

The European Union Prize for Literature

Twelve winning authors

2013



EUROPEAN UNION
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

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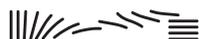

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Forewords

Foreword by José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

I am pleased to present the winners of the 2013 European Union Prize for Literature. These exceptional authors come from twelve different countries: Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. They show European literature in all its richness and diversity.

The European Union Prize for Literature is a good example of what we mean by European added value. The Prize does not compete with the national awards, but complements them, and brings authors unknown outside their countries into the limelight in other European countries. It also facilitates the translation of the winning books. It therefore aims to attract readers beyond borders and overcome the fragmentation often caused by the language barriers. The Prize is another means of supporting the diversity we all cherish and from which we all profit in the European Union. It is also a symbolic act of support for European authors and the European book publishing industry.

I believe literature is fundamental to us as human beings and to our personal and cultural identity. Literature can touch, teach, illuminate, entertain and challenge us. As readers we are drawn into adventures and we experience other cultures and ideas. With the European Union Prize for Literature we celebrate and promote our literary diversity so vital to all of us.

On the following pages we offer you passages from this year's twelve prize winning books, carefully selected by the authors themselves. You will enjoy a privileged preview and fascinating glimpse of new European literature, both in the original language and in English or French translation. I wish you wonderful sights and discoveries, wandering through new and open literary landscapes!



*José Manuel BARROSO
President of the European Commission*

Foreword by Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the EC in charge of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

The European Union Prize for Literature is young and unique; it was launched by the European Commission in 2009 and is now in its 5th year.

This is the only book award that puts the spotlight on new or emerging authors, regardless of their age, from such a large number of European countries and language areas, as it is open to all 37 countries currently participating in the Culture Programme. The list of participating countries each year reflects Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity and provides a mosaic of language groups and geographical areas in Europe.

Our aim is to highlight the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe's contemporary literature, help cross-border sales of books and foster greater interest in publishing, selling and reading of foreign literary works. Appropriately, as the Prize has added value across the entire book sector, it is currently organised by a consortium of the European Booksellers Federation (EBF), the European Writers' Council (EWC) and the Federation of European Publishers (FEP).

Translation is the key to our common literary treasures. Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity is a tremendous asset, but naturally it also presents challenges for authors and publishers who want their books to reach the widest possible readership. The European Commission has invested €3 million each year on literary translation under the Culture Programme and has, since 2007, helped translate more than 3200 literary works involving more than 30 languages. We have also sought to encourage the translation of books which have won the Prize. Since the Prize was launched, we have supported the translation of books by 43 winning authors into 20 different languages, covering a total of 149 translations.

The European Commission is launching the new Creative Europe programme, which will support the cultural and creative sectors over the period 2014-2020. Its main objectives are to foster Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity as well as to help strengthen the competitiveness of those sectors and develop new audiences for culture and the arts across Europe and beyond.

We envisage funding the translation of more than 4 500 books under Creative Europe. I am very happy that literature will find a big place in our new programme, as it is one of the sectors who can better contribute to these objectives. And, of course, the European Prize for Literature will continue to honour the best of emerging talent in European literature in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Vassiliou', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Androulla VASSILIOU



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Isabelle Wéry

Marilyn Désossée (2013)

Marilyn Deboned

Publishing House **Editions Maelström**

Biography

Isabelle Wéry is a Belgian actress, theatre director and author. Born in Liège, she studied acting at INSAS in Brussels until 1991. In parallel with her work as an actress with a variety of directors, she writes and creates her own theatre works.

Three times nominated for the Prix de la Critique de Théâtre Belge (for the Seul en Scène category), she received the prize in 2008 for her original theatre piece *La tranche de Jean-Daniel Magnin*.

Her written debut for the stage was with *La mort du cochon*, for which she received her first nomination for the Prix du Théâtre. At the Théâtre de la Vie, she directed her two other texts: *Mademoiselle Ari nue* and *Juke-Box et Almanach. Ceci est mon corps*, based on *La vie sexuelle de Catherine M* by Catherine Millet, is one of her latest creations for the stage. She also wrote *Le Bazar des organes* for the Compagnie SKBL, touring all over France.

She is also the author of the novel *Monsieur René*, an imaginary biography of the Belgian actor René Hainaux, as well as *Saisons culottes amis* (*Yvette's Poems*), published in 2010. In 2013, her short story *Skai* was published as part of a collection of Belgian authors, *Feuilleton*, and her novel *Marilyn désossée* was published in 2013.

Synopsis

Marilyn Turkey writes a novel. Ever since her childhood, she has been fascinated by romantic encounters and inhabited by ideas of duos, complicity, pacts, "love undertakings" and amicable partnerships. While she is writing this novel, she revisits fragments of her life and becomes immersed in the memories of her intimate and explicit encounters.

Marilyn Deboned is a road-movie in three acts: the first act when she is aged between six and eight, the second part as a young adult and the third act in the "here and now". It's the story of an exploration and a digression. What are the diverse forms in which love is embodied? What is this crazy thing that suddenly brings together two creatures for a unique moment? Marilyn's exploration knows no limits. She searches everywhere she feels like, including the world of humans, the world of animals, and the world of plants. Her unusual approach leads her into side paths, ravines, and unexplored corners of existence, experiencing life, "in all its splendour and all its rawness".

Marilyn Désossée

Isabelle Wéry

MON AMOUR,

*De la douceur de mes 6-8 ans,
Je t'écris cette première lettre.
Je ne te connais pas encore.
Je ne t'ai jamais vu.
Tu ne te doutes même pas que j'existe.
Mais moi, je veille sur nous.
Je pense à nous.
Je me prépare à t'aimer.
À te marier.
Et à te donner mon corps parfait de femme.
Je t'adore,*

Marilyn Turkey.

MON AMOUR,

Soyons clairs.

Je veux une grande robe blanche de mariée.

Dessous, je porterai un body de dentelle blanche qui moulera mon corps parfait de femme. Oui, une espèce de tout juste au corps, un peu comme celui que je porte au cours de gymnastique. Mais celui du cours de gym, je le hais. Il rentre dans mes fesses, et mes jambes de cochon sont complètement nues. Face à mes 2 guiboles à vif, j'ai beaucoup de mal à faire

la roue, le grand écart, les cumulets; toujours sous ma vue, elles m'empêtrèrent mes mouvements, ma concentration dans un méli-mélo corporel anarchique, battement d'ailes boudins blancs. Pourquoi suis-je obligée de montrer à la classe entière ces parties de mon corps que je te réserve?...

Pour l'body de dentelle blanche, la sensation sera bien différente. Et puis, d'ici à notre mariage, je n'aurai plus mes jambes de cochon; pour l'instant, je suis encore un morceau de pâte plasticine ingrate, sans queue ni tête, mais attends de voir, Mon Amour, de voir la suite...

La seule question que je me pose, c'est pour le riz.

J'ai bien observé le riz au mariage de Tante Poupy... Le riz, elle en avait partout jusqu'au trou du but, je suis sûre. T'imagines la nuit d'noces qu'elle a dû passer avec tous ces grains collés, incorporés à son fond de teint, sous ses ongles incarnés, et qui sait, oui, peut-être un tout petit grain de rien di tout osut s'infiltrer là où l'on ne doit pas aller! Oh, le vulgaire grain de l'Oncle Bent dans sa boîte orange... Qui se faufile au plus doux de toi-même le plus beau jour de ta vie.

Tu vois, je veux être claire avec toi.

Je réfléchis beaucoup.

Le hasard n'aura aucune emprise sur la perfection de notre amour.

Marilyn T.

Une autre lettre: MA MAISON

Tu sais ce que c'est une « tranche milanaise » ?

Tu confonds pas avec « escalope milanaise », hein ?

Non. Une tranche milanaise, c'est un gâteau de glace d'Italy qui a 3 goûts différents.

3 étages, 3 parfums et un sommet parsemé d'éclats de noisettes sucrées.

C'est vraiment délicieux. Je la mange parfois au restaurant des Italyens.

Ben ma maison, c'est une tranche milanaise: 3 étages, 3 parfums et un toit plat où les oiseaux-noisettes viennent se déposer.

Alors :

PREMIER ÉTAGE,

C'est la cave, le garage et la buanderie.

Et pour le parfum, ça pue un peu partout. À cause des eaux des égouts de tous ces tuyaux boyaux qui transpercent le bide de ma maison. On dit que dans les tuyauteries, il y a des serpents qui vivent. On dit que c'est arrivé près de chez moi, qu'un serpent est venu lécher les fesses de quelqu'un assis sur le pot du WC. Tu imagines?... Alors moi quand je suis là peinarde au fond de mon bain, je ne sais pas comment ce qui peut m'arriver. Ce qui incontestablement doit arriver. Ce qui m'ARRIVERA, puisque je ne suis PAS comme tout le monde et que quelque chose d'important VA m'arriver. Je le sens. Je le sais.

Dans la buanderie,

Il y a un congélateur, une machine à laver le linge, un orgue.

Je sais jouer de l'orgue. De toute façon, faire de la musique, c'est ultra simple : il suffit de mettre les doigts aux bons endroits et aux bons moments. Pour quelqu'un d'assez ponctuel et précis comme je, c'est donc assez facile. Et de l'orgue, j'en joue. Surtout l'Ave de Maria. Suis douée pour. C'est vrai. Quand j'en joue, même les poissons du congélateur sont troublés. Je dirais même, impressionnés. Une majesté musicale jaillit de cet orguelet noir et blanc – qui pue lui aussi, une odeur de bouche mal aérée – et éclate en pétards d'émotions trifouillant âme et corps de tout ce qui est en vie. Et l'Ave de Maria, c'est puissant hein. Il paraît que c'est un truc de la religion. Alors mon père m'a dit : « Tu vois que la religion a aussi ses bons côtés ! » Et ça m'a troublée. De vrai. Parce que moi j'étais devenue contre la religion. Et je ne VEUX PAS faire ma communion. À cause du curé. Dans l'église, il dit des histoires qui me donnent envie de pleurer, et quand je pleure, je deviens encore plus faible, et là l'curé, il peut me faire gober tout ce qu'il veut tant j'ai besoin de croire en quelque chose qui me rassure. Oh c'est une lutte interne. Et puis quand il faut toujours être gentille même avec ceux qui sont méchants avec nous... C'est dur quoi ! Ça m'emmerde, ça franchement. Je devrais donner mon stylo préféré à mon frère quand il m'énerve ? ! ! Mais non. Des claques oui. Au frère, au curé ! Œil pour œil dent pour dent, et je garde mon stylo, et va jouer avec tes autos ! Tête d'hydrocéphale va !

Oui. « TÊTE D'HYDROCÉPHALE ».

Si les eaux font gonfler les tuyauteries du 1er étage, l'eau fait aussi gonfler la tête de mon frère. Pauv' tout petit, i n'a pas d'chance. C'est le médecin qui a dit à ma mère que « l'enfant a une grosse tête ». J'ai bien vu que ma mère n'a pas du tout

apprécié. Moi, j'ai observé mon frère sous toutes ses coutures-jointures, j'ai rien décelé d'anormal. Alors oui, sa tête est bien grosse, mais ça fait pas flotchflotch hein comme une bouée remplie d'eau. Et mon frère pisse normal, pleure normal, bave normal, sue. Mais si le médecin l'a dit...

Mais moi, du tréfonds de la buanderie, j'éructe mes Ave de Maria à la face des 3 étages de ma maison. Et la musique adoucit les demeures... Ma musique adoucit mes sueurs... Ma musique plane dans la tête comme un albatros...

« 8. 9. 8. 6. 8. 9. 8. 6. 11. 9... »

Mon Amour,

Quand tu me tiendras dans tes bras, ce sera fort.

Tu embrasseras de toute ta longueur mon corps de femme...

Ta chair scotchera à la mienne

Comme guimauve.

Nous serons bien.

Un essaim de baisers rouges galopera de par ma nuque ;

Au cœur de tes oreilles gambadera ma grammaire mystère

Que tu n'y comprendras que goutte,

Et je te dirai :

« Cherche, mon petit, cherche ce que je te dis. »

Ton visage ravi tourmenté

Se secouera de petites convulsions divines.

Nous serons bien.

Des élixirs floraux rempliront nos verres.

Ta patte de droite versera, goutte à goutte, les précieux nectars

Au fond de mon bec...

Si je pose ma main ? Si je dépose ma main... Si je la...

Au palpitant de ta gorge... Je... je... je.

Putain. Putain.

AU SECOND ÉTAGE,

Il y a la cuisine.

(Elle est à ce second étage, ce que ma lingette est...)

En haut du meuble haut, des revues automobiles.

Photos de femmes dans autos rouges.

Bocal poisson rouge sur plan de travail.

Son frère, l'autre qui est déjà mort, il s'est suicidé.

Du bocal, hors, il a sauté.

Écrasé au sol comme un jaune d'œuf rouge.

J'ai pleuré.

Le canari aussi est mort.

Échappé de sa cage, on a tenté de le rattraper et a cassé son cou.

Cou cassé.

Mort l'oiseau.

Jaune aussi.

Comme le poisson-œuf.

Je me prépare du thé anglais.

Avec du lait de vache. J'ai trouvé LA cup of tea de mon livre d'apprentissage de l'anglais au fin fond d'une armoire;

tasse oubliée, ovni-tasse anachronique au milieu des tasses à café banales banales. Là, ma cup of tea exhumée de son oubliette, je l'ai fourrée d'eau parfumée à l'herbe et de lait. De lait de vache ben oui. Doucement brunâtre, le liquide s'est fait âcre. Alors, j'ai rêvé toutes les Angledesterres, tous les « Yes with pleasure », toutes les îles britains peuplées de corbeaux noirs-on-dit, j'ai rêvé les nuits de Noël aux dindes truffées, les gâteaux à la menthe et chocolats à l'orange...

« Is Mrs Smith home ?

– No, she's dead. In the little kitchen.

– Colonel Moutard, where is Colonel Moutard ? ? ! »

Quand ma mère arrive, je la pistolette du regard qu'elle me porte à mon thé et à mon Britain qu'elle n'y comprend que dalle. Le lait, le citron, parfum herbacé et âcre... No Mummy, je n'ai pas pris de coke, d'héro ou d'champigno... Citron est pour tea. Lemon tea. Milk tea. Do iou understood. She can't. She cooks. Pure cooking. Pure home.

Le chat est mort lui aussi.

Dur, tout dur, je l'ai touché. C'est moi qui l'ai trouvé. Couché dans sa barquette comme les restes d'une sardine dans son alu.

Alors, je suis là, avec mon mort sur l'estomac. Et qu'est-ce que tu veux faire avec ce corps durci comme pain rassis. Tu restes là, devant lui, tu as juste envie de comprendre d'où ça vient ? où ça part ? et c'est quoi en premier ? Alors, tu lui fourres un doigt dans l'panpanculcul au minou, juste pour faire thermomètre, voir si c'est toujours chaud dans le tunnel. Puis, tu penses qu'il est mort tout solitaire le chat. Tu vérifies s'il avait terminé ou non sa platée. Tu sens s'il pue pas trop.

Puis tu pleures.

Un temps.

Puis tu te demandes ce qu'on va en faire.

Quand la mère arrive, elle met la bête dans la poubelle.

Mon frère et moi, on se rebelle. On sort l'animal du trou d'plastic et on le remet au jour.

On l'enterre.

Comme les reines. Comme les chefs d'état. Comme le Roi des Belges.

On le fait. En grandes pompes.

Mon frère tient son lapin de tissu et regarde le chat de mort.

On sent, l'un et l'autre, que nous vivons un moment déterminant.

Et la vie tourne.

La vie va, et se taisent les minous, les lapins mous.

L'enterrement effectué, j'embarque mon vélo à vif sur les routes.

Oh Mon Amour,

Mon vélo, je l'aime surtout quand on part en piknik, Coraly et moi.

On pédale pédale jusqu'à l'autre bout de l'existence, on s'arrête un peu, on sort nos victuailles à même le sol, on mange et s'envole.

Coraly est mon amie rigolote. Avec elle, on peut rêver. Elle dessine hyper bien et son père est architecte. Elle a une grande sœur, un grand frère. Les 2, ils la protègent fort leur Coraly.

Mmmmmmmmh envie d'une grande sœur moi aussi. Le frère, il a une voiture sport rouge décapotable. Elle est minus comme un suppositoire, mais elle file vite que l'éclair au fond des nuits. Il est pas très sympa le frère, et ma mère veut pas que j'aille dans la voiture. Parfois il gueule même qu'il a dû chercher Coraly partout et que sûrement il préférerait avoir la paix et aller aux filles. Moi, il ne me regarde pas. C'est un adulte.

Coraly a aussi un petit chien de conna blonde, un toutou à nœud sur le crâne je le hais. Je le hais qu'elle l'embrasse même avec la langue et moi pas et quand il dort entre elle et moi quand je reste à dormir là-bas je lui pince fort les tasticulettes qu'il comprenne qu'il pue entre elle et moi qu'il s'en aille...

Non, Mon Amour,

Tu n'es pas dans ce chien.

Où es-tu Mon Amour ?

Marilyn Deboned

Isabelle Wéry

Translated from the French by Astrid Howard

MY LOVE,

*From the sweetness of my 6-8 years,
I write this first letter to you.
I do not yet know you.
I have never seen you.
You do not even know that I exist.
But me, I am watching out for us.
I am thinking about us.
I am preparing myself to love you.
To marry you.
And to give my perfect woman's body to you.
I adore you.*

Marilyn Turkey.

MY LOVE,

Let's be clear.

I want a big white wedding dress.

Underneath, I will wear a white lace leotard that will cling to my perfect woman's body. Yes, a sort of xtra second skin, a little like the one that I wear in gym class. But I hate the one from gym class. It bunches up in my bum, and my piggy legs are completely naked. Confronted with my legs in the

air, I find it very difficult to do a cartwheel, the splits, somersaults; always in my sight, they entangle my movements, my concentration in an anarchistic bodily mix-up, in a fluttering of white sausage wings. Why am I obliged to show the whole class the parts of my body that I am saving for you?...

As to the white lace leotard, the sensation will be completely different. And then, by the time we get married, I won't have these piggy legs any more; for the moment, I am still an ungrateful piece of plasticine, without head or tail, but wait and see, My Love, wait and see what is to come...

The only question I have is about the rice.

I carefully observed the rice at Aunt Poupy's wedding... There was rice everywhere even in the brown hole, I'm sure. Can you imagine the wedding night she must have had with all those grains of rice stuck, incorporated into her make-up, under her ingrown nails, and who knows, yes, perhaps a tinynyny little grain that dared to infiltrate there where it shouldn't have! Oh, vulgar little grain of Uncle Bent's in its orange box... Which slips into the softest part of yourself on the most beautiful day of your life.

You see, I want to be clear with you.

I think a lot.

Chance will have no impact on the perfection of our love.

Marilyn T.

Another letter: MY HOUSE

Do you know what a “Neapolitan ice cream” is?

Don’t confuse it with “Neapolitan Opera”, huh?

No. A Neapolitan ice cream is an ice cream cake from Italy which has three different tastes.

3 floors, 3 flavours, its top sprinkled with sugared hazelnut bits.

It’s really delicious. Sometimes, I eat it in restaurants for Italians.

Well, my house is like a Neapolitan ice cream: 3 floors, 3 flavours and a flat roof where the nut-birds alight.

So:

First Floor,

The basement, the garage and the laundry room.

As to the flavour, it stinks, everywhere. Because of the drain water in all the hose-pipes that pierce the belly of my house. They say that there are snakes that live in the pipes. They say that it happened in my neighbourhood that a snake came and licked the bum of someone who was sitting on the pot. Can you believe that... ? Well, when I’m lying cushy in my bath, I don’t know how what could happen to me. What unavoidably will happen to me. It WILL HAPPEN to me because I am NOT like everyone else and something important IS GOING to happen to me. I can feel it. I know it.

In the laundry room,

There is a freezer, a washing machine, an organ.

I know how to play the organ. Anyhow, to make music is super easy: you just have to put your fingers in the right places at the right times. For someone who is fairly punctual and precise like I, it is thus relatively easy. And so, I play the organ. Especially the Ave of Maria. I'm made for it. It's true. When I play it, even the fish in the freezer are troubled. I would even say, impressed. A musical majesty comes out of this black and white organette – which also stinks, like a musty mouth – and explodes with fireworks of emotion playing with the body and soul of all that is alive. And the Ave of Maria, it's powerful, you know. Apparently, it's a religious thing. So my father said, "You see, religion also has its good sides!" That confused me. It's true. Because I'd turned against religion. And I DO NOT want to make my confirmation. Because of the priest. In church, he tells stories that make me want to cry, and when I cry, I become even weaker and then the priest, he can make me swallow anything he wants because I need so much to believe in something that reassures me. Oh, it's an internal fight. And then you always have to be kind even to those who are mean to you... It's hard! It pisses me off, frankly. I should give my favourite pen to my brother when he's bugging me? No way. Punch him, yeah. My brother and the priest. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, I'll keep my pen, and you go play with your cars! Hydrocephalus head!

Yes. "HYDROCEPHALUS HEAD".

If the water makes the pipes on the first floor swell, the water also makes my brother's head swell. Poor li'l guy, he's so unlucky. It was the doctor who said to my mother that "the child has a big head." I could see that my mother didn't like that at all. Me, I have examined my brother along all his suture-seams, and I have not seen anything abnormal. Yes,

his head is very big, but it doesn't go swish-swosh, huh, like a buoy filled with water. And my brother pisses normal, cries normal, drools normal, sweats. But if the doctor said...

And me, in the bowels of the laundry room, I belch forth my Ave of Marias in the face of the 3 floors of my house. And the music soothes the savage breasts... My music soothes my savage sweats... My music floats in the head like an albatross...

“8. 9. 8. 6. 8. 9. 8. 6. 11. 9...”

My Love,

When you will clasp me in your arms, it will be magnificent.

The whole length of your body will embrace my woman's forms...

Your flesh will stick to mine

Like marshmallow taffy.

It will be good.

A swarm of red kisses will gallop around my neck;

In the inner recesses of your ears, my mysterious grammar will gambol

Of which you will understand nothing,

And I will say to you,

“Search, my boy, search for what I am saying to you.”

Your delighted, tormented face

Will shake with divine little convulsions.

It will be good.

Floral elixirs will fill our glasses.

Your right paw will pour, drop by drop, the precious nectars
Deep into my gullet...

If I put my hand? If I put my hand on... If I put it...

On the throbbing of your throat... I... I... I...

Fuck. Fuck.

ON THE SECOND FLOOR,

The kitchen.

(It is to this second floor, what my panties are to...)

High on the high kitchen cabinet, car magazines.

Photos of women in red cars.

Goldfish bowl on the counter top.

His brother, the one who is already dead, he committed
suicide.

Out of the bowl, he jumped.

Squashed on the floor like a red yellow yolk.

I cried.

The canary is also dead.

Escaped from its cage, we tried to catch it and broke its neck.

Broken neck.

Bird dead.

Also yellow.

Like the fish-yolk.

I prepare myself some English tea.

With cow's milk. I found THE "cup of tea" from my "How to Learn English" book at the back of a cupboard; forgotten cup, anachronistic ufo-cup in the middle of the common, common coffee cups. There, my "cup of tea" exhumed from its forgotten corner, I filled it with water flavoured with the herb and milk. Cow's milk, yes. Gently brown, the liquid became bitter. Then I dreamed all the Anglesmen, all the "Yeswithpleasure", all the Britains isles peopled with black crows they say, I dreamed the Christmas nights with stuffed turkeys, mint cakes and chocolates with orange...

"Is Mrs. Smith home?"

"No, she's dead. In the little kitchen."

"Colonel Mustard, where is Colonel Mustard? ? !"

When my mother arrives, I gun her down with the look she gives my tea and my Britain that she doesn't understand at all. The milk, the lemon, the smell herbaceous and bitter... No, Mummy, I didn't take coke, or hero, or 'shrooms... Lemon is for tea. Lemon tea. Milk tea. Do iou understood. She can't. She cooks. Pure cooking. Pure home.

The cat is also dead.

Hard, very hard, I touched it. I was the one who found it. Lying in its basket like the remains of a sardine in its tin.

So, there I am with my dead lying in the pit of my stomach. And what do you want to do with this body hardened like stale bread. You sit there, in front of it, all you want to do is to understand where does it come from? Where does it go? What was it in the beginning? Then you stick your finger in the pussy's bumbum, just to do like a thermometer, see if it's still warm inside the tunnel. Then you think, he died all alone,

the cat. You check if he finished his food or not. You can smell that he doesn't stink too much.

Then you cry.

Time passes.

Then you wonder what's going to be done with him.

When your mother arrives, she puts the animal in the trash bin.

My brother and I, we rebel. We take the animal out of the plastic hole and we bring him back into the light of day.

We bury him.

Like the queens. Like the heads of state. Like the King of the Belgians.

We do it. With great ceremony.

My brother holds his cloth rabbit and looks at the dead cat.

We feel, both of us, that we are living a decisive moment.

And life goes on.

Life goes on and silences the pussycats and the limp rabbits.

The burial done, I take my bike by storm onto the road.

Oh My Love,

My bike, I like it best of all when we go on a piknik, Coraly and me.

We pedal pedal till the other end of existence, we stop for a little while, we put our victuals on the ground, we eat and fly.

Coraly is my funny friend. With her, you can dream. She draws super well and her father is an architect. She has a big sister, a big brother. Both of them do everything to protect their Coraly. Mmmmmmmmh I want a big sister too. The brother, he has a red convertible sports car. It is as mini as an enema, but it speeds lightening into deep night. He is not very nice, her brother, and my mother doesn't want me to go in his car. Sometimes he screams that he had to look for Coraly everywhere and that surely he would prefer to be left in peace and go with girls. Me, he doesn't even see me. He's an adult.

Coraly also has a little blond bimbo's dog, a doggy with a bow on its head I hate it. I hate it that she kisses him with her tongue and not me and when he is sleeping between her and me when I sleep over I pinch his tasticulettes hard so that he knows that he stinks between me and her so that he will go away...

No, My Love,
You are not in this dog.
Where are you My Love?

Bosnia-Herzegovina



© Amer Kuhinja

Faruk Šehić

Knjiga o Uni (2011)

The Book of Una

Publishing House **Buybook d.o.o.**

Biography

Faruk Šehić was born in 1970 in Bihac. He grew up in Bosanska Krupa. Until the outbreak of war in 1992, Šehić studied veterinary medicine in Zagreb. However, the then 22-year-old voluntarily joined the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he led a unit of 130 men as a lieutenant. After the war he studied literature and, since 1998, has created his own literary works. Literary critics regard him as one of the most gifted young writers in the former Yugoslavia, a shining light of the so-called “knocked-over generation”.

The collection of short stories *Pod pritiskom (Under Pressure, 2004)* was awarded the Zoro Verlag Prize. His debut novel *Knjiga o Uni (The Book of Una, 2011)* was awarded the Meša Selimović Prize for the best novel published in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia in 2011. Šehić, who lives in Sarajevo, is a member of the Writers' Association and the PEN Centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he works for the magazine *BH Dani* as a columnist and journalist.

Synopsis

The Book of Una is about a man trying to overcome the personal trauma caused by the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. It is also a novel about childhood on a beautiful river; about fishes, plants, swimming, diving and enjoying life in a small Bosnian city. The book covers three time periods, taking in childhood before the war, the battle lines during the war, and attempts to continue with normal life in a destroyed city and country after the war.

The Book of Una attempts to reconstruct the life of the main character who, like the text in the book, is rather bipolar in nature: he's both a veteran and a poet. At times, he manages to pick up the pieces of his life, but at other times it escapes him. His memories of the recent war and the killings are “dirty and disgusting”, while he views his present as humdrum and his identity feels incomplete. With the help of his memories, he uses his mind and strength to look for a way out of the maze in which he is confined.

In parallel to this story, the book's passages on the city next to the river Una take on mythical and dreamlike dimensions. Here, the novel expands into a poetic description of nature, seasons, flora and fauna, as well as childhood memories not yet tainted by all that will happen after 1992.

Knjiga o Uni

Faruk Šehić

NOĆNO PUTOVANJE

Ako kiša zapada uoči petka onda će padati sedam dana, tako nam je majka stalno govorila. I dažd je prekrrio naše nebo snagom ajetâ sure Al-Qari'a / Smak svijeta.

Kada nas je voda okružila sa svih strana, majkina kuća je krenula na svoju prvu plovidbu. Prije nego smo postali unoplovci začuo se jak prasak, jer se kuća odvojila od svojih zemaljskih korijena. I tako olakšana, bez temelja u koje su ugrađeni oklopi i stabilizatori eksplodiranih avio-bombi iz Drugog svjetskog rata, bez kamenja stare kuće koja je izgorjela za savezničkog bombardovanja grada, i riječne sedre u fundamentu, kuća se spremala da izdrži ono najgore: put u nepoznato.

Oni hitronogi koje voda nije iznenadila kao nas, takvi su se uspeli na Ravnik, na sami vrh Huma odakle su se nadali da će sunce konačno probiti oblake i zaustaviti potop. Mi koji nismo imali puno izbora, i koji nismo htjeli da vremenski hir odlučuje umjesto naše volje, sami smo uzeli sudbinu u svoje ruke.

Nekim čudom podrum se uvukao u kuću postavši naša mašinska paluba, jer su dole bili crveni tlakomjeri sa malenim okruglim upravljačima za kormilarenje nabujalim i nesigurnim vodama. Poklopci na njima su se povremeno dizali ispuštajući ljutitu paru, ako bi se motori nehotice pregrijali. Vinova loza se odmotala sa majkine kuće i pretvorila

u olistalo jedro, za svaki slučaj, kao rezervni pogon. Sišao sam u podrum nakon što smo rukama i pajserom rastavili brodski pod, i prihvatio sam se metalnih kolutova za kormilarenje. Majka je stajala u kuhinji na prozoru zajedno sa stricem Šetom koji je služio vojsku u Jugoslavenskoj ratnoj mornarici. Ona je upravljala kućom koja je postala plovni objekat, držeći tespih obješen o dlan. Kuglice njenog jantarnog tespiha su kružile svojim nečujnim univerzumom. Šeta je držao ostve na gotovs, ako slučajno ugleda leđa velike štuke. Voda nas je prskala po licima želeći uskočiti u majkinu kuhinju, ali to nije smanjivalo našu mornarsku odlučnost.

Spuštali smo se niz Unadžik ravno prema Pilanici pa sve tamo do sastavaka na čijim je pjeskarima uvijek bilo mrenova i škobalja. Na sastavcima se Unadžik ulijevao u Krušnicu. Tu su se miješale dvije vode. Krušnica se zadržavala na dijelu rijeke prema desnoj obali, gdje je voda bila hladnija, dok je Una zauzela područje lijeve strane zbratimljenih tekućica. Sredinom toka, za ljetnog vodostaja, plutali bi kosmati šaševi s cvjetovima nalik na oči plašljivih hidro-pigmejskih bića. Ja sam, kroz podrumski prozor nastojao zabacivati mesingani blinker, jer je on predviđen za mutnu vodu, pažljivo prateći manometre s crvenim strelicama, i slušajući majkine upute. Vješto smo izbjegavali sedre preko kojih se voda prelijevala u debelim neprovidnim slojevima.

„Lijevo, punom snagom lijevo!”, vikala je majka, i ja bih dohvatio kormilo okrećući ga dok je kuća odgovarala željenim manevrom.

Ništa nas nije ugrožavalo, naša plovidba je bila sigurna. Čak ni džinovski talasi što su se međusobno sudarali praveći zastrašujuće vodene divove. Sjetio sam se Nostradamusovih stihova o propasti svijeta:

*Na četrdeset osam stepeni more se pjeni,
a ribe se kuhaju.*

Već smo odavno izgubili iz vidokruga priobalne kuće u Pazardžiku i spuštali smo se niz bregove pilaničkih slapova u novostvoreno jezero, koje se protezalo sve tamo do škole Đuro Pucar Stari, prijeteći da dohvati prve kuće izgrađene na travnatim padinama Zahuma. Svakako je bilo vrijeme poplava, ali ovakva još nije bila viđena, barem ne za majkinog životnog vijeka. I tako smo počeli kliziti krakom Une i glavnim tokom Krušnice, što su zajedničkim snagama potopile kilometarski duge ade i sve što je bilo na njima. Prečke na fudbalskim stadionima Meteora i njegovog nižerazrednog brata Željezničara virile su iz jezera, naslonjene na nekih pola metra stativa. Na zapadnoj tribini većeg stadiona sjedila je nijema i prljava voda. U mreži gola zaustavio se nadut leš nečije krave. Na tri sata od nas voda je pokušavala smanjiti Točile penjući se preko krošanja nemoćnog drveća. Posvuda su tonula ptičija gnijezda. Iz dubine su izranjale ribe nikad viđene na dnevnom svjetlu, nezgrapnih tijela sa glavama toliko nalik ljudskim da su neke od njih mogle i pričati.

Jedna s kositrenim krljuštima mi je dobacila, začuđeno gledajući preko majkine kuće kako oblaci plove iznad Točila: „I prvi anđeo zatrubi, et facta est grando et ignis...”, brzo sam je prekinuo odgovarajući joj kroz prozorčić svoje mašinske kabine: „...mista in sanguine, et missum est in terram, et tertia pars terrae combusta est, i trećina drveća izgorje, i sva zelena trava izgorje.” Našto se povukla natrag u muljevitu dubinu udarajući teškim repom po vodenoj površini. Riblji pogled je bio strašan, stariji od vremena. Učinilo mi se da sam krajičkom oka spazio Čudovište iz Sokione kako plovi u džinovskoj unskoj školjci pomno zapisujući sve što se

dešavalo. Umor je uzimao maha i bilo je nemoguće otjerati turobne misli.

