

VERSOPOLIS ONE

from An invented child

fra Et diktet barn

Monica Aasprong

Translated from the Norwegian by May-Brit Akerholt

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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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The authorship of MONICA AASPRONG (born 1969, Kristiansund, Norway) is distinguished by a versatility of genre and an unusual poetic ear. She has shown during fifteen years of literary activity a wish for her writings to stay experimental until they stop being experimental and are transformed into a new way of perceiving the world. Her work is thus difficult to categorise as an entity: mythical and sacred elements mix effortlessly with directly political and acute questions, while the form follows transformations from the obvious to the cryptic. Now and then Aasprong crosses the borders of literature and her writing takes on a performing quality, closer to visual art or music.

Her latest book, *Circle Psalm (to Bethlehem / to Jerusalem)* has been performed as a sound installation at Audiorama in Stockholm and as concert in collaboration with the Norwegian composer Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje at Kunstneres Hus in Oslo 2013. The book has neither a fixed beginning nor end, and even its design (by Aron Kullander-Östling) plays with the endless shape of the circle.

She makes her debut as a novelist in 1997 with the intense chamber piece *between Alex Gobulev and me*, before she becomes active as an editor and translator (of among others, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Bernhard and Sara Stridsberg). When she publishes her second book, *The Soldier's Market*, in 2006, this work is already well known among the Scandinavian reading public, as it has circulated in magazines and at exhibitions since 2003. Originally, *The Soldier's Market* was started as a serial in the journal *LUJ* (of which Aasprong was one of the founders). From there, *The Soldier's Market* quickly became a work much talked about as an example of the often postulated flourishing of conceptual literature in Scandinavia in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The work has all the characteristics one expects of a good piece of literary conceptualism: a striking simplicity and transparency, built upon a totally open code which makes the work easy both to reproduce and to parody.

The Soldier's Market was, on the other hand, no literary artifact addressing the moment. The work's genesis took place over several years, parallel with it being published and going through several transformations: all the words and signs used in the work have their origin in the title, *Soldatmarkedet*. From there, the words are repeated and transformed in patterns and blocks on the book pages and

broken down into syllables and phonemes. The signs are repeated so many times that you forget their function, until you catch yourself inventing new areas of meaning for signs and intervals. On a parallel level a contrary movement is taking place: the trans-illumination of the words reveals not only their (often asserted) arbitrary and abstract components, but also more tangible and more ritualistic qualities which make single words such as 'salt' and 'donkey', or evident signs such as the letter 't' accumulate meanings which go far beyond their functions of assignation. Thus *The Soldier's Market* embodies the whole spectrum of conditions and expressions which either are an abundance of meaning or a scarcity, without becoming analytical or idea-based. Rather, *The Soldier's Market's* transformations are eruptive and expressionistic. When *The Soldier's Market* finally came out in book form, it had flowed into a longer, rhythmic poem with epic touches. At the same time, you knew as a reader of the book that the work had a history as a radically opinion-changing serial in countless magazines, and had been exhibited in art galleries in the form of handmade books and a grey filing cabinet where 16,000 permutations of the title lay sorted.

The epic touch continued in Aasprong's 300-page poetry collection *An Invented Child* (2010). The poems are written in an immediate and directly spoken language which may well be reminiscent of Greek tragedy's wittily poeticised imperatives. The immediate and direct tone reveals a complex relational inter-world where categories such as child and adult, individual and collective identity, power and powerlessness, language and affect, both comfort and frighten, interrogate and transfer.

Gunnar Wærness

PUBLICATIONS:

Sirkelsalme (til Betlehem / til Jerusalem), poems, Cappelen Damm

2013

Et diktet barn, poems, Cappelen Damm 2010

Soldatmarkedet, No press, Canada 2008

Soldatmarkedet, Oslo poesifestival, 2007

Soldatmarkedet, poems, N.W. Damm & Søn 2006

Soldatmarkedet, Biblioteket Gasspedal, chapbook #4 2003

mellom Alex Gobulev og meg, novel, Tiden Norsk Forlag 1997

jeg diktet et barn
det gir meg ikke fred

jeg ser det bli båret
jeg ser det bli båret

blodig og født

≈

nei sier jeg til barnet
det er ikke slik vi skal se det

nei sier barnet: her skriker man

I invented a child
it doesn't give me peace

I see it being carried
I see it being carried

bloody and born

≈

no I tell the child
that's not how we should see it

no the child says: here we scream

Jeg skal fortelle deg det eventyret du liker så godt.
Det om ilden:

Jeg møtte ilden i skogen

ilden så meg og så på
meg med skinnende øyne

den kom nærmere og nærmere

og varmen varmet

fra armene gule

ansiktet rødt

den stopper og spør:

blir du med meg inn i skogen

bli med meg gjennom trærne

gjennom gresset

bortover marka, skal jeg

under jorda, sa ilden

med munnen full av bark

og stemmen full av blomster

og jeg slo følge med den videre

gikk ved siden av den i mørket

jeg viser vei, sa ilden

I shall tell you the fairy tale you're so fond of.
That of the fire:

