



Ulysses' Shelter IV

ANTHOLOGY

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foreword

The *Ulysses' Shelter IV: Anthology* consists of works by artists who participated in the *Ulysses' Shelter* program in 2023, 2024, and 2025. *Ulysses' Shelter* is an international literary residency program for emerging poets, writers, and translators that has successfully finished its third cycle. The network of literary residencies has now been extended to eight European countries: Czechia (Culture Reset), Croatia (Sandorf), Greece (Thraka), Malta (Inizjamed), Serbia (Krokodil), Slovenia (Slovene Writers' Association), Spain (Mallorca Film Commission) and Wales in Great Britain (Literature Across Frontiers), and collaborates with many institutions and organizations in each participating country.

The project has been in place for the last 6 years. Throughout its duration, 20 writers have stayed in Larissa for a 2-week period, and 14 Greek writers have stayed in Ljubljana, Belgrade, and the island of Mljet.

The authors included in this book participated in the program's latest cycle. They are: Aitana Ahrens, Ioanna Lioutsia, Ondřej Lípár, Ivana Maksić, Efstathia P. (tria epsilon), Natassa Sideri, Danae Sioziou, Nežka Struc, Tonia Tziritza-Zacharatou, Josip Čekolj, Sergej Harlamov, and Marios Chatziprokopiou.

The Ulysses' Shelter project is co-funded by the European Union under the Creative Europe Program 2021-2027.

–Nikolas Koutsodontis

Aitana Ahrens

Aitana Ahrens is a young poet and screenwriter from Spain. Her first poems appeared in the volume of Mariposa Ediciones, *Luna llena*, in 2020 while she was studying film directing at the ECAM in Madrid. During the last few years she has combined directing and screenwriting. She has been awarded with Best Film and Audience Award in the “Dissidents” section of the LesGaiMadrid Film Festival (2022) for *Plastic Touch*, as well as *Roel de Oro* Prize at the 26th Medina del Campo Film Festival (2023) for *Cleo vendrá esta noche*. During her stay at the Ulysses’ Shelter residency, she presented her work at the Thessalian Poetry Festival.

this could be us

*love has shapes that we do not understand,
how is it possible that we fall in love so far
away?*

“This is a visual poem constructed through images made by AI, home video of a trip and the landscapes of the Internet. It explores a brief love story in which you don't quite know what you feel but it aims to expose it in order to find in an eternal memory of that love, how it remains and the possible oblivion. That thought is what me and the person shown (with their music present on the film) tried to portrait.

Another of the topics I navigated is how is the image we have of ourselves and how do we expose that to others. Using AI to create the images of how we could be together we realized non binary people like us don't have a fixed image in the internet. So what we could find are pictures that make you feel something but you don't know what is missing.”

–Aitana Ahrens

Link: <https://vimeo.com/809541293/dc602e3b7f?share=copy>

Ioanna Lioutsia

Ioanna Lioutsia was born in Thessaloniki, Greece, in 1992. She is a PhD researcher at the Theatre Studies Department of the University of the Peloponnese writing her thesis on Performance Art in the Balkans and its Political Dimensions. She holds an Integrated Master's degree in Directing (Theatre Department, AUTh, 2018), a BA in Acting (Contemporary Theatre Drama School, 2017) and a BA in History & Archaeology with a specialization in the History of Art (AUTh, 2014). She has written the following books: *Wide Vowels and Bitten Consonants* (poetry, 2022), *12 short plays for 19 World Days* (for use in primary school, 2021), *Silence in two spaces* (poetry, 2019), *Arrythmias* (poetry, 2016), *Conversations on Do(n't)Major* (poetry, 2014) and has translated into Greek two plays by Henrik Ibsen: *Norma or A Politician's Love* (2020) and *St. John's Eve* (2022). She also writes theatrical plays. Her play *First we take Manhattan then we take Berlin* was shortlisted in Berliner Festspiele's competition (2019), while she has won the 2nd award in playwriting competition of State theatre of Northern Aegean for the play *Beware of Loneliness and People* (2014). She is a co-creator in street writers' group "grafoules" and a member of the organizing team of the interdisciplinary festival on gender and literature "Mov Medouses". She has been active as a performance artist since 2013 and has received the 3rd award in Performance Art category at the Florence Biennale 2021 for her piece *Every day is a Woman's Day*. She works as actress, director, dramaturg and theatre educator.

when I utter “freedom”

When I utter the word “freedom”
two images always come to mind:

sixth-grade boys
with bicycles in packs
August
around the city’s neighborhoods

and

a chubby Chinese teenager
second-generation immigrant
with his plastic slippers left upside down
lounging outside his parents’ store
like a cat
on an October afternoon.

–Translated by Ioanna Lioutsia and Giannis Stamos

women wrecks

Women, wrecks
with their feet on twin towers
travel through the night.
They cake themselves in mud
so that they are to your taste
when you see them under the interrogating
light of day.

They lighten their hair:
bronze, brown, blonde.
Little by little they open up more and more.

Women, wrecks
are hanging by threads,
men's threads
– not fabric ones.
They wake up
before their husbands and
they wait.

Their lives are determined
by a memory from the future,
an image from their familiar past,
an image of a woman, wreck:
mother, sister, aunt, grandmother.
Cast out from their own creation

Women, wrecks make the world
And dwell outside of it.

–Translated by Ioanna Lioutsia and Giannis Stamos

the city at night

blankets
more blankets
piles of blankets
only blankets
blankets vertically
and blankets horizontally
in all shades of woolen brown
a road paved with blankets
among the blankets you'll find blankets
above below around the man
just blankets

– behind him though
inside the big toy store on the corner
pretty little dolls with their little pets
sleep in their little beds and cots
blissfully.

–Translated by Ioanna Lioutsia and Giannis Stamos

if poems were medicines

If poems were medicines
if poems were nutrition
if poets were on the streets
if they sat on low stools
if I once walked past them
if I were ill and found the courage
 I would ask:
– How much is one for solitude?
– One and a half euros and it's yours.
If I had a euro and a half on me, I'd buy it.
if I weren't too curious, I'd read it at home.
if it was good, when it was over
I'd feel your hands dressing my body
if, of course, poems were medicines and I
was willing to cure you.

–Translated by Giannis Stamos

first morning bus

the time when the workers meet
the girls returning from a night out,
the bakeries turn on their lights majestically
for their daily premiere
and the lights of the nightclubs beside them look
dim as the day is breaking
 their people out of place
 in their ostensibly formal attire
the time is five o'clock
and a new routine dawns upon the city
unchanging;

but for someone, something might change today.

–Translated by Giannis Stamos

Ondřej Lipár

Ondřej Lipár is a poet, journalist, and photographer. He has published three books of poetry: *Skořápky* (*Nutshells*, 2004), *Komponent* (*Component*, 2014), and *Retro* (2023). For more than a decade, he has been cooperating with the respected publisher Éditions Fra. Since 2020, together with Barbora Votavová, he has been producing *Do slov*, a literary podcast. He was a chairman of the Czech Writers' Association and currently works as the Managing Editor of *Vogue CS*.

lab

We brew our morning coffee with displeasure
and break into corners
where we overlap youth and budget furniture
with rare exclusives
from lengthy supply chains

At one laminate table
we plug away at transience
We answer questions with creative solutions
which soon no one will purchase

We're surprised both by hunger and the speed
with which it's satisfied
We drool whenever the doorbell rings
One day heartlessly we'll laugh at this

You bombard me with symptoms and family history
I'm your legal open source crawler bot
for potential connections and error messages

A dialogue tree unfailingly rigid
with only minor discrepancies
Therapy meditation escalation
Can I help you with anything else today

—Translated by Rob A. Mackenzie

courting

I keep my house spotless
Be mine!

