

The European Union Prize for Literature

Twelve winning authors

2012



Culture
Programme



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

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Table of Contents

Foreword	5
2012 winning authors	
Austria	
Anna Kim – <i>Die gefrorene Zeit</i>	7
Croatia	
Lada Žigo – <i>Rulet</i>	27
France	
Laurence Plazenet – <i>L'amour seul</i>	43
Hungary	
Viktor Horváth – <i>Török tükör</i>	55
Ireland	
Kevin Barry – <i>City of Bohane</i>	71
Italy	
Emanuele Trevi – <i>Qualcosa di scritto</i>	91
Lithuania	
Giedra Radvilavičiūtė – <i>Šiņnakt aš miegošiu prie sienos</i>	103
Norway	
Gunstein Bakke – <i>Maud og Aud – ein roman om trafikk</i>	117
Poland	
Piotr Paziński – <i>Pensjonat</i>	131
Portugal	
Afonso Cruz – <i>A Boneca de Kokoschka</i>	151
Slovakia	
Jana Beňová – <i>Café Hyena (Plán odprevádzania)</i>	167
Sweden	
Sara Mannheimer – <i>Handlingen</i>	183
Bibliography	203
EUPL 2012 National Juries	209
EUPL 2012 Jury Reports	213

Foreword

Foreword by José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission

I have the great honour to present the twelve winners of the 2012 European Union Prize for Literature. This year, the winners come from Austria, Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden. With this prize we are establishing a fine tradition and a true celebration of European literature in all its excellence, richness and diversity.

Since its first edition in 2009, the European Union Prize for Literature has gone from strength to strength. In 2011, we completed the first 3 year cycle for the prize and this year we are embarking upon the second cycle. The prize is yet another example of how much we treasure cultural and linguistic diversity in the European project. Books are fundamental vehicles of European culture, knowledge and languages. They open doors to our souls, help us understand the “Other”, live experiences and feelings that otherwise would be out of our reach. The book sector is also an important contributor to the European economy, creating jobs and growth.

The prize is organised by the European Commission and a Consortium consisting of the European Booksellers’ Federation, European Writers’ Council and the Federation of European Publishers. I want to thank the Consortium for their excellent work and fruitful collaboration since 2009, which has ensured that the prize has gained in prestige and visibility and increased its added value for the winners, readers and across the whole book sector.

The prize is open to all countries presently involved in the European Union’s Culture Programme. Each year, national juries in a third of the participating countries have had the extremely difficult task to nominate the winning authors, and accordingly, all countries in the programme are represented over a three-year period. I am very pleased to see that the participant numbers are growing; Bosnia and Herzegovina is the 36th and Albania the 37th country to join the Culture Programme and both will participate in the new cycle for the prize.

As world renowned author Umberto Eco said, “Translation is the language of Europe”. The European Union Prize for Literature aims to raise the profile of authors and to help increase publishers’ appetite for the translation and publication of a wide variety of European works. It also aims to encourage people to read more and more literature from countries other than their own.

Within the EU Culture Programme we give grants for literary translations, from and into all 23 official EU languages as well as the official languages of the other countries in the Culture Programme. Since 2007, nearly 3000 literary works have received EU funding for translation totalling €14 million. In 2011 a record-high 600 works were translated. The authors who receive the European Union Prize for Literature are given priority for translation support and we have seen an increase in award winners’ translations and in cross-border sales of rights.

Every year we publish the book you are now holding in your hands. Here you will find information about this year's winning authors and chosen passages from their winning books in the original language and in English translation. I wish you some very good and interesting moments to savour these small but wonderful taste samples. I suspect they will give you a huge appetite for more!

I congratulate the winners of the 2012 European Union Prize for Literature!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke that curves upwards at the end.

José Manuel DURÃO BARROSO



© Roland Dreger

Anna Kim

Die gefrorene Zeit (2008)

Frozen Time

Publishing House **Literaturverlag Droschl**

Biography

Anna Kim was born in 1977 in Daejeon, South Korea, moving to Germany in 1979, when her father took up an academic post in fine arts. Since then, she has returned to South Korea several times for short visits.

She studied Philosophy and Theatre Studies at the University of Vienna and wrote her master thesis on Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*.

She has published several short stories, essays and poems in newspapers, literary magazines and anthologies. Her three novels are *Anatomie einer Nacht* (*Anatomy of a Night*, 2012), *Die gefrorene Zeit* (*Frozen Time*, 2008) – which has been translated into English and Albanian – and *Die Bilderspur* (*The Trace of Pictures*, 2004). She has also written a collection of poems, *Das Sinken ein Rückflug*.

Kim, who has received numerous awards and grants, lives in Vienna.

Synopsis

Since the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia, more than 30,000 people were reported as missing to the International Committee of the Red Cross. So far, only 15,000 of them have been identified.

This is the background to the story Anna Kim tells in her second novel: the search of a Kosovar for his missing wife and the first-person narrator's gradual penetration of the complexities behind this traumatic event. Not only does she experience everyday life in the Serbo-Albanian conflict zones of the Kosovo, she also encounters the gut-wrenching work of the archaeologists and forensic anthropologists, and the Red Cross questionnaires to collect 'antemortem data'. Above all, the dimensions of memory and the loss of it, of interrupted biographies and of a "frozen time" open up in front of her.

In this extraordinary book, Kim takes up where she left off in her debut novel *Die Bilderspur*, exploring concepts such as foreignness with a depressing relevance to the present. However, it is not just contemporary history that she is interested in, but also the linguistic portrayal of such incomprehensible horror, the search for the right words and sentences to describe something so extreme.

Die gefrorene Zeit

Anna Kim

Du hast beschlossen zu berichten, doch manchmal zittern die Hände, ein Zwillingszittern, wie das der Worte, ein Nachbeben im Hals; starrst auf die Tür, als wäre sie ein Fenster und in ihr unvergessliche Landschaft, dann ein Erwachen, du kramst in der Hose und legst den Reisepass deiner Frau, ein schmales Fotoalbum sowie die Heiratsurkunde auf den Tisch.

Der Ante-Mortem-Fragebogen: Zweiundzwanzig Kapitel, die die Kennzeichen einer vermissten Person, Merkmale, die jene zu Lebzeiten, *ante mortem*, besaß, festhalten mit dem Ziel, durch Analyse und Vergleich mit Gebeinen, Knochenstücken, Daten *post mortem*, fündig zu werden. Der Fund ist nicht die Person, sondern ihr Rest. Das Innerste, wenn man so möchte, andererseits das Äußerste, im Sinne von Letzte, Allerletzte, und doch sprechen sie von Identität, die Vermissenden und Suchenden, meinen *vollkommene Übereinstimmung mit, zugleich innere Einheit der Person*, die Ebenen vermischen sich, scheinen untrennbar: Es lässt sich nicht vermeiden, die Leiche wird zum Individuum. Wie lange kann sich dieser Gedanke halten, doch nur solange das menschliche Fragment nicht gesehen wurde, solange das Totsein eine Abstraktion, eine Idee bleiben darf.

Dem Toten ist es gleich, ob seine Identität gefunden wird oder nicht, für ihn spielt es keine Rolle mehr, ob er eine besitzt oder ob sie während der letzten Jahre verloren ging; sie existiert aus seiner Warte nur für die anderen, nicht für ihn selbst. Wird sie schließlich gefunden, ist sie körperlich und zufällig; zufällig, da es nie wirklich um sie, sondern lediglich um die Zuordnung ging.

Identität laut Fragebogen ist klar bemessen, sie setzt sich zusammen aus Geschlecht, Alter, Krankheit, Kleidung, Augenzeugenberichten und Zufallsbegegnungen. Im Sprechen unternehmen wir den Versuch, die verschwundene Person einzukreisen, festzuhalten, festzulegen. Vielleicht ist es ja wahr: Die Einzigartigkeit eines Menschen, seine Identität? , ist tatsächlich unsterblich, sie kann noch lange nach seinem Tod gefunden werden; jeder Satz ist eine *Handlung*, jedes Wort wird *verwendet*: Identität sprechend zu stiften, Identität zuzusprechen, nagt an der Substanz, da anstelle eines Menschen gesprochen wird, das Stapfen in unbekannten Fußspuren immer Nummern zu groß; die Fremdperspektive entfremdet zusätzlich –

und ein besonderes Kennzeichen stiehlt allen anderen die Schau: das Verschwundensein mutiert zum Muttermal auf der Stirn, zur Narbe an der Wange; zur Vorliebe fürs Schwimmen im Regen, Schlendern auf Straßen nach Mitternacht.

Wer hat Ihnen von der Entführung erzählt?

Meine Mutter, Emine Alushi.

Deine Stimme bewölkt, ein wenig; die Augen an den Rändern glasig, knetest unentwegt deine Hände.

Ich habe schon von weitem gesehen, dass etwas passiert ist. Die Haustür stand weit offen, unsere Nachbarn und mein Bruder waren auf der Straße, ohne Jacken, dabei war es sehr kalt.

Extra dicke Handschuhe, die Gärten auf dem Weg zum Dorf verschneit, dein Atem hinterlässt Spuren in der Luft. Als du den Aufruhr bemerkst, beeilst du dich, du parkst noch vor der Einfahrt, läufst die letzten Meter zum Hauseingang, dein Bruder Fehmi winkt, Emine schreit, *sie haben sie verhaftet*,

sie haben sie mitgenommen! , alle sprechen durcheinander, vor dir unablässiges Weinen, du bittest um Ruhe, wen haben sie mitgenommen, fragst du, wen? , *deine Frau!* , heulen sie, du beschwichtigst, es kann sich nur um einen Irrtum handeln, ein Missverständnis, warum sollten sie sie verhaften, sagst du, du möchtest alles hören, der Reihe nach, Emine schreit, *vor drei Stunden, sie sind vor drei Stunden gekommen und haben sie und Ali mitgenommen!* , ich unterbreche.

Wer ist Ali?

Mein Nachbar.

Du seufzt, ich habe deinen Rhythmus gestört. Ich gebe dir ein Glas Wasser, du trinkst, Schweißperlen auf der Stirn, deine Knie zucken.

Was ist geschehen?

Ein Dutzend maskierte Männer an der Tür, sie hämmern wild, sie sprechen Albanisch, manche sind uniformiert, manche in Zivil, einige tragen schwarze Westen und rote Handschuhe, die meisten maskiert, einer nur unmaskiert, langhaarig und blond. Sie verlangen, dass man die Tür öffnet, die Familie ist unschlüssig, die Frage ist, Fliehen oder Verstecken, Emine möchte mit den Männern sprechen, aber Fehmi und seine Söhne müssen vorher verschwinden, sie hat von Verhaftungen gehört, sie haben es aber nur auf Männer abgesehen, Fehmi, verlangt sie, verkriecht euch im Keller, erst dann werden wir die Tür öffnen, nur einen Spalt breit. Die Männer stoßen sie ins Wohnzimmer, sie brüllen, sie wollen *Waffen, Gold und Geld!* , die Frauen antworten nicht, die Kinder wimmern, so prügeln sie sie mit ihren Gewehren. Wir haben nichts, ruft Emine, ihr Oberkörper blau von Schlägen, sie brechen ihr die Hand, wir haben keine Waffen, *von wegen!* , sie glauben ihr nicht, treten sie, schlagen ihr ins Gesicht, ketten die Kinder an den Hälsen

aneinander, zwingen sie, auf dem Küchenboden zu knien, deine Frau wird beschimpft, abgeführt, niemand wagt zu widersprechen, *es brüten schlimme Dinge im Ohr*. Sie hören das Öffnen und Schließen der Wagentür, das Starten des Motors.

Hat jemand das Auto gesehen?

Mein Neffe, er sagte, es war ein weißer VW-Bus, die Reifenspuren waren am nächsten Morgen noch sichtbar.

Womit waren die Gesichter der Männer verdeckt?

Mit schwarzen Tüchern über Mund und Nase.

Wie sah die Uniform aus? Fiel Ihrer Familie ein bestimmtes Emblem auf?

Sie war grün, auf dem Abzeichen war ein weißer Adler.

Ich habe von ihnen gehört, von den *White Eagles* und *Arkan's Tigers*, paramilitärische Einheiten, die sich vom Krieg mehr als zwanzigtausend Mark monatlich versprachen, nicht dazugerechnet die Prämien für zerstörte Dörfer, erfolgreiche Vertreibungen, das Leerräumen ganzer Regionen, *Maßarbeit*, schließlich die Geiselnahmen einzelner Flüchtlinge, die den Familien nur im Austausch gegen hohe Summen zurückgegeben wurden, vorausgesetzt, die Geisel überlebte –

wir haben denselben Verdacht, aber wir schweigen.

Erst jetzt hat mich der Name der Vermissten zu interessieren: die Fragen strikt nach Plan, ein Abweichen unmöglich. Die Vergangenheitsform vermeiden, unbedingt.

Wie heißt Ihre Frau?

Fahrie Alushi.

Hat sie einen Spitznamen?

Nein.

Wie hieß sie vor der Eheschließung?

Ivanova.

Wo wurde sie geboren?

Prishtinë.

Wann wurde sie geboren?

Am 5. August 1977.

Besitzen Sie persönliche Papiere Ihrer Frau, abgesehen vom Reisepass?

Nein.

Besitzen Sie Fotos Ihrer Frau?

Du legst Farbkopien des Reisepasses auf den Tisch: Der Hintergrund türkisfarbenes Blau, Fahrie trägt ein graues Kostüm, schwarze Locken hängen in ihre Stirn.

Wo lebte sie vor dem Krieg?

In B.

Was war sie von Beruf?

Sie hat studiert.

Haben Sie jemals von anderen Menschen, Personen außerhalb Ihrer Familie gehört, dass Ihre Frau nicht überlebt hätte?

Du starrst mich an, als würdest du mich nicht verstehen, wie solltest du auch, du glaubst, dass deine Frau noch lebt, oder zweifelst du? Auch ich möchte diese Frage nicht stellen, ich würde dieses Kapitel lieber überspringen, glaube mir, und doch – fahre ich fort; ich bemerke, dass meine Stimme leiser wird, du runzelst die Stirn, als versuchtest du, deine Ohren in meine Nähe zu rücken.

Wenn ja, hat der Zeuge eine schriftliche Aussage abgegeben? Wissen Sie, wo sich diese Aussage befinden könnte? Wissen Sie vielleicht auch, wo, in welcher Gegend, die Leiche laut Zeuge begraben liegen könnte?

Bist du entrüstet, bist du entsetzt, ich kann es nicht sagen, es hemmt mich dein Blick, eine Wand; du verschränkst deine Arme.

Nein, es gibt keinen solchen Zeugen, aber ich bin sicher, dass es eine Liste aller Gräber gibt, irgendwo versteckt, vergraben – wie es ein *Buch der Sichtungen* gibt? Ein Verzeichnis, in dem beschrieben wird, wer von den Vermissten wo und wann gesehen wurde; es kursiert angeblich in Restaurants und Cafés, ein Werk, das Wunder verspricht, und doch ist sein Erscheinen willkürlich, ebenso willkürlich wie die Entführungen, Verhaftungen, von denen es erzählt.

Was trug Ihre Frau, als sie entführt wurde? Hose oder Rock? War sie barfuß oder trug sie Schuhe? Wenn ja, was für welche? Du blätterst in deinem Adressbuch.

Sie trug einen langen, schwarzen Rock aus Baumwolle, Strumpfhose, Stiefel und eine weiße Bluse.

Trug sie Unterwäsche?

Du nickst.

Was genau? BH und Unterhemd? Unterhose?

Du schüttelst den Kopf, das hast du nicht notiert. Wenn du antwortest, habe ich den Verdacht, dass du nur sprichst, um das Formular zu füllen.

Ein weißes Unterleibchen aus Baumwolle und eine weiße Unterhose.

Welche Farbe hatten die Stiefel und die Strumpfhose? Aus welchem Material waren Schuhe und Strümpfe?

Die Stiefel waren aus braunem Leder, die Strumpfhose – du zuckst mit den Schultern, du weißt es nicht; und je weniger du weißt, desto unwahrscheinlicher erscheint es dir, Fahrie jemals wieder zu sehen, desto schuldiger fühlst du dich; als läge es in deiner Macht, sie mit jeder erfolgreich beantworteten Frage einen Schritt aus der vermeintlichen Gefangenschaft zu führen.

Von welcher Marke war die Kleidung? Können Sie sich erinnern, wo Ihre Frau am liebsten eingekauft hat, in welchem Geschäft?

Ratloser Blick.

Trug sie unter der Bluse etwas anderes außer Unterwäsche, ein T-Shirt vielleicht?

Nein.

Wie sah die Bluse aus? Hatte sie kurze, lange Ärmel oder Puffärmel? Hatte sie ein spezielles Muster? War sie gerüscht oder tailliert?

Du seufzt, überfliegst die Fotos im Album. Keine weiße Bluse.

Ich weiß es nicht, ich kann mich nicht erinnern, vielleicht gestreift, ja, ich glaube, sie war gestreift.

Welche Farbe hatten die Streifen? Waren sie schmal, breit oder gemustert?

Der Abend verdunkelt Gedanken, du kennst diese Spur, so benimmt sich ein heikler Weg: Nun ist es wieder da, dein Seufzen, was ist es bloß, die Vorstufe zu Tränen? Immerhin seufzt du einige Male, ehe du zu weinen beginnst; und manchmal scheint das Seufzen das Weinen zu ersetzen, so lange, bis es unersetzbar wird.

Wie groß ist Ihre Frau?

Sie war klein, zart –

du deutest, zeichnest ihren Körper in der Luft, hältst abrupt inne. Die Pause bleibt, weil sie eine Leerstelle ist. Solange es keine *wahren Worte* gibt, muss diese Stelle ausgelassen bleiben – Sie ist klein, einen Kopf kleiner als ich.

Etwa einen Meter sechzig?

Ja.

Welche Farbe hat ihr Haar?

Dunkelbraun, fast schwarz, kleine, enge Locken.

Lang oder kurz?

Schulterlang, nass sind sie länger als trocken.

Vielleicht aber ist Seufzen ein Gleichnis für Trauer, ein Gleichnis der Handlung Weinen, das sich zum echten Weinen wie die Vorstellung zur Realität verhält; das Seufzen führt im Grunde zu nichts, bringt aber als Symbol einen Ersatz hervor: ein Bild, eine Verbildlichung, ein Symbol des inneren Zustands, ein Gleichnis für Tränen.

Hat sie graue Haare?

Nein.

Färbt sie sie?

Nein.

Oder es leben in dir zwei Zungen, eine vergangene und eine gegenwärtige, sie nähren sich von zweierlei Gedächtnissen, Identitäten. Das Zwiegespaltene artikuliert sich in Sprachbrüchen, Hybridsätzen: im Seufzen. So entsteht ein Kauderwelsch aus der Bemühung, den Kontakt zu jener untergegangenen Sprache nicht zu verlieren, indem du ständig Exkursionen

ins Heute unternimmst. Vergeblich sind sie, die Übersetzungen; eindeutig hat sich dein Sprechen am *Ende der Sprache* verankert.

Schreibt sie mit der linken oder der rechten Hand?

Sie ist Rechtshänderin.

Trägt sie eine Brille? Wenn ja, können Sie die Brillenfassung beschreiben?

Nein. Sie hat sehr gute Augen.

Hat sie eine Narbe am Körper, von einer Operation oder Verletzung, oder hat sie eine Tätowierung, ein besonders auffälliges Muttermal?

Sie hat eine Narbe am Oberschenkel. Die Haut dort ist dunkler, ein großer, runder, brauner Fleck.

Ist sie zuckerkrank? Leidet sie an Asthma?

Nein.

Wurde sie jemals operiert? Hatte sie Operationen am Kopf oder Gehirn?

Nein.

Hat sie sich jemals etwas gebrochen?

Nein.

Hinkt sie?

Nein.

Hat sie Prothesen, künstliche Gliedmaßen?

Nein.

Zu harmlos diese Erklärung, viel zu harmlos. Tatsächlich hast du die Regeln des Sprechens verlernt, du hast vergessen, wie es ist, zu verstehen und verstanden zu werden.

In deinem Seufzen drückt sich stets dieselbe Antwort aus, weil es nur noch diese eine gibt. Du bist, nach unendlich langen durchdachten Tagen und Nächten, *verständnisleer* bis an die Grenze.

Frozen Time

Anna Kim

Translated from the German (Austria) by Michael Mitchell, for Ariadne Press (2010)

You agreed to answer the questionnaire, but sometimes your hands tremble, tremble in concert, as do your words, an aftershock in your throat; you stare at the door, as if it were a window with an unforgettable landscape in it, then wake, rummage in your pocket and place your wife's passport, a slim photograph album and your marriage certificate on the table. The Antemortem Questionnaire: twenty-two sections recording the distinguishing features of a missing person, characteristics that person possessed while still alive, ante mortem, with the aim, through the post mortem analysis and comparison of skeletons, pieces of bone, data, of finding them. What we find is not the person, but their remains, their innermost essence, if you like; on the other hand, what is left, the last remaining scraps, are mere externals and yet they – the bereaved and the researchers – talk of identity, meaning complete identity with, at the same time inner unity of the person. The levels intermingle, seem inseparable: it is unavoidable – the corpse becomes an individual. How long can this thought last? Only as long as the human fragment has not been seen, as long as its death can remain an abstraction, an idea.

The deceased don't care whether their identity is found or not, for them it doesn't matter whether they have one or whether it was lost over the last few years. From their point of view, it only exists for others, not for themselves. If it is eventually found, it is physical and coincidental, coincidental because it is never really a matter of their identity, but solely of its classification.

Identity according to the questionnaire is clearly defined, it consists of sex, age, illnesses, clothing, eyewitness reports and chance encounters. Our conversations are an attempt to home in on the missing person, to tie them down, hold on to them. Perhaps it is true that the uniqueness of a person – their identity? – does in fact not die with them but can be found long after their death. Every sentence is an act, every word is utilized: to establish identity by speaking, by putting it into words, eats away at its substance since the person is replaced by talk, following in unknown footsteps that are always several sizes too big; in addition the alien perspective is alienating – and one particular distinguishing feature steals the show: being missing mutates into the birthmark on their forehead, into the scar on their cheek, into their predilection for swimming in the rain, strolling along streets after midnight.

Who told you about the abduction?

My mother, Emine Alushi.

Your voice clouds over, a little; your eyes are glassy around the edges, you're constantly kneading your hands.

Even before I got there I could tell something had happened. The front door was wide open, our neighbors and my brother were out in the street, without jackets even though it was very cold.

Extra thick gloves, the gardens on the way into the village covered in snow, your breath leaving traces in the air. When you see the commotion, you accelerate, park at the bottom of the drive, run the last few yards to the door, your brother Fehmi's waving to you, Emine's screaming, they've arrested

her, they've taken her away! everyone's talking at once, you're faced with incessant tears, you ask them to be quiet, who have they taken, you ask, who? your wife! they wail, you try to calm them down, it must be a mistake, a misunderstanding, why should they arrest her? you say, you want them to tell you everything, right from the beginning, Emine screams, three hours ago, they came three hours ago and took her and Ali away! I interrupt.

Who is Ali?

My neighbor.

You sigh, I've disturbed your rhythm. I give you a glass of water, you take a drink, beads of sweat on your forehead, your knees twitching.

What happened?

A dozen masked men at the door, hammering furiously, speaking Albanian, some in uniform, some in civilian clothes, a few wearing black vests and red gloves, most of them masked, only one isn't, with long, blond hair. They order them to open the door, the family's uncertain what to do, flee or hide, Emine wants to talk to the men, but Fehmi and his sons have to disappear first, she's heard of arrests, but they're only after men. Fehmi, she orders, you all go and hide in the cellar, only after that will we open the door and then only a crack. The men push her into the living room, bawling that they want weapons, gold and money! the women don't reply and they hit them with their rifles, making the children whimper. We haven't got anything, Emine cries, her upper body black and blue from the blows, they break her hand, we haven't got any weapons, Bullshit! They don't believe her, kick her, slap her across the face, chain the children to each other by the neck, force them to kneel on the kitchen floor, your wife's insulted, taken away, no one dares

Speak out, bad things brood in their ears. They hear the vehicle door open and close, the engine start.

Did anyone see the vehicle?

My nephew, he said it was a white VW minibus, the tire tracks could still be seen the next morning.

How were the men's faces covered?

Black scarves over their mouths and noses.

What were the uniforms like? Did your family notice any particular emblems?

They were green, the badges had a white eagle.

I've heard about them, the White Eagles and Arkan's Tigers, paramilitary units who hoped to earn more than fifteen thousand dollars a month from the war, not counting the bonuses for villages destroyed, expulsions carried out, whole regions cleared, their speciality, and finally taking individual refugees hostage and only returning them to their families for large sums of money, provided the hostage survived –

We suspect the same thing, but we say nothing.

Only at this point do I have to ask the name of the missing woman: the questions strictly according to the schedule, diverging from it impossible. The past tense to be avoided, at all costs.

What is your wife called?

Fahrie Alushi.

Does she have a nickname?

No.

What was her maiden name?

Ivanova.

Where was she born?

Prishtinë.

When was she born?

5 August 1977.

Do you have any personal papers of your wife's in your possession, apart from her passport?

No.

Do you have any photos of your wife?

You place color photocopies of the passport on the table: the background is turquoise blue, Fahrie is wearing a grey suit, black bangs hang down over her forehead.

Where did she live before the war?

In B.

What was her profession?

Student.

Have you ever heard from people outside your family that your wife did not survive?

You stare at me, as if you don't understand, how could you? you think your wife's still alive, or do you have your doubts? I'd prefer not to ask the question either, I'd prefer to skip this part, believe me, but still –

I go on; I notice that my voice becomes softer, you frown, as if you were trying to bring your ears close to me.

If so, did the witness make a written statement? Do you know where this statement might be? Do you know in what area the body might be buried, according to the witness?

Are you indignant? Are you horrified? I can't tell, your look holds me back, a wall; you fold your arms.

No, there is no such witness, but I'm sure there's a list of all the graves, hidden away somewhere, buried – just as there's a Book of Sightings? A list describing which of the missing persons have been seen, where and when; it's said to go around the restaurants and cafés, a book that promises miracles, but it appears at arbitrary moments, just as arbitrary as the abductions, arrests that are its subject.

What was your wife wearing when she was abducted? Trouser or skirt? Was she barefoot or wearing shoes? If shoes, what kind?

You leaf through your address book.

She was wearing a long, black cotton dress, pantyhose, boots and a white blouse.

Was she wearing underwear?

You nod.

What exactly? Bra and undershirt? Panties?

A shake of the head, you haven't noted it down. When you reply, I suspect you're only doing it to fill in the form.

A white cotton undershirt and white panties.

What color were the boots and pantyhose? What were the shoes and stockings made of?

The boots were brown leather, the pantyhose – you shrug your shoulders, you don't know, and the less you know, the more unlikely it seems to you that you will ever see Fahrie again, the more you feel guilty, as if it were in your

power to bring her, with each question you manage to answer, one step more away from her presumed imprisonment.

What brand were her clothes? Can you remember where your wife liked to shop, in which store?

A helpless look.

Was she wearing anything apart from underwear beneath her blouse, a T-shirt perhaps?

No.

What was the blouse like? Did it have short or long sleeves, puffed sleeves? Did it have a particular pattern? Was it frilled or fitted at the waist?

You sigh, flick through the photos in the album. No white blouse.

I don't know, I can't remember, striped perhaps, yes, I think it was striped.

What color were the stripes? Were they narrow, broad or patterned?

The evening darkens thoughts, you know this trail, it's the way a tricky path behaves. Now it's back, your sigh, what is it, the prelude to tears? At least you sigh several times before you start to cry, and sometimes your sighing seems to replace crying until it becomes irreplaceable.

How tall is your wife?

She was small, delicate –
you show me, draw her body with your hands, stop abruptly.
The pause remains because it's a blank. As long as there are no true words, that box must remain empty –
She's small, a head shorter than me.

About one meter sixty?

Yes.

What color is her hair?

Dark brown, almost black, tight ringlets.

Long or short?

Shoulder length, wet it's longer than dry.

But perhaps sighing is a metaphor for grief, a metaphor for the act of crying, related to real crying in the way the idea is to reality; basically sighing gets one nowhere, but as a symbol it creates a substitute: an image, an imagining, a symbol of a state of mind, a metaphor for tears.

Does she have any gray hair?

No.

Does she dye it?

No.

Or there are two tongues living inside you, a past and a present one feeding off two different memories, identities. The split is articulated in fractured language, hybrid sentences: in your sighing. So your attempt not to lose contact with that lost language, by constantly making excursions to today, results in a mishmash. The translations are futile: clearly your speech has anchored itself at the end of language.

Does she write with the right or the left hand?

She's right-handed.

Does she wear spectacles? If she does, can you describe the frames?

No. She has very good eyesight.

Does she have any scars on her body, from an operation or a wound, or does she have a tattoo, a particularly striking birthmark?

She has a scar on her thigh. The skin's darker, a large, round, brown mark.

Does she have diabetes? Does she suffer from asthma?

No.

Has she ever had an operation? Has she had an operation on her head, her brain?

No.

Did she ever break any limbs?

No.

Does she have a limp?

No.

Does she have any prostheses, artificial limbs?

No.

This explanation is too innocuous, much too innocuous. The fact is, you've forgotten the rules of speaking, you've forgotten what it's like to understand and to be understood. Your sighs always express the same answer because that's the only one left. After endless days and nights spent going over things in your mind, you are drained of understanding to the limit.



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Lada Žigo

Rulet (2010)

Roulette

Publishing House **SysPrint**

Biography

Lada Žigo is a Croatian writer born in 1970 in Zagreb and graduated in Comparative Literature and Philosophy. She has written literary reviews and essays for many newspapers and cultural and literary magazines and she runs a literary panel for the Croatian Writers' Association. Her first book, *People and News People (Ljudi i novinari, SysPrint 2007)* was shortlisted for two prestigious awards – Ksaver Šandor Gjalski and Kiklop. Her second novel, *Bitches (Babetine, SysPrint, 2009)* sets itself against the “women’s writing” then in vogue. In 2010 Ms Žigo published *Roulette (Rulet, SysPrint)*, a novel exploring how gambling can become the only hope for people in a transitional society who have no better prospects. In 2011 she published *Healer (Iscjelitelj, Alfa)*, a novel in which she targets another phenomenon not unknown in transitional societies – false healers and fortune-tellers who manipulate people and take their last hopes. Ms Lada Žigo is a member of the Croatian Writers' Association and Croatian Freelance Artists Organisation. She lives and works in Zagreb.

Synopsis

Roulette describes post-war Croatia in a way which differs from the stereotype that has been fed to European readers for over 20 years. This description is based on several factors: more than a billion Kunas are spent every year on gambling and there are about 50,000 chronic gamblers in Croatia. There are more betting and gambling outlets in Croatia than there are in London. The sale of Croatian banks, businesses and firms to foreign investors and companies is just one aspect of the brutal capitalism which led to exploitation on all levels. Metaphorically speaking, human beings become like roulette balls in a game in which only powerful croupiers take the winnings. The main character of this novel is a disillusioned soldier who starts to gamble after he finds out that powerful Serbian and Croatian leaders are united in crime. At the same time, the Americanisation of the culture and language is further annulling the sovereignty of this “small country”. Disappointed and disillusioned, the main character in Žigo’s novel indulges in playing roulette, a game that becomes one of destiny in which one can win or lose all. Organized as a series of adventurous episodes, the novel also introduces a plethora of side characters who tell their own tragic stories of life on the margins of society.

Ilica je bila opet pusta. Bilo je oko tri u noći. Hodali su prema Zagrebačkoj pivovari. Ante je gledao u beton. Profesor je gledao u nebo. Ali, kao da su im pogledi bili u istoj ravnini.

»Gospon profesor«, zastane odjednom Ante, uhvati se za željeznu ogradu i zagleda se u stablo. »Večeras sam ucijenio jednoga gada. Mislite li da je to moralan čin?« upita i potegne šipku, kao da će je iščupati.

»Nema morala. Moral ne postoji«, ogovori profesor smireno. Zastane, nakašlje se i nastavi:

»Živimo u društvu bez morala, gospon Ante. Postoji pitanje prava i pitanje moći. Jedno mora ići s drugim, a obično nije tako. Postoji moć bez ikakva prava, a to su politika, korupcija...«

Ante zastane. »Znam«, reče tiho i nastavi polagano hodati.

»Ali postoji i pravo bez moći. Mi imamo svoja ljudska prava – pravo na stan, na posao, na mirovinu, ali nemamo moć. Pravo bez moći – to je smijurija. Tako je govorio veliki Pascal.«

»Noćas sam ucijenio gada. Uzeo sam mu novac. Uzeo sam prljavi novac čovjeku koji me je bacio na cestu. Majku mu ljubim! Jesam li trebao prasnuti ili trpjeti? Što mislite o tome, profesore?«

»Kada se čovjek poziva na pravo, a nema moć«, započne profesor i podigne kažiprst, »onda pobijesni na one koji imaju moć, a nemaju prava. I osveta je logična. Osveta je uglavnom motivirana izvana, rijetko kada iznutra. Psihopata je malo. Luđaci su obično najobičniji ljudi, žrtve društva.«

»Pojednostavnite, profesore! A mržnja... je li mržnja logična posljedica onoga koji je težio pravdi?« upita Ante zanesen, kao da noćas nije ucjenjivao nego meditirao.

»Znate li kako nastaje pesimist?« upita profesor i uhvati Antu za ruku. Pogleda ga ravno u oči. »Tako što idealist pretpi nekoliko razočaranja.«

»I nekoliko, i još, i još...«, doda Ante i iskesi se.

»A onda... onda kada idealist shvati da nema idealizma, svijet mu se postavi naopačke«, nastavi profesor, pogladi bradu i ponovno zastane.

»Kada shvatite da život vodi slučaj, a ne neki sisitem ili logika, a ako ste još uvijek pobornik sistema, onda vas alogičnost posve izbací iz takta.«

Ante je držao ruke u džepovima i gledao profesorovu žučkastu bradu pod svjetlom ulične lampe. Prvi put je vidio da je žučkasta – prljava, neuredna, kao i sve oko njega.

»Onda se lako postane kockar. A kada u kocki vidite filozofsko opravdanje, onda ste duboko zagrezli u taj porok, mladiću.«

Ante je zurio u pod. Razumio je profesora. I on je imao sistem koji su narušili, razlog da odgovori. Imao je samo ideju, a zapravo nije imao ništa.

»A zašto ste se vi razočarali?« upita Ante i stavi mu ruku oko ramena. Lipa je u dvorištu nasuprot zašuštala. Ante je osjetio dah hladnog vjetra.

»He, he, verde quatro verde... propast je najbolje opjevati... Ali, svaka pjesma ima i svoju prozu, svoju životnu priču. Vidite, gospon Ante, imao sam sina...«

Profesor odjednom promijeni boju glasa – Anti se učinilo da iz njega počinje curiti život... onakav kakav je bio.

Profesor zastane, tužno zašmrcne, a onda uhvati Antu pod ruku i lagano krene.

»Bio je narkoman. Žena mi je zbog njega umrla... sirota... od moždanog udara. Mislim, jadnica je izdahnula zbog onih... zbog utjerivača dugova. Nedužna moja žena. Vrijedna krojačica. Vidite ovu košulju na meni? Šila ju je one noći kad su se kamatari prvi pu pojavili na vratima. Šila i jecala. Zna li kako je teško patiti i pritom nešto stvarati, krojiti jednu običnu košulju, ubadati iglom u platno dok vam nož siječe srce?«

Ante je i dalje gledao u pod i hvatao korak s profesorom. Kao da mu istim ritmom koraka želi biti saveznik.

»I onda, mladiću moj, jedne noći, malo nakon pokopa, došle su nabildane sotone na vrata. Tražile su od mene dvadeset tisuća kuna. Ako ih ne dam, zapalit će mi stan. Da, jedan je imao usko čelo kao tanka letva, duboke bore, guste obrve i baš je taj rekao da će mi zapaliti stan. Ostali su stajali pored njega... Bog da mi prosti, kao gavrani. Da, može biti da su imali i kljunove, a ne usta. Može biti... A moja žena još se nije bila ni ohladila u grobu. Sutradan sam ih išao prijaviti policiji. No, dobio sam odgovor da se ne petljam. Pola godine poslije jednog od utjerivača vidio sam u društvu načelnika policijske uprave. Zbilja – u kavani Matoš, sjedili su njih dvojica, u odijelima, a kladim se, mladiću, da su to bili oni, kladim se u milijun... Kakva slučajnost, he, he.«

»A sin?« upita Ante iako je očekivao odgovor.

»Pobjegao. Ni danas ne znam gdje je. Vodi se pod nestale osobe. Sanjao sam noćas da je u zatvoru s načelnikom, sanjao sam da su obojica mrtvi – pjani, da su origijali u ćeliji, a onda je došao gospon ministar, lijepo platio... Ma, znate... snovi...«

»I tako, iduće noći, nakon što mi je policija odbila zaštitu«, nastavi profesor, sada malo promuklim glasom, »spustio sam se u grad. Dva sata u noći, nigdje ni žive duše. Nigdje nade, nigdje spasa. U meni samo odjekuju glasovi: 'sutra do podne, ili si gotov, čiča!'. Uska varoš, muk, u daljini huk, he, he...«

Profesor opet naglo zastane. Pogleda u nebo. Raširi ruke i zapjevajući: »I tako sam otišao u kaazinno...« Nakašlje se, ubrza korak i nastavi ozbiljnim tonom:

»Nigdje ništa otvoreno. Kao ni danas. Vrata pakla uvijek su samo jedna i nevidljiva... ali daju tračak svjetla. Mladiću, te noći, iz meni nejasnih razloga, odlučio sam uložiti mirovinu na rulet. Iz meni nejasnih razloga. Nešto se u meni zainatilo. Život se već bio raspao, razumijete? Ostao je samo rizik – ili ću dobiti ili će mi zapaliti stan. A izgubiti nisam mogao ništa. To je bila jedina logika.«

»Razumijem vas. I ja imam svoju logiku. Kada društvo sve otkoči, onda stavite papučicu na gas. Iz sve snage. Pa što bude! Možda se zabijete u zid, a možda i skrenete negdje, možda se nađete na nekoj drugoj, široj cesti. Obećavajućoj. Zna li da sam ja propali branitelj? Vi kockate iz viših motiva, ja imam dijagnozu. PTSP. Svatko ima svoje motive!«

»Svatko ima motiv za osvetu. Ali ljudi olako osuđuju osvetu, ne gledaju motiv. Devedeset posto ljudi slijepo je kod zdravih očiju.«

»I što je bilo te noći. Mislim, u kazinu?«, presječe ga Ante.

»Sada smo kod fasinantnog slučaja«, usklikne profesor i udari dlanom o dlan. »Uložio sam sve na nulu. Jer je sve u meni bilo prazno. Prazna vreća ne može se više isprazniti. Može se samo napuniti.«

»I?« upita Ante s osmijehom, iako je slutio...

