

Poems for Brazil: Dilma Rousseff's Father and Bulgaria's Greatest Poetess between Friendship and Love?

The article of Novinite.com (Sofia News Agency) is available HERE:

http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=124256

Below are five of the nine poems from Bulgarian poetess Elisaveta Bagryana's "Brazilian Cycle" (1960-1962) dedicated to Dilma Rousseff's father Petar Rusev (Pedro Rousseff).

The translation of the poems is by Ivan Dikov; it does not claim poetic talent, and is solely supposed to convey their basic meaning.

Whiskey with Ice and Tears

by Elisaveta Bagryana

*In this pearly Brazilian forenoon
we are sitting alone by the meeting embarrassed
on the peaceful terrace
above Rio de Janeiro towering.
I gaze my eyes yearningly
into the stunning view
emerged to the surface, engulfed into the sunny brightness
like a mirage above the desert of water.
Unwillingly I close my eyes, I shut my lashes,
and then I open them again
to see that it is real
and not a cinerama image
this vision shining
between the two blue hemispheres
of sky and ocean.
That a reality
is also my accidental presence
on this fantastic beach...*

*And you – you slowly sip
whiskey with ice,
with a blind look staring
not here but somewhere far, perhaps
beyond the ocean, coasts.
The question, unstopping, invariable,
waiting for enlightenment for so long,
is weighing on your pale lips
and pain it pictures on your face.
“How is it there, with us?” -
it finally is uttered
in your Bulgarian, half-forgotten,
unspoken in 30 years.
“Tell me the truth.
About alive
and about dead.”
Did you knock down a rock from your chest?
I come to my senses from my oblivion,
I take my sight off the horizon,
I turn it inwards,
to the heart,
and speak
about Bulgaria.
Slowly, unpretentiously.
What am I telling?
“Your mother lives
with your photographs and the rare letters.
She pines after you.
She says she is okay.
She shows to relatives and neighbors*

*your wife – a beauty!
Most favorite
of the kids – is the youngest one
who you named with her Bulgarian name.
She shows your new home, the car...*

*But you're turning your head away, you stand up quickly
to the end of the terrace you go
and before the laughter of a poster,
you discreetly wipe your eyes.*

*Returning, you ask me with excitement -
not to speak about her any more...
But your raving remorse
and grief,
how will dissipate?*

*What am I telling?
Simply and chaotically,
without unneeded fervor, or comments,
about my last journey I took
on Bulgaria's new roads.
"By car?" you ask me.
"Yes, by car," I say.
"So they are not those roads today..."
I am not making up thing for you.
I'm not exaggerating, nor hiding what's good,
what's bad;
I am not making
our roads straighter.
I am not making
our mounts higher,
nor our Black Sea coast more beautiful,
nor our new lakes deeper,
nor our burning furnaces more powerful,
nor the Kremikovtzi mud more shallow,
nor do I turn the houses in the Rhodope into palaces,
nor do I add more storeys to our cities,
nor do I make our new villages richer,
nor do I make our people, us, more perfect,
without a shadow,
stain,
rust,
inside the soul.
Nor do I make our mistakes – less important,
though overcome
and paid for they are...*

*What am I telling?
Most usual
and everyday exploits and facts
known with us even to the children.*

*And you have gazed at me,
with elbow on the marble table,
and hand has nervous twitch.
What am I telling?
“In the hard years
of bloody fight, war, deceptions,
not few of your friends
in prison,
in fight,
in the hands of firing squads
they died...
But memory about them is alive, alive
and love in the hearts does not get colder,
and dead they aren't for us
but alive they are.*

*What am I telling?
I hear, you're breathing hard.
“Yes, Nikolay, your closest friend
from your school years
(you know, today he is a writer)
is asking you -
do you still write poems,
and won't you ever to your fatherland
come back?*

*What am I telling?
You absolutely faded,
as if you're shivering with awful fever
and you start talking brokenly:
“Since I've been here not a single line I've written
and, shame on me, forgot my native tongue.
The first fifteen years
I was fighting
tooth
and nail,
and fist
for some shelter, even small one,
for meager bread,
and for a little whiskey.
And only I do know how much I wandered,
and how many kilometers
I went on foot...
Now I am tangled in a golden web
by banks,
by factories
and markets
(they bring surprises every day),
by love and unaltered worries -
for both my kids,
and for my wife -
a coddled and frail southern flower -*

*who helpless is without me.
Unbreakable is
this golden web engulfing me
so closely.
I know, I will never leave from here,
and will never feel
the homely soil under my feet.*

*No, I have no,
I have no fatherland
any more..."*

*You gaze at me for moment with a blurry
and moist look.
Your head is bowing lower and lower,
your shaking hand is reaching
to the crystal glass -
with spectral glimmers from the sun.
And you raise it,
and gulp – thirstily, quickly.
But I see
how in it
from your eyes
two small gushing brooks
are flowing down...
And you are drinking -
whiskey with eyes
and tears....*

