

VOLUME 5 Number 2

Fall 2011

EZRA once heard the fine poet Tiare Picard telling Christian Bok “You can’t be a poet and play golf.” Hank Lazer wouldn’t agree, and, slightly miffed, neither would Ezra. In any case, if you are taking those last rounds you no doubt exult at how a ball is translated—from rattling in your closet to the hovering glint over the eighth green. All part of the great flux, Mme. Picard.

In a tribute to Libya’s summer, Salma Maref brings us the great KhouLOUD Al-Falah.

Acknowledgment is due to that strong publisher of translations, Ugly Ducking Presse, for LOOK BACK, LOOK AHEAD, which contains one of the Kosovel poems. It’s high time we got to know Kosovel’s work. And some of the Janis Einfelds work appeared in *Nelaudis* (2005). Kasai Kenzo is an important Japanese fiction writer little known outside Japan. The present excerpt may seem orphaned; it comes from the end of the novella *At The Lakeside*.

We’re grateful to Michael Rattigan—who knew Pessoa had a heteronym, Alberto Caeiro?

Two wonderful translation annuals are out, magnificent books. *Metamorphoses* is in a double all-Arab writers issue, and contains a CD and color plates. *Dirty Goat* offers old Ez faves Roger Sedarat, Toshiya Kamei, and the brilliant Horn of Africa translator Ghirmai Nedash. An index lists works from all the volumes, with translator, by country, and includes many Ezra writers.

In a break with house style, the Paol Keineg intro reads “translated from the French..” because Keineg sometimes writes in Breton! While we’re at it Ez reminds the gentle reader that our style aims to be airy and clean, for your scrolling ease. The countries and dates of only the least known writers are given; even these can usually be googled. We’re thinking of going to three issues a year, to reduce the wait time to print the large amount of good work coming in. Your thoughts are welcome.

Finally, a salute to our featured writers. *Chapeaux*, that is, hats off, to Keith Waldrop on his retirement from Brown University. His Verlaine is the most beguiling experience Ez has had with rhyme in a very long time. The Paol Keineg is a fantastic discovery. Burning Deck, the Waldrops’ press, is now more than 50 years old, and it is that operation, and the many translations in its list, that we particularly celebrate.

Does fall translate summer into winter? If you agree with Ez that it does, then savor the betweenness of fall, the echoing betweenness that translators cherish, that poetic image explores. Try to enjoy the deliquescence of the firm summer fruit, and, if you’re out on the links, may Harena, the goddess of sand traps and mixed metaphors, smile upon your swing.

Don't forget the ALTA meeting in Kansas City, and let's hope for another strong translator presence at AWP in Chicago!

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Michael Rattigan	Inara Cedrins
Salma Maref	Ana Jelnikar
Masako Nakagawa	Barbara Siegel Carlson
Janice Soderling	Adam Sorkin and Lidia Vianu

FEATURED WRITERS:

Keith Waldrop's recent poetry books are *Transcendental Studies* (Univ. of California Press, National Book Award 2009), *The Real Subject* (Omnidawn) and the trilogy: *The Locality Principle*, *The Silhouette of the Bridge*, and *Semiramis If I Remember* (Avec Books). Siglio Press has published a book of collages, *Several Gravities*.

He has translated Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and *Paris Spleen*, as well as books by contemporary French poets like Anne-Marie Albiach and Claude Royet-Journoud.

He was born in Emporia, Kansas in 1932 and teaches at Brown University in Providence, RI.

Rosmarie Waldrop's *Driven to Abstraction* is just out from New Directions. Recent books are *Curves to the Apple*, *Blindsight* (both New Directions), and *Love, Like Pronouns* (Omnidawn). Her collected essays, *Dissonance (if you are interested)* was published by University of Alabama Press.

She has translated most of Edmond Jabès's work (her memoir, *Lavish Absence: Recalling and Rereading Edmond Jabès*, is out from Wesleyan UP) as well as volumes by Emmanuel Hocquard, Jacques Roubaud, and, from the German, Friederike Mayröcker, Elke Erb, Ulf Stolterfoht.

Together, Keith and Rosmarie co-edit the small press, Burning Deck.

from **Triste Tristan**

~~translated from the French by Rosmarie Waldrop

Pan-European Tristan

at the height of optimism

led by his horse —

first woman frenetic,

the second he can't fuck,

crisis:

down to the basement

closets at night —

don't linger here,

love, metaphysics,

we have the police for that.

What we like: the hostility

of the barons hiding behind tree trunks,

the comm-

union with the woods, the sweat —

fear has its guardians

Breton's a free tongue —
shall we go watch the kings
sail by in the bay?
lets take the shortcut.

Here where violence against animals
is not a legend
and readers start from the end,
where it hurts —
the stone in the forest
has come a long way —
we'll have to go far, very far
beyond the customary investigations
to find worse obscenities —
you mob of scholarly pedants
get the hell out.

Two steps
into the pornotopic forest —
Iseut on all fours initiated

into animal mysteries
by penetration —
can't say she doesn't work
at pure happiness —
the moment she
demeans herself
belongs to all of us as our own —
a background of revolt
worth while.

From the edge of the forest
they watch the harvest, the carting
dream of bread, eat it in dreams —
two lives that add up to a novel
where the lovers are loved by all
but the spies —
worse than a bitch
no way to pry them apart
their empty guts —
and God in all that?
he's not against it

provided he's loved too.