I lead my chosen viewers
down hallways of pre-arranged language
each with its own
scent light name

It's very clean here
Be whoever you want to be
Translate yourself onto the surfaces

Cicadas rumble
from hidden speakers
men play in their lower abdomen
and drown out everything

—Translated by Rob A. Mackenzie

balance

Invasion for breakfast
You loosen your belt one hole
tea eggs fear
you can barely
It's peak season
you grip your devices
sweat blood

Mild sterile
eternal in a sense
Take, eat this body
between two slices of bun
drink without end

It's small clean artificially lit
well paid
You'll never afford it
not like a Ford

Heads ache without a headphone seal
Eurydice Medusa
Don't turn to yesterday's news
it's all still happening
no matter whether
you're on vacation

–Translated by Rob A. Mackenzie

my ringtone is a click

You have your airline ticket, your muscle spasm
Just like days when you switch between perfumes
you're not entirely certain who you are

You wait for an unfinished sentence
to give you a sign, to come true
You follow hard in the footsteps of consumers
their unique addresses, shared whims

Finally darkness falls and words lose their glow
Even dental impressions become a starting point for improvement
Do you know how much this body costs weekly?

Fully furnished anxieties
with optimal floorspace and spectacular financial outlook
complete with a stand
comprehensive amenities nearby

You're buying the debt of fulfilled dreams

Crumbs are crumbs at any address
Say what you want

–Translated by Rob A. Mackenzie

in its own time

It's not long since you wheedled and pressed me
your hair bleached by the sun
Now, I'm scattering sand around the house
wires jabber about a summit of superpowers

I'd like to extract small artworks
from your scorched limbs and remain in the dark
but catastrophe lurks even in strips of untanned skin

While they broadcast about no-go zones, we boldly go on a tour of our bodies
with laughter and guilty memories
of news headlines on the web
Sovereign waters splash onto your lap
When ships and continents collide we are at our best

I want to feed you overripe strawberries and lead idiotic outbursts
Instead I drift and fear consumes the scraps
It won't be long before everything has passed

–Translated by Rob A. Mackenzie

Ivana Maksić

Ivana Maksić was born in 1984 in Kragujevac (Yugoslavia). She writes poetry, prose fragments, nonfiction and translates from English. She has published poetry books: *O telo tvori me* (*Oh Body Em-body Me*, 2011), *Izvan komunikacije* (*Beyond Communication*, 2013) and *Kćeri, zar ne vidiš da gorim* (*Daughter, Can't You See I'm Burning*, 2020) which was shortlisted for Dušan Vasiljev Award and Vasko Popa Award in 2021. Her first book of fragments titled *Vejavica* (*The Blizzard*) is to be published this summer (2023).

Her texts have been selected for various anthologies and collections and published in regional literary magazines as well as in the UK and the USA. Her poetry has been translated into English, Italian, Slovenian and Greek (selections).

Maksić took part in literary festivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Poligon, 2021), Serbia (World Poetry Day, Belgrade, 2023 and 2016; AFŽ Novi Sad, 2020), Italy (Palabra en el mundo Venezia, 2020), Croatia (SUR, 2019), Kosovo (POLIP, 2019) and Slovenia (IGNOR, 2018) and was the co-editor of two collections of poetry (*REZ*, 2016; *Do zuba u vremenu*, 2014;). She works as a writer, a freelance translator and an international online English teacher.

daughter, can't you see I'm burning

on that day, here, horses are dying
all the riders, mine, through the fog, with spears,

through the water, blood, forest, fire,
fire, oh you fire, I'm burning, they say

ivana, they say, her, that woman, a woman, me,
on the edge, till the end, always through secrets

of a whirlpool, a whirlwind, the boots were destroyed,
the wave was breaking, never, you know,

slave drivers from a previous life
hadn't backed away, my daughter, fire,

little flames are rolling, swim,
go away from me, swim

through all the sea storms, be an ice-cold lump of coal,
be an invisible diamond,

just don't drag the baggage of incestuous
sons behind you, don't talk much,

change, transform yourself, turn everything down
make it quiet

not the fire though, awake with fire, burn, don't look
for a ladder, avoid funerals, don't wear

shoes, away from every sickroom,
pay morality no heed,

you, my faraway friend,

don't wear white, do not, ever,
like a defiance stay, a rock, a pomegranate flower

don't wave to anyone, not even me, not even from afar
don't wave, despise goodbyes,

don't stretch your hand as a hello,
don't grow a bullet in your palm,

don't break the arrows, let them, in the flesh,
the others don't see them

don't hug when you leave
others don't see

don't devise departures and hurts
others don't see

daughter, fire, mine you are not, run away
just disappear, others don't see,

just disappear

–Translated by Ana Seferović

give me a ship to write a ship diary

said the poetess
I'd like to look up to,
the one that knew how many maids had been killed
before she herself was pushed from the deck
by a writer in his effort to write a romance novel
that is still cited centuries later
in the narratives of my contemporaries.

–Translated by Jelena Mandić

people are silent

*

Maybe some could even
sway in the rhythm of the assembly line
compiling manuals for future former
idols, carrying people out of parks
in body bags in the morning.
Maybe this neutrality
was what he never had enough of, so he was
always cold, and wouldn't wrap around himself
not even one of the entrails
so readily available
and so equal, skillfully and purposefully
prepared pieces for an entire
nation, so that one could easily
screw up and not wrap himself in
that flag of warmth that daily and nightly
abundantly flowed over his
cousins and neighbors,
in front of whom he was somehow
too desolately naked, too much
a slave.

—Translated by Svetlana Rakočević

why do people die in Serbia?

14 out of 15 surgeries in Serbia
are performed by butchers.

This is more than a 90% chance
that your daughter will not survive.

The surgeries drove you to despair.
No matter how hard you worked, it wasn't enough.

You slept for an hour and a half every twenty-two hours.
The hands of time ravaged you.

This was why you didn't attend literary events.

They always started at 8 pm,
in the middle of your smoke break.

–Translated by Jelena Mandić

waiting

Murderers live among us.
People who instead of “recover” say “escape”.
Against pain, longing and anger, they have the same
word - migration.
Oblivion of all the faces, all the suffering bodies,
everything is justified by the escape.

They repair consensual blindness by running away.
Displacement of the body migrates the soul
indefinitely, contractually. They think: when they run,
they leave no traces. Traces that are then seen by the
sick, those who (deathly) remain and whose souls
linger nowhere except in the bodies.

There are bodies whose souls cannot escape.
Bodies that are workers. Workers whose souls are the
drowned in the waves breaking on the beaches
without a lifeguard.

To cave in back into yourself.
To be where the waiting means falling and rising
again.
Waiting is a glass that you cannot overfill. It is never
empty enough.

–Translated by Ana Seferović

Efstathia P. (tria epsilon)

Efstathia P. (pen name: tria epsilon) was born in Thessaloniki in 1994. She has a Bachelor degree in Greek Literature and a MA degree in General and Comparative Literature. Her first writing venture *I know those women who knit amidst the sea* received the First Unpublished Poetry Collection Award by Thraka publishing house in 2022 and the Award of Hellenic Authors' Society "Giannis Varveris" (first poetry collection).

asian women knit: machine, needle, sewing, they weave
towards the right side of the detention center – cotton fields

you left without a hint

little children are dancing hula hoop with the wandering circus, they ask me to drag an
imaginary box, when I open it, inside it lives a horse

neighing in a foreign language

before you disappeared, you tied a cord on my hand –burned its edges so it won't come
undone

you unravel barbed wires and slide from country to country in a bizarre sequence

even when the director is female
horror is depicted in a traditional way

–Translated by the poet

Lesvos

in that year of 21 moons, no one said a word

and then an entire generation came that no one talked, and as if this wasn't
enough –no one ever acted, until everyone forgot the notion of action

with few exceptions who were coming up against a brick wall
testing material strength

