

Sitok Srengenge

OSMOSIS OF ORIGIN

I ask the wind,
whence does reverie come,
the wind shakes the tips of leaves
and I see the trees paint the cycle of years

I ask the tree,
whence does time begin,
the tree opens its flower petals
and I see a bee alight down sucking honey

I ask the bee,
whence does the cell that begets my body originate,
the bee hums flying into a cave
and I see a bat shut its ears upon a stonewall

I ask the bat,
whence does sound emerge,
the bat flaps its wings up to the night sky
and I see dew glide down like a river

I ask the river,
whence does the source of milk flow,
the river shows off the mountain
and I see a valley shrouded in mist

I ask the valley,
whence does taboo,
the valley raises its shroud
and I see the naked earth swing in elegance

I ask the earth,
who does give birth to Mother,
the earth blushes, but I hear the sea answer,
"She witnesses upon fact, yet is incapable of utterance!"

I ask the sea,
who does contain her,
the sea roars, yet is drained
before fully breathing the Name

1995

(Translated by HasifAmini)

ZEEDIJK

A kind of warning: a hand squeezing a breast
 perhaps that of sinners, dumped. outside a church
 In Zeedijk, a dam against the sea,
 all that is beautiful seems hooked to death

A pretty city,
 a sly hooker,
 opening herself but shutting her heart
 In her heart a frozen lake,
 in its trough I want to reach you, a magic spell from the past

I summon you with love poems,
 but the snow won't let them turn to echoes

The weather whizzing around with a myriad of bayonets
 and the wind moving stealthily between the poplar trunks
 Watching over jobless immigrants
 and lunging at them with stabs of hunger

People in a parade, welcoming Santa Claus,
 the name and symbol of love, gifts with crimson ribbons
 But on the riverbank, where borderlines are fixed to the ground,
 an Afro woman collects breadcrumbs

I greet you with poems of sorrow,
 but my words clot in air

1996

(Translated by HasifAmini)

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FRANKRIJK

Like a bat
 the nocturnal wanderer that you know from pictures,
 or the ghostly prince from the dark chamber of Nosferatu's palace
 who abducts virgins
 into the fog and the howl of invisible dogs
 I find peat marshes
 in your piercing solitude
 I see the desire lurking in the veins of your neck
 like the fruit from the tree that has grown before the beginning of time
 So bury all intention
 to toy with eternity,
 soon the bell will toll
 from the peak of Anne Frank's tower,
 siren's wails slashing the night:
 somebody has just committed suicide

Dogs copulate with the cold,
 you and I dissolve each other's soul into desire
 Until someone with long hair,
 who once called upon your dream,
 opens the window
 The fire in the furnace is out, charcoals crushed
 into powder,
 you and I
 turn into ash

Driven by the winter wind I am cast into the ocean
 becoming islands of the equator
 you are left in your place, covered with snow
 lumped into the past

Someday when the snow melts and the wind stirs the windmills,
 you will be carried away by the water,
 and at a certain point
 will arrive at my side
 Maybe embracing each other, then letting go of each other
^{et} heaven knows when

Maybe like a dream
 Like a dream

1996

(Translated by Hasif Amini)

AHRWEILER

Before breath becomes fog
 and fog
 becomes snow
 and on the willow twigs the snow
 becomes tears, the fox lying on the bush path
 no longer is the silent possession of the oak forest

In the valley of the River Ahr a thought becomes a stone
 and the stone
 becomes an old coat for the city that hides a wound
 and the wound
 becomes open fields,
 where the veins are shattered
 arisen as grape shoots,
 children worm over, moaning with trembling lips,
 "So cold out here. Open the door, please
 don't let us die a frozen death."

Birds with wings of light kindle the stars in the sky
 and their twinkling echoes a spectral sound:
 Kling! Klingelingeling Like a groan from time immemorial,
 yet not touching the ears
 of the people
 crouching with arms folded by the fireside

The wind turbines of winter quiver
 driven into the altar
 and children lump together like tropical islands
 but no longer those of the mother who made the ocean with tears

Like an unexpected dream that makes one falter
 during silent nights,
 I come from an archipelago
 But not one of yours!

