

VERSOPOLIS TWO

Neither silver nor gold

*Ne srebro ne zlato*

Veronika Dintinjana

Translated from the Slovenian by the author, Rose Aasen,  
Mia Dintinjana, Ciaran O'Driscoll and E Underhill

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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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VERONIKA DINTINJANA is a poet and translator. Recognized as best young author in 2002 at the Festival of Young Literature, her first book of poems, *Rumeno gori grm forzicij* (*Yellow burns the forsythia bush*), received the Best First Book award at the 24th Slovenian Book Fair in 2008, when she won the Slovenian poetry tournament and the sixth Ljubljana poetry slam. Her poems have been translated into Italian, Spanish, Romanian, Macedonian, Galician, Spanish, Serbian, French, German, and Dutch. Her second book, *V suhem doku* (*In Dry Dock*) was published in December 2016 and nominated for the national critics' choice award (Kritiško sito). In Gdansk and Vilnius, a selection of poems from both volumes was published as chapbooks in Polish and Lithuanian translation as part of the Versopolis project. As a translator, Veronika has published poems and essays by Louise Glück, Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov, Ursula K Le Guin, Stanley Kunitz, Adrienne Rich and Ciaran O'Driscoll, and co-translated the 20th-century Irish poetry anthology, *Čudovita Usta* (*Marvellous Mouth*). As founder and manager of the Kentaver Arts and Literature Society she organizes the Mlade Rime monthly poetry readings, hosted since 2005 by Menza pri Koritu at Metelkova (and, more recently, at the Autonomous Zone Rog) in Ljubljana. The reading season begins in October and ends in July with a festival. She also edits a book series of world poetry classics in translation.

She lives in Ljubljana and commutes to work; her other vocation is medicine.

'Cathedral lions' and 'The orange tree in front of the house is in the zenith' were first published in English translation in Banipal 41, Magazine of Modern Arab Literature, Summer 2011, London.

'Ἀπολογία' was first published in English in Stony Thrusday, No.8, 2009, Limerick.

#### BOOKS:

*Rumeno gori grm frozicij*, LUD Literatura, 2008

*V suhem doku*, LUD Literatura, 2016

(as translator)

Denise Levertov: *Proti točki nič*, KUD Kentaver, 2014

Ciaran O'Driscoll: *Nadzorovanje življenja*, KUD France Prešeren, 2013

Louise Glück: *Onkraj noči*, Nova lirika, MK, 2011

Ursula K Le Guin: *Ples na robu sveta*, KUD Apokalipsa, 2007

*Čudovita usta – antologija sodobne irske poezije*, KUD Apokalipsa, 2007

#### AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS:

Nagrada festival Urška (Best Young Author Award) 2002

Nagrada za najboljši leposlovni prvenec (Best First Book award) 2008

Vitezinja pesniškega turnirja (Slovenian Poetry Tournament) 2008

Zmaga na 6. ljubljanskem slemu (Champion of 6th Ljubljana Poetry Slam)

Finale evropskega pesniškega turnirja (finalist of European Poetry Tournament) 2011

Nominacija za Kritiško sito (Nominated for National Critics' Choice Award) 2016

#### NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

'Exercise in automatic breathing', 'Concierto de Aranjuez', 'Sparrow, through a hospital window', 'St Francis' and 'Musei Capitolini' are translated by the author with E Underhill

'The orange tree in front of the house is in the zenith', 'Medea' and 'Ἀπολογία' are translated by the author with Ciaran O' Driscoll

'yellow burns the forsythia bush' is translated by the author

'Saskia' is translated by Mia Dintinjana

'Cathedral lions' is translated by the author with Rose Aasen

## Vaja v avtomatskem dihanju

spet pišem  
opoldne, ponoči, zjutraj  
vaja v avtomatskem pisanju  
nizanje misli in metafor  
brez odgovornosti  
brez ambicije trajati

pesmi brez obešencev  
brez umrlih sorodnikov  
brez dišeče kože ljubimcev  
rož in grmov  
oropane  
in prazne

neuspeh poskus oživljanja  
papir ne poka pod dlanmi  
kakor rebra in prsnica  
knjige po smrti ne zasmrديو  
držijo se jih le prah in madeži  
kave ali čaja

