

VERSOPOLIS TWO

Southern Cross

Južni križ

Tomica Bajsić

Translated from the Croatian
by Damir Šodan
and by Gabeba Baderoon with the author

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VERSOPOLIS
is a unique, Europe-wide platform.
It gives emerging European poets
the chance to reach an audience beyond
the boundaries of the language they write in
by translating and publishing their poems
and inviting them to perform at festivals.



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Tomica Bajsić is a poet, prose writer, graphic artist and translator. Author of five poetry collections, two books of travel prose, and a picture book for kids. Translator and editor of four international poetry anthologies. Twice awarded with national awards for poetry, Goran for young poets, and Dobriša Cesarić prize. His poetry and prose pieces are translated into many languages. He works also in the fields of restoration, illustration and graphic design. Had two photographic expositions in Zagreb Amazon Breathes in the Cultural Centre and Brazilian Rainforest in the Mimara Museum in Zagreb.

Long-time editor for poetry in translation in Croatian *Poezija*. President of Croatian PEN Centre as well as Croatian coordinator of the lyrikline network. Founder of Druga priča, Art & Poetry publishing.

Critics have declared him “one of the most authentic contemporary Croatian poets” whose “first book was the most authentic anti-war testimony about the war experienced first-hand” (Delimir Rešicki); “with a strong poetic voice whose books do not follow the generationally dominant neorealist matrix, but rather approach a fantastic linguistic cosmogony in their narratives” (Katarina Mažuran); and “a poet of a universal humanism and belief in the healing power of an artistic undertaking as was not seen to date in Croatian poetry” (Damir Šodan).

The basic direction, or location, of Tomica Bajsić’s poetry can be found on that dynamic intersection between high modernism and postmodern textual strategies and practices. It seems paradoxical that Bajsić started his poetic machine for creating consecutive eternity in an environment which mostly denies such an eternity – that is, in the midst of a personally experienced reality of war. But it is as though that reality infuses every living moment with an exceptional quality and intensity of a death delayed or overcome. With that intensity, Bajsić has, ever since the Southern Cross book, written poems with a strong vitalistic element about even the worst events from the war. His oeuvre contains some of the most authentic Croatian poetry written about the war since it is in no way declarative, and thus it is able to present war in its completely tragic nature. His poetry confronts war on both the poetic and human level, and it overcomes it with the intensity of the moment inscribed within the contemporary lyrical poetry despite the thorough destruction. The rawness of the real material, which Bajsić uses to build a fantasy of combined poetic worlds, enables the poet to speak directly

about something which would otherwise be perilous for the very nature of poetry. Bajsić remains direct, as he was with the topic of war, when it comes to commenting on controversial political and existential topics, such as the communist heritage, Yugoslav history, the Croatian War of Independence, the criminal economic transition and privatization, the arrogant political and tycoon elite and the impoverishment and ‘the breaking’ of the ‘losers’ during the transition.

BOOKS PUBLISHED: *Južni križ / Southern Cross*, poetry (Goranovo proljeće, 1998, translated to Slovene in 2014 by Ivan Dobnik); *Pjesme svjetlosti i sjene / Songs of Light and Shadow*, poetry (AGM, 2004); *Dva svijeta i još jedan / Two Worlds & One More* (Naklada Ljevak, 2007); *Ana i vila Velebita / Ana and the Velebit Fairy*, drawings and story (National Park Velebit 2007); *Pobuna obješenih / Mutiny of the Hanged*, poetry (Fraktura 2008); *Zrak ispod mora / Air Beneath the Sea*, poetry (Biblioteka nagrade Dobriša Cesarić 2009); *Amazona diše / Amazon breathes*, travelogue and photographs (Druga priča 2016.); *Nevidljivo More / The Invisible Sea* poetry with drawings (Fraktura, 2018).

AS TRANSLATOR (SELECTED): *Španjolske pjesme ljubavi i proganstva / Spanish Poems of Love and Exile*, selection, essays and translation (DHK, Zagreb, 2002); *Sve do srca svijeta / To the Heart of the World*, poetry of Blaise Cendrars, selection, introduction and translation (MD, Zagreb, 2003); *Južna pošta / Southern Mail*, travelling through the poetry of Southern America, translations and essays, (HDP Croatian Writers Society, 2009); *UREZI Antologija svjetske poezije o ratu, represiji, ropstvu . . . / Anthology of World Poetry about War, Repression, Slavery . . .* publisher, editor and one of the translators (Druga priča 2010); *Blaise Cendrars, Poezija, život i djelo / Blaise Cendrars, Poetry life and work*, publisher, editor and poetry translator (Druga priča 2015).

