

ARRIVAL AT SANTOS

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
impractically shaped and - ho knows? - self-pitying mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension?

Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag.
So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
I somehow never thought of there being a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen.
And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,

descending into the midst of twenty-six freighters
waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans.
Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook!
Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's

skirt! There! Miss Breen is about seventy,
a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall

s, New York. There. We are settled.
The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,

but they seldom seem to care what impression they make,
or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,
the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps -
wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter

do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,
either because the glue here is very inferior
or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
we are driving to the interior.

Elizabeth Bishop, December 30, 2016

TRUE LOVE

In silence the heart raves. It utters words
Meaningless, that never had
A meaning. I was ten, skinny, red-headed,

Freckled. In a big black Buick,
Driven by a big grown boy, with a necktie, she sat
In front of the drugstore, sipping something

Through a straw. There is nothing like
Beauty. It stops your heart. It
Thickens your blood. It stops your breath. It

Makes you feel dirty. You need a hot bath.
I leaned against a telephone pole, and watched.
I thought I would die if she saw me.

How could I exist in the same world with that brightness?
Two years later she smiled at me. She
Named my name. I thought I would wake up dead.

Her grown brothers walked with the bent-knee
Swagger of horsemen. They were slick-faced.
Told jokes in the barbershop. Did no work.

Their father was what is called a drunkard.
Whatever he was he stayed on the third floor
Of the big white farmhouse under the maples for twenty-five years.

He never came down. They brought everything up to him.
I did not know what a mortgage was.
His wife was a good, Christian woman, and prayed.

When the daughter got married, the old man came down wearing
An old tail coat, the pleated shirt yellowing.
The sons propped him. I saw the wedding. There were

Engraved invitations, it was so fashionable. I thought
I would cry. I lay in bed that night
And wondered if she would cry when something was done to her.

The mortgage was foreclosed. That last word was whispered.
She never came back. The family
Sort of drifted off. Nobody wears shiny boots like that now.

But I know she is beautiful forever, and lives
In a beautiful house, far away.
She called my name once. I didn't even know she knew it.

Robert Penn Warren, December 26, 2016

AMERICA

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January
17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I
need with my good looks?
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not
the next world.
Your machinery is too much for me.
You made me want to be a saint.
There must be some other way to settle this argument.
Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think he'll come back
it's sinister.

Are you being sinister or is this some form of practical joke?

I'm trying to come to the point.

I refuse to give up my obsession.

America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.

America the plum blossoms are falling.

I haven't read the newspapers for months, everyday somebody goes on trial for murder.

America I feel sentimental about the Wobblies.

America I used to be a communist when I was a kid

I'm not sorry.

I smoke marijuana every chance I get.

I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.

When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.

My mind is made up there's going to be trouble.

You should have seen me reading Marx.

My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.

I won't say the Lord's Prayer.

I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.

America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle

Max after he came over from Russia.

I'm addressing you.

Are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?

I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.

I read it every week.

Its cover stares at me every time I slink past the corner candystore.

I read it in the basement of the Berkeley Public Library.

It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious. Movie producers are serious.

Everybody's serious but me.

It occurs to me that I am America.

I am talking to myself again.

Asia is rising against me.

I haven't got a chinaman's chance.

I'd better consider my national resources.

My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals an unpublishable private literature that goes 1400 miles an hour and twenty-five-thousand mental institutions.

I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of underprivileged who live in my flowerpots under the light of five hundred suns.

I have abolished the warehouses of France, Tangiers is the next to go.

My ambition is to be President despite the fact that I'm a Catholic.

America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?

I will continue like Henry Ford my strophes are as individual as his automobiles more so they're all different sexes.

America I will sell you strophes \$2500 apiece \$500 down on your old strophe

America free Tom Mooney

America save the Spanish Loyalists

America Sacco & Vanzetti must not die

America I am the Scottsboro boys.

America when I was seven momma took me to Communist Cell meetings they sold us garbanzos a handful per ticket a ticket costs a nickel and the speeches were free everybody was angelic and sentimental about the workers it was all so sincere you have no idea what a good thing the party was in 1835 Scott Nearing was a grand old man a real mensch Mother Bloor made me cry I once saw Israel Amter plain. Everybody must have been a spy.

America you don't really want to go to war.
America it's them bad Russians.
Them Russians them Russians and them Chinamen.
And them Russians.
The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power
mad. She wants to take our cars from out our
garages.
Her wants to grab Chicago. Her needs a Red Readers'
Digest. Her wants our auto plants in Siberia.
Him big bureaucracy running our fillingsta-
tions.
That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read.
Him need big black niggers. Hah. Her make us
all work sixteen hours a day. Help.
America this is quite serious.
America this is the impression I get from looking in
the television set.
America is this correct?
I'd better get right down to the job.
It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes
in precision parts factories, I'm nearsighted and
psychopathic anyway.
America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

Allen Ginsberg, December 23, 2016

FOR SALE

Poor sheepish plaything,
organized with prodigal animosity,
lived in just a year —
my Father's cottage at Beverly Farms
was on the market the month he died.
Empty, open, intimate,
its town-house furniture
had an on tiptoe air
of waiting for the mover
on the heels of the undertaker.
Ready, afraid
of living alone till eighty,
Mother mooned in a window,
as if she had stayed on a train
one stop past her destination.

Robert Lowell, December 19, 2016

AND ONE FOR MY DAME

A born salesman,
my father made all his dough
by selling wool to Fieldcrest, Woolrich and Faribo.

A born talker,
he could sell one hundred wet-down bales
of that white stuff. He could clock the miles and the sales
and make it pay.
At home each sentence he would utter
had first pleased the buyer who'd paid him off in butter.

Each word
had been tried over and over, at any rate,
on the man who was sold by the man who filled my plate.

My father hovered
over the Yorkshire pudding and the beef:

a peddler, a hawker, a merchant and an Indian chief.

Roosevelt! Willkie! and war!
How suddenly gauche I was
with my old-maid heart and my funny teenage applause.

Each night at home
my father was in love with maps
while the radio fought its battles with Nazis and Japs.

Except when he hid
in his bedroom on a three-day drunk,
he typed out complex itineraries, packed his trunk,

his matched luggage
and pocketed a confirmed reservation,
his heart already pushing over the red routes of the nation.

I sit at my desk
each night with no place to go,
opening thee wrinkled maps of Milwaukee and Buffalo,

the whole U.S.,
its cemeteries, its arbitrary time zones,
through routes like small veins, capitals like small stones.

He died on the road,
his heart pushed from neck to back,
his white hanky signaling from the window of the Cadillac.

My husband,
as blue-eyed as a picture book, sells wool:
boxes of card waste, laps and rovings he can pull

to the thread
and say Leicester, Rambouillet, Merino,
a half-blood, it's greasy and thick, yellow as old snow.

And when you drive off, my darling,
Yes, sir! Yes, sir! It's one for my dame,
your sample cases branded with my father's name,

your itinerary open,
its tolls ticking and greedy,
its highways built up like new loves, raw and speedy.

Anne Sexton, December 16, 2016

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HOPE

Looking for who knows what, I stumbled
upon a set of silverware sunk to the bottom
of the last box with things no longer needed.
It does not fit in with anything in my kitchen
or in my life except an old fancy of my
mother regarding my future.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), December 12, 2016

BENJAMIN PANTIER

Together in this grave lie Benjamin Pantier, attorney at law,
And Nig, his dog, constant companion, solace and friend.
Down the gray road, friends, children, men and women,
Passing one by one out of life, left me till I was alone
With Nig for partner, bed-fellow, comrade in drink.

