

Vojka Đikić

Self-portrait

When the season of raspberries arrives
I begin cooking with the fury of the mad.

First raspberry, then strawberry;
Then sweet cherry and the bitter black-cherry.

Then, following my mother's recipe, apricot –
Bright, saffron of sunflower

(First boil, then peel
Then arrange carefully in a large pan

A layer of apricot and a layer of sugar
Next day boil with a few drops of citron).

Lastly, the season of cornel-berries.
It is already late autumn.

Mix the berries until your hand tingles.
And so the fruit – boiled, hardened and mixed –

Waits hopefully on shelves, since those who took to it
Never returned to the house.

Afterlife

I try learning
to live without you
but you're there in every glass
of white wine
every sunny or rainy day
you're Christmas in Berlin
Easter in Korčula
a strangest sleep
you're the silence on a terrace
the noise of crowds
you're the voice wakening me
into reality's nightmare
you're the owl hooting
as I close the door-latch
of home
betwixt myself and the world
you're the wind off Lambeth Bridge
and silence across the banks of the Thames
you're cloudbursts over Korčula
and the first morning mist after harvest
you're the rush through Liverpool Station
between sandwiches and the train
you're the peace of St Margaret's
where saintly females
seek forgiveness
for themselves
for me for you for the world
this century
you're not there only
as an empty echo
or forgotten joy
wandering
from windbreak to train track
the dawn a blue goat
plucking everything
you're all that was
and all that shall be
you are death
you are life
all upended

Girl in a white linen dress

Marko Vešović –
 young slim handsome
 as he was in the eighties
 when this town
 still
lacked ruins –
 recites prayers in my dream
while all around are crimes

They killed a girl
 I shout
but no one listens

They killed a girl
she lies in the gutter
dark cloth
 of a shroud
slowly soaking
with the red of sunset
the girl raises a hand
to defend herself
while someone
 unknown
buries her face
with a shovelful of rubble

Another girl
in a white linen dress
 is fleeing
as her sweetheart
cries out
 in the ruins

Last night who did they murder
 in my dream
who is the girl
 in the white linen dress
fleeing as if out of her mind
 leaving her sweetheart
in the ruins
that at any moment
could topple onto him

What is Vešović doing
 in my dream
slim young handsome
as he was in the eighties
when there were no ruins

around him
no ruins in my dreams
dreams where they killed girls
dressed in dresses
of white linen
Where are the prophets
to divine dreams
where is God
to end it
to show for once
his strength
to save us
from this madness
he who only
defends his son
lifting him from the cross
as our sons
handsome slim young
lie
as mown grass
as revenants
they wander the world
sometimes
a flower in their hand
they enter another's dream
where they awaken
mute witnesses
they recite prayers
with no will of their own
prepared for a long time
for these obsequies
while into a bloodied sunset
the earth sinks
whole

The sea

Gingerly we enter the sea
as if barbarians in an antique temple
amid the liturgical solemnities
suspecting we are out of place

The sea takes us into its care
and remembers the shape of our youthful bodies
and croons a lullaby so alike
the priest's voice in the antique temple
when we were still used to mass
thinking anxiously of warm houses
thatched with straw

Where is the priest's voice droning
in the wave crashing above
our anxious bodies
he who promised warm houses
thatched with straw
and the loaf and the vine forever

Houses are obliterated
tables mock their bare offerings
gingerly we enter the sea
and the empty houses
as if into the antique temple of solemn liturgy
suspecting we have no place
anywhere at all