

**Maja Haderlap**

**Maja Vidmar**

**Alojz Ihan**

**Aleš Debeljak**

**Barbara Korun**

**Uroš Zupan**

**Peter Semolič**

**Primož Repar**

**Nataša Velikonja**

**Aleš Mustar**

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# CONTEMPORARY SLOVENIAN POETRY

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10 POETS BORN BETWEEN 1960 AND 1969

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Photo by URSULA RAUSCH

Maja Haderlap (b. 1961 in Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla in Carinthia/Austria) is a poet, playwright and translator. Recently she has also started to write prose. She lives in Klagenfurt/Celovec, Austria. She studied Theatre Studies and German Language and Literature at the University of Vienna. After completing her doctorate, she worked as a theatre dramaturge and university lecturer. In the 1992-2007 period she was Senior Dramaturge at the Stadttheater of Klagenfurt. Haderlap was for many years the co-publisher and editor of the Carinthian-Slovenian literary journal *Mladje* (Young Branches). She has published three volumes of poetry: two cycles of poems written in Slovenian, *Žalik pesmi* (Mythical Poems, 1983) and *Bajalice* (Dowsing Rods, 1987) and a large volume of collected poems in three languages entitled *Gedichte Pesmi Poems* (1998), which for the first time contained her poems written in German. In 2007 she published a commemorative publication: *Das Stadttheater Klagenfurt. Die Ära Dietmar Plegerl 1992-2007*. She has received several awards for her literary work, including the prestigious Prešeren Foundation Award and the Förderpreis zum Hermann-Lenz Preis.

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# MAJA HADERLAP

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### what used to be

once a year,  
when bookmarks  
tumble from my books,  
bearing notes like  
counter ferns,  
recorder carnations,  
nettle clips,  
I return to my village.

upon the open pages  
the stories turn yellow.  
they have become legends  
and laid down their weapons:  
the mockery, the turmoil,  
the sweat of the dance  
that dripped  
from the dancer's temples.

I put on my red old red pinny,  
push my hair back  
over my head like a bush  
and wear dirty socks  
and boots that would fit a man.  
I smell the pork fat  
in the unaired kitchens  
and try out names  
and their shadow-stories.  
once triggered off  
they crash and boom  
like drifting timber.

at the yard entrance  
I stand still,  
there I have placed a stone  
beside a furrow in the lime,  
to remind me  
of where I came from.

### piran

there's a coming and a going in the neighbouring house,  
but the spindle-tree keeps me well beyond their glances.  
the paths that lead from the overgrown garden  
are followed only by cats, toads and snails.  
loudly the sea shakes off its stinking cloak.  
on my writing desk, invented characters  
rehearse their missing dialogue.  
I sit here, as if at the bottom of some old distress,  
press air into memory cells  
to keep it alive, walk in the evenings  
across piazza tartini and in the morning



come with fresh melons from the market.  
twice a week frida drops by.  
why don't you get married, she calls from the bushes,  
it's better than being lonely, at least!  
today a toad will lose its warts  
because I shall kiss it, I say.  
then, my dear poetess, I'd like to be  
a witness at your wedding.  
yet another door swings shut.

### alias

I have learned road maps by heart - and  
long-forgotten paths. my skin is taut and white,  
as if dyed with sand-lime. under my fingernails  
horsetail buds burst open like signposts.  
words hum in the tent of skin I bear before me  
as a protective sign, as a deceptive mask.  
I beat my drums and let the rockets rise,  
they flare up dangerously beneath the surface of skin.  
one breath of air might tear the mask  
from my body. but there's none blowing yet,  
and people still think they recognise me.  
when my name is uttered and falls there should be  
a white rag in the landscape. I was here.

### night woman

I lie on the kitchen table  
and listen to noises. a door is opened  
and light ushered into the room.  
cushions and boots are piled,  
metres-high, upon an unlit stove. now  
I want to see where you let her sleep,  
your wife calls. you come first,  
and with a smile caress  
the walls and me.  
I seek refuge outside in the garden,  
hear someone shout,  
she loves you, she just doesn't know it!  
it's raining on one side of the house.

*Translated by* PETER WAUGH

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again i write letters  
the days stretch like laughter in varnish  
across the yellowing grass  
the summer burst out with its belly  
like a glut of water turned out of a barrel  
sometimes it stinks of dung-water  
again i write letters



even say stay tonight  
let your hair grow  
on my sofa have  
your teeth taken with wild kisses  
houses grow out of my hands  
when i love you  
one for the holiday  
one for the torn out hair  
one for the fugitive peace  
which strays and sleeps with us  
when we are alone  
whatever wants to come, ought also to come  
have already planted flowers for the autumn  
call them red xanthippes and if you come  
for tea today i ask you sing for me  
this sad song *soncek cez hribcek gre\**

\* the sun crosses the hill

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it could be a woman  
showing me the way to the village  
that i'm looking for. it could be a village  
with lodgings for strangers  
and pairs of eyes to be counted.  
it could be a village  
with hoes and spades, well known to me.  
but in the night my mother comes.  
she points into the valley. none of that  
belongs to us, she says.  
my suitcases are standing packed  
in front of her door. i recite verses  
about arriving.  
they aren't songs or laments,  
only a loose sound.

*Translated by* JOHN L. LEWIS

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Photo by TONE STOJKO

Maja Vidmar (b. 1961) studied comparative literature in Ljubljana, where she currently lives as a freelancer. She has published several collections of poetry: *Razdalje telesa* (Distances of the Body, 1984), *Način vezave* (Ways of Binding, 1988), *Ihta smeri* (Urge of Direction – Selected Poems, 1989), *Ob vznožju* (At the Base, 1998), *Prisotnost* (Presence, 2005) and *Sobe* (Rooms, 2008). Her selected poems in the German translation were awarded the Hubert-Burda-Stiftung Prize. For her book *Prisotnost* she received the Prešeren Foundation Award, the Jenko Prize and the Grosser preis für osteuropäische Literatur (Vienna).

# MAJA VIDMAR

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Akt*, Zagreb: Meandar,  
1999  
*Liebhaftige Gedichte*, Graz:  
Droschl, 1999  
*Gegenwart*, Wien: Edition  
Korrespondenzen, 2007  
*Molitva tijela*, Sarajevo:  
Tugra, 2007

## The Couple

We are alone  
on a deserted island.  
Waiting for a ship  
that may not come.  
We are alone,  
a woman and a man.  
He is nothing in particular,  
with particularities,  
not my thing,  
but on an island there is no other,  
neither for me nor for him.

We are alone  
on a deserted island.  
Every day stretched on the rack  
between yes and no.  
Every day is worse  
than sex.  
Worst of all is the fear  
that I will spot the ship  
and the shore will have to be  
abandoned in the middle of the movie.  
Each day is a gift  
of delay.

## The House

With father's milk  
I drank  
the solid architecture  
of the house,  
and yet in these rooms  
every evening  
I covered up my head.  
There was no doubt:  
out in the open they would  
have come, those who are not,  
they would have devoured me.

It is hard  
with a house in your head.  
In the evening I sit  
at the back door  
crying out for them,  
those who are not.

## Idyll

It's no coincidence that you and I  
and the two children found ourselves  
in the lift. Even when



I was little,  
it was loveliest  
in the car, where  
we were all within  
arm's reach. The lift  
crunched like  
a fresh sugar wafer.  
We said to the children,  
*it's alright, it's alright,*  
and really, it didn't hurt.  
Just moments before,  
I was grateful for  
the experience.

### Isaac

When Isaac sleeps  
I cover his little wings,  
I watch him breathe  
and smell him  
as though he were mine.  
When Isaac waves to me  
I warn him across the street,  
trembling,  
as though he were mine.  
For I let him go,  
touching wood  
every day I let him go  
among the beasts.

How do I say,  
as though I didn't care,  
Isaac, come,  
let's climb the high mountain.  
How do I search for a chopping block,  
a smooth, clean chopping block  
for him.  
How do I take a knife  
as though I didn't care,  
take a naked, grey knife—  
how do I cut him off  
so alive.

Isaac, come, let's go.