–Translated by the poet

39.1067° north, 26.5573° east

*Please consider donating:
baby formula, cereal bars, pads, razors*

children are washed ashore at home we haven't decomposed yet
they grew up fast we began to decay

bodies float like fruits in Epano Skala
fish wander inside their lungs

–Translated by the poet

**a conversation with my dead grandpa
who used to be a teacher**

listen,

my children
might not have traveled the world in eighty days
but they spend two to three years to cross a few countries
and the water frontier

apart from when they end up blooming on its seabed

–Translated by the poet

when it gets dark on the port I know
in details how the color bursts on the wave
and if you stare ahead in the night you would always catch
the moon in crescent shape

if

you had taken a straw from your pocket to suck the sea, it would have
taken me roughly ten minutes
to cross to the other side

if

my legs were not tangled up in cans and teeth

if

we weren't swimming in the same waters with a dozen of
missions of humanitarian aid
from west to east and from east to west it's
a stone's throw

you would have known that if you had ever been in Mytilene

—Translated by the poet

Natassa Sideri

Natassa Sideri was born in Athens in 1981. She is a playwright, writer and translator. She has studied Business Administration at the Athens University of Economics and Business, Comparative Politics at the University of York, Contemporary French Philosophy at King's College London, and is currently studying towards an MA in Greek and World Theatre: Drama, Performance, Education at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her first plays were written and presented in English. In 2013, her debut play *On the Bridge* was the winner of a playwriting contest organized by Origins theater group (*Isle of Wright*, UK), while in 2014 she won the Ronald Duncan Literary Foundation playwriting contest with *The Island of Immortality*, which was subsequently put on stage by the Certainty of Chance Theater Company. Upon her return to Greece in 2015, she attended the National Theatre's Playwrighting Studio. In 2016, her short story *Three out of Five* received a commendation at the Greek Writer's Union annual writing contest. In 2017, her play *Battle of the Titans* (Sokoli, 2017) was staged at the National Theatre as part of the Writer of the Month initiative aimed at showcasing new voices in contemporary Greek playwriting. In 2018, her first short story collection *Seven Deadly Sins, the GR edition* (Mov Skiouros) came out, winning her the Best Debut in Fiction prize at the annual literary awards of the seminal literary magazine "O Anagnostis". In 2021, her play *Bound* was awarded first prize at the M Y T H O S ? ! playwriting contest organized jointly by the Theater of Regensburg and the National Theatre of Northern Greece. In 2022, she wrote the texts for the performance *Witches* (dir. Thanasis Dovris), which premiered at the defunct Tavros Municipal Slaughterhouses near the center of Athens. Her short stories have been published in Greece and internationally.

the song of the herd

(extract)

“Your mother is a whore, she’s a whore, she’s a whore.”

In his first school, they sang it to him on the concrete steps opposite the school. This was where the herd sat, waiting for him to come out. And when they saw him draw near the fingers pointed, the lips parted, the tongues roamed freely around the mouths and with the help of a mix teeth both permanent and baby they began singing the tune the school bell had already set off in his head: “Your mother is a whore, she’s a whore, she’s a whore”.

A few years before, and after, other herds sang the same song to his brothers and sister. He, the middle son, the second, was born three years after his older brother, three years before the youngest and seven before the girl. Due to the striking regularity of their mother’s births, the boys cracked the joke as soon as they saw the girl arrive: if their sister had come with one year delay, it was because she had missed the train making herself pretty. When she eventually hopped on, everybody was surprised. The mother more so than anyone else. Throughout the nine months of her pregnancy, not once had she considered the possibility that once the belly disappeared she would be left caring for a daughter.

The sight of the patchwork on the roof after eleven years of absence brought back the image of his mother, unhuggable, unreachable with her enormous belly, telling him to be patient, that any day now his new brother would replace the bump and the four of them would strut around the village like the Daltons. When that didn’t happen, the mother and her oldest son decided to call the aberration Averell. It would take years, five in specific, for her name to be shortened to Ava. That too she had to do herself.

The house they lived in was built by his fisherman grandfather. One day, when he was old enough to ask why their house was so far away from the rest of the village, his mother told him that the fisherman had tried to entice the sea. If the sea carried the house out, he would no longer need to brave the waves on his boat. The fisherman didn’t get his wish, so the house stayed there, on its rock, suspended between land and sea. Later on, at the foreign country and then continent, he often wondered whether the stranger he had never met or even thought of referring to as “grandpa” had sealed or guessed the family’s fate when he built their front yard on the waves, where their only neighbors were the seagulls.

The stranger grandfather taught his daughter how to fish and so he and his siblings never went hungry. But he did not teach her how to mend the roof —probably because, in his mind, this task had been assigned to the future man of the house who was supposed to arrive fully fledged rather than be produced on site. When that didn’t happen, pieces of tin started to appear all over the roof, and as the years went by and the boys still hadn’t grown up, the house started to look more and more like wrapped candy.

my father was a fish on his hands and body scales instead of hair I knew it from the beginning his clothes were there to hide him from others when he was out just like the house hid us when we were in and the others out

Nevertheless, on the days when he, the middle son, skipped the last hour of class to avoid meeting the herd on the concrete steps, he felt grateful as he saw the house approach, proud and faithful underneath its many layers of tin, always ready to give his family shelter. Wherever he found himself later, in the foreign country and then continent, he took with him this image of the house that bends under the weight but does not break —this image and the song of the herd.

my mother was a mermaid he said when I was little and I asked or was it me who said and he nodded or was it only my child's mind putting words where there were none I do not know I could not the house on the rock the fisherman built for the mermaid not for me never anything for me except for silence so that the mermaid can jump in and out of the window when the sea called her name asked her to go back come the sea said you are mine come

That children were to be born in March was the first and last rule of the house his sister agreed to follow. Despite being just seven when the girl was born, he understood. He didn't know how to call it yet, but he could hear it in his mother's voice. Years later, when he had chosen camps, he tried to find a name for it. He called it meanness, indifference, hatred, envy. He called it many different names because not one word seemed to prevail over the others.

to tempt her to stay longer he let her world come into our house it stayed with us ever since sand seashells cockleshells starfish seaweed pebbles pieces of rock of boats of anchors fish bones and actual fish living in buckets sinks basins filled with the mermaid's water not our own and the house standing there bewildered giving refuge to what it was initially constructed to keep out

—Translated by the writer

**Bound
(extract)**

act III, scene three

(NEPHOS and PETALIA. NEPHOS is working.)

PETALIA:
But I want to live free.

NEPHOS:
You will, one day. Just not right now.

PETALIA:
I don't think I can wait.

NEPHOS:
You can. We all did.

PETALIA;
I don't think I am like you.

NEPHOS:
Nobody was until they were.

PETALIA:
But I don't *want* to be like them.

NEPHOS:
Right now, you don't have a choice. The game is old and, in a sense, simple. You belong to your parents until you're old enough to live on your own. Then you acquire your freedom and you need to find a way to finance it.

PETALIA:
Freedom can't be bought.

NEPHOS:
I didn't say it could. But it has a cost.

PETALIA:
I know all this. Telling me how much I owe them, how much they've done and spent for me, is my mother's favorite pastime.

NEPHOS:

There's truth in it.

PETALIA:
I never asked for anything. Not even to be born.

NEPHOS:
Obligation is calculated on the basis of services rendered, not requested.

PETALIA:
Are you taking her side?

NEPHOS;
Of course not.

PETALIA:
It sounds like it.

NEPHOS:
How could I?

PETALIA:
That's what I wonder.

NEPHOS:
You talked about freedom. I'm simply explaining to you the terms and conditions.

PETALIA:
Freedom can't have conditions.

NEPHOS:
But it does. To be free you need to set yourself free. You, for example, need to make sure you go to university. Somewhere far. Where your parents can't reach you. And if they can't reach you, they can't control you.

PETALIA:
Have you seen how sharp my mother's claws are? She will never let me go.

NEPHOS:
She doesn't have a choice. The older you grow, the more you slip away. When you get a job and move to your own house, you'll have a door to shut and a phone to not answer. She won't be able to get to you that easy.

PETALIA:
She's already threatening to get ill.

NEPHOS:
If she does, you'll have to look after her. It's part of the game.

PETALIA:

But what if it destroys me, like it happened with you?

NEPHOS:

I said the game is simple, not that it's an easy one.

