

## **SPIRIT OF UKRAINE. VERONIKA IVANYTSKA. POETIC PROGRAM**

*Veronika Ivanytska is a Ukrainian poet and fiction writer from Zaporizhzhia, southeastern Ukraine, who currently lives and studies in Edmonton. Veronika published selections of her poems in various Ukrainian magazines and almanacs, such as "Literary Chernihiv", "Dzvin" and others. As a newcomer to Edmonton, Veronika wrote and published her winter blog "A lot of snow – a lot of bread". She considers herself a representative of metamodernism, a literary movement that corresponds to the digitized, post-industrial, globalized era. The author's poetic language is full of symbols, allusions, and metaphors. In her recent poems, Veronika focuses on the themes of a young person lost in the universe, and the image of a distant homeland suffering from the horrors of war.*

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**The following piece is the excerpt from Veronika's autoethnographic project *A Young Woman Fleeing the War: In-Between Two Worlds* that tells some of her story back in 2022. This piece is not presented at the concert.**

### ***The First Day. Zaporizhzhia, Southeastern Ukraine***

The first day of the invasion caught me off guard in my home city. Zaporizhzhia appeared in the midst of things almost immediately. I followed the news with wide-opened eyes and a constant blend of fear and anxiety. In three days, Russians took Melitopol and Enerhodar where the biggest European power plant is located. Government warned about the danger of an atomic disaster. Everyday felt like eternity, full of hope and worries. I couldn't do anything. I updated the newsfeed every single minute. I tried not to text my friends checking on them all the time. I felt useless sitting at home idly. I didn't have enough courage and skills to join other brave strangers in wearing protective nets or making Molotov cocktails. Among all other problems the feeling of guiltiness and helplessness gradually arose. How did I deal with this? I tried to watch something. I read books to my mom out loud. I played the guitar.

### ***A Prisoner at Home. Zaporizhzhia, Southeastern Ukraine***

I felt like a prisoner in my own apartment. It seemed extremely unsafe to stay outside, although there were no constant attacks. Nevertheless, the war is a totally different world. It takes time for the first shock to settle and adjust to the new reality. During that first week, we allowed ourselves only short walks and purchases in stores. When I recall it now, I can see cloudy sky above my head, empty streets in my district, the best district in the world, as it seems to me after the long parting, the building of my high school and hear a startling air alarm. When it started, we hurried back home, wrapped in the primal feeling of fear.

### ***Localizing Pain. A town in Western Ukraine***

The war was good at raising questions, providing heartbreaking answers and localizing the pain. One morning I opened the news and saw the familiar name. Not the closest one. Still, I couldn't believe it. It was a distant acquaintance of mine, and, as far as I knew, she was staying in a nearby city in Western Ukraine where I had to move at some point of the invasion. How could it be that she died in Kyiv? I called my mom, and things became even more tragic. This woman went to the capital for family reasons and was killed during a Russian missile attack. The rocket went straight into her apartment. Being a journalist, she became a 23-rd media worker who has been killed since the Russian invasion began. The pain was localized. The local freezing was not provided though.

It happened the week before Easter. I bought traditional Ukrainian Easter cakes. The principal of the school where the internally displaced people stayed did his best to make a celebration for those who were forced to leave their homes. On the day of Easter, the breakfast began with the priest entering the cafeteria to sanctify the festive food. Easter cakes and pysanky were served. The town was celebrating as well, decorated and full of church bells ringing. Life almost felt better among the crowded streets and huge lines of locals and displaced people like me who waited to sanctify their Easter baskets. Wherever I went, bells followed me. It sounded almost like magic, and the poem was written.

*The Alien World of War. Zaporizhzhia, Southeastern Ukraine*

The alien world of war presents familiar places under a different light. All the factories, hydroelectric station and bridges become strategic objects and, therefore, potential targets for the enemy. And all of these objects are located extremely close to my house. With this in mind, we stayed in the apartment while air alarms lasted. I played Bach and the Beatles. I went into a disturbing dream with the thought that I might not wake up the next morning. I didn't tell anyone that I thought it would be too early to die being seventeen; however, I convinced myself, I would at least leave the poems after me. They could tell my story.

