

**IOANA IERONIM**

**THE LENS OF A FLAME**



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**Editors:** Lidia Vianu, Georgiana Mîndru

**Proofreader:** Georgiana Mîndru, MA student of MTTL

**Technical editor:** Carmen Dumitru, MA student of MTTL



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## **I was just passing by**

I was just passing and you just said  
one of these things  
one of these things

or some god playful mischievous  
frolicking melancholy  
spoke through you – and went

here is this flame, flickering now  
and its reflections  
tangere - noli me tangere, it says

and I let it have its way, I listen from far and near  
and try to translate why this voice – disembodied  
and then embodied in so many things

I was just passing and you just said  
one of these things  
one of these things

maybe like boys in your street  
to a girl passing by  
on a Sunday afternoon



\*

my heart, all of me, this tree  
turning its leaves  
one by one in the wind

fluttering rustling with the call  
of your closed lips

mere light can move it  
a touch of light  
can make it sing

the shell of our lives capturing  
the tatters of a song  
: a torn veil, the unraveled loincloth  
of a wandering god

these sharp caressing tatters  
tongues  
of a song



\*

who are you on that shore?  
 who am I on this?  
 a stone each of us? a tree?

the sun rises from that shore  
 and sets on this one –  
 it did yesterday  
 and tomorrow it will

who are you on that bank  
 who am I on this  
 who was the bearer of the voice  
 that swished between  
 and called

a call that we could only hear  
 when he was no longer  
 to be seen

what kind of water  
 is this  
 that wets our feet and sings?  
 the smile that we can translate  
 in a thousand ways

the sun rises  
 the sun sets  
 and us  
 rooted in terra firma  
 throwing the tightrope from one to another  
 a sling of triangulation  
 to measure  
 unknown land



## The Language of Silence

shedding words  
like a serpent's skin  
until you reach the language of silence

silence  
of the wild  
its signals gleaming  
when the night is at its darkest

a Milky Way above  
another one on naked earth

– but who has lit the dark  
who has sent the wandering light across

the rocket among the stars

you  
or I?

and in what life?



\*

I've raised my drawbridges  
and yet you steal in

arches open and you  
soundless weightless  
come and go at ease

in order to hear and see you  
I've borrowed sight and hearing  
from eagles and owls and bats  
from deep ocean fish  
and creatures underground

here's the sound of your boots in mid-day  
your soft feet at night  
your gloved hands  
climbing up ivy-covered stones

your bare hands pushing  
windows open  
somewhere in my wall



\*

have you seen the moon  
enveloped in the shadow  
of the earth

its hunger  
bleeding?

have you seen the moon – muted  
in the embrace of earthen love,  
its growing sensuous darkness

the heart of dust under our feet  
borne on silvery spider legs  
in the dead of night

made visible

our human story up there  
in the airy mirror  
gone heavy



## Madonna and Elvis\*

silver birds above the city  
cricket calls flooding the air

Madonna and Elvis, the homeless teenagers  
their skin luminous under tatters  
their eyes shimmering in the translucent  
mid-summer darkness of Bucharest

just the two of them, hovering between  
a parked Chrysler  
and the statue of a Founding Father  
with his court of reclining nymphs

the night's whispers  
won't surrender to words

what might have been  
falls behind  
shredded under the late  
unhurried swish of wheels  
driving home

\*The protagonists of Saviana Stănescu's play Aurolac Blues.



\*

Let's go to the warm empty nest  
of my fortress in the Carpathians  
and eat the heart of flowers and leaves  
that children once knew to be good  
and click flints at one another  
and shout our names and get the echo back  
from the Big Gate  
and you telling me stories  
of dark-haired barbarians  
of Turks and Greeks  
and founding fathers

Let's go to my fortress  
in the Carpathians  
let's roll downhill to the sweet grass  
into the shadow of the rose hedges  
that Sleeping Beauty has left behind



## Whirlwind

whirlwind  
touching another whirlwind  
clashing savage and tender

having come from afar  
to either side of a screen  
thinner than the wing of a butterfly



## Seagull

then there was this singular shriek of a seagull  
in the dead of night  
piercing into the depths of sleep

what sea has it come from  
above our homes on land?  
what sea is it flying to?

what is in us that we do not know of  
but it can recognize

and pauses  
in its passage

and calls?



