

10

BOOKS

from

SLOVENIA

Drago Jančar

Evald Flisar

Sebastijan Pregelj

Vesna Lemaić

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Vinko Möderndorfer

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LITERATURE

Drago Jančar *I Saw Her, That Night*

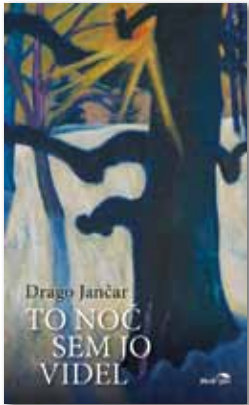
About the author



Photo by T. Pinter

Drago Jančar (b. 1948) studied law and has worked as a journalist, editor and freelance writer. During the time of the Communist regime, he was sentenced for “promoting enemy propaganda”. In 1985, he went to the USA as a Fulbright Fellow. As President of the Slovenian P.E.N. Centre (1987 – 1991), he was engaged in the rise of democracy in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. He has been described as “the seismologist of a chaotic history”. His novels and short stories have been translated and published in numerous European languages and his plays have seen a number of productions on American stages. In 1993, he was awarded the Prešeren Prize, the highest Slovenian literary award. He also won the European Short Story Award (1994, Arnsberg); the Herder Prize for Literature (2003); and the Jean Améry Preis for Essays (2007, Frankfurt Book Fair).

About the book



To noč sem jo videl (*I Saw Her, That Night*) is a novel about a few years in the life and mysterious disappearance of Veronika Zarnik, a young bourgeois woman from Ljubljana, sucked into the whirlwind of a turbulent period in history. We follow her story from the perspective of five different characters, who also talk about themselves, as well as the troubled Slovenian times before and during World War II; times that swallowed, like a Moloch, not only the people of various beliefs involved in historical events, but also those who lived on the fringes of tumultuous events, which they did not even fully comprehend – they only wanted to live. But “only” to live was an illusion, it was a time, when, even under the seemingly safe and idyllic shelter of some manor house in Upper Carniola, it was impossible to avoid the rushing train of violence. The first part of Veronica’s story is told by her former lover, an officer of the Royal Yugoslav Army, who, in 1945, ended up in a prison camp in Palmanova; the second part is recounted by her mother, who, that same year, is awaiting her daughter’s return in an apartment on the outskirts of Ljubljana, lost in her memories and frantic from uncertain hope; narrators also include a doctor of the German occupying army, the family housekeeper and, finally, a former partisan, who, on an unknown personal impulse, full of misunderstandings, sets off a train which speeds off into the night over the country and its people.

Excerpt

I Saw Her, That Night

Translated by
Špela Bibič

I saw her, that night, as if she was alive. She was coming down the aisle in the middle of the barrack, between the bunk beds, where my comrades breathed peacefully in their sleep. She stopped next to my bed, stared thoughtfully at me for a while, rather blankly, as always when she was unable to sleep and wandered around our apartment in Maribor, stood by the window, sat on the bed and went back to the window again. What’s wrong, Stevo? she said, you can’t sleep either?

Her voice was low, deep, almost manly, but muffled somehow, distant like her stare. I was surprised I even recognized it; it was so distinctly hers, this voice which, with the years, got lost somewhere in the distance. I could call her before my inner eyes anytime, her eyes, her hair, her lips, yes, even her body that, so many times before, had lain panting beside me, but I was unable to hear her voice; when you do not see someone for a long time, the voice is the first thing to go, its sound, its colour and power. I had not seen her for a long time, how long? I thought, at least seven years. A chill ran down my spine. It was the last night of May, late spring, the terrible spring of ’45, summer was beginning to make itself felt and it was warm outside, the barrack almost stuffy from the heat of the breathing and sweating men’s bodies, but the thought of it made me shiver. Seven years. When seven long years will pass, she used to sing, my Veronika, when seven long years will pass, I’ll see your face at last, she sang some Slovenian folk song she was particularly fond of in her gloomy moods, staring at me with that vacant look of hers, the same look she was giving me even now, God only knows when seven

years will pass. I wanted to say, nice of you to come, though it's already been seven years, Vranac is still with me, if you want to see him, I wanted to say, he's there behind the fence with the other officers' horses, he's enjoying himself, he can run around the meadow, he doesn't have to be in the stable, he's in good company, though he too misses the touch of your hand ... like I miss it myself, I wanted to say, but my voice froze in my throat, something gargling and hollow was coming out of my mouth, instead of the words I wished to pronounce. I thought you lived at the Castle, I wanted to say, do you do any riding out there? I reached out my hand to touch her hair but she moved away, I'll go now, she said, you know I can't stay, Stevo.

I knew she could not stay, just like she could not stay seven years ago, when she left our apartment in Maribor for good; if she could not stay there, how could she stay here, in the barrack of a prison camp, among the Royal Army officers, the photograph of the young king watching over them while they sleep, hung on the barrack wall, over there by the door, in a lieutenant's uniform, with his hand on the sabre, the king who had lost his kingdom, among his loyal subjects, who had lost their homeland. Suddenly, I heard the loud neighing of a horse, I could have sworn it was Vranac, she might also have gone to see him, before she was gone for good, he might have neighed for joy when he felt her near, when she, perhaps, like she always used to, put her hand on his nostrils and said, Vranac, we're saddling up now.

That was last night; it is morning now and soldiers from all over the camp are gathering for the morning salute to the flag; we still put up the flag every morning, the army without arms, English soldiers loiter at the entrance, wearily watching the morning bustle, the disarmed soldiers of the Royal Army coming from their tents, the officers, quartered in barracks, still ready to charge back over Slovenian mountains, inland, to Bosnian woods, where, according to reports we have been receiving, guerrilla fighting against the Communist authorities is growing stronger. And I am looking at my face in the mirror, knowing there is nothing there anymore, no Veronika, no king, no Yugoslavia, the world has fallen to pieces, just like this broken mirror, from which pieces of my unshaven face are staring back at me. I have no will to lather up and shave and tighten my belt and put myself in order and go to the assembly point, I am looking at this face, over which Veronika leaned last night, and wonder if she could even recognize me? Is this still me, Stevan Radovanović, major, commander of the cavalry squadron of the 1st brigade, that former captain of the Drava division, left by his wife back in Maribor, the laughing stock of his soldiers. No one is laughing at him now, no one is laughing at anybody, because nobody feels like laughing, everyone is rather pitiful, the defeated army, driven away from their homeland by Communist savages with no skills in weapons and tactics, is this still my face, these eyes, this nose, these cheeks, sliced up by the lines of the broken mirror hanging on the wall of the barrack's washroom. These dark circles under my eyes from all the sleepless nights, which look like bruises, strands of grey hair on my temples, chapped lips and a black hole in the line of yellow teeth. That hole, there used to be a tooth here only a month ago, when a mortar shell exploded next to the wall of a farm house in the hills somewhere over Idrija and a piece of stone or metal flew straight into my mouth, instantly covering me in blood, but it turned out, when I came to and washed away the blood, thanks be to God, that I was only missing a front tooth and my lips were tore up rather badly, they are only chapped now, I only lost a tooth, somewhere near the Italian border, towards which we were retreating to reorganize, as we were told, strike back, as we were told, and then, near Palmanova, we simply surrendered. Surrendered, what else, even though we were told that the English were our allies, that we would join forces and strike back against the Communists. We continued to carry our weapons for a couple of days, then the order came we were to surrender them, that is, we let the English soldiers shamefully disarm us, the officers were given the honour of keeping their unloaded revolvers, some days ago they took those as well, the last sign of dignity, we are no longer an army, this is the end, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia finis, the end of the world.

