

CONTENTS

Slovenian poetic tradition and Edvard Kocbek	9
Afterword to <i>Bride Dressed in Black</i>	19
My Morning	20
The torrents have subsided	21
Two powerful red bullocks	22
I stand by the pitcher	23
The dark woods	24
Women Break Off Work	25
The sun has set	26
A heavy log presses the last load of grapes	27
Moon Shining Onto Fenced Pastures	28
Being among objects	29
I lie flat among roots	30
O roar of waters	31
I set my stakes	32
Let us sing, friends: o light	33
Song about Man	34
Lesser Psalm	36
Slovene Hymn	37
A Prayer	39
Into the Dark	40
The Generosity of Poems	41
Loving	42
All the Doors Are Open	43
An Appeal	44
On the World's Disorder	45
Occurrence	46

The Game	47
Grace	48
Fiery Night	49
At the Rally	50
Evening Ritual	51
Ring Around the Moon	52
Moonlight	53
Hands	54
Black Sea	55
In a Torched Village	56
Earth	57
People and Animals in Mud	58
The Lamps Are Shining	59
We walk, exhausted and dimly changed	60
Ariadne	61
To a Friend	63
Early Show at the Tivoli	64
Darkness	65
Smuggling	66
Three a.m.	67
An Exercise	69
Transformation	70
Landscape	71
My uncle	72
The Dialectic	73
A Tale of Science	74
Tale	75
By Candlelight	76
My Life	77
Laying on Hands	79

Smuggling	80
Directions for Use	81
Gulping	82
Our Town	83
Thoughts of a Survivor	85
Who Am I?	86
Pontus	87
Bug in the Wall	88
Now	91
First-Aid Station	92
In Absentia	93
My Eurydice	94
Objects	96
A Plea	97
The Time of Poems	98
One More Plea	99
Straight Line	101
I'm Not Played Out	102
A note on the poet	103
Edvard Kocbek in translations	104
A note on the translator	105
A note on the editor	106

Slovene Hymn

Small and meek, I grow into the cosmic order, my brothers speak the same words as I, lifted from idleness, we gaze at the sphere of the earth.

The earth has been neatly drawn, the ground is indomitable, we set up our white houses long ago and bordered them in blue.

Its furrowed surface is worked into a wistful sky, live dark belts encircle it, all measures have banded wisely together.

Streams purl over the earth and springs gurgle, forests susurrate, fields sprawl in tacit persistence, flies swarm in the sunlight, gnats over twilit paths.

From village to village it is neither too far nor too near, enclosed gardens surround the homesteads, a dark green hedge looks out over a fence.

Fruit trees ripen around the houses, the wind prowls in their branches, a steep trail leads up to vineyards, down to a cellar where mallet blows thud dully.

Huge wardrobes stand in the parlors, the wall clock's pendulum chats with eternity, a cat kneads by the oven and apricot trees blossom in the soft grass below the fields.

The sun illuminates the great altar at evening, mass and the people's singing blend with incense, while now and then a schoolboy drops his hat.

Girls wear white kerchiefs to vespers, a flower pressed in the prayer book of each, and during the way of the cross they glance at the acolytes in black.

Pigeons cluck in the graveyard chapel, bats hang in the church tower, bees have their hive by the stream and mushrooms grow in places only old wives know.

Modest plum and apple trees flower in fertile ground, grain billows over gentle hillsides and flatlands, an occasional fish leaps out of the frothy water.

Fields of dry gold lie benumbed in the summer heat, shepherds light fires in high autumn meadows, a song about vineyards resounds amid

We dance at banquets and listen to a comical fiddler, and as we sort through seeds by a warm stove the wind and a creaky wagon strapped with chains go past together.

Experience dozes on the hay and in forests, love stirs in distracted young boys, candles burn at graves and bells chime at midnight mass. The holidays range from All Souls to Corpus Christi and Marymas, buckwheat follows wheat, turnips barley, we set out potatoes in the fallows, clover grows wild among the wheat.

People are like ants in the fields and on hillsides, at times a voice calls from the distance, which another one answers.

Asleep, there is a flicker of the thought of work, during work hope smolders, hope is tinged with sadness, then churchbells ring again.

Lifted from our idleness we gaze at the earth's sphere, and lo, the more deeply we stare, the heavier the deepness, stunned with pain we taste the bitterness of roots.

And look, smoke sweeps the horizon, swallows look plaintively from their nests, a bronze bell has cracked down the middle.

In silence mothers rock their children, potters' wheels stop, fabric rips on the loom, day laborers have bent their backs for years.

O land of our fathers, given to us like an enchanted princess, when will you be saved?

You are our night phantom, our morning burden, midday muddle and evening sadness, holy redemption wells up within us.

Disowned, you endure, great mother, quietly calling us, you have been ravaged, fertile body, and your children put to shame.

Our footsteps cry out to you, our kinship and comfort, we lift up our hands from your ancient soil and answer.

At night your eyes open like a passionflower, you take count of us, beside your hearth our souls beat as one.

You are the ark of our covenant, which we guard, we must be watchful each night and sing the songs we are pledged to.

O fearsome ripening of the ageless secret, unspeakably strong wine, we sense you in our blood, we are drunk like young fathers.

