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“Ready for Anything That Comes my Way.” Twelve Poems by Vasile Baghiu

CRISTINA SAVIN
Monash University

Vasile Baghiu is a Romanian poet who has published seven volumes of poetry and several volumes of fiction and short stories. He coined the concept of *chimerism*, which defines and shapes his identity as a poet (Baghiu 2017). The concept, thoroughly explained in his four *Manifestos of Chimerism*¹, has been widely accepted by the Romanian literary milieu. This translation and commentary reflects on Baghiu’s poetic style through the lens of *chimerism*, and on the process of translating into English twelve poems selected from two volumes: *Madame Bovary’s Wanderings* (1996) and *Himerus Alter in Rhineland* (2003). This piece also aims to demonstrate the uniqueness of Baghiu’s poetry, which resides in the innovative fusion of imagery, self-discovery, escapism and a sense of freedom.

Baghiu was born in Romania in 1965, where he currently resides. He began his working life as a nurse in a tuberculosis sanatorium. After seven years, while reading Gustave Flaubert’s travel diary, he imagined what it would be like to be away from the isolation of the sanatorium and to travel the world through a fictitious alter ego, later named *Himerus Alter*, a ubiquitous character residing in a “parallel reality” (Baghiu, 4). In this way, a poet was born, whose imagination knows no boundaries. Inspired by Jules de Gautier’s essay on *bovarysme* (2009) and by Fernando Pessoa’s work (1993), Baghiu coined the term *chimerism* – a cross between *bovarysme* and literature, defined as a tendency to escape everyday realities and to create a parallel universe, a counter-reality in which one lives (Baghiu, 4). The term, which has since been widely accepted by the Romanian literary milieu, signalled a new direction in Romanian poetry and resulted in the publication of his first volume of poetry: *Madame Bovary’s Wanderings*.² Baghiu went on to publish six other volumes of poetry, several volumes of fiction and short stories, and four *Manifestos of Chimerism*. He is also a prolific blogger.

Baghiu has received numerous accolades in his native Romania and his work has been widely reviewed in a number of reputable journals. Notable reviews highlight the uniqueness of his poetic style and identify the duality of reality-memory as a recurrent motif in his poems. Ana Blandiana, a leading contemporary Romanian author, writes in one review: “[F]or this young man [...] poetry is like an oxygen mask, a survival mode and a weapon against the loneliness and disease that surround him” (Baghiu 258). She continues: “[T]he verse flows calmly, serenely, entirely free of embellishments [...] his phrase is uncomplicated, he expresses his feelings in a quiet, reserved manner. And yet, his poetry cascades impetuously from every verse, and each verse could function equally well as prose” (Baghiu 258). Essayist Roxana Sorescu identifies some of the innovative elements of Baghiu’s writing. She notes:

[T]he most striking characteristic of this poet’s imaginary world is his capacity to live simultaneously in two parallel spheres: one that belongs to reality, the other to memory or fantasy, in which a fertile ambiguity is maintained. The real world is one of pain, disease, hospitals and enclosed spaces from which one can only escape with the help of imagination. Hence the need to create an imaginary, compensatory world [...] populated equally by real people and fictitious characters.

(Baghiu 259)

¹ The first two *Manifestos* were published in 1998; the third *Manifesto* was published in 2006 and the fourth in 2010.

² All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Writer Gellu Dorian takes a more organic view of Baghiu's poetry and asks rhetorically whether he will end up being known as "the poet of the sanatorium," since "his poetry has the endurance of an antibiotic-resistant chronic bacillus" (Baghiu 260).

Baghiu is one of the most prominent poets of his generation, a member of PEN International, and the recipient of four writer's residencies in Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Scotland (Banipal). My decision to translate his poetry was influenced by a number of reasons: his unusual, thought-provoking poetic style; his profound interest in enduring, universal themes such as identity, self-discovery and freedom; the innovative *mélange* of the elements that define the concept of *chimerism* and their incorporation into the realm of poetry, thus making the translator's work both interesting and challenging. I am also drawn to the fact that he uses his writing as a vehicle to voice his political, social and cultural views and to the fact that his poems are virtually unknown to the Australian readership.

