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# SREČKO KOSOVEL

TRANSLATED BY ANA JELNIKAR AND BARBARA SIEGEL CARLSON

## TO MECHANICS! (Mechanics and Drivers!)

I.  
Mechanics cannot die because it has no soul. To a mechanic the paradox is incomprehensible because it transcends the laws of mechanics. The paradox is a leap from mechanics into life. The paradox is alive as electricity. Electricity is not mechanical. **SO LET’S NOT BE MECHANICAL BUT RATHER ELECTRICAL.**

II.  
Contact between electric wires creates a spark. Contact between young people also creates a spark. It is an electric flame. To the mechanic it is dangerous for it makes a short circuit that burns through mechanisms. The short circuit burns through mechanisms. We are coming to destroy mechanisms. Man-machine will be destroyed. Hang a placard: **MAN-MACHINE** will be destroyed!

III.  
Lightning rods serve no purpose. Lightning must ignite the soul. Let it strike, set the soul aflame! We must destroy all mechanisms. We’ve declared war on all mechanisms! This is the first proclamation of war in the state of SCS.<sup>1</sup> It was enacted in Slovenia. **FIGHT ALL MECHANISMS!**

IV.  
Dawn is breaking! Can you feel the shimmer? No more peoples or nations, no more humanity. One Man stands at the center of the world, just one Man crowned with white thorns. And above him humanity’s silver halo. (Was it a

storm, death itself?) Only one Man, and everyone standing around him are just his different faces. (Is he a miner, tanner, dockhand, peasant, functionary, writer, scholar or beggar? I can’t tell. Is he a Slovene, German, Russian or Frenchman? I don’t know. All I know is I am terribly fond of this Man, whoever he is, whatever he is.) I don’t know who he is, what he is, for me it is enough to know only this: **I LOVE HIM!**

V.  
New humanity is rising. What if it comes from the depths? **IT WAS HUMILIATED.** What if it comes from the abyss? **IT WAS DESECRATED!** What if it comes with thunder and lightning? **IT WAS SUPPRESSED!** There’s only one thing ... that he is coming, let him come! What if he comes over dead bodies? There’s life force within him. A force that defies death. Open the windows! Wild air enters the room, a new atmosphere full of ozone, robust with health! (Ozone from pine trees!) Open the windows, open the doors: **NEW MAN IS COMING.** All mechanisms must die! New Man is coming! Bow to his suffering, kneel to his humiliation, greet his force. (All suffering was for him — joy, humiliation — glorification, force — resurrection.) *All mechanisms must die!* **NEW MAN IS COMING!**

VI.  
Let me greet him too!

Tomaj in the Karst, July 1925  
Srečko Kosovel

## MEHANIKOM! (Mehaniki in šoferji!)

I.  
Mehanika ne more umreti, ker nima duše. Paradoks je mehaniku nerazumljiv, ker presega mehanične zakone. Paradoks je skok iz mehanike v življenje. Paradoks je živ kakor elektrika. A elektrika ni mehanična. Elektrika je element. **ZATO NE BODIMO MEHANIČNI, AMPAK BODIMO ELEKTRIČNI.**

II.  
Stik električnih žic povzroča iskro. Stik mladih vrst povzroča tudi iskro. To je električni plamen. Za mehanike je nevaren, ker povzroča kratek stik in požge mehanizme. Kratek stik požge mehanizme. Prihajamo, da uničimo mehanizme. Človek-stroj bo uničen. Plakativajte: **ČLOVEK-STROJ** bo uničen!

III.  
Strelovodi ne koristijo nič. Strela mora vžgati dušo. Naj udari vanjo, naj jo vžge! Uničiti moramo vse mehanizme. Vojno smo napovedali vsem mehanizmom! To je prva bojna napoved v državi SHS. Izvršila se je v Sloveniji. **BOJ VSEM MEHANIZMOM!**

IV.  
Svita se! Ali čutite to svetlikanje? Ne ljudstev ni več ne narodov ne človeštva. En človek stoji sredi sveta, en sam človek, z belim trnjem kronan. A nad njim srebrna gloriola človečanstva. (Je bila nevihta in smrt sama?) En človek je in vsi, ki stojijo okrog njega, so le njegovi različni obrazi. Ali je rudar ali strojar ali nosač ali kmet ali uradnik ali pisatelj ali intelektualec ali berač, ne morem razložiti. Ali

je Slovenec ali Nemec ali Rus ali Francoz, ne vem, samo eno vem, da mi je strašno ljub ta človek, kdorkoli je, karkoli je. Ne vem, kdo je, kaj je, zame je dovolj eno: **RAD GA IMAM!**

V.  
Novo človečanstvo vstaja. Kaj, če prihaja iz nižin? **PONIŽANO JE BILO!** Kaj, če prihaja iz dna? **OSKRUNJENO JE BILO!** Kaj, če prihaja z nevihto in strelami! **TLAČENO JE BILO!** Samo eno je ... da prihaja, da le prihaja! Kaj, če prihaja preko mrličev! Sila življenja je v njem. Sila, ki smrti kljubuje. Odprite okna! Nevihtni zrak prihaja v sobo, novo vzdušje nastaja, polno ozona, polno krepkega zdravja! (Ozon prihaja od borov!) Odprite okna, odprite duri: **NOVI ČLOVEK PRIHAJA.** Vsi mehanizmi morajo umreti! **Novi človek prihaja!** Poklonite se njegovemu trpljenju, poklekните pred njegovim ponižanjem, pozdravite njegovo silo. (Zanj je bilo trpljenje – radost, ponižanje – povečanje, sila – vstajenje.) Vsi mehanizmi morajo umreti! **NOVI ČLOVEK PRIHAJA!**

VI.  
Dajte, da ga pozdravim i jaz!

Tomaj na Krasu, julij 1925  
Srečko Kosovel

<sup>1</sup> Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. [Ed. n.]

# JURE DETELA

TRANSLATED BY TIBOR HRS PANDUR

## THE UNDERGROUND MANIFESTO<sup>1</sup>

1. Sooner or later we'll all get a bullet in the head. This is unavoidable. We must therefore make sure that we get it from our adversaries and not ourselves.
2. There is no justice in this world. That is why we shouldn't demand anything of institutions that would confirm the intimate struggles of anyone among us.
3. The intimacy of our struggles is not in opposition to their public or objective informational value.
4. The highest moral principle of the world is anyone who realizes that he is the highest moral principle of the world.
5. Poets! Don't whine and complain if we are not given the opportunity to publish our poems! Don't blame the institutions because we don't believe in a form of justice that doesn't support our contempt in them. Let's instead film pornography and sell it to priests, vicars, and monks; let's rake in a ton of money and publish our poems ourselves.
6. Nothing in the world is so important that it would a priori be worth smashing someone in the face because of it's insignificance.
7. Death is entirely without value. There is therefore nothing in the world that is not worth dying for.
8. The world is so fucked up that it is worthy of love and death simultaneously.
9. Ideas don't matter. What matters is how individuals disclose their sensory confrontations with the universe. That is why no twentieth century architecture is worth a rat's ass compared to the buildings of beavers and the nests of birds.
10. Life is entirely without value. There is therefore nothing in the world that would not be worth living for.
11. All people and all other poets of this world! Let's not commit any more suicide; let us rather go underground.

<sup>1</sup> When I published the book *Orfijni dokumenti* [Orphic Documents, ed.n.] with a selection from Jure Detela's [1951–1992] literary legacy, I explained in the introductory note that this was only a selection. Detela's legacy includes many more surprising texts and represents a comprehensive space for inquiry. Now I am continuing with its publication: Detela's text from his legacy (NUK [National University Library, Ljubljana] and his manuscript collection 14/2011) preserved in typescript (with one single long-hand correction). I presume that it is dated from the 1970s, perhaps in the period after the death of Vojko Gorjan [1949–1975, a lucid prose-poet and translator, persecuted and institutionalized many times by the socialist regime during his lifetime, ed. n.]. — Miklavž Komelj

## MANIFEST ILEGALE<sup>2</sup>

1. Prej ali slej bomo vsi dobili šuse v glavo. Temu se ni mogoče izogniti. Torej moramo poskrbeti za to, da jih bomo dobili od nasprotnikov in ne od sebe.
2. Na tem svetu ni pravice. Zato ne zahtevajmo od institucij ničesar, kar bi potrjevalo intimne boje kogarkoli izmed nas.
3. Intimnost bojev ni v nobenem nasprotju z njihovo javnostjo in objektivno informacijsko vrednostjo.
4. Najvišji moralni princip sveta je vsakdo, ki se zave, da je najvišji moralni princip sveta.
5. Pesniki! Ne cmerimo se in ne jamrajmo, če nam ne dajo možnosti za tiskanje naših pesmi! Ne krivimo institucij, saj ne verjamemo v pravico, ki ne podpira našega prezira do njih. Raje posnamimo nekaj pornografskih filmov, prodajmo jih duhovnikom, župnikom in menihom, nabерimo si goro denarja in tiskajmo pesmi v samozaložbi.
6. Nobena stvar na svetu ni tako pomembna, da zaradi njene nepomembnosti že a priori ne bi bilo vredno koga treščiti po gobcu.
7. Smrt je popolnoma brez vrednosti. Zato ni na svetu ničesar, za kar ne bi bilo vredno umreti.
8. Svet je tako zajeban, da je vreden ljubezni in smrti obenem.
9. Ideje niso važne. Važno je, kako subjekti razodevajo svoje čutne konfrontacije z vesoljem. Zato je vsaka arhitektura dvajsetega stoletja vredna pol kurca v primerjavi z zgradbami bobrov in ptičjimi gnezdii.
10. Življenje je popolnoma brez vrednosti. Zato ni na svetu ničesar, za kar ne bi bilo vredno živeti.
11. Vsi ljudje in vsi drugi pesniki tega sveta! Ne delajmo več samomorov, temveč stopimo v ilegalo.

<sup>2</sup> Ko sem objavljai knjigo *Orfijni dokumenti* z izborom iz zapuščine Jureta Detele, sem v uvodnem pojasnilu opozoril, da gre le za izbor. Zapuščina skriva še veliko presenetljivih tekstov in je izčrpen prostor za raziskovanje. V tem času z njim nadaljujem in tu objavljам Detelov tekst iz zapuščine (NUK, rokopisna zbirka, 14/2011), ohranjen v tipkopisu (z enim samim rokopisnim popravkom). Domnevam, da ga lahko datiramo v sedemdeseta leta dvajsetega stoletja, morda v čas po smrti Vojka Gorjana. — Miklavž Komelj

# JURE DETELA

TRANSLATED BY ANA JELNIKAR & BARBARA SIEGEL CARLSON

## CULTURAL FEUDALISM

Slovenian literature is exceptional in that young authors write most of its highest quality poetry. Indeed most of Slovenia's best poets died in the third decade of their lives. I am not claiming that they died so young because they wrote good poems. However, the impossibility of putting a more advanced age to good poetic use is so pervasive that there must be a precisely identifiable cause for it. Personally I am not aware of any Slovene poet, with the exception of Kajetan Kovič, who, after the age of forty, wrote poems that would hold up to autonomous scrutiny independent of the author's already renowned position.

I believe that this situation is dependant on two factors. The first factor is a mindset I refer to as cultural feudalism, whereby dealings with poetry are reduced to an already determined framework that is attributed to the poet by the previously established position of his persona within the realm of the Slovene spirit. Criticism is only rarely concerned with analysing the poetic procedures specific to an individual poem or individual groups of poems. Usually, it is satisfied by simply determining the poet's position, which it either accepts or rejects, depending on the external constraints of this position. Texts printed in literary journals, primarily selected according to this principle, are determined by two sets of criteria: the journal's orientation and the text itself, and whether or not the two coincide. In this context, the desire to understand the poem without effort is as feudal as the desire for an avant-gardism defined by an already delineated history of poetry, which in turn is supported by theories credited with normative values in relationship to poetic production. The feedback of the reading public thus manifests itself as pressure for the poet to accept the position foisted on him. If the poet succumbs to this pressure, he is then

forced to defend his position. Only rarely does it happen in Slovenia that new poetic movements would accept a senior poet in terms of the on-going development of his poetry. Out of the desire for the poet to succumb to the pressure of feedback, a myth about the personal originality of the poet is launched; and because both poetry critics and the reading public strive for complete clarity of the cultural space and are therefore inflexible, originality is understood as an acceptance of a position that has been set once and for all. That is why, for example, most Slovenes perceive Tomaž Šalamun primarily as the author of *Poker*, disregarding the thirteen books that followed, which varied enormously among themselves in terms of the questions they raise.

Cultural feudalism makes it impossible for a poem to be defined as an intersection of information and interpersonal communication. The schema according to which a poet is given his position ends up appropriating his poems. However, the need for the intersection of information, which I believe to be the only justification for poetry, is not addressed if the conditions for creating a poem in which the poet dwells are not a priori unique and therefore different. Positions need not be defended against other positions. Neither can a position be justifiably attacked. Positions *exist*; therefore they need no defence. A position is something in which each poet is completely alone, although not estranged.

Moreover, all positions and all possibilities can find a defence in the position of Emily Dickinson, which was so marginal, so on the edge of the world, that it renders all positions that could be endangered by the a priori curse of alienation impossible. What I am referring to here is the total dedication of Dickinson's language to something that she insists she is not speaking about; she dedicates

her language to what is essentially unutterable. In her relationship to what cannot be articulated, she resembles Georg Trakl who lived after her. In contrast to Dickinson, Trakl strived to project the unutterable onto the world of his present, whereby the unutterable revealed itself to be an ultimately forgotten, lost mystery, which, because absent, negated the world of his present. Here I see the key to the schizophrenia of Trakl's poetry. Dickinson, on the other hand, renounced the possibility of entering a world that would negate her mystery, and this renunciation was so complete that her poems convey a fear of what new perceptions, new messages, might bring. The totality of her renunciation is also confirmed by the fact that she never sent out or published her poems and wanted them destroyed after her death. Here I am especially thinking of the poems beginning with the lines *I measure every grief I meet; I dreaded the first robin so; A murmur in the trees to note; Success is counted sweetest; I think that hemlock likes to stand:*

I THINK the hemlock likes to stand  
Upon a marge of snow;  
It suits his own austerity,  
And satisfies an awe

That men must slake in wilderness,  
Or in the desert cloy,—  
An instinct for the hoar, the bald,  
Lapland's necessity.

The hemlock's nature thrives on cold;  
The gnash of northern winds  
Is sweetest nutriment to him,  
His best Norwegian wines.

To satin races he is nought;  
But children on the Don  
Beneath his tabernacles play,  
And Dnieper wrestlers run.

At the other end of the spectrum, oppressive cultural feudalism is defined by the fact that an impressive amount of good poetry has been written and continues to be written in Slovenia. The general condition for this poetry to come into being in such an oppressive environment is the same condition that has enabled my own writing. In one's youth, one can write subjective poetry of high

quality. I take subjectivity to mean when words adhere to the unuttered and unutterable space, which is the criterion for the validity of an utterance, the criterion for correcting and changing a poem, and something that is personal to each poet. It could have to do with an event that the poet cannot even remember, but because the poet's relationship to this event is different from his reader's relationship, what constitutes the impossibility of remembering for the poet often comes across to the reader as suggestiveness and the magic of language. Such writing does not require the poet to be able to read his poem as an indifferent reader or to understand it outside his own mythology. Indeed it is not necessary to understand the potential energy of certain words; rigour and precision in defining the unutterable space suffices. But this type of writing becomes impossible if the poet's reflection on the process of writing increases to a degree that it invades the spaces in which the poems belong and thereby resolves their mystery. Poetry degenerates if it does not assume that all people, in their articulating consciousness, are in the same relationship to the poem's mystery as the one who utters it. If the mystery of the circumstances of a certain way of writing poetry is revealed at any level of the articulating consciousness, then the decision not to give utterance to this condition or enter the space of the new unutterable condition in any other way is identical to the appropriation of the mystery. This places the author in the position of arbiter deciding who is in on the secret, and thus allowed to enter the space of the poem, and who is not. What is put into words requires deciphering, a process in which the reader with all his experience is an active, autonomous, and total participant. If the constellation of the text is such that something unutterable acquires a position as though it had been uttered, then the reader, because the possibility of active deciphering has been denied him, can only belong to the text as ideology — passively and negating that which does not cohere with the ideology. In a poem, utterance is the only way to convey information on being. Intentional non-utterance does not allow for what is unuttered to exist at the level of articulated information, while at the same time what is unuttered is taken out of the world of the unutterable, which enters the space of a poem in such a way that the poem organizes it from without. Thus the world that is confronted in a poem, and which guards a mystery, cannot be whole. The poem disassembles it, while at the same time belonging to only one of its disassembled parts, defending it against all the others.

The unutterable is, and with every poem it constitutes itself anew, and the task of the poem is to sustain it in its totality. The futility of language can only be demonstrated; it cannot be simulated. We all equally participate in the unutterable. There is no position that does not convey information about collective values. It is impossible for decisions made in the writing process not to be subject to total confrontation. Whatever is uttered is inevitably understood somewhere. Even if something is uttered without knowledge of the event that conditions the utterance, the uttered statement brings information about the condition of the utterance. The unutterable does not exist a priori, but rather is recognized during the process of writing and acquiring information. Nothing is understood to a greater extent than it can be understood – whether it is I who understands it or someone else.

One of the most damaging obstacles created by cultural feudalism is the status of young adult literature, and the myth of generational relations that block the pulse of feedback for the literature of young authors. By definition, young adult literature is intended for readers who consider that the age of the author is important for understanding the text and is acceptable only insofar as seniority and youth are considered natural norms. If youth is seen to possess some form of purer consciousness, which must not be tainted and requires guardians, and if we also take into account the fact that young people are socially and culturally determined to the same extent as adults, youth become representatives of social perfection. But youth does enjoy a special status in culture, the validity of which is not grounded in any system of signification, in any specific school of philosophy. No officially acknowledged collective affinity stands behind this status, except for those praised by the adults already. To the extent that youth as established in our consciousness departs from the system of adults, it occurs only at the level of biology, not on the level of culture or the level of signification. By establishing the status of youth, young people are in fact denied the rights to such action that would create a system of socially dependent signifiers of the type that could actually change society. For if youth is a special value, and if this value is not determined by the establishing of particular signification systems (certainly for adults the value of youth is not increased by the signification systems that adults reject), then the value of youth is dependant exclusively on the perfection of the society in which young people live; and if this society is already perfect, there

is no need to change anything, therefore it is superfluous for young people to institute any new systems of signifiers; while at the same time they are forced to take upon themselves all the inconsistencies of the society to which they belong without being allowed to influence it. And no matter how great a value is attributed to youth, we know that no society is without inconsistencies. Therefore I think that when speaking about printed literature written by young people, we can legitimately say that the value of youth is not measured by anything other than the established values of adults, not least because the money for printing comes from organisations primarily comprised of adults. To claim that young adult literature is supported because of enthusiasm for symbolic systems that would oppose the world of adults – a world that holds virtually all the power over what gets printed or not – would be senseless. Of course, referring to the world of adults as something homogenous is a crude and foolish simplification; but “the world of adults” is a term demanded by the logic of the conceptual system that established the notion of “the world of youth” as a homogenous phenomenon; what I am suggesting is that the conceptual system that proposes youth as an a priori value is incapable of rationally sustaining the implications of its own logic.

The idea of the value of youth can only be established with the idea of a perfect society; no one can attribute to the natural potency that renders youth specific values that are independent of the values that this potency possesses. To the contrary, the myth about the a priori value of youth accords natural purity and the uncorrupted state of young people a role in verifying values that youth itself cannot, even within the logic of this myth, independently sustain.

## KULTURNIŠKI FEVDALIZEM

Slovenska literatura je izjemna po dejstvu, da je njena najkvalitetnejša poezija predvsem poezija mladih avtorjev. Večina najboljših slovenskih pesnikov je umrla v tretjem desetletju svoje starosti. Ne trdim, da so ti ljudje umrli tako mladi zato, ker so pisali dobre pesmi. Do nezmožnosti, da bi bilo večjo starost mogoče pesniško izkoristiti, pa prihaja s takšno doslednostjo, da je zanj gotovo kak natančno opredeljiv vzrok. Ne poznam nobenega slovenskega pesnika razen Kajetana Koviča, ki bi po štiridesetem letu pisal takšne pesmi, ki vzdržijo avtonomno konfrontacijo, neodvisno od avtorjeve renomirane pozicije.

To blokado vidim odvisno od dveh faktorjev. Prvi faktor je mišljenje, ki ga imenujem kulturniški fevdalizem; tu se ukvarjanje s poezijo zreducira na okvir, ki ga nekemu pesniku določa že opredeljena pozicija njegove osebnosti na področju slovenskega duha. Kritika zelo redko razbira obesedovalne postopke, specifične za posamezne pesmi ali vsaj za posamezne skupine pesmi. Navadno se zadovolji s tem, da določi pesnikovo pozicijo, ki jo v imenu sheme, ki pozicijo obrobja od zunaj, sprejme ali odkloni. Teksti, ki so tiskani po revijah, se selekcionirajo predvsem po tem principu, po dveh opredeljenostih, po opredeljenosti revijine težnje in po opredeljenosti teksta, in pri objavi gre navadno za to, če se ti dve opredeljenosti stikata ali ne. Tu je želja po doumevanju pesmi brez napora enako fevdalistična kot želja po takšni avantgardnosti, ki jo utemeljuje predstava o že definirani zgodovini poezije,

podkrepljena s teorijami, ki se jim pripisuje normativna vrednost za pesniško produkcijo. Feedback občinstva se torej izkazuje kot pritisk, da pesnik sprejme pozicijo, ki mu jo občinstvo vsiljuje. Če se pesnik temu pritisku ukloni, je prisiljen, da svojo pozicijo tudi brani. Na Slovenskem se skoraj nikoli ne dogaja, da bi starejši pesnik bil pri razvoju svoje poezije sprejemljiv za novorojene pesniške težnje. Iz želje, da se pesnik ukloni pritisku feedbacka, izhaja mit o osebni izvirnosti pesnika; in ker si kritika in občinstvo želita popolno razjasnjenost kulturnega prostora in sta zato nefleksibilna, je izvirnost pojmovana kot sprejetje pozicije, ki je enkratna za vse življenje. Zato je Tomaž Šalamun za večino Slovencev še zmeraj predvsem avtor Pokra, ne glede na trinajst kasnejših knjig, ki se po svoji problematiki med seboj močno razlikujejo. Kulturniški fevdalizem onemogoča, da bi bila pesem pojmovana kot križišče informacij in medsebojna komunikacija. Shema, kjer ima pesnik svoje mesto, si pesem prilasti. A do potrebe po križišču informacij, v kateri vidim upravičenost poezije, ne bi moglo priti, če ne bi bili pogoji za nastanek pesmi, v katerih biva pesnik, a priori enkratni in zato različni. Pozicij ni treba braniti pred drugimi pozicijami. Zato tudi ni pozicija tisto, kar je upravičeno napadati. Pozicije SO, zato se ni treba zavzemati zanje. Pozicija je nekaj, kjer je vsak pesnik popolnoma sam, a ne tuj.

Vse pozicije, vse možnosti za preizkušnjo ščiti pozicija Emily Dickinson, ki je tako mejna, tako na robu sveta, da zdaj ne more več biti nobene pozicije, ki bi ji grozilo apriorno prekletstvo tujosti. Mislim na totalno posvetitev govorce Emily Dickinson nečemu, za kar obljubi, da o tem ne govori; tako postane tisto, čemur posveča govorico, neizrekljivo. V tem odnosu do neizrekljivega je sorodna Georgu Traklu, ki je živel kasneje kot ona; toda Trakl je želel neizrekljivo projicirati v svet svoje sedanosti, pri čemer se je neizrekljivo razkrilo kot dokončno pozabljena, izgubljena skrivnost, ki zaradi svoje odsotnosti zanikuje svet njegove sedanosti; v tem vidim ključ za shizofrenost Traklove poezije; Emily Dickinson pa se je totalno odpovedala vstopu v svet, ki bi zanikoval njeno skrivnost, in v tej odpovedi je bila tako celovita, da njene pesmi sporočajo strah pred tem, kar bi lahko prinesle nove zaznave, nova sporočila; celovitost te odpovedi potrjuje tudi dejstvo, da svojih pesmi ni posredovala drugim in da je hotela, da jih po njeni smrti uničijo. Tu mislim predvsem na pesmi, ki se začenjajo z verzi I measure every greef I meet, I dreaded the first robin so, A murmur in the trees to note, Success is counted sweetest, I think that hemlock likes to stand:

Mislim, da trobelika rada  
stoji na robu snega;  
to se ujema z njeno strogostjo,  
to zadošča grozi,  
ki jo morajo v divjini ljudje udušiti,  
zasititi v puščavi –  
instinkt za slano, za goloto,  
potreben za Laponsko.  
Trobelikina čud se z mrazom krepi;  
škripanje severnih vetrov  
je zanjo najslajša hrana,  
najboljša norveška vina.  
Ona ni nič za žametne rase:  
ampak pod njenimi tabernaklji  
tečejo dnjeperski pretepači  
in donski otroci se igrajo.

Z druge strani opredeljuje blokirajoči kulturni fevdalizem dejstvo, da je na Slovenskem nastajalo in da nastaja precej dobre poezije. Splošni pogoj za to poezijo v tako blokirajočem ozračju razbiram kot isti pogoj, ki mi je doslej omogočal pisanje. V mladosti je mogoče pisati zelo subjektivno poezijo visoke kvalitete. Subjektivnost pojmujem kot pripadnost besede neizrečenemu in neizrekljivemu prostoru, ki je kriterij za pravilnost izjave, kriterij za popravljanje in spreminjanje pesmi in ki je za vsakega pesnika oseben. Tu gre lahko za en sam dogodek, ki se ga pesnik ne more spomniti; a ker je pesnik do njega v drugačnem odnosu kot bralec, je to, kar je za pesnika nemoč spomina, za bralca velikokrat sugestivnost in magija govorce. Za takšno pisanje sploh ni potrebno, da bi pesnik kdaj lahko prebral svojo pesem kot indiferenten bralec ali da bi jo razumel zunaj svoje osebne mitologije. Tu ni potrebno poznavanje energetičnega potenciala besed, dovolj je strogost in natančnost v opredeljevanju neizrečenega prostora. Toda takšen način pisanja postane nemogoč, če se pesnikova refleksija o postopku pisanja stopnjuje do takšne mere, da prodre v prostore, ki jim pesmi pripadajo, in razreši njihovo skrivnost. Kajti poezija se degenerira, če ne predpostavlja, da so v obsedovalni zavesti vsi ljudje v enakem odnosu do njene skrivnosti kot tisti, ki jo izreka. Če je skrivnost pogoja za nek določen tip pesnjenja razkrita na kakršnemkoli nivoju obsedovalne zavesti, je odločitev, da se tega pogoja v pesmi ne izreče ali da se na kak drug način ne vstopi v prostor novega neizrekljivega pogoja, enaka prilaščanju skrivnosti, ki postavlja avtorja v pozicijo razsodnika, ki določa, kateri so združeni z njim v poznavanju

skrivnosti in zato posvečeni, da se smejo srečevati na kraju pesmi, in kateri niso. Izrečeno zahteva razbiranje, pri katerem je bralec z vso svojo izkušnjo aktiven, avtonomen in totalen. Če je konstelacija teksta takšna, da ima nekaj neizrečenega v njem takšno pozicijo, kot da je izrečeno, lahko bralec zaradi onemogočanja aktivnega razbiranja pripada tekstu samo kot ideologiji: pasivno in zanikujoč tisto, kar z ideologijo ni v skladu. Kajti v pesmi je izrekanje edina možnost za informacijo o bivajočem. Namerno neizrekanje ne dopušča neizrečenemu, da bi bivalo na nivoju besedne informacije, hkrati pa je neizrečeno izvzeto tudi iz neizrekljivega sveta, ki se srečuje na kraju pesmi tako, da ga pesem navzven organizira. Zato svet, ki se konfrontira s pesmijo, ki varuje skrivnost, ne more biti celovit. Pesem ga razparcelira in hkrati pripada samo eni od njegovih parcel, ki jo brani pred drugimi.

Neizrekljivo je in se z vsako pesmijo nanovo vzpostavlja, in naloga pesmi je, da ga vzdrži v celoti. Nemoč govorce se lahko samo izkazuje, ne pa hlini. Neizrekljivega smo vsi enako deležni. Ni pozicije, s katere ne bi mogla priti informacija kolektivne vrednosti. Nemogoče je, da odločitve, do katerih pride v procesu pisanja, ne bi bile prepuščene totalni konfrontaciji. Karkoli je izrečeno, je nekje gotovo razumljeno. Tudi če se kaj izgovori brez vednosti o dogodku, ki izjavo pogojuje, prinese izgovorjena izjava informacijo o stanju izrekanja. Neizrekljivo ni apriorno, temveč prepoznano s pisanjem in informiranjem. Nič ni bolj razumljeno, kot je razumljeno. Vseeno je, če sem to jaz ali kdo drug. Če razumem jaz ali kdo drug.

Ena od najbolj škodljivih preprek kulturnega fevdalizma je status mladinske literature, mit o generacijskih razmerjih, ki blokira pulziranje feedbacka za literaturo mladih avtorjev. Kajti literatura mladine je za bralca, ki smatra, da je starost avtorja pomembna za doumevanje teksta, sprejemljiva samo, če smatra starost in mladost izključno za naravni normi. Če se mladini predpostavlja neko obliko čistejše zavesti, ki ne sme biti omadeževana, ki potrebuje varuhe, in če se obenem upošteva dejstvo, da je mladina prav tako družbeno-kulturno determinirana kot odrasli, je to trditev, da naj bo mladina prikazovalec družbene popolnosti. A mladost ima v kulturi poseben status, za katerega utemeljitev ni vzpostavljen noben sistem opomenjanja, nobena filozofska šola. Zanj ni uradno priznana nobena kolektivna afiniteta razen tistih, ki jih hvalijo že odrasli. V kolikor mladina, vzpostavljena v naši zavesti, odstopa od sistema odraslih, je to samo na biološkem, ne pa na kulturnem nivoju in

na nivoju opomenjanja; tako se z vzpostavitvijo statusa mladine odreka mladincem pravica do tiste akcije, ki bi vzpostavila takšen sistem od družbe odvisnih znamenj, ki bi družbo spremenil. Ker če je mladost posebna vrednost, in če ta vrednost ni določena z vzpostavljanjem specifičnih pomenskih sistemov (prav gotovo za odrasle ne višajo vrednosti mladine tisti pomenski sistemi, ki jih odrasli odklanjajo), potem je vrednost mladosti odvisna izključno od popolnosti družbe, v kateri mladostniki bivajo; in če je družba popolna, ni treba v njej ničesar več spreminiti, zato je odveč, da bi mladostniki vzpostavljali kakršnekoli nove sisteme znamenj; obenem pa so prisiljeni, da sprejmejo nase vse nedoslednosti družbe, ne da bi se smeli ganiti; kajti četudi pripisujemo mladosti še takšno vrednost, obenem vemo, da nobena družba ni brez nedoslednosti. Menim, da je pri govoru o tiskani literaturi, ki jo piše mladina, upravičeno trditi, da se vrednost mladosti ne meri z ničimer drugim kot s priznanimi vrednotami odraslih, saj denar za tisk v skrajni konsekvenci prihaja od organizacij, ki jih sestavljajo večinoma odrasli ljudje. Trditi, da je literatura mladostnikov podpirana zaradi navdušenja nad tistimi sistemi znamenj, ki bi lahko postali nasprotni svetu odraslih – in ta ima pretežno oblast nad tem, naj se kaka stvar tiska ali ne – bi bilo nesmiselno. Seveda je govor o odraslem svetu kot o nečem homogenem groba in neumna poenostavitev; toda “svet odraslih” je termin, ki ga zahteva logika tistega načina mišljenja, ki vzpostavlja termin “svet mladih” kot homogen pojav; in gre mi za to, da pokažem, kako je tista misel, ki vzpostavlja mladost za apriorno vrednoto, nezmožna z razumnostjo vzdržati posledice svoje vzpostavitve. Misel o vrednosti mladosti je vzpostavljena izključno z mislijo o popolnosti celotne družbe; kajti naravni potenci, po kateri je mladost specifična, ne more nihče pripisovati vrednosti neodvisno od vrednot, za katere se ta potencia zavzema; pač pa zadobi v mitu o apriorni vrednosti mladosti naravna čistost in nepokvarjenost mladostnikov vlogo preverjevalca vrednot, ki jih mladina niti v logiki mita ne more samostojno vzpostaviti.



# JURE DETELA

TRANSLATED BY RAYMOND MILLER

## 4 POEMS FROM “MOSS AND SILVER”

On the left there is sleep  
and blindness,  
on the right I am drawn  
on high.

## WINTER NIGHT IN A LOWER CARNIOLAN FOREST

Beauty always defines me anew with all  
the universe. The quivering  
is eternal, death falls through the throat: I forget  
the images every time. Movements

in the sky submerge into ice and burning,  
so that I am physically erased.  
Do I call witnesses? Dreams are mute  
as corpses. Everywhere there are ghosts,

who unite matter with speech: and in this way  
chasms are emptied. The magic  
of the clouds ‘round the moon is the birth of symbols.  
The karma of deathlessness seeks

the murderer. The open mouth grows stiff  
in the snow. The wind starts to blow  
through the dark skull. With a trance of madness  
the sun commands blindness.

## BUTTERFLY

In the land toward which every voice flies  
was a butterfly, its pieces dispersed,  
in hollow equilibrium immersed  
and put back into circulating time,  
which revealed the quivering of silver skin  
to eyes the butterfly didn’t recognize,  
as it was watched through the light of a flower,  
through the longing of bodiless grasses.

## POEM OF A CHILD TAKING ITS FIRST STEP

You mountains who move in  
the current that carries me,  
how I want to cry out  
all my anguish to you!  
You stop now, you mountains!  
You listen to my cry!  
No more, I don’t want to rush  
with the current that carries me!  
How I want to cry out  
all of my anguish!  
I want to stand! I want to be  
big, I want to be free!

# MARUŠA KRESE

TRANSLATED BY ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## AM I AFRAID? EXCERPT FROM THE EPONYMOUS NOVEL

Am I afraid? No. I’ve been squatting in the snow for three days now. I am sitting on an empty rucksack, though I must not sit, not really. I must only squat. I’d like to lie down for a moment, for a second, for just a half a second. You must never sit, the commissar of our dispersed unit told me only a few days ago. Now he is dead. We didn’t even bury him. We fled, fled. I don’t know from whom. From the Germans, the Italians, our own, the White Guard. We fled right past his body.

“You mustn’t close their eyes,” he said. Their eyes, his eyes. I ran past him lying in the snow. I didn’t really look at him. If only I had quickly closed his eyes. But I ran. Just ran.

Sometimes I am cold in the winter. Sometimes. But it was nice then, then, when I felt the cold winter blowing past my face, the tears running down my cheeks. Tears? I mustn’t cry. Above all don’t cry. Please. Then I’ll lie down, lie down forever. Cold, am I too cold? What is this? Just don’t close their eyes, don’t close them. I can’t feel the fingers on my hands, the toes on my feet. I can’t feel anything. I haven’t menstruated for a long time now. Am I even a woman anymore?

I can’t hear anybody. Are any of ours still alive? Should I crawl over to the next bush? I saw her. I saw Katja yesterday. She was hiding behind some great snow-covered logs. Was she alone? But where is Ančka? And my brother? My youngest brother. He had just started first grade. All proud, all happy he was, and our neighbor gave him a puppy. He took the puppy to school with him. Only for a couple of days. Until the Italians came and the neighbor with them. The neighbor pointed at to father and mother.

“They’re Reds,” he cried “Reds!” Since when had we been red, I wondered, trembling. That was the last time I felt fear.

“Don’t be afraid. It’s only me.”

Someone hugs me.

“Ančka. You’re alive.”

I haven’t seen her for a month. She sat by the fire then with her eyes closed. She was beautiful. Is she still? Is she still alive? I found her youngest brother in a hunter’s cabin yesterday. Barefoot, starving, terrified. He was crying.

“My sister said I must never cry, never,” the little boy sobbed.

“My sister said I was grown up now.”

I lifted him up, sat him on my horse, and brought him to our headquarters. We fed him, wrapped him in a blanket, put a cap with a red star on his head. He clung to me like a tic all night. I couldn’t take a single step without him. He doesn’t know, he doesn’t know anything. He’s desperate. Numb with pain. Brothers, sister, parents. Where are there? His father is in the Gonars concentration camp. That’s all he knows. We all know that. Should I take him to my family? But they’re also on the run, have been hiding for months. From time to time, someone tells me that they’ve seen one of them. I don’t know how to comfort the boy, what to say to him. The hell with it. Let the devil take him. How can I tell him his sister is alive? Alive? Nobody knows what happened to her unit. They were betrayed. And what now? It would be dangerous to look for them. Is she alive? She’s the most beautiful, that’s for sure. Or was. But usually she doesn’t even look at me. Is she arrogant? I know, I know. She went to high school and I didn’t. She read a lot and I didn’t. Still, if she’s still alive, if I find her, I’ll never let her go. Never. And her brother? Would we take care of him if he weren’t her brother? He looks like her. Too much like her.

It’s safe here in the middle of the forest. Are we in Croatia already? The top brass decided that we should hide until this fiery storm had passed over us. Is it the right thing to do? We can’t just stay here and wait for a miracle to happen. We have to go on. We have to go for help. But where? Where is everybody? It’s winter. Spring’s late again. We need the forest to grow green. Then it’s easier. Then we can at least eat leaves, and grass, the first strawberries. But a long time will pass before then. Is she alive?

Don’t daydream! Volunteers, where are you? Let’s go!

I mustn’t fall asleep. It’s Ančka’s turn now.

“If I snore,” she whispered just before she closed her eye, “hold my nose.”

She was out it an instant. And now my time has come to sleep. I can’t wake her. Her head is resting in my lap. I’ll try to last a little longer. I stroke her hair. When will we have enough water to wash our hair? Everything itches. We’re probably full of lice. Mother, where are you? Where are those gentle hands that braided my hair each morning? Where are you? The evenings when you made coffee from chicory and roasted chestnuts for us. You sat beside the stove and darned socks. Socks for seven children. You smiled and listened to our stupidities. Only now do I realize that you must have been tired all the time, that you were alone, that you had no help from your husband, from our father, who was always grim and demanding, wordlessly letting you know at every step that he had been disinherited at home because he had chosen you. He demanded your eternal gratitude and so you were silent. And the cousins – the sons of father’s younger brother who inherited the land instead and who married a woman who constantly prayed in church – they used to insult me at school. They used to laugh maliciously. I never wanted to tell you. And where are they now? Certainly not with us. And, Mother, where are you? Lojze, from the house next door who joined us a little over a month ago, told me that you and father were taken away, handcuffed, father supposedly to Gonars, but that he knew nothing about you, and that my brothers had all ran away. Our house had become an Italian station and, even before that, the neighbors had taken from the house everything that could not be nailed down. I’m not sleepy anymore, not cold, not afraid. I only worry what happened to all of you. I must not cry. Ančka should sleep a little longer.

The snow has finally started to melt. The youngest recruits snuck out at night and returned in the morning with some old potatoes they found in the nearby fields. The cook made soup from those strange unsalted potatoes and the young fighters were heroes for a day. The scouts we sent out to reconnoiter come back. It will be tough, they say. It will be difficult. But we have to move. The Germans are coming to help the Italians. Last night we lost three fighters who fell asleep in the snow. We ran out of slivovitz to lessen the pain of their wounds. Somehow we have to

get through to the monastery where there are monks who are on our side. They always give us brandy, flour, lard, dried meat, and a measure of optimism. We have to get through to them and leave our wounded with them for at least a couple of days. The few horses that we still have are too starved to use. What will we do with them?

We tidy up, wipe away our traces, make a battle plan. Her youngest brother asks for a rifle or a little grenade at least. A little grenade. Poor child. Will I be able to keep protecting him? I don't even think about his sister anymore. At least I try not to think about her. It hurts too much.

—

“Stay strong, my children. Do not forget who you are, what you are.” That's what our Slovenian teacher told us before he escaped through the window.

We trembled in fear and trepidation. The headmaster of the high school came to the class, the religion teacher, and four Italian officers. And a translator. It struck me that he was even paler than we were. The headmaster looked at each of us, stared deep into our eyes. He hit his willow switch against the table and later against our fingers and shouted at us.

“Who did this? Who brought this literature to school? Who organized this traitorous resistance?”

Traitorous resistance? Who's the traitor? We who don't accept the Italian authorities? We who promised our teacher that we won't forget who we are? We? Traitors? The headmaster says that we have chosen a dangerous path. It's true. But not his dangerous path. Our dangerous path. That night Mara, Katja, Slavka, and I went into the forest. We never went home after school. Mara's cousin was waiting for us in front of the school. He warned us:

“Don't go home. Hell has broken loose.”

They caught our teacher. He had a broken leg. We hid until evening and then we were taken across the lines to my older brother who had disappeared a couple of months before.

“It's better for you if you don't know anything,” he had said to us, before closing the door after him.

He smiled when he saw us come. We four frightened girls with our schoolbags, our skirts, and our sandals. It was summer time.

“What are we going to do with you?” my brother and his comrades joked.

The next day a farmer's wife gave us pants that had belonged to her sons. A week later I held a rifle in my hand for the first time and a glass of honey brandy in the other one. A few days after that, I shot my first man and became the leader of our unit. Actually I was the leader before I even held a rifle. They sent Ančka over to help me. She had come from the other side of the country. I embraced her the moment I saw her. She became the sister I never had. Ančka's sleeping now. I caress her with hands that kill. With hands that are like the hands of my mother. Those gentle hands that combed my hair each morning. Hands. Death. Silence. Silence that kills.

—

Slowly, slowly. We stop every fifty meters, listen, wait, and, only when the patrols turns away, do we move forward again. But how will we get anywhere if we move so slowly? The nurses keep the wounded quiet. I don't even want to know how they do that. If I were wounded I would want to shoot myself. To be such a burden to others, to be dependent on others, to be, to be ... No, I'd rather shoot myself. I wouldn't ask anyone for help. Is she alive? Is she wounded? I don't even want to think about it.

“We'll sleep here,” our commandant decided. We'd come too close to the village and had to retreat deeper into the woods. It was too dark to move onward.

They woke me to take my turn on guard duty. They pulled me from deep dreams. Dreams? Did I really dream? Again I was a boy accompanying his father to the station in a nearby town. I begged him not to go. I begged him to take me with him. Begged. I don't know anymore all the things I begged for. He wanted to wipe my tears with the fresh handkerchief mother had given him for his travels.

“You mustn't use that. Mother gave it to you.”

He looked at me, stroked my hair, and clapped me on the shoulder. “Don't cry. Now you must take care of the family until I earn enough for you to come after me.”

