

The background is a dark, textured, monochromatic composition. On the left side, there is a vertical column of several figures, possibly women, rendered in a light, almost ethereal tone against the dark background. They appear to be in various poses, some looking upwards. At the bottom center, a woman's face is visible, looking directly at the viewer, framed by dark, heavy, draped fabric. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

*Maura  
Del Serra*

LADDER  
OF OATHS

*Translated by  
Dominic Siracusa*

Di fronte al potere, muto e distratto nella sua arroganza, il poeta e l'artista cercano nella solitudine delle proprie viscere e del proprio spirito la leva, il confronto, lo specchio, il peso catartico. Se hanno grandezza, riescono a creare un universo parallelo che per vie segrete vivifica e trasforma quello "reale"; se non hanno grandezza, si condannano alla vita dell'alienato, per lo più chiusi in un rassegnato autismo, a volte furiosi di disperazione rivoluzionaria, segregati nella loro gabbia di ferro e d'oro. Sono condannati, specialmente dall'Illuminismo in poi, all'amore-odio, all'eros senza agape verso il loro tempo, che non li considera più i vati da onorare e proscrivere, gli uomini fatti moralmente e socialmente pericolosi, perché feriti dalla luce. Sentiamo colpevole il silenzio civile della poesia e dell'arte, rinunciataria la saggezza e l'eleganza della "torre d'avorio" pendente, ma insieme sentiamo oratoria, a volte fastidiosa come un rumore fuori scena la sua inattualità, la sua lussuosa certezza senza speranze contingenti.

Before power, mute and distracted in its arrogance, the poet and the artist seek, in the solitude of their own viscera and their own spirit, the lever, the comparison, the mirror, the catartic weight. If great, they succeed in creating a parallel universe that, through secret ways, enlivens and transforms the "real" one; if not great, they sentence themselves to an alienated life, for the most part enclosed in a resigned autism, at times furious with revolutionary desperation, segregated in their cage of iron and gold. They have been condemned, especially from the Enlightenment onward, to love-hate, to eros without agape toward their time, which no longer considers them as someone to honor and proscribe, the fatal men who are morally and socially dangerous, since they are wounded by Light. We feel the civil silence of poetry and art is guilty, the wisdom and the elegance of the leaning "ivory tower" as a defeated position, but at the same time we feel its incongruity, at times as annoying as an off-stage noise, its outdateness, like its luxurious certainty without contingent hope.

*Maura  
Del Serra*

*SCALA DEI  
GIURAMENTI*

*Poesie, aforismi e altro*

*2010 – 2015*

*Maura  
Del Serra*



*LADDER  
OF OATHS*

*Poems, Aphorisms, & Other Things*

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Identikit	1-2	Identikit
<i>Non mi fu dato scegliere</i>	3-4	<i>I was given no choice</i>
I. LA QUARTA PARETE		I. THE FOURTH WALL
<i>Lila</i>	7-8	<i>Lila</i>
<i>Ritmo</i>	9-10	<i>Rhythm</i>
<i>Scala animale</i>	11-12	<i>Animal Ladder</i>
<i>La creazione</i>	13-14	<i>Creation</i>
<i>Quali inverni</i>	15-16	<i>Which Winters</i>
<i>Criologia</i>	17-18	<i>Cryogenics</i>
<i>Irriducibilità</i>	19-20	<i>Irreducibility</i>
<i>L'invariabile mezzo</i>	21-22	<i>The Invariable Measure</i>
<i>Alètheia</i>	23-24	<i>Alètheia</i>
<i>Spiegare</i>	25-26	<i>Explaining</i>
<i>Fedeltà</i>	27-28	<i>Fidelity</i>
<i>La quarta parete</i>	29-30	<i>The Fourth Wall</i>
<i>Pudore</i>	31-32	<i>Shame</i>
<i>Pronome impersonale</i>	33-34	<i>Impersonal Pronoun</i>
<i>Donna di parole</i>	35-36	<i>Woman of Words</i>
<i>La foglia più verde</i>	37-38	<i>The Greenest Leaf</i>
<i>Il vino di Adamo</i>	39-40	<i>Adam's Wine</i>
<i>Rigenerazione</i>	41-42	<i>Regeneration</i>
<i>Scendere dalle nuvole</i>	43-44	<i>Down from the Clouds</i>
<i>Musa di fuoco</i>	45-46	<i>Muse of Fire</i>
<i>Scala dei giuramenti</i>	47-50	<i>Ladder of Oaths</i>