In the morning of life I knew aspiration and saw glory.
Then she, who survives me, snared my soul
With a snare which bled me to death,
Till I, once strong of will, lay broken, indifferent,
Living with Nig in a room back of a dingy office.
Under my jaw-bone is snuggled the bony nose of Nig —
Our story is lost in silence. Go by, mad world!

Edgar Lee Masters, December 9, 2016

NOSTALGIA

Remember the 1340s? We were doing a dance called the Catapult.
You always wore brown, the color craze of the decade,
and I was draped in one of those capes that were popular,
the ones with unicorns and pomegranates in needlework.
Everyone would pause for beer and onions in the afternoon,
and at night we would play a game called "Find the Cow."
Everything was hand-lettered then, not like today.

Where has the summer of 1572 gone? Brocade and sonnet
marathons were the rage. We used to dress up in the flags
of rival baronies and conquer one another in cold rooms of stone.
Out on the dance floor we were all doing the Struggle
while your sister practiced the Daphne all alone in her room.
We borrowed the jargon of farriers for our slang.
These days language seems transparent, a badly broken code.

The 1790s will never come again. Childhood was big.
People would take walks to the very tops of hills
and write down what they saw in their journals without speaking.
Our collars were high and our hats were extremely soft.
We would surprise each other with alphabets made of twigs.
It was a wonderful time to be alive, or even dead.

I am very fond of the period between 1815 and 1821.
Europe trembled while we sat still for our portraits.
And I would love to return to 1901 if only for a moment,
time enough to wind up a music box and do a few dance steps,
or shoot me back to 1922 or 1941, or at least let me
recapture the serenity of last month when we picked
berries and glided through afternoons in a canoe.

Even this morning would be an improvement over the present.
I was in the garden then, surrounded by the hum of bees
and the Latin names of flowers, watching the early light
flash off the slanted windows of the greenhouse
and silver the limbs on the rows of dark hemlocks.

As usual, I was thinking about the moments of the past,
letting my memory rush over them like water
rushing over the stones on the bottom of a stream.
I was even thinking a little about the future, that place
where people are doing a dance we cannot imagine,
a dance whose name we can only guess.

Billy Collins, December 5, 2016

FR. OMER

Dedicated to Omer Hadžiselimović

Just as we are soft when it comes to the faults
of our own children, I could not step back from
my poems and view them with objective eyes.
I was not capable of reading them as someone

else's until the time when, at a resting-place for diligences, my path crossed with Fr. Omer's.

Fr. Omer sat in a darkened room going through freshly arrived mail. Now and then, coughing or putting down his monocle, he'd startle the flame on the candle. He'd bring my letters to his ear and listen to them for a long time before copying them to the reserve language and arranging them in a shoebox. Today I got the package and am sorting the mail that has just arrived. I'm bringing my poems to my ear and listening to them for the first time as someone else.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), November 30, 2016

OUR LIVES ARE SWISS

Our lives are Swiss
So still – so Cool –
Till some odd afternoon
The Alps neglect their Curtains
And we look farther on!

Italy stands the other side!
While like a guard between –
The solemn Alps –
The siren Alps
Forever intervene!

Emily Dickinson, November 28, 2016

EARTHQUAKE

Americans don't know what tragedy is
a little 6.5 earthquake can set them to chattering
like monkeys
a piece of chinaware broken,
the Union Rescue Mission falls down

6 a.m.
they sit in their cars
they're all driving around
where are they going?

a little excitement has broken into their
canned lives

stranger stands next to stranger
chattering gibberish fear
anxious fear
anxious laughter...

my baby, my flowerpots, my ceiling
my bank account

this is just a tickler
a feather
and they can't bear it...

suppose they bombed the city
as other cities have been bombed
not with an a-bomb
but with ordinary blockbusters
day after day,
every day

as has happened
in other cities of the world?

if the rest of the world could see you today
their laughter would bring the sun to its knees
and even the flowers would leap from the ground
like bulldogs
and chase you away to where you belong
wherever that is,
and who cares where it is
as long as it's somewhere away from
here.

Charles Bukowski, November 25, 2016

WIEW OF A PIG

The pig lay on a barrow dead.
It weighed, they said, as much as three men.
Its eyes closed, pink white eyelashes.
Its trotters stuck straight out.

Such weight and thick pink bulk
Set in death seemed not just dead.
It was less than lifeless, further off.
It was like a sack of wheat.

I thumped it without feeling remorse.
One feels guilty insulting the dead,
Walking on graves. But this pig
Did not seem able to accuse.

It was too dead. Just so much
A poundage of lard and pork.
Its last dignity had entirely gone.
It was not a figure of fun.

Too dead now to pity.
To remember its life, din, stronghold
Of earthly pleasure as it had been,
Seemed a false effort, and off the point.

Too deadly factual. Its weight
Oppressed me – how could it be moved?
And the trouble of cutting it up!
The gash in its throat was shocking, but not pathetic.

Once I ran at a fair in the noise
To catch a greased piglet
That was faster and nimbler than a cat,
Its squeal was the rending of metal.

Pigs must have hot blood, they feel like ovens.
Their bite is worse than a horse's –
They chop a half-moon clean out.
They eat cinders, dead cats.

Distinctions and admirations such
As this one was long finished with.
I stared at it a long time. They were going to scald it,
Scald it and scour it like a doorstep.

Ted Hughes, November 21, 2016

I MISSED HIS BOOK, BUT I READ HIS NAME

Though authors are a dreadful clan
To be avoided if you can,
I'd like to meet the Indian,
M. Anantanarayanan.

I picture him as short and tan.
We'd meet, perhaps, in Hindustan.
I'd say, with admirable elan,
"Ah, Anantanarayanan –

I've heard of you. The Times once ran
A notice on your novel, an
Unusual tale of God and Man."
And Anantanarayanan

Would seat me on a lush divan
And read his name – that sumptuous span
Of 'a's and 'n's more lovely than
"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan" –

Aloud to me all day. I plan
Henceforth to be an ardent fan
of Anantanarayanan –
M. Anantanarayanan.

John Updike, November 18, 2016

SOGNEFJORD

Our daughter didn't dare to fall sleep for months.
We tried everything, but her unbearable nightmares
were waiting, persistent like moths, in each of our beds.
I said: "We must to Norway!"

When we sneaked up and climbed the hump of the Feige
Waterfall, the earth opened up before us, and the roads
of the sea entered among the cliffs like among dominoes.
We took out and laid down on the stone everything we had:
cucumbers and onions from our garden, sour cherries and
currants, as if we were offering sacrifices to the Queen
of the Fjords.

You said: "We'll sleep in the camps, in nobody's beds,
we'll dream other people's dreams!" Glaciers hung in
the sky shone in the evening sun like lanterns. I nodded:
"We have nothing to lose!"

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), November 14, 2016

THE WRITER

In her room at the prow of the house
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;
And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,
Beating a smooth course for the right window
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish
What I wished you before, but harder.

