



# Wheel with a Single Spoke: and other poems

*Nichita Stănescu , Sean Cotter (Translation) , Nichita Stănescu*

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"...The poet comes into possession of an important, essential message, one that has the prestige and mystery of eternity...." —Daniel Cristea-Enache

For the first time in English: the beloved poems of Nichita Stănescu, Romania's most influential postwar poet. In his world, angels and mysterious forces converse with the everyday and earthbound while love and a quest for truth remain central. His startling images cut deep and his grappling—making bold leaps—is full of humor. His poems seduce the reader away from the human.

Nichita Stănescu(1933-1983) towers above post-World War II Romanian poetry. His poems are written in clear language while posing profound metaphysical questions. He was born in Ploiesti in 1933 and died in 1983 in Bucharest. He is one of the most acclaimed contemporary Romanian language poets, winner of the Herder Prize and nominated for the Nobel Prize.

## Wheel with a Single Spoke: and other poems Details

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# From Reader Review Wheel with a Single Spoke: and other poems for online ebook

**Bogdan Suceava says**

<http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Sean...>

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**Zuzka says**

I got this this book in a First Reads Giveaway which I was excited about! =)

I love how the author deals with such serious things and themes with humour. I too think that nothing in life should be taken too seriously! =). I don't usually enjoy poems too much, but this book just got my attention.  
^\_^

The author comparing himself to a tree was an interesting thing. But I didn't wonder that much. Trees are for me the symbols of nature, peace, growth and transition of life along with wisdom.

An interesting book, which definitely will tackle people's attention who love poems which tell a story! =)

Definitely glad I got my hands onto this book!

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**Parrish Lantern says**

Nichita Stănescu (ni?kita st??nesku) was born Nichita Hristea Stănescu on 31st March 1933 in the city of Ploiesti (plo?je?t? ) the county seat of Prahova County in the historical region of Wallachia, Romania, located about 35 miles north of Bucharest. His mother Tatiana Cereaciuchin, fled from Russia and in 1931 married Nicolae H. Stănescu, which was something he commented on several times, stating that he had been given life by a Romanian peasant and a Russian woman. Ploiesti was overrun by Nazi's during the 2nd world war because of it's oil refinery, which was eventually put out of commission by United States bombers. Nichita finished high school in Ploiesti, before moving to Bucharest to study Romanian, linguistics, philosophy, and literature. In 1952 he married Magdalena Petrescu, although this was to last only a year and in 1957 he graduated. His literary debut was in the Tribuna literary magazine, followed by his debut poetry collection Sensul iubirii (The Aim/Sense of Love\*) in 1960, this was a collection of love poems which explore the meaning of love. Poems from the volume were previously published in the Tribuna, no. 6, 17 March 1957, and Gazeta literar?, no. 12, 21 March 1957.

End Of An Air Raid

(April 5, 1944)

You dropped your chalk

and the splintered door beat against the wall

the sky appeared, partly hidden

by the spiders

that fed on murdered children.

Someone had taken away

the walls

.....and fruit tree

.....and stairs.

You hunted after spring

impatiently, like you were expecting

a lunar eclipse.

Towards dawn, they even took away

the fence

you had signed with a scratch,

so the storks would not lose their way

when they came

this spring.

On June 6th 1962, he married for the second time, to Doina Ciurea, the marriage seems to have lasted for only two years although it wasn't till the around 1981 that they divorced and Stănescu married for the third

time in 1982 to Dora (Theodora Bran) whom he had met in 1978 when she was a student in Philology, in the Department of French. Throughout this period Stănescu was a contributor to and editor of *Gazeta Literară*, *România Literară* and *Luceafărul*, as well as creating an extensive body of poetry, essays and Romanian translations of poets such as Adam Puslojić and Vasko Popa. He also was the recipient of numerous awards for his verse, the most important being the Herder Prize in 1975 and a nomination for the Nobel Prize in 1980.

