

VERSOPOLIS TWO

Stone age

*Akmens amžius*

Aivaras Veiknys

Translated from the Lithuanian by Rimas Uzgis

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VERSOPOLIS

*is a unique, Europe-wide platform.*

*It gives emerging European poets  
the chance to reach an audience beyond  
the boundaries of the language they write in  
by translating and publishing their poems  
and inviting them to perform at festivals.*

*Experiences from childhood and adolescence are important for me. I had lessons then and they influenced me so much. All my lessons were learned in my life. There are authors who are important to me but life still is the main context for my creative works. To live for writing is more important for me than to write for living.*

Aivaras Veiknys (born 1983 in Elektrėnai) is a poet and journalist. After studying Real Estate Management at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, he worked as a journalist on the Lithuanian daily newspaper *Respublika* and reported from Afghanistan.

Aivaras started to write poetry at school. His poems first appeared in a students' book, *Gyvenimo labirintais* (*Labyrinths of life*). His first book, *R aktai*, was published in 2007. (The title is a word game: *Raktai* means keys and *aktai* means acts. When asked why *Raktai* he explained that poems are acts of writing: 'A poem is a very intimate communication with world. Sometimes it's pleasant, sometimes it hurts.') This was not the *début* a poet might dream about. Aivaras himself was upset about it, saying that the poems were not good enough. 'I felt like a lyrical subject from Hermann Hesse's novel *Unterm Rad* (*Beneath the Wheel*) – everything was so obscure around me.' Nevertheless he didn't stop writing and offering his poems for different festivals and the Cultural Press.

He participated in 'Readings of young poets' and received awards as a young emerging poet in the Lithuanian Poetry Festival 'Poetry Spring' in both 2008 and 2010.

The Cultural Press started publishing his poetry from 2008, and literary critics responded very positively. 2008 can be considered as a turning point as Aivaras started to participate in main readings in various festivals. This is how he started to prepare for his second book.

This book, *Paukštuko liudijimai* (*Testimonies by little bird*), was published in 2014 after he worked on it for several years. It was not surprising that it was awarded the prestigious 'Young Yotvingian prize' in the Druskininkai Poetic Fall Festival as the best young poet's book of the year. The Commission appointed by the board of the public organization *Druskininkai Poetic Fall* reads all the new books and then judges the Yotvingian and the Young Yotvingian prizes for the best books of the year. These Yotvingian prizes are among the most important prizes for Lithuanian poets as an

evaluation of their work. And the Young Yotvingian prize places an obligation on a poet: we expect more in the future.

The book *Testimonies by little bird* was edited by one of the best known Lithuanian poets, Aidas Marčėnas. He wrote about Aivaras: 'He is a poet. He is clinging to life with his poems. Language is doing its job in his poetry and this means that we are talking about a real poet.' Not many poets hear words like that, so this means a great deal. This was a main reason for the award of the Young Yotvingian prize to Aivaras.

The launch of his new book was not held until after this important award, so many poetry readers then knew about Aivaras and the launch was crowded. Aivaras is the perfect performer of poetry for the Lithuanian audience. He speaks clearly and knows how to talk to his audience. Social themes in his poetry are important as they are in all contemporary Lithuanian poetry. Young poets are active socially, they are brave and confident, they meet their readers in libraries and schools, and this is why they succeed.

Aivaras is a coorganizer of the festival 'Literatūrinės Vilniaus slinkty's' (Literary slide of Vilnius) and he is a compiler of three festival anthologies (2011-2013). It is important to explain that this festival is a new phenomenon for Lithuanian poetry and especially for young poets. We have two big international poetry festivals – Poetry Spring and Druskininkai Poetic Fall. This new festival launches new young poets and it can be as important as those other festivals for Lithuanian poetry readers.

## Berniukai žaidžia karą

Atvažiavo vandentiekio remontuoti,  
atvilko įvairiausios technikos,  
kelias dienas nesiliovė –  
išrausė tranšėją per visą kiemą,  
didžiausi kalnai abipus.

Dabar tai jokių sušiktų šautuvėlių,  
jokių *griūk negyvas*,  
dabar tai jau – iš tikrųjų:

tupim skirtingose fronto pusėse –  
žemių pilnom kišenėm,  
molio pilnom širdim –  
svaidom grumstus ir akmenis, svaidom  
grumstus ir akmenis.

Sutemus –  
jau visiškai sutemus –  
išlenda motina pro virtuvės langą –  
dairos girta, nemato,  
pradedą žviegti kaip kiaulė:

– *Suuukos, namooooo, pasakiau!!!*

Bet kur tau namai, jei fronte pats įkarštis –  
švilpia grumstai ir akmenys, švilpia  
grumstai ir akmenys,  
žiežirbos pilasi iš ausų.