My friend's father had emigrated too. We returned home together. We walked slowly, slowly. We didn't talk. Mother sat in front of the house with my younger brothers and sisters. Mother would be having another child soon. I went into the forest, down to the stream, and cried. After two days I went back. Then I grew up. A letter came from America with three dollars in it. Then another without any dollars. Then one from Brazil. Then nothing.

No, I didn't dream. Will this night ever end? Will this war? I won't be able to survive another winter like this. I don't know if I'll survive this one. Our friend from the town where we took our fathers decided differently. He went over to the Whites.

“I won't be cold anymore. I won't be hungry. My family will be safe.”

That's what he said. Was he right? No, he must have been mistaken. At least I hope he was mistaken. He'll be sorry. But if only the moon would shine for a few seconds. And the stars! If on this night, when I must not sleep, I could at least look at the stars. Like those beautiful nights when I took the cows out to graze, when I lay down and counted the stars. The stars would carry me on a visit to my father. I travelled with the stars across the sea to a country that everyone said was miraculous and beautiful. I asked the stars to tell my father how I am and to tell him that I really am taking care of my family. I asked the stars to carry my greeting to my father. Those beautiful warm eyes. I didn't know they were beautiful back then.

—

“Why didn't you wake me?” she asked.

“You were sleeping like the dead.”

“Thank you for the rest. And for the safety. Now you close your eyes for a little while.”

“I can't. It's already day.”

I sit on a rock. Around me only bodies. I walk from one dead man to the next. I close their eyes. It's all the same. Italians. Germans. Partisans. I close their eyes like a machine. Have I become a machine? What am I? Who am I?

When Ančka finally convinced me to sleep awhile, a Partisan fighter ran by us. Then another. Then another. They were fleeing.

“Run!” They yelled to us.

We were being attacked.

“Cowards!” Ančka yelled at them, picked up her gun, and started running in the other direction. “Attack! Attack!” she shouted as if she'd gone mad.

I follow her and also started to shout. I cannot stand my own voice when I shout. I jumped over the bushes and ran for life and death. I would rather die than flee. Other Partisan fighters raced after us, fighters who only seconds before had been fleeing.

I sit on the rock and look at the dead. Except for four, everyone from our unit survived. Have I become a machine?

“Where do you girls get your strength?”

Is that praise or something else? The courier came to tell us that it was time to move on.

—

How long has it been since I've seen a fire? I sit here in the warmth and wait for the soup in the kettle to be ready. In the past days, we've only eaten bark and our ten wounded fighters have died. Maybe I've already gone mad. I don't know where I still get my strength. But this isn't strength. It's rage and madness. An instant. Here and now. An instant where you have nothing to lose. You look your opponent in the eyes and you know: it's him or me. Him or me? Sometimes I want it to be me. I want everything to end.

I heard that they were saved, and she and Ančka become commandant and commissar of the battalion. I don't know which one is commandant and which commissar. It doesn't matter. I wonder if headquarters make this decision just to spite the men. But I heard she was alive. I'll speak to her when I see her since I have her brother with me.

The boy walks up and down by the fire, he salutes an unseen commandant and chants: “I am a Partisan. I am a Partisan.”

Poor little thing. He doesn't know what's waiting for him. But he's proud now. He can hardly wait to tell his older sister and brothers if he lives to see the day? I don't know but I'm more afraid for him than for myself.

Yesterday we attacked the castle where I worked before the war. The duke's family had long since left and moved to Italy. The library in the castle burned. I still have some of his books. He used to lend them to me and we'd discuss them. He said goodbye to me each day, told me to greet my family, and always comforted me that I would soon earn enough to travel across the ocean and find my father. A rather strange sort of comfort but it always made me feel better for a while.

The village priest came to have long talks with my mother and finally she relented. I was sent to the Aloisianum Collegium in Ljubljana. I cried most nights but when I confided in a schoolmate that I had no intention of becoming a priest, they sent me back to the village the next day. To a village where poverty and mistrust reigned. To a village where you can only arrive on foot and where a sad story lives in each and every house. To a village that lies on the shady side of the hill. To a village called Bogneča. If I understand the name correctly, that means the village that even god doesn't want. Or something like that.

But god? I have my own problems with god. He has only ever betrayed me. So I shall put him aside. Forever.

The man sat down. I admired him. Or perhaps not. I respected him. He had come back from Spain. He knows what war is and he knows what civil war is. He knows what it is when a brother looks in the eyes of his brother, and the two are enemies. He knows all of this but he doesn't want to talk about Spain.

"Forget it," he says each time I ask him.

"Forget it."

"I saw her," he said. "But you'll have to make more of an effort. She has many admirers."

I thought I would strangle him at that moment. But he just laughed at me. His wife is waiting for him in Ljubljana. And a child. What about them? Is he ever able to get a peaceful night's sleep?

I'll doze. Here by the fire. When was the last time I was warm? I cover the little boy with a blanket. He's already sleeping soundly, holding in his hand the cap with the red star. Good night! Nobody knows what will come tomorrow. Peace. Silence. Fear.

—

When Maria joined the Partisans, she was wearing a red skirt.

"Are you mad?" the party secretary scolded her. "You can be seen a kilometer away!"

Maria wept: "You're not my boss. I'm not in the Party. I ran, ran. I watched from the top of the hill as my house burned to the ground. My brother and sister and me. Everyone running in different directions. When we came home, father and mother were lying in front of the house, shot to death, and the three of us ran again. This red skirt. My mother sewed it for me on the first day of school."

We all looked at each other. I have to get her to safety. "I'm going to sleep at her place tonight," I said.

If anyone will be able to sleep at all.

I watch Maria. She used to live in the house next door. I envied her, it's true, and she knows that. I told her openly. A few months before the war started she returned with her family from America. She saw the sea. She sailed across the sea on a ship. The sea. Will I ever even see it, I wonder.

Maria sobs. I don't know what to say to her. That I admired her father? I remember how we went to him when the Italians and Germans occupied the town. For a while a German flag flew above city hall, for a while an Italian flag. They kept changing it. The town was filled

with swastikas and the high school was transformed into an Italian military hospital. They only let us use a few empty classrooms. The teacher of Italian and geography, who came from somewhere in Tuscany, said to us:

"Children, forget about politics. Knowledge of the Italian language and geography will serve you better. Forget politics. Just forget it."

In vain, he tried to teach us a little poem about a hen. There were only three verses. He finally despaired.

And then on December 1, there was the holiday for united Yugoslavia that is now forbidden. Everyone stood up and honored with a minute of silence the country that was still our homeland. Even the youngest in the school participated though they too knew it was forbidden. We were all sent home with the proviso that we could only return when we became members of the Fascist youth organization. We went to Maria's father. He listened and watched us and didn't talk for a long while. And then he said:

"You have to make your own decision."

The police occupied the school and we scattered to the winds.

And now her father is dead. What shall I tell Maria? That she still has me? Cold comfort.

—

I think winter is finally over. There is a strange calm recently. The peasants in the village gave us Easter eggs, ham, and cake.

"We've had all the food blessed by a priest," they assured us.

We made our way down to the stream, shaved, cut our hair, and slept.

"Tanks are coming toward the Kolpa River," a little boy from the village came running to tell us. He waves his hands. I used to go to school with his sister. Some of us make our way to the top of a hill. Tanks, trucks filled with armed soldiers, jeeps, motorcycles. We destroyed the bridge the day before. Something's moving in the water.

"They're ours," says the gunner.

I take his binoculars. People on horses are trying to cross the river. One man with a beard dismounts his horse and helps another who is sinking. They are ours and the river is deceptive. I see her. She is speaking to her horse, caressing it, urging it on. The river bottom disappears beneath her feet but she still doesn't let go of her horse. She must be mad. Later she lies limp on the bank. We run to help.

"Comrade, take my blanket," I say, and wrap it around her.

"I couldn't save him," she whispered. "I couldn't."

Her lips were blue. "He's saved my life so many times."

"It was only a horse," I comfort her, though I know the value of a horse these days. I would give my life for a horse. I hold her close to me.

Calm, be calm. She lies by the fire. She sleeps. Her little brother clings to her. He doesn't leave her. He tells her of all his heroic deeds and she sleeps.

And Maria? All desperate, she speaks of her red skirt. The river took it away. "Mother, mother," she says. "Mother sewed it. The river took it away. My red skirt."

We won't tell her now that her brother was saved and her sister was taken by the Germans. They shot her by the well in the vineyard. If the war ever ends, I'll buy her a new red skirt.

—

It's winter. Another winter. Winter again. Already during the first winter, I said I couldn't survive another one. Now it's the fourth. And I really won't survive this one. Murmurs run through the brigades. Someone always has new stories.

"They say he had a unit of gypsies killed just because they were late," Katja whispers to me as we squat behind the bushes doing our business. "It's true. Marko told me."

"Be quiet. You know the kind of things they say about Dušan. Don't believe everything you hear."

"I think it's time to trust your intuition. You always have the right feeling about people. Don't forget that."

They sent Dušan to replace our commandant until he gets back from Vis. Nobody actually knows he's in Vis. It's hard to wait for him and even harder to take this replacement. This Dušan. He's course and arrogant. I fear for the boys, that they'll turn against him. Not long ago I wanted to just shoot him. Well, not shoot him. I don't know what I want to do to him. Even now I see the crying children, the silent women and men, the old man cursing him at the top of his lungs. He just pushed them to the ground. We went through the village from which we had chased the White Guard out. How they ran. I even spotted my cousin among them. At least I think it was him. They were so funny.

"Why are you laughing," asked Ančka curiously.

"Next time."

The villagers greet us and suddenly I hear screaming. A woman with a black scarf on her head rushes forward and pulls a chicken from the hands of one of our men.

"Have you gone mad?" I yell at him.

"Not me, that new commandant," says a young Partisan, all red in the face. "He ordered us to go through the houses and get food."

"Are you mad?" I turn to Dušan. "Now in the middle of winter. They always give us what they have to give."

"Shut up," he yells, and I look at the gun in his hand. He probably did kill that unit of gypsies, I think.

I look at a peasant who is guiding a cart pulled by oxen. And another peasant and another cart. And another. People wordlessly load food onto the carts. Flour. Pieces of dried meat. Chickens. Lard. A barrel of wine.

"At least leave them something," I say. He doesn't even look at me. I turn and slowly walk away. How many others like Dušan are among us, I wonder. Winter. And another winter. This one the worst. And the villagers?

—

"Ivan betrayed us." I hear it over and over again. Ivan? Betrayed? Ivan was caught, tortured, and locked up. His young son and wife were also in jail. They threatened to torture his little boy. And his wife. Ivan supposedly talked and then they killed him. Nobody knows where they dumped the corpse. Ivan? Betrayed us?

I put on my uniform, borrowed a pair of pants from a peasant, and with heavy heart set out to see Ivan's wife. I stood for a long time in front of the house before quietly knocking on the kitchen window. Quietly, quietly, I call her in a whisper. So the neighbors won't hear.

"Open up. It's me."

I embrace her. I look at the little sleeping boy.

"He looks like Ivan," I say awkwardly. Could you think of anything more stupid to say than that he looks like Ivan? I am a fool.

"I don't have a name anymore. Now they just call me the traitor's wife."

"Stop," I stammer. "We don't call you that. We want to help you but we can't. You know what limited power we have. But I can get you into liberated Črnomelj,"

"How will they look at us there?"

She stares at the floor.

Yes. How will they look at her? This damned war. The things it is doing to us. Ivan, a traitor. I don't know. It's hard to imagine. I know that the whole brigade believes he's a traitor. I don't know. I have no child. I have no wife. I don't know what I would do if they brought my youngest sister in front of me and threatened to torture her if I didn't open



my mouth. I don't know. Actually I do know that I would do anything I could to save her. I know that I would go straight to the devil on my knees just to keep something bad from happening to her. I slowly return to the brigade. Through the dark forest where Ivan was captured. Through that terrible forest where just a few days ago we ran for life and death. A sleeping child and a lost wife. I have to do it. I have to get them to liberated territory. I don't care what other people say. I'll speak to them. Remember that they are only human, I'll say. Are any of us human anymore? We are slowly becoming beasts. And she? She's alone. So very alone.

—

There were more than five hundred of us. They come from Ljubljana and brought greetings from Bosnia, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro. Božo, a Montenegrin, was excited. I can't forget actually why he came and I am too embarrassed to ask again. I look at him happily embracing all of his comrades. We are like children on Christmas.

"Look, my schoolmate has come. They threw us out when we came to school wearing red stars on our coats. Now my sister and I serve together in the brigades. She got sick with typhus and became a teacher in the divisional Party school."

Tears of happiness and relief and suffering. When will this be over? And what next? Party school? Life? Mother of god.

We listen to delegates from other parts of the country. We listen to stories about victories, losses, burnt villages, destroyed bridges. We listen to stories about massacres, about heroism, about the dead, about people hiding with children and wounded in caves high in the mountains. We hear stories about the promised help of the allies and about millions of dead Russians. But now the Red Army is in Poland and the Americans in France. France, my French teacher. Will I ever see Paris? Millions of Jews. I listen. The sea. I'll go to the sea.

I was only in the cinema once before the war. Secretly. I was afraid to tell at home. My father would surely have lectured me and reproached me for my laziness. The cinema. It was magical. I could just sit there and watch. Even the empty screen. And now it seems that I am watching a film again. What film? Whose? Who directed it? How will it end? And when will it end? I watch us, how we sit beneath the tree, far from any settlements, ragged and hungry and stiff. Marked for all of our lives. Not one

among us has any idea what will happen and almost each of us has worries about our families. We've heard nothing from them for months and months. We count our living friends and cling madly to each tiny morsel of news, most of which is old and obsolete. But we treat it as if it were fresh and true.

I watch how attentively he listens. And nods. What is he thinking about? He says nothing about Bosnia. I can get nothing out of him. Nothing at all. And the others who came with him are silent about their long journey. What happened to them? But he's a good commandant. Almost too courageous at times.

"You know, I have nothing to lose," he once told me after a battle. "I'd rather lose my own life than bow down to anyone again." To whom did he bow down before? I listen. Though am I really listening? Suddenly, in front of my eyes, I see my teachers from the high school. Slowly, slowly, I put their stories together and now begin to understand what they were trying to tell us. Back then, we often felt pushed to the side, because they sent teachers from all over Slovenia to our school, those who were not politically reliable. Through them some of us gained access to forbidden leftist literature. Not only some of us. Most of us. Now, here in this forest, I look at those high school stories as happiness. Was it happiness? A happy coincidence? But there are no coincidences.

"Tito and Party! Tito and Party!" Mara grabs my hand.

"Lift your hand," she shouts at me.

"Why?"

"People are asking who will enter the Party," she says, pulling up my hand up. "Of course, you will,"

And Maria? She's probably doing the same thing somewhere in Bosnia and yelling: "Tito and Party!" If only she were here. I close my eyes and see the faces of the high school teachers nodding. Some are smiling as if to say: now you understand.

I lift my other hand and say: "Tito and Party!" I hate the sound of my voice when I shout. I watch them. They're all standing up and singing *Hey Brigades!* I can't hold back my tears. I stare at the ground. Janez plays the accordion.

—

I received a letter. Lovely. From Maria. I don't know how long it took the letter to get to me.

"Freedom" she writes. "Belgrade is ours. If you saw what I saw, saw how the people greeted us when we come to the city. Embraced us. Showered us with flowers. All of

Belgrade was on its feet. City dwellers grabbed us from all sides. Where are you from, they asked. From Slovenia. Have you seen my Jovan? My Rade? How they rushed to me, those asking women, those mothers and wives. I cannot find words to describe all of this. Do you know how beautiful it is to be free? You forget all the suffering. At least for the time being. And Slovenia will be free very soon. I want to hug you. Now it's high time we go to the sea. There is so much I want to do, so much I have to tell you. Beautiful things. You know I fell in love. Very much in love."

Maria. I just keep reading her letter. Maria's in love. Maria's happy. I see her smiling. I am happy for her.

And him? Only yesterday was I allowed to visit him. He said nothing. He looked into my eyes for a long time. I searched for words. I didn't find them. After three hours they told me I had to go. They said he was tired. Tired. I held his hand.

"It makes no sense," he whispered.

What should I say to him? That it does. That it's worth living. That the life we've experienced is not real life. That real life is a shiny wonderful thing. That's what I should tell him? That Maria says freedom is beautiful. Freedom, beauty. How many lives have been lost for this freedom. After all that blood, all that fire, that solitude, now beauty comes? We found a dead Partisan fighter recently, a woman. Cut up. With a five-pointed star cut into her belly. We buried her. Ivan sang softly at her grave. Life. I'll never know who she was. Where she was from. Her people.

I can no longer hold a gun in my hands. I simply cannot. I have become a political advisor to the military council. So I have advanced. But where have we come to that I should be an advisor? Politics. Once I would have said: "Let god have mercy on us." Now I am silent all the time. I am silent when they send me from brigade to brigade, from battle to battle. I don't want to shoot. I don't want to see any more death. I teach. I teach Marxism. I don't even remember if I finished reading *Das Kapital*.

"Hold on a little longer. Just a little longer." That's what I have been saying to myself ever since I received Maria's dreamy letter. Though it doesn't help much. I was on liberated territory for a couple of days. I almost envied myself. I went to the theatre, slept in, washed. And I danced. All evening. I met my brother Franci. He was in a bad mood. He wouldn't allow me to be happy to see him and he killed my joy of dancing.

"You know, they summoned me to be a judge. Quickly, they said. They'd caught eighty White Guard. When we came to Lojze's, none were left. None of ours, none of the Whites. In vain I asked around. I'm still asking. The hell with all of them!"

Franc, Maria, people are disappearing, our people and the White Guard. Silence. Freedom is coming. Freedom. And he? Is he dying?

—

They woke us at the crack of dawn. Everyone is running. Back and forth. At five in the morning, we had to shave and comb our hair. I got a new pair of pajamas and a rucksack into which the nurse Vida put my things. My things? Funny, since I have nothing. A Russian medal, a cap with a red star, a few letters. Her last letter.

"They're sending me to Herzegovina. Ančka too. We're going to teach. We're training new political cadres. Just think, Ančka and me. And Maria was there. She is happy. In love. Hugs. When will we see each other? I am always with you and always will be. It doesn't matter where you are. It doesn't matter what you decide."

I read the letter. Again and again. She should forget me. What would she do with me? And what will I do with myself? She wrote to me with a bad conscience. She danced one evening. I cannot live without her. I love her too much and she understands me too much. I don't even need to open my mouth. I miss our silence.

"You look nice," Vida pats me on the cheeks. She's confused. She treats me like a child. Even worse.

"Where are they sending us? Why this hysteria all morning? Are we preparing a new offensive?"

"They're sending you on a journey. On a long safe journey."

"That letter. Put that letter into my rucksack."

She smiled at me.

"It's been a long time. A long time."

Is this kind nurse full of malice or what? What is she trying to tell me? It hasn't been a long time. She hasn't been here a long time. What is she saying to me? I have been unkind to her. I think only of myself, only of my pain.

They put the one without legs onto a stretcher and then blindfold all of us. Darkness again and the unknown. This endless dependence on others. Where are they taking us? To the banks below. They uncover our eyes. They load us onto trucks.



“To safety, to another place.” I hear the doctor Bogdan speaking.

“Will you tell her?” I ask him.

“Don’t worry. Stay well and have a safe journey.”

I will never forget how he squeezed my hand.

We drive on. Quiet shivering in the truck. A cargo of desperation.

They put us on a plane. An American plane. Italy. Bari. We lie on stretchers on the beach. Sea, sun, bay. A lost bay. Or a forgotten one?

—

I saw the sea without Maria. It was more beautiful than I imagined it, more beautiful than in my dreams. But it was empty without her. Without Maria, the sea could not be the sea. Will freedom be freedom without Maria? Without Ančka, without Mara, without my brother, without my parents, without ... him? Will I also be alone in freedom? They said that the Americans are taking the seriously wounded to Italy. On planes. Across the sea. Him too. He wrote me a letter. They’ve taught him to walk with crutches and now he is waiting for a prosthetic limb. Can he bear it? I’m afraid that one day he won’t be able to bear it anymore.

“I won’t return,” he writes. “When I learn to walk, I’m going to go all the way. To America. It is closer from here, from Italy. And easier. I’m going to look for my father. Don’t wait for me. If they talk about me, if they say I am a traitor, at least you know it is not true.”

And the last words: “Don’t forget me. Wait. Soon, soon, I will come back. I will fight again. I send greetings to my people, to yours, to the brigade. Tell them that I will be back soon, really soon. Nobody writes to me. I was right when I said that a man is quickly forgotten. Right away, in fact, once he is no longer of use.”

Pious words course through my mind. I am angry with myself. Pious words and parishioners, the catechism teacher in school and his words that were even sharper than the willow switch he always held in his hand. I remember gathering kindling with my younger brothers in the forest and then selling it to buy paints for our Easter eggs. I teach Marxism here in Gorski Kotar and am haunted by their piety. Like a fanatic. Like a true parishioner. I look at the sea, all the way to the horizon, and I plead, I ceaselessly plead for this story to have a happy ending. Happy for him, for our people, for all of us. Plea and pray. The end is near now. Freedom is near.





# MIKLAVŽ KOMELJ

TRANSLATED BY RAWLEY GRAU

## ON THE POETIC METHODS OF TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN'S RECENT POETRY

*For the poet on his sixty-sixth birthday*

1.  
“The word departed from the flesh,” writes Tomaž Šalamun in a poem in *The Blue Tower*.<sup>1</sup> Is he speaking about his own word? The condition of his own poetic speech? The condition of language per se? Or the condition of the world?

Over the past ten years Šalamun has been writing quite pointedly about a particular condition of poetic language—a condition that seems to extend “past the end,” after a certain departure, a certain farewell. *The Book for My Brother* (1997)<sup>2</sup> takes as its epigraph Mandelstam's lines about a racehorse that “is lying in a lather, in the dust, snorting, / but the tight arch of his neck recalls / the stretched legs racing, / not just the four of them / but as many as the stones on the road / coming alive by fours / at each bound of the fiery pacer.” The quotation begins with the line: “The sound is still ringing, though what has caused it has gone.”<sup>3</sup> And in the books that follow this same feeling recurs and grows in various ways, right up to what is possibly Šalamun's most radical self-problematization,

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1 “Perzija,” *Sinji stolp* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2007), 39; translated by Michael Biggins with the author as “Persia” in Tomaž Šalamun, *The Blue Tower* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). The present essay first appeared as the afterword to the original Slovene publication of *The Blue Tower*: Miklavž Komelj, “O pesniških postopkih v novejši poeziji Tomaža Šalamuna,” in Tomaž Šalamun, *Sinji stolp*, 99–150.

2 Dates in parentheses refer to the original Slovene publication. — *Tr.*

3 *Knjiga za mojega brata* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1997), 5. The lines come from the poem “He Who Finds a Horseshoe” [“Nashedshiy podkovu”] (here presented in Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin's translation from Osip Mandelstam, *Selected Poems* [New York: Penguin, 1977], 73 — *Tr.*).

in the poem “In the Abulafia Clutches,” in *From There* [*Od tam*] (2003). Right up to the poem entitled “Poem,” in *The Chariot of the Sun* [*Sončni voz*] (2005), which concludes with the lines: “My poetry is no longer credible, / not for a long time. // It rots from the sheer glowing.”<sup>4</sup>

In Šalamun's poetry, however, “rotting” is hardly a disqualification. Rather, if we trace this conceptual register, which he often makes reference to, it seems to allude to one of the essential stages of alchemical transformation—*putrefactio*. As far back as the “programmatic” opening poem of his first book, *Poker* (1966), Šalamun romantically elevated the decomposing “coat of carrion” into an emblem of his own poetry, and did so without the least bit of mysticism. If in that early poem the rotting served to distinguish the poet's solitude from the image of his tribe, it now appears to have more to do with the chance that the poet might not succeed in his struggle not to end up as gilding—to borrow an image from another poem in *The Blue Tower*.<sup>5</sup> If in his poetry Šalamun understands rotting as part of the alchemical process of transformation, then gold and decay now seem to have become, in a way, identical: gilding is the same as decay, and vice versa. But this in no way resolves the problem of the poet's solitude: indeed, what if it only creates a much more terrible solitude? (In “The Shepherd,” from *The Measure of Time*, Šalamun radically evokes a solitude that exists apart from activity and experience: “They all had their moment except me: my pleasures, // my piping, my valley.”<sup>6</sup>) The problem of solitude must be posed *à la* Pasolini: What if true solitude is something that is not considered solitude?

(If Šalamun's earliest poems were felt immediately as a genuine earthquake in the history of Slovene poetry, this was in large measure due to a certain time lag in Slovene culture, which in its inertia had not yet come to terms with the modernist breakthrough in art. Poems that, structurally, were hardly radical in the overall European context of the time struck Slovene culture as nothing less than revolutionary—which was particularly curious given the

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4 “Pesem,” *Sončni voz* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2005), 27; translated by Thomas Kane with the author as “Poem,” in Tomaž Šalamun, *There's the Hand and There's the Arid Chair* (Denver: Counterpath, 2009), 96.

5 In “White Hash, Black Weed,” we find the lines: “I'm fighting with Primož's prediction that / I'll end as gilding ...”

6 “Pastir,” *Mera časa* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1987), 5.

fact that, while Šalamun's work was seen as an assault on tradition, he was the one who brought into Slovene poetry elements of the global cultural tradition that had previously been impermissible. In today's Slovene culture, however, Šalamun's new poetic language, as it attempts to inhabit spaces that have always been silent, is received, or not received, as a kind of inertia. In Slovenia his books appear, one after the other, almost without notice.)

One of Šalamun's most recent poems concludes: “I am dying of gold.” (This almost seems like a response to the poem Jure Detela dedicated to Šalamun, which ends with the lines: “May your gold / never / from this world / blacken. / Falcon.” If we read Detela's poem closely, we see that the reason why this gold does not blacken is because of its “black call.”<sup>7</sup>)

Šalamun's lines about rotting “from sheer glowing” recall two lines from one of Pasolini's early poems on the Passion of Christ: “The sky behind / rots in light.” Šalamun's verse about the word departing from the flesh also suggests a religious context: it inverts the well-known statement about Christ's incarnation in the first chapter of the Gospel of John: “The Word became flesh.” (Šalamun's poetry has for decades contained scores of allusions to religion and mysticism, as well as much deliberate flirtation with religious kitsch.) The religious connotation is here further confirmed by the line that follows: “The word departed from the flesh and / became the fruit of Nicodemus”—which also points to the fact that, despite taking leave of the flesh, the word has lost none of its sensuality, which has simply been transformed into the sweet “paradisal” sensuality of fruit.

But if the word has departed from the flesh, then where is the poem? Does the poem stand only on the side of the word (“An etching, a beautiful white etching, you're devoid of people, / devoid of bodies”<sup>8</sup>), or does it stand with the flesh as well? Whose side is it on? Or does it remain on both sides even after the word has departed from the flesh? Or does this departure create a gap between the word and the flesh that is the space of the poem? The flesh, abandoned by the word, decomposes ...

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7 Jure Detela, “Vidim tvoje možgane, Tomaž” [“I see your brains, Tomaž”], *Zemljevidi* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1978), 66–69.

8 The opening line of the poem “At Baroness Beatrice Monti della Corte von Rezzori's” [“Pri baronessi Beatrice Monti della Corte von Rezzori”], in *The Blue Tower*.

Šalamun’s poetry boasts a fair amount of decomposing flesh: in “The Walk,” from the collection *Ambergris*, “The corpses of God’s flesh / pour down your throat, and you clean them. Thank you”;<sup>9</sup> in “Chiunque giunge le mani,” the last poem in *The Blue Tower*, “the arm rots.” I mention this line especially because, from *Poker* on, images of the human arm and hand, brimming with intense meaning, occur over and over in Šalamun’s poetry. Indeed, in the very first poem of *The Blue Tower* we find the line: “I’ll show your hand, my hand is your hand”<sup>10</sup>—which makes the rotting arm of the book’s last poem all the more agonizing. Between these two images, we encounter another image: “a hand leaving its gesture.”<sup>11</sup> (On an entirely personal note: some ten years ago I dreamed that Tomaž Šalamun was saying to me, “Everything I write is simply so I can move my arm in the shoulder socket.”) Also this: “Mangle your hands. / Die them in a stork, so that / the golden gray gushes.”<sup>12</sup> Again we see an allusion to alchemy (along with Šalamun’s characteristic transitive use of an intransitive verb, “die”—a technique symptomatic of his transformative tendency to achieve “total conductivity”). “The golden gray”—a gray that enters the poem as the color of a stork and underscores a beginning’s openness to gold; a gray that is the color of indeterminacy, containing countless possibilities (compare Paul Klee’s comment about “the gray point,” or Rosa Luxemburg’s wonderful passage about the color gray in one of her letters)—such possibilities emerge from what had seemed a completion, the final stage of the process.

If Šalamun’s poems speak of a state “past the end,” he evokes it in the conviction that only now and only here is a true beginning possible. Šalamun’s inventiveness with language has, indeed, never been more dynamic than in his most recent books. But in this dynamism there is also a monotone quality, which the poet makes no attempt to hide. It is as if this ecstasy resulted from spinning endlessly in a circle, like the whirling dervishes—a religious order, incidentally, that was founded by the mystic Rumi, one of Šalamun’s favorite poets. In the recent books we find

the convergence of extreme dynamism and extreme stasis, as the poet makes ever more surprising connections between words (consider the very first line of *The Blue Tower*: “To provoke the pasture’s ladder, to wash out the cat’s message”), and it even looks as if, in the book’s last poem, he is trying to do something analogous to the transrational (*zaum*) poetry of the Russian Futurists. But emphatic unpredictability (which in “Title Still Pending” [“Naslov še čaka”] becomes thematic: “I scrub three ribs / and get stuck”<sup>13</sup>) can itself feel predictable—as repetition, sometimes even as a set format: the endless repeating of the unrepeatable, or the unrepeatability of endless repeating. But it would seem that the singularity of Šalamun’s poetic stance consists precisely in allowing this repeating with all its consequences. (In *The Blue Tower*, Šalamun draws a clear connection between his poetic language and birdsong: “A bird flickers like lightning and // sings like lightning. / Copying its divine gift.”<sup>14</sup>) For the poet, however, this means not recoiling from the consequences of “rotting.” It means looking without flinching at “rotting from sheer glowing,” even as he hopes that extreme inertia can be transformed into extreme intensity, although there is also the risk that extreme intensity can turn into extreme inertia. It seems that the intensity of Šalamun’s language lies precisely in the endless insistence of its pulsation.

(... you must go on, I can’t go on, you must go on,  
I’ll go on, you must say words, as long as there are  
any, until they find me, until they say me, strange  
pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it’s done  
already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps  
they have carried me to the threshold of my story,  
before the door that opens on my own story, that  
would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be  
the silence, where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know,  
in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t  
go on, I’ll go on. — Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*<sup>15</sup>)

13 Also in *The Blue Tower*. The phrase translated as “and get stuck” (“in ne vem naprej”) might be more literally rendered as “and I don’t know how to go forward.” — Tr.

14 “The Slave” [“Suženj”].

15 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels: Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 414.

As we read these poems, we seem to be listening to an inner monologue delivered in a *hypnagogic* state, a profoundly intimate kind of speech—which might also be understood as the endlessly repeated sound of someone knocking on a door that isn’t there (as in the poem “Waiting on Šaranovič Street” [“Čakal sem na Šaranovičevi”]<sup>16</sup>).

2. In “Title Still Pending,” Šalamun describes his speech as follows: “I palaksh around like some gypsy.” The neologism “to palaksh” (in Slovene, *palakšariti*) comes from *Pallaksch*, a word that was emblematic of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin’s way of speaking during his confinement in a tower in Tübingen. (This same word is used by Paul Celan in a poem dedicated to Hölderlin, and Celan’s name, moreover, appears in the title of another poem in *The Blue Tower*, where it is in fact linked to a tower: “La Torre, Celan.” We might, then, possibly understand the book’s title, *The Blue Tower*, as alluding to “palakshing,” although the phrase is also taken from a letter by the poet Kevin Holden.<sup>17</sup>) Hölderlin, who had rejected almost completely all forms of communication during this period in his life, would respond to visitors’ questions by using a different kind of speech logic, the logic of indeterminacy, which eluded any attempt to define it as affirmation or negation.

But Šalamun’s position can hardly be compared to Hölderlin’s. If the German poet withdrew into the solitude of his tower in a state of dramatic disharmony with the world, then the solitude of Šalamun’s “tower” appears, rather, to be the result of the poet having been *too greatly accepted* by the world. (Excessive acceptance, too, can provoke feelings of anxiety and alienation. The penultimate poem of *The Blue Tower* ends with lines that resemble something from a surrealist film: “I want up on the gallows. / I’m approached by a gentleman who / also wants up on the gallows. // I’ve been approached by ladies who had the most beautiful / hands in this or that city. / When did I miss their descent?”<sup>18</sup>) *The Blue Tower*, in fact, was written in the elitist milieu of the Santa Maddalena

16 In *The Blue Tower*.

17 Published as a poem, “Letter From Kevin Holden” [“Pismo Kevinu Holdena”], in *The Blue Tower*.

18 “Reminding Mankind of Yourself With a Whip” [“Z bičem opomniti človeštvo nase”].

Foundation in Tuscany, where the poet was the guest of the Baroness Beatrice Monti della Corte von Rezzori; his stay here can be interpreted as the frame of reference for the entire book. It is as if we suddenly found ourselves in a Luis Buñuel film. Even the book’s title can be understood as an allusion to this setting (and we should notice that the book contains the line, “The tower ignited, the tower was almost blown to bits.”<sup>19</sup>) Does Šalamun participate fully in the social rituals of this milieu, or is he merely—to paraphrase Khlebnikov—a butterfly that has fluttered in through the window?

The thematization of this anachronistic (and far from appealing) world and all its bizarreness can, however, also be understood in expressly symbolic terms: as Šalamun’s declaration of a certain aristocratic stance in poetry. I do not mean this in the sense of a particular social class, or that the poet identifies with the aristocracy (although these poems do not conceal his fascination with this world, despite the ambivalent line, “Manure smells of nobility, not a stable”;<sup>20</sup> still, the poem “Breakfast with My Hostess in Alderborough,” for instance, begins: “A pig went to a trough, / ate three silent birches, and that’s supposed to be kind?,” which is followed by the reply: “It is”). Rather, I am referring to a style of writing that does not attempt to be communicative but rather seeks to be something that cannot be made into a commodity. (It was in this sense that the leftist Pasolini, late in his career, declared himself in favor of the “aristocratic” stance in art; for him, this stance meant resistance to the vulgar utilitarianism of late capitalism: consider, for instance, his line, “In defiance, I am familiar with, and by now want, the uselessness of every word.”<sup>21</sup>) A gesture in Šalamun’s poem “Strange Dreams” is emblematic: the poet aims his flashlight at the stars. In *The Blue Tower*, then, could the elitist aristocracy be an emblem for the aristocratic stance, just as Fernando Pessoa needed the bizarre persona of the Baron de Teive to express some of the things he wanted to say? And if the eccentric world of the baroness really is such an emblem, then Šalamun’s choice of this emblem must also serve as a form of (self-)problematization; this bored/ecstatic

19 “Pleasure” [“Slast”].

20 “Reminding Mankind of Yourself With a Whip.”

21 “Il Gracco,” from *Trasumanar e organizzar* (1971), in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*, vol. 2 (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), 903.



world—as it is presented in *The Blue Tower*—is actually, even in its ecstasy (and especially in its ecstasy), utterly banal.

The title of the book mischievously combines two emblems from an “aristocratic” poetics that goes back to romanticism and symbolism: “the blue flower” and “the ivory tower.” Indeed, in one of the poems we find the words: “A flower blooms for itself”<sup>22</sup>—which can be understood, too, as a reference to Angelus Silesius’s famous distich about the rose (and to the title of one of Celan’s books; although we can also understand this flower as “The Flower Without Support” from *Ambergris*—this poem ends with the lines, “I eat from under you only / the bread of the building you travel through / internalized”). But a curious paradox is at work in Šalamun’s poetry, for in its emphatic rejection of vulgar communicativity, in the difficulty of its alogism and the absence of any flirtation with popular taste, there burns a truly irrepressible desire for contact, intense contact with the reader, to cast a spell over the reader, as if this alogism was the very thing that made direct contact possible, as if the poet was using it as a genuine incantation to bring the reader into a relationship of transference. In this poetry, the aristocratic stance is joined with a truly obsessive desire for acceptance. (It is interesting, by the way, that Šalamun’s poetry, which when read in the original Slovene seems to rely on wholly unpredictable linguistic means for its effect, has in fact achieved its greatest impact internationally, through translation.) It often seems that the poet is asking for love in these poems, as if we could read in them the statement Leon Battista Alberti formulated as “*Leggetemi e amatevi*” (“Read me and love me”).<sup>23</sup> Sometimes we can even detect an undertone of actual begging, which is only compounded when the poet compares himself with a dog: “I hear the paws of Teddy, the black dog, as they / echo off the grass like a carpet. / He also loves and desires attention.”<sup>24</sup>

If Šalamun aims at “unreadability” (and he writes in a poem in *From There*: “The poem must / resist intelligence like a goalie”<sup>25</sup>), then to create this “unreadability” he must have a reader—someone the poet can, by disorienting him and taking away all rational supports, place before a new set of coordinates for the act of reading per se. At the same time, this “rational” logic can, ironically, serve him as an argument: the reader might know how to escape from the poet’s baskets, but he can’t escape from five baskets all at once, to borrow another line from *The Blue Tower*.<sup>26</sup> (In Šalamun’s poetry, the following is always important: the suggestiveness of his language lures the reader into an intense identification with it, which can suck him in with an extraordinary force—Šalamun has said that language is the most dangerous drug. But almost always, there is a point at which identification becomes impossible, which keeps the reader at bay and compels him to reflection. What is more, something that is impossible to identify with may emerge out of the very intensity of the identification.) The question that is raised with these poems, then, concerns the nature of this “unreadability.”

Are we dealing with language at extreme tension, with pushing the boundaries of language, in which the signs on the paper, beyond sense or nonsense, begin to move, to live their own unfathomable life? Begin, indeed, to elbow their way through apparent nonsense into a higher sense? (Thus Pasolini, when he was working on his last novel, *Petrolio*, wished, beyond any readability, to cover the pages with signs that would look like “*qualcosa di scritto*”—“some sort of writing”; thus Artaud said of one of his last works that it was a book deliberately written to be impossible to read: “All true language is incomprehensible.”)

In the penultimate poem of *The Blue Tower*, “Reminding Mankind of Yourself With a Whip,” we read: “My pages are all over the place, with / ants walking on them.” Or perhaps this “unreadability” has to do with a kind of evasion? Head-spinning convolutions while saying things that are actually banal? Is such language a case of extremely rigorous precision, or surrender to inertia? Is this radicalization or escapism? Is this a language that goes places language has never been before, or regression into

an illusion about the “primordial state” of language? To put it bluntly, is this an entirely impersonal retreat from “the rational order of things” into a visionary eavesdropping on outer-space explosions, or purely personal eccentricity and caprice?

Does the poetic language in *The Blue Tower* inhabit spaces newly opened as it radically pushes its way through the impossible? Or is this a hedonistic record of kaleidoscopically reworked impressions from the poet’s stay in Tuscany, which, linked to the bubbling of interesting personal reminiscences and anecdotes no less than lucid art-historical observations, overflow in a excitingly delirious semiconscious haze? Is the poet’s “alogism” a kind of “higher math” of language, a stance of resistance against the vulgarity of time in order to safeguard something uncommodifiable? Or does it signify the dissolution of meaning in the inertia of universal commodifiability, where in the same euphoric breath one can mention the death of Celan and “slow food”?

These questions, bluntly posed, are in no way rhetorical. I ask them not because I have some well-prepared answer to offer, but because, as a reader, I find them genuinely exciting. What is more, I think that this indeterminacy is exactly what the structure of these poems is playing with—and often even makes an explicit theme. It is absolutely necessary, then, that we attempt to speak about Šalamun’s poetic methods in somewhat more definitive terms.

To be sure, Šalamun has said in various interviews that he does not follow any particular methods in his writing, as if it was all about simply surrendering to the showering force of language, a sort of “jumping into the mouth of God.” But such statements (which have often caused the poet’s interpreters no little confusion) should not be taken as ingenuous. On the contrary, I believe that Šalamun’s is one of the most carefully considered, if not calculated, positions in Slovene poetry. The book *With Archilochus through the Cyclades* [Z *Arhilohom po Kikladih*] (2004) ends, significantly, with the line, “Maybe I know what I’m doing.”<sup>27</sup> In “The Hunter,” from *The Measure of Time*,

Šalamun writes: “Ecstasy is a precise gait.”<sup>28</sup> If Šalamun underscores indeterminacy and ignorance with regard to his own methods (“I don’t know what a word is”<sup>29</sup>), he can do this because he trusts in the precision of his instrument. Ultimately, he trusts in the readability of the unreadable with all its consequences, no matter how painful. The last line in “The Flight Into the Land of Egypt” [“Beg v Egiptet”] reads: “What hurts comes to the light of day on its own.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3.

The poem “In the Morning,” in *The Chariot of the Sun*, ends with the verse, “All my life I’ve been counting the tigers of teeth.”<sup>31</sup> I mention this line as a very simple example that will allow us to formulate a few basic principles as we examine the complex question of “alogism” in Šalamun’s recent work.

The “alogical” aspect in the structure of this sentence—let’s call it *Sentence A*—derives from its relationship to the “logically” structured sentence, “All my life I’ve been counting the teeth of tigers”—which we can call *Sentence A’*: the first sentence inverts something in the second one. Though not expressed, *Sentence A’* is indirectly evoked as the basis for understanding the “alogism” of *Sentence A* as an inversion of logic (thus identifying that logic by which—or with regard to which—this “alogism” is alogical).

Interestingly, Spinoza mentions this sort of inversion, which appears fairly often in speech as “slips of the tongue,” in a surprising context: in the scholium to Proposition 47 in Part 2 of the *Ethics*. In this proposition, Spinoza asserts that the human mind possesses an “adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God”; in the scholium, however, he argues that even something that seems an error in human expression is actually not a mistake, for the mistake resides solely in the expression itself and not in the mind of the one who has expressed himself in error. The mistake, then, is a mistake only in the expression’s inadequacy to what was intended to be said;

22 “Diran Adebayo.”

23 Thus the architect, poet, and cryptographer Alberti (1404–1472) concluded the Prologue to his book on family life, *I libri della famiglia*.

24 “The Slave.”

25 “Martirij praske” [“The Martyrdom of a Scratch”], *Od tam* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2003), 152.

26 “Where Is the Little Wall From” [“Od kod je zidec”].

28 “Lovec”, *Mera časa*, 6; translated by Michael Biggins, in Tomaž Šalamun, *The Four Questions of Melancholy* (Fredonia, N.Y.: White Pine Press, 1997), 189.

