

Dashnyam LUVSANDAMBA

Blue Evening in the Sozopol

Each time I hear the name of Sozopol, strange as that of a different star, my heart contracts, and my thoughts race across the boundless distance to float over the crests of lapping blue waves.

That day, the heat of the sun, the water of the inland sea aroused the highest joy in the midst of the sweet and merry air; as though fallen from the heavens, all at once a drunkard's voice cried, "I have not sorrowed for sorrow's sake, my friends, although destined only for sorrow, I have gone singing through the world!" He whimpered like an orphan camel, and seeing his tears fall, my heart felt empty--that poor man, chased away by the police and by so many authorities.

As I sat and stared at the gray seaside buildings that had long lost their color in the Sozopol sun and wind, they began to seem like old men and women. Perhaps their owners had looked for good fortune in the sea, and had left their grief by its shores, who knows. The houses of this antique land tell the story that whenever one comes in the world, another must leave. For whatever reason, grief pressed my heart, and I felt that I had no means of forgetting this pale blue evening in Sozopol.

Protected from seawater by stone foundations, propped up in the heat of the sun, on each of the hunchbacked wooden houses, the walls are marked with memorials of those who have died. Testimonies of the world's mortality, of the charity of their owners, in pure and faded paleur, they advertise words of blessing and human tradition to whomever might read them. Seen once, they are astonishing; remembered, they engulf you in the customs of the place, in the cries of those who missed each other, of relatives and intimate friends, in the power of innumerable signs.

It is impossible to pass through Sozopol's streets without remembering something. As I saw the white waves rise like spirits, I thought of Edgar Allen Poe's lovely poem, "And all day long/ Shines bright and strong, Astarté within the sky/ While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her matron eye/ While ever to her young Eulalie upturns her violet eye." I read it out loud and loudly. I wanted to laugh until my back arched and stretched.

Coolness drew from the sea. Sozopol's blue evening grew ragged underfoot. I turned my eyes to the water until my grief eased, as though from beyond the stone and wooden houses, a low, soft melody flowed.

Each time I hear the name of Sozopol, strange as that of a different star, I think that all people together have one life, and peace and reconciliation flow within me.

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Bifurcation

I am standing in front of a mirror
An enormous Bird-being
Gazes at me, with some reason
“Oh, Heaven’s high-ups
Sent me to hone
For this heroic Bird,” I thought

I am standing in front of a mirror
An enormous Scarecrow-ghost
Gazes at me pitifully
“Oh, King Yama of hell and death
Sent me to guard
For this thick flesh!” I thought.

(1996)

Translated by L. Dashnyam and Katherine Ives

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Grandmother in the City

City Grandmother lives on the fourth floor
A small room, not the size of a *ger*
Her youngest grandchild is afraid to go outside
A wooden board covers the window

When the traffic dies, the ground is trampled and torn
No money, they give up going to the countryside
She's the only kindergarten for her children's kids
The respected teacher of manic brats

From all sides she scolds them and cajoles
"Hooligans," pampered girls gather around her
She takes up her cane and fingers her prayer beads
"You too, will do this," is the loving lesson she teaches

When the spring birds sing, City Grandmother
Through the closed window hears their melody
Rarely, rarely, she sighs and moves her lips
As she sits, arranging her cups and spoons

When the autumn birds fly, gray mother
By the low bed, feels them go
Following their sun to the next land, poor things!...
Her eyes dampen and fill

City Grandmother lives on the fourth floor
A sad room, not the size of a *ger*
One after another her days unwind
Her dear heart hidden, she is going home

City Grandmother—far away, so far away Grandmother!

Translated from the Mongolian by Katherine Ives

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Every Morning I

Every new morning I
Become older and older
Intimate words, magic prayer
Fly out far away...farther...

An old fashioned brown box
Flaps like a little child
Memories, uncounterfeit,
Linger, joyful, beneath the page

Flowers that grow, the sun that rises
Since the beginning, now so old,
But still a thing to watch for, to see off everyday
With tenderness and ecstasy, still to wait

The cosmos wraps us
Our yesterday...and our future!...
Its meaning knits together
More like a patch, perhaps

Every morning I become farther
Older and older...farther...
Like a stone thrown upwards
That falls down again on my own head!...

Translated by L. Dashnyam and Katherine Ives

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Four Seasons and One Love

On the lake shore, a bird
Sings and weeps
Unconcealed, my soul grieves
I think of you

At the horizon, small clouds disturbed,
Shaman-like, call the spirits
Stray words perforate my heart
I think of you

Under the valley frost, a silver brook
Pales to white
Dreams entangle; time's tether loosens
I think of you

In the sky's vastness, a first crane
Declares thaw
Reminds me of our last meeting
I think of you

(1987)

Translated by L. Dashnyam and Katherine Ives

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Jinjimaa and Mukhlash

Jinjimaa has calf-black eyes
Voice like the ring of silver clappers
Gentle bearing as an autumn wood
Fair face absorbing the sun's warmth

Munkhlash likes a brown del
Dawdles with some few words
Gratified, how he saunters quite
 quietly by stone roads
As if he is searching for himself

“Look at those two!” shout proud children
“Here are a meritous people!” say old men

Jinjimaa and Munklash are two beautiful people
 --ordinary herders

(1987)

Translated by L. Dashnyam and Katherine Ives

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Happiness Hits

The universe is right that you are found
--sutra proverb

Chief Onhoon calls:

“You are appointed head of delegation
For the upcoming international forum
Let’s go order your flight
Inform them just now of your arrival!”

Another boss commands:

“Snow falls in the countryside
Without cease, conditions are extreme
You must go to the place of emergency
Swiftly, move the camp!”

Old Ochir invites:

“Many children I have begot
And today, I’m very happy, thanks to
Abundant alcohol, which I was finishing alone
Welcome, my dear, please do me the honors!”

Crone Ombo is selfish:

“Otgon’s new one became enflamed...
Our fate, unfortunately, was incomplete...
Come or go, the soul suffers, it’s no different
With whom to divide my regret, I have no mother...”

In the bosom of the universe as a drowsy star
Happiness, soon to hit, circles pianissimo

(1987)

Translated by L.Dashnyam and Katherine Ives

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The Steppe with Itself

I ride slowly, not to break up my thoughts
 For any moment
In my soul I carry
 My dead mother

At the edge of the steppe, a *ger* glimmers
A late-born herdsman, grieving, gallops
The wind blows augurous and gentle
Mirage or omen, unreadable distance

All has come loose, all ownerless—
 I think

The great steppe becomes unknown, abandons all
As if it reminisces with itself alone

(25-28.03.2003)

Translated by L.Dashnyam and Katherine Ives
