

# *The Poetry Miscellany*

2022



## Poems By

Michael Biggins

Barbara Carlson

Sheri Cohen

Elizabeth J. Coleman

Stephen Corey

Mark Cox

Miriam Drev

Carol Lynn Grellas

Danielle Hanson

Eric Machan Howd

Eleanor Kedney

Clint McCown

Anne Myles

Ata Moharreri

Kate Morgan

Bonnie Naradzay

Maggie Paul

Alexandre Romanès

William Pit Root

Betsy Sholl

Anne R. Z. Schulman

Diana Norma Szokolai

Melinda Thomsen

Leslie Ullman

Pam Uschuk

Robert Vivian

Uroš Zupan

Featuring an Interview with Slovene Writers

The  
Poetry Miscellany

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# Poems

Mark Cox

## **The Song that Never Ends**

Wonder of wireless technology,  
    this picture frame plays video too,  
and here are my children,  
    four and six years old,  
singing “The Song That Never Ends”  
    for exactly 15 seconds.  
It barely begins

    before it’s over,  
which applies to their childhood, actually,  
    as the next shot  
shows them in their twenties,  
    side by side again; this time,  
a recent dinner,  
    or birthday, embrace.

Such modern magic  
    both amazes and unnerves:  
my kids can beam photos  
    from wherever they go—  
merrily risking perils  
    I really don’t want them to.  
And what a mishmash  
    assemblage  
looping without end:  
    one day,  
it is her first of fourth grade  
    and the next,  
there’s a midriff tattoo;  
    one second,  
he’s wound in baby blankets,  
    then voila,  
bound for job interviews!

My head wheels  
    with the traffic of time,  
Jengas of random generations  
    stacking and restacking,  
digital strata  
    as real as dust on a sill  
or dirt on a coffin lid.  
    My mother and father, too,  
become old, then young  
    before my eyes,  
as if it is completely normal;  
    I say my goodbyes  
and behold,  
    here they are, reborn!

It is enough, enough, I say,  
    this circulation  
of ardor and regret,  
    this sense of having been,  
again and over again!  
    Those little hands  
that can barely grasp a story book,  
    instantaneously  
on a steering wheel!  
    My beard whitening  
in the time it takes to squint!

    Look, look, it says,  
at what you have lived!  
    Here you are in Africa  
with a machete and no shirt,  
    did you really have biceps  
40 years ago?  
    And the changing color  
of your daughter's hair,  
    blond, brunette, pink, green—  
it is dizzying. And there  
    is sumptuous Melissa,  
her youthful breasts reflected  
    in your mirrored sunglasses...  
(Ok, that is not on the frame,

that is more in my head),  
but this frame is much like the mind,  
fractured and associative,  
given to chaos,  
surprising forays  
into pleasure and guilt and sorrow....

And then, at last, fear.  
Of all the issues of aging,  
I fear memory loss most,  
What if I don't recognize  
my family and friends?  
What if I forget  
who I am?

On the frame, my uncle frowns  
from his Ford Bronco.  
He doesn't give a crap  
what we remember.  
And for a moment I wish  
I was equally cynical.

But then, right on cue,  
my kids are singing again,  
providing a kind of closure,  
this theoretically should lack,  
and transforming me  
once more  
into a young father at bath-time  
with another chance  
to tuck them in.  
Lucky me. Lucky me.  
I'll take it  
before it's gone.

## **Shroud**

From Grace, in love, out of favor, asleep—  
falling, it's said, because one feels  
the profound slant of experience,

those gravities with which we've plunged  
toward our separate selves—that otherness  
in which we're wound at birth—

one's last face always in the first,  
our deaths worn through life  
like a second skin.

Sometimes,

waking between sheets,  
I am a boy on the beach again,  
my face alone visible, soothed

by the press of damp coarse sand  
and the force of my brother's hands,  
as he scoops and packs the heaped mound.

Sometimes,

staring at that sky, I see  
far past it, pierce right through  
to the blue in everything.

Just so, chicks, barely hatched,  
know instinctively not to move  
when a hawk's shadow glides over them.

Just so,

as if this shroud of sand,  
these semi-human contours,  
were a cloud levitating  
in the azure and gold-tinged tropical sky,

the child quiets and stills, sensing now  
how each breath is the volume of time itself,  
that he will diminish, like the years,  
exhalation by exhalation.

*There is just one thing we can say we know.*

Inform the dirt of your impatience.  
Advise the ocean re the self.  
Instruct the waterfall as to emptiness.

Talk to the river about your life's free course.



## Portrait

The sky is chalked a powder gray. Vascular limbs seep black across it. The house's roof bears that heaven's weight. A girl's cat steps eternally down from the porch's slab, her tail low, her right paw outstretched. The grass is forever brittle with December's cold. Everything is about to change. The front door will always be just about to open. The pallid world in the storm door's pane will always be just on the verge of shimmering. Fleur de lis. Wrought aluminum. Pattern wrested from nature's flow. The girl's face will always be an entryway, walls of burnished butternut behind her. The empty birdcage. The dusty ivy dribbling from sconces. Each family forged around its ordained table. Generation to generation, the condiments passed. This was fifty years ago. The girl's father was 46. Her mother was 43. Shingles lay smothered on the roof. One strand of Christmas bulbs bowed slightly below the eaves. Leaves from the hardwoods had to be shaken from the evergreens. Even now, nuts need be raked into piles. Cup your hands around your eyes. Gaze down into the deepening glass. Everything is about to change. Everything depends upon some other thing. Someone leaving and someone staying. A neighbor wrings her undergarments. A neighbor is hanging himself. Help may or may not arrive. The ambulance may or may not need its siren. What the girl believes will prove to be unimportant. The neighbors' dog whimpers to be let in. The soul whines to be let out. The cat sniffs at the air.



*Untitled* - Hope Hunnicutt

# Betsy Sholl

## To Vincent Van Gogh in Heaven

After the gunshot did the crows scatter  
or swarm your painting? If heaven has a gate,  
is the latch on the inside or out?

You with your bandaged ear, just the lobe,  
not the whole rose of it deadheaded,  
as I first thought. You who can make

the tamest flowers wild, make any field  
stubbled and lush, dizzy with lilies  
under the stars, and on my way home

from walls hung with your sagging boots,  
plowed fields, lumpy potato eaters, sunflower love,  
make everything on the street a bright shock

first the rut and peel of a door's blue paint,  
then the thick bark of trees, and the glint  
of my dropped keys under the streetlight,

one sad, whose lock is long forgotten,  
two with sockets they still fit. And now rain  
washes the street taillight-red, caution-yellow,

rain that kept you inside wild-eyeing  
your room and remembered gardens, inside  
your troubled head, the yes and no of you

doubter of everything you did, believer too,  
saying, Paradise hello and good-bye  
and may I come in? Vincent,

may I call you that, because in grief  
I crave your gouges and grooves, your paint  
so thick it's more real than the drenched iris

under my window. Because your skies  
pulse with such abundance and abandon,  
I want to believe even in anguish

you turned a knob and the lock sprung,  
the doors flew apart, snapped their hinges  
and still hang loose on their jambs, and open.

**Rainy Street, Portland, Maine**

painting by Brian Killeen, 2017

It must be between State Street and High,  
perhaps the block near Port City Blue,  
music club offering Saturday night jazz.  
Rain makes the sidewalk bricks glisten  
but aren't those walks really concrete?  
So in this way the scene's imagined,  
an artifice of pattern and form, the salmon brick  
reflected in storefront windows,  
contrasting with varied blues of awnings, autos,  
and one lone figure out walking  
with a long watery reflection.  
Despite the rain there is a lightness  
to the sky, as if it's about to clear.  
We bought this painting in December  
at a friend's show, you and I  
each putting down our bank cards  
so it could be our gift to each other. Now  
it fills the wall, wet blur of street  
and that one figure carrying a blue bag  
doubled on the storefront glass.  
Gazing, I am aware of being warm and dry  
while also recalling the chill of rain  
as we headed out to that club,  
where some nights we found ourselves  
almost outside of time as flute, guitar,  
bass and drums took us far

from the tune's melody into pure attention,  
the air alive with improvisation,  
so immediate we both leaned in as if to touch  
some almost mystic source.  
Perhaps the painter also leaned in,  
making quick improvised strokes,  
starting with a photograph, then choosing  
the colors, blurring things  
to make the feel of rain and expectation,  
order and uncertainty,  
something about to break open,  
the way those nights it might have been  
a flute or guitar riff, or the stun of moon  
as we left the club.  
Now you are gone, though you left this  
this gift, your half of it,  
the way it seems half of me was always you,  
so many things soaked with you,  
your good eye, good heart how you'd respond  
to a cry in the street, an empty hand  
held out. Now I look again and see  
a touch of green signage above a shop,  
and another figure on the sidewalk nearly blended  
into what might be a mailbox behind it,  
a figure revealed only by its reflection  
on the wet bricks. How often have I gazed  
and until now not noticed this ghostly blur  
merging into everything around it?—  
this thin ripple of presence almost pulsing,  
whether it's walking toward me or away

# Stephen Corey

## Overlay

I was tired of the shouting and the celery,  
the ignitions and navels and telephones.  
I moved to a country where everything happened abstractly.

I had heard about this place in some translated poems:  
a country filled with suffering and death and hope  
and politics and minds to ponder them constantly.

But I was shocked by the new place, which proved to have many actual things:  
mating turtle, good cheap bread, homeless four-year-olds walking the streets,  
a museum filled with gold objects worth more than all the governments of South America,  
and clouds that offered fog four months per year, though never rain.

I learned that the translators were not there,  
but back in my own country amid sofas and taxis and loud music  
and slaughtered chickens, wishing for the misery and change  
this other country's poets might provide by turning  
dirty shoes to sorrow, potatoes to faith,  
loud music to notes that would lay over ours—  
doubling or words or cancelling them out.

## **The Ghost of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) at the Kroger Gas Station**

I always go for absolutely full,  
Re-click the pump past auto-shutdown  
To the, supposedly, overflow point.  
Today I pocketed my frail receipt,  
Headed home, pulled out the glassine slip,  
Saw the final count: 18.86.  
Without my calling her back she had come,  
Unsensed by anyone, not even me—  
The one who sees her so often, the one  
Whose dream is to enter her lovely brain,  
The astonishing electric flowing  
Born in, and from, this world that was her bourne.

# Leslie Ullman

## Little Soul: Six Lessons in Love

I  
*Saying Goodbye*

always takes too long or too short, regardless  
of time spent thinking about it, turning  
and turning away, opening one window  
after another to let fresh air into  
the self, that neglected house, after a holiday—

for in the end, the words are a one-time  
performance. Even when that lover suddenly  
isn't around, they gather the way clouds do,  
his evasions drifting into silence until you, too  
have nothing real to say.

It happens after you've stayed too long  
in his wrecked country where lies are bread  
and meat, yearly rain, hard cash, safe  
conduct. To answer a question straight  
was to shred your passport at the border

and bare your pockets to thieves—but oh, how  
you loved those the nights under stars, the speaking  
with hands, the toxic and intoxicating local brew—  
stories that required obtuseness from you as a form of  
good manners. Now, after weeks alone, you still

find ourself roused from sleep some nights  
trying and failing to explain it all away. Pain  
is a raven clinging to your shoulder. Eventually  
it happens like this: you head into the beverage section  
of the local grocery, and there he is, buying wine

and holding someone else's hand. You walk forward  
in slow motion, a little curious. His eyes slide  
right past you, as though he were scanning the aisle  
for yet another woman, and his hair is short now,  
trimmed close as a convict's. He steers her

away, pretending you never appeared, and it's  
the pretense that makes goodbye flare into fertile

finality—the pretense that makes you notice  
his greenish look from too much bad  
water—the pretense that lifts the bird’s wings

and lets you fly home, to yourself, for good.

## II

### *Borrowed*

Say, he is Pan with gentle hands,  
his eyes creased with mischief—  
he likes to roam at night, nothing  
but him and the stars, his blue gaze  
bright in his sleepless face. He says  
he wants to grow old with her

though he must keep her, and have her  
keep herself, a secret. She knows precisely  
at what point the pain will begin if he  
keeps coming around, calling her name  
softly in the pre-dawn stillness.

Say, he has kissed her once, then slipped  
away, flushed and dizzy, to the element  
he brought with him, the scent of night  
and the unsettling light of a sinking moon.  
Say, they’ve made love once, and again he has  
vanished into the last tendrils of darkness.

By day he drives to work across the border  
to cut steel with a needle of flame—she can see  
him draping his arm along the truck’s open window,  
his skin browning in the sun—and later treats kindly  
the woman he says he wants to stop living with.

At night her own house holds a throng of memories  
as echoes of other men who once thought her  
a discovery or the one person who understood them  
find their way in, along with grit from spring’s first  
furious winds—sometimes it’s her ex muttering  
“worthless,” glowering and refusing to talk

though he’s told others he never stopped  
loving her—she left him and doesn’t want to  
go back, but lately she curls over the part of herself,



as though from a blow, where love for him  
drove a deep root. And sees how she  
turned and turned from that greenness

until it dried, withered, and settled to ash.  
She traces its residue, nights alone, while  
this other man is whistling or stirring gravy  
or washing the dog, seamless and easy  
in his double life. One morning she's easing

her skittery mare from the barn, tears  
filling her eyes for no reason, like blood  
washing dirt from a wound, when he appears  
in the doorway, the sun behind him,  
his hair where her hands  
may or may not rest a bright nest

spun against hard daylight—say, he is  
Mercury—Hermes—messenger riding  
the thermals—say, he's another crack in a heart  
that yearns, as hearts tend to do, in spring's  
restless weather—perhaps this time

it will leave a scar like soldered gold.  
Seared, then annealed. Perhaps, she hopes,  
the seasons finally will get through to her  
with their simple lesson: subtraction  
& replacement, the earth's loose skin  
stripping itself again & again.

### III

#### *Sisters*

Reading a friend's blog about her ill-fated  
adventures with married men, I wonder  
about the wives, those background stick figures,  
their inner landscapes conveniently erased  
along with their once-loved faces smiling  
or tear-stained, beseeching or crumpled, their  
hopes and burdens banished from the snow-  
globe world of a man and woman mistaking  
lack of scruples for freedom. Erotic chutzpah.  
The right to search and seize.

But twice, long ago, I fell there myself, not knowing at first the men were partnered and then, once I knew, electing to seize—what?—not a point to prove, but something that might put me fully in my skin as never before. What possessed me? Not arrogance. Greed? Ignorance for sure, which might as well have been my own snow-globe of need, closing me in and blurring my view of the landscape of burdened, steadfast wives I once glimpsed at a distance

and dismissed—by a me much younger, working out my own story, not ready to imagine anyone else's. I cringe now, still not knowing what I would say to those women who knew those two men better than I ever would. I hope one of them is happy with her Peter Pan whom I loved for a time, and I hope the other is free of the man whose PTSD mowed down everything in its path. I am sorry, Catherine and Sarah. There was so, so much my unfinished heart

wasn't yet pummeled and stretched enough to hold.