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Evald Flisar On the Gold Coast

About the author

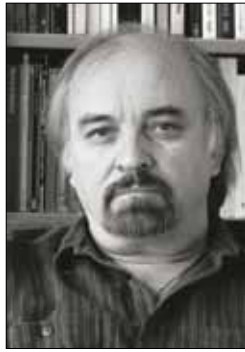
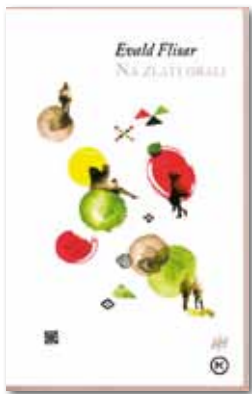


Photo by Igor Modic

Evald Flisar (1945, Slovenia). Novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, editor. Studied comparative literature in Ljubljana, English literature in London, psychology in Australia. Globe-trotter (travelled in more than 80 countries), underground train driver in Sydney, Australia, editor of (among other things) an encyclopaedia of science and invention in London, author of short stories and radio plays for the BBC, president of the Slovene Writers' Association (1995 – 2002), since 1998 editor of the oldest Slovenian literary journal *Sodobnost* (Contemporary Review). Author of ten novels (five short-listed for kresnik, the Slovenian »Booker«), two collections of short stories, three travelogues (regarded as the best of Slovenian travel writing), two books for children and teenagers (shortlisted for Best Children's Book Award) and thirteen stage plays (six nominated for Best Play of the Year Award, twice won the award). Winner of the Prešeren Foundation Prize, the highest state award for prose and drama. Various works, especially short stories and plays, translated into 31 languages, among them Hindi, Bengali, Malay, Nepali, Indonesian, Turkish, Greek, Japanese etc. Stage plays regularly performed abroad; in the coming season (2010 – 2011) in Austria, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan. Attended literary readings and festivals on all continents. Lived abroad for 20 years (three years in Australia, 17 years in London), since 1990 resident in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

About the book



On the Gold Coast (original title *Na zlati obali*, published in November 2010) is a novel about the power of literature to influence the actions and feelings of readers, in this case a group of European travellers in Africa whose paths keep crossing in unpredictable ways. A son looking for his lost father, two couples looking for the possibility of travelling together, and a third – who decisively influences events and draws them all together – are retracing the journey made through West Africa by a well-known travel writer who has mysteriously disappeared, leaving behind only an unfinished account of his journey. The manuscript of the unfinished book reveals that the author was travelling through Africa in the company of a dissolute young lady who had drawn him into a life on the dark side and made him abandon his steadfast morality. His son believes that he may still be alive and perhaps ready to reclaim his old self, and return home. But many surprises await him on his turbulent journey. Not a single thing in this ambitiously interwoven African story turns out to be what it appears to be. Secrets and mysteries, real and imagined, chief among them the source of our desperate urge to take control of life instead of remaining its plaything, are resolved only at the very end, when apparent fragments are retrospectively joined into an unexpected whole. (240 pages)

“My favourite subject matter is the psychological violence that we visit upon each other because of our fears, ambitions and fixed ideas. That's why I am interested first of all in the individual, in his or her personal truth, his or her story, and how it unfolds, or runs aground, through relationships with others. Only then does my interest turn to the wider social picture, and to general human conflicts and misunderstandings. I love and hate my fictional characters to an equal degree; they comprise the best and the worst of me, and the best and the worst of most people I know. Most of my characters, caught in the grip of unrealised youthful fantasies, are dissatisfied with things as they are. They tend to shift away from reality to the comfort of imaginary, alternative worlds in which they can be what they want to be. Another characteristic is their paranoia, their fear that they are being followed by someone or something that will reveal and make public their most intimate secrets, their weaknesses, and expose them to the mockery of the world. That's why they are constantly fleeing from one role to another, constantly trying not to be what they fear they are. Role-playing is in their blood. To call this book a novel about Africa would be misguided. It's a novel about a group of European travellers in Africa, in Africa of a certain period, in Africa as seen and (mis)understood through their eyes...”

The words of the author at the press conference introducing the book, published by Mladinska knjiga, the largest Slovenian publisher, in November 2010

Translated by
Evald Flisar

As soon as he closed the tap and reached for the towel, he found himself in complete darkness. They were left without electricity. He dried himself, wrapped the towel round his waist and felt his way out of the bathroom. First he ran against the wardrobe, then against the door which was ajar, and only then did he manage to move along the wall as far as the small table which he knew was standing opposite the bed. There was a flash of lightning, and in the split second of trembling light he saw that Sylvia and Irene were already asleep; Sylvia on the left side of the bed, Irene in the middle, with the right side waiting for him.

To avoid running into another piece of furniture, he waited for another flash of lightning. As soon as it came he moved to the bed and carefully, so as not to wake them, stretched out on the side they had allocated to him. By agreement? But they were both asleep; what a ridiculous thought! He tried to fall asleep as soon as possible.

Then, suddenly, the noisy air-conditioning unit shuddered to a stop. In the silence that filled the room he could hear the breathing of the two women. Lightning was joined by thunder, and a tremendous storm was unleashed on the town. The wind pushed its way through the gaps in the window, and because it felt cool, Peter went to open it. He could see amazing configurations of lightning, dancing over the plain all the way to the horizon. The first drops of rain hit the tin roof of the hotel with the weight of dead pigeons. The sound increased to torrential hissing. Thunder moved about like a drunken giant wearing metal clogs.

When he returned to the bed he heard Irene say, "I'm so afraid. Can you give me a hug?" In a flash of lightning he saw her lying on her back, propped up on her elbows, staring out of the window. He also saw that the towel into which she was wrapped had come undone and that she was lying there completely naked. The thunder was so violent that Sylvia couldn't have been asleep, but she pretended not to be aware of what was happening. Peter decided to do the same. But already after the next crash of thunder Irene shuddered and repeated, "I'm so afraid. Please, please give me a hug."

She started to sob. There was nothing false about it, the crying was subdued, and deeply shocking. It was Sylvia who first surrendered to the immeasurable sadness that filled her gasping sobs. She placed her arm round Irene's waist and gently pulled her towards her. "Everything will be fine," she said in a comforting tone, like a mother to a child.

Irene turned towards her and placed her right arm round her shoulders. "Both," she said. "You must both hug me."

There was a silence in which a long, trembling bolt of lightning lit up two embraced women and a man who was lying next to them not knowing what to do. If the woman in the middle had not been naked, and if this nakedness hadn't seemed calculated rather than accidental, he probably wouldn't have hesitated for quite so long. But for Peter the whole situation was something completely new, and he was fast losing ground.

Then he heard Sylvia's voice. "Why are you so cold?" she said with more than a hint of reproach. "Why are you so," she looked for the right word, "ungenerous?"

Fine, Peter thought. If my wife sees generosity as my readiness to embrace a naked woman lying between us, then I will do so, and let her take the responsibility for everything that may follow. He turned around and placed his right arm first round Irene's waist, and then, encountering there Sylvia's arm, moved it a little lower onto her hips.

He could feel how she twisted her body slightly to snuggle up to him, pressing her buttocks against his legs. With his arm dislodged, he moved it up to place it round her shoulders, but as he did so, before completing the movement, she raised her right arm just enough for his to end up on her chest. Before he could pull it away, she placed her right hand on the back of his and pressed it against herself in such a way that his palm came to rest on her left breast.

"Now it's okay," she said. "Now the storm can last forever."

