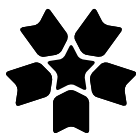


# EUROPEAN STORIES

European Union  
Prize for Literature  
Winning authors  
**2019**



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EUROPEAN UNION  
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

# EUROPEAN STORIES

European Union  
Prize for Literature  
Winning authors  
**2019**



FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN PUBLISHERS  
FÉDÉRATION DES ÉDITEURS EUROPÉENS



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**Austria**  
Laura  
Freudenthaler



**Finland**  
Piia Leino



**France**  
Sophie Daull



**Georgia**  
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Marta Dzido



**Italy**  
Giovanni Dozzini



**United Kingdom**  
Melissa Harrison



**Romania**  
Tatiana Țibuleac



**Slovakia**  
Ivana Dobráková



**Ukraine**  
Haska Shyyan

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# FOREWORD

Literary works are a great source of pleasure, a powerful way to touch our hearts and to understand what moves us. Writers give us the opportunity to better understand ourselves, other people and the world we live in. Literature contributes to the diversity and wealth of European culture – contributing to the way we think, feel, and belong together.

This book showcases the 14 laureates of the 2019 European Union Prize for Literature and shows how, through their stories, they nurture our ability to empathise. They bring us closer to other Europeans. What makes this prize so special is its aim to promote new voices from across our continent. And I sincerely hope that it will help ensure that the works of these European talents recognised in 2019 will be read in many countries, in Europe and beyond.

Supporting publishers and booksellers, making the works of European talents more known and accessible across national borders, is a key element of EU cultural policy. Every year our Creative Europe programme supports the translation and promotion of hundreds of books, including those awarded with the EU Prize for Literature, helping authors find new audiences. Throughout my mandate, I have firmly defended this need to continuously encourage the dissemination of literary works.

I am grateful to the consortium organising the European Union Prize for Literature, consisting of the European Writers Council, the Federation of European Publishers and the European and International Booksellers Federation. Their commitment to the prize and their support to European Union policies on books and reading are vital.

Finally, I warmly congratulate the 14 winners. I wish each and every one of them a splendid literary career, supported by many translations of their books, so that they can reach a wide public worldwide. And I wish all their readers a rewarding journey into the worlds created by our talented laureates – worlds that help us explore our identities, make sense of our shared experiences and build strong, cohesive and resilient communities.

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





# AUSTRIA

## Laura Freudenthaler **Geistergeschichte** *Ghost Story*

Graz: Literaturverlag  
Droschl, 2019.



### SYNOPSIS

What if a void suddenly opened up in your life? This is the question Laura Freudenthaler pursues in her second novel *Ghost Story*. In her gap year, that she meant to spend playing piano and writing textbooks, Anne is thrown off track. One by one she abandons her habits and hobbies. By day she roams the streets, by night she writes her observations into a notebook. Her flat, where she has been living with Thomas for 20 years, feels increasingly uncomfortable, not least because Thomas seems to be less and less present there. She had suspected all along that he might be cheating on her. And now the girl, as Anne calls his mistress, appears as fleeting, whispering ghost. There are noises and apparitions now which are getting harder and harder for Anne to identify.¶

### BIOGRAPHY

**L**aura Freudenthaler, born 1984 in Salzburg. She studied German language and literature studies, Philosophy and Gender Studies. She lives in Vienna. Her stories *Der Schädel der Madeleine* were published in 2014. For her novel *Die Königin schweigt* she was awarded the Förderpreis zum Bremer Literaturpreis 2018 and the novel was recommended as best German debut at the Festival du Premier Roman 2018 in Chambéry. In 2019 she publishes her second novel *Geistergeschichte*.

# Geistergeschichte

*Laura Freudenthaler*



Anne schließt die Wohnungstür von innen, sie legt die Handtasche auf den Hocker, schaut auf das Telefon und steckt es zurück in das Seitenfach. An das Huschen aus den Augenwinkeln hat sie sich gewöhnt, manchmal erschrickt sie trotzdem, wenn in dem Moment, da sie den Mantel aufhängt, etwas durch die offene Tür ins Wohnzimmer verschwindet. Oder wenn sie sich umwendet und ihr ist, als sei die Tür zu Thomas' Zimmer eben noch offen gewesen und eilig geschlossen worden. Die Tür zu Thomas' Zimmer steht aber schon lange nicht mehr offen. In der Küche wäscht Anne das wenige Geschirr ab, das noch benutzt wird, als sie ein Scharren von Holz vernimmt. Sie dreht das Wasser ab, hält den Teller in den nassen Händen, schaut dann hinter sich. Sie weiß nicht, wie die Sessel noch vor einem Moment um den Tisch gestanden sind. Im Wohnzimmer fällt ihr Blick ohne Absicht auf die untere Regalreihe, wo die Schachteln mit den Fotos stehen. Eine Schachtel ragt über den Regalboden hinaus. Anne geht hin und rückt sie mit dem Fuß zurecht oder auch nicht. Immer öfter lässt sie die Dinge, wie sie sind. Meist weiß sie nicht mit Bestimmtheit zu sagen, wie sie vorher waren. Neben dem Knappee liegt eine Zeitschrift auf dem Boden. Regelmäßig muss Anne sich wundern, dass sie die Zahnbürste nicht in den Becher am Waschbecken gestellt, sondern daneben auf die Waschmaschine gelegt hat, oder auf den Badewannenrand, ein anderes Mal neben die Abwasch in der Küche. Wenn sie schon in ihrem Zimmer im Bett liegt und gehört hat, wie Thomas in die Wohnung gekommen ist, wenn er im Bad war und



es in seinem Zimmer still ist, steht Anne noch einmal auf, um aufs Klo zu gehen und in der Küche ein Glas Wasser zu trinken. Im Vorzimmer denkt Anne daran, dass die Taschen von Thomas' Mantel und Jacke und auch von den Sakkos, die er in der Garderobe aufhängt, geleert werden müssen. Thomas selbst tut das nicht, er wirft keinen Kassazettel weg, auch wenn darauf nur eine Packung Hustenzuckerl verrechnet ist. Anne hat manchmal versucht, ihn nach dem Verlassen eines Geschäfts oder eines Restaurants dazu zu bringen, den Beleg in den nächsten Mistkübel zu werfen. Thomas ging auf das Spiel ein, doch wenn er die Hand mit der Rechnung über den Mistkübel hielt, konnte er nicht weiter und Anne sah sein zorniges Gesicht, ehe er sich abwandte, die Hand mit der Rechnung in die Tasche steckte und mit großen Schritten vorausging. Irgendwann wurde er langsamer, blieb schließlich stehen und wartete auf Anne. Mittlerweile bekommt man für jede Kleinigkeit Belege, und Thomas' Taschen sind immer schneller voll damit. Einmal in der Woche leert Anne die Taschen des Mantels, der Jacke und der Sakkos und geht mit zwei Händen voller Rechnungen, verschiedenfarbiger Notizzettel und Zuckerlpapiere in die Küche. Dort breitet sie alles auf den Tisch und sortiert es in drei Häufchen. Rechts die Notizzettel, auf denen bereits vergangene Termine festgehalten sind, dazu die Zuckerlpapiere sowie die unwichtigen Rechnungen. In die Mitte legt Anne die Restaurantrechnungen und links die Notizzettel, die noch wichtig sind oder die sie nicht zuordnen kann. Den Haufen mit den Zuckerlpapieren wirft Anne in den Müll, die übrigen Notizzettel steckt sie zurück in Thomas' Manteltasche. Die Rechnungen in der Mitte nimmt Anne mit in ihr Zimmer. Noch einmal geht sie ins Vorzimmer und holt aus ihrer Handtasche das Notizheft. Wenn das Mädchen abends in der Nähe von Thomas' Büro auf ihn wartet oder er es abholt, fragt Thomas das Mädchen, ob es schon gegessen habe. Natürlich nicht, lacht das Mädchen und Thomas sagt: Dann wollen wir dich einmal füttern.

Anne sortiert die Belege zunächst nach Datum. Am Montag vor einer Woche hat sie zuletzt Buch geführt. Es gibt Belege, die mittags oder nachmittags ausgestellt wurden, oftmals in der Umgebung von Thomas' Büro. Es gibt Belege, die mehrere Kaffees, Mineralwasser, Tee, ein kleines Bier auflisten, das sind die Nachmittage, an denen Thomas in einem Lokal mehrere Besprechungen hintereinander abhält. Es gibt Belege über zwei Kaffees und immer wieder Rechnungen von einem Teehaus über zwei Kannen Jasmintee, von denen Anne nicht weiß, ob sie allein oder zu zweit getrunken wurden. Unter den Abendessen ist meist ein berufliches, an dem mehrere Personen teilgenommen haben. Diese Rechnungen steckt Anne später, ebenso wie die langen Nachmittage, zurück in Thomas' Tasche, damit er sie von der Steuer absetzen oder weiterverrechnen kann. Die Abendessen mit dem Mädchen überträgt Anne in ihr Heft. Wenn sie tief in der Nacht die Woche aufgearbeitet hat, verlässt Anne noch einmal ihr Zimmer, steckt die Geschäftsrechnungen zu den Notizzetteln in die Manteltasche und wirft den Rest zum Altpapier.



Das Mädchen flattert, es ist ein Vögelchen, mit zarten Flügeln und feinen Federn, ein wenig Flaum hat es noch aus Kindertagen, am Haaransatz, und weiche, leuchtende Wangen. An der unerschöpflichen Lebendigkeit des Mädchens kann man sich unmöglich sattsehen. Thomas ist sehr besorgt um das körperliche Wohl des Mädchens, das den ganzen Tag nur winzige Bissen von etwas isst, ein halbes Käsebrot, einen Becher weißes Joghurt, einen Apfel der Sorte Kronprinz Rudolf, das sind die kleinsten. Abends wird es lachend antworten: Natürlich nicht, wenn Thomas fragt, ob es schon gegessen habe. Das Mädchen freut sich, wenn Thomas es dann eilig hat, ihm etwas zu essen zu beschaffen. Es mag diese Dringlichkeit zu Beginn ihrer Treffen und die Nervosität, die von

der Aufregung, ihn zu sehen, ausgelöst wird. Das Mädchen will Thomas nicht in sattem Zustand treffen, es fürchtet das Ausbleiben der Aufregung, die vielleicht nur auf nüchternen Magen möglich ist. Es muss sich zusammennehmen, um nicht zu flattern, mit Händen und Armen und Atem, und lacht und scherzt in einem Schwall, von dem Thomas sich überfordert zeigt. Er könne dem Mädchen nicht folgen, es bringe ihn ganz durcheinander, sagt er, aber das Mädchen weiß, Thomas wird unter ihrem Übermut lebendig, bis schließlich, nach dem Essen, das Mädchen ruhiger wird, ein wenig erschöpft. Doch dann hat Thomas sich bereits aus seiner Müdigkeit gelöst und plaudert und besieht das vom Essen warme Mädchen, das manchmal am Ende eines Lachens seufzt. Zwei Reiter, die nach einem Stück Weg, auf dem einmal der eine voraus war, dann der andere sein Pferd hat laufen lassen, endlich mit lockeren Zügeln nebeneinander herreiten, ins Gespräch vertieft. Und du bist früher wirklich oft geritten, fragt Thomas. Das Mädchen macht ein Gesicht, das Unmut ausdrückt. Erzähl, sagt Thomas. Manchmal, sagt das Mädchen, kommt mir vor, du möchtest mich jünger haben als ich bin. Du weißt noch gar nicht, sagt Thomas, wie jung du jetzt bist. Das Mädchen schaut auf die Serviette, die es an den Rand des Tisches schiebt. Lass uns zum Abschluss des Abends einen süßen Wein trinken, sagt Thomas, auf die Jugend. Anne wundert sich über den Dessertwein auf der Rechnung. Das Mädchen wird davon beschwipst. Komm, ich fahr dich nachhause, hat Thomas gesagt, ich bringe dich noch ins Bett. Wenn Thomas den Abend mit dem Mädchen verbringt, kommt er für gewöhnlich erst nach Mitternacht in die Wohnung zurück. Das Mädchen ist eingeschlafen, noch bevor er es verlassen hat, es hat einen guten Schlaf, um den Thomas es beneidet. Er hat sich angezogen, ist ins Bad gegangen und hat sich das Gesicht gewaschen. Mit nassen Händen hat er seine Haare geordnet und sich mit dem Handtuch des Mädchens abgetrocknet. In dem kleinen, engen Bad ist Thomas,

als er sich umdrehte, gegen die Duschkabine gestoßen, Lärm von Plastik und Metall. Er hat ein Fluchwort ausgestoßen und gewartet, ob sich etwas rührt. Thomas weiß, wie er die Tür des Mädchens ohne ein Geräusch von außen zuzieht. Er weiß auch, wie er die eigene Wohnungstür möglichst leise öffnen kann. Anne wacht trotzdem auf. Sie hört den Schlüssel im Schloss. Es hilft nichts, dass er die Wohnungstür versperrt, das Mädchen ist längst hier. Anne hört zu, wie Thomas ins Badezimmer geht und aufs Klo, wie er dann die Tür zu seinem Zimmer schließt und sich von innen noch einmal dagegen lehnt. Schritte und Stille und noch einmal Schritte. Er schaut in seinen Computer und noch einmal auf sein Telefon. Er weiß nicht, dass das Mädchen bereits daraus entstiegen ist und den Weg zurück nicht mehr findet. Er weiß nicht viel, denkt Anne, und, während sie wieder einschläft, dass sie einmal mit Thomas über das Mädchen sprechen sollte.



Am Rippenbogen entlang tastet Anne nach hinten, bis sie knapp an der Wirbelsäule die Verhärtung spürt, die sie vor ein oder zwei Wochen zufällig entdeckt hat. Sie kann nicht ausmachen, ob das Kügelchen im Fleisch wuchert oder aus der Haut herauswächst. Anne sitzt am Rand der Badewanne, einen Arm um ihren Oberkörper gelegt. Sie hört jemanden durch die Wohnung gehen und spürt die Luft kühl auf der nackten Haut, als sie aus dem Bad ins Vorzimmer tritt. Kannst du dir etwas anschauen? sagt Anne auf der Schwelle zur Küche. Thomas stellt das Wasserglas ab, aus dem er getrunken hat. Setz dich, sagt er und macht einen Schritt zum Tisch hin. Anne hat die Arme vor der Brust gekreuzt und die Hände auf die Schultern gelegt. Es ist nichts, will sie sagen, bestimmt nichts, aber sie folgt seiner Bewegung und setzt sich. Thomas steht hinter ihr. Du musst mir schon die Stelle zeigen, sagt er. Anne schiebt das Unterleibchen hinauf und tastet. Hier. Thomas' Finger rückt ihren zur Seite und streicht über die Ver-

härtung, einmal von oben nach unten und einmal von unten nach oben, dann drückt er leicht. Das ist nichts, sagt er und zieht das Unterleibchen über Annes Rücken hinunter. Man sieht den Eiter, in ein paar Tagen kannst du das aufmachen. Anne streckt ihre Hand nach hinten, um die Stelle zu bedecken, und dreht sich herum. Thomas tritt von ihr weg und greift nach seinem Glas, er nickt beruhigend. Anne schüttelt den Kopf. Sie verlässt die Küche, sie läuft ins Bad, durchquert den kleinen Raum, bis sie ansteht, vor dem schmalen, hohen Fenster. Dreht sich herum und lehnt sich an, der Heizkörper an ihren Beinen. Anne geht in die Hocke, rutscht am Heizkörper nach unten. An ihrem Rücken das warme Metall. Die Bodenfliesen sind weiß mit dunkelblau geschrägten Ecken. Im Staub erkennt Anne kleine Fußabdrücke. Das Mädchen ist vor den Spiegel gehuscht und hat sich darin angesehen. Anne stellt sich dorthin, wo das Mädchen gestanden ist. Sie betrachtet ihren Haaransatz, die Lider, die Lippen. Die Haut am Hals und in der Vertiefung zwischen den Schlüsselbeinen. Die Oberarme. Unter den Achseln und im Dekolleté ist das Leibchen weit ausgeschnitten, der Stoff ausgeleiert. Auf der Höhe der Achseln verdickt sich das Gewebe zu Wölbungen und sinkt darunter ab. Die Brüste sind klein und doch zu schwer. Der dünn gewordene Stoff des Leibchens liegt am Bauch auf. Als Anne zurückkommt, sitzt Thomas am Tisch. Er hat sein Telefon vor sich liegen und tippt darauf herum. Thomas, sagt Anne. Er macht eine Bewegung, der Bildschirm verdunkelt sich, dann blickt er auf. Sie steht im Türrahmen und weiß, was er sieht. Auch er beginnt beim Gesicht. Hinunter über den Hals, die Schlüsselbeine, die Schultern. Die Oberarme, die Achseln, das zu Wölbungen verdickte Gewebe. Das Leibchen bedeckt die Brüste und den Bauch. Weiter reicht der Badezimmerspiegel nicht. Anne dreht sich um und geht in ihr Zimmer, sie will endlich schlafen. An der Grenze zum Traum bereits hört sie Thomas die Wohnung verlassen.

# Histoire de fantôme

*Laura Freudenthaler*

Traduit de l'allemand par Pierrick Steunou

Anne referme derrière elle la porte de l'appartement et pose son sac sur le tabouret, puis elle jette un rapide coup d'œil sur son téléphone et le remet dans la poche latérale. Habitée à voir surgir des ombres du coin de l'œil, il lui arrive encore de sursauter en accrochant son manteau quand quelque chose se glisse par la porte ouverte et disparaît dans le salon. Ou en tournant la tête, persuadée que la porte de la chambre de Thomas était encore ouverte à l'instant et qu'on venait de la refermer à la hâte. Pourtant, il y a bien longtemps que cette porte n'est plus ouverte. Dans la cuisine, alors qu'elle lave les quelques assiettes encore utilisées, elle perçoit un bruit de bois qui racle le sol. Elle ferme le robinet, mais garde l'assiette dans ses mains mouillées et regarde derrière elle. Comment les fauteuils étaient-ils disposés autour de la table, il y a un instant ? Elle ne s'en souvient plus. Dans le salon, son regard se pose incidemment sur l'étagère du bas, là où sont rangées les photos. Une boîte dépasse. Du bout du pied, Anne la remet en place. Ou peut-être pas. De plus en plus, elle laisse les choses en l'état, souvent incapable de dire comment elles étaient disposées auparavant. Une revue traîne par terre, tout près du canapé. Régulièrement, Anne s'étonne d'avoir laissé sa brosse à dents sur la machine à laver, ou sur le rebord de la baignoire, ou même à côté de l'évier dans la cuisine, au lieu de la remettre dans le gobelet sur le lavabo. Lorsque Thomas rentre, si elle est déjà au lit, elle se relève pour aller aux toilettes et boire un verre d'eau dans la cuisine, une fois qu'il est passé par la salle de bains et que sa chambre est redevenue silencieuse.

Dans le couloir, Anne se rappelle que les poches de Thomas sont à vider, celles de son manteau, de sa veste et des vestons qu'il accroche dans la penderie. Thomas ne le fait pas de lui-même. Jamais il ne jette rien, même pas le ticket de caisse d'une boîte de pastilles contre la toux. Parfois, en sortant d'un magasin ou d'un restaurant, elle l'incitait à se débarrasser du ticket dans la première poubelle venue. Thomas jouait d'abord le jeu mais, la main avec le bon de caisse au-dessus de la poubelle, il était incapable d'aller jusqu'au bout de son geste. Anne voyait la colère envahir son visage, juste avant qu'il ne détourne la tête. Fourrant le ticket dans sa poche, il s'éloignait à grandes enjambées. Au bout d'un moment, il ralentissait son pas, s'arrêtait et attendait qu'Anne le rejoigne. De nos jours, on vous donne un ticket pour n'importe quelle babiole, et les poches de Thomas gonflent de plus en plus vite. Anne les vide une fois par semaine. Les deux mains pleines, elle emporte à la cuisine les factures, les fiches-mémos de différentes couleurs et les papiers-bonbons. Là, elle étale tout sur la table et procède au tri en faisant trois piles. À droite, les rendez-vous qui ont déjà eu lieu, les papiers-bonbons et les factures sans importance. Au milieu, les factures de restaurant et, à gauche, les fiches qui présentent encore un certain intérêt et celles qu'elle n'arrive pas à classer ailleurs. Elle jette les papiers-bonbons à la poubelle, remet les fiches dans les poches du manteau et emporte les factures de restaurant dans sa chambre. Elle retourne encore une fois dans le couloir pour aller chercher le carnet dans son sac à main. Le soir, quand la fille attend Thomas près de son bureau, ou quand il va la chercher, il lui demande si elle a déjà dîné. Bien sûr que non, répond la fille et Thomas lui dit: Alors on va te trouver un petit quelque chose à grignoter. Anne effectue d'abord un tri chronologique. La dernière annotation dans le carnet date du lundi de la semaine passée. Certaines factures, émises le midi ou

l'après-midi, souvent dans le quartier où se trouve le bureau de Thomas, concernent des boissons: thé, café, eau minérale, bière. Ce sont les jours où Thomas a eu plusieurs rendez-vous à la suite dans le même café. Sur certains tickets ne figurent que deux cafés; d'autres encore — assez nombreux — proviennent d'un salon de thé. Deux pleines théières de thé au jasmin ont été réglées, Anne ignore si c'était pour une ou deux personnes. Parmi les factures du soir, il y a la plupart du temps celle d'un dîner professionnel auquel plusieurs personnes ont pris part. Ces factures, ainsi que celles des après-midis à rallonge, Anne les remet dans les poches de Thomas pour qu'il puisse les déduire de ses impôts ou les intégrer dans sa comptabilité. Elle inscrit les dîners avec la fille dans son carnet. Tard dans la nuit, lorsqu'elle a passé en revue toute la semaine, elle ressort une dernière fois de sa chambre pour glisser les factures professionnelles dans les poches du manteau, avec les fiches, et jeter le reste dans la corbeille à papier recyclé.



La fille volette, elle est un oisillon aux ailes fragiles, aux plumes délicates; de sa plus tendre enfance, elle a conservé un fin duvet, à la racine de ses cheveux, et des joues douces, d'un vif éclat. On ne se lasse pas de la voir déployer son inépuisable vitalité. Thomas est très soucieux de son bien-être physique, elle qui durant la journée ne grignote que quelques minuscules bouchées, une demi-tartine au fromage, un pot de yaourt nature, une pomme Kronprinz Rudolf, les plus petites de toutes. Le soir elle répondra en riant: Bien sûr que non, lorsque Thomas lui demandera si elle a déjà dîné. La fille est ravie de voir Thomas s'activer pour lui trouver à manger.



Elle aime l'atmosphère d'urgence qui caractérise les premiers moments de leurs rendez-vous et la fébrilité que produit l'excitation de le revoir. La fille ne veut pas rencontrer Thomas le ventre plein, elle craint qu'une telle excitation, qui n'est peut-être accessible qu'à jeun, ne lui fasse défaut. Elle doit se maîtriser pour ne pas se mettre à voleter, avec ses mains, ses bras, son souffle, et elle rit et plaisante avec une telle fougue que Thomas se sent dépassé. Il dit à la fille qu'il ne peut pas la suivre, qu'elle l'affole au plus haut point, mais la fille sait que c'est son exubérance qui le rend vivant, et elle finit par retrouver son calme, après le repas, vaguement épuisée. C'est alors que Thomas, remis de sa fatigue, se met à bavarder et à observer attentivement la fille, réchauffée par la nourriture et qui, parfois, conclut ses rires par un soupir. Deux cavaliers qui, après un bout de route — le premier avait d'abord trotté en tête, l'autre avait ensuite fait galoper son cheval —, cheminent enfin côte à côte, la bride relâchée, en pleine discussion. Tu es vraiment montée à cheval autrefois, demande Thomas. La fille montre un visage contrarié. Raconte, dit Thomas. J'ai parfois l'impression, dit la fille, que tu me voudrais plus jeune que je le suis. Tu n'as pas idée, rétorque Thomas, à quel point tu es jeune en ce moment. La fille regarde sa serviette qu'elle repousse vers le bord de la table. Buvons un verre de vin doux, pour clôturer la soirée, dit Thomas, trinquons à la jeunesse! Anne s'étonne de la présence du vin de dessert sur la facture. La fille est un peu éméchée. Viens, je te ramène chez toi, dit Thomas, je vais te mettre au lit. Habituellement, lorsque Thomas passe la soirée avec la fille, il ne rentre qu'après minuit. La fille s'est endormie avant qu'il ne s'en aille, elle a un bon sommeil que Thomas lui envie. Il s'est rhabillé puis s'est rafraîchi le visage dans la salle de bains. De ses mains mouillées, il remet de l'ordre dans sa coiffure et se sèche avec la serviette de la fille. En se retournant dans l'étroite salle de bains, il se cogne contre la cabine de

douche: fracas de plastique et de métal. Laissant échapper un juron, il tend l'oreille pour savoir si quelque chose bouge. Il sait comment fermer de l'extérieur la porte de chez la fille sans provoquer le moindre bruit. Il sait aussi ouvrir la porte de chez lui le plus discrètement possible. Pourtant, Anne se réveille. Elle entend le bruit de la clé dans la serrure. Cela ne sert à rien qu'il verrouille la porte de l'appartement, la fille est ici depuis longtemps déjà. Anne entend Thomas aller dans la salle de bains et aux toilettes, puis fermer la porte de sa chambre et s'y s'adosser de l'intérieur. Des pas, un instant de silence, puis encore des pas. Il consulte son ordinateur puis à nouveau son téléphone. Il ne sait pas que la fille s'en est déjà échappée et qu'elle ne retrouve plus son chemin. Il ne sait pas grand-chose, pense Anne et, tandis qu'elle retombe dans le sommeil, elle se dit qu'un jour il faudra qu'elle parle de la fille avec Thomas.



Anne glisse son doigt le long de sa cage thoracique, vers l'arrière, jusqu'à sentir, tout près de la colonne vertébrale, la petite boule qu'elle avait détectée par hasard, il y a une ou deux semaines. Impossible pour elle de savoir si cette boule est nichée à l'intérieur de sa chair ou si elle a poussé sur la peau. Anne est assise sur le rebord de la baignoire, le bras derrière le dos. Elle entend des pas dans l'appartement et, dans le couloir, elle sent un souffle d'air frais qui fait frissonner sa peau nue. Je peux te montrer quelque chose? dit Anne, debout sur le seuil de la cuisine. Thomas pose le verre d'eau qu'il était en train de boire. Assieds-toi, lui dit-il en s'avançant vers la table. Anne a les bras croisés devant la poitrine, les mains sur les épaules. Ce n'est rien, ce n'est sûrement rien, s'apprête-t-elle à dire, mais elle suit son mouvement et s'assoit. Thomas est debout derrière elle. Il faudrait que tu me montres l'en-

droit, dit-il. Anne retrousse son caraco et cherche en tâtonnant. C'est là. Thomas écarte son doigt avec le sien et palpe la grosseur, de haut en bas et de droite à gauche, puis exerce une légère pression. Ce n'est rien, dit-il en rabattant le caraco. On voit le pus; dans quelques jours, tu pourras le percer. Anne passe la main derrière son dos pour dissimuler l'endroit et se retourne. Thomas s'éloigne d'elle et reprend son verre, en lui faisant un petit signe de tête rassurant. Anne secoue la tête. Elle quitte la cuisine, court dans la salle de bains et va se planter au fond de la petite pièce, devant l'étroite fenêtre oblongue. Elle se retourne, s'adosse au mur, les jambes contre le radiateur. Elle se laisse glisser jusqu'au sol et s'accroupit. La chaleur du métal dans le dos. Au sol, du carrelage blanc aux coins bleus. Dans la poussière, Anne repère les empreintes de petits pieds. La fille est venue fureter jusqu'ici pour se regarder dans le miroir. Anne est debout à l'endroit où se trouvait la fille. Elle observe ses racines de cheveux, ses paupières, ses lèvres. La peau de son cou et le creux de ses épaules. Ses bras. Le caraco est très échancré sous les aisselles et, sur le décolleté, l'étoffe est usée. Au niveau des aisselles, la chair fait des bourrelets et s'affaisse en dessous. Les seins sont petits et pourtant trop lourds. Le ventre est à l'étroit sous le tissu élimé. Anne retourne dans la cuisine et trouve Thomas assis à la table, pianotant sur son téléphone.

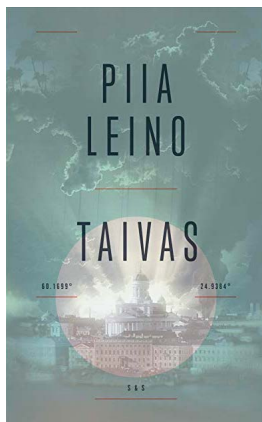
Thomas, dit Anne. Il fait un geste, l'écran s'assombrit et il lève les yeux vers elle. Elle est debout dans l'encadrement de la porte et sait ce qu'il voit. Lui aussi commence par le visage. Descend vers le cou, les épaules. Les bras, les aisselles, les bourrelets de chair. Le caraco recouvre les seins et le ventre. Le miroir de la salle de bains ne permet pas d'en voir plus. Anne fait demi-tour et regagne sa chambre, affamée de sommeil. Parvenue au seuil des rêves, elle entend Thomas quitter l'appartement.

# FINLAND

**Piia Leino**

**Taivas**

Helsinki: Kustantamo S&S,  
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## BIOGRAPHY

**Piia Leino** was born in 1977. She lives in Helsinki with her family, and has worked as a journalist at the Finnish News Agency, STT, for almost two decades. She got her Master's degree in social studies, majoring in journalism, from University of Tampere in 2004. She also studied creative writing for two years at the renowned Kriittinen korkeakoulu (Critical Academy) in Helsinki in 2015-2017.

Her second novel is literal dystopian novel TAIVAS (2018, 'Heaven'). Her first novel, RUMA KASSA (2016, 'The Ugly Cashier', publ. Johnny Kniga), was about reality TV and the pressures women face. Her third novel will be published in 2020.

As an author she writes to understand how society works, and where it is headed. Her interests include popular culture, social media and politics.

## SYNOPSIS

TAIVAS takes place in Helsinki, a city state, former capital of Finland, in 2058. Society has collapsed after a civil war, and a nationalist movement called Light is in power. All borders are closed, contact with the outside world is non-existent, as are any visions of the future. People live under strict misrule and oppression, and there are beggars on the streets. Instead, the ruling Light has given its citizens Heaven: a game, a virtual reality, where the old world lives on, more vivid and beautiful than it ever really was. Heaven is addictive, but it can only be accessed by people with enough money and standing. The protagonist, Akseli, works at the university trying to find out the cause of the epidemic of apathy: people hardly leave their apartments, don't talk to

each other and no babies are born. When Akseli is given total access to Heaven, he's soon about to be consumed by the virtual reality — until he meets, in Heaven, a woman called Iina. The meeting is so powerful that they decide to meet in real life. And after that, everything changes. The dystopian novel TAIVAS deals with important themes of today: climate change, growing inequality within a welfare state, technological inventions and their growing power, and nationalist movements in Europe and the world. ¶



# Taivas

*Piia Leino*



## 1. OSA

### *H A R M A A*

Kun Akselin on pakko lepuuttaa silmiään, hän katselee kerjäläisten neliötä.

Heitä oli alun perin neljäsataa, sata Hakaniemen torin jokaiselle laidalle, mutta osa on ehkä jo kuollut. Ensimmäisenä ulos ja sisään otetaan aina Siltasaarenkadun puoleinen laita, sitten järjestyksessä myötäpäivään. Viimeinen rivi ei mahdu Kauppahalliin, he nukkuvat torilla haalistuneen oransseissa teltoissa ja vihreissä roskapöntöissä. Yhdestä lappeelleen kaadetusta pöntöstä puuttuu kansi, sen tilalla roikkuu punaruutuinen vahakangas.

On jo huhtikuu, mutta kerjäläiset nököttävät yhä paksuihin kankaisiin kääriytyneinä myttyinä. Viima puhaltaa mereltä ja myös Akseli tuntee sen, vaikkei käy ulkona. Kalseus puree lattianrajassa nilkkoihin, nousee siitä ylemmäs kehoon ja siirtyy suruna mieleen.

Akseli seisoo ikkunan edessä, nostaa polveaan ja taivuttaa kyynärpänsä kiinni siihen, palaa perusasentoon ja toistaa liikkeen vastakkaisella puolella. Liike uuvuttaa jo, mutta hän tarrautuu äänteisiin, lausuu ne päässään niin kovaa,

että melkein kuulee äänen: kah-dek-san, yh-dek-sän, kymme-nen. Työkykyharjoitukset eivät ole miellyttäviä, mutta ne ovat pakollisia. Elämästä lihassa on maksettava hintaa. Valon ohjeiden mukaan lihakset ovat mielen muovailuvahaa ja siksi niihin on suhtauduttava työnä. Mielen muovailuvahasta puhui jo yli sata vuotta sitten merkittävä juoksija, lentävä suomalainen, jonka nimeä Akseli ei juuri nyt jaksu muistaa. Joka tapauksessa tuo suomalainen tiesi varmasti saman min-kä hänkin: liha on riesa, jota mieli raahaa perässään.

Akseli vaihtaa liikettä: painaa ensin sormenpänsä viileään lattiaan ja nousee sitten varpailleen kohti kattoa. Selän rusahdus tuntuu melkein hyvältä. Kerjäläiset istuvat aloillaan, kun ensimmäinen jyrähdys kuuluu jostain kaukaa. Rankkasateella tori tyhjennetään, mutta vielä vartijat nuokkuvat Kauppahallin seinää vasten, kenties nukkuvat. Heitä on kaksi ja Akselin mielessä välähtää ajatus, että torin väki voisi hyökätä heidän kimppuunsa, viedä aseet, tappaa heidät. Silti on selvää, ettei sellaista tapahdu. Kuka yhä jaksaisi kapinoida ja miksi? Sade humauttaa maisemaan ja virvoittaa vartijat, jotka nousevat ja viittaavat ryysyläisten joukon ylös. Väki alkaa valua sisään ja pisarat rapsahtelevat ikkunaan, mutta Akseli hädin tuskin huomaa. Hän jatkaa liikettään taasaista tahtia, ajatukset lepattavat irrallaan. Ennen ukonilmoja oli vain kesäisin, kai. Akseli ei ole varma, mutta muistaa isomummolan kaurapellon, jonka yllä salamoit ja sen, että se oli silloin harvinaista, sykehdyttävää. Nyt taivas murtauilee pitkin yli puolivuotista sadekautta ja kaupunki jyrisee tottuneesti murtumien alla.

Akselia hengästyttää, takaraivo tuntuu ontolta, veri ei jaksu pysyä liikkeen tahdissa. Hänen on tehtävä tämä, kaksikymmentä kertaa kutakin liikettä. Jos hän ei ole työkykyinen, hän ei voi tehdä työtä ja jos hän ei tee työtä, ylipisto ei maksa hänelle viiden tunnin päivittäistä Taivasmatkaa. Ilman Tai-

vasta on vain hytтынraadoista mustuneet seinät ja lähetti, joka tuo ruoan kerran viikossa. Tuijottaisiko hän toria ja pureskelisi sirkkapuuroa päivänsä loppuun, vai uskaltautuisiko avaamaan ikkunan ja hyppäämään tyhjyyteen? Kuolisiko tältä korkeudelta edes heti, vai makaisiko hän maassa kunnes valuisi kuiviin?

Akseli valmistautuu vatsalihasliikkeisiin taittelemalla pyyhkeen naarmuiselle parketille, sillä ranka ei kestä lattiaa. Kesken liikkeen valtava kärpänen pörähtää kohti hänen kasvojaan, sotkee rytmin ja laskutoimituksen ja saa hänet paniikkiin. Hän ei halua tehdä yhtään ylimääräistä liikettä eikä yhtään liian vähän, sillä juuri ohjeistettuun määrään hän kykenee. Akseli tekee vielä muutaman hätäisen toiston ja rojahtaa lattialle, näkee sängyn alla pölyn keskellä kuolleen torakan ja muistaa nähneensä sen monta kertaa ennenkin.

Kun kyyneleet alkavat valua, Akseli ymmärtää niiden olleen pinnassa koko ajan. Hän voisi jäädä lattialle loppuiäkseen, he voisivat käpristyä tässä yhdessä torakan kanssa, mutta Taivaassa odottaa lempeä sade ja tuuli ja linnunlaulu eikä hän vielä ole valmis luopumaan. Hän tempaisee itsensä pystyyn ja istuu hikisenä nojatuoliin, nostaa lasit lattialta silmilleen. Puolitoista tuntia, uusi työkykyjumppa ja Taivas. Hän pystyisi siihen kyllä, kun ensin muistaisi mihin jäi.



Lady Gaga nousee uima-altaasta yksiolkaimisessa nahka-asussa ja oudossa kypärässä, pelaa korttia, nykii lantiotaan rantatuolilla ja tuijottaa kameraan intensiivisesti kuin kutsuisi Akselia mukaan kauan sitten kadonneeseen leikkiin. Musiikkivideon vauhti on hengästyttävä, rytmi hakkaava: Lady Gagan vaatteet vaihtuvat, hän poseeraa



korttiringissä, valtavien koirien kanssa ja ihmisryhmässä tanssien, ja koko ajan on kyse vain hänestä, hänen sileästä pinnastaan ja siitä, mitä Akseli arvelee sukupuoliseksi viehätysvoimaksi. Naisten kauneutta korostettiin tuohon aikaan vähäisillä vaatteilla, laitetuilla hiuksilla ja kasvoväreillä ja Lady Gagalla on runsaasti niitä kaikkia.

Akseli on katsonut tallenteen kymmeniä kertoja. Se tuntuu yhä vastenmieliseltä ja syöksähtelevältä. Ajalleen tyypilliseen tapaan se pyrkii vangitsemaan katsojan mielenkiinnon valtavalla määrällä visuaalisia ärsykeitä. Vasta virtuaalimaailmat kykenivät vetoamaan kaikkiin aisteihin ja hyödyntämään biopalautetta, jolloin ärsykesyöttö rauhoittui meditatiiviselle tasolle. Rauhoittava mielihyvä syrjäytti kiihdyttävän, nautinto himon. Akseli vetää peittoa päälleen viileässä huoneessa ja yrittää keskittyä, mutta ei saa ajatuksesta otetta. Hän on katsellut laseistaan päiväkausia musiikkivideoita, pitkiä elokuvia ja hassuja pikkuelokuvia, joita he sanoivat pornoksi. Joissain tallenteissa aktiin ryhdytään suoraa päätä, mutta useimmiten keskitytään soidinmenoihin: naiset koristautuvat ja miehet mittelevät voimiaan taistelukohtauksissa. Joissain pitkissä elokuvissa saadaan jälkeläisiä, mutta heidän tuotannostaan puhutaan harvoin.

Vuosituhanne vaihteen tallenteista ei löydy pienintäkään viitettä tulevasta. Ihmiset pulppuilevat niissä halua ja järjetöntä mustasukkaisuutta, he ovat hirvittävän touhukkaita.

Sukupuolisen kanssakäymisen lisäksi heitä näyttää motivoivan mahdollisuus omaisuuden keräämiseen. Värikkäät kengät ja mekot kiihdyttävät naispuolisia henkilöitä jopa enemmän kuin parittelumahdollisuus. Eräässä tallenteessa neljä naista harrastaa sukupuoliyhteyttä lukuisten miesten kanssa New Yorkin kaupungissa, luonnollisesti ennen aaltoa. Suurinta mielihyvää naisille näyttävät sil-

ti tuottavan kaupan näyteikkunan epämukavan näköiset kengät, joiden näkeminen saa heidät kiljahtelemaan ja lyömään käsiään yhteen.

Akselin pitäisi aloittaa jo raporttinsa, mutta hänen päänsä on sumua. On mahdotonta kuvitella, mihin himo voitaisiin nykypäivänä kanavoida. Hylkäisivätkö naiset Taivaan ja hyökkäisivät kaupungille etsimään uusia vaatteita ja kenkiä? Vaa-tisivatko he aviomiehiä, monikerroksisia kermakakkuja ja vitivalkoisia mekkoja? Tappaisivatko miehet toisiaan? Mitä hän itse tekisi? Haluaisiko hän paritella tai tappaa, kahmia valtaa henkensä kaupalla? Akseli uskoo tietävänsä yhden seurauksen: Hän saattaisi poistua asunnostaan, ja jos hän poistuisi, voisi joku muukin poistua. Kaduille tulvisi valtava määrä ihmisiä, joiden ei tarvinnut olla siellä. He tekisivät jotain, mutta Akseli ei osaa kuvitella, mitä.



Iina astuu katukiveykselle ja kavahtaa kevään lämmintä tuulahdusta, joka löyhkää pilaantuneelle merelle, loppukielitölle ja jätteille. Tuulessa tuoksuu myös ripaus savua pohjoisista kaupunginosista, joissa avotulen teko ei ole kielletty. Valon kortteleissa, Kaartinkaupungissa ja Ullanlinnassa, tulta ei tarvita, sillä sähköt toimivat yleensä ilman katkoksia ja jätteet katoavat kaduilta jonnekin.

Taivas on syvänsininen, samanlainen kuin ennen sotaa ja silti aivan eri, täydellisen välinpitämätön. Iina pakottaa itsensä keskittymään asfaltin railojen varomiseen, asettaa puukenkensä huolellisesti aina yhden askeleen eteenpäin, puristaa koriaan niin, että sormien lihat painuvat sangan punokseen. Pelko ei katoa, mutta pysyy hallinnassa askeleen kerrallaan. Kuvat tulevat kuten aina ulkona, välähtävät ja katoavat: vääntynyt ruumis mukulakivillä, nälkiintyneen naapurin hengityksen löyhkä, nahkapäiden voitonparaati.

Pahimmat kuvat ovat niitä, joita hän ei nähnyt, mutta kuvittelee yhä uudestaan: isän viimeiset hetket, vangittu Marius.

Kauppatorilla kaikki on tuttua. Ruokakojut on sijoiteltu lähelle Kolera-allasta, vanhojen tavaroiden kauppiaat päivystävät tien vierellä. Vartijoita näkyy kaksi, molemmat jo keski-ikään valahtaneita miehiä, joiden pistimet kimaltavat auringossa. Iina vihaa heitä tottumuksesta, mutta vihassa ei ole voimaa. Torilla näkyy muutama asiakas. Kumarainen nainen seisoo lähimmällä kojulla ja tökkii sormellaan lokkia. Myyjä on pinonnut linnut päällekkäin siivet levällään ja Iinasta näyttää kuin ne lentäisivät pöydällä toinen toisensa selässä. Hän kuvittelee niiden muodostaman kakun taivaalle, oudoksi geenimanipuloiduksi eläimeksi, saalistajalle liian suureksi palaksi haukata.

Lintujen punareunaiset silmät ovat auki ja yhä kosteat, ne ovat kiistattoman tuoreita. Oli aika, jolloin Iina olisi maksanut mitä vain yhdestä lokista, repinyt nahan tottuneesti lihasta, keittänyt linnun hätäisesti ja kalunnut irti joka ikisen lihansäikeen. Enää hänen ei ole pakko. Hän haluaa vain jotain helppoa tarjottavaa Jalolle, täyttää velvollisuutensa ja olla rauhassa. Iina pysähtyy seuraavalle kojulle ja tuijottaa tummia, pulleita leipiä, muttei pysty nostamaan katsettaan myyjään. Suun avaaminen tuntuu ylivoimaiselta.

– Sirkkakukkoa, mies kysyy.

Iina vilkaisee miestä, joka on niin ruskettunut, että näyttää ulkomaalaiselta. Ei hän tietenkään voi olla, mutta jo mahdollisuus hätkähdyttää Iinaa. Se muistuttaa, että kaupunkivaltion muurien takana on melko varmasti yhä ulkomaalaisia ja ehkä myös entisiä helsinkiläisiä, ehkä jopa äiti, Mikki ja Marius.

Mies mittailee Iinaa katseellaan, arvioi varallisuutta.

– Viisikymmentä markkaa per kukko. Otatko?

Iina pudistaa päätään ja vetäytyy kauemmas, kavahtaa pyydettyä ylihintaa. Mies on nähnyt hänen lävitseen. Puute pakottaa tarkkaavaisuuteen, kiristää harteissa ja pälyilee silmissä, mutta hänen hulluutensa on pumpulia, joka hidastaa liikkeet ja sumentaa pään. Vuodet Jalon elättinä ovat tehneet hänestä pehmeän. Kaipuu Taivaaseen vihloo jo Iinaa. Siellä hän olisi yhdessä mutta yksin. Taivaassa ei ole puutetta mistään, ei tarvetta käydä kauppaa ja katsella toista kuin rahapussia. Ei kiirettä, ei hiertäviä kenkiä.

– Olen siellä kohta, Iina vakuuttaa itselleen. – On vain hoidettava asiat.

# Heaven

*Piia Leino*

Translated from Finnish by Lola Rogers

## *PART 1.*

### *GRAY*

When Akseli needs to rest his eyes, he watches the beggars.

There were four hundred to start with, a hundred along each side of Hakaniemi Square, but some of them may have died. They let the Siltasaari Street side of the square in and out of the market hall first, then everyone else in clockwise order. The last row won't fit inside. They sleep on the square under faded orange market tents and green garbage bins tipped on their sides. One bin with a missing lid has a red-checked oilcloth thrown over it.

It's well into April, but the beggars still sit bundled in heavy clothes. There's a breeze blowing in from the sea. Even Akseli, who doesn't go outside, can feel it. The cold nips at his ankles through the cracks in the floorboards, climbs like a sadness up his body and into his mind.

He stands in front of the window, raises his knee and twists to touch it with his elbow, returns to starting position, repeats the motion with the other knee. He's already tiring out, but he holds fast to the count, saying the numbers in his head so loudly he can almost hear them: eight ... nine ...

ten. The worker fitness exercises aren't pleasant, but they're mandatory. The price you pay for life in the flesh. According to the rules of the Light, muscles are the modelling clay of the mind, and maintaining them is part of your job. The thing about the modelling clay of the mind is something a famous runner said more than a hundred years ago. The Flying Finn. Akseli can't recall his name at the moment, but anyway this Finn knew what Akseli knows: flesh is a burden that the mind drags along behind it.

Akseli switches exercises. He presses his fingertips against the cool floor and raises up on tiptoe toward the ceiling. The crunch of his back feels almost good. The beggars are still sitting when the first distant rumble begins. The guards are supposed to empty the square when there's a cloudburst, but they're still slouched against the wall of the market hall. They might be asleep. There are two guards, and the thought flashes across Akseli's mind that the people on the square could ambush them, take their weapons, kill them. But that obviously isn't going to happen. Who would bother to rebel anymore, and why? A wet gust rouses the guards and they straighten up and wave the ragamuffin crowd forward. The people start to stream into the hall and the rain patters against Akseli's window, but he barely notices. He keeps up his calisthenics at a steady rhythm, scattered thoughts flickering. There used to be thunderstorms only in the summer, he thinks. He's not sure. But he remembers lightning over his great-grandmother's oat field, remembers that it was an unusual thing, exciting. Now the sky breaks up regularly in a rainy season that lasts far more than half the year, and the city is used to being shaken by thunder.

Akseli is out of breath. The back of his head feels hollow. His blood can't keep up. He has to do it, though. Twenty repetitions of each exercise. If he's not fit for work, he won't be

able to do his job, and if he doesn't do his job, the university won't pay him his five-hour daily trip to Heaven. Without Heaven, there's just bug-blackened walls and the dispatch that brings food once a week. Would he stare out the window and chew on his cricket porridge till the end of his days, or would he have the courage to open the window and jump into the void? Would jumping from here kill him instantly, or would he just lie on the ground until he bled dry?

Akseli folds a towel over the rough floorboards before starting his sit-ups. His bones can't take the floor. In the middle of his crunches a fly buzzes at his face and breaks his rhythm and he loses count, panics. He doesn't want to do a single crunch too many, or too few. He can just barely do the mandatory amount. He does a few more anxious curls and slumps to the floor. He sees a dead cockroach in the dust under the bed and remembers seeing it many times before.

When the tears start, Akseli realises they have been just under the surface all the time. He could lie here on the floor for the rest of his life, curl up here with the cockroach, but in Heaven soft rain is waiting, and wind, and birds singing, and he isn't ready to give up yet. He wrenches himself upright and sits down in the chair, sweating. He picks up the glasses from the floor and puts them on. One more hour and a half, then another round of fitness, then Heaven. He can do it, if he just remembers where he left off.



Lady Gaga rises up out of the swimming pool wearing a one-shoulder leather suit and a strange helmet. She plays cards, twitches her hips in a beach chair, stares intently into the camera as if inviting Akseli to join the long ago vanished game. The velocity of the video is dizzying. The rhythm

pounds, Lady Gaga's clothes change, she poses at the card table with an enormous dog, dances with a crowd of people, and it's all about her, about her slick surface and how Akseli rates her power of sexual attraction. Women's beauty was accentuated back then by scanty clothing, processed hair and face paint, and Lady Gaga has lots of all three.