II. FAMILIARI

II. FAMILY POEMS

<i>Alla ricerca del corpo perduto</i>	53-54	<i>In Search of the Lost Body</i>
<i>Handicap</i>	55-56	<i>Handicap</i>
<i>Conversione al bianco</i>	57-58	<i>Conversion to White</i>
<i>Geografia</i>	59-60	<i>Geography</i>
<i>Per il dono di una bicicletta</i>	61-62	<i>For the Gift of a Bicycle</i>
<i>La madre delle madri</i>	63-64	<i>Mother of Mothers</i>
<i>Piccola elegia fantastica</i>	65-66	<i>Short Fantastical Elegy</i>
<i>Dopo la caduta</i>	67-68	<i>After the Fall</i>
<i>L'altro nido</i>	69-72	<i>The Other Nest</i>
<i>Recisione</i>	73-74	<i>Cutting Off</i>
<i>Epitaffio per Maria Luisa Spaziani</i>	75-76	<i>Epitaph for Maria Luisa Spaziani</i>
<i>Il giardino ucciso</i>	77-78	<i>The Slain Garden</i>
<i>Meridiano e parallelo</i>	79-80	<i>Meridian &amp; Parallel</i>
<i>Primo compleanno di Zeno</i>	81-82	<i>Zeno's First Birthday</i>
<i>Secondo compleanno di Zeno</i>	83-84	<i>Zeno's Second Birthday</i>
<i>Terzo compleanno di Zeno</i>	85-86	<i>Zeno's Third Birthday</i>
<i>Essere in gioco</i>	87-88	<i>To Be at Play</i>
<i>Zeno forever</i>	89-90	<i>Zeno Forever</i>

III. TRE DEDICHE

III. THREE DEDICATIONS

<i>Per Wislawa Szymborska</i>	93-94	<i>For Wislawa Szymborska</i>
<i>Epigramma per Kafka</i>	95-96	<i>Epigram for Kafka</i>
<i>Per Albert Camus</i>	97-98	<i>For Albert Camus</i>



## IV. VARIAZIONI DI VIAGGIO

<i>Provenzali</i>	101–102	<i>Provincals</i>
1 — <i>L'incontro</i>		1 — <i>The Encounter</i>
2 — <i>Vaucluse</i>		2 — <i>Vaucluse</i>
<i>Ritorno a Capri</i>	103–104	<i>Return to Capri</i>
<i>A Siviglia</i>	105–106	<i>For Seville</i>
<i>Dalla vetta</i>	107–108	<i>From the Peak</i>
<i>Palermo</i>	109–110	<i>Palermo</i>
<i>Torino, le presenze</i>	111–112	<i>Turin, the Presences</i>
<i>Parigi, Musée Rodin</i>	113–114	<i>Rodin Museum, Paris</i>
<i>Veduta</i>	115–116	<i>View</i>

## IV. TRAVEL VARIATIONS

## V. DALLA STORIA

<i>I dimenticati</i>	119–120	<i>The Forgotten</i>
<i>Geremia e Antigone</i>	121–122	<i>Jeremiah &amp; Antigone</i>
<i>In memoria di Nelson Mandela</i>	123–124	<i>In Memory of Nelson Mandela</i>
<i>Coro delle vittime</i>	125–126	<i>Choir of Victims</i>
<i>Per Reyahane</i>	127–128	<i>For Reyahane</i>
<i>Haiti, dopo</i>	129–130	<i>Haiti, After</i>
<i>Gennaio a Kiev</i>	131–132	<i>January in Kiev</i>
<i>Rifiuti</i>	133–134	<i>Waste</i>
<i>Nike, Eros, Thanatos</i>	135–138	<i>Nike, Eros, Thanatos</i>
<i>Troppa vita</i>	139–140	<i>Too Much Life</i>
<i>Bambini-tubo</i>	141–142	<i>Sewer-Children</i>

