

Bells for Lepers

RELATIONS

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Editor-in-chief Roman Simić

Assistant editor Jadranka Pintarić

Proofreading Tomislav Kuzmanović

Croatian Writers Society

Basaričekova 24, Zagreb, Croatia

Tel.: (+385 1) 48 76 463, fax: (+385 1) 48 70 186

www.hrvatskodrustvopisaca.hr

ured@hrvatskodrustvopisaca.hr

Design and layout Maja Glušić

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Delimir Rešicki

Bells for Lepers

(selected poems)

Ed. Davor Ivankovac

Gnomes

* * *

anchors like hooks soothed into the mud
thrust into the soluble softness, the plumb line
swimming happily.

“my hometown is imperceptibly collapsing towards
its imagined centre, it most certainly has a lot to do
with me, because it’s not a blueprint, a concentric
circle”

(this doesn’t mean anything)

— in order to make a poem public
one needs to have a really good stomach
moralists would say a small, tiny, messy face

include me include me, you ugly gnome of printing.

(home for the severe
— mental retardation)

disgust and fear.

the thread and fingers weave the calm
madness of the hands,
the tapestry of the lip.

always in crowds
(the fear of the entrance, the exit and the wall)
white into the worry, paint-distorted day.

they have nowhere to go but back,
the first voice says:
the drunk sperm pours madness into time, I now
hear, another voice says:

for seven days they walked and washed
their heads dipping them in darkness.

on the eighth morning
the plain appeared before them.

s. beckett, a hundred years later

an evening

a tree

a road outside town

tone controls
in the bones strain whips
and cascades

the expectation
to the point of breaking

I don't know why this melancholy
about my mother being shot

Happy Streets

Sven

since last night
on our supermarket wall
there is a chromed-jade graffiti:

Queen are back on Top
of the pops
rock is dead all over again. The Queen sleeps
on JVC-mattresses

amphetamine speed inflates her pillow.
clammy radio waves ripple the calm
junks of her charisma. the revolution says:
make her jeans let out their blue blood.

everything is quiet when the lights go out
the boarding school's hall is as long as a year. right
door on the left. on it a drawing of a men's shimmy
shoe I'd lost a long time ago when I
dreamed of sahara.

where does the light go when the bulbs go off;
somewhere back, the teacher says, somewhere back
into your limbs to squiggle fire-resistant
aquarelles and chequered skirts of the girls
in your dreams, haya, haya, children. lullabies.

Dedication, Cons;

when I take off my shoes
the moonlight rots in your shoulder.
europe has a new gown
at night, all alone now
she walks along the glass edge of the road.
today the drifters
will pitch the tents of all of her great holidays
in your home.
marseilles' tide is pain.
before you do so, something, someone always
leaves a mark in the soft snow
right there at your feet.
in the spring, I can't make such mad haste
after the steppe.

the dealer is going to die alone
with the cones of snow
on the rug of autumn pine needles
in the hall, the tunnel, the fable,
in his panniers.

so, go and, with the azure threads
with the hem of snow on the razors,
sew all those grey, grey birds of rock 'n' roll
on my evening dress. because,

your hair is as red as slovenia.

Glaucoma, This Poem Begins in a Motel

I saw the open mouth of meaningless fish
in the deep, exhausting onanism of the aquarium.
this mouth is the lung of this city I told you
as large as a fist of a new-born child waiting
for bureaucracy:
she is pretty
as pretty as the fountain pen in the hand
of my former mother-in-law. she loved to travel.
on a slide from zagreb to sinai: that's where she died
simply because she didn't know to close her eyes,
her mouth and
ears
when the sand tornado hits.
she was mourned by the catholics,
orthodox christians, muslims

and the jews. I cried too but
no one wanted to believe my large
blue tears
that dripped all over
the waters of the mediterranean.

that's how I began to hate travels. south II.
from downtown to periphery it would take me
twenty minutes of futile attempts
to save my white startas sneakers
on the city bus
from the black, filthy fate.

Radio

night, agave, gulls, contador.
slowly, near the bottom, in its hot puddle, the wax
climbs up towards its symbols.
if now I'm truly listening to the radio,
if now truly is the night
the stampede of slow dying
in every telex of your sleeping breath,
then I really am pushing
a small, black, flaming obelisk
from east to west and back
along the deserted beach.
in the morning, on the green shores,
under their wet macs, the fishermen
will swallow your shoulders.
your profile of the volga

which, heavy with fog, for hours on end,
approaches its rotting corpse.
I flick the ash
from the top of my cigarette into my shoes.
it'll make my step lighter tomorrow.
half a year ago, wintertime,
as the insects under the wallpapers built
a pontoon of trains and roses
in a single hotel room,
I listened to the radio.
above moscow,
by then the cranes had already forgotten you.
palme was killed a couple of days later
in the first minutes of the green megahertz
when your uniform
had already become a warmed up snow suit
with the drawing of a constellation
of the melancholic sex.

Dust, Dust (dreamy, dreamy)

I looked straight in his eyes
a thousand times he combed his hair
right here in front of me
glancing at the golden dandruff
caught on his narrow shoulders.
he knew best when and how one day
stepped into another.
to guess the exact moment and only then turn
to the clock, remove the blindfold from your eyes.
once he told me,
I'll give you a lot, a lot of my dust
for one oxazepam pill.
and as the small pill dissolved in his throat,
sketching the hypotenuses
of the dreamy, dreamy praxis,

I knew that I could do whatever I wanted
with him.
but, I really don't know how to be someone's destiny
exactly such fucking mess
and I'd never been a pathetic
cunt like sven.
when he fell asleep, I spent hours sprinkling him
with that personal dandruff of his that spurted
between my fingers
when I ran my fingers,
and I did it more and more often,
through my hair. now luminal was his homeland:
that's how I gave him back his name, his ID card,
only now could he breathe peacefully.
when he woke up, he told me:
delimir, my favourite season is early fall
when school starts again, when many, little,
countless hammers quietly pound
in the long forgotten
manufactures.