The Generosity of Poems

Throughout all times poets have been charged
with trying to fix in special words
fateful human events worthy of remembrance,
like solemn chroniclers,
so that young and old could learn them
by heart and sing them in sorrow
to the glory and betterment of all generations. And
yet, poets have always exulted
and mixed their sacred duty to history
with an unbounded lust for the play of the elements.
They've written their poems, just as rain and snow
fulfill their duty in nature,
and like the careful sower sows the
upturned earth in fall and reaps in summer.
At this moment I feel a special generosity.
It is fed by all that was
and still remains in human worship,
surpassing my recall and mingling with everything
alive in man's community and the imagination.
Now I sense as never before that
a poem is the combined force of all human
talents, and that its exemplariness
derives from the abundance of language.

Loving

You have to be as simple as you can,
that is the only sure perfection,
when, at every moment, you're fresh and new
and fully aware that everything is senseless
except for quiet loving.

My powers come from bitter roots,
the deeply buried, unseen rites of earth,
where we're all at home, now
on just a short and joyful visit.

Loving is our sole perfection,
and you can achieve it only as a creature
ready for a sudden journey,
all other ways are false achievements.
All others are a false display of power.
Only through loving do we cleanse ourselves
for the future and prepare
for the great resourceful prayer. That is why
truly beautiful women are capable of such self - denial
and are so abundantly reckless in love.
There is enough space beneath these stars
for perfect love. Let us go, in peace,
into the unknown and fertile night.

Early Show at the Tivoli

On the first night I sit with the crowd
and reverently look up at the screen.
The engines have just started roaring
and the pilot shoots up like an arrow
out of the earnest film into the midsummer night.
Furiously attacking the sound barrier,
he pierces it with a powerful bang,
vertiginously shoots through to the other side
so that the old curtain rips,
revealing the market out on the old Roman road.
The huge space raves,
around me they begin to praise
the great foreign master.

Then terror seized me.
Midsummer among the barbarians had begun.
My hour came. I invoked
the help of conjurors' formulas,
auguries, charms and magic circles,
everything that could restrain demons.
And the children of Bethlehem,
extinct Aztecs and immolated virgins came,
Moors with trumpets, happy madmen,
and all torments, arrayed in a dreamlike alphabet,
right and left, like dark eyelids
will incline toward me, bound hostage,
as they lead me off this night to Babylon.

An Exercise

As concerns personal safety
I recommend a helpful exercise:
now and then, suddenly and completely
turn toward an unknown corner of the world
with that batting of an eye
that we once used to discover
moonlight on a sundial,
unseen tracks across the ceiling,
midnight in a foreign kingdom.
For in our castle only the revealed
fantasy of a wild man startles.

Which is why I recommend this simple exercise:
whenever possible look erratically
in all directions and don't take fright,
only what is sudden, crushed, unpleasant
and inexplicable is true.

Tonight you may pick up the following
optional, yet educational program:
a scorpion will crawl across your wife's lap,
your neighbor will turn in the lock,
the earth will set on the firescreen,
an armchair will set out for Japan
and saffron will flower in your bed,
icebergs will blaze in the hearth,
your children will wall up the windows,
in a cobweb a cash register will jingle,
mathematical systems will collapse in a lightbulb,
the clock will strike half past two till twelve
and on the wall you'll read: mene mene tekel upharsin.

Bug in the Wall

So, now we're alone,
 there's no one left except us two.
 Don't think I'm going to leave now,
 no rest or relaxation for you,
 your work is just beginning,
 you'll listen to my silence,
 my silence is more eloquent,
 in it you'll be condemned to a mountain of truth.
 Listen now, as you never have,
 eyeless, tongueless beast,
 monster of ears.
 My spirit needs no voice to speak,
 inaudibly it shrieks and howls
 with joy that you are here
 and can hear me, o Great Distrust,
 craving revelations.
 My silence opens books
 and dangerous manuscripts,
 lexicons and prophecies,
 ancient truths and laws,
 tales of faithfulness and pain.
 You cannot rest now,
 just swallow, force it down
 and strangle slowly,
 your ear ever more exhausted,
 and still you can't interrupt me,
 and there is nothing you can answer,
 my time is coming.
 I shall vilify and curse you,
 dissembler, cheat, poisoner,
 despoiler, slave, Satan,
 machine, death, death,
 swallowing your shame

unable to stop
 and give an answer
 because you're a monster,
 because you're only ears
 and a treacherous belly
 deprived of a tongue and truth,
 you can't call me a weakling,
 can't call me a strongman,
 cannot pronounce the words grace, despair,
 cannot shout stop.
 You're burning with a slavish fury,
 greetings crippled creature
 I'm glad you are here,
 I have such a sense of satisfaction
 that you're in the wall day and night,
 damned extension,
 abject ear of the Great Distrust,
 hellish belly of inhuman powers,
 vibrating day and night from weakness.
 Now you have aroused my strength,
 my full and undivided strength.
 There is nothing else I can
 hang on you but myself.
 I am what I am,
 unease and searching,
 susceptibility and pain,
 constancy and still more constancy,
 faith, hope, love,
 your great anti-doubt.
 I am what I am,
 you cannot divide me
 make me a double,
 you will never catch me

in a lie or calculation,
you will never be the henchman
of my conscience.
You will keep devouring my joy
now and then my sorrow
that you are my enemy,
my infertile twin,
so totally unlike me and inhuman
that you cannot burst your chains,
go mad, commit suicide.
Now I see
I've exhausted you,
your tail grows slack.
Still, this is just the tip
of my revenge.
My true vengeance is a poem.
You will never reveal or know me,
no light will reach those ears,
ears conspiring with the wind
and with mortality.
They will go the way of all mortality,
while I am a tongue of flame,
a fire that will flare up
and never stop shining
and burning.