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BOOKS

from

SLOVENIA

Kristina Hočevar

Stanka Hrastelj

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Iztok Osojnik

Peter Semolič

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Veronika Simoniti

Marko Sosič

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Suzana Tratnik

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LITERATURE

Kristina Hočevar Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips

About the author



Photo by Nataša Sukič

Kristina Hočevar (1977–) poet. She obtained her BA in Slovenian Language and Literature and General Linguistics at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and currently teaches Slovenian at two schools – the Moste Secondary School and the Ljubljana School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. She is the author of five poetry collections (*V pliš* – Into Plush, 2004; *Fizični rob* – The Physical Edge, 2007; *Repki* – Tails, 2008; *Nihaji* – Oscillations, 2009; *Na zobeh aluminij, na ustnicah kreda* – Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips, 2012). Her collection Tails won her the Zlata ptica Award and the nomination for the Veronika Award. Up to date, her poetry has been translated into English, Polish, Hebrew, Hungarian etc. It was also featured in the anthology *Vsaka ljubezen je pesem* (Every Love is a Poem, Slovene Writers' Association, 2004), *Contemporary Slovenian Poetry 3* (Center for Slovenian Literature, 2008), the 2010 *Days of Poetry and Wine* almanac, as well as *Talisman – A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 38/39/40, 2010. Kristina Hočevar has been described as one of the voices in the Slovenian literary field that are internally alive and dynamic on the one hand and sensitive and socially aware on the other. In the future, she would like to try out another artistic medium besides words.

About the book



Škuc, 2012, 101 p.

One of the poems in the collection *Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips* ends with – and opens into a new – question “where am I, what I write?” and “the self splits in half”. The space of the speaking words is established by relationships, recognising the boundaries over and over again, speaking from them. The poem arises from the tension in relationships. “you step inside your hoop and it always ends where you stop making circles. / there is eye shadow on the eyelids, aluminium on the teeth and chalk on the lips // ... when you want to whirl the hoop again, / you lick the chalk, smear the eyelids, saw through the aluminium”-

Even if the beginnings of the poems are open and the visible, written tracks of this openness are lower-case letters and enjambments and empty spaces, the verses – and poems – on the other hand, almost always conclude with an abrupt full stop. And thus begins a new cycle of speech, outlined in chalk, testing – and dealing with – the boundary: it saws through the aluminium, stinging, crackling, smarting: it does not bring *pleasure*, instead, the poem is turning into “a position of words, cut out with a stanley knife”. It speaks tension.

The boundaries are different: they are spatial, as recognised by the body in the form of its sensory impressions of space, split between the dangerous cultivated human community and the one outside, the softer breath of the forest. Between the room and the outside. Between the chthonic night and the sharper morning. Between the aggressive noise of words from the outside and the silence of written words.

And this poetic language and writing is even sharper in ascertaining and challenging the boundaries of assigned gender identities: of children, girls and boys, women and men, the metonymies of modern western, consumerist, ruminatively usufructuary identities.

Consciously and declaratively and through the presence of its writing, the speech literally de-naturalises, uproots the speaking self and the addressed others from their accustomed identities of body and space, pulling them out of the dangerous (“grey”) security of the learned symbolic order of language.

From the text by Vanesa Matajč for the book presentation

Excerpt

Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips

Translated by
Anda Eckman and
Andrej Zavrl

only these walls are your walls. teams change, sounds alter;
girls get younger. only behind these bars your body unfolds – there is no
other dance floor.

you watch all of them - yours and the presumptuous;
they spawn and hands slither, you breathe and the black sun above us revolves, you electrify
and there's no need for difference, in this territory you breathe scarlet, no one can throw
iron around these silken necks, there is night and it's day, when we are, we write, when we
dance,
we write and sounds sway the hips.

and you can only wipe the cocoa powder off my lips.

at these walls you lean with a bent leg. on these vaults
you lean with bare hands. there are girls,
hints of boys hints of girls. pomegranate nights are washed with glasses of water
and some boys some girls. you wash down pomegranate nights with glasses of water
and here stands your shelter: even though it is sinking

from underneath these vaults you rise:

here your kisses are,
in these walls – for only these walls
are your walls.

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

a black starry meadow covers the hole above us, open so it opens,
deep so it carves. endings, stations, x's.
you lie down under the blackness, breath
and a palm into the shadows seek imprints. the new alphabet helps only as much
as one has to play.

:what is it. birthday man. his
nose is dripping into a plate. he is scooping, sipping, dripping;
she's persuading him,

how everyone visits you, you are the birthday man;
it's still dripping, I'm eating, what to do:

why, and is it even important,
the place I will go.

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Stanka Hrastelj Acting

About the author



Photo by Borut Peterlin

Stanka Hrastelj was born in 1975 in Brežice, Slovenia. She is a poet, writer, translator of poetry from Croatian and Serbian, editor and host of literary events. Her works are featured in numerous anthologies, both Slovenian and foreign. She has published two books of poetry, *Nizki toni* (Low Tones, 2005) and *Gospod, nekaj imamo za vas* (Sir, We Have Something For You, 2009) and one novel, *Igranje* (Acting, 2012).

Her work has won her several awards. She was named Best Young Slovenian Poet, received the Award for Best First Book, was honoured with the title of Knight of Poetry and received the Blue Bird Award for Best Novel.

About the book



Mladinska knjiga, 2012, 184 p.

The novel Acting is a series of intimate reminiscences of the protagonist Marinka, whose peaceful and regular daily life is interrupted by the loss of her job. Though she has a great deal of time at night to focus on her hobbies, the confrontation with herself triggers the onset of her mental illness.

If it is not clear in the beginning of the novel why the heroine completely falls apart after losing her job, the reasons behind it start to unravel with the rush and surge of words and the heroine's introspection, reflecting some of the key moments [...] Her life is turning into a construct, the more things start to fall apart, the more she tries to get away from the people around her and convince them with her ready answers that she is just fine. It is at this point that it becomes clear how the intimate diary of some Marinka, grumbling about her life, her friends and work and walking the dog, writing erotic stories and articles for women's magazines in her spare time, differs from the *Bridget Jones's Diaries* or other modern desperate women like her. Marinka's life is not ruled by parameters, such as work, her partner relationship or social life, but something inner that is beyond all this and beyond her – her illness. As readers, we do not learn when and why it emerges, though we can assume it has awakened brewing after the sudden changes, and watch it escalate day by day, as manifested in the masterful stylisation of language: the sentences grow more and more snakelike from one chapter to another, the digressions and impressions more and more intertwined. When boredom is replaced by emptiness, emptiness by panic, panic by paranoia and paranoia by general empathy, it all reflects in the language, switching on and off, toying with the punctuation, repetitions and impressive phrase structures, most of which seem to be taken directly from life.

