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Antilyrik & Other Poems

Vítězslav Nezval

Translated by Jerome Rothenberg & Miloš Šovák

The Lesser Rose Garden

[Prologue]

The sun reflected in the colored splashes of
the paper lanterns in the lesser rose garden.

The Bowman lurking back of the ecliptic with
[imaginary arrows pierced the apricots.

He drove a needle thru her hat that lady sleeping
on her swing the lilies of the valley underneath her
[slowly burning out.

The dandelions' breath.

A mussel opened up toward sunset
in the sand drifts saga's dream.

& a stork drifts on a boat in mid-stream: this
Italian poet from the days of Petrarch.

Here on dusty roads enclosed by ivy I can feel the
sun's vibrations fill me & remembrance of lost love
is like the lesser rose garden & the time spent in
the arbor where we read romantic verses of eternity;
& mystery.

& it's like a memory of bygone Sundays from your
childhood & your eyes fixed sharply on the
highway crossing opened wide like flowers in
September those blue moon like blossoms which
will stay with me till death reminding me of
sunsets of my home of sagas where I know nothing
but the name.

Premier Plan

[Stage Front]

This night was ablaze like a necklace.

Above the green Bohemian lakes, the calls of frogs in

[chorus,

a bell was sounding an alarm.

Like the meridian a rubber ring of sound expanded
over the rotting woods, over the loony idyll of the
goblins those who chased

[each other

thru the stacks of wheat,

over the searchlights from the cities

beams inscribing pithy poems onto the clouds.

The rings that were projected there,

the foaming champagne bottles,

a roulette wheel like Saturn circled Monte Carlo,

while Versailles spouted golden fountains

& the Hotel Ritz in clouds broadcast a final tango

to which corsairs on Corsica would dance in time for the new vintage.

Vesuvius smoldering over Italy which rested on its laurels

& in Leningrad the streets were empty opening like canals into the world beyond.

Under the deepest basements land mines crisscrossed like white-hot cigars

lighting up caves & tunnels

in which gangsters crouched with guns & flashlights.

Asia steeped in perfumes waggled like a yellow flag

embossed with fancy baubles lotus gardens

cities that shed light like gold-rimmed china tea sets.

Tokyo convulsing in the air was like a neon sign

set up by fakirs sleeping at the base of giant Hindustani mountain ranges.

Antarctic ice was like the ruins of a marble kingdom

polar bears would dart across & snow-white fishes

[without blood

would swim there.

Africa, black paradise with palm trees,

on whose tents the gold-washed earrings of its negresses were hanging I

from which parrots swung nightwatch of the Sahara.

Australia sleeping in the trees was an electrified

[menagerie

inside a luna park
 & here Niagara Falls by moonlight
 hummed with organ-sounds above the Indian burial
 [grounds
 & further on above America where they were taking
 [leave
 like two ships of a single caliph
 filled with slaves & cargo, just about to sail.
 The Bohemian lakes gone green with choruses of frogs
 remnants smoldering after the storm has passed
 with the earth flooded out its primitive glory gone
 [under its
 oceans unending
 lighthouses loom like crazed fisherman's wives
 [singing songs
 that await an old sailor's return who is not coming back
 This night was ablaze like a necklace.
 Above the closed windows the earth moved on air like
 [a crown
 & the sleepers like sleepwalkers opened the windows
 A bell rang an alarm.
 Take over the world! Join the vanguard!
 & quickly an airplane took off in the night
 to plant a flag on the battlements high on the crown
 & behind it flew thousands of airplanes
 some like spent rockets burning
 augmenting the legions of stars
 still others returning like the work-weary builders of
 [Babylon
 while those who kept up the struggle formed letters & words in the stars:
 Take over the world!
 Take over the world! Join the vanguard!
 Swell the numbers of white-hot cigars in the basements
 make the cities you throw in the air fly like acrobats
 set up fireworks deep in volcanoes in time for the vintage.
 Inscribe poems onto clouds more fierce than the gold
 [of Versailles
 & let the fire of heaven be joined to the fire of earth.
 Wrapped in rubberized fireproof bags
 & careening like balls on the flery beams
 make the palm trees hide
 seeds huge as ostrich eggs under their ashes

give earth back its harvests
 let it sprout like a sweet-tasting jungle
 for the few who endure.
 & take over the world!
 Renew Tyrtus's rock
 because it doesn't make sense, no not for the sake of
 [the suicide's
 gurgle, the tired man's gasp
 that the godhead of healthy humanity perishes
 because it doesn't make sense for the mad pilots'
 [miracles
 not to have happened
 who wake up this night from their sleepwalker's sleep
 flying landing on battlements of the night's diamond
 [crown
 like carrier pigeons with a telegram driving us blind:
 Take over the world!
 & the flowers' blood spatters the coffeehouse
 [terraces
 & children are born despite the world's prisons
 & on earth no gold is lost
 & no platinum's lost
 & no fire.
 To defenestrate sleepwalking men who are blind
 who saw this night ablaze like a necklace
 its hieroglyphs still undeciphered
 & who in the sound of the bell heard their death
 [knells.
 Take over the world!
 & then walk like nomads
 away from the ponderous lakes of Bohemia
 where night's as green as a chorus of frogs
 & hear an orchestra of cries & lights
 & in the rhythms of its drums that clatter
 like buds of black & white light
 see the stage front of earth as a mirror
 laid bare by their searchlights
 who knew of the need for a miracle
 to live eternity in one generation
 & to not lose a moment
 those whose sleep like their death was lit by clairvoyance
 as night's sleep was lit

who joined eternity's fire with the fire of a moment.
This night was ablaze like a necklace.
& just then an airplane took off on patrol
with a pilot who looked like an airman from 1914
whose shadow fell on the gates of the town
 with signed proclamations of war
& covered the sun until darkness was everywhere.
We all watched thru smoke-colored glasses
& the old women saw the sign first divined by the
 [Sibyl:
Bohemian nights turning green with frogs in a chorus.
But the pilot today was still more appalling
a sower who scoops up stars in his lap
& casts them like so many seeds on the earth
to keep off the fire lying in wait for us
when the planet like Joan of Arc twists on the pyre
& recants not one word of all that was spoken.

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