

TWELVE WINNING AUTHORS

2016



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Christophe Van Gerrewey • Tanja Stupar-Trifunović • Antonis Georgiou
Bjørn Rasmussen • Paavo Matsin • Selja Ahava • Nenad Joldeski • Benedict Wells
Gast Groeber • Claudiu M. Florian • Jasmin B. Frelih • Jesús Carrasco

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Foreword

The European Union Prize for Literature honours new literary voices from across 37 European countries, regardless of nationality, age or language. I am delighted to present this year's winners, talented authors from twelve countries: Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia and Spain.

We know that culture has great social and economic value and that, at the same time, it has immense intrinsic value. This is about European identity and our common cultural heritage, our languages, our arts and our literature. We are proud of our cultural diversity, and we want to promote it. This is why the EU helps artists to travel, works of art to be circulated, films to be distributed and books to be translated. Some authors say that having their works translated is even more rewarding than having them published, that their work is somehow set free – and made available to new readers, often bringing feedback as fresh inspiration for the author.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is at the heart of the European Union Prize for Literature. Supported by the EU's Creative Europe programme, the Prize draws attention to new and emerging authors and helps them reach new readers outside their home country. More broadly, it aims to foster interest in the translation, publishing, selling and reading of foreign literary works.

The prize-winning books, 96 in all over the eight editions since the Prize was established in 2009, constitute a wide and wonderful range of high quality fiction produced across Europe – a veritable literary gold mine!

Writers trigger creativity. Literature and the free written word help us to better understand ourselves and the world around us. This anthology offers excerpts from this year's prize-winning books, carefully selected by the authors themselves and presented in the original language as well as in English or French translations.

I invite you to browse, to savour and be captured by the glimpses offered from these new stories – and I wish you an excellent literary excursion across Europe!

Tibor Navracsics

European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport



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Christophe Van Gerrewey

Op de hoogte (2012)

Up to Date

Publishing House **De Bezige Bij**

Biography

Christophe Van Gerrewey (b.1982) studied architecture at Ghent University and literary science at KU Leuven. His PhD, 'Architecture: a User's Manual. Theory, Critique and History since 1950 according to Geert Bekaert' was published in 2015.

He is a member of the editorial board of *OASE*, a Dutch journal on architecture, and of *DWB*, one of the oldest literary journals in Flanders, and has also published essays in other journals and newspapers. Since September 2015, he is professor of architecture theory at EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Synopsis

A young man awakens in a house belonging to friends. They are on holiday, and he is taking care of their cat. He remembers how he spent the previous summer in exactly the same house, accompanied by his lover. She is no longer there, and he decides to write her a letter, to give her an account of everything that has changed since their breakup. While writing, the nameless narrator realises that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to actually mail his letter. Wouldn't it be better to publish the letter as a novel?

Not everything goes according to plan: in an increasingly perverse mix-up, the addressee turns the tables, and she starts talking to him, instead of the other way around. Soon, the real purpose of this letter (and this book) becomes unclear: is this a letter of complaint from a jilted lover, an exhibitionist confession to the world, or a scrupulous, somewhat ridiculous self-examination? And then there is the cat, still recovering from the flea infestation of last year, and probably the real protagonist in the novel, or at least the only living creature the narrator is able to make contact with.

Op de hoogte

Christophe Van Gerrewey

Ik zou je in deze eerste zin moeten stoppen, als een zakdoek die vol plooiën verborgen zit in een vuist, en die door een clown als een boeket tevoorschijn wordt gehaald. Zohoort het, bij een brief: de belangrijkste eigenschap uitgedrukt in één adjectief (eventueel voorafgegaan door een bijwoord), en dan de naam van de geadresseerde, die niet noodzakelijk de naam is die iedereen kent, maar vaak de relatie aangeeft die er tussen verzender en ontvanger bestaat. Om vele redenen is een dergelijke aanspreking niet mogelijk. Dit is geen brief, en zo ben ik ontslagen van de verplichting om je aan te spreken en je samen te vatten – om ons samen te vatten, en wat er tussen ons is gebeurd. Dit is het soort tekst waarin andere regels gelden.

–

Ik bevind me in een huis dat je goed kent, in het uitzonderlijke gezelschap van iemand met wie je vertrouwelijk hebt samengeleefd, misschien niet zo heel lang, maar toch lang genoeg. Hoe goed kan een mens een kat kennen? Hoeveel tijd, hoeveel gebeurtenissen moeten er voorbijgaan voordat je vertrouwd bent met een dier, en wat neem je mee van die vertrouwelijkheid nadat je afscheid hebt genomen? Komende maand zal ik in dit huis wonen, dat niet het mijne is, maar dat toebehoort aan vrienden die vier weken op vakantie zijn. Omdat ze Muisje niet kunnen meenemen op reis, omdat er planten in het huis staan die water nodig hebben, omdat vissen in een bokaal niet overleven zonder schilfers artificieel voedsel en vers water, omdat de post zich zou opstapelen en de brievenbus verstopt zou raken zodat de postbode de brieven moet

retourneren aan de afzender, omdat ik het niet erg vind om een tijdje elders te wonen, al is het dan in de buitenwijken van Gent, in de periferie van de stad waarvan ik het centrum bewoon – om al die redenen woon ik in augustus hier, zoals ik hier vorig jaar in augustus ook woonde, samen met Muisje, en ook samen met jou, in dit huis, in deze kamers. Je hebt er vast nog herinneringen aan.

–

Door het raam op de eerste verdieping kijk ik uit op een langwerpig bakstenen gebouw, dat de kleine achtertuin begrenst en het gras en de struiken en de eenzame boom tot staan brengt, dat rechts en links buiten mijn blikveld eindigt en begint, en dat bekroond wordt door een reeks schuine, asymmetrische daken die elkaar opvolgen als de tanden van het blad van een zaag – een gigantische zaag waarmee een stuk land van de wereld kan worden gescheiden. Daarachter staan hoge sparrenbomen, dicht bij elkaar, bijna vormen ze een bosje, en in de verte kan ik een wit appartementsgebouw zien dat net boven die bomenrij uittorent. Dit is de rand van Gent, net voor de deelgemeentes beginnen en de ruimte een andere naam krijgt. ‘Het is heel fijn om hier te kunnen wonen samen met jou en Muisje, en het is een prachtig huis, waarin ik heel goed zal kunnen werken – maar helaas bevinden we ons in suburbia,’ zoals jij het uitdrukte op een manier die mij bleef verrassen, ‘suburbia, terwijl Gent in het geheel een uiterst suburbane stad is die de titel stad niet eens verdient. In Gent gebeurt er niets of hoogstens één ding tegelijkertijd. Als je in Gent bent en je vraagt je op een avond af wat je zou kunnen doen, dan heb je altijd maar één mogelijkheid, tenzij je hoogst uitzonderlijk geluk hebt, dan heb je er twee. Ik spreek me niet uit over de kwaliteit van die mogelijkheid of van die mogelijkheden, maar voor mij is Gent daarom onbewoonbaar,

het is een stad die denkt dat haar bewoners geen zin hebben om te kiezen en die in hun plaats kiest. Daarom is Gent een stad met periodes, en in die periodes is het duidelijk wat er gebeurt, en wordt er verwacht dat wie het niet zint wat er in die periodes wordt aangeboden, de stad verlaat. Op vastgelegde momenten komen de verschillende gebruikersgroepen van de stad tevoorschijn, als insecten bij een bepaalde temperatuur – studenten, toeristen, alcoholisten, wielerliefhebbers, milieuactivisten, amateurgastronomen, marathonlopers en wandelaars – altijd net op tijd om het startschot voor hun evenement af te wachten. Voor dingen die zich voordoen zonder startschot is er in deze stad geen plaats. Gent is onleefbaar, daarom, voor mij, en het suburbia van Gent is natuurlijk zo mogelijk nog erger. Hier gebeurt nooit iets, maar toch denken alle bewoners dat ze in een stad wonen. Wat zitten de mensen hier eigenlijk te doen? In suburbia, en zeker in het suburbia van Gent, is het leven pas echt zinloos. Het merkwaardige en het onuitstaanbare is dat de mensen hier dat niet beseffen, maar elkaar integendeel in een web van gezelligheid en vriendschappelijkheid gevangen houden. Het is goed dat we hier een paar weken mogen verblijven, maar veel langer zou het niet kunnen duren.’

—

Ons verblijf vorig jaar in dit huis heeft inderdaad niet lang geduurd. Alleen de allereerste keer toen wij ergens samen verbleven, zijn de dagen aan elkaar geregen en is het verblijf niet voortijdig afgebroken. Jaren tevoren hadden wij elkaar ontmoet op een verjaardagsfeestje van gemeenschappelijke vrienden, maar pas een hele tijd daarna bleek dat jij graag meer tijd met mij wilde doorbrengen, toen je dezelfde gemeenschappelijke vrienden had overgehaald om ons mee op vakantie te nemen, hoewel er van ons nog geen sprake was. Juist daarom

was die succesvolle reis jaren geleden georganiseerd: om ons in het leven te roepen, om ervoor te zorgen dat er voortaan op elk moment van de dag sprake van ons zou zijn, opdat wij, al dan niet denkbeeldig, voortdurend met elkaar zouden praten, overleg plegen, instemming vragen, meningen uitwisselen en verlangens verifiëren. Toen ik door onze gemeenschappelijke vrienden werd uitgenodigd, heb ik me afgevraagd of achter hun invitatie bedoelingen van jou schuilgingen, en hoewel ik dat vermoeden in alle bescheidenheid als een wensdroom zag, bleef het voortbestaan, en heeft het er misschien zelfs voor gezorgd dat ik uit nieuwsgierigheid op de uitnodiging ben ingegaan. In elk geval heb je later bevestigd dat je zonder terughoudendheid en met een even bewonderenswaardige als onverklaarbare standvastigheid je zinnen op mij had gezet, en dat je veroveringsplan, met hier en daar een kleine uitzondering, volledig naar wens is verlopen – iets wat je als een van de allergrootste verwezenlijkingen van je leven beschouwde, althans op het moment dat je er mij terugblikkend van op de hoogte bracht.

Gedurende die reis verbleven we op een boot die lag aange-meerd in een baai voor de kust van Kreta en die eigendom was van de familie van onze gemeenschappelijke vrienden. Toen ons gezelschap, bestaande uit een koppel en twee kennissen die op deze reis een koppel moesten worden, het vliegtuig verliet, moest ik al snel onder ogen zien dat mijn bagage niet was meegereisd in de laadruimte. Ik stond langs de transportband te wachten.

De zwarte rubberen schilden kwamen niet tot stilstand, maar ze bleven leeg – er kwam niets meer tevoorschijn, en toch durfde ik het niet aan om mijn bagage definitief als verloren te beschouwen, tot jij glimlachend in mijn richting kwam en suggereerde dat ik voor een paar dagen jouw kleren mocht

gebruiken. De boot waarop wij verbleven is al die tijd voor anker blijven liggen – slechts één keer zijn we een halve dag lang uitgevaren zonder een precieze bestemming, alleen maar om de motor van het vaartuig even in werking te zetten.

De rest van de tijd is de boot dobberend in relatieve stilstand gebleven, dus zonder zich meer dan een paar centimeter links, rechts, vooruit of achteruit te bewegen, maar tegelijkertijd zonder ooit langer dan een paar seconden roerloos te blijven. Dag en nacht werd er zacht met ons geschud, als met de kinderwagen van een baby die het wiegen nodig heeft om te kunnen slapen. Langzaam werd het tijdens die vakantie duidelijk dat jouw verlangens ook buiten mijn verbeelding bestonden, en langzaam heb ik ze steeds meer levenskansen gevonden.

Op een avond dreef ik helemaal alleen languit op een luchtmatras in het water, toen ik eerst hoorde en vervolgens ook zag hoe jij van achter de boot tevoorschijn peddelde, tot jouw doorzichtige matras net als je lichaam evenwijdig met mijn matras en mijn lichaam lag. Ik keek je aan, en concentreerde me daarna weer op mijn spiegelbeeld in het water, dat ik nu en dan met een kleine tik van mijn vingers aanraakte, zodat er concentrische rillingen doorheen trokken, als door de lucht die in de woestijn door de zon wordt opgewarmd. Zonder oogcontact te kunnen maken strekte ook jij je hand uit boven het kanaal tussen onze matrassen, en nam daarna mijn hand. Minutenlang heeft afwisselend jouw hand zich in de mijne bevonden, of mijn hand zich in de jouwe, alsof we schelpen of weekdieren onderzochten en het zand probeerden weg te spoelen. Nog steeds keken we elkaar niet aan. De matrassen golfdendichter naar elkaar toe, de zon was aan de dagelijkse afdaling begonnen. Het was duidelijk wat er tussen ons zou gebeuren, maar het was nog niet duidelijk hoe.

Toen hoorden we hoe iemand ons vanuit de boot riep. Kort klonken onze voornamen vlak na elkaar, en toen de roep zich herhaalde was het voegwoord ‘en’ tussen onze namen geplaatst. We keken elkaar aan, eerst door middel van het wateroppervlak, daarna in het echt. Het bleek dat mijn bagage op de luchthaven was gearriveerd. Dagelijks heeft de scène op de twee waterbedden zich als een echo herhaald, in telkens andere houdingen en omstandigheden, in het stapelbed in het ruim van de boot waarin wij sliepen, onder een olijfbom die geen enkel blad meer droeg en nauwelijks nog schaduw bood, aan de tafel in de eetkamer, aan een rond raam op gelijke hoogte met de zeespiegel – tot het eindelijk tijdens een kortstondige luchtzak was dat wij elkaar voor het eerst kusten, in het vliegtuig, vlak nadat de snuit van het toestel zich in een donker wolkendek had geboord om de landing naar België in te zetten.

Up to Date

Christophe Van Gerrewey

Translated from the Dutch (Belgium) by David Colmer

I should work you into this first sentence like a crumpled handkerchief in a fist, ready to be pulled out as a bunch of flowers by a clown. That's the way a letter should start: with the most important quality expressed in a single adjective (possibly preceded by an adverb) followed by the name of the addressee, not necessarily the most-widely-known name, but often a variant that suggests the relationship between sender and recipient. A salutation like that is impossible here for many reasons. This isn't a letter anyway, so I'm excused from the obligation to address you and summarise you – summarise us, and what happened between us. In this kind of writing other rules apply.

—

I am in a house you know well, in the exceptional company of someone with whom you once cohabited. Not for so very long perhaps, but long enough. How well can a person get to know a cat? How much time must pass, how many shared events before you're close to an animal, and what remains of that closeness once you've said goodbye? For the coming month I will live in this house which is not mine, but belongs to friends who are on holiday for four weeks. As they can't take Mousekins on holiday with them, as there are plants in the house that need water, as fish can't survive in a fishbowl without fresh water and flakes of artificial food, because the post would accumulate and fill the letterbox, obliging the

postman to return the letters to sender, and because I don't mind living somewhere else for a while, even if it's just the outskirts of Ghent, the city I usually live in the middle of – for all these reasons I will be living here for the month of August, just as I lived here last August, together with Mousekins, and together with you, in this house, in these rooms. You're sure to have memories of it.

–

I am looking out through the first-floor window at the elongated brick building that borders the small garden and provides a backdrop to the solitary tree, lawn and shrubs, a building which starts and finishes left and right outside my field of vision, and which is crowned by a series of asymmetric angular roofs that follow one after the other like the teeth of a saw – a gigantic saw that can separate a piece of land from the world. Beyond it there are tall spruce trees, close together, almost a wood, and in the distance I can see a block of white flats rising up just over the strip of trees. This is the very edge of Ghent, just before the satellite towns begin and the real estate bears a different label. "It's lovely to be able to live here together with you and Mousekins, and it's a beautiful house where I will be able to work really well – but unfortunately, it's suburbia," as you put it, finding an angle that kept surprising me, "suburbia, whereas Ghent, all things told, is an extremely suburban city that doesn't even deserve the name city. In Ghent, nothing happens or at most one thing at a time. If you're in Ghent and you feel like doing something on a particular evening, you only ever have one option, unless you are in extraordinary luck, then you have two. I won't say a word about the quality of that option or options, but the restriction alone makes Ghent uninhabitable as far as I'm concerned, a city that thinks its residents have no desire

to choose and chooses for them. That's why Ghent is a city of phases, and in those phases it's clear what's happening, and anyone who doesn't like what's on offer during those phases is expected to leave town. At fixed intervals the city's various consumer groups appear like insects when the temperature reaches a certain level – students, tourists, alcoholics, bike racing fans, environmentalists, foodies, hikers, marathon runners – always just in time to await the starting signal for their event. There is no place in this city for things that happen without a starting signal. That's why Ghent is unlivable, for me, and Ghent's suburbia, if possible, even worse. Nothing ever happens here, but all the residents think they live in a city. What are these people actually doing here? It is in suburbia, especially the suburbia of Ghent, that life becomes truly pointless. What's weird and insufferable is that people here don't realise it, but keep each other trapped in a web of socialising and friendliness. It's good for us to have a chance to stay here for a few weeks, but that really is long enough.”

—

Last year's sojourn in this house didn't last long. In fact, the only time we stayed somewhere together day after day without breaking it off prematurely was our very first holiday together. We'd met each other years earlier at a mutual friend's birthday party, but it wasn't until much later that you made it clear that you wanted to spend more time with me by convincing those same mutual friends to take us on holiday with them, although there was no *us* at that stage. That was the purpose of organising that successful trip years ago: to call *us* into being, to make sure that from then on there would be an *us* at every moment of the day because we, if only in our thoughts, would be in constant conversation with each other, consulting, asking permission, exchanging opinions

and verifying desires. After receiving the invitation from our mutual friends, it occurred to me that their offer might be a cover for your intentions, and although I modestly wrote that suspicion off as a pipe dream, it refused to die, and may have even led to me accepting the invitation out of curiosity. In any case you later confirmed that you had set your sights on me, unreservedly and with inexplicable determination, and that your strategy, despite minor setbacks here and there, went completely as planned – something you saw as one of the greatest accomplishments of your life, at least at the moment you retrospectively apprised me of it.

During that holiday, we stayed on a boat that was moored just off the coast of Crete in a bay and belonged to the family of our mutual friends. When our group, consisting of a couple and two acquaintances who were meant to become a couple on that very holiday, got off the plane, I discovered that my luggage had not travelled along with us in the hold. I stood next to the carousel and waited.

The black rubber plates didn't stop, but remained empty. Although nothing else appeared, I still wasn't prepared to accept that my bag had definitely been lost, until you approached me with a smile and said that I could use your clothes for a few days. The boat we were staying on remained anchored almost the whole time – only once did we spend a half-day pottering around on the sea without any particular destination, just to give the engine a run.

The rest of the time the boat bobbed around more or less on the spot, without moving more than a few centimetres to the left or right, forwards or backwards, but not staying motionless for more than a few seconds at a time either. Day and night it was gently shaken, like a pram when a baby needs to

be rocked to sleep. Slowly during that holiday it became clear to me that your desire existed outside of my imagination and slowly I gave it more and more chance of survival.

One evening I was all alone and floating stretched out on a lilo, when I first heard then saw you paddling out from behind the boat until the transparent lilo with your body on it was floating parallel to my lilo and my body. I looked at you and then returned my focus to my reflection in the water, which I touched now and then with a little tap of my fingers, sending a concentric shiver through it, as if through the sun-baked air of the desert. Unable to make eye contact, you stretched your hand out over the channel between our lilos and took hold of mine. For minutes it was either your hand in mine or mine in yours, as if we were studying molluscs or shellfish on the beach and trying to wash away the sand.

We still hadn't looked at each other. The lilos bobbed closer together, the sun had begun its daily descent. It was obvious what was going to happen between us, but it wasn't yet obvious how.

Then we heard someone calling us from the boat. Our first names sounded in quick succession, one after the other, and when the call went up a second time the conjunction "and" had been added between them. We looked at each other, first via the water surface, then for real. It turned out my luggage had arrived at the airport. Every day, the scene from the lilos was repeated like an echo, in different positions and circumstances, in the double bunk we slept in in the hold, under an olive tree that didn't have a single leaf left and provided hardly any shade, at the table in the messroom, by a sea-level porthole – until finally, in a small air pocket, we kissed for the first time, in the plane, just after it had pushed its nose into a dark layer of cloud to begin its descent to Belgium.

Bosnia and Herzegovina



© Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Satovi u majčinoj sobi (2014)

Clocks in my Mother's Room

Publishing House **Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva**

Biography

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović was born in Zadar in 1977 and is a graduate of the University of Banja Luka. She writes poetry, columns and literary reviews. Her poetry has been translated into several languages, and she was shortlisted for the CEE Literature Award (for poetry) in 2008. Stupar-Trifunović lives in Banja Luka and works as the Editor of *Putevi*, a literary magazine.

Synopsis

This is a story about a mother and a daughter, and about the life of women in the former Yugoslavia: the mother is a mirror through which the heroine tries to find her past and understand herself in the modern world, by returning to the very beginning, to her idyllic childhood home on the Dalmatian coast.

The heroine/narrator identifies herself as a novelist, and her alter ego, Ana, splits the main character into two, thus opening a dual expressive space, allowing for links between different interpersonal relationships, romantic experiences and periods of time. Memories are pieced together like a mosaic and the novel becomes a choir of ancestors, previously ignored and suppressed.

This story about women in peacetime and in wars that marked the region examines the ignored role of women in great historical upheavals, which can routinely assign them the role of passive observers with no right to interfere with the 'great' story of war and politics.

Against the backdrop of mothers and daughters, the novel deals with refuge, homelessness and a sense of not belonging. The narrator is stuck between two states, two lives, two loves, two unfinished books: this duality tears her apart, while she wears socially acceptable masks to heal her sudden removal from her childhood comforts. Writing and literature become her only home and sanctuary, where her partitioned self can finally become one and whole.

Satovi u majčinoj sobi

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Možda treba početi od djetinjstva. U djetinjstvu se utisci utiskuju duboko u čovjeka, kao stopalo u još nestvrdli beton. Sada već ostaju samo tragovi blata koji se lako speru. Ja sam odavno popločan trg, dovršeno šetalište uz obalu, izliven trotoar kraj ceste i sve je očvrslo u meni. Tuđi koraci više nisu duboki tragovi. Prošlost je kuća u kojoj završi neka neoprezn misao, prisjećanja pritišću kao zidovi pretrpani slikama.

Hodala sam obalom i skupljala školjke. Majka je galamila zbog previše sunca na mojim leđima. Koža je tamnila, koža je peckala, koža se zatezala. Nisam osjećala ništa. To je došlo poslije. Sada sam samo tražila. I moje oči su bile grabežljivci koji love i magneti koji privlače i molećivi prosjaci koji prizivaju. Školjke su ležale na obali među kamenjem. Dragocjenost koja je čekala da bude pronađena rukama. Kada ih okrenem bile su bijele i sedefaste (kao moj stomak), izvana tamnije (kao moja leđa). Kao život. Bijelo i sedefasto. Život koji odnekud stiže, koji počinje u glavama djevojčica, sedefast i bijel kao unutrašnjost morske školjke. U glavama djevojčica koje uplašeno i svečano očekuju.

Vjenčanje je bilo skromno. Bez bijelog. Bez sedefastog.

Školjka se nije do kraja otvorila. Previše oštar rub. Porezala sam prst. More je, slano, grizlo moju krv, peklo je (gurnula sam prst u vodu da majka ne vidi). More je posisalo dio mene kroz prst, dio mene je ušao u more. More nije bilo nepravedno, dio mora je ušao u mene (često se zaljuljam od nepoznatih obala, često se zanesem, jedva ostanem na nogama).

On, kad liže moju kožu, kaže nikada nisam spavao kraj slanje žene. Kao da se tuširaš morskom vodom.

Nešto preslano spava u mojoj koži. Neko uhvaćeno more.

Majka koja nadgleda kao galeb odozgo koju će naivnu ribu ščepati. Koji neoprezan pokret će me odati i prekinuti pustolovinu na suncu. Mahanje rukom i doziv kojim završiš u njenom kljunu, u hladovini. Na sigurnom. Ispod zelenog tamariša. Ispod smolavog bora. Ispod smokve iz čijeg nezrelog ploda curi ljepljivo i peckavo mlijeko po prstu.

Podstanarski stan je bio tijesan, memljiv i siguran. Daleko od mora. Po policama sam slagala školjke. Gušilo me je. Plašilo me je. Blizina zidova. Povjerljivost ostave koja nametljivo nudi ustajalost, prije nego što zgrabiš teglu s džemom već ti ispriča istoriju tuđe i tvoje sirotinje.

Drhtala sam zureći kroz male prozore na sivu cestu. More je bilo daleko, ali plime i oseke su bile tu. Unutra. I bure na moru. I jutra sa ribama razbacanim po obali. Nešto je raslo.

Nešto će jednom isplivati iz mene.

Ti si iskliznula niz moje slane butine okupane morskom vodom i krvlju. Opet se ponovilo. Dio mene je iskliznuo u tebe, dio tebe je ušao u mene. Razmjena se dogodila. Šumile smo obje. Ljeti smo skupljale školjke. U tvojim očima je bio isti onaj sjaj onog ko traga. Za bijelim, za sedefastim odsjajem. Među kamenčićima.

Majka je bijesno gledala u mene dok sam se lijeno vukla prema kući. Naslućena neprijatnost je usporavala moje korake. Čekala me je. Istukla me je. Komšiji sam nesmotreno otkrila kućne tajne. Ono što su mi rekli da ne smijem reći nikom.

O nama.

Unutra.

U četiri zida.

Nešto naše.

Odala sam.

Pitao me je. Bila sam iskrena. Mislila sam da su svi takvi kao mi, da ništa posebno nema u tim malim, kućnim tajnama. Unutra, sve je uglavnom isto. Svi lažu jedni druge. Da ih ne povrijede.

Ništa mi nije bilo jasno.

Boljelo me je.

Treba ćutati o tome. Batine me nisu naučile pameti.

Nije vrijedilo. Vjenčanje je bilo skromno. Majka je nakrivila glavu na jednu stranu, otac na drugu.

Otac je išao na more pecati. Molila sam ga da me vodi. Majka je rekla da to nije sigurno, voditi dijete na buru, na otvoreno more, u rano jutro. Voditi tako malo dijete, na tako veliko more, i možda će biti bure. Već puše pomalo. Da li si ti lud. I ti i ona. I nemoj. I molim te, tata. I poveo me je. Bili su on i muškarci. Bili su razdragani i veseli. Bilo je hladno to jutro dok je svanjivalo, i vruće kasnije. Sunce nam je zatezalo kožu. Bila sam kao jedan od njih. Ulovili smo sipu. Crna tečnost je prljala utrobu bijelog broda. Nije mi se gadilo, nije bilo ružno, nisam se plašila da ću se uprljati, baš kao ni oni. Ni poslije, dok su ih strateški razmještali po zaraćenim stranama ukopane u crnicu, nisu se plašili da će se uprljati. Nisu pokazali strah. Ustajali su rano. Palili cigarete i odlazili kao na pecanje. Ali ja sam se počela jako plašiti.

Više nisam bila jedan od njih.

Strah je rastao.

Sipino crno mastilo je iscurilo u priču.

Stidi se, rekao je otac. Stidi se. Stidila sam se. Zbog pogrešaka. Sigurno ih je bilo puno. Kao vreća kukuruza koju su pojele kokoške. Osim prazne vreće stida, preda mnom ne stoji ništa drugo. Stidim se. Vrijeme je pojelo pogreške, ali ja se i dalje stidim. I otac se stidi. I njemu su rekli, stidi se. Ukrao si limun, polomio si ogradu, razbio si komšijin prozor. I on se stidi na fotografiji, na zidu, gdje je njegova glava nagnuta na jednu, a majčina na drugu stranu. Na njihovom vjenčanju.

Bože, kako su velike. Prilazio je s leđa. Pokušao je da ih obujmi. Možda ti treba pomoći da ih nosiš, krive ti kičmu. Izmicala sam se. Za mnom su išli ti prsti kao meduze s pipcima, lijepili su se za vazduh, za kožu i otimali kisik. Imaš li momka? Dodiruje li te? Zašto meduze prve pojure ka našim grudima, ka našim srcima da ostave svoje otrovne opekotine? Kada sam ja bio mlad bilo je drugačije. Ona ne želi da spava sa mnom. Meduze su tužne, providne i otrovne. Meduze uvijek plivaju blizu djece. Djeca ništa ne govore roditeljima jer roditelji više vjeruju meduzama.

Onaj ko je bez grijeha neka prvi uzme kamen, povikao je otac tužnim glasom i tresnuo sam sebe u glavu.

I nemoj nikad više da odaješ šta se priča u kući, rekla je majka. Nikad.

Šta se priča? Šta se priča? Šumilo je more u meni.

Znaš li šta se priča o tebi? Rekla je moja kćer (rekla si ti) i pogledala me direktno u oči.

Znam, rekla sam. I počela da se smijem. Tebi se nije dopao moj smijeh. Ta vrsta smijeha se nikom ne dopada. Ali on je bio bolniji i brži od mene.

Fotograf je stajao nakrivo. Tako to tumačim, pa smo i nas dvoje kao iskošeni na fotografiji. Na našem vjenčanju. On stoji uspravno. Ako hoćete znati šta je pravi ugao, pogledajte ramena. Pogledajte glavu ovog čovjeka. On uvijek stoji pravo. Ali ja sam nagnula glavu na jednu stranu, suprotnu od njega i fotograf je nagnuo ruku. I sve je malo iskošeno.

U mom stomaku – moru pliva riba koja još ne zna da je tu.

U majčinom stomaku – moru nervozno sam se koprcala ja koja nisam znala da sam tu. I da sam ih ulovila.

Vjenčanje je bilo skromno, bez bijelog, bez sedefastog. Podstanarska soba u prizemlju je čekala umorna tijela koja su omamljena memlom zaboravila da su mlada.

Matičar je bila žena. Imala je oko pedeset godina. Njene oči su bile bezizražajna ogledala koja su odražavala da i da i da i da i da (iza kojih su vrištali ne i ne i ne i ne i ne).

Riba je već bila uhvaćena. Motor čamca je veselo brujaio. Muškarci su bili jednako razdragani i veseli. Pili su i smijali se. Idemo nazad. Sve je dobro prošlo. Žene se uvijek plaše bezrazložno. I gundaju bezveze. Bila sam ljuta na majku što ne poznaje ništa od ove muške radosti na otvorenom moru. Riba je bila tu, u kantama. I ja sam lovila. Bila sam ponosna. Sipin crni trag mi je odvrćao pažnju, bilo je nešto ljepljivo i meko u njenom tijelu, u njenom tragu, u njenom načinu da nas ima, sve nas na brodu. Sve nas vesele muškarce u kojima se neoprezno rasanila i probudila jedna žena.

Rekao sam ti da nikom ne pričaš o tome. Ti si moja tajna.

Neću nikom govoriti o tom.

Ti si moja.

Ti si moj.

Nikom.

Ulovljeni smo u fotografiji. (Malo smo svi nakrivo.) Rekla sam ti da nikom ne pričaš o tom, rekla je majka. Nisam se mogla sjetiti o čemu. O čemu sam to pobogu pričala. I taj podli komšija što je lukavo ispitivao djecu. Kao kakav voajer što se naslađuje tuđim porodičnim tajnama. Zar naša porodica ima neke tajne? Mi smo jedna dosadna porodica. Divna, dosadna porodica. Divna, dosadna, nakrivo uslikana porodica. Tu, unutra si ti, a u njoj sam ja. Kao luk u svakoj od nas novi sloj. Da, ta poređenja, ta obična poređenja od kojih plačeš dok ih ljuštiš.

Plači, rekla sam sama sebi i plakala. Sve dok nije sipino mastilo izašlo iz mene.

Ali prije toga, prije nego što je krenulo, prije nego što se bjeličasta sipina kost zablistala na dlanu, i brat i ja srećni otrčali da je prinesemo kao žrtvu kljunu našeg zlatnog kanarinca, prije velikog ulova i prije nego što se naš svijet rasuo ka onim pravcima i obalama o kojima nismo znali ništa, prije nego što se mogućnost plakanja i pričanja podatno ponudila kao utješna sloboda koja razrješava muka ta silna učutkivana usta, srca, međunožja, prije težine i prije lakoće, prije nego što su satovi u majčinoj sobi utihnuli i prašina pala po svemu, prije svega postojalo je jedno nježno sada u kojem smo se svi dodirnuli i čiji odbljesak, s vremena na vrijeme, neočekivano iskrsava u našim životima.

Clocks in my Mother's Room

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović

Translated from the Bosnian by Amira Sadikovic

Childhood is perhaps a good place to start. In childhood, impressions are deep and indelible, like a footprint in soft concrete. Now, it's just traces of mud, easy to wash off. I have long become a paved square, a completed playground by the shore, a fixed-up pavement by the road; everything inside me has become solid. The steps of others are not imprints any more. The past is a house where a reckless thought ends up, memories press like walls stuffed with paintings.

I was walking along the shore, collecting seashells. Mother yelled because of too much sun on my back. My skin was going dark, tingling, tightening. I felt nothing. That came later. Now I was just searching. And my eyes were predators hunting and magnets attracting and beggars imploring. The seashells were there, scattered over the pebbles along the shore. Precious items waiting to be picked out. As I turned them, they were white and shimmery (like my belly), and dark on the outside (like my back). Like life. White and shimmery. Life coming from somewhere, starting in girls' heads, shimmery and white, like the inside of a seashell. In the heads of girls frightened and solemn in their anticipation.

The wedding was modest. Nothing white. Nothing shimmery.

The seashell never opened all the way. The edge was too sharp. I cut my finger. The salt of the sea bit my blood, it stung (I pushed my finger under the water, so that Mother couldn't see it). Through that finger the sea sucked out a part of me, a

part of me went into the sea. The sea was not unjust, part of it came inside me (unknown shores often make me sway, I am often carried away, barely standing). When he licks my skin, he says he's never slept with a saltier woman. Like a shower with seawater.

Something salty is sleeping in my skin. A sea captured.

Mother watches over me like a seagull following its naïve prey. A careless gesture will give me away and stop this adventure under the sun. A wave and a call that takes me towards her beak, in the shade. In safety. Under the green tamarix. Under the sappy pine. Under the fig whose unripe fruit drips sticky and stingy juice over my finger.

The rented flat was tin, musky and safe. Far away from the sea. I laid my seashells on shelves. It suffocated me. It frightened me. The closeness of the walls. The reliability of the storeroom offering discretely its stale air: by the time you grab a jar of jam, it has told you the entire history of poverty, your own and someone else's.

I shivered as I looked out to the grey road through the tiny windows. The sea was far away, but the tides were close. Inside. And the storms. And the mornings with fish scattered along the shore. Something was growing.

Some day, something will swim out of me.

You slipped down my salty thighs, soaked in seawater and blood. It happened again. A part of me slipped into you, a part of you entered me. The exchange happened. We both murmured. In the summer, we collected seashells. Your eyes had the same glow of those who are on a quest. For the white, shimmery glow. Under the pebbles.

Mother looked at me furiously as I strolled towards the house lazily. A premonition of unpleasantness slowed down my steps. She was waiting for me. She gave me a spanking. I had recklessly revealed family secrets to a neighbour. Things they had said I shouldn't tell anyone.

About us.

Inside.

Within four walls.

Something ours.

I gave away.

He asked. I was honest. I thought that everyone was like us, that there was nothing special in those little family secrets. Inside, everything looks more or less the same. Everyone lies to everyone else. To avoid hurting them.

I couldn't understand any of it.

It hurt.

You should be silent about things like that. The spanking taught me nothing.

It wasn't worth it. The wedding was modest. Mother tilted her head on one side, Father on the other.

Father went out to sea to fish. I begged him to take me with him. Mother said it wasn't safe, taking a child out to stormy sea so early in the morning. Taking such a small child to such a great sea, and there could be a northern wind, there was a bit already. Are you insane? Both of you. And don't. And please, Daddy. And he took me. He and the men were there. They were cheerful and loud. It was a cold morning and a hot day. The sun made our skin tight. As if I was one of them. We caught a cuttlefish. The black liquid stained the inside of the

white boat. It didn't make me feel sick, it wasn't ugly, I wasn't afraid of getting dirty, just like they didn't. Even later, as they were strategically distributed along different frontlines, dug into deep, fertile soil, they were not afraid of getting dirty. They never showed any fear. They got up early. They lit their cigarettes and left, as if they were going fishing. But I became very, very frightened.

I was no longer one of them.

Fear grew.

The cuttlefish ink seeped into a story.

Shame on you, said Father. Shame on you. I was ashamed. Of all the mistakes. There must have been many. Like the bag of corn that the chicken ate by accident. There was nothing in front of me, except for that empty sack of shame. Time has eaten away the mistakes, but I am still ashamed. And Father is ashamed too. Shame on you, they told him too. You stole a lemon, you cut the fence, you broke the neighbour's window. And he is ashamed on the photo, on the wall, with his head tilted on one side, and Mother's on the other. At their wedding.

God, they're so big. He came from behind. He tried to grab them. Maybe you need help carrying them, they will bend your back. I wiggled away. Those fingers followed me like jellyfish, with tentacles sticking to the air on the skin, stealing oxygen. Do you have a boyfriend? Does he touch you? Why do jellyfish always go for our breasts, for our hearts, to leave behind their toxic burns? It was different when I was young. She doesn't want to sleep with me. The jellyfish are sad, transparent and toxic. The jellyfish always swim close to the children. The children don't say anything to their parents, because the parents prefer to believe the jellyfish.

Let him who is without sin cast the first stone, shouted Father in a sad voice and hit his own head.

And don't you ever, ever tell anyone about things we talk about at home, said Mother. Never.

We talk about what? What? The sea inside me murmured.

You know what they say about you? Said my daughter (you said) and looked me right in the eye.

I know, I said. And I started laughing. You didn't like my laugh. It's the kind of laugh no one ever likes. But it was more painful and faster than me.

The photographer stood on the side. That's how I interpreted it, and that's why the two of us are tilted on the photo. At our wedding. He is standing up straight. If you want to know what a right angle looks like, look at the shoulders. Look at this man's head. He always stands up straight. But I tilted my head to one side, away from him, and the photographer tilted his hand. And everything is a bit tilted.

In my belly-sea, a fish is swimming, not knowing it's there.

In Mother's belly-sea, I wiggled nervously, not knowing I was there. And that I caught them.

The wedding was modest, nothing white, nothing shimmering. The rented room on the ground floor waited for the exhausted bodies which, intoxicated by the damp smell, forgot that they were young.

The registry clerk was a woman. She was about 50. Her eyes were bleak mirrors reflecting yes and yes and yes and yes and yes (screaming no and no and no and no and no and no behind them).

The fish had been caught. The engine hummed cheerfully. The men were just as happy and noisy. They drank and laughed. We're going back. It all went really well. Women are always afraid for no reason. And they nag for no reason. I was angry at Mother for not knowing anything about this manly joy out on the open sea. The fish were there, in the buckets. I fished too. I was so proud. The black line left behind by the cuttlefish ink distracted me; there was something sticky and soft about its body, about its trace, about its way of getting us all, all of us on that boat. All of us cheerful men accidentally awakened to a woman inside them.

I told you not to tell anyone about it. You are my secret.

I won't tell anyone about it.

You are mine.

And you are mine.