*Na četrdeset osam stepeni more se pjeni,
a ribe se kuhaju.*

Na ovom mjestu snoviđenje se prekida kao rezom Solingen noža i ja se budim zadihan u majkinoj gostinskoj sobi pokriven masivnim jorganom. Negdje na zidu iznad mene takt satnog mehanizma daje gotsku notu uspavanom mraku. Kuća je još na suhom, a Unadžik je u svom odijelu, koje mu nije postalo pretijesno. Voda je zadovoljna i neumorno se spušta prema sastavcima miješajući se sa hladnim krušničkim fluidom. Kad ustanem otići ću u podrum i provjeriti crvene kazaljke na dva metalna vodomjera. Njihovu poziciju i broj što pokazuje utrošak vode koju napravi majkina kuća.

U praskozorje sam napustio krevet i ušao u hodnik. Lijevo prema ulaznim vratima niz ogledalo vješalice za odjeću slijevale su se svježje kapi vode, tepih u hodniku je bio namočen vodom. Debeli nanosi bijele boje na zidovima su mjestimično ispucali kao da je kuću pogodio zemljotres. Sada je to skroz jasno, majkina kuća se noću tajno kreće na vodeni pogon. Hoda krišom uz pomoć vodenastih trepetljika, i njeno noćno napredovanje je, zasad, izraženo u pedljima. Trepetljike su mali vodeni bičevi, zamjena za noge kod nekih vrsta vodenih organizama i mikroba. Kuća hoće da se pomjeri sa mjesta, hoće da ode u neki drugi, postojaniji, kvart, daleko od divlje rijeke iz snova, van domašaja poplava i nepogoda, gdje bi mogla doživjeti sretnu starost. U neki grad gdje žive bolji stanovnici: Petar Pan, Ivica & Marica. Kuća je naivna baš kao i oni čije ruke su je izgradile. U proljeće 1992. kuća je mislila da će nju poštediti, jer nikad nikom nije zlo učinila. Oko nje sve druge kuće su bile žute buktinje sa dječijih crteža.

Pravila se da je toliko blještavilo posvuda zato što su zvijezde rano izašle na nebu. I da druge kuće nisu ognjena sunca što se urušavaju u središte svoga pakla. Njena svijest se povukla ispod samog krovnog vrha, šćućurila se drhteći kao smrznuta sova.

Noć je mirnodopska, jedna od mnogih. Jedino što ima na raspolaganju su vodenaste trepetljike i rijeku koja njen bijeg prikriva svojim šumom. Vrijeme curi neumoljivo, i nije na njenoj strani. Kuća se priprema da iznevjeri svoju sudbinu koja se ponavlja sa užasavajućom preciznošću svakih pedeset godina. Da se pretvori u prah i pepeo. Je li potrebno napisati kako njen bijeg nikad ne uspijeva.

The Book of Una

Faruk Šehić

Translated from the Bosnian by Zvonimir Radeljković

NIGHT JOURNEY

If it starts to rain the evening before Friday it's gonna rain for seven days, so our granny always told us. And the heavy rain overspread our heaven with the force of a miraculous verse of Al-Qaria surah in the Koran – the one about the end of the world.

When the water surrounded us from all sides, granny's house started on its first voyage. Before we became Unafarers we heard a strong crash, as the house tore loose from its earthly roots. Thus lightened, without the foundation in which casings and stabilizers of exploded aerial bombs from the Second World War were imbedded, without the stones from the old house which had burned down during the Allied bombing of the town, and the underlining bed of alluvial tufa, the house was making ready to endure the worst: a journey into the unknown.

The fleet of foot – those who had not been surprised, like us, by the water – climbed up Ravnik, to the very summit of Hum, where they hoped the sun would finally penetrate the clouds and stop the deluge. We, who didn't have much choice and who wouldn't have wanted the whim of the weather, rather than the force of our own will, to decide the outcome, we took our fate in our own hands.

By some miracle the basement drew up into the house becoming our engine deck, since down there were red pressure gauges with little round wheels for navigating those swollen and dangerous waters. The valves on the gauges occasionally flipped up to release hot and angry steam if the engines should accidentally overheat. The grape vines unfurled from granny's house and became a leafy sail, just in case, as back-up propulsion. I went down into the basement after we had torn open the deck with a crowbar, and got hold of little metal navigation wheels. Granny stood at the kitchen window with uncle Šeta who did his military service in the navy. She was navigating the house holding prayer beads hanging from her palm. The little marbles of her amber prayer beads cruised through their silent universe. Šeta held a trident ready in case he caught a glimpse of the giant pike's back. Water was splashing our faces, wishing to jump into granny's kitchen, but this did not diminish our seamanlike determination.

We went down the Unadžik straight towards Pilanica and then to the confluence where there were always some barbels and sneeps at the sandy places. At the confluence the Unadžik joined the Krušnica. Two waters mixed there. The Krušnica waters tended to linger in the part of the river near the right bank where the water was colder, while the Una occupied the area of the left side of the brotherly flowing waters. In the middle of the current, when the water sank to its summer level, floated hairy bulrushes with flowers like the eyes of timid aqua-pygmean creatures. I repeatedly tried to pitch the brass fishing lure, which was especially designed for muddy water, monitoring carefully the pressure gauges with red arrows, and listening to granny's instructions. We skillfully avoided the tufa deposits over which the water spilled in thick opaque layers.

“To the left, full power to the left!”, granny would shout, and I would grab the helm, turning it, while the house responded with the proper maneuver.

Nothing posed a threat to us, our voyage was safe. Not even the monstrous colliding waves which looked like frightening water giants. I remembered Nostradamus verses about the end of the world:

*At forty eight degrees the sea foams,
And the fish are being stewed.*

Long ago we had lost sight of the riverside houses in Pazardžik and we were going down the hills of Pilanica cascades into the newly formed lake which extended all the way to the Đuro Pucar Stari school, threatening to reach the first houses built on the grassy slopes of Zahum. It was indeed the season of floods, but a flood like this had never been seen before, at least not during granny’s lifetime. And so we started gliding down the branch of the Una and the main flow of the Krušnica, which had joined forces to flood river islands kilometers long and everything on them. The crossbars at the soccer stadium of Meteor and its lower ranked brother Željezničar stuck up above the lake atop some half-meter goalposts. At the western grandstand of the larger stadium sat mute and dirty water. The goal net caught the bloated corpse of somebody’s cow. Three hours away from us the water was trying to reduce Točile, climbing over the canopies of helpless trees. Everywhere the birds’ nests were sinking. Fish never before seen in the light of day rose from the deep, ungainly bodies with heads so similar to humans that some of them could even talk.

One with tin scales, watching with amazement how clouds were sailing over Točilo above granny’s house, curiously remarked to me: “And the first angel blew his trumpet, *et*

facta est grando et ignis...”, and I interrupted it quickly, answering through the small window of my machine cabin: “... *mista in sanguine, et missum est in terram, et tertia pars terrae combusta est*, and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. “Upon that it withdrew back to the silty deep, slapping the water surface with its heavy tail. The gaze of that fish was horrible, older than time. It seemed to me that I saw, out of the corner of my eye, the Monster of Sokiona sailing in a giant Una shell, making notes of all that was going on. Fatigue was getting stronger and it was impossible to chase away gloomy thoughts.

*At forty eight degrees the sea foams,
And the fish are being stewed.*

At this point the dream vision breaks off, as if cut with a Solingen knife and I wake up panting in granny’s guest room, covered by a heavy quilt. Somewhere on the wall above me the clockwork’s rhythm gives a Gothic touch to the slumbering darkness. The house is still on firm ground, and the Unadžik is in its suit of clothes which have not yet become tight. The water is coming down tirelessly to the confluence mixing there with the cold Krušnica waters. When I get up I’ll go down to the basement and check the red hands on two metal water meters: their position and the numbers showing the consumption of water in granny’s house.

At early dawn I left my bed and entered the corridor. To the left of the entrance, fresh drops of water poured down the mirror on the coat rack, and the rug in the corridor was saturated with water. The thick layers of white color on the walls were cracked in places as if the house had been hit by an earthquake. Now everything is completely clear: granny’s house secretly moves at night using water propulsion.

It walks furtively, with the help of watery tentacles, and its nightly progression can be expressed, for now, only in inches. Tentacles are small water whips, used instead of legs by some water organisms and microbes. The house wants to move away, wants to go to a safer quarter, far from the wild river from dreams, out of the reach to floods and disasters, where it could live to a happy old age. To some town where nicer people live: like Peter Pan, Hänschen & Gretel. The house is naïve, just like those whose hands built it. In the spring of 1992 the house thought that it would be spared, because it never did any harm to anyone. All other houses around it were just yellow torches from children's drawings. It pretended that everything was blazing everywhere just because the stars had come out early in the sky. And that other houses were not fiery suns, each imploding in the middle of its hell. Its consciousness withdrew just under the rooftop, cowering and trembling like a freezing owl.

The night is as in peacetime, one of many. The only things the house can count on are its watery tentacles and the river, whose woods could cover an escape. Time leaks relentlessly, and Time is not on the house's side. The house is preparing to betray its fate which repeats with horrible precision every fifty years. To be transformed into dust and ashes. Need one add, the flight never succeeds?



Emilios Solomou

Ημερολόγιο μιας απιστίας (2012)

The Diary of an Infidelity

Publishing House **Psychogios Publications SA**

Biography

Emilios Solomou was born in 1971 in Nicosia and grew up in his native village of Potami. He studied history and archaeology at the University of Athens. He also studied journalism in Cyprus and worked as a journalist for a daily newspaper for some years. He is now a teacher of Greek and history in a public high school. In addition, he is a member of the editorial board of the literary magazine *Anef*, and he has served as a member of the executive board of the Union of Cyprus Writers.

For the novel *An Axe in Your Hands* (2007), he was awarded the Cyprus State Prize for Literature. His novel *Like a Sparrow, Quickly You Passed...* was translated recently and published in Bulgaria.

Synopsis

Yiorgos Doukarelis, an archaeologist and professor at the University of Athens, returns to an island in the Small Cyclades, Koufonisi, 20 years after the excavation that made him famous and changed his life forever. At that excavation, he discovered the prehistoric remains of a young pregnant woman murdered 5000 years ago. They gave her the name Kassiopi. During this trip, he had an affair with one of his students, Antigoni. They got married after Yiorgos' divorce from his former wife Maria. He returns to the island, six months after Antigoni disappeared mysteriously. The order and the routine of his daily life are destroyed. Going around the island, passing by the places he lived during the time of the excavation and meeting people from the past, he also wanders amongst his memories, exploring the secret ties that connect him with the three women of his life, moving from the present to the past. This is a second excavation for him, an excavation into the deepest places of his soul. In his fantasy, Doukarelis goes back to the prehistoric times of Kassiopi, recreating the story of the murdered pregnant young woman.

At the end, he learns that his wife Antigoni was found murdered, after being raped and kept for some time as a prisoner by a man. Doukarelis immediately leaves the island that connected him with the destiny of the three women who played such decisive roles in his life: Kassiopi, the mortal remains of the prehistoric past, Maria, the woman from the past, and Antigoni from the present. This diary of an infidelity is also a novel about time, destruction, memory and love, which balances the present and the past.

Ημερολόγιο μιας απιστίας

Emilios Solomou

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Κοιτούσαν εκστασιασμένοι τούτο το δύστυχο πλάσμα και σώπαιναν. Μια αλλόκοτη ύπαρξη που αναδύθηκε στο φως από τα έγκατα της γης πέντε χιλιετίες μετά. Αυτό που δεν μπορούσε να κάνει πριν η Αντιγόνη ανάμεσα σ' όλους, βρήκε τώρα την ευκαιρία, άρπαξε το χέρι του Δουκαρέλη, τον φίλησε στα χείλη, ένωσε στο στόμα τον ιδρώτα και τη σκόνη που κατακάθισε στο δέρμα του, την ένταση και το τρεμούλιασμα μπροστά στο αναπάντεχο της σπουδαίας ανακάλυψης. Μακάβρια, αλήθεια, άποψη του έρωτα, πάνω από το θάνατο, ανάμεσα στα κιτρινωμένα κόκαλα μες στο σκοτάδι. Η Αντιγόνη αντιλαμβανόταν πόσο σημαντικό ήταν γι' αυτόν τούτα τα ανθρώπινα λείψανα και το μόνο που του ζήτησε να της επιβεβαιώσει, εκείνο που έμοιαζε αδιαμφισβήτητο, ήταν αν πράγματι τούτος ο προϊστορικός άνθρωπος είχε δολοφονηθεί.

«Δεν είμαι ιατροδικαστής, αλλά έτσι φαίνεται», της απάντησε. «Αυτό μαρτυρούν το θρυμματισμένο κρανίο, η πέτρα δίπλα στο κεφάλι, η πρόχειρη και γρήγορη ταφή και ο ασυνήθιστος ενταφιασμός μέσα στο σπίτι, δίπλα στα θεμέλια του τοίχου».

Αναρωτήθηκε ακόμα αν ο σκελετός ανήκε σε άνδρα ή γυναίκα κι ο Δουκαρέλης με κάθε επιφύλαξη αποφάνθηκε πως πρόκειται για γυναίκα.

«Και γιατί τη σκότωσαν;» Στη φωνή της φανεωνόταν η θλίψη για τη μοίρα της γυναίκας σ' έναν κόσμο στον οποίο

ανέκαθεν κυριαρχούσε η παντοδυναμία και, όπως πίστευε, η αυθαιρεσία των ανδρών.

«Ποιος ξέρει, άβυσσος η ψυχή του ανθρώπου, ορισμένα πράγματα στην ψυχосύνθεσή του δεν αλλάζουν. Έτσι ήταν ο προϊστορικός άνθρωπος, έτσι είναι και σήμερα».

«Αν έτσι είναι ο άνθρωπος, τότε θα έπρεπε να ξέρουμε περισσότερα γι' αυτούς που ζούσαν εδώ πριν πέντε χιλιάδες χρόνια».

«Ναι», συμφώνησε ο Δουκαρέλης, «αν ξέρουμε κάτι, είναι γι' αυτόν ακριβώς το λόγο. Αλλά πολλά θα αποκαλύψει η εξειδικευμένη έρευνα στο εργαστήριο, καλύτερα να περιμένουμε, ας μην προτρέχουμε, γιατί ό, τι φαντάζεται και υποθέτει κανείς, αποδεικνύεται πολλές φορές αυθαίρετο».

Είχε πια σκοτεινιάσει κι αυτοί παρέμεναν ακόμα μέσα σε τούτο τον υγρό τάφο. Η Αντιγόνη άρχισε να φοβάται, ήταν πράγματι μακάβρια η στιγμή πλάι στα λείψανα. Κάθονταν σε μια γωνιά του σκάμματος, εκείνη παραπονιόταν ότι κρύωνε κι ο Δουκαρέλης την πήρε στην αγκαλιά του, να ηρεμήσει. Ένα φτεροκόπημα πάνω από τα κεφάλια τους την έκανε να πεταχτεί έξαφνα και να τεντώσει το κορμί της. Ανατρίχιασε, έτοιμη να ξεφωνίσει.

«Μη φοβάσαι, μια κουκουβάγια είναι», την καθησύχασε ο Δουκαρέλης.

«Είναι δυσσιώνο το κρώξιμό της», είπε αυτή. «Κάτι κακό θα μας συμβεί».

«Ανοησίες, είναι μια ηλίθια δεισιδαιμονία», απάντησε αυτός. Και της θύμισε πως για τους αρχαίους Έλληνες ήταν το σύμβολο της θεάς Αθηνάς, την ταύτιζαν με τη σοφία. Πριν τη ναυμαχία της Σαλαμίνας, καθώς οι στρατηγοί των Ελλήνων συζητούσαν στο κατάστρωμα ενός πλοίου τι να πράξουν,

ξαφνικά πέταξε μια κουκουβάγια. Κάθισε στα ξάρτια και η εμφάνισή της θεωρήθηκε καλός οιωνός. Οι Έλληνες τότε ετοιμάστηκαν να ναυμαχήσουν.

Η Αντιγόνη όμως δεν ησύχασε, η ακοή της ήταν σε εγρήγορση, τρανταζόταν ακόμα και στα ανεπαίσθητα συρσίματα των μικροσκοπικών πλασμάτων στις πέτρες και στους θάμνους.

«Δεν είναι τίποτα, μην ανησυχείς», ο Δουκαρέλης έκανε φιλότιμες προσπάθειες.

Και τι μπορούσε να της πει, αλήθεια; Πως τότε που μελετούσε τη χλωρίδα και την πανίδα του νησιού για τις ανάγκες της ανασκαφής, διάβασε πως εδώ σ' αυτά τα χώματα ενδημεί η *νίπερα αμμοδύτες*, η κοινή οχιά και ο *eryx jaculus*, το ερημόφιδο, ο λουρίτης κατά τους ντόπιους, το μοναδικό είδος βόα στην Ευρώπη, που ψάχνει τη λεία του μέσα σε τρύπες τρωκτικών, όπως αυτήν εδώ;

Σώπασαν για λίγο. Κι απέμειναν αγκαλιασμένοι κάτω από τον ουρανό. Μύρισαν ξανά την τραγίσια οσμή που 'φτανε κοντά τους από τις παρακείμενες μάντρες. Άκουγαν τις οπλές να χτυπούν στη γη. Μέχρι που αναπάντεχα η Αντιγόνη πάλι ρώτησε:

«Γιώργο, τι θα γίνει με μας;»

Ο Δουκαρέλης αιφνιδιάστηκε. *Τι θα γίνει με μας; Δεν* ανέμενε την ερώτησή της. Συνήθως, τα πιο απρόβλεπτα προκύπτουν εκεί που δεν τα περιμένεις. Τι γύρευε εδώ ένα τέτοιο ερώτημα; Έμεινε μετέωρο στον αγέρα, λευκό σύννεφο, που πνίγηκε μες στο πηχτό σκοτάδι. Τόσο πυκνό, σκληρό σαν πέτρα, που αν άπλωναν το χέρι, θα το 'νιωθαν στην παλάμη τους, να μυρμηγκιάζει το δέρμα, να παγώνει το αίμα, να παραλύει τις αρτηρίες. Τέτοια ώρα, τέτοια λόγια. Ακολούθησε παύση, εκείνος ξεφύσησε.

«Τι να γίνει, ποιος ξέρει τι μπορεί να γίνει...» είπε αινιγματικά.

Εκείνη φάνηκε να απογοητευμένη. Αποσύρθηκε σαν την άμπωτη από την αγκαλιά του, ακούμπησε ξανά στο τοίχωμα του σκάμματος, δίπλωσε τα χέρια της στο στήθος σαν φτερούγες, να ζεσταθεί.

«Δεν έπρεπε να μείνουμε εδώ. Αργήσανε...» είπε δύσθυμη.

Μα να που σε λίγο ακούστηκαν φωνές, σύντομα φάνηκαν σκιές να σαλεύουν με τα φανάρια ανάμεσα στα βράχια και ν' ανεβαίνουν στο ύψωμά τους. Ήταν καμιά εικοσαριά, οι περισσότεροι περίεργοι νησιώτες που μαζεύτηκαν να δούνε τι συμβαίνει, τι μυστήριο αποκαλύφθηκε απόψε στον τόπο τους. Θα 'ταν πολύ να 'λεγε κανείς πως έτρεξαν να συναντήσουν τις ρίζες τους, τούτο το λείψανο που περπάτησε σ' αυτά τα ίδια χώματα πριν από χιλιάδες χρόνια. Ανάμεσά τους ήταν ένας αστυφύλακας και ο κοινοτάρχης, ο Κουκουλές μπροστά σαν να 'ταν ο φυσικός αρχηγός τους, *κύριε πρόεδρε*. Ήταν πονηρός, το μάτι του κοιτούσε μια τον Δουκαρέλη μια την Αντιγόνη, που στέκονταν πλάι πλάι σε τούτο τον τάφο, όχι το σκελετό κάτω από τα πόδια τους. Δεν τον ξεγελούσαν αυτόν, κάτι έτρεχε ανάμεσά τους. Για το εύρημα δεν έδειξε ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον, δεν είχε προγονικές ευαισθησίες, τέτοια χούγια ήταν για τους αλαφροϊσκιωτους και τους φαντασμένους, οι πεθαμένοι με τους πεθαμένους και οι ζωντανοί με τους ζωντανούς. Αυτοί διατάραξαν την αιώνια ασάλευτη τάξη τους, έμπλεξαν ζωντανούς και πεθαμένους μαζί, ας βρουν μόνοι τους την άκρη. Οι κόρες στα μικροσκοπικά μάτια του είχαν διασταλεί και του 'διναν μιαν απόκοσμη όψη. Ο Δουκαρέλης είχε την αίσθηση πως γυάλιζαν μες στο σκοτάδι, δυο μικροσκοπικά, πυρακτωμένα κάρβουνα.

Ο αστυφύλακας απόρησε γιατί τους φώναξαν εδώ στις ερημιές τέτοια ώρα και ο Δουκαρέλης τού εξήγησε πως έπρεπε απόψε

να φυλαχτεί η ανασκαφή, το εύρημά τους ήταν εξαιρετικά σημαντικό, ίσως το μοναδικό που βρέθηκε ακέραιο στον κυκλαδίτικο πολιτισμό. Ο κοινοτάρχης διερωτήθηκε πόσο σπουδαίος μπορεί να είναι ένας σωρός από κόκαλα, το νεκροταφείο τους ποτέ δεν το φύλαξαν, εκεί μες στους τάφους αναπαύονταν δεκάδες, εκατοντάδες σκελετοί, κι εξ όσων γνώριζε, δεν το 'σκασε τόσα χρόνια κανείς. Ήταν φανερό πως αυτός ήταν το μυαλό, ο αστυφύλακας η προέκταση, το χέρι της εξουσίας.

[...]

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Όλο το βράδυ το πούσι τού τρυπούσε τα κόκαλα. Για να γλιτώσει, σύρθηκε κάτω από την τέντα. Αισθανόταν βρόμικος μέσα σε τούτα τα ρούχα, τα μουλιασμένα στον ιδρώτα και στη νυχτερινή υγρασία. Πότε πότε έκλεινε κουρασμένος τα μάτια, μα η έγνοια τον κρατούσε ξύπνιο. Άκουγε τον μονότονο ήχο, τικ-τακ, τικ-τακ, στο ρολόι του κι έπιανε τον εαυτό του κάθε τόσο να μετράει τα δευτερόλεπτα. Κοιτούσε τον ουρανό, προσπαθούσε να εντοπίσει τους αστερισμούς, την Κασσιόπη, το κεντρί του Σκορπιού, ψάχνοντας να βρει στήριγμα χειροπιαστό, να επιβεβαιώσει τη δική του ύπαρξη μέσα στο μαύρο σκοτάδι. Ήταν πραγματικός ή μήπως πλάσμα της φαντασίας;

Βρισκόταν ολομόναχος εκεί έξω, τον είχαν καταπιεί οι σκιές. Τα χτυπήματα από τις οπλές στις γειτονικές μάντρες έφταναν κοντά του σαν μέσα από τα σπλάχνα της Γης. Θυμήθηκε πως το ποδάρι του διαβόλου είναι τραγίσιο. Τι παράξενη σκέψη! Βυθισμένος μέσα σ' εκείνη την πίσσα και την ερημιά δε θέλει

και πολύ κανείς για να πιστέψει τούτες τις δεισιδαιμονίες. Ανήκε στους από δω ή στους από κει; Όσο και να προσπαθούσε να ξεγελάσει τον εαυτό του πως δεν έπρεπε να φοβάται, τώρα ήταν η σειρά του. Ο φόβος τρύπησε το πετσί του και ταξίδευε μέσα στο αίμα του. Κάθε τόσο ένα ρίγος τού τράνταζε το σώμα, μούδιαζε το δέρμα του. Εκεί κάτω ξάπλωνε μια γυναίκα δολοφονημένη εδώ και χιλιάδες χρόνια. Διαισθανόταν πως κάποιες μυστικές, αόρατες δυνάμεις απελευθερώθηκαν από τα δεσμά τους κι αναδεδούνταν γύρω του, παραμόνευαν μέσα στη νύχτα. Αυτός διατάραξε τον αιώνιο ύπνο τους, αυτός τις ανέσυρε από τα βάθη της προϊστορίας. Πότε πότε σερνόταν μέχρι την άκρη του σκάμματος. Άναβε τον αναπτήρα και κοιτούσε το εύρημα μέσα στο διαφανές νάιλον. Τα οστά της φωσφόριζαν. Ήταν εκεί, ακίνητη, δεμένη με την αιώνια χθόνια μοίρα της, είχε δίκιο ο Κουκουλές, *κύριε πρόεδρε*. Το συντριμμένο επάνω μέρος του κρανίου, τα πόδια διπλωμένα και η λεκάνη κάπως ανασηκωμένη, όλος ο κορμός γερμένος στο πλάι. Αν μπορούσε να δει, αν μπορούσε να φανταστεί τα χαρακτηριστικά του προσώπου της, θα 'βλεπε τη σύσπαση του τρόμου που θα 'νιωσε στιγμιαία και τον τρομερό πόνο, ώσπου η ψυχή να πετάξει από τούτο το βασανισμένο πλάσμα. Αυτό που αντίκριζε ήταν φρικιαστικό, δε χωρούσε αμφιβολία, ήταν αποκρουστικά φρικτό κι αυτός ήταν μόνος μαζί του, μέσα στην απεραντοσύνη του κόσμου, κανείς άλλος. Ένωσε ξαφνικά σαν να τον έχουν κλείσει σε μian ιστορία τρόμου, απ' αυτές του Έντγκαρ Άλαν Πόε.

Μπροστά του, στο σύννεφο του καπνού που ανέβαινε από την πίπα του, είδε τη μάνα του να του κρατάει το χέρι και να τον σέρνει, μικρό παιδί, στους δρόμους του Βόλου, *μάνα*. Έψαχνε για δουλειά, δεν είχε πού να τον αφήσει. Είχαν κατέβει από το χωριό σαν κυνηγημένοι, πεινασμένοι. Έζησαν τις τρομερές δυσκολίες της εποχής, την πείνα και την ανέχεια, που

πολλούς τούς τσάκισαν και τούς γονάτισαν μέχρι το χώμα. Η μάνα του κάτι ρώτησε στο μαγέricko της πλατείας, ίσως αν ήθελαν υπάλληλο για τη λάντζα. Και πιο κάτω, ξαφνικά, βρέθηκαν μπροστά στο φανοστάτη. Από κει κρεμόταν ένα κομμένο κεφάλι, μεγάλες πρασινόμυγες ζουζούνιζαν γύρω του, σέρνονταν στο πρησμένο δέρμα, στο ξεραμένο αίμα, μάνα. Ήταν φρικτά παραμορφωμένο, τα μάτια ορθάνοικτα ακόμα ατένιζαν το θάνατο που ήρθε μ' όλη την ορμή να κόψει το νήμα της ζωής του. Από πάνω, μια πρόχειρη χάρτινη πινακίδα ανέγραφε τ' όνομά του, *ο συμμορίτης...* Ωστόσο, ήταν πολύ μικρός και γράμματα δεν ήξερε. Το κομμένο κεφάλι χαράχτηκε βαθιά στο μυαλό του, μια εικόνα ακραίας βαρβαρότητας. Είδε τη μάνα του να κλείνει τα μάτια, να δαγκώνει τα χείλη, ν' αποστρέφει το πρόσωπό της. Ανέβηκε στο πεζοδρόμιο κι άνοιξε το βήμα της. Προσπάθησε να πνίξει το λυγμό που ανέβαινε στο λαιμό της, ακούστηκε σαν μέσα από τα έγκατα της Γης, ένα πηγάδι, μια προαιώνια μαύρη τρύπα που ρουφάει τη μοίρα των ανθρώπων. Καθώς τον έσερνε στο δρόμο, αυτός ήταν ακόμα γυρισμένος πίσω, με το βλέμμα καρφωμένο στον μεταλλικό φανοστάτη, μέχρι που χάθηκαν στη στροφή. [...]

The Diary of an Infidelity

Emilios Solomou

Translated from the Greek by Irene Noel

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They looked in fascination at the unfortunate creature and fell silent. A strange being to come to light out of the bowels of the earth after five thousand years. Antigone did what she had been unable to do in front of everyone up till then: she took her chance, grabbed Doukarelis by the hand, kissed him on the lips, felt on her mouth the sweat and dust that had settled on his skin, felt him tense and tremble at the shock of their great discovery. A macabre approach to love, certainly, standing over death, in among the yellowing bones in the dark. Antigone was aware how significant those human remains were to him and her only question was the obvious one, whether this prehistoric person had actually been murdered.

“I am not a forensic expert, but that’s what it looks like”, he replied. “That is what the shattered skull, the stone beside the head, the shallow and makeshift grave and the unusual burial beside the foundations of the wall would seem to suggest”.

She wondered moreover whether the skeleton belonged to a man or a woman and Doukarelis, *very tentatively*, took the view that it must be a woman.

“And why did they kill her?” Her voice expressed sorrow for the fate of a woman, in a world where the omnipotence and, in her view, the callousness of men was ever dominant.

“Who knows, the soul of man is unfathomable, certain things in his psychological make-up never change. As he was in pre-historic times, so is man today”.

“If that is how man is, then we should know more about the ones who lived here five thousand years ago”.

“Yes”, agreed Doukarelis, “if we know anything, it’s for exactly that reason. But more will be revealed after specialized testing in the lab, better to wait, let’s not get ahead of ourselves, because the things we imagine or hypothesize often turn out to be wide of the mark”.

It had grown dark by now and they were still lingering in the damp grave. Antigone began to feel afraid. It had been truly macabre, that moment beside the human remains. They sat in a corner of the pit. She complained that she was cold and Doukarelis took her into his arms, to calm her.

A flapping of wings overhead made her suddenly start up and tense her body. She shivered, ready to cry out.

“Don’t be afraid, it’s only an owl”, Doukarelis reassured her.

“It’s unlucky when they hoot”, she said, “something bad is going to happen to us”.

“Nonsense, that’s a silly superstition”, he replied. And he reminded her that for the ancient Greeks it was the symbol of the goddess Athena: they associated her with wisdom. Before the battle of Salamis, just as the Athenian generals were on the deck of a ship discussing what to do, an owl suddenly flew up. It sat on the rigging and its appearance was thought to be a good omen. It was then that the Greeks began to prepare for battle.

But Antigone didn't calm down. Her hearing had quickened, and she started at the slightest rustling of every tiny creature over the stones and in the bushes.

"It's nothing, don't worry", Doukarelis tried manfully to reassure.

And anyway what could he say, really? That when he had studied the flora and fauna of the island for the requirements of the excavation, he had read that here in these parts the *vipera ammodytes* is endemic, the common viper and *eryx jaculus*, the sand boa, which searches for its prey in rat holes like this one here?

They were silent for a while. And stayed there entwined beneath the sky. They caught another whiff of the goaty smell that wafted over to them from the animal enclosure nearby. They could hear hooves tapping on the ground. And then unexpectedly Antigone asked again:

"Yiorgo, what will happen to you and me?"

Doukarelis was startled. *What will happen to you and me?* He wasn't expecting her question. As usual, the most unlikely things turn up just when you don't expect them. What was a question like that doing here? It hung in the air, a white cloud, smothered by the thick darkness. So thick, as hard as stone, that if they were to stretch out a hand they would feel it on their palm, tingling the skin, freezing the blood, stopping up the arteries. Words like that at a time like this? There followed a pause, he sighed.

"What will happen, who knows what might happen..", he said enigmatically.

She seemed disappointed. She drew back, as if ebbing away from his embrace, leaned against the wall of the pit once more and crossed her arms over her chest to get warm.

“We shouldn’t stay here. They are late...” she said morosely.

No sooner had she said it than they heard voices, and then shadows appeared flitting in the lamplight among the rocks, coming up the hillock to where they were. There were about twenty of them, mostly inquisitive islanders who had come up to see what was going on, what the mystery was that had revealed itself that evening in their neighbourhood. It would be too much to say that they were racing to get in touch with their roots, the human relic that had walked on this very turf thousands of years before. The constable was with them, with the village president Koukoulés in front: their natural leader, *Mr President*. He was a sly one, glancing first at Doukarelis and then at Antigone standing side by side next to the grave, rather than at the skeleton beneath their feet. They couldn’t hide from him, something was going on between them. He didn’t show much interest in their find. He was not moved by ancestry, such foibles were for people who fancy themselves and have their head in the clouds. The dead with the dead and the living with the living. If they would insist on disrupting a body’s sempiternal rest and confusing the living with the dead, then let them sort out the mess. The pupils of his tiny eyes were dilated and gave him a spooky look. Doukarelis felt them shining in the dark like two miniscule incandescent coals.

The constable couldn’t understand why they had been called out into the wilderness at this hour and Doukarelis explained to him that the excavation would have to be guarded tonight, their find was exceptionally significant, perhaps the only one to be found intact in the entire Cycladic civilization. The village president asked himself how remarkable a pile of bones could possibly be, they never guarded their cemetery, there were tens, hundreds of skeletons resting in those graves

and as far as he knew, none of them had broken out all these years. It was apparent that he was the brains while the constable was the extension, the long arm of power...

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All that evening the mist penetrated to his very bones. To escape it, he curled up under the tent. He felt dirty in his clothes, soaked in sweat and the night's damp. Now and again he would close his tired eyes, but his worries kept him awake. He could hear the monotonous tick tock, tick tock, of his watch and he caught himself every so often counting the seconds. He looked up at the sky, tried to locate the constellations, Cassiopeia, the sting of Scorpio, searching to find something tangible to hold on to, to confirm his own existence in the black of the night. Was he real or a figment of some fiction?

