

Dane Zajc
Three poems
Translated from the Slovene by Angus Reid

Dane Zajc is regarded as the most important Slovene poet of the second half of the twentieth century and is, to my mind, one of the greatest 20th-century poets. Anecdote recounts that Ted Hughes was introduced to his work while on a fishing trip to Slovenia in the 1990s, and saw in Zajc's tough lyrical swing a resolution of themes than he himself had been unable to achieve. I met him at the same time, and my translations in this volume were an exchange for three translations he made of my own poetry. He was a warm and generous man: he knew all his poetry by heart and he had an extraordinary speaking voice. Born in 1929, he had a traumatic childhood, witnessing the brutal murder of his father at the hands of the occupying Nazis, who threw him into a burning house. Both of his brothers also died during the conflict. Almost all his poetry – and particularly his love poetry – reflects this experience in some way, recycling images of fire, ash and violence. Zajc only achieved official recognition at the end of his life: before then his work was banned by the communist authorities, who also forbade his enrolment at university. For four decades he worked as a city librarian, but continued to publish poetry and plays. He re-entered the public scene as a vocal

supporter of the Slovenian Democratic Opposition in the late 1980s, during the Slovene Spring. Later, he served as president of the Slovene Writers Association and received the prestigious Prešeren Award for lifetime achievement. He died in 2005.

Black Flowers
(Rože Noči)

I gathered black flowers
Gathered them by night
In the hopeless meadow
In the poison light

I drank a passion drink
Drank a poison drink
Drank it seeming sweet
Sold my soul to seeming sweet
And sold my soul too cheap

Stamping on the higher slope
That black horse will have his way
He's muscled like a muscled rope
The one the devil cannot break

The force of him can force the field
And force across that meadow
The spark of him is fire-heeled
A flyer in the fire's shadow

Down the lonely length of hours
His raging ruts my head
Spattering black flowers
With blood's corrosive red

Go the Crows
(Dva Vrana)

Over earth frozen tight
black flight, black on white
two crows

cra cra
nae faurer can we fa

blown frozen over earth
over water frozen white
winter white

cra cra
nane ava, nane ava

black famine blown over
frozen earth, black on white
go the crows

cra cra
wing wing awa

Journeyman
(Potepuh)

Oh, lay my face between your paps
And drown me in your endless peace
Oh, teach me how with gentle steps
To bear myself, to make a truce

Faraway they know my name
The whisper came for me tonight
Despair and her accomplice Time
Accompany the early light

Were I to stay and stay for life
Despair would hammer her divorce
And injure this discovered love
And hollow out a lover's face

It's better to be on my way
With only here and now of you
Than to allow the prophecy
Of loveless Time to be the truth

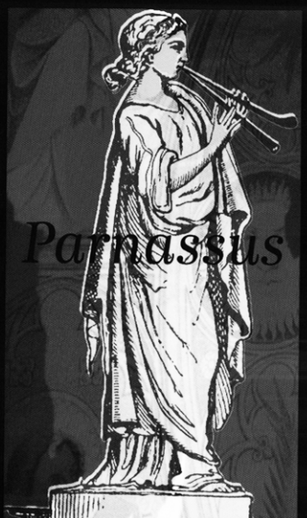
I was never more than poor
Never wanted less than good
Never wanted more than warmth
Never kissing where I could

The love I had was never full
Until it met me at your lips
And poured a bliss into my soul
And played upon my fingertips

There's that summons in the wind
Drumming me into the open
I'm leaving it, this quiet room
This one-way conversation

Sleep. Sleep on and sleep without
My body and my fiction
I know my heart, I know my route
My worth and my addiction

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