Akseli has watched the recording dozens of times. It still feels disagreeable, crammed to bursting. It tries to capture the viewer's interest in the fashion of its time, with great quantities of visual stimuli. It was only when the virtual worlds came and recordings could appeal to all the senses and use biofeedback that the feed slackened to a meditative level. A relaxing feeling of well-being in place of an agitating lust for pleasure. Akseli pulls a blanket over himself to ward off the cool of the room and tries to concentrate, but he can't get hold of his thoughts. He has been wearing the glasses for days, watching music videos, full-length movies, and silly short ones called porn. Sometimes the people in the recordings go straight to the act, but usually they're focused on display; the women adorn themselves and the men test their strength in fight scenes. In some of the longer movies they have offspring, but there's not much discussion of their birth rate.

In the recordings from the turn of the millennium, there isn't the slightest reference to the future. People pour forth their desires or senseless jealousies. They're terribly energetic. Aside from sexual intercourse, the thing that seems to motivate them most is the possibility of acquiring possessions. For female characters, colourful shoes and dresses are actually more exciting than a potential mate. In one recording, four women have sex with numerous men in New York City — before the wave, of course. But the greatest pleasure for them seems to be the uncomfortable-looking shoes in the



display windows of for-profit shops. The very sight of them makes the women squeal and clap their hands.

Akseli ought to start his report, but his head is foggy. It's impossible to imagine where such desire could be channelled nowadays. Would women reject Heaven and hit the town looking for clothes and shoes? Would they demand husbands, cream layer cakes and snow-white dresses? Would the men kill each other? What would he do? Would he want to mate, or kill, or go after power and risk his own life? Akseli thinks he knows one thing that would happen: he would leave his apartment. And if he would, so would other people. Vast numbers of people would flood into the streets — people who didn't have to be there. They would do something. But Akseli couldn't imagine what.



Iina steps out onto the cobblestones, startled by a warm spring breeze that carries the stink of rancid seawater, seagull soup, and garbage. There's also a whiff of smoke from the north part of town where open fires aren't banned. In the blocks occupied by the Light there's no need for fire because the electricity generally works without any outages and the garbage on the streets disappears somewhere.

The sky is deep blue like it was before the war, and yet very different. Utterly indifferent. Iina forces herself to concentrate on avoiding the cracks in the asphalt, placing her wooden shoes down carefully step by step, squeezing her fingers tight against the handle of her basket. The fear doesn't go away, but she keeps it under control, one step at a time. As always happens when she's outdoors, images flash on and then disappear. A twisted body on the cobblestones. The stinking breath of a starving neighbour. A leather-clad

victory parade. The worst images are the ones she didn't see but only imagined, over and over. Her father's last moments. Marius captured.

Everything on Kauppatori square is familiar. The food stalls near Cholera Slip, the flea market vendors set up next to the road. There are two guards visible, both slumped, middle-aged men, their bayonets gleaming in the sunshine. Iina hates them out of habit, but there's no strength in her hate. There are a few customers. A stooped woman is standing at the nearest stall, poking at the seagulls. The vendor has piled the birds on the table with their wings spread so they look like they're flying, perched on each other's backs. She imagines the gulls piled up like a white cake that reaches to the sky, like a strange, genetically modified animal, too large a morsel for any predator.

The gulls' red-rimmed eyes are open and still moist; unmistakably fresh. There was a time when Iina would have paid anything for just one gull, peeled the hide expertly from the flesh, cooked it quickly, and gnawed every string of meat from the bone. Now she doesn't have to. She just wants something easy to serve to Jalo, to fulfil her duty and be left alone. She stops at the next stand and stares at the dark, round loaves of bread, but can't look the vendor in the eye. To open her mouth feels beyond her capacities.

'Cricket loaf?' the man asks.

Iina glances at him. He's so tanned that he looks foreign. He couldn't be, but the mere possibility is startling. It reminds her that outside the city state walls there almost certainly still are foreigners, and maybe also former Helsinkiites. Maybe even Mom, Mikki, and Marius.

The vendor sizes Iina up, concludes she has some means.

‘Fifty marks a loaf. Do you want one?’

Iina shakes her head and retreats, frightened away by the high price. He can see right through her. Scarcity demands vigilance, shoulders tight and eyes peeled, but her madness is cotton wool slowing her movements and fogging her mind. Her years of dependence on Jalo have made her soft.

She can already feel a stab of longing for Heaven. If she were there, she would be alone, but with other people. In Heaven there is no shortage of anything, no need to go shopping and eye other people as if they were wallets of money. No need to hurry. No shoes that chafe.

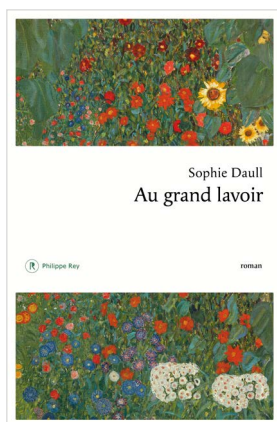
‘I’ll be there soon,’ Iina tells herself. ‘I just have to finish these errands.’

# FRANCE

**Sophie Daull**

**Au grand lavoir**  
*The Wash-House*

Paris: Philippe Rey, 2018.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Sophie Daull** is an actress and writer born in Eastern France in 1965.

It was her studies in music at the National Conservatory of Strasbourg that encouraged her early on to pursue her artistic practices. Since then, her experiences have become ever-more enveloped in the worlds of letters, sounds and movement.

She has danced with Odile Duboc, Georges Appaix and Jean Gaudin. On the stage she has worked with Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman, Carole Thibaut, Jacques Lassalle, Hubert Colas, Alain Ollivier, Stéphane Braunschweig Alain Barsacq et Agathe Alexis — recently with Elisabeth Chailloux et Roland Auzet.

She is the author of *Camille, mon Evolée* (2015) — which won the prize for best first novel from Lire magazine — *La Suture* (2016) and *Au Grand Lavoir* (2018), published by Editions Philippe Rey. The first two of these are available as part of the series *Livre de Poche* (pocket editions).

She appears regularly on France Culture. The practice of her own arts is never distinct from her educational and pedagogical pursuits — indeed she is regularly involved in teaching students of a wide variety of backgrounds. As part of a writers' residency grant from the region of Île de France, she recently spent 10 months coordinating a writing workshop for the inmates of Melun Detention Centre, 40 kms south-east of Paris. ¶

## SYNOPSIS

A novelist participates in a television show on the occasion of the publication of her debut book. She does not suspect that at the same time her image on the screen upsets an employee of the Parks and landscape service of the city of Nogent-le-Rotrou. Having served for a crime committed thirty years ago, he is now leading a low-key life, but is unexpectedly confronted with his past, his actions and his fault. Actually, the novelist is the daughter of his victim. And, in five days, she will promote her book in the local bookshop. A countdown unfolds for this lonely man, in an atmosphere both banal and oppressive, as he waits for a face-to-face he dreads but from which he cannot escape. In this narrative where each character is in search of an emotional recovery, Sophie Daull intervenes to claim fidelity she dedicates to the missing, the flowers and the sub-prefectures. A novel brilliantly built on the ambiguities of the wish for forgiveness.¶



# Au grand lavoir

*Sophie Daull*



*Jeudi soir*

L'autre soir, j'étais flapi. J'aime pas les jours de feuilles mortes. Ça casse les reins. La souffleuse en sac à dos pendant des heures, c'est vraiment la punition. Le bazar est aussi lourd et mal conçu que le packaging de vingt-cinq kilos des mecs de 14-18. Je sais pas pourquoi ils nous avaient changé le programme : on devait être de bulbes, ils nous ont collés de feuilles mortes, cantonnés sur la route de Chartres, à faire d'énormes tas de feuilles contre les troncs des platanes, entre la bifurcation d'Alençon et l'hypermarché, là où le trafic est le pire. Pour ceux qui connaissent Nogent, c'est tout dire.

J'étais passé à Ma vie en bio m'acheter un plat tout fait – quinoa à la crème de cerfeuil –, avec le projet comme tous les soirs de me caler bien tranquille devant la télé.

Depuis un moment, je vais plus boire un coup avec Gilbert après le boulot, il se met minable, et moi ça me gêne. Des fois il sait même plus où il a garé la fourgonnette.

Et puis de toute façon, au Relais de la Poste, ils ont pas de jus de tomate, et Gilbert, ça l'emmerde que je picole pas. Ça l'emmerde que je picole pas, ça l'emmerde que je sois végétarien, ça l'emmerde que je parle pas foot. Comment je pourrais lui dire à Gilbert que c'est en taule que j'ai attrapé le dégoût de la viande ? À cause d'un mec que j'ai rencontré làbas, qui était aussi raffiné que lui est banal, qui disait que ne pas manger

carné était la marque d'un esprit supérieur, qui faisait du taï-chi et du yoga, qui savait cuisiner le manioc et la feuille de bétel, l'oeuf de cent ans et la kacha, qui dormait dans des pyjamas en soie la tête au nord, à cause du feng shui ? On a été libérés ensemble. Lui avec un non-lieu, moi pour bonne conduite. Et puis on a vécu huit ans ensemble, comme mari et femme. Alexandre, il s'appelait. Le grand Alexandre n'est plus, et Gilbert est mon petit chef.

J'étais donc dans mon canapé, avec la barquette en carton sur les genoux, réchauffée grâce à mon ami le micro-ondes, pendant que mon autre amie la télé me livrait sa cargaison d'images. Je zappais sur les trucs qui hypnotisent facilement, les émissions pleines d'experts qui commentent pendant des heures l'actualité – politique, culturelle, économique.

Et puis soudain, j'ai lâché la fourchette, je me suis étranglé.

À l'écran il y avait une femme au visage pointu qui parlait plein cadre.

Putain cette nana je la connais j'en suis sûr.

J'ai monté le son et j'ai mieux regardé. La voix aussi je la connais. J'écoute. La femme a écrit un bouquin, c'est pour ça qu'elle est l'invitée de cette émission littéraire. Le bouquin, c'est pour sa fille qui est morte à seize ans. Elle parle de trucs pénibles, du deuil, de la perte, des fantômes et tout ça. Ses mains sont mobiles, ses gestes me sont désagréablement familiers. Et puis tout à coup je comprends, je recolle les morceaux.

Mais qu'est-ce qu'elle vient foutre dans ma télé cette gonzesse ?

Celle qui parle à la télé, c'est la fille de la femme que j'ai massacrée il y a trente ans. Non seulement ça fait un choc, mais en plus ça rajeunit pas.

Treize ans que je suis sorti de centrale, six ans qu’Alexandre est mort, cinq que je suis planqué ici, et je crois bien que ça fait au moins deux décennies que j’ai pas vraiment repensé à toute cette histoire, sauf pour le bluff avec les psys et les assistantes sociales du suivi médico-judiciaire.

Je suis resté comme ça la gueule béante devant l’écran, la zapette pendouillant entre mes cuisses, complètement paralysé. L’odeur de feuilles pourries incrustée dans mon jogging remontait sous mes narines, mélangée à celle, aigre, du cerfeuil refroidissant. Il y avait une sorte de court-circuit dans mes neurones, une décharge temporelle qui rembobinait les années dans un futoir assourdissant.

Je me suis souvenu d’un truc qu’Alexandre m’avait raconté – j’avais mal écouté parce que je décrochais toujours quand il étalait sa culture. Une histoire de mouches grecques, où un type, qui a tué sa mère-la-reine pour venger son père-le-roi, mettant ainsi un terme à une longue histoire de famille déjà bien sanglante et compliquée, se retrouve harcelé par des bestioles qui s’accrochent dans ses cheveux, dans ses habits, dans ses pensées, jusque dans ses rêves. Elles lui bourdonnent à longueur de journée des scies assommantes sur le remords, la faute, le pardon impossible, etc. Des furies au nom compliqué, quelque chose avec des i partout.

En allant me coucher, ça faisait bbbzzz dans ma tête...



Le type qui a tué ma mère de quarante et un coups d’Opinel, après l’avoir violée une nuit de janvier avec un manche de pelle à neige, a été condamné à l’emprisonnement à perpétuité. Dans la mesure où il ne possédait aucune des caractéristiques du récidiviste, que les experts en assises l’avaient jugé « réadaptable », sans compter que son parcours péni-



tentiaire était irréprochable, il a été libéré après avoir purgé les dix-huit ans incompressibles.

On trouve facilement, dans les archives judiciaires ou de la presse, les détails du crime, du procès, et même de son séjour en prison au cours de ses premières années d'incarcération, puisqu'il a fait l'objet d'un long documentaire télévisuel, où il apparaît particulièrement photogénique.

A star is born.

La femme de coeur que je suis, humaniste et progressiste, ne peut qu'applaudir à l'exemplarité de cette expérience de reconstruction : la cellule comme cabine d'ascenseur social, la vie derrière les barreaux comme stage d'épanouissement personnel, mené à bien avec succès.

Moi aussi j'ai pris perpète. Dans un cloaque de chagrin croupi, d'amnésie forcée, de refoulement vaseux, qui a fini par s'assécher, discrètement nauséabond. Mais après trente ans passés dans ce génial sarcophage, la croûte gratte, la plaie repare. Quelque chose suinte qu'il faut nettoyer à grandes eaux.

Alors j'irai au grand lavoir là-bas, où la mémoire se récuré contre le granit rugueux, où la langue se rince au torrent qui mousse comme un savon d'encre, où la fiction fait Javel. Je regarderai l'eau crasseuse s'écouler dans une grande synovie de mots et je laisserai sécher les éclaboussures au soleil de leur consolation. Grande lessive.

Un personnage s'impose. Quand je me penche au-dessus des derniers reflets, c'est lui que je vois. Star un jour, star toujours.

Le type qui a tué ma mère sera donc jardinier municipal à Nogent-le-Rotrou.



### *Vendredi matin*

J'ai pas dormi de la nuit.

Derrière mes yeux sont venus danser des visages balayés de ma mémoire depuis des années et des années : la femme que j'ai tuée, la fille de la télé – yeux verts, chignon roux, menton pointu –, le gros Jipé, ma mère, mon avocat, le pompiste de l'autoroute qui avait vu le sang sur mes fringues, les mecs de la télé, encore la fille de l'émission, redevenue la minette du lycée où j'allais draguer, toutes les tronches imbibées des copains avec qui je m'étais défoncé ce soir-là.

J'ai quand même dû m'assoupir un moment parce que j'ai aussi vu ma mère me roucouler des je t'aime mon grand dans les oreilles tout en se faisant sauter par des matons.

Et que ça, ça pouvait être qu'un cauchemar. Sale nuit.

Le lendemain j'avais rendez-vous avec Gilbert à 8 heures devant la mairie. Il fumait en m'attendant, adossé à la camionnette. Ça l'emmerde aussi que je fume pas mais il respecte : il allume jamais de clopes dans la bagnole quand il sait que je dois monter avec lui pour aller au boulot. Après cette nuit d'épouvante, j'ai eu envie d'embrasser sa grosse bouille de bouffeur de cervelas et de me serrer contre son bide tellement ça me faisait du bien de le voir. Je devais avoir une sale tête mais il a pas relevé.

En fait, je dis plein de saloperies sur lui, mais je l'aime bien, Gilbert. Parce que c'est un bon gars et que vraiment, il aime les fleurs. Faut le voir décharger amoureusement les cagettes de pensées ou de narcisses, marcher à reculons en

penchant son menton vers leurs pétales tremblotants pour les protéger du vent ; faut l'entendre parler tendrement aux cosmos, aux clématites ou aux delphiniums pendant qu'il les redresse sur leurs tuteurs de bambou.

Mais ce matin-là – mon premier matin où j'entendais zézayer dans mes oreilles les bestioles de l'Antiquité grecque –, pas question de fleurs. On devait aller bêcher le rond-point de la route du Mans. Ça voulait dire toute la journée en plein vent, à s'escrimer comme des cons au milieu de nulle part. Ça voulait dire aussi pas de plat du jour chez Francine, parce que dans ces cas-là on est en journée continue, et il faut manger sur site. Pourtant, moi, j'aime bien son couscous du vendredi à Francine, elle me le sert sans viande pour pas cher.

Il a fallu faire un détour par le Super U pour mettre de l'essence, ce qui a donné à Gilbert l'occasion de râler une fois de plus. Depuis que le service a subi des coupes budgétaires, la municipalité n'avance plus d'argent à ses agents pour leurs frais. Alors pour le moindre achat, Gilbert doit jouer de sa carte bleue personnelle et penser à demander une note qu'il met six mois à se faire rembourser. C'est comme ça pour l'essence, mais aussi pour les gants, les sécateurs, les choses indispensables au boulot. Il en a vraiment marre, Gilbert. Il pensait avoir la paix en passant chef de service, c'est tout le contraire. Bientôt on devra payer de notre poche les engrais, les tondeuses, et pourquoi pas les buses d'arrosage automatique ?

Moi je la ramène pas, je suis bien content d'avoir dégotté ce job, merci madame service-du-suivi-socio-judiciaire.

# The Wash-House

*Sophie Daull*

Translated from French by Patty Hannock

## *Thursday evening*

I was fagged out the other evening. I hate dead leaf days. They ruin your back. Wearing that blower machine on your back all day is pure punishment. The bloody thing's as heavy and bulky as the 25 kilo kits blokes carried in World War I. Don't know why they changed our programme: we were meant to be on bulbs, they put us on dead leaves, stuck out there on the Chartres road, stacking huge leaf piles against the plane trees between the turnoff to Alençon and the superstore, where traffic gets dire. For people who know Nogent, that says it all.

I stopped by Planet Organic to pick up a ready-cooked meal — chervil and pomegranate cream quinoa — planning on eating in front of the telly, as usual.

Lately, I've stopped going to the pub with Gilbert after work, he gets wasted and I don't like it. Sometimes he even forgets where he parked the van.

And anyway they haven't got tomato juice at the local, and Gilbert is pissed off about me not drinking. Pissed off about me not drinking, pissed off about me being vegetarian, pissed off that I know fuck all about football. How can I tell Gilbert I went off meat when I was in the slammer? Because of a bloke I met there, a bloke as refined as Gilbert is coarse, who told me that not eating meat was the mark of a

superior mind, who did t'ai chi and yoga, who knew how to cook cassava and betel leaves, century eggs and kasha, who slept in silk pyjamas with his head facing north because of feng shui? We got out together. His case was dismissed, I was released for good conduct. And we lived together for eight years, like man and wife. Alexandre was his name. Alexandre the Great is no more, and now Little Boss Gilbert is my company.

So there I was on the sofa with the little carton on my lap, heated up thanks to my pal the Microwave, while my other pal the Telly delivered its load of images. I zapped around stuff that hypnotises you real easy, programmes full of experts discussing the news for hours — politics, culture, economics.

And suddenly I dropped my fork and choked.

On the telly, there was a woman with a pointy face talking full screen.

Fuck fuck I know that bird I know I do.

I turned up the sound and looked harder. That voice, I know the voice too. I listen. The woman wrote a book, that's why she's been invited on this book programme. The book, it's for her daughter who died at sixteen. She's talking about painful stuff, grief, loss, ghosts and all that. Her hands move around a lot, her gestures are unpleasantly familiar. Suddenly I get it, I put all the pieces together.

But what the fuck is that bird doing in my telly?

That face talking on the telly is the daughter of the woman I murdered thirty years ago. A real shock, right, and it sure doesn't make you any younger.

Thirteen years since I got out of prison, six years since Alexandre died, I've been holed up here for five years, I reckon it's been at least two decades since I really thought about that business, apart from bluffing shrinks and social workers on the judicial monitoring team.

I sat there gobsmacked, gaping at the screen, remote dangling between my legs, completely petrified. The rotten leaf stench incrusting in my track bottoms rose to my nostrils, blending with the bitter smell of tepid chervil. There was a kind of short circuit in my neurones, an electrical time shock rewinding the years in a deafening chaos.

I remember this thing Alexandre told me — I wasn't paying attention because I always switched off when he started flaunting his knowledge. A story about Greek flies, where this guy, who murdered his mum-the-Queen to avenge his dad-the-King, putting an end to a long family history of bloodshed and complications, found himself pursued by beasties flying into his hair, into his clothes, into his thoughts, even into his dreams. All day long they buzzed old saws into his ears, about remorse, fault, impossible pardon, etc. Furies, they were, with a complicated name, a word with lots of i's in it.

When I went to bed, the bbbzzzing started inside my brain ...



The man who killed my mother with forty-one knife blows, after raping her with a snow shovel handle one January night, was sentenced to life. In view of the fact that he had nothing of a repeat offender's profile, and that court authorities esteemed him worthy of 'rehabilitation', without mentioning his irreproachable prison record, he was released after serving the mandatory eighteen years.

Details of the crime, the court case, even of his first years in prison, can easily be found in legal archives or press articles, given that he featured in a long television documentary, in which he comes across as particularly photogenic.

A star is born.

Being a generous, humanitarian and progressive woman, I can only applaud this exemplary experience of reconstruction: the prison cell as a social ladder, life behind bars as a personal development course, carried out with success.

I was sentenced to life inside too. Inside a cesspool of stagnant grief, compulsory amnesia and muddled repression, which eventually dried out with a subtly sickening smell. But after thirty years within this ingenious sarcophagus, the crust starts itching, the wound begins to speak. Something starts oozing and must be thoroughly washed clean.

So I'll make my way to the wash house, ... where memory is scrubbed against rough granite, where the tongue is rinsed by a river lathering like inky soap, where fiction acts as bleach. I'll watch grimy water seep away in a synovial torrent of words and dry out the splatter in the warm sun of consolation. Washing day.

A character is essential. When I lean down to watch the last reflections, he's the one I see. Star for a day, star forever.

The bloke who killed my mother will be a city gardener in Nogent-le-Rotrou.



*Friday morning*

I didn't sleep all night.

Faces wiped out of my memory years ago resurfaced and danced behind my eyes: the woman I killed, the girl on the telly — green eyes, red chignon, pointed chin — big fat J.P., my mother, my lawyer, the motorway petrol pump attendant who saw the blood on my clothes, the guys from the telly, the girl on the telly again but as the kid she was in high school where I hung around on the make, the shit-faced mugs of all the louts I got sloshed with that night.

Still, I must have dropped off for a bit because I also saw my mother cooing I love you big boy in my ears while the screws fucked her.

Yeah, that could only be a nightmare. Filthy night.

The next day, I had to meet Gilbert at 8 o'clock in front of the Town Hall. He was smoking while he waited, leaning against the van. It also pisses him off that I don't smoke but he shows respect: never lights up a fag inside the car when he knows he's driving me to work. After my night of horror, it felt so good to see him I wanted to kiss his steak-and-kidney guzzling gob and burrow into his belly. I must have looked fuck awful but he didn't mention it.

Truth is, I say nasty things about him but I do like Gilbert. He's an okay geezer and he truly loves flowers. You should see him unloading crates of pansies or daffodils, full of devotion, walking backwards with his chin low over quivering petals to shield them from the wind; hear him sweet-talking the asters, clematis or larkspur flowers while he eases them onto bamboo stakes.



But that morning — my first morning with those ancient Greek beasties hissing in my ears — flowers weren't on the agenda. We were supposed to dig up the roundabout on the Le Mans road. Which meant spending the whole day out in the wind, slogging away like idiots in the middle of nowhere. Which also meant no hope of Francine's Daily Special, that kind of job means you're at it all day long, and you have to eat on site. I happen to be a real fan of Francine's Friday couscous, she serves it to me without meat, and it's dead cheap.

We had to swing by the Super U for petrol, which provided Gilbert with yet another opportunity to moan. What with our department's cutbacks, the municipality has stopped making advances to cover expenses. So Gilbert's got to use his personal debit card for even the smallest of purchases, and remember to ask for a receipt each time, and they take six months to reimburse him. That goes for petrol, but also for gardening gloves, pruning shears, all the indispensable stuff for the job. Gilbert's fed up to the teeth. He thought being Head of Department would make it easier, and it's just the opposite. Next thing you know we'll be paying fertilizer and mowers out of our own pockets — and why not automatic sprinklers while we're at it?

I stay quiet about all that, pleased to have landed this job, thank you Mrs Post-Sentence-Supervision-Resettlement-Services.

# GEORGIA

**Beqa Adamashvili**

**ამ რომანში ყველა  
კვდება**

*Everybody dies in this novel*

Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri  
Publishing, 2018.

## BIOGRAPHY

**F**amous Georgian blogger and advertising copywriter **Beqa Adamashvili** graduated from Caucasus University, faculty of journalism and social science. He made his literary debut in 2009 with short stories published on electronic platforms and with time his name became popular among young readers. In 2014 Adamashvili made his debut with the novel 'Bestseller' which eventually became a local bestseller.

A great sense of humour and deep knowledge of world literature combined with marketing and advertising skills makes Adamashvili's prose hilarious and entertaining. He very often uses allusions from classic literature and sometimes even shifts the famous characters into his works. Critics claim that Adamashvili is one of the most creative-minded writers of contemporary Georgian literature.

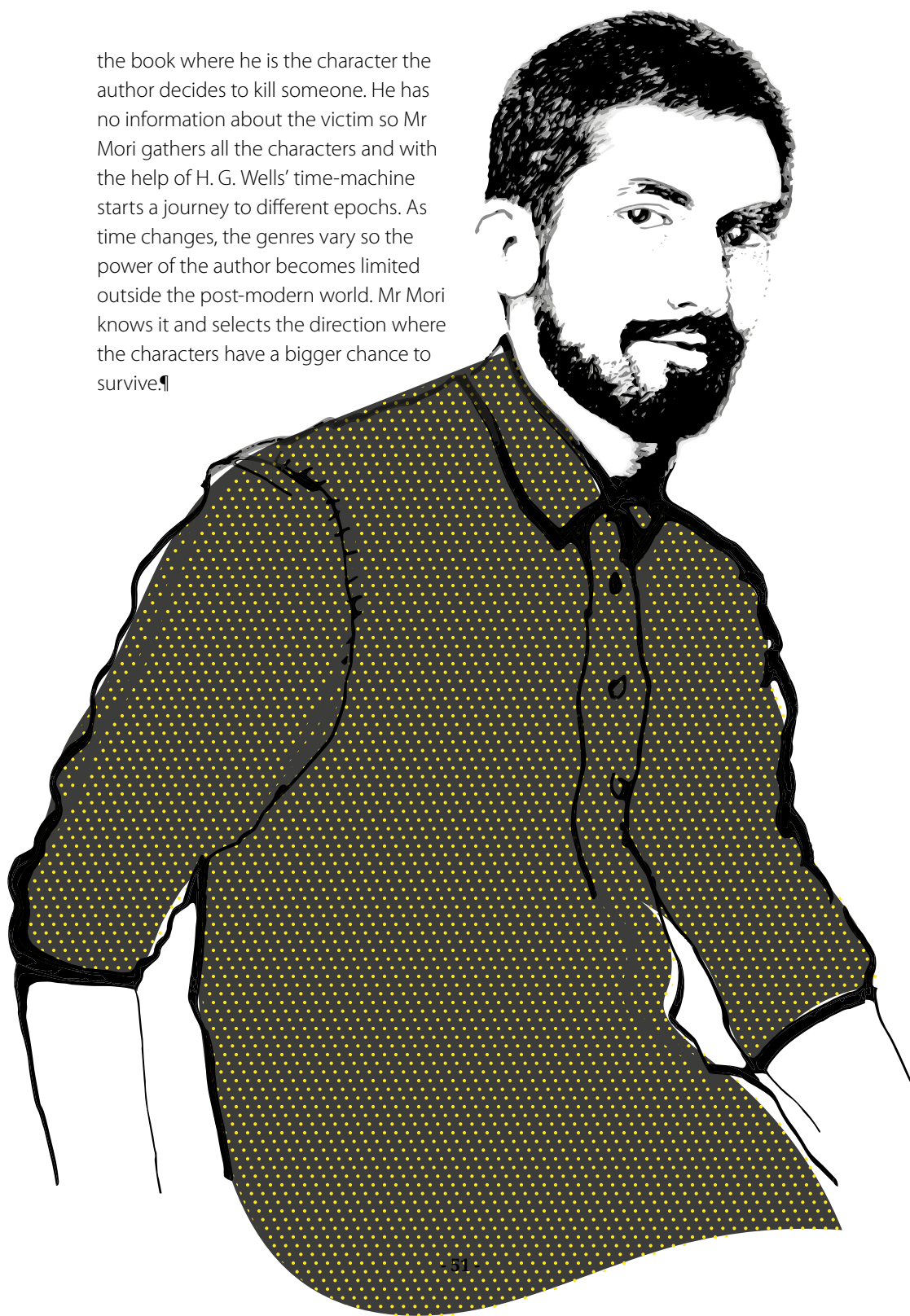


Apart from writing he works as creative director for Leavingstone — one of the most popular advertising companies, which is a respected brand in Europe.

## SYNOPSIS

On day Mr Memento Mori realises that he is a character with the superpower of travelling into the books and decides to strike against the evil writers who sentence their characters to death. Mr Mori persuades Romeo and Juliet that suicide is not a solution and in their adulthood they will remember these days with laughter. He goes to The Magic Mountain with a huge supply of penicillin. In reverse Mr More pushes Professor Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls and kills him in order to save many other characters. But everything turns upside down when Mr Mori discovers that in

the book where he is the character the author decides to kill someone. He has no information about the victim so Mr Mori gathers all the characters and with the help of H. G. Wells' time-machine starts a journey to different epochs. As time changes, the genres vary so the power of the author becomes limited outside the post-modern world. Mr Mori knows it and selects the direction where the characters have a bigger chance to survive.¶



# ამ რომანში ყველა კვდება

*Beqa Adamashvili*



სიკვდილმა მალვიძარა ოთხ საათსა და ოცდაცამეშ  
წუთზე დააყენა.

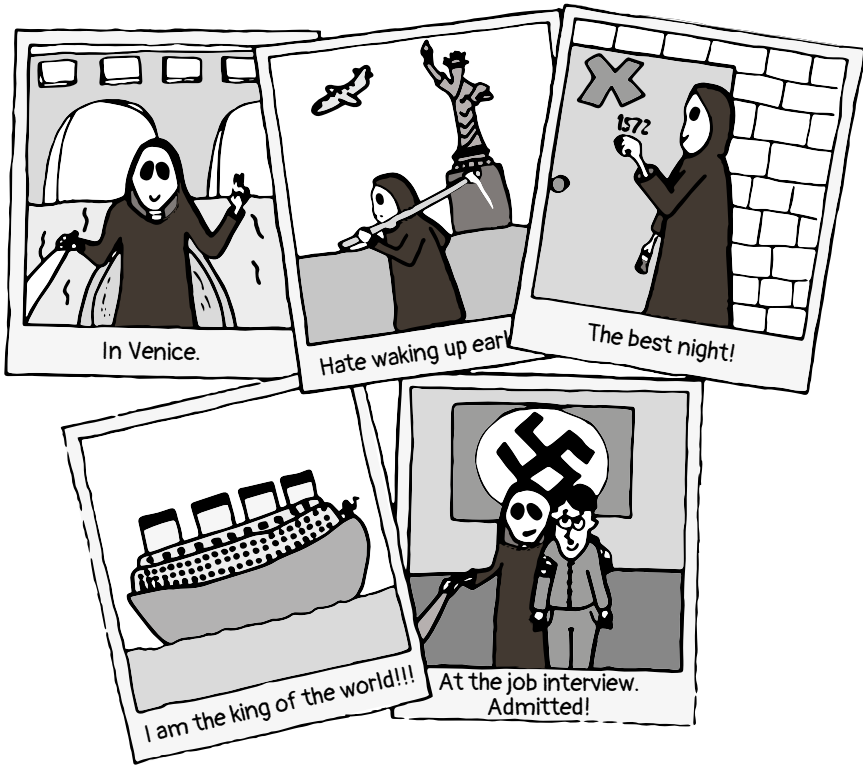
რაც ინსომნია დაუძინებელ მტრად ექცა, ყველაფერს  
ითვლიდა. ჯერ - ცხვრებს (ათი ათას ას ათი!), მერე  
- თეთრად გათენებულ ღამეებს (შვიდი ათას შვიდას  
შვიდი!), მერე ცხვრებისა და თეთრად გათენებული  
ღამეების თვლისას დახარჯული წამების რაოდენობას  
(თვრამეტი ათას სამი!), მერე ცხვრებისა და თეთრად  
გათენებული ღამეების თვლისას დახარჯული წამების  
თვლისას დახარჯული წამების რაოდენობას... რა  
დროსაც მიხვდა, რომ რაღაცების უაზროდ თვლის გარდა,  
ჩაძინების კიდევ ექვსას ოცი (!) მეთოდი არსებობს და  
გადაწყვიტა, სხვა ხერხი ელონა.

ჯერ იფიქრა, არაფერზე ვიფიქრობო, მაგრამ იქვე  
დაფიქრდა, ისიც ხომ ფიქრია, იმაზე რომ ფიქრობ, რომ  
არაფერზე უნდა იფიქროო და თავის ქალა ასტკივდა.  
მერე პრუსტის რომელიღაც ტომი გადმოიღო, იქნებ  
მოწყენილობისგან ჩამეძინოსო, მაგრამ პრუსტზე დროის  
დაკარგვა მალევე დაენანა. არც ყველა უსამართლობაზე  
თვალის დახუჭვამ გაჭრა და არც - ტოკიოს სატელეფონო  
წიგნების ტომეულის საჯაროდ წარდგენის წარმოდგენამ.  
ბოლოს მაჯის ძვლები და თითების ფალანგები ჩაიქნია,  
აბა ეშმაკმა რაღა უნდა თქვასო და ძილის მოლოდინში,  
მოპირდაპირე კედელს მიაშტერდა...

...მოპირდაპირე კედელი სიკვდილის მეუდრო, მაგრამ უსიცოცხლო კაბინეტის ნაწილს წარმოადგენდა. კედლის მარცხენა მხარეს კარი იყო, კარზე - უზარმაზარი პოსტერი, პოსტერზე - ჯიმ მორისონი - მისი ფავორიტი სოლისტი და ჯერ კიდევ შესავსები კოლექციის ერთ-ერთი ღირსეული წევრი. კოლექციაში სულ ოცდაშვიდი უნიკალური ექსპონატი უნდა შესულიყო, რის შემდეგაც სიკვდილი ყველა დროის საუკეთესო მუსიკალური ჯგუფის შექმნას გეგმავდა. მყვირალა სახელების მქონე არანაკლებ მყვირალა შემსრულებლებითა და სხვადასხვა ეპოქის ჰიტების სიქველებით. მაგალითად, როგორიც იქნებოდა - "Also Like, Haha and Wow" ან „Five more months, Please“<sup>1</sup>. თუმცა, ძვირფასი ექსპონატების შესარჩევად იუველირული სიზუსტე იყო საჭირო, რადგან კოლექციაში მოხვედრის მსურველთა მზარდი რიცხვი მომავალი ბენდის ხარისხს საფრთხეს უქმნიდა.

იქვე, კუთხესთან, სადაც პირველი კედელი მეორეს ხვდებოდა, უამრავი (რვა ათას შვიდას ორმოცდახუთი!) არაჩვეულებრივი ფოტოს გამოფენა იწყებოდა. ფოტოებზე თავად იყო გამოსახული. მისი რეზიუმე. სამუშაოზე გამოცხადებული სიკვდილის ერთგვარი ქრონიკა. კანტებზე კანტიკუნტად მიწერილი რემარკებით, რომელთა მეშვეობითაც იდეალურად იყო აღწერილი მთელი მისი ისტორია - ჟამი სიცოცხლისა და ჟამი სიკვდილისა:

<sup>1</sup> იგულისხმება სიქველები ჰიტებისა - „All you need is love“ და „Wake me up when September ends“.



მესამე კედელზე უზარმაზარი ცელი ეკიდა. დიაგონალურად. ორ ლურსმანზე. ახალი ტექნოლოგიების დანერგვის შემდეგ სიკვდილი მას უკვე ნაკლებად იყენებდა. უმეტესად - სელფის ჯოხად და ისიც - იმის გამო, რომ ყველგან ცელით ხატავდნენ. ის კი კაცობრიობის ამგვარ შეხედულებას ხათრს ვერ უტეხდა. კაცმა რომ თქვას, პატარა აღარ ეთქმოდა და ყველაფერზე ცელით წაწალი უკვე თვითონაც ესიკვდილებოდა. სამაგიეროდ, კურსორი ჰქონდა ცელის ფორმის. „ატროპოსის“ ფირმის სპეციალურ მოწყობილობაზე, სადაც „კაცობრიობის“ ერთ უზარმაზარ საერთო საქალაქო უთვალავი (შვიდი ათას ოთხას ოცი!) ქვესაქალაქე („ომი“, „კატაკლიზმა“, „ავადმყოფობა“, „უბედური შემთხვევა“, „სიბერე“, „ტერორიზმი“, „ჯვარზე გაკვრა“, „დარვინის პრემია“ თუ სხვა) და შვიდი მილიარდ

რვაასი მილიონ ხუთასი ათას სამას ოცი (ურცხვი ურიცხვი რიცხვი!!!) ფაილი იყო გაერთიანებული. სიკვდილის საქმეს კი მუდმივად განახლებადი ფაილების ქვესაქაღალდეებში გადანაწილება და პერიოდულად მათი წმინდად წმენდა წარმოადგენდა.

„ატროპოსის“ თავზე თაროები მოჩანდა, რომელთა ძირითადი ნაწილი ტერი პრეჩეტის წიგნებით იყო შევსებული. სიკვდილის აზრით, პრეჩეტი დაუვიწყარ წიგნებს წერდა იქამდე, ვიდრე მისი „ალცჰაიმერის“ ქვესაქაღალდეში ჩაგდება მოუწევდა. ნაკლები ოსტატობით არც სხვა რომანები იყო შესრულებული. თაროებზე ასევე ეწყო მანი, ზუზაკი, სარამაგუ, კრისტი... მოკლედ, ყველა, ვინც უკვდავების მოპოვებას სიკვდილზე წერით ცდილობდა და მისივე ნარცისული ბიბლიოთეკის გამოცოცხლებას უწყობდა ხელს.

...სიკვდილმა კედელს მიშტერებული თვალის ფოტოები ცერა და საჩვენებელი თითების ფალანგებით ამოისრისა. მისი უძილობა მთლიანად ფსიქოლოგიური ფაქტორებით იყო განპირობებული. ეშინოდა, დაღლილობისაგან ისე არ ჩასძინებოდა, რომ მალევიძარას ვერაფერი გაეწყო. „დღე საც, და მერე აუცილებლად მივალ ფსიქოლოგთან“, – გაიფიქრა. ბოლო ფსიქოლოგი, რომელსაც კარზე მიაღება, ფროიდი იყო. ოცდაცხრამეტში. თუმცა, ეს უფრო სამუშაო ვიზიტი გახლდათ, რადგან ფაილი „Sigmund Freud – 1856“ დიდი ხანია „მძიმე ავადმყოფობის“ ქვესაქაღალდეში ეგდო და ფსიქოლოგიც ამჯერად უკვე თავად იწვა დივანზე. „არა უშავს. მაგას ძილზე საუბარი ბევრად უკეთ გამოსდიოდა, ვიდრე უძილობაზე“, – თავის ქალა დაიმშვიდა სიკვდილმა და იქვე გაახსენდა, რომ მისი ინსომნია ფროიდამდე ბევრად ადრე დაიწყო. კერძოდ, იმ რამდენიმე შემთხვევის შემდეგ, როცა განსაკუთრებით ფხიზლად უნდა ყოფილიყო. მას კი ჩაეძინა და ამის გამო, მსოფლიოს ისტორია რადიკალურად შეიცვალა:

ალოიზი ღამით, სექსის დროს უნდა მომკვდარიყო.  
აუცილებლად. უსიკვდილოდ. სხვა შემთხვევაში,  
ექსპერიმენტი არასწორი გზით წავიდოდა და სიკვდილს  
მოუწევდა, მკაცრად ეგო პასუხი საკუთარი შემქმნელების  
წინაშე.

იმ საღამოს ალოიზიმ სულის გარდა ყველაფერი  
დალია. იმდენად მთვრალი იყო, ერთი თითი ჯერ ორად  
ეჩვენებოდა, ის ორი – ოთხად, ოთხი – რვად, რასაც ისეთი  
ანატომიური ანომალია მოსდევდა, რომ იძულებული  
ხდებოდა, თვალები დაეხუჭა და თავის მსუბუქი გაქნევით  
რეალობაში დაბრუნებულიყო. ამავე მიზეზის გამო, შინ  
მისულმა ალოიზიმ, თექვსმეტიდან ერთი რეალური  
კარის პოვნის შემდეგ, ჯერ კლარა შენიშნა, შემდეგ – ორი  
კლარა, შემდეგ – ოთხი, შემდეგ – რვა, რის შემდეგაც  
თვალები დახუჭა, თავი მსუბუქად გააქნია და სანამ ის  
ერთი კლარა ისევ გამრავლდებოდა, გასამრავლებლად  
საძინებლისკენ წაიყვანა.

სექსი არ გახლდათ ისეთი, რომანტიკულ ფილმებში რომ  
ხატავენ. იყო ისეთი, როგორსაც დოკუმენტურ ფილმებში  
აჩვენებენ. კერძოდ, Animal Planets-ზე. ალოიზი ქშენდა,  
როგორც ბაქანზე შემომავალი ლუმიერების მატარებელი  
და კლარა იყო უტყვი, როგორც ლუმიერებისავე კინო.

სწორედ ამ დროს უნდა ყოფილიყო საგულდაგულოდ  
დაგვემილი გულის შეტევა.

თუმცა, სიკვდილს ჩაეძინა.

საბედისწეროდ.

რამდენიმე წუთის შემდეგ, ალოიზიმ თავისი საქმე  
გაათავა და მცირე ხვნეშის აკომპანემენტით, კლარადან  
საწოლზე გადაწვა. ერთი შეხედვით, სხვა ათასი ღამის  
მსგავსად, ეს ღამეც არაზღაპრული უნდა ყოფილიყო, მაგ  
- რამ ამჯერად ყველაფერი სხვაგვარად მოხდა – პატარა



ადოლფმა კონკურენტები ადვილად დაამარცხა და დედის კვერცხუჯრედისაკენ ელვის სისწრაფით დაიძრა...

...უსიამოვნო მოგონებამ სიკვდილს არა მხოლოდ ძილის, ძილზე ფიქრის სურვილიც კი გაუქრო. წამოდგა, ლაბადა გაიხადა და თავი სარკეში შეათვალიერა. „ცოტა მომატება არ მაწყენდა. ცარიელი ძვლები ვარ დარჩენილი“, – გაიფიქრა, მოსასხამი ელექტროსკამზე გადაკიდა და ნანატრ შვებულებაზე ჩაფიქრდა. უფრო ადრეც იმსახურებდა. ამდენი მილიონი წელი ისე გავიდა, ერთ დღესაც არ გაჩერებულა. „იმას რა ენაღვლება! კვირას მაინც ისვენებს“, – ჩაიბუზღუნა და სიბნელეში ვიღაც შენიშნა. ჰალუცინაციებიდა აკლდა! თითების ფალანგებით თვალის ფოკუსები ამოიფშვნიტა და უკეთესად დააკვირდა. აღარავინ ჩანდა. დამშვიდდა, წამოწვა და ფიქრი განაგრძო. რა მალე გავიდა დრო. საუკუნის წინანდელივით ახსოვდა აბელი. მაშინ უბრალო სტაჟიორი იყო და სამსახურთან შეგუება უზომოდ უჭირდა. ჯერ მარტო მათუსალას რამდენი სდია... მერე ის საშინელი წვიმა. ორმოცი დღე შეუსვენებლად მუშაობდა, მაგრამ ერთმა ლოთმა დურგალმა მთელი შრომა წყალში ჩაუყარა. წყალზე „ტიტანიკი“ გაახსენდა. საშინლად ციოდა იმ ღამეს – სულ ძვალში ატანდა... ბრრრ... გააჟრჟოლა. თუმცა, სიცხეც არანაკლები ახსოვდა. ერთხელ ლონდონში ისე ცხელოდა, მტრისას, იწვოდა ყველაფერი! ცეცხლზე რატომღაც არქიმედე ამოუტივტივდა გონებაში. ცხელი აბაზანა... მარატთან ერთად... თბილი წყალი სასიამოვნოდ ელამუნება სხეულზე. თხემის ძვლიდან ტერფის ძვლებამდე ჟრუანტელმა დაუარა. მოეშვა.

„არ უნდა ჩამეძინოს!“ – ამის გაფიქრებალა მოასწრო და ჩაეძინა.

ოთხი ხდებოდა

## მეორე პროლოგი

ერთ დილას მემენტო მორიმ აღმოაჩინა, რომ პერსონაჟია და საკუთარი თავის შესახებ მხოლოდ სამი რამ ახსოვს:

1. ის, რომ უცნაური სახელი – „მემენტო მორი“ – ჰქვია;
2. ის, რომ პერსონაჟია;
3. ის, რომ საკუთარი თავის შესახებ მხოლოდ სამი რამ ახსოვს.

ასეთ დროს კი პერსონაჟობა ცოტა რთულია. განსაკუთრებით მაშინ, როდესაც პირდაპირ პროლოგში არსაიდან ჩნდები. არც საკუთარი წარსული იცი, არც – მომავალი და აწმყოზეც იმდენად ცოტა რამ გახსოვს, რომ სამი ფრაზა თავისუფლად გიტყვს. გარშემო არაფერია. ფანჯარასთან თუ მიხვალ და გარეთ გაიხედავ, შეიძლება იქაც სრული სიცარიელე დაგხვდეს. ეგ კი არა, ვერც ფანჯარას შენიშნავ, სანამ ავტორი არ აღწერს, რომ ოთახს, რომელშიც შენ იმყოფები, ოთხი ფართო სარკმელი აქვს, საიდანაც შესანიშნავი ხედი იშლება კლდის პირას მდებარე ჭვავის ყანებზე, რომ ეს სივრცე განსაკუთრებით ლამაზია შემოდგომის მიწურულს, როცა ხეთა ტოტები გიგანტურ ფუნჯებს ემსგავსება, ფოთლები კი – საღებავებს, რომ ერთ რამედ ღირს სამხრეთის ფანჯრიდან მიმინოტავრების ან დიკოპოტამების გადაფრენის ცქერა და ასე დაუსრულებლად. ერთი ისაა, მემენტო მორი ფანჯარასთან არ მივა, რადგან ბუნების აღწერა არაბუნებრივად ეჩვენება. საერთოდაც, იგი ფიქრობს, რომ ერთი ცოცხალი ხე ბევრად მნიშვნელოვანია, ვიდრე ტყეების აღმწერი ის მრავალი გვერდი, რომლისთვისაც ეს ხე მოიჭრა. თუმცა, მემენტო მორიმ ჯერ ისიც კი არ იცის, რა იცის, გარდა იმისა, რაც აქამდე მასზე ითქვა ან ამის შემდეგ მასზე დაიწერება.

ერთი კია, მისგან განსხვავებით, პერსონაჟთა უმეტესობა ვერასოდეს იაზრებს, რომ პერსონაჟია და რომ მათი

ნებისმიერი გადაწყვეტილება – თუნდაც ის, ვახშმად რა უნდა მიირთვან – სულ სხვა ადამიანის თავში იხარშება. ამგვარი გულუბრყვილობა გასაკვირი სულაც არ არის. წარმოიდგინეთ, ერთხელ თქვენთანაც რომ მოვიდეს უცხო ადამიანი და მტკიცე ტონით გითხრათ – დედამიწა სინამდვილეში კოკოშანზე<sup>2</sup> მცხოვრები ავტორის ერთ წიგნში არსებული გამოგონილი პლანეტაა და რეალურად არც თქვენ არსებობთო, – დაიჯერებთ? ცხადია, არა.

მემენტო მორიმ კი ჯერ აღმოაჩინა და შემდეგ დაიჯერა, რომ პერსონაჟია. სამყაროში, სადაც ადამიანი ძილში დიდ მწერად შეიძლება გადაიქცეს და ორ ფეხზე მოსიარულე შავ კატას, რაღაც ეშმაკობით, ტრამვაიზე ჩამოკიდებულს შეუძლია იმგზავროს, არაფერია შეუძლებელი. „თუმცა, – ფიქრობს მემენტო მორი, – თუ პერსონაჟთა ფიქრებს ყოველთვის ავტორი წარმართავს, მაშინ იქნებ ისიც ავტორის გადაწყვეტილებაა, რომ მე დამოუკიდებლად მოქმედების ილუზია შემექმნას და, შესაბამისად, ეს აზრიც ამგვარი პერსონაჟის უაზრობაზე, სწორედ ავტორის შთაგონებული გამოდის...“ არადა, რა დროს ასეთ წვრილმანებზე დარდია, როცა პერსონაჟობის გათავისებით უდიდეს ლიტერატურულ ძალაუფლებას იძენ: შეგიძლია, მწერალს მისივე გმირები აუმხედრო, ავტორისეული სიტყვები გააბიაბრო („იურული პერიოდის შემდეგ ამ ზმნას კიდევ თუ ვინმე იყენებდა, არ მეგონა“) ან სულაც წიგნებში იმოგზაურო. ჰოდა, ვინ ფიქრობს ასეთ დროს იმაზე, ავტორის ხელდასხმით ზდება ეს ყველაფერი თუ ხელალებით? არავინ! არც მემენტო მორი იფიქრებს. ავტორი მოკვდა. ვინც ეგ თქვა, ისიც მოკვდა. გაუმარჯოს ახალ პერსონაჟს!