### The Means

Use ordinary words  
and worn-out metaphors  
the way I do.  
Use betrayed loves  
and bloody, limp hands





the way I do.  
Use hopeless flights  
of tired pigeons  
and this burnished stone,  
about the only thing above water,  
the way I do.  
Use numb legs  
on your way into the water,  
and the fear there is no way out  
the way I do.  
Use my imminent death  
the way I  
use it:  
just to hear our whispers  
to each other,  
preferably, using ordinary words.

### I. Nigredo

Outside the big window  
the crazed caretaker  
is cutting off  
little black paws.  
Dismembered wolves,  
scattered all around,  
fertilize  
the school garden.  
I run away  
so I won't be noticed  
behind the glass  
by the merciless gardener.

### III. Albedo

The whiteness  
of a frozen night.  
A small skittish animal  
rests  
its fear.  
My little red paw  
lives in  
an iron snare.  
Moonlight  
and three footprints  
in the snow.  
That way!

Alojz Ihan (b. 1961) graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ljubljana, holds a Ph.D. degree in Immunological Sciences and is a Specialist in Clinical Microbiology and Immunology. He is currently employed as a Professor of Medical Microbiology and Immunology at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ljubljana. The literary work of Alojz Ihan comprises six books of poetry: *Srebrnik* (Silver Coin, 1985), *Igralci pokra* (The Poker Players, 1989), *Pesmi* (Poems, 1989), *Ritem* (Rhythm, 1993), *Južno deklo* (Southern Girl, 1995), *Salsa* (Salsa, 2003). He is the author of two novels: *Hiša* (The House, 1997), *Romanje za dva ... in psa* (Pilgrimage for Two... and the Dog, 1998) and two essay books: *Platon pri zobozdravniku* (Plato at the Dentists, 1997), *Deset božjih zapovedi* (Ten Commandments, 2000). Ihan also writes cultural essays and opinions in several of the most popular Slovenian journals and newspapers. For his literary work he has received several important national awards.



Photo by VLADO ŽABOT

# ALOJZ IHAN

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Srebrnjak*, Zagreb:

Goranovo proljeće, 1985

*Igrači na poker*, Skopje:

KMM, 1987

*Acerca de un rincón seguro*,

Tarazona: La Casa del traductor, 1999

*Ritmo*, Madrid: Hiperión,

2000

*El ritmo del mundo*,

Ljubljana: Verba hispanica, 2001

*Salsa: wiersze wybrane*,

Port Legnica: Biuro Literackie, 2003

## Casting out the devil

Bought at an antique store a very old book,  
found in it a recipe for casting out the devil,  
so shopped for frogs, crones hair, animal eyes,  
lead, roots of bident, dried, and some other  
essentials, combined and cooked, like it says,  
rubbed it under the armpits, on my thighs,  
sprayed the walls of the appartment, had as a result  
a heckuva fight with The Woman, then she  
stomped out of the place mad as Beelzebub.

## Loves from afar

How fascinating are these loves from afar and unspoken  
That exist with no real story to them, unnoticed  
Somebody buying vegetables always in the same store  
At exactly four o'clock, each afternoon, the bell jingles  
And it's "Good day," and the girl behind the counter will say  
"Yes, what would you like today?"  
And then it's all pears and vegetables and fruit from the south in surprisingly few words  
Though the fashion in fruit and vegetables changes yearly  
But, no, he always likes his red delicious, his pomegranates, his unripe bananas  
And in vegetables: eggplants, squash, lettuce of the season, and onions, nothing earthshaking  
Though it's not clear why precisely at four he has to go into the very same store  
If he ever thought about it, he'd be amazed, as he would if he asked himself  
Why for years, not years, decades he hasn't wanted to move out of the apartment  
Which, let's face it, is damp and too expensive for what he earns  
And nothing about it is really cosy, to spur one to singing in the shower  
Or doing calisthenics standing up in the living room  
Because there is always a heavy fog rolling in  
And who can really feel at ease when unable to see his feet and under them solid ground  
Without that feeling every step you take is tortured searching  
For the precipice's edge, a tense watchfulness on the part of the hands  
That at the last minute they might grab hold of something, anything  
Or shield the eyes, at least, when the buried land mine left over from the last war explodes  
If he really, if he truly gave all that some thought, he'd wonder why he doesn't want to leave  
And close the books in the accounting office, where the calculations and the numbers every day  
Revolve with the same rhythm around the giant zero, like planets the explosion of the dying sun  
Will swallow five million years from now, but till that day the same old rhythms will recur  
If he ever thought, really thought, about it he might ask himself if he does not not quit  
Only because it would then no longer be so it-goes-without-saying necessary  
To buy his vegetables and his fruit in just that store, in which each day, the girl behind the counter  
Says to him, "Yes, and what would you like today?"  
Even though she may the while be getting fruit for someone else  
Because it's rare, really, that a clerk will meet a client so kind, who just shyly waits  
And then clearly and distinctly desires the red delicious and the green bananas  
Like a, like a very precise plumber who stays faithfully in the territory assigned to him  
If the girl behind the counter were more confident of this, she might even ask him for a favour  
Because it's very useful having for a plumber a man you see every day  
Whom you can trust to turn up every day at four, no matter the sort of day it is  
To turn that smile on and that respect that people in sales do so, so miss  
Standing behind the counter every day, not understanding why somebody will out of the blue



Start giving them shit about the apples being too soft, because this somebody  
Ever since he was a kid liked them hard, why do people expect that strangers  
Will fulfill precisely the desires not even their mothers ever suspected they had  
That's why the girl behind the counter likes her plumber who comes exactly at four  
It's why she too takes the bus every day to the other side of town to come to her store  
Though she could long ago have found another, closer to her house, through whose  
Display window she could see the front door of her house, through which  
Her husband would be coming home, and he's not even close to being as reliably precise  
As the client who comes every day at four to ask respectfully for  
The red delicious and the kilogram of onions, and in the silence which follows both know  
Full well, that that is exactly as it should be, and any further word would be too much.

## Apple

As soon as I came on guard duty, the little girl  
began to act strange. She stood by the trench which  
surrounded the barracks, she was maybe six, or seven,  
wearing the wide trousers - red - had black hair, a real, real  
little Albanian girl; as I began to walk alongside the trench, she began  
marching in the same direction herself; soon I could see  
she was mimicking my every step, even my posture; she was playing  
my shadow and I became nervous, there could have been  
irredentists nearby waiting for the little girl  
to make me inattentive. So I motioned for her to  
leave, at once. She halted, then she laughed,  
reaching into her satchel, and pulled out an apple.  
She swung her arm and threw the apple toward me. I jumped  
behind a shelter, hugged my automatic, waited  
There was no explosion. I lowered the barrel. "I won't  
shoot the little girl," I told myself, "she doesn't understand."  
Then I watched the apple, big, red, it looked totally authentic.  
I made a threatening motion in the little girl's direction, she  
became frightened and started to run away. I didn't know what  
to do with the apple. It could have been injected  
with poison; if I bit into it, I might die or at least fall asleep,  
and then the irredentists would cross the trench and butcher me.  
I didn't know if the poison worked at the mere touch, and so,  
as a precaution, I did not touch the apple, nor did I kick  
it into the trench, I just stood there and waited,  
helpless. It seemed to me that these things were too big  
and too complicated for me and that I should really report everything  
to the commandant; if I sounded the alarm, all my worries  
would be over, the siren would howl, and there we'd all be,  
elbow to elbow in the trenches, guns at the ready.  
Really, I didn't know what to do and I became so nervous  
it almost hurt. Then, luckily, the next watch came.



## God could not keep a straight face

God could not  
Keep a straight face  
Sewing big gay wings for the butterflies  
For their busy fluttering around flowers  
Not to mention when he was honing bird beaks  
And buffing the glitzy fish scales  
Nor could he hold it in  
Faced with his pig snouts, with elephant trunks.  
I needn't tell you how it was with man  
No happier creation is there than the red tongue  
Swishly dancing around teeth  
Spraying words like a sprinkler on a lawn  
Each truth of the world is joyfully easy to master  
Nor is there love that the tongue cannot  
Prattle or hosanna about  
Though, yes, for entirely new words you do occasionally need  
Speech therapists  
Worse is what happens to humans by love surprised  
The suddenly mute, because now there's no word for it  
Though the weirdo will insist on going where no word can go  
When the only way out is honest stuttering  
You can, you can teach the tongue  
The words for that fear and the words for that love  
And words for filler, which bring a smile to the lips  
For each truth of the world is joyfully easy to master  
And love is the game when God just couldn't  
Hold it in anymore.