Richard Wilbur, November 11, 2016

THE HANGED ONES

The wind keeps nodding
our heads
yes yes yes

and spurs us on
until we start rocking
waving our hands around
as if we were walking hastily
or having an animated conversation

so we have come alive here
and nodded assent to everything
since the end of the world
yes yes yes

Ivan Wernisch (translated by Jonathan Bolton), November 7, 2016

THE ALCHEMIST: CHANT FOR THE TRANSMUTATION OF METALS

Sail of Claustra, Aelis, Azalais,
As you move among the bright trees;
As your voices, under the larches of Paradise
Make a clear sound,
Sail of Claustra, Aelis, Azalais,
Raimona, Tibors, Berangere,
'Neath the dark gleam of the sky;
Under night, the peacock-throated,
Bring the saffron-coloured shell,
Bring the red gold of the maple,
Bring the light of the birch tree in autumn
Mirals, Cembelins, Audiarda,
Briseis, Lianor, Loica,
From the wide earth and the olive,

From the poplars weeping their amber,
By the bright flame of the fishing torch
Remember this fire.

Midonz, with the gold of the sun, the leaf of the poplar,
by the light of the amber,
Midonz, daughter of the sun, shaft of the tree, silver of
the leaf, light of the yellow of the amber,
Midonz, gift of the God, gift of the light, gift of the
amber of the sun,
Give light to the metal.

Anhes of Rocacoart, Ardenca, Aemelis,
From the power of grass,
From the white, alive in the seed,
From the heat of the bud,
From the copper .of the leaf in autumn,
From the bronze of the maple, from the sap in the bough;

Lianor, Loanna, Loica,
By the stir of the fin,
By the trout asleep in the gray-green of water;
Vanna, Mandetta, Viera, Alodetta, Picarda, Manuela
From the red gleam of copper,
Ysaut, Ydone, slight rustling of leaves,
Vierna, Jocelynn, daring of spirits,
By the mirror of burnished copper,
O Queen of Cypress,
Out of Erebus, the flat-lying breadth,
Breath that is stretched out beneath the world:
Out of Erebus, out of the flat waste of air, lying beneath
the world;
Out of the brown leaf-brown colourless
Bring the imperceptible cool.
Elain, Tireis, Alcmena,
Quiet this metal!

Let the manes put off their terror, let them put off their
aqueous bodies with fire.
Let them assume the milk-white bodies of agate.
Let them draw together the bones of the metal.
Selvaggia, Guiscarda, Mandetta,
Rain flakes of gold on the water
Azure and flaking silver of water,
Alcyon, Phaetona, Alcmena,
Pallor of silver, pale lustre of Latona,
By these, from the malevolence of the dew
Guard this alembic.
Elain, Tireis, Allodetta
Quiet this metal.

Ezra Pound, November 4, 2016

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She sweeps with many-colored brooms,
And leaves the shreds behind;
Oh, housewife in the evening west,
Come back, and dust the pond!

You dropped a purple ravelling in,
You dropped an amber thread;
And now you've littered all the East
With duds of emerald!

And still she plies her spotted brooms,
And still the aprons fly,

Till brooms fade softly into stars –
And then I come away.

Emily Dickinson, October 31, 2016

CINEMA LIBERTY

“Hello?” Saša answered.

“Hello, it’s Adin, hello . . .” From the phone booth, I raised my voice over the clattering of a passing streetcar.

“Adin, man! You’re alive? Alive, damm, you’re alive! Where are you calling from?”

“From Zagreb.”

“Yeah, I can hear you’re in Zagreb. How did you get out? Man, I thought you were dead. You went through hell. I saw it on the news . . . Where exactly are you?”

“In a phone booth.”

“C’mon. As if Zagreb only had one phone booth! Where are you now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Look around and tell me what you see, any signs or—?”

“Cinema Liberty.”

“Okay. Listen. Get on streetcar nine towards Ljubljanska. I’ll meet you at Selska, the next-to-last stop.” We sat in Saša’s friend Ružica’s place catching up. A month ago Saša had managed to flee besieged Sarajevo with a stroke of luck and the Red Cross. He was in much better shape already after a month in Zagreb. A month ago I’d taken a direct hit from a shell in my foxhole, but by some miracle all the shrapnel missed me. The blast, though, had rattled the brains in my skull and the marrow in my bones—even the very soul left over in my war-wasted, hundred-and-ten-pound body. Medical referral in hand, it had taken me a month to make my way to Rebro Clinic in Zagreb. My head was a black hole of detonation and sedatives. Rebro didn’t want to accept me, even with a referral. At the admitting desk, the nurse snarled: “We Croats turned the other cheek to you Muslims. And just look what we got in return!” I didn’t get upset. I didn’t care. All I wanted was to get the hell out of that war. I no longer was afraid of death. “Let a streetcar run me over—fine. Let a flowerpot fall on my head, an absurd death—that’s fine, too. Whatever. But to be slaughtered or blown up by a grenade, no way in hell. Goddammit, it’s the end of the twentieth century. Out in the world people are dying of AIDS, but here it’s medieval. We’re getting butchered with knives!”

I contemplated my next move. “Rebro’s a big hospital. There must be a Muslim doctor somewhere.” I traipsed from door to door, scanning the name placards. For the first time in my life I wasn’t looking for a person, but for a Muslim. I soon spotted a doorplate bearing a Muslim-sounding name. I knocked on the door and was in luck—the doctor was in her office. “You’re Dr. So-and-So?” I called out to her. “Yes,” she hollered back, “Please come in.” Inside, as I told her my story, she burst into tears and opened up about herself. She’d worked at Rebro for years but had been born in Mostar. Her only sister had stayed behind, and now . . . But I had no tears left to shed.

“We’ll do all the tests, including a CAT scan,” she continued, “but I don’t know how to get you a bed in the hospital.”

“I don’t need one. I’ve got a place to crash.”

The next few days she led me around the hospital by the hand, from specialist to specialist. Finally she gave me the diagnosis: “Your condition will improve, though in the future you might have some memory problems. I don’t know exactly how to explain it, but that explosion wiped out some spots in your brain. You probably won’t be able to learn and remember the way you used to.”

“That’s fine. I’ve got plenty of things I’d like to forget,” I said, failing miserably as usual in my attempt to sound witty.

Later that same day I bumped into a guy from Sarajevo on the street. He told me Saša was in Zagreb and gave me a phone number, which I immediately dialed. Later on, catching up at Ružica’s, Saša pulled out a stack of poems he’d written in Sarajevo. I read them, one after another. They were about killing and evil, but without a trace of anger or hate.

“Do you have any?” he asked.

“Man, I was in a foxhole, and there’s no poetry in foxholes,” I said, reaching into my back pocket for the single poem that had congealed in my head in the bus, on one of the legs of my escape from war-split Bosnia, on the so-called Corridor (or rather Wild Goat Trail) of Life. I handed him a piece of paper folded into quarters.

As soon as he read it, Saša started bounding around the room, hugging and congratulating me. His reaction surprised me. I was pleased by but also skeptical of his praise—Saša’s always exaggerating. He grabbed the phone, cast me a profound glance, and began dialing. Somebody answered immediately. “Tomaž,” he said, “listen and learn how to write poems!” He recited my poem into the receiver and then repeated it one more time at the listener’s request. Saša even managed to keep his mouth shut for a moment or two before wrapping things up. “OK, I’ll send it to you tomorrow,” he said, slamming down the receiver. During the conversation I’d surmised this Tomaž was the well-known poet from another of the newly-minted Balkan republics. “I’m supposed to copy and send your poem to him immediately,” Saša explained. “He’s gonna go to Germany in a few days for some literary mingling. He wants to translate your poem and present it at a festival!”

