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Original titles and publishers

Strombolicchio. Uit de Smidse van Vulcanus (Prometheus)
Dwangbuis van Houdini (Prometheus)
Santander. Ontboezemingen in het Vossenveld (Prometheus)

Translation Dutch into English

Translator John Irons

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Solferino

It rose up from the very ocean floor
till the ice cap melted and cracked over Europe, it flew
along the hugest horror to the weakest wail
from the 25,000 throats of Béziers
standing by the Cathars, dancing over funeral pyres
on a Flamethrower with a bayonet
with the 15-inch-howitzers hacking on the cold
above Brandhoek, Ypres, Hellblast Corner, no-man's-land
sank alongside G.E. Ellison, lancer, the last to fall
mixed in carnal knowledge and then took root
in forgotten graves – Solferino, time after time

The curdling revenge of Captain Grapplehook

I break myself down, build myself up.

Tack aback and then flip-flop.

Foam at the chops.

Keelhaul and heave ho.

‘Sailor?’

‘What d’you want, Hook?’

‘Avanti. From lava to spumanti.

West becomes east.’

Other suns, other planets.

Mortals that know of no stopping, brave the high

wave, learn from keeling

survive an ordeal by fire with senses reeling

when rounding Fire Island.

New Year's Day

And now for poetry. For man and dog.

For he who has nothing to look back on and has no prospects. For he who is afraid of his own fears. For the unknown poet and yonder farmer, vicious with a pitchfork to a cow. For the helpless dove, though proud with that slice of bread round its neck. Roocoo. Roocoo. Life that is pecked away. For the early lives, at life already sold like guinea pigs. The squashed mosquitoes in private cabins with self-service. And for the abused housewife with soon a kitchen knife in the back and the old woman bound to the bog. A thick-skulled carcass on a mattress in an icecold lock-up. And for the dog of the Ponte della Maddalena. The devil built a bridge in exchange for the first soul to cross it. The village sent the faithful Borgo.

*In joy and grief, in ease and care,
In every age, prepare, prepare.*

Reynard, you'd amicably asked the rat to leave.
Two weeks later he lay on the lawn. You tattered and torn.

'99 frogs took a horse to Paris.' You saw a raven fly
to the other side of the world to make it dark.
Ice on fire. Mouse in trap. What song haunted your head?
Come, father, come on home with me.

Her pony mourns and dances to the thunder. Silverplate green.
Around her starry bed the family flattened like the clouds.

The magic lantern has been put out.
Mother stays strong, continues talking to her daughter.
Somewhere she can hear me still, she thinks.

Is she dead, child on the pier?
Dead she is.

The princess in the glass mirror

1

In every stage of life is given

A warning voice, it speaks from Heaven

Two thousand mice slept in two thousand matchboxes.
King Rat in his air balloon coloured everything in his flight: a
Friesian cow became a Belgian flag, mooed in shock until
it rained frogs. But still there fell no pennies from heaven.

A lamppost that waved and betrayed a young couple to death. After
25 minutes the girl was reanimated. A white dove that
flew against your window the night she departed this life. Did she call
on the emergency frequency? The dove on the roof stared at you. Don't ask
why. Coincidence or no coincidence: that wavelength. Inflation
everywhere.

Brain-dead.

Death leads life in randomly snipped-off courses.

In youth it whispers as a friend.

Is she still alive, pearl-fisherman?

She is still alive.

The dog of Devil's Bridge

III

Go to Burgos and read on an old palace
'dying well lasts a whole life long'

Go to Edinburgh, to Greyfriars
a statue to the faithful Bobby
that waited on the grave of his master

Everything is linked to everything, dog to man

I walk with my mother along hollow roads
seeking in the rain for the trees
of her youth – trees are flexible
they do not give in but give way

The wind plays with the leaves, she hears
three days before your death you'll get a sign
light is already lit in the House of Heaven
roamings outroamed
knapsack full of sorrow for the day flies by

We follow the route of the whipped dog

Come home, the skies drift backwards
outsiders grope in hidden circuits
a former bouncer of The Laughing Cow
jabbers and, ashen, falls apart
pulls himself together, aghast
at the warmth of a cup of coffee

The night pulls a sheet over the city
but what, navigator, if the head explodes

The magician comes

Picture a southern terrace in let's say Marseilles
you occupy a lousy room in the Rue de Mazenod
eat and drink like a jolly frog with an imaginary companion
look up, rub your eyes: no richly rhymed rhetorics
Dutchman, the Flying Dutchman ties up at the quay

A seigneur descends the gangplank in a natty cape
his trunk advances jauntily beside its master
the cutlery stands to attention at the Marseillaise
and your friend chokes on his bouillabaisse
you knew the magician would come

