

The European Union Prize for Literature

Eleven winning authors

2010



Culture Programme



Education and Culture DG



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

The European Union Prize for Literature

Eleven winning authors

2010



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

www.euprizeliterature.eu



Education and Culture DG
Culture Programme



european
booksellers
federation



Federation of
European Publishers

Table of Content

Foreword	5
The 2010 winning authors	
Belgium	
Peter Terrin – <i>De Bewaker</i>	7
Cyprus	
Myrto Azina Chronides – <i>To Peirama</i>	13
Denmark	
Adda Djørup – <i>Den mindste modstand</i>	25
Estonia	
Tiit Aleksejev – <i>Palveränd</i>	43
Finland	
Riku Korhonen – <i>Lääkäriromaani</i>	59
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	
Goce Smilevski – <i>Сестрата на Зигмунд Фројд</i>	71
Germany	
Iris Hanika – <i>Das Eigentliche</i>	91
Luxembourg	
Jean Back – <i>Amateur</i>	107
Romania	
Răzvan Rădulescu – <i>Teodosie cel Mic</i>	123
Slovenia	
Nataša Kramberger – <i>Nebesa v robidah: roman v zgodbah</i>	141
Spain	
Raquel Martínez-Gómez – <i>Sombras de unicornio</i>	163
Bibliography	175

Foreword

Foreword by José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

I am delighted to present the eleven winners of this year's edition of the European Union Prize for Literature. And I am glad that together with the European Booksellers Federation (EBF), the European Writers' Council (EWC) and the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) we are able to showcase a short passage from their award winning book in this brochure in their mother tongue and in a translation in English. This overview shows the great diversity of new European literature and highlights the unique virtues of this new European Prize.

Europe's vibrant creativity, its cultural diversity and abundant variety of styles and languages makes it a very attractive place to live, work and visit. In fact our diversity is one of our great assets. But diversity is also challenging because it means extra efforts have to be made to provide access to new literary works, simply because new fiction is often only available in the author's mother tongue. The latest digital developments are providing easier access to culture, but without the translation of new literature and accompanying cross-border promotion much of Europe's literary potential runs the risk of going unnoticed. This is where this prize aims to make a difference.

By working together with EBF, EWC and FEP, the Commission is aiming at showcasing the diversity of contemporary European fiction by helping new authors to break through national borders. We want to put the spotlight on emerging authors who otherwise may not be easily spotted outside their own country. By working together in this way the involved sectors and the Commission want to develop a smoother path for the translation of new literature. We expect that this will also increase the chance of new authors breaking through into other areas such as television, film and theatre.

The European book and publishing sectors top the rankings in the world and in these challenging times our aim has to be to stimulate developments that can increase European employment. We know that locally rooted talent can go on to have major international success; here are eleven examples of European authors who are still working nationally, but we hope they will break through.

International recognition can help not only their career, but also the employment of others through turnover in other sectors such as theatre, television, internet, film and tourism. From the study on the Economy of Culture – which the EU commissioned in 2006 – we know that culture and the cultural and creative industries are big and dynamic contributors to Europe's economies. They employ more than 5 million people across the EU – 27 and contribute 2,6% to the EU Gross Domestic Product. Experience teaches us that strengthening the potential of new authors can – over time – help smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.

Great adventures start between the cover of a book, but the book's success depends on its readers. I really hope you enjoy these excerpts –which were chosen by the authors themselves – as much as I have and that it will give you an appetite to find out more about their work.



José Manuel BARROSO



© Stefan Vanfleteren

Peter Terrin

De Bewaker (2009)

The Guard

Publishing House **De Arbeiderspers**

Biography

Peter Terrin (b.1968) represents a unique voice in contemporary Dutch-language literature, touching on universal and highly topical themes alike. Terrin, who has been described as 'a master of ominous detail', is considered by critics to be a literary maverick, a classic writer who doesn't follow trends, and a masterful stylist. He has also written for the theatre and is active as a columnist. Terrin has been nominated for major literary awards several times, including the AKO Literature Prize and the Libris Literature Prize. For *De bijeneters*, he was awarded the West Flanders Prize for Literature. The film rights to *Blanco* were sold to CCCP in Brussels, with the production selected for the Berlinale Co-Production Market in 2008.

Synopsis

In *De Bewaker*, Terrin tells a strongly allegorical story of 21st-century society, which holds the reader under its spell for 200 pages. Written in a sober style, the book slowly reveals the war of nerves underlying the narrative. Harry and Michel, two highly conscientious men, have been given an assignment to guard a block of 40 luxury apartments with their lives. They have taken up their position in a vast underground car park, from where they have an uninterrupted view of the entrance. The pair conduct their inspection rounds extremely meticulously and with an iron discipline. However, Harry and Michel are kept completely in the dark as to the whys and wherefores of their mission. They soon become entirely cut off from the outside world and have hardly any contact with the pompous, rich residents they are 'protecting'. Is there a war going on outside, they wonder, as the streets become eerily quiet. Even when one day all the residents of the complex – save for one – do a moonlight flit, they continue to unerringly carry out their duties. Their nerves are strained to breaking point. The inspection rounds become more and more obsessive. This tension is described in illuminating detail by Michel, who registers every sound, every scent, every change in the light, as the story progresses. *De Bewaker* is not only an enthralling psychological novel, it is also a love story, one which encompasses oppressiveness, emotion and explicit sensuality.

De Bewaker

Peter Terrin

Fragment hoofdstuk 69

Door de stilte te verbreken heeft de fietser haar bevestigd. Hij heeft de stilte op slot gedaan. Zijn passage was het geluid van de vergrendeling. Er is niemand meer in de stad, een halvegare op een oude fiets en twee bewakers in een kelder niet te na gesproken.

Harry heeft zich vergist. Er is geen laatste bewoner in dit gebouw; na zo lang zouden we een teken van leven hebben opgevangen. Iedereen is vertrokken, iedereen is op de vlucht. De stad werd niet geëvacueerd, maar is simpelweg door iedereen op eigen houtje ontvlucht. Harry, ikzelf en de dolle fietser zijn achtergebleven.

Niemand heeft ons verwittigd. Zoals sommigen hebben voorspeld, doemt een nieuw soort oorlog op, gemakshalve de Nieuwe Oorlog genaamd. Een oorlog waarvan niemand weet of hij werkelijk bestaat, nog moet beginnen of reeds in alle hevigheid is uitgebroken. Iets uit een toekomstroman.

Wat het wapen is en wat de verwonding, welk doel is gesteld door welke partijen: daar heeft iedereen het raden naar. Precies hierin ligt het voornaamste kenmerk van deze wereldoorlog. Precies dit jaagt iedereen op de vlucht: de vijand is onbekend.

De organisatie is ons uit het oog verloren. Bij een nucleaire aanval op de zuidkust was men ons komen halen. Bij een virale terreuraanval zou alles in het werk worden gesteld om de quarantaine van dit belangrijke stadsdeel zo vlug mogelijk op te heffen. Harry en ik zijn hier achtergelaten. Er is niemand meer om te beschermen en het gebouw wordt niet concreet bedreigd.

Ons verblijf op deze post is een administratieve vergetelheid van een dolgedraaide overste. Daarom horen wij niets van de organisatie, en niet omdat we in stilte zo voortreffelijk onze boontjes doppen. Daarom daagt de bewaker maar niet op. Men is ons vergeten.

The Guard

Peter Terrin

Translated from the Dutch by David Colmer – Ch. 69

By breaking the silence the cyclist has confirmed it. He's locked it down. The sound of his passing was the turning of the key. There is no one in the city except a halfwit on an old bike and two guards in a cellar.

Harry was wrong. There is no last resident left in the building; after all this time we would have seen some sign of life. Everyone's gone, everyone has fled. The city wasn't evacuated, its inhabitants just ran for it as best they could. Harry, me and the mad cyclist have been left behind.

No one informed us. Just as some people predicted, a new kind of war has arrived – conveniently referred to as the New War. A war whose very existence is subject to question, no one knowing whether it's already raging or yet to start. Something from a futuristic novel.

The weapons and the wounds they cause, the objectives and who's set them are anybody's guess. And *that* is the chief characteristic of this world war. That's what makes everyone flee: the enemy is unknown.

We've slipped off the organisation's radar. After a nuclear attack on the south coast they would have come to pick us up. After a viral terrorist attack they would have done everything in their power to lift the quarantine in this crucial part of the city as soon as possible. Harry and I have been left behind. There is no one for us to protect and no concrete threat to the building.

Our ongoing posting here is an administrative oversight made by a commander who's cracked under the pressure. That's why we no longer hear anything from the organisation – not because we're doing such an excellent job of taking care of ourselves. That's why the guard doesn't show up. They've forgotten us.



Myrto Azina Chronides

To Peirama (2009)

The Experiment

Publishing House **Armida Publications**

Biography

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

Synopsis

In short, Myrto Azina's book could be described as a study on erotic love and the soul. A couple's sexual relationship forms the central theme running across most of the stories. From the beginning, He and She, the book's protagonists, take a pledge to undergo an 'experiment': to understand the nature of erotic love and their relationship by abstaining from carnal contact so as to devote themselves to writing. She is an unbowed woman who claims her freedom. He is, "a wise man, a believer in the Socratic saying, 'All I know is that I know nothing'". *To Peirama's* peculiar, subtly connected narrative houses a collection of tales that lean towards the structure of a synthetic prose piece, neither novella nor novel. Consequently, the book is an original work, which does not fit easily within any traditional genre of creative prose.

To Peirama

Myrto Azina Chronides

Το σπήλαιο και το δέντρο

– *C'est une Folie!*
(Είναι μια τρέλα)... και γέλασε.

– *Ma Folie!*
(Η δική μου τρέλα),
εσύ, της απάντησε.

Anne Delbée, “Une femme”

... and all this is folly to the world
(... κι όλα αυτά είναι τρέλα για
τον κόσμο).
Ezra Pound, “A girl”

Εδώ και τρεις νύχτες, δεν περνούσε το κατώφλι του δωματίου. Την κοίταζε από μακριά, που είχε απλωμένα τα χαρτιά της, στοιβαγμένα τα βιβλία και τα μολύβια πάνω στο κρεβάτι τους και το παράθυρο ανοιχτό στο καταχείμωνο, να βλέπει, λέει, το φεγγάρι.

Αν δεν ήξερε αυτές τις καταστάσεις από παλιά, θα νόμιζε πως είχε μπει στην κλιμακτήριο κι άρχισαν οι εξάψεις. Αναγνώριζε όμως τη φωτιά στα μάτια της, το βλέμμα της τρελής, όπως έλεγε η ίδια, κι ήξερε και το χέρι της καλά, που πηγαينوερχόταν νευρικά πάνω στο χαρτί, σαν το βελόνι ραπτομηχανής, που ράβει ακατάπανυστα κάποιο στρίφωμα φούστας.

Εκείνη, πάλι, δεν τον προσκαλούσε, ούτε προκαλούσε το άγγιγμά του. Ένιωθε μια φωτιά να καίει στο σώμα της που δεν προερχόταν από τον ίδιο.

Οι χυμοί κυκλοφορούσαν αδιάκοπα. Η μαύρη χολή, το αίμα, ο αέρας, η βλέννα, όπως τα κατέγραψε πριν χρόνια ο Paracelsus, ξεκινώντας από τον Ιπποκράτη. Ήταν δηλητηριασμένη με τις λέξεις.

Κι έπειτα ήταν και κάτι άλλο. Κάτι που δεν ήθελε ακόμα να του ομολογήσει. Κάτω από το κρεβάτι τους, ήταν εδώ και μέρες μια καταπακτή, που δημιουργήθηκε από το τίποτα.

Ήταν δυο ή τρεις μέρες μετά τα Χριστούγεννα και ξάπλωναν μαζί στο στρώμα, όταν ακούστηκαν παράξενες κραυγές να σχίζουν τον αέρα.

Εκείνη σηκώθηκε απότομα και κοίταξε μέσ' απ' το τζάμι και είπε:

«Ω κοίτα! Μα κοίταξε σου λέω, κάτι λευκά πουλιά πετούνε στο φεγγάρι».

Κι εκείνος μισοσήκωσε τον κορμό του, τεντώθηκε κι είδε τα πουλιά και της εξήγησε:

«Είναι οι χήνες του χιονιού. Μα τι παράξενο! Πώς βρέθηκαν στα μέρη μας; Θα χιονίσει σίγουρα πολύ ετούτο το χειμώνα».

«Θα 'θελα να 'μουνα πουλί», του είπε. «Να πετώ πάνω απ' τα σπίτια και να προσπαθώ να φτάσω στα πιο ψηλά βουνά. Να παίζω με τα ξάρτια των караβιών και να κουρνιαζώ στους ψηλούς πύργους των κάστρων. Κι όταν σε πεθυμώ, να 'ρχομαι πάλι, γυναίκα, στην αγκαλιά σου».

«Tree you are, moss you are...» (Είσαι δέντρο, είσαι βρύο...), της απήγγειλε ένα στίχο από τον Ezra Pound.

«Δεν θα μπορούσα να 'μαι δέντρο», του είπε. «Τα δέντρα δεν μπορούν να πετάξουν. Κι εγώ πετώ, πετώ, κοιτάξέ με πώς πετώ!» είπε κι έκαμε μια πιρουέτα σέρνοντας μαζί της και το σεντόνι, που την τύλιξε σαν να 'ταν κάποιο άγαλμα ήρωα που περιμένει τ' αποκαλυπτήρια.

«Κι όμως, είσαι δέντρο», της είπε. «Ένα δέντρο που θέλει να πετάξει, αλλά οι ρίζες του στο χώμα είναι το ίδιο στιβαρές με τα κλαδιά του. Δεν θα πετάξεις ποτέ ολότελα. Θα μεγαλώνεις τα κλαδιά σου να φτάσουν το φεγγάρι, θα τεντώνεσαι, μα οι ρίζες σου όλο και θα σε δένουν με το χώμα. Θα ζουν υπόγεια, ανεξάρτητα από σένα τη δική τους ζωή και θα κρατούν και το σώμα του δέντρου σου στερεό, να μεγαλώνει χωρίς τον κίνδυνο του αγέρα».

«Εγώ θα πετάξω! Πιστεύω στα θαύματα», του είπε με νόημα. «Άσε και θα δεις!»

«Μ' αρέσουν οι εκπλήξεις», της απάντησε παιχνιδιάρικα.

Οι χήνες του χιονιού έφεραν μαζί τους επισκέψεις: Μια μακρινή θεία· την είδε εκείνη και την κάλεσε για φαγητό, ν' αναθερμάνουν τις σχέσεις τους.

«Θέλεις να σου διαβάσω ποίηση καθώς πίνεις το τσάι σου;» τη ρώτησε.

Κι άρχισε να διαβάζει. Όταν σχεδόν είχε τελειώσει, γύρισε και κοίταξε τα γουρλωμένα μάτια της θείας, τάχα, «Τι ποιήματα είναι αυτά, παιδί μου», και πριν προλάβει να κάμει η ίδια κάποιο σχόλιο, η θεία άφησε μια λέξη να πέσει στην ποδιά της.

Κι ήταν η λέξη που έψαχνε για χρόνια. Η λέξη-αζίνα, γιατί μ' αυτή άρχισε να σκάβει το λαγούμι κάτω από το κρεβάτι τους. Τακ τακ, ντουκ ντουκ, έσκαβε τα βράδια ενώ αυτός κοιμόταν. Μια-δυο φορές τον ξύπνησε, τον αναστάτωσε. Ύστερα

σκέφτηκε να βάλει στο κρασί του υπνωτικό ή κάποιο βότανο, μέχρι να τελειώσει το σκάψιμο. Έτσι έκαμε. Το λαγούμι προχωρούσε. Η λέξη – αξίνα ανακατώθηκε τόσο με τα χώματα, που χάθηκε λασπωμένη στον πυθμένα του πηγαδιού.

Ξάφνου έφτασε. Έφτασε στο σπήλαιο, στα Πετράλωνα, λίγα χιλιόμετρα έξω απ' τη Θεσσαλονίκη. Μια υγρή, θερμή ατμόσφαιρα την τύλιξε από παντού.

«Έξω είναι πλην έξι βαθμοί, μέσα ζεστασιά», είπε ο ξεναγός. «Γι' αυτό το διάλεξε ο πρωτόγονος άνθρωπος, για να προστατεύεται από το κρύο».

Εκείνη έδωσε γρήγορα γρήγορα τον ξεναγό κι έμεινε μόνη. Στα πόδια της, παντού απλωμένη μια λίμνη, σαν ένας διάφανος καθρέφτης. Από ψηλά, τεράστιοι σταλαχτίτες σαν πολυέλαιοι κι από δίπλα σταλαγμίτες σαν κολόνες. Μικρά γεφύρια ένωναν τις αίθουσες, η σπηλιά ήταν χωρισμένη σε διάφορα διαμερίσματα με αλάτινα κιγκλιδώματα.

Της φάνηκε πως άκουγε από παντού μια μελωδία: «Τρεις μέρες χώρισα από σένα...». Ίσως ερχόταν από το ραδιόφωνο του ξεναγού. Μέσα απ' το νερό, έλαμπαν κέρματα, ευχές από τους περαστικούς να ξαναγυρίσουν κάποτε σ' εκείνη τη σπηλιά.

Κι ύστερα κάθισε σ' ένα κούφωμα που έμοιαζε με κάθισμα κι ένιωσε πως αποκοιμιόταν και πως το σώμα του, το αγκάλιασμά του, πρωτόγονα όσο ποτέ, εισχώρησαν μέσα της απότομα. Τόσο απότομα που θέλησε για μια στιγμή να κλάψει. Όχι από πόνο. Από ξάφνιασμα, γιατί περίμενε από χρόνια αυτό το βίαιο σμίξιμο, και να που ήρθε τώρα με μια λέξη μόνο από το πουθενά.

«Περίμενε», του είπε. «Μη συνεχίζεις έτσι. Μου λείπουν οι λέξεις σου, ο λόγος σου. Πέρασαν αιώνες από τότε που κατοικούσαμε σε τούτη τη σπηλιά».

«The tree has entered my hands,

The sap has ascended my arms», της ψιθύρισε.

(Το δέντρο έχει μπηχτεί στα χέρια μου,

Ο χυμός έχει ανεβεί στα μπράτσα μου).

Ύστερα εκείνη σηκώθηκε αργά και καθρεφτίστηκε στη λίμνη
κι η εικόνα της αλλοιωνόταν ολοένα...

* * *

«Τελικά, είμαι δέντρο», του ομολόγησε καθώς τον έβλεπε να
στέκεται στο κατώφλι του υπνοδωματίου. «Είμαι χιονισμένη
το χειμώνα κι ανθισμένη την άνοιξη. Ρίχνω τα φύλλα μου το
φθινόπωρο και πρασινίζω το καλοκαίρι. Ανεβάζω κλαδιά στο
φεγγάρι για να πετάξω κι ελπίζω πάντα πως οι ρίζες μου είναι
μέσα σου.

»Ρουφούν αίμα από την καρδιά σου. Οι χυμοί μου φαρμακώ-
νουν τον εγκέφαλό σου. Τα τριχοειδή μου στήνουν ενέδρες
στη λογική σου. Θα 'θελα να 'μουν ένα σαρκοβόρο δέντρο.
Να σε τρώω λίγο λίγο ολόκληρο και να σε κυοφορώ γεννώ-
ντας σε, όλες τις εποχές στα κλαδιά – τα χέρια μου. Θα 'ναι η
μόνη μου παρηγοριά, αφού ποτέ δεν θα μπορέσω να πετάξω
όπως θέλω.

»Έλα μέσα λοιπόν κι άσε με να σε ξαφνιάσω με τις τρέλες μου.
Πέρνα γρήγορα γρήγορα το κατώφλι και μοιράσου τη χαρά
μου!»

«Μα τι 'ναι όλα αυτά», είπε ο άντρας έκθαμβος, μπαίνοντας
απ' το λαγούμι στη σπηλιά. Παράλληλα ανοιγόκλεισε τα
μάτια του, βλέποντας πως, αντί για κέρμα, κάποιος είχε ρίξει
μες στη λίμνη το φεγγάρι.

Η γυναίκα γέλασε. Τα ήξερε όλα. Τα είχε ονειρευτεί τόσες
φορές. Τα είχε σκηνοθετήσει άλλες τόσες.

«Κυρία, κυρία», τους διέκοψε ο ξεναγός. «Ελάτε να δείτε το σκελετό του πρωτόγονου ανθρώπου! Πέθανε στα τριάντα του, σε βαθιά γεράματα, κουλουριασμένος σ' αυτό το κούφωμα».

Η γυναίκα έσπρωξε πάλι στο πλάι τον ξεναγό και σκέφτηκε: «Αφού σ' αγαπώ και σ' αγαπώ, τι έχει να γυρέψει εδώ ο θάνατος;»

Φλεβάρης 2002

The Experiment

Myrto Azina Chronides

Translated from the Greek by Irena Ioannides

The cave and the tree

– *C'est une Folie! (It's Folly)...* and she laughed.

– *Ma Folie! (My Folly), you, he replied to her.*

Anne Delbée, "Une femme"

... and all this is folly to the world

Ezra Pound, "A girl"

Three nights now he wouldn't cross the threshold into the bedroom. He watched from a distance — how she had spread out her papers, piled up her books and pencils on their bed, with the window open in the dead of winter so she could see, as she would say, the moon.

If he had not experienced similar situations in the past, he would have thought she had entered menopause and that the hot flashes had started. But he recognized the fire in her eyes, the gaze of a mad woman, as she would call it, and knew that hand too well — nervously moving back and forth over the paper like the needle of a sewing machine that incessantly hems a skirt.

Then again, she did not invite him, nor provoke his touch. A fire was burning her body, but he was not the cause.

The juices kept circulating. Black bile, blood, air, mucus, as had been recorded centuries ago by Paracelsus, starting with Hippocrates. She was poisoned by words.

And there was something else — something that she did not wish to confess to him yet. Under their bed, for days now, a trapdoor had been created out of nothing.

It must have been two or three days after Christmas, when they were laying in bed together and those strange cries tore the air.

She jumped up, looked out the window, and exclaimed:

“Oh look! Look, I tell you, some white birds are flying to the moon.”

And he half-raised his torso, stretched, saw the birds, and explained:

“Snow geese. How strange! How did they ever get to our parts? We’re sure to get a lot of snow this winter.”

“I’d love to be a bird,” she said. “To fly over houses, trying to reach the highest mountains. To play with the rigging of boats and roost in the tall towers of castles. And when I miss you, to turn back into a woman, in your arms.”

“Tree you are, moss you are...” he recited a verse by Ezra Pound to her.

“I couldn’t be tree,” she said. “Trees can’t fly. And I’m flying, flying, look how I’m flying!” she said, pirouetting with the sheet wrapped around her body like the statue of a hero that waits to be unveiled.

“But you are a tree,” he told her. “A tree that wants to fly, but whose roots in the ground are as sturdy as its branches. You’ll never be able to fly, not completely. You’ll keep growing your branches to reach the moon, you’ll stretch, but your roots will fix you deeper in the soil. They’ll live underground, have their own life despite you, keeping the body of the tree solid, growing without fearing the wind.”

“I will fly! I believe in miracles,” she said with meaning. “You’ll see!”

“I like surprises,” he replied playfully.

The snow geese brought visitors with them: a distant aunt. She had run into her and invited her to dinner, to rekindle their relationship.

“Shall I read poetry to you while you drink your tea?” she asked her.

And she started to read. As she was about to finish, she noticed the aunt’s bulging eyes, as though: “What kinds of poems are these, my dear?” and before she had a chance to comment, the aunt let a word drop into her apron.

And that was the word she had been seeking for years. That was the word-pickaxe, with which she started digging the tunnel under their bed. Tack-tack, tock-tock, she dug at night while he slept. She disturbed him, woke him up once or twice. Then she thought of dropping a narcotic or some herb into his wine, just until she finished digging. And that’s what she did. The tunnel was extending. The word-pickaxe became so mixed up with the soil and, muddy as it was, it got lost at the bottom of the well.

Suddenly she arrived. She arrived at the cave, at Petralona, a few kilometers outside Thessaloniki. A warm, moist air enveloped her.

“It’s minus six outside, but warm inside,” the tour guide said. “This is why primitive man chose this place, to protect himself from the cold.”

Without delay she sent the guide away, and was left alone. At her feet, a lake stretched out everywhere like a transparent mirror. High above, enormous stalactites like chandeliers,

and stalagmites like columns to the sides. Small bridges connected the rooms, and the cave was divided into compartments by salty railings.

She thought she was hearing a song everywhere: “Three days away from you...” Perhaps it was the tour guide’s radio. Under the water the coins shone, wishes of the tourists to return to this cave one day.

And then she sat into a hollow that resembled a seat, felt herself nodding off and its body, its embrace, as primitive as ever, penetrating her abruptly. So abruptly that for a moment she wanted to cry. Not from pain. From surprise, because she had waited for this violent union for years, and now it had come out of nowhere, at the drop of one word.

“Wait,” she said to it. “Don’t continue like this. I miss your words, your language. It’s been centuries since we’ve lived in this cave.”

“The tree has entered my hands,

The sap has ascended my arms,” it whispered to her.

Then she slowly got up, cast her reflection into the lake, and her image kept shifting...

* * *

“Turns out, I am tree,” she confessed seeing him standing at the threshold to the bedroom. “I’m covered with snow in winter, and I bloom in spring. I shed my leaves in autumn, and I am verdant in summer. I raise my branches to the moon to fly, always hoping that my roots are inside you.

“They draw blood from your heart. My sap poisons your brain. My capillaries ambush your logic. I’d like to be a carnivorous tree. To consume you whole, bit by bit, to gestate you

and to give birth to you, every season in the branches – my hands. It'll be my only consolation, because I'll never be able to fly, as I wish."

"So why don't you come inside, and let me surprise you with my folly. Cross the threshold quickly, and come share my joy!"

"What's all this?" the man asked in bewilderment, entering through the tunnel into the cave. All at once he blinked and saw that, instead of a coin, someone had cast the moon into the lake.

The woman laughed. She knew everything. She had dreamed of everything so many times. And had staged it that many more.

"Madam, Madam," the tour guide interrupted them. "Come see the skeleton of the primitive man! He died in his thirties, of deep old age, curled up in this hollow."

The woman pushed the guide aside again and thought:

"Since I love you and I love you, what place has death here?"

February 2002



© Erik Refner

Adda Djørup

Den mindste modstand (2009)

The least resistance

Publishing House **Samleren**

Biography

Adda Djørup (b.1972) made her authorial debut in 2005 with a collection of poetry called *Mon-sieurs monologer*. Her work revolves around existential themes, with a twist of humour that suits her personal prose style and a distinct philosophical bite. All three of her publications have been praised by Danish critics. True to her versatility as an author, she is currently working on a libretto for a new opera. Djørup, who has lived in Madrid and Florence, is now back in Copenhagen. She holds a BA in Literature and, in 2007, she received an award from the Danish Arts Council. She is the mother of one child.

Synopsis

The novel *Den midste modstand* provides an insightful look at a remarkable year of a young woman's life. *Den midste modstand* is about Emma, a woman who surrenders to the forces pushing her life into new directions, and decides to drift along with the stream. When her grandmother dies and leaves her a wonderful summerhouse, Emma decides to visit with her grandmother's urn. On the way, she meets a very wealthy couple who, like her, are drifting through life. The three of them are at the summerhouse when Emma finds out she is pregnant. What she doesn't know is whether the father is the rich man she has met or her husband, who is currently away in Australia. The key characteristic of the novel is its language: everything, no matter whether speaking about the lighter or heavier aspects of life, is described with the same unsentimental, natural and reflective tone. The irony and intellectual reflection contained within the novel avoids glossiness and bears a faint resemblance to the great European authors of the early 20th century. However, this style is interspersed with a young writer's playfulness.

Den mindste modstand

Adda Djørup

Landet lå badet i sol. Bølgende marker, køer på græs og grønne løvtræer, der skummede livskraftigt mod himlen, bød sig til langs deres rute. De stoppede ved et ærte- og bærudsalg ved en rasteplads i skovkanten, en af den slags små ubemandede boder, hvor man bare lægger sine mønter i kassen og oven i handlen kan nyde følelsen af sin egen utvungne ærlighed. Emma var udemærket klar over at Dagny Dombernovsky ikke ville have brudt sig om et ligfølge, der kom anstigende med tre bakker jordbær og en pose ærter, men nuvel. Inga og John sad på bagsædet og kommenterede hvad de så og droppede en efter en de tømte ærtebælge ud af vinduet. Hvad var der virkelig at hidse sig op over?

Bedemand Jesper Espersens dør var låst, skønt forretningen ifølge skiltet med åbningstider burde være åben. De bad taxaen om at vente og gik bagom huset for at lede efter personale. De fandt en gårdsplads hvor en knaldblank rustvogn holdt sådan lidt nonchalant parkeret. Langs muren stod et par bænke og en række velplejede stedsegrønne planter i potter. Efter at have banket på døre og vinduer og råbt hallo, slog de sig ned på bænkene og fik selskab af en kælen kat, der kastede sin kærlighed på John og på den mest katteagtig måde smøg sig omkring hans ben og til sidst lagde sig for hans fødder, mand dog. Inga fik øje på en vandslange der hang på muren. Hun tog en bakke jordbær og skyllede omhyggeligt bærrerne. Tilbage ved bordet rakte hun skiftevis Emma og John et, og tog hver tredje gang selv. Sådan sad de jordbærspisende i hver

deres bekvemme stilhed. Emma begyndte at føle sig helt godt tilpas. En lang stund – hun fulgte med øjnene en svale, der for frem og tilbage mellem tagspærret og den blå himmel, der pustede sig mere og mere op – glemte hun endda hvad de sad der for.

Ved ellevetiden ankom Jesper Espersen på cykel med en bagerpose på bagagebæreren. Han havde jakken slængt over skulderen og det rædderlige slips stikkende op af baglommen. Med et adræt bensving steg han af cyklen og sagde dav. Han nævnte ikke med et ord at det hverken var den aftalte dag eller det aftalte tidspunkt, men takkede ja til et jordbær og bød dem indenfor. De afslog høfligt, og han smuttede selv ind efter urnen samt et par papirer der skulle underskrives. Mens Emma skrev under fik John overdraget urnen (med skruelåg, så simpelt), og Jesper Espersen mindede dem uden større ståhej om formalia, såfremt de ville strø asken over havet, før han gav dem alle sammen hånden og sagde at rundstykkerne stadig havde været lune da han hentede dem. Selvfølgelig, de var forstående, de havde jo også en taxa ventende.

Chaufføren løftede et øjenbryn, men følte sig åbenbart tryk ved at de alle tre satte sig ind på bagsædet. Emma sad i midten med urnen på skødet. Hun aede den med nogle små forsikrende strøg og fornemmede hvordan Dagny Dombernovsky (i askeform) faldt til ro og faktisk også befandt sig helt godt. De kørte turen hjem i stilhed, John blundede og Inga faldt i staver. Da Emma steg ud af bilen derhjemme, var det med følelsen af at have hjembragt en nyfødt. En skrøbelig og skattet favnfuld.

