

Sasha Skenderija



Born in Bosnia on July 4, 1968, Sasha Skenderija began publishing poetry, prose, and criticism in Yugoslav literary journals in the late 1980s. After surviving six months of the siege of Sarajevo, he fled to Prague in 1992. In 1999, with the help of translator and Cornell linguistics professor Wayles Browne, Skenderija arrived in Ithaca, NY. His poetry has been included in several Bosnian and Croatian anthologies and translated into Czech, English, and Slovenian. English translations of his poems have been included in *Scar on the Stone: Contemporary Poetry from Bosnia* (Bloodaxe Books, 1998), *Balkan Visions* and *Silver Visions II* (VISIONS International, 1995 and 2005 respectively). His latest collection of selected poetry, *Zasto je patuljak morao biti ustrijeljen* (*Why the Dwarf Had to Be Shot*) was recently published in Bosnia (CKO Tesan, 2005). Read more at www.skenderija.com.

Weirdos

Those that I love are mostly weirdos.

Deep and unreachable in their darkneses,
capriciously childish and tender
when we write to each other,
while we talk about one of us
who is not around.

I grew up with some of them,
others, who I met as grown-up people,
I could unerringly pick out in their photo albums
on group pictures of their school classes.
They've always been like that.

They remember every detail I've ever told them about myself,
and even some I left untold.
There's always one of them around to remind me
of important things about myself
when I sink or soar too high
in my petty existential delirium.

Some of them had nearly given up on themselves
and on me: they fell in and grew together with their own lunacies
pulling me and lifting me up
as a magnet picks up iron filings,
or a comb torn bits of paper.

People
that I love,
scattered along the meridians
and along their abysses:
among monsters of normalcy.

March, 2009

(Translated from Bosnian by author & Wayles Browne)

Sasha Skenderija (1968)

SPASIĆ (MORE THAN A GAME)

To Adin

While the country I was born in was approaching
its forced landing
our life and football appetites were soaring high.
Deaf and blind to the questions
that'd started exploding
right in our faces,
we contemplated a starry future
for ourselves,
for posterity,
for our national football team.

Asked why he kept a player
in the center of the defense
who didn't belong there at all
(with so many better players available)
the national team manager
(a man quite charming and wise)
once replied:
*This way, the other players on the pitch always know
where the danger's coming from and so
I get the maximum out of them.*

The coach liked to be on top
of the weak spots of the team
and would rather create them himself
than discover them on the pitch
in the middle of a crucial match:
Every real championship team has to have its own Spasić.

I'm not sure
if he said it exactly like that,
but it's how my friends and I recalled it
or embellished it,
anyway.

When the country
I was born in
was forcibly landing us and dislanding,
we were cheering each other up
by contemplating
the championship strategy -
creating and cherishing our own *Spasićes*
with the belief that this was the best way
to get the maximum out of ourselves
for the World Cup
which was just
(out of earshot of the guns)
going on –
without us.

We completely lost sight
of our opponents,
we neglected our own strengths
squandering them on tedious B-league
games of survival,
or taking them for granted
until we eventually atrophied
from the endless waiting to take our part
in the World Cup Finals.

We're still around.

If you take a closer look, you might still spot us
hunched down on the second-string benches
of other countries with championship aspirations
standing by
with eyes and ears wide open
for the slightest hint of forced landings
in a coach's wise and seductive words.

(March 2009)

Translation by Wayles Browne and Sasha Skenderija
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Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Awakening

- *To Milorad Pejić*

I get out of bed -
the first step into a new day
and the body is flooded with sorrow
the very moment it touches the ground,
it shakes and whimpers like a plane
touching down on a sunny winter afternoon,
when kissed by its own shadow.

Translated from the Bosnian by Wayles Browne
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Cape of Good Hope (Tešanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Grafik-komerc Tešanj 2011)

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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Contemporary American Poetry

I've been wondering
how woefully few junkies and alcoholics there are
amidst NPR's contemporary American poets,
even how few just plain smokers, and how
woefully many non-smokers, vegetarians,
globetrotters, and environmental activists.

How many poetry magazine editors
and non-profit publishers there are
among all those award-winning authors
of suburban and collegetown opuses,
multiply divorced and remarried ex-hippies
with paid-off mortgages and lawns,
how many professors
of literature and creative writing
who every now and then discover,
screw, and marry future NPR poets
and poetesses
from the ranks of their own students.

I wonder
how woefully few junkies and alcoholics there are
among future NPR American poets,
how few just plain smokers, even.