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All the poems are translated into English by Damir Šodan apart from *Fires Came and Went*, *Postcolonial Poem*, *Fathers & Sons* and *The Wanderer Butterfly* which are translated by the author and Gabeba Baderoon.

Dvadeset i sedmi dan

Mari, dvadeset i sedmi dan od tvog rođenja

Svjetlost i sjena: razdvajaju se . . .
A do prije 27 dana, bili su jedno!
Tvoje crne kose oči sada traže rubove.

Rođena u ovaj svijet s ničim
Od opreme — toliko si mala da ne poznaješ
Ni svoje ime — želiš nas osvojiti tim
Osmijehom novostvorenog neba.

Kakav je to osmijeh! Sve pčele Alpa
I sve šumske vatre Mongolije
I svih 350 crkvenih tornjeva Salvadora i
Svi planktoni Atlantika nalaze utočište
U nebu tvog osmijeha iskovanog na tajnom
Mjestu koje je poznato samo pojedininim,
Levitirajućim svecima.

Gledaš uokolo i svemu se čudiš, ali
Moram ti reći da u tvojim crnim očima
Starim deset tisuća godina još uvijek
Mogu vidjeti odraz onog tihog jezera
Čija dubina se ne može izmjeriti.

Meni je to tiho jezero nepoznato sjećanje
Znanstvenici ga zovu crnom rupom prostora
Neki ga jednostavno zovu vrećom ugljena
A religiozni ljudi — oni to jezero zovu Duh.

Na tom su tihom jezeru tvoje crne oči
Još do nedavno bile dva indijanska kanua
Koja bezbrižno veslaju beskrajem svemira.

The twenty-seventh day

To Mara, on the twenty-seventh day of your birth

Light and shadow: separating . . .
And 27 days ago they were one!
Your dark almond shaped eyes are now looking for contours.
Born into this world with no gear of your own.
You are so little you don't even know your name.
You want to win us over with that smile
Of a newly-built heaven.
What a smile that is! All the Alpine bees
And all the forest fires of Mongolia
All the 350 Church towers of Salvador
And all the plankton of the Atlantic
Have found recluse in the heaven
Of your smile forged in a secret place
Known only to a few levitating saints.
You look around yourself in wonder, but I have to tell you
That in your 10,000-year-old dark eyes
I can still see the reflection of that calm lake
Whose depth is immeasurable.
For me that lake is like an unknown memory.
Scientists call it the black hole of space.
Some simply call it a sack of coal.
While the religious call it the Spirit.
Your eyes until recently
Were like two Indian canoes
Rowing light-heartedly through the endless universe.

U krugovima

katkad mi se čini da živim posuđeno vrijeme
moji prijatelji mrtvi rasuti po grobljima
izbrisani s ploče nijedan nije dohvatio tridesetu
ti ljudi s kojima sam dijelio kruh
spavao u istim bunkerima hodao kroz istu
travu i noć penjao se na tenkovima i padao
licem u zemlju pritisnut mecima i granatama
(o slatka mirna zemljo koja poznaješ naše molitve)
njihovi duhovi sada dolaze u posljednjim glasovima:
ima li još soka? pita jedan koji će poginuti napadajući
čuvaj mi brata kaže drugi koga će ubiti tenk
treći se pokušava sjetiti tko je i odakle dolazi
dok mu se mozak polako gasi (pogođen je u glavu)
što ima tamo? pita četvrti i steže čašu bevande
pogleda uprtog u brda u kojima ga čeka zasjeda
a peti šuti ali njegove oči mogu reći:
smrt.

kojiput mi se čini da sam prekinuo lanac
probudim se u noći bez zraka kroz
otvoreni prozor šumi četrnaest katova
(iz drvenih sanduka penje se miris spaljenog mesa)
Krist Iskupitelj je uvijek svjež rana u crnim oblacima
električne krijesnice jurcaju i proklinju i slave
vrijeme kada su se svinje hranile ljudima
ima dolje jedna kuća koja je prije sto godina bila plava
a sada nema krova i prozori su joj otvorene duplje
iznutra je ruševina ali čudno noću oživi
zaboravljeni balkoni pune se cvijećem i svjetlošću
okrugle crnkinje u turbanima naslanjaju se na
zahrđalu ogradu i mali odjeci njihova razgovora
šapuću da je tristo tisuća ljudi mrtvo na onim poljima
gdje su moje čizme ostale bez đonova
gdje su moje oči potonule u blato svemira a
srce mi je kao željezno užo otkinuto od sidra
prozviždalo kroz zrak u slijepim krugovima:
bez cilja, bez cilja.

