

Annex 1 – English Versions
Literary Pieces for the Publication
Central European Literature in Thailand

Someone Worthy of Attention – by Dániel Levente Pál

He stepped off the tram, backtracked,
tailing her on Margit Bridge toward the Pest side,
at times passing her, then falling back,
deeply taken by the girl, by the way
she was walking like she knew exactly where
with a vacant picture frame in her hand.

He sat down on a bench and looked
into the sky swimming in blue-bright lights,
shut his eyes to fish for inspiration,
for signposts to its prompts.

It was an important poem he got started on;
sitting on that bench with eyes shut
he recalled the woman with
the empty picture frame in her hand
walking across the bridge toward
the possibility of an unframed painting

Tracks – by Dániel Levente Pál

I look around me, taking in the riverbank,
looking for tracks, animal tracks,
without undue haste.

The riverside is smooth, the sand of time drifting,
it might cross my mind, I have no thoughts.

I take a stroll, watching if
my tracks might withstand time.

They don't, I'm overcome by envy,
I power my steps with more weight;
I'd like to leave behind the kind of tracks
I had not seen by the river
in the past thirty years.

The kind of footprints that time cannot wash away,
nor can sand, water, time, sand, water,
men or women.

The red Sport Lada¹ of our dreams – by Dániel Levente Pál

The other day, I was walking home on Práter street with my girlfriend after the movies; we were holding hands eagerly inhaling the scents and the emotion-filled mist surrounding us. Just strolling and talking hardly saying a word, as if we could even finish each other's mental utterances. Then she noticed a Lada station wagon painted with flowers in a Woodstock-style. Judging from its flat tires, it looked as if it was destined to sit there till the end of time. The passenger side footwell was crammed with all sorts of garbage and trash bags, most likely from a long-abandoned relocation project. The age of flower power was over, Woodstock had been gone for a long time; all that was left was this gnarled memento.

We walked around it, admiring it and it made us think of our childhood, when we were children, and we used to have dreams. These dreams weren't like the ones we have now, not just any kind of dream; but real, magnificently grandiose Dreams with a capital D, all just waiting to come true. And when my girlfriend was little, her family had had a Lada, and now she remembered how she used to ride in it with her father and sometimes her mother—for some reason, never together—all surrounded by other Ladas, Skodas, Polskis and Zastavas on the road.

Then she recalled that she used to imagine in great detail that when she grew up, she would replace their cream-colored, rapidly-aging but otherwise invincible old family automobile with a real car; it wouldn't be anything like this philistine model, she would definitely get a super cool, red Sport Lada. It would be flame-red, looking like it was on fire as they tore along, just how it felt when the mechanic guy from next door let her ride with him. She remembered how they used to speed with all the windows down; she stuck her head out and let her hair fly while the whistling wind almost made her eyes water through the glasses, the radio was playing and she forgot about all the bad things awaiting her at home or in school. She planned all this and was determined to make it happen one day, but then, there was the regime change and new makes of car started appearing on the market, which meant more options but at the same time, it made the hopes and childish dreams more complicated and less relevant. Like her adolescent dream that when she grew up, she would fall in love, buy a flame-red Sport Lada together and speed along with the windows down. Then their hands would touch by the gearstick, the radio would be playing and they would feel nothing but pure bliss.

At the memory, tears came to her eyes, and she went on about the times when she couldn't sleep at night and covered her ears with a pillow because her mother and father were fighting, slamming doors and breaking anything and everything. Quietly stifling her tears, she imagined that it wouldn't be like this with her flame-red Sport Lada and her love; they would ride unchecked with the wind dancing past outside, past blurred houses, blurred trees and blurred people... They would be free and they would get as much gas as they could afford, as much as their freedom allowed them...

She said that she used to think that that was all they needed to feel alive, and if they felt alive and complete, they wouldn't have dreams anymore, and thus, they would experience complete happiness, since all they had ever dreamed of had come true. And it would be pure happiness itself to see her love clean the engine and wash the windshields on Sunday mornings while she would scrub the car carpet inside... She would hum tunes while he would play around with the soap suds, doodling musical notes on the windscreen.

We just stood there while the words kept pouring from her mouth, then, still sobbing, she rested her head on my shoulder. I caressed her hair and held her tight until she got her breath back. Then we continued our way down Práter street and after a little while, I took her hand, kissed her and whispered into her ears that although we didn't have and probably never would have a Lada, happiness was happiness, all the same.

¹ Lada – old, Soviet-style car, emblematic model of the past age of Socialism

Centaur – by Eva Luka

The centaur with his mysterious, wild body,
blackened by night music, with the look
of abandoned crows at the end of November, approaches
my house, in his mouth a silver
harmonica. He calls me out, the centaur does, dribbles
glittering spit, winds its threads round the corners
of my autumn dwelling, impatiently
tosses his head and pants behind the windows, a centaur
without time, without the will to wait,
without face.

So many times was I ready
to go out into the garden dusk,
to touch his chest, gaze at his dark profile;
so many times hidden in the heavy folds of the curtains,
did I watch him, how he shook his hips, how
his harmonica cast gleams of starlight
on his thick-haired sex.

Only at the moment I yield myself to the mercy of his arms, am I covered
by shadows of the strange vaults that accompany him.