29 From “We Build a Barn and Read Reader’s Digest” [“Skedenj gradiva in prebirava Reader’s Digest”] in *The Blue Tower*.

30 In *The Blue Tower*.

31 “Vse življenje štejem zobem tigre,” in “Zjutraj,” *Sončni voz*, 22.

it is a mistake only in so far as we are unable to see directly into the minds of those who seem to be mistaken. Spinoza says that he once heard a man exclaim that “his hall had flown into his neighbor’s hen”; the man, he stresses, was not mistaken since it was clear enough what he meant to say.<sup>32</sup> (If “My hall has flown into my neighbor’s hen” is Sentence A, then Sentence A´ is “My neighbor’s hen has flown into my hall.”) We might add that it is no accident that Spinoza cites this kind of example; inverted sentences of this sort were very popular in the baroque period, and coming up with them showed a kind of wit. For instance, there was a popular poem making the rounds in the German-speaking lands in the seventeenth century in a vividly illustrated leaflet (the Slovene polymath J. V. Valvasor had one in his collection). Entitled *Die widersinnige Welt* [*The Nonsensical World*], it was composed entirely of such inversions: a village sat in a farmer, who liked eating his spoon with milk; his corner had four houses; his milk was made from cheese; he put the oven in the bread; there was a yard lying in his hay; the stable stood in the horse; and so on.

But there is an essential difference between Šalamun counting the tigers of teeth and Spinoza’s exclaiming neighbor. Šalamun’s “alogical” inversion in Sentence A is established as alogical by its relationship to Sentence A´, but this hardly implies that A´ is the explanation of A: here, unlike Spinoza’s example, Sentence A´ does not supply the thought intended by Sentence A (that is, it’s not about having to invert the “anti-sense” of the nonsensical world to get a world of sense, as one does when reading the seventeenth-century German leaflet). Quite the contrary: in Šalamun, Sentence A acquires its sole “literal” sense precisely by removing the logical basis, by turning the sense inside out, by the “alogical” inversion that creates the sentence—an inversion that simultaneously underscores the self-referentiality of the statement in the sentence. For the action stated by the sentence “All my life I’ve been counting the tigers of teeth” is in fact contained in the utterance itself, in the inversion. The “logical” Sentence A´ (“All my life I’ve been counting the teeth of tigers”) would require us to ascribe some metaphorical meaning to it for it to make any sense. The “alogical” Sentence A,

however, is incomparably more concrete: what the speaker is in fact doing is (also) precisely the thing that is, on the methodological level, at work in the statement. The signification method here stands outside the dichotomy of “figurative” vs. “literal” meaning, and this is what gives the statement such exceptional concreteness.

But the role of Sentence A´ in creating the effect of Sentence A does not end here. The sensual intensity of Sentence A is grounded in the sensually vivid image of a hand in a tiger’s mouth in Sentence A´, and this concreteness is transferred to the inconceivable statement of Sentence A, where, certainly, it is compounded by the tension between the two sentences. Meanwhile, the inconceivability of Sentence A intensifies the connection between counting, teeth, and the tiger’s maw, along with the associated sense of danger.

If the word has “departed from the flesh” (and the relationship between Statements A´ and A implies just such a departure on the methodological level), then this has only amplified the word’s sensual intensity. Here, indeed, we find a possible explanation for the great suggestive power of Šalamun’s poetic language, which unites two extremes: the extreme autonomy of the signifier and the extreme, almost-physical concreteness of the expression.

In speaking of his relationship to language, Šalamun more than once refers to the Kabbalah. This introduces the question of mysticism, which, although undoubtedly important for understanding Šalamun’s poetry, has also led to some of the worst misunderstandings in its reception. Šalamun himself is somewhat to blame for this. In certain famous interviews in the 1990s, he said a number of things about his poetic work that seem to point us directly toward the religious sphere. (Let me say in passing that Šalamun’s well-known statement—in a 1990 interview in the journal *Literatura*—that his true poetic ambition was “nearness to God” was essentially a reiteration of what the poet Oton Župančič had said in an interview in Izidor Cankar’s book *Visits* [*Obiski*], namely, “In the act of creation, man draws near to God.”<sup>33</sup> I mention this because in *The Blue Tower*

Šalamun explicitly identifies himself with Župančič.<sup>34</sup>) It is also curious that such statements, both by people writing about Šalamun as well as by younger poets speaking of their own work, resulted in a deluge of overt spiritualism and mysticism in Slovene poetry in the 1990s. It became fashionable to view the act of writing poetry as surrender to the joy of euphoric jumping around in the spray of saliva from the mouth of God; poetry seemed to be a refuge where one could take shameless delight, without reflection or responsibility, in the most arcane religious (or pseudo-religious) feelings—an attitude that, not incidentally, was ideally suited to the reactionary restorationism of the time. Still, I think, this is hardly the level on which to understand Šalamun’s mystical references. In fact, it is only in his most recent books, in his extremely concrete linguistic methods, that one finds references to the Kabbalah—an extremely complex conceptual system—which thematize, as it were, the transformative power of language. In *From There*, Šalamun explicitly mentions the great thirteenth-century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, who devised a fascinating system of meditation based on shuffling the letters of the sacred names, which supposedly released the hidden forces of language, in total alogism, so as to reveal the divine truth of these names. This could only be done, however, by removing oneself from the spirit of the *sephira* (“emanation”) Yesod—the realm of “rational” logic—which one did through meditation with the help of this letter-shuffling system. Alogism, then, revealed the true logic of language. (As long as we are on the subject of mysticism, we might note that, at the beginning of the Slovene literary tradition, the belief in the power of *names* was so strong that the Protestant reformer Primož Trubar could use the phrase “divine names” as a synonym for “divine persons”—the three persons of the Holy Trinity: “this Person or Name is not a thing imagined or dead, or something that might pass through or rest upon some other thing, or be dependent. Rather, it is in itself a Free, living, wise Almighty thing, which needs no one, will be carried by no one, nor supported ...”<sup>35</sup>) Šalamun, of course, does not apply the Abulafian system in his poetic method, nor does

he deal, for the most part, with anagrammatic transformations within names per se. But in his recent books, we can see, on a different level, an “anagrammatic” shuffling that is meant to produce an analogical effect. Šalamun’s poetry deals with the entire linguistic reality “anagrammatically”; its elements are “thrown into the mind’s air” (as the poet Jack Hirschman says of Kabbalism’s anagrammatical methods in *The Arcanes*<sup>36</sup>) so as to release, in this endless reshuffling of elements, the transformative and, indeed, explosive power of language. But crucially, if we tried to restore this “anagrammatized” linguistic reality to its “normal” logic, we would lose the very concreteness that makes this linguistic reality so effective.

Šalamun understands, too, as few others do, the eroticism of words—an eroticism that is easily confused with the extralinguistic reality. No Slovene poet has more explicitly thematized the way sexuality is interwoven in language. In *The Blue Tower*, for instance, the fourteen-line poem “Marais” speaks of this directly (and it is, I think, one of the most beautiful poems in the book). The poem describes an erotic attraction based on the close similarity of two names and the repetition of the noun *la bouche*—which ultimately also relates directly to the “cosmic mouth” of the Abulafian Kabbalah; indeed, it looks as if a reference to an experience alluded to in “Marais” has already appeared in “In the Abulafia Clutches,” in *From There*. (Šalamun’s poems have a way of returning to the same experience over decades; in “Marais” we can connect the statement in ll. 9–10 with lines from the poem “Trout” in *The Measure of Time*, published more than ten years ago: “Okudzhava wore black pointy shoes. / He placed one foot on the wicker chair / and sang in a hoarse voice / that came out of his shoe / about the horror of suppressed people.”<sup>37</sup> I mention this because often the poetic images in a Šalamun poem serve as shorthand for something we can decipher from another poem of his. The careful reader of Šalamun’s work hears the statement “Okudzhava wore black shoes” in “Marais” as an echo from the poem “Trout.” If we try to read Šalamun’s work as a complete whole, it becomes considerably less “hermetic” than it might seem when we read a single poem in isolation.)

32 Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, tr. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 55.

33 Izidor Cankar, *Obiski* (1920), in *Leposlovje, eseji, kritika* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1968), 1:209. (The poet Oton Župančič (1878–1949) was a major figure in Slovene poetry in the first half of the twentieth century. — Tr.)

34 In the poem “The Gentleman Is a Bit Inclined to Disorder” [“Gospod je nekoliko nagnjen k neredu”].

35 Primož Trubar, *Ena dolga predgovor k Novemu testamentu* [A lengthy preface to the New Testament] (1557; facsimile, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1986).

36 *The Arcanes* (Salerno, Italy: Multimedia edizioni, 2006), 557.

37 Translated by Charles Simic, in Tomaž Šalamun, *The Four Questions of Melancholy* (Fredonia, N.Y.: White Pine Press, 1997), 195.

Marais

I dreamed that Martinique was reheeled with water.  
La bouche, la bouche, André kept repeating, when  
Andraž and I lived in Sing Sing. Did I chase him  
because his name was so close? I told him  
how I’d endured Senghor, that boats came floating from heaven,  
falling on Lake Ohrid like fairy flies, that we  
danced with our nephews, great-nieces and bodyguards,  
all the ones that were here to keep them from staging a coup over there.  
His locals lured me to a monastery. Okudzhava wore black  
shoes. I was the sweet party elite, sweeter than your  
mouth. Palms flutter in Senegal. The priests wear cassocks.  
And once, as I walked back from the Saint Paul metro station, after  
Semolič and I had been drinking at George’s, I was picked up  
by the same guy who had caught me at the words la bouche, la bouche.<sup>38</sup>

Marais

*Sanjal sem, da je Martinique potemplala voda.  
La bouche, la bouche, je ponavljal André, ko sva z  
Andražem živela v Sing Singu. Sem ga lovil,  
ker ima tako blizu ime? Pripovedoval sem mu,  
kako sem izkusil Senghorja, barke so priletele z neba,  
padle na Ohridsko jezero kot vilinske mušice,  
diskali smo z nečaki, pranečakinjami in body guards,  
tistimi, ki so tu, da ne bi tam priredili puča. Domačini so  
me zvalili v samostan. Okudžava je imel črne  
čevlje. Bil sem sladka nomenklatura, slajša kot tvoja  
usta. V Senegalu vihrajo palme. Kute nosijo svečeniki.  
Tudi, ko sem se enkrat vračal iz metroja Saint-Paul, ko sva  
popivala s Semoličem pri Georgeu, me je zapeljal  
isti fant, ki me je ujel na besede la bouche, la bouche.*<sup>39</sup>

38 Translated by Michael Biggins, in *The Blue Tower*.

39 *Sinji stolp*, 65.

To thematize the relationship between the closeness of two names and erotic attraction means to thematize at the same time the basic principle whereby the seemingly disparate, randomly associative linguistic-experiential material of the poem is linked to the structure. The closeness of the names, which triggers the event in the extralinguistic reality, is at once the poem’s theme and, on a subliminal level, its method. While the similarity of the names *ANDRaž* and *ANDRé* and the reiteration of the words *LA BOUCHE*, *LA BOUCHE* are explicitly thematized as the signal not only of the beginning of (erotic) attraction but also of the erotic attraction itself, in which the connection between two people is merely the reflection of the linguistic event, the actual mouth is less sweet than the naming (“I was the sweet party elite, sweeter than your / mouth”—in the original Slovene, the word translated here as “party elite” is *nomenklatura*, which suggests a double reading: not only the elite ranks of the Soviet Communist Party, here, obviously, in the sense of “VIPs,” but also “a system of names”). Moreover, scattered through the poem we find an entire chain of names that share a mutual similarity based partly on the alliteration of the consonant groups S-N-G, S-M-G, and S-N-L, and partly on the way this consonantal alliteration is combined with an assonance of vowels. (Taking the poem’s verbal material as a whole, we see that, in the original Slovene, *S* appears more often than any other consonant: thirty-three times, not counting the silent *s* in the name *Marais*.) This string of similar-sounding names amplifies the effect of the explicitly mentioned similarity between the names *Andraž* and *André*, since the same principle connects the poem’s lines in a logic of corresponding sounds and letters. First, let’s list the alliterative connections between proper names: *SiNG SiNGu—SeNGhorja—SeNeGaLu—SaiNt-paul—SeMoLič*, a series that is joined, additionally, by the verb *SanJaL (dreamed)* in the opening line and the combination of the auxiliary verb and personal pronoun *SeM Ga (Did I ... him)* in l. 3. Along with the alliteration, this string of names is linked also by another correspondence in the Slovene original, the combination of the consonantal alliteration with a total or partial vocalic assonance: *SENGHORja—SENeGaLu—SAINT-pAUL—s SEMOLičem* (in the name *Saint-Paul*, the *AI* is pronounced approximately like the Slovene broad *E*, and the *AU* like the Slovene broad *O*). Several intermediate links also make their way into this chain, to produce the following series: *SanJaL—SEm GA—SENeGALu—PALme—SAINT-PAuL* (if we now consider not the name’s pronunciation but its spelling).

Additionally, we can make a link between the words *senGhoRja—GuaRds*, with the latter word appearing again in the string *maRAis—maRTinique—guARds*. At the same time, the poem contains several other words that connect in a similar way: along with the already-mentioned pair *ANDR-až—ANDR-é*, we have *maRAis—maRTinique* (which further connects with the first pair through the correspondence/rhyme *AndRÉ—maRAIS*); similar vowel-consonant combinations (in pronunciation) create the string *la BOUCHe—mUŠice—PUČa—okUDŽava—la BOUCHe*; while yet another similarity, based entirely on corresponding vowels, gives us the chain *pUČA—okUdŽAva—nomenklatUrA—UstA*. The word *usta (mouth)*, meanwhile, corresponds with *la bouche* as the Slovene equivalent of the French word.

Through the entire poem, then, a subtle weaving occurs on the level of phonetic and orthographical correspondences, moving from the extralinguistic reality to the suggestion of the weaving of human destinies (ultimately, perhaps, also a Kabbalistic idea) and human encounters. The poem’s theme is also its method. The *intralinguistic* logic gives rise to an associative linking of images that refer to the extralinguistic reality, while the *extralinguistic* logic of connecting these images leads, in turn, to new intralinguistic correspondences. Thus Šalamun creates a complex interaction that thematizes the interwovenness of human existence and language; with the intralinguistic logic consistently exposed to such an extent, the consequences of this logic are made so visible that the logic of the poem can no longer remain *merely* intralinguistic.

4. “Alogism” does not remove the question of meaning; on the contrary, it intensifies it.

“What hurts comes to the light of day on its own.” The alleged irrationality of “randomly” scribbled statements is governed by a solid logic of strict regularities. Šalamun seems well aware of this, and in his writing he aims at nothing less through his “free association” technique. (In the poem “So We Don’t Lose Our Virginity” [“Da se ne razdevičimo”], he says, very beautifully: “The color of feathers, of fur, / of skin and the heart’s rumbling under volcanoes / all depend on the place where its point is // set in.”<sup>40</sup>) But how does his writing stand in relation to the

40 In *The Blue Tower*.

other side of this awareness about language? How does it stand in relation to the awareness of the blind irrationality at the very foundation of rationality? Does Šalamun's "alogism" represent the underscoring of these irrational consequences of the logic of language, or is it, perhaps, a retreat from them? Just how radical is Šalamun's "alogism"? How far does he take it? This question about the radicalism of his "alogism" should not be understood as simply asking about its distance from "rational logic"; rather, it is about the consequences of "alogism" with regard to the valorization of "rational logic." If, for instance, "alogism" remains merely on the level of transgressive pleasure with regard to "rationality," then it only affirms that which it is meant to oppose and fails to problematize the horizon of "rationality" as such. The degree of radicalism in "alogism" depends on the strictness with which it is applied, not its arbitrariness.

Fernando Pessoa, discussing "boldness" in poetry, once wrote that for the one who dares nothing, more or less everything is "bold." In itself, "boldness" is without meaning; the essential question is whether we are dealing with the "boldness of understanding" or the "boldness of caprice." For Pessoa, the distinguishing factor is the clear determination of the statement, its "monosemantic" nature. After all, we can ascribe meaning to even the most bizarre sentences, and indeed, it is impossible to construct a sentence to which some sort of meaning could not be ascribed, but what is important is that this "some sort of meaning" be a single meaning.

But in the extreme consequence, is it not true that the only way to achieve this "single meaning" in the strict sense is to use semantic polyvalence—an utterance that focuses everything the word contains as "a single meaning"? It is, indeed, the exposition of radical semantic polyvalence that makes it impossible to add different "figurative" meanings to the "literal" meaning; it is only in such exposition that words can be spoken in a manner that has no additional "hidden meanings," for "hidden meanings" are created the moment we presuppose the evidence of some basic "unhidden" meaning. To speak "without hidden meanings," however, means to problematize the dominance of one meaning over all others. This does not mean relativizing different meanings; rather, it means maintaining contradiction as the tension in which truth happens in language. (Pessoa elsewhere distinguishes between "direct meaning" and "indirect meanings"; if the former is what the word *states*, then the latter are what

the word *contains*.) This idea serves as the fundamental concept behind Velimir Khlebnikov's "star language": in the non-geocentric perspective, the sun is merely *one of* the stars; the perspective of "rationality" means the consideration of only one meaning, just as the light of what is only one of the stars prevents us from seeing the other stars. This "single meaning," then, is never in fact *the sole meaning*, but merely *one of* the meanings; the very notion of a "literal meaning" already presupposes that this is merely one possible meaning. When we shift our vantage point to "cosmic" space, where even the sun is seen as merely one of the stars, any given word has x number of meanings and these meanings are free of any relation of subordination; instead, what is crucial is that these x number of meanings constitute a signification that is no longer *one of* the meanings. It is precisely this semantic polyvalence, focused as such, that allows Khlebnikov to speak *without ambiguity*. (In this regard, it is entirely emblematic that Khlebnikov, as we know, in a text written in 1912, used his quite eccentric linguistic–mathematical methods to predict *unambiguously* the year of the revolution as 1917.)

Perhaps it is in this sense that we should understand Jure Detela's well-known dictum that the language of poetry ought to be "literal" and "without metaphors"—that is, not as some idealistic insistence on the opposition between "literal" and "figurative" meaning, but as the obliteration of this opposition.<sup>41</sup>

*(Poetry not as the substitution, but as the creation of a reality, independent—within the possible—of the reality I am accustomed to. Images alone do not awaken the emotions; they must refer to our wound: life, death, love, desire, anxiety. To name this wound of ours without subjecting it to an alchemical process is vulgar. It's not the same to say, 'There is no solution,' as it is to say:*

*nonetheless you will never leave your great prison of alcatrazes.*

41 Detela discusses this idea in relation to his own poetic practice in an untitled, posthumously published essay: "V svojih pesmih" ["In my poems"], in Jure Detela, *Zapisi o umetnosti: Eseji* (Koper: Hyperion, 2005), 17–26.

*I think these two lines are more natural and more spontaneous than the previous example. There is much more conventionality in naming things with words that have grown old than if we do this with words that surge up to us from somewhere like birds fleeing from our inner world because something has threatened them. The greater part of surrealist poetry is much less conventional, cerebral, and literary than the simple and blessed poems to which Spanish literature has accustomed us. — Alejandra Pizarnik, in a diary entry dated October 23, 1957.<sup>42</sup>)*

If I mention Jure Detela, it is because in *The Blue Tower* Šalamun refers in passing to his demand for "nonmetaphorical" poetry. In the poem "At Baroness Beatrice Monti della Corte von Rezzori's," we first hear the complaint that there are no metaphors in the poem; next, the lack of metaphor is said to satisfy the requirements of Detela's poetics, an idea that is then refuted: "hey, there are no metaphors here, Jure would be pleased, / no he wouldn't, this would be too frivolous for him ..."

(Let's return for a moment to the role of proper names in this book. If in "Marais" names convey closeness, including erotic closeness, then in other contexts they can also convey distance, as sites of emphatic discrepancies; in *The Blue Tower*, the name "Beatrice" in particular plays such a role. When this name appears in three-line stanzas, it is of course impossible to ignore the allusion to Dante—and it is here that a grotesque contrast is created with the elitist world of the baroness.)

The lines where Šalamun mentions Detela seem directly opposed to Detela's poetics. If Detela was concerned with extreme rigor in the production of poetic statements "in relation to the world," then here Šalamun's verses, witty as they are, convey primarily a feeling of exhausted surrender to the flow of blather that spurts out like the water from the pipes in the old baroness's bathroom. What is essential in Šalamun's formulation—"frivolity" (that is, a "relation to the world")—is defined as what keeps the poem from attaining, on the level of the poetic method, true "nonmetaphorality" in Detela's sense. "Metaphorality" or "nonmetaphorality" is decipherable on the level of the "autonomous confrontation" with the poem

42 Alejandra Pizarnik, *Diarios*, ed. Ana Becciu (Barcelona: Lumen, 2003), 79–80.

(to use Detela's term),<sup>43</sup> but it is inscribed in the poem's structure on a level that is not exclusively "intralinguistic." The poetic methods themselves are inscribed with a speech position that overdetermines them. This is not simply about a kind of rhetoric; to ask whether a statement is metaphorical or nonmetaphorical—i.e. to ask about the method by which the statement is formed—is to ask about the relationship of the speaker to the world (here I am by no means thinking of any mere once-and-for-all identification outside the text, which would automatically determine the text or be "reflected" in it, but rather about the relationship that is established by the text itself). The same formulation can be, in different contexts, both "metaphorical" and "non-metaphorical." "Alogism" can be the problematization of "rational logic," or it can be its confirmation through transgression. If one uses the same methods with two different speech positions, then one is not using the same methods. A clear example: if we compare the methods of the historical avant-gardes with the revival of these methods in the neo-avant-garde movements, we see that there is not even an approximate kinship between them. Pasolini was well aware of this; he opposed the neo-avant-gardes (in which he saw a form of bourgeois escapism) in the name of the ideals of the Russian avant-garde (i.e. the search for new and revolutionary forms of expression).

5. Šalamun stakes all his bets on "pure poetry"—we might even say "absolute poetry" in the sense one speaks of "absolute music." He takes his defense of "pure poetry" to the point where he views the language of poetry as the only true language he has. He has even said in the past that outside of this language he is "illiterate." (By "pure poetry" I am not, of course, thinking of the insulation of what is considered "poetic." On the contrary, Šalamun is the first Slovene poet since Srečko Kosovel to expose poetic language, in a truly radical way, to everything that was once deemed unthinkable in poetry; his poetic language is not afraid of getting itself dirty on things that stand outside "poetic" convention. For Šalamun, the "purity" of poetry means, rather, "Anything I touch becomes poetry.") In this regard, the witty short poem "A Word to the Hunters" offers a characteristic example for determining

43 Detela, "Kulturniški fevdalizem" ["Cultural-worker feudalism"], *Zapisi o umetnosti*, 5.



the nature of Šalamun’s poetry in *The Blue Tower*. (The poem comprises three sections: two couplets and a triplet, which is itself divided into a couplet and an additional concluding line; the very fact that, in the original, each section is written in a different language—Slovene, English, and Italian, with the last line again in Slovene—means that the dialogue between the irate “hunters” and the poet who tries to reassure them is shifted playfully to the level of “volleying” birdsong.) Here the poet associates his own speech with the singing of the birds and thus safeguards it from the vulgar critique of the “hunters”:

#### A Word to the Hunters

How the birdsong volleys!  
I walk on a stroller.

“Selfish little beast, writing your own  
stuff, who do you think you are?”

Calma, calma,  
non sono un cinghiale,  
don’t shoot me.<sup>44</sup>

#### Stavek lovcem

*Kako se ptičje petje žoga!  
Hodim po vozičku.*

*Selfish little beast, writing your own  
stuff, who do you think you are?*

*Calma, calma,  
non sono un cinghiale,  
ne me ustreliti!*<sup>45</sup>

In this little poem one easily sees an attempt to repeat on a smaller scale the gesture of Prešeren’s poem “The Organist” [“Orglar”].<sup>46</sup> More importantly, however, Šalamun clearly thematizes contemporary society’s view of poetry as something unbearable and scandalous, and he does this precisely by identifying his poetry with the gentle “volley” of birdsong. Šalamun defends the uselessness of poetic statement with a confident smile. “Pure poetry” is poetry at its most subversive, for it upsets the established order and touches a hidden nerve in people, who feel disoriented by it. (In this sense, moralistic accusations about the poet’s self-obsession are actually a way for the accusers to release their “hunter-like” aggression.) Today, when transgression has become the norm in art, true excess is signified by cheerful birdsong. It is no accident that *The Blue Tower* ends with the words, “bright goldfinch.” (In medieval Christian iconography, by the way, the goldfinch became a symbol of Christ’s Passion because it was thought to feed on thorny plants.)

But the declarative stance Šalamun assumes in this poem is more than bucolic; it is also deliberately dangerous. And not just because it places a person at risk of being shot at by ill-tempered hunters, but also because this stance is itself continually under the threat of losing the very thing it wants to protect.

(Let me add in passing a brief comment about birdsong. What in fact do we know about it? How do we know that it is some ecstatically cheerful “volley”? This is what Petrarch asked himself in the sonnet “*Quel rosignuol, che si soave piagne*”: “What if this nightingale, who sings so sweetly and whom I use as a metaphor in my sonnets, is perhaps mourning his dead offspring or his mate, and so feels about his song the same as I do about mine, which mourns Laura?” With this comparison, Petrarch is not aligning his poems with “the natural flow of things”—nor does he intend to place his feelings about Laura in the biological context of “the loss of a mate”—on the contrary, he recognizes that the nightingale’s song itself occurs in the register of the symbolic.)

46 In Prešeren’s poem (1845), a church organist attempts to teach the birds of the forest to sing sacred songs. He succeeds with all except the nightingale, who “keeps on singing his own things.” Finally, the organist complains about this to God, who, however, rebukes him by saying, “Let my nightingale sing the way I created his throat to sing.” — *Tr*.

What I wish to say is this: the moment I advocate the “uselessness” of an utterance, I must ask myself *whether this “uselessness” as such has not already been used*. What distinction am I trying to make here? It is the distinction between, on the one hand, the extreme exposure of a language that wrestles with its own boundaries, a language that does not want, and is unable, to rely on any pre-imposed meaning, and on the other hand, the establishment of a protected space of arbitrary speech without consequences. To truly break with the utilitarian understanding of poetic language cannot simply mean a retreat into aestheticism—which as such is also a retreat from other forces, which will take advantage of the retreat and occupy the field of operations that has been abandoned to them. In its “pure” form, however, such a break can occur only when it sets language in confrontation with what makes it impossible. (The first words in *The Blue Tower* are “To provoke ...” and later in the same line we read: “to wash out the ... message.”)

Pasolini’s poem “The Birth of a New Type of Fool” (which also begins with birdsong) contains the following lines:

What do I communicate if I no longer communicate,  
if in the end I have never communicated anything  
other than the pure happiness of being what I am?<sup>47</sup>

In Pasolini’s poem, this “pure happiness of being what I am” is what provokes the confrontation, for the very reason that such a stance is scandalous and is understood as defeatism—and not defeatism per se, but extreme exposure. And extreme exposure is possible only through radical self-reflection: “the pure happiness of being what I am” can be “the pure happiness of being what I am” only if there is no previously presumed innocence. Pasolini once made a short film in which God kills a young man who has rapturously surrendered to aesthetic pleasure at a time when atrocities are happening all around him. His innocence is his guilt. Pasolini constantly problematizes his own position. He was particularly aware of the danger that the most radical attempts can turn into the very thing they opposed. When he tried in certain films, for instance, to show “the revolutionary force of the past,”

he sometimes came dangerously close to touristic kitsch. But he continued to risk such attempts. Ultimately, with Pasolini, striving for “poetry as music” coincides with “throwing one’s body into battle.”

I mention all this because it appears that with Šalamun we are dealing with absence—indeed, with the very opposite of such intensity. In *The Blue Tower* we can detect a certain nonchalance out of which inner dramas unfold with a kind of epicurism, like some dazed, hallucinatory pleasure. But perhaps it is not as simple as that. Perspectives are constantly shifting; marvelous distant vistas open for a brief moment and cosmic expanses seem to pulsate inside them; then there will be some banal cheese-tasting party or a euphoric/tedious conversation in the baroness’s salon. Such discrepancies create an uneasiness that almost certainly plays a role in constituting a meaning, which is not the same as the “hunter’s” initial reaction to the (perhaps deliberately set) bait that makes him lose his temper.

Consider the poem “That’s How Many Mighty Heaven Will Endure” [“Toliko jih bo vzdržalo silno nebo”].<sup>48</sup> Here the solemn diction, slow rhythm, the bravura of the speech (a bravura that appears to go nowhere), a semiconscious conversing with the stars, and at the same time a very simple, realistic picture of a pleasure-loving middle-class man lying in the sauna in the evening who sees in this the ultimate horizon of effort—all combine to create an effect that is both cosmic and comic:

Why aren’t you shaken? I lie in the bathtub  
until after sunset one hundred stars  
light up in the sky. Droplets of sweat that  
drip down my arms in the sauna. Nothing. Slowly.  
With a drawing. As many droplets as I  
can endure, that’s how many mankind will endure.<sup>49</sup>

*Zakaj niste pretreseni? V banji ležim,  
dokler po sončnem zahodu na nebu ne  
bo prižganih sto zvezd. Kapljice potu, ki  
tečejo od komolcev v savni. Nič. Počasi.  
Z risbo. Kolikor kapljic bom vzdržal  
sam, toliko jih bo vzdržalo človeštvo.*<sup>50</sup>

48 In *The Blue Tower*.

49 Translated by Michael Biggins.

50 *Sinji stolp*, 35.

44 Translated by Michael Biggins.

45 *Sinji stolp*, 43.

47 From the poem “La nascita di un nuovo tipo di buffone,” in the book *Trasumanar e organizzar* (1971): Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*, vol. 2 (Milan: Garzanti, 1995), 902.

The distinct uneasiness created by these lines is the result of the painful proximity of the speaker’s relation to the stars, or rather, his idea that his effort is equal to the ultimate effort of mankind itself, and the idiotic pleasure of this same speaker who associates the verb *endure* with his endurance of the treatments at a wellness center. Such is the range these lines evoke. Of course, I do not identify the speaker with the poet’s persona; on the contrary, I think the poet is intentionally using a dramatist’s method here to wittily stage a scene that combines the uncombinable in grotesque fashion. This reminds me of Šalamun’s astonishing juxtaposition, in the poem “Borromini” from *The Black Swan* [*Črni labod*] (1997), of the baroque architect’s anxiety before death and massage rollers advertised in TV infomercials. And on the methodological level, too, such juxtapositions recall certain techniques in baroque poetry (indeed, one can find quite a few connections with the baroque in Šalamun’s poetry), in which we see poets on the lookout for exalted dramatic experiences and cosmic metaphors in connection with the most banal and insignificant everyday occurrences.

In “That’s How Many Mighty Heaven Will Endure,” however, such a juxtaposition does not sound at all innocent; the tension is pushed to such a degree of grotesquerie that, with all this talk about stars and mankind, we cannot help but be conscious of the class determination of a position that is trying to claim universality. For me, on first reading these lines, this tone elicited a rather brutal association: I recalled the scene in Georg Büchner’s play *Woyzeck* when the captain in his cosmic terror surrenders to pleasure as poor Woyzeck shaves him. The exclamation, “Why aren’t you shaken?” is so lofty that even as it calls for empathy, it creates distance and thus deliberately underscores the situation’s grotesque aspect. (Is this irony? Or is it, perhaps, a type of “protective” irony that only protects against the problematization of the speech position by giving the impression that it has already been problematized?) In any case, behind this uneasiness we can detect a rather serious consequence: the notion that even genuine mystical experience may be associated with genuine banality—the genuine cosmic terror I experience does not in any sense lift me above the banality that lies outside the experience. What is more, this is not only banality, but (even given all possible subjective innocence) complicity in the systems of class exploitation; when I declare that my position is identical to the position of abstract humanity, I conceal a certain class position that determines my

statement. Šalamun’s poem speaks about this with unusual clarity; the question, however, is whether this is the clarity of the concept or the clarity of the symptom.

But there are other, quite different comparisons that present themselves here. Šalamun’s method in these lines—placing some detail from an entirely ordinary daily routine in a cosmic perspective where it is supposed to represent a new stage in human existence—is paralleled in one of the most euphoric poems of the Russian avant-garde: Velimir Khlebnikov’s “I and Russia” [“Ya i Rossiya”] (1921). This a poem Šalamun knows well and must be especially fond of, for he included it in his selection of ten poems for the Slovene anthology of world poetry *The Song of Orpheus*.<sup>51</sup> (In fact, there are many allusions to Khlebnikov in Šalamun’s work, including a reference to the Russian poet’s well-known line about shooting stars. Curiously, even the title of the selection of Šalamun’s poems in the Kondor book series, *Verbs of the Sun* [*Glagoli sonca*],<sup>52</sup> is an almost literal quotation from Khlebnikov, who wrote, “There, toward the health of the world, / Fill verbs with the sun” [“*Tuda, k mirovomu zdorov’yu, / Napolnite solntsem glagoly*”]. And one of Šalamun’s poems in *From There* ends with the lines: “I dreamed of Khlebnikov. He had the moist gray snout of an animal that belongs / to darkness. I did not see him. I was shaken by / the smoothness, roundness and grayness of his snout.”<sup>53</sup>) In his poem “I and Russia,” Khlebnikov says (and here I am paraphrasing): “Russia gave freedom to thousands of thousands; but I took off my shirt and gave the sun to the peoples of Me; all at once were liberated the thousands of my body’s citizens, who pressed against the windows from every hair, ever pore,” and so on. Šalamun, it seems, in his lines about the droplets of sweat, wants to make a similar poetic gesture; we might even say that Šalamun’s poem parodies Khlebnikov (in my view, parody does not necessarily have to include an undertone of mockery, as is sometimes wrongly attributed to this method). The apparent similarity, however, makes the difference between the two poems all the clearer. At the same time,

51 *Orfejev spev*, ed. Niko Grafenauer (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1998). For this anthology, thirty-two Slovene poets were each asked to select ten poems from world poetry. — *Tr.*

52 Published in 1993 by Mladinska Knjiga in Ljubljana.

53 “Tiepolo,” *Od tam*, 178.

this difference, as an element of the poetic method itself, is not merely intralinguistic, but is based in the content of the gesture through which the speaking subject is constituted. It is not simply that Khlebnikov’s gesture is active while Šalamun’s is about passivity; the entire process of subjectivization in the connection *individual–mankind* aims in two completely different directions through the basic gesture, and this is what determines the difference between the poems. Khlebnikov defines his everyday gesture as liberation (though we can also detect perhaps humor and probably even irony in the poem); he underscores the subject’s singularity as mankind’s representative precisely in the emancipatory logic of the break with the past, and within this logic, the singularity, standing in the symbolic place of the whole, signifies the emergence of an emancipatory–political subjectivity (which is reflective per se). In “That’s How Many Mighty Heaven Will Endure,” on the other hand, the taking of a sauna bath creates the link *individual–mankind* by means of a “metaphysical” inertia of blurring borders, a “dispersal in the cosmos”; the subject in the sauna can create an identification of his position with mankind precisely because he abandons the unreflected class position that determines his speech. At the same time, in the clarity of their formulations, Šalamun’s lines make it possible to reflect on unreflectedness.

The difference between Khlebnikov and Šalamun, as I have described it, may serve (in very simple terms) to illustrate a fundamental difference between the historic avant-garde movements’ attempts to do the impossible and the discursive hedonism of the neo-avant-garde poets (although I do not include Šalamun in this latter group; his poetry eludes all attempts at classification)—even when the neo-avant-garde copies certain methods from the historical avant-garde.

(In his relation toward the world, Šalamun is not at all avant-garde in the sense of espousing some utopian project—not even when his verse resounds with a lofty euphoria; the very nature of this euphoria is entirely different. With Šalamun, for the most part—to again put it very simply—not even the most extreme boldness of expression tries to “leap into the sky”; rather, it is, ultimately, a religious delight in the grace of the sky, a surrender to ecstasy as one of endless available possibilities—until the lacquer dries, until the plaster cast is set, until it’s over, etc.—to cite a few images from his books. Time and again in his poetry, this “until” acts as a boundary. Šalamun’s

poetry is filled with euphoria, loftiness, and ecstasy; similarly, it is filled with an awareness of the metamorphic powers of language, which are able to bind themselves to the extralinguistic reality—but it is almost never, in the end, utopian; rather, it is melancholic. The title of the standard American edition of Šalamun’s selected poems, *The Four Questions of Melancholy*,<sup>54</sup> is especially telling, I think.)

But I wish to stress something else here. What makes us uneasy when we read the poem about the sauna is not the simple fact that uncombinable elements are combined, but the ease with which it is possible to combine things that seem uncombinable. Our uneasiness stems from the smoothness of the splicing. In much of his most recent poetry, Šalamun thematizes a condition that raises a question about the indeterminacy between, let’s call it, religious (or even mystical) experience and hedonistic euphoria.

On first inspection, one might easily label Šalamun’s basic poetic “stance” as hedonism. Vladimir Kopić, for instance, in his discussion of twentieth-century Yugoslav poetry in *Impossible Histories*, described the way Šalamun’s poetic methods have changed over time as moving

from an atypical minimalist divinization of hyperbolized subjectivity/objectivity of a linguistic type, on to the *debouchement* of a newly established lyrical subject, and finally into a full cultural and textual hedonism.<sup>55</sup>

In the 1990 interview I mentioned earlier, Šalamun’s full response to the question about the aim of his poetry was in fact this: “Nearness to God. Pleasure, pleasure, divine pleasure.” But Šalamun’s poetry also thematizes, again and again, the obscenity of the very pleasure it tries to identify with. Certainly, Šalamun does everything he can to safeguard the innocence of this pleasure, so that at times it looks as if he is even willing to aestheticize atrocities.

54 Edited by Christopher Merrill and published by White Pine Press, Fredonia, N.Y., in 1997.

55 Vladimir Kopić, “Writings of Death and Entertainment: Textual Body and (De)composition of Meaning in Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde and Post-avant-garde Literature, 1968–1991,” in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds., *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003), 111.

The title of the poems in *The Blue Tower* is characteristic: “So We Don’t Lose Our Virginity” (this poem, indeed, contains some of the book’s *most beautiful* lines; the opening sketches out an entire landscape, at least in my imagination: “Clay of silent diasporas, is water yellow / when the oar hits it flat? Where does / all the wool on the cliffs come from?” and so on.). But for this very reason the consequences that follow the failure of such efforts are all the more severe. Delight can turn into disaster: “You proclaim a new god and a tank drives into your mouth.”<sup>56</sup> And even the most ethereal, subtlest images can have problematic “godfathers”: “Tumbling through the air toward the / darkness comes pig, dolphin’s godfather.”<sup>57</sup> To be sure, uncritical surrender to religious ecstasy can be anything but innocent. And in his poetry Šalamun thematizes this idea precisely through his own surrender.

Here we should stress that nobody has yet problematized Šalamun more incisively than Šalamun himself. One can, of course, read his various attempts at self-problematicization in a way that ultimately makes them sound mainly like self-defense. But I think we need to read them with utter seriousness—just as they have been written, I think, in utter seriousness. I would like to quote in its entirety a poem mentioned earlier, “In the Abulafia Clutches” (which in its basic architectonics is structured as a sonnet), which I think is key to understanding of Šalamun’s poetry of the past ten years.

### In the Abulafia Clutches

Watered by pro domo sua, are my footprints servile?  
And who is this shelf, the edge of I, the roof above my  
head concealing the sky. Am I off? Is in the rarefied air  
left only a trace of scales’ libido? Scales of sloughs  
of the terrible cabalist Abulafia, who is in fact concentrated  
to the mouth, not even to the language. “La bouche,  
la bouche” in Marais, three steps from Seine, with  
sun from Haiti. Am I punished by Césaire? We, poets,  
after a certain fulfillment of years disappear. In the air,  
in the consecration, in the pandemonic responsibility,  
in Johanca, home at Vodice. We lose ourselves in  
the woods, they undo our hands. The horse  
from the turban doesn’t calm his stretched clients.  
I blacked out the source. Delight blacked out the source.<sup>58</sup>

### V krempljih Abulafie

*Zalit pro domo sua, so stopinje klečeplazne? In  
kdo je ta polica, rob jaza, streha nad glavo, ki mi  
zakriva nebo? Sem odšel? Je v razredčenem zraku  
samo še sled libida lusk? Lusk kačjih levov  
strašnega kabalista Abulafie, ki se res koncentrirala  
samo na usta, niti ne več na jezik. “La bouche,  
la bouche” v Maraisu, tri korake od Sene, s  
soncem iz Haitija. Me kaznuje Césaire?  
Pesniki po določeni izpolnitvi let izginemo. V  
redok zrak, v posvetitev, v pandemonično  
odgovornost, v Johanca iz Vodice doma. Zgubimo  
se v gozdu, roke nam odpnejo. Konj iz turbana  
ne pomiri več niti svojih zleknjenih odjemalcev.  
Onesvestil sem vir. Slast je onesvestila vir.*<sup>59</sup>

58 Translated by Michael Taren and the poet, in Tomaž Šalamun, *Curtis Harnack Wrapped Me in a Shawl* (n.p.: Scantly Clad Press, 2008) 10; electronic chapbook, <http://issuu.com/andrewlundwall/docs/tomazsalamun-curtisharnack> (July 5, 2011).

59 *Od tam*, 158.

I read this extraordinary poem as the statement of something that actually happened to the poet—as the statement of a certain condition in which he found himself; in my view, the questions he asks are not simply ironic or rhetorical. (As a side note, “*klečeplazzen*” [“servile, groveling”] was the word I myself exclaimed—against my will, as it were—when I heard Šalamun’s acceptance speech at the Prešeren Award ceremony in Ljubljana in 2000, so appalled was I by the poet’s conformist performance. I was truly heartbroken, for Šalamun was a poet I loved and admired. Three years later, however, when I read “In the Abulafia Clutches,” I literally breathed a sigh of relief. In *The Blue Tower*, Šalamun, identifying with Župančič, comments: “Oh, no, I said, Župančič even so. / He kissed ass once or twice, but you resent that // just because you kissed some ass yourself.”<sup>60</sup>) And the condition presented in “In the Abulafia Clutches” is indeed chilling: it is the realization that *true* mysticism, *true* entry into the Abulafian “cosmic mouth,” does not in itself provide any guarantee of innocence in the world of society; what is more, my exalted personal ecstasy is possible only if at the same time I agree to let them “undo my hands” (this chilling realization is what makes this a truly mystical and not merely mysticist poem). There is no guarantee that the situation that in its openness brings me to ecstasy will not be blocked in another context; meanwhile, for the poet, every case of being trapped in the “here and now” means, in fact, a departure (“Am I off?”). Šalamun formulates all of this with great acuity and a high degree of depersonalization, which on the methodological level is self-critical, although we can also read the poem as an act of self-defense: *one and the same* condition is described as a disappearance into both the Kabbalah of Abulafia and the charlatanism of Johanca of Vodice;<sup>61</sup> *one and the same* condition is described both as being trapped beneath the roof above one’s head and as getting lost in the woods! And this getting lost in the woods is not innocent; just like disappearance, like retreat from people, it can serve the interests of certain third parties: “They undo our hands.”

