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OJUN AND BATAL

BY

MANFRED BIELER

(A gong is struck three times.)

MONK: It is impossible to see the three trees at the same time. In the morning one can only see the one in the east and the one in the middle. In the evening, the one in the west and the one middle. And at noon, none of them can be seen. That's because none of them can exist when the shadows are small.

ANNOUNCER: We present the play "Ojun and Batal" by Manfred Bieler.

(The sound of a gong is heard. Change of scene. Footsteps are heard in a long corridor. There is knocking on a door. Again. Door opens.)

OJUN: Batal.

BATAL: Ojun.

OJUN: Batal.

BATAL: I love you.

OJUN: I-love-you-I-love-you-I love you.

(The door is locked. Change of scene.)

Small room.)

OJUN: Have you eaten?

BATAL: I can't eat a thing.

OJUN: My grandmother had a saying: "He
who's sad has great hunger."

BATAL: Ojun, I have to go to Djunbal, in
the Gobi. Perhaps as soon as tomorrow.
They've discovered oil.

OJUN: Yes.

BATAL: I have to.

OJUN: And for how long? One month? Two? A
year?

(Telephone rings.)

BATAL: Don't answer it.

OJUN: I'm still on call for next ten
minutes. In any case the Sister knows I'm
here.

(Footsteps. She answers the phone.)

OJUN: I've already told you the before,
don't serve him any hard-boiled eggs.
He's Polish; a European. He hasn't got a
Mongolian stomach. What's his temperature
like? Good. I won't be coming back to the
station today. I'll be in my room. Good
night.

(She hangs up the phone.)

He arrived with some kind of delegation.
He couldn't stomach the food. He's got a
high fever.

BATAL: It's vital that we send for
someone from Irkuteh.

OJUN: We've already phoned.

(Pause.)

BATAL: Did you understand what I said
just now?

OJUN: Yes. You want to leave for Djunbal,
in the Gobi.

BATAL: I have to. I was at the head
office this morning. It's no use to
refuse. Before I even said a word, the
chief made it quite clear that I hadn't
been in Odessa for nothing in those three
years. - Ojun, I might have to stay in
Djumbal for a long time. Longer than a
year.

OJUN: That means...

BATAL: There's nothing there except a few
barracks. We'll have to sleep in tents
the first few days.

OJUN: Who - we?

BATAL: All of us.

OJUN: So?

BATAL: Yes. My wife will come with me.

OJUN: That's understandable. I've been
standing at the window for over half an
hour, waiting for you. I saw you come.

BATAL: Ojun...

OJUN: Even so, I didn't open the door right away. I wanted you to wait too. Can you stay the night?

BATAL: Yes.

OJUN: Wait a minute. Let me get the map.

(Footsteps.)

BATAL: From a distance. What are you going to do with a map?

OJUN: So, it's approximately six hundred kilometers.

BATAL: From Ulan-Bator to Djunbal? At least...

OJUN: Back up a bit. It was five hundred from Kiev to Odessa.

BATAL: But they had streets, railroads, airplanes. From here to Djunbal - that's desert.

OJUN: But there is a road. Now, we only have to find a place where we can meet. Approximately half way. In that way it'll be no more than three hundred kilometers for either of us. See here. How would that do? Pankjang.

BATAL: Pankjang?

OJUN: An old monastery. It's one of the seats of the third incarnation of the Buddha.

BATAL: (Laughs).

OJUN: What's so funny?

BATAL: You can't even drive. How do you think you'll get there?

OJUN: Then I'll just have to learn.

BATAL: Come here...

OJUN: No. Take a look at it first. And remember it. And don't forget it, Batal.

BATAL: Pankjang. The third incarnation of the Buddha. Where are you going now?

OJUN: I have to set the alarm.

BATAL: And then you'll come here?

OJUN: Yes.

(Sets the alarm clock.)

BATAL: And you won't leave again?

OJUN: No.

(Steps.)

There. Now you have me.

BATAL: I love you.

OJUN: I-love-you-I-love-you-I-love-you.

(A long drawn-out tone of a gong being struck. Change of scene. Out in the desert. A jeep appears in the distance, comes closer and stops. Footsteps.)

BATAL: (Shouts) Hello! Hello! Is anyone here?

(Steps.)

Hellooo!

MONK: (Appears out of nowhere) Welcome.

BATAL: Good day. Pankjang monastery - am I right?

MONK: Yes. But the monastery is closed.

BATAL: Can I stay the night?

MONK: Of course.

BATAL: What do you do?

MONK: The Lamas have instructed me to seek solitude.

BATAL: I thought you said that the monastery was closed.

MONK: Can one say of a monastery, which has only one monk, that it is still open?

BATAL: Ah, you're a monk?

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: I am terribly thirsty.

