MUNDUS ARTIUM

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Mario Luzi

NEL CORPO OSCURO DELLA METAMORFOSI

A Carlo Betocchi, ai suoi meravigliosi settanta anni.

...quia talia sunt, ut in eis agantur vicissitudines temporum...

AGOSTINO

1

"La vita secondo il pensiero ci astrae dalle sorgenti del pensiero,
la vita secondo la vita
ci induce in errori e sofferenze da cui è impossibile la vita"
mi rimanda la parete di un sogno
sognato da sveglio. "Impossibile vivere, pensare anche" reca scritto
una rupe screpolata, guarda meglio:
una ragnatela di grinze, un volto
sconfitto di maestro d'Occidente
in cui più nulla è vivo che due punti—due occhi di lui—e il silenzio.

—È più grande di così il mondo—sorrido
e penso alla mia ilarità come a uno stormo
in fuga da una casa crollante.
—Perditi se vuoi ritrovarti, desidera
per non avere—mi traversa
e mi snebbia la vista un lampo
forse dalla mia parte d'innocenza
che come l'acqua ha resistito alla macina
e per questo, per questo non si arrende.
Mario Luzi

IN THE DARK BODY OF METAMORPHOSIS*

tr. I. L. Salomon

To Carlo Betocchi for his remarkable seventy years
. . . because they are such, the events of epochs occur in them...

St. Augustine

1

"Life consonant with thought abstracts us from the sources of thought, life consonant with life leads us into error and suffering where life is impossible"

the wall of a dream dreamt wide-awake

thrusts me back. "Impossible to live, even to think"—a cracked rock

bears this inscription; take a good look:

a cobweb of wrinkles, the defeated face

of a master-thinker of the western world

where nothing lives but two points—two eyes of a wren—and silence.

The world is greater than that—I smile

and I think of my hilarity as a covey in flight from a house collapsing.

Lose yourself if you wish to find yourself; desire so as not to have—lightning

slants across me and brightens my vision perhaps from my side of innocence

that like water has withstood the millstone

and for this, this, does not surrender.

*Translation dedicated to Allen Tate.
“Prega,” dice “per la città sommersa”
venendomi incontro dal passato
o dal futuro un’anima nascosta
dietro un lume di pila che mi cerca
nel liquame della strada deserta.
“Taci” imploro, dubioso sia la mia
di ritorno al suo corpo perduto nel fango.

“Tu che hai visto fino al tramonto
la morte di una città, i suoi ultimi
furiosi annaspamenti d’annegata,
ascoltane il silenzio ora. E risvegliati”
continua quell’anima randagia
che non sono ben certo sia un’altra dalla mia
alla cerca di me nella palude sinistra.
“Risvegliati, non è questo silenzio
il silenzio mentale di una profonda metafora
come tu pensi la storia. Ma bruta
cessazione del suono. Morte. Morte e basta.”

“Non c’è morte che non sia anche nascita.
Soltanto per questo pregherò”
le dico sciaguattando ferito nella melma
mentre il suo lume lampeggia e si eclissa in un vicolo.
E la continuità manda un riflesso
duro, ambiguo, visibile alla talpa e alla lince.

* 

Quante vite, questa per esempio
detta mia per inerzia e abitudine . . .
E ora lei che con lo sguardo perduto
affiora in superficie
sdrucendo una pellicola di pioggia
dal profondo della città pescosa,
prende per mano suo figlio, una mano,
mi sembra, sfuggente alla sua presa,
boccheggia, non pronunzia parola
“Pray,” it says “for the drowned city.”
Coming to me face to face from the past
or from the future, an apparition hidden
behind a flashlight searches for me
in the oozy mire of the deserted street.
“Quiet,” I plead, uncertain it may be my soul
returning to my body lost in that mud.

“You who have watched until sunset
the death of a city, its last
furious pawing of air in drowning,
listen now to its silence. And wake up,”
that wandering apparition continues,
I not quite certain it may be another’s, not my soul
in search of me in the ominous marsh.
“Awake, this silence is not
the mental silence of a profound metaphor
as you contemplate history. But a brutal
cessation of sound. Death. Death and no more.”

“There is no death that is not also birth.
Only for this will I pray.”
Injured, sloshing in slime, I speak to it
while its light, eclipsed in an alley, flashes,
and its after-image sends a glaring reflection
ambiguous and visible to the lynx and the mole.

* 

How many lives, this for example
called my own out of inertia and habit...
And now with a bewildered glance
a figure surfaces,
ripping a membrane of rain
from the depth of the fish-swarmed city,
takes her son by the hand, a hand
it seems to me, escaping her grip;
gasping, she says not a word
mentre io ne ricevo dolore
più in là di quella causa, e ondate
d’un rimorso che tende allo spasimo
la parte infinitesima di tempo
in cui l’azione è sospesa, o il pulsar.

"Aggirarsi in questo chiacchiericchio da souk,
vendere i propri meriti o anche fumò soltanto,
patteggiare, tramare il proprio utile,
beninteso portando il lutto per la rivoluzione mancata . .
beh, c’è stato destino peggiore sotto il sole"
scherzavo io coi miei compagni d’un tempo
sapendo e non sapendo d’inasprire col fuoco
una piaga maligna che butta pus.
"Perfido" mi ustionavano vivo
appena entrato nel raggio delle lenti
quegli occhi di cetacei, liquorosi,
ugualmente sensibili al potere, ai buoni affari e al rimorso.

La frasca riveduta
nella nudità di sterpo,
il luogo delle scorrerie d’estate
visitato fuori stagione, calvo,
ossuto, irritato dal freddo—pensavo frattanto.

O gioventù, per l’uomo
perduto in un amore senza limiti,
senza ritorno di coscienza, il punto
tra memoria e desiderio
si sposta, è alla deriva di un gorgo.
Passato ed avvenire s’invertono,
su sé si capovolgono, delfini
o tonni nella rete del senso.
Sono io dalla parte del torto, amen.
Salvo l’uso della parola. Meno
la pentecoste del dolore
che brucia tutti nello stesso stampo.

E quel vino. Quel vino che in gola non si appanna.
while I feel the pain
beyond that cause, and waves
of remorse strain to a spasm
the infinitesimal instant of time
where the event is suspended or the pulsar.

2

"To walk about to the chattering of a bazaar-hawker,
to sell what's worthwhile or even perpetrate a swindle,
to bargain and plot in self-interest,
aptly wearing black for the lost revolution... well, worse has been destined under the sun."
I used to joke with my one-time friends;
aware and unaware that with fire I aggravated
a malign wound spurting pus.
"Vicious" just as I came into the gleam of their glasses
those watery cetacean eyes
equally sensitive to power, good business, remorse
scalded me alive.

The leafy bough seen once again
bare as a twig,
that place of our summer excursions
come on out of season, bleak,
bony, nipped by cold—in the meantime I was thinking.

O my youth! for man lost
in limitless love
without return of conscience, the point
between memory and desire shifts,
adrift in a whirlpool.

Time past and future reverse direction
and capsize; dolphin
and tuna in the net of perception.
It's I who am on the wrong side, amen.
Except for the gift of speech. Less
the Pentecost of grief
that smelts everyone in the same mold.

And that wine. That wine not dulled in the throat.
L’ombra fra i due d’un amore impari
a svantaggio di lei che un poco ne soffre
e un po’ divertita ne sorride
saggia, con un divorzio alle spalle
neanche troppo amaro, il filo
solo un poco allentato
di molte buone usanze, viaggi, arte,
un Natale dignitoso passato a Zermatt.

Di tutto questo si scusa in umiltà e con grazia
fatue ma solo quel tanto,
lo spazio d’un saluto, anzi d’uno sguardo.
Se ne scusa con me che appena l’osservo
e immergo nei suoi un mio pensiero
svagato in questa luce di Lungarno.

“Sofferenze che vanno
che vengono e ti sporcano.
E intanto ti maturano, ti portano al punto...”
La voce sempre udita di donna
che fu di mia madre ed ora è sua, la voce
sacrificale che scioglie il nodo
amoroso e doloroso di ogni esistenza, si stacca
da qualche scambio di parole avuto
con molti intercalari, opaco, nella caverna dell’anno
non in primavera, nei vaperi della sua nascita.

Voce afona spogliata della gorga
di lei che provvisoria
l’improntò della sua pena
e la chiuse nella stretta
di timidezza e d’ansia
del diverbio in cucina, della preghiera sulle scale, anonima,
affaticata dal mare del mutamento e ferma
che trapan, rifonde dal principio ogni sostanza,
la città nella pietra, la storia nei suoi eventi.
The shadow between lovers of unequal ardor
is to her detriment, who suffers a little
and slightly amused and wise,
smiles, divorce behind her
not altogether bitter.
Only slightly slackened is the thread
Of many good habits, trips, the arts,
a dignified Christmas at Zermatt.

Of all this she excuses herself with humility
and grace, yet frivolous only so far,
time for a greeting or rather a glance.
She excuses herself as I hardly look at her
and into her thoughts I plunge one of my own,
pleasure-minded in this light on the Lungarno.

*  

"Sufferings that come,
that go, besmirch you.
In the interval they mature you, carry you to a point. . ."
The voice of a woman always heard,
once my mother's, now hers, the sacrificial
voice that dissolves the knot
loving and grievous in every life, severs itself
from some exchange of words,
opaque in their meanings in the cavern of the year,
not in the spring but in the haze of its birth,

Voice deprived of speech in her throat
who temporarily marked
her pain there
and shut it in that strait
of fear and anxiety
during a spat in the kitchen, a pleading on the stairs.
Impersonal and steady, wearied by the sea-change
that voice bores through, recasts every substance from the beginning,
the city in stone, history by its events.
“Tu che vanti la conoscenza del mare e non ce l’hai”
m’avvisa un grido inutilmente burbero
evocando cera nelle orecchie, corpi legati all’albero
“non ignorarne la dolcezza, non tradire nessuna memoria,
ma prosegui il tuo viaggio. Fa’ la tua parte. E che sia giusta.”

3

La strada tortuosa che da Siena conduce all’Orcia
traverso il mare mosso
di crete dilavate
che mettono di marzo una peluria verde
è una strada fuori del tempo, una strada aperta
e punta con le sue giravolte al cuore dell’enigma.

Reale o irreale, solare o notturna—
assorti ne seguivano
il lungo saliscendi
di padre in figlio i miei vecchi con un presagio di tormento.
Reale o irreale, solare o notturna—
interroga negli anni
la mente—e l’idea di vita le si screzia
d’un volto doppio imprendibile—
interroga il pianeta duro della landa,
i poggi bruciati, le sparse rocche.
E il vento, non so se dal tempo o dallo spazio, che frusta il sangue.

Pensieri tirati sulla corda
d’un’interrogazione senza fine
non lasciano vivere, non hanno risposta.
Lo intende bene lei passata da quelle dune.

*

“Non distinguere, non dividere. Prendi
il tuo bene come ti viene offerto”
vuole giungere a me, batte colpi sul diaframma del tunnel
lui che avanza dal lato più lucente,
alter ego solare della vicenda, mia gioiosa antiparte.
“Tieni in serbo la tua sapienza, per dopo, per un altro tempo”
gli resisto ancora, gli resisto come posso.
"You who boast of familiarity with the sea and have it not"
a useless gruff cry, evocative of bodies bound to the mast,
ears stopped with wax, warns me
"not to ignore its sweetness, not to betray remembrance,
but to go my way, do what I have to. And may it be right."

3

Across the troubled sea
of washed clays,
become a downy green in March,
the crooked road from Siena that goes on to Orcia
is a road outside of time, an open road
pointing as it winds to the heart of the enigma.

Real or unreal, solar or nocturnal—
my ancestors from father to son
with foreboding torment
attentively followed its ups and downs.
Real or unreal, solar or nocturnal—
the mind interrogates
the years (and the idea of life is speckled
in a face doubly unassailable),
examines the rough plant on the moor,
the burning hillocks, the scattered rocks,
and the wind, I know not whether of time or space, that thwarts the blood.

Thoughts drawn on the string
of endless questioning
do not permit existence, provide no answers.
She indeed understands this who walked through those dunes.

