



*A Too Powerful Word*

Issue 1, Volume 1, June 2021.

# *A Too Powerful Word*

Issue 1, Volume 1, June 2021.

Editor-in-chief: Danijela Trajković

Editorial Board:

Marlon Fick, prose section editor,

Mihajlo Sviderski, prose section editor,

Mircea Dan Duta, poetry section editor,

Nenad Trajković, poetry section editor,

Koushik Goswami, review section editor,

Marko Ignjatijević, art section editor,

Carl Scharwath, art section editor,

Milutin Obradović, art section editor.

Special thanks to:

Mircea Dan Duta, a great friend of mine,

Nenad Trajković, best brother ever, and,

Aleksandar Popović, my love.



On the cover *A Noble Vine* by Marko Ignjatijević

Contents:

Natalie Nera – *Ice Cream and Apostles*

Bengt Bert – *Nordic Light*

Sándor Halmosi – *Manifesto for Pure Literature*

Đorđe Despić – *Nettle*

Nixon Mateulah – *The Bitches of Blantyre*

Nicoleta Crăete – *2020 Birds*

Nikola Yozgof Orbach – *Moatasem*

Dragan Đorđević - *Cockroaches, Merima, Jora, Old Dad, Old Mum and Nikola from „General Janković“*

Maximilian Heinegg – *At the Baths*

Shakira Parvin - *Peddler of White Dreams*

Alberto Palomo Villanueva – *Silen*

Okolo Chinua – *White is The Colour Of Innocence*

Timothy Adès – *In a Ruined Abbey*

Romeo Aurelian Ilie - *41*

Mina Decu - *Forty-one. Me, the Deaf-Mute, A Possible Understanding of a Poetry Collection*

Richard Spisak - *Linda Snake Stomper*

Aaron D. Graham - *The Alpha and the Amiga*

Rebecca Gethin – *Sperm Whale Factory*

About the authors

**Natalie Nera**

*Ice Cream and Apostles*

I find myself with my face stuck to where a door handle should be. There is nothing there, just a plaster, like it was a sore thumb. There are many things missing.

I wish there were seatbelts here. I roll again. My Dad argues with the driver. I recognise the golden roof of the National Theatre on the river bank, now covered in the first frost. I sense we are close to our destination. The Skoda MB's brakes screech as our vehicle goes into a sudden halt. I bang my head but I don't want to make any noise. I don't like crying in front of a stranger.

The grey buildings squeeze the street from both sides as if they wanted to fall on our heads and crush us. The same sign on every door: PUBLIC SECURITY.

The scent of nicotine makes me feel sick. It is in my hair and clothes. The driver lights up another cigarette. The smoke reminds me of my Grandma. She smokes Sparta, three packets a day, named like the football team. The ashtray between the two front seats overflows with cigarette butts, the dust falling off on both sides and soiling my father's suit trousers, the deep navy colour dotted with galaxies of burnt out sparks. The driver rolls down his window, letting in the mist from the outside. He tips the ashes on the street.

I button up my duffle coat, its baby blue smeared with the dirt from the taxi. Dad throws several green bank notes in the face of the man and slams the door. I follow him, ploughing through the smog that lingers on the cobbles.

I love November. *I'm eleven in six days. I have to be patient. I can't wait to be older, to be closer to becoming a grown-up.* But then, it feels ages away. My eleventh birthday in 1982, or the day I will be an adult. Perhaps I will never grow up. Maybe we will all die in a nuclear war, as our class teacher keeps reminding us every day

The taxi hiccups, leaps, then nearly pushes us over before disappearing around the corner.

I stumble backwards and twist my ankle. I have to hobble onto the pavement, trying to prevent any sound leaving my lips by biting them. I sigh. Dad looks at me: "Best behaviour."

I nod in agreement.

We ring the bell on an unmarked door. My father's nail accidentally runs on the metal. I shiver. The key rattles in the lock. The man who appears in the doorway wears a uniform, made from a thick canvas. It reminds me of army tents we tested at school during our military exercises two weeks ago. Grandma calls this kind of colour "goose shit" green. Letters *VB* shine against it.

"Good day, Comrade Officer,...," and before Dad can finish his sentence, the man grabs a red booklet, my Dad is holding in his hand. I know it is called a "Citizen's Identity Pass". He says nothing and disappears behind the door.

The pain in my ankle has almost gone but I feel cold. I play hopscotch on the pavement, although without chalk I have to imagine the squares and rectangles. I am bored. We wait for what feels like years to me. I pretend Grandma is held behind the fortress gate in the castle of an evil warlock. We are going to rescue her, after overcoming the goblin who guards the entrance. I smile so my Dad does not see. He does not like my pretend games. He says that imagination is dangerous. But at the moment, he does not pay any attention to me, leaning with his back against the wall with

many cracks, his legs crossed, his hands shaking. He reaches for his pocket and takes out one Sparta. I am not going to tell Mum that he has started smoking again.

After two-hundred and twenty hop scotch jumps, Grandma appears in the rusty doorway. Her hair sticks out in every direction; the blouse is torn and missing three out of five buttons. She is accompanied by a man in a suit. He smiles when he sees me:

“Yet another parent who thinks they can use their child as a human shield. Doctor Novák, we would have taken you in if we had wanted to.”

Dad stares at him for a moment, then his raspy voice cuts through: “Comrade, you didn’t think it was necessary to inform us for three days that you are holding my mother?”

The officer laughs.

“No harm done, Doctor Novák. We haven’t told you because your mother is a seditious element.”

“She is a pensioner!”

“That’s right, Officer, that regime of yours can’t be too strong, if you think I, a senior citizen, can single-handedly undermine it.”

At Grandma’s words, the officer laughs out. “You live with your mother, Doctor Novák? Good luck!”

We stare at his back as he disappears behind the metal door. Dad lights up two cigarettes, then passes one to Grandma. They smoke in silence. I would like to speak. I would like to tell them that I believe the officer. I think Grandma can be scary.

As we set out on our journey home, the grown-ups walk before me and talk in whispers. Dad says we will hear from them again and wants to know why Grandma has been detained. Her answer drowns in the clatter, stamps of heels, Grandma’s walking stick hitting the cobbles, roars of the trams and passing cars, and humming of the people’s conversations. We approach The National Boulevard. The voices of Dad and Grandma are low but I recognise the tone.

They continue their quiet argument, this time about whether to take a taxi. Dad insists on the tram. He says he has no money left because he was ‘robbed by the taxi driver’ on the way in. Grandma says she does not care, she is exhausted and wants to get home as soon as possible. I can see Number 22 arrive in the stop. The adults keep raising their voices.

They cease their exchange only when they notice a man in a cap approaching:

“Comrade, I think we went to school together.”

“I’m sorry, Comrade, I don’t remember.” Dad looks away and is about to walk towards the tram.

But the man knows my Dad’s name and says his, Pepa Málek. They used to sit next to each other at school. He is a taxi driver, and offers us a ride for free. Dad shakes his head but before he can say anything, Grandma opens the door of the car, standing next to the tracks, and climbs into the passenger seat. It does not take long before we are home. Dad is frowning and smoking his third cigarette. Grandma is happy: “Cheer up, son, it was nice of your friend. He is only a taxi driver.”

“That’s what he says,” mumbles Dad, but I can hear him.

I wake up to a new week and ask Mum to make pancakes. To my surprise, she obliges although Monday is not a special day. I eat them smothered with the strawberry jam we made in the summer. When I close my eyes, I can taste the juice of the fresh fruit on my tongue when I picked them in June.

The scent of my Mum's cooking pervades every corner of our apartment, seeps through thin walls of the block of flats. Grandma says it will make our neighbours jealous because they will think we have a reason to celebrate. She clutches an empty mug in her fingers, her skin taut over bony joints. Its pallor makes her spots and wrinkles more visible, her hands look like pieces of tissue paper. She is looking for something to drink, aware that all our eyes are on her. I sip hot milk and try my best to be invisible.

Dad disappears into the hallway to make a telephone call to the hospital where he works. I move my chair as close as possible. As soon as he picks up the receiver I hear clicking. He does not bother dialling the number and instead shouts:

“Happy to hear how you fucked up our lives, you bastards?”

He does not replace the phone but instead slams it so hard that a piece of Bakelite chips off and flies across the floor. He storms out of the house without his breakfast, leaving his keys on the table.

Mum mutters “Not again,” although I am not sure if she means the forgotten keys or the fact that Dad has gone out without his coat in November.

That evening I sit at the kitchen table, writing my homework. My teacher says that my handwriting is not very neat. As a girl, I should do better. I like maths, even though my friends at school say it is wrong. Maths is for boys. I feel befuddled. I am always confused these days.

The soup on the stove bubbles away. The room is filled with a scent of marjoram and garlic. The radio is playing music I don't like but Mum hums the tune while chopping the carrots. The announcer says that Comrade Brezhnev has died. I know Comrade Brezhnev is Russian. Our class teacher says that the Russians are best friends of Czechoslovakia. That is why the radio speaker tells us we should all be sad.

Mum begins to slice the carrots like other people chop fire logs. Her apron gets covered with more and more orange chips as she executes the vegetables. Then she screams: “At last! The old swine!”

I stare at her. I say nothing. The pencil I have been holding in my hand is in two pieces.

Mum holds the knife. Chop. Cut. Stab. Chop. She bursts into tears.

At school, we are encouraged to read newspapers and talk about it before our classes commence. This morning, our teacher invites us to speak about the death of Comrade Brezhnev. Confident about my answer, I raise my hand.

“My mother says that Brezhnev is an old swine,” I say.

“Mine too!” shouts someone behind me.

“My Dad called him a bastard and a son of a bitch!”

All of a sudden, the whole class, forty of us, shout out at our teacher. Droplets of sweat run down her face. She bangs the ruler against the desk:

“Quiet! Order in the classroom! I can see you all discussed the sad news of the departure of Comrade Brezhnev at home. Now, let's learn some Czech language.”

We talk about why there are words, called expletives that we should never use even if we accidentally hear them from other people, including our parents. We make lists of words like ‘fuck’, ‘shit’ and ‘bollocks’ and discuss how we can replace them with nicer expressions. By the end of the lesson, there are more than eighty bad words in our exercise books.

I am desperate to tell my friends at school about what has happened this past weekend. I bet they would be impressed about my Grandma's vanishing. My parents don't really like me talking to other kids because many other parents are members of the Party. But now Mum has banned me from telling anyone anything. Today's classes seem more boring than usual. I need some answers. I need to talk to the one person who has always been straight with me, my Grandma.

When we are about to go home, the teacher calls me to her desk and gives me a note for my parents. I stand close to her. Until now, I have never noticed she has so many wrinkles on her forehead. Her eyes are pink and swollen.

I unlock the door of our apartment. I am scared about what the note might say, that I am in trouble. I try so hard but with this note, I am no longer a good girl. My eyes search the floor of our hallway, identifying every speck of dirt, every grain of dust Mum forgot to remove with her *Bistol*. Everybody has a bottle of it at home to make their linoleum shine.

Grandma sits in the armchair, holding today's copy of *The Red Right* in her hands. Her hair sits once again in a helmet of tight curls. She glances at me. At once I know she knows. I confess to her about the note.

She suggests we play a spy game. She uses a candle to open the envelope. Then she takes out the paper and lets me read it. After, she puts it back in and sticks the edges with *Herkules* glue. She asks me what was inside.

"It said that I was very good. I have improved and even my handwriting is much better." Grandma is proud. I did not know I could lie so well.

My turn to ask questions. I want to know about those three days at the Police station.

"Never mind, they made a mistake," she brushes me off.

But she also hugs me. My Grandma and I are alike.

Later that evening, when Mum reads the lines from my teacher, I know exactly what they are:

*"Please could you explain to your daughter that she is not to repeat what she hears at home elsewhere? Many thanks. Alternatively, please do not discuss any sensitive matters in front of her.*

*With Comrade Greetings, Marie Procházková, Year 5 teacher"*

I am worried but my mum calls me "sweetie" again. She gives me a hug and tells me that I am her girl, that I have not done anything wrong.

"I am sorry, sweetie. We failed you. We assumed that because you did not say anything, you could not hear us. We were mistaken. "

Mum bursts into tears. When she stops, she tells me about a lot of things. I also get extra chocolate. She repeats what the class teacher wrote to her: I am not to repeat anything I hear at home, in public. Not at school, to my friends, in the Pioneers, anywhere. Mum adds that if I do, she and Dad could end up in Public Security detention, not for three days like Grandma, but for a very long time. I would be sent to a children's home. I don't like this adventure any more.

Later at night I cry so my mother does not see. I don't want to upset her.

The bell rings. I run to the door, open it, wondering who it might be. *Visitors on Thursday afternoon?*



I stare at a woman in an apron with flowers. She leans on her crutches. Her ankles are swollen and red, her toes turned and twisted. I try not to look at those feet. I hope she does not spot me averting my eyes. It is not her fault that I don't like them.

"Good day, Mrs. Slabá." I am brought up well, she can see that. She asks after my Grandma.

I lead her to the living room. Mrs Slabá limps behind me. Grandma's newspaper crackles and her eyes look over the top rim of the glasses.

"Hello, Marta, studying your enemy?" our guest speaks.

Grandma scrunches the corners of her papers but says nothing.

I go to the kitchen to make some coffee. I can hear shards of conversation through the clatter I make.

"*Sorry... past....*"

The kettle bubbles on the stove, gas hisses like an angry adder.

"*...gone by...choice...no choice...*"

My father killed an adder in the summer when I accidentally stepped on it during our walk in the woods. The steam makes a whistling noise. I cover coffee grains with water.

"*...mistake...my son....apology...*"

I am good at making Turkish coffee, Czech style. Then I arrange sugar cubes on the saucer and some biscuits on a tray. The two women stop talking as soon as I enter.

I retire to my room to read our compulsory book *Robinsonka*, about a girl whose mother dies in childbirth. The heroine's shopping trip to the corner store two-hundred yards away is described over thirty pages. By the end of it I want to die myself. What kind of fourteen-year old does not know how to buy a loaf of bread or make porridge? I am nearly eleven and I know how to do all this. I give up after five minutes and read one of my favourite stories, *Alice from Planet Earth* by Kir Bulytchev.

Steps, tapping of crutches and a walking stick, no good-byes. Knock on the door.

"Can I talk to you, sweetie?" asks Grandma.

I nod.

"Can you please NEVER let Mrs. Slabá in here? She is no friend of ours."

I don't know what to say, apart from '*Sorry, Grandma, I had no idea.*'

Grandma sits on my bed, where I am lying with a book. I rise up as she continues:

"Mrs. Slabá and I used to go to school when we were your age. We were never close friends but now... She is the reason I was taken in by the Secret Police."

"But why?"