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*The following poems are presented before M. Skoryk – Diptych*

**1. Слова склалися в слова**  
*Words Formed into Words*

Слова склалися в слова,  
Слова народжувались знову.  
Їх як зіницю берегла,  
І наче голкою вкололась.

І гімн лунав, і сад свистів,  
І думалась вже вкотре дума.  
Шукай мене у воротті  
Та каяття собі придумай.

Пісні вливалися в пісні,  
Ні на хвилину не вщухали.  
І дні перепливали в дні,  
І більш ніколи не вертали.

Words formed into words,  
Words were born anew.  
I treasured them like the apple of my eye,  
And then it was as if I was pricked by a needle.

And the anthem resounded, and the garden whistled,  
And thought was repeatedly pondered.  
Search for me in redemption  
And invent repentance for yourself.

Songs poured into songs,  
Never ceasing for even a moment.  
And days flowed into days,  
And never returned again.

## 2. Мара *A Nightmare*

навкруги краса,  
весняна зима,  
а знімати на плівку чомусь не хочеться.

пішоходи у хмарах хмарних,  
ми як з казки про рукавичку,  
казка, байка, легенда, мара...  
ми усі на одне обличчя.

окуляри у сніжну крапинку,  
ліс одягся і відвернувся.  
виглядаю весняну ластівку,  
але бачу лише землетруси.

навкруг – одні душі,  
не живі, та й не мертві,  
які струшують спокій з білявих дерев.

all around is beauty,  
winter pretending to be spring,  
but there's no desire to capture it on film.

there are pedestrians in cloudy clouds,  
we are like characters from *The Mitten* tale,  
a fairy tale, a fable, a legend, a nightmare...  
we all wear the same face.

glasses covered in snowy specks,  
the forest got dressed and turned away.  
i look for the spring swallow,  
but all I see is earthquakes.

all around – only souls,  
not alive, yet not dead,  
shaking peace from the blond trees.

## 3. Брама портова *The Gate at the Port*

Крізь куполи напівскляні  
Софія дивиться зжурено.  
Рахуй секунди, долі, дні  
У тамбурах прокурених.

Крізь вертикалі різких змін  
Костьол відкриє брами.  
І ти, роками навздогін,  
Підеш собі світами.

Скрізь куполи не золоті,  
І світ злий не зі зла.  
Проходиш браму у порті  
Крізь сон, крізь призму скла.

Through semi-glass domes,  
Sophia\* gazes sternly.  
Count seconds, destinies, days  
In the smoke-filled vestibules.

Through the verticals of sharp changes,  
The church will open its gates.  
And you, chasing through the years,  
Will traverse worlds of your own.

Not everywhere domes are made of gold,  
And the world is not evil from evil.  
You pass the gate at the port  
Through sleep, through the prism of glass.

\*Saint-Sophia Cathedral (Kyiv) is implied here

#### 4. Несказане

##### *The Unsaid*

Сказати щось – ти не почувеш.  
В мені несказане живе.  
Десь проживеш, десь заночуєш,  
А втім – зачепиш за живе.

Розворушити ватри попіл,  
Сказати щось – слова як дим.  
Несказане сідає в потяг,  
І шлях гіркий, немов полин.

If I say something – you won't hear.  
Inside me, the unsaid lives.  
Somewhere you'll live, somewhere you'll spend the night,  
Yet, you'll hit a nerve.

Stirring the ashes of the fire,  
If I say something – words are like smoke.  
The unsaid takes the train,  
And the path is bitter, like wormwood.

*The following poems are presented before A. Rodin – Violin Concerto*

#### 1. Наживо

##### *Live*

наживо. шахи.  
підшуковую зміни.  
антени страху.  
мрії мої — дельфіни.

влучно. стрімко.  
то, мабуть, було серце.  
вголос. стіни.  
пори року. долоні терцій.