Squats down to piss in the micromoss
of xenoland:
if I'm beautiful
it's that the rest of my country's so shitty —
as I said: the habit of desire
has made a crime
of tentative gestures —
screams in writing
crime scenes without name —
the body, story of a screen.

So thin she no longer has breasts
craves a bit of soup —
we hear her noisy secretions
as far away as the islands —
if we could help her
could blow on the embers —
a skeleton thrown on the bed,

love demands you make love to her
on bended knee.

Tristan, Iseut, etc.

take nudity by storm —
the poor girl has escaped,
bursts of hate
all around the woods,
and the burghers
end up with a beautiful wedding,
the dog taken in with the loot —
the gift of oneself estranges the self,
we'd like to ruin
these militant lovers.

Joined

to the lady's ass
for hours —
poetry's can't-do-a-thing
no worry to him —
years near sovereignty

forbid his touching a corpse —
the forest experienced
as basis of
civilization —
the lady with the prominent nose turns into a scold.

PAOL KEINEG

Paul Keineg was born in Brittany in 1944. His first book, *Le poème du pays qui a faim* (1967) became a manifesto of Breton militancy. While remaining intensely interested in Celtic mythology, he taught for almost thirty years at Brown and Duke before returning to France in 2009. He is both playwright and poet. His most recent book is a *Collected Poems: Les trucs sont démolis* (2008). Burning Deck has published a translation of *Boudica*.

Melancholy

~~translated by Keith Waldrop

I

RESIGNATION

Still a mere child, I dreamt the Koh-i-nor,
Extravaganza Persian and Papal,
Heliogabalus, Sardanapolus!

My desire built, underneath a gold ceiling,
Amid billowing perfumes and musical din,
Endless harems, paradises of feeling.

Cooler these days, though with ardent tendencies,
But knowing life better now, better at kneeling,
I've learned to curb my beautiful frenzies,
Albeit without completely giving in.

Well yes, the grandiose slips away: a pity,
But down with the nice, throw the dregs away.
I still despise the woman merely pretty.

As well as slant rhyme. And friends that pray.

II

NEVERMORE

Memory, memory: what do you want with me? Fall
Prompted a thrush through the vacant air;
Sun meanwhile, over a yellowing forest wind
Invading from the north, thrust its monotonous pall.

We were alone, side by side, we walked in a dream,
She and I, thoughts blown about, like our hair,
When, movingly, she turned to me, her voice
Golden: "Which day of your life has been the best?"

Her clear sweet voice, angelically fresh; my discreet
Smile I thought adequate reply, and certainly blest
I bowed devoutly to kiss her white hand... —Ah,

First flowers, how fragrant! as there slips
In a delightful murmur, the initial *yes*
From adored lips.

III

THREE YEARS LATER

Having passed the rickety strait gate,
I traversed the little park

Lit gently by a morning sun
That left on each flower a liquid spark.

Nothing was changed. I saw it all again:
Simple arbor with rattan chairs, rank vine...
Fountain still broadcasting a silvery plash,
Old guy trembling with sempiternal whine.

As before, the roses aquiver; as before,
Proud lilies tall and swaying in the wind.
I recognized every arriving or departing lark.

I found even, at garden end, unbent,
Veleda¹, her plaster flaking —thin,
Surrounded by a stale mignonette scent.

IV

WISH

¹ Veleda was a prophetess during the reign of Vespasian.

Ah! love-lays! those of our first successes:
Hair gold, blue eyes, flesh flowering; and then,
Breathing the scent of a body young and lithe,
Hesitant spontaneous caresses!

Are they really over, those joys,
Those artless pleasures? Alas, after regretted
Springtime come bitter winter days
Of doldrums, disgust, distresses.

So now I'm here alone, sad, and miss her,
Sad and despairing, shivering like a graybeard,
Like a poor orphan who's lost his big sister.

O for a loving woman, cuddly and mild,
Tender, dark, thoughtful, never shocked,

Who would kiss my forehead, like kissing a child.

PAUL VERLAINE

The Traveling Eid

~~translated by Salma Maref

Destined was
the lifetime,
to travel
like a rose
in a garden, forgotten.

The Eid,
gathered
his things
and departed
in the presence
of my broken laughs.

And there is no pleasure
to restore
for my confused evenings,
their far off, beautiful calm.

Grief
possesses me,
refusing the amity
of the morning's pigeons.

When I was a little girl,

my only doll
was lost.
Ever since a long time ago:
my dear things
getting lost,

one following the other.

KHOULOU AL-FALAH (Libya)

The One Hidden In My Features

~~translated by Salma Maref

Tonight,

nostalgia overwhelmed me,

I therefore went out , forgetting my features,

upon

the pillow,

tracking imprints of a beloved

who once

adorned my city

I watch for you

my wait is tiring
and the female inside of me
fabricates smiles
for the bitterness to come

As usual
burrowing through the dreams of yesterday
looking for your face
as though it were to be found hidden,

in my features.

Blanketed in silence
for fear
of stumbling
over the question
why is such dancing sadness
in the eyes?

KHOLOUD AL-FALAH (Libya)

The Onlookers

~~translated by Janice D. Soderling

As we watched the miracle happening,
their faces transfigured,
their eyes animated by an inner light,
their bodies become translucent
as from fire,

when we saw the miracle happening to the others,
terror seized our hearts:
why not us,
why not us?
Why must we wait and endure alone
these long, long days of wait and want,
until our hearts perish and our souls shrivel?