#### IV

##### *Unbalanced Load*

Consider, yes, the invisible lumps and shifts of what someone you live with is trying to batten down as he/she opens the blinds, starts the coffee, fills the cat bowl—but what about the stash of memories, triggers, and withheld retorts you haven't figured out what to do with, rattling around in the oversized flatbed of your inner life? You never know what will clog a day's routine commerce, requiring frequent stops, the tightening of bungee cords, just to keep up civilized conversation and play by tacit rules. Or break the rules if a conversation you need to have gets detoured or pulled over before it can deliver—sometimes you need time to wander around for the right question, or a version of truth that will not upend the baggage another self

is hauling. So consider the load times-two. Both in the same lane tailgating, passing one another by a hair, hubcaps and fenders kissing the air.

V

*Solitude Switch*

If a woman is lucky to live alone long enough to like it, the wiring is set despite the later luck and benign static of sharing space with a loved mate whose packing for a brief trip

now brings on temporary panic—what will I do if the pilot light goes out?—and mourning his absence on the other side of the bed even while he’s still in it...

Sociality is a query into what others are doing and know, said one of two women who dialogued in brief essays, long-distance, exchanging ironies and icy humor, each riff sparked by the keenness of the other’s

refusal to take for granted common behaviors they isolate and probe, each observation almost graspable though undercut in a flash by the next, so that reading them is like running one’s fingers over broken glass.

Now, first day alone, my dreamy ignorance returns, their printed words settling into a blank-slate mind and mulled over during light cleaning and routine chores, the unsocial air

an old slipper easy to slip into and pad around in, the hours losing their shape. Eating from a saucepan. Summoning the patience to ease the tight screw-top

off the Pinot Grigio. Locating and resetting a tripped fuse.

Remembering, though my better  
half indeed leaves a gap, a dormant  
half is still wired in.

VI  
*Virginal*

Not so much chaste  
as how one emerges from  
the roiled sheets touched, yes, at one  
petaled place but not all the lotus  
openings—heart, throat, third eye,  
seats of utterance and insight.

Not derailed, not surrendered, not  
disembodied—though the Little Soul understands  
that such transports exist for some  
women possessed of sublime erotic  
skills and sensibility—something the Selves  
aspired to, for a time.

Sensual, maybe...  
warm fur stroking skin as the cat  
emerges from beneath the covers, sun-  
sweet apple just shaken from the tree,  
moonstone refracting hints of lavender  
and yes, the warmth and male firmness  
of a soulmate's hand encountered  
late in life. His clear eyes across the table.  
His solid shoulders. Ease in passing one another  
naked or clothed in shared rooms. Intimacy.

Still, Little Soul remains a semi-wild  
creature nourished in solitude, the presence  
of animals, the new scents of earth at the cusp  
of each season. Deaf to pick-up lines, no longer  
swayed by the plumage and promise of  
courtship (the Selves, for a time, experimented)....  
Artemis. Atalanta. Peter Pan in a girl's body.  
Friend of men, yes. Lover of one. The core  
intact.



*Dylan Thomas' Writing Shed - Richard Jackson*

# Pam Uschuk

## Barred Owl at Equinox

Grandma Anna taught me not to listen to owl  
hoots, to avoid their daylight stares, so  
I nearly miss the barred owl,  
dumpy, unkempt, squatting  
camouflaged between two white oaks, focused  
on what we fear—  
a fat water mocassin the color of wet  
mud coiled on a rotting log in black  
backwater, where peepers treep treep  
treep  
sharp as the pileated woodpecker's rap  
sounding hollow wood.

Each time owl shuffle-hops to another  
limb, squirrel flicks his tail's come-eat-me  
tease. We eco poets thrill  
to watch his rarity  
hunker into thick brown down hiding his death intent.

Squirrel is wired as a terrier, snapped  
synapses rattling a few feet from talons. This  
cheeky teen has no fear, dis-throws insults at  
a puffed-up tyrant, risking everything.

Despite binoculars, a spotting scope  
that can nail a mole on a child's hand, we lose  
him in the suffocating twist of Southern leaves.  
When he lifts from his perch, we die a little,  
awed by the soundless sough  
of his huge wings, deft even as they tilt  
through the swamp's impossible mesh.

He swoops, and in one talon thrust,  
impales a large garter snake  
as if to say,

*I take the feast I need.  
What about you?*

He knows he owns us, flaunts the snake  
whipping between limbs back to the oak to  
eat. With one nip of his yellow beak, he quick  
snips off the head, sips  
the entire reptile like limp linguine.  
Drunk on his meal, owl stares beyond  
our scrawled field notes.

For decades, I have sought out rare  
wings, memorized songs to remember my  
own.  
What composes owl's bass line  
echoing my deepest childhood fear?

At our feet, nations of petals--trout lilies,  
celanian poppies, lobed toothwarts,  
trillium slender as lemon flames.  
It's Equinox. How can we not consider balance?  
While lightning bugs turn leaves to  
constellations, an eagle circles above owl,  
above you  
and the canopy of moonless night. Opening.

Western Tanager  
*for Fenton Johnson*

Back from hiking the far mountains, I find  
your desiccated body perfect, black  
wings tucked under the slick yellow back,  
orange head intact but for eyes eaten by sky.

Slim sarcophagus you bear no wounds.  
Neither owl, cat or hawk tried to eat you.  
Your petrified beak cocks its last song  
to the invisible sea beyond Sombero Peak. Sleak,  
your mummified carcass offers no clues. Were  
you smashed to earth by monsoon or did our  
picture window lure you to mystery?

Beauty, I can't bury you, won't disturb your solemn  
rest on the picnic table among presidential lies in the  
*New York Times*, bellowing his urgent need to build a  
20 foot high steel wall to secure our border from  
unarmed refugees. You nestle with turret shells from

the Sea of Cortez, a sand dollar said to contain the  
crucifixion, lovely beyond belief.

Lithe acrobat

too rarely have I seen you flip  
through memory's eucalyptus leaves.

Where do you sing?

A full moon collapses  
like the Halloween pumpkins on the porch.

I gentle you weightless to my shelf.

Time never rests,

its ghost prints leading us over a horizon  
giddy with insistent light  
we cannot conceive will ever end.

Web

For months the web persists, one staunch string  
tying the dead cholla arm to the living dipladenia  
vine, hanging from it the intricate design, made by a  
black widow and unfurling green tendrils  
slow bottle flies land on to lay eggs  
the spider wraps in silk.

I watch the tiny mummies multiply  
guarded by the arachnid who glares at  
me. I wonder whether vine and spider  
despise

or love one another.

Is their relationship simple necessity, a  
union sealed with the wax of cooperation  
bypassing emotion or desire.

How like a long marriage or friendship  
taken for granted until the smash of wind's violent  
intent, the mindless sweep of a broom.

This morning the web dangles,  
spider's vanished with her red violin,  
leaving a few fly mummies behind.

What gleams is that slim arm of a vine  
stretching to the doorknob, dexterous  
and as beautiful as calligraphy suspended  
between the living and the dead who've moved on.

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## Hight Alert

Air force fighters growl over our roof,  
supersonic ripsaws tearing through finchsong, spring  
buds and St. Francis who cradles the concrete wolf  
on our patio where hummingbirds  
feed. Desert sleeps far from the distant hiss  
of Cruise missiles pulverizing Ukraine streets.  
Putin's emails incinerate highrises, amputating  
lives. 1000 towns destroyed. A Russian tank  
clanks, flattens a small car, another swerves  
into a city bus. Troops crawl with assault rifles, to  
strafe the Nicholas Bridge. Bombs burst  
craters in schools, homes, landmarks, parks. Putin  
blusters he must protect Russian rebels. A friend  
posts, we are all Ukrainians now.  
Putin says, we are all Russians. What's his  
real game? Soviet satellites, a borscht of lies and blood  
spattering cobbled streets, tattered sheets ripped for  
makeshift bandages to staunch torn arteries, the  
severed limbs of teens. Today, I sing for my cousins  
shuddering in the Kyiv Metro underground, others who become  
instant guerilla fighters, their hands that held babies and lovers  
last week, cradling AR15s. They will never surrender.  
I sing for my Belarus ancestors who can't stop  
crying over the corpses of their children curled  
like charred snail shells in snow  
falling on the ashes of their homes Stalin torched.  
Who starts a war during a Pandemic  
in winter except another Caesar in an Armani suit  
immaculately tailored, the same metallic  
gray as a missile's stunted wings?

# Barbara Carlson

## Cloudscape

Massive and illusory  
roadless and singular  
your contours constantly  
changing separating  
into islands archipelagos—

each burning coal  
a body of hidden waters  
history and breath  
tinged with red  
and streaked with violet,

my eyes will become your  
sapphire holes through being  
in an unearthly dimension  
whose sphere overshadows  
this slim shoreline  
where I walk between weeds  
waving and blushed illuminated  
for a moment at dusk.

# Sheri Cohen

## **shadows**

I take photos of shadows and steal light from the dusk of buildings that lean toward night and an alley shadows of plants that fall across sidewalks but not shadows of people I have no right to their secrets contrasts stops me every time but the shades of grey keep me looking charcoal pewter silver slate ashen the color absent from a flower revealing its structure I once heard someone say that shadows are signs of aging and that's where I find the truth

## **Saturday morning with Lenny**

we were listening to the baseball game on the car radio so there's no talking and I already knew there's no crying in baseball way before Tom Hanks said so the loud and running voices talked strikes and balls and raced the wind from the window where the metal frame was angry hot so don't touch it stupid its August and little did we know fifty years later his wife would die the same day and he would be gone ten years before that and there was no crying then either the last time I talked to him he was yelling curses like fast pitches and flinging rage like curve balls all strikes and the hot wind of regret

# Elizabeth J. Coleman

## Wintercress

Growing through pristine snow, it was—  
last night I dreamed  
of wintercress—

All night, soft and silent—  
A quilt of snow, and somehow

I was reading  
in Italian, as you used to do.

And almost as if from a roaring fire,  
I could see you were smiling.

I'd forgotten  
that strong, surprising nose,

and how you—  
—the last time I saw you I was sixteen,

it was early spring, so the cherry blossoms—  
soon dogwoods—

But I wasn't  
as I have become,

and you and I had—

And then

I'd never see you again.

I imagine the stone pines, and Rome,  
or you in a café

under the trees—  
reading your beloved Italian,  
and I imagine you sit among—

We only touched that one time  
innocently.

And young for my age then.

I'd forgotten how slight and lithe you are.  
Forgotten  
faces light up with intelligence.

Forgotten lit up, the words and your face.

And there was a warm glow from your lamp,  
not cold. For I could see you in a window

surprised, and I walked silently  
through the snow—

like the olden days when snow would—  
Dear Ed, last night I dreamed of wintercress.

# Carol Lynn Grellas

## **Before Her Bed Was Empty**

I learned the intricacies of my mother's  
body in her final days. She'd whisper

my name in a shallowed voice, her hands  
no longer able to hold anything without shaking.

When her sheets were soaked with death,  
her skin became a soft shade of water,

her muscles limp as the stem of a delicate flower.  
And when she could no longer murmur my name,

I'd lie with her and wait for some sign  
of breathing to start then stop again, as her lungs

gasped for air, drowning in saliva.  
And when she could no longer move

I'd lift her Raggedy-Ann bones from commode  
to shower and back to a place of sleep—

where darkness hides each life through morning.  
And when she'd no longer wake, I'd bathe

her skin in oil, wash her feet, and stroke her hair  
with prayers each night until her breath became

so slight, her lungs emptied of song. I watched  
her life drift through an open window

and rise through a cloud-filled space,  
knowing there'd never be anyone who

would allow me that kind of grace again.

## **In the Name of Cruelty**

“Don’t talk to me about cruelty” —Lucille Clifton

This poem isn’t about love; there are too many of those already. This poem

is about murdering the creature that stirred on the concrete floor,

waiting to strike as I walked over the threshold into a room of dimness.

It’s true, what they say about bullies and their need to embrace an imbalance

of power. In this case self-defense drove me to it, but anyone witness

to my crime would disagree and it would be clear, fear pushed

me over the edge, past the brink into ruthlessness, an aggressive

blow to the head of that legless serpent with its mobile mandible

and backward-pointing teeth— a carnivorous beast who snuck

in from the yard. I struck him hard, the sharp blade of the hoe slicing

from the top of his neck clear through to the underside until he lay there

flaccid in two parts, his eyes still glaring at me from a detached skull.

And I was glad I did it, proud of my killing as I watched the blood drain across

the cold gray cement like a winding river of red. I reckoned it was me

or him, and at that moment, I was  
a true warrior, gloating at his beheading,

taking pride in his agony. No, this isn't  
a poem about love; there are too many

of those already, this is a poem about  
fear, and validating my own

declaration of war. After all, "it's not  
the truth that matters, it's victory."

Hitler said that, and for a while  
people even believed it.



# Ata Moharreri

## The Secret

I look for you between the waves and the dunes  
where a breeze opens its little hands and then draws  
them together again, where salt mingles with light  
in the air.

I look for you between shadows  
of lightning and silences of thunder, and I look for you  
between the skin of sand and palms.

Between  
the feathers and the shrieks of seagulls playing in  
the briny airstream that carries away the last  
bits of day and scatters them over the same  
ocean I look for you.

For you I look between a bonfire's dying  
embers and a silhouette of bluffs facing  
the murky Pacific.

Between the first dewdrops  
of morning I look.

Through a storm  
during a dead end afternoon when the first  
stars turn around and blink, when waves reach back  
into themselves and groan, I look for you.

I look for you between the silence and the hope  
of people watching a sunset as the last stars open their eyes  
after praying with the wind, and I don't find you.

## Lacebark Elm

For Matthew Followill

Late October rain puddles  
Cover the empty schoolyard.

Beneath a heavy cloud  
Geese in formation turn like paper  
Burnt and thrown from an apartment window  
Fourteen floors up.

I am shriveling from a lack of sleep  
And disturbing waking dreams I have.

Life blows through holes in my face  
And it sounds like a choir of a hundred  
Chipmunks chanting.

### **Moss Between Cobbles**

For Joshua Mensch

An arrangement of stones sings  
in the river.

At Kafka's childhood home  
night wind  
crawls  
into a doorway.

Across the street  
a kid's bucket of dreams flattens  
between gears  
inside the Astronomical clock.

What sounds like a horse  
clipping around the corner  
is really  
a boy walking in flip-flops.

His shadow nestles  
into a patch of moss between cobbles.

No one asks how old summer is.

No one notices the way lost memories  
huddle together  
in museum entryways.



*Predjama Castle, Slovenia - Liz Bruce*

# Danielle Hanson

## **Night as a Dog**

A dog steps backwards, behind  
itself and disappears. A black  
dog becomes the night. The night  
is what it eats, a black dog. Night  
growls in the shadows.  
Night whines for scraps  
of lamplight. Night fetches whatever  
thoughts were flung into the winds of day.  
Night paws your hand, gently taking it  
into mouth. The night is what it eats.  
Loyal night, lay down and dream  
a furry body around our hearts.