nihče ni nenadomestljiv  
ponoči sanjam, zjutraj se mi razodene  
pomen: trik ni v izjemnosti, bolj enostavno je:  
biti nenadomestljiv za nekoga –  
ni nujno Toskana, ni nujno poletje  
niti ni nujno, da traja

to je najtežje, zato vadim  
vsak dih sproti

## Exercise in automatic breathing

again I write,  
morning, noon, night,  
exercise automatic writing  
a series of thoughts and metaphors  
without responsibility  
without ambition to last

poems without hanged men  
without the dead relatives  
without the scented skins of lovers,  
flowers and bushes,  
bereft  
and empty

a failed attempt at resuscitation  
paper doesn't crack under one's palms  
like ribs or breastbone  
books do not start to smell after death  
they are only covered by dust and stains  
from coffee or tea

no one is irreplaceable  
at night I dream, in the morning the meaning is revealed  
to me: the trick is not in being exceptional, it is much simpler:  
being irreplaceable for somebody –  
it does not have to be Tuscany, it does not have to be summer,  
it does not even have to last

this is the hardest, so I exercise  
one breath at a time

## Oranževец pred hišo je v zenitu

Poslušam odsotnost vetra med listi  
in neobljudeno popoldne.

Zaradi treh stvari puščam polkna priprta,  
zaradi štirih zapiram vrata.

Zaradi lune, ki razbeljena zacvrči, ko jo kovač potopi v vedro.  
Zaradi jutra, ki prebledi, ko ga v obraz pogleda sonce.  
Zaradi dneva, ki zardi v noč, in zaradi praga,  
namesto stopinj ga bodo obrusili cvetovi.

Trije se dvigajo v nebo,  
štirje so šli brez najmanjšega šuma.

Šla je gorilna nitka v žarnici,  
iz glave mi je ušla prekinjena vrstica.  
Skozi priprto okno se je pririnil hlad  
in za mizo si je prostor našla večerja.

Štirih stvari ne morem dojeti,  
treh ne pozabiti.

Oblega kamna na obali, kot otroka me je naučil  
razlikovati levo in desno koleno, levo in desno stran ceste.  
Bolečine, ki je bila vseobsegajoča in je minila hip zatem.  
Ljubeznivega morja, vsako noč ga sanjam, čaka me pred vrati.  
Podnevi pošilja galebe in druge sle po odgovor.

In drevesa, ki zahaja nad svetom.  
Ni moč videti, kdo se vrti okoli koga.

Po dolžini sence določamo smeri neba.  
Po dolžini korakov, katera ura noči je.

## The orange tree in front of the house is in the zenith

I listen to the absence of wind in the branches  
and to the unpeopled afternoon.

For three things I have left the window shutters open,  
for four I close the door.

For the glowing moon which hisses when the blacksmith sinks it in water,  
for the morning which turns pale when the sun peers in its face.  
For the day which blushes into night, and for the threshold –  
there will no longer be feet to shine it, only petals.

Three ascend towards the heavens,  
four have left without a slightest sound.

The filament blew in the light bulb,  
a distracted line has vanished from my head.  
Through a half-open window the cold came in,  
and supper found its place at the table.

Four things I cannot comprehend,  
three I cannot forget.

The round stone on the beach which taught me as a child  
to tell my right knee from my left, one side of the road from the other.  
The all-encompassing pain that left me a moment later.  
The kindly sea I dream of every night, that waits for me at the door,  
and by day sends seagulls and other messengers for an answer.

And the tree which is setting over the world.  
You cannot tell which revolves and which is still.

By the shadow's length we set the sky's directions.  
By the pace's length we know the time of night.

## Concierto de Aranjuez

*Bilo je poletje, zavito v zimski plašč dežja.  
Bila je jesen zrelih fig in modre suše.*

Beli kamni so varovali speče vodnjake,  
črne in sladke so se robidnice skrile v niše  
suhih listov, prekritih s tanko plastjo prahu in soli,  
gola pobočja so prerasli srebrni grmi  
žajblja, oljke so imele zahodno stran  
in skale pod stalnim pritiskom burje vzhodno,  
neživo, belo površino meseca, ostrih robov  
brez zaklona pred soncem.