* 

"Not to distinguish, not to divide. Take
the good as it is offered you."
He who goes forward from the brighter side
wants to reach me, hammers blows on the tunnel's diaphragm,
a solar alter ego of the story, my joyous counterpart.
"Preserve wisdom for later, for another time."
I still resist him, resist him as I can.
Non siamo ormai molto lontani da Tiflis
nell’ora, tra Asia ed Occidente,
che inchiostra d’un turchino da sillabario i monti
quando lui riprende: “Per amore dell’ombra?
del rovello del mondo e della tua mente?”
“Non solo questo” mormoro io sotto quella sferza
nell’aria rota da un brivido tra Caucaso e Caspio.

*  

Lei che pensa all’autunno dei parchi
e negli occhi e nei capelli trattiene
qualcosa della tenerezza d’alberi
mentre lui le invecchia di fronte
di là da una cascata silenziosa
si sente indovinata da me
che al rullio del treno la guardo
e non trova indiscreto il mio sorriso
ma lo accoglie in sé, lo ricambia
rifranto all’infinito nel suo.

Ma ancora più vasto un senso inesprimibile
come quando agli stampi vuoti della storia
affluisce un metallo nuovo che poco vi si adegra
né altri se ne trovano di pronti alla colata
ora, nell’istante irreversibile, o mai.
E in quella dispersione di potenza
malato nella volontà o drogato
un grumo ancora detto anima si avvita
su di sé, sbanda in un movimento inceppato:
e non per poco ma per troppo ardore si logora.

O non è invece a limarti un messaggio impercettibile ad orecchio
mentre avverti, non è raro,
nelle sue vertebre lucenti,
nelle sue cartilagini febbrili vibrarne il mondo—mi chiedo.
E in quella: “vieni a me”
Now we are not far from Tiflis
between Asia and the West in that hour
that splatters ink from a sky-blue speller on the mountains
when he resumes: “For love of shade?
Of the world’s and your mind’s rage?”
“Not only this,” I grumble under that lash
in the air broken by a shuddering between the Caucasus and the
Caspian.

She who thinks of parks in autumn
has in her eyes and hair
something of the tenderness of trees;
as if behind a silent waterfall,
he grows old before her,
who is aware of my conjecture
as in the rolling train I observe her;
she does not find my smile indiscreet
but welcomes it in an exchange
refracted unendingly in her own.

But there is an even greater inexpressible sense
as into the empty molds of history
a new metal flows, barely adequate,
nor are others found ready for the casting now,
this irreversible instant, or never.
And in that dispersion of power
sick in the will or drugged
a clot still called soul spins
about by itself and breaks up, its movement impeded:
not by a little but by too much ardor is it consumed.

Or rather isn’t it a message like radar imperceptible to the ear that
worries you,

while you observe (it is not rare)
its world vibrate in sparkling vertebrae
in feverish cartilage—I ask myself.
And at that moment someone screams
mi grida qualcuno con voce strappata,
uscito dalla pioggia, si direbbe, con due "bae de tempesta",
due fori bianchi per occhi causa la consuetudine col mare,
intimandomi sangue freddo e calma,
pilotandomi fuori da un risucchio
brulicante di scorie—o almeno vorrebbe.
Mentre io tra ossequio e riluttanza
mi protendo e mi rifiuto
nell’aria pigra ancora azzurra di notte della stanza.

Oppure quando un tempo sotto pressione
disperde la sua potenza inservibile
in una nube vorticosa di scorie
e tu stesso in una parte di te—non sai
bene quale—soffri, vorresti dormire,
ma un’inquieta
semicoscienza ti tiene sveglio,
non del tutto presente alla metamorfosi
e al lungo dolore della nascita di un’epoca.

Ne viene un senso, ti ammala,
di forza dissipata
dal mondo, dal disunito.

"Ma che piccola cosa il tuo lamento"
rimprovera dal fondo pullulante degli occhi
uno sguardo un po’ bambino—lo sguardo azzurro carico
della creazione, ti sembra—
che ti buca la retina con il suo battito e ride
cacciandoti dal chiuso
dell’infermità dell’anima, chiamandoti al futuro
di un universo in crescita. E non ammette risposta.

"Non sapevi, non ricordavi
tormenti come questo di tempi
più maturi e meno di te?"
balbetta un dormiveglia
in a distorted voice: "Come to me,"
one inured to the sea, in out of the rain,
one would say, with two hailstones or two white holes for eyes,
ordering me to be cold-blooded and calm,
piloting me outside a whirlpool
swarming with slag—or at least he’d like to,
while I between deference and reluctance
thrust forward yet withhold myself
in the sluggish air of my room still blue with night.

* 

Or when time under pressure
scatters its futile power
in a whirling cloud of slag
and yourself in one part of you—you know not
what precisely—suffers as you would sleep,
a restless
semiconsciousness keeps you awake
not completely present at the metamorphosis
and the long grief of the birth of an epoch.

A sense of strength
dissipated by the world and disunity
derives from it and sickens you.

"But how small a thing your lament"
a childish glance, a reproach
in the budding depth of the eyes—the deep blue
glance of creation, it seems to you—
which pierces your retina with its throbbing and brightens,
driving you from the enclosure
of the soul’s infirmity, calling you to the future
of an expanding universe. This calls for no answer.

* 

"Didn’t you know or remember
torments like this of times
more and less mature than you?"
The soul half-awake hesitates
che è l’anima o piuttosto straziata nelle palpebre
dal battito dei suoi colori chimici la notte stessa, l’insonnia.

“Non sapevi, non ricordavi?”
rimugina un vento di rovina
fiutato dai proconsoli
in qualche provincia in disarmo;
“non sapevi, non ricordavi?”
gorgogliano da sotto il pelo della broda le risaie del Vietnam.
“Poco, poco vale la memoria di questo.”

*——In questo albergo,
in questo albergo—mi ricordano—si uccise Essenin.

5

Chiesa, Chiesa...
GIOVANNA MARINI

Qualcosa la sovrasta e la domina,
la fa piangere e offrirmi in silenzio lacrime
mentre io non circoscritto in un limite
di passato e di presente la guardo
e non turbo l’assise silenziosa
con domande od altro, la guardo
negli occhi bassi perduti nel disegno del kashemir.
E ricevo la forza d’amore e di dolore
del mondo. E più ancora, più ancora di questo.

*——Quasi non lo ricordo—intende il suo primo marito.
Non aveva più volto
perché il volto dell’uomo era distrutto
e forse lo è ancora, sebbene i lager...

Il suono di metallo battuto a freddo che ha la sua voce
mi colpisce di striscio in un punto tra l’animale e l’uomo
non molto alto nella scala
chi sa se mai raggiunto dalla trivella di fuoco della redenzione,
or rather the night itself
torn by the blinking of chemical hues—inomnia.

“Didn’t you know or remember?”
A ruinous wind sensed by proconsuls
broods over and over
in some dismantled province.
Didn’t you know or remember?
The ricefields of Vietnam gurgle from under the film of muddy water.
“The memory of this is worth little, little.”

* * *

—in this hotel
in this hotel—they remind me—Essenin killed himself.

5

Church, Church
Giovanna Marini

Something imminent dominates her,
makes her weep and offer me tears in silence
while I not circumscribed by any limit
of the past and present look at her
and do not disturb the silent session
with demands or anything else. I study
her eyes lowered to and lost in the arabesque design.
And I receive the power of love and sorrow
of the world. And still more, still more than this.

* * *

“I almost don’t remember him.”—she means her first husband.
“He no longer had a face,
since man’s was destroyed
and perhaps still is, granted that concentration camps...”
The sound of metal hammered cold has a timbre
that glances off me not very high in the scale
at a point between animal and man
who knows whether ever reached by the swirling fire of redemption,
certo non mai salito al vento e alla luce,
non per questo morto o perduto. Dolore
che ne segue, opaco, diffuso
tra i nodi di liana della specie,
non mio, non all’altezza del cuore,
non del braccio radiale della croce—
che ne sai tu
che ascolti non lei il manichino svuotato di memoria che un poco le somiglia
squittire nell’aria dilavata la perdita dell’uomo senza contorni di fattezze
in questo dopotempo, in questa malattia di non amore che dilaga—

Tendile le braccia piuttosto
mentre nell’entroluce turchino
la primavera affogata nell’erba
le bersaglia i timpani con bordate di sangue,
le batte il suo ritmo di tamburo trionfale e umilante.

*  

La città vuota nel pomeriggio di festa
di ponte in ponte infilata dall’armo
sul fiume ombroso alla ricerca del ritmo
mentre lei che è simile all’albero del sandalo
e profuma la scure che la recide
riapre la sua casa piena di solitudine
ma quasi con un sorriso di grazie
nell’attimo, lo so,
che le riappare davanti
la sua felicità fotografata da un lampo.
Non la chiamo indietro, non la trattengo.
Né la strappa al mutamento questo pensiero
come pensato da un altro o forse neanche.

*  

Lei, l’agnello, la vittima del brutto risveglio
siede ora nel suo angolo
franata dentro—può darsi—
ma eretta nell’amara dignità che le resta del comprendere
surely not ever risen to the wind and light, not for this dead or lost. Grief that follows dulled, diffused between the liane knots of mankind, not mine, not at heart’s height not of the horizontal arms of the Cross—what do you know who listen not to her but to a manikin emptied of memory that resembles her a little, squeaking in the washed-out air of the loss of man with no contours to features in this aftertime, in this sickness of non-love that overflows— rather stretch your arms to her while in the blue inner light springtime drowned in the grass strikes her ear-drums, blood pounding, beats its rhythm on a triumphal, if humiliating, drum.

* The city empty the holiday afternoon a scull threading its way from bridge to bridge on the shadowy river in search of a rhythm while she who is like sandalwood perfumes the axe that cuts her; she reopens the house replete with loneliness but almost with a gracious smile; at the moment I know it when her felicity photographed by flashbulb reappears in front of her. I don’t call her back. I don’t detain her. Not this thought as if thought by another, or not even that, wrenches her from mutation.

* A lamb, a victim of troubled awakening, she sits now in her corner crushed—it may be— but erect in her bitter dignity that remains of understanding
e passa di grandi ore inutili
ascoltando con altri orecchi musica già udita,
risfogliando con mente mutata i libri letti
e appassisce e risplende della sua rinnovata solitudine,
strano evento, perfino grandioso, che le capita
non più grande di lei che lo accoglie tra anima e chacram.

—Non pensarti colpevole o incolpevole.
Non è questo il punto: se a te
più che ad altri è toccato di offenderla—
sorride frattanto il suo pastore
e pastore della sua angoscia Giovanni
sospeso in quel respiro di sisma e fisso non di meno
nella luce di miniera celeste che le è intorno:
mentre percepisco il farsi,
il disfarsi, l'origine continua, il bugno.

6

Il risvolto della felicità di un'epoca.
La regina della città rupestre
con la sua mente lucida, con le sue lacrime
e quelle più oscure dei suoi sudditi
per nulla catturate dalla perfezione dell'opera—

Sì, la fissità solare del numero.
Ma, dietro e dopo, il timore del mutamento,
la sua necessità. E l'anima malata al punto che non solo non ha pace

ma non vuole pace, non desidera niente,
rifiuta il nutrimento, rifiuta la vita.

A questo penso mentre indugio tra pochi altri incantati sullo scalino rovente
e il colombo fila l'olio azzurro dello stordimento
da un versante all'altro della luce di mezzogiorno
nella piazza-miracolo che non ha vere ombre
se non rare fenditure, qua e là, nelle muraglie di marmo.

Un istante che dura ed abbacina
segnato nella linea volante delle alte cupole

24
she spends heavy futile hours
listening with different ears to music once heard,
releafing books read with a mind transformed,
and she withers and glows in renewed solitude,
strange event, even majestic, that befalls her
no grander than herself who welcomes it between soul and the life-source.

—Do not think of yourself as guilty or innocent.
This is not the point: if you
more than others happened to offend her.—
Meanwhile her shepherd smiles,
the Shepherd of her anguish, John,
suspended in that seismic breath and fixed no less
in the light of the celestial quarry that surrounds her:
while I perceive the doing,
the undoing, the continual source, the hive.