## **Saint Barnabas in the Afterlife**

Heaven is just a storage locker for ghosts with no one to haunt.  
I spend my days wringing out the laundry of my flesh, airing it  
like a braid of garlic from the ceiling. My martyrdom  
requires upkeep—patching and darning, and always  
the slipping of the parts of me that haven't yet let go.

# Eric Machan Howd

## Low Tide in Provincetown

and we walk out  
to where crab shells

shimmer half-buried  
in sand that never quite

softens into good beach.  
We find it harder to bend

and pick treasure these days  
though our eyes are sharper

more aware of the good finds  
like the intact scallop

or the rare rounded  
blue ear of sea glass.

We watch our time now  
careful of the moon's quiet

pull on water  
ever mindful of getting

trapped in rising water  
or losing ourselves

to the deep black  
impossibility of stars.

# Eleanor Kedney

## Crisscross with a Crow

To live self-aware as a carrion crow—pondering my mind and reasoning through tasks as new research shows they do. I'd say what I know—*the comet flashed across the night sky*. Thoughts would be an experience, unburdened by anxiety—stray words caught on chiseled consonants. My hand touches a wall, a solid, to end the loop.

I'd remember where I put my glasses or where I parked the car. Track objects and find the walnuts in the pantry, behind the cereal boxes. I'd be good at using tools to open paint cans, cut wire, screw in a towel bar, fix a dripping faucet.

I'd still live mostly solitary—maybe build a treehouse in a mesquite. Gather palo verde twigs, quail feathers, jack rabbit bones, though my nest would be empty at sixty-seven years old. My throaty voice calling out when threatened, as I did on the corner of Silverbell and Grant: *Give me my wallet, you bastard!* My small frame knocking the robber down. I'd, too, nudge a hedgehog across a road, as I do with collared lizards sunning on blacktop.

To live deliberate as a crow—staying close to my acre of land, wingbeats slow, not missing a moment of sound and light, the pungent smell of creosote wet with rain, or the raised bodies of eagles, far away, coming closer.

## Bonnie Naradzay

### **Reading About Purgatory After Watching Geese Glide Through an Algae-Filled Pond**

Swept in by October's clean blue winds,  
the airborne birds deploy their landing gear:  
splayed feet like water skis.  
They transform their shapes  
with nonchalance,  
create momentary wakes.  
The green slick parts ways.  
These are not Mary Oliver's wild geese  
but tell me about despair  
and the vestibule of Purgatory  
that we're in.  
And I will tell you how to let it all go  
leaving nothing but a slick green residue of sin.

## Anne Myles

### Rising

—after George Luks, “Allen Street” (1905)

If I were among them—and how close these figures are to my own ancestors—I’d be the woman mounting the stairs toward the lit-up second-floor showrooms. She’s bent forward slightly as she climbs, feeling the flight’s steepness in her thighs, the drag of her skirt and coat. She doesn’t reflect to herself *one day I will rise above this place*; she thinks, at most, *quiet*. Does another staircase we can’t see lead to her apartment? But if I am her she slips inside the store, not to sell or buy or covet; she keeps the shining scrolls of dresses to her back, her cautious fingers resting lightly on plate glass. She stares out to the street and other windows, to further rooftops ranged beyond them, to the swoop of lights marking a bridge. I can’t say just what she looks for. Perhaps she strains to see the sky—its bruised half-dark forever without stars. There was a world where once she saw them clearly, day by day unspoken, vanishing from mind.

### Uncle Eddie Tried to Push Grandma Pearl Out the Apartment Window, Or That Was the Story I Heard

—after a line from Eugenio Florit’s “The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian”

Yes, come to my arms, heartless pigeons,  
fluttering upward with your messages:  
*you . . . you . . . it is yours to do!*  
I have seen you perching on the sill;  
come in now, give me power.  
It’s time for her to join you  
whether she flies or falls—  
this Manhattan street’s a canyon of rare air  
for a pigeon or a tiny Jewess.  
Her jewelry sparkles with the colors  
wrapped tight around your necks;



her fingers clench the window-frame  
like bird-claws, bony.  
Listen to her high-pitched cries!  
Since boyhood she's thrust her beak in me—  
my brain she pecks and pecks,  
then swivels her head indifferently—  
nothing like a mother  
this sharp sidewalk strutter  
fluffing her precious plumage.  
Even her eyes are yours:  
flat and black, no kindness in them,  
just that terrible hunger  
to flap up higher in the sun  
or the night sky lit by Broadway—  
to flock with the big machers.  
Harden me, little doves of iron!  
Help me drive her from her roost in me,  
so I can sleep in my poor human flesh  
and have quiet, quiet.

# Kate Morgan

## **Aurora Ouroboros**

Some years before we unfollowed the gods,  
when this place was the indisputable center,  
a flock of people saw the heavens climax  
and erupt with fainting stars.  
The pop and fizzle of crystalline flutes  
swanned gold dust down their throats.

To consummate the moonless sky—  
what euphoria, what sheer terror.

The planets fall even now,  
your matcha tongue like cosmic matter  
spun upon the Milky Way.  
We text our stardust composites  
in their drunken graves,  
begging for the cosmos' lurid pink  
sign to tell us that the past was meant  
to bring us here, on this wounded comet's tail.

O, your deafening saxophone laugh!  
How it melts me into a sea of wine soaked tears!  
We'll kiss the constellations off each other's backs  
and learn to cherish every Leonid year.

# Clint McCown

## **This Saddest Thing**

My mind can still catch its breath  
on the moon,  
but only when the moon is full.  
If just a wedge, I stumble  
on a cutting edge of dark  
and slip into a slow fall.

Flesh is just a space-suit  
keeping us together  
until the slingshot  
sends us on our way again.  
We cry for losses yet to come,  
forget whatever blessed us here.

We hope there will be starlight, always,  
and maybe always hope,  
and maybe all the maybes  
will deliver in the end.

I know: hope  
is a scarecrow in a wintry wind,  
frail before the scavengers.  
And maybe it's the saddest thing of all.

But maybe every crow  
will scatter to the trees,  
while new growth rises in the field.  
Let's hope so, anyway.

That's what keeps us going, after all:  
this blind maybe, this saddest thing.



*Anghiari, Tuscany - Richard Jackson*

# Robert Vivian

## Until The Poem Falls From The Tree

Until the poem falls from the tree and the apple sings of brightness, until the rapt dawn becoming you in full breathing awareness, until the seconds unto dying, until my hand holding yours there where the world is turned inside out and time itself bends back to earliest childhood where play is all there is and we never stop running and there is not enough, not enough, dear love to touch and to hold and to wonder, oh, that long ago suddenly present now empty full summer day teeming with dust motes, climbing trees, trying out kissing and tying shoes with trembling fingers for the very first time, until the poem pray, until the heron stalking fish like I stalk my heart-most leanings, until I breathe back the mercy that becometh me, until I sing and say and whisper praise, until the earth that will one day cradle and break down my bones into dust, until the quaking steps inside my body for the beginning of a poem and the beginning of a poem, oh, dear Lord, may it never end, never stop, never cease this endless yearning for sound, for verb, for word, for touch, for beauty, for waking, for sobbing, for comma, dash, parenthesis in this new century of so much waste and wastrel, may I be your limp-most human flower draped over the hood of someone's pickup, may I—a whole woman between us—may I—a whole child between us—may I—a whole man between us—jump again until the poem falls from the tree, until the poem brings me to my knees, until the poem speaks itself softly from forever and the murmurs of a stream that is also forever so forever is a stream that murmurs forever and forever is a stream that forever streams in cold, clean braids of forever water forever up north, up north and magnetic filings deep inside my forehead so that I am human steelhead, my kype growing ever craggier and more cliff face so steelhead swims so far and so fast every church is broken into kindling, until steelhead overtakes my every dream, until the poem, until the poem, until the poem beaches itself with a mighty gasp and I fill with Lake Michigan, until the page turns back into the tree-leaf it came from and every chlorophyll desiring, until I become breath and song again, mighty current, human-water-river, until this final singing, until the ethos of rhyme and rhythm and the splendor of caesura, until finally happening now I become earth again, actual dirt and clod, roots singing blindly into tree and flower and wild strawberry, until I can feed directly on sunlight, until the ink overtakes my body, my heart, my soul, writing me into the earth in the book turning pages into seasons, into winter then spring then dandelion turning into glorious bright color drifting spores once more playing light games under the beautiful sun.

## **A Sigh Away From Here**

And love here again among the ferns and willows in this sudden dream of a childhood summer day come back in pellucid clarity burnished and brightened by pebbles and stones gathered from a river just a sigh away from here and no other impetus or cause than pure ache and yearning drunk as butterflies fluttering among the lilacs in a lightness only the first tender shoots of grass know in the day that was once true now truer than ever though it is not yet the end of January but I carry the warmth of delirious June here in my heart but also love of the beautifully sculpted snow like a graceful human body prostrate and laid out in rapturous repose or offering and such delicate lineaments of tendon and chiseled cheek bones and all precious limbs knitting the whole world into a sacred shroud covering each of the directions not only for modesty but also for raiment sprinkling down from the stars, wings even, and love among these pages maybe teetering most of all, this deep night of ink somehow saving me from grief and despair on the white top of a piece of paper and the three point line beyond the arching bend of a rainbow after a thunderstorm where I shoot to win my soul before the shot clock expires or another star goes racing down to its last glittering comma, and love among teaspoons of honey one then two and love between each breath and each buzzing of a bee in the hive from on high, each pulse and heartbeat in the rapt abeyance of temple stillness where a single candle is burning in such gentle faithfulness it stokes a gentle gladness deep within, each quickening come alive again this frigid morning with yet a hint of spring in the air somehow in a drifting molecule or two and the scent of an unknown flower I will call here *Mysterium Eternalistus*, and love in every form of punctuation and parentheses and brackets that hold even the coos of a dove before they melt those bars with joy rung by sobbing rung, and what does it mean to write with all of one's soul and body I ask once more of the cold starry sky for after the first lyrical heartache you want to sing or swoon forever and all we have left to do or be is gush and pour this madcap praise, and love among the wind turbines here in central Michigan turning clockwise and cantilevered to the sky as if to sip on the vast emptiness above, love of humble Highway 46 spanning east and west as if to connect them by concrete grace with cracks and fissures every hard driven mile and pot holes created and cratered by speeding drivers adream at the wheel, somewhere I swear just a sigh away from here there must be a headwaters into which we can fall and be made whole again, the summer day of childhood or Aloysha held up to the icon by his weeping mother in *Brothers K* in the sacramental memory that will last forever, love again and love again here all along just a sigh away or at the tip of our trembling fingers as we seek to reach out or write or hold it once more because we are old and young, because we are wild and free.

# William Pitt Root

## New Narrative

Telling a story once is enough:  
The yacht weighs anchor,  
the tale begins. Whoever hears  
this first telling politely forgets later

when some falling star  
provokes a repetition. So,  
there we were, two weeks out,  
radio on the blink, waves

cresting the deck.... Telling  
becomes recitation,  
the tale sealed up  
like a miniature boat

in its shrinking bottle. The  
adventure of the act  
of recovery into words  
is done. A new tone enters.

A certainty. Once the wheel's secured  
the honorarium of  
each new audience is attention  
as spray petrifies

across the narrators's brow.  
By now the waves have fallen calm  
long ago, and the heart  
beats as if there were no ending.

The harbor pretends it is a harbor.

## **Eichmann and the Half-Moon**

How we conspire— set between right lung  
and left, lodged dead center &  
wildly beating  
is the juicy red  
heart-apple, always awaiting  
the half-moon chomp of the swine.

Week after week, the Israeli major  
interviews Eichmann, eats with him,  
drinks with him, inevitably dreams of him, until, one day,  
dead earnest, he confides,  
“Every single member of my family  
died in the camp you ran.”

Eichmann— right, left, dead-center—  
grimaces in sympathy, “O  
how terrible  
that must have been for you.”

Between the two men  
whose gazes have deadlocked  
smoke from the limbs of cigarettes  
rises, curls with little interrogations of its own.

## **Relicks**

after Vladas Slaitas (Lithuanian; 1920- )

I didn't have time to take a things, even a handful  
of the earth where I was born.  
Nothing but the strong scent  
of the black earth of Aukstaitijaa— odors  
of grassroots,  
Earthworms,  
and little clouds.

And the twilight  
of the quiet cross  
as the sun sank behind our village church..  
or  
the insect whirr  
still ringing in my ears.



No, I didn't have time to take a thing,  
not a single bundle,  
nothing but this fragrance when spring plows  
mix black earth and sky.  
And this music from the village with the small church  
when, all night long, the insect choirs sound.

# Maggie Paul

## **A Dark Circle**

“Orders! When what’s needed is imagination.”

—Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Is the breeze blooming behind my  
curtains the breath of life or death?

Hard to tell, the way a secret is invisible  
but has a narrative, and spreads

attaching itself to your breath or mine.  
Hiding on the key latch, the metal knob

to our front door. Or the button I’ve just  
undone, the white towel seeming clean

as a cloud. Outside, a solitary plane  
shakes the still sky. In the valley, farmers

breathe dust particles that sail on dry wind  
then catch in the throat. Who will pull

artichokes, garlic, peppers and onions  
from the ground? There is talk

of the thin veil between worlds.  
Some see through to the other side.

Yesterday, when I asked the child with a red  
crayon what she was drawing, she said

it was a secret. But it looked like  
a dark circle covered with crowns.

## **The Most Startling Thing**

Mid-October, and the small eucalyptus grove at Natural Bridges awaits the return of the monarch butterfly.

The eucalyptus bend earthward. Tangled tendrils of silver-green leaves droop to the ground like long, unkempt hair.

I want to witness the clusters of marigold and desert-brown wings marked by perfectly drawn black veins. To observe the obsidian

and white dots symmetrically sprinkled on each tip  
and how, when asleep, they cling to the leaves, wings closed

like hands in prayer, or clothespins clasped to the line.  
It's early yet, but fewer arrive each year. Not enough

milkweed to lay their eggs, aging trees. Looking up,  
I can't decide which is the most startling thing.

Perhaps their two sets of eyes containing 12,000 lenses,  
an acute sensitivity to sound, allowing them to listen for birds.

Maybe it's the gossamer wings that travel 3000 miles with absolute precision,  
or the long-chambered heart stretching the length of its upper body.

In the end, I think it's how the monarch remembers its past life  
as a caterpillar, the way we sometimes remember pieces of our childhood.

# Anne R. Z. Schulman

## Invitation to “Forest Bathing”

There still exists a tree, that once lived in Eden,  
whose bark tastes as sweet as its bright yellow fruit.  
So many beckoning wonders in the woods, that  
wish to welcome the gentle company of calm-seekers.

