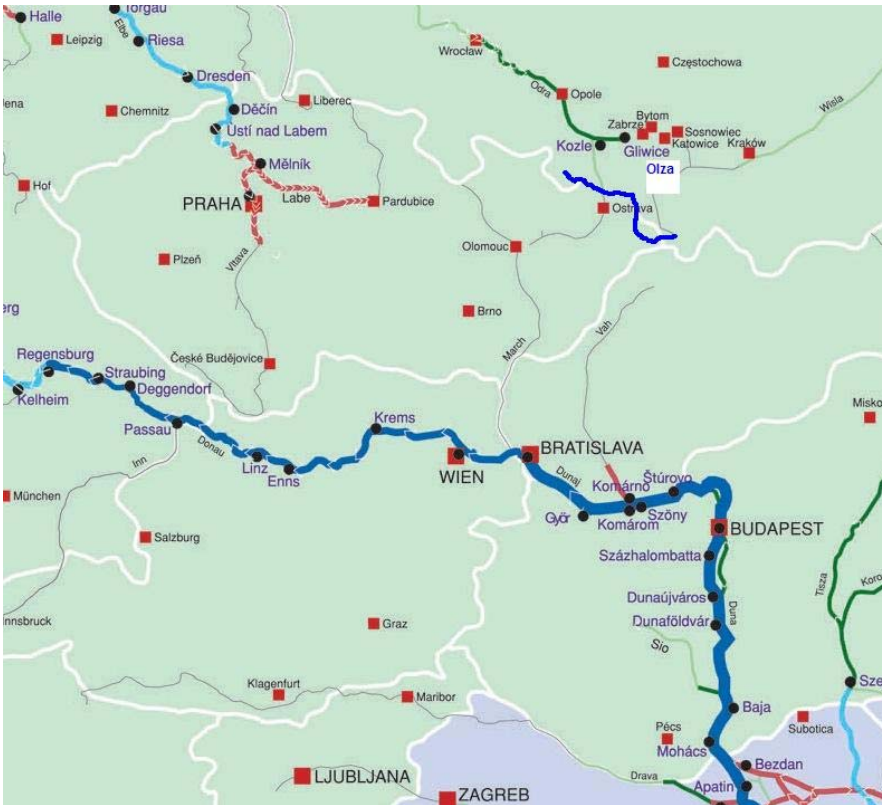


Conversing with the River: The River as a Unifier in Central European Literature



Tadeusz Różewicz W środku życia¹

Po końcu świata
po śmierci
znalazłem się w środku życia
stwarzałem siebie
budowałem życie
ludzi zwierzęta krajobrazy

In The Middle of Life

After the end of the world
after my death
I found myself in the middle of life
I created myself
constructed life
people animals landscapes

to jest stół mówiłem
to jest stół
na stole leży chleb nóż
nóż służy do krajania chleba
chlebem karmią się ludzie

człowieka trzeba kochać
uczyłem się w nocy w dzień
co trzeba kochać
odpowiadałem człowieka

to jest okno mówiłem
to jest okno
za oknem jest ogród
w ogrodzie widzę jabłonek
jabłonka kwitnie
kwiaty opadają
zawiązują się owoce
dojrzewają

this is a table I was saying
this is a table
on the table are lying bread a knife
the knife serves to cut the bread
people nourish themselves with bread

one should love man
I was learning by night and day
what one should love
I answered man

this is a window I was saying
this is a window
beyond the window is a garden
in the garden I see an apple tree
the apple tree blossoms
the blossoms fall off
the fruits take form
they ripen my father is picking up an apple

¹ Różewicz, Tadeusz. *Poezja*. [Poemat Otwarty (1955-1957)] Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988, pp. 404-406. Translation by Czesław Miłosz. Map courtesy of <http://fispahustej.net/page.php?128> Accessed September 2009.