6

The obverse of felicity in an epoch:
the queen of the rocky city,
bright of mind, her weeping
and the humbler tears of her subjects
in no way caught up in the perfection of work—

yes, the solar immutability of number.
But, before and after, the fear of change,
its necessity. And the spirit sick at a stage where it not only has no
peace
but wants no peace, desires nothing,
rejects nourishment, rejects life.

Of this I think as I loiter on the scorching stairs among a few others
astonished

as a pigeon whirls a blue oil of dizziness
from one slope to another in noon light
in the miraculous square that has no true shadow
but a thin crack here and there in the marble walls.

An instant that holds and dazzles
marked by a flying line of lofty cupolas
al riparo, sembra, dalla metamorfosi—
Adempiuto il compito della potenza e dell’arte.
Ma l’altro, la parte imprendibile del fuoco—mi dico
e penso lo sguardo lungo di antilope delle donne del luogo.

*

Non di meno: “inseguimi”
mi trafisge nel sonno
col suo trillo d’allodola passata tra le maglie
della fucileria domenicale la vita
mentre io legato alla noria
del mutamento del mondo
(e sia pure, mi dico, con ali d’ippogrifo)
sorrido, non le rispondo.
“Inseguimi” ripete quel suo grido
ma di già più lontano e come semidetto da un’arpa.

Lo confido a te che già mi leggi i pensieri
e non ne provo rossore, e neppure tormento.

*

Lo sboccio improvviso di più anima
nel mattino tutto sole di una fede senza sospetto
condivisa con me, anzi unica
e se possibile universa—è questo
che oscuramente aspetta, sono certo,
fissa la calamita della mente,
fissa sui grandi trapassi,
quando nasce un amore—chi sa—
o irrompe nella dura prospettiva
della storia il treno di Trotzkij.

La speranza—so poco di lei.
Se non che già ne sfolgora il suo viso
che così illuminato mi ricorda
la nube di fuoco del querceto
un po’ sopra il nevaio. Senza questo,
mi dico, anche meno. Anche meno saprei.
sheltered, it seems from metamorphosis—
the consummation of power and art.
But the other, the unassailable part of the fire—I tell myself
and think of the long antelope glance of local women.

*

Nevertheless: "Follow me."
Life, its skylark warbling piercing the meshes
of the Sunday fusillade,
transfixes me asleep
while I bound to the water-wheel
of change in the world
(also, I tell myself, with the wings of a hippogriff)
smile and don't answer—.
"Follow me" that scream repeats,
already more distant as if half-spoken by a harp.

I confide it to you who already read my thoughts
and I feel no shame, not even torment.

*

The sudden blossoming of the very soul
in the full morning sun of absolute faith
shared with me, rather unique
and possibly universal—is this
that darkly awaits, I am certain,
the fixed magnet of the mind,
fixed in its great transits
when love is born—who knows—
or Trotsky's train breaks through
the tough perspective of history.

Hope—I know little about it.
Or else it blazes in her face
so illuminated I am reminded of
a cloud of fire in a stand of oaks
a little above the snowfield. Without this,
I say, even less. I'd know even less.
Il punto vivo, la primavera del mondo
che sfolgora e recede all’infinito
ergli occhi dell’altro
nell’ora che il pensiero condiviso
in pieno sopprime l’ombra
e detto e non ancora dicibile
sfavillano nella mente reciproca,
il punto vivo, il punto pullulante dell’origine continua—

si sciolse dal suo passato, lei,
tagliò il mio cammino di sonnambulo
un po’ come gli uccelli
sorpresi dalla sete che scollinano basso,
mi venne incontro sul ciglio
dove andavo con pericolo
cercando erbe—
guarigioni nell’ignoranza.

E può non essere più la stessa,
subentrarle un’altra
che la perpetua, la sgomina,
la converte in lacrime . . .—penso
anni dopo—o evi—mentre le guardo le pupille
e sorprendo il mutevole e il durevole
strettamente mischiati nella sorgente.
The living instant, the springtime of the world
that blazes and recedes into infinity
in another's eyes
now when thought shared
completely suppresses shadow
and the spoken and the still unutterable
sparkle in identical minds,
the living point, the budding root of her continual beginning—

she freed herself from the past,
cut across my sleepwalker's path
a little like a bird
surprised thirsting in flight down hill
and came to meet me face to face on the brink
where I walked in danger
looking for herbs—
remedies for the ignorant.

And no longer can she be the same
or have another replace her
to perpetuate and overwhelm her
and make her cry... —I think
years—or ages later. As I look into her eyes
I come on the mutable and the eternal
intimately mixed in the source.
THE DUEL

JORGE LUIS BORGES

tr. NORMAN THOMAS DI GIOVANNI

Henry James—whose world was first revealed to me by one of my two characters, Clara Figueroa—would perhaps have been interested in this story. He might have devoted to it a hundred or so pages of tender irony, enriched by complex and painstakingly ambiguous dialogues. The addition at the end of some melodramatic touch would not have been at all unlikely, nor would the essence of the tale have been changed by a different setting—London or Boston. The actual events took place in Buenos Aires, and there I shall leave them, limiting myself to a bare summary of the affair, since its slow evolution and sophisticated background are quite alien to my particular literary habits. To set down this story is for me a modest and peripheral adventure. I should warn my reader ahead of time that its episodes are of less importance than its characters and the relationship between them.

Clara Glencairn de Figueroa was stately and tall and had fiery red hair. Less intellectual than understanding, she was not witty, though she did appreciate the wit of others—even of other women. Her mind was full of hospitality. Distinctions pleased her; perhaps that’s why she traveled so much. She realized that her world was an all too arbitrary combination of rites and ceremonies, but these things amused her and she carried them out with dignity. Her family married
her off very young to a distinguished lawyer, Isidro Figueroa, who was to become the Argentine ambassador to Canada and who ended by resigning that post, stating that in a time of telephones and telegraph, embassies were anachronisms and amounted to a needless public burden. This decision earned him the disapproval of all his colleagues; Clara liked the Ottawa climate—after all, she was of Scottish ancestry—and the duties of an ambassador's wife did not displease her, but she never once dreamed of protesting. Figueroa died soon after. Clara, following several years of indecision and self-searching, took up the exercise of painting—stimulated, perhaps, by the example of her friend Marta Pizarro.

It is characteristic of Marta Pizarro that when speaking about her people referred to her as the sister of the brilliant Nélida Sara, who was married and divorced.

Before choosing palette and brush, Marta Pizarro had considered the alternative of writing. She could be quite clever in French, the language in which she had done most of her reading, while Spanish was to her—like Guaraní to ladies in the Province of Corrientes—little more than a household utensil. The literary supplements had placed within her reach pages of Lugones and of the Spaniard Ortega y Gasset; the style of these masters confirmed her suspicion that the language to which she had been born was less fit for expressing the mind or the passions than for verbal showing off. Of music, all she knew was what any person who attends a concert should know. Coming from the western province of San Luis, she began her career with faithful portraits of Juan Crisóstomo Lafinur and of Colonel Pascual Pringles, which were—as was to be expected—acquired by the Provincial Museum. From portraits of local worthies, she passed on to pictures of old houses in Buenos Aires, whose quiet patios she painted with quiet colors and not that stage-set showiness with which they are frequently endowed by others. Someone—surely not Clara Figueroa—remarked that her whole art drew its inspiration from the work of anonymous nineteenth-century Italian bricklayers. Between Clara Glencairn and Nélida Sara (who, according to gossip, had once had a fancy for Dr. Figueroa) there had always been a certain rivalry; perhaps the duel was between them and Marta was merely a tool.

As is well known, most things originate in other countries and only in time find their way into the Argentine. That now so unjustly forgotten school of painters who call themselves concrete or abstract, as if to show their utter scorn for logic and language, is but one of many examples. It was argued, as I recall, that just as music is ex-
pected to create its own world of sound, its sister art, painting, should be allowed to attempt a world of color and form without reference to any actual physical objects. The Dallas art critic Lee Kaplan wrote that their pictures, which outraged the bourgeoisie, followed the Biblical proscription, also shared by the Islamic world, that man shall make no images of living things. The iconoclasts, he argued, were going back to the true tradition of painting, which had been led astray by such heretics as Dürer and Rembrandt. Kaplan’s enemies accused him of being influenced merely by broadloom rugs, kaleidoscopes, and men’s neckwear.

All aesthetic revolutions put forth a temptation toward the irresponsible and the far too easy; Clara Glencairn chose to be an abstract painter. Having always been an admirer of Turner, she set as her goal the enrichment of abstract art with the diffused splendor of the Master. She worked under no pressure, painted over or destroyed a number of canvases, and in the winter of 1954 exhibited a series of temperas in a gallery on Suipacha Street whose specialty was paintings which a military metaphor then in vogue called the vanguard. Something paradoxical happened: on the whole, the reviews were favorable, but the sect’s official organ condemned her anomalous forms, which, although they were not representational, suggested the tumult of a sunset, of a tangled forest, or of the sea, and did not limit themselves to dots and stripes. Perhaps the first person to smile was Clara Glencairn. She had tried her best to be modern and the moderns had rejected her. The act of painting, however, mattered more to her than its public success, and she went on working. Indifferent to this episode, art also went on.

The secret duel had already begun. Marta was not an artist alone; she was, as well, deeply committed to what may not unfairly be called the administrative side of art, and was assistant secretary of the organization known as the Giotto Circle. Sometime toward the middle of 1955, Marta managed to have Clara, who had already been accepted into the Circle, figure as a committee member among the Circle’s new officers. The fact, in itself trivial, may be worth analyzing. Marta had lent support to her friend, but it is undeniable—although mysterious—that the person who confers a favor in some way stands above the one who receives it.

Around 1960, “two plastic artists of international stature”—may we be forgiven the jargon—were in the running for a first prize. One of the candidates, the elder, had dedicated solemn oils to the representation of awe-inspiring gauchos of a Scandinavian altitude; his
rather young rival, a man in his early twenties, had won both praise and indignation through deliberate chaos. The members of the jury, all past fifty and fearing that the general public would impute outdated standards to them, tended to favor the latter painter, though deep down they rather disliked him. After arguing back and forth, at first politely and finally out of boredom, they could not reach an agreement. In the course of their third meeting, one of them remarked, "B. seems quite bad to me; really, I think he's even worse than Clara Figueroa."

"Would you give her your vote?" said another juror, with a trace of scorn.

"Yes," answered the first, at the brink of ill-temper.

That same evening, the prize was unanimously granted to Clara Glencairn. She was elegant, lovable, scandal had never touched her, and in her villa out in Pilar she gave parties to which the most lavish magazines sent photographers. The expected dinner in her honor was organized and offered by Marta. Clara thanked her with few and carefully chosen words, remarking that between the traditional and the new, or between order and adventure, no real opposition exists, and that what we now call tradition is made up of a centuries-old web of adventures. The banquet was attended by a large number of society people, by almost all the members of the jury, and by two or three painters.

All of us tend to think of our own circumstances in terms of a narrow range and to feel that other pastures are greener. The worship of the gaucho and the Beatus ille are but a wistfulness bred of city living; Clara Glencairn and Marta Pizarro, weary of the continual round of wealth and idleness, longed for the world of art, for people who had devoted their lives to the creation of things of beauty. My suspicion is that in heaven the Blessed are of the opinion that the advantages of that locale have been overrated by theologians who were never actually there. Perhaps even in hell the damned are not always satisfied.

A year or two later, in the city of Cartagena, there took place the First Congress of Inter-American Painting and Sculpture. Each country sent its representative. The topics of discussion—may we be forgiven the jargon—were of burning interest: Can the artist disregard the indigenous? Can he omit or slight flora and fauna? Can he be insensitive to problems of a social nature? Should he not join his voice to those suffering under the yoke of Saxon imperialism? Et cetera, et cetera. Before becoming ambassador to Canada, Dr. Figueroa had performed a diplomatic mission in Cartagena. Clara, a bit proud over
the prize, would have liked returning there, this time as an artist. That hope was denied her; the government appointed Marta Pizarro. According to the impartial reports of correspondents from Buenos Aires, her participation (although not always persuasive) was on several occasions quite brilliant.

