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DANIEL SIMKO: II POEMS

PAVESE, A DEPARTURE, A ROMANCE

Of course, the emptiness of the room doesn't matter. As usual, a warm rain is falling.

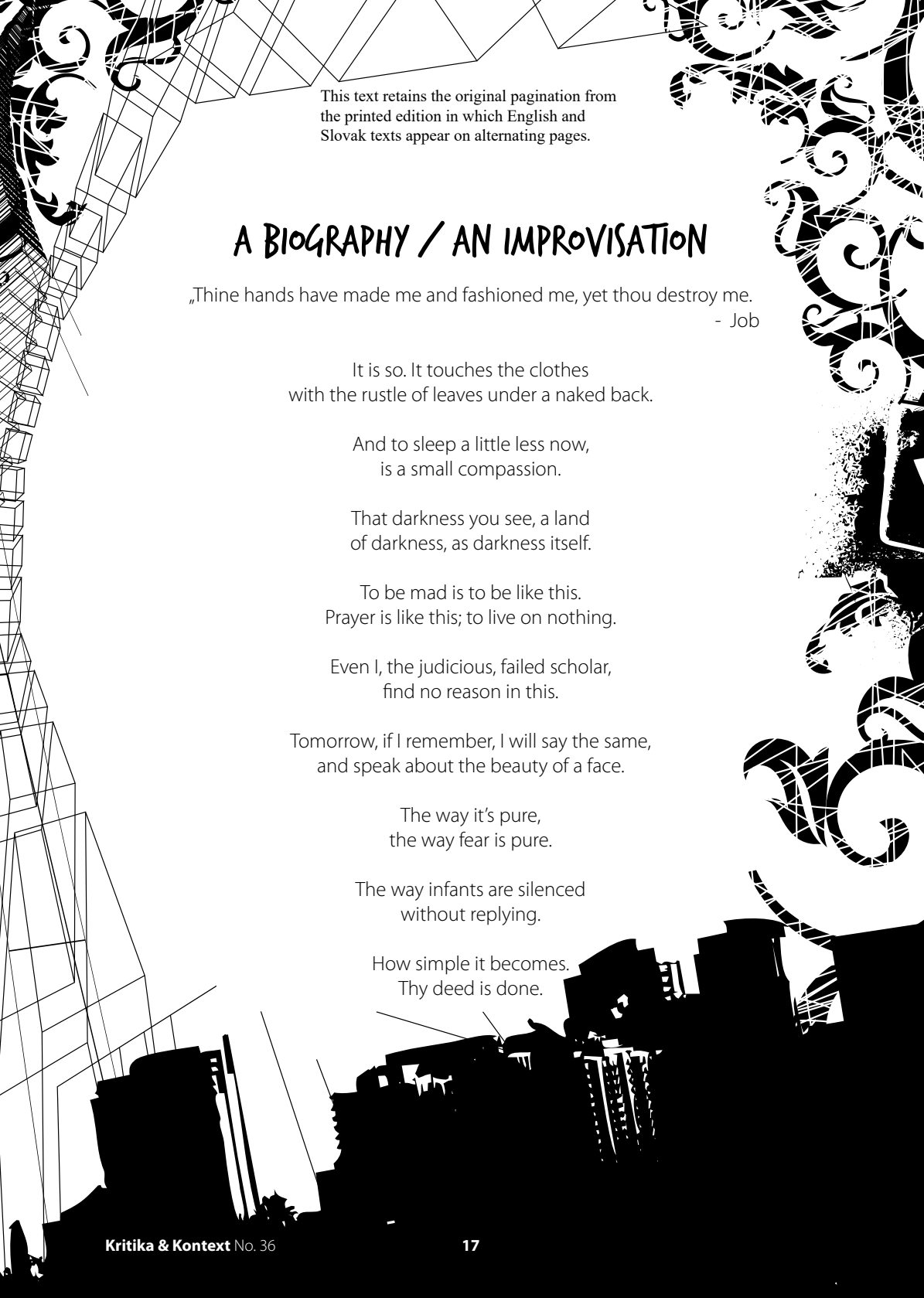
Of course, the emptiness doesn't matter now. The darkness is like a shirt filling with a body that was carried out of the hotel in Turin, in 1950.

And again, a quiet Sunday.

When I look into an empty room, I feel the dust in my clothes quicken, and my shoes grow large. But I turn my face away.

Pressed against yours, it becomes quiet, finally, like a forgotten instrument. It is calm now, as we sleep, and when rising, I will remember all the years.

All would be well. All would be lovely. If the Damned, would only stay damned.



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A BIOGRAPHY / AN IMPROVISATION

„Thine hands have made me and fashioned me, yet thou destroy me.
- Job

It is so. It touches the clothes
with the rustle of leaves under a naked back.

And to sleep a little less now,
is a small compassion.

That darkness you see, a land
of darkness, as darkness itself.

To be mad is to be like this.
Prayer is like this; to live on nothing.

Even I, the judicious, failed scholar,
find no reason in this.

Tomorrow, if I remember, I will say the same,
and speak about the beauty of a face.

The way it's pure,
the way fear is pure.

The way infants are silenced
without replying.