After his kiss I feel in my mouth
the taste of ginger and a dreadful forest; from my palm he carefully
bites out a pearl.

I return disordered, without the will
to wait, without time. Like an eternal spider,
I begin from within to spin around my house

with dark saliva.

You Sleep – by Ján Buzássy

You're dreaming:
You're dancing in front of a station,
You rise, intoxicated,
embracing a tipsy woman,
music plays.

She is the last woman,
she dissolves in your embrace,
she falls apart like a bouquet of flowers
and a tepid rapture washes you.

It was never like this before.
You don't feel your heavy soldier's coat,
the duffle-bag on your back,
she's the last woman.

The transport is ready to depart.

Moonmaiden – by Uršula Kovalyk

Midnight. The round moon shines through the half-closed Venetian blinds, cautiously lighting up the room, so as not to wake anyone. It turns the dust on the old furniture into golden sand. Marta is not asleep. She has been waiting a long time for the house to fall quiet, to die down, for the last sound to fade into the regular breathing of her husband and children. Only the creaking of the parquet floor, the faint cracking of the cupboards and the ticking of the clock disturb the realm of sleep from time to time. All is quiet. There are not even sounds from the street, just the clicking of the hands on the broken clock marking off the time in the square. For a while, Marta lies in bed, silently watching the strip of moonlight. Then she gets out of bed and quietly slips into the next room. She sits down in an armchair, pressing her knees to her chin. She hugs her bare heels. Silence and darkness. Marta loves silence. After whole days thinking, rushing about, doing chores, listening and talking, she can at last ponder all the trivialities of the world. The trivialities of her world. She cannot always manage this, sometimes dropping off from exhaustion before her body even touches the bed. But today she has succeeded. She is alone at last. All by herself. Her eyes run over the furniture, the ornaments, cupboards and carpets. The room is different in the night. The night has its own magic. It smoothes sharp edges, turns coarse materials to velvet. Even the huge piano, which Marta hates so much, which gets in the way and always has to be polished, has turned into the black wing of a rook. Marta likes rooks. They remind her of the night. They remind her of silence. The moon moves, rolling on to another part of the sky. A sharp strip of light cuts through the room. "Like scissors," she thinks. She holds out her hand. In its light, it becomes translucent, smooth, moon-like. The cracked skin disappears. "It is a beautiful hand," thinks Marta and holds out the other. For a moment she turns it over, watching the beads of sweat, now the colour of silver. Marta sits in the armchair. It is dark. Everyone is asleep, the room is dumb. She sits in the armchair and the strip of moonlight caresses her hands. She likes that. She begins to move them, as if washing them. Then she immerses her toes in the light, her knees and breasts. Her elbows, tummy and shoulders. She bathes her whole body in the white light of the moon.

Marta gets up and quietly tiptoes across the room to get the mirror. She picks it up and immerses her face in the light. It is yellowish-white, with a touch of silver. Her wrinkles are gone, her moles and spots, too. Her face is smooth and translucent. Perfect. Like the skull of a skeleton. She bares her teeth and wags her tongue. "Moonmaiden," says Marta. The woman in the mirror says so too.

The moon takes another leap, rolls over and along like an orange ball on the black carpet. The light falls on the wall and licks the picture. An old picture. Marta had forgotten all about it. She hasn't looked at the pictures on the walls for a long time. It is a photograph really, of a little boy with a fish on his head. He's standing on the seashore. The sea is grey. She cut it out when she was still a young girl, from some magazine, she can't remember which. She's forgotten. But now the moon is lighting up the boy, the enormous fish glistening on his head. Marta looks into the boy's eyes. How can he carry such a big fish? All these years. On his head. She gazes at his emaciated body, torn clothes and bare feet sinking in the sand. His lips parched from the sun. The fish's eye staring dully up at the sky. Suddenly, the boy moves. He slowly turns his head, scratches his knee and puts the fish down on the ground. "Marta," he says, "my fish is hungry." Marta starts, opening her mouth in surprise. For a moment, she can't believe it. It's only a picture, she tells herself, but she moves closer to get a better view of the fish.

It's true, the fish is emaciated and its ribs are protruding from its skin. Its huge, yawning jaws dumbly gulping air. "I'd forgotten," says Marta. "I forgot long ago." The boy rolls the fish over from side to side, the sand sticking to its thin body. The fish slowly moves its eye to look at Marta. "Your fish really is hungry," she says and takes it in her arms. It is light, like a roll of paper. Like a dry leaf from a tree.

Somewhere in her little finger, she can feel the weak beating of its cold, fish's heart. She strokes it with her hands, bathes it in the narrow strip of light and kisses it. She holds it to her face. She rocks it and fondles it, pats it and sings to it. The fish grows larger. Its body fills out, its skin softens, its ribs disappear and its eyes take on the sheen of a fish. Very soon, the fish is quivering in the moonlight. "Moonmaiden," says the boy. All is quiet.

Everyone is asleep. The moonmaiden stands in the middle of the room, holding the quivering fish in her arms. She hands it back to the boy in the picture. He smiles. He smiles and throws the fish back into the sea. He stands alone and his feet sink into the grey sand. Somewhere in the distance can be heard the murmur of waves. The moon rolls along to the other end of the sky. Suddenly it is dark. The strip of light disappears, and the rook's wing becomes a black hole. Marta remains standing for a long time in the darkness scrutinising the picture. The boy says nothing. His large eyes just gaze pensively into the darkness. She feels a sense of relief. She goes to lie down and sleep.