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Cape of Good Hope (Tešanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Grafik-komerc Tešanj 2011)

SASHA SKENDERIJA

Why The Dwarf Had To Be Shot

On June twenty eight, Nineteen hundred and ninety two,
in the basement of the Sarajevo City Hospital we sat
with professor Dževad Karahasan and his wife, who were serving
as hospital volunteers, since the city had been massacred day after day.
They were devastated by their family tragedy, her mother murdered
in her apartment by a grenade, and we came to console them
with conversation, with desperate hope
that military intervention was on its way. But instead,
along with pomp and unprecedented measures of security,
Mitterand came, to give us and our slayers a lecture
in morals and mutual understanding. Horrified starving old women
sobbed beyond consolation, while confused passersby and children
hurried toward international television cameras, behaving
like pandas born by Caesarian section in a zoo
in Indianapolis. The whole world applauded with praise the French
love of justice, the French *courage*,
French altruism —while Mitterand senilely
smiled at the decor of a destroyed building which had been,
in his honor, renamed *L' hospital France*. Murderers did not
bombard us for a few hours, taking their time
to shake his hand, and all went smoothly,
almost like an ecumenical colloquium somewhere in Paris.

A local TV crew came to the basement asking
for an interview with Dž. K. What did he think about the surprise
visit of Mitterand, they asked. He said, "Disgusting filth."
They asked him what he thought, in his opinion, ought
to be done. He said, "to shoot the dwarf dead." They asked
if he would do it. He said, "If I had a weapon at hand, for sure."
TV crew: "Would you do it, professor, to go down in history?"
Dž. K.: "What history, friend? I would do it in order to reach sense."

No weapons were at hand, and the interview, unfortunately, has not
until now been published.



▲ SASHA SKENDERIJA

Family, Summertime

We are fighting to extinction,
to the last glass of brandy,
my father and I.
A warm night, a family picnic
in the backyard of our summer home.

The futile effort
to convince,
to subordinate the other
as always.
And mom's resigned sadness.

(Before going off to bed, she clears away
our meat-bones,
empty glasses,
an overfilled ashtray and the tablecloth, soiled.)

We are fighting to extinction
leaning back in the yard chairs,
numbed, each staring into his own half
of the starry sky.

My father and I.

*This is the sound of mother sleeping, I utter,
of muskmelons ripening in the dark. So the last word
is mine.*

(1991)

Translated by Aaron Tate, Wayles Browne and Sasha Skenderija

● 10



I had always wondered how it would feel ■

I had always wondered how it would feel

to survive an airplane crash: chosen
by the mercy of a statistical paradox, *deus
ex machina*, one of the thousands who still
remain . . . Always the cases fascinated me
of deserters and women who committed suicide,
that sentimental belief in human dignity, in fate.
Always I was a dog: I was afraid.
I was not able to endure any longer
and for that reason I survived. For days
I cried like a dog,
I howled at myself alone.
I had no choice but to remove myself from that,
to undertake something, to change.
And so on the 23rd of November,
Nineteen hundred and ninety two,
I came to Prague.

(1993)

Translated by Aaron Tate



▲ SASHA SKENDERIJA

Unconditional childlike trust in the world

as the train speeds into the haunted house. Or when appear
the majestic zodiac figures in the dome of the planetarium,
or the devotion I give to finding an escape
from the labyrinth of mirrors. Cotton candy, popcorn, circus
pleasures—enchanted moments of joy, rare, at ease.
Another day bound by its own limits, seams.
Exhausting confabulations: the transvestite in the telephone
booth, twisting the ends of his platinum-blond hair, how he turns
his body, holding in his hands a military magazine with images
of the tanks of the world's armies. Or, say, an American student
of creative writing, with his video camera on the monstrous
communist city square: trying to record something, to embrace it,
soon he withdraws, leaves—it is too difficult for him.

(In recent times I dream only commonplaces: I dream
of childhood, sailing, how I fly, how I make love
with the heroines of Krzysztof Kieslowski's movies.)

(1993)

Translated by Aaron Tate

● 12

When you leave, I go to the movies. ■

For Zelkida

When you leave, I go to the movies.

