

10

BOOKS

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CENTER
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LITERATURE

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Jasmin B. Frelj – *Tiny Ideologies*

About the author



Photo by Maj Pavček

Jasmin B. Frelj was born in Kranj, Slovenia, in 1986. He studied comparative literature, and literary theory and history, at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. His first novel *Na/pol (In/Half)* was published in 2013 by Cankarjeva Založba to considerable media attention and critical acclaim. It received the best literary debut award at the annual Slovenian Book Fair in 2013 and the European Union Literature Prize in 2016. His short story collection *Ideoluzije (Tiny Ideologies)* was published by LUD Literatura in 2015 and was shortlisted for the critic's choice book of the year award. In his five years as a prose fiction editor for the literary review *I.D.I.O.T.*, he worked with some of the best writers and poets of the new Slovenian literary generation. His short fiction, essays and translations of American authors appear in the leading Slovenian literary reviews *Sodobnost*, *Literatura*, and *Dialogi*. His translations of Slovenian poetry into English have been published in *Banipal*, *Versopolis*, and international anthologies of the *I.D.I.O.T.* literary review.

About the book



Publisher on the book: *Tiny Ideologies* are a collection of intense short stories by the award winning author of the younger generation, in which reality appears as a tangle of sensual perception and mediated fact. With precise architectonic and a rich language the collection brings us diverse socially engaged stories from times of prehistory to the uncertain tomorrow, resembling our today. With just the right, sometimes hardly discernible, amount of fantasy it underscores the insight into social change and social conscience as a conflict with the individual, and many stories appear almost surreally real, even prophetic.

Introductory manifesto: Any serious artist working today must simultaneously take into account two basic facts of contemporary life:

Modern civilization is a web of received meanings, both psychic and physical. Its space is fragmented and its time is long, but finite. The materiality of its symbols and their meaning are particular, contingent and accessible to all. There is no truth in civilization, only relations of meaning between individual agents. Civilization's mask of immutability is violence, its mask of permanence is consensus.

The emotional integrity and the existential experience of an individual are unique, universal and eternal. There is no history in being present, no alternative meaning in being alive. The lived moment is not a property of space, and it is without a past or a future. Emotion is the only shared truth of all who exist in a single moment.

Excerpt

Translated by
the author

Tiny Ideologies

Doorman – an excerpt

And you're coming home from work to your father, who will look at you with melancholy in his eyes and lie to himself that you're alike, and you will lie to yourself that you're not.

On the way I stop by the Koreans and buy a Snapple. You drink it. It's an hour past midnight and only the homeless sleep, on church porches, while the rest of us are defending ourselves from the siren calls of our beds. Step by step down the street you have seen in countless movies, but you didn't know that the camera lied. This street is nothing special. There is no upbeat music, short frames, quick cuts, steam rising from the drains, no vivid bums wrapped in porcelain cellophane, no running cops and no mafia shootouts. In a rare case you might see yourself in the camera of a new wave auteur, a black and white picture, a drop of sweat on your forehead, the tired fixed gaze, the gentle clamor of the city, a car horn and a siren, far away, the camera's point of view is unmoving, the building beside you unchanging, and if you were to

dabble in heresy you might say that the whole thing is actually boring, but you rather pretend you like things just the way they are and that you might have even for a moment believed you were happy.

You turn down the red bricked underground, where you are almost alone and when with the ruckus of the Flood the train arrives and you enter, you find yourself in a very peculiar company of commuters.

On the seat across from you there is a young man from a central Asian country or another, who seems almost as tired as you are. Next to him, on the seat perpendicular to his, a skinny long black guy is comfortably slumped while clipping his toenails with a clipper. On my side, a few seats away, is a hugely fat east Asian kid, about fifteen years old, pounding down tiny bags of chips, one after the other. On the far side of the car, under a flicker of broken light, is an old black-haired lady, holding her shoe in her lap and caressing it as if she were caressing a cat.

The rails and the train perform their rhapsody of contact, composed millenia ago, and it actually feels almost quiet, when the train stops with a squeal.

An invisible man speaks.

“There is train traffic in front of us. We will be moving shortly. We are sorry for the delay.”

The moment of absolute silence is cut short by the door at the end of the car, which open with a bang and let in a bearded white man, maybe a Jew, whose business suit is all in tatters and leather shoes all clipped. He is holding a tin can filled with some change in his hand, he puts his feet apart, stands still, we all look at him, and he begins.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mike and I had a job at Lehman Brothers. I’ll be honest with you, even though this never worked for me so far. Three months ago I had a bunch of money in my bank account, I was living in a spacious house in the Village, I had a wife, three kids and a dog we called Lucky. Bad loans caused our firm to go bust. I was responsible for some of those loans. They took all my money, and my wife left me and got the kids and the house in the divorce. Lucky died this morning, because I couldn’t get him anything to eat. I beg for alms.”