## Wild Geese

I know that you were somewhere among  
The flight of geese flying south  
I stood waist-deep in the marsh, gun against my cheek  
And the geese like a storm cloud covered the sky  
I know you had to be among that swarm somewhere  
For, for the longest time, I've dreamt nothing but you  
And it is clear why, motionless in the marsh, I  
searched and sought among the feathered bodies, and waited  
For the finger to squeeze, for the shot to slash the air  
Then one of the feathery bodies vortexed  
And fell at my feet  
It was warm and at peace when I touched it  
Then I awoke and now I don't know  
Where you were among the flight  
That like a storm cloud covered the sky  
In my dream.



Photo by ERICA JOHNSON DEBELJAK

Aleš Debeljak (b. 1961) graduated in comparative literature from the University of Ljubljana and received his Ph.D. in Social Thought from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York. He was a Senior Fulbright fellow at the University of California, Berkeley and a fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study - Collegium Budapest. Debeljak has published twelve books of essays and seven books of poems in his native Slovenian. A translator of a book of selected poems by John Ashbery and a book on the sociology of knowledge, he has also edited an anthology of American metafiction and published a book of critical essays on American literature. He won the Prešeren Foundation Prize, the Miriam Lindberg Israel Poetry for Peace Prize, the Chiqyu Poetry Prize and was named Ambassador of Science of the Republic of Slovenia. He has edited Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian sections for *Shifting Borders: East European Poetries in the Eighties* and *Prisoners of Freedom: Contemporary Slovenian Poetry*. A founding editor of the *Sarajevo Notebooks* magazine and a contributing editor of the *Verse* magazine, Debeljak is also a general editor of *Terra Incognita: Writings from Central Europe*, a series of books published by White Pine Press, Buffalo, New York.

# ALEŠ DEBELJAK

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Rječnik tišine*, Zagreb:  
Quorum, 1989, 2002

*The Chronicle of  
Melancholy*,  
Chattanooga: Poetry  
Miscellany, 1989

*Slownik Ciszy*, Krakow:  
Cassiopeia, 1992

*Momenti d'Angoscia*,  
Napoli: Flavio Pagano  
Editore, 1993

*Anxious Moments*,  
Fredonia: White Pine  
Press, 1994

*A csend szotara*, Pecs-  
Budapest: Jelenkor  
Kiado, 1996

*Katalog prachu*, Olomouc:  
Votobia, 1996

*Shisyuu fuan na jikoku*,  
Tokyo: Kashinsya, 1997  
*Grad i djete*, Zagreb:  
Meandar, 1998

*Mesto a dite*, Prague:  
Mlada Fronta Press,  
1999

*The Dictionary of Silence*,  
Santa Fe: Lumen Press,  
1999

*The City and the Child*,  
Buffalo, New York:  
White Pine Press, 1999

*Miasto i dziecko*, Krakow:  
Zielona Sowa, 2000

*Minutes de la peur*,  
Pézenas: Domens, 2001  
*Skice za povratak: izabrane  
pesme*, Banja Luka –  
Beograd: Zadužbina  
Petar Kočić, 2001

*Netobula žoždio aistra*,  
Vilnius: Lietuvos  
Raštoju Sajungos  
Leidykla, 2001

*Kaupunki ja lapsi*,  
Helsinki: Nihil Interit,  
2002

*Izabrani Pesni*, Skopje:  
Blesok, 2004

*Ispod površine*, Zagreb:  
HDP, 2006

*La ciutat i el nen*,  
Barcelona: Edicions La  
Guineu, 2006

## A Letter Home

I long for a comfort that cannot be measured,  
forgotten caves where Bach can't reach,  
the bell that sounds for a monarchy  
not found on any globe, for the feverish  
concentration of hunters who oil  
and polish their guns. I long for the salt  
that tears contain, the marrow that boils  
in my bones, I long for the miracle opening up  
like a mouth when nothing comes out.  
If I am the only one listening, the percussion  
of grace in my loins is what I become,  
pulling the trigger like no one has taught me  
and no one would know how to gauge.  
Alone on a trail that nobody knows  
I follow the line of your neck. Your head  
is tilted back, I give myself to whatever it is  
that strains my muscles and forces me  
to flower like the scatter a shotgun fires,  
singing at last from a single place  
called Rome, Medina, Jerusalem,  
which is home to me  
as only one place can be.

## Cast Vote

That crystal morning, snow over snow:  
in capital cities they might be ashamed of it.  
That conference of birds, and light upon water,  
the parliament of dreams, and knowing no fear  
of getting old, and she, alone this winter  
morning, her face that sees itself within  
a flower etched by ice along the glass,  
her reflection thawing and piercing  
the window: she is austere and never so strange,  
outside her shadow sputters again  
like a match refusing gravity and singe.  
In the vast expanse of frost and worry,  
not even a minute to think, she was the one  
with the courage to disobey silence,  
she could not be voted down and said:  
Look, in the shallows of this common river  
the Black Sea claims as its own,  
fish still wriggle out of a boy's hands, tracing  
a perfect arc, and with them everything  
that flows, everything that falls, rushes  
without reason as one's childhood rushes by—  
look: we are not a wall but a shutter  
some far-off god is opening halfway.



### Hymn to the Favorite City

The ground is soaked with weeks of high water,  
and thieves of sanctuaries beside the lagoon  
are on the run, my eyes following them everywhere,  
somewhere close, a robin's breast collapses  
under the pressure of a thumb: only a little while  
before the dock a black boat leans against  
is covered with drops of blood, useless  
as a song two people can hardly hear. Well,  
maybe it's merely a melody without words.  
This city has baptized a dozen generations  
in the sacrament of war, but I go on  
all the same. As if I had a choice.  
The harlequin from the Palazzo Grassi,  
the one who inspired Picasso, has meaning for me  
only when I see you rendered blue,  
faint and luxurious, with the violence  
beauty uses to enter certain homes:  
indivisible, unable to end, like a cloud  
that houses thunder, beneath which I work  
my memory's weakness, widen channels  
and clear out passageways, so the voice  
that surges out of you can spill downstairs  
to the living room, and cross the yard  
in a rush basket I can barely see.  
Carried by the echo through whirlpools  
and across the shores of death, it says: no.

### Grass Psalm

Seekers after sources and rivers,  
messengers of useless desires, traveling  
merchants, a spider in its web:  
they keep me company this early  
evening hour, in the privacy of a groggy soul  
who stands and smokes and three kids  
sleeping upstairs. In a dream, my years  
of devotion grind by, and images evolve  
less real than I would want. Look at it:  
translucent it reveals itself, is not  
the least bit shy, radiates like an apparition  
over a desert discovered by others;  
but all the same it suits me, so big  
and unsatisfied, like a monologue  
running without a break, it lasts  
as long as the pain of harvest grass  
when left to rot. Look at me as I tremble,  
you cannot miss how I reach for you,  
my partner I do not know. Yet you alone  
can fix my sight, you're a welcome  
guest in every house, you detect  
the failures in my speech, you forgive  
the stutter that I am.





## Drowned Love

You burn me, this is my weakness.  
I admit: I can't stand that everything,  
everything —words and bodies— passes  
from hand to hand. Like a walk  
down to the three bridges, past bookstores  
and the ornaments almost invisible  
on each façade, past the stains  
on violins, shiny and hard  
like madness, past the palaces  
in no hurry to be restored,  
an orchestra playing day after day  
in another gazebo, another park,  
when I lost my way among the streets  
and wandered, ignorant, under the dome  
of another sky, in another dream,  
which threatens and seduces  
just like you, you who lure  
a trout to your hips, you who foretell  
how memories twist in the genes.  
You burn me, this is my weakness.  
Like an omen I can't dismiss.  
A hand to another hand. Tears,  
I know this too well, tears  
don't run down the cheeks,  
they're oil a downpour can't wash off  
and high tide breaks against the soul  
in vain. There's nothing else I can do:  
I give you up to the current,  
and I do it out of love. You vanish  
into pain, a strange joy, and nothing.

