

Selected Poems

From the cycle *Gallery of Discarded Things*

IV

We are that we are, and the in-between shall be in-between.
This is no religious wisdom. This is but a summary of my life,
As simple and predictable as it takes. In the shadow of Akkad, Thebes,
Memphis, Karkemish, Delphi, the Ganges, Jerusalem, Lhasa,
While I'm barbecuing steaks in the garden, raking molehills,
Throwing rotten tomatoes on the compost, hanging the washing on a line,
Elegantly moving about the kitchen or repairing the roof, and
Pondering the joy of losing balance only to be shattered on your forehead;
Or while I'm mowing the grey-green grass of your eyes, planting the
Seeds for you in the birdhouse, pruning the sweet-smelling slim necks of
Branches, mending the gutter, red like fire, for the hoary juice of rain,
Or scrubbing the sun-tanned floor of the veranda, knowing all the time that
I would deal with you more thoroughly than that Neruda spring does with
Its cherry blossoms, or the autumn with the leaves and bushes;
While I'm changing the bed linen and twisting the remains of your hair into a
Ball, or while, because the sky is full of stars, I simply wonder about
The truth of the zodiac.
What sinister design is woven into this routine!
You'll never know what's going on in the metaphysics of my household.
(This is all the bag and baggage of my world.)

From the cycle *Lošinj*

Lošinj.
Veli and Mali.

The remains of the monastery walls are grazed
By echoes of solitude. There is no one here to
Translate time when you choose to substitute your body
For another, whiter than yours, with a sign of the Living.

At the far end of the quay I left you a dumb sign:
A school of tales, tossing in the net of your hair,
Living and asleep, with the smell of the tar of
Unnameable ships. Uvala Krivica. Ravenska. Sveti Ivan.
All's kodak-distant.

Sometimes it seems, because you are gone, that
The sea has not been created. That the shudder
Of the agaves within your eyes is not from
The mistral and my seagull-tongue.

And Him, whose all the edges I have blunted,
Yet still I bleed every time I snuggle in and out?

Like the very moment when a birth rolls away,
And we fail to be near.

Twice Lošinj.
If we are ever to leave it for the third time,
It will be of ashes, not of salt.

As I Was Saying My Introit Prayers

At the end of times,
At the prolongation of the shade of shades,
When death no longer is discussed
Without the pondering on life,
Will there be one to call himself a poet?

(The expanded metaphor is therefore to be
Swallowed by the shifting sands of pain.)

As you were coming up, I barely saw you:
You were walking midst the drops of rain.
You spoke like one
Lamenting for the death of fate.

*If you had loved the sky
As much as I did love the rain,
Would our space still lack
The gender and the number running empty?*

*You are agitated by, that much I know,
The common garden, engraved on the four rows of stones.
It is being soaked in four waters.*

(Like the glory of the fathers graven on the long garment,
Where the world will find its rest.)

At the end of times.

*You shall not stroll through it
Until you've counted all the grains of sand,
And the hourglass has stopped in you.
You shall measure the depth of yourself
By the four waters.
You shall find a rest on the four stones.*

And when you say:
Take this body and don't bring it back
Until I'm truly worthy of it,
I will bring the first bucket.

*Night after night, three times running
You shall be sad because of losing
Sadness.
The ray of darkness will dry your throat.
You shall gather water for the second time.*

(Once you've entered, you're out.
The door is the same, with a two-fold profile.
Like the sun-wind
In the white sails of the waters,
They show refusal to return to the
Dullness of the surface.)

*It will pour for the third time,
And you shall sing:*

Eros, Logos, Kairos, Agape.
Four riders of Love,
Drenched with sweat and full of dust.

I await my second

Conscious shock.
I reflect upon the difference between
Number four and number five.

*Once started, there's no end to it.
There's only time at the end of times.*

From the cycle *The Cloud of Knowing*

Tango

Proposing to Love, Lust dances the tango.
 Are the source and the mouth of a river
 Indeed its beginning and end?
 Ask me an easier question.
 Should people who have never known
 Love insist it's nowhere to be found?
 People who wake in a sweat because
 They have failed to observe the duple time?
Arrida. Mordida. Salida.