We all look down. The bag of chips goes crunch, crunch, the black guy clips and a piece of his nail flies through the air, the Iranian dude yawns. The old lady stands up and comes closer, her white sock shuffling on the floor, her shoe still in her hand. She sits right next to you and shoves her face into your face, so you can smell her bitter breath.

“Are you happy?” she asks you.

You don’t know what to say, so she repeats herself.

Are you happy, clip, crunch crunch and then Mike shakes his tin can, so the quarters rattle in it, chrring.

Clip. Crunch crunch. Are you happy. Chrrring. Are you happy. Crunch crunch. Clip. Chrrring. Chrrring. Crunch crunch. Are you happy. Clip. Crunch crunch. Clip. Are you happy. And then the Iranian dude catches the rhythm and squeezes a folk song, a mourning song, a love song out of his throat, I don’t know, something, he sounds like Lucky did before succumbing to hunger. Aiieeeeeaiee. Crunch crunch. Aaa-clip-chrrring-areyouhappy-iiieea-crunchcrunch-aaaooioee-clipcrunchcrunch-eeaiichrrring chrrringcrunchclipcrunchooaaaaareyouhappy.

Are you?

Jure Jakob – *Houses and Other Narrative Essays*

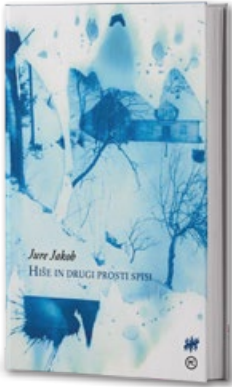
About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Jure Jakob was born in Celje in 1977. He obtained his master's degree in comparative literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. He is a poet who occasionally dabbles in other literary forms. Up to date, he has published four poetry collections. His poetry combines a largely non-urban poetic geography and a reserved lyrical stance with narrativity and with markedly imaginative force in the author's own unique way. In 2010 he published a monograph on the prose of Lojze Kovačič entitled *The Child's Perspective*. 2015 saw the release of his book of essays and short prose memoirs *Hiše in drugi prosti spisi* (*Houses and Other Narrative Essays*) for which he received the Kritiško sito Award conferred by the Slovenian Literary Critics' Association for the best literary work of the past year.

About the book



Jure Jakob's Houses and Other Narrative Essays is a book of essayistic short prose. There are several possible readings of *Houses*. They can be read as a sort of development autopoetics of a young poet who has discovered that he is no longer young, but still a poet. As a notebook of the author's sometimes emotionally enthusiastic, sometimes laconically realistic, but mostly open, honest essays about himself and his experiences. Or as a meditative introspection, the main character of which does not play a major role on a big stage but sits outside, on the bench outside the theatre, devouring the show of the everyday world with wide-open eyes. Divinely executed.

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Houses and Other Narrative Essays

Walk – An Excerpt

...

Thinking is a spiritual movement. Just like blood must constantly flow through the body if it wants to live, so thoughts that drive the mind must keep moving. We have different ways of moving around. We drive, sail, swim, fly, ride, sometimes even crawl. And walk. There is a sort of matter-of-courseness in the idea of walking that, at first glance – compared to other ways of moving –, denies it practically any dignity. We know of Icarus. We know of Odysseus' seafarer, we remember the Argonauts. We are fascinated by Saint George who comes riding in like a bolt from the blue, saving us from evil in one fell swoop. Not many people know a foot soldier. A foot soldier is a common soldier, a pair of legs carrying weapons in the Roman Legion, flesh of little worth that, if it makes it to old age, will be listening to the bleating of sheep, bent over its little plot of land. An anonymous pilgrim. Some troubadour, perhaps, not mentioned in any sources. Or some early modernist poet whom the sources do mention but whom hardly anyone understands. A capricious Sherpa in sandals, a silent shadow behind a famous mountain climber (or a rich tourist), strong muscles without a name. There is nothing famous in walking. Nothing historical. Caesars and kings would arrive in a carriage, on horseback or were carried around; they only walked in ceremonies of symbolic humiliation. History is not made on foot, it would take too long. The only walking character with a halo of some sort of historical dignity I can think of is that of a flâneur, a loafer, and even he is a literary character, half-fictional. And there is something suspicious about him, something that prevents him from being allowed past the entrance hall of the progress of civilization. Flâneurs were artists and their imitators, bohemians, no better than tramps. They spent all their days strolling around

and, not making the best use of their time, they didn't get very far. They moved about the world as if they cared little for this world. The world was moving faster and faster. Quick ways of moving used to be reserved for mythological heroes and the social elites, but by the end of the 19th century, they were becoming more and more accessible to everyman. In the 21st century, the general mobilisation, in the so-called developed world at least, is a part of everyman's daily life. All of us are extremely fast. Those who still use their legs to move about move them very quickly, not walking but running. Old people and very small children walk. Having mastered various types of movement, we imagine that we have also altered distances. Which is not true, of course. The distance between Stranice and Vitanje is exactly the same as it was one thousand or fifteen years ago. Distances are not in our heads, as is commonly said. Distances are. But we can also overcome them in our minds, but only if we experience them first. Before we get to complex calculations, we must first learn how to count, then comes the multiplication table and so on. Step by step. A mind that doesn't know how to walk doesn't have the experience. It knows its way around many places, but it doesn't know them. It can hardly stand properly. It won't make it. It will trip as soon as it sets foot on the ground.

