

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

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ATLANTIS
ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY: ŠKUC, 2008

TRANSLATED BY: RAWLEY GRAU

ORIGINAL TITLE: ATLANTIS

NUMBER OF PAGES: 147

Boris Pintar (Gojmir Polajnar): Atlantis

Swan Song

My name is Fatima. I am a Muslim. This is the most important fact of my life. I loved a Christian. We met at a piano competition. He played Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto and took second place. I came in third with Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor. My family was open-minded; I studied piano; we were wealthy and lived in the Paris suburbs. I was the only one in my family who was interested in Western art. I never wore a bikini or a sleeveless top. After the competition he invited me back to his place for tea. Such boldness! This was the first time I had ever been alone with a strange man in his apartment. The only thing I took off was my shoes; the whole afternoon he played for me on his electric piano, talked about the philosophy of art and life, read his poems to me, showed me his drawings, and explained the structure of the heart to me using a model designed for medical students. I was not a good enough pianist, life and art were not complicated enough for me, for him to ask me to play something for him. I was knowledgeable about modern poetry and painting and could see that here, too, he was re-creating great works, just as he did in his music. But there was something that remained inexpressible, undepictable, uncapturable by melody, a pain that did not reflect the success he had found in every field. He was manifoldly gifted, well-educated, hard-working, disciplined; he had practiced several hours a day before the competition; his desire was to win, he wanted to make a name for himself everywhere—in music, in medicine, in society. His vitality attracted me; his hands were never idle, whether gliding over piano keys, leafing through a book, or reaching for cigarette after cigarette. Our afternoon was a continuation of his morning performance at the competition, where he had been given too little time to show off his abilities; our dialogue was a monodrama for a receptive audience, who followed its dramatic arc to the philosophical world-pain that is the foundation of Christianity. We both came from large families, but in my family, life was not a penance but a privilege; my father and I did not argue back and forth endlessly about how he had left the mark of his authority on me as a child; I did what he told me to do – that's how it had always been; he never asked me to do anything that would hurt me, he never raised his voice, he encouraged me to pursue my education so I would know the unbelievers' culture as well as the ones who called themselves natives; but I knew that I was a Muslim and that my husband would be one too. We obey our men—our fathers, brothers, husbands, sons—and we expect them not to abandon us. Family is as sacred as faith, so we preserve it like a relic (as he would say), and it will continue to live on even when the society of the natives is no more.

I came back. We had our Héloïse and Abélard secret, our search for love in lost piano lessons and missed trains. We would stay in his dark cell, with its window in the lower part of a light well

where the sun never shone. The opposite wall was covered in mirrors and the room was filled with the playful shadows of candlelight. We did not sit in the old bistros of Montmartre with their little round tables and wobbly chairs crammed together on sloping sidewalks as if all the couples in love were part of a single big group. We didn't parade our passion; we talked about music and its pain. We were self-sufficient in our little den, with the piano, the computer, and books. I admired his compositions while he flaunted the adorable movement of his body. One of his pieces was dedicated to Mata Hari; he played it for me on the computer with an electronic orchestra and performed the Dance of the Seven Veils. I stared at the mirror, frozen, as he tossed off his clothes; his body was muscular, his legs as strong as a ballet dancer's, and his arms could have lifted me like a swan. My brothers were different; they were soft and hairy; beauty has rounded contours; the attractive body should be pliant enough for another body to nestle in as if in fluffy down. I had never before seen a man in tight underpants; I lowered my eyes; the show was about to end or else I would have fled. The orchestra stopped playing; he stood naked before me, in profile, so I could clearly see his swollen organ. He was looking at me in the mirror as I kept glancing frantically up at the appendage, curved like a Turkish saber, on the bronze body of a fertility god, which I had once seen on a postcard of an ancient Greek statue. He stood in the pose of a living tableau the color of patinated bronze. The first naked man I ever saw was a Greek demigod; although white as salt in the Louvre, in their own day they had been painted, with red lips and blue eyes, so why couldn't they have been as dark as Bedouins? As if his feet were riveted by horseshoes to the floor, he waited for the clink of the coin that would bring him to life; I held my breath; I did not know what tone to take; and when I exhaled the hot breath he shifted his hand, took hold of the protuberance, turned toward me in slow motion, and started sliding his fist up and down. I was like stone; he came closer; I let my hair fall over my eyes. He did not touch my hair; he unbuttoned my blouse and out jumped my lavish pale breasts with their firm chestnuts and my bouncy belly rolls. He did not go further; he contented himself with the soft quilt above my heart and, for his messenger, my instrument of speech. He turned me so he could watch the path of the divine herald in the mirror; now you see it, now you don't, as it loses itself along the milky way. This was not me, my father's daughter; this was Judith, the maiden of paradise, who sacrifices the warrior for the freedom of her race. I am a maiden with a mouth full of elixir. The seed I had hoped would spawn godly musicians was trickling down my face. I took a long time rinsing out the blouse in the bathroom; black semen eats into fabric and boiling is the only way to remove it, just as it does into wood, where the evidence of our lovemaking remained on the parquet floor in front of the mirror.

