

Dane Zajc

Kepea pepela

Mladinska knjiga 1984

Dane Zajc (1929–)

A poet of dark tones and free forms, Zajc was not immediately popular in the post-war period because he sang of life's cruelties while readers were craving songs of life's joys. As time has gone on, however, his work comprises more and more of the mainstream of modern Slovene poetry in that it is concerned with the large and difficult questions of life as viewed from a slightly depressive, usually pessimistic vantage point. The first five Slovene texts are drawn from Dane Zajc, *Pesmi*, ed. Kajetan Kovič (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1979); "Dva" is from Dane Zajc, *Kepa pepela* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1984). The translations are all from *Le livre slovène* 20/1–2 (1982): 50–55.

Kepa pepela

Dolgo nosiš ogenj v ustih.
Dolgo ga skrivaš.
Za koščnim plotom zob.
Med belim risom ustnic ga stiskaš.

Veš, da ne sme nobeden zavohati
dima iz tvojih ust.
Spominjaš se, da vrane ubijejo belo vrano.
Zato zakleneš usta.
In skriješ ključ.

Ampak nekoč začutiš v ustih besedo.
Votlina glave ti odmeva od nje.
Takrat začneš iskati ključ svojih ust.
Dolgo ga iščeš.

Ko ga najdeš, odkleneš lišaj svojih ustnic.
Odkleneš rjo vojih zob.
Potem iščeš jezik.
Ampak jezika ni.
Potem hočeš izreči besedo.
Ampak usta so polna pepela.

In namesto besede se skotali
kepa pepela med saje
v tvoje grlo.
Zato odvržeš zarjaveli ključ.

Potem si narediš nov jezik iz zemlje.
Jezik, ki govori besede iz prsti.

lump of ash

For a long time you carry fire in your mouth.
For a long time you hide it.
Behind a bony fence of teeth.
Squeezing it within the magic circle of your lips.

You know that no-one must sniff
the smoke from your mouth.
You remember that crows kill the white crow.
Therefore you lock up your mouth.
And hide the key.

But one day you feel the word in your mouth.
It fills the cave of your head with echoes.

Then you start to look for the key of your mouth.
For a long time you look.
When you find it you unlock the lichen of your lips.
You unlock the rust of your teeth.
Then you look for a tongue.
But there is no tongue.
Then you want to utter the word.
But your mouth is full of ash.
And instead of the word a lump of ash
stirs in the soot
of your throat.
Then you discard the rusty key.

Then you make yourself a new tongue of earth.
A tongue that speaks words of soil.

Vrt

Vrnil se je rasušen.
Samo brazda v rumenem pesku za njim
je pričala, da se premika.

Straže so sporočile iz gnezd:
Bitje prihaja iz puščave.
Zbrali so se na meji.
Potenili so ga v svet zelenja.
Jaz sem tisti, ki ste ga poslali, je rekel.
Kot bi spregovorile klešče,
je bil njegov glas.

Potem je omahnila njegova glava,
nasajena na vrbov prot.
Ni nam podoben, so mislili
in gledali njegov pasji jezik,
ki je lizal travo.

Kakšno je sporočilo Prepovedanega, so ga vprašali.
Vse je res, je zašklepetal
in klešče njegovih ust so se zaprle.

Kanili so mu vode na jezik in zahtevali:
Ali ni vrta na drugi strani.
Ali ni v vrtu vse, kar pogrešamo.
Vse, kar veste, je res, je zašelestel.

To ni tisti, ki smo ga poslali, so rekli
in mu prerezali žilo.
Ko je pritekla iz nje počasna siva tekočina,
so bili prepričani,
da je sovražno bitje.
Pustili so ga tam. (Rebra so se mu stanjšala
v veje suhljadi.)
Izbrali so novega odposlanca.

the garden

He came back shrivelled.
Only the furrow behind him in the yellow sand
showed that he was moving.

From their perches the lookouts reported:
something is coming out of the desert.
They gathered on the border.
They pulled him into the world of green.
I am the one you sent, he said.
It was like pincers talking
when he spoke.

Then his head slumped down,
impaled on a willow wand.
He's not one of us, they thought,
and gazed at his doggish tongue
licking the grass.

What news from the Forbidden, they asked.
It's all true, he shivered,
and the pincers of his mouth closed shut.

They dropped water onto his tongue and demanded:
Isn't there a garden on the other side?
Isn't everything we don't have in that garden?

