, how

else explain it? And I often ask myself, should I be a bit tougher in my life, put my foot down a bit more. That's what my mother used to say. That's why, she said, I never got ahead in life. But I am too sensitive to put my foot down. Although always, inexplicably, in fairy tales, only in fairy tales, not in real life, I would always be on the bad guy's side. Since I was a child. Can you imagine? Even now. I don't know why. It's not so easy to change a habit is it? I always preferred Gargamel to the Smurfs, the big bad wolf to the three little pigs. I like cartoons. I sit for hours on the sofa watching – I also like crisps. And I often dream that one day Gargamel, or just for once the wolf, will win, one day, once would be enough, to pay back all the insults.

I spend the mornings here on my little bench. Yes, here where you see me now. No, the woman with the headscarf doesn't come every day. I sit here for hours and think and think. I like the mist. And the sun – I'm like a reptile, drawing in a little energy. This park with its vast birch trees, it gives an illusion of countryside, that I'm in a forest, far from the city; the surrounding apartment blocks disappear. I hear leaves rustling, rooks cawing in the branches. I watch my breath whirling chaotically in front of me and feel as if I'm lost in the fog and the depths of the forest. Does that ever happen to you? I'm convinced that this time of contemplation and reading have influenced the deeply reflective attitude I have to things.

Yes, I dare repeat it, I'm a good person... I'm not bragging. I can tell you, having often allowed myself to be humiliated. But there are times when the blood rushes to my head. How could it not rush to one's head? You see them yourself. There are so many, damn them, and they keep having children, any amount. They hang around here and there aimlessly, in a great flock. And what about the others? The ones with dogs, they're no better are they? That's another breed. Instead

of children, they drag their dogs along. It's bedlam in the mornings here. And at night. The dogs bark, they fight, their leads get tangled. Jewish dogs in a synagogue I tell you! Yes, I can't be doing with such people. Is it possible, tell me, to love animals more than humans? Are such things possible? No, I can't be doing with them. And they leave their messes in the park. What? Not them, their dogs. Look at that mess, on the roots of the birch tree, look... it's been there since yesterday, no one's picked it up. They have no conscience. And there's a person in the flat next door, thinks he's really someone, has a dog. It barks the entire time, I get no peace. I keep thinking I should throw a poisoned titbit onto its balcony, but I would feel sorry for it, damn it. On account of my sensitivity you see. Yes, I don't like any of them. With gays I don't have a problem. Nor with priests.

I don't like them I tell you. There, like that one there. That one walking past us now. The one with the worn out coat, yes him. They're all the same, how can you tell them apart? I often watch him. He walks back and forth, back and forth. And I ask myself, does he have nothing to do in his life? Let him get a job, why doesn't he? They come here, make a nuisance of themselves and... Anyway. In the mornings he holds a child by the hand, a young child, must be six, seven? Probably taking him to some state school somewhere. He doesn't aimlessly wander this way and that with the child. He's in a hurry then. They overdress the little kid, wrap it up from top to toe, these people can't take the cold. I have nothing against the child, I love people, but what do they want to come here for? Can't they be sent back to their own country?

And yet... There are good people among them. Once one of them stood up and gave me his seat on the bus. Can you imagine? There are some good ones, of course there are, the truth must be said.

I don't think I have issues with people. I rarely quarrel with my neighbours. But there are one or two I can't stomach. They slam doors, put on loud music. One night I dialled the police. Then they went quiet. The caretaker for our block of flats rang on my bell the other day, I didn't answer – I know why he came. The people downstairs complaining that water from the rose pot drips on their balcony. And I can be obstinate, every now and then it gets to me, I'm only human, I empty the can onto the balcony and the water runs down like a cascade.

So I was saying that I can't stand those people. No. You can say what you like in their favour, I can't stomach them. I have nothing against gays and priests. What? Did I already say that? And I wonder, is no one ever going to come and round these people up? Where will this story end, can you tell me?

I get on well with people, I can't complain. Like now that we are sitting here together talking civilly. Why shouldn't we humans be civil to each other? What is there to fight over?

Here he is again, he's turning the corner and coming over, d'you see him? Sometimes he doesn't show for days. He came the day before yesterday. Holding the child as if it were a little dog. And all of a sudden something lit up inside me, it reminded me of something, can you imagine? I didn't know what. All day the image tormented me. He was in front, the child behind holding his hand. And that night late, I leapt out of bed. I remembered! It was a book on my bookcase. I have many such books on my bookcase. About Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin. I like them. Yes, it's a book about Korczak. You know Korczak? I'll give you the book one day and you can read it. He was a teacher. They say he was a great man, I don't know. He must have influenced me, and I'm sensitive, dash it, it can't be helped. Maybe that's why I've become so deeply humane. Yes, that book had some photographs of Korczak and in one of them the Old Doctor, that's what they called him, is pulling

a child along, one of his children, in the last photograph of him, on the way to the gas chambers. Yes, that was what reminded me. Ha! Can you imagine? Yes, Korczak is just like the father. I'll bring you the photograph to see. They always have the child wrapped up like that, top to toe, see it? Like a cauliflower. He is in front, the child behind. They never notice me, just keep straight on. Although, yesterday the child turned round for the first time and looked at me. I don't know why, it unsettled me. It looked sad, like Korczak's child, but it smiled at me. Like a flash going off. Can you imagine? I'll bring you the book so you can read it. And another one, about Hitler.



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

S onu stranu

The Other Side

EUPL laureate 2016: *Satovi u majčinoj sobi*
(Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva)

BIOGRAPHY

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović was born in Zadar, Croatia, in 1977. She graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She has published four collections of poetry, one collection of short stories and one novel. Her poetry and prose has received awards and has been translated into English, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Slovene and Danish. Her book of poems *O čemu misle varvari dok doručuju* (*What Barbarians Are Thinking about While Having Breakfast*) was shortlisted for the ProCredit Bank Literature Award for East and Southeast Europe and won the author a one-month stay in Vienna, Austria. The poetry book *Glavni junak je čovjek koji se zaljubljuje u nesreću* (*The Hero is the Man Who Falls in Love with Calamity*) won the Fra Grgo Martić Literary Award for the best poetry collection in 2009. Her works have been included in anthologies and poetry or prose selections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad. She was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature for the novel *Satovi u majčinoj sobi* (*Clocks in my mother's room*) in 2016.

S onu stranu

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović



Otac je otišao. S onu stranu. More je bilo mirno. Prije trideset godina vodio me je na pecanje. Moraš paziti na mamac. Moraš paziti na udicu. Da ne spadne, da se ne ubodeš. Da meko meso na njoj ne bude tvoje. Nije lako uloviti ribu. Njeno tijelo je sklisko i brzo. Hvataš je za njenu glad. Kada se zakoprcala na savijenoj žičici koja joj je bolno probijala tanku liniju otvorenih usta nešto se u meni pokolebalo. Zaglavila sam se između sopstvene strasti lovca i njenog bola koji je skliznuo u moje dječje srce nesviklo da gleda tuđa polagana umiranja. Otac je gledao u mene, ja u njega. Trajao je trenutak kolebanja u nama prije nego što je njegova ruka uzela koprcavo tijelo, skinula sa udice, udarila njime o oštru ivicu mola na kojem smo stajali i ćušnula ga u kantu. To mora tako, rekao mi je, sluteći moje dileme. To ti je život. Ili je to bila smrt. Ne znam. U kanti njeno oko je gledalo nebo. On je bio zadovoljan. Gledaj kakav smo ručak ulovili nas dvoje, pecaroša.

Ostavljáš me. I ja to vidim. Svako ostavljanje za mene je mala smrt. Puno je bilo umiranja ali ne mogu reći da se na to može navići. Uvijek se ista bol zarine u želudac kao nož, kao sve metafore sa sječivima. Onda se popne kao vreline koja pali do srca i ruku. Kao neka vatra koja ne grije nego spaljuje sve pred sobom. Od djetinjstva živim s tim unutarnjim groznicama i povjerujem svakom hladnom dlanu na čelu da zna magiju izlječenja od ove surove vatre. Počinjem ti govoriti o pecanju. O agoniji lovca i ulova. I kako nikad obje gladi ne mogu biti

zadovoljene. Riblje oči ulovljene u smrti ili moje oči ulovljene u čekanju da se uznemiri more trzajima dobrog ulova. Vraćam ribu u more i neoprezno pritisnem prstom udicu. Oštra bol prolazi kroz tijelo i shvaćam taj nagon, trzaje i želju da se tijelo otme od nje.

Dan je bio ljetni. Sve je bilo obično. Turisti su se u grupicama zbijali oko starih građevina. Kao da ta drevnost umiruje. Nešto postoji jako dugo. Nešto svjedoči trajanju. Kao ovaj grad. Koraci po kamenoj kaldrmi i glasovi. Svako ljeto je isto. Istost umiruje. Svakog ljeta doći će turisti koji nikad ne umiru. Da hodaju po ulicama grada i fotografiraju nasmijane sebe ispred gradskih bedema, crkava i kraj obale. Njihova razdraganost zapljuskuje kao talas. Tako je lijepo ovdje. Ovo je najljepši grad. U kući, jedna fotografija motri na mene sa zabrinutim očima, s viškom tuge ispod obrva, s malom ljutnjom u uglu očiju, s crnim florom preko ruba koji svjedoči kako život ovdje prestaje i lako odleprša na suncu i vjetru kao zmijski svlak. Cvijeće na grobu je uvenulo poslije dva dana. Vrelo je. Niz lica kapa znoj. Prokleta podnevna žega. Otac je uvijek dobro podnosio vrućinu. Nikad mu nije smetalo sunce na čelu. Ono razgoni mrak, razgoni strah.

Nije to to. Nisam ta osoba koja te razumije. Previše sam u sebi. Samo sam odsutni pecaroš kraj obale. Ne razumiješ što ti hoću reći. Moji razlozi i opravdanja su suludi. Moja očekivanja su nerealna. Kako možeš istovremeno biti i ruka i udica i ulovljena riba. O kakvoj boli ti govorim. Od prije. Ne voliš more, ni vrućinu. Ne želiš ići tamo sa mnom da šetamo uz obalu. More je depresivno zimi, a prevruće je ljeti. Gužve ti stvaraju nervozu. Mrziš turiste. Pa i moje uspomene od tamo i nisu baš lijepe. Ne shvaćaš zašto želim da putujemo skupa u taj grad. Bolje je da svako ide na svoju stranu. Pokušali smo, nije išlo. Ne vrijedi sada raspravljati o tom.

Prereži silk. Gotovo je. Kaže otac. Zakačila se udica negdje, ne vrijedi da vučeš. Polomit ćeš štap. Moraš paziti da se ne uplete. Moraš stalno biti na oprezu. Dosta je za danas. Idemo kući. Polako. Hajde, već je sunce jako. Goriš. Zaboljet će te glava. U kanti se, u ritmu s našim koracima, njišu njihova tijela. Klizeći jedna preko drugih. Mislim kako su nježna riblja tijela. Dodirujem ih s dječjom znatiželjom, tako meko, toliko sklisko da su i mrtve pokretne i sklone bijegu. Po dlanovima sluz i krljušt. U meni se miješaju prijetnost i neprijetnost. To će ostati tako i kasnije.

Dok pokušavam rukom dohvatiti tvoj dlan nešto hladno i sklisko mi dotakne kožu i uzmakne. Ne voliš dodire. Oni te uznemire. Čine da se osjećaš kao lovina. Ne vjeruješ toplini ljudske kože. To je zamka. Treba ti neko tko može razumjeti kako dvije samoće mogu mirno sjediti jedna kraj druge, ne dotičući se, ne pokušavajući uloviti toplinu koje nema. Sunce je zašlo i na dokovima ne peca nitko već godinama. Mogli smo živjeti mirno, skoro pa i lijepo bez mojih nemogućih nastojanja. Bez te potrebe da kidam kraste sa sraslih rana i govorim o mogućnosti stvarnog susreta dva bića. Kao da živim u nekom drugom vremenu. Kao da ne vidim kako svijet krvari. Kako je svijet trajno umiruće mjesto. Zvijezda koja pulsira bolom, po površini posuta predivnim ukrasima ali čim posegneš rukom u tren ili u stoljeću ili u milijun godina... Shvaćaš? Raspe se sve. Nije stvarno ništa. A ja kao noj glavom u jedan san, u jedan te isti san upadam i dozivam te i tražim tamo. Dok gradovi gore, čitave vječnosti se osipaju, planine liče na trunje odavde, samo na korak dalje. Zašto tražim da mi sve to govoriš kad ne mogu podnijeti ni sasvim obične stvari. Svakodnevnice. Slomi me riječ, a virim k tebi. Ne shvaćajući kako u tvojoj glavi univerzumi pršte i rasipaju se kao čaša koja ti je ispala iz ruke. Tvoj grozničavi glas je govorio kako dolazi novi rat, psi ga njuše u zraku, a ljudi u svojim dušama,

nemir nadire preko rubova prozorskog okna. Samo ptice su kao i ja, one pjevaju odu životne radosti nesvjesne kako ona brzo uzmiče. Naivna sam iako poznajem stvarnost, još mislim da mogu vuku premazati očnjake šećerom, pa neće biti gladan. Svijet je grotlo koje guta.

Gurnuli smo ga u rupu. U običnu rupu. Da bude progutan. Stavili smo ga pod beton. Kao guštera. Ostavili smo ga na suncu. Strašno je pržilo taj dan. Govorila sam sebi ali to više nije on. On je list i vjetar i gušter i ptica i drvo pored. Ali nije to tu što leži. To lagano tijelo u kutiji koje je izjela bolest vlastitom podmuklom glađu. To tijelo koje me je grlilo dok je imalo još snagu i zapreminu. Te ruke koje su me stisnule jako, ta usta koja su rekla budi jaka. To nije više on. On je otišao odavde. S onu stranu. I nije tu. Na tom ružnom mjestu. U toj rupi. Lišen mogućnosti da zagrlji. Da ga zagrlim. On je otišao do mora da peca. Vrelina je nepodnošljiva. Njemu ne smeta sunce. On dobro podnosi vrućinu. Niz sva lica teče znoj. Netko jeca. Neka izmaglica od vreline kroz koju klize prizori kao ribe u kantu. On ih ubacuje. Veseo je. Zar si povjerovala u sve te privide. Skoncentriraj se. Budi jaka. Moraš biti oprezna dok pecaš, silk lako zapara kožu, udica ubode, ima i otrovnih riba. Okrenuo je dlan ka meni sa zastarjelim ali još dubokim i crvenim ubodima. Kada te ubode riba morski pauk osjetiš toliki bol da želiš sam sebi odsjeći ruku. Rane ostaju godinama.

Ne dodiruj me, nešto otrovno će isteći iz mene i ući u tebe. I neće ti biti dobro. Ti se ne znaš nositi s tim. U meni ima taj otrov skupljen davno. Možda je tu još od rođenja, kao jedina moguća obrana od nasrtljivosti ljudske gladi. Ali što ako je moje srce već porobljeno morskim paukom kojeg sam neoprezno upecala stavivši samu sebe za mamac. Govorim ti o ocu, o njegovim ranama na dlanu. O tom kako smo zajedno išli na pecanje. I kako si ti moj morski pauk od čijeg otrova mi otiču udovi i

bole. Slušaš me prekrivši lice s nekim poluosmijehom iza kojeg vidim tvoje odsustvo kao veliku praznu sobu po kojoj padaju moje riječi. Kao mrtve ribe u kantu. Sklisko i ne dotičući te. Bolje je da idem kažeš i pitaš me s vrata a zašto mi stalno pričaš o tom pecanju. Jesu ocu zarasle rane od morskog pauka?

Jesu. Kad je otišao s onu stranu.

The Other Side

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Translated from Bosnian by Amira Sadikovic

Father has gone. To the other side. The sea was tranquil. Thirty years ago, he took me fishing. You have to watch the bait. You have to watch the hook. To make sure that it doesn't fall off, that it doesn't prick you. That the soft flesh on it is not yours. It's not easy to catch a fish. Its body is slippery and fast. You're catching its hunger. As it wiggled on the tiny, curved wire that pierced painfully the thin line of its gaping mouth, something in me relented. I was stuck between my own hunting passion and its pain, that slipped into my infant heart, unaccustomed to seeing slow deaths of others. Father looked at me, I looked at him. Our reluctance lingered for a moment, before his hand reached for the wiggly body, pulled it off the hook, hit it against the sharp edge of the pier we were standing on and tossed it into the bucket. It has to be this way, he said, sensing my dilemma. That's life for you. Or was it death? I don't know. One of its eyes stared at the skies from inside the bucket. He was pleased. Look at the lunch the two of us, fishermen, hunted today.

You're leaving me. And I see it. Any departure is a small death for me. There's been so much dying, but I can't say that it is possible to become accustomed to it. It's always the same pain that pierces your stomach like a knife, like all those metaphors with blades. And then it climbs, like heat that burns your heart and your arms. Like a fire that does not keep you warm, but scorches everything in its path. Since I was a child, I've been living with this inner fever, and I trust any cold palm that touches my forehead that it knows the magic of healing

from this cruel blaze. I start telling you about fishing. About the agony of the hunter and the prey. About how it is impossible for both hungers to be satisfied, ever. The eyes of the fish, caught in death, or my eyes, caught in the waiting for the sea to ripple from a good catch. I return the fish to the water and I accidentally press the hook. Sharp pain flashes through my body and I understand the urge, the wiggle, and the desire of the body to snap away from it.