It turned out I wasn’t the only one who wanted to get the hell out of Croatia—Saša also wanted to disappear. Zagreb hadn’t exactly been the most pleasant or welcoming place lately. Both of us lived under constant threat of the cops whisking us off the street, dressing us up in Croatian uniforms, and shipping us back to Bosnia. Back to the front. And it wasn’t that easy just to pick up and flee. At the Croatian border, the guards wouldn’t allow any draft-age men who didn’t have a special exit permit to pass. The Western countries had already gotten smart and had stopped accepting people holding visaless passports from the now-defunct Yugoslavia. But, fortunately for us, the East (as usual) lagged behind the West. Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland—not to mention a few others—would still accept us. Saša and I agreed we’d go together. He insisted on Krakow; my vote was for Prague.

“Man, how did you come up with Krakow?”

“Don’t you know all the giants who were studying there?” He began rattling off names. “Tesla, Ivo Andrić. This guy, that one, and remember—”

“And don’t YOU know what great beer they have in Prague? Not to mention the women!”

We had to decide fast. Zagreb was getting way too hot for comfort. In the end, we settled on Prague. I don’t recall why, but we traveled separately: Saša flew via Vienna while my train departed two days later, connecting in Budapest. I was by myself in the compartment. In Hungary, approaching the border, the conductor shook me awake.

“Wake up, sir! Romanian smugglers are in the next compartment. If they catch you sleeping, they’ll rob you!”

“Thanks for the warning,” I said, “but I really don’t have anything worth stealing.”

I peered into my bag: only a pair of socks, underpants, and a few books of poems I’d bought in Zagreb for a song (they were literally giving away anything printed in Serbia and Bosnia, especially in Cyrillic). I only really had to keep my eye on my passport, which was ridiculous. I was traveling with the passport of a country which had de facto ceased to exist, yet was still decaying, hemorrhaging. Its breakdown was a case of metastasis, with pathological cells devouring healthy ones, constantly multiplying uncontrollably until they dropped dead along with the dying organism. Disgusting.

The compartment door opened. A short drunken Romanian murmured something. I gathered he wanted a cigarette, but felt repelled by his drunkenness, his stench, and so threw him one (I’m never that impolite, but I didn’t want him to touch my cigarettes). Ten minutes later he came back, demanding another one. “No way!” I snapped. Eyeing the water bottle on the tabletop under the window, he sat down on the seat across from me and blurted, “Vodka!” The clear glass container didn’t have a label. “It’s not vodka, moron. And I didn’t say you could sit down.” He didn’t understand or just pretended not to. Whatever. “Vodka!” he slurred, lurching for the bottle. I jumped up, grabbed the scruff of his neck, and kicked his ass out of the compartment.

Believe it or not, it’s a true story. My one hundred and ten pounds had ballooned into five hundred pounds of pure fury. And the guy wasn’t even heavier than me, just a featherweight. “If he comes back with his posse,” I raged to myself, “I’ll show ‘em vodka. Smack upside the head!”

He didn’t return. Instead, the Czechoslovak customs inspectors burst in. Ignoring the drunken smugglers in the next compartment, they dragged me, my problematic passport, and my suspiciously scanty baggage off the train and into the customs booth. Stripping me of my passport, they left me waiting in a filthy corridor with barred windows during its inspection. I didn’t get too fired up—at least I could smoke there and still had enough cigarettes. “Hey, my train’s gonna leave!” I told them. “There’ll be another one,” one of the inspectors answered. I paced nervously back and forth, puffing. “How lucky is that, my fellow Slavs,” I uttered to myself under my breath, “at least we can somehow understand each other!” After a while, they eventually called me in for questioning. “The purpose of your trip?” “Tourism,” I answered laconically. Two or three hours later they actually released me, the very moment the next train to Prague arrived. At parting, one of the inspectors even clapped me on the shoulder and politely wished me well.

It was about 4:30 A.M. when I finally arrived at Prague's main station. Before I'd left Zagreb, my father's friend had pressed a one-way ticket to Prague and three hundred Deutschmarks—starter money—into my hand. And somehow thirty or so Czechoslovak crowns had made their way into my pocket. Saša, who was supposed to have picked me up, was of course nowhere to be found. He was late—typical! Not knowing what else to do, I bought a can of Staropramen beer from the Czech change, using up almost all of it. Saša finally showed up at nine. (Saša's always thinking in rapid fire—much faster than mere mortals. He usually sees several moves ahead, but normal everyday things he does at a snail's pace. And he's clumsy as hell!) Two days earlier, my friend Jiřina, a good-looking and enterprising Czech girl I'd met on the Adriatic Coast before the war, had collected him. Without her, I honestly don't know what we would have done. We didn't know anyone else in Prague. Jiřina let us stay a week for free (local calls for answering Room for Rent ads included) in a room in the former student dorm she'd bought and turned into a hostel after the Velvet Revolution.

After four or five days, we managed to find a cheap room. The landlord, a former gymnastics champion, was now a day laborer in construction—and a heavy alcoholic. We called him by his nickname: Bohuš. He was kind-hearted but insufferable when drunk. The apartment was dreary, our landlord desperate, and the two of us were literally shitting our pants because of the horrors of war and of refugee living. Bohuš didn't have any extra bedding to offer us, and we were broke. And he only had an old semi-automatic, or rather hand-operated, washing machine. Saša and I had never seen such a wonder of technology—or shall I say, museum piece—and immediately christened it Perestrojka. Once I tried to wash the little underwear we had. Perestrojka ate two undershirts; I freaked out and vowed never to use it again. Jiřina (or rather her husband, a doctor in a large suburban hospital around the corner) saved the day for us again. “The simplest thing is to do,” he advised, “would be to get bedding from me. I work the night shift, so the hospital provides me with clean sheets. I'll give you each a set from now on—we'll exchange dirty linens for laundered ones once a week. Don't bother buying anything or fussing with washing and ironing.” So that year living with Bohuš, that's how we managed: Saša and I slumbered every night on sheets stamped in indelible ink with the name of a hospital and the number of a particular shift. My letters to my refugee friends scattered around the world opened with lines like: This week started off with number seven, Kukoč's basketball uniform . . . or, Today I awoke to number five (Sretenović) . . . 1

Saša and I signed up for Czech at the very best academic language school—it was expensive as hell and populated mostly with Western grad students; they'd waived our tuitions since we'd just fled a war zone—but in just a couple of weeks I had to drop out and earn some cash. I found a job in a workshop for leather accessories, where every day I'd stand eight hours at the leather-trimming machine selecting the proper quality and thickness of skins before cutting out pieces for bags, backpacks, wallets, and other related crap. Because leather is so expensive, they made sure I wasted as little as possible, and they deducted each and every mistake from my pay (itself one-third less than that sorry mess of a language school I'd dropped out of). Unlike me, Saša always somehow had some money in his back pocket—every now and then, a friend would think of him and send a mark or two. I didn't have any friends who could do that. So I shuttled every day from the apartment at one end of Prague to the workshop on the other side of the city. On the bus or streetcar, I'd memorize Czech words from my pocket dictionary in those two hours before and after my eight-and-a-half-hour shift. At home I'd try to rest, but wallowing in depression isn't exactly relaxing. Now and then I tried to put a poem together. Meanwhile Saša went on learning Czech, shutting himself up in the apartment, and going out of his mind worrying about his girl, still stuck behind in besieged Sarajevo. And of course he wrote poems. We had nothing to read so we wrote (as newcomers to Prague we didn't yet know it had the world's largest specialized Slavic library). One day Saša presented me with one of his numerous ingenious plans: “We'll take turns writing poems for each other. One day I'll write a poem for you to read, and the next day you'll do the same for me.”

