

she is a sweet and likeable character, as are the other denizens of Dorothy's—especially the drag queens with Dewey at the head. Some may act tough and uncaring but, deep down, they represent the best in humanity, flaws and all.

It's a novel that should be read for enjoyment, strictly for the fun of it. It's perfect for that day on the beach or a train journey. We know, no matter what happens, that Calli is not going to die. We know she'll solve the case. And we know she'll get her cat, Sherlock, back.

—Michael Mirolla

## Poetry

**Goran Simić**, *Sunrise in the Eyes of the Snowman*, Biblioasis, 2010

**Keith Garebian**, *Children of Ararat*, Frontenac House, 2010

The image in the title of Goran Simić's third English language poetry collection—the first written entirely in his adopted English—is familiar. So too is the image of the 'swollen carrot/and two charcoal eyes on the pavement/in a cold puddle' in the prologue/title poem. It recalls Anne Carson's famous description in *Eros the Bittersweet* of books whose subject is desire: 'If Eros is something written on a page, you can close the book and be shut of him. Or go back and read the words again and again. *A piece of ice melts forever there*' (italics mine). *Sunrise in the Eyes of the Snowman* is, on its most primary level, a catalogue of desires, be they the ever-present desire to come to terms with the experience of atrocities in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War, the desire to find meaning within a new existence for exiles in a foreign country, or the poet's desire to have the book's recurring muse, the young wife whose 'rustle of new leaves made my bed sing/a lullaby for the swollen carpenter's hands.'

There is no obvious narrative principle organizing the collection; you can, as Carson might generalize about such a book, 'open it anywhere and end when you like.' But the melting snowman's appendages floating across a cool, faceless element comprise, I would argue, the organizing image. It undergoes various haunting and delicate transformations, and echoes from poem to poem. The micro floats atop the macro, personal effects atop a great tide of history. In 'Old Man Waiting for the Lost Letter' we find the image of postage stamps '[falling] into the sea.' In the poem 'Candle of the North' the speaker wants to walk 'over crossword-puzzle magazines' on the beach. In more explicit gestures to genocide and war, 'diapers flutter merrily

on a clothesline/stretched between two graveyards' ('Spring is Coming'), or 'On the streets of Sarajevo you could see so many shoes in pools of blood' ('What I Saw'). In one image from 'The Poet and His Brother the General on a Hill After the War,' crickets are described as '[playing] in the ashes/we used to call home.' In another moment from the same poem the titular characters are described as 'Lying on soft grass that had already chewed/generations of bones.' So the snowman's coals are cooled, then warmed, and turned over and over again. Through this turning, the sad cliché of Frosty leaving with the seasons takes on different tones, different potential powers: to commemorate lost lives, to reinvigorate old lust, and even, perhaps, to hope for some kind of reconciliation—if not of nation states, then at least of brothers, lovers, perhaps even of the poet's fractured versions of himself.

Another kind of melting occurs on the editorial level, in the number of English language poems Simić has borrowed from his previous collections. More comfortable writing in English now, he radically edits earlier versions. 'Adam' and 'Angels' are far more concise, syntactically sinuous figures than in their previous incarnations, while poems such as the brilliant 'My Accent' and the harrowing 'What I Saw' undergo only minor revisions. In the new version of the poem 'Christmas Tree Decorations,' the speaker's father disappears from the poem entirely. These sorts of decisions will provide those acquainted with his previous work a vantage point from which to consider some of the deeper ramifications of the editorial process with regard to poems of witness and historical memory.

Simić has always been a powerful poet in his native Bosnian, but now he has also become an excellent English-language poet, capable of experimenting with rhyme schemes or writing convincingly in the voice of an old hotel. He can write with cold detachment about the mathematics of genocide, of a mother making sandwiches 'already eaten by sorrow.' He can also play the dirty, only-half-joking old man with lines like, 'Would you let me slide my hand into your pants/to caress your pubic hair if I told you I am dying?' This brings us back to the subject of desire: for what else could drive a man—already considered by many to be one of the greatest poets to emerge from Eastern Europe after WW II—to write in an adopted language simply, according to the author's notes, 'to gauge how much, as a poet, I feel comfortable with the language I learned by reading and listening. And how much I sound like myself?' That desire to recognize oneself in a new context is one more piece of ice that melts throughout *Sunrise in the Eyes of the Snowman*, and his adopted language is richer for it.