It was a summer day. Everything was so ordinary. Groups of tourists were gathering around old buildings. Their age seemed to be soothing. Something that has been there for so long. A testimony of existence. Like this city itself. Steps on the cobblestones, and voices. The same thing every summer. Sameness is soothing. Every summer, tourists who never die appear again. And walk the streets of the city and take photos of their smiling selves in front of the city walls, the churches, and the shore. Their joy floods up like a wave. It is so beautiful here. This is the most beautiful city. At home, a photograph stares at me with concerned eyes, with surplus sadness under the brow, with a tiny bit of anger in the corner of the eye, with a black ribbon over the edge, confirming that life stops here and that it drifts away, carried by the sun and the wind, like the fine skin shed by a snake. The flowers on the grave withered within two days. It's hot. Sweat drips across the face. Damned midday heat. Father always tolerated heat. He never minded a bit of sun on his forehead. It chases away darkness and fear.

That's not it. I'm not the person who understands you. I'm too withdrawn. Just a pensive fisherman by the shore. You don't understand what I'm trying to say. My reasons and explanations are insane. My expectations are unrealistic. How can you be the hand and the hook and the caught fish, all at the same time? What kind of pain am I talking about? The one

from before. You don't like the sea, you don't like the heat. You don't want to walk with me along the shore. The sea is depressing in the winter and too hot in the summer. Crowds make you nervous. You hate tourists. Even my memories about the place are not so pretty. You don't understand why I want us to go there together. Better that we part ways. We've tried and it didn't work. No point in talking about it now.

Cut the line. It's over. Father says. The hook got stuck, pulling it is pointless. You'll just break the rod. Just be careful, it may get tangled. You must always be careful. It's enough for today. Let's go home. Easy now. Come on, the sun is scorching already. You're burning. You'll get a headache. Their bodies sway in the bucket, following the rhythm of our footsteps. Sliding one over the other. I think about how delicate the bodies of the fish are. I touch them with childish curiosity: they are so soft and slippery that even dead, they seem to be trying to escape. Slime and scale on the palms of my hands. Comfort and discomfort mix inside me. This will stay on.

As I try to reach your hand with my fingers, something cold and slippery touches my skin and moves away. You don't like to be touched. It upsets you. It makes you feel like prey. You don't trust the warmth of human skin. It's a trap. You need someone who understands that two solitudes can sit calmly side by side, without touching, without trying to catch the warmth that isn't there. The sun is up and no one has been fishing at the docks for years. We could have lived quietly, even almost nicely, without my impossible ambitions. Without this need to pick the scabs off the wounds that have healed and to speak about the possibility of two beings to truly meet. As if I were living in a different time. As if I don't see how the world is bleeding. How the world is a permanently dying place. A star pulsating with pain, with beautiful ornaments sprinkled across its surface, but as soon as you reach out with

your hand, in a moment, or in a century, or in a million years... See? It all falls apart. It is nothing, really. And I, like an ostrich, keep shoving my head into one and the same dream, calling out and looking for you there. As cities burn, eternities erode, mountains crumble like specks of dust, just a step away. Why do I want you to tell me about this, if I can't handle even the most ordinary things. Everyday things. Words break me, and I keep looking towards you. Not understanding that universes in your mind scream and explode like a glass slipping from your hand. Your feverish voice said that a new war was coming, the dogs of war could sniff it in the air, and people could feel it in their souls; the unrest was flooding the windowsills. Only birds were like me, singing and ode to the joy of life, unaware of how quickly it was seeping away. I am naive, although I know the reality, I still think I can offer a bit of sugar to a hungry wolf and stop its hunger. The world is an abyss that swallows everything.

We placed him into a hole. An ordinary hole. To be swallowed. We put him under concrete. Like a lizard. We left him in the sun. The sun was blazing that day. But it's no longer him, I kept saying to myself. He is a leaf and a lizard and a bird and the tree nearby. But he is not that which is lying there. That light body in the box, eaten by the cunning hunger of disease. It is the body that embraced me while it still had the strength and the volume. Those hands that held me tight, that mouth that told me to be strong. That is no longer him. He is gone. To the other side. And he is no longer here. At this ugly place. That hole. Deprived of the possibility to embrace. Of the possibility for me to hold him. He's gone fishing at the shore. The heat is unbearable. He doesn't mind the sun. He tolerates heat well. Someone is sobbing. Some kind of heat haze that images slip through, just like the fish into the bucket. He tosses them in. He is cheerful. Did you really believe all those illusions? Fo-

cus. Be strong. You have to be careful when you fish, the line can cut into your skin, the hook can prick, there are poisonous fish. He turns his palm towards me, showing old, but still deep, red pricks. When a sea spider stings you, the pain is so strong that you want to cut your own hand off. The wounds take years to heal.

Don't touch me, something poisonous may run from me into you. And it won't be good for you. You don't know how to handle it. There is poison in me, gathered long ago. Perhaps it's been there since I was born, as the only defence from the onslaught of human hunger. But what if my heart has already been captured by the sea spider I caught by accident, placing myself as bait? I'm talking about my father, about the wounds on his palms. About how we used to go fishing together. And how you are my sea spider, whose poison makes my limbs swell and hurt. You listen to me, covering your face with an incomplete smile, behind which I can see your absence, like an empty room that my words roll across. Like dead fish in a bucket. Slippery, without touching you. I should go now, you say, and you ask me from the door, why do you always talk about fishing? Have father's wounds from the sea spider healed?

Yes. After he went to the other side.



Hungary

Noémi Szécsi

A Földikutya Éve

The Year of the Mole-Rat

EUPL laureate 2009: *Kommunista Monte Cristo* (Tericum)

BIOGRAPHY

Noémi Szécsi, born in 1976, is a Hungarian author. Born in Szentes, Hungary she studied Latin, Finnish and English in Budapest. Between 1998 and 2000 she attended the University of Helsinki, Finland as a student of Finnish language and gender studies. She started her writing career with a novel, *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* (2002), which has been published in Poland, the UK, the US and Italy and was nominated for the Salerno Book Prize in 2014. She was awarded the European Union Prize For Literature in 2009 for her political satire *Communist Monte Cristo* (2006). In 2011 she received the József Attila díj state award for literary achievement. Noémi Szécsi is the author of seven novels and five non-fiction books. The latest is a novel, *Egyformák vagytok* (*You Are All the Same*), published in 2017 by Magvető.

A Földikutya Éve

(állatmese a Rohadt állatok-ciklusból)

Noémi Szécsi



A Vakond egy hatalmas U betű alsó hajlatában fészkelődött, vigyázva, hogy bele ne szoruljon. Az O betűbe pontosan ezért nem mert volna beleülni, a még szűkebb G-be pedig végképp nem. Fekete bársonyt viselt, mint mindig, öltözete nem az em-lékév ünnepélyes megnyitójának szólt. Ásólábát igyekezett könnyedén nekiérinteni a telefon monitorjának, ami már így is tele volt karcolásokkal. Kedvenc *social media* oldala úgy nyílt meg, hogy rögtön a főnökét ábrázoló lehető legelőnytelenebb, politikai ellenfelei által előszeretettel használt fénykép töltötte be a képernyőt. A dugig tömött pofazacskójú Hörcsög szájából vetőmag csurgott, alatta pedig ez a főcím volt olvasható:

A Hörcsög az anyját is meg...

A továbbolvasáshoz kattintani kellett, de a Vakondnak ennyi is elég volt, szempillantás alatt úgy leizzadt, hogy bele kellett törölnie a jobb mellső lábát a fekete bundájába, nehogy megcsússzon az érintőképernyőn. Csak ezután nyomta meg a gyors tárcsázóra állított harmadik számot, ami az aktuális nősténye és a főnöke száma után következett. Nyelt egyet, hogy ne érződjön a hangján az ingerültség.

– Ez a hír? Azt hittem, hogy a kerítés ellen tiltakoznak.

– Változnak az érzékenységek – válaszolta a sajtós güzüegér.

Az ő hangjában inkább tanácsstalanság érződött, mint ingerültség. Még betanítás alatt állt, de a Vakond megbízott ben-

ne. Kizárólag güzüt érdemes felvenni gyakornoknak, hiszen kicsi, ezért csak apránként lop, és olyan keveset visz egyszerre haza, hogy nem bántó a szemnek. Ráadásul szorgalmas is, dolgozik, mint az állat.

– A *metoo hashtag* vírusként terjed – folytatta a güzüegér. – A főnök régi beszédének videója nyomán sokan posztolták áldozatként elszenvedett élményeiket. Nem gondoltam volna, hogy ilyen sokan...

– Ugyanazt a videót posztolod a főnök oldalára – szakította félbe türelmetlenül a Vakond. – Diktálom a szöveget: „Szegények voltunk, de szeretjük egymást...«. Őszinte vallomás egy nehéz gyermekkorról. Hallgassa meg a vezérünk csatlakozás alkalmából tartott beszédét. Mi vált valóra a Biokertek egyesüléséről szőtt álomból.” És így tovább, blablaba. Ne higgyék, hogy van rejtegetnivalónk. – Aztán sóhajtva bontotta a vonalat.

Akárhányszor járt itt, sosem tudott igazán belefeledkezni a franciakertbe, ahol időről időre az ORGANIC GARDENS UNITED válogatott állatrepresentánsai összegyűltek. Az üléseket ilyenkor az *Orangerie*-ben tartották, hiszen februárban még bírható volt az üvegház, nyáron saját levükben párolódtak volna meg ott az állatok. A Vakondnak sosem szórakozást, hanem mindig a munkát jelentette a *Jardin Européen*. Ezért most külön örült, hogy tél van és a fakó gyeppel meg a fagyott föld nem csábítja önfeledt ásásra. Ahogy fáradtan az éles télvégi napfénybe nézett, a kert bejáratául szolgáló barokk diadalkapun álló győzelmi szekér mintha az Apokalipszis négy lovasának alakját öltötte volna. A Hódítás, a Háború, az Éhínség és a Halál megtestesítői. Különösen rossz ómennek gondolta őket most, közvetlenül a Földikutya Évének meghirdetése előtt.

– A faji diverzitás jegyében az OGU 2018-ra meghirdeti a Földikutya Évét – harsogta győzedelmesen a hangosbemondó.

A Vakond már sietve az *Orangerie* felé iramodott volna, de oldalról négy ujj fúródott hengeres testébe.

– Hogyan kommentálja a kertvezetés szóvivője a Hörcsögről legutóbb előkerült videót?

A Vakond végigmérte az útját álló erőszakos hímet. Egyszerű városi patkány volt, amelyik egy-egy fontos ügy érdekében a végsőkig kitart, de amúgy bármilyen dögöt elfogyaszt, és szükség esetén végez a maga fajtájával is. Vérébeli újságíró.

– Ez egy szövegekörnyezetéből kiragadott idézet – mondta a Vakond pikírten, de azért örült is, hogy nem a kerítésről kérdezik.

A Patkány az iPhone-ján keresgélt, majd egyrészt udvariaságból, másrészt udvariatlanságból a Vakond arcába nyomta az eszközt. A kásás, imbolygó képeket a hátsó sorokból vehették fel. A Vakond emlékei szerint azon a csatlakozási majálison itt a kistestű ragadozók álltak. A távolság olyan gyatra hangminőséget eredményezett, hogy a közzetevők feliratozni kényszerültek a Hörcsög beszédét. Vagyis azt a mintegy 30 másodpercet, amit kívágtak belőle: „Én is népes alomba születtem, ráadásul egy kiégett tsz-ugar közepén. Apám napi négy kilométert gyalogolt a majorsági magtárig. Szegények voltunk, de szerettük egymást. Anyámat csak akkor ettük meg, amikor az aszályos nyár után különösen kemény tél köszöntött be...”

A Vakond megállította a felvételt.

– Drága uram – nézett hunyorogva arrafelé, ahol a Patkány csillogó fekete szemét sejtette. – Ne mondja nekem, hogy még soha nem evett egy falatot egyetlen rokonából sem! Egy-egy kemény tél után. Hol nőtt fel maga, csatornában? Vagy vidéki gyerek? Látom az éhes tekintetén, hogy valami elnépteledett szocialista iparváros kátyús betonútjain kóborolt üres hassal... – blöffölt a Vakond, mert nemcsak hogy nem olvasott más állatok tekintetében, de el sem jutott a szemkontaktusig. A fajt ugyan felismerte, de a másiktól így sem látott többet, mint egy szürke szőrcomót.

A Patkány arcán nem mutatkoztak érzelmek. – Hagyjuk a származástant. Most nem rólam van szó – jegyezte meg jéghidegen.

A Vakond azon vette észre magát, hogy visszakívánja azt a néhány héttel ezelőtti incidenst, amikor a főnöke egyik *Twitter* üzenete miatt kellett magyarázkodnia, amelyikben azt taglalta, hogy az igazi hím attól indul be igazán, ha a nőstény szőrzete dúsabb, mint az övé.

– Bárkivel megtörténhet.

– Bárkivel igen. De a Hörcsög a közösség vezetője. Utoljára kérdezem: mit idézhetek öntől?

A Vakond már bedugta az ásólábát az üvegház szellőzőnyílásának részébe, hogy kifeszítse.

– Szegények voltak, de szerették egymást – vetette oda és elfordult.

Az OGU bevett standardja szerint a különféle nyelveken ugyanarra a fogalomra vonatkozó elnevezések tapétaminta-szerűen borították a molinót: *Erdhund, zemni Kutsche, szlepecz, mole-rat, Blindmaus, földikutya*. A pódiumon álló rőt szőrzetű professzor az első ismert tudományos igényű szakmunka, *Az Földi-kölökrű'* korai földikutya-reprezentációjáról értekezett. Az előadást olyan monoton hangon olvasta fel, hogy Hörcsög már alig tíz perccel a konferencia megkezdése után laposakat pislogott, bágyadtan nézegette a telefonján a hírfolyamot az asztal alatt.

A Vakond a Hörcsög mellé telepedve figyelte, hogy a professzor – akinek a pezsgősüveg záródrótjából hajlított fémkerekes szemüveg olyannyira entellektüelkülsőt kölcsönzött, hogy nem is tűnt fel, hogy ő maga is földikutya – eközben zárásként az évszázadokon át tartó rendszerszerű elnyomásról és a többre hivatott faj szabadságvágyáról beszélt. A Vakond érdeklődve nézte a kivetítőn megjelenő archív felvételeket. Ezeken emberek bökdösték bottal, dobták vízbe, vagy zárták ládába

a sivalkodó, zokniszerű lényeket, amelyek kétségtelenül ki akartak onnan törni, tehát szabadságvágyukat nem lehetett kétségbe vonni. Ő természetesen már rég nem hívta őket lenézően „zokniknak”, mint a Biokert műveletlenebb fajai. Akadtak a barátai közt is földikutyák, és elismerte a tehetségüket a művészetekben. Amikor Soil, a földikutyák leghíresebb, bár korlátozott hallású dívája rekedtes hangján azt énekelte, hogy „Szemem előtt egy hártya”, a Vakond lelkének összes húrja beleregegett.

Persze ha igazán őszinte akart lenni magával, benne is éltek előítéletek a földikutyákkal szemben. Gyakran jutottak eszébe a Brehm-lexikon közismert sorai: „A földikutyák nagyon emlékeztetnek a vakondra, de arcuk széles és tompa; a vakondnak minden kellemetlen tulajdonságát átvették, a hasznosakat azonban nem.” Ebből fakadó büntudata viszont még fokozottabb nagylelkűségre sarkallta, ha róluk volt szó. A földikutyák között a lelkekbe épült kisebbségi komplexust ki-ki a maga módján dolgozta fel: volt, aki otthagytta a mély járatokat és vakondos allűröket vett fel, vagyis nyakra-főre feldugta a fejét; mások akkor is leucodonnak akartak látszani, ha történetesen microphthalmusnak születtek, csak hogy társadalmilag egyfeljebb pozicionálják magukat. Megint mások pedig éppen ellenkezőleg, abból csináltak háborút, hogy nyíltan, sallangmentesen és a maga teljességében éljék meg a földikutyaságot: az „őseik járataiban kaparva” félig süketen és szinte teljesen vakon döngölgék kemény fejükkkel a talajt, akár négy méter mélyen a föld alatt, jóformán semmiféle kapcsolatot sem tartva a külvilággal.

– Sunáznám – bökte meg a Hörcsög a Vakond oldalát és a hatalmas kivetítőn megjelenő World Press természetfotó felé biccentett, amelyen egy patakból kitápászkodó fiatal nőtény vizes bundája sokat sejtetően a testére tapadt. – Szeretem, ha egy nőnek narancssárgák a fogai. Azonkívül a zoknicsajok nincsenek annyira túlfüggetlenedve, mint a nőtényhörcsö-

gök, a szexben is hálásabbak, odaadóbbak. Bár az fura, hogy csinálni csak sötétben sze...

A Vakond undorodva elfordult. Kapóra jött, hogy a levezető elnök kávészünetet hirdetett. Azzal kecsegtette a résztvevőket, hogy az asztalokon a földikutya-gasztronómia ingyencségeibe kóstolhatnak bele, amelyek a kelet-európai konyha minden kedvelőjét el fogják elbűvölni rusztikus ízeikkel, keresetlen egyszerűségükkel. Erre persze többen megvetően azt mondták, hogy ez csak szeletelt sárgarépa. Vakond közben magában hálát adott, hogy a főnöke ezúttal legalább nem akar felszólalni, hogy lezoknizza a földikutyákat, csámcsogva részletezze, hogy mire valók a nőstényeik, dicsérje magát, hogy a betolakodók ellen emelt kerítéssel vágta félbe az élőhelyüket, a keménykezű kertvezetés hasznáról áradozzon, vagy nem minden célzás nélkül megkérdezze a közönségtől, hogy melyek ezen a tájékon az őshonos fajok. A Vakond a legutóbbi diplomáciai csúcs alkalmával is vetődve verte le a mikrofont, mielőtt a vezér kimondhatta volna, hogy „élettér”.

