

Andrei Khadanovich
Poems

NEVER COME BACK

The next stop is
The indoor flea market.

And you're threading your way
Between parked bicycles
Afraid of knocking into one
And setting the alarm off,

While the music in your headphones
Is mixing up with street sounds
In the pulse of your music,
And your inner guide tells you:
The next stop is
The indoor flea market.

And the local all-round expert
Is waving two fingers at you,
Either "Victory" or "Quick!
Two Euros for everything
You didn't even know you needed
To make your life complete—satisfaction guaranteed!"

It's an *Innovations* catalogue come to life:
A three-string guitar for playing songs you only half know;
A rake with interchangeable prongs:
Clear the garden, then massage your aching back;
Skates for the short-sighted and anti-tank galoshes;
Traffic lights for the home—no more hallway pile-ups;
A wall-mounted cuckoo-toaster;
A Swiss Army watch with a pull-out corkscrew;
A Singer typewriter that makes carbon copies
Of up to five pairs of trousers;
Wind-up gramophone whisky —78 staggers a minute;
Pornographic cards of secret aerodromes...

And you are almost in the state
When trams stop right outside
The door of your consciousness
And take you to the next floor.

A circle is formed.
There is no way out.
The next stop
Is always the indoor flea market.

COLOMBIAN DIVERTISSEMENT

1. *Envy*

“Lord, how the Colombians dance!”

I reflected for a minute and added:

“I’d like to write poems
like the Colombians dance!”

I reflected a bit longer and added:

“And just to dance like the Colombians
would also be great!”

2. *Traffic Rules*

A motorcycle stops at the crossroads.
In the driver’s seat – a girl wearing a helmet,
Looking gorgeous.

Behind her – a guy without a helmet,
sits and –
with risk to his life –
doesn’t hold on to her.

And all the Colombian men
stand along thinking:
“Even with risk to my life
I would have held on to this girl!”

3. *Symbols of Peace*

In the very heart of Colombia
on El Colombiano avenue
a darling dove sits down on the roof
and a dove – on top of the darling.

There could be a moral here:
“Make love, not war!”

But it works out fine without a moral!

THE LAKE SCHOOL OF POETRY

There was a lake,
The terminal station of suburban train.

There was a sky,
The terminal station of his flippant dreams,
Six days of travel across the rain.

And there was a sun on the seventh day,
And he saw
That the previous six were worse.

And there were sails,
Steamers and buoys
With the warning "no swimming".

And they were alone, only two of them in the world
But for natatoriums –
Gulls and school rovers.

And she was topless,
Wearing fashionable shorts,
With an apple in the pocket,
Protruding at one side,
As a tennis woman
Preparing for the first serving...

No need for the second one.

DRIVE

I could be cheap and rhyme it with "thrive"
but our driver speaks in prose,
I can understand only a third of it
so instead I listen to the radio.

Berlin FM is crowded:
twenty four hours of jazz
and twenty four hours of classical music.

Mozart works perfectly
with our driver's pace.
everything is virtuoso
and punctual in best german traditions,
as if it were initially written
for great traffic core slaloms:
once you got in
you better core it,

and he is coring
in re minor,
major phony!

jazz is different.
you're suddenly seized by panic.
you think that Oscar Peterson
plays for the last time in life
at least your life.
because your driver
bewitched by his syncopation,
is about to collide,
and then real jazz will begin,
music for fat paramedics,
who wont get
what has happened:
was it the door that got stuck
or was it you who got struck
or is it the fault of the driver
who
in the traffic oratory
bumped into his satori.

PROGRESS IN LITERATURE

After all a French story-teller
had a point
when he swore his allegiance
to progress in literature.

Contemporary Homeros
does not depend
on power outage,
he can easily run
a new National library,
though at heart he envies
Ronsard and Beethoven:
after all the best readings
were organized by the Deaf Association.

Sappho
does not run for the position
of the tenth muse any longer,
now she is all about cinematography;
and though unsuccessful in private life,
she got a Nobel prize
for the promotion of political correctness,
leaving behind Verlaine, Rimbaud and George Sand.