*Translated by* ANDREW  
ZAWACKI AND THE AUTHOR

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Photo by TONE STOJKO

Barbara Korun (b. 1963) took a degree in the Slovenian language and comparative literature and taught literature at high schools. She works at the Slovenian National Theatre in Ljubljana as a language advisor. Her collection *Ostrina miline* (The Edge of Grace, 1999) received the National Book Fair Award for a debut collection. Her other collections of poetry & prose poems are *Zapiski iz podmizja* (Notes from under the Table, 2003), and *Razpoke* (Fissures, 2004). A leading figure in a generation of radical young women poets, her work has been published in many anthologies and reviews in fourteen languages.

“The short, imagistic poems rip into the senses and change the perceptions of the reader, time and time again. Barbara Korun’s direct voice is haunting and full of surprises. There is a surrealistic tone to the poems – Korun dwells in myth, the animal world, and relationships between men and women as she builds upon human frailty to establish fresh dimensions beyond it.” (Bloomsbury Review, Oct. 2005)

# BARBARA KORUN

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Chasms*, Chattanooga:  
Poetry Miscelanny, 2003  
*Songs of Earth and Light*,  
Cork: Southword  
Editions, 2005  
*Krilati šum*, Zagreb:  
Naklada Lara, 2008

## The Moon Will Cover Me

I have two animals,  
A red one and a blue one.  
When the blue one drinks,  
the red one goes rushing about –  
and vice versa.  
I never can catch them, torn as I am  
between the resting one and the rushing one.

I float a thought for bait,  
far, far out over the plain.  
They take no notice,  
their snouts sniffing the infinite.

I will lay myself down in the long grass,  
close to a well, and sink into sleep.  
The moon will cover me.

They will come in the morning  
with the first horizontal light,  
tired, sweaty, foam on their muzzles.  
Then we will go together to drink water.

## Lioness

The lioness is my love for you, the tawny lioness  
with her golden skin, her golden eyes.  
She walks by my side always;  
when I sit down to rest she lies beside me,  
her face by my leg like a loyal dog.  
I play with her, I lie down between her great paws  
and let her toss me like her cub.  
I feel the weight of her great paws,  
the sharp precision of her claws.  
I taste dead meat on her breath.

Now she is dying, the tawny lioness.  
More and more she falters behind me,  
hurrying to catch up with me when I rise.  
I see the clotted blood that beads her snout.  
She lies there on her side, she raises  
her yellow, waning gaze to me.  
I ask her: Where has your strength gone?  
Where has your voice disappeared to?  
I lay myself down between her weary paws,  
I close my eyes with hers.



## Stag

I wake to a warm stag's tongue between my legs,  
the evening light comes horizontal in through open doors.  
Gently he nuzzles my breasts, this stag, and licks me,  
his coarse tongue warm on my vulva, my breasts, my face.  
His scent intoxicates me – earth, moss, fear and decay –  
the raw odour of instinct.  
He lies down beside me against my smooth belly,  
I run my hands over his matted hair.  
He holds his head proud, he gazes away from me into the woods.  
His bare penis is reddening in the shadows of dusk.

Time thickens. I reach out into the dark, I touch a man's body.  
Desire flares in me, I am suddenly all heat.  
He makes love to me simply, directly; he holds me close.  
In his hands are the north wind and the south wind.  
Rivers and oceans run through his body.  
His mouth is warm and full of summer rain.  
The room fills with songs of earth, of beyond our earth.  
Sometimes a flash of moonlight reveals his face.

He does not look me in the eye, he protects me from himself.  
Sometimes when he is with me I no longer feel the ground.  
Sometimes lust pools in his navel like a clear spring.  
Sometimes he fountains, spewing lava.  
He never hurts me.  
With infinite care he turns me belly down on to the earth,  
when he bites my neck and I smell his hot breath I know  
I am to be spared.

With the coming of dawn I feel small horns in his hair.  
Fur sprouts from his head to his back, his rump.  
On his belly are sudden tufts of bestial grass.  
He has a stag's head at daybreak, his eyes on me barely human.  
Eyes from the other side of the frontier.  
Absent-minded, his hands of horn caress me.  
I watch his antlers burgeon and spread.

The scent of morning flushes the hut, he stands to go.  
One brief glance at me as I stand in the door  
and I am split in two, I fall to the ground in flame.  
I listen to the pock of sharp hooves going away,  
I feel how my burnt halves are putting out flowers.

## Sisyphus

Through my dreams,  
you roll a stone.  
My body,  
my heart,  
groan in sleep.  
You roll the stone,



your eyes  
two slits of dark.  
Above,  
a surprise to me  
over and over again,  
you pounce on the stone  
like an animal,  
a body delighting  
in movement;  
when I catch up with you  
you are already panting  
in happy exertion.

Through my dreams  
you roll a stone,  
under my ribs the echo  
of your terrible footfall.

### **Birth of an Angel**

I gave birth out of a swelling on my breast, my third breast,  
long hidden under scarves and shawls. It hurt as it came. He  
helped me with his broad hands, he who husks out the shape  
of souls. I saw a small being, the size of a fist, covered all over  
with down, white and sticky. First you must let it dry, he said,  
warming the creature between his big fingers. I could see as it  
dried that this tiny being was wrapped in wings much bigger  
than itself. It didn't live, it couldn't, it didn't want to live. Apparition,  
sea-foam, it melted in our hands.

### **Mirror**

A man leans over me  
as over water.  
He wishes to see his face  
in my water mirror  
but my water is dark,  
dark and deep, will not  
give back his reflection.  
He searches, surprised  
then amazed, and I am afraid  
he will jump in, jump into me,  
and find staring back at him  
his own face there,  
dead.



Photo by TOMAŽ BERČIČ

# UROŠ ZUPAN

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Beim Verlassen des  
Hauses, in dem wir uns  
liebten*, Salzburg, Wien:  
Residenz Verlag, 2000  
*Prygotowania do nadejścia  
kwietnia*, Krakow:  
Zielona Sowa, 2001  
*Pripreme na dolazak  
travnja*, Zagreb: Konzor,  
2002

*Otváranie delty*, Bratislava:  
F.R.&G, 2004  
*Beim Verlassen des  
Hauses, in dem wir uns  
liebten*, Wien: Edition  
Korrespondenzen, 2005  
*Immer bleibt das Andere*,  
München: Carl Hanser  
Verlag, 2008

Uroš Zupan (b. 1963), a poet and essayist, graduated in comparative literature from the University of Ljubljana. He has won numerous prizes including: Best First Collection Award, the Prešeren Foundation Award, the Jenko Prize, the Župančič Prize, Herman Lenz Preis, Premio della VI Edizione del Festival Internazionale di Poesia (Genova) etc. He has published eight collections of poetry and four books of essays. His poetry titles include *Sutre* (Sutras, 1991), *Reka* (River, 1993), *Odpiranje delte* (Opening of Delta, 1995), *Nasledstvo* (Succession, 1998), *Drevo in vrabec* (A Tree and a Sparrow, 1999), *Nafta* (Oil, 2002), *Lokomotive* (Locomotives, 2004) and *Jesensko listje* (Autumn Leaves, 2006). The books of essays are: *Svetloba znotraj pomaranče* (Light inside an Orange, 1996), *Pesem ostaja ista* (The Song Remains the Same, 2000), *Pešec* (Walker, 2003), *Čitanka Panini* (Textbook Panini, 2007). He has translated several poets, including Yehuda Amichai and John Ashbery. His own work has appeared in many languages, books and journals.