In circles

Sometimes it seems as if I'm living on borrowed time
my friends are dead and scattered across graveyards
wiped off the slate just like that, none of them even thirty
those people I used to break bread with
those people I slept in the same bunkers with
those people I walked the same grass with, climbing onto tanks and falling
down
hitting my face against the ground showered with bullets and shells
(oh sweet quiet earth you know our prayers)
their ghosts still come back with the last of the echoing voices:
is there more juice? asks one who will die in an attack
take care of my brother, says another who will be killed by tank
the third one is trying to remember who he is and where he's coming from
while his brain slowly switches off (he'd been hit in the head)
what's over there? asks the fourth clutching a glass of red watered wine
his gaze fixed over the hill where an ambush has already been set up for him
and a fifth is silent but his eyes are able to pronounce:
Death.

sometimes it feels as if I'd broken off the chain
I wake up in the middle of the night gasping for air
hearing the hum of fourteen storeys through the open window
(the smell of burnt flesh rising out of wooden caskets)
Christ the Redeemer is a lasting fresh wound among the black clouds
electric fireflies scurry, curse and celebrate
the time when pigs fed on human flesh
down there is a house that once, a hundred years ago, used to be blue
now it is a roofless ruin with frameless windows like empty eye sockets
the inside is all wrecked but somehow at night it becomes alive
the forgotten balconies fill up with flowers and light
while round black women with turbans lean against
corroded fence and tiny echoes of their conversation
whisper that there are three hundred thousand dead people on those fields
where my boots lost their soles
where my eyes drowned into the mud of the universe
where my heart was like an iron rope cut off from its anchor
whizzing through the air in blind circles:
aimless, aimless.

Ranjenik iskušava Boga

luta sam šumom neprijateljskog kraljevstva
i naletio na žicu skrivenu u travi
pješađijska rasprskavajuća odskočna mina PROM2
u djeliću sekunde pred eksploziju
očekivao sam od Boga da me zaobiđe ta čaša
kada me detonacija izbacila u zrak vidio sam komade
željeza komade moje odore komade mog mesa kako hvataju
orbitu / pijesak zvijezde porculan četiri kuta vjetra tartan
žilete led / Josepha Conrada kako prosi Freyu djevojku sa
Sedam otoka / moje neprijatelje mačke kako krađu kisik
planete i ruju po smeću / sve svjetionike u plamenu
od Novih Hebrida do Obale papra / predsjednika Zimbabwea
Canaana Bananu kako sluša Njemački radio / tisuću
prepariranih ribljih glava koje prorokuju stranim jezicima /
Amadeusa Mozarta kako slaže aviončiće od novina –
nikada nisam volio Mozarta i to me bacilo dolje na zemlju
a zbor bečkih dječaka je zapjevao:
“vrč ide na vodu dok se ne razbije
vrč ide na vodu dok se ne razbije”

Bože, daj da me zaobiđe ta čaša molio sam
u bolničkim kolima
daj da živim još malo bar kojih 100 godina
ne želim umrijeti sada kada je došlo naše vrijeme
htio sam da moja odlikovanja blistaju poput petrolejskih
platformi koje osvijetljavaju noćne letove preko Atlantika
i da moja karizma veterana bude električna
pusti da mi limuzina klizi kroz narod kao što je Moby Dick
klizio pred očima bespomoćnog kapetana Ahaba
nikada nisam rekao da ne želim prodati dušu
samo sam licitirao cijenu
daj da budem pozvan na prijam kod predsjednika
toliko je jela koja nisam probao
toliko ima ljudi na zemlji čiju sudbinu nisam
uzeo u svoje ruke