There he was, all alone, the shadows had swallowed him up. The clopping of hoofs from the nearby pens reached him as if it came out of the bowels of the earth. He remembered that the devil has a goat's foot. What a strange thought! Lost in the pitch dark and the wilderness it doesn't take much for a person to believe in such superstitions. Did he belong over here or over there with them? However much he tried to tell himself that he shouldn't be frightened, now it was his turn. Fear crept under his skin and travelled through his blood. Every so often a shudder ran through his body, chilling his skin. A woman was lying down there, murdered thousands of years before. He had the sense that secret, invisible forces had been loosed from their bonds and were stirring about

him, lurking in the night. It was he who had disrupted their eternal rest, he who had dragged them from the depths of prehistory. Every now and then he would inch over to the edge of the pit. He lit his lighter and looked at the find through its see-through plastic. Her bones were phosphorescent. There she was, motionless, tied to her eternal, earthy fate. He was right, Koukoulés, *Mr President*. The crushed upper part of the cranium, the folded legs and slightly raised pelvis, the entire body turned to one side. If he had been able to see, he could have imagined her face and its features, seen the spasm of terror that she had felt for an instant, and the terrible pain, until the soul finally flew from its tormented body. He was confronting something gruesome, there was no doubt about it, it was horribly gruesome and it was he who was alone with it, in the vastness of the universe, no-one else. He suddenly felt as if he had been shut into a horror story by Edgar Allan Poe.

Before him, in the cloud of smoke that rose up from his pipe, he saw his mother, pulling him along by the hand as a small boy through the streets of Volos. *Mother*. She was looking for work, she didn't have anywhere to leave him. They had come down from the village like hunted creatures, starving. They had lived through the horrors of that difficult time, the hunger and poverty which had done for so many and brought them to their knees. His mother asked at the eatery in the square, whether they might be needing someone to work in the scullery. And then further on down, suddenly, they were standing by the lamppost. From it hung a severed head, large greenbottle flies buzzing around it, crawling over the swollen skin, the dried blood, *mother*. It was hideously disfigured, the eyes wide open staring at death, which had come with all its force to cut his life short. From above, a rough paper placard noted

his name, the *bandit*... But he was too young and couldn't read. The severed head scored itself into his brain, an image of extreme brutality. He saw his mother close her eyes, bite her lip and turn her face away. She stepped up onto the pavement and quickened her pace. She tried to smother the sob that rose up in her throat, and sounded as if it came from the depths of the earth, a well, a primeval black hole which sucks in the fate of men. As she dragged him along the road, he kept on turning back to look, his gaze fixed upon the iron lamp post, until they had disappeared round the corner...



© Gonzalo Baro

Kristian Bang Foss

Døden kører audi (2012)

Death Drives an Audi

Publishing House **Gyldendal**

Biography

Kristian Bang Foss was born in Denmark in 1977. After initially starting a BA in mathematics and physics, he graduated from the Danish Writers' Academy in 2003.

His first novel *Fiskens vindue (The Window of the Fish)* was published in 2004 and impressed reviewers with its linguistic style and accurate depiction of seemingly ordinary everyday actions and pursuits. His début was followed by *Stormen i 99 (The Storm in 99)* in 2008, which takes place in an ordinary workplace environment that, with wonderful black humour, becomes the epicentre for slandering, games of power and a variety of absurd events.

In his winning novel *Døden kører Audi* – which, in its absurdly humorous style, uses characteristics from the traditional 'on the road' novel – he tells a satirical tale about the Danish welfare state and takes its characters on a trip through Europe to Morocco in search of a healer.

Synopsis

Asger lives with his girlfriend and her daughter in Copenhagen and works for an advertising agency. It's 2008, the credit crunch has just begun to bite, and after leading a catastrophic campaign, Asger is fired. He spends his days lying on the sofa, developing problems with both his weight and alcohol. His girlfriend breaks up with him and he moves to a flat in Sydhavn, losing contact with everybody. Half a year later, he is forced to take on a job as a disabilities carer in Stentofte, a dreary concrete suburb of Copenhagen, looking after a sick man called Waldemar. Their daily life together is a study in hopelessness. But Waldemar has a plan: he wants to go and see a healer in Morocco. Asger is sceptical, but nevertheless he helps Waldemar raise money for the journey, and after a while the two friends find themselves on a road trip through Europe. However, they are being followed by a person in a black Audi – and as they get closer to Morocco, the trip turns into a race with death.

Døden kører audi

Kristian Bang Foss

Et andet udtryk, som vi var glade for, var „høje puder til sideliggere“. Vi samlede det op på en tur i Ikea, hvor Waldemar skulle have en ny lampe. Det stod på et fuldstændig dumt diagram i sengeafdelingen, hvor man ud fra sin sovestilling – ryggen, maven, siden, etc. – kunne finde ud af, hvilken størrelse pude man skulle have. Vi sagde det konstant, det udkonkurrerede drømmeguf i en periode, og da vi blev trætte af bare at sige, høje puder til sideliggere, og af at spørge i forretningerne, vi kom ind i, om de havde høje puder til sideliggere, begyndte vi på små variationer over temaet, og en samtale som denne kunne udspille sig:

- Skal du snart have ny pude, Waldemar?
- Jeps.
- Hvor høj skal puden være?
- Den skal være sygt høj.
- Hvorfor?
- Fordi jeg er sideligger.

En dag kulminerede det i, at vi ansøgte kommunen om en højere pude til Waldemar. Begrundelsen var, at han havde opdaget, at han var sideligger. Sagsbehandleren ville se dokumentation fra lægen, og vi fik Waldemars læge til at skrive en erklæring om, at Waldemar af helbredsmæssige grunde måtte have en høj pude. Og så fik vi vores pudemæssige carte blanche fra kommunen og tog ud i Ikea, og vi havde aftalt, at

Waldemar skulle sige, mit navn er Waldemar, og jeg er sideligger, og jeg vil gerne bede om den højeste pude, I har.

Ude foran Ikea røg vi en joint. Da Waldemar rullede mod skydedøren i sin kørestol med mig ved siden af, og glasset gled til side med en hvislen, sagde jeg, kan du høre det, Waldemar? Det er dørene til pudehimlen, der åbner sig på vid gab.

På vejen til afdelingen med puder og dyner og den slags, kom vi igennem møbeludstillingen, og specielt var der én stol, der fangede vores opmærksomhed, fordi den hed Boliden, og jeg råbte, se, de har en stol, der hedder Bol-i-den, og vi hulkede begge to af grin, og jeg måtte sætte mig I stolen og sunde mig et minut. Så kom der et ægtepar i slutningen af trediverne, der så usigeligt selvhøjtidelige ud, og som tydeligvis overvejede at købe en Boliden, så jeg rejste mig for at lade dem betragte den i fred, og sagde, det er en dejlig stol, men de værdigede os ikke et svar. I badeværelsesafdelingen kiggede jeg mig i spejlet. Mine øjne var røde af hashen.

Da vi fandt en ekspedient at henvende os til i sengeafdelingen, holdt Waldemar sig ikke helt til manuskriptet, men det gjorde det kun endnu bedre, han sagde, har I høje puder?

Og ekspedienten, en mand i midten af tyverne, som af en eller anden grund var utrolig energisk, sagde, vi er rigtig stærke i puder, og det svar tog helt pusten fra Waldemar og mig, og da vi ikke sagde no- get, og jeg måtte vende mig bort og bide mig i læben, sagde ekspedienten, hvor høj skal den være?

– Tårnhøj, sagde Waldemar, jeg er nemlig sideligger, og så fik han nogle mærkelige trækninger i ansigtet, og der rullede tårer ned ad hans kinder, men ekspedienten ignorerede det, han troede nok, det var en del af hans handicap, og sagde, følg med mig, og mens vi gik, sagde han, der er jo også spørgsmålet om fyldet.

Efter pudekøbet spiste vi kötbullar I kantinen, og Walde-
mar insisterede på, at hans nye pude skulle ligge på bordet, og
at tallerknen med kötbullar skulle stå oven på puden, og den
blev eleveret så meget, at han dårligt kunne nå, og det kun var
hans øjne, der stak op over tallerknen.

- Det er eddermaneme en høj pude, sagde jeg.
- Det er en rigtig sideliggerpude.
- Du brækker nakken, hvis du vender dig i søvne.
- Sådan vil vi sideliggere have det.

Og sådan blev vi ved.

Den trang til at gentage et mantra hidrørte fra, at vi jo til-
bragte så enorme mængder tid sammen med at lave ingenting,
eller i hvert fald med at lave ting, der kun lå få hårsbredder
fra at være det rene ingenting. At vi måtte udfylde tiden med
ekskursioner ud i byen efter overflødige ting, som ingen
levende havde brug for, at vi måtte gøre rent i lejligheden,
selvom den i forvejen var ren, at vi måtte på posthuset og
indbetale husleje til et hjem, der ikke var et hjem, men en
fjende af alt liv, og når så tomheden en gang imellem truede
med at bryde igennem den ganske tynde fernis, vi konstant
malede den over med via vores tåbelige gøremål, hjalp det at
sige noget endnu mere tåbeligt, det manede tomheden væk.
Jo, der var et element af horror vacui over det, som når hånd-
værkere fløjter eller skruer højt op for transistoren, men det
var også et modangreb, og ingen steder syntes vi, ondskaben
og hykleriet var så tydeligt, som i en sætning som høje puder
til sideliggere; vi så den konsekvente pervertering af alt, og
så kunne vi ikke gøre andet end at le. Efterhånden som vi
udviklede denne sære form for selvopholdelseshumor, kunne

et brev fra borgerservice få os til at hikke af grin, når jeg læste det op i det rette tonefald. Ja, med tiden var det, som om man kunne kilde os under fødderne, bare ved at nævne et ord som borgerservice. Vi var for længst ophørt med at være borgere. Og det føjede spot til skade at kalde os det. Vi måtte le.

Så en dag viste det sig, hvad Waldemar havde siddet og pønset på ved computeren. Har du nogensinde været i Marokko? indledte han med at spørge, og jeg sagde, uha nej.

– Men har du hørt om Torbi el Mekki fra Skhirat? sagde Waldemar.

– Min gamle ven Torbi fra Marokko, sagde jeg, selvfølgelig har jeg hørt om Torbi, men Waldemar ignorerede min sarkasme og fortsatte med sin Torbi el Mekki, der viste sig at være en healer, han havde fundet på nettet. Waldemar fortalte, hvordan han havde helbredt mennesker med alvorlige sygdomme, hvordan folk havde smidt deres krykker efter et besøg hos healeren, hvordan de havde kunnet se igen, hvordan de havde kunnet gå.

– Men det er jo bare pis, Waldemar.

– Du kan selv google ham, han er ægte nok.

– Jeg tvivler ikke på, han er ægte. Det er det med, at han skulle kunne kurere noget som helst, jeg ikke tror på.

– Jamen, jeg tror på det... Desuden gør han det gratis. Hvis han var en fupmager, ville han tage penge for det.

– Men synes du ikke, det virker langt ude, at en eller anden mand i Marokko skulle kunne helbrede sygdomme med de bare hænder?

– Nej.

– Jeg ved ikke, hvad jeg skal sige... så dum troede jeg ikke, du var.

Waldemar rejste sig fra sofaen og gik ind i soveværelset og lukkede døren.

Jeg blev siddende og tændte for fjernsynet. Ærgerlig over mig selv og ærgerlig over dumheden. Der blev vist Extreme Makeover. Efter ti minutters tid var Waldemar stadig ikke kommet ud. Jeg rejste mig og gik over og bankede på døren.

– Ham der din ven i Marokko, sagde jeg.

– Om ikke andet kunne det jo være en god tur derned.

– Jeg tager et kørekort og kører derned alene, svarede han ud gennem den lukkede dør.

– Jamen, jeg vil gerne med. Vi kan tage en færge fra Gibraltar.

Der var stille derindefra et stykke tid.

– Gibraltar, det lyder vildt.

Jeg lavede kaffe, og vi satte os ved sofabordet og planlagde.

– Det første, vi skal gøre, er at søge kommunen, sagde Waldemar.

– Hvad skal vi søge om?

– Løn til dig, blandt andet, og tilskud til en bil. Der er mange ting.

– Har du nogen penge sparet op?

– Jeg har ti tusinde.

– Jeg få jo stadig min løn, selvom vi tager af sted, og jeg kan låne penge af en af mine venner, så jeg har lidt ekstra. Hvis

vi dropper det med kommunen, kan vi være af sted allerede næste uge.

- Det er dumt at gå glip af tilskud, hvis vi kan få det.
- Det kommer til at tage en evighed.
- Tre uger, sagde Waldemar, og holdt tre fingre I vejret, maks tre uger. Vi skal jo også have skaffet en bil.

Jeg opgav foreløbig at forstå Waldemars pludselige stålsathed på en ide, der virkede, om ikke grebet ud af den blå luft – han havde jo åbenbart siddet og researchet på internettet – så i hvert fald en smule tilfældig. Og på trods af, at jeg følte en meget stærk fjendtlighed på grænsen til had mod den healer nede i Marokko og alt, hvad han stod for, var jeg selv ivrig efter at komme af sted. Jeg var desperat efter et hvilket som helst initiativ, der kunne bryde min pendlen mellem trøstesløshedens to poler: min lejlighed i Sydhavnen og min arbejdsplads i Stentofte. Og så gik det også op for mig, at der faktisk var en del af Waldemars plan, jeg forstod til fulde: Det drejede sig om at komme væk. Langt væk.

Death Drives an Audi

Kristian Bang Foss

Translated from the Danish by Paul Russell Garrett

Another expression we were fond of was “plump pillows for side sleepers”. We picked it up in Ikea, on a trip to get Waldemar a new lamp. We discovered it on a completely geniotic diagram in the bedroom department, where, depending on your sleeping position – on your back, stomach, side, etc. – you could find out which size pillow you should be using. We repeated it constantly; it even ousted dreamsweets for a time. When we got tired of just saying, ‘plump pillows for side sleepers,’ and of asking in shops if they had plump pillows for side sleepers, we began to make small variations on the theme, and the conversation would go something like this:

‘Are you going to buy a new pillow soon, Waldemar?’

‘Yep.’

‘How plump is the pillow going to be?’

‘It’s going to be disgustingly plump.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I’m a side sleeper.’

One day, it went so far that we actually petitioned the council to get Waldemar a plumper pillow. Our reasoning was that he had just discovered he was a side sleeper. The case handler wanted to see documentation, so we had Waldemar’s doctor write a declaration that he needed a plump pillow on health grounds. And when the council gave us *carte blanche* for

pillow-buying, we took a trip to Ikea. We agreed that Waldemar should say, 'My name is Waldemar, I'm a side sleeper and I would like the plumpest pillow you've got.'

In front of Ikea, we smoked a joint. Waldemar rolled his wheelchair towards the automatic doors; the glass slid away with a whistle and I stood by his side saying, 'Do you hear that Waldemar? That's the door to pillow heaven opening wide.'

On our way to the department with pillows and duvets and all that, we passed through the furniture showroom, where one chair in particular caught our attention. It was called the Jerker and I shouted, 'Look, they've got a chair called the Jerker!' We both cried with laughter and I had to sit in the chair for a minute to recover. A couple in their late thirties came by; they looked unspeakably self-important and were clearly considering buying a Jerker, so I got up to let them study it in peace. I said, 'That's a lovely chair,' but they didn't dignify me with a response. In the bathroom department, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. My eyes were red from the hash.

When we found a salesperson from the bedding department to speak with, Waldemar wandered from the script a little, which only made it better. He asked, 'Do you have plump pillows?'

The salesperson, a man in his mid twenties, who for whatever reason was unbelievably keen said, 'We're very strong in the pillow department.' His answer completely took the wind out of our sails. When Waldemar and I didn't reply and I had to turn away biting my lip, the salesman then asked, 'How plump would you like it?'

'Plump as pudding,' Waldemar said. 'You see, I'm a side sleeper,' and his face began to twitch strangely and tears

rolled down his cheeks but the salesman ignored it. He must have thought it was related to his disability and said, 'Follow me,' and as we walked, he said, 'Of course, it's all a question of the filling.'

After the pillow purchase, we ate Swedish meatballs in the canteen with Waldemar insisting that his new pillow should stay on the table and that his plate of meatballs should rest on top of it. He could hardly reach it, it was so high, and only his eyes stuck out above the plate.

'That is one damned plump pillow,' I said.

'It's a proper side sleepers' pillow.'

'You'll break your neck if you roll over in your sleep.'

'That's how we side sleepers like it.'

And we carried on like this.

The urge to repeat this mantra stemmed from spending enormous amounts of time together doing nothing, or at least doing things that were only a few hair widths away from being absolutely nothing. Forced to pass the time by going on out-of-town excursions, searching for unnecessary items which no living person had any use for, having to clean the flat even though it was already clean, having to go to the post office to pay the rent for a home that wasn't a home but an enemy of all things living and so on the odd occasion when the emptiness threatened to break through the terribly thin veneer which we were constantly painting over with our ridiculous goings-on, it helped to say something even more ridiculous; it kept the emptiness at bay. Yes, there was an element of horror vacui to it, like when tradesmen whistle or turn their transistor radio up high, but it was

also a counterattack. For us, nowhere was wickedness and hypocrisy more evident than in a sentence such as plump pillows for side sleepers; we saw the consistent perversion of everything and we could do nothing but laugh. As this specific form of self-preservation humour developed, a simple letter from the citizen's bureau could make us convulse with laughter, just by reading it out in the right tone. Yes, over time it was as though simply saying citizen's bureau was like tickling the bottom of our feet. We had long since ceased to be citizens. It added insult to injury to call us that. We had to laugh.

One day Waldemar revealed what he had been plotting on his computer. He began by asking, 'Have you ever been to Morocco?' and I said, 'God no.'

'But have you heard of Torbi el Mekki from Skhirat?' Waldemar said.

'My old friend Torbi from Morocco,' I replied, 'of course I've heard of Torbi.' Waldemar ignored my sarcasm and went on with his Torbi el Mekki, who turned out to be some healer he'd found on the internet. Waldemar described how the man had healed people with serious illnesses, how people had cast aside their crutches after a visit with this healer, how they'd regained their sight, how they could walk again.

'But you know that's just nonsense, Waldemar.'

'You can google him yourself, he's real enough.'

'I don't doubt that he's real. It's just the bit about him being able to cure anything at all, that I don't believe.'

'Well, I believe it... besides, he does it for free. If he was a fraud, he'd ask for money.'

‘But don’t you think it seems farfetched, that some man in Morocco is able to cure diseases with his bare hands?’

‘No.’

‘I don’t know what to say... I didn’t think you were that stupid.’

Waldemar got up from the sofa, went into his bedroom and closed the door.

I stayed in my seat and turned on the TV. Annoyed with myself and annoyed with the stupidity. Extreme Makeover was on. After ten minutes, Waldemar still hadn’t come out. I got up, walked over to his door and knocked.

‘About this fellow, your friend in Morocco,’ I said. ‘If nothing else, it could be a nice trip.’

‘I’ll get my driver’s permit and drive down there by myself,’ he answered through the closed door.

‘Well, I want to go with you. We can take the ferry from Gibraltar.’

For a while, it was quiet inside.

‘Gibraltar, that sounds wild.’

I made coffee and we sat at the table making plans.

‘The first thing to do is to apply to the council,’ Waldemar said.

‘What are we applying for?’

‘Your wages, among other things, and money for a car. Lots of things.’

‘Have you got any money saved up?’

‘I’ve got ten thousand.’

‘I’ll still get paid if we go and I can borrow money from one of my friends, so that’s a bit more. If we drop this thing with the council, we can leave as early as next week.

‘It’s stupid to miss out on benefits if we can get them.’

‘It’s going to take forever.’

‘Three weeks,’ Waldemar said holding three fingers in the air, ‘three weeks max. We still have to find a car.’

For the time being, I gave up on understanding Waldemar’s sudden determination to follow through on an idea that seemed, if not to have appeared out of nowhere – apparently he had done his research on the internet – then at least to be a little random. Despite feeling a very strong dislike, bordering on hate, towards this Moroccan healer and everything he stood for, I was still eager to leave. I was desperate for any sort of initiative that could break my commute between my twin poles of desolation: my flat in Sydhavn and my workplace in Stentofte. Then it dawned on me, there was actually a part of Waldemar’s plan which I understood completely. The part about getting away. Far away.



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Meelis Friedenthal

Mesilased (2012)

The Bees

Publishing House **AS Varrak**

Biography

The Estonian writer Meelis Friedenthal (b.1973) has written a doctoral thesis at Tartu University on a 13th century philosophical-theological treatise about seeing and vision. Friedenthal has worked as lecturer in the faculty of theology and history and is currently working as a senior researcher in Tartu University Library.

Friedenthal has earned a reputation as a speculative fiction writer, his first novel *Golden Age* is about the role of history in shaping our identity and won third place in a national novel competition in 2004. The following year, his story 'Nerissa' won an Estonian science fiction prize. He is also a member of the editorial board of the webzine *Algernon*, which publishes science fiction stories, news and articles. Friedenthal has also written an extensive postscript about the historical context of the events described in the novel.

Synopsis

Friedenthal describes the adventures of Laurentius Hylas, a student travelling from the University of Leiden to the Academia Gustavo-Carolina in Tartu, Livonia.

Laurentius arrives in Estonia some years before the end of the 17th century, together with his parrot Clodia. The parrot's sanguine temperament is supposed to help counteract the melancholia that affects Laurentius. Tartu has a reputation as a city of muses, but Laurentius sees starving people behind the city gates and feels the dampness of the houses. Thus, his melancholia worsens and he starts to suspect seeing again the ghosts which have haunted him from his childhood onwards.

Everything he eats tastes of mud and putrefaction, and he feels weaker and weaker every day. He tries to find some cure for his disease but only manages to arouse suspicion of witchcraft. Laurentius hears a professor talking about the medicinal theories of Boyle and follows his advice of bloodletting to cure his condition. Unfortunately, the process does not work and Laurentius faints. In the haze of weakness he sees a girl who has, "eyes like gold, like the dark honey, her breathing like humming". She starts appearing at night and, later, Laurentius begins to discover that strange events are happening around him. He is unsure if it is possible to explain them naturally or supernaturally, as the competing philosophical theories he follows permit both.

Kogu aeg sadas vihma. Vihm oli mädandanud saagi põldudel, pannud hallitama majade puust seinad, muutnud vetikaligedaks laevade tekilauad. Laurentius oli juba mitu kuud söönud mädanenud leiba, elanud hallitavates majades ja viimasel nädalal ka libisenud ligedal laevatekil. Must sapp kogunes temasse, nagu jõkke torgatud toki otsa koguneb kõnts. Nüüd astus ta lõpuks kõikuvast paadist sadamakaile, selle põhjamudasse rammitud palkide peale löödud libedatele laudadele ja vaatas kõhklevalt ümbruskonnas ringi. Tuul puhus madalast taevast hoogude kaupa veeprintsmeid näkku ja ta proovis aru saada, milline on see maa, kuhu ta enda vabal valikul oli tulnud. Lage, valge liiva ja üksikute pillirootutidega kaldariba ning ühtlased hallid pilved meenusid väga seda sadamat, kust ta oli teele asunud. Postilaeva mast paistis samasugusena halli taeva taustal ning palakad, mis nendele olid tõmmatud, paistsid samasugused hallid ja ilmetud nagu siis, kui ta oli teele asunud. Pikalt merre ulatuva silla kõrval oli näha pooleldi porise vee alla mattunud muul ja selle otsas vees kõssitav vana vahimaja, mida ilmselt juba mõnda aega ei olnud keegi kasutanud. Neid majavaresid oli kõikide sadamate juures ning vaatamata oma armetusele sisendas selline pilt Laurentiusele miskipärast hoopis kindlust. Siingi oli sadamaid ümber ehitatud, siingi laiendati uute laevade tarbeks, vanad vahimajad jäeti maha.

Ta ohkas ja kohendas närviliselt veest tilkuvat katet puuri peal.

Oma varustuse kaasavõtmiseks ei pidanud ta kuigi palju pingutama – üks tammelaudadest kokku löödud kast mahutas täielikult selle, mida ta oli pidanud vajalikuks kooli kaasa võtta. See läks koos laeva trümmis veetava kaubaga tolli ning ilmselt võis selle alles täna õhtul kätte saada. Laeva last, ka reisijate isiklik pagas, vaadati hoolikalt üle ning pandi kirja kõik, mis võis vähegi maksu alla käia. Sellega ei olnudki tegelikul muret, tal polnud seal suurt midagi väärtuslikku, kõik tema vähesed isiklikud raamatud olid ka ametlikult lubatud ja medikamente oli ta kaasa võtnud vaid minimaalselt. Raskusi valmistas hoopis puur kaeluspapagoiga. Juba kodus oldi teda hoiatatud, et linnu transportimine ei pruugi kõige lihtsam olla, ning olud, mida ta siit eest leiab, võivad sellele saatuslikuks saada. Samas ei tahtnud ta kuidagi oma seltsilisest loobuda ja otsustas pigem riskida. Praeguseks oli kõige suurem mure saada lind võimalikult kähku külma vihma käest kuhugi soojemasse kohta.

Laurentius pühkis laiaäärsest kübarast hoolimata silmadesse valgunud vihmavee ära, heitis mantlihõlma alt pilgu taskukel-lale ja jäi otsima kedagi, kes võiks teda mingi trahteri juurde juhatada ja võib-olla hiljem ka kasti tollist ära tuua. Puuri ei julgenud ta kellelegi teisele usaldada. Tegutseda tuli kiiresti, sest teed olid juba praegu üsna viletsad ning ta ei tahtnud mingil tingimusel kauem oodata, et siit linnast edasi sõita. Sügisised, järjest tihedamaks ja rajumaks muutuvad vihma-sajud uuristasid niigi pehmeid radu ja iga päevaga muutus nende läbimine vaevalisemaks. Õhk tõmbus aeglaselt jäiseks. Papagoi võis külma saada. Tuli kohe leida mingi vanker või tõld, mis Tartu poole minema hakkaks.

«Hei!»

Vihmast ligedal sadamakail olid vaid mõned üksikud uudishimulikud, kes olid vastikust ilmast hoolimata tulnud saabuvaid paate vaatama. Nad teadsid ilmselt väga hästi, et erilist lootust tööd leida neil ei olnud, ning ei osanud seega Laurentiuse hüüde peale kohe reageeridagi. Kogu lasti ladusid tollimaja juures maha meremehed ja tüdinud hooletusega askeldasid kaupmeeste palgatud laadijad, kes libedaid kaste ja niiskunud kotte kärudele vinnasid. Ametnikud märkisid kaupu üles.

Laurentius hõikas veel kord.

«Hei, sina seal!»

Kui hõreda ja kulunud kuuega uudistaja tuimalt üles vaatas, viipas Laurentius talle kutsuvalt käega juhuks, kui teine tema keelest aru ei peaks saama. Mees ise nägi välja nagu tege lane ajaloo keskmise perioodi süngete kunstnike maalidel, mida ta oli Hollandis näinud: loperguseks vajunud viltkübara alt ulatusid salkudena välja ebamäärast värvi juuksed, nina oli muhklik ja punetas, harva habemetüüka alt aimus haigusarmiline lõug. Laurentiusel oli tunne, et mehe kaela oleks sobinud suurepäraselt silt «Nurjatus». Kõikides sadamates luusisid sellised ringi ning enamasti oli nende välimuse põhjal tehtud instinktiivne otsus õige. Samas olid need tege lased alati ka kõige paremini linna kõrtside ja võõrastemajade olukordadega kursis, ja nii võis neist ka palju kasu olla. Petsid nad muidugi alati, küsimus oli vaid selles, kas said rohkem või vähem petta.

«Juhata mind korralikku kõrtsi,» teatas Laurentius lühidalt ja vaatas, kuidas mees sõna lausumata minekule pöördus. Loo detavasti sai ta siiski keelest aru – või siis aimas.

Laurentius tõstis ettevaatlikult papagoipuuri sülle ja hakkas mehe järel linna poole liikuma. Lind kriiksatas ärevalt.

«Tss, Clodia, ole tasa.»

Nad kõndisid järjest tihenevas hämaruses edasi ja Laurentius püüdis võimalikult vähe puuri kõigutada. Öhtuse taeva taustal joonistusid ähvardavana välja toekatest kividest laotud sirged ja paksud linnamüürid, ümarad keskaegsed kindlustornid ja neli kõrget kirikut, madalamad majad neelas endasse pilvedest imbuv nätske hämu. Mees tema ees kõndis ootamatult kebjal sammul ja näis väga hästi teadvat, kuhu ta kavatseb välja jõuda. Temal endal seevastu hakkas vana haigus üha tugevamalt ja tugevamalt välja lööma. Praegune lakkamatu, kõigesse imbuv ja turrutav niiskus mõjus rängemalt kui varasematel aastatel. Sisikonnas kääriva musta sapi üleküllus muutis ta keha tavaliselt alles hilissügiseks jõuetuks ja unetuks, kuid sellel suvel algasid vihmad juba jaanipäeva paiku ning see lõppematu sabin oli tema sisikonna, südame ja aju kleepuvasse udusse mähkinud. Nüüd laevalt maa peale asudes ja lamedatel läikimahõõrutud kivilidel kõndides tekitas mere kõikumise mälestus sellele lisaks veel tunde, nagu peaks ta soost läbi pressima. Iga samm oli pingutus.

«Eh,» ühmas ta omaette. «Veel veidi.»

Ta vaatas ees kõndiva kaltsaka kookus selga ja mõtles, et ilmselt peab ikka kellegi teise oma kastile järele saatma. Nii viisi sadamast leitud juhuslike tegelastega võis sageli mingi jama tekkida. Tõenäoliselt oskab kõrtsmik aidata. Ta püüdis meelde tuletada, millised on Tallinna vääringud, mille kohta olid talle laeva peal erinevad reisijad nõu andnud ja millest ta juba siis järeldas, et täit selgust siin ilmselt kätte ei saa. Ars apodemica's, reisimise kunstist rääkivates raamatutes, ei puudutatud Eesti- ja Liivimaa olusid peaaegu üldse – seal olid pigem üldised juhtnöörid, mida tähele panna ja kuidas arukalt ümbrust jälgida. Siinsed linnad ja maad olid apodeemiliselt

täiesti kirjeldamata – huvi pärast reisitakse ikkagi ju mujal, lõunas. Kultuuri ja ajalooa paikades. Ta ei suutnud midagi asjalikku meelde tuletada. Pea oli paks.

«Olgu,» otsustas Laurentius lõpuks. «Kuuendikust öörist peaks igal juhul piisama.»

Peaaegu kottpipedas peatusid nad lõpuks kollase laterna all, mis valgustas ootamatult viisaka väljanägemisega kõrtsi, mis asus vaid veidi maad enne linnaväravaid, ja mees sirutas käe pikale. Laurentius poetas sinna juba salaja taskust välja otsitud väikese mündi ja lõi pilgu maha. Mees tunnistas hetke talle antud raha ja naeratas siis laialt.

«Pagan,» mõtles Laurentius. «Ikka andsin liiga palju.»

Ta tiris puuri uksest sisse.

«Kas ta soovib veel midagi?» uuris kaltsakas ootamatult heas saksa keeles.

Laurentius kõhkles. Kõige parema meelega oleks ta näinud, et mees kiiresti minekut teeb, sest need, kes end ise sulle külge kleebivad, on tavaliselt erilised kaabakad.

«Mul on vaja Tartu poole minna,» ütles ta siis eneselegi ootamatult. «Ja võimalikult kähku.»

Kasti järgi saadab ta siiski kellegi teise, aga tee uurimises ei olnud ju midagi halba. Mingisugusel hetkel pidid neil siin käima voorimehetõllad ja laevas teati rääkida, et pea iga nädal pidi mõni seltskond Tartu poole minema. Talle oldi kaardi pealt isegi kahte võimalikku teed näidatud – mõlemad võtsid mõni päev aega, olenevalt teeoludest võis ka kauem minna.

Mees heitis veel kord pilgu papagoipuurile ning lahkus siis – Laurentiusele tundus, et pilkliku kummardusega.

Ta kehtas õlgu, tõstis puuri kaminale kõige lähema laua peale, tõmbas tumeda niiskunud riidepalaka sealt ära ja vaatas, kuidas papagoi end õrrel kohendas.

«Noh, Clodia, oled valmis veel üheks reisiks?»

Koldest tulvav soojus mõjus ergutavalt ja ravis tema meeleolu ja papagoi külmetavat keha. Võtnud taskust paberi seest mõned seemned, puistas ta need puuri põhja. Polnud kindel, et siin kandis võis kusagilt päevalilloseemneid leida, ning seega oli ta neid ise kaasa võtnud. Nagu tavaliselt kogunesid muidu ruumis tegevusetult seisnud inimesed kohe puuri ümber, kes kõik tahtsid imelikku värvilist lindu näha.

«Kust selline ka pärit on?»

«Mida ta sööb?»

«Kas ta laulab ka?»

Laurentius seletas. Ühest küljest oli muidugi papagoi kaasatassimine tülikas ja ebamugav – ja mitte vaid Laurentiusele endale, arvatavasti kannatas lind selle käes isegi rohkem –, kuid teiselt poolt aitas see suurepäraselt inimestega kontakti luua ning Clodia oli talle juba laevas suureks abiks olnud.

«Olete üliõpilane, jah?» küsis keegi laua tagant tõustes.

«Jah,» vastas Laurentius. Tundus, et mees oli teda juba mõnda aega silmitsenud – ta tajus selliseid asju väga täpselt ning oskas pilku maas hoida, et mitte kogemata mõnele juhuslikule uudishimulikule otsa vaadata. Juba noorukina oli ta aru saanud, et sellest tulevad pahandused. Alguses hakkavad inimesed kahtlustama, pärast hoiavad temaga rääkides sõrmi selja taga ristas, pööravad tänavanurgalt tagasi ja väldivad hoopiski. Kõige kindlam on pilku maas hoida.

«Mina ei soovitaks teil Tartusse praegu minna.»

Mehe pindmise viisakuse tagant õhkus irooniat ning ka tema teietamine oli kuidagi pilklik.