His palace is as big as your imagination, picture it to yourself
it is enthroned in creamy clouds like Nephelokokkugia
the female slaves there lick his wand, he flicks pearls at their navels
thrusts his little battering ram between the guru's chubby cheeks
throws him into a dungeon so dark even the enlightened one shudders

When the magician comes

You do not fear his wrath – you're lucky, you certainly had it coming
even more, you smash all the plates at his feet
you fill his boots with pastis before he can even say 'abra...'
you place him in front of a carnival mirror and paint his portrait
he genially crooks the corners of his mouth, finds it 'impressionnant'

You imitate a sunset, most impressionist
until he starts to nod – dismount your easel while he's still asleep
for if he suddenly starts, sea horses will run aground
if his balls nag, consumptives will shag themselves sound
if you summon him, you'll be astounded

The magician comes

The seagulls of Polperro

the seagulls of Polperro all know Captain Slim
a heart of stone, an empty bench to watch the sea
his eyes bright blue with cloudlike tatters of a dream

rapscallions of the wind, on every chimney of
Polperro he echoes, the thief of fish and chips

a chair in Mousehole takes a look outside and sees the cat
of Captain Slim that's bored, plays with the fishermen
the Stormcat blows from Land's End up to John o'Groats
sometimes releasing boats – and then his hunger swells
John Does like mice caught in a trap
John Shot
John Toms

the seagulls of Polperro all know Captain Slim
he cut Blue Peter's throat (the old romantic)
an inn recalls the booty that was shared around
the weathered women bore their pearly consolation
their Johnnies winkled from their shells
with seasigh for the other side
the briny green
why Johnny Raw
John Barleycorn
John Dory too

his John was long and thus his name on every tongue
The Red Fox, wily captain of the night
illusion, no – although he gleamed there in your pint
silence after the storm, child, that's what life's about

the seagulls
in '33 crying round the Billie Bray

Roza and the moon

The moon is a boy and yet he's cute
he peeps from under the clouds
but I sleep under the sheets.

He sings at an impossible hour:
'Nought are the stars, nought is the moon
it's off to bed the stars must soon
but it's time to wax for Jack 'o Light Moon.'

He mangles in a loud voice:
'Kirk, you're no Adonis thinking
he's at the centre of things.
Spock, your rusty starship
isn't leaving anywhere at 25.00 hours
for the moon of Manakoora.'

Dim-witted owlets and rabbits
start the mousy-hair rocket
stew the piggy with the longest snout
for the moon is in the clouds, lies
asleep in my bed of roses.

The Sleeping Giant

Late afternoon. The wasps approach me.
Not to tease me or to beg for something sweet.
They tamely moan, their wings now lame, their paws now lead.
'Have pity on us, euthanise us. We cannot go
on. Us wasps have had enough of summer.'

Eight of them I duly clobbered like a cat that
catches snails. That's it for the day.
The trots, everything sluggish except my bowels.
Outstretched in the grass, my child crawls over me
as over a hill. She has the eyes of
my mother (who's in the kitchen snipping with a dirty
pair of scissors at her corns; deeper than the dead
flesh a consoling pain wells up).

My bird-wife strokes me awake. Look up.
The silly sparrow's like a tower. Two blackbird nestlings
gape for food. She now removes her shoes.
Her swollen feet move when she thinks.
Her ballerinas lead their separate lives.

A thrush hip-hops away. The clouds collide.

Grass is already sprouting from my nostrils. The wind gets up
and sweeps through the three birches on my breast.
Scrub from the storm that's raging in my head
overruns my silhouette. The trees are dancing.
Zip like sheet lightning to an eroded tor
in Scotland. 'Sun is life,' is what a hiker says
at Kinloch Rannoch to his son.

The redshank sees in the hillside the profile of
a sleeping giant.

Song for the dead

Upsadaisy. From hobby-horse to hearse over the cobblestones.

It drizzled when grandmother was buried.

In September her daughter scrubs the grave though no one
ever comes by. My knees are ruined, she muses. So many
wasted years. If I ever get Alzheimer's, give me a jab. Or:
poor old granny was afraid the rabbits would nibble at her toes
in the cemetery. When my time comes, I'm going to let myself be
cremated. Mr Death's a gourmet underground.

In the mist above the graves: a little room at her house. Grey
dove stares at the tube, doesn't recognise her. 'I only get twenty
degrees and the TV guide offers only lousy programmes. You're
not sleeping with that man from downstairs, are you? How could you?
He's a thief, I hide my money.'

The smell of burning potato leaves. Mum says goodbye
to the swans. The skies are heavy, the mud sucks. Arthritis
in the shoulder. Quickly back to the house.

A radio drama in the living room. Nobody listens.
The hit parade. Anti-wrinkle cream. And a rosary in the drawer.