

## Damir Šodan

*If you don't become the ocean,  
you'll be seasick every day.*

Leonard Cohen

### IN ANY CASE

while driving to meet the man  
who in one day  
single-handedly  
between nine and five  
(typical daily working hours  
for an average clerk at Lloyds TSB Bank HQ  
on London's Gresham Street)  
with bursts of gunfire  
executed several hundred civilians,  
the man at the wheel  
tells me about his trip  
through Indonesia  
and how in Bali  
he ventured into the wilderness  
with no guide  
all by himself!

have you ever held a snake in your hands?  
anaconda, cobra, common adder, taipan, rattlesnake, water moccasin  
or maybe a Spanish viper?  
they are so cold, those reptiles  
and so wiry and slippery  
once you take them into your hands.  
but you should try it  
*(A life unexamined is not worth living,*  
as blogger Socrates correctly pointed out)  
in any case.

AISHA KANDISHA\*

from Tanger  
to West Sahara

stronger than kif  
spicier than majoun

there is a beauty  
bearing horror

hatching bedraggled  
chicken in grottas

meaning multitudes  
forming foreign legions

sometime in the 50ties  
so the books say

there were 35,000  
married to her

most of them inmates  
of the madhouse in Ber Rechid

Anno Domini 1953  
she was particularly agile

calling to the wretched charmed ones  
in their mothers' voices

compared to her  
Circe is no more than a cunning c---

seamen say  
and polyhistorians too

because when you see those  
poor creatures drilling into

the chapped soil  
in the dried out river bed

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\* Aisha Kandisha is a Moroccan evil spirit that possesses only men.

as the kids  
shower them with stones

you should know that no sorcery  
or *fqi* can do the trick

because love  
is always a pain

that one shares  
with others.

NABOKOV IN OPATIJA, 1905

entomology, dycotiledons,  
busty college girls, the order of things in Gregor Samsa's room,  
the incurable melancholy of Charles the Bald,  
Pale Fire, Lo, Vera in her bathing suit  
with heart shaped sunglasses, the ugly wall-paper  
in that hotel in Montreaux, the sweating Solzhenitsyn  
aghast at the bourgeois display of wealth...  
all this is still so far away  
because now  
they are nestling here in Abazzia  
since VDN condemned Bloody Sunday  
before the entire Duma.  
soon he will return  
to Sankt Peterburg  
and they will proceed to Wiesbaden.  
but for now  
they will observe the distressed seagulls  
from their deck chairs  
and the sea as grey and as marble-like as whale's carcass.  
aunt Nathalie holds him by the hand  
and points to a distant sail, somewhere there  
in the direction of eternal Venice.  
she thinks the little one would grow to become a painter or a cellist.  
but Humbert has nearly mastered his synesthesia  
and already knows damn well that nothing ever turns out to be  
the way Russian aunties expect it to be.

## ACROSS THE STREET FROM SPINOZA'S HOUSE\*

so here I stand again  
observing certain ladies  
in the small alley  
across the street from Spinoza's house  
remembering  
how some ten years ago  
some of us landed here  
'round about the same time

in desperate search for jobs  
craving with every limb those ripe fruits  
of the democratic West  
(or however you'd like to put it);

these ladies in the context  
of monetary and flesh exchange  
and myself pursuant to articles, paragraphs and subparagraphs  
of my esteemed Institution.

and at the very first sight  
I begin to realize  
that even after a decade  
wasted in a foreign country  
we still have a lot in common:

flexible working hours  
suspicion towards other foreigners  
and similar modes  
of prostitution.

I see the absent-minded Heloïse  
still weaving some embroidery  
and Alina  
swiftly changing stations on her red transistor-radio  
and Amra and Jammila  
laughing uproariously while patting the bald head of their big black  
friend

while I push  
my bicycle  
(like a wheel of destiny)

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\* Benedict Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677), a "pantheistic monist" lived since 1699 in The Hague in Stille Veerkade Street where in 1675 he completed his celebrated work *Ethica*, and where Leibniz visited him the same year. In the immediate vicinity of his house today there is a "division" of the Red Light District.

thinking how  
from Spinoza's window  
all the way to the last booth with red lights on  
at this very moment  
freely and easily  
blooms and opens  
(on the whims of Euclidian geometry)  
a thousand flowers  
of some invisible Bermuda triangle  
composed of human petals  
dipped deep in the mud  
of a so-called "better life"  
like stones trapped in the kidney channels  
of our third-world bodies  
which we dragged over here  
like decanted sand boats from our Byelorussias, Ukraines, Ugandas,  
Kirgiasias, Ghanas, Romanias, Croatias ...

only to end up staring at each other  
in silence like those eels  
in the aquariums  
in Chinese restaurants.

and even if somebody would  
turn us upside-down  
slap us all over and connect us  
to some cosmic polygraph  
he unfortunately would not be able  
to squeeze out  
a single line  
from Baruch's great *Ethics*.

Translated by the author