Chimerism and chimeric poetry

The concept of *chimerism* is closely linked to Baghiu's personal journey to becoming a poet, shaped by the isolation of the sanatorium and the oppressive totalitarian regime of the 1980s. He strove to escape the regime through writing. As he revealed in one interview,³ he knew instinctively that this creative outlet would allow him to become "someone else" and to "wander through cities and places" (Baghiu 2017) he had never seen, but dreamt about. Oneiric at first, these reflections crystallised over time into the four major elements representative of his writing, thus closing the circle of what would become the concept of *chimerism*:

[I]maginary journey, a way of escaping the socio-political constraints and the cultural provincialism of the time; *disease*, which represented a reality devoid of superficiality and flippancy; *transfiguration*, a way of creating new experiences; and *science*, seen as poetic adventure in a space that has rarely been explored through poetic means.

(Baghiu 2017)

These elements are intrinsic to all of Baghiu's poems, and it is from this perspective that I approached my translation of his verse.

Baghiu confesses that "the driving force behind *chimerism* was Thomas Mann's Bildungsroman *The Magic Mountain*, along with poems depicting sickness and human suffering," which he read throughout his teenage years. It was his conviction at the time that "working with the sick would give him insights into life and confidence to write" (Baghiu 2017). But what came out of that experience was something quite different: first, the realisation that "poetry does not represent one's ability to put words on paper, but rather one's capacity to see and understand life" (Baghiu 2017); and second, the "metamorphosis of the sanatorium from a centre of gravity and equilibrium" of his day-to-day life and a "place of isolation and professional formation" into a theme that "slowly evolved into the *chimeric* world, a form of freedom that helped me escape totalitarianism" – the embodiment of personal, geographical and intellectual isolation and oppression (Baghiu 2017). This sense of freedom has become "a central theme" of his writing and "a constant companion" (Baghiu 2017) throughout his life.

Chimerism and 'chimeric poetry', as I discovered in the process of translating Baghiu's verse, are powerful frameworks for contemplating and dreaming freely about the world. Enter Himerus Alter, the poet's alter ego, a character "born out of desperation" and invented to "express frustration at the lack of freedom" – he who speaks from a different perspective and

³ The quotes in the section *Chimerism and chimeric poetry* are selected from a personal interview I organized with the poet and which is referenced in the Bibliography. I conducted the interview in Romanian and translated it into English.

gives the poet the freedom to daydream (Baghiu 2017). Through extrapolation, chimeric poetry gives the reader permission to make a choice, and just like Himerus Alter, the reader is able to meander around the world through a somewhat “detached poetic sensibility, free of tensions and full of understanding” (Baghiu 2017). *Chimerism* gives the poet (and, by extension, the reader) the chance to live multiple lives in multiple ways, as different personas and embodiments, and to obliterate metaphorical borders in order to transform spaces and appropriate new worlds. But *chimerism* is not just an answer to individual solitude and transformation; it is, in Baghiu’s words, also a “solution to the renewal of Romanian poetry, to achieving freedom from provincialism and its limitations” by offering “a new frame of reference” and, unapologetically, “a metaphysical way out, a retreat from the passive-aggressive reality” as well as a move away from the “formalism and fatigue” that seems to characterise the contemporary Romanian literary milieu (Baghiu 2017). Baghiu is an *écrivain engagé*; he uses chimeric poetry as a vehicle to voice his political, social and cultural views, which argue against the “postmodernist trend that dominates the artistic and literary space” and instead offers “a psychological portrait” of the contemporary Romanian poetry that aspires to align with, and become part of, world literature, though it is somewhat “limited by language, cultural isolation and shady political games” (Baghiu 2017). Through chimeric poetry Baghiu offers an opportunity to develop “a state of un-consolated *bovarysme* into a transforming space where a new reality can be imagined” (Baghiu 2017).