Life demands a passion. Both women found it in painting, or rather, in the relationship imposed on them by painting. Clara Glencairn painted against Marta and in a sense for Marta; each of them was her rival’s judge and only public. In their pictures, which even then no one ever looked at, I think I observe—as was unavoidable—a mutual influence. Clara’s sunset glows found their way into Marta Pizarro’s patios and Marta’s fondness for straight lines simplified the ornateness of Clara’s final stage. It is important to remember that the two women were genuinely fond of each other and that in the course of their intimate duel they behaved toward one another with perfect loyalty.

It was during those years that Marta, who by then was no longer so young, rejected a marriage proposal. All that interested her was her battle.

On the second of February, 1964, Clara Glencairn died of a heart ailment. The columns of the newspapers devoted long obituaries to her of the kind that are still quite common in the Argentine, where a woman is regarded as a member of the species, not an individual. Outside of some hasty mention of her dabbling in painting and of her impeccable good taste, she was praised for her religious devotion, her kindness, her constant and almost anonymous philanthropy, her illustrious family tree—General Glencairn had fought in the Brazilian campaign—and her outstanding place in Society’s highest circles. Marta realized that her life now lacked a meaning. She had never before felt so useless. Remembering her first endeavors, now so far in the past, she hung in the National Gallery a sober portrait of Clara after the manner of those English masters that the two women had so admired. Some judged it her finest work. She was never to paint again.

In that delicate duel, only suspected by a few close friends, there were neither defeats nor victories nor even an open encounter nor any visible circumstances other than those I have attempted respectfully to record. Only God (of whose aesthetic preferences we are unaware) can grant the final palm. The story that made its way in darkness ends in darkness.
Ryuichi Tamura

tr. from the Japanese by
SAM GROLMES AND YUMIKO TSUMURA

THE WITHERED LEAVES

and
they died without shedding
green blood
before they return to the soil
they change to the color of soil
the color of silence that died
one death
why does everything
seem transparent even though
we are endlessly walking
the border of night and day
in withered leaves

a man
whose star is fixed
does not look back

A DISTANT LAND

My distress is
a simple thing

No special means are needed
to raise an animal from a distant land
My poetry is
a simple thing

No special tears are needed
to read a letter from a distant land

My joy and sorrow are
very simple things

No special words are needed
to kill a man from a distant land

OCTOBER POEM

Crisis is my nature
There is a hurricane of feelings
under my smooth skin
There is
a fresh corpse thrown up
on the desolate shore of October

October is my Empire
My hands manipulate things to be lost
eyes look at things to disappear
ears listen to the silence of things to die

Fear is my nature
The Time that murders every
thing flows in my rich blood
There is
a new hunger trembling in
the cold sky of October

October is my Empire
My
dead armies occupy all cities where rain falls
dead patrol planes circle over muddled souls
dead men sign their names for the dead
INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY CROATIAN POETRY

Vasa D. Mihailovich

Croatian literature is relatively little known beyond its borders—as is the case, unfortunately, with many “smaller” literatures throughout the world. The language barrier, difficult historical and economic conditions, and small population frequently prevent these literatures from reaching the larger and more fortunate nations. The purpose of the small collection of poems that follows is to acquaint the English-speaking reader with the variety and richness of one such literature—contemporary Croatian poetry.

One of several literatures written in Yugoslavia, Croatian literature has existed for about a thousand years, first in the independent medieval state of Croatia, then through the centuries of foreign domination, and finally in Yugoslavia after World War I and, again, after World War II. Fierce independence has always been the trademark of these people and their literature, even after they were united with other South Slavic nationalities following the First World War. Through the Catholic religion and cultural ties, the Croats have always gravitated toward Central and Western Europe, although their Slavic background, perhaps best manifested in the beautiful epic poetry, has never
ceased to direct them toward Slavic nations as well. This has tended to create a certain dichotomy in the psyche of a Croat, yet his best spokesmen, the poets, have always been both Slavs and Europeans.

The poets in this selection represent only a small segment of a thriving community of poets in present-day Croatia. They were selected on the basis of their artistic achievements, but also because they epitomize, each in his own way, the wondrous variety of this rich poetry. There is no need to go too far back in its history, for we can say on the basis of the achievements in this century alone that Croatian poetry measures up to other European literatures. A brief look at its development will augment this assessment.

Around the turn of the century, Croatian poetry experienced a renaissance, coinciding with the stirring of national aspirations after several centuries of foreign rule. This movement is fittingly called *Moderna*. Not only was it in step with the national awakening—a very modern phenomenon in those days—but it brought about modernization in poetry, patterned after the European poetry of that time, especially German and French. Several outstanding poets (Vladimir Nazor, Dragutin Domjanic, Vladimir Vidric, Antun Gustav Matoš) paved the way for even greater achievements after the liberation and unification with other Southern Slavs. In the interwar period there were again many outstanding poets, the greatest of whom were undoubtedly Tin Ujević and Antun Branko Simić.

The situation in the newly created state of Southern Slavs, later renamed Yugoslavia, with all its shortcomings and incongruities, did not, for the most part, hamper the development of the arts. On the contrary, the unhappy political conditions and internal strife churned the poets’ innermost feelings and concerns, on the national, political, or social level. Thus we note in the interwar poetry a wide variety of attitudes and orientations among the artists in general, and the poets in particular. This teeming activity was brought to a temporary halt by the Second World War, only to flare up again during the war, in a different form, when poets with opposing ideologies found themselves locked in an armed battle.

The year 1945 represents a natural watershed because the end of the war brought about not only liberation from the enemies and a reunification with other South Slavic nationalities, but also a totally new, communist governing system. During the first few years, when Yugoslavia was a close ally of the Soviet Union, the political system and cultural policies in that country were emulated in all aspects and with dire consequences, especially for the artists. There were unceasing
efforts to propagandize the method of socialist realism as the only valid esthetic principle. Poetry written in those lean years either unabashedly glorified the exploits of the War of Liberation or supported the Party’s efforts to establish a communist society. Then came the sudden break with the Soviet Union in 1948, an event of immense importance for the Yugoslav people. In literature, the writers set out to extricate themselves from the stifling dictates and virtual isolation from the rest of the world except for the Soviet bloc, and to return to the cultivated form and experimentation. These efforts lasted several years, culminating in the struggle between the defenders of the \textit{status quo} and the advocates of freedom in the arts. The struggle was won by the progressive forces around 1955. Ever since then, Yugoslav writers have been moving steadily toward increasing freedom of expression, within certain limits, to be sure, but to a much larger degree than in any other socialist country in Eastern Europe.

A brief survey of important Croatian poets since 1945 shows several generations. To be sure, in the first postwar years poetry was dominated by writers established before the war. Foremost among them was Vladimir Nazor (1876-1949), who at his venerable age joined the partisans and wrote poems extolling their struggle. His postwar output is small. He continued to create myths and to glorify nature, but he was also inspired to write about everyday politics. His best works are to be found in the first decades of this century. Augustin-Tin Ujević (1891-1953) also wrote his best poetry before the war, but he contributed to contemporary poetry as well. He was a poet of unusual talent, linguistic virtuosity, unbounded imagination, and innovative spirit. He has been very influential among younger Croatian poets. Gustav Krklec (b. 1899) established himself before the war, but he has remained active to this day. Several collections of conventional poetry show him as a descriptive poet of personal experiences, attempting to lend lighter, more philosophical overtones to a basically tragic existence. Dobriša Cesarić (b. 1902) writes simple and conventional but unquestionably beautiful poetry, devoid of rhetoric and full of intimate allusions to a rich inner life. He also writes poetry of social protest. Dragutin Tadijanović (b. 1905) changed from a prewar free-verse poet lamenting the loss of childhood innocence and dwelling on the loneliness of his native countryside to a more contemplative poet who grapples with the perennial problems of transience and death. Quite different is Drago Ivanišević (b. 1907) a versatile writer, a cosmopolitan intellectual, and an avantgardist. Outside of all currents and schools,
he is intrigued by metaphysical questions and man's inability to escape his fate.

In the first new generation, Jure Kaštelan and Vesna Parun occupy prominent positions. Jure Kaštelan (b. 1919) is considered the leading postwar poet. He brought a new, specifically personal tone into Croatian poetry, especially in his compact poems about the partisans, their suffering and sacrifices. In his most recent poetry he is searching for a modern poetic expression, replacing the horrors of the war with the anxiety of modern man. Vesna Parun (b. 1922) combines emotions and sensuousness with the rich texture of her spiritual world. As a consequence, her poetry appeals to both the senses and the mind. Her poetic idiom is one of intimacy and confession in content and pure lyricism and femininity in tone. Some of her primary concerns are the love of a woman and the closeness of man to nature. Above all, her easy-flowing, melodious verse makes her one of the best contemporary Yugoslav poets.

The next generation produced several eminent poets. Slavko Mihalić (b. 1928), a neo-romantic with intellectualistic inclinations, attempts to overcome the absurdity of life with his ardent belief in the humanistic role of a poet. He is a subtle poet of rich inner experiences. Milivoj Slaviček (b. 1929) is an antipode to Mihalić in that he is a rationalist and a noncomformist. His poems resemble prose, yet they are not devoid of warmth. Slaviček seems to carry on a running dialogue with his fellow man and himself about the basic problems of existence expressed in everyday terms. Ivan Slamnig (b. 1930) similarly uses a prosaic tone but for different reasons: to play with serious problems of life, to point out the supremacy of reason, and to experiment in form. Primarily an intellectual in poetry, he follows the Anglo-Saxon tradition in Croatian poetry. Antun Soljan (b. 1932) is related to Slamnig in many ways, although he is less cerebral and more experimental. Of late, he has turned to fiction and drama. Zvonimir Golob (b. 1927) and Vlado Gotovac (b. 1930) are antipodes in several ways. Golob employs his peculiar approach to surrealism, but he is also concerned with existential as well as with social problems. His love poems, perhaps the best he has written, are emotionally charged and suffused with passion. Gotovac, on the other hand, deals with ideas, often abstract ones, probing man's relationship to them. His philosophical musing sometimes forces him into hermetrical situations, in which he ponders the fate of man and the ethereal reality of love and death. Vesna Krmpotić (b. 1932) brings a touch of femininity while grappling with
basic dilemmas, especially love and death, in a style marked by personal and confessional lyricism.

At the beginning of the sixties, a group of talented young poets (Danijel Dragojevic, Dubravko Horvatic, Mate Ganza, Zvonimir Mrkonjic, Nikica Petrak, Ante Stamac, Igor Zidic, and others) entered the literary scene.

More recently, an entirely new group of poets has begun to appear on the horizon. Some of them sound exciting and promising. Their most interesting characteristics are a surprising maturity, a cultivated poetic idiom, and a resolution to strike their own paths. However, it is too early to assess their significance since most of them are still in the formative stage.

These are, briefly, the most important personalities and the most salient features of their works in contemporary Croatian poetry. It is regrettable that many other accomplished poets—Nikola Šop, Mak Dizdar, Slavko and Miroslav Madjer, Nikola Milicevic, Josip Pupanic, Krsto Špoljar, Dubravko Skurla, and the younger ones—can only be mentioned. For obvious reasons, not all deserving poets nor all manifold aspects of their poetry could be presented, or even discussed, within such a limited scope. It is hoped, however, that even this brief selection and discussion will show the reader the rich quality, thematic scope, and variety of forms contemporary Croatian poetry has to offer.
Drago Ivanišević

tr. VASA D. MIHAILOVICH

METAPHYSICS III

The night rides in a black coach
high above us
its murmur rustles in us
in our dense roots it stays overnight

The night sows its seeds
over us
in us

The eyes of the night glow around us
and in us

We walk thus and we sail
through the night into the night
we the night the whole night all night long
into the day
the nocturnal day

If naked it meets its night
it perishes nocturnal
our blood
Drago Ivanišević

GAMES AT THE EUROPEAN MASKED BALL

THE FIRST, THE MAIN GAME

First sharpen the knife well,
a knife is best sharpened on a brother’s throat,
then drink a glass of wine or whiskey,
to drink or not to drink to the war
is all the same, one can do without all that,
then carefully cut the mother’s throat,
lay her on her back and lie down next to her
and place your head on her bosom,
then carefully, so as not to hurt the joints,
slowly take off all the nails from your fingers,
sharpen the fingers well, like pencils,
then drink several glasses of wine or whiskey
and let the tears flow, cry for the mother,
for a long, long time, until sated,
then with the sharpened fingers
mix blood with tears
and draw many longitudinal lines on the shirt,
(the shirt can be white, black, or multicolored)
the rest will then be easy.
Go and do not turn! You are leading the column of the dead. 
Sight your barrel of the first violets. Sleep in your shoes.