Nostalgic Love

by Elisaveta Bagryana

*Two blue eyes
stared at me so astonished
as if I'd flown here
from a country unreal.
And you were all gripped by anxiety,
confusion so sincere
as if you had in front of you standing
a woman from another planet.*

*But I was bringing the whiff
of Thracian grain fields,
and crane's bill from the Balkan
that you as a kid would gather.
Through me you saw
close to yourself – both -
your mother inconsolable
and your sister deceased.*

*Though me you saw
in the blurry distance
the new fatherland's
risen unknown image.
And deeply depressed
and perhaps already extinguished
a new nostalgic craving in you
like a geyser started to boil.*

*You poured before me
full baskets with the most fragrant
and sappy fruits
never before by me tasted.
You surrounded me with tropical
bright flowers unknown,
with palm tents,
with eucalyptus woods.*

*Towards gold diggers' centers,
towards farms, hamlets,
age-old jungle forests
hurdled along our way.
In colorful Brazilian hammock
under a coconut shadow
you swung me -
and you entrusted me with your life and love.*

*But the hour came
for my return journey.
You were as if dazzled
by an opium cloud.*

*You talked about a last,
last love un-experienced.
You talked – and your blue eyes
burned before mine.*

*I listened to you and listened -
and was watching the world above -
this sky southern and foreign,
with these foreign stars.
I believed you and didn't,
and deep, deep down understood,
I was the receiver,
you, motherland,
were the sender.*

Azalea

by Elisaveta Bagryana

You are asking about the poet? – Listen:

*I got as present – for my name day,
or for some different occasion,
a present very dear to me –
an azalea in a pot.
She is imported plant at home
(she was from a beloved person, I don't hide it)
and made me very happy
with its pink decoration.*

*I placed her on my table –
so she has direct sunlight,
and put a lot of care every day
into the warmth she needs,
and proper moisture.
As if from gratitude, she
also started shining with new blossoms,
and blossomed the entire winter.*

*But then, she faded in the second one,
subsided she her pale blossoms,
and in the third year,
in spite of all my hearty care,
my azalea died.*

And I didn't understand what caused her death...

*And here I saw today blooming
azaleas next to your yard.
Azaleas – entire trees –
much, much above my height.*

*They've opened their blossoms in their own air,
and in their own soil they have their roots,
They are so wanton with sap and powers,
unlike their sister –
my azalea who died...*

*Her death I only understood today.
Did you understand my answer?*

A Handful of Snow

by Elisaveta Bagryana

A telegram is flickering in my fingers.

Dead...

Dead?

For five days already?

*And the drama ended in your soul
with this suddenly resolved finale?*

*Deaf above the tropic and equator
flew this black piece of news,
and through the Atlantic
and Europe,
it landed in my hands today.*

*The radio says -
on the squares,
in the heat – fifty degrees in shadow -
there people were dying of sun strokes.
You feel
no heat,
no ice.*

*And here it is 20 below zero,
and there is awesome bluish snow falling down.
Do you remember that night below the tower
how I told you about Boyana once again?*

*Three nights and three days I was trapped inside
by myself in the drifts and blizzard,
thinking that the house above
was crashing down on my in the darkness of the night.*

*You uttered
hardly audible:
“How I crave a handful of snow...
And to have been with you,
right there,
in the winter -
I would give half my life for that...*

*I made a joke:
“I promise you -
that if I fly over for a second time -
in a flask
brought from Vitosha,
a handful of snow will be my gift for you.*

*And now you are pressed forever
under the heat of foreign,
fatherly coast.*

*And I am throwing over you only in my thoughts
the handful of snow
I promised you once.*

The Eyes of Brazil

by Elisaveta Bagryana

*Through the ocean
flying alone,
wandering
in the huge land,
I was coming,
a stranger unknown,
with heart open for your
heart,
and searching -
not for your luring gold,
but for your real,
good face -
with the color of a dark,
unrevealed lily,
with your mysterious eyes,
Brazil.*

*Through all the windows,
and doors,
and through invisible slits,
you burst gasping close to me -
with tropical
sparkling sky,
with your soil
red hot,
with what,
that you still were not,
but that I felt,
hidden in abundance
for tomorrow's day,
Brazil.*

*Elusive
but everywhere you were,
and I gathered your features:
through your cities
of many millions,
in the hotels -
on the 20th floor,
on the power-steamers,
weighting thousand tons,
on the blue Capacabana beach,
in the Serton's joyless idyll.
And you were everywhere,
and you were not,
Brazil.*

*But today to you
with open sails*

*and with your
waving banners
reached you
the ship of freedom.
You made way for it
in your waters
and let it
fly winged
into your expanse
under the southern stars.*

*Now I perceive
your image
dear,
and the secret in your eyes,
Brazil.*