«Miks siis?» üritas Laurentius vastu vaielda. Tegelikult ta muidugi teadis, milliseid vastuväiteid võiks Tartusse minemisele tuua.

«Halvad ajad. Ka professorid võtavad oma ülesandeid praegu väga laisalt. Suvi oli vihmane, nälg on vältimatu, kõik hinnad lähevad üles.»

«See on igal pool nii.»

The Bees

Meelis Friedenthal

Translated from the Estonian by Adam Cullen

It rained all the time. Rain had rotted the crops on the fields, had covered the wooden walls of the buildings with mold, had made ships' deck boards as sopping as seaweed. For already several months' time, Laurentius had been eating rotten bread, had been living in mildewed buildings, and in the last week, had also been sliding across the soggy deck of a ship. Black bile collected within him like sludge atop a stake driven into a riverbed. Now, he finally stepped from the lurching boat onto the harbor dock, onto the slippery boards nailed onto logs that were rammed into the mud beneath the water, and peered hesitatingly at his surroundings. The wind flung drizzle into his face in bursts from the low sky, and he strove to understand what sort of land it was, to which he had arrived by his own free choice. The bare, white sand and lone patches of reeds along the strip of shore, as well as the identical gray clouds very much resembled the harbor, from which he had set off. The mast of the post ship looked just the same against the gray sky, and the sheets that had been raised on it appeared just as gray and featureless as they had when he cast off. Next to the pier, which extended far out into the sea, a jetty buried halfway beneath the muddy water could be seen, and on top of it was an old watchman's house crouched down in the water, which no one had apparently used for already quite some time. These ruins could be found in every harbor, and despite their pitiful appearance, such an image rather instilled a sense of confidence in Laurentius for some reason.

Here as well, the harbors had been rebuilt; here as well, they had been enlarged for new ships to dock, and the old watchmen's houses had been abandoned.

He sighed, and nervously adjusted the cover over the cage dripping with rainwater.

He had not been required to make all that much of an effort in bringing his paraphernalia along—one chest hammered together from oak planks fit what he had deemed necessary for bringing with him to school entirely. It was sent to customs together with the goods carried in the ship's hold, and he would apparently only receive it that evening. The ship's cargo—even its passengers' personal baggage—was looked through carefully, and anything at all that could be subject to a tax was written down. There was actually no real worry about that—Laurentius had nothing of great value in the chest; every one of his few personal books was also officially permitted, and he had taken along only the bare minimum of medicines. What posed a difficulty was actually the cage containing a rose-ringed parakeet. Already when he was back at home, he had been warned that transporting a bird might not be the easiest thing, and the conditions that he would find before him could be fateful for the animal. At the same time, he did not want to give up his companion in the very least, and decided to take the risk instead. As of now, his greatest worry was getting the bird out of the cold rain and into a warmer place somewhere as quickly as possible.

Laurentius wiped away the rainwater that trickled down into his eyes despite the wide-brimmed hat he wore, glimpsed at a pocket watch beneath the hem of his coat, and started looking for someone who could direct him towards some pub, and maybe also retrieve his chest from customs later. He did not

dare entrust the cage to anyone else. He had to act quickly, because the roads were already rather abysmal, and under no condition did he want to wait any longer to travel on from this town. The fall showers, which were becoming ever thicker and more furious, made furrows in the already soft paths, and traversing them became more toilsome with each passing day. The air slowly turned icy. The parakeet might freeze. He needed to find a wagon or a coach that would start making its way towards Tartu.

“Hey!”

Only a few lone, curious individuals who had come to watch the arriving boats in spite of the nasty weather stood upon the dock, which was slippery from rain. They were apparently very well aware that there was no great hope in finding work, and were thus unable to react to Laurentius’ cry right away. The entirety of the cargo was being unloaded at the customs house by the sailors, and the haulers hired by merchants bustled around with wearied carelessness, heaving the sopping crates and moist sacks onto carts. Officials were marking down the goods. Laurentius called out a second time.

“Hey, you there!”

When one onlooker wearing a threadbare, worn coat glanced up expressionlessly, Laurentius beckoned in case the man did not speak his language. The individual himself resembled a figure in the somber paintings of artists from the Middle Ages, which Laurentius had seen in Holland: hair of an indeterminate shade poked out in clumps from beneath his lopsided felt hat, his nose was knobbed and reddish, and a chin scarred from sickness could be detected beneath his sparse stump of beard. Laurentius had the feeling that a sign reading “Wickedness” would hang wonderfully around his neck. This

type of person could be found drifting around all harbors, and the instinctive decision made on the basis of their appearance was, for the most part, correct. At the same time, these characters were always the most familiar with the situations in the town's pubs and boarding houses; thus, they could be of great use as well. They would always deceive you, of course—the question was merely whether you were deceived to a greater or a less extent.

“Direct me to a proper pub,” Laurentius stated curtly, and watched as the man turned to leave without saying a word. Hopefully, he spoke the language all the same; or else he surmised its meaning.

Laurentius picked up the parakeet cage, cradling it carefully in his arms, and started following the man into town. The bird screeched anxiously.

“Shh, Clodia, be quiet.”

They walked on in the progressively thickening dusk, and Laurentius strove to rock the cage as little as possible. The straight and sturdy town walls stacked from robust stones, the round, medieval defense towers, and the four lofty churches cast a threatening silhouette upon the evening sky, while the lower buildings were swallowed up by a dank murk, soaking from the clouds. The man walked in front of him at an unexpectedly brisk pace, and appeared to be very well aware of the destination that he planned to reach. Laurentius himself, on the contrary, began to suffer from stronger and stronger waves of his old illness. The current, ceaseless, all-penetrating and all-waterlogging dampness affected him more harshly than it had in earlier years. The excess of black bile fermenting in his innards usually made his body feeble and sleepless only by late fall, but that year, the rains had already begun around

midsummer, and the endless drizzle wrapped his intestines, heart, and brain in a viscous fog. Now, having disembarked the boat and walking upon the flat stones worn to a shine, the memory of rocking at sea further added to it a feeling, as if he had to press his way forward through a swamp. Every step was an exertion.

“Eh,” he said under his breath, “just a little further.”

He kept his eyes on the crooked back of the vagabond walking before him, and pondered that he should probably send someone else to fetch his chest all the same. Some sort of a mess could often arise with the chance characters found at a harbor. The barkeep would likely be able to assist him. He strove to remember what kind of currency Tallinn dealt in: he had inquired about this from various passengers back on the ship, and had concluded that he apparently would not achieve full clarity in the question. *Ars apodemica*, books that spoke of the art of travel, almost did not touch upon the conditions in Estonia and Livonia at all—rather, they contained general tips on what to pay attention to, and how to intelligently observe one’s surroundings. The towns and lands here had not been apodemically described at all—people naturally traveled elsewhere out of interest; southward. To places with culture and history. He was unable to recall anything practical from it. His head felt thick.

“Fine,” Laurentius ultimately decided. “A sixth of an *ör* should be enough, in any case.”

Finally, in the nearly pitch-black night, they halted under a yellow lantern illuminating a pub with an unexpectedly decent appearance, located just a slight distance before the city gates. The man stretched out his palm.

Laurentius slipped the small coin into it, which he had already secretly searched out of his pocket, and cast his eyes away. For a moment, the man studied the money that he had been given, and then smiled broadly.

“Curses,” Laurentius thought to himself. “I still gave him too much.”

He lugged the cage in through the door.

“Would he like anything else?” the vagabond inquired in unexpectedly good German.

Laurentius was taken aback. He would have been gladdest to see the man quickly making his way back, because those, who glue themselves to you on their own, are oftentimes especially great scoundrels.

“I need to go towards Tartu,” he then spoke, even surprising himself. “And as quickly as possible.”

He would still send someone else for his chest, but there was nothing wrong in having him look into the journey. Haulers’ carriages had to stop by here at some point, and the other ship passengers had said that one group or another was supposed to embark in the direction of Tartu nearly every week. They had even pointed out two possible routes to him on a map—both took a few days’ time, but could also take longer, depending on the road conditions.

The man cast a glance at the cage one more time, and then left—with a mocking bow, it seemed to Laurentius.

He shrugged, lifted the cage onto the table closest to the fireplace, pulled the dark, damp piece of fabric off of it, and watched the parakeet adjust itself on its perch.

“Well, Clodia—are you ready for one more trip?”

The warmth that cascaded out from under the mantle had a stimulating effect, and healed his mood as well as the parakeet's freezing body. Taking a few seeds out of a piece of folded paper in his pocket, he sprinkled them over the bottom of the cage. He hadn't been certain of whether one could find sunflower seeds anywhere in these parts, and had therefore taken some along himself. As usual, the patrons, who were standing around the room and had nothing to do otherwise, immediately gathered around the cage, each wanting to see the strange, colorful bird.

"Where's that'n from, ey?"

"What's it eat?"

"Does he sing, too?"

Laurentius explained. On the one hand, hauling a parakeet around with him was naturally inconvenient and a bother (and not only for Laurentius himself—the bird presumably suffered from it even more than he), but on the other, it was a fantastic means for helping him make contact with people, and Clodia had already been of great aid to him on the ship.

"You're a university student, yeah?" someone asked, rising from a table.

"Yes," Laurentius replied. It seemed that the man had been eyeing him for already some time—he had a very sharp sense for such things, and knew to keep his eyes on the ground in order to not accidentally look directly at some random, curious observer. Already as a young boy, he had realized that trouble could come from it. At first, people grow suspicious, and afterward, they make a cross with their fingers behind their backs when talking to him, turn around from the street corner, and avoid him entirely. The surest way to go about things was to keep his eyes on the ground.

“I wouldn’t recommend you going to Tartu right now.”

Irony radiated from behind the man’s superficial politeness, and even his respectful manner of addressing Laurentius was somehow mocking.

“Why is that?” Laurentius tried to argue. In reality, of course, he knew the kinds of objections that could be made against going to Tartu.

“Bad times. Even the professors are taking their tasks very lazily at the moment. The summer was rainy, famine is unavoidable, all of the prices are going up.”

“That’s how it is everywhere.”



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Katri Lipson

Jäätelökauppias (2012)

The Ice-Cream Man

Publishing House **Tammi Publishers**

Biography

Katri Lipson was born in Helsinki in 1965. After secondary school, she studied medicine in Sweden and graduated from the Medical School of Uppsala University in 1993. Since then, she has been working as a doctor in Sweden, Africa and Finland. She has always written, including fairytales, short stories, poems, plays and novels. Her debut novel, *Cosmonaut (Kosmonautti)*, was nominated for the respected Finlandia Prize in 2008 and won the Helsingin Sanomat Debut Book of the Year Award in 2008. Her second novel, *The Ice-Cream Man (Jäätelökauppias)*, was published in 2012. She lives with her family in Vantaa, Finland.

Synopsis

Jäätelökauppias (The Ice-Cream Man) is a playful and charming story, mostly situated in the Czechoslovakia of the 1940s and 1950s, but also progressing to the present day. A film crew is making a new movie. The director wants to work without a script and the film is made in chronological order so that the actors cannot guess the destinies of their characters. The actors are making up and living the lives of their characters at the same time – but can the life of these fictional characters become more real than reality itself? And what is, after all, the difference between real and invented or fictional experiences? In this novel, life is seen as a collection of details and stories, and history conducts a fascinating dialogue with the present.

A man and a woman with false identification papers provide the focus for events. Without knowing each other, they agree to marry and try to find a safe place to live in the countryside. Fear and desire, weakness and strength go hand in hand in their story. When the actors start to understand the improvised lives of the characters they are playing, these main heroes start to lead lives of their own. Thomas and Esther Vorszda begin a life together with help of a widow named Mrs Němcová. As time goes by, new characters enter the story, including Jan Vorszda, his Swedish wife Kerstin and their daughter Gunilla, who travels from Sweden back to his father's hometown to find piles of mysterious letters. During the story, the city of Olomouc stays at the centre of events: the story is rooted there and grows from there. The destinies of characters intertwine with each other and the imagery becomes rich with meaningful details: in this world, there are no coincidences at all.

Jäätelökauppias

Katri Lipson

1

Elämän kuvaaminen

”Puolassa en nähnyt ainoatakaan ruumista, en siviilin enkä sotilaan.”

LENI RIEFENSTAHL

Ohjaajasta on sanottu, että kaikki johtuu hänen äidistään. Siitä on tullut yleinen vitsi, äidin sitä ja äidin tätä; kun ohjaaja kiihtyy tai juuttuu johonkin, hänen selkensä takana kuiskitaan ”äiti haluaa näin”, ”ei auta, äiti päättää”.

Minua on neuvottu: Ole varovainen rekvisiitan kanssa. Älä missään nimessä riko mitään. Älä edes ehdota että jotain vaihdettaisiin, ei vaikka saisit siitä kirppuja. Ja kuitenkin kaikki on päin seiniä. Määrissä muka lämmitetään taloja keskellä kesää. Ja kappale jota soitetaan Tomášin syntymäpäivillä vuonna 1942 ilmestyy vasta 1945.

Ohjaajan äiti on höperö, istuu puutarhatuolissa ja kirjoittaa vastineita. Äidin maine on jatkuvasti vaarassa. Maineen vaaliminen ulottuu takautuvasti Itävalta-Unkarista nykyhetkeen ja nykyhetkestä tulevaisuuteen, joka jatkuu armottomasti äidin kuolemankin jälkeen. Kun lehdessä kirjoitetaan viidestäkymmenestä husaarista, hänen vastineensa ilmestyy yleisönosastolle: ”Minulla ei ole ollut mitään tekemistä husaarien kanssa.” Kun sota loppuu: ”En ole koskaan käynyt

Münchenissä.” Ihmiset ahmivat hänen vastineitaan. Välillä ilmestyy vastine jonka pitäisi kattaa kaikki mahdolliset juorupuheet ja epäilyt: ”Sanoudun irti kaikesta, ajasta ja paikasta riippumatta.” Mutta sitten kaikki alkaa taas uudestaan, yksityiskohtien hekuma: ”Ei edes sen husaarin kanssa, jolla oli punaiset viikset.”

Voiko sellaisen äidin poikaa syyttää siitä että pitää kaiken omana tietonaan? Ja voiko näyttelijöitä syyttää siitä että he uhkaavat soittaa kulttuuriministerin paikalle elleivät saa lisää tietoa roolihahmoistaan?

Kun odotimme sadetta, yritimme juottaa ohjaajan humalaan. Emme saaneet hänestä mitään irti, hän kertoi vain oppivuosiastaan. Ja erityisesti yhdestä illasta, sillä missään hän ei ole oppinut elokuvasta niin paljon kuin Berliinissä, ennen sotaa, yhden ainoan illan aikana. Hän oli hummaillut vapaamielisen kaupunginosan tanssiravintolassa ja eksynyt sen sokkeloihin etsiessään miestenhuonetta punaisten käytävien varsilta. Miestenhuonetta ei heti löytynytäkään. Hän huomasi pian sen kuuluvan tarkkaan harkittuun juoneen – navan alapuolella tuntuva pakotus ja ovien raoista työntyvät laveasti maalatut avuliaat huulet: *Was suchen Sie, lieber Herr?* Lopulta hän löysi etsimänsä, pienen käymäläkopin, jossa mahtui tuskin kääntymään. Kun hän oli tyhjentänyt rakkonsa ja vetänyt katosta roikkuvaa narua, seinän takaa alkoi kuulua kiivasta väittelyä. Käytävälle palattuun hän painoi korvansa vieressä olevaa ovea vasten mutta jo muutaman sekunnin kuluttua se tempaistiin auki. – *Sie wollen sehen? Zwanzig Mark, bitte.*

Ohjaaja ei vielä tänäkään päivänä tiedä mikä kohtauksessa oli näyteltyä tai ennalta sovittua ja mikä niin kutsuttua todellista elämää. Saattaa olla että ravintolan asiakkaiden joukossa

oli henkilöitä joiden viihdyttäminen vaati ambivalenssia älyn ja viettien, faktan ja fiktion välillä. Nuhjuiseksi takahuoneeksi lavastetulla näyttämöllä oli tarkoitus tallentaa filminauhalle naisen ja miehen välistä kohtausta varsin yksintyiskohtaisesti. Tunnelma oli juuri niin kulahtanut ja turtunut kuin näin olisi tehty sata kertaa aiemminkin. Mutta sitten naisnäyttelijä sai hepulin: hänen sopimuksensa mukaan penetraatiossa hänet oli korvattava sijaisnäyttelijällä. Kameramies ei häiriintynyt naisen riehumisesta vaan jatkoi filmaamista kyynärlihakset pinkeinä. Naisen ilmoitus oli miesnäyttelijälle uutinen. Yllätyksen lisäksi tämä ei ilmeisesti voinut olla ottamatta sitä henkilökohtaisesti. Siksikö että tunsi naisen entuudestaan vai siksikö että he olivat toisilleen tuiki tuntemattomia? Peittääkseen loukkaantumisensa mies alkoi kiistellä naisen kanssa pitkään siitä, miksi aito penetraatio oli esityksessä niin tärkeä elementti. Nainen ei voinut muuta kuin ihmetellä, naisen pää oli haastavasti kallellaan, kulman saattoi huomata ainoastaan mikäli aistit olivat sille herkistyneet. *Und warum?* Mies tuijotti naista suu auki sen näköisenä kuin sanat eivät riittäisi kuvaamaan sitä taiteellista totuutta, jonka kanssa hän oli jäänyt järkyttävän yksin. Taiteellinen totuus vaati nyt puhumaan vertauksin, niin kuin arkielämää ylimaallisempi tieto vaatii aina, ja se oli valinnut hänet puolustajakseen (kauhea, huumaava, odottamaton kunnia). Miesnäyttelijä käveli sermin taakse naiselta ja kameramieheltä näkymättömiin, mutta ohjaaja näki hänet edelleen: mies avasi sermin hämärässä mineraalivesipullon, joi siitä aataminomena pomppien, nojasi seinään ja haroi hiuksiaan, puristi nenänjuurtaan kuin olisi pidätellyt itkua, ja toisella puolella sermiä nainen huojui pitkien sääriensä päällä kuin verkkosukkiin puettu kirahvi kunnes mies syöksyi sermin takaa takaisin hänen lähelleen, oli viimein saanut kiinni kuvasta ja ryhtyi selittämään palavin poskin: Se on samaa kuin taikuri sahaisi

naista kahtia, yleisön on nähtävä nainen kokonaan ja saha joka halkaisee ruumiin, kaikki samassa kuvassa, yhtä aikaa. Jos nainen on jo palasina, ei se ole temppeu eikä mikään.

Nainen pyöritteli hetken silmiään, käänsi selkensä miehelle (jonka hartiat samalla lysähtivät alaspäin) ja alkoi vuorostaan sättiä kameramiestä: eikö miehen sopimus penetraatio-kohtauksen osalta ole identtinen naisen sopimuksen kanssa? Kumpaa oli huijattu ja miksi? Kummalle maksettiin enemmän? Ja mistä loppujen lopuksi maksettiin: näyttelemisestä vai siitä että jotain tehtiin ihan oikeasti? Miesnäyttelijä nosti kätensä ylös ja vaati myös sijaisnäyttelijää. Loppujen lopuksi he häilyivät penetraation rajalla sitä koskaan ylittämättä ja näyttelivät juuri siksi aika hyvin. Sijaisnäyttelijät asettuivat kymmeneksi minuutiksi biljardipöydän ääreen, ja mies työnteli naista niin etäältä ja laajalla amplitudilla kuin pystyi ettei kameralta jäisi mitään näkemättä. Petetty aviomies seisoj varmuuden vuoksi molempien parien vieressä. Päättäisiinkö vasta myöhemmin kummasta aktista leikattaisiin aviomiehen ilmeet lopulliseen versioon? Lienee kuitenkin vaikea uskoa että aviomiestä esittävä näyttelijä olisi nähnyt sijaisnäyttelijöiden tekevän mitään uutta tai kiihottavaa, ja toden totta, hän näytti pikemminkin kuuntelevan kuin katselevan, koska sermin takaa alkoi kuulua jotain, joka vaikutti koskettavan häntä hyvin henkilökohtaisella tasolla: siellä taiteellisen totuuden vakuuttama nainen ei antanut itsestään vain paloja vaan antautui kokonaan miehelle joka ei ollut itkenyt turhaan.

Ohjaaja vaikenä. Istuimme verannalla. Pitkäjalkaiset mutta lyhytsiipiset hyönteiset lentelivät päin öljylampun kupua. Kuka nekin oli suunnitellut? Ohjaaja ei sietänyt mitään analyysiä. Kaikkien piti vain tuijottaa hiljaa pimeyteen. Se tuijotti moninkertaisesti takaisin. *Tausend und tausendmal.*

The Ice-Cream Man

Katri Lipson

Translated from the Finnish by David Hackston

1

The depiction of life

*“I did not see one dead person in Poland,
not one soldier, not one civilian.”*

LENI RIEFENSTAHL

People have said of the director that everything has to do with his mother. It's become something of a running joke – mother's this and mother's that. Whenever the director gets wound up or latches on to an idea, behind his back people whisper things like 'it's what Mother would have wanted' or 'it's no use, Mother has made her mind up.'

I've been given one piece of advice: be careful with your props. Whatever you do, don't break anything. Don't even suggest changing anything, not even if it's giving you fleas. And still everything's totally nonsensical: in Moravia they apparently heat their houses in the middle of summer and the music played at Tomáš' birthday in 1942 was only released in 1945.

The director's mother is demented, just sits in her garden chair all day answering letters and writing opinion pieces. Her reputation is in constant danger. The struggle to preserve her reputation dates retroactively from the era of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire to the present day, and from the present day to a future that will continue mercilessly long after her death. When the newspapers mention the fifty Hussars, her response is published as a letter to the editor: “I have never had anything to do with the Hussars.” When the war ends: “I have never even set foot in Munich.” Readers are hungry for her letters. Occasionally a piece is published in order to quash all possible gossip and suspicion: “I deny everything, regardless of time and place.” Soon afterwards everything starts over again, laden with juicy details. “Not even the Hussar with the red moustache.”

Can you blame the son of a mother like that for wanting to keep things to himself? And can you blame the actors for threatening to alert the minister for culture unless they are given more information on their roles?

As we were waiting for the rain, we tried to get the director drunk. We couldn't get anything out of him; all he told us was about his years as a student. He mentioned one night in particular, for nowhere had he learnt so much about film as in a single evening in Berlin before the war. He'd been spending the evening at a dance in one of the more liberal parts of town and ended up getting lost looking for the men's room that was nowhere to be found in a labyrinthine mass of red-lit corridors. He soon realised this was part of a carefully planned scheme: the sense of urgency building in his groin and the eager, garishly painted lips moving behind each of the doors whispering *Was suchen Sie, lieber Herr?* Eventually he found what he was looking for, a small cubicle with barely enough room to turn around. After he'd emptied his bladder and tugged the string dangling from the ceiling, he heard a

heated discussion from the other side of the wall. Once back in the corridor he pressed his ear against the adjacent door, and in a matter of seconds it was wrenched open.

Sie wollen sehen? Zwanzig Mark, bitte.

To this day, the director told us, he wasn't sure which parts of this scene were acted and which were what one might call 'real life'. It might have been the case that the restaurant's clientele included people for whom entertainment required an ambivalence between intelligence and instinct, fact and fiction. The intent was to capture on film a considerably detailed scene between a man and a woman on a set made up to look like a shabby old backroom. The atmosphere was as flat and numb as if this had all taken place a hundred times before. Then suddenly the female actor flew into a rage: according to her contract, in all acts of penetration she was to be replaced by a body double. The cameraman didn't take any notice of the woman's tantrum but continued filming, his arms taut with exertion. The woman's announcement was clearly news to the male actor. And regardless of the surprise, he couldn't help but take it all personally. Because he knew the woman from before? Or perhaps because they were complete strangers? To hide his annoyance, the man began a long argument with the woman about why genuine penetration was such a crucially important element of the overall performance. The woman could do nothing but wonder at this. Her head was tilted confrontationally to the side, something one would only notice if one's senses were attuned to the gesture. *Und warum?* The man stared at the woman, his mouth drooping open as though words were unable to describe the artistic truth with which he had now been left feeling utterly alone. Artistic truth now required that he speak in metaphors, as knowledge higher than our everyday lives always requires,

and the truth had chosen him as its defender – a terrifying, dizzying, unexpected honour. The male actor walked behind a screen, but the director could still see him: in the shadows behind the screen the man opened a bottle of mineral water, gulped from it, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down, leant against the wall and ran his fingers through his hair, and clasped the base of his nose as though he were holding back tears, while on the other side of the screen the woman staggered atop her long legs like a giraffe in net stockings until the man lunged back from behind the screen and stood beside her, having finally managed to grasp the image at hand and began explaining things to her, his cheeks burning. It's like a magician sawing a woman in half: the audience must see the woman whole and the saw that will cleave the body in two all at once, in the same picture. If the woman is already in pieces, there's no magic whatsoever.

The woman rolled her eyes for a moment, turned her back to the man (whose shoulders then slumped) and began harassing the cameraman: isn't the man's contract identical with the woman's with regard to the penetration scene? Which of them had been cheated and why? Which of them was being paid more? And what were they in fact being paid for: acting or for the fact that something was being done for real? The male actor then raised his hand and he too demanded a body double. Eventually the pair hovered on the brink of penetration without ever crossing the threshold, and for that reason they acted very well. The body doubles propped themselves by the billiard table for about ten minutes, and the man entered the woman from far enough away to make sure the camera didn't miss a thing. Just to be sure, the betrayed husband stood next to both couples. Perhaps they would decide later which set of reactions to use in the final cut. It's hard to believe that

the actor playing the husband might see anything new or thrilling in the body doubles, and true enough he seemed to be listening more than looking, as behind the screen there came the sounds of something that seemed to touch him on a far more personal level: there a woman, convinced of the need for artistic truth, was surrendering completely to a man who, it turned out, had not wept in vain.

The director fell silent. We were sitting on the veranda. Insects with long legs and short wings were flying back and forth against the glass cover of the oil lamp. Who had designed them? The director couldn't bear any analysis. We were all simply to stare into the darkness. It stared back at us many times. *Tausend und tausendmal.*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



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Lidija Dimkovska

РЕЗЕРВЕН ЖИВОТ (2012)

Backup Life

Publishing House Ili-Ili Skopje

Biography

Lidija Dimkovska was born in 1971 in Skopje, Macedonia. She is a poet, novelist, essayist, and translator. She studied Comparative Literature at the University of Skopje and took a PhD in Romanian Literature at the University of Bucharest. She has worked as a lecturer of Macedonian language and literature and as a lecturer of World Literature. Since 2001 she has been living in Ljubljana. In 2009, she received the Hubert Burda literary prize for young East European poets and, in 2012, she won the Tudor Arghezi international poetry prize in Romania. Her first book *Skriena Kamera (Hidden Camera)* won the Writers' Union of Macedonia award for the best prose book of the year.

Backup Life received the Writers' Union of Macedonia award for the best prose book of the year and was also shortlisted for the Utrinski Vesnik award for the best novel of the year.

Synopsis

Backup Life is an original story about two Macedonian Siamese twins joined at the head, Srebra and Zlata, and their struggle for individuality, privacy and a life of their own. The story is told by Zlata and begins in 1984, in a June suburban afternoon in Skopje, and it ends on August 18, 2012, at the exact same location. The game the characters play is the same: Fortune Telling. Later in the novel, their prophecies come true, but in a tragic fashion. In the beginning, Srebra and Zlata get to play the game; in the end, it belongs to Zlata's daughters, Marta and Marija, also twins. The circle is complete, including 28 years of living, growing, suffering pain, and experiencing love and hate. There is also darkness due to death, the separation of conjoined twins, and the break-up of joint Yugoslav republics and autonomous regions. Srebra is left on the outside: the circle closes without her, for she 'does not survive'. The novel takes in the death of a child, the heavy burden of guilt, hatred, weddings and funerals, incest, murder, passport falsification, a poverty of the soul disguised as social poverty, faith and God, holidays and traditions, masturbation, family dysfunction to the nth degree, and acculturation. The novel is a personal, political, and historical story about the time we live in and the people we identify with.

РЕЗЕРВЕН ЖИВОТ

Lidija Dimkovska

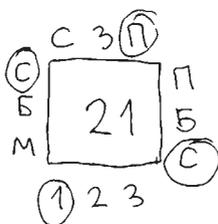
1984.

Тоа јунско попладне пред нашата зграда на периферијата на Скопје јас, Сребра и Розе си игравме една сосема нова игра: претскажување на судбината. Со бела креда врз вжештениот бетон во удолницата што водеше кон гаражите на станарите цртавме квадрати и во нив го впишувавме бројот на годините кога сакаме да се омажине. Сигурно му паѓавме в очи на секој минувач, а сè уште и на станарите седнати на балконите или застанати крај отворените прозорци од зградата што нè познаваа мошне добро: имено, јас и сестра ми бевме близначки, сијамски, со сраснати, споени глави кај слепоочниците, веднаш над моето лево и нејзиното десно уво. Такви се бевме родиле, за наша несреќа, а за срам на нашите родители. И двете имавме долги, густы костенливи коси што ни го затскриваа, или барем така мислевме, местото на сраснатоста; на прв поглед изгледавме како да сме клекнати со допрени глави една до друга, а удолу телата ни беа слободни, облечени во летни фустанчиња без прерамки, со ластик над градите, јас во зелено со ситни жолтеникави цветчиња, а сестра ми во црвено, со сини и бели точкички. Сестра ми, Сребра, а јас, Злата, на 12-годишна возраст можевме само да се срамиме од нашите имиња. Како може деца, девојчиња, да се викаат Сребра и Злата? И онака веќе обележани деца, со сраснати глави, ненормални за околината. Тоа се

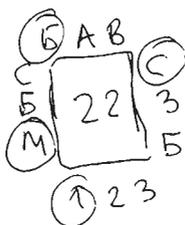
имиња за стари жени, за тетки што чистат по влезовите или за продавачки на компири пред пекарницата. Мама секогаш нè замолчуваше со аргументи кога повторно ќе се побуневме за имињата: „Така сакаше кумот, Злата по света Злата Мегленска, а Сребра по некоја си Сребра Апостолова што погубила два бега во Лерин.“ „Глупав“, беше секогаш нашиот коментар, еден од ретките што ни беше заеднички. Од крштевката наваму кумот никогаш повеќе не стапна во нашиот дом, како да пропадна вземи. Поточно, заминал на печалба во Австралија и засекогаш нè отпишал од неговата свест. „Злата на клада, Сребра без ребра“, нè задеваа децата од улицата и освен Розе, а понекогаш и Богдан, никој друг и не си играше со нас. Едни не ги пуштаа родителите, да не имаат ноќе кошмари ако преку ден си играат со нас, „ненормалните“, а други сами бегаа и оддалеку нè гагаа со каменчиња извикувајќи „ретардирани“. Розе беше единствената што немаше тешкотии со нашата физичка мана, живееше на вториот кат во нашиот влез, беше една година поголема од нас, имаше густа црна кадрава коса и беше црномурна, малку пониска, но поцврста, зашто има деца што се кревки, чиниш ветрот ќе ги дувне, со тенки нозе, блед лик и ситни, костенливо-зелени очи, како нас, а има деца што изгледаат мускулесто, здраво, тешки за носење в раце, со цврсти дланки, како Розе. Беше многу решителна и нејзиниот збор беше толку цврст што секогаш се сложувавме со нејзините предлози. Така беше и тој ден, кога предложи да нацртаме квадрати, да ја впишеме во нив возраста на нашата посакувана мажачка, над квадратот да напишеме по три почетни букви на нашите симпатии – кандидати за мажи, под квадратот да напишеме броеви од еден до три – колку деца сакаме да имаме, од левата страна да ги

ставиме почетните букви на трите финансиски состојби на нашите мажи (сиромашен, богат и милионер), а на десната страна на квадратот да напишеме почетни букви на три градови во кои би сакале да живееме со нашите мажи. Мојот квадрат и квадратот на Сребра беа близу еден до друг, а Розе го нацрта својот малку понастрана од нашите. Потоа ги пребројувавме напишаните знаци точно онолку пати колку што беше бројот впишан во средината на квадратот и ги заокружувавме знаците што ни се паѓаа. Вака изгледаа шемите на нашиот посакуван брачен живот некогаш во иднината:

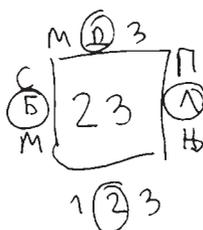
Розе



Злата



Сребра



Розе сакаше да се омажи по осум години, што и онака ѝ се чинеа многу, на 21-годишна возраст, исто како мајка ѝ, и ѝ се падна дека ќе се омажи со некое момче на П, да, колку убаво што ѝ се погоди токму симпатијата Панаит од Катерини каде што секој јули одеше со семејството на одмор, во некоја стара куќа со апартмани близу до катедралата на гратчето. Во соседниот двор живеел Панаит, симпатично момче кое за волја на Розе научило неколку македонски збора доволни за нивната срамежлива комуникација со погледи, криенки и капења во морето. О, ќе бидеме сиромашни, извика, зашто така и ѝ се погоди, дека Панаит ќе биде сиромашен, и дека ќе имаат едно дете, и дека ќе живеат во Солун, градот што Панаит го сакал најмногу од сè на светот, зашто таму се родил, како недоносче, таму му го спасиле животот и затоа секоја година со родителите оди на поклонение во црквата Свети Димитрија, да му се заблагодари на светецот. Само едно дете, тажно рече Розе, зашто си замислуваше кога ќе биде голема, среќна и омажена за Панаит – дом полн со деца, или барем со две, како што се таа и сестра ѝ, поголема од неа три години.

