

Four Cycles of Poems

Ihor Kalynets

Summing up Silence

before these gates
should halt the boor
these gates **are** small thermopylae
beyond them white linen
on a green field
the untouched nation
of poetry for which we also
come to know the taste of blood

we shall talk of the poet
let us leave tyrants in peace

we shall talk of the brazen
let us leave alone those
who have gone dumb

we shall talk of Mytusa
but why not also recall
Holoborodko or Vorobiov
my peers

“nevertheless
the famed bard Mytusa
aged and in his pride not wishing
to render service to Prince
Danylo tattered and
in chains was brought”

but why not then
sum up one’s own
silence

but each day
shrinks to one sun

but each night
grows to one star

but each day and each night
shrinks grows

and immutably
each on his forehead wears
the escutcheons of duty

without even suspecting it

only I, o Mytusa
must know

about my unrepented escutcheon
the escutcheon of *melancholy*

I shall spill on the scales
all the dried leaves of words
summing up silence

o how late now is the autumn
of our silence

o what a plaything for the wind
is our petty silence

maybe I could
utter

sweetest

but do any words have value
balanced against your name

but do any words have the value
of one golden leaf of day

that from the bough of autumn
soon soon shall fall

until the silence fades
tarry for one moment

until the word comes full circle to the fruit
tarry for one moment

until I learn to perceive in the wind
Mytusa's brazenness

I too like he
shall depart with this autumn day

free of the favors of art patrons
tarry for one moment

having left behind not a single book
tarry for one moment

we shall lose ourselves in this solitude

among these three trees
among these three days

my most beautiful poem is on the bark
under the moss
the most beautiful rhyme for me
is you yourself
the longest life for me is one
of those days

I do not believe he is a stranger
nevertheless a stranger
would betray our silence

but since he has lost himself
in this solitude
among these three trees
among these three days

then his poems will be on the bark
over mine
then his rhyme will be more sonorous
than we
and for his life he'll choose
whichever day's convenient

and Mytusa also has
autumn for a lover

the parchment rinsing in the wind
is not for his purse

let the ink of the elder
ferment in the garden

let nestors in monasteries
practice their cyrillics

summing up silence
Mytusa will say

boians wall up with honey
the prince's ears

for the gold of an autumn tree
I exchanged that of a prince

therefore it is not my parchment
rinsing in the wind

not my ink
fermenting in the branches

all the escutcheons of our nobility
are in foreign museums
all the escutcheons of our artisans
are in foreign hands
all our towns are under
the escutcheons of strangers

even the golden tree
and that in the neighbor's orchard
even this autumn
not in accord with our calendar
even you Mytusa
strictly speaking
are out of your time

nevertheless your silence
is unique
and those who would destroy
the tower of silence
rake together stacks of paper

all my books the wind bought
all my books the ash burned
all my books are in the safest
of libraries
in the treacherous eyes of my beloved change to lover

there came one more art patron
and he says
I too am the wind

there came one more ash
and he runs on
here's an index of books
for burning
could it be I'm too late

there came one more beloved
and she announced
there are no eyes more treacherous
than mine

but I had no more
for another wind
for another ash
for one more beloved
not even one line

summing up silence
I shall then speak

with the lips of an autumn day

with the uncertain color
of your eyes

with the yellow cloud
of a tree outside the window

summing up silence
I shall say

what unheard of luck
from among the millions
who lived live
and will live

with the lips of an autumn day
with the uncertain color of eyes
with the deceptive meeting of arms
with the yellow cloud of a tree
outside the window
for us to remain silent

Translated by Volodymyr Hruszkewycz

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242.

Backyard Grotesques

we pray to you
holy spirit
in a leather shell

to your immortal
eleven priests
and to all their rites

on giant cathedrals
of stadiums

we form our
round worldview

where the ideology of the whistle
is founded in tradition

here anew we found cities
or overthrow governments

above this green chalice
we first received the eucharist
of the body and blood
of our homeland

we first tasted
ecstasy

in these days under our city
an explosive has been planted

it might explode into the air
at any minute
or not move at all

a thousand buildings
could crumble
or just a pebble beneath our feet

cars might be flipped
with naked bellies up like beetles
and streetcars too
or one streetcar might be
a few minutes late

panes might shatter
in every window frame
or a pair of glasses
might fall from
a pensioner's nose

it is difficult to predict
the corona of an explosion

only one thing is certain
that our city has been mined

our whole little province
is fenced in with tin tongues
beyond which there is no escape

immediately they raise
a theatrical thunder

evenings willingly
we listen
to concerts

and when real clouds
grumble above us
we think
that they too are of tin
and our little province
nails them down with golden nails

to also fence itself in
from above

a secret last supper in our city
when among the twelve
is one judas

ten times more secret if
among the twelve there were
ten judases

the tastiest course
is mania

our hosts and guests
dine on the host
of complexes .
of one of the hot poets
from the capitol

when he dined one on one
he was not assured of secrecy

now he has cooled off
he wants to be laid
to rest with *Literaturna Ukraina**

Translated by Volodymyr Hruszkewycz

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* Official newspaper of the Soviet Ukrainian literary establishment.

