

Ján Gavura

The Other Monk

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Hell

I expected a southern gale
and lots of red, blood-red colour.
Lava, flames or smoke of a blaze,
at least in something to match
the prophetic words.

It was all quiet.
People we met
were at peace.

Though when I looked at my daughter
and wanted to hold her firmly by the hand,
I found just the face of a dog
with sad or empty eyes.

Hunger

Rain falls into a boar's hide turned inside out,
sinking into the mud and flooded tracks
of fox cubs, badgers and a stray dog.

The animals' rough tongues have scraped it smooth,
but not even the sharpest teeth can tear this parchment.
It distracts the beasts to desperation.

A boar's hide is otherwise than a kitten's
which perished in the jaws of a faithful dog,
with only a child witnessing the relationship
of one natural born killer
to another natural born killer.

To Kill

I killed my first wolf
when the hair on my temples
had begun to turn grey.

If you know how,
a roe deer can be killed
with patience, with trust.

Look at wasps like living targets
glittering in a hunter's heart.
They call: *try us, our bones are soft.*
There's only one truth.
We've never heard of contradictions.

Even a hunter can be killed,
his years counted exactly
as in the homework of a pupil
who secretly loves his teacher.

In this simile
there's someone who knows the way,
someone who is the way,
who like a grey wolf goes astray.

A Baroque Painter

The guards brought him here
on the command of the Maestro, the hand of God.

This fat man is perfect,
in his alcohol-bloated face
there's still a red glare from a fight.

The painter is content.
All that remains is to find a theme for his expression
to capture his eyes, looking from the window at the dawn
above the city.

So he starts to tell him of a mother, deceased,
of disfigured children on the cathedral steps,
of a painful death, of a cat
that chased a pigeon and how with her unerring
instincts she processed the bird's flesh, tiny bones,
underbelly feathers, leaving behind only
the worthless wings.

A Report from a Business Trip to the Museo del Prado

Goya on Olympus revolves with his brush.
In black tempera he follows wordlessly
the glint of stars.

The sixteenth century vibrates in the gallery
like a string on invisible bow -
the arrows penetrate the perfect body
of Saint Sebastian once more and again
and again.

Visitors revolve before the images in a dance of bees
amply hipped, hair pigmented, contours of muscle
and within all the same: smell, blood and the insatiable desire
to penetrate, to rub, to be penetrated.

Nevertheless life is still defined
by the unrelenting vegetable battle for light:
saints and archers, dancers and Madonna,
whosoever falls behind is damned.

The brush touches the canvas,
a plan for a beginning, perhaps for a conclusion,
in Goya's deafened ears molecules roar,
unseen planets.

The Gambler

Permit me, Lord,
to beg for a fortunate life for my three girls.
The game-plan ripples before me like a map.

I chose for them an incomparable mother
from a line that lost everything and with obduracy
recouped it. I hold this in my hand like a lucky die.

The girls attended the finest schools,
an Italian Master taught them to paint,
they learnt to ride and their maids, as was my wish
taught them the mysteries of making love to men.

The first marriage will be one of reason.
Grant the eldest girl a heart that is calm,
dispassionate, a love for the theatre and masks.

The second will, surely, fall for a poet
and everything she loves in him
she'll come to hate. Let him continue to love her all the more,
as she loves him. And when, crestfallen,
she enters a convent let the bell
that sounds at the hour of her death unlock heaven's gate.

The youngest sleeps naked each night.
her eyes don't know how to look away
when they see suffering.
Lord, grant her a husband who'll be a decent sort,
and who won't cheat on her with the housemaids,
at least, not so very often.