

Family Tree Rings

Said the owl to the cockerel: The sun is not important, you shouldn't sing its praises. And so the poem stayed enjoyably dark.

Things couldn't get any stranger. So another poet made a pact with the sun.
Sun arises/ whole world red/ me too.
We danced in the morning dew.

The tops of Macchu Picchu rose before us –
on cushions on the Doelen's floor – up to the stars.
In the land of dwarfs the mountains are king,
you once told me, darling,
you giant, me just 5ft3.

Standing in an island on Westersingel,
the tree of the unknown poet. How come?
Nobody has fallen in any war, have they?

In the lockup Breyten got
a thin mattress and a hint of moon
and the poem felt ashamed.
Yes, it is ashamed to be a poem
and not a shot – the Fifties' Poet Emperor
would have preferred that.

Poetry is a banana peel
below the feet of The System.

Thank God, Irina, you're no longer *imprisoned*
in the gigantic chessboard.

The tree grows a new top every year,
the leaves talk incessantly.
Is it borderline? Am I a poetry devotee?
We need space as much as love,
they whisper.

Along the way, yes along the way they spread
their wings for a foggy day in Rotterdam.

There's a poet in a completely white room
standing still in grass no-one has sown.
Grass, just like that.

And our tongues are stiffened with surprise.
The trembling hairs on the penis of a deer,
tremble on the penis of a deer.

Poets put words in order, so that
all appears different than before.

Is love an onion with a thousand skirts?
We will live and languish till it snows.
Can you see two suns at a glance?
Five perhaps as Chinese people do?
Can the stone blossom?

We grow as rings in the trunk
of Rotterdam's poetry tree
There are forty already.
Poetry slam! Championship!

Poets are builders,
the city thrives in their hands.
Sometimes they whistle as I pass.

But that man with the worn-out jacket
whom I once asked to show me the way I didn't find.

Oh, a young man is talking to me.
A tourist who says that he is lost.
I'll give you a poem, I say,
one of Jules's evergreens:
Als ik mijn ogen toe doe
ben ik op Honolulu

He looks quite puzzled. I have a crack at it.
'When you close your eyes
you are in paradise'

He lowers his eyes,
holds out both his hands.

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'Along the way' alludes to Rien Vroegindewij, 'an onion with a thousand skirts' to Jehuda Amichai, 'two suns' to Maria Barnas, 'Can the stone blossom?' to Arjen Duinker and 'that man with the worn-out jacket' to Makoto Ooka.

'The tops of Macchu Picchu' is a well-known poem by Pablo Neruda, 'A foggy day in Rotterdam' by Cor Vaandrager, 'completely white room' is the title, in translation, of a poetry volume (2002) by Gerrit Kouwenaar.