

*Tomaz Šalamun*

**Woods  
and Chalices**

*Translated from the Slovenian  
by Brian Henry and the author*

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*To Metka*

## The Lucid Slovenian Green

---

To step into the splash. To adorn oneself. I strode  
the Karst valleys and bloomed. The underworld  
is plastic and juicy. Whales dunk a little,  
shoot a little. Chile is dewy, spring  
is paper-wrapped. Girded like an ant,  
like a cadet with argil. How do you reckon this? Bruised  
like an icon? Blasted with small and large candles?  
Slices are also in the trunk, there, where  
squirrels and hornets fertilize tiny eggs. Caesar  
walks staccato. Rome crawls by your feet. Wherever  
the grape plucks, it starts to purl. The Irish saved Europe.  
They piled sagas at fire sites. Everything northern  
(Styria). There, in the forests, live char men  
with flashing eyes. They snack on the *Book of Kells*.

I grew up with eggplants. I stepped  
from the truck, honey, chestnuts  
rolled in honey. The higher, grayer part  
creaked. It tottered. For a raven  
that you snatch by the legs and spin like a bundle,  
as long as it doesn't crash into a windowpane,  
you don't know if it hits with its back or its eyes  
closed, glued from fear. The windowpane  
is not its beak. The raven has no beak.  
The raven has only a sail with drawn-on  
seed. Stars, ricocheting into the moon's  
glass, go out. Between the time someone's  
in the sky and the time he burns  
in the sky is the beat of an eyelid. Water spins the logs.

## In the Tongues of Bells

---

I decant a blossom. It goes before you.  
You're filled with Uriah. Green, tiny, and pressed.  
Blueness is a furious cake, a round  
cake where yearning sleeps. Are the balls  
the balls of the earth? At wells  
and fountains? At Adas's pillar?  
You say that you'd be my property.  
You'd lose everything instantly.  
I still wouldn't notice you anymore, injured.  
I choose from the thickness. Honey collects  
cries. And when the body thickens and you get up  
because I dress you, because I congeal you.  
I erase you back in the past. I draw  
a white flap, shine a white flap.



## The Clouds of Tiepolo

---

The flock fell behind a hill. God  
tottered. I chased a stall. Faded  
and flew. When there's no syrup in the eyes, there's  
no black man in the body. Virgo is in the loaf and creels.  
She throws snowballs while standing. Plans unravel.  
Clouds are rosy, as by Tiepolo.  
As by Deacon and Aritreia. Tasso  
kills a cricket. The knot spreads and advances  
into the jacket with many *and's*, as with the Danes,  
who also translated the Bible like this. And so we have  
and, and, and—no more—which the French  
don't have. They have crouching planks there,  
they call them elegance. The bridge goes in the eyes.  
The soul in the railway. I puff, for I'm a pillar.

## The Edge From Where We Measure

---

Shiva gleams on a white pansy  
and a penguin kicks the sphere. The radar  
switches off. After speed? Nothing.  
We only slept some twelve hours.  
We were eating pizzas from Santa Fe  
to Boston. Our minds sprinkled. The wheat  
cleaved. I wanted to lick you on the neck.  
What? Where? You rob the steering wheel  
and the air. You stop. You smoke  
and build a hut for little birds. Triangles,  
you split open their feet, their toes  
with the drawn-in bulbs for fingernails  
which may be a football ground, a sea  
or your screen. You inherited six of them.

## Ferryman

---

I know you toil and loiter. The mourner  
bids adieu. Her leaves' whiteness  
recalls stalks. The graffiti of the poor  
is under the earth. The adieu has staccato poses.  
Drowns and flees. It resounds in the hut  
when you wipe off the saddle. So we have  
a wet ship and a dry rider. A worm  
from a trunk and an oudine from grain. The position  
between the land and the river is wiped. The position  
is wide. The river is cold. As long as he travels  
parallel he doesn't need a draftsman.  
But then, now will it whistle? Will there be  
a bell, will it be perforated? Will the earth  
split, as then within vineyards?