To make a long story short, we were broke and lonely, yet we were young and thirsty for everything. Saša kept on proposing ideas. For example, how could two guys squeeze the most fun out of the least amount of money. “I found this Latin American night club: fifteen crowns to get in and beers for ten each. If we take the last subway downtown we'll be there at midnight. We pay at the door and we can limit ourselves to a beer an hour and a pack of cigarettes each. We make it an all-nighter and leave at five A.M. with the first subway. All that for a grand total of 200 crowns!” “And where,” I sighed, “are we gonna get 200 crowns?” Another time, exhausted from work, I met him at the doorstep: “I've got a plan! We'll just sit down and write a letter to Tomáš. Remember when I called him in Zagreb? He said he'd send me a couple of bucks if I was really in need. He's a friend. And knows both of us. Just think how much he liked your poem! Remember he knows what kind of dire straits we're in (blah, blah) . . . We just have to make him read between the lines (blah, blah). . . .”

“Listen, Saša, don't do it.”

“Why not? He's rich and famous. And he's my friend.”

“You won't get any money and you'll lose a friend.”

“How can you tell if you don't know him personally?”

“I've read him. I know his type.”

“Aw, Adin, c'mon. That's bullshit. You're not a fortune teller, are you?”

Yes, I'd known Saša forever. Always asking my advice and never following it except that one time back in Zagreb when we chose Prague over Krakow. I didn't have the patience anymore for pointless discussions with him.

“Write whatever you want,” I hissed, “just be sure you don’t mention me.” A few days later I got back from work and found Saša chain-smoking, pacing the floor, depressed out of his mind, and on the verge of tears.

“What the hell is going on?” I asked dumbstruck, fearing the worst from Bosnia.

“Nothing,” he said.

“Don’t bullshit me—what happened?”

He hesitated a moment before handing me a picture postcard from Ljubljana he’d gotten earlier that day. From Tomaž.

“Oh, that shit?! I was afraid something had really happened.”

“Just read what he wrote.”

“Why, goddammit, would I ever read that? What were you expecting?”

What Tomaž actually wrote was this: Sure, I understand, but lately I’m having troubles of my own . . . Complete bullshit! The only clear and unambiguous thing on the whole postcard was a bit about how he’d started working on a new collection of poems he’d gotten a fellowship for. But he couldn’t make up his mind whether or not he should write them in Barcelona, or in Prague . . . And he was asking Saša how things were in Prague . . .

“Saša, that’s none of my business. Stop your bitching and get out of my sight! I don’t wanna see you like this and I can’t afford to be pulled down by such bullshit.”

Saša was literally sick for a couple of days after, but I kept on mercilessly ignoring him. After the fourth or fifth day, when I got home from work, he met me at the door with a broad smile and a kind of fanfare.

“Oooh, Adin, my man! Where’ve you been all this time? I’m throwing a little party for us, and you’ve been nowhere to be found. I bet you’ve found a little hottie in that leather works of yours?”

I immediately knew he’d written a good poem. But I had no idea yet what it would be about and just how good. He ushered me into the kitchen. On the table was a plate of two sliced tomatoes (the beautiful and expensive but tasteless and rubbery kind) and a few pieces of feta cheese, arranged nicely. And next to it was a little flask of cheap Moravian plum brandy.

I sat down. “OK, show me what you’ve got.”

I barely remember my own verses, but that poem, made up of several scenes from Prague and situations we’d lived through together, immediately stuck in my memory. Saša begins by addressing his friend Tomaž, a famous poet, who’s wondering whether or not to write his new collection of poems in Barcelona or in Prague: In Prague you can see a tour group of the blind testing the guide’s eloquence with their white canes: Gothic portals, Baroque vaulted spaces . . . In Prague you can also see how: In the Latin American night club, with drunken Quechuas lying on the tables at 3:30 A.M., Prague girls fall into hopelessness like Bosnian cities on the radio news . . . To sum it up: a man in Prague can really see a lot, only if he really wants to—even if he’s blind. At the end of the poem, Saša advises Tomaž to stay at home, anyway.

“What do you think? Should I send him the poem?”

“Send it,” I said, “and you’ll never hear from him again.”

Of course he sent it; no answer ever arrived. Yet soon afterwards, we changed our address and moved away. We moved away from our landlord Bohuš. We left the apartment that wasn’t a hospital for us—but it was our madhouse. We moved away from the days, from the nights in which we were fleeing into dreams, tucked into our bedding and pillowcases stamped with the name of a hospital and the numbers of a shift.

We changed apartments and bought new bedding.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Wayles Browne and Stephanie Krueger), October 28, 2016

LONG DISTANCE II

Though my mother was already two years dead
Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,
put hot water bottles her side of the bed
and still went to renew her transport pass.

You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.

He'd put you off an hour to give him time
to clear away her things and look alone
as though his still raw love were such a crime.

He couldn't risk my blight of disbelief
though sure that very soon he'd hear her key
scrape in the rusted lock and end his grief.
He knew she'd just popped out to get the tea.

I believe life ends with death, and that is all.
You haven't both gone shopping; just the same,
in my new black leather phone book there's your name
and the disconnected number I still call.

Tony Harrison, October 24, 2016

ONE FLESH

Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,
He with a book, keeping the light on late,
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,
All men elsewhere-it is as if they wait
Some new event: the book he holds unread,
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.

Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,
Or if they do, it is like a confession
Of having little feeling-or too much.
Chastity faces them, a destination
For which their whole lives were a preparation.

Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,
Silence between them like a thread to hold
And not wind in. And time itself's a feather
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,
These two who are my father and my mother
Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?

Elizabeth Jennings, October 21, 2016

THE SILENCE OF THE WORLD

I can imagine the silence when the world
will have stilled itself – no more poems tossed
off the tongue, no more screams
of raven lugging entrails of porcupine,
no more tales of the Navajo, or Louisiana black man,
or old-time Vermonter,
no more breathing in the ear of last lover,
no more angelic beings left to be kissed
into the claustrophobia of flesh,
no more temples giving light
from open doors into bitter winter nights, no more
curious weasel who leaves
her black ring frozen in the air,
no more tooth that gnaws through gum and bones into
the cathedral of the mouth.
No more splat when singer spits
mouthwash into the washbasin after the concert,
no more “Quit yer bawlin!”
from punk principal to slob schoolboy
when sore mother hauls
small boy into classroom by sore ear.
No more young woman in large hat in profile
in afternoon light saying, “So what, darling?”

I don't hate you. I love you. So what?"
No more flutesman trudging through snow
on 125th Street on the last Sunday morning of his jeopardy.
No more husband saying, "Snack bar's the other way."
No more wife replying, "You aren't going to eat again,
are you?"
No more husband replying, "I don't want to eat,
I was just telling you where the snack bar is."
No more wife replying, "For Chrissake! I know where it is."
No more caesura or else everything one endless caesura,
no more feminine rhyme such as "lattice" and "thereat is,"
no more parallelismus membrorum panting in one ear,
no more Neruda's slowly deepening voice saying,
"Federico, te acuerdas, debajo de la tierra..."

