

Brian Turner

Sniper Alley

Vedran Smailovic plays Albinoni's *Adagio*
on a sidewalk, on a quiet Sarajevo morning,
wearing his finest suit, his cello leaning its neck
over his shoulder, as if searching the rooftops
for what audience there might be, listening.

A mortar shell killed so many who were
waiting in the bread line, nervously patient,
where flowers now hang their heads and fall
piece by piece to the earth, as though hushed
only by Vedran's requiem, this impossible music.

Listen. There is nothing romantic about this.
There is a rifle scope magnifying him in its lens,
reticular crosshatchings bisecting his body.
There is a rooftop sniper, not far from here,
who has watched Vedran come to this place
for over twenty days now, resting the crosshairs
on his heart, measuring the distance between them,
how all that is needed is for a finger to press down,
for one long agonizing note to rise from it, stunning.

NOTE: In fact, Vedran Smailovic, of the Sarajevo Opera orchestra, actually did risk sniper fire at the site of this attack, playing his cello for 22 consecutive days. (See *Sarajevo, A Portrait of the Siege*, pp. 46-47)

Listening To The Rocks

Slobodan Milosevic (1941-)

Can it be true that *Slobodan* means *freedom*?

It is night in the Hague. All the world is hushed
into dream. And Slobodan, he is listening hard.

His father is in the mountains of Montenegro,
searching, even long after midnight, from one rock

to another, speaking to them, his palms feeling
the cold sides of their faces. These are the angels

in earth, made of stone. He rests the cold shotgun
in their mouths, barrel by barrel, and pulls the trigger.

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Slobodan's mother is with him in his cell tonight.
He can see her hanging by a cord, her hair gone soft

in moonlight. She watches over, wingless and mute.
And Slobodan, he rests his hand on the stone walls.

He can feel the thrumming of voices from far-off rooms.
He is shivering. His fingers are rifle-barrel cold.

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From the fields of his country, the dead rise up now.
They walk through firesmoke valleys to cross over water.

They gather around him. They are as uncountable
as fog. They whisper to him, *your name is for no one else,*

you who would murder the word, only yours is yours to take.

But there is not one tear in his eye. He sees the dead among him

as the last breath of greater Serbia. Even in the dark hush.

Even with his mother's angel in suicide relief, his father's voice in stone.

In the Trigger Housing

You must relax the pad of your index finger,
here, in the trigger housing, where the slightest pressure
releases the sear spring, throwing the bolt forward,
with its firing pin, that smooth shiny chrome pin,
igniting the primer and propelling the bullet round
forward in a gunpowder charge, explosive, spinning
in the turning lands and grooves of barrel rifling,
propelled through the flash suppressor's flare and smoke
to brassy freedom, to flight, a round's arching trajectory
over distance and time, muted by the cold wind
blowing through the field, what chills a man
standing rigid in the slushing mud, who could be
praying to your own god, in his own quiet way,
his boots sunk deep in the mud, his hands rough
and tender from work, tired of what the day has brought,
though relaxed in the muscle, unstartled by the sound.

BRIAN TURNER is author of *Here, Bullet*, an award-winning collection of poetry. He served as an infantry team leader in Iraq with the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. He also served in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the 10th Mountain Division.