Emma forsøgte sig med forskellige placeringer. Ingen tvivl om at Dagny Dombernovsky skulle have en plads blandt de levende. Fjernsyn, borde og vindueskarme var udelukket på forhånd. Hun prøvede oven på reolen, men det virkede både risikabelt og tragisk hengemt. Inde i reolen virkede til gengæld al for tilfældigt, nærmest ligegyldigt. Under spejlet var for dekorativt. Til sidst besluttede hun sig for en plads på skrivepulten, og mindede sig selv om at være forsigtig når hun skulle i skuffen med frimærker. Hun fjernede en lampe og erstattede den med en overdådig buket Inga tjenstivrigt havde plukket i haven. John fandt efter Emmas anvisninger en flaske tør sherry i køkkenet og de løftede deres glas i stilhed. Emma stod og blev helt glad for sit valg af urne. Prunkløs og pæn, den passede fint til stuen, den var faktisk lige Dagny Dombernovskys stil. Hun havde, skulle Emma sige det, al mulig grund til at være tilfreds.

Med Dagny Dombernovskys ankomst bredte sig en vidunderlig ro. Blæsten var stilnet af, den lovede hedebløge indfandt sig til tiden. Det var vitterlig som om alting faldt i hak og julidagene forvandlede sig til intrikate maskiner af velsmurte tandhjul der greb ind i hinanden, nænsomt og sikkert, nydende deres egen formålsløse gang mod august. Emma kunne godt at have fundet sit liv den følgende tid perfekt, hvis ikke det var for endnu uafleverede arbejdsopgaver og kontorchef Birthe Bentzons gentagne opringninger. Der var ingen vej udenom, Emma måtte hver eftermiddag tilbringe nogle timer ved køkkenbordet med sin computer, mens John og Inga slog tiden ihjel med badminton og solbadning, og jævnligt forstyrrede hende med spørgsmål. Var der et par ekstra badesandaler? Hvor kunne de købe nye fjerbolde? Og plagede hende for at leje cykler, spille pool på cafeen eller spise frokost med Søs Guldberg, der inviterede. Vidste du, sagde Inga, at hendes

bedste veninde er gift med sundhedsministeren? Forkert, sagde Emma. Sundhedsministeren er hendes bedste veninde, og hendes mand danser som en drøm. Really, sagde Inga. Det skal jeg prøve at huske.

Efter et par dage flyttede Emma sin arbejdsplads ned i gæstehuset, der stod tomt eftersom John og Inga havde valgt i stedet at installere sig i soveværelset i stueetagen, hvor der var en mere bekvem dobbeltseng. Selv foretrak Emma det lille gæsteværelse på første sal, der havde balkon og morgensol. Deroppe tilbragte hun sine morgner med avislæsning og kaffe. Med udsigt til fyrretræets krone og havet, og avisens olympiske blik på verden, følte hun sig som en anden Zeus. Eller Hera, den kvieøjede.

Op ad formiddagen mødtes de alle sammen på stranden og spadserede langs vandet over på Helenekilde Hotel og Badepension, hvis eksistens Inga til sin begejstring var kommet i tanke om. Den kridhvide kasse på toppen af klinten og turen derop ad en stejl trætrappe havde åbenbart de pittoreske kvaliteter, der stemte overens med hendes fordrømte forhold til sit gamle fædreland. Hun kaldte med stædig sværmeriskhed slet og ret stedet for badepensionen og var kommet til en forståelse med tjeneren om et fast bord med udsigt. Her brugte de en magelig times tid på at indtage en portionsanrettet brunch. I starten byttede de høfligt bidder (hvad du siger du til at jeg lige snupper) men indså hurtigt at ritualet var overflødigt, og langede så blot ud efter deres personligt foretrukne lækkerier på de andres tallerkner. Inga var en hund efter rørag, John holdt af anything fruity and cheesy, mens Emmas favorit var de små sprødstegte pikante pølser, der gav efter for hendes bid med en kæk lille lyd. Efter måltidet skiltes

de. Inga dryssede rundt på Hovedgaden eller ledte efter kantareller oppe i Hegnet. Med den glæde det beredte hende at stikke i et par moderigtige gummistøvler og tage en kurv over armen, nænnede Emma ikke at minde hende om at kantarelsæsonen end ikke var nær, endsige at det ikke regnede. John og Emma gik hjem for at spille tomandswhist.

Emma foretrak at sidde i skygge, John i sol. De fandt et smukt kompromis under birken, der lod tilstrækkeligt meget sol slippe igennem til at bade Emma og John og spillebord i et flimrende mønster af lys og skygge. Emma hentede kort og John forfriskninger.

Der var en slående lighed i deres spillestil. Ingen af dem var ivrige efter at vinde, de var ikke emsige med at tælle kort og lave sandsynlighedsberegning, de arrangerede ikke deres stik i ordentlige bunker. Tværtimod. De spillede i fælles kontemplering over spillets omskiftelighed. De betragtede, i tavshed eller sludrende om livets almindelige eller spillets partikulære gang, hvordan deres mentale bølger i overensstemmelse med regelsættet for tomandswhist manifesterede sig på spillebordet, mens spillet med usvigelig sikkerhed nærmede sig den afslutning, der allerede var indeholdt i begyndelsen, hvordan mulighederne, der var udtænkt for det samme, en efter en satte hinanden ud af spillet, og hvordan de, de spillende, i takt med at mulighederne begrænsedes, antog karakter af, eller måske endda trådte i karakter som, brikker. Ja, netop. Hvordan spillet så at sige spillede dem. Nu vinder du, sagde en af dem. Eller: Måske skulle du hellere have gjort sådan. Nå ja, skal jeg gøre det om? Det ved jeg ikke. Prøv da.

I løbet af disse spil lærte Emma et par ting om John. Den ene, at han havde en livsfilosofi, og at den stod med Coca-Cola skrift på en t-shirt han ejede i to forskellige farver, petroleumsblå og meleret lyserød: *Surf the wave*. Og hvis Emma en dag prøvede at surf the wave, sagde han under et spil med klør som trumf og pegede på sig selv iført den lyserøde udgave, ville hun sandsynligvis give ham ret i at surfing var det perfekte billede på den mest attråværdige tilstand man kunne befinde sig i, fysisk såvel som mentalt. Den, nemlig, hvor man med få og rimeligt enkle manøvrer holder sig flydende og lader sig bære frem på overfladen af vældige kræfter man ikke selv er herre over. Således ville man med et minimum af anstrengelse komme gennem livet, der ellers godt kunne vise sig at være noget af en strabadserende affære, det vidste han alt om. But don't get me started.

Og den anden, at i Johns personlige liv forlod han sig stort set på tre bølger, som han regnede med ville aflevere ham pænt og nydeligt ved livets afslutning, såfremt han ikke kløkkede i det. For det første den søde Inga, som han ærlig talt elskede, både for hendes vidunderligt lange ben og sære charme, og på trods af hendes despotiske væsen, hvis værste udsving heldigvis kunne undgås takket være den lille vidunderpille prozac. For det andet Ingas fars reb og ananas-formue, en pragtfuld og i denne verden ret usædvanlig bølge, på hvilken han og Inga sammen red hvor som helst og på hvilken som helst måde det faldt dem ind. Og Bombay Sapphire. Love, money and self medication, opsummerede ham. I'm not gonna ask for more.

Emma var imponeret. Hun lagde sit ruder es, som John snupede med en sølle klør tre, hvilket afgjorde spillet til hans fordel, 14-12. Du tabte, konstaterede han, og gættede på at hun havde troet at han var renonce i trumf eller at hun havde ladet sig distrahere af samtalen. Nemlig, grinede Emma, og sagde at den t-shirt for øvrigt klædte ham. Det gjorde den virkelig (og den blå version endnu mere endda).

I løbet af det følgende spil bekendte Emma til gengæld sin egen uskyldige last, og gav den oven i købet et navn. Tænkningens minimalhedonisme, sagde hun og så helt oprigtig ud. Hun sammenlignede den uvilkårlige tankestrøm (man kan ikke lade være med at tænke, det er umuligt, sagde hun belærende) med havets overflade og tænkerens opmærksomme men afslappede selvbevidsthed med surferens ditto krop. I mødet mellem disse to størrelser, sagde hun, fandt hun personligt den mindste modstands punkt, hvor oplevelsen af at være blot var en konstant, behagelig kildren, der aldrig blev for meget eller for lidt, aldrig for ophidsende eller for kedelig. Men, for nu at blive i metaforen, i modsætning til Johns surfing, der syntes at bero på fremdrift og afveksling, søgte hun tværtimod mest mulig stilstand og monotoni og fandt en soleklar fordel ved denne mentalsport: Man er ikke afhængig af andre bølger end dem man alligevel altid har med sig, sagde hun og bankede sig illustrativt på panden. Enhver kan gøre det, når som helst og hvor som helst, om end det som med alt andet gælder, at kun øvelse gør mester. Og du ser tilfældigvis på en lige nu, sluttede hun uden falsk beskedenhed af.

Emma havde talt med blød, dæmpet stemme og nu og da ladet sin frie hånd vugge blidt på et punkt i luften, alt imens hun stille og roligt tog stik hjem. 17-9, sagde hun, du taber. John

så søvnig ud, men hans smil var sært opvakt, da han sagde at selvom han ikke helt havde fattet hvad hun sagde, var det åbenlyst at de i bund og grund forstod hinanden. Og hvis, tilføjede han, hun en dag skulle få lyst, ville han med fornøjelse give hende en lektion i wavesurfing, the real stuff. Eventuelt kunne de give hinanden lektioner. Her lo de begge to. Et smigret smil blev hængende på Emmas ansigt da latteren ebbede ud og John nærmede sig, og. Nå ja.

Der var end ikke anløb til fumleri. Galant hjalp John Emma ud af kjole og trusser før han selv i et snuptag afklædte sig t-shirt og shorts og bar hende ind i huset og op i gæsteværelset, hvor der var varmt og støvet svævede dovent rundt i striber af sollys. I løbet af den følgende times tid skiftedes de til at udvise saglig grundighed og drømmende eftergivenhed. Da deres bevægelser stilnede af, var solen forsvundet fra værelset og siddende i hver deres ende af sengen betragtede de smilende hinanden.

The least resistance

Adda Djørup

Translated from the Danish by Walton Glyn Jones

The country lay bathed in sunshine. Undulating meadows, grazing cows and green deciduous trees frothing vigorously to the sky displayed their charm along their route. They stopped at a stall selling peas and berries by a picnic area on the edge of the forest, one of those small unattended stalls where you simply put your money in the kitty and in addition to the deal can delight in the sense of your own unforced honesty. Emma was perfectly well aware that Dagny Dombernovsky would not have been keen on a funeral cortege that turned up bearing three punnets of strawberries and a bag of peas, but never mind. Inga and John sat in the back commenting on what they saw and dropping the emptied peapods out of the window one by one. What was there really to get upset about?

Jesper Espersen the undertaker's office door was locked, although according to the notice showing the opening hours it should have been open. They asked the taxi to wait and went round the back to look for some member of the staff. They found a courtyard in which a shiny hearse was parked rather casually. Alongside the wall there was a row of well-tended ever-green potted plants. After knocking on doors and windows and shouting hello, they settled down on the benches and attracted the attentions of an affectionate cat that took a fancy to John and in the most cat-like manner rubbed against his legs and finally settled down at his feet, good heavens. Inga caught sight of a garden hose hanging on the wall. She took a punnet of

strawberries and carefully washed the fruit. Back at the table she offered one to Emma and John in turn, taking every third one herself. Thus sat the strawberry eaters, each in convenient silence. Emma started to feel quite at ease. For a long time – watching a swallow darting back and forth between the rafters and the blue sky that puffed itself up more and more – she even forgot why she was sitting there.

Jesper Espersen turned up about eleven o'clock on his bicycle with a bag of goodies from the baker on his carrier. He had his jacket slung over his shoulders and the dreadful tie sticking up out of his back pocket. Swinging his legs nimbly over the bicycle, he dismounted and said hello. Not with a single word did he refer to the fact that this was neither the day nor the time they had agreed, but he accepted a strawberry and invited them inside. They politely refused and he dodged inside himself to fetch the urn and a couple of papers that had to be signed. While Emma was signing, John was handed the urn (with a screw top, how simple), and without any great to do Jesper Espersen reminded them of the formalities if they wanted to scatter the ashes over the sea, after which he shook hands with them all and said that the buns had still been warm when he went for them. Of course, they were understanding; they had a taxi waiting as well of course.

The driver raised an eyebrow, but he obviously felt safe with them all three on the back seat. Emma sat in the middle with the urn on her lap. She caressed it gently and reassuringly and sensed that Dagny Dombernovsky (in the form of ash) was settling down and in fact also feeling quite good. They drove all the way home in silence, John dozing and Inga lost in thought. When Emma got out of the car on arriving, it was with a sense of having brought a new-born baby home. A frail and precious bundle.

Emma tried various places for it. There was no doubt that Dagny Dombernovsky should have a place among the living. Television, tables and window ledges were out from the start. She tried the top of the bookcase, but that seemed to be rather risky and tragically out of the way. On the other hand a place inside the bookcase seemed far too casual, almost a sign of indifference. Putting it beneath the mirror would be too decorative. Finally, she decided on a place on the writing desk and reminded herself to be careful when going to the drawer containing stamps. She removed a lamp and replaced it with a sumptuous bunch of flowers that Inga had eagerly picked in the garden. Following Emma's instructions, John found a bottle of dry sherry in the kitchen, and they raised their glasses in silence. As she stood there, Emma was quite pleased with her choice of urn. Unostentatious and pleasing, it was entirely in keeping with the sitting room; in fact, it was just to Dagny Dombernovsky's taste. Emma had to admit that she had every reason to be satisfied.

The arrival of Dagny Dombernovsky brought with it a splendid sense of peace. The wind had settled, and the promised heat wave arrived on time. It really was as though everything was falling into place, and the July days were transformed into intricate machines of well-oiled cog wheels that engaged in each other, gently and securely, enjoying their pointless progress towards August. Emma could well have found her life perfect during the following time were it not for tasks waiting to be handed in and repeated telephone calls from Birthe Bentzon, the office manager. There was no way round it: Emma had to spend some hours each afternoon at the kitchen table with her computer while John and Inga spent their time playing badminton and sunbathing and regularly

interrupting her with questions. Was there an extra pair of beach sandals anywhere? Where could they buy some new shuttlecocks? And they pestered her about hiring bicycles, playing pool in the café or having lunch with Søs Guldberg at her invitation. Did you know, said Inga, that her best friend is married to the Minister of Health? Wrong, said Emma: The Minister of Health is her best friend and her husband dances like a dream. Really, said Inga. I'll try to remember that.

A couple of days later, Emma moved her work down into the guest house, which was empty as John and Inga had chosen instead to install themselves on the ground floor, where there was a more comfortable double bed. Emma herself preferred the little guest room on the first floor, which had a balcony and caught the morning sun. She spent the early morning up there, reading the newspaper and drinking coffee. With a view of the top of the spruce tree and the sea and with the newspaper's Olympian view of the world, she felt like another Zeus. Or the ox-eyed Hera.

Later in the morning they all met down on the beach and walked along the water across to the Helene Spring Hotel and Seaside Hostel, the existence of which, to her delight, Inga had remembered. The chalky white building on the top of the cliff and the walk up there by way of steep flight of wooden steps obviously had the picturesque qualities that harmonised with her romantic relationship with her old native land. With a dogged and exaggerated imagination she called the place purely and simply the Hostel and had come to an arrangement with the waiter that she should have a regular table with a view. Here, they spent a relaxed hour or so eating brunch served in individual portions. To begin with they politely

exchanged nibbles (I'm sure you don't mind if I just pinch this), but quickly realised that the ritual was superfluous, and so they simply reached out for the titbits they personally liked best on each others' plates. Inga was mad keen on scrambled egg, John was fond of anything fruity and cheesy, while Emma's favourites were the tasty, crackly little sausages that produced a cheerful little sound as they surrendered to her bite. They dispersed after the meal. Inga drifted around in the High Street or looked for chanterelles up in the Plantation. In view of the pleasure it gave her to put on a pair of fashionable rubber boots and take a basket over her arm, Emma hadn't the heart to point out to her that it was nowhere near the chanterelle season let alone that it was not raining. John and Emma went home to have a game of two-handed whist.

Emma preferred to sit in the shade, John in the sun. They reached a fair compromise that allowed sufficient sunshine to slip through to bathe Emma and John and the games table in a flickering pattern of light and shade. Emma went in for the cards and John for the refreshments.

There was a striking similarity in their style of playing. Neither of them was eager to win; they weren't over zealous at counting the cards and making probability calculations; they didn't arrange their tricks in orderly piles. On the contrary. They played in mutual contemplation of the variable nature of the game. Silently or chatting about the progress of life in general or the game in particular, they considered, how, in accordance with the rules for two-handed whist, their mental currents revealed themselves at the card table, while with unerring certainty the game came closer to the end that was already implicit in the beginning. They reflected on how the possibilities that

had been devised for that end put each other out of the game one by one, and how, as the possibilities became more limited, they the players came to resemble, or perhaps even took on the nature of, pieces in a game. Yes, exactly. How the game so to speak played them. Now you are winning, said one of them. Or: Perhaps it would have been better if you had done it this way. Ah, yes, shall I retrieve it? I don't know. Then try.

During these games, Emma learned a couple of things about John. The first was that he had a philosophy of life and that it was emblazoned in Coca-Cola lettering on a t-shirt he possessed in two different colours, petroleum blue and mottled pink: *Surf the wave*. And if Emma tried to surf the wave one day, he said during a game with clubs as trumps, pointing to himself dressed in the pink version, she would probably agree with him that surfing was the perfect image for the most attractive state to be in, physical as well as mental. That was to say the state in which by means of a small number and reasonably simple manoeuvres you keep yourself afloat and allow yourself to be propelled on the surface of huge forces of which you yourself are not in control. In this way, with a minimum of exertion you could get through life, which might otherwise turn out to be a rather bothersome affair – he knew all about that. But don't get me started.

And the second was that in his personal life John relied generally speaking on three waves that he reckoned would bring him to the end of his life in good shape and in an orderly manner if he didn't make a mess of things. First, there was sweet Inga whom he honestly loved both for her wonderfully long legs and her singular charm and in spite of her despotic nature, the worst

manifestations of which could fortunately be avoided thanks to that wonderful little pill called prozac. In second place there was the fortune Inga's father had made from rope and pine-apples, in this world a rather unusual wave on which he and Inga rode together anywhere and in any way they fancied. And Bombay Sapphire. Love, money and self-medication was how he summed it up. I'm not gonna ask for more.

Emma was impressed. She played an ace of spades, which John took with a miserable three of clubs, a move that decided the game in his favour, 14-12. You lost, he pointed out, guessing that she had thought he had no trumps or that she had been distracted by the conversation. Of course, Emma grinned and said that by the way the t-shirt suited him. And so it did (and the blue version even more so).

During the following game, Emma acknowledged her own innocent vice and even gave it a name. The mini-hedonism of thought, she said, looking quite honest. She compared the involuntary stream of consciousness (you can't avoid thinking; it's impossible, she said didactically) with the surface of the ocean and the thinker's attentive but relaxed self-assuredness with the ditto body of the surfer. It was in the meeting between these two concepts, she said, that she personally found the point of least resistance, where the experience of being was only a constant, pleasant thrill that never became too much or too little, never too exciting or too dull. But, to keep the metaphor, in contrast to John's surfing, which seemed to be based on drive and variety, she on the other hand sought the greatest possible immutability and monotony and saw a very obvious advantage in this mental sport: You are not dependent on other waves than those you nevertheless always have

within you, she said, tapping her forehead to make her point. Everyone can do it, at any time and in any place, although as with everything else it is true that only practice makes perfect. And you happen to be looking at a practitioner now, she concluded without any trace of false modesty.

Emma had spoken in a soft, subdued voice, now and then allowing her free hand to float gently at some point in the air, and meanwhile quietly and calmly taking one trick after another. 17-9, she said; you lose. John looked sleepy, but his smile was curiously bright when he said that although he hadn't quite understood what she was saying, it was clear that they fundamentally understood each other. And, he added, if she should fancy it one day, he would be delighted give her a lesson in wave surfing, the real stuff. Perhaps they could give each other lessons. Here, they both laughed. A flattered smile remained on Emma's face as the laughter ebbed out and John came closer, and... Oh well.

There wasn't even the slightest hint of fumbling. John gallantly helped Emma out of her dress and knickers before deftly divesting himself of t-shirt and shorts and carrying her into the house and up into the guest room, where it was warm and where the dust floated lazily in strips of sunlight. For the following hour or so they took it in turns to demonstrate comprehensive proficiency and dreamy indulgence. When their movements subsided, the sun had gone from the room, and sitting each at their own end of the bed they looked at each other with a smile.



Tiit Aleksejev

Palveränd (2008)

The Pilgrimage

Publishing House **Varrak**

Biography

Tiit Aleksejev (b.1968) graduated from the University of Tartu with a master's degree in Medieval History. He has worked as a diplomat in Paris and Brussels, and currently lives in Tallinn. His first short story, *Tartu rahu*, won the annual award from the literary magazine *Looming* in 1999. His first novel, *Valge kuningriik*, a thriller whose action unfolds in Paris and retrospectively in Afghanistan in the 1980s, was awarded the Betti Alver Prize in 2006 for best debut novel. In order to write *Palveränd*, Aleksejev researched material for ten years and visited the main battle scenes in the Holy Land.

Synopsis

Palveränd is Tiit Aleksejev's second novel, set in the last years of the 11th century. The main character, Dieter, is a young man-at-arms, bound for Palestine with the Count of Toulouse's army to conquer it from infidels. Although on the surface an adventure novel, *Palveränd* is above all a meditation on human loyalty, betrayal, love and treachery. Dieter becomes involved in the Crusades as someone who is neither really a horseman, nor a priest, nor an ordinary civilian. Without belonging anywhere, he is able to move between different adventures and environments. *Palveränd* is the opening volume of a two-part novel planned by the author, which is why the adventure remains incomplete – the crusaders manage to conquer Antioch, but Jerusalem still remains a dream in their minds.

Palveränd

Tiit Aleksejev

*Seigneurs, sachiez qui or ne s'en ira
En cele terre ou Dex fu mors et vis,
Et qui la croiz d'outremer ne prendra
A paines mès ira en paradis*

XII sajandi ballaadist.

Anno Domini 1148.

Boscodoni Jumalaema klooster Provence'is.

Mu nimi on Dieter. Kunagi olin ma keegi teine, aga sel ei ole enam tähendust. Maa, kust ma pärit olen, ei ole enam endine ja inimesed, kes mind mäletasid, on surnud. Sest mis on üks maa ja üks rahvas? Veepiisk veenõus, ei enamat. Ma olen siiski üritanud. Olen üritanud koduranda leida. Käsikirjadest ja kaartidelt ja rännumeeste lugudest. Teda pole kusagil. Kuid ma mäletan pilvi tema taevas, udu tema niitude kohal ja jälge, mis jäi tõmbi peaga maost, kes läbi lõikeheina libises. Ja ma tean, et ma ei ole und näinud.

Tõeline kodu on see, mille poole inimene teel on. Mida ta oma mõtteis kannab. Minu mõtteis on linn, mille me uskmatuselt tagasi võitsime. Minu jaoks on ta kõiges ja kõikjal. Igal ööl hiilib kõrb üle mu läve, tuul puhub, luited liiguvad ja palverändurid on ületamas tühermaad. Ja siis ei olegi vaja koltunud reisikirju lehitseda, sest igaüks neist peab rändurit juhutama lähemale Jumalale, mitte kodurannale ja iga kaardi keskpaigas on Jeruusalemm.

†

Aristoteles kirjutab, et inimkehas on kaardistatud kogu kosmos. Minu keha on valu maakaart. See aitab leida kohti, kus ihu on lõigatud, muljutud ja purustatud. Iga arm on osa teekonnast. Iga vigastus on mingi lahinguväli. Öösel lavatsil lebades sulen ma silmad ja libistan sõrmedega üle inimeste maa: Nikaia, Dorylaeum, Harem, Antiookia, Kerbola, Jeruusalemm, Askalon.

Valul on omad mälestused. Põlvedes ja puusades tuikab ratsutamisest. Õlaliiges pakitseb mõõga vibutamisest. Pahklud sadulast langemisest. See kõik on ainult pinnavirvendus. Tõeline valu on mujal. Palverännul öeldi: võitle ja ära karda, elu saab sinult võtta, kuid au mitte iialgi. Aga saab sedagi. Ning autusest saab häbi, mis saadab inimest elu lõpuni. Mis muserdab ja närib ja tuletab end iga Issanda päev meelde: täna, täna, täna. Täna. Kui täna on teie päev, siis te teate. Ja neile, keda häbi maadligi surub, võin ma öelda: ma tean, mida te tunnete. Ma olen teie.



Ma olen elanud mitut elu. Ma olen olnud see, kes hoiab sulge, ja see, kes hoiab mõõka. Kõik on hajunud nagu suits tuules. Täna olen ma see, kes hoiab taimi, ja homme olen ma muld, millest taimed uut jõudu saavad. Muld ei hooli, kui palju keegi head või halba tegi, ja õigest mehest ning õelast mehest võrsuvad ühesugused viljapead. Võib-olla on tuules kõikuva vilja jaoks kõik inimesed ühtemoodi õiged.

Ma olen aednik kloostri, mis asub Montpellier' linnast kahe päevateekonna Pühale Kirikule annetas. Issanda aastal 1142 asus kolmteist venda Chalais't tee, et uuele konvendile alus panna. Ürikutesse jäi neist kaksteist, sest kaksteist on apostlite arv. Väljajäänud vend olin mina, aga see

ei teinud mulle meelehärmi. Inimese elu sulab nii või teisiti möödanikku nagu kala vette. Isegi siis, kui see kroonikatesse üles tähendatakse. Jääb ainult kala. Ainult vesi.

Eile kaevust veenõud kergitades kummardusin ma allapoole. Sünkjal pinnal väreles kellegi nägu. Silmade asemel oli kaks mustavat koobast. Kaks musta koopasuud. Mida rohkem ma jälgisin, seda hägusemaks muutusid kujutise piirjooned. Näis, nagu tõrjuks maailm mind endast eemale. Sinna alla, sügavikesse, kus elusast saab eimiski ja siis jälle midagi.



Ma olin kohal, kui krahv Guillaume vastlaotud kloostrimüüre vaatamas käis. Temaga oli kaasas kõrge külaline, Brabandi isand Godefroy VII. Räägitakse, et selle mehe soontes voolab Godefroy de Bouillon'i, Püha Haua Kaitsja verd. See näis tõele vastavat. Samasugused kõrged põsesarnad. Samasugune ekslev pilk. Veel räägitakse, et Godefroy oli vapraim palverändurite seast, ja ma vaatasin ta järglast huviga. Et milline tema on. Godefroy oli nõrk mees. See, mida vapruseks peeti, oli ainult põikpäisus. Hirm taganeda.

Tõeliselt vaprad jäid Anatoolia mägismaale ja Süüria kõrbe. Issand kutsub õiged enda juurde. Oma vägedesse, et nad mõnes teises lahingus uuesti langeda saaksid. Brabandi käskija vaatas mulle otsa ja ma ei löönud pilku maha. Ma võin seda endale lubada. Ma olen ainult aednik, märkamatu ja tähenduseta nagu rohukõrred kloostriõuel. Öeldakse, et märkamatu elu on Jumala kiituseks.



Täna pärastlõunal hakkas Boscodoni kohal vihma kallama. Veejoad paiskusid sellise hooga, nagu oleks keegi lasuursinise peekri ühe hooga tühjaks valanud. Vend Glaber ütleb, et vihm on osa lunastusest, mida taevas maale laseb osaks saada. Kõlab ilusasti, aga see on kloostritarkus.

Vihmast saavad aru ainult need, kes teda ootavad: talupojad, kelle vili on põllul nädalate kaupa kõrbenud. Sõjamehed, kes on Süüria päikesest poolsurnud. Ma vaataisin, kuidas mullapinnale tekkinud tumedad plekid mõne hetkega laugasteks muutusid. Vihm oleks nagu kõik minema uhtunud, nii mineviku kui oleviku. Jeruusalemma müürid ja kloostrimüürid. Müüride vangistuse. Maailm lagunes ja langes koost, jäi ainult taevast alla paiskuv vesi. Taevane kosk.

Hiljem, hilisõhtul, läksime me kõik missale. Ma seisin vendade keskel, aga mulle tundus, nagu oleksin neid ülalt vaadanud. Mungad laulsid ja nende hääled voogasid uue kiriku võlvide all. Väljas sadas ikka veel.



Kloostri siseõues õitseb magnoolia. Päikesepaistel tundub, nagu väreleks igas õiekobaras küünlaleek. „*Post tenebras spero lucem,*” pomises ristikäigus puud imetlema jäänud abt. Seejärel vaatas ta mulle otsa, nagu ootaks mingit vastust. See maailm on täis varje, oleksin võinud öelda. Miks mitte järgmine? Aga ma teadsin, et kloostriülem ei oota minult midagi. Ja ma hoidsin suu kinni.

Boscodoni aias kasvab palju erinevaid taimi, ainult lavendlit mitte. Oleks kaunis, kui see siinsete maadega kohaneks. Kloostri ümber võiksid laiuda lavendliväljad nagu Langedocis, kust me krahv Raymond'i vägedega läbi ratsutasime. Me kõikusime sadulas, päike lõõmas pea kohal ja

ümberringi sinas lavendel, nagu oleks taevas maa peale laskunud ja öelnud: veel veidi kannatust – Jeruusalemm võib olla juba järgmine linn, pärast taevasinist merd. Ainult veel veidi kannatust. Palju pole enam jäänud.



Anno Domini 1098. Antiokia

Pärast päikeseloojangut asume Haremi poole tee. Seitsesada rüütlit, kahvatut ja näljast sisselangenud nägudega. Püüame laagrist lahkuda võimalikult vaikselt, et mitte Antiokia kaitsjate tähelepanu äratada. Lahingukorras liigume mööda Aleppo teed, hääletult nagu kummitused. Vaimude armee, mõtlen enda ümber vaadates. Läbi öö libisemas, hommi-kuks hajununa. Need, kes ütlevad: oleks juba õhtu. Kellele on varjud sõpradeks. Ja pimedus liitlaseks. Pimeduse hirmud.

Mõned tunnid enne koitu hakkab vihma sadama. Sadu ei ole tugev, sellest hoolimata oleme varsti läbi vettinud. Päikesetõusu ajaks jõuame järve ja jõe vahelisele lagendikule, mille Bohémond on lahingupaigaks välja valinud. Me oleme tiibadelt kaitstud ning suutelised kõike ühele ainsale sööstule panustama. Nagu skorpion, kes on astla välja sirutanud ja valmis salvama. Pimesi, vastase suurust hoomamata, kõige lihtsama ründeplaaniga.

Ja siis on taas järjekordne varahommik ja järjekordne lahingukord, aga tunne on iga kord erinev, südame põmm-põmm, tolumumaitse, rauamaitse ja sähvakad silme ees. Teadmine, et sa oled ühes tükis ja elus, nii elus, kui üldse olla saab ja sa võid elada kahesaja aastaseks nagu Aabraham, aga rohkem elus ei ole sa surmatunnini. Me oleme jagunenud

kuude *bataille*'sse, vaikivad rüütlid, palverännu lõiketera ja piigiteravik ja mida kõike veel. Aga mis toimub ülejäänud viies, sellest pole mul aimugi. Ma tean ainult seda, kes on mu kõrval, ja iseend tean ma samuti, kuigi see tunne on püsimatu ja tahab pageda, nagu pihku surutud lind, kelle süda taob ja kes mõtleb ainult sellest, kuidas end vabaks rebida.