PETALIA:

You said that somewhere in all this there's freedom to be had.

NEPHOS:

There is. To some degree.

PETALIA:

I don't see it. What I see is a life filled with obligations from the moment you're born. Maybe even before. When you're still just a thought in your parents' head, already looking after them, working to pay for their pensions, filling them with joy over your future success and all the dreams that have been assigned to you, you, the body that comes to flesh out the idea. A constant race between you and the other kid, the good one, that your parents molded in their mind long before you came around.

NEPHOS:

I'm not saying you're not right.

PETALIA:

Then how can you talk to me about freedom?

NEPHOS:

Because I, perhaps more than anyone, am the living proof that even though this freedom is not perfect, it is still worth fighting for.

PETALIA:

You were a friend of the family and you became our slave.

NEPHOS:

I work to pay off my debt. I'm not ashamed of that.

PETALIA:

But I am, to have a home slave. We're like the stories you hear about on TV.

NEPHOS:

It's not the same.

PETALIA:

What's the difference?

NEPHOS:

The ones you're talking about are poor people from failed countries. They would do anything for a loaf of bread. Also, they are forced to do what they do. They take their passports and lock them up. I, on the other hand, had a choice.

PETALIA:

You're here because you want to, then?

NEPHOS:

It was the only way to keep my house.

PETALIA:

So you *were* forced.

NEPHOS:

No. I could have given in, but I chose to keep on fighting.

PETALIA:

You can call slavery a fight for freedom, it will still be slavery. Just with a different name.

NEPHOS:

You're wrong. One day all this will be finished and I will be back where I belong.

PETALIA;

Where is that?

NEPHOS:

In my house. Where I'm free to do as I please.

PETALIA:

There will always be predators like my parents to force a debt on your back.

NEPHOS:

It's the case in every society.

PETALIA:

Not in a truly free one.

NEPHOS:

It's not that simple. Humans are vulnerable when they live on their own. When you join a group you get protection but there are sacrifices to be made.

PETALIA:

That's not good enough for me. That's not the kind of freedom I want.

NEPHOS:

You'll learn to live with it. If not today, tomorrow.

PETALIA:
No.

NEPHOS:
You'll grow up.

PETALIA:
Never. Once I set myself free, I'll live in real freedom. Then I'll come back for you, too.

NEPHOS:
Thank you.

PETALIA:
You don't believe me?

NEPHOS:
I just hope that by then I will be gone.

PETALIA:
If I know my father, he will never let you go.

NEPHOS:
He doesn't have a choice. Besides, from a legal point of view, our deal has barely any force at all.

PETALIA:
My father *is* the law.

NEPHOS:
Don't worry about me. You go on and find a way to live in absolute freedom and I'll come meet you wherever you are.

PETALIA:
You promise?

NEPHOS:
I do.

(They shake hands.)

-Translated by the writer

Danae Sioziou

Danae Sioziou (b. 1987) is a poet, essayist, educator, feminist activist and cultural worker. Her books to date include her first poetry collection *Useful Children Games* (2016, Antipodes Editions) which was awarded both the Writers' Society "Yannis Varveris" Prize for Young Authors and (ex aequo) the National Book Award for New Authors. Her second poetry collection *Probable Landscapes* (2021, Antipodes Editions) is shortlisted for the National Poetry Prize. Her third poetry collection *Letters* will be published in 2023. Her poetry has been translated into more than twenty languages, anthologized (e.g., by Karen Van Dyck in *Austerity Measures*, 2016), published in acclaimed journals and newspapers nationally and internationally (including *World Literature Today*, *Harlequin Creature*, *NYRB* among others) and presented at numerous festivals and other events in Greece and abroad. She has been awarded various fellowships and participated in artistic residencies in Europe. Danae Sioziou co-organizes the Purple Medusas Festival, an international, interdisciplinary festival with a focus on literature and gender. She is a member of Book History Lab and works for it at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She is a member of Versopolis poetry platform. She has translated Susan Sontag, modern American poetry, Afroamerican poetry, Aboriginal poetry and modern German poetry.

greek dream

I remember you driving in the mountains
on steep roads bending into hairpin turns
I am slightly dizzy
your voice fills the car
like old spring snow
there is a town next to a lake, clear as a
mirror
where you return to find
everything you left behind
because it wasn't enough.

I know exactly what wasn't enough
what was left out, what you used to hold
on to
if I look back, my gaze slides
to the end of the route that ripples like a
ribbon
and then I see you on the balcony.

You are silent like the future.

I pass by the blond children,
the wife, the little country house,
the Greek dream
for which you gave your lives.

I walk decisively towards you
my feet bleed as if I were walking on snow
I cover your eyes with my hands and hug you:
I am ready to become all this old spring snow.

It's very simple: we don't know how to love each other.

You are silent.

I know that if you could you would return
to your childhood village,
long before the Greek dream.
I know it, because I look at you
through the eye of the talisman,
through the eye of an animal,
you keep silent like a secret
folding into itself.

You shouldn't have left anything behind
You should have just kept the secret.
Even now you can go up to the little
house.
The animal inside you like the eye of the
talisman
can guide you.

If you get there, you will be alone
if you get there, stay there.

It's not too late and this isn't anymore
the dream for which you gave your life
it is a dream you carry up the mountain
where once again you become no one.

Returning, you are back in your village
where you prayed to become someone.

Returning, I am back at the car
where I prayed I was your son.

Now your voice doesn't fill the car
like old spring snow.

We are silent like the future.

—Translated by Danae Sioziou and Eera Mac

poem for my birthday

When it's my birthday, I want to sleep all day long
covered in bills, W2 forms, postcards,
and I want to cry, but since I am not a crybaby,
I simply say that I will faint and then go to sleep.
Because a birthday after thirty is
like when they surreptitiously open your mail
like when you try to park
and you have blocked traffic
it's like getting a call from the debt collectors
whether you have a car, children, spouse, dog
or not, a birthday after thirty
is like you are waiting to shop the clearance sale
and you can't find anything in your size
in general terms it's not your fault
when it's my birthday I'm an answering machine
without space for new messages,
someone who hitchhikes on the wrong side of the street,
when it's my birthday I can't remember
what's the big deal
I'm unbearable
and I'm not at all afraid of metaphors
when it's my birthday, I suddenly remember
that I want to live forever
and I ruin the party.

–Translated by Adam Goldwyn

my best friend is in love with you

My best friend is in love with you
and you must build her a house
because she's my best friend
and she's in love with you
she aligns herself to your thoughts
just like the magi to the North Star
her every step follows this thought
magnetically drawn toward your constellation
like a temple complex
like a mathematical sequence
like a symphony
like end credits
like two hundred and fifty flavors of ice cream
like a collection of short stories, poems, butterflies, coins
like any collection it too requires
a fanatic or someone lost
she's my best friend and when she falls in love
her hair floats up toward the sky
it expands, grows long
and joy gets bigger like the moon
3.8 centimeters per year
you must build her a house
because she's my best friend
And she's in love with you.

–Translated by Adam Goldwyn

burglary

As I open the door to my house,
I think that poetry is a privilege
like the expensive toys of childhood
or listening to your favorite song for the hundredth time
under ideal listening conditions
like kissing the love of your life
like millions of sparkling ponies
like life on other planets
like honey that dissolves completely in tea
like herds of lightning in the distance
and I like writing poems
as I like lying in the grass
eating cream with apricots, petting dogs
and even if people don't like to hear poems
I like their sound
the way you put the words in order
the way you open the door holding the keys
to an inviolable house
I like writing poems
like cats like licking themselves in the sun
and I want to get good at this work
I want to get good at this work.

—Translated by Adam Goldwyn

the spider

Dear Sir,

I watch you from the ceiling,
your coffee requests more sugar.
Something about the clothes and the shoes is off,
you shouldn't have patched up all the holes.
Grab the day like a knife,
the weight of your life keeps growing,
the agreement with the mirror has been cancelled
and you are turning fat.
Tomorrow I will hang before your nose,
perhaps you could please feed me?

