

Gellu Naum

The Incendiary Wanderer

Excerpts from Gellu Naum, *Athanor and Other Pohems*, translated by MARGENTO and Martin Woodside, New York: Calypso Editions, 2013 and *Vasco da Gama și alte poheme*. *Vasco da Gama and Other Pohems*, translated with an introduction by Alistair Ian Blyth, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007. The selection is completed by Gellu Naum's "The Voyage with Stelică", translated by Claudiu Komartin and Stephen Watts, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 'Between Clay and Star', No. 2, 2013.

This publication is part of the Romanian Cultural Institute's Gellu Naum Centennial programme, London, 24-29 October 2015. The Romanian Cultural Institute in London would like to thank Sebastian Reichmann and Oana Lungescu, who own all the rights to the original work, all translators hereby mentioned, as well as Calypso Editions, Humanitas Publishing and Modern Poetry in Translation, for allowing the present publication.

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Athanor

From an ancient gesture burnt four thousand years ago

The flutter of ashes extinguished memories of fire over limestone tattoos among the shoals shirts of clear water vegetal worms squirming around pebbles the whooshing of buckets dropped into wells

But all this happens in the shade of a green tomato and one good day he came out to see

We sat above by the tomato cages our twisting locks creeping out

The lime pit fallen into disuse menacing birds of sleep rambled in the fog as we tried to fend them off and he held us up with his eyes

Along the River Bank (Acolo lângă mal)

Along the river bank beneath the monastery a girl kept kicking a guy in a grey hat I stopped Having no idea why (maybe it was my unfortunate need to rejoin lost causalities) she sensed me and turned around She had a luxurious purse Hey ragged-ass what are you staring at Don't you see we're making love here

I lay down in the grass I glistened within the guy whimpered Get rid of him please

I could have answered rudely even drowned their motorbike perhaps I glistened so powerfully their eyes started to shed tears and the girl took off like a butterfly She hovered towards me coming closer like a blind bride like some sort of cherry tree

it was all the same anyhow I was hovering myself the sky lifted higher and higher that guy still whimpering Get rid of him please

The Horse (Calul)

The horse had grown up in my garden
It was harder in winter
I had to keep him safe from the mulberry roots
from the frozen touch of the sun
and it was so cold among the withered brambles
at night the gate pipes would crack
and his mane rustled like withered reeds

In spring our streams would come muddled breasts wobbling beneath the blouse he was pure and blushed like a saint in an icon You know—he said—as I stand motionless as I grow up motionless in your garden there are so many traces left around me so many bridges over these muddled waters You should lend me you rifle for one night

He spoke about his inner galloping About his frozen galloping

I never told him about the things happening to me and the night stork circling the place calling for me to sleep in her egg

In a certain way we could feel the waters' complicity the sands' fertile protection and when we walked barefoot on clay we could feel how close the wet brothers dwelt. The well wheel creaked kids going home from school stopped by to ask us for some stale water uttering words feminine masculine and neutral unquiet about the sex of abstract words and they watched the horse though with a world-old understanding in their eyes yet smiling in a friendly way as they wiped their mouths with the palms of their hands

Then the dahlias grew large and heavy like brass mirrors and once in a while a tired tree would lie down in the grass

(n) AUM in the Rain ((n) AUM în ploaie)

The window has opened towards the dark the dead are alive in shrouds made of cloth and bones are conducive to eternity holding a snake in the grass at the shadows' confrontation

for their commemoration in a den for their ultimate white confession for the technical employment of contemplation (as we will all turn into dust and mold) they would deserve titles of nobility in times of hardship and obscurity at the turning back to the twilight and lead us silently into infinity when the eagle starts his retreat towards the stars in the memorable second when the sun and the moon rise in conjunction in liquid form and continue their subtle trip towards a land of heresy within the spiral the unparalleled lunar streaming and its pleasant terrestrialization

only the hands can pass over the rainbow as the roots grow on our tongues fire is their food, and water and let them lead us silently into infinity

The Poet's Arrival at the Great Airport (Sosirea poetului pe marele aeroport)

He descended a careless stairway. The light, the air flooded his veins insinuating its way into his cypress geometry. Then a door opens. The metal starts to scream. Still he goes in. Huge corridors of mosaic and glass lie in wait, smelling him out. With her torso leaning over the grid the Warner passed in whispers. That's when the customs officers ambushed him, tore his clothes off, made his face bleed, dug through his immaculate suitcases. Brand new departures and spectacular arrivals were in store. And then, the PA went out. Just beneath the ceiling, among the sciences, something roared like an ocean of milk, the memory of a breast. He sat down for a moment to draw his breath, careful not to tilt his skull full of hand grenades.

