

JACQUELINE
SAPHRA
PJESME I
KAMENJE

JACQUELINE SAPHRA

PJESME I KAMENJE

skua
light

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Zagreb, 2025.

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S engleskoga preveo Goran Čolakhodžić

Proslov

Povijest postaje
Kasandra.

Napastovana
zbunjena

ona proriče
prošlost

i nudi je
budućnosti.

Kao što je pretkazano
taj je projekt

osuđen na propast.
Sadašnjost

joj vjeruje
ali je

ne smatra
novošću.

Prije rata

Nori Nadjarian

Draga Nora, prvo smo se upoznale zadovoljne i neugrožene.

To je bilo prije rata.

Knjiga je bila otvorena, pjesma je zvala, ali to je bilo prije rata.

Kosa mi je vjerojatno bila ravna, rekla si mi tad, kad je
maskara još bila važna,

i bile smo spremne ispisati svaku sekundu. Kakvi planovi,
prije rata!

Draga Nora, onda ti je smrt posjetila oca. Ali ne smijem to
govoriti.

Ovo pismo gore je uništeno; možda je to bilo prije rata?

Danas sam vidjela fotografiju gola mrtvaca bačena u bunar.

Bol je još tu, još tu, spomenula si: naravno, čak i prije rata.

Draga Nora, sjećaš li se kad smo razgovarale o mjesecu i
smrti?

Volim biti živa! Nabacila sam. Život je bio začudno ugodan
netom prije rata.

Pisati za buduće naraštaje: kakva sprdnja, napisala si. Pjesma
je držala jezik za zubima,

poluoblikovana, poluprisutna, prigušena užasom, ne kao
prije rata.

Bol je na svom dugom, sporom putovanju: starac hoda niz
ulicu u plamenu
pod mutnim srpom mjeseca zaziva ime djeteta kao prije rata.

Sad istina razvlači i samrtno oteže: “Na koji to trenutni rat
mislite?”

Živimo u mraku tog pitanja: nema tog doba zvanog “prije rata”.

Draga Nora, pomози mi. Pjesma pita pjesnika: “Što se rimuje sa
žalost?”

Predaleko odoh za odgovor. Mislila sam — znam. To je bilo
prije rata.

“Trenutak kad sruše ruski helikopter”

Ne želim

željeti to vidjeti

Za boga miloga

ja sam pacifistkinja

Pogledam ga osamnaest puta

onda ga dodam u favorite

Velvelova violina

Prema Rachel Shtibel

Sve ratne godine Velvelova violina nijemo je ležala pod orahom gdje ju je zakopao.

Kao i Rachel i Luci čija su djetinjstva ušutkale štale i bunkeri, njoj je bilo samo do igranja.

*Zayde*¹ im je svojim očima gledao, kroz ogradu groblja, kako mu živu ženu zakapa Gestapo.

Grobovi se miču, grobovi se miču!
govorio je getu i izgubio želju za životom.

Kad su Rachel i Luci ispuzale iz rupe koju su dijelile dvije godine, bile su već izgubile glasove.

Poslije rata, preostaci obitelji iskopali su Velvelovu violinu ispod oraha.

To je sve što nam je ostalo od Velvela reče njihov otac ali naravno, nitko nije znao na njoj zaigrati.

Tjeskobna židovska pjesma

Britanski su Židovi tihi, uglavnom se kriju
pod šeširima i plitko dišu
rado nečujno židovski šapuću
rastezljivi i ugođeni sa snebivljivim Britancima
dok židovski glavešine skidaju kipe²
i ustaju pjevati kralju i domovini.
Prošlo je židovski dugo od zadnjeg
židovskog vala i može se reći da smo sigurni:
zasad prolazimo, a neki od nas ne
štuju, neki uopće ne primjećuju, osim
Židova koji bi vjerovali podneblju: njegovim
židovskim naborima i pomacima, drevnim pogrdama
koje sveudilj mute, lecaju se i krvare kroz pokožicu
sjećanja? Židovska se povijest burka, crvena boja
pljuje Židi, Židi, Čifuti, Shyloci, još uvijek
šale o židovskim parama, korekcije nosa, čuvari
na vratima. Pa pognite svoju židovsku glavu
i spremite pomno židovsku torbu, pa kad
dođe židovsko stani-pani, kako se pokazalo
uvijek iznova, moji židovski drugovi, koliko god
ne bili Židovi, oni neće zaboraviti
vašu židovsku djecu i židovskog boga
vaše patinaste svijećnjake, vaše zvijezde
vaše zahrđale *mazel tove*, vaše židovske knjige.
Nikad ne podrazumijevajte. Prihvatite židovski kruh
bez kvasa; budite uvijek spremni na pokret.

