

VERSOPOLIS FOUR

Cities of lights and dogs

Mestá svetiel a psov

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Translated from the Slovak by Marián Andričík

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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.*

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‘In many of my texts I deliberately use the cinematographic way of associating or juxtaposing images. I work with pictures conceived as “shots”, with framing, general views, close ups and so on. In my first book, there’s residual presence of the film theory, and plenty of other traces of my specialized readings. In the second book, these references are less numerous. But the scriptwriter’s method is still there.

‘Frontiers of the body are limits of immediate perception. Imagination and reflection go further, of course, but the body represents to me the primary perception, the real, if you want. But the body can be also victim of phantom pains, the psychosomatic diseases; it can be subject to the mind’s horsing around. This is what interests me even more. The body is, literally, the physical presence of the subject which means the object is the subject and vice versa.

‘But there is another problem related to the body in the poetry. The body is often apprehended as one of the elements of “female poetry”. It’s kind of stereotype I don’t like at all. My second book is about

motherhood. Obviously I couldn't erase or avoid the body in this book, that's why I tried to use it differently to disturb the stereotypical representation of what is usually read as a typically female theme.

'My own writing – as far as I am conscious of what influences me – draws from several poetic contexts at the same time. Two of the most important are defined by the paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s: the group of French “Textualists” gathered together by the revue *TelQuel* and the Slovak “Lonely runners” (Ivan Laučík, Ivan Štrpka and Peter Repka) as well as the Slovak “Concretists”. French Textualists seem to accord an ontological autonomy to the sign and the Slovak poets I mentioned present a very concrete visual, yet intellectualist imagery. Both deal, each in a very different way, with the notion of freedom in / through the poetry and write in free verse. But my first book which is widely influenced by these groups of poets is actually more knowledgeable than spontaneous. No freedom, just circumspection.

And the second book, concerning its typographical form, is not experimental at all. So I am afraid for me the question of freedom is quite simple. No matter the type of verse, the poetry gives me the freedom to code the message I need to pass on. I write poems very rarely and admit it is a kind of therapy for me. Before 1989, the coded poetic messages probably served a different purpose as well, but for me the poetic code is now exclusively personal.'

[The quotations are adapted from S J Fowler's interview with Mária Ridzoňová Ferencuhová, published online as *maintenant#9* in his 3:AM MAGAZINE: <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/maintenant-9maria-ridzonova-ferencuhova/>]

[SKRYTÉ TITULKY]

v meste psov

I/

kryštály vyrástli prirýchlo: rozdrviť zubami,
poškrabať krk. tenkými prstami po plátne
nezvučne obkresliť zákruty.

tunajšia voda pri ceste: snáď podľa starého
tajného receptu procesom očisty zachovať kal.
pach – vôľa pretrvať, pach syra a rýb.

a drobné škvrnky na povrchu: nič iné, než ešte
včera lahodná potrava psov.

II/

aj myši sú rýchle:

v podzemí. vo farbách. pod sedadlom. hľadajú
jesť. pomedzi dva vlaky.

načisto ohluchli: riadia sa – ako ty – chvením
kolies a nôh.

III/

posledné škrupiny. predošlých dní. (procesom
očisty zachovať kal.) v stmavnutom zrkadle
ďalšia z tvojich tvári.

zakaždým patriaca k rase, čo zakliali.

IV/

ľutuješ pomalých, všetkých, čo zastali, ukázali
dlaň a nahé predlaktie, všetkých tých, ktorým
vyklzla súkromná koža z rukáva priveľmi na oči.

a ak sa náhodný úsmev zastaví na tebe, zostane
náhodný.

to, čo nosíš pod vlasmi,

aj tu najčastejšie oslovujú niektorým z bežných
krstných mien.

[from HIDDEN SUBTITLES]

in the city of dogs

I/

the crystals have grown too fast: to crush between
one's teeth, to scratch the neck. to copy the curves
on canvas silently with slender fingers.

the water here by the roadside: perhaps to preserve
sludge by the process of sewage disposal, according
to an old secret formula. the smell — the will to
survive, the smell of cheese and fish.

and small stains on the surface: none other than
yesterday's delicious dogfood.

II/

mice are fast, too:

underground. in colours. under the seat. they seek
food. in between two trains.

they went completely deaf: guided — like you — by
the trembling of wheels and legs.

III/

the last shells. of previous days. (to preserve sludge
by the process of sewage disposal). another of your
faces in the darkened mirror.

each time belonging to a race that is enchanted.

