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The Country Between Us

Dežela med nami

San Onofre, California

We have come far south.
Beyond here, the oldest women
shelling limas into black shawls.
Portillo scratching his name
on the walls, the slender ribbons
of piss, children patting the mud.
If we go on, we might stop
in the street in the very place
where someone disappeared
and the words *Come with us!* we might
hear them. If that happened, we would
lead our lives with our hands
tied together. That is why we feel
it is enough to listen
to the wind jostling lemons,
to dogs ticking across the terraces,
knowing that while birds and warmer weather
are forever moving north,
the cries of those who vanish
might take years to get here.

1977

San Onofre, Kalifornija

Prispeli smo daleč na jug.
Dalje od tod najstarejše žene
v črne šale luščijo limski fižol.
Portillo praska svoje ime
na zidove, tenke linije
urina, otroci teptajo blato.
Če gremo naprej, utegnemo po ulici
dospeti prav na tisto mesto,
kjer je nekdo izginil,
in slišati besede *Pridi z nami!*
Če bi se to zgodilo, bi
živeli svoja življenja z zvezanimi
rokami. Zato se nam zdi
dovolj, da prisluhnemo
vetru, ki premetava limone,
tiktakanju psov po terasah,
vedoč, četudi se ptice in toplo vreme
za vselej selijo na sever,
da bodo klici tistih, ki so izginili,
prispeli sem šele čez leta.

1977

The Memory of Elena

We spend our morning
in the flower stalls counting
the dark tongues of bells
that hang from ropes waiting
for the silence of an hour.
We find a table, ask for *paella*,
cold soup and wine, where a calm
light trembles years behind us.

In Buenos Aires only three
years ago, it was the last time his hand
slipped into her dress, with pearls
cooling her throat and bells like
these, chipping at the night—

As she talks, the hollow
clipping of a horse, the sound
of bones touched together.
The *paella* comes, a bed of rice
and *camarones*, fingers and shells,
the lips of those whose lips
have been removed, mussels
the soft blue of a leg socket.

Elena se spominja

Dopoldan preživimo
na tržnici s cvetjem, štejemo
temne jezike zvonov,
ki visijo na vrveh in čakajo
na tisto tišino ure.

Najdemo mizo, naročimo *paeljo*,
hladno juho in vino, kjer mirna
luč migota leta za nami.

V Buenos Airesu je še pred tremi
leti njegova roka zadnjič
zdrsnila pod njeno obleko, biseri
so ji hladili vrat, zvonovi kot
tile pa so se krušili v noč –

Ko spregovori, se votlo
kopitanje konja zlije
z rožljanjem kosti.
Paelja prispe, posteljica riža
in rakci, prsti in lupine,
ustnice tistih, ki so jim ustnice
odstranili, školjke,
mehke ovojnice sklepov.

This is not *paella*, this is what
has become of those who remained
in Buenos Aires. This is the ring
of a rifle report on the stones,
her hand over her mouth,
her husband falling against her.

These are the flowers we bought
this morning, the dahlias tossed
on his grave and bells
waiting with their tongues cut out
for this particular silence.

1977

To ni *paelja*, to je, kar se je
zgodilo s tistimi, ki so ostali
v Buenos Airesu. To je obroč
poka puške na kamnih,
njena dlan na ustih,
njen mož, ki se zgrudi pred njo.

To je cvetje, ki smo ga kupili
dopoldne, dalije vržene
na njegov grob in zvonovi,
ki z izrezanimi jeziki čakajo
na točno to tišino.

1977

The Visitor

In Spanish he whispers there is no time left.
It is the sound of scythes arcing in wheat,
the ache of some field song in Salvador.
The wind along the prison, cautious
as Francisco's hands on the inside, touching
the walls as he walks, it is his wife's breath
slipping into his cell each night while he
imagines his hand to be hers. It is a small country.

There is nothing one man will not do to another.

1979

Obiskovalec

Po špansko zašepče, da ni več časa.
To je zvok kos, ki se sločijo v žitu,
bolečina pesmi na poljih Salvadorja.
Veter zaveje ob zaporih, oprezno
kot notri Franciscove roke, ki se med hojo
dotikajo zidov, to je dih njegove žene,
ki se vsako noč splazi v njegovo celico, in si on
zamišlja, da je njegova dlan njena. To je majhna dežela.