Translating Baghiu’s poetry

After reading many of Baghiu’s poems, I opted to translate a select few from *Madame Bovary’s Wanderings* (Baghiu 66-95) and *Himerus Alter in Rhineland* (Baghiu 173-209) as I felt they best reflected the poet’s inner journey towards freedom and self-discovery. Further considerations included stylistic features, register and poetic structure, but also certain aspects of Romanian language and culture to which I wanted to introduce Australian readers. My overall engagement with Baghiu’s poetry had three dimensions: first, that of a reader of the source text (ST), attempting to uncover all its mysteries and to appreciate the complexities of meaning, subtle implications and cultural inferences (Grossman 9); second, that of the translator seeking to transpose the ST into a text that functions well in English (Baker & Saldanha 196); and third, that of a *re-reader*, this time of a translated text that tells a very similar story to the original. The ST features stylistic complexities reflective of the fact that Baghiu’s poetry is deeply introspective. The verse is crisp and economical, even cryptic at times, yet each poem tells a well-rounded story; overall, visual image takes precedence over rhythm and sound. Each poem becomes a *tableau*, and as a translator I found that the most demanding task was capturing both the visual elements and the meaning behind them, ultimately coming up with a poem that preserves the freshness and authenticity of the original. It often felt as if I was trying to re-create a painting, rather than a poem, in English. Perhaps the most arresting example is “That Day in Rome,” an exceptionally visual poem which I considered as a whole, to the point of disregarding the individual verse. Even from the first reading it became clear that searching for ‘equivalents’ to express such rich visual elements was not only futile, but a recipe for disaster. And while it was not impossible to find such equivalents, I felt that it would do an injustice to the original text and rob the reader of a unique poetic experience. The visual image in the verses “părul tău flutura despletit / pe fundalul mulțimii compacte” evoked Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* (1889); in particular the swirling, wave-like shapes rolling above the village, which I translated as “your hair was undone in the wind, undulating / against the backdrop of a dense crowd.” The translation of “mortul impozant” as “stately corpse” (rather than the more literal ‘imposing’ or ‘commanding’) brings an element of grandiosity, more appropriate to the description of a great poet’s funeral. The contrast between the undulating hair, the compact crowd and the stately corpse creates both a feeling of movement and stillness.

Another stylistic aspect of Baghiu's poetry is intertextuality (Venuti 158) in the form of linguistic, semantic and aesthetic features that carry specific cultural connotations; in particular, location markers that situate a scene in a specific historical and geographical place (Pym 85). The poem "Once Upon a Time I Was Looking For You on Lips cani Street" features such location markers. A very familiar place for the Romanian reader, Lips cani is the *axis mundi* of Bucharest's old town. Constructed in late 16th century as a commercial hub, nowadays it represents the symbolic centre of bygone days, and its charming buildings and narrow cobblestone arcades attract steady streams of tourists. In this particular instance I chose to use foreignization as a translation strategy (Venuti 20), to give Australian readers a flavour of Romanian culture. The poem, which begins with the words "once upon a time," brings the weight of the past into the present. Baghiu's masterful use of adjectives ("trembling years," "frosty racecourse") and turns of phrases ("lives paved with winter holidays," "spring simmered under the layer of ice," "too old to carry its inflorescence on our shoulders") creates a certain luminosity that emerges from the darkness of war. The confluence of sound, sense, image and emotion in this poem posed a challenge for translation, and I sought to find the right balance of all these elements in order to re-create the poem in English (Grossman 95).