Everything you know is true, he rustled.
This isn't the one we sent, they said,
and slit his vein.
Then the slow grey liquid came oozing out of it,
they were sure
he was a hostile being.
They left him there. (His ribs thinned to
sticks of brushwood.)
They chose a new messenger.

Veliki črni bik

Veliki črni bik rjove v jutro.
Veliki črni bik, koga kličeš?
Prazni so pašniki.
Prazne so gore.
Prazne so grape.
Prazne kot odmev tvojega klica.

Veliki črni bik rjove v jutro.
Kot da bi brizgala težka črna kri
pod vršičke temnih smrek.
Kot da bi se nad gozdom na vzhodu
odpiralo v jutro
krvavo bikovo oko.
Veliki črni bik, koga kličeš?
Je slast poslušati,
kako ti vrača odmev
svoj zamolki klic?

Veliki črni bik, brezkrvno je jutro.
Tvoj glas pada v grape
kot razcefrana jata
črnih vran.
Nobeden ne sliši tvoje samote.
Nikogar ne napojiš
s črno krvjo svojega glasu.
Umolčni, veliki črni bik.

Veliki črni bik rjove v jutro.
Sonce na vzhodu brusi
bleščečo mesarsko sekuro.

the big black bull

The big black bull roars into the morning.
Big black bull, who are you calling?
The pastures are empty.
The mountains are empty.
The ravines are empty.
Empty as the echo of your call.

The big black bull roars into the morning.
As if the heavy black blood was spurting
to the tops of the dark pine trees.
As if over the wood to the east
was opening to the morning
a bull's bloody eye.
Big black bull, who are you calling?
Does it give you a thrill
to listen to the echo
return your hollow call?

Big black bull, the morning is bloodless.
Your voice falls into the ravines
like a ragged flock
of black crows.

Nobody hears your loneliness.
Nobody drinks
the black blood of your voice.
Shut up, big black bull

The big black bull roars into the morning.
The sun in the east sharpens
the gleaming slaughterer's axe.

Veno Taufer and Michael Scammell

Ubijavci kač

Če srečaš sovražnika,
ga piči tvoja kača.
Ampak to delajo samo tisti,
ki imajo radi sebe
in si zelo zaupajo.

Tisti, ki se nimajo radi,
grejo v samoto, da bi tam srečali svojo kačo.
Da bi se z njo spogledali.
Da bi vzdržali njen pogled.
Potem jih kmalu najdejo mrtve,
z rano, neznatno kot cvet lakote na višnjevih ustnicah.

Malo vemo o skrivnostni sili kačjih oči,
ker ubija samo v samoti
in jo popotnik velikokrat zamenja z žarkom rose na zelenem listu.

Če kdo krikne v gozdu, mislimo, da je kragulj ubil ptico.

Ni zločin, če koga ubijemo s svojo kačo
in ne če se hočemo z njo srečati.
Oboje je samo muka s samim sabo.
Huje je, kadar nekomu ubijemo njegovo kačo:
tisti se bo zavlekel v prvo gosto senco
in zvečer ga bo posrkal zadnji ostanek sonca.

Ne vemo, kaj se zgodi z ubijavci kač.
Najbrž da niso kaznovani in da ne trpijo.
Iz svetovja so, ki ga ne moremo spoznati.
Ne vemo, če so tisti, ki odhajajo z udarci trenutka, ki je minil.
Ne vemo, če so tisti, ki nam ukazujejo izza nohtov na prstih
in ne če so tisti, ki stopajo iz temnega zidu prihodnosti.

Nikoli ne vemo, kateri ubijavec kač
nas lovi po kamnolomih sveta.
In čeprav nikoli ne vemo, kje so naše kače,
bojo zmeraj prišle na naš klic in storile naša dejanja.

Vsakdo ima svojo kačo in svojo zvezdo.
Ampak zvezde samo včasih z nevidnim žarkom
prebodejo list v goščavi naših trenutkov.

snake killers

When you meet a foe your snake bites him. But this is done only by
those who are fond of themselves
and very self-confident.

People who are not fond of themselves
go off in secret to meet their snake.
To look it in the eye.
To stand up to its gaze.
Soon afterwards they are found dead
with a wound as imperceptible as the bloom of starvation on purple lips.

We know little of the mysterious power of snakes' eyes
for they kill only in secret,
and the traveler mostly mistakes them for the gleam of dew on a green leaf.
When we hear a cry in the wood we think a hawk is killing a bird.

