

EDVARD KOCBEK: FIVE POEMS

translated by Tom Ložar

The two doves larking on the sill

The two doves larking on the sill
take to the chestnut grove.
When in the air the sunny breeze has ceased,
the water in the hollow comes aglow.

Quietly objects signal for companions,
wing whispers to wing in flight.
More and more the swing is slowing down,
I knew how to play by myself until tonight.

Zemlja, 1934

Death

Once we drove the darkness wild,
celebrating all night long,
and when towards morning
we could not part,
we sat down on the ground,
so many shame-faced divers,
not one pearl among us,
early birds found us,
shut our hoarse mouths up,
eerily the morning shone
like a lily to a girl
rising for the first time from
the bed of love.

Now I get up from my cot
with the glory of dreams aurora'd,
all night long we did not sleep,
drinking one another,
yet we are not tired,
not drunk and not ashamed,
stilled are we by the scents of matter,
no one can part us,
you are mine forever and forever,

mystery unfathomably gentle,
memorial apparition,
loveliest of witches,
death in the midst of morning.

Groza, 1963

August's isolation

When his foes had slowly
shucked him, heavy rose,
and with nakedness obscured him,
he took refuge in the arcane rapture
seeds and herbs have
in the attic of an afternoon,
and much like a sorcerer
with belief unbounded
in a secret knowledge
lifted off into the air
to remain there at the end of a rope,
fulfilled and upstanding
among the good tools
and the worn-out objects,
among the calendars and almanacs
and the memorial book of the farmer's calling,
becalmed, touchingly true,
illuminated beyond his mind,
by suffering blessed,
and so a part of things
that at midnight anew
he'll touch his father's floor,
remove the martyr's laurel,
and, returning to the sacred cares,
begin walking about the house,
thence to step into the yard,
yoke the remaining horse to the plough,
and ride off to the moonlight's gates
to finish up in the fields
they took from him years ago
and which even now lie fallow.

Poročilo, 1969

Deep above

No sense can tell me
where I am: deep above, high below,
I'm still not in possession of a measure
proving me real and real the world,
am searching still for the basis of a beginning,
something to suit a sense primeval,
and which, though it does not speak, sounds sweet.
My pining is bigger than everything.
So armless I embrace you, melodiousness,
and without body love you. I don't know
what to do with myself in all my slow
and moving celebration. Pleasant clamor
under old oaks, the nostrils of the trees aflare,
and in the sky the moon, out in the daylight.
Let not the clarinet sound
until the trumpet and accordion begin.

Nevesta v črnem (unpublished)

Maharajah

You are history
from the algae up to my heart,
I am the future
from your heart all the way to the algae,
you come from the sea,
I, from the black sun,
we keep meeting on the earth,
in chlorophyll and in the blood,
in the hourglass we whisper to each other
this old tale,
I am a maharajah,
mysteriously vanished
from the divan of love
three hundred and fifty years ago today,
you are the faithful candle
still lighting his way.

Note:

The first four are translated from the versions printed in Tone Pavček, ed., *Edvard Kocbek. Zbrane pesmi I-II* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1977): 'Na oknu se igrata dva goloba,' I:9; 'Smrt,' I:142; 'Samota avgusta,' II:17; and 'Globoko zgoraj,' II:217. 'Maharajah' was not included in *Zbrane pesmi*; it was published under the title "Iz novih pesmi" in *Prostor in čas* 3/4 (1972). The translation of 'Maharajah' first appeared in *Canadian Forum*, June-July, 1981.

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