From across the valley the thud of an axe
arrives later than its strike
and the call of goodbye slowly separates itself
little by little from the vocal chords of everything.

Gabrey Kinnell, October 17, 2016

I REMEMBER THE SEA WHEN I WAS SIX

I remember the sea when I was six
and ran on wetted sands
that were speckled with shells and the blowholes of clams
bedded secretly down in black muck –

I remember the sun, fishy airs, rotting piers
that reached far out into turquoise waters,
and ladies in white who sprinkled light laughter
from under their parasols...

Where was it, that beach whose hot sand I troweled
day after day into my red tin pail?
It's only in dreams now I sense it, unreal,
at the end of an inner road no longer traveled.

Frederick Morgan, October 14, 2016

SKUNKS

The corruptions of war and peace, the public and wholesale
crimes that make war, the greed and lies of the peace
And victor's vengeance: how at a distance
They soften into romance—blue mountains and blossomed
marshes in the long landscape of history—Caligula
Becomes an amusing clown, and Genghiz
A mere genius, a great author of tragedies. Our own time's
chiefs of massacre—Stalin died yesterday—
Watch how soon blood will bleach, and gross horror
Become words in a book.

We have little animals here,
slow-stepping cousins of stoat and weasel,
Striped skunks, that can spit from under their tails
An odor so vile and stifling that neither wolf nor wildcat dares
to come near them; they walk in confidence,
Solely armed with this loathsome poison-gas.
But smelled far off—have you noticed?—it is surprisingly
pleasant.
It is like the breath of ferns and wet earth
Deep in a wooded glen in the evening,
Cool water glides quietly over the moss-grown stones, quick
trout dimple the pool.—Distance makes clean.

Robinson Jeffers, October 10, 2016

A MARRIAGE

When my mother knew why her treatment wasn't working,
She said to my father, trying not to detonate her news,
'Steve, you must marry again. When I'm gone, who's going
To tell you to put your trousers on before your shoes?'

My father opened his mouth to—couldn't—refuse.
Instead, he threw her a look; a man just shot
Gazing at the arm or leg he was about to lose.
His cigarette burned him, but he didn't stub it out.

Later, on the porch, alive in the dark together,
How solid the house must have felt, how sanely familiar
The night-lit leaves, their shadows patterning the street.
The house is still there. The elms and the people, not.

It was now, and it never was now. Like every experience
Of being entirely here, yet really not being.
They couldn't imagine the future that I am seeing,
For all his philosophy and all her common sense.

Anne Stevenson, October 7, 2016

WIND

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. Once I looked up –
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap;
The wind flung a magpie away and a black –
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

Ted Hughes, October 3, 2016

CITY PSALM

The killings continue, each second
pain and misfortune extend themselves

in the genetic chain, injustice is done knowingly, and the air
bears the dust of decayed hopes,
yet breathing those fumes, walking the thronged
pavements among crippled lives, jackhammers
raging, a parking lot painfully agleam
in the May sun, I have seen
not behind but within, within the
dull grief, blown grit, hideous
concrete facades, another grief, a gleam
as of dew, an abode of mercy,
have heard not behind but within noise
a humming that drifted into a quiet smile.
Nothing was changed, all was revealed otherwise;
not that horror was not, not that killings did not continue,
but that as if transparent all disclosed
an otherness that was blessed, that was bliss.
I saw Paradise in the dust of the street.

Denise Levertov, September 30, 2016

THE PAW OF A CAT

The first trickle
of water down
a dry ditch stretches
like the paw
of a cat, slightly
tucked at the front,
unambitious
about auguring
wet. It may sink
later but it hasn't
yet.

Kay Ryan, September 26, 2016

BUT, MUMMY

'But, mummy, the elephant's having such a hard time ...'

The six year-old child clasps her hands, moaning through her tears, shame and fear, as she watches – for the first time in her life, the first time she's been to a circus – an elephant, which has been forced to stand with all four feet on a gleaming silver ball. It is peeing with the tremendous effort, with fear of its trainer and fear of people, endeavoring to hold its enormous body on one leg on the shiny slippery ball that weighs only a few kilograms.

At first her mother smiles at her words, but when she turns her head and catches sight of her little girl's face, quite distorted with terror and sorrow, she strokes her head, then hugs her and says:

'But, my son,' son, that's a term of endearment for little girls in the Balkans, 'my little donkey,' donkey, that's a term of endearment for little girls in the Balkans, 'the elephant's trained to do that! He's used to it, he does it all the time ...'

'No! No! He wouldn't pee if it was easy ... !'

The little girl is shouting by now, she can't control her horror. She jumps up from her seat. She wants to go down into the circus ring.

To tell them.

To shout at them.

To take the elephant away with her.

To put it into her little bed.

To rescue it.

To wipe its tears and put pants on it.

To punish someone.

To read it bedtime stories.

To do all sorts ...

Her mother is pink with embarrassment: what kind of child has she got, my God, ever since she was born she's been unlike anyone else. She doesn't eat like other children, she doesn't sleep like other children, nor does her heart beat like other children's: hers beats crazily, erratically, as though it wants to leap out of the fragile cage of her six year-old body.

She grabs her daughter's dress, pulls her back and presses her down onto the seat as though trying to stick her to it:

'Hush, you silly,' silly is a term of endearment for little girls in the Balkans, that's what her reasonable and flustered mother says, 'it's only a circus!'

'No, no! I don't like it! I want to go home! I want to go hooommme!'

The little girl struggles, unsticks herself from the seat and hurls herself down the steps. Her mother stands up, now deep red with shame: what will people say. What people would say was always more important than what her children thought.

Nan, her mother's mother, held the reins her whole life, even when she turned into a wrinkled apple on her bed; her bed became bigger and bigger as she grew smaller and smaller, until in the end all that was left of her was an apple skin that the wind dispersed with the spring blossom.

That was why her mother now wants to hold the reins of the life of her little six year-old daughter, she hadn't understood that things could be different, she hadn't realized that a child could be like this, and not obedient and quiet as she had been, her whole, strange, life.

The two of them come out of the stifling circus tent that stinks of horse pee; they are both flushed and tearful, each for her own reason, forever, just as the purple curtain falls and hides the circus ring, the elephant, the gleaming silver ball and everything else that the little girl has found so disturbing.

The little girl knows that everything she has just seen in the circus is a blatant lie! It's a lie that everything is wonderful! Fun! Magic! Is it possible that she is the only one to see that the circus is one great unbelievable lie where elephants and small girls are tormented?

Would God see it all at least – mummy says He sees everything?

The applause resounds under the tent, while the little girl goes on screaming as her mother, her fingers digging violently into the child's arm, drags her towards the tram stop – to put an end to this disgrace.

Here, of course – for dramatic effect – the afore-mentioned applause is louder the louder our little girl's screams are.

Which means that now at this moment it is echoing through the entire universe.

That's the way it has to be written, and that's how it was written, because the drama of the situation develops of its own accord and not according to the will of the writer, who is a complete ignoramus in matters of the child's and other people's hearts.

And that would be that.

Which somewhere in the world would be a good story.

In Chekhov's hands, above all, of course. But who would compete with Chekhov, for heaven's sake!

