

# 5

## 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 wagged 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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