mój ojciec zrywa jabłko
ten człowiek który zrywa jabłko
to mój ojciec

that man who is picking up an apple
is my father
I was sitting on the threshold of the house

siedziałem na progu domu
ta staruszka która
ciągnie na powrozie kozę
jest potrzebniejsza
i cenniejsza
niż siedem cudów świata
kto myśli i czuje
że ona jest niepotrzebna
ten jest ludobójcą

that old woman who
is pulling a goat on a rope
is more necessary
and more precious
than the seven wonders of the world
whoever thinks and feels
that she is not necessary
he is guilty of genocide

to jest człowiek
to jest drzewo to jest chleb

this is a man
this is a tree this is bread

ludzie karmią się aby żyć
powtarzałem sobie
życie ludzkie jest ważne
życie ludzkie ma wielką wagę
wartość życia
przewyższa wartość wszystkich przedmiotów
które stworzył człowiek
człowiek jest skarbem
powtarzałem uparcie

people nourish themselves in order to live
I was repeating to myself
human life is important
human life has great importance
the value of life
surpasses the value of all the objects
which man has made
man is a great treasure
I was repeating stubbornly

to jest woda mówiłem
gładziłem ręką fale
i rozmawiałem z rzeką
wodo mówiłem
dobra wodo
to ja jestem

this water I was saying
I was stroking the waves with my hand
and conversing with the river
water I said
good water
this is I

człowiek mówił do wody
mówił do księżycy
do kwiatów deszczu
mówił do ziemi
do ptaków
do nieba

the man talked to the water
talked to the moon
to the flowers to the rain
he talked to the earth
to the birds
to the sky

milczało niebo
milczała ziemia
jeśli usłyszał głos
który płynął
z ziemi wody i nieba
to był głos drugiego człowieka

the sky was silent
the earth was silent
if he heard a voice
which flowed
from the earth from the water from the sky
it was the voice of another man



Włodzimierz Pietrzak – Cieszyn²

Woda z jaru biało się rzucała
za rzeką obce światła darły ciemność
by cicho patrzeć na nagie ciało Olzy
drzewa
słuchać
wysokie serce lopotało o pierś mocno
róża czerwona o ostrych kolcach
krwią mogła uderzać i we krwi kwitnąć
dłonią przygarnąć milczący lunatyzm

widma kołysze jeden wiersz
wtedy usną w ulicy jawory jak drzewo
i brwi ściągnie noc

mały kot się dźwignie z niskiego posłania
matkę ciepłą porzuci płaczem i śpiewem
na chłodnym bruku jesieni dmącej poszuka
za co ganić naprawdę

Kiedyś pragnąłeś
w szybkich oddechach wiatru wiosną
biegłeś jakby pożarem
gasł w schnące zieleni zamek i gasła rzeka

jak odchodzący czas
to
Broń oknem patrzyła w wzbierający wschód

The water from the ditch cast
a white light beyond the river which cut through the darkness
so it could quietly watch the naked body of the Olza
wood
listen
a heart felt high near your throat beats strongly against her breast
a red rose with sharp thorns
could strike blood and that blood could blossom
and with your palm, you gather together the quiet - lunatism

a mirage is swaying a single verse
now the maples fall asleep in the street like trees do
and the night knits its eyebrows

a small cat will get up from his low-down sack,
leaving his warm mother with crying and with singing
searching on the cold pavement, which blows with winter,
for something to blame indeed

Once you had a wish
in the quick release of a springtime wind
you ran as if through a fire
the castle extinguished in its withering green,
the river is extinguished

like time passing by
that
weapon looked through the window at the rising east



“Olza v Cieszynie - Most Wolności [The Olza River in Cieszyn – Freedom Bridge]”

² Miękina, Leon, ed. *Znów minie wiek...: Antologia literatury nadolziańskiej*. Cieszyn: Macierz Ziemi Cieszyńskiej, 2001, pp. 304-305. Translation©Alexander Szurman and Clarice Cloutier. Painting of the Olza in Damca, Zbigniewa. *Olza w akwareli Zbigniewa Damca*. Cieszyn: Muzeum Śląska Cieszyńskiego, c2008, p. 37.



Jaroslav Seifert (excerpts)

“Čas, řeka, mládí a co ještě?” [“Time, river, youth – what else?”]³

A řeka nelže; její řeč je jiná
a je v ní věrnost země odvěká.
Tak mluví matka vítající syna,
který se šťastně vrací z daleka.

