

Pavol Janik



Mgr. art. Pavol Janik, PhD., was born in 1956 in Bratislava, where he also studied film and television dramaturgy and scriptwriting at the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (VSMU). He has worked at the Ministry of Culture (1983-87), in media and advertising. President of the Slovak Writers' Society (2003-07) and the Secretary-General of the SWS (1998-2003, 2007 -), he has received a number of awards for his literary and advertising work both in his own country and abroad.

Notable collections of his poems include: *Nezarucene spravy* (Undelivered Reports, 1981), *Zrkadlo na konci leta* (A Mirror at the End of Summer, 1984), *Do videnia v mnoznom čísle* (Goodbye in the Plural, 1985), *Hura, hori!* (Hurrah, It's Burning! 1991), *Niektó ako boh* (Someone Like God, 1998), *Bud vona tvoja* (Thy Scent Be Here, 2002), *Kmitocet tvojich bokov* (The Oscillations of Your Hips, 2002) Collections of aphorisms: *Dobra zrada nad zlato* (Good Advice is Worth More Than Gold, 1996), *Satanovisko* (Satan's Place, 1999), *Pes hore bez, 101 psin* (A Topless Lark, 101 larks, 2000), *Spinave cistky* (Dirty Purges, 2002) Dramatic works: *Tuctova komedia* (Commonplace Comedy, 1986), *Sukromny striptiz* (A Private Striptease, 1993), *Maturitny oblek* (A School Graduation Suit, 1994), *Nezna klauniada* (A Tender Farce, 2004).

A collection of three plays by the Slovak dramatist Pavol Janik has been published in a Canadian university periodical, the *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, under the title of "Dangerous Comedies" translated into English by Heather Trebaticka. The periodical is available on-line:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/09/index09.shtml>

Six poems by Pavol Janik

translated by James Sutherland Smith

ASTONISHMENT

I stretch out the water
in which you are reflected.
With a shout to stop
all possible outflows.

I address you by breath
such release of speech.
Until you are glassy with ice before me
as before a draught.

Tirelessly you quiver under the numb surface
and on the bottom for a moment gleam
so that I glimpse the day,
which will only light up in you

KOSOVO

A burning
paper Goethe
prays
in Serb
for four hundred dead children

In Schiller's stone eye
gleams a tear of mercury

There's a Gypsy weeping
for a little Romany fairy
at the bottom of the Adriatic

Blood
has an irresistible color
of the bluish dusk of the sky
from which falls
light and glitterings
like a gust of May rain
to fertilize the wounded earth.

THE THEATER OF LIFE

Life which means only the theater --
such life we always wish to play.
If just now you've got a funny thought
change into your clown's suit.

Life sways with us like a pendulum --
it runs from mud into a puddle.
It never is as it used to be
is a truth well-tried from age to age.

Time is like a glass filled to the brim
 again and again it runs over.
 It ourselves that step on our heels
 and we wish to find the person inside us.

There are patches on curtain and the soul...
 At the end death gives checkmate.
 Yet it's still worth playing the game,
 you should be glad that at least you've existed.

Life has found a mirror on the stage --
 it comes alive in it every night.
 if something has lured into the theater
 let's move into ancient times.

Settle into your empty seat,
 learn life by heart.
 If you yawn during life
 then ask for your entrance fee back.

FAMILY STUDY

Always when I think of you
 dawn breaks above Buenos Aires
 and the Atlantic has the inexplicable color of your eyes.

Exotic birds
 nest on out TV aerial
 until the announcer
 has a pearly hairdo
 and complete blonde smile.
 She claims that eternity has already lasted a whole year.
 The weather forecast
 announces in her place
 a rainbow parrot.

For our wedding route
 it wishes us little cloudiness
 and success at least as large as the discovery of America
 or the record flight of the ostrich from Australia
 to the zoological gardens of Europe.

Always when I think of you
 dawn breaks above Buenos Aires
 and the wind whirls the pamphlets
 of all the airlines in the world.

The Atlantic does not admit any other continent.
 It's clear as a stone of precious clarity.

Despite its twinkling depth it resembles a question
 which posed passionately by your body.

Children search tirelessly for an answer

till now unwritten in books
and cut out colorful pictures from it.

It happens at home
behind whose windows fireworks blaze every evening.

Always when I think of you
dawn breaks above Buenos Aires.
And today, too, the Atlantic is completely upset.
It's completely bashful
as its accustomed only to invisible phenomena.

YOU CAN TELL AN ANGEL FROM HIS FEATHERS

(For my parents who are not yet - departed-)

In my innermost display cases
all my glassy memories tremble.

At the end of silence to hear last year's rain
how it dictates whispering
its incomprehensible telegram
A pack of sad angels
howl in the light of the moon

The river falls from weariness,
the mortal spirit of water
in it falls with ease
to the bottom

I feel mercury in my veins
after the explosion of blood
-- it's in my guts
supersonic angels
rise from the dead.

Their deafening engines
start up in my head.

When they take off
the deepest silence begins
in which perhaps I'll hear
distant pearls
how they pour on the parquets.

A morning confession of frozen tears
freezes me
in my yet more Autumn eyes.

Poems translated by
James Sutherland Smith

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