Galiausiai  
liekam tik brolis ir aš:  
guzas mano kaktoj,  
ašara jo akyje,  
juodas virtuvės langas  
moja užuolaidom pasitikdamas.

## Boys playing war

They came to fix the sewer pipe:  
with all kinds of machines,  
working for days –  
they dug a trench through the yard,  
with giant mountains on either side.

No more shitty guns for us,  
no more ‘bang, bang, you’re dead’ –  
now it’s for real.

We crouch on separate sides of the front –  
our pockets full of earth,  
our hearts full of clay.  
We throw clods and stones, heaving  
clods and stones.

When it gets dark –  
completely dark –  
mother leans from the kitchen window,  
looks around, drunk, not seeing,  
and starts to howl like a pig:

– *Biiiiitches, come hooome, now!!!*

But what is home when the front is boiling over?  
Clods and stones whistle by, clods  
and stones flying, sparks  
shoot out from our ears.

Finally,  
there is just my brother and I,  
a bump on my forehead,  
a tear in his eye,  
the black kitchen window  
waves its curtains at our return.

O vidury nakties –  
vidury giliausios nakties –  
motina, staigiai pašokusi, mūsų tipena  
žiūrėti: gulim tokie vienodi,  
tokie vienodi vienodi,  
kad vos beatskirsi, kuris labiau nebegyvas.



## Dūmai

Šiame eilėraštyje reikalingi dūmai –  
tai joks daiktavardis, greičiau –  
liepiamoji nuosaka,  
kurios paragintas imu veikti:  
mosuoti rankomis,  
draskyti suplėkusias metų užuolaidas,  
galiausiai – matyti vaizdus,  
kuriuos jau tariausi  
pamiršęs.

Dūmai neturi kūno, aiškios  
konstantos – jie plazda tarytum  
naktiniai drugiai, pinas tarpusavy, maišosi  
su tabako dūmais;

iš nuosakos tampa būdvardžiu,  
kuris sufleruoja vaikystės  
akimirkas.

Dūmai –  
toks didelis laukas prie meldų  
šukuojamo ežero;  
tenai mus atveždavo  
kasti bulvių: žmonės veidais sukaitusiais –  
gyvos jų kapinės irias lėtai kaupertukais . . .



At midnight –  
in the deepest heart of the night –  
mother suddenly rises, and tiptoes  
into our room: we lie – so similar,  
so similar, we are so similar  
that you could barely tell which one of us was more dead.



## Smoke

This poem needs smoke –  
not some kind of noun, but  
the imperative mood,  
at whose command I begin to act:  
waving my arms,  
tearing the curtains, musty with years,  
and finally – seeing visions  
which were supposed to be  
forgotten.

Smoke has no body, no definite  
state – it flutters like  
night moths, winding upon itself, mixing  
with tobacco smoke;

the mood becomes adjectival,  
prompting flashes  
from childhood.

Smoke –  
a huge field, rushes  
on the edge comb a lake;  
they used to take us there  
to dig potatoes: flushed faces in heat –  
live graves slowly rowing with hoes . . .

Dūmai –  
tai vėjas nuo ežero.  
Dūmai –  
tai varnos nuo ežero siūsto vėjo . . .

Paskui jau – kumelė liūdnom akim,  
pilnas maišų vežimas . . .

Mums duodavo tiek,  
kad visad paskui pritrūkdavo . . .

Dūmai  
šitam eilėrašty  
reikalingi,  
kad visko neprisiminčiau.



## Stebuklų metas

Grandinėms žvangant baigsis lapkritys,  
pietų kryptim tirštai raitysis dūmai,  
žiupsnelis druskos, purvas, nešvarumai –  
per naktį viską, žvelk, ir užpustys

pirmasis sniegas; einant prakurų  
girgždės pasaulis, kiaulės melsis tvarte –  
išvengta durklo širdyje, tad šerti  
dabar tau teks jas; ties langais būriu

ganysis vištos, kudakuos, stos gruodis –  
danguj akis Veneros pasirodys,  
tai akiai stebint miegančius vaikus,

eglyno vidurius praretins pjūklas,  
ir banalus, tačiau vis tiek stebuklas –  
tave romėnams nebylys įskųs.

Smoke –  
wind from the lake.  
Smoke –  
crows from the lake-sent wind . . .

Then – a mare with sad eyes,  
a wagon piled with sacks . . .

We were given enough  
to always have a lack . . .

Smoke  
this poem  
needs smoke  
so that I don't remember it all.



