

JONATHAN DUNNE

IANA BOUKOVA studied Classics at Sofia University and since 1996 has lived in Athens. She has published two collections of poetry: *Diocletian's Palaces* (1995) and *Boat in the Eye* (2000), a Greek translation of which was published as *The Minimal Garden* by Ikaros Publishing Company. She has also published a collection of short stories: *A As Anything* (2006). In addition to Greek, her texts have been translated into Croatian, English, French and Spanish. Her own translations from Greek into Bulgarian include work by Dimitris Allos, Kostas Montis, Yannis Ritsos and Miltos Sahtouris as well as anthologies of contemporary Greek poets. The poems that follow are translations from *Boat in the Eye*.

JONATHAN DUNNE studied Classics at Oxford University and holds advanced diplomas in Bulgarian, Galician and Spanish. He translates Enrique Vila-Matas, Manuel Rivas and Alicia Giménez-Bartlett among others for Europa Editions, New Directions, Overlook Press and Random House. His translations have been nominated for the International IMPAC Award and the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize. He has written *The DNA of the English Language* (2007), a book about English word connections, and can be contacted via the website www.smallstations.com.

IANA BOUKOVA

IN THE BOOKSHOP

In the bookshop where I work, he comes and talks to me about Spanish ships, aerostats named after beasts, polar expeditions lost in mirrors. (And only somebody in my profession could recognise the smell of damp bread and fustiness left behind by books.) In the course of time, I notice one of his eyes is made of glass. To be more precise, one of his eyes is a glass ball known to me from childhood by the name of 'marble'. That's where his problems start too. On certain days unspecified by meteorologists, the glass crunches with its ancient sands. A desert wind rearranges the lineaments of his face. He is left alone, the shop window surprises him, stops him entering. 'No, sir,' I reply politely, 'we don't have any books about Spanish ships. We only sell dry paper.'

SELF-PORTRAIT ON A BACKGROUND OF BEGONIAS

for Monty Python

A ship sinks in the square
smoke still issuing
from its chimneys
Faces pressed against the windows
guzzle down the outward scene
Somebody sells ice-cream
Somebody else has clasped his mouth
holds on so strongly that if he let go
he would surely fall break into pieces

At night those sounds start up
the scratch of pencils the distant
hem of understanding
Sounds that make you turn on the lamp
and sleep in the light
wasting electricity

You'll say tiredness from work
you'll say nervous hypertension
But they said this to Kafka as well
until once he yanked open the door
and fifteen well-dressed gentlemen
reading newspapers
piled on top of him.

PAPER CUTS

Observed by
museum attendants
iron lasts shorter
than clay

Of course
the question of materials' endurance
does not concern diamond thieves
or one struck by the lightning
of a passing ankle

And so
I prepare my paper clothes
for the glaciers sliding down highways
and for my immortal soul.

MISS ELEONORA TELLS OF A DISTANCE

He who dawned in my eyes
and was greeted by my blood with flags and horns
now lies on the bottom of the bay
under the red-bottomed boats

And the other a good talker
a beautiful imperative nakedness his
(he also lies on the bottom of the bay
under the red-bottomed boats)

How much water my heart contains.

SOMETIMES IN THE DARK

(poem that begins like a dream and ends in tears)

Sometimes gropingly
she gets up to drink a glass of water
the carpet trips her up
throws out floating fag-ends
midnight and the bee begins to
bite in the transistor
and she finds neither the glass nor anything
else to hold on to
her life constantly leaning
towards what's next
she goes back to the room
but her bed isn't there either
and what is left for her
but to carry on walking
like all these people
with their refugee trolleys
piled high with frying pans
and bedside tables and
new year cuckoos
as the snow covers the tracks
even of the innocent
and bridges fall on their backs
and communications are broken
and up above the moon a sucked sweet
drops its bait
and waits.

MY VELVET BLACK

A well migratory
cold-blooded
a pin under the eyelid
and in the dream
waiting for passers-by

munching stars
and filling its belly with cries

Today
it is in this man's breast

it bores and blackens
without affecting the vital organs
now it's deeper than the roots of grass
than the roots of trees
deeper than the dead
now it crosses underground rivers
reefs of gold

then the man stands
more or less
stands
on his own ground

branches snap against his forehead
stones weigh down his jacket

let anyone who dares go and talk to him.

