

Miloš Đurđević
Poems

Tutte le direzioni

You Who Entered

To write as a chisel writes on rock
so every phrase you write resounds forever:
Jamie McKendrick: *Ye Who Enter In*

The sun didn't come out, dimmed by the pillows of haze
Of breathless soil that's drying, rustling, scribbling in the dust
For weeks. It didn't wait for you. Satisfied with someone else's
Sullenness you approached the window and got blinded

By the linens, by the whiteness of the clouds on the ground, the last locks
Had already disappeared, you saw nothing. Now you walk from window
To window and count the strikes of the chisel, their echo vanishing behind
The eighth or the ninth hill. In the kitchen Francesco and

Giovanni are having their second cup of coffee. The first one is leaning
Above the closely shut book, its clamps are massive and as
Reliable as the main gate's hinges. The other is again scraping
The sketch from the wall, the left ear is bigger and lower, he's trying

To hear what happened down there. He's not pleased, but
We know he won't say anything. He lowers his head and taps
His fingers on the heavy covers a couple of times. Your coffee's getting cold,
Did you sleep well...

August

The landscape was always the best part.
Charles Wright

upon my arrival I climbed up
the wrong hill the same dusty
path depleted with deep
ruts on the middle gray
dust over the fields yellow slopes
black and green groves you should
go back down to the road see
up there the road escaped in sharp
curves dipped into the light under
a clear incline as thick as the door-knocker
of the south cascade in eight shades of
terracotta like eight vocals in the bark
that echoes from the nearby hill
eight times I circled Ravenna
Tutte le direzioni until I found
the south exit for the south
eight verticals along the old strada
through the Tuscan vocals with his back
turned mute San Pietro
mumbles under his breath while
away from the road he picks wild
chicory and wide scarola leaves
Divieto di caccia I slowed
down and eased up on the pedal
late afternoon I enter Umbria
god's hunting ground the gas gauge reads low
a single red dot on the empty tank
under eight dog legs without
hunter eight octaves scattered from
the beginning to the night's end for crickets
the persistent keepers of his valleys

E 45 Umbertite Exit

only on my second attempt
I manage to get off
the freeway false directions
for Rimini and then at Cesena
I finally dive headlong
into the south road the bandages of light
fall down to open the Tuscan
corridor for me here Tevere is one
moment a stream the next a thin scar
in the gray sun a concrete
fence separates the narrow lanes
and bends towards sunset
that has already escaped
far in front of you down
the gutter while blue cars surface
flow passing as if saying
dolce writing bella in the air

Dürer's Hare

for a start the fields on the gentle slope
under eastern windows are dark yellow
and gray like the leather on old driving
gloves shallow furrows on the open
palm that back at the beginning of summer
let go of the wheel for a moment and completely
forgot where it should have turned
just before sunrise the lavender bush and pomegranate
trees and olives with their knotty joints
raise themselves up just above the ground to show
you the shadow of a hare jumping over the tracks
Catarina Mantelatta left lodged on
the grass as she hurried down the path
always towards Siena the black edges of his
upright ears remain immobile
while on the other side of the hill
cracked shadows slowly appear
La Misericordia on the drought's board

* * *

under my window the crickets
start their engines all over again
and instantly put in the highest
gear they fly over the valley next to
which on the east and the west
new different valleys open
on their Vespas tirelessly
without rest chased by no one
chasing no one the self-proclaimed and
undisputed rulers of Umbrian
darkness climb up in large
groups toward the crossroad of
summer the whole night their
invisible traffic lights shiver
and blink a gigantic green light
hidden under the soft deep
palm that opens before every
morning and with its red
and yellow fingers lowers
the ramp for the day's passing

* * *

this can only be said
by gold the gold gets its tongue
it stutters under my windows
from the very sunrise on it lines
the fields in tiny silent
steps at first slowly
warily then in wider and wider
strokes it covers the valley
all the way to the rim and over
the days breathe golden dust
it drizzles through the air in immobile
vortices buzzes under my
roof until the evening that
is always late all over again
fastened by thick ropes
against the night's well in every
room seals of gold are pressed