No one.

We were caught in the photo. (We are all a bit tilted.) I told you not to tell anyone about it, said Mother. I couldn't remember what it was. What on earth have I talked about? And this mean neighbour who grilled children in such clever ways. Like a voyeur enjoying other people's family secrets. Our family had secrets? We're just a boring family. A wonderful, boring family. A wonderful, boring family in a tilted photograph. You're here, inside, and I'm inside her. Like an onion, each one of us has a new layer. Yes, that kind of comparison, the ordinary comparison that makes you cry as you peel the layers off.

Cry, I said to myself, and I cried. Until all the cuttlefish ink has seeped out of me.

But before that, before something moved, before the white cuttlefish bone gleamed on my hand, my brother and I ran happily to offer it as a sacrifice to the beak of our golden canary, before the big prey and before our world has dispersed towards places and shores we knew nothing about, before the possibility of crying and talking has presented itself generously as the comforting freedom that delivers from hardship all those silenced mouths, hearts and groins, before the hardship and before the lightness, before the clocks in my mother's room have gone silent and before dust has covered everything, before everything, there was a tender and gentle now, where we all touched, and whose reflection occasionally and unexpectedly flashes in our lives.



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Antonis Georgiou

Ένα αλπούμ ιστορίες (2014)

An Album of Stories

Publishing House **To Rodakio**

Biography

Antonis Georgiou was born in Limassol, Cyprus, in 1969. He studied law in Moscow and works as a lawyer. He is a member of the editing committee of the literary magazine *Anef*. He was also in the editing team of the *Theatre Diaries*, a series of publications that illustrate the history of theatre in Cyprus. He is currently a postgraduate student of theatrical studies at the Open University of Cyprus. In 2006, he published a book of poetry, *Πανσέληνος παρά μία (Full Moon Minus One)*, and a book of short stories, *Γλυκιά bloody life (Sweet Bloody Life)*, which was awarded the State Prize for Short Stories. He has also contributed to several short story collections. Georgiou also writes plays, some of which have been performed by different theatre groups in Cyprus. His play *My Beloved Washing Machine* won the Theatre Prize of the Cyprus Theatre Organization and was included in its repertory. Antonis Georgiou is also the writer of the plays *The Disease*, 2009; *Our Garden*, 2011; *La Belote*, 2014; and *I Was Lysistrata*, 2016. His book *An Album of Stories*, published in 2014, was awarded the Cyprus State Prize for a Novel. It is being adapted and presented on stage in 2016.

Synopsis

Antonis Georgiou's *An Album of Stories* uses a polyphonic narrative in this 'post-novel', a mosaic which presents a whole country and its people. On the occasion of a grandmother's death, a range of stories are revealed. From the grandmother to the family and from the small village to the whole country, these stories speak about life, love, death, war, refugees and emigrants. These are old and new stories, in the Greek language and Cypriot dialect. The stories are aided by quotations from newspapers, recipes, children's drawings, folk songs, laments, poems and many photographs from family albums. Sometimes the stories are confused and the reader is also confused: where does one story end and another begin? And does it matter? Or perhaps our lives are nothing but a collection of stories, that we remember sometimes, relate them to the stories of others, write them down and give them a title. And they become like one story, the story of each one of us, the story of all of us. Aren't our lives nothing but an album of stories?

Ένα αλπούμ ιστορίες

Antonis Georgiou

ένας φεύκει άλλος έρκεται [...] ένας αδελφός της γιαγιάς μου ο Σπυρής, όταν πέθανε η γυναίκα του έμεινε μόνος και τα παιδιά του κανόνισαν να έρθει μια γυναίκα από την Θαυλάνδη για να τον φροντίζει, φαίνεται πως τα πήγαιναν καλά οι δυο τους, όχι απλώς καλά αλλά πολύ καλά! ήταν ωραίος άντρας στα νιάτα του ο Σπυρής και ήταν ακόμα στεκάμενος και μια μέρα ανακοίνωσε ότι θα την παντρευτεί την κορούα, πέσανε τότε πάνω του όλοι, ειδικά η κόρη του η μικρή που τον υπεργαπούσε και της είχε τόση αδυναμία, «τί εννά πει ο κόσμος» και «τούτη θέλει να σου φάει τα ριάλια»· ποια ριάλια; ποια περιουσία; κάτι λίγα που είχε τους τα είχε μοιράσει ήδη, με τη σύνταξη ζούσε, δεν άκουγε τίποτε και ετοιμαζόταν για το γάμο, όταν όμως μια μέρα η κόρη του ξέσπασε πάνω του, «επέλλανες τέλεια, έκαμες μας ρεζίλιν, ούτε τα αγγόνια σου έν σκέφτεσαι που αντρέπονται να κυκλοφορούν μες στο χωρκόν», πήρε την απόφαση και έφυγε για Θαυλάνδη, παντρεύτηκε και έζησε χρόνια πολλά χωρίς να γυρίσει ξανά πίσω, να μην ενοχλεί κανέναν, να μην ντρέπεται κανένας για λόου του· εκεί πέθανε· τηλεφώνησε τότε στα παιδιά του η γυναίκα του αν θέλανε να στείλει τη σορό στην Κύπρο, αλλιώς θα τον έκαιγε εκεί όπως ήταν οι συνήθειές τους, της είπαν να τον κάψει, δεν ξέρω αν ήταν από πείσμα, από πικρία ή ζήλια ή αν απλώς ένιωσαν πως ανήκε πλέον στην νέα του χώρα και στη γυναίκα εκείνη που του στάθηκε μέχρι τέλους και ήταν δίπλα του και του έκλεισε τα μάτια, κάηκε πάντως και η στάχτη του αιωρείται κάπου εκεί στη Θαυλάνδη, μόνο η γιαγιά δεν το δέχτηκε ποτέ αυτό και θυμάται ακόμα κάθε τόσο τον αδελφό της

«μά να κάψουν τον αρφόν μου;»

«τούτα ούλλα, ταφές τζαί τέθοικα, έν' κατασκευάσματα των παπάδων, είπεν το τζαί ο Μάρξ, "τό όπιον των λαών"»

«Κωστάκη μου, μεν μιλάς έτσι, έπρεπεν να τον εφέρναμεν πίσω ή ας τον εθάφκασιν, όι να τον κάψουν, μάνα μου, τον αρφόν μου, μα να τον κάψουν; κάμνουν του κανέναν τρισάγιον, κανέναν μνημόσουνον τζεί κάτω που ένι;»

«κάμνεις του εσύ γιαγιά, αθθυμάσαι τον εσύ, το ίδιον ένι»

«νναί, αλλά τζεί κάτω που επέθανεν έν του κάμνει κανένας! εσείς, μωρά μου, εννά μου κάμνετε κανέναν μνημόσουνον άμαν πεθάνω; εννά με θθυμάστε καθόλου;»

«εννά με θυμάσαι άμαν πεθάνω;» θυμάμαι μια νύχτα τη δική μου γιαγιά τη Μαρουλλού να μου το λέει, εκείνη με ανάγισεν, μέχρι τα δέκα μου στο σπίτι της ζούσα, κάθε μέρα μετά το σχολείο στη γιαγιά πήγαινα, ο παπάς μου, η μάνα μου δούλευαν μέχρι αργά, έφτασα να έχω το δικό μου δωμάτιο στο σπίτι της γιαγιάς, κοιμόμουνα και εκεί κάποτε και μετά όταν πέθανε ο παππούς έμενα μαζί της σχεδόν όλα τα βράδια μέχρι που λίγα χρόνια μετά τον ακολούθησε και εκείνη· μια νύχτα γυρίζει και μου λέει «γιόκκα μου, εννά με θυμάσαι άμαν πεθάνω; εννά με θυμάσαι, Κωσταντίνο μου, καθόλου;» «γιαγιά, μεν λαλείς έτσι, μεν λαλείς, έν θα πεθάνεις», της έλεγα και άρχισα να κλαίω, «μέν κλαίεις, γιέ μου, έτσι το έδειξεν ο Πλάστης μου, ούλλοι μας εννά πεθάνουμεν κάποτε, να με θθυμάσαι όμως», εγώ όσο την άκουγα έκλαιγα πιο πολύ, γοερά μάλιστα, δεν μπορούσα να σταματήσω, με είχε πιάσει κρίση, τα έχασε μέχρι να με ηρεμήσει, «καλά, καλά, έν θα πεθάνω» μου είπε, «σιώπα, σιώπα, μεν κλαίεις, είπα σου, υπόσχουμαι σου, έν θα πεθάνω ποττέ!», ησύχασα με την υπόσχεσή της και κοιμήθηκα, «έν θα πεθάνω!», είπε μου, ήμουν μιτθής, είστεψα την ένα αλπούμ ιστορίες ελογιάσασιν τον αδελφό του ένα χρόνο μετά που πέθανε η γιαγιά, αρχές του

2010, πήραν λουλούδια, γλυκά, ένα δαχτυλίδι και πήγαν στο σπίτι της νύφης, εκείνος, η μάνα του, η αδελφή του, ο ξάδελφος και ο γαμπρός φυσικά, ήταν κάπως αμήχανα στην αρχή αλλά οι συμπεθέροι τους καλοδέχτηκαν, φύγανε αργά τα μεσάνυχτα, όχι όλοι, ο αδελφός του έμεινε εκεί όπως είναι η συνήθεια, θα έμενε στο σπίτι των μελλοντικών πεθερικών του με τη γυναίκα του μέχρι να φτιάξουν το δικό τους σπίτι, παράξενη συνήθεια, ο ίδιος αν θα έπρεπε να το ακολουθήσει δε θα το έκανε, αν και ξέρει πως δε θα χρειαστεί ποτέ να αποφασίσει για κάτι τέτοιο· σε λίγους μήνες λογικά θα είχε χαρτώματα, μετά γάμους, στη συνέχεια βαφτίσια, έτσι δεν είναι το «φυσικό του ανθρώπου» που έλεγε κάποτε η γιαγιά; χαρές αλλά και τρεχάματα πολλά και πολλές φωτογραφίες, πολλές καινούριες φωτογραφίες αυτό μάλλον το σκέφτηκε και η μάνα του· τη βρήκε μια μέρα στο σαλόνι να περιεργάζεται μπερδεμένη ένα κουτί, «έλα να με βοηθήσεις», «μά είνταμπου τούτον;» τη ρώτησε, ήταν ένα digital photo frame DPF 7901, 7'' και μάλιστα new design, του είπε ότι είχε πάει να αγοράσει άλμπουμ καινούρια να τακτοποιήσει τα παλιά, να φυλάξει και κάποιες σκόρπιες φωτογραφίες που είχε εδώ και εκεί αλλά περισσότερο για να «υπάρχουν» αν χρειαστούν, «ειδικά τώρα με τα χαρτώματα τζαί τον γάμον», η πωλήτρια, μια συμπαθητική μικρή, της είπε να «ξεχάσει» τα άλμπουμ, υπάρχουν τα κομπιούτερ, τα σιντί ή αν θέλει υπάρχουν αυτές οι φωτογραφοθήκες οι ηλεκτρονικές· «ξέρεις ότι μπορείς να βάλεις ως τζαί εκατόν φωτογραφίες, όι μόνον εκατό, πολλά παραπάνω», προσπάθησε να του εξηγήσει πως οι φωτογραφίες «εννά αλλάσσουν μόνες τους, δηλαδή εννά φαίνεται η μιά, μετά εννά μπαίνει η άλλη», δεν έδειχνε να καταλαβαίνει τι ακριβώς έλεγε, αλλά φαίνεται την ενθουσίαζε η προοπτική αυτή της εναλλαγής των φωτογραφιών! θα χρειαζόταν πάντως το τάνυμαν του, «είπεν μου ακόμα ότι αν θέλω μπορώ να βάλω τζαί παλιές φωτογραφίες, αλλά κάτι πρέπει να μου τές κάμεις στο κκομππιούτερ σου πρώτα...», «πρέπει να περάσουν από το scanner», «νναί, έτσι μου το 'πεν! τελικά ούλλα

ξέρεις τα! εννά θέλω να μου τανύσεις τζαί να μου βάλεις μαζίν τζαί παλιές τζαί τζαινούρκες φωτογραφίες, θέλω τες έτσι ούλλες μαζίν ανακατωμένες όπως τες έχουμεν στα αλπούμ μας!»

μιά μέρα μάζεψα όλα τα άλμπουμ που είχε η μάνα μου φυλαγμένα στο αρμάρι, παλιά άλμπουμ, από εκείνα τα μεγάλα με τα σκληρά εξώφυλλα, κάποια πολύχρωμα και λουλουδάτα, άλλα με τοπία από την Κύπρο ή με ζευγάρια αγκαλιασμένα, πήρα και κάτι μικρότερα που μας δίνανε δωρεάν με κάθε «εμφάνιση φίλμ», τότε αυτά, τώρα ελάχιστοι τυπώνουν τις φωτογραφίες τους, απομένουν στα σιντί ή στα κομπιούτερ, τις ξεχνάμε εκεί, ενώ εκείνα τα άλμπουμ τα άνοιγες και πετάγονταν μπροστά σου οι εικόνες ανακατεμένες από αρραβώνες, γάμους, βαφτίσια, γενέθλια, γιορτές

κάποτε και οι χωρισμοί ήταν εκεί! όπως σε ένα άλμπουμ της μάνας μου, ήταν μια φωτογραφία ενός ζευγαριού που στην πορεία είχε χωρίσει και μια μέρα που ήρθε επίσκεψη η παρατημένη σύζυγος και την είδε πήρε ψαλίδι και έκοψε τον πρώην σύζυγο, μένοντας στη φωτογραφία μόνη να γέρνει τον ώμο προς το κενό που κάποτε βρισκόταν ο άντρας της

φωτογραφίες «ατομικές», από αυτές τις οχταήμερες, τις στημένες στο στούντιο, οι κοπέλες με το δάχτυλο στο μάγουλο ή με το χέρι στο πιγούνι, οι άντρες με τα στρατιωτικά ή κουστούμι και γραβάτα, αλλά και οικογενειακές με παππούδες, γιαγιάδες, γονείς, παιδιά, πολλά παιδιά και όπως τα άλμπουμ αφορούσαν μια ολόκληρη ζωή και κάποτε περισσότερο, αφού ήταν του καθενός μας εκεί και πρόγονοι και απόγονοι, έβλεπες τα παιδιά της μιας φωτογραφίας να είναι πιο κάτω ενήλικες με παιδιά πια οι ίδιοι, τους νέους που κοίταζαν με θαρραλέο βλέμμα το φακό και το μέλλον τους να είναι λίγο πιο πέρα, κουρασμένοι και στριμωγμένοι από το παρόν τους και, όπως η μάνα μου στρίμωχνη και αυτή καινούριες φωτογραφίες ανάμεσα στις πιο παλιές, έβλεπες κάποιους



από σελίδα σε σελίδα, από φωτογραφία σε φωτογραφία να ψηλώνουν, να βάζουν κιλά, να χάνουν μαλλιά ή τη λάμψη στο πρόσωπο· είδες τις κοπέλες στην προηγούμενη σελίδα; στα δεξιά, με τα τακούνια, είναι η μάνα μου, ήταν μόλις έβγαλε τα μαύρα που φορούσε για τον παππού και πριν φορέσει τα μαύρα για τη γιαγιά που θα πέθαινε σε λίγο, εκείνη δεν το ήξερε τότε, κοίτα τες, είχανε βγεί βόλτα στο πανηγύρι του χωριού, είδαν το φωτογράφο και είπαν να απαθανάτισουν τα νιάτα τους και ό, τι αυτά πάντοτε σημαίνουν, τα όνειρα, τον ενθουσιασμό, το φόβο, τις προσδοκίες· η μάνα μου, οι κοπέλες αυτές αργότερα φορτώθηκαν χρόνια, ιστορίες, φορτώθηκαν ζωή και τα άλμπουμ τους γέμισαν τόσες άλλες φωτογραφίες, δικές τους και ανθρώπων που μπλέχτηκαν στα χρόνια τους, κάποιοι ήρθαν και μείνανε, άλλοι περαστικοί μείναν μόνο σκόρπιες φωτογραφίες εδώ και εκεί· έτσι παράξενα μπλέκονται σε αυτά τα παλιά λευκώματα, άνθρωποι, ηλικίες, εποχές και τόποι ένα κουβάρι

μά και η ζωή μας, τελικά, μήπως δεν είναι άλλο από ένα τέτοιο κουβάρι ιστορίες; που κάποτε τις θυμόμαστε, τις διηγούμαστε, τις γράφουμε, τους βάζουμε κι ένα τίτλο, *Ένα αλπούμ ιστορίες*, και γίνονται σαν μια ιστορία, ιστορία του καθενός μας ή ιστορία όλων μας· η ζωή μας όλη μήπως δεν είναι άλλο από ένα άλμπουμ με ιστορίες;



An Album of Stories

Antonis Georgiou

Translated from the Greek (Cyprus) by Yiola Klitou

people come, people go [...] when his wife passed away, one of my grandmother's brothers, Spyris, was left alone and his children arranged for a housekeeper to come from Thailand to look after him; it seems that the two of them got along well, not just well but very well! Spyris was a handsome man in his youth and he was still hale and hearty and one day he announced that he would marry the girl and then everyone was on his case, especially his youngest daughter who adored him and for whom he had a soft spot, "what will people say" and "she wants to get your money"; what money? what property? what little he had, he had already shared it between his children; he lived on his pension; he wouldn't hear a thing and was getting ready for the wedding; one day, however, when his daughter blew up at him, "you've gone completely mad, you've made us a laughing stock, can't you even think of your grandchildren who are ashamed to show their faces in the village?" he made up his mind and left for Thailand where he got married and lived for a long time without ever coming back, so as not to bother anyone, not have anyone feel ashamed of him; he died there; then, his wife called his children to ask if they wanted her to send the body back to Cyprus, otherwise she would cremate him there as was their custom, they told her to cremate him, I don't know if it was out of spite, bitterness or jealousy or if they just felt that he now belonged to his new country and to that woman who stood by him until the end and who was on his side and shut his eyes, in any

case, he was cremated and his ashes are floating somewhere in Thailand; only grandma never accepted this and she still remembers her brother every once in a while

“but burn him? burn my brother?”

“all these, burials and stuff, are fabrications of the priests; even Marx said so, ‘the opium of the people’”

“don’t talk like that Costaki, we should have brought him back or at least they should have buried him, not burned him; burn him? burn my poor brother? do they ever hold a Trisagion for him at that place where he is, or even a memorial service?”

“you do grandma, you remember him, isn’t it the same?”

“yes, but at that place where he died, nobody does! and you my babies, will you sometimes hold memorial services for me when I die? will you ever remember me?”

“will you remember me when I die?” I remember my grandmother, Maroullou, saying this to me once; she raised me; up to the age of ten I lived in her house; every day after school I went to grandma’s, my dad, my mom used to work till late, I even had my own room at grandma’s and slept there sometimes and after grandpa died I stayed with her almost every night until a few years later she followed him; one night, she turned around and said to me “will you remember me sonny when I die? will you remember me at all, Constantino?” “don’t talk like that grandma, don’t talk like that, you are not going to die,” I said and started to cry, “don’t cry kiddo, this is the will of God, we are all going to die one day, but you should remember me,” the more I listened to her the more I cried, I was wailing, I couldn’t stop, I was beside myself, she completely lost it before she was able to calm me down, “ok, ok, I won’t die,” she said, “hush, hush, don’t cry, I told you, I promise I will never die!” I took her promise to heart and went

to sleep, “I won’t die!” she said, I was a young boy, I believed her
 her **an album of stories** his brother was promised a year after grandma died, early 2010; they took flowers, candy, a ring and went to the bride’s house, him, his mother, his sister, his cousin and the groom of course; it was somewhat awkward in the beginning but the in-laws made them feel welcome; they left late, at midnight, not everyone, his brother stayed there, as was the custom, he would stay at his future in-laws house with his wife until they could have their own house; strange custom, he would never follow it himself, even though he knows that he will never have to decide about something like that; in a few months’ time they would normally have the engagement, then the wedding, then the christenings, isn’t this “a man’s destiny,” just like grandma used to say? happy times but also a lot of running about and a lot of photos too, a lot of new photos; this was probably his mum’s idea; he found her one day in the living room perplexed and examining a box, “come help me”, “what is this?” he asked her, it was a digital photo frame DPF 7901, 7” and a new design, no less; she told him that she went to buy new albums to sort out the old ones, to put in some scattered photos she had here and there but mostly to “keep” them if we need them “especially now with the wedding” and the saleswoman, a nice young lady, told her to “forget” about albums, now there are computers, CDs, or if she wanted there are these electronic photo frames “did you know that you can even put 100 photos in them, not just 100 but many more,” she tried to explain to him that “they will change on their own, I mean, one will be on display and then the other one will come on top,” she did not seem to understand exactly what she was saying but she seemed excited at the prospect of the photos alternating! in any case, she needed his help, “she also told me that if I want I can put in old photos, but you have to do something with them first on your computer...”, “they have to be scanned”, “yes, that’s what she said! well, there’s nothing you don’t

know! I will need your help and I want you to put both the old and the new photos together, I want them all together, jumbled like we have them in our albums!”

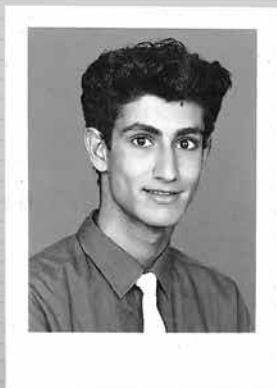
one day I gathered all the albums my mom kept in the closet, old albums, the big ones with the hardcovers, some multi-coloured and flower-patterned, others with pictures of Cyprus landscapes or with couples in each other’s arms, I also took some smaller ones that they used to give us for free with ‘every film development,’ this was then, now very few people print their photos, they are left on CDs or computers and we forget them there, while those albums you opened them and mixed up images would leap in front of your eyes, from engagement parties, weddings, christenings, birthdays, celebrations

even break-ups were sometimes there! just like in one of my mum’s albums, that had a picture of a couple who got divorced down the road and one day that the abandoned wife came to visit she saw it and took the scissors and cut out her ex-husband leaving herself alone in the photo leaning her shoulder on the gap where her husband used to be ‘individual’ photos, the ones that supposedly needed eight days to be developed, the ones you had to pose for at the studio, the girls with a finger on their cheek or resting their chin on their hand, the men in military uniform or suit and tie but also family photos with grandparents, parents, children, lots of children and, just like the albums, these photos were the photos of a lifetime and sometimes more since each and every one of us had their ancestors and descendants in them; children in one photo were adults with children of their own in the next, young people boldly looking at the lens and then their future a little further down, tired and crowded in their present, and, just like my mum who also placed new photos in between



the older ones, you saw some people from page to page, from photo to photo get taller, gain weight, lose their hair or the glow of their faces; have you seen the girls on the previous page? on the right, in heels, is my mother, this was right after she stopped wearing black for my grandfather and before she put them back on again for my grandmother who would pass away soon after, she didn't know that then, look at them, they had gone to the village festival, saw the photographer and decided to immortalise their youth and whatever that always means, dreams, enthusiasm, fear, expectations; my mother, these girls, were later burdened with years, stories, life and their albums were filled with so many other photos of themselves and the people who were entangled in their years, some came and stayed, others just passed through, some scattered photos were left here and there; thus strangely mixed up in these old scrapbooks, people, ages, eras and places in a tangle

but, isn't our life, in the end, nothing but a tangle of stories? that we sometimes remember, tell, write and entitle, *An Album of Stories*, and they seem as one story, the story of each of us or all of us; isn't our whole life nothing but an album of stories?





© Frida Gregersen

Bjørn Rasmussen

Huden er det elastiske hylster der omgiver hele legemet (2011)

The Skin Is the Elastic Covering that Encases the Entire Body

Publishing House **Gyldendal**

Biography

Bjørn Rasmussen was born in 1983 and graduated from the Danish Playwright School in 2007 and from the Danish Writers' School in 2011. He received the Montana Literary Award in 2011 for *Huden er det elastiske hylster der omgiver hele legemet*, was awarded a three year work grant from the Danish government in 2013 and received the Kultur Bornholms Literary Award in 2014.

Synopsis

Huden er det elastiske hylster... is a coming-of-age novel about a young man looking back on life growing up in rural Denmark; not least his far-reaching encounter with a much older riding instructor, with whom he develops an attachment that becomes a romantic and erotic obsession. Any kind of conventional plot summary would do the book an injustice: bleak teenage years involving drugs and self-harm, identity crises, a dysfunctional family, a first big love, and fierce sexual longings, as well as trying to deal with all of these as extremely as possible. But it's the novel's exceptional language and voice that led the Danish EUPL jury, as well as Danish critics and readers of all ages, to be utterly captured by this debut. The idiosyncratic yet highly assured prose and poetry is wild, untrammelled and defies all taboos. And despite its reckless confrontation with despair, it manages to move, fascinate and shock the reader with its glittering, undeniable beauty. The author brings words and sentences from favourite writers to his tale, yet it remains entirely his own. A combination of prose, poetry, social realism and autobiography that's unprecedented in Danish literature. We await future works from him with bated breath.

*Huden er det elastiske hylster
der omgiver hele legemet*

Bjørn Rasmussen

ELSKEREN

Jeg var allerede ældre, da en mand en dag kom hen imod mig i hallen til et offentligt sted. Jeg så dit skuespil, sagde han, det rørte mig usigeligt. Jeg genkendte ham ikke, jeg registrerede blot hans bevægelser, denne skrydende gangart, der er bestemt af en opvækst i provinsen, han kunne være hvem som helst. Ryger du stadig, sagde han, her er kvælende varmt, her er så mange mennesker, lad os gå afsides, må man byde en cigaret.

Meget tidligt i mit liv var det for sent. Da jeg fyldte sytten var det for sent. Da jeg var tolv fyldte jeg en sok med sæd, alt, hvad jeg drømte om, var at se op i en mands røvhul og trække et særligt vejr, jeg tænkte kærligheden, en fugls flaksen. Da jeg var femten-et-halvt kom ridelæreren.

Jeg tænker ofte på dette billede, som jeg stadig ser, og som jeg aldrig har talt om. Ridebuksernes læder op ad inderlårerne, syningen i skridtet, rundt om sædet, hud og hud. Den skarpe stank af hestepis, ammoniakken gør halmen rød og tung og sadelsæben, ridelærerens grove hænder. Ja.

Dette ved jeg, jeg striglede hoppen, jeg spiste i et koldt køkken med brødrene, moderen, hendes kæbe: knak knak. Det er det eneste der binder mig til moderen: den kølige tristesse og knak knak, jeg kan ikke komme i tanker om andet, måske det fede fordi. Dette er moderens fede fordi:

Hun vågnede en morgen, og hendes elskede lå ikke længere ved hendes side. Er han ved havet, tænkte hun, er han gået til grønthandleren efter figner og artiskok, er han gået i stalden. Om natten ledte moderen langs grøftekanterne i det mørke land. Hun forestillede sig den elskede blødende, skambidt af ulve, og som en ulv hylede hun selv mod himlen, hun sang og skreg i den frostklare nat. Om dagen indhyllede hun sig i mørkeviolet og bar store blikspande cement ud til de natbesøgte grøfter, som hun fyldte op for at markere, krydse af; her var han ikke.

Lad mig fortælle, at jeg er femten-et-halvt.

Jeg sidder i bus nr. 491 mod Fjaltring.

Jeg har ikke skiftet tøj, jeg skal komme sådan, fastholdt i hestedunst, det står i kontrakten, sådan lyder instruksenen, tag tøjet af, du stinker af lort. Solen gennem busruden, de flade marker, havet, det er første gang, jeg besøgte ham.

Jeg bor på en statslig kostskole. Jeg spiser, sover, studerer, jeg er sytten år, dette ved jeg. Jeg ved, at moderen har forbindelser, ellers sad jeg ikke her, der findes procedurer i provinsen, der findes præcedens for tilberedning af medisteren. Jeg ved, at jeg blev sendt på en færge, brødrene vinkede fra kajen, moderen græd, først farvel til den elskede, så weimaraneren, nu den lille. Jeg græd ikke. Jeg har ikke grædt, siden jeg faldt

ned fra en gynge i folkeskolen, asfalten skar et stykke af mit knæ, men jeg fokuserede kun på den lille hudafskrabning på håndfladen, det var den lille dråbe blod på tommelfingerpu-den, der gjorde, at jeg skreg.

Brødrene svælgede i knæet, moderen bragte jod.

Familien er konkret, familien er utilsigtet blind, dette ved vi. Familien er til for at minde den lille om, at der findes en rod, og roden gør ondt og roden gør godt, og roden skal værnes om, det er en pligt, og rodens lokalitet skal værnes om, flaget hejses. I dag drømmer jeg om flagafbrændinger i gaderne, jeg savner en større respekt for tekstiler end at dekorere dem med symboler og lort, jeg opponerer mod dekorationen af de nyfødte; her er dit køn, dit navn, dit flag og din familie, må du forsøge at slippe af med det, må du kvæles i dit opkast, må du blive sendt væk.

Nej, han græd ikke på dækket, den lille, han har aldrig grædt over den familie, han har ikke kastet op siden ridelærerens gin og gin, siden han tog ridelæreren til roden i gin og gin, den lille har ikke kastet sig op, kastet sig ind til en anden siden gin og gin, han har ikke trukket det særlige vejr, han kalder kærligheden, siden gin og gin, nu trækker han vejret i en automat i indre by, nu trækker han med fremskudte hofter på parkeringspladser i provinsen, nu smiler han og sejler og væk.

Man har ofte sagt mig, at det var den alt for stærke sol gennem barndommen. Mine udlandsrejser hver sommer med brødrene, vi vendte først hjem til september, skolen var for længst i gang. Kemilæreren lægger en tung hånd på min skulder og presser sin vom mod min ryg, min pik banker i de små shorts, jeg må blive siddende flere minutter, efter at det ringer ud. Jeg sveder sådan om pungen, sandalerne er fugtige, foden

smutter. Jeg prøver at gå ned ad gangen med bunker af papir i klamme hænder, at bære kødgryde, kartofler, råkost og dressing fra glasmontrerne i kantinen og hen til et bord, jeg prøver at finde et frit bord, prøver at sætte mig over for et menneske, prøver at se et menneske i øjnene, prøver at finde et menneske, jeg ikke har lyst til enten at kneppe eller slå ihjel. Man har ofte sagt, at det var øjnene, det var galt med, at jeg havde set for længe op på solen, at det var svært at nå ind til mig på den måde, hvad tænkte jeg mon på, var der ikke noget mærkeligt over min mund. Brødrene blottede tænder alle vegne, de flænsede koteletterne, bed i deres stilehæfter, de lo.

Jeg vender tilbage til moderen. En aften gik hun ind i den elskedes kammer og fandt hans trombone. Hun skilte den ad, samlede kondensvandet og spyttet i et lille bæger. Hun rykkede lange totter hår ud af sin hovedbund, vædede dem i bægeret og spandt elleve, slanke hunde heraf; sølvgrå, elegante. Disse hunde fulgte hende overalt, hvor hun kom. Man opdagede følget på lang afstand. Hende i midten med koret af hunde omkring sig, en oval og brusende fremkomst, hundenes rå fodpuder mod asfalten, de smidige led, kløerne. Den sølvgrå pels glimtede i solen, hundenes savl steg til vejrs som sæbebobler.

Mit livs historie eksisterer ikke. Dette ved jeg nu. Tidligere bildte jeg mig ind, at den lå et sted og vibrerede, min historie, at jeg kunne nærme mig den gennem skriften. Jeg tog fejl. Stol aldrig på et livs historie. Stol aldrig på en mand, der ikke kan lide at slikke pik på en mand, der sætter sig på en stol aldrig på en mand, der ikke kan lide at slikke røv på en kvinde, der sætter sig på en stol aldrig på en kvinde, der ikke kan lide at slikke kusse på en kvinde, der sætter sig på en stol aldrig på

en kvinde, der ikke kan lide at slikke røv på en mand, der sætter sig på en stol aldrig på en pik, der sætter sig på en stol aldrig på en kusse, der sætter sig på en stol på en røv.

Jeg siger det, som det lyder.

Skriv med røvhullet, det er et råd til en ven.

Jeg begyndte at skrive, den dag dyrlægen kom for at inseminere hoppen. Hun tog en lang plastichandske på og gravede store håndfulde lort ud. Så sprøjtede hun hingstens sæd ind i hoppen gennem et tyndt, gennemsigtigt rør. Jeg blev forvirret over de handlinger, over sammenblandingen af lort og sæd og æg, sammenfaldet af de to huller, jeg kunne ikke regne det ud, jeg var grædefærdig. Jeg ville tegne det for at forstå, men jeg kunne ikke, jeg rystede på hænderne.

Nu ser jeg, at jeg, da jeg var meget ung, tretten år, fjorten år, havde et ansigt, som indvarslede det, jeg senere i mit liv har fået af alkohol. Næsens fedt, huden rundt om kindbenene, øjnenes glans. Jeg begærede alt, der kunne gennemstrømme mig, mit ansigt var en åben invitation til vinens gæring i porerne. Man bemærkede dette perforerede ansigt, endnu inden jeg havde smagt en øl, man hæftede sig ved noget anderledes, man kaldte det gammelklogt, ridelæreren hviskede *skyldig* efter en time.

En aften skamferer jeg hans Kiefer-saddel.

Jeg lister en saks op af køkkenskuffen, sniger mig ud på gårdspladsen, ind i laden, tænder intet lys, gennem stalden, ind i sadde rummet, famler mig frem. Jeg hiver efter vejret, hugger til, skærer igennem og sprøjter i ridebukserne, hugger, skærer, sprøjter.

Femten-et-halvt.

Jeg står af bussen.

Der er frost og stærk sol, moderen er ængstelig for, at vandrørerne skal fryse til, at hun skal rundt med spande til de tørstende dyr. Jeg er ængstelig for, at han sender mig hjem med den sidste bus, de går kun tre gange på en lørdag. Jeg kan høre havet herfra, jeg ved, at han vinterbader, jeg ved, at hans brystvorter bliver små og hårde, når han vinterbader, at pikken bliver kort og stram og stritter, at forhuden beskytter hovedet. Jeg er tidligt på den, jeg går ind i købmandsforretningen, de har oste og vin, ejerne er lesbiske, dette ved man, de tager sig ikke af, at man stinker af stald. Man bør medbringe noget, man kan ikke komme tomhændet, man må købe en flaske vin til ham, man må købe oste også, man.

Det var i løbet af denne rejse, hvor billedet syntes frigjort, at det kunne have revet sig løs fra helheden. Hvis ikke det var, fordi fordi. Moderens fordi, provinsens fordi, ridelærerens. Jeg siger rejse, fordi bussen, fordi Fjaltring, havet, ham. Jeg føler ikke noget for helheden, jeg kender den ikke, jeg siger indre by og ser intet, jeg siger moderen og brødrene på gården, jeg kan ikke tage det store billede på mig, jeg ved knap, hvad det lille billede forestiller, på den måde er der næppe tale om en frigørelse, snarere en lille pøl af mudder. Sand, grus, lerjord, hvad, skorpe og skred. Da jeg var ti, bad Gud mig om at få alle mine øjeblikke til at holde hinanden i hænderne. Jeg har aldrig brudt mig om bønner, jeg har aldrig brudt mig om Gud. Instrukser derimod, jo det.

Syatten-et-halvt.

Jeg står af bussen.

Jeg finder trappen fra parkeringsdækket og går op gennem færgen, ud til rælingen. Forstanderinden stiller sig ved siden af mig. Hun har en bleg mund, slanke hænder, hun peger ud i landskabet, hendes tunge fingerringe, jade og guld. I mine dagbogsoptegnelser omtaler jeg hende som Værtinden, Damen, Fruen. Jeg skriver sjældent om landskabet. Det flyder ud som blækklatter, jeg har ingen perspektiv i min skrift.

Jeg står altid af bussen, når vi kommer op på færgen, også om natten, for jeg er altid bange, jeg er bange for, at rebene giver efter, at vi skal blive ført til havs. Jeg står ved rælingen og kigger ud i mørket. Jeg er interesseret i druknedøden. Jeg er interesseret i alle tænkelige måder at dø på, men der er noget ved druknedøden, jeg finder særlig sirligt; langsomheden, vandets tavse indtrængen. Ja.

Jeg er iført en kjole af natursilke. Den er slidt, næsten gennemsigtig, det er moderens. Jeg har huset for mig selv, moderen er på jagt med weimaraneren, brødrene er med i deres ny erhvervede oilskinsfrakker, tre numre for store, to grinagtige grønne tvillingetelte, tavse af ærefrygt for jægerne, hundenes instinkt, stanken af krudt og dødt vildt. Weimaraneren er champ, den vinder altid alting, moderen kalder den det grå spøgelse, hun er den eneste kvinde blandt jægerne, mænd er nogle svin.

Jeg går fra etage til etage i kjolen og tager huset i øjesyn, det er som at se det for første gang. Jeg lader mine fingerspidser glide over det kolde granit i køkkenet, krukkerne med sylt i bryggerset, det argentinske porcelæn i vitrineskabet i spise-stuen. Jeg bevæger mig ganske langsomt gennem rummene,

mine bare fødder skriver trægulvet frem, skridt for skridt. Så de orientalske gulvtæpper i pejsestuen, så pejsens åbne krater, asken i mine nye, store hænder.

Jeg kravler ind i pejsen, jeg kan akkurat knække ryggen og rejse mig derinde.

Jeg ser op gennem den sorte skakt.

De kommer hjem med den døde weimaraner i et tæppe. Brødrene græder, vimser om moderen, serverer te. Hun drikker den ikke, hun sidder rank og stirrer ud i luften. Så opdager jeg hendes mund. En kold rystelse slår gennem min krop. Munden: latterlig, grusom. Hun ser ikke på mig, mens hun siger det: Jeg slår dem ihjel. Jeg slår de svin ihjel.

Jeg er indsmurt i sod, jeg har stadig kjolen på.

The Skin Is the Elastic Covering that Encases the Entire Body

Bjørn Rasmussen

Translated from the Danish by Nina Sokol

THE LOVER

I was already older when a man one day approached me in the entrance hall to a public space. I saw your play, he said, it touched me beyond words. I did not recognize him but merely registered his movements, this boastful gait that stems from an upbringing in the provinces, he could have been anybody. Do you still smoke, he said, it is stiflingly hot, there are so many people, let's get out of here, can I offer you a cigarette?

Very early in my life it was too late. When I turned 17 it was too late. When I was 12 I filled a sock with semen, the only thing I ever dreamed of was looking up into a man's asshole and breathing in a certain kind of air, love, I thought, the flapping wings of a bird. When I was 15 and a half years old the riding instructor came.

I often think of this picture that I still see and that I have never spoken of. The leather of the riding breeches against the inner thighs, the seam in the crotch, circling the buttocks, skin and skin. The sharp stench of horse piss, the ammonia makes the hay turn red and heavy, the saddle soap, the riding instructor's coarse hands. Yes.