»Pala je nula. U prvom krugu! Zamislite, zaradio sam sedamdeset i dvije tisuće kuna. Trideset i šest mirovina! Jedno nisam znao razlučiti – je li to bio poklon Boga ili Vraga. U svakom slučaju, tada mi je odjednom sivi pejsaž života postao zelen. Gotovo fluorescentno zelen.«

Profesor se nasmije. Bio je to užasno sarkastičan smijeh.

»Stan je bio spašen. Tada zbilja nije bilo važno je li spasitelj Svjetlo ili Mrak«, odgovori Ante.

»Nula me je spasila, nije to više bila nula nego pozitivan broj, broj spasa, razumijete li me, bio sam u debelom plusu.«

»Shvaćam, profesore, možda ne morate dalje. Onda ste ponovno zaigrali na nulu i sve izgubili.«

»Ooo, varate se, mladiću. Nisam igrao nakon toga pet godina. Nisam ni razmišljao o ruletu. Sve dok nisam poželio postati pisac.«

»Pisac? Pa kako su vas to slova odvela do brojki?«

»Da, slova od kojih ne možete preživjeti, slova koja ne možete plasirati gotovo svakog pisca dovode do svojevrzne opsesije brojkama. Zato mislim, mladiću dragi, da su književnost i matematika na neki način prožete. Kada shvatite da pamet uzalud bacate u vjetar, nije problem otvoriti jednoga dana i lisnicu i... prepustiti i ono malo što imate pukom slučaju brojki. Počinjete vjerovati, naime, da će na jednom ruletu, na jednom đavoljem krugu, biti možda više logike i sreće nego li u kaosu ideja od kojih doista nemate ništa osim bezvremene neimaštine.«

»Meni su, profesore, brojke na ruletu simboli ljudskih života. Životi su puka slučajnost, bačeni smo u ovaj svijet protiv svoje volje, zašto se se bismo igrali? Borio sam se u ratu... Izgubiti novac i život gotovo je isto mentalnom invalidu kao što sam ja.«

»Vi ste se borili u ratu, ja sam se borio u miru. Za mali cilj. Ali, naoružanje je bilo posvuda. Mislim na one nevidljive kalašnjikove beščutnih poduzetnika... Naime, napisao sam knjigu. O hrvatskoj poeziji, o iskri božanskog u hrvatskoj poeziji. Trebalo je čitati i čitati, tražiti te iskre. Pisao sam je godinama, desetljećima. Ali, svi su me izdavači odbili. Oni nisu vidjeli nikakve iskre. Iskre koje vidi nas nekoliko nisu unosne. Poezija nije profitabilna, to su govorili, a neki su mi se unosili i u lice, da se odmaknem. Tjerali su me iz ureda kao štakora. Zna li vi kako je bijedno biti pjesnik u moru memoarskog štiva s kičastim naslovnim stranicama? Zna li kako je gadno u propaloj zemlji biti autsajder koji je u sebi pokopao svoju ideju?«

Profesor je opet zastao. Pljunuo je na pod. »Mediokriteti. Invazija mediokriteta. Žutih mrava. Navrli su i u kulturu. Množe se kao gamad. Skorojevići, buržuji, oni kojima pamet izlazi na dupe! Hrvatska kultura uvijek je bila na samrti, a u kapitalizmu je izdahnula. Trebalo bi joj upriličiti dostojan pogreb. Uz limenu glazbu. He, he. Razumijete li, mladiću? Gangsteri imaju pogrebe. Političari imaju pogrebe. Grobovi ništarija prepuni su cvijeća. Je li hrvatska kultura zaslužila grob?«

Profesor stane, počne puhati u šake, a onda poskoči.

»Eto vraga, skok na skok, he, he. Mladiću, pa ova je zemlja groblje. Većina živih, onih poduzetnih, zapravo su zombiji.« Naglo uhvati Antu za rame i unese mu se u lice.

»Ono malo ljudskih bića klatara se naokolo i donose nekakvu luč. Uzaludno. Opiru se ti dobrohotni ljudi, nude svoju maštu, ideje, bacaju pregršt blaga pod noge zombija, no znate što oni rade? Priđu im, nacere im se u lice, kažu da su staromodni

anđeli i isisaju im krv. Kreativni ljudi ovdje nemaju šanse. I znate što onda učine? Počinju se rugati svemu. I sebi. I onda odu u kazino. Sve ili ništa. Posljednji prasak sreće ili mrtvilo. Sredine nema. Ionako je sve sredina. Prosjek, fuj, taj ljigavi prosjek – to vam je groblje. Na groblju nema mirisa, okusa, nema definicije osjećaja.«

»Neka, profesore, neka ste se prokockali! Pokažite žutim mravima da živate, da znate živjeti, pa makar kao autsajder. Luđaci imaju slobodu. Njima je svako rješenje moguće. Mi smo propalice, ali nitko na nas ne računa. Postigli smo tu slobodu da ovisimo sami o sebi.«

Roulette

Lada Žigo

Translated from the Croatian by Tamara Budimir

Ilica Street was once again deserted. It was three in the morning. They were walking towards the Zagreb Brewery. Ante was looking down at the asphalt. The professor was looking up at the sky. But they seemed to be gazing at the same plane.

“Professor”, said Ante halting suddenly and holding onto the metal fence whilst gazing at a tree. “This evening I blackmailed a lowlife. Do you think this is a moral act?” he asked, pulling at the metal rod of the railing, as if he wanted to pull it out.

“There are no morals. Morals do not exist”, answered the professor calmly. He stopped, coughed and then continued:

“We live in a society without morals, Ante, my young man. It’s a question of rights and power. One needs must go with the other, but often this is not so. There is power without rights, like politics, corruption...”

Ante hesitated. “I know”, he said quietly and slowly continued walking.

“But there are rights without power. We have our human rights – the right to a flat, to a job, to retirement, but we lack power. Rights without power – what a laugh. So said the great Pascal.”

“Last night I blackmailed a lowlife. I took his money. I took sullied money off a man who threw me onto the street. God

damn it! Should I have lashed out or simply taken it? What do you think about that, professor?”

“When a man claims his rights by law, but does not have the power”, began the professor raising his forefinger, “then he lashes out at those who wield the power, but do not have the right to do so. And revenge is logical. Revenge is mostly motivated from without, rarely from within. There are very few psychopaths. Madmen are usually ordinary people, who have fallen victim to society.”

“Explain, professor! What about hate... is hate a logical result of one who tends towards what is right?” asked Ante in a fluster, as if he had not blackmailed someone the night before but simply been meditating.

“Do you know how a pessimist is born?” asked the professor taking Ante by the hand. He looked him straight in the eyes. “When an idealist experiences a number of setbacks.”

“And then others, and others, and others...”, added Ante and smirked.

“And then... once the idealist realises that ideals do not exist, then his world is turned upside-down”, continued the professor, stroking his beard and then stopped again.

“Once you realise that life is run by coincidence, and not by a system or logic, and if you still favour systems, then the illogical throws you out of joint.”

Ante kept his hands in his pockets and regarded the professor’s yellowish beard in the streetlamp. This was the first time he saw that it was yellowish – dirty, unkempt, as was everything else about him.

“Then it’s easy to become a gambler. And once you see a philosophical justification to gambling, then you’re already deep in the grips of this vice, young man.”

Ante stared at the ground. He understood the professor. He too had a system that had been disturbed, a reason to reply. He only had an idea, and he actually had nothing.

“So why are you disillusioned?” asked Ante laying an arm around his shoulder. The lime tree in the courtyard opposite rustled. Ante felt the hint of a cold wind.

“He, he, verde quatro verde... it’s best to sing about calamity... But, every song has its underlying prose, its life story. You see, Ante, my young man, I had a son...”

The professor’s voice suddenly changed timbre – to Ante it seemed as if life had begun to seep out of him... life as it had once been.

The professor stopped, snivelled sadly, and then took Ante by the arm and slowly moved on.

“He was a drug addict. My wife died because of him... bless her soul... from a stroke. I mean, the poor woman died because of those... because of the debt collecting henchmen. My innocent wife. A hard-working seamstress. Do you see this shirt on me? She was sewing it the night when the loan sharks first appeared at our door. Sewing and weeping. Do you know how difficult it is to suffer whilst creating something, sewing an ordinary shirt, applying the needle to the linen whilst a knife is piercing your heart?”

Ante continued staring at the ground and kept pace with the professor. As if by keeping step with him he wished to be his ally.

“And then, young man, one night, just after the funeral, some muscled up devils came to our door. They asked for twenty thousand Kuna. If I didn’t give it to them, they’d set the flat on fire. Yes, one of them had a forehead as narrow as a plank, deep furrows, thick eyebrows, and it was he who said that they would set fire to my flat. The rest stood by... God forgive me, like ravens. Yes, perhaps they even had beaks, and not mouths. Quite possibly... and my wife was barely cold in her grave. The following day I went and reported it to the police. But I was told not to meddle. Half a year later I saw one of the henchmen with the head of police. I did – at the Matoš Café, the two of them sitting there, in suits, and I’d swear, young man, that it was them, I’d swear by... What a coincidence, he, he.”

“And your son?” asked Ante although he already half-expected the answer.

“Fled. I don’t know where he is to this day. He’s being treated as a missing person. I dreamt last night that he was in lock-up with the head of police, I dreamt they were both dead – drunk, wreaking havoc in the cell, and then came the minister, and nicely paid... Anyway... dreams...”

“And so, the following night, after the police had refused to offer me protection”, continued the professor in a voice that was beginning to sound hoarse, “I went down to the city centre. And at two in the morning, not a soul in sight. No hope, no salvation. The voices echoed within me: ‘tomorrow by noon, old man, or you’re done for!’. Small town, silence, a bustling in the distance, he, he...”¹

The professor halted suddenly again. He looked up at the skies. He spread his arms out and began to softly sing: “And

1. Allusion to a poem from Antun Gustav Matoš, a Croatian poet.

so I went to the caasinoo...” He coughed, quickened his step and continued in an earnest tone:

“Nothing open anywhere. Just like today. There is only one door to hell and it’s invisible... but they let off a glimmer of light. Young man, that night, for reasons unbeknown to me, I decided to stake my pension on roulette. For reasons unbeknown to me. I felt defiance well up in me. My life had fallen apart, do you understand? All that was left was risk – either I would win or they would burn down my flat. I had nothing to lose. That was my only logic.”

“I understand. I also had my logic. When society let’s lose of all reins, then you put your foot on the pedal. You floor it. Whatever the consequences! Perhaps you end up smashing into a wall, and maybe you veer off somewhere, maybe you find yourself on a broader path. A more promising path. Did you know that I’m a down-and-out homeland defender? You have your motives for gambling, I have a diagnosis. PTSD. We all have our motives!”

“Every one of us has his own motive for revenge. But people are quick to condemn revenge, they don’t look at the motive. Ninety percent of all people are blind, although they have perfect vision.”

“So what happened that night. I mean, at the casino?”, interrupted Ante.

“This is where we light upon a fascinating case of chance”, exclaimed the professor and clapped his hands. “I placed everything I had on the zero. As everything within me was null and void. I was an empty sack. All you could do was fill it.”

“And?” asked Ante with a smile on his face, although he already sensed he knew...

“The ball fell upon the zero. In the first spin! Imagine, I had won seventy-two thousand Kuna. Thirty-six of my pensions! The only thing I couldn’t discern was whether this was a gift from God or from the Devil. Suddenly my drab existence began to take on a green sheen. Almost a fluorescent green sheen.”

The professor laughed. A sarcastic laugh.

“The flat was secured. At that point it really wasn’t important whether the saviour was Light or Darkness”, replied Ante.

“Zero had saved me, it was no longer a zero but a positive number, a saving number, do you understand, I was well into the plus.”

“I understand, professor, perhaps you needn’t go on. Then you placed your bet on the zero again and lost everything.”

“Ooh, you’re mistaken, young man. I didn’t play for the next five years. I didn’t even think about roulette. Until I decided to become a writer.”

“A writer? So how did letters lead you off to numbers?”

“Yes, letters that do not allow you to have a livelihood, letters that cannot be marketed force almost every writer to obsess over numbers.

This is why, my dear young man, I believe that literature and mathematics are intertwined. Once you realise that you’re wasting your breath and mind, then you don’t see any reason for not taking your wallet out and... taking a chance on random numbers. Namely, you start believing that one game of roulette, one spin of the devilish wheel, will afford more logic and luck than the ideas that bring you nothing more than enduring poverty.”

“For me, professor, the numbers on the roulette table are symbols of human lives. Lives are pure coincidence, we are thrown into this world against our will, why should we not play? I fought in the War... Losing money or your life is almost the same to a mental invalid like me.”

“You fought a war, I fought in peace. For a small goal. But, armament was everywhere. I’m talking about the invisible Kalashnikovs of callous entrepreneurs... Namely, I wrote a book. On Croatian poetry, on the divine embers in Croatian poetry. I read and read, looking for these divine embers. I spent years, decades writing it. But the editors refused my book. They didn’t see any embers. The embers that only a number of us see are not profitable. Poetry isn’t profitable, that’s what they said, and some got into my face, asked me to back off. They threw me out of their offices like a rat. Do you know how low you feel being a poet in a sea of memoirs with kitschy front covers? Do you know how demeaning it is to be an outsider who has buried his idea within himself within a fallen state?”

The professor stopped again. He spat on the ground. “Mediocrities. An invasion of mediocrities. Yellow ants. They’ve taken over culture. They’re multiplying like vermin. Upstarts, bourgeoisie, those whose intellect comes from out of their arses! Croatian culture was always on the decline, and it took its dying breathe during capitalism. It needs to be given a decent burial. With music supplied by a brass band. He, he. Do you understand what I’m saying, young man? Gangsters have funerals. Politicians have funerals. The graves of the no-goods have flowers. Does not Croatian culture deserve a grave?”

The professor stopped, blew into his fists and then jumped.

“The devil comes knocking, he, he.² Young man, this country is a cemetery. Those who are still alive, those who can still undertake something, are actually zombies.” He suddenly grabbed Ante by the shoulder and stared him straight in the face.

“The few humans remaining are wandering around trying to throw some light on things. To no avail. These well-intentioned people are trying to resist, they offer their imagination, their ideas, throw a trove of treasures before the feet of the zombies; but do you know what they do? They come up to them, smirk in their faces, say that they are old-fashioned angels and suck their blood. Creative people don’t stand a chance here. And do you know what they do then? They start ridiculing everything. Themselves. And then they go to the casino. All or nothing. A last shot of luck or nothingness. There’s nothing in between. It’s all somewhere in between anyway. The average, how terrible, a terrible average – it takes you to your grave. And the cemetery has no smell, no taste, no definition of emotions.”

“No matter, professor, no matter that you’re a gambler! Show the yellow ants that you’re alive, that you know how to live, even if it means living as an outsider. Madmen have their freedom. For them any solution is possible. We are the downbeats, but nobody counts on us. We have attained the freedom to rely on ourselves.”

2. Another allusion to Antun Gustav Matoš.



© Catherine Hélié

Laurence Plazenet

L'amour seul (2005)

Love Alone

Publishing House **Albin Michel**

Biography

Laurence Plazenet was born in Paris in 1968. At five-years-old, she was already a passionate reader, quickly developing her desire to write. A former student at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, she is a Classic Literature 'agrégée' and holds a Literature PhD. She started her career as a Sorbonne professor, and studied at Princeton in 1994. However, for a long time she was convinced that she didn't have anything to say that was worth being printed. She then worked for ten years on academic papers, feeling she was, at least, useful to literature. She broke the silence in 2005 with *L'amour seul*, published by Albin Michel, then with *La Blessure et la soif* in 2009 and *Disproportion de l'homme*, both published by Gallimard.

A lecturer of French Literature at Paris-Sorbonne, a member of the French National Centre for Scientific Research and the Institut Universitaire de France, and a vice-chair of the Société des Amis de Port-Royal, Plazenet is also currently writing her fourth novel.

Synopsis

Mlle Louise Catherine d'Albrecht is only fifteen-years-old when she meets love. She lost her mother and her father brought her up sternly, with no physical display of affection, while anonymously spoiling her with presents.

Monsieur de Ramon, her tutor, arouses her first physical flutters and becomes her secret lover. At first, Louise is tormented by her feelings but she ends up giving herself, body and soul, to the man who seduced her. When her father forces her to leave the city to return back to the country, Louise is looked after by her young aunt, the austere Mlle d'Ambricourt.

Later, back in Paris, she hopes her lover will find her again, but he fails to return. Full of anxiety and piety, she dedicates her life to her studies and writes her first book. Thanks to this book and her words, Monsieur de Ramon comes back to her. They give their love to each other, an absolute love, until Monsieur de Ramon, feeling old and not worthy of his lover's brightness, decides to leave her while she is pregnant. Later, tragedy strikes when she loses her six-year old daughter, and she sinks into a lonely life, full of memories of her lover and haunting desires. She has a one-way correspondence with her lover, finishing her life in asceticism, sharpened by the ghost of desire and hastening her end by curing victims of an epidemic.

L'amour seul

Laurence Plazenet

1.

Elle avait quinze ans. Elle en paraissait moins.

Elle vivait à l'écart.

2.

Quand sa femme était morte, Monsieur d'Albrecht avait refusé de s'écarter du corps qu'elle avait déserté. Il était resté agenouillé, ses mains jointes à celles de son épouse. Il n'écoutait pas les prières des prêtres ni les objurgations de ses domestiques. Il regardait les paupières closes de Madame d'Albrecht. En esprit, il les baisait ; dans la nuit de leur chambre, il caressait ses seins. C'était troquer une obscurité pour une autre.

Deux grands cierges disposés de chaque côté du lit mettaient à peine une lueur sur ce dernier conciliabule.

Son fils vint parler à Monsieur d'Albrecht. Le jeune homme ne se sentait guère le droit de prononcer les remontrances qu'on lui avait dites. Il se tenait gauchement, les yeux rivés sur le cadavre de sa mère. Le veuf l'ignora. Le garçon attendit un moment, puis il sortit.

La nuit passa.

Au matin, on mena sa petite fille à Monsieur d'Albrecht. Elle marchait à peine. Ses joues étaient roses. Elle ne le divertit pas. Il se leva d'abord avec un mouvement de colère. Puis, il s'immobilisa et il demeura glacé devant l'enfant. Il trouvait qu'elle ressemblait à Madame d'Albrecht d'une façon qui le

saisissait. Elle entrouvrait les lèvres de la même manière. Ses cils battaient à la même vitesse. L'intensité noire des pupilles qu'ils abritaient était identique. La fillette avait éclaté en sanglots. Il avait ordonné, dans un souffle, la bouche sèche, qu'on l'ôtât de sa vue.

Monsieur d'Albrecht était un homme plein de morgue, très instruit, taciturne. Il fuit sa fille. Il commanda qu'elle habitât un corps de logis éloigné de celui où il se tenait lui-même et qu'elle ne parût nulle part. Il restait des semaines, des mois parfois, sans la rencontrer. Un jour d'été, dix ans plus tard, il raccompagnait des hôtes jusqu'à la première cour de sa maison, il entendit à sa gauche, venant d'une galerie suspendue, une voix dont l'intonation était la même qui, toutes les nuits, résonnait encore à ses oreilles. Son ciel se voila. Il fut secoué d'un tremblement. Il gémit. Il fit venir la coupable devant lui. Il la surplombait entièrement. Il voyait la piqure au sommet de sa coiffe. Il ne trouvait pas ses mots. Les autres le dévisageaient. Il se reprit. Sa colère était immense. Il eût voulu battre celle dont les lèvres avaient laissé échapper ce son, ravivant jusqu'à l'extase le tourment qu'il croyait dissimuler au monde.

En cachette, il la comblait.

Il lui faisait tailler des robes de brocart ; au lobe de ses oreilles, il suspendait des perles que la Reine avait désirées. Il lui donna un livre rempli d'annotations de la main de Pétrarque. Elle fut malade et les médecins désespérèrent de la sauver. Il ne la visita point. Quand on lui dit qu'elle avait réchappé, il lui porta des mules brodées qui venaient de Chine et où étaient cousus des diamants. Elle dormait. Il déposa les souliers sans la réveiller sur une chaise basse au pied de son lit.

Mademoiselle d'Albrecht grandit entre sa nourrice, des domestiques qu'elle intimidait et le prêtre qui l'entendait en confession. Dans cette solitude, à peine bougeait-elle, ses jupes bruissaient comme un vol d'oiseau ; la honte la transperçait.

Son bonheur était dans les livres.

Toutes les filles de sa famille étaient bien élevées. Elles étaient si belles qu'il leur fallait beaucoup d'esprit pour se garder d'être vaines et sensibles aux hommes. Louise-Catherine savait le latin, le grec, l'hébreu, l'araméen. Elle avait aussi appris l'italien, l'espagnol et le portugais, qui sont des langues de poètes. Elle déchiffrait l'arabe. Elle aimait les écritures étrangères, les proses rudes et difficiles. Elle regrettait de n'avoir jamais été rompue aux mathématiques, aux astres, à toutes les sciences qui requièrent une application que l'apprentissage des langues et des textes n'exigeait pas d'elle. Dans ce dialogue avec l'inconnu, elle s'éprouvait. Il lui arrivait d'entendre, en lisant, une rumeur qui montait d'elle, bien qu'elle fût incapable d'y repérer un discours intelligible et qu'elle soupçonnât que ce pouvait n'être qu'une simple respiration. Elle était attentive, cependant, à son retour. Elle concevait à ce moment une espèce de joie, vive, brûlante, pareille à un surenchérissement de route sa personne.

Le goût qu'elle avait de la musique, des voix quand elles délaissent la parole pour le chant, frôlait la passion.

Elle allait aux messes basses.

Elle redoutait d'aimer Dieu impurement.

Elle méditait les histoires des saints. On leur coupait les mains. On tranchait leurs langues. Leurs pudeurs étaient déchirées, leurs attachements violés. Ils provoquaient encore leurs bourreaux. L'insolence était dans leur bouche jusqu'aux chagrins, le grand repli des mortifications. D'autres partaient

se taire entre des montagnes de sable. Ils se nichaient sur des colonnes. Ils pleuraient après Dieu. Tant de désordre pour du recueillement la fascinait.

Elle s'ennuyait. Elle avait le vertige de tout ce qu'elle ignorait et qu'elle imaginait qu'elle était vouée à ignorer.

Violente, elle haïssait la violence.

Elle tenait en honneur la chasteté et la tolérance.

3.

Ce fut un éblouissement.

Il s'exprimait avec des inflexions étrangères dont la gravité faisait ressortir, soudain, la suspension du débit, l'allègement du ton, la concentration du sens dans les mots qu'il employait. Son front était haut, la figure allongée, la barbe sombre et fournie. Une raie séparait ses cheveux en deux massifs qui retombaient de chaque côté de la tête, belle, intelligente. Les lèvres, fines, avaient un air de sévérité. Il donnait un sentiment de réserve et de force. La jeune fille nota les plis horizontaux au-dessus des sourcils, ceux qui coupaient le visage entre les ailes du nez et les commissures de la bouche. Les yeux étaient clairs, leur expression pénétrante. Il l'observait.

Il se tenait près de son père ; tous les deux lui faisaient face. Elle s'inclina, le buste raide. Le contre-jour accentua l'ovale des traits, l'étroitesse du corps et des mains.

Elle s'interrogea sur ce qu'elle voyait dans son regard : de la moquerie, de la convoitise, une connaissance d'elle absolue.

Ils furent un long moment sans détourner leurs yeux, presque sans ciller.

Il la désira dans l'instant. Parce qu'elle était interdite et qu'il était improbable qu'elle s'intéressât à lui, parce qu'elle était vierge et qu'elle rougirait quand il la mettrait nue. Elle pleurerait peut-être lorsqu'il la toucherait. Ce spectacle serait le plus beau des plaisirs.

Aguscin Ramôn y Cordoba salua son élève.

4.

Elle connut le visage de son amour.

Love Alone

Laurence Plazenet

Translated from the French by Jessica Alexander

1.

She was fifteen years old. She seemed younger. She lived detached from the rest.

2.

After his wife died, Monsieur d'Albrecht had refused to relinquish the body she had abandoned. He had remained kneeling, his wife's hands in his own. He ignored both the priests' prayers and the rebukes of his servants. He watched Madame d'Albrecht's closed eyelids. In spirit, he kissed them; in the twilight of their room, he caressed her bosom. It was the substitution of one obscurity for another. Two large candles burning on either side of the bed faintly illumined this final tryst.

Monsieur d'Albrecht's son came to speak with him. The young man felt in no position to utter the reprimands he was to convey. He stood gracelessly, his eyes riveted on his mother's corpse. The widower ignored him. The boy waited a moment, then withdrew.

The night passed.

In the morning, Monsieur d'Albrecht's daughter was brought to see him. She was hardly walking. Her cheeks were pink. She did not entertain him. First he rose angrily. Then he froze and remained immobile before the child. He was struck

by the resemblance she bore to Madame d'Albrecht. She parted her lips in the same way. Her lashes blinked at the same speed. The intense black of the eyes they sheltered was identical. The little girl had burst into tears. In one breath, his mouth dry, he had commanded that she be removed from his sight.

Monsieur d'Albrecht was a man full of hubris, well-educated, taciturn. He fled his daughter. He insisted that she reside in quarters far from those he inhabited himself and that she appear nowhere. He went weeks, sometimes even months, without seeing her. One summer day ten years later, while walking guests back to the first courtyard of his residence, he heard, on his left and coming from a hanging veranda, a voice whose contours echoed those that still rang in his ears night after night. A fog descended. A shiver ran through him. He shuddered. He ordered the culprit brought before him. He towered above her. He could see the hollow at the top of her coiffure. He was unable to find words. The others stared at him. He pulled himself together. His fury was incalculable. He would have liked to strike she whose lips had spilt this sound and revived, nearly to the point of ecstasy, the torment he believed hidden from the world.

In secret, he pampered her.

He had brocade dresses fashioned for her; from her earlobes he hung pearls the Queen had coveted. He gave her a book whose margins were crowded with notes written in Petrarch's own hand. She fell ill and the doctors lost hope of saving her. He did not come to see her, not once. When he was told that she was recovering, he brought her embroidered scuffs that came from China and were stitched with diamonds. She was sleeping. Without waking her, he left the slippers on an ottoman at the foot of her bed.

Mademoiselle d'Albrecht grew up in the spaces between her nursemaid, the servants she intimidated, and the priest who heard her confessions. In this solitude, with her slightest movement, her skirts would rustle like the flight of a bird; she was transfixed by shame.

Her happiness lived in books.

All the women in her family were well-mannered. Their beauty required sharp wits to prevent them from growing conceited and susceptible to men's charms. Louise-Catherine knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. She had also learned Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese – the tongues of poets. She could puzzle out Arabic. She loved foreign scripts, the difficult and rugged prose. She regretted having never been well-versed in mathematics, the stars, and all the sciences which demanded an assiduity that the acquisition of languages and texts had not required of her. In this dialogue with the unknown, she tested herself. Sometimes, when reading, she would hear a murmur rising from within, although she was incapable of identifying anything intelligible in it and suspected it might be nothing more than her own breath. Nevertheless, she listened attentively for its return. In this moment she experienced a kind of joy – acute, ardent, comparable to an eclipsing of her entire person.

Her taste for music, voices abandoning word for song, was akin to passion.

She went to low mass.

She feared her love for God was impure.

She contemplated the histories of the saints. Their hands were severed. Their tongues were cut out. Their honor was shredded and their attachments ravaged. Still they provoked

those who tortured them. Their mouths were filled with insolence until they were lost to penitence, those deep folds rendered with self-privation. Others left, fell silent among oceans of sand. They nestled atop pillars. They begged for God. So much disorder on which to meditate fascinated her.

She lost interest. All that she did not know and imagined she was fated to never know made her dizzy.

Violent herself, she hated violence.

She prized virtue and tolerance.

3.

It was pure bedazzlement.

He spoke with a foreign inflection whose gravitas would educe, suddenly, a break in the stream of speech, a softening of his tone, a concentrating of sense in his words. His forehead was long, his face elliptical, his beard dark and thick. A part separated his hair into two massifs that settled on either side of his face, itself beautiful and intelligent. His lips, delicate, wore an air of seriousness. His mien suggested reticence and intensity. The young girl took in the horizontal creases above his eyebrows and those that divided his countenance between the sides of his nose and the corners of his mouth. His eyes were clear, their gaze penetrating. He watched her.

He stood near her father; the two men faced her. She bowed with a stiff chest. The light shining from behind accentuated the oval of her features, the straight line of her body and hands.

She asked herself what she was seeing in his gaze: mockery, lust, absolute knowledge of herself.

For a long moment, neither turned away, hardly blinked.

He desired her instantly. Because she was forbidden and because it was unlikely that she was interested in him, because she was chaste and would blush when he stripped her nude. She might cry when he touched her. This sight would be the utmost of pleasures.

Agustín Ramón y Cordoba greeted his student.

4.

She saw the face of her love.



© László Tóth

Viktor Horváth

Török tükör (2009)

Turkish Mirror

Publishing House **Jelenkor**

Biography

Viktor Horváth was born in 1962 in Pécs. Between 2003 and 2006, he studied for his Ph.D. at the University of Miskolc. Since 2003, he has been teaching the theory of poetic structure and the history of form in medieval and late-medieval times at the University of Pécs. He is a translator of texts in English, German, and Spanish. His guidebook, *Through Other New York Variations* (*Át avagy New York-variációk*) was published in 2004.

Synopsis

Turkish Mirror takes the reader on an adventurous journey back in time to 16th century Hungary, when the country was still a new suzerainty of the victorious Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. The novel describes an unstable borderland situated between two great empires, a colorful cavalcade of calendars, taxation systems, languages, sacred writings, kings and emperors, mighty sultans, Hungarian nobles and Ottoman Beys, merchants, city burghers, village magistrates, and – from time to time – even angels, djinns and peculiar flying machines.

In the book, we see the city of Pécs gradually giving way to the world of the *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, where camels walk the streets, apricots and dates hang from the trees in abundance, thieves roam the woods, and the first mosque and Turkish bath are built. Indeed, the great charm of *Turkish Mirror* lies in its uninhibited flair for storytelling, while its ingenuity lies in showing us the world of Hungary through the eyes of the occupying Ottoman Turks. This is presented as a complex, puzzling, multicultural land, fraught with danger and ruled by complex power relations, as opposed to the Padishah's civilized and refined empire. Thanks to this surprising point of view, the reader visits a terrain where everything that was familiar is now foreign and exotic.

Török tükör

Viktor Horváth

Hogyan vesztek össze a bolond frengi szultánok

Szejfi, a nevelőm, úgy mondta el nekem, ahogy az áldott emlékü oszmán történetírók megírták. Én csak ámultam azon a beszéden, Szejfi pedig nagy komolyan mondta, mondta, de időnként megállt és mosolygott.

Szerettem Szejfit.

Így mesélte:

Abban az időben a bálványimádás tévhitétől elvakított nyugati országok szultánjai a császári koronának hódoltak, ezért mindannyian igen vágyakoztak erre a koronára. Ám ez a korona Lausnak (akit az alávaló gyaurok Második Lajos Királynak neveztek), tehát ez az úgynevezett korona ennek az esztelen Lausnak a birtokában volt, és ez a Lajos Alamán ország és Üngürusz ország szultánja volt. Ezeket a vilájeteket a bálványimádó hitetlenek Németországnak és Magyarországnak nevezik.

Tehát, ez a Lajos szultán, ez a Laus, igen nagy hatalmat tartott a piszkos kezei között. Szandzsákjainak területe és várainak sokasága megmérhetetlenül terpeszkedett, gyalogos és lovas serege annyi volt, mint égen a csillag, birtokai és földművelő rájái, mint mezőn a fűszál, sivatagban a homokszem. És a hadai! Minden disznópofájú katonája magas volt és félelmetes, akárha dzsinnektől származtak volna, lovaik tüzet fújtak, mint a sárkányok, és akkorák voltak, mint a rúkhmadár az Ezeregyéj meséiben. A lovasok és gyalogosok tetőtől

talpig vasba öltöztek, és olyan ádázul forgatták a fegyvert, mint az ördögök; hadnagyaik a seregek elrendezéséhez és a hadviseléshez úgy értettek, akár Aszáf, a régi Bölcs Salamon hadvezére, bátorságuk pedig Túséhez volt hasonlítható, aki a legnagyobb perzsa hős a régi időkben.

De ez még nem minden, mert nem a Lajos volt az egyetlen frengisztáni szultán. Itt volt még a Lajos leghitványabb rokona, Ferendus szultán is, aki Ferdinánd Császárnak hívatta magát, és ez a Ferendus kapzsi volt a kapzsik között.

Ám mi történt? Francse szultánja az ostoba és felfuvalkodott Francsiszko volt, más néven Ferenc. Ezt a Francseországot Franciaországnak nevezik a magyarok. Nos, ez a Ferenc is vágyakozott a koronára, hát így okoskodott: „háborút indítok Lajos ellen, hogy a koronát megkaparintsam”. Csakhogy Lajos erős volt, mert ő és a német Ferdinánd egy karavánnal utaztak. Ráadásul volt Ferdinándnak egy édes testvére, a Karló, más néven Károly, Iszpania szultánja. Ez a Károly, aki szintén a hitetlenség bűzös mocsarában cuppogott, igen nagy hatalmú szultán volt, és amikor meghallotta, hogy Ferenc rátámadt Ferdinándra, igen megharagudott. Mert a Ferdinánd a testvére volt. Nyomban háborúba szállt, és hátbatámadta Ferenc király szultánt, a francia dögöt.

Ferenc így már kétfelé viselt hadat. Egyszerre hadakozott Ferdinánddal és Lajossal, akiket ő maga támadott meg, és Károllyal, aki a Ferdinánd segítségére jött, hiszen az testvéröccse volt neki. Hamar kiderült, hogy Ferenc király nem bír Lajos, Ferdinánd és a spanyol Károly erejével.

Mikor ezek hárman több várat és a hozzájuk tartozó falvakat is elfoglaltak már a Ferentől, és mikor Ferenc király látta, hogy mindüket le nem győzheti, igen megijedt. Azon kezdett gondolkodni, hogy az elbizakodottság metélyétől

megfertőzött agyában fogant tervének szekerét miként kormányozhatná a megvalósulás palotájának udvarába, és így töprengve hirtelen a világosság apró lángja gyúlt ki háborodott eszében. Papirost, pennát és tintát rendelt, leült, és levelet kezdett írni a Padisáhhhoz (legyen boldog Alláh fényében!), a Nagy Szulejmánhoz, mert ő volt akkoriban a hitet védelmező kalifa, Mohamed Próféta (áldás reá és családjára!) hős utóda. A levél pontosan így szólt:

A disznó Ferenc Király levele

Nagy Szulejmán, aki a disznóhúsevő és maguk is disznó keresztények ellenében az igaz hit védelmezője vagy! Én, az alávaló és gonosz természetű Francsiszkó, ostoba elmémben a meggondolatlanság trágyadombján fogant tervem szerint rátámadtam Lausra, Alamánia és Üngürúsz mocskos és erkölcstelen szultánjára és Ferendusra, hogy tőlük a hívságok haszontalan és semmit érő koronáját megkaparintsam. Ám a Ferendusnak az édes testvére, a becstelen és égetni való Karló Király szultán, aki Iszpania ország szultánja, szintúgy háborúba szállott ellenem, és most hárman kétfelől dúlják utálatos országomat, melyre rátekinteni is borzalom. Együtt pusztítják és dúlják Francse országot, a bálványimádásnak ezt az igen mély pöcegödrét, melynek minden megátalkodott lakója a legalsó pokol tüzén fog égni halála után. Velem együtt.

Világos elméjű, hatalmas Padisáhom! Én, Francsiszkó, hason csúszva, méltatlan pofámat zsámolyod lábához dörgölve könyörgöm, hogy leckéztess meg az elbizakodottság borától megrészegült jézushívő német és magyar kutyákat keleten, és akkor az én alávaló hadseregem már le tudja győzni a gonosz Karló Királyt nyugaton. Ha nagy bajomban segítesz rajtam, legboldogabb leszek legutolsó rájáid között, és életem végéig

szolgállak tégedet, és még azután is, mert összes szörnyeteg természetű gyaur leszármazottaim és elvetemült utódaim mind hódolni fognak neked egészen az idők végezetéig. Továbbá lehozom neked a Napot és a Holdat.

És az angyali természetű Padisáh megkönyörült.

Így kezdődött.

(...)

Madonna

Teltek a hetek, elmúlt a gyaurok karácsonya, amikor Jézus próféta születését ünnepelték (simogassák Őt nagy szemű hűrik Alláh kertjeiben!), én kínlódtam Szudabé miatt, és azon gondolkodtam, hogyan láthatnám meg végre az arcát, rongáltam tovább a falat meg a nyílveesszőket a kopár szobában gyermefénynél a késő esti ima után. Dervis bég megparancsolta Szejfinek, hogy tanítson retorikára és latinra, elvégre sok könyvet otthagytak a tévelygő püspökök, de Szejfinek annyi ideje sem volt, hogy a Koránból feladott leckéket behajtsa rajtam. Gergely diáknak az lett volna a dolga, hogy írni tanítson magyarul és latinul is, de előle egyszerűen elszöktem a rációkhoz a templom mögé, Ferruh pedig csak nézte, hogy a vakolat napról napra kopik a szalmabála mögötti falon. A nevelőapám pedig észre sem vette, hogy nem fog rajtam semmi tanítás, annyifelé futkosott a környéken és a városban a sok igazítani való után.

A várnagy egy veterán janicsár aga volt, Alinak hívták, és ötven akcse fizetést húzott naponta. Egyszer láttam, hogy ez a dizdár a városba indul, odamentem hozzá, és azt hazudtam neki, hogy a bég megparancsolta, menjek vele, és válasszak ki

neki egy macskát, vegyük meg neki, és majd utólag megadja az árát Alinak. Ali dizdár elhitte, egyik emberét mellém adta a nagypiacon, amíg ő valamit intézett a húslátóknál és a piac-felügyelőknél. De a piacon nem lehetett macskát kapni, visszamentünk macska nélkül, én elfutottam tőle, amint beléptünk a várkapun, ő pedig ment jelteni a bégnek, hogy sajnos nem kapott macskát. Ilyen ostoba és gonosz voltam.