The morning is different. The mornings are always different; full of agitation, laughter and shouting. The children make chaos in the house. They get dressed, shout and fight. They slam doors. Marta gets the breakfast, putting hot toast on a plate. Steam rises from the teapot. Butter melts and they all sit around the table. Her husband munches his toast, crumbs falling from his mouth. The children squabble. Their hands leave greasy prints all over the table. They poke each other, ask questions. Endlessly It makes her feel giddy and her hands shake. She isn't even hungry She goes into the living room to prepare a shirt for her husband. The room is different in the morning. The rook's wing is gone, the furniture is covered with ordinary dust. The chairs have sharp edges. Marta looks at the picture. The little boy is standing in the sand on the seashore. She opens the cupboard. The smell of clean linen soothes her nose. "Marta," says her husband, "it's time to go." He points at his watch. She hands him his shirt. "Have you noticed?" she asks. Her husband is putting on his shirt and the pleasant smell clings to his body "What?" he says, doing up his buttons with fingers as thin as the legs of a spider. That boy in the picture hasn't got a fish on his head anymore. His gaze wanders to the picture. "He never did have a fish on his head, Marta," her husband replies. Marta feels puzzled. For a moment she hesitates. Then she remembers the mirror, and the moonmaiden. The narrow strip of light. "He did last night," she says. Her voice sounds confident. "On his head," she says to her husband, looking him straight in the eye and holding his chin in her hand. "And that fish was hungry; I fed it and then he threw it back into the sea. That's why he hasn't got it now." Marta is still looking into his eyes. Her husband stops doing up his buttons. Clearly disbelieving, he goes over to the picture. "You must have been dreaming," he says and wipes the dust off the frame. "I felt its ribs in my hands and the faint beating of its heart," she added, not giving in. He sighs. Marta sighs, too.

"I must be going, it's time," says her husband and quickly knots his tie. He puts on his coat. Picks up his keys. The children run out to the car. Marta watches them from the window as they squabble about who is going to sit where. They pull each other's hats off and kick each other. Her husband shouts at them. They fall silent. The car blinks its rear lights. To say goodbye.

For a while, she walks around the house, the rooms now seeming unfamiliar to her. She notices the mess lying around. Heaps of dirty clothes scattered everywhere. Scraps of paper. Chewing gum stuck to the furniture. Hidden yelling. Piles of questions and future replies. Before she gets down to work, she'll make herself a cup of coffee. She sits down in the armchair, in front of the picture. She puts her feet up on the table. The boy in the picture says nothing. Marta sips her coffee. All is quiet. The boy in the picture stands and says nothing, she sips her coffee and somewhere in the depths of the sea a shiny fish swims.

Walking Around an Island – by Milan Děžinský

* * *

Before you go deaf, you're blind.
You talk to the creator
only to find out he's just a go-between.
Why couldn't it be the rain, or a turtledove
on a wet bough or someone with a knife.
Or someone with a knife?

From a car passing by
the hand gestures: We'll eat your heart.

That's just the spirit wandering and searching for what to leech its imprint onto.

Song overheard in a bar

Kiss me as if I were a girl.
I just want you to know I've got red dress and the moon,
pumps on high-heels and I'm alive.

Wires crackling like traps, honey, I'm on fire.
Here in my body is an unborn child.
I know when evening comes I'll die happy.

* * *

Still during hotel breakfast
during coffee drinking
the scintillation of your hairs,
before we got surrounded by riders on ponies,
crooked Chinese teeth, thick glasses and short legs.
We'll never know
what your youth makes of it,
what happens inside a travel bag, zipped-up tight,
with a brush and a comb in embrace,
before we die for one another, each in a different distance
underneath a snow crust,
what about the toes in Cossack boots under the table,
their every single motion
running through the dream like dog sleigh.

A Kiss

From the platform a woman sends her word like a kiss,
A word I cannot decipher:
Before it can sail to me, it gets hit by a punto,
transporting a wardrobe so large
it seems someone has a car hidden in a wardrobe.

The automobile is perhaps off to the sea in Karlín and Libeň,

or to the borders of south mountains, along whose slopes
you'd make it to a tarn
in which the fish, when they collide,
ring like bells.

I Would Like to Come into a Merry House today,

so that my wife smiles at me as on our wedding day,
so that no-one's standing at the door,
so that nothing's peering in through the windows,
so that the wind whispers in the eaves.
The spirit bloweth where it listeth.
Look at your wife, she's smiling already,
her tongue is flat decorations,
colour differences,
a combination of sweaters.
Even the most beautiful poem says what I've long known.
Poem is not life.
It's okay for it to end by breathing in.

Song from a Jukebox

I liked your voice so much,
but kept watching your hands,
the slender fingers, constables.

Why did you come to me at night?
You've come from the desert,
finding a boat made of one trunk.

A long pirogue.

Why did you come to me at night?
Why did you come to me at night?