She tells me that this is the first and last time we are going to talk about this. Mrs Slabá's job is an informer. Her son does not have the grades but, because of what she does, will be allowed to study at the university. Grandma tells me that our neighbour has to write down everything other people say and do. From now on, there will be a file on my coffee making skills. I know this is a joke because Grandma is smiling.

Besides, there is a file with my name already. My teacher opened it for me when I started school. We had to write down the jobs we wanted to do when we grow up. I remember putting down next to the big word ASPIRATIONS, '*I want to be a wood nymph.*' My mother was asked to come to school to discuss it and given a referral to take me to the child psychologist. We missed our appointment.

This Saturday is special; today is my birthday. Grandma is taking me for ice cream in the Wenceslas Square. We are to stop at every ice cream window, starting with pistachio at the top

and finishing with the expensive vanilla dipped in hot chocolate sauce and chopped nuts. We conclude our trip in the Old Town Square by watching the Apostles appearing in the Astronomical Clock. I am really excited. We have done this every year as long as I can remember. Dad laughs and says I am never going to eat all that ice cream. Who eats ice cream in November? We are going to do it anyway.

Grandma dresses up for the occasion. Her coat smells of mothballs but when she drapes a scarf around her neck, she looks nice. The scarf is the colours of the summer sun. I touch it, its smoothness and the label reminds me that this is a foreign sun shining in my face. Made in the People's Republic of China.

We are about to step out of the door when Grandma says: "Wait a sec!"

She disappears inside her room. I can hear rummaging and rustling. When she emerges, she beams and winks.

"Now, I'm ready." She sports an enormous bag. Its darkness, the mismatched embroidery of silver bears, does not go with the rest of her outfit. I embrace her with my smile.

Grandma jumps, and laughs and even attempts to run, supported by her walking stick. I slide alongside her. The pavements are covered in ice, with no sand.

We sit on the bench on the Kampa Island near the Vltava river. I can smell Christmas in the frozen air. I ask Grandma what absurd means.

"It means this country. You live in it. Absurdistan." She opens the large bag and takes out a purse. "Come on, let's go." She gets up and sets off. I point out that she has left the large bag on the bench. She smiles at me.

"I left a play called *Audience* in it. Mr. Vaněk is picking it up shortly."

I run after my Grandma who is walking ahead. There are so many things I don't know. I can suddenly see her hair when we picked her up last Sunday; her missing buttons, the thin mouth where her smile should be. My face is close to her scarf. I grab her hand as we turn the corner.



*Beautiful Woman* by Carl Scharwath

## **Bengt Berg**

### *Nordic Light*

What shall we say about the light?

The cat sees in the dark

without a flashlight, the glow-worm  
can be seen, without neon  
We climb out of the darkness into the light  
as in the beautiful old song  
That Nordic light  
that we wander in and out of,  
that soft gloomy darkness  
provided by mossy pine forests,  
those glimmering glades  
among groves of birches — all this  
with its light and darkness  
has coloured our senses

What more can we say about the light  
that grows from within, that is created,  
that is believed?

And deep down in the darkness  
at the bottom of a glacial lake  
a Triglopsis Quadricornis noses around  
searching for its utopia  
among stones and silt

In the rain's high pine  
a blackbird is perched,  
charges by the batteries of July light  
while we others, we  
decenders of shoe-wearing creatures  
wander pine forest paths

back and forth

while we wonder:

What should we say about the light?

An open question, the light

stands free, like a glistening

rain-wet scarecrow

out in the newly harvested

fields of oats



Photo by Bengt Berg

### *A New Year*

A New Year seldom comes alone,  
in tow it hangs all days-of-the-year  
like sea-shells threaded  
on a string of wind, filled by  
forgotten sailors' songs.

A New Year is date-stamped, and comes  
with the seal of growth-rings; after some months  
you can buy the recently new calendar  
for half-price.

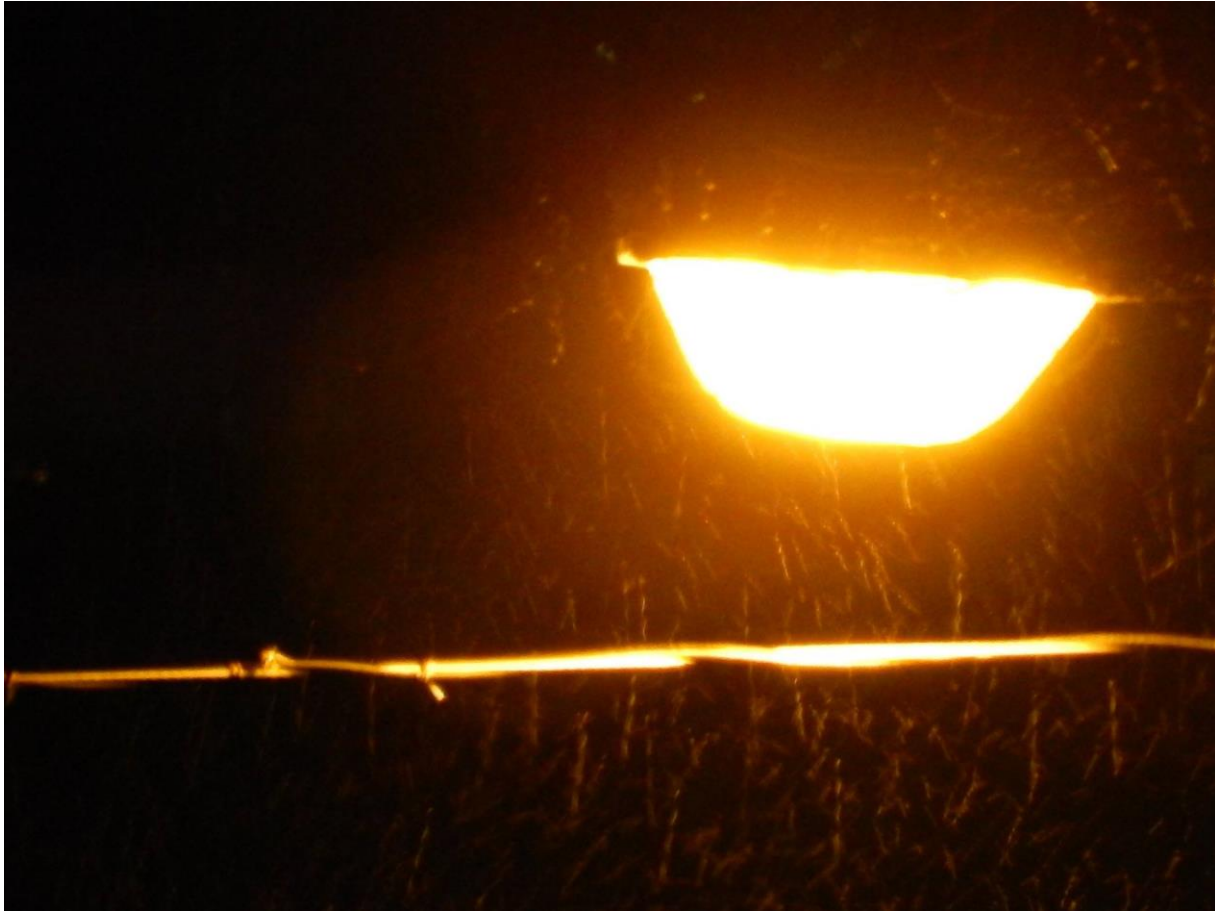
A New Year provide us with a blind-fold  
just because we will get appeased with the shower of sparks  
from the New Year rockets which try to exceed  
the Karla carriage, while clinking from champagne glasses —  
more and more sounds like somebody's way home  
over night-old ice.

A New Year makes us grown up once again,  
just like Christmas transformed us like children  
— once again. (The difference is that the child can see  
how its longing becomes his fulfillment, while  
we grown-ups ensure that the living  
candles do not burn to the end).

A New Year gives us hope that —  
what we didn't want to happen — will not happen,  
that the mornings of the New Year should be as shining  
as the olives before disappearing  
in the Quattro Stagione oven.

A New Year is something that we already know a lot of —  
like unexpected smiles that will meet you  
in the street freely, like idiotic [drivers] overtaking at will,  
like Spring Equinox,  
like summer flowers,  
like it is time for changing to studded snow-tyres.

A New Year to enter, just to be met  
by the perenial current question:  
what prevents you from happiness?



*Light* by Richard Burchette

### *Simplicity*

1

It is summer still  
and the wind touches  
the lady-bug on my hand  
It is mid-evening  
I'm sitting quite simply

on the porch

2

It's finally August:

No-one thinks of the dull ice

which, too, is

on its way —

And no one knows

why the wind sounds

the way it does

And it isn't even necessary,

it isn't needed

But the grass is needed

and the rain, the damned

rain, is needed

The slow worms are needed

for the soil

and us

3

The wind is there

and knows what it wants

to do with this evening

which simultaneously resembles

a twig of lilac

and a sheepdog's nose

4

To borrow someone with the eyes



without knowing

Because behind the dark  
darkness awaits

The grass has reached  
its ultimate greenness

The waves shout their names,  
the little answer  
to the childishly big question

5

There are moments  
when thoughts grope  
like blind porcupines  
over the stones  
accustomed to waiting  
in the mid-evening

I'm sitting  
quite simply  
on the porch

*Translated by Sudeep Sen*

## Halmosi Sándor

### ***ORA ET LABORA***

***The poet is naked (screening attempt)***

### ***MANIFESTO FOR PURE LITERATURE***

Because not only the king but also the poet is naked. Either by not wanting to hide and nowhere to go, or by just wanting to hide, not to show his true face, and maybe even lost it.

One of them has the same life and work, he himself is an open book and he lies there on the operating table, everyone can rummage in it, he cannot and does not want to escape.

There is nowhere and there are no loopholes. He wants to raise and enrich the world. He often falls into poverty.

He speaks little.

He knows he could be wrong. Free.

He is thin and only gets thinner over time. Translucent. Light-scroller.

The other's life and work are completely independent of each other, all the while searching for loopholes, obsessed with parrying, positioning. Elbows, treads. Wades. He's not telling the truth.

He wants to get rich here and now.

He keeps talking, bustling. Poses.

Skulks around. He thinks he is unerring.

He gets stuck into the mud. Lightproof.

Because there are those who work and those who are perfectly positioned.

Or as Szabó Magda puts it: some sweep, and some make others sweep.

Between these two main haplotypes, we are all writhing, contemporary poets.

But we can choose and keep choosing one of them. We have our say. And that say, no matter how difficult, we must have.

Because "*We have to see: / If they ask, they have to answer honestly. / The fight must be / honestly / taken up, / the road must be honestly / walked, / the role must be / honestly / played, / hard and regardless.*" professes Jenő Dsida, the poeta sacer, in his poem 'Regardless'.

And he adds, "Christ and Pilate cannot be served equally."

Literary public life is loud from many things, only the most important is rarely discussed, literature and quality. About the soul. On authenticity, on the poetic position, on the responsibility of scribes. About what we do. About the kind of life from which poetry is born that lifts the soul and provides a grip even in the most difficult times. What can tell together a world that has disintegrated day by day and can rethink it every day. What words to say and what not to say. How not to constantly poison the well, the source. Because the spoken word has power. Its creative and harmful power.

And a hundred times, and a thousand times woe, if the poet does not put his life on the former. If anyone, then he needs to know that demons have power over us only until we name them and see through them. Then they disappear by themselves. Even our own daimons, which are the toughest.

*Tell the truth, not just the real thing.* Because the true word initiates, heals. And the poet, if he is a psychopomp, cannot do anything else. You can't lie in the work anyway.

This literary public discourse, destined for the better, more beautiful, nobler, more elevated, is dominated mainly by ordinary speech, institutional speech, life abuse and two-sided disgust, ditch picnics, lowly temper and gestures, boring panels, characterless character assassinations, lack of silence, expectations, the discrimination, daily politicizing, or something they think is, pointing at each other or the other, shifting responsibility, the less often we run into an honest word, a soul-raising thought, synthesis speech, self-examination, goodsilence, real performance. Until that ratio is reversed, we should grow quiet with becoming modesty, to come to our senses, and to sweep at our own door, and to work, and to work, and to sweep. Lot. Like Stanislavsky and his company, before each performance.

Numerous classic and contemporary examples show that it is possible to create, to put authentic oeuvres on the table even without continuous state support, scholarships, awards, or even in their complete absence. Harder, but it can be. And you can fall with your support, too. Get out of the outer and inner screen. Don't get me wrong, I'm not speaking for or against moral and financial support. Indeed! They can also be good, sensible, just, deserved, well-earned, helping the work and the creator. There are many classic and contemporary examples of this as well. I'm talking about us. About the fact that the poet has one most important thing: to preserve his faith, his authenticity, his vulnerability through his bareness. A healthy distance from the pathos. Joy of life, humour. To overcome his horror above the depths, his constant comfort zone outside. To keep the silence to himself, he hears the spaces, even when sobbing inside. To be vigilant, to recognize and separate the good from the bad, the dark from the light, the important from the less important. The spiritual in the material. *Diacrisis pneumaton*. If, in the meantime, you keep expecting and pointing and waving and measuring [by double standards], you can easily lose your balance and crash.

And although the saying holds that only the dead poet is the good poet, let us disprove that. As long as we live, let us work. Let us create value. Let us be vigilant, let us be present. Let us look at ourselves. Let us bow our heads sometimes, let us be aware of our own and common things. Let us talk more to each other, let us be a spiritual workshop. Take the phalanx seriously while we build it, laugh it out when we don't. Let us rejoice in the work of our hands, let us step out of ourselves, and let us be extended in someone else. Let us destroy our stacked towers against each other, eat an apple every day. If there is silence, its peace, if there is speech, is liberated, not measured by words, knowing while the other will disarm if we are serious anyway, and he will defend you because he is skillful, because he respects you, because he trusts you. There is something behind everything, even behind the pain, only behind the destruction. It is not enough to survive, but to live. Proudly, beautifully, serenely. Relationships can be restored, we can be forgiven for ourselves and others, people can be sought and called, we must rejoice in cloudless joy, we must show the way in disintegration. And work and not to be ruined.

*Don't ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for it.*

Just as the poet is the conscience of society, so the editor-poet, the curator-poet, the head of the institution-poet, the poet-poet [the poet who personifies the unity of the world in one person] is the conscience of literature. If you do your job well, if you serve, *order and peace will come [Lao-ce-Weöres: Tao Te King]*, if you don't, everything will be covered in swamp, mud, bog stench. Then the fabric of society will disintegrate, its morals will be distorted, its immune system will be weakened, the first breeze will overthrow it. If there's a problem, it didn't just start. It has been going on for decades, but it may be a century. Completely independent of the current course. Moreover, regardless of the general course. The literary old-boy network is an ancient, under-course, inner world. You could say it's *cursive*. Bowing, slavish, peddling, bossy, high-minded, putting you on hold in the anteroom. If there are two sides in this country, then those two sides are definitely. On the one hand, the writer who abuses his power and putting you on hold in the anteroom, on the other, the writer who flatters, bows. Begs. Entreats. Who is a coward and an opportunist. It was as if centuries had passed without a trace. The all-round author who abuses his power and many positions to arrange and extort awards to himself, the editor who doesn't respond to authors' letters, the publisher who runs only the same few authors while advertising himself, both inward and outward, that he is the editor of the literature, the blinkered reviewer of the well-known, specifically representative selections of poetry, who does not take the really great effort to comb through not only a few pages, but the entire publication space, including works published only in volume, the curator, the all-encompassing decision-maker who always has the interests of himself and a narrow circle in mind, even if the tender does not tie his hand and could work from a larger immersion, the store chains and distributors who distribute the works they are meant to connect with readers, but often they are the ones who isolate them, who does not promote synthesis, meaningful convergence, dialogues, the selflessness of quality and the widest possible expansion.

