

Tomaz Šalamun

Acquedotto

I should've been born in Trieste in 1884
on the Acquedotto, but it didn't turn out that way.
I remember the three-storied reddish house,
the ground floor with its furnished living room,
my great-grandfather (my father)
nervously studying the stock market reports,
blowing cigar smoke and calculating quickly.
When I was already four months inside my great-
grandmother, there was a family council,
the result of which was the postponement
of my arrival for two generations.
The decision was written down, the sheet stuffed
into an envelope, sealed and sent to an archive in Vienna.
I remember traveling back toward the light
on my belly, and watching an old man
fussing as he measured the shelf, taking another body from the shelf
and shoving it by the head down the air shaft.
I had the impression I was seven years old,
and that my substitute, my grandfather,
was a bit older, nine or ten.
I was composed. At the same time these events disturbed me.
I remember that for a time I withered,
most likely because of the strong light,
and then my lungs flattened like a bag.
When I reached the proper tonus I fell asleep.
I knew my body was down below,
and in my dream I saw it many times.
It was that of a slow-moving man with mustaches,
a dreamer and banker his whole life.

Translated by Charles Simic

Andraž

my brother strides naked
beautiful as a virgin spring
through the hall, kills the lamb
with love

we eat and meditate on the image

sleds rust between winters, the sky gets lower
and grows damp
the earth bears strawberries
soldiers stand hungry
among daffodils yellow as night
a clear, pure guard

shutters, closed and locked
trail markers in the woods and mountains
O Mt. Čaven, air crowded with angels

army tracks, bread, bread
O Sibyl, split hardened color
immovable, unalterable itch

Translated by Anselm Hollo and the author

Blossom and Blood

I'm the fruit whose skin breaks,
a container grabbed with a crane.
Gulls are bloodthirsty and hungry.
Their plucked feathers descend
as I climb. Booms, silky booms
in the frozen boat's throat, between
the sliding rusty doors of the tanker.
What do I do here if my seal breaks?
How should I grease my black and blue shoulders?
Hey, little stoker, I squeezed your head
under the ceiling for I started to breathe.
Your limbs smashed on brown metal
cannot be washed away. A mosquito is caught in oil.
They nail the box Illyria on a stick
and when the lid is pressed to the ceiling
where should it go if not inside? You resemble
an old fly's turd looking partly gray on a light bulb.
Shall we throw spears? I don't have a tool.
And the huge trunk with a pulley coming closer
owns nothing. I'm shifted around.
Machines are putting me on the other dock.
And from there a train through
dark tunnels and damp gorges
or in the sun, sun among wheat spikes,
an hour before the arch goes out and the lights
of cars and houses ignite. How should I
remember you, little stoker. I'm almost
unloaded. Only a lintel or two,
only a distance traveled on foot and then
that closeness with the heart shown by your
hand. A span. A span. You slap wood
as if a piano, you measure the tone.
Such sweet sounds Pythagoras takes.

Translated by the author and Peter Richards

Dolmen

O view from the window, at daybreak
from the tenth floor, of the sea,
of the lighthouse and freighters in Saint-Nazaire.
The same view: from Keller bar, at the end of Christopher
Street, of freighters sliding on
the Hudson as here on the Loire.
Here olympian and slow, there
juicy and fresh and black,
a black man who cried in my lap
brought me there.
The red mouths of black men are silkier than the mouths
of white men, softer, more terrifying, more
tender and deeper. More like the mouths of calves
from Karst, which die in innocence before
they're slaughtered.
You're my stone, Kosovel.
Resin, ropes, fences,
tar and the silent sliding of tires.
You hear it more than the breakers.

The coin, which silently circles, falling and rising
in the alcohol, it's not you hissing, it's the gasoline.
Why in the flocks and why do they scream?
They tear themselves apart. Soda water shreds sight.
As long as the green doesn't calm down again,
o plush of beads.
You barely touch the stick with the chalk.
The sea behind the glass is the other pole of collision
and drinks it. People really rip themselves apart.
Rip like scarves. This continent is
big. It can smash your lungs
if it catches them. Here the Atlantic is
massive and gray, fed by
the Loire. Stones furrowed like eternity and
old. The fresh beasts along the Hudson, one
next to another, tears the mountains apart, avidly,
the sea is still too young to calm you down.

Translated by Christopher Merrill and the author

The Apple

such an Eros? such a home?
it tumbles, reckless, humus of earth
the woods, brilliant steam of night
the smoke, we name the smoke the surface of the sea
who wallows in the vault?
who supports the hunger of the sky?
where will we put earrings, young lieutenants,
weary sailors?
as if the light itself would show us how to pluck an apple
how to smell it, predatory beast
how ink pencils, ice of mirrors
from the hand descend clouds, who seduces fire in the night?
who knows about loam, about weather? who knows how to feed the stove?
herd of hungry mercenary minds
pesky habits, lazy muzzles
Thoth's work coupled common flowerbeds
steam! steam moves souls! textiles!
breaking hiddens slide
monkeys are hungry, runners are hungry
gifts lick straps, the principle trembles
lying down, I will rake fishes, dry color of crumbs
fencers, baroque stuntmen, huts of mouth
look at loosened world bonds, drunken crickets
buckskin pokes, terrible children
there is bustle in the orbits, rot in mobile fish
break neck in the heights of eagles
wrappers, rivers of angels, raspberries pierced
on earth we do not file flames, we do not foresee God's temples
we do not turn up our palms
on earth we tremble, destroy waters, nourish smoke
in the dark we lay hands on the hunger of the sun

Translated by Anselm Hollo and the author

Go

Go.
Grind up the pure light and wipe it away.
Step into the pure light.
It's there, it flutters like a flag.

It kneels.
No need to melt it down again.
It's everywhere, in the humidity.
In the white gill of the silver thread.

There is a saying: it lulls you.
You can make a little nose from the light.
Which breathes boats, graves and air,
the wall of the white we.

Translated by Christopher Merrill and the author

Lacquer

Destiny rolls over me. Sometimes like an egg. Sometimes
with its paws, slamming me into the slope. I shout. I take
my stand. I pledge all my juices. I shouldn't
do this. Destiny can snuff me out, I feel it now.

If destiny doesn't blow on our souls, we freeze
instantly. I spent days and days afraid
the sun wouldn't rise. That this was my last day.
I felt light sliding from my hands, and if I didn't

have enough quarters in my pocket, and Metka's voice
were not sweet enough and kind and solid and
real, my soul would escape from my body as one day

it will. With death you have to be kind.
Home is where we're from. Everything in a moist dumpling.
We live only for a flash. Until the lacquer dries.

Translated by Christopher Merrill and the author