Most fáradtan az üvegfalnak dőlt. Egyrészt arra gondolt, hogy ha egyszer innen hazajut, nem teheti meg, hogy felmond és vidékre költözik, hiszen már réges-régen vidékre költözött. Másrészt eszébe jutott az a nőstény, akit indulás előtt erőszakkal a járataiba vonszolt majd földdel temette be a kijáratot. Vajon él-e még, talált-e valamit enni a hideg talajban, esetleg kiásta magát? Ez a kellemes gondolat néhány másodpercnyi felüdülést jelentett. Jó lenne elfordulni ettől a lélektelen, kegyetlen közélettől és csak a szerelemnek élni, révedt el, de a hangosbemondó már a szaporodási kerekasztalra hívott.

„A kolonialista korszakban egyetértés volt abban, hogy a földikutya kártékony állat ugyan, de szerencsére nem szapora”, kezdte a *keynote speaker*, egy hipszterszakállas mormota. „De hihetünk-e még a civilizáció építői kontra kerti kártevők bináris oppozíciójában,” tette fel a feszítő kérdést, miközben a jelenlevő rágcsálókat az utódnemzés pszichológiai, szociológiai,

gazdasági, valamint politikai vetületeinek vizsgálatára buzdította. A Vakond látta, hogy a Hörcsög, aki felvillanyozva ült be a programra, kissé elkedvetlenedik, mikor a mormota azzal fejezte be vitaindítóját, hogy a földikutyák szaporodásának módjáról még mindig nagyon keveset tud a tudomány. A kertvezér unalmában a telefonját kezdte babrálni, miközben más szakértők vették át a szót, azon sajnálkozva, hogy hiába töltik a földikutyanyóstenyek az életüket nagyrészt tétlenül a sötét lyukakban, két kicsinynél többnek csak ritkán adnak életet. Mivel lehetne ezt a nagy múltú és őshonos fajt rávenni, esetleg kényszeríteni a szaporaságra, hűmmögtek az üveglapoktól felerősített téli napsütés üvegházi bezártság keltette melegében. Mivel több állat is téli álmát szakította meg a szerencsétlen időpontba kitűzött konferencia miatt, senki sem volt különösképpen szenvedélyes vagy eleven.

Hirtelen éles pattanás hallatszott, mintha egy üveglap hasadt volna meg.

Az üvegház oldalát törték be kívülről, faltörő kosként használva egy odakint felejtett ácskalapácsot. Egy csapat nőstény földikutyá szerzett valahonnan egy fél pár szürke emberi zoknit, amit kitömtek valamivel, és festékszóróval ráfújták, hogy MY BODY, MY CHOICE. Ezt pálcákra szúrva a fejük fölé emelték és körbehordozták. Kisvártatva kiderült, hogy megvan a szürke zokni párja is: arra a tüntetők szögesdrótot tekertek és fel akarták gyújtani, miközben azt skandálták, hogy „Élőhelyünk határvonal”. A Vakond lesápadt a fekete bársony alatt. A megremült közönség egymást taposva spriccelt szét a lángra kapó zoknik elől.

– Van rá esély, hogy agyonverjék egymást? – érdeklődött a Hörcsög, miközben az *Orangerie* munkatársai és testőrei személyvédelmi okokból egy használaton kívüli kályhakerékbe gyömöszölték. – Nem értem a militáns hangulatot. Én kifejezetten békülékeny hangot ütöttem meg – nyomta a Vakond aprócska szemei elé az imént posztolt üzenetét: *Régen a keleti*

földikutyákat néztük le, *de megszoktuk őket, vannak náluk taszítóbb, NEM ÓSHONOS fajok #földikutyaeve #fajmentés #hajrázoknik #dugjatoksokat*

A Vakond túl volt a szégyenen, már csak a vándorkiállításra és az abba beleölt költségvetésre tudott gondolni. Némán szedegette a méregdrága nyomdatechnikával kinyomtatott táblákat, amelyeket a földikutya éve alkalmából hoztak ki OGU-s pénzből. Mire visszatért a *12 hét fogság* című mozifilm plakátjával és a földikutya földrajzi elterjedésének térképével – ami egyébként érthetetlen okokból pontosan egybeesett az egykori Oszmán Birodalom körvonaláival –, a Hörcsög már egy kiállítási panelen aludt édesdeden. Teljes testével takarta annak a 19. századi kelet-európai polihisztornak az arcvonásait, aki először szentelt tudományos figyelmet a földikutyának. Így csak a háta ívében volt olvasható a latin felirat: *Gaude natura Europea, quae talem tulisti!*

The Year of the Mole-Rat

(a fable from
the “Rotten Animals” cycle)

Noémi Szécsi

Translated from Hungarian by Peter Sherwood

Mole had ensconced himself in the hollow of a huge letter U, having taken care not to get wedged in. Fear of getting stuck was the reason he hadn't dared risk the letter O, and least of all the even more constricting niche of the G. As ever, he wore black velvet, though not in honour of the opening ceremony of the anniversary year. When he tapped the screen of his phone with his broad foreclaw, he tried to do it as gently as possible, since it was already covered in scratch marks. His favourite social media page opened with the least flattering photograph imaginable of his boss, the one preferred by his political enemies. It showed Hamster's mouth, his cheek pouches stuffed to bursting, dribbling seed corn, and bore the caption:

Hamster is a right mother-...

You had to click to read on, but for Mole this was quite enough, in a flash he was drenched in so much sweat that he had to wipe his right foreclaw on his black fur to make sure it didn't slip on the touchscreen. Only then did he press a number on his speed dial, the third after that of his female and his boss. He swallowed hard to avoid sounding irritated.

“Is that all the news? I thought they were protesting about the fence.”

“Sensitivities are changing,” replied Steppe Mouse, the press officer.

The latter's voice suggested puzzlement rather than irritation. He was still in training, but he enjoyed Mole's confidence. Only steppe mice were worth hiring as trainees, as they are small and thus embezzle only piecemeal, taking home so little at any one time that it never puts anyone's nose out of joint. Moreover, they are industrious: they work like a horse.

"The #MeToo hashtag has gone viral," Steppe Mouse went on. "Since that video of the boss's speech turned up, there's been a spate of posts about victims' experiences. I didn't think there'd be so many..."

"You'll post the same video on the boss's page," Mole cut in impatiently. "This is what the soundtrack will say: 'We were poor, but we loved one another... A searingly honest account of a difficult childhood. Listen to our leader's speech on the occasion of our admission. How so many of our dreams about the unification of the organic gardens have been realised.' Etcetera, etcetera. No one must think we have anything to hide." Then, with a sigh, he hung up.

Though he often went for a stroll there, he never felt he could truly relax in the formal garden, the regular venue for the meetings of ORGANIC GARDENS UNITED's chosen animal representatives. The sessions would be held in the Orangerie, as in February the glasshouse was still tolerable, while in summer the animals would be stewing in their own juice. For Mole, the Jardin Européen invariably meant work rather than pleasure: he was especially gratified that it was winter, so that the dull turf and frozen soil didn't tempt him to indulge in unabashed digging. As he screwed up his weary eyes in the sharp winter sunlight, it seemed as if the chariot atop the baroque triumphal arch that served as the entrance to the garden represented the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the very embodiments of Conquest, War, Famine, and Death. He thought them particularly unfortunate omens just now, as the Year of the Mole-Rat was about to be proclaimed.

"OGU dedicates 2018, the Year of the Mole-Rat, to ethnic diversity," the loudspeaker blared out triumphantly.

Mole would have scurried off in the direction of the Orangerie but felt four fingers jabbing into the side of his cylindrical body.

"Any comment from the garden leader's spokesman about the video that's recently come to light?"

Mole eyed up the insistent male barring his way. He was an unsophisticated urban rat, one of those prepared to chase down an important story to its bitter end, yet willing to consume any corpse, if necessary even one of his own kind. A journalist through and through.

"This is a quotation ripped out of context," said Mole, stung, but at the same time pleased not to have been asked about the fence.

Rat scabbled around on his iPhone and then, partly politely, partly impolitely, thrust the device in Mole's face. The blurred and unsteady images must have been taken from somewhere near the back. To the best of Mole's recollection on the May Day celebrating the accession this was where the lesser predators had been standing. Because of the distance the sound was of such poor quality that Hamster's speech had had to be subtitled. That is, for the 30 seconds cut from it: "I too was born into a large litter, moreover in the middle of waste ground in an agricultural co-operative. My father had to trek four kilometres to the manor's granary. We were poor, but we loved one another. We ate my mother only when the summer drought was followed by a particularly hard winter..."

Mole stopped the screening.

"My dear sir," he said, blinking in the direction he suspected Rat's gleaming black eyes to be. "Don't tell me you have never taken even a bite out of one of your relatives!? After 'a particularly hard winter', indeed. Where were you brought up? In a drain? Or are you a country kid? I can see from your lean and hungry look that you wandered the potholed roads of some de-

serted socialist industrial town with an empty belly...” Mole was bluffing, because far from being able to read others’ faces, he couldn’t even get as far as making eye contact. Though he could make out the species, all he could actually see of the other was a bundle of grey fur. No flicker of emotion crossed Rat’s face. “Spare me your genealogical ramblings. This is not about me,” he said frostily.

Mole suddenly found himself wishing he were back at the time of that incident a few weeks earlier when he had to explain away one of his boss’s tweets claiming that an alpha male is really turned on only when the female’s fur is thicker than his own.

“It can happen to anyone.”

“To anyone, yes. But Hamster is the leader of the community. For the last time: can you give me a quote I can use?”

Mole already had his foreclaw in the ventilation duct of the glasshouse, ready to prise it open.

“They were poor, but they loved one another,” he said blithely, and turned away.

In line with OGU accepted practice, the walls of the temporary stands were plastered like patterned wallpaper with versions of the same term in various languages: *Erdhund*, *zemni Kutsche*, *szlepecz*, *mole-rat*, *Blindmaus*, *földikutya*. The russet-furred professor on the podium was lecturing on the early representation of the mole-rat in the first extant scholarly treatise devoted to it, *On the Ratte-Pupp*. He droned on in such a monotone that Hamster found himself blinking with heavy lidded eyes hardly ten minutes into the conference, idly following his phone’s newsfeed under the table.

Settling down next to Hamster, Mole watched as the professor – whose metal-rimmed spectacle frames of champagne-cork wire lent him such a scholarly air that no one realised he was himself a mole-rat – was concluding his talk by referring to

the “systematic oppression of the species down the centuries” and “the yearning for freedom of a species destined for higher things”. Mole watched the archive footage on the screen with interest. The images showed humans poking the squealing creatures with sticks, throwing them in the water, or incarcerating them in crates that they obviously wanted to break out of, so there could certainly be no doubting their yearning for freedom. He, of course, no longer called them by the degrading term “socks”, like the less educated species in the Organic Garden. Some of his best friends were mole-rats, and he readily recognised their achievements in the arts. When Soil, the most famous, though aurally challenged, mole-rat diva, sang in her hoarse tones that “There is a cataract over my eyes”, it felt as if every string in his heart were being plucked.

Of course, were he to be entirely honest with himself, he too had his prejudices about mole-rats. He often had occasion to recall the well-known lines from Brehm’s *Tierleben*: “Mole-rats closely resemble moles, but their faces are broad and stubby; they have adopted all the latter’s unpleasant qualities and none of their useful ones.” However, so great was his resultant sense of guilt that he felt impelled to be excessively tolerant when they cropped up in conversation. The inferiority complex deeply embedded in the mole-rat soul was processed by each in their own way: there were those who forswore the depths of their burrows and put on moles’ airs and graces, bobbing their heads up and down heedlessly, while others wanted to look like leucodons even if they happened to have been born with microphthalmus, simply to position themselves one rung higher on the social ladder. Yet others, by contrast, took up the cudgels by living a life of mole-rathood simply, openly, and to the full: “burrowing in the pathways of their ancestors”, hard of hearing and virtually blind, they pummelled the soil with their heads as many as four metres deep underground, maintaining barely any contact with the outside world.

“I’d give her a good seeing to,” said Hamster, elbowing Mole in the ribs and nodding in the direction of the enormous World Press photo on the screen, which showed a young female clambering out of a stream with her wet fur clinging suggestively to her curves. “I like it when a woman’s teeth are orange. And then, unlike female hamsters, sock chicks haven’t gone all women’s-libby, they’re more appreciative when you have sex, more passionate. Though it’s odd that they only like to do it in the da...”

Mole turned away in disgust. The chair’s announcement of a coffee break came not a moment too soon. He invited the participants to sample the delicacies of mole-rat gastronomy displayed on the tables: their home-made taste and unpretentious simplicity were sure to beguile every aficionado of East European cuisine. Of course, many scornfully pointed out that what he was proffering was just sliced carrot. Mole, meanwhile, thanked his lucky stars that at least this time his boss was not intending to hold forth and disparage mole-rats by calling them socks, to go into juicy detail about what their females are really for, to shower praise on himself, saying how he had sliced their homes in two by building a fence to keep out intruders, to go into raptures over the need for firm garden leadership, or to remind his audience, without putting too fine a point on it, which species were indigenous to their region. At the most recent diplomatic summit, too, Mole had had to make a grab for the microphone before the leader could utter the words “living space”.

He leaned against the glass wall; he was tired. On the one hand, he reflected that if he ever managed to get out of here, he couldn’t resign and move to the countryside, for he had moved to the countryside a long time ago. On the other hand, he remembered the female he had dragged down into his burrow, whose entrance he had then stopped up with soil. Was she still alive, he wondered, did she find herself something to eat in the frozen ground, or had she perhaps even dug herself out? This

happy thought raised his spirits for a moment or two. How wonderful it would be, he mused, to be able to turn one's back on the soulless, brutish world of public life and live just for love, but the loudspeaker was already summoning everyone to the reproductive round table.

"Under colonialism it was generally held that although the mole-rat is a pest, it is, fortunately, not prolific," began the keynote speaker, a marmot with a hipster beard. "But how long can we continue to maintain this binary opposition between builders of civilisation and pests of the garden?" he asked in an urgent tone, at the same time calling upon the rodents present to consider thoroughly the psychological, sociological, economic, as well as political aspects of reproduction. Mole could see that Hamster, who had been galvanised at the beginning of the session, was beginning to flag as the marmot concluded his keynote by saying that science still knew all too little about the biology of mole-rat reproduction. The garden leader was so bored that he began to fiddle with his mobile when other experts took the floor, expressing their regret that even though female mole-rats spent much of their lives doing little or nothing in the darkness of their burrows, they rarely brought forth more than a couple of offspring. How, they wondered out loud, trapped in the heat generated by the winter sun's rays and intensified by the walls of the glasshouse, might it be possible to persuade, or perhaps even compel, this ancient and autochthonous species to be more prolific? As many animals had interrupted their hibernation to attend this poorly scheduled conference, no one was particularly enthusiastic or even animated.

Suddenly a sharp crack could be heard, as if a sheet of glass had shattered.

The glasshouse had been broken into with a discarded wooden mallet used as a battering ram. A pack of female mole-rats had got hold of a grey human sock somewhere, stuffed it full of something, and spray-painted it with the words MY BODY,

MY CHOICE. As they marched, they held it aloft on the ends of sticks. The other sock of the pair soon materialised: the protesters had twisted barbed wire around it and were about to set it ablaze while chanting in unison: “Take your claws/off our homes!” Mole blanched under his black velvet. The terrified members of the audience trampled each other underfoot in the scramble to flee the blazing socks.

“Any chance of them battering one another to death?” Hamster inquired as, in the interests of safety, the staff and security guards of the Orangerie bundled him into the chimney stack of a disused stove. “I am at a loss to understand this militant mood. I struck a distinctly peaceful note,” he said, thrusting before Mole’s tiny eyes the text he had just posted: *Once we looked down on the mole-rats from the east, but we got used to them; we now have more repulsive, NON-INDIGENOUS species to cope with #yearofthemolerat #saveourspecies #hurrahforsocks #screwalot* Mole was past all shame and could now think only in terms of peripatetic exhibitions and the huge budgets they entailed. Silently he gathered up the ultra-high-quality posters for the Year of the Mole-Rat that they had had printed at enormous expense with OGU money. By the time he returned with the poster of the film *Twelve Weeks a Slave* and the map showing the geographical extent of the mole-rats’ habitat – which, by the by, happened mysteriously to coincide exactly with the extent of the former Ottoman Empire – Hamster was sleeping like a baby on one of the exhibition panels. His bulk obscured the entire outline of the nineteenth-century East European polymath who was the first to devote scholarly attention to the mole-rat, leaving visible, in the arch of his back, only a line of Latin: *Gaude natura Europea, quae talem tulisti!*

(Translator’s note: The gravestone of Pál Kitaibel (1757-1817), after whom the European copper skink, *Ablepharus kitaibelii* is named, bears the inscription: “Gaude Hungaria quae talem tulisti”)

English translation © Peter Sherwood 2018



Bulgaria

Kalin Terziyski

Обща и Частна Европа

Europe public and private

EUPL laureate 2011: *Има ли кой да ви обича* (JANET 45)

BIOGRAPHY

Kalin Terziyski was born on 22 March 1970 in Sofia, Bulgaria. He graduated from medical school and specialised in psychiatry. During his medical training he worked in various professions – carpenter, interviewer, sanitarian, copywriter, editor, etc. From 1996 to 2001 Terziyski worked as a physician at the St. Ivan Rilski psychiatric hospital. Also, since 1995 he has engaged in journalism and various artistic activities for radio television and shows. Terziyski publishes his texts in periodicals such as the magazines. Kalin Terziyski started to write poetry and fiction in 1997.

Awards: Award for bestselling Bulgarian book for the novel *Alcohol*, 2010. European Union Prize for Literature 2011 for short stories *Is there anybody to love you*. Golden Feather Award for Contribution to Bulgarian Culture, 2013.