янголи. шах і мат.  
ми з тобою з'їмо пуд солі.  
сонце. сонети сонат.  
це минуле в нас за спиною.

live. chess.  
i am searching for changes.  
antennas of fear.  
my dreams – dolphins.  
  
accurately. swiftly.  
that, perhaps, was the heart.  
aloud. walls.  
seasons. palms of triads.  
  
angels. checkmate.  
you and I will eat a peck of salt.  
sun. sonnets of sonatas.  
there is the past behind our backs.

#### 2. Наголос

##### *The Accent*

старі боги померли  
бо ми втрачали віру  
перебирали перли  
ламали крила ліри

the old gods have died  
for we lost faith  
sorting through pearls  
breaking the wings of lira

і захід сонця сердивсь  
і затуляв руками  
обличчя тіло серце  
був богом над богами

and the sunset got angry  
covering its face with hands  
face, body, heart  
and was the god above gods

наш наголос невдячний  
він не на тому складі  
цей світ багатозначний  
зведи в рядок з балади

our accent is ungrateful  
it is not on the right syllable  
arrange this ambiguous world  
into a line from a ballad

### 3. Кобзар *Kobzar\**

без б і без а  
фальшива робінзонада  
відкритий «кобзар»  
не роздавай мені поради

ringing a bell you cannot unring  
a fake Robinsonade  
“the Kobzar” is open  
don't give me advice

тривожна доба  
руки на пульсі  
заходить Кобзар  
на нього дивлюся

an anxious era  
keeping a finger on a pulse  
Kobzar enters  
i look at him

без б і без а  
сховатися ніде  
на кобзі кобзар  
зіграє молитву

ringing a bell you cannot unring  
there is nowhere to hide  
on a kobza kobzar  
will play a prayer.

\*A *kobzar* was an itinerant Ukrainian bard who sang to his own accompaniment, played on a multistringed kobza or bandura.

Taras Shevchenko, a famous Ukrainian poet, is also often referred to as Kobzar (his first book of poems “The Kobzar”, as well as his subsequent works, became a foundational text in Ukrainian literature).

### 4. Колискові йшли полем *Lullabies Walked Across the Field*

навала обіймів,  
що бути без них – то як плакати натщесерце,  
то бувати без рідних  
у звивистих коридорах смерті.

a deluge of embraces,  
to be without them – like crying in vain.  
it is like existing without kin  
in the winding corridors of death.

повені колискових,  
що їх матері сповивали знову і знову,  
і колискові йшли полем

floods of lullabies  
that mothers cared for again and again  
and lullabies walked across the field

житнім та рідним, старим і новим.

врожаї перемог,  
що збирати їх, збирають якнайшвидше  
кличе Бог,  
і ти  
підіймаєшся  
вище, вище і вище...

of rye and familiarity, of old and new

harvests of victories  
to gather them, gather them as fast as you can,  
God calls,  
and you  
rise  
higher, higher, and higher...

## 5. Любов Love

Любов витікає з мене,  
І рештки лишає на дні.  
Розчинена в мідному небі,  
Спалена на вогні.

Любов дихає важко  
І дістає пігулки.  
З мене знімають маску.  
Любов відкрива притулки.

Любов розкриває обійми  
І знає, що траур не вічний.  
Любов припиняє війни  
І починає сторіччя.

Love drains from me,  
And only remains are left behind.  
Love, dissolved in the copper sky,  
Burnt in the fire.

Love breathes heavily  
And gets pills.  
My mask is removed.  
Love opens havens.

Love opens embraces  
And knows that mourning is not eternal.  
Love ends wars  
And begins centuries.

*The following poems are presented before V. Silvestrov – Silent Music*

### 1. Передмістя передмов The Suburbs of Prefaces

не розумію твоїх полудневих молитов.  
я птахоліт і пароплав. нічого більше.  
загублюсь у передмісті передмов.  
у слухавку сопить, зітхає тиша.

не розумію твоїх полотняних сузір'я.  
красномовство наразі ставить підніжку.  
як не віриш на слово, послухай хоч вірш.  
літо, як дзеркало, надтріснуто трішки.

i do not understand your midday prayers.  
i am a bird flight and a steamship. I am nothing more.  
i will get lost in the suburbs of prefaces.  
in the handset, silence snuffles and sighs.

i do not understand your linen constellations.  
rhetoric currently puts a foot in the door.  
if you do not believe my words, listen at least to the verse.  
summer is slightly cracked, like a mirror.

