

10 BOOKS *from* SLOVENIA

Polona Glavan

Nataša Kramberger

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LITERATURE

POLONA GLAVAN *No Matter How*

About the author



Photo by Jure Močnik

Polona Glavan (1974) is a writer and translator. Her short stories, regularly published in literary magazines in the 1990's, were featured in the anthology of Slovenian short prose *Čas kratke zgodbe* (*Times of the Short Story*; Študentska založba, 1998) and *O čem govorimo* (*What We Talk About*; Mladinska knjiga, 2004) as well as several anthologies of Slovenian prose published abroad. Her first novel *Noč v Evropi* (*A Night in Europe*; Študentska založba, 2001) was nominated for the Kresnik Award for Best Slovenian Novel and reprinted in 2012. In 2004, her short story collection *Gverilci* (*Guerillas*, Študentska založba) came out and won the author the Zlata ptica Award for Outstanding Achievements in Literature. She translates works of modern American, English and Irish literature. Among others, her translations include *Grace Notes* by Bernard MacLaverty, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

About the book



The novel *Kakorkoli* (*No Matter How*) follows two parallel narrative voices – the voice of seventeen-year-old Lili and that of university student Alja. While Lili and her older boyfriend Mars are dealing with an unplanned pregnancy, Alja is trying to bridge the distance between her and David whom she fell in love with when she was in Ireland. Both women soon realise that the world around them is much wider and much more complex than their love woes. Through tutoring, Alja meets thirteen-year-old Senad who lives in abject poverty with his Bosnian family. Appalled at the conditions they live in, she joins an activist group fighting for minority rights. Meanwhile, Lili's boyfriend Mars loses his job after an outburst against an immigrant. The paths of the two protagonists cross in a brief but fatal moment when they find themselves head to head at the same protest demonstration ...

Excerpt

No Matter How

Translated by
Špela Bibič

And here we are, the twenty-odd of us from 3C, thrown together as if randomly into one pile, one class, but when you look at us it doesn't take a genius to see it can't be that much of a coincidence. A few idiots, a few plonkers who don't know what the fuck they are and a few of us who know a bit more about how things stand. Just enough to be aware of them. Oh yeah, and a few *cefurs*, of course. There's no class without a few *cefurs*. They're a special breed, that lot. Of course, we've been told since we were born how we're all totally the same, us and them, how you can't judge a person by where they come from or what they look like but by what they do. But hell, they can preach that to country folk like Špela who commutes from some hilltop village near Horjul, people like her might actually buy it and forget about it halfway back to their godforsaken hole where they don't have to deal with these things anyway. But someone like me who's been living among them her entire life and I guess always will – well, they can't sell that shit to me. 'Cause the point is that *cefurs*, they *do* shit that provokes you. Just look at Halilović and her daily show, look at the trackies yawning on the benches outside the shop, unable to keep their mouths shut if a broad under a hundred walks past them, *Hey doll, where ya at*; I heard that once and that was it; from then on, I prefer to detour around ten blocks of flats just to avoid them. You could say they spoil my quality of life, hell if they don't. And god forbid you ever say something, no, then you have a whole army of them after you and good luck getting them off your back. That's what happened to Zajc, Brane's mate who lives two buildings down. One time, this guy Cvijanović, an ex-Yugoslav National Army officer who thinks he's still a big shot and no one can touch him, slammed his door into Zajc's car in the car park right before his eyes. He hit it so hard it left a dent. At first he pretended like nothing happened of course, what else can you expect from a guy like him, and when Zajc finally lost it, saying he

was going to call the police, the bloke just shrugged and walked away, just like that. Then, after a couple of days when Zajc cooled off and told himself it wasn't worth it, things were only just getting started. One day he was missing a wiper, then his bumper was torn off, then someone stuck a gum to his doorbell in the middle of the night, waking the entire building before he managed to get down and scrape it off. And he kept seeing that bastard around, he seemed to be patrolling every corner on purpose, laughing in his face. He was obviously waiting for Zajc to punch him so he would finally have an excuse to get his *četnik* crew together and beat him to a pulp. Luckily, Zajc was smart enough to let it go but it gave him ten years' worth of grey hair. Yep, *čefurs* are in a class of their own when it comes to provocation. Mars has read a lot about this shit, the whole history of former Yugoslavia and the war and further back, and he says that all Balkan people have this twisted logic in their heads, that they won even if they actually lost and that that's where they get that feeling that they're better than the rest of us and of course all the other shit that comes with it. And obviously, if your parents and their parents and your uncles and aunts and the whole family have been telling you since you were born that you're a hotshot even if you're the biggest loser, you're going to think you can play the boss wherever you go. I mean, what can you say to someone who's lost but claims they've won? You can run them over with a tank and they'll go on saying they're alive and well. And when this has been going on for years and centuries, it's no longer just a matter of what you see and what you hear, it gets in your genes. Mars said that too. And of course he's not making this stuff up, there are tons of books on the subject, they're always discussing it at Orga, almost everybody's read something about it. If something keeps getting repeated long enough, it becomes genetic. Giraffes grew long necks because other animals would eat all the leaves near the ground. *Cefurs* felt they weren't good enough, so they made up they were. And us, who have always been used to a certain logic and fair-play, we let ourselves fall for it. First for the tale that we would be able to speak Slovenian, which we couldn't do before when we were under Austria, and then the one that we were brothers and that we were stronger together and that we would help each other and everything would be just great. That was kind of the long-term plan but unfortunately, it went so well people bought the whole thing no questions asked. We have it in our genes too, for fuck's sake, fooling ourselves that we're our own people now and that no one can touch us and that they're finally letting us be. Sure, they let us be. They're everywhere, they got into every fucking hole, ramming their music and their language and their customs down our throats and you can't say shit because then you're a racist and a nationalist and practically a bad guy just because you want to live in your own country and speak your mind and because you expect other people to play by the rules that apply here. Like Mars says, they want to fuck us over the nice way. Subtly. Inconspicuously. And the worst part is that people don't want to see what's really going on. That they're too lazy to think and do something about it. That they're too lazy to even listen. That they're, just like us, the people in this class, fucking *in between*. Now that I think about it, it's almost as if we're *nowhere*.

NATAŠA KRAMBERGER Wall-less

About the author



Photo by Daniele Croci

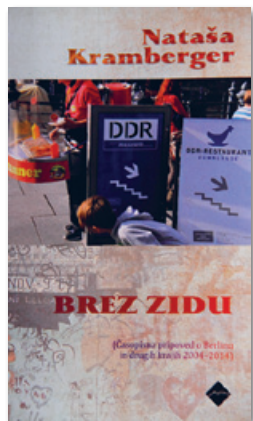
Nataša Kramberger (Maribor, 1983) writes essays, literary reportages and novels, and explores the basis of social ecology in the eco-art collective Zelena centrala in Jurovski Dol (www.zelenacentrala.eu). Her texts have been translated and published in several languages all over Europe.

Her debut novel, a novel in stories *Nebesa v robidah* (*Blackberry Heaven*) was nominated for the Kresnik Prize as Slovenia's best novel of the year in 2008 and won the EU Prize for Literature in 2010. In 2011 Kramberger published a novel in rhymes *Kaki vojaki* (*Some Soldiers*) and in 2014 a collection of literary reportages *Brez zidu. Časopisna pripoved o Berlinu in drugih krajih 2004-2014* (*Wall-Less. A Newspaper Tale of Berlin and Other*

Places 2004–2014).

Kramberger is also active as a cultural producer and networker. In Berlin, where she currently lives, she founded Periskop, an association for the promotion and connection of creative perspectives between Slovenia and Germany. When she is not in Berlin, she works in Jurovski Dol, Milano or Trieste.

