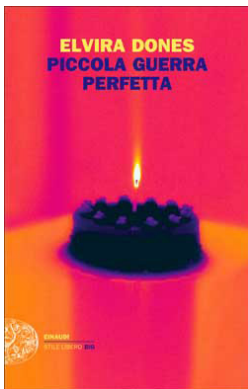


Translation Proposal by	Clarissa Botsford
Date	September 2020
Author	Elvira Dones, with a Preface by Roberto Saviano
Original Title	Piccola Guerra Perfetta
Working title in English	Perfect Little War
Publisher	Einaudi, Turin
Rights free	Dones and Saviano's agent: Roberto Santachiara
Pages	164 printed
Year of Publication	2010



This is the most recent book written in Italian by the Albanian writer and filmmaker Elvira Dones, recipient in 2008 of the prestigious Grinzane Cavour Prize for her contribution to Euro-Mediterranean culture. My English translation of her other Italian novel, *Sworn Virgin* was published to critical acclaim in May 2014 for And Other Stories. Dones is media savvy and extremely articulate on radio and television, in Albanian, Italian or English. Her documentaries for Swiss television are always hard-hitting and provocative. She has good media and cultural contacts in Albania and could possibly tap resources for a contribution to the cost of the translation. In 2013 *Perfect Little War* was published in French by Editions Métailé and the Turin Teatro Stabile produced a play based on the book directed by Domenico Castaldo.

The narrative of *Piccola Guerra Perfetta* follows the timeline of the ironically named “Perfect Little War” in Kosovo: the so-called surgical strikes from March 24, 1999 to June 10 the same year. But the theatre of war could equally be Iraq, Syria or Gaza today. In the novel the eyes chronicling the events are those of two women, Rea and Nita, and a third, Nita’s sister Hana who suffers from heart disease and whose condition steadily worsens as the war rages on. Under siege in their homes, Rea and Nita venture out of the house under sniper fire to look for bread and water, and, more importantly, to get to a fourth woman’s house in order to

communicate news to the world outside. Every day the outings become more dangerous, but bread is a staple, and the bakery is the place where life feels almost normal – until the bakers themselves refuse to give the women bread. “Go to Clinton and Blair,” they tease. “They’ll give you bread and something else.” The longer the air campaign goes on, the more reality is turned inside-out. The normality of a quick trip to the baker’s becomes a deadly dangerous bread-line where anyone becomes a potential victim of petty Serbian revenge.

In Roberto Saviano’s Preface, he writes: “As soon as you have read this book, you learn that no war can be described properly without listening to the women who have experienced it firsthand [...] this is not a novel about war, nor a war novel. It is war itself, experienced directly by its victims, who neither judge nor condemn but simply communicate what they see and feel.”

The straightforwardness and minimalism of her style, her use of direct speech and almost total lack of authorial intrusion contribute to creating an atmosphere of intimacy. Candlelight dinners, women’s chatter, children’s dreams and fears, family ties, everyday difficulties, shopping, cooking, eating, laughing, making love, going out to work – as you read you almost forget there is a dark shadow outside the door. And when it strikes, it is direct to the gut. You will never forget again.

Elvira Dones travelled to Kosovo five times to research her novel. In an interview on Italian television, she said she thought the book was “useful” because “in the meantime another war comes along, and then another, and we tend to forget.” In another section of the interview, when asked how people survive the horror of war, she says that the “pain of war filters slowly through your system, and sometimes catches you by surprise just as you think you are living a normal life.” “War never smells on TV”, she concludes, but in this book “you smell and feel the burning”.

It is literally seared on your flesh after reading it. And you will not be able to forget that war is never either “perfect” or “little”.

#### **Clarissa Botsford: Brief bio:**

Clarissa Botsford studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Cambridge and Comparative Education in London before moving to Rome. She has worked in the fields of teaching, intercultural education and publishing and is also a musician. She currently teaches English and Translation Studies at Rome University and translates contemporary Italian fiction and poetry. Her translation of *Sworn Virgin* by Elvira Dones was published in May 2014 by And Other Stories, UK. Valerio Magrelli’s poetic prose memoir, *Condominium of the Flesh*, also translated by Clarissa Botsford, was published Free Verse Editions, Parlor Press, in November 2014.

## Extra Publicity Material

### Foreword to *Sworn Virgin* by Ismael Kadare:

‘Elvira Dones is one of the most distinguished contemporary Albanian authors. Astonishing, brilliant, and unabashed by taboos of any kind, she is as much at ease in Albanian as in the rest of European literature. This is not only because she writes in two languages, Albanian and Italian (a tradition that goes back to the late middle ages, when the Ottomans prohibited written Albanian and our writers used Latin as a second language), but because her vision of art and of the world is in harmony with both Albanian and European culture.’

### Some quotes from reviews of *Sworn Virgin*:

‘Dones's ability to tell a politically and psychically complex story with such lightness of touch is down to her flowing, spring-clear prose and slyly subversive vision. [...]. But how come there is nothing else in English by this crystalline and courageous European voice – can someone please translate Dones's novel *Perfect Little War*?’ **Kapka Kassabova, The Guardian**

‘Artfully written by one of Albania’s most distinguished authors, *Sworn Virgin* is a story that resonates far beyond one country’s borders.’ **(Elizabeth Millard, Foreword Reviews)**

‘Elvira Dones’s engaging novel, *Sworn Virgin* (translated from Italian by Clarissa Botsford and regrettably the only Dones novel available in English), not only unpacks these fascinating gender questions, but transplants the issue between two nations.’ **Edward Champion, Reluctant Habits**

‘A gripping, metamorphic tale. The themes of culture, gender, identity and family are explored with real understanding and piercing authenticity in this tender and arrestingly original novel.’  
**Which Book**

‘Dones has a light and easy way of writing so that the story sweeps you along ... The strength in Dones’s writing is in the characterisation.’ **Belinda Farrell, Biis Books**

‘The author puts a light touch on the issues of culture, immigration, gender tradition and race ... The novel can be sensitive or brusque depending upon which sex is narrating.’ **Harriet Addison, The Times**

‘The latest hidden gem uncovered by this publisher; There is more to the book than the unearthing of a remarkable tradition: Dones' characters are vibrant and her portrait of life in the mountains and in Tirana, the capital, is vivid; Clarissa Botsford's translation (from the Italian – Dones writes in Albanian and Italian) is elegant and sensitive.’ **Jethro Soutar, The Independent**