The wounded man is tempting God

I wandered around the forest of the enemy kingdom
and stumbled upon a piece of wire hidden in the grass
it was a buried PROM2 tripwire-activated
bounding anti-personnel mine
and in the split second before the explosion
I wanted God to make that cup pass me by
but when the detonation threw me in into the air I saw pieces
of iron, pieces of my uniform, pieces of my flesh whirling
in orbit / sand stars porcelain four winds tartan
razors ice / Joseph Conrad proposing to Freya the girl from
the Seven Islands / my enemies cats stealing the planet oxygen
digging through garbage / all lighthouses ablaze all the way
from the New Hebrides to the Pepper Coast / the President of Zimbabwe
Canaan Banana listening to the German radio / thousands of mummified fish
heads
prophesying in alien tongues / Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
making airplanes out of a piece of a newspaper -
I never liked Mozart and that's what threw me down on the ground
while the Vienna Boy's Choir sang:
“a jug goes to the water until it breaks
a jug goes to the water until it breaks”

God let that cup pass me by I thought there in the ambulance
let me live for a little bit longer at least for another 100 years
I don't want to die now that our time has come
I wanted my medals to shine like oil platforms
lighting up the night flights over the Atlantic
and my veteran's charisma to become electric
let my limousine slide through the crowd like Moby Dick
slid before the eyes of helpless captain Ahab
I never said I did not want to sell my soul
I was only negotiating the price
let me be invited at the presidential party
ther are so many dishes I never tasted
there are so many people on this Earth whose destiny
I never took in my hands

želim otimati i držati lekcije pokradenima
želim lagati i smijati se prevarenima
želim svoje mjesto u arci kako bih mogao
gledati poplavu s koktelom u ruci
jer bolje je podmetati požare nego biti spaljen
bolje je ponižavati nego biti ponižen
zato stavimo karte na stol – život je samo jedan
daj mi sto kurvi ljudožderki s Bornea
daj mi da se kupam u pročišćujućim vodama mladosti
daj mi snagu da zauvijek trajem poput nevidljivog
otrova u krvnim žilama ljudi
daj mi neke njihove dijelove kičme ruke oči mozgove srca bubrege
moje su ruke kipara žedne rada
osmjehnut ću vam se, zelena Hrvatska polja,
osmjehom žeteoca

a pred vratima bolnice mačke ruju po smeću
skovale su zavjeru da ukradu sav kisik planeta
željezni utori na fasadi su prazni
tu su 50 godina visjele tri zastave
jedna za proždrljivost druga za pohlepu
treća za kukavnost
umjesto njih digli smo našu zastavu od tri boje
crvenu za krv kristovu mineralnu
krv naših poginulih zaštićenu podzemnu krv koja kipi
bijelu za nadu da se borimo za bolju civilizaciju
plavu za drsku pustolovinu, prijateljstvo čvrsto poput
onih prekomorskih telegrafskih kablova na koje ponekad
naiđu ribari kada im mreže zalutaju dosta duboko
ali mačke su došle noću i izvele podli trik
crvena boja opet stoji za proždrljivost bijela
za pohlepu plava za kukavnost
zato prijatelji, jedno je izvjesno,
i na vratima drugog svijeta one su čuvari
te iste mačke, lukave mačke koje se ponekad
preoblače u političare, mačke koje i dalje
kopaju po smeću i kuju zavjeru da ukradu
kisik planeta

I want to rob and preach to the robbed ones
I want to lie and laugh at the deceived ones
I want my place in the Ark so I can
watch the flood with the cocktail glass in my hands
since it is better to set fires than to be burned
it's better to humiliate than to be humiliated
so let's lay all the cards on the table – we have but one life
give me a hundred cannibal whores from Borneo
let me recover myself in the purifying fountains of youth
give me power to last forever like the invisible poison
in the veins of all humans
give me parts of their spines hands eyes brains hearts kidneys
my hands are the hands of the sculptor thirsty for a work
– I'll smile at you, the green pastures of Croatia
with a smile of a harvester

in front of the hospital alley cats rummage through garbage
they have conspired to steal the oxygen of the entire planet
the iron holders on the facade are empty
fifty years ago three flags hung there
one for the gluttony another one for greed
and the third one for misery
instead of them we hoisted up our tricolor
the red is for the Christ's mineral blood
the blood of our dead the guardian subterranean blood boiling
the white is for hope that we are fighting for a better civilization
the blue one is for our blazen adventure, for friendship firm as those
overseas telegraph cables that fishermen sometimes find
when their nets get lost somewhere
really deep
but the cats came overnight and did their dirty trick
so the red stands for gluttony once again
the white for greed
and the blue for misery
so, dear friends, one thing is certain:
those very cats are the guardians of that other world as well
these cunning cats that sometimes transform into politicians
the cats that are still rummaging through garbage
conspiring to steal the oxygen
of the entire planet.