About the book



On 9th November 2004, Nataša Kramberger publishes her first literary reportage from Berlin. It is entitled *Not a History, but a Part of Our Lives* and it talks about the 15th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Ten years later, Berlin is celebrating another anniversary, whilst Kramberger, the award-winning Slovenian author, offers her readers a new, very special book: *Wall-less. A Newspaper Tale of Berlin and Other Places 2004–2014*. A great voyage between journalism and fiction, a wall-less expedition of literary reportages between the places she has seen and written about in these ten years of the newest third millennium.

The central figure, Berlin, the wall-less city Kramberger has chosen to live in, love and explore, gets the synonyms and antonyms all over Europe, in Warsaw, Tirana, Maribor, but also in Havana, Cuba. The fallen Wall gets to see its eastern and western blocs, its before and after, its boxers, squats, stadiums and night shifts, its facts, memories and fairy-tales, charmingly narrated with an extreme power of words and incredible literary depth.

“Nataša Kramberger is definitely a master of literary reportages among young Slovene writers.” – Žiga Valetič, *Bukla*

Excerpt

Wall-less

Translated by
Špela Bibič

First Story

DIY

(...)

17 January 2005 “Remember, one clever punch is worth more than three hundred powerful ones,” we hear Chris say as he’s explaining the basics of combat strategies to eight year-old children. Worn trackies and focused looks, some thirty children are prancing from one wall of the school gym to the other in rhythmic sliding steps, hop forward, left, left, hop together, right, right. It may well be a dance class, but it’s actually a boxing lesson for primary pupils from Marzahn, Berlin’s easternmost district. “A good boxer is a wise boxer. He has eyes to see half a second into the future.” Hm. This smells of metaphysics, but the boys and girls in the gym seem to understand him perfectly.

“A lot of things were messed up in the DDR, but the sports policy for the young was good. At seven, every East German kid was doing at least two sports. At ten, they specialized in one. At twelve, they already knew who was going to be in the national team. But others continued to be in regular contact with sports, team sports, individual sports, amateur tournaments, and annual championships at district, city, state, international level kept the children active and in constant contact with their peers from everywhere. That’s where the most beautiful friendships

were formed and the first personal victories were won. It's true that the best were often pressured, but I think in general the rivalry wasn't as intense as it is today. Our upbringing was rather Spartan, but collaborative, comradely," explains Christian Milbradt, once a three-time East Berlin youth boxing champion.

Meanwhile, the gym is really starting to smack of sweat. The young boxing hopefuls are doing push-ups and squats, sit-ups and push-ups, jumps, squats, bend left, three steps back, one sit-up, one squat, sprint! Chris is red in the face from all the yelling, this is an explosive exercise, the little ones are changing the exercises at dictation, unpredictably, fast, faster, better. "The magic of boxing is not power, but agility. To dodge the punch, that's the mission. A hollow victory if you end up with an orbital fracture."

Chris' remarks sound like slogans, but he's not bluffing. "Young people can see right through you if you try to trick them. Either you're for real or you're better off staying away. These are mostly children from working-class and socially disadvantaged families; Marzahn has one of the highest unemployment rates in Berlin," says the coach who also goes by the nickname Mister Happy. "When I train them, I try to remember what I liked about boxing when I was a kid. The unexpectedness. The physicality. The game. These kids are exposed to violence on a daily basis, at home in their families, on the halls of their blocks of flats, in the playground, in the lift, on the street. Poverty goes hand in hand with violence. I wish that learning how to box would make them realise that the strongest is not necessarily the smartest and that sometimes you can save yourself, your pride and even your head with one duck."

The frosty darkness on the street then comes as a complete shock. The cold front has encased the lined-up square skyscrapers, the pearl of socialist proletarian architecture, and the white neon lights coming from the school gym are throwing long reflections across the crystal snow, locked in bitter cold. The four-lane in between the working-class blocks runs far east, the traffic on it inching along between high banks of ploughed snow; there is no one on the pavement and we are falling, skating, falling again.

Chilled to the bone, we skate up to a station of the circular city railway, not even bothering to check where the first oncoming train takes us. It is four pm and pitch dark outside. There is nothing but blackness when you look out the windows of the S-bahn, so we find other ways to distract ourselves. The Berlin City Railway has installed TV screens in its newest trains so they can show commercials advertising their services. The ad shows a carriage full of many different faces; a punk girl giving the finger to her fellow passengers, a granny giving a lecture on diabetes pills, a fat man sleeping with his mouth open. The slogan of the ad: City Railway – the best theatre in town. We look around our carriage and turn pale. Uh-oh. Plainclothes ticket inspectors are here! Run! We head for the door, five minutes to the next station. Great.

But people in winter gear are good people; they search their pockets slowly, opening their zippers, undoing their buttons, reaching inside their cardigans, under their sweaters, wait, wait, their hats are falling down to their noses. Where, oh where did I put my ticket? Those who don't have it are stalling out of desperation, and those who do have it know that by stalling they are doing a favour to those who don't. Or do we now see solidarity even where there is none? The inspectors are huffing nervously as they wait, their eyes ticking off everyone who is about to get away shamelessly. The clock is ticking, the next station is approaching, tick tock, tick tock, ticket, please, we run out, make our getaway, the scarf fluttering victoriously. Long live, yippee, the best theatre in town!

Once outside, we take a deep breath, ooow, minus twenty-two degrees Celsius. The air cuts through our lungs, the dry snow crunches under our shoes. We have nowhere to go in this unfamiliar part of town, so we follow our noses. Hop forward, left, left, hop together, right, right. It may well be a dance class, but it's actually a boxing lesson. We slide along the frozen paths: man to man; to dodge the punch, that's the mission.

KATARINA MARINČIČ In Their Own Words

About the author



Photo by Stane Jeršič

The writer Katarina Marinčič, born in 1968 in Ljubljana, received a PhD in French literature (Balzac) at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana where she now works as a lecturer of eighteenth and nineteenth-century French literature. She is the author of the novels *Tereza* (1989), *Rožni vrt* (*Rose Garden*, 1992) and *Prikrita harmonija* (*Hidden Harmony*, 2001), a story set in the time around the First World War, for which she received the prestigious Kresnik Award (given by *Delo*, the main Slovenian newspaper). Her book *O treh* (*Three*, 2005), awarded with the Fabula Award in 2007, contains three longer novellas that take place in different historical periods. Her newest novel, *Po njihovih besedah*

(*In their Own Words*) was published in 2014. The novel *Prikrita harmonija* was also published in German (*Die Verborgene Harmonie*, 2008).

In all her works, Katarina Marinčič experiments with the traditional forms of historical fiction. Her main artistic interest, however, lies in personal histories, not in History. She has been praised for the “almost Proustian sensitivity” of her writing, her “keen ear for details” and her “polished style”.

About the book



The novel interweaves (through the eyes of a fictitious writer) three narrative strands based on three autobiographical writings: the story of a celebrated archaeologist (Heinrich Schliemann), the story of an author of adventure novels (Karl May) and the story of a head of the secret service in an “unnamed country” set in the 20th century. The main common link between the narratives is the writer’s reflection on the falseness or truthfulness of autobiographies.

The story of the counter-intelligence agent is written in prose while parts of the archaeologist’s story are in verse (hexameter, the elegiac couplet) and the story of Karl May is presented in the form of a theatre play. The inspiration for such a mixture of genres comes, formally speaking at least, from Enlightenment novels (Diderot, Sterne). In the context of world literature, the work therefore belongs to the tradition of the modern novel, the beginnings of which most literary historians trace back to the turn of the 18th century.