## Garden, Bach

There is no death here. Forms flow from one into another. Everything floats and hovers. When I close my eyes, I see the macadam fly up toward the sky. Acacias spread their shadows, squandering their whitewashed scent. A cherry tree responds from the other side of the garden, from the outer edge of the day. Its words will soon become red. The windows in the gray-brown facades of houses glint like giants eating the afternoon sun. A yellow bulldozer nibbles on a nearby hill. I am little. I pet a little cat who is even lower than the May grass. I hear the voices of people as they step in and out of the house behind me. When they go inside, the darkness and cool lick at them. When they come out again, motes of sun sprinkle down on them. A lilac tree divides our garden from the street, divides our garden from the world. Only shards of voices and fractions of shadows make their way in. Everyone calls me by name, laying their hands on top of my head. I don't know these words yet: Anger, Fear, Hatred, Pain, Departure. I don't know these places by their sounds. I know nothing, only this garden, the infinite reach of eyes that measure the world. If I lie on my back, I see the clouds. If I exhale carefully, the clouds change. They are: an airplane, a dog's head, a horse, a sheep, snowy palms. Now I pull them all together. Seven seas and nine hills to the first river and the last valley. But never the end of the garden. Never the end of the world. The rooms hold all the hours, the crossroads all the days. An eternal light burns or only one candle. It doesn't matter. The pages of the future turn on inner borders of gold. But I am little, and I cannot read them. I am little, and I peacefully float under the eyelid of Time. The doorway into the light swings on its hinges, padded and soft. It never strikes me, never turns anyone away. I lie and I look and I quietly breathe. The garden will change into a cloud any moment now. That way it will last longer in the archives of the sky.

## Return Home

Dusty streets, a voice that rises from the throat and dissolves in the desert, the smell of waxed wooden floors on some September morning, a dialog of light and shadow which we forgot to write down, the possibility

of being in a different place, although it's undeniable that our feet are imprinted in the asphalt and that time like quicksilver rebounds in our veins.

We seek shelter in all of this when we return home.



The sky above our heads is furrowed and below, somewhere  
on the right, we hear the calm ripple of a river never  
waded into twice. It's like that somewhere, for somebody,  
it's always like that. Waiting for us at home are things that

have been pushed away into silence, and sometimes it seems  
to us that a forgotten bird flutters up out of the morning  
fog, setting off toward the borders of expectation,  
because life is being made now, when there is no face

to observe a reflection in the glass, and no hand that  
slides for the hundredth time along these cheeks  
to verify the age of someone who always expects us.  
Quiet steps echo, steps that scale night's damp walls,

that run silently beside a dark river that tomorrow morning  
will turn to silver, and the distance that can still be measured  
with memory grows farther and farther away, like those steps,  
winding slowly into the arms of an uncertain future.

### Island

It lasts all day, the battle between sky and horizon.

Scents of eucalyptus, sage and rosemary  
are mute witnesses, the colors of an airy geometry,  
that begins there  
where the water first approaches  
the recognition of its own death.

When night falls the adversaries grow weary.  
All that remains among the trees is silence,  
silence made from the sea.

### Valium

The world has slowed down, is  
harmonized with the steps of morning.  
It glues itself to the soles of my feet.  
I sit in my room. Sunbeams widen the space.  
I slept all night in an avalanche of silence.  
I put my skull on the bed and forgot about life.  
Dark hollow figures rapped on my door.  
Self-love melted away like spring snow.  
I didn't let them in. I didn't take off my skin.  
Outside New York multiplies like cancerous cells.  
It writhes like electrical centipedes. It lifts  
its tail like a frightened scorpion. But I remain  
safe inside myself. I no longer battle the air  
that someone smuggled out of a haunted house.  
I sit within my own breath. The sky kills no one.  
A flower raised on wild blood may kill. A razor blade





kneaded into our daily bread by those dark hollow figures  
may kill. God plays counting games and murmurs in his sleep:  
one, two, one, two .... I sit on his right. I sit on his left.  
I sit in his head. Nothing can reach me: one, two, one, two ....  
My hands float in the air like the wings of a false angel,  
but my body remains faithful to its shadow. A child  
awakens from a nightmare. He walks all the way  
to his parent's bedroom and lies down in their bed.  
Nothing can reach me. Hell's visit is postponed.  
The world, wrapped in blackness, shines like gold.

### Art History for Beginners

(Paul Cezanne speaks through my mouth, and I through his)

This one will go straight into the Louvre, if it doesn't burn down first.  
Dim corridors will be kinder, not that there's anything seriously  
wrong with that, but let history remain history, and literature  
literature. Each in its own place. And I in mine: the provinces.  
I fled. The provinces are elixir. The easel blisters my back,  
the wind bites, my hat slides over my eyes.

But the provinces are still elixir. Malice and stupidity are  
forgotten, reserved for the city. I am on the air, in the air.  
Some people say I am strange. When it's green, I am green,  
when blue, I am blue. Colors are chameleons. Nature unlocks itself  
for me. The mountain opens before me. I step into it and touch  
it from the inside, then I paint my touch. I record nothing.

I tremble and wrinkle my brow. I swear: form is too slow, my  
brain too quick. Geometry being only an approximation, I tread  
other paths. I toppled Ingres. Delacroix, Courbet, Monet never  
went out into the fresh air. Poussin sits in the shadow and looks  
over my shoulder. I like to be on his tree lined street. What I did  
for the future was pure ignorance. It lies under seal and waits.

A pile of stupidities will be written about me, also about the things  
that I said, that the universe is all flow, an ethereal river of echoes,  
that light is concave. All that is not important. It is only important  
to know that theory is dead, that I came to announce the dictatorship  
of light and herbs and that I covered the henhouse with that canvas  
not because the painting did not attain perfection and that drew me  
into a state of mystical suffering, but only in order to keep the hens dry.



Photo by TIHOMIR PINTER

Peter Semolič (b. 1967) studied linguistics and cultural studies at the University of Ljubljana. Besides poetry, he also writes radio plays, children's literature and translates from English, French, Serbian and Croatian. He has published nine books of poetry: *Tamariša* (Tamarisk, 1991), *Bizantinske rože* (The Roses of Byzantium, 1994), *Hiša iz besed* (House Made of Words, 1996), *Krogi na vodi* (Circles on Water, 2000), *Vprašanja o poti* (Questions about the Path, 2001), *Meja* (Border, 2002) *Barjanski ognji* (Bog Fires, 2004), *Prostor zate* (A Space for You, 2006) and *Vožnja okrog sonca* (Ride around the Sun, 2008). He has received many awards, including two eminent ones, the Jenko Prize and the Prešeren Foundation Award. In 1998 he won the Vilenica Crystal Award. His poetry has been translated into many European languages.

# PETER SEMOLIČ

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Wiersze wybrane,*  
Port Legnica: Biuro  
Literackie, 2003

### Hatchet in a Knot

Father, it is time for us to meet fully awake.  
You, entirely of memories and ashes. I ...

You will recognize me easily.  
I bear your eyes, your chin, your destiny  
written in my skin.

Father, it is time for us to admit the presence of a hatchet,  
driven into a knot.

I'm not asking you for a miracle.  
I'm not asking you to tug on the blade.  
I agree to the fact  
that our hearth will be forever cold.

I am asking you simply to admit:  
we did not obey the laws of growth.

And I accept the excuse:  
it was cold,  
which is why the handle shivered in our grip.

Father, that is all I ask for.

I know you have always said  
that birds are merely the trees' visitors.  
That the wind sifts the leaves only for itself.  
But I cannot be otherwise.

How can I throw my slender youth  
into the fire of memory,  
if unacknowledged steel is lurking in it?

Let us admit its presence, Father.  
So death will be easier for you  
and life less of a burden for me.

*Fužine, 20 August 1998*

### The Squares of Fužine

are oases of silence, oases of peace,  
as the night pales in the east.

The squares of Fužine—pale flowers  
under the first light of dawn.

The squares of Fužine—solitary paths  
of early workers and late-night lovers.

The squares of Fužine—the rush of leaving  
and the slow, maybe secret, arrival.



Across the squares of Fužine blows  
a mild wind from the faraway Alps,  
  
sifting through the leaves of fallen newspapers.

*Fužine, 14 July 1999*

### **On Second Thought**

On second thought, I was never  
a child of nature. I imagined dragon flies  
were helicopters and a shark's sharp fin  
was a periscope. On second thought,

the cowboys and Indians of westerns  
were maybe not more real,  
but way more important than the farmers  
who took milk to the local co-op

every morning at the same time, along the same route  
past our house. On second thought,  
the seven o'clock cartoon was  
a hundred times more exciting

than any storm, no matter how wild,  
breaking out over Morost. On second  
thought, for years the only real sunset  
was in black and white.

*Fužine, 14 July 1999*

### **Writing It Down**

When you wait for your bus, all the others  
come first, some more than once, before yours,  
always the last. It isn't true that it's always like this,  
but it's often enough that your skepticism fades and before you know it,  
you're studying the ecliptics of the sun, the moon and the planets; you cast  
the cards; you're trying to trace, in the dim light of a streetlamp,  
the uncountable hair-thin lines  
branching out from your lifeline.