60 In “The Gentleman Is a Bit Inclined to Disorder.”

61 In 1913, a woman named Ivanka, or “Johanca,” Jerovšek, from the village of Vodice (about nine miles north of Ljubljana), created a sensation when she claimed to have seen a sculpture of the Virgin Mary crying tears of blood; as a result, people came from all over Slovenia to witness the supposed miracle. Eventually, however, a newspaper exposed the miracle as fraudulent and Johanca became an object of derision. The phrase *vodiška Johanca* (*Johanca of Vodice*) soon became a byword for charlatanism in Slovene. — *Tr.*

It is possible, by the way, to detect a change that almost imperceptibly enters Šalamun’s poetry in the 1990s and that seems connected with historical circumstances—and with Slovenia, which despite the poet’s pronounced cosmopolitanism (and Šalamun was the first Slovene poet who could function as a true cosmopolitan even in international circles) may define him much more strongly than one first imagines. Among Šalamun’s poems from the sixties, seventies, and eighties, there are a number of very important works that possess a “socio-critical” edge. In these poems, without ever descending into topicalism or letting his poetry become directly polemical, but with extraordinary sharpness and wit, not to mention real courage, Šalamun was able sometimes in a single phrase to accentuate critically the recidivism of the petit-bourgeois mentality within Yugoslavia’s declared socialist project—from the line “socialism à la Louis XIV” in “Duma 1964” to the poems “Ljubljana” in *Arena* and “My Tribe Does Not Hear Freedom Anymore” in *The Measure of Time*. In the 1990s, however, with the triumphant restoration of capitalist socioeconomic relations in Slovene society, the “socio-critical” edge suddenly disappears in his verse when he thematizes the present age. To be sure, we can still find a line in *The Blue Tower* like, “Even Philistines / are part of democracy and etiquette,”<sup>62</sup> which can be understood as witty gentle irony, but in the context of the poem the function of this statement is not, I think, subversive; it sounds more like affirmation, like gently distant acquiescence. In this context, “democracy and etiquette” seem to mark the ultimate horizon of the possible. And the poet’s ideological stance seems bounded by this horizon (this middle-class horizon—to identify it as a class position).

Of course, this is precisely where we have to make a distinction in the poetic language between “direct expression” and “content” (to refer again to Pessoa’s terms). We cannot understand the actual ideological implications of a given poetic oeuvre if we confine ourselves to a vulgar attempt to identify the ideological positions of the speaker; the actual relation between art and ideology happens not through “reflection” but through “refraction.” And in this regard, Šalamun’s poetry of the past ten years is, in its relation to the age, of exceptional interest particularly in the way it reveals its contradictions so intensely and overtly through

62 In “Sounds Near Pistoletto” [“Šumi ob Pistolettu”].

indeterminacy: euphoria can also be inertia; delight can also be disaster; the world’s constant change can also be acquiescence to its immutability; astounding dynamism can be paralysis; transgression can be conformism; “bloody radicalism” can be kitsch and escapism; mysticism can be banality—and all without the one canceling out the other. (In “It Is Too Hot,” from *Ambergris*, Šalamun introduces the theme of indeterminacy in truly apocalyptic tones in lines that echo T. S. Eliot’s famous verse about the world ending “not with a bang, but a whimper”: “Will / the end of the world be of iron, of might and of crackle? / Or will we think that mice run around the corners, / the trains on the tracks, my hand on your white red shirt?”<sup>63</sup> Here indeterminacy is displayed even in the color of the shirt, which is “white red.” And just before these lines, the poem asks, “Who will cut off our arms?”) We might go so far as to say that rarely do we find the young Walter Benjamin’s radical thesis about “capitalism as religion” so intensely illustrated as in Šalamun’s poetry. “Capitalism as religion” is, indeed, the fundamental existential modality in which, on the thematic level, Šalamun’s verse happens. But the poet’s attempts to escape the consequences are, in the final consequence, mercilessly reflected in the writing process itself. A line from the last poem of *The Blue Tower* is emblematic: “age of pleistocenestimated seed” (“*vek pleistocenitvenega semena*”).<sup>64</sup> Here Šalamun forms the new, ambivalent word *pleistocenitven* (translated as “pleistocenestimated”) from the words *pleistocen* (“Pleistocene”) and *cenitev* (“estimation”). But the very ambivalence of the word makes the statement unambivalent: it makes escape into the ambivalence of the archaic impossible precisely because it underscores the indeterminacy that thematizes the escape attempt and its impossibility.

Over the past decade, Šalamun’s verse has been a poetry of such extreme indeterminacy that even when it seemed inert it was filled with tension. To put it more precisely, if what seems to be exalted dramatic tension in this verse perhaps contains inertia, then perhaps what seems to be its inertia contains the very drama of our age.

6.

To conclude, I would like to offer merely the rudiments of a structural analysis of one of the poems in *The Blue Tower*. I have chosen “We Build a Barn and Read Reader’s Digest” because here we see perhaps most vividly and most clearly all the inner oppositions in Šalamun’s recent poetry that I have been trying to discuss. What is more, the poem thematizes the very indeterminacy I want to define, and takes it to its most extreme consequences.

#### We Build a Barn and Read Reader’s Digest

Quick ostrich. Quick ostrich. Quick sand. Quick sand. Quick lime. Quick grass. The white juice from celeste Aida, and forgot-to-take-it dries up. The one

trampled by sheep (down below), Grischa and Beatrice (up above) converse. They’d recognize each other in a cover, a box, a jacket, a picture, in moss and trampled

dirt. At this angle of the sky there are no pictures allowed. Corpses are wrapped up like sheaves. Dismiss the footprint. Wipe your eyes.

Stop pilfering. Grapshot gets tangled up. I go paying visits with my lives. Here I just romped and touched the rug

with a yellow shoulder. I don’t know what a word is. To cry out *moth!* when on your white towel you see a scorpion? El Alamein! Where is the difference?

Rommel would kiss the hands of heaven, and yet from his airplane above the Sahara, my uncle Rafko Perhauc still blew him to bits.<sup>65</sup>

63 “Prevroče je,” *Ambra*, 26; translated by Joshua Beckman and the author, published in English in Tomaž Šalamun, *The Book for My Brother* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 66.

64 “Chiunqe giunge le mani.”

65 Translated by Michael Biggins.

#### Skedenj gradiva in prebirava Reader’s Digest

Živi noj. Živi noj. Živi pesek. Živi pesek. Živo apno. Živa trava. Beli sok celeste Aide, nima-ga-spravljenega-je-izhlapelo. Tisti

*poteptani od ovc (spodaj) Griša in Beatrice (zgoraj) se pogovarjajo. Prepoznajo se v deki, kišti, bundi, sliki, mahu na steptani*

*zemlji. Pod takim kotom neba se ni dovoljeno slikati. Trupla so zavita kot svaljki. Odjavi stopinjo. Obriši oči.*

*Nehaj zmikavtiti. Žibra se krotoviči. V goste odhajam s svojimi življenji. Tu sem samo divjal in se dotikal preproge*

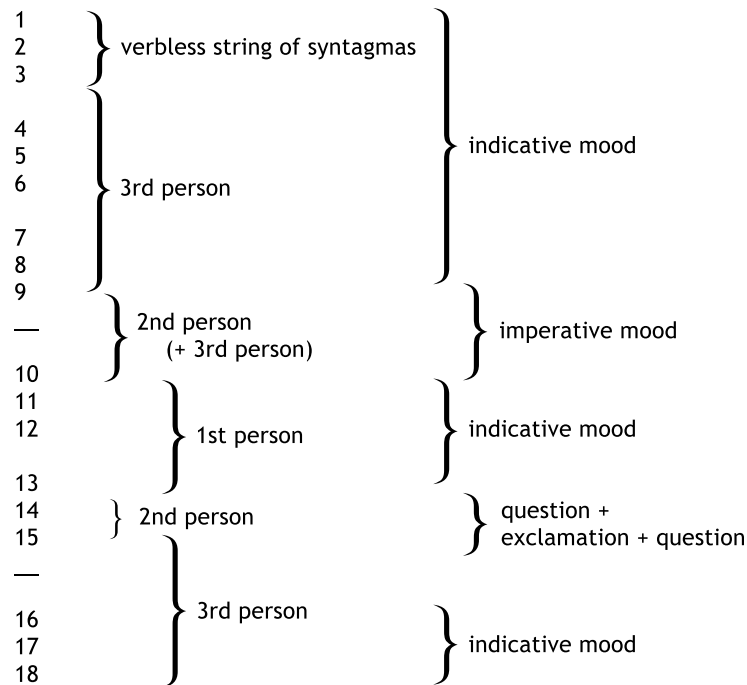
*z rumeno ramo. Ne vem, kaj je beseda. Da zavpiješ molj, ko na beli brisači zagledaš škorpijona? El Alamein! Kje je razlika?*

*Rommel je poljubljal rokice nebu, pa ga je moj stric Rafko Perhavic iz svojega aviona nad Saharo vseeno raztreščil.*<sup>66</sup>

66 *Sinji stolp*, 16.

At first glance, these randomly tossed-on statements—which might seem to correspond to the verb phrase “blew to bits,” which ends the poem—are organized in a form that is actually quite strict. Eighteen lines are arranged in six tercets, which are divided into two groups of three each, thus alluding to the structure of the Dantean period, which typically comprises three tercets. While the sentences in the last lines of the first two tercets flow into the following tercet in enjambements that underscore continuity, the third tercet ends with a full stop, which underscores the end of the rhetorical period. In the second half of the poem, the last sentence of the fourth tercet again continues into the fifth in an enjambement, while the fifth tercet ends with yet another underscored break, this time indicated with a question mark. Neither break is accidental, for they correspond to the two crucial self-reflective moments in the poem: the break between the third and fourth tercets occurs is the point of the self-problematization of the discourse, the point of interruption in the associative continuum; the break between the fifth and sixth tercets, with the intensification of this self-problematization, serves to pose a direct question about difference in a certain situation of indeterminacy. The last line of the first section of the poem and the first line of the second section are joined across this break in a couplet based on the grammatical person—the discourse shifts from the third to the second person: “... Dismiss the footprint. Wipe your eyes. // Stop pilfering. ...” Thus the poem’s central couplet (on the basis of grammatical person) is connected with l. 14, which is exactly in the middle of the second section (“To cry out *moth!* when on your white towel you see”). Meanwhile, the middle of the poem is linked to the middle of the second section on the basis of grammatical mood. There is a shift in the last line of the first section from the indicative to the imperative mood (marked, to be sure, with a full stop), which continues in the next line. This is followed by lines in the indicative mood; ll. 14 and 15, however, are both in the interrogative mood, interrupted by the exclamation “*El Alamein!*” This structure may be diagrammed as follows:





The two lines that open the poem have a special status: they may be read indicatively, as a list of objects, or they may be read as an invocation. This in itself creates a certain indeterminacy, which intensifies over the course of the poem, right up to the defining of a certain irreconcilable difference and confrontation in the final tercet.

As I have indicated, changes in the grammatical person are connected, in the poem’s structure, with the function of creating turns in the content. The appearance of second-person discourse acts, in both cases, as a self-reflective turn: in the first case it introduces a transition to first-person discourse (the first-person discourse begins with the line “I go paying visits with my lives” [“*V goste odhajam s svojimi življenji*”]—this line plays a special role in the poem, partly because, in the original Slovene, it can be read as a hendecasyllable, the “standard” line of the Dantean tercet, whereas the poem’s other lines range from ten to sixteen syllables—and ends with the statement, “I don’t know what a word is,” which represents the sharpest possible thematization of indeterminacy on the level of poetic self-reflection and as such evokes yet another turn in the poem), and in the second case to third-person discourse. In these shifts (*third person* > *second person* > *first person* > *second person* > *third person*), there is also a change in the function of the third-person narrative. In the final tercet, the third person becomes the means for radicalizing the self-reflective turn: the third-person narrative about a certain historical situation proves to be even “more first-person-like than first-person speech”: it is the most radical form of the speaker’s self-reflection. If the third-person discourse in the poem’s first section is the means for creating a certain indeterminacy, then the third-person discourse in the final stanza is nothing less than the shattering of indeterminacy: it is the thematization of total differentiation, even confrontation. Shifts in grammatical tense are also connected with what happens here. Most of the poem is written in the present tense, which the past tense interrupts in three places: in ll. 3 and 12, and in the final tercet. In each case, the past tense appears in the function of dividing or separating: first, in a certain evaporating or “drying up” (in the original Slovene, the phrase translated as “forgot-to-take-it dries up” includes a past tense verb: “*nima-ga-spravljenega-je-izhlapelo*,” which might be rendered more literally as “doesn’t-have-it-put-away-it-evaporated”—*Tr.*); second, in removing the speaker from a certain condition “here”; and third, in direct confrontation.

At the same time, the spatial relations evoked by these lines also change. This is particularly true with the relation *above–below*, which the poem explicitly underscores. The opening two lines evoke the ground—the indeterminacy between desert sand and grass—while in l. 3, the word-phrase “forgot-to-take-it dries up” (literally, “doesn’t-have-it-put-away-it-evaporated”) evokes the rise of something indefinable into the sky. This is followed by an explicit defining of the *above–below* relation, which could be either spatial or symbolic or both; given the book’s context, we might even understand this relation in class terms: “the ones // trampled by sheep”<sup>67</sup> are below, while Grisca and Beatrice, as representatives of the aristocracy, are above. (If we consider certain biographical facts not mentioned in the poem, this conversation can be understood as the living Beatrice talking with her dead husband, Grisca.<sup>68</sup>) A conversation occurs in which *above* and *below* meet in a certain indeterminacy; next comes the warning, “At this angle of the sky / there are no pictures allowed” (“*Pod takim kotom neba se / ni dovoljeno slikati*”). In this statement, *above* and *below* are joined: the space is defined as the relation between *below*, where there are people who might be photographed, and *above*, from which angle one might photograph them (here we are no longer dealing with class relations, but with the feeling that someone in an airplane is looking down at the space “below”)—but at the same time this gaze is recognized as impermissible. Next there is an image of corpses, which introduces a turn that problematizes the speech position and that is sharpened into the statement about the speaker going somewhere (“I go paying visits”). In the final tercet, the *below–above* relation is again established in the ruthlessness of the decisive confrontation—and at the same time there is movement in two directions: Rommel, rising up from below, kisses the hands of heaven, and Rafko Perhauc bombs Rommel from his airplane—the confrontation is determined in this movement from above to below. The final tercet also connects with the statement about pictures not being allowed—in both instances we have the word *nebo* (translated in l. 7 as “sky,” and in l. 16 as

67 Although in the English version the phrase “*Tisti // poteptani od ovc*” is translated in the singular (“The one // trampled by sheep”), the Slovene is ambiguous and allows for the plural as well. — *Tr.*

68 Gregor Von Rezzori, the baroness’s late husband, went by the name “Grischa.” — *Tr.*

“heaven”), which is situated in the poem’s structure with extraordinary precision: it first appears two lines before the midpoint of the poem, and then two lines before its end. The action of the poem can be read as a linear progression—there is a steady increase of indeterminacy, which as such evokes a certain determination that in the final tercet appears as a *deus ex machina* in the image of the determination of a confrontation from World War II. At the same time, the poem demands a multidirectional reading; in fact, it is not until the final tercet that the multiple directions of the earlier lines are connected, from the ostrich and sand to the corpses (the appearance of which we are able to understand in connection with what happens in the final tercet; by the same token, with the final tercet the phrase “angle of the sky” in l. 7 acquires an entirely new meaning).

But the basic structural dualism of this poem resides in how the words connect with each other and how they point to things outside themselves. The very first lines underscore—declaratively, as it were—the indeterminacy between the two basic ways we must read Šalamun’s language: between the logic of the autonomy of the signifier and the logic whereby the language is the immediate record of what is *seen* and as such is organized on the basis of a visual logic that ultimately does not belong to the language. The poem opens by stringing together syntagmas that all begin with a form of the adjective živ (“live” or “living,” but here translated as “quick” in order to achieve an effect similar to that of the original—*Tr.*). Intralinguistic logic creates this sequence of syntagmas, which are formed on different semantic principles; by underscoring the similarity, the differing nature of the principles by which the words in the shared sequence are joined into syntagmas is brought out with particular clarity. The descriptive logic of “živ*i* noj” (“live ostrich”) and “živ*a* trava” (“live grass”) is juxtaposed in the shared sequence to the symbolic logic of “živ*i* pesek” (“quicksand”) and “živ*o* apno” (“quicklime”). Spanning this duality, meanwhile, there is an associative bond between two syntagmas formed on different principles (“živ*i* noj” [“live ostrich”] and “živ*i* pesek” [“quicksand”]), which is stronger than the bond between syntagmas formed on the same principle (“živ*i* noj” [“live ostrich”] and “živ*a* trava” [“live grass”]), for it evokes a shared setting: the African desert. Another associative link to this setting is created by the phrase “*The white juice from celeste Aida*,” an allusion to the famous aria from the Verdi opera, which is set in Egypt

and which Verdi wrote for the opening of the Suez Canal as a symbolic affirmation of the West’s colonial domination of the region. Indeed, running through the entire poem we find an associative chain that thematizes the desert and that becomes increasingly determinable: *ostrich—sand—the white juice from celeste Aida—a scorpion—El Alamein—Sahara*. (Other evocations of Africa in *The Blue Tower* are mainly connected with the poet’s socializing with the Nigerian writer Diran Adebayo, who was staying at the Santa Maddalena Foundation at the same time as Šalamun and is one of the book’s *dramatis personae*.) The scene of the final confrontation is itself evoked through two different kinds of logic. The name *Rommel* appears in the poem through both the logic of alliteration: (*z RuMeno RaMo* [“with a yellow shoulder”]—*RoMMeL*) and the logic of association (evoked through the toponym *El Alamein*). The Battle of El Alamein, in the summer of 1942, put an end to Rommel’s North African campaign; it was here that his last offensive was crushed. (The remarkable concreteness of the final tercet is established through symbolic logic: Perhauc’s “blowing to bits” of Rommel, mentioned here, is symbolic. The Slovene Rafael, or “Rafko,” Perhauc was a central figure in Yugoslav military aviation in World War II; in 1944, he became the commander of the Yugoslav anti-Fascist air force in Algeria, and in the 1960s, just as the young Šalamun’s poetic career was on the rise, he wrote a fascinating memoir entitled *Aviators in the Overseas Brigades*.<sup>69</sup>)

The whole poem is an intersection of different principles of speech that reaches its climax in the penultimate tercet, which demands that a certain difference be defined:

with a yellow shoulder. I don’t know what a word is.  
To cry out *moth!* when on your white towel you see  
a scorpion? El Alamein! Where is the difference?

*z rumeno ramo. Ne vem, kaj je beseda.*  
*Da zavpiješ molj, ko na beli brisači zagledaš*  
*škorpijona? El Alamein! Kje je razlika?*

69 Rafael Perhauc, *Letalci prekomorci* (Nova Gorica: Soča, 1968).

The inner tension of this tercet—in which the very choice of punctuation suggests a climax of emotional tension (in the original Slovene, apart from l. 15, where two question marks and an exclamation point appear in close proximity, all the other punctuation marks in the poem are commas and periods)—is so great because it is formulated at an intersection with a certain other indeterminacy. When Šalamun inserts the exclamation “El Alamein!” between the statement “I don’t know what a word is” and the question “Where is the difference?,” his method is utterly precise. Not knowing about words coincides with a certain other question, which has to do with the basic speech position (defined as that of the speaker, presented in the second person). Is this “the word departing from the flesh,” or is it total inertia? The inertia of the speaker, who is so completely immersed in “flesh,” in benumbed relaxation, that from inertia he formulates even his alarm about a scorpion as a typically petit-bourgeois dread of moths? The indeterminacy is not innocent: the wrapped corpses evoke an indeterminacy between an awareness of the horrors of war and culinary techniques (the word translated as “sheaves”—*svaljki*—can also mean “roulades”—*Tr.*),<sup>70</sup> which elicits in the speaker himself a need for distance and clarification. (Not least of all, an associative link may also be made between the wrapped corpses and vacationers lying on towels.) In this light, not even the reference to the aria “*Celeste Aida, forma divina ...*” is necessarily innocent. Should we read it as an allusion to the moving tale of love and death told by Verdi’s brilliant opera, or understand it as an emblem of the (petit-)bourgeois taste of someone who kisses the hands of heaven?

The signifier *El Alamein*—underscored as the emotional focal point of the poem by the simple fact that it carries the poem’s sole exclamation point (in the original Slovene—*Tr.*)—functions as the nexus of all the tensions; it is both a vehicle of indeterminacy and the point that interrupts the indeterminacy and transforms it into the setting for the confrontation. El Alamein is today a seaside luxury resort in Egypt, so its mention can easily conjure up the image of a vacationer on a beach towel; at the same time, however, when we encounter this name, we cannot help but think of the World War II battlefield. Additional ambivalence comes from the title of the poem. The reference to

70 Should we perhaps read the poem “Pleasure” as an aestheticization of the war in Iraq?!

*Reader’s Digest* suggests the emblematic reading material of the petit bourgeois on holiday (remember how Roman Polanski used this magazine as an emblem of the petite bourgeoisie in the film *Rosemary’s Baby*); we can easily imagine a vacationer reading an article in *Reader’s Digest* about the Battle of El Alamein—which raises the tension another notch. Here we must also say a few words about the dual grammatical number in the title: “*the two of us* build ... *the two of us* read ...” (*gradiva in prebirava*).<sup>71</sup> In the structure of the poem, we can connect the dual with the use of second-person discourse. But the function of second-person discourse in the poem is to introduce the self-reflective turn: its first appearance (ll. 9–10) can be read either as the speaker addressing another person or as the speaker talking to himself, while its second appearance (l. 14) can be read either as a question to someone else or as a rhetorical question. So even if the poem is addressed to another person, the role of the second-person discourse in the poem is primarily self-reflective, and as such, the dual number refers to the dualities within the speaker himself: the dual of indeterminacy and the dual of confrontation.

The name *El Alamein*, meanwhile, can be read not least of all as a “verbal mask”—the “closeness of the names” (to use Šalamun’s expression from “Marais”) is unmistakable: *ALAMeiN–ŠALAMuN*.

At the precise moment of confrontation—the moment of decision—the ambivalence of the speaker’s position is intensified. There is no ambiguity about the speaker’s conscious identification with Rafko Perhauc, who is emphatically described as “my uncle.” On the other hand, however, emblems of the (petite) bourgeoisie in the poem are clearly associated with the image of Rommel. Here, the alliterative connection between *RuMena RaMa* (“*the yellow shoulder*”)—the speaker’s shoulder—and *RoMMel* adds a certain subliminal bond. The confrontation splits the speech position in two, with resolution occurring only in the final line. It is in the description of Rommel that I see the sharpness with which Šalamun poses the situation. By presenting Rommel as a sentimental kisser of the hands of

71 Uniquely among the modern European languages, Slovene has three forms of grammatical number: not only singular and plural, but also dual (indicating two of something). In the Slovene title of the poem, “*Skedenj gradiva in prebirava Reader’s Digest*,” the verbs *gradiva* (“build”) and *prebirava* (“read”) are in the first-person dual form. — *Tr.*



heaven, Fascism/Nazism is thematized as something that is potentially present in the very essence of the (petite) bourgeoisie—as Pasolini once posed the question with full perception: “Did not Nazism define the ‘normal’ petite bourgeoisie and does it not continue to define it?”<sup>72</sup> The answer to the innocent question about whether the exclamation “Moth!” at the sight of a scorpion crawling on a white towel is or is not a word, is possible in this consciousness only through the radical problematization of the alleged innocence of the speech position.

On the level of the text, then, the confrontation occurs as a confrontation within the speaker himself. His entire speech is focused on a danger from which only the necessity of differentiation can rescue him—a necessity that is called forth by the indeterminacy itself. Thus the poem speaks also about the process of its own creation. The Polish poet Julian Tuwim, in the poem “Letters,” begs the reader to pray for his letters, which will keep piling up like a black desert until he, the typesetter, finally breaks through this desert with a poem. Šalamun sets up both the desert and the breaking-through of it. His poetic language finds itself in dangerous proximity to inertia, but at the decisive moment it becomes clear that there is within it an explosive power.

#### POSTSCRIPT

When I was writing this attempt at an analysis, I came across a text that thematizes a different kind of indeterminacy with regard to El Alamein that in a peculiar way is connected with the situation presented by Šalamun’s poem. I am thinking of the indeterminacy between “entertainment” and momentous historic events in the eyes of the very pilot who in the poem appears as the person in the battle who blows Rommel to bits. In his book *Aviators in the Overseas Brigades*, which I looked at again while writing this text, Rafael Perhauc describes traveling by truck through El Alamein in 1944, on his way to Benina, Libya. He writes that it was “entertaining” for him to see this place, which had only recently been a battlefield:

On the way from El Alamein to Benina, a journey of more than a thousand kilometers, debris was scattered along both sides of the road, recalling the past offensives of 1941 and 1942: demolished tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, broken-down trucks and other military vehicles, planes that had been shot down—all provided eloquent testimony to the desperate efforts of the Germans and the Italians, and to no little degree the British as well. This now provided entertainment for the passing traveler, for each of these objects was fascinating in its own way. Some tanks and trucks lay on their sides; others had their wheels sticking up in the air; most of them, however, had no wheels at all, for the various motorized divisions, when passing through this place, had taken them as replacements for their own worn-out or damaged wheels, which they had then simply left lying nearby.<sup>73</sup>

Ljubljana, May–June 2007

<sup>72</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 231.

<sup>73</sup> Perhauc, *Letalci prekomorci*, 64–65.



# TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

TRANSLATED BY JEFFREY YOUNG AND KATARINA VLADIMIROV YOUNG, WITH THE AUTHOR

## ANDES<sup>1</sup>

### UNDER GLASS AIR SPEWS

I walk. Under glass air spews.  
I opened little belts. Rushes and  
a small basket was woven already inside  
water. After the fish went sludge. The water  
was religious. Rhinos were lying in it  
inside a matchbox. Were there  
also Tokyo streets? When you fall into the cylinder, into  
the silo, they intercept the corpse. With a net. With  
hooks. By dragging. “Leg already  
stiffened, neck not yet,” goes into the report.  
With one race like this, with another race like that.  
In the soft sun a small white-eared rabbit hops along  
mountain pastures. He darts with a skiff through the forest  
over cranberries and heather and strengthens his spirit.

### POD STEKLOM BRUHA ZRAK

Hodim. Pod steklom bruha zrak.  
Odpri sem paske. Ločje in  
košarica je bila spletena že znotraj  
vode. Za ribo je šel mulj. Voda  
je bila verna. Nosorogi so ležali v njej  
v škatlici za vžigalice. So bile tam  
tudi tokijske ulice? Ko padeš v valj, v  
silos, prestrežejo truplo. Z mrežo. S  
kavlji. Z vlečenjem. “Noga je že  
otrdela, vrat še ni,” gre v zapisnik.  
Pri eni rasi tako, pri drugi rasi tako.  
V sončku belouhi zajček skablja po  
planinah. Šiba s čolničkom po gozdu  
čez brusnice in resje in si krepi duha.

### THE BLOSSOM FALLS, PEOPLE DIE

When I had read the book *Ghost Train  
Through the Andes* by Michael  
Jacobs and stepped before  
the threshold  
*con mia ultima sigaretta*  
with a glass of wine  
I quietly called inside myself  
Sophie! Sophie!  
how he revived you, how you are present  
today, here inside me.  
I admire you!

And it’s about Michael Jacob’s grandmother, he lives in  
Spain with a beautiful dog,  
travels all his life and writes beautiful books.  
And he defended Blunt, publically,  
Blunt according to him was not an active spy from  
the war onward, the Queen  
forgave him.  
Michael, Waheed, Alex, and Beatrice now  
happily babble, I look at  
stars,  
quietly calling Sophie.

### ODPADE CVET

Ko sem prebral knjigo *Ghost Train  
Through The Andes* Michaela  
Jacobsa in stopil pred  
prag  
con mia ultima sigaretta  
s kozarcem vina  
sem tiho v sebi zaklical  
Sophie! Sophie!  
kako te je obudil, kako si prisotna  
danes, tukaj v meni.  
Občudujem te!

In gre za babico Michaela Jacobsa, ki živi v  
Španiji z lepim psom,  
vse življenje potuje in piše lepe knjige,  
in Blunta je branil, javno,  
Blunt po njegovem ni bil aktiven špijon že od  
vojne naprej, kraljica mu je  
odpustila,  
Michael, Waheed, Alex in Beatrice zdaj  
veselo čebljajo, jaz gledam  
zvezde,  
tiho kličem Sophie.

<sup>1</sup> These translations are selected from the book *Andes*, published in the United States in December 2016 by Black Ocean Press. Šalamun’s penultimate book-length manuscript—*Andi* in the original—was written in spring 2012 during a stay at the Santa Maddalena Foundation for Writers and Botanists in Tuscany. The text has yet to be published in its entirety in Slovenian, but a generous selection was included in ID16, following Šalamun’s death in December 2014. NB: During our work with Šalamun on these translations, he would occasionally make changes to the English text without making the corresponding change in Slovenian. This explains the discrepancy between the title “The Blossom Falls, People Die” in translation and the original.—Tr.



YOU CRY BECAUSE MY LOVE ISN'T DEEPER, I KNOW

From Florence come plans, sketches,  
deliberations and reasonings.

We don't give a damn about that. *Sono un  
Slavo Dalmata*, a son of Venice.

Like Titian I fly from one to  
another among colors. Like

Tiepolo we are both stretched by blueness. Joshua  
says: we met by chance,

I don't know by which logic, in the basement of the Empire  
State Building. Tomaž otherwise

had a total sense for algae. Only  
money he didn't have and neither did I.

Now they sail above the country. Like some kind of dots.  
Like some kind of dots, and I am jealous.

LUNCH AND THE EVENING

O, my virgin kleptomaniac. You're  
stepping on lilies. You're aping divas,

with a tiny overcoat you cry. Kaput!  
Kaput! The femur.

Yesterday I saw a Korean woman.  
She was wiggling her toes. And when

she was bowing, when she was  
bowing. Yesterday

I lunched with Amir. I hugged  
him. Yesterday I

sat in the fifth row. This is  
the best row in

the world in the hall of Spanish Fighters  
in Moste in Ljubljana.

JOČEŠ, KER MOJA LJUBEZEN NI GLOBLJA, VEM

Iz Firenc prihajajo načrti, skice,  
tehtanja in umovanja.

Mi se na to požvižgamo. *Sono un  
Slavo Dalmata*, sin Benetk.

Kot Tizian letam od tipa do  
tipa med barvami. Kot

Tiepolo naju razpenja modrina. Pravi  
Joshua: slučajno sva se dobila,

ne vem po kaki logiki, v kleti Empire  
State Buildinga. Tomaž je sicer

imel totalen občutek za alge. Samo  
denarja ni imel in jaz tudi ne.

Zdaj plujeta nad deželo. Kot kake pike.  
Kot kake pike in jaz sem ljubosumen.

KOSILO IN VEČER

O, moja devica kleptomanka. Po  
liliji stopaš. Dive zviráš,

s plaščkom jočeš. Kapút,  
kapút. Stegnenica.

Včeraj sem videl Korejko.  
Migala je s prsti. In ko

se je priklanjala, ko se je  
priklanjala. Včeraj

sem kosil z Amirjem. Objel  
sem ga. Včeraj sem

sedel v peti vrsti. To je  
najboljša vrsta na

svetu v dvorani Španskih borcev  
v Mostah v Ljubljani.

MORNING

Immortality comes and goes, don't blind yourself  
young man. If you don't grab it by

the horns, it will look. At the moon. At a theodolite.  
It will shine only on your coupled

brain, coupled heart, coupled T-shirt,  
coupled eyes. Everything on you will be

edged, pressed, and crumpled. Hide  
yourself under the snow and rest. In the storm,

when I had to release a barrel of oil into the sea  
that it made an eye, a radiant barrel,

immortality hugged you. May it not be  
the last time. Dante does not report on this. Neither

Ariosto, nor Torquato Tasso. Hold  
yourself by the sleeves and fly away. Stay.

JUTRO

Nesmrtnost pride in gre, ne slepi se  
mladenič. Če je ne boš zgrabil za

roge, se bo ozrla. V luno. V teodolit.  
Obsijala ti bo samo parne

možgane, parno srce, parno majčko,  
parne oči. Vse na tebi bo

obrobljeno, sprešano in pomečkano. Skrij  
se pod sneg in počivaj. V nevihti,

ko sem moral v morje spustiti sod olja,  
da se je naredilo oko, žareči sod,

te je nesmrtnost objela. Naj ne bo  
zadnjič. Dante o tem ne poroča. Ne

Ariosto, ne Torquato Tasso. Primi  
se za rokave in poleti. Ostani.





# ALEŠ DEBELJAK

TRANSLATED BY ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## ALBANIA

*Albania is our smallest neighbor, having a population approximately twelve times smaller than Yugoslavia. It is the homeland of a people known as Shqiptars. For many centuries, the Albanians lived under Turkish rule. They are primarily engaged in the raising of livestock, especially sheep, in the mountainous regions of the country, and farming in the lowlands.*

We came to the foothills of the accursed mountains in a Volkswagen van to become acquainted with our homeland and so love it better, Kosovo in late May 1975, qualifications for the national judo team, I competed in my Club Olympia kimono, I gazed through the broken glass across the plains of a kindred world, shabby stone gorges and sparsely scattered forest glades, serrated mountain tops, and above them others, revealing a shelter here and there, a refuge, I discovered one on a paper boat, a port for old and young in search of knowledge, for anyone in the throes of boredom, I developed the habit after the first year of high school, I retreated from the scramble for power and style, if not for money, I sailed around reefs and through channels, I pulled my oars through each printed letter, through the sonnets of ruined poets, the confessions of unsavory believers, between advice for skimming stones and instructions for passing the night beneath an unfriendly sky, I navigated without the help of a charismatic captain, on my own steam and I layered on the weight of legacy, reclined on a shelf of dictionaries, atlases, and doors magnanimously opened, and yet intoxicated, memory demands new curses, *čiuša*

*nona*,<sup>1</sup> pecking in the belly and hocking in the park, hidden meaning is here, certainly, but where does it reach if it is not known to me that I, like Skanderbeg Iskaner,<sup>2</sup> hold dominion over the main square of Pristina where flaneurs slake their thirst with too sweet lemonade as pleasing as brandy never is on Celovška Street in Ljubljana, a warrior from the wild days sits between doves and garages, at ease astride the saddle, leading his nimble black horse through the occasional parade, an amber bottle, perhaps light crimson, riding past the Ottomans, meeting the eyes of the honored guests, the comfort of the smooth watery surface, not just a cheap copy of that velvety liquid, we cultivated the deception that we were more worthy.

<sup>1</sup> *Čiuša nona* is the Slavized version of an Albanian curse (*pizda ti materna* in Slovenian; *Te Qifsha Nānen* in Albanian; roughly rendered in English as *fuck your mother*) brought back to Slovenia by soldiers serving in Kosovo. It is said that the curse was considered so offensive that people were warned not to use it front of Kosovars, as they risked being killed on the spot. [Ed.n.]

<sup>2</sup> Skanderbeg was an Albanian nobleman and military commander during the Ottoman era. Later a high-quality cognac was named after him. It was considered one of the most prestigious alcoholic beverages during Yugoslav times. [Ed.n.]

## ALBANIJA

*Albanija je naša najmanjša sosed, saj ima dvanajstkrat manj prebivalcev kot Jugoslavija. To je domovina ljudi, ki se imenujejo Šiptarji. Dolga stoletja so živeli pod turško oblastjo. V goratih pokrajinah se ukvarjajo z živinorejo, zlasti z ovčarstvom, v nižinah pa s poljedelstvom.*

Do vznožja prekletih planin smo prispeli v folksvagnovem kombiju, spoznaj domovino, da bi jo bolj ljubil, Kosovo v poznem maju 1975, izbirno prvenstvo za državno reprezentanco, nastopil sem v klubskem kimonu Olimpije iz Ljubljane, skozi razbito šipo sem pogledoval po planotah iz sorodnega sveta, razdrapane skalne soteske in gozdne jase, na redko razmetane, nazobčani gorski vrhovi, za njimi so še drugi, komaj kdaj in kje pokaže se zavetje, na ladji iz papirja sem ga odkril, pristanišče za stare, mlade vedeže in z dolgočasence vseh vrst, navado sem po prvem letniku gimnazije razvil, umaknil sem se pred pehanjem za močjo in stilom, če že ne dinarji, plul sem ob čereh in skozi ožine, gnal sem vesla do vsake tiskovine, med sonete propadlih pesnikov in izpovedi proslulih vernikov, med nasvete za metanje žabice in priročnike za prenočitve pod neprijaznim nebom, krmaril sem brez karizmatičnega kapitana, po lastni volji in predstavi sem preložil na kilograme dediščine, naslonjen na polico s slovarji, atlasi in vrati, odprtimi širokogrudno, čeprav opito, spomin zahteva novo kletvico, čiuša nona, kljuvanje v trebuhu in bljuvanje v parku, prikrit pomen je tu, gotovo, vendar kam sploh seže, če ni mi niti znano, da sem poveljeval kot Skenderbeg Iskander, na glavnem trgu Prištine si sprehajalci tešijo žejo s presladko limonado, prileže se tako, kot se žganica ob Celovski cesti ni, vojščak iz divjih dni med golobi in garažami sedi, sproščeno se v sedlu drži, vranca vešče vodi

na priložnostno parado, žolta steklenica, mogoče že svetlo škrlatna, razjahal je pri otomani, častni gostje so ga iz oči v oči spoznali, ugodje gladke gladine, ne zmerjaj z bedno kopijo te žametne tekočine, utvaro smo z njo negovali, da smo več veljali.



# ALEŠ DEBELJAK

## IN PRAISE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

I’m a modern everyman. I make use of books to find for myself a dwelling place, if only a temporary one, within the pastiche of narratives and experiences, facts and fantasies. I leaf through the books, do not drink and do not drive—I smoke and fly, through the tunnel under the city castle and over the main square, hovering for a moment under the old plane tree before disappearing among the arcades of cajoling shop windows.

For me, the geography of towns, harbors, streets, and squares overlaps with literary topography. The poems and novels I read are chapters in a story about a *particular* place with which *any* place can identify. The tension between the fearful anxiety and the thrilling exploration that propels me on my wanderings around my imagined city delineates the modern mentality in which inescapable loyalty to a home place challenges one’s need to freely choose identity.

I’m not an exception. I remain attached to my birth town, family house, and my reading-corner armchair. I lend an ear to poets and writers as I weave a literary cosmopolis and freely choose my home. I draw from many narrative stocks as I deny the authority of chronological time the better to respond to the melancholic gaze of a deer that flashes by through the morphine-laden verses of Georg Trakl; I trace the vestiges of a personal drama in the wet flowers on the façades of bourgeois palaces under the slopes of Kapuzinerberg; and I am unmistakably, although temporarily, at home in Salzburg!

The book flutters its pages and old-fashioned raincoats fan out in an effort to protect the dry loneliness of night strollers passing by the craft shops of Alfama, the heart of old Lisbon; the portrait of Fernando Pessoa emerges from

under the jutting roofs of the past colonial glory written in sea salt and pigeon droppings; the portrait of a poet who produced an eternal homage to his Lisbon using the voices of imaginary authors who sing various songs but share one soul. His Lisbon is my Lisbon!

The book spreads its tattooed pages and I’m embraced by the smell of the sea-worn cliffs of the northern Adriatic; the tower of the *Thurn und Taxis* castle appears for a moment, a fleeting pulsation, and I slowly surrender to the recognition that I’m at home in Trieste; it is here that Rainer Maria Rilke wrote two of his dizzily inspiring *Duino Elegies*, and it is where I now find home, under the hills of the “gulf city” depicted in the books of Boris Pahor. I’m at home in the nostalgic *chiusa tristezza* from Umberto Saba’s poem “Three Streets”; the steps of Nora Joyce rustle through the whiteness of the book while she paces around a rented apartment, one of a dozen she and her husband lived in, fleeing from creditors; I can hear the argument of far-sighted Henrik Tuma, who as early as before World War I wanted to establish the first Slovenian university in cosmopolitan Trieste, the chief port of the Habsburg Empire, rather than in landlocked Ljubljana; although it is not visible to my eyes, I can nevertheless see Dragutin Kette’s sad promontory of San Carlo in Trieste, where the poet went to soothe the wounded heart and the needs of the swollen body; I imagine that I can understand the dialect of šavrinke, the peasant women traders from the Karst high plateau who together with the readers of Marjan Tomšič’s novels head daily towards the vegetable market in the harbor as they did during the distant times of the Habsburg monarchy; the inscription on Italo Svevo’s grave in St. Ana Cemetery tells me that he “smiles at evanescent life and glory which crowned his work late.” Roberto Bobi

Bazlen, a publisher and a critic, despairingly reminds me from the desks of the Biblioteca Civica that there is no other way to write modern books but as footnotes.

I’m at home in Zagreb, too. Well, at least in the books about Zagreb that strive to confirm the ironic thought of the great Croatian bard Miroslav Krleža that Central Europe begins on the terrace of the Esplanade Hotel; I’m at home in Belgrade, whose head resides in cosmopolitan heights thanks to the poets Vasko Popa and Miloš Crnjanski, and the writers Danilo Kiš and David Albahari, while its legs are entrenched under the swinging lamp of a brawly Balkan tavern!

And I’m at home, truly at home, in Sarajevo, defined by ineffable suffering but also with an ethical determination to continue to talk in many voices about the right to have many identities, through the supreme works of art such as can only be born out of extreme circumstances, finding expression in the quivering elegies of Izet Sarajlić, the noble sentiment of Abdulah Sidran, or the broad-minded critique of Dževad Karahasan.

The poems of Czesław Miłosz, Tomas Venclova, and Eugeniusz Ališanka open for me the door to Wilna or Vilnius, the “city of ash” amidst Lithuanian forests that lives a secret life of another reality, one that has been sifted through the sieves of my literary memory. I suck in the smoke, leaf through the books of poems and stories, and fastidiously sip the verses and passages in which the creative talent succeeded in conjuring up the shared destiny of immigrants and refugees, nomads and displaced people, roaming the streets and courtyards of the town whose walls demarcate the ultimate frontiers of freedom.

To be at home in a place where the sky meets the earth is to make the experience real! To be at home in a place that offers the elementary, emotionally laden and full-blooded experience! To be at home in a place in which every thing has a name! To breathe the metropolitan air that ever since the Middle Ages has been inviting all citizens of the urban republic to get rid of old communal ties! I myself would like to become a map of the city, a written page, a thin cobweb through which older and dimmer biographies and urban chronicles shine!