Yet there are heads of institutions, editors, curators, laureates, small and large publishers, distributors, writers, *poets in innocence*, who have put their lives on literature, do their work with great dedication, selflessness and humility, manage their papers and publishers well, with public funds, if they get, steward well, but if they don't, they persevere to the very end, many of whom have civilian occupations, raise children in the evenings, write at night, who are able to maintain their integrity even in the most difficult personal and community crises, live, create, work without compromise, often day by day. They are building a country image. They do hard, persistent, thorough work. You can always count on them. I believe there are more of them. I believe they are literature. In which only one aspect prevails: the literary. And the quality. Where joy reigns, not suspicion.

If we do not destroy more than we build, if we can make the world a hair's breadth better, we will no longer live in vain.

And just as monasticism played a key role in the creation of the world ethos, so the poetic monk of today cannot run away from the gigantic task of rebuilding this battered ethos, which has been partially destroyed by poets and scribes. Responsible. *With his dawned intelligence*.  
Da capo al fine.

The way we treat each other is our homeland.

To work and pray. Not in words, but in deeds.  
Let our lives be prayer and not the other way around.  
And when all the ropes are torn,  
the poem and the silence be with us.

*For the gods  
Often fall asleep  
And the bright-eyed  
All get stuck  
That's when you hug  
You tear flowers  
You joy  
Instead of them  
You bring damnation  
And if you weren't  
The world would hang  
Unredeemed*

*5th February 2020*

*Translated by József Mészáros*

### ***I DO NOT SAY***

*(Nem mondom)*

I'm not saying I don't ask for it, because I do.  
I'm not saying I don't wait for it, because I do.  
But there are too many fights already in the world.  
And by the time it comes, the soul will have been  
worn out of the fabric.

## ***THAT FRAME***

*(Az a váz)*

I'm also thinking about that frame,  
for days and about the bone white one.  
And about the many replicas we live in, which  
are black and white, too. Daguerreotype grey.  
That rusty greenish brown. Like in old military  
maps the soulless landscape. Like the shabby  
still magnificent wall of decay in the factory in  
Salgótarján. Like Otto's drawings in the south  
at Palics. As the Neretva spreads out in the delta,  
after passing by the cliffs, the Sufi monastery,  
the Mostar bridge and the proximity of Medugorje,  
surrendering itself and flowing into the blue,  
which doesn't exist.

## ***NERETVA***

*(Neretva)*

I'd say something nice just you aren't so cold.  
Something to shiver down to your sore knees.  
Yet because of the stumbling stones of the world,  
the torn flowers, and my awkwardness I prefer  
to stay silent. Again. Grandma neither talks  
anymore nor forces you constantly into  
a nicely-ruffled bridal dress. You are looking

for love, I'm just after the big metaphor.  
Just not to be obliged to say it.  
Just always to say the same thing.

### ***AFTER SO MANY YEARS***

*(Annyi év után)*

After so many years, many years come.  
And so much fasting due to so much feasting.  
The haystack pricks from the inside.  
It's late. And it will always be late.  
There is no point in chasing the soul chariot.

### ***THIS SPACE***

*(Ezt a teret)*

I've been looking for this space for a while.  
This Dalmatian lane, here on the urban slopes  
of Pilis. Dogs don't bite here, not even  
at a horse kick before midnight.  
Carved stones, cobblestones, well curbs,  
milkweed, feeble sounds, desolation, moss.  
It is all emotion. Trace of life-loving people.  
You are here, somewhere in the world.

Rather there. The paradox of proximity.

***MILGRAM***

*(Milgram)*

You just can't sit still.

You keep raising the stakes and you fail.

They stigmatize you.

Though you could also be the subject  
of the greatest self-restraint of their lives.

Fusion power plant of this hungry world.

*Translated by Márta Gyermán-Tóth and Anikó Szelle*





*Hilandar* by Dragan Tasić

## **Dorđe Despić**

### *Nettle*

This very rainy day  
that goes slowly  
and turns the late afternoon  
into some fine hearing  
all in the murmur of water  
in the nuances of melancholy  
and remembering

you have your  
nettle tea  
the nettle you met  
painfully

with your whole half-naked body  
during a clumsy fall  
when were a little boy  
and it met back your shriek and cry  
hidden carefully for a long time  
and buried  
deep under the surface  
of soft skin  
that its thin needles  
touch for the first time  
you empty your cup  
on which walls are  
funny maxims about  
men  
your fingers still have  
the scent of lemon peel  
that will soon disappear  
only will stay the hearing  
of drops that flow down  
the gutter  
and cheeks

and the taste of childhood  
tingling under the palate

### ***Remembering***

Like in a children's game  
you carefully lift your shoes  
and try the intimacy  
of this loam  
wet with the rain  
under the cold January sky  
it sticks down  
to you  
it sticks you to the ground  
you lift your shoes  
listening to its champ  
and you measure its power  
to keep you  
sucks you in  
somewhere very deep

perhaps in your remembering  
of your first child's standing  
beside a grave  
remembering of the sorrow around you  
of seriousness and black  
silence and rain  
the same like this one  
and the mud on your shoes  
that tears haven't washed yet

*Translated by Danijela Trajković*



*Adoration* by **Roel Sauviller**

**Nixon Mateulah**

*The Bitches of Blantyre*

“This time around I won’t go to Mustapha’s house. Last week I met a real man at the Church Square, in Pretoria,” said Christina smugly.

“What you mean by a real man?”

Christina, Thoko and their new friend, Amina, were sitting on the three-seater just behind the seat from the emergency window.

“What you mean by a real man, girl?” repeated Thoko.

“A man with cash!” said Christina impetuously, irrespective of inquisitive glances from the passengers who had turned their eyes to her in their collective denunciation.

“Have you dumped Mustapha now?”

“Why not? Mustapha is just an ordinary dressmaker, and drives an old battered Mazda 323. I have found a real man now.”

Abruptly, the bus resounded with catcalls, whistles, booing and an agony of windows being pummeled to a musical tune.

“Stupid men!” cried Christina as she got up and turned her eyes to the back seat.

The men abruptly stopped the cacophony of mind-bending pummelling of the windows and got up.

Thoko too got up in defence of her friend and started to hurl stones of admonition at them.

“All of you guys are stupid! You have left your wives behind for other men to gobble them up! You are going to South Africa to look for work — I bet you, only a handful of you would return home alive — some of you would die there, your wives and children would never see your tomb!” blurted out Thoko, shooting out her tongue and curling it down her lip, her eyes hollow in a caricature of mockery.

“Sit down you damn ass!” roared, a burly muscular man, a cobra’s head tattooed on the side of his right biceps. He was chewing Chappies bubble gum and looked like a typical he-goat enjoying a tender shrub. He got up, bounded down the aisle and confronted Thoko.

“You’re a stupid man!” snapped Christina, “look at you, at your age, fighting with a woman!”

“Shut up woman!” cried the man, brandishing his clenched fist whose fingers adorned cheap silver rings which wheezed in the air as he quickly swung it up and down to scare the women. “Hit her!” growled Thoko, “and see what will happen to you in South Africa!”

“I don’t care whether you have skolies in South Africa! I can maul your face and nose like a hyena and you couldn’t like yourselves anymore!”

“Go ahead!” thundered Christina balefully as she walked to the man, brandishing an empty bottle of Castle Lager. “Hit her!” hollered Thoko brandishing a knife. Then the other bus driver who was retiring on the back seat got up and stopped the scuffle. The fighters returned to their seats and silence reigned for a while.

Christina was slightly plump and blessed with a youthful face that had defied her real age. She was in her early thirties but could pass on for a twenty-year-old girl and with her constant use of skin lighteners, she looked absolutely beautiful. She wore a blonde wig that matched her light face and many people had mistaken her for a coloured woman, she preferred it that way. And in South Africa she had named herself Christina Gaffer and not her husband’s name Nthungululu. Her friend Thoko was a bit dark, tall and curvaceous. She looked sexy in her tight jeans and long dreadlocks that cascaded down her waist. She was a black beauty with such an infectious smile that whenever she smiled her cheeks moved up almost closing in on her eyes and many men found her so endearing and luscious — was in her late twenties. Amina who was sitting by the window was stout and possessed an elegant figure that was disguised in her black hijab. She had a round forehead, sparkling brown eyes and dimples that enhanced her facial excellence — and was also in her late twenties.

The bus was presently speeding towards the town of Tete, shops that lined up on either side of the road appeared like they were in a race speeding in the opposite direction as the bus rumbled away. After a while, Christina and Thoko resumed their conversation.

“What were we talking about?”

“You’re talking of the new man in your life.”

“Oooh, Welemu — he got money and he drives a black E90 BMW 320d.”

“So what will happen to me? Since I go out with Mustapha’s friend, Chezwiche?”

“Just tell Mustapha that I have failed to come because my husband is sick.”

“So you told him that you’re married.”

“Why not, after all, my husband is at home in Malawi. You very well know that every car has a spare tyre, always!” Startled passengers just shook their heads at her crude, gibberish mumbo-jumbo.

“So, what will happen to me since I’m a first-timer? Who’ll help me buy the stuff in Johannesburg?” asked Amina, with a lumpy throat.

“We will give you a man!” piped up Thoko.

Unexpectedly the bus ricocheted with the passengers’ antiphonal chant of aaahs and ooohs that went on for a couple of minutes. This annoyed Christina, who violently and belligerently got up, her eyes flashing fire, and trudged to and fro in the aisle looking for a ringleader. No one stirred. She sat down at last and continued with their conversation.

“I can’t do that, I am a Muslim and married woman, and my husband is a very respectable man in our community.”

“A Muslim!” laughed Christina brusquely.

“There’s Khadja Bauleni, a Muslim in Hillbrow. She is my friend from Ndirande. She’s making money like water from a burst pipe. She has lot of clients — famous soccer players, rugby players, musicians, politicians and even white business men,” said Thoko gaily.

“I know her — she’s no longer in Hillbrow. She moved to Sea Point in Cape Town. Last year, she came home driving a black BMW X5. She was untouchable!” cried Christina.

“I heard she had changed her name. She got a halo around her inscribed, Khethiwe Baleen.”

“No one can blame her. She is smart!” said Christina with laughing eyes.

“She is not!” countered Amina after she couldn’t bear any longer with their disgusting praises of a prostitute, “she is a disgrace to her family and the Muslim community as a whole.”

“Okay! I will introduce you to a Muslim client in Laudium. How about that? His name is Suleiman Khan, a Pakistani national. He owns the famous Bismillah Tikka Chicken Den in Laudium, and is mad about black Muslim girls — and he pays well,” said Thoko.

“I cannot do that!”

“Without a spare tyre! You won’t survive in this business — stationery! Think of the inflation rate, expenses you’ll incur! How do you think we survive in these difficult times?” asked Christina gravely.

“When we’re in South Africa, all virtues and morals and religions cease to function — robes and long dresses we stash them away and put on short skirts and revealing blouses and go about painting the city — making money and meeting libertines from all walks of life,” said Thoko without an ounce of shame.

“I cannot cheat on my husband. Why can’t we be proud of our innocent, sensible husbands? How many men in Malawi allow their wives to do cross-border business? Think twice guys. We have families to look after, children to raise and there are diseases out there.”

“We’re not forcing you to indulge in debauchery, you will see for yourself how it strengthens one’s business just like love herbs tame a man in an irretrievable marriage,” said Christina, taking out her expensive phone, Samsung Galaxy S7, from her handbag.

“Wow! What an expensive phone!” bellowed Amina with envy tinged in her voice.

“My new boyfriend, Welemu bought me this phone, cash! Do you think my husband could afford to buy this phone — a man who uses an out of date Nokia 3310?”

“So, what do your husband say about this phone?” asked Amina as she admired the phone.

“What can he say? My husband is a fool. In fact, every man is a fool. Men readily believe everything we say at the opening of our legs. Every woman’s body is gold — it gives us whatever we want in life. I don’t know why some women stupidly install themselves in indigent homes whilst they have an expensive asset between their legs! I don’t know why God loved us women more than men so much by giving us this expensive asset that drives men or even highly religious men insane all the time?” asked Christina, casting her mocking glances like a net over the men, who had been quiet, stunned and subdued by her blasphemous oratory.

“Because, without that God would not have created a woman,” mumbled a voice from the back. Christina and Thoko got up simultaneously like marathon runners at the shot of a gun.

“Aha! This is interesting, indeed, that means Eve brought happiness in the Garden of Eden,” said Thoko still standing.

“Eve brought problems. All women are whores!” fired out a hoarse voice from the back seat that sounded like a maize corn in the pan.

“Your Maa! Come out and show up your ugly face! You shiftless nincompoop!” snapped Christina as she got out of her seat and walked defiantly to and fro in the passage.

“Woman, sit down!” thundered the muscular man as he got up from his seat, scurried out and confronted Christina.

“Don’t dare your filthy hands lay on me! Don’t touch me!” barked Christina with venom.

“Man leave her! Or else we’ll deal with you in Pretoria!” warned Thoko brandishing a stiletto heel shoe and a knife. The muscular man grabbed Christina by the waist and picked her up, Christina kept on pummelling his head with her hands as the man traipsed to her seat and threw her onto it. Thoko attempted to stab the man but he quickly grabbed her hand, and as he was about to smack her in the face — the other driver, Chamunorwa, ran quickly and stopped the scuffle.

“Hey! Young man these are just women!” The tall and lean Chamunorwa towered in between the fighters like a referee in a boxing ring and asked them politely to return to their seats. The driver urged the passengers to avoid talks that could ignite a tiff.



The sun was busy burying itself behind the hills. If it were a person's internment, then we would say the undertakers had reached a point where they were shaping up the mound with their bare hands. The veil of darkness was descending down very quickly like the motion of an automatic gate sliding to close.

Thoko and Christina remained silent for a while until Christina thundered out: "I think when we're in South Africa I must phone Welemu to meet us at the Bosman depot and teach that twit a lesson."

"I will call Chezwiche too, he knows bad guys in Garankuwa, who would vice-grip that nitwit's testicles at Chezwiche's order!"