На Сребра која посакуваше да се омажи на 23-годишна возраст ѝ се погоди дека тоа ќе биде некое момче на буквата Д, иако такво не постоеше во нејзината свест, го стави онака, колку да има три машки имиња, дека Д ќе биде богат, дека ќе имаат две деца (Блазе си ти! , извика Розе), и дека ќе живеат во град на Л. „Во Лондон!“ извикав, и од изненадувањето малку ја повлекох и нејзината глава со својата. „Како во Лондон? Не ни знаеш како изгледа! И плус е толку далеку! Јас не сакам да живеам во Лондон! Како ќе живееш таму ако не живеам и јас? Само на себе мислиш!“ Да, уште од најраните години имав чувство дека Сребра секогаш мисли само на себе и дека воопшто не ѝ е грижа што имаме сраснати глави, што не можеме да имаме одвоени животи туку еден заеднички, како да сме една личност во две полуспоени тела. Сè моравме да правиме заедно: да јадеме, да спиеме, да одиме по нужда, на училиште, надвор, внатре, сè. Уште кога бевме мали и ноќе ќе ѝ се примочкаше, нагло ќе го отфрлеше јорганот и ќе срипаше од креветот што значи дека и мене ќе ме повлечеше крајно нечувствително, ќе ме разбудеше од сон неочекувано и ќе ме поставеше на нозе, иако сè уште бев во некакво бунило, меѓу сонот и јавето. Толку беше силна болката во делот кај што ни беа споени главите што извикував од ужас, а Сребра со стиснати заби веќе трчаше влечејќи ме кон тоалетот. Таму кога едната седеше на ве-це школката, другата мораше исто така да поткликне и да седне, а најчесто да тресне врз пластичната сина корпа за отпадоци, која ја поставувавме лево или десно од школката, во зависност која од нас клечеше врз школката, а во која не се фрлаше само хартијата за бришење што не беше тоалетна и мирислива, туку беше хартија за машина за пишување што мајка ни скришум ја

носеше од работа и потоа секој лист го кинеше не четири дела, за да можеме со нив да се бришеме по нужда, туку и кујнските отпадоци, остатоците од храната, и сè што беше смет. И јас честопати бев сурова, повлекувајќи ја нагло во некој правец, но бев свесна дека главите ни се физички сраснати, дека во секој миг треба да внимаваме на однесувањето за да не се повредиме, пред сè физички, зашто болката во слепоочниците кај што ни беа сраснати главите беше неиздржлива кога ненадејно ќе направевме некое ненајавено движење. Сребра беше исто така свесна дека сме две во едно, но само физички, кога ќе ја здоболеше главата, а психички не, правеше големи планови во животот и едноставно не ги поврзуваше со моите желби и нашите заеднички можности. Беше сигурна дека еден ден, кога ќе бидеме големи и кога ќе имаме многу пари, ќе можеме да платиме за операција за одвојување на сијамски близнаци. Толку многу веруваше во тоа што дури и со споени глави правеше планови како да сме веќе одвоени. Така беше и тогаш, со играта на претскажувањето, кога најмирно на свет ми рече: „Стопати сум ти рекла дека сакам да живеам во Лондон, а ти не си го ставила тука, еве, ти се паднала буквата С, сигурно Скопје, ама јас не останувам тука ни за жива глава! Во Лондон сигурно ќе можат да нè одвојат, таму има такви лекари“. Во очите веќе ми се собираа солзи. Најсилно што можев со левата рака ја штипнав за нејзиниот десен лакот. Сребра ја извиши левата рака и преку сопствената глава ме удри најсилно што можеше по главата. Тие нејзини удари по главата што ме болеа по цели денови. Мама еднаш ѝ рече „Така ќе ѝ го дупнеш мозокот, па ќе се сликаме после“, а тато, како и секогаш, додаде: „Изелици низаедни, го изедовте светот“. Иако главите ни беа сраснати и тоа

преку заедничка вена низ која нашата крв се мешаше и во мигови на возбуда, вознемиреност и други крајни ситуации во нашиот живот и двете чувствувавме како да ни бие срцето во слепоочниците, сепак размислувавме поинаку, значи мозоците внатре не ни беа сраснати, што не знам дали беше среќна или несреќна околност на нашиот живот. Затоа Сребра кога ќе ме удреше по главата секогаш и ќе ми просаскаше: „Немој да си зуцнала дома!“ Но, сега не успеа да рече ништо, зашто јас почнав толку силно да плачам што Розе веднаш се наведна над нас и ми ги избриша очите со рака. „Еј, Злата, немој, види колку убаво ти се паднало, маж ти ќе биде милионер и ќе имате едно дете, а со милионите сигурно ќе најдете и лекар да ви ги одвои главите“.

Backup Life

Lidija Dimkovska

Translated from the Macedonian by Ljubica Arsovska and Peggy Reid

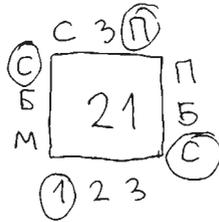
1984

That June afternoon in front of our block of flats on the outskirts of Skopje, Srebra, Roza and I played a completely new game: fortune telling. On the hot concrete of the sloping driveway leading to the residents' garages, we used white chalk to draw squares then wrote in them the age at which we wanted to get married. We must have been a sight for every passer-by, and even more for the neighbours sitting on their balconies or standing by the open windows of our block of flats, who knew us very well: in fact my sister and I were twins, Siamese twins, with heads joined at the temple, right above my left and her right ear. We were born like that, to our misfortune and the great shame of our parents. We both had long, thick chestnut-brown hair that covered the place where we were joined, or at least so we thought; at first sight it looked as if we were squatting with our heads leaning together, and all the way down our bodies were free, dressed in little summer dresses with no shoulder straps but held up with elastic above the breast, I in a green dress with little yellow flowers, and my sister in a red one with blue and white dots. At the age of twelve the only thing my sister, Sreba, and I, Zlata, could be ashamed of was our names. How could anyone name their children, girls, Srebra (Silver) and Zlata (Gold)? Children already marked at that, by joined heads, and abnormal as far as other people were concerned. These were names for old

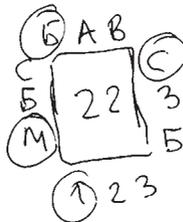
women, for stair-cleaners, or for the women selling potatoes in front of the bakery. Mum used to silence us with arguments when we came down on her about our names: “That’s how your godfather wanted it, Zlata after Saint Zlata of Meglen, and Srebra after a certain Srebra Apostolova who killed two beys in Lerin.” “Stupid,” that was always our comment, one of the few that were concerted. The godfather never set foot in our house after the christening, it was as if the earth had swallowed him up. In fact he had left for Australia to earn a living and wrote us off his consciousness for ever. “Zlata in the gutter, Srebra no vertebra,” the children teased us in the street, and apart from Roza, and sometimes Bogdan, no one else ever played with us. Some weren’t allowed to by their parents, so that they wouldn’t have nightmares from playing with us, the “abnormal”, during the day, and others fled us of their own free will and threw pebbles at us from a distance, shouting “retards”. Roza was the only one who had no problem with our physical impairment; she lived on the second floor of our block of flats, a year older than us, with thick curly black hair and a darkish face, a little on the short side, but sturdy, for there are children that are delicate, you’d think the wind would blow them away, with thin legs, pale faces and small chestnut brown-green eyes, like us, and there are children that look full of muscle, healthy, heavy to carry in the arms, with firm hands, like Roza. She was very strong-willed and her word was so firm that we always agreed to her suggestions. That day too, when she suggested we drew squares, write the age we wanted to get married at in them, then the initials of the names of three boys we fancied – candidates for husbands – above the squares, then under the squares the numbers one to three: how many children we’d have, on the left the initial letters of three financial statuses for our

husbands (poor, rich and millionaire) and on the right the first letters of three cities where we would like to live with our husbands. My square and Srebra's were close to each other, and Roza drew hers a little further away. Then we counted the signs we'd written exactly as many times as the number we'd written in the centre of our squares and circled the letters and numbers we'd arrived at by this counting. This is what the graphics of the married lives we wished for ourselves at some future time looked like:

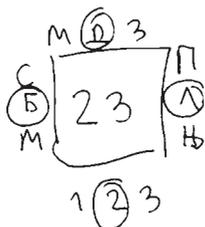
Роза (Roza)



Злата (Zlata)



Сребра (Srebra)



Roza wanted to marry in eight years, which seemed a long time to her, at the age of 21, like her mother, and it fell out that she would marry a boy whose name began with P, yes, it was so nice, she'd got Panait from Katerini where she went with her family every summer for the holiday, staying in some old house with apartments to let near the cathedral. In the house with the garden next door lived Panait, a nice boy who had learned a few Macedonian words for love of Roza, enough for their shy communication with glances, hide and seek, and swimming in the sea. "Oh, we shall be poor!" she exclaimed, because that was what the counting showed, that Panait would be poor, that they would have one child, and that they would live in Salonika, the city Panait loved more than any other in the world because he had been born there, a premature baby, and they saved his life there and that was why once a year he and his parents went on a pilgrimage to the Church of St. Demetrius, to thank the saint. "Only one child," Roza said sadly, because she'd been imagining that one day when she was grown up and happily married to Panait she'd have a house full of children, or at least two, like her and her sister, three years her senior.

To Srebra, who wished to get married at the age of 23, it fell out that she would marry a boy whose name began with a D, although no such name existed in her mind, she'd scribbled it off the top of her head so as to have three boys' names, that D would be rich and that they'd have two children ("Good for you!" Roza exclaimed) and that they'd live in a city with a name beginning with L. "In London!" I cried out, and overcome with surprise I pulled a little at her head with mine. "Why in London? You don't even know what it looks like! And besides, it's so far away! I don't want to live in London! How will you live there if I don't too? You're only thinking of yourself!" Yes, even in childhood I had the feeling that Srebra always thought only of herself and that she couldn't care less that we were joined at the head, that we couldn't possibly have separate lives but a single one shared, as if we were one person in two semi-joined bodies. We had to do everything together: eat, sleep, go to the toilet, to school, out, in, everything. Even when we were little if she felt like peeing at night, she used to throw off the quilt and jump out of bed, which meant she would tug at me extremely inconsiderately, she'd wake me up unexpectedly from my dreams and have me get to my feet although I was still in a sort of torpor, between dream and reality. The pain in the area where we were joined was so severe that I screamed with horror, while Srebra, teeth clenched, was already running to the toilet dragging me with her. And there, when one of us sat on the toilet bowl, the other had to bend her knees to sit, most often hitting her bottom, on the blue plastic waste bin that we moved to the left or the right of the toilet bowl depending on which of us was sitting on the bowl, the bin where we threw away not only the paper, which was not scented toilet paper but type-writer paper my mother had filched from her office and then torn every piece into

four so that we could wipe ourselves after relieving ourselves, but also the kitchen waste, leftovers, and anything that was rubbish. I was sometimes cruel too, pulling her suddenly in an unexpected direction, but I was aware that our heads were physically conjoined, that we should be careful in our movements every minute so as not to hurt ourselves, most of all physically, because the pain in the temples where our heads were joined was unbearable when one of us made a sudden unannounced movement. Srebra was also aware that we were two in one, but only physically, when her head started to ache, but mentally she was not, and she used to make great plans for her life which she simply didn't relate to my wishes and our shared capacities. She was sure that one day, when we were grown up and had a lot of money, we'd be able to pay for surgery to separate Siamese twins. She believed it so intensely that even when our heads were still conjoined she was making plans as if we'd already been separated. It was like that then too, with the fortune-telling game, when she said to me in an absolutely calm voice: "I've told you a hundred times that I want to live in London, and you haven't written it here, look, what you got is the letter S, it must be Skopje, but I'm not staying here, not for anything in the world! In London they're sure to be able to separate us, there are doctors like that there." My eyes were already filling with tears. I pinched her as hard as I could on her right elbow with my left hand. Srebra raised her left arm over her head and hit me on the head as hard as she could. Those blows on the head she used to give me hurt for days. Mum once said to her: "If you go on like this, one day you'll make a hole in her brain, and I don't dare think what will happen to us then!" And Dad, as always, added: "Voracious beings, you've eaten up the world!" Although our heads were not only joined but shared a vein at that, where

our blood mixed so that in moments of excitement, anxiety or other extreme situations in our life we both felt as if our hearts were beating in our temples, we nevertheless thought differently, which meant that our brains were not conjoined and I still don't know if that was a fortunate or unfortunate circumstance in our lives. It was why whenever Srebra hit me on the head she hissed at me: "Don't you dare tell about this at home!" But this time she didn't manage to say anything because I started to cry so desperately that Roza immediately bent over us and wiped my tears away with her hand. "Come on Zlata, don't, see how nicely it's all turned out for you, your husband will be a millionaire and you're going to have one child, and with all those millions you're sure to find a doctor to separate your heads."



© Peter von Felbert

Marica Bodrožić

Kirschholz und alte Gefühle (2012)

A Cherrywood Table

Publishing House **Luchterhand Literaturverlag**

Biography

Marica Bodrožić was born in 1973 in Svib, Croatia, in the former Yugoslavia. She moved to Germany at the age of ten and learned German, which she now sees as her “second mother tongue”. German also became her language for creating literature.

Bodrožić writes essays, novels, poems, and stories; works as a literary translator; teaches creative writing, among other places, in high schools and colleges; and has made a documentary film. Her novel, *A Cherrywood Table*, has received consistently favourable reviews from critics and readers, who called it, “a poetic work that thoroughly explores memory and remembrance.” Bodrožić, who lives in Berlin, has received many prizes and awards, including the Hermann Lenz Award in 2001, the 2008 Initiative Prize, the 2009 Special Prize for Outstanding Emerging Artists awarded by the Bruno Heck Prize Scholarship, the 2011 Liechtenstein Prize for Literature (Poetry Section), and the 2013 LiteraTour Nord Prize.

Synopsis

The civil war in the former Yugoslavia has robbed a young woman, Arjeta Filipo, of her homeland. When she finds some old photographs during a change of residence, she suddenly understands much of her own life story that had long seemed obscure. So Arjeta follows up once again the ruptures in her consciousness and her life—and the ruptures in the world.

Arjeta can dissociate herself from many things, but not from her grandmother’s table. Now she sits at this inherited piece of furniture in her new Berlin apartment and spreads out photographs over it that have come into her hands when she moved. Memories begin to surface, as if the cherrywood table offers up all the stories it bore witness to through the years.

There’s the besieged city, Istria, the sea of her childhood and youth, and her escapes at the beginning of the 90s that changed everything. But mostly it is about the time in Paris where she studied philosophy and started a new life in a new language—together with Arik, a painter she fell in love with against her will. Misha Weisband, an ornithologist, became her confidant, while Nadezhda, a physicist, is her closest friend. There is a secret that ties the two women together, but also separates them—a secret that only Arik knows and keeps for many years. Not until they both confront the blind spots in their inner lives do they manage to find their way to the truth.

Kirschholz und alte Gefühle

Marica Bodrožić

Heute habe ich fast alle Kisten ausgeräumt. In der Leere meiner neuen Wohnung ist noch nicht viel gesprochen worden. Die von Erinnerung freie Luft aus dem Vögelchenzimmer macht sich auch in den anderen Räumen breit. Manchmal scheinen sich meine Zimmer zu weiten. Seitdem ich hier wohne, denke ich immer wieder an das Meer. Je länger ich in der Lage bin zu schweigen, desto entschiedener reisen meine Ohren zum Meer, zurück zu den Orten am Meer, zu den Häusern am Meer, zu den Menschen am Meer. In der Erinnerung an das Meer strenge ich mich nie an. Es ist eine Reise ins Blaue. Innere des Wassers. Ohren, rauschen. Kein Knirschen. In den Knochen. Ich sehe Segelboote vor mir und kleine Fischerbarken. Netze, angefüllt mit dem nächtlichen Fang. Mein Kopf ist darüber so überrascht, dass der Druck vorne in meiner Stirn fast vollständig aufgehört hat. Das alte Pochen und Picken und Drängen, es ist Erinnerung. Bald wird es nur noch Ahnung sein, und ich werde mich im Zurückdenken anstrengen müssen, wenn ich wissen will, wie es damals war, mein Leben. Die Ohren hören das Meer. Sie hören es für mich, und ich werde durch mein Ohr dieser Klangraum, die sich stetig wiederholende Arbeit des Meeres. In der Tiefe der Stille kommen sie an der Küste an. Die Wellen. Ich spüre den Sand von früher zwischen meinen Zehen. Ich höre mich, höre meinen eigenen Atem, nach dem Einsatz des Meeres, in seinem Gleichklang, die unermüdliche Arbeit der Wellen und der Stille, die dann folgt, in meinen Ohren. In der Meeresstille habe ich keinen Namen. Bin ich. Noch nie vorher habe ich gehört, wie laut einem die Lunge das

Leben voratmet. Und ich frage mich, da alle Orte ein Ort in mir geworden sind, alle Zeiten eine Zeit in mir, ob ich es nun hier schaffen werde, in ihrem Verlangen weiterzumachen, in ihrem Tempo in die Zukunft zu gehen, ohne ihr zum Opfer zu fallen. Oder ob ich meiner Lunge etwas anderes beibringen, ihr Murmeln in mein Murmeln wenden muss, in meine ganz eigenen Wörter, die sie nicht kennt, nicht kennen kann, da ich dafür zuständig bin, sie ihr zu geben, über den Rand zu reichen, durch das Gatter, das unsere Berührungen darstellen. Die Reibung mit der Luft. Zittern. Beim Gedanken an die Weite des nach Innen verlegten Raumes, in dem es keine Landkarte gibt. Nichts, das mir den Weg im Dunkeln weisen würde. Und doch liegt genau darin eine Genauigkeit, die präzise mit meiner Lichtlinie verbunden ist. Das weiß ich. Da bin ich schon jenseits der Ahnungen. Auf eine immer gleiche Weise schiebt sich die Sonne in den Morgenstunden über die Fläche des Holztisches. Meine Küche, in der der Tisch steht, zeigt Richtung Osten. Der Tisch ist hier von Anfang an meine kleine Sonnenstation gewesen. Und wie jeden Morgen habe ich auch heute wieder als erstes meine Hände auf den Tisch gelegt, seine Wärme gespürt, bevor ich meinen Kaffee getrunken habe. Die Plastiktüten, die meine Mutter mitgebracht hat, habe ich nach dem Frühstück auf dem Tisch ausgeschüttet. Gestern Abend hatte ich Angst vor dem Durcheinander. Einen Moment lang spielte ich mit dem Gedanken, zur Mülldeponie zu fahren, alle Fotos aus den Tüten in einen großen schwarzen Sack zu stopfen und sie dort zu entsorgen. Aber dann stellte ich mir plötzlich vor, dass irgendein verrückter Künstler genau so etwas suchen würde, so etwas wie mein Leben, dass er dort vorbeikommen und die Fotos einfach aufklauben, sie zu seinem Eigentum, zu seinem Gedächtnis und am Ende zu irgendeiner Serie in seinem Werk machen könnte.

Dann wäre er der Erzähler unserer Sommermonate am Meer. Nicht ich. Die Fotos musste ich allein schon deshalb behalten. Oder verbrennen. Sie durch das lebendige Feuer gehen lassen. Aber das konnte ich ja immer noch machen. Bevor ich einschlief, beschloss ich, die Plastiktüten keinem Fremden zu überlassen, sie nicht aus den Händen zu geben.

Ich versuche, eine Ordnung in das Chaos auf dem Tisch zu bringen und die Fotos nach Jahren, Geburtstagen und Festen zu sortieren. Meine Mutter und ihr Blick sind bei mir. Sie sieht mir über die Schulter, schaut nach, ob ich mich gut um ihr Kodak-Brownie-Erbe kümmere. Der warme Tisch wird mein großes Passepartout, ein Rahmen für meinen lange aufgeschobenen Versuch, Mutter und ihren Augen gerecht zu werden. Worüber wacht sie in meiner Vorstellung? Meine Mutter hat mich vor ein paar Monaten in meiner alten Wohnung besucht, und ich habe sie endlich gefragt, warum sie mir immer die alten Fotos in Plastiktüten bringt. Lieblos zwingt sie unsere ganze Welt von früher in die Tüten. Ihre Antwort war bezeichnend. Sie hat alles auf das begrenzte Gepäck geschoben. Sie wolle kein Geld wegen dieser alten Sachen ausgeben. Außerdem war es die letzte Tüte. Sie wird mir keine Fotos mehr mitbringen. Ich sehe sie mir an, ihre Schnappschüsse haben schon einen leichten Stich ins Haselnussfarbene. Fotos aus einem ganz anderen Jahrhundert. Sie wirken koloriert und einem mir jetzt schon fremden Zeitmaß entsprungen, jenseits der Zeiger, die auf unseren Uhren die Stunden zählen. Das Haselnussfarbene sagt: Es ist für immer vorbei und wer bist du jetzt? Auf vielen Schnappschüssen trage ich die bunten Kleider, die mir meine Mutter angezogen hat. Ganz oft stehe ich zusammen mit meinem istrischen Freund Mateo unter einem Baum. Er lächelt und hat ein weißes T-Shirt mit blauen Streifen an. Mateo wollte schon damals

Philosoph werden, nicht Matrose, wie ich es gern gehabt hätte. Er hat gesagt, dass nur Idioten Matrosen werden, das hatte ich ihm aber nicht geglaubt. Kein Idiot kann so gut aussehen wie ein Matrose, sagte ich, und Mateo lachte, ich solle abwarten und später noch einmal mit ihm darüber reden. Das habe ich ihm versprochen. Aber als Erwachsene haben wir nie wieder darüber geredet. In Istrien erzählte er mir jeden Sommer von Diogenes in der Tonne. Und schon damals, ich muss ungefähr fünf Jahre alt gewesen sein, versuchte meine Mutter, ihm beizubringen, dass es vielleicht gar keine Tonne war, in der der alte Grieche saß. Mateo ärgerte sich über sie. Er wollte einfach an der Diogenes-Tonne festhalten und fand es kleinlich, dass meine Mutter ständig auf ihre Übersetzungsidee zu sprechen kam. Sie ist rechthaberisch, sagte er dann, wenn wir unter den Bäumen saßen, die Hunde ihre Köpfe an unseren Füßen ablegten und mit ihren warmen Schnauzen unsere Zehen kitzelten. Mateo hat einige Jahre im Garten meiner Großmutter gearbeitet und so gab es keinen Baum, unter dem wir nicht irgendwann fotografiert worden wären. Jahrelang hat meine Mutter nichts über Mateo erzählt. Aber bei ihrem letzten Besuch redete sie nur noch über ihn, alles, was sie in der neuen Zeit als schmerzlich empfand, schien sich für sie in seiner Person zu bündeln. Ich weiß nicht, was von den Geschichten stimmt. Aber er hatte sie enttäuscht, das war nicht zu übersehen, wahrscheinlich gerade weil er Philosoph war, der einzige aus dem istrischen Dorf.

Die letzten zwei Wochen, die meine Mutter mit Nadeshda, Ezra und mir in Berlin verbrachte, redete sie beinahe ununterbrochen über Mateo und erzählte nichts über sich. Dabei hatte ich gehofft, dass sie sich dieses Mal nach all den Jahren des beharrlichen Schweigens öffnen und ich mehr über sie erfahren würde. Kaum dass aber die Rede nicht von Mateo

war, sprach sie vom kommenden Sommer, und ich befürchtete plötzlich, dass sie mich bitten könnte, sie in Istrien oder in der Stadt zu besuchen. Ich wusste nicht, ob ich die Kraft haben würde, um ihr diesen Wunsch zu erfüllen. Aber als sie mich dann doch nicht fragte, war ich enttäuscht. Zugleich spürte ich ihre Scheu wie nie zuvor, bemerkte, dass sie wie ein Kind auf die Füße sah, wenn ihr ein Thema unangenehm war. Schon früher war es immer ihre Art gewesen, jede Lücke mit Geschichten zu füllen, die ihr plötzlich einfielen und die sie uns fast atemlos erzählte, als ginge es um ihr Leben. Nie wusste ich, wie viel sie von mir wahrnahm, doch darüber, dass ich nun in Berlin lebte, schien sie glücklich zu sein. Weißt du, sagte sie, du wirst nie erfahren, wie beharrlich Blut an Schuhen kleben kann. Und das sei mein größtes Glück. Ich war sprachlos. Wir sahen uns an, lange, ich brachte kein Wort heraus, aber als ich dann auf sie zuging und fast schon dabei war, sie zu umarmen, trat sie einen Schritt zurück und tat, als hätte sie es nicht bemerkt. Alles, aber auch alles hat sich verändert, sagte sie. Den Satz wiederholte sie mehrmals. Ich glaube, sie merkte es selbst nicht einmal, wie oft sie den Satz wiederholte. Er klang wie ein Mantra, aber es half ihr nicht. Mich überkam das Gefühl, dass sie genau wusste, wie sie mich von sich fernhalten konnte. Es war ein bestimmter Ton in ihrer Stimme, eine alte Höhe, aus der sie mich wie früher in der Kindheit mit den Augen ins Visier nahm. Wenn ich diese Tonlage hörte, schwieg ich, war wieder das gehorsame Mädchen, das keine Fragen stellte und das wartete, bis es angesprochen wurde. Zuerst dachte ich, sie rede von Berlin und dem Fall der Mauer. Ich wusste, dass sie in ihrer Jugend mit meinen Großeltern längere Zeit in Schöneberg verbracht hatte und sich ein wenig auskannte. Aber sie sprach nicht über Berlin, sondern über unser früheres Leben. Über

Jahre hinweg hatte sie, ganz anders als ich, mit ihren eigenen Augen gesehen, wie sich alles änderte, aber erst jetzt, und zum ersten Mal hier bei mir, schien sie in den fortwährenden Wiederholungen ihres Satzes zu verstehen, was in ihrem Leben unwiederbringlich verloren gegangen war. Statt den Verlust zu empfinden, erzählte sie wieder nur über Mateo. Schon morgens fing sie damit an. Kaum dass wir am Tisch saßen und Kaffee tranken, war sein Name mehrmals gefallen. Sie berichtete Nadeshda und mir von den Leuten, die mit Mateo in dem Sprachverein waren und sich jetzt alle hauptberuflich nur um die Korrektheit der Sprache kümmerten. Das setzte ihr besonders zu. Mateo sei unter den Sprachreinigern der ehrgeizigste und habe zu den Leuten gehört, die öffentlich arme Buchhändler beschimpften, nur weil sie Bücher in kyrilischer Schrift verkauften. Auf den Fotos, die auf dem Tisch vor mir liegen, sehe ich einen anderen Mateo, seine Augen leuchten so zeitlos wie nachdrücklich. Er hatte damals einen wachen Blick. Ich kann die Freude, die von seinem jugendlichen Gesicht ausgeht, nicht mit dem in Verbindung bringen, was meine Mutter erzählt hat. Meine Erinnerung trägt mich zurück zu den Sommern und den unzähligen Tagen, an denen wir unter den Bäumen saßen und stundenlang aufs Meer hinausschauten, zu den Möwen und auf die Wellen, die in unserer Vorstellung miteinander redeten. Das Meer verstand die Sprache der Möwen. Und die Möwen verstanden die Sprache des Meeres. Und wir sahen ihnen dabei zu und freuten uns, wenn Wind aufkam und über uns die Wipfel der Bäume zu hören waren, nirgendwo Stillstand, überall die pralle Bewegung.

A Cherrywood Table

Marica Bodrožić

Translated from the German by Gerald Chapple

I unpacked nearly all the moving boxes today. There hasn't been much talk yet in the emptiness of my new apartment. The memory-filled air from my tiniest room—I imagine it to be like a wee bird—suffuses all the other rooms. Sometimes my rooms seem to expand. Time and again I've turned my thoughts to the sea ever since moving here. The longer I'm able to remain silent, the more resolutely my ears travel to the sea, back to the villages by the sea, to the houses by the sea, to the people by the sea. I can bring the sea to mind without any effort. It's a mystery tour off into the blue. The interior of the water. Ears, rustling. No crackling. In my bones. I see sailboats before me, small fishing boats. Nets filled with the night's catch. Images that take my mind so utterly by surprise that the pressure in my forehead has let up almost entirely. The old pounding and hammering and pressing—it's all just a memory now. Soon to be a mere intimation, and it will be a strain to look backward if I try to comprehend what it was like back then, my life.

My ears hear the sea. They hear it for me, and I'm becoming that sound-space through my ear, becoming the sea's steady, repetitious moiling. In the depths of silence they come onshore, the waves. I sense the long-ago sand between my toes. I listen to myself and hear—after the sea's toiling—my own breath in the synchronized sea, in the indefatigable labor of the waves and the following silence, in my ears. In the silence of the sea I have no name. I exist. Never before have I heard

how lungs can draw breath so loudly before life does. And I ask myself—now that all places are one place in me, all times one time in me—whether I can manage to keep moving ahead at time’s urging, here and now, on into the future, following time’s tempo without falling prey to it. Or whether I should teach my lungs something new, to turn the murmuring of time into *my* murmuring, into words entirely my own that time does not know, cannot know, because I am charged with giving words to time, handing words over the edge, through the latticework that embody our contacts. Rubbing against the air. Trembling. At the mere thought of the vastness of the space now displaced inward, uncharted space. Nothing to lead me through the dark. And yet that’s exactly where an exactness lies, tied precisely to my beam of light. I know it. I’m way beyond intuitions or inklings.

The way the morning sun slides across the surface of the wooden table is always the same. The table is in my kitchen, which faces east. This table has been my little sun station here from the very beginning. And the first thing I do every morning—and I did it again today—is to lay my hands on the table, feeling how warm it is before finishing my coffee. Yesterday, after breakfast, I emptied out on the table the plastic bags my mother had brought. I was afraid of that messy pile during the night. I toyed with the idea for a moment of stuffing all the photographs from the bags into a big black garbage bag and getting rid of them at the dump. But I immediately figured that some crazy artist might be looking for something like that, a thing like my life; he could come along and simply pick up the pictures, declare them to be his property—his *own* memories—and turn them into a photographic series, part of his oeuvre. Then *he* would be the one telling the story about our summer months at the seaside. Not me. Reason

enough to keep the pictures to myself. Or burn them. Into the blazing bonfire to let go of them. Of course I could still do that anytime. I decided before going to bed not to abandon the bags to a stranger, not let them out of my hands.

I make a stab at organizing the chaos on the table and sort the pictures by year, birthday, and other celebrations. Mother and her gaze are right there beside me. She peers over my shoulder, checking to see if I'm taking proper care of her Kodak Brownie legacy. The warm table becomes my large mounting board, a framework for my long-postponed attempt to live up to mother's expectations—and that look in her eye. What's in my mind that makes her stand on guard? Mother paid me a visit at my old apartment a few months ago, and I finally asked her why she keeps bringing the old photos in plastic bags. She crams all our bygone world into those bags—no love lost. Her answer was typical. She blamed everything on baggage restrictions, said she didn't want to spend money on all those old things. Besides, that was the last bag. She wouldn't be bringing me any more photographs. I take a good look at them; her snapshots have already gone a bit hazelnut brown. Photos from a very different century. They come across as colorized, as though they'd jumped out of a timescale foreign to me, one from beyond our clocks and their hands that count out the hours. That hazelnut tint tells me, "It's gone forever, so who are you *now*?" Many of the snapshots show me wearing colorful clothes my mother dressed me in. I'm very often standing under a tree with Mateo, my Istrian friend. He's smiling and has got on a white T-shirt with blue stripes. Even in those days Mateo wanted to be a philosopher, not a sailor, which I'd have really liked. He said only idiots get to be sailors, but I didn't believe him. I said there's not one idiot as good-looking as a sailor, and Mateo

laughed, telling me to wait and see, we'd talk about it later. And I promised him I would. But we never did talk about it when we were grown-ups. In Istria he'd tell me every summer about Diogenes and his barrel. And even then—I must have been about five—my mother tried to knock it into his head that maybe what the ancient Greek sat in wasn't a barrel at all. Mateo was annoyed with her. He just wanted to stick with Diogenes and his barrel; he thought my mother was mean to keep harping on her idea that it was something else. When we would sit under the trees and the dogs lay their heads on our feet and their warm muzzles tickle our toes, he used to say she was bossy. Mateo had worked in my grandmother's garden for several years so there wasn't a single tree where our picture had *not* been taken at some point. My mother didn't mention Mateo for years. But the last time she came over, all she could talk about was him; everything giving her pain recently seemed to be concentrated in his person. I don't know what the truth was in her stories. But it was impossible not to recognize he was a disappointment for her, most likely because he was a philosopher, the only one from our village in Istria.

When my mother, Nadezhda, Ezra, and I were in Berlin, she went on about Mateo almost non-stop for our last two weeks there—but said nothing about herself. I was hoping that now she'd open up after all those years of stubborn silence and I'd find out more about her. But the conversation would barely have turned away from Mateo before she'd start talking about the coming summer, and I was suddenly afraid she'd ask me to visit her in Istria or the city. I didn't know if I would have the strength to carry out her wish. But when she did *not* ask me, I felt let down. At the same time I sensed her diffidence as never before, noticing how she looked down at her feet like

a child when she found any topic distasteful. It was her style from quite early on to plug any lull in a conversation with stories that popped into her head; she'd recount them almost breathlessly as if her life were at stake. I've never known how much she understood about me, but she seemed happy now that I was living in Berlin.

"You know," she said, "you're never going to find out how blood can really stick to your shoes. And that's the biggest piece of luck you'll ever have."

I was dumbfounded. We studied each other, for a long time; I couldn't utter a word, but then as I was walking toward her and about to give her a hug, she took a step backward, as if she hadn't noticed.

"Everything, and I mean everything, has changed" she said.