While I’m getting lost wandering along the boulevards of real megalopolises and among the covers of borrowed books, I actually search for my imaginary city. Wherever I discover it, a provincial village easily emulates the dwelling of gods and becomes the capital of the world!

More precisely: it is the capital of my world that, along with many other and different worlds of other and different readers, travels the orbits of the “Gutenberg galaxy.”

It is true that we readers are the citizens of various nation-states, each with our own home address and hometown. Yet the moment we open a book and yield, in our unique ways, to the adventurous challenge, we take part in the same ritual. We assert that our place of residence is in the same community, in the Republic of Letters. It cannot be found in any world atlas; its borders are unstable and are passionately negotiated time and again. With every story read, with every verse quietly recounted, we renew our citizenship in the Republic of Letters. Many opportunities arise and dissolve within it, faces distorted by horror offer a hand to fantastic patterns of paradise, and every page read turns a new chapter in a reader’s biography.

We can all become citizens in this republic, without restrictions. The only condition required to obtain citizenship is a human capacity for empathy—that is, the capacity to put oneself in someone else’s shoes. No one’s human rights are curtailed in this republic, no one is discriminated against, sentenced, or erased from the register.

Moreover, no one in the republic of letters is forced to speak the language of the majority. The literary republic of letters speaks in one language. It is the language of translation. Literature is not what gets “lost in translation,” as Robert Frost famously exclaimed in defense of poetic singularity. As for me, I prefer Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet’s definition, who said that the reading of poetry in translation resembles “a kiss through a veil.” I could not care less for the ascetic chastity that, fearing loss, remains innocent, while with my lips parted in expectation I leaf through the pages of books written in languages I haven’t learned. I take my hat off thankfully to translators, the exemplary citizens of the republic of letters, who continually make it possible for every reader, all of us, to be part of the story of a temporary community committed to the lost cause that represents our true home.

# KATJA PLUT

TRANSLATED BY ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## BECOMING HUMAN

*Perhaps mogoče peut-être if I was an angel če bi bila angel que si j'étais ange da sam anđeo  
it would be easier for me to get along bi se lažje shajalo il serait plus facile pour moi à vivre  
bilo bi puno jednostavnije, in razumelo et à comprendre i razumljivije to understand or if  
Iwas human ali če bi bila človek ou si j'étais homme ali nisam*

I want to know everything,  
everything about me, about you, about all the people who will live, about  
buried minstrels,  
I want to speak all languages and talk to every  
human being every night.

I want to sleep with every man, every woman, I want to walk every path upon which roadside  
rituals have not been stripped  
away by hordes of the passing dead.  
I want to return among children and among families of dolphins, but  
even before that, I want

to reflect about things from a rational point of view  
make love with our two hearts as if they  
were each stretching themselves across half of the Earth.  
I want to argue with myself and become the kind of person it is necessary to be,  
suitably, a person of many directions, capable of walking in any shoes,  
that are available, looking through my and your eyes, into any belfry or the middle of the  
earth or the sky, but never at cross purposes.  
I want to become human, so I can loudly depart in any direction, but  
never at cross purposes.  
Because I am doing something here without really concentrating  
on what I am or what I do and why others are

so much better plugged into this scene.  
I was born and I have been constantly complaining, taking myself for granted, just like all of  
you and  
all of your troubles.  
It seems to me that I should start paying rent, because  
the way I live contributes nothing to the community  
in which I live.  
Forgive me but first I will have to forgive myself, first

we need to have a decent argument, so that I can calm down  
into one person again.  
To be a person that can loudly depart  
and only then will I actually be able to depart.

April 2005

## AD APTA

I vomit sad and angry letters.  
I vomited kisses to people about whom  
I knew nothing, I based them on the aboriginal  
assumption that these days celebrates 500 years of naivety;

it is bad if you do not learn from the fall of other peoples;  
look at the condition we are all in this together now; I and them and  
Little Red Riding Hood;

adapt or die, it was written in a letter vomited by  
Charles Darwin.

István says that the most developed species is capable of subordinating  
another. I say that the most developed species is the happiest one.  
(Supposedly it is not necessary to define happiness because it is secreted  
in the form of hormones.)

It's all about shopping. As for me, it's not about what's  
important to whom, but what quantity of time someone  
spends questioning this market. To István, I seem like a sweet  
silly speck, because I tear my self apart by drilling into my reasons.  
But I think the sweet silly specks are those that struggle to collect  
one of the 10 or 15 biggest collections of the products of the **NINfactory**.

They call us Little Brothers. How sweet. The Romans would call  
us barbarians. But the Romans don't exist anymore, right? And the word  
barbarian no longer means anything. Honor is a historic fact,  
Indians are only children and dolphins are animals. And coincidence is  
all powerful. And everyone is innocent, until the cleverest  
among us proves guilty. And the people purchA250se.

It doesn't need to be a coincidence for you to see that we are controlled  
by a handful of thieves and robbers that were carried on the Niña, Pinta in Santa Maria into the  
vast lawlessness against  
India.  
Children.

C’EST NOUS

l’etat, c’est toi,  
l’extase  
c’est moi.

SHE SAID TIME

Ref.: for 2000 years preachers taught us on Sundays  
and life on all other days.  
The test is here  
and only a few tribal nations know the day;  
only a few tribal nations remember  
that we cannot outwit the Cosmos by ignoring it,  
that today is a trial and we are only half prepared  
the Cankaresque mother Earth has no intention of cradling us  
of waiting  
for whether  
something will come or not  
from what we SAID would be  
*Ref.: for 2000 years preachers taught us on Sundays  
and life on all other days.*  
And now we are growing from adolescents into people  
or not  
the choice is  
yours  
mine  
hers etc.  
No teacher can help.  
In the beginning was the word  
the beginning is over  
and it’s time  
for action  
and by this I do not mean winter sales  
and by this I mean  
that with the word WHATEVER all meaning has been lost in between  
oh oopsie daisy,  
even withmyowneyes doesn’t matter  
paradise is sold on every sidewalk  
if everything looks like paradise  
why does it burns like hell

YOU CAN EXIT NOW. WE HAVE REACHED OUR DESTINATION.

“Our new religion  
will be a religion of love”  
and it will be 2000 years old at birth.  
We really ain’t fast,  
we didn’t do our homework  
and our cramming approach is as obvious as my garden this spring  
we just have no time for these things  
now there really  
wasn’t any time left  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPEpSXo8K\\_Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPEpSXo8K_Q)  
shit  
... and these tectonics completely fit... with my  
— ... well enough already, can I live?!  
— I dunno,  
she said.  
Try.



# BRANE MOZETIČ

TRANSLATED BY BARBARA JURŠA

*when I was little, they made us wave little flags*

at the president, our school was near celovška street, on the strategic route from brnik airport to ljubljana. sometimes we would also wave foreign flags. when he had a guest. now they make us vote. to make it look fair. the new government poses for the cameras. where do they find the hope to believe that there's still something left to steal. strong gusts of wind from the hills, it's cold and there's barely any snow. I look through the window at the people who are slowly beginning to grasp that they've been taken for a ride, and don't understand how this could have happened. it has been flowing for years and years.

*I drag myself through long empty corridors, bleak,*  
my legs and arms ache from the load. on and on into the big white hall, a consecrated entrance to a consecrated country. the line is long, folding back on itself ten times, the wardens strict, the questions serious; they're all little world policemen. all americans seem like this to me. they've been bending over world maps since kindergarden, moving tanks, directing rockets. even if I crossed the border every week, they would photograph me each time, they would take the prints of my ten fingers each time. where do they get lost? there, in empty words of freedom. I'm limping on, the eternal potential enemy, here and there, decades ago and still today. we used to be taught that we need to be on constant alert against the enemy. all we learned is to vote for them, to become like them ourselves, like americans rising up into the sky and dropping bombs. perhaps one day there will be a mistake and we'll demolish our own towns. perhaps the earth will open and swallow us. we gather in the streets and protest against the war. hypocrites, we who voted for it.

*that day we were supposed to hold a meeting at my place*  
for the magazine revolver<sup>1</sup>. I think it was summer, getting on towards evening. s. had already come while the others hadn't shown up yet. then n. called. said that there were tanks on the streets. that she would try to push her way through like a partisan. she came much later and said that a war had started. the meeting was called off. what had started has left me with a feeling of guilt. they divided the country among themselves, plundered it, left a heap of dung in grandma's garden, chickens fighting for worms, poking around and cackling. cannons can be heard in the distance. I wasn't destined to live in peace, without heartache. I travel to get away. but in new countries there are new cannons, soldiers, machine guns, I put my hands behind my neck, lie down on the ground, I remember my protest readings for democracy – and now this.

*the hot sun of nicaragua. beneath it, yoked horses*  
for tourists. in a long line. if anybody happens to take pity on one, the first cart drives off and the horses behind automatically step forward. they are skinny, worn, they couldn't manage a long trip. two are drawing a hearse, a coffin behind the glass, and behind the coffin a long happy procession, trumpets blasting jazz, they can't be bothered, the posthumous masks, not even the believers in church who sing, dance, clap their hands. the banging of the drum beats down on my head. in the evening, when the heat slackens a bit, the birds become lively, screeching like crazy. but nothing can bother the horses. from time to time somebody pours water over them. from behind, the steam rises from the soil. the night will come. they'll drive us into our wretched pens. I'll rub against the horse beside me and imagine he caresses me. I won't see him, he won't see me, he'll merely feel the exhausted body next to his.

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<sup>1</sup> A popular gay magazine published in Slovenia, Yugoslavia from 1990 to 1997. The author worked as its editor.

on 11/28/1973 I watched the movie cabaret in the union cinema. I wrote its summary and added the judgement: I don't know where the charm of this movie is, why it won eight oscars. and a few months later cries and whispers. and last tango in paris. I watched a lot of movies at the time, attended the week of soviet films, the minifest which followed the belgrade one. but those years I mostly made music charts. all of my musical idols were rebels of some kind. I translated dylan's lyrics, cut out pictures of singers from the magazine stop and glued them into a notebook. sometimes a picture of a well-built young man in trunks found its way into the pages. we were all rebels at the time. we looked down on marriage, we were disgusted by the image of a family driving off on a sunday trip in a volkswagen beetle. we despised money, everything associated with it. we walked around in shabby clothes, somewhere on the margins, looking for the tiny energies between us. until the revolution. or contrarevolution. then those energies got lost, the margins fell away, everyone around me started to fight for marriages, families, sunday trips with the kids, young men started to come only for money, they didn't touch me lightly with fingers, didn't feel my shivers, they didn't know what to fight for.

ko sem bil majhen, so nas vodili z zastavicami mahat predsedniku, šola je bila blizu celovške, na strateški poti z brnika. včasih smo mahali tudi s tujimi zastavicami. kadar je imel gosta. sedaj nas vodijo na volitve. da bi izgledalo pošteno. nova vlada se nastavlja fotoaparatom. le kje jim upanje, da je ostalo še kaj za pokrast. od hribov močni su-nki vetra, mrzlo je, in komaj kaj snega. gledam skozi okno, na ljudi, ki počasi doumevajo, da so bili naplahtani, a ne razumejo, kako se je to lahko zgodilo. leta in leta je teklo.

vlečem se po dolgih praznih hodnikih, pustih, da me bolijo noge, roke od tovara. vse do velike bele dvorane, posvečenega vstopa v posvečeno državo. vrsta je dolga, desetkrat zavita, nadzorniki so strogi, vprašanja resna, sami mali svetovni policaji. zdi se mi, da so vsi američani taki. že v vrtcu se sklanjajo nad svetovnim zemljevidom, predstavljajo tanke, usmerjajo rakete. tudi če bi bil vsak teden na meji, bi me vsak teden fotografirali, mi vsak teden vzeli odtise desetih prstov. le kam se zgublajo? tja kot prazne besede svobode. krevsam naprej, večni poten-cialni sovražnik, tu in tam, že pred desetletji in še vedno. nekoč so nas učili, da je treba biti nenehno na preži pred sovragom. naučili smo se le, da jih sedaj sami volimo, da sami postajamo taki, da se kot američani dvigamo v nebo ter spuščamo bombe. morda nekoč pride do napake in zrušimo lastna mesta. morda se odpre zemlja in nas pogoltne. zbiramo se na cesti in protestiramo proti vojni. hinavci, mi, ki smo sami zanjo glasovali.

tistega dne naj bi pri meni imeli sestanek za revolver, mislim, da je bilo proti večeru, poletje. s. je že prišla, drugih pa nekako kar ni bilo. potem je klicala n., da so na ulicah tanki. a da se bo skušala po partizansko prebiti. prišla je dosti kasneje in povedala, da se je začela vojna. nič ni bilo s sestankom. začelo pa se je nekaj, kar je v meni vselej puščalo občutek krivde. državo so si razdelili, jo izropali, na vrtu stare mame so pustili kup gnojja, kure se tepejo za gliste, vneto brskajo in kokodakajo. v daljavi donijo topovi. ni mi bilo dano, da bi živel v miru, da me ne bi stiskalo pri srcu. potujem, da bi ušel. a v novih deželah novi topovi, vojaki, brzostrelke, dvigam roke za vrat, legam na tla, spominjam se svojih protestnih branj za demokracijo – zdaj pa tole.

vroče sonce nikaragve. pod njim stoječi konji z vprego za turiste. v dolgi vrsti. če se slučajno kdo usmili, se prvi voz odpelje in konji se avtomatično pomaknejo naprej. suhi so, načeti, težko bi zmogli dolgo pot. dva vlečeta mrliško kočijo, za steklom je truga, za njo dolga vesela procesija, trobente pihajo jazz, ne dajo se motiti, posmrtni maske, niti verniki v cerkvi, ki pojejo, plešejo, ploskajo z rokami. udarjanje bobna mi razbija po glavi. proti večeru, ko vročina malo popusti, se razživijo ptiči, kričijo ko nori. a konjev nič ne zmoti. kdaj jih kdo polije z vodo. zadaj se iz zemlje dviga dim. prišla bo noč. odvedli nas bodo v bedne staje. podrgnil se bom ob sosednjega konja in si predstavljal, da me je pobožal. ne bom ga videl, ne bo me videl, le čutil utrujeno telo ob sebi.

28. 11. 1973 sem si v kinu union ogledal film kabaret. spisal sem mu obnovo in dodal oceno: Ne vem, v čem je čar filma, da si je prislužil osem oskarjev. in nekaj me-secev kasneje krike in šepetanja. in še poslednji tango v parizu. tedaj sem gledal veliko filmov, hodil sem na teden sovjetskega filma, na minifest, ki je sledil beograjskemu. predvsem pa sem leta sestavljal glasbene lestvice. vsi moji glasbeni idoli so bili nekakšni uporniki. prevajal sem dylanova besedila, iz stopa rezal slike pevcev in jih lepil v zvezek. kdaj tudi kako fotko postavnega mladeniča v kopalkah, ki je zašla med strani. tedaj smo bili vsi uporniki. prezirali smo poroko, na bruhanje nam je šlo ob podobi družine, ki se na nedeljo s fičkom odpelje na izlet. zaničevali smo denar, vse, kar je bilo povezano z njim. hodili smo v ponošenih cotah, nekje po robovih, iskali smo drobne energije med nami. vse do revolucije. ali kontrarevolucije. potem so se energije zgubile, robovi so se podirali, vsi okoli mene so se začeli boriti za poroke, družine, nedeljske izlete z otroki, mladeniči so prihajali samo še zaradi denarja, niso se rahlo dotikali s prsti, niso čutili mravljincev, niso vedeli, za kaj bi se borili.

# NATAŠA VELIKONJA

TRANSLATED BY JERNEJ MOŽIČ, ANA JELNIKAR & KELLY LENOX ALLAN

## NEVER SAY NEVER: FROM HOMOSEXUAL GHETTO TO CAMP<sup>1</sup>

Dear homosexuals, did you think it would eventually get better? That their world would open up and we would be able to love without limits? Did you really believe that all those happy films and sexy TV-series, all those *L-Word* and *Queer as Folk* and *Better than Chocolate* and *D.E.B.S.*, all those avant-garde products about intangible bodies, would chase away the torment of our existence in which we are inevitably trapped? Did you believe that they would penetrate our eternally separated spaces and our civilizational unacceptability? That they would dissolve the fate of our migrations? Did you really believe that all these new words about your exquisiteness, your daring, the exceptionality of your bare life, would appease you and spare you from being kicked in the head? Did you realize who it was saying those words to you? It was no one like you. Did it ever seem to you, dear lesbians, during moments of deranged judgment, conceived by the iridescent cocktail of despair, claustrophobia and stinging sparks of desire that any of *these* women would actually go to bed with you? *Homosexuals are everywhere*? Not really.

I entered the lesbian scene and activism in 1993, just before the so-called *information revolution*, just before it surfaced. It was already present at the time, but the old patterns of communication were still in use; in the-then world, divided into sectors, meetings were still taking

place in fought-for, publically accessible and precisely marked spaces. In 1989, Ljubljana's *Club K4* opened the *Pink Disco* on Sundays. In 1993 a gay and lesbian club was formed at the squatted *Metelkova*. This spatial condensation was a continuation of the previous cultural positioning through the formation of specialized gay and lesbian publishers, magazines or film festival. From a world where my lesbian life depended, as the old homosexual saying goes, *on the random kindness of strangers*, I did not hesitate entering this gay *ghetto* where everything depended solely on me—and I wished never to leave it.

It appears that generations that grew up alongside new information technology feel certain contempt towards being spatially situated. This contempt is surely manifested in the increasingly fashionable repudiation of activism that was founded particularly on territorial premises. It is also manifested in the recurrent criticism of the public that breaks out at open expressions of gay and lesbian presence, *Pride Parades*, and the Ljubljana *Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, or of successful breakthroughs of gay and lesbian literature. What distinguishes these critiques from the old frontal homophobia is that, more or less benevolently, they question the importance of such kinds of connectedness, or of taking a stance at a time when, due to the (allegedly) end of *homicide* (ha ha!), it is all but unnecessary. I feel this contempt in the renewed objectivization of homosexuality, which is now rarely displayed through the repressive eye of psychiatry, medicine, biology or the criminal sciences, but rather in the same authoritarian and patronizing manners of the university, institutes, and human rights organizations that no longer acquire venues for connecting communities, but, of course, only offices, which are continually multiplying. I also feel it in a large part of the *queer* paradigm, which although it welcomes principles of fluidity of identities, conceals unsolved problems regarding basic postulates of *gay and lesbian liberation*. And I feel it in the new gay and lesbian referential platforms, in the densely populated virtual space of cyber cafes, internet chat rooms, web networks, and online diaries, which in Slovenia, despite the fact that they are intended explicitly for the homosexual population, are called “*rainbow*” or “*women*”, or something like that, who would know.

That is why every evening I, an unaccustomed urban bitch, have to sift through the entire city to run into three lesbians. Or anyone else. In these times, when after 7pm all homosexuals are at *home domains* with *pseudonyms* or in the *closeted private sector*, it appears that the new *mobile revolution* has not liberated us, nor discharged us, but that we have simply vanished together with all the differentiating scenes, collectives, communities and cultures. New generations are not bound to and defined by space. They do not need *liberated territories*.

I think I was not aware of this disintegration of the community and ascribe my lesbian disappearance from the world solely to my own subjective choices. At first, being restless, powerful, supreme, and always in love, I was driven out by a gust of several happy love stories, the gilded and priceless legacy of the old passing *ghetto*. I was convinced that millennia of civilizational restrictions no longer concerned me. It seemed to me that at 40, life had carved me out just about right, honed me like a crystal, making me look perfect. It seemed to me that this whole *designed, flexible, fluid, cyber, multitudinous, cool, post-structural, post-subjective, trendy, broadband* world in which no one had prejudice any longer and in which no one left the table in the face of *lesbian inappropriateness*, was real, that there were no *hetero-homo* borders anymore. I did not know, however, that its *super-straight-heroines* lived in a rigid social matrix regulated by thousand-year-old Christian criteria, never mind their cultural conscience of it, not knowing that humankind will become extinct before they would think about giving it up. And this is what happened. Listen, if you lived a bit of my life, you would be less of a *machine*, and if I lived some of yours, I would not burn out on the street, sick, scabby and devastated.

Yes, at first I thought that our *homo ghetto* became too crowded, too positivist, too willing, but not eager enough. I thought that the legitimacy of *desire*, this modernist imperative which we are heirs to, was rapidly losing its value, and that the vital expansionism of this perpetually pushed-to-the-edge, ancient species too hastily gave in to the promise of a never-seen or experienced schematic of orderly *homes* and *joint life*. Yes, first I thought it was an instantaneous incident when younger colleagues wanted to invite a Catholic priest to speak at the *Pride Parade* in Ljubljana and the public space became crammed with their privacy to the extent that there was nothing

<sup>1</sup> From the book *Lesbian Bar* (Škuc Publishing House, Ljubljana, 2011); translated by Jernej Možič.



else in it but a homosexual *Reality Show*, full of their *coming-outs*, *confessions*, grandmothers, mums, fathers, relatives, kitchens, pop singers like Nuša Derenda, without any people from the scene who deep below their *Arc de Triomphe* still avoided *coming-outs*, *confessions*, grandmothers, mums, fathers, relatives, and kitchens, and especially pop singers like Nuša Derenda. And kept on *cruising*. I found out that colleagues from the *International Gay and Lesbian Association* in Brussels, who should be experts in recognizing bio-politics, greeted the European epidemic of anti-smoking laws with excitement, but had no idea that Jacques Brel was born in this city, although they knew where the *European Quarter* was. By the way, *European Quarter* is right there where Jacques Brel was born.

At first I thought that this radical lack of knowledge of European history and theory or at least a minimal activity according to the two, that this jovial directness, this stubborn inaccessibility, this paranoid precaution, this new semantic insanity which liberates words, this new privatization which liberates *power*, signified something more abstract, something I could avoid. And while avoiding, I realized that this very avoidance lead me back into my own past and that the *random strangers* are already nodding to me smilingly and that we have come to the end of the spatial concentration. It did not finish for everyone however, but it was not of my concern anymore.

For centuries, the age-old homosexual *camp*, faggoty and lesbian, preserved homosexuals and homosexual cultures as being recognizable, unique and physical. In my desire to remain *present* in today’s historical regression, in my return to the empty, defragmented cities, I gradually, as if I were the only homosexual on the planet, found myself at its core. Waiting for me there were Renée Vivien, Djuna Barnes, Quentin Crisp, James Baldwin, Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini with his *ragazzi*, Sadie Lee with her Amy Lamé, striptease dancers and Holly Woodlawn, Antony, Rufus Wainwright, dead and alive, embodied in the ancient culture of stoic melancholy, cultivated love suspense, a phantasmagoria of romances that do not exist in a physical world, but only in twilight zones of rejection, violence, dreams and art. That is where I found myself again watching *The Killing of Sister George* by Robert Aldrich from 1968 and seeing old waspish sister George in a different way, who in that last scene when she ends up without a lover and with no work, smashes the set of the

film studio, and also a coffin, meant for her written-off character, saying: “*Even the bloody coffin is a fake!*” For her your civilization ended.

## REVOLUTION<sup>2</sup>

After a whole night and in fact a whole week of fits of panic. I now feel free, free of the illusions I’ve had these past years that there exists solidarity, a joined front, a future, or a larger circle of supportive friends. I’m worth something only when someone wants to press their lips against my stomach.

2 From the book Weed (Škuc Publishing House, Ljubljana, 2004); translated by Ana Jeltnikar & Kelly Lenox Allan.

## NIKOLI NE RECI NIKOLI: IZ HOMOSEKSUALNEGA GETA V KEMP<sup>3</sup>

Dragi homoseksualci in homoseksualke, ste mislili, da bo sčasoma kaj bolje? Da se bo njihov svet odprl in da bomo lahko na veliko ljubili? Ste res verjeli, da bodo vsi tisti srečni filmi in seksi serije, vsi tisti *L-Wordi* in *Queer As Folki* in *Better Than Chocolate* in *D.E.B.S.*, da bodo oni avantgardni produkti o neoprijemljivih telesih pregnali mukotrpnost eksistence, v katero smo neizbežno ujeti? Da bodo predrli naše večno ločene prostore in našo civilizacijsko nesprejemljivost? Da bodo razblinili usojenost našega seljenja? Ste res verjeli, da vas bodo vse te nove besede o vaši odličnosti, o vaši drznosti, o izjemnosti vašega golega življenja nahranile ali vam morda celo prihranile brce v glavo? Ste dojeli, kdo vam jih govori? Nihče, kot ste vi. Se vam je v trenutkih neprištevne presoje, porojene iz mavričnega koktejla obupa, klavstrofobije in žgočih isker želja, zazdelo, drage lezbijke, da bo katera od *teh* šla z vami v posteljo? *Homoseksualci smo vsepovsod*? Niti ne.

Na lezbično sceno in v aktivizem sem prišla pred, kot ji pravijo, *informacijsko revolucijo*, leta 1993, oziroma ravno ob njenem vzniku. Bila je že tu, ampak načini komunikacije so bili še stari: srečevanje v takrat še vedno sektorsko razdeljenem svetu je potekalo v izborjenih, javno dostopnih in precizno obeleženih homoseksualnih prostorih. Leta 1989 se v ljubljanskem *klubu K4* začne nedeljski *Roza disko*. Leta 1993 se na zasedeni *Metelkovi* oblikujeta stalna gejevski in lezbični klub. To prostorsko zgoščevanje je bilo nadaljevanje predhodnega, kulturnega pozicioniranja skozi oblikovanje specializiranih gejevskih in lezbičnih založb, revij ali filmskega festivala. Iz sveta, kjer je bilo moje lezbično življenje odvisno od *naključne prijaznosti tujk*, kot se glasi staro homoseksualno reklo, sem brez pomisleka vstopila v ta gejevski *geto*, kjer je bilo vse odvisno samo od mene – in si želela, da ga nikoli več ne bi zapustila.

Zdi se, da generacije, odrasle ob novi informacijski tehnologiji, čutijo določen prezir do prostorskih ureditev. Ta prezir se gotovo kaže kot vse bolj modno zavračanje tistega aktivizma, ki se je utemeljeval predvsem na teritorialnih

postavitev. Kaže se v vse pogostejših kritikah javnosti, ki se pojavijo predvsem ob javnih manifestacijah gejevske in lezbične prisotnosti, ob *paradah ponosa* in filmskem festivalu ali ob uspešnih prodorih lezbične ter gejevske literature, in se od stare, frontalne homofobije ločijo po tem, da se bolj ali manj dobrohotno sprašujejo o smislu tovrstnega združevanja ali opredeljevanja v obdobju, ko naj bi to bilo, zaradi domnevno končanega *homocida* (ha ha!), že povsem nepotrebno. Ta prezir čutim v ponovni objektivizaciji homoseksualnosti, ki tokrat redkeje nastopa skozi represivno oko psihiatrije, medicine, biologije ali kriminalistike, a ravno tako avtoritarno in pokroviteljsko s strani univerze, inštitutov in organizacij za človekove pravice, ki ne pridobivajo več prostorov za združevanje skupnosti, temveč, seveda, zgolj pisarne, ki se množijo in množijo. Čutim ga tudi v velikem delu *queer* paradigme, ki pod sicer zelo dobrodošlim načelom o fluidnosti identitet le slabo prikriva nerešene probleme z osnovnimi postulati *gejevske in lezbične osvoboditve*. In čutim ga v novih gejevskih in lezbičnih referenčnih platformah, v gosto naseljenem virtualnem prostoru spletnih kavarn, spletnih pogovornih sob, spletnih mrež, spletnih strani in spletnih dnevnikov, ki se, četudi so izrecno namenjeni homoseksualni populaciji, v Sloveniji imenujejo “*mavrični*” ali “*ženski*” ali kaj podobnega, kdo bi vedel.

Zato moram znova, neprilagojena urbana psica, vsak večer prebroditi celo mesto, da naletim na tri lezbijke. Ali na kogarkoli drugega. V tem obdobju, ko so po sedmih zvečer vsi homoseksualci po *domačih domenah*, na *pse-vdonimih* ali pa v *zaklozetiranem* zasebnem sektorju, se zdi, da se z novo *mobilno revolucijo* nismo niti osvobodili niti razbremenili, temveč smo povsem izginili, skupaj z ostalimi razlikovalnimi scenami, kolektivi, skupnostmi in kulturami. Novih generacij prostor ne obvezuje in ne določa. *Osvobojenih ozemelj* ne potrebujejo.

Mislím, da se tega razpada skupnosti najprej nisem zavedala in sem svoje lezbično izginjanje s sveta najprej pripisovala povsem subjektivnim odločitvam. Najprej se mi je zazdelo, da me je, vso nepotrpežljivo, močno, suvereno, venomer zaljubljeno, ven pogнал sunek več srečnih ljubezenskih zgodb, te zlate in neprecenljive dediščine starega, minevajočega *geta*. Bila sem prepričana, da me tisočletja civilizacijskih omejitev ne zadevajo več. Zazdelo se mi je, da sem od lajfa ravno prav izklesana štiridesetletnica, da sem izbrušena kot kristal, da izgledam

3 Iz zbirke esejev *Lezbični bar* (Škuc, Ljubljana, 2011).

odlično, da je ves ta *dzizajniran, fleksibilen, fluiden, kibernetski, multituden, kul, poststrukturalen, postsubjektivski, trendovski, širokopasovni* svet, kjer nihče več nima predsodkov, kjer nihče več ne vstane od mize pred tribadistično nevmesnostjo, stvaren, da *hetero-homo* mejá ni več, ne vedoč, da njegove super-*strejt*-junakinje živijo v togi, po vseh tisočletnih krščanskih merilih ukrojeni socialni matrici, njihova kritična zavest o njej gor ali dol. Ne vedoč, da bo prej konec človeštva, pa še takrat se ji ne bodo odpovedale. Kar se je tudi zgodilo. Poslušaj, če bi živel malce mojega življenja, bi bila manj *mašina*, in če bi jaz živel malce tvojega življenja, ne bi izgorela na ulici, bolna, garjava, uničena.

Da, najprej se mi je zazdelo, da je ta naš *homo geto* postal pretesen, preveč pozitivističen, preveč hoteč in premalo željan. Zazdelo se mi je, da legitimnosti želje, temu modernističnemu imperativu, katerega dediči in dedinje smo, vse preveč bliskovito pada vrednost, da se je vitalistični ekspanzionizem te večno ob rob potisnjene, prastare vrste preveč sunkovito prepustil obetu pred tem nikdar videne ne doživete shematike urejenih domov in *skupnega življenja*. Da, najprej se mi je zazdelo, da gre za hipen incident, ko so mlajši kolegi hoteli na ljubljansko *parado ponosa* pripeljati katoliškega duhovnika za govorca, ko so javni prostor do vrha natrpali z zasebnostjo, tako zelo, da ni ostalo v njem nič drugega kot homoseksualni *Reality Show*, poln njihovih *coming-outov, priznanj*, babic, mam, očetov, sorodnikov, kuhinj, nuš derend, nikoli ljudi s scene, ki so se medtem, globoko pod tem njihovim *slavolo-kom zmage*, še dalje v smrtnem strahu izogibali *coming-outom, priznanjem*, babicam, mamam, očetom, sorodnikom in njihovim kuhinjam, predvsem pa nušam derendam. In še naprej *štrikali*. Ko sem ugotovila, da so kolegi in kolegice z bruseljskega sedeža *Mednarodne zveze lezbijk in gejev*, ki bi morali biti mojstri in mojstrice prepoznavanja biopolitik, z navdušenjem pozdravili evropsko epidemijo protikadilskih zakonov, ni pa se jim sanjalo, da se je v tem mestu rodil Jacques Brel, četudi so vedeli povedati, kje je *evropska četrt*. Mimogrede, *evropska četrt* je prav tam, kjer se je rodil Jacques Brel.

Najprej se mi je zazdelo, da je to radikalno pomanjkanje poznavanja evropske zgodovine in teorije ali pa vsaj minimalnega delovanja po njiju, da je ta vesela neposrednost, ta zadrta nedostopnost, ta paranoidna previdnost, ta nova semantična blaznost, ki osvobaja besede, to novo

zasebnišтво, ki osvobaja *oblast*, nekaj bolj abstraktnega, nekaj, čemur se lahko izmaknem. In tako sem, izmikajoča se, ugotovila, da me je sàmo to izmikanje privedlo nazaj v lastno preteklost, da se mi *naključne tujke* že nasmihajo v pozdrav in da je naseljenosti konec. Ni je bilo konec za vse, ampak to ni bila več moja stvar.

Prastari homoseksualni *kemp*, pederski in lezbaški, je dolga stoletja ohranjal homoseksualce in homoseksualne kulture prepoznavne, posebne, telesne. V tej moji želji, da ostanem *prisotna*, v tej dandanašnji zgodovinski regresiji, v tem mojem povratku nazaj v prazna, defragmentirana mesta sem se, zlagoma, kot bi bila edina homoseksualka na planetu, znašla v samem njegovem jedru. Tam so me čakali Renée Vivien, Djuna Barnes, Quentin Crisp, James Baldwin, Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini s svojimi *ragazzi*, Sadie Lee s svojimi Amy Lamé, striptizetami in Holly Woodlawn, Antony, Rufus Wainwright, mrtvi in živi, utelešeni v prastari kulturi stoične melanholije, kultiviranega ljubezenskega suspenza, fantazmagorije romanc, ki ne obstajajo nikjer v fizičnem svetu, temveč zgolj v conah somraka zavrnitev, nasilja, sanj in umetnosti. Tam sem se znašla, naenkrat, kako znova gledam film “*The Killing of Sister George*” Roberta Aldricha iz leta 1968 in povsem drugače razbiram staro, zajedljivo sestro George, ki v zadnjem prizoru, ko ostane brez ljubimke in brez dela, razbija po filmskem studiu scenske elemente, tudi krsto, v katero naj bi položili njen odpisan filmski lik, rekoč: “*Even the bloody coffin is a fake!*” Vaše civilizacije je zanjo konec.

#### REVOLUCIJA<sup>4</sup>

po tem, ko sem vso noč in pravzaprav ves teden imela napade panike. zdaj se počutim svobodno, svobodno pred iluzijami, ki sem jih imela ta leta, da obstajajo združena fronta, solidarnost, prihodnost ali širši krog podpornih prijateljev. veljam samo toliko, kolikor bo nekdo pritisnil svoje ustnice na moj trebuh.

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4 Iz pesniške zbirke *Plevel* (Škuc, Ljubljana, 2004).

# VESNA LIPONIK

TRANSLATED BY ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## HUMOR

neko noč  
v sadovnjaku  
zagledam  
svojega očeta  
kako leži  
zasajen v drob  
manjkajoče jablane  
in iz njegovega  
razparanega hrbta  
poganja  
krastavo skrivenčeno  
deblo  
ker se pri tem smehlja  
vem  
da bo celotno stvar  
obrnil na hec

## HUMOUR

one night  
in the orchard  
I see  
my father  
lying  
interred in the innards  
of an absent apple tree  
and out of his  
torn back  
sprouts  
a scabbed twisted  
trunk  
he laughs  
and I know  
he`ll turn the whole thing  
into a joke

## FISH

I.  
during the evenings I wait at the shore  
for them to swim by  
I catch them  
and kill them  
pound them against a stone  
until their bodies are silent  
until they stop twitching  
then I wrap them  
in thick guttural packages  
and I bury them  
so that they will be safe  
so I won` t see them  
shining sliding visions  
so that there are fewer  
fewer of them each day

## RIBE

I.  
ob večerih dolgo čakam na obrežju  
da priplavajo  
ulovim jih  
in ubijem  
tolčem ob kamen  
dokler telo ne utihne  
dokler ne trzajo več  
nato jih zavijem  
v debel grlen omot  
in zagrebem  
da so na varnem  
da jih ne vidim  
svetlikajočih polzečih prikazni  
da jih je manj  
da jih je vsak dan manj

# MUANIS SINANOVIĆ

TRANSLATED BY ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## SARAJEVO II

I dreamed that Sarajevo  
didn't want me,  
but then when it let me in  
as if through an automatic carwash, tentacle-  
covered rollers touching me,  
and lights in front of me,  
I followed them.

then it turned out  
that Sarajevo didn't want me,  
the city drove me away from the banks of the Miljacka,  
into the hills, onto streets from which new  
streets unfurled onto new hills  
that I will never reach,  
I was driven out by the rising water  
flooding the valley, water  
in which others could breathe.

I ascended the spiral  
streets and looked at how the lights shone  
through the water and how  
they scornfully shone on the hill  
above the opposite bank of the Miljacka.

and then I saw that I wasn't alone,  
they galloped up with clutched  
bristle bouquets,  
ascending the hill, clinging to the edges  
of the garbage cans,  
melancholy eyes, like the crowd  
of which you are a part, a crowd of individuals,  
they accompanied me and they didn't,  
that's just what they do,  
citizens on errands in the city,

they,  
the strays dogs of Sarajevo.

## HAVERI

I.  
that it nestled  
a droning poem in the temples,  
and is born from its nest,  
first the wings,  
and only afterwards the body, the head,  
the little feet. that in one memory  
and a second memory, and a third,  
tibor's and blaž's and becirk's  
from their poems,  
in which I behold one of my *nows*,  
it steps before me in the town,  
from memory  
in its specialstreetness,  
all on some surface,  
joyful,  
as I approach her, and a little inside,  
unwhole divided in her and un her,  
on some surface that stands  
while I pass away  
in the town, in its  
specialstreetness.

II.  
continue into this space,  
says Ivan,  
this space, pace, ace  
your uniqueness  
in this space, pace, ace,  
says Ivan,  
and today I stand in  
my crater in this space  
not remembering the bomb  
that made it,  
not knowing  
if I am a detonated bomb  
"the soul is a bone"  
the soul is a detonated bomb,  
and in this space I have no  
common bones. Ivan,  
a Byzantine man, pulls his smile  
through the streets,  
his smile appears  
on maps.

III.  
misunderstanding  
is the mother of cuttlefish bones, soft  
spongy flesh protecting the hard bone.  
in Sarajevo, a disease persists,  
a disease that my body  
carried there, was infected with there.  
misunderstanding is magnetic resonance  
without the pictures,  
without results. the multiplicity of the singular  
friendship, the blindness of friendship  
overcoming the missing pictures,  
because they cannot be seen, be seen,  
the fragility of his blindness,  
reminds me of the fragility of Simona's  
kitten, its eyes peeled back.  
she bats a little piece of paper  
between her paws, hunting it.

our mistakes  
are the capital that we pursue.  
our mistakes are our masterpieces.  
but mastery is not our prey.  
our aim is to draw lines of escape  
across the maps,  
manufactured revelation.



THE MOON ABOVE THE ARCTIC

piqued, smeared with painted targets,  
like lipstick around the lips of a bleary  
creature or a clown. I am looking for  
my spirals, something to be woven. an arctic  
base pulled down into the ice,  
foundations forming roots in the solidified water,  
sparrows hatching between two ice  
floes, carefully, so there is minimal  
breakage of the shells. something is always crackling  
here, crumbling, the icebreakers with clouds  
above them. and I don't care. don't care.  
some pulverized flesh crawls from the membrane  
of my ear, something pulverized, completely  
artificial, but because of that no less fleshy flesh,  
which is not mine or anybody else's.

*(a less pathetic representation is  
still a representation)*

I am looking for my spirals, vectorial  
shavings behind the commas  
of the ears, sweat without salt, the expectation of people  
as if across mirrors, in scribbles of smear-  
ed lipstick. who will say what?  
here sounds can no longer be sorted  
even by murmurs.

basifying, becoming pale  
some pure school for urstronauts  
some moon, cratered according to archaic measurements  
with no appropriation  
no flannel wrinkles of local legends.  
we wait for evening when a thousand drill presses  
will awaken.

the moon slides a couple of centimeters  
above the arctic, heeeey

SARAJEVO II

sanjal sem, da me Sarajevo  
noče,  
potem, ko me je spuščalo vase  
kot skozi pralnico, skozi valje,  
polne migetalk, s katerimi me je  
tipalo, medtem, ko je s svojimi  
lučmi svetilo pred menoj,  
da sem jim sledil.

potem, ko je ugotovilo,  
da me noče,  
me je gnalo od brega Miljacke  
v hrib, v ulice, za katerim so valovale  
nove ulice na novem hribu,  
do kateirh nikoli ne bom prišel.  
gnalo me je z vodo, ki je naraščala,  
preplavljala dolino, z vodo, v  
kateri so drugi lahko dihali.

vzpenjal sem se po ulicah,  
spiralasto, in gledal kako skozi vodo  
svetijo luči v dolini in kako  
porogljivo svetijo luči na hribu  
na drugem bregu Miljacke,

a potem sem videl, da nisem sam.  
galopirali so s sprijetimi  
šopi ščetin,  
se vzpenjali in oprijemali robov  
smetnjakov,  
otožnih oči, kot množica,  
katere del si, množica posameznikov.  
spremljali so me in me niso,  
kot pač to počnejo  
prebivalci na opravkih po mestu,

oni,  
sarajevski psi.

HAVERI

I.  
da se vgnezdi  
brenčoča pesem v senceh  
in se rodi iz svojega gnezda,  
najprej s krili  
in šele potem s trupom, glavo,  
nožicami. da v nekem spominu,  
in drugem spominu, in tretjem,  
tiborja in blaža in becirkov  
iz njunih pesmi,  
ugledam enega svojih *zdaj*,  
v mestecu, ki je iz spomina  
stopilo predme  
v svoji posebnouličnosti.  
vse to na neki površini,  
radostni,  
ko ji bom blizu, in malo znotraj,  
necel razdeljen nanjo in nenanjo,  
na neki površini, ki stoji,  
medtem, ko minevam  
v mestecu, v njegovi  
posebnouličnosti.

II.  
nadaljuj v tem prostoru,  
pravi Ivan,  
prostoru, storu, toru,  
tvoja posebnost  
v prostoru, storu, toru,  
pravi Ivan,  
in danes stojim v svojem  
kraterju v tem prostoru,  
ne spominjajoč se bombe,  
ki jo je izdolbla,  
ne vedoč,  
če sem eksplodirana bomba.  
“duh je kost”,  
duh je eksplodirana bomba,  
in v tem mestecu nimam nobenih  
skupnih kosti. Ivan,  
Bizantinec, razvleče nasme  
skozi ulice,  
in njegov nasme se zariše  
na zemljevide.

III.

nerazumevanje  
je mati sipjih kosti, mehko,  
gobasto tkivo ščiti trdo kost.  
v sarajevu vztraja  
bolezen, ki jo je moje telo  
tja vneslo, in jo tam pobralo.  
nerazumevanje je magnetna resonanca  
brez slike,  
brez rezultata. množičnost singularnega  
prijateljstva, slepota prijateljstva  
prehiti pomanjkanje slike,  
ker je ne more videti videti.  
krhkost njegove slepote  
me spominja na krhkost Simonine  
male mačke, ki so se ji oluščile  
oči. med tacama si podaja košček  
papirja in si ga preganja.

naše napake  
so naš kapital, ki si ga preganjamo,  
naše napake so mojstrovine.  
toda mojstrstvo ni naš cilj.  
naš cilj je na karte  
zarisati linije bega,  
proizvodnja odkritosti.