The experimental nature of the Enlightenment novel, rediscovered by postmodernism, is reflected in the novel *In Their Own Words* mainly in its playing with the forms of expression in autobiographical writing. (Today, both in Slovenia and in the international arena, autobiography is one of the most current topics among writers and literary scholars alike.) In terms of its content, the work is open outwards, but at the same time – due to the character of the writer as well as the presence of an implicit reader – it is deeply embedded in Slovenian society.

Excerpt

In Their Own Words (from Chapter XV)

Translated by
Špela Bibič

“Universities are sturdy organisms!” murmured P.

It was pouring outside and he was listening to the rain. The murmur was loud, explicit, like a tiny bit over-amplified, slightly crackly recording. And yet the sound was pleasant and perfectly genuine; there was a certain healthy logic in the coming of rain after days of sunshine. P. was in his office, relishing the afternoon peace and quiet. If the weather was different, he would be quick to spoil his mood out of sheer habit, thinking it was merely the calm before the storm. But no: the storm had just passed, one could still hear the echo from the east, as if there was a quarry or a sandpit in that direction and they were just in the middle of blasting. The air had cleared. P. should be looking for metaphors for nausea, anxiety and despair elsewhere, not in meteorological phenomena.

He preferred to stay carefully optimistic. It was looking more and more likely that Cambridge would give her a PhD. They asked for her CV and select bibliography. P. had already gone through the documents; he evened up the papers, the file coded ECCD1/1 was lying closed on the right edge of his desk, *ad acta*, at least for the day – for the week, really, for it was

Thursday and institutions like Cambridge University rested over the weekend.

“Everyone is going somewhere. They don’t consider even the most urgent of documents, Comrade,” he told her: “That’s why things are the way they are over there.”

Yes. He was making fun of people with the president’s wife. And what did those couple of minutes cost him? Did he upset anyone by it? He wasn’t hurting anyone; he merely got himself a few precious moments to think about the bigger picture, to think an empty thought or two, even.

That’s why things are the way they are over there: he could easily change the meaning of words: as if he had deliberately cooked up an ambiguity for himself to find. According to them – according to ancient university institutions – there are no urgent documents. For them, there are only *important* documents (various basic and constitutional charters), but no urgent documents in the sense of urgency that an operative faces. A western or an eastern agent, there are no major differences between the two blocs.

Ancient university institutions, mused P., form an entirely different world. No, not even form, they are each a world of its own. In Oxford, people lie on the grass. (One green is not like another: satin lawns require a gentle, steady moistening.) In Cambridge, people row on the River Cam on sunny afternoons. Students and young professors, good-looking men with well-groomed, but unruly hair, put on their cricket knitwear for the weekend, their soft white sweaters or vests with red- and blue-edged V-necks. Edges in other colour combinations are also allowed.

A disturbing thought: Comrade and his wife like to sport *matching sweaters*, they have cricket sweaters in their closet and have even taken photographs wearing them. But the picture certainly hasn’t reached Cambridge. What do they know? Why on earth would they feel obliged to check who wrote the Comrade’s PhD thesis and who writes her academic articles? That kind of a check would, after all, jeopardise the careers, the freedom, perhaps the lives of their anonymous authors.

No. This last bit is nonsense. Dealing with nameless chemists from an unnamed country is not one of the responsibilities of Cambridge University. And, like I said, repeated P. to himself, Cambridge doesn’t even know, doesn’t even suspect. How could they, in that setting, imagine the conditions we have here?

Not only the weather, his good health also encouraged him to look at the world in a more lenient light. His stomach hadn’t been bothering him for weeks; the diet with acid blockers had worked. (“This way we’ll prevent the fire instead of putting it out, if you know what I mean,” said the GP standing in for Dr M. What rubbish, thought P. in anger hearing that, I’ll demand that Dr M return from her conference earlier. But he didn’t do that, firstly because he wanted to continue his genuinely good relationship with Dr M. and secondly because the drug was working. After only three capsules, the burning sensation had given way to a feeling of lukewarm emptiness, as if the walls of his stomach had been lined with rice porridge. That very day, in the afternoon after the storm, the relief began to feel natural: the artificial slime had melted into the gastric mucosa. P. could forget that he was on medication.)

KATJA PERAT Value Added Tax

About the author



Photo by Maj Pavček

Katja Perat was born on 7 January 1988 in Ljubljana. In 2012, she graduated in Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, where she continues her studies as a PhD student of Literary Sciences. She is a poet, critic, columnist and editor. Her first book of poetry *Najboljši so padli* (*The Best Have Fallen*) was published in 2011 by Študentska založba, Beletrina book series. She received the Slovenian Book Fair Award for Best First Book that same year and the Kritiško sito Award, a critics' choice award conferred by the Slovenian Literary Critics' Association, in 2012. The book was also nominated for the Veronika Award and the Jenko Award. Her second poetry collection *Davek na dodano vrednost* (*Value Added Tax*) came out in 2014 with Literatura. It won great critical acclaim and was again nominated for the Veronika Award and the Jenko Award. She has appeared at several literary festivals: Pranger and Days of Poetry and Wine in 2012, Vilenica in 2013 and Literodrom in 2015. Her poetry has been translated into Serbian, German, French, Flemish, English, Catalan and Japanese. A selection of her poems was featured in the anthology *Od Dekleve do Peratove* (*From Dekleva to Perat*) and the international anthology *Fear of Language*.

About the book



One could say that Katja's poetry alleviates and smooths over misunderstandings that arise between the two sides. Her poetic process, at times flirtatiously direct in its fraternization between the lyrical subject and the empirical author, is like the writing of notes, annotations and explanations to a punchline verse that appears in most of her poems. Despite its semantic intensity (which is what makes the author's verses so appropriate for being taken out of context and used independently as aphorisms), its full expression requires – a poem. The effect this process brings about, sometimes in the form of a conclusion to the poem, can be ever so slight, "trivial" even, as is seemingly the case with everything that we're not used to in a given context. Just like we're not used to hearing songs – if they're not exactly pop songs – about someone who is simply happy, even just for a bit, or offering a hug to someone that will help them carry the weight of deep insights. Katja's is a poetry that stems from the realisation that life itself is a habit that is harder to kick than thinking. And she is not afraid to admit it in her poetry. For values are relative, it is tax rates that give the world some provisional stability.

From the blurb by Urban Vovk

Excerpt

Understanding Distance

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Literature sets some impossible demands
Like writing a poem about Italy
Because the latter is beautiful and important
And binds you with everything
That is superior in art,
Or like writing a poem about how you get laid
Because everyone should understand
How changed forever love will be
Once it has passed through your hands.

One has to go very far
Or use very complicated tools,
So that things such as church façades
Or the relief of a landscape
Can gain more meaning.
One has to be merciless,

Force beauty to be non-binding,
To let itself be observed from a distance,
To not demand anything for itself.
One has to think like the owners of large factories,
Like encyclopaedists,
Like those in power.
One has to practise distancing oneself
Until there appears the outline of
Homesickness in Bologna,
Rapture in Naples,
Unsuitable footwear in Florence
And toothache in Rome
As well as the skin temperature,
Facial expressions and wakefulness of the people
Beside whom you wake up,
Arranged, sorted, controlled.

Though it can come in handy,
Understanding distance.
In the realm of the everyday,
Where certain layers of understanding,
Although beautiful and important,
Don't apply
And you can no longer count on their support,
In the sphere of talking, kissing and doing business,
In the sphere of interests,
Among human affairs,
Under the reign of endeavours,
Deaths, family disputes
And unadjustable political decisions,
In the midst of the gentle thoughtlessness
Of the organic world and market economy,
This can help.