## V. FROM HISTORY

<i>L'ostacolo</i>	143-144	<i>The Obstacle</i>
<i>Canto dei migranti</i>	145-146	<i>Migrants' Song</i>
<i>Poesia in forma di rovo</i>	147-148	<i>Poem in the Shape of a Bramble</i>
<i>Ali</i>	149-150	<i>Wings</i>
<i>Salva</i>	151-152	<i>Salva</i>
<i>Hôtel al nero</i>	153-154	<i>Clandestine Hotel</i>
<i>Elogio della veglia</i>	155-156	<i>Praise of Vigilance</i>
<i>Degli amori impossibili</i>	157-158	<i>Impossible Loves</i>

#### VI. EMISFERI

#### VI. HEMISPHERES

<i>Giustizia</i>	161-162	<i>Justice</i>
<i>Triade</i>	163-164	<i>Triad</i>
<i>I nativi cartacei</i>	165-166	<i>The Paper Natives</i>
<i>I neutrini</i>	167-168	<i>Neutrons</i>
<i>Body Art</i>	169-170	<i>Body Art</i>
<i>Algebra</i>	171-172	<i>Algebra</i>
<i>Aritmetica</i>	173-174	<i>Arithmetic</i>
<i>Proclama di Re Orgoglio</i>	175-176	<i>Proclamation of King Pride</i>
<i>Rose di mare</i>	177-178	<i>Sea Roses</i>
<i>Il bene in vista</i>	179-180	<i>Good in Sight</i>
<i>Trapianto di cuore</i>	181-182	<i>Heart Transplant</i>
<i>Atterraggio</i>	183-184	<i>Landing</i>
<i>I ponti</i>	185-186	<i>Bridges</i>
<i>Stella ospite</i>	187-188	<i>Guest Star</i>
<i>Eppure</i>	189-190	<i>Yet</i>

<i>Van Gogh: "La sedia vuota di Gauguin"</i>	191–192	<i>Van Gogh: "Gauguin's Empty Chair"</i>
<i>Emisferi</i>	193–194	<i>Hemispheres</i>
<i>La compresenza</i>	195–196	<i>Co-presence</i>
<i>Les amants désunis</i>	197–198	<i>Les amants désunis</i>
<i>Vedere il ritorno</i>	199–200	<i>Return is Near</i>
<i>Come Ulisse in mare</i>	201–202	<i>Like Ulysses at Sea</i>

VII. HAIKUS	205–230	VII. HAIKUS
-------------	---------	-------------

VIII. ALTRI SCRITTI	231–300	VIII. OTHER WRITINGS
---------------------	---------	----------------------

AFORISMI E PENSIERI	233–282	APHORISMS & THOUGHTS
---------------------	---------	----------------------

PER ELISA	283–300	FOR ELISA
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Identikit

*Lo spazio avvolto in cosmiche spirali  
si specchia nelle impronte digitali.*

Identikit

*The space coiled in cosmic spirals  
is mirrored in our fingerprints.*

*Non mi fu dato scegliere  
tra la vista dell'aquila e quella della talpa;  
ma fui talpa che vola  
sul dorso occhiuto della sua aquilina  
fata madrina.*



*I was given no choice  
between an eagle's eye and that of a mole;  
but I was a mole that flies  
on the ocellated back of its aquiline  
fairy godmother.*

## I. LA QUARTA PARETE

## I. THE FOURTH WALL

*Lila*

La giovinezza pianta fiori in cielo  
e la vecchiaia vi porta la terra.  
Gioco di un dio bambino  
l'altalena gremita, le stagioni, il giardino.

*Lila*

Youth plants flowers in the sky  
and old age fills it with earth.  
The game of a child god  
the crowded swing, the seasons, the garden.