IV/

you feel sorry for the slow ones, for all those who
stopped to show their palm and bare forearm, all
those who let their private skin slip out from the
sleeve exposed to full view.

and if a casual smile stops on you, it will remain
casual.

what you wear under your hair here too is mostly
called by one of the common first names.

skryté titulky

nepovedala som to, čo som čakala: to kvôli čomu som zdvihla slúchadlo. len som sa smiala: medzi studeným prstom a ešte jedným – medzi palcom a ukazovákom – som krútila sklenenú stopku pohára. pozerala na svoje nohy ponorené do vody. zelený odlesk: predimenzovaný pohyb: uterák. izba. lampa. tma.

v dvoch krajinách žijú mlčiaca a kričiaca skutočnosť: pravý a ľavý profil banálnosti: a medzi nimi tvár čo nepatrí nikomu.

píšu sa listy a emaily bez perlete. púšťa sa striedavo potichu a nahlas rádio. vypínam telefón. šumenie neustáva: v dome oproti sa rozsvecujú stále nové okná.



a/ tým istým perom, tou istou modrou farbou: dokonca aj písmo spoznávam. pomalosť stroja, v predsunutí nohy, v spáde priehlavku, v kvalite mlčania. zvuk opatrne otočenej strany: papier zachytený o okraj rukáva.

b/ nemôžem donekonečna skúmať cudzie balkóny, porovnávať modrú so šedou a každý nový spánok utraťiť v prospech znepokojeného pátrania po tom, či už zmizlo aj vzdialené úpätie kopca. či som čoraz hlbšie vo vnútri.

c/ vložiť do obálky, predtým podpísať. topánku očistiť najskôr o obrubník a potom o trávku. skontrolovať menovku na dverách, zamknúť za sebou. poprípade znova vyvetrať.



in the city of dogs

I didn't say what I expected to: what I'd lifted the receiver for. I just laughed. between one cold finger and the next — between thumb and index — I twisted the glass stem. looked at my feet dipped into water. a green reflection: an excessive movement: towel. room. lamp. darkness.

in two countries live a silent and a screaming reality: right and left profiles of banality: and between them a face that belongs to no one.

emails and letters are written without flourish. the radio is switched on, by turns silently and loud. I disconnect the phone. the noise does not subside: more and more windows light up in the house opposite.



a/ with the same pen, with the same blue colour: I even recognise the writing. the slowness of the typewriter, in extending the leg, in the slope of the instep, in the quality of silence. the sound of a carefully turned page: paper snagged on the edge of the sleeve.

b/ I can't explore other people's balconies endlessly. to compare blue with grey and to squander each new sleep in a disquieting investigation, wanting to know if the distant foot of the hill has vanished too. if I am deeper and deeper within.

c/ to put in the envelope, after signing. to clean the shoe first on the kerb, then on the lawn. to check the nameplate on the door. to lock it. possibly to air the room again.



ak ti povedia: tragicky odcestovala,
predstaviš si prinajmenšom dutú explóziu,
rozhádzané neživé časti nábytku zašpinené
chodníky,
alebo aspoň kusy zvetranej kartónovej
krabice vodou nalepené na sklo,
ak ti povedia: ako prvé sa prestali pozerat'
ryby, nevieš čo si máš predstaviť,

netušia, čo ti majú povedať,
netušia, aký to neskôr môže na teba mať
vplyv



m.z.

tras mnou. prejdi ma.
po kôre po svetle. prevráť ma na brucho.
stále za chôdze. vlož ma medzi dve strany.
zaši. zapi ma vodou. zútulni. skolmi.
predpriprav. preskoč v odraze.
rozprávaj o mne hocikomu. rozožeň. poštví
na mňa slová. umlč ma. stíš ma. nakresli ma
v čakárni. zúroč naučené:

reč vyklízne spomedzi nás oboch. teba
vlepujem: ... sledovať lineárny príbeh
prežitého najskôr tam, kde trpne podlieha:
krajina po kataklizme, sopka ...

if they tell you: she left tragically,
you picture at least a dull explosion, scattered
inanimate parts of furniture, smudged pavements,
or at least shreds of a weathered cardboard box
stuck on the windscreen,
if they tell you: fish were the first to stop looking,
you don't know what to imagine,

they have no idea what to tell you,
they have no idea what effect it can have on you
later



m. z.