Beyond the dry as bone nature of the facts, Nichita Stănescu comes across as an outgoing gregarious individual, he seems to dispel the image of the lone writer working at his craft, preferring the company of others. He spent most of his time residing in the homes of his friends, enjoying copious amounts of drink and could regularly be found improvising poems whilst his audience attempted to follow him and transcribe them at the bar. In fact the title of this post is called “The Ritual Of Writing On Air” because that was how he described his technique, drawing inspiration from his immediate environment, and using that to craft his verse, stating in a Belgrade interview that:

“Gutenberg flattened words out, but words exist in space ... Words are spatialized. They are not dead, like a book. They are alive, between me and you, me and you, me and you. They live; they are spoken, spatialized, and received”

While.

And yet, I have seen a bird

lay eggs while it flew --

And yet, I have seen someone cry

while he laughed --

And yet, I have seen a stone

while it was --

In 1983 he died in Fundeni Hospital (Bucharest) after a liver condition he had had for some time worsened. He was posthumously elected a member of the Romanian Academy, although by this point he had reached an enviable position where both the critics and the general public had declared him as one of the most loved and prominent writers in the Romanian language, a language that he had himself declared was “Divinely Beautiful”. Despite living through the second world war and Romania’s fall into an oppressive police state under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu, a regime characterized by an increasingly brutal and repressive apparatus and, by some accounts, the most rigidly Stalinist regime in the Soviet bloc. Stănescu was considered a metaphysical rather than a political poet, using this approach to examine the universe and humanity’s place within it, using various perspectives to voice the fundamental questions of his and our time. Also by walking a line between what could and could not be said, he crafted a new aesthetic for his verse, one that in his own words:

“ while the poems, often lapidary, appear to indicate a sublimation of the senses, a tendency to crystallize

into a symbol, an attentive reading unveils the opposite process, that is the symbol's subtle disaggregation, its incorporation into matter, something like the fissuring into a star of a pane of glass, broken by an invisible stone"

Meaning from the star, we notice the pane and intuit the stone. The pane registers the lines of fissure, which we might take as the lines of the poem, moving through the human language. We move from metaphor – the broken glass as star – toward the material yet abstract world, the stone that cannot be directly described in human language. (Taken from the translator's afterword)

Sometimes you love something. Sometimes something hits you so hard that it becomes part of your DNA, you're not sure why, there was no known defining moment - it just is. But with hindsight-reasoning you try to define what it is that has affected you in such a manner and how it could have happened. Then using all your grandiose ideas on "the power of reasoning" you attempt to capture what was a moment, a word, the slightest shadow of a suggestion, but like with most nets, the minnows and microscopic organism pass through, leaving you with the big ideas and grandiose statements and still no idea why you loved this thing. This is how I feel about this collection. Of late this book has taken on the mantle of a personal talisman, always with me, being opened up at random, and the words, the verse, the poetry, it's very language has worked it's charm upon me. In a world whose very words of late have grown heavy, and cumbersome this has lightened them, in most senses of the word.

Wheel With A Single Spoke And Other Poems, celebrates the work of one of Romania's highly loved & critically regarded poets, one who Tomaž Šalamun, described as "The greatest contemporary Romanian poet" and one who is in the rankings as one of the most important poets of the twentieth century. This dazzling collection of poems – the most extensive to date, was translated by Sean Cotter, who has chosen poetry from each of Stănescu's books, although he concentrates on the specifically fertile period of 1965 – 1975, charting the emergence and growth of what would become his characteristic style, allowing us to see how his own distinctive voice developed.

<http://parrishlantern.blogspot.co.uk/...>

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## **Galen says**

I'm ashamed I didn't read this sooner.

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## **Nick says**

What an absolutely astonishing surprise this book was! I won it on a Goodreads Giveaway, but it proved itself so worthy that I've sought more of Stănescu's work---he has a wit about him, and also steers his chariot of inquiry directly into the brightest of suns (horrible image; sorry). My favorite part is in the middle, in which he deals directly with one of astronomy's most troubling figures, the ancient influencer Ptolemy. He dives into the contradictions of Ptolemaic thought, while also positing some hilarious and deadly serious issues: what if earth really *is* the center of the universe, and all our math and observation suggesting otherwise are inaccurate? A crazy question, and absolutely one worth exploring further.

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## Mohsen says

Great!

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## Desiree says

I think that the absolute best part about this book is the surprise humor found randomly throughout the poetry. Nichita Stănescu very obviously had a wonderful sense of humor as well as intelligence. Unfortunately, I wasn't much of a fan of his meter and a good deal of the subject matter but there were still several poems that I greatly enjoyed and have shared with others.