A good American film-maker, like Houston, for instance, would turn this into a bitter-sweet film, something like *Annie*, at the end of which a kindly rich man would buy up the elephant along with the whole circus and settle them in the garden behind the little girl's house, to prove to her that adults, and particularly the wealthy, have feelings. Ha-ha. The little girl doesn't have a garden. She lives in a little cramped apartment at the end of town, in an apartment like a matchstick, with a kitchen like an even smaller matchstick, and a bathroom like a corner of that matchstick, in a high-rise block designed for Tito's working class by an architect who lives in a lovely capitalist villa in the centre of town and has a small villa in the mountains – that working class is something that only those swear by who do not take their children to small peripheral circuses. Their children watch big international circuses, elephants that flutter on a wire as in cartoons and do not pee as they try with all their might to carry out their painful circus tasks in order to earn a little sugar-lump as a reward.

An Italian director would make a twentieth-century neo-realistic film. In it the revolting circus owner would try to rape both the elephant and the little girl, while her mother would be thrown into a madhouse, and it would all take place to the accompaniment of violent, crazed music, where a harmonica would screech along with the little girl and dandelion snow would swirl through the air as in *Amarcord*. No, that's too like life. The workers' settlements at the edge of the town are filthy and true like those films.

A Czech director would make a tender and infinitely melancholy story about communist times, when little girls dreamed about a circus in which elephants did not pee with effort but hovered airy and balloon-like over scintillating silver balls and trumpeted through their gilded trunks with joy at being in the circus, and the Great Comrade, our Marshall, came to wave to them as they waved red paper flags with five-pointed stars euphorically ... Her mummy would be beautiful, she would not be ashamed of anything, including her daughter, she would have manicured hands, with no scarf covering her lovely hair while she worked in a textile factory. Her dad would take her to the circus. Every day.

All this would make the little girl cry, throw up and slowly die.

That is, in fact, how so-called real life began: with crying, throwing up and dying. And dreams, which help one to survive, as in: one day things will be different.

And, of course, the little girl survived it all. And grew up. And approached everything and recoiled from everything. And finally – she stood on a shiny circus ball.

But, she learned to laugh: she laughed and laughed, her whole life through. She spread her infectious laughter around, and it confused the weak and maddened the strong.

The little girl danced on the ball, laughing, the audience clapped in amazement; the little girl peed with the effort and fear of her trainer and people, with the feeling that she was only an elephant on a fragile crystal ball; her eyes sought in the audience the frantic eyes of a little girl who would come to her aid, take her away and rescue her. Punish someone. Take her away. Forever.

The other little girl appeared, when it was almost too late for anything. She came up to her one day, in the circus, and put her tiny warm hand into hers. And led her away. Into a dream about life.

Why not?

Why should contemporary short stories in Bosnia not have a happy end?

Ferida Duraković (translated by Celia Hawkesworth), September 23, 2016

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Robert Frost, September 19, 2016

IN THE WINTER WOODS NEAR VOLKHOV

The tanks' turrets were frozen stuck,
the machine guns wouldn't fire,
the explosives merely hissed,
you had to carry your rifle beneath your coat

but the lice, the lice were biting as much as ever –

I thought of love so I wouldn't think of death,
and I thought of death so I wouldn't think of love –

I got a letter written in Brussels
and in June

Ivan Wernisch (translated by Jonathan Bolton), September 16, 2016

OUT

We all decay into a nothingness, into
the abyss... forever.
No meaning to a life lived.
It is over.

Memory lasts only for a little while,
then disappears...
creation annihilated.
We wait for our perfect bodies to
die in torture and suffering.

How long will a wreath lay on our grave?

Only once.

Leave a rope around the gravestones
so the dead can climb out.

Gloria Mindock (Glass Lyre Press, Glenview, IL, 2016), September 12, 2016

TITO SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLES

Today one doesn't know anymore if the equator and
the meridians are what chokes the globe, or if they are
what keeps it from falling apart. But it was different once:
the more East and West tightened the squeeze, the tighter
we clung to one another, like staves on a barrel. It was a long
time ago, but we were closer to freedom then than now.

No matter how hard you stare into the distance, you can't
see any further than the bright past. Instead of leeches,
bloodsuckers are treating you now and, goggle-eyed, with
a blind man's stare, you know neither where to go nor how.
And I'm telling you again: everyone and each person individually
must tear down his bridge in order to cross it.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 9, 2016

WEDDING WIND

The wind blew all my wedding-day,
And my wedding-night was the night of the high wind;
And a stable door was banging, again and again,
That he must go and shut it, leaving me
Stupid in candlelight, hearing rain,
Seeing my face in the twisted candlestick,
Yet seeing nothing. When he came back
He said the horses were restless, and I was sad
That any man or beast that night should lack
The happiness I had.

Now in the day
All's ravelled under the sun by the wind's blowing.
He has gone to look at the floods, and I
Carry a chipped pail to the chicken-run,
Set it down, and stare. All is the wind
Hunting through clouds and forests, thrashing
My apron and the hanging cloths on the line.
Can it be borne, this bodying-forth by wind
Of joy my actions turn on, like a thread
Carrying beads? Shall I be let to sleep
Now this perpetual morning shares my bed?
Can even death dry up
These new delighted lakes, conclude
Our kneeling as cattle by all-generous waters?

Philip Larkin, September 5, 2016

THE SNOW-STORM

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit

Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come, see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, naught cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer's sighs, and at the gate
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

<1835>

Ralph Waldo Emerson, September 2, 2016

MARINA

Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
What images return
O my daughter.

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning
Death
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning
Death
Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning
Death
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
Death

Are become insubstantial, reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger –
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye
Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.
I made this, I have forgotten
And remember.
The rigging weak and the canvas rotten
Between one June and another September.
Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.
The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.
This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers

And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, August 29, 2016

SALMON

Mighty is nature for it has endowed the salmon
with a memory for a million years to return to die
in its first water, on its native bottom. When it feels
the time has come - it has come: it leaves everything,
setting out from the distant oceans and moving like
a compass needle in the imagined direction. Come fall,
it's already climbing up the Ångerman River, smacking
its tail on fallen birch leaves in the shallows like a wild
stallion swatting flies.

Blind is the all-seeing hand that in our time has
erected the hydropower plant so salmon, which
keep arriving as punctually as registered mail, strike
the dam, kamikaze style. Under the oil of moonlight,
they swarm the unyielding gate until the first snows
and, enervated at last, spawn there outside the walls.
Water then bathes and sweeps away the bodies as if
nothing had happened. Oblivious is nature for it has
not taken away from God's fish of the Ångerman
the memory of home, so they keep on striking
the concrete and assailing the unknown.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), August 26, 2016

DADDY

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time –
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You –

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two –
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

Sylvia Plath, August 22, 2016

THE HILT

A man who has never known suffering

*cannot be self-reliant, nor can he recognize
his own value.*

Joseph de Maistre

We who passed through the siege of Sarajevo
shall, of course, gain nothing.
An experience that will serve no purpose:
as if you lost your arms and won a violin,
as Rasko would say. You can't even tell
others about it. Can you reconstruct an ancient jug
from the lonely handle that made it to our time?
We should lock it all up in the soul
and forget. But at least we shall, from now on
have a touch more self-respect, I hope,
like the fighter who takes a billion blows
but stays on his feet and his mangled
face in the mirror tells him who he really is.
We experienced our own limits. For to know
who you are, has always been the victim's privilege.
To know how much you can bear, without exploding
– that is the only property that you shall,
if you survive, bring from this war,
endless like the handkerchief a magician
pulls out of his hat. This knowledge – a saber which
we shall not draw very often from the scabbard.
But at least I will keep my hand
on its hilt.