Women in the Hinterland Still Wear Black Headscarves

for Nick Cave

she ran into the room and said:
some madman, in the street, a couple of minutes ago,
shoved his fingers four inches into
my brain.

on sultry afternoons
the women in the hinterland
still wear black headscarves
and I know very well
what sometimes wiggles its little fingers in my belly
trains its lenses on the non-existing eyes.

and, actually, what to do now
when the butcher, across the street,

is waving his blunt axe,
breaking the bones for the dogs
that, one winter, gave me all of their warm,
hairy freedom.

Gondola, Intertextual Construct

if the eye is a small projection machine
then the cogwheels move the perforated
brain bands while the harlequins, buffoons, all
the goofy synonyms of a slap,
with a body so familiar to me, gift me
the calm and therapeutic waters of the unlit venice.

that's how the body once again delivers
that first, forgotten fatherly slap.
that's how a hobbyist-surrealist
takes pleasure in his bribable privacy.

your bone-aching knees
forget their final destiny for a moment.

annie lennox sings: jennifer. if they're not
idiots, everyone understands this.

you say

my back is an empty background
of an advertising dollar from which street painters
cut out living silhouettes.

I'll send you a postcard of my bare back
for holidays, for holidays, a musical postcard.
I heard, my unstitched break-dance sock
is that imminent sabbath.

Pastiche on Imbecile Personal Planners

if you've ever seen
the flame licking a fire escape
in a gallop
if the seagulls down the cliff ever
got up in the morning because of you
then you know

these poems are written
for all of those past twenty-six who still
like rock 'n' roll.
besides, it doesn't matter

if morpheus dreams of them
or they of him
dreaming them.

Happy Streets

I.

Roderick

show me happy streets
your blue
wide thighs
the hospital in whose stomach we'll love each other
when you become a chubby sonnet
that's where we'll smash the readable ampules of time
and with its musical syrup
tease the limbs tired from chemistry and
sodomy

sister, I'm awake and watching
the colourless, red hot mercury dripping
out of my nose
for days on end
all over the azure dust
peppered around your bed:

I am your busted pimp
sister
I sold your panties
to the horny voyeurs in
an endless line
of peep-show booths at golgotha
I

in the first days of the war
when your mouth was a damp
smoke-filled compartment
pressed the button at the sunset's doorway
from
 footsteps
 ultramarine and
 shop windows

whose wombs
smoulder the whole night long

Back in Those Days, An Unpretentious Entry

for fifteen afternoons
I watched the school program
all until survival
drove me into rapid, intermittent vomiting.
for the most part, animals, thoroughly and endlessly,
devour one another in the maculate nature.
I'm a humanist
but I don't know how to imagine things
that's why I always lose it
when I see my neighbour's dog
watching, firmly, for hours on end, the young
thigh of the moon, remembering and crying.

millennia, they say, coexist. so sometimes
before the show I have to eat seeds

sing battle songs quietly
and then out of my complexion
throughout less than a year
sprout fields of wheat
gently whispered to by local poets.

on the lips of the sea
sylvia fell asleep, the star of softcore, dreaming of me
when the sea speaks she wakes up
and remembers nothing.

I think nothing of the vandals
who, last night, right here in front of me
pumped your archaic and vain kitchen towel
that's the beginning of the third,
most exciting chapter of emmanuelle
I'll finish everything they've started myself anyhow
when tomorrow
in the kitchen
you turn your back on me.

that's the only reason why
I twice walked out into the hall to smoke
and, and that day saw
a phonebooth getting rained at all empty
in the hot summer shower
that somewhere in the villages
slammed on the dirt road
lifting, in the first moments of the downpour,
little clouds of dust
and this was the most beautiful thing to be seen
back in those days, I repeat
I saw an empty phonebooth
my abandoned home
in which I had taught myself final aphasia
the street was once again the fourth
atonal quartet of nothing
people withdrew to alleyways and quickly
while they were still wet
read astrological signs of rebuilding
from their palms.

at the hypoderm of the phone rope
that whole time
my best poems streamed
I knew
if I picked up
the phonebooth beneath would burst, I know
because I had seen so many of such tricks
in cheap videos
oh vienna this means nothing to me...
soon they will come and hose
the night city
once again the leaves will drink with ruthless calm
and the bugs will thrust their thirsty stings
into trampled berries on the market
that stinks
like an empty telephone signal.

Die die my darling

We, Walking on the Leaves

that's us, the same ones who sleep
on the pillows filled with rotten antlers of deer
that rubbed their phalluses against
the green, sulfuric ocean of the homeland.
that rotten peace silvers like a sore teenage lip
every time when petrified,
walking on the leaves
from the nearby stars
we come back to the city. I can't come up with
a better description of this street at four a.m.
rosemary fields in twist, again, biljana died
on the red-hot wind
and lake ohrid now evaporates insects
that will come back like an apocryphal dollar rain.

lights out in the barrack no. 5
a black condom
like a blackbird in the snowy winter woods
travels into the angel's anus:

cicciolina, I love, I love you too.

Christa

everything that's yours, all of lonely you
I've put at stake
and now I'm waiting to see on which of its six
sleepy faces the snow will fall, lips first.
what will and in what language god say
when the receiver of rotten ivory
gets sweaty in his hand.
remember, in osijek, we opened
the drunk taxi driver's womb
to relieve at least some of
our ancient hunger but instead of a heart
on the observatory's marble floor
all we found was a ball of snow
picked up at the edge of that distant road.

the meter flickered
like a far-away planet under your tongue
on which the dust blinds the sleeping angels
on which virgins say, pointing at a pile of trash:
that rib was stolen from here,
let the camera die here.

the night is a gentle recording tape
from which quietly
after the snow has touched it many, many times
your voice is heard.

at that moment that child comes up to you
and kisses your hair
like he's kissing the ocean one last time.