In the first part, where the trail rose, I always walked a little faster, with more determination than in the second part where the trail flattened out before descending. If I set out in Vitanje, the whole of first part ran through the woods or right along the woods. That may be another reason why I preferred to walk that way. Because if I went that way, there was no disturbance, no unpleasant section at the beginning of my journey that I would want to leave behind as soon as possible. I didn't want to leave anything behind, I wanted to have it all with me. Everything stayed with me. The lightness you feel that starts drawing near the moment you take the first step, the moment you start out. Sometimes you don't feel like going. But once you start walking, you don't want to turn back, the walk pushes you on. The air changes, it turns into an actual, real element. You can't see it if you're standing still, you're looking through it; you feel it once you start walking. The cold winter air that stings you and instantly clears your head. The oppressive, heavy, stifling air when a storm is brewing in the summer. The sweet-smelling, snow-wet air that will turn to frost. That early spring air, still crisp but no longer winter- cold, softened, ready for change, you can smell snowdrops and see tiny buds. You can't go past air when you're walking. No matter how absorbed you are in your thoughts, no matter how sure and unmindful of everything around you you are as you're walking down the path that you know by heart, the air sneaks inside you, you breathe it, it crawls into you. After being ill, when you can't go out for a while, the first thing that a walk gives you is a gust of air. It's only when you walk that you truly breathe. If you walk upwards, you breathe even more. Every time I made my way slowly up the first part of the trail from Vitanje, there was a certain anticipation in the air. Always something else. Every walk stirred its own ball of thoughts and feelings into motion. As the legs moved, the ball unfurled, and the thread interlaced the things that occupied my thoughts, feelings, memories with what I saw, heard and smelled into one. Not every walk is a good walk. The conditions may be unfavourable, the weather bad and your thoughts are so heavy sometimes you can barely move them. So knowing a good path is really precious. Once you get to know a path you can take, you should not forget it. You can follow this path even when it feels like the ball of thoughts is in a complete tangle. On a path like this, you can trust your legs, the legs take over, pull the ball forward, make sure that you have a change of ground, a change of air, the ball rolls, where the knot won't come undone you cut it and redo the thread. When I reached the end of the rising pathway and stepped on the level, white gravel forest road, a decision was usually reached. The knots untangled or broke. The anticipation subsided, the feeling of gratification slowly approached, sometimes full, sometimes bitter. The path used to run along the edge of the forest, now it cut through it, under the tall, old pine trees. In the winter when the days were short, I usually went in the late afternoon; I would enter the dusk here and be greeted by the soft darkness on the other side of the woods, spread on the ground like some hairy watchdog. It followed me, it went with me all the way to Stranice. Other than an occasional dog, I hardly ever met anyone. I always walked alone, only now and then, very rarely, would I go there with my dad. I preferred to go alone.

Cvetka Lipuš – *What We Are When We Are*

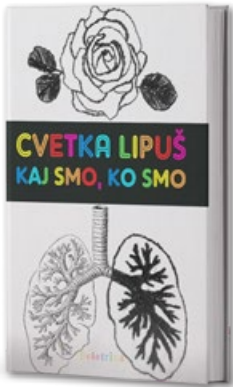
About the author



Photo by Marko Lipuš

Born 1966 in Železna Kapla. Poet. Graduated from the Slovene high school in Celovec/Klagenfurt (Austria) where she then studied comparative literature and Slavic studies. She lived in USA for 15 years where she also finished library and information science studies at the University of Pittsburgh. She has been living in Salzburg, Austria since 2009. So far she has published seven poetry collections (most of them were translated and published also in German), the last one published by Beletrina (Ljubljana) in 2015 was named *Kaj smo, ko smo* (What We Are When We Are) and awarded one of the most prestigious national prizes. Her poetry has been described as expressive, uncompromising and worldly, and her poetic voice as accomplished and original.

About the book



Cvetka Lipuš' poetry collections published thus far have earned the author recognition as a poet with distinctive and inimitable poetics. She represents an accomplished and original poetic voice that doesn't stop at the obvious but reaches beyond the horizon of the unexpected time and time again. Hers is an uncompromising writing that doesn't look for emergency exits, that is aware of the limitations of its finiteness and is capable of seeing itself with a downright eerie dose of self-irony. The poetry collection *What We Are When We Are* is an exciting journey to the end of the night where we are met with everyday images that have a short lifespan but are no less glorious for it.