LUNA NAD ARKTIKO

pikiran, premazan v tarčne kroge,  
kot šminka okoli ust kramežljavega  
bitja ali klovna. iščem neke svoje  
spirale, neka svoja upajčenja. baza  
z arktike potegnjena dol, v led,  
temelji koreninijo med strjeno vodo,  
lastovke se rojevajo med dvema ledeni-  
ma ploščama, pazljivo, da je minimum  
loma jajčne lupine. vse nekaj hrešči,  
se tre, vsi ledolomilci nad seboj  
nosijo oblak. in briga me. briga me.  
iz membran na ušesih mi lazi neko  
mleto meso, neko mleto, popolnoma  
umetno, a zato nič manj meseno meso,  
ki ni ne moje ne nikogar drugega.

iščem svoje spirale, medtem pa  
vektorski odpilki, za ušesi vejice,  
znoj brez soli, pričakovanja ljudi  
kot po ogledalih v čačkah razmaza-  
ne šminke. kdo bo kaj povedal?  
tu se zvoki ne sortirajo več niti  
po šumu.

bazirajoč polebdevajoč,  
neka čista šola za prastronavte,  
neka luna, kratirana na naših vatlih,  
brez kakršnekoli apropiacije  
ali flanelastih gub lokalnih legend.  
čaka se večer, ko bo prižganih na tisoče  
vrtalnih mašin.

luna drsi nekaj centimetrov  
nad arktiko. heeeej!

(manj patetična reprezentacija je še  
vedno reprezentacija)

# TIBOR HRS PANDUR

TRANSLATED BY JASMIN B. FRELIH, THP AND JEFFREY YOUNG

## INTERNAL AFFAIRS

*My youngsters will never work. Whoever works cannot dream. And wisdom comes in dreams.*  
— Chief Smohalla

*We often see the dreamer acting against the forgetting of his dreams, by way of putting them down in writing right after waking. We can tell him that this is in vain, because the resistance, from which he was able to snatch the dream text, transposes itself to the associations and makes the manifest dream inaccessible for interpretation. In these circumstances we shouldn't wonder, if the continued escalation of resistance represses the associations altogether and thus thwarts the interpretation of dreams.*  
— Sigmund Freud: New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis

## I.

My life's problems are sketched out on these pages  
Plans for the future and other disasters  
How it ran for whole stories and unwritten novels  
Evacuating me, when I lost it  
So I caught my breath with the doctors in the limo  
How Jasmin explained his new novel over the phone  
And everyone found themselves in the zone  
Nejc, when he fell in love  
Petra in the company of doctors, when they were chatting  
Me only in my dreams  
At least when I wrote the draft  
Of the banking house,  
Which tuned into the living tissue of society  
As the hippest bestseller  
Turns on all your senses  
Mixes war and the hero's dilemmas  
Into the spontaneous flow of the story  
Which through highs and lows  
Reveals evidence  
That the hero is in the zone  
That he is writing, living, facing his problems  
And solving them  
That he relives all this  
Going berserk to finally catch  
The flow of his life  
And realize the unrealizable  
Write in the dark and love openly  
These wonders of little things  
Fights with sleepy muscles  
With decades of postponement  
With pain piled up  
With wrong choices  
Gambled times  
And gained opportunities

I met you on my street  
Discarded like a bag of garbage  
With scars  
On your neck when you wanted  
To escape your kidnappers  
You tried to kill yourself with shards of glass  
I put a black coat over you  
And covered the red shirt of your past  
We went to gather the evidence the shards in ashes

On the spent fireplace with remains of blood and your suitcases  
When we met your torturers  
I introduce myself, pretend to be myself  
They flash their knives and smiles behind the masks of their politeness  
I'm scared because maybe I'm not ready to defend her  
They tested me and know me  
They best me easily  
When we return to my street I embroider the doors with grandpa  
Lock them with a golden chain and weave talismans  
Vertical statues from childhood to man  
And books: the bedroom will be ordained in her name  
As to the female principle  
To the anima of sexual aphorisms  
No evil shall enter here

## II.

You were so beautiful and pure  
When you masturbated before me  
And spoke openly of it like Marguerite Duras  
You wrote your schedule and lived your dreams  
Made your money and entered massages  
Dialysis, hobbies, tubs, aikidos  
Made collages  
Tracked changes  
And wrote poems just for yourself  
So I could finally understand the verse  
“Flowers smell for themselves”

And I convinced myself  
I couldn't live without her  
And suffered when she was  
And suffered when she was not

I don't know if anyone actually cares about this  
Unless he can and wants to relive it  
Because what else can this be  
But a reliving machine?

What else its purpose?



NO I WASN'T VIETNAM

You were  
I was there through you  
Father to his son, in a sense  
That he knew callousness before he left  
How he rejoiced of his passport  
How he was the first to disavow rapes  
The first night from his comrades  
Amidst the piss and shit someone  
Stands up to rape someone else  
Madness of war, nothing fazed me a fuck  
I went saw random stuff  
Guerilla attacks, bombs thrown into bars  
People explode, others still shoot and the ship  
I observe among them  
Someone comes to my desk and you're fluttering  
You're flying next to the fence close to the mount  
For going home, for behind me, for some land  
And then I understood what these people fought for  
For a patch, for a morsel of land  
Where they can have peace  
From others

I MADE MYSELF A SHIP

A real big one, with wheels  
So it could go on the road  
And it had a pool in it  
And Željko helped me  
And I organized everything  
Magnets that I could do anything  
I imagined seas  
On which we'd sail  
Gathered the crew  
Said farewell to my friends  
I was happy  
So immensely happy  
To go  
Željko hid the boat  
Between some cars in the parking lot  
And smashed one belonging to security

When we said goodbye to Livija, Tomaž and the team  
And I leafed through Bakunin's book, owned by Tesla  
They took our ship away  
And the next day the ship was gone  
And we had to wait until morning  
The courts put things in motion  
Interrogated witnesses etc.  
And I became angry,  
That I let others steer my ship  
I was so immensely happy to go  
Irene came and said I'd gone too far  
But I told her through tears that I am finally happy  
That I don't want to suffer and hurt anymore  
That I have enough  
That I heard  
She said ok and hugged me  
Blessed me and took the snakes away

But when I woke up the anger returned  
Because if you let others take control of your vehicle, you  
lose it  
If you don't squat the space for yourself  
You lose

If you stop breathing with your diaphragm, you lose  
If you don't go, when you feel you must  
You lose  
If you can't chill yourself out  
If you don't transmute this force through your body  
If you don't get it that you yourself are  
Your own perfect ship  
And just be

Simply write this as instruction  
To a self  
Transformed by this very inscription  
Into someone who forgets

Just be  
Breathe, have the sound of birds  
And the rustling of trees in the leaves  
Just have this

And understand how your life  
Has been formed by yearning  
You transposed into a precondition  
Of persistent inscription  
And thus solved these dilemmas  
Of life on a leaf of paper

Whirled within you  
In self-prisons of envy  
Resentments towards mothers,  
Exaggerated,  
Who left you in front of TV's  
Exchanged for appearances  
(So you can forgive them infinitely)

To desire peace  
Wind in your ears  
Greens in your eyes  
Have this  
Just this really have  
Nimbleness of body  
The air that breathes you  
The acid you manufacture  
Millions of cells

If through subjective revelation  
Of a specific soul  
A universe of truths unfolds  
If it is possible to present what flows  
What you lose in dreams  
What hurts  
What glimmers as the feeling of final hope  
On harmony  
On the peace you own if you leave yourself alone  
On the freedom you seize with a gesture  
The water of bodies you perform every movement  
The endorphins you generate for yourself

To see people elevated  
For gentle signals  
For the enigma of touch  
For the warmth of bodies  
To the point of presence, where the hole sews itself  
To thank someone  
Who put his brains through his hands,  
To transmit  
To show  
To undress  
To undie  
To unfold

To bring this stuff out  
Assuming that what's within  
Real for you  
Common perhaps to all  
So that an unborn might see  
Or have something to read  
That the ink which turns to thought  
Makes this page into a body  
In which you've already been  
That someone could smile  
Or to make silence  
To see  
To be able to move on

THE JOKER KNOCKED

So I opened  
Dark zones of neon-coke  
Information deals  
Manipulations of human destinies  
How he had it all  
And gambled it all away  
Until Val Kilmer  
Wrote blurbs for his books  
For methods  
And rich girls laughed  
As he put down or fucked over  
Friends in their absence  
And banged into  
Leather armchairs  
Success was  
To get high  
To the core  
To steal your friend's  
Diaries and files  
And submit them  
To their commercial  
Enemies  
But there was something else  
Next to quotes from batman  
Masks of horror  
Illusions of cocaine success  
Paying for whores  
And fucking multiple women simultaneously  
All drugged up  
Orgies with Björks  
On the last remaining beaches  
Untouched

Paintings and arrangements  
Of bodies copulating near waterfalls  
The movie that got made and the screenplay  
That was rewritten from the sci-fi  
Story of this planet  
Of disinformation  
Of brainwashed aeronauts  
Of post-modern propaganda  
Of guinea pigs  
Turtles sent to colonize  
This new planet  
And came for nothing  
Without legs  
To hook up probes  
To measure the moisture of heaven  
Disks from the eighties  
Traveled and wandered across valleys  
Of mountainous jungles  
Didn't get how this works  
And who's their leader  
Amid landscapes  
Of this heavenly fiction  
Of coated prearranged plastic  
Where half-developed organisms  
Landed in order to  
Fulfill a mission  
Of which they had no clue of  
And connected circuits barely alive  
On the set of this planet that I adapted  
For a movie based on a novel  
For which I had no rights  
So I will have to change everything  
Put dots between words so it won't look the same  
As the original

Although it's a cinematic masterpiece on the colonization  
Of brainwashed aeronauts  
Who got tricked  
That it makes sense to search for other worlds (while  
All are inherent to this one already)  
And to import designers of orgies  
Onto paradisaical beaches of sets  
Of the productions of their industries  
To process foods into drugs  
Sands into concrete  
Silicon into banks  
Data into megabytes  
Sunsets into kitsch  
Kitsch into cash  
Into nothing  
Of fake satelllites  
Barely orbiting  
And even this only because of the underpaid  
Labor of a million mercenaries  
Who hold equilibriums  
Of the algorithms  
To their orbits  
—although they look like props  
by Ed Wood plates on small ropes  
attacking the mysteries of nature  
with forces that counter intelligence  
It was better  
When it wasn't written down yet  
More pure  
Like that guy  
Who didn't want to feel  
Just for a second  
On top of the world  
In an almighty trip

Of white snorting  
And didn't go out  
Didn't fuck models  
Or break into apartments  
To report on his neighbors  
But sat at home  
And wrote the next bestseller  
Which will in two hours  
Colonize  
Disinform  
Rooms of  
Spectators  
—and cried or fucked up  
in subtle subversions between couples  
cocky machisms  
who fucked who  
and how and why  
Who's the coolest in the States  
Who has the biggest studio  
Complexes  
Better stuff  
Chicks and hostesses  
Who knows more  
Who makes more  
Who always knows what part to play  
How many calls you get  
Who all cares  
Does he put out at once  
Or doubts  
Or see-saws  
Or pretends  
Or preserves  
Integrity

THE FUTURE OF MANKIND  
(based on a stolen screenplay rewritten  
& adapted by THP)

A million cosmonauts  
Were ready to sacrifice  
Their lives in capsules  
To satisfy the wishes  
Expressed in phonemes of their great leader  
And went like microbes  
Of probes into space  
Dust among dust of micro-atoms  
Of Force  
Sent on missions  
On something similar  
We already have  
Amid billions of existing  
Galaxies  
Cosmonauts amid nothingness  
Akyey?<sup>1</sup>  
And something goes terribly wrong  
Someone has to die  
To further the plot  
Otherwise it doesn’t work  
And no keeps watching

ALL ONE SKIN

As their skin peeled of  
From the truth of the atomic bomb  
And gave collective statements  
*We are all one skin Now*  
*there’s nothing left to fight for*  
Those were wild times  
Mladinsko Theater in the eighties  
Festivals in Bolivia  
Before gangs beturfed all territories  
Before the terrorism of tourism  
When you could hang out and drink strawberry beer  
Bought directly from your neighbors’ apartments  
Where Latinos understood what you said  
Because of prolific Yugoslav-Cuban exchanges of the Non  
-Aligned  
Movement  
Where you could really groove freely  
Smoke on the streets and be safe from police rage  
Where Goths could walk on avenues tatooed and naked  
Where we were all equally black  
Where I shared a flat with a prompter  
And met her at late hours  
As two poles of the same force, who can’t sleep  
When she offered coffees and shared backgrounds  
How I like the word prompter  
Always have

How my whole family is in theater  
Mother a dramaturge  
Uncle is Dad, I mean my Uncle is a director  
Dad an actor  
Wild times  
When Mladinsko regularly toured  
South America  
And Janez Škof sang orgies at parties  
Without holding anything back  
Before movies, which revealed for the first time ever  
Neoliberal conspiracies  
Genocidal expansions of empire  
Manic regime changes  
Condorizations  
Of Social Democracies  
Before Nixon and Kissinger bombed Allende  
And before our heroes’ skin came off  
From the atomic bomb  
Now we are finally one  
We’re all one skin now  
Transformed into soldiers  
Watching their movies  
As frontal offensives  
Held onto our hard-ons on patrol  
So as not to fall asleep  
And connect the plots  
That played us

MITAR

A ship revealed  
A huge space  
Standing at the end  
Of monkeys versus man  
Where I’m waiting for containers  
And set up  
Mitar, a link who worlds!  
Who brings books  
Who gets things done  
Glory to you, Mitar!  
Who books of systems  
Ships of space  
Memories potential/travels  
Circuits of desires  
Creations  
Projections of the future  
Realizable  
Forward  
Protests happen  
Of idiots who end themselves  
Spend themselves completely  
While we infinite  
Screens  
Copy books  
Set up space  
Between us  
The holy library  
Houses liberated

1 Russian for: “Okay”. [Ed.n]



Ships of the universe  
Archives opened  
Ancient technologies  
Of the future  
Free  
Media of the people

Where Tesla would bring down Queens  
And the world as we know it  
And the brigadiers  
The libraries where I filter  
The hidden hyper-right, placing messages  
In books and poems of the true hyper-rich  
So Tomaž would get  
You shouldn't mess with racism

Bombs of diplomacy  
Topographies of world trade  
Are today inversions  
Of sun's topologies

Love is in the palms of our hands  
And Energy available to all in the magic of Space

II.

Mitar, you legend!  
What have you hacked!  
Fractals and visitors on their way  
Safe systems and boundaries  
On a need-to-know basis  
I can't wait  
If only a baboon wouldn't, in the end  
Attack us in the dark  
If only we wouldn't leave the door open  
If only too many things wouldn't happen at once  
Things we may be unable to hack  
If only grandma would close the windows in the end  
And clean it all up, so everything's cool  
So cool I can hardly wait  
For it all to really happen  
That it's true that language creates commons  
Turns commons into actually enlightened technology  
Thrilled that the breakthrough into harmony  
And the rhythm of the ship of the world  
Like a fleet on land  
In the sea of time's spiral  
Drank all ideas all sips  
Opened people locked all doors  
Got all info, tricked all agents  
Quantum-leaped obstacles  
Got all the cash realized all potentials  
Generated all gathered people  
Into wheels of progressive lights  
With a spiral of notes their contacts sincere  
Extreme diplomacies  
Sober and calm blood  
Stations and speeches  
Organizations of words  
Simply accessible  
Dematerializations of violence

A SHIP ON EARTH

We made ourselves a city  
With technology to open all doors  
We made beds for children  
And spaces for learning and practice  
Labyrinths of joy and work unfolded  
We started living in the ship's bunker,  
Spreading day to day  
On computers we made ourselves  
Circuits were established between us  
All are with us  
Those who died, didn't die  
Because they live with us in dreams

Then we banned alcohol and all drugs  
And lit up the beacon for the light of the world  
So that all could see  
The stars of our voices singing  
Energy stations and through entire countries  
The stardust of our melodies spread  
Joyous festivals of our survival

I walked the hallways and visited children  
Who fell asleep for the first time in their new beds  
Organized in such a way  
That they could watch the girls on the other side  
And abysses between them  
Their letters were a ship on earth







# ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

## A WIDOW’S TRAVELOGUE

### BORDERLANDS *Krasnogruda*

I was invited to Krasnogruda, Poland on April 30 and May 1, 2016 to attend a reunion of the group called Café Europa. The invitation came from Krzysztof Czyżewski, one of a group of like-minded intellectuals—including my late husband, the Slovenian poet Aleš Debeljak, who was killed in a traffic accident on January 28 of this year—that came up with the rather whimsical idea of Café Europa in the wake of the Bosnian War in 1995. It would be a flying literary-artistic café, the group of friends decided. They would meet in cities all over Europe, pursue the cosmopolitan café tradition in a new mobile manner, invite local intellectuals to sip first coffee and then wine and spirits long into the night, read poetry, tell jokes, debate the burning moral questions of the day, and finally drop into their beds at dawn. In this way, they would symbolically defy the consequences of the tragedy of Bosnia and the failure of Europe’s multicultural values.

Over the years, various permutations of the group—members included, besides Aleš and Krzysztof, Chris Keulemans from Amsterdam, Madga Cârnei from Bucharest, Nino Žalica from Sarajevo/Amsterdam, Chris Merrill from Iowa City, Peter Jukes from London, and many

others—met in Amsterdam, Stockholm, Cracow, Sarajevo, Barcelona, Brussels, and Berlin, and even hopped across the ocean to Iowa and New York. The group was loose and fluid, non-binding, in the way that café society must be, and so it is hardly surprising that it became the victim of the same modern ailments that tend to befall all of us: the increasing demands of our busy lives, and, when we are not busy, the lure of home and the computer screen. The first meeting of Café Europa was in 1995, the last one over a decade ago.

I asked Krzysztof about the reunion, why now, after so many years.

He answered: “I was thinking about Aleš. I wanted to honor him.”

And so I went. I brought along two of our three children, our sons Simon and Lukas, nineteen and seventeen years old. I ventured out, some three months after my husband’s death, on my first travel into this strange new world that does not contain him.

Krasnogruda, a place Aleš had visited but I had never been, lies in a remote corner of northeastern Poland, close to the borders with Lithuania and Belarus. The region is characterized not only by its distance from any airport—Warsaw is nearly three hundred kilometers away, Vilnius some two hundred—but also for its great natural beauty as the glacial flatlands to the north give way to a landscape of lush forests, secret glades, and small lakes. It has been marked more darkly by its traumatic past: pogroms, anti-Lithuanian riots, the destruction of its Jewish population during World War Two.

There is a sort of historic justice then that the village of Krasnogruda and the nearby regional capital of Sejny have become home in the past two and a half decades to several forward-looking and inspiring organizations (both founded by the miraculous Krzysztof): the Borderland Foundation and Borderland Centre of Art, Culture, and Nations established in 1990 and housed in Sejny’s old Jewish buildings, and the Center for International Dialogue in the revitalized manor house of the family of the poet Czesław Miłosz, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980. You must travel very far to get there, but once you arrive you find yourself subsumed in a unique combination of sylvan beauty, nostalgia for an unrecoverable past, and a gentle thread of hope for the future.

The event on the first night took place in the White Synagogue in Sejny, clad for the evening in the secular garb of a café—a swarm of small round tables each equipped

with a porcelain teapot and cups, wine from Tbilisi, the bright flicker of candlelight. Amazingly, a large audience of local people also came. Krzystov got the evening rolling. A jazz band called *Harmony of the Spheres* played while photographs of Aleš were projected onto a screen. Chris Merrill, Aleš’s first American translator, reminisced about their early days together. The Polish poet Zbigniew Machaj read a funny poem that had emerged from a long-ago e-mail communication with Aleš. The Lithuanian poet Eugenijus Ališanka, one of my husband’s dearest friends, spoke about the silence in his poetry, their friendship, and Aleš’s continuing presence in the landscape even now that he is no more. Chris Keulemans read an essay about Aleš that he wrote for the event (published in the Slovenian daily *Delo*’s Saturday supplement on May 21, 2016). Even I spoke publically for the first time about my husband’s life and death. Krzysztof requested I do so, telling me that my testimony had weight.

The second night took place in a more intimate setting—an actual café, a jazz club across the lane from the White Synagogue. The evening began with Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova reading a poem about the borderlands and ended with Lukas reading one of his father’s poems in the original Slovenian, evoking Aleš’s incantational rhythm, the way he clipped his words into distinct syllables—*mod-ri-kast*. The sounds hovered briefly in the smoky atmosphere of the jazz club, the bright sharp blasts of a trumpet, and then faded and were gone.

Yet the weekend was far from mournful or funereal. Interspersed among the two Café Europa evenings was an outdoor play with bonfires and local children singing old folk songs among the trees. There was lively conversation, new friendships made, old ones rekindled, workshops and exhibitions, even one about all the species of local birds around the Miłosz estate, the interest a Warsaw ornithologist has taken in them, the wonderful cacophony of birdsong in these remote borderlands—something Aleš would have loved.

I never thought about the word *widow* until I became one. Now that I have been thrust into the condition and the word, no longer a wife but a widow, I have become curious about both. Even though death is inevitable, and simple mathematics dictate that some half of us who make marital attachments will one day be widows (or widowers), the word strikes me as old-fashioned, archaic, having no place in our brassy modern world. It has a Victorian or Dickensian feel to it—like spinster, bastard, orphan. Perhaps because



of this, the condition, too, seems to wears a slight patina of stigma, shame, the moldy scent of the cloister and the almshouse.

But as it turns out, the etymology of the word is entirely neutral. It comes from the old English *videwe*, its Latin root being *di-videre*, to separate or divide, not unlike the role of the border. And so I am grateful that my first travel as a widow was not only to a place that Aleš loved, but precisely to these borderlands with their sylvan beauty, their nostalgia for an unrecoverable past, the gentle thread of hope for the future. For I, too, am now caught in a sort of borderland, between my life, which must go on, and Aleš’s death, which never ends.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF LOSS

### *Prague*

“It must be hard visiting the same places, the same streets, the same apartments,” a young friend wrote to me in an e-mail when I was in Prague during the month of May some three months after my husband’s unexpected death.

And, true enough, Aleš and I had visited Prague many times together, the city gradually acquiring a geographical significance during our twenty-three-year marriage. The first time we went was in 1993, after I had moved from New York to Slovenia, setting out on what would turn out to be a marvelous adventure to “the other Europe”—as the poet Czesław Miłosz once defined the former Communist-bloc countries—with my brilliant handsome husband as my guide. Those were hopeful heady days after the fall of the Wall. The region was opening up, habits changing, tourists and students beginning to arrive, dreams of joining the rich European Union a glint in policymakers’ eyes. On that occasion, a reading of Slovenian poets took place in the Czech capital. The poet Svetlana Makarovič travelled with us, and I distinctly remember her dark musings about the linguistic formation of women’s surnames in Slavic languages. I had married, she warned me, and would henceforth be not just Erica Debeljak, but Debeljakova, the possession of Debeljak. I sat by her side in the bar and nodded gravely, pretending to share her feminist concern, but I was giddy then, happy. I didn’t really mind being the possession of Aleš: after all, that was why I had transplanted myself to the “other Europe” in the first place.

The same places, the same streets, the same apartments: this is the landscape of loss, a palpable sense of absence in the physical environment, which may be more acute in my case because the landscape that surrounds me isn’t really mine. It is not a childhood landscape into which I can easily retreat, but a borrowed one, an adopted one that had been transmitted to me through the eyes of the lost lover, the lost guide—the lost object as Freud coldly terms it in his seminal text “Mourning and Melancholy”. Together Aleš and I had walked the streets not just of Ljubljana, but of many Central European capitals—Budapest, Vienna, and Prague, in the neighborhood of Vinohrady, where friends live up five flights of stairs, in an apartment practically nesting in the bell tower of a church.

“I guess it is similar to when an addict tries to go through his day without the drug,” my correspondent continued, “only from the addict’s point of view a bit worse, because

an addict can get his drug if he indulges.” Yes, I would have eagerly, if it were only possible, filled a hypodermic syringe with some essence of Aleš and plunged it into my vein. “About the addiction observation, interesting,” I shot back bitterly, “but you could just as easily say that it is better from the addict’s standpoint because he *can* get the drug.”

The reason for this most recent trip to Prague was that my youngest son, Lukas, had been invited to read at an alternative poetry festival called Microfest, which, similar to that first visit in 1993, was presenting a group of Slovenian poets, both established and younger, on the weekend of May 15. My daughter attends Charles University in Prague, and we invited my older son, Simon, to join us so the family was as complete as it now could ever be. On Saturday evening, we set out for the event at Vzorkovna, an underground club, and an eccentric, even perverse, choice for a poetry festival situated in the City of a Hundred Spires. Just as the loveliest hues of early evening touched the cobblestones of the city lanes, poets and listeners descended into a medieval labyrinth, passing through a set of locked iron gates, negotiating with a bald man who had the air of an executioner, exchanging our Czech crowns for a new currency of electronic chips. We went down a steep set of stone stairs into the bowels of the old city. We wound our way through a series of cement-block rooms in search of the one where we could use our newly acquired chips to procure beer in large glass jars from a pale shirtless barkeep lording over a row of spigots. An Irish wolfhound, coat trimmed neatly into a sort of canine Mohawk—a magical-seeming creature that perhaps had never seen the light of day—presided over the whole cultish gathering. He barked only rarely, but when he did, we all fell silent. Nobody misbehaved, at least not until the poetry began.

The reading was delayed. For one hour. And then two. The hues of twilight were long gone when the first of the established readers stepped onto the stage and by that time many in Vzorkovna had paid one visit too many to the shirtless barkeep. As is often the case, many of the poets read for too long and some were mediocre. (At such moments, sitting in the darkness, nursing my jar of beer, I was lured back to the negotiation phase of mourning: why, I pleaded with the god of poetry, did you take one and not another?) But there were also moments of transcendence amidst the squalor. Boris A. Novak—writer of epics, beloved professor, family friend, eulogist for my husband—read beautifully. When he mounted the stage, one of my sons shouted:

“Boki! Boki!”

When he named Erica Johnson Debeljak as one of his translators into English, the cheers rose in the smoke-filled atmosphere:

“Mami! Mami!”

My other son hushed him: “It’s not a football match.”

The Irish wolfhound barked. Poetry as brawl, as hurly-burly, competing voices, the ebb and flow of clarity and intoxication, lightness and dark. I slipped out just before midnight, before Lukas and the other students read and the place descended into pandemonium. I rejoined the relative silence of the familiar Prague streets. I negotiated my way home to our friend’s apartment, travelling the exact same route that Aleš and I had travelled the year before: waiting opposite the National Theatre for the number 22 tram that conveyed me past Karlovo náměstí, where we had installed Klara in her first miniscule dormitory room, in a sort of American rite-of-passage Central European style, up the hill to serene Vinohrady, getting off the tram at Krymská and climbing a narrow set of stairs through a park, the sounds of drunken Czech revelers filling the night air. When I finally arrived at my nest in the bell tower, I sat on the bed and flipped open my laptop. An answer from my young friend was waiting in my inbox:

“You could say that, but even though an addict *can* get the drug, he eventually remains an addict, miserable and empty. One wishes to be immortal, but when this wish is granted, one loses the life essence. Mortality is the condition for love. The more one loves, the more one is open to pain. It is sad, but also beautiful, even fortunate, at least in retrospect, because life without experiencing pain, is eventually life without love...”

But love itself is immortal. It remains even when the object of love is gone. Aleš, inside of me, looking out through my eyes, regarding with bemusement his children and the poets he left behind moving through a strange subterranean playground; accompanying me on my nocturnal journey home through the streets of a familiar city.

A HUMAN RIVER  
London

*The key to my house...*  
*A stone from my father's olive field...*  
—Ali, 22 years old, from Syria

On Wednesday, June 22, 2016, I found myself on Baker Street in London at a place called the Koppel Project—a posh amalgam of gallery, café, bookstore, and performance space. It was Refugee Week in the UK. Over the course of seven days, a series of events took place aimed at both welcoming refugees into the country and at raising awareness and tolerance among the population at large. Ironically, the idealism of Refugee Week was bookended on one side with the brutal murder by a deranged nationalist of Jo Cox, a Labor MP who had a background in human rights and was the most knowledgeable and outspoken MP on the situation of Syrian refugees, and on the other side with the BREXIT referendum, the perverse decision of a small majority of UK voters to leave the EU, a result fuelled mostly by anti-immigrant hatred.

The event at the Koppel Project was a presentation of *Other Story* (<http://www.other-story.org>), an alternative media platform created by Danish performance artist Madeleine Käte. In an effort to push back against the stereotypical images of refugees disseminated by the media (masses of dark-skinned people crowded on boats, in filthy trash-strewn camps, pushing their children through razor wire fences, pouring like a human river across fields and borders), Madeleine Käte had a simple idea. She would go to the main points of entry, Kos and Lesbos, and film ten-minute interviews with individual refugees. She would not ask them about religion or politics or war. She would ask them very basic questions: What did you bring with you? What did you leave behind? What did you dream of becoming as a child? Were you ever in love?

Since I suddenly became a widow six months ago, I have undergone many changes, felt many emotions. Among them, I have felt a heightened sense of empathy, a greater understanding of the dimensions of loss, the reality of it. Now when forty-four perish in a terror attack at the Istanbul airport, or forty-nine in an Orlando nightclub, or eighty-four during Bastille Day celebrations, or only one, Jo Cox, on a sidewalk in her hometown, it is no longer just a news story, just casualty figures. I know more or less what each family, each survivor is going through: the

surreal disbelief of the phone call; how the body instantly dehydrates from shock and remains dehydrated for days; how sleep doesn't come and when it does it is merciless and short, like sinking down in a shallow pool, bouncing almost immediately off the bottom, rising back to the surface, back to awareness: he is dead, he is gone, I will never see him again.

More surprisingly, I have felt a powerful affinity with refugees. On March 7, Woman's Day, I attended a talk in Ljubljana given by Zlata Filipović, the Sarajevan Anne Frank, who published *Zlata's Diary*, an account of her life in besieged Sarajevo, in 1993. After the publication of the book, Filipović and her family left Sarajevo as refugees, and as an adult she has made a career as an advocate for human rights organizations. At one point during the talk, she said, almost by the way, that the task of a refugee is the reinvention of self (the creation of a new life, a new career, the mastery of a new language) in the face of the most devastating possible loss (of family, home, the totality of the life one knew before). I recognize myself in this formulation. True, I am not on the move, I have a roof over my head, food on my table. But the emotional trajectory, and the challenge, is the same: inconceivable trauma and loss, emotional pain that is so unbearable you think it will break you in two, coupled with the need to go on, to take care of your children, to find a way to survive, to live, perhaps even to thrive again.

Thus I recognize myself in the young men who appear on the screen at the Koppel Project: Ali, 22, years old from Syria; Elias, 24 years old, from Syria; Jan, 19 years old, a Kurd from Syria. Their determination is plain, and their strength, but a simple question—what did you leave behind? what is your favorite place?—can derail them, summon unwanted tears that they try and blink away, a flood of emotion that makes speech momentarily impossible, that makes their manly features tremble with the effort to regain control. I am no different. A thin veneer of control, a semblance of normal human function over a roiling sea of loss and pain.

Madeleine Käte gives herself strict guidelines for the *Other Story* project. She will only show films or post them on-line if she remains in contact with the subject of the film. This is an essential ingredient in her humanizing manifesto. As part of the presentation at the Koppel Project, she placed a Skype call to Ali who agreed to talk with us. He has arrived in Norway, lives in an apartment in a small town where he is quite isolated and, although he

has the status of asylum seeker, is not yet allowed to work. In nearly everything he says, his loneliness and desolation is clear. As grateful as he is for the refuge and the financial assistance provided by Norway, for being safe from the war in Syria, he describes his life as an indeterminate sentence in a clean and beautiful European jail.

During my brief life as a widow, I have relied immensely on the support of the people around of me, a few close friends and relatives. I have those I can call in the middle of the night when the veneer of control falls away into the darkness and an indescribable sense of existential anxiety closes in, when I almost don't know who I am anymore, when any self I once had seems to have vanished with Aleš, my love, my anchor. I cannot imagine what Ali and so many others like him do when the night terrors strike, the agony of what they have lost, and they have no one to call, no one to hold, nothing familiar around them. We may think of refugees as mostly a political problem to solve, as human cargo that have to be fed and financed and put somewhere, but one day the magnitude of their emotional loss will also have to be acknowledged and absorbed.

The last column my husband wrote for *Delo's* Saturday supplement was entitled "Tears in Europe". He begins the column with an anecdote about seeing an unknown girl in our neighborhood. She is wearing a blue jacket, leaning against a concrete wall, crying for a reason he doesn't know. He writes about the nature of tears: their universality, how they come when emotion overpowers reason. He writes about all the tears shed in Europe during the past year, the tears of the far too many who have lost someone to violence in this beastly bloody world of ours, and, of course, the tears of the itinerant, the unwanted, the refugees. He starts with the tears of one, and ends with the tears of many.

# BLAŽ BOŽIČ

TRANSLATED BY MONIKA VREČAR

## IN SIGHT

golden October attested through  
the window slow exegesis  
not for hours rightly aligned:  
attempting speech  
obsession with utterance

as if all this is too much for one day  
this is not a warning, no, this is a ship that can't be saved.  
during the day there was foam, at the peaks of waves the Crux  
at night food persistently deterred tears

off of their path across your face, you said food of the sun  
and even if you were ever able to close your eyes, you couldn't  
brush off what inhabited you forever:  
with strings, drawn taut by the hand of *life in the grave*  
through October through the tax assessments

through the empty country through the sliding scales  
in the morning we all had to hurry as the days  
from both ends lengthwise and crosswise  
deeply burdened the quotidian

to remain hidden before the closing act  
forever groaning in past tense  
this foliage upon which the world sleeps  
waiting for someone to attribute it a fine —

## NA VIDIKU

zlati oktober izpričan skozi  
okno počasna eksegeza  
še več ur ne bodo na pravi višini:  
poskusi govora  
obsedenost z izrekanjem

kot da je vse to preveč za en dan —  
to ni opozorilo, ne, to je krov, ki ga ni moč rešiti.  
čez dan je bila pena, južni križ vrh valov  
ponoči je hrana vztrajno odvrčala solzo

z njene poti čez tvoj obraz, rekla si: hrana sonca  
in četudi ti je že kdaj uspelo zatisniti oči, nisi mogla  
pomesti, kar te je za vedno obljudilo:  
s strunami ki jih napenja roka *življenja v grobu*  
skozi oktober skozi davčne napovedi

skozi prazno deželo skozi spolzele luske  
zjutraj smo morali vsi pohiteti ker so dnevi  
z obeh strani po dolgem in počez  
globoko obremenili vsakdan

ostati skrit pred sklepnim dejanjem  
za vedno hropeč preteklike  
to listje na katerem spi svet  
in čaka da mu nekdo pripiše globo —

# JAN KRMELJ

TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR

Inside my lungs I had felt  
So many birds  
I uttered

A cry that resonates  
As silence.

—

To dislocate one’s arms from life – To remain  
Hanging in fluid control – Between the brutal borders and wind –  
In the water – With a look – A body, concieved  
Of hands – From the cohesion of corneas grown, the child – Areas  
And transmuted buds – Three instead of a single wound –  
To glow with circumstances – Hay dripping from the cart – In the air –  
To search for hay in a pile of needles – The legs entwine with hills, the knees  
Coloured, injured, alone.

—

There are only consolations: a scream, sheltered from the storm,  
Does not promise anything, yet guarantees:  
What will flow from my mouth –  
And does not finish the genesis.

—

To live inside the fear of play –  
further – to do  
this without fear  
of play –

stained knees,  
laughter fills the open ground

of an abandoned body.

V pljučih sem začutil  
toliko ptic,  
da sem izustil

krik, ki odzvanja  
kot tišina.

—

Do izpaha dvigniti roke nad svojim življenjem – izviseti  
v fluidnem nadzoru – med brutalnostjo mej in ubojev –  
v vodi – s pogledom – telo, spočeto  
iz rok – iz stika beločnic vzrasel otrok – količina ozemlja  
in transmutirane glave cvetov – namesto vboda trije –  
grleti z okoliščinami, ki premaknejo slamo z voza – in v zraku –  
iskati bilke v kopici šivank – noge se zapletejo v pobočja kolen,  
obarvanih, ranjenih, samih.

—

Le tolažbe so: krik, zajezen pred nevihto,  
ne obljublja ničesar, a zagotavlja:  
kar se bo izlilo iz mojih ustnic –  
in ne dokonča stvaritve.

—

Živeti v strahu pred igranjem –  
dalje – storiti  
to brez strahu pred  
igranjem –

madeži na kolenih,  
smeh zapolni odprte rove

opuščenega telesa.



# IZTOK OSOJNIK

TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR

## DONALD HALL AND MY JAPANESE POEM

Earlier in the morning I felt that strange sensation of a new poem, an electric current burning through my flesh, vibrating, radioactive, freezing, calling, wishing, lustful, yearning, a mouth full of saliva, horny even, and then, I think, it was then that I bumped into a poem by Donald Hall. In the New Yorker it was, now I remember it well.

I started to read an article about the young Norwegian genius chess player Magnus Carlsen, I turned the page and there was the poem by Donald with that line about his wife and an old man not being able any more to fuck. He probably had written it before they started to advertise (and sell) Viagra via spam that has been polluting your e-mail ever since.

I mean I know Donald Hall, personally. I touched him, shook his hand, listened to him reading poetry, with some difficulty though, several times I shared a table with him in a pub in the city of Limerick in green Ireland two or three years ago. A lot has changed since. A week ago I promised to Petra Černe Oven to write a poem for the tsunami survivors, a poem about Japan and my Japanese experiences, though thirty years have passed since along with a lot of water in the river Shannon.

In the meantime I had fever and chills, I went skiing, several times, in the Alps, where else. I am a well traveled man with my bifocal glasses on (broken in Delhi). I do remember Kyoto, the dragon's spring somewhere north I visited one day by bicycle, beat poets used to stay there and meditate or whatever they had been doing, something that Kazuoko Shiraishi has not written much about.

But let's bring the story about Donald Hall to a fair end first. We had dinner in the White House Bar (I lie, it was not with him, but with C.K. Williams). I forgot the name of his girlfriend, was it the Linda of his poem *Green Chairs from an Old Farm*? Anyway there was no exchange of sparkles between us, he kept ignoring me. I was not on the list of the invited poets and Linda was of no help either watching him like an owl. Never mind, I thought, things like this happen, though not always, for instance not with Bob Hass as I wrongly assumed at the time.

But that is another story. I must tell my story, as promised, and god knows, I keep my promises, at least sometimes, the one about Japan first. Kyoto was my second home—if not the first—regardless of the embarrassments I experienced and caused there, with all the Japanese smiles that reflected my rudeness and my barbarian *gaijin* impoliteness—I thought I was expressing my freedom of mind.

Still those were fantastic years, Zen in my bones and Miles Davis on my trumpet and cherry blossoms and bosoms and late night hikes up the snow covered Mount Daimonji into the burning ocean of the razor sharp moonshine. My western resistance collapsed there the wild ghosts of my very own Noh drama my blistering eternal emptiness bursting out of my head with blissful lightning and long hair,

my half naked body happily sweating in the freezing cold wind above the twinkling Kyoto at the foot of the mountain like a mystic crystal. Oh, and I could fuck then, no problem, and I did, and I still do, but that's another story. That was “the animal soup of time” as Ginsberg put it (Bob Hass alerted me to it) and still is. In my veins and in my bones Zen cyclones still roar

deep down there in the abyss of my eagle-eyed existence in  
the colossal openness on the top of Mount Daimonji  
where one touches the universe and is gone.

So mine too is the tragedy of sea monsters rising from  
the ocean with dragon's teeth and roaring waves and  
Kublai Khan the terrible with the plutonium aggregates  
that have blown away divine protection once again  
like some post-industrial Sybil  
inhaling radioactive fumes from a crack in the concrete wall  
deep within a Fukushima nuclear shrine  
and again I am thinking about you among  
the blossoming cherry trees at the foot of Mt. Heian and along  
the streets of ancient Kyoto, my second hometown

and I am thinking about my return to be soon there  
knowing that the past has gone  
and that the future is yet to be born, which is no news of course  
and that my poem about Donald Hall and my Japanese poem  
will have to be abruptly declared unfinished right here.

## DONALD HALL IN MOJA JAPONSKA PESEM

Že zgodaj sem začutil čudno vznemirjenje  
nove pesmi, električni tok je žgal skozi meso,  
vibracija, radiacija, mrzlica, klic, želja, strast,  
hrepenenje, usta polna sline, celo poželenje,  
in potem, mislim, da se je zgodilo takrat,  
sem naletel na pesem Donalda Halla,  
objavljeno v New Yorkerju, dobro se spomnim.

Začel sem brati članek o mladem norveškem  
šahovskem geniju Magnusu Carlsonu, obrnil stran, in  
tam je bila: pesem Donalda Halla z verzom o  
njegovi ženi in starcu, ki ne more več fukati. Verjetno jo je napisal,  
preden so po spletu začeli oglaševati (in prodajati) Viagra,  
med smetmi, ki od takrat naprej onesnažujejo moj poštni predal.

Donalda Halla osebno poznam, dotaknil sem se ga,  
se rokoval z njim, ga poslušal, ko je bral poezijo, čeprav  
z določenim naporom, večkrat sva skupaj obedovala  
pri isti mizi v gostilni v središču Limericka v zeleni Irski,  
pred dvema ali tremi leti je bilo. Od takrat se je  
marsikaj spremenilo. Pred tednom dni sem Petri Černe Oven  
obljubil, da bom napisal pesem za preživele  
v potresnem valu, pesem o Japonski in mojih izkušnjah tam,  
čeprav je od takrat preteklo že trideset let in tudi precej vode  
po strugi reke Shannon.

V vmesnem času sem imel vročino in krče, večkrat sem šel smučat,  
v Alpe, kam pa drugam. Veliko potujem, z očali z dvojnimi lečami  
na nosu (polomljenimi v New Delhiju).  
Dobro se spomnim Kjota, zmajevega studenca  
nekje severno, ki sem ga nekega dne obiskal z biciklom,  
beat pesniki so se nekoč zadrževali tam  
in meditirali ali karkoli so že počeli, nekaj o čemer  
Kazuoko Shiraishi ni nikoli napisala niti besedice.

Ampak da najprej pošteno končam zgodbo o Donaldu Hallu.  
Skupaj sva kosila v White House Bar (lažem, ni bil on,  
ampak C.K. Williams). Pozabil sem, kako je bilo ime njegovi  
prijateljici, je ona Linda iz njegove pesmi Zeleni stoli na  
stari kmetiji? Kakorkoli že, med nama se ni nič zaiskrilo,  
vztrajno me je ignoriral. Nisem bil na seznamu povabljenih pesnikov  
in od Linde ni bilo mogoče pričakovati pomoči, nanj  
je pazila kot sova. Nič ne de, sem pomislil,  
take stvari se dogajajo, čeprav ne vedno, na primer ne tudi  
v primeru Boba Hassa, kot sem takrat napačno mislil.