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Sebastijan Pregelj *The Man Who Rode a Tiger*

About the author



Sebastijan Pregelj (b. 1970) belongs to the younger generation of Slovenian writers. He obtained his degree in History at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and that same year published his first book, the short story collection *Burkači, skrunilci in krivopriječniki* (Jokers, Desecrators and Perjurers). Then followed two more collections of short stories, before in 2004, his first novel *Leta milosti* (Years of Mercy) came out and was shortlisted for Best Slovenian Novel of the year. Four years later, his novel *Na terasi babilonskega stolpa* (On the Terrace of Babel) was once again one of the finalists for the award. In 2010, Pregelj published his third novel *Mož, ki je jahal tigra* (The Man Who Rode a Tiger). The literary guide *Literarne poti Ljubljane* (Ljubljana Literary Trail), of which he was sole author, came out that same year. In 2011, he published his short story collection *Prebujanja* (Awakenings) and the English translation of the literary guide is soon to be released.

Sebastijan Pregelj has been featured in several anthologies in the Slovene, Slovak, German, Polish and English language. He is a member of the Slovenian Writers' Association. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

About the book



In some respects, *The Man Who Rode a Tiger* is quite similar to Pregelj's first two novels. Again, it is a hybrid of genres, not easily described, playing with different narrative registers. Right beneath the surface of ordinary everyday life, where we least expect it, is hidden an astounding "other" world of angels, saints and other strange creatures, the main characters are once again pursued by the secret service and there is even a touch of a love story.

The novel is set in Russia, if we consider the MKS Zarya space station, three hundred eighty-five thousand metres above the Earth as part of Russian territory.

With a refined characterisation of the protagonist's story, the author moves nonchalantly along the line of universal questions. The answers are gentle, but definite: a Russian cosmonaut, who gets the opportunity to see everything an average man could never dream of seeing, learns a lot about himself, without forgetting the warning an old man once gave him that, given his privilege, he would not be able to tell people about the things he had seen, because they would simply not believe him.

Pregelj's story does not slip into the easy world of new age spirituality, but tackles the answers to big questions without offering the final guru truths and delusory recipes for new beginnings: everything that needs an explanation is explained through revealing the cosmonaut's hopes and thoughts. At the same time, the story of the discovery of *the book of life* and the meaning this final realization can have is intoned in an ambiguous manner, it is never quite clear which world we have found ourselves in.

Pregelj's novel is a charming, absorbing read on a man's helplessness, his fears and the wonder of hope, written in an impressive style. / Tina Košir and Igor Bratož

Translated by
Špela Bibič

With my long beard and a few kilograms less, I look gaunt and not very healthy. But my meals are balanced. I consume just the right amount of everything. What's killing me is this solitude. I am certain solitude is to blame for the visible aging and weakening of the body. Up here, I am even more alone than down there. I am forty-three and have no wife or kids. That's pretty unusual for a man my age on the planet below. Normal men have families at this age. Sometimes I think about what I'm missing out on. When I was younger, I couldn't understand why a man and a woman couldn't live together and have no children. The Earth is overpopulated anyway. There are already enough of hungry and abandoned children, too many natural disasters, wars and terrorist attacks, which, for now, are happening far away, but come tomorrow, we could find ourselves in the middle of a calamity we won't be able to do anything about, devouring people with its insatiable appetite. I was convinced a child would only be one more burden I wouldn't be able to carry. Besides, none of the women I was ever with seemed fit for a mother, even though every one of them wanted to marry and start a family with me. I couldn't imagine spending the next thirty years with any of them. How then could I imagine having children?

Today, I regret not having someone waiting for me down there. If I had one more chance, I would do everything differently and would know now I had a wife who was waiting for me down there, I would know somebody was thinking of me.

If I had one more chance, I wouldn't look for a perfect woman, but an average one. The kind that sits in front of the TV and is capable of devouring the whole jar of chocolate spread when she's sad and goes out shopping and spends a good portion of her salary on lacy lingerie when she's angry; the kind that talks of eating less and exercising more in the winter, but does nothing about it, then half-starves herself before summertime; the kind who would want me to be faithful but would never ask me if I had been with another woman since we got together, because she wouldn't want to answer the same question herself; the kind who would say I shouldn't push her when I wanted to make love and she wanted to watch television and wouldn't try to seduce me when the roles were reversed but just unzipped my pants, because she would know I wouldn't resist; the kind who would – while I was in space – find another man and later wouldn't apologize for it but say I had to understand her needs. You were far away, she would protest, and I was so alone. You have to understand that, Artiom. Be fair to me. Every time I went to see him, I stopped by the church to light a candle for your safe return. Every time I came back, I stared into the sky, wondering if you saw and knew everything, did you therefore know what I was doing and did you know it wasn't easy for me, did you know I didn't feel innocent but didn't feel guilty either? I can't help myself. I'll manage somehow. If I had kids waiting for me, I would forgive her. I would say I wasn't fine with it, but it was OK. I wouldn't reproach her for it. I would go on living as if nothing had happened. I would only ask her never to speak of it again and think to myself it was better that way. It was better it happened to her. If something similar happened to me one day, she couldn't hold anything against me.

If I had one more chance and did things differently than I did, I would have kids waiting for me down there. If they weren't in school yet, they wouldn't understand where I had been for so long, but if they went to school, their classmates would know their daddy was a cosmonaut. They would know he was doing something big, something none of their dads would ever do. Their dads could drive around in their BMW's and range rovers but could never fly a rocket.

Vesna Lemaić *The Dumping Ground*

About the author



Vesna Lemaić (1981) lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She holds a degree in Comparative Literature. She is the founder of the reading initiative Readers Anonymous, which focuses on women's writing. In her spare time, she works in a club at the Autonomous Cultural Zone Metelkova. Every year, she runs creative writing workshops for children and young people. She made her debut as a writer in 2008 with her book of short stories *Popularne zgodbe* (Popular Stories), which has earned her numerous prizes and awards, including the 2008 Zlata ptica Award, the 2009 Slovenian Book Fair Award and the 2010 Fabula Award. She has received the award of Radio Slovenia and the Lapis Histriae Award for two of her short stories. She also wrote a radio play for Radio Slovenia. She thinks awards are also good for filling up empty spaces in biographies. Her short stories were staged by an amateur theatre group of foreign students, the blind and retired people. In 2010, she published her first novel *Odlagališče* (The Dumping Ground). She believes in solidarity and the supernatural, claims herself a horror addict and is always out hunting for new ideals.

About the book



Odlagališče (The Dumping Ground) is a lesbian action thriller. It is a novel about a world not far away that has so far gone unnoticed. The inspiration for the book comes from real electronic dumping grounds and the society, in which the manufacture of products and waste storage are reserved for the people living on the margins, while consumption and prosperity are the privileges of people with political and economic power. Social outcasts, who represent a threat to the system, are condemned to forced labour. One of them is Grace, a thrasher who refuses exploitation, democracy and, most of all, the capitalist social order. She stands up to them with fanaticism, her body slowly becoming the dumping ground of ideas and toxic substances. Trixie is a corporate researcher who even considers her own orgasms as property of her mysterious employer, the omnipresent Base. And then there is Britt, psychodogmatics dealer and master of survival. The women cross paths in the Delta Zero zone, each in their own way trying to change their destiny.

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The horizontal view was blocked from all sides; above, a blank screen of a sky, overcast with heavy clouds. Not enough room for ideology, let alone God.

Grace's thoughts were lost in the hollow monitor, on which her gaze was fixed. They said the Dumping Ground was so large, it was impossible to walk the distance on foot. No one knew.

They did not know if they were located at the very heart of the Dumping Ground, or perhaps on its margins? They said that every day, tons and tons of fresh waste shipments were dumped on the periphery, that they were buried in electronic junk, that there was enough of it to last a million working lives. Grace did not doubt the truth of these rumours but she recognized the traits of a lethargic, psychodogmatic mind behind them.

*

It was dawning. The enormous generators supplying freezers with electricity roared on with a deafening thunder, as if nothing had happened. The hangar was bolted shut. She found the oblong hole that she and Grace had cut a couple of days ago and squeezed herself under the roof.