There is no cool detachment in Keith Garebian's fourth poetry collection *Children of Ararat*. Garebian writes from the 'heat beyond despair' of the Armenian genocide in 1915. *Child of Ararat* would be a less misleading title, as this truly is the work of one man, one generation removed from the massacre, documenting as best he can the suffering of his family and his people. He attempts to forge a community of witness and reckoning through an ekphrastic dialogue with other twentieth and twenty-first century Armenian artists—filmmaker Atom Egoyan and painter Arshille Gorky most prominent among them. The book struggles to bridge 'The gulf/between ourselves and the voiceless dead/[that] grows by generations.'

A sustained boiling point persists throughout Garebian's collection: 'a roaring which carries [him]/ to the end of this world.' This book serves a purpose: to educate a new generation of readers about a genocide that is still routinely denied by subsequent Turkish governments. It also makes a significant gesture towards articulating the way that a loss on this scale will carry itself over borders and across generational lines.

The book's craft does seem to suffer under the weight of its emotive and historical ambitions. Consider the second section of the poem 'My Father':

## 2. *Silence and Stammer*

Ash on his orphaned tongue  
weight of the void

he stammered into stone, into silence  
the nothingness of night

words speaking stones  
stones speaking silence

dry tongue feeling around  
the seams of syllables

stammer in the dryness of exile  
spells the distance unforgiving

his murdered kin, the shadows looming  
dark birds hammering the sky

I'm moved by the comparison of ash on the tongue to dark birds, and feel a force in the verb 'hammering' that captures the frightful stammer of one trying to articulate an inarticulable sorrow. The first and last lines of this section together create a powerful image, but it's

diffused by the litany of hammer strikes in between: lines rife with empty prepositional phrases like “The nothingness *of* night,” “Weight *of* the void,” and “the dryness *of* exile” (emphases mine). Many of the other poems suffer from a similar lack of precision.

Garebian seems aware of the difficulty. In ‘The Need for Precision’ he considers

...how easy  
to account for clay bowls,  
for gall-nut, sugar and rice,  
hemp cords and silk clothes.  
The tally of torts worth gold.  
But where is the precision  
of headless bodies, of unmarked graves,  
shreds of scarves hanging in walnut trees,  
of apple-cheeked children  
whose golden hair was carried  
by winds to the mountains?

This poem lets us hear the hard syllables of the materials it describes, then slips us the impossible weight of the interrogative on the heels of this precise description. The tautness of the first few lines comes apart in the elongated sounds of ‘headless bodies’ and ‘shreds of scarves.’ There is violence in these lines, and memory.

96

Other poems such as ‘Items Retrieved From My Father’s Room’ and ‘Egoyan’s Archives of Intimacy’ are built upon similar kindling. The latter strikes a particularly terrifying matchstick in its closing lines: ‘Archives can access intimacy, even depression./ /Outside, things collapse.’

The collection collapses into prose in the book’s afterword: ‘Denial,’ an extended lyric meditation/collage of historical facts and philosophical speculations, includes quotes from Paul Celan, Atom Egoyan, and references to the author’s own previous work on the subject of his parents and the Armenian genocide. While agreeing with the essay’s many assertions and ascribing to the tenor of its voice, I could not help thinking that its inclusion created the sense that the poems had perhaps cracked under the pressure of the author’s vision. One senses that these poems are but one pane in Garebian’s more prismatic, multi-genre project, and that taken together with his other work, they might form a more complete picture of just how much damage Turkey’s denial and revisionism has wreaked upon the collective soul of the Armenian population.

—Nick Thrane