His father was from the Ivory Coast, his mother, a Frenchwoman; he was neither black nor white, neither an Abidjanian nor a Parisian. My family was from Lebanon; we were Shiites; we followed the lineage of the Prophet; I bore the name of the Prophet's daughter and played Chopin. Lebanon was paradise on earth, a community of religions, a bazaar of cultures, the bank of the Arab world; because of my religion I was not French, because of my art, not Arab. Would our children be the heirs to a universal music, or would they be hybrids, a legitimate target for anyone to throw stones at? The Shiite community offered me trustworthy support as a family; I had no desire to become a Frenchwoman; I did not regret not being exposed; my body was uninteresting in close-fitting clothes; its lavishness found full expression only when it overflowed, unconfined, within the folds of a wide

bed. He was tormented by his background; he won prizes in competitions, he was better than his colleagues, he was proficient in a wide range of sports, his education met the requirements of the upper class, but that class would not accept the mulatto as an equal. In the land of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, anyone can do whatever he wants – but not with whomever he wants like in America, which achieves success without the benefit of ancestry and then builds houses for itself that resemble *châteaux*. How could a child raised in France identify with a land famous for the slave trade, where the Portuguese bought prisoners of war and deviants off the local chiefs; a land known for its coffee, cocoa, and palm oil; for its wars over the riches of the earth, which it gets entangled in whenever the French take offense at the Americans or the Americans at the English; for Our Lady of Peace, which surpasses even St. Peter's in Vatican City; how could he identify with a homeland that had never cultivated any symphonic orchestral tradition of baroque lavishness, where there was no need for the baroque, since the Huguenots had been unable to destroy in a few decades the lavishness of nature? He told himself that he was better than his peers, more desirable, so why did he need so much love? Wasn't his circle of friends enough for him? And why did these friends always have to make such an exhibition of their longing? He depended on no one, which was why he needed the confirmation he sought in the underground world with his idealized body, to be able to bridge his shortcoming, just as with his giftedness he overcame the distance between us. I had never opposed my father, his word was law; I knew he would not accept this union, that he would have me ostracized from the community; my brothers would not have killed me, as in Germany, but I would be for them the sister who never existed. Dorian wrote long letters to his father – he passionately desired his acceptance, although he never told him why he was afraid he would reject him; over and over without success he tried to clear the air between them; his father was to blame for his fears of social nonacceptance, just as the mother is to blame among Americans. He never mentioned me in his letters, although he proposed that we live together. I explained my situation to him; he was crystal clear, with no frozen sediments: if I