<sup>2</sup> დედამიწაზე მცხოვრები ავტორის ერთ წიგნში არსებული გამოგონილი პლანეტა.

სამი ფიფქი ერთგვარი შემცვლელია ფრაზისა „გამოხდა ხანი“. ანუ, იმ ერთ არასრულ სტრიქონში, ამ აბზაცის დასაწყისს წინა აბზაცის დასასრულისგან რომ გამოყოფს, მემენტო მორის ცხოვრებაში უჩვეულო არაფერი მომხდარა. ძირითადად, ჭამდა ან ეძინა. და ვინაიდან აღარავინ კითხულობს ამბებს მაძლარ მძინარა პერსონაჟებზე, მემენტო მორიმ გადაწყვიტა, „წონა“ და „წოლა“ რამე უფრო წონიანი მიზნით ჩაენაცვლებინა. სხვა თუ არაფერი, ის უჩვეულო სუპერძალას ფლობდა. სუპერძალა კი მის გამოუყენებლად, იგივეა, საკუთარი Wi-Fi-ს პაროლი რომ დაგავიწყდეს. მით უფრო იმ სამყაროში, სადაც ბოროტი ავტორები ბოგინებენ და საკუთარ პერსონაჟებს კალმის ერთი მოსმით ხოცავენ. ასეთ უსამართლო სივრცეს უდავოდ სჭირდება ერთი სუპერგმირი – სუპერმენტო! მემენტომორიმენი!! ტერმინმენტომორი!!!...

ან მოდი, ისევ მემენტო მორი იყოს.

რამდენიმე წელს (რომელიც, თითქოსდა ბევრი ჩანს, მაგრამ, როგორც ხედავთ, ცამეტ ასოში შეიძლება ჩაეტიოს) ყველანაირი ტიპის ლიტერატურას ეცნობოდა. „დასასრულის განცდით“ დაწყებული, „მოკლე მოთხრობებით“ გაგრძელებული და „დაუსრულებელი ამბით“ დასრულებული. მერე უკვე ამ წიგნებში მოგზაურობასა და პროტაგონისტების გადარჩენასაც შეუდგა. ხან რომეოსა და ჯულიეტას არწმუნებდა, რომ ყველაფრისგან ტრაგედიის შექმნა არ იყო საჭირო და მერე ამ ამბავს ტკბილად გაიხსენებდნენ, ხან ოსტაპ ბენდერს უწევდა პირველად დახმარებას, ხანამ იპოლიტ მატვევიჩი მდინარეში იხრჩობოდა (ბოლივარი ორს ვერ ზიდავს), ხანაც – მოგვიანებით შექმნილი ჯადოსნური პენიცილინით დატვირთული, ფარულად დავოსის ერთ სანატორიუმს ეწვეოდა ხოლმე. ზოგჯერ ახერხებდა, ავტორებზე გამარჯვება ეზეიმა, ზოგჯერ წიგნის სისქე

აბრკოლებდა და, სანამ ტრაგედიის გვერდამდე  
 მიაღწევდა, მთავარი გმირის მატარებელი უკვე ჩავლილი  
 იყო. ერთხანს „ომსა და მშვიდობაშიც“ სცადა ბედი,  
 მაგრამ ფარ-ხმალი მალევე დაყარა. ვერც თვითმკვლელი  
 ქალწულები გადაარჩინა და ვერც – \*\*\*Spoiler  
 Alert\*\*\*<sup>3</sup>. რა ექნა, თვითონ ერთი იყო, დანარჩენი  
 პერსონაჟები – მილიონი. ყველას ვერ იხსნიდა და არც  
 იყო საჭირო. მორიარტის საერთოდაც თავადვე ჰკრა  
 ხელი რაიხენბახის ჩანჩქერზე და ჯერაც ვერ ივიწყებდა  
 ჰოლმსის გაოგნებულ სახეს, რომლის მანქანასავით  
 გამართული გონება ამ Deus Ex Machina-ის გამოჩენას  
 ვერაფრით ხსნიდა.

თუმცა, მოდი, გულწრფელად ვთქვათ – დიდად  
 საინტერესო არც წიგნებში მოგზაურობა აღმოჩნდა.  
 ცხადია, ჭამა-ძილის უწყვეტ პროცესს ბევრად სჯობდა,  
 მაგრამ რამდენიმე აბზაციც და ამდენი ლიტერატურული  
 ალუზიით შეწუხებული მკითხველი ისეთი ხმაურითა და  
 მძვინვარებით დახურავდა წიგნს, რომ მემენტო მორის  
 გვერდებს შორის გასრესვა ნამდვილად არ ასცდებოდა.  
 მკითხველის შესაჩერებლად ამბავი იყო საჭირო და  
 სწორედ ამ დროს გააკეთა მემენტო მორიმ ის აღმოჩენა,  
 რომლის მეშვეობითაც დამოკლეს მახვილი მარტივად  
 აირიდა თავიდან – სანამ თვითონ სხვა რომანებზე იყო  
 გადართული, საკუთარ წიგნში ვიღაცის მკვლელობა  
 დაიგეგმა. ზუსტად ოთხ საათსა და ოცდაცამეტ წუთზე.  
 პროლოგში ყველაფერი დეტალურად ეწერა, გარდა  
 ერთისა:

ვინ უნდა მოეკლათ?

<sup>3</sup> იგულისხმება რენდალ მაკმერფი, რომლის გადარჩენაც მემენტო მორიმ ვერ შეძლო. თუმცა, კიზისაგან განსხვავებით, მან სცადა მაინც.

# Everybody dies in this novel

*Bega Adamashvili*

Translated from Georgian by Tamar Japaridze

## *Prologue*

Death set his alarm clock for 4.33 a.m.

He had been counting everything since insomnia became his vigilant adversary. First he counted the sheep (ten thousand one hundred and ten!), then the sleepless nights (seven thousand seven hundred and seven!), then the seconds spent on counting the sheep and the sleepless nights (eighteen thousand and three!), then the seconds spent on counting the seconds spent on counting the sheep and the sleepless nights ... Suddenly it occurred to him that there were six hundred and twenty(!) other ways of falling asleep besides this futile counting, and decided to try something else.

He thought, he'd better think about nothing, but then realised that thinking of thinking about nothing was already a thought, and felt a persistent ache in his cranium. Next he turned to a volume by Proust hoping to fall asleep from boredom, but soon reckoned that it wasn't worth his while, as he didn't want to be in search of lost time later. Neither closing his eyes to all injustice nor imagining the public presentation of the Tokyo telephone directory was of any help. In the end, he waved his wrist bones and finger phalanges despairingly, stared at the wall opposite,

and tried to calm himself down by the fact that, all in all, his state was far better than that of the Devil's who had never once slept in all his days ...

... The opposite wall represented a part of Death's cozy but pretty dead office. On the left there was a door with a huge poster of Jim Morrison — his favourite lead vocalist, a worthy member of his precious collection that was still incomplete. He wanted his collection to consist of twenty-seven unique specimens. When all the twenty-seven were there, he would create the best music band of all time, with big names, equally big performers, and the sequels (such as 'Also Like, Haha and Wow' or 'Five more months, please' <sup>(1)</sup>) to hits of different epochs. But the valuable specimens had to be selected with the accuracy of a jeweller, since the increasing number of willing applicants created a danger to the quality of the future band.

At the corner of the room, right where two walls met, there started an exhibition of myriad wonderful photos (eight thousand seven hundred and forty-five in total number!). All of them depicted him, and the whole thing represented a sort of a summary or rather a chronicle of 'Death at work'. The remarks inscribed on the edges of the pictures gave a detailed account of his lifetime activities — A Time to Live and a Time to Die:

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(1) The sequels to the hits 'All You Need Is Love' and 'Wake Me up When September Ends'.



A huge scythe hung on the third wall. It hung diagonally, on two nails. After new technologies had been introduced, Death scarcely utilised it as intended; he mostly used it as a selfie stick or a prop (he was always depicted holding the scythe, you know, and he didn't want to deceive the expectation of mortals). He was no longer a kid, so to speak, and was tired to death from carrying the scythe on his shoulders. However, he had a scythe-shaped cursor on the monitor of his special device from the company 'Atropos', in which he kept numerous (seven thousand four hundred and twenty!) subfolders ('War', 'Cataclysm', 'Disease', 'Accident', 'Old Age', 'Terrorism', 'Crucifixion', 'Darwin Prize', etc.) and seven billion eight hundred million five hundred thousand three hundred and twenty files (fancy that!) in a huge folder



named 'Humankind'. His job was to distribute continuously updated files into subfolders and delete some of them from time to time.

Over the 'Atropos' there were shelves full of Terry Pratchett books. To Death's mind, Terry Pratchett used to write unforgettable books, until he had to be sent to the 'Alzheimer' subfolder. Some other novels, too, were written very skillfully by famous authors: Mann, Zusak, Saramago, Christie and many others who tried to acquire immortality by writing about Death, and hence helped to revive his narcissistic library.

Death rubbed his eye sockets (which were staring at the wall) with the thumb and index finger phalanges. His insomnia was caused entirely by psychological factors. He was afraid to fall so hard asleep with fatigue that even the alarm clock could not wake him up. 'I must consult a psychotherapist ASAP', he decided. The last one he visited in 1939 was Freud. But he didn't consult him, it was just his duty visit, since the file 'Sigmund Freud — 1856' had long been in the subfolder of 'Severely Sick,' and it was already the poor man himself who was lying on the couch. 'Never mind', Death calmed himself down. 'He was good at discussing sleep, not sleeplessness'. Then he recalled that his insomnia occurred much earlier than his visit to Freud, namely after one occasion when he had to be very vigilant but fell asleep, and the world's entire history changed dramatically.

Alois was to die during coitus. By all means! Otherwise, the experiment would fail, and Death would be strictly accused of inefficiency by his creators.

That evening Alois drank everything but deadly poison. Acutely intoxicated by alcohol, he even suffered from diplopia: one finger seemed to be two to him, those two seemed

four, and four seemed eight. Eventually, it resulted in such an anatomic abnormality, that the poor man had to close his eyes and shake his head to come back to reality. For the same reason, upon returning home, he (having at last found one real door out of sixteen) first saw one Klara, then two, then four, and then eight respectively. So he closed his eyes, shook his head, and before his wife multiplied again, he took her to the bedroom to multiply the number of his family members.

Their coitus was nothing like the sex in romantic movies; it was more like the act of reproduction in documentaries from the series 'Animal Planet': Alois puffed like a train in the films of the Lumiere brothers, and Klara was as silent as the same movies.

The lethal heart attack should have started at that very moment.

But alas! Death fell asleep.

A fatal misfortune indeed!

Several minutes later, the act was over and Alois, panting heavily, climbed down from Klara to the bed. At first glance, this was an ordinary night like one thousand and one other nights, but it turned out to be fabulous: wee Adolf defeated his enemies using the blitzkrieg tactics and headed towards his mother's ovum at the speed of light ...

... The unpleasant memory not only kept Death fully awake but also made him lose the desire to think about sleep whatever. He stood up, took off his cloak, and examined himself thoroughly and closely in the mirror. 'I need to gain weight, I am nothing but bones', he concluded. Having hung his cloak over the electric chair, he began to think about coveted holidays. He really deserved a good rest after millions of

years without a single day off. 'Of course He doesn't care ... He himself rests on Sundays, anyway', Death grumbled, and suddenly spotted someone in the dark ... Damn'd hallucinations! He rubbed his eye sockets with finger phalanges and scrutinised the darkness in front of him. This time he saw no one there. So he chilled out, lay down and continued to meditate. Time really flew quickly! He remembered Abel very well, as if they met just a century ago. Death was a simple intern those days, and it was too difficult for him to get used to his job ... Aw, and how he sweated while chasing Methuselah! ... Then there came that Great Flood. He worked forty days in a row, but one tippler — a carpenter — spoiled his every effort. Recalling the Flood reminded him of the 'Titanic'. It was awfully cold that night and Death was chilled to the bone ... Brrr ... He shivered. Once he witnessed a devastating heat in London: September of that autumn was so hot as if it was on fire ... When the image of the blazing fire submerged into the fluid of his subconscious, some new images emerged from it by the law of buoyancy ... Archimedes ... A hot bath ... together with Marat ... The warm water felt very pleasant ... The sudden feeling of pleasure thrilled the whole of his skeleton. He relaxed.

'I must not sleep!' he thought, and fell asleep almost instantly.

It was about four in the morning.

### *Another Prologue*

As Memento Mori awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he discovered that he was a fictional character, and that he remembered only three things about himself:

He had a strange name — ‘Memento Mori’;

He was a fictional character;

He remembered only three things about himself.

It’s difficult indeed to be a character in such an odd situation, especially when you appear right in the prologue from nowhere, knowing nothing about your past or future, and being able to say only a few words in three short phrases about your present. You are surrounded by strange void spaces: if you go to the window and look out of it, you might see vast emptiness. Moreover, you won’t be able to spot the window at all, if the author doesn’t say that the room, in which you happen to be, has four large windows with a wonderful view on the rye field over the crazy cliff, and that the whole of this spot is especially beautiful in the late autumn, when the tree branches resemble gigantic brushes, while leaves look like the drops of coloured paints. The author should also say something like ‘it’s a wonderful experience to watch heffalumps and woozles floating by the south window’, and so on and so forth. But the thing is that Memento Mori won’t go to the window, as he thinks that description of the nature is always pretty unnatural. By and large, he thinks that one living tree is much more important than the whole forest described on many pages for which the very tree has been cut down. Anyway, let me remind you that Memento Mori still doesn’t know anything about what he knows or thinks apart from what has already been said about him. Neither does he know what will be said further.

And yet, unlike him, the majority of characters usually never realise that they are characters, and that even their simple decisions, such as what to have for supper, for instance, are cooked in another person's mind. There is nothing extraordinary in such naivety. Imagine a stranger coming up to you and asserting that actually the Earth is nothing but a fictional planet from a book by an inhabitant of the planet Kimkardash <sup>(2)</sup>, and that in reality you, too, don't exist either. Would you believe it? Of course you wouldn't.

As for Memento Mori, he first found out that he was just a fictional character and only after that he believed it. In the world where a human being can turn into an enormous insect in his sleep, or a huge black cat walking on two legs can ride a tram hanging on it, nothing is impossible. 'However', Memento Mori thought, 'if the author always directs the character's thoughts, then it might be his decision as well to make me think that I can act independently. Therefore, my sense of senselessness of such a character might also be dictated by him' ... Well, well. What's the use of worrying about such trifles when by accepting the idea that you are a fictional character, you acquire a great literary power: you can make the other characters rebel against the author, completely ignore his words, or just travel from book to book. So tell me, for goodness' sake, who cares whether it all happens at the will of the author or not? No one does! Neither will Memento Mori. The author has died! And the literary critic who first asserted this fact died as well. So Long Live the New Character!




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(2) Kimkardash — a fictional planet in a book by an inhabitant of the planet earth.

Three asterisks in a row usually stand for the phrase ‘time has passed’. That is to say, nothing important happened in Memento Mori’s life between the last line of the previous paragraph and the first line of the following one. He only slept and ate. As nobody feels like reading about the characters that are only sleeping and eating, Memento Mori decided to exchange his laziness and drowsiness for something more impressive. He had an exclusive superpower, let alone everything else, and ignoring this fact (especially in the world full of cruel authors who could kill their characters with one simple sentence) was the same as to forget the password of your own Wi-Fi. Such an unfair situation needs one superhero at least — Supermento! Mementomori-man! Termimentomori!!!!

Or let it be Memento Mori again.

For several years (which might sound a long period of time, but it can be described in fifteen letters, as you see) he had been reading various books from ‘The Sense of an Ending’ to ‘The Neverending Story’. Then he started skipping from book to book making an effort to save protagonists: he tried to assure Romeo and Juliet that there was no need to turn every problem into a tragedy, because later their problem might seem merely a sweet memory of the past. He also tried to offer the first aid to Ostap Bender while Ippolit Matveyevich was drowning in a river (Bolivar cannot carry double). At times, when the magic penicillin had been already invented, he even visited the Davos sanatorium in secret. Sometimes he managed to triumph over the authors, but some other times the volume of the book created a serious obstacle for him, and struggling through its pages he missed the train of the protagonist. Once he even tried his luck in ‘War and Peace’, but surrendered in no time. He wasn’t able to save the Lisbon girls from ‘The Virgin Suicides’, neither

could he succeed with \*\*\*Spoiler Alert\*\*\*<sup>(3)</sup> ... What could he do? He was coping alone with a million other characters. Little wonder he couldn't manage to save them all (and there was no need of doing it by the way). He even pushed Moriarty himself at the Reichenbach Fall, and still remembered bewildered face of Sherlock whose razor-sharp mind could not guess from where this Deus Ex Machina came.

Frankly speaking, travelling through the books didn't prove to be exciting either. True, it was much better than a continuous process of eating and sleeping, but several more paragraphs, and the reader (fed up with so many literary allusions) might close the book with such a sound and fury that Memento Mori would be crushed between pages. The only way to avoid such a terrible misfortune was to start telling a new story ... At that very moment, Memento Mori found out something that saved him from the Sword of Damocles very easily: while he was concerned with other problems, someone's murder had been planned in his own book. The murder had to take place in the morning, at 4.33 sharp! ... Yeah, everything was written clearly in the prologue, except one detail:

Who was to be murdered?

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<sup>(3)</sup> I mean Randle McMurphy, whom Memento Mori couldn't save, although (unlike Ken Kesey) he at least tried to.





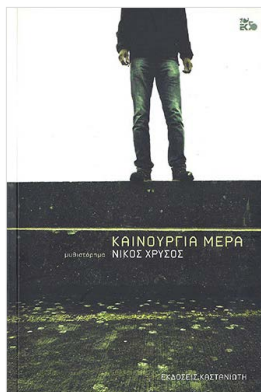
# GREECE

**Nikos Chryssos**

**Καινούργια μέρα**

*New day*

Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018.



## BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1972 in Athens, **Nikos Chryssos (Νίκος Χρυσός)** studied at the Department of Biology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and at the Department of Film Direction at the School of Cinematography 'Lykourgos Stavrakos'. He is the owner of an old bookstore in Athens. He wrote the novels *The Secret of the Last Page* (Το μυστικό της τελευταίας σελίδας, Kastaniotis Editions 2009) and *New Day* (Καινούργια μέρα, Kastaniotis Editions 2018). In 2014 he edited the annotated revised edition of the book *Unforgettable Times* (Αξέχαστοι καιροί) by Lefteris Alexiou as well as the collected volume *Stories of Books* (Ιστορίες βιβλίων), both published by Kastaniotis Editions. Since September 2018 he has been the Vice-President of the Greek Section of the 'International Society of Friends of Nikos Kazantzakis' (ISFNK).

## SYNOPSIS

The book records the adventures of a homeless group who live and die in some southern European port. The central character called Sebastian is murdered. His four mates, who remorsefully search for the deeper essence of his life and death, by delving into their shared memories, as well as his stories which are precious inheritance for them, revivify their history in a sequence of episodes which alternate with Sebastian's stories. Paul, one of the murderers, shaken by the savagery of the murder, becomes a mystic and a martyr, as happened with Apostle Paul who bore the same name. His advice directs his four friends to record their memories and produce new artistic narratives endlessly. Sebastian remains, however, the great absentee. The *New Day* narrates the human adventure — murder and redemption, cruelty and compassion, being at its core an allegory for the natural and the supernatural essence of narration.¶

# Καινούργια μέρα

*Nikos Chryssos*



Μετά τα ασθενοφόρα και την Πυροσβεστική, έπειτα από τους νταγλαράδες της υπηρεσίας Προστασίας του Πολίτη και τα τσουτσέκια της Δημοτικής Αστυνομίας, ήρθε η σειρά της υδροφόρας και των υπαλλήλων καθαριότητας, οι οποίοι βάλθηκαν να καταβρέχουν και να τρίβουν τις στάχτες, τα καμένα λίπη και τα αίματα που είχαν αναμιχθεί σε μια πηχτή κηλίδα λάσπης στο πλάτωμα του παλιού αμαξοστασίου. Τρεις σκουπιδιάρες είχαν αράξει στο μπάσιμο της αλάνας και οι οδηγοί κάπνιζαν μπαϊλντισμένοι δίπλα στις καμπίνες, ενώ έξι άντρες με πορτοκαλί φόρμες τάιζαν τους περιστρεφόμενους κάδους με χαρτόκουτες, ξεβαμμένους μουσαμάδες, κουρελόπανα και ξύλινα κασόνια που κατά τη γνώμη μας δεν ήταν καθόλου για πέταμα. Δυο άλλοι, ντυμένοι στα πράσινα κι οπλισμένοι με βαριές συρμάτινες σκούπες, έτριβαν τον λεκέ, κουρασμένοι ήδη από το μάταιο της προσπάθειας, αφού καταβάθος γνώριζαν πως θα χρειαζόταν καιρός, κάμποσες βροχές κι αρκετός ήλιος για να σβηστούν τα ίχνη που άφησε ο φίλος μας. Το μόνο που κατάφερναν με το τρίψιμο ήταν να ζωντανεύει η μυρουδιά που είχε καθίσει στο τσιμέντο, μια οσμή άγρια και βαριά που 'κανε τα μάτια μας να θολώνουν και υποχρέωνε τους καθαριστές να στέκουν κάθε τόσο και να φτύνουν πικρές ροχάλες. Εν τω μεταξύ η υδροφόρα έστελνε κατά διαστήματα πίδακες νερού προς κάθε κατεύθυνση ραντίζοντας τις σκουριασμένες λαμαρίνες σαν να ήταν ποτιστική βεντάλια και οι ελάχιστοι κουρελήδες που είχαν ξεμείνει μέσα στα παρατημένα τροχοφόρα κούρνιαζαν κάτω απ' τα σκεπάσματα, ελπίζοντας να τε-

λειώσει το πανηγύρι πριν γίνουν μουσκίδι ως το κόκαλο. Πριν ολοκληρωθούν οι εργασίες καθαριότητας, άρχισαν να πέφτουν πυκνές νιφάδες και μέχρι το βράδυ ολόκληρο το Λιμάνι είχε καλυφθεί από ένα στρώμα χιονιού που έφτανε έως τη θάλασσα κι όταν αποχώρησαν τα οχήματα και οι άντρες του δήμου, οι άστεγοι ξεμύτισαν από τα μεταλλικά καταλύματά τους γυρεύοντας ζεστές γωνιές για να ξεχειμωνιάσουν και το αμαξοστάσιο έμεινε έρημο για σαράντα μέρες, όσο κράτησε δηλαδή εκείνο το πρωτόγνωρο κύμα ψύχους που παρέλυσε μια πόλη μαθημένη σε ήπιους μεσογειακούς χειμώνες, μαλακούς γραιγούς, ντροπαλά μαϊστράλια και σύντομες τραμουντάνες.

Όλο εκείνο το διάστημα οι άνθρωποι περιόρισαν τόσο τις μετακινήσεις τους, ώστε στριμωγμένοι στις εισόδους των παλιών μεσοαστικών πολυκατοικιών του Α τομέα –στις «σπηλιές των γερόντων», όπως ήταν λίγο πολύ γνωστές στο σινάφι– σπάνια αναγκαζόμασταν να παραμερίσουμε για να μπει ή να βγει κάποιος τολμηρός υπερήλικας που αψηφούσε το κρύο, κι ακόμα και τότε κανείς δεν μας έδωξε ούτε καν μας στραβοκοίταξε όπως συνήθως. Μικρές σταγόνες γλιστρούσαν από τα καλώδια και πριν προφτάσουν να σκάσουν στην ασφαλτο, πάγωναν η μια κάτω από την άλλη σχηματίζοντας μακριά κρυσταλλικά κορδόνια που έλαμπαν σαν στολίδια ώσπου ένα ξαφνικό ρεύμα αέρα να τα κατακρημνίσει. Εκατοντάδες τέτοιες αιχμηρές προεξοχές κρέμονταν πάνω απ' τα κεφάλια μας κι όμως εμείς θρηνούσαμε κάθε τους πτώση, ανεξήγητα. Έτσι κατάλευκη η πόλη είχε χάσει την περπατησιά της κι αυτό επέτεινε μιαν αίσθηση αποπροσανατολισμού που είχε παρεπιδημήσει άξαφνα μέσα μας. Οι θόρυβοι είχαν σωπάσει και ήταν σαν να 'χε το λευκό βάψει και τα αυτιά εκτός από τα μάτια μας· μόνο ένα φύσημα ακουγόταν τα πρωινά κι ένα ελαφρύ σφύριγμα, λες και βρισκόμασταν μέσα σε μια τεράστια μπάλα που ξεφούσκωνε. Ακόμα κι οι μπάτσοι, που περιπολούσαν δυο δυο τις λεωφόρους, δεν μας έδιναν σημασία παρά έσπρωχναν τα βήματά τους, κι έτσι σφιγμένα από το κρύο τα μούτρα τους

μας ήταν παντελώς άγνωστα σαν να μην είχαμε ανταμώσει ποτέ πριν, σαν να μη μας είχαν διώξει, απειλήσει, κυνηγήσει, μαντρώσει τόσες εκατοντάδες μέρες στην ίδια πόλη. Ένα πρωί είδαμε κάποιον αστυνόμο να στέκεται δίπλα σ' έναν παγωμένο μπόγο στο παγκάκι μιας στάσης, περιεργάστηκε για μια στιγμή το ξαπλωμένο σώμα και με τα μούτρα γκριζα σαν τη στάχτη γονάτισε κι άπλωσε το δεξί χέρι ίσα για να του κλείσει τα μάτια.

«Δεκάδες άστεγοι πεθαίνουν από το κρύο σε όλη τη χώρα», έγραψε κάποιος δημοσιογράφος σ' ένα μονόστηλο στο πρωτοσέλιδο μιας απογευματινής εφημερίδας κάτω από τον κεντρικό τίτλο που υποσχόταν «ενδυνάμωση του κοινωνικού κράτους και παράλληλη ενίσχυση της κατανάλωσης».

«Ο τύπος στο παγκάκι λες να 'ταν νεκρός;» αναρωτήθηκε ο Λάκυ κι έπειτα απόλυτα βέβαιος: «Τον σκέπασε ο μπάτσος μέχρι πάνω και τη γλίτωσε», συμπλήρωσε καθησυχαστικά.

Το ίδιο πάντως βράδυ συνομολογήσαμε πως ήταν μια παρηγορητική εικόνα· ο ουρανός φάνταζε αβάσταχτα λευκός για να ξεμείνεις με τα μάτια ανοιχτά. Ακούγεται αστείο, μα ήταν ό,τι πιο κοντινό στη συμπόνια μπορέσαμε να σκεφτούμε.

Δυο φορές τη μέρα διασχίζαμε τους ημιέρημους δρόμους κι ανταμώναμε στα συσσίτια, που είχαν γίνει πολύ τακτικά λόγω ψύχους. Η σούπα πάγωνε προτού τη φέρεις στα χείλη και το λίπος έφτιαχνε αραιές κηλίδες στην επιφάνειά της, όμως ακόμα κι έτσι ήμασταν πιο χορτάτοι απ' όσο συνήθως.

«Ας έχουμε θερμίδες αφού δεν μπορούμε να έχουμε θέρμανση», είπε κάποιος, αλλά κανέναν δεν ανακούφισαν τα λόγια του.

Μονάχα δυο Πακιστανάκια, τα οποία δεν καταλάβαιναν ακόμα τη γλώσσα, χαμογέλασαν δουλικά, αν ήταν χαμόγελα αυτά κι όχι μια θλιβερή προσπάθεια να ξεπαγώσουν τις μασέλες τους.

Μετά το γεύμα ή το δείπνο δοκιμάζαμε να ξαναθυμηθούμε ιστορίες που είχαμε ακούσει από εκείνον επιδιώκοντας να τις καθαρίζουμε από υπερβολές και ανοησίες που παρεισέφρεαν κατά την επαναδιήγησή τους από τον έναν ή τον άλλον, λες και ήταν δυνατόν να φτιάξουμε μια συλλογή, μια ανθολογία αποτελούμενη μονάχα από δικές του λέξεις στη σωστή σειρά. Συχνά οι ιστορίες άλλαζαν θέμα ή περιεχόμενο, αλλά στην πραγματικότητα κανείς δεν μπορούσε να είναι βέβαιος για το ποιες από αυτές είχε αφηγηθεί ο ίδιος ο Σεβαστιανός και ποιες ήταν μπολιασμένες με περιστατικά από τη δική μας ζωή, αφού ζαλισμένοι από την απώλεια είχαμε, περισσότερο από ποτέ, ανάγκη από εύχητα παραμύθια κι αποκαλυπτικούς μύθους, από διηγήσεις που θα μας ταξίδευαν κοντά του ή έστω κάπου μακριά απ' το παρόν που έμοιαζε αφόρητο. Όποιον και να συναντούσαμε, είχε ακούσει μια ιστορία κι ήταν πρόθυμος να τη μεταφέρει στους άλλους· αυτή η ξαφνική διάθεση αλληλεγγύης έδινε ζωή ακόμα και στις πιο άνευρες κι άτεχνες αφηγήσεις, ώστε τελικά χωρίζαμε ικανοποιημένοι. Όταν ανταμώναμε οι τέσσερις –ή οι πέντε μας λίγο αργότερα– προσπαθούσαμε να ταυτίσουμε κάθε διήγηση με τη στιγμή και τον χώρο όπου την πρωτακούσαμε, αλλά ήταν εξίσου δύσκολο με το να αποφασίσουμε ποιο το σωστό τέλος ή η κατάλληλη αρχή για κάθε μια. Οι ιστορίες άλλαζαν διαστάσεις, ξεκινούσαν σαν τσιγκούνικα δίστιχα και δειλά χαϊκού, ώσπου ξεχείλωναν σε μακροτενείς αφηγήσεις δίχως τέλος, αμήχανα έπη, χνότα που κρυστάλλωναν στον παγωμένο αέρα κι έμεναν μια στιγμή εκκρεμή πριν θαφτούν στο γκρίζο χιόνι του δρόμου.

Ο Λάκυ απήγγειλε μια από τις ακροστιχίδες του Τέως, «Μικρές Γοργόνες Διαγουμίζουν Εννιά Σόλιγκ» ή «Καλός Ιστός Θαλασσινός Ήρθε υψωμένος», ενώ κάποιος άλλος θυμόταν μια λιμανίσια ιστορία του Σεβαστιανού, ο Μαρκόνης μνημόνευε τον καπετάν Τάκη τον Κολόμβο κι ο Τέως επέμενε πως συνάντησε δίπλα στον φάρο τον Ροντρίγκο ντε Τριάνα,

τον πειρατή, τον σαλτιμπάγκο, τον πρώτο Ευρωπαίο που αντίκρισε την Αμερική (ορκιζόταν ότι τον αντάμωσε κουρελή και σακάτη να ατενίζει με ένα μονοκιάλι τα πέλαγα μασουλώντας φτηνό καπνό) κι έπειτα οι φωνές δυνάμωναν, καθένας επέμενε στη δική του εκδοχή με τα αυτιά ωστόσο στραμμένα στους άλλους· αν κάποιος μάς παρακολουθούσε, δεν θα 'βγαζε άκρη κι όμως στριμωγμένοι κάτω από ένα υπόστεγο, στα σκοτεινά, συντονιζόμασταν τελικά στο πολυφωνικό μας τραγούδι που αναβόσβηνε κι έτρεμε, αλλά αν το άκουγες προσεκτικά δεν μπορεί παρά να αντιλαμβανόσουν τη σημασία του.

Τα βρωμόνερα συνέχιζαν να τρέχουν στα λούκια και στους υπονόμους κι ακούγοντας τον παφλασμό αργά το βράδυ, ξεγελασμένοι από το κρύο, πιστεύαμε πως αρχαίοι υποχθόνιοι ποταμοί κυλούσαν ορμητικοί κάτω απ' τα πόδια μας.

Άλλες φορές τυλιγμένοι στις κουβέρτες ανταλλάσσαμε ιστορίες θανάτων, επεισόδια που είχαμε ακούσει ή σκαρώναμε επιτόπου, περιστατικά τα οποία αφηγούμασταν σαν ξόρκια, για έναν εργάτη ο οποίος γλιστρώντας από τον τελευταίο όροφο μιας οικοδομής έσκασε πάνω σε στρώματα μονωτικού υλικού κι απρόσεκτος εξαιτίας της αναπάντεχης σωτηρίας έπεσε στον λάκκο του ασβέστη και κάηκε, για κάποιον ξένοιαστο στοχαστή που θαύμαζε την πτήση ενός αετού ώσπου μια χελώνα ξέφυγε από τα νύχια του πουλιού κι άνοιξε το κεφάλι του στα δύο, για μια πικρόχολη γεροντοκόρη που δάγκωσε τη γλώσσα της και πέθανε, για έναν επίδοξο χημικό που ζαλισμένος από ενθουσιασμό για τη νέα του ανακάλυψη ύψωσε αντί νερού ένα ισχυρό αντιδραστήριο και το ήπιε μέχρι τον πάτο, για μια ρομαντική κι ανέραστη λαίδη η οποία κατά τη διάρκεια του κυνηγιού ευχήθηκε ένα βέλος να τρυπήσει επιτέλους την καρδιά της κι η ευχή της πραγματοποιήθηκε, για έναν μασκαρά, ντυμένο γάτο, που τον σκότωσε η περιέργεια, ανέκδοτα για ανθρώπους

που έσβησαν άδοξα πριν καλά καλά προφτάσουν να πουν «Τετέλεσται».

Κι ενώ όλα τα προηγούμενα χρόνια διαβάσαμε τα προμηνύματα της άνοιξης ένα ένα, τη μυρωδιά των λεμονανθών, τα αραιά φτεροκοπήματα των πελαργών, τις παπαρούνες που έσκαγαν σαν αμυχές στα παρτέρια, μια μέρα πριν μπει καλά καλά ο Φλεβάρης ξημέρωσε ένας απριλιάτικος ήλιος και σε δυο ώρες έλιωσαν τα χιόνια, έλαμψαν τα καλώδια και τα λούκια, κυμάτισαν οι κουρτίνες απ' τα ανοιχτά παράθυρα σαν σημαίες, γυναίκες κι άντρες πρόβαλαν στους δρόμους διστακτικοί και σαστισμένοι, ώσπου ξανανιωμένοι από τις καυτές αχτίνες κι από τις νεραντζιές που άνθιζαν η μια μετά την άλλη με δροσερούς κρότους, ξέχασαν τις επιφυλάξεις τους και το 'ριξαν στα τρεχαλητά και στα γέλια με τέτοια απερισκεψία, οπότε δεν άργησαν να εκδηλωθούν τριβές και γκρίνιες, συχνά καβγάδες δυσεπίλυτοι κι ασυνεννοησία, αφού η παρατεταμένη απομόνωση είχε σαν συνέπεια να λησμονήσει ο ένας τη γλώσσα του άλλου και μόνο εμείς, μαθημένοι στους δρόμους, καταλαβαίναμε όλες τις γλώσσες κι όλες τις διαλέκτους και ενθουσιασμένοι από την αναπάντεχη ζέστη σπεύδαμε σε ρόλους διερμηνέα ή μεσολαβητή ανάμεσα σε Ευρωπαίους, Ασιάτες κι Αφρικανούς, ανάμεσα σε Ιταλούς, Ισπανούς, Νιγηριανούς, Κινέζους και Σύριους, σε καλοβαλμένους μεσήλικες κι ατίθασους έφηβους, ευπρεπείς κυρίες και κορίτσια του Λιμανιού, ανάμεσα σε καπεταναίους και εργάτες, τρυφηλούς εισοδηματίες και γεροδεμένους χειρώνακτες, γηγενείς κι εμιγκρέδες, ελπίζοντας να αβαντάρουμε την άνοιξη, να διασκεδάσουμε την ώρα μας, να παραμένουμε απασχολημένοι μακριά από τη μάντρα του αίματος.

# New Day

*Nikos Chryssos*

Translated from Greek by Irene Noel-Baker

After the ambulances and the Fire Brigade, the louts from the Department of Public Safety and the crooks from the Local Police, it was the turn of the water truck and municipal cleaners, who set about soaking and rubbing the ash, burnt fat and blood which had blended into a thick stain of mud on the floor of the old depot. Three rubbish trucks had parked themselves at the entrance to the enclosure and the drivers were smoking lethargically beside the cabins, while six men in orange uniforms were feeding the returning bins with cardboard boxes, faded tarpaulins, rags and wooden crates which in our opinion weren't in the least for chucking. Two others, dressed in green and armed with heavy wire brushes, scrubbed at the stain, bored already by the vanity of the attempt, since at heart they knew it needed time, a few rains and plenty of sun to rub out the traces left by our friend. All they succeeded in doing with their scrubbing was to revive the smell which had settled into the cement, an angry heavy stench that made our eyes water and obliged the cleaners every so often to stand and hurl out bitter gobs of spit. Meanwhile the water lorry sent intermittent jets of water in every direction spraying at the rusty sheet iron like a garden sprinkler and the few people in rags remaining in the abandoned caravans hid under their blankets, hoping for the jamboree to end before they were soaked to the bone. Before the cleaning operation was complete, thick snowflakes began to fall and by the evening the entire Port was covered in a layer of snow which reached to the sea and when the vehicles and men from the municipality had departed, the



homeless people poked out of their metal cabins looking for a warm corner to spend the winter and the depot was deserted for forty days, for as long as that unprecedented wave of cold lasted which paralysed a town used to gentle Mediterranean winters, mild north-easterlies, tentative mistrals and brief north winds.

All that time people limited their movements, so much so that crammed in the entrance of the old bourgeois apartment blocks of the A sector — the ‘old people’s caves’, as they were generally known — we rarely had to make way for a bold elderly person disdaining the cold either to enter or leave, and when they did they never shooed us away or looked at us oddly as they usually do. Small drops slid along the wires and just before they splashed onto the tarmac they froze, one beneath the other, forming long crystal ribbons which shone like jewels until a sudden gust of wind shattered them. Hundreds of such sharp protrusions hung over our heads and yet we mourned their every fall, inexplicably. The snow-covered town had lost its rhythm, and this intensified the sense of disorientation that suddenly came over us. The sounds were hushed as if our ears as well as our eyes had been painted white; only a susurrations to be heard in the mornings and a soft whistling sound, we might have been inside a giant deflating balloon. Even the cops, who wandered in twos around the streets, didn’t take any notice of us but shuffled their feet and screwed up their faces in the cold until they were totally unrecognisable as if we’d never met them before, as if they had never moved us on, threatened us, hunted us down, kept us incarcerated for all those hundreds of days in the same town. One morning we saw a policeman standing next to a frozen bundle on the bench at a bus stop, he examined the reclining figure for a moment and then with a face grey as ash he knelt and stretched out his right hand just far enough to close the man’s eyes.

‘Dozens of homeless people are dying of cold all over the country,’ a journalist’s column on the front page of an evening newspaper with the headline promising ‘a strengthening of the welfare state while also increasing consumption.’

‘Do you think the guy on the bench was dead?’ wondered Lucky, and then with complete confidence added to reassure us: ‘The cop covered him right up and he survived.’

That evening we agreed that on the whole it was a reassuring scene; the sky was too unbearably white for anyone to be left with their eyes open. It sounds absurd, but it was the closest to compassion we were able to get.

Twice a day we crossed the half-deserted roads and met at soup kitchens, which were much more regular due to the cold. The soup was frozen before it reached your lips with a thin stain of fat on its surface, but even so we were less hungry than usual.

‘We might as well have calories since we can’t have heat,’ someone said, but his words didn’t alleviate the mood.

Only two Pakistani boys, who didn’t yet know the language, smiled ingratiatingly, but they were barely smiles, rather a feeble attempt to unfreeze their jaws.

After the lunch or supper we tried to remember stories we had heard him tell, and attempted to clean up the exaggerations and idiocies that had crept in at the retelling by one person or another, as if we might make a collection, an anthology consisting solely of his own words in the right order. Often the stories changed theme or content, but in fact no one could be certain as to which of them had been told by Sebastian himself and which had been grafted with circumstances from our own life, we were so dazed by our loss that we had, more than ever, a need for pretty-sounding fairy

stories and revelatory myths, of narratives which would take us nearer to him or at least somewhere far away from the present which seemed intolerable. Whoever we met, they'd have heard a story and be eager to tell it to the others; this sudden disposition for solidarity brought alive the most lacklustre and feeble tales, so that in the end we parted satisfied. Whenever the four of us met — or the five of us a little later — we tried to identify each story by the moment and place we first heard it, but it was as difficult as deciding which was the true ending or the best beginning for each one. The stories changed dimension, began as miserly couplets and timid haikus, until they spilled out as lengthy narratives without end, clumsy epics, out-breaths that crystallised in the frozen air and stayed for a second suspended before being buried in the grey snow on the road.

Lucky recited one of Teo's anagrams, 'Small Mermaids Plunder Nine Solings' or 'A Good Seaworthy Sail Arrives Hoisted', another called to mind a sailor's yarn of Sebastian's, Marconi reminisced about Captain Taki the Columbian, and Teo insisted he had seen Rodriguo de Triana by the lighthouse, the pirate, the charlatan, the first European to set eyes on America (he swore he had met him — a cripple in rags looking out to sea through an eyeglass and chewing cheap tobacco) and then the voices grew louder, each insisting on their own version while listening out for the others; anyone watching would have been utterly confused, and yet holed up beneath a shelter, in the dark, we finally came together in harmony, and though our song flickered and trembled, if you listened carefully you couldn't help but understand its meaning.

The dirty water continued to flow down the drains and gutters and hearing the splashing late at night, deceived by the cold, we thought of ancient underground rivers rushing boisterously beneath our feet.

At other times wrapped in our blankets we exchanged stories of death, incidents we had heard about or made up on the spot, circumstances that we narrated as an exorcism, about a worker who had slipped on the top floor of a building and crashed onto layers of insulation material and then elated by his unexpected salvation fell into the lime pit and was burned, about a carefree dreamer admiring the flight of an eagle when a tortoise slipped from the bird's talons and cracked his head open in two, about a wizened old maid who swallowed her tongue and died, about an aspiring chemist who dizzy with excitement at a new invention raised a strong reactive solution to his lips instead of water and downed it to the dregs, about a romantic, lovelorn lady, who prayed throughout the hunt for an arrow to pierce her heart at last, and had her wish come true, and about a masquerader, dressed as a cat, whom curiosity killed, anecdotes about people who perished ingloriously before they could say 'It is finished.'

And whereas in previous years we read the signs of spring one at a time, the scent of lemon blossom, the flapping of storks' wings, poppies blooming like weals on the terraces, one day right at the beginning of February an April sun rose in the sky and two hours later the snow had melted, wires and drains gleamed, curtains billowed through the opened windows like ensigns, women and men came out onto the street, hesitant and dazed, until revived by the burning sun and the Seville orange trees bursting each in their turn with fresh buds they forgot to be cautious, and took to scampering about and laughing with such abandon, that it wasn't long before the friction and the complaints began, frequent petty quarrels and miscommunication, the result of an extended period of isolation which meant they had forgotten one another's language and only we, habituated to the streets,

understood all the languages and all the dialects and encouraged by the unexpected warmth we hastened to take on the role of interpreter or mediator between Europeans, Asians and Africans, between Italians, Spaniards, Nigerians, Chinese and Syrians, the wealthy middle-aged and the rebellious teenager, decent women and girls from the Port, skippers, pampered rentiers and stocky manual workers, between natives and expats, hoping that we would hasten the spring, while away our time, keep ourselves busy far away from the bloody depot.

# HUNGARY

**Réka Mán-Várhegyi**

**Mágneshegy**

*Magnetic Hill*

Budapest: Magvető Kiadó,  
2018.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Réka Mán-Várhegyi** (1979) spent her childhood in Târgu Mureș, Romania; she moved to Hungary after the fall of the communist regime in 1990. She has been a Hungarian citizen since 1992. Currently she lives in Budapest, Hungary. Though she studied Aesthetics and Sociology, and specialised in Ethnic and Minority Studies, she has been working as an editor at a children's book publisher for many years. Her first collection of short stories, *Unhappiness at the Aurora Housing Estate* (Boldogtalanság az Auróra-telepen, 2014) was hailed as a remarkably mature debut. Besides that collection, Mán-Várhegyi has written two children's books and a book for young adults as well as her new novel, *Magnetic Hill* (Mágneshegy, 2018). She is a recipient of the JAKkendő Literary Prize\* (2013), the Horváth Péter Literary Scholarship (2015)

and the Déry Tibor Literary Prize (2018). \*JAK is a Young Writers' Association, its mosaic-name is combined from the word 'nyakkendő' (tie-pin) in the name of the prize.

## SYNOPSIS

Réka Mán-Várhegyi's novel paints a vivid picture of the life of young academics in Hungary at the turn of the millennia. Enikő, a thirty-something feminist sociologist returns to Budapest from New York, brimming with research plans. Armed with state-of-the-art research methods and theories, she leaves her husband, an American performance artist, in order to write a 'real self-help book' entitled *The Misery of Hungarians*. Yet she finds herself struggling with writer's block. Tamás Bogdán, a star lecturer at the university,

a first-generation intellectual, is in a relationship with Enikő as well as with Réka, a student of them both. Réka, who is writing a novel, comes from a dystopian communist-style housing estate, a breeding-ground for neo-Nazi ideologies, which happens to be the subject of Bogdán's research. Magnetic Hill is much more than a campus novel: through the struggle of the main characters, we glimpse several layers of contemporary

Hungarian society, each with their particular milieu, history, prejudices and challenges, from leftist liberal intellectuals and aristocratic families to marginalised groups. This eminently readable, often hilariously funny novel touches upon a number of questions, ranging from female identity to the intellectual's responsibility in presentday Hungary. ¶



# Mágneshegy

*Réka Mán-Várhegyi*



Egy nő lép a pódiumra. Felismerem, az ebédszünetben ő állt előttem a mosdóban. Ámulva néztem a ruháit, mélybarna kordbársony zakóját, vakítóan kék nadrágját, ami bár farmer, mégis elegáns. Külföldi lehet, gondoltam. Amíg vára-koztunk, ő a szemöldökét szedte. Hasított bőr táskáját a hóna alá szorította, az egyik kezében zsebtükröt tartott, a más-ikban szemöldökcsipeszt. Arcával a kicsi ablakból beeső fénysávot kereste, és mivel a táska egyre lejjebb csúszott, a combjával a falhoz nyomva igyekezett megtartani a mélybe zuhanástól. Amikor befejezte a szemöldökszedést, figyelme-sen méregette az eredményt, aztán a haját vizsgálgatta. A zsebtükrőben találkozott a pillantásunk. Felém fordult, és meglepve láttam, hogy a szeme vörös, orrcimpái mentén a bőr sötétlilán repedezett, az arca leharcolt, legalábbis fáradt benyomást kelt.

Az egyetlen működő vécében már rég elhalt a csorgatás hangja, teljes csönd honolt, mintha az, aki korábban még minden jel szerint ott volt, időközben köddé vált volna. Az-tán ez a valaki hosszan szellentett. A vékony, bártortalan hang azt sugallta, hogy az illető minden erejével igyekszik visszafogni a szellentést, ám az éppen ezért lesz ilyen kíno-san hosszú. Mintha egy kiskutya sírna fel álmában.

– Nem bírom – mondta a zakós-farmeres nő. Átsiklott raj-tam a tekintete, amitől olyan érzés fogott el, mintha miat-



tam lenne felháborodva, mintha én lennék az, aki elfoglalja előle a vécét. A táskáját a fűtőtestre akasztotta, és engem finoman félretolva a mosdókagylókhoz sietett, majd, mintha meggondolta volna magát, visszatért, de csak a táskájáért. – Menj előre – mondta nekem, harmadszor is félretolt, majd az egyik mosdókagylóhoz lépett, és megeresztette a vizet.

A vécéből ezután evickélt ki a hölgy, aki szellentett. Nehézesen préselte ki magát a fülkéből, kezében a kosztümfelsőjével, táskájával, ballonkabátjával és az egyik drogériamárka zacskójával.

– A másik vécé nem jó? – kérdezte tőlem némi rosszallással. Természetesen azt hitte, hogy én vagyok az, aki nem bírja.

– Nem. Az rossz – válaszoltam. – Ki van rá írva.

A fülkében vettem észre, hogy a kezem remeg, mint ekkoriban mindig, ha feszült helyzetbe kerülök. Odakint zubogott a víz. A hangokból arra következtettem, hogy a fiatalabb nő az egész testét lecsutakolja. Lögybölt, fröcskölt, szétterítette magán a vizet, és nagy levegőket vett, mint aki épp elmerülni készül. Arra gondoltam, efféle profán bugyborékoló hangokat nem adhat ki olyasvalaki, akinek ilyen mélybarna zakója és azúrkék farmernadrágja van.