Apokrifi o Titu

Tito glođe svinjsku glavu na tavanu
jednim okom vrebala ulicu da ga roditelji ne uhvate
baš me briga / misli / pobjeći ću biciklom

Tito ilegalno u bečkom tramvaju
obukao je svoje najbolje sivo odijelo
misli: što sam ja gori od tih studenata?

Tito je Walter / John Smith / Fantomas / Caspar
Hauser / Howard Hughes / Tito je alias / alias je Tito
koliko imam imena / divi se Tito sam sebi

Tito jaši Romanijom
iza njega starina Nator posrće kroz snijeg
Vladimire Vladimire / misli Tito dobrohotno

Tito maše okupljenoj djeci iz Mercedes
crvene marame im vezane kao omčice oko vrata / i sunce
će se jednom ugasiti / misli Tito filozofski

Tito je elegantan u smrti
spisak neutješnih po abecednom redu:
akrobati u cirkusu / činovnici / djelatnici
Instituta za historiju radničkog pokreta /
engleska kraljica / filmski radnici / hipiji /
Ilich Ramirez Sanchez a.k.a. Carlos / krojači /
kubanska industrija cigara / lijepe žene /
ljudi koji nose brkove / medvjedi nosorozi lavovi /
nastavnici u osnovnim školama / nogometaši /
oficiri iz vatrogasnih domova / odlični učenici /
operni pjevači / povijesne ličnosti / predsjednici
ribičkih društava / prodavači kukuruza na radnom
mjestu broj. 7 / pankeri / rezervni milicioneri /
Sai Baba / šahisti / šefovi kućnih savjeta /
umirovljeni stariji vodnici / zeleni

Tito se pojavio u balonu iznad istočne Afrike
spušta dalekozor na krdo zebri

Tito Apocrypha

Tito gnaws a pig's head in the attic
eyeing the street in fear that his parents might catch him
I don't give a damn / he thinks / I'll escape on my bicycle

Tito riding a tram in Vienna under cover
wearing his best grey suit thinking:
why should I be any worse than those students?

Tito riding over Mt Romanija
followed by old Nator stumbling through the snow
Vladimir Vladimir / thinks Tito benevolently

Tito waving at the rows of kids from his Mercedes
red bandannas are tied around their necks like nooses / the Sun
will once grow dark / ponders Tito philosophically

Tito is elegant even in death
here are the mourners listed alphabetically:

bears rhinos lions / chess players
cineastes / circus acrobats / clerks
corn seller at work station no 7
Cuban cigar industry / employees of the Institute for the History
of the Working Class Movement / the English Queen
Greenpeace activists / heads of the tenant's councils
historic figures / hippies / honour students
Ilich Ramirez Sanchez a.k.a. "Carlos" / men with moustaches
officers from firemen's clubs / opera singers
presidents of fishermen's societies / pretty women
primary school teachers / punks / reserve policemen
retired warrant officers / Sai Baba
soccer players / tailors

Tito showed up again in a balloon above eastern Africa
pointing his binoculars at a herd of zebras

prugasti đavli / misli Tito / svi su isti

Tito kaže NE Staljinu a Staljin
njemu baš me briga / ko te jebe
umiješ li računati?
imam ih dvadesetjednu tisuću osamstopedesetšest
umravljenih u lišće Katynske šume / imam ih tristo tisuća
zakopanih krišom
imam ih deset milijuna likvidiranih likvidacijama
imam sve njihove papire / fotografije njihove djece / pisma puna
neopravdanog optimizma / njihove olovke / sitan novac
imam ih sve čitko provedene kroz knjige

≈

Veslo je prošlo kroz vodu u kovitu crnih ledenih iglica

Ušao sam u sobu i našao te kako spavaš
tako nepomična da mi se učinilo kao da si mrtva.
Da živimo i dvjesto godina uvijek bi ostalo stvari
koje nismo stigli reći jedno drugom.