In *Književni listi*, the literary supplement to the Slovenian daily *Delo*, Gabriela Babnik wrote that "Cvetka Lipuš' new poetry collection *What We Are When We Are* is characterised by distinct gravity, sharpness and, above all, composure. Comments on the outside world are present, though not central; they are more a reflection of the poet's intimate struggle expressed in the form of a sharply polished dramaturgy of poems written with an epic stroke of the pen," while, according to the review by Veronika Šoster published in *Pogledi*, the cultural supplement to the same newspaper, "diving into the verses, one embarks on a journey that leads to nowhere else but death."

Excerpt

Translated by
Tom Priestly

What We Are When We Are

Perpetuum mobile

Both grandmothers in the beyond,
one ashen young
the other covered with
age spots and earth:
will they know about the threads
that knit them into a new story?
The first, a heroine without words,
without a body, a handful of dust
on the bottom of a lake. The other,
a protagonist with the eyes of a geranium,
with fingers in which reside work and fruit.
Together they are the confession
that we extend into permanence,
the axis around which we spin into a number.
When gravity slackens off,
when we are the sum of what is inherited

and what has been acquired, when we are
carried away in all directions,
will those two ever pull the thread,
unpick what they share?

Watch us float

I

When we move here we begin going to concerts.
Like refugees who land up in an unknown place,
we follow the conductor through a blizzard of sound
until the notes on the piano knock on our muted hearts.
We follow the leader, the pied piper, who drags after
him a troop of visitors through churches, palaces, past statues
of generals who are having their eyebrows tidied up
by pigeons. The soles of the feet of bronze horsemen itch
when surrounded by strange accents. We new arrivals follow
the crumbs of welcomes right up to tablefuls of locals.
They serve us with the years marked on housefronts,
with the whisper of vestries, with chips from a castle wall,
sprinkled with salt like pretzels on a bar,
so we return home drunk with alien history.

2

We woo the land which offers us its green hand in greeting,
only later, after we shake hands, are we aware of the river,
the veins of water. In warm pockets a chestnut accustoms
our fingers to the fall which will squeeze us into a corner,
so that faces will fade away, so that shapes that are bundled
in parkas will be fantastic chromatic spots on the grayish
brown watercolor. When we are alone we slip off into the past
as into a bathrobe. How softly it clings to us. In a glitter
of gold it rises above us, as in the morning quiet we sip
our coffee and half asleep stare at the puzzled chairs
which are carefully placing their legs on the new floor.

3

From behind the curtain we peek at the stage of the city
preparing for the work day. The noise of a tin caterpillar
resounds, creeping from the suburbs into the glare of the
center, where a baroque garden fixes its clipped haircut
in a mirror of thin ice, ready for the cameras of countless
guests who are still dozing in hotel rooms.
In foreign languages they dream about croissants being
thrown by knights from the castle wall into the orchestra
pit. When we step into the street scene we accept everything
that falls into our arms — the flags on the tips of umbrellas
from Asian tourist guidebooks, the blind stare of a putto,
the fast walk of a rural costume —, and expose our face
to the cold air, so our eyes start to weep and above the river
appears a rainbow of doves, notes and white periwigs.

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Miha Mazzini – *Childhood*

About the author



Photo by Petra Bodlovič

Miha Mazzini is a writer, author of 30 published books, translated in 10 languages. His work was selected for many anthologies including Pushcart prize 2012.

Screenwriter of 2 award winning feature films, TV film and documentary and writer and director of 5 short films.

MA in Creative Writing for Film and Television at the University of Sheffield. PhD in Anthropology of Everyday Life, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Slovenia.

Voting member of the European Film Academy.

Computer consultant specialized for usability of web pages and mobile phones applications.

About the book



It took me years and a lot of courage to write *Childhood*, an autographic novel in fictitious stories about the first six years of my life.

The book starts with a dream and slowly moves back to the earliest years, encountering horror, solitude and laughter before returning to present. You'll meet my religiously fanatic grandmother who keeps dying and reviving, apart from once (when she gets buried under the wrong name); my mother, a woman capable of many things, done mostly to me; her brother Vinko, a man of the world who brings with him the scent only attractive and self-confident men possess: the scent of cigarettes, brilliantine, fake leather car seats and women's glances. – *author's statement*

Kresnik award for the best Slovenian novel of the year 2015.

Excerpt

Childhood

Translated by
Gregor Timothy Čeh

Uncle Vinko

"I have traveled a long way to show you this," he unwrapped a photo album from a plastic bag and placed it on his knee. His hands shook as if trying to weigh the air, all that was left of his cheeks were hollow dimples and the only thing still coloring his moustache was tobacco. "I heard you passed your driving test. The second person in our family to do so. Will you be a trucker?"

I shook my head.

He looked at me for a long time, something painful flashing in the depth of his eyes, hidden behind the opaque flakes gathering on their surface like clouds before a storm.

"This," he lowered his head. "Look at this life. A trucker's life. The freedom and the joy. The wheel to steer not just your car, but fate. Look at me ... look at a young me on the Dunes of Pilat! And here... look, parked in the crooked forest of Czarnowa! Oh, how I negotiated the bends in the road up to Montepulciano!"