Hikers, testing distance or endurance, may be aliens  
in that sacred space, for their purposeful deeds  
distract from possibilities of easeful spiritual immersion  
in nature, offered by embracing arms of boughs to

willing listeners of the wind, of own exhaled breath  
filling the air, feeding greenery’s needs, creating  
Shinrin-Yoku, an abundance of interconnectedness  
with the forest, where trees and earth, essence of souls

speak, and are ever heard. Cease speeding time; notice  
what dwells above and below, the soft smell of moss, the  
comforting cool shade of canopies, the borderless vast blue  
beyond. Be mindful of the wide, wise world of extraordinary

creatures exploring and settling in homes high and low.  
Flow only thoughts light as bees’ wings and breezes.  
Hug lulling melodies, hum resonating notes of love,  
dance candescent paths that quiet the wild heart.

# Melinda Thomsen

## Angus Steers

As a child, I loved riding  
over roots and rocks on my bike  
pretending to be Johnny West  
on his horse herding cattle  
or buffalo across the plains.  
I used to break off a branch  
to guide my own behemoths,  
and with every step they stamped  
the earth until it thundered.

Today, I'm driving a Volkswagen  
behind a trailer hauling four Angus  
steer, each in their own boxed cage.  
One looks back at the traffic  
as their pick up truck hauls them  
toward the stockyard in the next town.

The steer facing me  
must weigh 700 pounds  
and stand about six feet tall.  
His glossy coat looks mink smooth,  
and snout as large as my palm  
flexes as he breathes. At another light,  
we all slow down. He looks like  
he's taken this road before,  
or maybe he's medicated,  
so he'll stay still on the scale.

I thought about that steer's  
great brown sleepy eyes  
as I sat in the Angus Grill  
with its walls of TVs blinking,  
and my husband said, The food  
is fine but not the atmosphere.

I carried that Angus steer burger  
home within me. My body churned  
protein through my system,  
and flesh became flesh  
while nearby lowing rumbled  
skyward from pastures and barns.



*Galatea* - Hope Hunnicutt

# Translations

Miriam Drev

translated by the author and Barbara Carlson

## Čaplja

Trsje ob ribniku je oklesteno do tal. Siva čaplja, ki se je jeseni zlila z njim, zdaj ne bi imela več kam. V tej goloti ni namiga na rast. Vseeno se vračam. Na kraje srečevanj, po še neodkrito.

V bližini ni velikih širjav. Nismo na sibirski planotah. In zato ni skrajnosti, se zdi. Preostaja razsežnost kril te ozke ptice, lok v preletu, navidezno brez konca. In ko gledam za njo, kakor da brez cilja.

Toda poznam drevo, kjer pristaja, se privije k veji. Ne razmišljam o tem, da je plenilka, ki zabode. Nekam me usmerja s svojim ostrim krikom v mraku, pepelnato siva selivka. Ko se tu in tam spet srečava, kot da preskuša zaupljivost mojega srca, neko trajnost.

Čeprav, rečeno po pravici, ne gre za najin odnos, ki traja.

## Heron

Reeds at the pond are levelled to the ground. The grey heron concealed there in fall now has nowhere to hide. In this bareness no hint of growth. Still I return. To the meeting places, seeking the yet undisclosed.

Here no expanse of land. This is not the Siberian plain. Nothing extreme, it seems. Just the spread out wings of a slim bird, its curve in flight, seemingly endless. And when I watch it fly away, as if without an aim.

But I know the tree where it lands, fastening onto a branch. I don't think about it stabbing, being a predator. With its screech cutting into the dark, it is guiding me somewhere, this ash-grey bird of passage. We meet here and there, as if it's testing my trust, a commitment of sorts.

Though in truth, it's not about us—that bond continues.

## **Mlada sova**

V obmorskem mestu, sredi ne prehude gneče turistov po pločniku teče mlada sova. Sivo perje, rumene, v popoldanski luči kratkovidne oči; strah. V bližini ni dreves. Torej padec iz gnezda v zvoniku. Kolikšna je možnost, da dočaka noč, več noči?

Nočnemu bitju je svetloba v dnevnem času močnejša od žarometa. Tema je zatišje.

Na terasi ob vinu razmišljam o divjih bitjih, njihovi plahosti. Tudi o močnih sovjih krilih, ampak ta morajo najprej zrasti. Šele takrat postane plenilka, kar je po svoji naravi. Prej pa vzgaja svoje čute

Stotero lekcij: kako prhneš, komaj slišno, se zliješ z zrakom. Kako zabodeš kljun.

Noč ob izteku počitnic je bila pomešana s prostostjo. In s poginom. Dolgo se nisem ganila od tam, niti potem, ko je bil kozarec prazen. Čutila sem neslišnost v bližini. Če bi se ozrla, bi jo videla sedeti na prečki za svojim hrbtom.

## **Owlet**

In a town by the sea, in the midst of a small crowd of tourists, an owlet is scurrying down the road. Grey feathers, yellow eyes, purblind and filled with dread in the afternoon light filled. No tree in sight. It must've fallen from the nest in the bell tower. What is the chance it will see the night, several nights?

To the nocturnal creature daylight blinds like a torch. Darkness a shelter.

Sipping a glass of wine on the terrace, I think about the feral, their shyness. And the strong wings of the young owl, how they must grow first. How its senses must be honed. Only then can it become a bird of prey.

A hundred lessons: how to swoop, barely audibly; how to blend with air. How to pierce with its beak.

That night at the end of summer mixed with freedom and ruin. I stayed out for a long time, long after my glass was empty. I could sense an absence close by. Had I turned around I would have found the owl sitting on a bar behind my back.



Uroš Zupan

Translated from Slovenian by Michael Biggins

**Autumn Leaves 1**

I

An August morning still moving slowly, full of quiet recordings, outside motionless trees, big shaggy shapes. The upper side of the leaves starting to turn yellow. Sun beating down relentlessly and too little moisture. Getting ready for the midday glare when the air grows smudgy and the hot wind mercilessly mixes and flings it around like empty bodies. Quiet rejoicing when everything happens for the first time again. The blinds still left half closed. Geometrical figures of blinding light totally motionless on the walls, different from those that I've watched through water and dreams. Shadows in the bedroom like transparent rectangles. Music plays in the next room: Ornette Coleman. The mingling colors of audio collages, the instruments' meandering, neon traces, resembling the rounded contours of color in Pollock's paintings. A child crying and saxophones. Pop hits from a different universe. Books by Kenneth Koch and James Schuyler on the floor. When I was in New York in 1987 both were still living and we shared the same city air, the slow sunsets of the Lower West Side. The drawn-out fading of orange surfaces that the highest windows held onto like hostages. In *A Few Days* James Schuyler wished he could live to the end of the millenium. He didn't succeed. Kenneth Koch crossed that threshold of time. A few days ago in the *San Francisco Chronicle* I read that Czesław Miłosz has died. The old professor that I hoped to meet. His shaggy eyebrows and a look that had to command clarity and depth. For years he lived on the Magic Mountain. In Octobers hot as hell, cool Julys, beneath trees that blossom in February. He didn't choose California. It was given to him. As it was to me. In my dreams. In the evening I spread ointment on your belly and can feel our child move in his gentle darkness, listening to me. A record I put on has finished and now I'll put on another: Science Fiction. Clouds collect in the sky and commingle like the breath out of horse nostrils. Bugs swarm in their unconquerable domains. Variegated butterflies flit past close to the ground. Some little kid we don't know runs

toward the sandbox with his green plastic bucket.  
His shovel digs through the hardened and clumping shoal. His little blonde sister follows behind, taking cautious steps. Their mother walks a dog on a leash. In the air there's a murmur of voices, amazed at the world and the whole perfect arrangement of things in it: the sky blue, clouds white, grass green, the children's light hair a faded gold. Live sewing machines uninterruptedly hem up the summer warmth. Ornette breaks through a door to the beyond. Both little kids clean up the sandbox. They toss out fallen leaves and return August to August. The sound of traffic from the highway. Mobile anthills. Tin boxes that someday will be seen as ancient relics. How many ways can I describe this momentary halting of time, the supreme and extreme efforts of summer? Words get worn out. Images fade. The number of combinations is finite. When the moments last, I want them to be over, and when they're over, I miss them and mourn. Life transpires between accidentally chosen quotations from Meister Eckhart, "God gives to all things alike and all things are alike as they emanate from God," and lines from The Freak Brothers, "We sniffed up a whole year's supply of coke in two days." Then comes the time when the children's games end. The last, desperate surge of light before the glow starts to sink and disperse. If I were the creator, I'd always be on Earth wherever it's dusk. Timeless, with bent, shallow clouds patiently being sent by the gentle wind to far-away lands. The tortured leaves at last approaching their well-earned sleep. The sun touches the dancing crowns of the trees and children's shouts and their tousled hair. The smell of smoke joins in the early preparations for evening. Sight sends its final messages to memory. Heavy rays of warm air have settled into the grass. The river takes on its color from the sky. The light on the asphalt turns copper, borrowed from railroad ties. The kids examine their first dead squirrel, one of the summer's unusual gifts. We'll go for walks when the nights begin to exhale their cold breath. Constellations of stars and air traffic corridors slowly, carefully reveal themselves to our eyes. Mechanical fireflies that light up and go out way up above, in the dark. I can't guess their directions and far-off destinations. I don't know how to read palms. The whole area is criss-crossed with high-frequency chirping. Illuminated patches of asphalt and the power relay station glow through the metal window frame. "On earth as it is in heaven." The images on TV screens nervously pulsate and flicker. The neighbors' last conversations, the flicking of light switches.

“Good night, see you tomorrow. Don’t talk too long. Touch me and go to sleep. Good night. See you tomorrow.”

## II

Shyly approaching late August. No one escapes it. No one can do anything to avoid it. In California there are no seasons. Here there are seasons. The corn has long since turned ripe. Plums shine dark blue in their trees, concealing sweet, golden green flesh under their skins. An azure, supremely calm and clarified light envelops midday over the sea. Long sighs of the wind stick to your skin like transparent veils. Tone scales of silver sleep amid the trees. The boreal wind’s invisible rollers flatten the evening. It will be followed by melancholy and lessening fires. When I was younger, this was my favorite time of year. I hoped I’d be meeting some new love. Soon it will be my birthday. I’ll be forty-one. Fernando Pessoa was visibly sick, alone and defeated by forty. An unprepossessing man in glasses, with no hat, adapting the universe to his despair. At forty-two Cesare Pavese committed suicide. “What are the dangerous years? How long would you like to live?” The days vanish. Somber thoughts burrow into their bright centers from nowhere. They cause the mornings to shudder a bit, sending waves. Keep going and don’t pay attention. You’re on a pilgrimage. You imagine that no one will ever leave. The physical body is the agent of spirit and its mirror. The physical body is a machine, the reflection of spirit. Death is the dark backing that the mirror needs in order to see anything. The emergency exits, consolations. The suspension bridges between days. Marked paths in the dark. A future theosophy, rewritten. It’s still summer. The entire stage set of the world was made just for us, only for us. A little rabbit is perched in the grass of August, protected by children’s hands. A tiny life is growing in you throughout August, protected by my hands. “How long would you like to live?” The gentle morning chill and lonely bareness in the mirror. Empty, comfortable shirts on the hangers, waiting for the body to fill them. The smack of window blinds and Ornette Coleman. Pop hits from another universe. He sat his son down at the drums when he was twelve years old. My son is inside you and you’re not at home.

August. I wash my hands and splash my face with cold water.  
I like to wash with soaps that smell of oranges,  
linden and ferns. I like to walk through clouds of perfume  
that smells of myrtle, but I never put it on my skin.  
As a boy I went to church and smelled the incense.  
When I'm afraid I might die, I start to pray and  
say words I've forgotten. In August if  
I go swimming in a pool in cloudy weather, my silhouette  
recognizes itself only against the dark blue ceramic line of the pool's  
bottom. An extinct prehistoric bird spreading its atrophied  
wings at regular intervals, or a Gormley  
angel. If I swim when the sun is out, a golden web  
constantly shifts over its light blue surface. When I push  
off from the wall, air bubbles get trapped under my overlong nails  
Sometimes in summer young women would put on  
for us unannounced shows. They were betting on  
their body and didn't realize they would lose. During the day  
in the half empty pool I can read my age from  
their faces, which I recognize, though I can't  
recall their names. I didn't bet on  
my body. But I'm still losing. In The Swimmer  
Burt Lancaster swam his way across all the private pools  
in some Connecticut county. He was more  
than forty years old. He admired his  
illusions and body and the Indian summer - and lost.  
No Indian summer here. No bet or missed  
future. Just a lazy, expanding  
August; a cat with fur the color of paradise. The sky  
opens and closes. The reflex actions of a demiurge.  
Mists over the mountains on all sides. Clouds  
without gilding or frayed orange edges. An approaching  
gray murmur in the distance like a breath that brings  
momentary devastation and a new beginning. Disturbances  
in the electrical current. If a light goes out, some life will  
go with it. Your belly gently tugs at the fragrant sheets.  
I used to like to make bets with myself, under a certain  
street lamp that always hummed and kept going out  
like post-romanticism in an underlit lecture hall. August.  
Above the clouds high-octane explosions, the constantly  
changing cities of spirits, illuminated landscape,  
X-ray pictures, photo negatives, articulated branches getting  
ready after a long time to shake hands in the dark. A black  
truck that will drive through the landscape and night. August.  
The things I think of: the smell of bread, the smell of gasoline,

the smell of coffee, smoke. Faded and falling curtains of rain,  
hanging water gardens. A clock ticking. Subtracting and adding.  
There is no absolute silence. Ever. (Maybe in death.)

### III

The steady hum of a hidden life in the scattering  
white, as though chickens were hatching. God's breath.  
A dual blood. Your belly gently tugs at the nearby  
air and my arm. Smearred with herb ointment. Shallow  
breathing when I put out the light. Legs separated by  
a pillow. For a moment early autumn. New England  
gold. Whiteness, kaleidoscopes, pictures  
that have begun to talk in the dark. I'll get up,  
open the window and let night and mosquitos into the room.  
In the orchards the weight of overripe fruit. The earth  
getting its generous meal. Between the three of us  
shallow breathing and skin, and when day breaks and brightens  
and the light returns — little islands for studying solitude,  
abandoned playgrounds, high grass that's grown up overnight,  
rusted swingsets. Devastation and peace. Autumn  
in August. Vicious jays have stopped flying from  
tree to tree. Life beginning to take off in neutral.  
Gray paving in the sky. Gusts of an awakened wind.  
Straight lines of trees to the north. Distant  
twitter of birds. And once again the return of nighttime and Pacific  
air, as though of my long ago November in California.  
Chicory, buttercups, white cumin, daisies, crows,  
flattened frogs that just yesterday emerged from their ponds.  
All of it frozen. Quavering puddles on asphalt  
in which you can see trees and the weekend.  
All of that frozen, too. Forgotten droplets sliding  
down leaves, dropping to the ground. "What kind of person will  
my son be?" The extended arm of a storm, the exhausting kindness  
toward the world that eludes your grasp. And then: Cesare Pavese,  
seen from inside. "Would I like me if I met myself?"  
Oscillations of the air in the room. Bands of clear sky in the west.  
A new evening spectacle. Exhausting kindness to the  
world. The violets will fade soon. Green  
glinting leaves of hibiscus show from the balcony.  
You think things over as the child inside you slowly calms down.  
Our fear is a shadow at first. Sudden kicks at your body,  
words that get caught in your throat that could also flare up

and burn while we're sleeping. If it happens that we lose the child now, there's nothing we can do, just wait again and not get tired of waiting. Laundered clothes. Open metal cases for sticks of incense. Bars of soap with the scent of figs. Technical difficulties on some English TV channels. A storm. It's good there are books living here, too, stored at just the right distance. John Constable on glossy pages. Quiet streams and mills and mounting clouds, images I'd like to see as my thoughts wander and I sink into sleep. John Constable. Once the world was like that and people lived in it. Pages quickly leafed through from an afternoon nap. Walking through the summer grass, touching the ground with your bare feet, always coming home to the same woman, your cold fingers seeking her warm body. "Does a person kill himself when he gets knocked down for the thousandth time in love?" Cesare Pavese, seen through my eyes. Crystals of sugar on the plums. No produce in the garden. Snails fat as horse droppings in all the damp corners. Gnawed eggplants, tomatoes with rust, potatoes waiting for me to dig them up with an old hoe. August and Beth Gibbons, who sings to me about autumn. Tunes as slow as the sea rising. A piano accompaniment like streams of water on the glass of a windshield wrinkles in the loudspeakers. Every music has its season. The smell of grated cucumber and divka. Church bells in the distance. The return of your will when the fog lifts. The sudden approach of the landscape through transparent crystals. Every spring I say to myself, "Remember." Then I forget and the ocean dries up at my back. "What kind of person will our son be?"