Lower Section – Middle

After Piero

and what's with this accumulation of clouds
in the west how many ways through
the valley and up over the ridge
not there on that side that goes down
and on over the porous forest's edge
and shines at the foot of the limestone and pale
brick spectrum how many paths will the water
in gray streams wash away dripping
under La Verna but exactly these
remnants are as undesirable
as the red frame of a kite that's
at the same time here and any
second it'll disappear perhaps in this very night
the thin black string melted into
the background one moment dark the other glistening
you went down on your right knee
like when in the shallows you step on an urchin
the sulfur and the cover of grass and water
settle just like the wrong turn
one move and the morning scatters sputters
not at all loudly along the vertical of
light then shadows then shorter and
shorter paths that like lines
lead diagonally back from the first
one to the fifth the circle is just
an unneeded witness that cannot
satisfy the thirst as complete as
the drop of sun in the smear of the well

Sleepers

if you want to see it all it is here
filled to the very brim
nothing reflects nor
continues every thing
breaks in its membrane
porous are only the joints
windows glistening in
late afternoon sun
in the rhythm of that same hawk's
unhurried and uncatchable wings in the shades
of brown and ocher just like
the bricks on the porch a couple degrees
from the eaves slanted under the roof
to the left maybe to the right their
deep carved wrinkles
are someone's signature
that was later erased
dried up and illegible
like the triangle of the white
flag with two red
stripes the crossroad
above the left knee
who will wake me up
the land and its scenery
are the same and unvoiced
take a look around yourself
their breathing is deep even-paced
like white and dark trees
that's the sky snapping its fingers
rustling and shaking the bush following
the creases later on always
on the white fabric the body is
the steam of someone's breath that
disappears in the split
of light but not the sun
prostrated on your right side
leaning against a low wall
with your head thrown back
you rub your eyes with both
hands although you know
you will never open them

Translated from the Croatian by Tomislav Kuzmanović

HARVEST

*

looks like you've taken away something stolen
something someone will catch you red-handed right
there at the spot you've started taking notes
with no reason the date you'll put at

the end you'll check on the desk calendar
as if it could be some other day some other
month some other year on the lawn under the window
the smoldering collection of the images of the dark

sunset a burned out texture on the side-walk casts
on the walls of the buildings so like an orange I'm
peeling off at the moment sitting at the table invisible
jets of odor lining the air red dissolving in blue and gray

as though these pips these nearly darkened clouds falling
into plates are about to echo like footsteps at the door

*

when after a six-month break
I wrote my first poem I stood up from the desk
and repeated the same actions I'd tried
to write about as if they'd already

happened or as if I'd watched
them take place all over again the disquiet
I feel like a silent fever puts him to
a stop just almost exactly like

the wish that gave him a start when
in the spur of a moment I wrote another poem
he decided to sit down at the desk again

*

that was me too there when they circled
him and he shouted he shouted I didn't they
I was never there leave me alone I'm sick of
your plurals how did it all begin dark

gold had gone too ripe and no one would stop
to check on which side the foundry had cracked
and how would approach them again once you
feel the wax and honey on your palms when on mornings

and humid afternoons forgiveness begins to flow and hum
through the window like a heavenly insect or a slow wind that
changes the color of the skin and tendons and makes them supple
and light like his walking on water yes I was there too shivering in

the chitin of my singular spinning my talismans faster and
faster like brass rosary beads and I was ready I was ready
to tell him to somehow persuade him that shame is sacred
and expendable like breathing like salt and that fear melts away

like all former friendships my body is my territory and my
witness I said but by then there was no one in the garden just
the clinking of dust and plants wavering sings of the land

*

there surely lies some kind
of trap in the whole
city you could not see

any mark as if
all evil had been
used up a long time ago

I went out again
and dipped into heat
slithering down the surface

like a mosquito
across the puddle into quicker-
than-the-collective-blast

of luck in a tin goblet
of streetlight nothing
there and nobody bothers

to turn back any more
on all that they did
to our forefathers

I would now have to say
that the laws of summer
are more durable in town

than the dead language of buildings
that they are forgotten
the same way diseases

and old debts are

remembered that fire
is a blessing to the earth

no other way
to stop the buzzing
that no one is capable

of stopping while
the seams of July
and August each year

cling closer one
to another but who is
going to sit

in a weed-run vineyard
whose shirt shall I put on
while whispering to myself

this is yours all this
is yours take take
all that belongs to you

*

if the phone starts ringing right now
I'll raise my arms because the whirr and rattle
of whoever and whatever make a good prayer
and chances are someone will answered it

