

V E R S O P O
L I S F O U R
L E D B U R Y
T W E N T Y T W E N T Y - O N E

Preludes

Prelúdiá

Eleni Cay

Translated by John Minahane, Marián Andričík
and the author

A R M E N I
A N B E L
A R U S I A
N G R E E K
S L O V A K

VERSOPOLIS FOUR

Preludes

Prelúdiá

Eleni Cay

Poems in Slovak translated by either John Minahane or the author
and poems in English translated into Slovak
by either Marián Andričík or the author

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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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ELENI CAY is a Slovakian-born poet living in England and Norway. Her award-winning first collection was published by Parthian Books and her second poetry collection *Love Algorithm* by Black Spring Press. Her first two pamphlets — *Colours of the Swan* and *Autumn Dedications* — were published by Westbury Arts Centre as part of her poetry residency and her third pamphlet was published by Eyewear Press in 2017. Eleni's most recent poems have appeared in Acumen, Atticus Review, The Cardiff Review and Poetry Ireland Review. She is known for her multimedia poetry, which has been screened at international festivals and featured on Button Poetry. Her selected poems have been translated into German, French, Italian, Romanian and Slovakian.

Eleni Cay's digital home is: www.eleni-cay.com.

'Welcome Digital', 'Circles' and 'Black-and-white QR Codes' were written by the author in Slovak and published in the collection *Záchvevy motýľa v digitálnom čase* by Čakanka (2013) in Slovakia. They were translated by John Minahane in 2015 and published in English by Parthian Books in 2018 as *A Butterfly's Trembling in the Digital Age* in the UK.

'Royal Beauty' was originally written in English by the author and translated from English to Slovak by Marián Andričík. The poem will be published by Global Slovakia (2021) in the anthology *Slovakia in Poems*.

All other poems were written in English by the author and will be published in her second collection *Love Algorithm* by Black Spring Press in 2021. The author translated these poems in May 2021 for this chapbook.

Vitaj, digitálno!

Pred pár rokmi ceruzkami a papierikmi
rozprávali sa myšlienky.
Dnes stačí im malá krabička.
Netreba lístky, róby, určiť hodinu.
Z nekonečného javiska do nekonečného hľadiska
kedykoľvek, kdekoľvek
myšlienky si lietajú.

A všetko, všetko do digitálneho sa zmestí.
Náhodné stretnutia, klamstvá, vyznania, cestovateľské zvesti.

Možno je to fajn,
že zapípa ti v tichom lese správa.
Jedného poteší, druhý nadáva.
Jeden odfotí, druhý napíše.
Vždy hľadalo ľudstvo
pre pocity skrýše.

Tak vitaj, digitálno!
Fantázie mojej nové žriedlo.
Ako po vodnej hladine,
rovnej a vyhladenej
rozbieha sa lietadlo.
Vítam ho s úsmevom,
omámená nádejou,
strácam sa v ňom.

Welcome, digital!

A few years ago thoughts spoke
with pen and paper.
Now a small box can be their medium.
No need for tickets, dressing, scheduling:
from stage to auditorium,
when and wherever endlessly,
thoughts wing.

The digital holds everything, all sorts.
Chance meetings, lies, creeds, travellers' reports.

Maybe it's fine
that your message bleeps in the quiet of a wood.
One curses and the other thinks it good.
One photographs, the other writes some pages.
For their feelings people
always seek refuges.

So welcome, digital!
My fantasy's new well and source.
As if it went on water,
level, smooth,
an aircraft runs its course.
I welcome it and then,
dazzled by the hopes,
lose myself therein.

Kruhy

Keď sa kraj kreslí ostrými kontúrami
a vták rámuje ho mäťovým povetrím,
vtedy ti, Bože, bezpodmienečne verím.

Ako studnička v chotári
nechám sa tvojou vodou nalievať,
opíjať jedom vo vlastnom pohári.

Pokým opäť prídu.
Tie dni bezbožnej všednosti
prehĺbia brázdu v rane.
Bez prehnanej citlivosti
vyplačem im vtedy kúsok dane.

Vrátim požičané,
nech majú iní za čo sadiť a rúbať nové lesy.
Nech môžeš ďalej posielat modrý dážď na zelené adresy.

Tak plávam s tebou, Bože, v jednom kruhu
a nehľadám už pieseň novú.

Život pod nami, nad nami,
číra hladina v nás.
Nič už neláka, nič nebolí ma.
Všetko mám. Mala som.
Budem mať zas.