"No man can sit and do nothing when his dearest lover is being attacked by another man. Welemu would bring bad guys too."

Out of the blue, the muscular man got up at the back and traipsed to the women quietly. Other passengers got up too from their seats in anticipation of the fight. Christina and Thoko got up to confront him. The man skulked stolidly in subservient gait, his hands clasped behind his back like a losing soccer coach at the touchline.

"I have come here in peace," he bowed, "and I'm here to apologise to both of you for everything. I have realised that a man who fight with a woman is a coward. I am not a coward. Please sisters forgive me for everything." There was silence for a moment. The man stood stock-still waiting for a friendly reply.

"It is not easy for a woman to forgive and forget when she has been ridiculed beyond endurance by a man. I require you to come again to apologise on your bended knees tomorrow morning!" ordered Christina balefully.

"I will do as requested," said the muscular man solemnly, and he strolled back to his seat. There were chants of ooh and aah amongst the passengers as the muscular man tottered back to his seat, his eyes magnetically looking for a ringleader to catch, but he at last dismissed his malicious intention and quietly proceeded to sit on his seat satisfied with his signature of truce with the women. He had feared for his life — he knew the women were prostitutes who knew a lot of bad guys in South Africa and could easily mobilise skolies to kill him — as it is evidently known that life in South Africa is so cheap that one can go under the knife by as little as an offer of a bottle of beer.

This time the bus passed through Harare and it was cruising towards the town of Masvingo. The magnificent full moon blazed out in the deep blue sky and stars were thinly scattered across the skyline. It was very hot. Christina tried to lean her head against the open window but the fiery breeze that wafted through the window scalded her head. She withdrew her head from the window

and rested it on the shoulder of Thoko. By now most of the passengers had retired in their seats and slept.

As the bus hit the vicinity of Polokwane city, the propeller shaft of the bus broke off from the centre bearing. Luckily, the bus driver stopped the bus without causing an alarm. In consternation, the driver got down and discovered the dreadful truth — the propeller shaft was hanging down and had made a trail of engraved zigzagged marks on tarmac from where it broke off to where it had stopped.

“What’s the matter?” cried the muscular man as other passengers encircled the bus driver.

“The propeller shaft is broken,” said the driver solemnly, “I am sorry, we will have to wait for a bus from Jo’burg”

“What?” exclaimed the angry passengers. The driver tried to weave his way out of menacing wall of the passengers as others had started to push him into the centre. The muscular man grabbed him by the right arm and pulled him out.

“Didn’t your mechanic check the bus before we left, huh?”

“Leave me alone,” pleaded the driver as he tried to shake off the man’s hand.

This did not go well with the passengers who were very tired and wished their interminable journey had come to an end. Many passengers expressed their disappointment and others vowed that they would never travel by Mufambe Zvakanaka bus again. The driver, reeling in a fit of uneasiness after being chaffed by the passengers’ reproof, ran a few yards away and in a brief solace phoned the Johannesburg office to bring them another bus. After a while, the driver’s face inflamed with enforced unctuousness coated over his apprehension, informed the passengers that another bus from Jo’burg would come in five hours.

“Five hours! My goodness! Your boss would pay for this!” cried the muscular man pointing an accusing finger at the driver who had gone and sat down against the bus’ rear tyre, his head glued to his hands.

The angry and intractable passengers did not say much as it appeared to them that the writing was conspicuously on the wall — whatever they would say would not change the scenario at hand so they collectively watered down their burning anger and wondered about Polokwane city like cows without a herdsman. The time was around three in the afternoon, the sun pitilessly churned out its mighty hit and it was scorching hot. And the ground burned enough to make the sweet potatoes buried underground on farms readily roasted and edible.

Five hours later, the bus from Johannesburg arrived. The driver went about calling out to the passengers to board the bus quickly. The bus left exactly at eight-fifteen PM. Christina took out her phone and phoned her boyfriend Welemu to pick them up at the Bosman depot in Pretoria. The muscular man indeed in the morning had apologised to Christina and the spirit of goodwill and friendliness pervaded the bus. Thoko had tried to call Chezwiche but his phone went on voice.

Nonetheless, the bus arrived at Bosman depot before midnight. Welemu had arrived earlier at the depot. He had been drinking and playing pool in Marabastad when Christina had phoned him. Welemu, a Zambian national, was in a company of his friend Joao, a Mozambican who worked for a security company, Fidelity, and as a DJ at Club Obrigado in Gezina. Christina stepped down from the bus and, like a bullet, shot into the open hands of Welemu. Welemu staggered a few steps back from the impact and after regaining his balance scooped up Christina off her feet, turned round and round and almost falling from dizziness, stopped, staggered a little backwards and kissed her loudly: mwah! And placed her gently on her feet again.

Meantime, Joao was reversing Welemu's BMW E90 which was parked a few metres away.

"I've two friends here," said Christina to Welemu.

"Are they coming with us?"

"Thoko and Amina, will you come with us?" asked Christina.

"Is there a hotel nearby?" asked Amina quickly.

"Tell him to drop me in Laudium at Chezwiche's house," said Thoko.

"Why can't you go with us, my beautiful lady?" said Joao fondly as he walked towards Amina. Amina stepped back and stretched her hands forward like a traffic officer trying to stop a speeding car, her two palms bent at 90% on their wrists. Obediently, Joao stopped in his tracks shaking his head in disbelief as someone not used to rebuffs from women.

"Come on Amina, why must you waste your money while there's a man at hand to look after you? He will give you everything — accommodation, you name them, and no one at home will know it," said Christina.

"Of course, my beautiful lady, every time you come to South Africa I will take care of you. I will do everything for you and you won't spend a kobo out of your purse," coaxed Joao as he attempted to touch her. Amina placidly moved away. Welemu opened the boot of the car and took four Savanna Dark beers from the cooler box and offered each one a bottle. Amina refused the beer and expressed her immediate wish to get a room at a hotel. Thoko and Christina drank quickly like water and begged for more.

Joao drove to Welemu's apartment in Sunnyside, where Christina and Welemu were dropped off, and then he took Thoko to Laudium and returned with Amina to Pretoria city to help her get accommodation at a hotel.

"You know what, as you can see all hotels are fully booked and full. This is Sunday — it is difficult to get a place."

"So what?" exclaimed Amina. Deep down, she knew that he was lying.

It was now around one in the morning. Amina was very tired and needed a bath and sleep badly. Somewhere in Pretorius Street Joao stopped the car.

"There's nothing we can do, and I don't stay far. I stay in Schubert Street," said Joao as he started the car.

"Are you married?"

"No...no...no..."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Is not easy these days to get a good woman. It seems modern women are not interested anymore in marriage, I don't know why?"

"Young men and women of today indulge in long sensual vices well up into their 30's, some even into their 40's, and in an abrupt emotional turn — regretfully, seek to start families whilst one leg is already in the grave," said Amina gravely.

"We want to enjoy while we're young, before constraints of marriage lock us up in bondage," countered Joao.

"That's why most of you would not taste fruits of old age."

"It doesn't matter."

"Young boys and young girls must marry whilst they're young, so that they can live to see their children get married and give them grandchildren — and if fortunate enough, live to see great grandchildren," said Amina.

“Mmmmh... It’s late — let us just go to my apartment,” said Joao parking the car in the parking lot.

Amina said nothing.

Joao’s face glowed with delight at the prospect of sleeping with Amina. His apartment was on the third floor so they had to climb the steep interminable steps to his apartment. It was a one bedroom apartment with a living room, kitchen and bathroom. Joao ushered Amina into the living room which was excellently furnished with maroon leather sofas and linoleum flooring, and the aroma of lavender hung around the room. He darted to the kitchen and returned a minute later to the living room and asked Amina fondly with love glistening in his eyes to take a bath as he would be busy frying chips and chicken pieces in the kitchen.

After eating the food, Joao coughed as if dislodging a fish bone stuck in his throat and croaked:

“Let me show you where you will sleep.” Amina’s heart skipped a bit.

“Is there another bedroom?” she asked pointing at the curtain that covered the door way of the bedroom.

“No... my dear,” said Joao cheerfully.

“Don’t trouble yourself — I will sleep here on the sofa.”

“No, my dear, the sofa is not meant for sleeping. You’re a beautiful woman. I will treat you like a queen. Come... on,” said Joao as he stretched out his arms in anticipation of hugging her. Amina remained sitting on the sofa. She fumbled into her handbag and fished out two bed sheets. She got up, unfurled one sheet on the sofa and then lay down on the sofa and covered herself with the other sheet. Joao darted to the bedroom to fetch a duvet.

“Would you please uncover yourself and take this duvet?”

Amina shot out her head like a tortoise from its shell and looked at Joao sternly. She received the duvet and asked Joao to switch off the lights as he walked to his room. Joao could not sleep — his licentious desire had tortured his manhood extremely. He sat down, his head in his hands and at last resolved to go to Amina and beg for coitus.

It is now around three in the morning, and in two hours’ time day light will be out, Amina might decide to leave early, thought Joao pensively. He got up violently and stopped at the door way, his erection stiff and rebelling libidiously in its underpants confinement. He grabbed the two door frames and contemplated on a move to seduce Amina. Meantime Amina was snoring — her snores reverberated into his room. He switched on the lights, doddered quietly to her, sat down quietly next to her and watched over her lasciviously, his guard still stiff and rebelling, so much that the weight of two bricks could not weigh it down. He was trembling with lust and fear, and every time he tried to lift up the duvet, Amina stirred sleepily and Joao had to stop, his heart racing, and this confused his erection.

When he tried for the third time to gently lift up the duvet, by pinning it with his forefinger and thumb at its corner, he discovered that Amina was sleeping in her clothes — in a pair of pants and a robe. His detumescent erection went dead. Then, out of the blue, Amina stirred and got up awestruck when she saw Joao sitting by her side in a boxer's shorts without a vest.

“What are you doing here?” asked Amina frightfully, yawning loudly shooting her arms sideways. Her eyes were puffy from unfinished sleep.

“I can't sleep,” said Joao as he moved closer to Amina.

“What are you doing now?” said Amina moving away.

“My beautiful lady, do not act like...a small girl...come here,” said Joao as he tried to pull her to his chest.

“Let go off my hand, please!” yelled Amina angrily.

“Come here,” whispered Joao as he tried to encircle his hands around her waist. Amina summoned all her strength and wrenched her hands free from Joao's grip. Joao stood ramrod straight with his eyes flashing fire — he gazed at Amina for a second and stomped off to his room.

Amina quickly picked up her handbag and raced out. Her footsteps could be heard dwindling like water filling up to the brim in a pail, as she ran down the steps. A strident muezzin was heard from Pretoria Central Mosque. It was now around five AM. Joao was very stultified, and cursed himself for not using enough force to screw Amina. But later he gave in to common sense — sex that is forced upon someone is so nauseating and always cannot slake one's lust.

At around eight in the morning after wandering in the streets of Pretoria, Amina decided to sit down on the terrace at the Church Square. When she turned back she saw Christina, Welemu and Thoko getting out of the car, a few metres away in Paul Kruger Street. She got up immediately and raced to them.

“Amina!” cried Thoko excitedly.

“Look at you Amina!” said Thoko her eyes wide open in wonder, “your hair is tousled, your clothes creased and you don't look well at all.”

“Why did you run away from Joao?” asked Christina.

“I did not run away, I just decided to leave early that's all,” fibbed Amina.

“Joao called us to say you had run away.”

“I just wanted to leave early that’s all.”

“To where? And you hardly know Pretoria. What if you got lost, huh?”

“I got your cell numbers guys.”

They took her to Welemu’s house where she had a bath and breakfast before they proceeded to Johannesburg to order their goods.

Thoko had an intriguing story to relate to her friends. When Joao had dropped her off at the door of her boyfriend, Chezwiche, in Pendant Street, she had learnt that Chezwiche had run away to Malawi after conning an Indian businessman, Mr. Tayub of about five hundred thousand rand. Chezwiche was a bogus herbalist. He had sold to an Indian a magic toad. He had instructed the Indian to blow at it all the time at his shop and customers would come in droves. Chezwiche had demonstrated the act and indeed customers came in large numbers, others had to wait outside impatiently as if the goods sold in the shop couldn’t be found in any other shop. Three days later, when the Indian had tried to blow at the toad, no customer stepped into his shop. Those who quickly walked in quickly walked out like running from something unpleasant. Mr. Tayub was stultified and shocked — he grew more and more crotchety at the trick Chezwiche had played on him. He warned that he would skin Chezwiche alive if he happened to show his ugly face in South Africa again.

On the very same day, Chezwiche had conned the Indian, he bought a brand new secondhand E46 BMW and on it stuck a sticker that read: Am so fly, and raced to show off to his friends in Area 25, in Malawi. Chezwiche’s friend Saddam related the whole story to Thoko.

That night Saddam screwed Thoko and the two agreed to meet in Johannesburg in the afternoon. Saddam was a driver — he worked for Home Hyper City in Pretoria. He was younger than Thoko, probably in his early twenties, but Thoko did not mind, what had cared for was his money. Saddam withdrew almost all his money from his Post Office savings account and bought Thoko a new pair of shoes and an expensive handbag at Edgars and gave her one thousand rand as pocket money. All these transactions took place under the nose of Amina who was just looking on quietly — a look that was difficult to decipher whether it envied it or abhorred it.

On the other hand, Christina received from Welemu about five thousand rand and after their shopping spree were taken to eat at Nando’s in Market Street.

Nonetheless, Amina remained adamant and determined not to be captured by an alluring of money, and had readily agreed to sleep in the filthy Mufambe Zvakankana passengers’ restrooms than commit adultery. Thoko and Christina returned to Pretoria with their boyfriends. The restrooms were a hell of a place — filthy and smelt like a public toilet. The rooms were furnished with cardboards that served as mats and cheap ‘dog’ blankets that were infested with lice. Thoko had warned her of the place, but Amina was so obdurate and determined to face whatever hardships came her way than squirm under the slab of adultery. Mufambe Zvakankana bus was to leave on

Wednesday, so she slept in those squalid rooms for two days whilst, Thoko and Christina shagged their boyfriends on comfortable beds.

On Wednesday morning they regrouped at Mufambe Zvakanaka and the bus left thirty minutes late at exactly half-past twelve in the afternoon.

They arrived at Mwanza, Malawi border post next day in the late afternoon. Everybody got out and took his or her goods into the building where custom officers checked the goods and prescribed duties to be paid. Amina had found out that she was short of money by about twenty thousand kwacha to clear her duties. Thoko came to her rescue.

“But...next time,” said Thoko as she counted the money, “if you had played your cards right you couldn’t be paying any duties here at all. These officers need women like you. We have paid absolutely nothing, look, you’re ruining your business already. See you tomorrow in Limbe, we have to rest a bit, go well and think carefully, next time.”