Staša Pavlović, Sodobnost 2012, no. 9

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Erik's cousin was the third person this month to say poor Marinka, the third this month and probably the fiftieth this year, the compassion of all these people and our conversations seem like a repetition of the same form, all of them take more or less the same approach, their faces twist into a strange grimace, they apply a touch of shadow, mix it with pleasure, they cannot hide their delight, they walk up to me with this grimace on their face, usually take me by the shoulder or put a hand on my forearm as well, keep silent for a while, use the short pause as an introduction to the drama, look me in the eyes, thinking they're looking deep into my eyes, but that is not a look, it is merely their performance, then they say poor Marinka, is it true what I've been hearing, this is how it begins, then their eyes light up with curiosity, itching them so badly, they want to hear the details, they want to bathe in them, then they drop various hackneyed phrases to express their concern you don't say, and with all the effort you've put in, and you were so good, I can't believe it, after all these years, they drop phrases like they were breadcrumbs, how could this happen, to you of all people, they say, relieved that it hasn't happened to them, they listen to my story, nodding, and in the end they always say and what are you going to do now? I tell her, yes, you've heard right, I don't go into details with her, like I haven't with anybody for a while now, in any case, I can sum up the story in one short sentence, I let myself be very brief, simply saying you've heard right, I've developed an allergy to acrylate and I will never be able to do my job again, and to all of her further questions, how many years have I worked in dental technology, if there really isn't any other place for me in the field, if not, maybe now I could start considering taking up the director's position in the clinic, what exactly is this allergy, I answer tersely, seven, no, you're kidding, an allergy like any other, but I can't avoid the fatal question and what are you going to do now, I no longer feel great discomfort, the need to reassure the inquirer, to reduce his or her concern, the need to assume a defensive posture, to say it's not the end of the world, things like that just happen to people, I'll work something out, I'll find something, I know full well that people aren't interested in that sort of thing, it is simply a precious moment for them when someone unexpectedly encounters a major obstacle in their life and they can walk up to that person, cruelly ask them the rude question and what are you going to do now, I have learned to reply but now I have a lot of time for myself and I'm enjoying myself, it is the only answer that disarms them, but there are also people who end the conversation ruthlessly you see, now you and Erik can have children. But somehow, I have gotten used to that as well, I've learned a lot in the few months that I have been out of a job, I've learned to be sharp with my answers sometimes, I've learned that people don't ask because they care and also forget if you tell them how you feel, these conversations are forms, ping pong, they throw a ball, you return it, I've gotten used to being cold and reply to such a remark by saying yes, now we can, but even though I say it easily, I feel a pain in my stomach, it builds up on the walls, running down, getting bigger, accumulating, gathering into a ball, into a hard and heavy ball, as if my stomach was filled with granite stones and salt, the pain doesn't wear off for hours, sometimes it helps if I picture the scenes of torturing these people in my mind, I would simply grab them by the hair and slam their faces against the wall, I slam and don't stop, sometimes I take it further, I focus on the details, I tie the person to a post and cut a carefully chosen piece of meat from their face, there are many other ways, sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't help at all. I always feel guilty later, I reproach myself for being rude, I reproach myself for my abruptness, when the people were in fact asking me a polite question, they do care about me, I feel ashamed for seeing nothing but nosy people gloating over the misfortune of others in them, I feel ashamed for becoming allergic to acrylate and no longer being able to make dentures, I feel ashamed for not really knowing what to do now, for not knowing how to go on.

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Maruša Krese *Me, Afraid?*

About the author



Photo by Borut Krajnc

Poet, writer, publicist, world traveller and humanitarian worker Maruša Krese was born in 1947 in Ljubljana. She studied Art History, Comparative Literature and Psychotherapy in Slovenia, the USA, Great Britain and the Netherlands. She had lived in Berlin and Graz as a freelance journalist and writer since the 1990's, then moved back to Ljubljana in 2012. She wrote numerous radio plays and documentary and art shows, mostly for the German and Austrian radio, and contributed to magazines and newspapers like *Die Zeit*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *NZZ*, *TAZ*, *Lettre International*, *Manuskripte* and other. She received several awards for her work, including the Fabula Award for her short story collection *Vsi moji božiči* (All My Christmases, 2008) and the Milena Jesenska Award for Journalism (2008), while *Der Wind geht gen Mittag und kommt herum zur Mitternacht* was named radio play of the year (1993).

During the crisis and war in the former Yugoslavia, she organised several initiatives in Germany to help independent media and the peace movement in the area, for which she was conferred the Gold Cross of Honour by the President of Germany and was listed among one hundred of the most powerful women in Europe in 2007 by the authors of the European project Women with a Vision.

Shortly after the publication of her first novel *Da me je strah?* (Me, Afraid?), Maruša Krese passed away after a serious illness on 7 January 2013 in Ljubljana.

About the book



Goga, 2012, 201 p.

The characteristic features of Maruša Krese's literature are autobiographical fragments from everyday life, shocks and indignations at the violence and destruction of war, high ethical standards and sensitivity, desire, disillusion and resignation, cosmopolitanism, alienation, exile. She is exceptional, direct and relentless in unveiling the woman's fate and reality, marked by pain, sacrifice for others, compassion, outrage, anger in the ruthless world, aging and loneliness. The emotional impulse is clearly expressed by the free verse form and distinctive melody of prose.

The novel *Me, Afraid?* takes us back to the first years of World War II, the time of confusion and insecurity, as well as the time of turning points in history, then leads us through the war, the first years of the post-war period and up to the present day. The stories are not told by someone who knows all the ins and outs, the before and afters; instead, three first-person narrators let us under their skin – a young partisan couple, later joined by their daughter's voice. In the time when the Slovenians feel the growing need to divide ourselves into *ours* and *theirs*, the present work allows us to listen to the personal, intimate views on war, on freedom and particularly on our own position within no matter what form of struggle for a better tomorrow.

Excerpt

Me, Afraid?

Translated by
Špela Bibič

*

We are full of revenge. At least I am. We are not taking revenge, as we keep on saying, we are merely defending our mother country. We have reached the very edge and are slowly burning out. All of this has been going on for so long that we are becoming more and more reckless, insolent, insensitive. Sometimes we are so far gone that we watch each other's every move, counting the macaroni that our fellow combatant was given, the cups of tea that we hardly ever get anyway. We blame each other for our lice and insomnia. Comradeship? It is fading away somehow. We are becoming cruel.

The other day I was returning to the brigade when Ančka and the courier suddenly ran up to me.

Panting, they ask me: "Quick, quick. You don't know what they want to do. You must stop it. They won't listen to us."

I don't ask and run with them through the mud and the dead leaves. Two combatants are lying on the ground. Shot.

“Too late,” moans Ančka.

“Who did this?” I shout.

Four partisans walk up to me with their heads down.

“What’s going on, for God’s sake?”

All of them are silent. I look at the young men lying dead before me. They have joined us not so long ago. What am I going to tell their mothers?

“They ate the cracklings we were saving for the wounded,” said Marko after a long pause.

“And these four wouldn’t listen to us. We asked them to wait for you. The commander has also ridden away to the base.”

Cracklings have become more valuable than life. I look at these four before me. Murderers, I think, keeping it to myself. I saved one of them only yesterday. He was so exhausted that he fell into the fire while sleeping and did not even feel it. I came at the nick of time. Should I punish them? Why? How? Who are we? Brave heroes or savages?

“Dig the graves,” I say to Marko.

I am leaving the brigade. They are sending me to the 15th division political department. But this is not the moment to say goodbye. I will wait for tomorrow.

“Ančka, good night.”

“I can’t sleep. I keep seeing their frightened eyes.”

*

“This is for yesterday,” shouted Vid, waving the machine gunners to start the attack. They gave us a terrible beating yesterday.

“The Whites’ are running away,” exclaims Vid in delight. “Look at them go.”

“Don’t rejoice too soon. They’re strong. Stronger than I thought.”

I watch them retreat. They haven’t pulled that far back.

“Change the overheated barrels on the guns! Are all of the wounded safe?”

We set up an ambush today where the wounded and sick were lying only yesterday. We have a rough day ahead of us. Rougher than yesterday even. We have to break through their lines today, otherwise we’re goners. It’s terrible, it has actually become tedious. I say goodbye to everyone in my mind before each fight. To my sisters, my mother, my father and now her. Farewell. I could barely hold back my tears when she was leaving the brigade. Will we ever meet again?

“Damn it, now they’re going at us with grenades too,” curses Vid.