A jó Dervis bég ezért bezáratott egy szobába a palota alsó szintjén. Azelőtt soha nem voltam itt. A szoba az épület északi végén volt, ott ahol majdnem érintkezett a nagy templom sarkával. Soha nem fűtötték, kicsi volt az ablaka, csak kevés fényt engedett be a keresztboltozatos mennyezet alá. Először azt néztem, hogy ki tudom-e nyitni az ablakot, hogy kiszökjek aztán, amikor semmiképpen nem tudtam kinyitni, összetörni pedig nem mertem, elkezdtem szétdobálni a fal mellett felhalmozott gyékényszőnyegeket, hogy betakarózzak velük. Azonban valami más volt alattuk, amit csak be akartak fedni, hogy elrejtsek. Keretbe foglalt vásznak a falnak támasztva – legalább húsz. Színes vásznak fa keretekbe feszítve. Némelyiknek a kerete egyszerű volt, némelyikét olyan gazdag faragás díszítette, amihez hasonlót még soha nem láttam. Alláh, segíts, ezek festmények, gondoltam, Kászim bég nem égette el őket, amikor megszállta a várat. Miért nem? Sajnálta? Leszedette mind a falakról, és összehordatta a legutolsó földszinti kamrába, hogy ne lássa senki. És hogy baja se legyen, hiszen az emeleten beáztak a nem használt helyiségek.

Teljesen kiszabadítottam a képeket, és megnéztem az elsőt. Visszahőköltem, Uram segíts! Nincs erő és hatalom csak a magasztos és felséges Alláhnál! A vásznon egy prófétát gyalázó festmény éktelenkedett. De milyen gyönyörű volt! És hogy megrémültem ettől a szépségtől! Mert olyan volt, mintha élne, és éppen ezért volt gusztustalan. Nem Mohamed próféta volt,

hanem csak Jézus próféta, viszont meztelen volt, csak egy rongy volt az ágyékán, és ki volt szögelve arra fakeresztre, amit a pogányok úgy imádnak, a mellkasa is át volt szúrva, folyt a vér, hogy az gyalázat! De a távolság! Hogyan képesek a gyaurok mesterek arra, hogy megmutassák a távolságot? Hiszen a vászon lapos! Mégis olyan volt, mintha egy kútba zuhannék, egy vihar szele szívna befelé, mert a képben volt messzeség, a Prófétának meg teste volt! Vastagsága volt a combjának, a karjának és mindenének. Boszorkányság és szépség! Olyan hihetetlen volt, hogy megfogtam, aztán ijedten elrántottam a kezemet.

Még sokáig bámultam, aztán meg akartam nézni a többit is, mert úgy tett velem az első kép, mint az ópium az elpuhult emberekkel. Mikor félreraktam a Jézus-festményt, megláttam a mögötte levőt, és már késő volt, nem tudtam eltakarni. Maryam Anyácska éppen a csecsemő korú Jézust szoptatta. Látszott, ahogy a gyerek bekapja a mellbimbót, de közben rám sandított, kicsit kancsal volt, de akkor is rám nézett, valahogy kifelé a képből, és Maryam anyácska másik melle sem volt betakarva, hanem előremeredt a sápadtrózsaszín mellbimbója, és ő is a szemem közé nézett, mint Jézus, én hátraléptem, mert ilyen megdöbbenő szentségtelenséget nem képzeltem volna, közben az ágyékomban felágaskodott a férfiasság, és feszítette a nadrágot, mert azt képzeltem, hogy Szudabé arca is ilyen, bele kellett nyúlnom a nadrágba, hogy eligazítsam, megmarkoltam, de túlságosan hátrahúztam a bőrt, aztán vissza, és akkor megszólalt a nagytoronyban a müezzín imára hívó ezánja, előttem elsötétült a mindenség, a térdem megroggyant, forróságot éreztem, csikordult a kulcs a zárban, és belépett Ferruh aga, hogy kiengedjen a mecsetbe, mert péntek volt, én tehetetlenül nyögtem, és nyúlós folyadék árasztotta el a nadrágomat. Ferruh csak állt, aztán mintha a villám csapott volna bele, a szeme boldogan felcsillant:

- Melyik kezedet tetted a gatyádba?
- Mi? Mi? Mit melyik – reszkető lábakkal támaszkodtam a falnak.
- Melyik kezed volt a gatyádban, Ísza, azt kérdeztem.
- Hát ez – néztem a bal kezemen fénylő valamit.
- Gyere gyorsan! – azzal elkapta a nyakamat, vágatott velem fölfelé a lépcsőn, az emeleten bevonszolt abba a szobába, ahol lövöldözni szoktam.
- Vedd fel! – mutatott az újra. – Fogd meg azt az íjat! Nem azzal! A másik kezedd! A jobbal! A... azzal a másikkal a nyilat tedd a húrra!
- De az ilyen... ilyen lett.
- Majd megmosod. Fogd meg, nesze, húzd ki, és most lőj bele!

Balkézzezzel megfeszítettem az ideget, nem volt bennem sok erő, csak valami egyensúly, amit eddig nem éreztem. Jólesőt lélegeztem, és elengedtem a húrt. A nyíl belevágódott abba az átkozott bálába pont középén, bele a fél almába, amit célpontnak tűztem oda. Elképedve néztem Ferruh agára, az meg vihogott, mint az eszelős, könnyezett, és a térdét csapkodta. Én az idegre tettem egy újabb vesszőt, és az előző után küldtem, aztán a következőt és a következőt, hogy egymást hasogatták szét a nyilak az alma roncsaiban.

– Te... te... te kölyök, Alláh nevére, te balkezes vagy! Balkezes vagy, érted?

Tanulság: Isten a legjobb tanítómester.

Turkish Mirror

Viktor Horváth

Translated from the Hungarian by Judith Sollosy

The book takes the reader on an adventurous journey back in time to 16th century Hungary, then a suzerainty of the victorious Sultan Suleyman, whose everyday life is described to us by an old Muslim as he lived it when he first came to Hungary, and who assumes that by the time his words are read, the Hungarians will have assimilated with their conquerors, and not the other way around. This is why he begins his description by addressing the reader as "my heir to the true faith", an ingenious reversal that runs throughout the book and gives it its special charm.

How the foolish frengi sultans came to blows

My tutor Sejfi told me the story just as the Ottoman scribes of blessed memory had recorded it. I listened to him spell-bound, and he, Sejfi, continued to relate it with due seriousness, though from time to time he stopped for a smile.

I loved Sejfi very much.

This is the tale he told.

Back in those days, the sultans of the western nations, blinded by the errant faith of idolatry, paid homage to the imperial crown, and so they all coveted it, down to the last man. But this crown was in the possession of Laus (whom the base giaours called King Louis the Second), in short, this so-called crown was in the possession of by this foolish Laus, who was the sultan of the lands of Alamania and Ungurus. The infidel idolaters called these vilajets Germany and Hungary.

So then, this sultan Laus, or Louis, held very great power in his unclean hands. The domain of his Sandzaks and his

countless castles spread over immeasurable distances, his foot soldiers and mounted soldiers were as the stars in the sky, his estates and serfs who worked the soil like blades of grass in the meadow, like grains of sand in the desert. And as for his armies! Every one of his pig-faced soldiers was so tall and terrifying, you'd think that they'd descended from djinns, their horses snorted fire like dragons, and were as huge as the Rukh bird in the Arabian Nights. The equestrian and foot soldiers were clad in iron from head to toe and they wielded their weapons as ferociously as any devil. Their lieutenants were as expert in the arrangement and deployment of their troops as Asaph, the war lord of Solomon the Wise, while their bravery was akin to Tuse, the great Persian hero of times long past.

But that's not all, because Louis was not the only sultan of Frengistan. There was Louis's basest of all relatives, Sultan Ferendus, who had himself called Emperor Ferdinand, and this Ferendus was legendary for his avarice.

And what happened? The sultan of Franche was the dim-witted and conceited Francisco, also known as Francis. This Franche is what we call France. Anyway, this Francis also coveted the crown and reasoned thus: "I shall wage war against Louis to get my hands on that crown." But Louis was strong, because he and the German Ferdinand traveled in the same caravan. Besides, Ferdinand had a brother, Karlo, also called Charles, the sultan of Hispania. This Charles, who also bid his time sunk in the putrid marshes of the infidel, was a sultan who enjoyed great power, and when he learned that Francis had attacked Ferdinand, he boiled with rage, because Ferdinand was his brother. He promptly went to war and attacked the sultan king Francis, that French villain.

So now Francis was waging war on two fronts. He clashed swords with Ferdinand and Louis, both of whom he had attacked with Charles, who came to Ferdinand's aid, he being his younger brother. It soon became apparent that King Francis is no match for the combined strengths of Louis, Ferdinand and the Spanish king, Charles.

When these three had seized several castles along with the surrounding villages from Francis, and when King Francis saw that he could not vanquish all three, he became sore afraid. He began ruminating about how he could maneuver the chariot of his plan, conceived by his intellect, contaminated as it was by the contagion of conceit, into the courtyard of the palace of action, when thus reflecting, a small spark of inspiration suddenly flared up in his deluded mind. He called for paper, pen and ink, sat himself down, and began to pen a letter to the Padishah (may he shine in the light of Allah!), the Mighty Suleyman, because back then he was the khalifah, the defender of the faith, the heroic successor to the Prophet Muhammad (may blessings shower down upon him and his family!). I quote the letter just as it was writ:

The letter of the pigheaded King Francis

O, Bright and Exalted Suleyman, who art the defender of the true faith against pork eaters and Christians who are themselves as pigs! I, the base and mean spirited Francisco, driven by the promptings of my witless brain feeding on the dung heap of rashness, did attack Laus, the unclean and unvirtuous sultan of Almania and Ungurus in order to lay my hands on their worthless and vainglorious crown. But the blood brother of Ferendus, the ignoble King Karlo sultan fit for the gallows, who is the sultan of the land of Hispania, thereupon also did take up arms against me,

and now the three of them are devastating my loathsome country, an abomination even to behold, from two directions at once. Their forces united, they are dealing destruction and bringing ruination on Franche, this deepest cesspool of idolatry, every impenitent inhabitant of which will burn in the fire of the lowest circle of hell after their deaths, myself included.

Grand Phadishah of the bright understanding! I, Francisco, crawling on my belly, rubbing my unworthy cheeks against the leg of your tabouret, beseech you to teach the German and the Magyar giaour Jesus-followers to the east, inebriated as they be with the wine of pretension, a lesson they will not soon forget, in which case my own ignoble army can make short shrift of the wicked King Karlo to the west. If you will assist me in my great affliction, I shall be the happiest of your base vassals and shall be your humble servant until my dying day and beyond, because my black-natured giaour descendants and depraved issue shall be likewise devoted to you to the end of times, down to the last man. I will also bring the Sun and the Moon down for you.

And the Phadishah of the angelic nature was merciful unto him.

And that's how it began.

(...)

Madonna

The weeks went by, the giaours' Christmas, when they celebrate the prophet Jesus' birthday (may round-eyed houris pamper Him in Allah's orchards!) had come and gone, and I was still suffering because of Sudabé, thinking how I might catch a glimpse of her countenance at last. Meanwhile, after

late night prayers, I continued peeling away at the wall by the light of a candle in that bare room. The erring bishop had left many books behind, so Dervish bey ordered Sejfi to instruct me in Latin and rhetoric, but Sejfi was too caught up to check if I'd done the lessons from the Koran he'd marked out for me. The scribe Gergely was supposed to teach me to write Latin and Hungarian, but I ran away from him and hid behind the church with the Serbs. And all the while Ferruh saw the plaster gradually peeling away on the wall behind the heap of straw. Also, my foster father never noticed that I wasn't learning anything. He was too preoccupied running after all those many alterations waiting for him in the surrounding areas, and in town too.

The castellan was a veteran janissary. His name was Ali, and he bagged fifty silver akche a day. Anyway, on one occasion I saw this dizdar prepare to visit the town, so I went up to him and lied that the bey ordered me to go with him and chose a cat and buy it, and he'd give Ali the price afterward. Ali dizdar believed me and had one of his men accompany me round the great market while he visited the meat surveyors and the market supervisors. But there were no cats to be had at the market, so we returned empty handed. The minute we walked through the castle gate I ran off, and the castellan went to tell the bey that he could not purchase a cat, alas. That's how ignorant and wicked I was.

The good Dervish bey had me locked up in a downstairs room of the palace. I had never been there before. The room was located in the northern wing, where it almost brushed up against the corner of the great church. It was never heated, and it had just one small window that afforded scant light under the crossbeamed ceiling. First I tried prying it open to make my escape, and then, when I couldn't open it no matter

how hard I tried, and I didn't dare break the glass, I began scattering the rush mats heaped up along the wall so they'd serve me for a cover against the cold. But there was something behind them that they wanted to hide, framed canvases leaning against the wall, twenty of them, at least. Colorful canvases stretched taut between wooden frames! Some of the frames were simple, but others had ornate wood-carving on them the likes of which I had never seen. Allah, help me, I thought, these are paintings! Kasim bey had not burned them when he occupied the castle. Why not? He didn't have the heart? He had them all taken down from the walls and had them brought to this remote chamber on the ground floor, so no one should see them. Also, in order to protect them, because the rooms upstairs that were not used were damp.

I flung all the rush mats from in front of the pictures and took a look at the first, but immediately started back. Oh Lord, have mercy on me! There is no strength and might besides the most majestic and august Allah! There was a hideous painting on that canvas reviling the prophet! And how beautiful it was! And how that beauty frightened me! It was just like life, and that made it distasteful. It wasn't the prophet Mohamed, just the prophet Jesus, but he was naked, with just a piece of cloth covering his loins, and he was nailed to that wooden cross the pagans worship, and there was a wound in his chest, and the blood was flowing. A disgrace. And the distance! How can the *giaour* masters portray distance when the canvas is flat? And yet I felt as if I were falling into a well, as if a maelstrom were sucking me in, because there was distance on the canvas, and the prophet had a body! His thigh and arm and every part of him was round. Beauty and witchcraft! I reeled as I touched it, but then frightened, drew my hand away.

I looked at it for a long time, but then I wanted to see the others, too, because the first painting affected me the way opium affects the enervated. And when I put the Jesus painting aside, I saw the one behind it, but by then it was too late, I couldn't cover it. It showed Mother Maryam nursing the baby Jesus. I saw the infant take the nipple between his lips, and all the time he was looking at me with such mischief, squinting, but looking at me all the same, looking out of the picture, somehow, and Mother Maryam's other breast was uncovered, too, and her pale pink nipple stiff, and just like Jesus, she was also looking straight at me, and I stepped back, because I would have never thought such shocking impertinence possible, and meanwhile my manhood stiffened and strained against my pants because I imagined that Sudabé's face is like that, and I had to reach inside my pants to fix it, and I grabbed it, but I pulled back the skin too far and then back again, and then the muezzin's ezan calling the faithful to prayer came from the great tower, everything around me turned dark, my knees grew weak, the heat flooded me, the key turned in the door, and it was Ferruh aga come to let me out to the mosque because it was Friday, and I groaned, helpless, and the viscous fluid flooded by pants, and Ferruh just stood there, but then there was a strange gleam in his eye as if he'd been struck by lightning.

"Which hand did you slip inside your pants?"

"What? What did you..." I started to say, leaning against the wall, trembling.

"Which hand was in your pants?"

"This," I said with a look at that something shimmering on my left hand.

“Let’s go,” he said, then grabbed me by the neck and ran with me up the stairs, and there dragged me into the room where I practiced archery.

“Pick it up,” he said, pointing. “Grab that bow! No. Not with that! With the other hand! Your right hand! And place the arrow against the string with the other!”

“But it’s... it’s... you know.”

“You’ll wash it off later. Here, take it, draw it back. And now, shoot!”

I pulled taut the bowstring. I didn’t have much strength, just a new sense of balance I hadn’t felt before. I took a deep breath and released the string. The arrow pierced that darned bale right in the middle and landed in the half of an apple I’d stuck there for a bull’s eye. I looked incredulous at Ferruh aga, and he grinned like one demented. He had tears in his eyes, and he kept slapping his thigh. I placed another arrow along the bowstring and sent it in wake of the one before it, and then again and again, so the arrows split each other apart in what remained of the apple.

“In the name of Allah, boy, you’re left-handed! You’re left-handed, boy, understand?”

Moral: God is the best teacher.



Kevin Barry

City of Bohane (2011)

Publishing House **Jonathan Cape, Random House**

Biography

Kevin Barry is the author of the short story collections *Dark Lies The Island* and *There Are Little Kingdoms* and the novel *City of Bohane*. He has won the Authors Club Best First Novel Award, the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, and the Sunday Times EFG Private Bank Short Story Award, and he has been shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award. His stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Granta Book of the Irish Story*, and many other journals. He also works on plays and screenplays and he lives in County Sligo.

Synopsis

Forty years in the future. The once-great city of Bohane on the west coast of Ireland is on its knees, infested by vice and split along tribal lines. There are posh parts of town, but it is in the slums and backstreets of Smoketown, the tower blocks of the Northside Rises and the eerie bogs of Big Nothin' that the city really lives.

For years, the city has been in the cool grip of Logan Hartnett, the dapper godfather of the Hartnett Fancy gang. But there's trouble in the air. They say his old nemesis is back in town; his trusted henchmen are getting ambitious, and his missus wants him to give it all up and go straight. And then there's his mother...

City of Bohane is a visionary novel that blends influences from film and the graphic novel, from Trojan beats and calypso rhythms, from Celtic myth and legend, from fado and the sagas, and from all the great inheritance of Irish literature. A work of mesmerising imagination and vaulting linguistic invention, it is a taste of the glorious and new.

City of Bohane

Kevin Barry

1

The Nature of the Disturbance

Whatever's wrong with us is coming in off that river. No argument: the taint of badness on the city's air is a taint off that river. This is the Bohane river we're talking about. A black-water surge, malevolent, it roars in off the Big Nothin' wastes and the city was spawned by it and was named for it: city of Bohane.

He walked the docks and breathed in the sweet badness of the river. It was past midnight on the Bohane front. There was an evenness to his footfall, a slow calm rhythm of leather on stone, and the dockside lamps burned in the night-time a green haze, the light of a sad dream. The water's roar for Hartnett was as the rushing of his own blood and as he passed the merchant yards the guard dogs strung out a sequence of howls all along the front. See the dogs: their hackles heaped, their yellow eyes livid. We could tell he was coming by the howling of the dogs.

Polis watched him but from a distance – a pair of hoss polis watering their piebalds at a trough 'cross in Smoketown. Polis were fresh from the site of a reefing.

'Ya lampin' him over?' said one. 'Albino motherfucker.'

'Set yer clock by him,' said the other.

Albino, some called him, others knew him as the Long Fella: he ran the Hartnett Fancy.

He cut off from the dockside and walked on into the Back Trace, the infamous Bohane Trace, a most evil labyrinth, an unknowable web of streets. He had that Back Trace look to him: a dapper buck in a natty-boy Crombie, the Crombie draped all casual-like over the shoulders of a pale grey Eyetie suit, mohair. Mouth of teeth on him like a vandalised graveyard but we all have our crosses. It was a pair of hand-stitched Portuguese boots that slapped his footfall, and the stress that fell, the emphasis, was money.

Hard-got the riches – oh the stories that we told out in Bohane about Logan Hartnett.

Dank little squares of the Trace opened out suddenly, like gasps, and Logan passed through. All sorts of quarehawks lingered Trace-deep in the small hours. They looked down as he passed, they examined their toes and their sacks of tawny wine – you wouldn't make eye contact with the Long Fella if you could help it. Strange, but we had a fear of him and a pride in him, both. He had a fine hold of himself, as we say in Bohane. He was graceful and erect and he looked neither left nor right but straight out ahead always, with the shoulders thrown back, like a general. He walked the Arab tangle of alleyways and wynds that make up the Trace and there was the slap, the lift, the slap, the lift of Portuguese leather on the backstreet stones.

Yes and Logan was in his element as he made progress through the labyrinth. He feared not the shadows, he knew the fibres of the place, he knew every last twist and lilt of it.

Jenni Ching waited beneath the maytree in the 98er Square.

He approached the girl, and his step was enough: she needn't look up to make the reck. He smiled for her all the same, and it was a wry and long-suffering smile – as though to say: More of it, Jenni? – and he sat on the bench beside. He laid a hand on hers that was tiny, delicate, murderous.

The bench had dead seasons of lovers' names scratched into it.

'Well, girleen?' he said.

'Cunt what been reefed in Smoketown was a Cusack off the Rises,' she said.

'Did he have it coming, Jen?'

'Don't they always, Cusacks?'

Logan shaped his lips thinly in agreement.

'The Cusacks have always been crooked, girl.'

Jenni was seventeen that year but wise beyond it. Careful, she was, and a saucy little ticket in her lowriders and wedge heels, her streaked hair pineappled in a high bun. She took the butt of a stogie from the tit pocket of her white vinyl zip-up, and lit it.

'Get enough on me fuckin' plate now 'cross the footbridge, Mr H.'

'I know that.'

'Cusacks gonna sulk up a welt o' vengeance by 'n' by and if yer askin' me, like? A rake o' them tossers bullin' down off the Rises is the las' thing Smoketown need.'

'Cusacks are always great for the old talk, Jenni.'

'More'n talk's what I gots a fear on, H. Is said they gots three flatblocks marked Cusack 'bove on the Rises this las' while an' that's three flatblocks fulla headjobs with a grá on 'em for rowin', y'check me?'

‘All too well, Jenni.’

It is fond tradition in Bohane that families from the Northside Rises will butt heads against families from the Back Trace. Logan ran the Trace, he was Back Trace blood-andbone, and his was the most ferocious power in the city that year. But here were the Cusacks building strength and gumption on the Rises.

‘What’s the swerve we gonna throw, Logan?’

There was a canniness to Jenni. It was bred into her – the Chings were old Smoketown stock. Smoketown was hoors, herb, fetish parlours, grog pits, needle alleys, dream salons and Chinese restaurants. Smoketown was the other side of the footbridge from the Back Trace, yonder across the Bohane river, and it was the Hartnett Fancy had the runnings of Smoketown also. But the Cusacks were shaping for it.

‘I’d say we keep things moving quite swiftly against them, Jenni-sweet.’

‘Coz they gonna come on down anyways, like?’

‘Oh there’s no doubt to it, girl. They’re going to come down barkin’. May as well force them to a quick move.’

She considered the tactic.

‘Afore they’s full prepped for a gack off us, y’mean? Play on they pride, like. What the Fancy’s yelpin’? Ya gonna take an eye for an eye, Cuse, or y’any bit o’ spunk at all, like?’

Logan smiled.

‘You’re an exceptional child, Jenni Ching.’

She winced at the compliment.

‘Pretty to say so, H. O’ course the Cusacks shouldn’t be causin’ the likes a us no grief in the first place, y’check? Just a bunch o’ Rises scuts is all they is an’ they gettin’ so brave an’ lippy, like? Sendin’ runners into S’town? Why’s it they’s gettin’ so brave all of a sudden is what we should be askin’.’

‘Meanin’ precisely what, Jenni?’

‘Meanin’ is they smellin’ a weakness, like? They reckonin’ you got your mind off the Fancy’s dealins?’

‘And what else might I have my mind on?’

She turned her cool look to him, Jenni, and let it lock.

‘That ain’t for my say, Mr Hartnett, sir.’

He rose from the bench, smiling. Not a lick of warmth had entered the girl’s hand as long as his had lain on it.

‘Y’wan’ more Cusacks hurted so?’ she said.

He looked back at her but briefly – the look was his word.

‘Y’sure ’bout that, H? ’nother winter a blood in Bohane, like?’

A smile, and it was as grey as he could will it.

‘Ah sure it’ll make the long old nights fly past.’

Logan Hartnett was minded to keep the Ching girl close. In a small city so homicidal you needed to watch out on all sides. He moved on through the gloom of the Back Trace. The streets of old tenements are tight, steep-sided, ill-lit, and the high bluffs of the city give the Trace a closed-in feel. Our city is built along a run of these bluffs that bank and canyon the Bohane river. The streets tumble down to the river, it is a black and swift-moving rush at the base of almost every street, as black as the bog waters that feed it, and a couple of miles downstream the river rounds the last of the bluffs and

there enters the murmurous ocean. The ocean is not directly seen from the city, but at all times there is the ozone rumour of its proximity, a rasp on the air, like a hoarseness. It is all of it as bleak as only the West of Ireland can be.

The Fancy boss Hartnett turned down a particular alleyway, flicked the cut of a glance over his shoulder – so careful – then slipped into a particular doorway. He pressed three times on a brass bell, paused, and pressed on it twice more. He noted a spider abseil from the top of the door's frame, enjoyed its measured, shelving fall, thought it was late enough in the year for that fella, being October, the city all brown-mooded. There was a scurry of movement within, the peephole's cover was slid and filled with the bead of a pupil, the brief startle of it, the lock clacked, unclicked, and the red metal door was slid creaking – *kaaarrrink!* – along its runners. They'd want greasing, thought Logan, as Tommie the Keep was revealed: a wee hairy-chested turnip of a man. He bowed once and whispered his reverence.

'Thought it'd be yourself, Mr Hartnett. Goin' be the hour, like.'

'They say routine is a next-door neighbour of madness, Tommie.'

'They say lots o' things, Mr Hartnett.'

He lit his pale smile for the Keep. He stepped inside, pushed the door firmly back along its runners, it clacked shut behind – *kraaank!* – and the men trailed down a narrow passageway; its vivid red walls sweated like disco walls, and the building was indeed once just that but had long since been converted.

Long gone in Bohane the days of the discos.

'And how's your lady wife keepin', Mr H?'

‘She’s extremely well, Tommie, and why shouldn’t she be?’

A tautness at once had gripped the ’bino’s smile and terrified the Keep. Made him wonder, too.

‘I was only askin’, Mr H.’

‘Well, thank you so much for asking, Tommie. I’ll be sure to remember you to her.’

Odd, distorted, the glaze that descended for a moment over his eyes, and the passage hooked, turned, and opened to a dimly lit den woozy with low night-time voices.

This was Tommie’s Supper Room.

This was the Bohane power haunt.

The edges of the room were lined with red velvet banquettes. The banquettes seated heavy, jowled lads who were thankful for the low lights of the place. These were the merchants of the city, men with a taste for hair lacquer, hard booze and saturated fats.

‘Inebriates and hoor-lickers to a man,’ said Logan, and it was loud enough for those who might want to hear.

Across the fine parquet waited an elegant brass-railed bar. Princely Logan marched towards it, and the obsessive polishing of the floor’s French blocks was evident in the hump of Tommie the Keep’s back as he raced ahead and ducked under his bar hatch. He took his cloth and hurried a fresh shine into the section of the counter where Logan each night sat.

‘You’ve grooves worn into it, Tommie.’

Logan shucked loose from the sleeves of his Crombie and he hung it on a peg set beneath the bar’s rail. The handle of his shkelper was visible to all – a mother-of-pearl with markings of Naples blue – and it was tucked into his belt just so, with

his jacket hitched on the blade the better for its display. He smoothed down the mohair of the Eyetie suit. He picked at a loose thread. Ran dreamily the tip of a thumb along a superstar cheekbone.

‘So is there e’er a bit strange, Tommie?’

There was a startle in the Keep for sure.

‘Strange, Mr H?’

Logan with a feint of innocence smiled.

‘I said is there e’er a bit of goss around the place, Tommie, no?’

‘Ah, just the usual aul’ talk, Mr Hartnett.’

‘Oh?’

‘Who’s out for who. Who’s fleadhin’ who. Who’s got what comin’.’

Logan leaned across the counter and dropped his voice a note.

‘And is there any old talk from outside on Big Nothin’, Tommie?’

The Keep knew well what Logan spoke of – the word already was abroad.

‘I s’pose you know ’bout that aul’ talk?’

‘What talk, Tommie, precisely?’

‘Bout a certain... someone what been seen out there.’

‘Say the name, Tommie.’

‘Is just talk, Mr Hartnett.’

‘Say it.’

‘Is just a name, Mr Hartnett.’

‘Say it, Tom.’

Keep swivelled a look around the room; his nerves were ripped.

‘The Gant Broderick,’ he said.

Logan trembled, girlishly, to mock the name, and he drummed his fingertips a fast-snare beat on the countertop.

‘First the Cusacks, now the Gant,’ he said. ‘I must have done something seriously fucking foul in a past life, Tom?’

Tommie the Keep smiled as he sighed.

‘Maybe even in this one, Mr H?’

‘Oh brave, Tommie. Well done.’

The Keep lightened it as best as he could.

‘Is the aul’ fear up in yuh, sir?’

‘Oh the fear’s up in me alright, Tommie.’

The Keep hung his bar cloth on its nail. He whistled a poor attempt at nonchalance. Tommie could not hide from his face the feeling that was current in the room, the leanings and nuance of the talk that swirled there. Logan used him always as a gauge for the city’s mood. Bohane could be a tricky read. It has the name of an insular and contrary place, and certainly, we are given to bouts of rage and hilarity, which makes us unpredictable. The Keep tip-tapped on the parquet a nervy set of toes, and he played it jaunty.

‘What’d take the cares off yuh, Mr Hartnett?’

Logan considered a moment. He let his eyes ascend to the stoically turning ceiling fan as it chopped the blue smoke of the room.

‘Send me out a dozen of your oysters,’ he said, ‘and an honest measure of the John Jameson.’

The Keep nodded his approval as he set to.

City of Bohane

Kevin Barry

Translated from the English by Antoine Monvoisin

Note aux lecteurs : le texte d'origine fait un usage très créatif de la langue anglaise ; le traducteur aura donc cherché à reproduire ces effets.

1

La Nature du problème

Tout ce qui cloche chez nous vient du fleuve. Pas à discuter : la méchante infection dans l'air de la ville vient de ce fleuve. On parle de la Bohane là. Un flot trouble, malveillant, qui arrive en rugissant des terrains vagues de Big Nothin' et la ville en est le rejeton, elle en prend le nom : Bohane.

Lui suivait les docks et respirait cette douce infection. Il était minuit passé sur la promenade. Il y avait une régularité à son pas, marquée par le rythme lent et calme du cuir contre la pierre, et les lampadaires brûlaient dans l'incertitude d'un brouillard vert, la lumière d'un triste rêve. Le grondement du cours d'eau imitait pour Hartnett la clameur de son sang et alors qu'il passait la cour des marchands les chiens de garde ponctuaient son passage le long de la promenade de hurlements. Regardez les chiens : leur encolure ramassée, leurs yeux jaunes et livides.

Nous devinions son approche aux hurlements de ces chiens.

La polis le surveillait mais de loin, deux montés faisaient boire leurs pies à un abreuvoir de l'autre côté, à Smoketown. Tout frais revenus de la dernière scène de refroidissement.

– Mate-moi ça ? dit l'un. Ce fils de pute d'Albinos.

– Régulé comme une horloge, fit l'autre.

L'Albinos, pour certains, pour d'autres l'Élancé : il contrôlait le Hartnett Fancy.

Il bifurqua, quitta les docks et s'avança dans le Faubourg, l'infâme Faubourg de Bohane, le plus mauvais des labyrinthes, une toile de rues inconnues. Il avait cet air des Faubourgs sur lui, un poulain pimpant dans un Crombie bien propre, drapé en toute décontraction sur un costume de rital gris pâle, en mohair. Un dentier comme un cimetière vandalisé, chacun sa croix. C'était une paire de bottes portugaises cousues main qui claquait à chacun de ses pas, et la légère syncope, l'emphase, c'était de l'argent.

Fortune chèrement acquise... Oh les histoires qu'on ne racontait pas ici sur Logan Hartnett.

Des petits squares froids et humides s'ouvraient soudain, comme un tressaillement, et Logan les traversa. Toutes sortes d'étranges oiseaux traînaient dans les profondeurs du Faubourg au petit matin. Tous baissaient les yeux quand il passait, tous fixaient leurs pieds et leurs poches de picrate – on ne croise pas le regard de l'Élancé, pas si on a le choix. C'est curieux, mais il nous effrayait autant qu'on l'admirait. Il avait de la tenue, comme il se dit à Bohane. Ne manquait ni d'orgueil ni de droiture et ne regardait jamais à gauche ni à droite, toujours droit devant, les épaules balancées en arrière comme un général. Il parcourut l'arabesque des rues et ruelles qui composaient le Faubourg et toujours ce claquement, ce soulèvement, claquement, soulèvement du cuir portugais sur les pierres des quartiers pauvres.

Oui, Logan retrouvait son élément en arpentant ce labyrinthe.

Il ne craignait pas les ombres, il connaissait les fibres du lieu, la moindre rumeur, la moindre modulation.

Jenni Ching l'attendait sous les aubépines du square de la 98^e.

Il s'approcha de la fille, et son pas suffit : inutile qu'elle lève les yeux pour le remettre. Il lui sourit malgré tout, un sourire résigné, désabusé, comme pour dire : « Encore, Jenni ? » – et il s'assit près d'elle sur le banc. Il posa sa main sur celles de la fille : petites, délicates, meurtrières.

Des noms d'amants de saisons mortes griffés sur le banc.

– Eh bien, petit ?

– L'con refroidi à Smoketown était un Cusack des Barres, répondit-elle.

– L'a sans doute pas volé.

– Toujours comme ça avec les Cusack, non ?

Logan approuva d'un pincement de lèvres :

– Vrai, les Cusack ont toujours été tordus, petit.

Jenni venait d'avoir dix-sept ans, mais sa sagesse démentait cette jeunesse. Prudente qu'elle était et un sacré numéro dans son taille basse et ses talons compensés, ses cheveux auxquels elle avait fait des mèches ramenés en un chignon haut. Elle tira un mégot de cigare de la poche de nibard de sa combinaison blanche en vinyle, et l'alluma.

– J'ai assez de chats à mater de l'autre côté de la passerelle, M'sieur H.

– Je le sais ça.

– Les Cusack vont nous chier une de ces envies de revanche à la longue, tu me suis ? Une râtelée de ces branleurs qui descendent des Barres, c'est la dernière chose qui faut à Smoketown.

- Les Cusack ne sont jamais que des grandes gueules, Jenni.
- C'est autre chose que leurs gueules qui me fait peur, H. Se dit qu'ils ont le renfort de trois pâtés de maisons dans les Barres ces temps-ci, et qu'c'est trois pâtés de maisons pleins de pipes qu'ont l'esprit à l'embrouille, tu captes ?
- Que trop bien, Jenni.

La tradition voulait à Bohane que les familles des Barres Nord mènent des charges contre les familles du Faubourg. Faubourg que gérait Logan, il en était de sang et d'os, et restait le leader le plus acharné de la ville cette année-là. Mais voilà les Cusack qui se découvrent un peu de jugeote et montent en puissance dans les Barres.

- Qu'est-ce qu'on leur envoie, Logan ?

Jenni était perspicace. Héréditaire – les Ching étaient à Smoketown depuis des lustres. Smoketown, c'était putes, herbe, salons de fétichisme, bouges, ruelles pleines de drogués, « instituts de beauté » et restaurants chinois. Smoketown se trouvait de l'autre côté de la passerelle par rapport au Faubourg, de l'autre côté de la Bohane, et c'était le Hartnett Fancy qui régnait aussi sur Smoketown. Mais les Cusack voulaient que ça change.

- Je veux qu'on se les farcisse sans tarder, ma douce Jenni.
- Parce qu'ils vont nous descendre dessus quoi qu'il arrive, hein ?
- Oh, ça ne fait aucun doute, petit. Ils viendront aboyer dans le coin. Autant qu'ils le fassent sans traîner.

Elle réfléchit à cette idée.

- Avant qu'ils soient prêts à nous bouffer, tu veux dire ? Jouer sur l'orgueil, genre. Qu'est-ce que jappe le Fancy ? Ça va être œil pour œil ou t'as un reste de couille ?

Logan sourit :

– Jenni Ching, tu es une enfant exceptionnelle.

Le compliment la fit grimacer.

– Sympa, H. Sûr, les Cusack ne devraient pas nous causer à nous autres ce genre de chagrin en premier lieu, tu vois ? Juste une bande de bites des Barres, tout ce que c'est, et d'où y se laissent pousser du courage, de l'audace, hein ? Envoient des coursiers à Smoketown ? D'où ils trouvent les couilles d'un coup, ça qui faut savoir.

– Où tu veux en venir, Jenni ?

– Moi, je dis, ils sentent une faiblesse, savent que t'as pas la tête aux Fancy ?

– Et où j'aurais la tête ?

Elle posa sur lui un regard froid, Jenni, et le fixa.

– Pas à moi de le dire, M'sieur.

Il se leva du banc, en souriant. Pas une lapée de chaleur n'avait pénétré la main de la fille tout le temps qu'il y avait posé la sienne.

– Tu veux qu'les Cusack en chient plus ? demanda-t-elle.

Il lui jeta un regard bref par-dessus l'épaule. Pas d'autre réponse.

– T'es sûr de ça, H ? Un autre hiver rouge à Bohane, quoi ?

Un sourire, le plus terne qu'il pouvait décocher :

– Pourquoi pas ? Au moins les nuits seraient moins longues.

Logan Hartnett préférait garder un œil sur la jeune Ching. Dans une petite ville si vicelarde, faut faire attention de toutes parts. Il s'avança dans la pénombre du Faubourg.

Les rues des vieux immeubles y sont étroites, encaissées, sombres et les hautes buttes de la ville leur donnent une atmosphère étouffée. Notre ville s'est construite sur le flanc de ces buttes qui bordent et surplombent la Bohane. Les voies dégringolent vers le fleuve, c'est un cours noir et rapide au bas de presque toutes les rues, aussi noir que les eaux tourbes qui la nourrissent, et à quelques kilomètres plus en aval le fleuve contourne la dernière butte et rejoint là les flots murmurants de l'océan. Impossible de voir la mer depuis la ville, mais à chaque instant une rumeur d'ozone trahit sa proximité, une aigreur dans l'air, comme un enrouement.

Triste, comme seul peut l'être l'ouest de l'Irlande.

Hartnett, le boss du Fancy, descendit une allée, jeta un bref coup d'œil par-dessus l'épaule – toujours prudent – puis se glissa dans l'encadrement d'une porte. Il utilisa trois fois la sonnette de cuivre, patienta, et sonna deux fois encore. Il remarqua une araignée qui descendait le chambranle en rappel, apprécia la chute mesurée et progressive, se dit qu'il se faisait tard pour ce petit père, octobre, la ville toute de brun vêtue. De la précipitation à l'intérieur, la trappe qui recouvrait le judas glissa et fut remplacée par la perle d'une pupille – bref sursaut – le verrou claqua, se déverrouilla et la porte de métal rouge grinça – kaaarrrink! – le long de son rail. Il allait falloir qu'on la graisse, pensa Logan, alors qu'apparaissait Tommie La Garde: un navet qui avait du poil au torse. Il s'inclina et murmura quelques politesses.

– Me disais bien que ce serait vous-même, M'sieur Hartnett. C'est pas loin de votre heure.

– On dit que la routine est voisine de la folie, Tommie.

– On en dit de ces choses, M'sieur Hartnett.

Il adressa un pâle sourire à La Garde. Il entra, repoussa rudement la porte le long de ses rails, qui claqua derrière lui – kraaank! – et les deux hommes se glissèrent dans un couloir étroit; les murs rouges vifs suaient comme ceux d'une discothèque, le bâtiment réaménagé depuis longtemps avait d'ailleurs servi autrefois à cela.

Envolés depuis belle lurette les jours du Disco à Bohane.