chose him, he would be the only loved one I had left, he loved me enough to bear this burden, he couldn't just send me back to my father when he was done amusing himself with me. I wanted to believe him; if only he had told me this without any *Fleurs du mal* parables, simply, as in some bucolic tale. I was not one of those European women who loudly insist they won't be washerwomen for their men's dirty clothes—and then ban these men from the laundry room because that's where they drape their soiled underpants over their noses; women who dress their men like children and won't let them choose their own necktie or shoes—they think they have better taste than the men, but accumulating knick-knacks has nothing to do with beauty—and all the while they demand to be made love to like bitches. I like the idea of submitting to my man, pleasing him, and knowing that he will respect my needs—of not living in the fear that I might not be attractive enough for him anymore or that some teenage brat with a ring in her belly-button had turned his head. The position of the mother is more secure than the pussies he chases after with that smile he reserves for trollops. The painted wrinkled women who are pursued by young circumcised men with no money for a wife are as much to be pitied as those old men with hair implants who marry Playboy virgins. I would have left my family for him, if that was what he really wanted. I never took off my skirt, he never saw my thighs; his soccer legs were a shapely pedestal for a monument; our union was not consummated; I would smear his semen over my breasts, where it had

dried, so I could feel it tingling my nipples when I was under my father's roof. He invited me to share his mirrored chamber with him. He received half-pay for his work at the cardiology department, enough so we wouldn't go hungry, but I wasn't sure I'd be able to satisfy his needs, to banish his fears, or if I would become an amulet he'd take from the shelf to comfort himself with in lieu of a tattered teddy bear.

All the while he was promising never to leave me he was also courting a beautiful Ethiopian woman; he told me about her after he had been seeing both of us for several months. He showed me her picture on his mobile: she was tall and slender, with compact curves, a clear complexion, dark, bare skin, and an Afro coiffure. She was my opposite; black women are like gazelles; it's only after giving birth that these graces become as baroquely abundant as Muslim women. People have always told me that an undulating belly and backside are marrow for men; those who are drawn to tight jeans I prefer not to think about. She wrote columns on East Africa for *Le Monde*; he could read her newspaper pieces on his morning coffee break after hospital rounds. I was studying Arabic, but not so I could translate for French companies doing business in the Arab world, or so I could publish articles, but so I'd be a better teacher to my children when they read the Koran and a better wife to my husband, who would take care of me. He said he loved us both with all his heart and suggested we meet. He was searching for his roots in West Africa, where he had been, altogether, for only a few weeks on holiday, staying with

relatives who were close to the president; he attended meetings of West African dissidents, who stood in front of their embassies and called loudly for democracy from behind their placards; whenever someone seized power, he wanted to be counted among these protesters; they were the reason he was excluded in other circles, but neither was he received with favor among the professional dissidents, who felt no guilt over their successful establishment in society. Nobody needed his conscience, that fiction of poets and witch doctors which is marketed as the pain of the world by the kind of people whom decency does not permit me to name.

Sibyl was from the Horn of Africa and belonged to the world's oldest nation, a nation that had not been colonized, one of the earliest Christian states, which had built monolithic churches in stone, an empire that had preserved its languages, the land of Eve, who had been named Lucy—she was all he lacked for a prince's self-confidence. I saw them once from a distance on the Champs Élysées; they were strolling along, arm in arm, looking at the window displays; they were a well-matched couple; they carried themselves with pride, as if walking the runway in a fashion show; some Algerian construction workers, who were renovating the façade of one of the buildings, whistled at her from the scaffolding, but he was the one who turned and smiled, as if they were flirting with him. Like a king and his queen, they were gracious to the white peasants. He had a partner who turned people's heads and, as he told me, all the sodomites at work were trying to win his favor; he liked the fact that they were both so desired and he was glad when he could display this to the world. What I belonged to was trapped in his heart and, apart from him, no one was allowed to know of it.

