



In Her Wake

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*"Weszo,
Dadoro
Miro... .."*

Forest, my father, my black father, you raised me, you dropped me, like a leaf...

Bronisława Wajs, Papusza (1908-1987)

Father, my forest my black forest
I never quite entered your leaves.

The Doll closed her glass eyes you said
swallow the beads their blue light
will keep the devil away, *devlá*,
devlá breath on windows
of big cities swallow your eyes
go draw
a circle with charcoal go

by feeling your way
through the dance

Not by seeing: never open the eyes
Never spit the eyes out
Never spit into the eye of the devil.

Closed
Around,
an' around

The dance and my mind drops to the ground
a shadow of a leaf you dropped,

me,
you —

so slight into the wind hands held out

The line of love joined with the line of life my forest

my black light our song is to share
the roads born in us, at crossroads, I never
even, looked into that well of leaves
your yellow leaves they never
entered my mind.

(" what frightens us most
about the Death card?" — "It reminds us that we could die
not knowing how many visions were stored in this shell",

The whiteness
of a blank egg.)

Snow Owl



Copper feet of a frore sight. A shy dent
on the surface, thoughts expanding underneath
crack and freeze.

A bright winter in the shape of an owl.

Palpable as haze
against the fog-lights he sends himself
with a mute spin, fast, faster grows
heavy on the chest of the night
a hard bud and a coat that spreads inward

seeking to bind his form, shrill snowdrifts

& her desire, together, toward whiteness

Until the shaman's eye is eclipsed

①

ex-carnifico = *ex-canto*

①

Deep inside the body of winter
the body of mastery

Deep in the bird a fool, salt
on fresh cuts skin flesh cut blood shed hooked
He hooks. Claws to reveal

in her
in me
in the night
the ebony air

A couple of feathers

Chopped off the storm, that flutter & stick
unspoken for
the fate in the throat — or stay put
on ice, their slim blades bleeding birch into the conversation

through a blue skylight

Clubbed under
like a frozen animal
seduced from a hole in ice
a deaf thought
hatching fear.

①

Some of the birds
had two faces

A hooked bill, large eyes,
one at the front
one at the back of their neck,

All sketched in soft plumes.

①

He is the god
of snow, and the angler
of the night, and haze
of the ghost, his fish swim
around the Blue Mountain, tangible as love
is in her, is part of her

shoals passing over the head, wise
a storm perched on storm on the threshold
of transparency, the owl spins

with the perverse complexity in each horny mouthful

a ring of red rapids with a jasper eye ripped
out of the bodies,

trails & entrails

disperse like seeds in fresh snow, planted where he lays it all out
down to insoluble perfection

Snow

coming

out of the blood moon

sleeping awake, head

unaware of feet, and feet

of head. Waking asleep

They keep whirling. Tossing

dervish

around the sleeper's eyelids with white hiss the glass skirts of phantom hands
twist the air to fall along the night's spine
in long sparkling ribbons, we give in, we give in
to eat ourselves out-of-senses, to the silent ouroboros, back, back,

we spit out breath, the feather bones, a line blown-through
to-die to-die to-die a swift monotone light
inside a lullaby of lies, to die for sex
of the golden eels, ears, eaten by, *Sama* language, that does not run from life

to death, or from death to life but rather circulates slowly the sandbanks
warm and swift, around so we can drift drawn
turned-on softly
turned-on turned-onto the under-plumage of the old habit

to fall for his face

to fall for his second face

For the brittle secret turning in us.

and only the shadows of the shadows of the shadows left
to meditate on the vanishing form and the form's long hold
in the owl, tenderness toppled



"Sooner or later
Your hands
Will find the way
To my song"

(*Gilori, 1952, Papusza*)

In the forest where the tents
stagger in a fairy circle, the cloth
bright with satin glow like golden caps
each luring the eye to the earth
closer
to where it is full of leaves and small lives, drunk
on all the warmth

Dikchaw doj, dikchaw daj,

Above the stone forest the grey concrete forest

there is a brass moon, that drips
milk into the mouth of the gypsy,
milk with *slivovitz*

to fill her with flames, as flowers of the oak and flowers of the broom form

in her memory, and the winds melt
the flowers "like my own heart
I love the fire"

Dikchaw daj, dikchaw doj

here.

.there

.look

above the red fire
above the fire where the lovers leap, out of the mouth
of that fire where the gypsy's fortune curls
like her Snail Amulet, over
here, over there,
a twain wet fir bough spills

old pain

spits sequins off its chest,

(But the gypsy must not
sow, except gold in grass
by the river, must look into
the future, see the future,
but never see it grow)

Dikchaw daj, dikchaw doj

And she can almost hear the hand with a coin, the eyes swept to,
and even the hands gone far far away from

the polished snail shell with the road of its own

that remembers and murmurs all the inroads

the wanderers murmur in her the song,
as their lips find the way.



Bronisława Wajs (1910—1987), known as **Papusza** (the Doll) is a Gypsy poet who wrote in the language of the Roma. The poet-to-be was one of the few literate Gypsy women of that time; the story goes that she learned to read by trading stolen chickens in exchange for lessons with local villagers.

Papusza owes her discovery, and the publication of her books, primarily to the Polish Romist, Jerzy Ficowski who collected, transcribed, and translated her words from Romani. Unfortunately for Papusza their life-long friendship drew accusations of treason from her own people, especially after the publication of Ficowski's book "Polish Gypsies", a study of their traditions and language.

Papusza was declared "unclean" by the Gypsy King and the elders. This *falorykta* — condemning, or a curse for revealing secrets — made the poet collapse into mental illness which recurred throughout the rest of her life.

The opening and closing poems of "In Her Wake" move to the sound of Papusza's songs. I listen to her voice, one line at the time. And from the shimmering syllables of Romani, bleached by the Polish translation, washed in the stream of landscapes we both wander, I compose my own tale. Trying to stay true to the color and radiance of the original poetic images, I translate the mood rather than the poem. Except for three direct invocations I do not quote Papusza's actual words, but hold onto the presence of that boat that was once writing a ripple on water, while centering myself in the line.

"*Weszo, Dadoro miro*" ("Oh Forest, my Father", 1970)

"*Dikchaw daj, Dikchaw doj*" ("Look here, look there", 1951)

"*Gilori*" ("Song", 1952)

①

Images in order of appearance:

Tête (2012) — 50 x 70 cm – Private collection

Personnage (2011) — 185 x 96 cm

D'après DEGAS (2011) — 40 x 40 cm – Private collection

Deux Ménines (2012) — 200 x 200 cm – Private collection

Born in Poland, **Hanna Sidorowicz** studied painting in Gdansk before moving to France in 1985, where she completed her artistic training at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*. She lives and works in Paris.

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