Amina was completely poleaxed as Thoko and Christina disappeared behind the building — hand in hand with men.





*Lace on Your Shoulder* by **Milutin Obradović**

## **Nikoleta Crăete**

### ***2020 birds***

no one has come to ask me why

no one in what way with whom when or where

I go or become

in the roundest of pitch black not a soul in the sight

sitteth I and the bread

sitteth I and the wine

twothousandtwenty birds against the window then crashed

spilling the wine

over the bread turned into crumbs on the road

### ***overturned dream***

love is a scaffold where we sleep

whereas our sleep has a sight towards birds

don't make yourself a cradle from a watered woman's hair

a bird has built a nest in it

so it could die

you are to plant it the next day

and you will know

that you know nothing that you know

while reading on the bodies with your blinded hands

all you are left with is to tie the trees face down

so that the earth should mirror them when calling you

with a strange name

### *picture*

they are eating according to the schedule

in an organized civilized non conversational manner

the first one is eating the second one's

left eye

the second one is eating the third one's

right eye

the third one the next one's

face

the next one eating the next one's

patience

so on

in case nothing relevant has been eaten to him

the last one is eating the first one's

something irrelevant

### **who is that wandering one**

people have forgotten to breathe

fragments of void

rest helter-skelter ordained

on houses of them

time for the bandstand to ring

of flesh lieth in wait their feed

shadowing earth

but come into the shadowy glide

birds falling birds falling

with tombs in their beaks

and the query

who is that wandering one

no raiment or name

who is that wandering one

*Translated by the author*



*Raven* by **Richard Burchette**

## **Nikola Yozgof Orbach**

### ***Moatasem***

If  
you will come to conquer me  
occupy me  
like the deserted Palestinian  
who left the ground of my soul  
longing for his bare feet,  
who broke through all my walls  
until I surrendered  
until I fell in love  
until I remained a land of longing  
until I was Palestine.

### ***My Grandfather***

Who knew all the sufferings of the world  
teach me how to swim in the dark  
Pave my way in butterfly motions  
rowing in the dark  
and breathe light sprays  
until the night goes out and a day strikes.

## *Sura 109*

Say I did not know love other than him  
and you did not know my love  
and I knew no other besides him  
and you will not know that I am  
bitter as wormwood when my faith fades.

## *A royal crown*

The black hijab on your head  
my love  
Is your royal crown  
your wand of victory  
your weapon in the damn struggle  
that forced you to cancel your identity.

The black hijab on your beloved head  
is the place from which your heavenly prayer rises,  
is a fountain of bubbling beauty  
in the heart of a human desert.

The black hijab on your head  
Is a naked Islam  
without masks and lies  
pure  
cries out in a thousand sharp and proud voices  
for your protection  
like it was a piece of your skin  
as you were  
a piece of his skin.

***I was defeated***

Who I was in my previous incarnations  
wants to take over me  
to consume every being,  
without you knowing I was conquered  
without you knowing, he's back on track to make another roll of life.  
No one but me will feel him.  
No one but me will understand me  
and when I conquer,  
he will deny everything and will live among you.





*Haiduk and The Fairy of Kraina* by **Miloje Negotinski**

**Dragan Đorđević - Đoka**

***COCKROACHES,  
MERIMA,  
JORA,  
OLD DAD, OLD MUM,  
AND NIKOLA FROM "GENERAL JANKOVIC"***

They crawl. Big and scary. Cockroaches. They usually crawl in dark. When you shed light on them, they just freeze in one place. Are they waiting? What happens when you make a move on them?

They are not scary, they don't bite - it was said to Nikola, once upon a time, by his uncle Milan. It all happened in a small local town right on the border of Kosovo and North Macedonia. There, sometime between 1960s and 1970s. Uncle liked to be addressed as "old dad" and aunty as

“old mum”. At that time, Nikola was not wondering why is that, it wasn't a big deal for him and it meant a lot to his uncle.

Uncle Milan and auntie Ilinka lived in an old apartment building that had 4 apartments. They didn't have children. This was old dad's second marriage and he had a daughter from the first one, she was Nikola's age. He would tell Nikola, without auntie knowing it, that one day when he grows up, he will introduce him to his daughter and they will make such a good couple, a healthy relationship. “You can bet on it!” He had a tendency of saying, “She has straight A's, so do you.” “Don't spread your seeds in vain on some random girl.”

They were really fond of Nikola, at least he really felt like that's the case. He would go there even when he wasn't on a school break. One of his best friends there was Ismet - a Turk. A young man purest of hearts but troubled by acne all over his face. He was almost twice the Nikola's age who enjoyed spending time with boys who are much older than him. Once, he witnessed something called “Carrousel”. At that point in time, Nikola had no idea what expression “Carrousel” meant.

A lady named Merima and her husband came from Germany, a visit to her birthplace – General Jankovic. She was tiny but adorable. All the people called her “Mera”. Her big breasts made her special. Only nice things were said about her. For some reason, she was really mad at her husband. Probably because of some other women. She decided take vengeance on him - to cheat on him with few local guys. Those were Hippy times. Mantra was “Let's make love, not war.” Long pants, long hairs and sideburns. People were listening to Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Korn band and Pro Arte.

News of Mera were spread like wildfire, especially fast during nighttime. They reached Jora, the most famous hunchback in General Jankovic. He really had a distinguished hump. He was short and chubby. If Fellini was casting in this God forsaken place, he would most definitely get some kind of role in the movie. People were saying that when Jora was talking about Mera, he was seeing her as young non -married woman, his eyes would spark and he would stroke his long beard and mustaches. He was chasing after Merima. Like crazy, all over the places. He would ask around and believed everyone when they would say that they saw her somewhere. In a pub close the main road leading to Skopje; In management facility cement factory “Shar”; With her daughter at the public stream with sparkling water - their best mineral water in the region. Here; There; He was buzzing after her like an animal. Drooling and heavily breathing when talking about her. It was simply uncomfortable, was Mera owed to him somehow?

And? How was it, what happened in the end?

Nikola remembers that he, Ismet and couple of other friends, waited for their turn in a secluded forest area. One guy was already with Mera. They were quickly changing turns. They were so happy, like somehow it was unexpectedly blissful. They were sweating so much probably out of excitement and expectations. Like they won the lottery without even buying the ticket. Ismet was especially happy. He was standing last in line. He was afraid she is not going to go with him because of the acne. But it was dark, she is not going to see them, he was encouraging himself while asking to be the last one to do it... Unlike some from that group, Nikola was there only for

the show as he was young and small, barely of age... After a while, he was slowly realizing what “Carousel” meant...

And what happened in the end? She only didn't sleep with one of them. It was sad to watch Jora, so lost and hopeless - they all witnessed it. Jora was married but he could care less. His head was ringing. If she was with this guy, that guy, she has to be with me as well, just be in the right place in right time, he hoped... All the guys were almost sadistically enjoying in Jora's pain. He was suffering and not trying to hide it... His sadness shrunk him even more and made his hump even more visible. His face was saying: “She has to give it to me, right?”.

Mera was there for only two nights. So little time for Jora. Her arrival was sudden and her departure from this desperate place was even more abrupt, on tail of Kosovo, with one big street that intersected with main road leading to nearby towns. The other part lead to the river of Lepenac, fast stream with clear waters. Foam was escaping the waves in volatile manner and it almost looked like someone was shaving the earth with a sharp razor while white blood was bursting into the air.

Nikola enjoyed his time in “General Jankovic.” On a two-language traffic sign, next to Serbian name, it was written “Elezi han” in Albanian.

Nikola's uncle Milan, “old dad”, was obsessed with inventions. They knew him as an outstanding marksman who improved the manufacturing process in cement factory “Shar” with his discoveries. Nikola remembers his uncle telling him that he got rewarded for it. At that time, inventors were considered crazies. Nikola loved him and had huge appreciation for him. He was a little bit strange but so what? As Nikola had a talent for drawing and had exemplary handwriting, he was in charge of transferring machine models images to drawings to a certain extent. He was enjoying it. It made him feel older, more important, in a way, he was making it up for all the hospitality that his uncle was offering him.

Nikola's aunt Ilinka - the “old mum”, was really fond of him. She would prepare for him, believe it or not, only fondant for cake because that's what he asked for. He was capable of eating the entire pan, the smaller one of course. Yes, yes, just fondant. Sometimes it was yellow, sometimes brown covered in sherbet. Even nowadays, Nikola starts drooling just thinking about it. Was it because those were hard times when people had little but enough to be happy?

In third grade Elementary, on a written assignment, when asked: “What were your strongest impressions of summer break?” - Nikola answered: “Fondant for cake I ate at my cousins in “General Jankovic.” Normally - he got a C...

*Translated by Dušan Đorđević*

## Maximilian Heinegg

### *Brodsky*

That day, he snapped the filters off a continuous cigarette,  
exhaling as professors rose like suitors to tender  
erudition, tinder for his wit.

Reading *To Urania*, he stood, a contemplated dissident,  
his song of exile safely taken in,  
tempting me to take the pen,  
not yet a talisman.

### *Synecdoche*

One tooth's  
blood on the cheap  
vanity. A parting  
from superfluity  
to a grainy count-  
down. Quite less  
emphasis

than Keats's  
warrant—the well-boded  
drama of the body,  
grotesque in miniature.  
While we live, the word of  
our bond is maintenance.  
The earth rots

into rebirth,  
but the garden of  
this mouth, no. Panic  
at my heeled exodus. Any  
breath a berth before  
I'm finished, mid-minted  
pink spit, closer

to death than birth. Each  
flossing, gums  
sink  
millimeters, ground  
gaining on the loose  
headstones. The kids name their  
dance the same.

### *At the Baths*

I tug at the octopus suction cup  
shower mat to lie on the white plastic  
covered cast iron in my grandparents' house  
in hour four of my Christmas trip, sinking  
to the bottom of the Roman baths—  
an empire of water from the tribute of sky,

a largesse of clouds to genius aqueducts,  
wastage embraced, forests felled to fire  
for holidays of water, two *denarii* or this tab,  
stutter steps from cumulus ceilings, sounding  
hypnotic veils, rings, staining, fabled air  
kissed off by mountains returning to tunnels

for shoulders dripping with the daze of water's  
sudden hum, the melody of what's gathered  
in it: whale, wave, wind, great schools & poets:  
Ovid, Virgil, Martial, Lucan, Horace, Juvenal, all  
saw the stone walls beading up in the great *caldarium*  
as mine fell to *tepidarium*—I rose to towel.

### *Service*

He'd lifted crystal kernel husks, my malt-

mill's sweet dust. By night, he must have  
heard my antsy steps & fled  
the basement's leaky sink, his fountain.

The fridge's back a flat, our wires a file  
for his teeth. Gifted intermittence,  
the current no deterrence.  
Worse, his shit ubiquitous.

He brought friends; I bought poison.

We passed a season's silence, until he fell  
unseen—his scent revenged.

He'd wintered in our drafts, heard the girls'  
laughter from the crawl space, eking  
near our surfeit. Had he lazed  
by the furnace in the catless calm, or  
fretted each moment, an unnerved squatter?

Typing, my long teeth grind to keep my mind  
safe from the point. I'll speak for him:  
the peaceful creatures especially have enemies.

### *Chamomile*

I forage in the pantry for a barleywine,  
but find tea boxes sitting in dry excellence

like students waiting to be called upon.

Peppermint & hibiscus, chamomile,  
& Sweet Dreams, purchased  
for my pregnant wife, avoiding caffeine.

The straw gold & white flowers, the *ground apple*—  
not the numbness I needed.  
Work's made *sleep* pillow-talk, a fire & a book

our tame haven. Slight to not be pissed,  
the night's dry land, & I'm a sailor,  
cursing every sip not at sea.



*Khapa* by **Maksud Ahsan**

## **Shakira Parvin**

### *Peddler of White Dreams*

Your white hair is so stunning  
Why did you conceal it for so long  
You must have forgotten  
The breathtaking beauty of white  
You added relish  
To ravishing white rice  
Needlessly  
You could sprinkle a trace of white salt  
Just simple plain white salt  
Perhaps a leafy white onion  
Maybe a green or red chili utmost  
That's all!  
Haven't seen the white nails in ages  
Only the drifting stench of naphthalene all around  
You wore white nail polish at last  
Lovely indeed  
In the season of bailey blossom  
I know you'll love it for sure  
The bright brilliance of white dress  
Time is trapped in the eternal pandemic of black  
O dear peddler of white dreams  
Behold your decree of demise for a little while  
Let the flock of white heron  
Take a few more living flights

*Translated by Feroze Alom*

### *Special*

And then they gave me a name: Special Child.  
They think I am special.  
A unique baby. My mom weeps. I laugh. Dad's on the roof.



Watering plants. And his eyes.  
Mom thought she'd take her own life. Dad thought of remarrying.  
New flowers will bloom. Will eat street food in the afternoon. And I'll read  
The difficult words slept on a palm frond.  
I can speak. But I won't. My aunt's harmonium.  
Let them take out the reeds. I'll fix a bicycle. And ride it. I'll ride the rains.  
On the street where the traffic is away on leave. I'll ride sunshine. And wind.  
And rowan boat.  
Mom thought. I'd paint. Dad. I'd write. Uncle. I'd sing.  
Grandpa. I'd tear things up.  
I do tear things up.  
Time.  
Politics.

*Translated by Prof. Syed Manzoorul Islam*

## **Alberto Palomo Villanueva**

### ***Who...?***

.

the night ... is dripping ...

the branches of the trees ... dance ... to a tv commercial song ...

next to the cactus that I always water ... but it is made of plastic ... the remains of a mandala ... a  
bottle with sand and a red wooden pony ...

stories from Tibet ... Sahara and Iceland ...

/

along the shore of my sight...a firefly dies...

how absurd it is ...not to believe...what our senses feel...

a pair of child's eyes are looking at me...

I'm sure...that I don't have lost my mind...

He is scared...and about to cry...don't be afraid ...I say...

in a slow way...this is a dream...

what other thing...this could be...?

the little child is 6 or 8 years old...he pointed to a picture of my wall...and say...Alexander...

I ...now know...that ...this is not a dream...

What's your name...I ask...

Alberto...

Oh...I say...like me...

we both...

he was now close to me...his whole body...with a toy in his left hand...

I remembered that toy...

My heart was beating very fast...He was looking at my clothes and around the room... and then...stopped his eyes on mine...

He says...ooh...the future...ooh ... I like your TV set...

where do you have the toys...?

my eyes were wet...

why are you crying...?

and he held my right hand ...

his soft skin...and his face...made me felt...like never before...

Do you have a horse ? Have you seen any Pirate ?

/

I was following him...across the room...as he was touching everything...also was talking...

granny says that there are a bunch of worlds...and that we never die...

I believe it...

he turned back and holding my hand again... says...you know...?

I don't think that this is a dream... I'm hungry...