The Wounds on My Mother's Skin Heal as Quickly as the Dog's

wait a bit longer
when the night knocks down its drunken angles
on leningrad
we're going to sell those roubles with false zeros
like our evil eyes
to confused tourists.
eyect:
there's something truly alarming
in fast forwarding or rewinding the tape.
apple falls from the tree, gets up and in the grass
devours the terrified worms
whose horror has no name.
our mama got married
and on that very day the tumour gushed
on the inside under my chest from my living skin

it was a magical feeling
like a kiss on a deserted beach after a million years
it seeped all over the wedding gown
and everyone
glared at the spot so tactlessly
as if I ate my own genitals
they applauded their small cramped hands
and you, mama
a whole eternity plus a mile or two away
slapped my lips with an iron
gently whispering
my son
the law of this cinematographic procedure says that
the intensity of following the whole film
depends on
how scared they get in the first five minutes
mama you're the milky way
you're a joint
lit on easter island
where flocks of flamingos cry after us
at sunset that devours their pupils

just like this plankton here
that I'm wiping off your lips
devours toxic lights
here in the city that takes me to the skies
mama, hear the bells
the bells are dressed in dark strawberries
falling on your thighs
have no fear
neva told all of her daughters
cover me with something when I pass
mama, I don't know
why you never bought a guitar
imagine that duet
these sleds and I
through the night across a frozen lake!

Zorica is Spray

a dog that has wandered from somewhere into the shaft
measures the existential corridor of your eye.
it licks the frozen snow.
walks around a dug out wound.
reaches the eyelashes, from here on only
the ocean and the atlantic fog, here
it watches the star turning
in a grave that's crumbling
for other saturday female guests.
in the darkness the dead roads are lying, in
in the darkness
the dead sacraments of futile peace are lying.
in my womb holy letters are buried
in the archives the passes and passports have burned.
a dog. salt lake city.

you watch it from your window.
we are the secretaries of the living cobweb.
tired traveling salesmen
who have fallen asleep at the doorbell.
the skin is the shortest way.
you are spray.
the skin is spray.
the tangerines bring you up
wherever you turn
they remember you, the keys to stone gates
are in them. once everyone will be able
to lock us in with them.
so
if you ever walk again
drink all the dark juice from the halted sides
of all of those
on the asphalt
and
one step beneath the sky
one second
slower than you.

Pagodas, Paraphrase

I'm afraid of locks on other people's apartments
I'm more and more afraid of pagodas.
I'm afraid of escalators
and the land of the rising sun
and I don't like it when the cherries blossom because
every time I say
that only silver has the right
to ask me
for a night and day interview with you
you say
deposit, wheel, you point up with your hand
that wheel is turning in the dust,
that lock in the dead medusa eye
is the road I pull off from into
my home, into
pagodas.

Theatrum Mundi

someone persuaded the earth, the sky and the sea
someone persuaded the quartz
to do to me
what now eight hours a day
and overtime a night do
and glass sprinters do into the green crematorium
those unrestrained, disarmed gauchos
of photosynthesis
that built taj mahal.
how sad our interwar
poetry was
I told the inspector
when under my bed they found
an amphibious vehicle with the crew of four
sleeping on your eyelashes
already touched by the summer heat.

and how can I not say I'm dust
when every winter I remember
walt disney
who gifted his dead body
to eternal ice
and is now patiently waiting
for war reparation
that his own
cancerous flesh
is due to pay him
so he will
as the acting officer of the delayed death
succeed in
what he couldn't pull away
with m. mouse:

eternal, final, golden schund

the dark shadow of vanished angels
I once saw on
your face while from your upper lip

with the tip of your tongue
you patiently soaked a drop of ketchup
on the afternoon
burger
in the crowded
underpass.

I Will Go to Szechwan to Die There with the Pandas

I will go to szechwan
every morning with some unknown fatigue
upon its skin
the sun wakes up and immediately collapses
into the yellow, yellow, amber sea.

I will go to szechwan
and lie down onto the wet gunpowder
of a spring forest
to be there and hide there.

I will wake up every 365 years watching
a fern sprouting out of my belly
right there upwards towards you, upwards
oh mao, mao
you are now sitting on a high cloud
spilling golden rice all across szechwan.

you told me I would be a combat plane carrier
when I grow up!
your skin is cold porcelain
I used to place my face against.
a small metal plate was planted
under my forehead.
I did not know its purpose but
during those summer heatwaves
seemingly coming out of nowhere
I kept on falling and crawling
as the scorched metal under my forehead melted
my brain, bones, everything.
the fog swallowed the pedals under my feet and
I could not reach her any more
cycling all the way to the other side of shanghai
although I had a token for that purpose
I wasn't meant to watch her and kiss her
and that's why I'm now going to szechwan
alone and blind
to die there with the pandas.

The Book of Angels

Almonds in Your Lap

I reach one important
decision a day.
Regarding you
because I'm the only one of a hundred
who
without any doubt
doesn't remember you.

The golden wheat glows
in the rear-view mirror of a car
in which
I sit dead
at the front seat
counting the dead almond saplings in your lap.

Because I'm blind
I can stop talking
about anything
whenever I feel like it.

Between the ground
and the first millimetre of air
there is an invisible
infinitely thin
impenetrable layer of loneliness
in which the moonlight
uses the glimmer of fish scales
in the night grass along the banks
and the dispersed memories and recollections
to conceive angels.

Ivan the Factory

for Blanka & Petar

Thousands upon thousands of dead
must talk and talk
so that somewhere in the forest
a singular mushroom could sprout
from a spot entirely out of their reach.

That's how I would like you to remember me
if you can remember what's been said
I was told in a dream by someone
whose name I must not speak.

With their eyes rolling in the dust
on a multi-track railway
the trains zoom by each other
through the cathedral

whose chiming bells
inside the membrane of one's eye
suddenly woke us up.

You know that
24 times in a single second
death stops by the roadside fountain
and stealthily examines
in a puddle
in a mirror evaporating
into an ancient and icy mirage
its bluish face of a girl
collecting sticks in a schoolyard.

We rode our bicycles that day
and stopped by the factory
with chimneys spewing
silver pillows.

These people really have a gift for fortune telling
you said with lips somewhat strangely slanted.

Your son slept in the next room.

The cleaning lady on the fourth floor
exactly at our eye level
was scattering
raspberry seeds
all across the floor and all over the shelves
and spraying artificial snow
in the middle of summer
onto her sweaty face.

She could have been around fifty
and later she kept on laughing for a long while
on the departing tram.

