

Illyria

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“Dans les Balkans, rien n’est vrai, rien n’est faux. Chaque village est porteur d’un fardeau impossible à gérer. La seule façon de la raconter, ce serait la poésie.”

- Panos Ioannides: *Macedonia*

*“War ...
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing..”*

- Edwin Starr

Ljubljanski Grad

late evening was entangled in the net of streets
I was drinking a slow coffee at the corner of the square
darkness fell past the closed windows like black fronds

in the dark café I sat clothed in silence
slowly I drank while the square floated beside me like a cloudy boat
stars wrote dim lines of letters above the birdless roofs

slowly at first the streets gave up their echoes of footsteps and breathing
no faces flowered at the window as I gazed silently out
I drank and my thoughts drifted towards the ceiling like steam

in the liquid hush the trees slowly moved to a slanting position
the fronts of buildings swayed and flapped like flags
and light dripped from their eaves like spilt wine

the riverside houses leered at the icy pavement
forest clung desperately to the edges of the hills
the castle hung among clouds like the voice of a god

slowly at first I rose through the icy air and danced

I flew above the frosted city among the plumes of smoke which rose like pillars
towers climbed towards me from street corners
deserted parks and huge muffled squares spread like blood at my feet

among the numb thickets some snow patched the ground
and left its ambiguous dust on the aristocratic pines

at the railway junction the indistinct sky sighed bleakly over the empty tracks
as a black lake lay sleeping in winter's rigorous embrace

finally high on the castle hill I stroked the night's pale skin

I sat late in the darkness
silence steamed from the streets in the ancient night
as I rose to leave my breathing echoed among the aching walls

A Coffee in Zagreb

in the distant south the sky is filled with ashes
tractors plough the rutted road through the rancorous hills
fleeing women clutter the mountain passes
in the frozen woods the fighters huddle alone
and still fire rains from the clouds and still the homeless trudge towards the border

on the coast the houses turn inside out
at the railway station dry aloes sprout in the silence
all that remains
the vertical sound of rivers
the memory of kite-flying
the yellow moon over the pointed hill

the velvet of evening snakes across our skin
morning unfurls above the sea like a flag
the sadness of the streets after rain cannot be tolerated
in secret courtyards aflame with birdsong we will arrive at our decisions
a wicked generation of generals will be brought before judgement
while in the street named after an aged philosopher the houses burn

the weary violin gives way to the crack of fireworks
the stones of the streets are empty
trees fill with birds and rise into the air
a caravan of farmers is burnt in an instant
the sky is silent yet breeds bombs like an evil black sow
between the warehouses the barrel-organ will not play

among the fig-trees we have picked our way along the holed and stony track
the fetid bushes slowly begin to flower as if fire burns on their branches
bullets bloom dimly against the walls of the plum-orchards

Karst: To Knin

as we rise among the rocks
the heavenly port cities slip from sight
the noble palm tree is forgotten
in the kingdom of the oily bush and the crow

there is no-one here
there is no-one

in the deep distance the sea circles
the harbour towns exhale
the gull vaults skywards

rocks scatter the plain like bones
a few shrubs point from the grey earth empty-handed

the ashen soil weeps dry tears
or sometimes the sun red as blood hangs from a cliff
stones thirst silently among the dry grass
terrible arbitrary hills rear on all sides

valleys are the property of the fig and the olive
and the doog's dry mouth

until we ride through the land of the ruined farms
and reach the untilled fields under the frowning fortress

a cracked wall undulates on the broken hilltop
held tight in the greasy fingers of gnarled bushes

we pass under red tiles and empty branches
a grey wall of mountains sneers from the horizon

in a smoky barn we sit sipping cautiously at rough brandy
a bushy-browed boy with a farmer's face fingers a shotgun

The Straight Road from Osijek to Vukovar

a tank cannons through the city streets
in its wake lie crushed fragments of cars and buses
one man, angry, drives his tiny Fiat into the tank's path
he jumps clear and crouches behind some trees
the tank squashes the car like a screwed-up paper bag
its remains are spat into the gutter

a dented tram rocks slowly between the dusty buildings
the rainy square bears a huddle of mournful roofs
in the afternoon bulging black clouds possess the sky
the evening suburbs are sour with the sound of weeping
at night one single light shines from a tower

bullet-shredded corpses line the road
a man in a tin hat stamps on a severed head
one woman's bicycle lies across her tangled like a knot

at the edge of Vukovar the Danube churns
slow-witted from its journey through the Hungarian marshes
the distant flickering mirage turns slowly into a nightmare

Dreaming of Belgrade

Belgrade. Beograd. Nandorfehervar Weissenburg Sigidunum.

I am sitting in a café in Genoa drinking coffee
I am in Béziers ordering breakfast at six in the evening
my sherry-glass touches yours in the shadow of Seville cathedral
someone asks me the time in Arabic in Marrakesh
in Dakar I am eating a curry with a student of chemistry
I am dreaming of Belgrade

I am riding a taxi through the night towards Algiers
on the edge of the desert a postman shakes my hand in farewell
I awake in Bucharest at three in the afternoon drenched in sweat
I walk arm in arm with you over the Polish border as the rain begins
in Berlin we are eating soup within sight of the wall
I am dreaming of Belgrade

I rise from sleep and gaze at a green island hanging in the turquoise sea
a railway winds through a hushed pine forest towards the Baltic coast
we wait for a yellow tram at night in the suburbs of Budapest
I am wandering the back streets of Havana while music oozes from the doorways
I am lying on my back in a field of blackbirds
I am dreaming of Belgrade

I drink a beer on a Canadian ferry below a leaden sky filled with eagles
I am buying blueberries from a station platform on the Trans-Siberian Railway
deacons are singing the Easter Psalms in a dark church lit only by a few candles
entering a tiny bar in Venice from a misty lane I order a sandwich
I am trying to sleep in a telephone-box in the Pyrenees
I am dreaming of Belgrade

Belgrade is a grey ghost which lingers at the end of the railway line
Belgrade hovers dimly behind the Danube mist
Belgrade is an ugly woman with beautiful handwriting and an arousing scent
Belgrade is a pile of dried melon seeds on a tablecloth of sadness
Belgrade is an ache which wakes me at the black border of dawn