The White Guard charged headlong, but our ambush stopped them with hell fire. Hell. I never had a clear idea what it was and now it has become reality. Some of the Whites have fallen and the others have thrown themselves on the ground. And now. Now everything depends on us. We have to get to the other side today. The Germans are coming with their tanks. We have to be faster than them.

We look into each other’s eyes. That’s how close we’re standing.

“Bad idea!”

“Tramps! Gypsies!”

“You’re too stupid to learn your pet’s language!”

“Reds! Bolsheviks!”

“Shitty clericals!”

Words have become sharper than shots. At times, at least. I jumped over to my neighbour who used to graze cows with me. He was aiming his rifle at me.

“Do you remember ...”

It is night. Such a dark night. I slowly open my eyes. There is something wet around my feet. And warm. Where am I? I’m lying. Where? As if someone was rocking me, as if I was on a ship sailing across the choppy sea. All these weary trees around me. And they’re moving. Walking. This pain in my right leg. A storm is coming.

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1 Members of the White Guard, a colloquial expression for the Axis collaborators in Slovenia during World War II.

Iztok Osojnik Married To Red

About the author

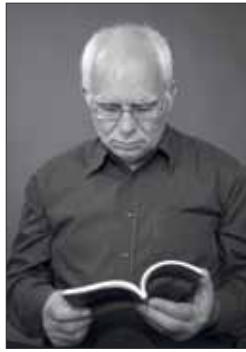


Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Iztok Osojnik (born in 1951 in Ljubljana), poet, anthropologist, historian, comparatist, philosopher, editor, painter, writer, essayist, translator, mountain climber, tourist guide, traveller. The founder of a number of artistic movements, the co-founder of the anarchist “underrealistic movement”, artistic “Garbage art” (Kyoto), music “Papa Kinjal Band”, “Hidrogizme” and a number of other established art institutions and festivals (ŠKUC Gallery, Equrna Gallery, The Tercets of Trnovo, The Vilenica Comparative Literature Colloquium, The Young Vilenica Festival, Discussion in the Villa Herberstein, Review within Review, the international poetry translation workshop Golden Boat, the International Comparative Literature Symposium in Škocjan and other). He holds a BA in Comparative Literature from the University of Ljubljana, completed his postgraduate studies in Osaka, Japan, and obtained his PhD from Historical Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities in Koper. Up to date, he has published 27 independent books of poetry, his last two collections are ****Asterisk* (Asterisk, Kud France Prešeren, 2011) and *Poročena na rdeče* (Married to Red, MK, 2012), five novels, his most recent being *Svinje letijo v nebo* (Pigs Flying Into the Sky, Kud Police Dubove, 2012) and two collections of essays and studies. His central study *Zgodovinski ustroj totalitarnih režimov* (The Historical Structure of Totalitarian Regimes) is about to come out. He runs the Vermont College Summer Residency in Slovenia, the international poetry translation workshop Golden Boat and many other programmes. His books and works have been published in more than 25 languages. They have won him numerous prizes at home and abroad, most recently the nomination for the 2011 Jenko Award and the 2011 International Literary Award KONS. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

About the book



Mladinska knjiga, 2012, 155 p.

The book brings together 45 poems in prose or rather prose fragments that are more ecstatic outbursts than stories, an eruptive and vitalist verbal flow. The line between poetry and narrative is blurred; Osojnik has found a new way of recording what we know from some of his previous works: climbing, including the kind with less heroic outcomes, world travels, connectable dots on the way, we have the streets of Prague next to English mansions, the snowing in the Šar mountains and the hills of South America. Sometimes, the people he mentions are authors he has read in the past that he enters into a dialogue with, from Socrates to Agamben, and those he is currently reading or translating (and this is where Osojnik shows the full breadth of his erudition); at other times, there are well-known and renowned names of international poets and authors he has met. The writing is thus a conglomerate of the experienced and the read, everything, all of his experience and knowledge are compressed into a fragment, intentionally hermetic or manifestly political at times. More than with naming, he deals with digression, description and transfer, with subversion. For instance, he advocates for the deprivatisation of the accumulated and appropriated public wealth. Osojnik's adventures and misadventures are on the path he follows in his poetry and prose, and their main quality, with the amount and scope of the world they encompass, is their anxious and dramatic stream of thought that blends and whirls the things of eternity and the current states of mind, engagement and lyricism, self-irony and self-reflection.

From the review of Matej Bogataj for Radio Slovenia Three

Translated by
Špela Bibič

on crime

light is falling through the lens of the rainy echo. underneath the broken clouds rises the sceptical mount krim. it has something to be sceptical about, too, i think. it is hard to stuff the waves of unpolished ideas into a single sleeve of a document. the thought lingers like a man not quite certain if he has forgotten something in the house that he is just leaving to go on a date of time wasted by sips of coffee in a french-style café. soles on wet pavement rustle like a river carving its path into the chaos, restrained in the domain of *poiesis*, as the ancient greeks used to call it, the activity that causes the non-being to become and exist. the aggregate of existence. the word directly touches the world. sticks its finger in the face of evil. there are poets who warn it is more lucrative to hush up the genocide of armenians or the massacre of children in treblinka, leave the crimes of humanity in the past, secure a kind of ivory position in the international conspiracy of silence and of memory wiped clean and collect the prize. the steel of the poem bends dangerously at this point, threatening to break, to hit in the face, knock out a tooth or two, break the jaw, get plunged into my brain. the rhythm quarrels with the stubborn prose of communicativeness, reminding one of the clumsy bouncing of the wheels of the wright brothers' plane: you rise a little, then hit the bumps on the ground again. knock, knock. silence takes the words out of the mouth, pulls the skin off the body. we air the sheets. the word does not have the power to reach into the darkness and sting the heart. still, it is clearly visible, it can be counted: child after child of terror, shattered skulls, staggering skeletons, carried off into the desert by the starving wind of hunger, blowing against the loose skins. the suffering had long ago melted the silent accusations into looks without substance. sand everywhere. it is terrifying to live in a world with killers like you, who, under the pretence of art, gather at the assembly of the pragmatic freeloaders of art. no use hiding. the black gleam gives you away in the crowd, going about your everyday business. there is no escalation in evil. every move of evil equals total evil. krim rises above the broken clouds. it is not sceptical but openly accusatory. it keeps its silence in the rainy lens in the ashen greyness of the tears run dry. the words touch the cold. the horizon, white, so white.

the lift bridge

why this feeling of deprivation, when it has everything and nothing to do with you. i erased that photograph from the name list. i prefer to work the graphite mass, pound on it with a hammer, an attempt at a magic trick. i risk it, though it is not wise to talk about these things, you can get burned. but what can i do? excesses intrigue me, a man can diverge from his path and the destination can kiss the arrival of the train at gare du nord goodbye. it is unwise to reserve a hotel room or announce your visit to a friend in paris. the train will undoubtedly arrive at the station, but i will not be on it. only my body will be there, leaning against the corner of the seat by the window, a seeming reflection of sadness on the steamed-up windowpane. but that is not me on the brightly-coloured rollercoaster of imagination, among the colourful freaks and plastic toys. the smell of socialism is shaking the window curtain. something burns in the heart, the water in the coffee pot is boiling on a primitive gas cooker. the door is wide open, the cool is slowly carrying snowflakes in the room. on the bed lies a one-armed man, first a man and then a poet, probably dead for a day or so, without anyone realising it. it is nice to be independent, to take large steps along the pavement leading to that studio apartment in šiška, the heart singing in excitement. this is where the different phases of interpersonal relationships meet. there is something extraordinary about no one knowing that that man is dead. the world is so frighteningly close then, practically all here and open, virginally open like the door to the house with the snowflakes carried in by the wind. that is where that part of me is, the part that has emerged from the body on the train just arriving at gare du nord, a giant moon of greyness, a painfully transparent aquarium, a painfully torn-out tongue, strangely free. a cross between wilderness and absence, something intense, something bare, something that has nothing to do with you, a static, wild rollercoaster of multicoloured greys on a windy field somewhere in holland. that is my conclusion based on the lift bridge visible in the background.