And the river does not lie; its speech is not mum
retaining earth's faithfulness from long ages past.
So speaks the mother welcoming her son,
who's happily returning from afar at long last.⁴



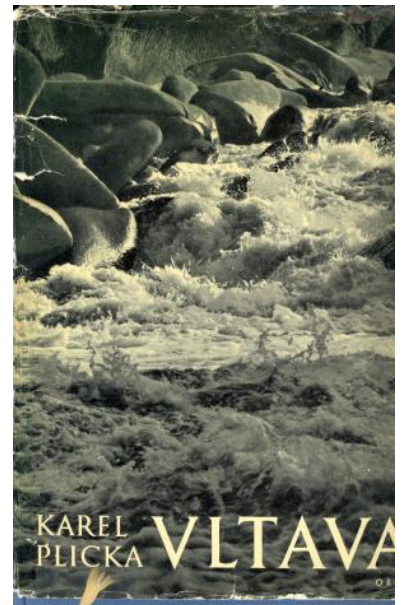
Mosty umožňují
obyvatelům města
přechod
z jednoho
břehu Vltavy
na druhý
suchou
nohou

Alexander Kliment – excerpt from *Nuda v Čechách* [*Boredom in Bohemia*]⁵

Walking across the Charles Bridge I had a gold, utterly festive feeling. I hadn't had such a good feeling in a long time. I was happy to give myself up to this feeling. The Svatovítský Bell in the Prague Castle had just begun to ring out five in the afternoon. The princely, kingly, imperial voice of the bell spread down over the roofs of Malá Strana to the banks of the Vltava and settled on the dark-gray surface of the river. And it settled into me, sounding in me as well...

It was growing
dark. Autumn,
almost winter.
A light fog rose.
The year

nineteen sixty-seven. In a few weeks, just before Christmas, I would be forty years old. Until recently, this realization had made me feel ill. But now I had the impression, as I had had years ago, that everything lay ahead of me. It wasn't just an impression. The fog felt pleasant.



Oskar Kokoschka “The Charles Bridge and Hradčany” (1935)⁶

Karel Plická – cover for Vltava book⁷

³ Seifert, Jaroslav. *Kamenný most*. Praha: František Borový, 1947, p. 17. [This book was originally published in 1944.]

⁴ Seifert, Jaroslav. *Přílba hlíny*, Praha: Práce, 1945, pp. 90-91. Poem: “Příjezd presidenta Beneše” [“The Arrival of President Beneš”].

⁵ This excerpt is from Kliment's 1978 *Nuda v Čechách* (*Boredom in Bohemia*) as reprinted in *Daylight in Nightclub Inferno: Czech Fiction from the Post-Kundera Generation*. North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1997, pp. 245-246. Translation of excerpt by Andrée Collier. Drawing of Prague in Šlitr, Jiří a Jiří Suchý. *Praha, město věží*. Praha: Olympia, 1970, p. 14. The drawing reads, “The bridges allow the city's residents to get from one bank of the Vltava to the other with dry feet.”

⁶ See painting courtesy of: http://www.neartexpress.com/liMONH1225.html?mv_pc=froogle Accessed January 2006.

⁷ See picture courtesy of <http://www.czech-books.com/files/imagecache/product/files/vltava.jpg> Accessed September 2009. Plicka, Karel. *Vltava*. Praha: Orbis, 1965.



Daniel Šimko



Zátišie

Váza, tanier, obraz a šálka:
miesta tmy, miesta láskavosti.
Šaty, kedysi dotknuté, prevesené cez stoličku.

Okmášané topole, obrovské telá ničoty,
oslovujúce temné okná,
alebo tých niekoľkých, vyhýbajúcich sa polícii.

Načo to však všetko? Tisíce míľ odtiaľto
Dunaj je šľah skla proti zamínovaným lesom –
Tvár, bobuľa hrozna, zrno.

Zapisujem si vaše mená posledný raz.
Píšem vaše mená potajomky.
Buď tichý... Buď tichý...

Broskyňa červeno žiari na stole.
Plátok jablka padá do pohára čistého vína.
Všetko je číra beloba. Si sneh.

Still Life⁸

Vase, plate, picture and cup:
places of darkness, places of kindness.
Clothes once touched hanging over a chair.

