

“STARTING UNDER ONE RÉGIME AND ENDING IN ANOTHER”

Translations from Romanian by Prof. Dr. Lidia Vianu (Bucharest) and Anne Stewart. The poems are from a competition anthology titled *Saying No to Communism – 30 Years Later*, which gathers together work by younger poets for whom communism is closer to a historical concept (here, Cristina Botilcă and Iulianu Miu), and those who lived under communism, either as adults or children (here, Monica Manolachi and Carmen Sorescu), and experienced the fall.

Winter day

It was the winter holiday and we were playing Scrabble.
Calea Văcărești filled with a strange humming noise:
not of trams, trolley buses, car sirens,
not the clatter of hoofs and carts.

It was voices chanting Freedom, Freedom,
the same voices as inside factories,
a long, painful, woeful echo
and I did not yet have all the letters
to lay my word on the board.

I rushed to the window and saw it all:
holding flags, their arms raised,
they strode, wearing heavy coats
ushankas made of sheepskin, just like my grandad's.

They were heading for the town centre, but there was no
centre, not since the earthquake in '77, collapsing
all the blocks of flats, everyone turfed out,
out of their dreams, driven to madness or suicide,
some were just leaving with no idea of destination—
it looked like a procession, like some sort of wedding,
but with no bride and no groom.

Mother tried to phone at lunch time:
“Don't go out!” but all the lines were down.
The field across the road was all snow and scars,
there was no door that could be got out of,
no more bitter cherries from sellers at the gates.

It was winter. We had to understand that.
Death. Birth. Life. All of it at once.
Heroism, we'd been taught about it for years in school
and now, here it was, happening, live, on our streets,
where we'd licked candy floss in summer
and played “What's the time, Mr Wolf?!”

The city bustled, the metro, people came and went,
as the meaning of it all sank in,
and subway trips went on forever
starting under one régime and ending in another.

In broad daylight, turtle doves fell from the sky,
black-and-white televisions blinked euphorically,
screens came alive with unexpected colours,
branches flew from the trees,
fires alive with promise lit the night.

I left myself behind for years on end,
I would follow myself as we do now on Google,
I would say to that girl hi, how are you?
By the time the answer came, she had already gone,
separations never hurt,
I would glide across the abyss between us,
I invented linguistic seasons,
I have and have and have, you have and have and have
dreamt, failed, resumed.

Had I been able to go out then,
I would have seen the queues snaking around absence,
I would have heard the keys turning in the keyhole,
Dacian words, *barză*, *varză*, *viezure*, *mânz*,
I would have sensed carbide lamps from barricades,
I would have intuited locks, dampness, rust,
the eyes of empty dark rooms,
the candles and smoke of a memorable Christmas,
I would have enveloped this world in evening,
I would even have seen you at your window,
a polyhedron with a heart
playing non-stop Scrabble.

Monica Manolachi

note: barză, varză, viezure, mânz, stork, cabbage, badger, colt

Every Woman

Carries on her back just one sunset for the only man she has ever loved
Every woman has a slope, a burnt spot on her back, where rain no longer falls
Every woman has one silence and one death for the only man she has ever loved
Every woman has a glorious end, an amputation of dreams, one armour only
Which can be pierced, which can be defeated only once, once only
There comes a time when love is no longer woven with threads of flesh, when it is darned with jute
As if facing a battered sack, at least once in her life, every woman sits
On the edge of her soul, gazing into the abyss, going round and round her own body
The same as birds feed their fledglings till a day comes when they give up
Every woman almost, though not quite, touches her lover's heart
During one night alone, and that will be her chance to steal chests filled with gold
She will have a thousand hands and all that follows will be no more than successful or failed
Repetitions of that one night, because, during that night
She has a thousand eyes that see all his entrails, his dreams and his protective stars
Just once and once alone will she be able to sew almost invisibly to anyone ever
The two souls into one: only once does a woman cross the river
And if she stops on the other side—there is, there will be no way back

Carmen Sorescu

(untitled)

The flowers on the table in the hallway,
the flowers you brought yesterday,
are all dusty.
“Without flowers, this house,
is... is... just colourless.”
You failed to see the stag grazing in the hallway,
the swallows raising their heads above the bookcase,
the long necks of the swans that reached the ceiling lights.
You failed to see in the bedroom the sand leading to the sea,
or the fir tree needles in the kitchen,
or the lime flowers in the closet.
You stepped into the hallway and stumbled on a log,
almost cursed,
flung the plastic flowers onto my table.
You looked content.
“Without flowers, this house,
is... is... just colourless.”
I smiled, it was not hard to understand.
I could tell you had never seen real flowers.

Cristina Botîlcă

Back to Square One

The mud of “how are you?” chokes me!
My arse!
My life is perfect.
Perfect failure, I mean.
I take my overdose of virtual reality.
Laser strikes again: fleas and cheetah cubs.
Diagnosis, radio, gamma.
Lots of entrepreneurs, lifestyle, food blogs and vegan!
Cosmic scrap and animal therapy.
Vietnamese pig dressed in a pink frock.
Attention in excess is bad for your health.
My ears ring. My eyes hurt.
Why can't I find it explained anywhere?
On TV, in legislation?
I have such a craving for failure,
For Paris in the wind, for the song of the chaffinch!
What the hell am I doing here, in this pox of a game called
“Best Kitsch Bitch!”

Iulianu Miu