Ja siis kappab rivi ette Bohémond, mustal täkul, punase maoga standart selja taga lehvimas, ja lipuhoidja on noor poiss, päris lapseohtu, ja ta käed värisuvad. Ta on noor, ta kardab. See on loomulik.

„Julgust, mehed,” ütleb Bohémond. „Ja seiske kindlalt. Varsti tapame nad kõik. Ei suuda need poniratsanikud meie rünnakule vastu seista. Vihm on nende vibunöörid nätskeks teinud ning lähivõitluses pole neist meile vastast. Mõelge oma esivanemate kuulsuse peale. Ja selle peale, et edaspidi räägitakse teist. Kui te sarvehäält kuulete, siis piigid ette ja andke minna. Nottige paganaid ning Issandal on teie üle hea meel.”

See on hea kõne. Lühike ja selge. Mõõgameeste, mitte kroonikute keeles. Ja siis kõlab sarvehüüd ja me läheme liikele. Me ei tea, kui palju uskmataid seal eespool on, aga võib arvata, et tuhandeid. Me ei mõtle sellele. Kõrvuti üles rivistatud viis *bataille*'d ründab mööda Aleppo teed lähenevat vaenlast, kel ei paista meie kohalolekust aimugi olevat. Ühel hetkel on nende ees päikesetõus, lagendik, jõgi ja järv ning järgmisel hetkel kihutab nende poole terasvall ja see terasvall oleme meie ja sel päeval oleme me palju muudki veel. Ja ei ole Ridwani eelväest meile vastast, isegi mitte niipalju, et see meie rünnakuhoogu pidurdaks. Me lõikame sellest läbi nagu sirp viljast, viljapõldu laiu tumedaid tühimikke jättes. Aga see on ainult vastase eelvägi, mida edasi, seda tihedamaks kõik muutub. Aga ikkagi ei suuda nad meid kinni pidada.

On neid, kes arutavad tagantjärele, et oma osa oli siin päikesel, mis meie selja tagant paistis, või siis vasakut kätt jääval ma. Nekünkal, mis vastast segadusse ajas, sest neil ei olnud aimu, kui palju meid veel reservis võib olla. Üks on selge – Bohémondi sõjaplaan töötas ja isegi need meie seast, kes olid sisemas surmaks valmistunud, märkavad, et surm on sel päeval uskmatusena ametis ja meie jaoks tal eriti aega ei jäägi. Ja meil, meil jääb üle talle üha uusi uskmatusi ette saata, et vikat ühes suunas sähviks ja et ta niitja kaart ümber ei seaks. See on raske töö ja me anname endast parima ja ainus, millest me aru saame, on see, et tagasivajumise asemel liigume me aina edasi ja me oleksime narrid, kui me seda ära ei kasutaks. Me kardame, et see kõik võib lõppeda, et sõjaõnn pöördub ja siis on meie kord taganeda, nagu toona, peavärava all, seepärast me raiume, raiume, raiume, ühel hetkel näib midagi murduvat, vastupanu ei olegi enam, me raiume ikkagi ja siis on väli meie ees puhas, vaenlane põgeneb ja lahing on läbi. Me oleme Ridwani väe puruks löönud ja palveränd on päästetud.

Me paneme mõõgad tuppe ja laskume sadulast ja seisame väljal, pead norus, ja on neidki, kes haavadest ja kurnatusest pikali varisevad. Aga siis tuleb Bohémond ja ütleb, et me olete võidelnud Jumala võitlust ja et me oleme võitnud. Ja ta ütleb veel, et kui see kõik ei ole Issanda ime, siis tahaks ta teada, mis Issanda ime üldse olla võib. Aga ennekõike tahab ta tunnustada meie vaprust, sest vapramaid mehi ei ole ta oma elus näinud. Ning ta paljastab pea ning kummardab sügavalt oma armee ees, sest sel hetkel on Jumala armee Bohémondi armee ja see on õiglane, see on välja teenitud. Ma vaatan teda ja soovin, et oleksin suuteline võidurõõmu tundma. Aga ainus, mida ma tunnen, on väsimus.

The Pilgrimage

Tiit Aleksejev

Translated from the Estonian by Christopher Moseley

*Seigneurs, sachez qui or ne s'en ira
En cele terre ou Dex fu mors et vis,
Et qui la croiz d'outremer ne predra
A paines mès ira en paradis*

From a 12th-century ballad

Anno Domini 1148.

Abbey of the Mother of God, Boscodon, Provence.

My name is Dieter. Once I was someone else, but that is of no consequence. The country I come from is no longer the one it was and the people who remembered me are dead. For what is one country and one people? A drop of water in a vessel, no more. All the same, I have tried. I have tried to find my home shore. From manuscripts and maps and travellers' tales. It is nowhere. Yet I remember the clouds in its sky, the mist on its meadows, and the traces left by the blunt-headed snake that slithered through the cut hay. And I know I was not dreaming.

A man's real home is the place he is on the way to. What he is carrying in his thoughts. In my thoughts is the City of God that we won back from the infidels. For me it is everywhere and in everything. Every night the desert creeps across my threshold, the wind blows, the sand-dunes shift and the pilgrims are crossing the wasteland. And then it is no longer necessary to leaf through the yellowed travellers'

chronicles, for each of them must lead the wanderer closer to God, not to his home shore, and at the centre of every map is Jerusalem.



Aristotle writes that the whole cosmos is mapped in the human body. My body is a map of pain. It helps to find places where the flesh has been cut, bruised and broken. Every scar is part of a journey. Every mutilation is a field of battle. Lying on my plank bed at night, I close my eyes and slide my fingers across the peopled lands: Nicaea, Dorylaeum, Harem, Antioch, Kerbola, Jerusalem, Ashkelon.

Pain has its own memories. My knees and hips are throbbing from riding. My shoulder joint smarts from a sword wound. My ankles, from falling out of the saddle. All this is only a ripple on the surface. The real pain is somewhere else. On the pilgrimage they said: Fight and be not afraid, your life may be taken from you, but your honour – never. But it will. And dishonour becomes shame, which accompanies a man to the end of his days. Which crushes and gnaws at one and brings itself to mind every blessed day: today, today, today. Today. If today is your day, then you know. And to those pressed down by shame, I can say: I know what you feel. I am you.



I have lived several lives. I have been one who holds a pen and one who wields a sword. It has all vanished, like smoke in the wind. Today I am one who holds a plant, and tomorrow I will be soil whence plants get new strength. Soil does not care how much good or evil one has done, and from the righteous man

and the wicked man alike the same ears of grain will sprout. Maybe for the grain swaying in the wind all men are equally righteous.

I am a gardener in a monastery located two days' journey from the town of Montpellier, Count Guillaume de Montmiral's donation to the Holy Church. In the year of our Lord 1142, thirteen brothers set off for Chalais to found a new convent. The records number them as twelve, for twelve is the number of the Apostles. The brother who was left out is I, but that did not trouble me. A man's life melts into the past, one way or another, as a fish into water. Especially when one is speaking of chronicles. Only the fish remains. Only the water.

Yesterday, raising a vessel of water from the well, I was bending down. On the murky surface flickered someone's face. Instead of eyes it had two black sockets. Two black cavern-mouths. The more I followed it, the more hazy the features of the image became. It seemed that the world was rejecting me from my own self. Down there in the depths, where the living turn to nothing, and then to something again.



I was present here when Count Guillaume came to view the newly-laid monastery wall. He had with him a distinguished visitor, Godefroy VII, Lord of Brabant. It is said that in his veins flows the blood of Godefroy de Bouillon, Defender of the Holy Sepulchre. That appeared to be the truth. The same high cheekbones. The same wandering gaze. It is also said that Godefroy was the bravest of the pilgrims, and I looked with interest at his successor. What kind of man was he? Godefroy was a weak man. What was taken for courage was only obstinacy – fear of retreating.

Actually the brave remained in the mountains of Anatolia and the deserts of Syria. The Lord calls the righteous to Himself. To his own people, that they may fall again in some new battle. The lord of Brabant looked me in the face and I did not flinch. I can afford that. I am only a gardener, insignificant and meaningless like the blades of grass in the monastery grounds. It is said that an unremarked life is a commendation to God.



This afternoon rain started pouring at Boscodon. The water came with such force that it was as if someone had tipped an azure-blue beaker out in a single shower. Brother Glaber says that the rain is a part of the redemption granted by heaven to the earth. It sounds beautiful, but that is the wisdom of monks.

The rain is only appreciated by those who expect it: the peasants whose grain has been parched for weeks in the fields. The soldiers, half-dead under the Syrian sun. I watched as the dark flecks on the surface of the soil changed into pools in a moment. The rain seemed to flush everything away, the past and the present. The walls of Jerusalem and the monastery walls. The imprisonment of walls. The world broke down and fell apart, there remained only water, flung down from heaven. A heavenly waterfall.

Later, late in the evening, we all went to Mass. I stood among the brothers, but it seemed to me as if I were looking down on them from above. The monks sang and their voices undulated beneath the vaults of the new church. Outside it was still raining.



In the courtyard of the monastery a magnolia is flowering. In the sunshine it seems as if a candle-flame were flickering in every cluster of flowers. “*Post tenebras spero lucem*” mumbled the abbot as he stopped on the procession to admire the tree. Then he looked me in the eye, as if expecting a response. This world is full of shadows, I could have said. Why not the next? But I knew that the head of the monastery does not expect anything of me. I held my tongue.

There are many different plants growing in the Boscodon gardens, but there is no lavender. It would be good if it were adapted to the soils here. Fields of lavender could spread around the monastery as in Languedoc, through which we rode with Count Raymond’s troops. We rocked in the saddle, the sun blazed down on us, and all around the lavender shimmered blue, as if Heaven had descended to Earth and said: just a little more patience – Jerusalem may be the next town beyond the azure sea. Not much further to go.



Anno Domini 1098. Antioch

After sunset we set out toward Harem. Seven hundred knights, pale and sallow-cheeked with hunger. We are trying to leave camp as quietly as possible, so as not to arouse the attention of the defenders of Antioch. In battle formation we move along the Aleppo road, as noiselessly as ghosts. An army of spirits, I think to myself as I look around. Gliding through the night, vanishing by morning. Those who say: would that it were evening. Whose shadows are their friends. And darkness their allies. The terrors of darkness.

Some hours before dawn it starts to rain. The shower is not heavy, but nevertheless we are soon wet through. By sunrise we get to a clearing between a lake and a river, which has been chosen by Bohémond as the site of battle. We are protected on the flanks and able to make a single swoop together. Like a scorpion that has stretched out its sting, ready to strike. Blindly, without regard to the size of its opponent, with the simplest plan of attack.

And so then it is another early morning and another battle formation, but the feeling is different each time, the boom-booming of the heart, the taste of dust, the taste of iron and the flashes before the eyes. The knowledge that you are in one piece and alive, as alive as you can be, and you can live for two hundred years like Abraham, but you will never be more alive until your dying hour. We are arrayed in six *batailles*, the silent knights, the cutting edge of the crusade, the tip of the lance, and whatever else we are. But as to what is going on with the other five, I have no idea. I only know who is beside me, and I am aware of myself too, though that feeling is fleeting and wants to escape, like a captured bird whose heart is pounding and who thinks only of how to tear itself free.

And then Bohémond gallops up in front of the ranks, on a black stallion, his standard with a red serpent fluttering behind him, and the flag-bearer is a young boy, a mere child, and his hands are trembling. He is young, he is afraid. That is natural.

“Courage, men,” says Bohémond. “And stand firm. Soon we will kill them all. Those pony-riders will be unable to withstand our attack. The rain has made their bowstrings soggy and in close combat they will make no opposition for us. Think of the fame of your ancestors. And of how you will be spoken of in the future. When you hear the sound of the horn, then – lances forward and go on the attack! Slaughter the heathen and the Lord will rejoice.”

It is a good speech. Brief and clear. In the language of swordsmen, not of chroniclers. And then the call of the horn, and we go into action. We do not know how many infidels there are ahead of us, but one can guess there are thousands. We do not think of that. Ranked side by side, the five *batailles* rush past the enemy, approaching along the Aleppo road, who seem to have no inkling of our presence. One moment they have before them the sunrise, the clearing, the river and the lake, and the next, a wall of iron is bearing down upon them, and that wall of iron is ourselves, and on this day we are much more besides. And the advance guard of Ridwan makes no opposition to us, not even so much as to break the pace of our attack. We cut through it like a scythe through grain, leaving broad dark spaces in the field. But that is only the advance guard, and the further we go, the denser the troops become. Yet still they cannot halt our progress.

There are those who reason after the event that a part was played by the sun which shone behind us, or by the hill to our left, which drove the adversary to confusion, because they had no idea how many we had in reserve. One thing is clear – Bohémond's battle plan worked, and even those among us who were inwardly prepared for death observe that death was at work that day among the enemy and did not have much time left for us. And for us it remains to drive more and more infidels before us, so that the Reaper's scythe will flash in a single direction and not turn back on us. It is hard work and we are giving the best of ourselves, and the only thing we understand is that instead of falling back we always move forwards, and we would be fools not to take advantage of that. We are afraid that this might all end, that our luck in battle may turn and then it will be our turn to retreat, as we did that time by the main gates, and so we chop and hack and hew, at

one moment something seems to break, there is not resistance any more, we carrying on hacking, and then the field before us is clear, the enemy flees and the battle is over. We have hacked Ridwan's forces to pieces and the pilgrimage is saved.

We put our swords in their sheaths and descend from the saddle, standing on the field, our heads bowed, and there are those, too, who collapse on the ground from their wounds or from exhaustion. But then Bohémond comes and says that we have fought God's battle and won. And he also says that if this is not a miracle of the Lord, he would like to know what is. But above all he wants to acknowledge our bravery, for he has never seen braver men in his life. And he uncovers his head and bows low before his army, for at that moment God's army is Bohémond's army, and that is right, it has been earned. I look at him and I wish I were capable of feeling the joy of victory. But all that I feel is weariness.



© Harri Pälviranta

Riku Korhonen

Lääkäriromaani (2008)

Doctor Novel

Publishing House **Sammakko**

Biography

Riku Korhonen (b.1972) made his literary debut in 2003 and has quickly established himself as one of the central Finnish modern writers. He writes about serious and important topics, but in an entertaining style that brings his narrative skills to the fore. Before he became a full-time writer and columnist, he worked as a Finnish teacher in high-school and as a lecturer of creative writing at the University of Turku. His debut novel, *Kahden ja yhden yön tarinoita*, won the prestigious Literary Award of Helsingin Sanomat in 2003. The novel has been adapted into a stage play by Turku City Theatre. Korhonen's second novel, *Lääkäriromaani*, established him as one of the leading writers of his generation, winning the Kalevi Jäntti prize for young authors. Korhonen has a regular column in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Synopsis

Lääkäriromaani by Riku Korhonen is a masterful depiction of love, death and politics. It tells the story of four entangled destinies at the frontier of an empire. The end of the summer of 2003 is hot and intense in many ways, both politically and personally. In Iraq, Western troops are promising to guide its people to the path of democracy and capitalism. But, far away from these battles, in a Northern European coastal city, thirty-something university researcher Niklas spends much time drinking and worrying over his girlfriend Inna, whose father is dying of cancer. One night, Niklas sees a vision that transforms him. He believes he has found a cure for the cause of his beloved Inna's worries. But Niklas must face the fact that the consequences of his procedures aren't always easy to foretell. In his third, beautifully written novel, the Finnish author Riku Korhonen weaves together a memorable story of intertwined destinies, a gripping analysis of a media war and a subtly humorous imitation of a romance novel.

Lääkäriromaani

Riku Korhonen

Synnyin vuonna 1972 kaksilapsiseen keskiluokkaiseen perheeseen, jossa vanhempien poliittiset mielipiteet ilmensivät syvää kiintymystä epäpoliittiseen elämäntapaan.

Isäni on laukaalaisen maanviljelijän vanhin poika, joka muutti yhdeksäntoistavuotiaana Turkuun opiskelemaan ja valmistui sääntöjen jälkeen lääkäriksi vuonna 1968. Seitsemänkymmentäluvun puolivälissä hän sai lastentautien erikoislääkärin oikeudet. Hän on sukunsa ensimmäinen akateeminen ja tuntee yhä kiitollisuutta koulunkäynnistään. Mitä vastaan hän olisi nuorena miehenä noussut? Minkä puolesta? Talous ja politiikka olivat etäällä ja hahmottomia, yhteiskuntaan asti ei navetan vintiltä nähnyt. Läheistä isänperintöä olivat maa, metsä ja taivas, jotka eivät yhtä säyseää laukaalaispoikaa kavahtaneet.

Isän puheista olen ymmärtänyt, että hänen lapsuudenkotinsa hauras aatteellisuus oli sekoitus juhlapyyhinä tirskahtellen tunnustettua herranpelkoa ja vuoroin omahyväiseen kotiseuturakkauteen ja maailman vieroksumiseen taipuvaista alkiolaisuutta, jotka molemmat unohtuivat, kun viinapullo avattiin ja ruvettiin puimaan tärkeitä asioita, tehtyjä töitä, laihon kasvua, sotaa ja riistaonnea. Turun kaduilla kävellessään isä näki jättävänsä taakseen sukunsa vainiot ja maatalousyhteisön liikkumattomuuden. Hän tunsikin, ettei kumouksia kaivattu, että vaivalloisesti karttuva tieto oli varmin tie mielenkiintoisempaan ja parempaan maailmaan.

Äitini on syntyperäinen turkulainen, menestyneen liha-kauppiasperheen omapäinen tytär, joka tuotti ailahtelevilla

rakkaussuhteillaan vanhemmilleen murhetta. Joulun 1966 alla isä näki hänet kauppahallissa ojentamassa palvilihapakettia tiskin yli. Köyhä isä alkoi laittaa rahaa syrjään ja asioida hallissa useammin kuin hänellä olisi ollut varaa.

Kevättalvella isä pyysi äitiä kahville. He istuivat Humanistinkadun Aschanilla. Äiti alkoi pelätä, että muuten niin miellyttävä isä oli hänelle liian järkevä. Hymyilevä isä kertoi viettäneensä opiskelun alkuaikoina yksinäisiä iltoja hengittystä pidättäen ja ottaen sekuntikellolla aikaa. Hän oli yrittänyt ennätystä. Kerran hän oli pyörtynyt kello kädessä.

Äiti katsoi isää ja mustavalkoisia Marimekon verhoja tämän takana ja ajatteli, että isässä oli sittenkin mieheltä vaadittavaa iloista hulluutta, hienovaraudessa muodossa tosin. Äiti tunsisällään rauhan. Ehkä hänen rakkaussotkunsa olivat olleet kapinaa varsinaissuomalaisen yrittäjäperheen rasvanäppistä materialismia vastaan, romanttisen hengen ristipistoja leikkalekaupan pikkuporvarilliselle pohjakankaalle. Isän kanssa hän tunsiolevansa kahden. He kumartuivat toisiaan kohden, maailman humussa sekoittuivat musta ja valkoinen, jin ja jang, liha ja henki, eikä sen monimutkaisempia soidinmenoja tarvittu. He rakastuivat, avioituivat ja saivat vuonna 1970 sisareni Johannan, joka on perinyt äidin itsepäisen luonteen. Johanna väittää äidin ja isän liiton kestäneen yksinkertaisesta syystä: Aina kun isä palasi matkoilta, hän halusi ensimmäiseksi halata äitiä. Sitten hän antoi meille pennuille tuliaiset ja ajoi meidät pihalle.

Mikäli vanhempiemme liitossa on vuosikymmenten myötä riehunut tuhoisia intohimoja, he ovat suojanneet minut ja sisareni niiltä. Me vartuimme ja näimme isän nuortuvan perhoa heittäessään ja äidin polvistuvan kasvimaalle hellyys kasvoillaan. Tässä katkerien isäsuhteiden maassa tunnen oloni osattomaksi. Tiedän tyrehdyttäneeni monta

kapakkakeskustelua sanomalla: Minun isäni on hyvä mies. Hänen pitkänhuiskean hahmonsa hyväksyvässä varjossa on vaikea lietsoa itseään oidipaaliseen raivoon. Korkeintaan voin syyttää, että ammatillisista syistä hän osoitti kasvuvuosinani tuskallisen tiivistä mielenkiintoa kivesteni kehitystä kohtaan. Tai voin väittää hänen olleen suhteessaan minuun niin ylivoimaisen ymmärtäväinen, että jäin itselleni käsittämättömäksi.

Kun äiti oli alkanut odottaa minua, isä oli myynyt vanhan autonsa, pienen punaisen Fiatin, ja ostanut valkoisen Ladan. Kuljin ensimmäisen automatkani tammikuussa 1972 keskussairaalan synnytysosastolta kotiin. Isä ajoi, minä nukuin äidin sylissä aavistamatta, mitä talvi tai kärsimys on.

Suomalaiset ovat puineet liikaa 60- ja 70-lukujen poliittisia pikaromanssejaan. Markkina-arvon ja maksutaseen aika on synnyttänyt tylsän tunnustuksellisen lajityypin: katuva taistolainen tv-studiossa klo 21:10. Heidän kostuneet silmänsä kavaltavat heidät – hauskaa on ollut. Jokaiselle suodaan yksi ihana nuoruus, jonka ylle kohoaa huojuva näyttelypaviljonki nimeltä ihmiselämä.

Politisoituneen sukupolven lasten erästä yhteistä kokemusta on käsitelty vähän ja epärehellisesti. Vuosia sitten näin tv-dokumentin, jossa Lada-lapset muistelivat persoonalliseksi väitettyä autoa nostalgisen lämpimästi. Minusta dokumentti oli itäautohäpeän historian vääristelyä.

Kun perheemme teki kesälomamatkoja Keski-Suomen suvun luo, helteessä lämmenneen muoviverhoilun haju sai minut ja Johannan oksentamaan. Pimeillä talviteillä kuuntelin venäläisen voimansiirron alkeellista jylinää vihan vallassa. Valvoin öisin ja mietin, miten saisin isän ostamaan kunnon auton. Ellei hän vaihtaisi autoa, halusin kuolla.

Aloitin ensimmäisen luokan syksyllä 1979. Minulla oli edellytykset pärjätä peruskoulun pudotuspelissä, olin nopea-älyinen, kauniskasvoinen, urheilullinen ja hyvä tappelemaan. Heikoin kohtani oli isän auto. Tiesin, että sitä käytettäisiin minua vastaan.

En ymmärtänyt, miksi isä halusi ajaa Ladalla. Hän ei uskonut kommunismiin. Hän oli erikoislääkäri, kyllä hänellä olisi ollut rahaa kunnon autoon. Selailin hänen *Tekniikan Maailmojaan* ja osoitin kuvia: Metallinharmaa Volvo. Taunus on hyvä auto. Toyota Carina tehdään Japanissa asti. Isä näki näiden yritysten läpi. Yhä uudestaan haaveeni ihmisarvoisesta elämästä haaksirikkoutuivat järkevien perusteluiden matalikolle:

– Hintaluokassaan Lada on paras.

Isän autoiluun liittyi yksityiskohta, joka teki pihan pojista erityisen pilkallisia. Isä käytti nahkaisia ajohansikkaita, joissa ei ollut sormia ja jotka kiristettiin ranteesta remmillä. Sellaiset olisivat sopineet James Bondille hänen kaahatessaan *Kultasormessa* Aston Martinilla. Isä sanoi, että niillä sai varman otteen ratista. Töihin lähtiessään hän teki aina samoin. Hän avasi kuljettajan oven, heitti salkkunsa sisään, veti auton vierellä hanskat käteensä, kiristeli remmejä huolellisesti, istui autoon ja ajoi pois.

Kaikki tämä, ja alla oli Lada.

Kerran hän vei minua nappulaliigan harjoituksiin. Nurmikkoa ajava talonmies katseli, kun isä kiristi auton vierellä hanskojaan. Tarkkaa touhua toi itäautoilu, talonmies sanoi. Isän vain hymyili hänelle ja nyki remmejä kuin valmistautuisi operoimaan jonkun sydäntä. Isän kädet näyttivät hanskoissa ilkeän vammaisen käsiltä.

Kesällä 1982 muutimme kaupungin toiselle puolelle omakotitaloon. Pääsin muuttoautoon kahden haalarimiehen väliin. Vilkutin ohjaamon korkeudesta entisille ystävilleni. Tunsin heidän kasvojensa ja nimiensä pyyhkiytyvän pois. Syksyllä aloittaisin uudessa koulussa. Koska asuisimme omakotialueella, koulussa ei välttämättä kuultaisi isän autosta. Ehkä hän jopa vaihtaisi sen nyt, kun meillä oli oma pieni uima-allas.

Elokuussa isä tuli iloisena kotiin ja pyysi perheen ulos. Pihalla seisoj uusi valkoinen Lada. Se näytti samalta kuin vanha. Mykistyi raivosta. Menin sisään, nousin portaat ja pauskasin huoneeni oven kiinni. Makasin sängyllä vedet silmissä ja etsin pulssia ranteestani. Kauheimmalta tuntui, että isä näytti niin iloiselta. Kuin hän olisi oikeasti iloinnut.

Ensimmäisenä uuden koulun päivänä satoi. Kieltäydyin isän kyydistä ja kävelin lämpimässä loppukesän tihkussa. Istuin luokassa uudenjäykät Adidas Jaguarit jalassa ja katselin luokkatovereitani, mietin kenestä tulisi ystävä, kehen rakastuisin ja ketä oppisin vihaamaan. Mukava miesopettaja pyysi jokaista vuorollaan nousemaan ja esittäytymään, koska luokassa oli kolme uutta oppilasta. Esittäytymiset olivat lyhyitä ja ujoja. Kun tuli minun vuoroni, kerroin jännittyneellä äänellä kuka olin, mistä tulin ja mitä mielelläni tein. Yritin muistaa, mitä muuta minusta saattoi sanoa. Näin tyhjällä tiellä kulkevan suuren mustan auton, jonka kromattu keula välähti auringossa. Sen liikkeessä oli leveäteräisellä tussilla piirretyn viivan vakautta. Sanoin: *Mun isä aikoo ostaa Chrysler New Yorkerin*. Hiljaisuus oli suopeaa. Opettaja nyökkäsi. Istuin alas ja tunsin poskieni lehahtaneen kuumiksi. Olin hetken iloinen kuin olisin kaatanut vihollisen dominojonon.

Doctor Novel

Riku Korhonen

Translated from the Finnish by David Hackston

I was born in 1972 into a middle-class two-child family in which my parents' political opinions espoused a profound attachment to the non-political way of life.

At the age of nineteen my father, the eldest son of a farmer from Laukaa, moved to Turku to study, and after years of diligent cramming he graduated as a doctor in 1968. In the mid-1970s he was appointed a paediatric specialist. He was the first academic man in his family, and to this day he feels a great sense of gratitude for his education. What could he have possibly risen up against as a young man? On whose side? Politics and the economy felt distant and shapeless; from the attic above the barn you couldn't see out into the wider society. His family inheritance was the land, the forest and the sky, things that were not enough to stir even such a docile young man from Laukaa.

From listening to my dad I'd come to understand that the fragile ideology of his childhood home had been a mixture of sniggering Sunday-morning fear of authority and a small-time farmer's mentality prone alternately to a smug affection for the local area and a disdain for the world at large, both values that were forgotten as soon as the bottle of liquor was opened and people started thrashing out more important matters: work accomplished, the growth of crops, war and the varying success of hunting expeditions. In walking the streets of Turku, Dad thought he was leaving behind the fields of his

family and the inertia of agrarian society. He knew that revolutions weren't the answer, that painstakingly accumulated knowledge was the surest way to a better and more interesting world.

My mother is Turku born and bred, the headstrong daughter of a successful family of butchers whose ever-changing boyfriends caused her parents many a headache. It was Christmas 1966 when Dad first saw her in the market hall handing a packet of smoked ham across the counter. My penniless dad started putting money aside and visiting the market more often than he could afford.

Early the following spring he asked Mum out for coffee. They sat in the Aschan café on Humalistonkatu. Mum started to worry that Dad, who was otherwise so pleasant, was far too sensible for her. Beaming with smiles, he told her that he used to spend lonely evenings at the beginning of his studies holding his breath and timing himself with a stopwatch. He'd gone for a world record. Once he'd fainted with the watch in his hand.

Mum looked at him and the black-and-white Marimekko curtains hanging behind him, and decided that perhaps he had the unbounded craziness that a man needed after all, albeit in small amounts. Mum felt an inner calm. Perhaps her complicated love life had been a form of teenage rebellion against the greasy-fingered capitalism of a family of southwestern Finnish entrepreneurs, romantic little cross-stitches on the bourgeois canvas of the cold-cuts counter. With Dad she felt it was just the two of them. They bowed towards one another; the world's commotion was a swirl of black and white, yin and yang, body and soul, and there was no need for any more intricate mating rituals. They fell in love, married,

and in 1970 they had my sister Johanna who has inherited Mum's stubborn nature. She thinks our parents' marriage has lasted for one simple reason: whenever Dad came back from a trip, the first thing he did was give Mum a hug. Then he gave us children our presents and sent us out into the yard.

If our parents' marriage was marked by decades of raging, destructive passions, they certainly managed to protect my sister and me from them. As we grew up we saw Dad rejuvenated as he cast his fishing line and Mum kneeling in the vegetable patch, an expression of tenderness on her face. In the land of bitter father-son relations, I feel almost dispossessed. I know I've suffocated many a pub conversation with the words: my father is a good man. In the all-accepting shadow of his tall, gangly frame it's hard to whip yourself into a frenzy of Oedipal angst. At most, I can say that during my teenage years, for professional reasons, he seemed to demonstrate an excruciating interest in the development of my testicles. Or I could accuse him of being so overwhelmingly understanding in his relationship with me that to myself I remained utterly unfathomable.

When Mum was expecting me, Dad sold his old car, a small red Fiat, and bought a white Lada. I took my first car-ride in January 1972 from the maternity ward of the city hospital back home. Dad was driving, I was asleep in Mum's arms, completely unaware of what winter or suffering really were.

Finns have spent far too long raking over their fleeting political romances of the 1960s and 70s. The era of market economies and BOPs has given birth to a banal, confessional stereotype: the repentant former Communist in a post-watershed TV interview. Their teary eyes betray them – it's been a lot of fun. Everyone is allocated a single, wonderful

childhood, and rising up above it is the rickety pavilion that we call human life.

The children of the politicised generation have one shared experience that has been examined very little and rather dishonestly. Years ago I remember seeing a documentary in which Lada children recalled this supposedly quirky car in a spirit of warm nostalgia. To my mind the documentary was a gross misrepresentation of the true history of Commie-car shame.

When our family went on summer trips to visit relatives in Central Finland, the smell of plastic upholstery warmed in the heat made me and my sister feel sick. On the dark winter roads, I listened to the primitive rumble of Russian power transmission in the grip of fury. I lay awake at night wondering how I could get Dad to buy a real car. As long as he refused to change cars, I wanted to die.