## Tiepolo Again

---

The pill percolates. Methadone is technology.  
Eyes in the Sava. There will be no more white tuck-ins.  
Christ was exposed. Roe deer  
kept their paws apart. Quilts  
fluttered, and the wheat-like ones. We shelled  
tweezers. Is there always skin under  
the skin? Is the situation in the niches  
and cockroaches and in the deep  
Piranesi caves taken care of? Will lights be  
by the legs? Will the dust burn? I gather myself  
by Mormons. I embroider from lace, I have  
a butterfly, Tasso, who drinks  
from a bottle. Clouds rush like crumpled  
wash, faster than watered guests.

## In the Tent Among Grapes

---

Don't sneak me onto mountains, chicken. Don't verify  
your neighbor. You creep on my vaults. Where  
paws and stars flash. Where Nietzsche  
bites his knees (*Komarča!*) on the path above  
Nice. What an azure milky whiteness!  
Did you knead a little flour into torpedoes?  
Did you sponsor a robbery of bees? Ears  
adjust to the sky. Tendrils—if wholly  
in white garlic—do you then tear them  
like berries? We hear the engine, not the horse.  
His eyes are poured out onto my hands.  
Stumps and columns and stalks that you dunk  
into the Mediterranean. Steve and Ken (asleep)  
water flowers. The chimney branches out.

## Mother and Death

---

There is no grinding. Consumption is embittered.  
The shove twists a white feather. The law  
is in Kent's throat. White green violets.  
The *schmeketa* pump is knocked down.  
You revolt in the color of spilled wine.  
You bring cakes and name them,  
sell them here. White quails  
have top-notch wings. The bone is among  
the found. The found is expected  
by witch doctors. Confirm to her what she saw.  
Confirm to her that she was chatting.  
That there are no remains. That the way is easy  
always. That there is not even a drop  
of reproach in front of the white mute.

# Along Grajena River

---

I helped  
the peach  
to braid itself.

Why did you already shut  
your mouth on the mountain?  
The sled

rolls,  
turns round its axles.  
It runs with

dogs and moose.  
Boka is an ink stain.  
Cut into the icy slope

and scattered powder.  
The stone gives heat.  
Ormoź begs a hen.

I am Ban's daughter.  
I played piano  
in Poker,

the garden  
did not keep.  
Surely I must have died.

## The Dead

---

*Ou peut-être pas.*

Perhaps their trumpets curve.

They forgot doorknobs in the floods  
and now they dive for them.

Maybe they press the buttons  
to rescind the aberrations.

Maybe they use crepe paper.

Maybe they're not so talentless  
and crackle underwater like shells  
and stones, such that every thousand years  
of crackling harvests us  
a tiny white stone.



Is it cold?  
Are you snowed in?  
The tent, does it still creak?

In a field near the Hrpelje-Kozina station  
in the year 1911,  
a cadet shot himself  
in the mouth with a pistol.

## Academy of American Poets

---

Muldoon says Heaney is like the Vasa  
ship. Built on three floors,  
it was the world's biggest battleship.  
It made half a mile  
and capsized alone in a harbor.  
The warriors are killed by insects  
and lack of glycerine.  
Scurvy corrodes their skulls.  
Spruce trees shake off their seed and snow.  
Between Zlatorog and the Savica waterfall  
there is no hoarfrost.

## Enamel

---

The tongue doesn't bind itself. It's a cleanser and a clean freak,  
the marble-smooth skin of refined ladies,  
a cork, a self-satisfied little clod.

When Alexander burns Persepolis, it can  
meditate. It takes apart fighting lions  
as if it's a silky little onion (diminutives strengthen,  
they flood), their kindness is worse  
than K's, who wishes us all well.

Am I a cold fish that kills Christ  
with its tail? Saws through the cross? Should he fall  
on his knees again, although he's still perforated  
with nails? How will we do this, take him off  
the cross so the knees will bend?