shake me. pass through me.
on the bark, on the light. turn me over on my
stomach. still walking. insert me between two
sides. sew me up. drink me down with water. make
me cosy. vertical. pre-prepare. jump over in the
reflection.
tell anyone about me. disperse. set words on me,
silence me. soothe me. draw me in the waiting
room. make good use of what you've learned:

speech slips out from behind both of us. I am
pasting you in. ... to follow the linear story of the
lived first at the place where it passively succumbs:
country after cataclysm, volcano . . .

v literárnej čajovni

1/ v literárnej čajovni, kde sa tesne nad podlahou hromadí chlad: ťažoba.

nad pohármi a vedľa bzučivých hlasov gymnaziálnych pedagógov na dôchodku: nemožnosť pohnúť plecami.

čítam, ako sa patrí: čítam.

už vieš, že vo väčších mestách vniká reč do držania tela a chtiac-nechtiac implikuje samostatnosť.

2/ presné rozmery úzkosti: ako sa nebáť určenia vlastného času? isté ženy na fotografiách z mladosti, taká ingeborg bachmann, nedokážu pôsobiť ako cudzie: ako neznáme.

už bez vône si uvedomíš ďalšiu stratu: komu si včera potme tísna nos na rameno, tiež už uplynul. dobre aj tak: z minulého sa pohyb tráti a tlak na pokožku by bol len zbytočne bolestivý.

3/ no je ti aj slabo: čo všetko za teba ešte nebolo! priznávaš tým stvrdnuté kolená a ochabnutý úsmev, horkú chuť kávy, ktorej pach ulpie na podnebí.

zostávame sedieť. ešte je potrebné prediskutovať, prečo sa niekde stropu ústnej dutiny hovorí podnebie a inde zase palác. a tiež pomenovať únavu z vlečúceho sa dňa, zo spomalených gest, zo znehybňovaného chrbta. nakoniec sa zhodneme, že postačí akékoľvek krátke psie meno.

in a literary tearoom

1/ in a literary tearoom where coldness gathers close above the floor: oppression.

over the glasses and next to the humming voices of retired grammar school teachers: it's impossible to move one's shoulders.

I read the proper way: I read.

you already know that in big cities speech permeates the posture and willy-nilly implies independence.

2/ exact dimensions of anxiety: how not to be scared of the determination of one's time? certain women in photos of their youth, ingeborg bachmann, say, cannot look foreign: unknown.

with no more smell, you'll apprehend another loss: the one whose shoulder yesterday you pressed your nose to in the dark, he too has passed away. Even so, it's all right: movement disappears from the past and the pressure on your skin would be uselessly painful.

3/ but you also feel faint: is there anything you haven't been through! thus you admit to calloused knees and a feeble smile, a bitter taste of coffee; the smell of it clings to your palate.

we remain sitting. it's still necessary to discuss why somewhere the top of the oral cavity is called a roof and elsewhere a palate. and also to name the fatigue of the dragging day, of slowed gestures, of a stiff back. finally we agree that any short dog-name will do.

le dépays
(1982 – 2002)

ch.m.

vravíš, že tykanie nemá iný význam, než naznačiť
prípasť medzi tým, ktorý cestoval a tým, čo teraz
píše.

trúfam si na základe spriaznenosti s tou, čo práve
v diaľke číta: s tebou.

vravíš, že tam, kde je ten, komu tykáš, je čas
riekou, čo tečie iba v noci.

cudzie slová sú teraz tu a sú tvoje: vraj šíp nemá
o nič jasnejší cieľ ako život: podstatnou je len
zdvorilosť prejavená luku.

I/

pokrútený konár je stromom prijímaný presne
tak ako ten rovný. aspoň napohľad. zratúvaš listy,
hľadáš hmyz.

prázdne hniezdo je však v tráve a viniť vietor
zase zbytočné.

II/

opieraš sa o pohľad, o hnedú, psiu, spomenieš si
na arnolda, ktorý skočil kvôli srne pod auto.

o barovú stoličku sa oprieť nedá, dokonca aj
stena sa ti vyhne. spomenieš si na srnu, ktorá
pre ponárajúci sa ostrov skočila do rozvodnenej
rieky.

viniť rieku je tiež zbytočné.

≈

le dépayés
(1982 – 2002)

ch. m.

you say that being on first name terms has no other meaning than to indicate the gap between one who has travelled and the one who is writing now.

I am presuming on a basis of affinity with the one who is just now reading in the distance: with you.

you say that where the person is with whom you are on first name terms, time is a river that runs only at night.

foreign words are here now and they are yours: an arrow, it's said, has no clearer aim than life: what matters is the politeness shown to the bow.