I smiled...he too...

we holding hands went to the kitchen...but...it wasn't my kitchen...well...It was the kitchen of my house when I was his age...

/

I swear...that...what I have written...it is true...

I omit...what we talked about and what we ate...

However...I can share...with you...how this finished...

we ...saw fireflies thru the window...he stood up...and ran after them...

I stayed there...looking at the red wooden horse...and at the reproduction of the Battle of Gaugamela (Alexander the Great and Dario of Persia).....

/

### ***Silence...***

.

Silence of the unwritten words...

Transient clouds ...souvenirs of other lives ...in this one...

Hang over...of...repeated ...desires...and...wishes...

Twilight ...

where....the soul ...paints ...her shadows and Shapes...

Agony of poems without words...

Wild flowers...

alone ...with the SUN

yellows..browns...

reds...pinks...

Words to be...

sighs...thoughts...

tears...smiles...

privacy...of a secret love...

Who cares for these flowers...of undreamed colors..?

Where are the words...I miss..?

Silence of unwritten poems...

Drunkenness of repeated ...sounds and songs..  
How much is repetition ..and how much is Deep...?  
But...my Muse whispers...  
"let the wind blow..."  
So...taking my pen...and in a low voice..  
I draw again...the line of the horizon...  
Wooden floor ...  
feet drawing...  
legs...wrestling in Love...  
Cheek to cheek...  
No one should think...  
That it is just Imagination...or...  
some kind of Drunkenness...  
It's simple...  
an unwritten poem of love...  
for you...  
Who crossed my Sky...  
Too fast comet...for a too short story..  
..



*Off With His Head* by **Roel Sauviller**

## **Okolo Chinua**

### ***WHITE IS THE COLOUR OF INNOCENCE***

*"The way to being a priest is to learn to immerse yourself in robes of character, to become what the cloth is not what you are,*

*This is why you find brown and red men in white*

*And you wonder if it's because white is the colour that births other colours."*

A symphony of bells remind me of my time there. From childhood I had always nursed the intention of being a priest, a man in cloth as we used to call it back then. I'd sit behind during mass imitating the priest, saying word for word everything he recited on the altar. Sometimes I would bend and kiss the bench in front of me in an attempt to imitate the priest. I always wanted to be a priest. I would stand tipping my toes at the tall windows to get a glimpse of him as he walks immaculately towards his car, his every gait as pure as the white of his cassock. When he smiled I felt my insides tingle and when he was angry I was angry too. "*Fada anaghi eme njo*" Priests do not sin. I always carried that belief with me as I grew. Most times I had been right in a case reported to him by my mates but after the judgement he had deemed me guilty. I was not bothered. "Priests could not sin" so I had accepted everything from a priest as the right thing.

*"Ha si na onwe otu fada no n'ime mgbe ulo ahu na-agba oku"* Adaugo had said while jesting to her friend. The conversation was about a room in a certain lodge in the University that had caught fire. As the story had it a certain priest had been going to visit a female student who resided in that school and during one of such encounters the room had caught fire. The girl was confirmed dead. No one knew about the priest's whereabouts. "*Fada anaghi eme njo*", sometimes we sinners out of jealousy for the priests make up false stories so as to denigrate their image... "I had explained to Ebuka, my friend from the Altar Knights Association. It was a reaction to the conversation I had overheard from Adaugo, one of the Altar girls who enjoyed gossiping. She had delivered her story to Ifeoma while they were both setting the altar on Saturday for mass the next day.

Fr.Dan was the priest we knew in charge of the parish. Most of us had joined the Altar Servers Association in an attempt to get close to him, the immaculate and good-looking priest who I used to stand on my toes to watch from the parish windows as a child. Fr.Dan could do no wrong. We always struggled to be the one assigned to clean his room on Saturday mornings. Brother Chijioke, one of the big ones in the association had told us that women were usually assigned the duty but to avoid temptation they had started assigning the work to the Altar Knights. Father would always

give gifts of money and biscuits to the one assigned to his room for the week. Sometimes we would see 'nwafada' coming out with a bottle of groundnut, a gift from Father. Being 'nwafada' meant being Father's favourite and for that we always envied Johnbosco. We all wanted to be like him. He got to ride with Father in his Jeep that bounced whenever it moved, prancing silently as it explored the dusts of the compound while Father went out with it. Being Johnbosco meant being everything.

*"I ga-arupukwa mass server ahu I no na ya"* my uncle had said sternly to me one Saturday evening as I was about going for evening practice. I had gone to inform him before leaving the house. "Mass server? Practice? *Mbanu!*" he had said, shaking his head as he continued shining his already-polished shoes. "Uncle... " I had started. "Mass server? *Mbanu. I ga-erozo ya.* Forget it!" Uncle wasn't a man of many words and when he said no he meant no. He banned me from associating with the altar knights who I had already made friends with and hit me really hard whenever he saw me trying to talk to Johnbosco.

Time they say, heals all wounds. With time I adjusted to my Uncle's wish. It was difficult avoiding people I had been with, served with and talked with for years all of a sudden. Uncle's eyes never left me and all of my neighbours were eager to report me to him whenever they saw me talking to anybody. Mama Emeka was the worst. She was always monitoring me. One certain time I had helped a boy who was lost in our street find his way back home. That evening, Mama Emeka came and poured the story to my Uncle, adding unnecessary details that never happened to her story. Uncle didn't ask questions. He just pounced on me and beat me till I became unconscious.

*"A kpojere ya ebe ozo.* He has been transferred." I overheard our neighbour say three years after I had been banned. I had just come back from school for the Junior BECE break. Fr. Dan had been transferred to another parish. Three years ago such news would have left me devastated but now it didn't seem like something big. Most of my friends from the Altar Knights Association had joined the seminary. The goal was to become like Fr. Dan. I wasn't allowed. Uncle made sure I enrolled in a mission school that was entirely different from the seminary. It was mixed.

Three years later I would come to learn that Fr.Dan had been accused of sexually abusing a boy in his new parish, a member of the Altar Knights who had been assigned to clean his room. I would come to learn that Johnbosco had been expelled from the seminary because of 'ntu.' He had been caught making love to a male junior student. As he was leaving the school he had cried "*Okwa fada kuziri m ihe a*. It was Father who taught it to me" as he left the school premises. I would come to understand that the groundnuts and biscuits he had received were compensations to ensure his silence as he had been abused in the room. I would come to learn that in a previous parish Fr.Dan had abused a member of the Altar Girls as she was cleaning his room, a severe case that had been thrown under the carpet and the parents' silence bought with money. He had been transferred from that parish to ours to avoid soiling his name. I would come to learn that the priest who had been visiting a girl's lodge in the University, the one which caught fire, had been Fr.Dan. The true story had not been revealed but eye witnesses had identified and described the priest as a steady visitor.

*"Fada anaghi eme njo*. Priests do not sin." I would never confront my Uncle about my discovery. Sometimes I wonder if he had known all this while, if maybe that was the reason behind his sudden change in attitude towards my Altar Knight membership. I had been so close to becoming 'nwa fada.' I wonder if I would have been Johnbosco if I had not had my Uncle. The clanging symphony of bells coming from the parish house remind me of my time there. *Yagaziere ndi no ebe ahụ ofuma*. Let it be well with those there.



**Timothy Adès**

**IN A RUINED ABBEY**

*a translation of Victor Hugo*

Just we two, and we sing!  
Joy of love!  
He sowed, we reap the spring,  
God above!

Shades here so tenebrous:  
laughter peals!  
Paled here so many brows,  
sombre souls!

Here we are, new-married:  
We let fly  
charming cries, all varied:  
ecstasy!

Pure frolics in breezes  
that shiver!  
The dark convent seasons  
our pleasure!

Abbess's two hands join  
in stone prayer:  
we pluck the white jasmine  
twining there.

Marked with a cross, the tombs  
take their part  
in our innocent games:  
nettles smart!

Hide and seek: and we sense  
love brings light  
to the old cloister, dawns  
in its night.

I kiss you, you kiss me,  
we adore,  
clasping insistently,  
and there's more.

Pillars and arching curves,  
effigies.  
It's the tale of the birds  
in the trees.



*Villers-la-Ville Abbey* by **Timothy Ades**

## **Romeo Aurelian Ilie**

\*\*\*

41 degrees Celsius.  
all streets, empty;  
all people, barricaded indoors,  
fearing not to melt down.

Only he, the deaf-and-dumb, is left  
to quietly roam the avenues,  
fearlessly.

It is only now,  
at 41 degrees,  
that the miracle stole up to him:  
the pores of his skin got so dilated  
that he can hear with every one in turn.

He can hear children laughing and women crying,  
the poor grieving and the rich aching,  
he can hear lovers indulging their pleasures.

And everything that he hears  
is instantly absorbed into his bloodstream,  
everything he hears  
is soon sent rummaging through his loins.

He is simmering, not from the heat,  
but from life. He finds himself inebriated with life  
as before he had been intoxicated with death.

He can truly feel himself alive,  
now that he's been through death  
now that he's been through the resurrection.

\*\*\*

Every now and then,  
God stoops above him,  
relieves him of his deaf-and-dumbness  
and cuts Himself out a cape  
for His nightly pains.

He then starts talking  
so as to ransom the price of silence.

But God, a deaf-and-dumb one,  
has stopped listening to him,  
nor does he pray anymore  
in his own heart  
crying out loud,  
as accustomed.

This instant is the glory  
of absurdity:  
he believes himself God  
and is willing to rebuild the world.

But each and every commandment is turning  
against him, multiplied to the power of 41.

\*\*\*

One day,  
God created the sphere  
and made it a gift for the deaf-and-dumb one,  
saying onto him:

*Take it and cut yourself a face out of it  
shape it into your appearance and likeness.  
Take it and fashion ears and a mouth for it  
so that it may hear and speak in your stead.*

He took it,  
gave thanks for the living dead  
and started carving.

When he was done,  
he called onto God  
and told him:

*You take this cube, God,  
with its 41 walls  
that I have fashioned after the appearance  
and likeness of Your sorrows,  
let there play within its hide-away  
the world's deafness and dumbness,  
for, behold, from now on I am addressing You  
as a friend.*

\*\*\*

When the great war started  
they put a machine-gun in his hands and sent him to the front.  
but he, not comprehending a thing, stayed put  
gun in hand.

People were dying all around him and tombs were being born,  
pain was building its kingdom around him,  
fear was bringing forth monsters all around.

He didn't shoot at anybody and no bullet touched him.

When the war stopped,  
they found him motionless, gun fully charged, the trigger loose and cold,  
his eyes void, unslept and cold,  
his heart empty, beating vainly, in a death toll.

They judged him according to martial law  
and named him traitor, chicken, wet-behind-the-ears, a punk,  
limp-handed,  
dead.

He was forbidden passage through the arch of triumph  
and was erased from all the conscript lists;  
next he was convicted not to die

until he would have lived through the horrors of 41 more wars.

Not for an instant did he understand what was going on around him.  
Inside himself, he had already been through a life-long  
war raised to the power of 41.

The war with his deaf-and-dumb self.

*Translated by **Adriana Bulz***



*Longing for Life* by **Dušan Nedov**

**Mina Decu**

***Forty-one. Me, the Deaf-Mute***

***A Possible Understanding of a Poetry Collection***

(review on „41. I, the Deaf-and-Dumb” by Romeo Aurelian Ilie (Tracus Arte Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018)

"Welcome, deaf-mute!

Look, you are in the realm

of eternal insufficiency.

The place where nothing is finished.

Where nothing is thought to be definitive,

where no one is neither dead nor alive;

no one ever really loved,

and no one has ever told the pure truth. "

Romeo Aurelian Ilie identifies, in this debut collection, poetry with something that sells hope, without having it, in the form of icons, with the help of a deaf-mute scribe, who sometimes dreams of losing his hands, in order not to be able to confess what he has seen in the realm of imperfection, where he had been declared as god, because he had “lived a perfect life” and “died a perfect death”. The whole volume is impregnated by a soft self-irony, marked by elements of Orthodox theology, as the author is a graduate of the Faculty of Theology.

In Borges's story Asterion's House, the number 14 is mentioned again and again, as for the Minotaur it has the value of infinity. When thinking of this story, which, by the way, is my favorite from what Borges wrote, I can't see Deaf-Mute's 41 anything else but as a fourteen written by reverse: 14, because I perceive some similarities between both of the characters, Asterión, who walks alone through his labyrinthine house, inventing all sorts of games, each of them more fantastic, mythological or real than the one(s) before. And inventing also the Deaf-Mute, who



keeps separating and dividing everything in groups of 41 items and seeing this number everywhere: it is the number of the tram line he is travelling along with for selling orthodox icons, it is the the mirror breaking before him into 41 smiles (here, another symbol reminding Borges) and so the world becomes his home, as he has no one. Maybe it is a forced comparison, maybe I was taken by the wave, as there are also some narrative elements in Romeo Aurelian Ilie's poems, and so maybe the connection I made with Borges's mentioned story Asteri6n are just artificial and flamboyant. Nevertheless I wonder now, when being in the very deep middle of the "critical fiction", what else could be more beautiful and more dangerous within literature being taken by the wave of narration and inventing fiction that is always able to give the impression of being truth – and maybe it really is?! In order to continue the comparison with Borges's Asterion, here we have the tenderly-naïve image of the Deaf-Mute before going to bed, as depicted by the author in the poem "18":

"Each evening,  
before going to sleep,  
I, the Deaf-Mute, read Job, (chapter) 41  
and I cry over this  
just like when,  
after many years,  
you take a look at some old pictures  
in the family album."

We are dealing here with the prototype of the antihero: Asterion does not understand why the crowd runs out of his way, but admits having noble blood, because his mother is a Queen, while the Deaf-Mute falls asleep in tears after reading in a book about his biblical origin. Author's modesty and humbleness consists in providing his antihero an Old Testament origin, while connecting him to a number one can't consider as a symbol. For, as far as we know, 41 is deprived of any symbolistic, it is just a number and that's all. Although, at one point, the author mentions something about Temptation of Christ, after the 40 days fast:

"20.  
I'm the Deaf-Mute who died  
with every unspoken word.

I'm the deaf-mute who arose

with each human being that understood the secret:  
on the 41st day of famine,  
the Emperor defeated  
for the first time  
the ruler of this world.

Author's courage of assuming a not really theological language, makes out of his hero, in our eyes, a kind of wandering Jew with the destiny of Job. Yet not until the end. For God does not restore, neither increases Ilie' Deaf-Mute's prosperity, as it happens with Job, but the character only claims he'd go back home. How it develops further, what's the conclusion of the story – all this is up to reader's imagination. It is also interesting that the Deaf-Mute could be also understood as a kind of Lazarus, as he continues writing even after his death, slightly suggesting a kind of resurrection.

"30.

(...)

And he's boiling, but not because of the heat,  
but due to life. He's drunk with life  
just as he has been dead drunk so far.  
It's only now that he really feels alive,  
now that he has known death,  
now that he has known resurrection."