As noted above, *chimerism* gives the poet a chance to live multiple lives, in multiple ways, as different personas; and I believe this sentiment is beautifully captured in the poem "I try to fly with myself as one" – a poem that reveals the dual presence of the author and his alter ego. The poem embodies some of the most striking aspects of Baghiu's poetic style as is reflective of his artistic sensibility, as it represents the unity of the author's semantic and expressive intentions – the poet is utterly immersed in his language and inseparable from it, a pure and direct expression of his own intention (Bakhtin 285). The poem is a narrative, the language is simple and its message powerful: in his journey through places he did not know existed, the poet becomes one with his soul under the weight of time – everything he experiences today is already a step ahead. The *mélange* of past, present and future becomes a single moment in time as the poet escapes his own condition in a journey that unsettles him. The difficulty associated with the translation of this poem was to capture that precise feel by which the sense of freedom is achieved. After much consideration, I decided to be as concise as possible, and to keep very close to the original, thus moving the reader toward the writer (Schleiermacher 49). I felt that some translation loss was necessary – for instance, I translated "deși fusesem prevenit / cum sunt mereu prevenit" as "even though I had been warned / as I always am," omitting the word "prevenit / warned" in the second line. To strengthen the underlying message in the target text, I chose to translate "m-am reconectat la propriul meu suflet" as "I am one with my soul" (rather than the more literal 'I reconnected with my own soul') as I wanted to re-emphasise the symbolic "one" of the title and final line.

Vasile Baghiu's poetry is complex and meaningful. It follows closely the *mélange* of the four dimensions representative of his writing: imaginary journey, disease, transfiguration and science. In my translation of the twelve poems presented here I sought to provide a thinking space that captures and highlights the richness of imagery and the deeply introspective nature of Baghiu's poetry. As a translator, I have focused on the stylistic complexities of the individual verse and of each poem as a whole, on the intertextuality expressed as linguistic, semantic and aesthetic features that carry specific cultural connotations, aiming to give the reader a taste of Romanian historical and geographical places, and I have endeavoured to capture the delicate balance between the poetry's key themes: *chimerism*, escapism, freedom and self-discovery. It is my hope that the reader will thoroughly enjoy Baghiu's beautiful, inspiring work.

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**Selected Poems
By Vasile Baghiu**

Incerc sa zbor odata cu mine

Presiunea timpului diferă cu vârsta,
pentru că tot ce trăiesc astăzi
e deja un pic mai înainte.
Mergând spre Vest,
alături de un cuplu tânăr de nemți
într-un zbor care mă tulbură,
pentru că dorim să lungim o zi începută,
însoțind soarele.
Norii îmi aduc aminte de lucruri plăcute,
iar ca să simt căldura soarelui aici,
la mii de metri înălțime,
am pus mâna pe hublou.
M-am reconectat la propriul meu suflet
și navighez cu încredere
prin locuri pe care nici eu nu le știam.
Sînt pentru o clipă derutat,
deși fusesem prevenit,
cum sînt mereu prevenit.
Se întîmplă cam la fel: vine cineva trist
care tulbură chicoteala
și este mereu ceva important de spus.
Comandantul aeronavei
ne spune că suntem deasupra Germaniei,
în timp ce eu încerc sa zbor odată cu mine.

În acea zi la Roma

În acea zi la Roma treceau funeraliile unui mare poet,
sub un soare nemilos, flori și parfumuri discrete.
N-am reușit să trecem strada vreun ceas.
Priveam cortegiul greoi.
Sus, în balcoane, pe cerul albastru, înflorise lămâiul
și părul tău flutura despletit
pe fundalul mulțimii compacte
care petrecea mortul impozant.

După cină ne-am instalat pe punte

După cină ne-am instalat pe punte la lumina
lampioanelor,
cu țigări și cafele.
Baletul de chelneri,
stelele chioare deasupra apei călduțe cu valuri,

**Selected Poems
By Vasile Baghiu
Translated by Cristina Savin**

I Try to Fly with Myself As One

The weight of time changes as I age,
because everything I experience today
is already a step ahead.
Travelling West,
next to a young German couple
this journey unsettles me,
as we want to make the day longer
following the light of the sun.
Clouds bring pleasant memories,
and to feel the sunlight,
here, at a thousand meters in the air,
I touched the porthole.
I am one with my soul
and I navigate with confidence
through places I didn't know existed.
I am momentarily confused,
even though I have been warned,
as I always am.
Things happen the same way: someone sad
comes along
who interrupts the chuckle
and there is always something important to be
said.
The aircraft pilot
informs us that we are travelling above
Germany
while I try to fly with myself as one.