## The time of miracles

November ends with the clanging of chains,  
and smoke now snakes toward the south,  
a pinch of salt, dirt, defilement – vouch  
for pain through the night. The last rains

turn to snow as you crawl out for kindling  
into a crunching world. The pigs say amen –  
you parried the heart-spike – feed them in their pen.  
A brood of chickens flocks – cluck, clucking

by the windows. Slowly, December stirs  
as Venus opens her eyes like an omen,  
watching over children as they sleep.

Banality reigns: now, only a saw sounds deep  
in a forest of fir, yet one more miracle will occur –  
a mute man will denounce you to the Romans.

## Atskrido

Vieną rugpjūčio vakarą –  
tartum iš niekur –

kirto snapu  
į balkono stiklą –

siuto –

siuntė linkėjimus iš  
Anapus —

– prietarai, pliurpalai,  
nesąmonės; sausis

plonom adatėlėm beldžias  
į paširdžius, motina  
guli ligoninėj –  
pusės netekusi kūno,  
žodžiais, viduj iškapotais —

mama, sakau, tu tik  
laikykis; pats  
jau virstu į bedugnę,  
gniaužiu jos užmuštą ranką.

## It flew up

One August evening –  
as if from nowhere –

it smashed its beak  
on the balcony glass –

seethed –

sent greetings from  
the other side —

– superstitions, babble,  
folly; January

knocks on heart-space  
with thin needles, mother  
lies in the hospital –  
half her body lost,  
words pecked out, inside —

mom, I said, you just  
hang in there; while I myself  
teeter over the abyss,  
clutching her dead hand.

## Vandžiogala (Miestelis Kauno rajone)

Kapinės, kuklios lenkų kapinaitės,  
kuriose – su visais kitais – amžino atilsio  
atgulė Č. Milošo seneliai;

vidudienio saulėje besimurkdantis darželis,  
nedidelis vaikų darželis: mergaitės, berniukai; aš –

žmonos atbogintas uošvion, lėtai vaikštinėjantis  
siauru takeliu, svetimas, varstomas

miestelio gyvųjų bei mirusiųjų,  
vienas nuo kito atsiribojusių keliomis dešimtimis  
nebegyventų metų, krūmokšniais,

vienintele juos jungiančia tvora.

Vandžiogala  
(A village near Kaunas)

Graves, a modest Polish graveyard,  
where – with everyone else – rest in peace,  
Milosz's grandparents were laid;

a garden purring in noonday sun,  
a small children's garden: girls, boys; I –

hauled by my wife to the in-laws, slowly  
walking the narrow path, a stranger, opened

and shut by the living and dead, locals  
distanced from each other by decades  
of unlived life, shrubbery,

a fence, their only connection.

## Pakelti

Pusė kiemo draugų lankė *kačialką*,  
todėl ir aš vieną dieną nusprendžiau žūtbut  
pasekti jų pavyzdžiu.

Toje *kačialkoje* buvo daug veidrodžių –  
ir pirmasis sunkumas, kurį teko pakelti –  
mano paties atspindys juose.

*Kačialinaus* mėnesį, bet vaizdas  
nė kiek nesikeitė.

Kai jau atrodė, kad bergždžias šis reikalas,  
kad kam taip save kankinti, jei nieko iš to nebus –  
mirė senelis.

Jį pašarvojo centrinėje miesto šarvojimo salėje –  
tiesiai virš mūsų *kačialkos*.

Užlipau laiptais aukštyn; nulipau  
laiptais žemyn; pažvelgiau į save veidrody –  
ir Arnoldas Schwarzeneggeris pažvelgė iš to veidrodžio  
į mane –

ir nieko nebuvo, ko negalėčiau pakelti.

Ir nieko nebus.



## Lifting

Half my friends from the yard were going to the gym,  
so I decided one day, enough was enough:  
I would go too.

The gym sported so many mirrors  
that the first weight I had to bear  
was my own reflection in the glass.

I did that neighborhood gym for a month,  
but my image didn't change.

When it began to seem like all this was in vain –  
why burden myself if there is no gain? –  
my grandfather died.

The wake was in the central funeral home –  
just above our gym.

I went up the stairs; I went  
down the stairs; I saw myself in the mirror –  
Arnold Schwarzenegger looked back  
at me –

and there was nothing, anymore, I couldn't lift.

And there will be nothing.

## Kito gyvenimo

Ilgų distancijų mokykloj nemėgau labiausiai –  
šaudavau staigiai į priekį, lėkdavau, kiek kojos  
neša, po rato imdavau dusti,

nervingai dairytis per petį, žiūrėti –  
kiek atitrūkau, ar niekas manęs neatsiveja; būti  
pirmam man reiškė viską visiems įrodyti.