Sincerely,
The Spider

Dear Spider,

just yesterday the bat gave birth in a corner of the attic, her tasty eggs float in the air.
I haven't learned to drive, to debone fish, to read newspapers.
I have two useless dog teeth and a BB gun.
I have made a deal with the morning coffee,
I respect the decision of the mirror.
I no longer set traps for birds,
each day I head to the river and shoot the waters.

Yours,
K.

–Translated by Panagiotis Kechagias and Mania Meziti

Nežka Struc

Nežka Struc (1987, Slovenija) is an anthropologist and poet. She has published three poetry collections: *Nihanja (Wavers)* (Hiša poezije, 2017) and “Do severnega sija” (To the Northern Lights) (Ignor, IA, 2021), “Le kaj bo rekel Ivan? Nismo utrujeni” (What will Ivan say? We are not tired) (Hiša poezije, 2023). In 2017, she co-translated the anthropological classic “Argonauts of the Western Pacific” by Bronisław Malinowski. Since 2019, she has been more intensely engaged with questions related to the interpretation of poetry. This exploration has led to several spatial, vocal, and video interpretations of her own poetry. Her poems and short stories have been translated into Italian, Croatian, English, Serbian, and Czech. Her poetry was featured in the anthologies “Srca v igri: Izbor leposlovnih del mladih slovenskih avtoric_jev LGBTQ+” (*Hearts in Play: A Selection of Literary Works by Young Slovenian LGBTQ+ Authors*) and *Za robom jezika: Antologija sodobnih pesnic Maribora (Behind the edge of language: Anthology of contemporary poetesses from Maribor)* and in several literary magazines in Slovenia. In her role as a producer of literary events, programs, and festivals, she works at the UNESCO City of Literature office and Literature House Vodnik Homestead in Ljubljana. She is involved with the Pranger Festival, a gathering of poets, critics, and poetry translators, and Ignor, a platform for literature, sound, visual arts, and performance.

let's solve the report

I am in the corner of your anger
my blood on your knives
I have to kill you
you over:
abuse
hurt
break
you break glasses and smoke

I bargain for my salary
1300?
1200?
500?
next month? in two months? in half a year?
cold, you sit on my shoulders

bad worker
naughty worker
pretty worker
batboi
sadboy fuckboy badboyworker
good worker
burning fryer, trembling grinder, radio shits (my ass), moldy cakes, moldy food, spoiled soup, workers steal, I have to return money for lunch and transportation, boss falls in love (not with me), boss gets divorced (not with me), I translate and break my back and don't know how to use prepositions, no one needs me when everyone comes back from their holidays, parole parole, I launder bones and also money a bit and from next month on the salary will be lower!

stab me in the back, lovingly, smiiiiile, we are all friends

you didn't cut the cabbage and where is that radio??
splash splash coworker pushes head under water (mine, not his).

father said I have to write, that poetry is not my strong suit, that I really have to start writing. so I wrote that I worked for 5.5 euros per hour last month. my nail polish is going mad.

I have two floors and gloves, and garbage bags, to collect, wipe and clean the plastic carpet. plastic in my heart, plastic carpet, carpeeeeet 4evah. the best sunsets are from where I clean. and repetition in 3 stages leads to a mystery: shoe on the roof, a corpse, wrapped in the carpet, finger in the snack bar. murder not out of jealousy, but because of an unemptied bin and stolen chocolates.

roses smoked opium and the vacuum cleaner furiously scrubbed the carpet. I'm not babbling. I'm learning.

WHO?

Where are we going?

where is what

where w

WHERE IS WHO GOING

WHO IS WHERE

we are not useful to god. I miscarried the angels of traffic fines. I wish ill upon you, it smells so bad in our kitchen, did someone die here a week ago, the kingdom of flies, and their queen is an apricot pancake?

but most of all, I love pasgras at the workplace.

–Translated by the poet, proofreading: Pino Pograjc

first part of the ministry: I told you so

dealing with carelessness
twice I got tangled in the wheel
twice to the same song
you don't see the bruises
they are not yours because I have to fall alone and where I fall you are not there is
only a big 30l pot
stainless steel doesn't rust but it can break bones

I vomit at the words freedom love solitude parallel ship phone dogs coffee silk wings
journey do you get it, you see
I vomit if someone hugs me I throw bitterness of a damaged soul with leftovers of Pfizer
because love is not care and it is not safety coexistence understanding
(these are some Christian tricks right?)
it is just tearing trampling ignoring escape and butterflies in the ass
it is an idea love is an idea

just don't touch me
so that you don't ...
twice for sure

–Translated by the poet, proofreading: Pino Pograjc

two ladies and a security guard

lady, you are dressed in a black mushroom trumpet
can a mushroom be a person?
the security guard is very friendly– which means the situation is really bad

I told you: you're not right
I'm not a right person
of course not
palms are growing from my ears
they will plant them in Koper
above the rubble where I paid an 80 euro fine
and they didn't even know
how much of me has withered away
so it could die completely
I told you: that continents don't exist
they are part of an elevated ocean floor
a systemic error of the curriculum
even a dead bloated whale is more of a continent than land
it remains as material and food
our bodies predict the future
not our heads

I told you: that you won't be able to give blowjobs anymore once you paint your nails red
I really didn't know how I could imagine that
sure, sure, and the tea kitchen is on the right
we don't have lunch all at once
but he drinks coffee with half a teaspoon of crushed sweetener and half a deciliter of skim milk
oh, that's why he was dusty under his nose
no, that's drugs

I told you: this form requires its sacrifice
it must be laid in the genes
you have to fill it out intuitively
using the right sequence of words
magic?
but, Ms. Mushroom, the universe doesn't send me information directly into my brain
shall we call Ms. Biserka, the commissioner
Ms. Mushroom, do we have a problem?
Ms. Biserka, the commissioner, the poet doesn't believe in the cosmic intuition of this form but it's all the same and clear
as clear as day if we disregard the double-sided boxes
how lovely
Ms. Mushroom, shall we nod at each other

the security guard compassionately snorts

–Translated by the poet, proofreading: Pino Pograjc

Tonia Tzirita Zacharatou

Tonia Tzirita Zacharatou (Heraklion, 1993) is a Greek interdisciplinary poet based in Athens. She studied law and comparative literature. Her first poetry book *Defteri Neotita* (*Second Youth*, Thraca Award 2020) has received the “Anagnostis” (the Reader) Magazine award and the «Jean Moréas» award for first appearing poet. She has translated indigenous American poetry during her collaboration with the poetry magazine Teflon, and the poetry book *Adrianos* by the Portuguese poet Tatiana Faia. In her work she is interested in cultivating a poetic practice that would include musical and performative elements, and she has often organized and participated in art happenings and workshops. Currently, she is preparing her first music & poetry performance in collaboration with Michalis and Pantelis Kalogerakis. She has participated in poetry festivals and residency programs in Greece and abroad. Her poems and essays have been published in print and online magazines.

the river we used to call

This is the river we used to call *Little gray* when we lived briefly in the city by its shores. Ljubljana is a word that reminds me of a warm body made out of freshly baked bread, leaning tenderly against one's breast. But how do we learn to love each other at the edge of the river, looking straight at its dark waters, while the raindrops keep falling faster and faster? Going back and forth between the Dalmatian horses and the half-erased corpses in the paintings of Zoran Mušič? By the river we used to call *Little gray* I started to collect your body limb by limb like a passenger in the tramway that realizes suddenly how limited his perspective is, how it only allows her a brief insight into fragmented torsos, elbows and crooked noses. We fed our stale bread to the ducks and the swans, and to these beaver rats which gather in the riverbanks carrying stories from across the ocean. They are invaders like us in a dream that belongs to somebody else. Look now how she tries to wake up in vain. Ljubljana is asleep. But elsewhere passion is a chaos that grows redder in every sunset. How do we love each other at this point of the night, where no straight lines exist anymore? Only curly hair and stained shirts ready to hijack the first passing bus before morning. This is the river we used to call *Little gray* crossing its bridges over and over again; a ping pong ball clips the net and goes over, where your feet under the bed sheets turn cold

–Translated by the poet

beyond the river, a river

What benefit is there in me talking about rivers?

