

# erbacce

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*erbacce* stems from the Italian word for ‘weed’  
it’s pronounced so that it rhymes with ‘apache’

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**Ursula Hurley interviews Margarita Serafimova,**  
Salford/London, January 2020

**Ursula:** Welcome to *erbacce* and congratulations on being shortlisted for our 2019 prize! By way of introduction, could you tell our readers something about yourself and your writing?

**Margarita:** I write and publish internationally, in English and Bulgarian. I'm a Pushcart Prize 2020 nominee and a finalist in nine other U.S. and international poetry contests. My chapbook, "Surgery of A Star" (Staring Problem Press, CA), is forthcoming in 2020. I have four collections in Bulgarian. My work appears widely, including at Nashville Review, LIT, Agenda Poetry, Poetry South, London Grip, Waxwing, A-Minor, Trafika Europe, Noble/ Gas, Obra/ Artifact, Great Weather for Media, Origins, Nixes Mate, Writing Disorder, Orbis, Moria. Visit: [https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt\\_homepage\\_panel](https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel).

**Ursula:** That's quite a back-catalogue for readers to explore. I'd like to begin by saying that what made your work stand out to me was its apparent use of the fragment as a literary form. Could you offer some thoughts on why you work in short or fragmentary forms, and what you feel this offers your creative intentions? Is it a carefully-considered approach, or is it more organic/instinctive?

**Margarita:** Well put; it's entirely organic, intuitive. To be honest, I never have creative intentions; I simply have poems occur to me, in a flash, mostly ready-made. I seldom edit in any meaningful way; just perhaps change the places of two words, or some other small adjustment.

I was greatly influenced as a child by a haiku book my dad gave me; my first poetry reading. I was profoundly impressed by how such simple, concise utterings create resounding images in the mind. Subliminally, terse, incisive writing became the norm for me. I don't view my poems as fragments; I don't intend them to be ones. I seek to reflect significant moments as they occur. I strive to do justice to a feeling or an image that I sensed as complete, if fleeting. There being no narrative or context, I see why some readers could regard such poems as unfinished/ partial. I

believe the more space a poem leaves for readers' projections, the more it is capable of being rich and moving to them. Again, this is not my intention. Writing micros is not a design of mine to get a response from readers. I simply desire to recreate the essence of what happened to me; not dilute or overgrow it with superfluous words. If I get the feeling that I did manage to distill the moment that I had, I have satisfaction. I serve the moment. Moments are emperors.

**Ursula:** Thank you for that eloquent unfolding of how you understand poetic quality. I appreciate that you don't see your work as fragmentary, but I'd love to get your take on this quotation by William Tronzo:

“a fragment is not simply the static part of a once-whole thing. It is itself something in motion over time, manifesting successively or variously as object, evidence, concept, and condition.”

*(The Fragment: An Incomplete History* edited by William Tronzo. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2009.)

Does this resonate at all with your own experience, or perhaps your perceptions are entirely different?

**Margarita:** I do concur that micro poems are, or could be, in themselves, whole things. Like photographs, they can capture a highly symbolic (inner) scene that is an entirety of itself. No matter if the next instant brings another view altogether as all things are in flux. Our minds capture shots because we need to uncover meaning, and it transpires in stills of beauty. My existential and poetic pursuit is to see and to mirror such subtle bursts of existence. Existence is god.

**Ursula:** While I'm pondering that thought, are there any poets you would recommend to Erbacce readers, perhaps those who have a similar ethos to your own?

**Margarita:** In addition to classic haiku poets, I do love Homer. Yes, his works are so very long but they are truly vivid and thrilling, and do hold just the kind of arousing instants I adore:

“As a horse, stabled and fed, breaks loose and gallops gloriously over the plain to the place where he is wont to bathe in the fair-flowing river—he holds his head high, and his mane streams upon his shoulders as he exults in his strength and flies like the wind to the haunts and feeding ground of the mares [...]”

**Ursula:** That’s a wonderful example. And so interesting that you chime with a longform poet in this instance. Who or what else inspires you?

**Margarita:** In this world, there are so many stirring things! As an imperfect mortal, I am moved by beauty and grandeur, and, most of all, by truth. There are so many sublime faces of our planet to worship - trees, animals, oceans, clouds, peaks, and other people who bond with us and make us re-attain our sense of being living, our highest aspirations. Perhaps, connection is what animates me the most, no matter what or whom I relate to. As an earthling, I do connect with non-human living beings on a par with humans. Water is a great thrill to me too. As a passionate diver, I bond deeply and blissfully with the underwater world. Furthermore, as a human rights lawyer, I get moments of elation by conceiving of ideas to do with fundamental rights and justice, as well as connecting with the court as a figure of quintessence. To me, the court is an archetype; very numinous.