Complete darkness enveloped her. She did not have a torch, but she knew the way. She ran her fingers along the surface of the reinforced concrete, until she felt the cold metal door under her palms. Carefully, she opened it just a crack. The hall was illuminated by flickering blue neon lights. The isolation chambers vibrated in irregular rhythm. She got to work.

She turned on the first rotation mechanism and unbolted the door. Ice poured down between her legs, she jumped, the first body came rolling out. She took a blade out of her pocket. Her hand trembled in mid air, before she plunged it into the dead woman. – But the body was rock solid. She did not stab through it, just grazed it. She had not considered this obstacle before. She shook her head. Out of all the frozen Jane Does, she would have to find one that was brought from Delta that same night.

In a nervous rush, she started opening the freezer doors, the dead rolling out, she kneaded them with her fingers, but all of them were deep-frozen. Her hands were numb from the ice-cold meat. The frost pierced her bones and she thought she would never be able to get warm again.

She reached the end of the line and moved to the next. The chambers were lined along both sides of the corridor. She kept on running, now here, now there, setting the thrashers free from their icy tombs. Only shortness of breath forced her to stop and turn back. The passage was buried under a sea of ice cubes, cadavers left and right, with their shoulders, knees and heads sticking out of the pile. Right beside her, Trixie saw a woman lying on her stomach, with an abnormal lump above her buttocks. Thinking of Britt made her weep. She stooped down to the body, lifted up its head and held its face. – It was almost tender. She had found her. Right up close, those glassy eyes were staring at her with contracted pupils. Trixie shook her head, reminding herself it was not Britt, Britt was alive, she might already be driving along the territory out of the Base's jurisdiction.

She touched the thrasher's eyelids, she was unable to close them, they were immovable, the skin already frozen solid. She stuck the blade into the woman's kidney, piercing right through it. She turned it, kept turning it, until she hollowed out an opening wide enough. She stretched the skin, splitting the tissue open. She reached inside with her fingers. It was cold, she was chilled to the marrow; pulling out her hand quickly, she drew out a gigantic kidney.

The snail-like organ gave an impression of frailty. She placed it in her lap. Trixie warmed the degenerate kidney in her hands, feeling the heat of her body seeping into it. She was unable to hold it in her hands any longer, she let go of it, letting it soak in its icy puddle.

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Lado Kralj *The Reaper Sharpening His Scythe*

About the author



Lado Kralj was born in 1938 in Slovenj Gradec. He got his joint degree in Comparative and English Literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, where, in 1986, he also obtained his PhD. He has worked as a journalist for the national radio-television broadcaster and a secondary school teacher, many years as university professor, was the artistic director of the Slovene National Theatre (1978-1982), freelance cultural worker (1982-1987) and went back to teaching at the Faculty of Arts in 1987, before retiring in 2005. He was co-founder and first president of the Glej Experimental Theatre (1970). After his postgraduate studies at New York University (1970-1971) he returned to Ljubljana and founded the Pekarna Theatre. He was also a member of the judging panel at the Sterijino Pozorje in Novi Sad (1971-1973) and federal selector at the Festival of Small and Experimental Stages in Sarajevo (1975). Visiting professor at the Lomonosov Moscow State University and the University of Vienna. Some of his books: *Ekspressionizem* – Expressionism (1986), *Teorija drame* – The Theory of Drama (1998), *Primerjalni članki* – Comparative Articles (2006), *Kosec koso brusi* – The Reaper Sharpening His Scythe (2010) etc.

About the book



The title of the collection directs us to the image of a reaper, a well-known medieval iconography of the final harvest, when the dead fall in sheaves or one by one, and if the reaper is most often a blurred figure – sometimes croupiers as judges, at other the passage of time in a sandglass, the third time as self-cleansing and self-punishment, as an inner judge – in the last story, the Reaper appears in letter and flesh [...]

Kralj's prose is compositionally agile, he builds his narrative on fragments and their mirror images, with cool straightforwardness and skill, the resemblance in motif and atmosphere tying him to the colleagues of his generation is therefore no coincidence, but more a consequence of living and resonating in the same time. Perhaps, it stands out most because of its language, which is often a bit informal, especially when it is used by people of specific occupations; the syntax is then altered and the vocabulary moved to the jargon part of the language spectre. A distinct and omnipresent characteristic of the book is its distanced, mostly playful undertone; Kralj knows where to find those loopholes, where the other, humorous side of reality leaks out; the intrusion of the suppressed is let out not so much in the form of unnerving register, but more as a quote or a playful fantasy, which gravitates towards grotesque. Even though it is more a classical fantasy, the impression is particularly fresh and nimble – precisely because the possible recent past corresponds to the here and now – the writing is masterful, even though this is the author's first book of fiction. And, of course, a teacher, let us not forget. / Matej Bogataj, *Literatura* 2010, no. 233

Translated by
Špela Bibič

I was hurrying along the embankment, it was already early afternoon. Time flies and I haven't gotten anything done yet! On the pavement about four metres in front of me, a giant crow was busy picking at a half of a broken raw egg, it had pulled this prize from the nearby waste bin. The shell still contained some egg-yolk and the crow was tasting it, hopping with delight, rather awkwardly, both claws at a time, making some kind of clumping, wooden noises. Then it stopped, tilted its head sideways and stared at me. As if it was trying to say: "This is my territory, no passing!" What now? Just an ordinary bird, yes, but it looked quite feisty and could smear my pants with that egg-yolk. We stared at each other for a moment or two longer, then I stepped off the pavement onto the road, as far away as possible from that disgusting creature, and passed the animal like that. When it was behind me, it crowed with pomp and triumph. But that wasn't the end of it! All of a sudden, I heard the crowing above me, this time ten, twenty times louder – a dreadful noise, a deafening crackling and screeching. I looked up: above me flew a whole flock of these insufferable birds, mocking and ridiculing me. One by one, they landed on the rooftops around me. They were all looking at me, waiting for my next move. Seriously, what am I going to do next? Then I perceived the steel tower of my bank in the distance and immediately knew the answer to my question. I'll go get the money now. Some people babble on and on that money is pathology – they can talk all they want, I have to think of myself right now. Where I'm going, there are no banks, I think; at least no one could tell me if there were or not. But I'm gonna need the money, badly, I'll have to grease some palms, I'm sure they have an office manager or a chief this and that over there. And in situations like that, there is only one thing that works: cold hard cash. So I'm gonna have to take the banknotes with me, in the luggage.

I can't draw such a hefty sum of money at the counter, the transaction will have to be more discreet; I'm gonna call my personal adviser. But – should I make the call from here, where all these crows could hear me? Don't be silly! Don't be silly! Crows can't understand what I'm saying, for god's sake! I called my bank adviser and, as usual, she wanted to know exactly what it was I wanted; then she sighted that that was "a lot of money", that we had to discuss the details and then she tried to fit me in her schedule for the next day. I was resolute, maybe even slightly hysterical and eventually, I managed to get a meeting in one hour. I stood fixedly in front of the building, waiting, and when my time came, I hurried up to the first floor, into the adviser's little office. "You know what," she said, "please sit down, 500,000.00 EUR in hundred euro notes, don't you find that a bit old-fashioned? A whole bag of money! Our bank has branches all over the planet, a simple money letter would be a far more civilised way of meeting your wishes." "But I demand actual banknotes and nothing else. And I want them now." "Can I ask you again why you need them in that form? Dear mister Everyman, you are our regular and favoured client, but what you're asking for now is very unconventional."

