Flood at the International Writer's Workshop

Bogomil Gjuzel
A. G. Denegris

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His heart feels light.  
Life has fallen back,  
Slipping away like a deer.

So, I didn’t want  
To idealize him,  
To number him among  
The great outlaws,  
To give him a place in History.  
All I wanted was  
To enter his mind for a moment.

August, 1974

Translated by the author with Daniel Weissbort

BOGOMIL GJUZEL / YUGOSLAVIA

Flood at the International  
Writer’s Workshop

Since the sky started crying  
I haven’t been out-of-doors for thirty-one days:  
By now the earth must be a pair of pliers  
With tatters of human flesh stuck to its jaws.

I imagine myself on a see-saw, balanced so lightly  
That if even an atom fell on it (let alone a bomb)  
I would be hurled like a stone from a catapult  
Straight back into the trap of Macedonia.

My people, are we God’s voracious eye  
Suspended in the air like a traffic-light  
Which, as it blinks, directs the flow of nations?  
Right now I’m only that greedy eye of legend  
Which, on my side of the scale, outweighs the world.

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In the Ark, our elevators work erratically:
Every deck is bursting with trapped livestock!

On the first floor, insects have turned into neurons
Without any owners;
On the second, saurians form a mythic chain
To swallow each other so they will all disappear,
But too feeble to achieve total consummation;
On the third floor, the mad vegetarians
Roaring with hunger, lay waste the frigidaires;
On the fourth, the carnivorous flowers
Make plans to devour God;
On the fifth floor, this lone Macedonian
Mangles their languages, recreating Babel.

And every line that occurs to me sinks like a plummet
When it should splash about like a happy dog
And, like a dolphin, jump through its trainer's hoop.
But I'm dense when it comes to featherweight words!
The verb should be in a state of constant erection,
In equal readiness to strike, or stroke;
The adjective sticks to the noun like a lizard catching flies;
And the noun should swing both ways,
While the conjunctive is a universal pass-key.

So the sky sobs on, like an hysterical child,
Like the she-dragons of my legends.
The gutters gurgle, and gargle.
The drain-pipes are subterranean Mississippis.

The words refuse to swallow us any longer
Now we have set them to quarrelling among themselves:
Trying to strangle each other, they bite off their tongues.
They have burned to tell us everything they know,
But, being dumb now, drooling idiots,

Speechlessly, they copulate with rainbows.