One thing I liked in particular was that he often likened himself to a tree... I've often thought of myself very much like a tree as well and it was interesting to read something so familiar.

Notable Poems (in my humble opinion)...

I Remember, Still Amazed

A Poem

Autumn Love

Fate

The Young

On Contemplative Beings, Things They Say, and Some Advice I Would Give Them

You Leave Your Scent

Ode to Joy

So I'll Stay

Poem

Cold Balance of the Stars

**Note to Animal Lovers:** Some of these poems are definitely not something you would like, especially The Sacrifice and Burning of Everything and Tennis as a good portion of them describes the mutilation and death of animals.

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## metaphor says

And if I ache with rivers,  
rocks, a length of ocean,  
just enough for everything to be my bed,  
never enough to fit my thought's  
eternal expansion, oh, then there's no way I'll know  
how you also ache, and I am not the one  
to whom I speak.

\*

Everything is simple, so simple that

it becomes incomprehensible.

\*

Everything is so close, so  
close, that  
it slips behind the eyes  
and is seen no more.

\*

I sit on a terrace of loss  
at night, under a moon that covers half  
the sky.

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### **Russell says**

A friend of mine once did commentary for a literary death match in the language of wine labels: a fruity blend of blackberry and barnyard; hints of oaky tangerines and smoked chestnuts; and so on. This worked well because no one forgets irony in literary death matches: everyone knows the contest cannot ever really be a contest. Unfortunately not the case with the things called contests, and O, do we need some irony in contests!

This is one—though just one—of the reasons that Nichita Stanescu's *Wheel with a Single Spoke*, in Sean Cotter's English translations, should won a contest. It knows for irony, as when, in the love lyric, "Beauty-sick," the lover enjoins, "Do your best not to die, my love / try to not die if you can"; or, in a nod to trans-sense, ("What is the Supreme Power that Drives the Universe and Creates Life?"), it turns out to be "A and E / and I and O / and U." And once this tone, then everything takes on a tinge, or you at least have to wonder, when he writes words like "consciousness" and "cognition" and "being" and "ah" and most definitely "O." (See the rest of this review at Three Percent: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/tran...>)

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### **Rosa.cruz7 says**

A book definitely needing to be re-read... and perhaps a hard read for some.

Stanescu's writing is haunting...

For those oblivious to the events that lead up to World War II and the all the consequences of that, particularly for those living in the Balcan area it may be somewhat confusing (but all the more reason to brush up on History, I think)

Sometimes eerie, provocative, stark, sometimes beautiful, you get a glimpse into a haunted soul. I definitely recomend it - but pehaps not to the faint of heart.

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### **MB says**

Excellent book of surrealist poetry. Stanescu stuns with the grotesque, impresses with the satanic lurkings of the mundane. A must read for lovers and students of surrealist poetry.



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## **Rodney says**

In the course of his own translations from Serbian, Stanescu created one of the best metaphors for poetry in translation I've ever encountered: the star-like cracks in a pane of glass "broken by an invisible stone." Sean Cotter includes it in his diamond-sharp Afterword, along with a reading that sees this not just as an apt description of Stanescu's own poetics, where symbol and metaphor point back to the simplicity and force of a material world just outside the poem's frame, but as an account of how one language impacts another. Stanescu's poems in English offer a compelling pattern of cracks, but you have to intuit the stone, and you're always aware, because it's broken, of the glass between you and the original.

Cotter goes on to explain how glass in Stanescu's soulful, ambiguously direct poems is often translucent but never transparent: luminously opaque. It's a deft way to connect the qualities of Stanescu's poetry to the difficulties of bringing it over into English. One mark of the success of these translations is that in reading them, I'm aware of how much I'm missing. You sense what made Stanescu so magnetic and seductive, even while perceiving the smudges on the cultural window that prevent him from having the same impact in English. Cotter's translations—maybe any translation—bears some of the light without being the light; I doubt that Stanescu, who knew just one language but "seven times over," would expect any more from his translit poems than that.

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## **Chad Post says**

Winner of the 2013 Best Translated Book Award!

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