For endless hours I listened as he spoke of intricate conspiracies, the result of so many people desiring him and his being unable to comply. His adviser at work, the man who was preparing him for the medical board exam, had fallen in love with him; he wanted to have him for himself; he was jealous of Dorian's male colleagues and maligned him in their presence. Dorian let the professor know that he

wasn't a degenerate, that he had a girlfriend whom he was going to marry—but that made no impression; he knew that the young man belonged to him if he cared at all about working at the hospital because otherwise he could just forget about his career; black people didn't have their own lobby in cardiac medicine the way Jews did, who could get rid of anybody who opposed them. There was no committee, no jury to help him if this capricious old man got it stuck in his head that he deserved his wrath, because all his life he had been denying himself, concealing himself, lonely and afraid, all so he could reach the position of power that now made it possible for him to demand of others what had previously been demanded of him, and he was not about to renounce it for the price of any ideals, or changes, or life itself. The

more Dorian flirted with his female colleagues, the more the director craved his body, which, as much he could not possess it, he wanted to destroy. He constructed a network of connections around Dorian that would make it impossible for him to advance or be hired in the profession. Only how did he enlist them all, since surely he had not told his old female workmates that the young doctor had refused to hand him the key to his virginity and this was why he would not be allowed to join the guild of cardiologists? Through twisted channels he conveyed the message that Dorian should be happy to get a job as a family doctor in some village in the Pyrenees because otherwise he could still end up dealing with bear problems. The man was driving him to the verge of suicide, he admitted to me after a long confession; I was frightened; I didn't know how to help someone who I thought had everything and yet wished to die. It is blasphemy even to think such a thing, let alone say it. How could I rely on him, if my love was not stronger than the hatred of some embittered male?

There were more and more of us in his little box: the Muslim pianist, the black princess, the Jewish murderer; we were all striving for the attention of the heart composer, who flew from blossom to blossom, drank nectar and distributed pollen, suffered from anxiety, curried the favor of others, but never asked himself if his dividedness was hurting anyone, never wondered if I was content to be one of his four wives. We served his exceptional nature, the diversities he carried within himself. We were not alone. A writer from some imaginary land showed up; he was studying French psychoanalysis in a gloomy bar. He told him the story of the four, as he had earlier told me, and at the same time he was shamelessly learning the secrets of womanhood. How could he select me as his confidante for these indecencies when he knew that I was the least able to bear them? He mentioned love at first sight, which was why he wanted to surrender himself to the stranger without a condom—even though recently he had been saying he wanted to sire a child with me. Metaphysical pain turned into sexual warfare; he was a lover of the gentler sex; me he loved platonically, his black Barbie doll physically, and he gave himself over to sin like a woman in heat. Nothing seemed wrong to him; he was able to sip from all beliefs whatever suited him; we were priests and priestesses waiting for the birth of the prophetess. He was dear to me and I became a nurse to him, this fosterling, who curled himself in my arms whenever he felt hurt.

I played European music, but I was not looking for my child in my man; I was looking for someone who would respect me and for whom union with me would be joy, not the pain of sexual difference. I no longer play the piano; his music attracts men who are more interested in themselves than in the revelation of creation. Forgive me, for I have loved an unbeliever!

Atlantis

If you don't believe me

you can lick my ass,

lick it till it's heaving!

This might take a lot of time,

but god, won't it be sublime!

— Mozart, from a letter

Nowhere more blatantly than in Christianity does the work of art

show itself as what it has been in all places—obscenity.

— Lacan, “On the Baroque” (*Seminar 20*)

The doorbell rings out “Silent Night.” The man adjusts his bowtie in front of the mirror and, his hand slightly shaking, hurriedly opens the iron door, which was made to look like oak; steel bars lock it on three sides, but in spite of its weight, it is so well oiled it handles easily. They stand face to face: an athletic-looking young man in a biker’s black leather bodysuit and boots, and a person of some years, his body gravitating toward the navel, meticulously groomed, with the polka-dot bowtie perfectly arranged against the plaid flannel shirt beneath his smoking jacket and wearing loose corduroy trousers and fur-lined slippers. The old man smiles, the racer keeps a straight face.

“Home delivery from the Orion Agency.”

I hit the jackpot. If his tool is anything like . . . the bowtie-wearer thinks and steps back to let the man in black in. He is barely across the threshold when the chimney sweep becomes lord of the manor, grabs the door from the poor fellow’s hands, slams it shut, and with shovel-like palms seizes his victim by the neck, unties the bow and starts pulling it tight. The pasty face seizes up, veins pop out, eyes bulge, the mouth stops gasping for air.