Like the withered and the halt, waiting at Bethesda,
dragging themselves to the pool with their last remnant of faith,
waiting for the angel to trouble the waters,
so we too are waiting ...

And when we see the lame walk,
the blind regain their sight,
the dumb regain their speech,
the possessed be freed,
then terror seizes our hearts:
why not us, why not us?
Why are we never chosen?

EBBA LINDVIST (Sweden)

Anguish

Deep anguish does not wring its hands,
does not proclaim itself on the village square.
It wears no heavy mourning veils.
Does not seclude itself in dim chambers
wanting solitude and dusk;
it has no rancor to resolve.
It dares go hushed among the people,
taking life simply as it comes,
radiant in tears as a bow
fused of rain and sunlight
stretching across the heavens to signify
that never again will the earth be ravaged so.

EBBA LINDVIST

An Evening in March

It is an evening in March
and the air is so thin
as if it couldn't carry sound.
And the sky so brittle
as if it couldn't sustain a sunset,
but lay already blasted and broken,
and colors fight
a battle for life or death
and every sound is like a cry of pain.

And the shadows of the trees slash sharply
as if severing life from spring
and the hillocks stand
gray and heavy
heavy as if life ruptured.
It is an evening in March.

EBBA LINDVIST

Darkening of the Moon

~~translated by Inara Cedrins

The moon grazed like a lamb, nibbling the evening grass. On the moon's craters rays of moonlight calmly scattered grain. And the eye obtained only peace, the ear those whispers heard before sleep, the nose – scented flowers. Brushed with stars will come only when it is completely dark, black as the forest berries. But he will come, black dung pellet dollars in his wallet, that are heavier than gold. Drink the wine goblets empty, eat everything from the plates so that they are bare, for tonight the cost is nil.

JANIS EINFELDS

The Promised El Dorado

We are promised maintenance in the fairy-tale world. And we wait. Dreams appear to us, and in excitement we dream them. We are overcome by rosy harems and swept away by rivers of milk. We are dust, soot and smoke. Our homeland is formed of roofs, which like bits of broken glass make up a city. We have both glazed tiles and slate; we have black chimneys, their masters blackened with smoke, and somnambulant cats on their ridges. Down below we have laborers who return from work and warm us. We are children of the heights, burning for the comforts of others. Throughout the day we dance upon air, and our balls are never-ending. The dust has little grey dresses, smoke – black frocks. Very late, we drink the night – black balsam – and grow dizzy. Then we sing gay songs, but our voices are soft, and we are not heard. Toward morning the promises made us become imperious. We are tricked, but we forgive. We don't know how to work, and therefore empty the lying goblet of hope.

JANIS EINFELDS

Mutiny of the Pocket Shadows

*Stones poured out tears,
words were lacking;
my lips as well
became sealed.*

I.

Softly may the word sleep. Mute as a fish, pushing back upon a turnip, Mintietis worked. Quietly the rural districts unfurled all around. Having said his last words to the fallow, Mintietis grew obstinate about the hill that stubbornly slept beneath his feet. Mintietis hoped to slowly annihilate with language, and had merciless incantations in his mind. Having learned of this, in the night devils appeared around the sleeping man and whispered at his ear: “Give it like this, like that!”

In the desire for language, characters want to sprout from horns. And Mintietis rose like a hill grown green, back of head hitting the ceiling; even the billows of water that filled his mouth could be heard. Mintietis tensed, drew a bludgeon from his sack and flattened the devils. In horror the devils counted up black and blue spots – these were numerous. The devils shivered and howled – at the striking of the hour of strength, they shut themselves into the mill, sobbing, stumbling behind the sacks; and collapsed into the pile of white grain. They beat each other with small twigs, but the flour rose and, sticking little by little, turned their bodies white. Dirt and feathers disappeared. The whiteness even became pleasurable, and the top layer held firm until the hour of the cock’s crowing. On later nights those who had been made white walked at the fringes of remote villages, bellowing out tales of robbery into the roadside dust. So they roused the village to its feet, and in the sleepy crowd found allies.

But Mintietis held onto the obstructed sentences. Until he exchanged the unsaid words for emptiness. In emptiness he would live. Within emptiness no one could reach him, and emptiness would render him invisible – after harvest time he would be transformed to a dark rain cloud, in order to speak rain to the earth. And we would wet the backs of our heads in the drops. Let the words keep in a chest for the time being – when many people come together, they can open the gate of the tongue, so they may flow. Let the air speak to our own people about deceit, which hides deep in whirlpools, and then allow them to find strength in the grain.

II.

K. My thoughts are a slingshot. But they haven't got far. Because the sharp clearings, forests and palisades have scraped the thoughts sidelong. They've become bare. Clouds drawn together indicate the wrong path. They come to a box with its eight doors – opening any one, a weighty bad spirit leaps out and evaporates into air. This makes thoughts weak, and they hurl spears at the box. Discontented, the beautiful word creeps out. It is so alone, so harmonious a sound, and so worthy of adoration. The thoughts come to blows and fall dead like chaff, having light flesh. The word wades among them and polishes its clasp. The word hasn't slept much, hasn't eaten much, so it is not in good humor.

Brave thoughts searched for their predecessors, lost sisters. Did not find them. Broke apart the sharp places in the path, so that the order of the cells would not be disrupted. Clipped the bad ones' hair, for they had such invisible tow on their heads, and declared to the box: Come into captivity! Otherwise we'll put fire to the soles of your feet!