Ampak to je že druga zgodba. Naj povem svojo zgodbo, kot sem obljubil, in bog ve, da vedno izpolnim svoje obljube. Vsaj včasih. Najprej zgodbo o Japonski. Kjoto je bil moj drugi dom – če ne prvi – ne glede na neprijetnosti, ki sem jih doživel in povzročil, z vsemi japonskimi nasmehi, ki so zaznamovali mojo grobost in mojo barbarsko *gaijin* nevljudnost – ampak mislil sem, da jasno kažem svojo umno svobodo.

In vendar so bila to fantastična leta, zen v kosteh in Miles Davis na moji trobenti in češnjevi cvetovi in vroča mednožja in nočni vzponi na zasneženo goro Daimonji, gor, v žgoči ocean kot britvica ostre mesečine. Moja zahodnjaški odpor se je zrušil tam in divji duhovi moje nadvse osebne No drame moja blesteča neskončna praznina se mi je razpočila iz glave s slepečim bliskom in dolgimi lasmi.

Moje na pol golo telo se je ekstatično potilo na ledeno mrzlem vetru nad utripajočim Kjotom ob vznožju kot mističnim kristalom. O, pravim, kako sem lahko takrat fukal, nobenih problemov, in tudi sem in to še vedno počnem, ampak to je že druga zgodba. To je bila „živalska juha časa“, kot je zapisal Ginsberg, Bob Hass pa me je opozoril na to, in še vedno je. Po žilah in kosteh še vedno divjajo zenovski tornadi globoko spodaj v breznu mojega obstoja z orlovimi očmi sredi kolosalne odprtosti na vrhu gore Daimonji, na katerem se človek dotakne veselja in ponikne.

To velja tudi za tragedijo morskih pošasti, ki se iz oceana dvignejo z zmajevimi zobmi v rjovečih valovih in strašnim Kublaj Kanom plutonijevih agregatov, ki so znova odpihnili božansko zaščito kot kakšna post industrijska Sibila, ki vdihuje radioaktivne pare iz razpoke v betonskih zidovih globoko v nuklearnem templju Fukušime, in spet razmišljam o tebi med razcvetelimi češnjami v vznožju gore Hejan in na dolgih ulicah v starodavnem Kjotu, mojemu drugemu domu.

In razmišljam o svojem skorajšnjem povratku tja, zavedajoč se, da je preteklost minula in da se mora prihodnost šele roditi, kar ni seveda nič novega, mojo pesem o Donaldu Hallu in mojo pesem o Japonski pa je treba prav tu nepričakovano razglasiti za končano.





# SVETLANA SLAPŠAK

## THREE WOMEN ON LOVE DURING WAR: ANICA SAVIĆ REBAC, OLGA FREIDENBERG, EDITH STEIN

The opposition war-peace, the expected and the “natural” one, remains in the field of public discourse and politics: the shift should thus be to thematize the history of emotions, or provide an anthropology of emotions during war time, and to follow the gender divide in this. A rather narrow space, a kind of *site-catchment* that I want to explore, is that of women from the intellectual elite, each of them in their well-defined, small unit of exchanging and producing ideas, approximately at the same time – during World War II (WW II). *Site-catchment* is an archaeological term, defining the possibilities of controlling a space (site) in relation to the everyday mobility requirements of a human group settled there, usually over a one-day span. My use of the term underlines the existence of a limited set of communication frameworks – in this case siege, war zone, exclusion and eventually concentration camp, and the expansion of theorizing under such restrictions. Further re-semanticization of the term goes into the texts: war, as a kind of hypo-text, is hardly mentioned, and the pain and the toils of everyday life are generally omitted, they cannot be read from the core texts which are firmly residing in theory – philosophy, ethics, history, folklore. This clear division allows for reading biographical data as part of the hypo-text. The standard textual procedures of a scientific discourse in the humanities, in times of war, have to be seen in such a multiple-level division. Beside the hypo-text (life during war) and the core text (scientific discourse, in this case), there is also a third text to be read – the meta-text, or the explanatory hints that appear in the choice of topics, examples, quotations, etc., from which immanent poetics can be construed. If all three

texts have some of the same narrative units, like war and opposition to war, then we could even speak of a genre, or sub-genre, *polemography*, which is not historiography, nor war prose, but reading-in the war through a basic anti-war procedure, and the continuation of writing as if there were still peace and normality. So why not just theorizing peace, as the opposite of war? One of the answers could be found in the history of European pacifism, which failed to prevent World War I (WW I) or to significantly impact the cultures of the related nation-states. It thus did not offer any theoretical framework that was powerful enough to be recycled or revived when facing the threat of WW II. Although Gandhi opened up a new way to think of peace, and many proletarian revolutions adopted programmatic pacifist texts, theorizing peace did not take ground until after WW II, when the threat became global. Love as the opposite of war thus offered, in the cases I am going to address, a larger theoretical horizon.

Contemporary feminism and gender studies have done a lot to first mythify (*sic*) women’s “innate” opposition to war, and then quite a lot to deconstruct and de-mystify this concept, although still “workable” in war zones and grass-root activism. Women against the war remains a powerful narrative, in which some features of women’s writing can be seen more clearly against a gloomy background: life and living as the only sense bearers, the everyday and common as meaningful and even subversive, the trivial as resistance to the highbrow and offering false discourse on sacred goals, patriotism, and necessity of violence. Women theorizing on love during war, as scarce as this was in Europe during WW II – and perhaps I am referring to a few, rather unique cases – opposes both mainstream gender-genre conventions, and women’s writing during (or on) war.

## ANTIQUITY IN SEARCH OF LOVE THEORIES

Choosing three women who opposed the war through thinking and writing on love, all of them during WW II, I position the philosophy of love in women’s culture, in order to celebrate these women’s breach into the fields of men’s privileged reflective, spiritual, and intellectual competences, such as philosophy, and to put forward an unexplored but convincingly argued European invention of Antiquity.

There are only two moments in European history in which love is defined as a public affair, pertaining to a citizen’s identity. The first is more widely accepted, the culture of the Greek polis in the classical period, especially the Athenian one; the second is much more contested, but almost lasted as long as the “golden era” of Athenian democracy, and this is the 1968 revolution in understanding, acting and presenting love. Of course, there have been several intellectual projects, more precisely utopias in modern Europe, and the one invented by François Rabelais is particularly evocative in this context, proposing a liberated sexual life as the foundation of civic fulfilment. We cannot deny that our ways of making love, living together, choosing partners and presenting sexuality have radically changed since 1968, with deep traces in almost every part of culture and everyday life, most visibly in popular culture and the media. The slogan “make love not war” can also be understood as re-vindicating the public space for love as a civic activity within the context that I attempt to limit and define in this text.

It is not surprising that one of the most successful global cultural activities in March 2003, aimed at preventing the war in Iraq, was the simultaneous performance of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* in more than 300 places around the world. *Lysistrata*’s carnivalesque plot is about the women of Athens, who proclaim a sexual strike until a peace treaty between Athenians and Spartans is concluded, with the Spartan women also drawn into the action. The needy men on both sides consent to peace after a number of comic twists and turns. The men’s sexual suffering is a public affair, as they seek solutions by confronting or negotiating the women’s refusal of sex. This strike is the women’s own intervention into public and political life, one of the few courses of action open to them as non-citizens of their states. Aristophanes’ upside-down comic world is conditioned by genre and context – and the tradition of exclusively male theatre public. But there are many other

aspects that point to the ancient understanding of love and sexuality as a public matter. For instance, there is a stable motif in Ancient Greek literature, from the Classical period to late Hellenistic times, that of the dangers of male sexuality for the stability of the state. Another fascinating issue is the position of women, the body in which a citizen is “cooked” with the proper ingredients: a mother that is the daughter of a citizen, and a father who is a citizen himself. Ancient gynaecologists, like Soranus, saw the uterus as a vessel. The idea of a new-born baby being breastfed and “massaged” into a proper form not by his/her mother, but rather by another (hired) woman, at the expense of the father, can be recognized not only in Ancient Greece, but also in Islamic cultures.

The argument that social stability depends largely on male sexual desire being satisfied, or that such desire can de-stabilize the state, can be readily traced back to *Lysistrata* and Aristophanes. But it reappears in different literary genres, and becomes a standing motif in writings of Alciphron and other late “re-inventors” of the Athenian Golden Age: *hetaerae*, the courtesans, gave themselves credit for keeping philosophers’ minds from stirring up revolutions and instability, an effect achieved by keeping their bodies sexually satisfied. As such, instead of preparing for civil war or tyranny, the philosophers were said to be too tired to get up early and discuss politics after a night of love... Furthermore, the courtesans prevented men folk from engaging in incest or adultery, thus supporting family values. Here we can see two clear ideas, that of social stability and stability in general depending on citizens having good sex lives, and male sexuality as a natural threat to order and democracy. Athenian democracy constantly feared the destructive force of male sexuality in its more political form, i.e., homosexual relations, always constructed as power-relations between younger and older lovers, never two adults of the same status. This is because such relations reflected aristocratic behaviour and the threat of an aristocratic conspiracy against democracy: a fear that history justified (Harmodios’ and Aristogeiton’s tyrannoc-tony), as did more recent events (the Tyranny of the Thirty, carried out by Socrates’ pupils). Alciphron’s arguments follow a long line which can be seen in Plato’s dialogues, especially *Menexenes*, where Socrates presents an ironic theory that Aspasia in fact wrote Pericles’s speeches, and that she was an excellent, though secret, teacher of rhetoric. In Aristophanes’ *Women in Parliament* (*Ecclesiazousae*), the wives easily steal their husbands’



language, and make the Parliament vote to delegate power to women. The connection with wit and irony, which in Plato’s case serves more as a simple equation women = irony, went through a subtler change after the death of democracy and the deep cultural transformations that occurred in the Hellenistic era. On one side, the rich and clever arguments of Alciphron, which do not include the real fear of an anti-democratic conspiracy, and on the other the case of Athenaeus, chronologically close to Alciphron, who developed a concept in which gender and genre are related. His *Deipnosophistae*, or *Philosophers at the Feast*, is a curious work, of which only about half of the text is preserved. Athenaeus is interested in everything and anything: his guests at the imaginary (or real?) symposium debate history, literature, mythology, technical matters, the hard sciences, geography, travel, food, love, philosophy, art, architecture, plants, animals, and condiments, but avoid any allusion to the local or political, or in fact anything concerning power games. In Book XIII, which bears the title *On Women*, Athenaeus’ intellectuals discuss women and love. Obvious changes in women’s positions, above all legal and political, occurred between the years of Athenian democracy, Hellenistic times and Late Antiquity, most of which gave them greater emancipation and more rights and visibility. There is no need to fall into the trap of concluding that the only recorded functional and highly structured direct democracy was in fact bad for women, while monarchy was better, although the system of heirs and familiar lineage related to power seen in the latter was quite helpful in developing some new rights for women. Athenaeus’ intellectuals may be nostalgic about the old times, but they do not (at least not all of them) pose as traditionalists. However, their debates on women and love reflect some of the changes in conceptualizing women, and thus offer some strategies with regard to dealing with an alterity that is becoming ever more complex. Women as *alterity* in Antiquity (especially during the development of *polis* in Greece), is now the prevailing and generally accepted result of research, especially in historic anthropology. An Athenian citizen, to take the best known example, searched to confirm and define his predominantly externally oriented identity by “mirroring” himself/his *self* in others – women, slaves, barbarians, nature, mythical (often virtual or hybrid) creatures, divinities, or animals. Women were extremely dangerous in this group of the wild and untamed, at least when the basic identitarian texts of democracy are analyzed, above all tragedies and comedies.

One of possible philosophical classifications, or strategies of complexity, is that presented by Aristoteles’, who defined women in quite demeaning terms, as if the debate on women’s rights was not already at the table of the generation of Athenian intellectuals like Plato, Aristophanes, and Euripides. Athenaeus’ “masters of memory” had a challenging project, to trace the winding road of how the greatest authorities had chose to define women. This is a very good reason to venture into the contextual framework of Athenaeus’ symposiasts.

The feasting intellectuals do not have a single female guest among their number. They also do not have any female entertainers, as was customary for men-only symposia – at least in earlier times. Some of the philosophers present in Athenaeus’ group are Epicureans, and thus familiar not only with women’s presence, but also their participation in philosophic and academic activities. The absence of women at this gathering might perhaps be explained by a new and different mentality, or maybe a new social norm, which did not allow for the hiring of expensive and sexualized entertainers (their roles were always multiple); but whatever the reason, Athenaeus’ group looks like an old boys’ club. When they refer to tacky, or overtly obscene narratives, they seem to enjoy these *acoustically*, which is today one of the most expanded modalities of sexual satisfaction (as seen in the sex-prone phone industry), being a cheaper, more comfortable, and less risky way of enjoying such pleasures. The contextual scenery of Book XIII can be understood fully only when we compare it to the complex setting of the Ancient symposium, as seen by today’s historic anthropologists – readers of images, and also to the changed context of the Hellenistic symposium: it is certainly a miserable setting when it comes to satisfying men’s desires. The acoustic aspect of enjoyment, boldly compared with and justified by current technologically advanced but anthropologically parallel practices, appears to be the main semiotic code of Book XIII.

Let us go now back from context to concepts: discussing women and love diverges into the two main lines of explanation. Firstly, one aims to neutralize women’s impact on culture and the world as a whole – or the memory as a whole – by privileging friendship and love, detached from genre-divisions, as non-destructive emotions, although they, once expressed, may produce auto-destruction and destruction *tout court*. This is quite a development from the early Greek concept of love as a disease. The complexities of love and friendship (including animals

loving people, homosexual relations, and other forms of emotional entanglements) emerge as a new, not yet classified complexity, which does not allow for any gender specificity, but stresses the complexity of emotional states and modes. The second line of explanation is in slightly contradiction with the first. It tries to re-establish gender specificity, by constructing a special mode of verbal expression for a special kind of women. Again, the work of memory is masterly displayed in this work, by quoting, using and re-narrating the plots of the so-called Middle Comedy, collections of anecdotes, bits and pieces of many authors, historians and polyhistor, and the textual tradition which is defined as *pornography*, or writing on whores. Athenaeus is the inventor or the first user of the term we know of, and whores, or *hetaerae*, are the class of women which serve as a screen for projecting this gender specificity, or strategy of complexity. *Hetaerae* are thus given a literary genre and a discourse. The literary genre is pornography, which is obviously understood as a form of prose, apart from comedy, and the discourse, or the oral genre, is the joke (witz). The hidden complexity of gender relations is thus deconstructed and re-classified, with an innovative solution to the problem of self-expression and intellectual emancipation of *hetaerae*. In fact, all the jokes cited by Athenaeus’ participants (the old boys’ club) are about the intellectual superiority of such women, especially when their charms do not count any more, in their old age. They typically outsmart men, be they philosophers, butchers, soldiers, or kings... By treating gender concepts in this way, Athenaeus proposes not only a new strategy of dealing with complexity, which we could define as disciplinary expansion, interdisciplinary cooperation, and looking for a definition between genre and discourse, but also does a much more remarkable job of connecting gender and culture. The debate about women and love moves from the anthropological situation of the *alterity* of women towards the integration of women into the world – even if it is the virtual world of memory – allowing for women to excell in the same privileged art of commanding the memory, and having a genre/discourse to do it properly. Thus gender is conceptualized – and realized in culture, and this is accepted as a general framework – a theoretical pre-condition for the entire field of gender studies. Athenaeus’ old boys’ club did see women as secondary, from the position of power and a restrained acoustic command of sexuality. But from this position new options for dealing with complexity appeared, and the ancient *alterity* was

replaced by a much more responsible and intellectually challenging process of inventing new (textual/discursive) spaces for women’s identity. Athenaeus’ strategy of complexity can be read as a good example of an epistemological experiment, an impressive endeavor coming from a neglected part of the past that we should certainly pay more attention to.

We will find some fragments of these arguments in many of the current debates on prostitution, clouded by modern civic (post-Christian, post-religious) moral concerns. Re-discovering the Ancient politics of love (with all its conceptual differences) indirectly reveals the still functioning censorship and re-naturalization of love, muffled in the term “nature,” very much like gender itself used to be presented. The cultural and performative aspects of love become especially challenging and inspirational when theorized by previous female authors, emerging out of great places, seasons and jargons of theory on gender, love, and sexuality.

#### CHRONODISTOPIA: THREE WOMEN, SAME TIME, DIFFERENT PLACES

My point about this topic is that it was already presented, researched, and used in public discourse to define a certain anti-war intellectual attitude and the philosophical relation to ancient views on love and the public sphere long before 1968, but in cultures less resonant and hardly recorded in what we might understand as the collective (Western) European memory. I am referring here to the case of Anica Savić Rebac, who was educated in the unique socio-cultural context of Viennese, Novi Sad and Beograd intellectual circles at the peak of their activities with regard to inventing or imagining a new society and its culture, namely the Yugoslav society and culture. To do this, it was necessary to construct a code for the interpretation of Antiquity and establish a certain intimacy between the Balkan/Yugoslav and ancient cultures, which would not use the concept of an “origin” as a tool, or indeed any of the other tools for the European appropriation of Antiquity that have been applied over the centuries. Anica Savić’s godfather and mentor, Laza Kostić, a poet and a theoretician, wrote a treatise on beauty, in which he relies on Heraclitus’ teaching, but also repeats many of Athenaeus’ statements, with a good portion of this text being on love. Not only Anica Savić Rebac, but the whole generation of

students of Antiquity from this region were well aware of Laza Kostić’s attempt to bring the Balkan cultures and Antiquity closer, including his experiment with translating Homer into the Serbian epic decametre, his theory of theatre originating in Balkan ritual performances, and so on. In the case of Olga Freidenberg, the early revolutionary energy in her circle of Petrograd intellectuals was also directed into a re-interpretation of Antiquity, again against the model of origins and appropriation, and more toward a universal anthropological and folkloric lineage or parallels (paligenesis+polygenesis). In this case the “classical” was also less interesting to research than the pre- or post-classical periods, both in terms of chronology and evaluation. This interest was local, responding to local needs. Similarly, when a new interest in Athenaeus emerged just a few years ago, nothing of this “peripheral” European tradition was mentioned. Instead, this new interest in Antiquity looked at some of the issues examined by the less known Hellenistic authors, who were not treated as if their works were mere footnotes in relation to the bigger names, and who in fact produced some original theories. No better parallel could be presented here than Mikhail Bakhtin, who “unearthed” Menippos, a nearly forgotten Hellenistic author, to construct a literary theory around his work, at approximately the same time as Savić Rebac and Freidenberg were working on similar projects of re-reading. Even in the case of Edith Stein, who wrote in the very heart of the Western (German) philosophical tradition, there is a veil of oblivion woven from different aspects of her otherness: gender, fluctuating ethnic and religious positioning, and eventual closure inside the institutions of the Catholic church. The general ignorance that exists with regard to such texts is due to (Western) European cultural colonialism, and the gender constraints which are of a more universal nature, with a kind of *longue durée* characteristic, and certainly not limited to Europe. The three authors that I am interested in belong in different degrees to liminal cultures, languages and disciplines. They are outsiders in terms of today’s humanities and academia, just as they were outsiders in their lifetimes. In the cases of Freidenberg and Savić Rebac, gender instigated censorship is one side of the problem, while European cultural supremacy is the other, while in the case of Stein we see that the intensity of the first can easily make up for the absence of the latter.

## HOW EUROPEAN IS THEORIZING ON LOVE?

Three aspects of the politics of love in Europe at the same historic moment of the WW II will be explored here: gender, history, and the anthropology of intellectuals. Before this the overall notion of “European” should be addressed: what is European about these three women and their works? The tradition of theorizing love starts with Plato’s *the symposium*, which is the first attempt at confronting contemporary sexual practices, patterns of behaviour and ruling discourses in all their variety (with all the guests at the symposion), and the need to theorize them critically, via Socrates, who in fact “translates” an absent authority in the matter, Diotima. There has been a strong European tradition of interpreting Plato’s dialogue (together with *Phaedros*) over centuries, whenever love and beauty come under the gaze of philosophy, but also for less theoretical purposes, like a crypto-defence of homosexuality. A clear reference to this can be seen in Anica Savić Rebac’s thematic approach to “pre-platonic erotology” (the title of her PhD thesis), which immediately stresses her distancing from this tradition, and her remarkably ambitious project of exploring its unrecognized sources. Another European feature in this case can be the model of intellectual enclosure it presents, as echoed in later monasteries, universities, intellectual circles, and (revolutionary) salons. All three of the women were functioning in such enclosures, which deteriorated radically during the war, while other, violence-based systems were formed. Communicating under such conditions is certainly not specifically European, neither is feminist networking (such as the friendship between Rebecca West and Anica Savić Rebac), but neglecting non-Western European achievements in the humanities, both arts and academia, is a recognizable – and questionable – European feature. Another of the European features in this context is women in philosophy, with all the difficulties of affirmation that they faced, being pushed to “where they belong,” into literature: Olga Freidenberg is mostly known today through her correspondence with her more famous cousin, Boris Pasternak, and Anica Savić Rebac – for those who recognize the coded name – from her appearance in Rebecca West’s travelogue. Multilingualism is another European feature, along with constant translation and terminological invention, such as Anica Savić Rebac’s *erotology* for the philosophy of love, a very useful neologism that alone should serve to make its author better known.

The aspect of gender difference is thematically situated: conceptualising love in theoretical terms, in spite of circumstances. In the works of the these women love is not a symbol of hope or human values, and is not at all escapist: instead it is a proposal for a public civic attitude, although addressed to different recipients and thus presented in different ways. Parallels for such intellectual behaviour can be found in war-torn Europe, and the example of Carl Orff’s *Catulli Carmina* (1943) should suffice in this sense. However, although love and sex are the principle topics of Orff’s musical and theatrical work, they do not send a political/civic message, and the only message they seem to convey operates on the “universal” level. In contrast, in the cases of the three women I am discussing here the political aim is clearer, and even more because it is not backed up by any state institution. Their insistence on love both impacting on and originating from public life – be it in historical terms, and thus slightly masked as a message, or an open call to the Pope (as in the case of Edith Stein) – does not invoke personal human happiness and consolation, but a form of social and political action which is openly against the romanticising of love in its Western intimate/bourgeois context, and instead “hailing” its political energy. Such political tension, quite close to high emotional exciting, can be found in the texts of some of the Western intellectuals who felt compelled to explore the horrors of the just finished WW II – Theodor W. Adorno, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hannah Arendt, and especially Simone de Beauvoir, who saw the double victimisation of humans and women continuing, rather than purged or punished, after the war. The three women whose reflections on love remained unknown for so long can be seen today as almost prophetic figures, or at least very advocates of thinking about love in terms of public responsibility.

The three women “exemplifiers” in this text are Anica Savić Rebac, Olga Freidenberg, and Edith Stein. I chose Edith Stein as *tertium comparationis* because she, both by her writing and her public role, became well known in the culture of the Catholic Church (as a Jewish woman who turned to Catholicism, was killed in a concentration camp as a nun, and eventually became a saint). Her position in secular culture became much more interesting after her 1933 letter to Pope Pius XII was released by the Vatican in 2003, stirring a new controversy over the position of the Church in relation to the Holocaust. I will have to go into the biographies of the three women in order to illustrate

their contexts, underline the synchronicities among them, and last, but not least, to establish a hypo-text: their life stories as conforming-confirming texts of their core texts. There is, of course, my intervention regarding the choice of data, epitomization of data, and choice of narrative, in short, my intentionality. I would like to put it even more bluntly: I have a clear intention of feminist solidarity in telling a her-story.

## HYPO-TEXT: ANICA SAVIĆ REBAC

Anica Savić (who gained the name Rebac on marrying) was born in 1894 in Novi Sad (the former Yugoslavia), the cradle of modern feminism in the Balkans, into a wealthy family of intellectuals of mixed Greek and Serbian origins. As a girl, she could not attend the high school reserved for boys, but got plenty of attention and the best education at home, which was one of the liveliest intellectual focuses of the city – then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and host to the Serbian intelligentsia. The little girl published her first translations from Ancient Greek (Pindarus) at the age of 10, her pioneering translations of Emile Verhaaren’s poetry at the age of 12, and wrote her first dramas, mainly with Ancient and Anti-Christian motifs, at the age of 13. By the age of 18 she was fluent in Ancient Greek and Latin, German, French, English, Italian, and Hungarian. This “wunderkind” was accompanied by her mother to the University of Vienna, one of the most intellectually exciting cities in Europe around 1910, and studied the crowning discipline in academia of the time – Ancient Studies. She was also involved in the Yugoslav movement, fostered by students coming from different parts of the Balkans, dreaming about destroying the Austro-Hungarian Empire and constructing a new, democratic, multi-ethnic state (or states) in its place. She had to return home before she presented her PhD due to the outbreak of the WW I. While the conflict raged she met Hasan Rebac, a Muslim of Serbian origin and a well-known guerrilla fighter for the Serbian cause in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Austrian rule. They married after the war, and Anica Savić Rebac consequently lost most of her social support in Novi Sad. The couple then settled in Beograd, and although she could not get a post at the University she brilliantly defended her PhD thesis there. They were soon both employed by the state in Skopje, in today’s Macedonia, she as a teacher in a girls’ high school, he as a teacher in a *madrassa* (Muslim

religious school): such relatively low positions were due to the couple's staunch opposition to the monarchy and its right-wing government, in addition to their socialist ideas. This is where Rebecca West, alarmed by the French philosopher Denis Saurat and her Beograd "informer" and guide, a Serbian Jew, as well as the multi-talented Stanislav Vinaver (poet, linguist, and parodist) travelled to meet Anica, and the two women forged a lasting friendship. Anica is described as "Militsa" in West's book on Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb. Grey Falcon* (1941), in following terms: "Once I showed Denis Saurat, who is one of the wisest of men, a letter that I had received from Militsa. "She writes from Skopje, I see", he said. "Really, we are much safer than we suppose. If there are twenty people like this woman scattered between here and China, civilization will not perish." Or, a little further: "Yet these two are steady as pillars. They are pillars supporting that invisible house which we must have to shelter us if we are not to be blown away by the winds of nature. Now, when I go through a town of which I know nothing, a town which appears to be a waste land of uniform streets wholly without quality, I look on it in wonder and hope, since it may hold a Mehmed, a Militsa." It is with Anica/Militsa that Rebecca West visits a sacrificial site in Macedonia, guided by her new friend – an excellent authority in matters of Balkan rituals, and this is where she formulates her predominant metaphor of useless sacrifice (the black lamb) in the Balkans. West's critical eye tried to spot internal signs of collapse in Yugoslav society and culture, convinced as she was that Yugoslavia was an easy prey for the rising Nazi-Fascist coalition around it. In fact, this was the main reason for her decision to visit and research this part of Europe – the fear that it would vanish soon along with its cultural diversity. And she was right in her prediction. The concept of a black lamb in her book is one that denotes internal violence and its irrational motivation in the Balkans, an active cultural memory far from today's Western – and European – stereotypes of the region. Ironically enough, for many years after WW II the Yugoslav authorities forbade the translation of Rebecca West, because of her sympathies for the Serbian royal house of the Karadjordjevići.

Anica Savić Rebac exchanged letters with Rebecca West before and after WW II. While one of the letters, describing the horrors of war and her and Hasan's successful attempts at escaping Serbian nationalist paramilitaries (*tchetniks*) while hiding in deep in a Serbian province, has been published, others remain unknown to the public. She

also had a rich exchange of letters with people she was consulting about her ideas and research. These correspondents included Gershom Sholem, whom she asked several questions about the Kabbalah, Heinrich Leisegang, and her professor in Vienna, Ludwig Radermacher, while Denis Saurat was also among those she wrote to when researching Christian and Jewish mysticism. In order to clarify her positions, Anica translated much of her work into German. An excellent translator of classic works in various languages (e.g., Pindarus, Lucretius, Shelley, Goethe, and Thomas Mann), she also translated the mystic epic *The Ray of Microcosm* by the Montenegrin romantic poet P. P. Njegoš (who was both religious and political ruler of Montenegro in the early 19th century) into English and German, a text that was published after her death in *Harvard Slavic Studies*. Her relation with Thomas Mann was remarkable: she was the first person in Yugoslavia to identify him as a great European writer, and translated his three novellas (*Tonio Kröger*, *Der Tod in Venedig*, and *Tristan*) in 1929, with versions still considered the best in Serbo-Croat, and she followed his work with a keen critical interest. He in return included her definition of love in his *Joseph und seine Brüder*. Anica Savić Rebac finally got a positon at Beograd University in 1945, as her socialist ideas were considered acceptable by the new communist authorities, and her anti-fascist convictions were well known. She contributed to the new socialist and Marxist ideological concepts being discussed, presenting P.B. Shelley's socialist ideas in a public lecture in 1945, and by translating folk partisans' songs (most of them women's songs) into English. Her first public appearance, with Shelley' socialism as the topic, might have not been that popular among political leaders whose political reflections followed abbreviated forms of Lenin's (or Stalin's) interpretation of Marxism. But this was more a sign of political solidarity on both sides, and she at least was not punished for it. However, Anna later refrained from offering any public support for the new authorities. Moreover, since she had long been a convinced feminist, the rise of feminism after WW II was nothing new to her, and she wrote a number of articles for a periodical aimed at university educated women. In 1953, Anica committed suicide after a sudden death of her husband.

## HYPO-TEXT: OLGA FREIDENBERG

Olga Freidenberg (1890–1955) was born into a Jewish family, her mother was sister to Boris Pasternak's father, and her father, also a good friend of Pasternak's father, was an ingenious inventor, producing, among other things, an automatic telephone switch. Olga Freidenberg, whose life is known mostly through her correspondence with Boris Pasternak, was a brilliant young woman with knowledge of Ancient Greek and Latin, German, English, French, Swedish, Spanish and Portuguese, who got the chance to study at the University of Petrograd after the revolution, and then the opportunity to form a new department of Classical Studies, as a student of the then influential linguist, Nikolai Marr. She introduced an innovative approach to the study of Antiquity, based on semiotic theories and the study of folklore, thus becoming a forerunner of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mikhail Bakhtin. Although she did not share Marr's rather fantastic linguistic theories, favoured by the regime, she suffered for her connection to him when he fell out of grace: her major study on the poetics of Ancient literature was thus not able to be published in the 1930s, and most of her work was never published. The victim of petty intrigues at the department she founded, she did not have any real collegial support, or student-followers. Her brother died a prisoner in Siberia, while she endured teaching and researching in almost total isolation, cut off not only from Western developments in the discipline, but also from access to sources in her own surroundings. During the siege of Leningrad she was teaching courses to her students, and languages to soldiers, in exchange for bread. After the war, her situation did not improve, and her health was ruined. She retired, and died in 1955. More than 15 years after her death, her correspondence with Pasternak, her diaries (more than 2,500 pages), and her studies were discovered. The collection of her main studies on Antiquity was first published in 1978 in Russian, translated into Serbo-Croat in 1987, and English in 1997.

## CORE TEXT: ANICA SAVIĆ REBAC AND OLGA FREIDENBERG

The parallels between two contemporary lives and works, those of Anica Savić Rebac and Olga Freidenberg, are striking, as well as those between their individual intellectual histories: this is why I am adding the *tertium comparationis*, Edith Stein, somewhat apart from these two

women. Both Olga Freidenberg and Anica Savić Rebac were classicists, and may even have had a common influential predecessor, the Polish classicist Theodore Zielinski, who cooperated with Anica Savić Rebac' colleagues in *Revue internationale des études balkaniques (RIEB)*, published in Beograd in the 1930s by Milan Budimir and Petar Skok (1932–38), and which served as an open space for more innovative approaches to Antiquity and Balkan history, with a strong anti-fascist and pro-Yugoslav orientation. The positions of Anica Savić Rebac in her link with *RIEB* and Olga Freidenberg in her avant-garde formalist surroundings thus have several common features with regard to researching Antiquity: an interest in folklore and comparative insight, semantic and semiotic analysis, clear political orientations (against traditionalism, favouring democratic aspects and values, with a dash of pro-communist sympathies), and linking Ancient phenomena to their own contemporary situations, including a certain "feminist practice" represented both by men (for instance the editor of *RIEB*, Milan Budimir) and by women (Anica Savić Rebac and Olga Freidenberg). By "feminist practice" I understand the position of taking for granted women's equality in everyday life and their careers, and, thematically, going for the toughest and most authoritarian disciplines and academic circles – Ancient studies, philosophy, literary theory, religion and folklore, with an energy that we could define today as deconstructive. Anica Savić Rebac took an active attitude, writing about forgotten feminists from her native region, and taking part in the Association of Women Academics after WW II. Olga Freidenberg, living in a new culture in which feminist ideas were at least seen positively in the early revolutionary days, was almost obsessed with finding traces of Ishtar, the Mediterranean goddess of fertility, in various rituals and texts: both Anica Savić Rebac and Olga Freidenberg made similar conclusions about the double nature of Phaedra (from Euripides' play *Hippolytos*), as a possible ritual memory of the old goddess. Curiously enough, both Anica Savić Rebac' and Olga Freidenberg's works were saved thanks to their female friends and relations: Anica Savić Rebac' friend in this case happened to be the Director of the University Library in Beograd, where her archives are still kept; one of her students, a woman, published her manuscript on Ancient aesthetics a year after her death, two women (I was one of them) took care of publishing her complete works from 1984–1988, and then two other women took care of preserving, opening, and handing over Olga Freidenberg's work for publication.



But the most fascinating about these two women is their synchronous work in theorizing love in Antiquity, that is Eros. Anica Savić Rebac’ work is more complex and theoretically refined: she coined a term to denote the philosophy of love, *erotology*, which remains attractive even today, with its hyper-production of terms and jargon. She published her PhD thesis on erotology in 1932, but worked on the topic through the 1940s, enlarging the concept to include aspects of mysticism and Judaeo-Christian folklore, including the *bogomils* of Bosnia in the Middle Ages (a dualistic heresy that was extinguished by Serbian kings, but continued in Bosnia), and up to the idea of love expressed in the mystic poetry of P. P. Njegoš. This is why she needed interpretations of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (with one of her contemporary interpreters being Denis Saurat), and of the Kabbalah. She invigorated her interpretation of Eros and the state in her book on Ancient aesthetics, which contains an outline of the erotology of Plato and Aristophanes. Let me just give a taste of her way of thinking in her imagining what art could have been had Plato’s aesthetic model ever been realized: it would be most similar to Piet Mondrian’s paintings ...

Anica Savić Rebac discusses different phases and forms of Eros in the god’s ritual varieties – diverging and converging gender constructs and social functions – from the cosmic egg (feminine) to the wind and fire daemon (masculine), and the military and gymnastic friendship protector (homosexual). This double or multiple nature of Eros goes through a significant political modification under Athenian democracy, ending in two forms (dual Eros): Eros the erotic passion as a danger to the inner state’s stability, be it male or female, and Eros the wisdom master, one who enable the civic values, or “social virtues” as Anica Savić Rebac calls them. This Eros takes care so that uncontrollable sexuality does not create *stasis*, a civil war. She attributes this development to Euripides and Socrates and their influence in Athens. Anica Savić Rebac’ approach relies on semantic history, folkloric elements connected to rituals, and the history of ideas, along with the “classic” European philosophical practice. Her civic Eros, as presented in the model of a minimal education for Athenian citizens in her book on Ancient aesthetics, has in fact a distinctive anti-war political meaning. This is the most delicate part of Anica Savić Rebac’ discussion, since she cannot deny that war was seen as one of the legitimate activities of

Athenian democracy – war against outside enemies, be it for reasons of colonial expansion and supremacy, against other Greeks, or against “barbarians” and other non-Greeks. In fact, as is quite clear from Pericles’ speech about the Athenians killed in the Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian war (as rendered by Thucydides), going to war is one of the basic democratic activities of a male citizen, and a line of Athenian *hoplites* its main visual presentation (*isokephaleia*, or all heads in the same line). At the same time, *stasis*, civil war, is considered the ultimate evil for the *polis*. To overcome this problem, Anica insisted on the apparent simplicity of a citizen’s education: a little grammar, geometry, music and swimming. Preparing for war remained in the area of sports, and thus a form of competition and *rite de passage*. This ambivalence allowed her to focus her interest on the first aspect of civic education. Many years later, Pierre Vidal Naquet and Alain Schnapp researched this ambivalence in detail and came out with ground-breaking results on the complex practices and representations of the construction of identity in Antiquity. A good portion of Schnapp’s seminal work is about anthropology of love... In her later work on Ancient aesthetics, in which she had to openly oppose Croce’s negation of such theorizing in Antiquity, the relation peace-love is easily integrated with her reading of the immanent aesthetic theories contained in different Ancient texts – epics, lyrics, drama, and philosophy. No wonder that Anica Savić Rebac’ favourite author in this work is Aristophanes, who is a partisan for peace, has respect for the sexual needs of women – even older women, as in his comedy *Ecclesiazousae* – and ridicules Athenian men as obsessed with war and power. Her work on aesthetics in Antiquity, written during WW II and published after her death in 1953, also relates as a meta-text to the situation in the war-torn Yugoslavia, where different nationalist groups were fighting each other, forming both fascist and anti-fascist coalitions, although she was undoubtedly in favour of the latter.

Olga Freidenberg’s analysis of Eros is more fragmentary, incorporated in her study on Ancient and earlier (in her terms folkloric) mime. She constructs Socrates (in Plato’s *Symposium*) as a “mask,” a dissimulator, but with a “shining divinity” inside him, one who can exclusively reflect on the double nature of Eros. As a master-obstetrician of truth (*maieutike technē*), Socrates must have a female double (Diotima), and must operate in a specific genre, as defined by irony and parody. If the Eros in the state is “controlled” by double-minded thinkers, who can

combine distance and passion, irony and mystic conviction, then we could make a linkage in our interpretation. This Eros is adapted to the war which Olga Freidenberg had to live through: an invisible enemy outside, and a single-minded enemy with a constraining ideology within, which can be fought only with a double sense and irony. The passionate and destructive Eros, the war Eros in her case, originated from restricted/censored thinking, while the state-constructive Eros is his opposite. Let me plunge into an anthropological aspect of these women’s positions on Eros: during the war, Anica Savić Rebac was surrounded by people who could become killers without any previous sign of blood-lust, and lived in a precarious situation of foreign occupation. Olga Freidenberg was also living in an unpredictable situation, with people ready to denounce each other in order to save themselves, with daily life taking place under in impossible conditions (hunger, cold, danger, and disease), all imposed by otherwise invisible enemy. The state-constructive Eros invented by Anica Savić Rebac had to take care of the inner instability in order to resist the danger from outside, while the state-constructive Eros invented by Olga Freidenberg had to destabilize the paranoid ideological unity in order to win over the outside danger, and thus to regain its civic qualities. In both cases, the Ancient Eros was considered an affair of the state, a public and social construct, with ritual roots and imaging, but also a simulacrum or projection of an imminent political desire. This private Love-Eros was for both women something public in the distant European past, and it could be re-established as such in a time of need, such as during a world war. The necessary corrections in the concept of a citizen diverge, of course, in both cases, but there was a clear synchronous turn in thinking of both women in the same discipline and in a similar context.

#### HYPO-TEXT, CORE TEXT AND META-TEXT: EDITH STEIN

How does Edith Stein fit into this story? While Olga Freidenberg and Anica Savić Rebac long remained unjustly unknown, even within their own discipline, Edith Stein is known around the world as a saint. She was born into a Jewish family in Breslau, in 1891, studied philosophy, and was Husserl’s assistant in Freiburg. Her PhD thesis concludes with proposing empathy as a specific form of knowledge. We are thus not far from the concept of love, but Edith Stein would follow a different path. After reading the

autobiography of Saint Theresa d’Aquila she converted to Catholicism, just as many years before Husserl turned from Judaism to Protestantism. Indeed, changes of churches and religions are certainly a distinctive feature when it comes to the history of European intellectuals, although this issue will not be tackled here.

First among Dominicans, and then among Carmelites in Köln, Edith Stein continued her philosophical writing, trying to connect phenomenology with different Christian philosophies. She fled to Holland in 1938 because of the Nazi threat, but was taken from a monastery into Auschwitz in 1942, where she was gassed with her sister the same year. She was beatified in 1987, and proclaimed a saint in 1998. Her letter to the Pope Pius XII, written in 1933, was finally released from the Vatican archives and published in February 2003. One line of research would be to follow the concept of empathy in her writings, and also to link her phenomenology to her semiotic and anthropological approaches, which could be done in ways similar to the case of Ernst Cassirer. The other line of research is somewhat awkwardly obvious – and that is the concept of Christian love, which is by definition related to the public domain, a civic construct, and the state, but is deprived of any relation to sexuality and desire. In Edith’s letter to the Pope this aspect of Christian love is highly politicised, noting the responsibility of the Catholic Church if it does not react politically to Nazism: if Christian love toward the other, in this case the Jews, is neglected, and if the other is not protected, then such love may cease to function as the motor of Catholic teaching, which is public and state-related. There is another thin thread to follow in the work of Edith Stein, exemplified in a book on woman that was published after her death. Although according to Edith Stein a woman’s love can only be motherly, there is a lot of debate on women’s career, women’s choices, and women’s institutions. In fact, Stein’s book is a seminal work in what we today call feminist theology. Whichever way we think today of her theorizing and practice of Christian love during the war, with the most tragic consequences, Edith Stein’s example is one of acting on behalf of love and performing love against the war, including many aspects of civic and state constructs and values still in use today in the pacifist thinking and rhetoric. She thus presents a necessary mirroring counterpart of openly atheist approaches of Anica Savić Rebac and Olga Freidenberg, but also a very clearly structured and most politically efficient relation between peace and love. This, of course,



is secured by the different epistemological statuses of the object of the women’s theorization – love. Edith Stein operates within the framework of sustainable and obtainable truth – Christian truth, while the other two operate in the unmapped territory of knowledge. Their point of convergence is, however, in the public discourse, which for the two academics always remains in the domain of desire, while for Edith Stein it represents an area of possible/controlled invasion. Restrictions for her come only from an organisational hierarchy, which also includes gender. Although remaining on different sides of this discussion, the academics and the nun could not only easily communicate if given any chance during their lifetimes, but also politically cooperate in favour of peace and against the war, using love as the central notion. The three women never met, never wrote to each other, and probably never heard of each other either. But their point of convergence can be easily reconstructed – and be functional – in current genders studies and feminist theorizing and practices.