*Ritmo*

Nel brulichio stellare della vita  
la musica solenne del pensiero:  
da vette e mari della conoscenza  
bandiere e vele battono in foglie d'oro leggero  
la catena di piombo  
che ci assorda di morte nel rimbombo.

*Rhythm*

In the stellar whirling of life  
the solemn music of thought:  
from peaks and seas of knowledge  
pennants and sails flap in light gold leaves  
the lead chain  
deafening us to death with its rumble.

*Scala animale*

“Ah gli uomini, che troncano con una scure d’oro  
i nodi lutulenti dell’autocompassione,  
che erigono la forza in maniere d’illusione  
mutando la natura in un lucroso forziere...”

“Ah le donne, le grandi traduttrici, ingegnere  
dell’anima, rammendano la luna deflorata,  
fanno sorgere il pozzo dall’acqua sperperata,  
profumano la scure nera che le recide...”

“Ma gli animali, lieti di un’ignota ragione,  
nel belato, nel fischio, nel ruggito  
legano l’infinito”.



*Animal Ladder*

“Ah the men, who with a golden axe chop  
the turbid knots of self-compassion,  
who establish power in manors of illusion  
mutating nature into a lucrative coffer ...”

“Ah the women, the great translators, engineers  
of the soul, they mend the deflowered moon,  
they cause the well of squandered water to spring,  
they perfume the black axe that severs them ...”

“But the animals, content in an unknown reason,  
in the bleating, the whistling, the roaring  
bind the infinite.”

*La creazione*

Il cuore si formava  
mentre la luce esatta lo pesava —  
le voci estive creavano i prati,  
gli dèi plasmarono gli innamorati —  
l'alto ventaglio delle nebulose  
cadde spargendo in parole le cose —  
e il firmamento appese al cielo i monti,  
e i morti bevvero a tutte le fonti ...

*Una farfalla sopra la cascata  
si sveglia un attimo, meravigliata.*

*Creation*

The heart was formed  
while the exact light weighed upon it —  
summer voices created the meadows,  
the gods molded the lovers —  
the high fan of the nebulae  
fell scattering things into words —  
and the firmament hung mountains on the sky,  
and the dead drank from all fonts...

*A butterfly over the waterfall  
awakes for a second, amazed.*



*Which Winters*

How many times has the summer of the dream given  
 me my first love again, un-lived celestial flash  
 and the long consumed impure love,  
 conjoined in the supple, steady shape  
 of faithful adventure,  
 like a rainbow dissolved by a shower  
 in the calcified ferrous Roman aqueduct —  
 How many times has the autumn of waking  
 harvested every image  
 in a lucid elixir of pure solitude —  
 How many times ...

yet which

winters will still have leaves and wings  
 for speaking to the light that doesn't dream & in me sleeps  
 with future forms?

*Criologia*

L'orgogliosa montagna scende verso chi beve  
la sua disciolta neve:  
così io giovane, cieco-fidente,  
corsi a scavare il letto sepolto a ogni torrente —  
ma con più cieca, indifferente lena  
mi travolse ogni piena,  
e la mia sete intransitiva, oscura,  
sparse il suo sangue in quella dismisura.  
Ora che si discioglie l'orgoglio dei ghiacciai  
in quello matricida dei figli del pianeta,  
salgo lenta, guidata da chi non bevve mai,  
portando neve a ogni cima segreta.

*Cryogenics*

The proud mountain descends toward those  
who drink its melted snow:  
so young, blind-faithful,  
I ran to dig a bed buried for every torrent —  
yet with a more blind, indifferent vigor  
I was overcome by every flood,  
and my dark, intransitive thirst  
spread its blood in such excess.  
Now that the pride of glaciers has dissolved  
in one of the world's matricidal sons,  
slowly I climb, guided by those who never drank,  
bringing snow to every secret summit.