The word, frightened, crept out. The brave thoughts grew silent, for none had seen such a beautiful young man before. The brave thoughts fell at the feet of the word and prayed: choose one of us! We want to bring lapfuls of good to you! We can, we will do it.

The word became confused. It twisted its hair into an S. With a sharp blade it trimmed hangnails and sighed: I haven't chosen yet. I'm resounding. Your courage and pleading eyes throw me into despair. And you're mute. I'll have to return to my brothers, but I'm ashamed! Embrace me, then it will be easier; let's become a little more carefree, let's rest! Look, how things are! Become familiar with each sound, sit upon the curve of reason, swing! Noise belongs to us until morning! But let's leave a clearer head for a later time.

My head no longer belonged to me. In it words and thoughts danced, clattering. They couldn't be approached, and colored flags crept through the nose, for tonight kings were feted.

III.

THE INCONSIDERATE. Every inconsiderate word can rip up an entire fabric. Let's say – a word, healthy young one, ran out among people, dipped his feet in milk and rinsed his beard in ale. But he wasn't at fault, men began to thrash each other in fistfights, women tore at each

others' hair with their nails. The inconsiderate ate and drank for free. And taunted the people to the deepest smouldering.

I'm waiting for a horse from the constellations that will take me away from these fools! I can't bear them any longer.

At an unfortunate time the quarrelers and ruffians heard of the youth's scorn. Then the people took up cudgels and stones, blued the word, till it was neither white nor black. It would have been the word's last hour, if it hadn't found a tongue in defense. Unbridled, it began to croak: horrors, terrors, why touch a child, it's fearfully small. Can't you see that the beard isn't yet grey, its age is only a few score. Left the nipple not long ago. People, you're out of your minds. One can't break bones for lack of consideration.

First you, mouth, pay for the spilt milk! screeched the women.

First you, voice of the heart, make reparation for the spilt ale, the intoxication that has evaporated! the men said belligerently.

It will happen, it'll happen! snapped the mouth, and pointed to a covered cart that looked large as a hill – breaking open its sides, brown cows with swollen udders raced toward the women. A barge anchored in the river, from which barrels beaded with dew were unloaded – after slowly finding their balance, they were rolled with a clatter to where the others waited, slavering. Then people forgot the mouth.

Come, child, into me! Don't be so inconsiderate, it's too early yet to strike out alone to see the world! Creep inside!

And, flushed, the young one crawled into the barrel – the lips puckered, drew on a wide smile and slipped into the head.

IV.

THE AIRY THREAD OF STRENGTH. One loved word held the cord and carried one forward. No, it was not a cow freed from its tether, but flying lakes, delicate and pale as rivers of milk. The word created places for the lakes. And the lakes took the word as their origin. The king of bubbles fell into the sand, a sputtering lake. A mournful and silently expectant lake fell upon the forest. Gnarled and small, fell into the hills, squeezed between islets. Still more fell. Only fish lived in these, and other living beings. Expanded in these as at home, their sustenance. But their bringer – the simple word searched the lakes for brides. Didn't find any. For who would come to

a mere marriage broker? Empty words have slight sound, neighboring lakes have bellies of water, no one wants to drown. And the young girls turned away. The lakes remained empty. The loved word grew sad. Not to show its gloomy cheek, the word tightened its favorite belt – the airy thread of strength. And raced over the lake’s surface to count heads and lull droplets, to sleep in peace. From the droplets many grey heads were formed, from the tribe of sunken old men; to them the word brought peace, counting them as lake folk. Boats were the legs of the word, and a century passed before the waves of the lake were counted. The opposite shore revealed only emptiness, and in order not to be saddened, the word swam back. It took another century before the loved word reached the beginning. But the beginning was a flat plane. On the plane a man with a braid, in a white wig, pressed a kiss to a lady’s powdered cheek. She hastily tidied her hair with a knitting needle and wanted to look more attractive. They were waited on by a fat, revolting dog in velvet leggings, because they liked obedient servants. They enthuse about color, but do not forget to assign switching for the disobedient. Strangers gather on the plane. Everyone drinks tea and speaks a foreign language. These businessmen seem too high-minded and evil, the word will not give them love.

Only later the word saw, under the plane, his predecessors fettered in chains, tortured and enslaved. The word grew angry and tied the businessmen up with an airy thread of strength, so that they could not move. The counted heads of waves ran up and lost their braids in the sunken islands of the lake. The loved word freed its kin, a day of joy unwound in the air; but its own people would not take the word back into their mouths, because, having fought for centuries, it had grown old.

V.

CRIME. Go quietly, go silently, do not disturb the forest, it hasn’t yet been born.

Some good words, worthy of a title, obeyed the messengers of dawn. But they were mistaken – the forest had been born and had lived more than a thousand years. Only to a few words the silence was unclear, that which had sealed the beaks of birds. Birds in flight gave themselves over to mute song, and then suddenly began to scatter ugly, inappropriate words. Even such as would not be allowed inside a respectable mouth. A few good words froze – they had been struck by the sound-filled forest. Suddenly a few words observed the coat, the stance, that entered the birch grove. A few had second thoughts, and followed. The grove went up in smoke, burning with yellow flames. Watched carefully, it seemed that here crime was born. A few wanted to struggle, but suddenly felt swallowed up by repulsive, slick lips, and before the eyes darkness was opening up.