Circles

When the land is drawn in sharp contours,
framed by a bird in a mint breeze,
then, my God, I believe in you without question.

Like the sheepfold's small well,
I let your water pour over me,
and get drunk on my own glass of poison.

Till they arrive again.
Those days of godless ordinariness
deepen the furrow in the wound.
Without overblown sensitivity
I'll pay some tax to them when they come round.

I shall return my loans;
let others have wherewithal to plant and fell new forests.
May you continue to send blue rain to green addresses.

Thus I sail with you, God, in one circle
and no longer seek a new song.

Life beneath us, above us,
entering us, the pure surface.
Nothing lures me now, nothing pains.
I have all. I have had.
I shall have again.

Čierno-biele QR kódy

V tanci stačí gesto,
aby pochopila žena, že točiť sa má.

Tak aj na pocity niekedy postačí ti ikona.
Ako unavený spisovateľ
díváš sa na námestie,
ešte nedoznel tvoj ortiel,
už zvieráš dlane v päste.

Prejedáš sa, človek, lebo blíži sa ti doba spotreby?
Rýchlo píšeš dodatky do zmluvy,
čo privedie ťa do záhuby?

Na billboardoch svietia slová,
čo ešte len čas
rozbalí v životoch.

Spráchnivela cesta do kostola,
modlíme sa v nových kódoch.

Akési čierno-biele
to, čo z nás dnes vychádza.

Farebnú bielizeň na dvore
hlasná sušička nahrádza.

Stráca sa báseň v diktáte novej módy.
Bezfarebná, bez života —
ako tie QR kódy.

Black-and-white QR Codes

A gesture tells the woman
she has to twirl, in a waltz or reel.

And an icon may suffice for what you feel.
Weary of writing,
you gaze out on the square,
your sentence still resounding,
your fists clenching on air.

Man, do you stuff yourself because
your expiry date is near?
And quickly scribble an extra clause

to a deal that leads to catastrophe?
Billboard words are tumbling,
and all that time will yet unwrap
for lives' episodes.

The path to the church is crumbling.
We're praying in new codes.

A noisy drier substitutes
for colourful washing out the back.

Currently what we produce
is sort of white-and-black.

The poem's lost in the dictate of new modes,
with no colour, no life —
like those QR codes.

Kráľovská krása

(napísané v reakcii na legendu o Báthoryčke[†] na Čachtickom zámku)

Tiekla krv. Veľa krvi.
No krásy nikde.
Lebo krása nevzniká z krvi,
vzniká z času,
nemožno ju vynútiť od jej nositeľov,
správa sa ako láska.

Zrúcaniny Čachtického hradu sa vnárajú do zeme,
jesenné lístie rúbi relikviu v zlatom ráme.
Hrdzavo-karmínové ozdoby sa vzdávajú lístia,
vlievajú svoje túžby do motýlích krídel
a potom sa rozprášia do západov slnka.

[†] Podľa legendy mala Báthoryčka upírske sklony a kúpavala sa v krvi panien, aby si udržala mladosť a krásu.

Royal beauty

(written in response to the Bathory Legend[‡] at the Cachtice Castle, Slovakia)

There was blood. A lot of blood.
But no beauty.
Because beauty is not made of blood,
It is made of time,
it can't be hustled from its bearers,
it behaves like love.

The Cachtice ruins sink into the soil,
autumn leaves enclose the relic in a golden frame.
Ginger-crimson glitters abandon the leaves,
infuse their aches into butterfly wings,
then powder themselves into sunsets.

[‡] The legend goes that Bathory had vampire-like tendencies and bathed in the blood of virgins to retain her youth and beauty.

Iktsuarpok

Júlové slnko krája oblaky na plátky
citrónovej torty, vtáky lietajú vrstvu
cez vrstvu, stavajú sochu nášho príbehu.

Inuiti majú jedno slovo na ten dlhý pocit
očakávania že niekto príde ku dverám.
Ja nemám špeciálne slovo, ja len čakám.

Každý deň vystieram kráľovský koberec
kde môžeš jazdiť na svojom holandskom bicykli,
špliechajúc kvety z tvojho prúteného košíka.

Taký istý bicykel vidím na stanici v Manchesteri,
v Šanghaji, bežím k nemu, bicyklujúc nás späť
na to miesto, kde sme sa stretli.



Neskorý letný večer

Keď začalo pršať,
vedela som presne kde budú mláky.

Tancovali sme tango viackrát touto ulicou.

Silne červená jahoda sa prerezáva
vrstvami pudingu s citrónovou kôrou.