I/

a twisted bough is accepted by the tree just like a straight one. at least at first sight. you count the leaves, look for insects.

the empty nest is in the grass, though, and it is pointless to blame the wind.

II/

you rest your eyes on brown, a dog's colour, you remember arnold who jumped under a car because of a doe.

you can't lean against a bar stool, even the wall avoids you. you recall the doe that jumped into the flooded river because the island was sinking.

to blame the river is pointless too.

≈

ešte skôr, ako si trúfneš písať, prekrútiš sled nádychov: poprieš existenciu udalosti: rozpustíš jej hranice, lebo reč si vytvorí vlastné: vnúti aj nádychy, aj pevnosť hlasu.

stačilo by krehké:

okno, liate sklo, do ktorého za horúca postupne pridávaš látky s inou teplotou topenia.

stačilo by zoradiť všetky prvé slabiky do reťazca.

potom zaň prevziať zodpovednosť. tíšiť ho: že po prvom páde sa stanú jeho črepy nerozbitnými.



línie začali pričasto vybiehať z rámov, údajne im už doterajšie vymedzenie nestačí. farby sa usádzajú na ľubovoľných plochách. dovoľia si zasahovať do slov. rámy sa preto sťahujú do nových oblastí. to jediné, čo si ešte udržiava platnosť, sa vraj nespája ani s rečou, ani so zmyslami.

vektor: nosič: jasný smer. ťažké vozidlo, čo sa pokojne zabára do rozbahnenej zeme.



before you dare to write, you distort the sequence
of breaths: you deny the existence of the event: you
dissolve its boundaries, because speech will create
its own: impose breaths and firmness of the voice.
what would do is a fragile:
window, moulded glass to which you gradually add
substances with different melting points.
what would do is to line up all first syllables into a
chain.
then to take over responsibility. to soothe it:
that after the first fall, its shards will become
unbreakable.



lines began to run out of the frames too often
allegedly their present demarcation will not do.
colours settle on any surfaces. they dare to interfere
in words. the frames therefore move to other areas.
the only thing that remains valid is said to be linked
neither with speech nor senses.

the vector: the carrier: the clear direction. a heavy
vehicle, calmly sinking into muddy soil.



poviem ťa. ale akoby kresliaca ruka stále patrila

inej, ležiace telo zase hline, rozopnutej, mäkkej,

poviem: skoč, a poviem: vidieť ťa ešte bielu, z kopca, zošikma.

neviem, kedy píšem, a neviem, kde — priestor je náhodný, vytvorený súradnicami prstov na klávesoch, mnohorozmerný, disociovaný pohybom, prinavracaný. kde neexistuje krivka zošívaná perom, spojitosť, kde niet hlások zväzovaných dychom, stále pochybuješ o možnosti reči.

si zatiaľ ešte vnútram myslenia, aj tvoja koža je tu ešte vnútram.

I'll speak you. but as if the drawing hand still
belonged
to another, and the reclining body to the soil,
unbuttoned, soft,
I say: jump, and I say: to see you still white,
downhill, aslant.
I don't know when I write and I don't know where
— space is random, created by the coordinates of
fingers on keys, multidimensional, dissociated by
movement, being restored. to the place with no
curve sewn by a pen, connection with no sounds
bound by breath, you still doubt the possibility of
speech.

for now, you are still the interior of thinking,
and your skin is the interior here, too.

[PRINCÍP NEISTOTY]

svetelné mestá

I

Leto neodchádza, zostáva ako zápal na vydýchaných cestách,
teplý kameň, ani stopy po krokoch (a predsa vlhký vzduch);
rany sa nehoja, rovnaký pohyb každé popoludnie — rukou si
z očí zotrieť prach a olej z rozohriatych kolies. Október.

Ani nie návrat: trvanie v štrbinách – mesto si nepamätá,
nechceš si ani ty: stĺpnuté chodidlá, popraskané ruky, prečo si nepriznať

—
úžina, pasáž, spoza rohu sa namiesto (inej) spomienky vynorí
ulica. Ďalšia. Rovnaká.

A na peróne šialenec, načisto opustený
(nikto sa ho už nelaká), prestupná stanica Réaumur-Sébastopol:
na samom vrchu spí človek v ponožkách,
z jednej mu trčí obväz, no iba málokto si trúfne zakryť nos.