VI.

OUT. How disgusting was this wide mouth. An unseen weight dispersed. Here the beautiful, tortured words withered pitifully. Here you could not even gnaw a slice of bread or sprinkle yourself with water. Famine, vaporized blackness and a wheel of torture, upon which many words were broken and, sticking to the palate, then lay about like spilled bones and skulls - prefixes and suffixes. A few words felt blackened. Roll about in rubbish, drown in mucus, don't hope for rebirth. Your fate has been ruled on, others have done it in your place.

Suddenly it was as if a lid sprang open, the mouth was filled with sunlight. A sword had been placed to the evil lips, an unfamiliar rescuer gave threat: out, come out!

Tortured, but fortunate, both whole and broken words crept out, unable even to express thanks. Some words immediately took a liking to the courageous one. The others, suffering from famine, could not for the time being recognize that the sun had been returned to them. When they understood, they rejoiced. The courageous one ground his teeth in rage, and axed the mouth, which fell as a flabby dead thing. The courageous one wiped away sweat, smiled and said: we're free for a moment. We have to manage to hide, because all around us roam many hungry tongues!

The words agreed to flee; some of them stood up straight, whispered news into the ear of the courageous one, and the key to this news was stored in a wide boat at the lakes where it was possible to take up dippers full of water. All went there and hid in lit places, in their skirts, not to draw misfortune.

JANIS EINFELDS

from **At The Lakeside**

~~translated by Masako Nakagawa

Osei's telegram of five p.m. arrived around ten a.m. the following day. She

wrote, “Mr. Kimura died. I took care of everything. His uncle is coming from the province tomorrow. Respond.” I had no choice but to reply in a telegram, “I cannot return. Take care, all.”

“Deceive” was K’s honest description of the actual event of about two years earlier when a penniless K, at the end of his resources, resorted to summoning his sister to Tokyo by sending a telegram saying that he was seriously ill. Instead of his sister, who had just had a miscarriage, his paternal uncle came all the way from Tadaumi, Bingo by an express train only to find Matsumoto and his wife waiting for him on a platform at Tokyo Station. According to the story, the uncle said to him, “I was afraid that you were gone by now” and showed a crested mourning hemp kimono, a kimono jacket, and trousers that were all in his suitcase. The same uncle was on his way to Tokyo this time also. In a sense, the publication of “Deceive” became K’s apology to his uncle.

K had me read a draft of “Deceive,” and I realized how hard he kept up the fight against his illness over the years. Now that he had succumbed to the illness, I felt ashamed that I had criticized him for his lack of effort for so many years.

The publisher kindly paid K for “Deceive” without delay, but requested K to write a more light-hearted story because “Deceive” was thematically too sober for a women’s magazine. K vomited blood on September 4th at two p.m. while working on his new story. On August 28th, one week before, I visited him in his apartment and talked with him over sake late into the night. I told him:

“Pull yourself together. Think about your wife. ...you can publish “Deceive” somewhere else. Write a new story as soon as possible and answer the kindness of the publisher of the women’s magazine. The deadline is around September 5th, isn’t it?”

“I will. Of course, I will. These days I have been working as hard as I can. I am not as lazy as you think. If you think I am lying, ask my wife.”

He was uncharacteristically excited on that night and almost glared at me when he spoke.

The evening turned out to be the last time we drank together.

In a newspaper I found out that K's "Deceive" would appear in the October issue of the magazine. His work did not appear in the literary section, but instead was in the miscellaneous hobby section. The selection eloquently tells about the unfortunate life of K as a writer. But I hardly knew anyone as incapable of deceiving himself or others as K.

I received the telegram which Osei sent on the afternoon of October 8th informing me that K's urn would leave home at eight p.m. tomorrow. I walked along the dark lakeside road about twelve *cho* (about one mile), and right around eight o'clock I stood on a newly-constructed, sturdy but rough-planed bridge over the Yudaki Water Fall, where the lake's water plunged. Earlier, a group of about two hundred students threw an after-dinner party downstairs in my lodge. I could not keep drinking sake by myself while thinking about K. My legs trembled on the bridge while I listened to the overwhelmingly powerful sound of the water falling and landing 135 meters below me. Behind me lay the still water of the dark ominous lake. I clasped my hands in a silent prayer: "Forgive me, K. [I cannot even go to your funeral.] Only two or three friends will bid their final farewell to you when your urn leaves your house with your wife and uncle. You are now leaving the harsh city for good. You will no longer cry out. I climbed up to Nikko, screaming in desperation. I cannot even say goodbye to my best friend. I am not a happy man, either."

K was not a man who pondered and worried over fame on his death bed. When I visited K after he coughed up blood the first time, I knew that he had already made up his mind to accept his fate. K died in obscurity and poverty -- but it is meaningless to cry over those matters.

A moonless night over a mountain hall,
Stars fill heaven,
And, showering over the railing.

That's it, K! With all my heart I believe in the glory of your soul.

KASAI KENZO

Untitled, from Uncollected Poems of Alberto Caeiro

~~translated by Michael Rattigan

All theories, all poems

Last longer than this flower.

But that's like mist, which is uncomfortable and damp,

And larger than this flower...

The size and lastingness aren't important...

They're only size and lastingness...

What matters is that the flower lasts and has size

(If reality is the true dimension of things)...

Being real is the only true thing in the world.

Does my verse make sense if the universe doesn't make sense?

