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Writing Sample

Matjaž Pikalo

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Matjaž PIKALO
POEMS

DO NOT ASK!

True, I earn my living in a strange
way, but do not ask me what is
I do. I have quarrelled with bread,
it was long ago. I was too scared.

The sun is pouring nicely, the track is
marked with rabbits, on a river two boats
chase the honour for their universities.
Paris gave me you and the streets through

which I wandered, sharpening my senses,
black woman. Children are playing war
and nothing beats the sight of cattle,

drinking. Hollowness fells an apple tree
above the wheat, a buzzard grabs a
dove. But do not ask me what it is I do.

RAIN DANCE

The job of a medicine man
is to dance for rain.
Angels and birds are silent
when it rains.
My head is the square
of a square.
When the drought is here
a farmer doesn't cheer.
A poet doesn't care.
For the monsoon and the drought,
the medicine man and the farmer.
His poem is a prayer
for both, for all.

Translated from the Slovenian by Špela Gruden

ANGEL IN THE GARDEN

A garden is an island's alter ego. A desert's alter ego is an oasis. An angel in the garden is washing the soil. Oil floats amidst the stones.

A fakir lies on nails, while a bear sleeps in a spider's web. The search for a place to sleep is the main task. If a boulder blows a fuse,

the axis of the had spins empty. A gash into the throat is allowed. The jug is broken, the summer ended tragically. The city which

appeared in my dreams, was dreary and empty. The bus ride reminded me of the woman with whom I played craps on Komiza. With her hands

she played a game of a devilish tail. On the reef there's a palisade for diving into the sea. A petrified bouquet is deathless, papers are

dead butterflies. A sponge drinks water, the bottom of a boat is bailed. A school of dolphins is a phantom in the air, painting on the cross is vulgar. Everything beautiful is filled with deathly fear.

THE CRUEL SEA

Oh nightmare maker, the sea of silence, one has through the day! The nights are damp, strewn with ivres, the dreary land is covered yellow thorns and golden fleece, which someone clipped from a flock of sheep.

Five days I've been here, left without luggage. Alone. I recall that Kalan and I were singing on a yawl. I feel the echo of a horrible explosion on Jupiter, like the one that created conditions for life on

our planet. What good is your light for? The soft water that laps you? My genitals are covered with clam prawns tenderly chew me till blood comes. Yesterday

my fire burnt out. I can't take it anymore and it's not I don't want to. I will write a note and put it in a bottle. And I'll throw it the bottle into the sea. Death is dumb.

INDIAN SUMMER

Dates open the door to the Orient, where does
the road of a scorpion lead to? There is a track
in the sand, covered with desert dust. The red

bear is getting ready for the winter, the surface
of the moccasin is white. His squaw is quietly
watching him, hidden behind the tent. The son

had a dream in which a spear had been thrust into
a bed. Into which bed? The bed in which his
father and mother lie. I've been rambling through

the streets for four years now. A dog rolls in the leaves.
The flight of a bee is zigzag. The frost killed all the flowers. The time
has arrived when I won't be able to sleep in the hay any longer.

LES BALLOONS

Everything
that has to be
is already written – balloons.
Maybe they are flying to Dan.
God,
who is watching us from above,
must be extremely tired,
it shows on his face.
The world
is full of children
playing hares and hounds.
The Moon
is entering the nucleus
of Earth's shadow,
starlings are moving into towns.
Everything is already there –
Ballons, God, Moon, Earth.
The wax of our meeting
is shaping our deathly strength.

THE BIRTH OF THE UNIVERSE

Galaxies gather into flocks, the Earth
is thirsty, it awaits the last days, the rain
which is coming. The universe is still
trembling and although billions of years
have passed since the big bang,
the pre-explosion of the space itself,
I hear the diminishing echo of creation.
I am a point, a waiter's apprentice, someone
has given me a name to play a joke on me.
Now I know the effect of gamma rays on the
growth of man-in-the-Moon marigolds. I don't
hate the world in which I reside although I
sometimes think that it deserves a punishment.
My curiosity equals precise observation of star
movements, which Yang Wei Te performed
in the office of Chinese imperial government. I am
the only witness to a tremendous new explosion
that has completely blown up a mighty star.

PROPHET

You will try to find your way in the image of the bread.
Sun will burn your eyes, so you will not see. You'll
push yourself, but there won't be any effect. You'll
pray to be heard, but you won't be. Don't expect

anything, not even a breeze. Nothing. Your hands
will be torn apart and your legs pierced. The very
thing you feared the most will happen. Horses will
drag you through the sand like a sack of meat. They'll take

your words, which you have been sowing around towns.
They'll take everything away from you, even your clown rank.
You won't be able to pick up your hat, the hat will pick you up. Someone

will push you down the Nile in a paper basket, so you wouldn't
be slaughtered by the night. You'll remember the image of bread,
your mother's mouth, "Nobody is a prophet in his country", it will whisper.

Translated from the Slovenian by Liza Debevec

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

Look,
the world is run
by merchants with black gold,
democracy in the hands of the people
is just an illusion!
They give it to us
as a tip!
Lizards are flying over
the path across the continent,
spiders are spinning their webs
way up high.
Their persistence is as astonishing
as that discovery
about the world and democracy.
It is perfectly clear:
merchants make money,
spiders spin heavens.

BIRDIES, BIRDIES ...

Hooray, back again is Saint Valentine's Day!
In my right testicle a buzz saw is itching.
Someone has drilled a hole through a wire,
now a stream runs through the institute.
The trees I recognize by the leaves,
you by the dots and hop, into a mosaic.
Dogs are breaking loose, the end is the end.
Coming, coming, coming is the spring.

In my right testicle a buzz saw is itching.

THE REEFS

Of the dust of sunbeams I am made, my
boy, twinkling. My wife walks around in
panties. Detonations of the soul are frequent
here, when I write, it is peaceful. So I live

on the island, on the reefs. I place my
feet gently on the rocks, careful not to
kill myself. I sing lullabies to my child, protect
the sheep from Polyphemus, who lives up

there in the cavern. There are bones in the cave, snakes on the stones. The fig-tree bears no fruit anymore, it barely supports itself. The

sea is endlessly wide, the Earth is blue.
Ants are eating me alive, I have wet dreams. The end is in you, my boy!

WHAT'S LARA GERSTEIN DOING?

Maybe she's skating in Central Park. "It's so easy to get lost in New York ..." I read it in her diary, when she wasn't at home. I believe she had been attacked in the subway. There were

Three of them. "Please no, please no ..." she was begging. One night, in Rue Mouffetard, I was dyeing her hair, theatre tickets lay on the table. She was telling me about her grandmother

who had still spoken Yiddish. Her father himself built her the studio equipment, and I made the picture, which I left there on the closet. When her

brother flew in from New York, she owed him ten dollars. It's a pity I wasn't more interested in that Japanese poet with glasses.

IN SILENCE YOU WILL BE TOLD

You sweep snow off the roofs.
In silence you cry:
"Catch me, catch me ..."
White road, white village.
In the woods, monkeys.
A spring of water.
God's grave.

The seed of a goat is black.
Not like mine:
bitter, bitter ...
I am wading deep.
The mountains cannot be reached.
The sun will set too soon.

Translated from the Slovenian by Špela Gruden