## 2. Почерк в електронному листі The Handwriting of an Electronic Letter

хочеться, бажається і прагнеться  
будь-чого, окрім наземних драм.  
проситься, благається і тягнеться  
споминів виразних перший план.

сперечається, прощається, вертається  
із образ «веселе» асорті,  
повниться і мнеться, забувається  
почерк в електронному листі.

знайдеться, загубиться, відбудеться  
зустріч ся під наглядом ночей.  
зробиться, зіставиться, втамується  
спрага й осінь лагідних очей.

longing, aspiring and desiring  
anything but earthly drama.  
yearning, pleading, and craving  
vivid memories in the forefront.

arguing, forgiving, returning  
a "joyful" assortment of insults,  
filling up and crumpling, forgetting  
the handwriting of an electronic letter.

finding, losing, passing  
a meeting under the gaze of nights.  
becoming, comparing, soothing  
the thirst and autumn of gentle eyes.

*The following poems are presented before Z. Kolodub – Sinfonietta*

### 1. Відстані The Distances

Ми на відстані, люба.  
Від сьогодні між нами  
Кілометри і гори,  
І мости з блокпостами.

Ми на відстані, сонце.  
Я в снігах і веснянках,  
Я керую собою,  
Як спустошена склянка.

Ми на відстані, квітко.  
Проростають новини  
Між стежками фольклору  
Із коріння провини.

We are apart, my love.  
Starting today, between us,  
Kilometers and mountains,  
And bridges with checkpoints.

We are apart, my sun.  
I am in snow and spring breezes,  
I control myself  
Like an empty glass.

We are apart, my flower.  
News sprouts  
Among the paths of folklore  
From the roots of guilt.

### 2. Магнолія Magnolia

магнолія тьохка дзвінко  
ельфійськими пелюстками.  
струмок пробігає стрімко  
неназваними містами.

magnolia rings softly  
with elvish petals.  
a stream rushes swiftly  
through unnamed cities.

я відкриваю очі  
і все, що я бачу – зелень,  
зелень, квіти пророчі,  
янгольські паралелі.

майже надходить сонце,  
магнолія сипе тюльпани.  
в прочинене щедро віконце  
линуть лани й омани.

i open my eyes,  
and all I can see is greenery,  
greenery, prophetic flowers,  
angelic parallels.

the sun is almost setting,  
magnolia sprinkles tulips.  
through an open window,  
meadows and delusions flow.

### 3. Сліди майбутнього *Traces of the Future*

Я виписую кола та чекаю чогось незбутнього.  
Почуваюся дивно живою.  
На зібганій серветці проступають сліди майбутнього,  
А невдачі ідуть за мною.

Що й казати, нема ні прози вже,  
Ні каміння в кишенях рим.  
Я тремчу на вітру, як мімози ті,  
Я лечу як кудлатий дим.

Я вигадую хитрість сценарію –  
Він не збудеться, визнаю.  
Хтось зібрав мене із гербарію.  
Я насилу його впізнаю.

Що й казати, дива за обрієм.  
Не попишеш, не виправиш ритм.  
Серце свариться з другом-розумом.  
Я лечу як кудлатий дим.

I draw circles and wait for something elusive.  
I feel strangely alive.  
Traces of the future emerge on the crumpled napkin,  
While failures follow me.

What else to say, there is no prose anymore,  
No stones in the pockets of rhymes.  
I shiver in the wind like those mimosa trees,  
I rise like a fluffy smoke.

I invent a cunning script –  
It will not come true, I confess.  
Someone gathered me from herbs.  
I barely recognize them.

What else to say, miracles are beyond the horizon.  
It cannot be helped, the rhythm cannot be fixed.  
The heart argues with its friend, reason.  
I rise like a fluffy smoke.

\*All poems are translated into English as free verse versions, although all poems in the original have a rhyme (except for “Мапа” (*A Nightmare*)).