"She's right. Very unconventional. And so: I won't allow it, no way." Who said that and in such a strange voice? Arrogant and maybe artificial, or even metallic? This nasty figure, this cocky man in a dark grey business suit, who just walked into the room and is staring at me through two small holes in his head! He's stocky; fat or muscled? His skull is bare; bald or shaved to the skin? "And who are you?" I asked him impatiently. "And why are you intruding, I'm on a business date with Mrs. Ana!" "My name is Croesus Well-Off." "What, who?" "Croesus Well-Off. The keeper of your money."

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Vinko Möderndorfer *The Blue Ship*

About the author



Vinko Möderndorfer (b. 1958) is a director, playwright, poet and writer. He graduated in theatre directing at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (AGRFT) in Ljubljana with the performance *The Proposal* by A. P. Chekov in 1982. He directs for theatre and opera, as well as television and radio. In the past twenty years, he has directed more than 70 theatre and opera productions. Between 1992 and 2006, he wrote and directed 12 television plays and documentaries. He writes plays, poems (also for children), short stories, novels, television and film screenplays, radio plays for children and adults. He has received numerous awards, including the Borštnik Award for best director (1986) for the performance

Potujoče gledališče Šopalovič (The Šopalovič Travelling Theatre); the Župančič Award of the City of Ljubljana (1994) for his short story collection *Krog male smrti* (The Circle of Small Death); the Prešeren Foundation Award (2000) for the book of short stories *Nekatere ljubezni* (Some Loves); first prize in the anonymous competition of Radio Slovenia and WDR (1994) for his radio play for adults *Pokrajina* (The Landscape); the Rožanc Award (2002) for best collection of essays *Gledališče v ogledalu* (A Mirror to Theatre) and many others.

About the book



In Möderndorfer's short story collection *Plava ladja* (The Blue Ship), life and death are inextricably linked: life is full of bigger or smaller deaths, more or less fatal endings, destructions, and in every death, there is life, growth, accumulation, if nothing more, the life of a body and some inconceivable impulse that, even in conscious decisions for 'death', for nothing (*Pes je prinesel kost* – The Dog Fetched the Bone), anchors us to our here and now. The one thing *in* which and *after* which life and death exist, is time – with their clear and to us the only relevant beginning and end ... And the time is us, split between past-present-future, separately and simultaneously. Naturally, we carry the awareness of our true ending with us the entire time, the awareness of death being a distinctive trait of human nature, but 'the burden we shoulder' is not so much a defined concept of awareness, as an anxiety, known also to the aforementioned character ("For most of his life, he was scared of death. /.../ He cannot say that he was afraid. Maybe in the beginning. /.../ The rest is just uneasiness, a feeling of anxiety. With every breath he took, the anxiety grew greater and greater, every time he exhaled, he felt as if an invisible weight was pressing down on him, making the next breath shallower and the next one even shallower ..."). This anxiety is crucial, as it *weights down* on the present of Möderndorfer's characters; subconsciously, it makes them look back on the memory, instead of the now and the unknown, as well as giving their passiveness, their inability of getting out of their suffocating state, greater meaning in their eyes. / Tina Kozin

Excerpt

The Blue Ship – The Hair

Translated by
Špela Bibič

It all started when she found that hair.

A long, blond hair in his bed. Her hair was dark. Short. It happened after they made love. She always said *to make love*, he persistently used other words she didn't like. *Let's get it on! Are you up for a quickie? Wanna fuck? Want me to hump you? Wanna copulate? Screw?* And such like. She protested for a while, tried to make him understand she found such words vulgar, inappropriate, primitive, obscene, that they didn't express what was supposed to represent the merging of two souls that love each other ... Then she gave up. Adapted. Like always and in everything. She also adjusted to him in bed. She wanted tender, slow caresses, he was anxious, he liked it quick, reckless, rough. He couldn't hold out. He grabbed her, slid his hands across her breasts twice or thrice, *slid* – literally, his touch could in no way be called *fondling*, a slide – that was the right word, he slid across her breasts, over her stomach, and he was already between her legs. Swiftly. Like *blitzkrieg*. And when he came, he always took a nap. And she caressed him. His hair, his face, forehead, neck, chest. He smiled in his sleep. She found him beautiful and gentle in those moments. Like a boy. No flaws, no sins, white, tiny and only hers.

For the moments when he slept, his thin lips curling, drawing the corners of his mouth into a faint smile, she held on.

Then came the afternoon when she found the hair.

After he tore himself away from her with a moan, the last, loudest in the series of increasingly heavy, satisfied pants, rolled over onto his hip, gave her a kiss on the nose and then lay on his back, his hands slightly clenched into a fist and placed beside his head – he fell asleep immediately. They lay naked next to each other. The perspiration of their lovemaking was slowly cooling on their bodies. He dozed. His breathing grew calmer. Her fingers were just moving along his forehead, over his cheek, down to his chin, when she saw ... The hair. On the pillow. A long, woman's hair, slightly curled at the tip. She picked it up with two fingers and carefully, like it was a living being, held it to the light.

He opened his eyes. *What are you doing?* he asked. Kindly, sweetly, as if he hadn't noticed the hair she was holding between her thumb and index finger, observing it closely. He was looking at her. A thin hair was between them, like a barely visible line, dividing the space between their faces. *Should we have some coffee?* he said, *I'll make it.* Usually, he said to her: *Will you make some coffee? Come on, be a dear and make us some coffee!* And now, before even finishing his sentence, he jumped up and only his white, naked buttocks could be seen disappearing through the hallway door. She was holding the hair between her fingers and felt sick. And he kept on talking and talking. She heard his voice from the kitchen ... Broken pieces of words came floating into the room, when she lay her face on the pillow and held the long hair right up to her eye ... I love ... terrific ... our ... sex ... great ... never ... only ... I ... you ... love ... doing it ... Were the words coming from the kitchen. Voracious. A bit hysterical. As if trying to cover something up. More than once, a certain word reached her ear, a word which stung her because he never used it ... *I love ... like making love ...* It burned her; she knew those words were lies, deceptions ... Then he was standing naked before her. And he had two mugs in his hands. *Coffee for my sweetheart! Steaming coffee,* he said, *steaming coffee for my fiancée!* Then he reached his hand over her head and placed the mug on the nightstand behind her back. His hairy crotch touched her hand, her elbow, the hand in which she was still holding the hair close to her face. Then he stretched out beside her, rested his mug against his chest and quietly sipped his hot coffee. He was staring into empty space. With a glassy look in his eyes. Solemnly. As if he was focusing only on the taste and smell of the dark brown liquid.

They were silent. She was watching him. Still pressing her cheek against the pillow, her clenched hand next to her face, her thumb and index finger clutching the barely visible thread ... She knew that he knew she had the hair in her hand.

Hungry? he asks, without looking at her. *I'm always starving after making love to you,* he adds in a tiny, sweet voice, like a young man passionately in love, trying his hardest to impress his love he finally got into his bed.

The role of a clown doesn't suit him at all, she thinks, as he gets up again and rushes, as if he was running away, back to the kitchen, where he, so he says, will make them something taaaasty to nibble on, because after that amazing lovemaking, he feels like eating an elephant, a lion, a giraffe, the entire zoo. *You make love like the biggest porn star,* he adds from the hallway and she really feels sick to her stomach.

She sits on the bed. Her thumb and index finger hurt her. She can't unclasp them. Some sort of cramp. She wants to drop the hair on the floor. She can't. She feels the rush of heat to her head. She gets up. Lets her arm fall to her thigh. The tips of her thumb and index finger are touching. They have grown together. His talking can be heard from the kitchen. He talks and talks and talks. Kindly. Sweetly.