But what if they're already cold and stiff  
like Cletus's corpse, whom Alexander undid  
out of a guilty conscience, since he burned  
Persepolis. Clearly Persepolis had to be  
burned, the Rothschilds denationalized.

## Vases

---

The sold-out butter rolls are padded.  
Torcello burns. The khan who spat  
over the drop is driving. The data is where

the woods shove. When we come through  
the woods to the corpse, fond of air,  
did we already see this hide?

Is it borrowed? Where are its signets  
and crinolines and my stamps? *Die Gestalt*,  
all scratched, cracked on the fork.

Or further inside. What do I know.  
Did he ramble as in some kind of pot? We,  
the types, must borrow a little stove. Atanor

wheezes. Cumin is brutally alive.  
Waterlilies go through little needles. Dwarves  
jump off. The does with snouts do not.

Frightened, they kneel on leaves. This lumberjack  
appears in a porno. He's drenched.  
He has an axe. The shirt fits him well.

The birdies accept him, and the elephants, marching  
into the daylight, trod the reservoir alone.  
The curtains only hindered them.

## Pessoa Scolding Whitman

---

The whore of all solar systems and diligent  
little ant, let's begin with this restriction. Until here,  
cows, but here the guests can already wipe

their backs, except we dry this laundry  
outdoors and the muffs also hang, although  
it's summer at Jama in Bohinj. Špela is already

a great-grandmother now, she has a grandson  
who plays hockey at Tufts, already forgotten as well,  
like those who played chess here:

Cvit, Raša, Avčin, the awesome Montanists,  
you can be Mister God in your country  
(Raša), but here in Oxford we wear coats

differently, also stutter a little, out of pathos,  
so this then pours into our Carinthian blood,  
and after my sister, who got married

to Detela, bore a genius (deceased), and one  
good and important writer,  
now the living and the dead pull each other's hair

and with Barbara we're civil servants, telephones  
constantly bang against us, and she was a little  
in love, and I, too, and we sang

*žure*, put together for us by our mothers,  
Madam Silva in her instance, and out  
of this are born poets and civil servants,

who every free minute break for the Strand,  
give search for Mikuž, another boy scout,  
another nephew, another son, translating

that dreadful Latvian, I can find him  
nowhere, and then Lojze arrives, the type  
who would not believe I wished him well,

and yet today, first he gets lost in Harlem,  
then he still comes up to Phillis,  
who was wildly searching for him, and together

they watch *Microcosmos*, Phillis  
howls with enthusiasm and they talk  
fourteen hours without stopping, while

---

I, with Metka, rush to the same film:  
how the snails fuck doesn't move us, hardly  
staying upright against catatonic fits

of sleep because I must save my energy  
so I will wake up in the morning because then  
I furiously type and sniff everything: Barbara,

if Govic rises, I will stare once more  
at the muscles of the inflated Avčín  
rowing, how should I be interested in

the little sex lives of insects  
and robbers, and whether I truly  
forgot a gift for her birthday.

# The Pacific Again

---

Open the bread.  
Oil the wound.  
Throw it up, puke it, speak it.  
As long as you won't speak, it will hurt.  
It will hurt, too, when you say it.  
A caraway seed is a bath towel.  
Chafers that fold on bones.  
Puteshestveny's bundles are clearly starving.  
The hunger reflects.  
From the statue, from Oregon,  
south of your Mihec, who is poured  
by a lotus blossom emptying.  
Order a mouth.  
You don't know you can order it.  
Few things are always technical.

The fan carried Liquido in his arms.  
If I make him a face L will spring.  
We also capitalize the countermand  
and mythological monsters help us  
so our apertures don't squirt.

Crown witness, crown garden,  
watch the white lamb!

Boštjan read me and then  
died underwater.

Ophelias on hooks, I'm a statue.  
I'm a statue, fairy tales rustle.

Boštjan read me and then  
died underwater.

Who will be the third Saint Sebastian?

The world wants to forget.  
We want to forget  
the dead and youth and freedom.



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