She repeated the sentence several times. I don't think she realized how often she repeated that sentence. It sounded like a mantra, but it didn't do her any good. The feeling came over me that she knew perfectly well how she could keep me at a distance. A certain tone of voice was an old, elevated vantage point for her eyes to get me in their sights just like in the past, in my childhood. Whenever I would hear her voice at that pitch, I'd fall silent—once again the obedient little girl who didn't ask questions and didn't speak until spoken to. I thought at first she meant Berlin, the fall of the Wall. I knew she'd lived with my grandparents in Schöneberg for a fairly long time when she was young, so she knew her way around a little. But she didn't mean Berlin; she was referring to our former life. Unlike me she'd seen with her own eyes how everything changed over the years, but only now—for the first time, at my place, and by saying that sentence over

and over—did she seem to realize what had been irretrievably lost in her life. But instead of feeling for her loss, she just went on and on about Mateo. She'd start up with it every morning. By the time we'd sat down at the table and were having our coffee, his name had already come up several times. She gave Nadezhda and me an account of the people with Mateo in the Society for Linguistic Purism; their main job was to enforce correct language usage. She said she was particularly worried because Mateo was the most ambitious of the language police and joined others in shouting abuse in public at poor little book dealers just because they sold books in Cyrillic. But I perceive another Mateo in the pictures on the table before me, with sparkling eyes that are ageless and compelling. His eyes were always on the alert back then. I cannot connect the joy emanating from his youthful face with what my mother was saying. My memory takes me back to the summers and countless days when we would sit beneath the trees and gaze at the sea for hours, at the gulls and the waves; we imagined they were talking to one another. The sea understood the gulls' language. And the gulls understood the language of the sea. And we watched them converse, delighting in the strengthening wind that let us listen to the treetops above; nothing standing still, everything powerfully in motion.



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Tullio Forgiarini

Amok – Eng Lëtzebuenger Liebeschronik (2011)

Amok – A Luxembourg Love Story

Publishing House **Editions Guy Binsfeld**

Biography

Tullio Forgiarini was born in 1966 in Neudorf, Luxembourg, the son of an Italian father and a Luxembourgian mother. He studied history in Luxembourg and Strasbourg. Since 1989, he has been teaching history, Latin and geography at the Lycée du Nord in Wiltz, Luxembourg. He is also very engaged with children having a difficult social background.

Forgiarini writes dark stories, mostly in French and inspired by *série noire* crime novels and genre films. He has had his work published in newspapers, magazines and anthologies and is the author of several novels. He is married and lives in Luxembourg.

Synopsis

In 17 short chapters, *Amok* tells the story of an adolescent's search for love, recognition, happiness and a place in today's society. Via the use of often crude language, Tullio Forgiarini convincingly reflects the prevailing problems of social isolation, neglect, lack of perspective, behavioural disorders and senseless violence. Sharp dialogue, realistic depictions and a poetic economy in the carefully placed dream sequences distinguish *Amok* as a decidedly contemporary novel in both form and content. It leads the reader into an exploration of everyday realities that are often absent in the media as well as in public discourse. The reader is thrust into the imaginary and ingeniously crafted dream worlds of the protagonist that stand for his doomed attempts at escaping an unmanageable reality. They convey the sense of tragedy of the protagonist at simultaneously failing to negotiate and escape it.

Amok – Eng Lëtzebuerger Liebeschronik

Tullio Forgiarini

...

Mir sinn ze fréi. Méi wéi eng hallef Stonn. Mir sinn awer net déi éischt. E puer Autoe sti schonns um Parking. An och e Bus. An och Kanner. Esou fënneft, sechst Schouljoer. Si spille Fussball. Also d’Jongen. D’Meedercher kucken no. A gackeren domm. D’Joffere stinn och do. Déi si schonns genervt. Eng huet d’Bouwe vernannt. Op Däitsch, mengen ech. Héieren hunn ech näischt. Mir bleiwe léiwer am Auto sätzen. Fir a Rou ze fëmmen. Fir net zevill gesinn ze ginn. D’Shirley hält de Bak. Schonns ganz laang am Fong. Zanter der Affär mam..., mat deem, wat gëschter Owend war. Gleeft mer wuel net. Datt ech et schonns zwanzeg Mol gemaach hunn. Oder datt et cool war. Oder déi zwee. Dann eben. Esou cool war et och net. Also guer net wéi an de Filmer. Do dauert dat ëmmer..., wat?... Eng Véirelstonn..., mindestens eng Véirelstonn!... An do dinn d’Puten och därmoosse Kreesch... Gëschter war alles an zwou Minutten un an aus. Ouni, datt een eppes gesot huet... Dach, dono sot d’Shirley *War et schéin?* an ech sot *Jo...* D’Shirley schléift nees. All Minutt, wou näischt leeft, schléift dat! Dat nervt, mee iergendwéi fannen ech dat cool. Ëmmer, wann et der net dono ass, einfach anhänken... Nach zwee Busser. D’Autoen zielen ech guer net méi. Geschwë maachen se op... Mäi Réck kraazt nees. Wéi verréckt. Net dauernd, mee elo nees mega. Am Fong ëmmer nëmmen, wann ech eleng sinn..., also eleng mat mir..., mat menge Gedanken... Et dréckt mer duerch den T-Shirt. Duerch de Pullover. Duerch d’Jackett. Esouguer duerch den Autossätz.

Ech kapéieren d'Shirley net. Dat kann him dach net egal sinn... Obwuel..., d'Nathalie huet och näischt gesot..., mee souwisou..., oder... ?... Ech huele mäin iPhone aus der Täsch. En ass ganz aus. Wéinst de Flicen. Wann ech en umaachen, da wëssen se direkt, wou mer sinn. Oder vläicht och net. Wann ech e just ganz kuerz uloossen..., just fir ze gesinn, ob een ugeruff huet... oder eng SMS geschéckt huet... Ech maachen en un. Et dauert e bëssen, bis hien d'Netz fonnt huet... An..., dräi Uriff. Zweemol meng Mamm. An eng Nummer, déi net ugewise gëtt. D'Flice wuel... An eng SMS. Och vu menger Mamm. Ech soll zréckruffen. Soss näischt. Just *Ruff un*. Mol net *Ruff un!* Oder *Ruff un, w.e.g!* Just *Ruff un*... Ech maachen nees séier aus. Et ass all Mënsch schäissegal... Bal schäissegal. D'Flice sichen e bëssen. Well se müssen. An... d'Sandra och. Well et mengt, et misst. Well et mengt, eng Mamm misst. Well et mengt, et wär eng Mamm. Well et mengt, et wär meng Mamm...

- Geet elo op?
- An..., an zwou Minutten. Wéi méchs de dat?
- Wat?
- Erwächen, just wann et un der Zäit ass...
- Wat? Ech versti guer näischt... Gi mer?
- Ok...
- Phantasieland! Phantasieland!

Et huet sech wierklech net ginn. D'Shirley. Dauernd gebirelt. *Phantasieland!* Ech hu gefaart, mir géifen opfalen. Mee guer näischt. Bei de Keessen hunn sech Tonne Leit gedrückt. Kanner. Awer och Jonker. Esou wéi mir. Déi hunn all esou Kreesch gedoen. An déi puer Erwuessener hunn eis net bekuckt..., oder dach, awer just ganz kuerz. Esoubal se

gemierkt hunn, datt mer net zu hirem Grupp gehéiert hunn, waren se erliichtert an hunn eis vergiess.

Dobanne war et nach méi einfach. Déi Kleng si mat hire Joffere vu Spill zu Spill gepilgert, mee net déi Grouss. Déi krute just eng Moralpriedegt gehalen a konnten dann dorëmmer lafen, wéi se wollten. Genee esou wéi mir.

– Fir d'éischt maache mer d'Achterbahnen. All! Do sinn ëmmer déi meeschte Leit! A wann d'Schlaang net ze laang ass, da maache mer se direkt e puer Mol hannereneen. Dann hu mer dat schonns. Dat hëlt keen eis ewech!

D'Shirley rennt vir. Hatt dréint sech net ëm, fir ze kucken, ob ech do sinn. Ech lafen him no. Mir maache genee dat, wat hatt sot. Ouni eng dotëschend ze fëmmen. Ouni pissen ze goen. D'Black Mamba gefält dem Shirley am beschten. Well do d'Féiss ënnen eraushänken. A well een sech véier Mol iwwerschléit. Während der ganzer Fahrt bläert hatt esou haart, wéi et geet. Hatt leeft rout un am Gesiicht. Blo esouguer. Mee et bläert riicht weider. Siwe Mol gi mer op d'Black Mamba. Siwe Mol hannereneen. An der Schlaang drécke mer eis vir. E puer Aler meckeren. Proffe wuel. Dat ass eis schäissegal. Et wär wéi Fléien. Seet d'Shirley. Ech fannen net. Soen awer Jo. Fir dem Shirley e Gefalen ze maachen. Hatt gesäit och glécklech aus.

Mir ginn op de Colorado Adventure. Esou een Zichelchen. Wéi aus enger Goldminn. Den iwwerschléit sech net. Rennt dofir awer megaséier e megagéie Bierg erof.

– Hannen! Ganz hannen! Ganz hanne muss ee sätzen! Do hieft ee richteg of!

Ech weess net, wouhir d'Shirley dat alles weess. Hatt war nach ni hei. Den Zuch gött de Bierg eropgezunn. D'Shirley

dréckt sech ganz fest widdert mech. Dat ass esou cool! , seet et. Dat huet hatt haut schonns honnertmol gesot. Méi. Zanter gëschter Owend ass alles cool. Zanter mer... Si ass net dout. Sécher net.

– Ouni d’Hänn! Ouni d’Hänn! Unhalen ass fir Looser!

D’Shirley streckt d’Äerm héich an d’Luucht. A jäizt ganz haart. Just wéi de Weenchen no vir kippt. Ech loosse lass. Mäin Aasch léist sech vum Sëtz. Meng Been drécke géint d’Staang, déi eis festhält. Drécken ëmmer méi. Am Réck bascht eppes. Neen, alles. Alles fiert op. Ech gesinn se. Just aus dem Aewénkel. Grouss. Riseg. A schnéiwäiss. Si schloen am Takt. Si rappe mech aus dem Sëtz. Aus dem Weenchen. Nach een, zwee Schléi, da brécht d’Staang, déi eis hält. Da fléien ech eraus. Da fléie mir eraus. Esou grouss a staark..., déi packen eis zwee... Ech falen zrëck an de Sëtz. Ginn nach e puermol no lénks a no riets gepucht. Da bleiwe mer stoen.

– Cool, hä? Komm séier! Nach eng Kéier!

– Mir ass e bësse schlecht...

– Du Tussi do! Dajee! Komm!

Ech ginn nach eng Kéier mat. Nach zweemol esouguer. Esou schlecht ass mer och net. Just e bësse komesch. Dës Kéier hiewen ech d’Äerm och net méi. Ech leien am Sëtz wéi e Sak Sand. Et leeft mer eppes de Réck erof. Waarm. A pecheg...

– Ech hunn do eppes... Am Réck...

– Schonns erëm! Da weis emol... Do d’Jackett aus...

D’Shirley ass genervt. Oder just prësséiert. Hatt fiert mat der Hand ënnert mäin T-Shirt.

– E bësse Blut...

Hatt reift se laanscht meng Box.

– Näischt Schlëmme. Dat kënnst vun deene Rëff... Gi mer op d'Wildwasserbahn? Mir kënnen awer och eppes iesse goen, wann s de wëlls...

Bei der éischer Bud si mer stoebliwwen.

– Oh, wéi cool! Kaf mer esou een!

Häerzer. Aus Liefkuch. Mat lauter esou Spréch drop. Mein Herz gehört dir. Danke! Zuckermäus. Ich liebe dich. Für immer dein. An nëmmen däers. A mir ass et net gutt. An déi zwee Typen...

– Dajee! Et ass un eis!

– Jo..., wéi eent wëlls du?

– Ah neen! Du muss et eraussichen!

– Ah..., äh... Das da...

– Soll ech der och eent huelen?

– Äh... neen. Ech huelen en Hamburger...

– ... und zwei Cola! Bitte!

Ech bezuelen. Zuckermäus. Méi hunn ech mech net getraut. Mir setzen eis op eng Bänk. D'Shirley ässt d'Häerz. Systematesch. Fir d'éischt de Bord. An dann ëmmer esou ronderëm. Bis näischt méi iwwreg ass. Den Hamburger ass net immens. Ech puchen d'Halschent fort. D'Type sinn och nees fort. Zwee Stéck. Security. Esou mat Sonnebrëller. An engem Walkietalkie, deen dauernd kraacht. Mir hunn se schonns dacks begéint. Immens dacks am Fong. An si kucken eis ëmmer. Ok, si kucken all Mënsch, mee eis kucken se ëmmer méi laang. A wann se weiderginn, da schwätzen se eppes an den Walkietalkie. Elo bei der Friessbud stoungen se just hannert eis. Dat huet mech nervös gemaach. Ech hätt de Schäiss iPhone net sollten umaachen...

- Geet et?
- Jo..., jo.
- Wëlls de e Stéck vu mengem Häerz?
- Wa... ? Nee merci...
- Et geet awer erëm, so?
- Jo, jo. Tipptopp!
- Ass cool hei, hä?
- Jo. Mega!
- Gi mer elo op d'Wildwasser?
- Jo. Kloer...

Vläicht ass et och just wéinst dem Shirley. Datt se méi laang kucken. Hatt ass esou duerchgeknallt... Ech fueren a meng Jackettstäsch. D'Pistoul. Kleng a sëlweg. Ech hat se schonns ganz vergiess. Soss hätt ech se bestëmmt am Auto gelooss...

Bei der Wildwasserbahn gi mer erwaart. Oder och net. Si sinn op alle Fall do. Déi zwee Typen. An net nëmme si. Ech gesinn der nach zwee. E grouse Schwaarzen an eng Tussi. Baseballkapen, Sonnebrëller a Walkietalkie. Si schnesse mateneen. Sinn opgereegt. D'Tussi gestikuléiert a weist op eis. Also op d'Schlaang, déi virun der Wildwasserbahn waart. D'Shirley wëllt sech erëm virdrénken, mee ech halen hatt zréck. Hatt meckert net. Gëtt mer en décke Kuss. Riicht op de Mond. Seng Zong dréckt sech duerch meng Zänn. Hatt huet bestëmmt gemengt, et wär dofir, wou ech hatt festgehalten hunn... Ech soen näischt. Laachen e bëssen domm. D'Shirley laacht och. Awer vill méi richtig. Richtig glécklech. Ech misst him vläicht eppes soen. Mee ech weess net richtig, wat. An och net, wéi.

D'Wildwasserbahn fënnt d'Shirley cool. Megacool! Obwuel mer eréischt e puer Sekonnen drasëtzen. An esou engem Plastiksbamstamm. Obwuel mer just eréischt amgang sinn, erop gezunn ze ginn. D'Shirley léisst sech ganz widdert mech rutschen. An dréckt meng Äerm ganz fest ronderëm sech. D'Kant vu mengem Sëtz buert sech a mäi Réck. Ech bludden nach ëmmer. Mengen ech. Vun uewe gesäit een op de Parking. Ech gesinn eisen Auto. Dem Nathalie säin. Net dout. Bestëmmt net dout... An e Flicenauto. Net wäit dovun ewech. En däitsche Flicenauto. Sëlwreg wäiss a blo. Also vläicht. Ech sinn net ganz...

– Ouni d'Hänn! Ouni d'Hänn! Wouaaaaahhhh!

*

Ech drécken d'Shirley ganz fest. An hatt mech och. Hatt huet d'Aen zou. Ech och. Dofir kann ech et jo net gesinn. Ob hatt d'Aen zou huet oder net. Mee ech si sécher. Mir hunn allen zwee d'Aen zou an drécken eis ganz fest. A ronderëm eis nëmme Loft. Gutt waarm Loft. A Megakaméidi. A soss näischt. A soss guer keen. Si sinn dobausse bliwwen. Déi véier. Si waren do, wéi eise Bam ukomm ass. Si hunn eis nogekuckt, wéi mer erausgeklomme sinn. Dës Kéier sinn ech sécher. Si hunn eis nogekuckt! Mir waren zimlech naass. Dofir si mer an déi Kabinn gaang. Hunn zwee Euro agepucht. E risege Föhn huet ugefaange mat Blosen. D'Shirley huet gemaach, wéi wann hatt géif fortfléien. A meng Äerm ass hatt geflunn. Also esou gemaach huet et. An elo halen ech et. Fest. Ganz fest. A mat den Aen zou...

Elo sinn der nach just zwee do. De Schwaarzen an d'Fra. Si kucken eis net. Si kucke Richtung Agang. Si waarden. Op hir Kollegen. Oder op d'Flicen...

– An elo op d’Geisterbahn! Esou cool! *Et ass déi längst
ënnerierdesch Geisterbahn vun der Welt! Wousst de dat?*

– Hä? Äh... nee.

– Déi längst vun der Welt! Megacool!

...

Amok – A Luxembourg Love Story

Tullio Forgiarini

Translated from the Luxembourgish by Tom Johanns

...

We're too early. More than half an hour. Still, we're not the first ones. A few cars are already at the car park. And a bus. And also kids. Probably 5th, 6th school year. They're playing football. Well, the boys are. The girls are watching. And sniggering stupidly. The teachers are standing there as well. They're already irritated. One has told off the boys. In German, I think. I haven't heard her. We prefer staying in the car. To have a quiet smoke. Not to be seen too much. Shirley's been keeping quiet. For quite a while, in fact. Since the event with..., with what happened yesterday evening. She doesn't believe me, apparently. That I have already done it 20 times. Or, that it was cool. Or both. Oh, well. It wasn't that cool. Well, nothing like in the movies. There it always lasts for... 15 minutes? Yeah, 15 minutes minimum! And the bitches are screaming their heads off... Yesterday, everything was done and dusted in 2 minutes flat. Without anybody saying anything... Well, afterwards Shirley asked "Was it nice?" and I said "Yes"... Shirley's sleeping again. She sleeps every single minute when nothing's happening! That's so annoying, but somehow I admire that. Every time you feel like it, just dropping off... Two buses left. I'm not counting the cars anymore. They are opening soon... My back is itching again. Like mad. Not all the time, but now way too much. Actually, always when I'm alone... well, alone in my thoughts... It's trying to get out through my t-shirt. Through my jumper. Through my jacket.

Even through the seat. I don't get Shirley. How can she not be bothered about that?... But, then again... Nathalie didn't say anything either... no matter... or... ?... I'm taking my iPhone out of my pocket. It's switched off. 'Cause of the cops. If I switch it on, they immediately know where we are. Or, maybe they don't. If I just switch it on for a few seconds... just to see whether someone called... or sent a message... I turn it on. It takes a while 'til it finds a network... and... 3 calls. Twice my mum. And a number that's not being displayed. Probably the cops... and a message. Also from my mum. I'm supposed to call her back. Nothing else. Just *Call me back*. Not even *Call me back now!* Or *Please call me back!* Only *Call me back*... I turn it off again immediately. No-one gives a shit... almost no-one. The cops are searching for us. Because they have to. And... Sandra as well. Because she thinks she has to. Because she thinks, a mother has to. Because she thinks she's a mother. Because she thinks she's my mother...

- Are they opening now?
- In... in 2 minutes. How are you doing this?
- What?
- Waking up just at the right time...
- What are you talking about?... Are we going in?
- Ok...
- Phantasialand! Phantasialand!

She just didn't stop. Shirley, constantly screaming the name.

Phantasialand! I was afraid of attracting attention. But, nothing at all. Loads of people were queuing and shoving each other at the entrance. Children. But also teenagers. Just like us. They were all screaming incessantly. And those few

adults didn't even notice us... well, they did, but only for a few seconds. As soon as they noticed that we were not part of their group they were relieved and forgot about us. Inside, it was even easier. The small children scampered along with their teachers from game to game, but the teenagers didn't. They were just harangued on how to behave and then they could go wherever they wanted to. Just like us.

– First we go on the rollercoasters. All of them! That's where most people go! And if the queue isn't too long, we can ride them a few times. So that we can already tick that off our list. Nobody can take that from us!

Shirley's running in front of me. She doesn't look back to see whether I am following. I run after her. We are doing exactly what she told me. Without having a smoke. Without peeing. *Black Mamba* is Shirley's favourite. Because her feet are hanging out underneath her. And because there are four vertical loops. She's screaming as loudly as possible during the whole ride. She's turning red in her face. Even blue. But she continues screaming. We're riding *Black Mamba* seven times, back to back. We're jumping the queues. Some adults are complaining. Probably teachers. We don't care. It's like flying, Shirley says. I don't think so but agree. Just to please Shirley. She looks so happy.

We go to the *Colorado Adventure*, a small train. Just like in a gold mine. There are no vertical loops but it's extremely fast and goes down an amazingly steep hill.

– At the back! Right at the back! That's where we must sit! There you almost get thrown out of your seat! I have no idea where Shirley knows that from. She hasn't been here before. The train's being pulled up the hill. Shirley's pressing herself firmly against me. *This is so cool!* she says. She's already said

that a hundred times. Even more. Everything has been cool since yesterday evening. Since we... she isn't dead. Of course not.

– No hands! No hands! Holding on is for losers!

Shirley raises her arms high above her head. And she's screaming again. Just when our part of the train falls forward. I let go. My ass comes away from the seat. My legs are pushing against the railings that are holding us in place. Pushing more and more. In the back something's cracking. No, everything. Everything's cracking wide open. I see them. Just from the corner of my eye. Big. Gigantic. And white as snow. They are hitting in the same rhythm. They are tearing me from the seat. From the carriage. One, two more hits and the railing's broken. Then I fly out. Then we fly out. So big and strong... they can handle both of us... I fall back into the seat, get thrown to the left and the right a few times. Then we stop.

– How cool was that? Come on! Again!

– I feel a bit sick...

– You wimp! Come on!

I follow her again. Twice even. I don't feel that sick after all, just a bit strange. This time I'm not lifting my arms again. I'm lying in my seat like a brick. Something 's running down my back. Warm. And sticky...

– I've got something on my back...

– Again! Show me... take your jacket off...

Shirley's annoyed. Or just in a hurry. She slips her hand under my t-shirt.

– A bit of blood...

She rubs her hand against my trousers.

– Nothing bad. That’s from those scabs... Are we going to the water slides? We can also get something to eat if you want...

We stopped at the first booth.

– Oh, how cool! Buy me one like that!

Hearts. Made from gingerbread. With loads of different sayings. *My heart belongs to you. Thanks! Sweetie. I love you. Forever yours.* Stuff like that. And I’m not feeling too well. And the two guys...

– Come on! It’s our turn!

– Yes..., which one do you want?

– Oh no! You have to choose one!

– Oh... well... that one...

– Shall I get you one as well?

– Oh... no. I take a burger...

– ... and two Cokes! Please!

I’m paying. *Sweetie*. I didn’t dare getting another one. We are sitting down on a bench. Shirley’s eating the heart. Systematically. First the outside and then in circles until there’s nothing left. The burger isn’t that good. I throw half of it away. The guys have gone away as well. Two of them. Security. With sunglasses. And walkie-talkies that are making a constant noise. We’ve already seen them a few times. Quite a few times, in fact. And they’re always looking at us. Ok, they’re looking at everybody but they’re looking at us a lot longer. And when they’re walking on, they’re speaking into their walkie-talkies. Here at the booth they were just behind us. That made me nervous. I shouldn’t have switched on that fucking iPhone...

– Are you ok?

– Yes..., yes.

- Want a piece of my heart?
- Wha... ? No, thanks...
- But you're ok again?
- Yes, yes. Fine!
- It's cool here, no?
- Yeah. Brilliant!
- Are we going to the water slides now?
- Yeah. Definitely...

Maybe it's just because of Shirley. That they're staring at us. She's so crazy... I slide my hand into the pocket of my jacket. The gun. Small and silver. I had already forgotten about it. Otherwise I would have left it in the car for sure...

We're expected at the water slides. Or not. They are there. The two guys. And not only them. I can see two others. A tall black guy and a chick. Baseball caps, sunglasses and walkie-talkies. They're talking to each other and seem excited. The chick is gesticulating and pointing at us and at the queue in front of the slides. Shirley wants to jump the queue again but I am holding her back. She isn't complaining. Kisses me intently. Straight on my mouth. Her tongue is pushing through my teeth. She probably thought that was why I stopped her... I don't say anything. I laugh a bit. Shirley's laughing as well. But her laugh is more honest. Really happy. Maybe I should tell her. But I don't really know what. Or how.

Shirley thinks that the water slides are cool. *Extremely cool!* Even though we have just got on a few seconds ago. In a plastic tree trunk. Even though we are just getting pulled up. Shirley lets herself slide against me. And pulls my arms tightly around her. The edge of my seat is pushing into my back. I'm still bleeding. I think. From the top one can see

the car park. I can see our car. Nathalie's. Not dead. Definitely not dead... And a police car. Not far away from ours. A German police car. Silver, white and blue. Well, I think. I am not completely...

– Without hands! Without hands! Yeeaaaahhhh!

*

I am holding onto Shirley really tight. And she does the same. She has her eyes closed. Me, too. That's why I can't see her. Whether her eyes are closed or not. But I am sure. We both have our eyes closed and are holding onto each other. And around us only air. Nice, warm air. And loads of noise. And nothing else. And nobody else. They didn't come in. Those four. They were there when our tree arrived. They stared at us when we climbed out. This time I'm certain. They stared at us! We were quite wet. That's why we went into those changing rooms. Threw two euros in. A giant hair dryer started blowing hot air. Shirley faked flying away. She flew into my arms. Well she faked that. And now I am holding her. Tight. Very tight. And with my eyes closed...

Now there are only two of them left. The black guy and the chick. They aren't looking at us. They are looking at the entrance. They are waiting. For their colleagues. Or for the policemen...

– And now the ghost train! So cool! It's the longest subterranean ghost train in the world! Did you know that?

– What? Hmm... no.

– The longest in the world! Excellent!

...



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Ioana Pârvulescu

Viața începe vineri (2009)

Life Begins on Friday

Publishing House **Humanitas Publishing House**

Biography

Ioana Pârvulescu was born in Brașov in 1960. She graduated from the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest in 1983, establishing herself as a distinct voice within literary circles. Since 1996, she has taught modern literature at the same faculty, her 1999 doctoral thesis entitled *Literary Prejudices: Comfortable Options in Interpreting Romanian Literature (Prejudecăți literare. Opțiuni comode în receptarea literaturii române)* earning her a PhD. She has coordinated the series *Cartea de pe noptieră (Bedside Book)* at Humanitas Publishing House, worked as an editor at the literary journal *România literară*, and has also translated from French and German several books by Maurice Nadeau, Angelus Silesius and Rainer Maria Rilke. She is a member of the Romanian Writers' Union and a founder member of the Comparative Literature Society in Romania.

Synopsis

Life Begins on Friday is a unique and charming journey into the amazing world of times gone by – a world more than 100 years distant, but very similar to our own in its core features.

A young man is found lying unconscious on the outskirts of Bucharest. No one knows who he is and everyone has a different theory about how he got there.

The stories of the various characters unfold, each closely interwoven with the next, and outlining the features of what ultimately turns out to be the most important and most powerful character of all: the city of Bucharest itself. The novel covers the last 13 days of 1897 and culminates in a beautiful tableau of the future as imagined by the different characters.

We might, in fact, say that it is we who inhabit their future. And so too does Dan Crețu, alias Dan Kretzu, the present-day journalist hurled back in time by some mysterious process for just long enough to allow us a wonderful glimpse into a remote, almost forgotten world, but one still very much alive in our hearts.

Viața începe vineri

Ioana Pârvulescu

Lui B., în orice lume s-ar afla

*Pentru că ceea ce vrei este viața aceea,
și asta, și alta – le vrei pe toate.*

(Miguel de Unamuno, iulie, 1906)

Vineri 19 decembrie. O zi cu evenimente

1.

Îmi place să citesc în trăsură. Mama mă ia la rost, papă, care nu uită nici în familie că-i Domnul doctor Leon Margulis, medic primar cu cabinet în dosul Teatrului Național, zice că-mi stric ochii și-o să nasc copii cu vederea slabă. Însă eu sunt încăpățânată și tot îmi iau cartea cu mine. Pe vremea lor or fi avut mai mult timp de citit și de multe altele, dar noi, cei mai tineri, trebuie să ne chivernisim bine orele. Abia așteptam să văd ce mai face Becky din *Vanity Fair*. Deși, la drept vorbind, cred că eu semăn mai mult cu proasta de Amelia, și-o să iubesc toată viața cine știe ce ticălos. Azi n-am avut noroc cu cititul. Mai întâi pentru că-mi înghețau mâinile. Apoi, de cum ne-am suit în trăsură, mama și papa l-au tocat mărunț-mărunț, cum toacă bucătăreasa noastră pătrunjelul, pe necunoscutul cules de Petre din zăpadă, azi-dimineată, aproape de pădurea Băneasa, în câmp, la lacuri. A fost dus în arest la Prefectura de Poliție. Mama, care e la zi cu absolut totul, zice că-i scăpat de la balamuc, că sigur a înnebunit de

prea multă învățătură. Și s-a uitat amenințător la mine: „Așa o să pățești și tu dacă citești toată ziua!“ Apoi s-a uitat la papa: „E timpul ca Iulia să se gândească la un bărbat cumsecade cu care să se mărite!“ Papa l-a consultat pe străin la rugămintea lui Costache, prietenul nostru de la Poliție, și zice că nu-i vagabond, chiar dacă e îmbrăcat cu niște haine neînchipuit de ciudate. O fi clown, la circ. Altfel curat, nici un cusur „fiziologic“, în afară de faptul că, într-adevăr, vorbește uneori în dodii. Dar, dacă-i nebun, e unul cultivat, „rotunjește frumos vorbele“. Însă când papa l-a întrebat dacă n-are tuberculoză omul s-a uitat la el batjocoritor, părea scos din fire, și i-a răspuns jignitor: „Ești un actor de două parale!“ Papa a replicat, serios, cum e el în orice situație: „Domnule, vă rog, nu sunt actor, ci medic!“ A adăugat că plămâni îi sună puțin înfundat, e foarte palid, dar boală serioasă nu-i găsește. Atunci bărbatul s-a calmat și i-a spus că vrea să fumeze, papa, care e contra acestui obicei, i-a adus totuși tutun fin și foiță de pe masa lui Costache, dar zice că, după o căutătură sălbatică, arestatul i-a întors pur și simplu spatele. Nu-i un om bine crescut! I-au reținut valiza pentru cercetări, o cutie argintie, ca un *safe*, și asta arată c-ar putea să fie vreun falsificator de bani, dar lui i-au dat drumul după numai o oră de arest și un scurt interogatoriu luat de conu Costache. Când s-a văzut liber, a șters putina imediat. Însă îl urmărește discret cel mai bun vizitiu al Poliției.

— Câți ani are? a pus mama întrebarea ei favorită.

— A declarat 43, păi asta ar însemna cu patru mai puțin ca mine, dar eu zic că minte, nu-i dau mai mult de 30-35. Zice că-i gazetar și că-i născut aici. Dan Kretzu. M-a mirat că se poartă ras complect, cum vezi doar la actorii care joacă rol de muiere. Hm! Și papa și-a mângâiat fuiorul firav de barbă blonzie ca mătasea porumbului, suferința lui de-o viață.

— O să aflăm mai multe mâine, la cină, că l-am invitat pe conu Costache.

Papa a observat că sunt aprinsă la față și mi-a pus imediat mâna pe frunte, să vadă dacă n-am febră. Pentru el totul are cauze concrete, trupești, să n-audă de suflet. [...]

4.

Poate că tot ce a fost și o să fie este acum, în prezent. Poate că ce a fost este ce va mai fi. Înainte de a-mi pune orice întrebare, încercați să vă obișnuiți cu vocea mea, o voce de om despărțit de o lume pe care ajunsese s-o cunoască destul de bine, și căzut într-una necunoscută și de neînțeles. Poate că trăim, fără s-o știm, chiar în clipa asta nesfârșită, în mai multe lumi deodată. Poate că vocea care vă vorbește acum și care se zbate printre vocile de aici ca un pește în plasa pescarului, vocea asta care se află în orașul nașterii ei și-n țara ei, mai singură decât orice voce de om prizonier în țară străină, vorbește chiar acum cu ființe pe care n-aveți cum să le vedeți. Sau poate că eu, izvorul vocii, m-am stins deja, ca soarele care tocmai a apus, dar voi mă auziți încă, acolo, în lumea voastră cu soare la zenit, acolo, în camera voastră caldă, sau afară, într-un parc verde sau alb, pe o bancă. Sau poate că, tocmai când nu mă puteți auzi, când dormiți fără vise sau când țipați ca nebunii unii la alții, sau când vă plictisiți de moarte, așteptând doar să treacă timpul, tocmai atunci se petrec, aici, lucrurile esențiale. Sau poate că n-am să ajung niciodată la voi și nici asta nu mă mai întristează. Dar uite că îmi ridic în sfârșit vocea la cer, și mă rog și pentru voi, cei de departe, și pentru mine, mă rog aici, la icoana asta de argint, din a cărei platoșă se vede, neajutorat, un cap mic de femeie și-un cap și mai mic de

copil; [...] Te rog, Îndurătorule, îndură-te. Cândva, sunt sigur, o să vin cumva la voi și-o să mă auziți iar. Încerc să vă văd de aici, din rama zilei mele de-acum și, dacă tăceți o clipă, cum tac apele adânci din fântâni, poate-o să auziți ce îmi spun mie însumi, pentru că vorbesc pentru mine și numai cu mine. Sunt singur: eu cel care fac și eu cel care mă judec. Eu sunt cel care vorbește și eu cel care tace și ascultă:

Mereu e altfel decât credem, dragă Dan. Ai căzut din viață-n viață. Când am deschis ochii, am văzut mult cer albastru și mulți copaci îmbrăcați în chiciură. Sute de gămălii care zburau la câte-o adiere. Aerul mă strângea. Eram culcat pe spate. Mi-am cufundat ochii în cer, cu o mirare de orășean. Deodată am auzit un zgomot ca de apă care curge din țeava robinetului. Venea din imediata apropiere, din dreapta. Am întors capul fără să-l ridic și nu mi-a venit să cred. Nu încăpea nici o îndoială: lângă mine era un cal care dăduse drumul unui jet teribil de puternic de urină, ca o coloană. În jurul coloanei se încolăceau aburi. Părea că nu se mai oprește, iar jos, în zăpadă, se făcuse o adâncitură rotundă. Calul era înhămat la o sanie încărcată cu bucăți mari de gheață și câțiva butuci.