Túžba po hodvábe tvojho tela stále ťažká moju myseľ.

Všetky tie hlboké diery života . . .
Kto ich zapláta?

Iktsuarpok

The July sun cuts the clouds into slices
of a lemony cake, the birds fly through
layer by layer, sculpting our story.
Inuits have a word for looking outside
in anticipation that someone might be coming.
I don't have a special word, I'm just waiting.
Every day, I roll out a royal carpet
where you can ride your Dutch bike,
splash flowers from the wicker basket.
I see the same bike at stations in
Manchester, in Shanghai, run to it,
cycle it back to where we met.



Late summer evening

When it started raining, I knew exactly
where the puddles would be.

We have tangoed many times this street.

A bright red strawberry cuts through the thick
layers of a lemon posset pudding.

The desire for the silk of your body

still niggles my mind.
All these deep holes . . .

Putovanie

Bol koniec leta. Otvoril si okno na aute,
vystrčil hlavu ako labrador.

Ak láska nie je o križovatkách po známych cestách,
tak potom neviem ako pomenovať život.

Pritlačím pery na tvoj sveter, látka jemná ako tvoje líca, rukávy
dlhé ako tvoje ramená čo ma čakajú na autobusovej zastávke.

August láme srdcia, aby sa zrástli a zosilneli.
Pero roluje tvoje pery v mojich básniach.

Ak láska nie je o križovatkách po známych cestách,
tak potom neviem ako pomenovať život.



Znalosť všetkého

Dážďovníky obyčajné spia, jedia, pária sa a krmia vo vzduchu.
Kosákmi chvostov podrezávajú nebo, ukladajú
oblaky na modré polia vo vrstvách bielej slonoviny.
Ty, človek, potrebuješ prístrešok. Značené cesty.
Pastierov a stroje na ich dokonalé dokončenie.
A aj tak, na tvojich strechách a cestách
sú neustále diery, ktoré len prehliadneš.
Vedomosť, ktorá ťa vyhostila z Edenu
je iba základ pre hranice duše.
Sily, ktoré riadia tvoje závislosti
sa križujú s Bohom, udomácnenom
v medzerách medzi tvojimi myšlienkami.

Journeyings

It was the end of summer.
You rolled down the car window
poked your head out like a labrador.

If love is not criss-crossing familiar paths,
then I don't know how to remember life.

I press my lips on your jumper, the fabric soft
as your cheeks, the sleeves as long
as your arms waiting for me at the bus stop.

August breaks hearts so that they grow
more resilient. A pen rolls your lips into a poem.

If love is not criss-crossing familiar paths,
then I don't know how to remember life.



The knowledge of everything

Swifts sleep, mate, eat and feed in the air.
They cut the sky with their scythe tails, lay
the clouds on blue fields in layers of ivory white.
You need a shelter. Marked roads. Shepherds
and machines to craft them to immaculate.
Still, there are holes in your roofs and paths —
and you can't even see them. The knowledge
that cast you out of Eden is merely a foundation
for the boundaries of your soul. The forces
that steer your addictions cross
with the God you domesticated in
the gaps between your thoughts.

Topole

Videla som ťa v Moskve. Vymenili sme si čísla, obaja vediac že ich nikdy nevytočíme. Povedal si mi, ako žiješ na káve

a v skorumpovanom vzťahu s časom. Nepamätám si čo som ti povedala o mne. Či som vôbec vypila môj čaj.

Odvtedy vidím tvoju tvár za oknami, na každej obrazovke. Osvetlenie iných áut ma oslepuje,

hrám sa s nimi s polomatnými očami, skladám z nich trblietave prstene, našu svadbu.

Nedokážem robiť rozhodnutia, ako laň uprostred cesty neviem, či prejsť alebo nie,

nikdy predtým som nevidela niečo také oslepujúce. Trúbiace auto ma prinúti doširoka otvoriť oči.

Vidím juhovýchodné vetry, ktoré pätnásť rokov tlačili na konáre topoľa, každú zimu vyvíjali tlak na jeho korene,

až strom spadol na Zem.

Poplars

I saw you in Moscow. We exchanged numbers we knew we'd never dial. You told me how you live on coffee and twisted relations with time. I can't remember what I told you about me. Or whether I even drank my tea.

Since then, I can see your face behind windows, on every screen. The car lights blind me, I play with them with my half-closed eyes, make them into luminous rings, our wedding.

