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MATE: Kei te mōhio tāua, he reo kei tōku arero

*And the kin: tanned, earnest  
Slavic Polynesian faces...  
– Kendrick Smithyman: An ordinary day beyond Kaitaia*

1 *Mira Petricevich visits Croatia (1991)*

My father prayed in Croatian, sure  
the Lord held a special regard for  
Yugoslavia.

But I listened to the Pākehā  
farmer – I was like his lost daughter,  
my doppelgänger

sorting the washing after chapel  
while he cleaned his pipe, then stumped uphill  
to check the high fence.

So childhood was seven parts horse sense  
and three parts parable, a growing  
love of everything

beyond knowing. But I liked English  
best, it let the white folks distinguish  
me, my Māori  
family. Now I see each country  
constructs an ideal for its children  
so they are hidden

from themselves. Dad restored his boyhood  
by praying in a language he could  
perfect, and his bliss  
was timeless. Now when I reminisce  
details shift: the past is a collage  
so by middle age

it is clear nothing is ever clear–  
except the need to reconsider  
what was obvious  
to the child who grew oblivious  
that a cloud resting on a puddle  
is untouchable.

If I crept into a cathedral  
God would still refuse me, as if all  
my prayers were swear words  
and His silence was pointless, two-thirds  
empty, with the last third an echo  
of nothingness, so

I still could not hear any questions  
clearly. *Just give me some suggestions*  
I think, turning back  
to the earth, following a dirt track  
past my abandoned home, to listen  
in the dark: *That's mine?*

For hours I've stared at the remembered  
sea, the one that washed up the last word  
and the child's laughter –  
that laughter would haunt me through the war;  
curling inside the seashell I held  
to each ear, it swelled

until there was nowhere to hide. Insight  
died with the men of my village, night  
and day. I heard them  
crying inside one dull shell, its stem  
thin as a wasp's waist. Stung, I buried  
that shell at low tide...

Now I'll circle fire, twirling until  
the spirits of my ancestors spill  
from their graves, dancing  
so the stars are dizzy. Advancing  
far beyond St Mary of the Rocks  
the unorthodox

dead turn inside the eye of a hawk  
over Pazin, Pula, and Poreč  
picking out *my* eyes  
as they rise. Blind, I'll see worlds capsized  
within this timeless solar eclipse  
the apocalypse.

I can still hear a treadle from my childhood.  
Language is the furious loom of my grandmother  
working out our place  
with the warp threads of memory,  
the weft threads of expectation.  
First things first, she ordered, meaning God.  
In my village, Živogošće, I was so well known  
the priest with the easy smile named a saint  
after me. That did not stop bad things happening.  
One summer Uncle Josip's goat jumped  
into a dry well, breaking both front legs;  
my father helped to haul up the poor creature  
before he cut its throat.  
You get one chance, sometimes not even one.  
A goat bleats in every known language.

Surrounded by the white noise of shells  
recovered from the Tasman Sea  
I still hear silence  
the way an Austrian conscript hears an order  
*In Deckung gehen!* I lie on my own shadow.  
The new field has greener grass  
but a lamb trembles  
separated from its mother.  
The stock phrase 'when I was young' is an address,  
a place loved more intensely  
because it can never be entered  
again. I am left nowhere,  
but a nowhere with new white paint.

Don't put your hand in New Zealand soil  
or your fingers will grow –  
that's what they promised.  
Yet the rest of the body will rot in a sod race.  
If land is a man's inheritance,  
a man is the land's inheritance.  
Damp clay pulls at your boots,  
seals the zig-zag laces,  
takes the weight of your body all too briefly.

In the camp kitchen some wit  
stuck a sewing needle in the picture of Christ.  
We will all go to hell for such sacrilege!  
No, we are already there. Chosen  
diggers make more than a leap of faith, they

somersault into the hereafter,  
like scarab beetles rolling dung...

His windpipe was partly severed, yet  
Spiritioni Spalatriono

John Scopinich

Peter Gojack

Stipe Frankovy could still talk:

*There's a pile here to be made,*

*it's not my luck to get it, I'm done or else*

*I'll go to chokey.* On the camp table a paper

with his name and the sign of the cross

in outline, emptied of content.

That morning his first hollow-eyed words were:

*Get up, put on the billy. I'm dry as a cork.*

Or dry as the hills above Podgora.

Inside Makarska's Franciscan monastery  
the names of those who left for 'America' wait  
to be reclaimed. Swollen with belief then,  
I waved to my family from on top of a donkey.  
From the bottom of the world, on foot  
I wave at midges. I turn my best jacket  
inside out – the lining is brighter,  
like the face of a single man  
at a midsummer picnic  
as the girls get ready to swim.

Whoever settles outside his village,  
he needs a wife to fill up his life  
or he'll be empty as a bottle of bootleg grappa  
after a card game with the neighbours.

Makareta Raharuhi cast her spell  
with a soft caress on a mingi mingi mattress,  
her underwear cut from flour sacks.

My elder brother Mate, his heart  
leapt for the darkly bright Ripeka Tepania,  
that teenager bound by her jealous sisters,  
set adrift in a dinghy...