Ničesar ni, česar človek ne bi storil drugemu.

1979

The Colonel

What you have heard is true. I was in his house. His wife carried a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over the house. On the television was a cop show. It was in English. Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.

May 1978

Polkovnik

Kar ste slišali, je res. Bila sem v njegovi hiši. Žena je prinesla pladenj s kavo in sladkorjem. Hči si je urejala nohte, sin je odšel tisto noč ven. Tam je bilo dnevno časopisje, kužki, pištola na blazini za njim. Luna se je gola zibala na svoji črni vrvi nad hišo. Na televiziji je bila policijska serija. Bila je v angleščini. Po vsej hiši so bile v zidovih razbite steklenice, s katerimi so lahko zajeli pogačici iz nog moškega ali mu prekrojili roko v čipko. Na oknih so bile rešetke kot v trgovinah z alkoholom. Za večerjo smo imeli jagnječja rebra, odlično vino, na mizi je bil zlat zvonček, da so poklicali služkinjo. Služkinja je prinesla zelene mange, sol, nekakšen kruh. Vprašali so me, ali mi je njihova dežela všeč. Zavrtela se je kratka reklama v španščini. Njegova žena je vse odnesla z mize. Potem se je nekaj časa govorilo, kako zahtevno je postalo vladanje. Papagaj na terasi je rekel živijo. Polkovnik mu je ukazal, naj utihne, in se odrinil od mize. Moj prijatelj mi je s pogledom zabičal: ne reci ničesar. Polkovnik se je vrnil z vrečo, v kakršnih prinašajo domov špecerijo. Na mizo je stresel človeške uhlje. Videti so bili kot kake polovičke suhih marelic. Tega ni možno povedati drugače. Enega je prijel v roke, z njim pomahal pred najinima obrazoma in ga spustil v kozarec z vodo. Tja je prišel živ. Sit sem te zajebancije, je rekel. Kar pa zadeva pravice kogarkoli že, povejta vajinim ljudem, da naj odjebejo. Z roko je pometel uhlje na tla, nato kozarec s preostankom vina dvignil v zrak. Nekaj za tvoje pesmi, ne? je rekel. Nekaj ušes na tleh je ujelo ta drobec v njegovem glasu. Nekaj drugih ušes na tleh je bilo stisnjenih ob pod.

maj 1978

Because One is Always Forgotten

IN MEMORIAM, JOSÉ RUDOLFO VIERA
1939–1981: EL SALVADOR

When Viera was buried we knew it had come to an end,
his coffin rocking into the ground like a boat or a cradle.

I could take my heart, he said, and give it to a *campesino*
and he would cut it up and give it back:

you can't eat heart in those four dark
chambers where a man can be kept years.

A boy soldier in the bone-hot sun works his knife
to peel the face from a dead man

and hang it from the branch of a tree
flowering with such faces.

The heart is the toughest part of the body.
Tenderness is in the hands.

Ker je nekdo vedno pozabljen

V SPOMIN JOSÉJU RUDOLFU VIERI
1939-1981, EL SALVADOR

Ko so pokopali Viero, smo vedeli, da gre h koncu,
njegova krsta se je zamajala v zemljo kakor čoln ali zibel.

Lahko bi vzel svoje srce, je rekel, in ga dal *campesinu*,
razrezal bi ga in mi ga vrnil:

srca se ne jé v tistih štirih temnih
prekatih, kamor je lahko nekdo pahnjen za leta.

Na razbeljenem soncu se deček vojak igra z nožem,
da bi olupil obraz mrtvega možkega

in ga obesil na vejo drevesa,
na katerem že cveti veliko takih obrazov.

Srce je najbolj trpežen organ v telesu.
Nežnost je v rokah.