I started first grade in the autumn of 1979. I had all the qualities needed to do well in primary school: I was smart, handsome, sporty and good at fighting. My Achilles heel was Dad's car. I knew it would be used against me.

I couldn't understand why Dad wanted to drive around in a Lada. He didn't believe in Communism. He was a medical specialist, so he would have had plenty of money to buy a real car. I used to flick through his copies of *Technology World* and point at the pictures: a metallic grey Volvo. The Taunus, now there's a good car. The Toyota Carina is manufactured in Japan. Dad saw through these feeble efforts. Time and again my dreams of a life of human dignity ran aground in the shallow waters of sensible arguments:

'For its price, the Lada is the best.'

But there was one aspect of Dad's motoring habits that really coaxed out the spite of the boys in the playground. Dad used fingerless leather driving gloves that were tightened around the wrist with a strap. These might have suited James Bond swerving headlong in his Aston Martin in *Goldfinger*. Dad said they gave you a more secure grip on the steering wheel. Every time he left for work he went through exactly the same routine: he opened the driver's door, threw his briefcase inside, put on the gloves standing next to the door, carefully tied the wrist straps, got into the car and drove away.

All this, and in a Lada.

Once he took me to the under-10s' football practice. The janitor mowing the grass looked over as Dad was doing up his gloves beside the car. Can't be too careful with that Soviet technology, said the janitor. Dad just smiled at him and yanked the wrist straps as though he were preparing to operate on a patient's heart. In those gloves Dad's hands looked like they belonged to some malevolent cripple.

In the summer of 1982 we moved to a detached house on the other side of the city. I got to sit in the removal van between two men in overalls. From the elevated cab I waved to my former friends. I could feel their names and faces being wiped away. That autumn I would start going to a new school. And because we lived in an area of detached houses, people might not necessarily hear about Dad's car. He might even get a new one, now that we had a small swimming pool all of our own.

That August Dad came home all smiles and asked the family to step outside. There on the yard stood a brand-new white Lada. It looked the same as the old one. I was speechless with rage. I went inside, climbed the stairs and slammed my door shut. I lay in bed, my eyes wet with tears, and tried to

find my pulse. The worst thing was that Dad looked so happy, as if he'd actually been over the moon.

On the first day at my new school it was raining. I refused to let Dad give me ride and walked through the warm, late-summer drizzle. I sat in class with a pair of stiff new Adidas Jaguars on my feet and looked at my classmates, wondering who would become my friend, who I would fall in love with and who I would learn to hate. A friendly male teacher asked us all to stand up one at a time and introduce ourselves, because there were three new pupils in the class. The introductions were brief and shy. When it came to me, I told the class in a nervous voice who I was, where I came from and what I liked doing. I tried to think what else I could say about myself. I saw a large black car driving along an empty road, its chrome bonnet glinting in the sunshine. Its every movement exuded the stability of a line drawn with a wide steel brush. I said: *My Dad's going to buy a Chrysler New Yorker.* The silence was humble. The teacher nodded. I sat down and felt my cheeks hot and tingling. For a moment I was happy, as though I had toppled the enemy's row of dominoes.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



© Igor Todorovski

Goce Smilevski

Сестрата на Зигмунд Фројд (2007)

Sigmund Freud's sister

Publishing House **Kultura**

Biography

Goce Smilevski (b.1975) was born in Skopje, Macedonia. He was educated at the Sts Kiril and Metodij University in Skopje, at Charles University in Prague and at the Central European University in Budapest. He is the author of the novels *The Planet of Inexperience*, *Conversation with Spinoza* and *Sigmund Freud's Sister*. He won Macedonian Novel of the Year Award in 2003 for *Conversation with Spinoza*. In 2006, he was also awarded the Central European Initiative Fellowship for young European authors.

Synopsis

Sigmund Freud's Sister by Goce Smilevski is a novel told from the point of view of Adolfina, one of Sigmund Freud's sisters. It is a personal story that mirrors the rise and fall of the era that begins with optimism in the middle of the 19th Century and ends with the Holocaust in the Second World War. Set in Vienna, the novel portrays the relations within the Freud family, especially those of Sigmund Freud with his mother Amalia and his father Jacob that could be seen as the soil from which grew Freud's ideas on dreams, the Oedipus complex and the death instinct. Its narrative structure relates a recollection of memories, which draw upon the interplay between the life of the Freud family and the theory of psychoanalysis, as well as between dreams and reality. *Sigmund Freud's Sister* shows how the search for lost time as Adolfina grows from a girl to an old woman, is a search for truth. It is a search that does not result in a simple listing of memories, but instead reveals a story about self-understanding spanning from her childhood to her last days in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942.

Сестрата на Зигмунд Фројд

Goce Smilevski

“Адолфина... Спиеш?”

“Будна сум,” реков. До мене на креветот лежеше сестра ми Паулина.

“Колку е часот?”

“Сигурно поминала полноќта.”

Сестра ми се будеше секоја ноќ и секогаш со исти зборови во мракот на собата ја започнуваше истата приказна:

“Ова е крајот на Европа.”

“На Европа многупати ѝ доаѓал крајот.”

“Ќе нé испоубијат како кучиња.”

“Знам,” реков.

“И не ти е страв?”

Молчев.

“Вака беше и во Берлин во 1933,” продолжи Паулина, и јас веќе не се обидував да ја прекинам во она кое ми го имаше раскажано многупати пред тоа: “Штом Националсоцијалистичката партија и Адолф Хитлер дојдоа на власт, младината почна да маршира по улиците по тактот на воената музика. Како што сега маршира овде. На зградите се развеаја знамињата со кукаст крст. Како што сега овде се веат. Од радио-апаратите и од разгласите поставени на плоштадите и во парковите, се слушаше гласот на Фирерот. Како што сега овде се слуша.

Ветуваше една нова Германија, една подобра Германија, една чиста Германија.”

Беше 1938 година, а четири години пред тоа Паулина и Марије го напуштија Берлин, и дојдоа да живеат во домот од кој заминаа кога се омажија; веќе четири години ние трите сестри живеевме заедно. Паулина беше скоро сосема слепа, и некој постојано требаше да биде покрај неа, па спиеше на креветот на кој некогаш спиеја нашите родители, а на местото до неа се менувавме Марије и јас. Се менувавме, затоа што Паулина секоја ноќ се будеше, и Марије или јас, според тоа која од нас беше со неа во собата, остануваше без сон.

“Исто ќе биде и овде,” продолжуваше сестра ми. “А знаеш како беше таму?”

“Знам,” реков поспано. “Ми имаш кажувано.”

“Ти имам кажувано. Униформирани лица упагаа навечер во еврејските домови, кршеа сè околу себе и маваа по нас, и ни велеа да си одиме. Сите кои не размислуваа како Фирерот, а јавно се осмелуваа да ги кажат своите ставови, веднаш исчезнуваа без трага. Се зборуваше дека противниците на идеалите на кои требаше да биде изградена новата Германија, ги носат во логори, и таму биле принудувани на тешка физичка работа, биле измачувани и убивани. Така ќе биде и овде, верувај ми.”

Ѓ верував, а сепак молчев, затоа што секој мој збор ќе ја потсилеше да раскажува уште повеќе. Неколку недели пред тоа германските воени трупи вмаршираа во Австрија и воспоставија нова власт. Насетувајќи ја опасноста, нашиот брат Александар побегна со своето семејство во Швајцарија. Ден потоа беа затворени границите, а секој кој сакаше да ја напушти Австрија, мораше да се обрати

до тукуштоотворениот Центар за издавање на излезни визи. Илјадници луѓе поднесуваа барања, а само по некој од нив добиваше дозвола да ја напушти земјата.

“Штом не нé пуштаат слободно да замине од земјава, тоа значи дека имаат план за нас. Пеколен план,” зборуваШе Паулина.

Јас молчев.

“Најпрвин сé ќе ни одземат, а потоа со нас ќе полнат дупки.”

Неколку дена пред тоа во станот на Роза беа влегле униформирани лица, и ѝ покажале документ на кој пишувало дека станот и сите предмети во него ѝ се одземаат. И таа дојде во станот во кој живееше Паулина, Марије и јас. Со себе донесе неколку фотографии и малку алишта, а сé друго им остави на војниците кои се вселиле во нејзиниот некогашен дом. “Сега на креветите на кои спиеја моите деца, спиејат некои офицери,” рече Роза кога се досели во нашиот дом.

“Ме слушаш? Со нас ќе полнат дупки,” ми рече Паулина погласно.

“Секоја ноќ ми го кажуваш истото,” ѝ реков.

“Ти кажувам за да знаеш дека и овде ќе биде исто.”

“И тоа ми го имаш кажано.”

“И сепак не правиш ништо.”

“А што можам да направам?”

“Да одиш и да го убедиш Зигмунд да побара излезни визи за нас четирите.”

“И каде ќе одиме?”

“Во Њујорк,” рече Паулина. Во Њујорк живееше нејзината ќерка. “Знаеш дека Беатриса ќе се грижи за нас.”

Јас секој ден се јавував кај Зигмунд, а одговараа ќерка му, жена му или нејзината сестра и ми кажуваа дека тој не е дома, или дека е зафатен со пациентите, или дека не му е добро па не може да се јави. Се распрашував дали ќе поднесе молба за визи за излез од Австрија, а Ана, Марта и Мина велееа дека не знаат ништо за тоа. Помина цел месец откако не го бевме виделе брат ни. На шести мај 1938, на неговиот осумдесет и втори роденден, бев решила да појдам кај него со Паулина. Земавме малечок подарок за него, книга која помисливме дека ќе му се допадне, и тргнавме кон Берггасе број 19.

Во домот на брат ни вратата ни ја отвори Ана.

“Не најдовте во работа...,” рече, правејќи меѓу себе и вратата простор за да влеземе.

“Работа?”

“Се пакуваме. Испративме десетина големи пакети вчера и завчера. Ни остана уште да одбереме кои од подароците што ги има добиено тато ќе ги земеме со нас.”

“Заминувате?,” прашав.

“Не веднаш, но сакаме што поскоро сè да спакувавме.”

Во кабинетот на брат ми насекаде беа расфрлени сувенири, книги, мали и големи кутивчиња, антиквитети – сè она што некој некогаш му го подарил, а тој го сочувал. Зигмунд седеше на големата црвена фотелја на средината од просторијата и гледаше во расфрлените предмети по подот. Се сврте кон нас, само климна со главата, и пак се загледа во нередот. Му кажав дека сме дојдени да му посакаме среќен роденден. Се заблагодари и го остави нашиот подарок на масата покрај себе.

“Како што гледаш, заминуваме. За Лондон,” рече.

“Би можела да ви помогнам,” реков. “Во пакувањето.”

Ана рече дека ќе ми ги подава предметите кои треба да се фрлат, да ги ставам во кутијата со непотребностите, а таа ќе ги сложува избраните предмети во кутиите кои потоа ќе ги испратат по пошта за Лондон. Паулина остана да стои покрај сидот.

“Оваа табакера?,” праша Ана, вртејќи се кон татко си, и покажувајќи му ја сребрената кутијка во која беа вградени неколку зеленкави камченца.

“Тоа е подарок од мајка ти. Ќе ја земеме.”

Ана ја стави табакерата во картонската кутија покрај себе.

“Ова домино од слонова коска?,” праша Ана.

Зигмунд мислеше миг-два, потоа рече:

“Не се сеќавам од кого е. Фрли го.”

Ана ми го подаде доминото, и јас го спуштив во кутијата покрај мене, во која на голем куп беа ставени книги, сувенири, дребулии кои требаа да бидат фрлени.

“Ова?,” праша Ана и подигна една книга, приближувајќи ја до очите на Зигмунд.

“Таа ‘Тора’ е подарок од дедо ти Јакоб за мојот триесет и петти роденден. Ќе ја земеме.”

Ана рече дека се уморила работејќи уште од утрото, и потребни ѝсе минута – две да здивне. Отиде до трпезаријата да ги размрда нозете и да се напие вода.

“Значи, сепак си побарал визи за излез од Австрија.”

“Побарав,” рече.

“Ме убедуваше дека нема потреба да се бега.”

“Ова не е бегање, туку привремено заминување.”

“Кога заминувате?,” го прашав брат ми.

“Марта, Ана и јас на почетокот од јуни.”

“А останатите?” прашав. Брат ми молчеше. “Кога заминуваме Паулина, Марије, Роза и јас?”

“Вие нема да дојдете.”

“Нема?”

“Нема потреба,” рече.

“Нема потреба да преживееме?”

“Не станува збор за преживување. Сè ќе биде во ред.”

“Сè ќе биде во ред? Па тогаш зошто сите бегате?”

“Тоа е само привремено.”

“Ајде и ние да побегнеме привремено. Да не бидеме дел од оние кои ќе бидат истребени затоа што останале овде.” Тој молчеше. Јас продолжив: “Значи, за нас не побара визи...”

“Ти велам – нема потреба за заминување. Јас одам не затоа што самиот го побарав тоа, туку затоа што некои мои пријатели –дипломати од Британија и Франција инсистирале во овдешните служби да ми издадат излезни визи.”

“И?”

Можеше да игра фарса - да ни каже дека некој странски политичар или дипломат измолил да ги пуштат неговите деца, него и жена му, а самиот тој е немоќен да стори што и да е за спас на други луѓе; можеше да игра фарса, но тоа не беше негов жанр.

“Ми дозволија да направам список на луѓе кои ми се блиски, кои би заминале со мене од Австрија,” рече.

“И на списокот со луѓе кои ти се блиски не ги стави нашите имиња,” реков.

“Не ги ставив вашите имиња,” рече.

“И во ниту еден миг не помисли дека би можел да ги ставиш нашите имиња.”

“Во ниту еден миг. Ова е само привремено. Ние ќе се вратиме.”

“И да се вратите, нас веќе ќе не нема.” Тој молчеше. Потоа реков: “Јас немам право да го барам тоа, но сепак – кој сè е на списокот со твои блиски луѓе кои треба да ги спасиш?”

“Навистина, кој сè е на списокот?,” праша Паулина.

Брат ми можеше да заигра фарса – да каже дека ги ставил само имињата на своите деца, своето име и името на сопругата – значи на оние кои му ги посочиле од службите како луѓе кои може да ги стави на список на блиски луѓе кои би ги спасил, па ги навел само тие имиња, само најблиските; можеше да заигра фарса – но тоа не беше негов жанр. Однекаде изваде лист хартија, и рече:

“Еве го списокот.” Ми го подаде и продолжи: “Од утре дел по дел ќе заминуваат од Виена. Последни заминуваме Марта, Ана и јас.”

Гледав во имињата запишани на хартијата.

“Читај ми и мене,” рече Паулина.

Читав на глас. На списокот беа брат ми, жена му, нивните деца со семејствата, сестрата на жената на Зигмунд, двете куќни помошнички, личниот доктор на брат ми и неговото семејство. И сосема на крајот од списокот – Жо-Фи.

“Жо-Фи,” се насмевна Паулина, и се сврте кон онаму од каде што го слушаше гласот на брат ни. “Па да, ти никогаш не се делиш од своето кученце.”

Ана се врати во собата, и рече:

“Јас не ве прашав дали сакате да се напиете нешто, или да не сте можеби гладни.”

“Ни гладни, ни жедни,” реков.

Паулина како да не ги слушна зборовите на Ана и моите зборови; и продолжи:

“Навистина е добро од тебе што си мислел на сите тие луѓе. Си мислел и на своето кученце, и на својот доктор и на неговото семејство, и на сестрата на жена ти. Но, си можел да се сетиш на своите сестри, Зигмунд.”

“Да беше потребно да заминете, ќе се сетев. Но, ова е само привремено, затоа што моите пријатели инсистираа да заминам.”

“А зошто инсистирале твоите пријатели да заминеш, ако не е навистина опасно да се остане овде?,” прашав.

“Затоа што и тие, како и вие, не сфаќаат дека оваа ситуација нема да трае долго,” рече Зигмунд.

“А ако не трае овој ужас долго, тогаш зошто не заминеш само ти, онака на кратко, колку да ги смириш своите пријатели? Зошто не одиш само ти, туку со себе го водиш не само семејството, туку и твојот доктор и неговото семејство, двете куќни помошнички, па дури и кученцето и сестрата на твојата сопруга?,” прашував јас.

Зигмунд молчеше.

“А јас, Зигмунд,” рече Паулина, “јас, за разлика од Адолфина, ти верувам. Ти верувам дека сиов овој ужас

нема да трае долго. Но мојот живот ќе трае пократко од тој ужас. А јас имам ќерка. Ти, Зигмунд, си требал да се сетиш на својата сестра. Си требал да се сетиш на мене, и на тоа дека имам ќерка. Ти секако си се сетил, затоа што во овие години, откако дојдов од Берлин, а мојата Беатриса замина за Њујорк, постојано ја споменувам. Ја немам видено четири години. И, ти си можел, само со едно испишување на моето име, да помогнеш да ја видам ќерка ми уште еднаш,” рече, и на зборот ‘видено’ преврте со очите кои можеа да видат само контури. “Си можел да го ставиш моето име таму, под името на сестрата на жена ти. Или под името на твоето кученце, и тоа би било доволно да успеам да заминам од Виена, и да се сретнам со Беатриса. А вака, јас знам, таа повеќе нема да ме види.”

Ана се обиде повторно да не врати на поделбата на предметите кои требаа да бидат спакувани, и оние кои требаа да бидат фрлени.

“А ова?,” праша. На дланката држеше дрвен сувенир - гондола малечка колку палец.

“Не знам од кого е,” рече Зигмунд. “Фрли го.”

“Време е да си одиме,” рече Паулина.

Ја водев сестра ми кон нашиот дом, држејќи ја за раката. По згрченоста на нејзините прсти знаев како се чувствува. Повремено ја погледнував – на лицето ѝ трепереше онаа насмевка што некои слепи ја имаат постојано, дури и кога чувствуваат страв, гнев или ужас.

Едно спарно утро на почетокот на јуни Паулина, Марије, Роза и јас отидовме на железничката станица, за да ги испратиме брат ни, Марта и Ана. Тие тројцата беа застанати покрај отворениот прозорец на нивното

купé, ние четирите стоевме на перонот. Зигмунд го држеше своето кученце во рацете. Писна сирената која го најавуваше поаѓањето на возот. Кученцето се стресе од страв и во избезуменоста го касна Зигмунд за показалецот. Ана изваде марамче и му го преврза раскрварениот прст. Сирената на возот писна уште еднаш, возот тргна. Брат ми ја крена раката да поздрави, но едниот прст му беше завиткан, другите четири прсти му беа свиткани, и така со испружениот показалец и раскрвавеното марамче околу него мафташе во воздухот.

Sigmund Freud's sister

Goce Smilevski

Translated from the Macedonian by Graham W. and Peggy Reid

“Adolphina, are you asleep?”

“I’m awake,” I said. My sister Paulina was lying beside me in the bed.

“What’s the time?”

“Certainly past midnight.”

My sister woke up every night and always began the same story with the same words in the darkness of the room.

“This is the end of Europe.”

“It’s often been the end of Europe before.”

“They’ll butcher us like dogs.”

“I know,” I said.

“Aren’t you afraid?”

I kept silent.

“This is what it was like in Berlin in 1933,” Paulina went on, and I no longer even tried to interrupt her in what she had already told me many times. “As soon as the National Socialist Party and Adolph Hitler came to power youths started marching through the streets in time to military music. Just as they’re marching now. Flags with the swastika hung from the buildings, just as they hang there now. You could hear the voice of the Führer from loudspeakers set up in the squares and parks. He was promising a new Germany, a better Germany, a pure Germany.”

It was 1938, and four years earlier Paulina and Marie left Berlin and came to live in the home they had left when they got married; for four years now we three sisters had lived together. Paulina was almost completely blind and somebody always had to be with her; she slept in the bed where our parents had once slept and Marie and I slept alternately beside her. We alternated because Paulina woke up every night and Marie or I, depending on who was in the room, went without sleep.

"It'll be the same here," my sister went on. "And do you know what it was like there?"

"I know," I said sleepily. "You've told me before."

"I've told you. People in uniform burst into Jewish homes, wrecked everything around them and beat us up, telling us to go. All who did not think like the Führer, and dared to express their opinions in public, immediately disappeared without trace. Word was that opponents of the ideals on which the new Germany was to be built were being taken to camps and forced to do hard physical labour there, were being tortured and put to death. It'll be like that here, too, believe me."

I believed her, but kept quiet because any word of mine would only encourage her to tell me more. Some weeks before this, German troops had marched into Austria and set up a new government. Sensing danger, our brother Alexander had fled with his family to Switzerland. The day after, the borders were closed and anyone who wanted to leave Austria had to apply to the newly-opened Centre for the Issue of Exit Visas. Thousands of people applied, but only a few of them got permission to leave the country.

"Since they weren't allowing us to leave the country freely, it meant they had a plan for us, a hellish plan," said Paulina.

I kept silent.

“First they’d take everything from us, and then they’d fill holes with us.”

A few days before this, uniformed men had entered Rosa’s flat and shown her a document which said that the flat and all its contents were to be confiscated. So she had come to the flat where Paulina, Marie and I were living. She brought some photographs and a few clothes with her and left everything else to the soldiers who were enjoying themselves in what had been her home. “Officers are now sleeping in the beds where my children slept,” said Rosa when she moved into our home.

“Do you hear me? They’ll fill holes with us,” Paulina said more loudly.

“Every night you tell me the same things,” I said.

“I’m telling you so that you know it’ll be the same thing here.”

“You’ve told me that, too.”

“And still you don’t do anything.”

“What can I do?”

“Go and persuade Sigmund to apply for exit visas for the four of us.”

“And where will we go?”

“To New York,” said Paulina. Her daughter Beatrice lived in New York. “You know that Beatrice will look after us.”

I had been phoning Sigmund every single day, but his daughter, or his wife, or her sister would say he was busy with his patients or that he wasn’t well and couldn’t come to the phone. I asked whether he would apply for exit visas to leave Austria but

Anna, Martha or Mina would say that they didn't know anything about it. A whole month had passed since we'd last seen our brother. On 6th May, 1938, on his eighty-second birthday, I made up my mind to go and visit him. We took a small present for him, a book we thought he'd like, and set off for 19 Berggasse.

At my brother's house, Anna opened the door to us.

"You've found us at work," she said, making a space between her and the door for us to enter.

"Work?"

"We're packing. We sent off a dozen large packages yesterday and the day before. All that's left is to choose which of the presents father's been given we'll take with us."

"You're leaving?" I asked.

"Not immediately, but we want to get everything packed as soon as possible."

My brother's office was scattered with souvenirs, books, larger and smaller boxes, antiques, all the things that someone or other had given him and he'd kept. Sigmund sat in his big red armchair in the middle of the room and regarded the objects scattered over the floor. He turned towards us, merely nodding his head, and looked at the chaos once again. I told him we'd come to wish him a happy birthday. He thanked us and laid our present on the table beside him.

"As you see, we're leaving. For London," he said.

"I could help you," I said. "With the packing."

Anna said she'd give me the things to be thrown out and I could put them in the box for unwanted things while she stacked the selected things in boxes to be sent by post to London. Paulina remained standing by the wall.

"This cigarette case?" asked Anna, turning towards her father and showing him a silver case inlaid with green stones.

"That was a present from your mother. We'll take it."

Anna put the cigarette case in the cardboard box beside her.

"This set of ivory dominoes?" asked Anna.

Sigmund thought for a moment or two, then said: "I don't remember who it's from. Throw it out."

Anna gave me the dominoes and I put them in the box beside me where there was a great heap of books, souvenirs and knick-knacks that were to be thrown out.

"This?" asked Anna, and held up a book, bringing it close to Sigmund's eyes.

"That Torah was a gift from your grandfather Jacob on my thirty-fifth birthday. We'll take it."

Anna said she was tired, having been at it since early morning, and needed a break for a minute or two to get her breath back. She went through to the dining-room to stretch her legs and have a drink of water.

"This means you've applied for an exit visa from Austria."

"I applied," he said.

"You convinced me there was no need to flee."

"This isn't flight. It's a temporary removal."

"When are you leaving?" I asked my brother.

"Martha, Anna and I at the beginning of June."

"And the rest?" I asked. My brother said nothing. "When will we leave, Paulina, Marie, Rosa and I?"

"You won't be coming."

“We won’t?”

“There’s no need,” he said.

“There’s no need for us to survive?”

“It’s not a question of survival. Everything will be alright.”

“Everything will be alright? Then why are you leaving?”

“It’s only temporarily.”

“Well, let us escape temporarily too. So that we’re not among those who’ll be exterminated because they stayed here.”

He kept silent. I went on: “That means you didn’t apply for visas for us...”

“I’m telling you that there’s no need to leave. I am going not because I myself wanted to, but because some of my friends, diplomats from Britain and France, insisted with the authorities that they grant me exit visas.”

“And?”

He could have been acting out a farce – telling us that some foreign politician or diplomat had pleaded for them to let his children, him and his wife go, while he himself was powerless to do anything to save other people; he could have been acting out a farce, but that was not his style.

“They allowed me to draw up a list of people who are close to me who would leave Austria with me,” he said.

“And you didn’t put our names on that list of people close to you?”

“I did not put your names on it,” he said.

“And you didn’t for one moment think that you could put our names on it.”

“Not for one moment. This is only temporary. We’ll be coming back.”

“Even if you do come back, we won’t be here anymore.” He remained silent. Then I said: “I’ve no right to ask this, but still: who all are on the list of close ones whom you have to save?”

“Indeed, who all are on the list?” asked Paulina.

My brother was not able to act out the farce, to say that he’d only put down the names of his children, his own name and his wife’s, that’s to say those whom the office had indicated as people who could be put on the list of close ones whom he’d save and he’d only put down those names, only the close ones; he could have acted out the farce, but that was not his style. From somewhere he took out a sheet of paper and said:

“Here’s the list.” He gave it to me and carried on speaking: “From tomorrow, a few at a time, they’ll be leaving Vienna. Martha, Anna and I will be the last to leave.”

I looked at the names written on the paper.

“Read it out to me,” said Paulina.

I read it out loud. On the list were my brother, his wife, their children with their families, Sigmund’s wife’s sister, the two maids and my brother’s personal doctor and his family. And at the end of the list was Sophie.

“Sophie,” Paulina smiled and turned to where she heard my brother’s voice. “Oh yes, you are never separated from your little dog.”

Anna came back into the room and said: “I didn’t ask you if you’d like something to drink, or maybe you’re hungry.”

“Neither hungry nor thirsty,” I said.

Paulina, as if she had not heard Anna's or my words, went on: "It's really good of you to have thought of all these people. I mean of your little dog, your doctor and his family, your wife's sister. But you could have remembered your own sisters, Sigmund."

"If it had been necessary for you to leave, I would have remembered. But this is only temporary, because my friends insisted that I leave."

"And why did your friends insist on your leaving if it's not really dangerous to remain here?" I asked.

"Because like you, they too don't understand that this situation will not last long," said Sigmund.

"If this horror will not last long, then why don't you go alone for a short time, enough to calm your friends down? Why aren't you going alone, but taking not only your family but the two maids as well and even your little dog and your wife's sister?" I asked.

Sigmund remained silent.

"But I, Sigmund," said Paulina, "I, unlike Adolphina, believe you. I believe that this horror will not last long. But my life will end sooner than this horror will. And I have a daughter. You, Sigmund, should have remembered your sister. You should have remembered me, and that I have a daughter. You certainly do remember, because during these years since I came from Berlin and Beatrice went to New York, I've continually mentioned her. I haven't seen her for four years. And you, with just a single writing of my name, could have helped me to see her once more," she said and at the word 'see' she rolled her eyes which could only see blurred outlines. "You could have put my name below the name of your sister-in-law.

Or below your little dog's name, and that would have been enough for me to manage to leave Vienna and to meet Beatrice. As it is, I know that she will never see me again."

Anna tried to get us back to separating out the things that had to be packed and those that were to be thrown out.

"And this?" she asked. In her hand she held a souvenir, a little wooden gondola as small as her thumb.

"I don't know who it's from," said Sigmund. "Throw it out."

"It's time for us to go," said Paulina.

I took my sister back to our home, holding her by the hand. By the contractions of her fingers I knew how she felt. I glanced at her face from time to time. It trembled with that smile that some blind people have all the time, even when they're afraid, angry or horrified.

One sultry morning at the beginning of June, Paulina, Marie, Rosa and I went to the railway station to see off our brother, Martha and Anna. The three of them were standing at the window of their compartment, the three of us stood on the platform. Sigmund was holding his little dog in his arms. A whistle blew, announcing the departure of the train. The startled dog shook with fear and bit Sigmund's index finger. Anna took out a handkerchief and bandaged his bleeding finger. The whistle sounded once more, and the train started. My brother stretched out his hand in farewell but one of his fingers was bandaged and the others were bent, so that he waved in the air with his extended index finger sticking out with a bloodstained handkerchief round it.



© Barbara Klemm

Iris Hanika

Das Eigentliche (2010)

The Bottom Line

Publishing House **Droschl Verlag**

Biography

Iris Hanika (b.1962) was born in Würzburg and grew up in Bad Königshofen. In Berlin, where she's been living since 1979, she studied Universal and Comparative Literature. She wrote her first book in the summer of 1989. Since 1998, she has been reviewing political books for the national newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. She was one of the first freelancers to work on the *Berlin Pages*, a daily supplement for the German capital in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. From 2000 to 2008, Hanika wrote for the magazine *Merkur*. In 2006, she was awarded the Hans Fallada literary prize for notable young authors from the German-speaking world.

Synopsis

To Hans Frambach, what matters most are the crimes of the Nazi-era that have made him suffer since he can remember. It is because of these concerns that he chose to work as a registrar in the Institute for History Management. To his best friend Graziela too, it is the inconceivability of the past that matters – that is, until she meets a man who covets her. From then on, carnal desires take precedence. As the story progresses, it deals with the extent to which history plays a role in their lives. Can one hold the Nazi past responsible for everything? Is it not simply their inability for happiness that makes Hans and Graziela such strange figures? Iris Hanika shows how the crimes of the Nazi-era still keep a hold on Germans today, while also examining the absurdities of professional commemorations and our helplessness in the face of these crimes.

Das Eigentliche

Iris Hanika

S. 18–25

NEUE WOCHE, ALTES UNGLÜCK. Er fuhr mit dem Aufzug in den sechzehnten Stock des Instituts für Vergangenheitsbewirtschaftung hinauf, hielt seine Mitarbeiterplastikkarte auf die dafür vorgesehene Fläche neben dem Eingang, bis er ein leises Klicken hörte, öffnete die Tür des Archivs und trat in den ihm vertrauten Empfangsraum hinein, einen Kubus aus kaltem Licht. Die Neonröhren, die an der Decke leise vor sich hinbrummten, leuchteten diesen Raum bis in den letzten Winkel aus und ließen Frau Kermers wohlgepflegtes blondes Haar eisig strahlen. Es umfloß sie bis zu den Ellenbogen hinunter, und da sie stets darauf achtete, es nicht in Bewegung zu bringen, kam sie ihm manchmal vor wie eine Statue, ein gleißender Empfangsbuddha. Meistens aber wie der Drache vor der Höhle. Oder die Hüterin des Grals. Und manchmal wie die Bestie von Buchenwald.