I am so far away.

Rivers remain indefinite.

They try to escape metaphor
which sees in them time flowing.

Rivers want to become rivers
beyond cement, beyond metaphor.

Perhaps this is the only benefit in speaking about them.

To me

all my

rivers

are

fantastic.

To speak

how?

—Translated by Panayiotis Xenophontos

the world within

Yesterday was the day
I forgot to water the pots and I let
The laundry clothes imagine
A new color in my fountain.

I can't say for sure if it was
The beginning or the ending of the week
Though I have been taught the difference
Between days and how important it is
To attach yourself carefully to the present
With impalpable threads. But I left
The bread in the oven and still there was
No one I knew in the emergency room
No sudden knocks on my door, only branches
From the backyard tree intruding through the window
And a burnt smell nobody could eat.

There was a world inside my house like a thorn
That is stuck in the paw of the fox
Whining, itching, crying, scratching, and for
The world's sake I forgot myself
And I licked the world in my flesh
Hard with a hard tongue trying
Never to let its syrupy flow exude.

–Translated by the poet

MY SISTER AS my sister as princess Elsa

I love my sister from a distance, behind
a frozen door. The secret is never to touch her
but to look for her in the cornflakes
stuck at the bottom of the box. From what material is a sister made?
She sings when she is happy, and she becomes a vegetable garden
that survives the frost. In the winter evenings, she spins around
like a dragonfly with no legs. Yesterday it snowed at last and the city
disappeared for long. I write snowed, where I should have written
my sister is a witch and *temperature is a hammer of ice*.
My sister is constantly shapeshifting, following
the patterns of the snowflakes. In the place of her heart
a small Swarovski animal is slowly melting. But every time she sees
me come closer, she wears a dog mask, and then it is impossible to caress her snout
without being afraid of the teeth. One day, when my sister gets lost for good
I will no longer trust the footprints of the rain boots.

–Translated by the poet

my sister as Serena Williams

Watching you play has always been a delight
so aggressive that I could feel your hands around my neck
even though they were only gripping a racket.

How do you teach somebody to lose –I practiced in between dust
and falling on a field where somebody had drawn
a line of dried mud in the middle.

To lose from your sister –look, the ball became a comet,
its tail is burning my eyelids. I lost to you
all the finals I managed to reach, but I come to all your games
just to see muscles stretched under the sun –how beautiful you are today
so beautiful that they kicked you out –out they cried, and they didn't mean the ball
like hostile referees that impose short skirts in every match.

You are an aggressive rain; you blaze.
Whoever crosses the line loses and eats
the soil of the summer olive grove.

You are my young sister who used to scratch
her knees here, and now she is reflected
on the metal of useless trophies.

None of these have any taste
and it is impossible to sleep in them.

–Translated by the poet

Josip Čekolj

Josip Čekolj was born in 1999 in Zabok, Croatia. He is the author of poetry book *The Decline of Heroes and Dragons* (*Junaci i zmajevi u zalasku*, Mala zvona, 2022), poetry book *A Boy Before the Harvest* (*Dječak pred žetvu*, Jesenski i Turk, 2023), a novel titled *The Rascals Deep in Mud* (*Hahari na dnu mulja*, Mala zvona, 2022), and a children's picture book titled *Srna and Mak in Pursuit of a Frightened Month* (*Srna i Mak u potrazi za uplašenim mjesecom*, Mala zvona, 2020).

His second poetry manuscript *A Boy Before the Harvest* won the Na vrh jezika award and Zvonko Milković award. The children's novel *The Rascals Deep in Mud* made it to the shortlist for the Grigor Vitez, Mato Lovrak, and Mali princ literary awards. He has participated in several Croatian and regional literary festivals. His short stories and poems have been published in regional and Croatian magazines and anthologies. In addition to his studies, he works as a text editor for literary works.

growing up

as caterpillars still climbed up my thighs
tugging on those first, white hairs,
saints fell from the skies
one by one

I put away my fear of stoning into a box,
but sometimes it still slithers out in the middle of
the night and licks my shivering knees with its
venomous tongue

I've seen the fear of death
in the visits Grandpa would pay to the brandy in
the cellar and in Grandma's worn out prayer
book
and in spasms rippling through skin

the fear of self
lies in the hidden flintlock and the blunt knife,
in unconsumed drugs and unconsumed beds,
in forged-iron shackles on one's wrists

and all those things had to be written in the dirt
with a stick and all those things had to be passed
over in silence and all those things had to be for-
given

–Translated by Goran Čolakhodžić

at the end of the path
there is a nest, a den, a grove,
a place, warm and tight,
that covers you, hides you, shelters you
when the fists of fathers and grandfa-
thers go berserk and when the heavens
lose their temper
unjustly

and that place needs to be rebuilt
always anew, from picked flowers,
fallen leaves and twigs, tufts of blown wool
and a fistful of warm earth

you are afraid, I know, afraid
of the words family, dwelling, domicile,
kinship, lineage, relatives, childbirth,
all those primary cells of society,
uneasy because they're unhappy

wounded does are shot out of compassion,
fawns become orphans, and their home is now like
jagged lightning, like gasps of fish out of water, a
bottomless wound,
an astonished o, an unvoiced collapse

blood is neither milk nor dew,
it is a log bridge washed away by the swollen river

during sleepless nights we rebuke our ancestors,
they are to be blamed for our imperfect shape,
it is easy to forgive, it is hard to forget,
words are bruises and cuts

taking a turn is sometimes justified so as to avoid
further accidents, crossroads are always dangerous,
choices are always the wrong ones

build that den in the ravine, survive the winter

–Translated by Goran Čolakhodžić

the storks are leaving us, descending into amber twilights

I kiss the top of your left shoulder,
I play with the coffee beans in your earlobes

like nesting in a belly of dewy grasses,
soft and secure – that's how it feels to enter your embrace

you recite to me
friendships are sacred, loves are fleeting,
but in the eyes of the storks everything is fleeting and sacred at once

–Translated by Goran Čolakhodžić

plum jam spills over the skies and my hands,
everything is burnt and sweet, wasps and ants are
already coming, the poems are all written, the gar-
dens are all hoed,
a shard of the forest has pierced my chest, I've
been whispering to gentle hares let me be saved,
let me be a child, let me be a child of wax,
let me make the deserted birch groves warm again

–Translated by Goran Čolakhodžić

Sergej Harlamov

Sergej Harlamov (1989) is a poet, sociologist and comparativist, recipient of the Prešeren Faculty Award for his dissertation *Michel Houellebecq and the Archeology of the Present*. Author of the poetry collections *Jedci* (2011) and *Mnogoboj mitologij* (2019), which was nominated for the Jenko Award and the Critical Sieve. In latest work *Hypomnemata ali Obnovimo osnove pisanja* he is adding to his poetics the elements of concrete poetry and auto-reference. He publishes his poems in all major literary magazines in Slovenia. Occasionally he finds himself in the roles of a publicist and prose writer, as well as vocalist and lyricist of the band Marta Fakuch.

**why I never learned how
to make a paper plane**

I've
never seen
anything
hang in the air
like

–Translated by Jernej Županič

**for you, to whom this poem
will never be addressable**

for Urša

rain
rain
rain
rain
rain
no

these aren't words

I'd like

to give to raindrops
but a language
that wants to collide with the sky
and scatter
with no excuses
in the fleshy expressiveness
of the lips

rain
rain
rain
rain
rain
the texture
of hooves rises on the skin
with deceitful blows
that cannot be suppressed
not even by obsessive incantation

rain
rain
rain
rain
rain

he who breaks the spell
will himself be

RAIN¹

–Translated by Jernej Županič

¹ Untranslatable onomatopoetic wordplay: “rain”, which reads as dež [dəž] in Slovene, can be understood as a vocal imitation of crushing sound.

humanoid ballads (dawn of the humanoids)

On they go. And the desert attends them.