MONK: Come. I'll get you some goat's milk.

(Steps. Change of scene. Small room.)

BATAL: Cigarette?

MONK: Yes. Thank you.

(Striking of a match - smoking.)

MONK: To hermits, small indiscretions do not mean that they crave something from

the world. They are only inner signs of the return of transcendent wants.

BATAL: Hm.

MONK: Did you like the milk?

BATAL: Yes, it was good. - Dull here, eh?

MONK: Not really. Do you want another blanket?

BATAL: No. It's good as it is. - Are you all so friendly?

MONK: There are three types of friendships: that which is practiced by those who have set out to find enlightenment in their hearts; this friendship radiates out to all living things. That which is practiced by those who are further along the path, they find happiness only in the aetherial. And that which is practiced by those who have already learned to be patient and to wait for nothing; their friendship is completely without goal.

BATAL: Then I'm in luck that you belong to the first group.

MONK: Luck? Is it not the same as with animals who mistake a mirage for water? Is it not the same as...

BATAL: Forgive me if I must interrupt you. I'm waiting for someone.

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: A woman.

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: That won't disturb you, will it?

MONK: No.

BATAL: Tell me - is she already here?

MONK: No.

BATAL: Doesn't it interest you at all -
who I am?

MONK: Do you wish to tell me?

BATAL: My name is BATAL. I'm an engineer
working on oil rigs. Do you know what I
mean?

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: And the woman I'm waiting for is a
doctor from Ulan-Bator.

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: Yes. - But I'm married to another
woman, who lives in Djunbal.

MONK: Yes.

BATAL: Even so, I want to stay with this
doctor from Ulan-Bator under your roof
tonight.

MONK: I heard.

BATAL: I hope you have nothing against
that?

MONK: (After a pause) In Kao-tschang
there was a monastery, and in this
monastery there was an Abbot by the name
of Fu-hui.

BATAL: Uhhmm.

MONK: One day Nun Feng begged Fu-hui to go to Goldenflower Monastery, and a monk by the name of Tschih-yuan, and receive the highest Dharma from him.

BATAL: What?

MONK: I could give you another word for it, but you would still not understand. - Now, Fa-hui went on his way and came to Tschih-yuan. Instead of getting the desired teachings, Tschih-yuen offered him a jug of Wild berry wine. Fa-hui refused this unholy drink and left the Monk. In any even, he took the wine as a gift, so as not to hurt Tschih-yuen's feelings. While on his way he recalled the bidding of Nun Feng, reflected on his own ignorance, and drank the wine in one gulp.

BATAL: And got drunk.

MONK: Yes, very drunk. He became nauseous and lost consciousness. When he woke up, he was so ashamed of braking his vows, that he took a stick and thrashed himself half to death. And because of this, he came to the third state, which is known as "The good seperation from desire", and when he returned to Tschih-yuen, and Tschih-yuen asked, "Do you have it?" he replied, "Yes, I have it." And when he was on his way back to Kao-tschang manastery, Nun Feng crossed his path.

BATAL: We agree so much.

MONK: I hear a car.

BATAL: Really?

(Change of scene. Outside. A car motor is turned off.)

BATAL: You drove alone?

OJUN: (Laughing) I learned.

BATAL: How long did it take you?

OJUN: Is that so important? I'm here. And I'm tired.

BATAL: Everything is ready for you.

OJUN: Are we alone?

BATAL: There's a monk still here. A very nice chap. I don't know where he's gone. Come, Ojun...

(A gong is struck and drones for a long time.)

MONK: The three trees cannot be seen at the same time. In the morning one can only see the one in the west and the one in the middle. In the evening, the one in the east and the middle.

OJUN: And at noon?

BATAL: (Mimicks the monk) AT noon all three disappear, because they can't exist when the shadows are small. Right?

MONK: Yes.

OJUN: Well, I can bring the binoculars the next time.

MONK: That will not make the shadows

darker nor the light brighter.

BATAL: O, I wouldn't say that. There are some very good night glasses.

OJUN: I think he means it in a different way.

BATAL: Yes, he means everything in a different way.

OJUN: How far can one see from here?

MONK: Six hours, by this weather.

OJUN: Oh!

BATAL: He means, six hours by foot. That's half an hour by car.

OJUN: And have you ever observed the tree trees at the same time from here?

MONK: No.

OJUN: Is it possible even to make all three of them out--together?

MONK: Yes, I've heard about such a thing.

BATAL: But that is certainly another one of your secrets.

MONK: My predesessor has seen them.

OJUN: Then why haven't you seen them?

MONK: It almost killed him.

OJUN: Well, in that case I'd rather pass.

MONK: He saw them and died from his

enlightenment--

BATAL: The third Dharma.

MONK: --Or I should say: because of his
luck. That's something you might be
able to understand better.