*Irriducibilità*

Eraclitee le nuvole, le farfalle, le storie  
 degli esseri senzienti —  
 parmenidei i coralli, le montagne, le stelle  
 ignote ed innocenti,  
 platonici i cavalli, gli acrobati allacciati,  
 i sogni dei neonati —  
 spinoziani gli occhiali del gufo, la ragione  
 liberata, la rosa in costruzione —  
 nietzschiani il dinosauro, il deserto, l'astronave  
 in fiamme ricaduta —  
 buddhisti il lago, i pioppi, il gatto acciambellato,  
 e musulmano il flauto sul tappeto cifrato ...  
 Ma cartesiani gli assi della Croce?  
 vichiani i cicli di Luna e di Sole?  
 Non-violenta la lotta delle specie,  
 "veli di Maya" i miti, la morte, le parole?  
 Improvvisa la fune che passa per la cruna  
 cuce le labbra ai libri, è la risposta perduta.



*Irreducibility*

Heraclitean the clouds, the butterflies, the stories  
 of sentient beings —  
 Parmenidean the corals, the mountains, the unknown  
 and innocent stars,  
 Platonian the horses, the entwined acrobats,  
 the dreams of newborns —  
 Spinozian the owl's glasses, the liberated  
 reason, the rose in construction —  
 Nietzschean the dinosaur, the desert, the spaceship  
 re-entering aflame —  
 Buddhist the lake, the poplars, the coiled-up cat,  
 and Muslim the flute on the cyphered rug ...  
 But Cartesian the axes of the Cross?  
 Vichian the cycles of the Sun and the Moon?  
 Non-violent the struggle of the species,  
 "veils of Maya" myths, death, words?  
 Suddenly the rope passing through the eye  
 sews lips to books, is the answer we lost.

*L'invariabile mezzo*

Fra il dito di Platone teso al cielo  
e quello di Aristotele puntato verso terra  
si apre la destra assorta del Buddha illuminato,  
ali annuncianti frullano su Maria e sul Profeta  
nella volta del portico azzurrato.

Nella guerra civile tra l'anima ed il corpo  
vince il respiro. E in quella  
tra gli opulenti frutti e le ascetiche radici  
svetta logico il fusto con misura segreta,

e la corsa cruenta uguaglia leone e gazzella  
nel clic aereo del fotosafari.

Rompono il dogma binario del tempo  
gli orologi fetali, quelli inventuti e fermi,  
le orbite dei pianeti e degli amanti  
felici attorno a certezze solari.

*The Invariable Measure*

Between the finger of Plato held to the sky  
 and that of Aristotle's pointed toward the earth  
 the rapt right hand of the illuminated Buddha opens,  
 announcing wings beat over Maria ☞ over the Prophet  
 in the vault of the azure portico.

In the civil war between body and soul  
 breath wins. And in that  
 between opulent fruits and ascetic roots  
 logic skives the trunk with secret measure,

and the sanguine hunt likens gazelle to lion  
 in the aerial *click* of safari photos.  
 Breaking the binary dogma of time  
 the fetal watches, those unsold and still'd  
 the orbits of planets and of lovers  
 happy around solar certainties.

*Alètheia*

Ciò che non si può mai dimenticare,  
il tizzone rovente  
che brucia il labbro e l'effimera mente —  
ciò che ti fa volare  
come una bolla d'aria ferma nel suo cristallo  
e che ti inchioda sul fondo del mare  
come buio corallo a sanguinare —  
ciò che dimentichiamo,  
da passioni e sventure presi all'amo...  
No, sei tu, verità,  
Alètheia, Sibilla, che ci scordi  
nell'oro del tuo Lete sovrumano,  
e la nostra ignoranza dell'ignoranza o il nostro  
odio dell'odio abbracci da lontano,  
come la neve della vetta abbraccia  
i suoi ruscelli al piano.

*Alètheia*

What may never be forgotten,  
 the ruinous brand  
 that burns the lips and the ephemeral mind —  
 what makes you fly  
 like an air bubble captured in its crystal  
 and which nails you to the seabed  
 like dark coral to bleed —  
 what we forget,  
 about passions & misfortunes snagged by hook ...  
 No, it's you, truth,  
 Alètheia, Sibyl, who forget us  
 amid the gold of your superhuman Lethe,  
 and you hug our ignorance of ignorance  
 or our hate of hate from afar,  
 like the hugs of snow peaks  
 their streams on the plane.