I drink down the mental content of the main character
just like a can of beer. So here we go: there is the gloomy house
with the cannibal tenants and two boys on the roof;
the butcher and his daughter are also there. Something
should happen soon. For it is too void when you leave.
The shop assistant at the hair dresser's,
she sweeps cut hair into ugly small piles
with absent-minded broom swings.
Some opposites are attracting each other
in the incomprehensible analogy
between cinema and hair salon.
Actually, it is all about inertia:
the hair that continues to grow after you leave;
the nails, beard and mustaches — nothing else
but a mere transcendence all the way from
point (0,X) to point (0,Y). That's the time
assigned to the main character to undertake something,
to kill the cannibal-butcher and marry his daughter.
And then the movie stops.
The film runs out. Nothing more to be told.
The corpse is being washed, shaved, and
taken away from the home.
The End.
When you leave, I kick empty beer cans
down the street. And it is so void.

Translated by Sasha Skenderija & Wayles Browne

Saša Skenderija

PICTURE POSTCARD

A nighttime panorama of Sarajevo caught
by the light of shellfire, gunpowder flashbulbs,
by the dance of silhouettes in which only the persistence of vision
can make out the former shapes (calling up flickering
skyline lights, orange neon canyons,
evening crescendos of headlights
tracing their fluorescent snakes on a time exposure).

But only this possible postcard
can literally catch the passing of time, so the city seems to float
in an intermezzo of decay,
in the irreversible approach of things
to their dark antitheses,
my building seems to float,
the City seems to float,
we all seem to float,
I seem, too

Translated by Wayles Browne
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Saša Skenderija

ON THE ONE-WAY STREET, GIRL WITH A DOG

Asja P, the girl with a dog: sometimes I meet her walking her beautifully trained Irish setter. Her father was a philosopher, a well-known university professor, so I suppose he named his only daughter after Asja Lacis, who used to be the director of the theater in Riga. It was passionate love for Asja Lacis that made the Jewish mystic Walter Benjamin leave his wife and take an interest in the idea of radical communism. He dedicated to her his ONE-WAY STREET, a melancholy treatise about liberating life, discovering health and body, and finding peace with nature. Asja Lacis - a reference point in the sensibility of a whole generation, who set out along the one-way street in search of its lost youth. It set out, alas, went along *the street of no return*. The father of the girl with the dog, Professor K. P., was a prominent member of that generation, which makes my supposition quite possible. And shattering.

Asja P, we must mention, is very beautiful. The last time I saw her was at a stand with video games that her dog had taken her to. I felt a tenderness for her, so unready, so embarrassed, and wanted to write her a love letter, to test my hypothesis, but her friends wouldn't let me have her address. Stupid jerks.

Translated by Wayles Browne
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Saša Skenderija

COMMON PLACES

We've changed? Hardly, not
significantly. The world has changed.

I've stayed the same: I live
in constant change
and I know all about you,
all that can be known,
all but your address, the city you live in,
your children, the language you fill out forms in,
where you go in the morning and who
you come back to in the evening,
that I don't know but I can guess
(I can see it all
with frightening clairvoyance).

You
live unchanged,
a witness to changes.
And you know almost all about me,
all that you need to know.

We have not changed.

And what about those of us who didn't make it?

But how can we talk at all
about what they've changed into?
It is the world that changed
by their not being around,
we have stayed the same.

Far from each other,
obsessed with the same world.

Small as we are,
insignificant.

Translated by Wayles Browne
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Saša Skenderija

WINTERTIME SCENE

It rained all night and the first snow showed up in the morning. But the café is cozy. You can sip hot coffee and look out the window at the street. The whiteness emphasizes shapes, movements, the day's subtle mechanics. Here on the terrace, last summer there was a huge video screen. Now it's just an empty steel square. Quite by chance it frames the winter: a cloud of steam from the hotel kitchen, a VW backs up its tailpipe scattering a flock of pigeons, an old woman with a red market bag slides along the sidewalk, streetcars cross paths before the army barracks, and over there in the corner, a lonely child.

The movie of the day winds on, all by itself, without apparent effort, affording you a chance to forget for a moment that your own eye's gravity and the empty steel frame are all that keeps your country in one piece.

Translated by Wayles Browne
© 2008 Wayles Browne

From **NOTHING'S LIKE IN THE MOVIES** (*Prague, 1993*)

Translated by **Wayles Browne**

and the members of **OSIP** (*the Organization for the Singing of International Poetry*)

BLACKOUT

We've doused all the lights, stuck
three layers of wallpaper on the broken
windows (last night a patrol came because
the ON light on the VCR was showing).
We're cut off from people, from neighbors
hiding in the cellar, by fourteen storeys
of fear. Cut off from the sons of bitches
cannonading us from the hills
by a sound-screen of Ramirez's Missa Criolla.
It lends our love-making on top
of the punctured skyscraper
a note of the astral, of almost
divine epiphany.