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Peter Semolič *Night in the Middle of the Day*

About the author



Photo by

Nina Medved - Mjedved

Peter Semolič (1967) is the leading voice of his generation of Slovenian poets. Although rooted in tradition, he started a new trend that the Slovenian literary critics called “The New Simplicity”. His transparent and easy to follow poems usually contain seemingly innocent images that quickly open up into a whirl of strong emotions, profound meaning or even wisdom. The flow of his poetry is reminiscent of a big river, silent, seemingly motionless, but incredibly powerful. All this has made him a major influence on other Slovenian poets at the moment.

Semolič, born in Ljubljana in 1967, studied General Linguistics and Cultural Studies at the University of Ljubljana. He is the author of twelve books of poetry: *Tamarisk* (1991), *The Roses of Byzantium* (1994), *House Made of Words* (1996), *Circles Upon the Water* (2000), *Questions About the Path* (2001), *Border* (2002), *The Bog Fires* (2004), *A Place for You* (2006), *The Journey Around the Sun* (2008), *The Milky Way* (2009), *Poems and Letters* (2009) and *Night in the Middle of the Day* (2012). He has received many prizes for his work, including the two most eminent awards in Slovenia, Jenko’s Poetry Prize and the Prešeren Prize (the National Award for Literature and Arts). In 1998, he also won the Vilenica Crystal Award. Peter Semolič also writes radio plays, children’s literature and translates from English, French, Serbian and Croatian. His poetry has been translated into Italian, French, Spanish, English, German, Finnish, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian.

About the book



Center za slovensko književnost, 2012, 71 p.

“When will the time of reconciliation come?/The time I await, the time I dread?” In his last collection, Peter Semolič once again poses the question put down in the verses of *The Bog Fires*, with no less fatality than before in his extensive oeuvre of poetry. Even though it might seem to some that, because of the humour, (self)irony and cynical stings pervading *Night in the Middle of the Day* to the very bone, the talk of fatal matters does not go that well with these poems. Not true. In a way, Semolič’s poetry, like few others in our literary scene, does in fact keep to the level of the most faithful possible straightforwardness consistently and seriously only at first glance, as the reality it refers to is so skilfully caught in the net from speech that we hardly notice it, but after reading it, this apparent merging of verses and reality only proves to be a deep crack in reality itself, in the life that the poet lives, the world he is part of. The apparent casual and chatty tone of the poems and their prose form do not lead to an equally non-binding prosaic content; it is merely a suggestion that there are things in life before which art should bow its head a little. That is what is so convincing about this collection. How unobtrusive, as if incidental, is the high and piercing sound of cosmic nothingness, loneliness, a loss of love and the anxious feeling of things passing, underneath the banal scenes from our everyday we pass sitting in pubs, glued to the screen playing video games, roaming through our home and foreign cities, sometimes looking back at the memories, sometimes astounded by the stupidity of the ruling mediocrities, sometimes simply sick and only rarely simply enjoying the moment we are given by a ray of sun. An almost playful, loquacious lightness emerges from the heavy lump in the throat; and Semolič does not really try to hide it, simply grinds on like a man. With his distinctive and signature disarming softness.

Jure Jakob

Excerpt

Night in the Middle of the Day

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Night fell in the middle of the day, the sun turned into a black spot and the ducks, chickens and geese buried their heads under their wings, mistakenly believing it was already evening. Everyone talked of the Millenium Bug, the floods, the fire from the sky, compared themselves with tyrannosauruses, repeating Nostradamus, Nostradamus, Nostradamus, feverish in their

expectation of the end of the world and themselves, tired of the world and themselves. Looking at the total solar eclipse through the smoked glass, I was more than a little disappointed – it was so far away and not one bit fascinating because of the distance. So I put down the glass and watched the live television broadcast instead. I asked myself what was it that the old prophet saw, if he was indeed a prophet and not merely a sly freeloader to various princes, when the window to our time opened before him. What if it opened into a cinema just showing “Deep Impact” or “Armageddon” or some other film about a falling asteroid? Floating over the heads of the audience, he felt as if he was travelling with the asteroid through space, straight towards the unsuspecting earthlings. The colours! he might have exclaimed. The destruction! he might have said to himself. This is phenomenal, he might have muttered as the window finally closed, luckily, before the film ended. For imagine how confusing that would have been for him! Overwhelmed by the greatness of creation, he just might have thought that he had read the real god’s name in the closing credits – Bruce Willis, for example.

My computer had joined the pirates. Putting a black patch over its big blue eye, it set out to the seas of the World Wide Web. With poor knowledge of pirating, picked up from the Wikipedia, it went after various ministries and banks, and in its blind foolhardiness, it even had a go at the high walls of Pentagon. In vain did I tell it that it was making a fool of itself, that it was not even capable of seizing yachts, inflatable boats, sculls, kayaks or canoes, let alone break into the closely guarded royal vaults. “Look,” I said, “even the tourists on pedalos find you amusing rather than terrifying!” It paid no attention to me. It sang “shiver my timbers, shiver my soul” and “yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum,” dreamed about treasures on the forgotten islands of ancient files and still caused enough of a stir for the Gates’ buccaneers to label it a fortune hunter. Eventually, it gave up. It stopped pursuing this crack or that, it toddled clumsily up and down the deck, puffing like an asthmatic. “Midlife crisis, the time when everyone’s warranty on youth runs out” was the diagnosis made by the doctor who had found it half-dead from exhaustion on the shores of BitTorrent and sent it to the hospital. Now they are clearing its tar- and nicotine-stained lungs, restoring its blood, diluted by viruses and bacteria it had contracted in exotic lands, brainwashing it – in order to turn it into a blue-eyed sailor, happy to be sailing in coastal waters once again.

At the Dragon Bridge¹, I am touched by the fate of dragons. Their problems are immense – their bat wings, pinned to a body of a crocodile, could barely keep them in the air, not to mention the bumpy landings: their thorny tails would mow down entire forests like fresh-cut grass. With their cat eyes, planted deep in their horned head, they could tell the difference between shadow and darkness, at new moon even, if they could see anything at all – they had no eyelids and their eyes kept watering. The dragon’s heart was magical and bigger than a sheep-, if not even cow-skin. When it burned with the passion of love, it literally burned and they would torch everything around them – first those closest and dearest to them. Blind and lonely, they would crawl clumsily about the burnt world, cursing the sick human imagination, woefully begging the passers-by for a merciful thrust of a spear. I look at them now, frozen in time and bronze, the verdigris slowly eating them away.