1996

(Translated by Hasif Amini)

BY THE BANK OF THE RIVER AMSTEL

By the bank of the River Amstel, in a cafe,
 you shake death off the coat, at dusk
 The years gilding the longing,
 your hair whitening
 The current keeps crushing between the swans
 and lines of light
 Seventeen teals crowding in the passageway of a cheesecake shop,
 seven glasses of alcohol spinning the coarse flannel of drizzle

Then you pry out that bit of exile: a flock of Peking ducks
 driven to an alien land south of Nanking
 where the sentries' whips
 are ready to strip reason, to lash death
 Between a tray of cannar meat slices and a pot of green tea
 you snort out once more with hate the sacred words of Mao

And as wild as a stray seagull,
 you arrange the memories, you follow the dreams, in confusion
 to the heights of a whip-driven climb
 up the parched cliffs of Manchuria

But at that dusk, Wispi, on the bank of the River Amstel
 you shake death, once again, off the coat
 For in your shrinking body
 there are pulses of the sea soothing bitterness:
 ideology, dreams of revolution
 -the precarious faith that builds prisons

The dangling red shawl on your neck, Wispi,
 is like a desire that never sees the light of day
 Perhaps, I can't be sure,
 you mention God with a sigh of a vein,
 beneath the scattering powder of snow
 through trees that withhold silence,
 you row your weathering age to heaven-knows
 where a crane stands dazed on the roof ridge, waiting for crumbs

Perhaps death has once called on Daltonstraat, one night
 whiffing over the memories that you've recorded, blurry books,
 traces of nicotine on the pipe, the echoing coughs on coffee grounds,
 when you go on vacation to a country of illusions

1996

(Translated by Hasif Amini)

GENESIS

The snake man squats under the *bungur* tree
 gathering a hurricane of dead leaves,
 the snake woman bathes mesmerized
 by the shadow of paradise at the bottom of the lake
 The man closes his eyes to dream of a thousand rapids,
 as the woman stays awake for the next moon to come

The roar of rapids breaks the silence of the stone,
 as the lake sends out the river to split the ravine,
 and the round moon guides the snake in its wanderings

The stones are set into the shape of a mountain, the man climbs
 The moons flock together to reach a year, the woman flies
 To tear at the mountain for many years, the snake coils

The man ends with rapids starts with stones,
 the woman ends with the lake starts with the moon,
 the snake man-woman start and end with heads with forked tongues

The man aims a stone at the snake's head,
 the snake's tongue calls to the lake
 The rowing with the moon runs ashore on the mountain with its rapids,
 the anchor is cast into the ravine
 where bananas and citronella grass grow

The snake-like instinct emerges at the hips and the woman writhes,
 the man's fingers grip the mountain
 The snake's glands creep onto the waist and the man tightens,
 the women's hands reach for the moon

The man of rapids splashes the bed of the woman lakes,
 the snake strikes the moon amidst the stones
 The dream of the sleeping Earth becomes you,
 when it awakes its consciousness turns into me

1995

(Translated by Margaret Agusta)

OBITUARY FOR THE MOON

My child sleeps figuring the moon
 and in class her eyes *still* keep the night
 when the teacher speaks of the sun
 My child draws a horizon, the ocean,
 a ship with no pilot,
 and the teacher's skirt is teased by the rising tide,
 the teacher is eaten by fish

In bed my child weeps
 the tears drop onto the notebook
 full of scribbles of red, orange, yellow,
 green, blue, indigo, purple
 My child says it is a pool!
 My child wishes to help the teacher,
 so my child draws a small boy fishing
 while looking at the moon above that pool
 And after that, the fish in the first verse
 becomes a snack for the teacher's dog

My child falls asleep again,
 figuring the moon
 in my child's eyes the night is held
 but the dog keeps howling for the fish
 My child quickly draws fish
 inside eyes which contain the sea
 but the fish whine for the teacher
 My child quickly draws the teacher
 in eyes that still contain the school
 but the teacher is again teaching about the sun
 My child repeats the drawing of the horizon, the ocean,
 the ship without a pilot...
 in my child's eyes the world is contained
 but the teacher does not like this
 and gives my child a score of five

In the following days,
 My child fears drawing anything again
 except for commemorating the small boy in the second verse
 who longs for the moon above the pool

1991

(Translated by Margaret Agusta)

YOU, THE WIND

At first I thought you were a wave,
but each time I dived in to swim
you would spin up like a wind storm
The sweat bursts and soul and body are restless
become a prayer of untouched Love
There, I find comfort in your breeze
once a while just before you blow away