– Et comment va votre dame, M'sieur H?

– Excellemment, Tommie. Pourquoi ça n'irait pas?

Le sourire de l'Albinos se figea soudain et terrifia La Garde. Lui fit se demander, qui plus est.

– Juste une question, M'sieur H.

– Merci, Tommie. Je n'oublierai pas de te rappeler à son bon souvenir.

Étrange, faussé, le voile qui recouvrit un instant ses pupilles, puis le passage crocheta, tourna, et s'ouvrit sur un repaire sombre où les messes basses faisaient régner la confusion.

La salle de Tommie.

Le repaire des puissants de Bohane.

Les murs de la pièce se bordaient de banquettes de velours rouge qui accueillaient des types lourds et joufflus appréciant le faible éclairage de l'endroit. Ceux-là étaient les marchands de la ville, des hommes au goût prononcé pour la laque à cheveux, la bibine corsée et les graisses saturées.

– Poivrots et coureurs de putes tous autant qu'ils sont, dit Logan assez fort que tous ceux qui le souhaitaient l'entendent.

À l'autre bout d'un joli parquet l'attendait un bar élégant au comptoir de cuivre. D'une démarche princière, Logan s'y

dirigea, la bosse au dos de Tommie La Garde qui se hâtait de doubler Logan pour se glisser sous le passe-plat témoignait du soin obsessionnel mis à polir les lattes. Il prit son torchon et se dépêcha de faire briller d'un nouvel éclat la section du comptoir où Logan s'installait tous les soirs.

– T'y fais des ornières, Tommie.

Logan se délesta de son Crombie et le pendit à un crochet installé sous le bar. Tous pouvaient voir le manche de son couteau – nacré avec des traces de bleu de Naples – rentré derrière sa ceinture juste comme ça, le pan de sa veste remontée pour laisser admirer la lame. Il repassa de la main le mohair de son costume de rital. Il pinça un fil qui dépassait. Passa rêveusement ses pouces le long de pommettes de superstar.

– Il y a des trucs pas clairs, Tommie ?

La Garde sursauta, aucun doute.

– Pas clairs, M'sieur H ?

Feignant l'innocence, Logan sourit.

– Je te demande s'il n'y a pas un peu de ragots dans le coin, Tommie ?

– Ah, juste toujours les mêmes vieilles histoires, M'sieur Hartnett.

– Ah, oui ?

– Qui en a après qui, qui évite qui, qui a quoi qui lui pend au nez...

Logan se pencha sur le comptoir et dit un ton plus bas :

– Et est-ce qu'il y a de vieilles histoires de l'autre côté de Big Nothin', Tommie ?

La Garde savait où Logan voulait en venir – la rumeur circulait déjà.

- Je suppose que vous êtes déjà au courant de ces histoires ?
- Lesquelles, Tommie, exactement ?
- Au sujet d'une certaine... personne qu'aurait été vu par là-bas.
- Le nom, Tommie.
- C'est juste des histoires, M'sieur Hartnett.
- Dis-le.
- C'est juste un nom, M'sieur Hartnett.
- Dis-le, Tom.

La Garde balaya la salle du regard, les nerfs à vifs.

- Le Gant Broderick, dit-il.

Logan trembla, comme une fillette, pour tourner le nom en dérision, et tapota du bout des doigts un rythme de cymbales sur le zinc.

- D'abord les Cusack, maintenant le Gant, dit-il. J'ai dû faire quelque chose de vachement crasse dans une autre vie, Tom ?

Tommie La Garde sourit et soupira.

- Peut-être même dans celle-là, M'sieur H ?
- Oh culotté, Tommie. Joli.

La Garde se rattrapa comme il put.

- La vieille peur vous prend, M'sieur ?
- Oh j'ai peur, n'y a pas de doute, Tommie.

La Garde pendit son torchon à un clou. Il siffla pour se donner tant bien que mal l'air décontracté. Tommie ne pouvait

dissimuler sur son visage le sentiment qui dominait dans la pièce, les tendances et les nuances des mots qui s'y mêlaient. Logan venait toujours le voir pour juger de l'humeur de la ville. La cité de Bohane pouvait être difficile à saisir. Elle a le nom d'un lieu insulaire et contrariant, et c'est vrai, nous donnons dans les accès de rage et d'hilarité, ce qui nous rend imprévisibles. La Garde fit nerveusement claquer ses semelles sur le parquet, et il se la joua désinvolte.

– Qu'est-ce qui vous soulagerait, M'sieur Hartnett ?

Logan réfléchit un instant. Il laissa son regard grimper jusqu'au plafond où les ventilateurs tournaient stoïquement en tranchant une fumée bleue.

– Envoie-moi une dizaine de tes huîtres, dit-il, et une bonne dose de John Jameson.

La Garde approuva d'un signe de tête en s'affairant.



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Emanuele Trevi

Qualcosa di scritto (2012)

Something Written

Publishing House **Ponte alle Grazie**

Biography

Emanuele Trevi was born in Rome in 1964. He is a writer and literary critic. Son of Mario Trevi, a Jungian psychoanalyst, he has written several papers and edited editions of the classics. He was creative director of the publisher Fazi and he also edited an anthology with Marco Lodoli. Trevi has written many critical essays on poets and writers, including a work on the poet Pietro Tripodo which won the Sandro Onofri Prize.

At the moment, he is working for Rai 3 Radio on the programme Lucifer. Trevi was in the jury of several literary awards and he has written for magazines including *Il Caffè Illustrato* and *Nuovi Argomenti*, and various national newspapers, including *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, and *Il Manifesto*.

Synopsis

Rome, in the early nineties. A writer in his thirties, cynical and naive, finds work in an archive, the Fund Pier Paolo Pasolini, where he meets a shrewish old woman called Laura Betti. The encounter with the mad heroine of this book, a spiritual heir of the Friulian poet, is an encounter with Pasolini himself. Meanwhile, a hidden story in *Petrolio*, the unfinished novel by Pasolini, becomes a guide to the disenchantment of our time and the mysteries of life. *Qualcosa di scritto* tells the story of a farewell to adolescence and an entire era, and explores the eternal secrets of life.

Qualcosa di scritto

Emanuele Trevi

Tra le tante, troppe persone che hanno lavorato per Laura Betti al Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini di Roma, tutte dotate di un loro pittoresco bagaglio di ricordi più o meno spiacevoli, credo di poter vantare, se non altro, una resistenza al di sopra della media. Non che mi fossero minimamente risparmiata le quotidiane e fantasiose angherie che la Pazza (così mi ero presto abituato a chiamarla fra me e me) si sentiva in dovere di infliggere ai suoi sottoposti. Le ero, al contrario, così irrimediabilmente *odioso* (non c'è una parola più esatta) da riuscire a stuzzicare tutte le corde del suo proteiforme sadismo: dall'inesauribile invenzione di nomignoli umilianti alla minaccia fisica vera e propria. Ogni volta che entravo nei locali del Fondo, in un tetro e massiccio palazzone d'angolo di piazza Cavour, non lontano dal fossato di Castel Sant'Angelo, percepivo in modo quasi fisico quell'ostilità animalesca, quella rabbia ingovernabile che iniziava a dardeggiare, come i fulmini a zig zag dei fumetti, da dietro le lenti dei suoi occhiali da sole quadrati. Seguivano immediatamente le formule di buongiorno. *«Buondi, zoccoletta, l'hai capito finalmente che è venuto il momento DI DARE IL CULO? O pensi di farla franca ancora per molto? ! ? Ma A ME non mi fai fessa, zoccoletta melliflua, ci vuole ben altro che una come te»* – solo l'erompere di una risata che sembrava provenire da una caverna sotterranea, ed era resa ancora più minacciosa dal contrappunto di un suono indescrivibile, a metà strada fra il barrito e il singulto, poneva fine a questa prima raffica di amenità. Molto raramente le valanghe di offese che si rovesciavano

addosso ai malcapitati erano riconducibili a concetti di senso compiuto. Come regola generale, del resto, la Pazza detestava il senso compiuto, in ogni sua forma. Non c'era strumento umano che nelle sue mani non si trasformasse in un ordigno pericoloso. E il linguaggio non faceva eccezione. Le sue tirate ruotavano sul perno di un epiteto offensivo, assaporato con voluttà e continuamente ripetuto, come se lì, nella pura formulazione dell'insulto, risiedesse il sugo del discorso. Se rivolto ai maschi, l'epiteto era regolarmente femminile. Anche le persone a cui voleva bene, e che stimava, dovevano subire questa specie di evirazione simbolica. Alberto Moravia, per esempio, al quale era molto legata, a un certo punto diventò «nonna», e non ci fu più niente da fare. Tutto il resto del discorso, una volta pronunciata l'offesa, era pura e semplice improvvisazione – un carcere piranesiano di malanimo e disprezzo, incurante di logica e sintassi. «*Zoccoletta*» – fin dai primi giorni, quella era stata la sintesi, la formula perfetta di ciò che le ispiravo. Numerosi e fulminei, gli aggettivi seguivano il sostantivo, come segugi sulle tracce di una volpe. *Zoccoletta* melliflua, vanesia, bugiarda, *fascista*. Gesuita, assassina. Ambiziosa. Quanto a me, non avevo ancora compiuto trent'anni, ma avevo già fatto a tentoni, come il prigioniero di Edgar Allan Poe, il periplo delle pareti, umide e buie come si addice a tutti i sottosuoli, del mio carattere. Che la Pazza non avesse tutti i torti, potevo ammetterlo abbastanza facilmente. A mandarla su tutte le furie, era la mia volontà di compiacerla, la mia ostentata mancanza di aggressività, e in definitiva quell'indifferenza che è sempre stata la mia unica difesa da opporre alle minacce del mondo. Non c'era dubbio sul tipo di dannati che si sarebbe volentieri incaricato di tormentare per l'eternità quella specie di mostro dantesco, circondato dal fumo delle sigarette che lasciava consumare nel

posacenere, con la sua mole sproporzionata e i capelli, di una terrificante tinta fra l'arancione e il rossiccio, annodati in un ciuffo che non poteva non far pensare, quando lo agitava, allo spruzzo di una balena, o al pennacchio di un ananas psicotico. Laura odiava gli ipocriti, e più in generale tutte quelle persone che, incapaci di esprimere se stesse, le apparivano *fasulle*, condannate a nascondersi dietro la loro maschera di cartapesta. Era questo che mi piaceva in lei, anche mentre ne subivo le conseguenze. Mi sembrava che, nascosta nei recessi di tutta quell'ostilità, ci fosse una specie di medicina, di insegnamento salvifico. E dunque, fin dalle prime settimane in cui frequentavo il Fondo, facendo presto esperienza di ogni genere di bufera umorale, dalle più lievi alle più gravi, avevo stabilito che il tempo che spendevo lì, all'ombra di quella Černobyl mentale, era tempo ben speso. Cos'era esattamente – una punizione che mi ero inflitto da me stesso per espiare qualche gravissimo peccato? un esercizio spirituale improntato al più rigoroso masochismo? A un certo punto, non ci potevano essere dubbi, la Pazza mi avrebbe licenziato, come aveva fatto con decine di altri (certi rapporti di lavoro erano durati non più di qualche ora). Ma io, per quello che era in mio potere, non avrei fatto nulla per andarmene. Il mio incarico, nemmeno troppo complicato, consisteva nel rintracciare tutte le interviste rilasciate da Pasolini, dalle prime, che risalivano ai tempi del processo a *Ragazzi di vita*, fino alla più famosa, quella concessa a Furio Colombo poche ore prima di morire. Una volta raccolto tutto il materiale, ne avrei curato un'edizione. Niente di trascendentale, a parte la fatica di farlo; e Laura era molto generosa in fatto di soldi. Le piaceva sganciare assegni, dopo averli vergati in un suo modo drammatico, trasformando ogni compenso in un dono immeritato, in un furto ai danni della sua grandezza d'animo, e in una

palese, inalterabile conferma di quella grandezza. Potendo, quegli assegni li avrebbe scolpiti nel marmo. Era anche molto abile nell'intercettare ogni tipo di finanziamenti pubblici, per sostenere tutte le iniziative del Fondo, e pagare un po' di personale fisso: un bravissimo archivista, Giuseppe Iafrate, paziente e distaccato come un bonzo tibetano, e un paio di ragazze che scorticava vive, ma che, senza nemmeno ammetterlo a se stesse, quasi finivano per volerle bene. Per quanto mi riguardava, prima o poi il licenziamento in tronco sarebbe stato inevitabile: ne avevo la certezza matematica. Il fatto è che Laura aveva delle idee tutte sue su come pubblicare quelle interviste di Pasolini. Erano pensieri folli e incomprensibili con cui mi affliggeva per ore, privi di qualunque utilità pratica. «Stammi a sentire, zoccoletta, queste interviste di Pier Paolo SCOTTANO, hai capito? Le hai lette. Lo capisci pure te. *Sco-tta-no*. E allora, in questo libro, tutte le parole devono VOLAR E, lo capisci cos'è *una forma che vola*? Devi farle volare, volare, volare». E io: sì Laura, sono proprio d'accordo, è quello che voglio anch'io, farle *volare*. Come aquiloni. In realtà, io quelle interviste volevo pubblicarle degnamente, e mai e poi mai avrei capito come avrebbero fatto a volare. Proseguivo sull'unica strada che ritenevo possibile. Di fronte al fatto compiuto – prevedevo – si sarebbe infine scatenata la catastrofe. E così avvenne. Nel frattempo, rintracciate tutte le interviste, le avevo sistemate in ordine cronologico, badando a eliminare le sviste e i refusi dei giornali, traducendone qualcuna dal francese o dall'inglese, e corredandole di lunghe note informative. Alla fine, avevo scritto un saggio introduttivo, in cui cercavo di spiegare come Pasolini, più di ogni altro artista dei suoi tempi, avesse considerato l'intervista come un genere letterario tutt'altro che minore e occasionale. Non era più possibile, arrivati a quel

punto, rimandare la resa dei conti. Per tutta la durata dell'ultima riunione con Laura nel suo ufficio la lama di un taglia-balsa, ben affilata, si agitò a pochi millimetri dalla mia giugulare. La catena degli insulti aveva raggiunto livelli di funambolismo verbale degni di un Rabelais. Capii quanto era esatta e letterale l'espressione *schiumare di rabbia*. Temevo da un momento all'altro di causarle un colpo apoplettico, di cui sarei stato in qualche modo responsabile. La povera cartella con il mio lavoro era finita, non senza la solita melodrammatica solennità, nel cestino della spazzatura. La minaccia di quella lama era impressionante, ma non pensavo che la Pazza sarebbe arrivata fino al punto di uccidermi o ferirmi – non era quel tipo di pazzia lì. A parte l'assalto all'arma bianca, avevo previsto tutto, ostinandomi a portare a termine il lavoro come meglio credevo. Dal momento in cui avevo cominciato a frequentare il Fondo, erano passati molti mesi, addirittura più di un anno. Lavoravo lentamente e per me si erano aggiunte delle altre mansioni, che avevano ritardato la cernita e la preparazione delle dannate interviste. Quello che terminava così bruscamente era stato dunque un periodo di tempo in tutti i sensi molto *istruttivo* – non saprei come altro definirlo – per me. Lo considero una specie di apprendistato. Tutti abbiamo bisogno di imparare qualcosa, e prima ancora di imparare ad imparare. Ma le uniche scuole davvero degne di essere frequentate sono quelle che non ci scegliamo e delle quali, per così dire, imbocchiamo la porta per caso; così come le uniche materie che ci conviene approfondire sono quelle che non hanno nemmeno un nome ben preciso, e tantomeno un metodo razionale di apprendimento. Tutto il resto, alla fine, è relativo. Laura era un libro di testo chiassoso e sgradevole da sfogliare, ma pieno di rivelazioni che, se restavano difficili da definire, non erano meno pungenti. E a questo

aggiungo subito, perché si tratta di un fatto fondamentale, la pubblicazione di *Petrolio*, che si abbatté sul piccolo regno di Laura in piazza Cavour come una folgore, come una manciata di polvere da sparo su un fuoco scoppiettante.

Something Written

Emanuele Trevi

Translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein

Among the many—too many—people who worked for Laura Betti at the Pier Paolo Pasolini Foundation in Rome, all of them endowed with a colorful store of more or less unpleasant memories, I believe that I can boast of, if nothing else, above-average endurance. Not that I was at all spared the extravagant daily persecution that the Madwoman (as I soon took to calling her, in my own mind) felt it her duty to inflict on her subordinates. On the contrary, I was so irredeemably *odious* to her (there is no more precise word) that I succeeded in plucking all the strings of her protean sadism: from the ceaseless invention of humiliating nicknames to real physical threat. Every time I entered the offices of the Foundation, in a dark, massive corner building on Piazza Cavour, not far from Castel Sant'Angelo, I sensed almost physically the animal hostility, the uncontrollable rage that flashed, like the zigzag lightning in a comic book, from behind the lenses of her big square sunglasses. The standard greetings immediately followed. “Good morning, little slut, did you finally figure out that it’s time to GIVE HIM YOUR ASS? Or do you think you can still get away with it? ! ? But you don’t fool ME, you sweet-talking little slut, it takes a lot more than someone like you”—and this first blast of amenities was ended only by the eruption of a laugh that seemed to come from a subterranean cavern, and was made more threatening by the counterpoint of an indescribable sound halfway between a roar and a sob. Very rarely could the avalanche of insults dumped on the

unfortunate victim be traced back to meaningful concepts. Besides, as a general rule, the Madwoman detested meaning, in every form. There was no human instrument that in her hands did not become a dangerously explosive device. And language was no exception. Her tirades revolved on the pivot of an offensive epithet, savored with pleasure and constantly repeated, as if the gist of the conversation resided there, in the pure formulation of the insult. If addressed to a male, the epithet was generally feminine. Even people she liked, and admired, had to put up with this sort of symbolic emasculation. Alberto Moravia, for example, to whom she was very attached, at a certain point became “grandma,” and there was nothing to be done about it. The entire remainder of the conversation, once the insult had been uttered, was pure and simple improvisation—a Piranesian prison of malevolence and contempt, heedless of logic and syntax. “Little slut”—that was from the start the essence, the perfect expression of what I inspired in her. Sweet-talking, vain, lying, *fascist* little slut. Jesuit, murderer. Ambitious. As for me, though I wasn’t yet thirty, I had already, like the prisoner of Edgar Allan Poe, groped my way around the walls of my character, which, as in all dungeons, were properly damp and dark. That the Madwoman was not completely wrong I could easily enough admit. What really infuriated her was my wish to please her, my ostentatious lack of aggressiveness, and, ultimately, the indifference that has always been my sole defense against the threats of the world. There was no doubt about the type of damned who would willingly take charge of tormenting for eternity that sort of Dantesque monster, enveloped in the smoke of the cigarettes she left burning in the ashtray, with her excessive bulk and her hair, of a terrifying reddish-orange hue, knotted in a tuft that inevitably made you think, when

she shook it, of the jet of a whale, or the crest of a psychotic pineapple. Laura hated hypocrites and, more generally, all those persons who, incapable of expressing themselves, appeared to her as *fake*, condemned to hide behind a papier-mâché mask. This was what I liked about her, even as I suffered the consequences. It seemed to me that, hidden in the recesses of all that hostility, there was a kind of medicine, a lesson leading to salvation. And so, from the moment I began going to the Foundation, where I quickly gained experience of every sort of temperamental storm, from the slightest to the most severe, I had concluded that the time I spent there, in the shadow of that mental Chernobyl, was time well spent. What was it, exactly—a punishment that I had inflicted on myself by myself to expiate some grave sin? A spiritual exercise imbued with the most rigorous masochism? At a certain point, there could be no doubt, the Madwoman would fire me, as she had dozens of others (some such relationships had lasted no more than a few hours). But I, as far as it was in my power, would do nothing to leave. My job, which wasn't very complicated, consisted of tracking down all the interviews that Pasolini had done: from the first, which went back to the time of *The Ragazzi*, up to the most famous, the one he did with Furio Colombo a few hours before his death. Once the material was gathered, I would assemble it into a book. Nothing exceptional, apart from the labor of doing it; and Laura was very generous when it came to money. She liked to tear off checks, after writing them in her dramatic way, transforming every compensation into an undeserved gift, something stolen from her greatness of soul, and a clear, unalterable confirmation of that greatness. If she could, she would have carved those checks in marble. She was also very skillful at getting hold of any type of public financing, to support all the

initiatives of the Foundation, and to pay a few regular employees: a great archivist, Giuseppe Iafrate, who was as patient and detached as a Tibetan bonze, and a couple of girls whom she flayed alive but who, without admitting it to themselves, ended up almost loving her. As far as I was concerned, inevitably, sooner or later, I would be fired: I was mathematically certain of it. The fact is that Laura had her own notions about how to publish those interviews. They were crazy, incomprehensible ideas, of no practical use, and she tortured me about them for hours. “Listen to me, little slut, these interviews of Pier Paolo are BURNING, do you understand? You’ve read them. Even you must get it. *Burn-ing*. And so, in this book, all the words have to FLY, you understand what *a form that flies* is? You have to make them fly, fly, fly.” And I: Yes, Laura, I absolutely agree, that’s what I want, too, to make them *fly*. Like eagles. In reality, I wanted to publish those interviews as they deserved, and I would never ever understand how they would be made to fly. I continued on the only path that I considered possible. The accomplished fact—I predicted—would trigger the catastrophe. And that was how it happened. In the meantime, having tracked down all the interviews, I had arranged them in chronological order, taking care to eliminate the mistakes and misprints of the newspapers, translating some from French or English, and preparing lengthy, informative notes. Finally, I had written an introductory essay, in which I tried to explain how Pasolini, more than any other artist of his time, had considered the interview a literary genre that was anything but minor and casual. At that point, I could no longer put off the reckoning. For the entire duration of my last meeting with Laura, in her office, the sharp blade of a box cutter quivered a few millimeters from my jugular. The chain of insults reached levels of verbal

tightrope-walking worthy of a Rabelais. I understood how precise and literal the expression “foaming with rage” is. I was afraid at any moment of bringing on a stroke, for which I would have been in some way responsible. The wretched file containing all my work ended up, not without the usual melodramatic solemnity, in the wastebasket. The threat of that blade made an impression, but I didn’t think the Madwoman would go so far as to kill or wound me—it wasn’t that type of madness. Apart from the assault of cold steel, I had foreseen it all, in my insistence on carrying out the work as I thought best. Many months had passed, more than a year, in fact, since I started going to the Foundation. I worked slowly, and other duties had been added, which delayed the collection and preparation of those damn interviews. What ended so abruptly had been, therefore, a period of time that was in all senses very *instructive*—I don’t know how else to describe it—for me. I consider it a kind of apprenticeship. We all need to learn something, and, before that, learn to learn. But the only schools that are truly worth attending are the ones we don’t choose, those whose thresholds we cross, so to speak, by chance; just as the only materials that we ought to study deeply are those which don’t have a precise name, and still less a rational method of being studied. Everything else, finally, is relative. Laura was a raucous and unpleasant textbook to page through, but full of revelations that, if they remained hard to describe, were no less penetrating. And to this I would immediately add, because it’s a fundamental fact, the publication of *Petrolino*, which struck Laura’s little kingdom in Piazza Cavour like a thunderbolt, like a handful of gunpowder on a crackling fire.



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Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

Šiandakt aš miegosiu prie sienos
(2010)

Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall

Publishing House **Baltos lankos**

Biography

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė was born in 1960 in Panevėžys, Lithuania. After finishing secondary school in Panevėžys, she graduated from Vilnius University in 1983 with a degree in Lithuanian language and literature. After that, she worked for a few years as a school teacher in her native region of north Lithuania. From 1987 to 1994, she worked as a journalist in Vilnius, for family and parenting magazines, and from 1994 to 1998 she lived in the USA, where her husband Giedrius Subačius was teaching at Chicago University.

She now lives in Vilnius with her daughter (a student of design at Vilnius Academy of Arts), where she is working at a government institution as a language editor.

Synopsis

These short stories, which can also be seen as semi-autobiographical essays, mostly deal with everyday occurrences, seemingly insignificant experiences and perceptions. Their sophisticated sensibilities reveal a rich existence, a deep sense of every quotidian moment. They are also very readable, devoid of any pomposity or exultation, often tinged with irony, dealing with such experiences as illness, physical fragility, loneliness, inability to pursue stable relationships, the burden of domestic chores, and so on.

"Writers are completely naked in their texts, even when they desire to conceal themselves under fantasies, such as the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, events from other lives, or the opposite sex," says Giedra Radvilavičiūtė. Some of the stories deal with the situation of a middle-aged woman, living with her daughter in a small flat in the Old Town of Vilnius; they look deep into everyday events, but at the same time the exquisite literary quality of the text contributes to a rewarding reading experience.

One of the segments in this book, 'The Allure of the Text' (which was included in the Dalkey Archive Press anthology, *Best European Fiction 2010*), lays out five criteria for a good literary work, which the author then goes on to illustrate in the unfolding story. Another story, 'Those Whom I Would Like to Meet Again: An Introduction', is a narrative reflection on a very diverse set of characters.

Šiandakt aš miegosiu prie sienos

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

„Susipažinkite: tie, kuriuos sutikti norėčiau dar kartą“

Būsiu praleidusi gerą gabalą pasakojimo galvodama, kaip atsitiko, kad šita moteris tapo geriausia mano drauge. Drauge, kurios kaip ir kitų, kuriuos norėčiau sutikti dar kartą, objektyviai aprašyti neįmanoma, nes tam trukdo meilė. Šitą prieštaravimą yra pastebėjęs ir Salingeris: „...rašau apie juos su ne-blėstančia meile (o šie žodžiai, man rašant, jau irgi tampa netikri), bet netvirtu talentu, ir šis nevienodumas, užuot pateikęs ryškų ir tikslų veikėjų paveikslą, beviltiškai gramzdina juos meilėje, kuriai talentas niekada neprilygs ir kuri, talentą pranokdama, veikėjus tarytum saugo.“

Galėjau viena tyloj praleisti dvi savaitgalio dienas, bet pasikviečiau ją čia ir įtariu, kad Salingerį teks dviem dienoms padėti ant palangės. Draugė buvo skaičiusi tik Zoščenkos apsakymus, ir tai neatidžiai. Ekspresyvieji jos žodžiai beveik visi buvo rusiški, nemokėjo jokios užsienio kalbos. Televizorių žiūrėdavo nuolat spaudydama nuotolinio valdymo pultelį, negaliu to pakęsti. (Eisim miegot, „Imtynininko“ nežiūrėsime, ir be to aišku, koks Rourke'as „sbornikas“.) Jos išlaidos buvo neadekvačios pajamoms, sakydavo, kad Dievas sukūrė pasaulyje per mažai pinigų ir ji jų pasiskolinanti iš velnio. Apie intymius dalykus kalbėdavo nejausdama ribos („Jei būdavo galima rinktis oralinį seksą ar karpį su drebučiais, rinkdavausi žuvį.“) Be pastangų laužydavo kalbos klišes, kurdama naujas prasmes („Pedofilai turi sėdėti kalėjime iki negyvos galvos.“) Kolekcionavo skelbimus nuo stulpų. Vertingiausias

eksponatas toje kolekcijoje buvo lentelė, kurią ji nuplėšė baseino persirengimo kambaryje: „Džiovintuvas galvos plaukams džiovinti.“ Šiais metais draugei turėjo keisti širdies vožtuvą. Ji laukė operacijos taip, kaip aš laikiu parduotuvėje pasikeisti per mažo numerio batus. Įsivaizdavo, kad mirs taip pat kaip jos senelis. Nuo širdies smūgio. Žaisdama pati su savim vakaro spindulių apšviestoj verandoj. Darže už stiklo kaip kompiuterio ekrane bėgioja kaimynų anūkai. Kibi ro vandenį suvirpina įkritęs šapas. Kur ne kur ant palangių priberta žieminių obuolių. Ant sofos guli trys cukinijų krokodilai ir nutukęs moliūgas. Lėtai lenkdama kelius ji įstrižai ima slinkti nuo šiaudinės kėdės, išsigandusi katė iš sterblės strykteli į amžinybę, ir pirštai atsigniaušdami paleidžia pasianso kortą.

Tokias cigaretes kaip draugės – „Parliament“ – Čikagoje rūkydavo vienas advokatas. Kiekvieną sekmadienį apsilankęs rudu kostiumu ir baltais marškiniais, su lazdele jis ateidavo į pseudolietuviško maisto restoraną. Kai sakoma, kad Amerikoje galima atrasti kiekvienos šalies kultūrą, visada patikslinu, kad ten galima atrasti kiekvienos kultūros surogatą. Pavaduodavau tame neva lietuvių restorane sekmadieniais dirbusią lietuvę studentę. Padavėjos sakė, kad advokatas bankrutavęs. Užsisakytos anties jis beveik neparagaudavo. Vyras pusvalandį paukštį pjaustydavo kąsneliais taip, tarsi kepsnyje būtų paslėptas žiedas su briliantu, ir nusivylusia veido išraiška užsirūkydavo sėdėdamas visada prie to paties staliuko „for smoking“. Vienąkart jis nebaigęs cigaretės pašoko ir iš kišenės pabėręs ant stalo dolerius išbėgo į gatvę stabdyti geltonų taksi. Buvo praėję jau kokie trys darbo toje kavinėje sekmadieniai, kai sužinojau, kad advokatas yra aklas. Norėčiau sutikti jį dar kartą. Norėčiau sutikti jį dar kartą taip, kaip kartais maga sulaukti filmo pabaigos.

Kitas visiškai aklas žmogus, kurį norėčiau sutikti, yra mano dėdė. Akti jis ėmė dar studijų metais, mokydamasis ispanų ir anglų kalbų Pedagoginiame institute. Instituto nebaigė, nes tada nebuvo diktofonų, kompiuterių ir audiolaboratorijų, prieinamų akliesiems. Jis nuvažiavo į Odesos klinikas ir ten oda, paimta iš apatinės lūpos, jam užlopė akies obuolį. Ligoninės palatoje gyveno armėnas, kuris neskirdavo svetimose kalbose giminės ir asmenų, kai eidavo atnešti vyno, sakydavo: „Nu, moja pošla.“ Kai vyno atnešti eilė atėjo dėdei, jis pasiklydo. Su viena užklijuota akimi ir išputusia lūpa. Apgriuvusio namo kieme už praviro lango stovėjo pusnuogė moteris, atsirėmusi į lango rėmą. Dėdė net pamanė, kad ten prasideda garsiosios Odesos katakombos. „Gal ta gidė buvo nuoga, – pasakojo jis po daugelio metų, – bet neatsimenu, kad žemiau palangės būtų matęsis jos gyvenimo centras. Kai iš jos išėjau, tai kitoj pusėj namo plytėjo dykuma, nepažymėta Ukrainos žemėlapyje.“ Dėdė nesinešiojo baltosios lazdelės ir vaikščiodavo gimtajame mieste greitai, viską regėdamas atminties akimis. Bet vienąkart jis apvertė ant tiltelio stovėjusį vežimėlį su vaiku. Vaiko motina kažkodėl išvadino jį impotentu, vežimėlis nuplaukė upeliu iki Nevėžio. Berniukas į krantą išsikabarojo ant gulbės nugaros, vėliau tapo miesto garbės piliečiu, dirba dabar Susisiekimo ministerijoje. Su dėde iki šiol keičiamės dovanomis. Paskutinė mano dovana jam buvo katalonės dainuojama „Bésame mucho“. Pagavau tą merginą po koncerto sename dvare. Papasakojau jai apie nebaigtą mokytiis dėdės ispanų kalbą ir ji net neišklausiusi istorijos iki galo padainavo jam tą dainą į mano mobilųjį telefoną. Tiksliau – jie dainavo kartu. Apšviesti telefono akinamai balti kataloniški dantys, o kitame krašto gale – dėdė visas: apsmukusi pižama, vilnonės kojinės, kambarys be šviesos. Šviesa tame kambaryje neatliko jokios funkcijos, muzika dėdei dabar reiškė tą patį, ką kitiems

šviesa. Kai man buvo treji metai, dėdė dar matė. („Nesijaudink, puikiai atsimenu, kaip pašviesėja arbata puodelyje, kai į ją įmeti citrinos.“) Jis fotografuodavo moteris, tas, kurios sendavo nepastebimai, šachmatus ant lentos, jei jie išsidėstydavo patu, šaligatvį išlaužiančius blyškius ūglius. Sušukdamas – *Hola!* – jis išmesdavo mane ant delno iki lubų, kurios tada man rodėsi kaip tėvų nuomojamas medinis dangus.

Iš visų viena ranka pakeliamų vaikų norėčiau sutikti dar kartą tik savo mažą dukterį. Iš egoizmo, kaip besąlygiškai mane mylėjusį žmogų. Virtuvėje Panevėžyje ji atsidarydavo spintelės duris ir žaisdavo pupomis. Žiūrėdama iš šono mėgdavau išardyti mergaitę detalėmis. Plaukai – iš močiutės (anos), šypsena – iš mano mažos motinos portreto, kaulai ir logika – iš tėvo, balsas – iš manęs, erdvinis mąstymas – iš Dievo. Kaip sakė vienas Woody Alleno filmo herojus – Dievas buvo dizaineris, nes viską sukūrė. Dukra nutarė sekti jo pėdomis. Dabar ji užaugo, kai stebiu ją iš šalies, nebeišsinarsto detalėmis. Įtariu, kad ji turi besąlygiškai mylintį žmogų. Gimimo dieną jis atsiunčia SMS, joje būna parašyta, kurioje Vilniaus vietoje užkasta dovana. Sidabriniu kastuvėliu miltams semti dukra išsikasa dėžutes, kuriose būna to vaikinio padaryti žaislai: žibintas su išgraviruotomis ant stiklo susikabinusių pelių ir katinų poromis, skėčiais, skirtais prisidengti nuo baimės, ir neegzistuojančio rojaus paukščiais. Karuselė... Ji sukasi, o vietoj krėslų aplink skrieja per pusę perskeltų graikinių riešutų kevalai, kuriuose cukruotus migdolus neša plastikiniai sklandytuvai. Kartais tose dėžutėse būna rašteliai.

Jei prisiminiau besąlygiškai mylinčius, reikėtų paminėti ir vieną vyrą iš savo biografijos. Jis mane traukė kaip psichiatras ligonį, o aš jį... Manau, kad būnant su manimi pasaulis jam atsiverdavo ryškesniais gabaliukais, toks, koks jis matosi tarp greitai lekiančio traukinio vagonų. Mūsų pora buvo be

perspektyvos, kiekvienas gyvenome kituose pasauliuose, darni pora turėtų gyventi šiame. Man patiko viena jo mintis: „Žemėje esu laimingas dviem atvejais – kai prisigeriu arba kai sugalvoju ką nors nauja.“ Kartą jis nuvažiavo komandiruotėn į Prahą. Po konferencijos su kolegomis išgėrė cisterną „Budvaizerio“, o turėjo kvailą įprotį, jei leidžia aplinkybės, miegoti nuogas. Kitaip nei man, nuogas kūnas jam nesisiejo su siela, tai tik viena iš medžiagų, sakydavo jis, kaip molis, asbestas ar šilkas. Naktį vienutėje mano draugas atsikėlė iš lovos, dviem žingsniais į kairę pasuko į tualetą, užsimerkęs grįždamas dviem žingsniais, deja, pasuko vėl į kairę ir paskui save užtrenkė duris. Atsimerkė ilgame viešbučio koridoriuje: blausiai apšviestas naktinių lempučių, kyšančių iš matinio stiklo lotosų, raudonas takas it sapno tęsinys driekėsi į niekur. Išeičių buvo nedaug. Pirma – pasibelsti į gretimą duris, kur miegojo konferencijos dalyvis iš ne visada mums draugiškos, bet tikrai krikščioniškos Lenkijos. Antra – susivynioti į taką ir kaip Kleopatrai pasirodyti registratūros antonijams. Pasilenkė, pačiupinėjo – takas buvo per kietas ir per ilgas. Moteris, tą naktį budėjusi prie registratūros stalelio, pamačiusi jį net nemirktelėjo, įdėjo į ištiestos rankos delną raktą (Prahos senamiesčio lankstinuką draugas pasiėmė nuogybei prisidengti).

O kai aš grįžau kartą iš Lenkijos, nešiau perone sunkią tašę. Nežinau, kodėl iki dabar nesu nusipirkusi lagamino su ratukais. Turiu dar vieną trūkumą – jei kas mane sunervina, reikėtų sakyti – sujaudina, atsimenu, kuo buvau tąsyk apsirengusi, nors po to įvykio būtų praėję net dvidešimt metų. Tempiau tašę geležinkelio stotyje ir staiga pajutau, kad nešulys kyla į viršų. Atsisukau – perone užmiegotomis akimis stovėjo tas vyras, kuriam būnant su manimi pasaulis atsiverdavo ryškesniais gabaliukais. „Tu čia ko nors lauki?“

– paklausiau. „Laukiu“, – atsakė jis žiūrėdamas man į akis. Aš irgi žiūrėjau į jį, bet mačiau savo dukart persisukusią kūno spalvos kojine, išsiklaipiusį per du pasienius veidą, beretę ant riebaluotų plaukų ir pleistrą ant dešinės kojos kulno. Ir jei toliau istoriją pasakotų tašė, perono įvykiai klostytųsi taip. „Vyras mane nunešė prie mašinos, įmetė į tuščią bagažinę. Moteris iškėlė vėl. „Nedurniuok, Kalėdos gi, pažiūrėk, kiek žmonių net prie troleibusų stotelės laukia, nuvešiu tave iki Panevėžio.“ Vyras liko sėdėti ant priekinės sėdynės pirštu sprigtuodamas kabantį pliušinį voriuką, o moteris pasuko į autobusų stotį. Laukdama bilieto eilėje ji padėjo mane ant pri-tryptų grindų ir užkrito ant viršaus – laukiau, kad iš knygų, dėžučių, skardinių ir batų sudėti mano šonkauliai suplėšys šonus. Tik aš žinojau, kad aname bėgių gale prieš penkiolika valandų ją išlydėjo irgi vyras. Perone jie bučiavosi. Matyt, tai, kad šitame bėgių gale netikėtai ją pasitiko kitas, ji laikė nuodėme.“ Pamačiau, kaip būčiau pasielgusi dabar. Tikriausiai su tuo žmogumi, kuriam nuogas kūnas nesisiedamas su siela atrodė tik viena iš medžiagų – molis, asbestas, šilkas, būčiau keliavusi į pragarą. Ar kas iš viso žino, kur prasideda bėgiai? Kur jie baigiasi ir kas laukia jų *gale*.

Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

Translated from the Lithuanian by Elizabeth Novickas

“Those Whom I Would Like to meet Again: An Introduction”

I will have missed a good portion of the story by thinking of how it happened that this woman became my best friend. A friend who, like others I would like to meet again, is impossible to write about objectively, because love gets in the way. Salinger isn't the only one who has noticed this contradiction; his epigraph is from Kafka: "...I write about them with steadfast love (even now, while I write it down, this too becomes false) but varying ability, and this varying ability does not hit off the real actors loudly and correctly but loses itself dully in this love that will never be satisfied with the ability and therefore thinks it is protecting the actors by preventing this ability from exercising itself."