Want me to cut some cheese? We've got everything: olives, prosciutto, pickled quail eggs, pickles, those tiny ... Wait, I'll put some nice music on. And then we can make love again, he said, giggling ... Then he arranged everything neatly on an oval plate, rambling on and on, about anything and everything that popped into his head, promising her a trip to the seaside, the mountains, mushrooming in the woods, a walk by the lake and around the lake, theatre, cinema ... And finally, he said: *We've been together for a long time ... I was thinking we ...* He stepped into the room, holding the tray ... *we could move in together ... We could get married!*

The bed was empty. Her panties, her bra, her jeans were no longer on the chair... He stood there for a while.

Then he put the tray down on the table, took a slice of prosciutto from the plate and stuffed it into his mouth.

Svetlana Makarovič *The Saga of Hallgerd*

About the author



Photo by Miha Fras

Svetlana Makarovič (b. 1939) graduated from the Academy for Theatre and Film in Ljubljana. She has worked as an actress and freelance writer. She is well known for her poetry and prose for children and adults, as a singer, composer, illustrator and performer of her own chansons. She has written over one hundred books of fairytales and theatre plays. Today, she is a professional writer, poet and one of the best-known Slovenian authors. Her literature is traditional rather than modern. The distinctiveness of it lies in paraphrasing the motifs and tone of Slovenian and European folk tradition, as well as in creating a dark, ballad-like atmosphere. In recent years, she has been writing ballad stories for adult readers. She has published: *Rdeče jabolko* (Red Apple, 2008), *Katalena* (2009) and *Saga o Hallgerd* (The Saga of Hallgerd, 2010).

About the book



The last ballad story of Svetlana Makarovič is a remake of the Icelandic *Njáls Saga*. In the book, the original motif of Viking life, which comes into conflict with emerging Christian values, particularly the notion of forgiveness, is remodelled by the author into the battle between the hypocrisy of Njál, a Christian convert, and the righteousness of Hallgerd, a pagan. Another important feature of the book is the eight poems incorporated into the main narrative, illustrating the contrast between the cautiousness of an average person and the boldness of a poet, who is always staring at the stars and is therefore likely to see the beauty of the aurora borealis.

In 10th and 11th century Iceland, a battle is raging between pagan tradition and Christianity. One of those engaged in the war is the beautiful Hallgerd, who adheres to old customs, has respect for her fellowmen but does not tolerate injustice. Because of this, her first two husbands fall by the axe of her half-brother Thjostolf, while Hallgerd herself takes revenge on her third husband. Her principles put her under a curse and that is why, even today, Hallgerd is an extremely rare name for girls in Iceland.

The design work on the book was done by Anamarija Babić and Suzana Kogoj. They first started working on the initials and continued with illustrations, as well as finding corresponding visual equivalents to the story. Eventually, they came up with ideas for the eyes, the braid and the axe, along with two basic colours: blue and gold. The book was published by the publishing house Arsem.

Excerpt

The Saga of Hallgerd

Translated by
Špela Bibič

There lived at that time on Bergthor's hill a man by the name of Njál Thorgeirsson. He was one of the first to discover the new religion and had himself baptized without hesitation. Njál was a wealthy farmer who owned a lot of land and enjoyed considerable reputation and respect, more so for being regarded as very wise and prudent. He was an expert in county laws and people frequently came to him for good advice. But he had one peculiarity: he could not grow a beard and had no body hair. He had a pale pink complexion and very bright blue eyes, not very pleasant to look at, because he had no eyebrows or eyelashes. Even so, he got married quite well, to Bergthora, who was a rather quarrelsome, but nevertheless a hardworking and god-fearing woman. She brought into the marriage Bergthor's hill, where they led a happy and exemplary married life. Njál declared that the old pagan gods were mere evil spirits and that they did not deserve the trust they had enjoyed among the people; he proclaimed the supreme god Odin a thief and a cheat and called the goddess Freya a whore. Thor was a common ruffian and brawler, no better than the cunning and lying Loki. He forbade his people to eat horse meat, ordered the sacrificing stones to be scattered on the moors. Ancient legends to him were nothing but foolish fables.

Outwardly, people yielded to his demands. But in secret, they still worshipped the old gods, though some of them let themselves be baptized, because Njál said they must. Yet they still whispered to each other that Njál was a no-balls man, just like his new god. If those rumours

reached Njál's ears, he knew no mercy. The slanderer was punished by having his ears and nose cut off, his eyes gouged out or his tongue torn out. And those obedient and faithful to Njál were often richly rewarded with a sheep, a cow, a horse or a warm piece of clothing.

But most of all, Njál Thorgeirsson hated the sin of fornication. And so, from the very beginning, he despised and mocked the young Hallgerd, Hoskuld's daughter, who was considered to be a free-spirited young woman. One day, Njál's wife Bergthora saw Hallgerd coming down the slope of a nearby pasture with her flock of sheep. The girl was shouting and hopping joyfully along the path, her long, unbraided hair flying wildly about her. Bergthora came up to her and scolded her, saying a well-bred girl should show some restraint and above all, should not run around with her hair undone, she was no longer a child. Hallgerd listened to her, knitting her eyebrows, when her half-brother Thjostolf came after her. When he saw Bergthora scolding Hallgerd, he was furious; he started screaming, swinging his club and came close to falling upon Bergthora and hitting her. One of Njál's men saw what was happening and came running, screaming that Hoskuld's bastard was acting like a berserker from pagan times. Thjostolf grabbed Hallgerd by the hand and quickly took her home, while Bergthora went to complain to Njál. He said Hallgerd was a disgrace to her father and that children should not be spoiled, because bad things happened that way.

Do not cross paths with the berserker,
for talking to him is of no avail.
For the berserker, man is no longer man,
but a wild beast, thirsty for blood.
The berserker is deaf to the words of man.
He rushes blindly, roaring like a lion, 'cross the plain,
what life there is, he cuts down, slaughters and destroys.
A wise man gets out of the madman's way,
and lies in waiting in a safe place,
until the wild one makes off.
Only a fool would wish him good morning,
before he finishes his greeting,
his head will be off.

On his way back from Althing and the Rock of Laws, Gunnar Hamundarsson and his retinue passed a cottage, in front of which stood a group of smartly dressed women. The first among them, the most beautiful and richly dressed of them all, smiled and said hello, he greeted in return and immediately asked her who she was. She said her name was Hallgerd, daughter of Hoskuld. She was not uncomfortable talking to him and asked him to tell her about his travels. Gunnar could not refuse her and so they sat and talked. Hallgerd wore a red, richly decorated tunic and over it a scarlet cloak, trimmed with exquisite lace. Her entire body was draped in her honey-coloured hair, reaching all the way down to her feet.

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Jure Jakob *Abandoned Places*

About the author



Photo by Zoran Arizanović

Jure Jakob was born in Celje in 1977. He obtained his Master's Degree in Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, where he lives and works as a freelance cultural worker. So far, he has published three poetry collections. Upon its release in 2003, his first book, *Tri postaje* (Three Stops), seemingly reservedly, but thoroughly reshuffled the cards of contemporary Slovenian poetry. It won Jakob the Zlata ptica Award and also earned him a prominent spot in the anthology of young Slovenian poets after 1990, which borrowed a verse of one of his poems for its title. The poetry collection was quickly sold out and reprinted in 2009. Jakob's second collection, *Budnost* (Awake), came out in 2006 and his most recent, *Zapuščeni kraji* (Abandoned Places), in 2010, establishing him as one of the stand-out poetic voices of his generation. His poems have been translated into English, Italian, Polish, Serbian and Hungarian and have appeared, along with the poetry of two other authors, in a German book publication. A Croatian translation of *Tri postaje* is currently underway.