At this moment Kalin Terziyski has published twenty books: five novels, twelve short-story collections and three poetry collections.

Обща и частна европа

Kalin Terziyski



Годината е 1246. Българският цар Михаил II Асен седи в тронната зала и силно иска да се почеше, но го е страх. В детската му глава се въртят какви ли не мисли. И той си представя мислите си като рибки в малък, бистър вир. Плуват и се стрелкат, сенките им по пясъчното дъно са толкова фини и красиви, а самото дъно на вира прилича на ириса на окото на онова момиче, което работи в кухнята на двореца... Ах, какви хубави неща има на тоя свят... И докато си мисли за мислите си като за рибки, той се успокоява и страховете му се разсейват за миг, но после пак му става страшно. Защото само преди месец по заповед на майка му са убили предишния цар — Коломан I Асен, който му беше...

О, Господи и всички светии! — той ми беше брат! Вярно от друга майка, но татко ни беше един и същ. Великият цар Иван Асен II ни беше баща. Значи бяхаме братя! И моята майка отрови моя брат, за да стана аз цар! Жалко за момчето, беше на... дали имаше 12 години? — така се пита цар Михаил и трепери и кой знае как и защо свързва убийството на природения си брат със сърбежа, който изпитва. Сърби го под мишницата, като че бълха се е завряла там, пълзи и хапе: Проклета бълха, чумата да я тръшне, хапе като зло куче... — така си мисли цар Михаил и му е страшно, защото си мисли още, че ако се почеше, може и него да отровят... та няма брат му... така де, природеният му брат Коломан I не го убиха точно защото беше дете?

Нямаше и 12 години, и сигурно още не е можел да се въздържа и да не се чеше, когато го засърби? А да се чешеш в тронната зала, тоест — на най-важното и блестящо място в държавата — това е никак не е царска постъпка, нали така?! Възрастните за такива неща убиват, нали така...?



Майката на непълнолетния цар Михаил II Асен — Ирина Комнина, дъщерята на епирския деспот Теодор Комнин седи в своята тайна стая и има неразположение. Вие ѝ се свят и ѝ се повръща. Пред нея стои малък пергаментов лист, а на него е изписано следното стихотворение:

*...Пресияйна и прекрасна, ти като луна проблясна
от една градина цвете, рай божествен, ти, царице!
По природа си красива, имаш кипреца се прелест,
като слънце над звездите бдиш с лъча на красотата...*

Стихотворението ѝ харесва, посветил ѝ го е някой си Андроникий, ромейски писател. Да, още съм хубава и стройна, така си е — казва си Ирина и въздиша, защото ѝ е мъчно. Мъчно ѝ е, че цялата тая хубост трябва да бъде погребана в България, скрита под вдовишките дрехи, спотаена в сумрака на каменните коридори на тоя мрачен царски дворец; а можеше да грее в Константинопол! И ѝ става още по-лошо и се страхува от това прилошаване, чак посяга към звънчето да викне придворния лекар. Съмнение я разяжда — дали с това писмо не са я отровили? Чувала е много истории за това, как арабите (пък и епирците и гърците) можели да направят отрова, която да те отрови само като я докоснеш. Намазват предмет с нея, или пък пропиват хартията и след това я изсушават... и като пипнеш с влажните си пръсти — отровата отново се разтваря и пропива в кожата... Затова — казва си Ирина и се усмихва странно — трябва върху хартията

да е написано хубаво стихотворение — за да се развълнува четящият и да се овлажняват от възбуждане пръстите му...

О, това са много лоши мисли — казва си царица Ирина и се опитва да се сети какво е яла от сутринта. Ами да! — ядох каша с гъша мас, а маста е тежка, пък може и да е била гранясала... Сигурно от това ми се гади така и ми се вие свят! Да съм бременна — не съм! Та нали като спим с писаря Самарий и ползваме този цар срещу забременяване, който го направи маджаринът-лечител Байер?! Значи ще е от кашата с мас — няма от какво друго да е...

И Ирина се замисля как да ожени сина си Михаил II Асен за някоя подходяща девойка с прочут баща... Кой ли да бъде той? — замисля се Ирина — дали да не бъде Ростислав Михайлович, князът на Чернигов? Той има хубавичка дъщеря — Анна Ростиславна... А руснаците са много силни и винаги побеждават, а са и богати. Хм, казват, че били и много добри любовници... Но какви грубияни са! Миришат винаги на риба и бършат ръцете си в брадите след като се нахранят... Та нали са наследници на викингите! Скандинавски варвари. Варяги, така им викат в Константинопол.

Но аз пък какво съм се замислила за бащата, като ще женя сина си за дъщерята — усмихва се Ирина — и все пак, все пак... какъв ли е този рус, риж мъж... с голяма, миришеца на риба брада, груб и силен... мощен и див като мечка — Ирина примижава и си мисли колко коварна и похотлива е всъщност. И също си мисли как въобще не я е срам от това... Изпитва даже известно самодоволство от този факт. И пак се усмихва и примижава. И си помисля, че би било редно да се помоли на Господ за прошка. Но Господ пък какво общо има с монарсите и с техните похотливи мисли?



Анна Ростиславна, дъщеря на черниговския княз Ростислав Михайлович и на маджарската принцеса Анна, сестра на унгарския крал Бела IV, седи в стаичката си в двореца в Шабац, в Мачва, в средата на сръбските земи, на които сега баща ѝ е владетел и разглежда малката статуетка на Богородица.

Дали баща ми ще ме даде за жена на някой хубав момък? — мисли си с тихо вълнение тя. — Но да е такъв... със сини очи, със златисти коси... като момчетата от рода на прабаба ми? А нали прабаба ми Гертруда от Мерания от своя страна — по майчина линия — е от рода на Ветините? А Ветините са най-голямата германска фамилия, която владее Тюрингия, Кобург и Гота... пък са и едни такива — синеоки, нежни, високи, приличат на ангели... Не са чернокоси и ниски като всички мъже тук, на изток... Или пък татко ще ме даде на някой жълт и кривокрак монголец? Нали сега монголците вече са в цяла Европа, завладяват... много са силни и страшни... стигнали са до Полша и са я захапали здраво, ох, какво ще стане с мен? Какво ще стане с тая стара Европа и тия *нови* монголци...? Пък аз не искам да се омъжа за монголец, а за русо момче! Ох как искам русо момче, била съм още малка, Господи, но и сега нещо се свива в слабините ми като си мисля за руси момчета... прости ми Господи и ти Богородице, това не е ли грях... така приятно да ми отмалява в слабините? Но пък монголците били много силни... Дали пък точно като си помисля за монголците и техните момчета не ми става така сладко и не ми прималява ниско долу? Ох, объркана е моята душа... Монголците миришели на коне и опитомявали соколи... ох мечтая си за русо и високо момче, русо и високо момче... германец или фризиец... но как силно ме привлича мисълта за един див, кривокрак монголец! Гнус ме е, но в същото време ми става едно такова — много странно... приятно е като че ли?! Те не са кривокраки, Господи прости, естествено че не са. Даже не

бива да мисля така — грях е... Но все пак, все пак... Просто мускулите на краката им са много развити от язденето, а едни такива мускулести крака, едни мъжки бедра като желязо между моите бедра... ох, прости ми Богородице, прости ми...



Алберхт II, наричан Негодния, син на Хайнрих III Светлейший — маркграф на Майсен и маркграф на Лужица, далечен братовчед по майчина линия на Анна Ростиславна, дъщеря на Ростислав Михайлович, княз на Чернигов и владетел на сръбска Мачва, седи на нощното си гърне и размишлява. Ето — казва си — ожених се за тая сицилианка, за Маргарета. Ожених се...И какво? Да, правилно. Аз след онова падане от коня, не съм много добър като мъж... не ме бива в леглото, по дяволите! Триста дяволи! Затова и ми викат Алби Негодния, така ми викат сред народа... А не си дават сметка колко съм нещастен. И затова аз се ожених за нея, защото аз съм негоден мъж, а тя е грозна... е не е грозна, но кой ли пък би я взел? Всеки! — ще кажете. Та нали е дъщеря на император?! На императора на Свещената Римска империя Фридрих. Но това не ѝ пречи като се усмихва да придобива такова отвратително ребешко изражение!... Да, иначе е хубаво момиче... Не е грозно... Гърдите ѝ са малки, има малко мъх, тъмен мъх — по горната устна... Както и да е — това може да се преглътне... Но из всички европейски дворове се смеят и шушукат — как като се усмихнула тая Маргарета и заприличвала на сом... или на щука..оф, не помня вече на каква риба разправяха, че заприличвала. И кого принудиха да се ожени за нея? Алберхт Негодния! Така ми се пада! Да не съм паднал от тоя идиотски кон!

А аз толкова харесвам оная ромейка... О, Боже, прости ми... нямам право на такава любов, аз искам да съм чист

пред Тебе, но тая стройна снага... и тая ориенталска красота, тия големи епирски очи! Ирина Комнина! Ирина... Как по гръцки звучи, как опиянява като южно вино името ѝ! Да, Боже, сега си представям как — ако само за една нощ се появи тя — като ангел в спалнята ми — и се шмугне под балдахина... и аз ще стана отново Алберхт Жребецца, Алберхт Силния, Алберхт Всемогъщия ездач! Нищо че била стара, какво като е стара?! Сигурно е не повече от 40! Това означава, че е опитна... и е вдовица, така че това не е грях, нали Господи? Ето, аз ѝ изпратих писмо... Стихотворение. Така направихме да излезе, че все едно е написано от някакъв ромейски поет. Нарекохме го май Андроникий. Ха, смешно! Моля те, Господи, дано ѝ хареса стихотворението, а още повече — дано да подейства! Та нали го напоихме заедно с придворния магьосник Одо с любовен еликсир! Съдържал и олеандър, и мандрагора, и беладона и какво ли не! От него на жените им омеква ли краката! Е, появявало се и леко гадене... Но определено ставали много по-любеобилни...

Боже, нищо не мога да свърша в това гърне, откак паднах с коня и увредих опашната си кост или там както го наричат гадните лекари — и нито в леглото ме бива, нито на гърнето... Алберхт Негодния, владетел на хубавия град Майсен! Пфу, ама че съдба!

О, Боже, следващото писмо, което ще изпратя на Ирина Комнина ще е напоено с още повече еликсир. И в него ще разкрия, че стихотворението е било от мене... А не от някакъв си там ромейски поет! И тогава тя ще се влюби в мен, нали Господи? И — о, направо не смея да си помисля — тогава може да измислим с Одо някоя отвара и да отровим нейния малък и глупав син, българския цар Михаил Асен... И аз да се ожения за нея... И да стана цар на българите! А, става ли така, а Господи? А разправят, че българките били хубави... Пфу, защо ме лиши от мъжка

сила Господ, а ме дари с толкова много желание? Владетел на България, мъж на епирска принцеса и настояща царица на българите... Много приятно звучи! Само трябва да премахна и Маргарета, тая риба! А казват, че там, в България, готвели и много хубав овен, пълнен с малки петлета, а те от своя страна — пълнени с варени яйца, на които жълтъците били извадени, смесени с кимион, с зехтин, с чесън и върнати обратно. В яйцата! И всичко това — готвено с чисто масло! Ох, размечтах се... Да ставам, така или иначе нищо няма да свърша на това нощно гърне. Трябва да посрещна онова смешно конте, бургундския граф Филип I, който има намерение а се ожени за Анна Ростиславна, макар че баща ѝ твърдо е решил да я омъжи за малкия български цар Михаил II Асен, тоя, дето е син на моята Ирина, и когото аз, ако е рекъл Господ, ще пратя с малко специална отвара на Небето... ах, Ирина! И така де, ще видим какво ще стане!

Слуга, изнеси гърнето, празно е!

Europe public and private

Kalin Terziyski

Translated from Bulgarian by Christopher Buxton

The year is 1246. The Bulgarian tsar Michael II Assen sits in the throne room and really wants to scratch, but he's scared. In his child's brain all kinds of thoughts revolve. And he imagines his thoughts like little fishes in a small crystal pool. They swim and dart, their shadows over the sandy bottom are so delicate and beautiful, and the very bottom of the pool looks like the iris in the eye of that girl who works in the palace kitchen... Ah what beautiful things there are in this world... And while he thinks of his thoughts as little fishes, he calms down and his fears are diverted for a moment, but then again they become terrifying. Because just a month ago on the orders of his mother, they murdered the previous tsar – Kaloman I Assen, who was his...

Oh Lord and all the Saints! – He was my brother! True from a different mother, but our father was one and the same. The great tsar Ivan Assen II was our father. That means we were brothers! And my mother poisoned my brother, so I could become tsar! Sad for the boy, he was... was he even 12? – this is what tsar Michael asks himself and trembles and who knows how and why he links the murder of his natural brother with the itching that he feels. It's itching in his armpit, as though a flea has butted in there, crawling, biting: accursed flea, the plague smash it, it bites like a bad dog... That's what tsar Michael is thinking and he feels terrified, because he also thinks that he can't hold back from scratching when it itches. And to scratch in the throne room, is to say – in the most important brilliant place in the kingdom – that this is not at all a kingly activity, is it?! Grown-ups kill for these things, don't they...?



The mother of underage tsar Michael II Assen – Irena Comnena, daughter of the Epirus despot Teodor Comnenus – sits in her secret room and is unwell. She’s giddy and sick. Before her eyes is a small page of parchment, and on it the following poem is written:

*Beautiful and radiant, like the moon effulgent
a flower from one garden, godly Eden, your Majesty!
Natural beauty, you have bubbling charm,
Like a sun above the stars you watch with a ray of beauty...*

She likes the poem, dedicated to her by some Andronicus, a Byzantine writer. Yes, I’m still beautiful and slender, that’s a fact, Irena tells herself and sighs, because she’s sad. She’s sad, because all of this beauty has to be buried in Bulgaria, hidden under a widow’s weeds, lurking in the murk of stone corridors in this dark royal palace; and she could have shone in Constantinople! And she feels even sicker and is scared by this deterioration, even stretches towards the little bell to call the court doctor. Suspicion eats her up – whether this letter wasn’t poisoned? She’s heard a lot of stories about this, how the Arabs (but also the Epirians and Greeks) can make a poison which can act even if you just touch it. They smear the object with it, or they soak the paper and after that they dry it... and when you touch it with moist fingers – the poison dissolves and seeps into the skin... That’s why... Irena tells herself and smiles strangely, a beautiful poem has to be written over the paper – so as to thrill the reader and have her fingers moistened in excitement.

O these are very bad thoughts, Irena tells herself and she tries to remember what she’s eaten from the morning. Oh well yes! I ate porridge with goose fat, and the fat is heavy, it could even have been rancid... It must be this that’s turning my stomach

and making me giddy! As if I'm pregnant – I am not! When I sleep with the scribe, Samari don't we use that contraceptive sulphur made by that Magyar healer, Bayer! That means it's from the lard porridge – nothing else it could be from...

And Irena wonders how to marry her son, Michael II Assen to some suitable girl with a famous father... Who could he be? Irena wonders: could it be Rotislav Mikhailovich, prince of Chernigov? He's got a beautiful daughter – Anna Rotislavna... And the Russians are really strong and always victorious, and they're rich too. Hmm, they say that they're really good lovers as well... But what brutes they are. They always stink of fish and they wipe their hands in their beards after they eat... Haven't they descended from Vikings! Scandinavian barbarians. Varangian – that's what they're called in Constantinople.

But me, what have I thought about the father, as I'm going to marry my son to his daughter, Irena smiles, and yet, and yet... what kind of man is this blond, ginger man with a big beard smelling of fish, rough and strong... powerful and wild like a bear. Irena grimaces and thinks how treacherous and lustful she really is. And she also thinks how she is not at all ashamed by this... She even feels a certain satisfaction at this fact. And again she smiles and grimaces. And she thinks that she ought to pray to God for forgiveness. But then what has God to do with monarchs and their lustful thoughts?



Anna Rotislavna, daughter of the Chernigov prince Rotislav Mikhailovich and the Magyar Princess Anna, sister of the Hungarian king Bela IV, sits in her chamber in the Shaban Palace, in Machva in the middle of the Serbian lands, now ruled by her father, and gazes at the little statue of the Virgin.

Is my father going to give my hand to some handsome lad? she thinks with a quiet thrill. But will he be like this... with blue

eyes, with golden hair... like the boys from my great-grandmother's clan? And wasn't my great-grandmother Gertrude of Merania, on her side, from the maternal line, from the Wettin family. And the Wettins are the biggest German family who rule in Thuringia, Coburg and Gotha... as well as being blue eyed, gentle, tall, looking like angels... they're not black haired and short like all the men here in the east... Or then maybe my father will give me to some yellow bow-legged Mongol? Aren't the Mongols now ruling over the whole of Europe... they're really strong and terrifying... they've reached Poland and they've sunk their teeth in hard, oh what will happen to me? What will happen to this old Europe and these new Mongols? But I don't want to marry a Mongol, I want a fair haired lad! Oh how I want a blond boy, I might be young, Lord, but something in my loins stirs me up as I think of blond lads... forgive me Lord, and you Virgin Mary, isn't this a sin... this feeling of such pleasant weakness in my loins. But then Mongols are so strong... But if when I think particularly of the Mongols and their lads don't I feel the same sweet weakness down below? Oh my soul's confused... Mongols smell of horses and trained hawks... oh I'm dreaming of a blond tall lad, blond tall lad... a German or Frisian... but how strongly I'm attracted to the idea of a wild, bow-legged Mongol! I feel sick but at the same time something comes over me like – really strange... as if pleasant somehow? They aren't bow-legged, Lord have mercy, of course they're not. I shouldn't even be thinking like this – it's a sin... But even so, even so... it's just that their leg muscles are so developed from riding, and such muscly legs, and such manly thighs, like iron between my thighs... oh forgive me Blessed Virgin, forgive me...