I tremble—it isn't true that in the years I wasn't writing poems  
I wasn't making poetry. I composed them in my head, some  
in prose, some in meter, verses, each one shorter, each  
more stripped, opaque, ever darker, ever closer  
to the spells of black magic. I forgot  
most of them right away, or within a few days, but some  
got nailed into my brain, pressing harder and harder  
on my thoughts, directing my actions. Nothing special—  
just the way I lace my shoes, yawn, how I



should scratch my forehead, turn my palm  
when shaking hands, how I should cross my legs. Nothing  
special. But in each gesture, I saw again a stranger,  
a savage, a clumsy shaman who had cast a spell upon himself.

One day I muster the last ounce of my strength. I write  
with the tip of my shoe, in the snow, white as paper, my name.  
Drive out the demon of superstition.

*Lavrica, 7 December 1999*

### **Morost, in Spring**

Fog's milk spills over the marshes of Morost. The dark  
back of Mt. Krim. Above it, like an Aristotelian  
cloud, the moon, with the blue  
shining through it. Morning. We rinse our sleep-stuck eyes,  
we shiver in the spring chill, not yet  
fully awake. Pieces of dreams, drifting  
toward wakefulness, merge with tufts of mist.  
A moment in which we can't be sure  
whether we are truly alive. Who is that lying  
next to me? Person or spirit? My sleeping bag  
is wet with dew. The firewood is damp. To start  
a fire, take a sharp flame and cut an opening  
to the sky, to see the everyday world. Shock! a blade  
of grass, just become visible, suddenly grows and bursts  
into clumps of grass, around me, wherever I look:  
grass grass grass. Somebody's already made a fire.  
I hear the sad moaning of the logs. Someone  
has ordered the fog to disperse. High above me, high  
above Morost: azure sky. Somewhere inside, my  
joints resolve and aching muscles tighten: we must  
get up. Take on the world as our own. Get moving.

*Translated by* ANA JELNIKAR  
& KELLY LENOX ALLAN

*Lavrica, 22 April 2000*





Photo by META JERNEJČIČ

Primož Repar (b. 1967) writes poetry and essays, while he is also a freelance writer, translator, researcher and editor. He graduated in philosophy and history at the University of Ljubljana. In 1993 he joined forces with an informal group of people – poets, philosophers, essayists, scientists, writers, artists, painters, architects – and along with some of them became the founder of *Apokalipsa*, a magazine and a publishing house and remained as its chief editor for almost fifteen years. He is also researching the philosophy of S. Kierkegaard and translating his work. Repar is the co-founder of the *Review within Review* project, which connects fifteen magazines from twelve European countries. His specialty is haiku poetry. In his long-term dealings with the haiku as an author, editor and analyst, he has sensed and embraced the essence of the haiku, not in terms of its execution or correctness but in the sense of the original approach to reality implied by this form. The last of his eight poetry collections are: *Gozdovi, ikone* (Woods, Icons, 2004), *Po žerjavici* (On Tenterhooks, Selected Poems, 2006), *Stanja darežljivosti* (States of Generosity, 2008). For the essays *Spisi o apokalipsi* (Essays about the Apocalypse, 2000) he was nominated for the Marjan Rožanc Prize.



# PRIMOŽ REPAR

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Krehké pavučiny,*

Bratislava: Drewo a srd,  
2003

*Gozdovi, ikone / Woods,*

*Icons*, Ljubljana: Društvo  
Apokalipsa, 2004

*Šumi, ikoni / Gozdovi,*

*ikone / Woods, Icons*,  
Skopje: Blesok, 2007

*Stanja darežljivosti,*

Cetinje: Otvoreni  
kulturni forum, 2007

## Pagan Death

Dreams. Hot willing woman.  
Her body like heaven's gate,  
her scent sharp and mild,  
breeze divine inspiration.  
There is but one god, o, Tien!  
There is but one penetrating deeper.  
To me she runs dark and bright merriment,  
At once. As usual.  
She cries not. She wants me.  
Something in her eyes strikes me,  
From her eyes I beg her.  
I come near. I caress her.  
I prey on her. Drink from her.  
With the tips of my fingers I touch  
her scarlet skin. She is mine, she is mine.  
I sense her through the depths... the skin responds.  
What more do you want,  
As if you were boiling, but never boiling over.  
At least not that way. Burdens me. And beauty burns up.  
Slowly she scratches the skin. Burns like embers  
of sacrificial rites. So open-heartedly.  
Something strange, something very strange.  
The skeleton begins to receive serious touches.  
Threatening forms. Skeleton soul.  
I get scared and bewildered. I awake.  
Instead of a face, living death stares at me.  
It struts about, enwraps me, opens me up.  
I stay awake all night  
and in the morning I rage – absent-minded frightened shadow.  
Fecundated from a dream.  
Like the negation of the end.  
How strange, how very strange.  
Like the existence of non-existence.  
Displaced belligerent attitude.  
Truly kind and terrible.  
I smite, I kill not, I bandage.  
Singing are the hands. My dear, my death!  
I rage into the flesh and save myself. Endlessly I sizzle.

*Translated by* MARJAN  
GOLOBIČ

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On chilly days  
moss – a sizzling thought  
atop a forest rock

*Translated by* JURE NOVAK

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Wood admid garden:  
a deer stares astonished  
at a man

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### Starfish

A red smudge has smeared the sparkle of white  
teeth in the pit of the jaws that spat out its  
thorn, as if from afar, who knows when,  
who knows where, ravens would take off  
in their most ardent plea, but from the haven of the loved one,  
before the veiled face,  
the voice would crack and sink  
into the holy symbol. At dawn,  
it would start conquering the vastness of tender designs; let us love!  
Oh, startled tufts, heavy is the symbol;  
Oh, lovely cliff, overheated are the oceans; oh, fish  
immaculate, the cradle of peace. Anointed are the bubbles  
in the pit of the jaws that spat out its thorn;  
anointed are the bodies of elusive solitudes;  
anointed are the sighs of the approaching;  
anointed are anointments with the sword of the cross,  
with the sword of silence, with the sword of hell. Crumbled are the pillars,  
that gave support to the noblest shudder. Rejected  
blues, blue, kind, mythical blues, sparkle in their completeness  
which cannot be claimed even by the sheen of everyday. On the  
overheated sky the stars battle the blood  
of speech, and on my shore, a seaweed-spangled fish  
swallows the azure star.  
I beseech my myrrh; from head to tail, the fish scrapes itself  
with the knife's handle. I see: chopped up, someone will bury it in embers.  
The ancient horrors will be horrified! The red blade will awake  
from a cloud, there, somewhere in the  
pit of the jaws!

### Offered Lady

Someday perhaps there will be no need to speak. Someday  
perhaps the dead power of reason will be. Someday perhaps  
you will say: I want love. Through the body the mother of becoming  
will be sketched and the mother of becoming will wait until  
the day I miss her. We will always be together on this path,  
immature for the time of nuptials. Everything will touch with a quiet  
whisper and everyone will hurt you with a passion of something that  
you dare not bleed. O, you offered lady! Far will I be and yet too  
close for you to hear my greeting. Today I cannot imagine  
that you were not Bach's fugue. Today I no longer am aware that  
you are not cocooned, that you are not curled up, but you wait, hope  
and say nothing. Lady, lady sensitive, who flexes your senses,  
who removes your thoughts, who comes and leaves?... She offers:  
scratched out with the aid of words. She sings: larva hidden



in a stone, the possibility of a butterfly  
in a sigh. She says: it's true, no  
lie.

### Fundamentum agendi

Through the soul dropped the contemptible... where are you?  
At the bottom of derision where I'm seething  
where memory is fire-branded. I live smoke for  
the sowing season. Tell me, tell me the contemptible,  
why are the yearnings abandoned?  
And why are the doors of horror buried?  
Who smeared the dust and  
put out the ashes, who forever  
made it through the night and hid in the potion?  
He concocted a source and pierced himself with the shadow  
of melancholy.  
He wrapped himself in sincerity which came to  
sadden the unfurled appearance of facelessness.  
And now I am where I have already been and  
shaken is my guilt of fire branding.  
But they look at me with disgust and their  
nightmares shimmer in reply: if  
tears could cry the obelisk would be abandoned.  
And wretched is their touch which cries in  
oblivion and disgusts itself in insanity...  
Where are you? At the tail of measure, which is one big painful touch.