Az idősebb hölgy már eltűnt, mire előjöttem. Újdonsült ismerősöm ekkor emelte ki a fejét a csap alól. A kagyló tele habbal, a folyékony szappanos flakon felborulva. A kordbársony zakó a térdai között, a táska a földön. A farmeron vízfoltok.

– Megmostam a hajam – mondta. A jelek szerint hozzám intézte szavait, hiszen más nem volt a mosdóban. – Nem bírom, ha zsíros.

– Végül is meleg van – válaszoltam kis szünet után.

Rövid hajából kicsavargatta a vizet, és aztán úgy rázta meg a fejét, mint egy ázott kutya a bundáját. Az egész mosdót vízcseppek borították. Engem is. Őszintén elcsodálkoztam, hogy ezzel ő mit sem törődik.

Még beletúrt párszor a hajába, aztán egy papírtörülővel megtörölte az arcát, a mellkasát és a kezét, majd egy-egy újabb papírtörülőt dugott be mindkét hónalja alá.

– Kicsit izgulok – mondta, és ellépett a mosdókagylótól. – Tiéd a pálya.

És most ott áll a pulpituson. A haja már megszáradt, és az egész egy irányba áll, mintha fújná a szél.

– Előadásom témája nem magától értetődő – kezdi. – Ezért rendkívül fontosnak tartom, hogy az elején magát a téma-választást úgymond tisztázzam, és kicsit explikáljam, hogy miről is van itt szó.

Van valami ideges vibrálás benne, hangosan, keményen beszél, minden egyes szót úgy hajít a közönség sorai közé, mint egy vázát vagy hamutartót. Nem írta meg előre az előadását, legalábbis nem mondatról mondatra, a kezében jegyzetfüzetet tart, a későbbiekben ebben lapozgat előre-hátra, keres valamit. Mintha gondban lenne, láthatóan kihívást jelent számára annak mérlegelése, hogy az előadása vázlatából mit emeljen ki, mit említsen meg, és mit hagyjon ki teljesen. Mondataiban egyre szaporodnak a bombasztikus jelzők. Már vagy tíz perce beszél, amikor rájövök, hogy fogalmam sincs, miről.

A mellettem ülők összesúgnak, úgy sejtem, az előadást szidják. Utak és tévutak az antiszemitizmus-kutatások hazai gyakorlatában, áll a programfüzetben. A nő neve Börönd

Enikő. Adjunktus azon az egyetemen, ahol én is tanulok. Még nem hallottam róla.

– Ahogy azt többen is állítják, és ahogy azt ma már – szünet –, ugye, Bélától is meghallgathattuk, az antiszemitizmus ma Magyarországon nem szalonképes eszme, és még a hagyományosan – szünet – erre fogékony társadalmi rétegek sem érzik, hogy többé-kevésbé antiszemita nézeteiket ildomos lenne mások előtt hangoztatni. Nagyon sok helyen és nagyon gyakran olvashatjuk azt is – szünet –, tanulmányokban és újságokban egyaránt, hogy a társadalom jelentős részének immunrendszere be van oltva az antiszemitizmus ellen.

Mintha csak settenkedne a témája körül. Nem értem, hogy az idézett tanulmányok állításait alátámasztani vagy megcáfolni akarja, utóbbira csak abból következtetek, hogy dérrrel-dúrral szalad neki minden mondatának. Elhadar néhány szót, és mint aki kifulladt, szünetet tart. Majd újra nekilendül. Szabálytalan időközönként elmosolyodik. Az a típusú jelentőségteljes mosoly, amellyel azt jelzi, hogy a kérdést, amit éppen szőrméntén érintett, az állítást, amit kicsit pongyolán odakent, szükségtelen kifejtteni, hiszen a jelenlévők mind értik, tudják, hogy miről van szó, és hogy az éppen úgy van, és nem máshogy.

Az előadások többségére jellemző kimért tudományos stílust részben elhagyja, és élőbeszédszerű fordulatokkal tölti ki a réseket. Ez tetszik nekem, noha képtelen vagyok eldönteni, hogy szándékos vagy a hevenyészett felkészülés következménye.

– Idő hiányában mellőzném az említett könyv részletekbe menő ismertetését – szünet –, pedig ez egy rettenetesen fontos kérdés. Ilyen típusú antiszemitizmusra is rengeteg példa van – szünet –, százféle. Ezerféle.

Kifújja az orrát, a papír zsebkendőt a jegyzetfüzet lapjai közé gyűri.

A moderátor mondat közepén áll fel, karikás a szeme, mint akin most tört ki az egész napos fáradtság, arcán fájdalmas fintor, és az órájára mutatva közli, hogy mindjárt lejár az idő, sietni kell. Börönd Enikő megígéri, hogy ettől kezdve a lényegre koncentrálni, lendületesen lapoz, repül a papír zsebkendő, de kit érdekel, neki meg kell találnia azokat a bejegyzéseket, amiket feltétlenül bele kell szorítania a rendelkezésre álló másfél percre. Megrendítő véghajrába kezd.

Utána újra egy férfi beszél. Antropológiai módszerek a szociológiai kutatásban, olvasom a programfüzetben. Az előadó adjunktus a szociológia tanszéken. Vele sem találkoztam még soha. Ő ma az utolsó, talán ennek köszönhetően a közönség apátiáján rések keletkeznek. Megélnék mindazok, akik még itt vannak. A férfi középkorú, inge és nadrágja egyaránt drapp, a kettő összemosisodik, mintha kezeslábasban lenne. Megakad a szemem feltűnően csapott vállain, amelyek már-már függőlegesek. Kiráz a hideg, elönt az undor, de nyomban tisztázom magammal, hogy ezt csupán azért érzem, mert szegény néhai apám tornatanár volt, aki hittel és szenvedéllyel hirdette, hogy azok a testek, amelyeken látszik, hogy nem tartják őket kordában sportolással, megvetést érdemelnek. Valahányszor elhízott politikusokat, anorexiás filmsztárokat vagy trampli műsorvezetőket látott a tévében, mindig ugyanúgy kommentálta: ez is fel volt mentve tornából. A drapp előadóra is ezt mondaná, és vele együtt a társadalomtudományokról is meglenne a véleménye, ha azokat efféle amőbák képviselik. Pedig ez a férfi a görbe hátú egyetemi oktatókhoz képest mozgékony, sőt ruganyosnak tűnik, testtartását gyakran változtatja, lendületesen gesztikulál, igaz, csak a kézfejével, könyökét, felkarját, mint egy büszke szárnyas, öntudatosan a hóna alá

húzza tartja. Miközben a kvantitatív kutatási módszerek árnyoldalait tárgyalja, úgy mosolyog, mint a tanító bácsi, aki lassan és élvezettel adagolja az anyagi gyermek szüleinek, hogy szemük fénye becsapja őket, valójában egy átokfajzat, aki terrorizálja a nála kisebbeket, és még csak nem is olyan okos, mint képzelik. A közönség egy része kuncog, időnként páran felnevetnek. Végigmegyünk néhány közelmúltbeli kutatás részletein, amelyek többnyire néhány ezer válaszadót megkérdezve próbáltak következtetni a teljes lakosság ideológiai beállítódásaira, és előadónk meggyőző példákkal bizonyítja, hogy a kapott eredmények bizonytalan lábakon állnak. Szinte lehetetlen úgy összeállítani egy kérdőívet, úgy megfogalmazni a kérdéseinket, hogy ne ágyazzunk meg félreértéseknek. Az egyetlen járható út a terepmunka, természetesen nem abban az értelemben, ahogy azt a kulturális antropológia alapító atyái elgondolták, de hogy pontosan milyenben, arra már jelen előadásában nem tud kitérni, azonban a konferenciakiadványba igyekszik olyan szöveget küldeni, már ha nem lesz limitálva a terjedelem, ami ezzel a kérdéssel is foglalkozik.

– A maradék egy percben csupán felsorolásszerűen, további magyarázat nélkül ismertetem a kvalitatív kutatások, azon belül a terepmunka előnyeit, amiket megfontolásra ajánlok a nagymintás kutatásokhoz szokott kollégák számára is – mondja, ám ekkor a közönségből felpattan egy lány, majd még egy, majd még kettő, és elindulnak a pódium felé. Ha a teremben bárki megmozdul, kimegy, bejön, azt óvatos mozdulatokkal teszi, nehogy megzavarja az előadást. Ezek a lányok nem így mozognak. Hangosan kérnek elnézést azoktól, akiken keresztül átmásznak, köhintenek, majd úgy trappolnak előre, mintha a pódium üres lenne, és ők tartanák a következő előadást. Amikor kiérnek, ketten megállnak az előadó egyik oldalán, ketten a másik oldalán. A férfi egy

pillanatra abbahagyja a terepmunka előnyeinek felsorolását, de máris folytatja, igaz, a szavai közé mintha kérdőjelek furakodnának be. A négy lány laza kisterpeszben áll szemben a közönséggel. Mint négy vadnyugati pisztolyhős egy westernfilm főutcájáról. Senki sem kérdezi, mi célból teszik ezt, mintha valaminek még történnie kéne ahhoz, hogy ki lehessen jelenteni, ezek a lányok zavarják az előadást. Az egyikük hirtelen felkiált. Nem is kiáltás ez, inkább egy harcias visítás. Erre a lányok balról jobbra egymás után ledobják a pólójukat. A gondosan melltartóztott mellükre mintha feliratot pingáltak volna. Némán, mozdulatlanul állnak újra, mintha szeretnék megvárni, hogy a közönségben ülők a kicsit elmaszatolódott betűket kisilabizálják, ami a hátsó sorokból egyáltalán nem könnyű, de a sutyorgás hullámaiban ugyanolyan gyorsan jut el hozzánk az üzenet, mintha mi magunk olvasnánk. Az első lány mellkasán a „MI” felirat díszeleg, a másodikon „VAGYUNK”, a harmadikon „A”, a negyediken „TEREP”. Előadónk fejét oldalra billentve vár. Majd az egyik lányra néz, és azt kérdezi:

– Befejeztétek?

Ekkor a feliratozott lányok egyszerre felvisítanak, majd szökdelve elindulnak a pódium körül, előbb halkán, majd egyre hangosabban kántálnak valamit, alig hiszek a fülemnek, de valószínűleg tényleg azt ismételtetik, hogy unga-bunga.

– Mit akarnak ezek? – kérdezi mellettem valaki.

– Unga-bunga? – kérdezi egy másik. – Ez valami vicc?

– Nyugi – fordul hátra egy jól értesült harmadik. – Ez egy intervenció.

– Most már talán elég lesz – mondja a pódiumon az előadó.

Erre az első sorokban ülők felugranak, köztük a moderátor, aki erélyesen szólítja fel a lányokat a távozásra, valaki az egyikükre rádob egy abroszt, a lányok továbbra is szökdécselnek és kiabálnak, majd amikor úgy tűnik, hogy ennek már soha nem lesz vége, az egyikük ismét felvonyít, mire a lányok megállnak, elhallgatnak, majd libasorban kivonulnak. Aztán csönd, a pódiumon lehajtott fejjel álló előadó két ujjával az orrtövét szorítja, mintha lenne ott egy szelep, amit most be kell fognia, nehogy kimenjen belőle a levegő. Meg mernék rá esküdni, hogy amikor felemeli a fejét, az én szemembe néz.

# La montagne magnétique

*Réka Mán-Várhegy*

Extrait traduit du hongrois par Joëlle Dufeuilly

Une femme monte sur l'estrade. Je la reconnais, elle faisait la queue devant moi aux toilettes pendant la pause-déjeuner. Ses vêtements avaient attiré mon attention: blouson en velours côtelé marron foncé, pantalon d'un bleu éblouissant, un jean, certes, mais néanmoins élégant. Je m'étais dit qu'elle devait être étrangère. En attendant son tour, elle s'épilait les sourcils. Son sac en daim coincé sous l'aisselle, elle tenait d'une main un miroir de poche, de l'autre, la pince à épiler. Tandis que son regard cherchait à capter le rayon de lumière qui filtrait par la petite fenêtre, son sac, lui, ne cessait de glisser, si bien qu'elle avait dû plaquer sa cuisse contre le mur pour lui éviter la chute. Une fois l'épilation des sourcils terminée, elle avait observé avec attention le résultat, puis s'était concentrée sur ses cheveux. Nos regards s'étaient croisés dans le miroir. Elle s'était retournée vers moi, et j'avais alors découvert avec surprise qu'elle avait les yeux rouges, le nez zébré de marbrures violacées, les traits tirés, marqués par la fatigue.

Dans l'unique W.C. en service, le bruit de la chasse d'eau s'était évanoui depuis déjà un bon moment, le silence total régnait à l'intérieur, comme si la personne qui, selon toute vraisemblance, s'y trouvait précédemment, s'était évaporée. C'est alors que nous avons entendu un long pet. La faiblesse et la timidité du son laissaient supposer que son auteur avait tout fait pour réprimer ce pet, ce qui expliquait pourquoi il avait duré si douloureusement longtemps. On aurait dit le gémissement d'un chiot pendant son sommeil.



— C'est insupportable, a dit la femme en jean en me décochant un regard presque accusateur, comme si j'étais la coupable, comme si c'était moi qui occupais les toilettes. Elle a alors suspendu son sac au radiateur et, tout en me poussant d'un geste délicat, s'est dirigée vers les lavabos, puis, comme s'étant ravisée, a fait demi-tour, pour aller rechercher son sac.

— Passe devant moi, m'a-t-elle dit, après quoi, en me poussant pour la troisième fois, elle s'est précipitée vers le lavabo et a ouvert le robinet.

À ce moment-là, la péteuse a fini par lever le camp. Avec ses bras encombrés de son haut de tailleur, de son sac, de son imperméable et d'un sac publicitaire, s'extraire de la cabine n'a pas été chose facile.

— L'autre WC ne fonctionne pas? m'a-t-elle demandé avec une pointe d'animosité. Bien entendu, elle pensait que c'était moi qui trouvais cela insupportable.

— Non. Il est hors service. C'est écrit sur la porte.

Une fois dans la cabine, j'ai remarqué que mes mains tremblaient, comme chaque fois que je me retrouvais dans une situation tendue. J'entendais l'eau couler à l'extérieur. Je déduisais du bruit que la jeune femme s'aspergeait à grande eau. Elle s'arrosait, s'éclaboussait, s'aspergeait et prenait de profondes inspirations, comme si elle s'apprêtait à plonger la tête sous l'eau. J'avais du mal à concevoir qu'une personne portant un blouson en velours côtelé marron et un jean bleu azur puisse émettre ce genre de gazouillis incongrus.

Quand je suis sortie de la cabine, la femme plus âgée avait disparu. Ma nouvelle copine, elle, sortait la tête de sous le robinet. Le flacon de savon liquide était renversé, le lavabo rempli de mousse. La veste en velours était coincée entre les genoux de la fille, le sac par terre; son jean était trempé.

— Je me suis lavé la tête. Cette remarque m'était vraisemblablement adressée puisqu'il n'y avait personne d'autre.

— Je déteste avoir les cheveux gras.

— C'est vrai qu'il fait chaud, ai-je dit après un petit moment de silence.

Elle a lissé avec ses doigts ses cheveux courts puis s'est ébrouée comme un chien mouillé. En éclaboussant tout le lavabo, et moi-même par la même occasion. J'étais franchement choquée par sa désinvolture.

Elle a une nouvelle fois lissé ses cheveux, puis à l'aide d'une serviette en papier, elle s'est essuyé le visage, la poitrine et les mains, après quoi elle a pris une nouvelle serviette en papier avec laquelle elle a tamponné ses dessous de bras.

— Je suis un peu stressée, m'a-t-elle dit en s'éloignant du lavabo.

— Je te laisse la place.

Et la voilà maintenant sur l'estrade. Ses cheveux ont eu le temps de sécher, ils sont tous coiffés dans le même sens, comme s'il y avait du vent.

— Le sujet de ma conférence ne coule pas de source, dit-elle. C'est pourquoi il me semble très important d'apporter en préambule quelques éclaircissements sur le choix de cette thématique, et d'expliquer rapidement de quoi il s'agit.

On sent chez elle une pointe d'agacement, elle parle fort, sèchement, lance chaque mot à la figure des membres de l'assistance comme s'il s'agissait d'un vase ou d'un cendrier. Elle n'a pas rédigé sa conférence, du moins pas intégralement, elle tient à la main un carnet, qu'elle feuillette, en avant, en arrière, à la recherche de ses notes. Elle semble dans l'embarras, bien évaluer ce qu'elle doit mettre en avant, ce qu'elle

doit mentionner et ce qu'elle doit laisser de côté représente visiblement un véritable défi pour elle. Les épithètes, aussi ronflants que redondants, s'abattent en trombe dans ses phrases. Cela fait dix minutes qu'elle s'exprime et je m'aperçois que je ne sais pas de quoi elle parle.

Les gens assis autour de moi commencent à chuchoter, j'imagine qu'ils étrillent la conférencière. Pistes et fausses pistes dans les méthodes de recherches sur l'antisémitisme en Hongrie, voilà ce qui figure sur le programme. La femme s'appelle Enikő Börönd, elle est maître de conférence à l'université où j'étudie. Je n'avais jamais entendu parler d'elle.

— Comme de nombreuses personnes l'affirment, et cet après-midi encore, n'est-ce pas... (pause), nous l'avons entendu de la bouche de Béla, l'antisémitisme en Hongrie est considéré aujourd'hui comme politiquement incorrect, et même dans les couches de la société... (pause) traditionnellement réceptives à l'antisémitisme, les gens sentent qu'il n'est pas de bon ton d'exprimer en public leurs opinions. Nous pouvons également entendre, et lire, de plus en plus souvent... (pause), aussi bien dans la presse que dans nos travaux de recherche, qu'une partie importante de la société est immunisée contre l'antisémitisme.

Elle semble tourner autour du pot. Je n'arrive pas à comprendre si elle soutient ou réfute les affirmations qu'elle mentionne, la seule chose qui me fait pencher pour la deuxième option est la violence avec laquelle elle débite chacune de ses phrases. Elle prononce certains mots à toute vitesse, ce qui l'oblige à marquer des pauses, pour ne pas s'étouffer. Après quoi elle repart. À intervalles irréguliers, elle sourit. Le genre de sourire éloquent, qui indique qu'il est superflu d'explicitier la question évoquée à grands traits, tout comme l'affirmation lancée de façon quelque peu péremptoire, puisqu'il va de soi que tous les membres de l'assistance comprennent, savent de quoi il s'agit, et qu'il en est ainsi et pas autrement.

Elle délaisse ici et là le jargon scientifique, utilisé par la plupart des conférenciers, au profit de formules empruntées à la langue parlée. Je trouve cela plutôt bien, même si je suis incapable de déterminer si c'est volontaire de sa part ou la conséquence de son manque de préparation.

— Par manque de temps, je ne m'attarderai pas sur la présentation détaillée du livre évoqué. C'est pourtant une question fondamentale. Il existe de nombreux exemples qui illustrent cette forme d'antisémitisme... (pause), des centaines. Des milliers.

Elle se mouche, puis fourre son mouchoir en papier entre les pages de son carnet de notes.

Le modérateur se lève au beau milieu d'une phrase en écarquillant les yeux, comme s'il venait de sortir d'un état de torpeur consécutif à une dure journée de travail. Un rictus de douleur apparaît sur son visage, il signale, en montrant sa montre, qu'il est temps de conclure. Enikő Börönd promet de se concentrer sur l'essentiel, elle feuillette fébrilement son carnet, le mouchoir en papier s'envole, qu'importe, il lui faut absolument trouver ses notes, et les synthétiser afin de les caser dans la minute et demie qui lui reste. Un poignant sprint final commence.

Un homme lui succède sur l'estrade. Je consulte le programme: Méthodes anthropologiques appliquées aux recherches sociologiques. Il est maître de conférence au département de sociologie. Je ne l'avais pas encore rencontré. C'est le dernier intervenant de la journée, ce qui explique sans doute pourquoi quelques fissures viennent ébrécher l'apathie générale du public. Les personnes encore présentes reprennent des couleurs. L'homme, d'âge moyen, est vêtu d'une chemise et d'un pantalon du même beige, les deux vêtements se confondent tellement qu'on croirait qu'il porte une grenouillère. Mon re-

gard se pose sur ses épaules tombantes. Un frisson de dégoût me parcourt, mais je me reprends immédiatement: si je ressens cela, c'est parce que mon pauvre défunt père était professeur de gymnastique et clamait haut et fort que les corps trahissant une absence de pratique sportive ne méritaient que le plus grand des mépris. Chaque fois qu'il apercevait à la télévision des politiciens bedonnants, des stars de cinéma anorexiques ou des présentateurs avachis, il faisait le même commentaire: encore un qui était dispensé de gymnastique. Il n'aurait sans doute pas épargné le conférencier en beige, pas plus que les sciences sociales, dès lors qu'elles étaient incarnées par ce genre d'ectoplasme. Comparé aux autres enseignants universitaires aux dos voûtés, l'homme semble cependant relativement agile, voire souple, il change souvent de position, gesticule avec aisance, mais uniquement avec ses mains, car, tel un fier échassier, il tient ses coudes et ses bras plaqués contre son corps. Tout en devisant sur les écueils des techniques de recherches quantitatives, il sourit, comme un maître d'école qui, lentement, avec une certaine délectation, distille dans la tête des parents d'un charmant bambin que la prunelle de leurs yeux les a bien grugés, car en réalité c'est un affreux garnement qui terrorise les petits et n'est pas aussi intelligent qu'ils se l'imaginent. Une partie de l'auditoire rit sous cape, quelques-uns rient franchement. Il passe en revue quelques travaux de recherches récents, qui tentent, sur la base de plusieurs milliers de personnes interrogées, de déterminer les positions idéologiques de toute la population, et notre conférencier de démontrer à renfort d'exemples convaincants que les résultats obtenus ne sont pas fiables. Il est quasiment impossible d'établir un questionnaire, de formuler des questions qui ne conduisent pas à des malentendus. La seule voie possible est le travail de terrain, pas dans le sens donné par les pères fondateurs de l'anthropologie culturelle, dans quel sens au juste, il ne pourra pas le développer dans le cadre de la conférence d'aujourd'hui, en revanche, il

essaiera d'envoyer un texte pour la publication des actes du colloque, dans lequel, si l'espace n'est pas limité, il évoquera ce sujet.

— Dans la minute qui me reste, je me contenterai d'énumérer, sans autre explication, les avantages des recherches qualitatives, et du travail de terrain, que je recommande vivement, même aux collègues habitués aux enquêtes réalisées à grande échelle... c'est alors qu'une fille se lève brusquement, suivie d'une autre, puis de deux autres. Toutes les quatre se dirigent vers l'estrade. En temps normal, lorsque quelqu'un se déplace dans la salle, entre ou sort, il le fait avec discrétion pour ne pas perturber la conférence. Elles, elles font tout le contraire, elles toussent, s'excusent en hurlant auprès des gens qu'elles enjambent, puis cheminent en direction de l'estrade comme si celle-ci était vide, et qu'elles s'apprêtaient à tenir la conférence suivante. Une fois arrivées, deux d'entre elles se placent à droite du conférencier, les deux autres à sa gauche. L'homme interrompt un instant son inventaire des bienfaits du travail de terrain, puis reprend, même si quelques points d'interrogation semblent s'être glissés dans ses phrases. Elles se tiennent jambes légèrement écartées, genoux fléchis, face au public. Comme des justiciers prêts à dégainer dans un western américain. Personne ne leur demande d'explication, c'est comme si tous attendaient qu'il se passe quelque chose pour intervenir et dire à ces filles qu'elles perturbent la conférence. L'une d'elle se met brusquement à pousser un cri. Un véritable cri de guerre. Puis, l'une après l'autre, en partant de la gauche, elles retirent et jettent par terre leur tee-shirt. Sur leurs poitrines, soigneusement cloisonnées dans des balconnets, on distingue des inscriptions. Elles se tiennent sans parler, sans bouger, comme pour laisser aux gens assis le temps de déchiffrer les lettres quelque peu estompées, ce qui pour ceux qui occupent les derniers rangs n'est pas

chose facile, mais grâce à la vague de murmures qui parcourt la salle, le message nous parvient assez vite. Sur la poitrine d'une des filles est inscrit: NOUS, sur la deuxième: SOMMES, sur la troisième: LE, et enfin: TERRAIN. Notre conférencier penche la tête sur le côté et attend. Ensuite il s'adresse à l'une d'elles.

— Vous avez terminé?

Les filles aux seins gribouillés se mettent soudain à pousser des cris et à sautiller autour de l'estrade, après quoi elles scandent, au début à voix basse, puis de plus en plus fort, un slogan, je n'en crois pas mes oreilles, elles répètent: «Unga-bunga».

— Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent? demande quelqu'un près de moi.

— Unga-bunga? intervient quelqu'un d'autre, c'est une blague ou quoi?

— Du calme, réagit une troisième personne bien informée. C'est une action.

— Bon, maintenant, ça a peut-être assez duré, remarque le conférencier depuis son estrade.

Les personnes occupant le premier rang se lèvent, le modérateur leur ordonne de partir, quelqu'un jette une couverture sur l'une des filles, elles continuent de crier et de sautiller, et juste au moment où tout le monde croit que cela ne cessera jamais, l'une des filles pousse un cri, toutes s'immobilisent, se taisent, puis se dirigent en file indienne vers la sortie. Le silence s'abat dans la salle, le conférencier, qui se tient tête baissée sur l'estrade, se pince le nez avec deux doigts, comme s'il s'agissait d'une soupape qu'il fallait boucher pour empêcher l'air de s'échapper. Je suis prête à parier que lorsqu'il relèvera la tête, il me regardera dans les yeux.

# IRELAND

**Jan Carson**

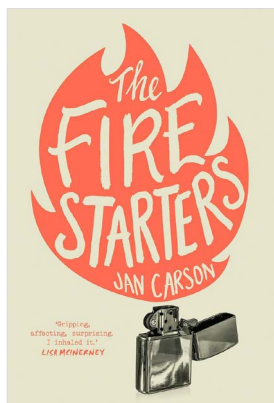
## **The fire starters**

Dublin: Transworld Ireland,  
2019.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

**J**an Carson is a writer and community arts facilitator based in Belfast. Her first novel, *Malcolm Orange Disappears* was published by Liberties Press in 2014 to critical acclaim, followed by a short story collection, *Children's Children* in 2016, and a flash fiction anthology, *Postcard Stories* (2017): every day in 2015 Jan Carson wrote a short story on the back of a postcard and mailed it to a friend. Each of these tiny stories was inspired by an event, an overheard conversation, a piece of art or just a fleeting glance of something worth thinking about further. The success of this collection lead to Jan Carson becoming the Irish Writers Centre's first Roaming Writer-In-Residence, 2018, working with aspirant authors who also created 'postcard stories'.

Published in journals such as *Storm Cellar*, *Banshee*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *The Honest Ulsterman*, Jan Carson received an Arts Council NI Artist's Career Enhancement



Bursary in 2014. She was longlisted for the Sean O'Faolain short story prize in 2015 and won the *Harper's Bazaar* short story competition in 2016. In 2014/15, she collaborated with local songwriter Hannah McPhillimy to produce an EP of songs based on her first novel. Hannah and Jan performed this material at music and literary festivals throughout Europe.

### **SYNOPSIS**

The core story of this novel is that of two fathers living in Belfast during a summer of deep discontent and social unrest. Against a background of riots and arson, not to mention the huge bonfires of the Orange marches around the Twelfth of July commemorations, Jonathan and Sammy face a crisis. For Jonathan, the moment has come which could transform his life from one of



melancholic withdrawal from society to one which embraces opportunities to connect with the people around him. Jonathan is the sole parent of a newborn baby and the question he has to struggle with is whether to permit the love and pleasure he experiences with the child to obstruct the fact that his daughter has attributes inherited from her mother, a Siren. For Sammy, the crisis concerns his full-grown son, who has all the characteristics of the murderous qualities Sammy himself

exhibited in his own youth, with none of the redeeming traits that have led Sammy to search for a way to contain his own violent impulses. Sammy is convinced that his son is the ringleader behind the arson campaign. Should he act on this? Report his own son to the police? Their paths crossing in a doctor's surgery, Sammy and Jonathan take something from their encounters to move each towards a decisive resolution. ¶



# The fire starters

*Jan Carson*



## 1

### *This Is Belfast*

This is Belfast. This is not Belfast.

Better to avoid calling anything a spade in this city. Better to avoid names and places, dates and second names. In this city names are like points on a map or words worked in ink. They are trying too hard to pass for truth. In this city truth is a circle from one side and a square from the other. It is possible to go blind staring at the shape of it. Even now, sixteen years after the Troubles, it is much safer to stand back and say with conviction, 'It all looks the same to me.'

The Troubles are over now. They told us so in the newspapers and on the television. Here, we're very great with religion. We need to believe everything for ourselves. (We're all about sticking the finger in and having a good hoke around.) We did not believe it in the newspapers or on the television. We did not believe it in our bones. After so many years of sitting one way, our spines had set. We will take centuries to unfold.

The Troubles have only just begun. This is hardly true either. It depends upon who you're talking to, how they're

standing, and which particular day you've chosen for the chat. Those who are ignorant of our situation can look it up on Wikipedia and find there a three-thousand-word overview. Further articles can be read online and in academic journals. Alternatively, a kind of history may be acquired from talking to the locals. Piecing this together will be a painstaking process, similar to forging one jigsaw puzzle from two, or perhaps twenty.

The Troubles is too less a word for all of this. It is a word for minor inconveniences, such as overdrawn bank accounts, slow punctures, a woman's time of the month. It is not a violent word. Surely we have earned ourselves a violent word, something as blunt and brutal as 'apartheid'. Instead, we have a word like 'scissors', which can only be said in the plural. The Troubles is/ was one monster thing. The Troubles is/are many individual evils caught up together. (Other similar words include 'trousers' and 'pliers'.) The Troubles is always written with a capital T as if it were an event, as the Battle of Hastings is an event with a fixed beginning and end, a point on the calendar year. History will no doubt prove it is actually a verb; an action that can be done to people over and over again, like stealing.

And so we draw no lines. We say this is not Belfast but rather a city similar to Belfast, with two sides and a muck-brown river soldering one to the other. Roads, other roads, train tracks, chimneys. All those things common to a functional city are present here in limited measure. Shopping centres. Schools. Parks, and the unspoken possibility of green acres glooming in the spring. Three hospitals. A zoo, from which animals occasionally escape. To the east of the city, a pair of yellow cranes stride across the horizon, like bow-legged gentlemen. To the west, a hill, hardly a mountain by Alpine standards, trips over itself as it tumbles into the bay.

Strung along the coastline there are very many buildings. They are perched like coy bathers, dipping their toes in the greeny sea. There are boats: big boats, smaller boats and that sunken boat, which holds the whole city captive from the ocean floor. There are no future boats.

Instead, there are glass and gunmetal structures stapled across the skyline. These are like stairs ascending towards the tooth-white heights once occupied by God. These are office blocks and hotels for visiting strangers: Americans mostly, and people from other earnest places. We have scant respect for these people and the photographs they will take. They believe themselves brave for coming to this city or, at the very least, open-minded. We wish to say to them, 'Are you mad? Why have you come here? Don't you know there are other proper cities just one hour away by budget airline? There is even Dublin.' We are not supposed to say this. We have already begun to lean on their money. We put the visitors in black beetle taxis and drive them round and round the ring road, up the tiny streets and down, until they, too, are dizzy, seeing this city from so many angles. We feed them fried eggs and bacon on almost-white plates and say, 'There you go, a taste of local cuisine. That'll set you up for the day.' We dance for them and their foreign money. We are also prepared to cry if this is expected. We wonder what our grandparents would say to all this clamour, all this proving talk.

In this city we have a great love of the talking. The talking can be practised on buses and park benches, from pulpits and other high places. It is occasionally expressed in poems, more frequently on gable walls. It swells in the presence of an audience, though a second party is not strictly required. There is never enough silence to contain all our talking.

We have talked ourselves sideways on subjects such as politics and religion, history, rain and the godless way these elements are bound together, like some bastard version of the water cycle. We continue to believe that across the sea, Europe (and also the world) is holding its breath for the next chapter in our sad story. The world is not waiting for us. There are louder voices around the table now. African. Russian. Refugee. They say terrible things in words that require translation. We are wet paper in comparison.

This city continues to talk. It tells anyone inclined to listen that it is a European city, twinned with other European cities. Who is this city kidding? It has no piazza, no marble fountains, no art to speak of. It crouches on the edge of the Continent, like a car park for mainland Europe. The people, when they speak, have a homely sound off them, like boiled potatoes dripping butter. There is no sun to speak of and no one sits outside at café tables. Even when there is a sun it is only a kind of cloud for the rain to hide behind. This is not a city as Barcelona is a city, or Paris, or even Amsterdam. This is a city like a word that was once bad and needs redeeming, 'queer' being the first that comes to mind.

Which is not to say this place is without charm. Despite its best attempts to disappoint, people do not leave and those who do keep coming back. They say, 'It's the people,' and 'You'd go a long way before you found a better breed of person.' They say, 'It's certainly not the weather we came for.' There is truth in every version of this.

Sammy Agnew has known this city his entire life. The map of its little streets and rivers is stamped into him, like a second set of fingerprints. When he opens his mouth, it is this city's sharp and stringy words that come nosing out.

He cannot bear the sound of his own voice played back. Sammy can't stand this place, can't quite curse it either. He'd give anything to scrape himself clean of it. To flit and start again, some place warmer like Florida or Benidorm. Some place less like a goldfish bowl. He has tried. God only knows how hard he's tried. But this place is like a magnet: coaxing, dragging, reeling him back in. No matter how far he goes, by plane or boat, or in his everyday thinking – which is the hardest place to achieve distance – he'll still be a son of this city; a disloyal son but, none the less, linked. Sammy keeps himself to the edge of things now, toeing the line where the nicer neighbourhoods fold into the not so nice. He knows he isn't above any of it. The stink of a back-street beginning cannot be washed off with soap or careful distance.

He is this place, as his children are this place. This is not necessarily a good thing to carry, though, these days, there's a sort of mumbling hope rising off the city, swelling mostly in the young. There are even individuals proud to raise their heads and say, 'I'm from here and I will not apologize for it.' Sammy thinks these folks are fools. He fears for his children, his son in particular. There's a hardness in the boy, peculiar to this place. Hardness is not the worst way to hold yourself in a city so marked by disappointment. Yet Sammy knows that hardness left to simmer breeds rage, and rage is next to cruelty, and this is what he sees every time he looks at Mark: this city, fouling his boy up, just like it once ruined him.

Jonathan Murray was born here, too, just five minutes up the road from Sammy, though the distance between them is continental. It isn't just money that keeps one man from mixing with the other. It's education and reputation, and

something harder to pin down; a whole different way of carrying yourself through life. Jonathan couldn't say he knows this city like Sammy knows it, for knowing implies familiarity and he's been holding himself at a distance for as long as he can remember. It isn't home to him. It doesn't even feel close. He drives its pressing streets daily and doesn't take time to look. He couldn't say with any confidence that this is not the place it was ten years ago, or point to any marked difference from the shooting days of the seventies and eighties. It could be any such city to him: mid-sized, industrial, sea-skimmed. Cardiff. Liverpool. Glasgow. Hull. One damp metropolis looks much the same as the next. Jonathan has no real sense of where he is or where he belongs; what it means to have a home.

This is Belfast. This is not Belfast. This is the city that won't let either man go.



It is summer in the city now. Not yet high summer, but hot enough to leave the local lads bare-chested, their backs, bellies and shoulders already pinkening to the colour of cooked-ham slices. It is a World Cup summer. The people here are particularly fond of football because it is a game of two sides and involves kicking. The sound of televised crowds can be heard grumbling through the open windows of every other house in the East. Drink has been taken. More drink will be taken. In the morning the smell of it will be like a damp cloth in a closed room. Overhead a helicopter hovers. It is a sort of insect, humming. Its blades turn the hot air this way and that. It is barely moving.

The women, who are mostly indifferent to sport, have dragged dining-room chairs into the street. They sit in front

of their houses, like fat Buddhas, watching the traffic idle. Sometimes they call to each other across the road. 'Good to see the weather back,' or 'I hear it's to turn at the weekend.' Sometimes they duck into their little kitchens, returning with fizzy drinks in glasses and tins. Before drinking they press the coldness against their foreheads for a minute and sigh. Afterwards the flesh is pink, as if it has been burnt. The deep V of their breasts is also pink and turning red. By ten o'clock it will smart like nettle stings but they do not, for a minute, consider sun cream. Sun cream is only for holidays abroad. The local sun is weaker. It is less inclined to provoke cancer than the continental sun. Every woman on the street is determined to be brown by September. They wear their skirts hoicked up above the knee, revealing splayed thighs and varicose veins, winter fur and occasionally the fine-laced ghost of a petticoat hem. They are their mothers and their grandmothers before them. They have been guarding these streets in similar fashion since the shipyards demanded houses, a hundred terraced streets rose in response, and this became known as the glorious East.

The children who belong to these women are watching the football or kicking their own footballs between cars. They are wavering up and down the street on hand-me-down bikes, their arms raised high above the handlebars, as if caught in the act of charismatic worship. It is two full months till school. All of July. All of August. When they think about the end of the holidays it is like thinking about the distance between solar systems. This is eternity, and the children are giddy on the wideness of it.



# L'allume-feu

*Jan Carson*

Traduit de l'anglais par Dominique Le Meur

## 1

*C'est ça, Belfast.*

C'est ça, Belfast. Ce n'est pas ça, Belfast.

Mieux vaut ne rien appeler un chat un chat dans cette ville. Mieux vaut éviter de mentionner des noms, des lieux, des dates, des noms de familles. Là-bas, les noms sont comme des repères sur une carte, des mots gravés à l'encre. Ils en font des tonnes pour nous faire croire qu'ils expriment une vérité. Dans cette ville, la vérité est circulaire d'un côté et carrée de l'autre. Il est même possible d'être aveuglé rien qu'en regardant la forme qu'elle prend. Même maintenant, seize ans après les Troubles, il est bien plus prudent de rester en retrait et de déclarer avec conviction: «Je ne vois pas de différence.»

Aujourd'hui, les Troubles sont finis. C'est ce qu'on nous a dit dans les journaux et à la télé. Ici, on est super forts en religion. À nous de nous fabriquer nos propres croyances. (Nous, on plonge notre doigt dedans et on touille bien tout ça). On n'avait pas vraiment foi dans la presse ou la télé. On ne faisait pas confiance à nos os. Tant d'années à rester assis de la même façon, notre colonne vertébrale ne bougeait plus. Ça prendrait des siècles avant de changer.

Les Troubles viennent tout juste de commencer. Pas tout à fait vrai non plus. Ça dépend à qui on parle, de la posture que les gens adoptent, et de quel jour en particulier on a choisi pour causer. Ceux qui ignorent tout de notre situation peuvent consulter Wikipedia et lire un aperçu de trois mille mots. D'autres articles sont disponibles en ligne dans des revues académiques. Ou alors, on peut se bricoler un semblant d'Histoire en parlant aux gens du coin. Rassembler l'ensemble est un processus long et fastidieux, comme former une pièce de puzzle à partir de deux ou peut-être vingt morceaux.

L'expression «les Troubles» est bien trop faible pour englober tout ça. C'est un mot pour décrire de petits tracasseries, comme un compte bancaire à découvert, une crevaaison lente, le cycle d'une femme en fin de mois. Ce mot n'a rien de violent. On aurait pourtant bien mérité d'avoir notre mot violent, quelque chose d'aussi direct et brutal que le mot «apartheid». Au lieu de ça, on a un mot genre «ci-seaux», qui ne peut être utilisé qu'au pluriel. Les troubles, c'est/c'était un truc monstre. Les troubles, c'est/ce sont quantité de malheurs individuels...

Le terme «les Troubles» est toujours écrit avec une majuscule, à croire que c'était un événement comme par exemple la bataille d'Hastings avec un début et une fin, un point précis dans le calendrier. L'Histoire confirmera un jour qu'en réalité, ce mot est un verbe; une action humiliante qu'on peut faire subir aux gens encore et encore. Comme les voler par exemple.

Donc il n'y a aucune ligne de tracée. On dit, ça, ce n'est pas Belfast. Plutôt une ville qui ressemble à Belfast, avec deux côtés soudés par une rivière boueuse. Des routes,

encore des routes, des rails de chemins de fer, des cheminées. Tout ce qui est commun au bon fonctionnement d'une ville existe bel et bien ici aussi; mais avec des limites. Des centres d'achat. Des écoles. Des parcs et l'espoir secret d'avoir quelques hectares d'espaces verts qui resplendiront au printemps. Trois hôpitaux. Un zoo d'où s'échappent parfois les animaux. À l'est de la ville, deux grues de couleur jaune barrent l'horizon telles les jambes arquées de deux gentlemen. À l'ouest, une colline — impossible d'appeler ça une montagne si on compare au massif alpin — dévale ses courbes par paliers irréguliers avant d'atteindre la baie. Tout au long de la côte, il y a des tas de bâtiments, perchés comme des baigneurs timides hésitant à tremper la pointe des pieds dans l'eau verdâtre de la mer. Il y a aussi des bateaux: des gros, des plus petits et cette épave qui ancre la ville au fond de l'océan. Plus d'autres constructions de prévues.

Au lieu de cela, des structures en verre et métal agrafées à l'horizon. On dirait des escaliers menant vers les hauteurs à la blancheur pure autrefois territoire des Dieux. Des bureaux et des hôtels pour visiteurs étrangers: des Américains principalement, et d'autres en provenance d'endroits très honorables.

On ne montre pas assez de respect pour ces gens et les photos qu'ils prennent. Ces gens se croient courageux de venir dans cette ville. Ou pour le moins ouverts d'esprit. On voudrait leur dire: «Vous êtes malades! Pourquoi êtes-vous venus ici? Vous savez qu'il y a d'autres villes à moins d'une heure d'ici, accessibles avec des compagnies à bas prix? Pourquoi pas Dublin, tiens?» On n'est pas censés dire ça. On s'est déjà habitués à profiter de leur argent. On promène les touristes dans des black cabs, on fait des

tours sur la rocade, on monte et on descend les petites rues étroites jusqu'à ce que, à eux aussi, la tête leur tourne de voir la ville sous toutes les coutures. On leur prépare des œufs au plat et du bacon servis dans des assiettes presque propres. «Et voilà, un échantillon de la cuisine de chez nous. Ça vous tiendra la journée.» On danse pour eux et leur argent étranger. On va même jusqu'à pleurer s'il le faut. Quand même, qu'auraient dit nos grands-parents devant tout ce cirque, tous ces bavardages pour qu'on existe?

Ici, on adore parler. Que ce soit dans les bus, sur les bancs d'un parc, du haut d'un pupitre ou autres estrades. Parfois, on s'exprime à travers des poèmes, plus souvent sur des murs. La présence d'un public nous enivre bien qu'on puisse aussi faire sans. Le silence lui-même n'est pas assez grand pour contenir tous nos mots. On s'est écharpés sur des sujets tels que la politique et la religion, l'histoire, la pluie et la manière profane de relier tous ces éléments ensemble. Une sorte de version bâtarde du cycle de l'eau. On continue de penser que, de l'autre côté de la mer, l'Europe (et aussi le monde) attend avec impatience le prochain chapitre de notre pauvre histoire. Le monde n'attend pas après nous. D'autre voix plus puissantes ont pris place autour de la table maintenant. Des Africains, des Russes, des réfugiés. Ils prononcent des mots terribles qu'il faut traduire. Nous, on a l'air ridicules à côté.

Et la ville continue de parler. À ceux qui souhaitent écouter, on dit que c'est une ville européenne, jumelée avec d'autres villes. Cette ville se moque de qui, au juste? Il n'y a pas de piazza, pas de fontaine de marbre, aucune vie artistique digne de ce nom. Avachie en bordure du continent. Un parking d'où on part pour le reste de l'Europe.

Quand ils parlent, les gens transpirent leur origine. On dirait des patates bouillies dégoulinantes de beurre. On ne peut jamais parler du soleil, personne n'est assis dehors à une table de café. Même quand le soleil se montre, ça ressemble à une sorte de nuage derrière lequel la pluie est en embuscade. Ce n'est pas une ville comme on s' imagine Barcelone, ou Paris, ou même Amsterdam. C'est une ville comme un mot jadis indécent et qu'il faut réhabiliter. «Anormal» étant le premier mot qui vient à l'esprit.

Ce qui ne veut pas dire que cet endroit est dépourvu de charme. Malgré tant d'efforts déployés pour les décevoir, les gens ne s'en vont pas et ceux qui finissent par revenir disent: «C'est les gens» et «Faudra vous lever de bonne heure pour trouver des gens de leur trempe.» Ils ajoutent: «En tout cas, on n'est pas revenus pour le beau temps.» Ces déclarations ont toutes leur part de vérité.

Sammy Agnew n'a connu que cette ville depuis qu'il est né. La géographie des petites rues et des rivières est imprimée en lui comme un second ensemble d'empreintes digitales. Quand il parle, ce sont des mots tranchants qui sortent en boucle de sa bouche. Il ne supporte pas d'entendre le son de sa propre voix. Sammy ne supporte pas cet endroit. Bon, il ne le maudit pas non plus. Il donnerait cher pour se laver de tous les miasmes que cette ville a laissés sur sa peau. Pour partir et tout recommencer, dans un endroit plus chaud comme la Floride ou Benidorm. Un endroit qui ressemblerait moins à un aquarium pour poissons rouges. Il a déjà essayé. Ça oui, Dieu sait qu'il a tout essayé. Mais cette ville agit comme un aimant. Réussissant à l'amadouer, à l'attirer pour mieux le ramener

vers elle. Il peut aller aussi loin qu'il le veut, en avion, en bateau ou dans ses pensées quotidiennes — où c'est le plus difficile de mettre de la distance —, il reste un fils de la ville, un fils indigne certes, mais gardant toujours une attache.

Désormais, Sammy reste sur le bord des choses, sur le fil entre quartiers paisibles et quartiers plus sensibles. Ni le savon ni même un éloignement raisonnable ne saurait vous débarrasser de la fétide odeur d'une sombre ruelle.

Ce lieu, c'est lui-même. Ses enfants aussi sont ce lieu. Pas forcément très bon de traîner ça avec soi. Pourtant, des balbutiements d'espoir montent de la ville, surtout parmi les jeunes. «Je suis d'ici et je ne vais sûrement pas m'en excuser.» Sammy pense que ces types sont des idiots. Il a peur pour ses enfants, son fils en particulier. Il y a une forme de dureté dans ce garçon, un truc spécifique à ce coin. La dureté n'est pas la pire des choses dans une ville aussi marquée par la désillusion. Pourtant, Sammy sait que la rage que l'on laisse mijoter conduira au final à une rage encore plus grande. Qui conduira ensuite tout droit vers la cruauté. C'est ce qu'il voit tous les jours sur le visage de Mark. Cette ville qui pourrait son fils. Comme elle a jadis ruiné sa vie.

Jonathan Murray est né ici, lui aussi. À cinq minutes de la rue où vivait Sammy. Encore que la distance entre eux était abyssale. Ça n'est pas seulement l'argent qui empêche les gens de se mêler les uns aux autres. C'est l'éducation, la réputation, et une autre chose plus difficile à cerner: une façon de se comporter tout au long de la vie. Jonathan ne pouvait pas prétendre connaître la ville aussi bien que Sammy qui lui connaissait bien les marques de familiarité implicites. De plus il a toujours gardé une certaine dis-

tance. Il ne voit pas Belfast comme sa ville. Il n'a même pas de liens étroits avec elle. Il circule tous les jours à travers le tumulte des rues sans prendre le temps de regarder. Il serait bien incapable d'affirmer avec certitude que la ville n'est plus la même qu'il y a dix ans, voire incapable de pointer les différences entre aujourd'hui et les heures sombres des années 70 et 80 qui avaient pour toile de fond des tirs d'armes automatiques. Pour lui, ça pourrait être n'importe quelle ville: ville moyenne, industrielle, au bord de l'océan. Cardiff. Liverpool. Glasgow. Hull. Ces métropoles toujours sous la pluie se ressemblent toutes. Jonathan ne sait pas vraiment d'où il vient, où est sa place. Ce que veut dire l'expression «être de quelque part».

C'est ça, Belfast. Ce n'est pas ça, Belfast. C'est la cité qui ne laisse partir ni les uns ni les autres.



L'été s'est maintenant installé dans la ville. Pas encore la pleine saison, mais il fait suffisamment chaud pour que les gars du coin se baladent torsés nus. Déjà, leur dos, leur poitrine et leurs épaules prennent la couleur rosée des tranches de jambons cuits. C'est un été de coupe du monde. Les gens d'ici adorent le foot. Ben oui, c'est un jeu avec deux côtés où on donne des coups de pieds. Un peu partout dans les quartiers est, la télé répand la clameur des foules de fans par les fenêtres ouvertes. On boit. On boit encore. Demain matin, l'odeur d'alcool rappellera celle d'un chiffon humide oublié dans un espace clos. Dans le ciel tourne un hélico. Sorte d'insecte vrombissant. Ses pales brassent l'air chaud tout autour. Il bouge à peine.