That Day in Rome

That day in Rome the obsequies of a great poet
proceeded under a merciless sun, flowers and
delicate scents.
We could not cross the street for an hour or so.
We watched the slow procession.
Up in the balconies, on the blue sky, the lemon
tree blossomed
and your hair was undone in the wind,
undulating
against the backdrop of a dense crowd
accompanying the stately corpse.

After Dinner We Sat On the Deck

After dinner we sat on the deck under the
lamplights,
with cigarettes and coffees.
Waiters were moving in slow motion,

sufletul nostru, în fine, electrizat de sentimente domestice.
Aveam să plec, să uit, am oferit de băut la toată lumea,
neghiobi care uitau cât de scurtă e viața.
La Los Angeles, la începutul acestui secol,
mi-am luat o cameră modestă,
Great Northern se numea hotelul,
avea o firmă ascunsă după o-ngrămădire de schele,
și m-am gândit acolo la viitor.
Afară ploua cu găleata
și în cealaltă cameră unul fluiera și cânta.

Peștii înotau în sus pe firul cascadei

Peștii înotau în sus pe firul cascadei biruitoare
trebuia să strigi ca să te aud,
deși erau atât de puțin necesare cuvintele,
mai târziu mi-ai mărturisit că ele te-au amăgit
totdeauna,
poate de aceea mă porți prin expoziții, prin săli
de concerte,
însă nu știi, zău nu știi din ce ar trebui să
construiesc
aride versuri,
poate din câteva frunze, pietre, nisip,
eșarfele tale, călimara,
vrăbiile moarte pe pervazul ferestrei (din
greșeală
ai presărat acolo otravă pentru șoareci),
poate ilustratele elvețiene cu cerul albastru,
ceașca plină de ceai în care a căzut acum un
păianjen,
sau fotografiile cu noi în fața unui arbore
scheletic,
ne-am risipit, un șuvoi mai aprig, destul de
incomod,
ne-a adus odată cu primăvara,
cu sloiurile,
cu frunzele aceluia arbore.

Pentru a fi dispus la orice

Stau la o masă violet
într-o sală de așteptare a aeroportului din
Amsterdam,
acultînd monotona voce
care avertizează de finalul pistei rulante
și limbile amestecate ale unei Europe
care pare să se așeze în sfîrșit.
Nu știi dacă voi găsi ceea ce caut.
Privind elegantele avioane rulînd pe piste

the stars were dim above the lukewarm, wavy
waters
and tranquil emotions stirred our souls.
I had to leave it all behind, I offered drinks to
everyone,
fools who forgot that life was short.
In Los Angeles, at the turn of the century,
I took a low-cost room
at the Great Northern hotel,
its sign was obscured by a mass of scaffolding,
and I paused there, reflecting on my future.
The rain was pouring outside
and in another hotel room someone was
whistling and singing.

Fish Were Swimming Up the Waterfall

Fish were swimming up the undefeated
waterfall
you had to call out to be heard,
although there was no need for words,
but later you confessed they have always
deceived you,
maybe that's why you take me to art displays
and concert halls,
and yet how can I carve
hollow verses
from leaves and rocks and sand perhaps,
your scarves, the inkwell,
dead sparrows on the windowsill (which you
dusted,
unwittingly, with rat poison),
maybe the blue sky on Swiss postcards,
the cup of tea in which a spider has now fallen,
or photos taken in front of an emaciated tree,
we consumed ourselves, a fiery torrent disturbed
us
and carried us along with the spring,
with floating ice,
and leaves from that tree.