Ljubljana, 22 December 2007–4 April 2011

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¹ *One of the bridges over the River Ljubljanica in Ljubljana [Author’s Note].*

Zorko Simčič *The Last Tenth Brothers*

About the author



Photo by Jože Suhadolnik

Zorko Simčič (born in 1921 in Maribor) is a playwright, writer and essayist who joined the Yugoslav Army as a volunteer when Germany attacked (1941). After the capitulation, he withdrew to Ljubljana and was later sent to the Gonars concentration camp. When he was still in secondary school, he won recognition with his novel *Prebujenje* (The Awakening, 1943), for which he received the Prešeren Award for Literature of the City of Ljubljana. During the war, he also published the collection of humorous stories and satires *Tragedija stoletja* (The Tragedy of the Century) and wrote the libretto *The Baptism on the Savica* (Krst pri Savici) and the play *The Last Chord* (Zadnji akord). In May 1945, he withdrew to Carinthia and worked as a translator for the English occupying forces in Austria. He then went to Italy and did various casual jobs, including working for Radio Trieste II, before finally immigrating to Argentina. In Buenos Aires, he was the organiser of cultural life at the Slovenian Cultural Action and editor of the main emigrant magazine *Meddobje*. He is one of the most distinctive emigration writers, particularly with his short prose and psychological novellas of emigration life. His most important play is *Zgodaj dopolnjena mladost* (Early Youth). His novel *Človek na obeh straneh stene* (The Man on Both Sides of the Wall), for which he received the 1993 Prešeren Foundation Award, is considered to be one of the most important works of Slovenian post-war prose. In 1994, he returned to his home country, where he still lives and works today. Since 2006, he is a senior member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

About the book



Študentska založba, 2012,
719 p.

The Last Tenth Brothers is no ordinary novel. The author had polished the manuscript for three whole decades, writing it when he was still an emigrant living in Buenos Aires, and put the finishing touches after returning to his home country. It is impossible to predict the judgment of time but it seems that in the end, *The Last Tenth Brothers* will be considered the central piece of Slovenian emigration. It is a monumental work, entirely devoted to the issue of Slovenian emigration after World War II. The novel focuses on collective fate, written in a series of twenty one parallel personal stories of emigrants, scattered around different continents, washed up into metropolises and remote villages. Their common basis is their involuntary life abroad, from Trieste to Argentina, Brazil and Australia, which the author records with the remarkable precision of a man who has gone through a similar experience. At the same time, the author interrupts the protagonists' narratives with the personal story of The Tenth Daughter Marjetica, through which we enter the old Slavic, one could say archetypal story of the tenth child as the connecting link between the various geographical positions of life. To be exiled, excluded, stigmatised – to take such a fate upon oneself as a way of making up for the sins of generations. Simčič does not offer us the final answer. His answer is to search and tell. The author does not go into the political dimension of post-war emigration, but rather deals with the existential side of such a fate. In so doing, he keeps coming back to the tormenting question: does foreignness have any deeper meaning or is it merely a coincidence in the wheels of history?

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The Last Tenth Brothers

Introduction

The morning smelled of grass that has not yet shaken off its night chill, it smelled of earth, of bread that a man never gets tired of, it smelled of eternity.

Right now, he is sitting on the third floor of the palace on Oberdan Square in Trieste, but the smell of grass is still with him. The day before, he received a letter asking him to see Lieutenant John Talley: his application for immigrating to South Africa has been granted and he should come in to discuss it.

He is thirty years old, his muscles are strong, everything inside him is strung like a cord.

He is no different than he was two years ago when he fled Ljubljana a year after the war was over. He is holding the paper in his hand, all of a sudden feeling as if he finally had a patch of safe roof over his head. South Africa! Johannesburg! Negroes ... From tinfoil and stamps that the children collected for mister catechist ...

Mister *Lieutenant* is a rather aged, plump gentleman. He is in a good mood. He seems like a pragmatic sort of man who knows that the best thing to do is to enjoy life as long as he has people to take care of him. Who knows what it's going to be like when he returns to the Dark Continent! He is also polite. He offers a seat, takes a deep breath, as if a gust of fresh air from the Karst has blown in the office with the arrival of the young man, he hands him over the envelope of documents strewn with seals, signatures and stamps. And congratulates him. And he also adds that the young man will surely be happy in the south of Africa, as will their government, who were in desperate need of strong young white men to fertilise, to multiply the white race ...

A man does not gain muscles in an instant, nor loses them, but now that he is back on the hallway, everything in him suddenly goes flabby.

He sat on the bench on the hallway outside the office. He sat staring thoughtfully for a while, then took a sheaf of documents out of the envelope, folding one after the other nice and slow with such care that the youth next to him – by the looks of him, he was also a refugee in Italy, a Ferenc or a Janoš or some other Hungarian – started eying him with suspicion. He ran his nail along the folds one more time, then tore up paper after paper right down the line, slowly letting them fall into the dustbin by the bench.

As he stepped out into the square, it started pouring; he ran and did not stop until he was under the arcade. He was quick but not quick enough to prevent his shoes from squishing. He felt good anyway.

That very day, thousands of “his kind” were already wandering the world in unfamiliar countries ... among them, three times seven of those marked by fate. Who knows: when meeting foreigners, strangers ... a blessing or ill fortune to them, salvation or condemnation to themselves ...

The Tenth Daughter

So – sacrificed, but ... was it really to satisfy the goddess for the past violations of her laws or to make sure she does not take revenge in the future. “Harm would come to the duck and its progeny ...”

Marjetica was overcome with despair. Being the tenth daughter¹ was hard, but also nice. Sometimes, usually when she woke up for a moment in the middle of the night, she even felt that the gods were close to her, closer than to other people ... but now that doubt has sneaked in – no one around, no one there, whose hands were really holding the toy? – she felt herself naked, empty, scraped from the inside down to the skin and tears filled her eyes.

But then – instantly – the final blow:

Who was she?

“What am I? The tenth daughter? Yes, the tenth daughter. But, Svetovid, I am not just the tenth daughter. What am I, me, Marjetica, as only myself? What am I? And if I was born one year earlier and was the ninth? Conceived by the same father, born of the same mother – what would I be? O god, I cannot merely be the being in the presence of whom people rejoice for not having to spend their entire lives roaming about, nor merely the being who was chosen, sacrificed, so that harm would not come to her family ... I must be more than that! And so, tell me: what am I as only myself, because ... look ... that is the only way I will really know ... why I live for ...”

Could Svetovid, who had brought her so many flashes and so much light, really not spare her this twilight, this doubt? It will not be long before she closes her eyes forever anyway ...

“You could have at least spared me this darkness ...”

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¹ According to a folk legend, the tenth child is supposed to leave home and go out into the world alone [Translator's note].

Veronika Simoniti *The Devil's Tongue*

About the author



Photo by Aleksander Štokelj

Veronika Simoniti (1967) holds a BA in Italian and French Language and Literature. For a number of years, she worked as a freelance translator. She started out as a children's author and first published her work on Radio Slovenia. Her first short story *Metuljev zaliv* (The Bay of the Butterfly) came out in 2000 and won first prize on the competition of the *Literatura* magazine. Since then, her work has also been published in other literary magazines, as well as on the radio. She has won several awards and nominations. Her first collection, consisting of twenty short stories, *Zasukane štorije* (Twisted Stories), which came out in the summer of 2005, was nominated for Best First Book of the Year later that year and was one of the four nominees for Best Short Story Collection of the past two years in January 2006 and 2007 (the Fabula Award). In 2011, her second short story collection, *Hudičev jezik* (The Devil's Tongue) was published, once again by LUD Literatura publishing. Two of the stories appeared in the Summer Stories section of the main Slovenian daily *Delo*. She is featured in the anthology of short prose in English *A Lazy Sunday Afternoon* (2007), bringing together Slovenian authors born after 1960 (*Litterae Slovenicae*, Slovene Writers' Association), as well as the anthology of Slovenian women authors *Kličič me po imenu* (Call Me by My Name, Študentska založba, 2013). Excerpts of her stories have also appeared in translation catalogues of Slovenian authors (*Ten Authors from Slovenia*, Frankfurt, 2006; *European First Novel Festival*, Budapest, 2006; *Cromografie*, 2007; *Pordenonelegge*, 2010 – *L'Europa oltre confine*). Her stories have been published in German, Croatian, Serbian, Italian and Hungarian.

About the book



LUD Literatura, 2011, 149 p.