Načula u vlaku 3

a jesi znao
da je više od
šest tisuća Židova
imalo urede
u Blizancima 11. rujna
to se zna
i pogodi šta
nitko od njih
nije došao na posao taj dan
mislim jebote
samo kažem
postoje dokazi
gle ima video

Ratne igre

Očaj je zavežljaj
koji si dodajemo.

Kruži li kruži.
Lijepo je dijeliti, kažemo.

Jedno po jedno
svako od nas dodaje svoj

mali i uzaludni doprinos
dok ne stane glazba.

Sad je zavežljaj tako težak
da ga više nitko ne može dići.

Nema veze.

Naučio je rasti
bez naše pomoći.

Ostavljamo očaj
u središtu
kruga i buljimo u njega.

Ne čini ništa.
Nije ga sram.

Bulji on u nas
golemim okom-krikom.

Meza uz etiku

Tijekom grozne meze pune kojekakvih pretencioznosti, Meg i ja raspravljamo može li se ljude podijeliti u dvije kategorije: recimo da se neki rađaju nesposobni za ljubav; možda su oni druga vrsta, možda ne možemo učiniti ništa po tom pitanju, a kamoli po pitanju ovog užasnog patlidžana očajanja. Empatija je naš križ, kažem prijateljici, ispirući riječi gutljajem vode, potajno zadovoljna što me taj stalni bol, ta nemogućnost gutanja nekako odrješuje. Ne znam, Meg, iznosim mišljenje žvačući ljigavu mozzarellu, čak je i Hitler bio odan svojem psu prije nego što ga je otrovao, čak je i Frau Goebbels voljela svoju djecu dok ih je ubijala, čak bih i ja mogla upucati Putina ili Bolsonara da mi daju malo poduke i pištolj. U međuvremenu se *taramasalata*³ skorila, a odbojni grah napustio je svaku nadu, ali kad otužni konobar prinese račun (*rat, suša, cijena goriva i gnojiva*) sjetim se da nisam gladna i ne kažem ništa.

Shmatte ⁴

Ovo su prnje naših pramajki i praotaca
skrpane skupa kao molitve u mrklini bijednih tvornica

rite koje su šlepali od vrata do vrata ne bi li zaradili
nešto ni od čega manu za preživjele

hranu za dijete koje je poživjelo i začelo mi pretke
čija su imena davno pokopana koje je svejedno začelo

moju prabaku Sheynu koja je izmađijala
vlastitom rukom žutu haljinu koja je privukla

pogled Jacku finom židovskom doktoru koji se oženio
mojom bakom Bessie Komunisticom koja je začela

Adriana Roberta Felicity i moju majku
Marnu učiteljicu koja nije marila ni koliko bi stalo u naprstak

za krojački zanat ali je začela mene Yael ja koja mogu
napisati ovu pjesmu ali jedva zašiti *shmattu za shmattu*

ja koja sam začela Jacoba Tamar Ethana Melissu
i stoga svečanim zavjetom ovih stranica

blagoslivljam i pamtim žutu haljinu konac
iglu naprstak sreću stopala magarce

kola kolotrag vlakove hrabrost za prelaske
kroz gubitak kroz strah i buru plod

te muke plod sanjara plod *chutzpe*⁵
koja nas je održala živima i izvela u ovo doba.

Mir s tobom

*“Svatko je od nas guslač na krovu
koji pokušava odsvirati lijepu,
jednostavnu melodiju i pritom
ne slomiti vrat” Tevje*

Obavezni poput majki ili liječnika
ili haringe, bili su tu i satovi violine,
klasika i klezmer iskopani kao mulj
iz masovnih grobnica Europe obredima
od konjske dlake i kolofonija, stare priče
izgrobljene iz šuma, probuđene
iz baršuna, crijeva i palisandrovine.
Koji to židovski roditelj ne bi prilijepio
Chagalova *Zelenog violinista* na vrata
frižidera ili pak pucajući od ponosa
rekao *Moje dijete guslač*, ili
sa strahopoštovanjem spominjao
Heifetza, Ojstraha, Menuhina?

Nije lak zadatak izmamiti pjev
iz tog glazbala; neću reći
da sam bila dobra, ali jednom ili dvaput
osjetila sam da mi rijeka povijesti blagoslivlja ruke
lukom prevlačeći preko žica
i stupajući u snoviti krajolik
Šolema Alejhema, onog koji je štetl
bar u duhu održao živim. Sviraj samo,
reče mi, ne zaboravi: ponekad

bi tu bio neki šešir, često povratak kući,
vjenčanje, pogrom, rastanak —
a tu i tamo neki ljudi glazbenik
balansirao bi po krovovima sela
koja nitko ne pamti, svirajući violinu.