I hunt the voice of the flute in the distance,
which I find are the rustling branches
I am dazed by the illusion of your moves,
as silent as the stone within my longing

Now I know there is no need to chase you
You live within and outside me
- there is no distance yet you are so far,
so close yet not touching

if it is true you are the wind
I will breathe you in as I wish
Deep within the heart that beats,
you are the new spirit of my life
Flows the blood, flows
within the vein of my Love
because of you, my Love

1991 (Translated by Margaret Augusta)

MEMENTO MORI

In your pale countenance
 I read a trace of hints:
 the whip of winter wind,
 rioters who return
 with remnants of the Stasi troops' rancor

The light is buried in the slumbering town,
 children and women from the East
 dream of a slice of bread and a gulp of wine

Surely, you served me
 that night:
 the burst of bones in the crematorium
 and the withered buds of wheat

And the rest, a veiled blanket,
 as soft and moist as mist
 shaken by the struggling thunder
 deep in the heart of the pine forest
 And so we lie down,
 and even our breath is choked
 The room becomes as silent as a crematorium chamber
 the dissolving moans scorched by the fire of desire

Behind your closed eyes,
 a woman is burning *Mein Kampf* secretly
 The mighty words of the Fuhrer shattered into husks,
 like the ember of your body which crackles and dies out
 History, crumbs, desire, shrink once more into the earth,
 where the first and last steps fuse in one spot

"Even you who walk with imagination
 soon will rest in an oriental region:
 a cozy soul
 in a span of Java.
 But my spirit will always wander
 looking for the promised land, somewhere."

As wide as you imagine, thousands of miles,
 spread between Euphrates and Nile
 But your people has been seizing,
 but your vow has been snatched

Birds
 pass through the dimness of the building's shadow,
 but you see yourself, perplexed in the darkness
 speaking in the language of the Southerner

The sky is like an invert of a winnowing tray
with the shivering of the Saturn's ray
"I want to return, Mother. Your child is still immature."

1997

(Translated by Daisy Ekowati)

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VIEW OF THE DUSK

So long
 the child is preparing paper and pen
 as if there is something to be written,
 maybe something secretly desired:
 a blister of lament, or of complaint,
 from someone who falls

So long watching the twilight
 perforating the sandalwood branches,
 as if he understands its meaning:
 in a moment the atmosphere will be gloomy,
 maybe also scary,
 because the night is never late
 to spread hatred
 Pillars of light faded
 as a shooting star, the idol whose legs are wide open all the time
 will be seized by shadows

Then he will find himself
 laying on his back in the grass field,
 looking up at the stars
 Then he will enter the dream world, which he created
 So long!

But he shivers there
 and doubts his unusual sight:
 a male cow is flying to the Southeast,
 falls deep into the belly of the limestone hill
 and the crows disperse
 towards the crack of the tomb's entrance
 For he knows there is no cow, there is no Southeast,
 and neither the crows
 Only the crushed hill,
 where a circus clown is building a sarcophagus

He feels his fingers trembling,
 between fear and fervor,
 paper and pen are in his hand without a scratch of line, not even a point
 Because he is stunned at the crimson sky:
 there is no clap of a heron's wing, only cotton lumps
 shaping a face:
 an executioner who breeds boots and rifles
 Instantly he spits snatched by dry wind
 thrown to the center of the lake,
 perforates into the plants
 becomes green, becomes yellow, becomes red, becomes black
 becomes restless, becomes risky, becomes curse, becomes vengeance

Then he hears someone cough loudly
overcoming the shriek of the Sphinx,
bursting siren, tear gas, bulldozer,
also rifle and panzer
The air is blackened by smoke,
the smell of burned flesh and goods
And as usual
someone is busy counting numbers, not lives,
because, he said, they are just villains
no more important than ruins

So long
that child is preparing paper and pen
as if there were something to be written,
maybe something secretly desired:
a gasp, or remorse,
from someone who falls

So long the paper and the pen are in his hand,
too full of scratches and crosses,
but he is powerless to write them
Not because of giving up, or fear,
he just feels, not hearing voices:
a scratch of scream, hurried steps,
or the sound of the soldiers' shoes
He doesn't see anything, except dusk and guns
So long!