Published in the Bookpress (Ithaca, NY, Vol. 4 No. 2, March 1994, p. 7)

THE OCCUPATION IN TEN SCENES

The birds are leaving us. They mass in flocks, upon
the sound of sirens they fly—and disappear.
Telephones keep ringing. When it hits,
dogs and car alarms howl moulfully in answer.
Kids pick up bits of shrapnel, housewives
with makeup on drink coffee in the cellar;
Boca, Kljuja, Franca and I play rummy.
The elevator's stalled, the water tap stops running.
The old deaf Spanish Civil War vet stands outside
the house door, leaning on his cane, clothed in his best,
surveying the horizon—no doubt seeing Spain.
We huddle close around the radio news. We wait.
They say it takes two sides to have a war.

Published in the Balkan Visions (VISIONS International, Black Buzzard Press, Falls Church, Virginia. No. 48, 1995, p. 8)

MASTER CRAFTSMEN

(for S. Sontag)

The analogy of photography and dying,
the death of the moment, or freezing it
is all too obvious, even banal.
A sniper and a photo reporter
on the corner of Marshal Tito Street and Maxim Gorki
in the same way make an abstraction
of my fate, reduced to a dozen
metres of street I must traverse.
The craftsmen, skilled in their trades, are waiting.
My hesitation fills them with
a professional nervousness which,
certainly in my favor, increases
my chances. Here we are at the heart of the matter:
murderers, like artists, are prone
to romantic exaggeration,
to mutual glorification, striving for effects.
They shoot past the mark. The sniper and the photographer.
The cross is the same in the center of their sights.

*Published in the **Balkan Visions** (VISIONS International, Black Buzzard Press, Virginia. No. 48, 1995, p. 8) as well as in the **Bookpress** (Ithaca, NY, Vol. 4 No. 2, March 1994, p. 7)*

SYMBIOSIS

Last night the eight-story building across the street
was hit by a shell. Blew the roof
framing and the top floor right off.

Glance through the window this morning:
between two burned-off beams
somebody's hung out their fresh washing.

(Unpublished)

From **NOTHING'S LIKE IN THE MOVIES** (*Prague, 1993*)

Translated by **Francis R. Jones**

Billie Holiday

Nitrates poisoned the tenuous soul
of my old love. Mia Z, jazz singer and first lady
of the Maribor Spring, from 7 to 3 a worker
in the local nitrate factory, loved my thin
body, bathed it that summer in cold
water from a broken boiler. On the photos that
remain, her figure is unreal, floating
on the sandalwood smoke of joss-sticks and gazing
at the big black-and-white poster of Billie Holiday,
as if acid has flowed over its contours.
Something similar has happened to her voice
on the cassettes, ifs going hoarse. The dull spleen
of the double bass and the despair she bewitched me with,
mezzo-soprano husky with nitrate fumes.
In the autumn of our love, despairing at my
youth, my leaving, she swallowed some pills,
had an abortion... Loneliness. A bitch of an autumn,
melancholy.

Craftsmen

(for Susan Sontag)

Photography and death—killing, freezing
the instant—is too hackneyed an
analogy, nothing short of a cliché.
The sniper and the press photographer
at the Tito-Gorky Street crossroads
are making the same abstraction
of my fate, condensed to the ten metres
of street I have to sprint across.
The artists, the master craftsmen, are waiting,
my hesitation fills them with
professional angst, which works
in my favour, ups my chances.
And that's just it, the root of the problem:
murderers, like artists, tend to
over-dramatise, go for mutual
glorification, cheap effects.
Firing at nothing. Sniper and photographer.
The same cross-hairs centre their shots.

Untitled (*Midday Express*)

Landscape chained in the lenses of your
sunglasses, thought given rhythm
by the even rattle of the speeding train, your
hand in my groin. This is a joy, sweetheart,
this is my love, the best that's left
of me. The outcome came out of the blue,
where we last expected it. I no longer
remember how, or why, just that you're here beside
me. Emerging too slowly, the scent of your skin,
factions of perception in the lenses of your
sunglasses. Travelling. How can we keep
our cool, sweetheart, how can we hold out?