Sve kuće na svijetu

Kad cure zalupe vratima misle *Prepuna sam gubitka sebe i rasola sebe i nabreklog smiješnog oblika sebe i beskrajnog sramotnog razlijevanja sebe, a što sam to sad slomila*

ali dečki kad zalupe vratima misle samo o vlastitim zvonkim izlascima uz oblake piljevine, krivljenju šarki na vratima i potresanju podova.

Cure iz soba plačno dozivaju *Uđi, neću te pustiti unutra, Uđi,*

ali dečki istupaju na ulice noseći nove, tvrde ruke, te bučne udove i na oprugu navijene zglobove. Netko ih je naučio da probaju otvoriti sve kuće na svijetu, netko im je rekao da su sva vrata širom otvorena i samo čekaju da ih oni komotno zalupe.

Prepotencija

(prema “Adamu” Jacoba Epsteina)

Kurac na pol koplja; brusi se da širi:
diže se, grdan; ne kao udovi koji
se, bljutavi, mlitave u sobama 3 i 4.
Pijan od žudnje, napumpan krvlju, stoji
širok na plinti i urla za pičkom. Izusti
sad *ne* na taj zov!? To je gdje
smjesti se izvor: prvi, iskonski grijeh:
on provrta otvor, ona ga pripusti.

Poslije su pisali *tražila je* — njezina roza,
zavodljiva put — *modricam, ne cjelovim*.
Pitaš tko piše te knjige: i, koja je tvoja prognoza?
Bi li ti, s čežnjom, raširila noge pred *ovim*,
rodila još ovakvih? Bome je zao čas.
Je l' mora taj čovjek bit' otac svih nas?

Koliko je sati u Novoj Škotskoj?

Ovdje su 3 sata ujutro, ljubavi, a ja ne mogu prestati razmišljati o morževima: povijesnim zapisima o mornarima koji bi uhvatili mladunče i mučili ga dok ne bi počelo kričati; odraslim životinjama koje bi svoju strašnu masu izvukle na kopno da spase svoje mlado.

Neću spomenuti da nitko još nije uhvatio čovjeka od kojeg si pobjegla, ali vratiš li se kući kunem se da ću te zaštititi. Ali ne smijem reći doći kući. Radi li grijanje? Neću pitati za tvoj kašalj, jedeš li naranče i učiš li francuski ili sviđa li ti se prsluk koji sam ti poslala. Da ti barem mogu iščerkati kosu. Podsjeti me da ti pošaljem recepte za juhe.

Odrasli morž nije imao nikakvih predatora osim čovjeka: bila ih je tolika sila mrtvih, ali lovci ih nisu mogli sve ponijeti, pa su ih ostavili na gomilama beskorisne na ecoucherie što je na francuskom obala mislim ali ti to sad već znaš ako učiš francuski.

Neću te pitati o radnim uvjetima, ili ozdravljaš li zbilja, ili o bravi na tvojim kućnim vratima i tvom slomljenom srcu, ne kažem da ti je srce slomljeno ali bude li ikad to ti je krasna, normalna stvar.

Moram opet zaspati, ne razmišljati o tvom biciklu, obijenim bravama, mračnim noćima, uljezima, morževima. Jesu li i oni bili roditelji, pitam se, muškarci koji su plovili kući u galijunima natovarenima strvinama: meso za put, kože za kaput, bjelokost za ures damskim zapešćima, ulje da upali svjetiljke Europe,

gdje sam ja sad, oceanima daleko od tebe u ovaj tihi sat, teška od težine morževa, bolna od želje da ih spustim i polegnem, znajući da se takve terete ne snima lako: stisak svake zvjerke ili djeteta, bespomoćnu ljubav koje jedno biće mora na srcu nositi za drugo.

Vječna

Rezervne nikad nismo držali, pa me jednog zimskog
popodneva,
pošto smo opet dosuđeni tami, majka poslala
preko velike ceste po šezdesetvatnu žarulju na bajunetni
spoj,

s deset šilinga u šaci, u željezariju
gdje je teta s košnica-frizuricom dokačila jednu
s polumračnih polica, izvukla je iz navlake

i kratko razmotrila stanje žarne niti
prije no što će je spustiti u tester, gdje je procvala
i obujmila nas žmirkave u svoj blistavi opseg.

Ponekad, noću, ležim kraj svih svojih mrtvih
u potpunom mraku i mislim o toj zimi, topeći se
od žudnje za izgubljenima koje se više ne može dodirnuti.

Ali kako ih otpustiti: najteži zadatak je prosuditi
kad je vrijeme da stisnem prekidač i dam se
zaslijepiti preobilnim sjajem tih vremena,

kad smo, govorila je majka, imali priliku
iznaći vječnu žarulju, ali smo nekim tajnim sporazumom,
tvrdila je, od nje odustali.