In geometry does a part exceed the whole?

In biology does the function of the organs

Have more life than the body?

From afar I see a ship go by...

Drift indifferently down the river Tagus.

Indifferent not for paying me no attention,

I don't feel distressed by that...

It's indifferent because it has no sense at all

Outside of the simple nautical fact

Of its going downriver with no reference to anything beyond that...

Downriver toward the reality of the sea.

FERNANDO PESSOA

THE LONG-HAIRED ROMANTIC

~~translated from the Slovene by Ana Jelnikar and Barbara Siegel Carlson

By the sad window.

You say goodbye

only once.

I hear the blue horse.

Is he coming with you,

the long-haired romantic?
Poplars by the autumn road.
Where are the poets
that they don't see these poplars?
A white graveyard wall.
Romanticism.

By the sad window.
Leaning over the carnations.
The sun catches
her black tearful eye.

SREČKO KOSOVEL, Slovenia (1904-1926)

AT A TRAIN STATION

On brass casters (cogged
and smooth as gilded buttons),
the sun gleams
as though through half-closed eyes.

Here and there the small wheels rise –
a distant chord wakes,

the clerk releases the belt –
each day the same call ...

The same steps, the office air
trapped – double-tracks into the world,
through the window – the wasteland of the Karst,
junipers and pines, acacias and wild flowers –
four trains make a day.—

One rings in: he opens his hands
and lifts his face
from his sad dreams.

SRECKO KOSOVEL

Two Selections from

Cousin Shakespeare

(Play in five acts)

~~translated by

Adam J. Sorkin and Lidia Vianu

NOTE:

“Cousin Shakespeare” is the final play of the celebrated Romanian playwright and poet Marin Sorescu, written in the late 1980s, the Ceaușescu dictatorship’s most repressive period. I would guess that Sorescu never expected to see it in print or produced in his lifetime, for its premise is that, because of the political spies, the terror, and the Elizabethan secret service, Shakespeare has writer’s block. Hence the character “Sorescu—a Dane” has gone back in time to help his cousin playwright. Written mostly in verse, the play is a kind of *tour de force* of moods, from seriousness to comedy, from bloody melodrama to pathos, from absurdity and farce to witty irony and trenchant satire. The roster of characters alone suggests the range of concerns. Among the characters are Shakespeare himself, Hamlet, a witch, a ghost, the Ides of March, Ophelia’s sister Camelia, a skull, a patriotic Romanian in search of a playwright to portray Romania’s tragedy (“Voicea – the hero who cannot find a place in Shakespeare”), The Dark Lady, Anne Hathaway Shakespeare, The Sailor (American), Ben Jonson, jesters, and various nobles and players and playwrights, etc.

In the selections that follow (note: the play is divided into acts, tableaux, and scenes), the following characters appear:

in Act III, Tableau II, scenes 1-2,

HAMLET – prince of Denmark

SORESCU – a Dane

THE GHOST

in Act , Tableau VI, scene 1,

RICHARD ZERO – actor, Shakespeare’s rivals

SORESCU – a Dane

VOICEA – THE HERO WHO CANNOT FIND A PLACE IN SHAKESPEARE

ACT III

TABLEAU II

Denmark, at night, on the ramparts of Elsinore castle.

SCENE 1

HAMLET

I'm sleepy. The ghost is late.

SORESCU

(yawning)

I'll stand by you. My mind's so alert that,
Draping sheets over my words, I could
Give a fright to a hundred more castles,
And my tirades, walking like scarecrows robed
In white, make listeners with crimes
On their conscience turn white as chalk.

HAMLET

(yawning)

I was reflecting as I leaned on my halberd:
Of the three of us, one must have a screw loose.
Maybe two... Either you, or me, or Shakespeare...

SORESCU

Good god, Hamlet, your mind's drifting somewhere
Else!... The three of us are perfectly
Sane.

HAMLET

If we are truly awake
And don't have a screw loose, please explain to me:
How can we talk and understand each other
Living in worlds and times so far apart,
Being first inventions, second flesh and bones?

SORESCU

And more than that, waiting for a spirit!
You have banished my sleep with your question.

HAMLET

(pathetically)

Has Shakespeare gone mad?

SORESCU

God forbid!
He has more screws than all of England added
Together – and in a trice could make sound

The mind of every bedlamite.

HAMLET

Well, then, either it's you or it's me.

SORESCU

(aside)

He's lightheaded.

(Aloud.) Neither one, my dear – friend. The times may be

Out of joint... Verily, the millennium,

For, take note, we have met, the three of us –

From the year eleven hundred,

Or thereabouts, you, Hamlet.

Sixteen hundred – Shakespeare. And two thousand, me, with a little luck.

HAMLET

Yea, a millennium...

SORESCU

The most prodigious thing is that, although living in ages so far apart, we understand one another as though we were contemporaries... We form, so to speak, our own confraternity... I believe that there must have been similar cases in the history of mankind – that great spirits and great inventions met, as if on the deck of a ship or on some terrace, just like this one, by virtue of a law of nature not yet known...

There exist folds in time, I've read in a book, that bring into contact souls living at great distances of time...

HAMLET

Isn't this madness?

SORESCU

It's not science,
But something seems to be.

HAMLET

I have begun to entertain a notion,
Like a frigate that is taking on water
And as it sinks, the rats abandon it,
Alas, too late...