V opoldanski vročini teče čas  
samo še po žilah senc, nasičen z negibnostjo  
živih bitij in zraka, zemlje in sonca. Nič  
se ne more spremeniti, so govorili čuti,  
a nisem verjela.

Z občutkom, da se spominjam  
sedanjosti, ko še traja, da sem kakor glina,  
kakor papir, nosilec sprememb,  
sel in sporočilo hkrati. Moja DNK,  
spominske celice v možganih,  
povezave med njimi. Sporočilo,  
ki se samouniči, ko ga poslušáš  
do konca.

Goži na vročih kamnih niso nevarni.  
Nevaren je samo strah, neprevidna  
naglica umika. In preveč sonca.

Če se ne vrnem, bodo oljke in trave,  
robidnice, žajbljevi grmi in kače  
enake, nespremenjene.

Če se vrnem, bodo tudi enake,  
samo jaz ne bom in med nami bodo  
neubesedeni spomini okusov in vonjev.  
Vsako uspešno prepoznavanje bo  
vzrok za novo srečo. Ni se spremenilo,  
vsaj to se ni spremenilo, v svojem bistvu je  
ostalo enako, ker prepoznam te liste,  
ker prepoznam močan vonj zelišč,

## Concierto de Aranjuez

*It was summer, wrapped in a wintry coat of rain.  
It was an autumn of ripe figs and blue drought.*

White stones guarded the sleeping wells,  
brambles, sweet and black, hid in the niches  
of dry leaves covered with a thin layer of dust and salt,  
bare slopes were overgrown with silver  
sage, olive trees kept to the westerly side  
and the rocks, exposed to incessant assaults of gales, to the easterly  
unliving white moon-like surface, sharp-edged,  
unsheltered from the sun.

In noon heat, time flows  
only through the veins of shadows sated with the immobility  
of living creatures and of air, earth and sun. Nothing  
can change, the senses were telling me,  
but I was not swayed.

Feeling that I remember  
the present while it lasts, that I am clay,  
paper, the medium of change,  
the messenger and the message. My DNA,  
memory cells in the brain,  
connections between them. A message  
that self-destructs when heard  
to the end.

Grass snakes on hot stones are not dangerous.  
Fear is dangerous, and the imprudent  
haste of retreat. And too much sun.

If I do not return, the olive trees and grasses,  
bramble, sage and snakes will  
remain the same, unchanged.

If I return, they will also be the same,  
only I shall not be and between us there will be  
recollections of tastes and smells unexpressed in words.  
Every successful recognition will be  
cause for new happiness. This has not changed,  
at least this has not changed, at the core  
it remains the same, for I recognize these leaves,  
I recognize the strong fragrance of herbs,

ker je morje še slano in kamen  
bel in grob.

Ne isto, enako. In če ni,  
je enaka vsaj sled  
sprememb, zapis, da je bil čas  
tudi tukaj, da se je ustavil med nami  
in napravil presledek v svoji pisavi.

—  
Legla sem na zemljo, bila je mrzla,  
mirna, negibna, zaprla sem oči in čakala,  
da se nalezem njene modrosti, nehati,  
ko je čas, prepustiti se. Zaprla sem oči.  
Utišala misli. Samo ušesa  
so ostala prizemljena. Zvoki praznega polja  
in moje dihanje. Nato nenaden zvok,  
kakor bi veter premaknil liste v krošnjah,  
kakor da so krošnje polne in je spet poletje.  
Odprla sem oči. Nad mano jata ptic selivk,  
slišala sem gibe kril v letu.  
Nepričakovani zvok odhoda in sprememb  
me je razgalil. Vstala sem  
počasi, kakor bi mi dlani kril dale  
videti, ob meni, nenadoma, prehod.



### Vrabec, skozi bolnišnično okno

Videl sem smrt,  
kako je prisedla na posteljo in si sezula copate.  
Pritisk mu je padel,  
obraz je postal bel, ko je legla.  
Oči prestrašene.  
Odletel sem ven. Ker nisem imel  
deleža pri njegovem življenju,  
je bilo edino prav, da nimam deleža  
pri njegovi smrti.  
Čez pol ure sem se vrnil  
po krušne drobtine,  
ki so ostale od kosila.

for the sea is still salty and the stone still  
white and rough.