Noting down
(Like someone
Who can apportion precisely each wound its allowed depth,
Like someone who has become barely involved)
How the sun falls down behind the Tuscan scenery
Or how it rises above the naked shoulder
On your left
Is learning to control the world.
Fulfilling the impossible demands of literature is
Learning how to survive.

ANDREJ PREDIN *Future Ltd.*

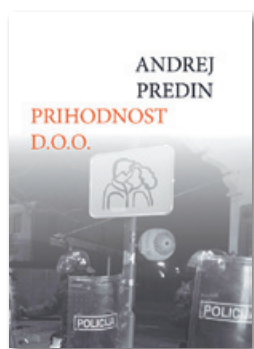
About the author



Photo by Ana Pandur

Writer and publicist Andrej Predin (1976) attended primary and secondary school in Maribor, then moved to Ljubljana to study biology. The three greatest loves of his life are music, books and sports (first climbing, kayaking and marathons and now boxing). As a student he spent a year in China, travelling from Tibet to Hong Kong and exploring nature. He wrote his first novel *Na zeleno vejo* (*Getting Ahead*, 2007) when he returned to Slovenia and achieved considerable success – the book made the list for the national literary competition, sparking off great controversy over its allegedly indecent and inappropriate content. It was followed by the novel *Učiteljice* (*Schoolmistresses*, 2010) in which Predin further polished his literary style. His third novel *Prihodnost d.o.o.* (*Future Ltd.*, 2014) is the last in his Maribor trilogy. He is currently writing stories about a little girl called Mica that are the product of collaboration with renowned illustrator Marjan Manček and have been translated into English and Turkish (*Mica pri babici: Čarobni cilinder* – *Mica at Granny's: The Magic Hat*, 2013; *Mica pri babici: Čarovniki iz dežele Merikaka* – *Mica at Granny's: Wizards from the Land of Merikaka*, 2014). His green picture book *Gnusna kalnica* (*Mucky Murkyland*) won the author the nomination for the Desetnica Award.

About the book



Andrej Predin caused quite a stir on the Slovenian literary scene with the publication of his first book *Getting Ahead*, set in the time of transition in Maribor during the decline of the city's industry and consequently the decline of values, ideals and the way of life for the people of the City by the River Drava. *Future Ltd.* completes the Maribor trilogy which, in addition to the two previously mentioned books, includes the novel *Schoolmistresses*. In his last book, the author returns to the present where, through the eyes and actions of a single father, he's trying to find a way to make a decent living. He decides to open a fortune teller's shop, though he doesn't know much about fortune-telling. He gets help from his friends who make their predictions come true to establish his credibility. Such interventions in the main character's local community soon produce a snowball effect as initial acts of kindness trigger new ones, causing a chain effect and improving the quality of life in the neighbourhood that has been greatly affected by the economic crisis. As the plot unfolds, the protagonist's primary materialistic motivation becomes a question of conscience and gives way to the realisation that everyone must do their part to improve the local community. *Future Ltd.* is a unique homage to the forgotten generation of young people who cannot find the necessary support to live a normal life in these difficult times and are forced to enter into demeaning jobs and employment relationships, readily taken advantage of by better-off and ideologically-motivated individuals. The novel *Future Ltd.* makes for a fun and enjoyable read that works in every environment and with readers of all generations.

Excerpt

Future Ltd.

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Darja and I took Marcel and Klara to the pool. Her ex-husband hasn't been around. Darja says he's obviously lost interest. I guess he got scared when he realised we've accepted her in our gang. We're lucky with the weather; the mountains of Pohorje have stopped the clouds and treated us to some real summer heat. Everything else is the same as always. The women have undone their bras at the back, soaking up the soothing rays of sunshine, and the men have taken refuge in a nearby bar to get away from the scorching heat.

Tine and Bine have found themselves a summer job; they have a huge bouncy castle on the Maribor Island for children to bounce on for a price. But it's not very popular because Tine and Bine are jumping on it all the time, the towers of the colourful fort swaying dangerously from side to side, scaring the kids.

Only small children with cute mummies are let into the twins' inflatable kingdom and given free minutes of frolicking on the castle. Even if the mummies are in a hurry, they have a hard time getting their children off the castle. The most determined of them run after them inside

the castle to get them out. There's nothing better than seeing a mummy in her swimming costume tripping and falling on an inflatable air cushion. Tine and Bine each have their own camera at the ready to take pictures.

"We're nip slip hunters," they brag to me in unison.

"I have eleven of them," says Tine.

"I have twenty," boasts Bine.

Tine protests because, according to his criteria, it's not a double catch if a mummy exposes both nipples at the same time. That makes sense to me.

Darja says she needs to work on her tan, stretches, then lies motionless on the towel like a lizard. I watch her for a while; I wave my hand in front of her sunglass-covered face to check if she's dozed off.

"Are you asleep?" I whisper. No answer.

I pluck up the courage to take a good look at her after all these years. The fuzz on her neck, her beauty mark, her slender arms; her arse is a little more saggy than I remember and her swimming costume is wedged in between, which is almost a rule here on the Maribor Island. Nevertheless, I'm happy to realise she's held up nicely; she's still firm and attractive.

I lift my gaze for a moment to make sure that the children are still safely splashing about in the pool before I let it fall back on Darja's body. I take a deep breath. I close my eyes, taking in the smell of coconut oil emanating from her skin, filling my lungs with it.

"What are you doing?" she asks.

I pull back hastily.

"Oh, nothing really. I thought you were asleep!"

"Were you smelling my arse?"

I smooth my moustache as I've got in the habit of doing when I feel ill at ease. I try to think of an excuse, then realise I don't really need one and tell her the truth.

"I wanted to smell your tanning coconut oil; it reminds me of our trip to Sicily."

Darja dexterously ties the top of her bathing costume between her shoulder blades, then turns and leans back on her elbows.

"You remember that? How cute."

"I thought you were asleep."

"You thought I was asleep, but I can see you're up," she says, letting her sunglasses slide lower down her nose so I can see where her gaze is directed.

The treacherous protrusion has made a tent out of my grey swimming trunks. I haven't noticed it and of course it's too late now. I cross my legs and quickly check if the kids are still in the water. Luckily they're having their fun at a safe distance.

"Don't worry about it. Be glad that you're healthy and that you're still, well, you know, ready," she barely manages to say before she bursts into laughter. "I'm sorry," she says, laughing even harder. "I didn't mean to embarrass you."

"What are you laughing about?" say the kids as they run up to us, happy that we're in a good mood.

"Just reminiscing a little," I hurry to say before Darja has a chance to give me away.

"Here, go get yourself some slide tokens," I say, giving them some money to get rid of them as quickly as possible. I watch them run around the corner. Why do children never walk anywhere, they always run?

SEBASTIJAN PREGELJ *A Chronicle of Forgetfulness*

About the author



Photo by Jože Suhadolnik

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, his graduation coinciding with the publication of his first book, the short story collection *Burkači, skrunilci in krivoprišežniki* (*Jokers, Desecrators and Perjurers*). He then went on to publish two more collections of short stories, *Cirilina roža* (*Cirila's Flower*) and *Svinje brez biserov* (*Pigs without Pearls*), before in 2004 his first novel *Leta milosti* (*Years of Mercy*) came out. Then followed the novels *Na terasi babilonskega stolpa* (*On the Terrace of Babel*, 2008), *Mož, ki je jahal tigra* (*The Man Who Rode a Tiger*, 2010), *Pod srečno zvezdo* (*Under a Lucky Star*, 2013) and finally

Kronika pozabljanja (*A Chronicle of Forgetfulness*, 2014). Three of Pregelj's novels were shortlisted for the Kresnik Award for Best Novel of the Year conferred by the daily paper *Delo*.

