

*With the People from the Bridge* by Dimitris Lyacos. Translated by Shorsha Sullivan. Nottingham, UK: Shoestring P, 2014. ISBN 9781910323151. 61 pp.

Dimitris Lyacos' *With the People from the Bridge*, translated by Shorsha Sullivan, reads as a strange journey taken underneath a bridge, one permeating with religious and philosophical questions. The work begins with prologue like prose to a drama concerning an arch under a bridge peopled by a narrative voice, main characters NCTV and LG, and chorus of women. The collection goes back and forth between the narrator presenting a couple, chorus and stage directions. As the voice arrives underneath the bridge, obscured by the dark, we, as readers, enter this work. As the voice is given a hand-out with the names of the narrator, chorus of women, NCTV and LG, we are given their actions. We are truly "with the people" as we experience a man attempting to open the coffin, bring to life, and leave with a lover. Lyacos' work is at once a broad meandering of deathlike life existence and lifelike death existence and specific contemplation of relationality between humans and humans and God.

Within the collection, the conversation between the man who has been cutting himself with stones in the mountains and God appears at the beginning, where God alleviates him from the "unclean spirit" legion. And this wrestling with religion appears intermittently throughout the collection with lines like "They were not to be found / because God had translated them" (53) and the end where the voice is "set" in the valley of bones and God says, "I will open your graves...and ye shall live" (60). We only seem to know that we are in a contemporary world through the presence of the television and cassette-player beside an epic existence through the symbolic presence of iron and religious one with the presence of crosses.

But this is a collection also tendering a couple albeit through the prism of death. The male lover desires to free the dead woman lover from her tomb: "I hear her. She wants to come out. / A box and something moving inside it, / open it. Bones, earth. Close it. / Open it. Same again" (17) and later "In the end I got her out" (22). The male character provides one rendition of a focal point in their time underneath the bridge: "I pulled her and turned her on her side" (22), ostensibly pulling the female character from her coffin. As the stage directions provide, the man and woman voices alternate, then overlay, becoming each other's voices as death becomes life as life has been death. Most ambiguous in the work are the people surrounding the couple, dead with the woman, living with the man, but all surrounding the bridge, wanting to go out, wanting to come in. Then the woman character relates of the same abovementioned event, "Numbness. Pulled by/the shoulder and turned me/to the side. Then on my back. Bound

/ legs, bound/hands crossed on the chest. / Bound. / He tries to cut it. / Sheet. / Stuck to the mouth. / Cold. A rope / Hurts. Legs” (28-29) then “A rag deep / in my throat all the way down. / He drew it out/and then with his tongue on my eye” (30). Finally, she comments, “Come close. Put your legs / like this. Hole. His body is warm” (36). The short lines iterate the monosyllabic nature of existence in this realm where actions devolve into feelings.

Thus, the collection also has to do with time. Existence and relationality are dealt with in terms of passing time: “This pain is like the clock that is heard / every time you pay attention to it. / Take it and throw it away” (21) and “in the end / Time passed” (21-22). This “pain” as “time passing” becomes the overall narrative of the collection: “It had rained so much that all turned to mud” (49). Beforehand, the narrator describes a city, “but there were no streets there were no/passages and there was no going from one place to the other” (48). This murky existence is played out in the work’s content and form, where punctuation is sometimes used, sometimes not used, depending on the cadence of a slow breath, dying or coming alive. The chorus tells the couple, “Don’t go out. Stay here until / they come and take you. If you go out / nobody will know you. Each one waiting / for their own, in a station / you don’t recognize, a station inside / a church” (55). As readers, we return to existence’s relation to God, but subsisting is the presence of pain. As the collection relates, in the coffin, “they will find two hearts. One smaller / and they drink from each other” (55). Then near the end, when the dead body has been discovered, and the people reach for God, referring to pages of the book he’s been reading from, the narrator states, “Why do I recall I took one and put it in my mouth. Paper like / honey, sweet” (59). And maybe, we, too, are to haphazardly swallow the collection with its treatment of “two hearts”—death and life as dying.

The collection ironically ends with a prologue: “The partially decomposed head of a / woman, stolen from a crypt at / Hollywood Memorial Park Cemetery / early Sunday, was found in the street / next up to a man who was subsequently / arrested, Los Angeles police said” (61), and only then we definitely know that the collection has delved into necrophilia. Yes, it could be considered avant-garde in its treatment of humans and God and dark tone, but Dimitris Lyacos’ *With the People from the Bridge* also subsists as a poetics of visceral ambiguity.

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