I could have spent two weekend days alone in the quiet, but I invited her here, and I suspect I'll have to put Salinger aside on the window sill for two days. All my friend had ever read was Zoshchenko's stories, and that not very carefully. Her expressive words were almost all Russian; she didn't know any foreign languages. She constantly switched stations with the remote control while watching television; I can't stand that. (We'll go to bed without watching *The Wrestler*, and besides, it's obvious what a *sbornik*, a scumbag, Rourke is.) Her expenses do not correspond to her income: she used to say that God created too little money for the world and she was borrowing it from the devil. She talks about intimate

things without sensing the boundaries. (“If it were possible to choose oral sex or jellied carp, I would choose the fish.”) She effortlessly breaks language clichés, creating new meanings. (“Pedophiles should be put away in jail for death.”) She collects signs from posts. The most valuable item in that collection was a sign she tore from a swimming pool’s changing room: “Dryer for drying hair on the head.” This year they were supposed to replace a valve in my friend’s heart. She was waiting for the operation the way I’d wait in a store for them to exchange shoes a size too small. She imagined she’d die the way her grandfather did. From a heart attack. Playing with herself on a veranda lit by the evening’s rays. In the garden beyond the glass, like on a computer screen, the neighbor’s grandchildren run about. The water in a bucket stirred by a fleck falling in. Winter apples strewn here and there about the window sill. Three zucchini crocodiles and a fattened pumpkin lying on the couch. Slowly bending her knees she starts sliding sideways from the wicker chair, the startled cat leaps from her lap into eternity, and her fingers, relaxing, let go of the solitaire card.

The same cigarettes my friend smoked—Parliament—were smoked by this lawyer in Chicago. Every Sunday, dressed in a brown suit and a white shirt and carrying a cane, he would come to a pseudo-Lithuanian restaurant. When it’s said that you can find every country’s culture in America, I always correct this to you can find every culture’s surrogate there. On Sundays I used to substitute for a Lithuanian student who worked in that supposedly Lithuanian restaurant. The waitresses said that the lawyer had gone bankrupt. He would barely touch the duck he ordered. For half an hour, the man would cut the bird up into little pieces as if there were a diamond ring hidden in the roast, and then, with a disappointed look

on his face, he would smoke a cigarette, always sitting at the same ‘for smoking’ table. Once, without finishing his cigarette, he jumped up, and throwing some dollars on the table, ran out into the street to stop a yellow taxi. Some three work Sundays had already passed in that cafe before I found out that the lawyer was blind. I’d like to meet him again. I’d like to meet him again the way I sometimes want to get to the end of a movie.

Another completely blind person I’d like to meet is my uncle. He started going blind when he was still a student learning Spanish and English at the Pedagogical Institute. He didn’t finish at the Institute, because back then there weren’t any tape recorders, computers, or audio laboratories accessible to the blind. He went to a clinic in Odessa, and there they took some skin from his lower lip and patched it over his eyeball. There was an Armenian in the hospital ward who didn’t distinguish gender and person in foreign languages; when he went to fetch wine, he’d say: “*Nu, moja poshla.*” When uncle’s turn came to fetch the wine, he got lost. With one covered eye and a swollen lip. In an open window of the courtyard of the dilapidated house stood a half-naked woman, leaning against the window frame. Uncle even thought that the famous Odessa catacombs started there. “Maybe that guide was naked,” he said many years later, “but I don’t remember seeing the center of her life below the window sill. When I left her, a desert that wasn’t on the map of Ukraine spread out on the other side of the house.” Uncle didn’t carry a white cane and walked the streets of his hometown quickly, seeing everything with eyes of memory. But one time he knocked over a carriage with a child standing on the little bridge. The child’s mother for some reason called him an impotent; the carriage floated down the creek to the Nevėžis. The boy scrambled

up on shore on the back of a swan, later became an honorary citizen of the town, and now works in the Transportation Ministry. Uncle and I still exchange gifts. My last gift to him was a Catalan woman singing “Besame mucho.” I caught that girl after a concert at an old manor house. I told her about uncle’s unfinished studies in the Spanish language, and she, without even listening to the end of the story, made a gift of that song on my mobile telephone. More accurately, they would sing together. The blindingly white Catalan teeth lit up the telephone, and on the other end of the country is all of uncle: sagging pajamas, wool socks, and a room without light. Light in that room didn’t perform any function; music now means the same to my uncle as light does to others. When I was three years old, uncle could still see. (“Don’t worry, I still remember perfectly how tea turned light in the cup when you put some lemon in it.”) He used to photograph women, those who aged imperceptibly; chess pieces on a board, if they were in stalemate; and pale sprouts breaking through the sidewalk. Shouting “Hola!” he used to throw me on his palm up to the ceiling, which at the time looked to me like parents’ rented wooden sky.

Out of all the small children lifted on one hand, I’d like to meet only my small daughter again. Out of egotism, as someone who loved me unconditionally. In the kitchen in Panevėžys she would open the cabinet door and play with dried beans. Watching from the side, I liked to disassemble the girl into parts. The hair was from her grandmother (the other one); the smile was from my mother’s portrait as a little girl; the bones and logic were from her father; the voice from me; the spatial thought from God. As one of the characters in a Woody Allen movie said—God was a designer, because he created everything. My daughter decided to follow in his

footsteps. Now she's grown; when I look at her from the side I no longer dissemble the parts. I suspect she has someone who loves her unconditionally. On her birthday he sends an SMS; it includes the spot in Vilnius where her gift is buried. With a silver scoop for measuring flour my daughter digs out a little box containing toys made by that young man: a flashlight with hugging mice and cats couples engraved on the glass, umbrellas designed to hide from fear, and non-existent birds of paradise. A carousel... It turns, and in place of chairs, walnut shells split in half fly around, in which plastic gliders carry sugared almonds. Sometimes there's notes inside those little boxes.

If I remember unconditional lovers, I should also mention one man from my biography. He attracted me like a psychiatrist attracts the patient, and I him... I believe that when he was with me, the world used to open itself to him in brighter pieces, the way it looks through the cars of a train traveling at great speed. Our pairing had no future; we both lived in other worlds—a harmonious couple should live in this one. I liked one of his thoughts: “There's two instances when I'm happy on this earth—when I'm drunk, or when I think up something new.” Once he went to a conference in Prague. After the conference, along with his colleagues, he drank a tanker of Budweiser, and he had a silly habit, if circumstances allowed, to sleep in the nude. Unlike me, he didn't associate a naked body with the soul; it's just a material, he used to say, like clay, asbestos, or silk. During the night in his cell my friend got out of bed, in two steps turned to the left into the toilet, returning in two steps with his eyes closed he unfortunately turned to the left again, and slammed the door behind him. He opened his eyes in a long hotel corridor: dimly-lit night lights protruded from frosted glass lotuses, and a red runner,

like the continuation of a dream, stretched to nowhere. There weren't a lot of choices. The first—knock on the neighboring door, in which a conference participant from Poland, a country not always friendly to us but truly Christian, was sleeping. The second—wrap himself up in the carpet runner and show himself like Cleopatra to the registration Anthonys. He bent down and felt it—the runner was too stiff and too long. The woman working that night at the registration desk, without even blinking when she saw him, put the key into the outstretched palm (my friend took a brochure of Prague's old town to cover his nakedness).

And when I returned one time from Poland, I carried a heavy bag down the platform. I don't know why I still haven't bought a suitcase with wheels. I have yet another fault—if someone makes me upset, or I should say, agitated, I remember what I was wearing at the time, even if twenty years may have gone by since. I was hauling the bag through the railroad station and suddenly felt the pack rising upwards. I turned around—on the platform, sleepy-eyed, stood that man for whom the world opened up in brighter pieces being with me. “You're waiting for someone here?” I asked. “I am,” he said, looking into my eyes. I looked at him too, but I saw my beige stockings twisted around twice, my face bedraggled from two border crossings, the beret on my greasy hair, and the bandage on the heel of my right foot. And if the bag were to continue the story, the events on the platform continued thusly: “The man carried me to the car and threw me into an empty trunk. The woman lifted me out again. ‘Don't be silly. It's Christmas, look at how many people are waiting at the trolleybus stop, I'll take you to Panevėžys.’ The man remained sitting on the front seat, flicking the dangling toy spider with his finger, while the woman headed for the bus station. Waiting in line

for a ticket, she put me down on the muddied floor and fell on top—I expected my ribs, piled up out of books, boxes, cans, and shoes, to tear the sides. Only I knew that fifteen hours ago, on the other end of the tracks, a different man saw her off. They kissed on the platform. Apparently, she thought the fact that a different one unexpectedly met her on this end of the tracks was a sin.” I thought about how I would behave now. I probably would have traveled to hell with that person to whom the naked body, unrelated to the soul, appeared to be just one material of many—clay, asbestos, silk. Does anyone really know where the tracks begin? Where they end, or what’s waiting there?



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Gunstein Bakke

Maud og Aud – ein roman om trafikk (2011)

Maud et Aud – roman de circulation

Publishing House **Forlaget Oktober**

Biography

Gunstein Bakke (b.1968) was born in Setesdal, a valley in Aust-Agder county in southern Norway. He made his authorial debut in 2000 with the novel *Kontoret*. All his publications have been well received, but with *Maud and Aud* he has finally been recognized as one of the most original and interesting voices among Norwegian authors. Bakke's thought-provoking book combines poetic language, polyphonic narrative and astute analysis in a manner that stands out in contemporary Norwegian literature, and *Maud and Aud* has brought him much acclaim from literary critics as well as several nominations for Norwegian literary prizes. Bakke currently lives partly in Oslo, partly in Gotland.

Synopsis

Maud and Aud consists of short chapters that alternate between narrative flashes and poetic descriptions, containing reflections on traffic and the physical aspects of human life in a society where technology has become an increasingly important part of our bodies as well as our lives. At the centre of the plot is a family which is devastated by a car accident: the mother dies, the father can only live on supported by artificial body parts, and the twin sisters Maud and Aud survive with bodily and mental scars. As it turns out, the sister with the lesser physical injuries is the one who cannot shake off the trauma of her family's encounter with death, and she is drawn to the thrill of reckless driving, both in her job as a traffic reporter and secretly during nightly drives to scenes of recent car accidents. From this starting point, the author creates an essayistic net of reflections on thematically connected topics. These include how the first heart transplant operation performed in Cape Town in 1967 expanded our possibilities of fighting physical death, and how Princess Diana in 1997 was chased to her death as her car crashed in the Pont de l'Alma-tunnel in Paris. Furthermore, he dwells on how cars represent one of the greatest threats to human life in modern civil society, but they are still perceived as a smaller threat to man than wild animals hunted to near extinction, arguing that evolution has not caught up with the rapid development of modern civilization. In short, Gunstein Bakke touches on questions of existential importance in a country where oil fuels not only the cars, but also a large part of society's development – and possibly also environmental developments that may eventually pose new threats to human life.

Maud og Aud – ein roman om trafikk

Gunstein Bakke

Det er ein nylagd asfaltveg, rettare sagt: det er ei nylagd asfaltstripe som utgjør halve vegen. Den andre halvdelan er gammal og grå og ligg nokre centimeter lågare i terrenget. På denne køyrer bilane forbi i små kolonnar som først har danna seg som køar ved dei transportable og provisoriske trafikklysa.

Vegarbeidarane har reist heim, men asfalten er fersk og angande. Den feite massen er enno varm under fotblada til jenta som har gått ut på det svarte bandet og no set lette spor etter seg. For kvart steg luggar det når det klebrige stoffet gir etter og held att, gir etter og held att. Det minner henne om å ete kransekake. Ho har lyst til å ete vegen.

Når ho legg seg ned og vil lage ein engel, blir bereflata for stor. Overflata tek ikkje imot inntrykket av kroppen hennar, og rørslene med armane – vengeslaga – manglar veggrep. Først når ho reiser seg att, blir det ei lita dump under rumpa. Og blant trådar og strimlar av det tynne kjolestoffet som har rivna ned langs ryggen, kan ein om ein ser etter, under teikna på at den nye vegen har opplevd si første ulykke, ane at asfalten også har motteke mønsteret av blommar.

✱

Ei ulykke er som ein førekomst av ein sjeldan art. Ingen veit når eller kor det neste eksemplaret vil dukke opp, sjølv om statistikk gir leietrådar. Eigne team reiser rundt for å forske på ulykkene og forstå endå meir av korleis dei vart til, kva føresetnader dei trivst best under. Og kan hende oppstår

i kjølvatnet av ulykka nye vekstforhold, slik ein kjenner til dømes frå skogbrannar, kor det syner seg at det nede i jorda har funnest ein vent på desse apokalyptiske vilkåra; at herjing og utsletting så å seie har sine avkom i kim alt lenge før tida.

Sikkert er, for trafikkulykkas del, at det organiske og det inorganiske kjem kvarandre så nær. Det organiske har eit anna resonnement enn det inorganiske. Resonnementet til det organiske er ordna rundt opninga og overgangen, døden og kjønnet, alt dette som Jon Berre ein gong fann seg så blottlagd for. Det inorganiske høyrer under ei anna eksistensform, pasjonar vi ikkje har kjennskap til, for store og for gamle. Vi held oss til det vi er utleverte til. Vi held oss til lovene som gjeld for oss, og til det dei gjer med akkurat oss. Her skrår, for eksempel, ei beinpipe ut av kjøtet. Sei det heller slik: kjøtet har rivna langs beinet. No skal det ikkje spenne seg meir, berre kjølna og gradvis bli mold, dette er ein kunnskap som finst utan at nokon eig den, som derfor ikkje blir gløymd eller desavuert, og som såleis kan fortene å nemnast lov. Ein magesekk er ikkje ein magesekk lenger, men batteriet som har trengt inn i bukhola er framleis eit batteri, og syrene som lek ut frå begge, framleis etsande. Ein liten, acetylengrøn loge er til stades og leikar seg litt, eit alvebarn i skumringa, borte, så attende. Det luktar svidd nitrilgummi. Nokre skår har tilhøyrte ein skalle, ei krukke, ei ventetid, ei innstilling. Damp stig frå metall. Fluorplast har smelta saman med hud. Glas har kryssa kjøt, funne bein og bite. Funksjonar er malne til mjøl. Vinklar som krev at liv tek slutt, har oppstått.

To menn og ei kvinne, til saman tre heile og åtskilte kroppar, står og betraktar vraka. Det er berre å vente, seier den eine, han som har ringt 113. Mm, seier den andre. Dei er her snart, trur den tredje. Får eg, seier den andre då den tredje tenner ein sigarett. Den første takkar også ja når han blir bydd, sjølv om han slutta for to år sidan. Flammen frå lighteren, suget frå lungene,

ein krins blir slegen, eit samband. Der borte kjem det framleis lydar frå vraka, substansar som smeltar, knekk eller kjølnar. Ingen av dei kjenner nokon av dei som sit i dei to bilane som har møtt kvarandre. Dei trur i alle fall ikkje det, for dei kjenner ikkje att bilane. Det kan vere kven som helst, slik dei sjølv er kven som helst. Nett derfor har kroppane deira kjennskap til dei andre kroppane, dei i bilane og dei attmed seg, for artsintelligensen hevar seg i og over dei einskilde førekomstane. Urolege er kroppane, heile, men skremde: dei er i live, andre er ikkje det. For den einskilde handlar ei ulykke om ein og null, liv eller død, men for arten er det noko anna som har skjedd. For arten er dette ein skade. Dei tre er derfor både overlevande og vitne, sjølv om dei i trong forstand aldri var involverte i ulykka; hjarta bankar fortare, lungene inhalerer substansar som spreier seg i blodet og produserer ei dempa kribling i huda. Ørsmå glasbrot i tobakken gjer opptaket i blodet meir effektivt, tannkjøtet smertar, pusten går djup og hard. Varseltrekantar er sette ut. Om ikkje lenge vil her finnast brennarar, refleksvestar, sveisebriller, kraner, tener. Men dei kjem ikkje til å vilje sjå på, ikkje lenge. Dei kjem til å oppgi namna sine, telefonnummera, nikke med samanknipne lepper når det heiter at dei vil bli kontakta. Kvinna og den eine mannen kjem til å ligge med kvarandre. Impulsen er den same som får eit frukttre til å bere meir frukt om det blir behandla dårleg, om ein skader det, kuttar det, bryt av ei grein. Ukjende blandar kjønn, det er eit teikn på ein katastrofe, eit sunnheits-teikn. Livet vil vidare. Livet vil vere.

Pusten raser fram og tilbake mellom kroppane og kulda. Alvebarnet dansar over myrene.

Ein av tre kastar opp.

Seinare kjem andre bilar og sneglar seg forbi i fila som framleis er open. Nokre stansar, folk kliv ut og stiller seg utanfor

sperrebandet og ser på ei stund, men blir haua og vinka på og bedne om å køyre vidare, vil også sjølve fort komme vidare, for kva kan vel roa til redningsfolket tyde om ikkje at det ikkje finst redning. Flammene skjer kvite gjennom dagen: eit lys som kjem frå inst i stein og ikkje frå sol. Gjennom fre-singa ramalar og klankar det mot asfalten. Bitar av kroppar blir lagde i ulike presenningar og merkte, dei heilaste hamnar i replantasjonspisar. Dei arbeidande kroppane er kursa for å tole dette, likevel sprekk den kognitive treninga opp, og bogar av kvalme bøyer også desse mot jorda. Men dei rettar seg att.

Dei er menn som dreg på ferie til Tyskland, dei er rolege, fortvila og profesjonelle. Alle er dei oppgitt over vegstandarden. Bitterheita dei forvaltar, er ikkje personleg, og dei held ut det andre ikkje ville halde ut. Dei vil ha bort drivstoffavgiftene. Lukta av brent menneske blir sittande i kroppen minst ei veke, minst eit liv, likevel eller snarare av den grunn et dei entrecôte same kveld. Det er tale om ulike kunnskapar i kroppen. Det er tale om å klare seg. Dette er robuste menn, menn av kjøt, med bypass i vente og rettferdssans. Når skumringa fell, mørknar formene deira ved sida av flammene. Dei ser det slik at staten drep bilistar. Dei vil ha Jon Berre og hans likar i sving. Bilen er livet, bilen er heimen, byråkratane er døden. Dei er jordas salt, desse mennene, dei liker song og gitar og samrøde, veit ingenting verre enn islam og skattereglar, og dei senkar ikkje stemma anna enn medan dei byssar sine nyfødde i søvn eller skjer laus det som enno er att av deira medtrafikantar på jorda. Men dei bannar ein og annan gong om kvelden, og i lyset frå ein femtitoms skjerm på veggen fortel dei sine koner at ingen skulle behøve å gå under i sin eigen heim. Ingen jævel på denne jord.

★

Tidlege modellar imiterte kroppar, etterlikna musklar. Bilane bula, hadde finnar, flexa. Dei gleid ut i verda under store, flamboyante namn som Eldorado, De Soto, Barracuda. Sidan vart det omvendt. Allereie ved Zeppeliner-fabrikken var straumliner blitt eit ord og eit prinsipp; no følgde metallet etter. Rørsla og lovene til rørsla fekk avgjere. Krafta låg i det anonyme. I det kompakte. Ikkje i det som stakk seg ut, som fall ein i auget, men i det føyelege, samarbeidande. Det absolute fråværet av svake punkt: det som ikkje ga noko frå seg.

Eit forsvar sterkare enn angrep. Blikket strammar seg. Alle bilar blir like, under lovene.

Og livvaktene som omgir dei rike og raske, dei kjende og synlege, imiterer bilane dei eskorterer dei inn i. Solbrillene, dei sota rutene. Dei dresskleddde kroppane pansra med skotsikre vestar. Alle kraftkjelder er løynde, på eit vis som fortel at dei finst.

Livvaktene er ein kategori mellom mennesket og metallet, i dette liknar dei superheltar, men til skilnad frå desse har dei ikkje namn: mindre enn vanlege dødelege så vel som vanlege udødelege, eig dei eigen identitet. Krafta ligg i det anonyme. Avskrekkinga kviler i det namnlause. På språket dei snakkar, er "Kan eg hjelpe Dykk" eit utvitydig trugsmål. Det ulastelege ved framferda deira, fråværet av evne til å gjere eit unntak, har sin grunn. For svart smerte finst alltid like innved, svart smerte og brent kjøt, brotne grenser, broten straum. Lik geistlege veit dei at å opne for det menneskelege vil sleppe helvete laus. Og kjem ein derfrå i live, dess verre. Ei livvakt som overlever, er skyldig. Ei slik livvakt får eit namn, blir kjend. Trevor Rees-Jones må bøte for dette med andletet sitt. Til og med kirurgen som opererer han, blir kjend. Den døde prinsessa avgir ein glans som langsamt, berre langsamt falmar, medan den opplyser ovalane kring den smadra sarkofagen.

Eg har aldri sett nokon overleve så maltraktert. Eg laut sette han saman etter fotografi, men eg er berre ein maxillofacial kirurg. Eg er ikkje Gud.

Berre Gud kan gjere han til den same.

Maud et Aud – roman de circulation

Gunstein Bakke

Translated from the Norwegian by Aude Pasquier

C'est une route d'asphalte qui vient d'être posée, ou plus exactement : une bande d'asphalte qui vient d'être posée et recouvre la moitié de la chaussée. L'autre, quelques centimètres plus bas, est vieille, grise. Dessus roulent de petites colonnes de voitures, comme des queues, qui se sont formées aux feux de signalisation provisoires et mobiles.

Les ouvriers sont rentrés chez eux, mais l'asphalte est frais et odorant. Sa masse épaisse est encore chaude sous la plante des pieds de la petite fille sortie marcher sur ce ruban noir, qui laisse maintenant de légères traces derrière elle. A chaque pas, ça vacille lorsque la matière collante cède et tient bon, cède et tient bon. Ça lui rappelle quand elle mange des *kransekaker*, avec leurs couronnes craquantes empilées. Elle a envie de manger la route.

Quand elle s'allonge pour faire une silhouette d'ange, la surface porteuse est trop grande. Elle n'accueille pas l'empreinte de son corps, et les mouvements de ses bras – les battements d'ailes – ne trouvent pas prise sur le bitume. Ce n'est que lorsqu'elle se relève que se forme un petit creux sous ses fesses. Et parmi les fils et les bandelettes déchirés dans le fin tissu du dos de sa robe, on peut, si on regarde bien, sous les signes qui montrent que la nouvelle route a connu son premier accident, deviner que l'asphalte a également reçu l'empreinte de fleurs.

*

Un accident est un événement d'une espèce rare. Personne ne sait ni où, ni quand surviendra le prochain exemplaire, bien que les statistiques procurent quelques fils conducteurs. Des équipes spécialisées parcourent le monde afin de les étudier et de comprendre plus en détail comment ils se sont produits, quelles sont les conditions idéales pour qu'ils s'épanouissent. Il se peut que soient mises à jour, à la suite de l'accident, de nouvelles prédispositions favorables à leur développement, comme pour les feux de forêt par exemple, lorsqu'il s'avère que sous terre, ces conditions apocalyptiques étaient attendues ; ravages et anéantissement se trouvaient pour ainsi dire en germe depuis longtemps.

Ce qui est sûr, c'est qu'en ce qui concerne les accidents de la route, l'organique et l'inorganique en viennent à se toucher de près. L'organique a un raisonnement autre que l'inorganique. Le raisonnement de l'organique s'ordonne autour d'ouverture et passage, mort et sexe ; tout ce à quoi, à une époque, Jon Berre s'est trouvé largement exposé. L'inorganique appartient à une autre forme d'existence, à des passions inconnues de nous, trop grandes, trop anciennes. Nous, nous nous en tenons à ce à quoi nous avons été livrés. Aux règles qui valent pour nous, aux effets qu'elles ont sur nous et nous seuls. Ici, par exemple, se dresse hors de la chair un tibia. Disons plutôt les choses ainsi : la chair s'est déchirée le long de l'os. Elle ne se contractera plus. Elle va tout simplement refroidir et graduellement devenir poussière, c'est un savoir qui existe sans appartenir à personne, qui pour cette raison n'est ni oublié, ni désavoué, et mérite donc l'appellation de loi. Ici, un estomac n'est plus estomac ; en revanche, la batterie qui s'est forcée un passage dans la cavité abdominale en est toujours une, et les acides qui s'échappent des deux poursuivent leur processus d'oxydation. Là, une flammèche vert acétyle batifole, enfant

elfe dans l'obscurité, loin, tellement en retrait. Ça sent le caoutchouc nitrile brûlé. Quelques éclats ayant appartenu à un crâne, une cruche, une attente, un agencement. Humide chemin de métal. Polymères fluorés fondus avec la peau. Du verre a traversé de la chair, trouvé des os, et mordu. Des fonctions ont été réduites en farine. Des angles exigeant que la vie prenne fin se sont formés.

Deux hommes et une femme, trois corps au total, entiers et distincts, considèrent l'épave. Il n'y a plus qu'à attendre, dit l'un, celui qui a appelé le 113. Mhh, dit le deuxième. Ils seront là dans pas longtemps, pense le troisième. Je peux, demande le deuxième lorsque le troisième allume une cigarette. Le premier accepte lui aussi quand on le lui propose, même s'il a arrêté depuis deux ans. Flamme du briquet, inspiration dans les poumons, un cercle se forme, un lien. Des bruits montent encore de la carcasse là-bas, substances qui fondent, craquent ou refroidissent. Aucun d'entre eux ne connaît les passagers des deux voitures qui se sont rencontrées. Du moins, ils ne croient pas, car ils ne reconnaissent pas les véhicules. Il peut s'agir de n'importe qui, de la même manière qu'eux aussi sont n'importe qui. C'est justement pour ça que les corps des autres, dans la voiture, ainsi que les corps voisins, sont familiers aux leurs: l'intelligence de l'espèce s'élève au sein des occurrences individuelles – et au-dessus d'elles. Inquiets sont les corps, entiers, mais apeurés: ils sont en vie, d'autres non. Pour l'individu, un accident, c'est une affaire de un ou de zéro, de vie ou de mort, mais pour l'espèce, c'est autre chose qui s'est passé. Pour l'espèce, c'est une blessure. Les trois sont donc à la fois survivants et témoins, même s'ils n'ont jamais été, au sens strict, directement impliqués dans l'accident: le cœur bat plus vite, les poumons inhalent des substances qui se diffusent dans le sang et produisent un chatouillement diffus

sous la peau. De minuscules éclats de verre dans le tabac rendent l'assimilation sanguine plus efficace, les gencives sont douloureuses, la respiration profonde, brutale. On installe le triangle de signalisation. Dans peu de temps arriveront brûleurs, vestes réfléchissantes, lunettes de protection, grues, écarteurs et cisailles hydrauliques. Mais ils ne voudront pas regarder, non, plus regarder. Ils donneront noms et numéros de téléphone et acquiesceront, lèvres pincées, quand on leur dira qu'on prendra contact avec eux. La femme fera l'amour avec l'un des hommes. C'est la même impulsion qui pousse l'arbre fruitier à produire encore plus de fruits s'il est maltraité, qu'on l'abîme, l'entaille, lui coupe une branche. Quand des inconnus mêlent leurs sexes, c'est signe de catastrophe, signe de santé. La vie veut continuer. La vie veut vivre.

Le souffle racle des allers et retours entre les corps et le froid. L'enfant elfe danse au-dessus des marais.

Un sur trois vomit.

Plus tard arrivent d'autres voitures qui passent à une allure d'escargot sur la file restée ouverte à la circulation. Certains s'arrêtent, des gens descendent, s'immobilisent devant les rubans de signalisation et observent un moment, mais on les hèle, leur fait signe de poursuivre leur route, eux aussi veulent vite s'en aller, car que peut bien indiquer le calme des équipes de sauveteurs sinon qu'il n'y a rien à sauver. Les flammes sont blanches dans le jour : une lumière venue de l'intérieur de la pierre, pas du soleil. A travers le fraissage, ça chute et ça se répercute sur l'asphalte. On met des morceaux de corps sous différents tarps étiquetés, les plus entiers finissent dans des sacs à transport de greffons. Les corps au travail ont reçu des cours pour encaisser ça ; néanmoins, l'entraînement cognitif se fissure et des vagues de malaise les font plier eux aussi contre la terre. Mais ils se reprennent.

Ce sont des hommes qui partent en vacances en Allemagne, ils sont calmes, découragés et professionnels. Tous préoccupés par l'état de la route. L'amertume qu'ils ravalent n'est pas personnelle, et ils supportent ce que d'autres n'auraient pas supporté. Ils veulent supprimer les taxes sur les carburants. L'odeur d'être humain brûlé restera dans leur corps au moins une semaine, au moins une vie, pourtant – ou plutôt : pour cette raison – ils ont mangé une entrecôte le soir-même. Le corps possède différentes compétences. Il s'agit de s'en sortir. Ce sont des hommes robustes, des hommes de chair, sur liste d'attente pour une dérivation gastrique et avec le sens de l'équité. Lorsque la nuit tombe, leurs formes s'assombrissent à côté des flammes. Voici comment ils voient la chose : l'Etat a tué des automobilistes. Ils veulent que Jon Berre et ses semblables restent dans la danse. La voiture, c'est la vie, la voiture, c'est la maison, les bureaucrates, c'est la mort. Ces gens sont le sel de la terre, ils aiment les chansons, la guitare et les conversations, ne connaissent rien de pire que l'islam et la loi fiscale et ils ne baissent la voix que lorsqu'ils bercent leurs nouveaux-nés ou détachent ce qui reste au sol de leurs collègues automobilistes. Mais le soir venu, ils poussent un ou deux jurons, et à la lumière d'un écran de cinquante pouces au mur, ils déclarent à leur femme que personne ne devrait succomber dans sa propre maison. Aucun pauvre diable sur terre ne mérite ça.

★

Les modèles d'avant imitaient des corps, ressemblaient à des muscles. Les voitures étaient gonflées, avaient des ailerons, roulaient des mécaniques. Elles se coulaient dans le monde sous de grands noms flamboyants tels qu'Eldorado, De Soto, Barracuda. Ensuite, ç'a été l'inverse. Dès les usines

de zeppelins, le carénage était devenu un mot et un principe ; par la suite, le métal a suivi. C'étaient les flux et les lois de la dynamique qui comptaient. La puissance résidait dans l'anonyme. Le compact. Pas dans ce qui se distinguait ou attirait l'œil, mais dans le docile, ce qui coopérait. L'absence totale de points faibles : ce qui ne lâchait rien.

Une défense plus solide que l'attaque. La tôle s'affine. Toutes les voitures deviennent les mêmes, soumises à ces lois.

Et les gardes du corps qui entourent les riches et pressés, les célébrités en vue, imitent les voitures dans lesquelles ils les escortent. Lunettes de soleil, vitres teintées. Corps costumés carapacés dans des gilets pare-balles. Toutes les sources de puissance cachées, d'une manière qui montre qu'elles existent.

Les gardes du corps appartiennent à une catégorie entre l'homme et le métal ; en cela, ils ressemblent aux super-héros, mais à la différence de ces derniers, ils ne portent pas de nom : ils possèdent encore moins d'identité que les mortels extraordinaires ou les immortels ordinaires. La puissance réside dans l'anonymat. L'effarouchement dans l'innommé. Dans la langue qu'ils parlent, « Est-ce que je peux vous aider » est une menace sans équivoque. Leur comportement irréprochable, leur incapacité à faire une exception a ses raisons. Car la douleur noire est toujours tapie tout près, douleur noire et chair brûlée, frontières forcées, carène brisée. A l'instar du clergé, ils savent que laisser entrer l'humain signifie donner libre cours à l'enfer. Et si l'un d'eux revient vivant, c'est encore pire. Un garde du corps qui survit est coupable. Un tel garde du corps reçoit un nom, devient célèbre. Trevor Rees-Jones en a payé le prix de son visage. Même le chirurgien qui l'opère devient célèbre. La princesse morte irradie un éclat qui, lentement, lentement seulement, se ternit, et illumine les ovales entourant le sarcophage défoncé.

Jamais je n'ai vu un rescapé aussi ravagé. Je devrais le reconstituer d'après les photos, mais je ne suis qu'un chirurgien maxillo-facial. Je ne suis pas Dieu.

Seul Dieu pourrait le faire redevenir le même.



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Piotr Paziński

Pensjonat (2009)

Boarding House

Publishing House **Wydawnictwo Nisza**

Biography

Piotr Paziński, born in 1973, is the author of three books: a monograph on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a subjective guide tracing the footsteps of Joyce's Dublin, and the novel *Pensjonat*, published in 2009 by the small Nisza Publishing House. For this novel, he received the Paszport Polityki, the cultural award of the Polish publication *Polityka*. Paziński lives in Warsaw, where he works as the chief editor of the Jewish magazine *Midrash*, and is working on a book of short stories.

Synopsis

This book from a small publisher has gained considerable popularity and brought the author, Piotr Paziński, a prestigious prize from the magazine *Polityka*.

On the surface, the plot of *Pensjonat* is fairly straightforward, describing a day trip to a boarding house outside Warsaw by a young man. As a small boy, he often spent time there with his granny, and he now encounters several aged guests who remember him as a child. But it is no ordinary boarding house: the residents are Jews who survived the Holocaust, and so everything that occurs here is like a dream about the past, a summoning-up of ghosts, a resurrection of not just people but also events, debates and ideological arguments from long ago.

Thus the plot only appears to be simple, but in fact it is set on several time scales and is bursting with typically Jewish anecdotes and parables. The past meets the present in the book – the old people see the past as something so close as to be almost within reach, but their recollections are also distorted by their obsessions or gaps in memory. They are the last living witnesses to the pre-war world of the Polish Jews, and the author shows in what form the Jewish tradition exists in Poland today. The book has an atmosphere full of warmth and gentle irony. It paints sensually rich images, and at the same time shows the diversity of the Jewish heritage: on the one hand it is a dialogue between different fates, and on the other it is an endless dispute about the ultimate questions, about the existence or non-existence of God, and about the issues facing the Jews. This dispute permeates the everyday world in a comical way, but provides meaning even when it is going through drastic changes, and most of the people taking part in the argument are dying. At that point it is taken up by the survivors, who resurrect the dead as partners in the debate.

Pensjonat

Piotr Paziński

Hol i jadalnia trwały bezludne w półmroku oczekiwania na wieczór. Tylko ze słabo oświetlonego biura obok świetlicy dobywał się stukot maszyny do pisania – znak, że życie w pensjonacie nie wygasło jeszcze do cna. Kierownik wypełnia codzienne obowiązki. Intendentura, media, produkty, środki czystości, żarówki wymienić na drugim piętrze. Pukanie wytrąciło go ze skupienia.

– Można?

– Proszę.

– Miałem się zjawić – zacząłem niepewnie.

– A, tak... – kierownik spojrzał w moją stronę nieufnie.

– No właśnie.

– Zaraz, zaraz – zerknął w rozpiskę gości. – Co my tu dla pana mamy? Tak... Dobrze. Na jak długo? Zechce pan tutaj podpisać – przysunął księgę meldunkową. – Dobrze. I data. Dzisiaj czwartek. Porządek musi być.

Zapadł się w fotelu.

– Pan, jeśli wolno spytać, ma – zawahał się, jakby starał się znaleźć słowo, które możliwie najlepiej wyrażałoby jego ciekawość – coś wspólnego z...

– Tak.

Odetchnął z ulgą.

– Co w Warszawie? Wie pan, my tutaj żyjemy trochę jak w pustelni. Zdani na łaskę i niełaskę przybyszów, z dala od tego

całego tam kołowrotka. Kombinatorzy, każdy zgarnia pod siebie, nie myśli o innych. Uważają się za nie wiadomo co! Ale nic. Pan pewnie zmęczony?

– Nie bardzo.

Siedzieliśmy przez chwilę w milczeniu, mierząc się wzrokiem. Kierownik ośrodka i jego kancelaria. Ośrodek. Szumna nazwa. Dawniej mówiło się „pensjonat”, ale „pensjonat” to zbyt burżuazyjne. Birkat haBajt, błogosławieństwo dla domu, wypisane na ozdobnym kartoniku, zaraz nad biurkiem. Niechaj w tym domu zagoszcą radość i pokój. Kiedyś tego nie było. To zamiast portretu Icchaka Lejbusza Pereca. A może to był Szolem Alejchem? Poważne twarze. Sami najwięksi, klasycy literatury jidysz, przeniesieni na półpiętro.

– Chodźmy jeść – zaprosił. – Kolacja czeka. Inni już zjedli, późno jest. Wolą wcześniej, o szóstej. Żeby zdążyć odpocząć przed dziennikiem. Dziewiętnasta trzydzieści, święta godzina. Gdyby jakiś rabin robił o tej porze nabożeństwo, to miałby tłum. Tyle że wolą siedzieć przed telewizorami. Taka modlitwa, przynajmniej nikt Panu Bogu głowy nie zawraca. Zresztą był tutaj rabin, przed laty, z Ameryki przyjechał. Spotkał się z nimi i, wie pan, w ogóle go słuchać nie chcieli. Co im tam rabin, tutaj każdy ma się za rabina. A kobiety za rebecn. A bo to problem? W tym pokoleniu? Ale pozapominali, tyle czasu minęło. Odkąd zamontowaliśmy telewizję w pokojach, pojawiają się tylko na posiłki albo i to nie. Świetlica to przeszłość.

Świetlica, z niezdnym freskiem, zaraz za jadalnią. Wydała mi się salą balową, tak ją nazywałem. Oddzielona ciężkimi, półokrągłymi drzwiami. Kryształ wprawiony w drewno. Trudno zajrzeć, w środku zawsze panował sakralny półmrok. Najbardziej tajemnicze miejsce w domu. Dla dorosłych, ale

mogłem przychodzić na dobranocki. Przed dziennikiem. Śnieżny ekran kolorowego telewizora, którego nikt nie umiał wyregulować. Siedzę sam w ciemnej sali, a obok, w wyścielonym, pluszowym fotelu, poświstuje pan Chaim. Stary mądry pan Chaim! Wszyscy do niego chodzili, dawał rady każdemu, kto o to poprosił. W ciągu dnia świetlica wypełniała się gwarem. Czarny fortepian, kącik bridżowy, zeks un zechcyg, co nowego w „Fołks Sztyrne”? Polityka, książki, Rudnicki coś nowego napisał. Przedstawienia w Teatrze. Za Idy Kamińskiej bywało lepiej. Zawsze kiedyś bywało lepiej, tak jest świat urządzony.