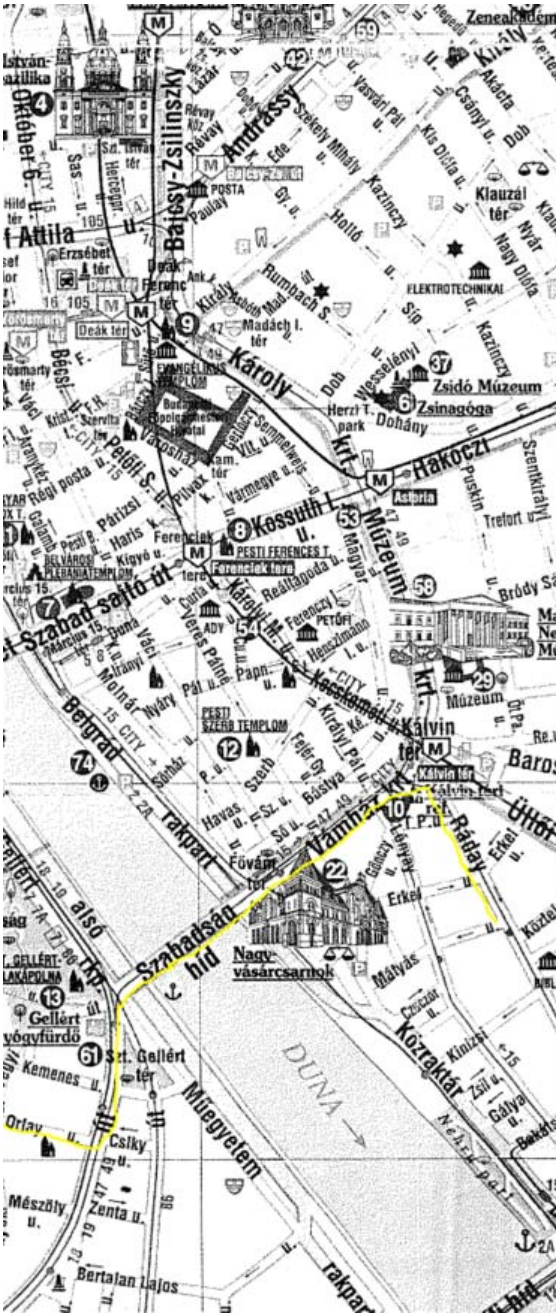
The frayed poplars, huge bodies of nothingness,
addressing the dark windows,
or the few avoiding the police.

But what's the use? Thousands of miles away
the Danube is a sketch of glass against the mined woods –
a face, a grape, a kernel.

I am writing your names down for the last time.
I am writing your names in secrecy.
Be silent... Be silent...

A peach glows reddish on the table.
A slice of apple falls into a glass of clear wine.
Whiteness is all. You are snow.

⁸ Šimko, S. D. *The World Within a Lost Glove/Svet v stratenej rukavici*. Ľubomír Feldek, trans., Bratislava, 2005, pp. 30-31. Picture in Karol Plicka. *Slovensko vo fotografii Karola Plicku*. Turčianský Sv. Martin: Matica Slovenská, 1949, p. 4.



Szabolcs Várady

Skékek a Duna Fölött⁹

Az a két szék a maga módján nem is volt csúnya. Kár, hogy a rugó kiállt belőlük, és hogy a kárpit olyan reménytelenül koszos volt. De székek székek, sőt. Abba a lakásba? Vittük tehát, jobbára a fejünkön, az Orlay utcából az egykori Ferenc József, ma Szabadság hídon át a Ráday utca 2-be, ahol P. lakott az idő tájt (nyomait lírálja őrzi).

Chairs above the Danube

The two chairs were not really all that ugly. Too bad the springs protruded from them and the upholstery was so hopelessly filthy. But chairs they were, all the same. And right for that apartment. So we carried them, mostly on our heads, from Orlay Street, across the former Francis Joseph, now Liberty, Bridge, to Number 2 Ráday Street where P. lived at the time (as some of his poems will show.)

⁹ Várady in Szirtes, George and Miklós Vajda (eds.), *Leopard V: An Island of Sound: Hungarian Poetry and Fiction Before and Beyond the Iron Curtain*. London: Harvill, 2004, pp. 285-286. Translation: William Jay Smith. From the book: *A rejtett kijárat (The Hidden Exit)*. Budapest: Europá, 2003. This poem was originally printed in samizdat in 1976.