\*

laugh, yes, laugh and spin away  
in the freshly mown hay

in the haze of the moon  
touched by your gaze  
from the Other Side

laughter – shared like bread  
a replacement of the self

which of course is blind  
and thus it can see  
what is invisible  
otherwise

how else could I so laugh  
and feel these things belong  
unfold and swerve  
in waves, in dancing lace  
from your mountain to mine

from your mountain  
to mine



## Words Torn Off

stark  
hunger  
the one that drives continents into water  
stars into one another  
us into waves  
that clash in amazement and mingle  
: two tall flocks of birds  
two golden clouds of minnows

words torn off with dust and pebbles  
and burning twigs  
words  
and their cosmic pulse – and you reel  
as if a pomegranate had burst in your face  
and ruby seeds have blinded you



## Here and in the Mirror

trying to utter the lightest words  
to be imagined

dandelion seeds, the same  
that would glide  
into your landscape  
and mine

here  
and in the mirror

now  
and in some other season



## Silence

silence  
shimmering with the embers  
of unspoken words

silence  
molding the air like clay

silence that touches  
with the clarity of its language,  
with its glow  
under the skin

your silence  
stronger than the noisy city  
that I am crossing today



## Mist at Dawn

luminous mist at dawn  
unwrapped from my body  
while I am still half-asleep

sailing  
unaware  
floating free towards you

freedom to follow the invisible  
pull of sky and earth  
as birds do

birds  
who know about these things



\*

we have lived all of it – and none  
on a threshold on a window sill  
in a mirror and on its reverse  
on either side of a continent  
of a curtain of a sea of a screen

we have been sending words and silences  
to one another  
they travel to the sky and come back on earth  
they have bloomed into airy concatenations  
whose roots have been lost

now they are everywhere  
mute waves of darkness  
showers of stars

we have lived all of it  
but all is out there – yet to be lived

here we are, like the Little Prince  
in a non-Euclidean realm  
we can watch sunset and sunrise  
whenever we wish



## Defying Gravity

defying  
gravity

in words

when even the words  
are sometimes too heavy

words, yet, swift and airy  
as one Rilke was able  
to shape and distill  
from his own earthen language  
in the tall flame of absence

but then, what words  
for the touch indeed  
of one another,  
of our dust, the heavy matter  
alive in the lightning  
that flares up  
burning the distance



## A Hundred Hues

a hundred hues and ripples  
that your silence sends this way

a bandanna around my head  
a belt around my waist

the motionless backdrop, a field  
of Byzantine gold



\*

how could I have ever made you hungry  
had that hunger not been in you

how could you have even seen me  
had I not already been  
cell by cell  
in you

how could I have ever been  
so drunken with you without even  
having touched the drink  
had your elixir not been in me  
worlds before

how can these ponderous bodies of ours  
and crude at times  
become radiant and immaterial  
lighter  
than a fleeting thought

if we were not the ones we are  
without knowing  
from times forgotten long since



## Tattoos

why waste time  
and not write a few lines in your palms  
terzinas on your cheeks  
a smiling roundelay on your lips  
sonnets on your shoulders  
haikus on your breast  
– and you whispering your answers

then more lines reaching around –  
the willow branches of a pantoum  
a pair of ghazals as tasseled slippers

but if such tattoo is too pagan for us  
and naïve  
as late in history as this  
or still too early  
let's just drape ourselves in words  
– our silk and satin



## Mirror Beyond

You, the wanderer the Flying Visitor  
 the hunter the fugitive the warrior  
 the sailor the Barbarian  
 the cowboy who can draw your pistol  
 and fire in a split second

you who blind me  
 with the flash of a mirror  
 from beyond

who fill the air with arrows  
 dipped in the moment's  
 thirst and hunger

who breathe over me  
 earliest in the morning  
 and follow me into my sleep

you  
 who want it all –  
 the durable and the transient

the unconquerable Now  
 its innocent cruelty  
 and its armistice

mountain after mountain  
 one horizon after another  
 on a tightrope  
 and the arrival postponed