The Devil's Tongue carries the call and the spirit of faraway worlds, its setting is the whole world. Not only its surface, not only the different places in all time periods, including the times past, equal representation to this so-called reality is also given to literary worlds, history and the personalities broken and burdened under its weight, to artists of all orientations, styles, their diverse and at times paradoxical fates. (...) Cortázar's opening quote therefore not only functions as a kind of tribute to the master, but also announces the main topic of the collection: the problem of language as an unreliable tool that cannot capture reality, but creates its own, new and equally unreliable, slippery. Right beside it are the problems of identity, related to the loss of this same language, no longer taken for granted. The stories are thus full of people who have found themselves on a mixed language territory, languageless, displaced in different and adopted languages, never quite their own, at other times deprived of a single syntax as a result of their injuries (...)

Matej Bogataj, from the text on the book jacket

The Devil's Tongue is an impressive fusion of the concrete and the abstract, an intellectual type of prose that deals with the complex issues of language and identity, but does so through a sensual, visually powerful, even carnal image. We are often somewhere at sea, in the sun, surrounded by lush vegetation, in fantasy worlds with magical and fantastic elements (...).

Iva Kosmos, Dnevnik

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Dante was right on the money when he said there was no greater sorrow than remembering happiness in times of misfortune. If a man is used to starched shirts, good Cuban cigars, suitcases stuffed with money and drama, spiced up with the thrill of new ideas, this grey Alcatraz stench that eats into my skin becomes an even bigger problem that I have always had with reality anyway.

That's how it is, mon cher, I said to him, this pile of iron will finally serve some purpose and believe me, I know what I'm talking about. I spent practically my entire childhood among the heaps of the scrap yard that my friend's father had back in Czechoslovakia; we would make ourselves guns from rusted bars and wood, there was nothing like it. I hurt myself plenty of times scraping against some protruding rod or trying to put some pieces of metal together to build myself a train. But tell me about yourself, you must have grown up in completely different circumstances, I prodded.

Well, it was no bed of roses, but I won't complain, he started in a moaning voice, basically, everything I've earned is the work of my own two hands, you understand ... I don't owe anything to anyone and that is not a bad feeling. Ha, I thought, if he only knew that it is not a bad feeling when you yourself believe what you say and what you have just made up was the gospel truth.

But rule number one is: let the victim cough up without showing any interest. His last name was Poisson, a real fish, and I was hoping he would take the bait. I told him some story about how the tower was bringing nothing but losses, that it was in need of renovation which would cost more than tearing it down, that it was built for the World's Fair and was never meant to serve any further purpose. *And so I count on your discretion, I said, taking him by the shoulder in confidence, talk about the matter as little as possible, the government would like to carry it through as inconspicuously as possible, but there are always going to be some pains in the neck who vehemently complain that it is a waste of public money.* He nodded understandingly. Looking musingly into the distance out of the car window, I saw a man and a woman kissing. Or was the woman pushing the man away? Well, it doesn't matter. *Dear friend, I said to him, the Great War is behind us, who knows what else is coming. The army needs artillery, battleships, in short: iron. The industry needs raw material. This is going to be the business of your lifetime, but naturally, everything must remain between you and me.*

We sat in a black limo, driving along Champ de Mars around the tower, rising pompously above the city on its four open legs. *It is ugly, remarked Poisson, the government has made the right decision to tear it down, eight thousand tons of spare material, that's no trifling matter.*

Half an hour later, we were already sitting in a café on Rue de la Fédération, drinking cognac. Rule number two that I learned when I was still living in casinos on ocean liners between Europe and America, before the Germans started bombing them: never get pissed, drunkenness can blur your sense of reality. He had no such concerns, he was in for a major deal, prepared to invest big money and contribute a handsome sum for my share. He knew that all government people were corrupt, he was not that naive, but he did not have a clue that I was not a government official at all. Five cognacs in, he started sweating and after the sixth, he was perfectly relaxed. Tongue sticky, he said, *when I was a child, my German teacher taught me "table – Tisch, fish – Fisch, porridge – Brei, lustig sein", ha, both of us are in that sentence, my last name, meaning fish, and yours, lustig, meaning you're a jolly fellow.*

Rule number three: never show you are bored and be a good listener, even if nothing but babble is coming out of your interlocutor's mouth, especially when they get wasted. A studied expression of understanding and attentive listening are subtly narrowed eyes, a slight occasional nod of the head, arms never crossed. How does it go again? *Mundus vult decipi ... the world wants to be deceived, so let it be conned and swindled.*

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Marko Sosič *You Who Come to Me From Afar*

About the author



Photo by Agnese Divo

Marko Sosič (1958), theatre and film directing graduate from Trieste, set out on his creative literary path in 1991 with the collection of novellas *Rosa na steklu* (Dew on the Windowpane). Six years later, it was followed by the highly successful novel *Balerina, Balerina*, (Ballerina, Ballerina) that won the author several awards, including the Vstajenje Award. The book was listed among the ten best Slovenian novels after 1989, was one of the five finalists for the Kresnik Award and selected for the European project 100 Slavic novels. Following his novel *Tito, amor mio* (2005), which secured him another nomination for the Kresnik Award, as well the Prešeren Foundation Award, Sosič again turned to short prose with the collection of short stories *Iz zemlje in sanj* (From Earth and Dreams, 2011). The book won Sosič a spot among the eight nominees for the Fabula Award for Best Short Story Collection of the past two years and on the shortlist for the newly-established award of the Slovene Literary Critics' Association, Kritiško sito. The author also published his memoirs from the time between 1991 and 1994, when he was artistic director of the Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica, entitled *Tisoč dni, dvesto noči* (One Thousand Days, Two Hundred Nights). His last novel *Ki od daleč prihajaš v mojo bližino* (You Who Come to Me from Afar, 2012) was named one of the ten books of the year by the *Pogledi* magazine.

About the book



Študentska založba, 2012,
345 P.

It would be difficult to find a Slovenian author who sets his stories in the same geographical context as consistently as Marko Sosič does. Trieste and the border villages of the Trieste Karst form a discreetly drawn, but defining background of his fictional worlds and their protagonists – and not coincidentally, as the said geographical topos, together with its socio-political historical connotations, directly relates to the issue that concerns Sosič as an author directly, particularly in his last novel *You Who Come to Me from Afar*: the issue of the individual's identity in a world that is controlled, more or less covertly, by antagonistic, aggressive social forces.

The main character of the novel is a Slovenian living in Trieste, professor of natural sciences and a man who seems to have everything an everyman needs to lead a fulfilled existence. However, there is a shadow in his life, a dark spot from the past that begins to loom over his present as well. It is a masterfully written story of suppressed pain, taking the protagonist back through the fragments of memories, visions, hallucinations and dreams to the event that scarred him and his family. From the multiethnic present reality of Trieste, the temporal setting of the novel thus stretches back for more than a decade, to the years of the Balkan war, the atrocities and intolerances of which are still present. The novel, which avoids any ideological declarations, carries the message of humanism, telling us not to shut ourselves off from the pain of others, but to enter it with compassion.

Excerpt

You Who Come to Me from Afar

Translated by
Špela Bibič

A shiver runs through my body.

I focus.

Has my mother decided to give me the truth? Why else would she call me and reveal so naively that she was not in Bassano, that she had lied to me about going to aunt Pavla and the spa?! Is she following my every thought, every action I take and sees my fears, finally decapitating them, releasing me from their presence? Or was it nothing like that and her call has rolled into me from the past like apples down the street?