- Gregor Strniša, Stars

don't believe the landscape's undulation
opening before you like a wound
inflicted by an unknown hand

remember first your whelping
and the screes you wandered over
with your herd to here and now
between the undifferentiated ebb and flow
of heat and cold
transpired your endless annular hunting for
a bite a swallow and her mammal body

but from time to time those fragile necks
slipped your fangs
and frequently some brother of yours ended up in the belly
of something more indomitable
or was gutted by his own breath
and more and more often it happened
that the one who lay by your side in the night
snarled her foreignness into you the morning after.

and so you awoke some muggy day
all confused and smeared with thirst
as in death throes
clenching the empty fist of your dead-limbed right hand

your fingers your knuckles your joints all
was still and wax
and when at last even your own scream
deserted you to the embrace of an obscure murmur
you jumped away in fear and ran

your wobbling waddle
scuffled from under you
the furrowed face of the windblown land
and, baiting you with the sunlit horizon,
hounded you further into its throat

but the thirst was a steadfast stalker
it became more and more tangible with each completed runstep

and then
in an inscrutable moment
curled the edges of its dusty planes
and offered them to your lips
like a full pitcher
with your exhausted step
it jumped you starved you
with greenery and its fruits blinded you
with its tree-crowns and the view they offer

and yet still you don't know
when the herd overstepped you
nor even
whether it leaped between you and their congregation
a germ of thirst or burble

all that seems certain
and for that still no more legible
is a gray residuum you scrape from your soles each
time you cross the threshold of your dwelling

because you sense already humanoid
one day on your path
from dust till dust
you'll feel again a stray seed
of gravel in your shoe
and trip upon your native tongue

—Translated by Lukas Debeljak

confessions of a ventriloquist / postcards from nowherehome

Your voice is mine.

III.

supposedly
it has happened right next to me
life
or something similar
the sheer intrusiveness of its fact
was a kind of enlightenment
but
if you come from some hovel
in some shithole
the light of the world can only blind you

you're then crying and screaming and flapping
all your limbs
in order to, with a real name,
embrace the inconceivable
which has just taken you over
but the language of the land
from which you have been exiled
and into which you are
together with them
exiled alone
is foreign to them

and the world
what does the world do then
the world
first thrusts a pacifier in your mouth
and because this never really suffices
it also puts words into your mouth
words
that only affirm
its way of presence
ah
I would give all the turns and overthrows
in existence or perhaps still to come
for just one dictionary
which would exclude all of our vocabulary
and all of our grammar

but such a dictionary
would probably be perfect
and I
who can only exist as murmur
in the existing dictionary of the world
could never
even write about that

–Translated by Barbara Jurša

doomed at the funhouse

in the beginning
was a noun
that was unable to get out
or to announce
an unnoun
or stay seated
to the right of anybody

it became a windmill
a dead phone
a wanton trojan horse
carrying

masters
adequately mindful and obedient
that they didn't have to dirty their boots
with the entrails of those
who'd fallen

because of it
and for it

a starver
strangles a starver
becoming an animal for a piece of bread

whoever put them together
provoking them with crumbs
has created a monster

we're all
frightened of it
and nobody
feels innocent enough anymore
to dare to be the first to cast a stone
we're buying it now
for a shooting wall
that could reflect
bullets of any caliber

now and then
one breaks off
of the burden

carried by
the shady voice of draft
scatters it
across the street
to mow down
the well-wishing
and oblivious
passers-by

later they
try to put it back together
piece
by piece into the monolithic mosaic of the wall
either a warning or an apology
and argue
about the chicken and the egg

and meanwhile
the undisturbed conveyor belt
keeps churning
carousels of wishes
like russian roulette
in order to protect the world of rides
with a human shield of those
who'd been left faceless
in front of the house of mirrors
buildings turn into museums
of decomposition
and archives
of the composition
of ostracisms
regarding that
which isn't born of a noun
and cannot be pronounced
with any simile other than

the only reality
of the film stock
is the moment
when it breaks

–Translated by Jernej Županič

Marios Chatziprokopiou

Marios Chatziprokopiou is a poet, performer, and researcher. His first poetry book *Topical Tropics* (Antipodes, 2019) explores issues of queer mourning and desire in connection to oral poetic traditions. It has been shortlisted for the State Literary Award for Best Poetry. His poems have been translated into English and Serbian. He translates Clarice Lispector into Modern Greek. He has presented performances and lecture performances internationally (see indicatively: Oxford University, Mouvoir Tanztheater/Cologne, Spinnerei/Leipzig, Onassis Foundation, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens Biennale, Mostra Latinoamericana de Performances Urbanas/ Βραζιλία, Columbia University etc.), and he has worked as a dramaturg in several productions (Athens and Epidaurus Festival, Dimitria Festival (etc.) He wrote the libretto for the performance Koutalianoi, The Weight of History (Megaron, the Athens Concert Hall, 2024).

In 2023 he was a writer-in-residence at the Ulysses Shelter (Belgrade) and a Vakalo Visiting Artist at the University of Michigan. He is currently an Assistant Professor in Performance Studies and Writing, University of Thessaly.

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luna de miel*

When father “passed on” — as they say —
I returned from the tropics myself.

And we left
forty-one days later
on a honeymoon
with mum.

The rooms-to-let would not contain
the orphaned one. It was still the beginning of
May. And the only customers
were retired women from the North.
All of them, with their husbands
still alive.

We left
We set off

We found ourselves in the middle of a flatland.

The three women came
grandmothers made of earth
—with hair in plaits—

They uttered their predictions for our lives.

The whole world came
— very kind of you, stranger!
in the space of a hitchhiking sip.

We sang sunsets

That very evening, at the mobile home
I dreamt
of a sooty fireplace
myself, the wet wood at fault
and a Saint George-Dragon
jolting me.

(disposing of me) to sparks
I was reduced.

Since then, whenever, and if

I see dad in my dream
he either smiles at me
or he embraces me,

*** luna de miel**

honeymoon [...]

μήν [...]

mensis [...]

month [...]

–Translated by Thodoris Chiotis

ballad of the shepherd girl

Once upon a time, a Laird of the black art
Lived on a wide farm. And had a yearly gathering
of story-telling that went on from night till dawn, from night till dawn...

There was not much to eat or drink, but those of faithful heart who came
they feasted on the telling, and truly got their fill.
Each would begin a tale to sing. And for the best one of them all
the Laird would give a coin of gold to the wildest story told
the most far-fetched, the greatest fib.

The wind was howling of an eve; around the fire as they gathered
with only small pickings to eat, but with much merriment and laughter...
A cattleman was there as well. A simple, an untroubled soul
who didn't know much of the world, and made his nightly bed in straw.
They gave him some homebrew and asked a story of him: "It's your turn!"
"Me?"

I have no story nor much else! I do know nothing of the world!
My eyes are blind, deaf is my soul..."

The Laird took him up on that:
"If you have no gift of gab, go make yourself useful
down by the river where my boat sits weather worn, in need of upkeep!"

The cattleman does like he's told, goes down to the river, jumps on board
but suddenly the boat's unmoored and off it goes, downstream it goes...

He casts an eye down on himself. He doesn't credit what he sees:
"Where have my woolen breeches gone? Where are my mud-spattered boots?"
now tiny slippers he has on, and silk-embroidered stockings.
What's there to do, he must go on!

And on the boat meanders
with no sail and no rudder
bearing the maiden hither and thither
downstream, way down to the Great River...

A sturdy lad stands on the bank! By her sight taken, he draws near
reaches his hand, pulls her on shore:
"Are you not frightened battling here,
all on your own, beautiful One?!"
And will you join me in my hut?"

They got to know one another. Passion was next to kindle
with no blessing from no priest; as betrothed, they lied together

splendid children they begot; as sweet a life as could be.

But then, a day came in May (Three full years had been and gone two little ones they'd sired...) And once again down they strolled a happy wife, a happy man, by the bank of that same river.