Ready for Anything That Comes My Way

Seated at a violet table
in a waiting room at the Amsterdam airport,
I listen to the monotonous voice
warning travellers of the end of the walkway
and to the blended languages of a Europe
that seems, at long last, to have found itself.
I am searching for something I may never find.
Watching elegant planes rolling on runways
I sense my perennial regrets departing,

am sentimentul că regretele mele adunate în timp
își iau zborul unul câte unul de pe un aeroport în care eu sînt un străin.
Eu sînt un străin
atunci cînd încerc să mă apropii
de ceea ce aş vrea să fiu cel mai mult
și un om de-al casei
cînd plec departe.
O voce mă avertizează în olandeză și engleză
că e timpul să mă ridic de la masa violet
și să mă îmbarc pentru Köln.
De fapt e timpul să mă ridic din propria mea
greutate sufletească
și să mă îmbarc
pentru a fi dispus la orice.

Fragmente de vitraliu, copilăria

Fragmente de vitraliu, copilăria învelită în pluș,
restul era o indicibilă rumoare, iar cei dinafară,
săltându-se în vîrfurile degetelor să vadă,
complicau și mai mult lucrurile,
cerul neavînd importanță, și zâmbetul meu,
temerar,
s-a pierdut în învîlmășeală,
acum reînnoit de alte speranțe, mereu
schimbătoare,
larma școlariilor,
onestele primăveri din anii aceștia strănii,
felul eroic de a privi lumea,
îngăduința care ne ajută să trăim omenește,
aversele de fericire câteodată pe stradă.

Undeva aproape de Canal Grande

Undeva aproape de Canal Grande repetam
Concertul pentru oboi și orchestră de Marcelo,
într-o capelă părăsită.
Niște nebuni, au zis, niște nebuni, dacă stau în
dărăpănătura aceea.
Într-o zi îi vom găsi sub ziduri.
Însă noi repetam cu inimile-ndurerate.
Mai cu seamă o colegă a ieșit cu ochii în lacrimi
și nu am mai continuat în seara aceea.
Nu știi ce a fost atunci și unde ne-am risipit,
atât de indiferenți la ceea ce ni se întîmpla cu
adevărat,
departe de umezeala care cojea zidurile umede.
Dar tu mă insoțeai peste tot,
zile în șir pe marginea canalelor fără să vorbim,
de parcă am fi prevăzut vremea aceasta
în care conversam ca să ascundem ceva

one by one, from this airport where I remain an
outsider.
I am an outsider
when I try to become
the man I want to be
and a family man
when I travel afar.
A voice informs me in Dutch and English
that is now time to leave the violet table
and board for Köln.
In truth, it's time to leave my qualms and to
board,
ready for anything that comes my way.

Fragments of Stained Glass, Childhood

Fragments of stained glass, velvety childhood,
what's left is a chaotic whisper, and the
outsiders
rose on their tiptoes to see inside
and made things more complicated.
The sky became irrelevant and my impetuous
smile
lost in the confusion
is now renewed by other hopes, forever
changing,
schoolkids vociferating,
the candid springs in those strange years,
when we were facing the world without fear
and strove to be compassionate,
as torrents of happiness sometimes cascaded in
the street.

Somewhere Near Canal Grande

Somewhere near Canal Grande we were
rehearsing
Marcelo's Concerto for oboe and orchestra,
in an abandoned chapel.
Those lunatics, they said, lunatics if they stay in
that derelict place
Some day they will be buried alive.
And yet, we rehearsed with heavy hearts.
An artist left in tears
and we didn't continue that night.
I don't know what happened then and where we
vanished,
so careless about the truth in our lives,
away from the dew tearing off the damp walls.
But you accompanied me everywhere,
day after day along the canals and no words
were spoken,

ce se poate spune mai simplu,
tranșant ca o sentință.