Wszystko oglądane przez kryształowe szyby. Głowy, jedna przy drugiej, na rozkładanych klubowych krzeselkach, słuchają odczytu. Wysoki pan stoi naprzeciw nich, coś objaśnia. Ręce uniesione ku górze, mocno gestykuluje. Błyszczą mu oczy. Klamka na wysokości głowy, a może i wyżej. Wiele lat później bal sylwestrowy. Sala balowa, teraz już w tej właśnie funkcji, obsypana confetti i papierowymi serpentynami. Baloniki na linkach zawieszone nad jadalnią, stoły zsunięte razem, przykryte białym obrusem. Ozdobne suknie i ciemne dwurzędówki. Wódka ze sklepu, brakuje orkiestry, ale poza tym jak na dansingu. I jeszcze raz sala balowa, nowe czasy. Prowizoryczna synagoga na obozie młodzieżowym. Święta arka zrobiona z szafki osłoniętej firanką. Łapanka do minianu na poranną modlitwę. Budzą mnie po ósmej, zwleczony z łóżka stąпам jak lunatyk. Bez dziesięciu Pan Bóg nie wysłucha tych trzech, którzy pragną, aby ich wysłuchał. Zimno, choć lato, siedzę skurczony z tyłu, próbując nadążyć za prowadzącym. Sacrum jakoś się ulotniło.

Odkleiłem nos od szyby. Zamknięte, nie można wejść.

W jadalni zapalono kinkiety. Przez pięć werandowych okien do środka zaglądał już tylko mrok. Kierownik wskazał miejsce przy służbowym stole. Milcząca kelnerka ustawiła talerze i koszyk z pieczywem. Ciężka biała zastawa, dzbanki do kawy z grubej porcelany. Przyprawy w zestawie obowiązkowym: solniczka, pieprzniczka, maggi i ocet w miniaturowych karafkach z grubego szkła. Maggi świetne do rozgniecionych kartofli. Do czego ocet? Do kotletów schabowych? Niekoszerny ośrodek, chłopskie, stołówkowe jedzenie. Nie uświadczysz rosółu z farfelnkami, marchewka z groszkiem podlana mączną zasmażką musi wystarczyć za cymes. Kurczak bez suszonych śliwek, zupełnie nie jak kurczak. Cała ta historia z koszernym, żeby Żydzi i goje się nie mieszała. I na co to wszystko się zdało? Widział kto dzisiaj żydowskiego kucharza?

– Cicho tu, prawda? – kierownik zagał rozmowę. – Martwo.

Przytaknąłem uprzejmie.

– O tej porze roku nie ma prawie nikogo, nie to co kiedyś. Latem jeszcze, jeszcze. A teraz? Palacz, sprzątaczką. I my.

– Jak to, a... – zaprotestowałem.

– A, ci! – machnął ręką uzbrojoną w widelec. – Ale oni są tutaj zawsze, to jakby ich w ogóle nie było. Kiedyś to był ruch w interesie! Wtedy było jeszcze tych Żydów trochę.

Zapadło milczenie.

Kiedyś wzywano na posiłki ręcznym dzwonkiem z drewnianą rączką. Przywilej dzieci. Stało się w pobliżu jadalni, na stromych wyściełanych linoleum schodach, w tym wyłożonym świerkową boazerią holu. Stamtąd najlepiej rozchodził się dźwięk. Na dwie minuty przed godziną pierwszą. Wielki zaszczyt i odpowiedzialność. Wczasowicze maszerują na

obiad. Pan Leon z nieodłącznym panem Abramem. Zawsze się kłócili. Pan Chaim. Pani Teczka, pani Róża, doktor Kamińska z milczącą siostrą. I niewidomy pisarz z parteru, pan Daniel, który zawsze powoli wspinał się po stopniach wiodących na taras. I jeszcze ten jeden, bardzo już stary pan, każdego roku brał pokój od strony podwórza. To o nim mówiono, że nie ma ręki, a ja przecież widziałem jego dłoń, zawsze w czarnej skórzanej rękawiczce, której nigdy nie zdejmował przy obcych. Tak czy inaczej, bałem się go bardzo.

Duży nakrapiany pies, który dotychczas drzemał zwinięty w kącie, poruszył się niespokojnie, uniósł łeb nasłuchując, ale wyczuwszy najpewniej znajomy zapach, ułożył się z powrotem do snu. Ktoś pchnął od zewnątrz skrzydło uchylonych drzwi. Ustąpiło z piskiem. W wejściu zamajaczyła ciemna sylwetka.

– Pokój temu domowi!

Starszy mężczyzna energicznym krokiem przemierzył jadalnię.

– Jakub! Serwus! – kierownik najwyraźniej się ucieszył. – Co ty tu robisz, nie byłeś na kolacji? Proszę, poznaj, nasz gość. Zna pan Jakuba – bardziej potwierdził niż zapytał. – Jakub to nasz stary bywalec.

– Bardzo stary – poprawił pan Jakub i teatralnie zakasłał.

Widziałem już gdzieś jego łysą czaszkę pokrytą pergaminową skórą tak cienką, że mogłaby się rozedrzeć pod najsłabszym dotykiem. Policzki o wydatnych kościach pokryte rumieńcem – śpieszył się tutaj. Zejście po schodach też wymaga wysiłku. Błękitne żyłki na jego skroniach pulsowały nieprzyjemnie, jakby miały nie wytrzymać wzrastającego ciśnienia krwi. Próbowałem odnaleźć tę twarz w zakamarkach umysłu, wydobyć ją stamtąd, jak z bardzo niedoskonałej

kliszy fotograficznej, by poddać na nowo obróbce, uzupełnić o szczegóły, które teraz, w osobie siedzącego, miałem przed sobą. A później odnaleźć resztę, czyli nazwisko gościa i jego lokalizację na towarzyskiej mapie.

Nadaremnie. Żadne przechowywane w pamięci oblicze nie chciało pasować do nieznajomego. A jednak, byłem tego pewien, pan Jakub nie był mi tak całkiem nieznajomy. Prawdę mówiąc, w ogóle nie nadawał się na nieznajomego. Był najwyraźniej kimś, kto istniał, kto musiał istnieć. Jeśli nie teraz, to wtedy.

– A kawalera to ja chyba znam – oświadczył dumnie pan Jakub. – Kawaler przyjeżdżał tutaj, siedział z nami przy stole.

W ukośnym świetle kinkietów plamy na jego niskim czole wyglądały jak dziwaczne narośle.

– Pan na długo?

– Na kilka dni.

– Na kilka dni. Przejazdem, znaczy się. Krótkie odwiedziny. Młodzież zawsze w ruchu.

Wypukłe ciekawskie oczy świdrowały na wylot. Czy go pamiętam? Wtedy na tarasie? Pan z fotografii. Mam dwa lata, siedzę w spacerowym wózku i konwersuję z kimś być może podobnym do pana Jakuba. Ja sam i oni. Jedyne dziecko, tu nie istnieli rówieśnicy.

– Nawet jest pan podobny – przyznał pan Jakub tonem osoby świetnie poinformowanej, jakby dopiero co opuścił moje własne myśli.

– A ciebie co tutaj sprowadza? – kierownik postanowił włączyć się do rozmowy.

– Jak to mówią, stara żydowska bieda. Jak człowiek jest już tym Żydem, to chce posiedzieć wśród swoich.

– Mało już ludzi, coraz mniej – westchnął tamten. – Wszędzie na świecie ich przybywa i tylko u nas odwrotnie.

– Po żydowsku, wszystko inaczej – zauważył pan Jakub tonem lekkiego sarkazmu. – Wyjdźcie przed namiot. Ile gwiazd! Pamiętacie praojca naszego, Abrahama?

– Rozmnożę twoje nasienie i będziesz niczym gwiazdy na niebie – odpowiedział kierownik. – Czy tak?

– Widać ich wiele w tym roku.

– Jak co roku, Jakubie. Gwiazdy to nie ludzie, ich nie ubywa i nie brakuje. Ale spójrz nie na niebo, tylko wokoło.

Pan Jakub spojrział z pobłażaniem na młodszego kolegę. Czego on chce? Co się raz stało, już się nie odstanie. Ile można drzeć szaty? Całe życie, a nawet dłużej? Ubrania nie starczy.

Kierownik nie mógł się uspokoić, trawiła go jakaś wewnętrzna gorączka. Był bliski wybuchu.

– Teraz wychodzą z mysiej dziury. Przez czterdzieści lat taki nie był Żydem, co ja mówię, od urodzenia, i teraz, proszę bardzo, on jest Żydem pełną gębą, a jego syn – w Izraelu, nagle religijny się zrobił.

– To i klientów ci będzie przybywać. Swoją, obcy, co tobie za różnica? Płaci za łóżko i chwatit.

– I tobie to nic nie robi różnicy? ! – wykrzyknął kierownik. Wstał gwałtownie od stołu. – A ja mam dosyć, rozumiesz? ! Co to za pensjonat! Ni to szpital, ni to trupiarnia! Wszystko postawione na głowie. Trzydzieści lat temu...

– A co ty potrzebujesz mnie uczyć, jak było trzydzieści lat temu? Co to jest trzydzieści lat? Wiesz, jak tu było przed wojną?

– Nie. I nie chcę wiedzieć – obraził się i ruszył do drzwi.

– Niech pan go nie słucha – pan Jakub zwrócił się do mnie konfidencjonalnym szeptem. – On tak gada każdemu. Stary bałwan! Kierownik. Teraz on jest wielki kierownik, a kiedyś... A zresztą, co ja będę panu mówił, szkoda nerwów.

– Kierowniku, to prawda, że teraz zamiast „dobry wieczór” mówi się „serwus”?

Szef pensjonatu zatrzymał się w pół drogi. Wszyscy trzej obróciliśmy głowy. Różowe policzki, brązowa ondulacja. Pani Mała. Żaden z nas jej wcześniej nie zauważył. Wśliznęła się po cichu i jak gdyby nigdy nic zaczęła jeść kolację.

– Nie wiem – wyburczał.

– Młódzież tak mówi – poinstruował pan Jakub.

Kierownik tylko zgrzytnął zębami i wyszedł z jadalni.

– A co jemu się stało? – spytała.

– Zawsze tak – pan Jakub machnął lekceważąco ręką.

– A! – zdziwiła się trochę. – A chłopak z panem przyjechał?

– Nie – teraz pan Jakub się zdziwił. – Co pani mówi? Dlaczego? Przecież on tu już wcześniej był.

– Wcześniej, co znaczy wcześniej? – nie mogła pojąć. – Toż on dopiero przyjechał. Chodziłyśmy z Tecią na spacer i nagle on tutaj jest. A wy się znacie? – nie chciała dać za wygraną.

– Świat jest mały. A żydowski świat jest jeszcze mniejszy. Każdy każdego zna.

– No to ja nie wiem. Przyjechał chłopak i co on teraz będzie tu robił?

– Ja nie rozumiem, o co się pani rozchodzi? A to pani interes? Przyjechał, to jest.

– I dobrze! Pan dzisiaj nie jest rozmowny – obruszyła się.

- Co zrobić.
- Niech pan lepiej pokaże chłopakowi jego pokój. Tam gdzie oni kiedyś mieszkali. Ta, co sprzęta, już tam pościel dzisiaj zmieniła.
- Dziękuję, pójde sam, trafię na pewno.

Boarding House

Piotr Paziński

Translated from the Polish by Tusia Dabrowska

The hallway and dining hall have remained desolate in the dusk of evening waiting. Only the clicking of the typewriter was coming from the half-lit office next to the common room—a sign that life in the boarding house has completely not gone out. The manager is completing his daily duties. He is jotting down a list: utilities, food, cleaning detergents, light bulbs to be changed on the second floor. Knocking broke his attention.

“May I?”

“Please.”

“I was supposed to stop by—” I begin hesitantly.

“Oh, yes....” The manager looks at me with distrust.

“Right.”

“Just a moment.” He glances at the guest logbook. “So, what do we have for you? Yes... good. For how long? Would you please kindly sign here.” He passes me the registration book. “Good. Date. And today is Thursday. The order must be preserved.”

He sinks into his armchair.

“You... if I may ask, do you have—” He hesitates as if searching for a word that most closely phrase his curiosity. “—some connection with....”

“Yes.”

He exhales with relief.

“How are things in Warsaw? You know we live here like hermits. We depend on the guests’ mercy or the lack thereof; we’re far away from the real mayhem. Shady folks, they’re taking everything for themselves. Nobody cares about others. They think they’re important! Anyhow, you must be tired.”

“Not really.”

We sit in silence, eyeing each other. The manager of the bed and breakfast, his office. Bed and breakfast. Big name. In the old days, they called it a “boarding house,” but “boarding house” sounds too bourgeois. Birkat haBayt, a blessing for the house, written on a decorative card above the bureau: “Let joy and peace reign in this house.” It wasn’t here before. It’s here in place of Isaac Leib Peretz¹. Or maybe Sholem Aleichem²? Serious faces. The giants, classics of Yiddish literature—taken up to the mezzanine.

“Let’s go eat,” he invites me. “Supper is waiting. The others have already finished; it is fairly late. They prefer to eat an hour earlier, at six, so they rest before the evening news. Seven thirty, the holy hour. If some rabbi held a prayer, he would have a hefty crowd. Just that they prefer to sit in front of a television—that kind of prayer, at least nobody is nagging the Lord. Anyway, we even had a rabbi here, years ago. He came

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1. I.L. Peretz (May 18, 1852 – 3 April 1915) —together with Sholem Aleichem, counted among the three fathers of Yiddish literature. An author, playwright and Yiddish language literature activist, Peretz was also fluent in Polish and Hebrew.
 2. Sholem Aleichem (March 2, 1859 – May 13, 1916)—the pen name of Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich. One of the three great classical Yiddish writers, Sholem Aleichem is known to international audiences as the author of stories that formed the foundation for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.

from America. He met with us, and let me tell you, they didn't want to hear him. What do they care about a rabbi? Everyone here fancies themselves a rabbi. And women rebbetzin. But is that even a problem? In their generation? Though they have forgotten, so much time has passed. Since we installed the television sets in rooms, they come out only for meals—or not even that. The common room is a thing of the past.”

The common room, with its artless fresco, is located right behind the dining hall. Once it seemed to me a ballroom; that's what I used to call it. Separated by heavy, arched doors—crystal framed in wood. Hard to peek in, sacral dusk permeated the inside. The most mysterious place in the house. Only for adults, but I was allowed to watch the bedtime children's program before the evening news. A color television set showing a snow pattern because no one knew how to fix it. I'm alone in the dark ballroom until, next to me, in a neatly covered armchair, Sir Chaim whistles. Old wise Sir Chaim! Everybody went to him for advice, and there was nothing he couldn't help with when people asked. By day, the common room filled with chatter. Black fortepiano, bridge club, zeks un zekhtsik³, any news in *Folks Shtime* paper⁴? Politics, books, Rudnicki had written something new. Plays in the Warsaw Jewish Theater. Back in the Ida Kaminska days, it was a lot better. The old days were always better. This is how the world is goes.

3. Zeks un zekhtsik (Yiddish)—“sixty six,” a popular card game.

4. *Folks-shtime* (*Voice of the People*) was the main Yiddish language newspaper of Polish Jews in the communist era. It was published from 1945 until 1991. First published under the auspices of Polish United Workers Party (the official communist party). Thereafter, it became the organ of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland. From 1969, the newspaper included a section in Polish (Yivo Institute, New York).

Everything observed through the crystal windows. Heads, one next to the other, on the folding club chairs, they are paying attention to a lecture that the tall man presents. His hands raised, he gesticulates with passion. His eyes are glistening. The doorknob is at the same level as my head. Many years later, a New Year's Eve ball. The ballroom, now in its proper function, is covered in confetti and serpentine throws. Balloons tied with strings in the dining hall, tables pulled together, covered in a white tablecloth. Evening dresses and dark two-button suits. Store-bought vodka. Only the orchestra is missing; other than that, the place is a real nightclub. And once again, the ballroom is a makeshift synagogue during youth summer camp. The Holy Ark is made from a cabinet with a curtain. Recruiting kids by name for the Morning Prayer, they wake me up at 8. Dragged out of bed, I amble like a sleepwalker. Without the other ten, the Lord will not hear the three who wish to be heard. Cold, though it's summer, I squat in the back trying to follow the speaker. Sacrum has left somehow.

I peel my nose from the glass. The room is closed, no one can go in.

In the dining hall, the electric Argand lamps are on. Through five veranda windows, only dusk peeks inside. The manager shows me a seat at the staff-only table. A silent waitress places a plate and a bread basket in front of us. Heavy white table set, coffee pots made of thick porcelain. Each meal comes with a mandatory set of condiments: salt, pepper, maggi sauce, and white vinegar in a miniature carafe of thick glass. Maggi sauce is perfect for a potato puree. White vinegar, what for? The pork cutlets? This bed and breakfast is not kosher; the food is peasant cafeteria food. You will not have chicken bouillon with farfalle here; carrots with peas in

buttered bread, a meal that has to be a satisfying substitute for tzimmes⁵. The chicken, without dried plums, tastes nothing like chicken. This whole story about kosher food, so the Jews and goyim wouldn't intermingle. And what good did it all do? Has anybody seen a Jewish chef today?

"It's quiet here," the manager tries to spark a conversation. "Lifeless."

I nod.

"At this time of year, this place is almost abandoned, not like in the old days. In the summer, it's so-so. But now? The stoker, cleaning lady. And us."

I protest. "What do you mean? What about—"

"Right, they!" he waves his hand armed with a fork. "They are always here, it's like they are not here. In the old days, it used to be busy! Back then, there were still quite a few of Jews here."

Silence.

In the old days, a meal was announced with a bell that had a wood handle. The privilege of children. I stood near the dining hall, on steep linoleum-covered stairs in this spruce paneled hall. The sound spread best from there. Two minutes before one. A great privilege and responsibility. The guests were marching for dinner. Sir Leon with inseparable Sir Abram. They always fought. Sir Chaim, Ms. Tecia, Ms. Rosa, Doctor Kaminska and her silent sister. And a blind writer from the ground floor, Sir Daniel, who always took forever to climb up the stairs to the terrace. And one more man: He was very old, and every year, he preferred a room with a backyard

5. Tzimmes (Yiddish) – a traditional Eastern European Jewish sweet stew.

window. Rumor had he was missing a hand, but I saw his palm many times—gloved in a black leather glove, which he never took off around strangers. Anyway, he scared the pants off me.

A large dog with spots, napping in the corner, moves tensely, raises his head scanning the room. Sensing a familiar smell, it goes back to sleep. Someone pushes the half-opened door. It recedes with a squeak. In the hallway, a dark silhouette appears.

“Blessing for the house!”

An older man crosses the dining hall. His walk energized.

“Jacob! Salute!” The manager is visibly excited. “What are you doing here? Didn’t you eat your dinner already? Please, join us, meet our guest. Do you know Jacob—” He more confirms than asks. “Jacob is one of our old regulars.”

“Very old,” Jacob corrects him and with a theatrical manner clears his throat.

I have seen before his bold skull covered with parchment-like skin, so thin that it could rip under the slightest touch. His cheeks, with protruding cheekbones, blushed; he was in a rush to get here. Walking down the stairs requires effort. Bluish veins unpleasantly pulsate at his temples, as though they were about to give under the rising blood pressure. I attempted to recover his face from the nooks and crannies of my mind, to retrieve it from there, as though from a very imperfect glass negative, to edit it again and fill out with details that now I had in front of me in the presence of the sitting man. Then I could find the rest: the guest’s name and his location on the social map.

All for nothing. None of the countenances stored in my memory wanted to fit the stranger. And yet, I was sure of it, Sir Jacob was not befitting a stranger. He apparently was someone, someone who existed, who had to exist. If not now, then back then.

"I think I know the young man here," Sir Jacob announces proudly. "You, young man, used to come here, sit with us at the table."

In the sidelight of Argand lamps, spots on his forehead look like some bizarre lesions.

"Do you plan to stay here long?"

"Some days."

"Some days. Stopping by, in other words. A short visit. Youth is always in a hurry."

Bulging curious eyes are piercing me. Do I recall him? Back then on the terrace? A gentleman from a photo. I am two years old, sitting in an umbrella stroller I hold a conversation with someone—someone who might resemble Sir Jacob. I—alone, and they. The only child in this place; peers didn't exist here.

"I must admit—you do resemble yourself," Sir Jacob acknowledged with a tone of a person who is up to date, as if he's just left my own thoughts.

"And what brings you here?" The manager decided to join the conversation.

"As they say, the good old Jewish tzures. When a man thinks himself a Jew, he wants to spend time among his own kind."

"There are not many of us left, less and less," sighed the

manager. “Everywhere else in the world, the number of them is growing; only here, everything is upside down.”

“The Jewish way, always diverging,” Sir Jacob noted with a hint of sarcasm. “Go outside of the tent. See how many stars! Remember our forefather, Abraham?”

“If thou be able to count them, so shall thy seed be,” the manager recited, “Is that how it goes?”

“There are many visible this year.”

“As in the previous years, Jacob. Stars are not people; they don’t wither out and are not scarce. Just look at the sky, look around.”

Sir Jacob looked at his younger peer with condescension. What does he want? What happened can’t be undone. How long can you watch the paint dry? Your whole life and even longer?

There won’t be enough paint.

The manager couldn’t calm down; some hidden fever consumed him. He was on the brink of exploding.

“Now, they come out of their mouse holes. For forty years, nobody was a Jew—what am I saying? Since their birth, and now, suddenly, voilà, he’s a full-on Jew, his son—in Israel—instantly religious.”

“You will gain more guests. One of our own, or a stranger, what difference does it make to you? He’s paying for his bed and that’s it.”

“And it makes no difference to you!” the manager screams. He rises violently.

“I have had enough, do you understand me? ! What kind of boarding house is this! Neither a hospital nor a boneyard! Everything is upside down. Thirty years ago—”

“What do you think you need to teach me how it was thirty years ago? What is a mere thirty years? Do you know what it was like here before the war?”

“No. And I don’t want to know.” The manager feels offended and begins to head out.

“Don’t pay attention to him,” Sir Jacob turns to me and says in a clandestine whisper. “It’s his normal ramble. Old fool! The manager. Now he is the great manager, but in the old days— Anyway, there is no point to waste your nerves, too.”

“Dear Manager, is it true that instead of saying ‘good-evening,’ we should say, ‘salute’?”

The manager stopped halfway through. All three of us turned our heads. Rose cheeks, brown hair wave. Ms. Mala. We have not noticed her before. She slipped in quietly, and without paying attention to us, she began to eat her supper.

“I don’t know,” he murmured.

“That’s what the youth says,” Sir Jacob instructed.

The manager merely grinded his teeth and walked out of the dinning room.

“What happened to him,” she asked.

“It’s always the same,” Sir Jacob waved his hand depreciatingly.

“Ah!” she seemed only slightly surprised. “And the boy, he came here with you?”

“Nope,” now Sir Jacob seemed surprised. “What are you saying? Why? That is, he was here before.”

“Before? What do you mean?” she couldn’t understand. “He just got here. We went for a walk with Tecia and here he appeared. Do you know each other?” she was not to give up.

“The world is small. And the Jewish world is even smaller. We all know each other.”

“Then I don’t know. The youth came here and what is he going to do here?”

“I don’t see what the problem is. Is this your problem, Miss? He came, so here he is.”

“This is great! You, Sir, are not in a talkative mood today,” she was upset.

“What to do?”

“You better show the youth your room, where they used to live. The cleaning woman has already changed the sheets.”

“Thank you. I will go by myself. I’m sure I won’t have problems finding the room.”



© Afonso Cruz

Afonso Cruz

A Boneca de Kokoschka (2010)

Kokoschka's Doll

Publishing House **Quetzal**

Biography

Afonso Cruz was born in Figueira da Foz in 1971. He works as a director of animation movies, an illustrator, a musician and a writer. Cruz studied at the António Arroio Arts High School in Lisbon, at the College of Fine Arts of Lisbon and at the Madeira Institute of Plastic Arts.

His animation career includes several movies and series. In 2007, he recorded an album with his blues/roots band, The Soaked Lamb, for which he composed the original songs, wrote the lyrics, sang and played the guitar, the banjo, the harmonica and the ukulele.

He started his career as a fiction writer in 2008 with the novel *A Carne de Deus (The Flesh of God)*.

Synopsis

Kokoschka's Doll acts as a symbol and metaphor for a story of friendship, a story of how the Other is fundamental for our own identity. The characters include Isaac Dresner, a Jew who developed a limp in his left foot, after he was burdened with the memory of his best friend being killed in front of him during World War II. The reader is also introduced to Bonifaz Vogel, a man with a suspended conscience, Tsilia Kacev, an Orthodox Jew who gets stigmata, and a millionaire, Zsigmond Varga, who wants to weigh the human soul, measuring evil and sin with a hydraulic scale. Music is a constant in this story, which also includes defeated poets, a man who is too kind, Kokoschka's doll itself, and a guitar player who classifies people under chords: bearded philosophers, for example, are diminished seventh.

A Boneca de Kokoschka

Afonso Cruz

Os avós paternos

O dia é metade morte, metade vida, tal como se pode ver pela quantidade de luz e escuridão que o compõe

Foi nesse dia, em que a morte se misturava com a vida, que a minha avó paterna morreu, quando, pela festa do Pentecostes, foi preparado um grande almoço. A minha avó não cozinhou porque estava grávida, ia ter um filho a qualquer momento.

Uma pesada mesa de carvalho tinha sido posta em frente da casa do meu avô (que era coveiro). O grande carvalho da entrada dava a sua sombra, sem pedir – como fazem os homens – nada em troca. Via-se com clareza a mistura da vida e da morte, o carvalho morto que é uma mesa, e o vivo que dá a sombra.

A maior parte dos convidados não apareceram, não queriam comer com o coveiro (que era meu avô paterno), misturar a morte com a vida, misturar as bocas que enterram cadáveres com as bocas que celebram a vida: os que vivem da agricultura e do lavrar da terra. Mas, no fundo, não há grande diferença entre um coveiro e um agricultor. Ambos colocam a sua esperança na terra, uns deitam a semente, outros o cadáver, mas ambos esperam que, do que se enterra, um dia brote vida.

A minha avó chamava-se Marija e era natural de Breslov – como o rabi Nachman. Curiosamente, tinha a profissão oposta à do meu avô: era parteira. Os dois faziam uma circunferência, um anel onde todo o drama humano se encerra.

Nessa tarde, do ventre dela, o meu avô puxou um filho cá para fora. Um filho nascido da minha avó morta, num movimento contrário ao que o meu pai estava habituado: em vez de enterrar o cadáver na sepultura, tirava dela a vida, desenterrava uma criança. Tirava da terra para semear no ar. Assim veio ao mundo o meu pai, David Dresner.

Os mortos não têm nome, dizia o meu avô

Depois, o meu avô foi buscar a pá, suou e cavou um buraco, juntou a minha avó à terra.

O meu avô dizia que a terra que pisamos é como um mar: ondula. E uma onda de terra é uma árvore, um cão, uma vide, um homem, um sapato, um cabrito. Deitou a minha avó na sua derradeira morada, como quem adormece uma criança. Gritou hossana, e tapou-a com carinho (como fazia quando se deitavam) com o cobertor que é comum a todos, o pó. Marcou o lugar com umas pedras e lá ficou ela sem nome gravado, tal como deve ser: os mortos não têm nome, dizia o meu avô.

Faremos das nossas carnes uma só terra

– Sempre me perguntei quem sepultará o último homem – disse o meu avô ao meu pai –, ou se quiseses, e neste caso, quem sepultará o coveiro? Tu, é claro. Não és coveiro, mas sepultar-me-ás na mesma terra da tua mãe que morreu quando tu respiraste pela primeira vez, há quase três vezes sete anos. A terra dela misturar-se-á com a minha como já aconteceu em vida, faremos das nossas carnes uma só terra.

Quando o meu avô morreu, o meu pai fez-lhe a vontade e eles misturaram-se para sempre.

Repetir o que o teu avô dizia é como olhar para uma fotografia dele

Sempre que abria sepulturas, o meu avô pensava alto. O meu pai, porque costumava ajudá-lo quando era miúdo – e de tanto o ouvir –, repetia muitas vezes o que ele dizia. Eram coisas como esta: “É da escuridade da cova que uma pessoa começa a crescer pela vertical acima. Primeiro constrói-se um buraco todo vazio, só feito de abismo. Quando mergulhamos nesse lugar escuro, acontece que, por irmos para baixo, levantamos voo. Mergulhar nesse abismo é como flectir as pernas para saltar. Para baixo, antes de bater com a cabeça no céu.”

Nunca conheci o meu avô (não conheci nenhum dos meus avós), mas o meu pai contava-me como ele era: a barba despenteada, a figura magra, os olhos escuros, as sobrancelhas que pareciam duas mãos a proteger a cara do sol, os joelhos ligeiramente tortos (eu saí a ele) e os pensamentos de terra. Às vezes, o meu pai pegava numa folha e desenhava uns riscos que, segundo ele, eram as rugas da testa do meu avô. Nessa altura tinha pena do meu pai e chegava a rezar para que Adonai lhe desse o dom do desenho. Talvez um dia conseguisse desenhar um rosto inteiro. Uma vez perguntei-lhe porque é que ele repetia tantas vezes as frases do meu avô e ele respondeu assim:

– Repetir o que o teu avô dizia é como olhar para uma fotografia dele.

Afinal, o meu pai não precisava de saber desenhar.

Os avós maternos

O sonho da biblioteca

A minha avó materna chamava-se Lia Rozenkrantz e tinha um sonho que se repetia muitas vezes, um sonho cheio de colunas e estátuas. O meu avô materno, que era um grande cabalista, acreditava que esses sonhos se passavam na antiga Biblioteca de Alexandria. Na verdade, esses sonhos sempre foram muito perturbadores para a minha avó, que acordava exaltada, cheia de medo. Eram imagens muito fortes, de cores vivas, daquelas que não se apagam quando se acorda ou à medida que o dia avança. Durante mais de trinta anos, o meu avô (que se chamava Dovev) dormiu com um bloco e uma caneta na mesa de cabeceira. Mal a minha avó acordava, ele massacrava-a com perguntas. Tentava anotar todos os pormenores. Tinha no escritório inúmeras folhas que, segundo o meu avô, eram a planta da biblioteca. Planta essa que se refazia a cada sonho. Ia modificando os traçados que desenhava e tentava encontrar nexos nos pesadelos da minha avó. Também tentou sessões de hipnotismo, mas sem qualquer resultado.

O meu avô queria que a minha avó andasse por esses sonhos com toda a calma, sem se sobressaltar, e pegasse em papiros e os lesse em voz alta. Queria recuperar obras perdidas da antiga biblioteca. Durante trinta anos acumulou inúmeras folhas cheias de fragmentos, de frases, todas transcritas dos sonhos da minha avó. Havia obras de Heráclito, de Andronikos, de Pirro, etc., tudo rasurado e reescrito incontáveis vezes porque os sonhos da minha avó mudavam muito.

Dizia o meu avô, citando o Talmude, que um homem sem mulher é só meio homem. Mas a minha avó ria-se dele e dizia: uma mulher sem homem é como um maneta sem luvas.

Uma das maiores tragédias que aconteceu neste lado da minha família foi a morte do meu avô. Ele costumava passar as tardes com o coronel Möller, que era o seu melhor amigo. Aliás, foi em casa do coronel que a minha mãe conheceu o meu pai.

Um dia, o mordomo do coronel assassinou o meu avô. O meu pai nunca me soube explicar muito bem porque motivo ele o havia feito: dizia-me apenas que o mordomo era um homem terrível, um monstro que, inclusivamente, não compreendia metáforas.

Eis o que Tsilia pensa sobre isso das monstruosidades:

Esta experiência parece-me assustadora, disse-me Tsilia: sobrepuseram as fotografias de todos os alunos de uma escola e, destas imagens, fez-se uma média. E dessa média surgiu uma cara que era o cânone grego. Até a turba tem cânone, e, no entanto, de onde vem a monstruosidade que vemos por aí? Ouvi, há muito tempo, uma experiência curiosa sobre aquela composição de Piet Mondrian, uma daquelas com quadrados, não me lembro do título. Pediu-se a alunos de Belas Artes que pintassem um quadro, o mais parecido que conseguissem com a obra de Mondrian. No final, expôs-se o resultado (algumas dezenas de rectângulos coloridos, imitações do verdadeiro) juntamente com o original, mas sem que nenhum deles estivesse identificado. Aos visitantes, foi-lhes pedido que escolhessem o quadro que achassem mais harmonioso. O do Mondrian, cheio de rectângulos de ouro e divinas proporções, foi o eleito da maioria. Uma percentagem muito alta escolheu a obra original. Isto revela que o homem, não só é composto de divinas proporções, como a reconhece quando a vê, mesmo um homem sem cultura visual, ou mesmo sem cultura nenhuma. E se o que é harmonioso e proporcionado

é fácil de reconhecer, donde vem essa atroz desproporção que vemos no mundo?

O meu pai não se importava que a minha mãe lesse o Zohar, mas os amigos da família achavam isso muito irregular.

O meu pai era muito bonito, mas a minha mãe dizia coisas mais inteligentes. Disse-me uma vez:

– Adonai não deve ser procurado nas palavras da Torah. isso seria um grande absurdo, mas sim nos espaços entre as palavras da Torah.

– A verdadeira Torah não tem espaços entre as palavras – disse-lhe eu.

– Ora aí está.

Os Pearlman, uma forma de incoerência

Fui viver para casa dos Pearlman porque o meu pai foi para um campo de trabalho e, pouco tempo depois, a minha mãe morreu com febre tifóide.

Os Pearlman eram uma família de cinco pessoas e dois gatos. O meu amigo Pearlman chamava-se Ezra, mas eu tratava-o pelo apelido. Tinha duas irmãs adolescentes, muito feias, uma com catorze anos e outra com dezasseis. A mais velha chamava-se Fruma e a mais nova, Zelda. Eu costumava dizer que a única bonita era a do meio. Para ser justo Fruma era ainda mais feia do que Zelda e Zelda era ainda mais feia do que Fruma. Uma vez vi a Fruma a tomar banho e achei que, apesar de ser horrível, tinha um corpo muito bonito, ou mesmo perfeito. Isso pareceu-me incompreensível, como se a cabeça não lhe pertencesse. Era muito estranho que o

corpo dela não fosse o equivalente de um sorriso com dentes desalinhados e uns olhos encovados, a piscarem demasiado. O corpo dela não tinha dentes desalinhados, pelo contrário, tinha formas que estabeleceriam o cânone da noção de beleza feminina. E as pernas eram duas coisas inesquecíveis, uma ao lado da outra.

O Sr. Pearlman, pai do meu amigo Ezra, tratava-me como um filho. Devia muita coisa ao meu pai, dizia-me ele, mas nunca soube que dívidas eram essas. Quando lho perguntava, ele passava-me a mão pela cabeça e ria-se com a sua voz de ópera.

– O meu pai dizia que – disse eu ao meu amigo Pearlman – o que está em cima é como o que está em baixo. Mas a tua irmã é muito esquisita.

– O que é que queres dizer com isso?

– A parte de baixo não é como a parte de cima. Vai contra muitas leis.

– Que é que queres dizer com isso?

A irmã do Pearlman foi a primeira incoerência que eu vi na vida. Tentei perceber melhor aquela estranheza de possuir a cara errada. Ou seria o corpo errado? As minhas dúvidas acabaram por criar problemas sérios. Fui apanhado com os olhos onde não devia e fui severamente castigado. Mas enfim, aquela foi a minha primeira incoerência e nós nunca esquecemos a primeira vez que vemos uma incoerência toda nua.

Kokoschka's Doll

Afonso Cruz

Translated from the Portuguese by Nuno Quintas

My grandparents from my father's side

**The day is half death, half life, as can be grasped by
the quantity of light and darkness that make it**

That day, when death blends with life, was when my grandmother from my father's side died, on Pentecost, during the preparation of a great lunch. My grandmother didn't cook because she was pregnant, she could deliver at any moment.

A heavy oak table had been set in front of my grandfather's house (he was a gravedigger). The great oak-tree at the entrance would cast its shadow without asking—as men do—anything in return. The blend of life and death could be clearly seen, the table being a dead oak, the oak's shadow giving life.

Most guests didn't show up, they didn't want to share a table with the gravedigger (he was my grandfather from my father's side), blending life and death, blending mouths burying corpses with mouths celebrating life: those who made a living out of farming and from toiling the land. However, deep down, a gravedigger and a farmer aren't that different. Both place their hope on the land, some cast the seed, others the corpse, but both hope someday, from whatever is buried, life will burgeon.

My grandmother's name was Marija and she was from Breslov—just like the rabbi Nachman. Funnily enough, her job was the opposite of my grandfather's: she was a midwife. The

two of them formed a circumference, a ring where the entire human drama is enclosed. That afternoon, from her belly, my grandfather brought his son to the world. A son born from my dead grandmother, in a movement contrary to the one my grandfather was used to accomplish: instead of burying the corpse in the grave, he took life from it, he unburied a child. He took from the land to seed in the air. That's how my father, David Dresner, was brought to the world.

The dead have no name, my grandfather used to say

Afterwards, my grandfather grabbed a shovel, with an effort dug a hole, returned my grandmother to the land.

My grandfather used to say that the earth we tread is like a sea: it waves. And an earth wave is a tree, a dog, a vine, a man, a shoe, a suckling kid. He laid my grandmother in her last address, as someone laying a child to sleep. He yelled hosanna, and he fondly covered her (as he used to when they went to bed) with the blanket common to each and everyone, dust. He marked the spot with some rocks and there she rested, no name engraved, just as it should be: the dead have no name, my grandfather used to say.

From our flesh we will create one land

'I've always asked myself who will bury the last man', my grandfather said to my father, 'or if you will, in this case, who will bury the gravedigger. You, of course. You're not a gravedigger, but you will bury me in the same earth your mother was buried, she who died during your first breath, almost three times seven years ago. Her earth will blend itself with mine as when we were alive, from our flesh we will create one land.

When my grandfather died, my father respected his will, and they were blended forever.

Repeating what your grandfather used to say is like looking at his picture

Whenever he opened a grave, my grandfather thought aloud. My father, because he used to help him when he was a young boy—from hearing him all the time—often repeated what he used to say. Things such as these: ‘It’s from the blackness of the hole that one begins to grow from the bottom up. First you dig a completely empty hole, only made out of abyss. When we dive into that dark place, it so happens, because we’re going down, we take flight. To dive into that abyss is like bending our legs to jump. Downwards, before we hit our heads in the sky.’

I never met my grandfather (I never met any of my grandparents), but my father used to tell me how he was: shaggy beard, lean frame, dark eyes, his eyebrows like two hands protecting his face from the sun, his knees slightly askew (I took after him) and thoughts of earth. Sometimes my father would grab a piece of paper and scratch off something—according to him, the wrinkles in my grandfather’s forehead. I felt sorry for my father and I even prayed for Adonai to offer him the gift of drawing. Maybe one day he could draw an entire face. Once I asked him the reason why he repeated so many times my grandfather’s expressions and this was his reply:

‘Repeating what your grandfather used to say is like looking at his picture.’

My father didn’t need to know how to draw after all.