*Spiegare*

(quasi una dimostrazione)

Non possiamo spiegare, da architetti,  
il padiglione gotico delle ali  
agli uccelli, di fisica innocenti,  
né alle stelle la luce  
né al respiro degli alberi l'ossigeno e il carbonio,  
né al pazzo né all'amante il suo demonio  
feroce e inebriante, né la musica  
ai sordomuti, né l'indifferenza  
ai santi d'ogni stile, né la neve  
alle sabbie roventi. Ma possiamo,  
come il ventaglio, spiegarci, fiorire  
di vento l'aria ferma, divenire  
quello che siamo: regali signori  
di effimeri colori.

*Explaining*

(almost a demonstration)

We can't explain, like architects,  
the gothic pavilion of wings  
to birds, innocent of physics,  
nor light to stars  
nor oxygen or carbon to the breath of trees,  
neither to madman nor lover his ferocious  
and inebriating demon, nor music  
to the deaf and dumb, nor indifference  
to saints of any style, nor snow  
to burning sands. Yet we can,  
like the fan, unfold, blooming  
of wind the still air, becoming  
what we are: regal lords  
of ephemeral colors.

*Fedeltà*

Sogno di un'ombra, vita di rugiada  
 fu detta l'esistenza  
 dai contemplanti dell'impermanenza:  
 "In un guscio di luna veleggiamo  
 sul nostro esile ramo".

"Come poppanti da madri morte"  
 altri dissero "ci beffò la sorte;  
 pioggia di frecce scagliate in mare  
 fu il nostro grido per testimoniare".

Ma nulla dice il pesce sul suo fiume  
 dai ghiacci ricoperto,  
 nulla il vento sull'aquila ferita,  
 nulla la manna sull'aspro deserto,  
 né la scomparsa cometa proclama  
 i mille modi per essere fiore.

Umane le parole, non umana la lingua  
 fedele al Nume.



*Fidelity*

Dream of shadow, life of dew  
 so existence was called  
 by contemplators of impermanence:  
 “In a moon shell we sail  
 on our feeble branch.”

“As sucklings of dead mothers”  
 others said “fortune fooled us;  
 rain of arrows hurled in the sea  
 was our witnessing scream.”

Yet the fish says nothing of its river  
 covered in ice,  
 the wind nothing of the wounded eagle,  
 manna nothing of the harsh desert,  
 nor does the extinguished comet proclaim  
 the thousand ways to be a flower.

Human the words, not human the language  
 faithful to Name.

*La quarta parete*

Fissi davanti alla quarta parete  
dell'eterno teatro, coperti d'invisibile,  
creiamo il tempo e le sue ombre inquiete,  
beviamo le parole del possibile,  
ci consigliamo con *i morti amici*  
e *le morte stagioni*, ridiamo quando inciampa  
sulla scena la vecchia mendicante  
di carezze, piangiamo — paghi di noi e felici —  
l'eroe puro, caduto sulla rampa  
dello show fumotecnico trionfante ...  
Sulle ali del biglietto io volo giù dal loggione,  
buco il fondale e il tetto dell'amata prigionia,  
e poso gli occhi vergini e le labbra rugose  
sulle mammelle delle nebulose.

*The Fourth Wall*

Still before the fourth wall  
 of the eternal theater, covered with the invisible,  
 we create time and its disquieting shadows,  
 drink the words of what's possible,  
 seek counsel with *dead friends*  
 and *dead seasons*, laugh when the old  
 female beggar of caresses stumbles  
 upon the stage, we cry — for ourselves, happy & fulfilled —  
 for the pure hero, fallen on the ramp  
 of the triumphant fumotechnico show ...  
 On the wings of my ticket I fly down from the gallery,  
 pierce the backdrop and the beloved prison's roof,  
 and place virgin eyes and wrinkled lips  
 upon the breasts of nebulae.