Published in Scare on the stone: Conterporary poetry of Bosnia. (Edited by Chris Agee) Bloodaxe
Books, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 1998, p. 196-197)

From PRAGUE FRACTALS (*Prague, 1996*)

Translated by **Wayles Browne** and the members of **OSIP**

* * *

My three-day friend from Slovenia

is suddenly going to Berlin. He's leaving. We got drunk in some bar, confided some painful masculine things to each other. At 2 AM we're saying goodbye at the railway station, it lasts too long, we fall silent in the boundless intimacy of people who are sure they won't meet again. A bum comes up and asks: Yugoslavians? No, we answer in unison, Vietnamese. O.K., my Vietnamese brothers, how about a beer for me to say goodbye with?

* * *

A sign in the beer cellar that says PRICE CATEGORY

THREE, my friend Mario, the last failed attempt to standardize the world, the only signpost you can still be sure to find me by. Prague's towers like broken high-tension lines (the last image I recall from my old home), revision of the streets, address books and phone directories, kaleidoscopic statelets, hours of curfew or months, or years... Lassie comes home. But screw a home that's no longer there. Lassie remarried, had pups, swapped passports and married once more. A total dog's life, my friend Mario, fits into a handful of human years.

* * *

The kind of unease that strikes you when you find in your pocket

a left-over ticket from the horse track that you, keeping it from yourself, bet on a complete outsider: if you dared trust yourself entirely to the devastating feeling, you might, while there's still time, realize something of the final things. But daring comes when it's all too late. It's just that all this has lasted too long; I don't know how else to put it across. The smell of fruit trees flowering in the air, matchless moments when her breasts seem bigger than my horrors and it seems there may be some sense in surviving. A long street is in front of you, you come home from work in the crowd: to someone, to someplace.

As if nothing were happening.

As if nothing had happened.

(Unpublished)

Why The Dwarf Had To Be Shot

On June twenty eight, Nineteen hundred and ninety two, in the basement of the Sarajevo City Hospital we sat with professor Dževad Karahasan and his wife, who were serving as hospital volunteers, since the city had been massacred day after day. They were devastated by their family tragedy, her mother murdered in her apartment by a grenade, and we came to console them with conversation, with desperate hope that military intervention was on its way. But instead, along with pomp and unprecedented measures of security, Mitterand came, to give us and our slayers a lecture in morals and mutual understanding. Horrified starving old women sobbed beyond consolation, while confused passersby and children hurried toward international television cameras, behaving, like pandas born by Caesarian section in a zoo in Indianapolis. The whole world applauded with praise the French love of justice, the French *courage*, French altruism — while Mitterand senilely smiled at the decor of a destroyed building which had been, in his honor, renamed *L' hospital France*. Murderers did not bombard us for a few hours, taking their time to shake his hand, and all went smoothly, almost like an ecumenical colloquium somewhere in Paris.

A local TV crew came to the basement asking for an interview with Dž. K. What did he think about the surprise visit of Mitterand, they asked. He said, "Disgusting filth." They asked him what he thought, in his opinion, ought to be done. He said, "to shoot the dwarf dead." They asked if he would do it. He said, "If I had a weapon at hand, for sure."
TV crew: "Would you do it, professor, to go down in history?"
Dž. K.: "What history, friend? I would do it in order to reach sense."

No weapons were at hand, and the interview, unfortunately, never saw the light of day till now.

(1992, edited 2004)

Translated 2004 by S. Skenderija & Aaron Tate

I had always wondered how it would feel

to survive an airplane crash: chosen by the mercy of a statistical paradox, *deus ex machina*, one of the thousands who still remains . . . Always the cases fascinated me of deserters and women who committed suicide, that sentimental belief in human dignity, in fate. Always I was a dog: I was afraid. I was not able to endure any longer and for that reason I survived. For days I cried like a dog, I howled at myself alone. I had no choice but to remove myself from that, to undertake something, to change. And so on the 23rd of November, Nineteen hundred and ninety two, I came to Prague.

(1993, Transl. 2004 by Aaron Tate)

Fourth of July

I
Orange fire hydrant, iron dwarf, into which the police car crashes often in silent movies, turning the thing into a stunning water palm tree, and the housefront mailbox metal-flags whose sole meaning I have for a long time grasped (since the dwellers of Donald Duck City gave with them a sign that it is time, for the postman to retrieve)—in America, in state-subsidized housing, beneath my window turned to the warehouse of furniture, here is where the immigrant destiny came to an end, and the future began, dreams too too easy to achieve:

You need only move two blocks further and already you are eighty six payments closer to the cocksure neighborhood foyer, white-skinned purgatory of an American heaven.

In the American dream, in broad daylight, as if when water-calm comes, to lay—so easy it is, to remember everything that has happened, as when through sunglasses you look at the sun, it is that easy, so easy not to have desire.