Bow and Arrow – by Marek Sindelka

"Is there anything you want to say about it?" Petr breaks the ice. His sentence fogs the windshield a little. But has no other effect. The patch of condensation quickly shrinks until it's gone. Gone, along with the meaning and purpose of his words. Silence. The soft, constant, sound of the engine, the hollow movement of the gears, the sigh of a passing car. Next to him, in his peripheral vision, his son. Leaning against the window, head flung back, twisted; lips pale, shut tight; unreachable, distant. Petr returns his eyes to the road. They're driving through the woods. It's raining. The wipers move at regular intervals, sweeping back and forth in a hypnotic arc. The blades squeak, the clear surface of the windshield is suddenly covered by rain.

"Well, it's obvious they're going to kick you out of school," Petr says, pointlessly now. A frost wafts from the seat next to him. The blades squeak, the windshield ahead starts to fill with rain. A chill runs down Petr's back. He downshifts with a fierceness that surprises him. Like he was dislocating a limb, breaking a living thing. He turns onto a forest road. Stones rattle against the chassis. He glances at the boy, who sits motionless, unchanging, pale, distant. What could he be thinking? He's looking up, into the treetops. Rushing by overhead.

The branches like giant nerves. Everything sliding past, slipping away. A little dizziness. And the water on the window. Drop weighing down into drop, pause, slide, leaving behind a wet trail that instantly breaks up again into individual drops. If only he knew where to start, how to approach it. Just say something, Jakub! Stop hiding from me! But Jakub is silent, the road rising ahead, the rain beating against the window. Above all, neurosis. Arc, squeak of wiper blades. A boy called Jakub. A son in his peripheral vision. Branches moving, trees moving. And, suddenly, above it all, an arc.

“Look, Kuba, a rainbow!” Petr says, pointing, but it’s useless, in vain.

“It’s not up to you anymore! Don’t you get it? It’s not up to you!” yells the petite, brittle woman. His ex-wife. Petr’s ex-wife. She’s hurling words at him, but all he says is, “Jana, please, I get it, you were right . . . We should’ve done something about it back then. But this . . . this isn’t right. You’re going to lose Jakub for good!”

But Jana insists:

“You have no right to de-cide-an-y-more!” the knife clicking against the cutting board in rhythm with her words, the onion falling apart, screeching from the next room. Jana’s other child. The one with her new husband. The new husband who stands leaning against the door. Listening. Silent. Staring into the pot, at the food.

“Jakub isn’t crazy,” Petr says shakily. “He isn’t a bully, or anything else. He’s a sensitive kid, fourteen, kids do stupid things at that age. Maybe . . . he fell in with some idiots, I don’t know . . .” He hears himself in a hiss of steam, in this kitchen that used to be his kitchen too. The fluorescent light over the counter with the small, greasy switch on the side, the cabinets with magnetic latches, the left rear burner on the stove that doesn’t work, the window that won’t close unless you force it down a bit. The wallpaper with the floral pattern they had a fight about. The stain on the wallpaper, just over the table, a chocolate fingerprint from three-year-old Jakub.

“They provoked him,” Petr says, finally, now sounding firm. “I’ll go talk to the principal, we can still sort it out . . .”

“How the hell are you going to do that?!” Jana gives him a cutting look as she slices the tops off the carrots. The blade gleams strangely with her nervous movements. “We should’ve sorted it out when he was nine . . . when he hung the neighbor’s cat . . .”

Petr thinks back to that afternoon. Summer, humid, gray skies, all of them numb from the heat, sweating. Petr, Jana, Kuba, and that battle-ax from the ground floor, Petr screaming at her for pulling Jakub home by the ear. All of them standing in front of her door, staring at the pink leaf of a tongue, the two bulging eyes, the shapeless lump that only an hour before had been called Mikeš hanging on the knocker.

“Jana, kids . . . sometimes . . . they do these things. They just . . . need to try stuff out . . .”

Jana snorts. “Are you out of your mind? So I guess he was just trying stuff out with that boy, too, huh?”

“For Christ’s sake, those’re two completely different things! That was a fight, an accident.”

“No, that was no accident. The boy has a broken jaw.”

“He was provoked.”

“That’s not true,” Jana says. Petr drums his fingers on the table and shakes his head.

“You’re going to believe those snots that say Jakub started it?”

The sound of the peeler stops. "It was in a classroom full of kids and . . . Jakub admitted it."

"Bullshit," Petr explodes. "That's total crap! I don't know why he said it, but it isn't true. He's doing it on purpose, I don't know why, to get back at you and me . . ."

Jana sneers, curls her lip. She goes on slicing carrots, says nothing. Her new husband stands, staring into the pot. Petr would keep going, but there's nowhere to go. He takes a breath, realizes something, grasps something inside of himself, then tosses it aside.

"All right then," he says gently, "what if I take Kuba for a while, try to . . ."

Silence.

"So now all of a sudden you care?!" Jana starts screaming. "Where were you when we needed you? You left us, don't you remember? You! You left us for that bitch! How was I supposed to cope on my own? You ruined everything! You know how much Jakub loved you. How much he missed you . . . You're such a bastard! They should never have let you see him again!"

"Jana, I . . ."

"Get out," Jana says softly, coldly.

Petr looks at Jana. The new husband keeps his eyes on the pots. Gentle bubbling and hissing steam. Pointless.

"I told you, get out. Go away! You hear me?"

"Jana, look, I'm not here because of you, I'm here for Kuba. Please calm down. We can't go on like this. What do you think . . ."