And suddenly I feel as if in the embrace of the green hills, as if touched by those grasses rustling down the slope all the way to the river, rippling by the old willows and the apple tree, as if I was suddenly able to discern the words of the soft and bright song resounding inside me again more clearly. What will happen to Kristjan? I hear my mother's voice say over the song. What will happen to Kristjan now that the war has broken out in Yugoslavia? she says

one day in the kitchen of the new apartment that we had just moved into at the time, looking out towards the small part of sea, while my father shuts himself in his room where he has just started building his plastic world.

I grab the handle of the front door leading into the building to my father and jerk it open. Oh God!

A swarm of people pours out through the door towards me. I step back against the wall by the stairwell and cover my eyes with my hands. It does not help, I see them even more clearly. As if the people had suddenly broken through the screen of the television that my mother used to watch in the kitchen. I see their wounded bodies, leaving blood trails behind them. They help each other not to fall down, the children among them cry out to their parents, others lie on the floor between the doorjamb, motionless, not far away from me who am now leaning against the wall and see the others still able to move stepping across the threshold, outside, towards the street. What will happen to Kristjan? says my mother's voice inside me. What will happen to Jasenka and Aiša? she says. I do not know them, I do not know their names.

I grab the phone. I check to see if I can call the number my mother called me from. It is listed in the memory. I see it. 0038 ... I call. I hear no signal. I call again. A barely audible sound. No one answers.

I run upstairs to my father's apartment. I see that the door is ajar, I push it open, cross the threshold and close it quietly. I feel the beat of my heart pounding hollowly in my chest. From my father's room, I can hear the sound of locomotives racing down the rail tracks through his landscape. The door to his room is closed. Only the sound of the locomotives is leaking to the entrance hall. I think that the train has just come out of the tunnel running through the snowy mountains, I think that there are people inside it looking through the grimy windows. Among them I see miners with helmets and torches on their heads. I am among them as well. I see myself sitting on that train, with my mother. Mother is cradling a cardboard box with her homemade cake. I remember. I sit across from her, a boy, holding a fishing rod in my hands. I understand that we are travelling to a land that is out of my memory now. Once again, I hear my mother's voice as if it was coming from that tunnel in my father's room straight into my mind. Uncle Kristjan got a job in the mines then, she says. And I hear my boyish voice as well: Uncle Kristjan is a miner? Yes, look, says my mother's voice. In my mind, I look in her hands there on the train, holding a photograph of uncle Kristjan wearing his miner's helmet and there is a girl standing next to him, dark-haired and black-eyed. And then I see myself again, sitting next to her, holding a fishing rod, wrapped in fine paper.

I think of the girl, the young wife with the black hair and eyes lying in my pocket who visited me in the night.

I walk on towards the door, behind which locomotives race through the landscapes of my father's world. I cling to the reality around me with my eyes, to relieve my anxiety, to distance myself from the images falling into the abyss in my head and gathering into a ball, moving up the walls.

I open the door to my father's room. Pop? Are you here? No answer. I walk on towards the plastic landscape where two locomotives race with no conductor. Pop?! No answer. Pop, where are you? I call out, looking to the locomotives and the tunnel, the plastic figurines of people standing motionless by the hamlets and painted roads, meadows and fields, as if I could see him any moment now, standing among them, small and motionless. He is not there. I would stop the locomotives but I am not familiar with the mechanism. I know that the handle and the switch allowing my father to regulate their speed are somewhere on the other side of the model but I do not know which one I am supposed to press. If I touch the wrong switch, I can increase the speed of the locomotives and cause an accident. I leave the room.

Tone Škrjanec *There Are Noises in the Air*

About the author



Photo by DK

Tone Škrjanec was born in Ljubljana in 1953. After finishing secondary school, he obtained his BA in Sociology from the former Faculty of Sociology, Political Studies and Journalism in Ljubljana. He spent a short time in education, then went to work as a journalist for nearly ten years. Nowadays, he is active in KUD France Prešeren as programme coordinator and organiser of poetry events and is also the head of the Ljubljana poetry festival The Tercets of Trnovo.

His first poetry collection *Blues zamaha* (The Blues of Swinging) came out relatively late, in 1997, others followed on a fairly regular basis: *Sonce na kolenu* (The Sun on My Knee, a collection of haikus, 1999), *Pagode na veter* (Wind Pagodas, 2001), *Noži* (Knives, 2002), *Baker* (Copper, 2004), *Koža* (Skin, 2007), *Duh želve je majhen in zelo star* (The Spirit of the Turtle Is Small and Very Old, 2009), and finally *V zraku so šumi* (There Are Noises in the Air, 2012). Translations of his poetry have been published in book form in Poland, Bulgaria, the US and Croatia. His poems can be found in many contemporary anthologies of Slovenian poetry and have been translated into numerous languages.

As an author, he likes to collaborate with various musicians; some of these fusions of poetry and music have also been recorded – his collaboration with Jani Mujič on the records *Košček hrupa in ščepec soli* (A Bit of Noise and a Pinch of Salt, 2003) and *Lovljenje ritma* (Finding the Rhythm, 2006), and with Illet on the record *Pri besedi z glasom in zvokom* (The Word in Voice and Sound).

In addition to being a writer, he is also a translator, mainly focusing on contemporary American literature, but also translates from Croatian and Serbian. During the day, he enjoys green tea and likes a pint of good beer in the evening.

About the book



Lud Šerpa, 2012, 139 p.

In all this time, I somehow could not shake the feeling that, even though Tone is a member of the Slovene Writers' Association, a translated author and not an unknown poet abroad, his older colleagues do not take him very seriously. I imagine that the problem is something like, but where does he come from, from what position does he speak, but where do his influences lie etc. That is it, that could be the problem, as Tone's influences are also closely connected to what is sometimes considered low in literature: to the popular music (sub)culture, the Asian way of thinking and the comic strip. They are a sort of mixture of blues and garage rock'n'roll, of rocksteady and reggae, not to mention tango and pronounced sexuality. On the other hand, it is an overt recognition of the *wu wei* principle, that is, the absence of doing (plainly speaking), which the book describes in the following words: "He does his job, but does not want anything in return. He dresses, feeds everything, yet refuses to be their master." And: even the scope of language that Tone uses, so it seems at least, corresponds to the scope traced by the Asian philosophies, something in the line of language, with the means it has at its disposal, being incapable of having an equal relationship to the Tao (or God or Allah, the name is irrelevant), as language always remains on the level of the conventional.

From the foreword by Primož Čučnik

Excerpt

There Are Noises in the Air

Translated by
Ana Pepelnik

A Hole in the Sky

we have to write, because that which comes today
holds true for tomorrow. soft simmering of speech
intermingles with the rattling of an old tractor
into ambient morning music. birds

hiding in gigantic green tree tops
around our yard fall silent
just for a second and listen.
girls are rubbing fragrant oils and creams
into their naked and mostly tanned
bodies, until the very last hair, until the thin
slice, descending arrow-shaped
into the pubic area,
so the tight curves of their little bodies
(which our eyes follow automatically,
like simple machines) glitter like
frosted beer bottles from TV
commercials. because there's a hole in the sky. I watch
an island between my bent legs.
it's small, barren, and completely uninhabited.
once we went there for a visit by boat.
we treaded so carefully over the sharp rocks
and picked a bunch of wild garlic.

Crows and Sea Gulls

yesterday the day was cool and the evening even cooler.
a northern wind was blowing somewhere from the north. a young woman
with a strong lower jaw wearing a pink plastic flower
in her hair slowly sips her beer. I don't like her too much.
we talk about grapes, figs, about how they were still green and hard three days ago,
about nature which takes and gives, and about crows,
this year there are almost as many as sea gulls.
the wonderful bush, full of pink blossoms
to which my gaze so often escape, goes unmentioned.