Les femmes, qui pour la plupart ne s'intéressent pas au sport, ont tiré des chaises sur les trottoirs. Assises devant leur maison, elles ont tout l'air de Bouddhas ventrus regardant passer les rares véhicules. Parfois, elles s'interpellent d'un côté de la rue à l'autre. «Le beau temps est revenu.» ou «Paraît que ça va changer ce week-end.» Parfois, elles disparaissent dans leur petite cuisine et reviennent avec des verres ou des canettes de soda qu'elles appliquent avec bonheur sur leur front pour se rafraîchir un instant avant de boire. Leur peau prend alors une couleur rose comme si elle avait été brûlée. Le V qui creuse le haut de leur poitrine prend lui aussi une couleur rose et vire doucement au rouge. Vers dix heures, ça va commencer à les démanger comme des piquûres d'orties, mais pas question de mettre de la crème solaire pour autant. La crème solaire, c'est uniquement pour les vacances à l'étranger. Ici, le soleil est moins brûlant. Très peu de chance qu'il provoque le cancer comme sur le continent. Chaque femme de la rue est bien décidée à exhiber son bronzage avant septembre. Elles portent leur jupe relevée au-dessus du genou, laissant apparaître leurs larges cuisses, ainsi que leurs varices et une sorte de duvet hivernal. Parfois, on aperçoit la dentelle fine de l'ourlet de leur jupon. Ça venait de leurs mères et avant de leurs grands-mères. Elles ont toujours été les gardiennes de ces rues, toujours habillées de la sorte. C'est comme ça depuis que ceux qui travaillaient au port ont demandé des maisons. En réponse, des centaines de rues bordées de maisons en enfilade ont été construites. C'est ce qu'on a appelé l'Est glorieux.

Les enfants de ces femmes regardent le foot ou tapent dans leur ballon entre les voitures. Ils parcourent la rue en zigzaguant à grands coups de pédales sur le vélo de leurs



aînés, les mains bien au-dessus du guidon comme s'ils accomplissaient un acte visible d'adoration divine.

Encore deux mois complets avant la reprise de l'école. Tout le mois de juillet. Tout le mois d'août. Pour eux, penser à la fin des vacances, c'est un peu comme penser à la distance entre des systèmes solaires. Une éternité. Et les enfants rient de plaisir à cette perspective.



# ITALY

**Giovanni Dozzini**

**E Baboucar  
guidava la fila**

*And Baboucar led the line*

Roma: Minimum Fax, 2018.

## BIOGRAPHY

**G**iovanni Dozzini was born in Perugia (1978) where he still lives today. He works as both a journalist and an interpreter. His articles have been published in several internationally acclaimed newspapers including *Europa*, *Huffington Post Italia*, *Pagina99*, *Onda Rock* and *Nazione Indiana*. Since 2014, Giovanni has been a member of the organising committee for Encuentro, a festival that aims to promote Spanish literature in Umbria. Music is a passion of his, and he often defines himself as a 'failed rock star'.

## SYNOPSIS

Four asylum seekers who arrived in Italy after crossing half of Africa and the Mediterranean. They are suspended between the hope that their request will be accepted and the anxiety of being rejected. There are those who wait for the first hearing before the commission, those who appeal to the civil court, those who have perhaps obtained humanitarian protection and for a while can go on without too much fear. One weekend



they decide to take a train that will take them from Perugia to the Adriatic. The journey is a rhythm of encounters, of the obsessions of everyone and of the fluctuating relationship with their common language, Italian. Forty-eight hours of apparently small events: fines, bivouacs, visions, football finals, some quarrels, in which the four friends will always find themselves walking, in single file, along the streets of the province of Central Italy as if they had returned to Africa. *Baboucar led the line* is a fable without morality, which addresses the issue of migration by choosing to tell what comes after the crossings, the elusive normality of a dignified life that follows every landing and everything that this normality contains: the fears, the desires, anger, nostalgia, succeeding in obtaining that particular poetic resonance that only real things have. ¶

# E Baboucar guidava la fila

*Giovanni Dozzini*



Baboucar guidava la fila. Subito dopo di lui veniva Yaya, qualche metro più indietro gli altri quattro: Robert, Ousman e i due ivoriani. Accanto a loro scorrevano la ferrovia e le case, coi piani terra infarciti di alimentari pakistani e Western Union. Le macchine passavano veloci, il sole era ancora alto anche se ormai si erano fatte le sette di sera. Si erano ritrovati un'ora prima nell'atrio della stazione per poi spostarsi in una piazza due isolati più in là, dove avevano potuto parlare all'ombra degli alberi frondosi disseminati lungo il bordo. Al centro della piazza c'era una grossa palma, sul lato opposto alle panchine su cui si erano seduti una giostra rosa e decorata con disegni per bambini sopra le vetrine chiuse.

«Allora domani partiamo alle sette», aveva detto Baboucar, e si era messo a spiegare il programma. Nessuno aveva obiettato, anche se era chiaro che esisteva un problema piuttosto evidente. Contando anche i due ivoriani, infatti, erano in sei, e nellamacchina di Maia ci sarebbero stati solo quattro posti. Baboucar però fece finta di niente, e si limitò a parlare dei tempi da rispettare e dei soldi, dei biglietti fino a Foligno e dei rischi da non correre più. La multa che aveva preso lui all'andata bastava e avanzava. Sotto sotto d'altronde sapevano tutti, loro per primi, che gli ivoriani avrebbero dovuto trovare un altro modo per

ritornare a Perugia. Avrebbero fatto quel che avevano in animo di fare dal principio, e cioè risalire su un treno e ripercorrere la strada al contrario fino a casa. E tutti sapevano, nessuno escluso, che non sarebbe stato un grande impiccio. Yaya aveva chiesto a Baboucar per chi avrebbe dovuto fare da interprete in tribunale, ma Baboucar sapeva solo che si trattava di due senegalesi e un gambiano, dei nomi non aveva idea. Ousman era stato silenzioso per tutto il tempo, perché pensava alla sua, di udienza, e pensava alla richiesta d'asilo rifiutata, e non trovava ragioni per fare qualcos'altro che non fosse tacere e perdersi nel proprio sconforto. Robert aveva capito, più o meno, e si chiedeva chi gli avrebbe fatto da interprete quando sarebbe toccato a lui andare davanti alla commissione.

L'altra questione da risolvere, adesso, era quella della notte. Yaya aveva chiesto a Ousman di raccontare quanto gli avevano detto i carabinieri, ma Ousman non era dell'umore giusto per parlare, così fu Yaya a farlo, e a domandare agli altri, fingendo di domandarlo a se stesso, se fosse o meno il caso di dormire in spiaggia. A quel punto c'era stato un po' da discutere.

«Ma noi siamo tanti. Non c'è pericolo», aveva detto Baboucar. Yaya sbuffò, e disse di non avere alcuna voglia di litigare con qualche balordo. Poi propose di dare un'occhiata vicino alla fabbrica con le ciminiere, che era meno vicino alla stazione, così si erano messi in marcia, e avevano cominciato a risalire la ferrovia. Sulle soglie dei pakistani e degli Western Union in effetti c'era già della gente dall'aspetto poco raccomandabile, perlopiù italiani e maghrebini con la birra in mano e gli sguardi ostili. Uomini ma anche qualche donna, e quando i negozi furono finiti e una ragazza africana magra con un corto vestito fucsia appostata all'angolo di una bassa palazzina gli sorrise Yaya pensò che an-

che stavolta l'avrebbero sfangata. Tutti notarono la ragazza, tranne Ousman. Baboucar aveva promesso che gli avrebbe passato il caricabatterie appena avessero messo piede nel bar, e adesso gli sembrava di avvertire il peso del telefono inerme nel fondo dello zaino, di figurarselo con esattezza in mezzo all'a- sciugamano insabbiato e al costume asciutto.

«È petrolio?», chiese Baboucar quando furono a tre o quattrocento metri dalla fabbrica, ma nessuno gli rispose. Dopo cinque minuti erano sotto le ciminiere. Il sole aveva finalmente preso a scendere alle loro spalle, e i sei ragazzi guardavano la linea dritta del mare. Si erano seduti l'uno accanto all'altro, tenevano le gambe piegate davanti a sé e le braccia stese ai lati, i palmi nella sabbia grossa e scura, la pelle nera e lucida costretta nei vestiti colorati. Gli zaini e la busta di plastica di Baboucar erano ammassati qualche metro più in là, vicino a una barca, e tutto intorno la gente aveva cominciato a sbaraccare e ritornare a casa per cena. Un vecchio pescatore abbronzato fino al midollo stava seduto su una sedia di tela da campeggio dirimpetto a una delle microscopiche casette. Di tanto in tanto un bambino di tre o quattro anni sgattaiolava verso di lui, faceva una specie di pernacchia e se ne tornava sotto l'ombreggiante steso tra altre due costruzioni. L'uomo aveva i capelli bianchi e un costume da bagno verde molto piccolo, le gambe e le braccia asciutte e muscolose, la grossa pancia tesa e glabra. Ai suoi piedi riposavano due lunghe canne da pesca, ferme come buffi animali da riporto stanchi dopo una giornata di caccia. Baboucar scattava fotografie al mare e agli altri, qualche selfie con la fabbrica e le ciminiere sullo sfondo. Intanto parlava del film, cercava di commentare la presenza della grande raffineria, diceva che andare al mare era stata davvero una buona idea. In pochi gli stavano dietro. Robert sì, e a un certo punto arrivò persino a chiedere da dove poteva

venire tutto quel petrolio, ma né Baboucar né Yaya né nessun altro seppero o vollero rispondere. Ousman era nervoso. Sentiva la sabbia nei calzini, e il pensiero del cellulare scarico lo tormentava.

«Per stasera secondo me qui può andare bene», disse infine Baboucar guardando Yaya con decisione, e quello gonfiò le guance e si strofinò il dorso della mano sul naso.

«Boh», si limitò a dire.

«Perché boh?»

«Perché boh. Forse un posto meno vicino alla ferrovia può essere meglio».

«Che posto?»

«Eh», fece Yaya. «Non lo so. Non lo conosco questo posto».

Ousman si piegò in avanti e squadrò entrambi. Non erano molto lontani dal punto in cui lo avevano fermato i carabinieri poche ore prima.

«Forse qui abbiamo pericolo», disse.

Yaya annuì, rimettendosi la scarpa che si era tolto per liberarsi di un piccolo sasso acuminato finito sotto al tallone.

«Ma siamo tanti!», disse Baboucar. «Ci lasciano stare. E poi guarda là. La stazione è lontana. Anche i pakistani e quei kebab. Lontani. Non ci vengono qua».

Lui, come gli altri, si immaginava gruppetti di quei tossici o nordafricani in canottiera che si mettevano a perlustrare la spiaggia con una bottiglia in mano e un coltello nell'altra, pronti a rapinare chi gli si fosse parato di fronte o a difendere con le buone o con le cattive il loro territorio. Ma era sinceramente convinto di non correre alcun pericolo. Era vero,

erano in tanti, e ciascuno di loro ne aveva viste di tutti i colori. Ed era vero anche che si trovavano nel punto più scomodo della spiaggia. Al di là della ferrovia la strada principale curvava verso l'interno e scompariva tra la campagna e la periferia. Cercò di spiegare questo suo ragionamento, e rincarò la dose facendoli riflettere su quanto corta sarebbe stata la notte.

«Veniamo a mezzanotte. Anzi dopo. La una. Poi alle sei ci dobbiamo svegliare. Sono meno di sei ore. Possiamo anche non dormire. Cioè, uno per volta. Posso farlo io. Quasi tutto io. Fino alle quattro. Poi due ore tu, Yaya. O tu, Ousman».

Robert annuì con vigore, e in un italiano stentatissimo si offrì di dare un cambio per un turno di guardia. Baboucar lo ringraziò, contento di avere trovato un alleato, per quanto si trattasse del pesce più piccolo di tutta la spedizione.

«Passeranno anche i treni», disse Yaya. «Non dormiremo un cazzo».

Baboucar si mise a ridere, forzatamente. I treni non erano un buon motivo per complicarsi la vita a cercare posti migliori. Il posto migliore era quello. Lo avevano immaginato da prima di partire, e non era successo nulla che potesse davvero fargli mettere in discussione quella decisione. Le raccomandazioni di due carabinieri non bastavano. Perché avrebbero dovuto fidarsi di loro?

«Eh», fece a quel punto Ousman, «non lo so. Non lo so, Baboucar. Vediamo».

Baboucar respirò profondamente, ma decise che non si sarebbe fatto rovinare la giornata da un intoppo del genere. Al momento di andare a dormire mancavano ancora molte ore, e dopo la partita gli altri avrebbero sicuramente cambiato idea. Dormire lì era la cosa più semplice. Con la stanchezza



e col buio, gli uomini hanno voglia di andare a dormire. E il più vicino possibile.

Pochi metri più in là, il pescatore aveva ascoltato i loro discorsi, e ne appariva piuttosto colpito. Da qualche minuto si era addirittura alzato e avvicinato, rimanendo a fissare il mare con un piede appoggiato sulla barca ma prestando tutta la propria attenzione a loro. I due ivoriani se n'erano accorti, ma non gli interessava un granché. Degli altri aveva intuito qualcosa solo Ousman, che adesso lo guardava incuriosito e perplesso. L'uomo raccolse il suo sguardo, e a quel punto decise di parlare.

«Sentite», disse rivolgendosi a tutti e a nessuno, «ve lo dico io dove dormire stanotte».

Sistemò le canne da pesca e gli fece strada fin oltre il sottopassaggio, dove Ousman ammirò ancora una volta i due mani-festi di Lory consumati dal tempo. Lei era sempre lì, chissà da quanto, colta nell'attimo prima di mettersi a cantare o andare a sistemarsi i capelli o togliersi di dosso il vestito, e lasciare i suoi grandi seni pallidi liberi di ammiccare verso chi volessero. Era lì nell'indifferenza di tutti, oramai, perché a nessuno interessava più un concerto vecchio di anni, e nessuno sapeva niente delle cose che Lory avrebbe invece potuto dire a lui, magari cantando, o chiedendogli un ultimo ballo. Ousman non rallentò, non ostentò interesse, vide quanto gli bastava e proseguì dietro agli altri, e quando sbucarono sulla strada al di là della ferrovia il pescatore aveva guadagnato qualche metro sul gruppo sgranato portandosi appresso Baboucar sottobraccio. Era in ciabatte, e s'era infilato una camicia a maniche corte completamente sbottonata sul ventre pieno di muscoli e grasso. Ousman non sentiva bene cosa si stessero dicendo, parlava soprattutto il pescatore ma Baboucar ogni tanto rispondeva o do-

mandava. Gesticolavano entrambi, e da dietro parevano due vecchi amici che si erano rincontrati dopo molto tempo.

Non ci misero molto ad arrivare dove gli aveva promesso. In una delle costruzioni sul lato sinistro della strada, stretta tra due portoncini di legno, si apriva una porta di metallo e vetro opaco, accanto alla quale era affisso un cartello di plastica con una scritta resa illeggibile dal tempo. Il pescatore la spalancò, e subito furono invasi da una forte puzza di chiuso. Nei raggi di sole che filtravano dalla porta galleggiò un pulviscolo denso. Uno dei due ivoriani tossì. Yaya fece finta di afferrare il raggio, sorridendo, e Ousman, che aveva avuto la stessa tentazione, gli offrì le nocche del pugno chiuso in segno di approvazione. Il pescatore stava già aprendo un'altra porta, pochi secondi e una luce al neon cominciò a vibrare sul soffitto.

«Il posto è questo», disse illustrando con un mezzo giro del braccio la stanza in cui si trovavano. Era piuttosto grande e quasi del tutto vuota. Solo un angolo era occupato da una scrivania ricoperta di faldoni, accanto alla quale campeggiava una sedia da ufficio in pelle nera con le ruotine. L'uomo si avventò subito sulla finestra che le stava alle spalle e la aprì in fretta. Di fianco, sul muro, c'era un calendario del 2014, su quello di fronte una grande riproduzione del Quarto Stato di Pellizza da Volpedo. Quel muro era anche l'unico a essere ricoperto integralmente di legno chiaro, sottili listelli verticali separati da scanalature larghe poco meno della metà. Accanto al quadro era appeso un bersaglio a cerchi concentrici gialli e neri, con due freccette conficcate non lontano dalla circonferenza.

# And Baboucar led the line

*Giovanni Dozzini*

Translated from Italian by Anne Milano Appel

Baboucar led them single file, one behind the other. Right behind him came Yaya, a few yards back the other four: Robert, Ousman and the two from the Ivory Coast. They proceeded along, the railroad tracks beside them and buildings whose ground floors were crammed with Pakistani markets and Western Unions. Cars sped by briskly, the sun was still high even though it was now seven o'clock in the evening. They had gathered an hour earlier at the entrance to the station, then moved to a square two blocks away where they could talk in the shade of leafy trees scattered around the perimeter. At the centre of the square stood a large palm tree; on the side opposite the benches where they sat was a pink carousel decorated with kiddie designs above shuttered glass partitions.

'So then, tomorrow morning we leave at seven,' Baboucar said, and started explaining the plan. No one objected, although it was clear that there was a rather obvious problem. Counting the two Ivorians, in fact, there were six of them, and there was only room for four in Maia's car. Baboucar, however, skipped over that, and only talked about the schedule they had to keep to and about the money, about the tickets to Foligno and about risks they should avoid. The fine he had got on the way up there was more than enough. Besides, deep down they all knew, they more than anyone, that the Ivorians would have to find another way to return to Perugia. They would do what they had intended to do from the beginning, that is, get back on a train and retrace the

way home in reverse. And everyone knew, no exceptions, that it wouldn't be a big hitch. Yaya asked Baboucar whom he would be interpreting for in court, but all Baboucar knew was that they were two Senegalese and a Gambian, he had no idea of their names. Ousman was silent the whole time because he was thinking about his own court hearing, about the denied request for asylum, and he saw no reason to do anything other than remain mum and wallow in his dejection. Robert understood, more or less, and wondered who his interpreter would be when it was his turn to go before the committee.

The other question to be resolved now was that of where to spend the night. Yaya had asked Ousman to tell him what the carabinieri had said to him, but Ousman wasn't in the mood to talk, so it was Yaya who did, asking the others by pretending to wonder himself whether or not it would be better to sleep on the beach. At that point there was a bit of discussion.

'But there are a lot of us. There's no danger,' Baboucar had said. Yaya snorted impatiently, and said he had no desire to skirmish with some thug. Then he suggested they take a look around the factory with the smokestacks, which was farther away from the station, so they set off and started back up along the railroad. There were some disreputable looking characters on the doorsteps of the Pakistani shops and Western Unions, in fact, mostly Italians and Maghrebis with a beer in hand and hostile looks. Men but also a few women, and when the markets ended and a thin African girl in a short fuchsia dress stationed at the corner of a low building smiled at him, Yaya thought that this time too they would manage to get by. Everyone noticed the girl, except Ousman. Baboucar had promised that he would let them have the battery charger as soon as they got to the bar,

and now Ousman thought he could feel the weight of the dead phone at the bottom of his backpack, picture it exactly in between the sandy towel and the dry swimming trunks.

‘Is it oil?’ Baboucar asked when they were three or four hundred yards from the refinery, but no one answered him. In five minutes they were close to the smokestacks. The sun had finally begun lowering behind them, and the six young men gazed at the distinct line of the sea. They sat next to one another, with their legs bent in front of them and their arms stretched out to the sides, palms in the coarse, dark sand, their shiny black skin constricted in the colourful clothing. Baboucar’s backpack and plastic bag were piled up a few yards away, near a boat, and all around them people had begun packing up to leave and go home for supper. An old fisherman, tanned to the bone, was sitting in a canvas camp chair opposite one of the microscopic little houses. From time to time a child of three or four would tiptoe towards him, blow a kind of raspberry and dart back under the sunshade stretched between two other buildings. The man had white hair and wore a very tiny pair of green swimming briefs; his legs and arms were lean and sinewy, his big belly taut and hairless. Two long fishing rods lay resting quietly at his feet, like improbable retrievers weary after a day’s hunting. Baboucar took photographs of the sea and of the others, a few selfies with the factory and smokestacks in the background. Meanwhile he kept talking about the film, trying to call attention to the presence of the large refinery, saying that going to the sea had really been a good idea. Few were following him. Robert was, and at one point even went so far as to ask where all that oil could come from, but neither Baboucar nor Yaya nor anyone else knew the answer or cared to respond. Ous-

man was edgy. He could feel the sand in his socks, and the thought of the dead cell phone nagged him.

‘If you ask me it’s okay to stay here tonight,’ Baboucar finally said looking decisively at Yaya, who puffed out his cheeks and rubbed the back of his hand on his nose.

‘Huh,’ was all he grunted.

‘Why huh?’

‘Because huh. Maybe someplace not so close to the railroad might be better.’

‘What place?’

‘Um,’ Yaya said. ‘I don’t know. I don’t know this area.’

Ousman leaned forward and looked from one to the other. They were not far from the spot where the carabinieri had stopped him a few hours earlier.

‘Maybe here we are in danger,’ he said.

Yaya nodded, putting back on the shoe that he had taken off to get rid of a small sharp stone that had ended up under his heel.

‘But there are many of us!’ Baboucar said. ‘They’ll leave us alone. And besides, look over there. The station is far away. The Pakistanis and those kebabs too. Far away. They don’t come here.’

He, like the others, imagined little gangs of those junkies or North Africans in tank shirts who prowled the beach with a bottle in one hand and a knife in the other, ready to mug anyone they ran into, or to defend their turf come hell or high water. But he was genuinely convinced that they were in no danger. It was true, there were many of them, and each of

them had been through all kinds of things. And it was also true that they were in the most out-of-the-way stretch of the beach. Beyond the railroad track the main road curved inland and disappeared among the fields and the outer fringes. He tried to explain his reasoning, and reinforced it by reminding them how short the night would be.

‘We come at midnight. Even later. At one. Then at six we have to wake up. It’s less than six hours. We can also not sleep. That is, take turns. I could stay awake. Almost the whole time. Until four. Then two hours, you, Yaya. Or you, Ousman.’

Robert nodded vigorously, and in very broken Italian offered to take a turn at standing watch. Baboucar thanked him, glad to have found an ally even though Robert was the small fry of the expedition.

‘Trains will come by too,’ Yaya said. ‘We won’t get any fucking sleep.’

Baboucar forced a laugh. Trains were not a good reason to complicate their lives by looking for better places. This was the best place. They had pictured it before leaving, and nothing had happened that could really make him question that decision. The warnings of the two carabinieri were not enough. Why should they trust them?

‘Um,’ Ousman said at that point, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know, Baboucar. We’ll see.’

Baboucar took a deep breath, but decided that he would not let the day be ruined by a glitch like that. There were still many hours left before bedtime, and after the game the others would surely change their minds. Sleeping there was the simplest thing. When they’re tired and it’s dark, men want to go to sleep. And as close by as possible. The closer the better.

A few yards away, the fisherman had listened to their discussion, and seemed struck by it. Some minutes ago he had actually stood up and moved closer, staring at the sea with one foot resting on the boat, but paying full attention to them. The two Ivorians had noticed it, but didn't much care about him. The only one of the others who had sensed something was Ousman, and he was now watching the man, curious and perplexed. The fisherman caught his eye, and at that point he decided to speak.

'Listen,' he said, addressing everyone and no one, 'I'll tell you where to sleep tonight.'

He stored the fishing poles and led them beyond the underpass, where Ousman once again admired the two time-worn posters of Lory. She was always there, who knows for how long, caught in the moment before starting to sing or going to fix her hair or taking off her dress and leaving her big pale breasts free to wink at whomever they wanted to. She was there to the indifference of everybody, now, because no one was interested in a concert that was years old, and no one knew anything about the things that Lory might instead have said to him, maybe singing, or asking him for a last dance. Ousman did not slow down, did not show any sign of interest, he saw what was enough for him and continued on behind the others, and when they came out to the road on the other side of the railroad tracks the fisherman, taking Baboucar under his arm, had gained a few yards on the trailing group of stragglers. He was wearing flip-flops, and had put on a short-sleeved shirt that flapped unbuttoned over his fat, muscular belly. Ousman couldn't hear what they were saying very well, it was mostly the fisherman talking, but Baboucar occasionally answered or asked a question. They were both gesticulating, and from behind



they looked like a couple of old friends who had met again after a long time.

It didn't take long to get to where he had promised them. In one of the buildings on the left side of the road, braced between two wooden wicket doors, was a main door of metal and opaque glass; a plastic sign was affixed beside it, its inscription rendered illegible by time. The fisherman swung open the door, and they were immediately assailed by a strong musty odour. Dense dust particles drifted in the sunbeams that filtered through the door. One of the two Ivorians coughed. Yaya, smiling, pretended to grab hold of a sunbeam, and Ousman, who'd had the same temptation, offered him a fist bump as a sign of approval. The fisherman was already opening another door, and after a few seconds a neon light began flickering on the ceiling.

'This is the place,' he said, indicating the room in which they found themselves with a half sweep of his arm. It was quite large and almost completely bare. Only one corner was occupied by a desk stacked with folders, next to which stood a black leather office chair with caster wheels. The man went quickly to the window behind it and hurriedly opened it. Beside the desk, on the wall, was a calendar from 2014, on the opposite wall hung a large reproduction of 'The Fourth Estate' by Pellizza da Volpedo. That wall was also the only one to be completely covered with thin vertical laths of pale wood, separated by grooves slightly less than half their width. Beside the picture hung a dartboard in concentric black and yellow circles, with two darts stuck not far from the edge.

# LITHUANIA

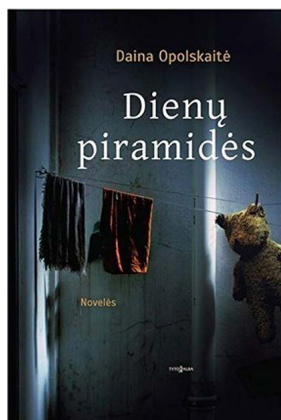
**Daina Opolskaitė  
Kovalčikienė**

**Dienų piramidės**  
*The Hour of Dusk*

Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2019.

## BIOGRAPHY

**D**aina Opolskaitė Kovalčikienė was born in 1979 in Vilkaviškis. She graduated from the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (former Vilniaus pedagoginis universitetas), where she studied Lithuanian philology, and now works as a teacher at a high school in Vilkaviškis. In 2000 she received the Lithuanian Writers Union prize for a first book (*Drožlės*), in 2018 she won Antanas Vaičiulaitis and Jurgis Kunčinas literature awards for short stories. D. Opolskaitė is very prolific in youth literature written for teenagers as well (during 2015-2018 she wrote three novels). In 2016 the writer was awarded a Children's Literature Award. In 2017 her novel 'Ir vieną kart, Riči', became the book of the year. In the Lithuanian press D. Opolskaitė published 30 short stories, reviews and essays.



## SYNOPSIS

Opolskaitė's short stories (a collection of 13 in this book) usually start off with intimately observed close relations within a family: between spouses, between parents and children, between siblings; sometimes between close young friends or lovers. Themes of betrayal and long-standing sense of guilt are explored by means of a sensitive and exquisite literary language. Out of an ordinary level the situation is usually elevated into something extraordinary; unexpected new aspects of the relationships emerge, the reader is offered a view from a fresh perspective. Within a net of entangled human relationships, we acquire an eye-opening unexpected dimension which also sheds new light on certain nuances

of the human predicament. This is mostly achieved with an ingenious tour de force at the very end of a story, providing a subtle epiphany. The effect is sometimes brought about by a subtle revelation of a hidden nuance in the very final sentence or two, or introducing a mystical thread into the story, which mostly serves as an unobtrusive literary device, opening up a new angle on the human relationships; for instance, when, in the final stage, the narrator does not yet realise, and the reader sees it only later, that she has just died, and it was her ghost speaking to herself and to us. ¶



## Dienų piramidės

*Daina Opolskaitė Kovalčikienė*



Iš tiesų visai neprisiminiau, kaip užmigau. Ko gero, tik tiek, jog dar tebuvo prieblanda, gal ankstyvas vakaras, kai Gabrielė užėjo man palinkėti labos nakties. Gaubiamą tamsaus ir sunkaus šešėlio tarsi apsiaustas, ji prisiartino prie mano lovos ir vos palietė man pirštus. Aš nemiegu, pasakiau, gerai, kad atėjai. Ji prisėdo šalia ir aš paėmiau jos ranką. Stengiausi išžiūrėti jai į akis, tačiau jos veidą negailestingai gobė sunkus šešėlio gobtuvas, teįžiūrėjau tik patamsėjusią antakių juostą ir vos blyškesnes žandikaulių kalveles. Norėjau paprašyti, kad ji uždegtų stalinę lempą, tačiau to nepadariau. Pajutau, kad toji staiga mudvi užklupusi akimirka yra pernelyg skausminga, trumpa ir brangi, tokia visa virpanti ir nykstanti čia pat akyse kaip liepsnojantis popierius, kad buvo baisu ką nors sakyti ar daryti. Buvo nepakeliamai sunku laikyti šiltą Gabrielės ranką saujoje, trapią ir švelnią kaip viščiuko sparnelis, tai buvo iš tikrųjų baisu.

Vieną akimirką aš tikrai išsigandau savęs pačios. Kažkur gerklės gilumoje pašėlusiu greičiu vijosi karštas ir sprangus ašarų kamuolys, ir aš išsigandau to, ką galiu padaryti, nežinojau ką, bet įsivaizdavau, kad kažką baisaus ir gąsdinančio. Pagaliau pati Gabrielė pasilenkė prie manęs ir jos kvėpavimas, jos plaukai, jos balsas man priminė nesuvokiamai senus laikus: kaip ji gimė ir ilgą laiką visai neturėjo plaukų, tik pavienius pūkelius ant viršugalvio, ir kaip bailiai glausdavosi prie manęs lyg kačiukas pamačiusi atskriejantį dvi ratų ar automobilį. Ji ilgai išsėdėjo šalia manęs netardama

nė žodžio, abi tylėjom. Tyla keistai ir ilgai skandino mūsų mintis, tačiau aš jaučiau, kad abi galvojame apie tuos pačius dalykus. Paskui mudvi kalbėjomės, tik neprisimenu apie ką, ir aš galiausiai nusiraminau. Po to ji pasakė: gerai, mama, jau eisiu, tu miegok, labanakt, o aš kažkodėl jai palinkėjau: sėkmės tau. Ir viskas. Neprisimenu, kad būtų nutikę kas nors dar.

Dabar man viskas atrodė visiškai kitaip. Nebuvo nė kruopelytės to gniuždančio pralaimėjimo pojūčio, kad viskas vyksta per greit, kad daug ko nespėju padaryti, o laikas nėra man pavaldus. Nebuvo tos sunkiai pakeliamos baimės, kuri mane gaubė jau ilgai, ištikus mėnesius ar net metus, dabar jaučiausi rami ir laiminga, sklidina nesudrumsčiamos ramybės kaip niekad. Bandžiau priminti sau visas tas liūdesio ir gailesčio priežastis, kurios ypač kamavo keletą pastarųjų savaitių, tačiau veltui. Sąmonė sumaniai ir meistriškai atmušinėjo jas vieną po kitos kaip teniso kamuoliukus - jos nė viena manęs nepasiekė. Ramybės pojūtis buvo dieviškas ir toks patvarus, toks nesugriaunamas ir tvirtas, kokį tik vienas Dievas tegali sukurti ir kaip nematomu apsiaustu apsupti tavo virpančius pečius.

Aš vis dar neketinau keltis. Tyčia mėgavausi, vilkindama laiką, norėjau neskubėdama sugalvoti, ką pradėsiu veikti. Pirmiausia visur nuvalysiu dulkes, seniai jau to nedariau, bent neprisimenu, kada. Juodus jų kamuolius atsargiai surinksiu rankomis ir atidariusi langą leisiu nusinešti vėjui. Rūpestingai nublizginsiu visus namuose esančius veidrodžius ir stiklus, visus esančius stiklinius paviršius, net vazas ir taures indaujoje, o po to iškilmingai pereisiu per visus namus atsargiai sugaudama savo atspindį kiekvieno jų gelmėje. Seniai į save nežiūrėjau. Kartais, prisimenu, paklausdavau Laimono, kaip atrodo, ir jis gūžtelėdavo pečiais, nevisai žinodamas, ką man atsakyti. Jo akyse atsispindėdavo

kažkoks neaiškus klausimas, tarytum vaiko, vartančio savo rankose sulaužytą žaislą ir nežinančio, kaip tai galėjo nutikti, o įsirėžusi raukšlė plačioje kaktoje pailgėdavo ir pagilėdavo dvigubai. Niekaip negalėdavau suprasti, ką tuo metu jis galvoja. Gabrielė čia pat pasiskubindavo ir pareikšdavo, kad man tereikia sutvarkyti antakius ir nudažyti plaukus, jie jau seniai ataugę ties šaknimis, ir viskas. Esu labai graži, iš tiesų.

Iš tikrųjų aš jiems abiemis buvau už daug ką dėkinga.

Pirmiausia Gabrielei. Ji buvo nuostabi. Žiūrėdama į ją aš kasdien nepalioviau stebėtis, kokia ji graži ir protinga, ir niekaip neįstengiau patikėti, kad ji yra mano, iš tikrųjų mano. Aš didžiavausi ja. Jos asmenybe ir viskuo, ką ji darė. Netgi jos išvaizda – didžiavausi ir ja. Aš niekada neturėjau tokių vešlių ir tokios nuostabios spalvos plaukų kaip jos, kokius ji atsinešė jau gimdama. Ilgos žvilgančios sruogos, kurias dabar ji kasryt segė aukštai į kuplą kuodą ant pakaušio, priminė man purų žiemos šerkšną, apgulanti kiekvieną medžio šakelę. Gabrielės plaukai buvo šviesūs, kiek tamsėlesni ties šaknimis, tačiau ne gelsvi, o sidabriškai balti. Purūs kaip sniegas, kaip debesėlis. Norėjosi į juos panardinti rankas. Tą lemtingą žiemą, kada kaktomuša susidūriau su Laimonu ant operos ir baleto teatro laiptų, akimirką negalėjau patikėti, kad žemėje yra žmonių, turinčių tokius plaukus. Sidabrinis. Dabar jis jau kuris laikas nebetas lemtingai sutiktas žmogus iš pasakos, sidabrinės garbanos metams bėgant nuslinko nuo viršugalvio ant pečių, palikdamos viršuje begėdiškai tuščią plynę. Tačiau yra Gabrielė, jo Gabrielė, ir aš žinau, ką jis jaučia, kasdien matydamas ją prie veidrodžio įmantriai šukuojant savo sidabro garbanas.

Ne tik nuostabių plaukų, reikia prisipažinti, slapčia jai daug ko pavydėjau. Ji labai anksti pasijuto suaugusi ir neišgyveno jokių audringos paauglystės kančių. Jos santūrumas, kito įsiklausymas ir tiesumas buvo tie bruožai, kuriais žavėjausi labiausiai. Man buvo nesuprantama, kaip būnant tokiai jaunai galima išlikti tokiai ramiai ir blaiviai įvertinti net kritiškiausią situaciją. Aš visada buvau linkusi pernelyg staiga pulti į neviltį, išgirdus ką nors siaubingo mane akimirksniu išpildavo prakaitas ir pradėdavo drebėti balsas. Galėdavau staiga apsiverkti, niekada nemokėjau valdyti savo emocijų. Kai sužinojau, kad sergu bei greitai nusilpsiu ir negalėsiu vaikščioti, jaučiausi visiškai bejėgė. Verkiau kaip išprotėjusi, nes tik tai galėjau daryti. Kai įsidrąsinusi vieną vakarą pasakiau apie tai Gabrielei, ji atidžiai pasižiūrėjo man į akis tarytum tikrindama, ar nemeluoju, po to padėjo savo galvą man ant peties ir paprastai pasakė: bus sunku, bet nereikia bijoti. Aš bijau, prisipažinau jai atvirai, nors to tikrai nereikėjo sakyti, atrodžiau tikrai kvailai, labai bijau. Nereikia, pakartojo ji, nereikia. Po to nė karto nesigailėjau to, kad viską jai pasakiau ir ji viską žino.

O su Laimonu buvo dar kitaip. Ilgai rinkausi dieną, kada jam pasakysiu. Buvo sekmadienis, Gabrielė išnėrė kažkur su draugais, o Laimonas neskubėdamas ruošėsi į koncertą. Jo laukė Paganini, Mocartas, Vivaldis, Šopenas ir daugelis kitų. Apie juos jis galvojo nepalyginamai daugiau negu apie mane. Visi jie buvo mirę, tačiau Laimonui jie buvo gyvi. Gyvesni už gyvus. Jis gyveno jais, kalbėjosi su jais vien jam suprantama kalba, bet aš niekada nejaučiau jokio pavydo ar nuoskaudos.

Priešingai, mane visada jaudinančiai žavėjo toks jo sugebėjimas lengvai užsimiršti laike, vienu lazdelės mostelėjimu perskrieti amžius ir epochas, įsigyventi į seniai nutolusius garsus, panirti į nesančius pavidalus, prikelti išblėsusius

jausmus. Tai buvo muzika. Mačiau – jam niekas nesibaigia, neišeina, jis nepažįsta mirties ir laiko pančių. Jis nukerta juos visus vienu pirmuoju stipriu rankos mostu, po kurio pasigirsta muzika. Tomis koncerto valandomis aš lengvai patikėdavau, kad Laimonas stebukladarys, genijus, nes savo akimis mačiau, kaip vienu lazdelės mostu jis nužudo du amžinai savo kraugeriškus nasrus iššiojusius cerberius. Smuikai, fleitos, saksofonai ir kontrabosai užlieja ir paskandina abi žudančiąsias chimeras. Vėl negęstančia gyvybės liepsna dega Bethovenų akys. Atšalę Mocarto pirštai bėgioja klavišais. Vėsus Vivaldžio kvėpavimas vos pastebimu šerkšnu nugula žvilgantį instrumento paviršių. Daugybę kartų lankiausi Laimono koncertuose ir ilgas valandas sėdėdavau atidžiai žvelgdama jam į veidą. Visada būdavau sukręsta, šokiruota to, ką išvysdavau liepsnojant jo akyse. Tai buvo aistra, pati tikriausia aistra, visiškai užvaldanti žmogų. Ar mudu kada nors patyrėme tokią aistrą?

Greitai aš negalėsiu vaikščioti, man labai blogai, tada prisartinusi tariau kiek galėdama ramesniu balsu, žiūrėdama jam tiesiai į akis. Laukia ilgi chemoterapijos seansai, man sakė, kad nebeturėsiu jėgų. Prisipažinsiu, tuo metu jaučiau kažkokį egoistišką smalsumą ir net keistą norą patikrinti jo reakciją. Norėjau pamatyti, kaip jis išsigąs, sutriks, nežinos, ką man pasakyti ir kaip paguosti. Žinojau, kad jausiuosi baisiai, tiesiog apgailėtina, tačiau kažkodėl norėjau patirti tą skausmą. Sąmoningai skaudinti save, kad prie to būtų lengviau priprasti.

Laimonas ramiai padėjo elektrinę barzdaskutę į spintelę ir atsisuko. Vienas jo skruostas buvo storai nuteptas baltų putų sluoksniu. Galvojau apie tai, nuoširdžiai prisipažino jis pribloškdamas mane, mačiau, kad tau nė kiek ne geriau.

-Matei?



-Taip.

-Kodėl man nesakei?

-O kam? Tu pati jauti.

-Tikrai baisiai atrodo?

-Aš ne apie tai.

-Pasakyk, tikrai atrodo baisiai?

-Aš neišmanau, baisiai ar gerai.

-Ne, išmanai. Prisimink, kai mes buvome nuvykę į kalnus. Tą vasarą. Tada man sakei, kad esu graži. Mes rinkome ir valgėme žemuoges. Prisimeni? Tada aš vilkėjau tokią gėlėtą suknelę, prisimeni? Pasakyk, ar aš dabar tokia kaip ir tą vasarą kalnuose? Na pasakyk.

-Kam apie tai kalbėti. Geriau pailsėk.

-Aš neilsėsiu, negulsiu.

-Gerai, kaip nori. Tada gali paruošti vakarienę. Grįšiu po kelių valandų. Jei ko prireiks, paskambink, grįždamas užsuksiu į parduotuvę.

Tada jis baigė skustis, išėjo ir tas keistas pokalbis baigėsi. Nebuvo pasakyta nieko reikšmingo, nieko jaudinančio, aš nieko nesupratau.

Dabar man norėjosi į visa tai lengvai numoti ranka. Įsibrąsinusi lėtai atmerkiau akis tarytum būčiau naujagimis ir tai daryčiau pirmą kartą, jas liete užliejo akinama dienos šviesa ir aš neskubėdama galėjau įsižiūrėti į viską aplinkui. Pirmiausia išvydau Gabrielės nuotrauką – ji stovėjo šalia, čia pat ant stalelio. Gabrielė šypsojosi žiūrėdama man tiesiai į akis, suglaustos jos lūpos priminė rausvą

žiedlapį. Juoduose akių vyzdžiuose spindėjo du šviesos sidabriukai. Viršuje ant knygų spintos amarilis laikė su-krovęs žiedą, netgi ne vieną, o visus tris, didžiulę žiedų kekę ir rengėsi pražysti. Kodėl anksčiau jo nepastebėjau? Galbūt kaltas skausmas. Kai skauda, ne tik kambarys, vi-sas pasaulis, visa žemė atrodo kitaip. Išnyksta visi daiktai ir kontūrai, išblėsta garsai, netgi tie, kurie yra arčiausiai tavęs, tie, su kuriais gyveni diena iš dienos. Laikrodžiai muša skausmo minutes ir valandas, skausmo sekundės kaip mažos adatėlės negailestingai susminga į odą kiaurai suvarpydamos jos epidermį. Skausmas yra pats stipriausias pojūtis žemėje, nesunkiai numarinantis visus kitus pojūčius ir netgi instinktus. Nieko nebematai, neužuodi, nenori – jis stipresnis už tave patį.

Lėtai pasisukdama ant kairiojo šono atsikėliau. Nieko ne-skaudėjo. Galėjau be vargo atsistoti, pakelti į viršų rankas, galėjau eiti. Dariau tai su baime, tačiau raumenys judėjo lengvai, jokio tempimo ar nutirpimo pojūčio. Nejaučiau jo-kio silpnumo ir galva nesvaigo. Nebereikėjo ramstyti nei į kėdžių atkaltes, nei siekti kaulinių spintos durų rankenėlių. Paprastas dalykas, bet ypatingas. Jokio skausmo nebuvo. Pasaulis be skausmo. Nuostabu. Pajutau, kad noriu nuvers-ti kalnus, padaryti šimtus darbų ir tokių, kuriuos jau buvau seniai pamiršusi, norėjau vėl pajusti jų teikiamą paprastą kasdienišką malonumą. Tik kasdienybės smulkmenose ir darbuose glūdi tikrasis gyvenimo žavesys – man prireikė laiko tam suvokti. Būtinai pasimatuosiu visus savo drabu-žius ir atsikratysiu nereikalingų, nusprendžiau. Susirasiu savo kosmetiką.

Kambario durys į koridorių buvo pravertos, iš tolo pa-mačiau, kad priėškambaryje ant batų dėžės raudonuoja paliktas mėgstamiausias Gabrielės švarkelis. Išėjo sku-

bėdama, kitaip jo būtų nepalikusi. Odinė Laimono striukė buvo taip pat persisvėrusi per kabyklą, skėtis nukritęs ant žemės. Jie abu skubėjo, aiškiai skubėjo, įdomu, kur? Ant tualetinio stalelio numestos šukos, juodo batų tepalo tūtelė, išraustas didysis prieškambario komodos stalčius, sumesti šalikai ir kaklaraiščiai, netgi dantų pastos tūtelė. Tačiau Laimono portfelis ramiai tūnojo savo kampe ant batų dėžės, o mokyklinė Gabrielės kuprinė tvarkingai kabojo ant vąšo. Kur jie abu išėjo, išnyko? Neprisiminiau, kad būtų ką nors sakę ar įspėję.

# The Hour of Dusk

*Daina Opolskaitė*

Translated from Lithuanian by Rimas Uzgiris

To tell the truth, I couldn't recall how I fell asleep. Only that it was twilight, early evening, perhaps, when Gabrielė came in to say good night. Covered in dark, heavy shadow like a shawl, she approached my bed and gently touched my fingers. 'I'm not sleeping,' I said. 'I'm glad, you came.' She sat down next to me and I took her hand. I tried to look into her eyes, but her face was covered by that pitiless caul of shadow, and I could only make out the darker band of her eyebrows and the pale ridges of her cheekbones. I wanted to ask her to turn on the desk lamp, but I didn't. I felt that this moment which had caught us unawares was too painful, short and precious, a moment that quivered and erased itself before our eyes like a scrap of paper in flame. A kind of dread made it impossible to do or say anything. Gabrielė's warm hand in mine felt unbearably heavy, but also fragile and delicate like a chick's new wing. It was an eerie feeling.

For a moment, it made me even afraid of myself. Somewhere from the depths of my throat, a ball of choking tears rose with frantic pace and I became frightened of what I might do — I didn't know what, but I imagined it would be something terrible and ghastly. Finally, Gabrielė herself bent down over me and her breath, her hair, her voice, reminded me of times incomprehensibly distant: how she was born and didn't have hair for the longest time, just a tuft here and there on the top of her head, how she cuddled tightly to me in fright like a kitten who has seen a bicycle or car bearing down on her. She sat next to me for a long while without saying a word.

We both remained quiet. The silence strangely drowned our thoughts for a while, yet I began to feel like we were thinking about the same things. Then we spoke, but I don't remember about what, and I finally relaxed. After that, she said, 'OK, mom, I'll go now. Get some sleep. Good night.' And for some reason I said to her, 'Good luck.' And that was it. I can't recall if there was anything else.

Now everything seemed different to me. There wasn't a scrap left of that oppressive feeling of defeat, that sense of everything happening too fast, that I can't manage to do so many things, and that time does not bend to my will. I wasn't carrying around the unbearable fear anymore which had been hanging over me for so many months or even years. Now, I felt calm and happy, full of this limpid serenity that I never had before. I tried to recall the reasons for all that sadness and self-pity, which had been especially strong these last few weeks, but in vain. My consciousness expertly and cleverly returned all the reasons like a tennis pro — not one could reach me. The sense of serenity was divine and sturdy, indestructible and strong, like only God above can make, covering your trembling shoulders with it as with an invisible shawl.

I still didn't intend to get up. I was enjoying the process of drawing out time. I wanted to casually think up what I would do. First, a thorough dusting, which I hadn't done in a long while, at least I don't remember when. I would carefully collect the dark dust devils by hand and open the window to let the wind take them away. Then, I would carefully polish all the glass and mirrors in my home, all the glass surfaces, even the vases and glasses in the cupboard. After that, I would walk with a dignified air through the whole house, attentively catching sight of my reflection in all of their depths. I haven't looked at myself

in a long time. Sometimes, I remember, I would ask Laimonas how I look, and he would shrug his shoulders, not really knowing what to say. An ambiguous question would be reflected in his eyes, like that of a child turning a broken toy over in his hand and not understanding how this could have happened. A deep wrinkle in his wide forehead would lengthen to twice its size. I could never understand what he was thinking at such times. Gabrielė would tell me straight away that I need to trim my eyebrows and dye my hair which had grown out at the roots, and that would be it. I am quite pretty, in fact.

In fact, I was quite grateful to both of them.

First of all, to Gabrielė. She was wonderful. Watching her every day, I couldn't stop being amazed at how pretty and smart she was. I couldn't believe that she was mine, really mine. I was proud of her, of her personality and everything she did. Even her appearance — I was proud of that too. I never had such luxuriant hair with such wonderful tone like she had. It was her inheritance. Every morning, she would pin her long shiny locks into a lush bun on the back of her head, and they reminded me of friable winter frost covering every branch of a tree. Gabrielė's hair was fair, a little darker at the roots, but with no yellow tint, rather a silvery white. Fluffy like fresh snow, like a cloud. You wanted to run your hand through it. In that fateful winter, when I bumped into Laimonas on the steps of the Opera and Ballet Theatre, for a moment I couldn't believe that there are people on this earth who have hair like that. Silver. For some time now, he has not been that person of destiny from a fairy tale: over the years, his silver locks have retreated to his shoulders, leaving a shameless empty waste at the top of his head. But there is Gabrielė, his Gabrielė, and I know too how he feels seeing her every day at the mirror elaborately brushing her silver locks.