right there by his side somewhere close-by
where all those sounds waits delays
drift off and want to rest I thought that I
couldn't be wrong and that the image of that portal

was the one that overlapped when we entered
the square and I'd already begun to describe what I
would've memorized too long ago if some new
shame hadn't stopped me or it was all

from the heat and hoot of the beginning of August
pallor and glare slipped away as always waddling
over stone slabs pines rustled even though I
expected – I don't know why – a halt in this motion you

were already leaning against the massive balustrade and watched
some different islands and I probably turned around
several times silenced by the feeling we get when we
sense someone eavesdropping on our conversation

*

do you remember when we were unloading the sacks from the truck
you had to push one so that it could rest against your shoulder and then
you'd stumble and have to catch your balance and you had to carry
them bent under their weight to the pallets lined up deep inside

the warehouse with the free hand you had to brace your hip
it's easier that way after several rounds the body starts
hopping by itself as if you were walking on springs or air-cushions
and then the strained spine your hands and legs strangely swollen

would start lifting the torso somewhere up following their
unique language even then you were unable to learn it that night
you couldn't sleep the room soaked with whatever was running from
your exhausted body in the morning you couldn't remember a thing isn't

it the vicious cycle of a habit that the body is not suppose to reveal
in the same way it does not speak of the true bearing of belief and
why the angels are being viewed as a sound or a color a kind of
bodily consecration as if one could bear one more learned repetition

bear the loss of what you'd been ready to take
as another desired body of yours

*

these days nothing happens afternoon and morning rains
bring and take away dark heavy clouds the clouds soak in and scatter
the air drenched in scents of soil leaves new grass shooting
boiling brush that runs wild twists and screams under

unwieldy always blunt clippers minute men in undershirts
hunch and grow small before the racket of a streetcar and then again
in regular slow movements they trim the hedge as if that's
the only thing that can be done as if that's the only way to

remind us that this is how our ancestors were given shape and that
any second moment they could gather here or anywhere else and wave those branches
as if to greet him as if they'd waited for him forever sparks
pour down from under the streetcar's cable in a small tranquil waterfall

and disappear in the rain like shiny commas in your handwriting

*

I heard you but you said nothing
to me this hand let's say grabs
an apple a cherry a handrail in

a streetcar a doorknob at the entrance
you're standing in semi-profile
you face is distorted

because you have to come closer
to hear the steps approaching
and that look through the bulging

eye when the door opens
you'll become an idle neighbor
but you can't trick me

the madness that glistens in the grass
is not mine and although I won't
get any relief from it

– and you know this – I head down
the staircase gripping
harder and harder and harder

at the dark handle of a half-empty suitcase

*

all things indicated that actions once learned should be
repeated sequence holds it is said and thought as if
an unwritten rule purpose order shelter design that

must be followed doggedly like well-kept well-fed hounds
like daily grooming brush strokes reveal a plan we are all
determined to see it like a sheen above things like a clear outline

of the palm arrested cascade of the pale down's maniac
precision soft fibers sprout out of the brush heavy wooden board slowly
moving in stream of granules and it's well known that the light after

long circling drizzles over the skin in a grainy whirl and that this is
the time to inscribe the doors room corners night darkness in the tap
that this when to decide on your viewing points and points of your viewing

and although we know we can stop at any moment we can walk to
the kitchen to the park the school yard that we can immerse into
the clumsy alchemy of shopping malls streetcars street crossings no one

moves as if we've always been
given the mercy of centre of all things

*

I'll remember everything a thick hashish smoke dark drops of
paper ashes and coals burned through the floor and the ceiling a cover
without a face lime in veins a heavenly pneuma a smoldering sword

a gray glass barrel a tin box for yesterday and
tomorrow colorless salt-dew of frail memory stupor
in legs when you wake up at midday bend forward stumble

remember everything the light will follow you with every
step you lay down the grindstone and grain water's sacrifices
angels dripping like god's dandruffs from the almighty

armor of the noon remember it then the rustling wings
molt canvases and clouds are their tasteless food
they can't see you standing and waiting for the day's sizzling edge

your crimson bread a blue pastoral glides by
dolphin's underbelly sunset's hard skin that's all
that's all you can get yellow night awaits you

Translated from the Croatian by the author