

Bella Akhmadulina

Volcanoes

Extinct volcanoes are silent :
Ash chokes crater and vent.
There giants hide from the sun
After the evil they have done.

Realms ever denser and colder
Weigh on each brutal shoulder,
But the old wicked visions keep
Visiting them in their sleep.

They behold a city, sure
Here summer will endure,
Though columns carved from congealed
Lava frame garden and field.

It is long ago : in sunlit hours
Girls gather armfuls of flowers
And Bacchantes give a meaning sign
To men as they sip their wine.

A feast is in progress : louder
The diners grow, more heated and lewder . . .
O my Pompei in your cindery grave,
Child of a princess and a slave!

What future did you assume,
What were you thinking of and whom
When you leaned your elbow thus
Thoughtlessly on Vesuvius?

Were you carried away by his stories?
Did you gaze with astonished eyes?
Didn't you guess—were you *that* innocent?—
Passion can be violent?

And then, when that day ended,
Did he lay a knowing forehead
At your dead feet? Did he, didn't he,
Bellow : "Forgive me!"?

translated by W. H. Auden

Evgeni Vinokurov

Every railway station keeps a book for complaints
And, if you ask for it, they have to give it you :
It wouldn't be a bad idea, I think,
If eternity had a book like that,
Then people wouldn't have to keep silent about their sorrow.
Timidly, cautiously at first, they would all come, bringing
The griefs they endure, the wrongs they are made to suffer,
To universal attention and judgement.
How we should then be struck, I know,
By one entry of half a line

written

By that woman who, slumped against its railings,
Was crying in the park last night.

translated by W. H. Auden

*Andrei Voznesensky***Fire in the Architectural Institute**

Fire in the Architectural Institute!
 through all the rooms and over the blueprints
 like an amnesty through the jails. . . .
 Fire! Fire!

High on the sleepy façade
 shamelessly, mischievously
 like a red-assed baboon
 a window skitters.

We'd already written our theses,
 the time had come for us to defend them.
 They're crackling away in a sealed cupboard:
 all those bad reports on me!

The drafting paper is wounded,
 it's a red fall of leaves;
 my drawing boards are burning,
 whole cities are burning.

Five summers and five winters shoot up in flames
 like a jar of kerosene.
 Karen, my pet,
 Oil we're on fire!

Farewell architecture:
 it's down to a cinder
 for all those cowsheds decorated with cupids
 and those post-offices in rococo!

O youth, phoenix, ninny,
 your dissertation is hot stuff,
 flirting its little red skirt now,
 flaunting its little red tongue.

Farewell life in the sticks!
 Life is a series of burned-out sites.
 Nobody escapes the bonfire:
 if you live—you burn.

But tomorrow, out of these ashes,
 more poisonous than a bee
 your compass-point will dart
 to sting you in the finger.

Everything's gone up in smoke,
 and there's no end of people sighing.
 It's the end?

It's only the beginning.
 Let's go to the movies!

translated by Stanley Kunitz