

Dinko Telećan

Gardens & The Red Phase

Translated from Croatian by the author

the volcanic path

I

on the way to Damascus on the way to Vesuvius
I shatter the masks I break the shackles
far away from any eloquent play
keen on defeating the planets
on crossing swords with what lies behind
with the millstones with brambles in my body
with an idiotic demon of my fainting spells
with my own tongue licking a cloud's image
on the black marble of an altar
where I lay my whole self
until the next eruption

II

on the way to oblivion or a garden
on that spacious subsidiary shitty way
I prefer a shabby tent to a reading-room
starwriting to handwriting
a lustful mutt to a haughty greyhound
and there is no contradiction
in my writing this in a reading-room
nor in my getting out of here
lighting a seven-mile cigarette
imagining a foaming horse in front of me
and a column of smoke on the verge of high plains
then stubbing out the cigarette
and returning inside with the thought
of how hard it is to love you
you the rover of my inner me
and with no blame whatsoever
being made literate
stiffened like lava

a fugitive

a pack of hyenas smells his fatigue
on the fugitive's trail they sharpen their teeth
their laugh almost childish as a ghastly jest
sounds and he's loudly lost and tries to breathe

“oh if I were a ghost if my blood didn't smell
if I were fleshless and deaf if I were a shadow
if I were not heard from afar playing gazelle
I would not curse the fate of hyena's prey”

and just as he got to think and saw
that an escape might be to transform
he was reached by a tender jaw
and turned forever into hyena

the red phase

(a travelogue)

I

the boiling throats of birds
under those red clouds
above that green river:
faceless cries are shifting
to the seething silence of the mosque
to the reddened arabesque
and under the bridge's vaults.
buildings and distant trees
take on the colour of sand

II

it seems the sun is setting
in the friend of birds as well
in the traveller ready for prayer
under the darkened sky.
his throat has dried from yelling
like the bed of Guadalquivir
and his throat grows and goes
after the flocks on the west
although he seems to sleep

III

under the mask a thought is boiling:
into the red time of this sunset
all the times of all sunsets fit
and all the bridges can be built
all the birds be blessed.
the oil that greased the wheel of time
leaks into an eternal flame
but the blood still circulates
and opens sore eyes.
time is vanishing in the heart
and the red dusk is already black night
oh it is already an even redder dawn
and the green river is already a bluegreen sea

IV

God has already said everything
the traveller has already asked everything
renounced everything
then returned to everything
summoned by a lost bird.
everything already scrambled for him
everything already fled from him
and not a single word to say:
stop – this is more than a camp in the desert.
the desert where devils grow
and plant evil flowers
flowers withered by wakefulness
smelling of dried blood.
to be awake oh traveller in the desert
to be an invisible flower
drunk with wakefulness!
and God always says everything
and the night that follows
after this lunatic sunset
is just a break
between His two words

V

the traveller had asked himself:
who am I now of all the selves that I have been?
which nocturnal image have I chosen
to show myself to the alien city's eye
which language to build a chord
which fades away by dawn?

I had tried all the devil's tools
until I was left lacking all limbs:
how shall I stand before you God
so sooty so smutty so lame?

resembling the points of quills
question marks were pinned into
the traveller's eyelids and neck

and the answer used to be:

"sí, soy extranjero"
y siempre lo seré
en todas partes
y sin lugar.
como un portero
de la noche serena
sin la puerta
que pudiera guardar.

VI

and he had thought:
we would fly
we would fly all the way to the skies
painted on the canvas of dreams
oh if only we really wished that
with no reserves and second thoughts
with no thoughts at all with no weight
just with a wish aimed at a cloud
and with hands transformed by the wish
– saying in your flight:
today I am a condor
let loose high above destruction
and yesterday a morgue's threshold was my bolster
– oh if only the weight were not our wish
and gravity our thought
all of it for the sake of remaining thoughtlessly
what we think we are
with two colossal pains
incurable in our backs
and with eyes riveted to the cloud
in our hands

VII

and one thoughtless morning
the morning of all mornings
when a path was bereft of its traveller
and finally turned to the path
after the long twilight

and a long night of crosses
he heard a warble
and warbled
and drifted off to gold

Córdoba, autumn 1999