Eutychia (Eftihia)

Only when beginning at the end are we able to understand the nostalgic mechanics of daily events the fury of layers preceding and following us

this is when the usually called "there" wears on its body the tree's bark carries with it

the arrogant scale with isolated limbs balanced there sleeping the statue of the Dog a confusing calculus born persistently in the grass's fear the land's green silence while all mothers may wake up each with a different moan

this is how many perished while we returned it was a farewell with no parting an unrest in the mist's magnet in the deep dark and its answers

we were mere black leaves swept outside and fluttering in the soft wind we were the small feet of a child forsaken and left all alone sleeping we were in love with the rustle of the greenery underground bearing witness to a desperate question

with the piety indecency and plenitude of our aggressive candor

and beyond millions of dark-years through the vainglorious black holes in the human psyche

there with live and dead seeds ants and justificatory novas sequoia trees ablaze sleepo-pithecines caterpillars and rocks gold granite copper kangaroos butterflies knives rains nightingales the genus chair boot and the clouds

electronics swallowing the logic of intuition and each of those with its poets forming a language using signs long forgotten by our sick species

I emotionally and respectfully salute the insects' poet his psychedelic colors I watch with my panicking blood while listening to the signs of his insurgency

so the psychedelic colored insect waits for me with its shape reminiscent of triangular bombardments the insect-poet looking at me with its deep blue-green eye struck dumb on an unripe raspberry the sole survivor of a long extinct species the newly arrived insect-poet set to witness crazy death by tragic multiplication as I am certain it recognizes me as far back

the times got tangled I sit on a rock and look forward through tangled times as a psychedelic age arrives while the rest is merely a golden blue-green ethereal triangular insect trying to communicate words

but I can feel the winged heel of tangled times I feel my leaf sliding across boundless deserts sitting on a bank on a blue rock where I stopped long ago like any other pilgrim ready to leave I left and here I am crammed up in the night within everybody

and there is a bridge boiling lava flowing under it the olive trees along the riverbank bear bitter fruit birds in gold-colored furs and foxes in feathers of all colors pass by those beautiful fox-witches and we press our knees into each other our eyes blurred after all the days we left silent together in the humans' blue crypt under the night's obscure seal and we make those modernistically likable gestures at all crossroads with snail shells and wing-cases breaking under our steps

one minute less after all those tangled times gazes that save of life and death of fighting roosters under a cobalt sky ignored and indestructible understanding inertia inquietude breasts of warm fog the steam of walking shortly spotted through the bus window the black panthers leaping grateful ferocious why should I look forward or back where the stray dogs greet me full of expectations and avalanches of snails millions of ants in swarm after swarm whirring along while a four or five hundred year old tree rots piercing the sky

but I say words that contain millions

I read the things within them my hair is ablaze I see it burn inside the words my hair hovers and burns as if in a mirror the color of the wood I dwell in well hidden a perpetual solitude a sort of sonorant mist irresistible

and imbued with written sounds

I see with my ear with my eyes I hear sounds that are creatures and things

and fire and lime pits

I believe in the acoustic vision of the magnificent black panthers giving them strongly colored shapes beyond that vision everything is black

I am almost alone amidst the bizarre shapes within the great magic of

solitude

I complement the atrocious game of the peace-giving shapes they collapse

the nocturnal sun the moon hovering higher and higher a dog leashed to the wind I would say almost cuffed by the gusts stuck to the withered windows I am looking through listening to his ashy howls written over with lunar powders the great expectations of those lying on the cliffs or drowned in the ocean reef dwellers clad in silver armors explorers of that drowned city they prefer to call EUTYCHIA I don't know why

with those deceased whales floating above

knock with a butterfly on my window bring your breasts near my face I am in agony keeping silent with a death tongue