Ne moraš biti mudra
ne moraš biti draga
Ne moraš biti ispravna
ne moraš biti dobra

i to otkrivenje je kao hladan tuš nakon
što godinama budeš zaglavljena u loncu iskuhavajući
svoje dopadljivo *ja* do smrti sve dok ne primijetiš
da postoje ljestve za izlaz i ispneš se van
i odvrneš slavine na najjače to je onaj hladan tuš
od kojeg zaplešeš i vičeš mokra i nemarna
dok ne budeš pročišćena i gola i ponosna
i neandertalka taknuta dvojnim božanstvima
Dovraga & Ne onaj tuš koji možeš podijeliti
sa svim svojim sestrama iz lonca tuš od kojeg
jurneš urličući u dan u kojem možeš reći
Ne Više Nema Šanse možeš reći Ne možeš reći

Ne Ne Ne Dovraga Ne

Cimex lectularius

Ovog sam tjedna saznala da obična stjenica
može preživjeti godinu dana bez jela i da Alzheimera

možda uzrokuje brza hrana, što me podsjeća na Davida
Blainea
ovješeno u kutiji iznad Temze bez i najmanje

mrvice hrane dok su ga ljudi gađali kobasicama
i lopticama za golf i kako je sišao, ošamućen nakon 42 dana

mrmljajući "Volim vas sve" kao da je sve zaboravio,
zbog čega se čudim gladi i samoobmanama

nevoljenih, recimo one anoreksične cure u crnom koja
protrči
pored mene svakog dana, ali mi nikad ne dâ da joj se
osmjehnem,

što me neodoljivo vuče natrag na čežnju i poricanje.
Možda bi se u to trebalo ugledati, u stjeničinu stoičnost,

u to kako živi omražena i pasivna u pukotinama, čekajući
u tihoj izvjesnosti neku budalu da legne u mraku.

Pjesme i kamenje

Glava je teška
od nepomirljivih bremena.

Ti svjetovi: kako poravnati
vagu, kako podnijeti bol.

Ljubav ošamućuje i pupa u kosti,
strahovi potresaju lubanju.

San trepti i podiže vjeđe.
Ovaj vrat je zakopčan stup.

Iz jednog oka suze bijesa;
iz drugog suze blagoslova.

Ovi su jecaji stijenje,
ovi su jecaji pjesme.

Kako da oslobodim te opreke
iz grla?

Više ni ne znam zbog koje
mi je to tako teško progutati.

Vijesti i kosica

Već danima nisam ništa
nego samo sebi bitna
dok ispisujem zaraćeni svijet
dok odbijam da me dekoncentrira
ženka kosa tamo vani, pred
mojim prozorom, kosica
koja nikako da prekine pjesmu
koja tu nema što tražiti
i ne može mi shvatit' bol—
i ne znam gdje su
mi oči bile osim
drugdje, uplakane,
um mi se rastvara zgnječen
kao plod koji nikako
da otpusti košticu, srce mi
tuguje i tuče
u voćnjacima rata.
No danas je kosica
odjednom zapjevala u tonalitetu
radosti: *Gle vani! Gle gore!*
i što sam drugo mogla
nego poslušati kad se stopila
sa zelenom žudnjom
šljivina stabla, domom
njenom gnijezdu što se ondje
skriva, teško od ptića
i uvijek gladno iza
raskoši i slave lišća.

Ljubav

Toliko toga visi
o toj riječi,
a ipak još hoda.

Natovarena
našim čežnjama
klipše uzbrdo.

Ta riječ ne nosi naočnjake;
široke joj oči
ne poznaju noć.

Hranimo je vjerom
i ona jede
uspinjući se,

vječne kičme napete
pod teretom
obećanjā.

Volim te:
lako je to reći.
Ljubav sliježe ramenima

kao na *zauvijek*
ili *u dobru i zlu*
ili *naravno, srce*

i njuši zrak.
Nov požar
nadolazi.

Ljubav pristaje opeći se.
Uporno korača
dalje.

Sonet za mir 1

A kad smo kod ljubavi, pogodi što ne volim:
zastave: te srušene saveznice uništenja,
tvoje ljubljene, kojima mašu kao kalašnjikovima,
dignute visoko dok nacije hvata buktinja,
pa pucaju po šavovima i duše se rašivaju.
Toliko je riječi za krv, za krivnju, gubitak,
za bombe i granice, za grlo nas hvatajuć'
bijes nas može dokrajčiti — (ne)ljudski bitak —
al' zašto ne govoriti o ljubavi? Odakle se kreće?
Volim široku ruku: pjesnici da pišu;
da se muškarčine grle; kidanje kruha; umijeće
građenja mostova. Prijatelju (smijem tako blizu?),
mogla bih voljeti i tebe, sve drveće što diše,
tiho nebo s kog pada samo lišće.