Sun blistering her lips, she prayed  
and the tide changed.

Her fortune was made  
when she was caught in Mate's worn net.  
Love covers its tracks with sleep:  
*A secret, can I be a part?*  
You can never tell  
how turquoise turns to indigo.

Duller than a rusted axe, perhaps  
but I'm not soft in the head.  
God is in control,  
that's how the soil learned new tricks  
of speech, vines that know the dialect of wind.  
Now I sell passionfruit wine on the sly  
from my '38 Chevrolet  
I'm more of a believer in luck than Jesus,  
I mean he *knew* what was coming.

The drudgery of gum-digging  
brings a love for what has gone,  
for the village with its rituals,  
each one a different bell. Don't look back  
they said, yet I rick my neck  
trying. If a man looks away  
it's either from or towards a woman  
who is long and thin as a prosciutto knife  
but more dangerous:

*Paurangi te ngakau e hine*  
*Moe moe wairangi te wairua...*  
Ripeka shapes raupo into pois,  
but it's how she plaits flax into whips  
that catches my attention – along with her breasts.  
Before the sun is hidden by the schoolhouse  
I'll boil the smallest eels  
in a 46 gallon kerosene drum,  
manure for the Tree of Knowledge.

Next summer I'll sell apple cider.

It is an ordinary day beyond Kaitaia.  
*A horse eats more grass than three cows;*  
*it's better to walk*  
*if walking lets you drink milk.*  
Mate was five foot nothing, plus a bit,  
but he pointed to a chimney  
drilled through sand-rock by his narrow spade,

a fire place underground.

*The best fire is in the centre of the Earth  
and in the summer sky.*

Walking past the cows  
an hour to the water,  
with your hand-line for fish.  
Dig pipis, tuatuas to cook  
on a windblown sheet of tin  
as the sky closes in... Feel the sand  
in your sandals and underwear.  
Wonder if this is love.  
It takes eighteen sacks, sewn together,  
stretched over a **ti tree** frame  
to make a shanty. Tonight  
set a double bed on bare earth  
in the centre, where memory turns.

5        *Lovre Petricevich*

The Franciscans at Makarska taught this boy  
love begins in a garden.

I could use a gauze-backed safe  
the way my neighbour does,  
but meat hangs safely in the shade of a fig tree.  
I'll attend to the vegetables.

Makareta's father taught me –  
**always store kūmara in a pit**  
protected by corrugated iron,  
line it with alternate layers of dry fern  
and sandy soil, place the kūmara  
as if they were heirlooms meant for a dowry box,  
repeat the process until the pit is filled.

I take a breather, roll some Havelock North tobacco,  
inhale. Assorted biscuits in tin boxes  
with drawings of chocolate ones on the sides,  
Highlander condensed milk,  
but nothing so sweet as Havelock North tobacco.  
Its smell could rouse that hungover truck driver  
*Mio, da buggar.*  
So the kūmara will taste of it.

The war was inside our wireless set, sparking  
through all our dark talk that March  
Lovre drove between Waitaki Landing and Te Hapua.  
He was steady as you go at 50mph, moaning  
*Where is da bloody Mio? Da buggar,*  
*on Saturday he going party, all day*  
*Sunday party, Monday*  
*a puncture for a mouth...* On and on  
like the right rear rim after a blow out.

Definitions of right and wrong  
sway, long prayer candles in an Easter procession  
through Živogošće to the clearest sea.  
There are names that are owned by sticks and stones.  
Those who are arrested,  
numerous as summer insects, sing  
loud and clear from their trucks every morning  
and a few do it again at dusk, the way Lovre sang  
reversing down the dirt track to Cape Reinga lighthouse.

We remember as a spade remembers  
the snarled root. Our old friend  
Ivan Radojkovich, he dug with us but took his share  
home; when the Austrians came again  
he hid in a crypt at Gdinj, climbing  
down the steel footholds into darkness,  
a darkness that stained his skin –  
even praise from Tito could not shift it.  
Not even Tito.

It is a land of unfiltered cigarettes  
and the plum brandy favoured by Chetniks.  
A man is worth less than a bear, even a skunk –  
but he smells worse. *I come from heaven,*  
*where do you think I come from?*  
*I'm a man like you.*  
*Here is the stone house*  
*where my mother embroiders*  
*each white sheet with our family shield.*

Ivan's mother could sharpen any blade with her voice –  
that's what was said, but not by him. Quiet as  
he looked for the next foothold  
and a Belgian shotgun with damask twist barrels,  
with a slip of light

left to get his bearings.  
Ivan believed light is how the soul travels;  
animal mineral or vegetable, it makes no difference.  
Here the stars glisten like fish-scales on a slipway.

7      *Mira Petricevich*

In Vrgorac a house called *Vila Auckland*. In Auckland a traveller from Vrgorac. So both places must echo with *Kako si?* ‘Work and to see America, that’s what brought Papa...’