And when it comes to love, the Deaf-Mute unveils that naivety means innocence before truth and being afraid the beauty might be denied to him. Actually he is the one who denies to himself the right to discovering the beauty, as his eyes wouldn't open for seeing it, but only for looking at it. He also unveils that denying means giving way to a new purpose, which can only be found in the emptiness, thus giving rise to an apophatic agape.

"25.

One day, a very beautiful woman  
crossed his way and asked:

Wayfarer, why do you keep travelling throughout the world in vain?

Come with me and I'll give you everything you wish.

But he didn't understand anything

And went further.

The sequence repeated itself identically

For 41 planks long then things went back to normal.

They told on the News a woman

That had left back

Her old self

was found by a river,

breastfeeding 41 weeping willow branches.

They admitted her into the hospital for the crying ones

and all the people there learned the language of the Deaf-Mute.”



*Ascetic, Atonement* by **Marko Ignjatijević**

## **Richard Spisak**

### *Linda Snake Stomper*

Linda, had been out gardening. Then as she was finishing up, she saw a neighbor walking by, who invited her to join her in a stroll.

The two women walked around the block, enjoying the cool of a summer evening in Florida.

When she arrived back home, she decided a sunset swim, might be just the thing. So rinsing the gardening dust and debris off she stepped into the pool.

She was entering the pool via the stair, an atypical entrance for her, but she'd decided after her rinse to avail herself of her floating lounge chair and the stairs were a distinct advantage for my petite wife.

She had just gotten hold of the chair to position it for climbing in when out of the corner of her eye she noticed a rippling in the water. She decided she'd best put her glasses back on for a better look. She left the pool, and snatched her glasses off of the table for a better look.

Just where she had seen that tiny rippling in the water, a small snake was trying desperately to climb up the tiles in the corner of the stairs. Leaning down for a closer look she realized exactly what type of snake she'd nearly shared the floating lounge with.

The old Rhyme went "red next to yellow, kill a fellow". She was looking at a Coral Snake. This snake was more poisonous than a cobra, who might have easily resented my wife, appropriating the raft he had sought safety on.

She scooped the snake out of the pool with a bucket. But the scooping had brought so much water into the bucket, so that as she lifted the bucket, the snake nearly escaped onto the patio.

She whisked the bucket over to the jacuzzi, to insure the snake didn't escape.

When I told her how proud I was she kept her head, she reminded me that the ladies at her office scream and run at the sight of spiders or even a dead cockroach.

I want to do a cartoon sequence

She said, if "you, had been here meaning me" she'd have been very happy to view the whole adventure from way across the pool.

She said, "I couldn't just leave it loose on the patio!" - I could only agree

I checked into available anti-venom access- answer: NONE AT ALL! They don't make it anymore because there is not enough money in it your. That is

NOT GOOD NEWS. We live adjacent to wet lands and have had four very close encounters with these very deadly beauties. Once I nearly grabbed one resting on the handle of an outdoor water faucet. And another time one had crawled in through an open patio door, and was exploring our living room while we were lounging on the floor, on a lazy afternoon.

The only good news I discovered was that their fangs are short so if you're wearing heavy leather boots you're fairly safe - they didn't mention barefooted? HMMM

She bought new gardening gloves the very next day - I tell you, incidents like that make getting into the pool a whole new adventure.

I sure have some amazing women in my life.

Aaron D. Graham

*The Alpha and the Amiga*

~For Greg Geis

Aristotle says that  
Prime Matter is  
*whatever already was  
and was always already.*

Which, I'll remind you  
was the nearest thing

Ancient Greeks  
had to grits.

It conformed  
to whatever  
they ladled over it.

I hear it's still served  
in New Orleans  
with a cream gravy,  
never that tomatoey shit.

Here, in the middle path,

we always  
bitch at weathermen  
like false Elijahs.

We, on our wu-zeey wie  
and our *non-ado* acts  
the drinking

the driving  
to Houston.

Lay waste  
the sagebrush and the sand.

Hump the dunes  
in Chinese APCs  
which break down  
and which  
as the Buddha says,  
mechanics both fix  
and do not fix.

Lord, make of our lives  
an ordered accounting  
an unbalanced checkbook  
people and gratitude  
what is left to us  
after us.

Not supplication.  
Merely being tidy.

We stayed in bed  
until dawn  
the sun

maintaining  
its orbit as long  
as could be expected.

Ultimately confirming:

the status  
is still quo.

There remains  
providence in each  
fallen sparrow.

*Even if it ain't  
fittin'a come now,  
it still fittin'a come.*

## **THE GODDESS SEES HER REFLECTION IN A WASH BASIN**

Wormwood made

her moon shine.

The Good Book

lied. The last days

came first, came

in the fertile years,

each one a breast.

Her lips made words



to plant a new nation

full of old county dirt

before the weather

was on her body,

burning like a broad

lawn, her hair like drawn

flames, her mother's screams

once wood, are now dust

and oranges. She notes how

limbs break mid-flow

like a misstep,

like a shifting line, whitening

even the fullest fires.

her arm is, just as night is,

silence. Dark acres

and white clover

are a gesture

towards the curve

of her bended knee.

## ***THE GODDESS'S NIGHT ON THE TOWN***

The night swings here

work has fallen

behind scars

her mask is the world,

so she is sober.

So she dares

to scour the sense

to be bewitched,

to be the ne ne ne

planting of okra

and the sowing of woe

beneath their rows

and she grieves

the heaving of seeds

the mounds of mud

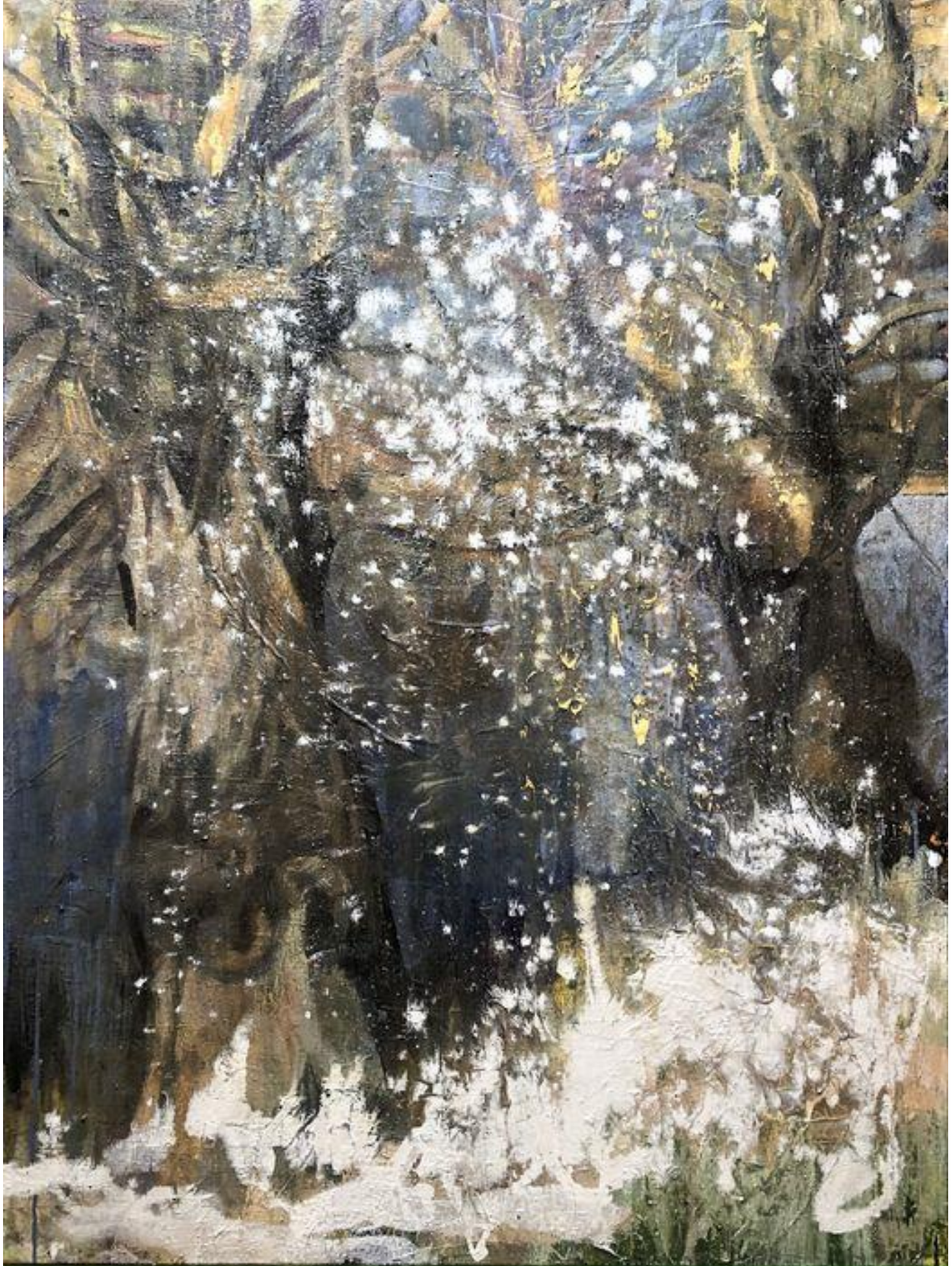
stitched with seams

of laced hair.

The banks beat down

&

latticed with the full moon.



*The Lake, the Burning Trees* by **Manu Rich**

## Rebecca Gethin

### *Sperm Whale Factory*

---

Madeiran 'baleirros' once killed thousands  
for their oil and spermaceti.  
We are bobbing in a rubber boat  
wearing high viz life jackets  
hunting down a sighting.  
When the boatman lets down  
a hydrophone into the water  
it's as if we're tuning into  
communications between Atlanteans  
whose syllables are morse.  
They're right below us  
thirty metres at least  
munching giant squid and octopus.  
They won't need to breathe for an hour.  
He explains their hearts are twice the size  
of humans' and I wonder  
if they feel twice as much love  
and if that is why when one of them -  
probably a youngster coming up for air -  
was harpooned the whole pod  
rose up quickly from down below  
to form a marguerite around her  
and were an easy target. Useful  
that their corpses don't sink.

(Published in *The Blue Nib*, 2020)

### *As they have no legs I should have guessed*

but when he talked about love being like sea horses  
I never imagined how they hang on  
to vegetation because they only have one fin,  
nor the little snap their skulls make  
as they suck in morsels of prey.  
I never imagined they change colour  
according to how they feel or to conceal themselves –

I only thought of the upside-down violin scroll  
of their tails curling round one another, like a living ring  
not that he'd bridle me,  
spur me roughshod,  
hammer nails into my feet.

(Published in Jam and Sand, 2020)

### *Holding the Night*

I bring it close, one hand under  
the belly and one over the wings,  
body all feather and skeleton.  
My tips answer its bounding heart  
as if together they created vibrato.

It weighs almost nothing:  
a ribcage enclosing  
the inner life  
air between wing coverts  
their silks rubbing.

With one wrong squeeze  
it might shatter into birds.  
I could fall into the gaping beak  
disappear into the pink gullet.  
Catchlights of star in the pupils.

The moon has marked  
its name on wing and tail.  
I never knew that flight is a living thing  
that only by being so light  
can it fly so far and carry the dark.

(Published in The Birmingham Review 2020 and in “Vanishings”, 2020)



*Synesthesia painting* (painted to music) by **Mysti Milwee** was painted in collaboration with a Music Producer **Pronoy Kumar Saikia**.

## About the authors



**Natalie Nera** is a pen name of Natalie Dunn. She is a Czech writer, an author of two published novels as well as an editor of a poetry anthology in her mother tongue, who spent fifteen years in the UK with her British husband and two young sons but has recently relocated to Prague, the Czech Republic. She writes in Czech, English and occasionally translates. Her written work (both poems and prose) has appeared in Czech, Russian, German, English, and Romanian. Her prose and poetry were published for example in *Mslaxia*, *Eunoia Review*, *The Selkie*, *Litero Mania* and *Tvar*. She is also a founder and prose editor of *Fragmented Voices*, a small, independent press based in two countries. Natalie is an alumnus of the Charles University (the Czech Republic), and Newcastle University (United Kingdom). More information may be found at <https://natalienera.com> and <https://fragmentedvoices.com/>. You can also follow Natalie on Twitter or Instagram (@natalienera & nerawriting)





**Bengt Berg** was born in 1946 in Torsby, Värmland, Sweden. He studied German and Nordic languages & Literary and Art studies at Uppsala University. He worked as a freelance writer and translator since 1975. Berg was a Member of the Swedish Parliament from 2010 to 2014. Since 1990, Bengt has operated the publishing house, Heidruns Förlag, and an Art Café in his home village Fensbol near Torsby in the Province of Värmland. Bengt Berg's debut poetry collection, *Where the Dream Ends*, appeared in 1974. Since then he has written more than thirty books, mostly poetry. His poems have been translated into Nordic languages, as well as Arabian, Chinese, Hebrew, English, German, Dutch, Greek, Romanian, Spanish, Turkish, Polish, Russian, Latvian, Vietnamese, Hindi and Malayalam. In 2014, he published his Collected Poems, *Dikter genom 40*

*år*. He has participated in many poetry festivals, including Medellín (Colombia), Granada (Nicaragua), Struga (Macedonia), och Druskininkai (Litauania), Nisan (Israel), Jan Smrek Festival (Slovakia), Kritya (India), Târgul Festival de Poezie (Romania), Poetry on the Road (Bremen, Germany), Qinghai Lake Internatioanl Poetry Festival, 2015 (China), Kathak International Poets Summit 2016 (Bangladesh), III International Poetry Festival of Lima, 2016 (FIPLIMA, Peru), among others. Berg has won several Swedish Literary prizes, among them some from The Swedish Academy.



**Sándor Halmosi** (1971), Hungarian poet, literary translator, publisher, and mathematician, born in Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare, Romania). He lived in Germany for 16 years, but currently lives in Budapest, Hungary. Besides all his literary activities he gives presentations on tradition, poetry, language, and symbols, with a view to promoting poetry and cultural dialogue, as well as the intersection of literature and fine art. In 2016, he started making cloisonné enamel artworks. Halmosi is founder of many literature and cultural associations, organizer of workshops and salons, member of the Hungarian PEN Club and of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and

Letters EASAL (Paris). He has been connected to a global network of poets and writer associations. He published a literary manifesto in February of 2020, with the title *Ora et labora. Shout-out for Pure Literature*. This is an attempt to shine a light on the spiritual crisis of the world, through an authentic poetic stance and the responsibility of the literate, – independent of countries, linguistic and social particularities. Volumes (Hungarian): *Showing off with the Demons*, 2001, *You were a Sun Girl*, 2002, *Laurel Grove*, 2003, *It belongs to Solomon*, 2004, *On the Southern Slopes of Annapurna*, 2006, *Gilead*, 2009, *Ibrahim*, 2011, *The Passion of Lao-Tse*, 2018, --- Apocryphal trilogy: --- *Apocrypha*, 2020, *Meltdown* (ongoing), 2021, *Cathars* (ongoing), 2021.