1997

(Translated by Daisy Ekowdti)

Sitok Srengenge

YIN-YANG

When the bud of love breaks in the woman's heart
and the voice twists its bonds, becoming words
sliding towards the man,
the lake in her womb
overgrown with silent bamboo

When the words collide with the man's soul's cliff
and the echo thunders like a hurricane,
at that moment the bamboo's been bewitched
and the woman knows a life begins inside her

The woman walks around before sleeping
so dreams will guide her to the road's bend,
where she'll meet a man
and the light radiating from the East
There a mother prepares a place
for the new life beginning in the womb

In the woman's lake containing a rainbow
the man entwines himself
till all dismays perish
billows becoming fog,
his body redeems
becoming mirage
his awareness rising high
becoming the sun,
and the mind which always keeps the woman's face
spreads out becoming a sky of billowing clouds

And the woman walks around,
circling the lake of her own creation
She sees fog, sees the sun,
sees the sky of billowing clouds
She sees the mirage,
sees transience
Desire stands eternally with the man
becoming the rainbow's thickest colour

Through tears the man reaches the woman
and if the fog
wants to tug
the man sneezes
and a typhoon rises from the eyebrows' base
making the sun slip into the lake till it sinks
and his tears wink transforming stars

While taking a cat in her lap
the woman looks upwards into the clear night
and stars fall to the bottom of the silent lake
And the woman daydreams before sleeping
till the dream ends her wandering at the brink of waking,
then she watches the man's sweat dangling from the leaves
in the glare of light radiating from the East

1995-1999

MAASTRICHT

My eyelids are transforming a boat
grounded on your river's frozen surface
a heart etched
and the moon puffing behind an ice berg
together piling up mist
and the night melts
The border wind touches your lips
tulips' petals delay breath in the dust of snow
Three guys, noses pierced with gold rings
approach me asking for marijuana
"Because your hair's long and black and, well, you're brown!"
No. It's the instinct to exploit
a subordinated race

And I remember a waitress at a restaurant
overlooking a park,
where a flock of pigeons
fought over breadcrumbs,
allowing her breasts to spill from her sweater
as if ignoring winter
As she turned her cat eyes to me
half scolding half seducing
"Sorry, you can't smoke *kretek* in here. But, if you want,
we could do it together in my apartment."

And I drift off in a second floor room
an old red brick building
A wad of a sofa
facing a TV playing soft erotica,
Stella Artois from Belgium,
and a pair of goblets between them
You imagine Rome, I remember Yogya
who knows why
There's also Gauguin's blow
like the wind,
red and mustard-yellow embracing,
dark and reddish purple
Maybe desire trembles because of the mist
and the mountain night
You reveal a cover,
offer a heart beat
My thoughts return to a hungry morning,
the wing of a seagull among drizzles, the lake's edge
Handful of bread,
a nipple of raisins, melted butter
But still I hear, faintly, in the boulevard,
the season blowing and the last twig of linden leaf leaves
at the moment your nerves shake
between jittery movement and stammering voice

Then: silence!
But, there in a park

Venus and pines whisper,
for they're wet
soaked by
January rain

1996

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FATAMORGANISM

Fingers of a mischievous season
 Grab a small girl's hip,
 Trembling butterfly waiting for the wind to pass
 towards Buchenwald
 I hold back a whistling heart,
 behind the back of an beheaded statue,
 before a government building's ruin
 assaulted by the anger of the unemployed

Suddenly the city becomes a musty man
 with whiskers and a beard thick as bushes,
 tousled tangled
 and his sight as blurred as the dusk's sun

The wind comes rustling
 tousling his hair which full of grit
 repressing memory of vociferous drizzle
 dripping down far in the Simbirsk morning,
 sprouting a clump of black grass
 spreading wide as night
 Then he hears a melancholy clap from the east, swallows
 leaving behind a broken colour of twilight, a Soviet

"Fate is not as slippery as woven linen, Mr Lenin," the horizon's only empty
 there's no sunrays, when he muttered the soliloquy

" Do understand, if there's no mausoleum for Mussolini,
 after an ideology which took sides for common people
 hardens to become cruel as an axe,
 beheading the shoots of reason and instinct."

"And the workers, the workers, keep being hunted and killed
 by the growing capital."

Half ripe words without echo without magnet,
 but the sky screams its voice, creaks its beating
 The man's body disappears with the twilight
 falling apart as blurred as a fatamorgana,
 his head sprawled among scattered rocks
 and splinters of a pair of butterfly wings

Between the beheaded statue, a stonehead,
 a corpse of butterfly, I'm dazed
 watching hope's trot like a last train
 to a concentration camp

1997