2010 saw the publication of the literary guide *Literarne poti Ljubljane*, to which he contributed all the texts. The English translation *The Ljubljana Literary Trail* followed a year later. In the summer of 2014, his novel *Under a Lucky Star* was published in serial form in the newspaper *Večer*.

Pregelj's short stories have been featured in several anthologies in German, Slovak, Polish and English translation. The German translation of his novel *On the Terrace of Babel* was published in 2013. A year later, Pregelj published his first children's book, *Duh Babujan in prijatelji* (*Babujan the Ghost and Friends*).

Sebastijan Pregelj is a member of the Slovene Writers' Association. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

About the book



A Chronicle of Forgetfulness deals with man's greatest, yet ever-losing battle – the battle with time or death – but is also aware that time is held together by crumbling memories that can either be trusted or not. As far as its form is concerned, it is often prose poetry immersed in a diary.

The protagonist in Pregelj's novel, who recently turned eighty, lives in a one-bedroom assisted living apartment. He likes his peace and quiet and hardly needs other people. But that changes when a woman named Konstanca moves into the apartment next door. Almost at the same time, stories of immigrants from all over the world and of homeless people who have nothing start eating away at his conscience. At their last stop, the pensioners are given a chance to start changing the world for the better, which makes them feel alive once again.

A Chronicle of Forgetfulness meditatively washes the story away, allowing the beauty that really is life to come shining through: a few bits of experience, a few revisions, some love, a little bit of everything.

Excerpt

A Chronicle of Forgetfulness

Translated by
Špela Bibič

All The Windows In My Life Have Faced East

My mornings start early. They say that elderly people don't need much sleep. I didn't need much sleep even when I was young. Five or six hours were enough for me. It's no different now, only my sleep is lighter. And I never wake up feeling truly refreshed. I usually wake up when it is still dark outside and the room is dim because the lights cannot be turned off completely. The eyes are quick to adjust.

When I wake up, I am wide awake. I never lie in, never try to go back to sleep; I get up immediately and go to the bathroom.

Wrapped in my bathrobe and with socks on my feet, I go back to the bedroom and sit by the window. My window faces east. That was my only condition when I moved in: the window must face east. Everything else is less important. The staff tried to persuade me that the equipment was the same in all the apartments, meaning that all the apartments were equally good. I don't care about the equipment, I told them. I care about the windows. I want to be looking eastwards.

All the windows in my life have faced east.

Most people don't know what the world looks like at the break of dawn. And very few of those who see it because they happen to be awake because of work, sickness, worries or for no apparent reason, are aware of the beauty of the first moments of the umpteenth repetition of creation. Most people are just glad that another night has passed.

I have been watching the birth and the advent through east-facing windows all my life. Each morning reminds me that I have to be happy and satisfied with what I have. And I really do have a lot. I was born on the better side of the world, a side where we believe life is easier and better. It doesn't take much to see what it's like on the worse side of the world. I only need to turn on the TV or the radio, look at the front page of a newspaper. Sometimes I wonder if people on our side of the world even realise it. I'm afraid they don't.

Of course every once in a while they attend a charity event and donate some money to one charity or other. They don't care what this organisation's employees will do with the money. They say that it's out of their hands and that abuse happens everywhere. Some help will eventually get to where it was supposed to. And that is better than nothing.

I feel ashamed. Our help doesn't come from the heart, it comes out of our hands; it's splattered with poisonous saliva. Our help mostly comes too late and falls into the wrong hands. And we are happy with that. Not only that, we expect people to whom we send expired drugs and excess food in dented cans, cast-off clothes and worn-out tents that we no longer have any use for to be grateful.

Here, on the better side of the world, we have big ships and planes. But we don't build planes and ships to transport people to where life is easier and better. Nor are we prepared to share our knowledge that could be used to create a better world. We want them to stay where there's scarcity, where nothing grows out of the sand because the water has run dry and there will be no rain for the next hundred or two hundred years, we want them to stay where the ground is poisoned a few feet deep and acid rain is falling from the sky and where they cannot see the sun on any day of the year because of the smog. We want them to need our help. We build planes and ships to take everything we no longer need to them. And there is more and more of what we no longer need. If everything we take there stayed here, we would suffocate in our own rubbish. One cannot wear five pairs of trousers at the same time, cannot eat twenty pounds of macaroni per day and cannot talk on twenty phones at once. If the worse part of the world is not properly grateful for our help, we throw a few automatic rifles, mines, bombs and machetes in the containers and the whole thing starts all over again.

The world is beautiful only from one side. Only this side has windows facing east, better than the other windows. They don't have windows facing east on the other side. They don't have any windows at all on the other side.

On the worse side of the world, they make boats that are too delicate for waves rising several feet high, in which they try to get to our side in long dark nights. Once aboard, they keep their eyes and their mouths closed so that their corneas and teeth wouldn't give them away. They wait to see what happens. Until the boat capsizes. If the boat doesn't capsize, they are stopped by a patrol boat that tows them to the harbour where they wrap them in blankets, give them some food and water, then load them onto ships that are strong enough to withstand the waves rising several feet high to take them back to their side of the world.

On the worse side of the world, people sew cloaks from thick animal skins and set out across snowy mountain passes wearing sandals or going barefoot. They walk in long columns and never break up, not even when they're fired at by border guards. Those who manage to get over the ridge hope that the patrol on the better side of the world won't catch them. Those who get caught are served a warm meal in the shelter and taken back to the worse side of the world on a truck. We don't care what happens to them over there.

JANA PUTRLE SRDIĆ *This Night the Beetles Will Come Out of the Ground*

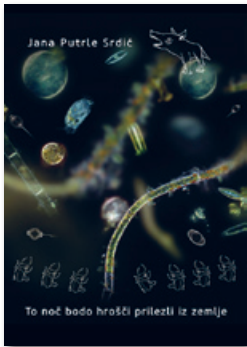
About the author

Photo by ZSJ



Jana Putrle Srdić (b. 1975) is a poet and intermedia art producer. She has collaborated on different art projects, combining poetry with new media and published three poetry books: *Kutine* (*Quinces*, 2003); *Lahko se zgodi karkoli* (*Anything Could Happen*, 2007) and *To noč bodo hrošči prilezli iz zemlje* (*This Night the Beetles Will Come Out of the Ground*, 2014) with the same publisher: Centre for Slovenian Literature. Her writings are regularly featured in both Slovenian and foreign literary magazines, her poems have been translated into numerous languages and included in 15 Slovenian and international anthologies. The Spanish title of her book is *Puede pasar cualquier cosa* (Buenos Aires, 2011). Another selection *Anything Could Happen* was published in 2014 by New York publisher A Midsummer Night's Press. Her next two books are coming out in Bucharest and Madrid in 2015. She has appeared at poetry festivals and readings in numerous countries around the world (South America, Russia, Europe). Besides translating poetry from English, Russian and Serbian (Robert Hass, Sapphire, Ana Ristović, *Contemporary Russian Poetry*), she occasionally writes art film reviews and is cofounder of the Gulag Institute for Arts and Cultures.

About the book



In her third collection, the author is interested in nature that is culture and vice versa: culture that is nature. Beyond what we consider nature – a manageable and controlled spectrum of life bound by the laws of chemistry, biology, physics. She acknowledges that the cybernetic age of today is redefining the boundaries of nature completely: we take refuge in our cars to get away from morning hail, but what about the unpredictable nature of the rush hour traffic? And isn't the uncontrolled matter of the Internet about as unimaginable as dark matter that makes up 96 percent of space? Where does nature end and culture begin? The relationship between the nature and culture of modern man remains an open dilemma.