lying on bed-sheets

I look above and see our whispers though it could be something else so let the explorers come the archeologists of kisses the divers those who listen to every wave's cry of terror those who see the dirty blood the memory of fish the lilac chiaroscuro of tired frigates lost in the deep under the stinky salt

sky of starfish the somnambulist propeller the sails made of Paradise Bird feathers

the sand garlands' seductive rosette

my knees have blossomed my comb lamp the bowl I eat from
my secret force is the rain the iron
the giraffe stretching its neck towards the moon the cold in you
in vain you cover yourself with four blankets in vain you light up the fire
along with theat feeling of no longer being
comes the dried zebra hide on the workshop floor
and all of a sudden the planets stop revolving everybody's lions startled
and intently watching flocks of flames rise from the de-scribed
deep

which is the sound of refining

and there is also the flower EUTYCHIA a sort of carnation that does not exist yet it is only a name

but it will be

before worlds collapse and our ashes drain into chaos afterwards after this after the early apparition of the beautiful burnt flower called

EUTYCHIA once and for all

I have become petrified I mean as time went by my blood has assumed an enigmatic stone-like shape

a pyramid sarcophagus or sphinx that is in any case impressed upon wood in capital letters and as time goes by the wind my life and death enemy gnaws at my cheeks and sometimes I happen to fly or keep silent which is one and the same a beautiful levitation a nostalgic burial up among the spheres in the rough roar in the everlasting cold and someone sleeps there on the grand astral catafalque but that doesn't matter anymore someone like a pyramid a sarcophagus or mostly like a sphinx sleeps there his eye lines desperately inscribing convulsive signs obscure hieroglyphs and lo comes EUTYCHIA descending the black marble stairway covered in ruby velvet and the rush of herds is heard under my window

bring your breasts near my face I am in agony I tell her keep silent with a death tongue

All the above poems (from 'Athanor' to 'Eutychia') were selected from Gellu Naum, *Athanor and Other Pohems*, translated by MARGENTO and Martin Woodside, New York: Calypso Editions, 2013.

The Persistence of the Flames (Persistența flăcărilor)

The devouring images of future things the bright star of a conflagration what I loved what I hoped what remains to be known

The costumes of the acrobats preserve their sprightliness the somnambular walk recommences along the wire between dream and waters between death and waking between memory and asphyxia

In this room attractive for its colour of coffins your scream opens like a window

It is time for us to know the sleeping woman she expects nothing but this she regards with a single languorous eye the bats that nest in our palms

In the Silent Mornings (Tăcutele dimineți)

In the silent mornings or in the silent nights there is a haunch there is a thigh there is a panther I try to catch your shoulders using a violin as butterfly net but if your hair chimes it's because it's dreaming if you eyelid blossoms it's because of the wind if your hand howls it's because it's night if your ears sleep it's because they're famished if your shoes laugh it's because they're thinking and if your shoulders take flight it's because it's very late

If your hand falls silent it's because it's a seashell if your veins race it's because of the mandrake if the thigh listens it's because there are still leaves if the blood foams it's the fault of the umbrellas

If your frock screams it's because it's dying if your shadow flickers it's because it's burning if your fingernail sits on the curtains it's because they're violet if your foot whinnies it's because of the clouds if the lungs fall asleep it's because it's dark and if your shoulders choke it is assuredly because of the trees

Heraclitus (Heraclit)

On old roots, I was sleeping a nodular sleep. On the branches, my brothers were airing their long tresses. The wind had ceased. Then, all at once, a huge abandonment began.

1

A wooden bird crossed from the tree to the tin roof of the houses the tree was awaiting a tin bird to me they were all perfectly conjugated but I was the wooden and tin bird that was sitting on a chair and looking out of the window

(Embrace me, my wet sun. The eyes' wand has gone astray. The sleeping one lends the fruit trees the whitewash of our innocence In the stove, the words gently crackle.)

2

I was dreaming acoustic landscapes sonic hills musical pyramids newly leafed pianos
I was dreaming the diurnal rhythm of the earth energetic guitars drums and everything and you press a key with a precise effect and the eye dances you pluck a well-known string and the leg laughs and rejoices

(Passing through sap, O my ruthless sister. With immobile flowers. Until my mountains budged. Outside, the sun conserved my treasures of dung.)