It wasn't just her lovely hair, for I have to admit, there were many things I secretly envied. She became an adult very quickly inside and didn't live through any stormy adolescent sufferings. Her temperance, ability to listen to others, and honesty were the qualities that I admired most. I simply couldn't understand how such a young person could remain so calm and reasonable in the most critical situations. I was always inclined to fall precipitously into despair, and upon hearing something horrible would suddenly begin to sweat and my voice would waver and crack. I could break out in tears just like that, never having learned to control my emotions. When I found out I was ill and would soon lose strength and be unable to walk, I felt completely helpless. I cried like a madwoman because that was all I could do. When I drummed up the courage to tell Gabrielė one evening, she carefully looked me in the eyes to see if I were lying, then she put her head on my shoulders and plainly said, 'It will be hard, but there's nothing to be afraid of.' 'I'm afraid,' I admitted to her in all honesty, though there was no need to say it. I dread the thought of how foolish I must have seemed. 'There's no need to fear, no need,' she repeated. After that, I never regretted telling her the whole truth.

With Laimonas it was different. I took a long time to choose the day when I would tell him. It was a Sunday, Gabrielė was out somewhere with friends, and Laimonas was taking his time getting ready for a concert. Paganini, Mozart, Vivaldi, Chopin and many others were waiting for him. He thought of them much more than he thought of me. They were all dead, but for Laimonas they were more alive than the living. In fact, he lived through them, spoke with them in a language only they could understand, but I never felt jealous or hurt.

In fact, quite the opposite, I was always charmed by his ability to lose himself in time, to cut through centuries and eras with one wave of his baton, to inhabit sounds that have long grown distant, to submerge himself in non-existent forms, to resurrect faded feelings. Such was his music. I saw how nothing ends for him, how nothing goes away. He doesn't recognise the fetters of death and time. He cuts them away with the first strong wave of his hand that ushers in the musical sound. Those hours of performance made me believe that Laimonas is a miracle-worker, a genius, for I saw with my own eyes how with one gesture of his baton he slays two bloodthirsty hell-hounds with their eternally gaping jaws. Violins, flutes, horns, double basses would pour out and drown the murderous chimeras. Once again, the undying flame of life burns in Beethoven's eyes. Mozart's cold fingers again fly over the keyboard. The cool breath of Vivaldi covers the instruments with a barely noticeable sheen of frost. I went to many of Laimonas' concerts and spent hours looking attentively at his face. I was always shocked and shaken by what I saw flaring in his eyes. It was passion, the most genuine passion, completely controlling the man. Did the two of us ever experience such passion?

'I will soon be unable to walk. I'm in a very bad way,' I said to him then, as calmly as I could, standing close, looking into his eyes. 'There will be long chemotherapy sessions. They told me I won't have any strength.' I must admit, at the time I felt some kind of egotistical curiosity and even a strange desire to test his reaction. I wanted to see how he would grow frightened, confused, wouldn't know what to say to me or how to comfort me. I knew I would feel terrible, downright pitiful, but I wanted for some reason to feel that pain. I wanted to consciously hurt myself so that it would be easier to get used to it.



Laimonas calmly put his razor into the cabinet and turned around. One of his cheeks was thickly slathered with a layer of white foam. 'I was thinking about that,' he admitted frankly, shocking me. 'I saw that you weren't getting any better.'

'You saw?'

'Yes.'

'Why didn't you tell me?'

'Why would I? You feel it yourself.'

'Do I really look terrible?'

'I'm not talking about that.'

'Tell me, do I really look terrible?'

'I don't know what is terrible or good.'

'No, you know. Remember when we went to the mountains. That summer. Then you told me that I'm beautiful. We picked wild strawberries and feasted on them. Do you remember? I was wearing this flowery dress, you remember? Tell me, am I now like I was that summer in the mountains? Tell me.'

'We don't need to speak about that. It's better for you to rest.'

'I'm not going to rest. I won't lie down.'

'All right, as you wish. Then you can make dinner. I'll be back in a few hours. If you need anything, call me. I'll stop at the store on my way home.'

Then he finished shaving, left, and that strange conversation was done. Nothing meaningful had been said, nothing emotional, and I didn't understand a thing.

Now, I just wanted to carelessly wave my hand at all of it. After getting my courage up, I slowly opened my eyes like some newborn doing it for the first time. They were flooded with the blinding light of day, and I slowly took in all of my surroundings. The first thing I saw was Gabrielé's photo — it was standing right next to me on the nightstand. Gabrielé was smiling, looking right into my eyes. Her lightly pressed lips reminded me of pink blossoms. Two silver specks of light glinted in the blackness of her pupils. On top of the bookshelf, an amaryllis held a full bud, not just one, but three, a great cluster of buds that were ready to bloom. Why hadn't I noticed it earlier? Maybe the pain was to blame. When you feel pain, not only your room, but your entire world, the entire earth looks different. Things and their contours vanish, sounds fade away, even those that are closest to you, those with which you live from day to day. The clocks tick minutes and hours of pain, and seconds of pain are like little needles pitilessly poking your skin, punching holes straight through your epidermis. Pain is the strongest feeling on earth, easily overcoming all other feelings and even instincts. You can't see anything, smell anything, and you don't want to: it is stronger than you are.

Gingerly turning over onto my left side, I raised myself up. Nothing hurt. I could stand without a problem, lift my arms, I could walk. So I did, but fearfully, yet my muscles moved with ease — no tightness, no tingling. I didn't feel any weakness or light-headedness. I didn't need to lean on any armchairs, nor reach for the ivory handles of the closet. An ordinary experience, yet special. There was no pain. A world without pain. Amazing. I felt like I could move moun-

tains, do a hundred jobs of the sort that I had long forgotten. I wanted to feel once more the everyday pleasure of doing them. The charm of life lies in the everyday details and work we do — I needed time to understand that. I will now try on all my clothes, I thought to myself, and get rid of the ones I don't need. I'll dig out all my make-up.

The door to the hallway was open. I could see from a distance into the entryway where Gabrielė's favorite red coat was lying on the shoe rack. She had left in a hurry, otherwise she would not have left it. Laimonas' leather jacket was also strung up on the rack, his umbrella fallen on the ground. Both of them had been in a hurry, clearly, but where? A hairbrush had been left on the dressing table, a tube of black shoe polish, the large drawer of the entryway dresser had been rummaged, scarves and ties thrown together, even a tube of toothpaste. But Laimonas' briefcase was sitting calmly in its corner on a shoebox, and Gabrielė's school backpack was hanging neatly on its hook. Where had they gone, disappeared too? I couldn't recall them saying anything to me.

# POLAND

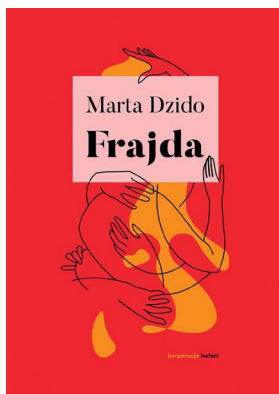
**Marta Dzido**

## **Frajda** *Pleasure*

Krakow: Korporacja Ha!art,  
2018.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

**M**arta dzido — born in 1981; writer, documentary filmmaker and film editor. Graduated at the Polish Film School in Łódź. Author of three novels: *A Mark Left by Mom* (2003), *The Clam* (2005), hypertext *Matrioszka* (2013), and a non-fiction book *Women of Solidarity* (2016). Director of photography of the documentary *Underground Women's State* (2009) and co-director of *Downtown* (2010), a documentary that won the Hollywood Eagle Documentary Award in 2011. Screenwriter, co-director and editor of *Solidarity according to Women* (2014, Krzysztof Kieslowski Beyond Borders Award, special award of Polish Film Institute) and docudrama *Women Power* (2018).



### **SYNOPSIS**

Her and him. Teenagers from the time before Facebook and Instagram. Madly in love, but avoiding the declaration in the form of the words 'I love you' like the plague. Crazy over each other. Shifting each others' boundaries in learning about young bodies. Testing emotional reactions. Experiencing all 'first times' together. The history of their romance happens in the 90s of the last century, when love letters were written with a pen on a piece of paper, when the photographs were made on film and to make a phone call you had to queue in front of the phone booth. A world free from immediacy, in which waiting accumulated the tension and longing for one another. Her and him. Kids who are not afraid



to cross the boundaries, who want to experience everything. Most of all they want to know their bodies. The hot summer is still going on, even when it is winter and everything else is frozen in January. There is a fever of two heroes, their passion, the power of attraction stronger than gravity. Somewhere in the back of their minds there is the end of the world, that is to come with the year 2000, when the comet will hit the Earth and the current civilisation will fall anyway. Him and her. Two people in their forties accidentally meet after years and realise that spark of youthful excitement is to be found in them, and the hope is not lost yet. Somewhere in

the everyday reality, between cooking dinners for children and subsequent instalments of credit, they begin to meet each other and recollect the memories of youthful passion, which at the same time pushed them towards each other and did not let them stay. They tell each other about themselves from years ago. What she remembers of him, and he of her. Their narrations changed over time, individual pieces created different versions of the same story. The heroes start to wonder what if? And face a new question: what would their life look like up till now and on? ¶

# Frajda

*Marta Dzido*



Może masz rację, może troszeczkę zwariowałam, zbyt mocno dałam się ponieść nastrojom i mówię teraz tak wszystko, tak bardzo, tak bez zastanowienia. Próbuję sobie przypomnieć twoje ciało, ale nie umiem przywołać żadnego obrazu, tylko wrażenia, fragmenty, kawałki puzzli. Wypukły pępek w kształcie spirali. Blizna na lewym udzie. Jędrny pośladek. Szorstkie włoski wokół brodawek. Jesteś teraz dla mnie pokawałkowanym wspomnieniem. Kubistycznym wzorem, rozpadającym się na mniejsze elementy. Każde ujęcie z tobą mam w zbliżeniu, żadnych planów średnich, żadnych pełnych. Nic, co dałoby tej opowieści odetchnąć. Bliskie i nieostre, drżące detale. Jeden po drugim. Przeczące wszelkim zasadom konstruowania filmowej narracji. Wypełniające cały ekran usta. Kawałek ucha. Pory skóry na bliżej nieokreślonym fragmencie ciała. Zgięcie w łokciu. Kark, gdzie kończy się naga szyja, a zaczynają włosy. Wy-stająca łopatką. Brązowy pieprzyk. W ścieżce dźwiękowej jest tylko głośny, głęboki oddech, świszczący jak pęd powietrza w otwartej przestrzeni, jak wicher hulający wśród skał, jak ryk oceanu i miarowe uderzenia fal. Taki sobie teraz wyświetlam o tobie film, zniszczoną upływem czasu jedyną kopię bez rekonstrukcji i niepokolorowaną. Dosłownie kilka niewykorzystanych nigdzie indziej ujęć, zarejestrowanych przez przypadek, jeszcze przed okrzykiem „akcja!”.

Miotnęło mną. Stężałam. Wybrzmiałam. Rozwijasz się we mnie ciągiem dalszym. Życie przyspiesza i meandruje, ale ty. Znów, jeszcze, i znów. Nasze wnętrza i nasze plenery. Nasze scenografie. Nie istnieje nic poza nami. Cały świat jest tylko makietą, na tle której możemy się całować w nieskończoność.

W mieście pachnie najpierw bzem, potem jaśminem, chwilę później lipą. Wkradamy się w rozmaite odosobnione miejsca, by tam, z dala od przypadkowych przechodniów, dać ujście pożądaniu, które pulsuje we krwi i napędza nasz wspólny nocny szal.

Brama jest zaryglowana i nie ma jak przejść górą, przez jej ostre zakończenia i zdobienia, ale pokazujesz mi dość szeroką szparę na dole, kładziesz się na chodniku i sprawdzasz, czy dałoby się prześlizgnąć. Rozglądam się, czy nikt nie widzi, i chwilę później przylegam plecami do ziemi, bokiem, ostrożnie, by nie utknąć, zmiotam włosami kurz.

Jesteśmy już po drugiej stronie. Udało się.

Najstarszy cmentarz w mieście cały dla nas. Cisza i pustka, ale jednak tłum. Trochę się waham, bo coś w środku mi mówi, że może jednak nie powinniśmy. Ale akurat w tym momencie nie mamy dokąd pójść, nie ma innego miejsca, gdzie moglibyśmy swobodnie pobyc chwilę ze sobą bez świadków. A tu jest tak niepokojąco pięknie, jest tak milcząco wśród omszałych pomników i starych rzeźb, jest tak bezpiecznie, gdy bliskość tych wszystkich wokół zakończonych istnień. Ususzonych kwiatów, dopalonych zniczy, wybrzuszających ziemię wielkich korzeni starych drzew.

Z nagłą i po omacku ściągasz mi przez głowę koszulkę i z obezwładniającą siłą przyciskasz mnie całym sobą do zimnego kamienia. Na plecach czuję przejmujący ziąb, na pier-

siach i brzuchu twój rozpalony gorąc. Przygwożdżona i jeszcze nie do końca zdecydowana, zdezorientowana prędkością rozwoju wypadków, niepewna, bo może to obrazoburcze, bo może tak nie wolno, bo może... ale gdzieś się ten racjonalizm oddala, gdzieś ten głos wewnętrznych nakazów, zakazów i powinności cichnie, kiedy zaczyna się wzmacniać we mnie to cudowne napięcie, zaczynające się w dole, w wewnętrznej stronie ud, napierające falami pragnienie nie do powstrzymania. Przyjmuję bez wahania to twoje wodzenie mnie na pokuszenie. Myślę, że skoro to jest aż tak silne, to bądź wola twoja. Wibruję, wiruję, wariuję. Jesteś dla mnie namiętny i pełny, a ja dla ciebie jędrna i soczysta. W obecności tak wielu śmierci bardziej gwałtowny i brutalniejszy niż zwykle jest ten nasz miłosny poryw. Jest w nim jakaś nie do opisania ostateczność, pęd na oślep i objawienie, które się kończy twoim we mnie wniebowstąpieniem.

Zostaje mi po tym wszystkim fioletowy odcisk na ramieniu po twoim zbyt mocnym chwycie, siniak, który w ciągu następnych dni zmienia kolor na szaroniebieski, zielonkawy, żółty. Aż w końcu znika.

(...)

Zapytałaś, czy mam z tamtych naszych czasów jakąś namacalną pamiątkę po tobie? Mam. Jedną fotografię. Jedziesz pociągiem roześmiana i podnosisz do ust butelkę z winem. Piękne jest to zdjęcie, bo mówi wszystko o nas z wtedy. Jest o naszym pędzie, o szaleństwie. O gnaniu przed siebie bez celu, o no future, o tym, że chcemy całego życia, a nawet więcej, i chcemy natychmiast. Smakujesz mi jeszcze w tamtym momencie cierpką papierówką, nie do końca dojrzałą, kwaśkowatą, ale twardą i świetnie nadającą się do schrupania. Duże oczy i buzia ni to kobiety, ni dziecka, całą sobą nadajesz



nieświadomie sygnał: zaopiekuj się mną. O tak, maleńka, zaraz się tobą zaopiekuję, na-wet nie wiesz, jak bardzo.

Nie umiem określić, dokąd na tej fotografii jedzie-my. My razem, bo ja też uwieczniłem się na tym zdjęciu, tylko że jestem po drugiej jego stronie, w przestrzeni tak zwanej poza-kadrowej, jestem tym, który nacisnął wtedy spust migawki.

Decydujący moment. Pstryk. Mam cię na wieczność.

Jaki był to kierunek, dziś nie wiem, ale wydaje mi się, że południowy. Z mgły wynurza mi się twoje do mnie nagle przywarcie. Pusty przedział tylko dla nas. Twoje ciężkie piersi, wrażliwe na dotyk. Siedzisz na moich kolanach, a po podłodze turla się pusta butelka. Brzdęk, brzdęk. Mia-rowy stukot kół.

Jest w tobie coś zwierzęcego, dzikość, w której nie ma miejsca na żadne przewidywalne czy wyuczone gesty. Chłonę całym sobą tę twoją pierwotność, a ty rzucasz się we wszystkich kierunkach, chciwa i łakoma, niespętana żadnym ograniczeniem. Słucham, jak mówi do mnie twoje ciało, i próbuję za nim nadążyć. Suniemy w mrok z prędkością sto na godzinę i tylko od czasu do czasu przefruwa za oknem jakaś luna światła albo peron widmo.

Podróż, w której to nie cel jest ważny, a droga. Jazda bez trzymanki, z górki, na łeb i na szyję, bez hamulców.

Dyszysz do mnie:

— Ty tylko o jednym...

Ja:

— A co jest jeszcze innego?

Zwalniamy w końcu w rano, w świt. Pociąg staje na stacji Zagórz. Wymiętoszeni, zgrzani do nieprzytomności, emanujący ostrym zapachem naszych wymieszanych soków wytaczamy się z wagonu w falujący żar, a przed nami jest jeszcze tydzień wakacji.

Mam też z tamtego czasu inne zdjęcie, które przedstawia mnie, ale to ty tym razem naciskasz spust. Mam półprzyknięte oczy, nagi tors, na twarzy błogie rozleniwienie. Jedziemy stopem na pacy. Pamiętasz, jak trzęsło?

Wlewał się w nas straszliwy upał, pozdejmowaliśmy z siebie wszystko, co jeszcze można było zdjąć. Spoceni, słoni od potu.

Wzięłaś mnie wtedy do ust, przyssałaś się do mnie taka ciepła, taka... masywna. Nie umiem teraz znaleźć innego słowa. Objęłaś mnie całego, a ja złapałem w garść twoje włosy związane w kucyk i rytmicznie, delikatnie za nie pociągałem. W górę i w dół.

Super mi było, zresztą sama wiesz.

Kierowca wysadził nas za zakrętem między Dwernikiem a Chmielem, nad rzeką San. W spożywczym kupiliśmy los na loterię i orzechowe wafelki.

Kiedy zasnęłaś, wrzuciłem ukradkiem ten los do ogniska. Patrzyłem, jak żżera go płomień, i w euforii, pełen endorfin czułem, że ja i tak już z tobą wszystko wygrałem. Zgarnąłem całą pulę. Z namiotu dobiegało twoje senne:

— Gdzie jesteś? Chodź do mnie.

Nie musiałaś powtarzać, od razu poszedłem.

Nie idealizuję nas, kochana, wręcz przeciwnie, wydobywam z pamięci każdą niedoskonałość, każde potknięcie i myślę teraz, że może mogłem coś wtedy inaczej, pełniej. Nie rozumiałem w tamtym czasie, nie potrafiłem, nie zdobyłem się na to, by ci powiedzieć te konkretnie dwa słowa, miałem ich przecież nigdy nie wypowiadać. Szumiałem ci tylko prosto w ucho, naśladując wiatr, licząc, że zrozumiesz to moje długie, przeciągłe wycie do ciebie, a tak naprawdę jedyne, co mi się udało, to wywołać huragan, który spustoszył twój misternie tkany krajobraz, sielankę, którą zbudowałaś, w której czekałaś na mnie.

Może pragnąłem innej kobiety na dorosłe życie. Takiej, która nie chciałaby tyle co ty przestrzeni. Tyle swobody. Kobiety, o której byłbym pewien, że jest tylko moja, że nie porwie jej prąd rzeki, że nie da się ponieść falom. Nie chciałem ciągle tylko gonić i drzeć. A ty czego chciałaś?

Nie mam pojęcia. Może powinienem był cię wtedy kochać. A może byłem na to za młody, zbyt zachłanny, nieprzygotowany. Stałem nieruchomy na brzegu i patrzyłem, jak mi odpływasz.

Wkurzony, że jesteś właśnie taka, a nie inna, że nie mogę cię opanować, że w głębi duszy pragnąłem mieć cię tylko dla siebie, na wyłączność. Schowaną do pudełeczka, zawiniętą w sreberko czekoladkę z nadzieniem.

Kucasz w lodowatym strumieniu, machasz do mnie w niebieskiej chustce na włosach i mokrych tenisówkach. Znalazłem nam za drzewami idealne miejsce, by rozbić namiot, a teraz chodzę wokół i zbieram drewno na ognisko. Przypominam sobie, jak wściekle mnie wzięłaś dziś rano, i my-

śle, że chciałbym wieczorem inaczej i odrobinę spokojniej. Czekamy, aż się rozgwieździ niebo, aż rozpali się w nas jasna noc.

Złowieszczy warkocz komety. Dym o zapachu szyszek. Ty, wilgotna ziemią i mchem.

Wsuwasz się na mnie i zastygasz znieruchomiała. I tylko w środku delikatnie zaciskasz się wokół. Nie pozwalasz, bym wykonał jakikolwiek ruch, żadnego nawet najdelikatniejszego pchnięcia, nic. Obejmujesz mnie i puszczasz, wsysasz tylko po to, by po chwili wyprzeć. Inne twoje mięśnie nawet nie drgną. Jestem w tobie, śliski, mięsisty i gotowy do strzału, a ty mnie całego w siebie przyjmujesz.

Później zapadam w ten cudowny poseksualny letarg i sam nie wiem, czy we śnie, czy na jawie mówisz do mnie niepokojąco, tak jakbyś przeczuwała nasz koniec:

— Jeżeli kiedyś będziesz zmuszony wbić nóż w moje serce, błagam, zrób to ostrożnie i zrób to z czułością.

# Pleasure

*Marta Dzido*

Translated from Polish by Kate Webster

Maybe you're right, maybe I went a little crazy, I got too caught up in the mood, and now I'm saying everything, so very much, without thinking. I'm trying to remember your body, but I can't recall an image, only impressions, fragments, pieces of the puzzle.

The spiral-shaped, protruding belly button. The scar on the left thigh. The firm buttocks. The rough little hairs around the nipples. You're a disjointed memory to me now. A cubist design, crumbling into smaller pieces. All my shots of you are close-ups, no medium or long shots. Nothing that would give this story room to breathe. Close and out of focus, details quivering. One after the other. Contradicting all the principles of constructing a film narrative. Lips that fill the entire screen. Part of an ear. Pores on the skin of an unspecified body part. The bend of an elbow. The nape where the bare neck ends and the hair begins. A protruding shoulder blade. A brown mole. The soundtrack consists of loud, deep breathing, whistling like a rush of air in an open space, like a whirlwind churning around rocks, like the roar of the ocean and the steady slapping of the waves. This is the film about you that I play, a time-worn single copy with no reconstruction or colour. Literally a few shots, unused elsewhere, recorded by accident, before anyone shouted 'action!'

I was stirred. I settled. I fell silent. You build excitement in me from episode to episode. Life hastens and meanders, but

you ... Again, still, and again. Our interiors and our open airs. Our film sets. Nothing exists but us. All the world is only a mock-up, a background against which our kisses last forever.

In the city, it smells first of lilac, then of jasmine, and soon after of linden. We sneak into various isolated places, away from random passers-by, where we can vent the lust that pulsates in our blood and drives our nocturnal frenzy.

The gate is bolted and there's no way to climb it, over its sharp points and embellishments, but you point to a wide gap at the bottom, you lie on the pavement to check whether we could slip through. I look around to make sure no one can see us, then I press myself to the ground, sideways, careful not to get stuck, my hair brushes the dust.

Success, we're on the other side.

We have the city's oldest cemetery all to ourselves. Silence and emptiness; and yet — a crowd.

I hesitate because something inside tells me that maybe we shouldn't. But at this point we have nowhere to go, there's no other place we could be together a while, freely, without witnesses. And here it is so disturbingly beautiful, so silent among the moss-covered monuments and old sculptures, so safe, the proximity of these dead beings all around. The dried-out flowers, burnt out candles, old trees with their huge roots bulging out of the ground.

All of a sudden, in the dark, you pull my top up over my head and with an overwhelming force you press me with your whole body into the cold stone. I feel a piercing chill on my back, your fevered heat on my breasts and stomach. Pinned down but not yet completely decided, disoriented by how quickly things have developed, uncertain, because maybe

it's iconoclastic, maybe it's not allowed, maybe ... But somewhere this rationalism recedes, somewhere this voice of internal dictates, prohibitions and duties falls silent, as this wonderful tension inside me begins to grow, starting low down, in the inner thighs, surging in waves of irresistible desire. Without hesitation, I let you lead me into temptation. I think: if it's this strong, then your will be done. I pulsate, I spin, I go crazy. For me you are passionate and full, for you I am firm and juicy. In the presence of so many deaths, our amorous impulse is more violent and brutal than ever. There is an indescribable necessity to it, a blind rush and a revelation that ends with your ascension in me.

Afterwards, I'm left with a purple imprint on my shoulder where you gripped me too hard, a bruise that changes colour over the next few days to grey-blue, then greenish, then yellow, until finally it disappears.

(...)

You asked me if I had any tangible mementoes of you from that time. I do. One photo. You're on the train, laughing, raising a wine bottle to your lips. It's a beautiful photo because it says everything about us then. It speaks of our hunger, of madness. Of racing ahead without a destination, of no future, of the fact that we want all of life, and more, and we want it immediately. I can still taste you in that moment, the taste of early apples, not quite ripe, slightly tart, but hard and perfectly crunchy. Big eyes and mouth, neither woman nor child, with your whole self you emit an unconscious signal: take care of me. Oh yes, little one, I'll take care of you, you have no idea how I'll take care of you.

I can't work out where we were going in this photo. The two of us, together — because I'm also in this picture, except that I'm on the other side of it, out of shot, I'm the one who pressed the shutter.

The decisive moment. Click. I have you forever.

I no longer know what direction we were headed in, probably south. Out of the mist emerges the way you were suddenly clinging to me. An empty carriage all to ourselves. Your heavy breasts, sensitive to the touch. You're sitting on my knee, the empty bottle is rolling around on the floor. Clink, clink. The rhythmic clatter of the wheels.

There's something animal inside you, a wildness that leaves no place for predictable or learned gestures. My whole being is drinking in your primitiveness, and you're thrashing about in all directions, eager and greedy, untethered by restrictions. I'm listening to your body talking to me and I'm trying to keep up with it. We're sliding into the darkness at a hundred miles an hour, and just once in a while some glimmer of light or a runaway platform flies past outside the window.

A trip where it's not the destination that counts, but the journey. A wild ride, downhill, in freefall, with no brakes.

Panting, you say: 'All you think about is ...'

I reply: 'What else is there?'

We finally slow down in the morning, at dawn. The train stops at Zagórz. Crumpled, sweated into a stupor, emanating the acrid smell of our mingled juices, we roll out of the carriage into a billowing heat, a week of holiday stretching ahead of us.



I have another photo from that period, a photo of me; this time you're the one pressing the shutter. My eyes are half-closed, my torso bare, my face a picture of blissful indolence. We're hitchhiking, in the back of a vehicle. Remember how it shook?

A terrible heatwave had been trailing us, we'd taken off whatever we could. Sweaty, salty from the sweat.

You took me into your mouth then, you latched onto me, so warm, so ... sturdy. I can't find another word for it. You wrapped your arms around me, and I grabbed your ponytail and pulled on it, rhythmic and gentle. Up and down.

It was great for me — well, you know that.

The driver dropped us at a bend in the road between Dwer-nik and Chmiel, on the River San. We bought a lottery ticket and hazelnut wafers at the grocery store.

After you'd fallen asleep, I secretly threw the ticket into the fire. I watched the flames devour it and — euphoric, full of endorphins — I felt that with you I had already won everything. I'd hit the jackpot. Your sleepy voice came from the tent: 'Where are you? Come here.'

You didn't have to ask twice, I went at once.

I don't idealise us, my love — on the contrary, I remember every imperfection, every stumble, and now I think that perhaps I could have been different then, better. I didn't understand at that time, I wasn't able, I couldn't bring myself to tell you those three specific words. After all, I was never supposed to say them. I just whispered straight into your ear, mimicking the wind, hoping you would understand my long, drawn-out howl, and the only thing I succeeded in doing was evoking a hurricane, which ravaged your intricate-

ly woven landscape, the idyll you had built, in which you were waiting for me.

Maybe I was craving another woman for adult life. One who wouldn't want as much room as you. As much freedom. A woman who I could be certain was mine alone, who wouldn't be carried away by the river current, nor seized by the waves. I didn't want to just keep chasing and trembling. And you, what did you want?

I have no idea. Maybe I should have loved you then. Or maybe I was too young, too greedy, unprepared. I stood motionless on the shore and watched you drift away from me.

Annoyed that you were the way you were, not different, that I couldn't control you, that in the depths of my soul I wanted to have you only for myself, exclusively. Tucked away in a box, a praline-filled chocolate wrapped in foil.

You're squatting in an ice-cold stream, waving at me, wearing a blue headscarf and wet trainers. I've found a perfect place behind the trees to pitch our tent, now I'm wandering around collecting wood for the fire. I remember how voraciously you'd taken me that morning, and I think that I'd like it differently in the evening, a bit calmer. We wait for the sky to fill with stars, for the bright night to be kindled inside us.

An ominous comet tail. The smoke smells of pinecones. You, damp with soil and moss.

You slide on top of me and freeze still. Inside, you're gently clenching around me. You don't let me make the slightest movement, not even the gentlest thrust, nothing. You grasp and ungrasp me, you suck me in, only to oust me a moment

later. Your other muscles don't even twitch. I am in you, slippery, fleshy and ready to fire, and you take all of me inside you.

Later I fall into a wonderful post-coital lethargy and I don't know whether I'm asleep or awake when you say to me — disconcertingly, as if you could sense our end: 'If you ever have to stick a knife in my heart, I beg you, do it carefully and do it with tenderness.'

# ROMANIA

**Tatiana Țîbuleac**

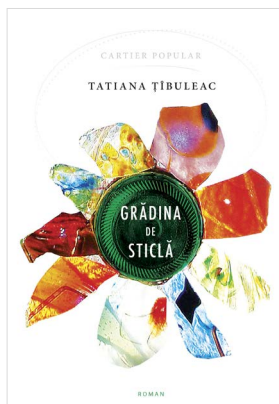
## **Grădina de sticlă**

*Glass garden*

Chisinau: Editura Cartier,  
2018.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

**T**atiana Țîbuleac was born in 1978 in Chișinău, Republic of Moldova, and has Moldovan and Romanian nationality. She studied at the Faculty of Journalism and Communications of the Moldova State University. She first came to the attention of a wide public in 1995, as writer of the 'True Stories' column in the Flux daily newspaper. In 1999, she joined the team at PRO TV Chișinău as a reporter, editor and news anchor and also worked in Moldova for Unicef. Since 2008 she has been living in Paris. She made her debut as a writer in 2014 with a collection of short stories *Fabule Moderne* — Modern Tales, from Urma Ta Publishing House, Chișinău. In 2017 her first novel appeared: *Vara în care mama a avut ochii verzi* — The Summer when my Mother had Green Eyes, Cartier Publishing House, was awarded the prize of the Writer's Union of Moldova, the prize of the *Observer Cultural* literary magazine in Bucharest



and the Observator Lyceum prize at the FILIT festival in Iași. The novel has been translated into French and Spanish.

*Grădina de sticlă* — The Glass Garden is her second novel.

### **SYNOPSIS**

*Grădina de sticlă* is a Bildungsroman about an orphan, a life-proven girl. Although the subject implies the risk of melodrama, the author avoids the trap through a stylistic masterpiece. Taken from the orphanage by a Russian woman, Lastochka is forced by her adoptive mother to pick up empty bottles and wash them, in a yard of miracles in the Chișinău of the 80s, where the Russian and Romanian languages are in a continuous challenge over all sorts of stories of life. The history



of Lastochka implies several themes: search for identity, construction of femininity and the maternal theme, along with an intense orchestration of sentiments and resentments of both love and hate. In a gripping way the author creates the day-to-day universe, scene after scene, one touch after the other. The girl-woman-mother recalls her childhood, unreal and miraculous as it was, as well as her adult metamorphosis, torn apart

by a tragic maternity. The novel contains an undisputed historical, even political dimension, which touches the themes of Bessarabian-Romanian relationship and the fall of communism. The subtle tension is controlled not only by thematic, but also through challenges, both in vocabulary and topics. Elliptic and passionate, Tatiana Țîbuleac's writing is about the searching of our place in the world. ¶

# Grădina de sticlă

*Tatiana Țîbuleac*



Mi-ați spus că sunt o cățea sentimentală, vă mușc până la lapte.



Mă nasc noaptea, am șapte ani. M-ar lua în brațe, îmi spune, însă are mâinile ocupate. De sus luminează o lampă albastră, legată de un copac cu un cablu. Se leagănă. Las capul pe spate și o văd mai bine: e rotundă, ca o pâine netăiată. Trece prin Porți ca printr-o burtă de piatră. Așa e la oraș, mă gândesc. Tot într-o vale, mereu la vale, drumul. Gheața ne cuprinde tălpile, strada se scurtează. Îmi întinde buzunarul ei ca să nu lunec. Și să mă uit în jur, să văd și eu frumusețe! Lumina aceea cernută. Cerul acela cu stelele fugite. Blocuri, blocuri, blocuri. Niciunul mai înalt de patru. Niciunul mai lat de patru. Buzunarul ei are blană, unghia ia foc. În geamuri, oameni mici se văd trăind frumos. Mii de pătrate cu mijloc de pară. Unii lângă alții, unii peste alții. Cei de jos îi țin pe umeri și pe ceilalți. Sunt puternici cei de jos. Un câine – albastru – se ia după noi cu urmele lui mici. La oraș totul e patru și albastru, mă gândesc. Și să nu rămân în urmă, să nu rămân în urmă niciodată. Lângă un gard ne oprim. Закрый глаза и забудь все. Nu înțeleg nimic, uit totul într-o secundă.

Închide ochii și uită totul. (rus.)



Nicio altă dimineață nu a fost ca aceea, prima, când m-am trezit în patul ei. Dormisem exact pe mijloc, ca o umplutură. Cinci fete ar fi încăput lângă mine dacă ne-am fi culcat toate de-a curmezișul. Așa trăiesc bomboanele, m-am gândit. Învelite în straturi foșnitoare până când le mănâncă vreo gură. La internat aveam doar o pătură. A mea mirosea a soareci, dar se putea și mai rău. În jurul meu lumina țâșnea din lucruri cum nu mai văzusem. Chiar și din scaune, chiar și din pereți. La geam – o lume nouă. Un ram cu boabe ca mărgelele. Un animal fermecat. Pe cer, amestecate, vârfuri de copaci și păsări. O voce a pornit spre mine. Ты проснулась? M-a deschis ca o cheie, și-a găsit loc între coaste, pe stânga. M-am ridicat din pat având mamă. Ce mirare să nu mai fiu orfană, ce frică să ajung din nou într-o secundă! Ласточка, m-a numit și așa a început să mă cheme.

Am mâncat în trei rânduri și s-a făcut amiază. Ceaiul ei avea miros, pâinea – unt, untul – miere. De la prea mult, a început să mă doară în stânga. Gazul ardea ca un nufăr albastru. La radio se auzea frumos ЛЮБОВЬ, ЛЮБОВЬ, ЛЮБОВЬ. Tamara Pavlovna asculta, zâmbind subțire, camera se umplea de cald. Mi-a arătat casa și s-a făcut seară. Ziua aceea o port cu mine în toate țările, în toate stările. Nu i-am găsit pereche nici în bani, nici în dragoste. Nimeni nu m-a vrut mai mult. Nici chiar voi.

Te-ai trezit? (rus.) Rândunică. (rus.) Iubirea, iubirea, iubirea. (rus.)



Nu că ar fi fost o profesie – primitul sticlelor –, dar nici nimic nu era. În capul Tamarei Pavlovna creștea o scară pe care oamenii urcau după merit. Pe scara aceea, noi ne aflam

sub poștași, însă deasupra vânzătorilor de cvas. Scrisorile puteau fi și documente, pe când cvasul, odată băut, nu-ți mai aducea bani în vecie. Iată, să zicem, o sticlă. O sticlă, chiar și goală, chiar și pișată, chiar și străină, te putea îmbogăți. Asta dacă nu erai putoare sau bețiv, iar noi nu eram. Noi știam să adunăm și adunam. Cu mâinile înțepenite de frig, cu stomacurile întoarse de greață, noi adunam. Banii câștigați pe loc gol. Averea din nimic. Pentru ei și-a transformat ea viața într-o umblătură continuă. Pentru bani m-a crescut și pe mine. Nu din inimă albastră, cum am crezut în primele luni: pentru și mai mulți bani.

Îmbătrânea și îi trebuia un ajutor, mi-a spus. Cred însă că voia, așa cum vor la un moment dat toți părinții și stăpânii de animale, recunoștință. Și i-am dat-o, i-o dau. Recunoștință din partea mea are din plin. Oricare i-a fost interesul din mintea ei hapsână, anume ea mi-a fost mamă. Dar cu ce preț? La ce bun să ridici un orb pe un vârf de munte? De ce să acoperi cu trandafiri proaspeți un hoit? Cu cât îmi cumpăra mai multe, cu atât voiam mai puține. Inimă avea, nu zic nu, doar că din altfel de carne ca a mea. Inima ei voia aur, a mea, stele. Ar plânge, mă întreb, dacă ar auzi ce spun acum? Ar plânge, știu. Nerecunoștința taie adânc. Nemernica asta mică, bastarda asta urâtă, doare cel mai tare. Nici să o ierți, nici să o pedepsești – o proastă.



De la internat nu mă luase, ci mă cumpărase. Asta am aflat mai târziu, deși nu destul de târziu ca să nu mă chinuie niște ani. Nu am întrebat-o niciodată cât i-a plătit directoarei și acum regret. Mi-ar fi plăcut să transform suma aceea în sticle și să știu și eu cât a costat viața mea. Aș fi cumpărat mai apoi acele sticle, v-aș fi găsit și vi le-aș fi răsturnat pe toate în cap. Să vă sparg și eu cum m-ați spart voi pe mine. Mă simt



vinovată că o vorbesc de rău pe Tamara Pavlovna. Și pentru asta tot pe voi vă urăsc. Uneori mă gândesc că, dacă o să vă urăsc cu un centimetru mai mult, ura mea va face un cerc complet și va ajunge la dragoste. De centimetrul acesta mă tem cel mai tare, din cauza lui amân totul.



După ce înșiram rufele, mă așezam la colțul blocului ca să le păzesc. Vara ni le păzea Șurocika de la balcon. Iarna însă nu putea, pentru că era prea frig. Îmi venea greu să cred că cineva s-ar fi încumetat să fure boarfe înghețate și apoi să alerge cu ele pe străzi, dar nu m-am opus niciodată. Abia așteptam să am o zi doar pentru mine, fără a scormoni prin gunoaie. Strigam de câteva ori „pâs-pâs-pâs” și, în câteva secunde, Morkovka venea șnur la mine și mi se cățara în poală. Ierni ca acelea nu mai sunt. Pisici ca aceea nu se mai fată. Dihania mea fermecată!

Spre seară le adunam. Scoteam din casă coșul cel mare și îmi înfășuram în jurul gâtului ața pentru cârlige. Aveam de făcut mai multe drumuri. Ceea ce în dulap ocupa o poliță, afară se întindea pe trei metri. Primele trebuiau aduse perdelele. Le târam subsuoară ca pe niște uși, având grijă să nu le lovesc de vreo mașină parcată sau vreun stâlp. Dacă așa ceva se întâmpla, Tamara Pavlovna spăla acel lucru din nou, înjurându-mă lung. Finețurile, la fel, se aduceau cu mare chin, pentru că aveau horboțele care se puteau frânge la ger. Așa am stricat acoperământul pentru televizor și n-am mai avut nume în iarna aceea. Din tot ce exista în casă, cel mai mult îmi plăcea fața de masă din salon. Era rotundă, dintr-o mătase galben-aurie și avea franjuri moi care se terminau în noduri. I-o adusesse Mihail de ziua ei, iar asta o făcea și mai prețioasă. Îmi plăcea la nebunie fața aceea de masă! Atunci când îngheța, franjurile i se întindeau drept

și, pentru câteva ore, devenea soare. Cu ea în brațe despicam orice iarnă.



Nu-mi fac iluzii cu Tamara mea. Nici-u-na. La bătrânețe, voi rămâne singură ca o lepră și toate fricile mele – pe care acum le țin în cătușe, în menghine, sub ghilotinele cu lamele ridicate – se vor năpusti asupra mea ca o haită. E mai bine așa. Să știi că nimeni, dar mai ales cei cu care îți pierzi anii și banii, nu-ți va fi alături la sfârșit. Ce ușurare să afli că lipsa celui pe care îl iubești este justificată. Că golul din inimă nu este eșecul tău și nici al altcuiva. Văd, înțeleg că Tamara nu va putea să aibă grijă de mine, iar asta mă face să îi dau și mai multe. Să o iubesc și mai disperat. Ce folos că Tamara Pavlovna m-a crescut de mică? Câte câni cu apă i-am dus, de câte ori i-am răcorit fruntea? Eu, la nebuni, Tamara – la spital. Cine se mai bagă? Vouă cine vă netezește sfârșitul?



După câte amintiri devine omul alcoolic, după câte trădări se înnegrește inima unui copil? Nu trebuia să mă fac doctor, nu trebuia. Pe unii oameni meseria îi înveninează, iar după Tamara mea ar fi fost corect să nu mă apropii de copiii altora. Îi privesc când se nasc – moi și neputincioși – și mă gândesc că măcar ei vor fericiți. Cu mame, iată, cu tați. Cu bani. Apoi îi văd cum își înfig maxilarele în cele care i-au născut și trag din ele ca niște câini tineri. Ce este durerea altui om pe lângă propria foame? Cruzimea. Cruzimea este deja acolo, în ei, fremătând ca o floare roșie. Crește cruzimea într-un om mai repede decât unghiile, decât părul, decât dinții. Femeia aceea care a născut un băiat mort – m-am dus totuși la ea – mi-a spus că, oricum, se consideră mamă. Că moartea nu a făcut decât să o treacă peste niște etape. Toți ajungem

acolo – *și viii, și morții, și ceilalți între*. M-au încolțit cuvintele ei și stau cu capul plin de ele. Le tot gândesc, le întorc, le vreau adevăr și pentru mine. *Și ceilalți între*. Moartea! Moartea, oricum, face ce vrea ea. Dar ce se întâmplă când viața te trece peste niște etape? Când vezi că mai ai carne și putere, iar ea, viața, te trimite la sfârșitul cozii și te privește ca pe un aproape mort. Eu sunt între, Tamara e între. Toată viața mea a fost între. Măcar cu două etape înapoi aș vrea. Măcar fără această mare amăgire care s-a vrut dragoste.



Sunt pe lume astfel de oameni care, dacă nu povestesc, n-au cum să trăiască. Pentru ei, pentru acești oameni, mereu frumoși și adeseori nebuni, viața trebuie să fie o poveste. Pentru că, doar acolo, între coastele ei moi și fermecate, se împacă ei cu răul și cu durerea, cu bolile și cu trădările, pentru că știu. Știu că o poveste nu lasă niciodată lucrurile nerezolvate. O poveste – chiar și cea mai scurtă, chiar și cea mai tristă – are mereu grijă să facă dreptate.

# Glass Garden

*Tatiana Țîbuleac*

Translated from Romanian

by Andrew Davidson-Novosivschei

You called me a sentimental bitch and I'll chew you down to  
your mother's milk for that.



I'm born at night, I'm already seven. She says she'd hold me,  
but her arms are busy. A blue light turns on overhead, tied  
to a tree with a cable. It swings. I lay my head back and I can  
see it better: it's round like unsliced bread. We pass through  
the Gates as if through a stone belly. That's how the city is, I  
think. Downhill, the road is always downhill. Ice grabs the  
soles of our feet, the street shrinks. She lends me her pocket,  
so I don't slip. And I can look around at all that beauty! That  
softened light. That sky with stars in hiding. Blocks, blocks,  
blocks of flats. None more than four tall. None more than  
four wide. Her pocket is furry. My fingernail is burning.  
The nice lives of little people in the windows. Thousands of  
squares with a pear in the middle. Side by side, one on top  
of the other. The ones below hold onto the others' shoulders.  
They are strong — the ones below. A dog — blue — follows  
us with its little pawprints. That's how the city is, I think:  
fours and blues. And never fall back, never get left behind!  
We stop next to a fence. Закрой глаза и забудь всё\*. I don't  
understand anything. I forget in a second.

\*Close your eyes and forget everything.



There was no morning like the one when I woke up in her bed. I slept right in the middle, like a nut in chocolate. Five girls could have fit in with me if we had to. That's how candies live, I thought. Wrapped in rustling layers until a mouth eats them. At the orphanage, I only had a blanket. Mine smelled like mice, but it could have been worse. Around me, light jumped out of things like I'd never seen before. Out of chairs, out of walls. A new world at the window. The berries like beads on a branch. A magical beast. In the sky, tree tops and birds mixed together. A voice towards me: Ты проснулась\*? It turns me like a key, finds an opening on the left side of my ribs. I get out of bed and suddenly have a mother. What a relief to no longer be an orphan, what fear that I could become one again. She said, Ласточка\*\*, and that became my name.

We ate three times and it turned into afternoon. Her tea had a smell, the bread — the butter, the butter — the honey. My left side started to hurt from eating too much. The gas burned like a blue water lily. The radio was singing любовь, любовь, любовь\*\*\*. Tamara Pavlovna listened, her lips pursed, the room filled with warmth. She showed me her house and it turned into evening. I keep that day with me in every thought, in every breath. I couldn't find its equal in money or love. Nobody wanted me more. Not even you.

\*Are you awake?

\*\*Swallow

\*\*\*love, love, love



It wasn't exactly a job — collecting glass — but it was something. There was a ladder in Tamara Pavlovna's head, and people could climb it based on merit. On that ladder, we found ourselves below postmen, but above salesmen of kvas. Letters could be valuable, whereas the kvas, once drunk, was gone forever. Take a bottle. Even empty, even pissed in, even someone else's bottle could make you rich. As long as you're not lazy or a drunkard, and we weren't. We knew how to collect, and we collected. We collected with our hands frozen-numb, with our stomachs heaving from the smell. Money out of nothing. Earnings from nothing. This kept her going. This made her raise me. Not from a good blue heart, as I thought in the first few months. Just for more money.

She was getting older and needed help, she said. But I think what she wanted was what all parents and pet owners eventually want: gratitude. And that's what I gave her, that's what I give her. Gratitude she can have. Despite all her selfish ideas, she was the only mother I had. But at what cost? What good is it to take a blind man to the top of a mountain? Why cover a corpse with fresh roses? The more she bought me, the less I wanted. She had a heart, I won't deny it, but it was of another order than mine. Her heart wanted gold, mine wanted stars. Would she cry if she could hear what I'm saying, I wonder? I know she'd cry. Ungratefulness, the nasty bitch, cuts deep. Forgive her, punish her — all the same, the stupid idiot.



She didn't adopt me from the orphanage, she bought me. I learned that later, though not so much later that it didn't eat away at me for a few years. I never asked how much she

paid and I regret it now. I would have liked to exchange that money into glass bottles to know how much my life was worth. Then I would have taken those bottles, found you and smashed them over your head. To break you like you broke me. I feel guilty for speaking ill of Tamara Pavlovna. And I hate you for that. Sometimes I think that, if I hated you just a fraction more, my hatred would come full circle and become love. This fraction scares me the most. That's why I keep postponing everything.



After hanging out the clothes, I sat at the corner of the block of flats on lookout. In the summer, Șurocika was the lookout from the balcony. In the winter, she couldn't do it because of the cold. It was hard for me to believe that someone would steal frozen old clothes and run off with them through the streets, but I never objected. I wanted a day to myself, without rummaging through trash. I'd call a few times, 'pss, pss, pss', and in a few seconds Morkovka snuck up to me and climbed into my lap. There aren't winters like that anymore. There aren't cats like that anymore. This magical beast!

I finished towards evening. I took the big basket out of the house and I wrapped the clothesline around my neck. I had to make several trips. What took up one rack in the closet, outside was spread over three metres. First, I had to take in the frozen curtains. They were like doors and I pulled them along under my arm, taking care not to hit a parked car or a pillar. If I did, Tamara Pavlovna would wash them again, cursing me the whole time. The same with the fine embroidery. They had to be carried carefully because they had ribbons that could break in the cold. That's how I cracked the embroidered TV cover, and I went through that winter nameless. Of all the things in the house, my favourite

was the tablecloth in the living room. It was round, a yellow-gold silk, and had soft bordering with knots around the edges. Mihail brought it for her birthday, which made it even more precious. I was mad about that tablecloth! When it froze, that bordering stuck straight out and, for a few hours, it looked like the sun. With it in my arms, I could cut through any winter.



I don't have any illusions about Tamara. Not at all. When I'm old, I'll be alone as a leper and all my fears — all strapped down tightly in guillotines with their blades up — will escape and run me down like a pack of wolves. It's better that way, knowing that no one will be with you at the end, especially those who you waste time and money on. What a relief to know that the absence of the one you love is justified. That the emptiness in your heart isn't your fault, or anyone else's. I can see, I understand that Tamara wouldn't be able to take care of me, but this just makes me give her even more. To love her even more hopelessly. What good is it that Tamara Pavlovna raised me? How many cups of water had I brought her, how many times did I cool her forehead? Me in the madhouse, Tamara in the hospital. Anyone else in? Who's watching when everything comes to the end?