"Get out of here," Jana yells, cutting her finger. A drop of blood falls, soaking into the white of the chopped celery. "Go away!" Tears, jacket, shoes, door. It's cool in the corridor, a damp basement smell.

They drive out of the forest. Wide pastures spread out to either side. Open country. Just a meadow with a stand of trees here and there.

Petr brakes, turns the key, the noise stops. Jakub doesn't move. They sit a moment in silence, staring at the windshield. Both of them feel, somewhere in their spines, in their bones, the tingling of the engine. Calm. Quiet. Pastures.

"Let's go," Petr breaks the silence.

They go.

Sounds. The two clicks of the doors. The squeak of shoes in wet grass. Kuba sneezes. Petr opens the trunk. "Can you give me some help?" They take out a square. A target. A wooden frame with strips of carpeting, felt, glass wool. The surface hard and solid to the touch, but an arrow easily slides in and can easily be removed. They walk through the meadow, carrying it. About sixty meters from the car they stop, unfold the wooden legs, and stand the target on the ground. They cover it with a new target face. Petr glances around. It's perfectly flat in every direction. The evening sun shines over the treeline. They can see a piece of the rainbow again. There is a smell of drenched meadow grass.

"So, have you been practicing?" Petr asks.

Jakub shakes his head. He stands over a large open black laminate case. Inside it is a bow. Two plastic limbs that look like skis screwed into a handle of solid beech wood. He hooks the lower limb behind his left calf, bracing the body of the bow against his other leg, so it crosses his thigh diagonally with its back to his right arm. He cocks his arm, twists his torso, flexes the body of the bow, and draws the bowstring. All of sudden he's holding a weapon. He tests the tension of the bow, stretching the string to his face, pauses a moment, takes aim, slowly releases the string. He's gotten strong. He's grown into a man, Petr thinks. A year ago, Petr still had to brace the bow for him. Now he can handle it easily. He's been using an adult weapon for some time now. A heavy one, like Petr's, accurate at a distance of eighty meters, a bow of the most difficult category that can be tightened for more power, without pulleys.

It only takes Petr a moment to ready his weapon. Then the two of them sling on their quivers, attach guards to their left forearms, and slip on leather finger tabs to protect their right index and middle fingers, which draw the string to fire. They screw metal sights onto the handles of their bows. Nock the first aluminum arrow. Adopt a sideways stance, spreading their legs. Petr draws back the string, takes aim, shoots. Jakub shoots. They take turns. Silence, taking aim, squinting. Peace and quiet. Only the hollow pluck of the string. The hiss of the arrow in flight and then, almost immediately, the muffled thud in the target. Speed. The fresh, raw air; the cold, weak sun; shreds of clouds; a bird in the forest. It calls out; silence; you hear nothing more.

They each take ten shots. Walk to the target. Count as they pull out the cold metal arrows. Petr points to something, gesturing, explaining. Jakub nods. Perhaps even says something, too. They walk back to the car. And do it all over again.

After a few rounds, Petr glances over the pasture, Jakub braces the arrow, ready to draw back the string, when Petr puts his hand lightly on Jakub's shoulder, stops him, nods his head: "Look," he whispers, trying not to startle or alarm him. Jakub turns his head, not understanding, then suddenly sees. By the woods, to the left of them, a large herd of deer, maybe twenty altogether.

Neither of them says a word as they watch. The deer graze calmly, far away, two hundred fifty, three hundred meters. It seems they haven't noticed Petr and Jakub; the breeze is blowing toward them, carrying their scent away from the animals. Suddenly Kuba whispers, "Let's shoot one of them." Petr is rattled. Maybe too rattled. Kuba notices and . . . smiles! Slightly, but still. Petr stands in shock.

"C'mon!" Jakub needles.

Petr glances at Jakub uncertainly, then finally, hesitating, says, "We can't do that, Kuba . . ."

"Why not?"

"They're too far away . . . and . . . you might not kill it. If you shoot one and it runs away, we'd have to go look for it in the woods . . . finish it off . . ."

"So we'll look for it."

Petr bites his lower lip. Peels a thin hair off its cracked skin. Spits.

"Would you know how to do that . . . kill it?" he asks Jakub.

"I don't know." Kuba shrugs. "Maybe. We do have a knife."

Petr nods. Yes. They have a knife. Petr has a switchblade in his car.

"It's not that easy . . . and besides, they're too far off. You wouldn't be able to hit them from here . . ."

Jakub fires a shot. Everything stops. The meadow, the forest, the eyes of the deer, Petr's heart. Jakub stands watching the arrow's arc. It's a smart shot, angled upward correctly. The arrow arcs, climbs to the highest point, and starts to fall, starts to gain a terrible, monstrous speed, starts to find its target.

It strikes the ground maybe fifty meters from the herd. The deer take a hop or two to the side. Petr lets out a breath.

Jakub lowers his bow.

"You see, they're too far," Petr says.

They stand watching the herd. The deer return to grazing calmly. Now and then, one of them lifts its head and sniffs. Pointlessly. The wind is blowing in the wrong direction.

"Now you try, Dad," Jakub whispers. He gives a little smile again. Petr suddenly feels him close, right up on him. They stand together. You try, Dad. A wind blows through the meadow; it delicately combs through the grass. It brings with it the smell of something resinous, moist, sickly. Acrid. A gamey smell. Some dung, some tree bark. The wind dies down. The smell disappears.