#### IV

When my father was in the hospital I wished he could one day see my child. Transfusions of blood. Motionless lying in bed. Collapsed lungs. Cardiograms and sporadic blood pressure readings. We live so close to each other that we've stopped communicating in words. We die so close to each other that we only touch each other in thoughts. James Schuyler and Kenneth Koch will never know about this poem. Czesław Miłosz will be buried in the crypt of the church on Skalka. August and these words to myself, unspoken: "Remember everything that has accumulated in your body and

don't write hermetic poetry. Don't veer off into symbols.  
Don't look for emergency exits, don't shame yourself with flights  
from reality. "How do we speak when we dare  
to speak?" August. September. October. Fixed  
colors in each month. I like calm, quiet and  
gentle poems. I like calm, quiet and gentle  
people. There's nothing you can get out of line.  
"What kind of person will our son be?" Before summer  
is over, I'm going to swim in the pool one more time. A gentle  
darkness over the graves. Warm hands wedged into open books.  
Radiant afternoons sent from another world.  
The wind repeats its primeval refrain. The blows of the hammer  
will always remain fixed in yesterday evening.  
The wall of the sandbox is fixed. Its shoals covered  
with fallen leaves. Your belly become like a full moon  
grown onto your body. At night it glows in the dark. My hands  
never grow tired. And the time is approaching, inexorably.

## **Autumn Leaves 2**

I

Pearls of water on the window ledges and branches,  
delayed freight from the night just departed. Already the trees  
almost bare. Wet leaves turned down toward the earth  
respiring motionlessly on a Saturday afternoon. The size of brown  
and green, green and red splotches in the depth of the woods  
reveals their distance from us. The sandbox abandoned, looking strange  
like beaches and small towns on the islands in November,  
like the sudden, apparent onset of fall in the middle of summer. Cool  
rays of sound smooth over the darkened silver to the south.  
Cold gusts of air are the unpleasant touch of a stranger.  
Autumn everywhere. Smudged shadings of warm air and sunlight  
spilled over the meadow become a gift of midday.  
Bird song at various heights, its audio setting,  
drawing attention, a sudden and powerful wish for sleep or the past.  
The music continues to collect outside the window. Jays search for  
worms in the grass. Some short shrubs draw back in the slow wind. Over-  
night mushrooms have poked their heads from the ground. Slowly shifting  
clouds mark the town's boundaries in airspace. Their memory  
is unfixed and shifting. Music continues to collect and  
spread in the room - a scarlet fog. Feldman's  
For Philip Guston strikes me as sad today

and as gray as the early morning light over harbors.  
The damp asphalt dries. Our son is one day old.  
There's a fat mouse, a skinny mouse and a furry bear  
all sitting in his bed. I don't know what they talked about last night,  
I've forgotten their language, and now they're just silent, waiting for him.  
Bursts of squeaks from a flute and xylophones search through the hours' pockets.  
The empty rooms have been sunk to an almost unprecedented depth  
and a silence that doesn't exist. You're asleep in the hospital. A slow  
day that's given you a new name lazily stretches just past  
your closed eyelids. I'm sitting and watching the surroundings  
and feeling the warmth on my skin and breathing in deeply,  
motionless amid the day that's given me a new name.  
What good is a poetry that can't remind our child of  
his first day on earth? What good is music that doesn't bring  
memory with it and doesn't force us into submission and admiration?  
Yesterday evening I wandered through town like a castaway  
washed onto shore by a new life. The cloudy  
sky. The autumn drizzle. Atlantic rain. Brake  
lights reflecting on the wet asphalt. Yesterday evening I wandered  
through town like a homeless man with the smell of  
his newborn still in his thoughts. Your warm brown eyes rested,  
head on your pillow. The warm breath of our son kept trading glances  
with your skin. The world came to a stop and forgot all its habits.  
Yesterday evening you and I talked through the night air and  
then fell asleep, each on our own changed forever.

## II

A warm autumn. The smuggled remains of a long summer.  
Insects revived from the dead. The swimming pool drained.  
Isolated blue coatings dreaming of swimmers and  
their long nails capturing some air from the surface  
that churns and shakes like mercury below. The fallen  
leaves practice dance steps on its abandoned and empty bottom.  
It's a long way to a new August. Autumn. The cemeteries have revived,  
becoming big cities of flames. Quiet prayers and silent  
words for those who stayed behind in a previous time are their  
invisible roof. When we leave, we're lost forever.  
The days when I don't hide in books and don't study  
spiritist rites and foreign theosophies. The pulsation of  
traffic lights sounds like the magnified heart beat of the carotid artery.  
The streetlights go on. The indistinguishable faces of people hover  
behind window panes and balconies. The streets are full  
of families out for a Saturday stroll. The shy smell of autumn



mixes with the smell of fallen leaves and the smell of the river  
and the smell of roast chestnuts and walks among the  
people out strolling. Bridges show off their white extremities and the willows,  
those peaceful, green giants, slowly descend toward the river.  
Will this be our son's favorite season? "A person's favorite  
season is always around their birthday."  
A friend's sudden insight or forgotten folk  
wisdom. I've never had the will to find out. Night  
spread over the earth and, in the morning, day had a hard time waking  
up and getting used to its new arrival. Rain, real rain, like the first  
report from the departed daylight. Condensation on the panes. Outside  
thick drops of rain fall on the trampled grass. The mushrooms  
lose their caps. The washing machine speaks as best it knows  
how, the way people have taught it. Its drum stubbornly turning.  
Rare, soaked birds, faithful to their trees and the  
sky, without any plans, fly back and forth through the grayness. It lasted  
two days, and then all my tenderness was suddenly outside me  
and staring me down like paintings that don't exist. The pink room.  
Practically the title of a Chinese novel that I never read.  
Morning slowly shakes the night off itself. I sit in the twilight,  
you lying close by. We wait for things to begin. On the table  
the book of patients' comments and the Holy Bible touch. "Praise the  
Lord, for he is good and his love is  
everlasting" and "My thanks to the staff for their attention and help..."  
I take turns touching and opening one, then the other, the way  
the rain and the sun take turns touching the windows outside. A midwife  
does simultaneous duty for all the new lives on this  
floor. I sit in the twilight and my cold hands as  
they rest in my lap are sweating. The morning  
countdown and coaching and breathing change into  
glowing bullets and then suddenly there's no voice at all  
anymore, just a sob that's not yours, separating from the body that's yours,  
and slowly growing someplace outside yourself as proof  
that we'll never again think we're alone. Is death like  
this, too? A needless shock that turns into amazement,  
because everything is so simple. The smell of wet flowers spreads  
through this room, the next, just one book and a bed, if you're lucky.  
Or perhaps death is that dumb escort that chases after  
us from morning to night like an old twinge of conscience or a  
senseless bad habit and at last catches up.

### III

Four in the morning and it's time to get up. A cramp in the unfailing  
mechanism that governs the body. Sliding footsteps

gently flutter like snow through the pulverized darkness.  
Dead lamps stay dead. Absent faces sometimes  
gleam as they move gently through an imitation of  
sleep. A distant neon sheath hovers over the city,  
reflections of a hollow white, as of light bouncing off some snow  
yet to come. The trees not aware that their twitching  
upsets the soft domination of night. A grace relived while  
asleep turns pale and naked out on the street. Every open door  
first lets restlessness in. Time crumbles  
into dust and light, and what remains is the faithfulness of  
unreal memories. The cool skin of my forearm covers my eyes.  
I'm asleep. Trying to sleep. I'll never be on my own again,  
I think in thoughts that are mine, as much as I hate them.  
I've been banished from carefree love into an unconditional love  
created by bodies and filled with the stuff that  
they wanted to keep for themselves. The neon light shines in your  
distant bedroom. Night melts your sleep, the way huge furnaces  
melt down bronze churchbells. The phones are silent and anticipation  
is written on the face bending over the mirror.  
The dark beyonds in it are friendly and repeat  
like a regular sequence of waves and newly inventorized  
hours. A faded and sleep-creased light has come to a stop  
outside the windows and asserted itself in the sky. Sometimes the neighbors  
are noisy and sometimes they're quiet. We know next to nothing about one another.  
Empty rooms on the placid surface of pictures covered in glass  
continue into the forest and from the forest to the horizon. Unread  
books and newspapers lie on the floor. The TV generously  
serves up its daily ration of hell. The radio generously  
serves up its daily ration of hell. I put the books back  
on the shelves, because they're useless and sad and don't conceal  
the absence of both of you. I've turned off the music because it's useless  
at conveying laughter and doesn't conceal the absence of both of you.

#### IV

Our son is going to be a week old. His golden skin  
won't let him get near me. Jaundice. Masks. Goggles.  
Eyes covered and protected from malignant light.  
Routine business for nurses and doctors and a first brush  
with the abyss for the two of us. "Nothing can happen to this  
helpless little tank that you had confused with fragility."  
That from some sleeping sound inside you doesn't get much respect.  
Tell it about home with a quiet welcome in your  
voice and the sound will vanish. Or is it all on account of the weather?  
The slow, diagonal, noiseless ripping of clouds.

Leave behind that show of submerged days lived half asleep.  
Hover first and then decisive action, long conversations  
that change the direction of the wind, cool your skin and let  
you grow older and forget the motionless morning torpor  
that sometimes lurks coiled inside your body. The cars  
glint in their great psalm in praise of time. Buildings burn  
amid their own memories of the slow descent of the sun  
behind the mountains and trees. Six fifteen, when I leave the hospital  
and go bounding down the straight road and leave you both behind  
and the straight road pursues me again and again, until it's forced  
to stop at a crossing. You told me that every woman  
in the ward was only able to talk about her own child,  
trapped in some one-way universe, and that bothered you,  
because you were also learning to talk only about our child,  
suddenly shoved as you'd been into some startling, one-way  
universe, but I wasn't there. Two books touching.  
"Sing a new song unto the Lord, for he has made wondrous things" and  
my sentences, written down in a moment of great feeling that caused  
high-flown aesthetic concepts to blush. Do I still have a right to look for  
my bright figure against a dark background? Pale blue,  
remote and unreal slashes of blue against a local  
sky. The smell of snow and the forest's colorless subsidence.  
It's important to note signs like that. At night  
the moisture thickened into sticky clumps and entered our nostrils  
like the cool fingers of an unknown hand. A laundered T-shirt is draped  
across the radiator, smelling of Crete. Hands smell of oranges  
and New Year's and occupy thoughts like slanting crosswalks,  
sums of sunlight trembling against the walls and keeping my eyes  
occupied. The speakers slowly begin to spread Autumn Leaves  
by Julian "Cannonball" Adderley through the room.  
The scarlet mist begins to evaporate and lift. There is no  
long-lasting sorrow and darkness in this music, just an occasional, mild regret  
that we're mortal. Wet sidewalks paved with gold  
dry out and glint in the sun. The darkness that will enter  
our room tonight will have the taste of lilacs and dry earth  
in August. Tomorrow will be autumn again, the air a flame  
in which after a long time I'll be able to recognize winter.

### **Too Serious, Uroš**

Too serious. Just have a quick look around. Look  
around yourself. Lend your eyes to heaven. Your feet to the earth. Your hands to water.  
There's too much fatalism. Too many fluttering banners of the Idea.  
The good of the nation is getting under your skin. The fog.  
The swamp. The nails. Black mass. The tribe. The raven.

Horror. Every sentence is a fossilized relic.  
An inexhaustible mine for researchers and history.  
That's what your stomach hurts from, not food.  
That's what's opened your wound up again, not changing beds.  
That's what's glazed over the world, not too much traveling

Morning, the day at the beginning of days.  
The day: inspired. Its skin: smooth and sweet-smelling.  
The dawn bit through its umbilical cord. The wind washes it.  
The wind dive bombs, scraping its belly on the asphalt  
and rising. Inhuman. Unscathed. 9/22/1999.  
A day known by its numbers. Uncertainty in the air —  
the mother of beauty. What can you accomplish today?  
Watch TV and wait for disasters.  
That's something you know. Not good. You move house out of laziness  
and flip it to your strength. That's better. There's still hope  
for you. That's also a way of spreading metaphysics and light waves.

You can open books and lay your hands on the pages.  
So that it comes back. So your body begins letting time pass again.  
So you can wander backstage in the dark theater  
long after the play has ended and the  
applause and amazement have found their way  
into somebody else's childhood. But you're just  
stumbling through the dark, constantly tripping on  
cast off props and dented toys.

But leave the skeletons in their closets. Just let them  
play their cards, calling trumps that were valid on  
some other night. Outside the birds are claiming  
responsibility for the existence of air. They have to fly somewhere.  
They have to spread their wings somewhere. Their invisible  
writing makes the sky more hospitable. Summer wears on,  
even if it is shrinking, becoming a smoldering butt  
of light, the shadow of its heavier breathing. You could  
start to mourn, but don't do that. Autumn will  
come and take you up on its lap. Ignite you with colors.

Relax. Poetry hasn't abandoned you. Nataša loves you.  
Everything's in its place. If you look through the window,  
you'll see trees enduring in their solemn morning  
silence, part of an order that's inconceivable to you, part of a world  
inconceivable to you. You don't need to decipher it. It's enough that you know  
it exists. It's not even ten o'clock yet. You have the whole day before you.  
You're lucky. Make do with that. It's time.

Alexandre Romanès  
translated by Diana Norma Szokolyai

**Poem 1**

Je n'ai rien à voir avec ces gens  
qui reculent quand il faut avancer,  
et pourtant, j'ai plié devant la vie  
comme l'arbre sans défense  
attaqué par le vent.