O poză în mâinile generațiilor viitoare

Scaunele din grădină
pe care am stat aseară la discuții literare și
politice
au fost răsturnate de furtună înspre dimineață.
La radio se aud aplauze,
în timp ce la TV prognoza pentru mâine e bună.
Viața mea iese victorioasă
în fața unui public doritor să afle ceva despre
mine,
dar apare învinsă în mine însumi.
Câteva voci de sub ramurile cu cireșe coapte
mă întrebau unde îmi este familia,
iar eu mă și vedeam
într-o fotografie cu familia mea,
departe de conferințe, lecturi
și alte lucruri de acest fel,
o fotografie la care se uită niște ochi sclipitori
ai unor draguțe persoane
din generațiile viitoare.

Ca o vorbă de duh

Aceste mici despărțiri ne pregătesc din timp,
iar eu sînt aici și nu foarte departe,
sub norii unui cer german din albume,
pedalînd pe o șosea pustie dintr-o pădure a
Westfaliei,
unde un huhurez cîntă ca în România.
Palpită în mine ceva de demult
și mă simt de parcă am fost oprit
de ceva ce nu înțeleg ce poate să fie,
așa cum unele păsări sînt oprite brusc
din zborul lor avîntat
de geamul imens al verandei casei Böll.

Ieri dimineață era un graur sub fereastră,
iar azi am găsit o rîndunică.
Așa am scris aceste rînduri,
întristat deodată și ascultînd mai atent în mine
vibrațiile grave ale unei coarde sensibile și
păcătoase
care încearca să bată mai departe,
ca o vorbă de duh
ce spune mai mult
decît pare să spună la prima vedere.

as if we made provisions for this day
when we hid behind a conversation
to voice a thought
as sharp as a death sentence.

A Picture in the Hands of Future Generations

The garden chairs
where we sat last night debating literature and
politics
were overturned by storm at dawn.
I hear clapping on the radio,
while on TV tomorrow's weather forecast is
good.
My life surfaces victorious
to a public who wants to learn something about
me,
but appears defeated within myself.
Under branches heavy with ripe cherries, some
voices
asked where my family was,
and I saw myself
in a picture with my family,
away from conferences, lectures
and other similar events,
a picture that someone nice
from future generations contemplates
with luminous eyes.

A Witty Remark

These brief separations prepare us for later,
and I am here and yet not far away,
under the clouds of a German sky from picture
books,
pedalling on a deserted road in a Westphalian
forest,
where the song of an owl reminds me of
Romania.
Something vibrates in me from days of yore
and I feel as if I'm being held back
by something I could not understand,
the same way birds are suddenly brought to a
stop
in their high-aimed flight
by the gigantic window on the Böll house
veranda.

Yesterday morning there was a starling under
my window,
And today I found a swallow.
And that prompted me to write these words,
suddenly saddened and listening to the sombre,
sinful vibrations
of my own voice trying to palpitate even more,

Astăzi când e soare

Astăzi când e soare ar trebui să fii cu totul străină
printre aceste dărâmături unde am ajuns din întâmplare
discutând un subiect de literatură,
am tot căutat linia, granița fluctuantă
în primăverile când ne bucuram de înflorire
și de florile astea sufocante,
parcă n-aș fi eu insumi, nu-mi este la îndemână
când vin pauzele lungi, tăcerile,
când scormonim absenți cu vârful pantofilor
bucățile de moloz, cu privirea în jos.
N-ai crezut că se poate spune despre cineva că e
plin de sine,
preocupat de corpul și inima lui,
sau de creierul lui învelit în meninge
protectoare,
învelite în oase late și piele și plete
din care tu știi că nu va rămâne decât o tigvă
care seamănă cu avertismentul de pe stâlpii de
înalță tensiune
sau pe flacoanele cu otravă.