How many memories make a person an alcoholic, how many betrayals make a child's heart black? I shouldn't have become a doctor, I shouldn't have. Work poisons some people, but after my Tamara, it wouldn't have been right for me to be around other people's children. I see them at birth — soft and helpless — and I think, at least they'll be happy. With mothers, look, and fathers. With money. Then I see how they



latch on to the one who gave birth to them, and they suckle on her like little dogs. What is one person's pain to another's hunger? Cruelty. That cruelty is already in there, in them, thriving like a red flower. Cruelty grows in a person more quickly than fingernails, than hair, than teeth. The woman who gave birth to a stillborn boy—I still went to her. She said she feels like a mother. Death just accelerated some parts of the process. We all wind up there—the living, the dead, and all those in between. Her words took root in me and they fill my head. I still think of them, I turn them around, I want them to be true for myself. And all those in between. Death! Death does what it wants anyway. But what happens when some parts of life get away from you? When you see that you still have flesh and strength, but life somehow sends you to the end of the line and looks at you like you're almost dead. I'm in between, Tamara's in between. My whole life was in between. I'd like to take at least two steps back. And avoid this bitter disappointment that called itself love.



There are people in this world who simply cannot live without telling stories. For them, these people, always beautiful and usually insane, life needs to be a story. Because, only there, between its soft, enchanted ribs, can they accept evil and pain, sickness and betrayal. Because they know. They know that a story never leaves things unresolved. Even the shortest, saddest story always makes sure that things are put right.



# SLOVAKIA

**Ivana Dobrákovová**

## **Matky a kamionisti**

*Mothers and lorry drivers*

Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2018.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

**Ivana Dobrákovová** is a Slovak writer and translator based in Turin. Her literary debut, a collection of short stories entitled *Prvá smrť v rodine* / *First Death in the Family* (2009), was shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera prize and won a Ján Johanides Award in the category Best Fiction by a Young Writer. Her second novel, *Bellevue* (2010), also nominated for the Anasoft Litera, portrays the experience of a young Slovak woman who has a nervous breakdown after taking a summer job in an international youth camp at a centre for disabled people near Marseille. Dobrákovová's third book, the short story collection *Toxo* (2013), was shortlisted for the Anasoft Litera in 2014, and her latest book, *Matky a kamionisti* / *Mothers and Lorry Drivers* (2018) has also been nominated for the prize.



### **SYNOPSIS**

Set in the streets of Bratislava and Turin, the book comprises the interlinked stories of five women — three Slovaks and two Italians — that complement, blend into and contradict one another, taking place in the women's bodies and their relationships, on the internet, in a riding school and in the Vanchiglia district of Turin but, first and foremost, inside their heads. Women's relationships with their mothers and lorry drivers, some virtual, some all too real, and some non-existent. ¶

# Matky a kamionisti

Ivana Dobráková



## Otec

Vyberiem jeden obraz, netvrdím, že čosi vystihuje, poznám ho len z rozprávania, sama si nič také nevybavujem: Sedím vedľa svojej sestry na pohovke v obývačke a spolu sa pozerať na rozprávky. Sestra je odo mňa o štyri roky staršia, v tej chvíli môže mať tak šesť, ja asi o niečo menej než dva roky, otec je v kuchyni. Bývame na hradnom vršku, pri Mudroňovej, v tej najsamskvelejšej bratislavskej štvrti, v garáži máme krásny Ford, v obývačke kozub a z balkóna výhľad na Rakúsko. Už rok chodím do jasieľ, lebo obaja moji rodičia pracujú.

Vojde mama, uťahaná z práce, obvešaná nákupmi, a tak nás tam nájde. Moja sestra so sopľom až niekde na kolenách, vďaka ktorému však aspoň necíti, že jej mladšia sestrička Svetlana je totálne posratá, so skrz-naskrz presratou plienkou, otec, áno, v kuchyni, ale spiaci, s hlavou položenou na obruse, vedľa fľaše. Čohosi. Netreba upresňovať, každému jasné.

Niečo by som však upresniť chcela. Otec s nami nebýval. Často k nám cez týždeň chodil, často prespával, ale trvale bydlisko mal inde, v dedinke na maďaroch, pri jazerách, kam sme sa v lete chodili kúpať. Keď sa rodičia zobrali, mama aj plánovala, že odíde za manželom, veď už bola tehotná s mojou sestrou, ale bývala v takej peknej časti Bratislavy, ko-

zub, výhľad atď., preto sa na poslednú chvíľu rozhodla, že nie, ona k Maďarom nepôjde. Možno v tom má trochu prsty moja teta, mamina sestra, celý čas jej dohovárala, veď tí by ňa nikdy neprijali za svoju, bola by si tam navždy cudzinkou. A ešte k tomu k svokre. Daj na mňa. Dala, mama. Lenže potom sa zaťal aj otec. Jeho domov je tam. A bodka. Skrátka, bývali oddelene. Aspoň prvé roky. Než sa zhoršil otcov zdravotný stav.

Vlastne neviem, čo povedať o otcovi, o tých prvých rokoch. Bol plešatý. Hrozne sa mi to páčilo. Volala som jeho plešinu kolo kolo mlynské. Tiež som chcela mať také kolo na hlave. Jedného dňa, presne si ten moment vybavujem, som vybrala zo šitíčka nožnice a vystrihala si dieru do vlasov. Celá hrdá som sa išla ukázať mame. Na jej reakciu si už nespomínam, ale spomínam si, ako to potom každému rozprávala. Okrídlená rodinná historka.

Vybavujem si aj dedinu na maďaroch. V Bratislave otec pracoval na Technickej univerzite, ale doma bol drobný roľník, hospodár, vždy s rýľom, motyčkou, hrabľami či hadicou, do pol pásu obnažený. Jeho záhrada sa mi zdala v detstve obrovská, hotové kráľovstvo, kde sa dalo driapať po stromoch, spadnúť do studne, spotiť sa v skleníku. Ohromilo ma, keď som sa neskôr dozvedela, že otcova záhrada je len zlomok pôvodného hospodárstva, ktoré naďapovi znárodnili komunisti. Siahalo vraj až k jazerám. To by bolo, skákať do vody priamo zo záhrady, mať aj kone a nielen tie sliepky a králiky, čo chovala naďmama.

Chodili sme tam na víkendy a pri jazerách sme trávili aj celé letá. Naďmama ešte žila a hovorila viac-menej len po maďarsky, na miestnych bastardov pokrikovala kiškuťu, robila nám so sestrou palacinky, o ktorých by som rada vyhlásila, že boli najlepšie na svete, ale pravdupovediac, už neviem,

aké boli. Spolu so synom sa starala o záhradu, o to malé hospodárstvo. V skleníku pestovala sadenice, ktoré potom predávala na trhu. Mama sa spočiatku aj snažila byť užitočná a priučiť sa čomusi od svokry, pomáhať, ale veľmi rýchlo pochopila, že jej sestra mala pravdu. Márna snaha. Všetko, čo robila, bolo zle a ištenem, haďd, nešegíč. Nadmama ju odháňala od sadeníc takmer ako nejakého bastarda, ktorý by sa k nám prevliekol cez deravý plot. Až si mama napokon povedala, dobre teda, aj ja toho mám dosť. A venovala sa už len kvetom v predzáhradke a okrasným drevinám. Neskôr začala dokonca tvrdiť, že skôr než by šla predávať na trh s káričkou plnou sadeníc, rozvedie sa.

Otec veľa cestoval a rád na svojich cestách fotil. V spálni mal skriňu plnú žltých obálok s vyvolanými fotkami, v ktorých som sa často hrabala. Otec dokázal cvaknúť dvadsaťkrát tú istú skalú cez sklo autobusu, otec dokázal vyfotiť tri filmy rozmazaných Niagarských vodopádov, otec nemal na foteenie žiadne vlohy. Našla som aj fotky otca v spoločnosti veľmi krikľavo namaľovaných a oblečených žien, ktoré vyzerali čudne a až o veľa rokov neskôr som to dokázala pomenovať presnejšie – vulgárne. Fotky, na ktorých objíma cudzie vulgárne ženské v akýchsi podnikoch, sú jediné, na ktorých vidno aj jeho. Inak len krajinky.

Otec sa na cestách spoznal s mnohými cudzincami, tých neskôr pozval k sebe domov, do rozľahlého poschodového domu, ktorý postavil tesne po páde komunizmu, hneď vedľa nadmaminho klasického dedinského domčeka. Otec na leto prenajímal izby rekreantom, čo sa chceli máčať v jazerách, a niekedy aj svojim zahraničným známostiam. Raz som s jedným z nich, istým Pančom z Peru, išla na futbalový zápas. Teda takto, pôvodne sme sa vybrali na kolotoče na druhej strane jazier, ale nechali sme sa strhnúť davom, ktorý sa práve v tom čase valil na futbalový štadión. On ne-

hovoril po slovensky, ja po anglicky, dorozumievali sme sa posunkami. Ale vlastne sme si na tom futbalovom zápase, ktorý nás oboch nudil, povedali len jednu vec. Panča ukázal na moje topánky a povedal, že sú pretty, nice. Toľko som ešte pochopila. Doma bolo potom ťažké vysvetliť, prečo sme išli na futbal.

Sestra si zo mňa neustále uťahovala. Raz mi narozprávala, že naše jazerá vznikli z pľuvancov. Kedysi to tam vybagrovali a ostala tam taká škaredá jama, že každý, kto šiel okolo, si musel znechutene odpľuť. A postupne, rokmi, sa to nazbieralo. Tie sliny. Neverila som jej, ale tá predstava bola odporná. Musím však dodať, že ma tiež naučila skákať hlavičky z mostíka. A robiť kotrmelce pod vodou. Spolu sme plávali na ostrov. Aj s otcom. Mama spomína, ako som sa raz pri jazerách stratila. Mala som vtedy štyri roky. Otec so sestrou ma nikde na okolí nevideli a už bol čas ísť. Išli teda. Doma otec mame povedal: veď ona príde aj sama. A mal pravdu, než mama upadla do mdlôb, prišla som.

Otec bol jasný patriarchát. Naďapa si vzal naďmamu len preto, že bola najlepšia pracantka na jeho pozemkoch a ako manželku ju už nemusel platiť. Otec tieto názory prebral, s obľubou hovorieval, že žena má pracovať na poli a keď je unavená, má si oddýchnuť pri domácich prácach. Ale ako som už spomínala – mama sa veľmi skoro zaľala pre tie sadenice a pod náporom naďmaminho kritizovania a zalamovania rukami a neskôr už len odpočívala pri prácach vo veľkom dome.

Občas zavárala jahodový lekvár. Otec ju chválil. Svojským spôsobom. Vraj je takmer taký dobrý ako z obchodu.

Bol tiež hrdý na svoje vydreté detstvo, na svoje vzdelanie, ktoré dosiahol len vďaka svojej inteligencii. Keď sa narodil, naďapa s naďmamou žili v šope v strede záhrady, kde

nebola elektrina, tečúca voda, len udupaná hlinená podlaha, neďaleko studňa, všetko z dreva. Otec si cez leto vždy z vlastnej iniciatívy vypracoval všetky matematické príklady z učebníc na nadchádzajúci školský rok a potom sa na hodinách zúfalo nudil. Neskôr študoval na univerzite v Prahe. V tom čase mal už dosť veľký problém s alkoholom. Raz bol taký ožratý, že sa z krčmy nevládal dostať po vlastných na internát. Problém však vyriešil logicky. Keďže krčma bola na kopci a internát na úpätí, lahol si na zem a zgúľal sa až k dverám internátu.

Naďapa mu po vyštudovaní ukázal zošit, kam si zapisoval všetky výdavky na jeho štúdium. Nič od neho nežiadal späť, len mu to ukázal, aby otec vedel, koľko stál tento špás, koľko naďapa minul na jeho školy. Mama vraví, že otec mu to nikdy neodpustil.



Čo viem o vzťahu svojich rodičov? Radšej nič? Je to bezpečnejšie? Niečo na ňom mama musela vidieť. Ale čo?

Raz jej vraj pred ľuďmi povedal, že je nielen múdra, ale aj krásna. Muselo to byť ojedinelé vyhlásenie, výnimočná pochvala, keď si na to tak dobre spomína. Keď jej to utkvelo v pamäti. Keď sa mi s tým zverila.

Jeho alkoholizmus bol vždy prítomný, a preto som ho odmala vnímala ako jeho neoddeliteľnú súčasť, ako čosi, čo k nemu patrí, čo tak má byť. Podobne ako chorobu. Je zbytočné dohadovať sa, čo bolo skôr, vajce či sliepka, čo zapríčinilo čo, labilná duševná konštitúcia, odveký sklon k pitiu, genetické predispozície na jedno aj druhé, obe veci sa navzájom preplietli, posilnili, až sa stali jeho samotnou podstatou.

A predsa niektoré epizódy vystupujú do popredia.



Raz v noci nás mama vytiahla z postele. Na konci s nervami. Dievčatá, vstávajte, dievčatá, poďte povedať apukovi, že bývame o poschodie vyššie. So sestrou sme sa v pyžamách vy-potácali na chodbu. Rozospaté. Nič sme nechápali. Otec na druhom poschodí vytrvalo zvonil susedovi, hoci sused stál v otvorených dverách a snažil sa mu v tom brániť. Všetky tri sme potom otca spoločnými silami vytiahli hore schodmi domov. Nevieť presne, kedy to bolo. Koľko som mala rokov. Sestra so mnou ešte chodila do školy, takže som mohla byť taká tretiačka. Jeden z prvých takýchto incidentov. Zdalo sa mi to bizarné. Ako sen. Ako nočné dobrodružstvo, ktoré predznamenaloby dobrodružnú mladosť.

Tá škvrna tam ešte stále je. V tej našej krásnej bytovke, garáž, kozub, výhľad na Rakúsko. A tá škvrna. Vo výťahu. Výťah bude mať možno už aj štyridsať rokov, nie sú v ňom také tie vnútorné dvierka. V našom výťahu vidíte, ako ubiehajú poschodia. Otec sa raz v noci vracal domov, namol opitý, a chcel sa oprieť o stenu. Oprel sa o ubiehajúce poschodie. Rozrazil si čelo do krvi. Dlhá tmavohnedá škvrna medzi prvým a druhým poschodím.

Čoraz častejšie prespával u nás v Bratislave. Chodil do Albrechta. Trávil tam celé popoludnia. Priamo oproti oknám mojej triedy. Niekedy som ho zazrela. Uprene som ho sledovala, opretá o parapet, ako ide do krčmy. Nikomu som, samozrejme, nepovedala, že aha, tam je môj otec. Ani sestre. Tá bola na druhom poschodí budovy, ale okná jej triedy smerovali inam. Na ulici sa mi naopak párkrát stalo, že som si ho vôbec nevšimla. Kráčal oproti mne a ja stále rovno za nosom, sklený pohľad. Napokon ma silno chytil za plece a obrátil k sebe. Doma som si potom vypočula, ako sa v kuchyni sťažuje mame, že sa k nemu nepriznávam, že sa zaňho hanbím. Vtedy to však ešte nebola pravda.

Niekedy v tom čase sa k nemu pridala aj sestra. Alebo vlastne, asi až keď chodila na strednú. A nepridala sa priamo k nemu, len sa vybrala v jeho šlapajach. Občas síce zakotvila aj u Albrechta, ale častejšie sa vybrala kamsi so svojimi kamarátmi. Albáncami. To už mama prestávala zvládať. Najprv manžel, a teraz aj dcéra. Raz sa sestra vrátila nadránom, strašne zmaľovaná, fialové oči, fialové ústa. Mama ju začala biť, kričala na ňu, že toto nesmie robiť, že toto už nikdy nesmie urobiť, ale sestra sa tak dobre bránila, tak pohotovo vystrkovala ostré lakte, že napokon nebolo jasné, koho tá bitka viac bolí. Ja som pri tom plakala. Apuka nerušene spal.

A sestra pritvrdila. Začala utekať z domu. Nič nepovedala, proste sa zobrala a odišla. S mamou sme sa potom vybrali na políciu, vyhlásiť pátranie po nezvestnej osobe. Zvláštne je, že si zreteľne vybavujem naše cesty, to, ako som hopsala dolu Hlbokou, ale bez akéhokoľvek pocitu úzkosti. A pritom som nemohla byť taká malá, aby som nevníkala závažnosť situácie. Sestra sa niekedy neukázala aj štyri dni. Raz dokonca išla do Prahy. Polícia bola nanič, sestra vždy napokon dokvitla sama.

# Mothers and lorry drivers

*Ivana Dobrovová*

Translated from Slovak by Heather Trebaticka

## *Dad*

I'll just pick out one scene, I don't claim it demonstrates anything, I only know what I've been told; I can't remember anything about it myself. I am sitting next to my sister on the living room sofa and we are watching children's cartoons. My sister is four years older than me, she could be about six and I'm just under two. Dad is in the kitchen. We live on the castle hill, near Mudroňova Street, in that super-duper district of Bratislava; we have a beautiful Ford in our garage, a fireplace in our living-room and a view of Austria from our balcony. I've already been going to a day nursery for a year because both my parents are working.

Mum comes in, tired from work and loaded down with shopping, and this is how she finds us. My sister with snot hanging down to her knees, thanks to which, however, at least she cannot smell that her younger sister Svetlana is up to her eyes in shit oozing from her nappy; yes, Dad is there, in the kitchen, but he's asleep with his head on the tablecloth, next to a bottle of something. No need to specify what, that's obvious to everyone.

There is one thing I would like to specify, though. Dad didn't live with us. He often came to our house during the week and slept there, but his permanent address was elsewhere in a village in the Hungarian-speaking south of the country, near some lakes, where we used to bathe in the summer. When our parents got married Mum planned to join her husband there; after all, she was already expecting my sister, but she lived in

such an attractive part of Bratislava, with a fireplace, view, etc., that she decided at the last moment — no, she wouldn't go and live among the Hungarians. It's possible that my aunt, Mum's sister, had something to do with it, as she kept trying to dissuade her: they'd never accept you as one of them; you'd always be a foreigner there. And what's more, you'd be going to your mother-in-law's house. Believe me, she said. Mum did. But then Dad dug his heels in too. His home was there. Full stop. In short, they lived separately. At least for the first few years. Until Dad's health got worse.

I really don't know what to say about my father, about those early years. He was bald. I really loved that. I called his bald spot a ring a ring o'roses. I wanted to have the same on my head. One day, I can remember this moment clearly, I took the scissors out of the sewing box and cut a clearing in my hair. I proudly went to show Mum. I can't remember her reaction, but I remember her telling everyone about it. An embellished family legend.

I can also remember the village in the Hungarian-speaking south. In Bratislava Dad worked at the Technical University, but at home he was a smallholder, a farmer, always to be seen with a spade, a hoe, a rake or hose, naked to the waist. When I was a child his garden seemed enormous to me, a veritable kingdom, where it was possible to climb trees, fall down a well, and sweat in a greenhouse. I was astonished when I learned later that Dad's garden was only a fraction of the original farm the communists had confiscated from nagyapo — my ethnic Hungarian grandfather — in order to nationalise it. Apparently it stretched as far as the lakes. That would have been something — to jump into the water straight from the garden, to have horses as well and not just the hens and rabbits that nagyamama, my Hungarian grandmother, bred.

We would go there for the weekend and spend whole summers beside the lakes. My grandmother was still alive and she more or less spoke only Hungarian; she would shout

kiskutya at the local mongrels; she made pancakes for me and my sister, which I'd like to declare were the best in the world, but to tell the truth, I can no longer remember what they were like. She and her son looked after the garden, that little homestead. She grew seedlings in the greenhouse and sold them at the market. At first Mum tried to make herself useful and learn something from her mother-in-law, to be of help, but she very soon realised that her sister had been right. It was a waste of effort. Everything she did was wrong and ištenem, haďď, nešegíc. Grandma chased her away from the seedlings almost as if she was a mongrel that had crawled in through a hole in the fence. Until Mum finally said, okay, I've had enough, too. And then she only looked after the flowers in the front garden and the ornamental trees and bushes. Later she even began to claim she'd rather get divorced than take a cart full of seedlings to sell at the market.

Dad travelled a lot and liked to take snapshots on his journeys. There was a cupboard in his bedroom full of yellow envelopes with photos I often browsed through. Dad was capable of taking twenty shots of the same rock through a bus window; he could use up three films with blurred views of the Niagara Falls; he had no gift for photography. I also found pictures of Dad in the company of odd-looking women wearing very garish clothes and make-up and it was only many years later that I could find the right word for them — vulgar. The pictures where he was hugging these vulgar strangers in bars were the only ones in which he appeared. Otherwise they were all landscapes.

On his travels Dad got to know a lot of foreigners who he later invited to his home, to that large house he had built just after the fall of communism, right next door to Grandma's typical village cottage. In the summer Dad let out rooms to holidaymakers who wanted to splash about in the lakes, and also sometimes to his foreign acquaintances. I once went to a football match with one of them, a certain Pancho from Peru.

That is, we had originally planned to go to the fun fair on the other side of the lakes, but we let ourselves be carried along with the crowd that was streaming towards the football stadium. He didn't speak Slovak and I didn't speak English; we communicated through gestures. But in fact at that football match, which we both found boring, we only said one thing. Pancho pointed to my shoes and said they were pretty, nice. That much I understood. Later back home it was hard to explain why we had gone to watch the match.

My sister was always teasing me. Once she told me that our lakes had been created from spit. That sometime in the past they'd dug out gravel and left such an ugly pit that everyone who passed by had to spit in disgust. And it had gradually accumulated over the years. That spit. I didn't believe her, but it was a repulsive idea. I must add, though, that she also taught me to dive headfirst from a springboard. And to do underwater somersaults. We would swim together to an island. With Dad too. Mum recalls how I went missing once near the lakes. I was four years old then. Dad and my sister couldn't see me anywhere and it was time to leave. So they left. Back home Dad told Mum: well, she'll come home by herself. And he was right. I appeared before Mum had time to faint.

Dad was an obvious patriarch. Grandad had married Grandma only because she was the hardest worker on his land and as his wife he didn't have to pay her wages anymore. Dad adopted the same attitude and was fond of saying that a woman should work in the fields and when she was tired she should relax doing the household chores. But as I've already mentioned, at a very early stage Mum dug her heels in. On account of those seedlings and under the strain of Grandma's criticism and hand-wringing. From then on she only relaxed doing the chores in the large house.

She occasionally made strawberry jam. Dad praised her. In his own way. Apparently, it was almost as good as that in the shops.

He was also proud of his hard-earned childhood, of his education, which he achieved thanks to his intelligence. When he was born, Grandad and Grandma were living in a hut in the middle of the garden, where there was no electricity or running water, only a dirt floor, not far from a well and everything was made from wood. In the summer, always on his own initiative, Dad solved all the maths questions in the textbooks for the following year and then was bored to death in the lessons. Later he studied at the university in Prague. Even at that time he had quite a serious problem with alcohol. Once he was so drunk he couldn't get from the pub to the students' hostel on his own two feet. However, he solved the problem logically. As the pub was at the top of the hill and the hostel at its foot, he lay down on the ground and rolled all the way downhill to the hostel doors.

When he graduated Grandad showed him a notebook where he had jotted down all the expenses for his studies. He didn't ask him to pay anything back; he just showed it to him, so that Dad would know how much this lark had cost and how much Grandad had spent on his education. Mum says Dad never forgave him for that.



What do I know about my parents' relationship? Preferably nothing? Is that safer? Mum must have seen something in him. But what?

She said he had once told her in front of others that she was not only wise, but also beautiful. It must have been an isolated declaration, rare praise, for her to remember it so clearly. For it to stick in her memory. For her to tell me about it.

His alcoholism was forever present and that's why from my earliest years I saw it as an inseparable part of him, something that went with him, as if that's how it should be. The same with his illness. There's no point in trying to work out

which came first, the chicken or the egg, what caused what, his unstable mental constitution and his long-term drinking problem, his genetic predisposition to the one or the other; both things were mutually intertwined, they reinforced each other, until they became his very essence.

Nevertheless, certain episodes do stand out.

Mum once pulled us out of our beds in the middle of the night. She was at her wits' end. Girls, get up, girls come and tell Dad that we live one floor higher up. Still in our pyjamas, I and my sister stumbled out into the corridor. Half asleep. We couldn't understand what was going on. Dad was relentlessly ringing the neighbour's doorbell on the second floor, even though the neighbour was standing in the open doorway and trying to stop him doing it. With a joint effort, the three of us dragged Dad up the stairs to our flat. I don't know when exactly this occurred. How old I was. My sister was still going to school with me, so I could have been about nine. One of the first such incidents. To me it seemed bizarre. Like in a dream. Like a night adventure that augured an adventurous youth.

That stain is still there. In our beautiful flat, garage, fireplace, view of Austria. And that other stain too. In the lift. The lift must be at least forty years old; it doesn't have an inner door. In our lift you can see the floors passing by. One night Dad was coming home dead drunk and he wanted to lean up against a wall. He leant on the moving floor and cut open his forehead. That's the long dark brown stain between the first and second floors.

He began to sleep in our flat in Bratislava more and more often. He would go to Albrecht's. He spent whole mornings there. Bang opposite my classroom windows. Sometimes I caught a glimpse of him. I pressed up against the window sill and stared as he went into the pub. Of course I didn't tell anyone: look, that's my dad. Not even my sister. Her classroom



was on the second floor of the building and the windows were facing a different direction. On the other hand, a couple of times in the street it happened that I didn't notice him at all. He was walking towards me and I was just following my nose, gazing vacantly into space. Then he would grip my shoulder hard and turn me to face him. At home I heard him in the kitchen complaining to Mum that I disown him, that I'm ashamed of him. At that time it wasn't yet true.

Sometime then my sister began to join him too. Or in fact it was probably not until she was attending secondary school. And she didn't actually join him, but she just began following in his footsteps. It's true she sometimes ended up in Albrecht's as well, but more often she went off somewhere with her friends. Albanians. That was too much for Mum. First her husband, and now her daughter. Once my sister came home in the early hours of the morning with awful make up on — purple eyes, purple mouth. Mum began hitting her, shouting at her that she mustn't do that, that she must never do that again, but my sister fended off the blows, adroitly sticking out her sharp elbows, so that in the end it was clear who was getting the worst of it. I cried while this was going on. Dad slept undisturbed.

And my sister got even worse. She began to run away from home. She would say nothing, simply take herself off. Mum and I then went to the police station to report she had gone missing. Strangely enough, I clearly remember us going there, me skipping down Hlboká Street without the least feeling of anxiety. And yet I can't have been so young as not to register the seriousness of the situation. Sometimes my sister would not show up for four days. Once she even went to Prague. The police were useless; in the end my sister always turned up of her own accord.

# UKRAINE

**Haska Shyyan**

## **За Спиную** *Dans le dos*

Kharkiv: Fabula, 2019.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

**A** writer, translator, blogger, photographer. Born in 1980 in Lviv. Studied classical philology at Lviv University.

Being a co-owner of a bookshop in Lviv, she actively campaigns for elimination of non-transparent corruption schemes in textbooks' purchase. She established an author's course Creative Writing with Tilo Schulz: A story in a Weekend.

In 2014, **Haska Shyyan's** debut novel *Hunt, Doctor, Hunt!* was published, a major part of which was written using the mobile phone while the author was temporarily bedridden.

Currently, Haska lives in Kyiv.



### **SYNOPSIS**

When Marta's boyfriend Max decides to enlist in the Ukrainian army to go and fight in the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine, the young woman is torn. The fighting takes place far from the comfortable nest they have built themselves — some 1 500 kilometres away. Marta has made a success for herself working for the booming IT industry. Both she and Max lived a cozy life distant from politics and war. Until Max's decision. With Max away, Marta tries hard to fit the model of a war hero's girlfriend. Patriotism has become a new norm in Ukraine — one that can hardly be questioned. Yet the young woman feels an inner conflict between this social pressure and her rejection of Max's departure. The young woman

settles for a depressive routine with no perspectives of change. Until one day she travels to Paris where she has a one night stand with Xavier, a young student. Xavier takes her on a trip to the French riviera. On the way to a party, Marta drags Xavier to Nice. Alas, it is 14 July. The couple are separated because of the chaos following the terrorist attack. Left with nothing but her purse, she has no idea what happened to Xavier. She has no way to find him again. Marta

makes her way back to Ukraine. Once home, she gets depressive and she goes on living in isolation. She stops returning Max's phone calls. The young man understands that this relationship has no future and gives up. The novel tackles the issues of military and moral duty, search for the feeling of safety in the modern world, patriotism and nationalism, female sexuality, social pressure in a patriarchal society and other important social issues. ¶



# За Спиною

*Haska Shyyan*



Елла нас запросила до себе. Її студентське «у мене ж нікого нема» в цій ситуації звучить як знущення. Квартирка Елли якраз така, як я уявляла. Невеличка і зграбна, зроблена для двох з можливою перспективою поповнення, тепер вона набула того особливого затишку в стилі випускниці пансіону благородних дівиць. Ідеальний порядок і чистота, причому якимось помітно, що не для гостей — так тут щодня. Через прочинені двері спальні я помічаю на одній половині великого ліжка якусь чорну гору, яка не вписується у загальний лад — здогадуюся, що це той Артурів бушлат, про який Елла згадувала в день нашого знайомства. Ще одна кімнатка, мабуть, за планом дитяча, зачинена. Вітальня із закапелком кухні простора і світла — новобудова не найгіршого планування, вікна сягають до підлоги і простягаються на усю стіну. Дизайн у білих і лавандово-баклажанних тонах — модний зараз стильок «Прованс», штучно зістарена столярка та імітація темної дубової підлоги. Усіляких милих цяцьок, якими мають схильність зловживати жінки, що вважають дизайн інтер'єру своїм хобі, не замало і не забагато: керамічні детальки з синім розписом на кухні, декілька рамок з фото в кімнаті — декупаж Елла, скоріш за все, робила сама. Ми сідаємо на здоровенний м'який диван навколо журнального столика з різними закусками: солоний арахіс, чипси, мандаринки, кошички

з салатом із крабових паличок і канапки з ікрою. Елла гучно відкорковує шампанське, так, що корок летить аж у інший кінець кімнати і губиться десь у тенетах фіранок. Ольга і Катруся явно щасливі спекатися мамських обов'язків бодай на один вечір. Катруся, до всього іншого, якраз учора закінчила годувати грудьми, тож першу склянку шампанського вона перехиляє майже залпом. Мені важко оцінити її стан повністю, але я, здається, відчуваю ту сп'янілу втому, яка розливається її змореним тілом. Вона сидить, спершись на стіну, запускає обидві долоні собі у волосся, збираючи його у хаотичну гульку, і майже нічого не говорить. Але таке враження, що видно, ніби в неї всередині клацають якісь запобіжники, тіло і мозок згадують давні насолоди та вподобання, і я думаю, якою ж була ця молода жінка, молодша від мене на рік, до цих трьох безперервних декретів і п'яти років лактації. Хвацькою пластункою К, за якою впадали хлопці з куренів із найвищим рейтингом популярності й бешкетництва, аж поки вона не вибрала серед них найкращого? Чи, може, симпатичною зграбною дівчинкою з простого району, яка у школі любила французьку і, незважаючи на впливи пацанів з двору, добре вчилася, але потім таки залетіла від одного з них? Зараз по ній майже неможливо цього сказати. Прості джинси і светр без найменшого натяку на якісь модні тенденції, нехай і попередніх років. Тут справа не в тому, що Катруся, скоріш за все, змушена вдягатися в секунді, а в тому, що її тіло ніби відвернулося від неї, зазнаючи постійних змін, тож вони так і не призвичаїлися знову одне до одного, і хтозна, чи ще призвичаються. Я буду безмежно рада за неї, якщо чоловік, повернувшись живим і здоровим, і далі бачитиме об'єктом бажань звичну, хай трохи згаслу за роки

жінку, і при цьому вони подбають про успішну контрацептивну стратегію.

Олька принесла текілу. Я такого від неї, правду кажучи, не чекала, хоча зараз розумію, що у цій гіперактивній до нав'язливості організаторці, як небезпечне ядерне пальне, поховано аж надто багато нереалізованої енергії. Усілякої. В тому числі й до розваг та пригод. Просто вона, скоріш за все, із тих відмінниць за духом, що якнайшвидше хотіли залагодити всі сторони свого життя по першому розряду. І про людське око їй це дуже навіть вдалося. Ольга з тих, кого вам завжди ставитимуть у приклад. Тільки тепер, коли вона хвацько злизує сіль і вгризається в лимон після першого келишка — теж, до речі, згідно з правилами, як справжня відмінниця,— я бачу, що всередині цієї пацанки за духом десь глибоко заховалася заздрість до того, як можуть жити такі, як, скажімо, Софка. Тільки у цьому вона не зізнається навіть собі. Хіба коли вже перестане рахувати шоти, але перевага текіли полягає в тому, що наступного дня вона нічого не пам'ятатиме. Ми починаємо доволі швидко п'яніти, і на поверхню неunikно лізуть історії про тих, хто пішов, про тих, хто повернувся, і про тих, хто ні. Дистанціюючись від власної травми, ми обговорюємо не своїх чоловіків, а якісь майже абстрактні приклади з життя. Хтось втратив успішний бізнес, поки був там. Хтось дзвонив на день народження дитини і розповідав у захваті, який учора був салют із «Градів». Хтось не пив десять років, а потім зірвався і помер від цирозу невдовзі після дембеля. Для когось головною мотивацією було, що інакше бабуса його не прийме на Різдво, бо за Україну загинув дід, тож це справа родинної честі. Хтось пішов після сварки, траснувши дверима,— помириться у них так і не випало

шансу. Хтось єдину відраду знаходить у тому, що вишиває бісером ікони після того, як зіскочив з амфетамінів. Хтось мав надлишкову вагу, бізнес і чотирьох дітей — і колишні ділові партнери не зрозуміли, що потягнуло його туди, звідки не повертаються. Хтось знімався в кліпі про УПА і ось, як наврочив. Хтось привіз СНІД, і це виявилось, коли вагітна жінка здавала обов'язкові аналізи. Від когось дружина приховувала, що лягає з дитиною в лікарню, щоб не відволікати від важливої місії. А хтось мав наречену, круту діджейку, яка у найневідповідніший момент дзвонила спитати, де лежать палички для суші. Хтось же просто чекав цієї війни усе життя. А хтось своє життя вирішив припинити, уже повернувшись до миру. Катруся розповідає про те, як одна знайома у волонтерській поїздці зустріла шкільну любов, з якою не бачилася п'ятнадцять років, і виявилось, що той на передовій від першого дня, передусім, щоб її вразити — і тоді вона покинула з дітьми успішного, перспективного чоловіка-науковця з контрактом у іноземному університеті, і минулого тижня вони з однокласником одружилися. Історій безліч, ми гортаємо їх, як ейчарівську картотеку, з усіма апрайзалами, фактами, експіріенсами, хвилями хайпу. Апрувим, сабмітим, чекапим, вони ллються якимось катарсисом, як своєрідне заспокоєння, що нас таких багато, що тисячі жінок через це проходять. Хтось несе тягучий обов'язок чекання, а хтось, нарешті, отримує нагоду для зради. Є і таке. Ось, нещодавно одна народила, і всі, окрім чоловіка, який приїздив у доволі рідкісні відпустки, знають, що то не від нього, він же вірить, що то чудо, і після восьми років лікування безпліддя втрутилися Бог і тестостерон. Ми переповідаємо ці історії у пошуках якогось трохи стрьомного, хворобливого полегшення. Вилловлюємо болючий романтизм у розповідях про іта-

лійку, закохану в харизматичного бійця, який загинув на першій хвилі самозреченого патріотичного запалу. Вона ще рік писала йому листи, аж поки не вийшла заміж за грузина. Розглядаємо під лупою натхнення в історії солдата, який малює, перебуваючи на лінії фронту, і роботи його, на думку близьких, через це набули такої цінності, що їх от-от виставлять на Сотбіс.

Текіла добряче нас вставила, і те, що Елла заморочилася ще й на традиційну курочку з картоплею, дуже пішло усім на користь. Тим часом ми довідалися, що Ольчина донька паралельно ходить на церковний хор і полденс у дитячий клуб «Мармеладка». За твердим переконанням Ольки, це просто спорт от тільки в інтер'єрі з рожевими пуфами. Вона сама ставить собі регулярно на стегнах синці в студії «Мармелад» для дорослих і не бачить нічого суперечливого у поєднанні такої фізичної активності з релігійними практиками. Ольга видудлює склянку кока-коли, висмоктує стік атоксілу, запиває ще двома склянками води і викликає їм з Катрусею таксі. Виявляється, у цієї дівчини є майже професійний досвід п'ятничних пиятик, бо на суботу у неї ж, мабуть, заплановано багато родинно-побутових передсвяткових справ. Без поїздки в «Ашан» і «МЕТРО» з попереднім порівнянням цін точно не обійдеться. Очікуючи машину, вона вмикає на телефоні «Буде нам з тобою що згадати», а тоді, похитуючись і гикнувши, видихає:

— Треба третім залетіти. Хай уже сидить вдома.

— Не допоможе,— відповідає їй Катруся.

І тривожний блиск її очей відлунує цитатою з пісні.



Мені чомусь не їдеться додому. Дивно, але у Елли я почувуюся затишно і не хочеться залишати її отак одразу саму, щоб вона відчула знову цю пустку, до якої, мабуть, уже звикла. У гулкому холоді однієї з найдовших ночей року затраскуються дверцята і м'яко від'їжджає таксі, я дивлюся в порожнечу, і на мене витріщаються медові комірки будинку навпроти — типової панельної висотки. Видно, як на кухнях ворухаться люди. Стелі здаються такими низенькими, а кімнати такими крихітними, що дивно, як ті всі бджоли, трутні і личинки вміщають там свої пожитки і виварки накручених на тиждень голубців.

Врешті я не витримую:

— Знаєш, коли тільки прийшла повістка, то перше, що я побачила перед очима, — його маленьке біле тільце, уявила його мертвим... — Я розумію, що говорити це Еллі — егоїстичний цинізм, але мене несе так, ніби всередині прорвало якусь загату і слова вириваються назовні швидше, ніж я їх встигаю обдумати, здається, що це взагалі говорю не я, а, можливо, текіла. — Він худий і зовсім не спортивний, у нього зір мінус два. Мабуть, труп буде зовсім жалюгідним і хирлявим. Ці видіння, вони були такі сильні. А якщо ще й без кінцівки?

— Я з самого початку постійно думала: ну як це — наші чоловіки на війні?

— Та це ж якось ніби про прабабусь, а не про нас.

# Dans le dos

*Haska Shyyan*

Traduit de l'ukrénien par Sébastien Gobert

Ella nous a invités chez elle. Son enthousiaste « Je n'ai personne d'autre » ressemblait dans cette situation à une tentative d'invitation contrainte. L'appartement d'Ella était exactement ce que j'avais imaginé. Petit et attrayant, fait pour deux avec un potentiel élargissement possible, à présent, elle a obtenu ce confort particulier à la manière d'une diplômée d'une pension de jeunes filles. Tout était propre et en ordre, et il était évident que le ménage n'était pas fait uniquement pour les invités, mais tous les jours. Par la porte ouverte de la chambre à coucher, j'ai remarqué sur la moitié du grand lit une sorte de montagne noire qui ne s'accordait pas avec le cadre de l'endroit. J'ai supposé que c'était le caban d'Arthur, qu'Ella avait mentionné le jour de notre rencontre. Une autre chambre, apparemment prévue pour les enfants, était fermée. L'entrée avec le coin cuisine intégré était spacieux et lumineux, un nouveau bâtiment pas de la pire planification, les fenêtres allant jusqu'au sol et couvrant le mur entier. La décoration était dans des tons blancs et lavande-aubergine, dans un style « provençal » à la mode, avec meubles en bois vieilli artificiellement et un parquet en imitation de chêne sombre. Il y avait tout juste assez de toutes sortes de petits bibelots mignons, qu'affectionnent particulièrement les femmes considérant la décoration d'intérieur comme leur passe-temps : des plaques de céramique avec une peinture bleue dans la cuisine, quelques cadres photo dans la chambre, des découpes qu'Ella a fait probablement elle-même. Nous nous sommes assises sur un grand canapé confortable autour d'une table basse avec une variété de collations dessus : des cacahuètes salées, des chips, des mandarines, des bols de salade avec des

bâtonnets de crabe ou des tartines de caviar. Ella déboucha brutalement le champagne, de sorte que le bouchon a volé à l'autre bout de la pièce et s'est perdu quelque part dans les rideaux. Olka et Katrusya étaient évidemment heureuses d'oublier leurs devoirs maternels pendant une soirée. Katrusya, de plus, venait de terminer l'allaitement maternel hier, et elle se saisit comme une folle de la première coupe de champagne. Il me fut difficile d'évaluer complètement son état, mais il semblait que je ressentais cette fatigue enivrante qui se répand sur son corps épuisé. Elle s'est assise, appuyée contre le mur, les mains dans les cheveux, les ramassant en chignon chaotique et ne disant presque rien. Mais il semble qu'il y a toujours de la fougue à l'intérieur, le corps et le cerveau se souviennent des vieux plaisirs et préférences, et je pense, à ce qu'était cette jeune femme, d'un an plus jeune, avant trois congés maternité et cinq ans d'allaitement. Peut-être que K était une tombeuse, pour qui les gars les plus populaires et les plus fous se sont rabaissés plus bas que terre, jusqu'à ce qu'elle choisisse le meilleur d'entre eux ? Ou peut-être était-elle une jolie petite fille attirante d'un quartier ordinaire qui aimait le français à l'école et qui, malgré les efforts des garçons du quartier, a appris avec application, mais finalement est tombée enceinte de l'un d'eux ? Maintenant, il est presque impossible de savoir cela. Un jean simple et un pull démodé, n'étant pas même à la mode les années précédentes. Il ne s'agit pas du fait que Katrusya était susceptible de s'habiller pour être prête en une seconde, mais que son corps semblait se détourner d'elle, subissant un changement constant, de sorte qu'ils ne se sont plus jamais habitués l'un à l'autre, et personne ne sait s'ils y parviendront un jour. Je serais infiniment heureuse pour elle si son mari, revenu en vie et en bonne santé, continuerait à la voir comme un sujet de désir, malgré l'épuisement de sa femme, tout en réfléchissant à une stratégie de contraception efficace.

Olka avait apporté de la tequila. Je ne m'attendais pas à cela, à vrai dire, bien que je comprenne maintenant que dans cette organisatrice hyperactive, au caractère obsessionnel, tel du combustible nucléaire dangereux, trop d'énergie non utilisé. De l'énergie de toutes sortes. Y compris pour le divertissement et l'aventure. C'est juste qu'elle devait être une de celles, qui souhaitent régler tous les aspects de leur vie le plus rapidement possible. Et aux yeux des gens elle avait bien réussi. Olka est de celles qu'on cite toujours en exemple. Seulement maintenant, quand elle éclabousse doucement le sel et mord un citron après le premier verre - en passant, ici aussi selon les règles, comme une excellente élève, je vois qu'à l'intérieur de l'esprit de cette petite fille dans l'esprit, se cache profondément la jalousie envers une vie que mène, par exemple, Sofka. Mais elle ne veut pas l'avouer même à elle-même. Peut-être seulement quand elle arrêtera de compter les coups, mais la tequila a l'avantage de faire qu'elle aura oublié le lendemain. Nous commençons à devenir ivres assez rapidement et les histoires de ceux qui sont partis, de ceux qui sont revenus et de ceux qui ne le sont pas, font inévitablement surface. En nous éloignant de notre propre traumatisme, nous ne discutons pas de nos maris, mais de quelques exemples presque abstraits de la vie.

Quelqu'un a perdu une entreprise florissante lorsqu'il était là-bas. Quelqu'un a appelé pour souhaiter un bon anniversaire à son enfant et a dit avec enthousiasme, qu'hier il a vu de magnifiques feux d'artifice des « Grads »<sup>(1)</sup>. Quelqu'un qui n'avait pas bu pendant dix ans, a recommencé et est décédé de la cirrhose peu de temps après sa démobilisation. Pour quelqu'un, la principale motivation était que dans le cas contraire sa grand-mère ne l'accepterait pas pour Noël, car son grand-père est décédé pour l'Ukraine, et c'est une question d'honneur de la famille. Quelqu'un est parti après une dispute, en claquant la porte sans jamais avoir de chance pour refaire la

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(1) Le BM-21 Grad est un camion soviétique lance-roquettes multiples développé dans les années 1960. (NdT)

paix. Quelqu'un a découvert son talent pour la broderie des icônes avec des perles après avoir arrêté les amphétamines. Quelqu'un en surpoids, avait des affaires et quatre enfants - et d'anciens partenaires commerciaux ne comprenaient pas ce qui l'a entraîné là d'où on ne revient pas. Quelqu'un a tourné dans un clip sur l'UPA<sup>(2)</sup> et a comme prédit que ça allait arriver. Quelqu'un a ramené le SIDA et cela ne s'est su que quand sa femme enceinte a fait les analyses obligatoires. La femme de quelqu'un cachait qu'elle était à l'hôpital avec leur enfant, afin de ne pas le distraire d'une mission importante. Quelqu'un avait une fiancée, une super DJ, qui a appelé au moment le plus inapproprié pour demander où se trouvaient les baguettes pour les sushis. Quelqu'un a juste attendu cette guerre toute cette vie. Et quelqu'un a décidé de mettre fin à ses jours, étant déjà revenu du front. Katrusya racontait que, lors d'un voyage de volontariat, une connaissance à elle a rencontré son amour de lycée qu'elle n'avait pas vu depuis quinze ans. Il s'est avéré qu'il était en première ligne au front dès le premier jour, et c'est avant tout, pour l'impressionner - et alors elle a abandonné ses enfants et son mari, scientifique prometteur ayant un contrat avec une université étrangère, et la semaine dernière, elle l'a épousé, son ancien amour de lycée. Il y a un nombre infini d'histoires que nous tournions comme des fiches RH, avec des appréciations, fuck up, expériences, moments de gloire. Nous approuvions, suggérions ces histoires, les vérifions, elles s'enchaînaient dans une sorte de catharsis, en nous apaisant, que nous ne sommes pas les seules, qu'il y avait des milliers de femmes traversent ces mêmes situations. Quelqu'un qui a le devoir fatigant d'attendre et quelqu'un d'autre qui se saisit, au contraire, d'une occasion de trahir. Il y a cela aussi. Par exemple, récemment, une femme a accouché, et tout le monde, sauf son mari qui a

(2) L'Armée insurrectionnelle ukrainienne ou UPA (en ukrainien : Українська Повстанська Армія, ou УПА) était une armée de guérilla ukrainienne formée en octobre 1942. Il s'agit de la branche militaire de l'Organisation des nationalistes ukrainiens (OUN). Au cours de son histoire, l'UPA s'est battue contre les trois armées qui occupèrent successivement l'Ukraine : la Wehrmacht, l'Armia Krajowa — issue de la résistance polonaise — et l'Armée rouge jusqu'en 1954, principalement dans les Carpates. (NdT)

rarement l'occasion de revenir à la maison de la guerre, tout le monde sait que l'enfant n'est pas de lui, et lui seul, il croit que c'est un miracle et après huit ans de traitement contre l'infertilité, Dieu et la testostérone ont gagné. Nous récitons ces histoires à la recherche d'un soulagement bien qu'amer et maladif. Nous découvrons un romantisme douloureux dans des récits d'une Italienne, amoureuse d'un combattant charismatique qui a péri dans les premières vagues de ferveur patriotique auxquelles il s'est adonné. Elle lui écrivait des lettres pendant encore un an, jusqu'à ce qu'elle se marie avec un Géorgien. Nous trouvons l'inspiration dans l'histoire d'un soldat qui peignait depuis la ligne de front, et ses œuvres, à l'avis de ses proches, ont pris tellement de valeur qu'elles sont sur le point d'être exposées sur Sotheby's.

La tequila nous a bien saoulées, et le fait qu'Ella ait aussi prévu un poulet traditionnel avec des pommes de terre était très utile pour tout le monde. Par ailleurs, nous avons appris que la fille d'Olka se rendait simultanément à la chorale de l'église et au pôle dance du club pour enfants « Marmelade ». Selon Olka, il s'agit simplement d'un sport qui ne se produit qu'à l'intérieur de la salle du club aménagée avec des poufs roses. Elle-même revient souvent du studio de danse pour adultes avec des bleus sur ses hanches, et ne voit rien de controversé dans la combinaison d'une telle activité physique avec des pratiques religieuses. Olka prit un verre de coca-cola, un stick d'Atoxil, puis encore deux verres d'eau, avant de commander un taxi pour Katrusya et elle-même. Il s'avère que cette fille a presque une expérience professionnelle des beuveries du vendredi, car le samedi, elle a probablement de nombreuses tâches préparatoires d'ordre familial et ménager. Cela ne fonctionne sûrement pas sans un passage à Auchan ou Métro et une comparaison des prix de deux enseignes. En attendant le taxi, elle met sur son téléphone le morceau « Nous aurons de quoi nous souvenir », puis, tremblante et haletante, elle exhale :

- Il faut tomber enceinte d'un troisième. Pour qu'il soit enfin à la maison !

- Ça ne va pas aider, - lui répondit Katrusya.

Et l'éclat alarmant de ses yeux fait écho à une citation de la chanson.