Contagion

There's no deeper sorrow
than travelling through Slavonia
on a Saturday afternoon.

Because sorrow, during those one and a half hour,
right here, to me, doesn't show
one clue of its origin.

What can be seen, quite clearly,
is just one superficial cut
healed by a cotton wad
found in someone else's words,
in someone else's address book,
in the filled ashtray of the compartment
that has been left empty
like a stab of some filthy awl.

I knew a child
who wanted to be a costume designer,
without any reason
she once stayed sitting in the dew
which in fear
she smeared all over her hair.

I truly want to get ill.

That cult. That sorrow.

That satyr of dogwood, ashes and dust.
To drink that dew with a golden straw
in the middle of the dead
whirl.

To say the Easter prayer with my arms full
of darkened silver.

Mantra by Your Pillow

All night long I watched
one black, dark mole on your back.
There was nothing, that whole time, closer to me.

There was nothing, at the same time,
more distant from me.

Nothing more real
than that small, dark lake
of curded silver milk
filled with dead children's eyes,
soft voices that vanished with the morning
in the first white light
on which you leaned your arm
so helplessly.

There where words
begin to take some serious meaning
believe me
sooner or later
crying will be heard.

Long-lasting, lonely and deep.

That's your name.

There's not one superfluous word in it.

There where your hand is my eyes begin.

There's no different touch.

The Earth spins around the dirty dress.

The dirty dress is sewn with the thread of the Earth.

Solitude

Oh what herbs
insomnia planted on your face!

Solitude is the darkness that collects slowly
around the candle that'll burn out soon.

It opens the shadows drawn on memory:

it makes the visible invisible
the invisible already quite visible by now.

Solitude is gold
say I swam through moss and honey
and you weaved the night sky
on my scarf

with the cobweb needle
ah Nibelungen, Nibelungen
solitude is light.

Solitude is the scent
up north
during brief bright summers
in the dark pine woods just before the rain.

Never say its name in vain.

On August, Morning and the Bell

When she fell asleep
the little drummer
was already walking stealthily
all around her hair
along the pillow floating
in the night heat of August
down that river of shadows that burns and flows
softly drumming his march:

that's the only thing he knew to play and sing,
that song of the land
between the mirror and the shadow
in which there had long been nothing
and no one to be found
who could tell him

why no breath of wind
could move the veil
from this sleeping face.

It was that in her ear
as the day approached
the sound grew softer and fainter
until just before dawn
it melted completely
with the moments of the first Sunday
morning silence
and the bells
from which the tears fell to the ground
transformed into gold
and dust.

The gold to purify the rot, the rot to purify the dust.

Ezekiel's Chariot

Fungi and Ringworm

Doctors
came to our valley
darling
long before any disease
and remained there
for the longest time
just sitting idly
and dreaming
for the longest time
and their ancestry grew like ringworm
and leprous fungi on our hands

So
don't believe the medicine man

invoking the rain in the spring dusk
don't believe the voice
calling out your name
in the overheated waiting room of a suburban
infirmary

Nothing will be sowed
on the field surrounding his feet
except thorns and pain
and only a small bundle of cobwebs will sprout
some mornings hastily plaited
between the fingers of new-borns

If heaven
can indeed hear
all their prayers
a million drops
replete with tasteless and colourless poison
will hasten to hit the ground
and no one will be spared

by that old parade
quenching someone's imaginary thirst
from high above

Rather
turn over in your sleep
to the other side of the bed
and draw a fish on the dead seal's belly

Be like love:

don't forget anything
and don't forgive anyone anything!

Be like that draft through a bloody gauze
don't let them
in heaven's name
heal you

Listen up:

night guards are picking up lost coins
from the sidewalks of dark streets
right below these windows

We tried once again
to bribe Judas and his sons
with those coins
but alas
Judas and all of his sons
moved to their silicone kingdom
long ago

Let everyone
a minute before midnight
fall in love with the day

Don't let anything change their world
Don't let anything change their world

for

everyone who does not know
this hospital like his own heart
will get hurt:

Jai Guru Deva Om!

Acacias by the Ancient Paths

Whenever I saw
from a moving train or a car
in the stillness of the summer air
the thick layer of dust
on the tiny acacia leaves
I knew
I was close to home

There, invisible iodine
once dripped down into the eyes of all my fathers
while all of my mothers carefully
washed my belly
removing the sickening traces of their own
touches

No longer do any of my friends
live there
where they lived less than a year ago

they went out to pick blueberries, blackberries
and mulberries
from the shady sidewalls
of high storeys
at dusk they watch the misty
plains poisoned by history and faraway seas
counting and chewing grasshoppers
of that ancient pest

before carving drowsy sailboats
into sleeping pills
with their awls and nails
only to sail off sail-less
all those quiet laureates
of yet another night regatta
circling around their eyes

as they bark, bark at the Moon
above that dusty cobweb

Moss

I wish I was moss

Most of all

I would love to be moss
upon whose lips the northern stars
in the dark press the words
of ancient testament

When I was young

I loved being summer
when I was summer I wanted so many things
but I was not young anymore

Now I would just love to be moss
not because moss
really is a guidepost
to the dreamy road in the heart of that healing
darkness
but because I have nowhere else to go

So you too remember the moss
when out of the sky
instead of snow
frozen ash bitter like rice
begins to fall
right into your eyes wide open
and into the mouths of travellers
who will never make it to the end of their
journey
to place at your doorstep
a golden nut

Because
the one who speaks the truth
always talks about moss
and when he speaks that way
moss grows on his tongue and on his roof-tiles
made of lies and arson
still guarding
all those ruins
there by the sticky road
that once were known as home

Crossroads II

It's been a long time since
I could tell the first drops of morning rain
from the quiet ticking of the wall-clock:

but
when I draw back the curtain
all I can see is the sultry air
while the sound of that clock
uncannily resembles a child's hand
knocking on the door
that hides the laughing one
who once was light

Once Again (and for the Last Time)
About Them Angels

for Branko Čegec

I never travelled much

Maybe because I had a heart smaller
than the smallest burdock in the field

That the evening star
at 5 AM and 5 PM
is not one and the same star
I learned by way of sugar and whip