The dark knives
are looking for your throat.

Do not drink at the wells because they are poisoned. 
For the mountains have died from the snakebites.

The dark knives
are looking for your eyes.

There is no dream in which lovers sleep disquietly 
nor the echo which resounds in the desolate gorges and ravines.

The dark knives
are looking for your heart.

The dark knives clang their lullaby. 
The dawn which you discern is cut 
into halves 
of dreaming and blood.
Vesna Parun

GIRLS IN THE MAUSOLEUM

tr. R. A. D. Ford

The gold of the mosaics awakens tulips on the sombre wall. Pensive shadows stir.

Who can number the mausoleum's quiet years? We are dark, naked.

Lithe lizards, silenced by love, we huddle in the cold oval of the tomb. We whisper: ancient marble, are we beautiful?

The evening is young and troubled. The horizon is heavy with flames. Our hearts are green like moon-light.

No more galleys in the sun, nor emperors in the portico; but we laugh in the Peristyle. The echo frightens the bronze pigeons.

Tonight, breathless, we will walk in the deserted streets. We will cover ourselves with shadows charged with the murmurs of the square.
Under the yellow subterranean light
the men grow dark and sing.
The damp sadness of things falls on us.

Speak no more of strange Diocletian!
Fright troubles our eyes.

But the sea brings to the port oranges.
And the skies are covered
with the deep red of spring.

Vesna Parun

THE FLAME

tr. VASA D. MIHAILOVICH AND RONALD MORAN

How much you whipped me, winds,
and I stand straight.
How much you consumed me, desires,
and I renew myself.
I shall transform thought into flame
and word into ashes.
Let the sky redden from the truth
and the heart darken from a lie.
Nikola Milićević

tr. VASA D. MIHALJOVICH AND RONALD MORAN

THE RAVEN

A black and lone raven flew at the foot of the mountain
toward the evening
and did not make a sound.
He carried on his dirty wings
the innocent color of the sunset

He flapped persistently,
shook off the sun,
and the light fell
from his long wings
in drops.
He flapped sharper and faster
in his struggle with the light
so that people would not see him
nor birds hidden in branches.
And the sun gathered its last strength
and shone more brightly going down.

He cawed frightened
and then people and birds saw
his bloody beak
glittering red
in the sun.
Nikola Milićević

THE WIND

The night was falling
down the wooded mountain
and descended into the lowland.
With it the wind came too,
a slow wind
of summer.
It rose
   up to us
and calmly passed
over our shoulders.
We were its boundary.
It brought something
to us
and carried it away—further.
It brought from the night
into which we were staring
and carried away into the night
that we could not see
spreading behind us.
More and more it seems that I hear the clouds
More and more my hearing attends me
The voices come from many things
I can no longer retreat into silence
I can already tell the sob of a mosquito
Or the suffering of a caught flea that trembles
More and more I do not hear the sound of man
And his words change into noise
Coming steadily from everything
A huge violin perhaps without strings
Quietly echoes across the blue sky
And the stars flicker in passion
And die down and go out and fall
While from the cool depth the new tones come
As if some drum summons for creating
The clouds carefree answer to all
And only children sing with them
More and more it seems that words are disappearing
For there is less and less of that song in them
More and more my hearing attends me
    I could descend among the dead
Vlado Gotovac

THE CLIMBER

tr. Vasa D. Mihaiovich

I a skillful climber
on a perfect top of a steeple
which alone does not repeat
a game that is already over
have placed a stone
with an invented name
in a secure position

and I do not have to return
for here I have fulfilled the task
only for myself

Vlado Gotovac

THEY CAN ONLY DISAPPEAR

tr. Vasa D. Mihaiovich

The softness of the grass cannot be replaced
Nor scent nor moisture
Nor a cool swinging coming from the sky
Common to the grass the clouds and the stars
One cannot replace a brook in a white morning
Nor mother’s hands fresh from slaughtered animals and dough
One cannot replace the bright and long cold
Nor the crunching of ice in the wooden utensils filled with water
One cannot replace the dew on peasant wagons
Nor the morning on the bare rocks of Zagora
One cannot replace my grandfather's head
Nor his gaze which had discovered the first secrets of life
One cannot replace my grandmother's hand with rosary
Nor her face that smells like old oak bark
One cannot replace the poor village of my old folks
Nor their graves which are quickly leveled
They can only disappear without losing strength

Vlado Gotovac

MY SILENT BIRDS

tr. VASA D. MIHAILOVICH AND RONALD MORAN

I have lifted my eyes and nothing has filled them
My looking toward the sky is an unspeakable loss
Since no time is announced from above
The earth is covered only with clouds
And silence my heart is silent
And what I hear in the coming of birds
I see all around
Their flight and their voice have lost
what the sky has lost.

But the beating of my heart quietly sustains
That desolate sky
From which silently descend birds announcing night
And how they once sang
everything was visible.

Neither is anything announced in the transparent eyes of children
The golden mist from their depth is already dispersed by our wind
And their dreams are heavy, the pictures are decomposing.
A SIMPLE DEATH

tr. VASA D. MIHAJOLOVIĆ AND RONALD MORAN

I

Created from and for a dream
you stop me
before the doors of a simple death
and I change
into a bird
and a river
backing up to its source.
Your name, that voice resembling silver
left in the throats of bright quails,
that is the night opening the eyes
of an eternal butterfly
and fires of sure springs.

III

You are a fire in which fingers tremble,
a knife cold and sharp in the moon’s groin,
a word which is not and death:
a sad game we have not yet learned.

I think no longer of the desperate grass,
and the cries of the stones of terrible kisses,
once again I fear that the doors may be closed
to thousands of horses who are afraid of dreams.
All who are forgotten in the darkness
seek their hands in the womb of the hyenas
and only one handsome shepherd
will find the flock of lost ants.

A woman cries in the corner.
Who will cover her mouth with earth?
Who will close the eyes of cautious shells
with the hand of glass, sand, and pine-cones?

IV

You make the moss soft
and you like grasses and the dream that does not come.
You make birds and clouds grow
and there is no tree that reminds me of death.
I greet you once more
with an unforgettable hand,
for it is the same, halved in the night,
unstable roundness in the hours of despair.
Who stands in the door, but without shoulders?
Who is at the window, but alone, without eyes?
You are separating the shores that are forsaking me,
I am not telling you: Go! and I keep silent: Do not return!

Zvonimir Golob

YOUR SHARE OF THE AIR

tr. Vasa D. Mihailovich

What will change after you, my poem?
In the common blood circulation the same cry,
the same post of shame, the same chains
at the bottom of a ship sailing somewhere.

At first confidence, then doubt,
three, four loves, if that is enough,
a desire to live and a desire to die,
and then everything remains the same.
A bed, a naked woman, and then what?
Transparent roots whose throbbing
says that you are smaller, and the water rises
and somebody has turned over instead of you.

What will change? Nothing.
If you see what you really see
others will want everything you have thrown away,
inhale your share of the air, and fall asleep.

Zvonimir Golob

AMONG MANY PASSERS-BY

tr. Vasa D. Mihailovich

I feel sorry for you, death, who will come for me
one day. What will you see,
what find in this attire, what news
about an event already long forgotten, in this room
to cast its fiery ring
on the neck of some fair's bottle? You will fill
the motionless void with your own, but if it was not
enough for me what good is it to you
what is left? The cold skin of a lizard
which it will leave to lie, after all,
on the streets of its city. If I reject
what you are accepting, will that be
a loss or honorable trade when I know today already
how much is left? I feel sorry for you, death,
for you will be deceived and it will be necessary
to find again what I have lost
moving toward you. I see already
as you hesitate repeating that you are right, I see
that indecisive gesture of the hand
which holds the edge of a knife and it remains for me
only to smile knowing
that your loss is my gain. I feel sorry for you,
for I have promised much I cannot fulfill.
pronouncing your every name in a hundred ways equally real. And you will find out what hope means every day. Only a shadow stooping in darkness will remain at the feet of the already dying who wave to you, flesh and blood in which you will live after me. I feel sorry for you, death, for I can already see your childlike face among many passers-by at the door of the Station and the wrath to which I had no right, while you are raking over with an impatient hand what is left:

several incoherent words which stood like a wall between the world and me, a little dust and crumbs of tobacco, a map of some invented city, a picture of a woman sleeping in the morning sun, a spot of ink on the fingernails still growing and the bed from which I descend laughing, while you search for the heart about which I know nothing and you find only empty space in which still the stroke of a thunder echoes.
Slavko Mihalić

tr. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Ronald Moran

FISHING

The water flows as if carried by someone
Whether clear or flooding the shores, it does not matter to it
Peacefully time grazes everywhere the same
the mountain too will fall with the coming water

We entered the water to our waist—enraged butchers
On the shore women shivered from hunger
There wind assailed our distorted faces
Our howling was heard far off

For the fish the net is no novelty
Always between the shores, the surface and the bottom
We went heavy, with headache and bloodshot eyes
Like after drinking but the drinking was yet to come

All night we shed that cold colorless blood
Senseless we dug our hands deeper than allowed
Die, water!—it did not even hear us
Leaving us frozen above the corpses
I would like to know from where this emptiness comes, so that I turn into a transparent lake in which you can see the bottom, but without fish.

But without shells, crabs, without underground growth that at least has a name, and I am today nameless. Even a little nonexistent.

And so, speaking of emptiness, I move the water in the lake, it throws around sand and some tiny particles clinging to the bottom. I am becoming ill.

I walk the streets with my head bent like another lake, dark above all, and even poisonous; let us not talk about those repulsive beings that crawl at the bottom, so that now I stink to myself.
The cities of dream wander under the bark of a December forest in which we wander like two trunks of love carrying in ourselves a sleeping animal that in dream gnaws on hazelnuts gathered last summer.

Yes, like a winter animal into its hole love too has retreated deep into the body.

It is cold, cold around us, over our path the bats are already sailing and our fruit gravitates toward the earth, our fruit, indigent before its flowering.

That word fell like a precocious bird from your lips.
It chirps in my palm so small and pulsating from the warmth of my eye, from the infertile goodness of my dream.
I know that the little word is hopelessly small, and it will never spread its wings in grand flight around the sun.
And it will never measure with a cry
the height of its fall.
But I love
and love the little word,
a premature little bird
of those dancing lips.
And I present it with a cradle,
my forehead,
under the lowered shine of the dream.

Vesna Krmpotić

YOUR LIFE, MY LIFE

tr. Vasa D. Mihailovich

Your life, my life and all lives
are made of the death of others.

And every drop of our time that rushes
is snatched from the time that stands still.

I have climbed the shoulders of the dead and wave
like a victorious climber from the top of a hill.

And every bite is snatched from some hunger,
every sip feeds some thirst.

But a posse has set off the very first day!
And while the dogs of a heavenly detachment sniff along our trail,
we dissipate our breath passionately and unkindly
as a thief dissipates the stolen money
before he begins to return it.
Venanzio Reali

HANNO GLI UCCELLI ANCORA FIATO

Hanno gli uccelli ancora fiato
nelle fragili gole;
tenace il canto ripullula
sui ruderi calvi, dove
il ramarro incanta l’aria,
il lichene rode la selce.
Odo l’usignuolo forzare,
a riprese audaci, un’imposta:
vuole aprirti, mistero,
con dardi di sole.
Poi la risposta e’ un silenzio
di cielo di terra di mare.

CONFITEOR

Stamattina, salendo l’altare,
la Tua ira mi tuonava dentro:
ero foglia smarrita, fiutata
da sottili rimorsi; ma appena
fermai i piedi sulla predella
mi riprese a cantare il sangue
alla vista di un grumo di viole.
La loro fragranza, che si dona
senza voce per la fredda navata,
mì persuase all’offerta
del mio trepido nulla
al Tuo perdono.
Venanzio Reali

tr. Dora M. Pettinella

BIRDS STILL HAVE BREATH

Birds still have breath
in their fragile throats;
their song tenaciously repeats
over bald ruins, where
the green lizard enchants the air,
and the lichen gnaws the flintstone.
I hear the nightingale in bold
refrains try to pry open a blind
with splashes of sunlight,
craving to know the mystery.
But the answer is silence
of sky and land and sea.