This I know, I groomed the mare, I ate in a cold kitchen with the brothers, the mother, her jaw: crunch crunch! That is the only thing that binds me to the mother: the cool melancholy and crunch crunch, I can't think of anything else, except perhaps for the big because. This is the mother's big because:

She woke up one morning to find that the lover no longer lay by her side. Is he by the sea, she thought, has he gone to the greengrocer for figs and artichokes, has he gone out to the stable. At night, the mother would search along the edges of ditches in the dark land. She imagined the lover bleeding, mauled by wolves, and like a wolf she herself howled at the sky, she sang and screamed in the clear and frosty night. By day she wrapped herself in dark purple and carried large tin buckets of cement out to the ditches that were visited nightly and which she would fill to mark, to check off; he was not here.

Let me say that I am 15 and a half.

I am sitting in bus number 491 toward Fjaltring.

I have not changed clothes, I must arrive like this, engulfed by horse stench, that's what it says in the contract, those are the instructions, take off your clothes, you smell like shit. The sun light through the bus window, the flat fields, the ocean, it is the first time I am visiting him.

I live at a state boarding school. I eat, sleep, study, I am seventeen years old, that I know. I know that the mother has connections or I wouldn't be sitting here, there are certain procedures in the provinces, there is a precedent for the preparation of a Danish pork sausage. I know that I was sent on a ferry, the brothers waved from the pier, the mother cried, first goodbye to

the lover, then the Weimaraner and now the little one. I did not cry. I have not cried since I fell off a swing in elementary school, the cement cut part of my knee, but I focused only on the little scrape in the palm of my hand, it was the tiny drop of blood on the pad of my thumb that made me scream.

The brothers wallowed in the knee, the mother brought iodine.

The family is finite, the family is inadvertently blind, that we know. The family exists to remind the little one that there is a root and the root hurts and the root feels good and the root must be safeguarded, that is a duty, and the location of the root must be safeguarded, the flag is raised. Today I dream of flag-burning in the streets, I wish a deeper respect was shown for textiles than decorating them with symbols and shit, I oppose decorating newborns: here is your gender, your name, your flag and your family, may you try to escape it, may you choke on your own vomit, may you be sent away.

No, he did not cry at the pier, the little one, he has never cried over that family, he has never thrown up since the riding instructor's gin and gin, since he took the riding instructor up to the root in gin and gin, the little one has not thrown up, flung himself at another since the gin and gin and he has not breathed in the specific air he calls love since the gin and gin, now he breathes air through an ATM in the centre of the city, now he is hustling with thrusting hips in the parking lots of the provinces, now he is smiling and sailing away and gone.

I have often been told that it was due to the much too strong sunlight of my childhood. My travels abroad every summer with my brothers, we wouldn't return home until September,

school had long since started. The chemistry teacher places his heavy hand on my shoulder and pushes his belly against my back, my prick is throbbing in my small shorts, I have to remain seated for several minutes after the bell has rung. My scrotum is really sweating, my sandals are moist, my foot slips. I try to walk down the hall with a stack of papers in my clammy hands, carrying a cooking pot, potatoes, raw vegetables, and dressing from the display case in the cafeteria over to a table, I try to find a free table, try to sit across from a person, try to look a person in the eyes, try to find a person that I don't want to either screw or kill. It had often been said that the eyes were the real problem, that I had looked at the sun for too long, that it was hard to reach me in a way, it was hard to tell what I was thinking about and wasn't there something strange about my mouth? The brothers flashed their teeth everywhere, they tore the cutlets to pieces, bit into their notebooks, they laughed.

But getting back to the mother. One night she went through the lover's room and found a trombone. She disassembled it and gathered all the condensed water and spit into a small cup. She pulled out large tufts of her hair, moistened them in the cup from which she spun 11 slim dogs that were silver gray and elegant. These dogs followed her everywhere she went. The entourage was noticeable from a long distance. She was in the centre with the chorus of dogs surrounding her, an oval and turbulent apparition, the dogs' raw paw pads against the asphalt, the supple joints, the claws. The silver grey fur shimmered in the sunlight, the dogs' saliva rose into the air like soap bubbles.

My life story does not exist. I know that now. Earlier, I had convinced myself that it was lying somewhere and vibrating, my story, that I could get nearer to it through writing. I was wrong. Never trust a life story. Never trust a man that does not like to lick another man's cock, that sits on a chair never on a man, that does not like to lick a woman's ass, that sits on a chair never on a woman, that does not like to lick the cunt of a woman, that sits on a chair never on a woman, that does not like to lick a man's ass, that sits on a chair never on a cock, that sits on a chair never on a cunt, that sits on a chair on an ass.

I'm telling it like it sounds.

Write with your asshole, that's a piece of advice for a friend.

I started to write the day the veterinarian came to inseminate the mare. She put on a long plastic glove and dug out huge handfuls of shit. Then she injected the stallion's semen through a thin, translucent tube. Those actions confused me, the blend of shit and semen and eggs, the merging of those two holes, I couldn't figure it out, I was on the verge of tears. I wanted to draw it in order to understand but I couldn't, my hands were shaking.

I see now that when I was very young, 13 or 14 years old, I had a face that would foretell what I would later get due to alcohol. The fat of my nose, the skin surrounding my cheek bones, the lustre of my eyes. I desired everything that could flow through me, my face was an open invitation to the fermentation of wine in my pores. This pocked face of mine had been noticed before I had had my first taste of beer and it had been registered that there was something different about it which was called precocious, the riding instructor whispered *guilty* after an hour.

One night I ruin his Kieffer saddle.

I sneak a pair of scissors out of the kitchen drawer, tiptoe out to the yard, into the stable without turning on the light, go through the stable, enter the saddle room, groping my way. I gasp for air, strike down hard, cut through and squirt into the riding breeches, strike, cut, squirt.

Fifteen and a half.

I get off the bus.

It's freezing and the sun is bright, the mother is worried that the water pipes will freeze, that she will have to bring buckets of water to all the thirsty animals. I am worried that he will send me home on the last bus, they only run three times on Saturdays. I can hear the ocean from here, I know that the polar bear swims, I know that his nipples will grow small and hard when the polar bear swims, that his cock will grow short and tight and jut out, that the foreskin protects the head. I am early, I go into the grocery shop, they have cheese and wine, the owners are lesbian, that is a known fact, they don't mind if you stink of shit. One ought to purchase something, one cannot arrive empty-handed, one will have to buy a bottle of wine for him, one will have to buy cheeses also, one will.

It was during the course of this journey, where the picture seemed to be liberated, that it could have broken loose from the whole. If it hadn't had been because, because. The because of the mother, the because of the provinces, of the riding instructor. I say journey because the bus, because Fjaltring, the ocean, him. I feel nothing for the whole, I don't know it, I say the centre of the city and see nothing, I say the mother

and the brothers on the farm, I cannot take the big picture upon me, I hardly know what the little picture is depicting, in that sense there is hardly talk of a liberation but rather a pool of mud. Sand, gravel, clay soil, what-have-you, crusts and landslides. When I was ten, God asked me to make all of my moments hold hands. I have never cared for prayers, I have never cared for God. Instructions on the other hand, well that's something else.

Seventeen and a half.

I get off the bus.

I find the stairs from the car deck and go up through the ferry, out to the railing. The principal comes over and stands beside me. She has a pale mouth, slender hands, she points toward the landscape, her heavy finger rings, jade and gold. In my diary entries I refer to her as the Hostess, the Lady, the Wife. I hardly write about the landscape. It all flows out like ink stains, my writing has no perspective.

I always get off the bus once we're aboard the ferry, even if it is night, because I am always afraid, afraid that the ropes will give way, that we will get lost at sea. I stand by the railing and look out into the darkness. I am interested in death by drowning. I am interested in many forms of death, but there is something about death by drowning that I find particularly methodical; the slowness, the silent penetration of the water. Yes.

I am wearing a dress made of real silk. It is worn, almost transparent, it is the mother's. I have the house to myself, the mother is out hunting with the Weimaraner, the brothers

are with them in their newly acquired oilskin jackets, three sizes too big, two ridiculous green twin tents, silent in their veneration of the hunters, the instincts of the dogs, the stench of gunpowder and of dead game everywhere. The Weimaraner is the champ, it always wins everything, the mother calls it the grey ghost, she is the only woman among the hunters, men are such pigs.

I go from floor to floor in the dress and inspect the house. It is like seeing it for the first time. I let my fingertips glide over the cold granite in the kitchen, the jars with jam standing in the scullery, the Argentinian porcelain in the display cabinet in the dining room. I move very slowly through the rooms, my bare feet writing forth the wooden floor, step by step. Then the oriental rugs in the room with an open fireplace, then the open damper of the fireplace, the ashes in my new big hands.

I crawl into the fireplace, I can just manage to stand up in there if I bend my back.

I look up through the black shaft.

They return home with the dead Weimaraner wrapped in a carpet. The brothers cry, bustling about the mother and serving tea. She doesn't drink it, she sits with her back straight staring into space. That is when I discover her mouth. A chill runs down my spine. Her mouth: ridiculous and cruel. She does not look at me as she says these words: I'm going to kill them. I'm going to kill those bastards.

I am smeared in soot. I am still wearing the dress.



© Merle Karu

Paavo Matsin

Gogoli disko (2015)

The Gogol Disco

Publishing House **Lepp ja Nagel**

Biography

Having started his literary career with self-published experimental avant-garde poetry books, Paavo Matsin has moved on to very tense and naturalistic prose writing. Loosely mixing history, fiction, fact and fantasy, alchemy and the esoteric with ironic but warm humour, his sharp, concise and exact use of words put more substance into his work than one might judge by volume alone. Matsin has received a number of prizes and acknowledgements, including the Criticism Prize of the cultural weekly *Sirp* in 2011, Siugjas Sulepea/The Serpent Pen Prize in 2012, as well as nominations for the State Cultural Award in 2012 and the Prose Book of the Year in 2014.

Synopsis

A small Eastern European town is inhabited by new settlers after a war in the imaginary future. As they are calmly going through their everyday business, the settlers' life, devoid of memory, is disrupted by the sudden resurrection of the classic Russian horror writer Nikolai Gogol.

Gogoli disko

Paavo Matsin

„Kotletid Gogolile“

Katerina oli terve päeva üksinda allkorrusel Grigori kadumise tõttu nutnud, lõpuks rahunenud, läinud Opiatovitši keelust hoolimata vastu ööd tagasi tööle, avastanud, et baariuks on lahti ning leidnud Gogoli Koidu ja Tartu tänava nurgalt pargis kuuvalgel magamas. Ta läks korraks veel tagasi koristama ja laenas siis vastasoleva kohtumaja hoovist aiakäru, millesse sealne veel haruldasest eesti soost kojamees tavatses punaste katusekivide allakukkuvaid tükke kokku koguda. Siis kärutas ta silmatorkavalt ja ebaharilikult rietatud mehe otsustavalt endale koju. Ööklubi juures ilkusid hilised suitsetajad tema ja ta käru üle, aga Katerina oli harjunud tülivate kundedega ega teinud teist nägugi. Gogol tuli turvalisse kohta viia. Vastik munakivisillutis, mille uus tsaarivõim oli kohe oma esimestel päevadel kõikjale maha tagunud, pani käru rappuma, nii et Katerina võttis peast pehme roosidega rätiku ja pani selle oigavale Gogolile selja alla.

Kodus hakkas ta rohkem närvide rahustuseks kui nälja pärast hommikupoolses haletuses kotlette praadima. Katerina oli Grigorist lootnud paljutki, mees oli talle taevad ja maad kokku lubanud, isegi kottidega sisse kolinud, kuid nüüd siis ikkagi kadunud ja veel niimoodi kiirustades, et polnud allkorruse tualetis isegi vett peale tõmmanud! Üldse oli Grigori kummaliselt palju peldikus istunud, viinud sinna veel kruusigi, nagu tahtnuks loputusvett juua! Issake! Ehk oli tal hoopis

mingi kummaline haigus? Mingi verine piss? Kahju muidugi, et kõik nii läks... aga hea, et vähemalt nüüd mingigi mees-
hing jälle majja tuli! Pealegi tundis Katerina vaikiva prohveti
suhtes seletamatut kiindumust, Gogol oli söönud Romaanis
isukalt ta päevapraade ja rääkinud otse südamesse minevaid
sõnu, kauaoodatud vastuseid tema suurtele küsimustele. Ta
ei rääkinud ka kunagi nende jubedate kolmekordsete väljen-
ditega! Katerina tundis seletamatut elevust ja väärikust, talle
tuli millegipärast kogu aeg pähe üks popplaul, kus kaunitar
elas jõeäärses majas, mille alt hakkas ühel ilusal päeval välja
voolama selge veega oja. Ka meenus talle evangeeliumist just
see, et lõpuks jäid Lunastaja risti alla ainult naised, sest kõik
mehed põgenesid!

Kotletid tulid imehead, suur Gogol sõi vaikides ja aegla-
selt nagu elluärrganud vana gravüür, mis järsku, mingi vale
valgustuse tõttu paistab öisele vetsuminejale liikuvat. Kui
naine pakkus veini, näitas võõras käega keedukannule ja
lasi sooja vett klaasi juurde valada. Katerina pani tähele, et
mehel on imelik komme teha saiaast kuulikesi. Ja veel, aknad
ning peeglid pidid olema kogu korteris kaetud. Kui nad
saabusid ja naine andis värisevale Gogolile selga Grigorist
maha jäänud dressipluuse, oli prohvet vaadanud pikalt välja
ööpimedusse ja rääkinud midagi enda viimasest eluasemest,
mille ees kõik sõidukid olid sooritanud ümberpöoret, nii
et toaknad alati üleni porised olnud. Gogol oli sikutanud
rulood ja Katerina oli täitnud mehe kummalise soovi ning
lasknud ise kõik katted alla. Nii et kui verine ja selgelt hul-
lunud Grigori tuli, kutsus talle hulluauto hoopis naaber, ja
Katerina ei osanud muud kui vaadata sinise taksoga äravii-
davat meest, kellest ta nii palju lootnud oli, ülevalt rõdult.
Siis oli naisel külm hakanud ja ta oli magama jäänud
Gogoli juurde tukastama istunud, omamata mingisugustki

ettekujutust, kuidas purunenud eluga edasi minna. Vahepeal Katerina ärkas ja katsus Gogolit, selle käed oli jääkülmad ja ta näol olid väikesed, ilmselt surimaski tegemisest jäänud vigastused, pisikesed haavad, mida naine lootis hommikul hea defitsiitse Jugoslaavia nardikreemiga ravida. Korra ärkas öösel ka külaline ja, viibides mingis sumbuurses seisundis, tahtis komberdada ülakorrusele, kus pidavat olema kodukabel! Paar korda kutsus Gogol unes ulgudes teenrit appi, aga ilmselt väsis siis ja suikus uuesti. Pärast hommikusööki tahtis Gogol aga harjunud kombel veeta päeva tualetis ja Katerina ei keelanud talle seda väikest veidrust, kus see surnu siis ikka olema pidi. Ta viis sinna ka paar pastapliiat-sit ning natuke märkmepaberit. Paar eestikeelset kirjandusteost – kellegi vanema autori Jaan Kausi „Ela ja sära“ ning eesti-nigeeria nobelisti Berk Vakri paks „Tartu lugulaul“ – olid seal ka mittelugemiseks kasepuust riiulil olemas, nagu tsaarivalitsuse määrus kadunud eestlaste ilukirjanduslike teoste suhtes ette kirjutas, et ikka vähemalt kaks teost nimekirjast ja hoida hügieeniga seotud ruumis. Gogol oli õnneks öelnud, et need on liiga keerulised tema jaoks... Katerina ei tahtnud probleeme, ta elas vaikselt ja täitis alati kõiki riiklikke korraldusi, see oli nii sisse juurdunud, et ta kaalus mõttes ka koduseid kotlette riikliku grammimäära alusel, mis siin rääkida veel siis niinimetatud sinistest määrustest, mis reguleerisid inimese vahekorda eelmise riikluse jäänuste ja esindajatega.

Järgmiseks õhtuks oli Katerina kutsunud külalise. Tema ainus rõõm siin elus olidki sõbrannad. Kõige lähedasem neist, Katja, töötas kahe teineteisest võrdlemisi kaugele jääva tehase juhina, nii et ta külastas hingeõde tihti juba puhtpraktilisel eesmärgil, et oleks, kus ööbida. Kuid Katerina ootusjoovastuse hajutas ootamatu sündmus. Ta ei olnud Katjale midagi

öelnud Gogoli kohta ja kavatses sellist pommuudist serveerida nii-öelda koos sisselükatava serveerimislauaga, aga nagu ikka, läks kõõgis just kõige kiiremal hetkel midagi kõrbema. Katja jäi esikusse üksinda ja kohe kuulduski tema karjatus, sest ta oli avastanud peldikust mingi vanamees-teispoonsus-skeleti lugemas kohustuslikku tualetikirjandust. WC-raamatud olid igal pool seadusega ettenähtult alati olemas, aga keegi ju ei võtnud neid ometigi kunagi kätte! Nüüd oli Katjal tunne, et ta sureb täna košmaarset surma kuskil pargipingil, mille kõrval võsas jubedates Lossimägede varemetes peab oma koosolekut kohalik vargakomitee! Nii jube tundus talle ilmutis! Nii uskumatu see rüve ja ebaseaduslik tegevus, peldikus eesti raamatu lugemine, et käes rippuv äsja kondiitriärist ostetud maasikastordik kukkus potsuga maha.

Aga kõik rahunes, elu ootamatult kuum puljong jahtus, kui Katerina hiljem võõra tuppä palus ja vaarikapunastes pükstes Gogol väriseva galantsusega oma kriiksuvast portsigartšikust naistele paberosse pakkus. Katja teadis, et Katerinas oli alati mingit tabamatut ja peidetud stiili olnud, ilmselt tema baltliku päritolu tõttu. Kui sõbranna kõrval oli, tundus talle olukord isegi põnev, nii huvitavat meest ta tööl kunagi ei näinud, isegi arvutimees ei küündinud Gogolini, kuigi käis ka ebaharilikult riides ja rääkis arusaamatult. Katja vaatas suure imestusega, kuidas Katerina tõi magamistoast enda kõige kallima nardisalvi ja määris sellega vanamehe jalgu. Kogu tuba lõhnas nüüd tugevalt nagu kirikus. Katja uuris salvikarpi ja vakatas hämmastusest, see maksis peaaegu ta aastapalga. Kui Katerina kummardas, said isegi ta juuksed salviga kokku, aga ta ei hoolinud sellest. Katjale tundus korra, et sõbranna isegi pühkis juustega ilmutise pruuni mädanevaid jalgu. Lõpuks kreemitas naine sisse ka Gogoli näo, et ilmselt surimaski võtmisest jäänud väikeseid haavakesi ravida.

„Miks sa talle küll nii kallist salvi määrid?“ küsis Katja kohe Katerinalt, kui nad korraaks köögis kahekesi jäid. „Elada ju nihukese vanamehega ei saa, ta ei teeni midagi... Kas sa mõnda kaugsõiduautojuhti ei taha? Võiksin korraldada, olen ju rääkinud...“

Katerina istus köögilaua taha ja hakkas nutma.

„Vaata, ta on siin ju ainult korraaks, kõik need teised meed on aga kogu aeg,“ ohkas ta, kui sai jälle rääkida, „mul hakkas tast lihtsalt kahju, ta on ju muidugi täiesti nemodnõi-parasiit-unitaas, aga Griša kadus ja ma ei suuda jälle hakata kuskilt...“

„No aga sa ei saa ju sellisega elada, Katerinake,“ ütles Katja, kelle nägu valgustas nüüd viimseni sisemine naiselik hämmastuslamp,“ selle salvi raha eest saaksid sa tavalist meest oma kolmsada päeva toita! Ta ei ole ju mingi Kristus! Ja meie ei ole juudinaised! Pealegi, kui tulevad inspektorid ja näevad teda lugemas, siis ei suuda sind ju keegi enam kaitsta, sa oled ju estonka, tahad, et sind viiakse ka sinna vanasse metroosse surema või...“

„Metroosse?...“ hüüdis Katerina. „Ma olen kogu elu ausalt tsaaririiki teeninud, ma ei ole kunagi isegi ajalehte tualetis lugenud...“

Ta nuttis nagu prostituut või jaamapianist. Kuidas oleks küll tema ellu vaja olnud Grigorit, ühte igapäevaste olukordade aranžirovtšikut, kes ütleks mis hea ja halb ja mis on elu mõte, annaks õige tooni ja võtaks klaverikaane vahelt alati täpselt sobiva rahasumma! Nüüd oli kogu elu jälle segamini nagu Prantsuse bulvar Pihkvas pärast avamispidustusi.

Katja üritas korraaks mõelda asjalikult nagu tehases, kui töömehed jälle halama tulid, et pole seda ja teist. Siis lasi ta tavaliselt neil kõik oma tööriistad ette näidata ning mehed

mõistsid, et midagi juurde nõuda ei ole tegelikult alust ja neile on kõik tingimused tööraseks loodud. Katja üritas kuidagi formuleerida oma tekkivat seisukohta:

„Kindlasti on mingi koht, kus tal on ohutum ja parem. Ega sinu juures ka ei ole viga, kommunaalkorteriga ei anna su elamist ju võrreldagi. Aga, kuule, Katerinake, järsku viime ta muuseumi?“

Katerina oli püsti tõusnud, ta silmad läikisid kummaliselt, nagu oleks maja viimane öölamp tiiki visatud.

„Jah!“ ütles ta murtud häälel pärast minutilist vaikust.

Nüüd naised rahunesid ja läksid tuppa tagasi. Gogol oli jälle vetsu läinud, kogu laual olev sai oli rullitud väikesteks kuu-
likesteks. Sõbrannad hakkasid vaikselt vajalikke asju kokku panema.

The Gogol Disco

Paavo Matsin

Translated from the Estonian by Adam Cullen

Cutlets for Gogol

Katerina had been crying over Grigory's disappearance the entire day, alone downstairs. She finally calmed down, went back to work around midnight in spite of Opiatovich having forbidden her to do so, discovered that the bar door was open, and found Gogol sleeping in the moonlight in a park at the intersection of Koidu and Tartu streets. She returned to the bar for a short while to clean up, then borrowed a wheelbarrow from the yard of the courthouse opposite – the rare ethnically-Estonian caretaker mostly used it to collect fallen shards of red shingle. Then, she purposefully wheeled the unusually and conspicuously dressed Gogol back to her home. Late-night smokers loitering outside the nightclub catcalled at her and the wheelbarrow, but Katerina was accustomed to troublesome customers and paid them no attention. Gogol had to be brought to a safe place. The horrendous cobblestones that the new tsardom had pounded into place during its very first days jiggled the wheelbarrow, so Katerina removed her soft rose-patterned shawl and positioned it under the moaning Gogol's back.

At home, she started making cutlets, more to soothe her nerves than out of hunger in the early-morning gloaming. Katerina had placed high hopes in Grigory – he had promised her the Sun and the Moon, had even moved his bags into her place, but

had now disappeared all the same, and in such a hurry that he hadn't even flushed the downstairs toilet! Grigory had spent an oddly large amount of time in the bathroom in general, and even brought a mug with him, as if he wanted to drink the flush-water! Good Lord! Maybe he'd actually had some strange disease? Or bloody pee? It was too bad that everything went the way it did, of course... but positive that at least *some* kind of male soul had entered the house again! Furthermore, Katerina felt an inexplicable fondness for the taciturn prophet – Gogol had eaten his meals at the Romaan Book-Bar ravenously and had uttered words that pierced straight to her heart; long-awaited answers to her great questions. And he never spoke in those awful threefold idioms! Katerina felt an inexplicable thrill and dignity. For some reason, a pop song kept coming to mind, one about a beautiful woman who lived in a riverside house, beneath which a crystal-clear stream started flowing one fine day. She was also reminded of the gospels – in the end, only women were left at the foot of the Redeemer's cross, because all the men fled!

The cutlets turned out fantastically. The great Gogol ate sedately and in silence – like an old engraving come to life that all of a sudden, seen by a late-night bathroom-goer in the wrong light, appears to be moving. When the woman offered him wine, the stranger pointed to the kettle and had her top off the glass with warm water. Katerina remarked that the man had the strange habit of moulding his bread into little balls. What's more, all the windows and mirrors in the apartment had to be covered. When they arrived and the woman gave the shivering Gogol a dress shirt that Grigory had left behind, the prophet stared out into the darkness of night for a long while and muttered something about his last dwelling, which vehicles turned around in front of, so the windows of

the room were always covered in mud. Gogol tugged at the window shade and Katerina granted his strange wish, closing all of them. Thus, when the bloodied and clearly deranged Grigory came, it was a neighbour who called the psych ward on him, and all Katerina could do was watch from the balcony above as the man, from whom she had hoped so much, was taken away in a blue van. The woman started to feel cold, so she went back inside to sit and doze off next to Gogol, who was fast asleep, having not the slightest clue of how to move on with her shattered life. After a while, Katerina awoke and felt Gogol – his hands were as cold as ice and his face was covered in small scratches probably caused by the making of his death mask; tiny wounds, which the woman hoped to disinfect in the morning with a good Yugoslavian spikenard. Her visitor woke up once that night, too, and – in a kind of somnambulant state – wanted to clamber upstairs, where he claimed the home chapel was! Gogol howled in his sleep a couple of times, calling out for his servant, but apparently exhausted himself and fell back into a deep sleep. After breakfast, Gogol wanted to spend the day in the toilet, as he was used to doing, and Katerina did not deny him that small oddity – where else was the dead man supposed to be, anyway? She even brought him a few ballpoint pens and some scraps of notebook paper. A couple of Estonian-language literary works – *Rise and Shine* by some older author named Jaan Kaus and a thick book titled *Tartu Title Track* by the Estonian-Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Berk Vakri – were also perched on a birch wood shelf there, but not for reading. As the imperial decree prescribed for literature written by Estonians, at least two works from the list were always to be kept in areas meant for hygiene maintenance. Luckily, Gogol said they were too difficult for him... Katerina didn't want any problems. She lived a quiet life and

always abided by all state laws – they were so instilled into her that she even mentally weighed her homemade cutlets using the state gram-measure and, it goes without saying, adhered to the ‘blue decrees’, which regulated one’s relationships with remnants and representatives of the former statehood.

Katerina had invited a guest to come over the next evening. Her girlfriends really were her sole joy in this life. The closest of them, Katya, worked as the director of two factories located relatively far from each other, so she called on her soul-sister frequently, if only for the purely practical intention of having somewhere to stay the night. However, Katerina’s ecstatic anticipation of the visit had dissipated with the unexpected development. She hadn’t told Katya anything about Gogol yet and intended to serve the news-bomb on a cart that she could ‘wheel in’, so to say, but as always, something in the kitchen burned at the busiest moment. Katya had been left alone in the entryway and her shrill scream rang out immediately, since she had discovered the skeletal old man from beyond the grave reading mandatory toilet literature in the bathroom. Toilet books were always stocked everywhere as required by law, but no one ever *picked them up*! Now, Katya felt like she was going to die a gruesome death today, somewhere on a park bench, beside which a committee of local thieves gathered in the bushes growing on the eerie ruins of Castle Hill! That was how horrible the phantom appeared! The disgusting and illegal act – reading an Estonian book in the toilet – was so unbelievable that the strawberry cake she had just bought from a confectionery store slipped from her grasp and hit the ground with a *plop*.

But everyone calmed down and life’s unexpectedly hot broth cooled when Katerina later asked the stranger to come out and Gogol, clad in raspberry-red pants, offered the women *papirosi*

from his squeaky cigarette case with trembling gallantry. Katya knew that Katerina had always possessed a kind of hidden, elusive style; probably as a result of her Baltic heritage. With her girlfriend by her side, the situation seemed even exciting – Katya had never seen such a fascinating man at work; even the IT guy wasn't on par with Gogol, although he also dressed unusually and spoke gibberish. Katya stared in wide-eyed wonder as Katerina took her most treasured spikenard from the bedroom and rubbed it on the old man's legs. The whole room smelled pungently like a church. Katya inspected the ointment's box and was incredulously speechless – it cost almost her yearly salary. Katerina's hair even brushed across the ointment when she leaned over Gogol, but the woman didn't care. To Katya, it briefly appeared as if her girlfriend was even wiping the phantom's brown, rotting feet with her hair. Lastly, Katerina also applied the cream to Gogol's face, apparently to treat the small cuts made by his death mask.

"Why on Earth are you rubbing him with such expensive ointment?" Katya asked Katerina as soon as they were alone in the kitchen for a moment. "You can't live with an old man like him, you know – he won't bring home the bacon... Wouldn't you like some long-distance trucker? I could arrange it; I've told you before..."

Katerina sat down at the kitchen table and started to cry.

"Look, he's only going to be here a little while, but all those other men are around all the time," she sighed when she regained her composure. "I just started to feel sorry for him – he is a totally *nemodny-parasite-unitaz**, of course, but Grisha disappeared and I don't have it in me to start again with..."

* "unfashionable-[...]-toilet" (Russian)

“Yeah, but you really can’t live with somebody like him, Katerinka,” Katya said, her face now fully illuminated by an inner lamp of feminine astonishment. “You could feed an ordinary man for a good 300 days with the money from that ointment! He’s no Christ now is he! And we’re not Jewish women! And on top of that, if the inspectors come and see him reading, then no one will be able to protect you anymore – *you’re an Estonka*. Do you want to be hauled off to the old metro to die, too?”

“The metro?...” Katerina exclaimed. “I’ve served the tsardom honestly my whole life, I’ve never even read newspapers in the toilet...”

She cried like a prostitute or a train-station pianist. How, oh how she needed a Grigory in her life; a little *aranzhirovchik*** of everyday affairs, who would tell her what is good and what is bad and what the point of life is, give things the right tone and always pull a suitable sum of money out from under the piano cover! Now her entire life was a mess again, like France Boulevard in Pskov after the opening ceremony.

Katya tried to think businesslike for a moment, just like she did at the factory whenever the workmen came to gripe again about not having this or that. She would usually have all of them display their tools to her, and they’d realise there was actually no basis for demanding anything extra and that all the right conditions for drudgery had been established. Katya attempted to formulate her developing viewpoint:

“There has got to be some place that’s safer and better for him. There’s nothing wrong with your place either, of course, but you can’t even compare your apartment to a communal one. But listen, Katerinka – what if we maybe take him to the museum?”

** “organizer” (Russian)

Katerina shot to her feet, her eyes glinting strangely like a house's last night light tossed into a pond.

"Yes!" she exclaimed after a minute-long silence, her voice cracking.

The women composed themselves and returned to the living room. Gogol had gone into the toilet again, and all the bread that had been on the table was packed into little balls. The two friends began quietly packing what they would need.



© Liisa Valonen

Selja Ahava

Taivaalta tippuvat asiat (2015)

Choses qui tombent du ciel / Things that Fall from the Sky

Publishing House **Gummerus**

Biography

Selja Ahava (b. 1974) graduated with a degree in scriptwriting from the Theatre Academy of Helsinki in 2001. She has written film scripts, a TV series and a radio play. She has also written works that combine text, space and performance.

Ahava received a grant from the Laila Hirvisaari Foundation for her debut novel, *The Day the Whale Swam through London* (original title: *Eksyneen muistikirja*). The purpose of this annual award is to support accomplished Finnish authors who are still at the start of their careers to write high quality, poignant books. Her second novel *Things that Fall from the Sky* (original title: *Taivaalta tippuvat asiat*) was nominated for the prestigious Finlandia literary prize.

Ahava lived in London for five years, having since settled in Porvoo, where she spends her time renovating an old wooden house and raising her children.

Synopsis

Selja Ahava's novel is a stunning narrative that explores the unexpected and inexplicable nature of reality. A triptych of voices weave together an array of human attempts to force life into logical chains of events.

On a sunny summer day, a block of ice falls from the sky and kills a woman on her home veranda. Her story is brutally cut short, and her eight-year-old daughter Saara is left motherless. After the tragedy, Saara and her father move in with their lottery-winning Auntie. Not long after, Auntie wins the jackpot for a second time and falls into a deep three-week sleep. When she wakes up, she is struck by questions about her good fortune and what the future holds. She decides to contact a Scottish fisherman who has been hit four times by lightning and asks for his advice. Their correspondence starts an archive of chance and coincidence. After four years, Saara and her father move back to their old house with the father's pregnant new partner. The house, where renovations never got completed, comes back to life and carries its own seeds of secrets. The novel gracefully combines the ordinary with the radically absurd, beauty with violence, fairy tales with strange facts about objects falling from the sky. Ahava tells us about pain and loss in flowing prose with a voice that is both powerful and effortless.

6.

Aika kuluu ja äiti liikkuu taaksepäin. Äidistä näkyvät housut ja pitkä suora tukka. Tuuli heiluttaa tukkaa ja toinen käsi tukee tupakkakättä. Sillä lailla äiti seisoo ja etääntyy.

Kun äiti kumartuu sängyn ylle, tukka valuu korvien takaa ja osuu minua suukkojen mukana naamaan. Kun sanon äiti kumartuu, se on vielä tässä. Kun äiti kumartui, se menee jo pois. Isä ei puhu äidistä, koska se ei pysty sanomaan kumartui. Se ei pysty puhumaan äitiä menneeseen, se aloittaa toisinaan lauseen äidin nimellä, mutta jättää sitten kesken.

Äiti on jäänyt kesken.

Isä puhuu kyllä äidin tavaroista, koska ne ovat olemassa edelleen. – Hannelen sukset on kellarissa, isä sanoo, ihan tavallisella äänellä. – Hannelen maalaamat kaapit. Se on siinä Hannelen saappaiden vieressä.

Oikean ihmisen ympäri voi piirtää viivan niin kuin Hercule Poirot tekee, kun lattialla makaa ruumis. Kuolema on helppompaa ymmärtää, kun sillä on kyynärpää ja polvitaive ja oma paikka lattiassa. Ja kun kuollut kannetaan pois, jäljelle jää valkoinen viiva, jonka sisällä ei enää ole ketään. Vähän niin kuin lottovoitto, jonka käsittäisi helpommin, jos se olisi kasa rahaa. Mutta muistoilla ei ole ruumista.

Elokuvassa muistot näytetään mustavalkoisina.

Kuollut ihminen jätetään seisomaan tienvarteen, auto ajaa pois, ja takaikkunasta katsotaan kuinka ihminen pienenee ja katoaa lopulta kokonaan. Sillä lailla elokuvissa kuolla.

Mutta ei se oikeasti näytä siltä. Ei aika pienennä äitiä eivätkä värit haalistu. Äiti vain räjähtää palasiksi, ja palaset jäävät ilmaan leijumaan. Kaikki palaset ovat kirkkaita – tukka, sormet, hörähdys, ihon vaot ja nenänreiät, naksuvat polvet, vatsan kurina – mutta itse äiti puuttuu.

19.

Joskus lentokoneessa, esimerkiksi sen vesiputkessa tai wc-järjestelmässä, voi ilmetä vuoto. Tämä on totta. Jos tihkuva vesi on sinistä, se tulee wc: stä, jos puolestaan kirkasta, sen lähde on jokin muu. Kun lentokone on maassa, vesi tihkuu tippoina maahan. Kun lentokone on ilmassa, tihkuva vesi jäätyy matalan ulkolämpötilan johdosta.

Pitkän lennon aikana muodostuva jääkimpale voi olla jalkapallonkin kokoinen. Kun kone sitten pudottaa korkeutta ja ilman lämpötila kohoaa, saattaa jääkokkare irrota lentokoneesta ja tippua maahan. Tämä on kaikkein yleisin asia, joka lentävästä lentokoneesta tippuu. Ja kun alapuolella on jonkun piha, jossa joku tekee puutarhahommia ja suunnittelee mansikkapyramidia, saattaa se joku saada jalkapallon kokoisen jääkimpaleen päähänsä ja kuolla. Tämä on totta.

Isä on alkanut istua tietokoneen ääressä. Se näyttää taas tavalliselta – ehkä se johtuu siitä, että se on vaihtanut aurinkolasit silmälasihin ja pukeutunut päivävaatteet päälle. Tai siitä että

sen varpaat eivät enää vuoda. Mutta nyt se istuu tietokoneen ääressä, lukee ja klikkailee ja kuuntelee huonosti. Annu-täti yrittää saada sen hommiin, koska lammasaita pitää siirtää ja kompostisäiliö tyhjentää, mutta isä vain murisee.

– Ei kyllä, näin se on. Kuunnelkaa tätä, isä aloittaa taas. Minä haluaisin livahtaa yläkertaan.

– Tässä on tällainen lista. Tää on siis ihan käsittämätöntä, miten tästä ei puhuta enempää? Moottorit: Elokuussa vuonna 2000 KLM-yhtiön koneesta tippui toinen moottori. Kapteeni onnistui tekemään hätälaskun uimarannalle. Ovet: Maalis-kuussa 2005 British Airwaysin Boeing-koneesta tippui ovi ja se joutui tekemään hätälaskun. Ovi meni vain 20 metrillä ohi kävelyllä olleesta pariskunnasta. Rengas: Toukokuussa 2001 Blue Panorama Airlinesin koneesta irtosi oikea rengas. Luukku: Lokakuussa 1999 Delta Airlinesin koneen rengas-luukku irtosi ja tippui keskelle hiljaista lähiötä.

Isä pitää tauon ja katsoo merkitsevästi minua ja Annu-tätiä. On kiva, että isä vihdoinkin tekee jotain ja että sillä on päivävaatteet taas päällä, mutta minusta se tekee nyt tätä tietokonejuttua vähän liikaa.

– Mutta tää jatkuu: Meteoriitit. ”Marraskuun 30. päivä vuonna 1954 Elisabeth Hodges nukkui päiväunia olohuoneessaan, kun 4 kiloa painava meteoriitti tippui hänen kattonsa läpi, kimposi radiosta ja osui Elisabethia lonkkaan.”

Isä näyttää netistä Elisabeth Hodgesin valokuvan. Elisabethilla on lonkassa tosi iso mustelma.

– Kalat. Kun lämmin ja kylmä ilmamassa kohtaavat, saattaa syntyä pikkutornadoja, jotka imevät kaloja ja muita mereneläviä vedestä ja kuljettavat ne sitten mantereelle. Rupikonnat. Vuonna 1794 ranskalaisten sotilaiden niskaan satoi

satoja hännällisiä rupikonnia. Golf-pallot. Vuonna 1969 Floridassa satoi satoja golf-palloja. Mutta tässä sanotaan kanssa, että on tapauksia, joissa tornadoteoria ei oikein toimi. Pohjois-Kreikassa satoi vuonna 2002 pelkkiä sardelleja.

– Ehkä jostain lentokoneesta tippui lasti, ehdottaa Annu-täti.

– Mutta vuonna 1859 Walesissa satoi pelkkiä piikkikaloja. Siihen aikaan ei vielä edes ollut lentokoneita! Isä katsoo meitä lasiensa yli, ikään kuin ratkaisua odottaen. – Sitä paitsi piikkikala ei ole parvieläin, että miten mikään trombi olisi voinut siivilöidä pelkästään piikkikalat ja jättää veteen muut kalat, kivet, leväpaakat. Oletko sä koskaan tajunnut, että tämä on tällaista? isä kysyy Annulta.

Sitten lista jatkuu.

– Raha. Vuonna 1940 Neuvostoliitossa satoi vanhoja ruplan kolikoita. Vuonna 1857 kahtena syyskuisena iltana Kaliforniassa satoi suuria sokerikiteitä. Lisäksi taivaalta on satanut myös hämähäkkejä, kottaraisia, matoja ja hyytelöä.