My grandparents from my mother's side

The dream of a library

My grandmother's name, from my mother's side, was Lia Rozenkrantz, and she often had a recurring dream, a dream filled with columns and statues. My grandfather from my mother's side, a great kabbalist, believed those dreams took place in the Ancient Library of Alexandria. In truth, my grandmother would always find those dreams very disturbing: she woke up in a state of excitement, of fright. Those were very strong images, images bearing bright colours, those you can't forget when you wake up or as the day goes by. For more than thirty years, my grandfather (whose name was Dovev) slept with a notepad and a pen on his bedside. The moment my grandmother woke up, he bombarded her with questions. He tried to write down every single detail. He kept numerous sheets of paper in his office which were, according to my grandfather, the library map. The map which mutated from one dream to the next. He modified the layout he had drawn and he tried to find any sense in my grandmother's nightmares. He also tried hypnotism, but to no avail.

My grandfather wanted my grandmother to calmly walk around those dreams, to grab papyruses and to read them out loud. He wanted to recover lost works from the ancient library. For thirty years he accumulated numerous pages filled with fragments, sentences, every one transcribed from my grandmother's dreams. There were works by Heraclitus, by Andronicus, by Pyrrhus, amongst others, all of them crossed out and rewritten so many times because my grandmother's dreams changed a lot.

My grandfather used to say, by quoting the Talmud, a man with no woman is only half a man. My grandmother however laughed and replied: a woman with no man is like a person with no arms wearing no gloves.

One of the greatest tragedies from this family's side was my grandfather's death. He used to spend the afternoons with Colonel Möller, his best friend. Actually it was at Möller's that my mother met my father.

One day the Colonel's butler murdered my grandfather. My father could never fully explain why he did it: he only told me the butler was a terrible man, a monster who couldn't even grasp metaphors.

Here's what Tsilia thinks about monstrosities and such:

This experience seems frightening, Tsilia told me: they overlapped the photos of every student from a certain school, and found an average. From it a face came out, the Greek canon. Even the crowd has a canon; still, where does the monstrosity we see everywhere come from? A long time ago I heard a curious experiment with that Piet Mondrian composition, one of those with squares, I can't remember its title. Some Fine Arts students were asked to produce a painting as close as they could get to Mondrian's work. In the end, the results were exhibited (dozens of colourful rectangles, imitations of the true one) with the original, none of them bearing any identification. The visitors were asked to choose what they considered to be the most harmonious painting. Mondrian's, full of golden rectangles and divine proportions, was the one chosen by the majority. A very high number of visitors chose the original work. This shows that not only is humankind made of divine proportions, but they also recognise those

proportions when they see them, even a person with no visual culture or no culture at all. If what's harmonious and well-proportioned is easy to recognise, where does the heinous disproportion we see in the world come from?

My father didn't mind that my mother read the Zohar, but our family friends thought it highly irregular.

My father was very handsome, but my mother said smarter things. She once told me:

'One should not look for Adonai in the words of the Torah, that would be tremendously absurd, but in the spaces between the words of the Torah.'

'The true Torah has no spaces between words', I replied.

'There you have it.'

The Pearlmans, a form of incoherence

I went to live at the Pearlmans' because my father went to a labour camp and, not long afterwards, my mother died from typhoid fever.

The Pearlmans were a family of five people and two cats. My friend Pearlman's name was Ezra, but I called him by his family name. He had two very ugly teenage sisters, a fourteen-year old and a sixteen-year old. The ugliest one was called Fruma, the youngest Zelda. I used to say the only one who was pretty was the middle one. To be fair Fruma was even uglier than Zelda, and Zelda was even uglier than Fruma. Once I saw Fruma taking a bath and thought that, despite her ugliness, she had a very beautiful, even perfect, body. That seemed incomprehensible to me, as if her head didn't belong to her. It was so strange that her body was not the equivalent

to a smile with crooked teeth and haggard eyes blinking too many times. Her body didn't have crooked teeth; on the contrary, it had forms which would define the canon for the idea of female beauty. And her legs were two unforgettable things, one beside the other.

Mr. Pearlman, my friend Ezra's father, treated me like a son. He owed my father a lot, he used to say to me, but I never knew what those debts were. When I asked him, he touched my head and laughed with his opera voice.

'My father used to say', I told my friend Pearlman, 'what's on top is like what's on the bottom. But your sister is too awkward.'

'What do you mean?'

'Her lower part is not like the upper part. It goes against many laws.'

'What do you mean by that?'

Pearlman's sister was the first incoherence I saw in my life. I tried to figure out the awkwardness of having the wrong face. Or was it the wrong body? My doubts ended up creating serious problems. I was caught looking at where I shouldn't and I was severely punished. Anyway that was my first incoherence, and we should never forget the first time we see a completely naked incoherence.



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Jana Beňová

Café Hyena (Plán odprevádzania) (2012)

Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)

Publishing House **Marenčin PT**

Biography

Jana Beňová (b.1974), is a poet and prose writer, who graduated from the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Bratislava (1993-1998) with a degree in theatre dramaturgy. At first, she wrote for the the publications *Dotyky*, *Fragment* and *Slovenské Pohľady*. Then she worked as a journalist for the daily newspaper *SME*, writing under the name Jana Parkrová. Currently, she is employed as an editor in the Theatre Institute in Bratislava.

She debuted with a collection of poems, *Svetloplachý* (1993), following up with another poetry collection, *Lonochod* (1997). Just as in her debut, this too is a 'travelogue' of interpersonal relationships, love, and observations on life. A collection of poems, *Nehota* (1997), a novel, *Parker* (2001), and a collection of short stories, *Dvanásť poviedok a Ján Med* (2003), followed. Her short stories are marked by a poetical sensibility bound with poignant insights into the human mind and human behaviour.

In the spring of 2008, the L.C.A. publishing house published *Plán odprevádzania* (*Seeing People Off*), subtitled *Café Hyena*. Her novel *Preč! Preč! (Get off! Get off!)* is marked by her original humour and ease of expression – precise, lively and spontaneous.

Synopsis

Café Hyena (Seeing People Off) is a novel, an unusual mosaic of observations, perceptions, self-reflections and memories. Two couples sharing a peculiar grant that allows them to live however they want. With some exceptions. Its heroine Elza lives in a huge apartment building in the borough of Petržalka. "Where all the walls play music and talk". "And where time is immaterial". "Here you can find creatures the rest of the world believes no longer exist and are extinct". The love story of Elza and Ian. Bratislava desperadoes not employed by an advertising agency, who have instead joined the carefree class of people who buy only what can be peed or pooped out or exhaled – recycled within twenty-four hours. Seeing people off means trying to protect them, to share the journey even when it leads to madness or death.

Café Hyena (Plán odprevádzania)

Jana Beňová

III Kalisto Tanzi

Elza. Jedli sme spolu hrozno a zapíjali ho ružovým vínom. Na druhý deň som nahmatala vo vrecku vlhkú hroznovú stopku. Vyzerala ako obratý vianočný stromček.

Kalisto Tanzi zmizol z mesta, ktoré zachvátila horúčava. Teplo sálalo z domov a ulíc rovno do tváre a rozpálené mesto sa ľuďom vtláčalo na čelo ako pečať.

Zastavila som sa pred divadelnou vitrínou, aby som si na plagátoch mohla prečítať Kalistovo meno a potvrdiť si, že existuje aj v skutočnosti. Mám pôžitok z vyslovovania mena, ktoré ho trápilo celé detstvo a pubertu a naozaj mu prestalo prekážať až s mojím príchodom. Pomaly kráčam na druhý koniec mesta, svaly na nohách sa mi zľahka chvejú v horúcom vzduchu. Je poludnie. Jediné, čo sa na tejto planéte skutočne pohybuje, sú kvapky potu. Stekajú ku koreňu nosa a opäť vyvierajú pod vlasmi.

Idem kúpiť jed.

Ian včera videl v záchode potkana.

Deratizér má pod obchodom pivnicu s vínom. V podzemí unikáme neznesiteľnej páľave a popíjame. Rozpráva mi, aké sú potkany inteligentné.

„Majú ochutnávača, ten prvý skúša potravu. Keď zdochne, ostatní sa nástrah ani nedotknú. Preto už ponúkame nástrahy druhej generácie. Potkan začne zomierať až po štyroch dňoch po skonsumovaní jedu. Zomiera na

následky vnútorného krvácania. O takejto smrti už Sene ca tvrdil, že je bezbolestná.

Ostatné potkany majú dojem, že ich druh zomrel prirodzenou smrťou. Ale aj tak – ak ich takto zomrie viac v krátkom čase, vyhodnotia lokalitu z hľadiska vysokej mortality ako nepriaznivú a sťahujú sa. Táto schopnosť hodnotenia úplne chýba niektorým ľuďom aj celým národom.“

Dokonalý hnusný svet. Usmievam sa nad tramínom červeným. Deratizér rozpráva veľmi rýchlo. Tvár má stále v pohybe. Akoby v nej mal priveľa svalov. Akoby mu pod kožou neustále pobehoval krídle hlodavcov. Od jedné ho ucha k druhému. Od brady k čelu a späť. Cítim, ako mu pod stolom kmitajú nepokojné nohy a celý trup sa mu kláti v tanci.

Pri tom pohľade ma chytá závrat. Hlava sa mi točí ako pri prirýchlo postrihanom filme. Deratizér sa ku mne nakloní a zamotá sa mi do vlasov.

„Ste taká pekná myška,“ usmieva sa. Usmievam sa tiež. Cítim, že páchnem osamelosťou.

Vyprevádza ma a na cestu mi dáva igelitovú tašku plnú deratizačných prostriedkov. Namiesto kvetov. Zvieram ju pyšne v ruke. Možno to už bude takto vždy, pomyslím si. Ak mi muži budú chcieť kurizovať, darujú mi namiesto kvetov tašku s deratizačnými návnadami druhej generácie.

Keď som vyšla z chladnej pivnice, do tváre ma udrel horúci vzduch a svet bez Kalista Tanziho.

Prvýkrát som Kalista videla na jednej vernisáži. Veľa sa tam pilo a v priebehu večera vzniklo zopár nových dvojíc. Ako hovorí Ian – tam, kde sú muži, ženy a alkohol... – a udáva tým základné súradnice na lokalizáciu sexu.

Pozerala som mu do modrých očí a po prvýkrát som zatúžila po bytosti s farebnými očami. Ian ich má takmer čierne. Farby boli pre mňa vždy rozhodujúce. Ich kombinácia v Kalistovej tvári ma priťahovala. Sedeli sme spolu do rána a rozprávali sa. Ako vždy na začiatku: človek môže rozprávať svoj život znovu a všetko stojí za pozornosť. Rozpráva a pomaly sa točí sám okolo seba – tancuje a s ním celá miestnosť jemný trblietavý prášok mu sadá do vlasov.

Pred Kalistom Tanzim moje rozprávanie ožilo. Môj vlastný život plával pred našimi očami ako sklený vrch. Každým slovom som ho opäť tvorila. Rekreaovala. Rekreaovala som sa pri Kalistovi Tanzim. Určite by sa o tom dala napísať kniha. To by bol muzikál: *Ach, víločka, keby si ty vedela, čo som ja všetko prežila...*

Ale to už je obed. A ja sedím v kaviarni. Oblečená v hnedých šatách: stará žena. Sedím oproti Ianovi.

Stará dvojica. Ticho medzi nami prerušujú len novinové titulky. Ian mi ich občas prízvukuje ponad stôl. A číta ďalej. Noviny sú padací most. Občas ich sklopí a pozrie sa mi do tváre. Oči sa nám nestretnú. Víno chutí ako sušené slivky a čokoláda. Nápis Coca-Cola na obruse začína nebadane stúpať v ústrety mojej tvári. Zafažím ho tanierikom. Mám rada, keď všetko zostáva na svojom mieste.

Doma sedím za stolom a píšem list Kalistovi. Ian mi stojí za chrbtom. – Ach, taký dlhý list musíš písať, chúďatko? Nestačila by esemeska? Napríklad: Kde si?

Kalisto Tanzi nemá mobil ani mailovú adresu. Považuje tento spôsob komunikácie za výpalníctvo. (Starý anglický výraz black mail označoval vymáhanie neopodstatnených daní. Neexistujúcich dlhov, nedaných sľubov.)

Neexistuje jednoduchý spôsob, ako mu zasiahnuť do života, vliezť cez okná na obrazovke alebo displeji, zhmotniť sa mu rovno pred očami. Elza sa nemohla spoľahnúť na elektronické zvädzanie. Hoci mala naň talent – na reči a rečičky. Bola zručný Ketzalquatzel.

Ale nové možnosti jej priniesli aj silnejšiu konkurenciu. Bolo také ľahké s niekým sa zaplietť, skontaktovať. Zvädzaniu všetko nahrávalo. Najmä čas ušetrený rýchlou komunikáciou.

Nik už nemusel hliadkovať v noci na tmavej ulici, cestovať v koči, v aute, v búrke. Opravovať kolesá, vymieňať vriacu vodu v chladiči, pochodovať okolo domov a kaviarní, krúžiť bezmocne v uliciach miest, kde je nádej na stretnutie s milovanou osobou. Mapovať možnosť jej výskytu. Sledovať, striechnúť, schovávať sa, zotrvať nehybne celé roky na jednom mieste či putovať bez prestávky.

Maily a rýchle esemesky boli oknami a zrkadlami, ktoré na svete rýchlo pribúdali. Dalo sa cez ne vliezť do izby, na strechu, toaletu, ponoriť pod vodu, vzlietnuť. Hocikam zavesiť vlastný lákavý obraz – inštaláciu.

Elza. Do vzduchu, do cesty. Vystavovať ťa môjmu obrazu.

Elzino ráno sa začínalo písaním. Pustila si hudbu a polho dinu náruživu pokračovala v písaní knihy. Často počas práce vstávala zo stoličky, spotená, lebo pri písaní pije litre čaju a púšťa si hudbu príliš hlasno do uší, a píše, píše. Píše, ako by utekala z kopca. Potí sa a mrazí ju. Celý život sa jej telesná teplota pohybuje medzi 37,1 a 37,6 stupňov Celzia a to nahráva ľahkej triaške a slabým nervom. Okrem toho, že horúčka prospieva tvorbe a erotickej vášni, umožňuje človeku aj nerušený pobyt doma. Lekári sa zväčša boja poslať pacienta s teplotou do víru pracovných dní.

Keď dopíše, je hladná, smädná a pozornosť má celkom vyčerpanú. Elze chýba schopnosť vytrvalej tvorby – zic-flajš. Jej pracovný deň trvá tri hodiny. Vtedy, keď Elza vstáva od pracovného stola, muž vstáva z postele. Sedia spolu na kanapke v kuchyni a rozmýšľajú, čo budú jesť a čo pôjde Elza nakúpiť. Zväčša obedujú obložené chlebičky a pijú džin s grepovou šťavou. Elza čítala, že na tom, ako sa človek cíti, sa z osemdesiatich percent podieľa jeho žalúdok. To v ňom. Obložené chlebičky a džin sú stravou súvisiacou s oslavami. Preto jej celé roky v živote pripadali ako jedna nepretržitá a poctivá oslava. Deň po dni. A ako počas každej nefalšovane prežívanej – neodfláknutej oslavy – podvečer alebo nadržanom – keď je svetlo dlho neurčité a krajina pripomína plasticky nasvietenú scénu – niekde na koreni jazyka a na podnebí sa objavovala decentná trpkastá chuť – chuť konca oslavy. Mala ovocný buket, izbovú teplotu, plné telo a dlhý chvost. V noci ju prebúdzala čoraz častejšie: chuť smutného konca. Ako keď na Silvestra pár sekúnd po polnoci odíde na chvíľu Ian von s inou ženou a Elza si na hrud', hlavu a plecيا čupne za rastený trol: nočná mora, a ciká jej horúčavu rovno na ploché prsia.

Po ceste domov sa Elza nadržanom rozplače rovno uprostred ulice:

„Ja nechcem pochodovať. Nechcem už ďalej pochodovať. Celý život len pochodujem!“

„Tak nemusíme ísť pešo. Zavolám taxík,“ tíš ju Ian.

„Nerozumieš tomu. To je jedno. Peši alebo v taxíku. Človek aj tak furt len pochoduje.“

Elza. Ale práve pochodovanie ma udržiavalo v bdelosti. Problémy v našom meste niektorí riešili chôdzou, iní plávaním, cvalom na koni či strelbou.

„Kam ideš, Elza? Aha. Túlaš sa, čo? Ja tiež. Ale kam? Nechceš mi povedať, čo? Mal som takého kamaráta, ani ten nikdy nechcel povedať. Len sa ku mne naklonil a pošepol: Vieš, kamarát, ja teraz práve idem na jedno také *mííisto*. Tak aj ty to tak hovor, Elza. Že ideš na jedno také *mííisto*.“

Mesto je malé. Len čo sa vydáte na cestu, máte už jej väčšiu časť za sebou. Kto sa chce u nás túlať, musí chodiť dookola – ako koník – a po ceste stále naráža na ďalšie túla júce sa koníky.

Túlame sa v snahe vyhnúť sa spoločnosti a trpezlivo krok za krokom si navodiť pocit slobody. V skutočnosti sme však členmi konskej sekty s tvrdými pravidlami kruhu.

Radšej skáčem do bazéna. Ruky a nohy pracujú ako dva mlyny. Dych sa zrýchli, prehľbi a ustáli. Menšie i väčšie bazény v hlave sa postupne zaplňajú plavcami: striedavo sa v nich preteká a topí, ponára a splýva.

Dnes je na plavárni priveľa ľudí. Ledva sa vyhýbam najprv náručiam roztvárajúcim sa pod hladinou a vzápätí kopajúcim nohám. V strede stoja v kruhu deti a hádzu si loptu plnú piesku. Zo steny bazéna mi v ústrety vystreľujú tučné nohy cvičiacej panej. V šatni sa slepé dievča neisto prezlieka do plaviek. Strpnu mi zuby. Akoby som po tvári dostala palicou.

Oproti východu z plavárne je byt Kalista Tanziho. Nespúšťam ho z očí. Toto leto z mesta neodcestujem. Nemením obzor. Nehľadám more. Lipnem na oknách opustené ho bytu.

S Ianom sa stretávame náhodou v meste. Pijeme celý dlhý letný večer víno. Rozpráva mi, ako si kedysi myslel, že si bude svoj život pamätať tak nejako podrobnejšie.

„Vypadli mi celé úseky, panely. A udalosti sa nevzďaľujú lineárne s pribúdajúcim časom. Nie je to ustupujúca línia, sú to serpentíny. Niektoré časovo vzdialené úseky sa v zákrutách tesne primkávajú, ohyby sa pretnú a záblesk sa vynorí nad hladinu: ruka pokrčená v lakti, mokré vlasy, zastreté okno, ústa ako kruh napäté v nádychu.“ Rozprávam Ianovi, čo som dnes čítala o jednej nebezpečnej chorobe. Prepukne v strednom veku a prejaví sa tak, že človek začne tancovať. „Tak k tomu už len nájsť nejakú dobrú hudbu,“ povie Ian.

Ian doviedol Elzu k stanovištu taxíkov. V snahe vyhnúť sa ďalšej fľaši vína a pochodu cez rozpálené nočné mesto. Posadil ju vedľa šoféra a pozrel mu do tváre. Sám zostal stáť na chodníku. Zabuchol za Elzou dvere a ruky mu bezmocne zostali visieť popri tele, zbytočné a pridlhé. Musel dávať pozor, aby ich nevláčil po zemi. Aby si ich nepostúpil.

O chvíľu taxík na konci ulice zastaví a Elza vysadne. Vyskočí ako srnka. Vnára sa späť do mesta. Roztvára náruč, kope nohami. Muž na chodníku sa díva za jej vzdáľujúcim sa chrbtom a pozvoľna začína tancovať. Orchester nehrá.

Kalisto Tanzi, spieva si Elza. Tak sa volá to malé prítulné zviera, ktoré vo mne lenivo rastie. Spieva si Elza.

A ženy by ho chceli kúpiť mužom a muži ho chytajú do oka. Pozerajú na mňa a vidia ho, ako sedí vnútri a dozrieva. Spieva si Elza. Rovno za dverami. A najradšej by mi rozpárali brucho a prelomili chrbát na dvoje. Len aby ho mali oni. Spieva si Elza. Najradšej by mi odtrhli hlavu a zalovili vo mne rukami. Spieva si Elza. Nehľadiac na krv: pokojne aj pred deťmi. Elza si spieva.

Café Hyena (Seeing People Off)

Jana Beňová

Translated from the Slovak by Heather Trebaticka

III Kalisto Tanzi

Elza: Together we ate grapes and washed them down with rosé. The next day I discovered a damp grape stalk in my pocket. It looked like a Christmas tree, upside-down.

Kalisto Tanzi disappeared from the town, which was gripped by a heat wave. The heat radiating from the houses and streets burned people's faces and the scorching town seared its mark on their foreheads.

I stopped in front of the theatre's display case so I could read Kalisto's name on the posters and reassure myself that he actually did exist. I derive pleasure from uttering the name that had tormented him throughout childhood and puberty and only really stopped annoying him after my arrival. I slowly walk to the other end of the town, the muscles in my legs tingling slightly in the hot air. It is noon. Drops of perspiration are the only thing really moving on this planet. They run down to the bridge of my nose and spurt out again from under my hair.

I'm going to buy poison.

Yesterday Ian saw a rat in the lavatory.

The rat-catcher has a wine cellar under his shop. We go underground to escape the unbearable heat and sip wine. He tells me how intelligent rats are.

“They have a taster, who is first to try the food. If he dies, the others won’t even touch the bait. That’s why we use second generation baits. The rat begins to die only four days after consuming the poison. It dies as a result of internal bleeding. Even Seneca claimed that such a death is painless. The rest of the rats get the impression that their comrade has died a natural death. But even so – if several of them die in a short time, they decide the locality is unfavourable on account of the high mortality rate and they move elsewhere. Some people and even whole nations completely lack this ability to assess a situation.”

A perfect, repulsive world. I smile over red Tramin. The rat-catcher speaks very fast. His face is in constant motion. As if he had too many muscles in it. As if a pack of rodents were running around under his skin. From one ear to the other. From his chin to his forehead and back. I can feel his restless legs jiggling under the table and his whole trunk sways in a dance.

The sight of this makes me feel dizzy. My head spins like when watching a film that flashes too quickly from one scene to the next. The rat-catcher bends forward and gets tangled in my hair.

“You’re such a pretty little mouse,” he smiles. I smile back. I sense I stink of loneliness.

He sees me out and on the way he gives me a plastic bag full of rat poison. Instead of flowers. I clutch it proudly. Perhaps it will always be like this, I think to myself. If men want to court me, instead of flowers, they will give me a bag of second generation rat bait.

On emerging from the cool cellar, hot air and a world without Kalisto Tanzi hits me in the face.

I first saw Kalisto at a private preview. A lot was drunk there and a few new couples were formed in the course of the evening. As Ian says – where there are men, women and alcohol... – and he thus gives the basic coordinates for the localisation of sex.

I looked into his blue eyes and for the first time I longed for a being with coloured eyes. Ian's are almost black. Colours have always been a decisive factor for me. Their combination in Kalisto's face attracted me. We sat together and talked until morning. As always in the beginning: you can once more give an account of your life and everything is interesting. You talk, slowly revolving around yourself – the whole room dances with you – fine sparkling powder settles in your hair.

In Kalisto Tanzi's presence my account seemed more exciting. My own life swam before our eyes like a glass mountain. With every word I created it anew. Recreated. I recreated in Kalisto Tanzi's presence. No doubt I could write a book about it. It would be a musical: *Ah, little fairy, if you only knew all the things I've been through...*

But it's lunchtime now. I am sitting in a coffee bar. Dressed in brown: an old woman. I am sitting opposite Ian. An old couple. The silence between us is broken only by the newspaper headlines. From time to time Ian reads one out to me over the table. Then he reads on. The newspaper is a drawbridge. He occasionally lets it down and looks at my face. Our eyes do not meet. The wine tastes like prunes and chocolate. The coca cola inscription on the tablecloth begins to rise imperceptibly to meet my face. I hold it down with a plate. I like things to stay in their place.

Back home I sit at the table and write a letter to Kalisto. Ian stands behind me – Ah, do you have to write such a long letter, you poor thing? Wouldn't an SMS do? For example: Where are you?

Kalisto Tanzi doesn't have a mobile or an e-mail address. He considers this form of communication threatening. (The old English term blackmail referred to extorting unjustified taxes. Non-existent debts, promises not given.)

There did not exist a simple way of interfering in his life, climbing through the window of a monitor or display, appearing in person before his very eyes. Elza could not rely on electronic seduction. Although she had a talent for it – for chatting and sweet nothings. She had the gift of the gab.

But the new possibilities also brought her stronger competition. It was so easy to get involved with someone, to contact them. Everything played in favour of seduction. In particular the time saved by rapid communication.

Nowadays no one had to patrol a dark street at night, travel in a coach, a car, a storm. Repair a wheel, change the water boiling in a radiator, walk around homes and coffee bars or helplessly roam streets where there was a hope of meeting the loved one. Map the possibility of their being there. Follow, track, hide, stay in the same place for year after year or travel endlessly.

Emails and quick SMS messages were windows and mirrors rapidly multiplying in the world. Through them it was possible to climb into a room, onto a roof, into a lavatory, plunge under water and fly into the air. Hang up your own alluring picture – install yourself – anywhere.

Elza: In the air, in someone's path. Expose you to my picture.

Elza's morning begins with writing. She puts on some music and for half an hour eagerly gets on with her book. While working she often gets up from her chair damp with

perspiration, because when writing she drinks litres of tea and has the music on too loud and she writes and writes. She writes as if she were running downhill. She sweats and that chills her. All her life her body temperature has ranged between 37.1 and 37.6 degrees, which tends to produce slight shivering fits and weak nerves. Apart from the fact that a fever is good for creative work and erotic passion, it enables one to stay at home undisturbed. Doctors are usually afraid to send a patient with a temperature into the whirlwind of working days.

When she has finished writing, she is hungry, thirsty and her concentration is completely exhausted. Elza lacks the ability to keep at creative work for a long time – *sitzfleisch*. Her working day lasts three hours. When Elza gets up from her desk, Ian gets out of bed. They sit side by side on the couch in the kitchen and think about what they will eat and what Elza will go to buy. They usually have open sandwiches for lunch and they drink gin with grapefruit juice. Elza has read that your stomach – what is in it – contributes eighty per cent to how you feel. Open sandwiches and gin are food associated with celebrations. That is why whole years in her life have seemed to her like a really good, endless celebration. Day after day. And, as during every celebration genuinely enjoyed and properly done – in the early evening or early morning, when the light has long been vague and the scenery looks like a lit-up stage setting, somewhere at the back of the tongue and on the roof of the mouth a discreet bitter taste would appear – the taste of the end of a celebration. It had a fruity bouquet, room temperature, full body and long tail. It woke her up in the night more and more often: that taste of a sad end. Like when at New Year, just a few seconds after midnight, Ian goes outside for a while with another woman and a hairy troll

crouches on Elza's chest, head and shoulders: a nightmare, and it tinkles a wave of heat right onto her flat breasts.

On the way home in the early hours of the morning, Elza bursts into tears in the middle of the street:

"I don't want to march. I don't want to keep marching on any more. All my life I have done nothing but march on!"

"Then we needn't walk. I'll call a taxi," Ian tries to calm her down.

"You don't understand. It's all the same. On foot or by taxi. One way or another, all we do is just keep marching on."

Elza: But in fact it is marching that has kept me awake. Some people solve the problems in our town by walking, others by swimming, horse riding or shooting.

"Where are you going, Elza? Aha. You're just wandering, are you? So am I. But where to? You don't want to tell me, do you? I had a friend who never wanted to say either. He would just lean over towards me and whisper: you know, mate, I'm just going to one of *those places*. So you just say the same, Elza. That you're going to one of *those places*."

It's a small town. You've only just set out and the greater part of your journey is already over. If you want to roam here, you must go in a circle – like a pony and on the way you keep bumping into other roaming ponies.

We roam in an attempt to avoid company and to patiently evoke, step by step, a feeling of freedom. But in fact we are like members of a pony sect with the rigid rules of the circle.

I prefer to jump into a swimming pool. My arms and legs work like two mills. My breath grows more rapid, deeper and then steadies. The smaller and larger pools in my head are gradually filled with swimmers: they take turns to race and drown, submerge and float.

There are too many people in the pool today. First I can hardly manage to avoid the arms opening wide under water, and then the kicking legs. There is a circle of children standing in the middle of the pool and throwing a ball full of sand. The fat legs of a woman exercising shoot out towards me from the wall of the pool. In the changing room a blind girl uncertainly changes into her swimming costume. It's as if someone has hit me in the face with a stick.

Opposite the exit from the pool is Kalisto Tanzi's flat. I can't take my eyes off it. I'm not leaving town this summer. I will not change my horizon. I'm not going in search of the sea. I cling to the windows of the deserted flat.

Ian and I meet by chance in town. We spend the whole long summer evening drinking wine. He tells me how he somehow used to think he would remember his life in more detail. "Whole sections, whole panels, have fallen out. And events don't move into the distance in a straight line with the passing of time. It's not a receding line; it's like a serpentine road. Some sections miles from each other in time come together at the bends, the curves intersect and suddenly something breaks through the surface of the water: an arm bent at the elbow, wet hair, a curtained window, a mouth stretched in a circle as it gasps for breath." I tell Ian what I have read today about a dangerous disease. It breaks out in middle age and manifests itself in such a way that a

person begins to dance. “Then all you need is to find some good music to go with it,” says Ian.

Ian led Elza to the taxi stand. In an effort to avoid a further bottle of wine and a walk through the sweltering night town. He sat her next to the driver and looked at his face. He himself remained standing on the pavement. He slammed Elza’s door shut and his arms were left hanging limply beside his body, useless and too long. He had to be careful not to drag them along the ground. Not to trip over them.

A while later the taxi stops and puts Elza down at the end of the street. She leaps out like a young deer. She dives back into town. She opens her arms, kicks her legs. A man on the pavement looks at her retreating back and slowly begins to dance. The orchestra is not playing.

Kalisto Tanzi, Elza sings to herself. That is what the cuddly little animal that is lazily growing in me is called. Sings Elza.

And women would like to buy it for men and it catches men’s eyes. They look at me and see it, sitting inside me and maturing. Sings Elza. Just behind the door. And they would like to slit my belly and break my back in two. Just so they can have it. Sings Elza. They would like to tear off my head and grope inside me with their hands. Sings Elza. Not minding the blood: happily, even in front of the children. Sings Elza.



© Helén Karlsson

Sara Mannheimer

Handlingen (2011)

The Action

Publishing House **Wahlström & Widstrand**

Biography

Sara Mannheimer grew up in Gothenburg, Sweden, and was educated in the United States, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic. She now lives in Stockholm. In addition to writing, she runs the glassworks Stockholm Heta Glas (Stockholm Hot Glass). In 2011 and 2012, the critically-acclaimed *Come Rushing*, a dance-theatre work she collaborated on with the choreographer Birgitta Egerbladh, ran at Stockholms Stadsteater (Stockholm City Theatre). *Reglerna* (*The Rules*), her novel from 2008, was nominated for the August Prize and won the prize for debut writers from the newspaper *Borås Tidning*. *Handlingen* (*The Action*) was nominated for Swedish Radio's prize for novels.

Synopsis

Handlingen (*The Action*), is Sara Mannheimer's second novel, after the critically acclaimed *Reglerna* (*The Rules*). Here, the author continues to explore the development of different vulnerable mental states. The protagonist is a woman who is driven by a desire to conquer The Library, containing the educated world and the entire global collection of literature. Underlying this neurotic need to control the world around her, and to master the theoretical complexity of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, is her overwhelming grief over a failed pregnancy. Magic and realism are intertwined in Mannheimer's poetic writing, and she succeeds once more in depicting the often well-concealed fragility of everyday life, erasing the fine line between reality and imagination. Stylized and weighted with symbolism, *Handlingen* is a portrayal of a human being's obsession with spiritual purity, and with replacing the weakness of the body with an unassailable intellectual identity.

Handlingen

Sara Mannheimer

Hemmet

Äntligen! Jag måste säga det högt –

Det är höst och jag är inte mållös, inte hemlös, jag har ett Hem inuti vilket målet är löst!

Jag säger det högt, för att det verkligen ska få fäste i mitt medvetande, att jag har skrinlagt alla-andra-möjliga-kommande äntligheter som klibbar vid föreställningen om ytterligare platser och större framkomster.

Jag bär skrinet med mig genom rummen under tiden. Jag går genom rummen med den myllrande inkapslade frånvaron. Frånvaron av det som kunde blivit, och förstås av det som än så länge kan bli. För visst är det omöjligt att gå händelserna I förväg och utesluta att någonting kan komma att växa inifrån – eller att De Våldiga Anderna plötsligt kan resa sig som en bakgrund – vem vet, men skrinet måste hållas stängt. Det som är, eller kan komma att bli dess innehåll, får inte spridas som trollspöglitter över Hemmet, över livet.

Nu är jag här, äntligen i ett slags hamn, i ett slags tillfredsställelse.

Och skrinet blir som det verkar allt svårare att lokalisera, det driver djupare och djupare in i min kropps tunnlar och farleder, som om Hemmets omslutande väggar öppnat en väldig oöverblickbar rymd inuti. Jag har hört folk säga: den inre resan är större än den geografiska, men det har varit tomma ord, något jag aldrig tidigare förstått innebörden av.

Det är först nu jag har kommit fram.

Det har tagit sin tid, jag menar att komma hit. Jag har släpat mina tillhörigheter genom världen från hus till hus och varje gång har det förundrat mig att just mitt bagage sett så märkligt ut, inte alls som rektangulära väskor låsta med små sifferkombinationer, utan mer som inlindade dvärgnoshörningar eller stora tavlor under otympliga presenningar surrade med snöre.

I de rum och lägenheter jag tidigare bott i har provisoriet och parentesens bestämt var skåpet ska stå. Häftmassan har tyngdagslydigt glidit över väggarna med sina segel av Arosenius- och Vermeer-reproduktioner, vilka snarare förr än senare skvalpat längs listernas kajkanter innan det varit dags att samla dem med gummisnodden inför nästa avfärd.

Det har varit i rörelsen, i att vara på väg mot det kommande, i en svärm av framtidsattribut jag blivit verklig för mig själv.

Nu står jag mitt i Hemmet, liksom omgärdad av framkomsten, och trots denna segervissa känsla av att ha landat känner jag mig på något sätt tagen på bar gärning, ja, jag känner mig avklädd, rent ut sagt, *naken*.

Om jag under mitt ambulerande liv varit klädd eller pake-terad i en framtidens flagga, vadderad av ett slags löftets morots¹¹ färgade banderolloverall har nu hela munderingen blåst av mig och fladdrar istället som en otyglad fackla utanför Hemmets port. Mina egna lindor måste jag finna inomhus, ja, inuti mig själv. Att på nytt jaga efter dem i världen vore dödfött eftersom jag inte för mitt liv vill vara någon annanstans, jag vill inte härifrån.

Jag är här, mitt arbete är här, Máram, Randi och Löwet är här, allt jag behöver för att finnas, för att leva, finns här.

Ändå, förutom det här med nakenheten, förutom det här med den levande frånvaron och det som kan komma att ta gestalt inifrån, hur ska jag säga, det är ett par saker som jag inte är klar över än.

Trots att jag inte tvivlar på att det är här jag vill vara, hur otvivelaktigt är det att själva Hemmet kommer att vara? Hur är det till exempel med väggarna? Är det riktiga väggar eller är de bara utsågade i faner, spacklade och målade med målarfärg? Och hur är det med ljuset, är det inte nästan onaturligt ljus?

Trots att jag är i det närmaste euforisk över att vara här kommer frågan gång på gång till mig: Hur vet jag att detta är ett riktigt Hus, ett riktigt Hem?

Jag måste erkänna att jag inte är hemtam i Hemmet än. Jag måste erkänna att jag ifrågasätter dess varaktighet. Är det tillbörligt att tro på väggar av nedbrytbara material, tro på målarfärg, glasull och spackel? Är det inte sådant man använder för att täcka över, för att skyla själva – katastrofen.

Katastrofen kan komma. Katastrofen kan komma att komma mitt i en tro.

Står Hemmet kvar, som ett försvar, är Hemmet min borg?
(När avgrunden öppnar sig och tar?)

✱

Jag skrek till exempel högt, och hjärtat började slå våldsamt när Máram plötsligt visade sig invid dörrposten med en matkasse i handen.

– Lugna ned dig!

Hur är det möjligt att vara så oförberedd på någons ankomst när denne någon trots allt bor i samma hem?

– Men, hör jag mig själv säga i försvarstalston till Máram (egentligen är det nog mig själv jag talar till), brukar inte möten invid dörrposter i rum med väggar av tunna träplattor föregås av repetitioner? Hade jag kanske tilldelats minsta utrymme att få begrunda och förbereda mig på denna plötsliga entré? (Nej, den kom farande som från ett helt annat skådespel.)

Jag lyfter blicken och blir i samma ögonblick varse sprickor i taket vilka förvisso bildar intressanta mönster men samtidigt omedelbart bevisar, det anser jag i alla fall i stunden, att detta Hem är lika förgängligt som alla andra konstruktioner och är kanske egentligen något helt annat än ett hem, kanske snarare något slags dekor som jag själv frammanat, för att i skyddad verkstad kunna bearbeta allsköns handlingar och skeenden på mitt eget lilla vis, ja, genom att stoppa in allt i språksparkdräkten: Det eviga barnet, diktens eviga Det, för att överskrida Tiden som redan överskridit Platsen, för att ta Döden-somska- komma i egna händer, massera den, stryka den medhårs med bläck, kanske är det infamt, jubelidiotiskt –

Men vad är det som rakt upp och ned kallas mitt Liv om mitt Hem är en scen, eller låt säga en konstruktion?

I vilken dimension befinner sig då den så kallade verkligheten?

★

I natt drömde jag om en liten fet pojke.

Vi var på övervåningen, jag var rädd för att bli smittad av de magra kvinnorna på undervåningen, en halsinfektion de drogs med. Jag var också rädd att bli smittad av den lille fete, men jag kom över det. Jag lekte istället med honom, jag ville att han skulle känna att jag ville leka med honom på riktigt! Inte som om jag gjorde det enbart för hans skull. Leken var av akrobatisk sort. Vi rullade runt en del på golvet, det fanns ett täcke, jag såg inte så mycket av hans ansikte, kände mest tyngden, bilringarna, det vita fläsket, mjukt, osäkert, han var väl ändå lite ledsen, han var ju en tjockis, blek och fet och liten, han hörde inte till huset och ändå, vart skulle han annars gå?

Inte heller jag hade någon annanstans att gå, inte heller jag hörde till huset.

Men ändå gick han, jag tror det. Det var då jag öppnade fönstret för att skaka och skaka täcket som kanske var smittat, av fläsket, av bortkommenheten.