Petr shoots. The arrow lands some thirty meters from the nearest deer. The herd jumps, trots, stops. The animals turn their heads in confusion, sniffing, then drop their heads to graze again.

"They don't know what's happening!" Jakub whispers with excitement.

"We need to get closer," Petr says. He goes back to the car, takes the knife from the glovebox. Pushes the switch and the blade snaps up with a click. Fifteen centimeters of metal. How tough are deer tendons? Where do you cut? Across the neck? Through the spine? All right, Jakub. Count me in. I'll do this with you. Let's go for it. But only if you're sure you know what you're getting into. Only if you're ready. Can you imagine it? Petr tries to imagine it. A shot on target. Chaos in the body of a small animal in a meadow. Hooves pounding. Nailed to the ground by an arrow—from a closer distance, you could even take down a cow . . . and a deer is small, fragile as a whippet. Petr sees it. Sees the horror in the deep dark beads of its eyes. Petr and Jakub come running as the animal lifts itself from the ground, tries to wrench itself free (better to expect the worst), flees, limping, falling, picks itself back up again, spread-eagled and stumbling like a newborn foal. It escapes. Disappears into the woods. The flash of an aluminum arrow between the trees. It's gone. Petr drops his bow and runs with all his strength, runs as hard as he can. Through dead brambles. Stumbling over roots and mossy boulders. But the animal is gone. Lost deep in the forest, alone with its injuries. How long can it survive? Its muzzle reaching for a foreign thing stuck in its body. Turning in circles. Like a dog chasing its tail . . . I'll do it, Jakub. What do I care about some deer? What do I care about anything? I'll do it, because maybe that's the way . . . The way for us to find each other.

He closes the knife, puts it in his pocket.

They're on the move.

Arrows notched. Muffled breath and footsteps. Crouching, they creep through the grass. The grass is wet, it doesn't whisper. All of the animals freeze when any of them senses something. They stop. Wait. Go back to what they were doing. Jakub is on edge. Petr can see it. And he can see it in himself. The excitement, the thrill. There's something atavistic, ancient in it. An ancient formula. Archetype. Father, son, the hunt. The kill. Petr can feel his pulse. In his wrist, throat, temples, on the left side of his chest. Licks his lips. Another few steps. He measures, weighs, executes each movement. The closer the herd, the cleaner and emptier he feels. Clearing everything superfluous out. Stripping himself of reason, gathering his thoughts from the dregs. He feels lightheaded. His tendons, nerves, bones are thinking for him now. He halts Jakub with a wave. They've covered

a good fifty meters. Jakub throws him a questioning glance. Petr nods. They shoot. Both at once. Jakub immediately loads another arrow and shoots again. Petr shoots one more too.

The arrows land.

A ripple of fright moves through the herd, they dash frantically for the forest. Hovering over the meadow's surface, flowing. They seep through, in between the trees. Hoofbeats thud like hailstones. Slowly fade. Disappear.

Again quiet.

They didn't get even one. Their arrows landed right in the middle of the herd, but didn't hit a single deer. They can clearly see the white feathers of the four arrows jutting up from the meadow. They didn't hit even one. Something heavy and black from the empty pasture starts to leak into Petr's crystal-clear thoughts. As if they had missed much more than that. Something more elemental. It was in range. In reach. They had grasped at it, even held it in the palm of their hands, but it had slipped their fingers. Jakub glances at the four spent, deaf, impotent arrows buried in the meadow. And the moment turns bitter. Curdles. Petr says something, he isn't sure what. He should be slowly walking. They need to gather the arrows, it's getting dark, they should be leaving now. They should go, but they don't, they just stand and wait.

Jakub raises the bow, bends it back with all his strength, and shoots straight up in the air. Directly over their heads. It goes black before Petr's eyes. What the hell are you doing, Jakub?

The arrow sinks into the dirt about four meters to the left of Jakub.

The two of them stand there. Breathing. Petr's heart is beating so hard he feels his body sway. His heart muscle balances in the middle of the meadow. Jakub just stands there, terrified too. He looks drunk. Looks at Petr through empty eyes. Looks through him. Now what? Fever. Black spots. Swarming. It's like something comes rolling over them. Sliding and dipping. The black trees at the edge of the meadow are moving. The wind. Sweeps across, disappears. Bare treetops, sprawling like nerves. It slips, taking on weight, gathering speed and direction. Petr's head is spinning. He is standing in the middle of a continent. On the top of a tectonic plate. Jakub waits. Terrified, drunk with horror and god knows what. And Petr has to. He has to, because maybe this is the thing . . .

He draws the string and releases it. It whirs, hisses. The arrow goes straight up. Petr closes his eyes, firmly pressing down his lids. So tightly it hurts, setting off a humming in his head. The whole world is ending, forever losing its shape, its meaning.

Petr stands still.

And waits.