II

As I carry Mirna on my shoulders she asks, *Why are there fireworks, daddy?* "Because it is my birthday today." *And where do all the rockets fall?* "Nowhere, honey, they vanish, just burn away." And suddenly, finding its way, the song comes into my head, an old forgotten gem:

"When the cities will burn one day, the smoke will rise to heaven, a magnificent firework display, just as it once used to happen, on the good old First of May, when they would take us to the parade."

And I pause to consider, without horror, how the singer then could have known, how slight is the visible difference between a celebration ignited by matches and a capital city by grenade, and I wonder whether Mirna herself will ever have to discover such a completely unnecessary matter. —Daddy, she says, *is it that fireworks melt like ice cream in the sun?* —"Oh yes, my sweetheart, exactly. It is exactly like that."

(2000)

Translation 2004 by Aaron Tate

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

I promised Zekida
To bring a poem
From the edge of the world
From the Cape of Good Hope
Though she hadn't
Asked me to

Unfortunately
But when one's written
A few poems
Good poems
He doesn't write poems just for nothing
Or make promises

I was flying from Johannesburg
To Cape Town
A masculine-looking woman
On the seat next to me
Asked me
What language that was
That I was reading a book in
I answered like a shot
BOSNIAN
Aha she said
Uncomfortably

She said We have Bosnians here too
In South Africa
I know
But tell me, how many kilometers is it
From Johannesburg to Cape Town?
About 1400
Aha
Like Atlanta to New York
I said

The book I was reading
Was by Amir B.
The Bosnian
The man who
Unlike me stayed
And put up by himself
A grave marker to his father
He wrote a poem about it
What a poem!
I had never met him
But Adin
An old buddy of mine
Got him to write dedications in two books
And send them
With Fatima
On to America
One he signed *In friendship*
And the other *With respect*

Reason enough
To take his books
With me to the edge of the world
(I'd never had a better friend
Than that old buddy Adin
Other than Zekida
And maybe
Teno)

The plane landed in Cape Town
At dusk
The most dizzying sight
I have ever yet seen
I thought
Maybe only the descent into Rio
Is comparable with this
Thanks to Cendrars
But who knows
Even Rio isn't out of the question
Now that I have landed at the Edge

The hotel room was cramped
In a one-time prison for one-time bank robbers
But the furniture was OK
A window part way open and a storm every little while
Then calm again
I left the TV on
Since I was frightened alone at the edge of the world
In the dark of the cell
Soft-core porn on Channel 6

In the middle of the night I woke up and shut it off:
*I went out into the world to rest a
Body confused by the fear of disappearing
But my courage left me in the first gloom -*
And then I remembered
That Semezdin hadn't gotten in touch
Ever since I asked him
To send me an invitation letter
In the name of the Voice of America
For Teno
To get a visa
What crap

It's strange

It seems to me that
There's a certain point
On the life map of each of us
And when you reach it
Every trip becomes a return
And every mile takes you
Further and further from your companions
And closer and closer
To those who stayed at home

In the morning
In the coach
The guide told us
How the First Voyage
In fact was a failure
And how the Navigator returned broken and embittered
To tell the King about the *Cape of Storms*
At the edge of the world
Beyond which nothing lies
But the furious sea
And the fatal shoals hidden in fog
Sharper than Levantine sabers

Later the King changed a detail
In the log of the voyage
And rewarded the Navigator with riches and glory
For
The disheartened homeland was in need of
Places of good hope
New horizons
Words of comfort
And encouragement

(9/2003)

Translation **Wayles Browne**

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Unconditional childlike trust in the world

as the train speeds into the haunted house. Or when appear
the majestic zodiac figures in the dome of the planetarium,
or the devotion I give to finding an escape
from the labyrinth of mirrors. Cotton candy, popcorn, circus
pleasures—enchanted moments of joy, rare, at ease.
Another day bound by its own limits, seams.
Exhausting confabulations: the transvestite in the telephone
booth, twisting the ends of his platinum-blond hair, how he turns
his body, holding in his hands a military magazine with images
of the tanks of the world's armies. Or, say, an American student
of creative writing, with his video camera on the monstrous
communist city square: trying to record something, to embrace it,
soon he withdraws, leaves—it is too difficult for him.

(In recent times I dream only commonplaces: I dream
of childhood, sailing, how I fly, how I make love
with the heroines of Krzysztof Kieślowski's movies.)

(1993)

Translation 2004 by **Aaron Tate**