I'm nothing like people  
who retreat when you need to advance,  
and yet, I have bent in the face of life  
like a tree without defenses  
attacked by the wind.

**Poem 2**

Aimer c'est souffrir.  
Prendre sa femme dans ses bras,  
rire avec ses enfants.  
Qui ira le premier enterrer l'autre?

To love is to suffer.  
To take your wife in your arms,  
to laugh with your children.  
Who will be first to bury the other?

### Poem 3

Quand mon coeur était seul  
dans sa flaque de sang,  
quand mes colères étaient inattendues  
comme un orage d'été,  
qui aurait pensé qu'un jour mon coeur  
battrait plus fort que tous les coeurs?  
Car même mort, chaque fois que mes filles  
Viendront sur ma tombe, mon coeur renaîtra.

When my heart was alone  
in its puddle of blood,  
when my anger was unexpected  
like a summer thunderstorm,  
who would have thought that one day my heart  
would beat faster than all other hearts?  
For even dead, every time my daughters  
come to my grave, my heart will be reborn.



*Church of Hallgrímur, Reykjavik, Iceland - Liz Bruce*

# Interview with Slovene Writers

**Political Polis Politics Poesia: a Conversation with Slovene Writers**  
Ljubljana, Križanke, 2017

**Participants:** Alenka Jovanovski, Darja Pavlič, Tibor Hrs Pandur, Muanis Sinanović, Radharani Pernarčič, Iztok Osojnik

**Moderator:** Richard Jackson

**RJ:** Okay, we're actually recording. Let's start. What do you think is a role of the writer in the society in a political climate. Where especially the writer feels out of place or disagrees?

**Alenka:** Perhaps we should start with the question about what political means because I think that should be answered first.

**RJ:** Okay, go ahead.

**Alenka:** You define the role of the writer by what is political, so I am asking you what do you mean by political? Do you mention political climate only in the meaning of a party system or as a political structure, that holds the power and so on.

**RJ:** Yeah, well, the political structure in America—what bothers people now — especially with Trump, okay, is this. It's been gradually getting this more and more to the right and very, very conservative, but also this idea that there's these people and these people on the left and the right, and nobody talks to one another. These people talk only to themselves, and these people talk only to themselves in these small groups. Some of them are religious, some of them are political conservative, some are the leftist, some, and there's no way in which they can bridge a gap. And so, I think some writers in America are thinking maybe there's some way in which we can bridge gaps. But, it's mostly for America the political situation, when they talk about that, it's the rise of the right wing especially.

**Alenka:** Yes, but I think we should go deeper. When we talk about the political situation in this way then we are limited by the illusory split between left and right. For instance, in at the elections in France, the people basically had the only possibility to choose between native fascists and foreign fascists, so it would be better to talk about structure. I mean, political means a particular a structure, the way the power operates involving everybody in the society. By my opinion this should be the point



where any productive talk can begin from as otherwise we would miss the hidden reality in the sense that you say white, I say black, and we get fifty-nine shades of grey. It doesn't get us anywhere because we proceed blinded by the very structure, that features our invisible reality unconscious to us.

**RJ:** What do you mean by the political structure here, and how do you perceive it in the United States?

**Alenka:** I don't know how it is in the United States because I have never been there. What I see is only what I get from the media, and I don't really trust them. So perhaps you should tell us what is the situation there.

**RJ:** What is your perception—because that's what we really want to know. What is your perception of it?

**Alenka:** My perception of it is that politics presented in the media feature two sides of the same coin: the struggle in the USA has really been going on between two capitalist options. There isn't really any fundamental difference between those two options. In substance both Hillary and Trump represent the same system. From the start it has been evident that both of them are exponents and supported and financed by the big money, basically the US war machinery, so people as people have been excluded — that is the problem.

**RJ:** Yes, money really is the political structure in America.

**Alenka:** And people, yeah. What I see and what really astonishes me, though of course I shouldn't be astonished, is that people — even those the most deprived ones — they voted for the right and basically supported the Trump's capitalistic option — basically against their own needs and interests.

**RJ:** Oh yes, this is a common idea in America—why do these people do this; it seems crazy.

**Alenka:** But it's not crazy because in this situation the deep invisible structure has been at work, the campaign diverted people's attention against a irrational populist hate against the outer enemy, while the basic unjust antisocial system could not only be preserved but even pushed way deeper.

**RJ:** One of the things in America is that things are so split—

**Alenka:** Voters were brainwashed and blinded.

**RJ:** Things are so split not only left and right, but also all these different parts so you have one group of people and there's maybe ten issues, but they only vote for one issue, and this group of people votes only for this one issue because sometimes they

have money interest or they have a church interest or something like that in America. It's not only this huge split this way but even in between, and so it becomes really difficult even in terms of a structure to identify it. So somebody like Trump or Hillary can come in and try to lie to this group of people and make this little composite. So you were going to—

**Muanis:** I want to say, but maybe we are further diverging from the topic, actually I don't think the people were blinded, people who voted for Trump. They just didn't have any possibilities to change things economically or any other way. Everything has been going on the cultural level. This was a cultural struggle between two political sides. People felt that they were marginalized, which they were, on both the economical as well as on cultural level. They were constantly pushed aside by the cultural elitism of the upper and upper middle class represented by the leading media and so on who controlled the public debate and voiced/asserted their views. People who are marginalized cannot speak. It is easy to get people to support you if you declaratively simply position yourself on their side in a very binary and infantile way. Besides we should consider the situation shown to us in the case of Trump, that there at the top does not exist a highest monolithic consensus of power which should govern any society but also the deep state come into the public view because the big troubles it causes Trump. Actually he can't do all of the things he wants to do. So, political we can understand also in this way. This "real politic", as we call it in Europe after "die Politik" in German, reaches very deep down, both up and down. The power doesn't function in just one direction from the highest level to the bottom. Political is kind of represented in the whole institutionalized system of institutions, whether they are part or not part of the government. Now there is really a kind of a status quo. Everyone thought things were going to change when Trump comes to power, but nothing has really changed. Maybe for a short time something on the cultural level, but then the cultural counter movement reacted in the media, there have been a lot of protests, feminist movements, marches and so on. The role of the writer should be, in my opinion, to somehow challenge this status quo. But how can he or she do it is a quite another and a very complex topic. Maybe others can say something about that.

**Radharani:** My view is maybe even more radical, and maybe it doesn't even fit in the discussion at all. I think the question of what is the role of the writer means nothing because the only question I can ask right now is what is the role of any individual person. In a sense, I would even say that the written word in the contemporary world doesn't really have any power. The entire policy is based on perception management. Written word is very fragile due to the perception management, and the only thing that isn't exposed to the perception management—of course yes to perception but not perception management—is what we do right now: just being real, physically together people with people and having real, physical communication. Anything else can be misevaluated by an anti-word. Somebody writes something, and another can write anything counter to it, everybody can publish anything on the internet, and there always could be somebody to publish anything against it or contrary to this, or

slightly different, or likely slightly different. Even blank lies. So you have so many opinions that in the end, people are lost because they cannot get to the sources of what would be real, I won't even say true, but just simply real. When you are physically together with people everyone at least one can grasp what is real. I can't say, "Vance was here or isn't here." Though I can mean it, or yeah, I can even say it, yeah I can claim it.

**Iztok:** See, but in two months you can say, "Oh I was never there."

**Radharani:** Yeah, but still she said it, huh; So only in physically real situations, we can all grasp reality, not the truth but reality.

**Muanis:** Well in my opinion, for example, poets have to invent a way to get poetry onto streets again as in the way of American spoken words written and spoken in Afro-American communities as in the sixties and before. We have to find ways to reinvent that form and get it back onto streets again and influence actual living people who are actually listening to it. I'm trying to do it with my straightforward poems. I 'm starting to write straightforward political poetry again in a way of a witness or something like that.

**RJ:** There was this anthology that people did called Truth to Power and it was against all these things. And they gave their reading in Washington DC, but it was in a small room and it was only by and to the people who already believed so.

**Muanis:** Yes I can see it, but changes actually always came from minorities and small groups.

**Radharani:** Yeah but that's what I meant by my opinion that is radical. Even when you bring literature or poetry onto the streets, it just turns into a show that it can just slip through your brain, and pass by in the public. What I meant is— that's why I emphasized it—not as a writer, but as an individual person. In each small occasion, every person should insist on being, on communicating and acting out his or her sensitive mind. You don't let little situations pass by, you know? Like, somebody just issued a sentence; somebody just did something, whatever. I just want to be nice. No, I don't want to be nice, I will tell what I mean, and I will stop a person and say, "Okay, what do you mean? Let's talk. What do you really mean?" And okay, it only seems very small because I can do it with you, and with you, and with you, but when you do it, you do it, she does it, he does it, it can develop in something very big. It only seems small because you can only judge it against the scale within your reach, but when you multiplied it, then more people can insist on it and really do it, so then I believe this is the only way to achieve something. But maybe even that is just an illusion to.

**Muanis:** I agree, but we have to reinvent this kind communication, reinvent in some way.

**Radharani:** Yes, yes exactly. Maybe not even to go out with poetry but simply with this sensitive attitude one exposes when writing poetry, and to use it in any kind of social context.

**RJ:** What you were talking about is exactly what happened in the sixties and seventies, with music and poetry. And yeah, it did have small groups but then these small groups made other groups and other groups, and then it grew into a bigger movement after that, but you have to start small I agree, you have to start small.

**Iztok:** Also, I believe it's a very complex issue. We have to understand what we are facing. We face a huge, gigantic system that's not something that just appeared out of nowhere but it has an elaborated background of at least a hundred years. There have been all these institutions, mind tanks, all kinds of institutes and research establishments. You just scratch a little bit the seemingly innocent appearances and under the surface suddenly you realize you deal with gigantic systems with incredible amounts of money, and their sole purpose has been to invent strategies and ways of how to occupy the public space, how to manipulate the minds of the people, the public opinion, and how to eradicate all kinds of controversial and problematic issues that may disturb the big money out of the agenda. For instance it is not difficult to see how at the universities suddenly they stopped to address social agendas, and replaced it by cultural topics. For instance, by this approach suddenly so a guy from Nigeria, and let's say intellectual from Oxford were considered on equal terms both of them representatives of a particular culture; two cultures were compared as of equal potential. But the guy from Oxford monthly earns like 6000 or 7000 pounds, while the guy from Nigeria is happy to stay alive on a bowl of rice. It is quite comfortable affair for the Oxfordian to write his well appreciated book during his sabbatical year on a yacht or some comfortable residency. While the Nigerian has to fight his way to the metropolis first through all kind of local militia and deadly proxy squads in jungles and deserts and across the Mediterranean sea. There is no way that their voices are of equal acceptance and reach. The cultural studies and the sort has been generated introduced and run by this big money—that's what we are facing, you know? Any kind of social issues were considered outdated and passé. That's why I was really astonished when Sanders came out with such a huge and strong public appearance. How would McCarthy deal with him? Still three days before he started to talk, anything he said had been considered Communist. We can check issue by issue, anything of the sort that one addressed in public in the States, was accused of Communism and publicly persecuted, fiercely. A hundred years of Sacos and Vanzettis. Now, the rest of the world starts with the States. America follows a very well-considered and planned extremely aggressive doctrine; the Monroe doctrine. America first. Me the big guy, you the slave. The doctrine developed into this neo-liberal globalism with the mega-corporations and the big money as a hegemonic sovereign force over any kind of law (even the laws pushed through the legislation by the big capitalists, e.g. the Koch brothers and Co.), any kind of civil code, international law or signed agreements. It's just as what Marx says—it will be Communism or barbarism, and we are back to technologically highly developed and controlled barbarism. Whatever the big money decides—we can fuck ourselves if we want, nobody cares?

In the latest elections in States, the only actual opposition was Sanders and none of the other two, I mean, sorry, because first of all Hillary is not any better than Trump, if you ask me. No, no she is just very nice and pretending and so on, but behind her has been the war machine. She openly said it: “We saw, we came, we killed.” She was clapping with both hands any time when the American army took a march across the world killing people without any rights, without respect of anything that you might call human rights. And of course she’s just blah, blah. Democracy and freedom.

**RJ:** She would’ve been easy to pull the trigger—I agree with that.

**Muanis:** But Trump also did that.

**Iztok:** I’m not denying that. I said it is the same machine. Trump used media propaganda much more prepared. He trusted the new media so much more than her. He just used the Twitter. It has been just a bunch of bullshit and total lies, but it was what people wanted to hear, and were capable of reading. An average contemporary reader could not stand more than five words in a sentence. That is the situation.

**RJ:** You were going to say something, before when he was [talking]?

**Muanis:** I think Trump is not any better about this issue—

**Iztok:** Yeah I agree. Of course.

**Muanis:** On politics and bombarding people. Actually, one of his first moves was the bombardment of civilians in a house in Syria where twelve or something people died, children among them too. You mentioned Twitter; this is the level where we can talk about poetry. Twitter is something which has stolen the essence of poetry, the ways poetry can operate with language, and maybe the goal of the poetry today would be to reclaim this essence, to struggle against this kind of Twitter communication. Also, Mussolini talked about that in the past century already, and I think there are two ways to write poetry today. One way is this way of writing poetry meant to be read very articulated poetry which intertwines with the kind of algorithms which Trump has been using very much—he had profited much from using the bit data collected from various social media and so on. The other way is the way I mentioned the way of straightforward poetry to be read aloud at least in the streets. I think we are in the situation where we can only do either this or that or both of these. This can be political.

**Iztok:** I just wanted to—sorry I will say a few more sentences, and then it will be enough. I personally described the problems we are facing. I agree with what Muanis said; we should forget about being poets because of poetry should be an expression and individual. Now we are making a big thing of poetry, and actually by making a big thing of poetry we do the same thing these guys do. They just put the meaning to something that belongs to every single living person on the planet. What we should consider

is how this single intelligent, cognitive person faces this situation that involves so much more knowledge and cleverness than he or she manages. Behavioral studies invented ways to do things to us that we don't even realize that are happening to us. But the thing is, if one is seriously engaged in poetry, he or she should not forget first of all, that poetry is language, poetry is the way of communication, and poetry is the way we structure our notions, our ideas, our understanding, our ethical positions, and so on. The real political act of poetry is to develop strategies that would be of real efficiency in our facing this colossal system that is attacking us from behind from the political unconscious in such a way that we don't recognize its workings. When today we address poetry we immediately see a book. And we see a public stage; then we see a poet reading in a very touching way, so the people go "Oh, look this is the voice that I love," In reality poetry is nothing to do with that. It's just another kind of industry; another kind of commodity, though very exclusive one, yes, that's capitalized. It's a monopoly scheme, so to say. Its true dimension involves somebody who uses language in the particular way, that we now keep reserved only to products that we signify with the word poetry in the genuine meaning of the word of a particular language function, going back to the beginnings of the world, because those beginnings are still here; poetic language is still a living thing. In this sense poetry never died. never stopped to function, never stopped to face any kind of situations that are by the interest of the people who manage the aggressive or even criminal power in their hands. We should not submit to their dictate and fight battles on their battle grounds. We should not accept their discourse but find ways to use language in ways that enables us to reach to dimensions of the language that would avoid the manipulations of these gigantic systems. In this sense, it doesn't really matter whether it was Hillary or Trump because both of them are killer monkeys, and the real thing behind is not a person, one person, or two, three persons; it's the nihilistic scientific capitalist system. And that system functions as a social system in the sense of global wrapping of the human society as a general into some kind of terminal exploitation—not only of human society, but of all the animals, all the minerals, everything, the whole planet included—the system that we cannot reject or change by simply trying to talk about good or bad evaluations of this guy or that guy. I think this is what happened in the twentieth century; all these philosophies, theories, and literature all act subversively in this sense, and in this sense, I consider arts, literature, and poetry deeply political. Political in the sense of acting and changing structures and ways of language use in its core, not out there, not facing the bad guy over there on his playground. It is me actively and successfully facing myself as a speaker of genuine poetic language that would enable me to use the language in a creative way beyond present limited understandings and established normatives of poetic achievement. I think that each human being including us has that politically suppressed potential in ourselves, thus each of us for our own good as well for the good of the common situation in our simple way should imply in our communication. The very moment we as poets start thinking about success, we're gone. We have already submitted our will to it as the agents of the system that is basically working against us, and we are supporting it because it's us doing it. So not to be voters who voted for Trump we have to recognize our own position and stand up against it against our own fantasies about success.