Totul era liniștit, încremenit chiar, albul din jur, soarele, o tăcere cum n-am mai auzit, fiindcă și tăcerile se aud. Animalul și-a cufundat botul într-un sac agățat de propriul grumaz și a început să mestece. Coada o avea legată într-un imens nod lucios.

— Sus, băiete, că te brinde noabtea în zăbadă. Cin' te-o fi lăsat să mori aci, că nu-i bicior de om, cât vezi cu ochii?

Era un bărbat negricios, cu palme uriașe, în care ținea o toporișcă. M-am speriat. Valiza era la câțiva metri și am vrut să mă scol s-o iau. M-am clătinat, îmi înghețaseră picioarele.

— Nu te ții be bicioare? Da' grozavi brieteni tre' să ai, că te-au lăsat să-ngheti aci, beat, îmbrăcat ca o sberietoare, și-n cabu' gol.

Când nu înțelegi nimic, nu-ți rămâne decât să taci. Vorbea el, dar parcă avea tot timpul gura plină. Bărbatul a aruncat toporișca în sanie, lângă un târnăcop și-o lopată, a dezlegat sacul de pe grumazul calului și mi-a întins o mână roșie și aspră. Îi lipsea jumătate din degetul arătător, care se încheia cu un moț, ca o pungă strânsă la gură.

— Suie sus, că te duc înapoi în oraș și mă cinstești cu doi lei și-un bahar de vin. Îți luăm și cutia... Uite, trage șuba asta beste tine. Ești în stare să teții?

Când vorbea, îi ieșeau aburi din gură. A apucat hățurile, iar calul și-a mișcat vioi fundul. Sania s-a întors pe urmele ei, ca pe niște șine. Pădurea a rămas în urmă, iar nesfârșirea albă a câmpului însorit s-a deschis înainte. Sclipea toată de picături, ca marea. N-am apucat, așadar, să plec din țară nici acum. Ce se întâmplă? Unde-a dispărut totul? De unde-a apărut totul?

Spre deosebire de mine, care n-aveam nici măcar o urmă de răspuns, bărbatul de pe capră își găsea el singur răspuns la toate întrebările, știa tot. Om masiv, cu mustăți lungi care se vărsau în mari favoriți creți, ușor încărunțiți, îmi inspira și încredere, și spaimă. Avansam alunecând încet.

— Cât e ceasul?

Iată-mi și vocea, pentru prima dată. Răgușită la cât și înfundată la ceasul.

— De un' să știi? E devreme! M-am sculat cu noabtea-n cab. Mata' n-ai ceasornic? L-ai bierdut la cărți, ca baltonul și căciula, ai? Uite, ia baltonul de colo, voiam să-l dau de bomană, pentru taică-meu, c-a murit luna trecută.

Are nasturi de os. Mi-a întins o sticlă aproape plină și iar i-am văzut arătătorul tăiat și cusut grosolan:

— Trage-o gură, să te dregi!

Am băut, era țică. Am trecut de niște ciori care se decupau bine în albul drumului. Nu și-au luat zborul, și-au văzut de treabă, croncănind și lăsând desene cu gheare, în zăpadă.

— Mie-mi zice Betre... a spus omul, mama era venită din Rusia.

— Petre?

— Da, Betre, Betre, a țipat el, de parcă aș fi fost surd.

Aștepta reciprocitate. Plictisit de tăcerea mea, a trecut la interogatoriul direct.

— Matale din ce familie ești? De unde?

Am răspuns fără tragere de inimă:

— Bucureștean. Crețu.

— Rudă cu spițerul Kretzu, ăla cu mustăți roșcovane? Da' matale cine ți-a ras mustățile?

N-am mai răspuns. Nimic nu se potrivea cu nimic. Petre îmi mai arunca din când în când o căutătură, tot mai piezișă. Vedeam că face eforturi mari de gândire. Brusc a tras de hățuri, eu am venit în față ca împins, iar el a sărit jos cu o iuțea care dovedea un lung exercițiu. Eram într-un pâlc de pomi cu zăpadă prinsă pe trunchiuri, ca un mușchi alb. Pe jos, un trup care zăcea pe spate. Nu-l observasem.

— Alta-acum! a exclamat Petre și s-a apropiat de forma din zăpadă. Ce-i cu voi, oameni buni? [...] Naiba m-a bus să fug azi de-acasă, cât mai departe, de gura nevastii, și chiar de naiba am dat, Doamne iartă-mă, a zis Petre. Ce ne facem?

Brusc s-a întors la mine și m-a privit bănuitor.

— Nu cumva l-ai... mata?

Life Begins on Friday

Ioana Pârvulescu

Translated from the Romanian by Alistair Ian Blyth

For B., in whichever world he might be

*Because what you want is this life,
both this one and that one – you want them all.*

(Miguel de Unamuno, July 1906)

Friday, 19 December. An eventful day

1.

I like to read in the carriage. Mama takes me to task; Papa, who never forgets, not even *en famille*, that he is Dr Leon Margulis, primary physician with a surgery behind the National Theatre, says that I will ruin my eyes and give birth to nearsighted children. But I am obstinate and still bring a book with me. Back in their day, they probably had the time to read and do lots of other things, but we youngsters have to dole out our hours with care. I could hardly wait to find out what Becky would get up to next in *Vanity Fair*. Although truth to tell, I think that I am more like that silly Amelia, and I shall end up loving some rascal all my life. Today I had no luck with my reading. Firstly, because my hands were frozen. And then, no sooner did we climb into the carriage than Mama and Papa, chopping the subject as finely as our cook does the parsley, began to dissect the case of the unidentified man Petre found lying in the snow this morning, in a

field near the Băneasa woods and lakes. He was taken to the Prefecture of Police and placed under arrest. Mama, who is up to date on absolutely everything, says he is a fugitive from the madhouse and that he must have been driven insane by too much learning. And here she gave me a minatory look: “It is high time that Iulia decided on a decent man to marry.” Papa examined the stranger at the request of Costache, our friend from the Police, and said that he was not a vagrant, despite his wearing unbelievably odd clothes. Perhaps he is a clown from the circus. He is otherwise clean and has no “physiological” flaws apart from the fact that he does sometimes talk in a garbled way. If he is a madman, then he is a cultivated madman; he “couches his words nicely”. But when Papa asked him whether he had tuberculosis, the man gave him a scornful look, as if infuriated, and answered cuttingly: “You’re a two-bit actor!” Papa replied, as gravely as he does whatever the situation: “Sir, if you please, I am not an actor, but a physician!” He added that his lungs sounded a little congested, that he was very pale, but that he could not find any serious illness. The man calmed down and said that he would like to smoke. Papa, who is against the habit, nonetheless brought him some fine tobacco and rolling papers from Costache’s desk, but said that the man under arrest, after giving him a savage glance, quite simply turned his back on him. He is ill bred! They retained his valise for examination, a silver box, like a safe, which indicates that he might be a money forger, but they released him after keeping him under arrest for only an hour and following a brief interrogation by Costache. On finding himself free, he straightaway made himself scarce. But the best coachman in the Police was assigned to follow him unobtrusively.

“How old is he?” asked mother, her favourite question.

“He declares himself forty-three. Well, that would mean he was four years younger than me, but I say he’s lying. I reckon he is no older than thirty or thirty-five. He says that he is a journalist and that he was born here. Dan Kretzu. What surprised me was that he is completely shaven. You see the like only with actors who play the rôles of women. Hmm!”

“We shall find out more tomorrow, at dinner, because I have invited Mr Costache.”

Papa noticed that my face was flushed and immediately put his hand to my forehead to see whether I had a temperature. As far as he is concerned, all things have solid, bodily causes. He will not hear of the soul. [...]

4.

Perhaps all that has been and will be exists now, in the present. Perhaps what has been will exist again. Before you ask me any question, try to accustom yourselves to my voice, the voice of a man sundered from a world he had come to know quite well and cast into a world unknown and incomprehensible. Perhaps we live, without knowing it, in this endless moment, in many different worlds at once. Perhaps the voice that speaks to you now and which struggles among the voices here, like a fish in a fisherman’s net, this voice that finds itself in the city and the land of its birth, a voice lonelier than the voice of any man held prisoner in a foreign land, is speaking this very moment to beings you are incapable of seeing. Or perhaps I, the source of the voice, have already faded like the sun that has just set, but you will still be able to hear me there in your world where the sun is at its zenith, there in your warm room, or outside, in a green or white park,

sitting on a bench. Or perhaps when you will no longer be able to hear me, when you will be sleeping a dreamless sleep or bawling at each other like men possessed, or when you will be bored to death, waiting only for the time to pass, perhaps precisely then will the essential things take place here. Or perhaps I shall never reach you, and nor does this sadden me. But behold I raise my voice to the heavens at last and I pray both for you, those afar, and for myself, I pray here, before this silver icon, from within whose silver cladding are visible, helplessly, the small head of a woman and the small head of a child; [...] I pray Thee, Merciful One: have mercy. Sometime, I am sure of it, I shall somehow come to you and you will hear me again. I try to see you, from the frame of my present day and if you fall silent for a moment, as silent as the deep waters of wells, perhaps you will hear what I say to myself, because I talk to myself and only to myself. I am sure of it: I who make and I who judge myself. I am the one who speaks and I am the one who keeps silent and listens:

It is always different than we think, dear Dan. You have been cast from life to life. When I opened my eyes, I saw wide blue sky and many trees clad in hoarfrost. Hundreds of pin-points took flight at each gust of wind. The air clasped me. I was lying on my back. With a city-dweller's wonderment, I plunged my gaze into the sky. All of a sudden I heard a sound like water flowing from a tap. It came from nearby, to my right. I turned my head without raising it and I could not believe what I saw. There was no doubt about it: next to me a horse had released a gushing torrent of urine. Steam wafted around the jet. It seemed unending, and a round hollow had formed in the snow. The horse was harnessed to a sleigh laden with blocks of ice and a few logs.

There was complete silence, a petrified silence, all around was whiteness, sun, a silence such as I had never heard before, because even silence is audible. The beast thrust its muzzle into the bag hanging from its neck and began to chomp. Its tail was tied in a huge glossy knot.

“On your feet, lad, or else nightfall will catch ub with you here in the snow. Who can have left you here to berish, where there’s not another berson as far as the eye can see?”

He was a swarthy man, with huge hands, in which he was holding an axe. I took fright. The valise was a few feet away and I struggled to get up, to go to it. I tottered. My legs were frozen.

“Can’t you bick yourself ub? Some friends you’ve got, leaving you here bissed, to freeze in the snow, dressed like a scarecrow and without so much as a cab on your head.”

When you understand nothing, all you can do is keep silent. He was talking, but it was as if his mouth were full. He untied the horse’s nosebag and stretched out a horny red hand to me. Half his index finger was missing and it ended in a knot, like the neck of a pouch pinched with a drawstring.

“Jumb ub, I’ll take you back to town and you’ll bay me a cub of wine. Let’s fetch that box of yours... Bull this sheeb-skin over your shoulders. Can you stand ub?”

As he spoke, steam poured from his mouth. He grasped the reins, and the horse gave its rump a lively shake. The sleigh glided back along its own tracks, as though along rails. It left the forest in its wake, and before it spread the endless white sunlit plain. Everything glistened with droplets, like the sea. And so, not even now had I managed to leave the country. What was happening? Where had everything vanished? Whence had everything appeared?

Unlike myself, who found not a trace of an answer, the man at the reins found an answer to all questions; he knew everything. A burly man, with long moustaches that joined to curly, greying sideburns, he inspired both trust and fear in me. We advanced, gliding slowly.

“What time is it?”

Here was my voice, for the first time, hoarse and muffled.

“How should I know? It’s early! Ain’t you got a timebiece? Lose it at card game, did you, the same as your coat and cab?”

He handed me a bottle, which was almost full, and again I saw the crudely stitched stump of his forefinger:

“Have a swig, to warm yourself ub!”

I drank; it was plum brandy. We passed some crows, stark against the white of the road. They did not take flight, but minded their own business, croaking, tracing patterns in the snow with their claws.

“Betre is my name,” said the man. “My mother was from Russia.”

“Petre?”

“Yes, Betre. Betre!” he shouted, as if I were deaf.

He was expecting me to reciprocate. Bored of my silence, he broached me directly:

“What’s the name of your family? Where’re you from?”

I answered unenthusiastically:

“Bucharest. Crețu.”

“A relative of Kretzu the abothecary, with the ginger moustaches? And who was it shaved your moustaches off?”

I made no reply. Nothing matched up with anything else. From time to time, Petre cast me increasingly wary glances. I could see he was making a great effort to think. Suddenly he pulled on the reins. I jolted forward as if pushed. He jumped down with a nimbleness that was evidence of long practice. We were in a copse; snow clung to the tree trunks like white moss. A body lay on the ground, on its back. I had not noticed it.

“Here’s another now!” exclaimed Petre and went up to the form in the snow. “What is with you, good beoble? It was the devil himself made me leave the house today, to get away from my wife’s brattle, and now I’ve met the devil himself, God forgive me. What to do?”

He suddenly turned around and looked at me suspiciously.

“It wasn’t you, was it?”



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Gabriela Babnik

Sušna doba (2012)

Dry Season

Publishing House Študentska Založba

Biography

Gabriela Babnik was born in 1979 in Göppingen, Germany. After finishing her studies at Ljubljana University, she spent some time in Nigeria before working on a master's degree on the modern Nigerian novel. Since 2002, she has regularly contributed articles to all major daily and weekly publications in Slovenia. In 2005, Babnik graduated in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Ljubljana.

Her first novel *Koža iz bombaža* (*Cotton Skin*) was published in 2007 and was awarded the Best Debut Novel by the Union of Slovenian Publishers at the Slovenian Book Fair. In 2009, her second novel *V visoki travi* (*In the Tall Grass*) was published, which was shortlisted for the Kresnik Award in 2010.

Babnik lives with her family in Ljubljana.

Synopsis

Gabriela Babnik's novel *Dry Season* is a record of an unusual love affair. Anna is a 62-year-old designer from Central Europe and Ismael is a 27-year-old African who was brought up on the street, where he was often the victim of abuse. What unites them is the loneliness of their bodies, a tragic childhood and the dry season or *Harmattan*, during which neither nature nor love is able to flourish. She soon realizes that the emptiness between them is not really caused by their skin colour and age difference, but predominantly by her belonging to the Western culture in which she has lost or abandoned all the preordained roles of daughter, wife and mother. Sex does not outstrip the loneliness and repressed secrets from the past surface into a world she sees as much crueller and, at the same time, more innocent than her own. Cleverly written as an alternating narrative of both sides in the relationship, the novel is interlaced with magic realism and accurately perceived fragments of African political reality.

»Spiš?« je rekel in premaknil svoje božansko telo. Bil je iz zlate dobe, kjer se ljubimci niso držali za roke, še skozi lase so si komaj šli.

»Ne, ne morem.«

Hotela sem reči »ne znam spati kot ti«, vendar ni imelo smisla, ne bi razumel. Naključni tujec, s katerim sem v postelji preležala popoldne in eno noč, ne da bi se med nama karkoli zgodilo.

Med ponovnim odlaganjem torbe na tla, na tepih, po katerem se je sprehodilo že toliko stopal, večinoma bosih, od kod sicer tisti vonj po potu, po goloti, po zamolčanosti, me je spreletelo, da je ta navesek vse, kar mi je ostalo od prejšnjega življenja. Zunaj lije noč, na njo kapljajo zvezde in moj sin nekje v onstranstvu gleda še en nor film. Tokrat iz lastnega življenja.

Zazrla sem se v njegov molk in nato v njegove velike dlani z lepo oblikovanimi nohti, nekoliko nenavadno za fanta s ceste, ki je počel že toliko stvari, pa vendarle, zatlačene za kavbojke. To je tisto golo, kamnito področje, ki ga verjetno premorejo samo moški. Ali pa sem jaz iz kakšne stare šole.

»Zebe me,« je rekel in z brado pomignil nekam pod pas, kot da hoče prekiniti moj tok misli.

»In si greješ roke?«

»Ja, pa še navajen sem.« Vedno sem si predstavljala, da moške roke v hlačah pomenijo protekcijo in seveda preverjajo,

ali je stvar še tam. Moj sin tega ni počel, vsaj ne v moji prisotnosti. V tem je bilo verjetno tudi najino nesoglasje. Ko se je dogajalo njemu, je skrival, ko se je dogajalo meni, bi mu morala pokazati. Ga učiti. Vendar sem mislila, da bi ga vsega o flori in favni morala naučiti druga ženska. Druga, kot sem bila jaz druga za tega mladca pred menoj. »Veliko moških to počne,« je leno dodal in mi namenil nasmešek, pri čemer je razkril zgornji rob dlesni. »Nisi videla tega pri nogometu?«

Zmedlo me je, zmedlo njegovo nenadno tikanje. Bo zdaj še enkrat ponovil tiste vulgarne besede, razkleni se, daj, da te pofukam, čeprav, čeprav jih ni nikoli izrekel. Veliko žensk, to sem videla v tistih reklamah za mila in detergente ali pa celo prebrala v detektivskih romanih ter raznobarvnih časopisnih dodatkih, ima to željo, kaj željo, obsesijo po posiljevalcu. Groza, da bi si nekdo na silo vzел njihovo telo, da bi v zatemnjeni hotelski sobi prodril vanje, sploh če je moški lep in mlad in temnopolt in one stare in ovene in svetlopolte, se lahko spremeni v mantranje, v priklicevanje. O bog, če bo res storil kaj od tega, bo z menoj konec. Razprla bom usta kot ona z vlažnim, svetlikajočim v sebi, medtem ko ji je otrok padal med snežinke. In je stol ob oknu ostal prazen.

»Sem. In?«

»Tam spodaj smo najbolj občutljivi.« Spet sem pogledala proti torbi na tleh. Vse prijateljice, ki so poznale mojega sina, so me po tem, ko so opazile njegovo nekoliko uvelo, zaprepadeno pojavo, začele gledati sumničavo. Zanje sem postala nekdo drug, ne Ana, ki so jo poznale. Še vedno Ana v visokih usnjenih škornjih pozimi in kačjih balerinkah poleti, Ana, ki izdeluje mehke blazine z botaničnimi vzorci in tapete v ognjenih barvah, vse to, ker ni znala ukrotiti svojega skrivnostnega in nepredvidljivega vrta, pa vseeno drugačna Ana.

Ana izdajalka. Ana izumiteljica svojega sina, ki je bila videti tako močna, ko ga je rodila. Ana, ki po rojstvu ni bila nič drugačna od onih div, ki na odru bosih nog srkajo viski ter kljubujejo celemu svetu. Toda potem se je tej isti Ani otrok sfižil. »Nisi vedela, da hijene žrtev najprej zgrabijo za moda?«

In ker nisem hotela, da bi samo sebe ter svoje celotno življenje opazovala iz neke nove perspektive, sem mu na hitro odgovorila: »Če ulovijo samca; kaj pa, če ulovijo samico?«

»Vas ne zaboli šok tam spodaj?« je rekel in zdaj se ni več smehljajal, ni več kazal dlesni. Nagnil se je nekam proti moji polovici postelje in zdelo se mi je, da se vendarle hoče dotakniti tistega skrivnostnega področja.

»Ne vem, še nikoli se mi ni zgodilo. Čeprav je po mojem vagina bolj za nežno odprtje in dotik.«

Jezik, ki sva ga govorila, ni bil njegov jezik. Dajal je vtis nonšalantnega razbojnika, ki se ima povsem v oblasti, vendar je bil tam pri srčnem prekatu še ranljivejši od mojega sina. »Ja, to je res, bolj zaprta je.«

Zdaj sem bila jaz na vrsti, da se zasmejim, da pokažem dlesni. »Ali veš, kaj se pogovarjava?« In ker ni kazalo, da bi vedel, da bi v tistem hipu sploh karkoli vedel, sem rekla, nekoliko predrzno sicer, za tisto hotelsko sobo in za svoja leta: »Ali veš, da sva se ravno zdajle ljubila?«

Vsi moji akvareli skupaj niso premgli pol toliko nežnosti kot njegovo vprašanje. »Misliš z jezikom?«

Zaželela sem si, da bi mi šel skozi gozd las in da bi doživela tisti čudoviti, sanjski trenutek zblížanja moškega in ženske ali pa da bi vsaj razgrnil zavese, težke žametne zavese, ki so naredile noč še bolj temno, vendar je storil nekaj čisto drugega.

Ne vem, koliko časa sva z Malikom preživela v Cotonouju, teden, dva, mesec, leto, tisti čas je zame kakor izbrisan. Med čakanjem na konec šole sva živela pri neki Francozinji, ki ji je bilo ime Julie Amado. Lahko bi bila mimobežna ženska iz Črne ulice z visoko spetimimi lasmi, vitkim hrbtom, ki se ji je v notranjost telesa odpiral v obliki črke s, in počasno hojo, prepočasno celo za njeno starost, izdajala jo je ta hoja, govorila o njeni nejasni preteklosti ali pa vsaj o pretirani nagnjenosti k melanholiji, vendar sem se po daljšem premisleku odločil, da ne gre za isto osebo. Malik ni mogel imeti stvari pod tolikšnim nadzorom in tudi Julie sama po sebi se je zdela napol nora. Ponoči na primer *ni spala, saj so njeno velikansko posteljo zasedale mačke; sama je sedla na stol in položila noge na posteljo, vse tiste mačke, moralo jih je biti več kot dvajset, pa so spale ob njenih nogah in med krožniki napol gnilih rib.*

Malika nisem spraševal, kje je spoznal Julie niti kaj počneva pri njej. Vse, kar sem razumel, je bilo, da čakava. Malik me je Julie sicer predstavil kot prijatelja, ki zna delati stavke in zato piše roman. Zanj si je celo izmislil naslov, *Spet morje* ali nekaj podobnega, in Julie je bila navdušena. Ponudila mi je pisalni stroj, veliko, črno, predpotopno žival, ki je ob tipkanju oddajala grozeč zvok ali pa požirala papir, na desetine dreves je šlo v njeno podolžno grlo, v takšnih napetih trenutkih sem skočil izza mize ter začel z rokami vleči papir, sprva previdno, potem pa vse bolj razjarjeno, raztrgani kosi so leteli po zraku kakor snežinke, *smo kot sneg, ki vedno poneha*, sem si mrmral stavek, za katerega še zdaj ne vem, kje sem ga pobral, ampak po nekaj dneh je stroj odnehal, tropski gozdovi so bili rešeni, pokrajina odmrznjena, medtem ko se je zame vse šele začelo. Julie mi je po kotih hiše začela pripovedovati svoje spomine. Menda so bili do tolikšne mere zanimivi, da naj bi iz

njih sklofal knjigo. Odklonil sem, češ, v resnici sploh ne znam delati stavkov, Malik je tisto rekel kar tako, vendar je še naprej prislanjala hrbet na steno, grizla v luknjast sir in v bageto ter pripovedovala. Tako sem izvedel, da je v Cotonou pred leti prišla kot učiteljica prostovoljka. Toda ker se stvari niso izšle, rekla je čisto tako, natančno se spominjam, je službo pustila.

»Ne razumi me narobe, po srcu sem še vedno humanitarka, otrokom pomagam, kolikor lahko, olajšam jim pot, brez mene bi še bolj trpeli, toda če misliš, da iz tega posla lahko izstopiš, ko si enkrat v njem, se motiš.«

Več ko je govorila, manj sem razumel. Otroci od osem do šestnajst let, zvezane roke, treba jih je pospremiti. Uradna razlaga: transport mladoletnikov, ki jih hočejo posvojiti belci (moje razmišljanje: morda jih bodo prodali v suženjstvo, morda za prostitucijo, kajti lepo vas prosim, kateri beli par bi pa hotel posvojiti malega črnuha?). In kdo je še vpleten v posel? Ljudje na položajih, polkovniki, birokrati, ministri.

V tem trenutku sem se nehote zarežal: »Julie, z vsem spoštovanjem, kje se nahajam jaz v tej bordelski verigi?«

V naročje je vzela eno izmed mačk, ki so se nama pletle med nogami, in jo začela božati. »Še vedno ti ni jasno, kaj? Morda pa res nisi pravi pisatelj.«

V bližnji trafiki sem si kupila zavojček cigaret in telefonsko kartico za klice v tujino ter tako opremljena splezala na streho družinske hiše. Zdaj vem: od tu je Ismael strmel v ogenj, ki ga razširjajo kmetje v času harmatana, od tu je gledal bežeče živali, goreče ptice, ki letijo kakor feniksi, preden jih pogoltnejo plameni. Tu je bil prostor njegovega počitka in

sanj, čeprav je mene na vrhu spreletaval prej občutek, da sem se prišla posloviti. Želela sem prekoračiti namišljeno ljubkovanje mladega moškega telesa, pa mi je spodletelo. Želela sem preseči bridko žalost, stopnjujočo se osamljenost, pa očitno investicija ni bila prava. Zato je bil čas, da odidem. Poleg tega ni imelo smisla obremenjevati Ismaelove tete. Za ljudi, ki so prihajali na dvorišče, si je v mojem imenu izmišljevala zgodbe, ki jim je le malokdo verjel; nekoč me je neka starejša ženska celo zgrabila za trebuh in mi v obraz izkričala grobe, najbolj grobe besede mojega življenja. Teta me je tolažila, naj se ne zmenim zanjo, same neumnosti je rekla, vendar sem vseeno vedela; tega, kar sem občutila, ne bi smela preseči z Ismaelom, Ismael je bil namenjen za druge stvari.

Vtipkala sem številko telefonske kartice v mobilni telefon in nato očetovo telefonsko številko. Preden bi se odločila za karkoli, preden bi splezala s strehe in pustila goreče fenikse viseti v zraku, sem morala preveriti, kako je z očetom. Se me je odrekel, odkar sem mu priznala, da sem se tu z nekom zblížala, z nekom, ki je nekaj desetletij mlajši od mene, se me je odrekel, ker se kljub njegovim tožbam o prizadeti polovici možganov še vedno nisem odločila vrniti, ali pa je še vse po starem? Če je še vse po starem, potem je to zame pravzaprav dobro, če pa bo prijazen, pomeni, da so mu zamenjali srce. In v tem primeru se ne bom imela več kam vrniti.

Telefon je ponovno zazvonil. Zvonjenje sem slišala v glavi, v telesu, morda še intenzivneje, ker so vsi zunaj na dvorišču zadrževali dih. Noč, koze, celo kmetje, ki so zažigali travo, so za trenutek potihnili. Med dvigovanjem slušalke in še po tem, ko sem namesto tistega praznega halo izrekla Ismaelovo ime,

sem se zavedala, da je najina ljubezen trajala čas ene sušne dobe. Posejala sva seme v zemljo, in ker ni bilo klitja, ker ga nikoli ni moglo biti, se mi dozdeva, da je vse zgolj naključje, da sem sama bitje, oropano smisla.

Dry Season

Gabriela Babnik

Translated from the Slovenian by Olivia Hellewell

“Are you sleeping?” he said, moving his divine body. He was from a golden age, where lovers didn’t hold hands; they barely ran their fingers through each others’ hair.

“No, I can’t.”

I wanted to say “I don’t know how to sleep like you”, but there was no point; he wouldn’t understand. The chance for-
eigner, with whom I had been lying in bed all afternoon and one night, without anything happening between us.

Whilst yet again placing the bag on the floor, onto the carpet over which so many steps had walked, mostly bare, from where that smell of sweat, nakedness and concealment came, it occurred to me that this bag was all that was left of my former life. Outside the night pours, stars splash into it, and somewhere beyond, my son watches another crazy film. This time from his own life.

I stared into his silence and then, despite them being tucked into his jeans, at his large palms with beautifully formed nails, somewhat unusual for a street boy who had done so much. This is that bare, stony terrain, which probably only men can possess. Either that, or I’m from some sort of old school.

“I’m cold,” he said with his chin beckoned somewhere below his waist, as if he wanted to interrupt my stream of thought.

“And you’re warming your hands up?”

“Yes, I’m used to it still.” I always imagined that male hands in trousers meant protection, and that they were of course checking that the thing was still there. My son didn’t do it, at least not in my presence. There was probably something of our misunderstanding in that too. When he did it, he concealed it, when I did it, I would have to show him. To teach him. But I thought that another woman should teach him all about flora and fauna. Another, just like I, was another to this young man in front of me. “Lots of men do it,” he added lazily, giving me a smile which revealed an upper rim of gum. “You haven’t seen that in football?”

It threw me, his unexpected informal address. Will he now repeat those vulgar words again? Open yourself up, go on, so I can screw you, although, although he never uttered them. Many women – I’d seen it in those adverts for soap and detergent or even read it in detective novels and multi-coloured newspaper supplements – want that, that desire, they obsess over somebody ravishing them. The horror, that someone would take their body by force, take them down in a darkened hotel room, if the man is at all handsome and young and dark-skinned, and they old and withered and light-skinned, that horror can turn into a mantra, a summoning. Oh god, if he were to do anything like that, it would be the end of me. I will widen my mouth like her, moist, opalescent inside her, whilst the child was falling amongst the snowflakes. And the chair by the window remained empty.

“I have. And?”

“It’s where we’re most sensitive, down there.” Again I looked towards the bag on the floor. All my female friends who knew my son began to look at me suspiciously when they noticed his

somewhat withered, startled character. To them I had become someone else; not the Ana that they knew. Still Ana in leather high heels in winter and snakeskin ballerina pumps in summer; Ana, who makes cushions with botanical designs and wall hangings in fiery colours, all this, because she didn't know how to tame her secret and unpredictable garden, yet still a completely different Ana. Ana the traitor. Ana, inventor of her son, who had seemed so strong when she gave birth to him. Ana, who after the birth was no different from those divas who would get up on stage bare-legged, would sip whiskey and defy the whole world. But then, the child of that very same Ana got spoiled. "Didn't you know that hyena's prey go for the testicles first?"

And because I didn't wish to observe myself and my entire life from some new perspective, I answered him quickly: "If they catch buck; what about if they catch a doe?"

"Well doesn't it give you a painful shock down there?" he said, no longer laughing and no longer showing his gums. He leant somewhere towards my side of the bed and it seemed as if he still wanted to touch this secret region.

"I don't know, it's never happened to me. But I'd say the vagina is more for softer opening and touch."

The language which we were speaking wasn't his language. He gave the impression of a nonchalant bandit, who has himself under complete control, although there, in those ventricles of the heart, he was more vulnerable than my son. "Yes, true, it's more closed."

Now it was my turn to burst out laughing, showing my gums. "Do you know what we're talking about?" And as he didn't look as if he did know, or as if he knew anything at that moment, I said, somewhat boldly, for that hotel room and for his age: "Do you know that we just made love?"

All of my watercolours combined could not have contained half the softness of his question. “Do you mean with words?”

I wished he would go through my forest of hair and that I could experience that wonderful, dream-like moment of man and woman coming closer or that he would at least draw the curtains, the heavy, velvet curtains which made the night even darker, yet he did something completely different.

I don't know how much time I spent with Malik in Cotonou; a week, two, a month, a year – this time was somehow deleted for me. Whilst waiting for school to end the two of us lived with some French lady called Julie Amado. She could have been the fleeting woman from Black Street with hair tied-up high, a slender back which at the inner of her body opened out into the shape of a letter ‘s’, and a slow gait, too slow even for her age. It betrayed her, that gait; it spoke of her vague past or at least of her excessive proclivity to melancholia. But after much thought I decided that it couldn't have been the same person. Malik couldn't have things under such supervision and also Julie herself seemed completely crazy. For instance *she didn't sleep at night, with her huge bed being overrun by cats; she sat alone in the chair with her feet on the bed, whilst all the cats – there must have been more than twenty of them – slept on her lap and in amongst plates of rotting fish.*

I didn't ask Malik where he met Julie, nor what the two of us were doing at her place. As far as I understood, we were waiting. Malik had otherwise introduced Julie to me as a friend, who knew how to form sentences and who was therefore writing a novel. He had even thought up a title for her, *Once Again, the Sea*, or something like that, and Julie was

thrilled. She offered me a typewriter, a large, black, antiquated animal, which upon typing gave out a menacing sound and it consumed paper, with the trees going into its oblong mouth in tens. At such tense moments I leapt from behind the table and began to pull the paper, at first carefully, but then more and more furiously, with the torn up pieces flying through the air like snowflakes, *we are the like snow which eventually ceases to fall*, I murmured a sentence to myself which I still don't know where I picked up, but after a few days the machine gave way, the tropical rainforests were saved, the landscape unfrozen whilst for me everything had only just begun. Julie began to tell me her stories all over every corner of the house. Maybe to some degree they were interesting enough for me to churn out a book about them. But I declined, seeing as in reality I had no idea how to construct sentences, Malik had just made that up, but she carried on leaning her back against the wall, biting into a baguette and some holey cheese, and recounted. It was how I learnt of how she came to Cotonou as a volunteer teacher a year earlier. But because things didn't work out – she said it just like that, I remember exactly – she had left her job.

“Don't get me wrong, I'm still a humanitarian at heart, I help children however I can, I make their paths easier and without me they'd suffer even more, but if you think that you can get out of that business once you're inside it, you're mistaken.”

The more she spoke, the less I understood. Children from eight to sixteen years old, hands tied, needed to be accompanied. The official explanation: the trafficking of children, which white people wanted to adopt (my thinking: maybe they were going to sell them into slavery, maybe into prostitution,

because I ask you, which white couple is going to want to adopt a little black kid). And who is still involved in business? People in positions: colonelships, bureaucrats, ministers.