2

I was standing behind myself and dreaming of rejoicing like my leg
I was seeking hexagonal words
at the wire ending of tranquillity
I was seeking long colours I was hungry for long colours
I was dreaming gloves and boots of violet sounds
and the houses resounded and the clouds were rustling
and in thought I was oxygenating countless flocks of sheep and doing their makeup
for the great spring transhumation
then after this exhausting labour
I was walking in front of myself and wiping the sweat from my brow

4

At night the cockerels had screech crests
the world's exhalation steamed up my window
and I wiped it with a clean towel
somebody go and see to the dog
then a very beautiful woman gave me milk
perhaps I had many lanterns I no longer know
I would speak softly so as not to tear her blouse
she gave me milk and bread and set off barefoot down the road

eastwards westwards deafwards deathwards

5 Then the frenetic river and my friends swimming asleep

(We loved each other like fruit trees, in the shade of bushy eyebrows. Like passers-by, in the smoke. Our lanterns were full of fruit. I plucked myself from you. You reposed on the bench of my silences.)

6

At evening when I went back into my cube I would want to rejoice and the things smoked in uncertain outlines the neighbour's stag would stomp around the kitchen but with an egg to their ears the two old men would listen to the intact silence of the yolk and blink rhythmically to the tick-tock of the clock

7

(In the distance, I could see your scream burning. Here and there, where the sand outlined the figure of a slain dampness, you would remain visible. Ferryman of these crossings, night would bind the road-heads.)

Then the immense hatching and among so many other exceptionally bad things butterflies would alight on my ears of stone

The Double (Dublul)

In the name of fertility she spirals her smile and hides it in a snail of sleep

What a crust has enriched itself on the vehemence of its folds

Adept of the great mute connections (a few have chosen the air) for its capacities of blue flax and crucible)

I seek in stones the reserves of an as yet unchangeable realm and the grasses are propitious to me

while with brow in the water my axe lies in wait for the iron wedding of the fish

Eagles on Holiday (Vulturi în vacanță)

In august when the sky fills with bulls an eagle alights in the neighbourhood and from the first telephone lets me know he's coming to see me

Admirable pyromaniac haunted by blazes with a black serenity over his feathers he comes troubled by the forecast of sure flames cartesian eagle schooled in the classes of harsh colleges he has difficulty reconciling himself to my silences but he knows that we bear the same sign beneath our eyelids and feels the same gold on his knees

We man and bird in two armchairs sit talking for a long time while my love with tranquil gestures she revives the comforting archetype of night

Naturally I could tell him that I have driven a stake into the mist that last night the otter called out to me once more

I could show him the fourth sign of the mole and the lucid answer of the nettles but my places perhaps seem to him an unknown island that's why he slowly moves a bright wing and takes refuge in the strict geometry of quietude

Both of us in two armchairs we sit talking for a long time outside night rusts my dogs

Whenever (De câte ori)

The soul of the wood sighed a bird lay down in another bird

After it has sullied itself with man flesh the saw cuts the locust tree of the sky On the pond between moorhens and wires the carpenter hammers nails into the water

o my love with boomerang eyes whenever the train whistles we await the subterranean snows

Beginning and End (Început și sfârșit)

I accepted that the things loved us

Fragile and hard on their plains we rejoiced when the vegetables bloomed that we might keep the waters intact

The tools obeyed us until evening about which eyes do you speak

The fishermen dozed among the fish-centaurs from the shores they viewed them with wholly different eyes and Plato my obscure horse fanaticised grammar

The Domesticated Triangle (Triunghiul domesticit)

A few scrunched up words in the right eye a teardrop in the mouth a sound on the shoulder

Naturally it is a simple journey from good to bad from cold to hot in this boat full of nails

Perhaps everything is happening inside a cow

Vegetal Phoenix (Fenix vegetal)

Far off in your pupil immobile and supple I grow in the circles of a harsh geometry

There I grow looking underneath the bark at the wicker chair whereon I sleep the chunk of plaster that falls noiselessly on the grass our hempen busts naked beneath the lustre of the armour far off in your pupil

The Blue Shore (Malul albastru)