Amazed she calls out: "My love! Look there if that isn't my boat of old! It's come! The very one that brought me here!" Hardly were her exclamations done, and she leaps on board "Oh, come with me! Oh, come along!"

No sooner has she set her foot, the boat becomes unmoored
the waves grow fierce and mighty, snatch her away from the shore.
The maiden struggles with the boat, she tries to steer against the wind
- My beloved! My beloooooooooooooooooooooooveddddddd!"

But halfway through the unwilling trip, casting an eye down on herself he sees: the boots and woolen breeches, spattered with mud and cow dung! lifting a hand up to her cheek, he feels a beard sprouting there.

Her soul is crying out for his mate, as the boat takes her upriver
back to the place where he began...

He sets her foot on dry land, though her eyes are far from dry.
The stars above twinkle in sorrow. The earth is heaving. Her heart is breaking
My beloved, where? How? Why?

But then his steps take him uphill. Back to the wide laying farm and to the story-tellers' gathering, around the fire, yarn swapping.

The Black Laird spots him and calls: "Hey! Come inside, cattleman,
Where were you? Did you find the boat?"
And he replies: "I did. Now leave me alone."
"Oh! What is wrong with you, then? Come, tell us, why the crying!"

The cattleman comes in and sits, sobbing and crying bitter tears.
He tells them of his man. He tells them of his kids.
All that he had. And now has lost. All that he had. And lost.

“By the blackness of this night, I never heard a wilder yarn!
Here’s a coin of gold and more, and very well earned they are!

“Sir, you can keep your gold. To me it is as nothing
But, please do give me back the boat. To go across the water
To find again my little-ones. To find again my husband’s arms”.

–Translated by Konstantinos Matsoukas

***hram**

Little azure girl that twenty years afore
you were watering with milk your grandfather's bedding, swishing grandchild

Barren you now sweat to saddle yourself with them, a tourist
childless
(disavowed)
offspring

with money

of unknown origin self
creating. Glass-like skin longing to be scratched

Website: "Easter at the village"

(-Does Resurrection ever sound
in the hecatombs of the chests?

- For sure, daughter of mine, for sure

The beddings that raised you, wares
you haggle over with foxes rabbit-sisters
bishops brothers scions and acquired
tele-salesmen of the family house.

The years that corroded you, pixels
online pics and you grope around in the hope of finding
and (re)claiming with a credit card number
the mark of shame that bore you.

***hram**

wool-cotton bedding [...]

Agiasos, Lesvos [...]

Local idiom [...]

Turkish [...]

ihram

حرا

iḥrām

[...] arabic

[...] garment

[...] faithful to Islam [...]

psychological condition

[...] pilgrimage

hajj

حج

ḥarām

حَرَام

saint/

sinner [...]

etymology : arabic root

h-r-m

Modern Greek: *χράμι*

χάραμι

χαραμίζω

χαραμής

χαρέμι

–Translated by Thodoris Chiotis

ballad of the willows

Fiercely the sun beats on the crops, the drought sings the land
but Willowy quenches her thirst in the breath of her Braveheart

Their loving gaze locked tight, although their bodies kept apart
by a fence, the cradle of their longing and executioner of their love

Day and night they step up to either side of the wire,
with no way to sweetly kiss, nor give vent to desire

But Easter day arrives, the cover is lifted off the sky
the heavens' glare softens and they are gifted with clear sight.

A hole in the fence that Willowy sees, a tiny rend, a pass
she folds herself in two and twists and glides into Braveheart's arms.

He scoops her up and leaps and gets away, in speedy flight
leaving behind their noxious kin, the thankless earth all dried

they get to the far reaches of the world, all dusty and hazed
near fainting from the sun but saved by the Virgin Mother's grace:

"Here, eat and drink, the blood and flesh of my one Son, your Lord
wherever his cross takes you, that place will be your home"

The Virgin said, entrusting the sacred piece of wood to him
and Willowy puts it round herself, as weightless as a drapery.

They drifted with the clouds, they meandered with the wind
and reached a distant, far off land, the cross grown heavy 'n weary

Next to a hamlet, at a clearing, the wooden cross lay still
the nails flew out and from the wooden beams a little hut was built

Willowy and Braveheart will have three years together there
of everlasting love and friendship sweet and rare.

But a leap year lay ahead, soul crushing times
the sun scything the crops, Death harvesting young lives,
and Braveheart, too, an old man in his hut, now follows suit.

Like a reed in a flatland, the old woman, all alone and bereft
calls in the neighbors, and they start the sorrowful lament:

– Oh trusty neighbor and fair friend, whose graces number many
where are you off to, leaving your woman with no child and no kin
while your crops are getting burned and your livelihood's strewn to the wind?

And the widow pulling out tufts of her hair, she wails
And she beats at her breast and draws blood from her cheeks.

Then, the oldest one among the keening hags, she tells her:

– Rightly you wail and pull your hair, for you've been branded by Death
Well may you beat your breast and gouge your cheeks,
while the rest of us bathe, properly dress him and anoint him
with oils and fragrances for the occasion that I keep.

Sisters, you're kind of heart, my loss has left me both bankrupt and bereft
in all my life, never have I laid eyes on my beloved's naked flesh.

The women they get to work with a change of clothes at hand,
stripp down the dead man, to prepare him for the wedding suit.
Except, halfway through they are startled and they point and declare:

– Wait up, where is his ... bed snake? Can someone find his... meat sword?
– I' m looking for his ...trouser trout. Where is it, his ...love whistle, his
...wonder worm?

Couldn't you help to get up? Just play with it a bit!

– But he has nothing to play with! Well, 'll be!! This is a woman she's been sleeping
with!

Oh come! For Heavens' sake! What is this, for the love of Christ!

– My gosh! "He" has a hole down there! He's a vagina, like we have!

–Has.... what!? Oh Lord have mercy! You, devil's spawn! May you be cursed!

- How could you? Shameless and vile! You took ... a woman as your ...lawfully wed?

As if from stone, the widow sits, no notion what they're saying
she's lost her Braveheart, is all she knows and she can barely stand it

she does remember they always lay with one another in the dark,
the sweetness of their tight embrace and how it would bring out the stars
she pulls a chair to the table and sets it out for two.

The neighbors screeching go about and quickly spread the news
The Priest is asked to come, he says: from me, no blessing
Next, the Policeman is sent for: the likes of you are fit for prison

The neighbors screeching, out of the house they pour
Surround it on all sides, start throwing rocks and stones

The Policeman shoots his pistol, the Priest throws down his torch

And all the villagers, as one, become a fist of fire, to scorch
and strike the profane bitches down, deliver them unto the flames.

And, like the flames, the widowed woman's eyes are shining
as she kisses her dead love, tightly embraces her betrothed
and takes up a lament, without shifting from her stool:

Whether man or woman, saint or spirit, or not even human,
to me you are my Braveheart and I owe you the whole world wide
ashes to ashes with you I'll turn, and meet you in the other side.

And even as she speaks, down on their heads rain burning beams
their embrace turns to cinders, the spark of song is drowned out
and fire engulfs the hut, throwing its shadow across the heavens.

And the villagers grown silent, they turn around and they behold:
amid the smoke, fairy-like spirits they dart and fleet
casting dark urses on every head and poisonous seeds.

Fiercely the sun beats on the crops, the drought singes the land,
there isn't milk enough for both, so mothers choke the babes in arms.

The village gathers and bows before the vilified hut
with no policemen and no priest, no Jesus Christ, nor Saints
they kneel, hoping for healing from the charred remains.

For nine years they did the honors, but all they got was god's deaf ear

A tenth year they did come, in silence now. And a miracle takes place:

Amid the smoke, fairy-like spirits they dance and laugh out loud
And in their midst Two Brides; the figures of two girls, embrace
and start the wedding dance, and kiss each other in the mouth

And the villagers rejoicing, they take up a song of love

And the willowy spirits cast cool blessings all around and forgiveness.

—Translated by Konstantinos Matsoukas

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