*Pudore*

Nascondo le mie lacrime sul fondo del mare,  
le lussuose, delicate e rare,  
per non far torto ai pescatori in stracci.  
Nascondo fra le vertebre la spada di Giuditta  
per trafiggere i pubblici pagliacci  
e incollarli al sipario di polvere in soffitta.  
Nascondo sguardi d'aquila dietro bulbi anneriti  
per salutare lucciole, incontri predestinati,  
schiavi affrancati,  
Pègasi trasvolati.  
Nascondo contemplate nostalgie  
in opere festive e quotidiane,  
come l'osso polposo sotto la neve fresca  
copre, giocando coi bambini, il cane.

*Shame*

I hide my tears at the bottom of the sea,  
my luxurious ones, delicate and rare,  
to avoid insulting fishermen in rags.  
I hide Judith's sword among my vertebrae  
to run it through public clowns  
and stick them to the curtain of dust in the attic.  
I hide eagle looks behind cloudy bulbs  
to greet the fireflies, the predestined encounters,  
the freed slaves,  
Pegasuses fled by.  
I hide contemplated nostalgias  
in everyday and holiday works,  
like the meaty bone under the fresh snow,  
buried by the dog while playing with children.

*Pronome impersonale*

Madre di due selvatiche bestiole, una umana,  
l'altra felina, altère e paurose,  
figlia di due formiche tessitrici di ali,  
nipote nana di spiriti magni,  
portinaia di fate  
e città inabissate,  
in ricerca affannosa di equipaggio  
per il mio sempre immobile viaggio,  
infine giornalista del l'Anima del Mondo,  
io — due vocali  
nere nel firmamento di parole universe,  
arcobaleno di certezza vana.

*Impersonal Pronoun*

Mother of two wild beasts, one human,  
the other feline, haughty and appalling,  
daughter of two ants, weavers of wings,  
dwarf niece of great spirits,  
porter of peries  
and sunken cities,  
in the frantic search for equipment  
for my forever immobile journey,  
finally the journalist of the Soul of the World,  
me — two black  
vowels in the firmament of universe words,  
a rainbow of vain certainties.

*Donna di parole*

Vi ho cullate, forgiate in cerchi d'oro volante,  
sparse per le città dai cuori di diamante,  
scambiate con il pane dolce dell'illusione  
nell'età verde,  
e poi, quando la sera nel fuoco si compone,  
vi ho deposte, mature di ragione,  
davanti al giudice, al reo, al testimone:  
sole  
come montagne in briciole cadute in un fiume,  
date principio alla vegetazione.



*Woman of Words*

I reared you, forged in circles of flying gold,  
scattered across the diamond-hearted city,  
exchanged with the sweet bread of illusion  
in my green age,  
and then, when the evening gathers in the flame,  
I brought you, ripe with reason,  
before the judge, the criminal, the witness:  
alone  
like mountains crumbling into a river,  
you give birth to vegetation.



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✦ MAURA DEL SERRA is a poet, playwright, translator, and essayist whose work is highly regarded in Italy and Europe where it has garnered numerous accolades. Following her anthology *Coral* (1994) and the critically acclaimed collections of poetry *L'opera del vento* (2006) and *Tentativi di certezza* (2010), *Ladder of Oaths* contains poems & other texts Del Serra composed between 2010 & 2015.

*Ladder of Oaths* further develops & enriches the author's *ars poetica* — while rooted in classical Western and Eastern traditions, Del Serra's spiral-like gaze extends from cosmo-metaphysical *openings* to both autobiographical & civic themes. The architectural and polytonal character of her poetry is born of more than three decades of intense and convergent activity as a writer who embodies the multiple nuclei of a thinking poetry.

Entrusted to a passionate and metaphoric inventive *ductus*, Del Serra's work is dialogical and has a choral transitivity whose rhythms are as rigorous as her style is refined. Such is evident both in her free verse and in her haikus and aphorisms, not to speak of the vibrant, dream-like lyricism of "For Elisa," the *poème en prose* that closes the present collection. This is the first book of Del Serra's to be translated into English since *Infinite Present* in 2002.

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