**RJ:** Yeah. The problem with the literary movements for me is that they all say this is the truth and that becomes the truth.

**Iztok:** That attitude is exactly what is used to monopolize the situation.

**RJ:** For a writer, you always have to be questioning everything. Even question the strawberries.

**Iztok:** But, you should understand the nature of the language because you address things in language. So far, we are doing it by language. There is nothing outside language that is poetry. There is not very many Buddhas around. So because there's no Buddhas...

**Alenka:** You know, I've been thinking because as a scientist so many times I witnessed that an expert would be critical of a difficult poem by saying, "Okay. People don't read. People aren't—or don't want to be—intelligent. They do not want to read they just want to work." And I cherish an idea, why not use this exact mechanism and make some sort of silent initiative that would deliberately pin different connotations to words with established meanings and use exactly the changed established language system as the basis to develop it with new horizons and uses. For example lets take the word communism which is used as a curse. "Oh my God, don't even mention it." It's a swear word. But let's say we turn meanings upside down. Suddenly rich people is a swear word. Or, as well, success is a swear word too. And maybe eventually people would not want to identify with them anymore, with dreaming about of being rich like what happened in the sixties with the hippy movement and it wont be possible to pull their noses and fish them by this shit anymore. Because if one drops the established positive connotations, this will change the value system and people will just keep away from it. They swill start to follow new ways like what happened in Detroit after the collapse of the automobile industry.

**Iztok:** Hm. But the problem is that the machine that we are facing falsely reproduces these words with such a speed that even before they reach the other guy they are already contaminated and disseminated. There are five of us here, but everything else is already censored by the media machine. And that includes the internet too. I say this you say that in we go up in smoke.

**Alenka:** Yes, but then why not make a counter movement?

**Muanis:** But also there is a need to change of the language of the protest too. All the catch phrases, banners and buzz words used in the contemporary protests are boring, and they don't challenge the way we think.

**RJ:** They mean nothing.

**Iztok:** They comply with the system.

**RJ:** Darja, you've been quiet.

**Darja:** Yes. I have been listening to you poets. You want a perspective from somebody who is not a poet?

**Iztok:** From another individual.

**Darja:** From an individual, yes. I agree. It's a question much deeper than the question about poets—how to react, how to act in times like now days. I think when you introduce a historical perspective into this situation, you will always find people who were very engaged in political struggles and who reacted to oppressions and injustice, and there were people who silently followed the ways of the time or just lived their own life and didn't engage at all. I think it's the same thing today. In history we can recognize this situation as a constant: There has always been this possibility to engage or not to engage, and to question whether to engage is probably the false question. You have to ask yourself what you are doing. If you are doing things which are deeply faithful to your morality, to your ethics, then you are probably engaged in your own terms, not in terms of somebody else imposed from the outside but in your own terms. What could this mean when we speak about community or groups or so on? It's probably the kind of communication mentioned by Radharani.

**Radharani:** Yes, yes. Because then we talk, you say something and then I can directly react and ask you about what you mean.

**Darja:** Yes. I can ask you directly about what is your ethical stand? What is the actual personal belief forcing you to do things in particular way.

**Alenka:** I would like to come back—

**RJ:** Okay, Alenka—you started. Let's not forget.

**Alenka:** I'd like to come back to what we were talking about at the beginning. What to do against the machine of this huge structure? Facing it on my own disposition I have only my body and my moment of thought, this is what I have and millions of people have the same possibility, so what is possible to do is really to start from the cellular level; it offers the only possibility. Because when for instance ...

**Darja:** When you want to influence others somebody else ...

**Alenka:** It is not only about influencing others. It is about reeducating ourselves and try to search and explore the authentic moments of being, which are beyond socially, politically, economically, culturally and so on installed models of living, and acting.

**RJ:** So to always question these models that you are using, too.



**Alenka:** Of course, but when you look at our bodies—they're very much illustrated all over in the media—so we are very much educated to see those bodies and even our own bodies in generalized ways. These presentations feature the very moment when the individual truth of our singular cells of our body disappears, turns completely invisible.

**Iztok:** For this reason I have been using the notion of political unconscious. Political unconscious for me is a dimension or function of my own consciousness of which I'm not aware of the extended functioning and influence in me by that colossal political machine—the system. Let's say when people go to elections, and suddenly right there in the moment of signing their decision they encircle the particular name that represents everything that they are against and that they never even considered him or her as a possible candidate, and already the next moment they shake their heads and ask themselves "Why the hell did I do that?" I know guys like that. They say it's because of the influence of the media or some unreasonable thought that sparked in their brains in that very moment. But at the end, it's because of their own self machine. So, in the moment that was important for the system, "it" - the political unconscious made them react in this particular way, and this I call the true political conscience. It's not just individual conscience, and no doubt it's political. That's what we are facing when we are dealing with. I don't think only about poets, but about the so called individuals. I do not judge them, as I am one of them. There are not to many people who are aware at least that there is something that you can be suspicious about it even in clever dealings with my own self. So I myself start checking around and start asking questions. The really important thing to check is not the news that the media presents because I know they are fake and lies anyway. In the socialist times of Yugoslavia, we called that reading between the lines. So it was written, "No way that the price of the gasoline will go up." The very next ten minutes, there were lines of cars at the gasoline station because they all understood that at midnight the prices would go up noticeable or that there would be no gas in the next days. For us it's no big deal to read between the lines. You know, when Trump says something—sorry to say that—but when anybody of the public office in America says something, we immediately hear the opposite of what he or she has said. When somebody says, "Oh yes, I will take care of the people," I say, "People you are going to be fucked. Get ready" It means he or she find a new way to squeeze something out of you. It's not so difficult to protect yourself from the outside media, but it's very difficult to protect yourself from the way the hidden machines manipulate media, public opinion, of political conscience to out mock you as the individual and to make you follow the interests of the people who have the power in their hands. This is not theory of plotting. That is plotting. There is a system at work behind there. For me, the language of poetry is a tool to fight that. To explain it requires a kind of a complicated theoretical elaboration, to really come up with a satisfactory working explanation of that system I'm referring to, but at least that's how I write poetry. Muanis calls it a straightforward political poetry. I don't write poetry to be nice, to be liked, to be something enjoyable and accepted by everyone. I try to expose the truth. I use any possible strategy, any available element, regardless their aesthetic value, actually that is what I call aesthetic and ethic truth of poetry, poetry as such. I don't think poetry primarily has to do with meanings and messages; poetry uses them, no doubt, but it is not depended on them

it is not their slave. There goes a popular Hegelian understanding of arts as the embodiment of the universal spirit. There is no universal or absolute spirit in poetry, no god, no redemption, no wisdom, no salvation or any of that in poetry. The poet has to get rid of this historic and deeply rooted metaphysical phantasms to start with. Poetry provides me with the opportunity to face my own consciousness in a very particular way, which I call ethical. For me ethical differs from moral. Moral tells you about the values you should respect and apply, and of course you don't respect them and don't apply them because that's the true meaning of morals; declaration of something that you're doing just the opposite of it. The ethical stand on the other side is always expressed in what you do; you cannot get away from that. The question is what I mean by ethical? Ethics goes beyond the good and bad of the moral. It brutally exposes itself. So, to face myself and my own unconscious in an emancipating way is what I would call an ethical platform, which is not so much oriented toward providing answers in the sense of a new program for the masses of people, so that they could follow and we get a new trend of Buddhism or whatever of the sort. Poetry means ethics in action. One—here, I agree very much with Radharani—deals with seemingly small things, small everyday moments, small body movements, but one fights a big battle. That again and again creates situations in which you can force the unconscious to break out. In a way, one can even provoke that because when you write poetry, you can in a way loosely control it. A poet should let it go and not control it all the way, but there is that split of the second to decide, which way to continue writing, which word to choose, and which not, it features a very particular skill and challenge, because in writing you are all the time faced with many important and decisive possibilities which universe to involve. A poet need not respect any grammar or anything, as the controlling principle, he or she is limited only by the inner workings of his or her no existing self. One can do whatever one is capable of, but one is all the time there. No trances, no dreaming, no godly inspirations. On the other hand the poet knows, when he or she takes a wrong turn, the poem in writing will die and collapse, the poem will not work. That is the news from the intimate abyss of the poet. There is something invisible at work here. Alenka knows it as well as you the other poets present. She wrote about it in an excellent forward to a collection of poetry by another woman poet here, and for it she used the term of the voice in this particular invisible or better to say, silent way, the silent voice within us that actually comes out in writing poetry. I think the sounding of this voice is ultimately political. Political has nothing to do with party system. Political is not a problem of politics.

**RJ:** Oh yeah, I know. I never mean that.

**Iztok:** I know. Political means that I, as an individual belonging to the society, suddenly voice out something that I would call ethical in the sense that puts me in the position of speaking out of all the other beings around me by an attitude that I would recognize as, “Yes, I can consider this according to my own inner workings and freedom—”

**RJ:** For me, if I write something and somebody—to use the idea of voice—and somebody reads it and says it by his inner voice and is thinking. It's not so much that they think something different, but how they think the process, and somebody says,

“Oh, I see. Then I think in this way.” And that gives me a question and gives me almost a license to say, “Oh I can do that, too, but think a different way, not the way that’s in the poem.” It’s a catalyst for something different.

**Iztok:** Yeah, because you triggered something that I would call a political poem.

**RJ:** That’s an interesting term.

**Radharam:** Actually, now something happened that I was just thinking about. It has come from a different direction. It’s been about a couple of years or maybe more that I have this deep feeling that we could use this deep quietness—all of us. Wait, I will explain.

**Iztok:** Be quiet.

**Radharani:** No, but can we be quiet? When you will listen to the recording of our discussion, there will be no information about the time that we were quiet, so there’s a question mark. Either good or bad information can be used and abused, and I speak from different angles. Imagine a quarrel or a conversation between two people; it doesn’t matter what; as long as somebody responds or reacts, there is something going on. The moment somebody keeps totally quiet, there is a puzzle. The puzzle opens a space for question mark. You said before that there are split moments to decide between yes or no. Usually there is a split moment, and we think it has to be a split moment, but the only way to make space for any other option that isn’t imprinted in a pattern is to give time, to let the emptiness take over and deliberately give time, and this time provides space for options. I see it equally functioning between two individual people or on a social level. Imagine all of us—it’s an illusory vision—but let’s say that a number of people reaches an agreement that for ten days there won’t be anything published in newspapers, nothing on TV, nothing on the internet, nobody speaking about anything. There would be a huge puzzle going on. Okay, I’m speaking on a personal level out of my completely energetic feeling of how I see things. But on the other hand I also speak in the perspective of fact that there are places with huge computers that process billions and billions of information sent out in the world to predict what sort of needs people have, what sort of needs they will get from them, what they think, and what they will think. It’s calculated. But when they do not get any information, they cannot calculate anything. It’s also a very much structural, systematic, and political thing that I’m talking about. How about not responding by anything pretentious?

**Tibor:** Cultural silence?

**Radharani:** In cultural space. What do they do now?

**Muanis:** Do you think someone would be caring about this, about us not speaking?

**Radharani:** No, I'm just figuring it—I said it's an illusory concept.

**Muanis:** Yeah. I think it is a very good point.

**Alenka:** What you just said is very deeply revolutionary because what would be disclosed in this moment of space, in this strongly patterned societal way of life that we are tended or invited or attracted into has to do with fear. I think fear exists on some other level because what happens in the moment of pause and try to be quiet, try to catch the right option within as many options as possible, not to decide for a new one because any option could be the right one—it is a very strong chance it would be—another model of functioning. It would be an ideological model of functioning. In this moment of openness, I think everybody faces fear, really basic fear. Pass this moment of fear I think something opens, and this is what I was talking about—acting out at the cellular level. It's really deeply inventing things. It's very deeply creative. The very concept of being creative has been spoiled by capitalist notions of production, technical production. In order to reinvent poetic production, in the sense of coming into being, one has to deal first with this technical barrier which is the model of production.

**Iztok:** Yeah. But now you talk about how to be poetically creative and—

**Alenka:** No. It's not. I don't marginalize poetic creation or verse writing.

**Iztok:** Yeah, okay.

**Radharani:** I really like what you are saying, Alenka, because all this fuss that is going on is exactly to silence fear instead of giving the option or possibility or time or space to face the fear, accept it, to stay with fear, for the fear to be.

**Iztok:** We are forced to live with fear. Fear is in and all around us.

**Radharani:** No, we are not. We are not with fear.

**Iztok:** Fear is contemporary, ideological.

**Radharani:** No, not that kind of fear.

**Iztok:** No, fear is an ideological produced tool of control. When you have to pay for electricity and other daily expenses and you don't have the means to do it immediately there is fear. Suddenly you realize that fear has many very sophisticated ways to appear.

**RJ:** Yeah, but fear is also all these invisible forces around you, too.

**Radharani:** Yeah. What I have been saying is that fear is all around us and presses on us, but there is a big difference between, “Okay, I am feeling my fear now” and “I am with my fear. I am not running to the bank to pay my postal order. I am not going to run around in panic searching for the possibility of how to get the money needed because I am afraid because fear is pressing me to do it.” Or I’m not with the fear, I don’t sit down and say okay, “This is how it feels. I will feel my fear for half an hour now if I stay quiet.” This is what it means to be with fear.

**Iztok:** To be with fear—I agree. I know it. I experienced it on the mountain wall during climbing a very difficult and most dangerous pitch. But the thing is that the fear that suddenly attacks you makes you being aware of the presence of the fear only you keep it at a distance and go on with what is necessary to do.

**Radharani:** No, no. You are not consciously with the fear. Usually people are not consciously with their fear, and that’s why they do the things they do, or we do.