Not the same, equal. And if not,  
at least the trace of change is  
equal, testimony that time was  
here, too, that it had stood still among us  
and made a break in its script.

—  
I lay down on the earth, it was cold,  
calm, still, I shut my eyes and waited  
to take in her wisdom, to stop  
when it was still time, to let go. I shut my eyes,  
brought down the volume of my thoughts. Only my ears  
remained grounded. Sounds of a vacant field  
and my breathing. Then, a sudden sound,  
like wind shifting leaves in the trees,  
as if the canopies were full and it was summer again.  
I looked. Above me, a flock of migrating birds.  
I heard the movement of their wings in flight.  
The unexpected sound of departure and changes  
exposed me. I rose slowly,  
as if the palms of their wings had allowed me  
to see, suddenly, by my side, a passage.



### Sparrow, through a hospital window

I saw death  
sit down beside him on the bed and take off her slippers.  
His blood pressure dropped,  
his face paled, as she lay down.  
His eyes were frightened.  
I flew out. As I did not  
have a share in his life,  
it was only right not to have a part  
in his dying.  
Half an hour later I returned  
to pick up the bread crumbs  
left over from lunch.

## Sv. Frančišek

rasti v nebo,  
dokler ne postaneš drevo

poln prebranega dežja in prhke zemlje

kaj ti more veter,  
ko se odeneš v cvetje?

neponovljivost je tvoje žezlo

ne zlato ne srebro  
nista dala telesa  
za mizo, za posteljo

in ko pospijo ptice v tvoji krošnji,  
se ne premakneš več

abecedo znamenj zamenja molčanje



rumeno gori grm forzicij  
čebele obirajo fižolove cvetove  
popoldanska svetloba se cedi kakor med  
prilepljen na vrtno klopcu  
stvarnik kadi nebo  
in občuduje  
socvetja divjih kostanjev

## St Francis

grow into the sky  
until you become a tree

full of select rain and light soil

what can the wind do  
when you dress up in blossoms

singularity is your sceptre

neither silver nor gold  
have given their body  
for a table, a bed

and when birds in your crown fall asleep  
you stir no more

silence replaces the alphabet of signs



yellow burns the forsythia bush,  
bees buzz around the flowering beans,  
the afternoon light trickles, honeylike  
glued to a garden bench  
the creator smokes the sky  
and admires  
the blossoming wild chestnuts



## Saskia

Naslikati to žensko, ženo,  
njeno mehko kožo, njen vonj,  
preden se umije po napornem dnevu,  
kako puhti iz vseh pregibov,  
kjer se deli telesa lepijo med sabo.  
Način, kako si spne lase,  
kako ji vsake toliko uide koder, kako  
se nasmehne. Kako se ji tresejo  
prsi v smehu, kako v ljubezni in kako po njej.  
Kako speča ne sluti, da skiciraš njene odtise  
v blazinah, njene gube, vse trenutke  
majhnega življenja stisnjene  
v bežen poljub snopa svetlobe s kožo.  
Sledi donošenih otrok na njenem trebuhu,  
sledí nedonošenih in prezgodaj vzetih k Bogu  
v kotičkih njenih ust in oči,  
v ostrini, v odmaknjenosti izraza  
tik pred zoro ali ko se spet končuje dan  
in dobi žalost neprebojen, mrzel lesk jekla.  
Slikati, kar je pred tabo, tudi njo,  
ki te ni zapustila, še. Dokler vaju smrt ne loči.  
Razumeš, kaj je treba? Skozi to, kar imaš,  
skozi *golo vulgarno deskriptivnost*,  
hvali svojo ženo, hvali spretnost svojih rok  
in svetlobo. Hvali tudi temo in sence,  
zaradi njih postane platno slika.  
Zaradi njih postane čas življenje.  
Slehera ura in gib čopiča sta le posojena,  
pripadata gospodarju svetlobe in sence,  
vidnih in nevidnih stvari.  
Prav je, da ob vsaki uri dneva  
brez odlašanja vzameš v roko svinčnik  
in z mrežo črt rastočih na papirju  
pričaš o svetlobi onkraj časa,  
o podobah tostran senc.

