### In This Language I Shall Live

By Dragan Todorovic

I have always been interested in keywords. A keyword is not only summarising text, it is a Swiss knife of words, one answer to many questions, including translation. They don't have to be necessarily carrying the exact meaning, but are good as starting points, as weather vanes.

#### Feelings

A keyword for feelings is *distance*. This can be for obvious reasons, as with love where it is linear, but it can also be hidden, wrapped inside metaphors and reality. How is, for example, sadness related to distance? Is nostalgia also linear?

Some feelings are solid (not to be mixed with hard feelings) and some are soft. Solid feelings stand like turrets in the sun, glitter and gold, towers of our beliefs built in the cities we inhabit. Soft feelings are like breath on the mirror (and their purpose is mostly the same: to witness life). When we watch solid feelings from a distance they seem smaller due to perspective, but they are clearly there: blinding sunrays, choking shadows, red flags, skulls on shafts. Soft feelings just disappear with distance. You have to fire cannons on solid feelings; you can just forget soft feelings.

If you are unsure and need to test your emotions, take a trip. By what you see when you arrive and turn back you will know:

Love is both soft and solid. Love is a Schrödinger's cat. It's impossible to know whether it's alive until you open the box. Sadness is soft. Nostalgia doesn't exist as described. It is a post-revolutionary feeling, and we don't have revolutions anymore.

#### Cities

Cities are toponyms serving to triangulate our distance from the Self.

Strong cities annihilate your soft feelings and obstruct the view of the solid ones. By the time you arrive from the airport to your hotel, New York has rebooted you, Paris has painted you. The distance between *you* and *now* is such that the feelings must be restructured.

Foreign languages are cities. We lose ourselves in them, we find ourselves in them.

We learn languages to hide into them, to enhance our chances. Mother tongue is deep, secretive, exciting. Oaths taken in mother tongue are meaningful, pillow talk is arousing, secrets are taken seriously, feelings expressed with caution. In acquired language everything is cheaper, paler, more shallow. Insults don't insult and are easily hurled back, promises can be broken, feelings are given recklessly, with abandon. In an acquired language we behave like actors. We lend our bodies to the text that is not ours. We are who we are not.

#### Hair

So many things about who we are can be read from our hair. Ancient civilisations believed hair is the focal point of strength, a magical place from which someone's power emanates. Delilah depowered Samson by cutting his hair. Some tribes scalped their enemies. Perhaps we still believe in this. Prisoners have their hair cut when entering. Soldiers shave their heads. Monks as well.

Hair is not on our heads. Not the mane of our power, anyway.

Hometown is where your hair is hidden, wrapped up in the skin of your friends, tucked under the bridge of lingo, sealed in the locket around your first love's neck.

#### Narrative is art is narrative

When travelling from A to B one is not looking forward to his future, but to his past. We are not longing for what waits ahead, we are longing for the memories of what waits ahead.

The things we do we do not because they are our goal. We do them so we can have memories of them. Our general plan is to create toponyms that our memory could use to create a map—and that map is our narrative.

Everything we do we do for the big story. Our purpose on this earth is twofold: one is to carry on Life; the other is to create the narrative that will be part of the set making Life possible. That narrative is art. Language is the tool we build it with.

Language is the placenta keeping us alive.

#### The black holes of language

When exiles leave the map of their mother tongue and hurl their bodies, their minds and everything they have towards the map of another language, they enter the zone between languages, the zone of silence. Imagine two starships standing neither close nor far from each other—the exile in this metaphor leaves one ship to travel towards the other, hoping that it will take him in. Sounds don't travel through space, so while between the ships and their lights, warmth, gravity, the exile is weightless, a grain of cosmic dust, in perfect silence.

What black holes are to matter, exile is to language.

Once taken into the new spaceship, the exile is still exuding the smell of his homeland, still wearing the colours unfashionable here, his accent is more visible than a tattoo, but carrying the same meaning—that there has been a greater love in the past.

#### Stuttering of love

Why do we travel, move, seek new cities, dream of them, why do we long after them, conquer them or allow them to seduce us?

We travel to meet ourselves and we hope against all odds that our next version will be better than what we have at the moment, then who we are.

We travel because we cannot stand who we've become. Instinctively, we know that we lie ahead, that searching through family albums won't result in finding the us that we seek our whole life. We meet ourselves in foreign lands, where a different language is spoken, and we communicate in a broken language. We understand ourselves better when the meaning has been taken away. We stutter the words of love. We stand in awkward silence, thinking the same, feeling the same, but incommunicado.

#### Straight lines are impossible but days always arrive at midnight

Any journey is a journey in time. Destinations are only tricks of the mind to comfort us with a spatial achievement. We don't know what to do with time, how to work with it, not against it, and so we say to ourselves, Travelling in time is not possible, so let's travel in space. But travels in space will always take us back to the starting point and yield scenery of dubious qualities in between, while any arrival will confirm, again, and again, that we have moved in time. Where exactly we have arrived is irrelevant, because we iron it out and place it into the past even before it has happened.

Keyword for life is *memory*.

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