Er zog die Mundwinkel in einer Weise hoch, daß man denken konnte, er lächle. Man mußte das sogar denken. Durchaus beachtete er die sozialen Gepflogenheiten, darum hatte er die Mundwinkel nach oben gezogen, denn das war die Art, wie der Mensch lächelte.

„Guten Morgen, Frau Kermer“, sagte er und drehte sich gleich zur Garderobe um, wobei ihm die Mundwinkel wieder dorthin fielen, wo sie hingehörten. Sie sprach ihren Morgenruß gegen seinen Rücken, während er mit großer Sorgfalt seinen Mantel aufhängte. Er schob einen Kleiderbügel so in

dessen Schultern hinein, daß er vollkommen symmetrisch auf diesem Bügel lag, den er dann an die Garderobe hängte, wobei er darauf achtete, daß dieser sein Mantel so frei wie möglich hängen konnte, kaum die Garderobe berührte und bestimmt nicht Frau Kermers Mantel, der dort schon hing. Er bückte sich, nahm seine Aktentasche, die er zwischen seine Beine geklemmt hatte, unter den linken Arm, drückte sie sich vor den Bauch und strich sich mit der rechten Hand durchs Haar, als er sich wieder aufgerichtet hatte. Frau Kermer hatte ihm wohl zugesehen, denn gerade, als er sich zum Gehen wandte, warf sie ihren Enterhaken nach ihm aus.

„Herr Frambach! “riß sie ihn zurück, er geriet kurz aus dem Gleichgewicht, und als sie anfang zu sprechen, konnte er nicht verhindern, daß sich seine Mundwinkel wieder nach oben schoben. Das ging ganz automatisch.

„Herr Marschner bittet Sie, sich ab halb zwölf freizuhalten. Er möchte sich gerne mit Ihnen besprechen.“

Frambach nickte.

„Wann kommt er denn? “fragte er, um etwas Konversation zu machen und seine Mundwinkel zu entlasten.

„So um elf“, sagte Frau Kermer. Frambach nickte wieder. Das Lächeln, das Frau Kermer nicht spiegelte, drückte sich immer fester in sein Gesicht und tat ihm weh.

Marschner wußte natürlich, daß es sehr unwahrscheinlich war, ihn zu egal welcher Zeit innerhalb der Kernarbeitszeit nicht im Institut anzutreffen, immerhin saß er treulich jeden Tag von früh bis spät an seinem Schreibtisch, um ein Blatt nach dem anderen ins Archiv einzufüttern, und hatte keine Termine außer Haus, aber Marschner setzte Besprechungen dennoch immer im vorhinein fest und ließ den jeweiligen

Termin auch immer durch Frau Kermer ausrichten. Auf diese Weise suchte er einen Eindruck allgemeiner Dringlichkeit und hoher Professionalität zu erwecken. Es gelang ihm auch ganz gut.

Die schwere Fältelung von Frau Kermers Stirn hatte ihr Gesicht schon wieder in Richtung ihres Schreibtischs hinuntergezogen. Auch ihre Arbeit schien stets von großer Wichtigkeit, weswegen die Bearbeitung ihrer Papiere niemals einen Aufschub duldete. Sie hatte sein Lächeln nicht auf- und es ihm dadurch nicht abgenommen, weswegen er sich nun, als er in den nicht sehr hellen Flur, der zu seinem Büro führte, hineingetreten war, kurz schüttelte, um es aus dem Gesicht zu schleudern. Er umklammerte seine Tasche mit beiden Armen und schüttelte sich einmal kurz und kräftig, nur kurz, aber kräftig, da war er das idiotische Lächeln wieder los. Es lag nun im Dunkeln auf dem Boden, der schon übersät war mit all dem Lächeln, das er sich allmorgendlich abzwang, um Frau Kermer zu begrüßen. Die Putzfrau schob sein Lächeln gelegentlich in die Ecken, aber entfernen konnte sie es nicht, dazu fehlte ihr das Gerät.

DAS INSTITUT FÜR VERGANGENHEITSBEWIRTSCHAFTUNG liegt im Zentrum der Stadt, die sehr groß ist und weit in die flache Landschaft hinausgreift. Verglichen mit den anderen Städten des Landes, ist sie nicht sehr alt, sondern sogar sehr jung. Dennoch ist sie voller Geschichte. Mit schweren Hämmern hat die Geschichte ein ums andere Mal in diese große Stadt hineingeschlagen, und man sieht es ihr an – gerade weil sie immer wieder versuchte, wegzuschaffen, kleinzumachen, abzuschütteln, was von der jeweils vorangegangenen Periode der Geschichte zeugte. Dieser Wille zum Wegschaffen, Kleinmachen, Abschütteln ist ihr

Wesensmerkmal, wie einer ihrer Bewohner schon früh erkannt und als ihr Schicksal prophezeit hatte (vgl. Karl Scheffler: Berlin, ein Stadtschicksal. – Berlin-Westend: Reiss 1910). Die Stadt hat es in der Folge treulich erfüllt. Und nicht allein brache Flächen hinterließ die Geschichte, sondern große Gebäude ebenso.

Sechzehn Stockwerke ist das Institutsgebäude hoch, und hundertzwanzig Meter ist es breit. Dieses Gebäude entstammt der jüngsten abgeschlossenen Periode der Geschichte, doch wurde es nicht geschleift, sondern gründlich renoviert. Sechs Aufzüge fahren seine vielen Stockwerke hinauf und hinunter, in einem fort, und trotzdem müssen die Institutsangehörigen oft lange warten, bis der Aufzug bei ihnen angekommen ist, um sie hoch hinauf oder tief hinunter zu befördern. Denn das Institut hat unermesslich viele Mitarbeiter. Es müssen so viele sein, weil die Vergangenheit, die sie bewirtschaften, selbst unermesslich scheint, und es ist kein einzelner Stein, den sie in die Zukunft wälzen, wie Sisypchos es tat, sondern es ist ein Berg aus Geröll.

Alle, die hier arbeiten, begegnen sich regelmäßig und ohne Verabredung in der Mitte des Gebäudes, vertikal betrachtet, nämlich im achten Stock. Dort ist die Kantine untergebracht. In sie hinein gelangt man auch ohne seine Mitarbeiterplastikkarte, denn ihre Türen stehen immer einladend offen. Bezahlen kann man dort allerdings nicht anders als mit seiner Plastikkarte, auf welche man regelmäßig den Wert seiner Geldscheine übertragen muß.

Die Maschine zur Geldwertübertragung ist eine kleine rechteckige Säule mit zwei Schlitzten. In den einen steckt man seine Plastikkarte hinein, in den anderen einen Geldschein. Den soll die Maschine fressen, aber sie tut es nur widerwillig. Sie spuckt jeden Schein, egal, welchen Wert er darstellt, viele Male wieder

aus, bevor sie ihn endlich hinunterschlürft, und wegen ihres Widerwillens, das materiell ihr Angebotene in ein Immaterielles vom selben Wert zu überführen, gerade weil sie sich dagegen sträubt, einen Wert in einen anderen zu überführen, wie es in diesem Gebäude mit dem Greifbaren, doch Unbegreiflichen, geschieht, ist diese kleine Maschine das Herz des Gebäudes, das im Herzen der Stadt steht, in welcher das Herz der vergangenen wie zukünftigen Geschichte des Landes schlägt, weil sie dessen Hauptstadt ist. Denn eine solche Wertüberführung ist eine zu ernste Sache, als daß man dabei Fehler machen dürfte; es darf der jeweils zu übertragende Wert nicht erhöht, noch verringert werden. Der Wert der Geldscheine ist genau festgelegt, der Wert der Plastikkarten nicht. Die Geschehnisse der Vergangenheit sind genau dokumentiert, begreiflich sind sie darum nicht. Auch greifbar gemacht, bleiben sie unbegreiflich.

Die Arbeit des durch Erforschung der Geschichte die Vergangenheit bewirtschaftenden und auf diese Weise den Weg in die Zukunft bahnenden Instituts wurde nicht gleich in der Verfaßtheit des Staates, der aus dieser Geschichte entsprang, fruchtbar und lebendig, mit der Zeit jedoch seinen Bürgern zum Leben so notwendig wie die Luft zum Atmen.

Es erfaßte das Gedenken an die Verbrechen der Vergangenheit mit der Zeit restlos alle Institutionen des Landes. Das ging erst langsam, am Ende aber rasend schnell. Nachdem das Land seine Teilung, die unmittelbare Folge des Verbrechens der Vergangenheit, überwunden hatte und ein souveräner Staat geworden war, konnte es sich nämlich endlich ausschließlich mit sich selbst beschäftigen. Es war keinen anderen Staaten mehr Rechenschaft schuldig, sondern nur noch anderen Völkern, und die standen da und waren weder eine Institution, noch hatten sie eine Armee. Sie hatten

nur ihre Erinnerung an die schrecklichen Dinge, die ihnen angetan worden waren von den Vertretern des Volkes und in seinem Namen gar, nicht aber von dem Staat, in dem dieses Volk nun lebte. Sie waren Greise geworden. Es waren auch noch welche übrig von denen, die seinerzeit das Verbrechen verübt hatten. Für die war das auch eine Jugenderinnerung. Sie waren auch Greise.

Die meisten Bewohner des Landes waren zur Zeit des Verbrechens noch gar nicht auf der Welt oder höchstens Kinder gewesen. Doch lastete die Ungeheuerlichkeit des Verbrechens ihrer Vorfahren schwer auf ihnen, und wenn sie sich dieser Ungeheuerlichkeit näherten, so erwarteten sie nie etwas anderes, als ihre Vorfahren als Verbrecher zu entlarven. Das gelang ihnen problemlos und am laufenden Band. So groß war dieses Verbrechen gewesen. So groß, daß es wirken wird bis ins siebte Glied.

Dieser Zustand der permanenten Aufdeckung des Verbrechens der Altvorderen war nicht schön, doch nötig, und als er nicht mehr nötig schien, war es gar nicht mehr schön. Da besann der Staat sich auf seine Pflicht seinen Bürgern gegenüber und beschloß, ihnen diese Bürde abzunehmen, indem er das Gedenken an das Verbrechen der Vergangenheit zu seiner immerwährenden Aufgabe erklärte. Die Verpflichtung, sie zu erfüllen, wurde in Denkmäler hineingegossen, deren Zahl um so schneller wuchs, je länger das Verbrechen zurücklag. Jeder Ort, und derer waren viele, an dem das Verbrechen sich ereignet hatte, wurde in eine Gedenkstätte umgewandelt. Es wurde dieses Gedenken nicht mehr als eine bloß notwendige, sondern als die edelste Aufgabe des Staates angesehen, und nirgends war es ehrenvoller zu arbeiten als im Institut für Vergangenheitsbewirtschaftung, das in der Mitte der Hauptstadt des Landes angesiedelt war, weil hier, und das war eben

offiziell, das Herz des Landes schlug. (Natürlich befand sich in diesem Gebäude nur die Zentrale des Instituts; seine vielen Nebenstellen waren übers ganze Land verteilt.)

So war die Dunkelheit, aus der dieser Staat vor langer Zeit hervorgekrochen war, in das hellste Licht gestellt und zu seinem Eigentlichen erklärt worden, was nur logisch war, schließlich war es der Grund seiner Gründung.

Es wußten alle darum.

Es war kein Geheimnis und mußte nicht diskutiert werden.

Es war wirklich das Eigentliche.

Nur war es nicht mehr interessant, seit es auf dem Präsentierteller dargeboten wurde und wie von tausend Sonnen so hell und von allen Seiten beleuchtet war. Aus dem Blitzkrieg war Blitzlicht geworden und aus der Wirklichkeit dieses Verbrechens eine Geschichte aus alten Zeiten.

Auch dies war etwas, das er wußte. Auch in diesem Fall nützte ihm dieses Wissen nichts, denn er konnte trotzdem nicht aufhören, sich mit dem Verbrechen der Vergangenheit zu beschäftigen.

Es war ein so großes Verbrechen.

Schrecklich war jetzt, daß es kaum noch wehtat. Das war das eigentlich Schreckliche und mehr noch: für ihn war dies das Eigentliche. Daß dieses Verbrechen, so groß es war, hatte aufhören können wehzutun. Daß das möglich war. Daß so etwas überhaupt möglich ist, das – das war schrecklich. Und vergrößerte sein Unglück.

Er kam sich vor wie aus der Zeit gefallen. Denn ihm tat es immer noch weh.

The Bottom Line

Iris Hanika

Translated from the German by Steph Morris – pp. 18-25

NEW WEEK, SAME OLD MISERY. He took the lift to the sixteenth floor of the Institute for the Management of the Past, held his plastic employee-card against the card-reader next to the entrance till he heard a soft click, opened the door to the archive and stepped into the familiar reception area, a cube of cold light. The neon tubes, humming gently to themselves on the ceiling, illuminated every inch of the room and lent an icy shine to Frau Kermer's groomed, blonde hair, which flowed down to her elbows. She made sure her hair remained motionless at all times and sometimes looked like a statue, a gleaming Greeting Buddha. But mostly like the dragon defending the cave. Or the guardian of the grail. And sometimes like the beast of Buchenwald.

He turned the corners of his mouth up in a manner which could be interpreted as a smile. In fact it had to be interpreted that way. He observed social mores rigorously and turned up the corners of his mouth for this exact reason; this was the way a human being smiled.

'Good morning, Frau Kermer,' he said, and turned straight to the coat stand, the corners of his mouth immediately dropping back where they belonged. While he hung up his coat with the utmost precision, Frau Kermer wished his back a good morning. He inserted a hanger into the coat's shoulders so that it hung with perfect symmetry upon it and returned the hanger to the rack, taking care that his coat hung as freely

as possible, barely touching the coat stand and certainly not Frau Kermer's coat, already hanging there.

He bent down, took his briefcase from between his gripped legs and held it against his belly with his left arm, then ran his left hand through his hair as he straightened himself. Frau Kermer had clearly been watching throughout; as he turned to go, she flung a grappling hook after him.

'Herr Frambach!' She wrenched him back, he briefly lost his balance and, as she began to speak, he was unable to prevent himself turning the corners of his mouth up again. It happened automatically. 'Herr Marschner has requested that you be available from half past eleven onwards. He has something to discuss with you.'

Frambach nodded. 'When does he arrive then?' he asked, in order to make conversation and give the corners of his mouth a rest.

'Around eleven,' Frau Kermer said.

Frambach nodded again. His smile, which Frau Kermer had not reciprocated, was digging deeper and deeper into his face and now hurt. Marschner knew of course that it was highly unlikely he would fail to find Frambach in the institute any time within core working hours; after all he sat at his desk faithfully from dawn till dusk each day feeding one paper after another into the archives, and never had external engagements. But Marschner consistently arranged his meetings in advance, each time instructing Frau Kermer to inform the relevant individuals of the appointment. His aim was to create an impression of general urgency and utter professionalism. And indeed he was highly successful.

The heavy folds of Frau Kermer's forehead had already drawn her face down towards her desk again. She too seemed perpetually engaged in terribly important business; her paperwork had to be processed without delay. She hadn't absorbed his smile and thus hadn't absolved him of it, and so now, as he entered the somewhat dimmer corridor leading to his office, he shook himself quickly to dislodge it from his face: he gripped his briefcase in both arms and gave himself a quick hard shake, quick, but hard; then the idiotic smile was gone. It now lay in the shadows on the ground, already strewn with the forced smiles he greeted Frau Kermer with every morning. The cleaning lady sometimes swept the smiles into the corner, but she was unable to eliminate them entirely; she didn't have the right equipment.

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PAST was at the centre of a large city extending out into the flat landscape around it. Compared with the other cities in that country it was not terribly old, very young in fact. It was full of history however. History had hit it time and again with heavy hammers. This was plain to see, precisely because the city was always clearing away, breaking down, casting off – anything testifying to the previous period of history. This determination to clear away break down, cast off, was what characterised the city, as one of its citizens had soon noted, prophesying that this would be its future [cf. Karl Scheffler, *Berlin, ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: Reiss, 1910)]. The city then faithfully fulfilled his prophecy.

History did not only leave empty plots behind, but also huge buildings. The edifice housing the institute was sixteen stories high and one-hundred-and-twenty metres wide. Although built during the most recently concluded period

of history, instead of being razed to the ground it had been extensively refurbished. Six lifts continually rose and sank through its many floors and yet the institute's employees often had to wait for ages till a lift arrived to whisk them up or down; the institute had an immeasurably large number of employees. It needed this many because the past they were managing also appeared immeasurable, and instead of rolling a single stone into the future as Sisyphus had done they were pushing a mountain of boulders.

Everyone who worked there met regularly, without prior arrangement, at the vertical centre of the building – on the eighth floor. Here the canteen was situated. It was possible to get into it without your plastic employee-card as its doors always stood open and inviting. You could not, however, pay without your plastic card, onto which you had to transfer sums of money from banknotes at regular intervals.

The machine for transferring sums of money was a small rectangular column with two slots. You inserted your plastic card into the first, a note into the second. The machine was supposed to swallow the note, but did so only with great reluctance. No matter what sum it represented, the machine spat every note out several times before finally swallowing it down, and because of its reluctance to translate the materiality offered it into an immateriality of the same value, precisely because it resisted converting one value into another, which was what happened to the palpable but unfathomable in this building, this tiny machine represented the heart of the building, which stood at the heart of a city where the heart of the past and future history of the country beat – because it was its capital. Indeed such a translation of values is too serious a business for mistakes to be allowable; the values transferred should be neither increased nor reduced. The value of

a banknote is precisely determined; the value of a plastic card is not. The events of the past are precisely documented; this does not make them fathomable. Even if they are made palpable, they remain unfathomable.

The work of the institute, which managed the history of the past through research and thus paved the way into the future, did not immediately become a constructive, vital element of the state which arose from this history, but over time it became as critical to its citizens as the air they breathed.

After a while every institution in the country was wholly taken up with commemorating the crime of the past. It proceeded slowly at first; by the end at a rate of knots. After the country had got over its division – the immediate consequence of the past – and had become a sovereign state, it could finally address itself wholly to itself. It was no longer accountable to any other states, only to other peoples who stood there and were neither an institution nor did they have an army. They had only their memories of the terrible things which had been done to them by the representatives of this people – in their name indeed – but not by the state in which this people now lived. They were now very old. Some of those who had perpetrated the crime back then were also still alive. For them too it was a memory from their youth. They were also very old.

Most of the inhabitants of the country had not yet been born at the time the crime was committed – or were children at most. But the enormity of their forefathers' crime weighed heavily on them, and as soon as they approached this enormity they immediately expected their forefathers to be revealed as criminals. Their expectations were fulfilled effortlessly and continuously. So huge was the crime. So huge that its effects would be felt even into the seventh generation.

The situation whereby their ancestors' crime was permanently being revealed was not nice, but necessary, and once it no longer seemed necessary, it was certainly no longer nice. The state then recalled its obligation towards its citizens and resolved to relieve them of this burden by declaring commemoration of the crime of the past for all eternity as one of its functions. The responsibility for fulfilling this task was poured into monuments which grew in number with the time elapsing since the crime took place. Every site where the crime had occurred – and there were many – was converted into a memorial. This commemoration was no longer seen simply as necessary but as the noblest function of the state, and there was nowhere more illustrious to work than the Institute for the Management of the Past, situated in the centre of the capital of the country, because here – and this was of course official – beat the country's heart. (Obviously this building solely housed the institute's headquarters; its many subsidiary offices were spread throughout the country.)

Thus the darkness this state had crawled from, out of the past, was now placed under a bright light and identified as intrinsic to it, its ultimate bottom line – which stood to reason; ultimately it was the reason it was founded.

Everyone knew it.

It was not a secret and did not need to be discussed.

It really was the bottom line.

But since it had been displayed for all to see and lit from all angles as if by a thousand suns it was no longer interesting. Dark crimes had been replaced by bright lights and the reality of the crime had turned into a history from times gone by.

This too he knew. But in this case the knowledge was of no use to him as he still couldn't stop being preoccupied with the crime of the past.

It was such a huge crime.

The terrible thing was that it barely hurt any more. That was what was ultimately so terrible. Worse: for him this was the bottom line. That this crime, huge as it was, could cease to hurt. That this was possible. That such a thing was possible at all, *that* was terrible. And it increased his misery.

He felt as if he had been dropped here from another time. For it still hurt him.



Jean Back

Amateur (2009)

Amateur

Publishing House **Ultimomondo**

Biography

Jean Back (b.1953) was born in Dudelange, an industrial city on the French border. After finishing secondary education in Esch-Alzette, he became a civil servant, first at the Ministry of Labour, then at the Ministry of Culture. Since 1989, he has been in charge of the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel in Dudelange. In 1990, he staged a photo exhibition, *Lieux et Portraits du Bassin minier*. In addition to his strong commitment to visual arts, in 2003 Jean Back turned to literature with *Wollekestol*, a tribute to his hometown and its steel industry. Jean Back writes in Luxembourgish and German.

Synopsis

Jean Back's short novel *Amateur* houses a complex narrative. Set in 2007, the narrator comes across a short story he wrote in 1971 as an eighteen-year-old student. He rewrites the initial story and combines it with the memory of a love story, the heroine of which is Rosa, a young girl from Germany who is much more experienced in sexual matters than he is. Jean Back's text does not use a straightforward storytelling style, but deploys the complex composition of a 'polylogue'. So, using this collage style, the different voices do not gain an absolute meaning but a relative one, with the sense of the piece coming through the intertextual gaps. Back's fictional ideas extend outwards to contain much reflection on the opportunities and risks of literary writing.

Amateur

Jean Back

Vor drei Jahren: die Fotos vom Mai 68 auf den Titelseiten der Zeitungen, Aufruhr in der Sorbonne, Streiks in Nanterre, Sartre, Schlagwörter, Riesendemos, die verkohlten Autos und Cohn-Bendit, der den CRS ins Visier lachte... ich hatte damals den Eindruck, Luxemburg würde in den nächsten Monaten von Studenten überfallen, und ich fand plötzlich, dass brennende Barrikaden und fliegende Kappsteng der chicken *Groussgaass* sehr gut anstehen würden. Die Ladenfräuleins würden die Rollgitter vor den Juwelievitrinen herunterkurbeln und die Polizei würde die Studenten vertreiben, so wie sie fremde Musiker von den Straßenecken vertreibt. Doch der Widerstand würde wachsen, die Studenten würden gemeinsam mit den Schülern Front machen in diesem Reich der *Bänke und Banken*, wie Manderscheid es 1973 in seinem Film *Stille Tage in Luxemburg* bezeichnete. Ungeheuerliches würde über das stille Marienland hereinbrechen: Menschen vom Mars würden plötzlich die Zuckerbäckereien und die Fleischerläden plündern und johlend mit den abgeschlagenen Köpfen der großen Entenfamilie auf Spießen durch die *Ėnneschtgaass* ziehen. Schreie würden im Petrusstal gehört werden: die Ministerialsekretärinnen würden nackt über die Hangwiesen laufen und ihre schweren Brüste würden lustig auf und ab wippen. Autorallyes würden im Garten des bischöflichen Palais organisiert und der Bischof würde Kopf und Hände in den Pranger auf dem *Knuedler* legen und laut über das Unrecht weinen, das die katholische Kirche den Frauen während Jahrhunderten zugefügt hat.

Nichts würde mehr so sein, wie es einmal war. Selbstanklage über Selbstanklage würde die Zeitungspalten füllen: von den bürokratischen Kleingeistern angefangen, die ihre gut besoldete Zeit in Bistros anstatt auf der Arbeitsstelle verbringen, über autoritäre Lehrkörperschaften und geheimnistuerische Politiker bis hin zu den höchsten Polizei- und Gerichtsinstanzen, die Meister im Vertuschen delikater Affären waren. Luxemburg würde sich, welch revolutionärer Gedanke! in einen modernen, ganz der neuen Zeit verpflichteten Staat verwandeln. Die Regierungsgebäude und Museen würden entstaubt und all diese unzähligen Amtsstuben und alten Gemälde: Sie würden eine weite und klare Blumenlandschaft werden, in der es nach duftenden Kerzen und Lavendelöl riecht. Soziale Gerechtigkeit und die demokratische Mitbestimmung der Arbeiter in ihren Betrieben: sie würden endlich Wirklichkeit. Schülerkomitees würden sich bilden und müssten ernst genommen werden. Die neuen Begriffe wie antiautoritäre Erziehung, Toleranz und sexuelle Befreiung: Sie schwangen bereits kräftig in den teils ironischen, teils kritischen Kommentaren zu den Bildern der mit Steinen übersäten Boulevards mit.

Ich spürte damals eine Unruhe, die einen erfasst wenn man ein wichtiges Ereignis, das einen betrifft, nicht sofort versteht. Doch schien mir ein Erkennen aller politischen und soziologischen Zusammenhänge nicht unbedingt eine Voraussetzung zu sein, um trotzdem zu wissen, dass die Events in Paris, in Berlin und Frankfurt vor drei Jahren richtig und berechtigt waren, und dass die jugendlichen Helden vom Quartier latin und Rudi Dutschke und Fritz Teufel definitiv auch unsere Helden waren.

Wie ein Lauffeuer hatte sich die Nachricht im März 1971 verbreitet, dass vier Schüler aus dem Diekircher Lyzeum vom Unterricht suspendiert werden sollten, wegen aufrührerischen Verhaltens gegenüber der Schuldirektion und Teilen der Lehrerschaft. Für viele von uns war es ein unerhörter Eingriff in die Privatsphäre. Die wenigsten waren den Schülern vorher persönlich begegnet, doch solidarisch gegen die Maßregelung zu protestieren, wurde plötzlich absolute Pflicht.

Die Teilnahme an den Meetings in der Maison du Peuple und an den lauten Schüler sit-ins in der Alzettestraße, die Diskussionen über die Artikel und Karikaturen in der letzten Ausgabe der roten *Wullmaus*... die Schülerzeitung bestand nur aus einigen lose zusammengehefteten und schlecht bedruckten Seiten. Aber wir hatten ein unzensiertes und freches Sprachrohr mit dem viele von uns sich solidarisierten. Die Beiträge über den Palästinakonflikt, über die kommunistischen Entwicklungen in China und Albanien und über die beginnenden Unruhen in Chile wurden, so nehme ich an, von einigen von uns gelesen. Die Drecksschleuder, die pornografischen Zeichnungen und die Sticheleien gegen den Großherzog und seine Familie waren ein echter Knüller. Ebenso die Stellungnahmen zu den jüngsten Vorkommnissen in Diekirch und die Sondernummer zum Schülerstreik am 23 April. All dies gehörte plötzlich zu dem prickelnden Gefühl neue Freiräume im tief katholischen Luxemburg erobern zu können. Und eine neue Freiheit ist wie ein neu erworbenes Fahrrad: eleganter und farbiger als das rostige Drahtgestell, ein spleeniges Objekt in der Garage, auf das man sich liebend gerne schwingen möchte um einen Abstecher zur Bom zu machen.

Ein ordentliches Café, meinte ich.

Bom ist ok, sagte Fred. Das Bier ist ok.

Das Café war eine in die Länge gezogene, gute Stube mit Kohleofen und Rohrpfefe. Bom war eine freundliche, ältere Dame, ein echtes Düdelinger Original, und wenn sie mit dem vollen Tablett hinter dem Tresen hervortrippelte, hatte man den Eindruck, dass sie etwas Schlagseite hatte, so als ob sie die Getränke auf einem schlingernden Passagierschiff servieren würde.

Und? Von wo kommt ihr?

Bom stellte immer wieder die gleichen Fragen. Wir gaben immer wieder die gleichen Antworten.

Aus Esch, sagte Rosa.

Aus Differdingen, sagte Do.

Ja, dich kenne ich, sagte Bom zu mir und servierte das Bier und Fred zog plötzlich einen in eine Zeitung gewickelten Fisch aus der Innentasche seiner Lederjacke hervor und faltete das Papier sehr umständlich auseinander und sagte: So Kinder, jetzt essen wir Fisch.

Ihr wollt gebackenen Fisch essen? Jetzt? Um diese Zeit?

Warum nicht, sagte Fred und Bom verteilte Messer und Gabel auf dem Tisch.

Brauchen wir nicht, sagte Fred.

Ich liebe Fisch, sagte Do.

Wir spuckten die Gräten auf das Zeitungspapier und im Café roch es nach frittiertem Merlan, ähnlich dem Geruch, der einem in den Essbuden auf dem Wilhelmplatz in Luxemburg entgegenschlägt während der Zeit der Oktave.

Die katholische Frau von Luxemburg. Hatte ich mir so vorgestellt, sagte Rosa.

Das heißt?

Das heißt, Amateur, dass meine Eltern evangelisch sind und wir über Luxemburg sprachen, als sie ihre Stellen hier bei der CECA antraten.

Warum hast du eine eigene Wohnung?

Weil ich mir eine eigene Wohnung wünschte.

Ach so, sagte Fred. Nicht schlecht.

So waren die Abende in Düdelingen geprägt von Boms Matrosenauftritten auf hoher See und dem Fett eines gebackenen Merlans auf Zeitungspapier. Rosa liebte diese Ambiance.

Echt revolutionär, sagte sie.

Was ist an Bom revolutionär? fragte ich.

Nichts, sagte Rosa und darum gefällt es mir so gut. Die Normalität kann sehr schnell ins Gegenteil umschlagen. Das spüre ich hier. Der revolutionäre Funke kann auf die Massen der Arbeiter überspringen.

Ich musste lachen. Bom lächelte. Fred verschluckte sich fast an einer Gräte.

Rosa, du glaubst an das Christkind.

Genau das will ich nicht tun, sagte sie.

Wenn du meinst, die Arbeiter würden sich den Schülern anschließen... sagte Do. Also, an die Veränderung glaube ich zwar auch. Aber ich weiß nicht...

Wir haben uns nicht umsonst landesweit mit denen von Diekirch solidarisiert, sagte Fred.

Ich kenne das Milieu, sagte Do. Die streiken wegen anderer Geschichten, die Hüttenarbeiter. Aber nicht wegen uns.

Do erstaunte mich. Sie war bisher die Unpolitischste von uns. Doch ein Auftritt, Arm in Arm mit meinem Vater, Schlosser auf der Düdelinger Hütte, mit uns Siebzehnjährigen vor dem Parlament, indem wir Parolen brüllen und die Polizei mit zynischen Sprüchen beleidigen würden: Das konnte ich mir bei aller Sympathie mit den Pariser Studenten auch nicht vorstellen. Pflastersteine gegen die Chamber? Mein Vater und ich? Schon allein der Gedanke erschreckte mich zutiefst, obwohl ich wusste, dass die Luxemburger Geschichte nicht frei war von Protesten und Gewaltaktionen gegen die Obrigkeit. Aber damals, im Januar 1919, waren keine johlende Schüler mit ihren Vätern impliziert. Nur eine Handvoll erwachsener Revolutionäre, die die Republik ausrufen wollten. Und vom französischen Militär auseinander getrieben wurden. Und dann gab es diese große Arbeiterdemonstration im August desselben Jahres gegen die Teuerung. Ich erinnerte mich Postkarten von beeindruckenden Menschenmassen vor dem Parlament gesehen zu haben.