## Saskia

To paint this woman, wife,  
her soft skin, her smell  
before she washes after a hard day,  
how it rises from the folds  
where parts of the body stick together.  
The way she puts up her hair,  
how every now and then a lock of hair escapes her, how  
she smiles. How her breasts tremble  
in laughter, in love, and after it. How,  
asleep, she does not suspect that you are sketching her imprints  
in the pillows, her wrinkles, all the moments  
of a small life compressed  
into a fleeting kiss of sunbeams on the skin.  
The marks of children she had borne on her belly,  
the marks of those miscarried or taken by God before their time,  
in the corners of her eyes and mouth,  
in the sharpness, the distant expression of her features  
shortly before dawn or when the day winds down again  
and sadness takes on the impenetrable, cold lustre of steel.  
To paint what is there in front of you, her as well,  
who has not left you, yet. Till death do you part.  
Do you understand what it takes? Through this,  
through *bare vulgar description*  
praise your wife, praise the skill of your hands,  
and the light. Praise also the dark and shadows,  
for they make the canvas become a painting.  
For they shape Time into a life.  
Every hour and brushstroke are borrowed  
from the Master of light and shadow,  
things visible and invisible.  
It is fitting that at every hour of the day,  
without hesitation, you take the pencil in your hand  
and with a web of lines growing on the paper  
testify to the light beyond time,  
to the images on this, the shadow side.

## Medeja

Moj sin ve. Vsak večer me pokliče.  
Nanj se zanesem. Dober,  
skrben sin je, oba sta,  
moja sinova. Moja skrb  
in tolažba.

Z veseljem jima še zdaj operem in zlikam.  
Obožujeta moj biskvit iz marelic.  
Ko sta bila otroka, sem ju močno stisnila k sebi,  
to je poplačalo vse neizpolnjene obljube,  
sled šminke na srajci ali neskončne ure dela.

Mlajši sin ima ženo, ki ve, da se staram.  
In zna čakati. Uči se peči biskvit.  
Drugi sin nima žene ali otrok.  
Vsak večer me pokliče.  
Nobenega mazanja rok s krvjo ni bilo treba.

Mož je umrl pred leti.  
Dolgo je trajalo preden smo ga lahko pokopali.  
Noč za nočjo je sam bedel ob svoji postelji.  
Čas je učinkovitejši od noža. Jaz mislim nase,  
staram se zgledno.

Nisem čarovnica. Toda stvari je treba znati  
obrniti sebi v prid.

## Medea

My son knows. He calls me every night.  
I can rely on him. He is a good,  
caring son, they both are,  
my sons. My care  
and comfort.

I still gladly wash and iron for them.  
They adore my apricot cake.  
When they were children, I'd embrace them tightly.  
That repaid all the unkept promises,  
traces of lipstick on the shirt collar or the endless hours of work.

My younger son has a wife who knows I am getting old.  
She knows how to wait. She is learning to bake cakes.  
The other son has no wife or children.  
He calls me every night.  
There was no need to sully one's hands with blood.

My husband died years ago.  
It took ages before we got to bury him.  
Night after night he sat awake by his bed.  
Time is more efficient than the blade.  
I think of myself, I age gracefully.

I am not a witch, but one must know  
how to turn things in one's favour.

## Απολογία

Ladje, naložene do zadnjega noža,  
čakajo. Vsak dan zamude  
stane bogastvo, najeti morilci  
postajajo nestrpni, tresejo se jim roke,  
ko gredo mimo neprerezani vratovi  
miroljubnih meščanov. Ministri trepetajo,  
da se vsa stvar ne obrne proti njim,  
čeprav so načrti dobri, izračunani  
do zadnjega kosa slanine natančno.

Nič strašnejšega ni: zjutraj  
se namesto vetra dvigne sonce.

Obvisi na nebu, kot klada na klancu,  
in nikjer sekire. Samo napeta vrv ne počī.  
Sonce obsedi na sèncih,  
krona vse močnejše stiska lobanjo.  
Eno življenje je vse, kar ima vladar.