For a long time I forgot to speak my own language. It could have been Greek to Makareta.  
She laughed: *Ka mate te kāinga tahi, ka ora te kāinga rua.* That laughter

carried her into the hereafter.

8      *Mira Petricevich: Milosrdni andeo (1999)*

My mother Makareta’s eyes shine  
despite the years, they’re brighter than mine  
and impossible  
to outstare. Now she’s invisible  
I look out for her. If her skin’s smooth  
still, she will not soothe

me, I see myself in the mirror  
nearly three-score-and-ten years after  
she died. Yet her face  
lies under mine; soon it will replace  
my features, just as **dactylanthus**  
makes superfluous

green leaves or roots, taking another  
plant’s features. She’s my doppelgänger.  
Whatever she’s lost

finds me, the parasite becomes host.  
Inheritance sets up destiny  
when you are Maori.

And I hear the voices of the dead  
outlining these pictures in my head:  
spinning wheel, dowry  
chest, earthenware jug, the symmetry  
of my father's family at home,  
their mood black as loam

after ploughing. When snowdrifts piled high  
he drove stock inside the kitchen, dry  
but unhygienic.

Overnight all the children were sick,  
their complexions went pale as goat's cheese  
as they scratched at fleas

and worse. Stomachs were turned by those churns  
hung from the rafters... While my concerns  
appear privileged  
in comparison, they are gold dredged  
from the gravel of my father's voice  
and my mother's choice

to accept him: *What do you want?*  
*Tell me your story.* A confidant  
goes beyond the known  
with each secret, that is how I've grown  
these notes in Aotearoa  
and Dalmatia;

they help me to open each locked church  
from Kaitaia to Split. I will search  
for the eternal,  
believing it to be very small  
like the smile of a child in Belgrade  
waving, unafraid

as the first bombs fall.

NOTES      Mate: Kei te mōhio tāua, he reo kei tōku arero

The Maori in the title translates as '*We both know a language is waiting inside my tongue.*' It is a line from the poem 'Rākau', in original English by Alice Te Punga Somerville, and in Māori translation by Te Ataahia Hurihanganui (*Tātai Whetū: Seven Māori Women Poets in Translation*, eds. Maraea Rakuraku & Vana Manasiadis, Seraph Press Translation Series 4, 2018). It is used by permission of the author, translator, and publisher.

The parents of Miraka (Mira) Petricevich (1921–2001) were Lovre Petricevich (1887–1976) and his first wife Makareta Raharuhi (1890–1924). A distinguished Maori leader, she is better known as Dame Mira Szászy DBE, CB, QSMJP, BA, DipSocSci, LLD (Vic).

Lovre's elder brother was Mate Petricevich (1878–1952), who fathered two children (George in 1929, Mary in 1932) to Ripeka Tepania (1883–1957), who left Mate and the children in 1937.

Ivan Radojkovic (1894–1976), teenage gum-digger in New Zealand (1907–1926); upon his return to Yugoslavia he became a partisan hero honoured by Tito and, in 1956, was elected president of the island of Hvar.

*In Deckung gehen!*  
(‘Take cover!’)

*I come from heaven, where do you think I come from? I'm a man like you.*

A quotation from the Armenian Arshile Gorky (1904–1948), who was responding to a demand by U.S. police that he explain himself.

*Paurangi te ngakau e hine  
Moe moe wairangi te wairua...*  
(‘My heart is pounding,  
The soul sleeps foolishly... ’)

An excerpt from Emira Maewa Kaihau’s song *Akoako o te Rangi* (1918).

*Ka mate te kāinga tahi, ka ora te kāinga rua*  
(‘When one house dies, a second lives’)

This is historically used when two houses are merged due to the unfortunate circumstances of one particular family. However this could

be used when something good emerges from misfortune.  
[<https://www.maori.cl/Proverbs.htm>]

Following receipt of a Creative New Zealand Resilience Grant, this piece was supported by the Dalmatian Cultural Society's Slavenka Misa, Pam Roderick, and Steven Sulenta. The text draws on detail from *Papers Past* (complete with misspelt Croatian and Italian names), and works by Andrew Trlin, Stephen Jelicich, and Kaye Dragicevich, whose comprehensive *Pioneer Dalmatian Settlers of the Far North* suggested many anecdotes. The work's main critical influences are the masters and doctoral theses of Senka Bozic-Vrbancic, the latter expanded into *Tarara: Croats and Maori in New Zealand: Memory Belonging Identity* (Otago University Press, 2008).

Marko Pogačar made this project possible. After my Croatian translator Miroslav Kirin and his wife Renata hosted me in Zagreb, I drafted part 1 during a Writers' House Residency in Pazin (July 2017). Branko Vasiljević and his wife Ines chauffeured me around Istria; Irina Kivela guided me through Motovun; Emina Svilar introduced me to the Dance of Death frescoes at the Church of St. Mary on Škriljanah at Beram – these were finished in 1474 by the workshop of Master Vincent from Kastav; librarian Iva Ciceran dealt with local officialdom on my behalf; artists Gea Rajić (Pazin, 2017) and Katarina Ivanišin Kardum (Zagreb, 2021) responded to the work.