It is not a crime if we kill someone with our snake
nor if we want to meet it.
Both are just agony for oneself.
Worse is to kill someone else's snake:
that person will then crawl into the first deep shadow
and be sucked up in the evening by the little bit of sun.

We don't know what happens to snake killers
Probably they are not punished and don't suffer
They are from a universe we cannot apprehend.
We don't know if it was them leaving on the stroke of the moment just past

We don't know if it is them commanding us from under our fingernails
or if it is them stepping out from the dark wall of the future.
We never know which snake killer
is hunting us through the quarries of the world.
And we never know where our snakes are
although they will always come at our call and do our deeds.

Everyone has his snake and his star.
But only occasionally do the stars' invisible rays
pierce a leaf in the thicket of our moments.

Vse ptice

Pobili bomo vse ptice.
Vse. Vse, so rekli vrani v mraku.

In v tišini noči sem slišal,
kako nekdo v vrtu ubija moje ptice.
In vedel sem,
da bojo zdaj moja jutra
brez pesmi,
in čutil sem,
kako grabi žalost mojo dušo.

Vse. Vse ptice, so rekli.

In čutil sem,
kako plahutajo okrog mene
temne peruti
in kako me gleda izmed njih
rumeno vranje oko.
Česa iščeš, vran, sem vprašal.
Pod skorjo svoje lobanje
ne skrivam nobenih ptic.

Vse. Vse ptice.
Vse bomo pobili, je rekel.

In zbal sem se,
da mi bo neko noč
skoz temne sanje
razklal lobanjo
in da bo iskal z blaznim kljunom,
če se v gnezdu mojih misli
ne skrivajo pojoče ptice.

Vse. Vse ptice, bo hropel.

Zdaj čutim povsod na svojem tilniku
rumeno vranje oko.
Moja duša je prebodena.
Moja duša je ubita ptica.

Vse. Vse bomo pobili.
Vse ptice, krakajo vrani
pod temnim nebom.

all the birds

We will kill all the birds.
All. All, said the ravens in the dark.

And in the stillness of the night I heard
someone in the garden killing my birds.
And I knew that my mornings would now be

songless
and I felt
grief closing its hand round my soul.

All. All the birds, they said.

And fluttering about me I felt
black wings and
watching me from among them
a raven's yellow eye.
What are you looking for, raven, I asked.
There are no birds hidden
under the crust of my skull.

All. We will kill them all.
All the birds, he said.

And I was afraid
that one night
through my dark dreams
he would split open my skull
and with his crazy beak
search in the nest of my thoughts
for any songbirds hidden there.

All. All the birds, he will choke.

Everywhere I feel now on my neck
the raven's yellow eye.
My soul has been pierced.
My soul is a slain bird.

All. We will kill them all.
All the birds, croak the ravens
under the dark sky.

Dva

Vsak večer se iščeta.
Na poteh, kjer teče steklena deževnica mesečine.
On jo išče med njenimi travami.
Med strupenimi rožami spominov.
Dolgo išče.
Ko jo najde,
so njegova usta polna strupa.
Ko najde njen obraz na njeni poti.

Ona ga išče med kamenjem.
Med osatom.
Išče ga na njegovi poti.
Ko ga najde,
so njene roke krvave.

Ko ga najde, se objameta.
Zakaj so tvoja usta polna volčjih jagod,
ga vpraša.
Zakaj so tvoje oči polne osata,
jo vpraša.
In vsenaokrog že zida jutro
široko dvorano.
Zato razpadejo njegova usta v dim.
Zato shlape njene oči v roso.

Potem zbežita vsak po svoji poti neznatna
pod visokim, visokim stropom jutra.

Vsak večer se iščeta.

two

They look for each other every night.
On paths where the glassy rain of moonlight falls.
He looks for her in the high grass.
Between poisonous paths of memory.
He looks for her a long time.
When he finds her, his mouth is full of poison.

She looks for him between stones.
Between thistles.
When she finds him,
her hands are covered with blood.

When they find each other they embrace.
Why is your mouth filled with wolfberries,
she asks him.
Why are your eyes filled with thistles,
he asks her.
And dawn builds a spacious courtyard
around them.
That's why his mouth turns to smoke.
That's why her eyes turn to dew.

Then they both hurry away,
specks under the high ceiling of morning.

They look for each other every night.

Herbert Kühner and Hilde Bergner