

ТОМАЭ

TOMAŽ

A YOUNG LIFE OF
TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

CONSTRUCTED BY
JOSHUA BECKMAN
FROM CONVERSATIONS
AND INTERVIEWS

WAVE BOOKS
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First Edition

Have you ever seen God,
how he comes running at 2:30 exactly
responsibility responsibility
you don't draw me near the beginning or the end
immovable and tied
instead of dangling your legs just like that
responsibility responsibility
the world without nature
the world without conversation
irresponsible are the trees as they grow
and what has a word to do with it
the sun doesn't need it to set
nor the sky which is blue and nothing else
who did God ask
when he created the butterfly as it is
when he could have made its legs five inches in diameter
responsibility responsibility
baroque sustenance of the people.

I'm usually
somehow shy
about reading
my young
poems

because they don't
go with this
body anymore

it was in '64
so probably I was twenty-three
or maybe twenty-two

I don't remember
no I started one in '63

so I was twenty-four
or twenty-three

no

no art

I was just a student
of Art History

maybe I should start from my youth
from my childhood if you want

we came to
well my father was
in a way
politically punished

we had to leave Ljubljana

because he was very critical
of some vaccine

(a Russian vaccine
that was given to children)

he talked about this bad drug
and because he was a leftist

but never a Communist
and had people who liked him
they said, we should put you in jail
but the best we can do is
just hide you somewhere

so we went
to Herzegovina
to Mostar

and when the political situation
changed and Tito went against Stalin
then my father could come back to Slovenia

but not to Ljubljana
not to the central place

so we came to Koper
which was Capodistria

and we arrived in '49
and this was still practically
an Italian town

I remember we lived in the old part

there were two families
who were Slovenians
and all the others
the entire street Italians

and this was a small town
of a thousand people
and my mother taught me piano
when I was five
and the school opened
after two years

so when the school opened
I had some kind of advantage
and I was pushed as somebody
who had really
who had really great

and you know I did feel
because I had this

this is something big
this is art

and some friends of the family came
when I was ten eleven and they said

you cannot keep this kid here

you should go to Warsaw
or to Leningrad

this provincial
his provincial teacher
you are wasting his time

so I played
but the pressure built on me
and I had this incredible stage fright

and it happened once
when I had to play
in front of an audience
I just stopped
blank

and
I had to
go down from
the stage

it was an incredible shame

this huge
psychological torture
because they had
really treated me
like a wunderkind
and gave me lessons

harmony and contrapuntals

as someone who would study
in a musical academy

and one of my teachers
was a really hard alcoholic
a very well-known composer
but very unhappy
with this small Koper position

and so when I was twelve
I was also a rower
and we were competing
and we were training for regattas

and my father said to me