

Zbigniew Herbert

*Arion*

This is he - Arion -  
the Grecian Caruso  
concertmaster of the ancient world  
expensive as a necklace  
or rather as a constellation  
singing  
to the ocean billows and traders in silks  
to the tyrants and mule herders  
The crowns blacken on the tyrants' heads  
and the sellers of onion cakes  
for the first time err in their figures to their own disadvantage

What Arion is singing about  
nobody here could say exactly  
the essential thing is that he restores world harmony  
the sea gently rocks the land  
fire talks to water without hatred  
in the shadow of one hexameter lie down  
wolves and roedeer goshawks and doves  
and the child goes to sleep on the lion's mane  
as in a cradle  
Look how the animals are smiling  
People are living on white flowers  
and everything is just as good  
as it was in the beginning

This is he - Arion  
expensive and multiple  
cause of giddiness  
standing in a blizzard of images  
he has eight fingers like an octave  
and he sings

Until from the blue in the west  
unravel the luminous threads of saffron  
which show that night is coming close  
Arion with a friendly shake of his head  
says good-bye to  
the mule herders and tyrants  
the shopkeepers and philosophers  
and in the harbour mounts the back  
of a tame dolphin

- I'll be seeing you -

How handsome Arion is

- say all the girls -  
when he floats out to sea  
alone  
with a garland of horizons on his head

*Translated by Alissa Valles*