Unsere Bewegung wird nicht ohne Echo bleiben, sagte Rosa. Es war unser Protest. Wir hatten gemault. Alle zusammen. Das hat gewirkt. Auch auf die Regierung. Man muss uns endlich ernst nehmen.

Wir waren doch nur Mitläufer von denen aus den oberen Klassen. Wir plappern doch alles nach, sagte Do.

Na und? Es sind doch auch Schüler, wie wir. Und wir haben dieselben Ideen. Auch wenn wir Adorno noch nicht schaffen.

Ich habe Markuse gelesen, sagte ich.

Und du hast sicher alles verstanden? fragte Rosa.

So weit, ja.

Dann ist es gut, sagte Rosa.

Ich glaube fest daran, dass die Ausbeutung der Werktätigen irgendwann ein Ende nehmen wird, sagte Fred, dessen Vater Lehrer in Schiffingen war.

Natürlich, sagte Rosa. Wir glauben alle daran. Die Ausbeutung und die Lüge und die Verdammung der Sexualität und die elterliche Autorität und die Rolle der Frauen, KKK, Kind, Kirche, Küche oder andersrum... das wird sich ändern.

Ich habe kein Problem mit der elterlichen Autorität, sagte ich. Ich darf so ziemlich tun, was ich will.

Sieh an, Amateur.

Natürlich, sonst würde ich nicht bei dir übernachten. Und abends nicht auf Discos kellnern.

Ist auch wieder richtig, sagte Rosa und küsste mich. Nur Do hat Probleme zuhause. Stimmt's Do?

So ähnlich, sagte Do. Aber nur weil ich einmal in Differdingen hinter dem Fußballfeld gekifft hatte. Und weil ich die Tertia noch einmal machen musste. Unter anderem wegen Mathe und Biologie.

Riicht mat der Panz duerchgefall! lachte Fred.

Biologie ist Scheiße.

Biologie ist toll, sagte ich. Physik auch.

Übertreib nicht, sagte Rosa. Naturwissenschaften sind Instrumente in politischer Hand. Können zu allem eingesetzt werden. Auch zur Unterdrückung und Bespitzelung. Und die Aufarbeitung des Zweiten Weltkrieges wird auch kommen. Die Amtsstuben hier in Luxemburg sitzen ja noch voll von diesen alten Nazis.

Jetzt übertreibst du, sagte Do. In Deutschland ist es so. Hier nicht.

Woher willst du das wissen? fragte Rosa.

Ich weiß das eben. Unsere Nazis wurden nach dem Krieg erschossen.

Einige, sagte Fred. Die Schlimmsten von denen wurden gegen die Wand gestellt. Nicht alle. Mein Vater hat mir das erzählt.

Die Schlimmsten sind diejenigen, die nicht gegen die Wand gestellt wurden, rief Rosa. Die so weiter machen, als ob nichts geschehen wäre. Die dieselben Füllfedern heute benutzen, mit denen sie damals die Deportationen der Luxemburger Familien unterschrieben haben. Ich weiß das doch! Meine Eltern haben mich aufgeklärt, ehe wir nach Luxemburg kamen.

Rosa hatte sicher recht. Sie kannte die Geschichte Luxemburgs besser als ich. Was kein Wunder war: Das Thema wurde nicht einmal ansatzweise in den Schulen diskutiert. Ein absolutes Tabu im Lehrplan.

Bom schlief hinter dem Tresen. Unsere revolutionäre Zelle in Düdelingen wurde nicht von den Bullen ausgehoben. Und die Spitzel ließen auf sich warten. Und wir waren stolz auf unsere Art, die auf ewige Zeiten von den Konservativen festgeschriebene Staatsautorität irgendwie und etwas diffus vom *Café bei der Bom* aus in Frage zu stellen. Und lautstark dagegen protestiert zu haben. Es war eine sehr gute Zeit.

Amateur

Jean Back

Translated from the German by Sandra Schmit

Three years ago: the pictures of May 1968 on the covers of newspapers, riots at the Sorbonne, strikes in Nanterre, Sartre, slogans, mass demonstrations, burned-out cars and Cohn-Bendit laughing the CRS into their visors... back then, I had the impression that in the next months Luxembourg would be invaded by students and I suddenly thought that burning barricades and flying paving stones would suit our fashionable high street *Groussgaass* very well. Shop assistants would roll down the shutters before the jewelers' display windows and the police would drive the students away like they drive away foreign musicians from street corners. But, with high school kids joining the university students, the resistance would grow and together they would make a stand in the *Empire of benches and banks*, as Manderscheid called it in his 1973 film *Quiet Days in Luxembourg*. Outrageous things would befall our quiet Maryland: people from Mars would suddenly raid the cake shops and delis and, yelling, parade the cut-off heads of the large duck family on sticks through the *Ënneschtgaass*. Screams would be heard in the valley of the Petrusse: ministers' executive secretaries would run naked over the sloping meadows, their heavy breasts merrily bouncing up and down. Car rallies would be held in the garden of the bishop's palace and the bishop would place his head and hands in the stocks on the *Knuedler*, tearfully bemoaning the injustice which the Catholic Church has inflicted on women for centuries.

Nothing would ever be the same again. Self-accusation upon self-accusation would fill the newspapers' columns: from small-minded bureaucrats spending their well-remunerated time in bars instead of at their workplace, to authoritarian teachers and secretive politicians, to the highest ranks in the police force and judiciary who were masters in the dissimulation of delicate affairs. Luxembourg would, what a revolutionary thought!, transform into an open-minded, modern state. Government buildings and museums would clean house and all the stuffy administrations and old paintings would turn into a vast, clear flowering landscape smelling of scented candles and lavender oil. Social justice and democratic workers' rights: these things would at last become reality. Student councils would form in schools and would have to be taken seriously. New concepts like anti-authoritarian education, tolerance and sexual liberation: they already had their place in the half-ironical, half-critical commentaries next to the pictures of the stone-littered boulevards.

Back then, I felt restless, like you do when you cannot immediately comprehend an important event in your life. But it seemed to me that understanding the whole political and social context was not a necessary prerequisite to know, without any doubt, that the events in Paris, Berlin and Frankfurt three years ago were just and justified, and that the young heroes of the Latin Quarter and Rudi Dutschke and Fritz Teufel were definitely our heroes, too.

In March 1971, the news had spread like quickfire that four pupils from the lyceum in Diekirch were to be suspended from class for subversive behaviour towards the head of school and parts of the teaching staff. For many of us, this was an incredible violation of privacy. Not many of us had ever met the students in person before, but protesting in solidarity against the punishment suddenly became an absolute duty.

Our meetings in the *Maison du Peuple* and the boisterous student sit-ins in the *Rue de l'Alzette*, the discussions about articles and caricatures in the latest edition of the *Red Vole*... the student magazine consisted only of a few loosely stapled and badly printed pages. But we had an uncensored, cheeky mouthpiece with which many of us were solidary. The articles about the conflict in Palestine, about the communist developments in China and Albania and about smouldering political unrest in Chile, were, I suppose, read by some of us. The slander, the pornographic drawings and the jeers against the Grand Duke and his family were a big hit. As were the opinion piece on the latest events in Diekirch and the special edition about the student strike on 23 April. All this was suddenly part of the thrilling sensation of claiming new freedoms in deeply Catholic Luxembourg. And a new-found freedom is like a newly-purchased bicycle: more elegant and colourful than your rusty old bike, a crazy thing in the garage, which makes you itch to get on it and take it on a quick trip to Gran.

Good café, I stated.

Gran's all right, said Fred. The beer's all right.

The café was a stretched-out family room with a coal stove and a flue pipe. Gran was a friendly elderly lady, a real Dudelange original, and when she pattered out from behind the counter with a tray full of glasses, she looked like she had a bit of a list, as if she were serving the drinks on a swaying passenger ship.

So? Where're you from?

Gran kept asking the same questions. We kept giving the same answers.

From Esch, said Rosa.

From Differdange, said Do.

You I know, said Gran to me, and put the beers in front of us, and suddenly Fred pulled a fish wrapped in newspaper out of the inner pocket of his leather jacket, gingerly unfolded the paper and said: All right, guys, we're eating fish now.

You want to eat fried fish? Now? At this time of day?

Why not, said Fred, and Gran laid out the cutlery.

We don't need that, said Fred.

I love fish, said Do.

We spat out the fishbones on the newspaper and it smelled of fried whiting in the café, similar to the odour wafting out from the food booths on the *Place Guillaume* in Luxembourg during the annual *Octave*.

The Catholic woman from Luxembourg. That's how I pictured her, said Rosa.

Meaning?

Meaning, Amateur, that my parents are protestants and that we talked about Luxembourg when they started working for the ECSC here.

Why are you living on your own?

Because I wanted to live on my own.

Oh, ok, said Fred. Nice.

And so the evenings in Dudelange were marked by Gran's high-sea sailing and the grease of fried whiting on a newspaper. Rosa loved the atmosphere.

Really revolutionary, she said.

What's revolutionary about Gran, I asked.

Nothing, said Rosa, and that's why I like it. Normalcy is fast uprooted. I can feel that here. The revolutionary spark can inflame the working masses.

I had to laugh. Gran smiled. Fred almost choked on a fishbone.

Rosa, you believe in Father Christmas.

That's precisely what I don't want to do, she said.

If you think that the workers will unite with the students... said Do. Well, that's a change I believe in, too. But I don't know...

We didn't show nationwide solidarity with the guys in Diekirch for nothing, said Fred.

I know those people, said Do. They will go on strike for many things, the steel workers. But not for us.

I was surprised. So far, Do had been the least politically-minded of us. I tried to imagine my father, a worker at the steel works in Dudelange, arm in arm with us seventeen-year-olds, yelling slogans in front of the parliament and insulting the police with cynical remarks. Sympathise as I might with the Parisian students, I just couldn't picture it. Paving stones against the Chamber? My father and I? The thought alone frightened me, even though I knew that the history of Luxembourg was not free from protests and riots against the authorities. But back then, in January 1919, no bawling students and their fathers had been involved. Just a handful of grown-up revolutionaries who'd wanted to proclaim Luxembourg a republic. Only to be dispersed by the French military. And then there was that large workers' demonstration in August of the same year against the rising prices. I remembered that I had seen postcards of an impressive mass of people in front of the parliament.

Our movement will not be without consequences, said Rosa.

It was our protest. We grumbled. All of us. That worked. Also on the government. They finally have to take us seriously.

We just jumped on the bandwagon, said Do. We just repeat everything the upper graders say.

So? They're students, just like us. And we have the same ideas. Even if we don't get Adorno yet.

I've read Markuse, I said.

And I'm sure you've understood it all, asked Rosa.

So far, yes.

Good, said Rosa.

I firmly believe that the exploitation of the working force will one day come to an end, said Fred, whose father was a teacher in Schiffflange.

Of course, said Rosa. We all believe that. The exploitation and the lies and the condemnation of sexuality and parental authority and the role of women, the three Ks, Kinder, Kirche, Küche or the other way around... that'll change.

I have no problem with parental authority, I said. I can basically do what I want.

Is that so, Amateur.

Of course, otherwise I wouldn't sleep over at your place. Or work in discos in the evening.

True, true, said Rosa, and kissed me. Only Do has problems at home. Right, Do?

Something like that, said Do. But only because I smoked dope behind the football field in Differdange that one time. And because I had to repeat the eleventh grade. Among other things because of maths and biology.

Flunked, laughed Fred.

Biology's crap.

Biology's great, I said. Physics, too.

Don't exaggerate, said Rosa. The natural sciences are instruments in the hands of politicians. Can be used for anything. Also for suppression and spying. And one day, the Second World War will be dealt with, too. Our public administrations are still full of them old Nazis.

Now you're exaggerating, said Do. That's in Germany, not here.

You don't know that, said Rosa.

Yes, I do. Our Nazis were shot after the war.

Some were, said Fred. The worst of them were put against the wall. Not all, though. That's what my father told me.

The worst are those that were not put against the wall, cried Rosa. The ones that carry on like nothing happened. That are still using the same pens with which they signed the deportations of Luxembourgish families back then. Don't think I don't know it! My parents enlightened me before we moved to Luxembourg.

Rosa was probably right. She knew the history of Luxembourg better than me. No wonder: at school, the topic was never even broached. An absolute taboo in the curriculum.

Gran slept behind the counter. Our revolutionary cell in Dudelange wasn't broken up by the cops. And the spies took their own sweet time. And we were proud of the way we somehow, someway questioned government authority, written in stone for all eternity by the conservatives, from our base in *Gran's Café*. And of the fact that we had loudly protested against it. It was a very good time.



© Alex Leo Serban

Răzvan Rădulescu

Teodosie cel Mic (2006)

Theodosius the Small

Publishing House **Polirom**

Biography

Răzvan Rădulescu (b.1969) was born in Bucharest. As a student, he became a member of Letters, one of the most important training centers for young writers at the time, led by another famous author, Mircea Cărtărescu. Rădulescu's text was published in the anthology *Tablou familie* in 1995. His critical reception included winning the Romanian Writers' Union prize. His second novel, *Teodosie cel Mic*, was received with enthusiasm by many commentators. He has also written screenplays and collaborated with various magazines.

Synopsis

Răzvan Rădulescu's novel *Theodosius the Small*, a fantasy that wraps social concerns in fairytale attire, contains a range of characters that would not be out of place sitting at the same table as today's politicians, strategists or media personalities. In Rădulescu's world, the geography of Romania is transformed: borders are jumbled in such a way that new historic roots are formed in the resulting territories. Within a fantastical version of Wallachia, we find miniature kingdoms, containing both familiar contemporary localities, such as Bucharest, Filași and Petrila, together with places established by the narrative, such as the Mushroom Fields, Strawberry Fields and Mushberry Valley. The backdrop appears to be historical but, nevertheless, the story has many elements taken from the contemporary world. Although the novel concerns childhood as seen through an adult's eyes, it is not about childhood itself. Rather, it is about its fantasies, about the way in which the events of today's world are transformed by the vision of a child into a fantastical madness containing comic horrors and sad comedies.

Teodosie cel Mic

Răzvan Rădulescu

Capitol VI. Banchetul

În ciuda pregătirilor fastuoase pe care Pisicîinele și Teodosie le făcuseră pentru primirea Somnului Protector (întreaga reședință fusese înecată în apă, pernele de pe divane și șervetele din bucătărie se răsuceau lent în curenții albaștri, iar covoarele se ridicaseră de la podea zece sau chiar douăzeci de centimetri și filfiiau cu încetinitorul), acesta din urmă, fie din exces de prudență, fie pentru că voia să petreacă într-un mod mai puțin obișnuit, venise în propriul său acvariu de voiaj și ceruse ca banchetul să se desfășoare la umbra nucului.

Pisicîinele se conformase protocolar și adusese, ajutat de Teodosie, o masă lungă.

— De scaune nu e nevoie, făcu Somnul Protector un semn de refuz cu mîna de după sticla acvariului său încăpător. Într-adevăr, prin apa nu foarte limpede a acvariului – apă de lac, își imaginează Teodosie – se putea vedea o măsuță cu picioarele curbate pe care stăteau trei farfurii așezate una peste alta, una mai adîncă, de supă, alta plată, pentru felul principal, și ultima, mai mică, pentru desert; o frapieră cu picior și un compartiment separat pentru cuburi de gheață; un fotoliu în care se lăfăia Somnul Protector, destul de asemănător cu cel pe care-l văzuse Teodosie pe fundul Lacului Rece, dar probabil că mai ușor. Acvariul Somnului închidea în el, de asemenea, o masă simplă de serviciu, nisip și mîl de lac – acesta din urmă se ridica în vârtejuri la fund ori de cîte ori Somnul se fițîia în jîlțul său -, două ghivece cu plante filiforme de apă dulce și un dispozitiv

complicat, format în principal dintr-un tub cu articulații, o pîlnie și multe manșoane de cauciuc, care-i servea peștelui să se facă auzit atunci cînd catadicsea să vorbească. De-a lungul geamului acvariului, prinse pe ațe, se puteau trage niște draperii bogate ale căror falduri se îngheșuiau acum spre colțuri. Întreaga construcție de sticlă, cu tot ce conținea, se sprijinea pe un soclu de metal din care ieșeau, într-o parte și-n alta, cîte două mînere solide și iscusit decorate. De aceste mînere acvariul putea fi ridicat și cărat de colo-colo. Pentru această îndeletnicire, nu tocmai plăcută (căci acvariul, cu Somnul în el, trebuie să fi cîntărit destul de greu), peștele cel gras era însoțit, pe lîngă alți șase pești cu demnități mai mici, de patru pești cărători, închiși și ei în acvariile lor. Evident, acvariile care asigurau mediul natural celor care îl transportau pe Somnul Protector erau mai puțin somptuoase și fără nici un fel de facilități: nu existau nici masă, nici scaun, nici frapieră (de altfel, peștii cărători nu puseră nimic în gură pe toată durata ulterioară banche-tului). Acvariile lor semănau mai degrabă cu niște armuri de sticlă prin care mîinile și picioarele ieșeau la aer, strangulate la încheieturi de garnituri din cauciuc și inele bulonate. Construcția acvariilor le interzicea practic nefericiților pești să se așeze și, cînd Pisciținele le făcu semn să ia loc, cei patru cărători bîțîiră nervos din picioare și emiseră pe gură niște comentarii materializate în șiraguri de bule ce se adunară la suprafața apei.

— Ce bei? îl întrebă Pisciținele pe Somnul Protector.

— Ce bem? se întoarse Somnul spre cei șase sfetnici care, instalați în scaunele lor subacvatice, desfăceau cîte un șervet și-l întindeau tacticos pe genunchi. Nu bem nimic? Foarte bine. Eu am să iau vin.

— Beau și eu vin, spuse Teodosie, cum stătea așezat de cealaltă parte a mesei, chiar în fața Somnului Protector.

Pisiciînele îi turnă în pahar vin cam de două degete, își umplu propria sa cupă cu vîrf și răsturnă conținutul celei de-a treia peste marginea de sus a acvariului, în apa care-l conținea pe Somn. Vinul se desfăcu în fire grase și coborî unduind ca o meduză spre pește. Acesta deschise gura și înglobă o parte din lichid.

— Noroc, spuse el, și dacă vă arde de toasturi, țineți voi.

— Aș vrea să țin eu un toast, se auzi prin pîlnie glasul unuia din sfetnici. Deși n-am vin, zise el, ridicîndu-se afabil de pe scaun, vreau să-i urez Măritului Teodosie mulți ani de domnie și să îl asigur că, deși poate că în trecut noi, peștii, am uneltit împotriva lui, acum întreg Lacul Rece îi este devotat pînă la moarte – sau cel puțin așa cred eu.

Somnul se întunecase la față și bătea cu degetele în tăblia mesei.

— Ai terminat? Își chestionă el sfetnicul.

— De îndată, mărite Somn Protector. Aș vrea să adaug doar că ieri, în urma plecării Măritului Pisiciîne, am semnat un tratat cu Furnicile Vinete în legătură cu exploatarea minelor de sare. Și cu Furnicile Verzi, la Filiași, am avut o întîlnire fructuoasă...

— O clipă, îl întrerupse Pisiciînele pe sfetnic, să ne întoarcem puțin la Petrila. Cînd...

— De ce să ne întoarcem la Petrila? mieună Somnul Protector în direcția Pisiciînelui, apoi se răsuci spre sfetnic și îl fulgeră cu privirea. Sîntem aici ca să petrecem, nu ca să vorbim politică. Mai ales că am constatat că asta ne otrăvește viețile.

— De acord, nu discutăm politică, zise Pisiciînele. Vreau doar să aflu ce e cu minele de sare.

— Îți explic eu, zise binevoitor Somnul. Stai jos, se adresa el sfetnicului. Și aruncă tubul acustic. Acum. Aruncă tubul. Și voi, aruncați toți tuburile. Vă rog să nu mi-o luați în nume de rău, continuă el, întorcându-se spre Teodosie și Pisicîine, dar am ajuns să nu-mi mai suport consilierii cînd deschid gura. Sînt foarte duplicitari. Îi întrebi ceva și ei încep să o scalde, că mărite Somn Protector, tu ești stăpînul nostru, și tot așa. Nu pot să aud niciodată o părere sinceră de la supușii mei. De-aia îi las fără pîlnii, pentru că atunci trebuie să-mi răspundă clar: să dea din cap: da – nu.

Într-adevăr, peștii-consilieri aruncaseră afară tuburile prevăzute cu pîlnie – acestea căzuseră cu pocnet în iarbă și acum priveau nespus de trist spre stăpînul lor.

— Ia spuneți, bandă de ticăloși, răcni Somnul la ei, ceea ce provoacă încrețirea apei la suprafața acvariului. Vrea să mai țină vreunul dintre voi un toast?

Peștii dădură din cap că nu.

— Repet întrebarea: vrea să mai țină vreunul vreun toast?

Tulburați, sfetnicii se consultară între ei din priviri apoi, cu îndoială, făcură semn din cap că da.

— Nu vă jucați cu mine, răcni Somnul și cei șase începură să tremure ca varga, mișcînd capul în toate direcțiile. Somnul îi privi pătrunzător, apoi se lăsă în fotoliu și începu să rîdă. Bun, am lămurit-o și pe asta. Aș lua o bucată de șunculiță dacă ești așa de drăguț, Gavril. Aș vrea să îndepărtezi pătrunjelul de deasupra, îmi stă în gît. Aș vrea să mă servești tu, Teodosie.

Teodosie tresări. Vinul îl amețise ușor și îl cufundase într-o dulce plictiseală. Se ridică de la locul lui, luă o felie de șuncă pe care o scutură de verdeață și o aruncă în acvariul Somnului Protector. Acesta o privi cum se cufundă lin, îl fulgeră

alternativ cu privirea pe Teodosie, vădit nemulțumit de felul în care acesta îi aruncase bucata de carne, apoi, când șunca ajunsese în dreptul nasului său, o hăpăi închizînd ochii.

— Zi cu Petrila, reveni Piscîînele.

— Cu Petrila, răspunse Somnul Protector cu gura plină, lucrurile stau așa: imediat după discuția noastră de ieri, m-am gîndit să mă folosesc într-un fel de privilegiile pe care ești dispus să le acorzi furnicilor în viitor și am pus în practică o investiție costisitoare. Aceea de a dăruî supușilor mei o stațiune de ape sărate în Golful Balenei, cu amenajări, cu tot dichisul.

— Te miști repede, zise Piscîînele, mușcîndu-și buza inferioară.

— De ce nu? Costurile investiției sînt mari. Dacă făceam înțelegerea după ce semnai tu tratatul, furnicile și-ar fi ridicat pretențiile. Nu mă poți condamna pentru agerimea de care dau dovadă în afaceri. Totul e să fii pe fază.

— De ce-i spune Golful Balenei? vru Teodosie să știe, în vreme ce în mintea lui luau formă cetacee lucioase care se zbenguiau în golf și eliminau apa cu presiune prin vîrful capului.

— A, pentru că lacul e atît de sărat în zona aia, încît numai o balenă ar putea trăi acolo.

— A, da? se miră Piscîînele. Eu am crezut tot timpul că pentru că are forma unei balene cînd te uiți la hartă.

— Aș, de unde, rîse Somnul. Te uiți prea mult la hărți. Ce-i aia forma unei balene? Care-i forma unei balene? Aș mai vrea niște șuncă și, dacă se poate, brînză. Și eu am forma unei balene dacă mă desenezi pe hartă. Nu, e apa sărată din cauza Rîului Sărat. Care rîu, fii atent aicea, Teodosie, o să rîdeți, nu e sărat, de fapt, decît după ce trece prin minele de sare. Acest fapt le face pe furnici să creadă că au drepturi asupra apei din Golful Balenei. Susțin că sarea este a lor. Niște vin, te rog.

Pisicîinele se ridică și turnă vin în acvariul peștelui. Cu acest prilej, îi observă pe cei șase consilieri care se fițîiau în scaune și indicau cu degetele spre guri.

— Vă e foame? întrebă Pisicîinele Gavril.

Peștii dădură de multe ori din cap. Teodosie luă cîteva plato-uri cu gustări de pe masă și, cu ajutorul unei furculițe, deșertă mîncarea în acvarii, avînd grijă să facă o împărțire cît mai cinstită. Consilierii se puseră pe mîncat cu mare sîrg, în timp ce din ochi le curgeau lacrimi de recunoștință.

— Ei, continuă Somnul. Se puna acum cîteva ani problema desalinizării rîului. Eu m-am opus. O parte a autorităților de la Petrila este pentru închiderea minelor de sare. Asta, vă dați seama, ar duce automat la transformarea Rîului Sărat într-un rîu cu apă dulce.

— Și din ce trăiesc dacă închid minele?

— Chiar că asta este treaba lor. Mie nu mi se pare că asta e discuția. Problema e una de principii: curentul Golfului duce sarea de-a latul lacului pînă aproape de malul acesta. E adevărat că nu foarte multă, dar orișicît. Spune-mi, strict legal, a cui e sarea pe care o duce curentul Golfului? A furnicilor? Pentru că să nu te miri dacă mîine-poimîine or s-o revendice și pe asta.

Pisicîinele se destinse și începu să rîdă.

— Faci ce faci și pînă la urmă tot nu-ți convine tratatul cu furnicile. Se vede din fiecare vorbă pe care o spui.

— Păi nu? zise peștele cu gura plină.

— Aha.

— Aha, zici tu, dar mie nu-mi convine deloc. Adică, dacă închid minele, e una: mie mi se cam filfîie, s-a terminat cu stațiunea mea de odihnă, asta e, n-o să-mi pun eu capăt zilelor

pentru asta. Însă probabil că va începe exodul șomerilor către Filiași. Implicațiile navetismului sînt groaznice. Gîndește-te la traficul de furnici dimineața și seara pe lac. Ți-e clar că peste lac or să facă zilnic naveta.

— Și atunci?

— Și atunci, delegația mea a negociat cu acea parte a conducerii care nu dorește închiderea minelor. Simplu. N-ai să crezi, dar se găsesc destule Furnici Vinete care să disprețuiască Furnicile Verzi de la est și să dorească ruperea provinciei. Personal, nu le înțeleg, pentru mine toate furnicile sînt la fel, blonde sau brune, îmi e totuna, le găsesc deopotrivă de scîrboase și deopotrivă le detest, cu mușchii lor ca niște bile și cu antenele alea care se mișcă tot timpul, bîrc, te umplu de scîrbă.

— Te rog, făcu Pisicîinele semn cu mîna, sîntem la masă.

— Pardon, zise Somnul, nu m-am putut abține. Am vrut numai să-ți faci o idee ca să înțelegi ce simt eu la gîndul că bărci întregi cu astfel de făpturi ar naviga în sus și-n jos pe lacul meu. Și să revin. Am trimis o echipă de negociatori. Și ei au negociat și am încheiat un tratat care stipulează că minele rămîn deschise și cred că într-un an-doi Golful Balenei va deveni un paradis al stațiunilor subacvatice.

— înțeleg, zise Pisicîinele. Adică înțeleg în parte. Spui că ai negociat. Sînt convins că Furnicile care ți-au susținut cauza au primit anumite bonificații din partea ta.

— Natural, încuviință Somnul Protector, lăsîndu-se pe spate și scoțînd din buzunarul caftanului o scobitoare.

— Aș fi curios să știi ce.

— A, o nimica toată. Am promis că voi organiza, pentru adversarii lor politici, mici aventuri ori de cîte ori vor încerca să traverseze lacul.

— Și vei organiza?

— Nu mă întreba, habar nu am amănunte tehnice de felul acesta. Eu am semnat un acord de principiu. Este posibil să auzi sau să citești prin ziare că cutare sau cutare ambarcațiuni cu destinația Filiași a luat brusc apă și că echipajul a fost silit să abandoneze barca și așa mai departe, dar îți repet, nu voi avea cunoștință de nici un caz concret.

— Și ce altceva ai mai promis?

— Am mai promis sprijin efectiv pentru ca guvernul favorabil mie să rămână și să conducă Furnicile Vinete ani lungi și fericiți de acum înainte.

Theodosius the Small

Răzvan Rădulescu

Translated from the Romanian by Alistair Ian Blyth

Chapter VI. Banquet

In spite of the sumptuous preparations the Catdog and Theodosius had made for the Sheatfish Protector's reception (the entire residence had been inundated in water, the pillows from the couch and the napkins in the kitchen were slowly spinning in the blue eddies, and the rugs had risen ten or even twenty centimetres aloft and were fluttering in slow motion), the latter, whether from excessive caution or because he wanted to be entertained in a less customary fashion, had arrived in his own travel aquarium and requested that the banquet be held in the shade of the walnut tree.

The Catdog had punctiliously complied, and assisted by Theodosius he had brought out a long table.

— There's no need for any chairs, the Sheatfish Protector gestured behind the glass of his spacious aquarium in token of refusal. Indeed, through the none too limpid water of the aquarium – lake water, as Theodosius imagined – it was possible to see a little table with curved legs, on which stood three dishes all in a row (one deeper, for the soup, another shallow, for the main course, and the last smaller, for dessert); an ice bucket on a stand, and a separate compartment for ice cubes; and an armchair, in which the Sheatfish Protector was lolling. The armchair was quite similar to the one Theodosius had seen at the bottom of Cold Lake, but was probably

lighter. In addition, the aquarium of the Sheatfish contained a plain serving table, lake sand and silt – which eddied up from the bottom whenever the Sheatfish shifted position on his throne – two pots with filiform freshwater plants, and a complicated device, consisting mainly of an articulated tube, a funnel, and numerous rubber grommets, which allowed the fish to make himself heard when he deigned to speak. Around the panes of the aquarium, fastened by cords, it was possible to draw rich drapes, whose folds were now crammed into the corners. The entire glass construction and all its contents rested on a metal stand, from which two sturdy and skilfully decorated handles protruded to either side. The aquarium could be lifted and carried from place to place by means of these handles. For this none too pleasant task (since the aquarium, with the Shearfish in it, must have been rather heavy), the fat fish was accompanied, besides another six fishes of lesser rank, by four bearer fishes, themselves encased in their own aquaria. Of course, the aquaria that ensured a natural medium for those who transported the Sheatfish Protector were less sumptuous and had no facilities whatsoever: there were neither tables nor chairs nor ice buckets (in any case, during the entire course of the subsequent banquet, nothing was to pass the lips of the bearer fish). Their aquaria sooner resembled glass suits of armour, through which their arms and legs protruded into the air, strangulated by joints with rubber garnitures and riveted rings. The construction of the aquaria in effect prevented the fish from sitting, and when the Catdog made a gesture for them to be seated, the four bearers angrily jerked their legs, emitting from their mouths remarks that materialised in streams of bubbles and gathered on the surface of the water.

— What will you have to drink? the Catdog asked the Sheatfish Protector.

— What'll we have to drink? The Sheatfish turned toward his six counsellors, who, installed upon their sub-aquatic chairs, were each unfolding a serviette and leisurely spreading them over their knees. Aren't we having anything to drink? Very well. I'll have wine.

— I'll have wine too, said Theodosius, sitting on the other side of the table, opposite the Sheatfish Protector.

The Catdog poured about two fingers of wine into his glass, filled his own cup to the brim, and poured the contents of a third over the upper lip of the aquarium, into the water containing the Sheatfish. The wine separated into thick strands and sank undulating like an octopus over the fish. The latter opened his mouth and engulfed a part of the liquid.