With his trembling index finger he persistently scratched the plastic covering until it came unstuck and he was able to reach a smaller photograph stuck underneath the one displayed. Out of habit he looked left and right before showing it to me, "See this beauty from Barcelona?"

He winked at me and put it back before turning the page.

"Look, here I am on the Oberalp Pass! The unforgettable hairpin bends of Trollstigen! The endless turns of Stelvio! These here, look, are the tires of my truck on the beach at Sylt. Do you recognize me here on the icy shore at Reynisfjar?"

I could sense he was staring at me and looked up.

“All this,” he said, bringing his shaky index finger up to his eyes. “All this is in here. These eyes have seen it all. The life of a trucker. These eyes...”

His voice faded into a long sigh.

He was still pointing to the cataract that draped his memories like a grey curtain.

It seemed as if the ice we had just been looking at had pressed against us and started melting. The first drop appeared in his eyes, the second I felt in mine.

It came back to me; all the impatience with which I used to await his visits, hoping he would hug me so I could breathe in the scent only attractive and self-confident men possess; the scent of cigarettes, brilliantine, fake leather car seats and women’s glances. I wanted to hug him, squeeze him, though he was now far thinner than me, wring out of him the last drops of the scent of his life and my own desire for my childhood to end, but I felt the tear half way down my cheek and cut all emotion short with the only thing I knew I should not ask, “What do the doctors say?”

He shut the album with a snap, “I’m off.”

I stared after him through the window, his tiny bent-over figure moving from one shadow to the next, as if looking for shelter. His last words traveled slowly to my heart, “I must catch the bus.”

Brane Mozetič – *Embraces of Madness*

About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Brane Mozetič (b. 1958) is a Slovenian poet, writer, editor of the Aleph and Lambda book series and translator from French (Rimbaud, Genet, Foucault, etc.), best known as an author of homoerotic literature. His oeuvre extends to fourteen poetry collections, a book of short stories, three novels and four children's picture books. He has edited four anthologies of LGBT literature and several presentations of contemporary Slovenian literature. He has more than forty books in translation, his poetry collection *Banaliije* (Banalities, 2003) alone being translated into twelve languages, making him one of the most translated contemporary Slovenian authors. He also organises translation workshops, readings of Slovenian authors abroad, a small literary and music festival Living Literature, the Ljubljana Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, etc.

In his recent works, he continues to explore the urban gay theme, sharpened by increasingly anguished self-questioning. The typical unease in confronting oneself, on the other hand, also reveals a protective hardness of apparent self-sufficiency and impenetrable reality. Introversions and extraversion alternate as visions without gravity or significance, and they also erase the boundaries between dreams, mediality, memory, desire and event. While the day-to-day scene continues undisturbed with voices and steps, the boundary between reality and simulation is increasingly blurred. The author's (homo)erotica, though, remains full-bloodedly physical, and in the context of psychosis, resounds as only another in an ever longer series of different insomnias.

About the book



The first-person narrator is a translator on the lookout for younger lovers, which is his way of dealing with his aging issues. He always manages to run into mentally unstable or disturbed boys whose images intertwine, but are, at the same time, a reflection of the narrator's madness or broader – the madness of the modern world. His first lover is a prostitute who ends up in a mental institution and, not wanting to face this fact, the narrator takes refuge in a translators' residency abroad. Among numerous translators from all over the world, he gets involved with a mysterious young Greek who is desperately trying to hide his sexual orientation, and his unbalanced behaviour is further complicated by his pot smoking habit. The narrator escapes his outbursts by going to a mysterious nightclub in a nearby village which turns out to be a local hangout for older white gay men who like to vent their frustrations on young male prostitutes, immigrants from southeast Europe. Unfortunately, these night-time escapades are followed by further complications with the Greek translator who, in his mental jumble, suddenly decides to leave the translators' residency. The translator has visions of all of his past lovers and their behaviour that he tries to run away from once again. This time, he receives an invitation to a mysterious flea market in a nearby central European city. He moves from one exhibition hall to the next, and everywhere he looks he sees slaves on display, each with their own physical or mental handicap. These men are refugees from the Middle East without any papers or rights whom the fair organiser has earmarked to be sold to gay men. Here sexual meets political. When, after several sleepless nights, the narrator returns to the residency, the other translators have gone back to their respective countries to make room for other refugees who have been put up there.