Isä lopettaa lukemisen ja katsoo meitä taas.

– Hyytelöä? Annu-täti sanoo.

– Jep. Hämähäkkejä, kottaraisia, matoja ja hyytelöä. Näitä viimeisiä tässä ei selitetä sen tarkemmin.

Minua alkaa naurattaa. Tiedän ettei saisi, mutta en voi sille mitään. Kuvittelen, miltä äiti olisi näyttänyt, jos sen päälle olisikin tippunut hyytelöä. Voiko hyytelöön kuolla? Ainakin se kuulostaa pehmeämmältä kuin jalkapallon kokoinen jääkokkare. Minua naurattaa, koska luulen että äiti olisi voinut itse keksiä hyytelökuoleman. *Aargh-blub-blub-blub*, se olisi esittänyt hyytelön sisään sammuvaa kuolinkorinaa. Hyytelön pinta olisi vielä värissyt, kun onneton äiti sen sisällä olisi jo vaiennut.

– Ei helvetti kun tää on vaikeaa, Annu-täti sanoo ja alkaa äkkiä kikattaa.

Isä vilkaisee tätiä yllättyneenä, kurtistaa kulmiaan, mutta hymähtää sitten itsekin.

– Älä muuta sano.

Sitten isältä pääse kesän ensimmäinen nauru.

Me nauramme yhdessä hyytelöön kuoleville ihmisille, taivaaseen temmatuille piikkikaloille, merenrantaa käveleville pariskunnille, joiden viereen tipahtaa ovi, enkeleille jotka tekevät Pahaä Asiaa eivätkä varoita etukäteen.

Arvoisa herra MacKay,

Katsoin televisiosta teitä käsitelleen dokumentin, ja tarinanne kosketi minua suuresti. Halusin kirjoittaa teille, koska olen itsekin sattuman oikku. Tapaukseni on toki kovin erilainen kuin teidän ja ukkosen – olen nimittäin voittanut lotossa päävoiton kahdesti. Ehkä ajattelette neljä salamaa kokeneena, että kaksi voittoa ei ole vielä paljoakaan, mutta niin tai näin, minut se on saanut riittävästi tolaltaan.

Toivottavasti ei haittaa, jos kerron tarinani. Kolme vuotta sitten voitin loton päävoiton. Mikä sattuma – juuri minun numeroni siellä muoviputkiloissa! Sehän oli käsittämätöntä! Mutta toisaalta jonkun numerothan sinne putkiloihin aina tippuvat, ja nyt ne vain kerta kaikkiaan olivat minun.

Maksoin velkani ja järjestin elämäni juuri niin kuin halusin. Matkustin. Ostin vanhan talon. Rakennutin itselleni täydellisen työhuoneen. Olin onnellinen! Kaikki oli ratkaistu!

Ymmärrätkö herra MacKay, olen elänyt koko elämäni rahapulassa – ja nyt se kaikki oli ohi. Mikä vapaus ja helpotus!

Mutta sitten tuli toinen voitto. Taas minun numeroni tipahtelivat putkiloihin – eri numerot kuin ensimmäisellä kerralla. En tiennyt sen voivan olla edes mahdollista, mutta siellä ne nyt vain olivat. Ja yhtäkkiä sattuma ei tuntunutkaan enää riittävältä selitykseltä. En iloinnut enkä riemuinnut, en tuntenut yhtään mitään. Jollain kummalla tavalla tämä toinen voitto vei ilon siitä ensimmäisestä.

Minuun iski merkillinen syyllisyys. Ikään kuin olisin mennyt leikkimään jollain ilman lupaa. Mutta enhän minä ollut tehnyt mitään väärää! Olen lotonnut aina, en halunnut lopettaa. Pidän arvонnan jännittämisestä. Pidän siitä, kun pallot putoilevat. Elämässä on kovin vähän mitään muuta säännöllistä.

Ajattelin, että elämä jatkuu. Elän, huovutan, lottoan, ostan asioita kun ne ovat tarjouksessa.

Mutta tässä onkin kyse jostain muusta, siltä minusta nyt tuntuu. Mitä se on?

Olenko jonkin pilan kohde?

Mitä seuraavaksi tapahtuu?

Sitten satuin näkemään teistä kertovan dokumentin televisiossa ja ajattelin, että tuo mies varmasti ymmärtää tilanteeni. Tuo mies on ohittanut sattuman aivan kuten minä. Ehkä tuo mies osaa vastata.

BBC ei suostunut luovuttamaan osoitettanne, mutta ystävällinen kuvaussihteeri on luvannut toimittaa tämän kirjeen eteenpäin. Liitän loppuun yhteystietoni.

*Ystävällisin terveisin,
Annu Heiskanen*

Arvon rouva Heiskanen,

Olen kalastaja. Pyydän hummereita ja merirapuja. Asun vaimoni kanssa pienessä talossa, ja pihallamme kasvaa palkopapuja, perunaa, kolmenlaisia kaaleja ja kurpitsaa.

Te pyydätte selitystä, mutta luulen että teidän itsenne on löydettävä se. Oman kokemukseni mukaan muiden antamista selityksistä ei ole mitään hyötyä kuitenkaan.

*Terveisin
Hamish MacKay*

PS. Alla osoitteeni.

Herra MacKay,

suokaa anteeksi että kirjoitan taas. Ymmärrän kyllä, että minun itseni tämä täytyy ratkaista. Mutta dokumentissa vaikutitte niin tyyneltä, ja jäin miettimään, eikö teitä pelota tai suututa. Itse olen ihan raivona! Tai olisin, jos vain tietäisin kenelle.

Ei sitä ihminen kovin usein voi vetää kalenteriin viivaa, että tuossa se elämä muuttui. Mutta herra MacKay, me voimme. Joku voisi väittää minun jääneen hyvän onnen loukkoon ja teidät onnettomuuteen, mutta ei se niin yksinkertaista ole. Kuulkaa, matto voi mennä jalkojen alta ilman kärsimystäkin. Siksi minä teille kirjoitin ja kirjoitan nyt uudestaan, anteeksi. Olen vain niin kovin yksin tämän kanssa.

*Terveisin,
Annu Heiskanen*

Arvoisa rouva Heiskanen,

Olen minäkin kysynyt, onko tämä pilaa ja mitä tämä tarkoittaa, mutta ei niiden kysymysten kanssa pääse mihinkään. Siksi lopetin.

Vaimoni Mary istutti tänään palkopavun taimet kasvimaille. Palkopapu nousee mullasta reippaana ja vihreänä ja luottamusta pullollaan. Hetken se huojuu itsekseen kuin kävelyä opetteleva lapsi, mutta heti hipaistessaan jotakin se kiertyy karvaisella varrellaan sen ympärille ja tukeutuu. Se luottaa niin sokeasti vieraisiin.

Ja tiedättekö rouva Heiskanen, emme mekään ole aivan yksin. Luin Valituista Paloista, että Yhdysvalloissa asui metsänvartija, johon salama iski seitsemän kertaa. Seitsemännen kerran jälkeen hän ampui itseään haulikolla päähän. Enpä voi häntä siitä kyllä tuomita.

*Ystävällisin terveisin,
Hamish MacKay*

Choses qui tombent du ciel

Selja Ahava

Translated from the Finnish by Martin Carayol

6.

Le temps passe et ma mère recule. On voit son pantalon et ses longs cheveux raides. Le vent agite sa chevelure, et elle se sert de sa deuxième main pour soutenir la main qui tient la cigarette. C'est dans cette position que je la vois s'éloigner.

Quand ma mère se penche sur le lit, ses cheveux s'échappent de derrière ses oreilles et tombent sur mon visage avec ses baisers. Quand je dis « ma mère se penche », c'est encore là. Alors que « ma mère se penchait », c'est terminé. Papa ne parle pas de maman, car il n'arrive pas à dire « se penchait ». Il n'arrive pas à parler d'elle au passé, parfois il commence une phrase par le nom de ma mère, mais la phrase s'interrompt.

Ma mère s'est interrompue.

Il parle de ses affaires, en revanche, parce qu'elles existent toujours. « Les skis d'Hannele sont à la cave, dit mon père, d'une voix ordinaire. Les armoires peintes par Hannele. Tu l'as mis là, à côté des bottes d'Hannele. »

On peut dessiner un trait autour d'un être réel, comme Hercule Poirot quand il y a un cadavre par terre. La mort est plus facile à comprendre quand elle a un coude, un jarret, une place sur le sol. Et quand le cadavre est évacué, il reste le trait blanc, sans personne à l'intérieur. Un peu comme une victoire

au loto, plus facile à comprendre si c'est une somme d'argent. Mais les souvenirs n'ont pas de corps.

Au cinéma, les souvenirs apparaissent en noir et blanc.

On laisse la personne morte à un coin de route, la voiture s'éloigne, et par la vitre arrière on voit le mort rétrécir puis disparaître complètement. C'est comme ça qu'on meurt dans les films.

Mais en vrai ce n'est pas comme ça. Le temps ne fait pas rétrécir maman ni pâlir les couleurs. En fait, Maman explose en petits morceaux, qui continuent de flotter dans l'air. Ils sont tous très clairs — les cheveux, les doigts, l'éclat de rire, les sillons de la peau, les narines, les genoux qui craquent, le ventre qui gargouille — mais elle-même n'est pas là.

19.

Parfois, dans l'avion, par exemple au niveau d'une canalisation d'eau ou des toilettes, une fuite se déclenche. Pour de vrai. Si l'eau qui coule est bleue, ça vient des toilettes, si elle est transparente, c'est autre chose. Quand l'avion est au sol, l'eau tombe sous forme de gouttes. Quand il est en l'air, l'eau gèle à cause de la température extérieure très basse.

Le morceau de glace qui se forme pendant un long vol peut atteindre les dimensions d'un ballon de foot. Quand ensuite l'avion perd de l'altitude et que la température de l'air augmente, le glaçon peut se détacher de l'avion et tomber au sol. C'est ce qui tombe le plus souvent d'un avion en vol. Et quand il y a un jardin en dessous, avec quelqu'un qui fait du jardinage et élabore une pyramide de fraises, cette personne peut recevoir le glaçon sur la tête et mourir. Pour de vrai.

Mon père s'est mis à l'ordinateur. Il a à nouveau l'air normal — ça vient peut-être du fait qu'il a troqué ses lunettes de soleil pour ses lunettes habituelles, et qu'il porte une tenue de jour. Ou du fait que ses orteils ne coulent plus. Mais en tout cas il est assis devant l'ordinateur, il lit, il clique et il n'écoute pas. Tante Annu essaie de le mettre à contribution, car il faut déplacer l'enclos des moutons et vider le compost, mais mon père se contente de grogner.

« Oui oui, c'est bon. Tiens, écoutez ça », recommence-t-il. J'ai envie d'aller me réfugier à l'étage.

« Il y en a toute une liste. C'est franchement incompréhensible que les gens s'intéressent si peu au sujet ! Les moteurs : en août 2000, un avion de la compagnie KLM a perdu un de ses moteurs. Le capitaine a réussi à faire un atterrissage d'urgence sur une plage. Les portes : en mars 2005, un Boeing de British Airways a perdu une porte et a dû atterrir en urgence. La porte est tombée à 20 mètres à peine d'un couple qui se promenait. Les pneus : en mai 2001, le pneu droit d'un appareil de Blue Panorama Airlines s'est détaché. Les vannes : en octobre 1999, la vanne de pression d'un avion de Delta Airlines s'est détachée et est tombée au milieu d'un lotissement tranquille. »

Il fait une pause et nous regarde d'un air éloquent, moi et tante Annu. C'est bien qu'il fasse enfin quelque chose et qu'il mette à nouveau des habits, mais je trouve qu'avec l'ordinateur il va un peu trop loin.

« Et ça continue : Les météorites. Le 30 novembre 1954, Elisabeth Hodges faisait la sieste dans son salon quand une météorite de 4 kilos traversa le toit, rebondit sur la radio et tomba sur la hanche d'Elisabeth. »

Il nous montre sur Internet une photo d'Elisabeth Hodges. Elle a une énorme ecchymose à la hanche.

« Les poissons. Quand une masse d'air chaude rencontre une masse d'air froide, il peut apparaître des mini-tornades qui aspirent des poissons et autres animaux marins et les transportent jusqu'au continent. Les crapauds. En 1794, des centaines de crapauds tombèrent du ciel, atterrissant sur une troupe de soldats français. Les balles de golf. En 1969, en Floride, il a plu des centaines de balles de golf. Mais ils disent aussi qu'il y a des cas où la théorie de la tornade ne fonctionne pas vraiment. Au nord de la Grèce, en 2002, il y a eu une pluie d'anchois.

— C'est peut-être un avion qui a perdu une cargaison, propose tante Annu.

— Mais au pays de Galles, en 1859, il y a eu une averse d'épinoches. À une époque où il n'y avait même pas d'avions ! » Il nous regarde par-dessus ses lunettes, comme s'il attendait la solution de l'énigme. « En plus, l'épinoche n'est pas un poisson grégaire, donc quelle tornade aurait bien pu sélectionner les épinoches et laisser dans l'eau tous les autres poissons, les pierres, les algues ? Tu as déjà réfléchi à tout ça ? » demande-t-il à Annu.

Puis la liste continue.

« L'argent. En 1940, en Union soviétique, il y a eu une pluie d'anciens roubles. En 1857, pendant deux soirs de septembre, il y a eu une pluie de grands cristaux de sucre en Californie. Par ailleurs, on a observé des pluies d'araignées, d'étourneaux, de vers de terre, et de gélatine. »

Il arrête de lire et nous regarde.

« De gélatine ? demande tante Annu.

— Ouaip. D'araignées, d'étourneaux, de vers de terre, et de gélatine. Mais pour ces quatre-là ils n'en disent pas plus. »

Je me mets à rire. Je sais que je ne devrais pas, mais c'est plus fort que moi. J'imagine à quoi aurait ressemblé ma mère si de la gélatine lui était tombée dessus. Peut-on mourir d'une chute de gélatine ? Au moins ça doit être plus doux qu'un glaçon gros comme un ballon de foot. Je ris parce que je me dis que maman aurait tout à fait pu inventer cette histoire de mort par chute de gélatine. *Aaargh-bloub-bloub-bloub*, elle aurait imité le dernier soupir du type asphyxié par la gélatine. La surface gélatineuse aurait continué de trembloter au-dessus du corps de ma pauvre mère.

« Putain c'est dur quand même », dit tante Annu en gloussant.

Mon père lui jette un coup d'œil étonné, fronce les sourcils puis émet un petit toussotement amusé.

« Tu m'étonnes. »

Puis il rit aussi, son premier rire de l'été.

Nous rions ensemble en pensant aux morts par chute de gélatine, aux épinoches projetées dans le ciel, aux couples qui se promènent sur les plages et qui se prennent une porte dans la figure, aux anges qui font le Mauvais Tour sans prévenir.

Cher monsieur MacKay,

J'ai regardé à la télévision le documentaire qui vous est consacré, et votre histoire m'a énormément touchée. Je voulais vous écrire car je suis moi-même un caprice du destin. Mon cas est certes très différent de votre histoire avec l'orage — en effet, j'ai gagné deux fois le gros lot au loto. Vu que vous avez été foudroyé quatre fois, vous trouvez peut-être que deux victoires ce n'est pas beaucoup, mais quoi qu'il en soit, moi ça m'a rendue assez dingue comme ça.

J'espère que ça ne vous dérange pas si je vous raconte mon histoire. Il y a trois ans, j'ai gagné le gros lot. Quelle coïncidence : pile mes numéros qui tombent dans les tuyaux de plastique ! C'était invraisemblable ! Mais d'un autre côté, il faut bien que les numéros de quelqu'un y tombent, dans ces tuyaux, et donc cette fois-là c'étaient les miens.

J'ai payé mes dettes et j'ai organisé ma vie à ma guise. J'ai voyagé. J'ai acheté une vieille maison. Je me suis fait construire le bureau parfait. J'étais heureuse ! Tout était réglé ! Vous comprenez, monsieur MacKay, toute ma vie j'avais manqué d'argent — et tout d'un coup c'était terminé. Quelle liberté, quel soulagement !

Mais ensuite il y a eu la deuxième fois. C'étaient encore mes numéros qui tombaient dans les tuyaux — des numéros différents de la première fois. Je ne savais pas que c'était possible, mais voilà. Et soudain j'ai eu l'impression que le hasard n'était plus une explication suffisante. Je n'étais pas joyeuse ou triomphante, je ne ressentais strictement rien. Bizarrement, cette deuxième victoire m'a fait passer le goût de la première.

J'ai été frappée d'une étrange culpabilité. Comme si j'étais allée jouer sans autorisation. Alors que je n'avais rien fait de mal ! J'ai toujours joué au loto, je ne voulais pas arrêter. J'aime l'excitation que procure le hasard. J'aime quand les boules tombent. Il n'y a pas grand-chose d'aussi régulier, dans la vie.

Je me suis dit que la vie continuerait. Que je vivrais, ferais des petits objets en feutrine, jouerais au loto, achèterais des choses en promotion.

Mais maintenant il y a autre chose, me semble-t-il. Qu'est-ce que c'est ?

Suis-je la victime d'une plaisanterie ?

Que va-t-il se passer ensuite ?

Après, j'ai vu le documentaire qui parle de vous et je me suis dit, tiens, cet homme comprend sûrement ma situation. Cet homme a dépassé le hasard, comme moi. Peut-être qu'il saura me répondre.

La BBC n'a pas voulu me donner votre adresse, mais votre aimable scripte a promis de transmettre cette lettre. Je vous laisse mes coordonnées.

*Bien cordialement,
Annu Heiskanen*

Chère madame Heiskanen,

Je suis pêcheur. Je prends des homards et des langoustines. J'habite avec mon épouse dans une petite maison, et dans notre jardin poussent des haricots, des pommes de terre, trois sortes de choux, et des courges.

Vous demandez une explication, mais je pense que c'est à vous de trouver cette explication. Si j'en crois mon expérience, les explications que donnent les autres ne servent à rien.

*Cordialement,
Hamish MacKay*

PS. Je vous donne mon adresse.

Monsieur MacKay,

Excusez-moi de vous écrire encore. Je comprends bien que c'est moi qui dois résoudre le problème. Mais dans le documentaire vous aviez l'air si serein, je me suis demandé comment vous pouviez ne pas être effrayé ou furieux. Moi-même je suis en colère ! Ou je le saurais si je savais contre qui.

Ce n'est pas souvent que quelqu'un peut souligner un jour dans le calendrier en se disant que c'est le moment précis où sa vie a changé. Mais nous, monsieur MacKay, nous le pouvons. Quelqu'un d'autre pourrait dire que j'ai été frappée par le bonheur, et vous par le malheur, mais ce n'est pas si simple. Vous savez, on peut glisser sur un tapis sans se faire mal pour autant. C'est pour ça que je vous ai écrit, et que je vous écris encore, pardon. C'est juste que je suis très seule avec tout ça.

*Cordialement,
Annu Heiskanen*

Chère madame Heiskanen,

Je me suis moi aussi demandé si c'était une plaisanterie et ce que ça voulait dire, mais ces questions ne mènent nulle part. Donc j'ai arrêté.

Ma femme Mary a planté aujourd'hui des haricots à gousse dans le potager. Quand il lève de terre, le haricot à gousse est énergique, vert, plein de confiance. Il oscille un moment sur lui-même, comme un enfant qui apprend à marcher, mais dès qu'il frôle quelque chose il se sert de sa tige poilue pour s'enrouler autour de cette chose et s'appuyer dessus. Il a une confiance aveugle dans les inconnus.

Et savez-vous, madame Heiskanen, nous non plus ne sommes pas absolument seuls. J'ai lu dans le Reader's Digest qu'il y avait aux États-Unis un garde forestier qui a été frappé sept fois par la foudre. Après la septième fois, il s'est tué avec un fusil de chasse. Et je ne peux guère lui en vouloir.

*Bien cordialement,
Hamish MacKay*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



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Nenad Joldeski

Секој со своето езеро (2012)

Each with their own Lake

Publishing House **Templum**

Biography

Nenad Joldeski was born in 1986 in Struga, Macedonia. In 2010, he graduated at the Faculty of Economics in Skopje. In 2013, he received a master's degree in comparative literature on the subject of 'Intertextual Irony in Modern and Postmodern Short Stories.' He is a writer and author of two collections of short stories. His debut, *The Silence of Enhalon*, written in Macedonian dialect and slang, received the Novite Award from the publishing house Templum in 2009. His second book, *Each with their own Lake*, was published by Templum in 2012. He is also an editor of a collection of short stories dedicated to the Russian emigrant Dr Nikolai Nezlobinski titled *Nikolaj (Fiction. Water. Truth)*.

As a part of the art group Wezdensky, he adapted several screenplays for amateur theatrical performances. He is also a co-founder and one of the organisers of a festival for culture called *DRIMON*.

He was also a member of several teams that published online journals for literature, and for three years he was part of the team that was in charge of organising the prominent international poetry festival, Struga Poetry Evenings.

Synopsis

Each with their own Lake is a short story collection composed of 14 stories that oscillate thematically around the imperilled urban landscapes of the city, around grief and ageing, and love and sadness, set by a restless inky lake.

The short story 'Fire' is an example of the instability of identity and the need to share the identity of narratives and real events; where fiction brings balance to the disproportionate relationship between truth and lies, and reality and fantasy. In this circle of stories we can also include the short fictions 'My Father, the Clock and the Short Story' and 'My Mother, the Flood and the Short Story'. These are tense, dramatic, melancholic, and ironic stories in which the existential abyss and the abyss of identity are compensated by the silent text of the writer, carefully retaining the mystery by protecting the right of mystery as the right of creative freedom and the right of free absence or existence.

Секој со своето езеро

Nenad Joldeski

НИКОЛАЈ И МАСТИЛАВОТО ЕЗЕРО

5.

...

Лутајќи низ празните улици, поминав покрај музејот, поранешната кука на Николај и Софија Незлобински, истата онаа која неколку дена ми ја распламтуваше фантазијата. Помислив да влезам внатре, но вратата беше затворена, па наместо тоа, ги обиколив бараките и хотелот кој се издигаше зад нив и излегов на брегот на Дрим. Седнав на една клупа и ги затворив очите. Размислував за расказот кој бев решил да го напишам. Како и секогаш, со онаа детска нестрпливост што те тера да го прочиташ крајот на книгата без воопшто да ја започнеш, помислував на неговиот крај. Нешто емотивно. Со остра мелодија што завршува во е-мол.

Седев со часови на клупата покрај вечниот Дрим и посакав да бидам јагула. Да патувам илјадници километри без никој да ме забележи, кога некаде помеѓу желбата и звукот на брановите што се одбиваа од коритото, исчезнав.

6.

Утро е. Се будам во бараките покрај мастилавата река. Југот замрзнува се наоколу. Низ отворениот прозорец на малата соба влегува ладен воздух. Николај се буди сам во својот железен кревет. Софија ја нема и само индексот на нејзиното тело втиснат во белиот испреплетен чаршаф докажува дека била тука, покрај него. Стариот часовник на масичката покажува 8. Се прашуваше каде би можела да биде. Во стомакот чувствува мачнина.

Низ прозорецот гледа во накривената ограда покрај реката. Ја гледа и неа како зјапа во реката. Водата ѝ стасува до нозе. „Што е со тебе“, помислува докторот во себе. „Што правиш таму, кутричка ти.“

Потоа го замислува во себе нејзиниот глас.

„Сакам назад, Николај. Овде времето повеќе боли! Повеќе од сè на светов. Земјава, земјава тука пеколно потсетува на нашата, руската.“

„Софија... Софија... знаеш дека нема назад“, ѝ враќа тој во себе. „Царот падна, Русија е одамна готова. Овде е добро. Ајде прибери се. Нè чека долг ден. Само Бог знае што е најдобро.“

Се сепнува и се срами што си замислува.

Потоа го забележува фотоапаратот. Го мести, нишани во Софија и истрелува. Еднаш. Знае дека фотографијата ќе биде успешна и како по обичај си замислува како би изгледала во боја.

Мастилавата река

Мовта на оградата

Софија
Нејзиниот зелен фустан
Русата свилена коса
И како по правило:
Санкт Петербург
И Пјатигорск
Југот на Русија
Црното море
Мирисот на детството
Зелената мапа без топоними
Се облекува и излегува надвор. Таа не се помрднува од
оградата. Реката ѝ ги мие нозете заплискани во кал. Го
полазуваат морници и студенилото започнува да му ги
зафаќа нозете. Мастилавата река се бранува. Дајланите се
преплавуваат. Тагата и ветрот му го мрзнат телото и тој
повторно ги губи вистинските имиња.
Мастилавото езеро
Мастилавата река
Мастилавиот град

Се приближува до Софија.

„Што е со тебе? Што правиш тука?“, ѝ вели.

Таа се врти и се насмевнува.

„Реката. Реката ми зборува... Ах, исто како да сме кај
нас Николај“, му вели и како да го насетила невремето,
го прегрнува. Му зборува за детството, за коњите на
Пјатигорск и наеднаш сè се смирува. Тагата на Николај ја
впиваат исплашените очи на Софија Незлобинска. Таа се

сmee, а југот ја враќа топлината. Небото се чисти.

Николај ја бакнува.

„Ќе изградам музеј“, и` вели „Ќе ги покажам пеликаните на светот“, а потем нежно ја повлекува кон себе и ја враќа во собата.

Гледам како се приближуваат и наеднаш се присетувам на средбата со Цветковски. Трчам кон неговата канцеларија. Надвор почнува да врне. Стариот град бавно се топи пред моите очи.

Канцеларијата на Цветковски беше пренатрупана со книги и хартии. На северниот ѕид висеше портретот на Софија, истиот оној што Дурацовски го споменуваше во расказот. Се прашував дали зад портретот навистина постои друг, но само што сакав налудничаво и љубопитно да побарам дозвола за да проверам, како од бунар се слушна тивкиот и бавен вокал на мојот соговорник:

„Што поточно те интересира?“

Не знам зошто, но му кажав дека веќе пишувам расказ за Незлобински и дека секој нов податок би ми послужил. Тоа е сè. Ме ислуша и започна да ги реди оние информации кои што веќе ми беа познати, со неколку исклучоци: првиот – дека во музејот се наоѓаат повеќе од 100 документарни фотографии направени од самиот Николај; вториот – дека неговата оставштина, откако била преместена во просториите на водостопанство, била расфрлана и ѝ се изгубила трагата; третиот – Незлобински починал од срцев удар во мај 1942 година, а Софија го надживеала 15 години и работела како професорка по

руски, француски и музика во гимназијата во Струга. Покрај тоа, ме извести дека музејот веќе подготвува нова монографија – специјално посветена на докторот и дека ќе ја издаде по повод годишнината на неговата смрт, како и тоа дека доколку сакам може да бидам уредник на збирка раскази во која Музејот би го објавил мојот расказ, заедно со оној на Дурацовски и неколку други. Ми беше чест да прифатам. Покрај тоа, сакаше да ја знае содржината на мојот расказ. Реков „нешто околу тагата“ и, исплашен дека ќе разоткрие дека расказот воопшто и не е започнат, го споменав Данило Киш.

Фикцијата започнува онаму дека каде
историјата станува маглива...

Потоа се спуштивме во музејот. Ми ги покажа фотографиите, а со нив и една зелена мапа на Македонија како дел од кралството СХС – сопственост на самиот Незлобински. На мапата ја немаше Струга. Поминавме некое време разгледувајќи ги фотографиите, а потоа ја вративме оставштината назад и се изгубивме низ стакларниците со препарирани животни. Застанавме пред двоглавото теле.

„Кажи ми“, ми рече, „како го пишуваш расказот? Што сè мора да измислиш?“

Го гледав некое време без да му одговорам.

„Овој пат не пишувам. Повеќе би се рекло дека запишувам. Сведочам“, му одговорив во некаков почетнички занес.

Ме гледаше зачудено, а потоа се насмевна и продолжи да гледа во телешкиот Јанус.

И двајцата молчине. Тишината го пара просторот и времето. Подолу, на неколку метри од нас, Николај гледа во препарираните животни на првиот природо-научен музеј во Македонија. Неговите соработници треба да пристигнат секој миг. Гледа во пеликаните, во нивните скаменети очи и наеднаш го обзема студенило. „Што правам со кутрите птици“, си мисли, „зошто ги убивам?“ Сака да ја откаже изложбата, да престане да лови, но набргу се смирува. „Науката, науката заслужува таква жртва“, си вели. Низ прозорецот гледа во реката. Повторно е мастилава.

Во бараката влегува Софија. Од прозорецот паѓаат сончеви зраци.

„Дојди“, ѝ вели, а таа му се приближува и му го мести шеширот. „Кога дојдовме за првпат во градов, намирисав како изгледа среќата. И ја видов слободата во крилјата на пеликанот, и неа, среќата, во големото бело езеро. А сега, истиот тој пеликан, слободата, мојата радост, стои во оваа витрина.“

„Има многу пеликани на светов. Овој сигурно не е тој“, му одговараа таа неумесно, но знае дека и тоа е доволно за да му ја избрише тагата.

Николај сака да каже нешто, но некој влегува во бараката.

Елмаз Амза

Гани Дудуш

Суљо Таксим

Миле Шуле

Рудњев

Лукин

Макаров
и Баронот Борис.

До мене Цветковски ја прекинува тишината.

„Знаеш, кога Хитлер ја срамнил Југославија со земја, стружани не дозволиле да пропаднат музејските експонати и во сандаци ги сокриле во околните куќи. Спасиле сè“, ми вели и тргнува кон излезот, велејќи дека веќе доцни за ручек. Го заклучи музејот и излеговме надвор. Откако замина, за последен пат погледнав низ прозорецот. А таму, Рудњев гледа во пеликанот, па во рамениците на докторот. Како да сака да открие дали можеби и тој има крилја. Николај не го забележува и тивко му вели:

„Пријателе, Тесла рекол дека човек мора да биде сентиментален кон птиците заради нивните крилја. Вели дека и човекот некогаш ги имал, вистински и видливи! Крилјата се сè во животот! Но, тоа ме мачи, пријателе. Што е со црните крилја на Хитлер кои ја прелетуваат Европа. Што е со тие крилја, пријателе!?“

Рудњев стои скаменет. Знае кон што цели докторот.

„Тоа не се вистински крилја“, му вели, „сонцето ќе ги стопи“, но ни самиот не знае дали верува во тоа.

А надвор повторно се стемнува. Се враќам во својот дом. Преплавен од емоции, седнав да го пишувам ветениот расказ. Мојата нова градба.

Три неуспешни обиди да започнам и заспивам.

Николај седи на брегот на езерото и чувствува како бавно и неповратно тони во тињата на времето.

Годината е 1924. Доктор Николај Иванович Незлобиски, руски емигрант и белогардеец, одвеан од виорите на

~~Октомвриската револуција, гледа низ прозорецот на малиот воз кој бавно тактира по шините.~~

~~Наведнат под сивата наметка на денот што се спушташе бавно како растргнат пердув со матна историја на патување, се вртев низ собата преполна со книги, шарени фотографии и најразлични белешки кои запаѓаа сè подлабоко и подлабоко во омарината на заборавот.~~

7.

Утрото во неделата, пред да отпатувам назад за Скопје, го посетив мојот пријател од детството, Горан Ристовски. Седевме во неговото атејле каде што требаше да ми подари слика. Во собата некаде помеѓу платната забележавме една која изгледаше сосема необично. Горан не се сеќаваше кога ја насликал сликата, но по стилот се гледаше дека тоа е негово дело. Ракописот го издаваше.

И двајцата гледавме со неверување. На неа, еден човек со шешир на главата седи завртен со грб покрај едно езеро. Гледав и чувствував како бавно и неповратно тонам во тињата на времето.

Езерото е мирно и наоколу се гледаат разголените планини. Водата е мастилава, ладна и леплива. Од горе можат да се видат сенките на рибите што како сенки стојат под површината.

Мастилавото езеро (му се чини на непознатиот, иако не е така) нема име. Како никој да не го именувал досега. Како никој да не ни посакал. Како да е доволно само Езеро. Убеден е во тоа. Во сеќавањето дури повикува и една зелена мапа. На мапата забележува (иако, повторно греша) – езерото навистина нема име.

Истото е и со името на реката која бега од големата езерска мастилница малку поисточно од место каде што сега стои. Река. Различна од секоја друга што ја знае. Безимено и тивко си ја спасува сопствената приказна и дрско одбива да ја меша со езерската. Извира од јужната планина и низ Езерото се спушта во градот во светло зелени нијанси. Само понекогаш, кога небото ќе се замрачи, реката како да се сожалува на тагата на езерото, потемнува, посинува

до длабоко синило и започнува да се бранува преливајќи го коритото и да вејќи го градот. И кога е таква луѓето и` се плашат и ја почитуваат уште повеќе. Затежнати од разлутената река, чекаат заклучени во своите домови и одбиваат да ја видат мастилава и помешана. Ја пуштаат да истече, да си ги каже маките, а потем кога бојата и мирот ќе и` се вратат, и` се враќаат и тие.

Но тој не е како тие луѓе.

Градот, пак, кој на југ е зафатен од мастилавото езеро не му е туѓ, ниту непознат. Речиси осумнаесет години како лута по него. Му го знае секој сантиметар, негов и на планините што го опкружуваат. Во сеќавањето на Николај градот сè уште има име, но во името, размислува тој, има нешто што се празни и што заминува како одвеано, веднаш штом ќе се изговори гласно. Како целата суштина да бега од него низ невидлив премин. Тој сака да го извика името на градот, ги отвора усните, ги напрега мислите и со јазикот притиска врз долните заби. Но, само што ја изговара првата буква, се кочи, а името му бега од сеќавањето. Како утеха за заборавот и за тагата која му се шири по телото, гласно вели: „Залудно е секое повикување“. Зелената мапа му го кажува истото. Доволно е Град.

Но, најдобро да побрзам дури не исчезнало сè.

Гледајте.

Тој мисли и дека самиот не постои. Дека нема име ниту презиме.

Езерото е мирно. Топлиот мајски ден бавно се гаси и се полни со тишината на пролетната ноќ. Здрвен, неподвижен свет како болест ги нафаќа осумте страни на светот. Над него левитираат пеликани, но тие само навидум ја прекршуваат

здрвеноста. Ги следи. Наликуваат на препарирани експонати и како со конци зашиени на небото се нишаат безгласно, некоординирано и сосема вештачки.

Наеднаш помислува дека сè ќе застане

Тој

Времето

Светот

Помислува, но ништо не застанува. Наместо тоа, слуша истрел кој му се чини дека за миг ја гаси вечната ламбада на времето. Пеликаните исплашено бегаат на сите страни. Просторот се празни. Но, не е исплашен. Не мисли дека некој би го застрелал. И сосема е во право. Истрелот што го слуша доаѓа од фотоапарат, а не од огнено оружје. Тоа и го помислува. Фотоапарат. Продолжува да гледа во езерото. Од исток се крева прашина. Вдишува во виорот од прашинки и помислува како би изгледала фотографијата.

Бескрајна плажа

Ситен песок

Исфрлени трски

Запретани спомени во бескраен хаос

Небото, бело

Светлината слаба, но доволна

Тој и неговиот сламен шешир

Во мислите сега ја пакува малата зелена мапа, а над неа ја става замислената фотографија на која стои натпис:

прашлива галерија

[сè што сум закопал со годините]

Го зема куферот и сламениот шешир и заминува.

Замислува

Вдишува

Се буди

Ветерот се засилува. Спомените кои се мешаа со вителот од прашина што се разградува во големата мастилава бара започнуваат да го шараат дотогаш неподвижниот свет. Од далечината се крева бура.

Најчудното од сè е што неговото невреме, сега е и ваше невреме

Читатели

Започнува да паѓа силен дожд. Слуша чекори. Некој му се приближува. Ветерот се засилува и му го ниша сламениот шешир на главата. Го допираат на грбот. Во прекршеното мастилавото огледало на езерото ја гледа жена си.

Се врти. Таа го прегрнува и го бакнува на образот. Една солза паѓа и се меша со првите капки дожд. Не се знае чија.

На зелената мапа која повторно му се појавува пред очите сега се враќаат топонимите.

Охридско Езеро

Црн Дрим

Струга

Гледавме во сликата некое време, а потем ја зедевме со нас и се спуштивме долу. На Горан му раскажав дека пишувам расказ за Незлобински и дека сликата ме потсетува на него.

„Мислиш дека на сликава е Незлобински?“, ме праша.

„Сигурен сум.“, му реков. „Ти, не мислиш?“

„Не знам“, рече. „Не се сеќавам најдобро, но нема да ти ја дадам на подарок. Ќе морам да ја разгледам.“

Се согласив и му кажав дека ќе земам друга слика, но следниот пат.

Излеговме на прошетка. Езерото блескаше на зајдисонцето. Над нас прелетуваше јато гаврани. Ми се чинеше дека во нивниот крик го слушам изгубеното време. Одекнуваше од водата. Додека газевме врз трските по плажата, се замислував како летам над површината на езерото. Слободен како птица. Го прелетував секој сантиметар на водата и после неколку часови, пред повторно да знам за себе си, се најдов во автомобилот на брат ми на влезот на Скопје. Лет во темница.

8.

Во понеделникот седев пред мониторот и занесено со минути гледав во белата површина на виртуелниот лист. Белешката со името на докторот висеше залепена врз мониторот. Стрелката во текст едиторот се губеше и појавуваше во кратки интервали. Сакав да започнам со расказот и повторно мислев на неговиот крај. Датумот во десниот агол на компјутерот покажуваше 14 мај 1942 година.

Однадвор допира тажна мелодија на пијано. Утро е. Николај Антонович Незлобински гледа во мастилавата река и помислува на Русија. Мразот на тагата се нафаќа по рабовите на неговото срце. Снег бавно му ги полни коморите. Нозете му се преплавени во мастилото на тагата. Над неговата глава во бескрајни пируети се креваат два пеликани. „Слобода“, помислува, „слобода“ и срцето му замрзнува. Последните тонови на острата мелодија се редат бавно, во некакво бескрајно исчекување. Николај паѓа мртов во разбеснетата река. Мелодијата завршува во д-мол. Тонот трае 15 години.

Each with their own Lake

Nenad Joldeski

Translated from the Macedonian by Ljubica Arsovska

NIKOLAI AND THE INKY LAKE

5.

...

Wandering the empty streets, I found myself in front of the museum, once the home of Nikolai and Sophia Nezlobinski the same house that had been exciting my imagination for several days. It occurred to me that I might go in, but the door was locked so I went around the single storey, once wooden, buildings and the hotel rising behind them and found myself on the bank of the River Drim. I sat down on a bench and closed my eyes. My thoughts were on the story I had decided to write. As always, with that childish impatience that makes you read the end of the book before the beginning, I was thinking about its end. Something emotional. With a sharp melody closing in E-minor.

I sat for hours on that bench by the eternal Drim and at one moment wished I was an eel. To travel for thousands of miles unnoticed by anyone, and then, somewhere between the wish and the sound of the waves bouncing off the river bed, I vanished.

6.

It's morning. I wake up in the single storey wooden building by the inky river. The south wind freezes everything around. Cold air rushes in through the open window of the small room. Nikolai wakes up alone in his iron bed. Sophia is nowhere to be seen and only the imprint of her body impressed on the white crumpled sheets proves that she was there next to him. The old clock on the small table shows 8am. He wondered where she could be. A queasy feeling stirred in the pit of his stomach.