## To Be Your Odalisque

to be your odalisque in one of these lives  
and dance for you  
and play the tanbur and the cither

being for you enraptured  
in self-abandonment and bliss  
as an ancient Sufi mode describes it

we have lost that language  
though we still find it in books,  
somebody has made us for that joy  
– some of it is still here  
in spite of us having bitten  
the forbidden fruit

to be as blissful as children  
as able of self-abandonment as they are

to be enraptured, as we ourselves can be  
today



## The Awakening Self

I wish I could descend down silk and velvet ropes  
into the depths of your sleep

the way you swing under the late stars  
and the waning moon  
deep down into my sleep

finding your way under the night's  
closed eyelids  
as silky as a bat's wings

this  
radiance

this radiant whole.ness  
of the awakening self



\*

how many words are too many  
how few are too few  
how much silence is warm nearness  
how much of it – desert land

how many kisses would be too many  
how is it  
without

how could we find the golden mean  
when I the unknown am facing  
you the unknown  
and stories tend to fill the territory  
– if they are allowed

words can absorb so much  
for us they should absorb it all  
for in words we trust

how many words then are too many  
how few are too few

will we ever be wise enough to know



## Slow Quickness

suddenly I need to find you  
and I do not know how to do that  
where

the paths across land and water  
teasing

hidden and mute

Time revolves  
with its slow quickness  
quick  
slowness

grain of sand upon grain

until I happen  
just happen  
to remember  
myself

and there  
you are



## Inevitability

we are real  
we are imaginary

we are these tough earthen things  
these awkward earth-bound angels

a rugged rhyme  
alive and hungry  
a caduceus in a dream

inventing  
one another

this inevitability



\*

Hypnotic days  
hypnotic nights  
our bodies have burnt  
all clothes  
and several lives

we are  
as hungry as the world  
as old  
as young

our bodies  
two motionless stones  
in a mountain river



## Infallible Words

words  
and their season of innocence

when they are infallible  
like sprouting seeds  
like wings in the air

like bare feet  
on bare ground  
running



\*

if you were here  
and borders far  
I am afraid  
the slightest breath of wind  
would make us fail  
and fall  
and blindly mingle  
not knowing borders  
none to tell  
– not even  
sky from earth  
or thou from I  
or fact from fiction



## As Atoms Split

as atoms split  
and split once more  
in windy gardens  
and find themselves again  
and swirl and then break up  
and still keep gliding

the dance  
imprinted in us



## Locked in Letters and Tendrils

read these lines  
slowly

let them blow your foliage apart  
find your forsaken paths  
arrest you  
in the whisper of the story before story

cover your feet like freshly mown grass  
like the fresh foam of milk  
in the dim light  
before daybreak

do read  
these lines  
slowly  
locked in their letters and tendrils

as if  
an embrace



## Church on Wheels

here I am, carrying again  
my folding altar along  
as Romanian farmers used to  
when they mounted their wooden churches  
like carts on wheels  
and voided the land  
fled from barbarian invasions  
up the mountains



## The Way We Are

as elusive  
as unstoppable  
as the Heraclitean wave  
around a jug  
with the dark void at its core



\*

who cares that it has been there  
before us  
and will be there after, like the curvature  
of the Universe

who cares  
that our thoughts and laughter  
and the whole of us  
are probably  
just fuel  
for it all

who cares, on this beautiful day  
when I've suddenly remembered  
you asking once  
"where is my poem for today?"

your smile  
tout attendrissant  
on this  
pirouetting  
day



## Braşov, Kronstadt

the Cathedral of Braşov, Kronstadt  
 in the fold of my Carpathian, early Sunday morning  
 the organ resounds under locked doors  
 inside Gothic walls like mountains  
 – there's no way in

two flocks of birds, two splendid mobile sculptures above  
 merging, swerving asunder  
 approaching one another again  
 in their sky-drunken motion