Pe Lipscani altă dată te căutam

Pe Lipscani altă dată te căutam în mulțimea care
nu știa de noi.
Toamna bucureșteană e cea mai nemiloasă
Și aduce întotdeauna ceva de pierdut,
o privire îngăduitoare,
o ladă cu frângii și hamuri, hârtii,
fragmente de ziare îngălbenite.
Eu sunt vinovat că am risipit anii aceia
tremurători,
viețile noastre pavate cu sărbători de iarnă,
temerile tale care nu te duceau la magazine de
lux,
sau în săli de cinema vechi din timpul
războiului,
când rulau filme cu unul cu mustăcioară
și părul pieptănat într-o parte peste ochiul drept,
sau pâna în margine la hipodrom unde căzuse
bruma.
N-am bănuț că atunci clocotea primăvara sub
crusta de gheață,
că avea să ne cotropească, la fel ca astăzi,
prea vârstnici s-o ducem pe umeri cu înflorire cu
tot,

a witty remark
that means more than
it meant in the first place.

Today, on a Sunny Day

Today, on a sunny day you ought to be a
stranger
among these ruins where we arrived by chance
while discussing literature,
we searched the line, the fluctuating border
in springs of joyful blossom
and fetid flowers.
I lose myself and I feel restless
amidst long silences,
when we absently rummage in the rubble
with the tip of our shoes, looking down.
You did not believe one could speak of such
vanity,
obsessively preoccupied with body and soul
or with the brain enveloped in a protective
membrane
wrapped in wide bones and skin and hair
that you know it will be reduced to a skull with
crossbones
resembling the signs on power lines
or on containers of poison from days gone by.

Once Upon a Time I was Looking for You on Lipscani Street

Once upon a time I was looking for you on
Lipscani street in crowds oblivious of our
existence.
Autumn in Bucharest is unforgiving
and always brings something meant to be lost,
a look of compassion,
a crate with ropes and straps, papers,
scraps of faded journals.
I am guilty of wasting those trembling years,
our lives paved with winter holidays,
your fears that kept you from luxury stores
or from old wartime movie theatres
showing movies with a dictator wearing a
moustache
and hair falling over his right eye,
or from the edge of a frosty racecourse.
I did not believe that spring simmered under the
layer of ice,
ready to invade us, just like today,
when we are too old to carry its inflorescence on
our shoulders,
and too young to not care.

prea tineri pentru indiferență.

E ca un film francez

Toată povestea asta complicată cu poezia
ține de stilul de viață.
Dacă ești singur și vrei să fii singur,
dacă vorbești mereu între oameni care râd la
glumele tale,
dacă zbori repede cu bicicleta pe drumuri de țară
ținând ochii aproape închiși din cauza muștelor,
dacă scrii două rînduri în liniște
în timp ce radio BBC
anunță explozia unei bombe în Ierusalim,
dacă simți că orice moment
poate fi momentul tău,
iar lumea te cheamă și așteaptă două vorbe,
dacă ți-e dor de niște persoane dragi
rămase departe într-o țară săracă...
Toate pot fi în favoarea
acestei povești complicate cu poezia.

E ca un film francez
în care nimeni nu are slujbă,
nimeni nu are nimic clar de făcut,
decît numai să discute mereu
despre artă și alte lucruri asemănătoare.
E ca o poveste de Cortazar
în care cîteva femei sofisticate
au niște replici ca din filme.
Toate acestea și încă altele pot fi ale tale,
ca și cum ai fi autorul acestor cuvinte
pe care autorul le duce la capăt
fără să știe unde e capătul.

It's Like a French Movie

This complicated thing called poetry
comes from within.
If you are alone and wish to be alone,
if you always talk to people who laugh at your
jokes,
if you ride a bicycle fast in the countryside
with your eyes half-closed to avoid the flies,
if you quietly compose a couple of lines
while BBC radio
is announcing a bomb explosion in Jerusalem,
if you feel that any moment
can be your moment,
and people call you to hear two words from you,
if your heart yearns for some loved ones
left behind in a poor country....
All these make a case for
this complicated thing called poetry.

It's like a French movie
where everyone is out of work,
and there is nothing to do,
except to talk incessantly about
art and other similar things.
It's like a novel by Cortázar
where some refined women
talk as if they were in a movie.
All these and even more can be yours,
as if you were the author of these words
that you write all the way to the end
when there is no end in sight.