

Branko Ćegek

The etymology of nearness

The street was empty when with a gloomy laughter
I stopped the progression of transience and mortar,
a different picture of love seeping from it.
Sleigh bells of vanity and the unarmed symmetry
were fading like new fragrances and biblical nostalgia.

At the same place I met the warmth
of her long fingers, among them,
lurking shyly, the ancient danger of arson
and that mathematically clear feeling
of similarity everyone finds so very dear.

Millions of trampled steps
on the damp and muddy sidewalk
bear witness to the only genuine past, inscribed
in the dull rock of the street, then a stereotype
shaped by every whiteness of my incidental sentence.

June 1991

The syntax of skin, the syntax of moonlight

The triumph of numbers comes off the screen.
I slow down, powerless and silent.
As if renewed
in the belated philosophy of language and wine
I acquiesce
to every pathetic slalom
though the girl from the dial
fell asleep in the arms of insomniac nights
and fishermen's objections
the idyllic history of literature
oozes stickily from.

An essay is then
the impenetrable circle of danger:
new explanations arrive
for spent words, for exiting images
and frames from a borrowed movie:
the plane's boom and the cellar's dust
left their mark on your damp palm:
lovely, joyous, and tame
you crawled again into the odor of my skin,
the enchanted solar glue
from which there is no return, where nobody's the same,
which we find about from the newspapers
and the legends of deluded butterflies
on the window that vanishes
in the deep, fathomless dark.

I tell you: get into my mirror
and take me in the cold remembrance
to warm up, to fall asleep smiling
as if I were oblivion,
the calm sea, and Polić Kamov
in the lottery in Barcelona.
Ships and lady pianists
with long legs and laser fingers
wave to me as in every campaign
of innovations and death:
the stereo booms only with the rhythm of your touch,
followed by a tremulous flash of the skin
in the moonlight near the embankment, in spring,
when the winds are still very young,
and the night doesn't end, just like a manuscript,
writing out the ellipsis of a small letter "l"
to infinity.

The masked portrait of A. Warhol

1.

First there was October and the hair flew brutally to the sky,
the dogs and hedgehogs started to fight
among the pylons of the Brooklyn Bridge; and then the blacks
from the subway started to sing.

There were dead and injured people, the papers
plastered with boldfaced headlines
and my stuffed snapshots.

Later in the afternoon, fireworks cheered pale faces.
Between tin cans and the falls, the stereo and coca-cola
there glided only the sound of the screen freed of pictures.

There was no rain, there were no anesthetics:
the *phantom of freedom* cruised the unreachable blueness.

2.

California is far away. I rarely went there.
A glance at silicone breasts is the only stimulating thing.

The vignettes of the artificial world are melancholic. I put them
in a box, turned on the light, and stared at the dry summer night:
the riders of waves finished rotating, the guys
from the beach, crushed singles, the whole epoch of filigree plastic.

Sometimes my eyes hurt from all this. I overflow
in a masked cloth then and unfurl a text, textile, telepathy...

After all this, a beautiful and sad girl
in me bids me good night.

1992

Breath-hold diving

yves sent me a message:

"a girl from italy watches me under water
for the third day, and i watch her.

we are there, naked and alone.

above we do not know each other."

i replied, using our slang transcription:

"bi kul! stej vel!" after that, his next message

said he had dived again, "for it's quiet

and uniquely nice down there." i understood

his cry of suffering at another, distant shore.

next i dived into marguerite yourcenar's

oriental stories, went to china, kotor,

dubrovnik, came up again, melancholically,

though now that's way out of fashion.

i saw several italian, four czech,

and seven pudgy hungarian girls. i saw

a sunshade restless like someone's body.

i saw a pair of blue, anxious, deep-set eyes.

i wanted to suppress my passion for diving,

but couldn't look away, or put on my sunglasses,

not at all: unable to move, i was sinking,

steadily and silently, in the sand.

08/18/01

Never in the Netherlands

then he stopped and stared at me,
knowing he was to see my eyes never again.
what a feeling of emptiness!
what a grotesque!
you look and know you will not ever again.
then the corners of the lips got chapped.
then the eyes' glint sank into the indefinite.
then the shoulders slumped helplessly....
the last gallop sidetracked.
the last moon reflection in the glazed eye.
it went out, stopped sending messages
over the satellite to the life's end and indifference.
oh, what a mockery of beauty and banality!
of heights and plains!
the plains of paraguay.
the plains of finland.
the plains of kirghizia.
the plains of thailand.
the plains of wisconsin.
the plains of the netherlands.
oh, what a geography of asymmetry and cellophane!
what a screwed-up waterfall of rituals and downy mildew!
pus and jacobean well-being runs down
and the early morning alka of horse-to-assmanship:
in the center!
in the zero!
only the cascading boom in front of you:
whence has death crept closer?
who composes a list of violence and megalomania?
how can you turn off tv?

11/27/02

04/20/03

Translated by Mario Suško