Excerpt

Embraces of Madness

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Two men now sat down next to me, engrossed in conversation. Spit was spraying from their mouths. I understood that they used to fight in the Algerian War, or was I wrong? But it was like they hadn't killed enough people and such vermin should be dealt with. Maybe they were soldiers in the Foreign Legion, they looked like first-class thugs. Their eyes lit up when a tall,

skinny, darker-skinned youth came up to them; he was very different from the others. Arabic features, not Slavic. Algerian perhaps, I thought. They were negotiating the price; the two men were trying to beat him down, he kept shaking his head until they eventually came to an agreement – the price couldn't have been very low. They got up and all three of them headed towards the bedroom. This time they covered the niche from the inside with a sort of curtain, thick, dark red, stage-like. I caught some clatter; the near-silence of the reception room made it easier for me to hear, only discrete music from the bar could be heard in the background. Then the leather guy stepped in front of the niche. He didn't say anything, just waved a ten euro bill in the air, apparently letting us know that the rate for peepers had just gone up. But the men were not discouraged by that, they walked up to him one by one, giving him the money, and he held up the heavy curtain for anyone who paid to let them in. I joined them too. If only because I felt awkward staying behind with the boys who were still counting on making some money or an opportunity for someone to choose them as their victim and maybe take them even deeper, into the study, which couldn't have been completely uninhabited because every now and then you could hear thunderous voices, and cries too, coming from the inside. Especially standing in the silence of the bedroom, watching the show. We huddled together in the semidarkness for a while; some of the faces would throw me a scornful look, an occasional hand roughly pushed me away, but I found my spot and waited. The scene before us lit up in a milky, white-blue light; both men stood there, they were wearing uniforms, yes, Foreign Legion uniforms, definitely, holding the wretched Algerian in half-torn rags on each side. Just like theatre, I thought. They were pushing him back and forth, giving him a few of sharp slaps, no, this was no theatre, this was for real. They hurled French insults at him as they did it, which was rather unusual, though understandable. They shouted at him, asking him questions, and he denied everything, also in broken French. They pushed him back a little, he fought, he fought with all his might, there was a giant wheel hanging from the wall behind him, and they pushed him up against it, lifted him up slightly, he kicked, but eventually they managed to get his feet in the straps on the wheel. They held him up, then quickly turned the wheel; he was now hanging head down and was even more helpless. They could grab him by the hands and strap them up to the wheel as well. They slowly turned the wheel, his body twisting, the audience now cheering, encouraging the action, demanding even stricter punishment. The victim was all red in the face, as were the men, they were puffed up, the men under the light and those standing around me. Fair-skinned, red-skinned, grey-haired, hairless, red-haired, flushed from old age, fat, rage, aggression in their blood, they were letting out steam now, the whole spectacle was not erotic at all, the fags in them had disappeared, the only ones left were the executioners. The wheel stopped, the body strapped to it was hanging head down, the catchpoles stood astride before him, undid their trousers and covered him in two profuse gushes of piss. As if they had been warming up for it for hours and hours. Swallow, they shouted, open your mouth, kicking him in the gullet with their boots until he finally opened his mouth and the piss came pouring down his throat. The men around me were in an uproar, they wanted to have a go too, they wanted to, but no, they didn't pay for that, they would have to find their own victim, maybe take them to the toilet and piss on them for an appropriate price. After this cleaning process, they got on top of him, ripping his already shabby clothes. They turned him around and he stood before us completely naked, unprotected, left entirely to the mercy of his executioners. The leather guy who let me in the club appeared from somewhere and gave them a couple of whips, not the ones with leather straps used in erotic games, that would probably be too cheap, but two short whips, like those rods that riders use to encourage their horses. They were grinning now, pressing the tips against the boy's skin, running across it as if searching for erogenous zones, then giving it a slight crack, not too much, just enough to hear it snap. But that scene did not last very long because they showered him with a hail of blows, shouting wildly, until the boy started screaming and it got unbearable. What pleasure this was for the wild horde that was perhaps really made up of former soldiers, prisoners, murderers, Nazis, who knows, I couldn't understand it, nor could I stand it any longer, so I pushed my way through the crowd, drew back the curtain and went back to the reception room where the others were dossing about.

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Peter Rezman – *The Assembly Line*

About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Born in 1956 in Celje, lives in Plešivec, Velenje.

In 1975 he got a job as an electrician at the mine where he stayed until 1990. Then he went on to work at the municipalities of Velenje and Šoštanj. Retired.

He started publishing his poetry in the 1970s.

In 2008, Litera Maribor published his short story collection *Skok iz kože* (Leaping from Skin) that won the author the 2009 Dnevnik Fabula Award for Best Short Story Collection published within the last two years.

In 2010 he published the novel *Pristanek na kukavičje jajce* (Landing on the Cuckoo's Egg), followed by the short story collection *Nujni deleži ozimnice* (Compulsory Shares of Winter Stockpile) that made it into the top ten for the 2011 Fabula Award. 2012 saw the publication of his novel *Zahod jame* (The West of teh Pit) that was nominated for the Kresnik Award, followed by the novel *Tekoči trak* (The Assembly Line) in 2015 that was nominated for both the Kresnik Award and the Kritiško sito Award conferred by the Slovenian Literary Critics' Association. His most recent novel *Barbara in Krištof* (Barbara and Krištof) is currently in print.