BATAL: It's getting cold.

OJUN: And would you say--that it is the
rule for someone to die from one's
luck?

MONK: I wouldn't know.

BATAL: Come, Ojun, you're freezing.

OJUN: Yes. Good night.

MONK: Good night.

(Footsteps. Change of scene. Small room.)

BATAL: Are you asleep?

OJUN: No.

BATAL: You know, in Djunbal--

OJUN: Please don't! Don't speak of that.
Not now. Put your hand on my
forehead. Yes, like that. No. Put
your arms around me.

BATAL: Are you cold?

OJUN: I only want you to hold me. Tight.
And don't let go of me, even when you
fall asleep.

BATAL: I won't sleep.

OJUN: Do you love me?

BATAL: Yes.

OJUN: Say it again.

BATAL: Yes.

OJUN: Well?

BATAL: What?

OJUN: I thought you wanted to tell me something. Did you find oil?

BATAL: We wouldn't have gone otherwise.

OJUN: Don't let go of me.

BATAL: We drilled at a distance of six kilometers--everywhere oil. If our calculations are correct, then there should be a whole sea of oil under this part of the Gobi.

OJUN: Yes, and...?

BATAL: It's impossible to understand. --Where are you going? Why are you pulling away?

OJUN: What is so hard to understand?

BATAL: These riches. The refineries, gassworks, the synthetic processing...

OJUN: And you?

BATAL: What--and I?

OJUN: When are you coming back to Ulan-Bator?

BATAL: Soon.

OJUN: Right. When we get to see the three trees.

(Long gong.)

OJUN: Is it still snowing?

MONK: Yes.

OJUN: He won't find the way.

MONK: You must drink your tea.

OJUN: Yes. I was lucky. I was able to follow
the tracks of a truck. What are you doing?

MONK: I am massaging your feet.

OJUN: I don't feel it.

MONK: Yesterday I noticed that the mice have built
their tunnels all the way into the monastery
cellar. It's so cold. But today I also saw
a yellow antelope. She was running across
the road and stood still for a second when
I called to her. If it gets any colder she
will probably come back.

OJUN: What will you do with her?

MONK: She can stay in the barn, with the goats.

OJUN: (Suddenly) That's him!

MONK: No.

OJUN: Didn't you hear anything? A car?

MONK: No, that was the storm.

OJUN: It was a car. (Pause) Tell me something,
please.

MONK: (Like a litany)

"I am like a great cloud, which rises above the earth,
Which covers everything and obscures the heavens;
And this great cloud, filled with water,
Encircled by lightening,
Let's the lightening resound and refreshes all things.
Even so, this cloud also radiates HIM in this world."

OJUN: (Suddenly) There he is finally!

MONK: You should not say that.

BATAL: I eavesdropped. -What's with her?

OJUN: (After a pause) Is he there? - Are you there?

BATAL: Can't you see me? Don't you know me?

OJUN: I just fell asleep. (Awake) Yesterday I had the
night shift, and I couldn't get to sleep in the
daytime, because I couldn't stop thinking about
us seeing each other again.

BATAL: Is the Pole better?

OJUN: Him? For a long time already. He left four months
ago. He gave me his cigarette case.

BATAL: Ah.

OJUN: He was very nice. Really.

BATAL: Well, why not?

OJUN: Can you believe that he gave a Doctor in Warsaw
a cigarette case?

BATAL: He probably only meant well.

OJUN: Yes. But still. I was hurt. - Where is the monk?

BATAL: He went outside. - Did you like him?

OJUN: Who?

BATAL: The Pole.

OJUN: Oh yes. He reminded me of a someone I was seeing in Kiev. An actor.

BATAL: Wasn't that in Odessa?

OJUN: No. We didn't know each other then. I can't remember what the piece was called. I was only there four weeks, I think, and had the courage to keep the people on the stage apart. They all thought they were the same. I took note of the colour of their suits or their shoes, but when they changed between scenes, I was helpless. Only him, this one, I recognized again and again. I thought that he was playing his part for me. It was an English piece, in which a lot of tea was drunk and there was a lot of smoking. Or was it by Chekov? I would have to look it up in my diary, what the name of the piece was. In my case they played with real tea, so that they wouldn't pick up the empty can and pour too long. - They had real tea. And this man had a lady for a visitor, I think, that she was his girlfriend, or it was the murderess. It was actually a criminal piece. But then it probably wasn't Chekov - and when he poured her tea, he looked at me - I sat in the first row - , and he didn't notice the tea kettle, maybe he even forgot that they were using real tea, because he filled the cup and the tea spilled over to the plate and from the plate to the table, until the audience began to laugh...

BATAL: And then?

OJUN: Nothing!

END

Translation by Klaus J. Gerken 1974

Anita Lerek

...