Albrecht II, nicknamed the Degenerate, son of Henry III the Illustrious, margrave of Meissen and of Lusatia, distant cousin through the maternal line of Anna Rotislavna, daughter of Rotislav Mikhailovich, prince of Chernigov and ruler of Serbian Machva, sits on his night chamber pot and ponders. There, he says to himself, I married that Sicilian, Margareta. I married... and what? Yes right. After that fall from my horse, I'm not very good as a man... Not up to it in bed, devil take me. Three hundred devils! That's why they call me Albrecht the Degenerate, that's what they call me through the land... and they don't care how unhappy I am. And this was why I married her, because I'm a damaged man, and she's ugly... well not ugly, but then who would have had her? Everyone! You'll say... Isn't she an Emperor's daughter? The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick. But that doesn't stop her smile taking on such a disgusting fishy look!... Yes, otherwise she's a pretty girl... She isn't ugly... Her breasts are small, she's got a little fuzz, dark fuzz – on her upper lip. Well whatever – this can be swallowed... But in all the European courts, they laugh and whisper how when she smiles, this Margareta looks like a catfish... or like a pike... Oof, I don't remember now what fish they reckon she looks like. And who did they force to marry her? Albrecht the Degenerate! That's what falls to my lot! If only I hadn't fallen from that idiotic horse!

But I like that Byzantine so much... Oh God forgive me... I have no right to such a love, I wish to be pure in front of You, but that slender waist... and that oriental beauty, those huge Epirian eyes! Irena Comnena! Irena... how Greek it sounds, how her name intoxicates like southern wine! Yes God, now I'm imagining how – if only for one night she appears – like an angel in my bed chamber – and snuggles under the canopy... and I would become anew Albrecht the Stallion, Albert the Strong, Albert the all-powerful rider! It's nothing that she's

old, so what if she's old?! She's certainly over 40! That means she's experienced... and she's a widow, so that won't be a sin, will it God? Here I sent her a letter... A poem. We worked it so that it came out as if written by some Byzantine poet, I think we called him Andronicus. Ha, funny! Please God, she likes the poem, and even more, it works on her. Didn't we soak it with a love potion, me and the court wizard Odo. It contained oleander and mandragora and belladonna and goodness knows what else! Women's legs loosen up from it. Ey, there's a slight nausea... but they certainly become more lubricious.

Lord, I can't do anything in this chamber pot, from when I fell from the horse and damaged my tail bone, or there whatever the bloody doctors call it – so I'm no good in the bed or on the pot... Albrecht the Degenerate, ruler of the beautiful city of Meissen! Phew! What bad luck!

Oh God the next letter I send to Irena Comnena will be soaked in yet more potion. In it I'll reveal that the poem was from me... And not from some Byzantine poet! And so she'll fall in love with me, won't she Lord? And – oh I can scarcely dare to think it – then I can think up with Odo some infusion and poison her small stupid son, the Bulgarian tsar Michael Assen... And I will marry her... And become tsar of Bulgaria! Does that work, eh Lord? And they make out that Bulgarian women are beautiful. Phew, why did God deprive me of virile strength, while giving me so much desire? Ruler of Bulgaria, husband of an Epirian Princess and present Tsaritza of Bulgaria... It sounds really nice! I just have to get rid of Margareta, that fish! And they say that there in Bulgaria, they cook really lovely sheep, stuffed with small chickens, which in their turn are stuffed with boiled eggs, from which the yolks are taken out, mixed with cumin, olive oil and garlic and then put back. Into the eggs! And all

of that cooked with pure butter. Oh I'm in dreamland... Let's get up, one way or another I'm not going to do anything on this pot. I have to meet that comical dandy, the Burgundian Count Philip I, who wants to marry Anna Rotislavna, even though her father is absolutely determined to marry her to the little Bulgarian Tsar Michael II Assen, that one who's the son of my Irena, and whom, if God agrees, I will send to Heaven with a little special concoction... ah Irena! Well anyway, we'll see what will happen.

Page, take away the chamber pot, it's empty!



Serbia

Darko Tuševljaković

Rekonstrukcije

Reconstruction

EUPL laureate 2017: *Jaz* (Arhipelag)

BIOGRAPHY

Darko Tuševljaković was born in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1978. Since 2002, his fiction has been published in literary magazines and anthologies in Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans. In 2004, he was awarded the Lazar Komarcic Award for short fiction. Tuševljaković is the author of two novels and two collections of short stories. His books have been shortlisted for some of the most important Serbian national awards for fiction. In 2016, his novel *Jaz* (*The Chasm*), the Serbian winner of the 2017 European Union Prize for Literature, was shortlisted for the NIN Award for the best novel of the year, the most prestigious literary award in Serbia. He lives and works in Belgrade. Do far, translation deals for *Jaz* have been made with the following publishing houses: Voland (Italy), Uniscorp (Bulgaria), Albas (Albania) and Ezop (Poland).

Rekonstrukcije

Darko Tuševljaković



Ispred prodavnice suvenira, na dugačkim stepenicama, ćutali su kao zaliveni. Terasa Albertine pružala im je pogled na zgradu Opere i hotel *Zaher*, između kojih je kloparao fijaker pun japanskih turista. U niskim oblacima iznad grada kao da su se smešali krv i mleko. Tog jutra su najavili mogućnost grada. Novembar je, ovako duboko u kontinentu, bio još strašniji nego u Beogradu. Branka je na sebi imala skoro sve što je ponela, kod Danijela u stanu je ostala samo pidžama i nešto malo kozmetike. Iza njih, na staklenim ulaznim vratima, izobličena glava Džordža Dajera, ljubavnika slavnog slikara Fransisa Bejkona, gledala ih je svojim nemogućim očima. Na plakatu je pisalo RETROSPEKTIVA i Branka i Danijel su potrošili sate lutajući hodnicima muzeja, vraćajući se u prošlost. Došla je kod njega dva dana ranije, prvi put se obrela u Beču, posle više od decenije se uopšte našla izvan granica svoje zemlje, a da će uživo videti slike Fransisa Bejkona – na to nije ni pomišljala. Beogradski muzeji uglavnom nisu radili, druga reč je tamo bila većito aktuelna: rekonstrukcija. Ta reč znači da sadašnjost ne valja, dok retrospektiva podrazumeva da je sa sadašnjošću sve u redu čim postoji luksuz reminiscencije, svođenja računa, zaokruživanja priče. Njen život je, baš kao ti muzeji, već godinama u rekonstrukciji. Najstarija koje se sećala nastupila je onog dana kad je Danijel otišao. Misao o tome da je ostavljena trebalo je nekako podupreti, od nje napraviti nešto sa čim je moglo da se živi. I uspela je. Usput je bilo još nekoliko rekonstrukcija – posla, roditelja, prijatelja, stavova, prihoda i rashoda – ali nijedna, priznala je to sebi,

nije bila snažna kao prva. Ako je nju preživela, preživeće i ostale. Danijel je šmrknuo na hladnom vetru i podigao kragnu kaputa. To je verovatno bio mig kojim joj je nagoveštavao da želi da se vrate u stan u kojem je ona bila stranac, gost, ali odbila je da reaguje na signale. Još jednom je osmotrila plakat za izložbu. Kad je planirala put, po njegovom pozivu, nije znala da se u gradu održava takvo nešto. To je saznala čim je stigla, želeo je da je iznenadi. „Istoričarka umetnosti u zemlji bez muzeja“, osmehnuo se i pružio joj kartu. „Malo engleske pederastije u srcu Habzburške monarhije.“ Prihvatila je kartu, ali sada, dok je s visine posmatrala bečke konje kako kenjaju u korpe okačene ispod repova, poništena karta ju je žuljala u džepu pantalona. Nije trebalo da dođe. Nije trebalo da padne na njegov pritvoran osmeh. Je li mislio da će mu biti zahvalna? Da li je stvarno smatrao da će je tako lako kupiti? Fransis Bejkon? Otac budućeg slikara je svojevremeno gajio konje i dresirao ih, i, kad je provalio da mu se mili Fransis kara s konjušarima, naredio je da ga izbičuju. Znala je to. Naravno da je znala. Nije imala priliku da to nekom prenese, pošto njeni dotadašnji poslovi nisu imali veze sa strukom, ali sećala se. Mogla je da rekonstruiše Bejkonov život u tri ujutro, kad bi za tim bilo potrebe. Kad bi joj to neko tražio, pa možda i platio. Ali to ne može da bude Danijel. Nipošto ne on.

„Hajdemo odavde“, promumlao je u kragnu kaputa, izgubivši strpljenje. „Mislio sam da će ti se dopasti.“ U retrospektivi, postojale su bar dve prilike kad je izgovorio sličnu, ako ne i istu rečenicu. Jednom je to bilo na samom početku, u krevetu, kad je, okrenuvši je na bok, ušao u nju s leđa, ali ne tamo gde je očekivala. Zbolelo je kao ubod stotine igala, skočila je s kreveta i vrisnula, preneražena. Njegov pokušaj da se izvini bio je nespretnan, mumlao je i odvrćao pogled od nje: sad se pitala da li je to bila istinska smušenost ili poza koja je trebalo da ga iskupi. Drugi put je to bilo za trogodišnjicu veze, kad je organizovao žurku iznenađenja. I ona je spremila iznenađenje: bilo je proleće i došla je kod njega u laganom mantilu ispod

kojeg je nosila samo gaćice. Prijatelji, uglavnom njegovi, iskočili su iza nameštaja sipajući po njoj konfete i šampanjac. Uvaljana tako u slavljenički katran i perje, celo veče je ostala zakopčana do grla.

Kad joj je pre dvadeset godina rekao da ne može više da izdrži, nije je pozvao da pođe s njim. „Treba mi nov početak“, ponudio je kao objašnjenje i iselio se iz stana, grada, zemlje. „Ne mogu više da živim u ovom svinjcu“, rekao je i ona se godinama pitala na šta je tačno mislio. U Beču, istina, nije bilo svinja. Bilo je konja, Japanaca i Fransisa Bejkona. A kobasice su rasle na drveću.

„Znaš li da je on dva dana krio samoubistvo svog dečka kako bi na miru otvorio svoju veliku parisku izložbu?“, pitala je, ali predugo je to trajalo, na pola rečenice je ostala bez daha i bila je sigurna da je Danijel ne razume. Međutim, pokazao je rukom na plakat, na Džordža Dajera, koji je završio mrtav na hotelskoj klozetskoj šolji usred Grada svetlosti. „Kakve to veze ima?“

„Ima“, breknula se i sopstveni glas joj je zazvučao kao lavež. „Zataškao je smrt svog prijatelja, smrt svog ljubavnika. Zarad svog komfora. Dva dana je lež ležao u hotelskom toaletu pre nego što su ga prijavili policiji. To je krivično delo. Zločin. Sebični peder je stajao na otvaranju u Gran paleu i ćaskao s gradonačelnikom kao da se ništa nije dogodilo. Među izloženim slikama bila je i jedna s naslikanom klozetskom šoljom i gradonačelnik je, ne znajući za tragediju, baš nju hvalio dok je veliki umetnik treptao i uvijao se kao kurvica na ćošku.“

Danijel je pošao niza stepenice, pa se zaustavio i okrenuo se k njoj. Podigao je obrve i Branka je primetila sve te bore na njegovom čelu, godine života koje su potrošili razdvojeni. On se u Beču nije ženio, a njen muž, nekadašnji zajednički poznanik, umro je pre mesec dana od aneurizme. Zato ju je Danijel i pozvao da dođe. Da zaboravi na nesreću, kako je

rekao. Šta je on imao da ponudi? Dekadenciju u austrijskom dvorcu?

„Zašto si mi pisao?“, rekla je, iako nije nameravala da ga to pita. Posle dvadeset godina: pismo. Staromodno, na finom papiru, kupljenom u nekoj otmenoj knjižari. Maniri naučeni u belom svetu, daleko od svinjca. Nije nameravala ništa da ga pita; pristala je da dođe u Beč, s namerom da ćuti. Da ga kazni ili da pokaže ponos. Trebalo je toga da se drži, pošto mu je ovako samo servirala šlagvorte.

„Zašto si došla?“

Setila se priče o mazohizmu.

„Znaš li da je od svog prethodnog dečka tražio da ga tuče?“, rekla je naposletku. „Pojavljivao se s masnicama i oteklinama po licu na javnim mestima, uživao je čak i kad ga je on, u ko zna kakvom naletu poremećene strasti, gurnuo kroz staklena vrata kuće. Bio je toliko pocepan da su morali da mu ušiju oko u glavu, ali to ga je uzbuđivalo. Gledao je rane po svom telu i svršavao...“

Okrenuo joj je leđa i spustio se trkom niz preostale stepenice. Videla je kako mu se uši trzaju, kao u mačke, i znala je da je ipak sluša.

„Tu si me doveo?“, viknula je bez potrebe. Nekoliko turista s mobilnim telefonima uperenim u zgradu Opere trglo se. Niko nije ništa prigovorio: fin svet. Tolerantan. „Iz svinjca u dvorac? Ili ipak u dvorsku konjušnicu koja smrdi na znoj i govna?“

Sad se ipak frontalno suočio s njom. Na licu mu je titralo novo pitanje i ona shvati da se on ne seća nekadašnjih reči, zaboravio je šta joj je rekao na rastanku. Prozirne reči i nisu mogle mnogo da znače, ona je bila blesava što ih je toliko dugo pamtila.

„Je li ovo ta kultura s kojom si me prevario?“

Prošao je još jedan fijaker i konji su se uznemirili od buke, a Branka je petom zimske čizme udarila o tlo i viknula: „Jaaa, jaaa!“, terajući ih u brži kas. Nekoliko Japanaca je potrčalo za kočijom, s foto-aparatima nagotovs.

„Pogledaj oko sebe“, nastavila je, odjednom zajapurena, uzavrela, rascepljena tu, nasred ulice, poput pečenog kestena. „Gotske fasade i torta za turiste? Mocartove statue i suvenirni s Pratera? Zar ne vidiš da je sve to san?“

Prišao joj je i uhvatio je za podlaktice kao da je pridržava da ne padne. Zašto to radi kad ona ne gubi ravnotežu? Prisebna je, ali ako će već govoriti, to može biti samo o jednome.

„Ovde nema ničeg za nas, Danijele. Sve što vidiš sagrađeno je za nekog drugog. Pekare u podzemnoj železnici i roštiljare na autobuskim stanicama – eto šta smo. Prilepci. Ose koje dižu košnicu od blata na pročelju crkve. Nemoj mi reći da se osećaš kao kod kuće, čak ni posle dvadeset godina. Nemoj mi to reći, jer ću znati da lažeš.“

Držao ju je u stisku koji ju je sad već boleo; terao ju je da ga pogleda u oči.

„Šta je?“, zainatila se. „Šta hoćeš od mene?“

Pribio ju je uza se i ona oseti njegov dah na svojim obrazima. Kao i pre, mirisao je na nagorelo drvo, na kamin.

„Zauvek ćeš ostati stranac“, nastavila je, ali glas joj se utišao: nije više privlačila pažnju publike, posetioci grada su se okupili oko reklame za bioskop u kojem se dvadeset četiri sata dnevno prikazuje *Treći čovek*. Pored tog plakata stajao je onaj sa iskrivljenim licem Džordža Dajera i Branka se setila još nečeg u vezi s Bejkonom, ali pre toga...

Danijel se nagnuo i poljubio je. Miris drveta proširio se njome kao da ispunjava praznu sobu.

Posle Dajerove smrti, Fransis Bejkon je započeo vezu sa Džonom Edvardsom, momkom koji se nije palio na modrice. Bio je miran tip, „voleo je da se mazi“, negde je pročitala, i Bejkonu je od tog trena krenulo nizbrdo. Konačna potvrda njegove devijacije nije bila veza ispunjena nasiljem, već obrnuto – ona u kojoj nasilja, začudo, nije bilo. Slike su mu postale mlake, umetnost se razvodnila. Goriva je nestalo i veliki umetnik je zapao u krizu.

Otrgla je ruke od Danijela i ošamarila ga tako da su oboje posrnuli na pločniku. Neki muškarac im je prišao i pitao nešto na nemačkom, na šta je Danijel samo odmahnuo glavom. Fin svet. Zabrinut za drugoga.

„Da li si ikad znao šta u stvari želiš?“, pitala ga je i, ne sačekavši odgovor, pošla ka stanici tramvaja koji će ih odvesti u njegov becirk. Danijel ju je sustigao na početku Kertnerštrase i nasmešio se, obraza rumenog kao u deteta.

„Ispunjen život“, rekao je i raširio ruke, pokazujući joj sve te ljude, ulice, automobile, fijakere, konje, Operu, muzej, crkvu, hotel.

„Zašto ja nisam mogla da budem deo njega?“

Stali su pred crvenim svetlom na semaforu.

„Kad si mlad, ne sanjaš udvoje.“

„I šta sad imaš od toga?“

On opet rukama obuhvati svet. „Fransisa Bejkona u Albertini.“

Obuzeta mislima o nasilju, silovanju, mraku i izopačenosti, ona zausti da mu kaže još nešto o tom Bejkonu, ali on je preduhitri.

„Kakve su slike?“, pitao je i, kad se uključilo zeleno, ona shvati da nema snage da iskorači. Brada joj je drhtala i ona je pritisnu dlanovima da je umiri, ali tremor je bio prejak. Čučnula je,

poražena, dok su uviđavni prolaznici zapitkivali Danijela mogu li nekako da pomognu.