**Đorđe Despić** (1968) has published a book of poetry *Poems and Other Scars* (2018) for which he has received *Miloš Crnjanski Award*. Since 2016 Đorđe was an editor in chief of *Letopis Matice Srpske*, the oldest literary magazine in the world, in period 2016-2020. He teaches at the University of Novi Sad, Department of Serbian Literature.



**Nixon Mateulah** (1973) was born in Lilongwe, Malawi. He moved to South Africa in 1996. His writings have appeared in *Munyori*, *Jungle Jim Magazine*, *Storymoja*, *Aerodrome*, *Kalahari Review*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Stanzas Magazine*, *Poetry Institute of Africa* anthologies et cetera. He publishes poems under the pseudonym, Chichichapatile Mangochi. His debut novel, *Forgiveness* won a prize in an inaugural Malawi National Book Award (2018). Nixon has participated in the Fourth African Writers Trust's Editorial and Publishing Training Workshop (2016) in Kampala, Uganda, facilitated by Jacob Ross. He is currently working on his second novel, *Running Home* and publishing online epic fantasy series, *The Mystery Child*.

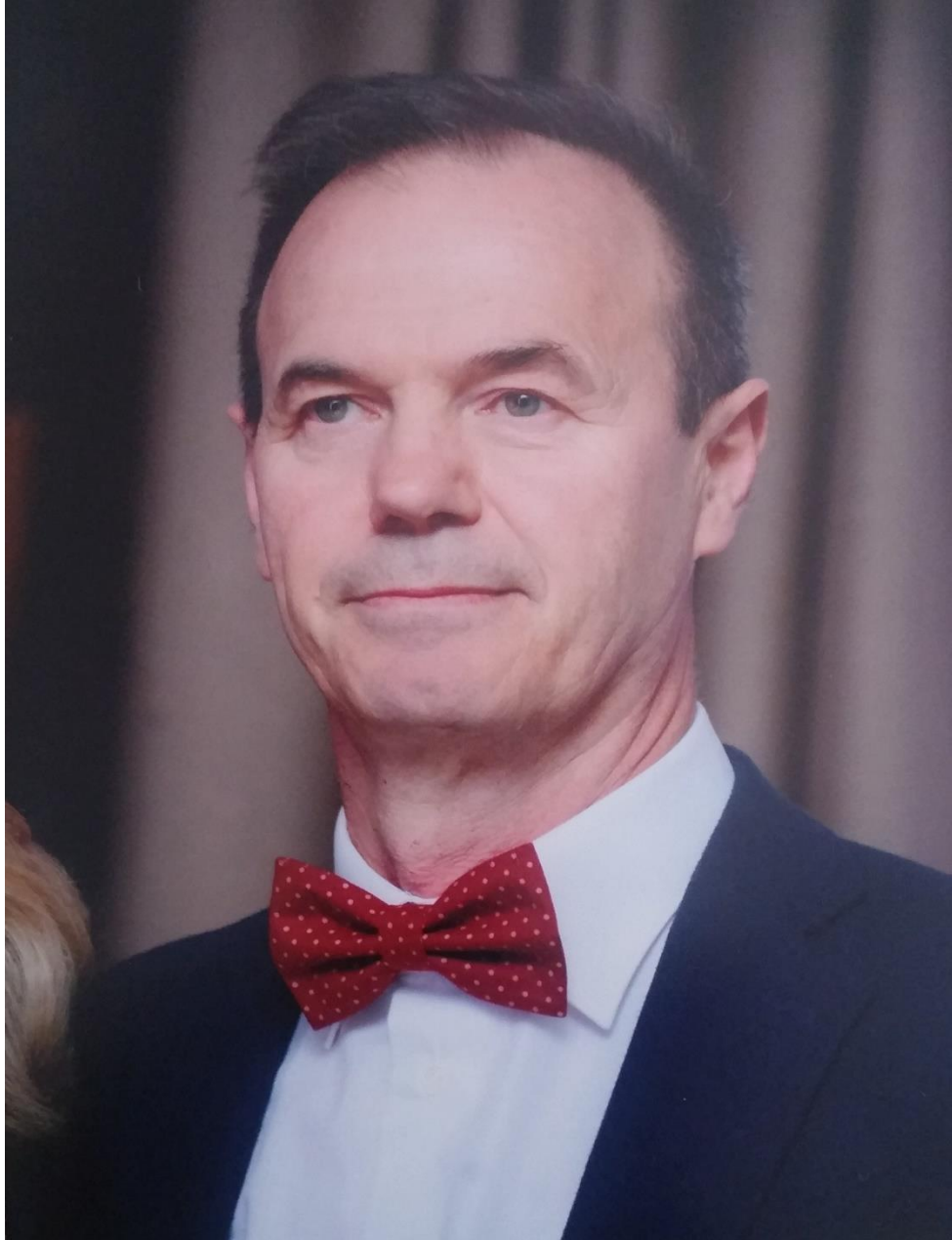


**Nicoleta Crăete** is a Romanian poet and translator. Her collection, "The woman with a body of wax", won the Manuscript Section of The International Poetry Festival of Sighetu Marmăției and was published in 2019 by Grinta Publishing House. It was also awarded the Book of the Year Prize at the Ion Cănațoiu Literature Festival.



**Nikola Yozgof-Orbach** was born in 1984 in Safed which located in Northern Israel. Yozgof-Orbach is a poet, editor, journalist, researcher, doctor of demography and literature. He is a faculty member at Safed academic college and at Haifa University Herzl institute. During his lifetime he published 8 poetry books, 5 academic books and dozens of academic articles, professional articles, and review articles in the fields of Geography, Demography, Literature and History.





**Dragan A. Đorđević – Đoka** was born in 1959 in Kosovksa Mitrovica. He spent his childhood there, and in 1972, he moved with his parents to Vranje, where he finished elementary and high school. He graduated from the Faculty of Architecture, the University of Belgrade in 1983. He has published following books: ZAPISI IZ UTROBE (2009). Vranje: Književna zajednica B. Stanković [eng. WOMB RECORDS], Pozdravi iz JENEA (2018). Vranje: Udruženje književnika Vranja [eng. Greetings from ARMY], ZaDAH ŽIVOTA (2019). Vranje: Književno društvo Kosova i Metohije [eng. THE BREATH OF LIFE]. He also paints. He participated in the painting colony "Prohor Pčinjski" in 1976 and 1978, and the painting "Biennial of Vranjes Artists of "in 2007, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2019. Currently, he is working on a manuscript titled "CORONA(RNI) ZAPISI "[eng. CORANA(RY) RECORDS]



**Max Heinegg's** poems have appeared in 32 Poems, Thrush, Nimrod, The Cortland Review, The American Journal of Poetry, and Love's Executive Order, among others. He lives in Medford, MA where he teaches high school English, is a musician whose records can be heard at [www.maxheinegg.com](http://www.maxheinegg.com), and is the co-founder and brewmaster of Medford Brewing Company. He makes records; here they are: <https://maxheinegg.bandcamp.com/>



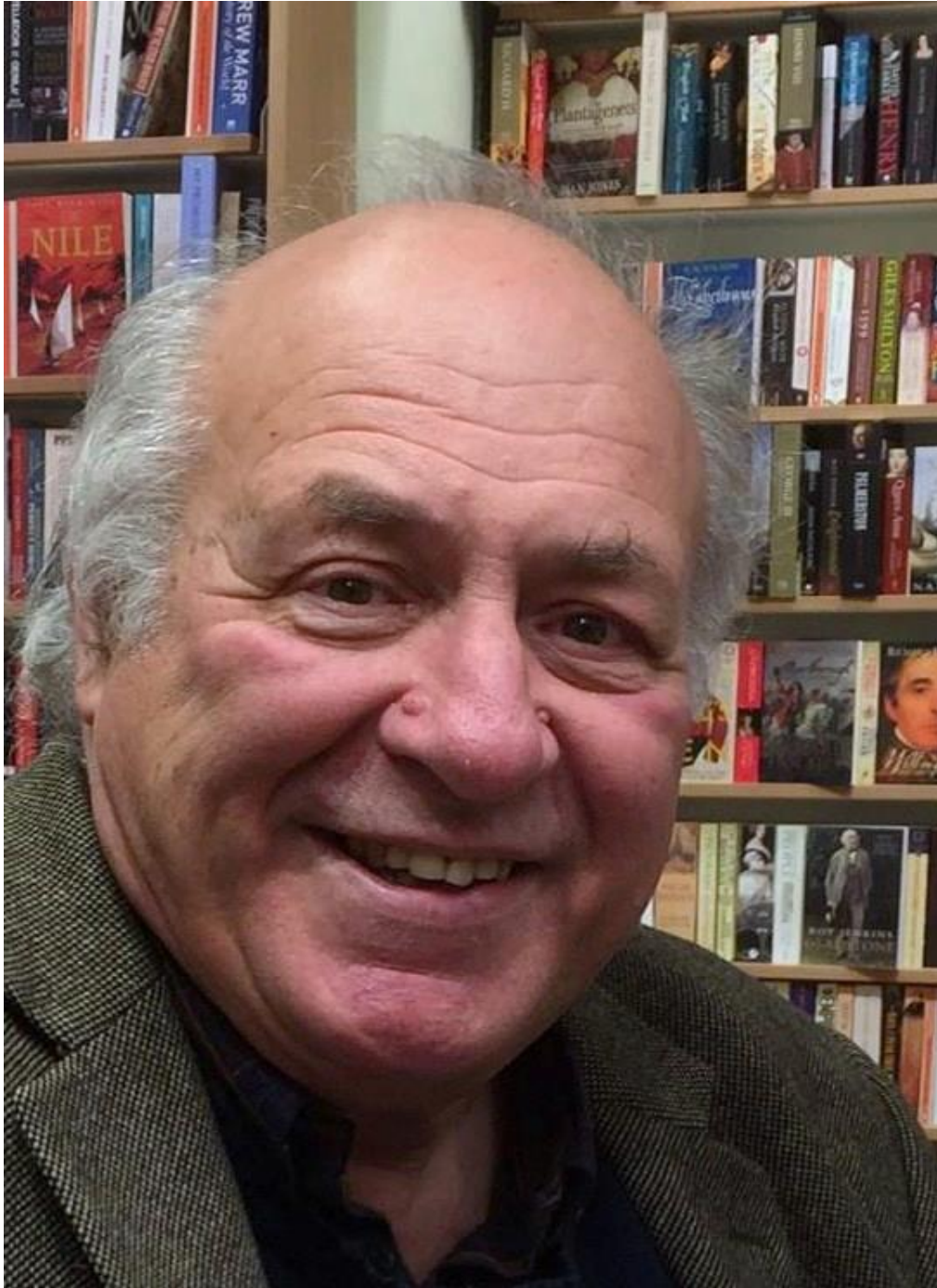
**Shakira Parvin** works as an assistant Professor in the Department of Film & Media, Stamford University Bangladesh. She has published seven books of poetry. She has been awarded *Kagaj Literary Award 2002* (by Gemcon Group Ltd. Bangladesh) and *Kali O Kalam Literary Award 2014* (by Bengal Group Bangladesh) as well. Along with two friends Poet Sabera Tabassum & Shahnaz Nasreen; she is organizing regular literary Adda & discussions by their literary organization *Kobitar Platform*.



**Alberto Palomo Villanueva** (Spain/USA) Linguistic/Translator he has taught Spanish Language and Literature, to different levels. Elementary school and high school. Also English as a second Language. During short periods, combined with his work, He has done translations and interpretations for the Policia Nacional de España. He works in the University Library and write/publish books (poetry/short stories).



**Okolo Chinua** is a writer who writes for many reasons, the beauty of tomorrow being the foremost. Currently he's a student of English Language and Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.



TIMOTHY ADÈS is a rhyming translator-poet, born in 1941, British, living in London. Widely published, he translates to English from French, Spanish, German, and sometimes Greek. He has two books each of Robert Desnos and Jean Cassou, one each of Victor Hugo and Alfonso Reyes, and awards for all these poets; and a book of Alberto Arvelo Torrealba, and one of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, rewritten without using letter E: poems of this kind are called lipograms. He is a trustee of Agenda magazine. Before the pandemic, he ran a bookstall of translated poetry at craft and gift markets. He is active on Facebook and YouTube and has many poems on [www.brindinpress.com](http://www.brindinpress.com) and on [www.timothyades.com](http://www.timothyades.com)



**Romeo Aurelian ILIE** is a Romanian poet. He is 32 years old. He has only one poetry book, named „41. I, the Deaf-and-Dumb” (Tracus Arte Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018), that was published after winning a debut contest. He has also published poetry, literary criticism and essays in various cultural journals from Romania, the Republic of Moldova, Spain, Italy and the USA.



**MINA DECU** (1983) has a Master's degree in Philology and Economic Studies; she is a former professor of Human and Social Studies and is now working as a bookseller, translator and a novice poet. Her debut book, *Desprindere*, Charmides Publishing House, 2018, received several awards: "Mihai Eminescu" National Award, Opus Primum, Young Poet of the Year Award 2018 at the Young Writers' Gala; the Debut Prize at the National Poetry Festival "Colocviile George Coșbuc".





**Richard Spisak** from Tennessee An artist since he held a crayon. A sculptor since playdoh and a multimedia artist from his first flashlight. Given a tape recorder as a child, he began recording his stories and interviews, even his own news casts. He learned poetry at his mother Dorothy's knee and found his own voice in his early teens. He began writing seriously in his teen, and began performance poetry in his twenties. His essays were included in several political essay collections and his performances moved from the stage to radio in his 30s. He has steadily written for radio/television and the web over the last 30 years. He's produced a webcast every week for the last nine years interviewing human rights activists, environmentalists and artists. ([www.NewMercuryMedia.com](http://www.NewMercuryMedia.com)) He's published two short story collections "Two small windows in a pair of mirror doors" and "Between the Silences" and his volume of collected poems will be released in January of 2021 its entitled "7370 Allen Drive". ((Check Amazon and Xlibris.com))



**Aaron Graham** is a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. His work has appeared in *f(r)iction* magazine, *Scalawag: A Journal of the South*, and *Rising Phoenix Press*, among others. He served as the editor-in-chief for the *Squaw Valley Review*, he currently attends UCNG's MFA program and is finishing his Ph.D. at Emory University. He lives in Greensboro, USA.



**Rebecca Gethin** has written five poetry collections and has been a Hawthornden Fellow and a Poetry School tutor. Messages was a winner in the first Coast to Coast pamphlet competition. She blogs at <http://www.rebeccagethin.wordpress.com>