SURVIVOR'S LETTER TO JOSEPH BRODSKY

After a while (I mention for the readers of memories)
the sun will crash behind the hills opposite
a little smoke and the day will be over
the dead gathered in
material damages accounted for
And I keep thinking recently mice
tame me and I keep thinking
they must have succeeded
I cross unaired rooms
glance through newspapers
and am not afraid
they ate the candle
then they ate the paper
thus ended the idea
of my writing a diary of nostalgia
Here a shore where the waves finished
step by step
the locals discuss the harvest and the weather
snowfalls unprecedented in previous decades
while some maintain it's got drier
the other day all birds
nesting in the vicinity
arose at once and flew away
showering us with droppings
I do not understand their climates
I do not understand their language well
a tricky tongue
with lots of guttural spasms
At exactly eight they switch off the lights pull down the blinds
place signs
closed till the next fire
to start with
or
closed and in my easiest clothes

or
closed due to Mariana
and that hungry gust in the square
sweetens the wine turns the clock
Here the locals (who know all about calculation) say
the wheat finishes first
and then the wind.

A SHORT POEM ABOUT THE EVENING AND MUSIC

Seven o'clock the fans have stopped
the city's muggy corridors
where the light ends and patience runs out
A child squeals as if being slaughtered
(or someone is slaughtered and squeals like a child)
Do I know
what goes on under my window every evening
Do I know
which cable leads underground
and which straight to the solar plexus
of my apprentice's equilibrium
just as you play with the keys
most irresponsibly.

EVE'S DREAM

apropos of the pension the State awarded to the poet Alexander Gerov after his death

A frozen sea
with fractured waves
and fish in the underworld

All around people build
their swimming pools fit
tiles open sunloungers

A scene you enter for free
and pay when you leave.

I'M SAYING RIVER

'Put your clear roots down there, where sand and blizzards sprout, where nobody speaks.' (His voice a whiff of petrol, fine glass between the teeth and few passers-by turned round.) 'That great migration I mean (stale words the bread) of bees in summer. Study your history...' (After a time walls sprang up from the soil and were named after him, but these are later events and have no place in this narrative.)

'Some day with better luck you'll wake up your thoughts heavy with apples. Some day with better luck you'll wake up with nothing. No bed, no memory, no patch on the skin you draw yourself alone among the stones. I know what I'm saying. I'm saying river. When your path is a body.'

And in the evening quieter now, as he was leaving (burning rubbish in the middle of the square, pieces of glass from the shop windows cut the moon): 'Maybe precisely the fish-hook in the throat will keep us straight.'

Pieces of glass, read newspapers, the steps peter out in the neighbouring streets, nobody returns from this chase.

TRAFALGAR

My skin a black continent
All evening I collected my toys
the little stone clown
bristling the shadows
the blue tiger with a rose in its heart
and the plane which never overflies
the equator of silence

On the subject of my childhood
let me not forget
the ivy which at night gnawed through
the wall and entered my bed

And a soft red curtain
at the end of the first act

'Saragossa' I said
as someone says 'To hell'
or another 'Sesame'
'Cartagena' I said 'Trafalgar'

But the charts up my sleeve no longer reached
I saw the moon
hanging over me
thirsty for blood
and circuses
There must
there must be an explanation
when I'm grown up.

IN A MALE VOICE

for Dimitris

Alone against the phalanx of birds
Night falls and I find pieces in my pockets
pieces in my thoughts
The same this season
my cigarette is full of rusty chips
and some other memories
which burst
when they reach the glow
Then the smoke rises high
higher than the trees
And everybody understands where I am
Moon-faced happy dogs then come
good people
bring me tea to warm me up
But where am I to go
with the gardens of damp on my wall
The horizon, you write in your letter,
the horizon is not to be read
Now I spend my time by the window
I leave my back unprotected
For those little
unexpected
What to many tastes bitter
for smokers is sweet.

TWELVE VERSES ABOUT A DOOR OPENING

The sun suddenly hid
and everything turned awful
Precious metals ran out
Only auburn rust in heavy shoes
leaves marks everywhere doesn't ask
I had to turn round then to see
the reflection in the beer lid
and the drummer's tin buttons
before the assault of the unknown
and night shedding its stars
and cities-natural disasters
with red sky and ashes
and spawning sea
far out beyond
my life
and the sudden flare of the flower
made to measure
for me not to be afraid
And look how pretty I am now
up to my neck in thoughts
and my teeth chatter
counting the seconds
I call my name to find myself
My lungs rust
and my nails fall off
I - the Dog sniffing out the light.