He stares through the window at the crooked low plank fence at the edge of the river bank. He sees her too, on the other side of the fence, staring at the river. The water reaches her feet.

"What's going on with you," the doctor wonders. "What are you doing there, poor thing."

Then he imagines hearing her voice.

"I want to go back, Nikolai. Time hurts more here! More than anything in the world. This country, this very soil painfully resembles our country, the Russian soil."

"Sophia... Sophia... you know there's no going back," he answers her in his mind. "The Tsar fell from power, and Russia has been done away with long ago. It's good here. Come on, pull yourself together. There's a long day ahead of us. Only God knows what's best."

He flinches and is embarrassed by his flight of fancy.

Then he sees the camera. He sets it, aims it at Sophia and shoots. Once. He knows the photo will be good and, as usual, imagines what it would look like in colour.

The inky river

The moss on the fence

Sophia
Her green dress
Her silky blond hair
And as a rule:
Sankt Petersburg
And Pyatigorsk
The South of Russia
The Black Sea
The smell of childhood
The green map without toponyms
He dresses quickly and goes out. She hasn't moved from the
fence. The river washes her feet splashed with mud. Shivers
run down his spine and the cold begins to grab his feet. The
inky river is rushing in high waves. The water runs over the
eel-trapping weirs. Sadness and wind chill his body and he
loses the actual names again.
The inky lake
The inky river
The inky town

He joins Sophia.

"What's the matter with you? What are you doing here?" he asks her.

She turns to him and smiles.

"The river. The river speaks to me... Ah, Nikolai, it's just as if we were back home," she says, and as if feeling the tempest approach, she puts her arms around him. She talks to him about childhood, about the horses of Pyatigorsk, and

suddenly everything subsides. Nikolai's sadness is absorbed into Sophia Nezlobinska's frightened eyes. She laughs, and the south sends the warmth back. The sky is clearing up.

Nikolai kisses her.

"I'll build a museum," he tells her. "I'll exhibit these pelicans to the world," and then he draws her gently closer to him and takes her back to their quarters.

I watch them approach and suddenly remember the meeting with Cvetkovski. I run to his office. Outside it's beginning to rain. The old town slowly melts before my eyes.

Cvetkovski's office was stuffed with books and papers. A portrait of Sophia was hung on the south wall, the same portrait Duracovski mentioned in his story. I wondered if there's really another portrait behind this one, but just as I was about to ask, absurdly and inquisitively, for a permission to check it, the low and slow voice of my collocutor was heard as if coming from a well:

"What precisely do you want to know?"

I don't know why, but I told him that I was already writing a story about Nezlobinski and that any new information would be useful. That's all. He heard me out and then started recounting facts already known to me, with a few exceptions: the first – that there were more than 100 documentary photographs in the museum, taken by Nikolai himself; the second – that his effects had been moved to the Water Resources Management, where they got scattered and mostly lost without trace; the third – Nezlobinski died of a heart attack in May 1942, and Sophia outlived him by 15 years and worked as a professor

of Russian, French and music in the Struga High School. He also told me that the museum was already working on a new monograph – a special edition dedicated to the memory of the doctor, to be published on the occasion of the anniversary of his death, and that if I wished I could be the editor of a book of stories in which the museum would include my story, along with Duracovski's and some others. I said it would be an honour and agreed. Then he asked me to tell him something about the angle of the story I was writing. I said, "It's something about sadness," and then, fearing that he would find out that I hadn't even started writing the story, mentioned Danilo Kiš.

Fiction begins where
history becomes hazy...

We left his office and went to the museum. He showed me the photographs, as well as a green map of Macedonia as part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – Nezlobinski's personal property. The map did not show Struga. We went through the photographs, then put everything back and strolled among the glass exhibit cases with stuffed animals. We stopped in front of a two-headed calf.

"Tell me," he said, "how do you write the story? What with all the things that you have to make up."

I looked at him in silence for a while.

"This time I'm not writing. It could rather be said that I'm writing down. I testify," I finally replied with a kind of beginner's fervour.

He gave me a perplexed look, then smiled and turned his eyes back to the Janus calf.

Neither of us says anything. The silence rips space and time. Further down, a few metres from us, Nikolai looks at the stuffed animals of the first Natural History Museum in Macedonia. His collaborators are to arrive any moment now. He looks at the pelicans, their glassy eyes, and is suddenly gripped by coldness. “What am I doing to the poor birds,” he thinks to himself, “why do I kill them?” He feels the urge to cancel the exhibition, to put an end to his hunting, but soon calms down. “The science, science deserves such sacrifice,” he says to himself. He looks through the window at the river. It’s inky again.

Sophia enters the building. Sunbeams bore their way from the window.

“Come closer,” he tells her, and she does and sets his hat right. “When we first arrived at this town, I could smell what happiness looks like. And I saw the freedom in the wings of a pelican and *it*, the happiness, in the big white lake. And now, that same pelican, the freedom, my joy, stands in this glass case.”

“There are many pelicans in this world. This can’t be the same one,” she replies ineptly, knowing that even this will suffice to soothe his sadness.

Nikolai wants to say something, but somebody comes into the building.

Elmaz Amza

Gani Dadush

Sulyo Taxim

Mile Shule

Rudnyev

Lukin
Makarov
and Baron Boris.

At my side Cvetkovski breaks the silence.

“You know, when Hitler razed Yugoslavia to the ground, the citizens of Struga did not allow the museum exhibits to be destroyed, but packed them in wooden boxes and hid them in the neighbouring houses. They saved everything,” he tells me and starts for the exit, saying he’s already late for lunch. We went out and he locked the museum. After he left, I took one last look through the window. And there, there was Rudnyev, looking at the pelican, and then shifting his eyes to the doctor’s shoulder blades. As if to check the doctor had wings too. Nikolai notices it and tells him quietly:

“My friend, Tesla said that a man has to be sentimental to birds because of their wings. He says that man too had wings once, real and visible! Wings are everything in this life! But, that’s exactly what’s been torturing me, my friend. What about Hitler’s black wings flapping over Europe? What with those wings, my friend?”

Rudnyev is rigid with apprehension. He knows what the doctor is aiming at.

“Those are not real wings,” he replies, “and the sun will melt them.” But he doesn’t know if he himself believes this.

And outside darkness falls again. I’m returning to my home. Overwhelmed by emotions, I sit down to write the promised story. My new building.

Three unsuccessful attempts at a good beginning, and I drop off.

~~Nikolai is sitting by the lake and feeling that he is slowly and irrevocably sinking into the soft mud of time.~~

~~The year is 1924. Doctor Nikolai Antonovich Nezlubinski, Russian émigré and White Guardist, blown away by the winds of the October revolution, is looking through the window at the small train slowly beating time down the tracks.~~

~~Crouched under the gray cloak of the day slowly descending like a ragged feather of a blurred travel history, I was walking back and forth in the room stuffed with books, photographs and all sorts of notes that were falling deeper and deeper into the sultriness of oblivion.~~

7.

In the morning on Sunday, before leaving for Skopje, I visited my childhood friend Goran Ristovski. We went up to his studio, where he wanted to give me one of his paintings as a gift. Somewhere among the canvases we noticed one that seemed markedly exceptional. Goran didn't remember having painted it, but the style clearly proved it was his work. It was his hand that was giving him away.

We looked at it in disbelief. In it, a man wearing a hat on his head sits by a lake with his back to the spectator. I looked at it and felt that I was slowly and irrevocably sinking into the soft mud of time.

The lake is peaceful and the mountains surrounding it are in clear view. The water is inky, cold and sticky. Looking down, one can see the fish standing still like shadows under the surface.

The inky lake (which seems inky to the untrained eye, even though it's not) does not have a name. As if no one has named it before. As if no one ever wanted to. As if it was enough for it to be a Lake. He's convinced of it. His memory even evokes a green map. He sees there (but is wrong again) – that the lake really doesn't have a name.

It's the same with the name of the river escaping from the big inkwell of a lake a little bit further to the east from the place where it is now. A river. Different than any other he's known. Namelessly and silently it saves its own story and arrogantly refuses to mix it with that of the Lake. It takes its source from the southern mountain and descends through the Lake into the town in light green hues. Only at times, when the sky darkens, the river seems to take pity on the Lake's sorrow

and darkens, turning blue to deep blue and begins to rise in big waves, flowing out from its bed and drowning the town. And when it's like that people fear it and respect it even more. Taken by surprise by the raging river, they wait locked in their homes and refuse to see it when it's inky and mixed. They let it flow through, tell its sorrows and then, when its colour and peace return, they return too.

But he is not like those people.

On the other hand, the town, with its south end taken over by the inky lake, is not alien to him, nor is it unknown. He's been wandering it for almost 18 years. He knows every single centimetre of the city and of the mountains surrounding it. In Nikolai's memory the town still has a name, but there is something in that name, he ponders, something that flows out and disappears as if blown by the wind the moment he says it aloud. As if the entire gist of it eludes him through some invisible passage. He wants to shout out the name of the town, open his mouth, strain his thoughts and press his tongue against the lower teeth. But as soon as he pronounces the first letter he's benumbed and the name escapes his memory. As if to find comfort for the oblivion and for the sadness spreading throughout his body, he says aloud: "All evoking is in vain." The green map tells him the same. A Town is enough.

But I'd better hurry before everything vanishes.

Just watch.

He also thinks that he himself doesn't exist either. That he has neither a name nor a family name.

The lake is peaceful. The warm May day slowly fades and fills itself with the silence of the springtime night. A deadened,

unmoving atmosphere spreads to all sides of the world. Over his head pelicans levitate, but they only seemingly break the torpor. He follows them. They look like stuffed exhibits stitched to the sky where they sway soundlessly, uncoordinated and absolutely artificially.

Suddenly he's struck by the thought that everything will stop

Himself

Time

The World

The thought strikes him, but nothing stops. Instead, a shot is heard that to him seems to turn off the eternal lambada of time. Scared pelicans fly to all sides. The place empties. But he is not frightened. He doesn't think anyone would shoot him. And he's quite right. The shot comes from a photo camera, not a firearm. That's what he thought. A photo camera. He turns his gaze to the lake. In the east, dust rises. He inhales in the swirl of small dust particles and imagines what the photograph would look like.

Endless beach

Fine sand

Washed out reeds

Entangled memories in infinite chaos

The sky, white

The light, poor, but sufficient

He and his straw hat

In his mind he now packs the small green map, and on top of it puts the imagined photograph bearing the inscription:

dusty gallery

[everything I've buried over the years]

He picks up his suitcase and his straw hat and leaves.

He imagines

He inhales

He wakes up

The wind grows stronger. The memories that were mingling with the dust whirlwind, which is now dissipating into the huge inky pool, begin to dart about in the – until then – motionless world. In the distance a tempest has started.

The strangest thing about this is that now his tempest is our tempest too.

Readers

Heavy rain begins to fall. He hears footsteps. Somebody is coming his way. The wind grows stronger and plays with the straw hat on his head. Someone touches him on the shoulder. In the broken inky mirror of the lake he sees his wife.

He turns around. She puts her arms around him and kisses him on the cheek. A single tear drops and joins the first rain-drops. It's unclear whose tear it is.

On the green map which reappears in his mind's eye, the toponyms are re-emerging.

Ohrid Lake

Crn Drim

Struga

We looked long at the painting, then took it with us and left the studio. I told Goran I was writing a story about Nezlobinski and that the painting reminded me of him.

“You believe the man in the painting to be Nezlobinski?” he asked.

“I’m sure it is,” I said. “You don’t think so?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t remember, but I know I’m not giving it away to you. I will have to take a closer look at it.”

I complied and said I would accept another painting, but some other time.

We went out for a walk. The lake was glistening at the sunset light. A flock of ravens flew above our heads. It felt as if I could hear the lost time in their croaks. Resounding from the water. As we trod on the dead reeds on the beach, I was imagining myself flying low above the surface of the lake. Free as a bird. I was flying over every centimetre of the water, and after the few hours it had taken me to regain awareness of myself, I realized I was in my brother’s car at the entrance of Skopje. A flight in darkness.

8.

On Monday I was seated in front of the computer, staring pensively for long minutes at the white surface of the virtual paper. A slip with the doctor's name was stuck to the monitor. The cursor in the text editor was disappearing and reappearing at brief intervals. I wanted to begin the story and I was yet again thinking of its end. The date in the right corner of the monitor read 14 May 1942.

A sad piano melody flows in from outside. It's morning. Nikolai Antonovich Nezlobinski is looking at the inky river and Russia comes to his mind. The ice of sadness gathers on the rim of his heart. Slowly, snow fills its ventricles. His feet are drenched in the ink of sadness. Above his head two pelicans rise towards the sky in endless pirouettes. "Freedom," he thinks, "freedom," and his heart freezes. The last notes of the sharp melody slowly follow each other in some kind of infinite anticipation. Nikolai falls dead into the raging river. The melody finishes in D-minor. The note resounds for 15 years.



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Benedict Wells

Vom Ende der Einsamkeit (2016)

On the End of Loneliness

Publishing House **Diogenes**

Biography

Benedict Wells was born in 1984 in Munich. At the age of six, he started his journey through three Bavarian boarding schools. Upon graduating school in 2003, he moved to Berlin. There he decided against an academic education and instead started to dedicate his time to writing. In order to pay for his living expenses, he worked in several side jobs. In 2008, he published his critically acclaimed debut novel *Becks letzter Sommer* which gained him the Bayerischer Kunstförderpreis, a Bavarian arts and literature prize. The novel was adapted into a feature film and released to cinemas in 2015. His third novel *Fast genial* became very popular with readers and ended up spending several months in the German book charts. After years of living in Barcelona, Wells has recently returned to Berlin.

Synopsis

“A troubled childhood is like an invisible enemy: you never know when it is going to strike.”

Although being fundamentally different, Jules and his siblings Marty and Liz have all been shaped by a tragic event in their childhood: growing up in a sheltered family home, they lost their parents in an accident.

Although subsequently sent off to the same boarding school, the siblings each make their own way in life and over time become estranged and lose touch.

Notably, the once so confident Jules slowly retreats into an imaginary world. His only friend is the mysterious Alva, but it will take him years to discover what she means to him and what she has been hiding from him all these years.

As adults, Alva and Jules meet again and for a moment it seems as if they could make up for lost time. Then, however, they are caught up by their past...

A heartfelt novel which deals with overcoming loss and loneliness, and addresses the difficult question of which characteristics are so intrinsically linked to a person that, no matter how their life develops, they will remain unchanged. But, above all, this is a great love story.

Vom Ende der Einsamkeit

Benedict Wells

Das Heim, in das meine Geschwister und ich nach dem Tod unserer Eltern kamen, war keine dieser elitären Einrichtungen mit Tennisplätzen, Hockeyfeldern und Töpfereien, die uns anfangs vielleicht vorschwebten, sondern ein billiges staatliches Internat auf dem Land, bestehend aus zwei grauen Gebäuden und einer Mensa, alles auf dem Gelände des örtlichen Gymnasiums. Morgens gingen wir mit den Landkindern zur Schule, die Nachmittage und Abende verbrachten wir auf unseren Zimmern, am See oder auf dem Fußballplatz. Man gewöhnte sich an dieses Kasernenleben, dennoch konnte es auch noch nach Jahren deprimierend sein, wenn die externen Mitschüler nach dem Unterricht zu ihren Familien durften, während man selbst wie ein Gefangener auf dem Heimgelände zurückblieb und sich fühlte, als habe man einen Makel. Die spartanischen Zimmer teilte man mit Fremden, die manchmal zu Freunden wurden. Nach einem Jahr musste man wieder umziehen. Schwierig, sein ganzes Leben auf so wenig Zeit und Raum ausbreiten zu müssen, es gab viel Streit, aber auch nächtelange Unterhaltungen. Ganz selten sprachen wir über wirklich wichtige Dinge, Dinge, die wir bei Tageslicht nie wiederholt hätten, meistens jedoch redeten wir nur über Lehrer oder Mädchen.

»Hat sie heute beim Essen wieder zu mir hergesehen?«, oder: »Wie, die kennst du nicht? Verdammst, Moreau, das ist die Schönste an der ganzen scheiß Schule.«

Viele Heimschüler waren zu Hause schon einmal auffällig geworden oder durchgefallen, manche hatten Drogen genommen. Hin und wieder wurden auch besonders kriminelle

Exemplare wie Strandgut ins Internat gespült, das als staatliche Einrichtung dazu verpflichtet war, nahezu jeden aufzunehmen. Dem gegenüber stand die fassungslose Dorfjugend, die mit ansehen musste, wie die Verrückten aus der Stadt in ihre Idylle einfielen. »Bist du auch aus dem *Heim*?«, fragten sie einen dann, wobei mit »Heim« weniger Internat als Irrenanstalt gemeint war. Beim Essen schlangen wir alles in uns hinein, es gab nie genug. In uns ein Hunger, der nie ganz gestillt werden konnte. Dafür gab es im Heim ein ständiges Grundrauschen von Gerüchten, es wurde genau registriert, wer mit wem sprach, welche Freundschaften entstanden und wer bei den Mädchen hoch im Kurs stand. Nicht jede Veränderung wurde gebilligt. Es gab neue Klamotten, die von ihrem Besitzer erst stolz vorgeführt wurden und dann schnell wieder im Schrank verschwanden, wenn sie keinen Anklang gefunden hatten. Manche Heimschüler versuchten, sich über die Sommerferien ein neues Image zuzulegen, sie kamen von zu Hause mit frischem Selbstbewusstsein, aber die meisten von ihnen waren bereits nach wenigen Tagen wieder die Alten. Man war und blieb der, für den die anderen einen hielten.

Während ich mich in den Jahren davor im Innersten sicher gefühlt hatte, gab es nun Momente, in denen ich bemerkte, wie mattes Abendlicht in einen schummrigen Flur fiel oder wie die Bäume in der Dämmerung einen gespenstischen Schatten über die Landschaft breiteten, und dann zog sich plötzlich etwas in mir zusammen. Dass ich auf einem Planeten war, der mit unglaublicher Geschwindigkeit durchs All schoss, kam mir ebenso erschreckend vor wie der neue, verstörende Gedanke, dass es unvermeidlich war zu sterben. Wie ein sich ausbreitender Riss nahmen meine Ängste zu. Ich begann, mich vor dem Dunkeln zu fürchten, vor dem Tod, vor der Ewigkeit. Diese Gedanken trieben einen Stachel in meine

Welt, und je häufiger ich über all das nachdachte, desto mehr entfernte ich mich von meinen oft unbeschwerten, gutgelaunten Mitschülern. Ich war allein. Und dann traf ich Alva.

*

In den ersten Tagen an der neuen Schule machte ich im Unterricht einen Witz. In meiner alten Klasse war so etwas von mir erwartet worden, doch schon während ich auf die Pointe zusteuerte, wurde mir klar, dass es hier nicht mehr funktionieren würde. Ich blickte in die fremden Gesichter meiner Mitschüler und spürte, dass mein Selbstbewusstsein verschwunden war, und am Ende lachte niemand. Damit war meine Rolle besiegelt. Ich war der seltsame neue Junge, der nicht dar auf achtete, was er morgens anzog, und der aus Nervosität anfang, einzelne Wörter zu verdrehen: zum Beispiel »lostensos« statt »kostenlos«. Um nicht zum Gespött der Klasse zu werden, sagte ich deshalb kaum noch etwas, und so saß ich isoliert in der letzten Bank. Bis sich nach Wochen ein Mädchen neben mich setzte.

Alva hatte kupferrote Haare und trug eine Hornbrille. Ein auf den ersten Blick anmutiges, schüchternes Landkind, das die Einträge an der Tafel mit verschiedenen Buntstiften in seine Hefte eintrug. Und doch ging noch etwas anderes von ihr aus. Es gab Tage, da schien Alva die anderen Kinder bewusst zu meiden. Dann blickte sie düster aus dem Fenster, vollkommen abwesend. Ich wusste nicht, warum sie neben mir sitzen wollte, wir sprachen kein Wort. Ihre Freundinnen kicherten, wenn sie zu uns sahen, und zwei Wochen später saß ich auch schon wieder allein in der Ecke. So überraschend, wie sie gekommen war, hatte sich Alva weggesetzt.

Seitdem sah ich im Unterricht oft zu ihr rüber. Wenn sie an der Tafel abgefragt wurde, beobachtete ich, wie sie unsicher vorne stand und die Hände hinter dem Rücken verschränkte. Ich lauschte ihrer sanften Stimme und starrte auf ihre roten Haare, auf die Brille, auf ihre weiße Haut und ihr hübsches blasses Gesicht. Vor allem aber mochte ich ihre Vorderzähne, von denen einer leicht abstand. Alva versuchte, beim Reden den Mund nicht zu weit zu öffnen, damit es keiner sah, und wenn sie lachte, hielt sie sich die Hand davor. Doch manchmal lächelte sie; dann hatte sie nicht aufgepasst, und man sah den schiefen Schneidezahn, und das liebte ich ganz besonders. Mein ganzer Lebensinhalt bestand darin, ihr über mehrere Bänke hinweg Blicke zuzuwerfen, und wenn sie endlich zurücksah, schaute ich verschämt weg und war glücklich.

Einige Monate später gab es jedoch einen Vorfall. Es war ein schwüler Sommertag, und wir durften in der letzten Stunde ein Video ansehen, eine Erich-Kästner-Verfilmung. Alva weinte mitten im Film. Sie saß zusammengekauert auf ihrem Platz, ihre Schultern bebten, schließlich entfuhr ihr ein Schluchzer. Auch die anderen Schüler wurden nun auf sie aufmerksam. Hastig stoppte die Lehrerin das Video – bei einer Szene, die in einem Ferienlager spielte – und ging zu ihr. Als die beiden das Klassenzimmer verließen, erhaschte ich einen Blick auf Alvas gerötetes Gesicht. Ich glaube, wir waren alle erschrocken, aber es gab kaum Gerede. Nur einer sagte, dass Alvas Vater nie zum Elternsprechtag käme und überhaupt seltsam sei, vielleicht habe es damit etwas zu tun. Ich habe oft an diese Bemerkung gedacht, aber ich habe Alva nie dar auf angesprochen. Was auch immer es war – ihr Leid musste sich im Verborgenen abgespielt haben und wurde seither gut von ihr gehütet.

Ein paar Tage danach ging ich nach der Schule allein in Richtung Heim.

»Jules, warte!« Alva zog an meinem Hemd, bis ich mich umdrehte. Sie begleitete mich zum Internatseingang.

»Was machst du jetzt?«, fragte sie, als wir unschlüssig vor der Tür standen. Sie sprach immer sehr leise, so dass man sich zu ihr vorbeugen musste. Obwohl sie eine Externe war und zu Hause wohnte, schien sie nur ungern heimzugehen.

Ich betrachtete den bewölkten Himmel. »Weiß nicht... Musik hören wahrscheinlich.«

Sie sah mich nicht an und wurde rot.

»Willst du mithören?«, fragte ich, und sie nickte.

Zu meiner Erleichterung waren meine Mitschüler nicht im Zimmer. Von meiner Mutter hatte ich den Plattenspieler und ihre Sammlung geerbt, knapp hundert Alben, von Marvin Gaye, Eartha Kitt, Fleetwood Mac oder John Coltrane.

Ich legte *Pink Moon* von Nick Drake auf, eines der Lieblingsalben meiner Mutter. Früher hatte ich mich kaum für Musik interessiert, nun war es jedes Mal ein Glücksmoment, wenn die Nadel knisternd auf dem Vinyl aufsetzte.

Alva war hochkonzentriert und veränderte beim Zuhören kaum ihre Miene. »Gefällt mir sehr gut«, sagte sie. Seltsamerweise hatte sie sich nicht auf einen Stuhl, sondern auf meinen Schreibtisch gesetzt. Sie nahm ein Buch aus ihrem Rucksack und begann wortlos darin zu lesen, als wäre sie in meinem Zimmer zu Hause. Es gefiel mir, dass sie sich in meiner Nähe so wohl fühlte. Die Nachmittagssonne brach durch die Wolken und ließ das Zimmer in cognacfarbenem Licht leuchten.

»Was liest du da?«, fragte ich nach einer Weile. »Ist es gut?«

»M-hm.« Alva nickte und zeigte mir den Titel: *Wer die Nachtigall stört...* von Harper Lee. Sie war elf wie ich. Ich beobachtete wieder, wie sie im Text versank. Ihre Augen rasten die Zeilen entlang, von links nach rechts und wieder zurück, unablässig.

Schließlich klappte sie das Buch zu und inspizierte meine Sachen. Ein seltsames Wesen, das sich zu mir ins Zimmer verirrt hatte und neugierig die Spider-Man-Comics und Kameras studierte, die in meinem Regal standen. Sie nahm erst die Mamiya in die Hand, dann die neueren Modelle, mit denen mein Vater in seinen letzten Jahren oft fotografiert hatte. Sie berührte alle Gegenstände bewusst, als wolle sie sichergehen, dass sie auch real seien.

»Ich hab dich nie fotografieren sehen.«

Ich zuckte mit den Schultern. Alva griff nach einem Familienfoto, auf dem meine Mutter und mein Vater zu sehen waren.

»Deine Eltern sind tot.«

Dieser Satz überraschte mich, ich glaube, ich stellte sogar augenblicklich die Musik aus. Seit ich auf dem Internat war, hatte ich niemandem davon erzählt. »Wie kommst du dar auf?«, fragte ich.

»Ich hab eine Erzieherin gefragt.«

»Warum?«

Sie antwortete nicht.

»Ja, sie sind vor einem halben Jahr gestorben.« Es war, als müsste ich für jedes Wort einen Spaten in einen gefrorenen Acker rammen.

Alva nickte und sah mir lange in die Augen, ungewöhnlich lange, und ich werde nie vergessen, wie wir dabei einen Blick in die innere Welt des anderen werfen konnten. Für einen kurzen Moment sah ich den Schmerz, der sich hinter ihren Worten und Gesten verbarg, und sie erahnte im Gegenzug, was ich tief in mir bewahrte. Doch wir gingen nicht weiter. Wir blieben jeweils an der Schwelle des anderen stehen und stellten einander keine Fragen.

On the End of Loneliness

Benedict Wells

Translated from the German by Katy Derbyshire

The home my siblings and I were sent to after our parents' death was not one of the elite boarding schools we might have imagined to begin with, complete with tennis courts, hockey pitches and pottery studios. It was a cheap state-run institution in the countryside, consisting of two grey buildings and a canteen, all on the grounds of the local grammar school. We went to school with the country kids in the mornings and we spent the afternoons and evenings in our rooms, by the lake or on the football pitch. You got used to the barracked life, but even after years it could still be depressing when the day pupils went home to their families after class while you had to stay behind in the home like a prisoner, feeling like you had some kind of defect. You shared a spartan room with strangers who sometimes became friends. You had to change rooms at the end of each year. It was difficult to restrict your whole life to so little time and space; we had plenty of arguments but there were also conversations that went on for nights on end. Very occasionally, we'd talk about really important things, things we'd never have repeated by daylight, but mostly all we talked about was teachers and girls.

'Did she look over at me at dinner?' or, 'What, you don't know her? Jesus, Moreau, she's the best-looking girl in the whole bloody school.'

A lot of the boarders had had issues at home or failed at another school; some had taken drugs. Now and then, particularly criminal cases washed up at the boarding school

like flotsam and jetsam. As a state institution, it was obliged to take in almost anyone. The local kids looked on in bewilderment as the crazies invaded their idyllic village. 'Are you from the *home*?' they'd ask, the word 'home' meaning more lunatic asylum than boarding school. At mealtimes we wolfed down all that we could; it was never enough. There was a hunger inside us that could never quite be satisfied. There were rumours in plenty, though; a constant white noise of gossip, registering precisely who spoke to whom, what friendships came about and who was popular with the girls. Not every change was approved of. There were new clothes shown off proudly by their owners and then banished to the back of wardrobes if they hadn't gone down well. Some boarders tried to cultivate a new image over the summer holidays, returning from home with fresh confidence, but most of them went back to their old selves in a matter of days. You were only ever the person other people thought you were.

While I had felt secure in my innermost self over the previous years, now there were moments when I noticed matte evening light falling into a dingy corridor or the trees spreading a ghostly shadow over the land in the dusk, and then something suddenly cinched together inside me. The thought that I was on a planet shooting through space at incredible speed was as shocking to me as the new, disturbing realisation that dying was inevitable. My fears grew like a spreading fissure. I began to be afraid of the dark, afraid of death, afraid of eternity. These thoughts drove a thorn into my world and the more often I dwelt on it all, the more I grew apart from my often untroubled, cheerful classmates. I was alone. And then I met Alva.

★

In the first few days at the new school, I made a joke in class. At my old school that had been expected of me, but even as I steered towards the punchline it became clear that it wouldn't work here. I looked at the unfamiliar faces of my classmates and realised that my confidence had evaporated, and at the end of the joke no one laughed. That sealed my role. I was the odd new boy who didn't care what clothes he put on in the morning and who got his words twisted when he was nervous: 'farecree' would come out instead of 'carefree', for example. So I barely said a word so as not to end up the laughing stock of the class, and sat isolated in the back row. Until a girl sat down next to me, six weeks later.

Alva had copper-coloured hair and horn-rimmed glasses. At first glance a shy, graceful country child who copied down the notes on the board using different coloured pencils. And yet there was something else about her. There were days when Alva seemed deliberately to avoid the other children. Then she'd stare darkly out of the window, entirely absent. I didn't know why she wanted to sit next to me; we didn't speak a word to each other. Her friends giggled when they looked back at us, and two weeks later I was on my own in the corner again. As surprisingly as she'd arrived, Alva had moved to another seat.

From then on I often looked over at her in class. When the teacher called her up to the front I watched her standing uneasily by the board, her hands behind her back. I listened to her gentle voice and stared at her red hair, her glasses, her white skin and her pretty, pale face. What I liked most of all, though, was her front teeth, one of which was slightly askew. Alva tried not to open her mouth too wide when she spoke so that no one would see it, and she held a hand in front of it when she laughed. But sometimes she'd smile; then she didn't pay attention and you could see her wonky incisor,

and I loved that. My entire life consisted of casting glances at her across the classroom, and when she finally looked back I would look away, shamefaced and happy.

A few months later, though, there was an incident. It was a muggy summer day and the teacher in our last class let us watch a video, an adaptation of a book by Erich Kästner. Alva started crying in the middle of the film. She sat huddled on her seat, her shoulders quaking, and eventually emitted a sob. The other kids noticed her then as well. The teacher hastily stopped the video – on a scene in a holiday camp – and rushed over to her. As the two of them left the classroom, I caught a glance of Alva's reddened face. I think we were all shocked but hardly anyone said anything. Only one person commented, saying Alva's father never came to parents' evenings and was a strange man; maybe that had something to do with it. I often thought of that comment but I never mentioned it to Alva. Whatever it was, her suffering must have played out under cover and she kept it a secret from then on.

A few days later, I was walking from the school building to the home.

'Jules, wait!' Alva tugged at my shirt until I turned around. She walked with me to the entrance to the boarding section.

'What are you doing now?' she asked as we stood uncertainly outside the door. She always spoke very quietly, meaning you had to lean down towards her. Even though she was a day pupil and lived with her parents, she seemed not to want to go home.

I looked at the clouded sky. 'Don't know... Probably listen to music.'

She didn't look at me but she blushed.

'Do you want to come with me?' I asked, and she nodded.

To my relief, my roommates weren't in. I had inherited my mother's record player and music collection, about 100 albums: Marvin Gaye, Eartha Kitt, Fleetwood Mac and John Coltrane.

I put on Nick Drake's *Pink Moon*, one of my mother's favourite records. I'd hardly been interested in music before but now I had a moment of happiness every time the needle touched the vinyl with that crackle.

Alva listened with intense concentration, her expression barely changing. 'I like it a lot,' she said. Strangely, she hadn't sat down on a chair but on my desk. She took a book out of her backpack and began reading it wordlessly, as though she were at home in my room. I was pleased she felt so comfortable around me. The afternoon sun broke through the clouds and bathed the room in cognac-coloured light.

'What are you reading?' I asked after a while. 'Is it good?'

'M-hm.' Alva nodded and showed me the cover: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. She was 11, like me. I went on watching her immersed in her reading. Her eyes raced along the lines, left to right and then back again, incessantly.

Eventually she closed the book and inspected my belongings. A strange being that had found its way accidentally to my room and studied the Spider Man comics and cameras on my shelf with interest. She picked up first the Mamiya and then the newer models my father had often used in the last years of his life. She touched all the objects deliberately, as though wanting to make certain they were real.

'I've never seen you taking photos.'

I shrugged. Alva reached for a family photo showing my mother and father.

'Your parents are dead.'

That sentence surprised me; I think I even turned off the music instantaneously. I hadn't told anyone anything about it since I'd been at the home. 'Why do you think that?' I asked.

'I asked a teacher.'

'Why?'

She didn't answer.

'Yes, they died six months ago.' It was as though I had to ram a spade into frozen ground for every word.

Alva nodded and looked me in the eye for a long time, an unusually long time, and I'll never forget the way we were able to cast a glance at each other's inner worlds. For a brief moment I saw the pain hidden behind her words and gestures and she got an idea in return of what I kept deep inside me. But we didn't go any further. Each of us stayed on the other's threshold and we asked no questions of one another.



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Gast Groeber

All Dag verstoppt en aneren (2013)

Chaque jour est un nouveau jour / One Day Hides Another

Publishing House **Op der Lay**

Biography

Gast Groeber grew up in Hollerich, Luxembourg, where he went to primary school. After graduating from high school in 1980, he studied primary education at the Institut Supérieur d'Études et de Recherches Pédagogiques in Walferdange, Luxembourg. From 1982, he taught at a number of primary schools in Luxembourg City. Since 2007, he has been head of the Centre Technolink in Luxembourg City, a division of school administration, which is in charge of equipping schools with computers, internet and new technologies.

Synopsis

Every day, the one before and the one after, every day is *everyday*: a day of reminiscences of the past and a day of anticipations of the future. Every day something transpires. In these nine short stories by Gast Groeber, we discover all kinds of people who live a day that changes their everyday life. Groeber's texts mirror modern Luxembourg, whatever the setting. Written in an innovative style, Groeber's third book confirms his ability to depict Luxembourgish reality in a masterful way.

All Dag verstoppt en aneren

Gast Groeber

Déi éischt Strale vun der Sonn krabbelen duerch
d’Fensterglas.

D’Liicht erwächt e Mann. Deen wenzelt sech zweemol ëm
seng eegen Achs. Da gräift en no sengem Handy. Aacht Auer.
En hieft sech aus dem Bett. Reift sech d’Aen.

Samschdes moies.

Wéi en an der Kichen ukënnt, schalt en de Kaffisautomat
un. Gräift no der Brouttut. Nëmmen nach haart Kuuschten
doranner! En zaapt sech e staarke Kaffi.

Säi Buch fält ëm erëm an. Hien wor de leschten Owend
doriwwer ageschlof.

Hie schmunzelt. Dofir déi oppe Rolllued. A weinst där
eropgerullter Rolllued ass hien esou fréi erwächt.

En hëlt eng Schlupp, trëppelt zréck an d’Schlofzëmmer.
Mam Buch a mam Brëll kënnt en zréck. Seng Taass Kaffi
dämpft nach. Den Damp hieft sech gemelleg aus dem
Parzeläin. Krauselt Aroma an de Raum.

Hien schléit beim Lieszeechen op, bliedert zréck. Seng Ae
picken an d’Textzeilen eran. Jo, hien erënnert sech. Dee
Personnage do, deen John ass an der Chemio. Sou frustréiert
doriwwer, datt hien elo Matleed kritt, datt jiddereen sech ëm
hie këmmere wëllt. Kuriéis, dat Buch! Gutt Erzielerin!

Hien iwwerleet. D’Erzielung pendelt tëscht Berlin a Wien,
dat dréit bestëmmt och derzou bäi, datt se hien iergendwéi
usprécht.

Säit dräi an engem hallwe Joer besicht hien europäesch
Haaptstied. Dat hat en sech iergendwann esou vir geholl.
Zu Berlin an zu Wien wor hien och scho gewiescht. Den
Hackescher Markt, d'*Museumsinsel*, den *Stephansdouw*,
d'*Museumsquartier*!

E fillt nach eemol d'Brouttut. Haart wéi Steen. Op engem
Samschde Moien. Den Himmel voller Sonn. A keng fräsch
Schmier!

Da muss hien eben erof, an d'Duerf, bei de Bäcker. Elo si jo
vläicht nach net sou vill Leit do! Mä da muss hie fir d'éischt
an d'Dusch.

Mécht duerno de Baart. Wäscht d'Zänn.

E kuckt sech am Spigel. Alles an der Rei!

Um Wee dohinner, genéisst hien de gestache bloen Himmel.

Aus engem Virgäertche flitt e Gaarderoutschwanz aus enger
Heck eraus. *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, fläissege klengen
Insektefréisser, kënnt all Joer zréck heihinner. Flitt da vu
September un erëm zréck an d'Sudaneseesch Zon an Afrika.
Eigentlech deen ideale Gaaschtaarbechter, jee nodeem wéi
een et gesäit! Vläicht ass en dowéinst zwee dausend néng
an der Schwäiz zum Vull vum Joer gewielt ginn, an an
Däitschland am Joer zwee dausend eelef.

E Laachen huscht ëm iwwert d'Gesicht.

*An hien? Vull vum Joer, a sengem Duerf, säit véier Joer,
ëmmer an ëmmer erëm!*

Säi Schrëtt ass méi lues ginn. E rëselt de Kapp, kuckt erop,
an déi azzure Luucht.

Aus dem Fong dréckt d'Scheif vum Mound sech sat wäiss no vir.
Virun der Bakstuff sti schonn en etlech Autoen.

Hien otemt nach eemol déi fräsch Moiesloft an an dréckt d'Dier op. Eng hallef Dose Leit heibannen.

Moien.

D'Verkeeferin äntwert, beschäftegt sech dann erëm mat der Commande vun hirer Cliente. Et ass roueg.

Hie bleift beim Zeitungsstänner stoen. Kuckt d'Titelsäiten. Fotoe mat Ënnerttitelen. Recherchéiert Titelzeilen fir déi neiste Katastrofen! En zitt eng Weekendseditioun aus dem Stänner.

Schwätzen d'Leit méi lues säit hien era koum? Oder bild hien sech dat nëmmen an?

Wéi sot säin Psy? Negativen Anticipatiounen aus de Féiss goen.

Hien stellt sech an d'Rei hannert déi aner. Kuckt seng Zeitung, liest d'Iwwerschräfte vun der éischer Säit.

E klenkt Meedche virun ëm dréit sech ëm. Kuckt e virwëtzeg un, laacht him. Wonnerschéin! Ae voller Liicht a frëschem Gesiicht. E gesond Laachen!

D'Héngerhaut leeft him de Réck erof.

Hoffentlech geschitt deem Klengen ni eppes!

D'Meedchen hält sech un enger Hand fest. Déi vun der Mamm, déi derbäi ass. Si zitt hatt elo douce méi no un sech.

Hien steet an der Rei, trëppelt all Kéiers e bësschen no vir, wann e Client serviéiert ass a bezuelt huet.