About the book



There is *The Bird Not Here*. There are the falcons, *in silence they spot and seize everything, though there is nothing*. And silence, if silence there is, *is empty as a glass*. But *the word wants to take in the world* and the poem, Jakob's poem, sees to it. That is what makes *Abandoned Places* a collection of naming: if in *Three Stops*, Jakob's first book, things themselves came to the word, offering themselves, turning smoothly into a poem, with no visible trace or remnant, there is now nothing, or rather, what comes is nothing. Only names remain by the poet's side, memorised and with no definite foundation in the world beyond speech. They demand to be spoken and the poem is written. But no name, no word *gives what it evokes*. That does not mean the world they call forth is empty – it does not lack woods, nor birds, nor light, nor sky –, but it is somewhat two-dimensional, everything is on the surface. At times it seems that this world also has a third dimension, its *living part*, [that] *remains underneath, hidden*. That is when room is made for desire; all around the individual uttering these poems, this world, is a frosted bell jar of (poetic) language, cool and imprecise, but its other side reveals something entirely real, full-blooded: "*I have locked myself in, but it shines here as well, / and I want to stay*". At other times, everything there is, grows dark and blends into a *thick, black background for a blurry reflection in the windowpane*. All roads seem closed and impassable, but the one uttering the poem plays a crazy move – he turns on the light in his room. Of course, this is not going to make the black mass on the other side of the window change back into its constitutive elements, into trees, a curved path, glistening leaves. It is a move which is not going to change anything; all that counts is that it was made. Pure resistance. And that is, they say, poetry. / Goran Dekleva

Excerpt

Abandoned Places – The Bird Not Here

Translated by
Teja Pribac

Under the drifts of leaves, a made bed,
a blanket, shrivelled like a lightly undulating sea,
something is digging, in the corner, deepened with crossed
shadows of trees, and searching.

Nobody has gone past here. Nobody will see him.
He gathers food, the wormy substance of continuation, and
takes it to the nest, not his own, back there where the look
wedges into the supple shirt of interwoven tendrils.

Stroke the bark, put your fingers on the high fibre
crackling as if the wind was an army;
he sits on one of those tops watching
the meadow below and you picking clover.

From the hidden bend of the sky, which the seasons avoid,
there where he sharpens his beak, combs his feathers
with long slow strokes, pulls
when the steps below have faded, thin tufts of poems.

If you turn around the wood is there before you, as if
someone opened the door of an abandoned house,
as if the one who had left it
leant on the jamb and called you.

You hear the rain trickling on the roof.
When he lifts his wings and takes off, light
through the naked trunks, the tree tops swing gently,
a seed has dropped.

One of the trees will grow into the room through the window.
Something soft and warm covers the ground.
Is it the colours of the down or the feeling that he's slipped
from the goblet of your palm back into the open?

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Tibor Hrs Pandur *Energymachine*

About the author



Tibor Hrs Pandur was born in 1985 in Maribor, Slovenia. He has a degree in Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. His first play, *Sen 59* (Dream 59), directed by Jana Peršuh, premiered at the Ljubljana Glej Theatre in September 2008. In April 2009, he cofounded the Paraliterary Organisation I.D.I.O.T. and the literary newspaper of the same name (of which he is Editor-in-Chief), where he publishes poetry, drama and theoretical writings. The newspaper's most recent, fourth issue came out in December 2010. The Paraliterary Organisation I.D.I.O.T. also combines literature with music, regularly giving live spoken word performances and organising literary events across Slovenia. The project is set out as a reinvention of the practises of modern poetry, prose, theory and drama, bringing together students and promising artists from Slovenia, Europe and elsewhere, regardless of their race, gender, nationality, age or political affiliation. (For more information, see: www.id.iot.si). In January 2010, Pandur's first book of poetry, *Enerđimašina* (*Energymachine*), was published by the Center for Slovenian Literature.

About the book



"The book of poetry by the first among the paraliterary idiots describes itself as a 'temporary autonomous zone, which reconstructs itself in a different place with every reading'. It says what it thinks, or rather, thinks what it says. It demands goodness, beauty and purity and is unwilling to make compromises. It tries to produce an act of creation, in full knowledge that it cannot escape from all the creations before it. It is conscious of the futility of action, but it just spews and spews on. It won't give up. Its cynicism is aimed only at cynicism. Its language keeps up correspondence with the avant-garde, the shouts of which usually proclaim that nothing in the world is as it should be. That something, probably everything, is terribly wrong. And when the *Machine's* poems feel, admire, love and torment, they try to go all the way: *You ask a question. You look into the fire. And life itself is the answer / When you go and piss into the darkness. And the peace out there. / How did it feel to be man here without light? / Darkness and stars and sounds* (In fact, the book is never meant to end: that's the idea) / "What is a house? What is a bed, given this?" / Matjaž Zorec, *Airbeletrina*, 26 July 2010

"*Energymachine* is a direct "fuck off" to detours away from feelings, its message (so what if it only echoes into the mute sky!) is: *Rather sublime etudes than empty spectacles*. Most importantly, it is a book which wishes "all the best" to those, who will understand it as a machine for the production of energy." / Mojca Pišek, *Dnevnik*, 20 July 2010

"*Energymachine* is a diverse book, but it truly thrilled me. When a new poet arrives, a miracle happens. It is a restoration of the cosmos. A revival of tremendous joy. You stand agape and realize the gift of life." / Interview with Tomaž Šalamun, *Primorske novice*, 31 August 2010

Excerpt

Energymachine – Return to Nikola Tesla

Translated by
Tibor Hrs Pandur

"Peace can only come as a natural consequence of universal enlightenment."

1.
Daddy cursed metaphysics all day long
But at night he wrote it
Alone in their games and arcades
And rooms from which people
Dangerous and dirty streets
Jump! Swim!
And you'll see

If you go
If you come
If you're there
If you
If you make it
If not
If you hug someone
Or keep to yourself
There he stood and watched their houses
And their flats and wells
He didn't see. There was a hill
And it was beautiful
"I started to build
All sorts of nice things
From petals to shiny things
And tables and knives
With minarets and just all things
But then people came
With dirty hands
And ate and drank and scrounged for cash
I just wanna be pure goddammit!
"Build light"
At least something beautiful
Music first
Without distance
I organized and worked
But they owned the project
The Barman wanted dough
A French girl outphilosophized me
As I quoted Ezra Pound
"This wind out of Ferrara
Paradise"
Without being there
Knew it just by name
"We're so different
But in the dark we're one"
She undresses in the bathroom
Her pubic hair is gold
Teenagers shatter empty bottles
In a drunken stupor
Against fences. Against the sea.
When no one's looking
Something's missing
I see her piss
Every pore of her vagina
Beating, smiling, judging, breathing flight
The truth of scent
All Kasper Hauser
She undresses and comes ... to me
And touch is language
But when we kiss
She can only smell herself.

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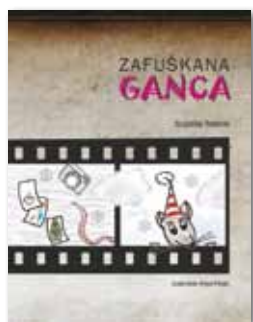
About the author



Photo by Nada Žgank

Suzana Tratnik (b. 1963) published her first short story collection *Pod ničlo* (Below Zero) in 1998, introducing a new kind of fiction about lesbian life in Slovenia. In her novel *Ime mi je Damian* (My Name is Damian, 2001) and its stage adaptation, Tratnik continued to write about less known sexual and gender minorities, soon earning the reputation of one of the most prominent (lesbian) writers. Her second forte is writing stories from a child's point of view, which she demonstrated in her collections *Na svojem dvorišču* (In One's Own Backyard, 2003) and *Vzporednice* (Parallels, 2006), for which she was awarded the Prešeren Foundation Award. She also published a study about lesbian writing, entitled *Lezbična zgodba – literarna konstrukcija seksualnosti* (The Lesbian Story – The Literary Construction of Sexuality, 2004). Her second novel *Tretji svet* (The Third World, 2007) describes the life of a lesbian living in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. She has published two more collections, *Česa nisem nikoli razumela na vlaku* (Things I've Never Understood on the Train, 2008) and *Dva svetova* (Two Worlds, 2010). In 2010, Tratnik also published the children's picture book *Zafuškana Ganca* (The Hany Rattie). Her books and short stories have been translated into nearly twenty languages.