**Ursula:** And now I can see the resonances from diving and practising as a lawyer in your work. You also seem to be very attuned to the natural world and for me some of your strongest pieces are those concerned with nonhuman entities. Would you describe yourself as a nature poet?

**Margarita:** I wouldn’t, frankly. Even as I adore the Earth and life on it – my first collection is entitled *Animals and Other Gods*, I also write a lot about human desire, mortality, and personhood, as well as the law as mentioned. Generally, I’d question a distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘non-nature’. There is no world outside of nature; nature *is* the world. But I’d agree that I am not a social issues poet. I focus on the individualistic aspect of everything, and even political concepts, such as history and the state, interest me as a poet in their intersections with personhood.

**Ursula:** Can you tell us something about your process? Where do your ideas come from? Do you redraft or edit in particular ways (in preparing your work for Erbacce you've been scrupulous about refining work that's already polished!)

**Margarita:** Thank you! I didn't think of myself as a poet who polishes her work; I hardly ever redraft. My process is the simplest and craftless. I just have poems come to mind in one go while I'm doing other things, such as going about my everyday business, driving, listening to music, doing legal work, even appearing in court. I never sit down to write poetry or dedicate any express time to writing. Being concentrated on another effort is not a bar to thinking up a poem; rather, the other way around. Any intensity of body or mind could spur a poem. Traveling is a stimulus, being outdoors, contemplating, diving, any physical exercise, as I love moving and the body. Feelings of love of any sort are the greatest trigger, and poems expressing them come to me all of their own accord just as love feelings envelop or stab us at any time regardless of what else we might be doing. I then have to write down the poem or else it is easy to forget. Often, poems occur to me when I am falling asleep, or being half-asleep in the middle of the night. I struggle then to turn on the light and put them down, or they won't be there in the morning.

**Ursula:** I love the idea of poems coming to you in court! Moving from writing to reading, who are you reading at the moment?

**Margarita:** A Bulgarian poet, Radoslav Chichev, whose new collection, *Lightnings*, just appeared. Here are two impromptu translations of mine of works of his:

### Lightning Strikes

My father is repairing the sky

I have the feeling that my father is behind me  
 I turn around  
 May evening light

I was not wrong

\*

**Ursula:** Given your “impromptu translation” (impressive!) I’d like to ask about your experience of working in other languages.

**Margarita:** As a matter of course, I write in my mother tongue, Bulgarian, and then self-translate into English. Often, however, I write directly in English. I could say I was a bilingual poet in that way. Use of English comes naturally to me. Of course, I do search the thesaurus when I need to render a Bulgarian word that is less used. In addition, sometimes, poem titles or bits occur to me in Greek or French, languages I speak. However, I don’t have sufficient command to write or translate a whole poem in Greek or French; I wish I did. Overall, I love languages very much and feel comfortable using them, even when I don’t really speak them. I recently wrote a poem with a title in Spanish, ‘El Mundo’, just from listening to a South American instrumental piece on the car radio while rushing through traffic to get to a concert one night. I scribbled it at the traffic lights.

**Ursula:** Margarita, it’s been an absolute pleasure, but we’ve run out of space. Finally, it is the solemn duty of every featured erbacce poet to pick the colour of the flower for the cover of the journal. What’s your preference?

**Margarita:** I would love the colour blue for the cover.

**Ursula:** Consider it done. Margarita Serafimova, thank you very much for your time... and now for some of your poetry:-

## Your Erect Head

Let history dare ask you who you are,  
I will ask her who she is.

\*

## Adult Dreaming

When the sun is ready,  
it comes down onto the sea surface,  
and starts racing on it, a single soul harnessed,  
freed of all body,  
streaming her own self – a lash of windstorm,  
a seeable cry of serious, furious joy.

\*

Fearsome was magnificence, refined as a voice,  
and it was speaking of you.

\*

From my father, a hat remains.  
In this winter,  
on this snowy path  
we once passed along together.

\*

## Icarus

The wind became blue.  
My wings became a fish's fins;  
and quivered exquisitely.  
My eyes flashed.  
The high was now inside.