JACQUELINE
SAPHRA
SONGS AND
STONES

Prologue

History becomes
Cassandra.

Done over
confused

she foretells
the past

and offers it
to the future.

As predicted
the project

is doomed.
The present

believes her
but doesn't

consider it
news.

Before the War

for Nora Nadjarian

Dear Nora, we first met glad and unthreatened. That was
before the war.

The book was open, the poem beckoned, but that was before
the war.

My hair was probably straight, you told me, back when
mascara mattered
and we were poised to write into every second. Such plans
before the war!

Dear Nora, then death visited your father. But I must not say
that.

The above letter was shredded; maybe that was before the war?

Today I saw the photograph of a dead man dumped naked in a
well.

Grief still there, still there, you mentioned: of course, even
before the war.

Dear Nora, remember when we talked about the moon and
death?

I love to be alive! I offered. Life was strangely pleasant just
before the war.

Writing for posterity: what a joke, you wrote. The poem held its
tongue,

half-formed, half-present, muted by horror, not like it was
before the war.

Grief is on its long, slow journey: an old man walks down a
burning street
under the moon's dull crescent calling a child's name as if
before the war.

Now truth drags out its death drawl: 'To which current war
do you refer?'
We live in the dark of that question: no such era as 'before
the war'.

Dear Nora, help me. The poem asks the poet: 'What rhymes
with sorrow?'.
I'm too far gone to answer. I thought I knew. That was before
the war.

“The Moment a Russian Helicopter is Shot Down”

I do not want to
want to see this

For god's sake
I'm a pacifist

I watch it eighteen times
then put it on my favourites list

Velvel's Violin

After Rachel Shtibel

All the years of the war, Velvel's violin lay silent
under the walnut tree where he'd buried it.

Like Rachel and Luci, their childhoods gagged
in barns and bunkers, all it wanted was to play.

Their zayde witnessed, from behind the fence
at the cemetery, his wife buried alive by the Gestapo.

The graves are moving, the graves are moving!
he told the ghetto, and lost the will to live.

When Rachel and Luci crawled out of the hole
they'd shared for two years, they had lost their voices.

After the war, the remnants of family disinterred
Velvel's violin from underneath the walnut tree.

It is all we have left of Velvel said their father
but of course nobody knew how to play it.

Anxious Jewish Poem

Jewish Brits are quiet, mostly hiding
under hats and breathing lightly
eagerly inaudible in Jewish whispers
stretched and tuned to bashful British
as Jewish Deputies doff their kippot
and stand to sing for king and country.
It's been a Jewish while since records of
a Jewish wave and you might say we're safe:
we pass for now, and some of us do not
observe, do not observe at all, but
Jewish who would trust the territory: its
Jewish folds and shifts, ancient slurs
that blur on, cringe and bleed through skin
of memory? Jewish history churns, red paint
spits the yids, the yids, Fagins, Shylocks, still
the Jewish money gags, nose jobs, sentries
at the gates. So keep your Jewish head down
and your Jewish bag well packed and when
push comes to Jewish shove, as has been proved
and proved again, my Jewish friends, however
Jewish you are not, they won't forget
your Jewish children and your Jewish god
your tarnished candlesticks, your stars
your rusty mazeltovs, your Jewish books.
Never assume. Accept your Jewish bread
unleavened; always be prepared to move.

Overheard on a Train 3

& did you know
there were more than
six thousand Jews
with offices
in the twin towers on nine-eleven
it's on record
& guess what
not one of them
turned up for work that day
i mean jesus
just saying
there's evidence
look here's a video

War Games

Despair is the parcel
we pass amongst us.

Round and round it goes.
It is good to share, we say.

One by one
each of us adds our own

small and pointless contribution
until the music stops.

Now the parcel is so heavy
nobody can lift it anymore.

No matter.

It has learned how to grow
without our help.

We leave despair
in the centre
of the circle and stare at it.

It does nothing.
It is not ashamed.

It stares right back at us
from one huge screaming eye.

Mezze with Ethics

During the terrible mezze with its various pretensions, Meg and I debate whether humans can be divided into two categories: suppose some are born incapable of love; maybe they are another species, maybe there's nothing we can do about that, let alone this appalling aubergine of despair. Empathy is a burden we carry, I tell my friend, washing it down with water, smug that this constant pain, this inability to swallow somehow absolves me. I don't know Meg, I opine as I chew the slimy mozzarella, even Hitler was devoted to his dog before he poisoned him, even Frau Goebbels loved her children when she killed them, even I might put a bullet in Putin or Bolsonaro if you gave me some lessons and a gun. Meanwhile the taramasalata has congealed and the despicable beans have given up hope but when the sad waiter tenders the bill *(the war, the drought, the price of fuel and fertiliser)* I remember I am not hungry and I say nothing.