The Envoy of Mr. Cogito – by Zbigniew Herbert

Go where those others went to the dark boundary
for the golden fleece of nothingness your last prize

go upright among those who are on their knees
among those with their backs turned and those toppled in the dust

you were saved not in order to live
you have little time you must give testimony

be courageous when the mind deceives you be courageous
in the final account only this is important

and let your helpless Anger be like the sea
whenever you hear the voice of the insulted and beaten

let your sister Scorn not leave you
for the informers executioners cowards – they will win
they will go to your funeral and with relief will throw a lump of earth
the woodborer will write your smoothed-over biography

and do not forgive truly it is not in your power
to forgive in the name of those betrayed at dawn

beware however of unnecessary pride
keep looking at your clown's face in the mirror
repeat: I was called-weren't there better ones than I

beware of dryness of heart love the morning spring
the bird with an unknown name the winter oak

light on a wall the splendor of the sky
they don't need your warm breath
they are there to say: no one will console you

be vigilant – when the light on the mountains gives the sign – arise and go

as long as blood turns in the breast your dark star

repeat old incantations of humanity fables and legends
because this is how you will attain the good you will not attain
repeat great words repeat them stubbornly
like those crossing the desert who perished in the sand

and they will reward you with what they have at hand
with the whip of laughter with murder on a garbage heap

go because only this way will you be admitted to the company of cold skulls

to the company of your ancestors: Gilgamesh Hector Roland
the defenders of the kingdom without limit and the city of ashes

Be faithful Go

Why the Classics – by Zbigniew Herbert

1

in the fourth book of the Peloponnesian War
Thucydides tells among other things
the story of his unsuccessful expedition

among long speeches of chiefs
battles sieges plague
dense net of intrigues of diplomatic endeavors
the episode is like a pin
in a forest

the Greek colony Amphipolis
fell into the hands of Brasidos
because Thucydides was late with relief

for this he paid his native city
with lifelong exile

exiles of all times
know what price that is

2

generals of the most recent wars
if a similar affair happens to them
whine on their knees before posterity
praise their heroism and innocence

they accuse their subordinates
envious colleagues
unfavorable winds

Thucydides says only
that he had seven ships
it was winner
and he sailed quickly

3

if art for its subject
will have a broken jar
a small broken soul
with a great self-pity

what will remain after us
will be like lovers' weeping
in a small dirty hotel
when wall-paper dawns

Orvieto's Duomo – by Zbigniew Herbert

A POET-FRIEND says: 'If you're going to Italy, don't forget to stop at Orvieto.' I check my guide book. Only two stars. 'What's there?' 'A huge square with grass and a cathedral. Inside, The Last Judgement.'

Stepping from the train, you cannot see the town from the small station situated between Rome and Florence. The town rests far above, hidden by vertical, volcanic cliff like an unfinished sculpture covered by rough canvas. The *funicolare* deposits its passengers near Porta Rocca. There is still a kilometre's walk to the cathedral, for the town's essence lies deep within its centre waiting to be revealed.

The cathedral stands (if this static verb defines that which splits space and makes your head dizzy) in a wide square while the surrounding houses fade without further notice. The first impression is no different from the last, the dominant sensation being the impossibility of approaching this architecture.

Robbe-Grillet, the master of inventories, would certainly write: 'He stood in front of a cathedral. It was 100 meters long and 40 meters wide; the height of the façade along the middle axis was 55 meters.' Though such description is void of vision, the proportions assures us that we are in Italy, where the soaring Gothic of the Ile-de-France was translated into very specific style, going under the common name (since the zeal for chronology means that everything occurring at the same time must be given the same label).

In the cathedral's museum, two pieces of parchment (yellowed and damaged, as though slowly consumed by fire) fascinate art historians studying the *Fasadenproblem*. Both drawings portray the same façade of Orvieto Cathedral and constitute a remarkable example of the evolution of tastes. The earlier one bearing the inscription '*manu magistri Laurenti*' ('the hand of master Laurence', i.e. Maitani – though there remains some doubt about this) still follows the northern style. The stress is placed upon the central section of the elevation above the main portal; vertical lines and sharp-angled triangles prevail. The second drawing introduces a substantial change. Both side elements of the attic are raised, horizontal lines appear, and the composition loses its slenderness while sprawling firmly on the ground. Most importantly, the façade's surface is enlarged to let the colour and ornament, in all its pride and splendor, render the architecture utterly unreal.

Fourteenth-century Italians must have seen the French cathedrals as magnificent but alien works. The severe solids, the upward strain of vertical lines, the ostentatious, uncovered skeletons and the austere ecstasy of stone surely offended the Latin inclination towards the circle, square, and right-angle triangle – that is towards a sensual, weighted equilibrium. Perhaps it was a matter of skill as well as taste. The more chauvinist French art historians view Italian Gothic as a failed offspring. Louis Reau cites Milan Cathedral, a work of many centuries and artists, as the most accurate expression of Italian architectural impotence.

For the Italians, the Gothic structures of the north were creations of a different spirit – to be viewed with a shade of terror like termitaries. The Italian façade was a colourful procession slightly overdone like an opera of sculpted choruses, mosaics, pilasters and pinnacles. Orvieto is one of the most striking models of this pictorial architecture: an ambiguous mixture of enchantment, confusion and sense of total immersion in a forest of colourful stones, weaving planes of brown, gold and blue.

The façade's oldest section has four sequences of bas-reliefs by artists mainly from Pisa and Siena: four great pages occupying one hundred and twenty square metres which are read from left to right and tell the story of the Creation, the genealogy of David, the lives of the Prophets, Christ and the Last Judgement.

