

gregor strniša

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VESOLJE

CANKARJEVA ZALOŽBA  
V LJUBLJANI 1983

**Gregor Strniša (1930–87)**

Strniša differed from the other poets of the post-war period most especially in his fondness for rigid poetic structures: twelve-lined poems (three four-verse stanzas) make up the bulk of his writing. His principal interests were metaphysical and symbolistic, using classical and biblical themes as the basis for his work. He also wrote often for the radio. The *Brobdingnag* texts are from Gregor Strniša, *Vesolje* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1983), and their translations are from Vasa D. Mihailovich, ed., *Contemporary Yugoslav Poetry* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1977). The other two poems are from Gregor Strniša, *Pesmi*, ed. Karel Hrovatin (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1978), and the translations are from Emery George, ed., *Contemporary East European Poetry: An Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1983) 389–90. Oxford UP published a revised and expanded edition of this collection in 1993, also edited by Emery George.

## Brobdingnag

### III

Žareči ognji Brobdingnaga  
pod luno z rdečimi očmi.  
V kovačnicah zvenčanje jekla,  
k belim vrhovom vstaja dim.

V Brobdingnagu so ulili  
zvon, ki odmeva srce sveta.  
Visi v zasneženi dolini.  
Tam ni nobenega moža.

Iz zvona prihaja šepetanje.  
Kadar pa tiho poje bron zvona,  
v srcu sveta ognjene sanje  
spominjajo se sonca davnega.

### V

Neznano ljudstvo Brobdingnaga,  
trooko, s tremi glávami,  
in bog, velik in črn kot zemlja,  
z imenom dolgim tisoč dni.

V trotamoro—bajka pravi—  
se steka pet dolin nekje  
in tam, med petimi gorámi,  
ima Brobdingnag svoje srce.

Je tam morda jezero plavo  
ali je zelen ledenik?  
O Lilliputu je vse znano,  
o Brobdingnagu nikdar nič.

## Brobdingnag

### III

The glowing fires of Brobdingnag  
under a red-eyed moon.  
In the smithies the ring of steel,  
the smoke rises to the white heights.

In Brobdingnag they have cast  
a bell that echoes the world's heart.  
It hangs in the snowbound valley  
But there is no man there.

The murmuring reaches from the bell,  
And as the bell's bronze sings softly,  
the glowing dream in the world's heart  
remembers the primeval sun.

### V

The unknown people of Brobdingnag  
three-eyed, with three heads,  
and a god, huge and black as the earth,  
with a name a thousand days long.

In the magic land—the story goes—  
five valleys converge somewhere  
and there, between five mountains,  
Brobdingnag has its heart.

Is the lake there perhaps blue  
or the glacier green perhaps?  
About Lilliput everything is known  
but about Brobdingnag nothing ever.

*Vasa D. Mihailovich*

## Svečeniki

Ko izžigamo srce,  
ne priteče niti kaplja.  
Ko izžgemo vse srce,  
je tam majhna črna maska.

Maska ima podobo boga  
ali pa podobo hudiča.  
Večkrat kot obraz boga  
vidimo obraz hudiča.

S snežne gore teče reka.  
V jami mutast plamen utripa.  
Z njim smo spremenili človeka  
v skrčeno črno lutko hudiča.

## Grobovi

Konja sta vozila glinasto lutko  
mrtvega kralja po majhnih deželah.  
Glinasta konja pod glinasto luno.  
Majhna leta so hitro tekla.

Glinasta devica je igrala na vozu  
hitre pesmi na mutaste citre.  
Lončar se vozi daleč po morju,  
včasih dolg val ladjo zaziblje.

Privid hrastove ladje v želodu zelenem,  
prikazen svetá na konici meča—  
majhna glinasta dežela  
v veliki črni deželi zemlje.

## The Priests

When we burn out the heart,  
not a single drop flows.  
When we burn out the whole heart,  
a small black mask remains.

The mask has the likeness of God  
or resembles the devil.  
More often than God's face  
we see the devil's.

A river flows the snowy mountain.  
In the cave a mute flame gutters.  
With its help we have changed man  
into a shriveled black effigy of the devil.

*Michael Scammell*

## The Graves

Through little lands two horses drew  
a clay effigy of the dead king.  
clay horses beneath a clay moon.  
The little years passed quickly.

A clay maiden in the cart  
played fast songs on a silent zither.  
Now and then a long wave rocked the ship  
far out to sea of the departing potter.

Ship of oak foreseen in a green acorn,  
apparition of light on the sword's tip—  
tiny country made out of clay  
in the big black country of earth.

*Michael Scammell*

## Tu je bil tiger

## I

Svetel pomladni dež je padal ves dan.  
Od vej kaplja, pesek po potkah je še vlažen.  
Zjasnilo se je. Počasi greš skoz park,  
v njem straši večerno sonce kot prikazen.

V obsijanem vrhu temnega drevesa  
prepeva kos. Večer je zelo tih.  
Sončna svetloba postane vinkordeča.  
Na jasi se leskeče bronast kip.

Takrat zagledaš pred sabo v mokrih tleh  
široke, ostre in globoke odtise.  
Park je zelo velik, poln sončnih lis in senc.  
Zdrzneš se, greš naprej in veš: Tu je šel tiger.