Finally, the poet sees animals as “mute” conversation partners. This key difference between speaking and non-speaking animals brings about unthinkable effects. Wolves, dogs, birds, beetles. Trees, the (rain)forest, the mycelial network, neurons. The poem pauses before a burning block of wood and wonders. Wonders that it is like it is, wonders that there is anything at all. “Nature is a theme on Descartes’ thought,” it says prophetically. But nature is not chemical formulas and biological derivations keeping it at a safe distance. The more we lose touch with it, the more intense are the close encounters; the more we try to subjugate nature, the more it gets in our face.

Under the surface of poetry it's teeming with life. This poetry collection is an intellectually convincing and intuitive poetic contribution to some of the most important discussions of our time, shaped by ecology, bioethics, biopolitics and cybernetics.

From the foreword by Mojca Pišek

Excerpt

This Night the Beetles Will Come Out of the Ground

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Fish

No matter how carefully you cut into the belly
of this wonderful silver fish and clean
the entrails, wipe the dust from the shelves,
and place fragile objects somewhere high,
safety will not save you from fear.
Misery doesn't ensure a good
poem. The closeness of death only makes you
more alone. Filled with joy, like an aquarium

with spawning fish,
we watch the ducks
follow one another with their shovel-like feet,
one two one two
in a line.
There is an order in everything,
some feathery lightness.

Explorers Wonder

Things used to be simple:
if you were slow, some beast would eat you.
The quick sometimes fell off the edge.

Today I'm safely surrounded by walls of books,
most unread. Each is a new world
that opens into even more unknown
ones and makes me feel discouraged.

What remains are bananas (from a banana
plantation? Unimaginable) and water dripping
through the drains like honey on this lazy afternoon.

The wolf-dog is sprinting up the hill,
her thoughts the shape of steep slopes.
Pure surplus.

You talk to me like a jungle
that swallows a dinosaur.

I make love to you like a fireball
exploding out of a volcano when the lava bursts.
In Herzog's documentary about Antarctica,
which doesn't explore the complex
behavior of penguins,
but why are we there.
Where are we digging.

Winter Slowness

Everything is happening to you with a delay:
one verse again and again.
A thousand times the same move, the knife over potatoes,
the hand across the body.
You turn the wheel and shift gears.
Nothing special, you're staring at the crystal
on your table, you're listening to the dog's breathing.
Most often, things just are.
She waves when you drive by,
cars drive through the green light,
stop at the red.
Everything is yet to come or is already gone:
love, solitude, work.
And everything is good for something,
even this damn cold that will kill all the ticks.

VERONIKA SIMONITI *The Stone Seed*

About the author



Photo by Laura Sozi

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 the first prize in a competition organised by the *Literatura* magazine. Since then, her work has been published in more literary magazines and on the radio as well. She has won several awards and nominations. Her first collection, twenty short stories headed *Zasukane štorije* (*Twisted Stories*), which came out in the summer of 2005, was nominated for the Best First Book of the Year later that year and was one of the four nominees for the Best Short Story Collection of the past two years in January 2006 and 2007 (the Fabula Award). 2011 saw the publication of her second short story collection, *Hudičev jezik* (*The Devil's Tongue*), once again by LUD Literatura Publishing. Two of the stories appeared in the Summer Stories section of the leading Slovene broadsheet *Delo*. She is featured in an English-language anthology of short prose, *A Lazy Sunday Afternoon* (2007), which brings together Slovene authors born after 1960 (*Litterae Slovenicae*, Slovene Writers' Association), as well as in the anthology of Slovene women authors, *Klič me po imenu* (*Call Me by My Name*, Študentska Založba, 2013). Excerpts of her stories have also appeared in translation catalogues of Slovene 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, Hungarian and Czech. In 2014, the publishing house Litera published her first novel, *Kameno seme* (*The Stone Seed*).

About the book



Rarely has a central metaphor been chosen with such care while being open to so many different and multi-layered interpretations. The stone seed referred to in the title is primarily the stone that someone throws at João that, in turn, triggers a chain of events which uncover the secrets of a small community of locals and holidaymakers in the holiday village Anti in Croatia. The people in this community can also be said to live lives set in stone, stuck in the bygone days, either because of relationships that some of them stay in even if the spark is long gone or was nothing more than an illusion to begin with, or because of their bourgeois conservatism on which their whole identity rests. Last but not least, the stone can be seen as a kind of metaphor of the novel's wonderful mosaic-like structure – a single story illuminated from the subjective perspectives of protagonists whose different understandings, different views and beliefs, even cultural and national backgrounds, slowly piece together the big picture before the reader's eyes. The novel therefore contains elements of a psychological, family, detective or crime novel, a love and coming-of-age novel.

The Stone Seed's greatest strength is its detailed insight into the minds of individual literary characters (...) Some of the chapters would probably work as independent short stories or novellas, which also speaks to the book's perfection and the reading pleasure it brings.

From the review The Stone that Started the Avalanche by Aljoša Harlamov, Delo

Excerpt

The Stone Seed

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The only ones who had even crazier parties were the foreigners from the new villa, *Bungalow Residence* it said on the fence, that stood above Marko's house; they also had a pool and a couple of acres of garden planted with the most beautiful Mediterranean plants. On the driveway stood cars with the Italian registration MI. She had to admit that the estate was tasteful and beautiful, but during the week, when Marko would be blind drunk by nine pm and all she had was the TV, she listened to those above her partying out on the terrace, she heard the humming of the smooth, sky-blue chlorinated water under the spotlights splashing against the edges of the pool, men's and women's voices, twenty- to thirty-year-olds having fun; one woman's voice was

particularly hysterical, louder than the others', and she couldn't stand it for the life of her". So she sat in front of the echoing television until her eyes started to close, then lied down next to Marko who snored away with his beer breath or cried out in his sleep every once in a while.

One night in early July, people from the bungalow were having another one of their parties when she was already lying next to the plastered Marko. It was one thirty am. She was trying to fall sleep, but couldn't: they come here and put up this palace on a plot you couldn't build on two years ago, for which they had to bribe more than one person down at the municipality and it was built by cheap foreign labour force. Then they send down their kids so they don't have to listen to them back home, a bunch of spoilt brats with full bank accounts and gold credit cards who don't know what to do with all this wealth. Then all of a sudden she didn't recognise herself anymore: her body got up and went out to the garden, behind the bushes by the fence where they couldn't see her, and yelled in the harshest voice she could muster: "Shut up, you animals! Shut up, you Berlusconi hysteric!"

To her great surprise, their racket died down immediately, a dead emptiness filled the air, its hollowness hanging in the air between the two gardens: what was happening at that moment on the other side of the fence, did the people there just freeze or did they go back to the house wrapped in their towels – she couldn't see that because she ran inside; despite her retreat, she went back to bed like a winner a few moments later, trying to snuggle up to Marko's clammy skin, as if wanting to let him know through his dreams that the enemy was defeated, her weapon had worked like a charm, the warning shot hit the bull's eye. Her heart was pounding from all the excitement and it took her a long time to go back to sleep, but the feeling was good, sweet, just.

The following day, she didn't mention anything to Marko; for some reason, she couldn't bring herself to tell him and wasn't particularly tempted to; in fact, she wanted to prolong the pleasure of her secret; she awaited the following night with delight, guessing how much time her scare tactics would buy her.

Marko had been drinking again; he started at breakfast while she went to the garden, behind the bushes, trying to find out if the group by the pool was talking about last night's incident, if her yelling had made any changes to their vacation. Could she, an invisible woman, have had an effect on other people's lives, complete strangers, no less? She could see them through the myrtle leaves, sitting there, moving about in pointless movements, talking quite calmly as if nothing had happened, rubbing sunscreen on their well-cared-for, smooth, tanned, scar-free bodies.