Divne... Veličanstvene... Ni sa čim drugim nisu mogle da se uporede; njihova strast, njihov vrisak, njihova elegancija i grozota, njihovo bogatstvo, njihov sjaj, njihova patnja, njihova teskoba i njihova sloboda. Bio je divan, osetljiv, genijalan, talentovan, bistar, neverovatno slab i manijački jak, smeo, bezobrazan, ekscentričan, andeoski, izvitoperen, okrnjen i savršen, mali poput miša, veći od života. Bio je lud. Bio je božanstven. Bio je božanstveno komplikovan, baš kao sve na ovom svetu. Kako je to mogla da sakrije? Kako je to mogla da prizna? Da li je ikad zapravo znala šta želi? Da li je sve ove godine pristajala na svinjac njemu u inat? Sebi u inat? Da li je lagala sebe više nego što ju je slagao on? Da li je imala pravo da laže? Da li su i dalje polagali pravo jedno na drugo? Da li su ikad? Da li su stvoreni jedno za drugo ili osuđeni na to?

Pomogao joj je da ustane i pozvao taksi. U vozilu je kroz suze videla da joj pruža nešto i isprva je pomislila da nudi maramicu, ali kad je obrisale suze rukavom kaputa, shvatila je da su to nove karte. Uzela je jednu i primakla je staklu prozora.

„U muzeju *Leopold* je Šileova stalna postavka“, rekao je. „Mislim da će ti se dopasti.“

Sutradan su otišli tamo.

Reconstruction

Darko Tuševljaković

Translated from Serbian by Randall A. Major and Ema Pandrc

In front of the souvenir shop, on the long steps, they stood dead silent. The terrace of the Albertina offered them a view of the Opera House and the Sacher Hotel, between which clattered a carriage full of Japanese tourists. In the low-hanging clouds above the city, it was as if blood and milk had been mixed together. That morning, possible sleet had been announced. November, this deep in the continent, was even more awful than in Belgrade. Branka was wearing almost all the clothes she had brought, she had left just her pyjamas and a few cosmetics at Danijel's place. Behind them, on the glass entrance doors, the misshapen head of George Dyer, the lover of the famous painter Francis Bacon, was looking at them with its impossible eyes. On the poster it stated "RETROSPECTIVE" and Branka and Danijel had spent hours wandering the hallways of the museum, returning into the past. She had come to his place two days earlier, visiting Vienna for the first time; she hadn't left her homeland for more than a decade, but that she would see Francis Bacon's art in person – she couldn't have seen it coming. Belgrade's museums were mostly closed, where a different word was always in use: reconstruction. That word meant that the present is faulty, while retrospective meant that the present is fine, because there is the luxury of reminiscing, the settling of accounts, the completion of a puzzle. Her life, just like those museums, had been under reconstruction for years now. The oldest reconstruction she could remember came about the day Danijel departed. The very thought that she had been abandoned had to be somehow underpinned, something had to be made of it that she could live with. And she managed to do so. Along the way, there were several other reconstructions – jobs, parents, friends, opinions, income and expenses

– but not a single one of them, she admitted to herself, was as intense as that first one. If she survived that, she'd survive the rest as well. Danijel sniffled in the cold wind and raised the collar of his overcoat. That was probably a gesture by which he was hinting to her that he wanted to go back to the apartment where she was a stranger, a guest, but she refused to respond to his signals. Once again she examined the exhibition poster. When she was planning her trip, at his invitation, she did not know that something like that was taking place in the city. She found out only when she arrived, he wanted it to be a surprise for her. “An art historian in a country without museums,” he smiled and handed her the ticket. “A little English pederasty in the heart of the Habsburg monarchy.” She had accepted the ticket but now, while she watched from above the Viennese horses crapping into the baskets hung beneath their tails, the torn ticket was poking at her in her pants pocket. She should not have come. She should not have fallen for his feigned smile. Had he thought that she would be grateful to him? Did he really believe that he could buy her off so easily? Francis Bacon? The father of the painter-to-be used to raise and train horses and, when he found out that his dear Francis was screwing the grooms, he ordered that his son be whipped. She knew that. Of course she knew. She hadn't had the chance to tell anyone that because her jobs till then had nothing to do with her profession, but she still remembered. She could recount Bacon's life at three in the morning if necessary. If someone would ask her to do so, and perhaps even pay for it. But that someone could not be Danijel. No way, not him.

“Let's get out of here,” he mumbled into his coat collar, losing his patience. “I thought you would like it.” In retrospect, there were at least two other occasions when he had spoken a similar sentence, if not that self-same one. The first time was at the very beginning, in bed, when he turned her on her side and entered her from behind, but not where she was expecting it. It hurt like the sting of hundreds of needles, she jumped out of bed and screamed, horrified. His attempt at an apology was

awkward, he kept mumbling and averting his eyes from her: now she wondered whether that had been genuine humility, or just an act intended to redeem him. The second time was on the third anniversary of their relationship, when he had organised a surprise party. But she had also prepared a surprise: it was springtime and she arrived at his place in a light raincoat under which she was wearing only her panties. Friends, mostly his, jumped from behind the furniture, showering her with confetti and champagne. Thus covered in celebratory tar and feathers, she spent the whole evening buttoned up to her chin.

Twenty years earlier, when he told her that he couldn't stand it anymore, he didn't invite her to come along. "I need a new beginning," he offered as an explanation, and then moved out of his apartment, city, and country. "I can't live in this pigsty any longer," he said, and for years she wondered what exactly he'd meant by that. In Vienna, true enough, there were no pigs. There were horses, the Japanese, and Francis Bacon. And sausages grew on trees.

"Did you know that he hid the suicide of his boyfriend for two days so that he could calmly open his big Paris exhibition?" she started to ask, but it went on too long; she stopped mid-sentence out of breath, convinced that Danijel didn't understand her. However, he indicated the poster with his hand, George Dyer, who ended up dead on a hotel toilet in the middle of the City of Lights.

"What does it matter?"

"It does," she snapped, and her voice sounded like a bark to her. "He kept secret the death of his friend, the death of his lover. For the sake of his own comfort. For two days, the corpse lay in the hotel bathroom before it was reported to the police. That's a felony. A crime. The selfish queer stood at the opening at the Grand Palais, chatting with the mayor as if nothing had happened. Among the exhibited pictures, there was a painting of a toilet bowl and, unaware of the tragedy, the mayor

was praising that very one, while the great artist blinked and squirmed like a tramp on the corner.”

Danijel headed downstairs, then stopped and turned to her. He raised his eyebrows and Branka noticed all the wrinkles on his forehead, the rings of the life they had spent separated. In Vienna, he never married, and her husband, a former acquaintance of theirs, had died a month before of an aneurism. Which is why Danijel had invited her to visit. To forget about the misfortune, as he said. What could he have to offer? Decadence in the Austrian court?

“Why did you write me?” she asked, even though she hadn’t intended to. After twenty years: a letter. Old-fashioned, on fine parchment, bought in a fancy bookshop. Manners acquired in the civilised world, far from the pigsty. She hadn’t intended to ask him anything; she accepted his invitation to Vienna, intending to say nothing. To punish him or to show her pride. She should have kept to that plan, because this way she was only giving him a cue to respond.

“Well, why are you here?”

She remembered the story about masochism.

“Did you know that he asked his previous boyfriend to beat him?” she said after a while. “He would show up with bruises and a swollen face in public places; he even took pleasure in it when the man shoved him through the glass door of the house, in an inexplicable outburst of sordid passion. He was so torn up, that they had to sew his eye back into his head, but that excited him. He looked at the wounds all over his body and it made him come...”

He turned his back to her and ran down the rest of the stairs. She saw his ears twitch, like a cat’s, and she knew that he was listening to her after all.

“You brought me here!” she cried needlessly. Several tourists with cell phones aimed at the Opera House were startled. No

one complained at all: nice people. Tolerant. “From the pigsty to the imperial court? Or is it perhaps to the imperial stables that stink of sweat and shit?”

Now he was finally facing her directly. A new question flickered across his face and she realised that he didn’t remember his words from back then, he’d forgotten what he’d told her when they parted. Empty words couldn’t mean much after all, and it was silly of her that she remembered them for so long.

“Is this the culture you cheated on me with?”

Another carriage went by and the noise disturbed the horses; Branka stomped the heel of her winter boot and shouted: “Giddyup, giddyup!”, making them trot even faster. Several Japanese people ran after the carriage, cameras at the ready.

“Look around you,” she continued, suddenly flushed, burning, torn apart right here, in the middle of the street, like a roasted chestnut. “Gothic façades and cake for tourists? Statues of Mozart and Prater souvenirs? Can’t you see it’s all just a dream?”

He came up to her and grabbed her by the forearm as if keeping her from falling. Why was he doing that when she hadn’t lost her balance? She was composed, but if they were going to talk, it could only be about one thing.

“There’s nothing for us here, Danijel. Everything around you was built for someone else. The bakeries in the underground and the grills at the bus stations – that’s who we are. Hangers-on. Wasps creating a nest of mud under the eaves of a church. Don’t tell me you feel at home here, even after twenty years. Don’t tell me that, because I’ll know you’re lying.”

He was holding her tightly and it was beginning to hurt; he forced her to look him in the eyes.

“What?” she responded in spite. “What do you want from me?”

He pulled her close and she could feel his breath on her cheeks. As always, he smelled of burning wood, like a fireplace.

“You’ll always be a foreigner here,” she went on, but her voice had grown quieter: she was no longer attracting attention, visitors to the city had gathered around the advertisement for a cinema, where *The Third Man* was being shown twenty-four hours a day. Next to that poster was the one with the misshapen face of George Dyer, and Branka remembered something else about Bacon, but before that...

Danijel leaned in and kissed her. The smell of wood spread around her as if filling an empty room.

After Dyer’s death, Francis Bacon began a relationship with John Edwards, a guy who wasn’t into bruises. He was a quiet chap, “liked to cuddle”, she’d read somewhere, and Bacon started going downhill from that moment. The final proof of his deviance was not a relationship charged with violence, but the exact opposite – one where there was, oddly enough, no violence at all. His paintings became mediocre, his art diluted. The fuel had run out and the great artist fell into a crisis.

She yanked her arms away from Danijel and slapped him so hard that they both fell to the sidewalk. A man approached them and asked something in German, to which Danijel just shook his head. Nice people. Concerned about others.

“Have you ever known what you really want?” she asked and without waiting for a reply, she headed toward the stop for the tram that would take them to his district. Danijel caught up with her at the head of Kärntner Strasse and smiled, blushing like a child.

“A fulfilled life,” he said, stretching out his arms and showing her all the people, streets, automobiles, carriages, horses, the Opera House, the museum, the church, the hotel...

“Why couldn’t I have been a part of it?”

They had stopped at a red light.

“When you’re young, you don’t dream for two.”

“And where has that gotten you?”

He embraced the world yet again. “To Francis Bacon at the Albertina.”

Overwhelmed with thoughts of violence, rape, darkness, and twistedness, she was about to tell him something else about Bacon, but he cut in.

“How did you like the paintings?” he inquired and, when the light changed, she realised she was too weak to step forward. Her jaw trembled and she pushed against it with her hands to calm it, but the tremor was overpowering. She squatted, in defeat, while the considerate passers-by asked Danijel if they could help somehow.

Wonderful... Magnificent... Nothing else compared to them; their passion, their scream, their elegance and horror, their richness, their brilliance, their suffering, their anxiety, and their freedom. He was wonderful, sensitive, ingenious, talented, sharp, extraordinarily weak and maniacally strong, daring, rude, eccentric, angelic, twisted, damaged and perfect, tiny like a mouse, larger than life. He was insane. He was divine. He was divinely complicated, like everything else in this world. How could she hide it? How could she admit it? Had she ever known what she really wanted? Had she been tolerating the pigsty all those years just to spite him? To spite herself? Had she been lying to herself more than he had lied to her? Did she have the right to lie? Did they still have the right to each other? Had they ever? Were they made for each, or destined for it?

He helped her to her feet and hailed a taxi. In the car, through her tears she saw that he was handing her something, which she first thought was a tissue, but when she wiped her tears on the sleeve of her coat, she realised that it was new tickets. She took one and held it up to the window.

“Schiele’s permanent exhibition is at the Leopold Museum,” he said. “I think you’ll like it.”

The next day, they went to see it.



Belgium

Isabelle Wéry

Ceci est mon corps

This is my body

EUPL laureate 2013: *Marilyn désossée* (Editions Maelström)

BIOGRAPHY

Isabelle Wéry is a Belgian actress, theatre director and author. She studied acting at INSAS (Brussels) and Shakespeare at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. In parallel with her work with various directors (including *The Vagina Monologues*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Good Person of Se-Chouan*), she writes her own theatre works (such as *La Mort du Cochon* and *Mademoiselle Ari Nue*). She received the Prix de la Critique for *La Tranche de Magnin*. She is a member of Company Point Zero and travels all around the world with the show *Ventriloquists' School* by Alexandro Jodorowsky. She wrote the novel *Monsieur René*, as well as *Saisons culottes amis* (*Yvette's Poems*). Her novel *Marilyn désossée* was a finalist for the Belgian Victor Rossel Prize and received the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013. This novel has been translated in many European countries. She writes newspaper articles and short stories for various literary magazines.

Ceci est mon corps

Isabelle Wéry



La question que m'avait lancée ce journaliste d'une chaîne de télévision chinoise m'avait laissée bouche bée. J'étais l'unique Européenne de ce prestigieux Festival international de littérature à Pékin. La salle de conférence de presse était bondée, les flashes des appareils photo crépitaient, le parterre de diplomates s'agitaient sur des sièges en velours rouge et devant leurs petits écrans, des millions de téléspectateurs chinois attendaient ma réponse à la question du journaliste. Mais moi, je sentais le sol se dérober inexorablement sous mes talons aiguilles... Il avait gelé toute la sainte journée à Pékin, un décembre glacial à vous figer la circulation sanguine dans toutes vos jambes. La foule était électrisée par ce froid de canard et tout le monde semblait suspendu à mes lèvres qui, elles, se refusaient à émettre le moindre balbutiement... Tout se brouillait dans ma tête, mille idées fusaient, se bouscuaient mais aucun son ne venait à ma bouche. Alors, le journaliste, un peu irrité a réitéré sa demande dans un anglais approximatif:

«As an European writer, how do you perceive the part of the world where you come from?»

Bon, il fallait que je mobilise toutes mes ressources, tout mon sens de la répartie et que je parvienne à formuler une réponse la plus précise. Mais cette question me paraissait insoluble! Il y a quarante années que je vis en Europe! Quarante années d'expériences, de voyages, de divagations, de va-et-vient! Comment voulez-vous que je réponde de manière concise à une

demande au spectre si large... Scrangneugneu! Allez, vas-y, trouve, Anna, cherche dans ta p'tite tête et trouve! Quelque chose qui frappe l'imaginaire, qui traduise tes pensées de la manière la plus fiable!... Mais les mots se rétrécissaient à mesure que j'échafaudais un début de réponse. Mon corps, lui, bouillonnait d'un feu bizarre, plus rouge que celui de l'Etna! Oui, mon corps manifestait de drôles de trucs et était sujet à de mini crises de hoquets, comme si j'allais vomir un machin du tréfonds de mon estomac.

«Comment, en tant qu'autrice européenne, je perçois ce coin du monde d'où je viens? Grrrrrrr... Anna! Commeeeeeeeent, commeeeeeeeent??? Commeeeeeeeeeeeent?!?!», me répétais-je sans cesse.

Tout à coup, hop, je me suis levée! J'ai ôté calmement ma veste de smoking, je me suis mise bien à mon aise. J'ai murmuré:

«Well... As an answer, I could tell you this... Mes yeux, par exemple. Mes yeux ont vu beaucoup de paysages d'Europe: les montagnes de Bulgarie où faune et flore regorgent, la campagne de Belgique et ses arbres cagneux comme des mains de vieille, les sols de Toscane déchirés par des charrues grandes comme des cathédrales. Oui, j'ai vu beaucoup de paysages...»

Ensuite, j'ai ôté mes chaussures. Cela prit un certain temps, elles étaient assez étroites. J'entendais un silence planer dans l'assemblée. Je dis:

«Autre exemple... Mes pieds! Ils ont marché dans le Trastevere de Rome, dans Berlin, dans Skopje et ses statues d'Alexandre le Grand, le long de la rivière Ljubljana en Slovénie, à Madrid, sur les remparts d'Avignon, sur le pont Charles de Prague... J'ai même couru sur les boulevards de Paris, à Den Haag, à Luxembourg, le long des quais à Liège, à Ulm, dans les vieilles ruelles de Rouen, à Venise.»

J'ai dénoué mon chignon:

«Mes cheveux, ils ont été coupés à Bruxelles, à Volterra, à Malaga, à Köln, à Tbilissi, à Thessalonique...»

J'ai dégrafé mon chemisier et montré une épaule. Là, j'ai senti tous les zooms des caméras se braquer sur mon bout de chair nue! J'ai poursuivi:

«J'ai senti le vent chaud du désert du sud de l'Espagne sur mes épaules, celui du Portugal aussi, celui de Croatie...»

Puis je l'ai ôté, mon chemisier, et j'ai levé les bras en l'air:

«J'ai nagé dans la mer Méditerranée, dans le lac de Garde, dans le lac de Bled, dans les rivières de l'Ardèche, dans l'océan Atlantique... J'ai senti les courants chauds, les courants frisquets, les vagues suaves, les roulis violents, les marées séculaires...»

J'ai baissé ma jupe et dévoilé mon ventre:

«J'ai mangé gras, dodu, végétal, brûlant, viandé, vert, rougeaud, rien, mou, haché. J'ai mangé des animaux d'Europe, beaucoup d'animaux, des mammifères d'Europe, des volailles d'Europe, des oiseaux d'Europe, des poissons aussi, poissons de mer, poissons d'eau douce...»