I stay glued to the Portal to capture the faint sound within  
 then I look for some smaller door between the Gothic ribs  
 somewhere closer to its heart

there – a deep-set little door, I lean against it  
 its ancient oak carved all around:  
 the big serpent biting its tail, beasts, men and branches  
 feeding on one another – like in the Book of Kells,  
 in the Scriptures and stones all over the continent

death feeding on life  
 and the other way round

Beauty  
 and Hunger  
 dreamily carved by a Saxon craftsman  
 once

and the sound of the organ today  
 the sound of Love locked inside

this one mirror, my skin and the wood and stone  
 that I am leaning against  
 sunrays carved in the middle

this mirror of words  
 trying to speak  
 about the unspeakable



## One Season

cherry blossoms  
have opened up overnight  
can you hear them ?

apples keep falling in the grass  
we can feel their thud  
in our innermost self

chestnut blooms like Christmas candles  
have just emerged – their lush islands  
in the rich old foliage rusty and golden

– this season in us –

newborn leaves  
gleaming  
among the seeds afloat in the air

masses of poplar seeds  
rolling like grandmother's wool  
when she prepared it for spinning



\*

no distance  
for your words

a breath a voice a presence a force  
coming straight  
reassured

touching my nakedness  
under my clothes



## Refresh the Button

sunflower without a sun  
arrow without an arch

a wedding picture taken  
long after

the bride's bouquet of paper flowers  
bodies  
grown out of their Sunday clothes



## Things to Read

I've been trying to read about you in the sunset embers  
in my city's motorcycle frenzy at midnight  
in the rust of this scaffold across the street  
in my sudden joy  
under the golden summer rain,  
in the warm snow that has fallen on the first cherry blossoms,  
in the swarm of little winged creatures drunken with the light on my desk,  
on the map of wine that's dried out in the glass,  
in our own words fallen like crumbs on the trails of the moon,  
in the noise of homeless children by the non-stop Angst store downstairs,  
in coffee grinds, of course, in the cowl shell of heart and hearing –  
all these things  
that speak in your voice

wrapped in your tune as I am  
like Cleopatra in the carpet  
Maenad in a veil

I looked  
and your eyes have looked back at me  
from the mirror

now I've broken the mirror  
and I see you  
thousandfold



## Going on Tiptoe

going on tiptoe  
sending ripples  
across

carrying water on my head  
as women used to  
leaving traces on timeless trails  
in the dust of our ancient lands

holding back my hem  
my breath  
my thoughts  
and their shades

crossing over

hoping you wouldn't know



## Tired and Tender

tired and tender  
I'd like to rest my hands in yours

I'd like to lean my face against yours  
in deep silence

the light of golden leaves underfoot

the shy nakedness of a tree  
enveloped in pure blue



## Leaves Lives Counterpoints

wading in layers of past year's leaves lives  
lived or not  
– bitter-sweet incompleteness hunting  
haunting

a stone sinking into the ocean of light  
motionless in the frozen river  
a coin gleaming on sealed lips

a song  
held captive in the mouth  
that unsettles the hour  
the walls of matter all transparent

what words have been hushed in the silence?

the attic of memory the cellar of childhood  
beams running into darkness  
coming back  
and nearer  
a motion of the heart

no louder than the earth that we tread on  
than the motion of evening clouds

than the flutter of this leaf free  
in its fall  
a wandering flame



\*

let me embrace you, soft and muted  
as the bell embraces its sound  
as the twilight,  
the hour of silent prayer  
envelops the land

do embrace me  
like a bell that wraps its sound  
in layers of silver, brass and gold

in the ember nest  
of this twilight

this twilight  
golden and warm



## Otava

the lush silky grass after mowing, the otava  
grows at our feet

radiant  
curving against the ribs of light

the lesser light  
beyond it  
so dim to our eyes



## The Lens of a Flame

but what are we?  
we who have found  
the void in the golden middle  
and wildfire at the core

and at the crossroads – no good choice,  
like in that old Romanian fairytale

pebbles struck in the dark  
kindled the fire  
– here, the scent of fire in our palms

are we then dragons  
wolves  
salamanders  
who have fed on words of fire  
and have opened a thousand eyes

yet there's only one way given  
for us to see

through a lens, the flame  
rugged and silky  
that envelops us