Three nights later, there was another party. This time they got even more wasted apparently, the poor fuckers who only needed two bottles for the lot of them to start singing and screaming and jumping in the pool and then they couldn't even drag themselves inside. Once again, she was sitting alone in front of the half-turned-down television; from behind the screen came the hollow, indefatigable voice of a sports commentator who paid no attention to the sounds from the bungalow. She waited until two, then got up and went out; when she was almost by the fence, she picked up a stone. It was a nice, rough stone with pointed tips and sharp edges, it fit her hand nicely; she weighted it, spread her fingers and looked at it. A moment later it flew off, violently, in a gripping dramatic arc, almost hitting its target; that was the point, *almost* hitting its target to frighten the people on the other side.

ANDREJ E. SKUBIC *Just Come Home*

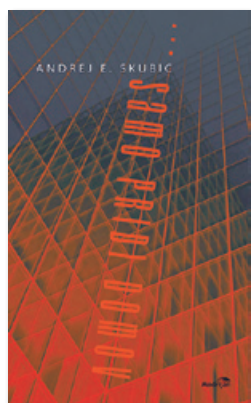
About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pintar

Andrej E. Skubic was born in 1967. He published his first stories in literary magazines in 1989; in 1999 he published his first full-length novel, *Bitter Honey*, which won the prestigious Kresnik Award for the best novel, as well as the Best Debut award. This was followed by five more novels (*Fužine Blues*, 2001; *Popcorn*, 2006; *Can*, 2009; *How Much Are You Mine?* 2011; *Just Come Home*, 2014), a short stories collection (*Madhouse*, 2004), a scientific monograph in sociolinguistics (*Faces of Language*, 2005), three theatre plays (*Countless Numbered Days*, 2009; *Paula Above the Precipice*, 2013; *Hurrah, Nosferatu*, 2015). He was also active as a TV script writer and newspaper columnist. The main topic of his writing is human condition in the times of political and ethical transition in the contemporary Slovenian society, which tends to develop toward the paradoxes of the archetypal human issues. His works won several important national awards, including the highest Slovenian artistic Prešeren Award; he also won the national Sovre Award for his translations of Scottish and American literature. His books have been translated in Czech, German, Croatian, Russian, Serbian and English.

About the book



In his novel *Just Come Home*, Andrej E. Skubic tackles a very current topic that has not been properly discussed in Slovenian literature before: the world of political tycoons and corruption. Though the swirl of events that reads both as crime fiction and drama keeps serving us points of reference that feel very much familiar from public life, this is not a roman à clef; nor is it a reflection of the current political situation.

Leon Berden loses his prestigious job at a law firm after revealing a client's dirty business secrets at a press conference. But even though this makes him a hero in the eyes of the public, his independent practice that he sets up is more or less deserted. Tension also builds up in his family as, due to his downfall, the role of the main breadwinner is taken on by his wife who accepts the position of state secretary and he isn't too thrilled about being their daughter's babysitter. To make things even more complicated, he has an affair with a former classmate, now a journalist, whose main interest seems to be the real reason behind his irrational betrayal of his client's confidence. Needless to say, the truth only emerges at the end when Leon falls into the hole that he has dug himself ...

The novel is an analysis of the current social and political morality without the moralising; of men-women relationships in an ultra-capitalist society without the sexism; and of eternal topics such as temptation, human intimacy, social success and downfall. A novel that holds up a mirror that the Slovenian society so desperately needs.

Excerpt

Just Come Home

Translated by
Špela Bibič

– So, how was it? asks Agnes, grinning, jumping on one foot as she's pulling a shoe off the other one. – I've heard most of it on the radio anyway.

– It was medium shitty, says Leon.

– Did he give you a hard time, Malevič? asks Agnes. She heads for the bedroom to take her clothes off.

– A little bit. Too bad you weren't there.

Agnes just looks at him.

– You have a licence, says Leon. – What if you represented me? Instead of that plank, Zuljan?

– The two of you have an intimate enough relationship, says Agnes.

– Yes, but I can't turn him on with my brilliant performances.

– Oh, you want to turn me on, do you? asks Agnes, intrigued. – Because that would be nice.

Just let me relax a bit first.

Leon thinks.

– I am a little tired though, he says. – You try being interrogated sometime.

– Ah, that again, says Agnes stoically. – Go on. Tie me to the bed and interrogate me closely if I've been a bad girl.

– Have you?

– I'm not telling you that. If you're not tying me up.

– I'll tickle it out of you.

Leon jumps Agnes, who's wearing nothing but her bra and knickers, and starts tickling her. She starts shrieking.

– Come on, stop it! Don't be a prick.

Naomi walks into the room, watching the scene with great interest.

– What are you doing? she asks.

– Daddy's punishing mummy, says Leon, still grabbing Agnes by the ribs. Naomi watches.

– Me too, she says lying down on their double bed. Leon lets Agnes go and turns to Naomi. – I've been a bad girl too.

Leon laughs and starts poking his fingers in Naomi's ribs until she's screaming and squirming.

– How were you bad? How were you bad? shouts Leon.

– I didn't want to eat lunch at kindergarten! We had kefir! Kefir's yucky. There are germs in it.

Leon lets go of her and looks at her, smiling.

– There are no germs in kefir. – Kefir is healthy.

– No it's not! Granny had a friend over and she was telling her about it, I heard everything.

– What did you hear? Who was saying what?

– Granny was saying it. Granny knows a lady who knows a lady and a man who make kefir. From germs!

– We used to make it at home for a while too, says Leon, watching Agnes as she's pulling her shirt up.

– No! yells Naomi. They have a factory!

– Oh, a factory?

– Yes! And they're very sick all the time because they put so many different germs into the kefir to make kefir, because you can't make kefir without them. She said that every year ... twice every year, they have to eat a lot of medicines to get better, otherwise they would die. Because they're surrounded by germs all the time.

– You must've mixed something up, Naomi, says Agnes, putting on her gym shorts.

– Did not! It's true! screams Naomi. – She said that, in this line of business ... in this line of business, no one could ever pass a sanititary test because everybody's sick all the time. Dad, what does pass mean?

– I don't think she has, says Leon. – That sounds totally like Manja to me.

– You spend too much time with granny, says Agnes. – Don't you think you spend too much time with granny?

– I do not. Granny's funny.

– Oh, she's funny?

– Yes. Dad said so too. Dad, what does pass mean?

Agnes throws a glance at Leon who spreads his arms.

– Oh, so Manja's funny? says Agnes. – And what do you ever do for the child?

Leon looks at her.

– I never said anything about what I do for the child, he says. – It's just that Manja is funny, she's objectively funny. You've said that yourself.

Agnes sighs.

– What kind of family are we? she says as she walks out of the bedroom towards the kitchen.

– I don't know, says Leon. – Seems to me like any other.

– Daaad, drawls Naomi.

– You can do or pass a test, says Leon. – If you do a test and the test says you're fine, you've passed it.

– We didn't always used to be like this, says Agnes from the kitchen, filling the plates.

ANDREJ TOMAŽIN *Stramor's Footsteps*

About the author



Photo by Andreja Prijatelj

Andrej Tomažin (1988) obtained his BA in Slovenian studies and comparative literature from the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. His prose and poetry have appeared in all major Slovenian magazines (*Literatura*, *Apokalipsa*, *Dialogi* and *Mentor*), the Serbian anthology *Rukopisi* and the Croatian anthology *Lapis Histriae*. He writes the odd literary review, but devotes much more of his time to music criticism and essays. He has been working at the oldest broadcasting student radio Radio Študent since 2009 and is a contributing author for the online magazine *Odzven*. Since March 2014, he maintains the music archive at Radio Študent. He is also the author of the monthly radio show *Otitis Media* in which he explores new-media, technological and software realities and philosophical deviations through the lens of (club) electronic music, mostly in the form of interviews and other intimate dialogues and polylogues. He was co-editor of the Škratova čitalnica Film School journals published by KUD Anarhiv.