I can't make decisions, like a doe in the middle of the road, unsure whether to cross or not, never seen anything that bright. Then a blaring horn forces me to open my eyes wide.

I see the southeast winds that have been gestating for fifteen years, applying pressure on the poplar's branches, every winter daring the roots, until the tree fell down.

Cena človeka

Mali ste stresujúci deň: Jenn vyliala kávu na Váš počítač.
Šok bol taký hlboký, že ste sa museli znova nalíčiť.

Asha dnes nemal stres: nikto neznásilnil jeho sestru. S prachom
na tvári, ukladaným niekoľko dní, vyzerá staršie, takmer mŕtvy.

Kliknutím dostanete topánky, ktoré si Anne kúpila minulý týždeň.
Vy a Vaši sledovatelia budú spájaní iba s vysokými hráčmi.

Na webovej stránke sa zobrazí opäť Ashova tvár. Amnesty International
zvestuje že doloval kobalt od dojčaťa. Jeho miechové disky sú rozbité.

Vy nikdy nič nenesiete. Máte toho toľko na svojom účte
že potrebujete iba telefón. Hľadáte online kašmírový kabát,

ale opäť je tu Asha. Dáma z Don Bosca hovorí, že potrebuje
nové topánky a knihy. V jej príbehu sa Asha volá Ismail.

Blokujete reklamu a nahlásite zneužitie dát. Ste jeden z bohov, jeden
z tých,
ktorí sa umiestnia na najvyšších priečkach, a pôjdu opäť vyššie —
také sú pravidlá.

Kde som ja v tejto hre? Asha nikdy nebude čítať, nikdy nepochopí,
túto báseň. Ja si tu iba očisťujem srdce od strieborno-šedej krvi.

Human cost

You had a stressful day: Jenn spilled a coffee on your computer.
The shock was so profound, you had to re-apply your make-up.

Asha had no stress today: no one raped his sister. The dust on his face,
deposited over several days, makes him look older, almost dead.

You click away, get the shoes Anne bought last week. Rate
your followers, only be associated with the high players.

There's Asha's face again. Amnesty International says
he's toiled cobalt since he could crawl. His spinal discs are shattered.

You never carry a thing. You've so much in your account
you only ever need your phone. You Google for a cashmere coat.

But there's Asha's face again. A Don Bosco lady says he needs
new shoes and books. In her story he is called Ismail.

You block the ad, report abuse. You're one of the gods,
those who are ranked highly will go higher again, those are the rules.

Where am I in this game? Asha will never read, never understand,
this poem. I'm just cleansing my heart from the silver-grey blood.

Rozšírené mozgy

Pôvodne usadené v tele,
niektoré zamotané, niektoré pripravené na pučanie,
súkromné poznámky sa rozvetvujú do digitálneho neba.
Nie si si istý, kde sú vlákna, kde sa krížia a kde začínajú.
Napriek tomu ich vystužuješ, chceš ich urýchliť, určiť
ako vyliečiť svoju digitálnu dušu.
Šablóny sú rovnaké: chceš ovládať, urobiť každý
kus materiality vyhľadateľný, uniformný. Chceš
rozšíriť lásku, to nekonečno v tebe, v ľudstve.
Mraky sú príliš ťažké na to, aby to všetko
zachytili bez búrky.

Augmented brains

*The known is finite, the unknown infinite; intellectually
we stand on an islet in the midst of an illimitable ocean
of inexplicability.* T H Huxley 1887

Sedimented in flesh before,
some bedraggled, some ready to bud,
private notes expanded to the digital sky.
You are not sure where the filaments
cross, where they begin. Yet, you thicken
them, make them run faster, determine
how to curate your digital soul.
The templates are the same:
you want to control, make each
piece of materiality searchable, uniform.
You want to augment love, the infinity
within you, within humankind.
The clouds are too heavy to hold all
that stuff without a storm.

Hroby vojakov

Miliardy malých čiernych striel
sedia vo vnútri nevinných makových hláv.

Ich neopätované bozky
zanechali prázdne miesta pomedzi divokú raž.

Nezáleží na tom, koľkých zranili v boji. Ved' aj
večerná obloha je zranená každý večer od západu slnka.

To, čo nás spája, je červená krv,
vystrekujúca priamo zo srdca.



Soldiers' graves

Inside the innocent poppy heads
there are billions of small black bullets.

Their unrequited kisses
leave empty spaces in between the wild rye.

It doesn't matter how many you hurt in the combat.
The fleeting sunset does it every evening to the sky.

What unites us is the red blood,
setting out from the heart.



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