Shmattes

These are the rags our foremothers and forefathers
pieced together like prayers in the murk of sweatshops

scraps they schlepped from door to door to earn
something out of nothing manna for the survivor

food for the kinder who lived to beget my ancestors
of long buried names who beget nevertheless

my great grandmother Sheyna who conjured
by her own hand a yellow dress that caught

the eye of Jack the nice Jewish doctor who married
my grandmother Bessie the Communist who beget

Adrian Robert Felicity and my own mother
Marna the teacher who did not care a button

for the tailor's art but beget me Yael I who can
write this poem but barely fix a shmatte to a shmatte

I who beget Jacob Tamar Ethan Melissa
and therefore by the covenant of these pages

bless and remember the yellow dress the thread
the needle the thimble luck feet donkeys

carts tracks trains courage of crossings
through loss through fear and storm the fruit

of the labour fruit of the dreamer fruit of the chutzpah
that has kept us alive and brought us to this season.

Peace Be Upon You

*'Every one of us is a fiddler on the roof
trying to scratch out a pleasant,
simple tune without breaking his neck' Tevye*

Mandatory like mothers or doctors
or herring, there were violin lessons,
classical and klezmer dredged from
the mass graves of Europe in rituals
of horsehair and resin, the old stories
disinterred from forests, rising
from velvet, catgut and rosewood.
What Jewish parent would not stick
Chagall's *Violiniste Vert* to the door
of a refrigerator, or would not kvell
to say *My kid the fiddle player*, or
would not speak in tones of awe
of Haifetz, Oistrakh, Menuhin?

It is no easy task to coax a song
from the instrument; I won't say
I was good, but once or twice
I felt history's river bless my hands
as I drew the bow across the strings
and entered the dreamscape of
Sholem Aleichem, he who kept alive
the shtetl of the mind. Play on,
he told me, don't forget: sometimes

there was a hat, often a homecoming,
a wedding, a pogrom, a farewell –
and now and then a crazy musician
balanced on a rooftop above a village
nobody remembers, playing the violin.

The World's Houses

Girls slamming doors mean *I am filled with the loss of myself and the brine of myself and the bursting ridiculous shape of myself and the endless embarrassing spill of myself, and what did I break,*

but boys slamming doors mean only their own reverberant exits in flutters of sawdust, putting hinges out of alignment and shaking floors.

Girls cry from their rooms *Come in, I won't let you in, Come in,*

but boys step out onto streets wearing new, hard hands, those rackety limbs and sprung joints. Someone has taught them to try all the world's houses, someone has told them every door is wide open and theirs for the casual slamming.

Spunk

(after Jacob Epstein's 'Adam')

His cock hangs at half mast; it's primed to score:
rising, monstrous; nothing like those bland
and flaccid members in rooms 3 and 4.
Drunk on lust, pumped up with blood, he stands
broad on his plinth and howls for cunt. Who'd dare
to leave that call unanswered? This is where
we find the source: that first, primeval sin:
he forced an opening, she let him in.

Later they wrote *she asked for it*—her pink,
seductive flesh, the bruise and not the kiss.
You ask who wrote those books: who do you think?
Would you, with longing, spread your legs for *this*,
bear more like him? It seems so far to fall.
Must this man be the father of us all?

What Time Is It in Nova Scotia?

Here, it's 3am, my love, and I can't stop thinking of walruses: historical accounts of sailors who'd trap a calf and torture it until it screamed; the adult animals who heaved their terrible bulk ashore to save their young.

I won't mention nobody's caught the man you ran from but if you come home I swear I'll keep you safe. But I mustn't say come home. Does the heating work? I won't ask about your cough, whether you're eating oranges and learning French or if you like the vest I sent. I wish I could brush your hair. Remind me to send you recipes for soup.

The adult walrus had no predators but man: so many dead, the hunters couldn't take them all and left them piled and useless on the ecoucherie which is French for shore I think but you know that by now if you're learning French.

I won't ask about the terms of your employment, or if you're really healing, or about the lock on your front door and your broken heart, not saying you have a broken heart but if you ever do, that's a lovely, normal thing.

I must go back to sleep, not think about your bicycle, broken locks, dark nights, intruders, walruses. Were they parents too, I wonder, the men who sailed their galleons home laden with carcasses: meat for the voyage, skins for leather, ivory to decorate the wrists of ladies, oil to light the lamps of Europe,

where I am now, oceans away from you at this quiet hour, heavy with the weight of walruses, aching to lay them down, knowing such burdens are not so easily offloaded, the hold of any beast or child, the helpless love one creature must bear another.