He’s reading my mind. I’m a s—

The helpless body collapses when the furnace man lets go; only the dick stands up, ready to fly into the world beyond.

“Lick the boots!” a voice commands from above, followed by a gurgling sound, and then a slimy, greenish brown blob of spit drops on the polished leather.

Just let him catch his breath and he'll obey every order; he loves it when he's being punished, no questions asked, so it's not always him doing the thinking; it excites him to get thrashed like some orphan out of Dickens. There's no rest period; the blacksmith's hand strikes him across the cheek so hard the fingermarks glow like white-hot nails; the phoenix flies higher, and before his lungs can fill with oxygen, he's licking the mucus off the boot, so it's trickling down the chin when the affection-hungry dog asks his master for more. The executioner clears his throat, an even more mucussy globule falls on the other boot, and a second, even more scalding slap strikes the other cheek. The starving dog laps up the viscous excretions and starts in on the boot's steel buckles; a prong stabs his tongue and a drop of blood darkens the gleaming metal; a painful blow to the back orders him: Make 'em shine! Hercules unzips the smooth skin's metal zipper from the Adam's apple down to his club. The sphinx gets on her knees and begs. Hercules' taut pectorals are as bare as a woman's breasts; a line of dark hair in the middle of his magic-square abdomen runs down across the navel and into Pandora's box.

The merchandise is excellent!

The host's abdomen is not as developed; it gathers in folds; he likes his muffins for breakfast and cheese after supper, which isn't something you need past forty. But he is a doctor of philosophy; his mind comes before any well-chiseled sculpture, gives meaning to what exists; the well-built pile of meat in front of him is consumer goods, like the handsomest, swiftest stallions who end up in the slaughterhouse. He doesn't need to deny himself like temple prostitutes, who are what they are because of their abdomens, although they need brains too, to act out the role that excites him. He slobbers on the leather across the jingles and the jangle. Is the butcher hard? With his teeth he pulls the zipper all the way down and the pig's knuckle and stamens slap him in the face. Though not yet standing at attention, it's already as big as his own magic flute, which, with the little bells, is playing a merry tune in his pants. Thickness is more important than length; on this point he happily agrees with lesbians, who otherwise tend toward the deceit that demands love, for in her essence woman is not whole, while he is on the side of desire for the *manque à être*. The libido is masculine in nature. Respiratory erogeneity comes into play with the spasm. Not breathing is liberating; the seconds without air, the timelessness of tense veins—this excites him more than getting aimlessly fucked; playing with life, gambling with death—this is the only way he can climax. Young guys need drugs to get it up; they all think they can do any job, no matter what; whores should get hard without him having to do the work for them. A blow on the back of the neck interrupts his thoughts; a brutal yank of the hair and the raw sausage is stuffing his mouth. He's proud of his gastronomic skills, his sublime nouvelle cuisine and his vulgar rough-and-ready cooking. The fact of its rising on the twenty-year-old is all down to the strength of his spirit. With his mouth still full, he strips off his jacket and shirt; underneath he wears a harness of steel rings and straps

