

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE SLOVENIAN

ATOS YENKELICH, 1946 – 2001

1 CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

They came by this way
Looking for the east;
Dirty and ragged, appalled
At the size of the world.

They were singing
For their holy city;
Betrayed by every land
That they passed through.

They came from everywhere,
From France, Germany, England;
Without words or money
With only strange dreams.

I think none arrived
At the holy land;
Unholy places raped them
Or took them in.

Some stayed here and
Became our ancestors;
Perhaps this is why
We dream of Jerusalem.

2. FRIDAY IN THE BURO

The clock or the scratch of a match
Are the loudest things: a sigh of content
Knowing the boss has gone to his house by the lake.

Afternoon light drifts in through pipe-smoke.
One of them stirs himself to put papers away;
Another countersigns a memo and passes it on.

It is time for righting of wrongs:
The neighbour whose dog barked all night
Is having anonymous comments added to his file.

It is time for planning the future.
The daughter's boyfriend with his hair too long
And his western car is having information laid against him.

It is the time of day to watch the trams
And the umbrellas go by below. All men's hearts
Are shrouded in mystery. Some will be followed home.

3. THIS LINE IN MY HEART

This line in my heart
Goes straight through the flesh,
Bisects the spirit in an endless vertical.
On either side there are inverted worlds
Whose river courses are blood vessels,
Whose vessels are river boats
Crossing from one country to another
As the river bends determine.

This line in my heart
Is my trademark, my imprimatur,
My hallmark, my fingerprint,
My birthmark, my birthright,
My gene markers, my passport.
Even so you cannot tell
Who I am from it unless you learn
The codes, and they are all lost.

This line in my heart
Is more subtle than a catholic's dagger,
Has no wings yet flies between
Good and bad, between love and hate
And can prove that opposites exist,
That some things have meaning,
That it is more than just a coursing
Of blood or a flowing of water.

4 NEIGHBOURHOOD OF DREAMS

It was where I grew up
Or where I dreamed I grew up
Or when growing up
It is the place my dreams made it become.

Why does no-one go there now?
The taxi drivers click their tongues,
Shake their heads and return to their newspapers
When you ask them to take you.
There are no trams there. You can check
At the depot why there is no line seven
On the map but they won't tell you.
You can try to walk there, but walls
Get in the way, roads are impassable
And alleys slowly angle away from
Where you feel your steps should lead.

I have only memories of memories.
Sometimes I almost doubt it existed,
Knowing that the past is constantly changed
By the demands of the present; pictures airbrushed,
Books re-written, remembrances questioned.
But once in a bar I spoke with an old man,
Gave him more brandy and he said,
"Yes, I remember Stary Vastar. I lived there once."
Tell me, I said: the veterans playing chess in the park;
Mothers with prams; an airship overhead;
A conditorei where idlers met; the sound of a clarinet;
Did these exist? Was I there? Do I recall?
"Ah, I will say this, I have said too much."

But my dreams, they never say enough.

5 **SOMETIMES THE MAN WITH HIS WORDS**

Sometimes the man with his words
Forgets his place and finds himself
In a part of a story he does not understand

Sometimes he skips a page
And wonders how did he get here
What is this street who are these people

Sometimes the man with his words
Forgets the language he is speaking
Turning mute making noises ignoring syntax

Sometimes he loses his thought
And confuses his listeners or he is faced
With a new world he is told to accept

Sometimes the men with his words
Searches for a tune which teases him
Inside his phrases but he cannot sing

Sometimes he forgets the games of grammar
And almost says what his heart tells him
But catches his tongue just in time

6 THE LOGGING CAMP

Winter in the hills. Blue sky.
Blue woodsmoke.

My father took me there.
Your uncle, he said. Your cousins: Sep, Udo, Willi.
Here, a bed for you and your bedroll.
Keep the coffee hot and they will not complain.

Silence in the forest
Unless it was a call of warning
Then a creak, a splash of trunk
Into the sea of branches.

They swam in the deep brown shadows,
Danced away from the toppling trees.

A man drove a lorry up to be loaded every day.
From time to time a hunter passed by.
Otherwise no-one came.

I kept the coffee pot full
And cooked bacon for them.

There were no rules.
Only the winter and the blue sky
And the incense of woodsmoke.

7 CROSSING THE RIVER AGAIN

He crossed the river again
On his way back home.

But it was not the same river
Because no-one steps in the same river twice.

And it was not the same home
Because his old self and new self
Could not occupy the same space.

Nevertheless he crossed the river again
Content to be an approximation.

8 REAR VIEW

In the rearview mirror
The line of the road behind
Shows all you need to know
About the road before you.

Looking out of the back window
Into the courtyard below
You see all you need to see
Of the main street out front.

Look back down all the mirrors -
Your children when they were small,
Your parents when you were young,
The years of war
When cities smouldered and
Things grew evermore indistinct.

9 **FLAGS OF MANY COLOURS**

Every man his own nation.
From the windows a thousand flags hang
Into the shared territory of air.

Along the street every metre marks
The border of a new sovereign state
Some welcoming, some closed, some indifferent.

I hang out my flag into my corner of air
But feel dissatisfied by the stripes and symbols
And the colours now the sun is on it.

Inside my head other flags unfurl
Cracking in the wind of my skull
Fighting like breakway states for recognition.

Every thought its own province.
There is a Parliament of fools
Inside me which cannot agree upon anything.

Flags of many colours, some fading,
Some burning; fit only for dusty halls
Or winding sheets for dead nations.