Marko Vešović (translated by Zvonimir Radeljković), August 19, 2016

PARTITION

Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,
Having never set eyes on the land he was called to partition
Between two peoples fanatically at odds,
With their different diets and incompatible gods.
"Time," they had briefed him in London, "is short. It's too late
For mutual reconciliation or rational debate:
The only solution now lies in separation.
The Viceroy thinks, as you will see from his letter,
That the less you are seen in his company the better,
So we've arranged to provide you with other accommodation.
We can give you four judges, two Moslem and two Hindu,
To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you."

Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day
Patrolling the gardens to keep the assassins away,
He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,
But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.

The next day he sailed for England, where he could quickly forget
The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,
Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.

Wystan Hugh Auden, August 15, 2016

ONE ART

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent

to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

– Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

Elizabeth Bishop, August 12, 2016

SONNET 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,

Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

William Shakespeare, August 8, 2016

THE SHOELACE

a woman, a
tire that's flat, a
disease, a
desire: fears in front of you,
fears that hold so still
you can study them
like pieces on a
chessboard...

it's not the large things that
send a man to the
madhouse. death he's ready for, or
murder, incest, robbery, fire, flood...
no, it's the continuing series of small tragedies
that send a man to the
madhouse...

not the death of his love
but a shoelace that snaps
with no time left...

The dread of life
is that swarm of trivialities
that can kill quicker than cancer
and which are always there –

license plates or taxes
or expired driver's license,
or hiring or firing,
doing it or having it done to you, or
roaches or flies or a
broken hook on a
screen, or out of gas
or too much gas,
the sink's stopped-up, the landlord's drunk,
the president doesn't care and the governor's
crazy.

light switch broken, mattress like a
porcupine;
\$105 for a tune-up, carburetor and fuel pump at
sears roebuck;
and the phone bill's up and the market's
down
and the toilet chain is
broken,
and the light has burned out -
the hall light, the front light, the back light,
the inner light; it's
darker than hell
and twice as
expensive.

then there's always crabs and ingrown toenails
and people who insist they're
your friends;
there's always that and worse;
leaky faucet, christmas and christmas;
blue salami, 9 day rains,
50 cent avocados
and purple
liverwurst.

or making it
as a waitress at norm's on the split shift,
or as an emptier of
bedpans,
or as a carwash or a busboy
or a stealer of old lady's purses
leaving them screaming on the sidewalks
with broken arms at the age of 80.

suddenly
2 red lights in your rear view mirror
and blood in your
underwear;
toothache, and \$979 for a bridge
\$300 for a gold
tooth,
and china and russia and america, and
long hair and short hair and no
hair, and beards and no
faces, and plenty of zigzag but no
pot, except maybe one to piss in
and the other one around your
gut,

with each broken shoelace
out of one hundred broken shoelaces,
one man, one woman, one
thing
enters a
madhouse.

so be careful
when you
bend over.

Charles Bukowski, August 5, 2016

ANOTHER REASON WHY I DON'T KEEP A GUN IN THE HOUSE

The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
He is barking the same high, rhythmic bark
that he barks every time they leave the house.
They must switch him on their way out.

The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
I close all the windows in the house
and put on a Beethoven symphony full blast
but I can still hear him muffled under the music,
barking, barking, barking,

and now I can see him sitting in the orchestra,
his head raised confidently as if Beethoven
had included a part for barking dog.

When the record finally ends he is still barking,
sitting there in the oboe section barking,
his eyes fixed on the conductor who is
entreating him with his baton

while the other musicians listen in respectful
silence to the famous barking dog solo,
that endless coda that first established
Beethoven as an innovative genius.

Billy Collins, August 1, 2016

A WOMAN'S BLOUSE

It's getting dark. And in the west someone's foot has knocked
over a jug of wine, pouring it all over the horizon.
The new moon looks like the horns on a helmet in which,
in films, Moses is shown. Pines smell
of a mixture of lemons and incense.

A soldier, long and brittle like a rye stalk, is doing sentry duty.
Brittle with youth and love. He pulls out of his bosom
a woman's white blouse. And he plunges his face in it.
He drinks its scent for a long time. Those five or six grams
of fabric he could pull through a wedding ring.

A sight divinely unutterable. Saying it in words
would be like measuring the weight
of a sun's ray on a scale.

Suddenly, from all this – from the wine-colored west
from the new moon with horns, from the small woman's
blouse whose scent can, like a thread, lead you out of hell –
suddenly, from all this, I feel relieved in my soul.
And more at ease in the world.

You know that war still exists on earth
like a black ball of yarn, but the soul
could play with it like a kitten. Death still
shows through everything, not like a snub-nosed
skull through the skin of the face, but like a seed
through a grape: making it more magical.

Marko Vešović (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 29, 2016

HOME

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers

sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Warsan Shire, July 25, 2016

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

A free bird leaps on the back
Of the wind and floats downstream
Till the current ends and dips his wing
In the orange sun rays
And dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage
Can seldom see through his bars of rage
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
Of things unknown but longed for still
And his tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
And the trade winds soft through

The sighing trees
And the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright
Lawn and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
His wings are clipped and his feet are tied
So he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with
A fearful trill of things unknown
But longed for still and his
Tune is heard on the distant hill
For the caged bird sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou, July 22, 2016

INVERSNAID

This darksome burn, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fáwn-fróth
Turns and twindles over the broth
Of a pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning,
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,
And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, July 18, 2016

THE MILLER

I can no longer
recall from memory the voice of Jusuf the miller.
I can't separate it from the murmur of water
and the creaking of millstones.

I remember only the images:
the pack saddle set down in the grass,
the peasant untying the sack, the horse
drinking from the river.

The wooden mill quivers, but the image
is clear: through the tiny holes beams of light
break in and insert themselves into the roaring
semi-darkness where soft wheat dust dribbles
onto the miller's cap and apron.

Grains ground to dust.
The days, too.
Dust to dust,
I hear father's voice.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 15, 2016

A South Wind — has a pathos
 Of individual Voice —
 As One detect on Landings
 An Emigrant's address.

A Hint of Ports and Peoples —
 And much not understood —
 The fairer — for the farness —
 And for the foreignhood.

Emily Dickinson, July 11, 2016

SAINT COLUMBA

I've been dead for fourteen centuries, but in the
 stained-glass window above the altar my image
 still smoulders like an unreleased soul. When
 from that window I gaze into the gloom below,
 the carpet of the past unfurls before me all the way
 to the night when, a white ghost on black ink,
 I unloaded my faith, coming here to the island
 of Iona to prevail singlehanded against false gods.

From a dove's perspective, creatures on the ground
 are tiny and I don't feel anyone's burden. I feel doubt!
 Along the corridors bald scalps are moving like
 the flat pieces in a game of checkers – silent moves
 elevating villains to the righteous. I would have left
 long ago were I not fettered by my own emptiness.
 Like a released toy balloon, my spirit is stuck
 between the roof beams. I've been dead long on
 the island of Iona, and this death is wearing me out.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 8, 2016