

1985 / 4

the splendor of the desert

(ljepota pustoši)

VESNA PARUN

OLIVES, POMEGRANATES AND CLOUDS (Masline, šipak i oblaci)

When I meet him by the stone wall, I turn my eyes away to the
clouds

Although I've waited three days for him to pass by.
The pomegranates have now blossomed, and the sea has swelled.

How solemn are the evening and the stars closing in his eyes.
How stunning he is against the night sky:
brilliant as a seashell.

But even now a fear of what will come tears at me
as the wind rises from the cape of olives
and this wretched, naked heart
trembles and listens.

Three days behind the stone wall, weighed down by youth,
I await his steps in the dark olive grove.

THE SPLENDOR OF THE DESERT (Ljepota pustoši)

Dark fantasy imagining a naked man before the horizon
of a barren terrain where wheat never grows, where birds
and tramps are afraid to roam.

You cannot calm the dismal flames of which you are made.
You flourish in rebellious isolation, despising the
imperfect peace of the world.

You've taught the road to be fearful, and the clouds to
be free.

From your wells drank those who haven't hands with which
to build homes.

Sip by sip you feed us like the rain feeds the shrivelled
river after the drought.

We are alone as the moon among winter mountains, behind
the forest.

The red horses of evening trampled the wild grasses and
disappeared.
Everyone turns back differently to their common nothingness
of pain.

THE SPLENDOR OF THE DESERT (2 of 3) (Ljepota pustoši)

(new stanza)

The earth draws us, in her beginning and her secret, to the
center of her selfishness.

(exists)

There is a place where we could feel whole, and if we could
find it, it would become vital to life.

Here, even death could not harm us, because our hands
would be as old as the bread of this world, the same bread
which tries

but cannot, once and forever, join in its crust surety and
freedom.

This soul is the deceitful messenger from unknown shores,
and we prefer it to stay

forever distant, like the glory of birth.

The sun and moon are our sleeping jailers.

And here among you is my desert in the ancient seeds of life.

THE SPLENDOR OF THE DESERT (3 of 3) (Ljepota pustoši)

I greet you, desert where wheat never grows, where birds
and tramps never roam.

Even if you were alone, like the last sea pebble, maybe you'll
begin trembling

before the leaves, on this morning which opens its caves to
the sun.

Maybe you'll witness a child being born, as he joylessly
steps out, abandoned, for his journey.

CORAL RETURNED TO THE SEA
(Koralj vraćen moru)

I give back to the mirror sea this red ring of sun, this star
of earth,
this embodied life form which can't be uprooted, which grows
among living colonies of sea plants and large, motionless fish.
I give back what I took to adorn myself like a flower for a
rite of people and spring
before the morning icon of light and the winds from a distance.
I give back this seed, this scarlet bud of life,
that is neither stone, nor shell, nor salt, nor vine, nor kernel,
yet lives and grows to be a mountain in the ocean.
I give back my youth and my death, and everything a tree
yields up from morning till night.
I give back sails to the high seas, birds to the shore,
streams to the clover, nests to the chests of light in the east,
tenderness to the embittered and confused, courage to those
who are going away,
loneliness to the strayed moon, sadness to herds of a mountain
sunrise.
I give back the cradle to the sea and divide fire into flints,
I carry on walking the untrodden paths of my life
overrun by the stampede of stars and the profuse silences.

**BEFORE THE SEA, AS BEFORE DEATH,
I HAVE NO SECRETS**
(Pred morem, kao pred smrću, nemam tajne)

If you seek a path to my soul
take me to the stormy sea.

There you'll find the unearthed temple,
the ruins of my life; and the plateau of my youth
enclosed by a wall of fig trees.
There you'll witness the ancient lament of my thighs,
that have brought pagan gods to their knees.

Before the sea, as before death, I have no secrets.
The earth and moon become my body.
Love transplants my thoughts
into the gardens of eternity.

NEVER (Nikad)

I don't know where the emptiness of the sea begins.
But I sense what has touched off in you or me
this voice, somewhere near us, saying,
Never.

It is the river which never returns
to its source
for it is destined to meet someone unknown
that waits in the distance.

It is the flower which newermore descends
to its roots
for the future has displaced it there.

Never.
It is the murmur of grasses on the untrodden plateaus:
the snow on mauve mountains.

Turn around and face this Never
which has grown in the grass of your hearing and sight,
in the shadow of tired hands,
in the glow of unextinguished desires.

Turn around, recognize your Never
spread out over the vanished lowlands.
And the heavy thought you've set in motion
will turn to warm affection, for beside it
stands a man, misunderstood in his loneliness.

And when he moves to walk off into the night,
into that enormous yawning space,
you'll reach out to him
and shout,
Don't go!

THE GREEN WINDOW FRAME OF DEATH (Zeleni okvir smrti)

A young woman in mourning quietly emerges,
with her head lowered, inside the green frame.
A child strokes the cat beside the open window.
Who spilled sunlight into the innocent eyes of sparrows?

As afternoon ascends the red hill, entering the fruit,
the child gasps inside the green frame of death.
The woman, heavy with the ache of grief, extinguishes the sun
with her palm, then throws the day in the river.

Unnoticed and unknown, the sparrows fly back and forth
enamored by the amber autumn.
The woman leaves without a smile. The child plays,
And red flowers fade on the empty window sill.

Dusk comes down the hills like a dark horseman
through the trees. The forest darkness rides beside him.
Two fiery eyes and the stamp of hooves draw near.
The child points at the gold icon and is silent.

The black garments of women in mourning are stirring.
Darkness grows, and the cat mews at the window.
The hoofbeats are very close. Where's the child?
Who rummages through grandma's locked drawer?

The long street winds away to the left.
The hoofbeats have passed by the house.
The green window frame is quiet, no one cries out.
The child's gnarled fingers hang in the half shadow.

SONNET (Sonet)

Sleep, white houses, cradles in the tempest,
each with two somber windows, each with two dark and
patient eyes.

On a doorstep, tonight, the stillness moaned,
the night Maria Lisica Bacoka died.

Death is a rosebush full of bitter saps,
a soul's blue journey to eternal heights.
It's a moment of waking for the mysterious lament of islands,
for the spirit of carob, and for the ardor of the sea in the
fragrance of rosemary.

Here then is a brown cross before the coffin, a swarm of bees,
an August afternoon on a dusty wreath,
while a drought smothers fig trees fastened to stone.

Death is a moment of destiny. An echo of distant shelling...
A tear of God: the living psalm at the ancient well
where death descended in a widow's black garment.

WINDOW IN A LOST TOWN
(Prozor u izgubljenom gradu)

Snow closed the windows of the ancient house.
Late in the winter hours a man grieves anxiously
for an absent face.

The sparrows at my sickbed
told me of a whiteness. I was a tame doe.
In the heat of ever I listened to Red Riding Hood,
a long time ago, singing to the spruces.

When the rain cleared out the room. The streets
pitched a red tent under the cramped sky.
Oh how strange and unkind the black furniture was.
And the footsteps of soldiers remain forever imprinted
on the wet pavement, like glaciers on Mt. Killimanjaro.

Useless to pace the shore, useless to love:
the drowned never come back.

The pike in the sand,
and the blood-red moon will swallow your fish hook.

Late in the winter hours a man anxiously grieves
for a face which was near him,
within reach of the window in the rain.