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Translated

by

Klaus J. Gerken

Introduction

With belated apologies to Vladimir Holan: I understand these poems better than I can translate them. But it is important that I do translate them, if only for my own peace of mind.

kjg

VLADIMIR HOLAN

THE WALL

THE WALL

Why is your flight so burdened,
Why so stalled?
- I have passed these fifteen years,
Talking to a wall,

And carry from the depths of hell
What remains,
Standing before my threshold
Crumbling from the pain...

21. 6. 1963

THE END?

**At this point she still allows herself everything:
She is bold, and always threatens us as if
The last heathen god has died...**

**And what an eternity it has been: so filled with hope,
And worshipped like the final hour before the coming of the
Christ.
Still she doesn't allow herself what's in her heart...**

FIXED

**Not that living wasn't what I wanted,
yet life, already so apocryphal,
gave me the right to search for it,
in the great enigma death...**

But in doing that...

HOW?

How to live? How to be simple and literal?

**I was always searching for that word,
spoken only once, but must confess,
to not having found it, yet.**

I should have searched for simple words...

Even unconsecrated wine

Can' be mixed with something else.

ON THE ADVANCE

Nothing frees the poet, - not even death.
There's always some extension to his soul -
his being that's not locked away -
that's touched by all his other lives;
none of which are perfect
as if they were in paradise -
truthfully, they are in hell...

THE PINE

How beautiful the old pine is,
There upon the hill of your childhood memories,
which you visited again today...
beneath its murmur you reflect
upon the dead, and wonder if
you might be next.
Beneath its murmur, it's as if
you have finished your last book
and in silence must begin
to shed a silent tear...so that
these words of yours can grow...

And what about your life?
You sacrificed the familiar
for the unfamiliar...
And fate? Well, only once
it laughed with you,
and that was
behind your back...

OCTOBER

**The air's so crystal clear
There's nothing like it here...**

**And even doubles must refuse
to speak: alive's the muse...**

**and what cannot be seen
has such an ugly spleen**

**we simply close our eyes...
good wine, good art, we prize.**

ONLY ONE...

**It's a small path in the mountains
where all the clouds become
fountains of divine inspiration -
shedding their light upon it
only for a while -
Here at first, you feel
a sentimental smile
choosing to address
a bitter loneliness.**

**Stay! ... be quiet and think
about it later,
you have little more than
this worn path:
for life, a stone,
for death, a fortress.**

SMILING

**There are so many ways of smiling.
But I'm thinking of the most difficult,
the simplest way to smile.
It's a smile that is tormented,
cut by the vignon's blade of time,
A smile that wants one more wrinkle,
to solve the riddle, and be ready
for God's great name.
Such a smile is fixed upon the face -
It stays much longer than the source from which they say it sprung -
anticipating and presaging it,
to see itself completely in the present
faceless...**

A YOUNG WOMAN

A young woman asks you: what is poetry?
You want to say: That which you are,
now here, that someone like you
could even exist; and that I, frightened
and astonished, am jealous of the proof
of this clear miracle, and of the fullness
and the beauty of your body; and that I cannot
even kiss you, nor sleep with you; and that
I have nothing, save he who has nothing
has nothing but song...

But you did not say it; you kept silent,
For she for whom the song was meant was deaf...

IT IS NOT

**It is not unimportant, where we are...
Some stars come dangerously close
to one another... Yet down here
it's the violent separation of lovers
only because time accelerates
at the beat of its own heart...**

Only simple folk do not believe in luck...

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

The maiden's hand
lay resting on her modesty,

with a light uncertainty,
as if secretly astonished

she remembered
that earth created earth.

It's only that there are
so many dead already,

and the earth is
still nothing more than earth,

But earth that is
a different earth...

WHEN LOVE WITHDRAWS...

Even when love withdraws from me

It's never really gone!

**Example: like the waterfall,
from which the same amount of water flows
forever, is always the same...**

FOR A LONG TIME...

**For a long time
god kept
laughter and song
beyond our reach
eternally -**

**We only glimpse those times, a fading spark
That kindles a steady flame inside of us.
It's almost more than a person can endure
At such times...the remnants...in his heart...**

CONSIDER

Consider this fine old furniture,
So soothing, smooth and pure,
Seems somehow when compared to
the iron bed folded in the corner -
safe from tampering!
A hundred years ago it was crafted,
and now wobbles, rusted, insecure,
but with tales of untold love...
it wants desperately to review
eternity which eagerly doesn't want
a part of what has been the past.

IN THE LAST TRAIN

Oh my tears, where do you store
your burden when you no longer
flow from my eyes? Where
do you fall when no one cares?
Are you one of those who cry
alone without another knowing why?
You who must restore
life to what it was before?

HOUSES

**Houses filled with footsteps of the murdered
have the most steps on the stairs.**

**Houses with lame arms
have no banisters.**

**Houses of the blind
have the most light.**

**Houses filled with broken hearts
are built of cement.**

**Houses of death
have a bar in the basement.**

Post Scriptum

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