Egy szék is, hát még kettő, alkalmas lehet sok mindenre. "Két költő a hídon, fejükön székekkel" – elképzelhető egy kép ezzel a címmel. Remélem, tárgyilagos kép volna, nem valamiféle átszellemítés. Az a két szék, fontos, hogy ezt megértsük, semmiképp sem glória a fejünkön. A híd közepe táján – de nem azért, hogy bármit is bizonyítsunk – leültünk rájuk. Különösen az egyik-

ből állt ki a rugó, nem tudom, melyikünknek jutott az. Mindegy, aligha lehetne erre a későbbieket visszavezetni. Kellemes nyári este volt. Rágyújtottunk, élveztük a lakályosságnak ezt a, mondhatni, szokatlan formáját.

A chair, not to say two, has many uses. "Two Poets on a Bridge with Chairs on their Heads" – one can imagine a painting so entitled. I hope it would be a down-to-earth painting and not one of those transfigurations. Those two chairs – and it's important to make this clear – were by no means just halos around our heads. About halfway across the bridge – and not for the purpose of proving anything – we sat down on them. The springs protruded more prominently from

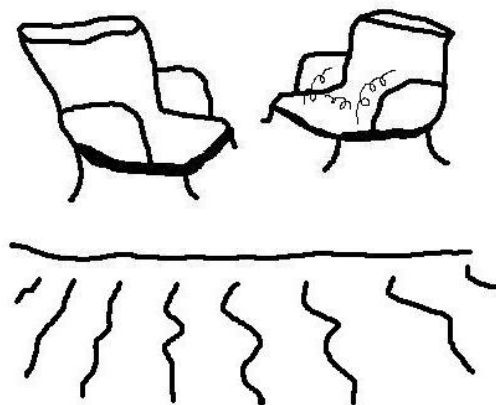
one – I don't recall which of us got it. Doesn't matter, since what happened later can hardly be explained by that. It was a pleasant summer evening. We lit cigarettes, enjoying this one might say unusual form of coziness.

A székek aztán

egy darabig szolgáltak becsületesen: ők voltak a székek P.-éknél. Hanem az ember jobbra vágyik, mint ami van: a székeket beadták egy kárpitoshoz. A lakást is elcserélték, az első kényszerből, a másodikat, mert nem szerették. Manapság ritkábban jövünk össze náluk. Sok minden közrejátsszik. G. elhagyta A.-t (P. feleségét), aztán M. (B. felesége) szakított velem, majd G.-től elvált a másik M. (G. felesége) és hozzám jött (közben B.-ék is különváltak), P. öngyilkos lett és azóta félig-meddig szanatóriumban lakik, nem beszélve a világhelyzet változásairól, és különben is: nincs hova leülni.

The chairs later served

nicely for a while: at the P's' they were *the* chairs. But man wants something better than what is: the chairs were sent to an upholsterer. Then the P's moved also, the first time, because they had to, the second, because they hated their apartment. Nowadays we meet less often at their place. Several things brought this about: G. left A. (P.'s wife) and then M. (B.'s wife) broke off with me, and the other M. (G.'s wife) divorced G. and married me (while the B's also separated) and P. attempted suicide and has been living more or less in a sanatorium ever since, not to mention the changes in the world situation, so anyway: there's nothing left to sit on.





Kanze Motomasa
Sumida River [Sumidagawa]¹⁰ (excerpt)

Place: Sumida River, in Musashi Province

Woman: Is this my child?
Umewakamaru: Is that you, Mother?
Chorus: As they reach out to join hands (Putting down the gong, she moves toward the child and tries to embrace him.) he begins to fade away. (Retreating, he enters the mound.) Her longing grows, while, as in a mirror, the boy's remembered form and phantom merge. (He reemerges from the mound and stands in the shite [primary actor] spot. She hurries toward him. He enters the mound. She kneels.) appears, then fades away again, as clouds in the eastern sky brighten with the dawn. (She stands and looks to the east.) and he is gone, for what seemed to be the child is gone.



“Snowy Morning on the Sumida River in Musashi Province”

¹⁰ Motomasa in Haruo Shirane, *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pg. 1004. Play translated by Anthony H. Chambers. Painting: “16. Snowy Morning on the Sumida River in Musashi Province” in a series from: “Famous Views of the 60-odd Provinces” [“Rokujuyoshu meisho zue”] Date: 1853 – 1856, Publisher: Koshihei, Engraver: Hori Take or Soji http://www.hiroshige.org.uk/hiroshige/60_odd_provinces/60_odd_provinces.htm Accessed September 2009.