But
on that sunny Easter
in the year of 1998
in front of the church in Branjin Vrh
in Baranja

where I learned in childhood
that God and a birch-tree are one and the same
now I have also learned
that the smallest
and even the most frightened burdock
in the uncertainty of its own path past the unknown one
and his unfathomable intentions
sometimes manages to find his way back there
where he once set off from
stuck to skirts and trouser legs
of something that dislikes him
of someone whose hatred
will revive him
with its cocky hand:

there where linen
covers the water in the well that angels drink from

there where proud willows grow
on the sorrowful soil

there where those
who clean fish by the water live
washing their faces in their own progeny

we will be telling our fortune
feeding with our sleepy eyes
that tiny
tiny burdock in the field

A Prayer for Dying

For a decade the tin rooster on the roof-top
of our house hasn't moved

The unknown light
leaks at night under the door
like dried up milk that sleepwalkers
suck up till dawn
from young poppy stems

The earthworm
deep below the feet of a Drava fisherman
carves deeper and deeper its silvery path
backwards through the clay
to the source of it all

Peace forgets about the war
more intensely and thoroughly
than the war
at its beginning
when ripened grammar silently hammers
the first nail into a soft fir coffin
forgets about peace:

he thought, reaching the first milestone
then he got out of the car
and calmly blew his brains out
feeling once more that incredible
soft breeze from the sleepy plains
caressing his face
always reminding him
of those moments when the snow was about to melt
forcing the cold water to break out of the stone

that Cain presented
Abel with
as a gift

Arrhythmia

Swallows in Baranja

Forty-four years
have passed
already.

I have only
two silver bullets
left from the old days
tucked inside the old spelling book –
one for each
temple.

I check if they are in place
every time the Sun rises or goes down.
One day I will fly away with them into the void
like a shot they let a drunken idiot
fire at a village wedding.

I never knew where to go.

Which side of the field
to head for in the morning with a sickle in my hand
nor which side to head for in the evening
with the wild poppy I left on your pillow
when you were born.

That what dies
every evening above the plains
is not the star that either of us
received as a present.

I look at the waters, those dreamy waters.

Out of this mud
God created the lotus
cresset and a swallow.

Out of this mud the swallow
made a nest on the old porch
under your lips
only to return home when summer ended

back to the cradle of the world

to be its first widow.

Pyjamas at the Cancer Ward

to uncle Andrija

Their evaporated insides
their devoured insides
now stare at me incessantly
through my own eyes.

Next to each one of those pyjamas
invisible sleds remained, you said,
the night and dog barks from those distant villages
have caught up with me for good.

Ambrosia

Why indeed would people
who are truly free need poetry?

Below the tree
where Branko Miljković hanged himself
the mandrake never sprung a flower.

The scarab from your eyelashes
flew to Pomerania a long time ago.

Nico's corpse decomposed
in the summer air because nobody wanted
to claim the coffin cruising ghostlike
around Europe for days
like ambrosial pollen on an angel's wing.

When she sang
some of that Berlin dust
was still settling in her eyes
long after the storm.

We never became like her
homeless middle-aged junkies
because that required a bit more time
than the one we were
granted by poetry.

Trakl, Grodek, the Inevitable Stations of a Dream

Old phantoms dance
on the tiny patches of snow
desperately trying
to survive on the dark
and soggy fields

they hid ripe lime honey
in the sister's corpse
the whole winter
its smell driving
the still unborn killers wild.

Dobova

Hundreds of times
I have passed through Dobova.
That first place that you see
when you cross the Croatian-Slovenian border by train.
That first sign that tells you
you are indeed going somewhere, that first milestone
that will on the way back
also inform you that you have in fact arrived
somewhere.

Purgatory, if it really exists
probably looks like Dobova.

A little girl with a tiny bucket full of milk.

Haystacks scattered across neatly trimmed pastures
calmly awaiting dusk.

At times something surreal appears
outside of your compartment
sticky with nicotine-filled smoke.

A customs officer removed his shoes
and stretched himself across the passenger seats
just to take a little nap en route to Zagreb.

The street in Ljubljana where the first ever
porn cinema opened in the former country,
where, having spent six months clad in the
olive-green
uniform of the former federal army,
I took two fellows from Gorski Kotar
to see American 80s porno diva
Kelly Nichols
receive double penetration in *Roommates*.

The village graveyards on timid hillsides
coated in winter evening mist.

One day I'm going to get off that train
and fall asleep on a bench
in front of that small train stop in Dobova.

If I ever wake up again, maybe you'll see me
waving at you from the platform
with both hands.

Sparks

I've been observing them my whole life.
Those sparks. That always hovered
before my eyes during insomnia.
Like a thousand new-born jellyfish
whose bells hid themselves in your heart.
Like overheated air
on the asphalt road, in the summer sultriness
with invisible, dead armies dancing inside.
Insomnia is a contagious disease.
It transmits itself by means of snow. Each time
someone's – anyone's – belated love walks right
into it
remaining forever lost in whiteness

the one deprived of any right to anything
the one that is mine, that pure
core anxiety, the music of spheres,
athanor danza, that mountain winter sun
that missed its own morning.

The sparks laugh at you eternally and brazenly.

You will never be able to touch them.

When you step forward
they recoil
and sink into her hair.

When you close your eyes
they approach you and disperse
behind your eyelids
like moss
on the low white wall
hiding the goldfinch

who has carried a rotten grain of wheat in his beak
from faraway fields.

Someday we too will become sparks.

High above the clouds
our own dead hands
will scatter us from the heavy, frozen
chariots in the sky
so we can steal away your dreams
one by one.

Kraków, Kazimierz

for Bruno Schulz

Never has God attached past to present
with such a powerful glue
like the one that I inhaled everywhere
by the Wisła River
– o you yingele!* -
looking for those cinnamon shops
where your ancestors once long ago
whispering in anguish
cursed all the morning stars
that remained forever sewn
onto their sleeves
and onto your snowy eyes

* Yingele in Yiddish means “little one”.

because God uses snow to medicate his own
incurable fear.