Bet sykį, būdamas dešimtoj ar vienuoliktoj,  
kritau kaip negyvas į drėgną stadiono žolę ir išgulėjau,  
kol aplenkė mane visi, netgi mergaitės.

Paskui atsirado mergaitė, kuriai  
nerekėjo nieko įrodinėti –  
gulėjome dviese toje žolėje,  
ir tiek —

— tos mergaitės teliko — dabar,  
kai ilgos visos distancijos,

bandau jas žodžiais įveikti, nes viskas,  
kas man nutiko, seniausiai pavirto žodžiais, žodžiai  
privalo išeiti iš manęs –

dabar man reikia žodžių kitų –

kad vėl gyventi pradėčiau –  
dabar man reikia  
kito gyvenimo.

## Another life

In my school days, I hated long-distance running –  
shooting suddenly in front, I'd fly as fast  
as my legs could carry, panting after a lap –

I would nervously look over my shoulder:  
how far ahead? are they gaining on me? to be  
first meant to prove everything to everybody.

But one time, running tenth or eleventh,  
I fell like a corpse into the damp stadium grass  
and lay there until they passed me, even the girls,

except for one, who didn't need  
to prove anything –  
we lay there together in the grass,  
and that was all —

— that girl remains — now,  
when all the distances are long,

and I try to overcome them with words  
because everything that happened to me  
has turned into words, words, that have to come out –

but I need different words now –

to begin to live again –  
now  
I need another life.

## Lova

Dejuojanti nuo menkausio judesio –  
sena ir kieta –  
jau 13 metų gedinti lova –

joje užsibaigė mano močiutė –

buvo vidudienis, spigino kovo  
saulė; kitam kambary,  
numuiline chemijos pamoką,  
mes rūkėm *Red White'ą*  
už litą septymdevynis  
ir lošėm  
į skolą kortomis.

Akies krašteliu,  
pro durų nedidelį tarpą,  
stebėjau, kaip juda močiutės  
pilvas:

it *Boeing'as*,  
pilnas girtų keleivių,  
jis kilo ir leidosi,  
kilo ir leidos,

kol sudegė visas kuras.

Mes išnešėm ją,  
suvyniotą į baltą antklodę, ir –  
*vienas, du, tryys!* –  
įmetėm į furgoną; minutę

pamindžikavę,  
sugrįžome tėt lošimo,  
į skolą.

## Bed

Complaining of the slightest movement –  
old, hard –  
falling apart for thirteen years –

my grandmother died in it –

it was noon, under the glare  
of the March sun; in the other room,  
blowing off chemistry class,  
we smoked Red Whites  
for a litas seventy-nine  
and played cards  
for credit.

Through a small gap in the door,  
out of the corner of my eye,  
I watched the movement  
of my grandmother's stomach:

like a Boeing  
full of drunken travelers,  
it rose and fell,  
rose and fell,

until she burned up all her fuel.

We carried her out,  
wrapped in a white quilt, and –  
*one, two, threeee!* –  
we tossed her into the van; for a minute

we shuffled our feet,  
then returned to continue the game  
in debt.

## Akmens amžius

akmenys lygiai kaip žmonės – mėgo sakyti –  
kiekvienas su savo slaptu gyvenimu,  
kieta tartum žemė atmintimi . . .  
pamenu,

tvirtos ir dailios gaudavos tvoros –  
vertos visų tų premijų, kurias dalimis  
prašvilpdavo . . .

mano tėvas buvo galingas tvėrėjas,  
daug galingesnis už tuos, su kuriais mane  
lygina neišmanėliai kritikai –

sunkus nei jo akmenys,  
gal net sunkesnis už visą priekabą, pririnktą  
per akmenkašį kur nors ties Biržais . . .

du visada nešiodavos kelių kišenėse –  
pajuodusius ir sudiržusius, kumščio didumo,  
neduok tu švenčiausias, jei išsitraukdavo . . .

mano jau nesantis tėvas vis dar yra kertinis  
šiurkščiam akmenų pasaulyje –  
šitiek sutvėręs per savo gyvenimą,

šitiek per jį sugriovęs.

## Stone age

stones are just like people – as they,  
who had a secret life, liked to say –  
hard like the ground of remembrance . . .  
I remember

how walls would turn out strong and smooth –  
worthy of all the prizes which we  
would mostly squander . . .

my father was a mighty maker,  
far mightier than those compared to me  
by ignorant critics –

heavier than his stones,  
maybe heavier than his trailer, filled  
with stones that he gathered near Biržai . . .

he always carried two in the pockets of his pants –  
the size of fists, blackened and callous,  
you could say your prayers if he pulled them out . . .

my father, who is not, is still my cornerstone  
in this harsh stone world –  
having built so much in his life,

having demolished so much.