those devils with stripes / thinks Tito to himself / they are all the same

Tito says NO to Stalin and Stalin
responds I don't care anymore / who gives a fuck
do you know how to calculate?
I have twenty one thousand eight hundred and fifty six of them
ground into the leaves of the Katyn forest / I have three hundred
thousand
secretly burried ones
I have ten million of those liquidated in liquidations
I have all of their IDs / the photographs of their children / the letters
filled with unwarranted optimism / their pencils / small change
I've got them all neatly placed on file

≈

An oar went through water in a whirl of black icy needles

I entered the room and found you asleep, so still
I thought you were dead.
There would still be things we could say to each other
Even if we lived two hundred years.

Postkolonijalna pjesma

Lavovi na trgu Trafalgar u Londonu,
u četvrti Montparnasse i svuda po Parizu,
na grobu kralja Richarda u katedrali u Rouenu,
u parku Tiergarten i otoku muzeja u Berlinu,
na Lančanom mostu Budimpešte; čuvaju ulaz
u kraljevsku palaču u Brüsselsu, drijemaju
u podnožju spomenika Kolumbu u Barceloni,
žongliraju na trgu markiza Pombala u Lisabonu.
Još davno su kamenim pogledima ispraćivali brodove
Istočno-indijske kompanije iz Amsterdama.
Ovdje ih ima više nego u Africi i Indiji.
Prijestolnice bivših europskih imperija
ne krasi ni dupini ni ptice, nego lavovi,
čija je snaga njihova samoća.

Kao dvanaestogodišnjak, klizao sam
jedne oštre zime zaleđenim jezerom
maksimirskog parka pokraj ZOO vrta.
Na jezeru nije bilo nikoga osim mene.
Ispod jednog od mostova osjetio sam
kod ulaza u nastambu prisustvo lava,
čija me rika zaustavila u mjestu.
I kada ti se čini da te vide, nisi u pravu,
lavovi zapravo gledaju ravno kroz tvoje kosti,
kroz zidove, rešetke i drveće, preko jezera
gdje sam klizao pa do rimskog koloseuma i dalje,
prostranstvima urezanim duboko u njihovu memoriju,
pogled im počiva u savanama Afrike prije kolonija.

Postcolonial poem

The lions at Trafalgar Square in London,
in quartier Montparnasse and all over Paris, lions
at the tomb of King Richard in the Rouen Cathedral,
the Tiergarten park and the Museum Island in Berlin.
They guard the Chain Bridge in Budapest, the entrance
to the Royal Palace of Brussels; slumber
at the foot of the Columbus monument in Barcelona,
daydream at the Marquise Pombala square in Lisbon.

Long ago their gaze of stone escorted the grand ships
of East India Company out of Port of Amsterdam.
We have more of them here than in Africa and India.
The capitals of the former European Empires
are not adorned with dolphins or birds, but lions,
whose strength is in their loneliness.

One harsh winter as a twelve-year-old
I went ice skating in park near our ZOO.
On the frozen lake no one but me.
Sliding under one of the bridges
I felt the presence of a lion.
Through the snow frosted trees
I could barely see the winter's den
but the lion's roar frightened me
and made me return to where I started.

But when it seems that they see you, you're wrong,
lions are actually looking straight through your bones,
through the walls, bars and trees, across the lake
where I skated and all the way over the Roman Colosseum
towards the wilderness carved deeply into their memory,
their gaze steadfastly rooted to the grasslands of Africa
before the colonies.

Vatre su došle i otišle

(bratu Vladimiru koji je kao dječak prekoceanskim brodom otplovio za Rio de Janeiro i nikada se više nije vratio . . .)

Povici i reski glasovi nestaju u tišini pepela izgorjelog drveća. Došla je kiša, ali zaborava niotkud. U zamasi, poput klatna, tupa svjetlost boli.

Vatre su došle i otišle.

Ali vratit će se, poput mora koje ne može zaboraviti svoje obale.

Ležao sam na balkonu u mreži za spavanje i drijemao. Negdje ulicom, prošao je kamion muklo odzvanjajući po rupama. Zazvučalo je kao da zazidane duše lupaju s druge strane.

Naglo sam otvorio oči.