Äddi a Merci. Dräi Schrëtt weider.

Äddi, schéine Weekend. Dräi Schrëtt weider.

Äddi, Merci, schéine Bonjour doheem, rëm dräi Schrëtt!

Et hate schonn aner Leit sech hannert hie gestallt.

Bis d'nächste Kéier. Äddi. Dräi Schrëtt.

Lo gött dat kléngt Meedche mat senger Mamm servéiert.
Hatt ass ganz konzentréiert. Dréckt de Fanger um Glas platt.
E Kaffiskichelche fält an d'Tut. Hatt leckt mat der Zong
iwwer d'Lëpsen.

Merci, Äddi. Kathy, sees de Äddi? Dräi Schrëtt no vir.

Hien steet virun der Vendeuse. Si laacht him.

Zwee Bréidercher, an dës Zeitung. Wann ech gelift.

Voilà. Véier achtzeg.

Merci. Äddi.

Äddi.

Ee jonke Mann ass deen eenzegen, deen nach Äddi seet.
Sécher réischt viru Kuerzem bäieplënnert.

Et ass roueg, wéi hien d'Dier op zitt an eraus trëppelt. En hält
déif Loft. Et wor him dobanne wéi wann en um Erstécke wier.

Doheem, a senger Kichen, schmiert e Botter iwwert dee
frësch gebakenen Deeg. De Geroch vum Brout klëmmt ëm
an d'Nues. Duerno Quetschekraut. Hien zaapt sech nach eng
Taass Kaffi an decidéiert op der Terrass z'iessen.

Eng Märel, *Turdus merula*, päift verspillt. Eng Grill,
Gryllidae, zirpt d'Äntwerten op dat Zwitscheren.

Hien erënnert sech un en Artikel, deen e viru kuerzem
gelies hat. Grilleweibercher markéieren hir Partner mat
engem Doftstoff fir se zeréck z'erkennen. Sou kënnen
se zukünftegen Accouplementer mat deenen aus de
Féiss hopsen an déi genetesch Pluralitéit vum Nowuess
assuréieren.

E Grinsen op sengem Gesiicht. Hat hien iere vu Gebuert un den Doft vun alle Frae vun dëser Welt u sech?

Hien hëlt säi Buch, liest e puer Säiten, genéisst de Kaffi.
Wat eng Rou! D'Wiermt vun der Sonn entspaant all Fiber a sengem Kierper.

En huet zwee Kapitele weider gelies, geet elo an d'Kichen.
Hie wëllt nach e Kaffi. D'Bäckeschut leit do. Wéi hien se gesäit denkt en u virdrun, wéi en am Duerf wor.

Déi Rou. An déi kal Bléck an deenen zou gepätzten
Bulldogsgesiichter!

Hëtzt vu Roserei leeft ëm d'Genéck an d'Baken erop.
Schäiss Duerf. Voller Beschass. Beschass mat Spannenbeen.

An dann, op ee Coup, sinn se erëm do.

Déi Biller!

Hien stäipt sech mat zwou Hänn op d'Aarbechtsplack.
Erënnerungen!

Hien hëlt déif Loft. Säi Fouss dréckt fest erof. Mä et hält net op.

Hie kann net bremsen. D'Biller sinn elo ganz kloer.

Dee Bouf, deen zu der Säit fält. E Knuppen um Capot.

Wéi de Won un d'Stoe kënnt, gesäit en de Jong net. Och net an de Spigelen, a kengem.

Handbrems gezunn, Motor aus, aus dem Auto.

Nieft dem Auto leit en. Blut leeft ënnert dem Kapp ervir.

Handy raus, eent eent zwee, Accident, schnell. Detailer,
Uertschaft, Strooss. Duerno eent eent dräi, déi selwecht
hektesch Informatiounen.

E kuckt dee Kapp erëm. Op enger Säit op geplätzt. Zéi
Drëpse vu Blutt. Keng Beweegung um Kierper.

Dat éischt Geräisch wat seng Panik duerch brécht ass dat
Gehicks. Deen Kräischkramp vun deem anere Bouf.

Déi fatal Sekonne lafen erëm a sengem Kapp of.

Hien wor héchstens mat drësseg gefuer. Hat dunn déi zwee
Jongen erbléckst, deem een hat deem aneren e Crochet
gemaach an en gestouss. Hien huet gebremst. Mä e wor jo
schonn niewendrun.

Et hat tomp geknuppt. En hat de Kapp gesinn op de Capot
opschloen, d'Hoer op deem Kapp, déi nogeschwongen
woren.

Elo lounge dee kleng Mënsch do.

Wéi al sollt e sinn. Zéng? Eelef? Vlächzt zwielef? Hie konnt
den Alter vu Kanner net gutt aschätzen.

Deen aneren hat sech op den Trottoir gesat. Spasmen vu
Kräischen hu säi Kierper duerch geschuddert. Tréinen ouni
Enn. Wor hien deem kleng säi Frënn? Säi Schoulkolleg?
Säin Noper?

Direkt nodeems hien de Crochet gemach hat, hat hien den
Auto gesinn. Seng Aen haten sech wäit opgerappt. Hien hat
gejaut. Mä du koum och schonn deem Opschlag um Capot.

Elo woren éischt Leit aus den Haiser rondrëm op der Strooss.

Ass d'Ambulanz geruff?

Kann een éischt Hëllef?

An d'Police?

Sou wéi hei gerannt gött!

Dat ass dach Schmitts hire Klengen!

Wëssen d'Eltere Bescheed?

Lieft en nach?

Sireene sinn an d'Strooss agebéit. Zweek Dokterer hunn nom Affer gekuckt. Ee vun hinnen ass mat der Ambulanz fortgefuer. Säi Gesichtsausdrock wor discouragéiert. Deen aneren huet sech ëm deen zweete Bouf gekëmmert, an ëm de Chauffeur. Allen zwee ënner Schock. Si goufe mat enger zweeter Ambulanz ofgeholl. D'Police huet Fotoe gemaach, mat Kräid op d'Strooss gezeechent. Nodeems d'Klinik ugeruff hat, hunn se de Riichter alertéiert, wéinst der Spuresécherung.

Wéi oft ass dee Film him schonn duerch de Kapp gelaf?
Souguer no den Therapien.

All Kéiers op en Neits.

D'Knuppen um Capot. De Schwäif Hoer um Kapp, deen no
ënne schléit. D'Hicke vun deem anere Jong.

Déi ganz Affär wor op d'Gericht komm.

Et gouv nëmmen zwee Zeien.

Deen éischte konnt net aussoen, e wor traumatiséiert. En
traumatiséiert Kand. Bleech, mat eidelen Aen.

Deen zweete wor de Chauffeur, hien.

Hien huet seng Ausso vu bei der Police widderholl, datt dee
Klängen ouni ze kucken op d'Strooss gelaf wor, widdert den
Auto. Hien hat gebremst, mä de Bouf wor schonn op der
Héicht vum Capot. Drësseg, héchstens, hat en drop. Wier en
do dach nëmmen siechzeg oder siwwenzeg gefuer! Da wier e
laanscht gewiescht, ier de Bouf gefall wor.

No den Zeie koumen d'Experten. Si hunn d'Vitesse
confirméiert. Bremswee. Impakt. Impaktwénkel a

Lesiounen. Null Promill. Keng Trace vu soss iergend enge medikamentösen oder narkoteschen Substanzen.

De Riichter huet hie fräi gesprach.

Keng Schold.

Een Doudegen. Ee Kand. Een doudegt Kand. En Non-lieu.

D'Eltere vum Jong hunn net reagéiert. Si haten hie verluer. D'Schicksal hat si getraff. Si si kuerz nom Accident aus dem Duerf fort gezunn.

En Duerf huet säin eegent Liewen.

En Non-lieu kann et net ginn!

En Accident? En Zoufall?

Leit brauchen e Schëllegen. Wann net um Geriicht, dann awer am Duerf. Soss ass den Zesummenhalt vun der Communautéit a Gefor. Scholdzouweisung hëlleft engem Clan sech ze eenegen.

Nom Accident wore Fundamentalisten op de Plang getrueden. Aktiviste fir manner Verkéier, fir méi Kontroll, fir méi Sécherheet vun de Kanner. Am Fong geholl woren et der net vill, just eng Hand voll vu sou engen. Mä keen hat an där Communautéit de Courage d'Argumenter a Fro ze stellen, d'Aktivisten a Fro ze stellen. Et wier en Affront gewiescht, en Affront géint d'Memoire vun engem verstuerwene Kand.

Eng Communautéit brauch Schëlleger!

A wann et nëmmen ass fir hinnen hir Schold ze verginn.

D'Duerf ass eng kleng Communautéit.

Hei gëtt engem nëmme verginn, wann eng aner Schold entdeckt gëtt, en neie Schëllege fonnt ass.

Hien bleift bis dato de Schëllegen. A senger Strooss, a sengem Duerf, an der Epicerie, beim Bäcker, iwwerall do, wou en sech weist. An a sengem Kapp. Säit véier Joren.

All déi Deeg an der Woch, wou en an d'Stad schaffe fiert, kann hien dat vergiessen. Mä soubal en d'Uertschaftsschëld gesäit, da pecht et erëm un him.

Heiansdo, da packt en et da net méi. Da flitt en iwwert de Weekend fort. An eng grouss Stad. Genéisst do seng Onschold. An der Anonymitéit vun deene villen Onbekannten.

Eemol an deenen éischten zwee Joren nom Prozess hat hien deen anere Jong zréck gesinn. Dee wor op en zou komm, hat him d'Hand ginn, Merci gesot, a wor rëm schnell fort gejauft.

Merci!

Hien rëselt de Kapp, dréit sech bei d'Kaffismaschinn, dréckt.

E mécht d'Aen zou, wéi en dat brongt Gesëffs lues a sengem Mond genéisst.

Merci!

Et wor dach net fir e Merci gewiescht, datt en deemools näischt vun deem Crochet gesot hat. Net bei der Police an net viru Geriicht.

Et woren zwee Bouwen! Déi beschte Frënn, ass dorëmmer erzielt ginn. Eelef, zwielef.

Kee weess, wat lass wor. Op jidder Fall wor deen ee rose wéi e Schwäin. Huet am Reflex deen anere mam Fouss gekroopt.

Wat hätt hien dann deemools solle man? En zweet Liewen zerstéieren? Dem Duerf e Schëllege liwweren?

D'Eltere vum Jong sengem Kolleg haten hien eemol
agelueden. Hire Jong hat hinnen iergendwann erzielt, wat
geschitt wor. Si wollte Merci soen.

Hien wollt dach kee Merci. Just nëmmen ee jonkt Liewe
verschounen. Zweek Liewe waren duerch deen eeklegen
Zoufall kaputt. Dat wor méi wéi genuch.

Kuerz duerno sinn och si fort geplënnert, mat hirem Jong,
op déi aner Säit vun der Stad. Fir d'Feierdeeg schécken se
him zënterhier ëmmer eng Kaart.

Chrëschttag. Merci!

Ouschteren. Merci!

Vakanz. Merci!

Chrëschttag. Merci!

Ouschteren. Merci!

Vakanz. Merci!

Chrëschttag. Merci!

Ouschteren. Merci!

Hien trëppelt op d'Pinnwand zou. Kuckt d'Kaarten. Zielt
d'Mercien.

Dann zaapt en sech en neie Kaffi.

Et ass ebe geschitt.

Den Zoufall huet aus him de Schëllege vun engem Non-lieu
gemaach.

Hien wëllt net fortlafen.

Op senger Terrass fillt hien sech gutt.

D'Sonn dréckt waarm a s'entspaant.

E Fliger dauscht eng Kondenssträif op déi blo Toile vum
Himmel.

Säi Bléck flitt no.

Vläicht muss e gläich erëm fort.

Op Berlin? Op Wien?

Hie gräift no sengem Buch. Setzt sech de Brëll op d’Nues.

Chaque jour est un nouveau jour

Gast Groeber

Translated from the Luxembourgish by Nathalie Ronvaux

Les premiers rayons de soleil se faufilent par la vitre
de la fenêtre.

La lumière jaillit et tire un homme de son sommeil.
Il gesticule et se tourne deux fois. Puis attrape son téléphone
portable. Huit heures.

Il s'extirpe de son lit. Se frotte les yeux.

On est samedi matin.

Lorsqu'il arrive dans la cuisine, il branche la machine à café.
Prend la corbeille à pain et constate qu'il ne reste plus que
du pain rassis ! Il se fait couler un café serré.

Le livre lui revient en mémoire. La veille au soir, il s'était
endormi en lisant.

Il sourit. Bien sûr, voilà pourquoi le volet était resté ouvert.
Voilà donc la cause de son réveil matinal.

Il boit une gorgée, retourne dans la chambre à coucher.
Revient muni de son livre et de sa paire de lunettes. Son café
fume toujours. La vapeur se dégage lentement de la tasse en
porcelaine et diffuse l'arôme dans la pièce.

Au marque-page, il ouvre son livre et feuillette en arrière.
Ses yeux parcourent le texte. Oui, il se souvient.
Ce personnage, John, subit une chimiothérapie. Tous veulent
prendre soin de lui tant et si bien qu'il a maintenant pitié
d'eux. Étrange ce livre ! Excellente narratrice !

Il réfléchit. Le récit se déroule entre Berlin et Vienne, ce qui ne manque pas de susciter son intérêt de lecteur.

Depuis trois ans et demi, il entreprend des séjours dans des capitales européennes. Un projet qu'il s'était promis de réaliser. À plusieurs reprises, il avait visité Berlin et Vienne. Le marché de Hacke, l'île aux Musées, la cathédrale Saint-Etienne, le Museumsquartier !

Il tâte à nouveau le pain. Dur comme la pierre. Et ce, en ce samedi matin au ciel ensoleillé.

Pas une tranche de pain frais !

Il va donc devoir se rendre au village, chez le boulanger. À cette heure, il ne devrait pas y avoir trop de monde. Mais avant, il doit prendre une douche.

Puis il se rase, se brosse les dents, se regarde dans le miroir. Tout va bien !

En chemin, il profite pleinement du ciel bleu.

Dans un jardinet, un rougequeue à front blanc s'envole d'une haie. *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, insectivore zélé qui revient chaque année dans nos contrées. En septembre, l'oiseau s'envole pour le soleil saharien en Afrique. D'une certaine façon, il représente le parfait travailleur immigré. C'est peut-être bien pour cette raison qu'il a été nommé en Suisse en 2009, l'oiseau de l'année, et en Allemagne en 2011.

Un sourire apparaît furtivement sur son visage.

Quant à lui ? Et bien, lui, dans son village, il est l'oiseau de mauvais augure et ce, chaque année, depuis quatre ans !

Il a ralenti le pas. Il secoue la tête, lève les yeux dans la lumière azurée.

Depuis l'horizon, le disque lunaire impose sa blancheur repue.

De nombreuses voitures stationnent déjà devant la boulangerie.

Il inspire un grand bol d'air frais et ouvre la porte. À l'intérieur une demi-douzaine de personnes.

– *Bonjour.*

La vendeuse répond, poursuit ensuite la commande de sa cliente. Tout est calme.

Il s'arrête devant le rayon presse. Regarde la une des journaux. Les photos et les sous-titres. Cherche les titres annonçant les dernières catastrophes. Extrait un cahier week-end du rayon.

Les gens parlent-ils à voix basse depuis qu'il est entré ? Est-ce le fruit de son imagination ?

Qu'a dit son psy ? Éviter l'anticipation négative.

Il rejoint la file. Regarde son journal et lit les titres de la une.

Une petite fille devant lui se retourne. Avec curiosité elle le regarde, lui sourit.

Magnifique. Des yeux pétillants et un visage rayonnant.

Un sourire éclatant !

Il a la chair de poule.

Pourvu qu'il n'arrive rien à cette petite !

La fillette s'agrippe à une main. Celle de sa mère qui l'accompagne et qui maintenant, avec douceur, la rapproche d'elle.

Il attend son tour et lorsqu'un client est servi, il avance à petits pas.

– *Au revoir et merci.* Il avance de trois pas.

- *Au revoir, bon week-end.* Il avance encore de trois pas.
- *Au revoir, merci, bien le bonjour chez vous.* Encore trois pas !

D'autres personnes se sont rajoutées à la file.

- *À bientôt. Au revoir.* Trois pas.

C'est maintenant au tour de la petite fille et de sa mère. Elle est particulièrement concentrée. Appuie son doigt sur la vitrine et choisit une viennoiserie. Elle se lèche les babines.

- *Merci, au revoir. Cathy tu dis au revoir ?* Trois pas en avant.

Il est face à la vendeuse. Elle lui sourit.

- *Deux petits-pains et ce journal. S'il vous plaît.*

- *Voici. Quatre euros quatre-vingts.*

- *Merci. Au revoir.*

- *Au revoir.*

Un jeune homme lui dit également au revoir. Il vient sûrement d'emménager.

Lorsqu'il ouvre la porte et la franchit, tout est silencieux. Il inspire profondément. À l'intérieur, il avait l'impression d'étouffer.

De retour dans sa cuisine, il tartine le pain frais. L'odeur du pain se répand dans ses narines. Il ajoute de la confiture de quetsches. Il se sert une tasse de café et décide de déjeuner sur sa terrasse.

Un merle, *Turdus merula*, siffle gaiement. Un grillon, *Gryllidae*, stridule et répond aux pépiements.

Il se souvient d'un article qu'il avait récemment lu.

Les grillons femelles marquent leurs partenaires, afin de les

reconnaître, d'une substance olfactive. Ainsi, elles évitent de s'accoupler avec le même partenaire et assurent la pluralité génétique des générations à venir.

Un sourire s'esquisse sur son visage. Portait-il déjà, avant sa naissance, le parfum de toutes les femmes de cette terre ?

Il prend son livre, lit quelques pages, déguste son café. Quel calme ! La chaleur du soleil détend chaque fibre de son corps.

Il a lu deux chapitres supplémentaires, retourne à présent dans la cuisine. Il a envie d'une autre tasse de café. Le sachet du boulanger est là. Lorsqu'il le voit, il pense aux clients de la boulangerie. Ces visages de bouledogues fermés, ces regards froids et ce silence.

Une bouffée de colère assaille son cou et ses joues.

Putain de village. Que de ragots. Médisances à pattes d'araignées.

Et brusquement, elles réapparaissent.

Ces images !

Il prend appui avec ses deux mains sur la plaque de travail.

Retour en arrière !

Il inspire profondément. Essaie d'empêcher que les images resurgissent. Mais ça ne s'arrête pas.

Il ne peut pas l'éviter. Elles refont surface.

Ce gamin qui trébuche. Un bruit sourd sur le capot.

Lorsque le véhicule s'immobilise, il ne voit plus le garçon, pas même dans les rétroviseurs.

Frein à main tiré, moteur éteint, il descend du véhicule.

Le garçon gît à côté de la voiture. Le sang coule le long de sa tête.

Téléphone portable, 112, accident, vite. Détails, localité, rue. Ensuite, 113, les mêmes informations urgentes.

Il regarde à nouveau cette tête. D'un côté, crâne ouvert. Flots de sang. Corps immobile.

Il perçoit le sanglot de l'autre gamin.

Ces secondes fatales lui reviennent en mémoire.

Il roulait tout au plus à trente. Avait entraperçu les deux garçons, l'un avait fait un croche-pied à l'autre et l'avait ensuite poussé. Il a freiné, mais il était déjà trop tard.

Le choc était assourdissant. Il avait vu la tête et la touffe de cheveux rebondir sur le capot.

Quel âge avait ce gamin ? Dix ? Onze ? Douze ans peut-être ? Il n'a jamais su estimer l'âge des enfants.

L'autre garçon s'était assis sur le trottoir. Des spasmes secouaient son corps. Larmes sans fin. Était-il l'ami du petit ? Son camarade de classe ? Son voisin ?

Immédiatement, après avoir fait le croche-pied, il avait vu la voiture. Ses yeux se sont écarquillés. Il a crié. Mais l'impact avait aussitôt eu lieu.

Déjà, les premiers badauds des maisons alentours les entouraient.

- *A-t-on prévenu l'ambulance ?*
- *Quelqu'un a-t-il des notions de premier secours ?*
- *Et la police ?*
- *Quand on voit à la vitesse à laquelle ils roulent par ici !*

- *C'est le petit Schmitt !*
- *A-t-on averti les parents ?*
- *Il vit encore ?*

Les gyrophares se sont engagés dans la rue. Deux médecins ont pris la victime en charge. L'un d'eux, la mine déconfite, est, sans délai, reparti en ambulance avec le gamin accidenté. L'autre, s'est occupé du deuxième gamin et du conducteur. Tous les deux en état de choc. Ils ont été emmenés par une deuxième ambulance. La police a pris des photos, a marqué la scène à la craie. Et suite à l'appel de l'hôpital, ils ont alerté le juge en raison de l'enquête scientifique.

Combien de fois s'est-il remémoré cette scène ? Même bien après les séances chez le thérapeute.

Toujours, comme si c'était la première fois.

Le bruit sourd sur le capot. La touffe de cheveux qui rebondit. Les sanglots de l'autre garçon.

L'affaire a été portée devant le tribunal.

Il n'y avait que deux témoins.

Le premier ne pouvait pas témoigner, il était traumatisé. Un enfant traumatisé, pâle, le regard vide.

Le deuxième était le conducteur, lui.

Il a réitéré le témoignage qu'il avait fait auprès de la police, que le petit avait couru sur la chaussée sans regarder. Il avait freiné, mais il était déjà trop tard. Il roulait maximum à trente. Si seulement il avait roulé à soixante ou soixante-dix, il aurait évité le gamin !

Puis les experts ont été entendus. Ils ont confirmé la vitesse. Distance de freinage. Impact. Angle d'impact et lésions.

Zéro gramme d'alcool dans le sang. Aucune trace d'une quelconque autre substance médicamenteuse ou narcotique.

Le juge l'a innocenté.

L'a déclaré non coupable.

Un mort. Un enfant. Un enfant mort. Un non-lieu.

Les parents de l'enfant n'ont pas donné suite. Ils avaient perdu leur fils. Le destin les avait frappés de plein fouet.

Peu après l'accident, ils ont déménagé.

Un village a ses propres lois.

Un non-lieu est inconcevable.

Un accident ? Un hasard ?

Peu importe, les gens ont besoin d'un coupable. Si le tribunal fait défaut, alors le village s'en chargera. Dans le cas contraire, la cohésion de la communauté est en danger. Cela va de soi, l'accusation contribue à l'unité d'un clan.

Après l'accident, les fondamentalistes sont montés au créneau. Des militants pour moins de circulation, pour plus de contrôles, pour plus de sécurité pour les enfants. En réalité, ils étaient peu nombreux, on pouvait les compter sur les doigts d'une main. Mais dans la communauté, personne n'avait le courage de mettre leurs arguments en doute, de mettre les militants en doute. Ceci aurait été un affront, un affront à l'égard de la mémoire d'un enfant mort.

Une société a besoin d'un coupable, ne serait-ce que pour expier ses propres péchés.

Et le village constitue une microsociété.

Ici, on ne pardonne qu'à condition qu'une autre faute soit révélée, qu'un nouveau coupable soit désigné.

D'ici là, dans son quartier, dans son village, à l'épicerie, chez le boulanger, et à ses propres yeux, il reste coupable ! Et ce, depuis quatre ans.

Les jours de la semaine, quand il se rend en ville pour travailler il est en mesure d'oublier, mais dès qu'il voit le panneau d'entrée de son agglomération ça lui colle à nouveau à la peau.

Parfois, cela lui est insupportable. Alors, le temps d'un week-end, il s'envole à destination d'une grande ville, se fond dans l'anonymat de la foule et jouit de son innocence.

Deux ans après le procès, il avait croisé le garçon qui avait été témoin de la scène. Le gamin est venu vers lui, lui a donné la main, a dit merci, et est immédiatement reparti.

Merci !

Il secoue la tête, se tourne vers la machine à café, l'enclenche.

Il ferme les yeux et boit son café.

Merci !

Ce n'était pas pour qu'on lui dise merci qu'il n'avait rien dit, ni à la police ni au tribunal, à propos du croche-pied.

Il s'agissait de deux gamins ! La rumeur disait qu'ils étaient meilleurs amis. Onze et douze ans.

Personne ne sait ce qui s'est réellement passé. Ce qui est certain, c'est que l'un d'eux, fou de rage et sans réfléchir, a fait, à l'autre, un croche-pied.

Qu'aurait-il dû faire ? Détruire une deuxième vie ? Livrer au village un coupable ?

Un jour, les parents du garçon l'ont invité. Leur fils leur avait confié ce qui s'était passé. Ils voulaient le remercier.

Il ne voulait aucun remerciement. Avait seulement essayé d'épargner la vie d'un jeune garçon. Deux vies avaient été détruites par ce tragique hasard. C'était bien assez.

Peu après, eux aussi ont déménagé, avec leur fils, de l'autre côté de la ville.

Depuis, pour les fêtes, ils lui envoient une carte de vœux.

Noël. Merci !

Pâques. Merci !

Vacances. Merci !

Noël. Merci !

Pâques. Merci !

Vacances. Merci !

Noël. Merci !

Pâques. Merci !

Il s'approche du tableau d'accrochage. Regarde les cartes de vœux. Compte les mercis.

Puis se sert un nouveau café.

Ce qui est arrivé, est arrivé.

Le hasard a fait de lui le coupable d'un non-lieu.

Il ne veut pas fuir.

Sur sa terrasse ensoleillée, il se sent bien.

Son regard suit le vol d'un avion, qui dans le ciel bleu, abandonne une traînée blanche.

Il devrait peut-être repartir.

À Berlin ou à Vienne.

Il prend son livre et met ses lunettes.



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Claudiu M. Florian

Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății. (2012)

The Ages of the Game – Citadel Street

Publishing House **Cartea Românească**

Biography

Claudiu M. Florian was born in 1969 in Rupea, Braşov County. He received a degree in German Studies at Bucharest University in 1994, an MA in 'Humanistic Interdisciplinary Studies in the German Language' at Bucharest University in 1996, and went on to obtain another MA in Contemporary History at Bielefeld University in Germany. From 2002, he worked as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, moving on to become Cultural and Press Attaché at the Romanian Embassy in Berlin from 2004 to 2009. Since 2010, he has held a key role at the Romanian Embassy in Bern, Switzerland.

Synopsis

We find ourselves in 1973, somewhere near Braşov in Romania, in a family that comprises Germans, people from the Oltenia region, from Transylvania, and from Bucharest. Sometime before the First World War, the great-grandparents left for work in America; now their descendants have to emigrate to a Germany (the FRG) that became a Promised Land for those remaining in Communist Romania.

If the scene set is of an ethnic melting pot, the spotlight that underlines the foreground belongs to a young boy, whose monologue (interspersed with numerous dialogues of the adults) carves out destinies, physiognomies, beliefs and attitudes with a soul-binding comprehension, admirably unfolded on the page. It captures, filters, analyses and diagnoses in the name of the fascination exerted by the „language of understanding.”

Weaving in and out of the boy's story are his maternal and paternal grandparents, Germans, Oltenians or Wallachians, relatives living in Germany, parents divided between Bucharest and Iaşi, uncles, aunts, neighbours, people of various ages, professions and beliefs, The German Tower and The Hungarian Church, the Drăgăşans, the hypnosis caused by the sour cherry trees in the orchard, the Free Europe broadcasts, Willy Brandt and Nicolae Ceauşescu, the history being learned through the fate of the people, and the world through the carousel of the family's destinies.

Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății.

Claudiu M. Florian

Noi suntem aici. Însă nu suntem singuri – și *aici* nu e singurul loc pe lume. Cerul, e adevărat, se termină în pădurile dindărătul cetății și dincolo de vale, iar la stânga și la dreapta în zare, printre dealuri, însă tot ce acoperă aici nu e la rându-i decât o parte a lui de-mai-multe-feluri. Pentru că locuri pe lume există cel puțin încă două. Sau trei.

Unul e Jibert, unde trăiește Otata, străbunicul. De sus de pe cetate se văd doar crestele dealurilor dimprejur, iar până acolo se ajunge doar cu autobuzul. Acolo se vorbește tot timpul săsește, limbă pe care unii de pe aici n-o pricep deloc, și se umblă mai mult pe pământ și cu pământul, pentru că acolo străzile sunt pămâtoase toate, pavate doar în dreptul caselor cu piatră de râu, iar pe câmpuri încă înainte de intrarea în sat, oamenii se apleacă preocupați asupra pământului și îl ciupesc sau îl frământă cu uneltele lor cu coada lungă. Zilnic către pământul jiberțean pleacă huruind un autobuz plin cu oameni, depune acolo pe câțiva, pentru ca apoi, după câteva ceasuri, să treacă din nou, din sens opus, spre a aduna și aduce înapoi pe câte unii, din când în când pe aceiași de la dus, anume pe Bunica și pe mine. Ne poartă până acolo, la numeroasele rubedenii și neamuri ce locuiesc laolaltă în sat, și ne aduce înapoi, la Bunicul cel răzleț.

Pe urmă există Dacia. Satul se găsește între locul nostru și Jibert, și de sus de pe cetate se poate vedea, cu vârful ascuțit al turlei bisericii, alături de câteva acoperișuri țuguiate, ițite printre dealuri. Și acolo coboară de fiecare dată câte unii din autobuz, iar alții urcă. Dacia e abia mai mult decât o

stație vremelnică, un scurt popas pe drumul dintre cerul de la noi și pământul jiberțean, cu câțiva oameni veșnic stând și așteptând.

Și apoi mai există *Îngermania*. Un loc deopotrivă bineștiut și de neatins: undeva el este, însă totodată nu există. *Îngermania* nu se zărește de nicăieri, nici măcar de sus, de pe cetate. Cu toate astea despre el pare să știe lumea întreagă. De acolo își fac apariția din când în când figuri familiare. Prin venirea lor iscă discuții și vioiciune, pentru ca pe urmă să dispară grabnic. Dar să pleci acolo tu însuși, întocmai ca la Jibert, la Otata în vizită, nu se poate. Într-acolo nu duce nici un autobuz huruind, țara aceea există doar în poveștile care se spun despre ea, și ele, aceste prea rare, auzite, stinse și mereu renăscute vechi istorioare, o fac să fie o țară din povești. Puținii oameni care pleacă și ei de la o vreme de aici pleacă în țara închipuirii și pe urmă nu mai există nici ei. Unii își mai fac din vreme în vreme apariția, devin pentru câteva zile cei ce au fost și înșiră la rândul lor noi istorioare. Pe urmă se fac iarăși nevăzuți, undeva în capătul străzii principale, și pătrund în poveștile celor rămași. *Îngermania* pare a fi un loc destul de jalnic: pe toți care vin de acolo pentru scurtă vreme, cât și pe toți acei ce pleacă într-acolo pentru totdeauna îi podidește la plecare plânsul. Unii plâng și la sosire.

Undeva pare să se mai afle un loc care, privit astfel, de asemenea nu ar exista: București. Nu e un tărâm de basm, deși adesea răsare și acela în tot felul de istorioare. De acolo figuri captivante nu sosesc, nici la plecare într-acolo nu plâng nimeni. În zarea lui nici turn al bisericii nu se vede și nici stație de autobuz plină de oameni. Nici un Otata nu trăiește acolo – și nici sub cerul de aici nu are loc. București se poate spune cu ușurință ce nu este, însă nu-mi dau seama ce oare ar putea fi. Acolo există chipurile doi oameni care și-ar avea de asemenea rostul aici,

care ar avea ceva de a face cu locul acesta și cu noi toți, care însă arareori trec de se arată. Părinți ar fi ei, părinți adevărați. Un cuvânt neobișnuit, ca o taină într-o sticlă rătăcind pe mare.

Bunica și Bunicul e vorba că nici n-ar fi adevărata mea mamă și adevăratul meu tată. Cu răbdare încearcă fiecare de la o vreme să mă facă să pricep. Tatăl și mama ar fi, chipurile, cei doi oameni veseli care ne vizitează din când în când și care de fiecare dată se simt aici ca acasă.

Trăiesc în acel București care se află pesemne dincolo de Dacia și de Jibert și care de acolo sus, de pe cetate, nu e de văzut. Pentru că de fiecare dată când trec pe aici, se cheamă că amândoi ar veni de la București.

Sus, în camera-din-față, deasupra televizorului, între fereastra către cetate și bufetul verde, care, împins în limba germană, se cheamă *Kredenz* și căruia, readus în românește, i se mai spune și kredențu, atârână pe perete, într-o ramă aurie subțire, o pictură cu mult albastru. Deschis, albastrul, cu unele nuanțe mai închise. La un mal frământat de mare, între cer și pământ, șade pe o stâncă solitară o tânără fată într-o rochie turcoaz ca din spumă, cu o bonetă din dantelă de culoarea norilor, ținând pe umeri o mică umbrelă deschisă. Privirea ei blândă se pierde visător în zare, deasupra mării, undeva înspre cetate. Pentru că șade cu spatele la kredențu verde, iar umbrela o ferește uneori în timpul zilei de potopul razelor fierbinți ce năvălesc prin fereastră. Culorile mării, ale cerului, ale rochiei și ale umbrelei se întrepătrund. Doar chipul ei, dimpreună cu soarele – cel din tablou, și cu stâncile, sunt altfel, de culoarea deschisă a nisipului. Aprinse la rându-le, în unele după-amiezi, de soarele adevărat de afară.

Când am întrebat-o cine ar fi fata din tablou, Bunica a suspinat și a spus încet:

— E mama ta.

Nu am fost lămurit: e prin urmare ea însăși, Bunica? Ei îi spun eu „Mama”. De ce, atunci, nu a spus pur și simplu: „sunt eu”? Însă nu – nu este ea. Pe ea am văzut-o mai des, ce-i drept, privind visător și azuriu, însă niciodată spre mare. Aici nu există mare. Doar pădurile, câmpiile, pajiștile de pe coline, cetatea. Prin urmare va fi fiind altcineva. De undeva departe, unde există și mare. Cineva care-mi aparține. O mamă, zice-se, ar aparține și ea cuiva. Atunci de ce nu mie?

Bunica se pricepe cel mai bine să deslușească tonurile de mai multe feluri din Turnul Sașilor. Auzul meu nu ia seama la rostul lor, iar Bunicul pare chitit mai degrabă pe sunetul mai îndepărtat al bisericii celei mici. Către ieșirea din localitate înspre *hill*, cum numesc unii dealul din zare crestat de șosea, îndărătul caselor aliniate umăr la umăr veghează o a doua biserică, al cărei turn cu clopot stă lipit de clădire, cu mult mai mic, însă, decât Turnul Sașilor. I se spune „Biserica Românilor”, pesemne pentru că sunetul firav al clopotului îl face de astă dată pe Bunicul să tresară și să-și dea socoteală, de fiecare dată când ecoul său pătrunde pe străzi, în curți și în cugete. Îndeobște Bunicul urmează chemarea clopotului acelei mici biserici – duminica mereu se primenește cu apă rece, se îmbracă frumos și pleacă în oraș. Fie și numai, uneori, ca să afle pentru ce a tras clopotul pe neașteptate.

La crăcana drumului către strada din sus, unde începe promenada de sub castani, îndărătul unei grădini pe creasta dealului se ridică de asemenea un turn, cu tot cu biserică. I se spune „Biserica Ungurilor” pentru că în ea intră ungurii. Pe unul din cei doi stâlpi ai porții e zugrăvită un fel de ghindă

mare, cu trei coroane una peste alta, în vreme ce de pe vârfurile amândurora privesc în gol două chipuri stranii, din piatră. Nici Bunica, nici Bunicul nu tresar la bătaia ocazională a clopotelor ei, deși amândoi îi pot desluși glasul răsunător. Cu toate că Biserica Ungurilor se află cel mai aproape de casa noastră, fiecare merge, atunci când merge, doar la Biserica Românilor, mai îndepărtată, sau la biserica de lângă Turnul Sașilor.

Ecourile celor trei turnuri nu sunt nicidecum ușor de deosebit, răsunetul lor fiind pentru mine aproape același, doar depărtarea dangătului lăsându-mă să aflu care dintre biserici își leagăna clopotul. Sunt și ceasuri când răsună toate laolaltă, ceea ce, cu toată frământarea pe care o stârnesc în aer, le simplifică jocul, de la nelămuritul de-mai-multe-feluri la odihnitorul de-un-singur-fel.

Mai puțin asemănătoare și confundabile decât glasurile de-mai-multe-feluri de clopot sunt mai-multe-felurile limbilor. Cu Bunicul nu vorbesc în aceeași limbă în care vorbesc cu Bunica, și nici el însuși nu vorbește cu ea cum vorbește cu mine. El nu vorbește decât românește. Însă prin el aflăm cu toții limba înțelegerii. Bunica vorbește cu mine, când suntem doar noi doi, numai în germană – și prin urmare iarăși altfel decât cu vecinii sau cu neamurile săsești. Dacă germana ei cu mine se simte ca un covor zburător, aspru, însă cu margini drepte și fără franjuri, săseasca ei cu ceilalți se simte precum niște franjuri zburători, fără covor. Spre deosebire de a ei, limba Bunicului e limba doctorului Voicu, a omuleților din televizorul brun-roșcat și a celor din emisiunile căutate și chemate într-adins din adâncimile radioului celui negru. De asemenea e limba lui „O, brad frumos”, a Tovarășului, a lui nenea Suciș și a altor frați de pahar. Într-o anumită vecinătate se vorbește și ungurește.

În primul rând alături, la Paula-Tante, bunica lui Emerich, care se pricepe însă, când vine pe la noi, să treacă detașat în germană, cu Bunica, pe românește, cu Bunicul, sau la verzi și uscate cu mine. Faptul că ungurește sună cât se poate de neobișnuit, și săsește de asemenea, nu e motiv să nu te înțelegi de îndată, întrucât cei care vorbesc între ei în aceste limbi se pricep, la fel ca noi toți, când ne aflăm în tovărășie străină, să salte una-două pe tricicleta comună a limbii române, disponibilă oricând. Limbile ce se întâlnesc aici nu lasă pe nimeni să plece nelămurit. Fiece scurtă oprire pe stradă și fiecare întâmpinare într-o limbă comună adaugă noi cunoștințe despre felul în care se găsește celălalt. Nu toți vorbesc germana, nici săsește și nici ungurește, însă cu toții vorbesc româna. E limba pământului, care nu lasă pe nimeni să plece neștiutor. Chiar dacă tonurile sale se rostogolesc în chip diferit în beregate, pe vârfuri de limbă sau printre dinți.

În televizorul brun-roșcat e de asemenea ceva de sărbătorit în seara asta. Însă fără brad și fără lumânări. Cu cântece da, însă nu despre brad, cetină verde și Crăciun, ci despre țară și partid. Și fără prăjituri sau cadouri. În schimb, există sumedenie de imagini cu șantiere și fabrici și cu mulți, mulți oameni care fac înfrigurat cu mâna sau îl aplaudă pe Tovarășul, fie de pe trotuar, în picioare, în timp ce el trece încet prin dreptul lor într-o mașină lată și neagră, fără acoperiș, fie într-o sală mare cât o șură, unde stau cu toții așezați, mici de tot, pe șiruri întinse și dese de scaune și îl au drept în fața lor, în picioare, la mijlocul unei mese lungi și înguste, vorbind la două măciulii de microfoane, îndărătul unui dulăpior teșit precum acoperișul căsuței din vârful cetății. De multă vreme vreau să aflu cum reușește Tovarășul să fie atât de repede, iarnă-vară, în atâtea locuri. Pare să fie peste tot.

