

## Primož Čučnik

### The Scent of Tea

My friend is an existentialist. He collects china  
and Japanese teapots. You get the best cup of tea at his place.  
Steeped to perfection. It may not be a true ceremony  
but in our drinking, when we sit around the table,  
there is definitely something aesthetic. I like the scene  
when we keep quiet and sip the scent of tea.  
All of us are existentialists. First we laugh, only then do we say  
that's a good joke. The two of us also read Šalamun.  
Once we spent the whole summer saying: Jonah  
are you a fish? I am a fish. We were all on the island Hvar.  
I have another friend who is a Buddhist. We were standing  
on the border between philosophy and theology. We said: ouch, it's  
sharp. You can cut yourself here. Perhaps he will read the Tibetan secret  
tantras and then we can all have a laugh together on Shoemakers' Bridge.  
Another time we joked about nothingness, how horribly cold it is  
for our homes. He said: I am sated with wisdom. From now on  
I shall take only with a teaspoon. It will lead us all astray.  
Branko sent me a sacred cow from Nepal.  
He should've come back by now, but he is a wanderer.  
Two of my friends are musicians. One writes to me from the North  
though he has an Eastern name. Lao Zi is a legend.  
The other is a bass player. He may speak to Peacock one day.  
On *Tales of Another* footprints are white. Jarrett is talking to  
angels. Spirits too, if you will. When we discuss music  
we never know where it comes from and where it goes. But for sure  
it is not in the notes. This much we agree on. And I know from personal experience.  
Another friend of mine works in printing. The two of us ride bicycles together.  
Sometimes we don't speak at all. Perhaps he doesn't know when I am decent.  
That I uncover myself when I am hot. Because I was afraid that he'd fall  
I gave him *The Climbing Skills*. A book from 1950.

Let's all go to Medvode for some tea some time to say a thing or two  
about our destiny. Something fine binds us. Grom said  
a good score is like a stick of gum that stretches and spreads  
to all sides but doesn't snap. It seems to be the same with us.  
We are swinging on rubber, careful not to be too rough.  
When it is hot we wait for it to cool. We blow too,  
and our wind makes ripples on the edges of china.  
Something fine binds us. The important thing is that it bursts  
but doesn't snap

Tr. by Ana Jelnikar and M. Zapruder

### Sonnet

Forgive me for being so inconsiderate

praise from the people close to you matters most  
love is a rushing homeland on a bicycle  
and war only frightful news on people's tongues

under coats stone particles crumble  
these don't overlook anyone's weaknesses  
but try and do whatever makes you satisfied  
fear is the forger of someone else's money

the body is an inner tube filled to the brim with air  
the universe an airless prisonhouse of the mind  
whoever dies won't say another word

is war merely frightening news on people's lips  
if only everyone did what made them happy  
change is a rushing homeland on a bicycle

Tr. by Ana Jelnikar and W. Martin

## **Chords I.**

*à Reverdy*

1.

Pick up castaway skates and glide  
across frozen pavements.

Point-blank honed, cut into the surface  
and let the legs with the skates be one.

Skate away quickly, alone, as though it were a race,  
pay no attention to shouts: "Where is he skating?"

It's good to skate this way, no bounds  
under skates everything is allowed.

You're the lone skater down here, you see  
neither marks nor shadows the skates cast.

You glide among the city lights,  
you hold your balance,  
you don't fall over backwards.

The skates leave a sharp trace of lines,  
grooves in the shimmering surface under them.

So, take a dusty old pair and skate away  
into a skidding substance, there you'll feel whole.

Skate by yourself and under you, ice will turn  
to a quickened liquid.

Don't tell people about your skating.  
Skate as though you weren't skating alone.

2.

Boy, where are you skating, in your anger  
you have lost your bearings.

There is a universe attracting you  
and your skates take leave of the ground.

Do dancers dance on their heads here  
or do they simply fall and are deep in their fast falling.

Tiny dots are planets and the skates  
every so often slide off the curved surface.

Is this a dance of dancing or has the earth  
danced for all time and your skating is only a wish.  
If you move with such haste, can anyone ever  
stop you, see you take off your skates.

You are a fine skater, your skating  
the flight of a comet's shards through the cosmos.

Did you ever see a shooting star, catch sight  
of lightning, suddenly, hear big banging.

Did your inner human voice burst or  
close-lipped voice for the first time.

Ah, you tremble (gliding into the void),  
the skates groan: regret nothing.

3.

Will you always skate alone.  
Will your skating pay off.

Skater, the music blusters out of silence  
stronger, your heart keeps balance with the skates.

The giant shapes of cities want you melancholy,  
but you can't stop to catch the open talk.

And you skate alone (as if someone was skating beside you),  
in a crowd of skaters (and yet you skate alone).

How you change, you know what's under the sky,  
how skilled your skates are!

Even the first skater wants to show you how to be  
the fastest skater in the rink of the universe!

That you are not the only one,  
that there are those more competitive,  
but not everyone can be in the wonderful thicket of the void.

Are you following the sky, follow it, follow it,  
there's always something momentous there.

Just don't tell people about your skating.  
They wouldn't believe you kept your balance on your own.

Stop always saying what makes you happy.  
You're not the only one with jagged skates.

Skate as if you were skating on your own.  
Skate as if you were skating alone.

Tr. by Ana Jelnicar and W. Martin

## **In which case**

I'm sure you absolutely have to  
trust imagination and the tracks  
that language takes in pathlessness.  
It probably knows. In any case,  
it's smarter than we are, probably our only support.  
When you walk through the desert you need water  
and spare parts for the jeep.  
So take everything you find in this dictionary,  
and everything you don't. You might need it.  
Even later, even when you no longer are —  
apparitions of comets over the dunes,  
and the stars will shine on.

Tr. by Ana Jelnikar and W. Martin

## First song

First song speaks of the old way  
of life. How things were set  
in the beginning and how it was clear where  
they should end or outlined begin again

with familiar feelings. But then the cuckoo  
started to strike greater hours, and grass  
grew taller and flowers blossomed more beautifully  
and afternoon strollers gazed at hitherto missed colours.

Snow still white, but cleaner  
and brighter, the sky above the roof tiles still blue,  
but blue in the goldenness of a perfect  
afternoon, and the song still resounding

in its evergreen tones. The stars cast  
their glance towards us like surprised acquaintances  
bumping into one another after a thousand years,  
and the book sticks to its claim even after a thousand years,

and a special river has crawled between  
the glittering rocks from the old riverness  
polished to perfect shapes like durable  
hearts tossed into its winding.

Not a month to name  
nor a year to know when  
it all started, only sounds of moments  
poured into an ear and the time unknown

as though all time was past, your original sin  
still buried in your sleep and from an empty  
pocket you can pull your first song  
which took you there. But it is plain and clear now,

only its chorus that you once knew by heart  
keeps changing, so that you can never catch the words.

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