At that moment I involuntarily became angry: “Julie, with the greatest of respect, where do I fit into this licentious chain?”

Into her lap she placed one of the cats which had been winding between our legs and started to stroke her. “Do you still not get it, or what? Maybe you’re really not a true writer.”

At the nearby newsstand I bought a pack of cigarettes and an international phone card and, so-equipped, climbed to the roof of the family house. Now I know: it was from here that Ismael stared at the fire which the farmers spread in the time of Harmattan, it was from here that he watched the escaping animals, burning birds which fly like phoenixes before being swallowed by flames. Here was his place of rest and dreams, although here at the top I got more a feeling that I had come to say goodbye. I had wanted to get over the imaginary caresses of the young male body but I failed. I wanted to overcome the bitter sadness, the increasing loneliness, but this investment obviously wasn’t the right one. That is why it was time to leave. Besides that there was no sense in troubling Ismael’s aunt. For people coming to the courtyard, she had been making up stories which nobody would believe; once an older woman had even grabbed my stomach and yelled rudely, the rudest words of my life, to my face. The aunt had comforted me, told me not to mind about her, it’s all nonsense she’d said, but still I’d known; Ismael couldn’t help me overcome what I was feeling, Ismael was meant for other things.

I typed the phone card's number into the mobile phone, followed by my father's telephone number. Before I decided on anything, before I climbed from the roof and left the burning phoenixes to hang in the air, I had to find out how things were with my father. He had renounced me ever since I confessed to him that I'd become close to somebody here, somebody who was a good few decades younger than me, he renounced me because despite his complaints about the affected parts of his brain I still hadn't decided to return, or was everything still as usual? If everything was still as usual, then it was actually good for me, but if he was going to be nice that meant that they'd changed his heart. And if that was the case I wasn't going to have anywhere to return to.

The telephone rang again. I heard the ringing in my head, in my body, maybe even more intensely because everyone outside in the courtyard held their breath. The night, the goats, even the farmers who had been burning the grass, all fell silent for a moment. Between answering the phone and then afterwards, when instead of that empty hello I said Ismael's name, I realised that our love had lasted an entire dry season. We sowed seeds in the ground, and because they didn't germinate, because they never could have germinated, it seemed to me that everything was mere coincidence, that I am just a being, devoid of meaning.



Cristian Crusat

Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto (2011)

A Brief Theory of Travel and the Desert

Publishing House **Editorial Pre-Textos**

Biography

Cristian Crusat (b.1983) is the author of *Estatuas* (2006), *Tranquilos en tiempo de guerra* (2010) and *Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto* (2011). In 2010, Crusat was awarded the Manuel Llano International Prize. He has seen his essays, translations and articles on comparative literature published in a wide range of Spanish and Latin American journals, such as *Revista de Occidente*, *Letra Internacional*, *Punto de partida* and *Revista Atlántica*. In 2012, Crusat also edited and translated *El deseo de lo único. Teoría de la ficción*, the critical essays of the French writer Marcel Schwob. He teaches Spanish language and literature abroad.

Synopsis

The six stories of *Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto* contemplate the full range of human experience. They take us on a journey around the world, from the arid landscapes of the Mediterranean coast to the work of the brilliant Serbian writer, Milorad Pavić. All of the characters are waiting for, searching for, or exploring the possibility of a revelation which never appears in their numbed here-and-now. And yet, paradoxically, they seem incapable of taking any kind of effective action, with the possible exception of Lena, who writes from the floating world of dreams. As Sufi mysticism tells us, the soul craves change, and immobility can feel like a slow death that can creep up anywhere: turning up on roads, in deserted parking lots or hotels packed with tourists (the desert of the modern world). However, fate or mere chance (an irrelevant incident, someone fainting on a nudist beach, a plane crash that never actually happened) can reveal in a flash the true face of a character's isolation.

Thanks to an extraordinarily versatile prose, a nomadic style, which adapts to the different spiritual, physical or imaginary locations of each story and to the fragile individuality of their inhabitants, Crusat guides these buffeted characters through the abyss of fears, self-doubt and desires which make up the modern world.

Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto

Cristian Crusat

El mundo acaba de dar una vuelta completa. Ahora gira en torno a un coche del que se acaba de bajar un autostopista ruso.

—No me gusta Almería —gruñe con tosquedad Ben desde el asiento del copiloto, con un regusto a gasolina bajo su lengua—. El coche de mi padre tenía matrícula de Almería. Siempre me pareció una mierda.

Aunque Ben y Magali se hallen confinados voluntariamente en el vasto paisaje desértico almeriense, sus terminaciones nerviosas todavía no han abandonado las paredes roblonadas de los lavabos de la gasolinera, la primera parada de este viaje iniciado en cualquier rincón de la Costa del Sol. Es julio.

(Aunque Ben y Magali hablan el mismo idioma, su comunicación atraviesa un momento particularmente confuso).

Después de conducir varias horas en paralelo al mar Mediterráneo —mientras observaban la sucesión de torsos musulmanes apuntando al suelo durante los rezos matinales (la religión acorralada entre badenes y sucios túneles de lavado) y la maraña de mansiones frente a la costa—, han llegado al desierto y a la gasolinera que ahora abandonan: un oasis de asfalto, vidrios rotos y plástico.

Al tiempo que mira a la bella Magali y sus brazos firmes y escuálidos sobre el volante —brazos de una delicada estudiante de música en el conservatorio—, Ben siente cómo en sus oídos aún resuenan los acordes de “Woman driving,

man sleeping”, de EELS. Al otro lado del cristal, el horizonte tiembla por el calor como si un niño intentara pellizcar un vaso de agua.

Minutos antes, los altavoces de la estación de servicios habían emitido una serie de agudos chispazos eléctricos que lograron inquietar a Ben: parecían anunciar el timbre imposible de un gigantesco teléfono móvil agazapado tras una colina calcárea, la sombra de algún animal monstruoso proveniente de fotogramas *hentai* o *anime* (o así se tradujeron los chispazos en su imaginación, incendiada por el sofocante calor del mediodía almeriense). El hedor a combustible y a goma quemada los persiguió hasta la curva en que el autostopista empezó a caminar elegantemente nimbado por la nada absoluta, como en un video clip de música country. Porque, y Ben lo adivina, *la culpa de todo esto* la tiene el autostopista ruso que recogieron en aquella rotonda y que acaban de abandonar en un kilómetro perdido de cualquier mapa que incluya a Almería. (Cuando descendió del coche, ni siquiera dijo “adiós”). Además, la descripción de la playa que les ha recomendado tiene todas las trazas de ser una perversa mentira soviética.

Hipótesis primera: Quien llega a un desierto —Magali, Ben, o aquel autostopista— escapa de algún otro lugar.

El desvío por el que se ha introducido el Renault Mégane, señalado con profusión de detalles por aquel autostopista ruso, una delgada arteria que comunica con la costa, su sucesión de terrenos áridos, polvorientos y mezquinos, parece ser la prolongación alucinada de los resuellos de las máquinas, barriles y barricadas, jarcias y bidones con olor a carburante de la estación de servicios. Hacía años que Ben no veía aquellos

antiguos mojones señalizadores, esos trozos de cemento rematados con un semicírculo de color rojo. (No son las únicas formas que en este viaje evocarán su infancia: su padre recogiendo a las puertas del colegio, con una bolsa de plástico verde y un cigarrillo quemando el reborde amarillento de sus uñas, cada día). Todo son grietas en el cemento y en el asfalto de la carretera. Ben observa la sucesión de montañas de arena, de gravilla, de balasto, hormigoneras, escoriales, depósitos, la fábrica de gas, bombas y varias torres de alta tensión: el horizonte se modula a la manera que lo hacen las pesadillas determinadas por los genios del destino de algunas películas de ciencia-ficción, personajes capaces de alentar comportamientos desquiciados en el resto del reparto, uno de los cuales indudablemente Ben identifica con el ruso que acaba de bajarse del coche: el fiel, intachable y ejemplar guardia de corps de cualquier héroe infame de Hollywood. Por un momento, Ben lamenta su presencia en el interior del vehículo, que identifica con un mal sueño. Quiere bajarse y volver a su casa, encontrarse en el desportillado Peugeot matrícula de Almería de su padre. Despertar de una puta vez.

Pero Magali...

Ella tuvo la idea. *Ella* es quien lo ha invitado a acompañarla en este viaje. *Ella*, después de cruzar algunas estúpidas palabras que sacaron a cada uno de sus respectivas soledades, lo invitó a cruzar la costa española. Cualquiera que los viera actuar —el autostopista ruso, sin ir más lejos— pensaría: Han reñido y están peleados. O: son un par de subnormales que se dedican a desconcertar a la gente, aunque ella es muy guapa, *extrañamente guapa* para ir acompañada de un tipo tan desastrado y autoabsorto. Además, esa cicatriz en la cabeza de él... Confiere virilidad a su rostro aniñado. Sin embargo, es mucho más sencillo, incluso prosaico: Ben y

Magali no se conocen (aunque Ben tiene la certeza, desde el día que hablaron por primera vez en aquel parque y Magali lo invitó a ir con ella, de haberla conocido *siempre*: suficiente motivo para mentir a su padre diciéndole que va de excursión con unos amigos. Le ha dicho que lleva todas sus medicinas, que no se preocupe).

El malestar de Ben se acentúa cuando Magali, cuya frente se ha perlado de sudor y cansancio a lo largo de los kilómetros, acelera en un tramo perfectamente recto que no parece tener fin o que, en caso de tenerlo, nunca llegaría por la natural voluntad del conductor. Ese ruso era un demonio, piensa Ben, todo ha ido bien hasta ahora, pero su sombra nos ha poseído a ella y a mí en el lugar de donde no se vuelve: el desierto.

El desierto de Almería.

Se ha agarrado a la enganchadera sobre la ventanilla de su derecha, y los posibles significados de la escena estallan sin orden en la mente de Ben. Entre espirales de polvo arcilloso y partículas de grava levantadas por la presión de las cuatro ruedas a gran velocidad, a través de las escasas acumulaciones arbóreas que tal vez sean tomillo, o anís, o simplemente mala hierba, los dos ojos abrasados de Ben divisan un amplio y en un perfecto estado sillón de dentista, delicadamente reclinado y con la base sobre la que se sustenta, entre tallos de arbusto, un poco corroída. Es de un blanco esmaltado y luminoso, percepción realzada grotescamente merced a los dos roquedales rojizos que enmarcan el espacio distante. La soberana acción del sol a esas horas posteriores al mediodía crea la ilusión de que se ha encendido el foco iluminador de la boca del paciente. Los rebordes de aluminio perfilan el sillón y, bajo el respaldo de cuero, un brazo articulado conecta con un diminuto caño de agua que hará desaparecer la sangre tras las extracciones

dentales (Ben recuerda una fotografía: Marilyn Manson, su dentadura amplia y groseramente a la vista gracias a un aparato ortopédico compuesto de varillas y clavos metálicos, algunos oxidados, además de un gorro de aviador nazi sado-masoquista). Se trata de un elemento cargado de una polise-mia tan brutal que Ben no es capaz de desviar la mirada, aún cuando el sillón ha quedado atrás (entre lo que ahora parece un campo de girasoles) y sólo puede seguir su desaparición definitiva por el cristal del espejo retrovisor. Lo hace hasta que en su campo visual se impone el azul marino de la playa (concluyendo que siempre habrá algo que genere una distancia, un desequilibrio entre ella y él).

Hipótesis segunda: El desierto es, por definición, un espacio árido y deshabitado, estrictamente impersonal, en congruencia perfecta con los estratos más profundos de la psique humana (...).

A Brief Theory of Travel and the Desert

Cristian Crusat

Translated from the Spanish by Jacqueline Minett

The world has turned full circle. Now it revolves around a car that has just dropped off a Russian hitchhiker.

“I don’t like Almeria”, Ben grumbles from the front passenger seat, aware of the lingering taste of petrol in his mouth. “My father’s car had an Almeria number-plate. I always thought it was crap.”

Ben and Magali are willing captives of the vast desert landscape of Almeria, but their nerve endings are still bouncing off the riveted partitions in the WCs at the petrol station, the first stop on this journey that began at a place that could have been anywhere on the Costa del Sol. It is July.

(Ben and Magali speak the same language, but right now communication between them is floundering).

After several hours driving parallel to the Mediterranean, with a succession of torsos bent in morning prayer (religion wedged between speed bumps and grimy car wash tunnels) and the sprawling sea-front mansions flashing past them, they reached the desert and the petrol station they have just left behind: an oasis of asphalt, broken glass and plastic.

Ben looks at Magali, taking in her good looks and her firm, skinny arms resting on the wheel, the arms of a willowy conservatoire student. He still has the tune of “Woman Driving, Man Sleeping” by EELS ringing in his ears. Through the windscreen, the horizon shimmers in the heat, like a child plucking at water in a glass.

Minutes earlier, at the service station, Ben had been unnerved by a volley of high-pitched crackling over the loudspeakers: it was as if they heralded the impossible ringtone of a gigantic mobile phone crouching behind a limestone hill, the shadow of some monstrous creature from a *hentai* or *anime* cartoon (the product of his imagination ignited by the stifling midday heat of Almeria). The stench of fuel and burning rubber hung in the air as far as the bend in the road where the hitchhiker coolly walked away, haloed in absolute nothingness, as if in a country music video clip. Because, as Ben instinctively knows, *the one to blame for all this* is the Russian hitchhiker they picked up back at the roundabout and have just dropped off at some godforsaken place on the map – any map – including Almeria. (He hadn't even said "goodbye" when he got out of the car). And another thing... The description of the beach he'd recommended to them was probably a perverse Soviet lie.

First hypothesis: anyone heading for a desert — Magali, Ben, or that hitchhiker — is running away from somewhere else.

The turning just taken by the Renault Mégane, which the Russian hitchhiker had described in such profuse detail, is a narrow road leading to the coast. In Ben's mind, it's as if the arid, dusty scrubland it runs through were an extension of the service station's wheezing machines, barrels and petrol drums, its cables and cans reeking of fuel. It is years since he has seen any of these old kilometre stones, cement bollards with a red semicircle painted at the top. (These are not the only visual cues on the journey that will remind him of his childhood: his father meeting him every day at the school

gates carrying a green plastic bag, the tips of his fingernails scorched and stained yellow by his cigarette). The cement and asphalt of the road are riddled with cracks. Ben gazes at the mountains of sand, gravel and ballast, the cement mixers, slag heaps, storage tanks, gasworks, pumps and electricity pylons as they fly past. The horizon shifts and changes like a nightmare scripted by the mysterious mastermind in a science fiction film, who is capable of unleashing all sorts of insane behaviour in the other characters and whom Ben doubtless identifies with the Russian who has just got out of the car: the faithful, infallible, consummate *garde du corps* of some despicable Hollywood hero. For a moment, Ben wishes he weren't in the vehicle, which is now associated in his mind with a bad dream. He wishes he could get out and go back home, he wishes he were sitting in his father's beaten-up Peugeot with its Almeria number-plate. If only he could wake up, damn it!

But Magali...

It had been *her* idea. *She* was the one who had invited him along on this trip. After exchanging a few idle words that had lifted each of them out of their respective loneliness, *she* invited him to travel the length of the Spanish coast with her. Anyone watching them now — the Russian hitchhiker, for one — would think, “They’ve quarrelled and are not talking to one another.” Or, “They’re a couple of weirdos who get their kicks by making other people feel uncomfortable. But she’s very attractive, *too attractive* to be travelling with an awkward, self-absorbed guy like him. And another thing, that scar on his head... It makes his boyish face look more manly.” But there is a simpler, more prosaic explanation. Ben and Magali are strangers (although, from the very first day they talked in the park and Magali invited him to join her, Ben has felt as if he has *always* known her – a good enough

reason to lie to his father and tell him that he's going on a trip with a few of his friends. He reassured him, saying he had all his medicines with him, and told him not to worry).

Ben's anxiety increases as Magali, who is tired after driving so many kilometres and whose forehead is beaded with perspiration, accelerates on a perfectly straight, seemingly endless stretch of road; or rather, it would be endless if it were up to the driver. "That Russian was a demon" thinks Ben. "Everything was fine until he turned up, but now we are both possessed by him in the place from which there is no return: the desert."

The Almeria desert.

Ben grips the handle above the side window on his right, the possible implications of the scene bursting chaotically on his imagination. Amid the swirling clouds of clay dust and particles of gravel thrown up by the pressure of the four wheels travelling at high speed, and through the sparse clumps of vegetation that could be thyme, anise, or just plain weeds, Ben's burning eyes spot a large, intact dentist's chair in a gently reclining position resting on a rusty metal base, in amongst the bushes. It is white enamel, made all the more dazzling by its contrast with the two russet-coloured rocky outcrops framing the far distance. The dental lamp appears to be switched on — an optical illusion caused by the relentless noonday sun. The chair has an aluminium frame and, under the leather chair-back, an articulated arm is connected to a small pipe delivering water to wash away the patient's blood after an extraction (Ben remembers a photograph of Marilyn Manson, his outsize teeth exposed in a hideous grin by a dental device consisting of metal rods and bolts, some of them rusty, wearing a sadomasochist Nazi aviator's leather

helmet). The object is so powerfully charged with multiple layers of meaning that Ben cannot tear his eyes away from it, even when the dentist's chair recedes into the distance (into what now looks like a field of sunflowers) and he can only watch in the rear mirror until it finally vanishes. He continues to gaze at it until the beach and the marine blue of the sea finally loom into view (and he comes to the conclusion that for some reason or other there will always be a gulf, an imbalance, between her and himself).

Second hypothesis: the desert is, by definition, an arid, uninhabited, strictly impersonal space, perfectly in tune with the deepest levels of the human psyche (...).

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Denmark – **Kristian Bang Foss**

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EUPL 2013 National Juries

Belgium

Coordinator: Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises

President: Jacques De Decker, Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises

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Monique Dorsel, Membre de la Libre académie de Belgique

Bernard Gérard, Directeur de l'Association des Editeurs Belges

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Prof. Amir Brka, President of the Society of Writers Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kristina Mrđa, Presidency member of the Society of Writers Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ljubica Ostojić, writer and member of Pen Centre Bosnia and Herzegovina

Cyprus

Coordinator: Union of Cyprus Writers

President: **Giorgos Moleskis**, president of the jury, vice president of the Union of Cyprus Writers

Members

Akis Cristou, president of the Cyprus Booksellers Association

Costas Nicolaides, literary critic

Marina Rodosthenous, Assistant Professor in Literature, University of Nicosia

Denmark

Coordinator: Danish Writers' Association

President: **Ellen Boen**, Danish Writers' Association

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Sissel Bergfjord, Danish Fiction Writers' Association

Charlotte Jørgensen, Danish Publishers Union

Katrine Krogbeck, Danish Booksellers Union

Estonia

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Piret Viires, Estonian Writers Union

Karl Martin Sinijärv, Estonian Writers Union

Maarja Kaaristo, Estonian Publishers Association

Tauno Vahter, Estonian Publishers Association

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Paula Havaste, The Finnish Association of Non-Fiction Writers

Stig-Björn Nyberg, The Booksellers' Association in Finland

Minna Castrén, Finnish Book Publishers' Association

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Coordinator: Macedonian Writers Association

President: **Risto Lazarov**, writer, President of the Macedonian PEN Club

Members

Rade Siljan, writer, President of Macedonian Writers Association

Ilhami Emin, writer, member of the Macedonian PEN Club and of the Macedonian Writers Association

Germany

Coordinator: German Writers' Union

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Manfred Keiper, Representative of the German Booksellers and Publishers Association (Börsenverein)

Uli Rothfuss, president of the European Authors' Association "Die Kogge"

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Jeanne Glesener, Université du Luxembourg

Claude Conter, Director of the Centre National de Littérature, CNL

Ian De Toffoli, literary critic

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Nicolae Prelipceanu, the Writers' Union of Romania

Cosmin Ciotlos, the Writers' Union of Romania

Daniel Cristea-Enache, the Romanian Publishers Association

Slovenia

Coordinator: Slovene Writers' Association

President: **Ivo Svetina**, representative of Slovene Writers' Association

Members

Ingrid Celestina, representative of Slovenian Booksellers Association

Zdravko Kafol, representative of Slovenian Publisher Association

Spain

Coordinator: Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana

President: **Francesc Parcerisas**, member of AELC-Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana and Chairman of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes

Members

Andrés Sorel, secretary general of ACE-Asociación Colegial de Escritores de España

Manuel Borrás, director of Editorial Pre-Textos and representative of the Federación de Gemios de Editores de España

Juan Ramon Masoliver

Javier Goñi

EUPL 2013 Jury Reports

Belgium

Isabelle Wéry is a rising star in Belgian literature. And the word 'star' fits her perfectly, as she is also an actress. Having interpreted major roles, she chose to write, starting with a tribute to theatre. Her first book was an inventive evocation of the life of an aged actor who fascinated her: René Hainaux.

In her following book, *Marilyn Deboned* (*Marilyn désossée*), one is led to believe that she is, again, attracted to a showbiz personality. Far from that! She merely devotes herself – ironically, that is – to an ageless creature who could be no one else but herself.

This book is enchanting because it feels like childhood regained unlimitedly – with its pranks and perversities, its anguishes and joys. The author paints them with humour, verbal invention, and a clear sense of paradox. Thus, she becomes part of this current that has always irrigated Belgian literature, with an artistic invention that goes way back to Bruegel.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Book of Una is a novel of exceptional artistic merit from beginning to end. It is a modern novel about a young man who went through the horrors of the Bosnian war, growing up next to the river Una, which is an inescapable part of his life. From childhood through to adulthood he is defined by the Una, regardless of the war's destruction, and the possibilities of reconstruction. Šehić uses local legends, strange landscapes and characters to tell his story.

The novel is written in the magic realism technique, combining phantasmagoria with the *Bildungsroman* of the main character, Mustafa Husar, but also revealing the wisdom necessary to penetrate the difference between appearance and reality.

Segments about the Bosnian war are combined with an almost Melvillian approach to the depiction of the water, the river Una, which adds universal mythical characteristics to this experience. Together with Husar, the novel contains a number of other characters, some real and some imaginary or transcendent, like the Renewer Smith or Gargano, the evil Doppelgänger of Husar. The novel also teems with echoes from other literary works, including those by Yeats, Whitman, and E. E. Cummings. It provides a universal image of human existence, focusing on the Balkan never-never lands.

Cyprus

The Cyprus jury of the EUPL 2013, after considering a number of prose books by Cypriot writers published in the last four or five years and, bearing in mind the criteria of the Prize, chose unanimously *The Diary of an Infidelity*, by Emiliios Solomou, as the winning book. This is the fourth novel by a relatively young writer (he was born in 1971), with an already successful career as a prose writer. In this sense, he is an emerging author. The book was published by a well-known publishing house in Athens which specializes in novels, and was well received by both critics and readers.

His studies in history and archaeology and his experience in archaeological excavations, as well as his study of the location where the story takes place, enables the author to create a realistic novel, containing bright and transparent descriptions of the place and the people, with a sense of mystery around them. This knowledge and experience help him bring to life key characters, including the students of the excavation team, their teacher, Professor Doukarelis, who is the central character of the book, and the people on the island.

In *The Diary of an Infidelity*, Solomou creates a contemporary story. Whilst telling the story of an affair between Professor Doukarelis and his student Antigoni, he makes parallels to the prehistoric and imaginary story of Kassiope, whose remains were found at that excavation, showing that she was a young pregnant woman who was probably murdered. This story, in relation to the disappearance of the wife of Doukarelis, Antigoni, 20 years after the excavation, along with the exploration of his memories while returning to the island, give the book a sense of mystery and fatality, making for especially engaging reading.

The rich and expressive language and the descriptions of the landscape of the island of Koufonisi and the Aegean Sea under the bright summer sun give the book an additional interesting dimension.

The Diary of an Infidelity is one of the best contemporary novels by a Cypriot writer and the jury is convinced that it deserves the European Union Prize for Literature.

Denmark

The Danish jury had lengthy discussions about which novels to nominate and ultimately which novel to select as a winner, but in the end the Kristian Bang Foss novel retained its originality after several rereads, as well as its humour. Not only is the novel very well-written, but the satirical style is wonderfully understated, the humour is pitch black, and observations about the Danish social welfare system and how we treat each other unravel with every reread. The novel deserves to be translated, and will enchant and amuse readers in any modern society.

Estonia

In May, Meelis Friedenthal's *The Bees* was voted as the winning novel, surpassing the other candidates by its mastery of language, composition and sensorial richness, as well as its ability to recreate the atmosphere of the 17th century.

The Bees is based on profound research and the novel's background consists of history, theology, medicine and even alchemy. But its composition is clear and its structure avoids all possible obstructions and unnecessary details.

The author is an expert in the 17th century, but he just opens the door to the era, lets the reader in and is never pedantic. But the most valuable quality of *The Bees* is its style and the author's command of language. The reader is haunted by the descriptions in *The Bees* long after finishing the novel. The author has a distinctive literary voice and the ripeness of his work surpassed all other candidates.

Finland

The Finnish Jury of the EUPL worked through our beautiful springtime, judging books by emerging fiction writers, books written mostly in Finnish but also in Swedish, as both of these are official languages in Finland. The jury is pleased to see how versatile and multifaceted our current literature is among young and emerging writers. Unanimously, the jury chose *The Ice Cream Man* by Katri Lipson as the winner. All members of the jury were impressed with this novel for its skilful construction and the high standard of its language. This fascinating story leaves lots of room for the imagination and impresses readers with its strong and intensive atmosphere.

Katri Lipson debuted with a novel *Kosmonautti (Cosmonaut)* in 2008. *Jäätelökauppias (The Ice-Cream Man)* is her second novel. It is a playful and charming story, mostly situated in the Czechoslovakia of the 1940s and 1950s, and looking at how dreams, friendship, love, pity and compassion are the characteristics that make us human.

A film crew is making a movie. The director wants to work without a script so that art and cinema start to reflect real life. But what is the difference between real and imaginary experiences? What is the value and reliability of personal history in the context of objective events and the turn of history? Questions of identity come into focus, while the style of narration varies from conceptual to dramatic and even poetic. The image of this novel is like the image of a kaleidoscope: endlessly on the move. The novel reveals life as a story – someone tells it to you, and as a reader you interpret, understand and continue the plot in your own way. Lipson's novel is full of references and allusions to literature, culture and historical events.

The Ice Cream Man is a novel with a very European atmosphere, constructed with an absolute joy for the written word.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

After detailed consideration, the Macedonian jury for the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013 unanimously proposed Lidija Dimkovska, author of the novels *Hidden Camera* (2004) and *Backup Life* (2012). Dimkovska is one of the foremost names in the new wave of Macedonian literature. The jury is convinced that she deserves this important award and the award will be a stimulus for further international recognition.

Germany

A generation of immigrants, and their children, appear to be making a significant impact on contemporary German literature.

With *A Cherrywood Table*, her second novel in a planned trilogy, Marica Bodrožić has written a book of retrospection, revealing how memories are transformed into poetic stories that coalesce into true literature. It combines contemporary history with first-hand personal experience, recounting her penetrating immersion into personal relationships and the impossibility of two people finding togetherness, while also describing the escapes from everyday life that were necessary for survival.

She relates all this through Arjeta Filipo, her first-person narrator, and also by making use of two symbolic objects. The first is the extensive photographic collection of her mother, who tried to ignore her but yet forcefully imposes on her when Arjeta moves into her new apartment in Berlin. The second and more important one is her grandmother's old cherry wood table that Arjeta's aunt brought from her Istrian homeland and Arjeta has now inherited. Trees embody history for Arjeta. And if she were to make even a little scratch on the tabletop, "then the wood will bleed and tell what the tree has seen and heard during the last century".

Since childhood, Bodrožić has suffered from brief periods of altered consciousness which she calls "breaks in my memory", and doctors define as 'petit mals' or absence seizures. And so, in the framing story-around-a-story—recounting the first seven days in her new, almost empty Berlin apartment—she wrestles hard with her recollections of the "besieged city", of summer days spent in Istria at her grandmother's, and of the intense experiences of life during her student days in Paris, while the Balkan war was taking place.

The story of Arjeta, the young heroine, keeps the space where the past is remembered—along with dreams, wishes and hopes for the future—in timeless abeyance, where life seems possible. This is a very timely book because it has as its main theme the lived-in world of a generation that comes in from off-stage, as it were, and is flung into the lives of established, saturated elites. Marica Bodrožić narrates her colourful story with power and verve, presenting us with a rare poetic language that shows how literature today can captivate us in a novel and different way.

Luxembourg

In 17 short chapters, *Amok*, the first novel by Tullio Forgiarini in Luxembourgish, tells the story of an adolescent's search for love, recognition, happiness and a place in today's society. The jury's decision for this novel is unanimous and it commends the author for the way he convincingly represents, via the use of often crude language, the prevailing problems of social isolation, neglect, lack of perspective, behavioural disorders and senseless violence. With *Amok*, Forgiarini has produced quite a different 'Luxembourg love chronicle', as the book's subtitle suggests.

Romania

The Romanian jury for the EUPL decided that the prize would be awarded to Ioana Pârvolescu, for her novel *Life Begins on Friday*. The novel, which already has a sequel (*Future Begins on Monday*) represents a clear confirmation of this author's qualities as an exquisite fiction writer, is a remarkable book on many levels. Using a range of characters (doctors, journalists, salesmen, policemen, detectives, and also adding a mysterious time traveller) and placing them in the historical background of Bucharest at the end of the 19th century, this novel not only possesses great literary merits, perfectly creating a seductive atmosphere, but also successfully expresses a complex meditation on human destiny.

Taking into consideration that the book also touches the limits of science fiction (one of the characters is able to travel, quite inexplicably, from our contemporary present back to the year 1897), *Life Begins on Friday* leads to differing interpretations. On the one hand, the book confronts two different epochs, underlying their contrasts and similarities; on the other hand, it stresses the ideas of the beginnings of Romanian journalism.

Some contextual merits of this novel should also be mentioned here. First of all, the subject matter is very important. Romanian literature after the Revolution of 1989 implied several "legitimizing myths". One common example is linked to the careful examination of our recent history, to the artistic exploration of the communist past. But Pârvolescu perfectly balances this tendency – that sometimes threatened to become overused in recent Romanian literature – with another ideological level, where the most important aspects are not the details regarding a sordid age, but the identifying signs of a new epoch: we are talking about the years between 1881 (after Romania gained her independence) and the beginning of the First World War.

We also have to mention the use of 'docu-fiction' in this novel. *Life Begins on Friday* succeeds in exquisitely using an impressive amount of historical information regarding everyday life. Great and ordinary literary themes are remarkably rendered: from the medical conferences dedicated to the risks of using the corset to the ideas of socialist anarchism, and from the local feminist movements to the description of Bucharest's old maps. An expert within this specific cultural field (that she also teaches at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest), Ioana Pârvolescu's book is a wonderful achievement in every possible way.

Slovenia

Gabriela Babnik's *Sušna doba* (*Dry Season*), her third novel, was published in 2012. After Babnik, who was born in 1979, finished her studies at Ljubljana University, she spent time in Nigeria and later worked on a master's degree on the modern Nigerian novel.

Dry Season describes the encounter between a mature European woman and a young African man. The novel explores this encounter on two levels: the relationship between a mature woman and a young man, and the differences of two cultures and lifestyles, differences which can be the cause of strong prejudice. There is nothing exotic in Babnik's novel, it is a very precise and realistic account of contemporary life in Nigeria, on the border between African tradition and global civilisation.

Babnik's novel is a very special and extraordinary account of the failure to live and love without prejudice.

Spain

The three Spanish associations involved in the 2013 EUPL are ACE (Asociación Colegial de Escritores de España), FGEE (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España), and AELC (Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana). Their representatives are: Andrés Sorel, secretary general of ACEC, Manuel Borrás, representative of FGEE, and Francesc Parcerisas member of AELC and Chairman of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes. Francesc Parcerisas has acted as president of the jury.

The three associations each proposed a book for the EUPL. After much deliberation, and with the contributions of two major literary critics, Juan Ramon Masoliver from *La Vanguardia* in Barcelona, and Javier Goñi from *El País* and Fundación March in Madrid, the prize was given to Cristian Crusat for *Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto*.

Crusat's stories contain "dirty realism", possess a common way of looking at things, and contain quite a risky narrative. Crusat seemed the most appropriate candidate, in that he is an emerging author with a bright future.

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 Culture 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 2013 award.

The nomination of candidates and the final selection of one winner in each country took place between February and July 2013.

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 countries selected
- To have published between 2 and 4 books of fiction
- The books should have been published during the five years before the Prize

Juries

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

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

The European Commission, DG Education and Culture

www.ec.europa.eu/culture

The consortium

The European Booksellers Federation

www.europeanbooksellers.eu

The European Writers' Council

www.europeanwriters.eu

The Federation of European Publishers

www.fep-fee.eu

The European Union Prize for Literature

www.euprizeliterature.eu

Twelve winning authors

Isabelle Wéry
Marilyn Désossée (2013)

Faruk Šehić
Knjiga o Uni (2011)

Emilios Solomou
Ημερολόγιο μιας απιστίας (2012)

Kristian Bang Foss
Døden kører audi (2012)

Meelis Friedenthal
Mesilased (2012)

Katri Lipson
Jäätelökauppias (2012)

Lidija Dimkovska
РЕЗЕРВЕН ЖИВОТ (2012)

Marica Bodrožić
Kirschholz und alte Gefühle (2012)

Tullio Forgiarini
*Amok – Eng Lëtzebuenger
Liebeschronik* (2011)

Ioana Pârvulescu
Viața începe vineri (2009)

Gabriela Babnik
Sušna doba (2012)

Cristian Crusat
Breve teoría del viaje y el desierto
(2011)