How simple it becomes.
Thy deed is done.

FAR

Bells, coming in a mile off. The North Star reticent
against the Danube bridge,
phrases falling on the cold metal.

The same bare poplar, the lonely spruce,
weave in the late October wind.

Or as I imagine them now, looking at them from the promenade,
years younger,

the same mildly uncertain expression spreading over my face.

I have come to love this city, this one thing
I could not keep.

The groves and vineyards that forgive me for leaving,
and the people who do not.

And if this is a poem of childhood,
then it's also the darkness within a glove.

Or in a trumpet, that the man playing the circus all night
finally puts down.

He has been unable to push it out. But he will continue playing.
Until he turns into music.

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FINAL INSTRUCTIONS FROM BRATISLAVA

You have been allowed to go home.
Some invective, you suppose.
All that bleeding was for nothing, repaired quickly.
Counting now, it is useless to count.
Those faces which rose from memory can do nothing.
Those notes typed into memory...
The kindness of wind, its cruel passport.
Nevertheless, you are leaving.

AUGUST, 1968

We are now two, or three.
We are six or seven.

Dull against the birch, we knife our names into...

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SOLITAIRE

A soft light falling
into the rented room
long into the afternoon.
Below the window small boys
approach the curb
where dirtwater claws
at scraps of paper,
those minute notes of promise
all addressed to the same woman.

All day the sun has strained
toward the street.
In the room he is suddenly frightened,
rises from the chair
to pull the long white curtains
closer together. It could be him
sobbing alone between the walls, between
everything breaking cleanly as it hits
the floor.

He could be on the roof in a long
hot afternoon reserved for sleep,
he could be back in the room
fanning himself with a newspaper
whose headlines have been forgotten.

He could be rising now
tying his shoes
and going out forgetting the keys.
So little matters, not even
the solitary drop crashing into the sink,
the long nights circling the weary alarm-clock
with its hands neatly folded
over its face, remembering nothing.

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(NO TITLE)

In regard to the question of Czechoslovak exiles, it must also be understood, that often, when one has nothing to fight for, one tends to fold his wings. This will be the case among the septegenarians presently alive in exile. Graceful retirement is unsuited, simply because it is too boring, activism is out of question because the younger will not accept it, because after all, even in mythology and religious belief the "new" "day" is always chronologically born, and only new ideas give way to the facility of perception. The problem for all of us – and our odds decrease by our youth – is that once we stepped over that mined threshold, we ourselves have died in many ways. We have ceased to exist in events. We are worse off than a stone that someone walking barefoot steps on and curses, because it hurts, We are the absence of that stone. A remembered scream.

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DUST: HOMAGE TO MARC CHAGALL

A girl and her lover are scaling an imaginary hill. In the distance, the sun reflects from the surface of a lake; trembling shadow of falling twilight.

In one of the houses a young woman has fallen asleep on a couch, just so, that her opened blouse, her breast, resemble the heart of a metronome, ticking into the mantle. Her arm, the bent neck of a viola, points to a dead dog, hairless on one side.

O the dreams of old lovers, her father flying, a chimney under his arm. Past the thin blue line of smoke rising. Past the blue horizontal above the trees.

Horses sleep in their stalls, waiting for a fire to drive them back. But everything turns, pales, darkens, and from the other side of the village, people in black are returning from a dark stroke of the brush. The darkness touches no one, except, from a distance, a terrifying laughter rises toward the moon.

It is frightening to look into a painting, and feel the dust your bones will resist in time...

The lovers are through now, dust, as is the painter, who hallucinated himself across the canvas, in the hope that it would all remain.

Wind from the east.

I am not far behind.

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THINKING ABOUT A HOLOCAUST VICTIM

The cold rain. Workmen cursing
the clouds, and then rain.
A cold quiet rain.

Before they knocked on your door
you packed your last belongings
and came here to sit at dusk.
You were singing your mother's song.
Quietly, just for yourself.

I stop the car
by the deep lake
where you had to hide underwater,
the thin straw to your mouth.
They never found you,
you hid so deep. Deep as a stone.

Now in the twilight I begin
turning over the pebbles of the shore.
A small crayfish backs away
toward the deep where you are.
It is so quiet
even my footsteps seem different.
And your breath is still
underwater.

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ANSWER

An itch of blood.

I have been translating my desire through a dozen languages.

In anger, I have stolen a star,
and replaced it with your thighs, which hinge open.

I have sucked blood from a fish.

..the dumb weight over my body,
the earth, with its slow grass and tall trees...

I have spoken to the emptiness above me.

Our arms are folded into wings.

Like Christ, we are flying somewhere.

I need you. I don't need you.

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A DREAM OF MY DEATH

A poem ending in a line by John Berryman

In the end, it doesn't matter.
You grow dark,
and I step out of the body
I have washed for years.

It is not difficult.

But now a button is gone,
a cuff is stained.

Hinges of the body come to dust,
and I will forget.
I will forget the beauty of a face,
of girls' legs in dry leaves.

I will forget my right,
and let my left remember.

And this is about silence now.
Not even the thin diction of a mosquito
can enter it.

How dark it is
No one has the stones.

O, yes, the stones

Night within me
Night without me

I come your child to you.