The fogs from the northern seas
still travelled long and far
as deep into the southern plains as possible
so that the firstborn could hide
his tired army in them

that's how
I always thought
Poland came into being
and whenever the late autumn fog descends
upon Kazimierz
I see myriads of those phantoms again
trying to burn
their own shadows
like dirty rags
spelling out the names
o you, yingele
of all my known

and your unknown
dead.

Whoever has but once
followed someone's footsteps in the snow
shall finally at the end of his journey
if only in a dream
reach Kazimierz

and there he shall say
why did you abandon me, sweet home,
o you, yingele.

Raymond Carver and I

In the first months of 2003
together with my wife
I worked quite painstakingly
on editing the translation of Raymond Carver's
prose pieces.

I hated more than ever
my daily job
hating then
even the very thought of anything
outside the safe distance
between mine and other people's past.

Winter, my favourite season,
was drawing to an end.

Somewhere up North
far from the human eye
heavy mounds of snow
were sliding down silently from the branches
of a spruce tree.

Gradually it dawned on me
that I'm becoming
justifiably
or perhaps not
a panicky cancerphobe.

She did not have to tell me
for it had been quite obvious
that lonely morning coffees before work
in half-empty city restaurants
had turned into the happiest moments
in my wife's daily life.

I listened ever more attentively to the stories
about tawdry adventures

with Ukrainian and other prostitutes
for two hundred Croatian Kunas
in the nearby Hungarian
semi-public brothels along the state border

but I honestly feared
a possible flicker of strange recognition
and the snowy dust
in their eyes.

One morning
I routinely asked
my five-year-old daughter
what she had dreamed of the night before
and she replied
– something ugly, I dreamed
something ugly
that all of our things
became ugly...

Naturally, I did not tell her
that that wasn't
actually a dream.

A few months later
after a long time I finally saw
the open sea
with buoys bobbing
on the night waves.

They floated on the water
like lying sentences
in the mouths of those
who will never shut up
or stop talking about love.

Hunters in the Snow

Baranja, Hunters in the Snow

Leave, forever.

Stop wrecking the old desolate fields.

Don't fence the rented hunting grounds.

The deer has walked
that same path
for hundreds of years.

Yesterday, after I got off the bicycle
I saw one of them, dead
his head all bloody
from desperately trying to find
the old passage through the wire.

Leading to those same evenings, same mornings,
same dawns and same dusks
wherein Bruegel's hunters returned to their village
trundling through snow on that winter picture.

I sat for hours below that painting
in the Vienna Kunsthistorische Museum.

Even if I was in the city for a single day,
I always had to find a moment for that.

Then one afternoon my legs
began to lift off from the ground and the doors
to everything in my life that had ever been covered
by snow opened at once.

Pig slaughter in the left corner of the picture.

Small prey, just a fox hanging on a rod
over the shoulder of one of the hunters.

The dogs sticking around their legs.

The white mountain tops in the background
some strange birds in the sky
and below them the skaters on ice
enjoying the last remnants of daily light.

Just one small however insignificant step
closer to that painting was enough for me
to remain forever lost in that space,
just because it was so perfect, so tranquil
I did not dare to come closer
even though I already felt the skates in my hand
ready to hit the evening ice.

Perhaps something was telling me
that I must keep looking
someplace else
for my own hunters
who for years hunt down

merely with their eyes
some other wintry scenes.

Head out with them in Baranja at dawn or dusk
through fields thick with snow
and be at least a silent witness
to the traces left there by the living and the dead
so hopeful in their attempt to find us
frozen by that wire once again.

Disease

Disease would not
perhaps even exist
if the patient
would not at a certain point
fall in love so fatefully
with none other but her
– his own disease.

Barely a moment was needed
for you to fall asleep on the bench
during the afternoon visit
that made an appearance
yet again
exactly at 4 P.M.
like some tired procession

dragging its feet up and down the stairs
from door to door
from silence to silence
and becoming – when everybody
eventually arrived only to find you asleep
on the bench in front of your room –
increasingly
unpleasant.

Leaves

for Neda Miranda

Someday
she said
I will be photographing
only leaves wet with rain
and sleet
fallen here
onto the city asphalt
onto the streets and desolate playgrounds
the ones that in memory or the future
of someone entirely unknown to me
the wind can still if only for a moment
pick up.

Disease II

Does disease wander down the bloodstream
like the sick man wanders
during those first two or three nights
down the hospital corridors
holding a catheter in his hands
looking for the beginning of any one thing
his first ever *objet trouvé*?

From a Polite Distance

Late at night
and all through the dawn
the windows swarm with smokers
holding a cigarette in one hand
while chasing smoke clouds with the other
so they don't reach the sensors on the ceiling.

That's how it is in hospitals
that's how it is before sleep.

Looking from a polite distance
all of it may resemble
the lights from some haunted cruise ship
that got stranded here, too close to the land
and
too far from the open sea.

Dreamy Praxis

This selection of poems by Delimir Rešicki represents the first-ever comprehensive translation of Rešicki's poetry into English, and it is also one of the rare selections from his poetic oeuvre in general, as so far there have been only three such selections: one in Croatian (2007), one in Hungarian (2008) and one in Slovenian (2013). The fact that this selection offers the first-ever overview of the poet's entire opus, having taken into account all of Rešicki's collections of verse, makes this feature even more unique. However, the poems published in the meantime in various periodicals have been left out, along with his relatively short book *Tišina* (Silence) dating from 1985. Even though the latter can be read as a single volume/long poem consisting of prose poems, it has nonetheless already been classified as a work of prose in the most recent authorised bibliography of Rešicki's work, that was

included in his collection of poems *Lovci u snijegu* (Hunters in the Snow).