An easier one.
 Are you a lover crossing a bridge
 And facing the source while
 She's turning to you?
 Or are you one of those who think
 That heart has every right to reason on its own?
 (The tragedy of mankind is in every
 Man's preoccupation with his own.)

Love shows no mercy.
 It is soothed by the nostalgia for
 Some lovely common habits. It will find
 Itself inflamed around the one who leads.
Molinete and Mordida.
 Love, standing on a single pair of legs.

Translated by the author.

From the cycle *De-dications*

Pax de deux

For Pino and Pia Mlakar

Feast of the Guardian Angels.¹
The Lože folk have lit their stoves,
Preparing for
The fasting of the heart through winter.

On Rob above Vipava,
Where hills are mute and ancient,
Where God in gales leafs through his poems
And through your thought. Through you as his.

Thought? – consider that at the moment
When you are leaning into gales,
Under an angle like a larch.
As long as you have known them, pondered them,
They have been pondering on something else.

(The larch is hidden in the word
Which quickens the world's movement.)

This is the *pas de deux*:
The dance of meaning with its fellow-meaning.
The never-finished pirouette
of common
denominators (ever dwindling).

I am not alone, then?
Yes.

¹ Celebrated on the first Sunday in September. In the village of Lože and in the general neighbourhood of Vipava (the town referred to in the second stanza), this was the time when stoves would be lit for the winter. (Translator's note.)

From the cycle *The Way of the Cross for the Blind*

Though we began our climb at crack of dawn,
 The air was close. (The month of reaping coincided
 With the lunar sickle.) Three pilgrims wearing sandals,
 Long grown over our soles, we fell out of step
 – as those who toe the line might say – with time.

I²

First we were stopped short by an ancient mariner
 Mistaking us, in his befuddled harbour,
 For wedding-guests who toasted in a different poem
 Death weddings births and lives.
 We passed him by.

(How often have I trudged along this track
 In hopes of being different from the others
 Or at the least resembling what portrays me
 And is to judge me. No one stopped me then.)

II

We came to Gap of Otlica, which watches,
 Like Cyclops, flocks through the Vipava Valley.
 A perfect setting for philosophy.
 Say that you walk your way and worry about the others:
 If it must hurt, at least let pain be pleasant.

It's in the nature of the bearer that he fits
 His burden. Makes it lighter.

III

I still recall when I wrote my first poem
 And when the absent grey-haired poet said,
You're at the start after the start.
 I dried, like swallows weaving with their wings
 The promised shore. I needed
 An *Ode*. It dawned on me that once I'd come to be
 The bucket and the well, the sky and sinkhole,
 A mouth which fights back to the very last drop.

But for the last, our falls are public matter.

² The fourteen poems of the cycle allude to the fourteen Stations of the Cross: 1. Jesus is condemned to death; 2. Jesus carries his cross; 3. Jesus falls the first time; 4. Jesus meets his mother; 5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross; 6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus; 7. Jesus falls the second time; 8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem; 9. Jesus falls the third time; 10. Jesus is stripped of his garments; 11. Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross; 12. Jesus dies on the cross; 13. Jesus is taken down from the cross (Deposition or Lamentation); 14. Jesus is laid in the tomb. (Translator's note.)

IV

When I saw Mum and Father for the last time,
On my return from pilgrimage to Brezje,
They seemed as pale and lonesome as a dried
Well in the Karst lands. In that stifling room,
Its wringing smell of the decay of hope,
Despite old age, the letters and the prophets,
Their last eyes dwelt on the infusion.

I recognised them by the tags at bedside:
So-and-so and date of birth.
They went then, their separate ways, I think.
With no transfusion of persuasive suffering
Or answer why we'd weathered anything together.
With no referral for the cure of childhood.

V

The day slid into noon. The memory
Of used-up innocence still lingered in the scent
Of tufted lousewort. It is rooted here.
Like grasses waving in the blowing sea.

We scrambled over the dried tree of ash –
Called so in Celtic tales – and Aleš said,
We're aching from the Rob track, where in details
God watches us.

Three ways on Rob ridge flowed into a fourth:
The goal of our journey was its start. [...]

XIV

All is extinguished, darknesses are lit.
The roots of His words lay
Deep in the earth, the branches winding skyward:
A melting-grave which presses out man's essence.

What's left is time without an end.
What's left is that which is what it is.

And you are.

Translated by Nada Grošelj