Nu saknar jag honom. Pojken som kanske var jag? Nu när jag är tillbaka här. I verkligheten?

Är det vad Hemmet är till för? Är det här jag ska våga bli fet, äntligen svullna, bli dallrig och fumla utan styrsel? Är det här jag ska hemfalla helt åt den organiska rörelsen?

Jag har inga svar.

Men min kropp gömmer än så länge det inbäddade skrinet, skrinet som bågnar av annanstans. Frånvarons och längtans svepta hål. Jag håller det svullna gapet i schack, jag håller det på plats inuti, tyst och stängt och smyckat som ett skrin, rödkantat som ett varligt vårdat sår.

Skulle det vara ett försvar?

Klart är, under alla omständigheter, att vad som försiggår I Hemmet kan jag inte kontrollera.

Inte Márams entréer, sortier och berg av brev och papper. Inte Randis många språng och sköna ting tumlande i hennes fartvind som mandelblom i storm. Och Löwet gör som Löwet vill, med sitt nyckelsmycke, sitt guldhår, så är det bara, just så. Bereden plats, de ryms ej i mina snäva bokstavsrum. Jag ser dem gå, stora ranka rusiga av liv, på väg, far väl!

Inte heller Rösterna, vilka i tid och otid talar till mig från vrår och skåp, inte rummens förhållande till varandra, deras varierande magnetiska inverkan på mig, temperaturrens skiftningar, sakernas sönderfall med mera och så vidare, råar jag över här och nu i Hemmet. Inte ens mina egna infall, drömmar, nervosa ilningar, plötsliga kräkningar, allt möjligt som flyttar sig utom räckhåll så fort jag griper efter dess eventuella systematik, dess konturer, upprepningar och mönster.

Det betyder att även om Hemmet inte är ett riktigt Hem, om Hemmet är en kuliss, något påhittat spektakel i vilket jag sant och visst kan flytta på väggar, förändra ljussättningen, måla om med mera och så vidare, så går det ändå inte att styra över det på riktigt, eftersom jag inte är ensam utan utsatt för ständig och energisk påverkan och eftersom den väldiga historiska floden strömmar genom allt i varje ögonblick.

Kanske har jag bara blivit varse den brist på kontroll jag alltid levt med, men inte märkt för att i rörelsen, i resan, i framåtsteget var jag upptagen av linjen från A till B, helt utan tanke på att B leder till Ö.

*Nu stiger vattnet runt om mig
Jag är kommen till en Ö
De som drar förbi med sina långa svallvågstungor
njuter hastighetens vind
Jag är en Ö
som bågnar som en nolla bågnar av sitt tomrum
och snart måste väl den stora FRÅNVARON komma ut
Och sen kommer svallningarna inifrån
ofruktbarhetspärlorna som färglöst sipprar ut i samma hav
Att ingen i just detta undre ö-liv kan bli till
att ingen kan förlossas mer
gör oceanerna och stjärnorna det samma
Torkan kommer, de invecklade skrevornas tid
långsamheten och den krumma rynkryggens båge
Snart öppnar döden sin käft och slukar i ett nafs min Ö*

Men går jag inte händelserna i förväg nu?

Är jag inte misstänkt angelägen om att sörja över sakernas för att inte säga mitt eget tillstånd? Och trånar jag egentligen efter omnipotens? Eller är det i själva verket efter den undsättning hjälplösheten utlovar?

För att återgå till katastrofen och min beredskap för den samma.

Varför måste jag vara på min vakt i Hemmet? Varför litar jag inte på regler av trä, glasull och spackel?

Därför att det tycks mig omöjligt att blunda för det vanskliga i balansgången mellan konstgjordhet och egentlighet vilken följer på frågan om huruvida någonting överhuvudtaget kan skapas ur intet.

Hur, jag frågar bara, ska jag kunna iscensätta livet framför en kuliss och samtidigt vara beredd på autenticitetens överraskningar?

Det jag vill säga är att om det bara hade varit ett riktigt Hem, med andra ord en riktig hemkomst, en riktig framkomst, en plats som på allvar kunde bära och stävja min irrande fåfänglighet, mitt vankelmod inför var saker och ting börjar och var de slutar, hade jag inte hoppat högt som i en fars vid anblicken av Máram.

Jag hade tagit tag om Márams underbara huvud, kysst min älskade, tagit stunden till vara. För sant är att det långt ifrån är var dag vi möts på tu man hand i Hemmet så här spontant.

Jag försöker skaka av mig den höga pulsen, vända nerverna ryggen, men de envisas med att förfölja mig.

– Andas lite, säger Máram som har tålmod, som har kött, känslor, blod och händer, allt livslevande, ja, hela Máram är fullkomligt trovärdig.

Helst vill jag inte att Máram ska lämna mig en sekund i sticket.

Ensam, absolut utlämnad alltså, i urskiljningen mellan det levande, sanna EGENTLIGA, och upprepningen, plagiatet, kopian, imitationen, efterapningen, parasiterandet, influensen, parafrasen, tolkningen, översättningen, ersättningen och stölden.

Jag vill inte vara ensam med den LEVANDE frånvaron och den evigt framrusande frågan.

Och jag vill på inga villkor vara ensam med mitt sjövildd
elektrokardiogram.

Jag måste ta itu med att ta mig samman.

★

I Hemmets lugna vrå ska jag äntligen få ro att arbeta, alltså
genom stil, form, innehåll, angelägenhet, musikalitet, lust,
kunskap äntligen fördjupa mig, det vill säga inte bara flyga
som ett enhörningsfölg efter sagans juveler, utan äntligen på
allvar ta mig an föräldrandets konst.

I Hemmet ska jag bli lärd.

I Hemmet ska jag inte bara påbörja utan också slutföra.

Jag ska börja från början och inte springa bort, springa ut
I det grönnare, i det som kan komma. Jag ska äntligen få möj-
lighet att undersöka vad andra har skrivit till de levande, de
döda och de ännu ofödda. Jag ska ta emot det jag inte visste
att jag kunde ta emot.

I Hemmet ska jag skapa mig mitt fläsk, mitt hull, mitt
stjärtskvalp.

Min själ ska flytta in i mitt fläsk.

Jag ska sitta i sittmöbeln med näsan i en bok, den ena efter
den andra.

Jag ska tränga in i skrifternas mysterium och i deras
vetenskap.

Jag ska bli invigd och utstötad de underförstådda humman-
dena på rätt sätt, med rätt intervall.

I Hemmet ska jag bli fet, bli mer av allt, mer människa,
mer kropp, mer minne.

Jag ska lära mig de främmande språken, de indoeuropeiska, de semitiska och de slaviska.

Jag ska simma i det etymologiska havet och vandra i de teologiska bergen.

Jag ska bli lärd och min kropp ska ta formen av en hydda.

The Action

Sara Mannheimer

Translated from the Swedish by Rika Lesser

Home

Finally! I must say it out loud–

It's fall and I'm not mute nor aimless, nor homeless, I have a Home in which the case is not lost!

I say this out loud, so it really takes root in my consciousness, that I've boxed up and shelved all-other-possible-forthcoming finalities that cling to the notion of farther-off places and grander arrivals.

I carry this box with me through the rooms and through time. I walk through the rooms with thronging encapsulated absence. Absence of what could have been, and of course what still might be. For surely it's impossible to anticipate events and rule out something coming to grow from inside–or that the Mighty Andes suddenly could rise like a background–who knows, but the box must be kept closed. What is, or can come to be its contents, may not be spread like fairy dust over Home, over my life.

Now I'm here, finally in a kind of harbor, in a kind of contentment.

And the box becomes as it will all the more difficult to locate, it bores deeper and deeper into the tunnels and channels of my body, as if Home's encircling walls opened a vast unsurveyable space inside. I've heard people say: *the inner journey surpasses the geographical*, but these were empty words, I'd never before grasped their meaning.

Only now have I arrived.

Coming here, arriving I mean, took its sweet time. I dragged my belongings from house to house through the world and each time it struck me how very peculiar my baggage looked, not at all like rectangular suitcases that close with little combination locks, rather more like well-wrapped pygmy rhinoceroses or large paintings under clumsy tarpaulins lashed with twine.

In the rooms and apartments I occupied earlier, the provisional and the parenthetical were masters of the house. The mounting putty, according to the law of gravity, glided down the walls with its Arosenius- and Vermeer-reproduction sails sooner rather than later spilling over the baseboard dock edges before it was time to roll them up and secure them with rubber bands in advance of the next departure.

In motion, en route toward what's to come, in a swarm of future attributes I became real to myself.

Now I stand in the middle of Home, as if embraced by arrival, and despite this feeling of triumph at having landed, in some way I feel caught in the act, yes, I feel undressed, to speak plainly, I feel *naked*.

If during my nomadic life I was dressed or packaged in a flag of the future, padded in some promise's carrot-colored banderol-overall, now the whole get-up has blown off me and instead it flutters, like an unbridled flame outside Home port. I must find my own swaddling inside the house and, yes, inside myself. To search for it again in the world would be a dead end, since not on my life do I wish to be elsewhere, I don't want to leave.

I'm here, my work is here, Máram, Randi, and Löwet are here, all I need to exist, to live, are here.

And yet, besides this nakedness, besides this living absence and what can take shape from inside, what shall I say, there are a couple of things I'm still not quite clear about.

Although I have no doubt that I want to be here, how doubtless is it that Home itself will go on existing? What, for example, are the walls like? Are they real walls or were they simply sawed out of veneer, puttied and painted over with house paint? And what about the light, isn't it almost unnaturally bright?

Although I'm practically euphoric at being here the question returns again and again: How do I know this is a real House, a real Home?

I must admit that I'm not yet at home at Home. I must admit that I'm calling its durability into question. Is it appropriate to have faith in walls of degradable material, to have faith in paint, glass wool, and putty? Aren't such things used to cover over, to veil catastrophe itself?

Catastrophe can come. Catastrophe can begin to come in the midst of faith.

Will Home remain standing, like a bulwark, is Home my fortress? (When the abyss opens and gapes?)

*

I screamed, for example, out loud, and my heart began to pound violently when suddenly Máram appeared in the doorway, a bag of groceries dangling from one hand.

– Calm down!

How is it possible to be so unprepared for someone's arrival when this person after all lives in the same house?

– But, I hear myself say in an apologetic tone to Máram (actually I’m probably talking to myself), aren’t encounters in doorways between rooms whose walls are thin sheets of laminated wood preceded by rehearsals? Couldn’t I have been allotted a tiny bit of space for meditation and preparation before this sudden entrance? (No, this came rushing in from a completely different play.)

I look up and at the same moment notice cracks in the ceiling that make remarkably interesting patterns but also at the same time immediately reveal—in any case I consider this now—that this Home is just as transitory as every other construction and may after all really be something completely different from a home, maybe rather some kind of scenery I myself have conjured up, to allow myself to revise all manner of actions and events in a protected workshop in my own small way, yes, by stuffing everything into a linguistic play-suit: The Eternal Child, the poem’s eternal It, in order to *run over* Time which has already run over Place, to take inevitable Death into my own hands, rubbing it the right way with ink, maybe this is vile, maybe I’m a prize idiot—

But what is it that can honestly be called my Life, if my Home is a stage or, say, a construction?

In which dimension then does so-called reality exist?

★

Last night I dreamed of a fat little boy.

We were on the floor above, I was afraid of getting infected by the skinny women on the floor below, who suffered from some kind of infection of the throat. I was also afraid of getting infected by the little fat boy, but I got over it. Instead

I played with him, I wanted him to feel that I really wanted to play with him! Not as if I were doing it for his sake alone. The game was somewhat acrobatic. We rolled around some on the floor, there was a blanket, I didn't see much of his face, mostly I felt the weight, the love handles, the white meat, soft, uncertain, he still seemed a little sad anyway, he was a fatso, pale and stubby and small, he didn't belong in the house and yet, where else would he go?

Nor did I have anywhere else to go, neither did I belong in the house.

But still he left, I think. Then I opened the window to shake and shake out the blanket that maybe got infected by the fat, by the disorientation.

Now I miss him. The boy who perhaps was I? Now that I'm back here. In reality?

Is this what Home is for? Is it here I shall dare to get fat, finally swell, become wobbly and fumble around without backbone? Is it here I shall wholly yield to organic movement.

I have no answers.

But my body continues to conceal the embedded box that bulges of elsewhere. The shrouded hole of absence and desire. I hold the swollen gap in check, I hold it in place somewhere inside, silent and hushed like a small jewel-encrusted box, red-edged like a carefully cared-for wound.

Would this be a defense?

In any case it's clear I cannot control what goes on at Home.

Not Máram's entrances, exits and mountains of letters and papers. Not Randi's many leaps and lovely things tumbling in the streaming air behind her like almond blossoms in a

storm. And Löwet does as Löwet likes, with his key pendant, his golden hair, that's how it is, just like that. Make way, they don't fit into my narrow literary grid. I watch them go, tall and lanky, intoxicated with life, on their way, farewell!

Here and now at Home I don't even prevail over the Voices that speak to me at all hours from corners and cupboards, or the rooms' relationships to one another, their fluctuating magnetic effect on me, temperature shifts, things decomposing et cetera, et cetera. Not even over my own ideas, dreams, shaky nerves, sudden vomiting, everything that moves out of reach just as soon as I grasp for its possible systematics, its contours, repetitions, and patterns.

This means that even if Home isn't a real Home, if Home is a stage set, some invented spectacle in which I can really and truly move the walls, alter the lighting, paint over the scenery, et cetera, et cetera, it still doesn't follow that things can be directed properly, because I'm not alone rather I'm continually and energetically exposed to influence and to the huge historical river that streams through everything at every moment.

Maybe I've only become aware of the lack of control I've always lived with but haven't noticed because in motion, in traveling, in stepping forward I was occupied with the line from A to B, completely without thinking that B leads to Z.

Now the water is rising around me

I have come to an isle

Those drifting past, tongues of swells in their wake

happily lap up velocity's wind

I am an isle

*bulging as a zero bulges from its vacuum
soon even great ABSENCE must emerge
Flashing waves will well up from within
Infertility's pearls colorlessly ooze into the same sea
That no one in this sub-island-life can come into being
that no one can be delivered any longer–
the oceans and stars are indifferent
Drought is coming, the time of intricate fissures
slowness and the bent bow of the curved spine
Before long death opens its jaw, snaps my island up.*

But maybe I'm jumping the gun now?

Am I suspiciously anxious about grieving over the way things are, not to mention my own condition? Am I actually yearning for omnipotence? Or is it rather for the rescue that helplessness promises?

To return to the catastrophe and my preparation for the same.

Why must I be on my guard at Home. Why don't I trust in wooden joists, glass wool, and putty?

Because it seems to me impossible to shut my eyes to the risky instability between the artificial and the real, which results in the question of whether on the whole something can be created from nothing.

How, I'm asking, shall I be able to set life on a stage, in front of a painted backdrop and simultaneously be prepared for the surprises of authenticity?

What I want to say is: if only this had been a proper Home, a proper homecoming, a proper arrival, a place that could seriously support and curtail my wandering vanity, my vacillation in the face of where things begin and end, I would not have jumped as in a farce at the sight of Máram.

I would have grabbed hold of Máram's marvelous head, kissed my beloved, seized the day. For it's true that it's scarcely every day that we meet in private at Home like this on the spur of the moment.

I try to shake off my rapid pulse, turn my back on my nerves, but they persist in persecuting me.

– Take a breath, says Máram, who has patience, flesh, feelings, blood and hands, everything lifelike, yes, all of Máram is completely credible.

Most of all I don't want Máram to leave me in the lurch for a second.

Alone, thus absolutely abandoned, in the distinction between living, true REALITY, and repetition, plagiarism, copy, imitation, mimicry, parasitism, influence, paraphrase, interpretation, translation, replacement, and theft.

I don't want to be alone with LIVING absence and the eternal onrushing question.

And on no account do I want to be alone with my tempestuous electrocardiogram.

I must set about taking myself in hand.

✱

In the quiet corners of Home, I'll finally find the peace to work, through style, form, content, urgency, musicality,

pleasure, appetite, finally engrossing myself in knowledge, not just flying like a baby unicorn after fairy-tale jewels, but seriously taking up the art of alchemy, the alchemy of words.

At Home I'll become wise.

At home I won't just begin things but I'll see them through.

I will begin from the beginning and not run away, run out into what's greener, into what may come. I will finally have the chance to investigate what others have written to the living, the dead, and the as yet unborn. I will accept what I did not know I could receive.

At Home I will make my own fat, my own flesh, my own wobbly butt.

My soul will move into my meat.

I will sit in an armchair with my nose in a book, one after the other.

I will penetrate the mystery of scripture and the science thereof.

I will be initiated and utter the tacit hemming and hawing in the right way, at the right intervals.

At Home I will grow fat, become more of everything, more human, more body, more memory.

I will learn foreign languages, Indo-European, Semitic, and Slavic.

I will swim in the Sea of Etymology and wander in the Mountains of Theology.

I will become wise and my body will take the shape of a hut.

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A Kis Reccs. Pécs: Jelenkor, 2012.

Ireland – **Kevin Barry**

Short stories

There Are Little Kingdoms. Dublin: Stinging Fly Press, 2007.

Dark Lies the Island. London: Jonathan Cape, Random House, 2012.

Novels

City of Bohane. London: Jonathan Cape, Random House, 2011.

Italy – **Emanuele Trevi**

Essays

Istruzioni per l'uso del lupo. Roma: Castelvechi, 1994 and 2002.

Musica distante: meditazioni sulle virtù. Milano: Mondadori, 1997.

Senza verso. Un'estate a Roma. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005.

Fiction

I cani del nulla. Una storia vera. Torino: Einaudi, 2003.

L'onda del porto. Un sogno fatto in Asia. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005.

Il libro della gioia perpetua. Milano: Rizzoli, 2010.

Qualcosa di scritto. Milano: Ponte alle Grazie, 2012.

Lithuania – **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**

Anthology

Siužetą siūlau nušauti (I Offer to Shoot the Plot). Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002.

Short stories

Suplanuotos akimirkos (*Planned Moments*). Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2004.

Šiąnakt aš miegosiu prie sienos (*Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall*). Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2010.

Norway – **Gunstein Bakke**

Translation

Juliana Spahr: *Alle med lunger kopla saman*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2008.

Novels

Kontoret (*The Office*). Oslo: Gyldendal, 2000.

Den indre olding (*The Old Man within*). Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005.

Maud og Aud: ein roman om trafikk (*Maud and Aud: A Novel on Traffic*). Oslo: Forlaget Oktober, 2011.

Anthology

Respons 22/7. Oslo: Forlaget Oktober, 2011.

Poetry

Murskueteknikkane. Oslo: Forlaget Oktober, 2012.

Poland – **Piotr Paziński**

Labirynt i drzewo. Studia nad Ulissem Jamesa Joyce'a
(*Labyrinth and Tree. Studies on James Joyce's Ulysses*).

Kraków: Austeria, 2005.

Dublin z Ulissem (Dublin with Ulysses). Warsaw: Czuly
Barbarzynca Press, 2008.

Pensjonat (Boarding House). Warsaw: Warsaw :
Wydawnictwo Nisza, 2009.

Portugal – **Afonso Cruz**

Novels

A Carne de Deus. Lisbon: Bertrand, 2008.

A Boneca de Kokoschka. Lisbon: Quetzal, 2010.

Jesus Cristo Bebia Cerveja. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2012.

Short stories

Enciclopédia da Estória Universal. Lisbon: Quetzal, 2009.

A Enciclopédia da Estória Universal: Recolha de Alexandria.
Madrid: Alfaguara, 2012.

Children's literature

A Contradição Humana. Alfragide: Editorial Caminho, 2010.

*Os Livros que Devoraram o meu Pai: A Estranha e Mágica
História de Vivaldo Bonfim*. Alfragide: Editorial Caminho,
2010.

O Pintor Debaixo do Lava-Loiça. Alfragide: Editorial
Caminho, 2011.

Slovakia – **Jana Beňová**

Poetry

Svetloplachý (Lucifugous). Bratislava: Hevi, 1993.

Lonochod (Wombokhod). Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 1997.

Nehota (Loveful Naked). Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 1997.

Novels

Parker (Lúbostný román) (Parker [A Love Story]). Bratislava: Park, 2001.

Café Hyena- (Plán odprevádzania) (Café Hyena- [Seeing People Off]). Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2012.

Preč! Preč! (Get off! Get off!). Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2012.

Short stories

Dvanásť poviedok a Ján Med (Twelve Stories and Ján Med). Bratislava: Koloman Kertész Bagala, 2003.

Sweden – **Sara Mannheimer**

Reglerna (The Rules). Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2008.

Handlingen (The Action). Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2011.

EUPL 2012 National Juries

Austria

President: **Dr. Ludwig Paulmichl**, Folio Verlag

Jury Members:

Gerhard Ruiss, IG AutorInnen

Dr. Christa Rothmeier, translator

Benedikt Föger, Czernin Verlag

Croatia

President: **Božidar Petrač**, writer, literary critic, translator and editor, president of Croatian Writers' Association

Jury Members:

Stjepan Čuić, writer and journalist

Nikola Đuretić, writer, translator and publisher (Naklada Đuretić)

Ružica Cindori, writer, CWA secretary

France

Président: **Eduardo Manet** (CPE)

Jury Members:

Carole Zalberg (SGDL)

Claire Delannoy (Albin Michel)

Alice Déon (Editions de la Table ronde)

Philippe Lecomte, Le Livre écarlate, Paris (librairie indépendante)

Hungary

President: **Dániel Levente Pál** (József Attila Kör)

Jury Members:

Imre Barna (MKKE)

László Garaczi (Szépírók Társasága)

János Szentmártoni (Magyar Írószövetség)

Ireland

President: **Liz Carty**, author, president of the Association of Irish Writers

Jury Members:

Jean Harrington, director, Publishing Ireland

Tom Owens, former director of trading at Easons Booksellers

Tadhg MacDhonnagain, Irish speaking scriptwriter, songwriter and singer

Maire Nic Mhaolain, editor of *An Gúm*, chair of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association, chair of Ireland Literature Exchange, and member of the board of the Irish Writers' Centre

Italy

President: **Gian Arturo Ferrari** president of the National Centre for Book and Reading

Jury Members:

Giancarlo Coletti is the owner of the catholic bookstore specialized in religious studies. His bookstore was opened in 1908

Paolo Mauri is a literary critic and historian of literature, and also a writer. He is responsible for the cultural pages of the newspaper *La Repubblica*

Lithuania

President: **Laimantas Jonušys**, critic, translator – Lithuanian Writers' Union; Lithuanian Association of Literary Translators

Jury Members:

Rimantas Kmita, poet, critic, literary scholar (Institute of the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuanian Writers' Union)

Antanas A. Jonynas, poet, chairman of the Lithuanian Writers' Union

Eugenijus Ališanka, poet, critic, editor of Lithuanian Writers' Union magazine *The Vilnius Review*

Lolita Varanaviciene, Lithuanian Publishers' Association

Norway

President: **Markus Midré**, writer

Jury Members:

Merete Røsvik Granlund, literary critic

Oliver Møystad, works in NORLA, Norwegian Literature Abroad, Fiction & Non-fiction, which is a government-funded, non-commercial foundation which promotes Norwegian literature to other countries

Poland

President: **Anna Nasiłowska**, writer and professor, Association of Polish Writers, SPP

Jury Members:

Professor Przemysław Czapliński – Polish Chamber of Books

Professor Grażyna Borkowska – Polish Chamber of Books

Leszek Bugajski – Association of Polish Writers, ZLP

Stefan Pastuszewski – Chamber of Polish Booksellers, IKP

Portugal

President: **José Jorge Letria**, SPA president (Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores)

Jury Members:

Jorge Joao Rodriguez, APEL, Associação Portuguesa de Editores e Livreiros, for publishers

Ana Maria Neves, APEL, Associação Portuguesa de Editores e Livreiros, for booksellers

Slovakia

President : **Miroslava Vallova** – director of the Centre for Information on Literature, translator

Jana Cvikova – publisher (Publishing House Aspekt), translator, founder of the feminist project Aspekt

Katarína Kucbelová – poetess, literary critic, founder and director of the first literary prize ANASOFT LITERA (Anasoft Litera is the most important and one of the rare prizes for prose in Slovakia)

Pavol Rankov – writer, university professor, winner of the EUPL Prize in 2009

Vladimir Petrik – prominent literary critic, member of the Academy of Sciences

Sweden

President: : **Jonas Modig**, writer and former publisher

Jury Members:

Magnus Jacobsson, author

Tove Skarstedt, bookseller

EUPL 2012 Jury Reports

Austria

The war in the former Yugoslavia left behind many wounds. More than 30,000 people were reported missing by the International Red Cross. To date, only about 15,000 people have been found and identified.

Using this historic background, Anna Kim tells the story of a Kosovar searching for his missing wife. The narrator takes the reader into the human consequences of his trauma, and also into the traditional agricultural world of Albanians living in Kosovo. At the same time, the author introduces the reader to the work of the forensic doctors and anthropologists in an emotional way.

This novel's strength lies in its ability to convincingly portray the act of remembrance, capturing all its personal and social implications. The stylistic complexity and sensibility of the work is captivating, highlighting an important European topic, namely that of communication across ethnic and religious differences.

Croatia

Everything in the winning novel revolves around the motif of roulette: one can win or lose at it, it causes despair and exultation, people can study and attempt to outwit it, to try and define its laws and guess its philosophy. But above all, as one critic wrote, "the roulette in this novel is a global metaphor". The author herself says in a foreword to the novel: "Roulette, this metaphor of Croatian society and human life... summarises contempt, hope, disappointment, and fury. A futile cry for a win over injustice and one's own destiny. However, is it at all possible to defeat the cursed roulette which plays with one's hope just as our society plays with one's existence?" One could hardly find another metaphor that could better and more expressively describe the state of contemporary Croatian society than the one offered by Lada Žigo. The disintegration of society is increasing, with rampant unemployment, a lack of vision, an omnipotence of money and impotence of justice, and cheap showbiz philosophy – these are among the signs of our time which are too strong not to be picked up by writers, not in order to judge people, but to describe these dominant social trends. A skilful stylist and brilliant storyteller, Žigo has successfully joined a group of writers of her generation who dissect aspects of contemporary Croatian society, revealing its virtues as well as its vices to the eyes of readers.

France

Our winner, Laurence Plazenet, lives and teaches in Paris. An expert in 17th century French literature, she has written three published books. The first one, *L'amour seul* (*Love Alone*), published by Albin Michel, is a novel inspired by the passion between Mademoiselle d'Albrecht, a fifteen-year-old girl, and her tutor Agustin Ramon y Cordoba, Monsieur Ramon.

For those who love the French language, *L'amour seul* is dazzling, written in a classical style reflecting 17th century French. Between sensuality and dereliction, the novel displays modern passionate relationships in a historical context. That ambiguity gives to *L'amour seul* its uncanny charm and grace, and its sense of absolute tragedy.

The second novel, *La Blessure et la soif*, is nourished by the same powerful creativity of her first, and is also set in the 17th century. She has chosen modern times for her third novel. *Disproportion de l'homme*, which talks about male-female relationships. Through an affected writing style – in a positive way – and through a true delicacy of style, the author goes well beyond the usual vaudeville cliché (the husband, the wife and the mistress) to reach a mystical sense of love, the transcendence of missing someone and the enjoyment of absence. The main character doesn't love an absent or present woman; he loves love itself.

Our 2012 jury loves Laurence Plazenet, a name to remember with a body of work well worth investigating.

Hungary

A young Turkish boy, Issa, the grandson of a high-ranking official of the Ottoman Empire, lives in the Sultan's palace in Istanbul when his father suddenly dies and his mother disappears under mysterious circumstances. The orphan comes to Hungary, to the freshly conquered border zone of the Empire, and grows up in the town of Pécs, fostered by his uncle, the military governor (bey) of Pécs county.

This southern town, at the border of the Hungarian and Croatian parts of mediaeval Hungary, was at that time a mosaic of nations, cultures and religions. Issa learns with the inquisitiveness of an adolescent how to live and communicate with Hungarian and Croatian peasants, German bourgeois, Bosnian craftsmen, Bulgarian gardeners, Serbian soldiers and Turkish ulemas. He also learns how to find common ground with believers of the Catholic and Orthodox faiths, with Shiite monks (dervishes) and Italian adventurers, and with all kinds of outcasts living in a wartime border region.

The plot is abundant with playful digressions. One such example is an ancestral tale, originating in the legendary past of the Arabic Caliphates, interwoven with episodes of the *Thousand and One Nights* and the cultural history of the Mediterranean region. We discover that one of Issa's ancestors translated Dante's *Divina Commedia* into the Arabic language, and another bought the Atlantic Codex containing Leonardo da Vinci's fantastic machine designs. This codex then reaches the family in Pécs, where one of the Shiite dervishes will construct Leonardo's flying machine and will test it above the city at the most inappropriate moment.

At the end, the secret behind Issa's mother's disappearance is revealed, and Issa encounters his step-brothers, an Italian adventurer and a Hungarian outlaw.

Viktor Horváth's work promotes one of the most important values of European culture, the idea of tolerance and coexistence, and looks at issues of cultural difference, all in a playful and amusing way.

Ireland

The Irish jury of the EUPL chose *City of Bohane* by Kevin Barry as the eventual winner for a work by an emerging author of fiction. This decision was reached by a majority of four out of the five jury members. *City of Bohane* was chosen from a shortlist of five novels which included *There Are Little Kingdoms* (Kevin Barry, published by Stinging Fly Press), *Dark Lies the Island* (Kevin Barry, published by Jonathan Cape), *The Apartment* (Greg Baxter, published by Penguin Group), and *On the Floor* (Aifric Campbell, published by Serpent's Tail).

The winning novel is a *tour-de-force* which depicts a world which is familiar yet threateningly apocalyptic. In a biting commentary on post-Celtic-Tiger Ireland, its brilliantly-drawn characters stride through the streets of a modern Gomorrah, where dark deeds are everyday events. In summarizing the decision of the Irish jury, its President Liz Carty said that Kevin Barry is undoubtedly destined to become one of the most important Irish literary figures of the 21st century. Although *City of Bohane* is a dark comic novel which casts a cynical shadow on contemporary Ireland, the writing displays humour and poetic richness in unexpected places. It is this diversity, together with the inventiveness and creativity of language which is almost Joycean in its richness, that reflects the best of contemporary Irish writing.

Italy

The ambition of Emanuele Trevi, fully realised in this book, has always been to write in an original literary style that is out of the ordinary. *Qualcosa di scritto*, according to Pietro Citati, "is not an autobiography, a biography, an essay, or a philosophical treatise: but it is all of these things together".

The author draws from time spent on an internship at the Fondo Pasolini, working with the very wild Laura Betti, who tries to make life difficult for him, both insulting him and courting him at the same time. Meanwhile, the reading of Pasolini's unfinished and posthumously-published novel *Petrolio* becomes an initiation, meaning much more than all the comment made about the book. Trevi, instead of simply re-reading the book, experiences a meeting with Pasolini himself, with his obsession for sex and with the duplicity of his characters.

Qualcosa di scritto confronts the unknown aspects of life (both ours and others), leaving aside what is already said and welcoming pleasure and pain as thresholds of death. With the help of Pasolini, Trevi tells us of a time in which nobody seeks the truth, and in which nobody (academics and critics included) wants to find the words to express the truth.

Lithuania

On the 29th of May, the Lithuanian Jury selected the winner, Giedra Radvilavičiūtė, for her collection of short stories *Šiņakt aš miegosiu prie sienos* (*Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall*), published by Baltos lankos in 2010.

A couple of her short stories appeared in a periodical in the late 1980s, but went largely unnoticed. After a long gap, her breakthrough came in the early 2000s when she started publishing semi-autobiographical, fictionalized essays in the cultural weekly *Šiaurės Atėnai* (this type of short first-person narrative is very prominent in recent Lithuanian literature. They are usually called essays, but can also be treated as short stories).

Šiņakt aš miegosiu prie sienos, her latest book, established her as one of the key emerging Lithuanian authors. Her work mostly deals with everyday occurrences, seemingly insignificant experiences and perceptions. Their sophisticated sensibilities reveal a rich existence, a deep sense of every quotidian moment. On the other hand, they are very readable, devoid of any pomposity or exultation, often tinged with irony, dealing with such experiences as illness, physical fragility, loneliness, inability to pursue stable relationships, the burden of domestic chores, and so on. Some of the stories deal with the circumstances of a middle-aged woman, living with her daughter in a small flat in the Old Town of Vilnius: the insights cut deep into everyday experiences, at the same time the exquisite literary quality of the text contributes to a rewarding reading experience.

One of the sections of this book, 'The Allure of the Text', was included in an anthology from the respected American publisher, Dalkey Archive Press, called *Best European Fiction 2010*. An American reviewer wrote: "Radvilavičiūtė not only lays out five exceptionally sound criteria for a worthy text, she gracefully illustrates them in the story she tells." Dalkey Archive Press is now preparing to publish a selection of Radvilavičiūtė's stories.

Norway

Maud and Aud consists of short chapters that alternate between narrative flashes and poetic descriptions, containing reflections on traffic and the physical aspects of human life in a society where technology has become an increasingly important part of our bodies as well as our lives. At the centre of the plot is a family which is devastated by a car accident: the mother dies, the father can only live on supported by artificial body parts, and the twin sisters Maud and Aud survive with bodily and mental scars. As it turns out, the sister with the lesser physical injuries is the one who cannot shake off the trauma of her family's encounter with death, and she is drawn to the thrill of reckless driving, both in her job as a traffic reporter and secretly during nightly drives to scenes of recent car accidents.

From this starting point, the author creates an essayistic net of reflections on thematically connected topics. These include how the first heart transplant operation performed in Cape Town in 1967 expanded our possibilities of fighting physical death, and how Princess Diana in 1997 was chased to her death as her car crashed in the Pont de l'Alma-tunnel in Paris. Furthermore, he dwells on how cars represent one of the greatest threats to human life in modern civil

society, but they are still perceived as a smaller threat to man than wild animals hunted to near extinction, arguing that evolution has not caught up with the rapid development of modern civilization.

In short, Gunstein Bakke touches on questions of existential importance in a country where oil fuels not only the cars, but also a large part of society's development – and possibly also environmental developments that may eventually pose new threats to human life.

Poland

Pensjonat begins with a nostalgic trip to a hotel near Warsaw that the hero frequented in his childhood with his grandmother in summer. The house, typical for this area, was built before World War II as a medical facility for wealthier Jews, which was operating even after the war. As the hero grew up, and an old generation died, the place has fallen into decline. His trip into the past begins with him finding the ruins of the house in the pine forest, but it does not stop there. The hero talks with old women about the past, and moves to the house of his childhood to dig deeper into the past, to the Jewish community in Poland before the Holocaust.

The literature on the Holocaust in Poland is a specific field, in which obligatory ethical restrictions are in force. Many older writers believe that the first task is to bear witness. The most restrictive opinion is that the use of any fiction (as fabrication and lie) is not allowed, and is not a reliable record of experience. According to this opinion, Holocaust literature in Poland should end with the last witness. However, a generation of younger writers, born after World War II, are attempting to go beyond the strict rules of documentary literature. Piotr Paziński's book is not the first example. His book is a particularly successful record of psychological post-traumatic experiences. The young hero is an ironic figure, his sense of humour providing a balance for the weight of traumatic memories.

Portugal

The Portuguese Jury of the European Union Prize for Literature has unanimously chosen the writer Afonso Cruz and his novel *A Boneca de Kokoschka* (*Kokoschka's Doll*) as the winner of this award, because it considers that both the author and the work are representative of the best literature currently being created in Portugal, in line with the Prize's definition of literature's emerging values.

The novel, published in 2010, reveals the imaginative and narrative talent of a versatile author who has also been establishing himself in the fields of illustration, music and cinema.

Cruz, who started his career as a fiction writer in 2008 with the novel *A Carne de Deus* (*The Flesh of God*), is one of the most innovative literary authors of his generation, with a fictional universe that is enriched by his experience as a plastic artist. *A Boneca de Kokoschka* is an early high point in a career that is only just beginning, a talent that the European Union Prize for Literature is expected to consolidate and promote on an international level, while showing that his work has already reached maturity.

Slovakia

On 15 May, the jury decided the conditions under which the Slovak candidates for the European Union Prize for Literature ought to be selected. Each jury member suggested five writers who met the recommended criteria and checked the availability of the suggested titles in book stores. On 25 May, the jury met to select and approve five authors for the shortlist. On 1 June, the jury selected Slovakia's winning author.

The procedures and system of voting of the Slovak jury included a points system, whereby an author would gather five points if they were on a shortlist of all five jury members; four points if on the shortlist of four jury members, etc. Authors on the same number of points were further ranked through discussion, followed by voting. The top five authors were placed on the final shortlist.

Each jury member then made his or her own rankings of the five shortlisted authors. The winning author was the one who reached the highest score. Through this process, the jury gave the award to Jana Beňová's *Café Hyena* (*Seeing People Off*).

Sweden

Sara Mannheimer's debut novel *Reglerna* (*The Rules*, 2008) created a claustrophobic linguistic space to depict its main protagonist, a woman who tries to exercise manic control over her daily life. In her follow-up *Handlingen* (*The Action*, 2011), she continues to explore vulnerable mental states. The central character is driven by a desire to conquer The Library, containing the educated world and the entire global collection of literature. Underlying this neurotic need, and her urge to control everyday life and master the theoretical complexity of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, is an overwhelming grief at a lost pregnancy. Stylised and weighted with symbolism, *Handlingen* is a portrayal of a human being's obsession with spiritual purity, and with replacing the weakness of the body with an unassailable intellectual identity.

With her highly personal blend of subtle humour and underlying sadness, Mannheimer creates a literary landscape that is both deeply original and always interesting.

The European Union Prize for Literature

The aim of the European Union Prize for Literature is to put the spotlight on the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe's contemporary literature in the field of fiction, to promote the circulation of literature within Europe and encourage greater interest in non-national literary works.

The works of the selected winners (one 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 12 countries participating in the 2012 award.

The nomination of candidates and the final selection of one winner in each country took place between February and July 2012.

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 12 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 Federation

www.europeanbooksellers.eu

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

Twelve winning authors

Anna Kim

Die gefrorene Zeit (2008)

Lada Žigo

Rulet (2010)

Laurence Plazenet

L'amour seul (2005)

Viktor Horváth

Török tükör (2009)

Kevin Barry

City of Bohane (2011)

Emanuele Trevi

Qualcosa di scritto (2012)

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

Šiqnakt aš miegočiu prie sienos
(2010)

Gunstein Bakke

Maud og Aud: ein roman om trafikk
(2011)

Piotr Paziński

Pensjonat (2009)

Afonso Cruz

A Boneca de Kokoschka (2010)

Jana Beňová

Café Hyena (Plán odprevádzania)
(2012)

Sara Mannheimer

Handlingen (2011)