About the book



Zafuškana Ganca (The Hany Rattie) is the author's first picture book, the idea for which came about rather unexpectedly, based on the stories that some rascally rat had brought on its tail. The rat of the species *Rattus norvegicus*, called Rattie, flees from the little underground tunnels to escape deratization in the Center district of Ljubljana and takes a job in a chicken restaurant in Bežigrad, which only has one table – a table for the staff. There, the rat meets her friend of the Featherus species, the proud kitchen chef Coco, who is not your average chicken, as he boasts a degree and scientific evidence. Together, they cook up plenty of dishes and share many an adventure, even travelling to faraway Lapland, where they spend actively relaxed holidays. Coco knows learned words, cherishes relaxation and knows very well what Labour Day is. Rattie knows how to dream effectively, values activity and, above all, knows when rats celebrate Nibble Day.

Even though the picture book *Zafuškana Ganca*, illustrated by Maja Petek, is primarily intended for children, the author, like in her adult fiction, has skipped traditional pedagogical patterns, restricted with black and white, good and evil. The character Rattie is enthusiastic about everything “hany”, that is, more than fabulous, to her taste. Despite being of a stubborn, independent and roguish character, she is committed to dignity and sticking together. Thus, the picture book is reading material for the young, as well as the old, capable of imagining hanyness, activity and relaxation, on which every true friendship is based.

Excerpt

The Hany Rattie – The Dream Life

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Coco could not stop to wonder about the world of dreams. But he determined to try to experience dreaming himself. He wished for simple dreams; dreams in which he would run out of ripe yellow corn or the red flower on his head would get stuck in his wing or the television would be turned on, keeping him awake. And when he flapped his wings and cackled, Rattie would immediately wake him up, gently, pour him five ratty handfuls of corn, release the flower on his head from the grip of his wing or turn off the TV.

One day, Coco said: “Coco took a nap today and then the doorbell rang. It was the postman with the paper. Was Coco dreaming?”

“Was the newspaper real?”

“Of course: here it is.”

“Then you weren't dreaming.”

Several days went by and Coco still did not manage to dream. If he was awake, he could not dream at all and as soon as he fell asleep, he forgot everything, even himself.

“Coco took a short nap on his stick today and when he woke up, he was hanging upside down,” announced Coco expectantly, when Rattie came home. “Was Coco dreaming?”

Rattie scratched her tiny ear with her tail and asked seriously: “While you were sleeping, did you realize you were hanging upside down from your stick?”

“No, not at all! I wouldn’t dream of it!”

“There you go! You were just dangling for no good reason.”

A month passed and Coco still did not know how it felt like to dream. But Rattie continued to have dreams every night and, what is more, everyone could see it. Sometimes, even her snout twitched, her little teeth chattered, she let out shrill squeaks and dug her little claws in the pillow. And she could always remember what she dreamed about.

Three months later, Coco almost forgot that he had never had a dream. One day, after a late, hearty lunch, they both, as was their charming habit, took a nap. Rattie made herself comfortable between the pillows and Coco rocked back and forth on his stick, until he shut his eyelids from down upwards. He fell into a doze and when he opened his eyes, he realized that Rattie was gone. He flew off the stick to the sofa and clawed his way between the pillows. Sometimes, she sank so deep, he had to grab her by the tail with his beak and pull her out. This time, she was nowhere to be found.

“Co, co, co?!” cackled Coco worriedly, but his friend did not answer his calls. He looked into every corner of the chicken coop, he even checked the oven, the drain of the kitchen sink and all the locks and still could not find her. But he did notice the coop was remarkably tidy, swept and brushed clean, so clean you could eat off the floor. Not a speck of dirt or crumb anywhere. All of Rattie’s things were not only in order, but had simply vanished. When Coco looked through the window, he saw that it was raining heavily outside. He thought that Rattie might have gone out with other rats on a stroll through their wet tunnels, chasing, playing hide and seek in the mud, laughing so hanily, she had forgotten her home in the coop. When he did not know what else to do, he jumped back on the stick, sank his wings knee-deep and got sad. He was worried now; Rattie might have gone down to the basement and accidentally ate rat poison, mistaking it for some old potatoes. He was already thinking of calling 911 to ask if, by any chance, someone had brought a badly poisoned rat of the species *Rattus norvegicus*. But he could not find the telephone or the phonebook anywhere, not even a pencil, everything was so neat. When he looked around the chicken coop again, he noticed that the table was gone, as was the stove, the restaurant, the sofa. The little of what was left had turned completely grey, including Coco himself. He wondered whatever got into Rattie to clean up all the colours as well, before she disappeared who knows where. But when he looked down under his claws, he discovered that even his stick was gone! He flapped his wings in horror, trying to regain his balance in midair. He was falling to the floor, when suddenly, someone grabbed him firmly by the wing.

“Co, co, co!” screamed Featherus at the top of his voice. When he opened his eyes, he saw that he was standing on his stick again and nothing was tidy anymore. Rattie was by his side, holding his little wing, waking him up gently.

“Coco had a dream that Rattie went away for good and took all the colours with her!” he cried.

And that is how he entered the magic circle of dream life.

The Center for slovenian Literature is a member of LAF – SLOVENIAN

(Literature Across Frontiers): www.lit-across-frontiers.org

The Center for Slovenian Literature is a non-governmental organization dedicated to literary and publishing activities. It was founded to contribute to the international promotion of Slovenian literature, and began operating in 1999.

The Center is dedicated to attracting support for, and encouraging work in the following areas:

- making quality translations of contemporary and classic Slovenian literature possible,
- drawing the attention of international publishers to the rich, albeit not very well-known, heritage of Slovenian literature,
- presenting relevant information to the interested public in the international context.

In this way the Center responds to the needs which other institutions in this field are either unable or unwilling to meet. While the Center's primary task is to address an international audience, it is no less committed to informing the Slovenian public about important international literary trends, authors, and publishing events. It is open to collaboration with other local and international institutions and individuals working toward similar goals.

The Center finances its activities with funds raised both locally and internationally. Its priorities include, but are not limited to, creating computer-assisted databases of translations and translators; providing information to chosen target-audiences; presenting selected works and authors abroad; enabling, coordinating and promoting international collaboration; integrating into existing international programs and networks with similar aims; and developing a creative approach to the promotion of Slovenian literature.

The Center for Slovenian Literature supplies information on contemporary Slovenian literature to its foreign partners through mail and contacts at various fairs. It sponsors translations and translators' visits to literary events and residencies. It supplies translators with books and literary magazines; occasionally, it provides them with grants for translations given by the Slovenian Book Agency.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is the publisher of the *Aleph* book series, which includes new Slovenian literary works as well as translations of contemporary world literature. While the Slovenian authors are supported by the Slovenian Book Agency, the majority of translations are published with the help of foreign translation/publication grants. Over hundred titles have been published in the series, some bilingual.

The Trubar Foundation

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of Slovene Writers' Association (www.drustvo-dsp.si), Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The financial means for its activities are provided by the Slovenian Book Agency and by other sources. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidy publications of Slovenian literature in translation.

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish Slovenian authors in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 50% of printing costs (see the form at: www.ljudmila.org/litcenter). It does not subsidy translation; translators can apply for translation grants directly to the Slovenian Book Agency (www.jakrs.si).

10
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