**Iztok:** You learn how to—

**Radharani:** Each of us with fear—

**Iztok:** You learn how to live, to deal constantly with the fear. Remember people in Sarajevo during the war.

**Radharani:** Yeah, but that’s just the presence of fear, not being with fear.

**Iztok:** Once Anna Akhmatova wrote a poem about it. It was fear, she wrote, “It was sheer animal fear. It was there all the time. We learned how to live with it.”

**Muanis:** I just read a short story, if we can call it that written by Berthold Brecht today, and I published it on Facebook about a worker coming to the court, and they ask him if he wants to swear to speak the truth on a Bible in a church way, in a religious way, or in a secular way. And he responded, “I don’t have a job.” Then this very short story goes on, and then Mr. K said, “He was not simply confused. He just wanted to say that he’s in a state where this kind of question, maybe even this whole process, doesn’t have any meaning for him.” This is how I understand the fear that you are talking about.

**Iztok:** Yeah, I agree.

**Muanis:** You are left without words, you are not consciously—

**Iztok:** But you still have to operate, still have to manage your life, still have to handle situations when—

**Muanis:** You are silenced without silence.

**Iztok:** For instance, we could say that—now I’m speculating a bit—but I think that cancer as an illness has a lot to do with being constantly in fear. In part that it actually works on your body. It psychosomatic, attacks your cells, your body as Alenka would have it. Fear is something physical. It eats you.

**Muanis:** There are actually facts proving it. For example, the homosexual population is usually dying quite younger than the majority population exactly because of this fear which is internalized and causes problems to the body.

**Radharani:** That’s exactly what I have been saying. How many people do you know who either you would see them personally, or they would tell you, “ I did this or that,” who would just sit like this and say it out loud, “ I am so afraid.” To experience it at a moment or to had it lasting for three hours and still be with the fear presently. If you concentrate yourself in all your presence fully conscious and aware of the fact that you are afraid, then you grasp it. Otherwise, it’s just in you. It works and eats you, but it’s there and keeps you thinking.

**Iztok:** I understand. It’s like a black fire within your stomach.

**Darja or Radha:** When you have grasped it, when you are with it, something else happens. It’s not just that suddenly you’re not afraid anymore, but now you are able to deal with it, to become different.

**RJ:** Yeah, because all these words the media, the politics, and everything—they’re all trying to say, “Don’t be afraid.”

**Iztok:** But then you’re afraid.

**RJ:** Because you read between the lines.

**Iztok:** The other day I told you that the last time I was in the States I could feel it in the air. I could see it in the eyes of the people. It is exactly the same kind of social climate I had experienced in Moscow in the beginning of the 80s when this omnipresent fear was an ontological omnipresence. It was not some threat from somewhere. It was there, just burning in the air. It also got me, though I was aware that I would be escaping it soon as a foreigner; I had an airplane ticket in my pocket, a passport that allowed me to leave anytime soon. I just passed by Ljubljanka—the famous KGB central building in Moscow. There were these huge entrance doors. locked and sealed with a small window at the bottom part, screened by a small curtain. Then suddenly somebody from the inside moved the curtain away, and an officer with the army cap looked out. Nothing special he was but the event triggered such a tremendous shock of fear in me. I panicked for a moment and it took me some time to compose myself. Rationally I could not explain it to myself but there was no doubt it was a tremendous jet of fear that I felt. It washed away any sureness that nothing could happen to me that I was not a subject of the system. And then I realized that was not a

moment of terror, that was a physical experience of the regime; the terroristic texture of the regime. And the same I felt in the States too, not as brutal as in Moscow at the time, but I felt it, I could smell it, it was in the air, a kind of omnipresent darkness.

**RJ:** Even more now, I think.

**Iztok:** Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Because in the USA one is helpless in the hands of officials of any sort. An agent, a local sheriff stops you on the road and though you did nothing wrong, no speeding, no traffic offence the guy can sadistically orders you: "Get out of the car, spread your legs." You completely freeze. You're completely vulnerable and helpless in. This guy could do anything to you, he can accuse you of some invented crime, of disrespect of the officer, of an attack on him and he can even shoot you because you moved your left hand to cover your mouth because of sneezing. If this is not terror then tell me, what it is. But this guy is nothing else but the system; the exponent of the regime, an act of its workings. It is exactly the same to what has happened to these countries in the Southern Mediterranean in the last ten years. Those countries were civilized, people enjoyed quite decent lives in well settled and ordered environments with all the infrastructure and modern institutions, education, medical security and comfortable networks of supply of necessary goods. I know it I had been there. And then some idiot or better put it some war criminal from the West sent in the bombers and destroyed all that under pretence of bringing down the local dictatorship and bringing democracy and freedom. Local people have nothing to do with it and then suddenly they had everything to do with it. Their civilized world was gone into ruins. Nowadays, arm forces they don't attack other armies. They attack and kill the civilians guilty of nothing, just because of the fact that they were there. And the so called civilized world: does it condemn those attacks. Of course not, why they should condemn themselves for what the intentionally had done. So with the mighty global hegemony using mass murdering as a military strategy against all the international laws and agreements – in the same way as the sheriff in the States – established a global reign of fear—the same fear that we talked about. We're sitting here now but we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Europe provides no safe escape with all the nuclear missiles they are installing all around. Remember the WWII or even Yugoslavia. They organized the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo. And then, booom.

**Tibor:** I think it's all about, as far as the writer.. I was thinking about the experience of fear and about everything said by now on a level of an individual. Poetry is individual excrement or creation. How much do you admit truths to yourself, or how much do you dare to reveal them, first to yourself and then to others? It can act in a way of a tactical kind of open communication or more open communication in this sense, making the invisible visible. I had been experimenting with dreams for some time, writing down my own dreams in the morning, and then leaving them, trying not to meddle with them too much, or trying to polish them out as to complete them. It features the same process when you write out the subconscious excrement, associations that spring out in it as a kind of dreams, and you can figure out also the way your brains structure the memory, so it's basically like an architecture of the

re-experience of the original experience, as a simulation of this experience. It's also a decision taken in the moment of writing your dream down or an event, of how are you capable to admit it to yourself? How far do you go? Do you reveal everything that it disclosed? Do you censor yourself? How much do you allow yourself to censor yourself or even to come to a point of speculating about the future interpretations or about what other people will think of this? In this sense, you can come close to revealing your state of mind, firstly to yourself and then in consequence to others. So, this would be a minor step towards open communicating or not trying to replicate the established mechanisms or creating an oversized image of yourself, and discovering in this way a relatively clear picture or clearer picture.

**RJ:** Yeah, I wouldn't think any kind of censoring of your self would help anything. Once you start to censor yourself, I think you also start questioning yourself. We were talking before about always questioning. That's why I like the idea of the silence because it is a way of forcing yourself to question yourself, to not only confront whatever fears are out there, but also to question what solicits them. How do they affect you, and what do you do about them? How do you confront it?

**Alenka:** And what is the public enemy number one in this capitalist world? Not doing anything.

**Radharani:** You know, in connection to what he was saying about dreams and all, I think it's also a two-way of silence and emptiness, just pausing. It's also a way to cause a question mark, but it's also a way to hear more subtly information—and by all this information I usually mean anything of the sort of sensation, feeling, concrete information, all this I call information—and sometimes there's much more subtle information than in the normal form loud information.

**RJ:** A dream makes you speak the silence, in a way.

**Iztok:** Before Alenka brought up the notion of the voice—that that voice actually is silent. And everything else comes out of that voice; it's basically alert in you all the time. One refers to this silent voice all the time, whatever one writes. When one builds up your sentences, one actually mirrors them against that silent voice. That's where the silence that you talk about is in the very heart of poetic discourse. That's where the difference between censoring yourself and guiding your sentences and your words lays. You don't censor yourself when you suddenly decide for this and not that word or this and not that direction or possible direction of the language flow; you're not censoring yourself. You do just the opposite. Censoring means to block one's self; to block the flow, the fluidity and so on. Listening to this silent voice is to paddle the living vessel of the inspiration, so to say. That's how you could proceed not just after writing two sentences, but from beginning to the end and often the flow of the sentences keeps continuing in a kind of a tandem chakra thing, and it's just the opposite of censoring. The guiding silence it's of course one's own silence—that's where the masterpiece springs from, and it's not just something formal or technical.



**Muanis:** Of course, you were talking about that. I wanted to look at it in a kind of musicology. If you approach it from that perspective, then inside the musical sphere and world actually noise is considered as a kind of silence. Noise as a sound is getting more and more marginalized and silenced. Noise is kind of a silence actually.

**Iztok:** It's very difficult to produce noise, a sound that has no structure and meaning to it. That actually is an intriguing phenomenon. To use it as a metaphor, it's very difficult to be quiet, when you're writing. Because the inbuilt structures we acquire in education as being part of the world, all the time, that there are in metrics, in patterns, clichés, stereotypes, images and so on.

**Radharani:** Actually, it's quite funny—what I'm thinking of, or maybe I'm jumping ahead. In performance arts, their development started from performing on the stage being at the top and do your show, and talk, talk, talk. Then with time, performance art appreciated more to simply exposed your total fragility on stage and let the public see your fragility which brings us back to discussion of fear. But the way society has been developing, it requires more and more of hiding your own fragility. If you don't feel good, you better stay at home. You don't want people to see you, and then you come back to see people only when you feel fine again and you sort of present and represent your act, and there's a show. Then you go home but when you're fragile, you stay away and hide somewhere. It's almost like the stage has been turned around like a sleeve having started from theater to address society but then it happened the other way around. I think with the rise of this individual platform, a way of helping ourselves would be just to be like the contemporary performative art. Can we be fragile with each other, totally visible? Can we allow ourselves to be scared, vulnerable, just as we are, clumsy, or stupid?

**Iztok:** But then we can go even a step further. Why not to be not fragile if you're not fragile, because that's the power of poetry. That's the power I get with poetry. When I was writing something, I never thought much about how this would be accepted and I really dared to do and say things, to explore things, to express them in as far I could go. But then I finished, looked at what I had written and I said, "Oh, this is probably too much maybe I went too far."

**Muanis:** Don't give a shit.

**Iztok:** Not so much. Lately, I recognize that going too far is maybe what I want because that's when I step across the line.

**Radharani:** That's not power. That's fragility.

**Iztok:** Yes, I agree. That's why I am mentioning it as a kind of fragility—yes, I agree. But at the same time, this fragility is nothing that I would feel like being vulnerable in front of the world.

**Alenka:** It's strange.

**Iztok:** Yeah, it's strange. You said it

**Radharani:** Then maybe fragility is not power, but is powerful.

**Iztok:** Okay.

**RJ:** That's a nice distinction.

**Iztok:** When I am walking down the street I am completely anonymous. I'm just another guy, but I am doing it with this incredible good feeling in me, with a kind of inner strength that I preserved. Then I meet an important poet who is established, who just published thirty-five books all over the world, who got all the fellowships, and who is supposed to be an authority. I look at him and say, "Who is this guy? What is he telling me?" But here on the street this doesn't mean anything because we are back to what you said in the beginning—we are individuals, not poets. And even when one writes that is the platform one must preserve in one's writing. One is just another individual. The circles, establishments, the closed resorts of academia and privilege positions feature completely different stages. Those are exactly the ground where you fight your literary battles. To preserve one's anonymity. That's the strength, the powerful that you feel, the fragility that you can openly manage. Not because you show up or because you want to prove yourself or anything, but that's the condition, the anonymous condition of anonymous guy.

**Alenka:** And it is joy, too.

**Iztok:** Yeah, sparkling, whatever you call it. But that's where it is. You forget that you exist, that you should sort of establish yourself as equal among equals or better among equals and to be thankful to included to the bottom of the list of the superior minds and monstrous geniuses.

**RJ:** So many, in America at least, people worry about they're being a poet or a novelist, and they define themselves that way.

**Iztok:** The whole machinery works like that.

**RJ:** Of course, but I think with this idea of vulnerability—going that step beyond to make yourself vulnerable, fragile, whatever it is—it's not just that it gives you power but it also gives you a way of being able to speak into other people and to be heard, too. Because you're not saying I'm up here the poet or the shaman or whatever. You're here, and it's one on one.

**Alenka:** That is the point of poetry.

**RJ:** And, I'm talking to you and I'm talking to you.

**Iztok:** And that's political.

**RJ:** Yeah, but at least in America, so many poets don't believe that.

**Radharani:** However, by my opinion, even if you say I'm up here and I'm a shaman, I think it's important to say I'm up here and I am a shaman and even up here I'm still very fragile.

**Muanis:** Even if am, I'm still nobody.

**RJ:** Or you think I'm up here, but I'm fragile.

**Muanis:** Yeah, but then you could say also I'm here, I'm a shaman, but this is not so important. But I think it is hard to do it. It is easy to get into that feeling in the moment you are writing, but when you come out of this moment and you step in to the literary machine, it is a whole different story.

**Iztok:** That's what I meant before.

**Radharani:** That's what I meant at the beginning. It's not about writing; it's about maintaining and using the poetic sensitivity in any action, in any situation.

**Muanis:** I think we have to be brutal actually.

**Radharani:** In a way, it's brutal, yes.

**Iztok:** Buddhists have a saying that it's not difficult to get on a donkey, it's difficult to get off.

**RJ:** It is. Literally it is. But say more about being brutal.

**Muanis:** It was kind of a joke, but I think a very similar concept to that of the silence we were talking about, but in a way opposite, is the concept of being brutal, or saying things which must not be said, which is today like—

**Iztok:** Things which shouldn't be said.

**Muanis:** Which shouldn't be said. Which is today harder than ever because we have crossed many, many lines. You have to decent into the sphere of bad tastes, and incorrectness, which is harder than ever. I think there are a few of the American contemporary rappers have a way to do this. For example, this whole genre of rap of bad taste, and it can be found also in the circles of people who love popular music—former punk rockers and so on. This genre is so narcissistic that it is actually over-identified...

or how would you name it? What is this concept called in English? Over-identification. It's so over-identified with this idea of the image, of how should the black rapper look and behave, that it subverts it in a way. Also, there are the myths, ideal self-images of poets, maybe this image is different in each country, but one could also try to be over-identified with. What is also interesting about rap is that these guys always call themselves crazy, no matter when they rap about politics, about sex, or anything else; they consider and declare themselves crazy. I think this is maybe a way to be fragile—to act like you're crazy, like you are actually crazy. Poetry is the kind of craziness I think. It can be a craziness of a mute person or craziness coming from someone who is too loud, who is noisy who is annoying, and so on. It is kind of the same thing. Both ways go in the same direction, I think.

**Iztok:** I saw that movie about Eminem. It was exactly about this. Everybody appreciated him from the very beginning, but at the end he had to win the battle with himself. And that's that craziness. You have to be able to let the craziness happen and go.

**Muanis:** Craziness can be referred to this Italian notion of the autonomist, like contemporary, free zone, you know? Not contemporary—temporary.

**RJ:** We might end on that.

**Muanis:** You're never ever going to survive, if you don't get at least a little crazy. (sings)

**Iztok:** But still, this craziness has to be controlled. Probably by the craziness itself.