

SAMPLE  
TRANSLATION

BLAŽ LUKAN  
SELECTED POEMS  
ENGLISH

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TRANSLATED BY: ANA JELNIKAR & STEPHEN WATTS

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## Blaž Lukan: Selected poems

### SPIRITS OF THE POLIS.

They claim ownership of the spirit,  
their mouths full of saliva.

A young body is closest to god, they say,  
that is why they can merge together.  
They comb their greasy hair with child hands,  
for breakfast they eat dozens of them, lightly toasted.  
Without a roof over their heads, they are forlorn,  
they can't pitch a tent, much less make a bivouac.  
They're shaken by the cold and afraid of thunder.  
They've lost the sword & tear flesh with bare teeth.

And yet they claim ownership of the spirit  
the spirit of decay.

## A BITE INTO THE APPLE.

We sit on separate benches, listening to the wind,  
my friend, your enemy.  
For me time flows forward, for you it flows back.  
Our hands are equally coarse, warm, our fingers bent.  
We live one life, divided in two.

The bird above our heads sits now on one branch,  
now on another, in a rhythm of music.  
The horizon ahead of us was once empty,  
now it is filled with air, we breathe it,  
deep and focused, wanting to plumb its depths.

Our faces do not age, just our hands and the tips of our hair.  
In a moment of quiet we think of no one but the other.  
We swap hats like clowns, smiling inside ourselves.  
We keep defying someone inside us, there's no threat from the outside.  
In our minds we are sprawled on the sofa, hands crossed over our chests.

We open up to others in small bursts, they come and go through a door slightly ajar.  
We don't even have to open our eyes to know why we are here and what lies ahead.  
We are shaken only by a sudden gust of wind from around the corner,  
I from expectation, you from fear.

In our round eyes, everything assumes the shape of an apple.  
Together we bite into it and freeze in that moment.

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## FORGOTTEN PARTISAN ATTACK.

The hand in mid-air is not a signal for, but against.  
Don't shout, just be silent and say it all.  
Hit me in the face and I'll begin to see.  
Speed is important, get moving.

Carnage on the horizon, let it be pure & clean.  
We'll be cutting off tongues slowly and systematically.  
After which, whoever is still speaking, will be awarded  
death, a funeral at the expense of the state.

Let blood spill off the flag.  
That's how our ancestors used to die.  
There was no fear, just amnesia.  
Let what has just been planted grow,  
not what right now is in blossom.

No one was given a mandate  
to be silent in our name.  
Make me the Commander, I want to give orders!  
Erase my name from the list, let me be a number.  
A number extended into a long chain  
that will tighten its belt round my country.

Let he be first who is without guilt,  
without hands, without a bullet-proof jacket.  
Let me just brush against him  
and catch his strength.  
As the first leaf falls, so does the tree,  
and everyone from their pedestals and niches.  
Let there be silence at least for a moment.  
And then the forgotten Partisan attack.

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## MOUTH IN THE POEM.

The difficulty is not in the saying, but in the staying silent.  
When a poem speaks of itself, it speaks of nothing.

Come into me, world, so I can swallow you!  
If I stammer persistently enough, meaning will come.

When the poem speaks of nothing, it speaks of itself.  
The body is never silent, the world is silent.  
The centre of the word is soft, the crust hard.

Nothing can be set in motion merely with language.  
Through the mouth, the wind breathes.

Only a poem, written on the skin, breathes.  
A word, uttered unto itself, is worthless.  
The value of silence overrated.

When the doors open onto the world, words gush forth.  
Grab hold of me, so you don't get sucked into the whirlpool!

Come into me, world, so I can swallow you!  
I gush out on the empty page of this book.

I will exorcise a poem from a poem, a word from a word.  
So much of everything still waiting for its voice.

## I EXPECT ATTENTION.

I expect attention, not giving, but taking,  
a big fish on a plate, a nettle in its muzzle,  
a bodyguard ready for a gunshot with eyes closed,  
a ceramic pen in the left hand, compliments of the president of the Crafts Guild.  
Because I'm not alone, I have to hang out with pain.  
In the end you always get the short end.

I can't see myself from the inside, but I am shabbily assembled,  
a picture I try to flog around – lying that it's me.  
I expect some sort of buzz in recognition of my spoilt habits.  
I draw models, tick off accomplished tasks, sit on foreign knees,  
I don't like to settle accounts, I don't dream about cats in the lap,  
I can only go with body against body, the silent darkness of the forehead,  
the shudder of tones in the breastbone.

I expect undivided attention, mother's hand on my forehead,  
tea in a teapot, water in a glass with a coin.  
I shudder from the shots put through me, let the bullet stay in the bone,  
let it lodge itself in the stomach so I can digest it like a grape pip.  
Let me be, let me be afraid as now when I understand the poem  
as a pronouncement, a judgement, a clairvoyant prophecy.

I expect attention from this poem, let it absorb me at last like a sponge.  
Let me be sea foam, if only for a moment, spraying from my wife's mouth..