## II

Še zmeraj se spominjaš tistega dneva,  
ko si prvič videl tigrovo sled.  
Tako j ko si se zbudil, si jo zagledal.  
Jutro je bilo podobno večeru, polno senc.

Od takrat je zdaj že zelo dolgo.  
Vso noč pred tistim jutrom si ležal buden v temi,  
potem si padel v bloden sen, ko da strmiš skoz okno,  
za njim pa kar naprej tiho sneži.

Živiš, ko da se ni veliko spremenilo.  
Kmalu po tistem jutru je prišla jesen,  
potem smo imeli dolgo, vlažno zimo,  
po temnem mestu je ležal moker sneg.

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## There Was a Tiger Here

### I

A bright spring rain fell the day through.  
The branches drip, the sand in the lanes is damp yet.  
The sky has cleared. Slowly you go through the park,  
the sun of evening haunts it, apparition-like.

In the illumined peak of the dark tree,  
a blackbird sings and sings, the evening very quiet.  
The sunlight turns wine red and on the lawn,  
shimmers a bronze monument.

Just then you spot in the wet ground before you  
the wide, the clear, the deep impressions.  
The park is very big, sun-striped, and full of shadows.  
You start, go on, but know: a tiger came this way.

### II

You still remember well the day  
when first you saw the tiger's trail.  
You had just wakened and there it was.  
Morning was like evening, full of shadows.

That was oh so long ago.  
The night of that morning you lay alert in the dark,  
then fell into a mazy sleep, like gazing out a window  
and beyond it softly snows and will not stop.

You live as if not much had changed, really.  
Soon after that morning, autumn came;  
then we had the long, the damp winter,  
and wet snow covered a dark city.



## III

Sediš z lahtmi na mizi, gledaš skoz okno,  
pozno popoldne je, kmalu bo mrak.  
Nobenega glasu ni zdaj več slišati v sobo.  
Pomisliš, da zunaj ugaša zimski dan.

Vidiš samo kos neba in streho, rdečo:  
najbrž je sneg v opoldanskem soncu zdrsnil z nje.  
V zadnji svetlobi meče dimnik šibko senco.  
Večer bo svinčenoplav, pomisliš, in malo meglen.

Stopiš do okna. Po cesti gre ženska v beli obleki,  
na drugi strani se v pesku nag otrok igra,  
poletni dan ugaša v temnih drevesih.  
Kot velik bleščeč oblak ugaša poletni dan.

## IV

Mogoče se ni veliko spremenilo.  
Samo v sobah, kjer si že bil nekoč,  
pogrešiš včasih na steni znano sliko,  
zdaj je tam samo bled štirikot.

Zmeraj bolj pogosto te na znanih poteh  
srečujejo visoki, prašni konjeniki.  
Na krajih, kjer si hodil dan za dnem,  
naenkrat stojijo težki bronasti kipi.

Včasih pa, ko vstopiš v znano hišo,  
prihajaš v nizke in zatohle kleti,  
ki jih prej ni bilo. Po vrtovih renčijo  
in se trgajo z verig velikanski psi.

## III

You sit, elbows on table, you look out the window,  
it is late afternoon, soon to be dusk.

Not a sound will come into the room now.

You think how outside the winter day is fading.

You see just a piece of the sky and a roof, it is red;  
likely the snow slid from it in the noontime sun.

In the last of light the chimney casts a feeble shadow.

Evening will be lead-blue, you think, and a little foggy.

You go to the window. A woman in white walks in the street,  
across the way a child plays in the sand.

A summer day flickers the darkened trees.

Like a great shimmering cloud, fades the summer day.

## IV

Maybe not much has changed at all

It's just that in rooms where once you were already,  
you fail to find a favorite picture on a wall:

now there's only a pale rectangle there.

More and more often on your familiar routes,  
tall, dusty horsemen cross your path.

Places you walked in day after day,  
bronze heavy monuments suddenly occupy.

And sometimes, entering a familiar house,  
you find yourself in a cellar, stale and squat.

It was not there before and huge snarling dogs  
are tearing at their chains outside in the gardens.

## V

Tako živiš, odhajaš daleč v svet,  
po meglenih morjih, po zasneženih gorskih hrbtih,  
vidiš veliko novih, tujih mest,  
kjer rad posedaš na majhnih, tihih trgih.

Tudi tam se včasih na gladkih tlakovanih tleh  
odražajo v poševnem soncu široke temne lise.  
Pobereš kamen, ga teškaš v dlaneh  
in odsotno zamrmraš: Tu je bil tiger.

Vendar pa njega samega še nisi srečal.  
Kogar pogleda tiger, kmalu umre.  
Zmeraj stopa pred tabo, skozi temna vrata poletja,  
skozi bele dvorane decembrske meglč.

## V

So you live, you're always off to distant places,  
down foggy seas, up snowy mountain ranges.  
You see so many new, so many foreign cities,  
in whose small quiet squares you love to sit.

There, too, on the smooth pavement, from time to time,  
dark, broad stripes stand out in the slanting sun.  
You pick a stone up, weigh it in your palm,  
you murmur absently: There was a tiger here,

But him himself you haven't met yet.  
Whoever the tiger looks at soon dies.  
Always he pads before you through summer's dark door,  
through the white, fog chambers neath December's skies.

*Tom Ložar*