In a room among newspapers from far-off climes like a tame animal like a marvellous man you love yourself and sit on the edge of the bed with your hands on your knees or absolved of birth and death you stroke your pumice cheek until the sun crosses to the other side next to the photograph of the happy child who is piddling on a blue shore Then every thing returns regroups as though in a boiling fog wherein things are mended among the obscure plantations of chance And alongside a woman carefully hangs out the clothes of the drowned lover and speaks to them the one who still seeks you in the black bones of the butterflies And while you wander lost through the mists of a powerful manhood past the spades left on the fresh molehill or gaze at the swaying of the two stakes planted in the shore or lie down on the ground and the wind covers your face with thistles brought who knows whence a great sadness brings back the lunar landscape of her tired shoulders and there are no more words but her whispers are things which settle everywhere filling the ripped silence of the train's screech her whispers are the water gathered over the prints of her soles after the last rain but a mere turn of the key is enough for you to be able to hear the slow flowing of time past your moistened socks or the heavy breathing of the roots

and again you dream the blue shore at the end of the river

on which we ruminate our enchanted abandonment

The Prenatal Brother (Fratele prenatal)

From egg to coffin on an accursed gravel in a land of brambles and midges the prenatal brother still sends us the sun that set in the roof of his mouth and it is time that we open for him the pods wherein we dwell

with bandaged eyes he mends the propitious errors the flouted landmarks the axle stabbed into the depths of the wheels and the drone of imaginable convoys before the moods become words

The Suitcase (Valiza)

I'd moved into a nest up a tree
I sat there on some straw
the mother-bird saw to her bird affairs
the male didn't say anything ignored me
once though he dealt me two or three pecks to my nape
it was raining at the time I was soaked through I was trembling and had taken shelter
beneath the huge maternal wing next to the little ones
(they were barmy I could hear them laughing in their eggs)

Otherwise what a life of ease I would read Mr Nietzsche and often contemplate the planet I had food in a suitcase next to some notes about the technique of non-action I used the notes as napkins now and then a young lady passed beneath the tree trampling these herbs with her white boots I loved her I would stand on tiptoes to recite I showed off my pohet's profile the mother-bird raised her beak to heaven and chattered in the end the young lady made an indefinite gesture then went home over those herbs Once a strange hunter came in her stead he was nodding and looking at the nest the mother-bird hid me beneath her wing in the eggs the little ones fell silent in terror

Belvedere

My friend the dead painter calls me (it's not important) ready drawn letters come from his mouth he is a normal chap all silver and buckles anyway all kinds of stuff and embroideries and other things he stands in a square in front of a building with a frontispiece in the frontispiece is written what is written on my bell

one might say that I'm being duped but it's not certain I've hailed him sixteen times and he keeps nodding towards me he has a tic he doesn't even see me he is holding under his arm the terrible book written in the language which we speak in thought

The Change in Things (Schimbarea lucrurilor)

Autumn came waves of leaves migrated certain things changed their names I stood on a shore tranquil I contemplated my love sighed closed her eyes "what sawest thou" she replied "an old man cometh up and he is covered with a mantle" here ended she the quotation (Samuel XXVIII 8-14) she opened her eyes pulled on the rod fished a wooden fish

The String-Spirit (Spiritul-sfoară)

Damned poplars were rustling in the dark it was cold I was wet I had diseases of the soul when I pressed up against them they nibbled my shirt down below someone was digging his nape had turned white he cadged tobacco from the passers-by some softly replied "take heed" hastily he dug he cried out to me "take heed look it's raining and why do you roam the night alone clothed in your purple overcoat better go inside lie down on the floor maybe the String-Spirit is coming and he'll teach you to peddle your legs aloft"

On the Woman in a Trance (Despre femeia leşinată)

It would suit me nicely with my clay hat
On the shore of the Euphrates in masculine waters
next to the Woman in a Trance
With my temple on a plank I would relate to her
how she might write to me for example
letters of adoration
"think a little" I would tell her "on our daily adventure
now that you abandon yourself to the deepest repose
now that you a poor little dove
try in thought to fly while I
stock-still and alone rest with my temple on a plank"

Until the Tornado Passes (Până trece tornada)