Walk

such a sticky day today.
coins are clinking in my pocket while I walk.
small piles of young ducks are squatting in the shade of a tree
which might be, let us say, a willow.
two women with legs, naked to the knees, are laughing
and blissfully gesticulating while crossing the street
which winds around the lake. the walk is important.
thinking while walking. bodies during the walk.
three cyclists on the top of the stairs are from a different world.
covered with science-fiction-like helmets,
all red and flushed, they look like aliens.
you meet many almost divine beings while walking,
i.e. tiny ducks, which I've already mentioned,
or this one here, sitting all by itself by the lake
and apparently for no reason opening its beak wide
so that its long and slender neck is bending beautifully.
such a sticky day, but still
such pleasant early evening silence,
just cars, birds and paddles
from a far, hitting the lake,
and it seems that we, the animals, are mostly satisfied.

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Suzana Tratnik *Reservation*

About the author



Photo by Nada Žgank

Suzana Tratnik was born in 1963 in Murska Sobota, Slovenia. She obtained her BA in Sociology from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana, and her MA in Gender Anthropology from the Ljubljana Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, where she lives and works as a writer, translator, and publicist. She published six collections of short stories: *Pod ničlo* (Bellow Zero, 1997), *Na svojem dvorišču* (In One's Own Backyard, 2003), *Vzporednice* (Parallels, 2005), *Česa nisem nikoli razumela na vlaku* (Things I've Never Understood on the Train, 2008), *Dva svetova* (Two Worlds, 2010), and *Rezervat* (Reservation, 2012), two novels: *Ime mi je Damjan* (My Name is Damjan, 2001) and *Tretji svet* (Third World, 2007), the children's picture book *Zafuškana Ganca* (The Hany Rattie, 2010), as well as a monodrama *Ime mi je Damjan* (My Name is Damjan, 2002), a radio play *Lep dan še naprej* (Have a Nice Day, 2012), and two expertises: one on the lesbian movement in Slovenia, and another on lesbian literature. She received the national Prešeren Foundation Award for Literature in 2007. Her books and short stories have been translated in about twenty languages, while she herself has translated several books of British and American fiction, non-fiction, and plays, including works from authors such as Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Leslie Feinberg, Michael Cunningham, Jackie Kay, Mary Dorcey, Katy Watson, Ian McEwan, Dennis Cooper, and Truman Capote.

About the book



Litera, 2012, 286 p.

Twenty short stories. Twenty reservations. From Native Americans to the skill of breathing with gills, economic corn, worn-out shoes, oil, your own Texas, the ultimate swearword and hitchhiking, concluding with a New Year's Eve kiss at Metelkova. Short stories written from a child's perspective, as well as stories from urban life.

About a girl whose secret wish was to be able to breathe with gills. About a school trip by train to see an extraordinary achievement – the nuclear power plant; on the way back, some of the boys round up the girls by force and stick a bottle between their legs (dressed), jokingly calling it “doping”.

About beating a woman in a locked bar in the middle of Ljubljana and about meeting a younger woman who does not believe in the City of Women festival because such ghettoisation destroys true art. About the day when Slovenia became part of the EU, while the protagonists deal with their life in the lesbian “ghetto” at Metelkova, seeing Europe as a sort of a side branch. A glimpse at the exhibition of Native Americans in New York, entitled *Reservation X*, about the culture of Native Americans not being frozen between the idealised pre-colonial past and the bleak, non-autochthonous present, which also holds true for the (post)Yugoslav situation in some of the stories. About hitchhiking as a travelling reservation.

Therefore, about different minor(ity) cultures and identities, moving underground, staying in their invisible reservation. And about the thoughts that every man/woman keeps or hides inside their own personal and mind reservation.

Translated by
Nada Grošelj

Oil

'Don't touch greasy stuff,' the mother told the girl, unexpectedly coming from upstairs to re-knot the wool scarf firmly around the child's neck as the workshop was cold. 'Because I can't ever wash it out.' The girl had grown used to no longer nodding assent at bits of advice or orders as nobody expected it of her, and her oil can was tucked away under her coat. Besides, she could not always tell which stuff was greasy. All she knew was that some was not, or at least should not be, for instance soil, fresh bread, people's heads, good beef, hair. 'Stay here and don't go out in the street,' her mother added before retreating up the planks again, back to the workshop foreman's wife. Although the main street was still quite far away at the time.

The girl no longer remembered when they had finally left the workshop that evening. All she knew was that they returned home on foot, trudging through the dirty street snow because it was Sunday and because mother liked to say that a family was there for going places.

When the two of them were actually packing up at home about twelve months later, the mother stressed that the girl should collect all of her stuff because they would not be coming back in a hurry. But the girl was fitting into her bag only what her mother had meticulously spread on the bed, mostly clothes, shoes, books and notebooks. Since her grandparents were sulking in the large family kitchen, it was obvious that her toys, stored in a wooden chest near the stove, were out of reach. It was safer that way. The girl could not stand the reproachful glances of grandpa and grandma, who had been angry all winter long with the young family, now really gone to the dogs, as they indignantly told the neighbours. Besides, she was sure that their fury had been fanned by her mother not taking her to the doctor, as her husband had advised. And because they hadn't gone to the doctor, they probably had to move out themselves now. Still, the girl would rather move out than be treated for an illness she didn't have. Although she didn't care a bit for the cellar room on the other side of town where they'd moved. It was murky, with a pervasive smell of sodden moss, and when they brought in all their belongings, the room turned out to combine the kitchen, sitting room and bedroom. They had no corridor, toilet or bathroom of their own at all. Nor their own backyard. All these were to be shared with strangers.

'Once you've put your stuff away, you can go out in the backyard, just watch out for grease,' said the mother. The girl had little work to do. The clothes went into the closet, the shoes into the common corridor, the books and notebooks on the shelf above the sofa. It flitted through her mind that there was not much to tidy up. She hadn't been able to bring all her stuff anyway, neither the toys from the kitchen chest, nor the hen coop, nor the ribbon of grass in front of her house, nor the large stones on the edge of her former backyard, among which lizards used to dart in the heat. All these, as well as the wide state-owned plot of land, had been left there, and since she was gone, they had served nobody else, most certainly not her grandparents and other angry people.

Having donned the coat that jarred on her mother because of a mysterious, lye-resistant oil stain on the inside, the girl stepped into the open. Crossing the backyard, which she didn't care for as it didn't belong to her but to that large brown house of many temporary lodgers, she headed for the main street. She had to learn the strangers' ways.

She relished every day when she could leave that house for school. She took to lingering at school even after class, attending singing lessons, the traffic safety workshop, gym. Thus she discovered a free time which had the advantage of not having to be spent where one didn't like it. And always she was very pleased because she was so well throughout the winter that she wasn't laid up with a single flu in the big brown house.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is a member of LAF – (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 a hundred titles have been published in the series, some bilingual.

The Trubar Foundation

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of the 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

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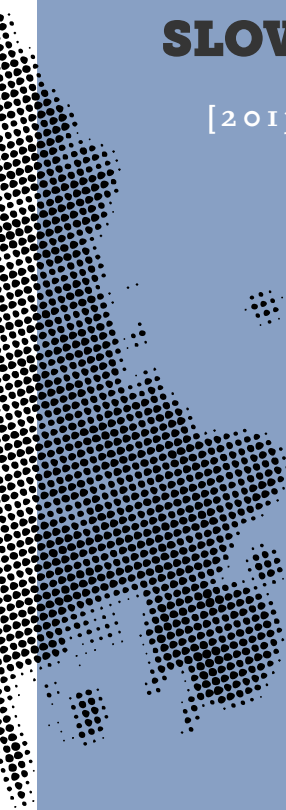
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