— Cheers, he said, and if you're in the mood for toasts, make them yourselves.

— I should like to make a toast, could be heard from the voice funnel of one of the counsellors. Though I have no wine, he said, affably rising from his chair, I would like to wish the Illustrious Theodosius a long reign and to assure him that, although in the past perhaps we fishes have machinated against him, the whole of Cold Lake is now loyal to him unto the death – or at least so I believe.

The Sheatfish's face darkened and he drummed his fingers on the tabletop.

— Have you finished? he asked the counsellor.

— Straight away, illustrious Sheatfish Protector. I should

merely like to add that yesterday, following the departure of the illustrious Catdog, we signed a treaty with the Purple Ants as regards exploitation of the Petrila salt mines. And with the Green Ants, in Filiași, we had a fruitful meeting...

— One moment, the Catdog interrupted him, let us go back a little to Petrila. When...

— Why should we go back to Petrila? mewed the Sheatfish Protector in the Catdog's direction, and then twisted around toward the counsellor and glared at him. We are here to carouse, not to talk politics. All the more so given that I have ascertained that politics poisons our lives.

— Agreed, let's not talk politics, said the Catdog. I merely want to find out what is with the salt mines.

— I shall explain, said the Sheatfish benevolently. Sit down, he addressed the counsellor. And jettison the acoustic tube. Now. Jettison the tube. And you, all of you, jettison your tubes. Please don't think badly of me, he went on, turning toward Theodosius and the Catdog, but I can no longer abide these counsellors when they open their mouths. They are very duplicitous. I ask them something and they start to quibble, about how you are our master, illustrious Sheatfish Protector, and so on. I can never get a sincere opinion from my subjects. That's why I'm leaving them without their funnels, because then they have to give a straight answer: to nod either yes or no.

Indeed, the fish-counsellors had jettisoned their funnel-equipped tubes – they had fallen with a thud onto the grass – and were now looking at their master with ineffable sadness.

— What have you got to say, you gang of scoundrels, the Sheatfish bellowed at them, causing the water at the surface of his aquarium to ripple. Do any of you still want to make a toast?

The fish shook their heads.

— I repeat the question: do any of you still want to make a toast?

Anxious, the counsellors consulted among themselves by means of glances and then, doubtfully, nodded their heads.

— Don't fool with me, roared the Sheatfish, and the six began to quiver like reeds, moving their heads in every direction. The Sheatfish looked at them piercingly, then slumped in his armchair and began to laugh. Good, we've cleared that one up. I'll have a piece of ham, if you'll be so kind, Gavriil. I'd like you to remove the parsley from on top – it gets stuck in my throat. I'd like you to serve me, Theodosius.

Theodosius gave a start. The wine had somewhat gone to his head and he had been overwhelmed by sweet boredom. He rose from his seat, took a slice of ham, brushing off the parsley, and cast it into the Sheatfish Protector's aquarium. The latter watched it gently sinking, alternately casting glances at Theodosius, visibly dissatisfied at the way he had tossed him the morsel, and then, as the ham reached the level of his nose, he gulped it down, closing his eyes.

— Tell me what is with Petrila, the Catdog resumed.

— With Petrila, answered the Sheatfish Protector with his mouth full, things stand thus: immediately after our discussion yesterday, I decided to put to some kind of use the privileges you are prepared to grant the ants in future, and to implement a costly investment. That of giving my subjects a salt water resort in the Whale Gulf, with facilities, the whole works.

— You move fast, said the Catdog, biting his lower lip.

— Why not? The costs of the investment are high. If we'd come to an understanding after you signed the treaty, the ants would have increased their pretensions. You can't condemn me for my business acumen. The main thing is to be on the ball.

— Why is it called the Whale Gulf? Theodosius demanded to know, while in his mind there took shape a gleaming cetacean, which frolicked in the gulf spurting jets of water from the top of its head.

— Ah, because the lake is so salty in that area that only a whale could live there.

— Oh, really? wondered the Catdog. I had always thought it was because it has the shape of a whale when you look at it on the map.

— Pah, not at all, laughed the Sheatfish. You spend too much time looking at maps. Where's the shape of a whale? What's the shape of a whale? I'd like some more ham and, if possible, some cheese. I too would have the shape of a whale if you drew me on a map. No, the water is salty because of the Saltwater River. Which river, pay attention here, Theodosius, you'll laugh, is only salty in fact after it passes through the salt mines. That is what makes the ants believe they have rights over the water in Whale Gulf. They claim that the salt is theirs. Some more wine, please.

The Catdog rose and poured wine into the fish's aquarium. In doing so, he noticed that the six counsellors were squirming in their chairs and pointing at their mouths.

— Are you hungry? asked Gavriil the Catdog.

The fishes nodded repeatedly. Theodosius took some trays of appetisers from the table and, with the aid of a fork, emptied the food into the aquaria, taking care to share it out as fairly as possible. The counsellors fell to eating at once, with tears of gratitude streaming from their eyes.

— Well, continued the Sheatfish. The question of desalinisation of the river came up a few years ago. I was against it. A part of the authorities at Petrila is in favour of closing the salt mines. That, you will realise, would automatically transform the Saltwater River into a freshwater river.

— And how will they make a living if they close the mines?

— That's their business. As it seems to me, that is not the issue. It's a question of principles: the Gulf stream carries the salt across the lake almost to the other shore. Not much salt, it's true, but a certain amount. Tell me, in strictly legal terms, whose is the salt carried by the Gulf stream? The ants'? So don't be surprised if they lay claim to that as well, tomorrow or the day after.

The Catdog had relaxed and began to laugh.

— You do what you do and in the end the treaty with the ants still does not suit you. It is plain from every word you say.

— Doesn't it? said the fish with his mouth full.

— Aha.

— Aha, you say, but it doesn't suit me at all. That is, if they close the mines, it's one thing: I couldn't care less, that'll be the end of my resort, but that's how it goes. I'm not going to do myself in because of it. But there will probably start to be an exodus of the unemployed to Filiași. The implications of commuting are dreadful. Think of the traffic of ants over the lake from dawn to dusk. It's clear to you that they'll be commuting over the lake day in day out.

— And then?

— And then my delegation negotiated with that part of the leadership which doesn't want to close the mines. Simple. You wouldn't believe it, but you find a lot of Purple Ants who despise the Green Ants from the west and who want to split the province. Personally, I don't understand them, for me all ants are the same, blonde or brunette, it's all the same to me, I find them all repulsive alike and I detest them all alike, with those muscles of their like balls and those antennae waving all the time. Ugh, they make you want to puke.

— Please, the Catdog gestured, we are eating.

— Pardon me, said the Sheatfish, I couldn't help myself. I only wanted to give you an idea so that you can understand what I feel at the thought of boatloads of such creatures sailing up and down my lake. However, to resume. I sent a team of negotiators. And they negotiated and I signed a treaty stipulating that the mines will remain open, and I think that in a year or two the Whale Gulf will become a paradise of underwater resorts.

— I understand, said the Catdog. That is, I understand partly. You say you negotiated. I am convinced that the ants who backed your cause received certain bonuses on your part.

— Naturally, the Sheatfish Protector agreed, leaning back and extracting a toothpick from the pocket of his caftan.

— I would be curious to know what.

— Ah, a mere bagatelle. I promised them I would organise wee adventures for their political opponents whenever they try to cross the lake.

— And will you organise them?

— Don't ask, I haven't got a clue about technical details of that kind. I signed an agreement of principle. It's possible that you will hear or read in the papers that such and such a vessel bound for Filiași suddenly sprang a leak and that the crew were forced to abandon ship and so on and so forth, but I repeat, I won't have any concrete cases on my conscience.

— And did you promise them anything else?

— I promised them effective support so that the government favourable to me will remain in power and rule the Green Ants henceforth for long and happy years.



© Nataša Kramberger

Nataša Kramberger

Nebesa v robidah: roman v zgodbah (2007)

Heaven in a blackberry bush: novel in stories

Publishing House **Javni sklad RS za ljubiteljske dejavnosti**

Biography

Nataša Kramberger (b.1983) was born in Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia. She won the Slovenian young authors prize in 2006 and her book *Nebesa v robidah* was nominated for the Kresnik Prize as Slovenia's best novel of the year in 2008. In the same year, Kramberger won the international short story competition, A Sea of Words, which is sponsored by the Anna Lindh Foundation, and in 2009 she won the Young Euro Connect prize. Nataša Kramberger works as a freelance writer and journalist. She pens several articles, essays and columns for daily newspapers in Slovenia and Italy, writes literary texts for magazines and radio, and works on screenplays for documentary movies. In 2009, she founded the eco-art collective Green Central, where she promotes ecology and art. She lives in Berlin and travels frequently.

Synopsis

The novel *Nebesa v robidah* is described by its author as "a novel in stories". These stories consist of multiple fragments and events that come to life as raindrops plunging *in medias res*, straight into the heart of the narrative, without introduction or explanation. The story runs like a river, sometimes wildly, sometimes peacefully, to many corners of the world. Its main character is Jana, a girl from the Slovenian countryside who moves to Amsterdam to study, while also working as a babysitter for a Chinese-Dutch child in order to make a living. Jana carries within her stories from the Slovenian countryside in the early 90s, after the declaration of independence and right in the middle of its harsh transitional period. The main male character is Bepi the fisherman, born between the two World Wars in Latisana, Italy, who lost his parents in unclear circumstances, before travelling the world. Bepi's many stories include tales of travels in South America seeking gold, sacred fish and sacred rivers, tales from Asia and the Mekong, and tales of meeting a wide variety of characters from Peruvian old ladies with long hair to a blonde love from Amsterdam. Bepi now resides in Amsterdam, taking care of his seven-year-old granddaughter, who was sent to him from India by her mother. To summarise this intriguing tale: when Jana, Bepi and the sacred fish meet one afternoon in Amsterdam, the consequences will be extremely unpredictable...

Nebesa v robidah: roman v zgodbah

Nataša Kramberger

PROLOG

Namesto bicikla je kupila jabolka.

Tri kile, dvanajst jabolk, in branjevka se je smejala s pelerino vred.

– Kadar dežuje, so še bolj dobra.

V Amsterdamu ob treh so kaplje padale čez svet in po pelerini.

Mlake so rasle čez mostove in po tržnici.

Ob kanalu so tatovi preprodajali kolesa.

– Bike, bike.

Namesto bicikla je kupila jabolka.

Njen praded je bil vaški muzikant in je igral rog na krstih in pogrebih.

Njen ded je bil grobokop, pred tem pa rubež za teve naročnine. Tistim, ki niso plačali, in onim, ki niso hoteli gledati, je televizorje zapečatil. S selotejpom in voskom.

Njena mama je pisala pogrebne govore. In jih brala, oblečena včasih v črno bluzo, včasih pa v črne čevlje.

Sama ni vedela, kam naj gleda, ko je avtobus pripeljal in ko je odprl vrata. Naprej je potisnila rukzak

in torbo in mama je rekla:

– Imaš denar?

Namesto da bi pokimala, se je spomnila, da bo zdaj zdaj cvetel bezeg. Potem je šel mimo Lojz in vse sfušal. Vprašal je, če imata doma kak štamperl, in mama je rekla, naj počaka, in ona je gledala v bezeg in v breze in v breg in po dolgi cesti, potem se je za Lojzom zadržala Fanika:

– Kaj spet fehtaš, ded frdamani,

potem tudi šofer ni bil dober z njima, rekel je, gremo, hudiča, sploh še ni prav stopila gor, sploh še ni povedala mami, da ima denarja dovolj, sploh še.

In še.

In še.

In vedno je bilo tako.

...

...

A pomembno je, je rekla mama pravi čas, da imaš v žepu zmeraj kalejdoskop.

Namesto bicikla je kupila jabolka. Tri kile, dvanajst jabolk, in branjevka se je smejala. Tudi njena pelerina se je smejala in v Amsterdamu je deževalo, lilo je kakor iz uma in ona je rekla:

– Kje pa ste jih nabrali, gospa, te delišese?

Vsi so šli že stran, joj, kako se je ulilo, voda je prala Amsterdam, da bi se stopil, če ne bi bil iz kamna,

gospa je zmajevala z glavo, ni razumela angleščine, ni razumela slovenščine, nič ni razumela, samo holandsko, in tako je bila že mokra, oprostite, gospodična, je rekla, ne razumem.

Potem ji je podarila zvonec za kolo, ni prav vedela, zakaj, pa saj ni bilo važno, joj, kako se je ulilo, in je šla.

Stala je sredi dežja z jabolki in zvoncem v roki, gledala je čez mokri most in videla, kako človek na kraju prodaja eno samo ribo.

Živo, živo.

Z brki in belim trebuhom.

Če bi šli v gorah Pakaraima do gore Ayanganna, bi našli reko Potaro, ki teče v reko Essequibo. Vmes gre čez slapove Kaie-teur in pri slapovih Tumatumarum prinese s seboj dosti zlata in veliko diamantov. Pri slapovih Tumatumarum moške in žene in otroci spirajo zlato in diamante in samo včasih jih tam, v reki Potaro navzdol, med muljem in zlatom obkrožijo svete ribe, z brki in belim trebuhom.

– Senior, si dobro, senior?

Če bi šli do gore Guosongmucha v kantonu Zadoi v avtonomni prefekturi Yushu v provinci Qinghai, bi našli reko Zajaqu, ki postane reka Lancang Jiang, ki se ji reče tudi Dza Chu, reka s skal, ki prečka provinco Yunnan, kar pomeni južno od oblakov, in tam spremeni ime v reko Mekong, v kateri so ribiči enkrat ujeli ogromno rečno pošast, z brki in belim trebuhom, ki so jo potem pojedli, kajti pošast je bila sveta in jim je podaljšala življenje in jim je življenje tudi osrečila. Nihče od ribičev ni vedel, od kod prihaja reka Mekong, ki so ji govorili sveta reka, kajti reka Mekong, ki prečka provinco južno od oblakov in še prej Tibet in še prej provinco Quinghai, izvira v gorah, ki so daleč in visoko in so v snegu. Zato dolgo nihče ni vedel, kje izvira sveta reka in kako se ji reče na samem začetku. Šele pred

kratkim, šele nedavno tega, so neki popotniki sledili orlom in se umikali plazovom, šli so naravnost do izvira in rekli, da ni nobenega dvoma, reka Mekong se najprej imenuje Zajaqu in prihaja odgore Guosongmucha, ki je v oblakih.

– Senjor, si dobro, senjor?

V sveti reki Urubamba pod sveto goro Macchu Picchu v času nalivov nihče ne lovi, kajti reka je mogočna in vode so divje, inkovski duhovi pa jemljejo ribe zase in za svoje inkovske sinove, v divjih vrtincih jih jemljejo pod zemljo in tudi v nebo. Kdor bi takrat vrgel svoj plovec, bi ga pobralo, plovec in tudi njega, odnesla bi ga sveta reka Urubamba pod sveto goro Macchu Picchu, inkovski duhovi bi ga vzeli v zemljo ali v

nebo. Ni videl vrtinca pod nogami, ni slišal deževja, ki je prihajalo, in ni vedel, kam naj gleda, ko ga je starka

tresla gor in dol, da mu je bilo v želodcu slabo:

– Senjor, si dobro, senjor?

Namesto da bi pokimal, se je spomnil, da bo doma zdaj zdaj zorelo grozdje. Potem se je nanj ulilo deževje, še več deževja, in starka je rekla, naj počaka. Potem se je dvignila in je bila kakor golobica, otresla je glavo kakor golobica in dve dolgi kiti črnih las je kakor golobica povila med prste in ju spravila pod klobuk. Potem je šla.

– Jej, senjor, jej

starka je bila dobra z njim, lupila je kuhan krompir in mu ga polagala na krožnik, in še druga starka je bila in mu povezovala nogo in tretja starka je čuvala njegov plovec, kakor da bi bil čudežen, kakor da.

Kakor da.

Kakor da.

In tako je bilo do odhoda.

...

...

Starke ob rekah so pomembne, si je mislil tisti čas, ker imajo zveze pri drugih starkah.

V Amsterdamu ob treh je stala z jabolki in zvoncem v roki, gledala čez mokri most in človek na kraju

je prodajal ribo, živo, z brki in belim trebuhom.

– Oh, gospod. Po koliko pa je, ta riba?

– Oh, gospodična. Po koliko pa so bila, ta jabolka?

– Oh,... , celo premoženje za kilo.

– Oh,... , za štiri jabolka?

Oh, je rekla, lahko se greva tudi matematiko, gospod, lahko se greva računanje je igra in poštevanko

na prste, lahko stojiva tukaj brez besed, dokler dež ne neha, in če izpustiva vašo ribo zdaj, ko je svet tako

voden, nama bo nemara res odplavala v nebo.

Oh, je rekel človek, oprostite, gospodična, razumem, pardon. Pa so dobra?

– Kadar dežuje, še bolj. Zakaj pa je živa?

– Kako, riba?

Bela, z brki in z repom cikcak, če pa si jo pogledal v pravem trenutku in v kalejdoskop, je rekla:

– Kaj pa zdaj?

PRVI DEL

Popoldne

je sonce vedno sijalo poševno čez cerkev in vedno je ura kazala deset čez dve. Bila je deset minut zadaj, ura na zvoniku, in onidve sta se špilali pri vaškem potoku, nekaj greznici podobnega, tam, pod mostom, ki ga je enkrat skoraj odnesla povodenj in je bil dva dni neprevozen. Oma še zdaj dobi vrto-glavico, ko mora prečkati mostove, takrat jo je voda nesla od cerkve do kapele in ji odnesla levi šuh.

Popoldne je sonce vedno sijalo čez kamne na potočnem bregu in alge so se scvrle, če si jih vrgel gor.

Onidve sta stali čisto pri vodi, prva je rekla, kaj pa zdaj, in druga: nič se ne sekiraj, jaz vem, kako gre.

Vsekakor sta bili hecna kombinacija, obe iz prvega a, in včasih sta šli k potoku. Prva je bila malo slabovidna, nosila je blesava rdeča očala z blesavo vrvico, za katero je optik vztrajno zagotavljal, da je izjemno praktična za majhne otroke in ne ovira pri igri. Druga je bila mala miš iz zakristije, hotela je postati ministrant, pa je niso vzeli, ker je bila deklica.

Popoldne sta šli k potoku, in ko sta cvrli alge, je ona iz zakristije rekla, čuj, zakaj pa ti nisi krščena. Kristus, kake maš, je rekla očalarka, nisem pač (pojma ni imela, kako naj razloži, da je njena mama nosila Titovo štafeto in po celem Benediktu nape-ljala vodovod z brigado, njen ata, tudi rdeč, pa je sploh verjel v teorijo verskega posilstva, kakor je pravil krstu otroka pri dveh mesecih). Potem pa ti nimaš ateja pa mame, je vrtala kristjanka, s krstom vsi dobimo sveto mater Marijo in očeta Boga. Moja mama je tudi Marija, je rekla očalarka in cerkvena miš jo je tresnila po nosu. Ti pa res nič ne veš, saj še imena nimaš, teslo, vsem ljudem na Zemlji da Bog ime pri svetem krstu.

In je prva rekla, kaj pa zdaj, in druga: nič se ne sekiraj, jaz vem, kako gre. Ob deset čez dve po cerkvenem času je miš iz zakristije vzkliknila, v imenu Očeta in Sina in Svetega duha te krstim z božjim imenom Sveta Jana. Čez glavo ji je ulila pol potoka, da so Sveti Jani lasje še tri dni smrdeli po greznici. Zemlja je dobila novega božjega otroka in sonce je še vedno sijalo poševno. Ampak jaz nočem biti Sveta Jana, je dejal otrok. Ko si star dva meseca, te tudi nihče ne vpraša, kaj bi rad bil, je rekla ona, ki je vedela, kako gre. Sploh pa to ni važno, ime je navsezadnje zgolj malenkost.

Zvečer, ko ni bilo več sonca, je ura na zvoniku še vedno kazala deset čez dve. Sveta Jana je reševala naloge Računanje je igra in si mislila, presneto, ono revo pa je res dobila tisto versko posilstvo.

Čez dva dni ob deset čez dve se je iz čiste formalnosti vpisala k verouku. Mašo Marijo je od šoka skoraj bog vzel.

DRUGI DEL

Prijela se ga je močno okoli vratu in njemu je bilo povsem prazno. Povsem prazno mu je bilo v mislih in v krvi in v jetrih in vsepovsod, videl je samo izvir, ki se je izgubljal v temi, in žensko, ki mu je trepetala v naročju. Pogledal jo je, ko se ga je držala, in rekel:

- S tem uvodom me delaš živčnega, ne vidiš, počasi bom začel gristi še tvoje nohte. In če že hočeš vedeti, vedno razumem samo polovico besed, ki jih govoriš.
- Ne, prosim, ne zbadaj me zdaj.
- Včasih niti polovice, če sem iskren. Niti polovice tvojih besed.

Vzel je njene dlani in jih spravil pod koco. Bil je tako prekleto prazen, da se je premikal čisto mehanično, prav ti je, majmun, si je pisnil v brado, kaj si pa mislil, z nosečo žensko laziti na izvir, kdo pa si, sveti Jožef? , vstal je z odeje in jo zavihal navzgor, čez njo, da je bila ovita v odejast kokon, drgnil je po njem, da bi ji bilo toplo, drgnil mehanično in brez misli, brez čustev, brez vsega, mojster legend, si je pisnil v brado, si pa res mojster legend, B e p i.

– Kaj praviš?

– Včasih ne razumem niti polovice tvojih besed.

– Niti? Polovice? To bi me ubilo.

Vrgla je glavo vznak in zamižala, šele zdaj se je vanj vrnil tisti prejšnji občutek nemoči, tisti prejšnji obup, ljubše mu je bilo, ko ni čutil ničesar, začel jo je drgniti po kokonu, če zaspi v mrazu, jo bo vzelo, njo in njen trebuh, drgnil jo je kot iz uma, če ji bo toplo, jo bo okrepčalo, spala bo tukaj ob meni vso noč in zjutraj se bova vrnila dol.

– Poslušaj me,

zbudila se je vsa nova, vsa sveža,

– Prej nisem mogla končati, zdaj ti bom pa povedala.

Odprla je oči na široko, čutil je njen pogled v temi, ko je rekla:

– Šele zadnjič sem pomislila, da ti mogoče ne razumeš vseh mojih besed, ker tudi jaz ne razumem, Kadar mi praviš, saj veš, ko si srečen srečen ali pa jezen jezen, kadar kričiš v tistem tvojem dialektu, ki se meni zdi kot drdranje lokomotive, to ti že moram povedati, da si smešen, kadar se tako dereš, zaljubljam se vate vsakič, ko kričiš, dio mio, dio šanto, in vse tiste o tristo kosmatih, zaljubljam se vate, pri moji veri, v tistih trenutkih si zame tako resničen, da se mi zdi, kot da se mi odpira

meso, odpira se mi in ti se mi zažigaš noter, čisto noter, čez pljuča in v arterije, nobene tvoje besede ne vem, a vse poznam, govoriš iz mojega trebuha, iz mojih ust, iz mojega obstoja.

Ne spodobi se, Bepi, to ti že moram povedati, kadar si srečen srečen jezen jezen, da kričiš tiste besede, bog bi ti lahko zameril, ti praviš, da so vzdih, vzdih življenja, praviš, življenja in ne kletvice, jaz pa ne vem najbolj, ne vem, kaj pomenijo vse tiste besede, paziti je treba, včasih, Bepi, to ti že moram povedati, bog bi ti lahko zameril, ko se jaz zaljubljam.

Zdaj vem, zdaj vem, da boš razumel, na koncu boš vse vedel, četudi ne poznaš mojih besed, ne govoriva istega jezika, nikoli ga ne bova, ti si grozno okoren pri učenju in jaz počasna, tvoj nizozemsko zveni kot hrskajoča radijska postaja in moj italijansko kakor razkuhan makaron.

Ne govoriva istega jezika, nikoli ga ne bova, a isti je ta jezik, ki živi, živi v mojem mesu, ko te slišim, živi v tvojem, ko govorim. Kadar me je strah bližine, zaprem meso in misli, okoli njiju zraste koža, ki razdeli, z živim tkivom razdeli dve bitji, ki se pačita vsaka po svoje, blablabla, takrat ti slišiš le besede, ki so tuje, in jaz drdranje lokomotive.

Rada bi ti rekla, Bepi, nekaj tako velikega, rada bi ti rekla za otroka, ki prihaja, uči ga odpirati meso in misli, brez strahu, uči ga, kakor si naučil mene, pri moji veri, da je beseda pesem, Bepi, da je občutenje pomen.

*Le ciel dans les ronces :
un roman fait d'histoires*

Nataša Kramberger

Translated from the Slovenian by Leni Mérat

PROLOGUE

Au lieu d'un vélo, elle a acheté des pommes.

Trois kilos, douze pommes, et ça faisait rire la vendeuse Et sa pèlerine avec.

– Quand il pleut, elles sont encore meilleures.

A Amsterdam à trois heures, les gouttes tombaient sur le monde et sur sa pèlerine.

Les flaques grossissaient sur les ponts et sur la place du marché.

Au bord du canal, des voleurs revendaient des vélos.

– Bike, bike.

Au lieu d'un vélo, elle a acheté des pommes.

Son arrière-grand père était musicien de village et il jouait du cor aux baptêmes et aux enterrements.

Son grand-père était croque-mort, et avant ça vendeur en redevances télé. A ceux qui ne payaient pas, et à ceux qui ne voulaient pas regarder, il scellait la télé. Avec du scotch et de la cire.

Sa mère écrivait des discours funéraires. Elle les lisait habillée parfois d'un corsage noir, parfois de chaussures noires.

Elle-même ne savait pas où regarder, quand le bus est arrivé et que la porte s'est ouverte. Elle a d'abord poussé son sac à dos et son sac et sa mère a dit :

– Tu as de l'argent ?

Au lieu de hocher la tête, elle s'est rappelé les sureaux qui étaient sur le point de fleurir. Puis Lojze est arrivé et a tout foutu en l'air. Il a demandé si elles avaient à la maison un petit godet, sa mère lui a dit d'attendre, et elle, elle regardait les sureaux, les bouleaux et la longue route, puis Lojze s'est fait engueuler par Fanika :

– Qu'est ce que tu mendies encore, foutu grand-père ?

Puis le chauffeur leur a mal parlé, il a dit, on y va, bon dieu, elle n'était pas même pas encore montée, elle n'avait même pas encore dit à sa mère qu'elle avait assez d'argent, même pas encore.

Et encore.

Et encore.

Et c'était toujours comme ça.

...

...

Mais c'est important, a dit sa mère au moment voulu, d'avoir toujours dans sa poche un kaléidoscope.

Au lieu d'un vélo, elle a acheté des pommes. Trois kilos, douze pommes, et ça faisait rire la vendeuse. Ça faisait rire

sa pèlerine aussi et il pleuvait à Amsterdam, il pleuvait des cordes et elle a dit :

– Vous les avez cueillies où Madame, ces pommes golden ?

Tout le monde était déjà parti, mon dieu comme il pleuvait, l'eau lessivait Amsterdam, qui aurait fondu si elle n'était pas en pierres, la dame hochait la tête, elle ne comprenait pas l'anglais, elle ne comprenait pas le slovène, elle ne comprenait rien à part l'hollandais, et elle était déjà trempée, excusez-moi mademoiselle, dit-elle, je ne comprends pas.

Puis elle lui a offert une sonnette pour vélo, elle ne savait pas vraiment pourquoi, mais peu importe, mon dieu comme il pleuvait, et elle est partie.

Elle restait debout sous la pluie avec ses pommes et sa sonnette à la main, elle regardait par-dessus le pont mouillé et elle vit un homme sur le bord qui ne vendait qu'un seul poisson.

Vivant, vivant.

Avec des moustaches et un ventre blanc.

Si on allait dans les montages Pakaraima jusqu'à la montagne Ayanganna, on y trouverait le fleuve Potaro qui se jette dans le fleuve Essequibo. Entretemps, il passe par les cascades Kaie-teur et aux cascades Tumatutumarum il amène avec lui de l'or et beaucoup de diamants. Aux cascades Tumatutumarum les hommes, les femmes et les enfants tamisent l'or et les diamants et seulement parfois, là-bas en aval du fleuve Potaro, entre le limon et l'or, des poissons sacrés les encerclent, avec des moustaches et des ventres blancs.

– Senior, tu vas bien, senior ?

Si on allait jusqu'à la montagne Guosongmuchu dans le canton de Zadoi dans la préfecture autonome de Yushu, dans la province de Qinghai, on y trouverait le fleuve Zajaqu, qui devient le fleuve Lancang Jiang, qu'on appelle aussi Dza Chu, le fleuve aux pierres, qui traverse la province de Yunnan, qui signifie au sud des nuages, et là il change son nom en fleuve Mékong, c'est là que des pêcheurs ont une fois attrapé une bête fluviale énorme, avec des moustaches et un ventre blanc, puis ils l'ont mangée, car cette bête était sacrée et elle leur a rallongé la vie et elle leur a aussi rendu la vie plus heureuse. Aucun des pêcheurs ne savait d'où venait le fleuve Mékong, qu'ils appelaient le fleuve sacré, mais le fleuve Mékong, qui traverse la province au sud des nuages et avant ça le Tibet et encore avant ça la province de Qinghai, a sa source dans les montagnes, qui sont loin et hautes et sont dans la neige. C'est pour ça que longtemps personne ne savait où était la source du fleuve sacré et comment il s'appelait tout au début. Il n'y a que peu de temps, dans un temps très proche, que des voyageurs en suivant des aigles et en évitant des avalanches, ont trouvé la source et ont déclaré que sans aucun doute, le fleuve Mékong s'appelait d'abord Zajaqu et provenait de la montagne Guosongmuchu, qui se trouve dans les nuages.

– Senior, tu vas bien, senior ?

Dans le fleuve sacré Urubamba sous la montagne sacrée Macchu Picchu, par temps d'inondations, personne ne pêche, car le fleuve est puissant et les eaux sont vives, les esprits incas attrapent des poissons pour eux et pour leurs enfants incas, ils les attrapent dans les tourbillons sauvages, pour les emmener sous terre, et dans le ciel aussi. Quiconque jetterait son flotteur se ferait emporter, le flotteur et le pêcheur avec, le fleuve sacré Urubamba l'emporterait sous la montagne sacrée Macchu-Picchu, les esprits incas l'emporteraient sous terre ou

bien dans le ciel. Il n'a pas vu le tourbillon sous ses pieds, il n'a pas entendu la pluie qui arrivait, il ne savait pas où regarder, quand la vieille l'a tellement secoué, qu'il en eu mal au cœur.

– Senior, tu vas bien senior ?

Au lieu de hocher la tête, il s'est rappelé le raisin qui était sur le point de mûrir chez lui. Puis la pluie s'est déversée sur lui, encore plus de pluie et la vieille lui a dit d'attendre. Puis elle s'est levée, comme une colombe, comme une colombe elle a secoué la tête, comme une colombe elle a enroulé deux longues tresses noires autour de ses doigts et les a rangées sous son chapeau. Puis elle est partie.

– Oui, senior, oui.

la vieille était gentille avec lui, elle a épluché une pomme de terre cuite et l'a posé sur une assiette, il y avait une deuxième vieille qui lui bandait le pied et une troisième vieille surveillait son flotteur, comme s'il était magique, comme si.