### From The Shield

Fallen angles,  
smitten with gifts,  
resting in mid-sky.  
Sterile thunder,  
again and again,  
but nothing fell asunder.  
The impure have  
skipped perfection  
and did not quake  
before the flattering shield.  
They reached into condition  
and covered the cloud.  
The shield crumbled.  
The fallen angels did not fall.



Photo by NADA ŽGANK

Nataša Velikonja (b. 1967) graduated in theoretical sociology at the University of Ljubljana, the city in which she lives. She works in many areas of social, cultural, scientific and artistic life in Slovenia. Since 1993 she has been an activist in the gay and lesbian movement. Four of her poetry collections have been published: *Abonma* (Subscription, 1994), *Žeja* (Thirst, 1999), *Plevel* (Weeds, 2004) and *Poljub ogledala* (The Kiss of the Mirror, 2007). Her first book is considered to be the first lesbian poetry book in the Slovenian language. She has published her poetry in many literary magazines in Slovenia and abroad and in various anthologies, including *Six Slovenian Poets* (Great Britain: ARC Publication, 2006). She works as an editor of many publications in the area of Gay and Lesbian Studies. As an essayist she has published more than five hundred articles, columns, sociological researches and essays in various journals, newspapers, magazines, books and radio stations in Slovenia and abroad. She also works as a translator in the domain of critical queer and lesbian theory and literature (Lauretis, Faderman, Wittig, Benstock, Goldstein, Cottingham, Lapovsky Kennedy etc.).

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# NATAŠA VELIKONJA

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## Revolution

after a whole night and in fact a whole week of fits of panic. i now feel free, free of the illusions i've had these past years that there exists solidarity, a joined front, a future, or a larger circle of supportive friends. i'm worth something only when someone wants to press their lips against my stomach.

## Weed

it's been going on for fourteen days now. the nights – beautiful, and a few of the most ghastly in my life. last night, for instance. for the first time i have to deal with all of this at once and everything is shattered, everything is coming unstitched, i have no clue what will happen. i have torn it all. at first i only tried, but last night i ripped it completely apart. i am not patient, not one bit. i don't know her, this may drive her away, this volatility of mine. i hope not.

if someone would tell me what's right and what isn't. i'm digging it all out of my head. it's four in the morning, i come by taxi to the metelkova and right away the first floor alarm goes off. then i have no change for the coffee machine. now i've found it here in the drawer, but i'm afraid to go back down in case it goes off again. it's from this kind of sadness perhaps the most beautiful poems emerge. she gives me no support when i'm down. niente. not even that time when i ran off to the hotel turist, she didn't come even then. maybe it's too soon for deep roots. well i've already sunk them to the centre of the earth. i always plant myself immediately, like a weed.

i can't do anything slowly, deliberately. i've got no clue what'll happen to me. i'll try to get back on my feet. i need to find myself a flat, a room, something. but right now i should be writing terminal for thursday. i should be writing, but i'm tortured by one thought: will she stay with me.

it seems these last years i've been in a stupor. writing like a machine. i was probably a bit naive. it's coming to an end, with me having just fallen asleep on the sofa in the library, around half past six the day begins and down below workers are shaking hands and coming to work.

when i turned eighteen i didn't know that for the next seventeen years i'd be writing like a maniac. if you ask me all those workers below have flats, or they are refugees, or else have nothing at all.

if she stays with me. then i'll have all that grace i see when she sings to me. what else is there. i still can't believe that i was with her. how many years i watched her, avoided her, let her go past me and sometimes even turned her away out of fear and this fear is here now, this morning, when i'm totally alone, when the big white world is ready to crush me like the last rat.

i have no prospects and there's no connective tissue, no one knows i exist. i lead a pre-civilised, lost life.



i'll pull through. i'll be happy yet. i texted her, come, and she didn't come. as if i wrote that every day. i won't be able to write love poems. i've always pulled through. i hope this time i don't.

i knew three years ago it wasn't going to work. i can't live in someone else's flat, straight away my breathing gets shallow. all of them drank themselves to death, there's never been some greater happiness. mind you all of them lived in larger cities, new york, london, berlin, you've got holes there, as many as you like. djuna drank first, then stopped, then she only growled. crisp spent entire days lying on his bed. in ljubljana you can't do that, because in ljubljana you only have flats full of brown furniture for the middle class, and i am a savage.

what are we doing. like dogs, roaming. occasionally i think a person is an angel. i'll never make it. the romans, they ate butterfly wings. then there's the combat option: now it's the world and me and this is the front, and if it crushes me, then i'm no good anyway. in this i'm totally tense and totally together, i take this totally personally, dark, restless, a little wild, lesbian, tall and skinny, i'm still in the habit of telling lies and i'm a little destructive. in my head i've got an image of the poet morrison, naked down to his waist, with his hair loose and a metal belt buckle, spinning on his axis. this is my cultural fantasy. but i've got to go back even further, to a faraway moment of lonely fascination, i'm on the bus, going for work experience, past morning poplars and early factory lights.

how many years i watched her. how many years i watched that lovely face of hers. the other day she had a go at me, said i didn't pick up her calls. what would've been. that which is now. i'm at the bloody metelkova, waiting for the newspaper, so i can call up ads for flats and rooms. she's unplugged herself, isn't making contact, safe under a warm blanket she says i shouldn't drag her into these stories.

### **Greetings From the Back of the Class**

i am the queen of the world. i am the one here now. now i'm listening to these night trucks, shoveling away snow and cleaning the streets, now i'm hearing these kinds, roaming the empty night streets and for now, still laughing at the emptiness. i see what's ahead of me: all the skinny old lesbians will perish. i can go on all i want telling myself that i need to be fast, that i am fast, that no one can catch up with me, but in the long run we will all perish. i am backing off already, bit by bit, cleaning off shelves and books.

first i thought i'd go into the bathroom and set my computer on the washing machine. that would be the best way to pass the time till morning. in actual fact i've come here to make friends. in gorica you've seen it all by eighteen. i've come here so i could describe events and have no problem qualifying for artists' benefits. the more events, the sooner you qualify. what should i write. is hanging on the bar in the monokel an event? i always get there when the lesbians are leaning on the bar, not



saying anything. then, by the time they're a little drunk and it's gotten too loud i have to go. when i'm capable, i pay my bills three days before they're due, i buy myself a french salad and a plant for the carpeted kitchen. tonight tanja is coming over, we are supposed to smoke and drink merlot, which she gave me when i moved out. i'm listening to music by mitar subotić. all those agents and landlords are tearing my patience apart. why does she text back to everyone else straight away, but not me? only once in all this time did i see her get a message and not reply; she said well what's that got to do with me and hung up the phone.

i think this was a film about love. everything was topsy-turvy: a woman gives a slave-owner the money to buy her. feelings are expressed mechanically. the biggest punishment isn't death, it's being reunited with your lover.

these were undoubtedly the most beautiful days of my life. spring, warm, i've gradually organised my work and i'm walking down trubarjeva street towards hotel union and i have a date in thirty minutes' time. thirty minutes in which i could be doing anything, at the end of it, she. where was i as a teenager. i am here – at last.

when she first invited me to her place, i walked all the way, the whole street. let's say forty-five minutes, because i was walking very slowly, smoking along the way and slowing my step even more. it was freezing cold, but somehow a feeling of thaw was setting in, the snow already wet in places so i didn't have to be so careful when walking, which was good, because i was so deep in thought that i would definitely have fallen on the first icy patch. she tells me i have to look after my lips more.

anyway, i put so much value in words and the other day she wrote for the first time, i love you. never before. i think she likes to do perfectly ordinary things – together. for instance, read a newspaper together. this is what she told me. the other day i was at her place and she brewed black coffee for me and made instant for herself, we're sitting in the kitchen and i'm flipping through the paper and she snatches half of it from me and starts reading it. i don't think she was really reading it. i think this was more a scene of peace and tranquillity. i don't think we can create the space for what matters most to her.