About the book



A novel about second- and first-generation Muslim immigrants in a Christian and atheist environment. A novel about industry and the mine. A novel about Slovenian fascism that is capable of killing a man – very current, sadly, given the migrant crisis. A novel about labour exploitation, a novel in which the literary characters are both people and masses of people (strikes). The author talks about them as if they had a body, a mind of their own, as if they were living creatures. – *From a review by Urška P. Černe*

The protagonist One, an honest guy, a guy in love, a fighter for the rights of his fellow men, is constantly the target of unjustified intolerance; in the end he falls victim to brutal hostility because he grows out his beard and converts to Islam.

*

Language, along with narrative zeal that sails determinedly through numerous less happy stories, and the efficient circular structure, is a strong point of this accomplished novel. – *Tina Vrščaj, Delo*

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The Assembly Line

“Wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in towers, raised high. And if good befalls them, they say, this is from Allah; and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, this is from thee! Say: all is from Allah! But what is the matter with these people that they make no effort to understand anything?” he read under his breath what Bosnian he could understand a bit better, flicked a few pages forward and again found the part he liked to read purely because of its juiciness. “Know you not that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Verily, it is all in the Book. Verily! That is easy for Allah. Imam is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books and His Messengers, the Last Day and to believe in the Divine Decree, the good and the bad of it.”

Once again the melody of his own whisper hypnotised him and he felt his own lips, their moisture, but this time he didn't press them together to silence the feeling of a kiss. His upper and bottom lip touched gently, feeling around the memory to find other touches still. Her touches.

He let his hands holding the booklet fall into his lap, looked at the floor for a while, then leaned his back against the backrest of the bench, staring into empty space, over the tracks. He stuffed the booklet carelessly in his overcoat pocket, fished out his mobile with the same hand, slowly and as if thinking what it was he had to do, he searched the directory for the word 'dida'. He opened the text message dialogue box and slowly, letter by letter, they flared up before his

eyes. *one really loves dida*. Then he stared at the four words with no punctuation for a while, and when he was certain that the 'o' and the 'n' and the 'e' could also easily be understood to mean someone, anyone, n. n., enen, a stranger whom no one knew, he pressed the key *send*. When he saw the indicator showing that the text had reached its intended destination, though he no longer knew where that was, the hand holding the phone fell for a moment, but quickly resisted the gloom and carried the phone back to the pocket, pulled out the green booklet again, opened it randomly where the pages would fall, and he read again, only this time he didn't move his lips as he was reading, let alone whisper the words under his breath.

Then the unexpected happened. Three men were walking up the platform. He recognised them immediately. He shuddered and shrunk back. But they were already there, standing around him. Their faces much like before, the expression of the red-cheeked one still innocently good-natured, the other two different. Impatient. The stringy one with the spider radiated spiteful malice, the guy he knew from town offended resentment. He quickly reached out his hand and took his reading material from him. Spider just stood there, his eyes flashing. His acquaintance now waved the green notebook under his nose:

"What do we have here?"

"You know ..."

"What? What ..., whatta you have this for?"

"I'm reading it ..., what! Is that a crime ...?"

"You're reading it. I see. Well, you ain't gonna read it no more," said his acquaintance and, to One's astonishment, tore up the neat booklet and trampled it with his boot.

"Can't you read something else ...?"

"What ...?"

"What, what, what ...," he parroted. "Something that normal Slovenians read. Novels!"

One thought, when was the last time I read a novel? He couldn't remember. Then he did. Maybe because they were at the railway station. Venedikt Yerofeyev, Moscow-Petushki. Without thinking, he said:

"Moscow-Petushki."

"Whaaat ..." said his fellow townsman, looking puzzled. The next moment the short one, the stringy one with the spider, slapped him in the face:

"I'll give you Moscow. This is Slovenia. This is Laibach!" Then he told the good-natured one with a hoarse cry: "Get him!"

Despite his clumsiness, the red-cheeked oaf stepped behind One's back with surprising swiftness, twisted both of his arms from behind, pressed his belly against him and locked him in a steel-tight hold. The guy he knew from town was looking at spider, checking to see if he was happy with his roughness. He stood there shouting on the empty platform:

"Well, tell us what you believe in, you fuck ..., you do look like a Bosnian!"

Once again, One thought it best to stay quiet.

"Well ... who do you believe in? Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

"I believe in god," and as if the second part was another *déjà vu*, spider suddenly jumped in, his voice threatening:

"Which god, man, tell us now! Which fucking god do you believe in!"

"There is only one god."

"Which god, you fucking religious pussy! Which god do you believe in?"

Like he wasn't himself, One spoke as if he was floating above the four of them, himself included, or sitting on top of some underwear billboard looking down on himself, and the voice that he spoke in sounded like it was coming from someone other than him. As if something was speaking from him, without him knowing what he was going to say next:

"Allahu akbar!"

That moment, the stringy one hit him in the plexus with his fist.