Endurance

In Belgrade, the windows of the tourist hotel opened over seven storeys of lilacs, rain clearing sidewalk tables of linens and liquor, the silk flags of the non-aligned nations like colorful underthings pinned to the wind. Tito was living. I bought English, was mistaken for Czech, walked to the fountains, the market of garlic and tents, where I saw my dead Anna again and again, hard yellow beans in her lap, her babushka of white summer cotton, her eyes the hard pits of her past. She was gossiping among her friends, saying the rosary or trying to sell me something. Anna. Peeling her hands with a paring knife, saying *in your country you have nothing*. Each word was the husk of a vegetable tossed to the street or a mountain rounded by trains with cargoes of sheep-dung and grief. I searched in Belgrade for some holy face painted *without hands* as when an ikon painter goes to sleep and awakens

Prestajati

V Beogradu so se okna turističnega hotela odprla v sedmi etaži nad grmi majnic, dež je z mizic na pločniku pospravljajl prte in pijačo, svilene zastave ne-
uvrščenih držav kot pisano spodnje perilo, obešeno na vetru. Tito je živel.
Kupovala sem angleško, imeli so me za Čehinjo, obiskovala sem fontane, tržnice s česnom in šotore, kjer sem spet in spet videvala svojo mrtvo Anno s suhim rumenim fižolom na krilu, z ruto iz belega poletnega bombaža, z očmi kot temnimi jamicami njene preteklosti. Rada je obrekovala s prijateljicami, molila rožni venec ali mi skušala kaj prodati. Anna. Z nožičem je lupila svoje dlani in rekla *v tvoji deželi nimaš ničesar*. Vsaka beseda olupek zelenjave, vržen na cesto, ali gora, obkrožena s tovornimi vlaki ovčjega gnoja in žalosti. V Beogradu sem iskala neki sveti obraz, poslikan *brez rok*, kot kadar se ikonopisec odpravi spat in se zbudi

with an image come from the dead.
On each corner Anna dropped
her work in her lap and looked up.
I am a childless poet, I said.
I have not painted an egg, made prayers
or finished my Easter duty in years.
I left Belgrade for Frankfurt last
summer, Frankfurt for New York,
New York for the Roanoke valley
where mountains hold the breath
of the dead between them and lift
from each morning a fresh bandage of mist.
New York, Roanoke, the valley—
to this Cape where in the dunes
the wind takes a body of its own
and a fir tree comes to the window
at night, tapping on the glass like
a woman who has lived too much.
Piskata, hold your tongue, she says.
I am trying to tell you something.

s podobo, ki je vzniknila iz zasmrtja.
Na vsakem vogalu je Anna izpustila
svoje delo iz rok in pogledala gor.
Sem pesnica brez otrok, sem rekla.
Že leta nisem barvala jajc, molila
ali izpolnjevala velikonočnih dolžnosti.
Lansko poletje sem šla iz Beograda
v Frankfurt, iz Frankfurta v New York,
iz New Yorka v dolino Roanoke,
kjer gore med seboj zadržujejo dih
mrtvih in iz vsakega jutra dvigajo
svežo povezo iz meglice.
New York, Roanoke, dolina –
na Cape Cod, kjer v sipinah
veter prevzame svoje telo
in se ponoči oknu približa
jelka, potrkava po šipi kot
ženska, ki je preživela preveč.
Piskata, drži jezik za zobmi, pravi.
Nekaj bi ti rada povedala.

Expatriate

American life, you said, is not possible.
Winter in Syracuse, Trotsky pinned
to your kitchen wall, windows facing
a street, boxes of imported cigarettes.
The film *In the Realm of the Senses*,
and piles of shit burning and the risk
of having your throat slit. Twenty-year-old poet.
To be in love with some woman who cannot speak
English, to have her soften your back with oil
and beat on your mattress with grief and pleasure
as you take her from behind, moving beneath you
like the beginning of the world.
The black smell of death as blood and glass
is hosed from the street and the beggar holds
his diminishing hand to your face.
It would be good if you could wind up
in prison and so write your prison poems.
Good if you could marry the veiled face
and jewelled belly of a girl who could
cook Turkish meat, baste your body
with a wet and worshipful tongue.
Istanbul, you said, or *Serbia*, mauve
light and mystery and passing for other
than American, a *Kalashnikov* over

Izseljenec

Ameriško življenje, si rekel, ni možno.

Zima v Syracusu, slika Trockega
na kuhinjski steni, okno, ki gleda
na cesto, škatle uvoženih cigaret.