CONFITEOR

This morning, walking toward the altar,
Your anger thundered in me:
I was a lost leaf, pressed
by vague qualms, but setting feet
on the altar step, I saw
clotted violets,
and my blood began to sing.
Their fragrance, spreading
in silence along the cold church nave,
persuaded me to offer
my trembling naught
for your forgiveness.
Venanzio Reali

SOLITUDINE

Mi si fa notte lontano da casa
nell’incerata della solitudine.
Le cose si spengono,
stelle non se ne accendono:
pelame nero ha la notte
e polpastrelli d’onice.
Cascano le serrande,
si smorzano le case,
vagano animali e donne,
gente dal pugno chiuso
fra muri alti e sordi.
Se il sole tarda, il dolore
resta una crepa sull’alba.

FRESCO E’ IL SILENZIO

Non tirare la tenda
cui imprime nel moto ondoso
l’ombra del davanzale
dorsi di tori sull’accesa rena.
Gia’ stordisce il meriggio i muri ocra
e il rado canto d’uccelli
e’ appena una fievole ansia
di bolle sul mare di lava.
Non tirare la tenda:
ancora fresco e’ il silenzio
nella stanza che da’ sul chiostro.
Venanzio Reali

SOLITUDE

Night is dense when far from home
in oilcloth of solitude.
Life is spent,
stars have no light:
night is furry black
with onyx fingertips.
Blinds close
windows darken
animals and women roam,
people have closed fists
amid tall deaf walls.
If sun lingers, grief
is a crack at dawn.

COOL SILENCE

Do not close the drape
whose undulating motions
over blazing sands trace backs of bulls
on ledge in shadow.
Noon already confounds the ochre walls
and the rare song of birds
is only a fragile sigh
of bubbles over a sea of lava.
Do not close the drape:
still cool is the silence
of this room overlooking the cloister.
One of the many things that Benedictos Koutroupes could not stand was the house of the grave-digger Strati Garia. That house turned his stomach, even though its walls did not block him in any way; neither did its courtyard shut him off; or the view from the windows engulf him; nor did the daily sight of the windows offend his nostril, for the houses were not next to each other. As a matter of fact, the house of the grave-digger Strati Gázia was at the other end of the city, at the extreme end of the public highway and just where the fields begin; so he would have had to set out on purpose to be annoyed by the sight of it.

But news was getting around that grave-digger Gázia was building a house, so that all who knew him could be riled. And even though Benedictos Koutroupes never came to the bitter conclusion reached by the neighborhood shoemaker, that “those who die exceed the number of those who walk,” nevertheless he could not get the idea out of his mind that something was amiss in this affair.

“And what can be wrong, Mr. Benedictos? Here there is no room
"for graft," remarked someone who had lost his patience.

"With burying and more burying of the dead, you still can't make money!" Koutroupes replied deep in thought.

"Then you believe that he also used to bury people alive? And let us say that this too used to happen, and that the grave-digger's conscience was able to take it; who, do you imagine, would have paid Gázia to do such a job?"

Benedictos made no reply; but he held on to his evil thoughts of the grave-digger.

Perhaps his antipathy to Gázia was a result of his miserable profession. Yet, just as Strati Gázia's profession was rough and mean, so had his heart remained soft and gentle. He had been like that ever since he was a little boy. Years before, he had worked in the Home for the Aged. He had been a market-gardener and, in addition, he had acted as superintendent. He used to live in the little house facing the large iron gate, beneath the pine-trees. One night, in a storm made by the wrath of God, someone knocked on his door; the rough wind, passing through the branches of the pine trees soughed like a real lament.

Strati Gázia was not timid, but this had never happened to him before; that someone should knock on his door at night and in such weather. So he didn't get up. But in a little while the knockings grew louder, and someone called out his name.

"Strati Gázia!"

He jumped up, opened the door and found himself facing the director.

"John Kalibitis died last night; you must open up a grave for him."

"I?"

"Well, who else?"

"I am a market-gardener; I also act as a superintendent for you, but I will not become a grave-digger! I will not open up graves!"

"So then?"

Strati looked at the director who was also a young man, almost a boy, with a soft and gentle face like that of a woman.

The director was a newcomer; he had never happened to see a dead man before, and the death of the aged Kalibitis had made a deep impression on him. Gázia, for the sake of the director, also performed this task.

Who could have told him on that wild night, when he, yet a boy without a moustache, had opened the grave of Kalibitis, that he would be doing this bitter work for the rest of his life?
He had dug a grave that was so long and wide, when the director saw it, he was amazed.

"Did you think they were bringing you some bishop? They are bringing you an inmate of The Home for the Aged; that means a real dried-up mackerel."

When Strati Gázia faced the corpse he was terror-stricken. He removed his cap, crossed himself and asked slowly: "Of hunger?"

"Yes," the director answered in the same tone.

"Outside, all right; but people dying of starvation even inside The Home for the Aged?"

"It's a Philanthropic Institution, Gázia, with a Supervisory Committee that is well-fed; what do you expect? Each day they reduce the rations. And what can they do? The capital, they say, must not be touched. The Institution must be maintained on the interest, and the interest is not enough. Then again, old people can't live on nothing; they can't subsist on watery soups, without oil, without meat, without wine. Old people are like little children; they need comfort for them to sustain themselves. So don't be surprised if from now on they take their leave of us, one by one."

"So long as the capital cannot be touched."

In the meantime, the water from the wet earth had drained into the grave and it flooded Strati to his waist. The director looked down at Strati Gázia and Strati Gázia looked up at the director. Where were they going to put Kalibitis? The director half-shut his eyes and ordered harshly, "Finish the job, Gázia. Bury him once and for all, will you?"

They lifted the old man out of the coffin. The poor have no need of such things. The poor man never becomes a proprietor. All the old people of The Home for the Destitute, each in turn will lie in this coffin.

"In a place of green pasture . . . in a refreshing place . . . " muttered the tired voice of the priest, as they lowered the old man into the grave. They lowered him with care, and in the meantime, the water splashed high as soon as the body of the old man had been placed in it and spattered the face and hands of Strati Gázia with its frosty drops, as if it were baptizing him grave-digger!

From now on, this was going to be his occupation. Everytime he buried a man, Strati Gázia sensed a chill which never left him for the rest of his life, even on a scorching August afternoon.

"Come, Uncle John! You never in your life stretched out as comfortably as I have laid you here," Strati Gázia said sweetly, and he started to cover him as gently as he could.
The director turned his head, and looked toward the sunrise dawning beneath the dark clouds. "The sun will never shine through such blackness!" he mused and thus musing he left.

The director loved old people. He used to watch them sitting on the wooden park benches of The Home for the Aged, in the sunshine, as feeble as infants. They would rest their hands, calloused by long, harsh and futile labor, on the thick bars, their heads leaning on their hands. Their bleary eyes were not looking at anything. Why should they look? They had already seen whatever they had to see. They kept looking at the past; that’s why they were bleary-eyed; and if by chance those bleary eyes fell on the director, his heart would break. He knew well that misfortune wants strength to be endured, and old people have no strength. "Don’t reduce their milk," he would entreat the Supervisory Committee. "My old people have need of some milk!" But he did not succeed in convincing them and they cut out the milk, and with that the meat, the fish, the cheese! "And what are the old people going to eat?" the director would ask wondering.

"What had they been eating in their own homes? A dry crust of bread and they were not sure they would have that either. Here they are sure they will get it, and they will be eating it fresh too. Do you consider this a trifling matter?"

No, the director did not consider it a trifling matter. Only he was positive that the old people would die.

Eh, after all, it does not matter! These would die, others would be brought. The place was full of poor people. But philanthropic institutions, and institutions of such significance as The Home for the Aged, with such a long record of humanitarian activities, no! Such institutions are not easily re-established, and when once they do exist, every sacrifice must be made to maintain them!

The whole committee agreed. . .

So it was not at all strange that in three months, sixty-three aged inmates died and that at the sixty-third death the sensitive director showed no emotion whatever.

It was still winter; the wind blew wildly and the bare branches of the trees crackled raucously.

Strati Gázia was digging the sixty-third grave and the director was attending the corpse of the baker Panayi Lionti. The old priest of The Home for the Aged was sending him off in his hoarse voice: "In a place of green pasture . . . in a refreshing place, whence pain and sorrow and sighing have fled. . . ."

The man had not died of old age; he had died of privation. He
had baked bread for forty years, and yet bread had not satisfied his hunger. He had come to The Home for the Aged to eat and to find rest. But he had fallen upon difficult days and he did not eat. . . Had he found rest? The way he was stretched out in the narrow wooden coffin of The Home for the Aged, he seemed to be satisfied with the rest that the institution had provided for him. When they had rested him in the earth, the wind blew stronger, and his little green jacket quivered as if Lionti himself had moved. The people were terrified. Strati Gázia looked at the director. The director was infuriated.

“What are you waiting for? Bury him quick before he comes back to life and asks us for bread!” And he stalked off, with lowered head.

“Everlasting be thy memory. . . ” The priest raised his cracked voice.

Strati Gázia grabbed the hoe and covered Lionti as fast as he could. But at night, in his bed, he could find no rest. What if Lionti had really revived? What if he had only fainted, and he, Strati, listening to the director, had buried him alive? Virgin Mary, what a crime! But then again, how could Lionti revive when even while he was alive he resembled a corpse? Outside the storm was growing worse. He dug his head under the covers not to hear or see the flashes of lightning. He tried to forget Lionti, but two faded blue eyes, Lionti’s eyes, were in front of him, looking plaintively at him. He threw aside the covers. He lit the lantern; he grabbed the hoe and ran out to the cemetery. He might not reach Lionti in time, but he would quiet his conscience.

In a minute, the earth was removed and the corpse was clearly to be seen. It had not stirred! He lowered the lantern close to the old man’s face, and inspected it in agony; the eyes were closed, the mouth was tight shut, just as they had been when he was burying him. He leaned over to see more clearly. “Had the expression changed? Was there any agony on his face?” None, absolutely. Lionti had been buried after death. And the skeletal face, austere and motionless, awaited as before the second advent, waiting to hear from the mouth of his Lord for what reason he had been given so much misery in so short a life.

“Lionti, I have done my duty; now you, too, do yours and forgive, if I hurried to bury you!”

He had barely completed his thought, when his eyes fell on a round clay urn that jutted out of the inner wall of the grave to the left of Lionti. There, the earth had not been dug out, and it wasn’t easy to dislodge it. He set down the lantern, picked up the hoe and in a little while, the round urn came out without breaking; the urn was small but heavy. He opened it with care. The irony of it! An en-
tire treasure inside Lionti's grave. He caressed the head of the dead man, and with a sense of peace he closed the grave. He took the urn and returned to his house.

Deep night.

No one had seen the treasure. As soon as dawn came, he ran to the diocese, found the priest, and ordered a forty-day liturgy to the memory of Lionti. And the priest consumed forty fresh, foamy loaves of eucharistic bread, to persuade the Lord to forgive the sins of Lionti who had died of hunger.

All this kept turning over in Gázia's head, and it left him no peace. Every time he wanted to put his hand into the urn and fill his palm with its riches, Lionti's faded eyes would appear before him and look at him. What did Lionti want of him? In order to escape, he quit The Home for the Aged and he became a grave-digger in the large municipal cemetery. There, digging all day long, he forgot the urn and thus he also escaped Lionti's eyes.

Years went by.

Strati Gázia grew tired of working, and then he remembered the urn once more. Wasn't the money his? Hadn't his good fortune sent it to him? Lionti had no right to complain. Wouldn't he have enjoyed riches without toiling for them? He too had labored all his life and he had suffered as much as the other. How come Lionti had not found a treasure? Gázia was not to blame for that.

So he built his little house.

What need was there now to give Benedictos Koutroupes an account of the why and wherefore of things? Let Benedictos Koutroupes believe what he liked; his conscience was at peace.