The three women reflecting on love in a time of (the same) war, which one of them did not survive, opened some still relevant epistemological questions pertaining to philosophy, anthropology and the history of love, as well as gender studies and feminism. The contexts of the communist, enlightened Catholic and socialist ideologies of their social and political environments conditioned their “feminist practice” or self-understood feminism, which can be read through their hypo-, core and meta-texts, but is not the main subject of their reflection – while love certainly is. Contextual narratives can be used in interpreting Anica Savić Rebac’ and Olga Freidenberg’s explanations of the stately Eros of Ancient Greece, the positive and the citizen-forming one. They both postulate love as a cultural and social construct, not only “translatable” into, but originating from ideologies and accommodated politics. The historic link with rituals, in the case of Olga Freidenberg, does not turn toward “nature” as an explanation, but serves as one of the tools to build a convincing framework of anthropological features (“structure” *avant la lettre*) in order to read the superpositions or chronology of ancient concepts of love. Anica Savić Rebac historicizes less, in order to conceptualise the anthropological features of love in Antiquity into a system of thought, following the model of the history of ideas. If Olga Freidenberg precedes structuralism, then Anica Savić Rebac can be seen as in some ways preceding the new historicism. Neither include a psychoanalytical or symbolic approach to Eros, but instead

insist on the social and political aspects of love. For both authors, symbols present phases of semantic/semiotic history, or condensed *lemmata* in an imaginary dictionary of ideas. Edith Stein, on the other hand, proposes a clear and direct concept of (Christian) love as a political tool, restrained by the clerical context and by its recipients, but at the same time following a clear line as a critique of ideological and ethic inconsistencies within an uncontested conceptual framework in the intellectual history of Europe, as exemplified by Luther’s (or even Trotsky’s) “believer’s criticism.” Anica Savić Rebac and Olga Freidenberg seem to have had a hidden agenda of deconstructing their contemporary ideological narratives by introducing a new and quite paradoxical political narrative, that of love in the distant past. Addressing ideological and intellectual circles that seemed to accept the idea of constant innovation and change, they proposed a subversive side-plan that would enlarge the space of civic consciousness and action. Their versions of Eros both have democratic spirits of expanding political and civic practices beyond the limits defined by politics and ideological narratives. Edith Stein’s love does not connect to democracy, but to inside rules and proclaimed principles. All three women, Anica Savić Rebac, Olga Freidenberg and Edith Stein, challenge philosophy and the humanities in general to rethink one of the least debated and largely minimized topics, love, while their personal life stories invite us to look at many tragic aspects of otherness – geographical, cultural, gender-defined, linguistic.

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# VLADIMIR ĐURIŠIĆ

## THE LOVE SONG OF ALFRED KITSCHAWK

Let us go then, do and die,  
(and do and die and do  
and then deny)  
Where and when never ending why  
Revenge of the I against the eye  
Against the gains of metaphorical retreats  
That Spread the “The”  
Just like empty sheets of clouds  
Epiphanize the gesture, looking for the  
Sky and finding skiing, finding Bee Gees guy  
In *Finding Nemo*. Where catcher in I is spared  
Rage against the sparrow in the eye  
And evening is paired  
With gray-eyed ladies,  
Cumming, humming  
Cummings.

Hours of rumors prove the women rooms, phoning,  
Talking of Michelangelo Antonioni.

Burst of things in a dream of explosion  
Poses as real:  
Relevance of evil elevation in a soap opera,  
Persistent  
In phony manhood of peasants.

The outlaws are patient,  
Flaws of silent selling out  
Are re-defining freedom,  
And more boredom we beat,  
More leather we sit on ...

And indeed, there will be time.  
To write for the retired fools wonderfully  
There will be tiny Myth of Why  
When I bare my pray:

“Must I die, to write, today?”

And I have known the nouns that already died trying  
To be ready as verbs, noun them all—  
Brave in reverb, everlasting everblue  
Etherized poetry awaits measuring  
The eye of a beholder with coffee spoons

I like the smell of palms in the mourning.  
The army isn’t waiting. The arm’s palm itself  
That cannot open the pages of newspaper  
Kissed by the fresh print, to be opened later,  
But never read, never really red, never really grown  
Into stereo mountains. Fresh meat of facts  
Is fucking a poem, being ready to kill for the  
Rendered remembering, like lies suck out  
The truth from memoirs. Form of a memo  
Looking rootless in the morning,  
Freeing the libertine free press fee  
From Alberti bass of cheap embarrassment.

Hours of rumors prove the women rooms, phoning,  
Talking of Michelangelo Antonioni.

Now press \*.

I go go I go go, I go, girl, to go go  
High halls of high heels high hopes of high peaks  
Of song on broken speakers.

I am not high.  
I shall swear I do not remember. I sell  
My dare to a shivering attention: notions of  
Giving, vigorous adjectives, it is impossible  
To say what I don’t mean,  
Fluid as a dilettante,  
Led as a tale’s tail,  
And solidly stubborn  
As a young death on a balcony:

Tomaž, you told me once  
*oh, how beautiful it was when I was you,*  
but I was never me, at all, dear friend  
my balls are ringing in a rubber bell,  
beautiful and strong and small.

Must I play, to write, today?  
I am not mine. So, am I mean?

Though I have seen my head  
(going slightly mad)  
I have seen the moment of my greatness weaken  
On twitter, I have seen it all, I have seen it, but  
I should say in return that this is not what I meant at all  
When I meant All in a mental hospital. This is naughty,  
I know, I know, I know now, but then ...  
To say. I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Look at my lovely bones, smell them, kiss them, kill.  
Wasn’t it a shameful form of parole, wasn’t it?

And turning toward the word: window  
I have to turn to Duchamp in Windows, Dos.  
I have to turn. I have to turn on  
Onions restless whiteness,  
Slow angels breath  
Rented to academics,  
To Hamlet’s Telemach,  
To the purest adjectiveness of being.  
I begin to pay attention to

Things of self,  
Thin itself.

Alea ejaculated:  
East.

Ikea, Ikea.

I should have been a payer of reggae crew  
Transforming the low incomes of newcomers  
Into logical ontology of  
Becoming cool.

And softer I become,  
The braver I look.

Our phony illusions. Our

I grow gold ...  
I grow gold ...  
But the gold  
Lies with the help of urine rush  
Hushing the tail to be tailored  
And me to blush, swearing that  
My trousers are mine.  
Arouser condoms as a mode for enough.  
I should have been a conservative swinger,  
Giving lessons of self preservation, forgetting  
That the fortune is not  
In fine tuning.

I have had my time for being stubborn to ask  
Why Geography lies in metaphors,  
Subtle and stubborn as digital watches  
Grown in wrists  
As stereo *never* grown in Montenegro,  
Where the mountains rest in let it be  
Convenient convexity of a boutique logic,  
Where the tiny-shoulder leader is eating a peach, thinking  
*Impeachment is impossible. I am nearly a king.*  
*I do not think they will sin against me.*  
*I want to believe (ingenious phrase)*  
*They want to be lied to, in phases.*  
*I want to be real as an allusion*  
*to see them*  
*part from my heritage,*  
*In a morphine guilt.*

We have a laundry lady dead in the chambers  
The sea gulls eating our remains by the sea-girls  
Still humming voice,  
In a cave,  
In dawn.

# MATVEI YANKELEVICH

One cloud pursues me and all trains, here to Berlin —  
a hunter training a rifle; a train of milk-white lace held  
up by villages. This town used to be elsewhere.  
They moved it here to shield the bunkers, barracks,  
back then. Still one cloud pursues me, the wind tangles  
its train, all tangled air, spine twisted in hard artifice  
of my century, the one that's over. Black trails move  
in darkness through the rocks and ruins. Remains  
of Goths cast up on roofs, still rotting as dogs rot.  
Parked Audis listen for their owners' footsteps,  
while once forgotten bones break ground. Where  
coziness is moral good, there is no uninvited  
guest at dinner. A church with pine-tree spires shelters  
under its boughs little white flowers, sleigh bells  
of the spring. Dogs used to bark here as trains slowed.  
Forgetting their sheep, shepherds woke from dozing.  
Now even the new tire plant is old: rubber swelters  
by the tracks, swallowing all light — as the world  
goes blind or simply turns to heaps of shadow, amounts  
to nothing. Left behind, the muscled turn of motorized  
plough at the end of every row of grain — soon no one  
will be here to note it's gone as age ends, long winter  
cloud settling in to cover up what's nakedly apparent.  
Tradition towers in the town. Above the minarets  
of auslanders, above each souk and trading post,  
stars of village life explode. At dogeared ledge of night,  
at ending place, in the pursuing cloud, your body  
will appear to me as milk: flow over itself to bathe  
your breasts, and one last time, your loins, in winter.

Winter has passed in  
Buenos Aires now.  
A pity. I would  
know it; I would see  
darkness move there  
differently, flipped  
like the back of a hand  
to the palm, the moon —  
backside of an eggshell.  
I can picture a landscape  
compared to that quiet,  
quiet way the bottom  
of a pan goes dark  
against heat's full  
flashing and hides its  
heat from light. Almost  
felt you burn below  
a pinky's knuckle —  
must be a muscle  
for writing there.

With every year, the highway is encroaching,  
closing on the slow tow path I pace  
in wandering, pastoral and embattled  
against the progress of redundant work.  
The novelty of speed wears off in wars  
that stretch through generations, carving deeper  
old crusade's divides. Though science proves  
identity unlikely, we cleave to it  
as our last idol, while flat worlds on our phones  
map blue circles where we stand, as zeros  
on the line of natural numbers.  
Capital makes brands, and brands identify  
our salt, our very special soul. And though  
we all know this, the soma in the water  
and the Beatles make it alright. Ice caps melt  
while baseball cap couture from China  
make someone a living where living's  
standardized and standards rise in time  
with oceans, rent, and every new day's sun.  
We've no excuse for living. Only bums  
are just. Tom Paine was right — why work for it.  
Suns set alike on hovels and mac-mansions.  
This waste of time, my own and yours, is bumming.  
I'd rather not rhetorically confront you  
with some searching truth or research in arrears,  
when we could sleep till morning, wake, make love  
and sleep again, make pancakes out of money,  
throw back a glass for every made mistake  
to insulate our bodies against winter.



# ARIANA REINES

## DREAM HOUSE

The pavilion has walls of rug when I'm a knight with blood  
Foaming out my chainmail so I lie down on my cot in the cool  
Darkness and when I close my eyes the falcons alight on my page's  
Glove. I'm fine to die in there, chill seeping into my bones, cold  
Spring like a Carpaccio painting.  
I fold my arms to compose myself like a coffinlid  
Knight, a crypto knight I mean a dreamer. I mean a man  
Who doesn't exist with his rock-hard sword standing up up forever.  
Since I was seventeen I've been dreaming  
I'm the maid in a house, a wide house in the mountains, and I'm  
A Victorian maid, a domestic, I'm asthmatic I mean  
Consumptive like Chopin or Proust and I'm honest  
And servile not artistic or cruel and not clumsily  
Dressed. I'm ugly in the simple way of having been made  
So by my servitude and not in the unsimple way of having  
Pursued what I pursued as a so to speak free woman. Do you remember  
The days of slavery. I do.  
I am wan and dowdy and I sleep on the floor.  
Once in the dream the house belonged to my father  
And a man said to me in his Schwizerdeutsch accent *And Now  
That You Have Entered The House Of Your Father.*  
I remember the ice of a nearish glacier seeming to steam  
Against the blue sky. One's eyes grow hard and gemlike  
In the Alps you know, not that I am from there  
Not even close. Still. In the Alps even (especially?) the dullwitted  
Develop raptor eyes. My grandmother worked as the maid  
To a duchess in Warsaw while her husband was gassed at Treblinka.  
Then the duchess died and she my mother's  
Mother had to find a new way to hide. Hide life  
Is a phrase I've read somewhere. In a poem, maybe. I keep  
Wishing I were writing about tents, walls of rug,  
Walls of yak felt, yurts, lying awake in my friend's mother's  
Bed thinking THE TEETH IN MY HEAD THE TEETH IN MY HEAD  
While my heart flared BIOS BIOS BIOS I though a woman could not bear  
The rhythm—what it takes to sustain biological life.

I was naked except for culture like everybody else in my generation  
I come from a broken home like they do and I hide it, serene  
At the joystick in the command station of my so-called self  
Except I try openly to hide only badly whatever it is I think is wild that I'm  
Doing my best to reveal by not really hiding though hiding.  
A poet can be a permanent houseguest like Jimmy Schuyler.  
A woman can be homeless to escape her homeless mother.  
A white woman can get away with certain things.  
A woman who does not want her spare thoughts to be consumed  
By lip implant rippling butt implant wet tongue in the sushi  
Flatscreeny gangbangs in a suntan might for example choose  
homelessness  
In order to pursue with some serenity her for example let's call them  
Literary researches, surveiling aristocratically only her own pathetic  
Machinations, like one of the dogs  
Shaped like Nazis in a guard tower in Maus  
By Art Spiegelman while a countertenor  
And a sackbut bleat Wikileaks Wikileaks and naked men  
And men with hoods over their eyes and zappers on their peens  
Quiver in citadels in which we The United States hid them. Yves Klein knew  
That walls are sad: designed to immure misery  
That is why he designed a house made of air. We only write  
Because we're nudists but not the kind you think but not necessarily  
Not that kind. Art gets  
Exhausted but a temple, I need to go to a temple  
Every now and again and in order to have a home  
I had to play a trick on myself which is that it's a temple, this house.  
In a movie from the eighties a man from California says  
My body's my temple. Okay well now in my dreams of domestic  
Servitude I receive small pay. I get to go across the street  
And contemplate the toiletries in an Alpine Seven  
Eleven. Salon Selectives, Prell, Garnier, or Pert Plus.  
My hair will look like shit. I don't buy anything  
I go back to the kitchen to fish out of drawers three  
Iron candlesticks. The dark lady who rages over the family  
Near the high vaulted hearth where I slave over a hot stove  
In nothing but a dirty t-shirt like a Thai baby in a National  
Geographic photograph all gorgeous in the mufti of my total deprivation  
The dark lady can only it seems be communicated with by me  
No longer the maid, but—progress—household witch  
Earning after all a salary however tiny; horse-whispering its deadest  
Most psycho old bitches, sweet-talking them down from the rafters, down  
Out of tantrums unthrown, unthrowable by nobody me, the inverted V  
Of downward-facing liberty: when you have no choice but to try to have chosen  
What you never, never would choose. Sitting on a bench at the end of my exhausted  
Term like a regular grownup I pictured myself shampooing my luxury  
Hair in some artsy shithole, mildew streaking the torn shower curtain

Lurching across the second  
My ruined imagination could manage: Well I guess I could join the Israeli  
Army. Why the fuck would you want to do that said somebody  
Else inside my dream head. Pretty much  
Dead by the time they were done needing me as their slave  
I started to feel kind of American I mean like an adult sitting uncomplaining  
Torso a plain physical fact over unquivering genitals  
Just meat on a stick with the vague sense that somewhere between lavish femininity  
And state violence lay a mediocre thing called liberty.  
Still, to be able to sleep at all's a process of waking. Everybody  
Has to live somewhere being that we are here where most  
Of us are not welcome. Did you know transcendental  
Homelessness is a thing. But I had that dream  
On a physical mattress. On an actual floor in a room with a door  
That I pay and pay for. If you write you can forge  
A substance that is other than the woman of substance  
You are. If you do it to such a point you can find  
Yourself declining substance altogether. It happens. It is a danger. But there will  
Always be the idea of a bath or a sleep in a bed or a dream  
In the head of a woman who is even beautiful visibly  
Or at least groomed, or somewhat fresh  
Or like that most domestic of bugs the cockroach  
Dragging his ponderous suit of armor across the floor  
Or clean sheets when it's raining and I love you so much  
And I think Gimme Shelter, which is a movie I've never seen.

#### OPEN FIFTHS

I just watched a Tony Robbins video  
You may judge this a counterrevolutionary gesture  
Thinking about the people I forgot to write back to  
I ate as much peanut butter as I could  
Listening to I CAN'T HELP FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU

(Pats the boot of his gun affectionately) a kind of bug  
As siphoner sucking up the purple world thru its straw  
Whorling hurricanes out from the backs of beetles, diaper rashes  
Heavy tits heavy eyes of a heavy lady, a lady with fibroids  
A lady who suffers migraines, I wanna fuck a woman who knows pain

I wanna feel the heat of a woman who knows pain  
Yezidi women and girls call each other comrade  
I'm not at all certain this is true  
I met Pussy Riot at Richard Hell's one night, proceeded to not write about it  
Richard had just read a thing in public to make him look like no friend of women

Then Pussy Riot called him wanting to be friends     the lord moves in mysterious ways  
Richard's apartment is tiny it was an intimate affair     whiskey  
And thick stew Sheelagh made     Stephen  
Gave someone a suboxone. Nadya had a bad  
Cold and a toothache. Maria though perhaps slightly less photogenic was sexier in person

I worship poetry she told me     what would I be if I came from such a country  
Putin barechested on his horse & out a-raping  
The people of Pushkin having not yet forgotten at which altar  
To kneel & worship & I've run out of money  
Again     there's really no excuse this time

The worship of certain maladaptive behaviors  
As though they pertained to art but they do  
In general it's my womanhood that takes the hit  
I used to think the defining characteristic of a writer  
Was not wanting to have her picture taken ever

A possible inversion of a yet deeper yearning  
As the one revealed by Shakespeare in the Sonnets  
For Beauty: first the despair at ever incarnating it in oneself  
Second despairing of possessing it thru the Other, & finally  
The sick & unassailable triumph of The Writer, the rare

Very rare one great enough to make a Beauty that won't die  
Which if you think about it is something even God doesn't do  
But the question of Beauty is no longer the question     not the question  
I mean of our times     but it is     but we won't admit it     my stomach  
Hurts from all the peanut butter I've eaten

You are allergic to peanuts and soy you are beautiful like a tuff & tall dove  
There's a kind of truth most people are afraid of  
Telling, which I understand because it would make them look bad  
I am similarly afraid of telling such truths, but now I'm standing  
Up on a crowded train I don't know that I'll be able to finish what I'm saying

Yes I will a man has just offered up his seat.     Gentle city, today again  
Underestimated by me! You looked so good on Google  
Hangout this morning I know it sounds jejune  
& though what we discussed about the subject FAKE  
Apparently what they want you to teach at Parsons

Hurt me a little as it hurts me now how the man  
What gave his seat up is now um adjusting something  
In the pocket of his pants less than a foot from my face  
In just such a way I really wish you were here  
Already even though I don't yet know how to live

Part of me loathes poems the amorous ones  
With a living addressee & feels as a reader  
I not only have a right to but deserve an author's  
Total devotion. I resent that other person behind their "you" want  
My writers flayed & turning on the spit for my love or God's, that's it

And as for artists I don't know in the fornicating wilderness  
Through which we all have no choice but to move I don't think it wrong  
To require of a thing at least passing devotion the train  
Vibrating everybody's genitals while half of us smash glass & spray machine  
Gun bullets across our phones that shit used to badly unnerve me

I don't want to stop but it's time  
For therapy. Therapy doesn't help very much. It helps  
Exactly enough sane slightly tantine presence  
Bearing witness to all the normie things I never learned  
Time management, the idea of not dying

Some things some beings  
Just have more life in them fake as we all  
May be, at least when we begin. And yes the future at times  
Itself can seem the most pernicious form of fakery  
You want to stay with the truth of having been destroyed

By what really did happen but now you must go on  
I'm so full I can't really think, like  
I just literally farted in a businessman's face but I had headphones  
On so it was easy to ignore what I'd done. You've hit the road  
Our laurel on your dashboard, you say, reminding you you will win

The moon was in Scorpio this AM, v moody &  
Macho which we also were & this record's like a piece of carnival  
Machinery, as they say, on crack. I read a beautiful essay  
By Russell Brand about crack and dope and not smoking  
Them. I hope "they" give him the credit he deserves

Soon if they have not yet. There are reasons a lapidary  
Style's a better bet for a woman than say mine  
Now I am peeing in REI. Now I'm in Whole Foods  
Buying Pro Bars. Leopoldine gripped me by the hips  
When she saw me. I really did

Eat a sick amount  
Of peanut butter & after that mung  
Beans simmered in New Mexican chilis etc  
Cos that was all there was. Now I'm missing Women's  
Gymnastics now I'm looking at progressive foods

I can see the money arpeggiating in transparent tubs  
Of plantain chips (tostones) & Spicy Pub  
Mix, snack foods of The People, bar fare of Joe and José  
Six Pack, Fanfare for the Common Man  
By Aaron Copland now gleaming on a shipping pallet

Ready to be turned into human money. I need chocolate  
Almond milk and cold brew concentrate  
If I'm going to clean the apartment and finish this  
All in the same night and tell the boy  
Named Offer I can't go to the Noguchi

With him cos I'm in love with you  
Marin Marais comes into my ears  
I'm thinking of Dolly Parton  
Likening her heart to a bargain store, her butterfly  
Tattoo and taking money from my little brother

I gave him Thurston & Eva's Necrobutcher book  
The bent Peruvian man I met two days ago  
In his new ice cream shop full of toys  
I still owe him a dollar. Except now it's tomorrow  
I've paid him back with interest. This morning

I heard FINE AND MELLOW for the first time in an age  
There are five lines a stanza in here open staves of slave  
Wheat waving in oppressive Ancient Egypt or if you prefer  
The Americanizing trumpets of Aaron "studied counterpoint  
With Boulanger" Copland, I don't know the things

It's right to care about, that's a feeling, my excesses go straight  
Into my own pussy where I pay them not a penny  
FINE AND MELLOW aches & aches with what is true  
Your mouth the way you cock  
Your head all over me oblivion

Oblivion's the larger part possibly  
You know of my art, at least latterly  
It has been. You never told me the meaning  
Of the yellow pollen your grandmother blessed  
Us with, so gently gently I looked it up online

Now you're texting me you've stopped in Soledad  
For a sandwich so I ask you to please pour out  
Some cola to the memory of Jonathan Jackson and George  
Jackson have you ever seen a string of shit hanging from a fish tank  
Fish I asked you cos that was a little how I felt



Rather spirderish my poem unspooling out of me  
Inside this imprisoned feeling. Men and women are not the same  
Thanks for the pic of NATURE’S GIFT CHERRIES  
“Remember here?” you asked & I do  
I feel relaxed & amorous but at the edge

Of me’s the sensation I’m being come into by six  
Hundred years of colonial horror as in that Adrienne  
Rich poem, the one that is for me her masterpiece  
The archival impulse in dudes makes me impatient  
But who, who is clean of it. & “dudes” made the place where we now meet

“Nothing, this foam” that’s Mallarmé  
In the poem called SALVATION or SALUTE or HELLO  
Or HI. If I remember correctly he was an English  
Teacher. Why don’t people remember that when they come  
All day all over what he left behind, taking him

So Oedipally seriously, “me already  
On the poop,” he writes I swear to God  
Badly on purpose. White shit. Cream  
Deth, the opposite of Prince. The day I earn  
As much as Seth’s the day he’ll kiss my ass

At Leopoldine’s reading she and the other female  
Reader both treated twin subjects: impecunity  
And getting stoned. Which will probably both be showing  
Up a lot for a while as more young woman  
Writers as they say EMERGE

Yesterday the director of the Belgian opera  
Took me to lunch at the place I met Seth  
Right off a redevye (I was) for breakfast  
I drank two camparis & told him (Belgian opera man who by the way is Swiss)  
My courtroom drama fantasy. It made me feel a little gross

& I don’t see him going for it. Carina says she got called “an aggressive bitch”  
At work today. I haven’t read “The Painter  
Of Modern Life” in half an age but I told Sheelagh  
I’d translate “Correspondences” for the Symbolism  
Show at the Frick. Good job you have detected this is a New

York School of Poetry poem, for one thing, by the presence  
Of the Frick with its Polish Rider so beloved of Frank O’Hara  
And I’m going to show it to you when you get here  
Even though you’ve already seen it but like the song  
Says, I’ll Take You There. My pen she glide so smoothly I can’t

Stop.

Actually I could stop and did but now I’m back again  
Tex Ritter’s singing RIDE RIDE RIDE. Seth had  
An extremely Western shirt on when me met  
The other week. A pregnant mare is not for riding  
On. My hat’s beside you as you drive you said. “A Step

Away From Them” is a poem I love. I can’t remember  
What happens in it right now though. “As I Walked Out  
One Evening” is an Auden nonsense poem. A love  
Poem I thought of as I walked out one morning into the porky  
Air, families of Queens having slept in then all set in unison

To frying bacon. Now the cat is yowling  
To the tune of RIDING INTO THE TOWN OF ALBUQUERQUE  
Which is where I got that leather biker  
Vest for \$7. Where Byron would go on  
And on a lady’d be wise to stop for my experience has shown me Romance

Looks better on the rich & lordly. SING COWBOY  
SING goes the radio, not bidding Ariana go on, supremely cracker  
Ass & so hokey in its stylings you have to think it is “on purpose.” Is my heart open  
Like O’Hara says his poem is? I’m looking at his  
Long-lost dick by Larry Rivers on SELECTED POEMS

Poets and painters, the joys of men, midcentury modernism  
Whatever. My mean way of reducing to furniture all the old avant  
Gardes I close my eyes and see your open  
Hand, your fist. Chelsea just walked in. Hello I say  
Her check has yet to come. Mine too. I guess I should go watch gymnastics

It’s true what they say, that meaning can be made from anything. The real  
Question might be must it & if so how. It’s true what the Jews say  
That the drawing-together of the two most disparate things is the real  
Mark of intelligence. It’s true what the Greeks say  
That metaphor is transportation. And Art’s

Demand that one turn a single idea into a thing, a place  
A series, and do it elegantly, I’ve put that in my pipe  
All over again and smoked it too. She picked  
Her potted plant up off the floor but did not disturb  
The dirt that it had left there. Transparency, surveillance

And whiteness. These are the three things. Compression  
Dispersal, being everywhere at once, dark feelings, sustained attention  
Paid to other people’s major obsessions for minor & neglected modes  
Of production, recent-past antiquing that can & must be turned to profit  
The delicate art of sculpting as with a scalpel using the market as one among several tools

While all the while fleeing, seeming to flee from it or at least to appear  
Relaxed. I'm a romantic & a voluptuary. I like  
My food & my lord you. I like lying around & getting dressed  
& walking around talking only to the shit  
Talking little Mozart of my mind

& I who was nowhere near Annandale-on-Hudson  
How could i know SCORPION GRASS was another word for FORGET  
ME NOT another blue flower  
Of poetry not that I had read Novalis either  
But I did see an early picture by Mondrian one time

Woke up with MOTOWN PHILLY in my head  
Guess whose fault that is  
I was gonna send you I LOVE YOUR SMILE by Shanice  
But better you send my love to your grandmother  
But I do love that song. Then all of a sudden the birds begin to scream

I'LL BUY YOU A CHEVROLET IF YOU LET ME DO SOMETHING TO YOU and  
THE WAY YOU SHAKE THAT THING MAKES ME LOSE MY APPETITE  
I had another dream I was in a cave filling out forms I couldn't  
Understand while JT yelled at me all day. Then finally here  
Come the warm jets, Crowley tears on my pillow ...  
2

And he rode into town in his sores ...  
In the idiot cloth of a do-gooder ...  
Seated backwards upon an ass  
Lo-res infinity in quiet carbonation about his head  
Neither top nor bottom tier, plaintive strains on a kind of trombone ...

Afternoon new music  
The early dawn is very old, PRELUDE  
TO THE AFTERNOON OF A FAUN except that wasn't it  
At all, a daffodil or Wordsworth's sister  
Dorothy, the poem Wm wrote to Toussaint Louverture

Worlds whipping themselves slowly into a cream  
She left her broken beaded necklace scattered where it fell  
"I'm paid a toll by every star inside this constellation"  
Humid Alberti bass of allergens & other dander  
Dusting haughtily the unchurned Milky Way

Moving unconsciously through this  
Apparently open system... The color  
Of neutrality, dignity's gender  
The babysmooth cheek of specie  
But I don't feel it's my job to resolve these things for you

& here's a little bag of preservatives inside a big bag  
Of jerky & here are condom wrappers & fingernail parings  
Engraved lead pipe fittings subtracted from the sites of their utility  
Soft black lead scored with the long long names of demons  
Held now in a white flame & now thrust deep in a cold cold mountain spring

Tears on my pillow .... And what of the Dumpster™  
Marked CENTURY WASTE, mess of tubes  
Comprising the inspirational skyline of tomorrow?  
Bay Bay it's fucking hot out  
LADY U NEED A TABLE was the old sluggard's weird catcall

To me as I scrivened fast upon a legal pad outside the deli & what if I did?  
& who was he to say. Hélas, the human heart  
Whose work can in no wise be avoided  
The sluggard retreated indoors with a Family  
Size bag of Lays & quickly drew the curtains

My hair's at least as good as Seth's  
Or Byron's so get down  
On yr knees & pay me I mean pray  
To the rainbow preserved in a jet  
Of oil, the ordered entrails of a bird ...

As I mounted the stair fat drops of acid  
Rain bursted down upon me I thought of Diego  
With his sour and silky-looking hair  
Diego who has fucked more women  
Than you sir have even seen

The voice of Mick Jagger in Wild Horses  
Always makes me think a little of cough syrup  
I didn't come here to resolve  
What you take to be MY DILEMMA  
Though for there is sir NO DILEMMA

For love requires leisure, the love poem  
Leisure too & slightly more. I have won  
Myself both by my refusal  
Ever to do anything else.  
Next question?

Clear Channel, The Complete Poem  
Brazilian Blowout by Ariana Reines  
Moroccan Oil Tome The First, too many Olympic  
Rings on yr fingers my friend but we both know  
That you are not my friend

What if it were true about the magic figures  
As simple as writing them down  
Roaring like a lion and never barring a seven  
With a bar, just never crossing your legs? What if it is  
As simple as that, and who can prove it isn't?

I am ready, frog titty, to receive the key  
I am wearing my organdy windbreaker  
I am shining like an alabaster  
And painted pig  
& I have hands & opposable thumbs

The pure religion of Blind Lemon Jefferson  
The horrible deathlike stomachlike feeling  
For Avital says the stomach is the crypt of the body  
And she is right about that and death's deferral  
Is another's upcycled trash. Now there are two fat men

Inside of CENTURY WASTE & a truck goes by  
With "TRAGEDY" tagged huge over the cab, quotation  
Marks included. I was watching this woman eat a bag  
Of Cool Ranch Doritos, it was ten in the morning & I swear  
It said in the upper corner of her blue bag MADE WITH 100% DOG OIL

Tears on my pillow, silhouettes on the shade  
Black words like falling hairs upon repurposed sailcloth  
Shipwrecks in the cool whip mind of Mallarmé pirates highwaymen knowing how to hit  
The glancing edge of badness where the setting sun's acclaimed  
By bolts of lightning falling fast into the hills

# ID..ENG 1..0 // BIOGRAPHIES

**Srečko Kosovel** (1904–1926) is one of Central Europe's major modernist poets and is an icon of the Slovenian avant-garde. A native of the Karst region of Slovenia above Trieste, he was sent to Ljubljana by his parents after the outbreak of WW1 to study. It was there that he began to write, experimenting with various poetic styles—including Dadaism, expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, Futurism and surrealism—which he crafted into his own unique lyrical and political idiom. He was active in Ljubljana literary circles and established a literary magazine, *Lepa Vida* (The Fair Vida, title taken from a Slovenian folktale) during the Italian occupation of the city. Although he wrote over 1,000 poems and several hundred pages of essays and other prose writings, Kosovel never published a book during his lifetime. His work was "rediscovered" in Slovenia after WW2 and again in the 1960s, during a period of greater cultural and intellectual freedom in Socialist Yugoslavia, and did much to inspire new avant-garde movements across all art forms as well as in cultural criticism and philosophy. Kosovel's work has been translated into over a dozen languages, including the books in English *The Golden Boat* (Salt Publishing, UK, 2011) and *Look Back, Look Ahead* (Ugly Duckling Presse, Brooklyn, 2010).

**Jure Detela** (1951–1992) was a poet, writer, essayist and eco-activist. He was born in Ljubljana and studied Art History at the University of Ljubljana. In his college years he collaborated with the poet Iztok Osojnik and sociologist Iztok Saksida in the publication of their *Podrealistični manifest* (The Sub-realist Manifesto) in 1979 and later participated in the avant-garde group *Pisarna Aleph* (Aleph Office). Four collections of his poems have been published in Slovenian: *Zemljevidi* (Maps), 1978; *Mah in srebro* (Moss and Silver), 1983; *Pesmi* (Poems), 1992; and *Haiku* =

*Haiku*, with Iztok Osojnik, 2004. In addition to poetry he also published an autobiographic novel *Pod strašnimi očmi pontonskih mostov* (Under the Terrifying Eyes of Pontoon Bridges) in 1988. In 1995 he was awarded posthumously the Jenko Award for best poetry book in Slovenia.

**Maruša Krese** (1947–2013) was a poet, writer, journalist and activist. Born in Ljubljana, she studied Literature and Art History at the University of Ljubljana and, in the early 1970s, psychodrama and Gestalt therapy in the United States. Krese later worked as a group therapist in Ljubljana and Tübingen and was a Slovene radio correspondent in Berlin in the early 1990s. In 1997 she was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for her humanitarian efforts during the Bosnian War. In addition to numerous radio broadcasts, essays and articles, Krese published three books of prose and seven books of poetry, the last of which was *Heute nicht* (Not Today), 2009. In 2008 her book *Vsi moji božiči* (All My Christmases) won the Fabula Award for the best collection of short prose in Slovenia.

**Miklavž Komelj** (1973– ) is a poet, essayist, translator and art historian. He was born in Kranj, studied Art History at the University of Ljubljana and started publishing poetry in 1991. In 2006 he won the Jenko Award for his book of poems *Hipodrom* (Hippodrome) and in 2010 the Prešeren Foundation Award for his poetry book *Nenaslovljiva imena*. (Unaddressable Names). In 2011 he received the Rožanc Award for the best collection of essays in Slovenia for his book *Nujnost poezije* (The Necessity of Poetry). He has translated into Slovenian the works of Pasolini, Pessoa, Vallejo and Djuna Barnes, among others. He is also the editor of the collected works of Jure Detela, due to come out in 2017.

**Tomaž Šalamun** (1941–2014) was a leading internationally acclaimed figure of postwar neo-avant-garde poetry. He was born in Zagreb to Slovenian parents and grew up in the port city of Koper, near Trieste. He earned a Masters degree in Art History from the University of Ljubljana and was a member of the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences. During his lifetime he published around 50 books of poetry in Slovenian and his work has been translated into nearly 30 languages. In addition to his prolific output as a poet, during the late 1960s he was a member of the Slovenian neo-avant-garde art group OHO and first came to the United States in 1970 as part of the “Information” exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In 1971–1973 he was a fellow at the International Writers Program at the University of Iowa. Over the next five decades Šalamun lived and worked intermittently in the US as a visiting lecturer at several universities; as a Fulbright Fellow at Columbia University; as a resident on several occasions at the MacDowell and Yaddo artist colonies; and, in the late 1990s, as the first Slovenian cultural attaché to New York City. He received numerous international awards and distinctions for his poetry during his career, including the Prešeren Prize, the Jenko Prize, the Struga “Golden Wreath” Award, the Njegoš Award, a Pushcart Prize, and the City of Münster European Poetry Prize.

**Aleš Debeljak** (1961–2016) was a poet, essayist, translator and professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Ljubljana. He grew up in Ljubljana and studied literature before earning a PhD in Social Thought at the University of Syracuse in New York in 1993. During his student years in the 1980s in Slovenia he was co-editor of the influential student journal *Tribuna* (The Tribune) and was an active member of emerging civil society in Slovenia during the decade prior to and after its independence in 1991. During his life he published fourteen books of essays and cultural criticism, including *Somrak Idolov* (1994), published in English as *Twilight of the Idols* (White Pine Press, 1994) and *The Hidden Handshake* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); and nine books of poetry in Slovenian, including *Slovar tišine* (1987, published as *Dictionary of Silence* (Lumen Books, 1999), *Minute strahu* (1990), published as *Anxious Moments* (White Pine Press, 1995). To date, his work has been translated into more than 20 languages. He won several national and international awards for his writing, including the Prešeren Foundation Award (for his second book of poems) and a Readers’ Choice Award for “Best Essay

of the Decade” in the magazine *World Literature Today* (2012). Among his several academic honors he was Senior Fulbright fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to his literary and academic writing, Debeljak was a frequent contributor to daily newspapers and magazines in Slovenia. His most recent book of poems in Slovenian is *Kako postati človek* (How to Become Human) (Mladinska knjiga, 2014) and in English translation, *Smugglers* (BOA, Rochester, 2015).

**Katja Plut** (1979– ) has published six books of poems in Slovenian, including most recently *Dvojnovidni* (2012, KUD Kentaver) and *Kresničke* (2012, LUD Šerpa). She received the Zlata ptica award for literature in 2007.

**Brane Mozetič** (1958– ) is a poet, writer, translator, editor, publisher, gay activist and promoter of Slovenian literature. To date he has published 14 books of poetry, two novels and a collection of short stories and has translated over twenty books, mainly from French, including the works of Rimbaud, Genet and Foucault. He is the editor of the book series *Aleph and Lambda* (Center for Slovene Literature, Ljubljana) and has edited several anthologies.

**Nataša Velikonja** (1967– ) is a sociologist, poet, essayist, translator, and lesbian activist. To date she has published five books of poetry and three books of essays and scientific papers. Her first poetry book, *Abonma*, (1994) is considered to be the first openly lesbian poetry collection in Slovenia. She has also translated several works of gay and lesbian theory and radical social criticism, is the editor of *Lesbo* magazine and is cofounder of the Lesbian Library in Ljubljana.

**Vesna Liponik** (1993– ) is a poet and translator. She lives and studies in Ljubljana.

**Muanis Sinanović** (1989– ) is a poet, writer, columnist, editor and one of the foremost literary critics of the younger generation currently active in Slovenia, the Balkans and Europe. To date he has published three books of poetry and numerous articles.

**Tibor Hrs Pandur** (1985– ) is a poet, translator, essayist, dramatist and founder of the Paraliterary organization I.D.I.O.T., as well as editor-in-chief of IDIOT magazine. His first book of poetry, *Energymachine*, was published in 2010 (Center for Slovene Literature, Ljubljana). His second book of poetry, *Internal Affairs*, will be published in 2017, as will his translation of Nikola Tesla’s essay *The Problem of Increasing Human Energy*, which includes his afterword “Tesla’s Hybris and the Laws of Nature”.

**Erica Johnson Debeljak** (1961– ) is a writer and translator. Her memoir *Forbidden Bread* was published in 2009 by North Atlantic Books. Her most recent novel is *The Bicycle Factory* (Modrijan Publishing House, Ljubljana, 2015). She was born in San Francisco, California, and has lived in Ljubljana since 1993.

**Blaž Božič** (1991– ) is the author of three poetry books: *K območnim poročilom* (CSK, Ljubljana, 2016), *Potem smo si vranice odprli na nežno valujoči livadi* (KUD France Prešeren, Ljubljana, 2013) and *Grč* (Edicija Demo, MIK, Kud Kentaver, Ljubljana, 2011). An active member of the unique underground band nevem nevem and the man behind the decadent noise project SsmKOSK is also pledged to sound and music.

**Jan Krmelj** (1995– ) is a theatre director, performance designer, poet and translator. His book of poems *Relikvije dihanja* (Relics of Breathing) was nominated for all the highest Slovenian national poetry awards in 2015. In 2016 he directed “UTOPIA – *An Archeology of Paradise*” (National Theater Ljubljana) and established the theater company *DivinaMimesis*.

**Iztok Osojnik** (1951– ) is a poet, fiction writer, literary critic, essayist, translator, artist, tour director, and mountain climber. He holds a PhD in historical anthropology and is the author of approximately 40 books of poetry, anthropology studies, and essays published in more than 20 languages. He is co-author of *Podrealistični manifest* (The Sub-realist Manifesto) and was a member of the avant-garde group *Pisarna Aleph* (Aleph Office) in the 1970s. In the early 1980s he lived and did post-graduate work in

Osaka, Japan. In 1996, his book of poems *Klesani kamni* (Carved Stones) received the Jenko Award for best book of Slovenian poetry. His most recent selection of poems in English is Elsewhere (Pighog Press, UK, 2011).

**Svetlana Slapšak** (1948– ) is an essayist, translator, academic, and feminist activist. She earned a PhD in Classical Studies/Linguistics at the University of Belgrade. During 1968–1972 she was an active participant in student movements and was editor-in-chief of the satirical periodical *Frontisterion* (issues of which were confiscated and destroyed by the police in 1970). Her passport was denied for several years during the period of Yugoslavia because of her dissident activities. Since 1972 she is a researcher at the Institute for Literature and Art in Belgrade. From 1994 she is editor-in-chief of *ProFemina*, a quarterly for women’s culture and feminism in Belgrade. From 1986–1989, she served as president of the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Expression at the Writers’ Association of Serbia. Slapšak is a Professor of the Anthropology of the Ancient World and of the Anthropology of Gender, now retired. From 2004–2014 she was the Dean of ISH, Ljubljana Graduate School of Humanities. She has published over 70 books of Ancient Studies, historical anthropology, gender anthropology and Balkan studies, including most recently *Kuhinja z razgledom: eseji iz antropologije hrane*, (Kitchen with a View: Essays on the Anthropology of Food), 2016. Her numerous awards and distinctions include an American PEN Freedom of Expression Award (1993) and more recently the Mirko Kovač Award for her book of essays, *Leteči pilav*, (Flying Pilaf), 2015, the 2016 Mira Slovenian Women’s PEN Award, and the 2017 Golden Heliotrope Award for the best literary work in Serbian, for her novel *Quarter pounder*. In 2005 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the “1000 Women” initiative.

**Vladimir Đurišić** (1982– ) is a Montenegrin poet, composer and essayist. His first published book of poetry, *Ništa ubrzo neće eksplodirati* (OKF, Cetinje, Montenegro), received Montenegro’s main prize for the best poetry collection in 2007. He is the Editor-in-chief of the Yugoslav and pan-Balkan literary and cultural portal *Proletter.me*.



**Matvei Yankелеvich** (1973– ) is an American poet, translator and editor. His books of poems include *Some Worlds for Dr. Vogt* (Black Square, 2015), *Alpha Donut* (United Artists Books, 2012) and the novella-in-fragments *Boris by the Sea* (Octopus Books, 2009). His translations include *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (Overlook/Ardis, 2012). He is one of the founding editors of Ugly Duckling Presse in Brooklyn New York, where he curates the Eastern European Poets Series.

**Ariana Reines** (1982– ) is an American poet, playwright, performance artist, and translator. Her books of poetry include *The Cow* (2006), which won the Alberta Prize from Fence Books; *Coeur de Lion* (2007); *Mercury* (2011); and *Thursday* (2012). Reines has been described by Michael Silberblatt of NPR’s Bookworm as “one of the crucial voices of her generation.”

**Marko Jakše** (1959– ) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana in 1987. Since then he has lived and worked as a freelance artist, exhibiting in numerous solo and group exhibitions home and abroad, and winning several international recognitions and awards, most recently the Prešeren Fund Award in 2015.



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