pierced with rivets, like the one on a horse or the string mesh on a pot roast. It hardens on the intruder into an idol of the ur-god, who is hidden in the symbol of fertility, a fertility to which the buttocks are symbolically linked. The professor is an expert on ancient cultures: in its original form the beautiful is the good. Phallic pleasure is the enjoyment of truth. He looks imploringly into the eye of the god: may he strip naked please, so the holy foot can crush him to the ground? He removes the corduroys but keeps on his snakeskin thong, which has a zipper over the cock and straps across the butt, so the trench is free. He puts a studded leash around his neck and offers it to the master along with a bull-pizzle whip. The master flogs the bare ass of the underpants-wearer until he's yelping on all fours and licking the Cosmatesque floor in the luxurious house in the presidential neighborhood. The blows leave marks on the tender skin and he barks all the louder at the antique furniture, not passed down in the family but accumulated from antique shops, from the English country furniture to the portraits of forgotten queens at the end of the line to the throne. The teacher of philosophy knows that female pleasure, which ought not to be necessary, about which it is impossible to speak, is anal pleasure, a pleasure without orgasm, which, though lacking, drives the world. He knows that the object-cause of desire, the petit a, the excrement, the excess, this something more than us, the anus, the gland, the hole, the ring of nothingness, is like the starry sky above us and the moral law within us. The Anoûs is depicted by the Grand Master of the Most High Bridgemaker in the image of God's Anus. Like a frog in a dissection lab, the philosopher is lying on the English farmhouse table with his underpants unzipped; the autopsy surgeon tightens the strap around the balls until they plump up like pride, attaches pincers to the nipples, turns the screws to the point of pain, connects the tit clamps to the ballstrap with a chain, and twists it slowly. The kitten purrs; with one paw she grabs the rod on Finnish Tom, which has gotten soft again, and with other gives him a razor blade, with which he makes bloody slits across the abdomen and chest. Tom writes himself into philosophy as a scar on the belly of the philosopher. Because of the sex difference, mothers need someone to guard the bloodline and men have to be certain of their paternity; women can't sleep without love, while males establish their genes by fertilizing a variety of females. He puts queers on the male side, despite their getting by far the most semen. It's because of the crack that there's no equality. If he puts queers on the side of the Female Other, then females are the ones with the power. Exotic mothers who smother their newborn girls are a cultural difference we should respect; the African circumcision of women must be protected no less than endangered elephants. Sexual speculation melts away problems the way the wax of a burning candle seals open wounds. Women, in their hurt over the faggots' indifference toward them, are ready to spend their lives with an asexual just so they can dress up defeat as victory. The professor lives with his elderly cook-and-gardener; they may have stopped having sex a long time ago, but whenever the professor has guests he still has to take a walk. After supper, they lay out the cards for solitaire, each at his own card table, and spur each other on with cries of joy whenever one of them finishes the deck. He knows that single mothers (marriages collapse like houses of cards) themselves offer gentlemen their little shepherd boys with their little flageolets; such is the order of the world; unsatisfied men are why wars break

out; unsatisfied women are why madhouses fill up. They are not jealous of the gentlemen; every man needs his flute. To mothers, sons are more attractive than the fathers, who are full of their own juice. The aesthete knows that single mothers have no taste, or have no money, which amounts to the same thing, so he feels no pity for them. Appearance is the reflection of essence, healthiness the appearance of disease, normalness the effect of the Dollar. The whore is male. The fallen get chomped up, the old become the state. A mouse gets itself caught in the mousetrap in the corner. The garden is riddled with holes and sometimes a mouse finds its way into the house. The philosopher is unable to kill the trapped mice. He tosses them in the sleepy river and believes the innocent ones will be saved. Fear is a wisdom tooth. Pleasure is gradual intensification, Foucault's whipping, pinching, stretching, cutting, burning is foreplay; he squeezes Figaro's nuts and points the fire hose toward his face. He catches the first squirt in his mouth and smells the sour scent of gold, then rain washes the blood from the wounds as the piss in the play within the play penetrates the living

shield.

The way you're fucking me, I'm taking you on the boat.

Mathematical archeology predicts that the year 2012 will see a new shifting of the earth's continents, land becoming seabed and seabed land, civilization sinking like Atlantis and history rising up with those revealed. The most fervent of all are the philosophers of conscience. When they destroy the people close to them, they persist, for the sake of conscience, until everyone has perished. Judas puts on a surgical glove and smears it with lubricant. The slave lifts his legs, the hand goes in without resistance, the desire of the maternal phallus swallows up the star, Anus sucks it in as the Nile did Hadrian's love. With the other hand Oedipus tightens the collar. The face tenses up, turns blue; euphoria grows, becomes unbearable; the dick spits out the professor's soul without anyone touching.