Je n'avais pas le courage de rentrer chez moi. C'est étonnant, mais avec Ella, je me sens apaisée et je n'ai pas envie de la quitter si rapidement avec ce vide, auquel, probablement, je me suis moi-même déjà habituée. Dans le froid d'une des plus longues nuits de l'année, les portières se ferment et le taxi s'éloigne doucement, je regarde dans le vide et les carrés des fenêtres de l'immeuble d'en face me regardent à leur tour. On peut voir les gens se déplacer dans les cuisines. Les plafonds semblent si bas et les chambres si petites, qu'il paraît étrange que toutes ses abeilles, frelons et larves arrivent à y rassembler leurs affaires et les grandes casseroles des holubtsi faites pour toute une semaine.

Enfin, je n'arrive plus à me contenir :

- Tu sais, lorsque la lettre de conscription est arrivée, la première chose que j'ai vue devant mes yeux était son petit corps blanc, je l'imaginais mort ... – Je comprends, que parler de ça avec Ella était d'un cynisme égoïste, mais c'était comme si j'avais une sorte de blessure à l'intérieur de moi et que les mots en étaient sortis plus rapidement avant que je ne puisse y réfléchir. Je pense que ce n'était pas moi qui parlait, mais la tequila. - Lui, maigre et pas du tout sportif avec la vision de moins deux. Apparemment, le cadavre sera complètement misérable et déformé. Ces visions étaient tellement fortes. Et si ce serait, en plus, sans membres ?

- Depuis le début, je me suis constamment demandé: comment ça se fait que nos hommes sont à la guerre ?

- On dirait que c'est plutôt l'histoire de nos grand-mères, pas la nôtre.





# UNITED KINGDOM

**Melissa Harrison**

**All among the barley**  
*L'orge est mûre pour la moisson*

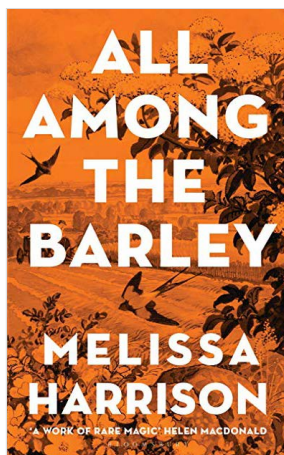
London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

## BIOGRAPHY

**M**elissa Harrison is the author of the novels *Clay* and *At Hawthorn Time*, which was shortlisted for the Costa Novel Award and longlisted for the Bailey's Women's Prize, and one work of non-fiction, *Rain*, which was longlisted for the Wainwright Prize. She is a nature writer, critic and columnist for *The Times*, the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian*, among others.

## SYNOPSIS

ALL AMONG THE BARLEY is set in the autumn of 1933. It is the most beautiful autumn Edie Mather can remember, though the Great War still casts a shadow over the cornfields of her beloved home, Wych Farm. When charismatic, outspoken Constance FitzAllen arrives from London to write about fading rural traditions, she takes an interest in fourteen-year-old Edie, showing her a kindness she has never known before. But the older woman isn't quite what she seems. As harvest time approaches and pressures mount on the whole community, Edie must find a way to



trust her instincts and save herself from disaster. Some of the great themes of English life are tackled here — class division, the patriarchy, folklore and psychosis, creeping fascism — but rather than being simply ticked off they are instead woven into the narrative with great subtlety and beauty. Themes covered are the changing face of farming, its effects on the natural world, the unrelenting demands and hard work of farming and the impact this has on relationships within farming families, traditional folklore and superstition, class divisions, patriarchy and patronage, injustice, treatment of mental illness, prejudice, bigotry and fascism, to name just a few — but there was never a moment when any of these felt either superfluous to the story or dominated the narrative. The ending is surprising, incredibly moving and befitting of a title of this quality. ¶

# All among the barley

*Melissa Harrison*



Darkness fell a little sooner now than it had done on the night of the village fete, but as I hurried along the field path towards Back lane there was still light left in the sky. A rich green aftermath had grown on great ley and over it a white owl floated, wings motionless, the disc of its face turned down to where tiny creatures doubtless crouched and shook. Home Field was invisible beyond a line of field maples and dog-roses on my right, but as I crossed into Greenleaze the view opened up to the stark corn stubble and the clump of alders, black as pitch against an opaline sky, that marked where the horse-pond was.

I stood a moment, my arms folded across my chest against the evening breeze, listening to a robin spill its plaintive song down from somewhere in the hedge. I couldn't have said why, but I wanted to see the pond again; I wanted to stand on the bank where I had stood two weeks ago in the moonlight, utterly possessed by the conviction that I had to go in. It would only delay me by a few minutes, I calculated; and the soil was dry around the shorn wheat stalks and strewn with flints, so I did not think the earth would cling to my sandals.

I can't rightly say what I was searching for there at the edge of the dark water; but what I found was Edmund's body, fly-blown and stinking, his breast torn open and his heart removed from its bloody cavity, his once-bright eyes picked out by crows.

As soon as I emerged from the cut onto the street I could hear Connie's meeting. The Bell & Hare was rowdy with voices and hubbub, and there by the green, Elmbourne darkening around me, the sound of it brought me up short. But I couldn't turn and walk home again, not now, for the discovery of Edmund's body had left my blood singing strangely in my ears. Compulsively, I traced a witch-mark on the goose-bumped flesh of my hip.

I took a breath and let it out slowly. I knew there was likely a door at the back of the inn somewhere, but I didn't dare try it; it seemed even worse to me to be caught trespassing in the private part of the inn than to risk making a spectacle of myself by going in where everyone could see. So, heart thumping, I crossed the road, thumbed down the iron latch and pushed open the door.

The air was hot and humid, and thick with the smell of hops and tobacco smoke. No-one turned to see me slip in, or seemed to feel the breath of night air I brought with me. I latched the door behind me and stood a moment to try to understand what was taking place.

All the tables in the tap-room on my left were taken, and men were standing between them, holding their mugs of beer; I had never seen the inn so full. I was glad to see some women at the tables: Elisabeth Allingham from Copdock, Mrs Godbold and one or two others. There was my father, red-faced at a corner table with grandfather next to him, and my stomach lurched as I saw Alf rose, laughing, on Father's other side. Frank and Sid sat on stools with their backs toward me; none saw me, I felt sure, as I ducked back quickly and stood once again just inside the inn door.

The bar-room, on the right, had had its tables entirely removed, and all I could see at first were backs, so that for

a moment it looked almost as though I had arrived late for church: jackets and waistcoats, shirtsleeves, a press of men. But unlike the reverent atmosphere in St Anne's there was a loud clamour of voices, and it was clear that this was where the meeting itself was being held – or perhaps had been held, for nobody seemed to be making a speech. I realised that in delaying at home I had probably missed it, and that I might as well just slip out again and walk home.

But just then I heard Connie's voice rising easily over the crowd and saw that she was standing in the entrance to the snug at the back, which was raised up a little by a step from the floor of the main bar-room. Six wormy, vertical timbers were all that remained of the snug's long-gone stud wall, and she stood in the gap where once there must have been a door. I craned to see her between all the men's heads; her height, and the step she stood on, gave her an advantage. She was wearing what looked like a shepherd's smock, but in silk, tucked into a narrow grey skirt; her hair had been set into loose waves and was held at the side with a barrette adorned with a yellow oxlip. She looked wonderful.

'Dear friends and neighbours, thank you again, and let me beg just one more moment of your time,' she called out. She looked happy, perhaps almost tri-umphant, and as the hub-bub died down, she gave one of her dazzling smiles.

'You've been kind enough to listen as Mr Seton Ritter set out the great need in our country now for the Order of English Yeomanry, and explained a little to you about our beliefs and our aims. The Order is made up of honourable patriots, people like Hugo – like Mr Seton Ritter here – and myself, and growing numbers of farmers like your own George Mather, too: ordinary Englishmen who believe in progress and in fairness, who decry the enthronement of international

money-lending, the centralisation of markets, and modern urban industrialism. People who are not afraid to question the high-handed edicts of the league of nations or the P.E.P., and who above all understand the irreplaceable value of our rural traditions, and wish to protect the health and the purity of our English soil.'

There was a rumble of assent from the crowd. Connie was doing rather well, I thought; it all seemed eminently sensible, though I wondered what the P.E.P. Was, and resolved to ask her later if I got the chance. It was a surprise to hear that Father had joined her club, or party, or whatever it was; I wondered if mother knew.

'Many of you here belong to an agricultural union. The Order of English Yeomanry does not require that you give up these loyalties, for while there are important concerns to be raised about the evil of Bolshevism, we believe that the re-creation of a vigorous indigenous peasantry – one with a true stake in the future of this country – is by far the more pressing goal.

'Therefore, if you have agreed with our speeches tonight, I would ask you to consider joining your neighbour George Mather in this, the local chapter of our order. The cost is a shilling; but tonight you need only give me your names. I shall be here until closing time – oh, and before I forget,' she said, holding up a copy of a magazine, 'I've more copies of our weekly publication here, *The English Pioneer*; it's usually a penny, but tonight they're free for you all to take away, so please help yourselves, if you haven't taken one already. I write a regular piece in each issue myself, and I think you'll agree it's a good read for all the family.'

She grinned at us, said 'thank you' again, and sat down next to an elegantly dressed man in spectacles, who I presumed

was Mr Seton Ritter; I recognised Mr Chalcott, her friend the photographer, in the snug too. But just as the roar of conversation began to swell again, a fair, stocky man shouldered his way up the step to the snug and turned to face the room. It was John.

‘I have something to say to you all, friends, if you’ll grant me a moment.’

Behind the bar the landlord folded his arms. There came a stillness now to the men’s backs such as hadn’t been there when Connie had been speaking, and again I was reminded of church.

‘We’ve seen a lot of Miss FitzAllen at Wych Farm this summer, and heard a lot about her ideas,’ he said. ‘In fact she’s become a regular fixture – out in the fields, too, where I’ll allow she’s been of some use. Now, you all know me for a fair man, and not one to speak out of turn. But I must say to you tonight that this woman is not all she seems.’

The inn was utterly silent; even the low murmur of conversation from the tap-room had stilled. I saw that Father and Sid rose had got up from their seats and were craning to see through into the public bar. By standing on tip-toe I could just about glimpse Connie’s face in the shadows behind John, wearing a fixed expression. I felt sick with embarrassment, and angry on her behalf.

‘Mr Seton Ritter here has talked to you tonight of patriotism, and duty to one’s countrymen, and the bonds of blood and soil. Now, I don’t hold with everything he’s said – not at all – but I believe him to be a man of honour. In the War he was Lieutenant-Colonel Seton Ritter, and he’s had the D.S.M. and the Military Cross. To my mind, he has taken the wrong course since then, but I respect him nonetheless.

‘Miss FitzAllen, however –’

Connie made as though to get up, but John simply turned and looked at her, and she sat back down again.

‘Our miss FitzAllen here spins a great yarn about her days in France as a V.A.D., but I’ve been asking around and from what I can make out she never even volunteered. Did you know that, Lieutenant-Colonel?’ he asked over his shoulder. ‘Or did she pull the wool over your eyes, too?’

‘And there’s more!’ he continued, turning back to us and raising his voice over the sudden hubbub. ‘there’s something else you should know before you decide to throw your lot in with this order, or society, or whatever it is. A few weeks ago Constance FitzAllen took it upon herself to evict a family of indigents living over at Hullets for no reason that I can see other than that they were Jews – them being to her mind responsible for everything that’s wrong with the world these days. Well, I’ve news regarding that family. I was at a union meeting three days ago in Corwelby where all the talk was of a family called Adler not long arrived from our direction, the father carrying a girl by the name of Esther, four years old and no more than a bag of skin and bones. She were dead.’

I closed my eyes as voices roared and bodies surged around me. I felt as though I was floating; I knew I should find the door somewhere behind me and go out to get some air, but I couldn’t leave. I took a deep breath but it was of stale pipe-smoke and men’s sweat. John was wrong, that much was obvious. He was quite, quite wrong in everything he said.

‘Now, I don’t claim the right to tell you how to think, and so I won’t; there’s been enough of that manner of talk for one night,’ he continued. ‘All I’ll say is this: we cannot set our

faces against change: it don't do, it never has. Albert Mather is here tonight, the first and best man I ever took a wage from, and he taught me well. He allus said we must have change – we must have it! For the past is gone, and that's just the way of it. Change allus comes, and all that falls to a man to decide is whether he'll be part of it or not.'

'But it's change we're wanting, man! Have you not listened, have you not heard a word –'

It was Father, pushing and shouldering his way through the crowd. I saw men turn, grinning; saw them part to let him through. The tenor of their attention had changed, and I could sense it; this was sport now, master against man. I saw one or two jostle him on purpose, saw men nudge one another and crane their necks ready to see the confrontation. I wanted to get Frank, but he was in the tap-room with the Rose boys and grandfather; I wondered if I should run home and fetch mother, but I knew it would take too long. And then it was too late.

John stood his ground as Father approached, only folding his arms. Connie, behind him in the snug, was standing; I could not see Mr Chalcott or the other man from where I was, but it seemed they had stayed in their seats.

Father stopped a few paces away from John, his red face full of choler. With the advantage the step gave John, they were about the same height, and I realised, with a wash of horror, that they might at any second actually come to blows.

'Please God, no,' I said out loud, although I hadn't meant to. A big man near me turned; it was the wheelwright's apprentice, a lad I had only ever glimpsed before in his leather apron hard at work among the half-built wagons or forging their wide iron tyres.



‘Well, if it in’t the famous Mather girl herself,’ he said now, and elbowed his companion. ‘Look who’s here!’

‘This is change!’ Father was shouting, pointing towards Connie. ‘This, John, this! We must rebuild the country, we must put our own kind first!’

Despite the confrontation, more men nearby were turning around to look at me; I felt their eyes on me, probing and keen. What had the wheelwright’s apprentice meant by ‘the famous Mather girl’?

‘This in’t change, man, it’s folly – dangerous folly, for all that.’

‘You speak against me, John Hurlock?’

‘In this matter, yes.’

‘You think you know better, that’s it. You allus have. And now you come in here, slinging mud about. Don’t matter if the woman were in the War or not, to my mind.’

‘No, I’ll wager it don’t – to a man who never served.’

Uproar then, the men rushing forward, something like joy surging through them and leaving me weightless and horrified and alone. I stumbled back a few paces, one hand seeking the inn door; I saw Frank, followed by Sid Rose, fighting to get to Father and John through the crowd; and then there on the floor was a discarded magazine, trampled by boots, an image of my face smiling idiotically out at me from the crumpled page.

# L'orge est mûre pour la moisson

*Melissa Harrison*

Traduit de l'anglais par Dominique Le Meur

Ce soir-là, la nuit est tombée un peu plus tôt que lors de la fête du village. Tandis que je marchais à pas rapides sur le sentier en bordure du champ vers Back Lane, le ciel gardait encore un peu de clarté. Une herbe verte et foisonnante couvrait le vaste pâturage. Au-dessus, planait une chouette blanche, ailes immobiles, ses larges yeux ronds scrutant le moindre mouvement qui trahirait la présence de petites proies en train de ramper ou de se déplacer. Home Field était invisible une fois passés le bois d'érables et les buissons d'églantiers sur ma droite, mais en traversant pour rejoindre Greenleaze, la vue s'ouvrait vers les chaumes de maïs abrupts et les massifs d'aulnes noirs comme de l'ébène sous un ciel opalin, délimitant l'étang où les chevaux venaient boire.

Je me suis arrêtée un moment, les bras croisés sur la poitrine, face à la brise nocturne, écoutant le chant triste d'un rouge-gorge niché dans quelque haie. Sans vraiment savoir pourquoi, je voulais revoir l'étang; me tenir sur la rive, comme je l'avais fait deux semaines plus tôt sous le clair de lune, me sentant entièrement possédée du sentiment que je devais m'y jeter. Un détour de quelques minutes, pas plus. Le sol autour des tiges d'ajoncs était sec, parsemé de petits cailloux. La terre ne collerait pas à la semelle de mes sandales.

Difficile de dire ce que je cherchais, là, au bord de ces eaux sombres. J'ai quand même trouvé le corps d'Edmund, couvert de chiures de mouches et qui dégageait une odeur fétide. Son torse était grand ouvert, le cœur retiré de sa cavité remplie de sang. À force de les picorer, les corbeaux avaient fini par arracher ses yeux jadis clairs.

Aussitôt après avoir quitté le sentier pour retrouver la rue, j'ai tout de suite entendu les échos du meeting de Connie. Un vacarme de voix s'échappait de la taverne The Bell & Hare, et là, près des champs, alors que le village d'Elmbourne était déjà baigné de ténèbres, ce brouhaha a attisé ma curiosité. Impossible de retourner à la maison. Pas pour le moment en tout cas. Il faut dire que la découverte du corps d'Edmund, avec cette impression étrange que mon sang chantait dans mes oreilles, me prenait un peu au dépourvu. Machinalement, j'ai tracé une marque maléfique sur le contour de ma hanche en proie à la chair de poule.

J'ai inspiré, puis expiré lentement. Je me doutais qu'il devait bien y avoir une porte à l'arrière de la taverne, mais je n'osais pas chercher plus loin. L'impression qu'être prise en flagrant délit d'intrusion dans une partie privée de l'auberge serait bien pire que le risque de me donner en spectacle en utilisant l'entrée principale sous les yeux de tous. Le cœur battant, j'ai traversé la rue. J'ai baissé le loquet pour ouvrir la porte.

L'air était chaud et humide. Une lourde odeur de houblon et de fumée envahissait la pièce. Personne n'avait prêté attention à moi ni n'avait semblé sentir le courant d'air frais de la nuit qui m'avait accompagnée. J'ai remis le loquet en place et suis restée un moment immobile, essayant de comprendre ce qui se tramait.

Dans le bar, toutes les tables à ma gauche étaient occupées. Des hommes debout tenaient leur bock de bière à la main. Jamais je n'avais vu cet endroit aussi bondé. J'étais heureuse d'apercevoir quand même quelques femmes assises: Elisabeth Allingham de Copdock, Mme Godbold et deux ou trois autres. Mon père aussi était là, le visage rougeaud, attablé dans un coin avec mon grand-père. Je n'ai pu retenir un haut-le-cœur quand j'ai vu Alf qui riait à côté de papa. Frank et Sid étaient perchés sur des tabourets, dos à moi, si bien qu'ils ne me voyaient pas. Je suis vite retournée à l'abri de la porte d'entrée où je me suis sentie de nouveau en sécurité.

À droite, toutes les tables avaient été enlevées. Je ne voyais que des gens de dos, un peu comme si j'étais arrivée en retard à la messe: des blousons, des manteaux, des manches relevées, une foule masculine. Mais au lieu d'une ambiance de recueillement comme à St Anne, résonnait l'éclat sonore des voix. Le meeting se tenait bien à cet endroit. Il venait d'ailleurs peut-être même de s'achever car personne n'était en train de faire de discours. En traînant à la maison, j'avais fini par le manquer. Il valait peut-être mieux que je me glisse dehors et que je retourne sur mes pas.

À ce moment, j'ai entendu la voix de Connie qui s'élevait sans effort au-dessus de la foule. Elle se tenait à l'entrée de la petite loge dans l'arrière salle, rehaussée d'une marche par rapport à la pièce principale du bar. Tout ce qui restait du mur de la loge, c'étaient six poutres de bois vermoulues. Connie se tenait dans l'espace vide où jadis il y avait eu une porte. Sur la pointe des pieds, je tentais de la voir par-dessus toutes ces têtes d'hommes. Sa taille et le fait qu'elle soit sur un petit podium lui donnait un avantage. Elle portait une sorte de tablier de bergère en soie rentré

dans une étroite jupe grise. Elle avait arrangé ses cheveux en longues mèches ondulantes, attachées d'une barrette ornée d'une primevère. Elle était superbe.

«Chers amis et chers voisins. Encore une fois merci. Accordez-moi encore juste un peu de votre temps, déclara-t-elle. Elle avait l'air contente, presque triomphante alors que le silence revenait peu à peu. Elle avait un sourire éblouissant.

Merci d'avoir bien voulu écouter M. Seton Ritter qui vous a exposé les raisons du besoin urgent qu'il y a pour notre pays de créer un Ordre de la Garde nationale et qui vous a aussi expliqué quels sont nos convictions et nos objectifs. L'Ordre accueille des patriotes honorables comme Hugo — comme M. Seton Ritter ici présent — et moi-même, ainsi qu'un nombre croissant de fermiers comme votre ami George Mather. Il accueille aussi des Anglais ordinaires qui croient dans le progrès et la justice, qui s'élèvent contre l'avènement des prêts bancaires internationaux, contre la centralisation des marchés et l'industrialisation urbaine moderne. Des gens qui n'ont pas peur de remettre en question les puissants édiles de la Société des Nations ou ceux du P.E.P., et qui, par-dessus tout, comprennent l'irremplaçable valeur de nos traditions rurales et souhaitent protéger le bien-être et la pureté de notre sol anglais.»

Un murmure d'approbation a parcouru la salle. Connie s'en sortait assez bien. Tout cela me semblait éminemment sensé. Je me demandais bien ce qu'était le P.E.P. Je lui demanderais plus tard quand j'en aurais l'occasion. J'avais été surprise de voir que Papa avait rejoint ce club ou ce parti, je ne savais pas au juste ce que c'était. Maman le savait-elle?

«Nombreux ici sont ceux qui sont déjà membres d'un syndicat agricole. Notre Ordre n'attend pas de vous que vous renonciez à cette appartenance. Car si des questions de haute importance doivent être abordées concernant la peste bolchévique, nous croyons que la résurrection d'un vigoureux mouvement paysan avec un intérêt réel pour l'avenir de ce pays, est un objectif bien plus pressant. C'est pourquoi, si vous approuvez ce qui a été dit ce soir, je vous invite à rejoindre notre voisin George Mather, qui est responsable de notre antenne locale. Il vous en coûtera un shilling. Ce soir cependant, nous nous limiterons à prendre vos noms. Je reste ici jusqu'à la fermeture. Oh, avant que je n'oublie, dit-elle en montrant un magazine. J'ai avec moi plusieurs exemplaires de notre publication hebdomadaire *The English Pioneer*. Le prix en est normalement d'un penny, mais ce soir, nous vous les offrons à tous gratuitement. Alors venez vous servir. Je pense que vous serez d'accord pour dire que ce magazine sera une lecture enrichissante pour toute la famille.»

Elle nous a souri, a encore remercié la salle, puis est allée s'asseoir à côté d'un homme habillé avec élégance qui portait des lunettes, sûrement M. Seton Ritter. J'ai reconnu M. Chalcott, son ami le photographe, lui aussi installé dans la loge. Mais, alors que le brouhaha des conversations reprenait de plus belle, un costaud aux cheveux blonds s'est frayé un chemin à coups d'épaules pour finalement rejoindre le pupitre et se tourner vers la salle. C'était John.

«J'ai quelque chose à vous dire, mes amis. Si vous voulez m'accorder un moment.»

Derrière le bar, le patron a croisé les bras. Le silence est retombé d'un coup sur les hommes que je voyais toujours de

dos. Un silence plus grand que pour le discours de Connie. Ça m'a encore rappelé la messe.

«Cet été, on a beaucoup vu Mlle FitzAllen à la ferme de Wych. On a aussi beaucoup entendu parler de ses idées, a-t-il commencé. En fait, elle nous est devenue familière — même aux champs, où, c'est juste de le dire, elle nous a été parfois bien utile. Vous savez tous, n'est-ce pas, que je suis un homme droit et que je ne parle pas pour ne rien dire. Je dois donc vous dire ce soir que cette femme n'est pas celle que vous croyez.»

Aucun bruit dans la salle, le murmure même provenant du fond du bar s'était tu. J'ai vu Papa et Sid se lever de leurs chaises et tendre le cou pour observer la petite foule. Perchée sur la pointe des pieds, j'ai réussi à apercevoir le visage de Connie, expression figée, dans l'ombre derrière John. J'en étais malade pour elle et ressentais sa colère.

«Ce soir, M. Seton Ritter ici présent, vous a parlé de patriotisme, de devoir envers ses compatriotes, du lien de sang et de sol qui nous unit. Pour ma part, je ne suis pas d'accord avec tout ce qu'il a dit, loin s'en faut. Mais je le tiens pour un homme d'honneur. Pendant la guerre, il était le Lieutenant-colonel Seton Ritter et il a reçu la médaille de distinction pour service rendu et la croix de guerre. Pourtant d'après moi, il ne suit plus la bonne voie depuis. Cela dit, je le respecte.

Quant à Mlle FitzAllen...»

Connie a fait mine de se lever, mais John s'est tourné vers elle et l'a fait rasseoir d'un regard.

«Notre Mlle FitzAllen aime à s'enorgueillir de ses jours passés en France dans le détachement des auxiliaires volontaires. Pourtant, j'ai demandé autour de moi et d'après ma

petite enquête, elle n'a jamais été volontaire. Vous le saviez, Colonel? a-t-il demandé en regardant par-dessus son épaule.

Ou est-ce qu'elle vous a berné, vous aussi?

Et ça n'est pas tout, continua-t-il. Il s'est retourné vers nous en élevant le ton de sa voix pour couvrir le vacarme qui envahissait de nouveau le bar. Il y a encore autre chose que vous devez savoir avant de vous donner corps et âme à cet ordre ou société ou je ne sais quoi. Il y a quelques semaines, Constance FitzAllen a pris seule l'initiative d'expulser une famille d'indigents qui vivait à Hullet. Pas de raison particulière, sauf qu'ils étaient juifs. Ces Juifs qu'elle rend responsables de tous les maux de notre monde d'aujourd'hui. Eh bien, j'ai des nouvelles de cette famille. Il y a trois jours, j'assistais à un meeting du syndicat à Corwelby. On ne parlait que de cette famille Adler à peine arrivée de chez nous. Le père portait une petite fille de quatre ans du nom d'Esther. Rien de plus qu'un sac d'os. Elle était morte.»

Je fermais les yeux. Un grondement de voix et une agitation montaient autour de moi. L'impression de flotter. Il fallait que je trouve la porte derrière moi pour sortir et respirer de l'air frais. Mais impossible de quitter cet endroit. J'ai pris une grande inspiration. J'ai seulement réussi à m'emplir les poumons de fumée sortie de pipes rances et de l'odeur d'hommes en sueur. John avait tort, évidemment. Il avait complètement tort. Sur toute la ligne.

«Voyez, je ne m'arroe pas le droit de vous dire ce que vous devez penser. Nous avons eu assez d'exemples de cela ce soir, a-t-il poursuivi. Tout ce que je dis, c'est qu'on ne peut



pas résister au changement. Ça n'a jamais fonctionné. Albert Mather est parmi nous ce soir. Le premier et le meilleur homme qui m'ait donné un salaire. Et j'ai beaucoup appris de lui. Il disait toujours qu'on n'arrête pas le changement et qu'il faut aller avec. Parce que le passé est derrière nous, c'est dans l'ordre des choses. Le changement est inéluctable et c'est à nous de décider si on veut y participer ou non.

Mais c'est ce que nous voulons, mon vieux. Tu n'as donc pas entendu un mot de ce qui a été dit?»

C'était la voix de mon père qui tentait de se frayer un passage à travers la foule. Des hommes se retournaient sur son passage en souriant, certains s'écartaient pour le laisser passer. Je sentais maintenant que le centre de leur attention venait de changer. Il y allait avoir du sport. La confrontation entre le maître et l'élève. Deux ou trois hommes l'ont délibérément bousculé, d'autres se poussaient et levaient la tête pour assister au duel. Je cherchais Frank, mais il était dans la salle avec les fils Rose et Grand-père. Peut-être devrais-je rentrer à la maison pour prévenir Maman? Non, ça prendrait trop de temps. Et puis c'était trop tard.

John n'a pas bougé à l'approche de Papa, se contentant de croiser les bras. Derrière, Connie se tenait debout dans la loge. Impossible d'apercevoir M. Chalcott ou quelqu'un d'autre de là où j'étais. Ils devaient tous être restés assis.

Papa s'est arrêté à quelques pas de John, le visage rouge de colère. Malgré l'avantage de l'estrade pour John, les deux avaient à peu de chose près la même taille. Je me suis soudain rendu compte avec horreur qu'ils pourraient en arriver aux mains à n'importe quel moment.

«Mon Dieu, non, ai-je crié malgré moi. Un costaud à côté s'est tourné vers moi. C'était l'apprenti charron. Un type que j'avais vu une fois avec son tablier en cuir. Un dur à l'ouvrage qui trimait parmi les wagons à moitié construits, forgeant leurs larges roues en acier.

Tiens, tiens. Ça ne serait pas la fameuse fille Mather? dit-il en donnant un coup de coude à son voisin. Regarde donc qui est avec nous.»

«Voilà le visage du changement, hurla Papa en montrant Connie du doigt. C'est celui-là, John, celui-là. Nous devons reconstruire notre pays et s'occuper d'abord des gens d'ici.»

Malgré cette apostrophe, de plus en plus d'hommes alentour braquaient leur regard vers moi. Je sentais leurs yeux sur moi, inquisiteurs et avides. Qu'est-ce que l'apprenti charron entendait donc par «la fameuse fille Mather»?

«Ça n'est pas le changement, mon vieux. C'est de la folie. De la folie dangereuse en plus.

— Tu oses me contredire, John Hurlock?

— Sur ce point, oui.

— Tu crois seulement tout savoir mieux que les autres, voilà tout. Tu as toujours été comme ça. Et maintenant, tu t'amènes ici pour répandre ton fumier. Qu'est-ce que ça peut bien faire qu'une femme ait fait la guerre ou non?

— Sûr que ça importe peu. Surtout pour quelqu'un qui n'a pas servi.»

Une effervescence s'est emparée de la foule. Les hommes se sont rués en avant avec une sorte de joie frénétique me laissant sans force, horrifiée et seule. J'ai reculé de quelques pas en titubant, cherchant la porte de l'auberge à

tâtons. J'ai aperçu Frank et Sid Rose, qui bousculaient tout le monde pour rejoindre Papa et John. Et sur le sol, un magazine déchiré, piétiné par les bottes. Avec l'image de mon visage souriant comme une idiote sur une page froissée.

# NATIONAL JURIES

The selected countries for the European Prize for Literature in 2019 are Austria, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and United Kingdom

## AUSTRIA

*President* **Alexander Potyka**, Picus Verlag publishing house, Chairman of the Austrian Publishers' Association and President of Literar-Mechana

*Members*

- Karl Pus, owner of Bestseller bookshop in Vienna
- Carolina Schutti, author and EUPL Austrian winner 2016
- Brigitte Schwenns-Harrant, literary critic
- Nathalie Rouanet, translator

## FINLAND

*President* **Ville Rauvola**, Publisher

*Members*

- Sinikka Vuola, author and creative writing teacher
- Malin Kivelä, novelist and playwright
- Aki Järvinen, sales manager, Academic Bookstore Helsinki
- Anne Mäntynen, author and teacher of Finnish Literature

## FRANCE

*President* **Stephen Carrière**, translator, author and publisher, Anne Carrière Editions

*Members*

- Éric Lafraise – Product manager Literature and Knowledge, Cultura
- Stanislas Rigot, bookseller at Lamartine in Paris
- Gaëlle Josse, author and EUPL French winner 2015
- Marianne Payot, literary critic, l'Express magazine

## GEORGIA

*President* **Natasha Lomouri**, Director of Writer's House of Georgia

*Members*

- Tinatin Beriasvhili, Executive Director of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association
- Medea Metreveli, Director of the National Book Centre
- Paata Shamugia, poet, translator and Head of Georgia Pen Centre
- David Barbakadze, poet and translator

## GREECE

*President* **Liana Sakelliou**, author and professor of English and creative writing at the NKUA

*Members*

- Erasmia-Louisa Stavropoulou, Professor of Modern Greek Literature
- Makis Tsitas, author, journalist, radio host and EUPL Greek winner 2014
- Athina Sokolis, Head of Sokolis publishing house

## HUNGARY

*President* **Endre Szkarosi**, Professor of literature, author

*Members*

- Joëlle Dufeuilly, translator
- Sarolta Deczki, editor and critic
- David Szollat, editor, Professor, researcher and critic
- Jozsef P. Korossi, author and publisher

## IRELAND

*President* **Conor Kostick**, author and Historian

*Members*

- Sinéad Mac Aodh, Ireland Literature Exchange
- Siorcha De Brún, author, Professor of modern Irish prose fiction, Irish language film, drama and poetry
- Ronan Colgan, Managing Director of Wordwell Ltd, publisher of Books Ireland
- Nessa O'Mahony, author and ICLA board member

## National juries

### ITALY

*President* **Barbara Hoepli**, Hoepli bookshops and publishing house, Chairman of the Board of Hoepli S.p.A

*Members*

- Annamaria Malato, CEO of Salerno Editrice Srl and President of the Rome Book Fair 'Più libri più liberi'
- Alessia Rastelli, journalist for "Corriere della Sera", editorial team of the Culture section and the cultural supplement „la Lettura“
- Anna Rottensteiner, author and translator

### LITHUANIA

*President* **Daiva Tamošaitytė**, author, philosopher, musicologist and essayist

*Members*

- Rūta Elijošaitytė, Executive Director of the Lithuanian Publishers Association
- Audinga Peluritytė-Tikušienė, author and literary critic
- Marielle Vitureau, translator
- Laimantas Jonušys, author, literary critic and translator

### POLAND

*President* **Anna Nasilowska**, author, literary critic, Professor and President of the Association of Polish Writers

*Members*

- Bernadeta Darska, author, literary critic and Professor
- Wojciech Nowicki, author, essayist and translator
- Grzegorz Jankowicz, philosopher of Literature, critic and translator, cultural editor of the "Tygodnik Powszechny" weekly
- Maria Krześlak-Kandziora, bookseller

### ROMANIA - SHORTLIST

*President* **Liviu Papadima**, Vice-rector of the University of Bucharest, critic, essayist, Literature historian and contemporary Romanian language theoretician

*Members*

- Razvan Voncu, Professor, author, critic and literary historian
- Oana Doboși-Potcoavă, co-owner of the bookshop La Două Bufnițe in Timișoara
- Angelo Mitchievici, Professor, author, literary critic and essayist
- Daniel Cristea-Enache, Professor, author, essayist and literary critic

## ROMANIA - WINNER

- Members*
- Răzvan Rădulescu, EUPL Romanian winner 2010, author
  - Ioana Pârvulescu, EUPL Romanian winner 2013, Professor, author and translator
  - Claudiu M. Florian, EUPL Romanian winner 2016, author

## SLOVAKIA

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  - Radoslav Passia, author, editor, literary scholar and essayist

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  - Ola Hnatiuk, literary critic, translator and essayist
  - Ostap Slyvynsky, poet, translator and literary critic

## UNITED KINGDOM

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- Members*
- Claire Malcolm, Founder and CEO of New Writing North
  - Sandeep Mahal, Director for Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature
  - Toby Lichtig, fiction and politics editor for the Times Literary Supplement
  - Philip Jones, editor for The Bookseller

# JURY MOTIVATION

## AUSTRIA

Laura Freudenthaler's handling of language and her ingenious narrative methods attracted attention as early as 2014 in her debut story collection *Der Schädel von Madeleine*. Three years later the first novel followed with *Die Königin schweigt*. With her latest novel *Geistergeschichte* she brings her narrative art to mastery.

In it she leads to an unsecured terrain: perception. The "shocks that one does not perceive until something has shifted far enough to fall", which shape the life and perceptions of a pianist in her sabbatical year, are not only told by the author in a gripping way, but Freudenthaler also finds the right language to do so. Memories are composed artfully and she gradually shakes the certainty of the readers through barely noticeable displacements.

Shifts also result from the linguistic world of the protagonist, who has learned her new language German mainly through her husband, whereby his individual way of speaking irrevocably inscribes itself in her

German. *Geistergeschichte* is thus not only a novel about perception and the function of memory, but also about cultural dislocation and cultural roots. A novel that is both Austrian and European down to the last detail.

## FINLAND

Taivas is luminous dystopia of near future. Leino manages to paint decayed 2050s Helsinki in disturbingly realistic way. At the same time she manages to create virtual reality *Heaven* in such manner that reader can easily understand why citizens crave so badly to escape reality. Wise, current and enlightened novel of a very possible dark future.

## FRANCE

Our jury elected Sophie Daull in the first round of votes. Her novel *Au grand lavoir* (*The Wash-house*) left its mark on the jury. Indeed, its subtle balance between intimacy, the brilliant construction and the confirmation of a stripping style strongly imprinted the jury. Her capacity to mix reality and fiction conquered our jury members. The emotion the text conveys finishes to



convince the reader of the author's vast talent. One needs bravery to be able to tackle the theme of forgiveness/guilt after *Crime and Punishment*. Sophie Daull in an autobiographic and literary move make her missing ones alive through the strength of love and poetry.

## GEORGIA

The novel by Beqa Adamashvili *Everyone dies in this Novel* is a metatext in its classical postmodernist sense. The author not only continues the line of intellectual detective, but manages to come up with high quality literature, where intellectual and poetic origins complement and empower each other. Notwithstanding its complex structural composition, extremely rich intertextual net and polyphonic kaleidoscope of characters, the special feature of the novel is a very attractive style of storytelling, which becomes even more appealing by masterly composed language games and extensive intellectual humour. This is the case where the literary piece is interesting because each of the artistic task is implemented on the highest level.

The culturological characteristic of the novel should be specially emphasized – on one hand, it is an excellent example a masterly written dialogue with post modern European tradition and on the second hand a non-trivial sequel to the German speaking Georgian author's Givi Margvelashvili's classical aesthetic

line, where characters revolt against the author.

And finally, the novel by Beqa Adamashvili *Everyone dies in this Novel* has its stubborn professional ethics: literature does not necessarily mean a strong plot, political correctness, covering the important social themes, epatage... literature is not journalism, does not welcome diminishing artistic goals – it is rather an autonomous entity.

## GREECE

The novel examines a contemporary theme that concerns the whole world: the homeless, the refugees, the marginals and their persecutors. It records a harsh and relentless situation: there is a trend of violence affecting the public and various groups of people. This violence differs place to place, but is a widespread and internalised one.

The homeless characters are described realistically: pitiful appearance, cruelty towards each other, humiliation which brings more shame. However, the novel is tender when it reveals the characters' paths, and what led them to marginalization. The homeless murderers search for the identity of the unknown murdered one. They build together his personality and life through speculations, reminiscent of the writer's character creation: he follows them and they show him the way. The novel shows that outcasts need

## Jury motivation

protection whose extinction should be condemned.

The author's observations are deep and the descriptions very detailed. The many contrary ideas and images function harmoniously. The narrative is unique: different narrators and alternating viewpoints, one generating another. The words are more important than the meaning. They have a wild beauty and reveal a sculpting ability, expressed through images and sounds.

The theme, characterisation and writing style produce together a powerful novel which excels through acute observation, extensive research and mostly, compassion.

### HUNGARY

*Magnetic Hill* is a critical novel, evoking to some extent a nineteenth-century -critical realism. The novel depicts the great expectations of Hungarian academic intellectuals after the fall of Communism by narrating the development of Réka, a university student, and two of her teachers, both young sociologists. They are typical representatives of a generation that dreamed about a more integrated society and about a higher level of academic perspectives in Hungary but soon they reached bitter disillusionments. The storytelling, on its surface appearing conventionally realistic, makes the novel easy to read

in the beginning, but *Magnetic hill* turns out to be subversive in a narratological sense. Conventional narrative structure is more and more challenged throughout the novel, and readers are compelled to re-evaluate the characters as their real nature unfolds with the story. The Hungarian EUPL jury hopes that the story of typical first generation Post-Communist intellectuals will find its readers not only in Central and Eastern Europe but also anywhere. The sharp irony of contrasting the theory of the academic people with their everyday practices, that is to say, their ideals with their actual way of life, is another feature that makes *Magnetic Hill* exceptionally amusing.

### IRELAND

Firstly, this novel displays a high standard of prose composition throughout. This is a sensuous read where sentences tumble unexpectedly from the page. Secondly, this a book that is rooted in a very particular geographical and social space but which reaches out to the whole of Europe in its engagement with myth and paternal crisis. There has been something of a renaissance in literature from Northern Ireland in the last decade, perhaps underpinned by a peace process that has allowed authors to breathe and speak with daringly candid voices. Here, for example, we enter the mind of a sectarian murderer

from East Belfast, now reformed. For readers wanting an insight into the lived experience of the people of Belfast, especially those working class Protestants who have been neglected in literature, they will obtain such from this novel.

Much more importantly, however, this work is more than a sociology text. It is a novel about seduction. The seductive qualities of lust and violence are epitomised in the Siren, a descendent, or perhaps indeed the same creature, who lured sailors of the Classical era to their doom. And while the Siren's impact on Jonathan, the retiring doctor, is largely positive (until he is overtaken by his fate), her seductive powers are mirrored in the way that violence and arson exert a fascinating but socially disastrous appeal to Sammy and his son.

### ITALY

Written by Giovanni Dozzini: *E Baboucar guidava la fila* is a powerful story that focuses on the important and relevant topic of immigration, without falling for preconceptions. Well written and precise, the story is told through the eyes of four boys who are waiting for a response to their asylum requests. The author Dozzini has the fine ability to describe the characters' feelings and perspectives by focusing on the concept of "other". This is done by showcasing how complex integration into a new, established and different

social-cultural reality can be. Giovanni Dozzini highlights some of the daily difficulties in common that are relevant to 20-25-year old's generally, rather than the overshadowing political themes; those that are often at the centre of the mainstream media's narrative on migration. By doing so, the book allows the reader to understand the importance of patience and respect in relation to our values of hospitality. *E Baboucar guidava la fila* succeeds in appealing to a vast public, those engaged with socio-political topics, but also readers who are searching for a modern-day romance. Further, the story can help to sensitize the attitudes of the younger generations towards the fore-mentioned topic and those concerned.

### LITHUANIA

National jury elected Daina Opolskaitė as a winner for the prize out of three candidates. While Gabija Grušaitė is intellectual young writer, who touches many actual themes like discrimination, globalization, press and media role in shaping the public opinion, traveling through different cultures and place of native culture in international panorama, and is very popular among artists of Lithuania, and Mindaugas Urbonas is very talented, master of fluent style and vast fantasy, D. Opolskaitė outbids them both as a writer of much higher quality of literature itself. The book *Dienų piramidės* is a result of long

## Jury motivation

observation of everyday life. The author was very attentive to the form as well as to the content of the short stories. She finished them in twenty years. D. Opolskaitė has distinctive personal style, and because of her unprecedented conscientiousness and insight this book has become an event in Lithuanian short story writing. She did precise work with a word and created deeply existential psychological prose, comparable to the finest examples of this kind of literature. We think that translation will require good professional skills in order to convey full subtleness of the work. *Dienų piramidės* has a great value as a genre and as an outstanding example of Lithuanian brand. D. Opolskaitė is truly an emerging talent, because is humble by nature and writes for the sake of inner necessity.

### POLAND

Polish Jury at meeting held on 11 April 2019 in the Chamber of Polish Publishers in Warsaw discussed 3 shortlisted books. We find the novel of Marta Dzido the best due to the rich language, construction of the plot and very refreshing imagination. Marta Dzido shows sensuality of a young woman in her first love but remarks also the time: 90-s in Poland, the era before Facebook, last generation which had only immediate experience and the first one to be able to travel from Poland

to other places in Europe without restrictions. The first relationship of the characters is spontaneous, there are no plans for future, no obligations, just pleasure and freedom as the most important values. It ends unexpectedly, but after years she (and he) find their relationship to still be perfect and true. The novel reminds jury members of the young Marquerite Duras love writing.

### ROMANIA

The novel by Tatiana Țîbuleac has been of great impact for the Romanian readers. It beholds at least three qualities which make it worth of the EUPL: literary value, a subject of actuality and the capacity to bring emotions to a large public. Within the literary value there is this passionate, unmistakeable stylistic touch, a well-controlled narrative breath, both robust and full of poetry and feeling. The subject of actuality is one woman's strive (could be anyone of us) to find her place in a rapidly-changing world. Of course, this does not exclude the perennial themes of novel as such, amongst which maternity plays here a central role. Not least, Tatiana Țîbuleac has the courage to intertwine her feminine character's storyline with historic tales concerning Bessarabia, a delicate issue in Romania's history, without falsifying or simplifying the complex reality.

## **SLOVAKIA**

The Slovak jury of the 2019 European Union Literature Prize has chosen Ivana Dobráková for the following reasons: its subtle subversion of social decorum and courageous and pertinent depiction of things that take place “below the surface”; the author’s endeavour to include in her writing, in an organic way, burning issues of social networks and the inter-relations between virtual reality and offline reality; her deep insight into current cultural trends; the functional utilisation of irony and self-irony in her texts and her polished literary language.

## **UKRAINE**

Haska Shyyan’s *Behind the Back* is a quality mainstream novel with the potential to draw a wider readership towards more complex topics which tend to be absent from contemporary Ukrainian literature.

The novel is stylistically skillful and mature but is also important for the present day, because it places Ukraine within the universal human context. The author converts this war from “somewhere there in the wild East” into the disturbing space of “here, in our shared Europe”. The conflict is indeed here, on our continent and concerns all Europeans.

Shyyan’s heroine, whose lover goes to the front, is both Ukrainian and

European; she is a resident of a big city, financially secure and freely operates the “global codes”. This new experience of the war, which she did not choose, makes her reconsider the concepts of “stability”, “security”, “mutual aid”, much more skeptically than before.

Haska Shyyan reminds us that this world of violence, death, wounds, mutilation, young widows and military hospitals, is very close. Modern life, overfilled with information is no more stable or secure than in the past, and humans are not any better. However, there are people able to understand and help.

The novel *Behind the Back* is about modern Ukraine, but not exclusively. It is also about our so called safe modern world but is fragile: starting with family and ending with societies, states and global institutions.

## **UNITED KINGDOM**

We believe that *ALL AMONG THE BARLEY* is a brilliant and timely novel. Deeply evocative of a historical moment - rural England between the wars, before mechanisation - it is also, unmistakably, about questions that press hard on us today, above all the dangers of nationalism, and how easily a love of place can be corrupted into something dark and exclusionary.

*ALL AMONG THE BARLEY* is a novel that uses an historical setting to tell us something of today. The story is

## Jury motivation

completely convincing in terms of character, place, and time. Melissa Harrison writes beautifully but this is far from a straightforward tale. The ending is surprising and incredibly moving. She is engaged with many different ideas and it packs a punch and does everything a reader would want from a novel. It is a beautiful, heart-breaking novel of great power

It is an incredible evocation of one corner of rural England in the 1930s. The story is powerful and subtle and richly detailed, this is a book that inhabits its

territory, knows its people, and follows its own haunting logic. Melissa Harrison has built a world for us, and peopled it, making it solid and real, and all the time making one aware of an awesome fragility – of human minds and bodies, of farmers under politicians and under nature, of ideas that might transform lives or might destroy them.

ALL AMONG THE BARLEY was the first book on both the longlist and shortlist for all the jury. We commend it to the EUPL Committee for the overall winner of 2019.

# THE EUROPEAN UNION PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

**T**he aim of the European Union Prize for Literature is to put the spotlight on the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe's contemporary literature in the field of fiction, to promote the circulation of literature within Europe and encourage greater interest in non-national literary works.

The works of the selected winners (one winning author per country participating in the Prize on a rotating basis) will reach a wider and international audience, and touch readers beyond national and linguistic borders.

The Prize is financed by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union whose three main objectives are: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

## SELECTION PROCESS

The winning authors are selected by qualified juries set up in each of the 14 countries participating in the 2019 award.

The nomination of candidates and the final selection of one winner in each

country took place between January 2019 and May 2019.

The new emerging talents were selected on the basis of criteria stipulated by the European Commission and fulfil in particular the following requirements:

- The author must be a citizen of the 14 selected countries.
- The author should have published between 2 and 4 contemporary fiction books.
- The winning book must not exceed the maximum number of 4 translations.
- The winning books must be the latest work of the author, should have been published in the last 18 months and/or must still be commercially available.

## JURIES

Three jury members are appointed by the national members of EIBF, EWC and FEP. The additional jury's members have been selected from a list of prominent literary personalities in each of the 14 countries participating. National juries are composed by a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 members

The jury reports were delivered in order to justify the jury's choice and provide relevant information on the winner and his/her work.

## **THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

[www.ec.europa.eu/culture](http://www.ec.europa.eu/culture)

The European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL) is part of Creative Europe, the EU Framework programme for support to the culture and audiovisual sectors.

### **More information:**

<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/>

Creative Europe Desks for information and advice are set up in all countries participating in the programme, including in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands.

### **Contact details:**

[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/contact\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/contact_en)

## **THE CONSORTIUM**

The European Writers' Council

[www.europeanwriters.eu](http://www.europeanwriters.eu)

The Federation of European Publishers

[www.fep-fee.eu](http://www.fep-fee.eu)

The European and International Booksellers Federation

[www.europeanbooksellers.eu](http://www.europeanbooksellers.eu)

The European Union Prize for Literature

[www.euprizeliterature.eu](http://www.euprizeliterature.eu)