Shabby as a wet butterfly I watch the poplar rising to the sky it metes out justice it has golden leaves o poplar I say nicely you rustle in the obscure embrace of our branches (if they part us we wither and die)

but until the tornado passes we better hide in our clothes full of bells while something glints like a hot tile and the sun dilutes amid the matted clouds

On the Hills of the World (Pe colinele lumii)

I had fallen like a giant with ears of stone onto the hills of the world in the dampness of encouraging gestures within—only night and water and the deaf infant was furiously playing the harpsichord

The Isles of the Blessed (Insulele fericiților)

It was spring I was standing by the window it was raining
I would have liked to mumble a few of my beautiful pohems
then who knows whence there appeared a young Hanska woman
we were sitting next to each other pressed up against the same wall
There was an unnatural silence we sat stock-still waiting
in any case some one unseen lay in wait for us
the others were watching television

And we what language we spoke

it was spring I wept in guffaws now desperate now happy never in between up above the eagles droned and that Hanska girl swathed in yellowish linen had long ago

drowned in the waters of the Vistula but thence she looked at me fell into thought sent me a note "it's all over for us" she wrote

outside on an intestinal-blue sky clocks were swiftly spinning their gilded hands

Melancholia

In Grand Place a few innocents caught a dead bird in flight ate it and also in Grand Place one of us had made a discovery something petrified on it appeared as though in a picture book how some of us rot on beaches how the others bleat in the mountains

now he stood to one side at a grave he had earth on his eyes He was saying that it would be lunchtime and what he eats "stay there quietly" I told him and she will bring you potatoes"

"perhaps she is coming"

he was looking at a grave and listening gloomily to our words coming from his mouth

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The Voyage with Stelică (Călătoria cu Stelică)

The lips of the lamb were bleeding in the evening chill when I saw the sun glowing above the sun I was stepping gingerly on the fur by the foot of the bed I had a buddy Stelică with an aura of beauty all around him lizards slithered dressed in lucent gold

this was called friendship and in it adolescence was rotting away strands of wire glowed on our fingers and wire words whimpered in our mouths

we were talking calmly as crickets when wrapped in his own space Stelic**ă** died

I was stunned as I thought of his unavoidable voyage toward the delta where the great river piles up human ruins it was raining beneath our supper table the sun was hiding all alone and Stelică's brothers were approachingpushed on by a surge of love through the thick fog of the end shrouded in untanned skins they were singing into their fists they came to free Stelică from the zinc ship and to wash his bones but he was whole unrotten gone to metal they kissed his breastbone at dew time but he had the pallor of death white horses were comingand covered him with leaves better had they pulled a small curtain over his eyelids sufficient his death for his mother's tears and from his cradle he'd been reading

a book of prayer an old man washed plums and gave them to him and he stopped reading he said to his mother, 'suckle me for the last time since I was a child I loved to be suckled'

now we were both walking in the birth lands and ravens were circling pitiful adolescents we were wandering about and all around us souls were bemoaning 'who are you from your childhood who are you if you don't even have the words to tell us who you are who from your childhood are you'

I taught him to say 'ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce myself, Stelică'

we were two wretched adolescents he dead from childhood on we were living in the backwoods trees were growing on us their branches gave us shade

we were walking together through the fog of a prenatal swamp we were asking after a certain Bacuta but no one knew of him Stelică was lain out well in a church on a table he was nearon floating in his zinc ship edifying our aggressive brotherliness at dawn some 2000 roosters were singing out their psalm each of us took his lover by the hand we were celebrating ourgolden weddings we felt a delicate anxiety a fecund deafness and here we were carrying our brides on our backs to the altar they sensed a slight shudder they sensed their wombs wetting they sensed the moon crumbling into a thousand threads and hiding in the grass we were chewing dirt together with them the amazon brides architects of our shadows invented by the wind with necklaces of lead the gaze of each of them substantiated each of us star reconciled with silence through signs of darkness

the ends of the nights was slowly coming the passing wind wrote on the waves and pushed us ashore we slithered the best we could toward the fires that had been lit in the courtyards many years have passed since then I had evidence of bitter agony

and I stayed there shattered my hat fallen in the dus

o how long it has been since I saw the sun glowing above the sun

Gellu Naum, "The Voyage with Stelică", translated by Claudiu Komartin and Stephen Watts, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 'Between Clay and Star', No. 2, 2013.