And when he saw that the florins that were left in the urn were enough for him to eat and drink for the rest of his life, he stretched out contentedly in his armchair. From now on he would rest easy. But he had barely considered this fully, when, there, Lionti's eyes appeared before him. But this time, a strange thing, they were not plaintive. They kept looking at him peacefully and contentedly, and as if they were rejoicing with him. A weight lifted from Gázia's soul. "Everlasting be thy memory," he whispered. He wished it with all his heart, and he stretched out more comfortably in his armchair.
I accepted the award of the International Poetry Forum and the invitation to come to the United States to acknowledge my acceptance as a new testimony to be added to previous ones which assert that poetry remains an illuminated face in this world. My presence here is nothing more than a presence before this face.

By coming here to this oasis for poetry in what is otherwise a world-desert where fear is carefully created the way bread is baked, I have to admit that I come from a land that has a history of blood. And in this history I imagine the body of my land in agony and tears.

I must also say that I come from a land where poetry is like a tree which watches over man and where a poet is a guard who understands the rhythm of this world. He travels with history and feels the rhythm of history. By heeding this rhythm, he realizes the gaps and distances that separate man from man. I see this separation between men as a darkness which science cannot dispel despite all of its transformative power. Only poetry can illuminate this darkness. And only when science returns to its essence, when it becomes visionary, when it discovers the unknown for the benefit of man, only then can it share the power of poetry. The primary objective of poetry in our time is to pressure science toward this transformation. Then science and poetry will doubly serve the same truth through the discovery of the unknown and the glorification of man.

In this sense, to speak of poetry is to speak of the essence of man. And it is also to speak of the essence of progress. From that point of view and in that spirit there is no difference between man and man, no difference, if you will, between people and people except their capacity to grasp poetry and practice it as an original intuition that we cannot replace or abolish. Small wonder then that we people to whom

*The following remarks by Adonis were spoken at the International Poetry Forum presentation ceremony (March 17, 1971) where he was named recipient of the Syria-Lebanon Award in Poetry.
many western technocrats refer as being underdeveloped often pride ourselves in proclaiming as a matter of right that—from the point of view of poetry, from the point of view of the essence of man—we are no less developed than any.

Therefore, in the name of that essence, I salute you by whispering that keeping silent about what distorts or kills poetry is the final destruction of all.

Let poetry then be a total and enveloping presence like the very air we breathe so that it can become, like the air itself, indispensable and indestructible.

Adonis (Ali Ahmed Said)

tr. Samuel Hazo

ELEGY IN EXILE

Phoenix,
when the flames enfolded you,
what pen were you holding?
What feathers sprouted
when your old ones burned?
Buried in your own ashes,
what world did you confront,
what robe did you don,
what color did you choose?

Tell me.
Tell me what silence follows
the final silence
spun from the very fall of the sun?
What is it, phoenix?
Give me a word,
a sign.
Your banishment and mine are one.
Your banishment and mine and the banishment of heroes are one.
Your banishment and mine and the banishment of heroes and the banishment of love and glory are one.

What is it we love or fear but shadows of ourselves?

When I recall your suffering, my phoenix, I forget my own.
No mother held you when you left until you burned for breath.

No father blessed your exile in his heart before you saw it born in flame with each horizon.

I've left.
I've left my mother. I've left my mother on a mat of straw to grieve my going. Astray, I swallow dust. I, who learned love from my father's eyes, have left my father's house to be the prodigal.

I am a hunted bird. I steal my bread. All I see is desolation. Pursued by falcons, my small wings lose their feathers, feather by feather.
"They say my song is strange
because it has no echo.
They say my song is strange
because I never dreamed
myself awake on silks.
They say I disbelieved the prophesies,
and it was true,
and it is still and always true."

My phoenix,
I learn with you
the banishment that murders me
in ruins and the sheerest voids.
I break from jail
to seek the man I keep becoming.
I leave the gate ajar,
the chain empty,
and the darkness of my cell
devours me like eyes in shadow.

Though banished,
I love all those who banished me,
who crowned my brow with chains
and waited to betray me.
I see my childhood
like an isolated Baalbek
with its longing pillars,
and I burn.
Horizon by horizon,
I am born to the chants of the sun.

My new wings grow
like yours, my phoenix.

Phoenix, we are born for death,
and death in life
deserves its springs and harvests,
its rivering Jesus,
its passion with the vineyard
and the mount.
But it is not all solitude
and echoes from the grave.

Phoenix, I remember one
who perished on a cross—
extinguished.

He burned in pools of cherry
like fire within fire—
extinguished.
Yet from the dark of the ashes
he glows.

His wings are numbered
with the flowers of our land,
with all the days of all the years,
with pebbles and the merest stones.

Like you, my phoenix,
he survived our hunger,
and his mercy feeds us.

Dying with his wings outspread,
he gathered all who buried
him in ashes
and became, like you,
the spring and fire of our agony.

Go now, my sweet bird,
show me the road I’ll follow.
It all began with that note. Had it not been for that curious note, believe me, I would not be telling you all this. Indeed, when I first came by it, I thought it was some kind of prank, and it nearly threw me into a fit of laughter. Nearly, but not quite because I had to consider the neighbors. It was late in the afternoon when it came, and the neighbors were all fast asleep, or so I thought. In any case, it would not have been in their best interest to wake them up with loud, uninhibited laughter, so I checked myself.

But then my mood changed. I didn’t feel like laughing. How did I happen to get this note, I wondered. My mind went back to a trivial incident of some months before. Probably if it had not been for the recollection of it, the note itself would have left me unruffled, and I would have gone to sleep without reaching for one of those scholarly tomes that seem to be designed primarily to put you to sleep.

It had been a trivial incident. I had been returning home one night in winter. The hour was late—after ten o’clock. The streets were all deserted, and I walked along at a sprightly pace, lost in thought. Then, as I was turning into a side street, I heard a scream so piercing that it made me stop in my tracks. I saw a figure rushing towards me; before reaching me it stopped short, turned around and rushed away, all the time screaming, “Ghost!” “Ghost!” The figure had been that of a woman.
Afterwards, whenever I happened to recall the incident, I only found it funny. It had been something out of the ordinary—that was true—but there was nothing in it to send shivers down the spine. It was, at worst, a bit grotesque.

But now, connecting it with the note I had received, I could no longer dismiss it as an absurd experience. It had taken on a wholly new perspective. It seemed to harbor some grim meaning for me. That experience began to haunt me, to pursue, to persecute me.

I am, I confess, an ordinary person, given to sleeping in the open until the end of September. The world knows me as Mukundilal—an identity that I am no longer sure is my own. I have no ambitions, no desires and dreams that might be deemed immodest for a small man like me, who serves in a small situation. I suppose I am lonely as only a long-married man can be. When I return home from work I often find my wife asleep. It is I who has to go to the kitchen and carry a cold meal to the table in the living room. And there I sit and eat by myself. But I always comfort myself in knowing that I have a well-ordered life.

You can imagine that there was nothing out of the ordinary in such a life as mine. It has been wholly an uneventful life. But my wife has told me of a curious happening, which I don’t remember at all, and of which I probably would have remained ignorant.

“Do you remember,” she said one day, “all those photographs that were taken at our wedding?”

“Yes. What about them?”

“Well, they were all spoiled.”

“All spoiled?”

“Yes, when the film was developed, it was found to be blank. Nothing had registered.”

The photographer, she went on to say, was very disappointed, because the film was of something that could not be repeated.

It was some time later, after I had received that first strange note, one night, just about the time I go to bed, that I heard footsteps on the stairs. My wife was already snoring; so I had to go and open the door. It was the postman.

“There is a strike on,” he explained, “and the distribution of the mail has become very irregular. We have to deliver the letters just as soon as we have finished sorting them.”

Some of the letters he gave me were for the neighbors. But there was one for my wife and one for me. I opened the envelope that bore my name. After reading the letter I was totally perplexed. Could it
be a joke? I looked at the envelope again. There was no mistake about
the addressee. And as I stood there wondering who the sender could
possibly have been, my wife suddenly screamed in her sleep.

"GHOST!" "GHOST!"

I rushed to her and shook her. "What is it, my dear? What is it?"

She gave me no answer, and soon she was back to sleep. But I
could not sleep. The letter I had received told me that I was a ghost, a
ghost that had assumed the identity of a man called Mukundilal, and
that if I challenged the veracity of the statement, perhaps I might care
to adduce proof to the contrary. It went on to say that perhaps I would
want to produce a witness to support my claim to be a man called
Mukundilal.

I was petrified. My wife screaming, just at the time I was reading
the letter, was too much of a coincidence. It made me feel worse. I
lay down on my bed and stared out the window at the sky and
stars. In a mysterious way, I was aware that I had known that sky and
those stars for hundreds and hundreds of years.

According to the letter, I had died some twenty years earlier.
Since I had supposedly died a violent death, my spirit had not found
peace as a consequence. It had entered the body of a man called
Mukundilal and taken possession of it, effectively suppressing Mukun-
dilal's original personality. The letter further said that if I, the ghost,
were to give up my possession of Mukundilal's body, its rightful owner
would again take over. Mukundilal, if one were to believe the writer
of the letter, had been a small and rather dull child twenty years ago,
one who was very bad at his studies.

It was highly repulsive to me to think that there was any truth
to these wild suggestions. I never had an occasion to doubt my own
identity. It had never occurred to me that I might, after all, be any
other person than who I thought I was. And if it were true, it was
quite beyond me to conceive of or to endure all its ramifications.

I got up early the next morning, went out and flung the letter
into the gutter. I wanted to be rid of it, and quickly. I went back into
the house and asked my wife about the dream she had had, and why
it had made her scream.

She looked at me in a strange sort of way and said, "I don't re-
member anything."

"But you screamed. Surely you remember that you screamed?"

"I don't remember anything. So please don't ask me."

I went to the office that day, but I could not concentrate on my
work. So I left the office. I walked, wandering through the streets

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quite aimlessly. I didn’t know and I didn’t care where I was going. After a few hours, I found to my surprise that I had come upon a cremation ground. In fear and confusion I retreated from that place quickly.

When I reached home late in the evening, I met the postman at the door.

“Your letter, sir,” he said handing me an envelope.

I immediately noticed to my consternation that it was the same letter I had thrown into the gutter. I just stood there, stunned, staring at the postman.

“Yes, I know,” the postman said, “the letter is in a bad way. But don’t blame us. It is this strike. Things are in a hopeless mess and letters frequently get torn and parcels are damaged.”

I left the postman there, and quickly climbed up the stairs to my room.

“So you left the office early today,” my wife said.

“How did you know?”

“A Mr. Khanna from your office came by. He told me about your leaving the office early.”

“Did he also tell you that he shouldn’t be meddling in my business?”

“No, but he was full of praise for you. He said you work like someone possessed.”

Like one possessed. The words drove a shiver down my spine.

Again that night I could not sleep. During the few brief snatches of drowsiness I managed to have, I kept seeing a vulture hovering overhead in the sky, covering cities and things under its dark wings. Again and again, I had to shake myself awake to be free of the nightmare. But I would fall back to sleep and it would be there again—the same vulture, the same dark span of wings. I couldn’t take it finally, so I sat up in bed and read the letter through again, to see if I could get any further information from it. Yes, I said to myself, I must prove that I am really and truly Mukundilal, and not an unauthorized, interloping ghost.

I went to the town where, according to the letter, I had died on the twentieth of September, twenty years before. I diligently thumbed through the municipal records to find out if indeed there had been a fatal accident on the day named. There was one such accident recorded, to be sure. But the particulars of the victim were lacking. No details about him could be traced. I sought assistance from the police. There too, I was disappointed.
I was back home now, and I felt at the end of my tether. I felt haunted, shadowed. You can imagine that it is not a happy thought to think that you may not be who you think you are, that you may not be able to verify your own identity.

You may ask why, if I have any doubts concerning this matter, I do not begin my investigations with myself—that is, me, Mukundilal, rather than with the corporeal past of the supposed ghost. Well, the fact is that my parents had died while I was still very young. I was brought up for a few years by my uncle, who also died. The years of my childhood are something of a blur. I have a vague memory of a kind of strayed existence. I wandered from one village to the next. I have no childhood friends to vouch for me. Yes, there is one Goku Babu. But then, how and where to find him is another matter.

