

**Gentian Çoçoli**  
**POEMS****In Memoriam: I. S. Ç**  
(1908 – 1991)

*“ he entered . . . then a light waved my mind”* Zef Serebbe

*i*

The will to turn back. Is that the vice of the dead?  
Here's what I think: he must have left where he was  
days ago now: but as he reached the attic room  
the fading light on the walls, the new climate of the house  
would have troubled and confused him.  
Now he can't remember anything at all,  
like our mulberry tree in winter  
with more branches than our house has windows;  
and it does no good, now, to have him back,  
to speak to him again, even if you could bring together  
all the angles of the house, the slopes of the cobblestones, the backs of my people.

*ii*

Your presence reaches the door of my sleep.  
A surge of feelings. The floor goes liquid,  
joints and knots of pinewood stretching and coiling  
like the ages of things lying near.

You pour the lamplight over my face  
as if all its deep machinery worked just for you,  
waiting for me to float up on the fins of fish  
who, still asleep, carry me to the surface.

My bed glides. The house listens to its foundations.  
Inside my sleep, his otherworldly steps  
echo through me as if on cobblestones.

Over the waters, the face appears.  
“Geni, are you sleeping?  
The hesitancy roars like a bay.

*iii*

He must have worn my blue sandals.  
The brand-new ones, still shiny like a young bird’s wings.  
With a cosmic vigor that he held in like breath  
he passed through the windows without scratching the glass,  
then froze: standing dazed by the crumbling walls of books,  
maybe he thought he heard grandma’s slippers on the rug,  
or perhaps the brazier full of cold ash seemed to him suddenly like an urn.  
Then he took a handful of ash, as much as a small bird  
and in an instant (the house’s time)  
blew it in a line through space, towards me.

*iv*

*(As if they were its own,  
the roof shook off its ashes over your shoulders.  
Like cigarette ash. The habit of Mandelstam.)*

*v*

The granules of stone on the walls  
Curve and glow dimly – magnetic fields  
where we are walking hand in hand; he bends down, gathering  
for the hundredth time, solstices from our lives  
and all the light buried in his ring slips from the engraved letters *I* and *Ç*  
then seals and rounds out our silent counting

*vi*

The house prepares itself for the new century.  
Out of his foundations. The axis, the roof-beams  
remember their source, "the house magic,"  
the chimney, still lean, I know, to our East.  
The wind turns. I am alone  
in my bed beating in the body of the house.  
He is flowing furiously. But to where? Sleep washes itself with sleep.

*vii*

And in the spirit of the darkness  
those massive, withered palms  
clasped and came together like a soldered latch  
in silence measuring my time, your time, ours.

*viii*

A sigh in black ink:

"Like Grandma used to say: 'I'll turn my heart into a butterfly'."

"I'll be there to embrace you before the South winds gets there."

*ix*

My face circled around you like a new moon.  
You hunted moons through my sleep,  
pushed my bed towards that bright field that for you was *the shore*.

The waters began to grow light. You turned your back to my bed  
slowly, so slowly, calmed, ebbing out.

*x*

Morning was splashing on the white walls.  
My mother, knitting needles working against each other,  
Knit into my shirt what disappeared with my sleep.

High above the garden  
a long hushed line of birds  
pleated in on itself like a celestial scissors.

It was the turning inside-out of our space.

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### The Skotini Cave

Excursion to the darkness. The oldest motherhood.  
We enter slowly the body of the cave –  
Heads pending backward as if resting on some big palms –

“Look! they’re just turning back, just turning back.”  
Stormy waters in foundations of the darkness,  
Gloomy winds blowing up our sinews.

We were there to foster wonders, foreheads fostered letters,  
The cave rent us our delicate bright gravities –  
An upside down crowd of bats flew to the furthest light.

“Years ago” teacher said, “three French speleologists poured  
into that deep hole a lot of gallons with contents,  
they appeared 33 miles away in the north-east of the valley

where Drino River and Kardhiqi River  
enter each other near the outfall of Palokastra . . . ”  
Being itself was relaxing and refreshing in that uttered fertile air,

Phyloresins crossing throughout the brain's hemispheres.  
Then it was an easy turn. The alcoves, or  
The meaning of the alcoves filled up

With all of us who even for a while find out ourselves as *language*.

*-translated from the Albanian by the author*

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