Everlasting

We never kept spares, and one winter's afternoon,
consigned to darkness again, my mother sent me
across the big road for a sixty watt bayonet bulb,

ten shilling note in my palm, to the hardware shop
where the lady with the beehive hooked one down
from a shelf of shadows, lifted it from its sleeve

and briefly pondered the condition of the filament
before she eased it into the tester, where it blossomed
and held us blinking in its bright circumference.

Sometimes at night, I lie with all my dead beside me
in the absolute dark, and think of that winter, basking
in the longings of the lost who can't be touched again.

But how to let them go: the hardest task is judging
when it's time to flick the switch and let myself
be blinded by the excess radiance of these times,

where, my mother used to say, we had our chance
at the everlasting lightbulb, but in some secret deal,
she claimed, abandoned it.

You do not have to be wise
you do not have to be kind
You do not have to be right
you do not have to be good

& that revelation is like a cold shower after
you've been stuck in the pot for years boiling
your loveable self to death until you notice
there's a ladder for climbing out & out you climb
& turn the taps to full the kind of cold shower
that causes you to dance & yell wet & reckless
until you are cleansed & nude & proud
& Neanderthal touched by the twin deities
of Hell & No the kind of shower you can share
with all your sisters of the pot the kind of shower
that sends you roaring into the day where you can say
No More No Way you can say No you can say
No No No Hell No

Cimex Lectularius

I have learned this week that the common bed bug
can survive for a year without a meal and that Alzheimer's
may be caused by fast food, which reminds me of David Blaine
suspended in a box above the Thames without so much as
a single snack while people pelted him with sausages
and golf balls, how he descended, woozy after 42 days
murmuring 'I love you all' as if he had forgotten, which
causes me to wonder at the hunger and delusions of
the loveless, like that anorexic girl in black who jogs
past me every afternoon but never lets me smile at her,
which leads me back intractably to longing and denial.
Perhaps it is something to emulate, the bedbug's stoicism,
how it lives reviled and passive in the cracks, waiting
with quiet certainty for any fool to lie down in the dark.

Songs and Stones

This head is heavy
with irreconcilable weights.

These worlds: how to balance
the scales, how to bear the ache.

Love stuns and buds in the bone,
terrors rattle the skull.

Sleep flickers and lifts the lids.
This neck is a buckled pillar.

From one eye, tears of rage;
from the other, tears of blessing.

These sobs are stones,
these sobs are songs.

How do I free these oppositions
from my throat?

I no longer know which one
is making it so hard to swallow.

The News and the Blackbird

For days I've been nothing
but important to myself
writing this warring world
denying the distraction
of blackbird outside
my window, blackbird
who will not stop her song
who has no business here
and cannot know my pain—
and I don't know where
my eyes have been except
elsewhere and weeping,
my mind twisting open
like a fruit that won't
release its stone, my heart
grieving and beating
in the orchards of war.
But today the blackbird
sang suddenly in the key
of joy: *Look out! Look up!*
and what else could I do
but obey as she folded
into the green desire
of plum tree, home
to her nest that lay
hidden, chick-heavy
and ravenous behind
a celebration of leaves.

Love

So much hangs
on the word
yet it keeps on walking.

Loaded
with our longings
upwards it trudges.

The word is not blinkered;
its wide eyes
know no night.

We feed it with faith
and it eats
as it climbs

eternal spine braced
under the weight
of promises.

I love you:
easy to say.
Love shrugs

as in *forever*
or *whatever*
or *sure, Honey*

and sniffs the air.
Another fire
is on the way.

Love takes the heat.
Puts one foot
in front of the other.

Peace Sonnet 1

And talking of love, guess what I don't love:
flags: those crashed allies of destruction,
your darlings wielded like kalashnikovs,
their colours raised aloft as nations burn,
burst their seams and unstitch their souls.
So many words for blood, for blame, for loss,
for bombs and borderlines, the stranglehold
of rage could take us all—the human curse—
but why not talk of love? Where shall I start?
I love an open hand: poets at their pens;
big men embracing; breaking bread; the art
of building bridges. Friend (may I call you friend?)
I could love even you, and all the breathing trees,
a quiet sky with nothing falling but the leaves.

Bilješka

Pjesme prevedene u ovom izboru izvorno su objavljene u zbir-kama: *Velvel's Violin* (Nine Arches Press, 2023.)—“Proslov”, “Prije rata”, “Trenutak kad sruše ruski helikopter”, “Velvelova violina”, “Tjeskobna židovska pjesma”, “Načula u vlaku 3” (*Kolažirana pjesma temeljena na zabilješki razgovora prislušivanog tijekom putovanja vlakom od Eustona do Northamptona u studenom 2022.*), “Ratne igre”, “Meza uz etiku”, “*Shmatte*”, “Mir s tobom”; *All My Mad Mothers* (Nine Arches Press, 2017.)—“Sve kuće na svijetu”, “Koliko je sati u Novoj Škotskoj?”, “Vječna”, “Prepotencija”, “Cimex lectularius”, “Vijesti i kosica”, “Ljubav”; *Dad, Remember You are Dead* (Nine Arches Press, 2019.)—“ne moraš biti mudra ne moraš biti draga ne moraš biti ispravna ne moraš biti dobra”, “Pjesme i kamenje”; “Sonet za mir” objavio je Whaleback Press 2024. godine.