I decided in the end to burn the offending letter. There was no other way. One evening I quietly took it out and set fire to it, watching with great relief as it turned to ashes. Imagine my horror when the very next morning I received another envelope just like the one I had destroyed. Only the postmark on it bore a date of twenty years ago.

"Whose letter is it?" my wife asked me.

"Oh, just something from the office," I lied to her.

I did not open the letter. It is still with me. I do not have the courage to dispose of it because I know that another will come. And what if it should fall into the hands of my wife?

For some days I tried to persuade myself, with questionable success, that this whole letter matter was some kind of conspiracy against me. Some enemy or enemies wanted to disrupt the even tenor of my life. I went through the letters my wife received in an attempt to get to know her secrets. It was a pleasant pastime, but it could not be continued for long. I had to confess to myself that there really was not and could not be any kind of conspiracy directed against me. It was inconceivable for anyone to be sufficiently interested in me to do such a thing.

I then read up on everything I could find about ghosts and spirits and rebirth. I found it quite an interesting subject, but it didn’t make me feel any better: the letter was still there. I was confronted with myself and I had to be sure. Someone told me that the feet of a ghost turned backwards. My feet, I knew, did not have this deformity. But I do have a sixth toe on one foot which is turned backwards. Who shall be able to tell me whether Mukundilal had such a toe as a child? I came to the idea of having this growth amputated, but then I thought better of it. There was no guarantee that it would not reappear.
I now sit and wait for Goku Babu to show up from somewhere. Maybe he can tell me that Mukundilal too had six toes on one foot. If he could do that, then I would be reassured. But one never knows with Goku Babu. He is such a spinner of yarns. Meanwhile, if any of you should have six toes on one of your feet, do not be alarmed. There is no danger of your being a ghost. It seems to be true only in my case. The letter is very clear about that.
IDENTIFICATIONS

This
quietus of months
nights of eroding fruit
walnuts crippled like old skin
rotting flowers amongst the nuts

my hand
completion of a design
grips two walnuts
grinds them sets a world
on edge

darkness stoops
stumbles like a black-cassocked monk
it rings the bell for me
it slams the book shut
it quenches the flame

I rejoice in this estrangement

I am as a dismal stone
I am as a rigid god

wind skelps on the wall
silts up the angles
the dead stone numbs it
walnuts
in the bowl of my hand
they are rugged
they are infinitely discreet

I smash one under my heel
expose its wrinkled soul
it is palsied like a brain
it is harsh without blood

a moon is not rising
a bulk of owl does not flute in the bare elms
where we saw screaming

I cannot see the veins of the bark
I cannot distinguish my hand
I cannot recognize this indolence
this bulky darkness

I feel myself enter the nut's firm shuck
I sense its sleeping urgencies.

Martin Booth

WHITE

my flesh is white
my bones are white
my hands on your neck
are white

white
is the colour you see
when you see me

it is a clean colour
it bears no apparent malice
it holds no hidden treacheries
it stands for loyalty

watch it slow down

see it form red and green
blue black yellow indigo

and these you must beware

indigo will fill your mouth
when my white hand tightens

black will be blood’s colour
when the knife impinges

red will be seen last

it will be through closed eyes
it will be the last sunlight
it will be a last longing

it will fold up
into a tiny spot
vanishing into the annals
of your mind

and mix with the others
forming white

forming white
György Porkoláb

TIMELAPSE

sharp x-ray night sky
moonlit clouds, sunlit moon,
the reflecting refracting lens systems
of consciousness float in their gyroscopic mounts
and in a moment of eclipse
the vegetation feeds on elemental structures
animals feed on vegetation
i feed on the animal
something feeds on me

A CHORD OF BLACK NOTES

No more food
I digest myself now.
All this pressure on the surface.
Her cognac tears
and the orange peel of her sex.
Richard Ward

FOR YOU WHO WILL LIVE

You die
and I live.
I die
and someone who’s known one or both of us lives,
and someone who knows that person
or knows someone that person knows
lives forever.
So do you.

Immortality is inescapable
so long as people live,
a short enough time.
But what you plant and walk on and encounter
changes.
You change,
transitive and intransitive.
You live longer than mankind.
So do we all.

Your dogmatism
which we both dislike,
which reassures neither of us,
I attack not to change you
who are perfect,
but to change what you’ll offer your daughters
whose perfection here
may be quieter than yours.
Richard Ward

PORTRAIT

Pacing
like an animal that has built its own cage,
that has locked itself inside, that is trying to force itself to push
the key outside, out of reach,
while no one stares.

QUIET

Quietly I sit waiting to die and be damned. Too quietly, my friends
tell me; but I prefer to listen to strangers, who say nothing. And
quietly my friends drift back into strangeness until finally I begin
again to listen to them.

God is a silent stranger.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ADONIS (ALI AHMED SAID) was born in 1930 in a small Syrian village near Tartus. Since 1956 he has lived in Lebanon where most of his poetry has been written. He was the editor of SHI'R, a magazine of Arabic poetry, between 1957-1964. His poetry collections include a volume of selected poems in English translation, The Blood of Adonis, published in 1971 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. In 1970, Adonis was named the winner of the Syria-Lebanon award under the sponsorship of the International Poetry Forum.

MARTIN BOOTH is a British poet, editor and publisher who was born in 1944. He was recently awarded both the Greenwood Prize for Poetry and the Gregory Award. Forthcoming books of verse include a collection, The Crying Embers, and a long single poem, “On the Death of Archdeacon Broix,” recently recorded for the BBC.


RAE DALVEN is an editor and translator who was born in Greece and educated in the United States. Her anthology, Modern Greek Poetry, which appeared in 1950, will be reprinted by Russell and Russell in 1971. Her translation of The Complete Poems of Cavafy was brought out in 1961. Miss Dalven is chairman of the English Department at Ladycliff College in New York.

NORMAN THOMAS di GIOVANNI is an American who lives in Buenos Aires, where he is collaborating with Jorge Luis Borges on the English translations of eleven of Borges’ books. The first volume in this series, The Book of Imaginary Beings, appeared last year. Mr. di Giovanni is also the editor of Jorge Guillén’s Cántico: A Selection published by Atlantic-Little, Brown in 1965.
ZVONIMIR GOLOB (1927), a Croatian poet, essayist, critic, and translator, has written eight collections of poems since 1946. A graduate of the University of Zagreb, he also translates poetry and has recently become known as a composer and writer of lyrics for chansons.

VLADO GOTOVAC (1930) is a prolific Croatian poet, playwright, short-story writer, essayist, and critic. He graduated from the University of Zagreb and is now a journalist at Zagreb Radio and Television. He has published numerous collections of poetry in all parts of Yugoslavia. His first collection, Poems Forever, appeared in 1956, and his latest, The Disputed Sandals, in 1970.

SAMUEL HAZO is director of the International Poetry Forum, and President of the Pittsburgh Council for the Arts. He has published five books of poetry, a critical book on Hart Crane’s poetry, and an anthology of contemporary religious poetry. He is Professor of English at Dusquesne University.

DRAGO IVANIŠEVIĆ (1907), a Croatian poet, playwright, short-story writer, essayist, and translator, has been publishing poetry since 1940. He studied at the universities of Belgrade, Paris, Florence, and Padua, where he obtained a Ph.D. He is also a prominent painter. After a serious illness, he has shown lately a remarkable renaissance, with an untiring activity in both poetry and painting.

JURE KAŠTELAN (1919) is a Croatian poet, dramatist, short story writer, essayist and translator. He graduated and gained a Ph.D. in Slavonic Studies at Zagreb University where he is now an assistant professor in Yugoslav literature. He has published eight volumes of poems, fiction, drama and criticism, the most recent being his Selected Poems in 1964.

VESNA KRMPOTIĆ (1932) is a Croatian poet, essayist, writer of travel books, critic, and translator. She graduated from the University of Zagreb and now lives abroad. She has published four books of poetry and travel-ogues between 1956 and 1965.

MARIO LUZI (1914) is an Italian poet and translator. His collected poems were published under the title, Il Giusto della Vita, by Garzanti in 1960. A collection of his essays is titled L’inferno e il limbo. He is a frequent contributor to Italian literary journals and periodicals. The selection of Luzi’s poetry which appears in this number of MA is the most extensive publication of his work in English translations to date.

VASA D. MIHAILOVICH is an associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has published numerous articles and reviews and prepared anthologies of Yugoslav and Russian literatures.
SLAVKO MIHALIĆ (1928), the foremost Croatian poet, is the secretary of the Union of Yugoslav Writers, the secretary of the Union of Croatian Writers, and editor of the periodical in foreign languages, The Bridge. Between 1954 and 1969 he published ten collections of poetry, of which the most prominent are Love for the Real Land (1964), A Banished Ballad (1965), and Last Supper (1969).

NIKOLA MILIČEVIĆ (1922) is a Croatian poet, critic and translator. He has worked as an editorial assistant and reporter for Zagreb periodicals and is now teaching modern Croatian literature at the Liberal Arts Faculty, Zagreb University. He translates poetry from Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Latin. He has published numerous anthologies of poetry and four volumes of his own poems since 1952.

KATINA PAPA (1903-1959) published two collections of short stories: Under the Mulberry Tree, which won her the award of the Academy of Athens in 1935, and If all had Changed (1948), in which “The House of Strati Gazia” is found. In addition to a teaching career in Greece, Miss Papa traveled to Austria and Germany to study psychology and therapeutic pedagogy. She published numerous scholarly articles in these fields.

VESNA PARUN (1922) is the leading Croatian woman poet. She is also a playwright and a translator. She studied at the University of Zagreb and now lives as a professional writer. She has published numerous books of poetry, poems and novels in verse for children, and translations since 1947.

DORA PETTINELLA is an American poet and translator whose work has appeared in many English and Italian publications including Chicago Review, Hudson Review, Nation, Malahat Review, Cenobio, Fiera Letteraria, Ponte and others. She has translated numerous works from the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French.

GYÖRGY PORKOLÁB was born in Budapest in 1948. He is currently a graduate student with the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia. His poems have appeared in The Canadian Forum, Trace, The Far Point, The Fiddlehead, and other Canadian journals.

VENANZIO REALI is a Capuchin Friar in his early thirties who lives in near seclusion outside of Rome. Although he is known and respected by the writers in Rome, Frate Reali writes and paints in the secrecy of his cell. In painting, his symbolistic sketches of Christ and the Madonna have been highly praised. The poems he has written can fill a book; some derive from his studies of Hebraic and Syriac, from the ancient writings of Scripture, and others are very modern. His work remains largely unknown in Italy or in translated form.
I. L. SALOMON has published one volume of poetry (*Unit and Universe*), and edited several bilingual selections of poems by contemporary Italian poets: *Carlo Betocchi: Poems, Dino Campana: Orphic Songs, Alfredo de Palchi: Sessions with my Analyst*. His newest book in this series, *Mario Luzi: In the Dark Body of Metamorphosis and Other Poems*, will be published soon.

RYUICHI TAMURA is the founder of the monthly poetry magazine *Arechi (The Waste Land)* whose members formed one of the most significant movements in poetry in postwar Japan. Tamura himself translated Eliot's "The Waste Land" into Japanese. His own books include: *Yonsen No Hi To Yoru (Four Thousand Days and Nights)*, 1956; *Kotoba No Nai Sekai (The World without Words)*, 1962; *Kyofu no Kenkyu (A Study of Fear)*, 1966; and *Midori No Shiso (A Green Thought)*, 1967.

YUMIKO TSUMURA has published original poems in English as well as translations of modern Japanese poetry and fiction. She is a graduate of the creative writing program at Iowa University. At present she is teaching American literature at Baika Women's College in Osaka.

GANGA PRASAD VIMAL was born in 1939 in a small Himalyan town of India. He has published eight books—poetry, criticism, and a novel. Many of his stories have appeared in translations in Indian languages and several in English. Two of his stories were broadcast by the BBC. He is currently teaching Hindi literature in a college of Delhi University.

RICHARD WARD is a poet, radio-dramatist, translator and film-maker. His radio dramas have been broadcast on the Canadian Broadcasting Company, and his poems have appeared in both journals and anthologies of contemporary writing. He is currently a student in the graduate program of the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia.
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