Za oknom bez roliet sa ktosi opíja,
celkom sám, za oknom s roletou si premalúvam tvár,
nevetrám, potichu vzývam telefón,
až napokon zaspím.

II

Prstový kód, hluk, tajné vstupy, hnevať sa na seba
za bezuzdnosť (v prvej chvíli), za rozumnosť (v druhej)
a zazlievať si samotu – aká cnosť? Z hľadiska večnosti
je jedno, či v tomto svete bok po boku s týmto telom
(alebo s iným), z hľadiska okamihu: voliť prázdnotu. A čakať.

Stará žena, vlastne nie stará, skôr už zotletá, možno senilná
a možno odjakživa pomätená, sa vozí hore-dolu výtahom,
zdraví zoširoka, nahlas, opakuje „áno, áno“ do nemoty,
s úslužným výrazom každému vraví pani, pane,
a prstami deťom siahá na líca.

[from THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE]

bright cities

I

The summer is not going, it stays like inflammation on stuffy roads,
warm stone, no trace of steps (and yet humidity in the air);
wounds are not healing, the same movement every afternoon — to wipe
the dust from one's eyes and the oil from hot wheels. October.

Not even return: continuance in crevices — the city doesn't remember,
nor do you wish to: numb footsoles, chapped hands, why not admit —
a strait, a passage, from behind the corner surfacing instead of (another)
memory, a street. Another one. Identical.

And a madman on the platform, quite desolate
(no one is scared of him any more), change at Réaumur-Sébastopol:
on the very top a man is sleeping in his socks,
a bandage sticking out of one, but hardly anyone dares cover his nose.

Behind the window without blinds someone gets drunk,
quite solitary, behind a window with a blind I change my make-up,
I don't air the place, I silently invoke the telephone,
till finally I fall asleep.

II

A finger code, noise, secret entrances, to be angry with oneself
for being (in the first moment) unrestrained, for being (in the second)
reasonable, and resent one's loneliness — where's the virtue in that?
From the point of view of eternity, it doesn't matter whether in this
world, side by side with this body (or some other), from the momentary
point of view: to choose emptiness. And wait.

An old woman, in fact rather mouldered than old, perhaps senile
and possibly bewildered for ages past, takes the lift up and down,
greeted at great length, aloud, repeats "yes", "yes" over and over again,
addresses everyone as "madam", "sir" with an assiduous smile,
and touches children's cheeks with her fingers.

Komusi ihlicou do žalúdka, inému slovom do srdca:
karanténa, štyridsať dní ticha.
Plameň, celofán, oškvrknutá predstava,
nainfikuješ sebou celú kolóniu a čuduješ sa,
keď ťa zatratia.

III

Sú domy z dreva, omietnuté alebo len oblepené plátnom,
koberce namiesto stien, po kútoch káble, v škárah prach
a vietor popod dvere.
Rýchlovarná kanvica, mikrovlnka, dvojplatnička,
kto spí,
nepohne sa. Sleduje meandre, nezbadá, že na brehoch
nieť zelene, nevšimne si dlažby, pokračuje ďalej,
tam, kde sa jazdí na ťavách,
s ruksakom na chrbte,
kde v piesku stoja sivé paneláky ako na predmestí,
len sú žeravé,
a pod oknami stany,
fontána bez vody a nebo v plameňoch,
chceš sa vrátiť k rieke, cesty niet,
— nie vo sne, a teda vôbec nie —
a pritom stačí len otvoriť oči, utekať pozdĺž stien,
horiace koberce, štiplavý dym,
naboso bez záster:
tie schody
ešte stoja.

A pin in someone's stomach, a word in someone's heart:
quarantine, forty days of silence.
A flame, cellophane, a scorched image,
you infect the whole colony with yourself, and you're surprised
when they condemn you.

III

There are wooden houses, plastered or just stuck together with cloth,
carpets instead of walls, cables in the corners, dust in the joints
and the wind under the door.
A jug kettle, a microwave oven, a hot plate,
someone who sleeps,
not moving. He who follows meanders, not aware of the riverbanks
bare of green, indifferent to the pavement: who continues on
to where people ride camels
with knapsack on back,
where grey blocks of flats stand in the sand like a suburb,
only they are burning,
with tents below the windows,
a waterless fountain and the sky in flames,
you want to go back to the river, there's no way,
— not in the dream, and therefore not at all —
you need only to open your eyes, run along the walls,
burning carpets, acrid smoke,
barefoot and apronless:
those stairs
are still there.