The given format of this selection entailed a compilation of 40 or 50 texts, not counting on choosing an equal number of texts from individual volumes, so the overall number of poems included in this selection varies from three to ten with respect to individual collections. Considering the age of the undersigned selector, as well as the historical period during which he was formed as an author, this selection could obviously be perceived (always with some reservations) as the reflection of a generational taste, for it goes without saying that a twenty or thirty year older, or perhaps ten to fifteen year younger poet, would pick somewhat differently, as he would look upon the *Quorum** or

* *Quorum* is a seminal Croatian literary magazine founded in 1985 in Zagreb, that first introduced postmodernism into our literary life. The generation of writers, poets and critics

post-Quorum period through the lenses of his own poetic formation, acknowledging the importance of Rešicki's influence in the entire enterprise. Naturally, the important criterion in the selection process implied that the selector possessed a competent insight into the "post-rešicki" period of Croatian poetry: this criterion had to take into account, to the extent possible considering the always questionable scope of one's knowledge, the influence of some of Rešicki's poetic strategies on the younger generations of poets (meaning younger and middle-aged generations, therefore poets and poetesses who established themselves in the 21st century).

Delimir Rešicki's poetic opus, consisting of a mere seven books of poetry published in a period

associated with the journal, that came of age mostly in the late 80s and throughout the 90s are often referred to as *kvorumaši*.

of thirty years, starting with his debut *Gnomi* (Gnomes, 1985) and ending with the most recent *Lovci u snijegu* (2015), could be divided into two phases – pre-war and post-war one, including the wartime destruction in Slavonia and Baranja, as well as his native Osijek, at the beginning of the 1990s, as a historical threshold that had severe impact on both the poet's personal life and his poetics. In the only selection of Rešicki's poetry available in the Croatian language so far, entitled *Crne marame* (Black Scarves, Carmen Croaticum, Vinkovci, 2007), Tea Benčić Rimay, who made the selection and wrote the introduction, also acknowledges this fissure that is nonetheless not that vividly discernible in the description of wartime and the immediate post-war reality, as much as it is evident in the sensibility, the perception of the spirit of the times and the dominance of the poet's own darker moods and sentiments clearly detectable in the alterations of style and form that the author experienced as he moved from one book to another.

However, the three pre-war collections, *Gnomi* (1985), *Sretne ulice* (Happy Streets, 1987) and *Die die my darling* (1990), had already paved the way for the poet's post-war poetics, indicating that the social circumstances became the fertile ground for poetic explorations, the seeds of the future development having thus been already sowed, meaning that some of the themes and motifs that he had been previously preoccupied with (mostly those adolescent ones stereotypically associated with the prevailing trends of the 1980s) began to wane while the newly budding inclinations grew into dominant poetic preoccupations. Those were the early hints of today's highly recognisable poetic codes: his native city and Baranja, its plains, the melancholy, the disease, the hypochondria and paranoia, the dreams and remembrances, the literary and other cultural references, the writing and self-reference, the whiteness of silver and snow, the autumn, the winter and angels, the atmosphere of the East-European cities and the Pannonian vastness,

the roadside landscapes seen through the window of a moving train. Thus Rešicki's early poetry, already deficient in overtly pronounced "language experience"^{*} and equally immune to the impact of semantic concretism^{**}, but with somewhat more easily detectable mass-media and pop-culture influences (rock music, film and pornography), became in the post-war period a synonym for a lowland melancholy of the anxious yet tranquilising northern open spaces, often marred by detrimental human actions, the traces of civilisation on

* In his anthology *Suvremeno hrvatsko pjesništvo* (Razdioba) [Contemporary Croatian Poetry (Classification)], published in 1972, Zvonimir Mrkonjić suggested the threefold classification of the Croatian poetry in order to describe the then current situation: the poetry of spacial experience, the poetry of existential experience and the poetry of language experience.

** Semantic concretism is the term coined in the 1970s by the poet Branko Maleš referring to poetry with a pronounced interest in the materiality of language and with less concern for "making sense".

the verge of extinction. The omnipresent computerisation as well as the media related machinery, mostly propagandist by nature, in the service of overall dehumanisation, if not the very fragmentation of subject, gave way to elegiac, romantic, dreamy atmospheres and introspections by means of introduction of the vast open spaces, the claustrophobic quarters of hospitals and the premises of old Baranja houses wherein angelic beings in the shape of fellow travellers or family members, simultaneously mysterious and intertextual, subject to miscellaneous interpretations, naturally cohabit with tenants (*Knjiga o anđelima* /The Book of Angels/ 1997, *Ezekijelova kola* /Ezekiel's Chariot/ 1999). Paradoxically, in those fifteen or so years, between the publication of *Die die my darling* and *Aritmija* (Arrhythmia, 2005), with the advent and mass expansion of the Internet, the world experienced informatic as well as technological transformation. Yet, in Rešicki's case, the actual intrusion of technology into everyday existence

and the human body led to the radical distancing of the subject from both the inner and outer landscape, not leading, however, to complete healing. The distracted and reduced speech of gnomes began stretching into longer narratives, having occasionally travelled, especially in *Lovci u snijegu*, to the very “boundaries of lyricism” (Neven Ušumović) and descriptiveness as such, however the motifs of hospitals and (psychosomatic) ailments continue to dominate reflecting wider social degeneration and the spirit of times. What’s left are also the poet’s characteristic and numerous cultural references, quotations and dedications, addressing not only rock heroes but also even more frequently painting, photography and film. The book *Lovci u snijegu* is furnished with numerous photographs, representing along with stylistic and formal changes one of the important novelties in his opus. Consequently, the last collection might suggest the opening of a new avenue in Rešicki’s

poetry whose future and development remain, rightly, as unpredictable as ever.

I believe that this selection, along with its potential fallacies that a benevolent reader might hopefully not find too offensive, for it merely represents a personal view on the opus of an influential author, offers a valuable and detailed enough introduction into the creative forces of this important postmodernist poet, particularly to those who might be encountering his work for the first time. For others this will be an opportunity for a reacquaintance with and enjoyment of the text, the latter being something, I believe, they remember the poetry of Delimir Rešicki first and foremost for.