Enfin, j'étais sur le point d'enlever mon slip quand un brouhaha s'est élevé de la salle... J'ai hésité un instant. Allais-je le faire? Des gens criaient «No!», d'autres criaient «Yeeees! Laissez-la parler!!!» Finalement, je n'ai écouté que mon corps et j'ai achevé mon mouvement. J'ai entendu de grands «Ooooooh» et des «Aaaaaah», mais personne ne s'est opposé:

«Mon sexe. Mon sexe, il a été baisé à l'allemande, à la belge, à l'espagnole, une fois à la hongroise, on l'a embrassé à l'italienne, à la tchèque, à la grecque...»

L'Europe, Monsieur le journaliste, cette Europe dans laquelle je vis depuis tant d'années, je l'ai bue, je l'ai vécue, je l'ai écrite, lue, dansée, je l'ai pensée, je l'ai regardée, je l'ai dévorée, je l'ai applaudie, je l'ai haïe parfois, je l'ai embrassée et je l'ai entendue. Dans chacune des parties de mon corps, elle s'est immiscée, infiltrée voire imposée. L'Europe s'est lovée en moi. Elle a déposé ses strates, belles ou irritantes, dans les milliards de cellules de mon organisme. J'ai des châteaux en moi, des torrents, des couchers de soleil, des tableaux de peintres, des proses et des chansons, des guerres et des régions, des dialectes, des herbes.

Donc, Cher Monsieur, pour vous dire comment je perçois cette Europe dans laquelle je vis et pratique l'écriture, vous comprendrez qu'il m'est impossible de vous fournir une réponse rapide et nuancée construite à partir de quelques simples mots, quelques consonnes et quelques voyelles. Il me faudrait d'autres outils, des aquarelles, de la musique, des parfums. Aussi, je ne peux que vous livrer ma chair, mes os, mes muscles et mon teint. Toute mon expérience de l'Europe y est. À vous d'y trouver votre réponse.»

Le journaliste, chinois et hébété, n'a rien osé ajouter si ce n'est un timide «Thankiou»... Dans un élan général, la foule, elle, s'est levée et, à ma grande surprise, a flambé dans un tonnerre d'applaudissements. J'en étais intimidée. Et intriguée. Est-ce mon audace qu'ils applaudissaient? Ou tous ces paysages d'Europe que je leur offrais via les sillons de mon corps?

Ici, dans la profondeur de la Chine, dans cette mise à distance de milliers de kilomètres, je ressentais mon chez moi, l'Europe, comme jamais: une immense cartographie de sensations

This is my body

Isabelle Wéry

Translated from French by Astrid Howard

The question that the Chinese television journalist had thrown at me left me speechless. I was the only European at this prestigious International Festival of Literature in Beijing. The press hall was bursting, the camera flashes popping, the audience of diplomats fidgeting on their red velvet seats and in front of their little screens, millions of Chinese awaited my response to the journalist's question. But me, I felt the ground inexorably go out from under my high heels... It had been freezing the whole damn day in Beijing, a glacial December that would turn the blood circulating in your legs to ice. The bitter cold had electrified the crowd and everyone seemed suspended from my lips, my lips that refused to emit a single burble... Everything blurred my head, a thousand ideas sprouted, one tumbling over the other but no sound came to my mouth. The journalist, somewhat irritated, reiterated his question in an approximate English:

“As an European writer, how do you perceive the part of the world where you come from?”

Well, I would have to mobilise all of my resources, all of my sense of repartee, and manage to formulate a clear and precise answer. But this question seemed to me unsolvable! I have lived in Europe for 40 years! Forty years of experiences, of travels, wanderings, comings and goings! How can I respond in a concise manner to a demand of such large scope... Jiminy Crickets! Come on, find something, anything, Anna, scrounge in your little head and find something! Something that strikes the imagination, that translates your thoughts in

the most accurate way!... But the words shrank as I sketched the beginning of a response. My body boiled with a strange fire, redder than Etna's! Yes, my body was manifesting strange things and was subject to mini-crises of hiccoughs, as if I was going to vomit something from the very depths of my guts.

“How do I, as a European author, perceive the corner of the world that I come from? Grrrrr... Anna! Hooooow, hoooooow-
www? Hooooowwwwwww?!!?” I repeated over and over.

All of a sudden, upps, I stood up! I calmly took off my tuxedo jacket, I made myself very comfortable. I murmured:

“Well... As an answer, I could tell you this... My eyes, for example. My eyes have seen many landscapes in Europe: the mountains in Bulgaria where fauna and flora abound, the countryside in Belgium with its gnarled trees like an old woman's hands, the Tuscan earth ripped open by carts as big as cathedrals. Yes, I have seen many landscapes...”

Then I took off my shoes. This took a while, they were very tight. I heard a silence hover over the assembly. I said:

“Another example... My feet! They have walked in the Trastevere of Rome, in Berlin, in Skopje with its statues of Alexander the Great, along the Ljubljanica River in Slovenia, in Madrid, on the ramparts of Avignon, on the Charles Bridge in Prague... I have even run in the boulevards of Paris, of Den Haag, of Luxembourg, along the quays of Liège, of Ulm, in the old alleyways of Rouen, of Venice.”

I undid my hair:

“My hair, it has been cut in Brussels, Volterra, Malaga, Köln, Tbilisi, Thessaloniki...”

I unhooked my blouse and showed one of my shoulders. I could feel the cameras zoom, closing in on my little bit of naked flesh! I continued:

“I have felt the hot wind of the southern desert of Spain on my shoulders, that of Portugal also, that of Croatia...”

Then I took off my blouse, and I raised my arms in the air:

“I have swum in the Mediterranean Sea, in Lake Garda, in Lake Bled, in the rivers of the Ardèche, in the Atlantic Ocean... I have felt the warm currents, the chilly currents, the gentle waves, the heavy violent swell, the secular tides...”

I lowered my skirt and unveiled my belly:

“I have eaten fatty, plump, vegetable, burning hot, meaty, green, reddish, nothing, limp, chopped. I have eaten European animals, many animals, European mammals, European poultry, European birds, fish as well, ocean fish, freshwater fish...”

Finally, I was about to take off my panties when a noise erupted in the hall... I hesitated an instant. Was I going to do it? Some people shouted, “No!”, others “Yeeeeesss! Let her speak!!!” Finally, I listened only to my body and I completed my movement. I heard great “Oooooohs” and “Aaaaaahs” but no one opposed me:

“My sex. My sex, it has made love German style, Belgian style, Spanish style, once Hungarian style, it has been kissed Italian style, Czech style, Greek style...”

Europe, Sir Journalist, this Europe in which I have lived for so many years, I have drunk it, I have lived it, I have written it, read it, danced it, I have thought it, looked at it, devoured it, applauded it, I have hated it sometimes, I have kissed it and I have heard it. It has penetrated, infiltrated even implant-

ed itself in each and every part of my body. This Europe has curled itself in me. It has deposited its strata, beautiful or irritating, in the billions of cells of my organism. I have castles in me, torrents, sunsets, paintings, prose and songs, wars and regions, dialects, herbs.

So, dear Sir, to tell you how I perceive this Europe in which I live and write, you understand that it is impossible for me to give you a quick and nuanced answer constructed from a few simple words, a few consonants and vowels. I would need other tools, watercolours, music, perfumes. Indeed, I can only give you my flesh, my bones, my muscles and my skin colour. All of my experience of Europe is here. In this you must find your answer.”

The journalist, Chinese and stupefied, did not dare to add a thing except a timid “Thankiou” ... In a general outburst, the crowd stood up and, to my great surprise, exploded in a thunder of applause. I was intimidated. And intrigued. Was it my daring that they applauded? Or all those landscapes of Europe that I offered them via the furrows of my body?

Here, in the depths of China, at a distance of thousands of kilometres, I felt my home, Europe, as never before: an immense cartography of sensations.



Latvia

Osvalds Zebris

Salmu vīrs

The Straw Man

EUPL laureate 2017: *Gaiļu kalna ēnā* (Dienas Grāmata)

BIOGRAPHY

Osvalds Zebris, born in 1975, is a Latvian writer and journalist with a master's degree in economics. Zebris has worked in public relations and communications for Hill+Knowlton and McCann, and as an editor for various newspapers and magazines. He is also the author of three novels. Zebris's first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Brīvība tīklos*, brought him instant popularity among readers and won him a Latvian Literature Award in 2010 for best debut. *Gaiļu kalna ēnā* (*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*) was written and published for the historical novel series *We. Latvia. The 20th Century*, focusing on the Latvian experience during 1905 in the Russian Empire. The novel *Koka nama ļaudis* tells the story of a strange wooden house in one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Riga. The wooden house is a breathing character in the story, influencing people living in it and initiating various mysteries. Zebris is a member of the Latvian Writers' Union.

Salmu vīrs

Osvalds Zebris



Saka, ka aprīlis esot ļaunākais no mēnešiem. Šogad tā nav. Aprīli viducī atkausējusi dūsmīga saule. Dubļusniegi sadzinušies melnā zemē, prom aizvilkušies, nu jau gaidāms, ka drīz dīgs.

“Dīgs,” – jauniņam Harisonam Fordam līdzīgais atkārtο pie sevis vēl reizi, vēl vienu un tad notiek kā parasti – tas skan tukši, tam vairs nekā nav iekšā, tas atkal ir neiztaisīts. Viņš var rīkoties pēc savas patikšanas, nekādas briešanas, no zemes ārā spraukšanās, nekādas zelšanas tur nav. “Dīgs” tagad var būt arī “vaidēs” vai “smīnēs”, taču ne šorīt. Nē. Šis nebūs vārdu taisīšanas rīts, kad viņš brauc, skrien, peld, aizsniedzas, sasniedz, pārsniedz, kad viņš rīkojas. Domā par rīkošanos. Šodien ir jāpaujas un jātiek saulē. Īstenībā. Ir viņa dzimšanas dienas rīts.

Pirmo viņš sastop sievieti. Kārtējā, iepriekšparedzamā ikdienišķība. Nē, ne jau pavisam jauniņu, bet meitenīgi tievugan, – stiegrainu skrējēju, kura uzsmaida viņam, iespējams, pat atskatās sarkanas plaukostas pret ceļiem atspiedusi. Viņš neatskatīsies, nē. Glūnēt uz pirmo pretimnācēju, tas nozīmētu mazu zaudējumu jau pie pašām namdurvīm. Kāds caur vieglā auto stiklu, kāds no pirmā stāva virtuves loga, kāds caur koka žalūziju šķirbām viņu pamanījis nosmīnētu: “Lūk, – šis atskatījās. Bija paredzams, tādi allaž atskatās, mehāniska kustība.” Viņš nav mehānisms, nav tas tukšais salmu vīrs, šodien viņš ir ļoti vērīgs un ļoti dzīvs. Šodien viņš būs.

“Labdien, jums arī labu,” viņš atbild laipnajai sievietei no blakus dzīvokļa, kura ir tik klusa, tik neticami atturīga, ka skauž. “Arī man tā šķiet,” viņš piekrīt Juronkulim, kuram rādās, ka

rīt, parīt klāt būs karš. “Nekādā gadījumā!” viņš ir strikts, apaļās brilles tīrot rauc augsto pieri, – viņš piebalso kolēģim Gunāram, ir caur un cauri pret kukuļiem.

“Es... šodien aicinu jūs visus uz...” – viņš mirkli saminstinās. “Lidiņu!” – iesaucas Asja. “Jā, kā tad! Tu vari iet, bet, ja nu tur neko apēdamu tomēr neatrodi, mēs visi būsīm... “Vincentā”,” – viņš precīzi iepauzē, uzliek atpakaļ brilles. Ir trāpīts, tie neizrāda, bet ir. Aleksis un Gunārs, Eižens un Francis, Jana, Maija un arī mazā, spītīgā Asja – mutēs ir ciet. Tad tie viegli piesit pie pieres, atmet ar roku, atceras, steidzas pie darba, uz savām vietām, atpakaļ. “Jā, puķes varētu paķert mūs jauniņā. Asja?” – sprogaino ērkuli no ekrāna neatrāvusi noskalda Maija. Viņa krāsas? “Viņa krāsas, viņa krāsas,” – divas reizes atkārtoto Jana, iespurdzas un šauj laukā, kas ielēcis prātā: “lavandas violets, laima zaļš.”

Mājas, beidzot viens pats. Skatās mazajā spogulī, saviebjas, pašķoba seju, pagroza muti, zobus pablisina. “Kemberbečs,” – viņš pastiepjas vēl sprīdi garāks un lūr sevī caur pieri. Tad galva slīd atpakaļ, zods augšup, acis piemiedzas šauras un smīnīgas. “Eminems,” – izgrūž caur zobiem. Tad Nortons, Deps, Daunijs, Pits, Makkonahijs. Viegli. Iestrēgst pie Īstvuda skatiena, jūt, ka nav tas, nav ticami, jāmet pie malas. Satumsis. Viņš gērbjas aiz skapja durvīm, lai neredz no ielas. Pieliecas, uzspiež kājas muskulim, pietupstas, ieelpo dziļi septiņas reizes. Mierina sevi. “Šis ir mans vakars, mans. Kā vikings es tur atnākšu, es kampšu, piedzeršos, triekšu ar viņiem līdz nemanāi, to Asju vienreiz jāņem pie dziesmas.” Kurš varētu būt viņējais? Kā tad! Tas būs vakara īpašais gājiens – viņš ar aktiera seju. Lai mēģina saprast, kas un kāpēc? Viņš šķirsta ekrānu, starp pirkstiem vīriešu sejas. Iesmejas, murkšķina: “Piedod, nē, citureiz, sorry, stop! Deimons būs īstais, tāds noslēpums, tāds nezināmais... kādi tur iksi.”

“Vincent”, deviņi vakarā, aprīlis, Rīga. Ir labi, silti. Viņi ir draudzīgi, ar viņiem ir droši un viegli, tik necerēti vienkārši. Pat pārsteigts. Mets nevar būt izbrīnīts, nē taču, – iešaujas

prātā, kad septiņas glāzes iegriežas, iedziedas “dzinn” pret viņo vienu. Uzacis lejā, smīnu, mazliet atmestu zodu, smieklus – reizi pa reizei.

“Paklau, tu šovakar esi... nu, tāds kā svešs,” – viņa čukst, iesmejas, pagriežas, piemiedz ar aci priekšniecei Maijai. “Vecāks?” – viņš perfekti nospēlē naivo. “Dzilāks!” – Asja uzgrūžas, noglāsta elkoni, piespiežas viņa rokai, tad atraujas, iesaucas: “Vīnu! Mēs taču esam pelnījuši vienu smalku vīnu, ko?” Pagriežas pret viņu, acumirkli ir maza meitene: “Esam?” Pēc ceturtais pudeles viņā sāk iegriezties nauda. Ieskrūvējas ar vārdiem “rēķins”, “čeks” un tādiem. Mets slīd nost no gludās sejas, viņš sparīgi mirkšķina, smejas jo brīdi, jo skanīgāk, aizvien vēl cenšas būt tagad un te.

“Izejam... uzpīpēt,” – viņa jau atkal tik tuvu, elpa viņam pie vaiga, vīrs auss, pāri tumšajiem matiem. Viņa pieceļas, gaida. “Tas bija jautājums?” “Tas bija teikums.” Spēcīga atbilde, – viņš domā un ceļas no galda, – tieša un trāpīga. “Bet es jau nemaz...” “Šodien tu smēķē, šodien tu drīksti, ja es tevi īpaši lūdzu,” – nu viņa vairāk arī nav pati, bet, kas, kas viņa tagad ir? “Tu... arī to proti, nu, mainīties, iejusties lomās, attēlot citus?” – viņš izpūš sev pār plecu. “Kas?” “Neko, man tikai likās, ka... aizmirsti. Pīpējam klusumā.” Nē, tomēr ir muļķe, – viņš izpūš caur degunu, zods aiziet gaisā, atgriežas smaids. Ir aprīļa vakars, divi pīpē uz stūra.

“Paklau, varbūt... ejam?” viņa uzsmaida, it kā apmulsusi, kā domīga, skatās uz ostas, uz Daugavas pusi, acis neatraujas, iestīgušas. “Bet viņi?” “Tie? Lai sēž, un – lai viņi maksā!” Skrūve no viņa sprūk laukā kā spunde – kā tad, mans vakars, mana diena, lai taču šie maksā. Tā būšot kā dāvana, viņa vēl piebilst, īsziņu raksta, iespurdzas. Par ko? “Raksti viņiem, ka esam uz kuģa, lai šie kāpj nākamajā un tiekamies Stokholmā, tiekamies Londonā, *whatever*, kaut kur.” Viņš smejas, atkal ir viegli, viņi ir divi. Viņi būs divi.

“Nu. Un kur tu mani vedīsi... tagad?” viņa ietinas zaļā šallē, apgriežas pati ap sevi, viņa ir skaista. “Bet tas taču pilnīgi

skaidrs, skaties,” viņš apņēma skaistules plecu ar garu roku, ar otru rāda tumšajā skvērā. “Tur,” – pirksts ādas cimdā lēni brauc no kreisās uz labo, – “mēs satiksīm veci ar atslēgu saišķi. Naktssargu. Viņš vedīs mūs uz pils pusi, mēs iesim gar kanālu, iesim gar kalnu, mēs iesim zem zemes, zem pilsētas nokāpsim. Tur būs milzīga zāle. Durvis. Pa atslēgcaurumiem mēs ieskatīsimies un izvēlēsimies vienas no durvīm, tur mēs ieiesim un paliksim līdz pirmajiem gaiļiem. Tad gan būs jāņem kājas pār pleciem.” “Kas tad tur būs?” “Aiz durvīm? Nu, tas atkarīgs no tā, ko izvēlēsimies, arī no tevis. Kas mums patiks visvairāk, tas arī būs.” “Man riebjas lūrēt pa atslēgu caurumiem. Bez tā nevar?” “Būs grūti, bet... labi. Es lūrēšu tavā vietā un teikšu, ko redzu,” – viņi iegriežas parkā, dzeltena gaisma virs viņiem te uzmirdz, te izzūd. Apstājas, klausās. “Re, “Tallinks” pienāca. Mēs vienreiz ar draudzeni bijām, tas bija kā... labi, jā, tavs plāns. Man nepatīk naktssargs, tas vecis. Kāpēc mēs nevaram iet divatā, kāpēc vajadzīgs arī tas vecis?”