\*

The Beautiful Solitude

A hound is drinking from a boat  
full of rain.

\*

Leave everything; even the precious.  
Time is a fire.

\*

A fragment of mirror in the snow.  
Death, sicknesses,  
snowflakes.

\*

At a turn in the road, I stood for a while  
and waited for myself to come.  
It was morning.



\*

Σεραφείμ, spoke Peter  
 Yes, my father said,  
 and lightly lay down on the green grass,  
 and above him, the invisible fire exploded.

\*

### The Millions of Years

The magnolia in bloom –  
 fruit of pink-white wind, startling;  
 light, elegant, apogee glory.  
 An epiphany –  
 celebrating Mesozoic Earth,  
 in the beginning of blossoms,  
 in the beginning of birds, before mankind.  
 I desire to be there.

\*

### The Clarity of His Body

The clean lines, all lean, all light,  
 the sun within the jasmine skin,  
 the proud look in free, clear eyes.  
 All joy is mine.

\*

This hyacinth, so full of whiteness,  
 of curly whiteness with yellow hearts –  
 yes, many hearts,  
 is bowed under its own weight,  
 under the weight of its own rich beauty;  
 its own scent is keeping it above gravity.  
 Its scent has no body, it is outside of dimensions.  
 Space and time cannot measure this scent.

\*

This is not going to bed.  
 It is going beyond the arches, through the spirals  
 into the inner cosmos where black holes birth  
 comets, and faces – soft, tender  
 faces, defeat death.

\*

I was watching the hotel clock on the wall,  
 cheap, aluminium,  
 and knew that it will outlive me.  
 It will be thrown away somewhere, its hands evenly  
 measuring, when the only directions in me  
 will be the roots of plants.

\*

Letters

We were writing and reading them –  
 sometimes, they were like a white Italian shirt,  
 the top button unbuttoned;  
 at other times, a straitjacket;

something was agitated underneath the letters.

\*

The pheasant, turned towards the sun,  
 an open red bill, a heavy body, elegantly adorned  
 as one of a guest of the light's –  
 brown-red, a black ring on his neck,  
 a long black tail hanging –  
 raises his strong, indignant voice,  
 and with a flap of the wings,  
 travels in the high air.  
 Lovely are the eyes that delight in him.

\*

### The Way of Roots

They break it.  
 They do not seek it, do not find it,  
 it is not there.  
 They make it.  
 They beat Hades.  
 Only they; the roots.

\*

### The Gate of the Rain

Fragrant burnt fields were underlining  
 that, if we were not to enter,  
 he, the rain, would enter.

A pheasant's shriek in the quietude put a final full stop  
to that.

\*

She Left, Never to Return, Even After the Tribunal  
Ruled in Her Favour 77 Months Later

Jurisprudence is the Great Mirror,  
where we see, eyes misty,  
another is not waiting on the other end.

\*

Dominus Litis

When I speak, it is not the court that changes.  
Language changes.

\*

I went to the middle of the ocean –  
yes, the equidistant water wilderness,  
berth of flying selfdom –  
and summoned the Law to recognise me.  
All the stars shone,  
brilliant in broad daylight.

\*

### A Friday in October

The morning after we had recovered our love, the sunrise  
had raised unseeable sheets of gold in the air.  
The light had bathed in the heavenly river.

For those who have entered its water,  
no end is there, only  
a wreathing of a door.

### Grief of Light

On this blinding day, on this sun-whitened Sofia street,  
I see this city will go on after I die  
just as it did - and does – after my father died.  
And July will return as many times as it takes  
to make permanent light.

## The Magnificent Man

Chiaroscuro of gray clouds and savannah,  
and among the contrasts – black, your eyes  
in the deep of the radiant.  
The sky becomes you.

You are touching me concentratedly,  
as if you are doing the most important thing in the world –  
more important than all the things ever done,  
more important than all the things being now done anywhere,  
more important than all the things that will ever be done, in  
the entire future,  
more important than all the things that could ever be done,  
in all the other possible futures –  
that concentratedly you are touching me.

From hall to hall –  
this is how I was passing from the light  
into the shade,  
from the spaces of the trees  
into my rooms,  
from the breeze into the sun,  
from the threshold into the quiet before the white curtain  
on the window.  
I had the peace of a grownup.

Birds are aware they are great.  
They have tails that spread –  
fans of white-fawn feathers  
that escort them;  
mantles, trains.

Gazes of fulcrum-less masters.