Photo by NEJC SAJE

Aleš Mustar (b. 1968) holds degrees in English and Pedagogy from the University of Ljubljana and a Ph.D. in Romanian Literature from the University of Bucharest. His poetry has been published in the most important Slovenian literary magazines and has been translated into Czech, Serbian, Polish, Macedonian, English and Romanian. Mustar has also written for the theatre and is a translator of Romanian and Macedonian literature. His book *(U)sodno tolmačenje* (*C(o)urt Interpretations*) was nominated for the best debut book of poetry in Slovenia and was translated into Macedonian and English.

# ALEŠ MUSTAR

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Sud(bin)sko tolkovanje,*  
Skopje: Blesok, 2007  
*C(o)urt Interpretations,*  
Berlin: Blatt Books,  
2008

## Depression

How can I not feel tormented  
when I – a middle-aged man – am forced to wait  
for my verse to mature  
while the world keeps turning into science fiction.  
I'm so numb  
that I can't feel the mobile phone vibrating in my trouser pocket anymore.  
The box, which at the push of a button  
can also serve to entertain,  
is vultuously broadcasting the funeral of the President of State.  
Viewing figures go up when the camera zooms in on accident charred bodies,  
and the meter goes berserk  
when the grieving faces of his wife and children appear on the TV screen.  
In another country, an earthquake buries three thousand people.  
The weight of casualties of war places them mere third.  
The computer animation is scratching its head.  
Even if we are saved from bird flu by vegetarianism,  
from AIDS by sexual abstinence,  
and from SARS by becoming homebodies,  
we will not escape one-track-mindedness.  
I receive an e-mail,  
I hope it's not virus-infected,  
saying that the promised land  
has just embargoed the import of literature from so-called non-democratic countries.  
Should I start building my musculature in fitness centers?  
Should I turn into Super, Action or Spider Man,  
are you willing to become my Xena  
so that together we can save the world?  
Is this becoming to a poet?  
How much virtual decency this indecent world requires!  
I'm not sure whether I should give in,  
climb the nearest hill  
to watch the freshly fallen snow,  
or change the channel instead,  
that's why today, my dearest,  
I'm so goddamn depressed.

## Crime and Punishment

I murdered myself of all people.  
Killed my illusions, my dreams,  
and fell asleep like an angel.  
On the third day I was resurrected as a court interpreter.  
Where are you, Fyodor Mikhailovich, old chum,  
where are you, so we can go get trashed on vodka?  
My brother from an early age  
who got me high without illegal substances,  
stole my nights away, and caused psychosomatic disorders  
back when I was still a little bear who wanted to see the stars up close.  
Resurrect, get yourself to the bar,  
bring along your imaginary gang of criminals,  
and I'll bring along my real one



so we can have a vodka-drinking contest  
competing as equals,  
and draw the lines.  
We are strong, born winners,  
mine are not the kind to be conscious-stricken, I know them inside out.  
I smell their sweaty palms in courtroom docks on a daily basis, and  
I flirt with prostitutes, the only advantage of my profession.  
Consciousness belongs in novels.  
Verdicts in the name of the people – which people? – my dearest,  
are inefficient, they don't cause internal struggles,  
and consciousness only exists in a bad TV adaptation of your novel.  
Everything is an illusion, a cheap play with even cheaper actors.  
I know I'm going to beat you, old chum,  
I just don't know  
which one of us is better off.

### At the Red Snake

Gypsies grown dumb,  
the bear beer is not on the menu  
but they serve an excellent house specialty:  
grilled Pushkin.  
The chef carves him up painstakingly.  
There are no manners at the Red Snake, you can eat with your fingers.  
The poet sentenced to silence is brought innards.  
The hungry ad designer bites into a juicy leg,  
and to me the waiter serves the heart!  
I keep chewing and chewing.  
How tough post-post modernism is!

### Legacy

Since a brief review of world literature is running  
through my mind, chockfull of academic junk,  
I'm battling with an internal struggle –  
postmodern frailty versus lyrical ejaculation.  
It's a tie.  
In my mind, I kiss my brothers, literary freemasons, on the forehead.  
Greetings, Beckett, who art my brother, let me kiss your forehead, brother,  
greetings, Ionesco, who art my brother, let me kiss your forehead, brother,  
and so on and so forth...  
Brothers, your legacy is flowing through my work,  
even though I've never asked for it,  
nor have I posthumously sued you for a statutory share.  
An overload causes my internal organs to fall ill,  
just as state organs are calling me to duty.  
In Srebrenica, rotten corpses are being dug out again.  
There's nothing left of them or after them,  
legacy doesn't make any sense.  
Only wandering souls are screaming again in a deserted house in a nearby village.  
No one can stop the screaming, not the police nor the firemen nor the Muslim priest.  
I turn off the TV and start to compile a response to the lawsuit





which my relatives, the vultures, dissatisfied with the quantity of legacy,  
filed after Grandma died.  
Blood is water.  
I shall give answers to my attorney in an utterly silent voice  
so that Grandma can't hear us  
and won't feel the need to haunt us, having toiled enough during her lifetime.  
And us two, my dear,  
to whom shall we pass on the fruits of our labor?  
Shall we turn sterile in the name of art?  
Come, let me kiss you  
so that our lives can become *in medias res* poetry.

### Happy Birthday to Me

Congratulations! Condolences!  
Greeting cards are always ugly in the same way  
regardless of the design: a bunch of flowers or a black ribbon.  
Clichés in sentences cut through the heart like surgeon's knives.  
A complacent company dealing in catalogue sales  
presents me with a gift coupon.  
A well-read marketing expert hasn't forgotten to include lines from Wordsworth  
closely followed by good wishes  
for a nice celebration and much joy in the use of the discount.  
As soon as the fax machine gets as smart  
as mobile phones  
and starts responding with the Happy Birthday tune  
I shall commit suicide.

Translated by MANJA  
MAKSIMVIČ

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The Center for Slovenian Literature is a non-governmental organization dedicated to literary and publishing activities. It was founded to contribute to the international promotion of Slovenian literature, and began operating in 1999.

The Center is dedicated to attracting support for, and encouraging work in, the following areas:

- making quality translations of contemporary and classic Slovenian literature possible,
- drawing the attention of international publishers to the rich, albeit not very well-known, heritage of Slovenian literature,
- presenting relevant information to the interested public in the international context.

In this way the Center responds to the needs which other institutions in this field are either unable or unwilling to meet. While the Center's primary task is to address an international audience, it is no less committed to informing the Slovenian public about important international literary trends, authors, and publishing events. It is open to collaboration with other local and international institutions and individuals working toward similar goals.

The Center finances its activities with funds raised both locally and internationally. Its priorities include, but are not limited to, creating computer-assisted databases of translations and translators; providing information to chosen target-audiences; presenting selected works and authors abroad; enabling, coordinating and promoting international collaboration; integrating into existing international programs and networks with similar aims; and developing a creative approach to the promotion of Slovenian literature.

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**THE CENTER FOR SLOVENIAN LITERATURE**  
**IS A MEMBER OF LAF** (Literature Across Frontiers): [www.lit-across-frontiers.org](http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org)

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The Center for Slovenian Literature supplies information on contemporary Slovenian literature to its foreign partners through mail and contacts at various fairs. It sponsors translations and translators' visits to literary events and residencies. It supplies translators with books and literary magazines; occasionally, it provides them with grants for translations given by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is the publisher of the *Aleph* book series, which includes new Slovenian literary works as well as translations of contemporary world literature. While the Slovenian authors are supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture, the majority of translations are published with the help of foreign translation/publication grants. Over hundred titles have been published in the series, some bilingual.





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# THE TRUBAR FOUNDATION

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is a joint venture of Slovene Writers' Association ([www.drustvo-dsp.si](http://www.drustvo-dsp.si)), Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The financial means for its activities are provided by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and by other sources. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidy publications of Slovenian literature in translation.

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish Slovenian authors in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 50% of printing costs (see the form at: [www.ljudmila.org/litcenter](http://www.ljudmila.org/litcenter)). It does not subsidy translation; translators can apply for translation grants directly to the Slovenian Ministry of Culture ([www.gov.si/mk](http://www.gov.si/mk)).



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