În televizor se sărbătorește sfârșitul unui an deosebit, în care se spune că patria noastră socialistă a făcut noi și importanți pași pe calea independenței, progresului și recunoașterii în lume. Pe urmă se spune ceva despre recenta călătorie a Tovarășului și a Tovarășei – pe care o cheamă la fel ca pe el, doar că Elena, o tanti la fel de mică, cu părul umflat – în niște state care ar fi unite și care s-ar găsi în America. Despre înțelegere și prietenie și despre o declarație comună care ar fi fost semnată cu acest prilej. Într-adevăr, sunt arătați doi nenea, unul din ei Tovarășul, șezând la o masă și desenând ceva, având în spate, în picioare, pe alți câțiva așteptându-i să termine. Apoi se povestește despre convorbiri și noi contacte cu organizații importante, despre acorduri, întreprinderi române și corporații americane – prilej pentru povestitorul nevăzut să vorbească iar și iar despre interesele patriei și despre mărețele înfăptuiri și semne ale timpului nostru.

Nu e prima oară când în televizorul brun-roșcat se vorbește în românește fără să înțeleg ce se spune, ca și cum ar fi o limbă cu totul străină. În cuvinte la fel de nedesluite se povestește despre Fond Monetar și despre Helsinki, despre o recentă vizită la Moscova, despre colaborare între țările socialiste și despre hotărârea recent adoptată de a se construi la Cernavodă, pe lângă Dunăre, o centrală nucleară, o mare cetate a energiei. Însă tot ce se vede în televizor, castelele ciudate, poveștile neobișnuite, muzica sărbătorească, totul arată altfel și sună altfel decât aici la noi. Bunica și Bunicul privesc doar fugar înspre el și-l dau mai încet și tot mai încet.

Hotărât lucru, sărbătoarea omuleților din cutia televizorului brun-roșcat nu seamănă de fel cu sărbătoarea de acasă de la noi.

The Ages of the Game – Citadel Street

Claudiu M. Florian

Translated from the Romanian by Mihnea Gafita

We are here. But we are not alone – and *here* is not the only place in the world. Indeed, the sky ends up in the woods behind the citadel, beyond the valley and far away, among the hills to the left and the right, but everything it covers here is itself just a part of several ways-to-be. Because there are at least another two places in the world. Or maybe three.

One is *Jibert*, where great-grandfather Otata lives. From the top of the citadel, only the peaks of the surrounding hills can be seen, and one gets there only by bus. People there speak Saxon all the time, a language that some cannot understand here, and they walk mostly on the earth and take the earth along, because the streets are all earthen there, paved with cobblestones only in front of the houses, while in the fields preceding the village outskirts they lean broodily over the earth and either pinch it, or knead it with their long-handled tools. A bus full of people rattles off towards the earth in Jibert every day, eases out a couple of them when it gets there, and then, after several hours, it drives back from the opposite direction to gather up and bring back some others, who every now and then are the same ones from the outgoing trip, namely Grandma and me. The bus takes us there, to the many relatives and kinsfolk living together in that village, then brings us back to Grandpa.

Then there is *Dacia*. The village lies between our own place and Jibert, and it can be seen from the top of the citadel, with the nib of the church belfry looking down over a handful of

high-pitched rooftops showing from among the hills. There, too, some people always get off the bus, while others get on. Dacia is hardly more than a sojourn, a brief stopover on the road between the sky up here and the earth down in Jibert, with a few people always standing and waiting.

And then there is *Ingermany*, a place both well-known and untouchable: it lies somewhere, yet it doesn't exist. Ingermany cannot be caught a glimpse of from anywhere, not even from the top of the citadel. However, the whole world seems to know about it. Once in a while, familiar faces show up from there. By simply coming, they give rise to gossip and liveliness, but afterwards they hastily vanish. And yet, if you chose to go there yourself, like going to Jibert to pay Otata a visit, you couldn't. No rattling bus gets you there, to that country existing only in the stories told about it, and those all-too-seldom heard, forgotten, but always reborn old stories that make it seem like a fairy tale country. The few people who leave here every once in a while, they too go to that dreamland, and then there's no more of them either. Some show up again from time to time, they become the same ones they used to be, for a couple of days, and start reeling off their own small stories. Then they get out of sight again, somewhere towards the end of the main street, and become the subject matter of stories told by the ones who stay behind. Ingermany seems to be a rather dismal place: all who come therefrom for a short while, as well as all who leave thereto for good burst into tears upon leaving. Some also weep upon arrival.

There seems to be another place somewhere, which also looks like it doesn't exist at all, when looked upon in this same manner: Bucharest. It's no fairy tale realm, although it often comes up in all sorts of small stories as well. No intriguing figures come therefrom, and no one weeps upon departing

thereto. No church belfry takes shape and no crowded bus stop is in sight towards its horizon. No Otata lives there – and that particular place has nothing to do under this here sky. One can easily say what Bucharest is not, but I, for one, cannot figure out what exactly it might be. There are, indeed, two faces living there, of people whose place might be here as well, who might have something in common with this here place and with us all, but who seldom make the scene. Allegedly, they are parents, genuine parents. An odd word, like a mystery bottled up and roaming the sea.

Grandma and Grandpa, they say, might not in fact be my real mother and my real father. Each has been trying patiently, for some time now, to make me understand. Father and mother, so it seems, were the two merry people who drop by from time to time and feel at home here every time they do.

They live in that Bucharest, lying, so I hear, beyond Dacia and Jibert, and impossible to see from even the top of the citadel. Because every time they show up here, it's like they both came from Bucharest.

In the front room upstairs, above the TV, between the window facing the citadel and the green cupboard called either *Kredenz*, when exiled to the German language, or else *kredențu*, when brought back to Romanian, there is a picture with a lot of blue in it, hanging from the wall in a slim golden frame. The blue is pale, with some deeper shades. On a battered seashore, between sky and earth, a young woman sits on a solitary piece of rock, wearing a turquoise-blue dress which looks like it is made of foam, with a cloud-coloured lace bonnet, and holding a small open umbrella on her shoulder. Her mild eyes wander dreamily across the sea, towards the horizon and the citadel. Because she turns her back to the

green *kredențu*, the umbrella sometimes shelters her, during daytime, from the hot sunshine flooding in. The colours of the sea, the sky, the dress, and the umbrella get intertwined. Only her complexion, the sun (the one in the picture), and the rocks are different, they are the light colour of sand. Those too get lit up by the real sun outside on certain afternoons.

When I asked Grandma who the girl in the picture might be, she heaved a deep sigh and said slowly:

“She’s your mother.”

I was puzzled: did she mean it was herself in that picture, Grandma, that is? I call *her* “Mother.” Why, then, did she not say, simply: “It’s me”? And yet, it is definitely not Grandma. I have seen her often looking dreamily, but never towards the sea. We have no sea here. Only the woods, the fields, the pastures on the hills, the citadel. It follows that the girl in the picture must be someone else. From somewhere far away, where there is also a sea. Someone belonging to me. A mother is likely, so they say, to belong to someone. Why not to me, then?

Grandma knows best how to distinguish between the different tones coming down from the Saxons’ Steeple. My own hearing takes no notice of their sequences, while Grandpa seems to be drawn to the more distant sound coming from the smaller church. On the outskirts of the village, towards the *mount* – as some call the rise on the horizon that is furrowed by the road, behind the houses lined up shoulder to shoulder – a second church keeps watch, whose belfry appears glued to the building, but is much smaller than the Saxons’ Steeple. It is called ‘the Romanians’ Church,’ and its bells’ frail sound makes Grandpa startled and take notice every time they echo

down the streets, across the people's yards and through their minds. Grandpa generally answers the call of that smaller church bell – on Sundays, he always freshens up with cold water, dresses nicely, and goes out. Even if it were only, at times, to find out why the bell has tolled unexpectedly.

At the road junction leading to the upper-side street, where the promenade from under the chestnut trees begin, a similar belfry stands, church and all, behind a garden perched up on the hill crest. It is called 'the Hungarians' Church,' because only Hungarians go to it. One of the two gate pillars has a kind of big acorn painted on it, with three crowns on top of each other, while two strange stone figures stare blankly from the tops of both. Neither Grandma nor Grandpa get startled by its bells' occasional toll, even though both can discern that echoing sound. The Hungarians' Church may be the closest to our home, yet the family goes, when they go, only to the Romanians' Church, which is farther away, or to the church by the Saxons' Steeple.

The echoes of the three belfries are not in the least easy to tell apart, their sounds being almost one-and-the-same to me; it is only the distance whence the toll is being heard that lets me know which of the three churches is pealing its bells. There are times too when all of them sound together, which, despite the turmoil they stir up in the air, also simplifies their play, from the puzzling several-ways-to-be to the soothing one-way-only.

Less confusing than the several-ways-to-be of the bells' tolls are the several-ways-to-be of the tongues. I don't talk to Grandpa in the same language I talk to Grandma, and he doesn't talk to her as he talks to me. Grandpa only speaks Romanian. But we all come to learn the language of understanding through him. Grandma talks to me, when it is just

the two of us, in German alone – in a different way again than to our neighbours or Saxon relatives. While Grandma's German spoken to me feels like a flying carpet, rough, yet having straight edges and no tassels, her Saxon spoken to the rest feels like flying tassels with no carpet. Unlike hers, Grandpa's language is also Doctor Voicu's, and that of the manikins inside the brown-reddish TV, and of those voices in the shows especially sought for in the depths of the black radio and snatched out of there. It is also the language of *O Tannenbaum* in the Comrade's version 'Oh, Handsome Fir-Tree', of Uncle Suciu and other drinking buddies. There is also a certain vicinity where they speak Hungarian.

Next door, Emerich's grandmother is particularly skilled whenever she drops by, promptly turning to German with Grandma, to Romanian with Grandpa, and to fiddling-faddling with me. The fact that Hungarian sounds as awkward as can be – the same goes for Saxon – is no reason why people shouldn't get on together immediately, since everyone speaking all those tongues is equally apt, as are we all whenever we find ourselves in foreign company, to jump without respite up the common tricycle of Romanian, always at hand. The languages that come together here let no one go away unenlightened. Any brief encounter in the street and any welcoming in a shared language brings up fresh knowledge as to the other person's how-and-why. Not everybody speaks German, nor Saxon, nor Hungarian, yet they all speak Romanian. It is the tongue of the earth that lets nobody go away unknowing, irrespective of the various ways its tones roll up in the throats, on the tongues' tips or between teeth.

Inside the brown-reddish TV, there is something to celebrate as well, tonight. No fir-tree and candles, however. There are songs, yes, but not about the fir-tree, its evergreen

foliage, and Christmas; about country and party instead. And without cookies or presents. There are, in exchange, a great many images of building sites and factories, and many, many people waving their hands feverishly or clapping them for the Comrade, either standing on the pavement – while he slowly passes in front of them in a broad, black, convertible car – or else in a meeting hall as huge as a barn, where they all sit tight and look tiny, in rows after long dense rows of seats, while he stands in front of them, at the middle of a long narrow table and speaks into a pair of microphones, partially covered by a slanting sort of a cabinet, like the roof of the small lodge on top of the citadel. For a long time I have wondered how the Comrade manages to get so quickly to so many places, be it winter or summer. He seems to be everywhere.

What is being celebrated inside the TV is the end of a special year, during which, they say, our socialist homeland has taken fresh and major steps towards its independence, progress, and worldwide recognition. Then something is being said about the recent voyage of the Comrade and his Comrade-wife – whose name is just like his own, only the other name is Elena, and she's an auntie just as small, with a swollen hairstyle – to some states said to be united and to be found in America. About understanding and friendship and about some mutual declaration they are said to have signed on that occasion. Two uncles are shown, indeed, one being the Comrade, sitting at a table and drawing something, while a few others stand behind them and watch, waiting for them to finish. Then the story turns to talks and new contacts with important organisations, to deals, to Romanian enterprises and American corporations – an opportunity for the unseen teller to speak time and again about the homeland's interests and about the great achievements and signs of our times.

It is not for the first time that Romanian is being spoken inside the brown-reddish TV, and I still cannot grasp what is being said, as if it were an entirely foreign tongue. Equally incomprehensible words refer to the Monetary Fund and Helsinki, about a recent visit to Moscow, about cooperation between the socialist countries, and about a recently taken decision of having a nuclear plant – that is a great stronghold of energy – built in Cernavodă, somewhere along the Danube. And yet, everything shown inside the TV, the weird castles, the unusual stories, the festive music – they all look different and sound different than down here, where we live. Grandma and Grandpa only furtively glance towards it and turn it down, lower and lower.

Make no mistake, the celebration of the manikins inside the brown-reddish box of a TV has nothing to do with our celebration here, at home.



© Maj Pavček

Jasmin B. Frelih

Na/pol (2013)

In/Half

Publishing House **Cankarjeva Založba**

Biography

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

Synopsis

In/Half is a globalist novel set in a post-globalist future. The book interweaves three distinct narrative threads: Evan, an addict theatre director in Tokyo in the future, is staging a play and lamenting the loss of the love of his life. Kras, a family patriarch and ex-war-minister, is celebrating his 50th birthday in the Slovenian part of what could nowadays be called Fortress Europe. Zoja, an anarchist poet, is getting ready to read at the Brooklyn festival Poetrylytics, attended by a motley crew of intellectuals, artists and madmen. *In/Half* uses every trick in the postmodernist playbook, while also taking the tricks seriously. Not content to push the limits of text's possibilities, the novel charges its investigations into the fate of the individual, of the family, and of society, with a solemn ontology and sends its characters hurtling through a disconnected world filled with the debris of past histories for them to find a sense of belonging. With its sharp focus on the contradictions of modernity, and with the reading experience likened to an extended surfing session on a world wide web crafted by an ingenious demiurge, *In/Half* is a powerful statement on the nature of the novel by a voice from the new generation of writers.

Utrinek je utonil v oranžno nebo. Zvezde trkajo po oblaku smoga in nihče jim ne pride odpret. Pod pokrovom so ljudje prikrajšani za svetlobo iz časa dinozavrov. Nekdo zahupa, nekje. Krik osamljene mehanične zveri. Iz streh se usuva prah. Veter s svojo metlo iz soli. Morje se leno obrača na bok, v daljavi. Plaže je slekla oseka, a jih ni sram. Okna stolpnic kradejo svetlobo zase.

»Grozno tremo imam,« pravi kitarist in stiska vrat kitare, kot bi davil raco.

»Zakaj?« ga vpraša Zoja.

»Še nikoli nisem videl toliko ljudi na kupu.«

Pri izhodu na oder stoji, eno oko uperi v občinstvo in ga takoj odvrne z drgetom vsega telesa. Zoja stori korak proti njemu, kar občuti kot rahlo grožnjo. Rad bi se osredotočil na glasbo, na njeno samostojnost, njeno neodvisnost od inštrumenta, na njen učinek, in odmisli njen vzrok, njen človeški izvor, zato ga Zojino telo, ki v zornem kotu postaja vedno večje, spravlja v nemir.

»Ne boj se,« mu reče Zoja. V odgovor skrivi usta navzdol in rezko pihne med ustnicami.

»Ne boj se,« mu ponovi. »Včasih so bile množice neskončne. Teh nekaj sto ljudi je kaplja v morje prepletu teles, ki se je nekoč zgrinjal na veliko bolj grozne stvari. Nihče od njih ni prišel, da bi sodil. Prišli so, ker so osamljeni. Ker jih je strah, da jih nihče ne razume. Ker jim je težko.«

»To mi prav nič ne pomaga,« ji tiho reče, bled v obraz, »moja glasba je samo zvok. Nikomur ne more storiti ničesar.«

»Tu ni nobene zahteve. Prišli so, da bi se prepričali, če kdo sploh še verjame.«

»Ne vem, če verjamem.«

»Ni tvoja naloga, da bi verjel zanje.«

»Ampak, če ste rekli...«

»Ti moraš samo čarati.«

»Samo čarati!«

»Ko se boš postavil na oder in dal prste na strune, pozabi, kje si. Pozabi, da je tam toliko lesa in toliko kamna in toliko stekla in toliko najlona in jekla in toliko src in dvakrat toliko zenic, pozabi, da čas teče utrip za utripom, pozabi, da je res vse, kar je res. Stopi v prazno luknjo, ki neuzrta lebdi v prostoru nekje izven naše galaksije. Ne poj ljudem. Poj tistemu praznemu kraju. Tam ni ničesar, samo tvoj zvok. Vse, kar je, je tvoj zvok. Célo tvoje življenje je tvoj zvok. Nisi se rodil, in ne boš umrl, dokler si na tistem kraju, in dokler je tisti kraj tvoj zvok. Nimaš staršev, nimaš otrok, nobenega človeka ne poznaš. Trema? Trema je nekaj, kar te doleti na avtobusu, ko pride sprevodnik po karto. Ko te neznanec prosi za uslugo. Ko bi rad nekemu, ki ga nimaš rad, rekel, rad te imam. Tremo dobiš, ko postaneš lačen. Ti si pa prišel ustvarjat. Prišel si razblinjat praznino. Prišel si čarat. Pusti tremo njim.«

»Njim?«

»Ljudem, ki so po nekaj prišli.«

»Po kaj pa so prišli?«

»Po nekaj, kar jim nihče ne more dati.«

»...«

»Pojdi ven, izgubi se, zapoj.«

Na njegovem obrazu se zvrtil kalejdoskop občutij, mišice poskačejo na vse strani in nato nenadoma otrpnejo v vdanost usodi. Saj poznate ta obraz. V težkih jutrih vam lebdi v ogledalu. Zoja ga nežno porine in njegovi koraki, ven, na oder, ven, v prostor, so skorajda mirni.

/

»Zvonec ni zvonil že leta,« je rekel Lefkas, ko sta se vzpenjala po stopnicah. »Najprej sploh nisem vedel, kaj se dogaja. Ste dolgo čakali?« Evan je dihal suh zrak in čez ograjo gledal v globino. Stopnišče se ni pričelo v pritličju, šlo je globlje. Okrog njega so brenčale muhe. Lefkas je bil oblečen v umazano rožnat kopalni plašč, lase je imel spuščene, na nogah je imel copate. Šop ključev v žepu mu je žvenketal z vsakim korakom. »Niti ne,« je odvrnil Evan, »malo je trajalo, preden sem vas našel.«

»In kaj vas je obsedlo, da ste prišli po zraku?« je vprašal Lefkas.

»Po zraku?«

»Od zunaj.«

»Je kakšna druga pot?«

Lefkas se je namuznil. »Morda.«

Evan humorja ni cenil.

»Prišel sem po mAk.«

Lefkas je za hip zastal, pa zopet nastavil korak s tihim »aha.«

»Kaj pa je ta kraj?« je vprašal Evan.

»Moj dom.«

»Dom?«

»Vsak ga ima.«

Obmolknila sta. Evan je zaznal tih hrum, ki je prihajal iz globin in napajal vse stvari z nežno vibracijo. Ko je prijel ograjo, je šla v kosti.

»Kaj pa je to?«

»Nihče ne ve,« je odvrnil Lefkas.

»Kako, nihče ne ve?«

»Če bi imeli čas, bi vam pokazal.«

»Kaj? Saj mi lahko poveste.«

Lefkas je za trenutek postal, kot bi preudarjal nadvse težke reči, preden je šel dalje.

»Tam spodaj, globoko spodaj, so nekakšna vrata brez kljuka in tečajev.«

»Kako so lahko potem to vrata?«

»No, saj sem vedel, težko je povedati.«

Evan se je opravičil in ga prosil, naj nadaljuje.

»Vrat se ne da odpreti, nikakor. Poskušali so že, ljudje. Povsem nemogoče je. Sanja se mi ne, kako in od kdaj so vrata tam. Za njimi mora biti kdove kakšna reč, da tako nadležno razbija. Nekakšen stroj ali reaktor, kaj jaz vem. Če nanje prisloniš roko, ti premeče vsako ped telesa. Pa ne bi rekel, da je ravno slab občutek, ampak tako, močan, veste, kot bi ga smel človek doživeti le enkrat v življenju, drugič naj se pa pazi. Ne vem, če mi sledite.«

»Sledim.«

Evan mu je sledil.

»No, saj to je več ali manj to. Jaz sem se že navadil. Ne bom rekel, da me ne zanima, kako je z vsem tem, ampak vsega pa tudi ne moremo vedeti, ne bi rekli?«

Evan si je z glasnim vzdihom s čela pregnal muho. Lefkas ga je pogledal in zamrmral nekaj nerazločnega, kot, mrčes, ja. Pred vrati v stanovanje se je obrnil k Evanu.

»Kje pa imate sponzorja?«

»Crknil mi je.«

»Nadomestni?«

Evan je prikimal.

»Pa veste, kaj se zgodi, če ste predolgo brez?« ga je vprašal Lefkas.

Evan se je začudil.

»Kako, kaj se zgodi? Kaj pa naj bi se zgodilo?«

Lefkas je zmajal z glavo, se s pomilovanjem nasmehnil in pritisnil na kljuko. Vstopila sta, a Evan ni odnehal.

»Čakajte no, kaj ste mislili s tem, če sem predolgo brez? Zjutraj mi je crknila...«

Zdaj se je začudil Lefkas, »ženska?«

»Ženska, ja, Koito nekaj, pred nekaj urami, ne vem, koliko je sploh ura? Kaj pa se zgodi, če si brez?«

Stanovanje je dajalo vtis nenaseljenosti, z izjemo kotička na skrajnem koncu sobe, kjer je nad kupom knjig gorela svetilka. Naslonjaču ob mizi je iz nepreštevnihih lukenj ven štrlela oranžna pena. Preproga, ki je tja vodila čez hodnik, je bila oguljena do sivin. S fotografij v cenениh okvirjih, ki so visele s sten, so v Evana boljčale oči neznancev. Lefkasu ni bil podoben nihče.

»Zaprite vrata, hitro, prosim, zaradi muh.«

Evan jih je zaprl.

»Povejte mi, kaj se zgodi.«

»Nič,« je odvrnil Lefkas, da bi ga utišal, »pozabite, da sem karkoli omenil. Ne tiče se vas.«

»Kako se me ne tiče? Če ste ravnokar rekli...«

Lefkas ga je prekinil z dvignjeno dlanjo.

»Verjemite mi. Prišli ste z razlogom, zato vam ne mislim govoriti o času. Tukaj sva. To je vse.«

Evan se je zdrznil.

»Torej, kaj, kaj torej počnete tukaj?«

»Vero oznanjam,« je dejal Lefkas.

»Tako temu pravite?«

Lefkas se je spustil v naslonjač in razširil roke.

»Vam se zdi hecno morda. Vi imate mAk za popestritev, za šalo, za šus. Da vam malo špila po glavi, kajne? Saj vem, nič se ne branite,« je dejal, ko se je Evan hitel zagovarjati, »da ne boste mislili, da obsojam ali kaj takega. Popolnoma legitimno je, to. Ampak, veste koliko ljudi je tam zunaj mrtvih? Pomislite kdaj? Množice zavesti, ki srkajo dneve skozi preluknjane slamice, ali pa dnevi srkajo njih. Samotarji. Ničvredneži. Norci. Na milijone... Za družbo so jim počena zrcala. Vsak trenutek se spotikajo po plitvinah, vsak trenutek hočejo ven, hočejo noter, hočejo...«

Evana je stisnilo v pljučih. Sključil se je in zajel zrak.

»Ste v redu?« ga je vprašal Lefkas.

Zasolzile so se mu oči. Prikimal je. Pogoltnil cmok.

»Kaj jaz vem, kaj hočejo,« je nadaljeval Lefkas, »da se jih svet usmili, ali da se oni usmilijo sveta. Vse življenje jih že gledam. Dobro jih poznam. In mAk je preprosta spojina. Malce elektrike namaže na opno možganov, par hormonov sprosti, nevrotrpin, oksitocin, vazopresin in podobno, nič posebnega, saj pravim. Vse to se sprošča v možganih že, ko je človek zaljubljen. Ampak nekateri ljudje niso bili zaljubljeni nikoli. Dobro delo opravljam, se mi zdi, če bi moral iskreno reči. Obujam mrtvece, če pretiravam. Ste v redu?«

Evanu se je osušilo grlo. Ves ta čas se je boril z draženjem, da se ne bi spustil v neskončen kašelj.

»Kozarec vode bi,« je hripnil.

Lefkas je planil pokonci, »moj bonton! Ne zamerite mi preveč,« je govoril na poti v kuhinjo, »ampak se pozna, da nimam pogosto družbe.« Izginil je med vrati. Evan se je pričel potiti. Plinsko masko je vrget na mizo in s pogledom ošinil hrbte knjig. Ni jih poznal.

»A boste čaj?« se je zaslišalo med ropotanjem posode. »Ne, vodo, prosim, samo vodo,« je odvrnil Evan. Pogladi se je po želodcu. Ničesar še ni jedel. »Imate mogoče kaj za pod zob?« je vprašal in se nakremžil ob besedi.

»Za pod zob?«

»Če imate kaj hrane, oprostite, tako se reče, ničesar še nisem pojedel danes.«

Zvoki kuhinje. Hladilnik se je odprl z vzdihom. Tiktak, tiktak. Evan si je s prsti krožil po sencih. Sproščal se je v pričakovanju. Spet bo čutil.

Lefkas se je primajal s kozarcem v eni roki in krožnikom v drugi.

»Se opravičujem, od včeraj so, upam, da so še dobre. Ja, tudi vso marmelado sem porabil, na žalost, drugega pa nimam za notri.«

Evan je skomignil z rameni. Kozarec je spil na dušek. Eno si je zvil. Ko je zagrizel vanjo, je padel v vodnjak.

/

Kras si je že zavezal kravato, ko se je pogledal v ogledalu in se s posmehom obregnil ob lastno ničevost, prst vtaknil v vozel in ga potegnil narazen. Kravato sname in jo vrže na tla. V kovčku nima veliko. Dodaten par čevljev, nekaj srajc, perilo, nogavice, hlače. Če bo pot vodila na sever, ali daleč na jug, bo plašč kupil na letališču. Ničesar zares ne potrebuje. In kravate zagotovo ne.

Posloviti se ne namerava. Tako ali tako ne bo dolgo zdoma, in na vprašanja noče odgovarjati. Njihova prisotnost je še živa v njegovi glavi, zbrani, kot so bili na praznovanju prejšnji dan, družinska slika živih barv. Zdaj so spet raztepeni v svoje okvire, zato jih ne bo obiskoval, da bi se prepričal, preden gre... Zakaj se mu zdi, da je na begu? Nikoli ni bežal. Tudi takrat ne, ko bi morda moral. Ko se je svet lomil in so se sklepale nevarne prisege in je sovraštvo terjalo davek v mesu. Nikjer ni bilo zapisano, da bo njemu uspelo, da bo on preživel, in če bi se takrat znašel na napačni strani, bi ostal za zmeraj tiho. Tudi zdaj ne beži. Samo po sina gre, kjerkoli že je. Samo po otroka. Čeprav ni več otrok. Toliko je star, kot je bil on, tedaj, ko je imel še izbiro.

Zvok zadrge na kovčku. Sprelet dvoma na obrazu. Ko je imel še izbiro. Izbral je zase. Izbral pa je tudi za vse ostale. Kako naj pusti sinu prosto pot, če pa je rojen iz izbire, ki je Krasu pot načrtala in zaprla? Očetje so sebični. Kras to dobro ve.

Nekaterih reči se mora človek držati. To niso samo besede. To niso samo spomini. In svoboda ne pomeni nič, če jo imaš samo zato, da bi se izognil tistemu, kar je bilo izbrano – zate.

Na dvorišču zahupa taksist. Kras se spusti po stopnicah, ven, kjer s pogledom ošvrkne očeta, visoko tam zgoraj, in zarenči nad župnikom, ki prihiti, da bi se mu izpovedal. Ne zanima ga, kaj se tu dogaja. Z očetom sta opravila dolgo nazaj. Vse ostalo je bila le dolgočasna variacija na temo. Kras je podedoval puščavo. Da bi kaj raslo, je moral zalivati s krvjo. Resnica zgodovine pritiska na čut za pravičnost. Pri močnih ga upogne. Pri šibkih ga zlomi. Nihče ni zmožen videti nedolžnosti, kar je dobro, saj je ni nikjer.

Usede se na zadnje sedeže in voznika ne pogleda. Ko se vozita, strmi skozi okno. Redke kaplje dežja rahljajo pokrov prahu. Oblaki se šopirijo s svojim špehom. Sonca ni. Večer je še daleč. Vse je ujeto sem. Koleno mu nemirno skače. Usnje pete in guma tal zacvilita ob vsakem stiku. Vse je ujeto sem. Kras vekam ne pusti, da bi mu prekinile pogled, zato se mu oči zasolžijo. Pokrajina se ukrivlja ob robovih solznih kapelj.

»Je tu kaj...« zamrmra in voznik ga sicer sliši, vendar ima dovolj zdravega razuma, da ostane tiho. »Je tu kaj, kar je več od mene?« vpraša Volk. Polje se upogne. Gozd na robu se zlije z nebom. »Vse in še, vsaj nekaj, vsaj malo, čez?« Barvi peska in bilk se zmešata v umazano zeleno. »Ali je vedno neka luknja,« stisne pest in jo s členki trdo, počasi prisloni ob steklo, »ki srka in srka in ne pusti, da bi se svet napolnil? In ni važno, koliko zmečeš vanjo, še vedno hoče več, in srka, in vsem stvarjem jemlje njihovo polnost... !« S pestjo udari ob steklo. Voznik se premakne na sedežu, vendar ostane tiho. »S čim naj jo zapolnim?«

»Prosim, gospod?«

»Rekel sem, s čim naj zapolnim luknjo?«

»Ne bi vedel, gospod.«

Kras prikima, prekriža noge, odvrne pogled od obzorja in zapre oči.

»Gospod Volk. Preden lahko zapeljem na letališče, moram čez kontrolno točko. Vam kar takoj povem, da se boste morali sezuti.«

Kras se skloni k vezalkam.

»Bova kmalu?«

»Minuto, gospod Volk.«

Samo še minuto.

In/Half

Jasmin B. Frelih

Translated from the Slovenian by Jason Blake

The shooting star sunk into the orange sky. The stars are knocking on clouds of smog and nobody comes to open up for them. Under this cover the people are deprived of light from the time of the dinosaurs. Somebody honks, somewhere. The scream of lonely, mechanical beasts. Dust pours down from the rooftops. The wind with its broom of salt. Off in the distance, the sea lazily turns on its side. The low tide has stripped the beaches, but they are not ashamed. The windows of the skyscrapers steal the light for themselves.

“I’m totally nervous,” the guitarist says and squeezes the neck of his guitar, like he’s strangling a duck.

“Why?” asks Zoja.

“I’ve never seen such a crowd of people.”

He stands by the stage exit, one eye fixed on the audience, and then he immediately looks away, his whole body shivering. Zoja takes a step towards him and to him this feels like a tacit threat. He’d like to concentrate on the music, on its autonomy, its independence from the instrument, on its effect, and not think of its causes, its human origin, which is why Zoja’s body, which from his perspective is getting bigger and bigger, unsettles him.

“Don’t be afraid,” says Zoja. In response he purses his lips, looks down and exhales sharply.

“Don’t be afraid,” she repeats. “There used to be no end to the crowds. These few hundred people are a drop in the ocean compared to the intertwined bodies that used to flock to much more awful things. Nobody has come to judge. They’ve come because they’re lonely. Because they’re afraid nobody understands them. Because they’re in a sad state.”

“That doesn’t really help me much,” he says quietly, pale in the face. “My music is just sound. It can’t do anything for anyone.”

“There are no demands here. They came to convince themselves whether anybody actually still believes.”

“I don’t know whether I believe.”

“It’s not your job to believe for them.”

“But if you said...”

“You just have to work your magic.”

“Work magic?”

“When you’re up there on stage and you’re running your fingers over the strings, just forget where you are. Forget about all that wood and all those stones and all that glass and all that nylon and steel and all those hearts and all those eyeballs, forget that time is passing, beat after beat, forget that everything that’s true is true. Step into the void that’s floating unseen in space somewhere beyond our galaxy. Don’t sing to the people. Sing to that empty space. There’s nothing there, just your sound. The only thing that exists is your sound. Your whole life is your sound. You weren’t born and you won’t die, as long as you’re in this place, and as long as this place is your sound. You have no parents, you have no children, nobody knows you. Nervousness? Nervousness is something you get on a train when the conductor comes to see if you’ve got a

ticket. When a stranger asks you for a favour. When you'd like to say *I love you* to someone you don't love. Nervousness is when you're hungry. But you came to create. You came to light up the emptiness. You came to work magic. Leave the nervousness to them."

"To them?"

"To those people who came for something."

"What have they come for?"

"For something that nobody can give them."

"..."

"Get out there, lose yourself, sing."

A kaleidoscope of emotions washes over his face, his muscles twitch every which way and then suddenly stiffen and give themselves up to fate. But you know that face. It's the one that floats in the mirror on those difficult mornings. Zoja gently nudged him forth and he stepped out, onto the stage, out, into the space, almost calmly.

/

"The buzzer hasn't rung for years," said Lefkas, as they were climbing the stairs. "At first I had no idea what was going on. Were you waiting for long?"

Evan breathed in the dry air and looked over the railing to the depths below. The staircase didn't start on the ground floor, it went even deeper down. Flies were buzzing around him. Lefkas was dressed in a dirty pink bathrobe, his hair was dishevelled, and he was wearing slippers. Each step he took rattled the keys in his pocket.

"Not at all," replied Evan. "It didn't take long for me to find you."

“And what got over you? What made you come for air?” asked Lefkas.

“For air?”

“From outside.”

“Is there some other way?”

Lefkas smirked. “Perhaps.”

Evan was not one for humour.

“I came for mAk.”

Lefkas stopped for a moment, but then moved on again with a quiet “aha.”

“What is this place?” asked Evan.

“It’s my home.”

“Home?”

“Everyone has one.”

They fell silent. Evan noticed a low roaring coming from the depths below and making everything vibrate. When he grabbed the railing, the vibration entered his bones.

“What is that?”

“No one knows,” replied Lefkas.

“How’s that, no one knows?”

“If you had time, I’d show you.”

“What? Why don’t you just tell me?”

Before going on, Lefkas stopped for a second, as if he were pondering very weighty matters.

“Down there, way down there, is a door of sorts without a handle and without hinges.”

“Then how can it be a door?”

“Well, I knew it would be tough to explain.”

Evan apologised and asked him to continue.

“The door won’t open, ever. People have tried and tried. It’s impossible to open it. I can’t even imagine how long there’s been a door there. Behind it there must be some who-knows-what making that annoying racket. Some sort of machine or reactor, what do I know. If you put your hand on the door, your whole body shakes. But I wouldn’t exactly say it’s a bad feeling, it’s just so, strong, you know, something you’re allowed to experience just once in your life, the second time one should beware. I don’t know if you’re following.”

“I’m following.”

Evan was following him.

“That’s more or less it, actually. I’m used to it by now. I’m not going to say I’m not interested in what’s up with it, but we can’t know everything, right?”

Evan exhaled loudly to shoo a fly away from his forehead. Lefkas looked at him and mumbled something indecipherable, something like insect, yes. When they were in front of the apartment door, he turned to Evan.

“Where’s your sponsor?”

“He died on me.”

“A replacement?”

Evan nodded.

“Do you know what happens when you go without for too long?” asked Lefkas.

Evan looked up in surprise.

“What do you mean, what happens? What is it that’s supposed to happen?”

Lefkas shook his head, gave a commiserative smile and turned the handle. They entered, but Evan didn’t stop.

“Wait, okay? What did you mean by that, by if I go too long without it? This morning it died out on me...”

Now it was Lefkas’ turn to be amazed, “A woman?”

“A woman, yes. Koito something, a few hours ago, I don’t know. What time is it anyway? What happens if you go without?”

The apartment looked uninhabited, except for a corner at the far end of a room where a lamp was shining above a stack of books. Orange foam was poking out of the innumerable holes in an armchair by a table. A carpet, grey and threadbare, led the way through the hall. From the photos hanging in cheap frames on the walls, the eyes of strangers stared out at Evan. None of them looked like Lefkas.

“Shut the door. Quickly, please. The flies.”

Evan shut the door.

“Tell me what’s going on.”

“Nothing,” replied Lefkas, to quieten him down. “Forget I even mentioned it. It doesn’t concern you.”

“How doesn’t it concern me? Didn’t you just say...”

Lefkas interrupted him with a raised hand.

“Believe me. You came here for a reason, so I’m not going to talk about time. We’re here. That’s everything.”

Evan blenched.

“Then what, what are you doing here?”

“I’m proclaiming the faith,” said Lefkas.

“That’s what you call it?”

Lefkas slumped into the armchair and spread his arms.

“It might seem a little funny to you. For you, mAk is a bit of a diversion, a joke, a thrill. Some little mind game, no? You don’t have to defend yourself, I know how it is,” he said when Evan hastened to object. “Just so you don’t think I’m judging you or anything. It’s completely legit, this. But do you know how many people out there are dead? Ever think about that? Masses of consciousness that suck the days through straws, or the days suck them. Loners. Good-for-nothings. Fools. Millions of them... With broken mirrors for company. Every minute they trip about in the shoals, every moment they want out, they want in, they want...”

Evan felt his lungs tightening up. He bent over to catch his breath.

“Are you alright?” asked Lefkas.

Evan had tears in his eyes. He nodded. He swallowed back a lump.

“How should I know what they want?” continued Lefkas. “For the world to have mercy on them? For them to have mercy on the world? My whole life I’ve been watching them. I know them well. And mAk is a simple combination. A little electricity smeared over the brain membrane, a few hormones released: neurotrophin, oxytocin, vasopressin and so on. Like I said, nothing special. If you’re in love, the brain itself releases all of this. But some people have never been in love. If you asked me, honestly, I’d have to say I’m doing charity. To exaggerate, I’m waking the dead. Are you alright?”

Evan's throat was parched. He was desperately fighting back a tickle that would have led to incessant coughing.

"I'd like a glass of water," he croaked.

Lefkas sprang up. "Where are my manners! Don't be too offended," he said on the way to the kitchen. "You can see I don't get a lot of guests." He disappeared through the door. Evan was beginning to sweat. He threw the gas mask on the table and skimmed the spines of the books. They were unfamiliar to him.

"Would you like some tea?" he heard from among clanging pots. "No, water, please, just water," replied Evan. He ran a hand over his stomach. He hadn't eaten yet. "Do you have something to munch on?" he asked, and winced at his words.

"To munch on?"

"If you have some food. Sorry, but I haven't eaten anything today..."

Kitchen sounds. The swoosh of the refrigerator opening. Cling-clang, cling-clang. Evan rubbed his fingers over his temples. He relaxed in expectation. He would once again feel.

Lefkas tottered in with a glass in one hand and a plate of crepes in the other.

"I apologize. I hope they're still good. They're from yesterday. Unfortunately I used up all the jam, but I've got something else to put in them."

Evan gave a shrug. He drained the glass in one go. He rolled a crepe. As he bit into it, he fell into a fountain.