I met the fire in the forest

the fire saw me and looked
at me with blazing eyes

it came closer and closer

and the warmth warmed

from its arms yellow

its face red

it stops and asks:

will you come with me into the forest

come with me through the trees

through the grass

across the field, I'll go

under the earth, said the fire

with its mouth full of bark

and its voice full of flowers

and I joined it on its journey

walked beside it in the dark

I'll show the way, said the fire

jeg gir deg en gråt som spruter
den skal du bruke
når noen trenger seg inn
da skal du la denne gråten sprute ut
la tårene danse ytterst
som kulene i en fontene

så gir jeg deg en hikstegråt
den kommer over deg
når du minst venter det
(og er vanskelig å stoppe)

jeg gir deg en bror å hate
(og volden får du som en del av søskenskapet)

det er ikke plass til deg i bildet, sier jeg
du må gå selv, på dine bein

I give you tears that sprout
you shall use them
when someone forces themselves inside
then you shall let that crying sprout
let the crying dance on the very edge
like the bullets in a fountain

then I give you tears that sob
they come over you
when you least expect them
(and are difficult to stop)

I give you a brother to hate
(and you get the violence as a part of siblinghood)

there's no room for you in the picture, I say
you must walk yourself, on your legs

jeg sleper rundt på alle føtters blod

det er derfor,

sier barnet

nei, sier jeg

det kan ikke stemme

det må være noe annet

mindre

du bærer

kanskje et brustent hat

det kan du prøve å hele

I drag around the blood of all feet

that is why,

says the child

no, I say

that can't be right

it must be something else

a smaller

burden

perhaps a shattered hate

you can try to heal that

du får et brev
som er så flatt
at det nesten
er tomt

så hvitt
og flatt
at det skjærer
seg inn i deg
ulest

inn i øyet
tetter halsen
vrenger magen

stopp,
sier barnet

jeg vil ikke ha
dette brevet

jo, sier jeg
det er allerede skrevet

det er allerede på vei
inn i øyet

you receive a letter
which is so flat
that it's nearly
empty

so white
and flat
that it cuts
itself into you
unread

into your eye
tightens your throat
turns your stomach inside out

stop,
says the child

I don't want
this letter

yes, I say
it's already written

it's already on its way
into your eye

barnet sier:

jeg ser en flokk bevege seg over himmelen det er fugler og
pelsdyr som har bitt og kloret seg fast i hverandre så de blir til
en slags sky, tett koblet sammen alle kroppene, til et stort mørke
av fjær og pels, klør og nebb. Jeg vet ikke om de klamrer seg til
hverandre av skrekk eller kjærlighet, eller om de biter og klorer
hverandre av hat. Ingenting er rødt. Alt er svart. Svart som pels.
Bær

gass til lampen, har du husket det,
spør barnet

og blod til pelsen

du ga meg en lampe av sølv

nei, et hav, var det vel
et hav

ryggens søyle i vann

neglens kraft
foldes ut

hår

the child:

I see a flock move across the sky it is birds and furred animals
which have bitten and scratched each other until they have
become one, a sort of cloud, all the bodies closely hooked
together, to a large darkness of feathers and furs, claws and
beaks. I don't know if they cling to each other out of fear
or love, or if they bite and scratch each other out of hatred.
Nothing is red. Everything is black. Black as fur. Berries

gas for the lamp, did you remember,
asks the child

and blood for the fur

you gave me a lamp of silver

no, an ocean, it was
an ocean

the column of the back in water

the nail's power
unfolds

hair

sårene og

pelsen til hunden

glass til klokken

glass lin til

grisen lin i

gulvet

det er ikke så lett,

sier jeg,

å ale opp et ansikt

the wounds and

the fur for the dog

glass for the bell jar

glass flax for

the pig flax in

the floor

it's not so easy,

I say,

to breed a face

jeg skal spise deg levende
jeg skal gjøre det for deg
om du vil være min mor

om du byr på
levende øyne

levende is is i
årene is i skallen
spekk hele isskrotter
levende

øyets lys
munnens mørke
nesens blod
lepper

jeg maner fram
ansiktsmasken

jeg bærer den tungt
jeg hugger den til om
det trengs, knuser den
om det blir nødvendig

jeg har redskaper
til å utslette alle
menneskelige trekk

jeg kjenner øyehulene
ut og inn

I shall eat you alive
I shall do that for you
if you will be my mother

if you're offering
living eyes

living ice ice in
the veins ice in the skull
fat whole ice-carcasses
alive

the light
of an eye dark
of a mouth blood
of a nose
lips

I conjure up
the face mask

I carry it heavily
I strike it if
needs be, crush it
if I must

I have tools
to wipe out all
human features

I know the eye sockets
inside out

blikket er fylt av stempler
det viser hvor du har vært

om det er et stempel du vil skjule
så flakk med blikket eller sov
med åpne eller lukkede øyne

blikket stemples ved alle grenseoverganger
hver gang du har gått over en grense, sier
jeg til barnet, enten det er dine egne grenser
eller andres

redselen i blikket kan du skremme
andre med, legger jeg til

du ler

den skrullete latteren din
går meg på nervene

men du sa jo at jeg skulle
bruke lattergråten (den gangen
du ga meg stemmebånd harde
som plater)

nei, sier jeg, du tar feil
det må være fontenegråten
du tenker på

men du sa jo
at jeg skulle gråte
med latteren

at jeg skulle få en gråt
som var en latter

nei det har jeg aldri sagt

the gaze is full of stamps
it shows where you have been

if there is a stamp you want to hide
then be shift-eyed or sleep
with open or closed eyes

your gaze is stamped at all borders
every time you have crossed a border, I say
to the child, whether they are your own borders
or those of others

you can frighten others with the fear
in your eyes, I add

you laugh

that screwy laughter of yours
gets on my nerves

but you said I should
use the laughter-crying (that time
you gave me vocal cords as hard
as boards)

no, I say, you're wrong
you must be thinking of
the fountain-tears

but you said
that I should weep
with the laughter

that I should get a crying
that was a laughter

no I never said that

