

Jesenske Haiku Pjesme

Haikus for Autumn in Dalmatia

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Deseti

Danas smo odrinu makli,
deka na krevetu stoji.
adio, lito.... adio.

Stradun zimi

ma nemoj...

... a šta češ?

opet kiša...

Četiri i po

Vjetar u portu,
Nikoga nema. Leteće kese
če potonut.

October

Sun shade in the closet,
blanket on the bed.
Another season, another year.

Stradun in winter

...so then she said

and it's still raining...

well, anyway...

darkening

no one at all
in the windy harbor.
At four thirty, the lamps switch on.

Advent 4

A plastic bottle
washes up, near sand angels
on the empty beach.

AUTHOR'S COMMENTARY: My First Croatian Poems

First, I have to recognize that these poems are not, strictly speaking, haiku. In writing them, I did not adhere to the constraints of the traditional Japanese form, or even to the syllable counts associated with the English versions. These short poems are simply haiku-like in form and spirit, a series of short word-pictures that seemed to write themselves, as I noticed and felt the slow, undeniable change of seasons in Dubrovnik -- summer fading into fall, and then darkening into winter.

My life here is close to nature, my daily mood seasoned moment by moment by weather, climate, changes in sunlight and wind. With so much sea and sky in my eyes every day, I've learned to see more and feel more each time I look out the window, or step outside. I'm conscious of the big, wild, living, changing system of air and water and plants and animals and planets around me, of which I am just a tiny, and relatively powerless part.

These poems essentially wrote themselves over a period of several months. Some of them originated as facebook statuses, others as phrases that rolled around in my head for a while. Most interesting to me is that these poems wrote themselves in Croatian first, which is remarkable since it is not my native language. I often find myself thinking and even dreaming in Croatian, but I think this my first attempt at Croatian poetry. (My first priority was to find the right words, and so attention to grammar came later.)

Since these particular phrases were born in my head in Croatian, it was actually a challenge to translate them into English. I had to take some liberties with the translation, particularly since words like *odrina* just don't have a good English equivalent (*awning* sounded terrible to me). Similarly, conversational phrases like "a šta češ?" are really untranslatable. I had to find an entirely different English phrase to try to capture the sort of sighing resignation that this phrase embodies. Another translation challenge of course, is rhythm . The four syllables of *opet kiša* have a beautiful sense of closure, which is lost in translation. So, rather than sticking to a literal translation, I allowed myself a lot of freedom in trying to simply capture the feeling of the moment.

Deseti was written on a sad day in October, when we really did take down the *odrina* from the terrace, and the bare *grede* were sort of sad. And after months of no blankets at all, I realized that day that I needed to get one out of the closet and spread it on the bed.

Stradun zimi is a poem for both eyes and ears, an attempt to catch snatches of overheard conversation, as well as to imitate the appearance of Stradun in winter, a vast, mostly empty space, with just a few isolated people, walking hunched against the rain.

Četiri i po began with the title. I wasn't sure at all what it was going to say at first, but I knew it had to be called *četiri i po*. Four thirty is an important and mystical time in November and December, and I wanted to capture that closing, darkening feeling.

Advent 4, unlike the others, was written in English first, and I haven't attempted a Croatian translation. Sand angels, of course, are a warm-weather version of traditional snow angels, made by children around the world. This poem, inspired by a real visit to the beach during Advent, is really about the trash that we see and the angels that we don't, and that sense of waiting, during Advent, for the revelation of a mystery that seems very near, if we can only recognize it.

Dubrovnik is famous, and, it seems, getting more so all the time. Millions of people have walked the streets of this town, but almost all of them under the summer sun. Yet, those of us who live here know the face of Dubrovnik out of season, one that is more complicated and surprising, and the inspiration for these poems.