Old Anacreont
has quit drinking
and can only dream of young girls,
in return he is on the “must-read” list
of all Greek schools and universities.

Villon
experienced to the full
the omnipotence of legal experts,
though his country did not abolish
death penalty,
and even if it does –
what could possibly be changed
by a handful of dissidents
with slogans “Where is Villon?”

Hugo, rejected by everybody,
learned from his own experience
that expression “you are a hemorrhoid on my ass”
is not only figurative.
On the other hand now we have show business
and one can always write lyrics for pop songs.

Goncourt
writes a live diary on the internet
and suffers from split personality.

Faulkner and Marquez
are rivals on the tourist market
offering hot tours
to Yoknapatawpha and Macondo.

Only Catullus
didn't go through any drastic changes:
just like two thousand and something years ago,
he is mourning over the death of his mistress's sparrow.
Bird flu, you know...

HAIR-2006

a quiet angel flew
over the cuckoo's nest

eleven more thousand
of your young compatriots
in the whole year
won't see a single movie
by Milos Forman

* * *

a foreign language
caresses my mouth
like piercing
on somebody else's tongue

* * *

trust weather forecasts and my own eye
will never lose thirst you wouldn't tell thirst to "get lost"
I'm boozing tête-à-tête with ten hot days
only my hope knows where to find us

I'm witching since the morning I'm watching clouds
when mind is blocked my hand casts curses
clouds move without escort and embroider the sky's canvas
on July landscapes of my fellow artist

July with its forty degrees of hot sun
is falling on heads but I won't surrender
i believe that right now it's downpouring in Vilnius
and the rain will move and stop right above you

i can't fall asleep frostbitten with heat
hypnotizing the words I will never tell you
this night is so long and you are so far away
they seem to be just a drop of Lithuanian rain

* * *

Having read so much of your life that a bookmark
is placed not among the last pages but among those already read,
you forget completely how the book once began
and turn the pages and suddenly find a trace
left on page seventeen by somebody's ring.

Red-eyes are staring from a Polaroid photo:
your awkward age at your mid-age crisis,
and you tell yourself that it too will pass,
and return the book to the school library.

COMMEDIA

Which circle
of Dante's hell
is meant for drunkards

who the day before were mixing
sweet wine with beer
and missed their chance to repent before death?

In this very circle
we woke up in the morning,
though formally speaking

we were in Poland
the city of Wroclaw
hotel Wodnik.

The spring sun soothed our pain a little
but didn't evoke any desire
to talk in tercets.

Morning coffee transferred us to Limbo –
as pagan bastards
(meaning virtuous pagans)

or maybe even unbaptized infants?
(you should have seen the infantile physiognomy
of a poet sitting in front of me!)

We kept ascending
Dante's ladder
and here we were in hotel Purgatory:

Finnish sauna, swimming pool,
TV set, pool table
and everything is free of charge.

Who knows how far into Heaven
we would have gone
if not for the check out time?

The receptionist's name was Peter;
but we didn't pay attention to his badge
when giving him our keys

and getting into a taxi.

CHRISTMAS RAP

In the country where a real drag drags the brakes,
where one same holiday is celebrated four times,

so that citizens like drug addicts would feel that it's here,
that winter night with its always new name "new year",

where fortune like a snowman is smirking full-face
and every shop window congratulates "Merry Christmas!"

you go blind while flying to Karaganda on reindeers
and Santa wipes out your tracks with his white beard.

Northern lights into your eyes and a polar star ahead
and on Saint Nicolas's sledge – a foreign license plate.

You are writing a Christmas song and end up with a Christmas rap
and you'd sing it if not for late night and your freezing bed.

This holiday midnight will be always haunting my mind
and everybody's drunk but for the mule, the sheep and the child.

Sweet dreams little Jesus
in Bethlehem and in Belarus.

Translated from the Belarusian by Valzhyna Mort