Te viņi stāv – neliela tumšmate ar zaļu šalli, pelēkais mētelis vaļā un viņš – galvu, pusotru garāks, zodu pasistu gaisā, ar smaidu. Viņš pievēris acis un skatās uz zāli ar divpadsmit, divdesmit, piecdesmit durvīm, katrām viņš pieies bez steigas un skatīsies, viņš paraustīs rokturus, durvis būs slēgtas. Vecis šiem bubinās pakaušos, sak, vēls jau, ies mājā, ko čammājas. Viņa spiedīsies tuvāk, spēcīgi smaržos, noliks blakus, teiks, – “es arī gribu, iedod palūrēt, nu, pavirzies taču.” Apniks, ņems vienas uz labu laimi, sargs nosplausies, atslēgs, viņi būs vieni.

Paiet vēl dažus soļus, uzsmēķē, viņa kļūst pikta. “Nu, sapņotāja kungs, ko tad mēs darīsim, ko? Es domāju, īstenībā,” viņa atspiežas pret kaut kādu sienu, kas tā par māju? Tumsā ir grūti salasīt, tumsā pazūd pat burti, bet šķiet, ka rakstīts kaut kas par dzīvi. Sarkani, apaļi burti, apakšā liesmas. “Paklau, ejam pie manis,” beidzot viņš atceras pareizos vārdus. “Īstenībā, vai tā kā ar to naktssargu?” viņa smejas tam sejā, beidzot ieskatās acīs, nebēg. Ko viņš tur redz? Tumsā jau saskatīt grūti, tumsā izgaist pat burti, bet viņam šķiet – izsmieklu, atklātas

ņirgas. Vai varbūt šī smejas par sevi? “Nu, mēs ejam?” melns cimdš saņem viņas balto plaukstu.

Cita roka – pelēka, bez cimda – uzguļas garajam uz pleca. Šis saraujas, dod kā ar strāvu. Ģimī nomainās Kemberbečs, Makkonahijs, Travolta. “Tu tagad tā mierīgi un lēnām paej maliņā, lai varam taču gaismā apskatīt to tavu lellīti,” tas saka mugurā. Vēl viens – zilā kurtkā un cepurē, kas krietni par mazu – iedod garajam ribās. Vienu reizi. Šis nosēcas. Asja apcērtas, uzšņāc kā kaķene, vicina aifonu: “Vācieties, jeb es tūliņ spiežu 112.” “Oi, jau mīžam, bikses i’ pillas. Gunč, tak pieturi viņu, es ņemšu garo. Eu, tu izskaties pēc šitā, pēc tā džeka no “Abbas”. “Abbu” zini?” Gunča pietur, Asja kunkst un īd, tuvāk pie bal-tās sienas, zem burtiem ar liesmām. Tas turpina: “Tu tagad ej mierīgi un ne par ko nedomā,” – kāds viņu pagriež, iesper pa pēcpusi. Dažus soļus viņš sper pēc inerces, nedomā, kā jau bij’ sacīts. Tad iekliezdas Asja, vēl reizi. Viņš neskatās, viņi ir divi, būdīgi tipi, laikam no “Tallinka”, nodomā garais. Vēl četri soļi, vēl. Prātā sēž mazākā ļaunuma jēdziens – visu baiļu rota, tērps no smagnēja samta, ar zelta diedziņiem kristīts. Kas viņš būs tagad? Parkā zib zilas un sarkanas ugunis, iekaucas sirēna, – “dieviņ, paldies!” – šis čukst, ar skatienu pavada kārtības sargus. Būs kārtība, būs.

Pēc gadiem, kad citi sumina garo dzimšanas dienā un vēlāk viņš kāto uz māju pusi – šoreiz viens pats – starp domām par būšanu un nebūšanu, un morālo likumu manī, kas taču spiests sadzīvot ar zvaigžņoto debesi pār mani, starp tām iespraucas tāda kā atmiņa. Tāda kā sirēna, kā bērna vai sievietes balss. Viņš mēģina atcerēties, blenž uz sienu, šķiet, te kādreiz bijuši burti. “Nē, tas nav iespējams, nekad neesmu te bijis,” viņš skatās un sajūta pēkšņi ir tāda, itin kā nupat būtu smēķējis, bet, kur nu, kur jau tie gadi. “Nē taču, murgi!” – viņš atmet ar roku un kājas nes cilvēku prom.

Bet rakstīts tur bija gan, un vārdi sacīja: “Dzīve ir ļoti gara.”

Osvalds Zebris, 2017. g. novembris

The Straw Man

Osvalds Zebris

Translated from Latvian by Laura Adlers

They say April is the cruellest month. Not so this year. The middle of April has been thawed by the angry sun. The slush has been driven into the black earth, dragged itself away, and soon there will be sprouts.

“Sprouting,” – the young Harrison Ford lookalike repeats again to himself, one more time and then as usual – it sounds hollow, there is no substance, once again unconvincing. He can do as he pleases, no build-up, no breaking through the soil, no big announcement. “Sprouting” could now also be “groaning” or “smirking”, but not this morning. No. This will not be a morning of word invention, when he drives, runs, swims, tries to reach, reaches, exceeds, when he is doing his thing. When he thinks about doing something. Today he has to put on his shoes and get out in the sun. Actually. It is the morning of his birthday.

The first person he meets is a woman. The usual, predictable routine. No, not a very young one, but slim like a girl for sure, – a wiry runner, who smiles at him, and possibly even looks back at him as she presses her flushed palms on her knees. He will not look back, no. Leering at the first one to come his way would signify a small loss right from the front door. Someone looking through a car window, from a first-floor kitchen window, or through wooden Venetian blinds would notice him and sneer: “Look, – this guy looking back. That was predictable, his type always looks back, a mechanical action.” He is not a machine, not that empty straw man, today he is very alert and very alive. Today he will be.

“Hello to you too,” he answers the friendly woman from the next apartment, who is so quiet, so unbelievably reserved, that he is envious. “I think so too,” he agrees with Uncle Juris, who believes that there will be war in a day or two. “No way!” he is strict, furrowing his wide brow as he cleans his round glasses, – he supports his colleague Gunars, who is vehemently opposed to bribes.

“I... invite you all today to...” – he pauses to set it up. “Lido!” – exclaims Asja. “Yes, of course! You can go, but, if you can’t find anything edible there, we will all be at... Vincents,” – he pauses deliberately, puts his glasses back on. He’s got them, they don’t show it, but he does. Aleksis and Gunars, Eizenijs and Francis, Jana, Maija, and also little, spiteful Asja – all silent. Then they tap his forehead, wave him away, remember, rush back to their work, back to their places. “Yes, perhaps our youngest could get the flowers. Asja?” – snaps Maija, without turning her curly unkempt head away from the screen. His colours? “His colours, his colours,” – Jana repeats twice, flitting in and spitting out whatever comes to mind: “lavender purple, lime green.”

Home, finally all alone. He looks in the small mirror, winces, crinkles up his face, twists his mouth, flashes his teeth. “Cumberbatch,” – he stretches to make himself a bit taller and checks himself out through his brow. Then his head slides back, chin upward, he squints his eyes narrowly and sneeringly. “Eminem,” – he utters through clenched teeth. Then Norton, Depp, Downey, Pitt, McConaughey. Easy. He gets stuck on Eastwood’s look, he feels that he doesn’t have it, it is not believable, he has to let that one go. It is dark now. He gets dressed behind the closet door, so he cannot be seen from the street. He leans down, presses on his leg muscle, crouches down, breathes deeply seven times. He calms himself. “This is my evening, mine. Like a Viking I will arrive, I will seize the moment, get drunk, chat away until I am incoherent, and finally make a move on Asja.” Who could be her guy? Of course! That will be his special

move tonight – him with an actor’s face. Let them try and understand what and why? He flips through the screen, between his fingers are men’s faces. He laughs and mutters: “Sorry, no, another time, sorry, stop! Damon is the one, such a secret, such an unknown... so much unknown.

“Vincents”, nine o’clock in the evening, April, Riga. It is nice, warm. They are friendly, with them it is safe and easy, simpler than he could hope. He is even surprised. Matt can’t be surprised, surely not, – it occurs to him that there are seven glasses which each make a “dzinn” song when clinked with his. Eyebrows down, a smile, a lowered chin, laughter – one after another.

“Listen, you are – well, kind of strange this evening,” – she whispers, laughs, turns, winks at Maija, their boss. “Older?” – he played dumb perfectly. “Deeper!” – Asja pushes up against him, brushes against his elbow, squeezes his hand, then backs away, exclaims: “Wine! We have surely earned one fine wine, no?” She turns to him, and for a moment is a little girl: “Have we?” After the fourth bottle he starts to worry about money. It really hits him when he hears the words “bill”, “check”, and so on. Matt slides off his smooth face, he blinks nervously, laughs in the moment, ever louder, always trying to stay in the here and now.

“Let’s go out... for a smoke,” – she is so close again, his breath on her cheek, above her ear, past her dark hair. She gets up, waits. “Was that a question?” “That was a statement.” A powerful response, – he thinks and rises from the table, – direct and exact. “But I don’t even...” “Today you smoke, today you are allowed, if I specially invite you to,” – well, she is no longer herself, but who, who is she now? “You... know how to do it too, to change, get into a role, portray others?” – he blows smoke out over his shoulder. “What?” “Nothing, it just seemed to me that... forget it. Let’s smoke in silence.” No, she is a fool after all, – he exhales through his nose, his chin disappears in the

air, his smile returns. It is an April evening, the two of them are smoking on the corner.

“Listen, maybe... let’s go?” she smiles at him, as if confused, deep in thought, looks at the port, towards the Daugava, her eyes not moving, fixated. “But them?” “Them? Let them sit, and – let them pay!” The screw inside him springs free like a plug – why not, my evening, my day, why not let them pay. That will be like a gift, she adds, sending a text, flitting about. For what? “Write that we are on the ship, that they should get on the next one and we will meet in Stockholm, meet in London, whatever, somewhere.” He laughs, it is easy again, they are two. They will be two.

“Well. And where are you going to take me... now?” she wraps the green scarf around her, gives herself a whirl, she is beautiful. “But that is surely completely obvious, look,” he put his long arm around the beauty’s shoulder, with the other he points toward the dark square. “There,” – his finger in a leather glove moves slowly from the left to the right, – “we will meet a guy with a bunch of keys. The nightwatchman. He will take us towards the palace, we will go along the canal, along the hill, we will go underground, we will climb down under the city. There will be a large room. Doors. Through the keyholes we will look inside and will choose one of the doors, into which we will go and stay until the first roosters crow. Then we will really have to run out of there.” “What will be there?” “Behind the door? Well, that will depend on which we choose, and also on you. Whichever we like the best, that is what we will have.” “I hate peeping through keyholes. Can we not do without?” “It will be hard, but... OK. I will peep in your place and tell you what I see,” – they turn into the park, a yellow light flashes on in one place, and disappears in others. They stop and listen. “See, the ‘Tallinks’ has arrived. We were there once with my girlfriend, that was as if... OK, yes, your plan. I don’t like

the nightwatchman, that guy. Why can't we go just the two of us, why does this guy have to come too?"

Here they stand – a petite dark-haired girl with a green scarf, grey coat open and him – taller by a head and a half, with his chin in the air, smiling. He has closed his eyes and is looking at a room with twelve, twenty, fifty doors, he will go slowly to each one and look, he will try the doorknobs, the doors will be locked. The guy will mumble behind them, hey, it's already late, go home, why hang around. She will press closer to him, with a strong smell, bend down next to him, saying, – "I want to too, let me have a look, move over." She will get bored, will take one on good luck, the guard will spit, unlock the door, and they will be alone.

They take a few more steps, take a drag, she becomes irritated. "Well, big dreamer, what are we going to do, what? I mean, for real," she leans against some kind of wall, what kind of house is this? It is hard to read in the dark, the letters even disappear in the dark, but it seems there is something written about life. Red, round letters, underneath flames. "Listen, let's go to my place," he finally finds the right words. "Actually, or like the nightwatchman did?" she laughs in his face, finally looks in his eyes, doesn't leave. What does he see? It is hard to see in the dark, even the letters vanish in the dark, but he senses – mocking, open jeering. Or maybe she is laughing at herself? "Well, are we going?" a black glove takes her white hand.

A different hand – grey, without a glove – is laid on the tall man's shoulder. He flinches, as if he had been hit with a current. His face changes from Cumberbatch to McConaughey to Travolta. "You just calm down and move off to the side, so we can check out your little doll in the light," the one behind him says. Another one – in a blue jacket and hat, which was way too small – punches the tall one in the ribs. Once. He crumples. Asja explodes, hisses like a cat, waves her iPhone: "Get lost, or I will dial 112 right now." "Oy, we are shitting

ourselves, our pants are full. Gus, hold her down, I will take the tall one. Hey, you look like that, like that guy from ABBA. ABBA, you know? Gus holds her, Asja grunts and squeals, closer to the white wall, under the letters with the flames. He continues: “You go quietly now and don’t think about doing anything,” – someone turns him around, kicks him in the butt. He takes a few steps from nothing, he does nothing, as he was told. Then Asja screams, again. He doesn’t look, there are two of them, muscular types, probably from “Tallinka”, thinks the tall guy. Still four steps, still. He is thinking about the concept of lesser evil – the jewel of all fears, a suit made of heavy velvet, christened with gold threads. What will he be now? In the park are flashing blue and red lights, a siren is wailing, – “thank you, god!” – he whispers, with a glance he follows the order guards. There will be order, there will.

Years later, when others celebrate the tall guy on his birthday and he later makes his way home – this time alone – between thoughts about being and not being, and my internal moral compass, which is still forced to coexist with the starry sky over me, between them appears something like a memory. Something like a siren, like a child’s or a woman’s voice. He tries to remember, staring at the wall, thinking there used to be letters here. “No, that is not possible, I have never been here,” he looks and he has a sudden feeling, as if he had just had a smoke, but how can that be, it has been years. “No, it’s just a nightmare!” – he waves his arm and his legs take the person away.

But the writing was there, and the words said: “Life is very long.”

Osvalds Zebris, 2017.g. novembris

The European Union Prize for Literature

Since its creation in 2009, the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL) aims to put the spotlight on the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe's contemporary literature in the field of fiction, to promote the circulation of literature within Europe and to encourage greater interest in non-national literary works.

In the course of the past nine editions, the works of the 108 selected winners have been able to reach a wider and international audience and touched readers beyond both national and linguistic borders.

The Prize, which is co-financed by the *Creative Europe* programme of the European Commission, aims to achieve three main goals: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

The EUPL is organised by a Consortium comprised of the European Writers' Council (EWC), the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) and the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) with support of the European Commission.

Selection Process between 2009-2017

In the past nine editions, the winning authors were selected by qualified juries set up in each of the countries participating in the award. Jury members were appointed by national members of EWC, FEP and EIBF and were composed of a minimum of 3 and a maximum 5 members.

The emerging authors were chosen on the basis of criteria stipulated by the European Commission. Details on these criteria are available on the EUPL website.

10th anniversary edition

In 2018 the European Union Prize for Literature is celebrating its 10th anniversary. To mark this special occasion a virtual and physical journey through the literary Europe and special a writing contest, exclusively open to all previous EUPL winners, have been organised.

The EUPL Writing Contest "A European Story: EUPL Winners Write Europe" is a unique short fiction competition that celebrates Europe, literature and – above all – 10 years of the European Union Prize for Literature.

36 EUPL winning authors from a total of 26 different countries have submitted fascinating European stories with a unique perspective. These stories, written in 23 different

languages, are compiled in this publication along with translations into English.

The EUPL Writing Contest will be judged by both a professional jury and the public, who will each choose a winner.

There will also be a special MEPs Prize, awarded by Members of the European Parliament, as well as a special mention for Cultural Heritage.

The winners of the four different categories will be announced at the Awards Ceremony taking place in Vienna in November 2018.

Professional Jury

A professional jury, made up of distinguished experts from the field of literature, including literary critics, journalists, authors as well as booksellers, will be judging these submissions in the coming months and choose a winner in November 2018.

The members of the professional jury are Maria-João Costa (Portugal), Nina George (Germany), Juancho Pons (Spain), Cathy Rentzenbrink (United Kingdom), Liana Sakelliou (Greece) and Marnix Verplancke (Belgium).

The detailed profiles of the jury members are available on the EUPL website.

Public Jury

The public will also be invited to have their say. All submissions received for the EUPL Writing Contest will be published in an online publication on the EUPL website, which will contain both original texts and English translations. People will be able cast a vote for their favourite short fiction directly on the EUPL website.

MEPs Jury

A jury consisting of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be awarding a special prize to their favourite short fiction. This initiative is spearheaded by Ms Petra Kammerevert, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

Special Mention for Cultural Heritage

As 2018 is the year of European Year of Cultural Heritage, the juries will be invited to give a special mention to the best short fiction in which European heritage plays a significant role.

You can find more information on the European Year of Cultural Heritage on the following website: <https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/>