Comme si.

Comme si.

Et ce fut ainsi jusqu'à son départ.

...

...

Les vieilles au bord des fleuves sont importantes, a-t-il pensé à ce moment-là, parce qu'elles ont des relations avec d'autres vieilles.

A Amsterdam à trois heures, elle se tenait avec ses pommes et sa sonnette à la main, elle regardait par-dessus le pont mouillé et l'homme sur le bord vendait un poisson, vivant, avec des moustaches et un ventre blanc.

– Oh, monsieur. Il coûte combien ce poisson ?

– Oh, mademoiselle. Elles ont coûté combien ces pommes ?

– Oh,... , une fortune le kilo.

– Oh, , pour quatre pommes ?

Oh, dit-elle, on peut aussi faire des maths monsieur, on peut jouer au jeu du calcul ou bien à compter sur ses doigts, on peut se tenir ici sans un mot, jusqu'à ce que la pluie cesse, et si l'on libère votre poisson maintenant, que le monde est si aquatique, il va peut-être nager jusqu'au ciel.

Oh, a dit l'homme, mademoiselle, excusez-moi, je comprends, pardon. Elles sont bonnes ?

– Quand il pleut, encore meilleures ? Pourquoi est-il vivant ?

– Comment ça, le poisson ?

Blanc, avec des moustaches et sa queue tac-tac, si on le regarde au bon moment et dans un kaléidoscope, il dit :

– Et maintenant ?

PREMIERE PARTIE

L'après-midi

le soleil brillait toujours sur l'église de biais et il était toujours deux heures dix à l'horloge. Elle retardait de dix minutes, l'horloge sur le clocher, et toutes les deux jouaient sur les bords du ruisseau du village, une sorte de tout-à-l'égout, là-bas, sous le pont, qui fut une fois presque emporté par une inondation et impraticable pendant deux jours. Grand-mère a encore le vertige, quand elle doit traverser des ponts, cette fois-là, l'eau l'avait emmenée de l'église à la chapelle et lui avait emporté sa grolle gauche.

L'après-midi, le soleil brillait toujours sur les rochers des bords duruisseau, on aurait pu frire des algues dessus. Toutes les deux se tenaient tout près de l'eau, la première a dit, et maintenant, et la deuxième: t'inquiètes, je sais comment ça marche.

Bref, elles formaient une drôle d'association, toutes les deux en CP 1, et parfois elles allaient au ruisseau. La première n'y voyait pas très clair, elle portait des lunettes rouges débiles avec un cordon débile, pour lequel l'opticien était convaincu qu'il était extrêmement pratique pour des jeunes enfants et ne gênait pas pour jouer. L'autre était une petite souris de sacristie, elle aurait voulu devenir enfant de chœur, mais on ne l'avait pas pris car c'était une fille.

L'après-midi, elles sont allées au ruisseau, et alors qu'elles faisaient frire des algues, celle de la sacristie a dit, dis donc, pourquoi tu n'es pas baptisée. Doux Jésus, tu en as de bonnes, a dit la binoclarde, c'est comme ça (elle n'avait aucune idée comment expliquer que sa mère portait le relais de Tito et qu'elle avait construit l'eau courante du Benedikt avec les

brigades de travail, son père, un rouge lui aussi, croyait à la théorie du viol religieux, c'est comme ça qu'il appelait le baptême d'un enfant de deux mois). Alors tu n'as pas de père ni de mère a dit la chrétienne, baptisés nous sommes tous les enfants de la Sainte Mère Marie et de Dieu le père. Ma mère s'appelle Marie aussi dit la binoclarde et la souris d'église lui donna un coup sur le nez. Tu ne sais décidemment rien, tu n'as même pas de nom, crétine, Dieu donne un nom de baptême à tous les gens sur terre.

Alors la première a dit, et maintenant, et la deuxième: t'inquiètes, je sais comment ça marche. A deux heure dix, à l'heure de l'église, la souris de sacristie s'est exclamée, au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint Esprit je te baptise du Saint nom de Sainte Jeanne. Puis elle lui a versé la moitié du ruisseau sur la tête et les cheveux de Sainte Jeanne ont pué les égouts pendant trois jours. La terre a reçu un nouvel enfant de Dieu et le soleil brillait toujours de biais. Mais moi je ne veux pas être Sainte Jeanne disait l'enfant. Quand tu as deux mois, personne ne te demande ton avis, dit celle qui savait comme ça marchait. Mais tout ça n'a pas d'importance, un nom n'est finalement qu'un petit détail.

Le soir, quand il n'y avait plus de soleil, il était toujours deux heures dix à l'horloge du clocher. Sainte Jeanne faisait ses devoirs du jeu du calcul et se disait, zut, l'autre poule mouillée, elle l'a vraiment eu ce viol religieux.

Deux jours plus tard, à dix heures moins dix, elle s'est inscrite, par pure convention, au catéchisme. Maman Marie a été tellement choquée que Dieu a failli la rappeler à lui.

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

Elle l'a attrapé avec force autour du cou et il se sentait complètement vide. Ses pensées étaient vides, son sang, ses tripes, partout, il ne voyait que la source, qui se perdait dans l'obscurité, et la femme qui tremblotait sur ses genoux. Il la regarde, comme elle s'agrippait à lui et lui dit :

– Avec cette introduction, tu me rends nerveux, tu ne vois pas, bientôt, je vais aussi ronger tes ongles. Et si tu veux vraiment savoir, je ne comprends que la moitié de ce que tu me dis.

– Non, s'il te plaît, ne m'attaque pas maintenant.

– Parfois même pas la moitié, pour être honnête. Même pas la moitié de ce que tu dis.

Il a attrapé ses paumes et les a glissées sous la couverture. Il était tellement satanément vide qu'il bougeait de manière mécanique, bien fait, crétin, il a marmonné, tu pensais quoi, se traîner avec une femme enceinte jusqu'à la source, tu te prends pour qui, Saint Joseph ? Il s'est levé de la couette, l'a tiré par-dessus elle, pour qu'elle soit enveloppée dans un cocon de coton, il a frotté dessus, pour la réchauffer, il frotte mécaniquement et sans pensée, sans sentiment, sans rien, expert des légendes, il a marmonné, tu es vraiment un expert des légendes, Bepi.

– Qu'est ce que tu dis ?

– Parfois je ne comprends même pas la moitié de ce que tu dis.

– Même pas ? La moitié ? Ça me tuerait.

Elle jette sa tête en arrière et ferme les yeux, ce n'est que maintenant qu'il ressent à nouveau cet ancien sentiment d'impuissance, cet ancien désespoir, il préférerait quand il ne ressentait rien, il se remet à frotter le cocon, si elle s'endort dans le froid,

ça va l'emporter, elle et son ventre, il la frotte comme un fou, si elle a chaud, ça va la renforcer elle va dormir ici près de moi toute la nuit et demain matin on va redescendre.

– Ecoute-moi,

elle s'était réveillée toute nouvelle, toute fraîche.

– Avant je n'ai pas pu terminer, mais maintenant je vais te dire.

Elle ouvrit grands les yeux, il sentit son regard dans l'obscurité, et elle dit :

– J'ai pensé la dernière fois que peut-être tu ne comprends pas tout ce que je dis, parce que moi non plus je ne comprends pas quand tu me dis, tu sais, que tu es heureux heureux ou fâché fâché, quand tu cries dans ton dialecte, qui je trouve ressemble à un grincement de locomotive, ça je dois te le dire, que tu es ridicule quand tu gueules comme ça, je retombe amoureuse de toi à chaque fois que tu cries, dio mio, dio santo, et tout le reste plus graveleux, je retombe amoureuse de toi, ma foi, dans ces moments-là, tu me sembles tellement réel que j'ai l'impression que ma chair s'ouvre, elle s'ouvre et tu t'allumes dedans, vraiment dedans, dans mes poumons et mes artères, je ne sais aucun de tes mots mais je connais tout, tu parles depuis mon ventre, depuis ma bouche, depuis mon existence.

Ça ne se fait pas, Bepi, je dois te le dire aussi, lorsque tu es heureux heureux fâché fâché de crier tous ces mots, Dieu pourrait t'en vouloir, toi tu dis que ce sont des bouffées, des bouffées de vie, de vie, tu dis, pas des jurons, moi je ne sais pas vraiment, je ne sais pas ce que veulent dire tous ces mots, parfois il faut faire attention Bepi, ça je dois te le dire, Dieu pourrait t'en vouloir quand je retombe amoureuse.

Maintenant je sais, maintenant je sais, que tu vas comprendre, tu vas finir par tout savoir, même si tu ne connais pas mes mots, nous ne parlons pas la même langue, jamais nous ne parlerons la même toi tu apprends mal, moi lentement, ton hollandais sonne comme une station radio grésillante et mon italien comme une pâte trop cuite.

Nous ne parlons pas la même langue, jamais nous ne parlerons la même, mais cette langue-là est la même, celle vit qui vit, vit dans ma chair, quand je t'entends, vit dans la tienne quand je parle. Quand j'ai peur du rapprochement, je ferme ma chair et mes pensées, autour d'eux pousse une peau qui partage à l'aide de tissus vivants deux êtres, qui boudent chacun de leur côté, blablabla, à ce moment-là tu n'entends que des mots étrangers et moi le grincement d'une locomotive.

Je voudrais te dire Bepi, une chose énorme, je voudrais te dire pour l'enfant qui arrive, apprends lui à ouvrir sa chair et ses pensées, sans peur, apprends lui, comme tu m'as appris, ma foi, qu'un mot est un poème, Bepi, qu'une sensation veut dire quelque chose.



© Javier de Agustin

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Sombras de unicornio (2007)

Shadows of the unicorn

Publishing House **Algaida Editores**

Biography

Raquel Martínez-Gómez (b.1973) was born in La Mancha in Albacete province. She has a PhD in Communications Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid, focusing on International Relations. Her short stories and poetry have received much recognition, and she is currently finishing her third novel at her home in Sussex, England. She combines her writing with her work specialising in the field of co-operation and development, and her work for the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency. Prior to this, she lived in Mexico, where she worked on part of her PhD and taught at the Instituto Tecnológico in Monterrey.

Synopsis

Claudia is a journalist who was born in Oviedo but brought up in Argentina. She returns to Spain, hoping to make a new start in life, and the first job she lands is in a Madrid cocktail bar, The Unicorn. She meets Edgar there, who is also in flight from a traumatic past and, like her, he soon realises it is impossible to start from zero, however hard you try. Claudia and Edgar dwell in an ambiguous space where imagination and desires roam, and travel between what they would like to be and what they really are. An encounter with the unicorn gives them an opportunity to find themselves, an opportunity that is no less wonderful for being unexpected. *Sombras de unicornio* is an invitation to come closer to yourself and take flight without ever lifting your feet off the ground.

Sombras de unicornio

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Dunas negras

Una duna negra, de contornos difusos, permanecía inmóvil en el centro de la ciudad, abrazada por viviendas precarias a un lado y casas confortables al otro. Édgar olvidaba a menudo su existencia y, al subir al cerro de las Noas a contemplar el horizonte, prefería imaginar un hueco vacío. Pero, a pesar de sus movimientos esquivos, la mole negra reaparecía de repente, al doblar una esquina u optar por una calle. Entonces la angustia aumentaba y pensaba en la huida.

Desde hacía años se estaban recogiendo muestras de tierra de distintos lugares, alejados o cercanos a la duna negra, para detectar los niveles de plomo. Ésa había sido, por parte de algunas organizaciones locales, una larga lucha contra el silencio municipal y la compra en cascada de voluntades. Pero la mayoría de la gente desconocía qué ocurría y muy pocos pensaban en mudarse. Los paseantes podían divisar la marca de la nave industrial escrita en letras rojas desde las colonias residenciales más antiguas mientras intentaban mantenerse en forma. Después volvían a casa y cerraban las ventanas herméticamente, pedían a la trabajadora del hogar que fregara el suelo de nuevo y, tras un baño con espuma, salían al jardín a leer las páginas centrales de *El Siglo*, orgullosos de cumplir con su deber social: el de informarse de las alianzas entre gentes de buena familia.

Pero unas calles más abajo, mucho más cerca de la duna negra, esos periódicos nunca eran del día ni se leían en un jardín; tampoco se podían vanagloriar de lo bien que salieron

en la foto. En los barrios del poniente las hojas de los diarios tapaban los vanos de puertas y ventanas; y la tierra, la misma sobre la que dormían, cristalizaba la sangre de sus hijos mientras el papel se volvía cada vez más opaco. En una ocasión, señores de traje gris y guantes de plástico, enviados por la empresa de la duna negra, llamaron a sus puertas para recoger muestras de plomo. La zona se llenó de máquinas limpiadoras que absorbían la tierra y de hombres con trajes amarillos que cambiaron los periódicos por cartones. Eso, y la promesa de leche para los niños enfermos, bastó para acallar el malestar.

Al cabo de dos semanas todo volvió a llenarse del mismo polvo. Los más pequeños, ajenos al peligro que corrían, construían con su imaginación, sobre la tierra envenenada, los juguetes que nunca tendrían.

Las protestas volvieron y los consejeros de la duna negra, que era además la planta procesadora de metal más grande del país, argumentaron que ellos llegaron primero, que los pobres se asentaron en tierras de la municipalidad. El nombre del dueño de la empresa, que vivía a mil kilómetros, salía todos los años en la revista de los hombres más ricos del planeta. La leyenda de la duna negra fue creciendo sobre la pátina de silencios que la cubrían. Édgar había aprendido también a negar los problemas. Durante mucho tiempo no quiso saber, y evitó mirarla de frente, ignorando su presencia detrás de la línea del atardecer. Pero esa negación terminó transformándose en un cañonazo que lo partió por la mitad. Un graznido de un chanaté, negro como la duna, penetró en su oído.

Era la tercera vez que se enfrentaba a la misma cola. Le sorprendió la fluidez de los turnos. Delante de él, un muchacho de botas puntiagudas y cabello ondulado se ponía y retiraba la gorra sin descanso. Parecía nervioso. Édgar contó el

número de personas que le antecedian: *una, dos, tres, la cuarta y la quinta parecen ir juntas... , diez*. Ya sólo quedaban diez. Entonces pensó de nuevo en la gente que se había manifestado en la calle Colón, muy cerca del bulevar Revolución. Todavía se podían escuchar algunas de sus proclamas, aunque no muy nítidas. Era por lo del plomo. Édgar escuchó en la universidad que la empresa que contaminaba la ciudad había creado muchos puestos de trabajo: eso parecía justificarlo todo. Volvió a pensar en las pancartas hechas de cartón, en sus mensajes con faltas de ortografía y en los ojos del único hombre joven que había en la manifestación; los demás eran mujeres y algún jubilado. Todas reclamaban para sus hijos, enfermos, con la sangre cristalizada, las bolsas de leche prometidas.

Le llegó su turno. El funcionario le brindó la posibilidad de pagar la mitad de la multa por la rapidez con la que había acudido a abonarla, lo que luego le valdría reproches de sus compañeros de escuela: *Pinche cabrón, ¿acaso eres noruego?* A cambio del desembolso, le devolvieron su matrícula. Al salir le distrajo la crecida del tumulto en la calle. Avanzó sin pensarlo hasta la procaduría, donde estaban concentrados los manifestantes. Al cabo de unos minutos, un silencio inusual, que parecía el inicio de algo impredecible, cubrió todo el bulevar. Sintió frío. Un todoterreno de la policía se acercó muy despacio, marcha atrás, al lugar donde se encontraba la cabeza de la manifestación. El llanto de un niño rompió los sonidos del silencio, pero hizo más angustiosa la visión. De repente, los policías fueron reuniéndose y caminaron hacia los concentrados. Las madres con hijos pequeños, temiendo lo peor, comenzaron a dispersarse. Édgar se refugió en una tienda de abarrotes, pero permaneció en la puerta sin creer lo que estaba viendo. El pánico y los llantos silenciaron las palabras. Decenas de porras fueron lanzadas con violencia contra el cuerpo del único joven, político

de un partido minoritario en la región, al que luego acusarían de instigador. Su mirada se detuvo un instante antes del apaleo. Después, la policía cargó contra mujeres, ancianas, paseantes, perros. Algunas pancartas quedaron destrozadas en el suelo.

Más frío, ausente el llanto agudo.

El periódico del día siguiente publicó la noticia de la manifestación. Parecía el dictado de una nota de prensa oficial. Se reconocía el encarcelamiento del dirigente político, pero se ocultaban los porrazos que la policía repartió. Esa tarde, Édgar pensó mucho sobre la duna negra. Se preguntó por qué no se habían llevado los procesos productivos más contaminantes del centro de la ciudad, tal vez por la ausencia de una ley medioambiental que lo exigiera, y por el silencio que impedía opinar sobre la ubicación de esa planta. Nunca le gustaron las diferencias de la sociedad donde creció. Tampoco la indiferencia a la que había que acostumbrarse sin más. Desde pequeño le enseñaron a verlo como un mal necesario. Su madre le prohibía abrir la puerta a esa prole de desharrapados que ofrecían a domicilio, a cambio de unos pesos, todo tipo de servicios, desde barrer el porche hasta cortar la hierba. Siempre fue a escuelas privadas, a la que sólo acudían los chicos de barrios de clase alta. Chicos con ropa de marca, sin picaduras ni heridas en las piernas, sin remendados en los pantalones, con los últimos modelos de zapatillas de deporte. Ninguno jugaba en la calle con la tierra, todos tenían videoconsolas que compraban en San Antonio, Texas, una ciudad de la que podían imitar su modelo de vida: una casa con jardín privado, tres televisiones, un perro con el que salir a correr. Los campos de golf ayudarían a construir el espejismo en medio del desierto, aunque fuera a costa de acabar con los cauces de sus ríos, los acuíferos, la diversidad del paraje. Una vez anulada cualquier

visión del futuro, ya no importaba mucho. Ellos vivían el presente, sobre un coche que les llevaba a su casa, a la universidad, al cine, a la discoteca... No tenía que juntarse con aquellos sin nombre que viajaban en camiones destartados, aquellos que trabajaban en los ejidos o en las maquilas y que nunca podrían vivir en su barrio. A Édgar le habían enseñado a esconderse, a no sentir ningún tipo de responsabilidad con la sociedad a la que pertenecía.

Aquella noche la cena fue ligera. Su padre comentó el suceso entre otras muchas cosas que pasaron en el día. Estaba enfurecido por la falta de dureza del cuerpo de policía. Creía que una acción más rápida, algún muerto quizás, habría impedido la paralización del tráfico a esas horas. Mientras lo escuchaba recordaba lo que había visto y se le revolvía el estómago. Tal vez su padre también sobornaba a los periodistas para que no informaran acerca de los salarios basura que pagaba, la ausencia de contratos, los despidos por maternidad, la falta de seguridad para manipular las sustancias químicas. Se levantó de la mesa sin pedir permiso. Ya en su cuarto, abrió su cuaderno y escribió la palabra esquizofrenia. Escribió sobre la contradicción entre aquello que leía y el comportamiento que le imponía su contexto social; sobre la mirada libre y el control férreo de la opinión; sobre el puñado de hipocresía que hacía falta para construir una montaña de basura; sobre el grado de pequeñez mental que cabía en una caja de zapatos. ¿Por qué destruimos la belleza con tanta impunidad? ¿Por qué nos creemos artífices de sueños infinitos si sólo somos un puñado de proteínas ciegas?

A pesar de las dunas, ese año volvieron a florecer los tabachines recordándole la irrecuperable felicidad de la inocencia.

Shadows of the unicorn

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Translated from the Spanish by Peter Bush

Black dunes

A black dune and its hazy outlines remained motionless in the centre of the city, embraced by precarious housing on one side and a residential estate on the other. Edgar often forgot it existed and when he climbed the crag of the Noas to contemplate the horizon, he preferred to imagine there was an empty void. But despite all his efforts to dodge it, the black hump suddenly reappeared when he turned a corner or decided which street to go down. His inner tension would deepen and he'd think about making his escape.

For years people had been collecting samples of earth from different places, near to and far from the black dune, to check the levels of lead. That was the consequence of a long struggle waged by a number of local organisations against the municipal council's silence and the wholesale suborning of individual consciences. But most people didn't know what was happening and very few thought of moving. Joggers could make out the red-lettered name of the company that owned the industrial site when they tried to keep fit on the oldest residential estates. Then they returned home, shut their windows tight and told the cleaner to scrub the floor again and, after taking a bubble bath, they'd sit in the garden and read the centre pages of *El Siglo*, proud to perform their social duty by bringing themselves up to speed on the latest betrothals between high falutin' families.

But a few streets further down, much closer to the black dune, the newspapers were never the ones delivered that day and read in any garden; and people couldn't boast how smart they looked in the photos. In the western districts newspaper pages stood in for doors and windows and the earth, that same earth on which they slept, was crystallising the blood of their children as the paper turned darker and darker. Grey-suited gentlemen wearing plastic gloves, sent by the firm responsible for the black dune, had once knocked on their doors in order to collect lead samples. The area was filled with cleaning machines that sucked up the earth and yellow-suited men who substituted cardboard for newspaper. That, alongside the promise of milk for sick children, was enough to quieten the unrest.

The same dust impregnated everything within a fortnight. The youngest children, unaware of the danger they ran, built toys in their imaginations they would never own on that poisoned land.

The protests resumed and the consultants for the black dune, that was also the country's largest metal processing plant, argued they had got there first, that the poor were squatting on municipal land. The name of the company's owner, who lived a thousand kilometres away, appeared every year in the magazine that published the list of the richest men on the planet. The legend of the black dune kept expanding over the patina of silences. Edgar had also learned to deny the problems that existed. For a long time he refused to acknowledge them and avoided looking straight at the dune, ignoring its presence as twilight fell. But his denial finally turned into a cannon-blast that split him down the middle. The croak of a blackbird, as black as the dune, penetrated his inner ear.

It was the third time he'd faced the same queue. He was surprised by how quickly your turn came. The boy in front's hair was wavy and he wore boots with pointy toes and kept putting his cap on and off. He seemed on edge. Edgar counted the number of people in front of him: *one, two, three, the fourth and fifth seemed to be together... ten*. Only ten people left. Then his thoughts returned to the people who'd demonstrated down the *calle* Colón., so close to *bulevar* Revolución that he could hear some of the slogans, though they weren't that clear. It was about the lead business. Edgar had heard in the university how the company polluting the city had created lots of jobs: that apparently justified everything. He thought once again about the cardboard placards, their misspelled messages and the eyes of the only young man on the demonstration; all the others were women and the occasional pensioner. They were demanding the milk supplies they'd been promised for their sick children whose blood had crystallised.

His turn came. The clerk gave him the chance to pay half the fine given he'd come to pay so quickly, something that would lead to recriminations from his schoolmates: 'You little bastard, you a law-abiding Norwegian now?' They returned his number-plate when he paid up. As he walked out, the turmoil in the street distracted him. He strode unthinkingly towards the Attorney General's Office, where the demonstrators had assembled. After a few minutes, an unusual silence, seemingly signalling the start of something quite unpredictable, descended on the whole boulevard. He went cold. A police jeep reversed slowly to where the head of the demonstration had come to a halt. A child's sobbing broke the deafening silence, but made the scenario even bleaker. The police suddenly came together and started advancing on the

protesters. Fearing the worst, mothers with small children began to scatter. Edgar took refuge in a grocery store, but stayed in the doorway unable to credit what he was seeing. Panic and screams of pain silenced the chanting. Dozens of clubs violently pounded the body of the only young man present, a minority party politician in the region, who would later be accused of being the instigator. Edgar's eyes lingered for a moment on the beating he was receiving. Then the police charged on women, old ladies, passers-by and dogs. Some placards lay in bits and pieces on the ground.

He felt colder and the screaming had stopped.

The next morning's newspaper reported the demonstration. It read like an official press communiqué. It revealed that the political leader had been imprisoned, but said nothing of the beatings the police had handed out. Edgar thought a lot about the black dune that evening. He wondered why they hadn't taken the most polluting production processes well away from the city centre: was it because they lacked the necessary environmental legislation, or because of the black out that prevented opinions being aired about the plant's location. He had never liked the differences in the society in which he'd grown up. And the indifference you were forced to accept without more ado. They'd taught him from childhood that it was a necessary evil. His mother instructed him never to open the door to the gang of ragamuffins who'd knock and offer to do every kind of domestic chore from sweeping the porch to cutting the grass in exchange for a few pesos. He had always gone to private schools attended only by children from the upper class districts. Children who wore designer fashions, had no bites and bruises on their legs, no patches on their trousers and always sported the latest leisure

footwear. Nobody played in a mud street and they all had games consoles they'd purchased in San Antonio, Texas, a city the life style of which they could emulate: a house with a private garden, three televisions, a dog you could take for a run. The golf links would help create that mirage in the middle of the desert, although it meant destroying riverbeds, aquifers and the diversity of the landscape. It didn't really matter once any vision of the future had been obliterated. They lived for the present, in the car that drove them home, to the university, the cinema, the disco. He didn't have to mingle with the anonymous people who travelled in rickety lorries, who worked in fields or factories and could never live in his neighbourhood. Edgar had been brought up to look away, to feel no responsibility for the society to which he belonged.

They ate a light supper that evening. His father commented on what had happened and on the many other events of the day. He was in a rage because the police had been too soft. He thought they should have re-acted more quickly, perhaps killed someone, and that would have prevented the untimely traffic snarl up that had occurred. As he listened, Edgar remembered what he'd seen and felt sick. Perhaps his father also bribed journalists not to report the rubbish wages he paid, the non-existent contracts, the sacking of pregnant women or dearth of safety measures for workers handling chemical substances. He left the table without asking for permission. Back in his bedroom he opened his exercise book and wrote the word "schizophrenia". He wrote about the contradiction between what he read and the behaviour imposed on him by his social position: on the freedom to see and the iron control of free speech; on the colossal hypocrisy that

went into building a slag heap; on the level of mental pettiness one could fit into a shoe box. Why do we destroy beauty with such impunity? Why do we think we are the creators of infinite dreams when we are but a handful of blind proteins?

Despite the dunes, the tabachines flowered again that year and reminded him of the bliss of innocence that had gone forever.

Bibliography

Belgium – Peter Terrin

De Bewaker. Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2009.

De bijeneters. 7 variaties. Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2006 (short stories).

Vrouwen en kinderen eerst. Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2004.

Blanco. Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2003.

Kras. Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 2001.

De code. Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 1998 (short stories).

Cyprus – Myrto Azina Chronides

To Peirama. Nicosia: Armida Publications, 2009.

Rachel. Nicosia: Nicolaides Publications, 1997.

Pathologia. Nicosia: Proodos Publications, 1984.

Hemerologion. Nicosia: Proodos Publications, 1979.

Denmark – Adda Djørup

Den midste modstand. Copenhagen: Samleren, 2009.

Hvis man begyndte at spørge sig selv. Copenhagen: Samleren, 2007.

Monsieurs monologer. Copenhagen: Samleren, 2005.

Estonia – Tiit Aleksejev

Palveränd. Tallinn: Varrak, 2008.

Valge kuningriik. Tallinn: Varrak, 2006.

Finland – Riku Korhonen

Lääkäriromaani. Turku: Sammakko, 2008.

Hyvästi, tytöt. Turku: Sammakko, 2008.

Savumerkkejä lähtöä harkitseville. Turku: Sammakko, 2005.

Kahden ja yhden yön tarinoita. Turku: Sammakko, 2003.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Goce Smilevski

Сестрата на Зигмунд Фројд (Sigmund Freud's Sister).

Skopje: Kultura, 2007

Разговор со Спиноза (Conversation with Spinoza). Skopje:

Kultura, 2002.

Планетата на неискуството (The Planet of Inexperience).

Skopje: Sigmapress, 2000.

Germany – Iris Hanika

Das Eigentliche. Graz: Droschl Verlag, 2010.

Treffen sich zwei. Graz: Droschl Verlag, 2008.

Die Wette auf das Unbewusste. Oder Was Sie schon immer über Psychoanalyse wissen wollten, Hanika, Iris / Seifert.

Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006.

Musik für Flughäfen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005 (short stories).

Das Loch im Brot. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003.

Luxembourg – Jean Back

Amateur. Sandweiler: Ultimomondo, 2009.

Mon amour schwein. Kuerzgeschichten an Erzielungen 2004-2007. Nospelt: Ultimomondo, 2007.

Wollekestol. Nospelt: Ultimomondo, 2003.

Romania – Răzvan Rădulescu

Teodosie cel Mic. Bucharest: Polirom, 2006.

Viața și faptele lui Ilie Cazane. Bucharest: A.S.B. și Cartea Românească, 1997. (Second edition: Polirom, 2008).

Închipuita viață a lui Raul Rizoiu, in anthology *Tablou de familie*. Bucharest: Leka Brâncuș, 1995.

Slovenia – Nataša Kramberger

Nebesa v robidah: roman v zgodbah (fragment) in anthology *European First novel*; ed. Karadi, Eva. Budapest: European First novel festival, 2010.

The Salt Roullette, a short story in anthology *A Sea of Words. 30 stories of young writers*. Barcelona: Anna Lindh Foundation, European Institute of Mediterranean, 2008.

Nebesa v robidah. Ljubljana: Javni sklad RS za ljubiteljske dejavnosti, 2007.

Spain – Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Sombras de unicornio. Sevilla: Algaida Editores, 2007.

Del color de la lava. Madrid: A la luz del Candil, 2003.

European Union Prize for Literature

The aim of the European 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 per country participating in the prize on a rotation basis) will reach a wider and international audience, and touch readers beyond national and linguistic borders.

The Prize is co-financed by the Culture Programme of the European Union whose objective is to achieve three main goals: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

Selection process

The winning authors are selected by qualified juries set up in each of the 11 countries participating in the 2010 award.

The nomination of candidates and the final selection of one winner in each country took place between February and July 2010.

The new emerging talents were selected on the basis of requirements stipulated by the European Commission and fulfil in particular the following requirements:

- Be a citizen of one of the 11 countries selected
- To have published between 2 and 4 books of fiction
- The books should have been published during the five years before the prize

Juries

Jury members are appointed by national members of EBF, EWC and FEP. National juries are composed by minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 members.

The jury reports were delivered in the national language, and in English or French translation, justifying the jury's choice and providing relevant information on the winner and his/her work.

The European Commission, DG Education and Culture
www.ec.europa.eu/culture

The consortium

The European Booksellers Association
www.ebf-eu.org

The European Writers' Council
www.europeanwriters.eu

The Federation of European Publishers
www.fep-fee.eu

The European Union Prize for Literature
www.euprizeliterature.eu

Eleven winning authors

Peter Terrin

De Bewaker (2009)

Myrto Azina Chronides

To Peirama (2009)

Adda Djørup

Den mindste modstand (2009)

Tiit Aleksejev

Palveränd (2008)

Riku Korhonen

Lääkäriromaani (2008)

Goce Smilevski

Сестрата на Зигмунд Фројд
(2007)

Iris Hanika

Das Eigentliche (2010)

Jean Back

Amateur (2009)

Răzvan Rădulescu

Teodosie cel Mic (2006)

Nataša Kramberger

Nebesa v robidah:
roman v zgodbah (2007)

Raquel Martínez-Gómez

Sombras de unicornio
(2007)