The story is both dignified and simple. One discovers that it is possible to render in stone the creation of light (the pointing finger of the Maker, the radiating lines, the upturned heads of the angels). The most beautiful scene is the birth of Eve. A rather portly Father takes a rib from Adam's slumbering body. In the next scene we see Eve, her head inclined, full of purity and sweetness. Further on, the Prophets unwind their scrolls, demons drag trains of doomed, and the grinding of teeth mixes with the songs of the angels who are perched on the branches of genealogical trees.

A huge, delicate rosette embroidered in marble seems more like an ivory trinket than a piece of monumental architecture. The façade's planes are fragmented by both colour and the precision of detail worthy of a master of miniatures, if Orvieto Cathedral allows comparison, it is to the first letter of an illuminated manuscript or to the high, intoxicating A.

The disgusting habit of closing the churches at noon wastes precious hours in a carefully planned schedule. One is left with the options of a nap in the shade, a pasta debauchery or a stroll. I choose a stroll.

The streets resemble mountain streams. Their current is swift opening on to unexpected perspectives. One floats from the square of the Duomo down a sharp bend to the Quartiere Vecchio. The terrifying stillness of high noon. The shades are drawn; the town is asleep. The slow breathing of stones rises and sinks under the plaster. Two black chairs at the gate echo the coffins leaning against the wall of the carpenter's shop. The streets are deserted. Cats sleep on low walls. When touched, they open their eyes, their narrow pupils marking the tranquil noon like the hands of a stopped watch.

The remains of city walls between Porta Maggiore and Porta Romana. A bird's-eye view of Umbria: Paglia's radiant sands, a blue hill across the river gently rising towards the sky at the edge of the blurred horizon.

Each Italian town has its colour. Assisi is pink (if this banal word can summon the shade of slightly reddish sandstone). Rome is terracotta on green. Orvieto – golden brown. One realized this when standing in front of the Romanesque-Gothic Palazzo del Popolo, a giant cube with a balcony on each floor, whose flat roof bristles with merlons and beautiful windows surrounded by columns and scrolls. The palace has a copper colour but without sheen. The fire is inside – the memory of lava.

No matter how far one strays, one can never lose the feeling that the cathedral is just behind. Its omnipresence ousts all other sensations. It is hard to imagine Orvieto (now an appendix to the cathedral) before the autumn of 1290, when Pope Nicolas IV attended by four cardinals and numerous prelates, '*posuit primum lapidem*' ('laid the first stone'), as the document states, and '*incepta sunt fundamenta sacrae Mariae Novae de Urbeveteri, quae fuerunt profunda terribiliter*' ('the foundations were started for the sacred church of the new Mary, which were terribly deep').

Twenty years after the initial construction, Lorenzo Maitani, a prominent sculptor and architect, was summoned from Siena. He corrected the construction errors, strengthened the walls and greatly influenced the shape and colour of the façade. The great builder remained in Orvieto until his death (though he occasionally travelled to Siena or Perugia to repair the aqueducts).

The question of Duomo's authorship is as pointless as the question who designs a town (a town, not a factory settlement) which has grown throughout the ages. After the mythical hands of Fra Bevignate and Lorenzo Maitani, the great names of Andrea Pisano, Orcagna, Sanmicheli follow as golden nuggets in the sand. Over the centuries the cathedral was tended by more than thirty architects, one hundred and fifty sculptors, seventy painters and almost one hundred mosaic specialists.

The muses were not silent though the times were by no means peaceful. The town was a hotbed of heresy; and through historical irony and thanks to thick walls, the frequent refuge of popes. The Guelph clan of the Monaldeschi fought against its Ghibelline faction, who were expelled from the town while the sculptors were illustrating genesis. According to the reliable witness, the author of *The Divine Comedy*, both families suffer in purgatory along with the kin of Romeo and Juliet. They were prolonged contests for power within the town. Orvieto was also besieged by the Viscontis. In a word, it shared the fate of other Italian towns – in Dante's words the fate of *dolore ostello*, 'the inn of suffering'.

The only restaurant with a view of the cathedral is as expensive as the surrounding souvenirs, since the shadow of a masterpiece on your spaghetti doubles the price. The proprietor is thin talkative with a long, turkey-like neck.

He: *Piace a lei?* (pointing towards the cathedral)

I: *Molto.*

He: (con fuoco) *La facciata questa filia del cielo che della terra.*

I: *Sì.*

He: *Qual miracolo do concenzione...qual magistro d'arte!*

I: *Ecco!*

Thus we talked about art.

On the menu I find a wine named after the town. The *padrone* praises it more loudly than the cathedral. Drinking 'Orvieto' may be treated as a cognitive act. It comes in a small fiasco with a cold haze, brought by a young girl with an Etruscan smile – a smile that resides in the eyes and the corner of the mouth, bypassing the rest of the face.

It is more difficult to describe the wine than the cathedral. It is the colour of straw and has a strong, elusive aroma. The first sip is rather unimpressive. The effect starts after a moment. The well-like chill flows down, freezing the intestines and heart while the head begins to blaze – contrary to the warning of a certain classicist. The sensation is enchanting; and one understands why Lorenzo Maitani stayed in Orvieto, was naturalized and even agreed to race with a lance over the wooded Umbrian hills in defence of his chosen land.