SORESCU

Just as the North Pole attracts icebergs,
Similar words attract similar thoughts,
Matter flowers in similar states of mind,
Crystals of the mind and shared dilemmas
As in a cave bring us together,
All of us shadows...

HAMLET

The ghost is late.

SORESCU

But soft. I think I hear footsteps. Take my hand.

HAMLET

I tremble with fear! No less than I – I,
So accustomed to ghosts and white spirits...

(Enter Ghost.)

SCENE 2

SORESCU

Behold! Lo, it comes!

HAMLET

(choked up with emotion)

Father...

GHOST

List! Seventeen blows the dagger stabbed in Caesar's body, like seventeen fountains in the heart of Rome, and through each one of them blood gushed... The people, thousands of torches they could have lit, from even one single drop of blood, in order to see the murderers run away...

HAMLET

'Tis not my father's voice...

SORESCU

(fearful)

'Tis Caesar himself!

GHOST

Revise the scene, Shakespeare! Give Caesar the leisure to say more than just “Et tu, Brute?” because he was slain at the height of creation; let his last words be much more copious... Why should Brutus have a longer speech than Caesar? Did he make war on the Gauls?

HAMLET

I shake like a leaf! I cannot understand.

SORESCU

Let me try

To explain to him... *(Aloud.)* You are mistaking us,

Your Majesty, but welcome; Shakespeare himself,

I have told that this fierce scene on the steps

Of the Senate, he dispatched in too much

Of a hurry. We must rewrite the murder.

GHOST

For so many centuries, Caesar has been

Unable to close his eyes in rest, busy

Preparing his defiant speech against those

Worthless conspirators... Revenge me, Shakespeare!

SORESCU

I will tell him so.

(Exit Ghost. Darkness.)

ACT V

TABLEAU VI

London. Backstage.

SCENE 1

RICHARD

He's obsessed! He torments pages with his nerves
Like others playing bridge... And he loses track
Of time! On stage with bags under his eyes,
Forgotten lines from his own texts revive
On his tongue. His memory is frayed and worn
Like the sleeve of an accountant who adds figures
And mixes up five and seven, about six
In the afternoon... (*Amazed.*) He called me "Sorescu" yesterday.

SORESCU

You make me laugh...

RICHARD

He sometimes thinks he's Sorescu.

SORESCU

These actors! Lewd
Language like theirs...

RICHARD

Upon my honor! Let him
Rest himself and his debilitated mind!
He can be only an actor, others
Can write good plays... Ben Jonson, Robert Greene,
I, myself, if I could find enough time...

(Enter Voicea, dressed in long peasant's coat ornamented with braid, peasant's sandals tied around his ankles, a fur hat. With a sack over his shoulders.)

VOICEA

(putting down the sack)

This world has far too many long, long roads. *(Sighing.)*
Do you know where the master playwright is?

RICHARD

He doesn't look like he's from these parts, the way he dresses.

SORESCU

Where are you from?

VOICEA

I heard that here there was one, what's his name... I've forgotten the name! (*Takes out a slip of paper.*) William of Shakespeare, of Stratfor... of... Amvon.

SORESCU

You tangled them up... You've gotten lost...

VOICEA

I never get lost... however far I may walk! Now, for instance, I come all the way from... Look, I have my bearings...

SORESCU

Do you have a compass, like our sailors, who explore the coasts of the Americas, or – as in days of yore – do you orient yourself by the moss on trees... which shows the north... always the north!?!...

VOICEA

I don't need anyone to show me anything. I have my bearings. (*Confidentially.*) It's the hill of Shitfire. When I wake up in the morning, the hill is on my left. When I go to sleep, the hill of Shitfire is on my right.... When I turn, the Shit... on my other hand... If I turn around a lot in a battle... as has been the case... the hill of Shitfire.... vanishes... And then I know there will be another war, a much more terrible war... as happened in the case with this tragedy... (*Fumbles in his sack.*) Shall I take it out or not take it out?

SORESCU

Is the hill in there?

VOICEA

How heavy can a head be? A handful of dust... Our principalities, all three in one place, as he united them with his sword, are no bigger, on a map, than this head... It must be buried in secret, back at our home... What a man! What a strong, heroic man!

SORESCU

But who sent you here to us?

VOICEA

The word's going around that you take great pains to find subjects... Rumor... You know, at home among us, rumor circulates very fast...

SORESCU

Faster than a German letter?...

VOICEA

Have you not heard of those Austro-Hungarians!... Basta was their man, and so died our brave one, killed by his treacherous sword... I have brought to you a real tragedy...

(Enter Shakespeare.)

SHAKESPEARE

I told them: no acting for a month, two, nine,

Until my play is done! Let all the dukes

Attend the theatre, I won't appear on stage!...

Nay, even for kings lined up indian file!...

This idea's too great, so I'll let all else drop.

SORESCU

A great miracle! Behold, the *Head* is here...

VOICEA

(takes a bloody head out of the sack)

He can't rest until... Great tragedy back home...

SHAKESPEARE

Who is that?

SORESCU

(to Voicea)

Pilgrim, you who bear the sacred tomb in your sack, tell him! Here is the man for whom you were searching.

VOICEA

William of...that?... Of... on Amvon?

SHAKESPEARE

Whose bloody head is that?

SORESCU

Tell him!

VOICEA

I fought in the army of our Prince Mihai the Brave, ever since his first uprising against the Turks, and to the very end... There was not a battle in which...