/

Kras had already tied his tie when he looked at himself in the mirror and laughed at his own vanity. He stuck a finger into the knot and pulled it apart. He took off the tie and threw it to

the floor. He doesn't have much in his suitcase. An extra pair of shoes, a few shirts, underwear, socks, pants. If his path leads him north, or very far south, he'll buy a coat at the airport. There's nothing he really needs. And definitely not a tie.

He has no intention of saying goodbye. In any case he won't be away from home for long and he doesn't want to answer questions. Their presence is still alive in his head, gathered as they were at the celebration the day before, a family picture in living colour. Now they are once again dispersed into their frames, which is why he won't visit them to convince himself before he leaves... Why does it seem like he's fleeing? He's never fled. Not even now when he probably should have. When the world became unhinged and when dangerous oaths were taken and hatred demanded its pound of flesh. Nowhere was it written that he'd succeed, that'd he'd survive, and if he found himself on the wrong side this time, he'd keep quiet forever. And neither is he fleeing now. He's just going for his son, wherever he is. Just for his child. Though he's no longer a child. He's as old as Kras was when he still had a choice.

The sound of the zipper on the suitcase. The shadow of doubt on his face. When he still had a choice. He made a choice for himself. He made a choice also for everyone else. How could he leave a free path for his son, if he was born of a choice which set out and closed off the path for Kras? Fathers are selfish. Kras is well aware of this. There are some things a man must hold on to. Those are not just words. Those are not just memories. And freedom means nothing if you have it only in order to avoid what was chosen for you.

In the courtyard, the taxi is honking. Kras heads down the stairs and outside, where he glances up to his father, way up there, and snarls at the priest and rushed confessions. He's

not interested in what's going on here. He and his father dealt with it a long time ago. Everything else was just a dull variation on a theme. Kras inherited the desert. To make something grow, he had to water it with blood. The truth of history presses on the sense of justice. In the strong, it bends. In the weak, it breaks. No one can see innocence, which is good, because it is nowhere.

He sits in the back seat and doesn't look at the driver. He stares out the window as they drive. A few drops of rain loosen the cover of dust. The greasy clouds are showing off. There's no sun. Evening is a long way off. Everything is captured here. His restless knees jump up and down, the leather heels and the rubber mat squeaking each time they make contact. Everything is captured here. Kras won't let his eyelids interrupt the view, so his eyes begin to water. The landscape curves over the edges of the teardrops.

"Is there a..." he mumbles, and though the driver hears him, he has enough good sense to remain silent. "Is there something here that's bigger than me?" asks Volk. The field bends. The woods at the edge blend with the sky. "Everything and more, at least something, a little beyond?" The colours of the sand and the blades of grass blend into a dirty green. He clenches his fist and runs his knuckles, firmly, slowly, against the glass. "Is there always a hole which sucks and sucks and won't let the world fill up? And no matter how much you throw at it, it always wants more, and sucks and takes away the perfection of everything... !" He bangs his fist against the glass. The driver shifts in his seat, but remains silent. "What should I fill it with?"

"Excuse me, sir?"

"I said, what should I fill the hole with?"

“I wouldn’t know, sir.”

Kras nods, crosses his legs, turns his gaze from the horizon and closes his eyes.

“Mr Volk, before I can take you to the airport we have to go through a control point. I’m telling you right now you’ll have to take your shoes off.”

Kras bends down to untie his laces.

“Will we be there soon?”

“In a minute, Mr Volk.”

Just one more minute.



© Raquel Torres

Jesús Carrasco

La tierra que pisamos (2016)

The Earth We Tread

Publishing House **Seix Barral**

Biography

Jesús Carrasco was born in Badajoz in 1972. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education and has worked, among other things, as a grape-picker, a washer-up, a physical education teacher, a music manager, an exhibition fitter, a graphic designer and an advertising copywriter. He took up writing after moving to Madrid, in 1992. Over the years, he has kept diaries and has written short stories, two books for children and one novel, and has grown as a reader. In 2005, he published an illustrated book for first-time readers, and that very same year, he moved to Seville, where he currently lives.

In 2013, his first novel, *Intemperie*, made a stunning debut on the literary scene. Carrasco received the Book of the Year Award from the Association of Madrid Booksellers, the Award for Culture, Art and Literature from the *Fundación de Estudios Rurales*, the English PEN Award and the *Prix Ulysse* for the best first novel. He was also short-listed for the European Literature Award in the Netherlands, the *Prix Méditerranée Étranger* in France and the *Dulce Chacón*, *Quimera*, *Cálamo* and *San Clemente* awards in Spain.

Synopsis

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Spain has been annexed to the largest empire that Europe has ever seen. After pacification, the military elites choose a small town in Extremadura as a prize for the leaders of the occupation. Eva Holman, married to one of these men, leads a peaceful, untroubled existence until she receives an unexpected visit from a man who will start by occupying her property and will end up taking over her life.

La tierra que pisamos (*The Earth We Tread*) explores our ties to the land and our birthplace, but also to the planet that supports us. These relationships range from the brutal commercialisation of power to the pleasant emotions of a man tending to his crop in the shade of an oak tree. And between these two extremes, one woman struggles to find true meaning in her life, a revelation that her upbringing has kept at bay.

In the same rich, precise prose as his previous novel *Intemperie* (*Out in the Open*), in this book Jesús Carrasco explores humanity's infinite capacity to withstand hardship, the revelation of empathy when someone ceases to be a stranger in our eyes, and the nature of a love greater than we are. This is a thrilling read, a book that might just change your perspective on the world.

La tierra que pisamos

Jesús Carrasco

1.

Hoy me ha despertado un ruido en mitad de la noche. No un ronquido de Iosif, que, raro en él, a esa hora dormía a mi lado en silencio, medio hundido en la lana del colchón. He permanecido tumbada, con la mirada detenida en las vigas de haya que sustentan el techo, apretando fuertemente las sábanas en busca de una firmeza que el lino, tan sutil, me ha negado. Durante un buen rato me he quedado quieta, con los hombros contraídos y las manos cerradas. Quería volver a escuchar el ruido con nitidez para poder atribuírselo a alguno de nuestros animales y así, tranquila, regresar al sueño. Pero, más allá del aire agitando las ramas de la gran encina, no he percibido nada, y entonces, como por ensalmo, el viejo mito del intruso de ojos vaciados por la codicia se ha agarrado a mis tripas y ha empezado a devorarlas.

Es agosto, las hojas de guillotina están subidas hasta los topes y una brisa perfumada y cálida mece los visillos. Los hace danzar de un modo tan hermoso que, en esta época, durante mis desvelos, me siento contra el cabecero y me quedo embelada viéndolos ondear cual delicados pendones. Aspiro las fragancias que el aire trae y que, por momentos, desplazan a los aromas estancados del cuarto. Llegan en oleadas, de la misma manera que el mar va depositando en la orilla los restos de un barco naufragado. En primavera el azahar de los naranjos florecidos lo ocupa todo, especialmente cuando cae la tarde. Días antes de que eso suceda, el árbol siempre envía

un mensajero. Jornadas todavía frescas en las que, repentinamente, un hilo fugaz avisa de que, en algún lugar de los contornos, la vida ha sido convocada a su renacimiento.

Con los puños llenos de tela y los ojos cerrados, he tratado de concentrarme en la oscuridad exterior. Y así, he imaginado que me asomaba al porche elevado sobre el fragante césped que rodea la casa y, desde allí, he dirigido mi atención hacia el frente, al lugar donde el predio se asoma al valle. A lo lejos titilan las farolas de gas del pueblo, encaramado como un galápago a las faldas del castillo. En mi mente desciendo los escalones de madera y camino unos pasos sobre la hierba húmeda hasta la verja que domina el huerto de la terraza inferior. No oigo nada allí, ni siquiera el áspero roce de las hojas ya secas del maíz.

Me giro hacia la casa para recorrer la parte trasera de la propiedad. En los tiestos sujetos a la balaustrada del porche crecen formas confusas. La campana de alarma cuelga del tejadillo sobre ellas y su cuerda casi las toca. A la izquierda del edificio se levanta la gran encina, un ser poderoso y rotundo, cuya copa invade parte del alero. Al otro lado, entre la vivienda y el camino, el pequeño establo con sus ventanucos enrejados y sus tejas alomadas. Dentro, ni siquiera se oye a la yegua rascar el suelo de pizarra con sus herraduras. Tampoco se oye a *Kaiser*, nuestro perro; era de suponer, porque es sin duda el animal más indolente que se pueda imaginar. «Debería poner una gallina a vigilar la finca —me dijo una vez el cartero—. Hasta ésa con el cuello desplumado asusta más.» Y yo quizá sonreí por la ocurrencia y seguro que le di la razón para que se marchara pronto.

Al parecer hay un lince, o un lobo, que lleva varias semanas merodeando por los alrededores del pueblo y que ha matado, dicen, a varias ocas y a algún cordero. Me lo contó el doctor

Sneint en el dispensario de la guarnición la última vez que fui al castillo en busca de las medicinas de Iosif. Mientras colocaba los frascos en mi alforja, él se levantó y, después de repasar someramente los lomos de su biblioteca, extrajo un atlas de fauna ibérica y me lo mostró. Del grabado me llamaron la atención las patillas colgando a los lados de la boca y el aspecto puntiagudo de las orejas. «Pinceles —apuntó el médico cuando pasé el dedo por esa parte de la lámina—. También podría ser un lobo o un zorro —me dijo—. Tiene usted que buscar sus deposiciones, preferiblemente, junto al camino de su casa.

Cuando las encuentre, ábralas y mire si hay mucho pelo en ellas.» Tanto la idea de buscar los excrementos como la de abrirlos me resultó en aquel momento repugnante, pero luego, ya de vuelta a la casa, encontré las heces y no pude resistir la tentación de revolver en ellas con un palo. Hacerlo no me resultó desagradable. Olían a conejo y, por su aspecto, se diría que esos animales solo se alimentan de pelo.

Me he levantado y he prendido la lámpara que tengo sobre la mesilla. Asomando el cuerpo sobre el alféizar, he movido la luz a un lado y a otro en busca de signos del animal, pero enseguida me he dado cuenta de que la luna llena iluminaba más que mi farol y he terminado por apagarlo. En cualquier caso, no he apreciado nada extraño. Quizá mi luz lo haya espantado. Los animales seguían tranquilos y yo he dejado que el aire templado que asciende por el valle me acaricie la cara. La luna llena teñía de un extraño amarillo las nubes detenidas sobre la llanura distante. He cerrado las contraventanas y me he vuelto a meter en la cama. Mientras regresaba el sueño, de nuevo mirando al techo, he reparado en que no hay hayedos en esta parte del país.

2.

Lo veo por primera vez con la mañana bien entrada, mientras arreglo los geranios. Los pliegues de su chaqueta se cuelan por entre las lamas blancas de la verja que da al huerto, justo enfrente de mí. Iosif descansa en su mecedora a mi lado, aunque decir que descansa es, de algún modo, redundante, pues se pasa el día recostado: en la cama, en el sillón del salón y, durante el buen tiempo, aquí, en el porche. Lo levanto cada mañana, lo visto y lo siento donde corresponda según la época del año. Le agarro del codo y él, con pasitos cortos, se deja llevar de un lado para otro como un perrillo complaciente. La enfermedad lo ha reducido a una mínima expresión de lo que fue. Un hombre que ha tenido a su mando divisiones, que ha dispuesto de las vidas de otros hombres, que ha asediado ciudades y pasado a cuchillo a enemigos y sediciosos. Me pregunto si sus viejos adversarios, aquellos a los que sometió hasta convertirlos en súbditos de su majestad, conservarán la antigua furia con la que, sin duda, rindieron sus armas a este hombre a cuya sombra he vivido y cuya sombra es ahora todo lo que respiro. Su mente opera de manera discontinua y lo mismo pasa dos semanas callado, con la cabeza caída, incapaz siquiera de levantarse solo e incluso haciéndose sus necesidades encima, que comienza a regir de manera repentina. En esos episodios, de duración indefinida, se incorpora a la vida cotidiana tan plenamente que parece que nunca la hubiera abandonado. A veces regresa y se comporta igual que un paciente caprichoso. Si estamos en la cocina y me está viendo cortar verduras, me exige que haga trozos grandes, y me explica, por enésima vez, que a él le gusta notar lo que está comiendo. «No quiero purés, mujer. Eso es para los niños y yo no soy un niño.»

En ocasiones, su cordura se remonta al pasado y se dirige a mí como si yo fuera parte de un recuerdo; me llama «comandante Schultz» o «mi flor», con tono marcial o almibarado, según el caso. Y lo extraño es que nunca en la vida, ni cuando estábamos prometidos, me llamó así, «mi flor». Se diría que entre las grietas de su cerebro reverdecen viejos anhelos o el recuerdo de otra mujer a la que, sin duda, deseó durante sus largas ausencias; en la época en que las campañas se sucedían y parecía que el Imperio acabaría ocupando el globo entero.

Por suerte, el que hace años que no me visita es aquel hombre que hacía temblar los cimientos de mi mundo. El modo en que se enfurecía cuando el pequeño Thomas no declinaba correctamente, o cuando volvía manchado del jardín. Lo agarraba de la oreja, tiraba hacia arriba y casi levantaba al muchacho. Lo zarandeaba y no fueron pocas las veces en que recibió bofetones y golpes en los dedos con la regla de madera. Yo le suplicaba que lo dejara, que era solo un niño, y entonces él se volvía y me hundía con la turbidez de su mirada; la de quien ha bebido hasta hartarse la sangre bullente de los hombres. Una mirada cuyo recuerdo todavía me estremece y de la que aún quedan rastros en el fondo de sus ojos.

«El maldito taladro», me digo al ver los tallos agujereados. Son imposibles de exterminar y todos los años tengo que arrancar muchas de mis plantas y quemarlas tras la casa, ya que es la única manera de que la plaga no afecte a los ejemplares sanos. Las tomo por el tallo y las vuelco para sacarlas de los tiestos. La tierra oscura cae al suelo, siempre fresca y bien ligada, formando grumos esponjosos que yo me llevo a la nariz para embriagarme con sus aromas.

Levanto la cabeza en busca del amplio horizonte de la Tierra de Barros y ahí está su chaqueta oscura, colándose entre las

tablas blancas, penetrando sucia en nuestra propiedad. *Kaiser* se ha acercado y lo olisquea curioso por este lado de la verja.

Sin apartar la vista del hombre, me incorporo, retrocedo lentamente hasta la puerta abierta y cojo la escopeta que tenemos colgada en el recibidor. He de ponerme de puntillas para alcanzar la bandolera con los cartuchos. Si la amenaza hubiera sido violenta, si lugar de ese pordiosero hubiera sido un ladrón intentando entrar en la casa, yo no habría tenido tiempo de repelerle. Pero no puedo permitirme que Iosif tenga al alcance de su mano la escopeta cargada. No otra vez.

Los dedos me tiemblan mientras introduzco el cartucho en el tubo. Cierro el arma, desciendo los escalones y camino en su dirección. A cierta distancia me detengo, aprieto con fuerza la culata contra mi hombro y no espero otra cosa que encontrarme a un borracho desorientado frente al cual, deseo, una escoba debería ser suficiente.

«No puede estar aquí —le digo—. Ésta es una propiedad particular.» No responde ni se mueve. No gira la cabeza para mirarme. Desde este lado de las tablas solo puedo verle la coronilla revuelta y sucia.

Aguardo. *Kaiser* mete el hocico por entre las maderas y lo achucha como una versión amable de mis punteras, cada vez más impacientes. Me acerco un poco, le doy un par de toques con la culata y me retiro. Sigue sin moverse y por un instante imagino que está muerto. Me desplazo en lateral hacia la portezuela por la que se baja al huerto. Quiero poder asomarme al otro lado sin perder la distancia. Es un hombre delgado vestido con la chaqueta oscura que ya había visto y un pantalón negro. Está recostado contra las tablas, las piernas rectas, la cabeza vencida y las manos sobre los muslos con las palmas hacia arriba. Hay una maleta a su lado y, sobre ella, un

sombrero marrón. No parece un mendigo ni un borracho y, si no fuera porque se ha manchado de polvo al sentarse en el suelo, podría entrar así vestido casi en cualquier lugar.

«Tiene que marcharse», insisto con el arma en los brazos y entonces sí, gira la cabeza en mi dirección, pero no la levanta. Tiene la mandíbula untada de ralo pelo blanco. Su camisa amarillea por el cuello, la chaqueta le queda grande.

«No le voy a dar dinero.» *Kaiser* ya se ha tumbado tras él, apretado contra los riñones del hombre, tan inútil como un cuarto de pólvora mojada.

No hay respuesta.

The Earth We Tread

Jesús Carrasco

Translated from the Spanish by Adam Cullen

1.

A noise roused me in the middle of the night. Not Iosif's snoring: strangely for him, he was asleep at my side in silence, half-sunk in the wool of the mattress. I stayed there prone, my gaze resting on the beech wood of the beams supporting the roof, hands clasping and seeking a solidity that the linen, so delicate, denied me. I stayed still some time, shoulders drawn in and hands closed. I wanted to hear the noise again clearly, to pin it on one of our animals, and having done so, to go calmly back to sleep. But I perceived nothing apart from the air rattling the branches of the big holm oak, and then, as if by sorcery, the old myth of the intruder with eyes torn out by greed, took hold of my entrails and set to devouring them.

It's August, the panes of the guillotine window are hoisted as high as they go, and a balmy, perfumed breeze sways the lace curtains. They dance so beautifully that these days, when I am sleepless, I lean against the headboard and stay there spell-bound, watching them quiver like delicate pennants. I inhale the fragrances the air brings with it, which displace, now and then, the stagnant aromas in the room. They come in waves, like the sea leaving onshore the remnants of a wrecked ship. In spring, the tang of the orange blossoms in bloom invades everything, especially at nightfall. The tree invariably sends a messenger days before. Still cool days when all of a sudden a fugitive thread gives notice that there, in some nook in its shadows, life has been summoned to be born again.

With fists full of fabric and eyes shut, I tried to concentrate on the darkness outside. I imagined stepping out onto the porch that presides over the fragrant stretch of grass surrounding the house, and from there I turned my gaze frontward, to where the grounds cut into the valley. In the distance, the gaslights tremble in the village, which is perched like a tortoise on the slopes rising up to the castle. In my mind, I descend the wooden stairs and take a few steps over the damp grass towards the fence that presides over the garden down below. There I hear nothing, not even the coarse chafing of the already withered corn husks.

I turn back to the house to explore the back of the property. Confused forms grow in the flowerpots affixed to the railing on the porch. From the awning, the bell hangs above them, its rope nearly grazing them. The big holm oak ascends to the left of the building, a round, robust creature, its coppice intruding onto the eaves. On the other side, between the dwelling and the road, the small stable with its barred windows and undulating roof tiles. Not even the mare inside is audible, scratching the slate floor with her shod hooves. Nor Kaiser, our dog, but that was to be expected, because he is, without a doubt, the most indolent animal imaginable. “You’d do better to have a hen watch over the property,” the postman said to me once. “Even that one with the frayed neck would be scarier.” And I may have smiled at this notion, and probably said he was right, to get rid of him sooner.

It seems there is a lynx, or a wolf, that’s been marauding for a few days on the outskirts of the village and has killed, so they say, several geese and a lamb or two. Doctor Sneint said as much in the garrison’s dispensary the last time I went to the castle to fetch Iosif’s medicine. While I slipped the phials in my saddlebag, he got up, and after a cursory glance over the

spines of his books, he took down an atlas of Iberian fauna and opened it for me. What caught my attention in the etching was the tufted fur hanging by the sides of its mouth and the pointed aspect of its ears. “Paintbrushes, they’re called,” the doctor noted, passing his finger over that part of the print. “Could be a wolf or a fox, though,” he said. “You’ll have to look for its droppings, preferably beside the road to your house.”

“When you find them, open them up and see if there’s much hair inside.” Right then, both the idea of looking for excrement and of breaking it open struck me as repugnant, but on my way home, I found some and couldn’t resist the temptation to poke around in it with a stick. I did not find doing so disagreeable. It smelled of rabbit, and from the look of it, you might say the animal that left it dined on nothing but hair.

I got up and lit the lamp I keep on the nightstand. Leaning out over the windowsill, I moved it from side to side, looking for signs of the animal, but then I realized the full moon glowed brighter than my lamp, and I snuffed it out. In any case, I found nothing strange. Perhaps my light scared it away. The animals stayed still and I let the warm air coming up from the valley caress my face. The full moon stained the clouds stranded over the flatland a strange yellow. As I fell back to sleep, looking again at the ceiling, it occurred to me there are no beech woods in this part of the country.

2.

I see him for the first time in late morning, while tending the geraniums. The folds of his jacket are there in front of me, poking between the white slats of the fence posts bordering the garden. Next to me, Iosif rests in his rocker, though to say he is resting is, in a certain way, redundant, since he passes the whole day prostrate: in bed, in the armchair in the living room, and for a long spell, here on the porch. I get him up every morning, dress him, and sit him where he's supposed to go, depending on the time of year. I take him by the elbow, and with short steps he lets himself be led from place to place like a compliant little dog. Illness has reduced him to the merest expression of what he was. A man who had divisions under his command, who held sway over men's lives, who laid siege to cities and put enemies and traitors to the knife. I ask myself if his old adversaries, those he subdued until making them subjects of His Majesty, hold onto the old fury they must have felt as they rendered up their arms to this man in whose shadow I have lived and whose shadow is now all that I breathe. His mind works in a disjointed manner, and it is just as likely he'll spend two weeks in silence – head sagging, unable even to lift himself and relieving himself where he sits – as it is likely that he will return, all of a sudden, to reason. In those moments of indefinite duration, he throws himself so wholly into everyday life that it seems as if he'd never left it. Sometimes, he resurfaces like a finicky patient. If we are in the kitchen and he is watching me cut vegetables, he commands me to do so in big pieces, and explains, for the umpteenth time, that he likes to have a sense of what he's eating. "I don't want purées, woman. That stuff's for children, and I'm not a child."

On occasion, his mind turns to the past and he addresses me as if I were a fragment of memory; he calls me “Commandant Schultz” or “my flower,” with a martial or a honeyed tone, respectively. The strange thing is that never in our lives, even when we were engaged, did he once call me “my flower.” It could be that down in the crevices in his brain, old longings stir, or the recollection of another woman he must surely have yearned for during his long stays away, in the days when the campaigns came one after the other and it seemed the Empire would end up overrunning the whole globe.

Fortunately, it’s been years since the last visit of the man who made my world’s foundations quake. How he would get mad when little Thomas wouldn’t decline correctly, or when he came back stained from the yard. He’d grab him by the ear, pull, and lift the boy almost off the ground. He’d shove him back and forth, and not just a few times, the boy got a backhand or a rap across the fingers with a wooden ruler. I begged him to leave off with it, said he was only a boy, and then he’d turn to me and drown me in the murk of his gaze; the gaze of one who’s drunk his fill of the boiling blood of men. A gaze the memory of which still makes me shiver, and relics of which linger in the depths of his eyes.

“Goddamned borer beetles,” I say to myself, looking at the perforated stalks. They’re impossible to exterminate, and every year I have to pull up bunches of my plants and burn them behind the house, as that’s the only way to keep the plague from affecting the healthy ones. I grab them by the stems and pull them upside down, tearing them out of the flowerpots. The dark soil falls to the ground, always cool and tightly packed, making spongy clods that I bring up to my nose to intoxicate myself with their scent.

I raise my head in search of the vast horizon of Tierra de Barros, and there is his dark jacket, poking through the white boards, filthily invading our property. Kaiser has gone over and sniffs at him, curious, on the near side of the fence.

Without taking my eyes off the man, I stand upright, step back slowly to the open door, and take down the shotgun we have hanging in the entryway. I have to stand up on tiptoe to get to the bandolier with the shells. If the threat had been violent, if instead of this beggar, it had been a thief trying to break into the house, I wouldn't have had time to fend him off. But I can't allow Iosif to have a loaded shotgun within reach. Not again.

My fingers tremble while I slide the shell into the barrel. I close the breech, descend the steps, and walk in his direction. At a certain distance, I pause, press the stock into my shoulder, and hope to find myself faced with nothing more than a disoriented drunk against whom, I pray, a broom would be weapon enough.

"You can't be here," I tell him. "This is private property." He doesn't respond or move. He doesn't turn his head to look at me. From this side of the fence posts, all I see is his dirty, dishevelled scalp.

I wait. Kaiser slips his muzzle between the boards and nudges him, like a gentler version of the ever-less patient toes of my shoes. I come a bit closer, nudge him a few times with the stock of the shotgun, and step back. He stays there without moving, and for an instant, I imagine he is dead. I move sideways to the gate that leads down to the garden. I want to be able to see to the other side without closing the distance. He's a thin man dressed in the dark jacket I already saw and black pants. He's leaned against the fence posts, legs straight

in front of him, head sagging, hands over his thighs with the palms facing up. Beside him, there's a suitcase, and on top of it, a brown hat. He doesn't look like a bum or a drunk, and if he hadn't sat on the ground and smeared himself with dust, he could have worn those clothes almost anywhere.

"You have to go," I insist, the gun in my arms, and then he does turn in my direction, but still without getting up. On his jaw is a streak of wispy white hair. His shirt's gone yellow around the neck, the jacket is too big for him.

"I'm not going to give you money." Kaiser has already laid down behind him, curled up against the man's kidney, useless as a pouch of wet gunpowder.

There's no answer.

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Hans Cottyn, journalist and literary critic, De Standaard

Willem-Bongers Dek, writer, poet and programmer, cultural
institute DeBuren

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Director of the book trading company Šahinpašić

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Member of the PEN Center

Almir Basovic, professor, Faculty of Philosophy, and
Member of the Writers Association

Vahidin Preljevic, professor, Faculty of Philosophy, and
Member of the Writers Association

Faruk Sehic, writer, EUPL winner 2013

Cyprus

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President of the Cyprus Writers Union

Members:

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Association

Voula Kokkinou, President of the Cyprus Publishers
Association

Costas Nicolaides, literary critic

Myrto Azina, writer, EUPL winner 2010

Denmark

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Representative of the Danish Authors' Society

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Publishers

Inuk Hoff Hansen, Representative of the Danish Fiction
Writers' Association

Helle Nanche, Representative of the Danish Booksellers
Association

Estonia

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Chairman of the Estonian Writers' Union

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Kerti Tergem, Estonian Literature Centre

Tauno Vahter, Estonian Publishers' Association/Publishing
house Tänapäev

Piret Viires, Estonian Writer's Union

Toomas Väljataga, Estonian Publishers' Association/
Estonian Language Foundation

Finland

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publisher, Schildts & Söderströms

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Tittamari Marttinen, writer

Helena Ruuska, writer

Marjo Tuomikoski, bookseller

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Vladimir Martinovski, author and university professor

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Littérature

Béatrice Klein, literary critic, RTL group

Jean-Claude Henckes, bookseller, Librairie Ernster

Romania

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Members:

Ioana Parvulescu, writer, EUPL winner 2013

Bogdan-Alexandru Stanescu, Editorial Director of Polirom
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Razvan Purcarea, bookseller, Humanitas Kretzulescu
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Florin Ifrim, bookseller, Okian bookstore, Brasov

Slovenia

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Ingrid Celestina, Representative of the Slovene Booksellers
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Helena Kraljič, Representative of the Slovene Publishers
Association

Igor Bratož, literary critic

Spain

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President of Gremi d'Editors de Catalunya

Members:

D. Juan Francisco Pons, President of the Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros (CEGAL)

D. Manuel Rico, President of the Asociación Colegial de Escritores de España (ACE)

EUPL 2016 Jury Reports

Belgium

A man wakes up in a house belonging to friends who are on holiday. In the company of their cat, he reminisces about the previous summer, when he still had a girlfriend. He decides to write to her and inform her of recent developments. He recollects and charts places where they stayed, the things they told each other, the secrets they shared. The absent lover, however, demands her place as well: bit by bit her voice overthrows his voice and she starts to display all his shortcomings. *Op de hoogte* is a clever and witty story of a breakup that keeps echoing. It's an attempt – at times funny, at times sad – to get a grip on the practical difficulties and contradictory longings of modern love. The question remains: how can we understand love if we don't even understand ourselves?

Bosnia and Herzegovina

This is a book about writing a book, a quest novel with the heroine and her daughter and mother creating a perfect triangle of female characters. This unique example of women's writing comes out of the most genuine motivation: a deep inner need to describe the world of a young woman inside a tragic, patriarchal, warrior society.

Its theme and narrative style make this novel a subtle act of defiance against a worldview where women are owned in the same way as a weapon or a good horse. Its thematic treatment of the process of remembrance and its relativity – which is what the novel is largely built on – confronts the epic 'absolute past' and its ideological implications. At the same time, clocks as the instruments that measure external, mechanical time, are confronted by the inner, biographical and biological time of the female narrator's voice, as well as the forever lost time of the characters who were never able to obtain such a voice.

Thematically rich, this novel touches upon all the traumas of our 1990s, including one of the worst: the loss of one's home and the creation of a new one.

This is also a novel about growing up, about time and about the small joys of life, told in a very sophisticated voice.

Cyprus

The Cyprus Jury of the EUPL 2016 has unanimously chosen the writer Antonis Georgiou and his novel *An Album of Stories* as the winner of this award.

The polyphonic narrative in this 'post-novel' sets up a vast mosaic, through which the people and the whole country of Cyprus are presented. On the occasion of a grandmother's death, a range of stories are revealed. From the grandmother to the family, from the small village to the whole country and from the present to the past, these stories remind us of our stories, about life, love, death, war, emigration, refugees and the return to the native places. Old and new stories of different people, old and young, native and foreigners, alive or dead, in Cyprus or beyond, are narrated all together, one story coming out of the other without punctuation, in the Greek language and in Cypriot dialect. Included in these stories are quotations from newspapers (authentic and invented), recipes, children's drawings, folk songs, laments, poems and many photographs from family albums. The author, implementing modern writing techniques, succeeds in bringing all these materials together in a creative and constructive way.

Denmark

Bjørn Rasmussen's debut novel, *Huden er det elastiske hylster der omgiver hele legemet*, published in 2011, is an unusual and highly promising work. Its style, form and language reveal an immense talent, and the storyline has a momentum that impels the reader onwards. Moreover, as the author boldly makes his literary mark on the tradition of European autofiction, his novel possesses such a command of the genre that he provides new and challenging insights.

The book is an engaging love story between a young man and his riding instructor. But its approach is unconventional, as the reader moves through passages encompassing different literary styles. Thus, a range of contradictory first-person narratives arise that provide tension and are never reconciled in an overall conclusion. The 'I' narrator is a kind of 'perforated I' – open to any sexual and erotic experience. Ready for anything in the name of love. Body skin becomes a vital organ of sense and perception. The reader is left stunned by this novel; written from the gutter of life perhaps, but its verbal and stylistic originality sounds like a celestial choir. The jury unanimously declares Bjørn Rasmussen the Danish winner of the EUPL Prize for 2016.

Estonia

Paavo Matsin has proven himself (with his two previous novels, *Doctor Schwartz* and *The Blue Guard*) to be among the most intriguing new prose writers on the Estonian literary scene. Whilst the aforementioned novels were very promising, the third one, *The Gogol Disco* is quite an advanced and skilled work, both on its own and when considered as a whole with its predecessors. Matsin's prose has a certain Central European touch to it, uniting an old-fashioned style with contemporary humour and quite radical twists in the plot and overall ambience of the text.

Finland

In her subtle and carefully measured novel *Things that Fall from the Sky*, Selja Ahava makes her readers face the ruthless randomness of life, mostly from the point of view of a young girl. Ahava's poetic language is precise and sparse; the child's voice and frame of mind are both believable and achingly true. The storyline focuses on tragic loss and recuperation, yet avoids sentimentality. Narratives of different characters, and also various genres, intertwine seamlessly and naturally in the novel – between the lines, and within the story, a whole tradition of storytelling is alive: fairy tales and ghost stories, anecdotes, biblical stories, history, as well as detective stories. The whole narrative is thus about the narrative act itself; about the stories, how they begin, and more importantly, how they end. Is narrative the only way to create cohesion and structure in a reality that has none?

The narrator's voice is enjoyable and self-assured, and Ahava is a trustworthy guide who steers her readers reliably all the way until the end. *Things that Fall from the Sky* is a beautiful, wise and touching novel, demonstrating strong literary talent, and promises a brilliant career for the author.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The collection of short stories titled *Each with their own Lake* by Nenad Joldeski, with its subtle style and vivid narration, is an outstanding example of some of the new tendencies in contemporary European prose. The author evokes the themes of identity and alienation, love and sadness, existence and death, while merging the borders of the real and the imaginary, the subject and the Other, and constantly linking the existential with the metaphysical.

The atmosphere of intimacy is a characteristic of the short stories of Joldeski, while his sensitive minimalistic approach recomposes the elements of everyday life in such a manner that he creates relationships between the realm of reality and the realm of art. Thus, in the short stories in *Each with their own Lake*, the realm of reality links the dialogue of the poetry of William Carlos Williams with the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder; and the music of the contemporary composer Max Richter with the poetry of Czesław Miłosz. In some of the stories in this collection, the narration is structured around the dialogue of the past and present (Russian emigrant Nezlobinski and the narrator), as well as around the dialogue of the reality of the narrator with his experience as a reader of Dimitrie Duracovski's fiction.

The stories in *Each with their own Lake* are based upon the canon of the urban topos, narrated through the traumas of modern divisions of the world, and projected in the double perspective. This duality is reflected in the level of discursive identity itself, when the fictional, dream world and the real world switch their positions.

Germany

It is rare to come across a book which uses an accident as its starting point and succeeds in telling a captivating story.

Benedict Wells' novel *Vom Ende der Einsamkeit* not only offers an exception to this rule, but above all offers an emotional tale that manages to captivate the reader from start to finish.

The novel recounts the story of a young boy and his older siblings who, following the early death of their parents, lose touch with the world and struggle throughout adolescence and adulthood to reconnect with it. Wells has created a novel whose strength lies in its characters, which despite all their sadness, emanate a warmth that is rarely found in today's world.

The special achievement of this young author consists in convincing the reader that his narrator tells this story – about the fight for his life and the struggle to return to a world long thought to be lost – from a relative distance to the events taking place in the book.

This achievement is due to Wells' outstanding imagination, which is a gift encountered rarely these days.

Vom Ende der Einsamkeit can be seen as an outstanding success in the author's bibliography and we can surely expect much more to come from him in the future.

Luxembourg

All Dag verstoppt en aneren (One Day Hides Another) is a collection of nine short stories written in Luxembourgish, featuring protagonists who have become estranged from their environment. As outsiders, they offer a different view on a materialistic society, which is dominated by economic thoughts to the point of depriving itself of its freedom. Through a straightforward, yet linguistically innovative, style of writing and its depiction of social vulnerability, isolation and personal distress, Gast Groeber manages time and again to induce empathy with his characters. The fact that the author sets the right tone while addressing difficult issues such as illness, mourning or gender-based violence is one of the reasons why he has earned both critical and public acclaim and has established himself as a promising prospect on the Luxembourgian literary scene. Although a lot of his stories are set in Luxembourg, they all take a wider view, and there is little doubt that they would translate well and be equally well-received in other countries.

Romania

In a Europe increasingly threatened with irreconcilable ideological, administrative and ethno-political divisions, enduring ancestral frustrations on a continental scale, this book is a refreshing delight. It is also a lesson of humanity, of social harmony through emotional diversity.

The core of the novel stands for an ethnic melting pot, an eloquent *concordia discors* for all the vital elements in connection with the pedagogy of tolerance and the culture of integrating differences. Somewhere in central Romania, in the last decades of the communist dictatorship, in a multi-ethnic region including Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, Jews and Gypsies, a young child observes, analyses, filters and diagnoses his family.

The family includes Transylvanians and Oltenians, people from the south, north, east and west, each with their own moral compass, while the child grows in the blessed warmth provided by his grandparents, not knowing exactly what to expect from the seasonally random returning of his migrant parents from Germany.

It is a novel about the family seen as a world, of reconciliation seen as wisdom, and a sense of awaiting seen in terms of unravelling and fulfilment.

Slovenia

The world of Jasmin B. Frelih's novel *Na/pol (In/Half)* is a severed world without a common basis. Communication is impossible and sources of information are fragmented. The individual is forced to entirely make it up.

The director Evan sets his theatre performance in the Far East and attempts to fill the hole through which the memory of a lost love constantly penetrates. The politician Kras has lost at the polls, and he is also gradually losing control over his own family. Zoja's poetry, meanwhile, has brought her fame in the Far East, but rather than bringing more benefits of civilisation, at best it just attracts people's attention. The three stories in Frelih's novel differ entirely in style and vocabulary, and from the very outset the reader senses that they have entered a very special world, where not everything is as it should be. Far from it, as this world is dominated by existential misery, fear, anger and pain. Many things go unsaid or unexplained. The young author intensifies all of this through wordplay and unfinished sentences, symbolising the modern, globalised world – a world in which some things are built and expressed 'in/half', a world of bluff and hiding behind masks of predictability and well-rehearsed roles. In this, his first novel, Frelih displays an abundance of literary talent and knowledge. His novel, just like his collection of short stories *Ideoluzije (Tiny Ideologies)*, is by no means made 'in/half'. His expressive writing makes him stand out as a producer of contemporary Slovenian novels, and it is for this reason that we are truly justified in saying he is a very promising author.

Spain

Jesús Carrasco succeeded in attracting the interests of critics and the public with his first novel, *Intemperie*, thanks to the rural context – in marked contrast to our increasingly urbanised society – in which it was set, and where we are brought back to in *La tierra que pisamos*, his prizewinning new novel. The jury appreciated the way in which Carrasco depicts the countryside and rural areas, as well as the highly-polished and well-balanced writing style. This environment, sometimes unknown to city dwellers or forgotten by them, provides us with an opportunity to meet memorable characters such as the vagabond – who reminds us of the presence inside our society of marginal individuals – of immigrants, and of the necessity for a solitary consciousness in order to face and resolve the issues arising from human interaction.

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 winning author 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 financed by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union whose three main objectives are: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

Selection process

The winning authors are selected by qualified juries set up in each of the 12 countries participating in the 2016 award.

The nomination of candidates and the final selection of one winner in each country took place between October 2015 and February 2016.

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

- Be a citizen of one of the 12 selected countries
- To have published between 2 and 4 books of fiction
- The winning books should have been published during the five years before the Prize

Juries

Jury members are appointed by national members of EIBF, EWC and FEP. National juries are composed by a 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 and International 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



Christophe Van Gerrewey • *Op de hoogte*

Tanja Stupar-Trifunović • *Satovi u majčinoj sobi*

Antonis Georgiou • *Ένα αλπούμ ιστορίες*

Bjørn Rasmussen • *Huden er det elastiske hylster der omgiver hele legemet*

Paavo Matsin • *Gogoli disko*

Selja Ahava • *Taivaalta tippuvat asiat*

Nenad Joldeski • *Секое со своето езеро*

Benedict Wells • *Vom Ende der Einsamkeit*

Gast Groeber • *All Dag verstoppt en aneren*

Claudiu M. Florian • *Vârstele jocului. Strada Cetății.*

Jasmin B. Frelih • *Na/pol*

Jesús Carrasco • *La tierra que pisamos*