Gdje god je to bilo moguće, u prijevodu su, u skladu s autoričinom željom, zadržane izvorne riječi na jidišu.

Notes

Prologue

Before the War

The Moment a Russian Helicopter is Shot Down

Velvel's Violin

Anxious Jewish Poem

Overheard on a Train 3

A found poem based on notes taken of an overheard conversation on a single train journey from Euston to Northampton in November 2022

War Games

Mezze with Ethics

Shmattes

Peace be Upon You

*The violin was a popular instrument in Eastern European Jewish culture. As Jews were forbidden to take up most professions, but for the few prodigies, becoming a violinist was a route out of grinding poverty and a chance to travel. Sholem Aleichem (a variant of a phrase that is translated as 'peace be upon you') was the pen name of Solomon Naumovich Rabinowich, a Yiddish author and playwright. The musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was based on his (much darker) stories of *Tevye the Dairyman*.*

From (Nine Arches Press 2023)

The World's Houses
What time is it in Nova Scotia?
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Cimex Lectularius
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From *All My Mad Mothers* (Nine Arches Press 2017)

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you do not have to be right you do not have to be good
Songs and Stones

From *Dad, Remember You are Dead* (Nine Arches Press 2019)

Peace Sonnet

Published by Whaleback Press 2024

On the Author

Jacqueline Saphra is a poet, playwright and activist. She is the author of nine plays, five chapbooks and five poetry collections. *The Kitchen of Lovely Contraptions* (flipped eye 2011) was nominated for the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize. *If I Lay on my Back I Saw Nothing but Naked Women* (The Emma Press 2014), illustrated by Mark Andrew Webber and set to music by Benjamin Tassie won the Saboteur Award for Best Collaborative Work. Jacqueline's T.S. Eliot Prize-shortlisted collection *All My Mad Mothers* (2017) and her subsequent one, *Dad, Remember You are Dead* (2019) were both published by Nine Arches Press. Her newest play, *The Noises* was shortlisted for a Standing Ovation Award. Jacqueline's collection, *One Hundred Lockdown Sonnets* (2021) was followed by *Velvel's Violin* in July 2023 (Nine Arches Press), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and BBC Radio 4 Extra Poetry Book of the Month. Her latest project is the libretto for 'A Kind of Haunting', an opera by British Jewish composer Michael Zev Gordon which will be staged at The Barbican in March 2025. She is a founder member of Poets for the Planet and has taught in many different settings including The Arvon Foundation, The Poetry School, Oxford University Summer School and the MsT at Cambridge University.

O pjesnikinji

Jacqueline Saphra je pjesnikinja, dramatičarka i aktivistica. Autorica je devet drama, pet kraćih pjesničkih zbirki (chapbooks) i pet knjiga poezije. *The Kitchen of Lovely Contraptions* (flipped eye, 2011.) nominirana je za Nagradu Aldeburgh za debitantsku zbirku. *If I Lay on my Back I Saw Nothing but Naked Women* (The Emma Press, 2014.), koju je ilustrirao Mark Andrew Webber, a uglazbio Benjamin Tassie, osvojila je Nagradu Saboteur za najbolje suautorsko djelo. Jacquelininu zbirku *All My Mad Mothers* (2017.), koja je dospjela u uži izbor za Nagradu T. S. Eliot, kao i narednu *Dad, Remember You are Dead* (2019.) objavio je Nine Arches Press. Njezina najnovija drama *The Noises* bila je u užem izboru za Nagradu Standing Ovation. Nakon zbirke *One Hundred Lockdown Sonnets* (2021.), u srpnju 2023. uslijedila je *Velvel's Violin* (Nine Arches Press), knjiga koja je zavrjedila posebnu preporuku društva Poetry Book, a BBC Radio 4 Extra proglasio ju je pjesničkom zbirkom mjeseca. Njezin je najnoviji projekt libreto za *A Kind of Haunting*, operu britanskog skladatelja židovskog porijekla Michaela Zeva Gordona, koja će biti postavljena u The Barbicanu u ožujku 2025. Jedna je od utemeljiteljica međunarodne mreže Poets of the Planet, a predavanja je držala pri različitim ustanovama, među kojima su Zaklada Arvon, The Poetry School, Ljetna škola Sveučilišta u Oxfordu i magistarski programi Sveučilišta u Cambridgeu.

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