SHAKESPEARE

I heard some reports... A horror!

SORESCU

This isn't the head of a jester, who at feasts
With gibes and gambols set tables on a roar!
He with his sword halted the progress of
The crescent moon for a short space. He held high
The shield of the united provinces
Of Wallachia, and they gleamed in the sun.

(Enter an actor).

RICHARD

(to Shakespeare)

On stage! It's your cue!
You're Hecuba.
The Trojans will throw rotten eggs if you're late!

SORESCU

(staring at the sack)

Time is in that sack, but these aren't the times!

A pity, we don't have time!
We're always squeezing the ancient lemon
While all around us much is signified,
Embodied in extraordinary heroes...

RICHARD

(pointing at Shakespeare)

He's a writer only in his spare time,
But he earns his bread as a histrion...
(Importuning.) Hecuba, again turn on your spring of tears
And tie back your hair... Please, here, take your wig.

SHAKESPEARE

(irritated)

I told you last night I wouldn't act!

Not today, not tomorrow, not... next month, the entire year 1601 will be devoted to writing... I am this close to becoming a... *(Emphasizing.)* dra-ma-tist. *(To Sorescu:)* I thank you, my friend... Without you I could not have emerged from the slough of helplessness...

SORESCU

See, subjects now seek you out on their own...

Start writing!... Let this resolution shake things up... the Middle Ages?... the Renaissance?... And all time still to come...

SHAKESPEARE

And yet I must act.

(To Voicea.) He was a courageous hero and I like
His modesty, for he comes, head in hands,
While his body takes root in the rich fields
And in the eagles that furrow your skies.
As in an ark, may the hands of your country
Hold him where he was born... May he light the way
For your fate, his blood burning in rainbows...

RICHARD

(in a hurry)

Hecuba, get going!

SHAKESPEARE

(amazed)

I was playing Priam...

RICHARD

(explaining)

Crossing the Thames, Hecuba was kidnapped...

SHAKESPEARE

Those ruffians!

RICHARD

Their aim's to compromise the company.

Today we are graced by Her Majesty
The Queen herself... Save us, o, Shakespeare!
Save us, o, Will!
You're the sole actor who knows the pair of roles
Better than well... Understand?... We'll arrange it
That Hecuba and Priam never meet
On the stage... Today is decisive... So
Enter into your part! Put on your beads!

SHAKESPEARE

(to Voicea)

Fare thee well, my man, fare thee well!
Travelers, you must travel on, but we,
Bound to Albion by the shore of the sea,
We languish in the fog...

RICHARD

(To Shakespeare)

We are called again.

(Puts his wig on him. Exit.)

SORESCU

Where exactly is that country on a map?

VOICEA

I must go... Poor head!... the body's summoning us. Let's get going, then.

(Puts the sack on his back.)

(Staring for a while.) Could you be German?

Great tragedy, indeed...

SORESCU

So...

VOICEA

You don't seem to belong here...

SORESCU

(evasively)

Well, well...

Let me find out from you about your land... Things come about there that leave the West wonderstruck. The Netherlands, Denmark, Spain... This Michael...

VOICEA

My friend, a great tragedy!

SORESCU

So great that it cannot find a place in Shakespeare.

VOICEA

Now I must be on my way! Aha, let me take my bearings. *(Makes a number of gestures.)* Hmm... It seems that it's here...

SORESCU

What's here?

VOICEA

The hill of Shitfire is on the left...

SORESCU

Aha! But why do you call it that?

VOICEA

Something spews out of it... don't know just how to say this... You cannot say it's brimstone, it's not. You cannot say it's blackest oil, it's not. You cannot say it's fire, it's not... But it's something! And in the morning you see it like a pointed fur cap of flames... Bluish, almost turquoise... Let's go home... oh, poor creature...

SORESCU

Why do you go walking so far to look for strangers with your subject in a sack? Don't you have your own writers?

VOICEA

We don't, 'cause they kill them.

SORESCU

Who?

VOICEA

They... Heathens. Right now we have... all we have is a special sort of writers. We call them *crossers*.

SORESCU

They write on crosses?

VOICEA

Last name and first. This we let them do, since how much drama can you write on a cross? For isn't there no room?! Much greater drama in the grave... But see, there's no room... That's why they allow us... And there are so many of them, these crossers... Mama, mama!... They sing out all day: "Here are crosses! I've got crosses!"... They bring them in sacks... They chant: "Crosses of bread," "Crosses for hanging on your breast, crosses!" "Buy my crosses!" You buy one, put your name on it... and it's a readymade, original play! You're the hero, the author, the critic, in this world and in the next world. Only they don't last long, for in about seven years... they toss you out... The letters get covered in moss... New crosses take their place... And it goes on and on... (*Worried.*) Wait, the image of the hill of Shitfire is fading from my mind... (*Takes his bearings.*) It's going that way... Ordeals are heralded to me like this, too... With the funnel of this hill... I know a month in advance what will happen before it does. More misfortunes! Screw it all... The heathens have made the hill very, very angry!...

SORESCU

Go thy way, Wallachian, may thy road be safe... Shakespeare cannot find a place for you, either... You could see: he cannot find a place for himself. Shakespeare can no longer be encompassed in Shakespeare! He is haunted by his own hill...

VOICEA

(*peering into his sack*)

Come along with me, poor creature... Let's go home... (*Lifts the sack on his shoulders. Exit.*)

MARIN SORESCU