

PAVEL ŠRUT

Translated from Czech by Ema Katrovas

Titanic

Childhood was completely lonely
Novak would tell me if he could
tell stories
Especially in full summer in the kitchen
full of flies
It was enough to move my hand on the table
and I had a hand full of them
a handful of flies so lazy
they started fighting for life
only when I rid them of
their brittle wings
and let them out on the surface
of the water in an iron sink

Right away they changed into paddle wheel steam boats
and stirred the ocean so wildly
so completely and hopelessly and happily
as if to say

“Oh yes
now we require only doom
to complete us”

Under the Apple Tree

In summer Novak would sit under the apple tree
yielding to fall

Morning sunlight rummaged through the leaves
evening dark did not rummage through the leaves

Sometimes he woke early and the fog lifted
sometimes he woke early and the fog descended

Sometimes a ripe apple fell on his head
sometimes the apple missed his head or wasn't ripe

For years Novak attempted to draw from such phenomena
a useful conclusion

If not for himself
at least for humankind

Sisyphus

for Rudolf Matyše

There's a nice view from the terrace of a mountain hotel
Here comes Novak
He has gone down hill
From bad to worse
But there are moments

There are moments of utter windlessness
when the horizon dunes and he knows everything
about the lightness of rocks and the weightiness of Indian summer
even the gluttonous arrogance of gods

Try with your thumb and forefinger
to transport a mountain of cigarette ash
or climb it in search of love or mortality

Only this way will he know
that he didn't live alone

from worse to worst

The Complaints of Homer's Wife

What's with a man who waits for the tide
To set out in the wake of Odysseus?
What's with a woman to which only the tide returns?
(When I drift asleep I'm an aviary
carried from inside by imprisoned birds)

No I don't miss him
I don't say "still yesterday ..."
And I don't go blind with tears
Like him
Who above his verses is losing his sight
And has only a table instead of sails

Oh don't believe him
He never set sail

The Wife of Demosthenes Speaks in Anger

Oh he knew how to keep his tongue
behind his teeth and his teeth behind his lips
and he would rather insert his index finger
into his own orifice
than to point with it at the back
of that Gold Card
with which he paid the Gods
and for which he received libation

And he spieled and spieled so that he was louder
than the sea humming in the dock
yet never louder than the rustle of my gown...
that stammerer with a mouth full of pebbles
who was agape at himself
in mute wonder
that limp dick of mine—and excuse the rhyme—
a mime orating for love