Consciousness of a Poem

from the indifferent dark
as from a rock

oozed the breasts
of the fruit of knowledge

lips wove
a cry

arms uttered
a painful word

chastity fell
to its knees

from that moment was
chaos

and my not distant eyes
that became blades
perceived

in that sweet darkness
a swarming of presence

in the ravine between the breasts
the solitary flower of the lips
breaks through
and on a thin stalk
carries out the red form
of the heart
across long fallen leaves
dead stalks
of half-forgotten favors

only now
in this ravine on the narrow
ascent out of the abyss
into which could squeeze
only my fingers
you crumpled into a clump
of fertile soil the substance
at the root of resurrection
from this place
we shall grow into a slender tree

and some day
no one shall be able to divide
autumn mourning
into yours and mine

the one thing of value
that cannot be marketed

two streams
that cannot be stepped over
that dams cannot dam

would that I were
that earth
that I might absorb them

would that I were
that cloud
that I might drink them

but no earth
no single spirit
holds sway over them

for they flow
from those secret springs

the same beginnings
as tears

thus we know one another
in a dream
we dreamed
millions of years ago

with a stone axe
I hunted down fire

it trembled like a deer
like hair it overflowed

it escaped across the threshold
of our locked lips

it splashed into our pupils
symbols of the subconscious

it screamed dark words
which even now are beyond understanding

listen
such dreams
are forgotten immediately
on awakening

the slanting rays of the evening

if only to extend the road
into despair

if only to stretch hands out
to the inaccessible

if only to widen eyes
to take in the infinite

if only to fit into the word
the kernel of the word

those slanting rays
trail after me
in ribbons of blood

and when wide eyes
of wakefulness
probe the deaf wall
of darkness

there shall be in the slough
buried alive

silver slivers
from the mirror of eternity

fragments of memories
of a brief love

and so it happened

on the black slate
beside the tracks of the fern
your palm
was fossilized

with the line of destiny
clearly broken

Translated by Volodymyr Hruszkewycz

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Threnody for one more
Way of the Cross

THE FIRST PASSION

on the Golgotha
of the provincial court
they screened Your shining face
behind a palisade
of rifles

in solitude
you bear the cross

so feeble still
are our shoulders

THE SECOND PASSION

from her eyes
Ukraine brushed
a secret tear

Lord
how luminous
is the transparent gathering
of mourners

yet the mother
fattened
on her own marrow
legions of spies

THE THIRD PASSION

and those two
who were crucified
beside Christ

today
camouflage
high Golgotha
with a thicket of codes

in the procurator's toga
they hide
the brigand's knife

THE FOURTH PASSION

a fresh cross

small wonder
it weeps
kosmach resin

it shall yet serve
shall serve
in place of the iconostasis
in our
plundered church

THE FIFTH PASSION

imbecilic little nation
go on calmly
bustling

after all today
the earth
did not quake

and the darkness
that settled
prematurely
as ash
about your
head

you did not notice
anyway

THE SIXTH PASSION

without betrayal

sold out
by our impotence

more than one brother
shall yet forsake us
this day

even without pieces of silver

perhaps
then
you will feel pity
for the biblical judas

THE SEVENTH PASSION

our father is silent
and our mother
falls upon the bloody
wounds

intercede
mother of God
who also
became our mother
for us

let us
lay hands upon
the ever burning wounds

THE EIGHT PASSION

above the throng
metallic
rose
the martyr's arms
of the helpmate

Veronica
you wished to wipe
the bloodied face

beneath their feet they shred
the linen cloth
that shall become
a banner

THE NINTH PASSION

turn away your face
from them

but allow
that in my soul
there should ever be

the image of Your
thorn-crowned
head

THE TENTH PASSION

out of love for us
he took upon himself
such a terrible
punishment

to redeem us from
the greatest
sin

carefree disregard
for *fire*

Translated by Volodymyr Hruszkewycz

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