Oprosti, hčērka, toda potrebujemo veter,  
in to nemudoma.

## Απολογία

Ships, loaded to the last blade, wait. Each day  
of postponement is costing a fortune.  
My myrmidons grow impatient, their hands  
begin to shake when the unsevered heads  
of peace-loving citizens pass them by.  
My ministers tremble to think that heaven  
might turn against them, though the plans are good,  
measured down to the last side of bacon.

Nothing is more terrible: every dawn  
the sun rises instead of wind and stays suspended in the sky,  
a log tied on a slope. Its taut rope holds as if we lacked for blades.  
The sun sits on my temples. This crown torques my skull.

One life is all a prince has. Daughter, I pray  
you'll forgive me: we need wind without delay.

## Musei Capitolini

Med poletom domov sedim ob oknu,  
na drugi strani prehoda oče in sin,  
oče mlad, star morda trideset, temnolas, lep,  
sin star šest ali sedem let,  
enakih las, polnejših lic;  
igrata se, očka ga žgečka, poljublja  
po licih, vratu, ramenih in rokah,  
deček se smeje, med smehom  
ga poljublja nazaj: »Contrattacco, babbo!«  
Oče ga poboža po trebuhu – kolikšna nežnost,  
kar si lahko delita le oče in sin,  
o tej nežnosti tudi ženske nič ne vedo.  
Tako lepa sta,  
kakor kipi v kapitolinskih muzejih,  
izkopani z vrtov rimske vile,  
gladki in sijoči, da bi se jih dotaknil,  
bogovi, nimfe, živali,  
popolni v svojem svetu,  
NON TOCCARE! opozori varuhinja muzeja,  
dotikanje uniči in umaže,  
kar mora trajati.  
Je mogoče čutiti do kipov tolikšno nežnost?  
Roko očeta, ki ga ni  
v Jupitrovem templju  
ali nad oblaki,  
čas se je tu ustavil  
(jaz in knjiga, ki pravi, da poezija  
ni imela najmanjše možnosti  
ostati zunaj zgodovine).  
Razpoke v kamnu,  
ki jih zazna le budno oko.  
Nekaj v meni, kar se ne more pomiriti  
s preteklostjo, milina, kjer enako rani  
zrak, ki jo obkroža  
in preprečuje dotik,  
muzej razbitin in ostankov,  
relief očeta, ki poljublja sina.

## Musei Capitolini

On the flight home I have the window seat.  
Across the aisle, father and son.  
A young father, perhaps thirty years old, dark-haired, handsome,  
the son six or seven years of age,  
the same hair, fuller cheeks;  
they play, Daddy tickles him, kisses  
his cheeks, neck, shoulders and arms,  
the boy laughs, laughingly  
kissing him back: 'Contrattacco, babbo!'  
The father caresses his tummy – such tenderness  
only a father and a son can share,  
a tenderness even women know nothing of.  
They are beautiful,  
as statues in the Capitol museums  
dug out from the garden of a Roman villa,  
so resplendent, you want to touch them,  
gods, nymphs, animals,  
perfect in their own world.  
NON TOCCARE! warns the museum guard,  
the human touch sullies and destroys  
what must last.  
Is it possible to feel such tenderness for statues?  
The hand of a father  
not in Jupiter's temple  
or above the clouds,  
the time here has come to a standstill  
(myself, and the book that says poetry  
never stood a chance of standing  
outside history).  
Cracks in the stone,  
visible only to the attentive eye.  
Something within me that cannot be at peace  
with the past, a gracefulness that wounds, as does  
the air that surrounds it, preventing any touch,  
a museum of wrecks and remains,  
a relief of a father kissing a son.

## Levi na pročelju katedrale

Tretjerazredni marmor so načeli dež,  
mraz in vročina; podobni so  
vrhovom valov, za hip  
privzamejo obliko  
in že se razpustijo

v peno.

Smehljajo se.  
Morda vejo, da kopnijo.

## Cathedral lions

Rain, cold and heat have corroded  
the low-grade marble; they're like  
the crest of a wave, for an instant  
take form  
and already

dissolve into foam.

They smile.  
Perhaps they know they are disappearing.