Davor Ivankovac,
Nuštar, February 2020

A Note On The Author

Delimir Rešicki was born in 1960 in Osijek where graduated in Croatian Studies at the former Teacher's College, now the Faculty of Philosophy. In the early 80s, he began publishing poetry, prose, essays and literary criticism in all major Croatian literary and cultural journals and publications. His work has been translated into numerous foreign languages, including German, English, Italian, French, Swedish, Spanish, Hungarian and Russian and published in international literary magazines such as *Akzente* and *Manuskripte*. In 2008, he was one of the authors of the blog *Kroatisches Quartett* for German *arte.tv*. He participated in the international multimedia CD-projects *Matria Europa* by Dutch artists *Sluik & Kurpershoek* (Kunst Ruimte, Amsterdam, 1996) and *soundtrack.psi* by Croatian artist Ivan Faktor (Osijek, 2001). His poems *Krakow*, *Kazimierz* and *Pusztá* were set to music, the

former in *Mala glazbena antologija hrvatskog pjesništva Ritam i Riff* (CD compilation, Relations and Poezija, Zagreb, 2010) and the latter by Lidija Bajuk. His poems and texts have been included in more than fifty anthologies, panoramas and reviews both in Croatia and abroad. In 2010 he took up photography and since then his photographic work has appeared in magazines *Tema*, *Tvrđa* and *Riječi*. He is the editor of the poetry series *Fraktali* in the *Fraktura* publishing house. He received a number of prestigious awards for his literary work, including the Sedam Sekretara SKOJ-a prize (1987), *Kiklop* (2005), *Vladimir Nazor* (2006), *Hubert Burda Preis* (2008) and *Goranov vijenac* (2011). In his own words, “when alive, he is on a bicycle in Baranja, cruising through villages and desolate locations around Kopački rit and further away, but not too far...” Delimir Rešicki lives in Osijek.

Poetry collections: *Gnomes* (1985), *Happy Streets* (1987), *Die die my darling* (1990), *Book of Angels* (1997), *Ezekiel's Chariot* (1999), *Arrhythmia* (2005), *Meghalni a pandakkal* (Veszprem, 2008), *Arrhythmie* (Vienna, 2008), *Black Scarves* (Vinkovci, 2008), *Aritmija* (Skopje, 2013), *Zaspati u Dobovi* (Ljubljana, 2013), *Hunters in the Snow* (2015).

BELLS FOR LEPERS

Bells for Lepers is the title of one of the poems from Delimir Rešicki's collection of verse *Hunters in the Snow*.

A Note on the Editor

Davor Ivankovac (Vinkovci, 1984) completed elementary school and high school in Vinkovci and graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Osijek. He published poetry, short stories and literary criticism in magazines and online journals in Croatia and abroad. His poetry was translated into a number of languages and included in several overviews and anthologies. Among others, he is the recipient of the 2012 Goran Award for Young Poets for his collection *Freud on Facebook* as well as the 2017 Lapis Histriae Award for his short story titled “Monday”. He published three books of poetry: *Rezanje magle* (Splitting the Fog, 2012), *Freud na Facebooku* (Freud on Facebook, 2013), and *Doba bršljana* (The Age of the Ivy, 2018).

Tomislav Kuzmanović translates between Croatian and English. His translations of fiction and poetry have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Granta*, *Absinthe: New European Writing*, Ugly Duckling Presse's *6X6*, *eXchanges*, and *The International Literary Quarterly*. His work was included in Graywolf Press' *New European Poetry Anthology* and Dalkey Archive's *Best European Fiction*. He has translated about twenty novels, short story or poetry collections, and plays, among others, *The Death of the Little Match Girl* by Zoran Ferić, *Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann, *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts, *A Frame for the Family Lion* by Roman Simić, *The Pitmen Painters* by Lee Hall, *Waiting for the Frogs to Fall* by Drago Glamuzina, *Why Do I Hate Myself* by Senko Karuza, *Birthday Letters* (with Dubravko Mihanović) by Ted Hughes and *Packing My*

Library by Alberto Manguel. His translations of Igor Štiks' *A Castle in Romagna* and Ivica Prtenjača's *The Hill* were longlisted for International Dublin Literary Award in 2006 and 2018. Heworks with the Festival of the European Short Story and serves as the translation editor at *[sic] – a Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation*. Tomislav earned an MFA in literary translation from the University of Iowa's Translation Workshop and teaches literary translation at the University of Zadar, Croatia.

Damir Šodan (Split, 1964), Croatian poet, awarded playwright, translator and editor graduated from the Zagreb University with a BA in English Literature and History. He has published several volumes of poetry, two collections of plays and an anthology of contemporary Croatian “neorealist” poetry. He translated Charles Simic, Raymond Carver, Leonard Cohen, Charles Bukowski, Richard Brautigan, Frank O'Hara and many others into

Croatian. His poetry has been translated into more than 20 languages, including Arabic, Hebrew, Korean and Chinese. He is one of the editors of the *Poezija* (Poetry) magazine in Zagreb. For more than two decades he worked as a translator for the United Nations and now he is a full-time writer and literary translator. He lives between The Hague, Netherlands and Split, Croatia.

Poems translated by:

Tomislav Kuzmanović

anchors like hooks soothed into the mud, (home for the severe — mental retardation), s. beckett, a hundred years later, Sven, Dedication, Cons;, Glaucoma, This Poem Begins in a Motel, Radio, Dust, Dust (dreamy, dreamy), Women in the Hinterland Still Wear Black Headscarves, Gondola, Intertextual Construct, Pastiche on Imbecile Personal Planners, Happy Streets, Back in Those Days, An Unpretentious Entry, We, Walking on the Leaves, Christa, The Wounds on My Mother's Skin Heal as Quickly as the Dog's, Zorica is Spray, Pagodas, Paraphrase, Theatrum Mundi, Almonds in Your Lap, Contagion, Mantra by Your Pillow, Solitude, On August, Morning and the Bell

Damir Šodan

I Will Go to Szechwan to Die There with the Pandas, Ivan the Factory, Fungi and Ringworm, Acacias by the Ancient Paths, Moss, Crossroads II, Once Again (and for the Last Time) About Them Angels, A Prayer for Dying, Swallows in Baranja, Pyjamas at the Cancer Ward, Ambrosia, Trakl, Grodek, the Inevitable Stations of a Dream, Dobova, Sparks, Kraków, Kazimierz,

*Raymond Carver and I, Baranja, Hunters in the Snow, Disease,
Leaves, Disease II, From a Polite Distance, Dreamy Praxis*

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