His first short story collection *Stramorjevi koraki* (*Stramor's Footsteps*) that came out at the end of 2014 has won many favourable reviews and praise from experts and general readers alike. At the beginning of 2015, he started working on his second book of prose that he believes will turn out to be a novel.

In addition to literature, he devotes himself to field recordings and electroacoustic music. He lives in Ljubljana.

About the book



"Andrej Tomažin's first book of prose *Stramor's Footsteps* hit the degraded and more or less exclusive world of Slovenian literature like a comet. [...] On top of its fresh and innovative lexicon that compels the reader to put in some effort, I can only say that it's been a long time since I've stumbled upon such dense, yet lively (literary) language." (Babnik, *Dnevnik*, 2 December 2014); "Muanis Sinanović sees progressiveness in Andrej Tomažin's first book of prose *Stramor's Footsteps*, as 'in terms of form, he has eliminated the distinction between progressive and conservative, between the urban middle class and farmers, the country middle class'." (Divjak, *LUD Literatura*, 22 January 2015); "The book *Stramor's Footsteps* [...] stands out for its innovative material and formal structure. Unlike other debuts by young Slovenian writers still searching for their literary expression, Tomažin's work seems polished almost to perfection in terms of its style, [...] its dynamic and antinomic construction will continue to boggle the minds of many a literary scholar, critic, philologist and philosopher for some time to come." (Gams, *LUD Literatura*, 22 January 2015); "Andrej Tomažin's first book of prose, the short story collection *Stramor's Footsteps*, radiates boldness, brazenness, even. [...] I wouldn't say that the consummation of *Stramor's Footsteps* brings pleasure, as it demands a fair amount of patience and concentration on the part of the reader." (Krkoč, *Dnevnik*, 12 January 2015); "It's safe to say that the stories possess a certain literary *dexterity*. [...] What gives the text an air of authority is undoubtedly the already mentioned distinctiveness of its vocabulary and hence its convincingness, from descriptions of various trades and the use of proper jargon to highly specialised knowledge, such as different types of moths." (Rus, *Pogledi*, 28 January 2015)

Excerpt

Stramor's Footsteps

Translated by
Špela Bibič

In a slow gesture of defiance, he got up from his familiar position, for only the first quarter of his cigarette had fallen off. He headed leftwards along the wall, with all the flickering darkness before his eyes, to get to the switch that turned on the light outside the stable doors. These were covered by a metal grate and locked with a gold-coloured padlock. The light shone through the darkness. It took a few seconds for his eyes to get used to the glare of the spotlights. And even then the image before his eyes was unclear for, under the canopy and all around, from the right side of the house to the garden on the left, were small swarms of moths flocking together,

a grey-brown river of an uncontrolled movement of wings that, instead of spreading out and making use of the space around them, bumped into each other and fell to the ground, regained some space after a few seconds and rose until they brushed against – this time a completely different – moth, the collision causing them to lose their recently gained altitude yet again. It went round and round; like a confined circle of constraint. *Milan's* eyes wandered from one corner to the other, until he started walking towards the moths in his thick rubber sole slippers and got lost in their embrace on the first contact.

They glistened from the front, and from the back they came out of the darkness like tar-covered dolls. Their shadows proved that they existed, but because of the enveloping darkness it was impossible to tell how many more flew at the back. They brushed their wings against his shoulders and a bit lower, where his shirt was rolled up, they got caught in his thick black hairs. Here and there they formed assemblies of moths, bumping into the exposed parts of his body. They filled the space all the way down to the ground, so *Milan* dragged his foot discordantly over the courtyard gravel to avoid trampling on them. Some of them he tried to wave away from his eyes and they fell to the ground. For a split second, his mind flashed back to the image of a meadow and a forest through which he was chasing a big swarm of moths. Orange swifts with white stripes over their wings. Timidly brown European corn borers. Death's-head hawkmoths. Female specimens of the ghost moth. Thin pinewood with red gnarls. At the back he could feel the vibrating of wings sticking to his body and the side wind throwing him off course.

He was standing under the high canopy. Chains that were only used during the slaughter season hung from it, but he could not see them now. As he turned to look towards the house, he saw nothing but a straight imaginary line strewn with dead insects. The trail was consistent with his footsteps. His hands and flannel shirt were sprinkled with powder. Moths were falling to the ground because small pouches of colour were falling off their chitin wings. These were scales protecting the colourless core against external influences: against rain, blows and other insects.

(But a missing scale doesn't mean they're about to fall. It does mean, however, that the fall is fast approaching.)

When the body of *Milan S.* waded into the group of moths, their wings had shed too many scales for them to be able to stay up in the already densely packed air. In the half-light on the floor, they built a second-class rainbow made up of dark shades and of the glistening gasping of wings that still wanted to fly, but couldn't.

Where does this swarm end, he thought. Tiny hairs on their heads and chests rubbed against the skin on his face. His uneasiness consisted mainly of ignorance.

He turned to the right and began his murder spree that was about to result in the deaths of a few thousand moths in the next forty minutes. (The exact number will never be known.) *Milan S.* will not turn his ignorance into knowledge, no, for the moths would circle around him the entire time he was walking around the village, its surroundings, so he could not find the edge of them, he could not grab it with his hand and throw it on the other side of the world. (Like Archimedes.) He knew the path he was walking or perhaps lumbering along by the quality of the ground and by the approaching objects which he kept at a distance of no less than two feet. That was as far as he saw. His feet glided along the macadam road, stepping into small puddles. His skin touched the tiny hairs. When he returned to the house a good thirty minutes later, he left behind millions of memories he was thrown into as his body brushed up against yet another moth.

Outside the door lay a whole constellation of the flying nocturnal creatures. By the time he woke up in the morning, they were gone.

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.

Co-financing Publications of Slovenian Authors in Foreign Languages

Slovenian Book Agency (JAK)

Founded in 2009, the Slovenian Book Agency (JAK) is a government institution that deals with all actors in the book publishing chain, from authors to publishers and readers.

Subsidies to translator for the translation of Slovenian authors

The main form of international promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages. JAK annually publishes a call for applications for co-financing translations of Slovenian authors' books into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatre plays and comics. Applicants can be publishing houses, theatres, and individual translators. In each case, a contract is concluded with the translator, and therefore all funding goes directly to him or her. The subsidy covers up to 100 % of the translation costs. Grants cannot be awarded retroactively.

Mobility grants for Slovenian authors

The call for applications is published once a year. The applicant can be a Slovenian author who has been invited to a literary event abroad. The application must be enclosed with the invitation and the program of the event. The subsidy covers up to 100 % of eligible travel expenses.

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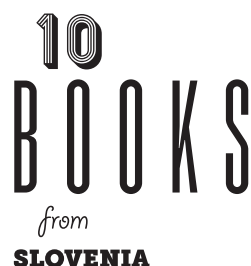
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Trubar Foundation

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of the Slovenian Writers' Association, Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidize publications of Slovenian literature in translation.

Subsidies to publishers for the printing costs of books translated from Slovenian

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish unpublished translations of Slovenian authors in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 50 % of printing costs. It does not subsidize translation. The Board will take all applications for works of fiction, poetry, drama, or literary essays into account, as long as they are originally written in Slovenian. The Board meets twice a year, usually in March and October. Therefore, applications received by the end of February and the end of September will be considered.



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