Cry

I see minds,
demented by plague
and internment,

1

Who feed and roll inside her darkness.
Noah, do they caress, assault, sicken?
Are the animals frightened?

The vessel is a prayer pinging in
rain-ocean madness. Breathing
holds them. Such is resistance

2

Who are young actors from the Orphanage
in the Warsaw ghetto, performing
Tagore's play, on July 19, 1942,

Who transport the audience
to grazing savannahs to chew
and re-chew metaphors
for slaughter.

Amal, the sick child in Tagore's Calcutta,
dreamt he would receive a letter
that his king and the royal physician
were on their way. Then he could die well.

August 5, 1942. The performance
continues. Ignoring fever and tummy
aches, guns and despair, 200 children,
crisply dressed, carrying blue bundles,
depart on trains shrieking east
to death camps, just as the script says.
Sleep is coming, darkness is coming.
The children know they will join Amal.

Dreaming, they resist.

Three

Who are in New York City,
April 1, 2020, holed up in this
last place, chewing,
regurgitating last words,
saving the leftovers,

bodies wrapped in orange
plastic, endlessly offered up
on plywood trays,

Who are smudges on exploding
graphs, of 1000, 10,000, 100,000,
millions of ashes unmarked,

Who is there to speak?
Who is there to listen?

Four

Who are prisoners, in Houston,
in Miami, in Kingston, in Joliette,
on 5... 25 ... 40-year repeats

Time is a limp body that lies
beside them, a ghost they activate
by fingering a calendar,
a phantom breast,

Who crush ants just to make
something happen,

Who will fly to the tops of pin dreams
to reduce time and body to nothing,

For whom virus is no big deal,
just a stroke in the grand
design of their erasure

Five

Who are inside workplace fullness,
now cast out, wheezing plaster
in paralysis and need,
waiting for orders,

to wake up suddenly, locked
into bedrooms, a harvest
of fear, of deadly flowers

pushing up,

Who are spouses, who are not,
rather, inner organs,
crumpled socks found
on laundry tables,
unrecognizable,

as lovers, first bearing galaxies
of cream delicacies,
turned stranger, mouths
as dead stars, cold, shuttered

Six

We who are flaneurs, wandering
through dead streets; in cafes,
jawing trauma, opening and closing,

It is time to return to her to
her fullness, to ride the threat,

We who are inside,
time holds us as prayer
hollowed into monster waves

in forgetfulness, still breath,
I must listen, protect—
but who will record her sobs?

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V1.3

Joseph Farley

Cycle

Think without thinking.

Dream without dreaming.

Know without knowing.

Touch without contact.

Live without living.

Die without dying.

Be without being.

Arrive before you begin.

Long Summer

As the summer stretches into November
the dried out trees remind of those
that once shed leaves in multi-colors,
the brisk walks in the early chill,
the smoke of fires in the woods
round which youths gathered
to celebrate being young,
learn to get drunk,
and maybe lose their virginity.
Air conditioning at Thanksgiving
is not the same, the shrinking days
less touched with magic,
and all the soot we make and breath
only darkens our lungs and memories.

All Praise and Hallelujah

Of all the gods I've worshiped,

you're by far the best.

For only fifty dollars

you gave me peace and rest.

Though the fleas and bedbugs

will pinch and take their tithe,

on the morning after

you will bless the door,

and send me through the garden

into the world once more.

Baah!

Blessed be the sheep
for they make good eating
and their hair can be made
into clothes,
and if you shout or scream
long and loud enough
they will believe
much of what you say,
and head to the polls
as willingly as the damned.

Work is Hell

Your devil and my devil

don't see eye to eye.

Your angel and my angel

often come to blows.

But society and the functioning

of any organization

requires us all to be civil,

at least in public.

I see the flames and scythes

behind your smile,

hear the cracking of bones

in all your words.

I know the knife will be polite,

placed in the center of the back

where I cannot defend.

And I know if I had the upper hand

you'd be the one on the watch

for cold steel in the board room

or the hallway heading home.

Ghost from the Past

At night we still fuck,

but only when I'm asleep.

Your body came from some god's hands.

The rest, I know, was born in hell.

Having known the good and the bad

I miss those moments when you dripped

in honey sweetness in writhing fits.

I Could Tell the Pharaoh

The shaman and the psychiatrist
give different meanings to my dreams.
As for me, I don't try to understand..
Let the show continue,
all the weirdness and the glory.

Looking back I know
the third of my existence
spent sleeping
may have been the best.

What a rush.
Nothing to rival it.
Not even the best
of my waking days.

Post Scriptum

worn out

defeated

you have won

with your ignorance

and hate

burn my books

delete my memories

the world is yours

i will be happy

in my grave

kjg 1022pm 5 sep 2029

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