Film *Cesarstvo čutil*

in zažiganje kupov gnoja in tveganje,
da ti prerežejo vrat. Dvajsetletni pesnik.
Zaljubljen v žensko, ki ne govori
angleško, ti mane hrbet z oljem
in se nabija ob vzmetnico z žalostjo in užitkom,
ko si jo jemlješ od zadaj, pod tabo se giblje
kot začetek sveta.

Črni smrad smrti, ko spirajo s ceste
kri in steklo in ti berač moli
svojo zgubančeno dlan v obraz.

Dobro bi bilo, če bi pristal
v zaporu in pisal zaporniško poezijo.
Dobro, če bi se lahko oženil z zakritim obrazom
in okrašenim trebuhom dekleta, ki bi znala
skuhati turško meso, natirati tvoje telo
z vlažnim in čaščečim jezikom.

Istanbul, si rekel, ali pa *Srbija*, škrlatna
svetloba in skrivnostnost in da si nekaj
drugega kot Američan, *kalašnikovka* na

your shoulder, spraying your politics
into the flesh of an enemy become real.
You have been in Turkey a year now.
What have you found? Your letters
describe the boring ritual of tea,
the pittance you are paid to teach
English, the bribery required for so much
as a postage stamp. Twenty-year-old poet,
Hikmet did not choose to be Hikmet.

tvoji rami, vcepljanje tvoje politike
v meso sovražnika postane resničnost.
Zdaj si že celo leto v Turčiji.
Kaj si odkril? Tvoja pisma
opisujejo dolgočasne obrede pitja čaja,
miloščino, ki jo prejemaš za učenje
angleščine, podkupnino, ki je potrebna
še za znamko. Dvajsetletni pesnik,
Hikmet si ni sam izbral, da bo Hikmet.

Reunion

*Just as he changes himself, in the end
eternity changes him.*

Mallarmé

On the phonograph, the voice
of a woman already dead for three
decades, singing of a man
who could make her do anything.
On the table, two fragile
glasses of black wine,
a bottle wrapped in its towel.
It is that room, the one
we took in every city, it is
as I remember: the bed, a block
of moonlight and pillows.
My fingernails, pecks of light
on your thighs.
The stink of the fire escape.
The wet butts of cigarettes
you crushed one after another.
How I watched the morning come
as you slept, more my son
than a man ten years older.
How my breasts feel, years
later, the tongues swishing

Ponovno srečanje

*Tako kot se spreminja sam, ga na koncu
spremeni večnost.*

Mallarmé

Na fonografu glas
ženske, mrtve že tri
desetletja, poje o moškem,
ki bi jo lahko pripravil do česarkoli.
Na mizi dva krhka
kozarca s črnim vinom,
steklenica zavita v krpo.
To je soba, ki sva
jo najela v vsakem mestu, taka,
kot se je spomnim: postelja, snop
mesečine in blazine.
Moji nohti, raze svetlobe
na tvojih stegnih.
Smrad s požarnih stopnic.
Vlažni ogorki cigaret,
ugašal si drugo za drugo.
Kako sem pričakovala jutro,
ko si spal, bolj moj sin
kot deset let starejši moški.
Kakšen je občutek na prsih, leta
kasneje, pod mojo obleko

in my dress, some yours, some
left by other men.

Since then, I have always
wakened first, I have learned
to leave a bed without being
seen and have stood
at the washbasins, wiping oil
and salt from my skin,
staring at the cupped water
in my two hands.

I have kept everything
you whispered to me then.
I can remember it now as I see you
again, how much tenderness we could
wedge between a stairwell
and a police lock, or as it was,
as it still is, in the voice
of a woman singing of a man
who could make her do anything.

šuštijo jeziki, tvoji, in tisti,
ki so jih pustili drugi moški.
Od takrat sem se vedno
prebujala prva, se naučila
zapustiti posteljo, ne da bi me
kdo videl, stala pri
umivalnikih, si s kože
brisala olje in sol,
in strmela v zajeto vodo
v svojih dveh rokah.
Obdržala sem vse,
kar si mi takrat zašepetal.
Zdaj ko te spet srečam, se spomnim
vsega, koliko nežnosti bi lahko
spravila med stopnišče
in zapah ali kot je bilo,
kot še vedno je, v glasu
ženske, ki poje o moškem,
ki bi jo lahko pripravil do česarkoli.