Pokopali smo mog brata u Rio de Janeiru, na groblju Sao Bento. Nakon što sam položio kovčeg u rupu u zidu djelatnik groblja je u nekoliko vještih poteza špahtlom zacementirao pukotine. Pita sam ga pod kojim se brojem vodi ta gaveta. Nije mi odgovorio. Drugi je djelatnik prišao i kredom na ploči podebljao broj.

21, rekao je.

21, rekao sam svima ostalima iza sebe gledajući u oštra crna brda kišnih šuma i Lanca orgulja gdje pod konkavnim nebom megalopolisa dišu milijuni duša od kojih mnogi nemaju ni imena ni broja kao potvrde svog postojanja i osjetio trenutnu slabost u koljenima i pomislio ipak kako neka stabla, kada izgore, postaju hlad zemlje, nestaju u sjeni, no ima ih koji nakon što izgore ostaju s nama još dugo, jer njihova je ljubav za života obasjala cijeli beskrajni ponor kao žeravica koja se nikako ne daje ugasiti.

Fires came and went

(to brother Vladimir, who left Zagreb as a young boy on an ocean liner for Rio de Janeiro, and never returned home again . . .)

Shouts and harsh voices disappear in the silence of the ashes of the burnt trees.

There came the rain; but oblivion was nowhere to be found. In swings, like a pendulum, dull light of pain.

Fires came and went.

No doubt they will return, like the sea which cannot forget its shores. Surrounded by pine trees I was daydreaming in a hammock on my balcony. Somewhere a passing truck echoed hoarsely over the street holes. It sounded like souls were battering from the other side.

I open my eyes.

We have buried my older brother in Rio de Janeiro, in Sao Bento cemetery.

After I pushed the casket through the hole in the wall, the assistant cemented the cracks in a few skilful moves. I asked him the number of this vault. He did not reply. Another employee approached and outlined the number with white chalk.

21, he said.

21, I said to everybody else behind me and looked at the sharp black hills, the Tijuca rainforest and the Organ Mountains where under the concave sky of the megalopolis lie millions of souls, some with neither name nor number to confirm their existence, and felt a sudden weakness in my knees thinking how some trees, when they burn down, become a shade of the earth, disappear in the shadow. But some, after they burn down, stay with us forever, because the love they had in their lives stays as an ember which cannot ever be extinguished.

Leptir lotalica

Iza koraljnih grebena
pustog mora i prštećih svjetala
gdje povjetarac i ptica u zraku
navještaju željeno kopno
gdje vlada *scuba*
diving harmonija
gdje splavi od bambusa iz Vijetnama
prelaze ocean u potrazi za kruhom
i kada vide leptira pamte
zauvijek svaku njegovu poru
koja diše u navirućim bojama
jer to je znak da je blizu kopno
i da se neće utopiti ili
umrijeti od žeđi.

Tamo iza podmorja
okamenjene lave
leži Australija.

The wanderer butterfly

Beyond coral reefs
a deserted sea where a light
breeze and a bird in the sky
announce the longed-for land
of scuba diving harmony.

It is where Vietnamese bamboo rafts
cross the ocean in search of bread
and when they see a butterfly
they remember for ever
each of its pores
breathing in spouting colours
because that means the land is near
and they are not going to drown
or die of thirst.

There beyond the seabed
of petrified lava
lies Australia.

Očevi i sinovi

Prvi put nakon velikog broja godina
imam u ruci novčanicu od punih tisuću kuna,
s likom Ante Starčevića, zvanog i ocem domovine.
Držim je pri sebi samo na mah, jer već sam
na redu u banci gdje plaćam račune.
Onakav si kakva sam te zamišljao, oče,
tvoja brada prošarana mudrost, oči
duboke, znatiželjne, ali ne činiš se sretan
što gledaš u svog sina. Iznenađen jesi,
ali radostan nisi. To sam ja kakav jesam,
oče, tvoj je sin već ostario čekajući na red
da te upozna.



Fathers & sons

For the first time in my life I hold in my hand
the banknote of 1000 kunas with a portrait of Ante Starčević,
called the father of our homeland Croatia.

I am clinging to it just for a little while,
before I enter the bank to pay the bills.
You are just like I imagined you to be, father,
your beard streaked with wisdom, eyes deep, inquisitive,
but you don't seem to be looking at your son with joy.
Surprised you are, but not happy at all.

It is me as I am, father,
Your son has grown old waiting in line
to meet you.