"Muslim! You Islamist mother fucker," he screamed, hitting him in the nose with his bony fist until blood came flowing from his left nostril. One was willing to do anything to settle this misunderstanding. Surely they were looking for someone else, not him. Someone who deserved this beating. He didn't. What did he do to bring this upon himself? He wasn't provoking anyone.

Peter Semolič – *The Other Shore*

About the author

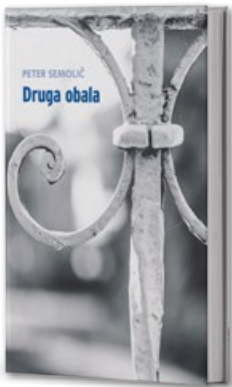


Photo by Nina Medved

Semolič, who was born in Ljubljana in 1967, studied general linguistics and cultural studies at the University of Ljubljana. He is the author of thirteen 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 Space for You* (2006), *Ride Around the Sun* (2008), *Milky Way* (2009), *Poems and Letters* (2009), *Night in the Middle of the Day* (2012) and *The Other Shore* (2015). He 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. In addition, Peter Semolič writes radio plays, children's literature and translates from English, French, Serbian and Croatian. Although rooted in tradition he started a new trend called "The New Simplicity" by Slovenian literary critics. 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.

About the book



Unlike Semolič's other collections, *The Other Shore* dives into dark waters, exploring the edges of other borders. The debris washed up on the other shore speaks of the painful revelation of a universal, yet so very intimate, extreme experience that is the feeling of finiteness. Death seems almost a privilege, a feature of life ("if something doesn't die, has it ever lived at all", he writes in *An Icy Rain*), but Semolič's shores are much broader than such obvious comparisons. The poet listens to various experiences of passing with an equal degree of sensibility. For the other shore is not just an image of death but perhaps even a symbol of passage, a space "floating between two realities" (*The Black Widow*), the search for and preservation of a fragile moment that suspends death itself. "I'm looking at the other shore now," says Odysseus in the poem of the same name, a shore that is just as broad as the life he has left behind, but with the promise of (an)other, yet unknown, unexplored life. Uncertainty in life develops into uncertainty *over there*, as a promise, too, of dreams, hallucinations, visions, as "an idea waiting to be realised in the middle of the change / between light and shadows" (*The Seer*). The images of a fictitious world to which Odysseus himself belongs to, after all, are frozen in timelessness, much like Napoleon and other notorious dead men have, for all eternity, become part of the world of history and modern myth. The writings of the *Empty Frames* cycle are another example of flirting with the edge, as a reminder of the realisations of monsters living in each and every one of us. *The Other Shore* is an experience from the edge, the borderline. It is an account of the end that meets the new beginning, flirts with the other shore, a collection of different poems. As proof that every end always carries within it the announcement of rebirth. – Ana Geršak

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

The Other Shore

The Navje Cemetery*

So let's step inside, step into the sacred space, among the golden
corpses, as the early spring
sun already sparkles on the light green leaves
and leaks into the greyness of the old tombstones... More real
in their books, even in school textbooks, than here,
they are still so much themselves, free of grammatical rules,
whispering in the language of early grass, the sizzling of candles,
the hum of the breeze that blows along the path we

walk on; they are themselves more than ever before.
We stop by the arch vestibule, where an angel spreads
his scorched wings above one of the tombs. Or has
somebody sprayed them black? We don't pray
for their escaped souls, we don't honour their
merits for the nation. We keep silent. We listen to the blackbird singing
in the nearby bush, and another one responding from behind
the wall that divides the world of the dead from the world of the living.
A cloud blocks the sun... or perhaps it's suddenly evening...

*Navje is a memorial park in Ljubljana, with tombstones of personalities
who played a significant part in Slovenian history.

An Icy Rain

Blessed are gods for their immortality?
I heard Achilles' horses cry over Patroclus,
I saw the bloody rock with which Cain
killed Abel, my father and my brother –
they lied, turned into a stone, serene
as two gigantic pebbles on a riverbank.
An icy rain above Ljubljana and my face is already
pricked to the point of bleeding, tears from the wind in my eyes.
A language without tropes, a black-and-white drawing on paper
spanning even beyond the horizon, an infinite
repetition in mirrors placed opposite each
other – they will never die, that's for sure,
but if something doesn't die, has it ever lived at all?
The morning coffee is pleasantly warm and the girl who
walks by – and I've told myself not to write
about this anymore! – is truly beautiful: a red parka
on the background of snow melting more and more, disappearing.

Colours

Your eyes are blue, blue is your colour.
Near the evening, the yellow forsythia flowers and a full
moon above the apartment blocks close by – you have made a
step and I, though still brown, walk by your side,
suddenly no longer staggering, your step
is thirty-two years long and smells like an orange.
I haven't expected it, not even in a dream – tonight we
shared in it white bread and then called forth,
no longer in a dream, big red
blossoms to our faces. Which colour is your favourite one?
Which male singer? Which female one? Summertime sadness
is behind us and the black voice of Lana del Rey is no longer a sign,
but just another song like any other.
Light green grass, dark green in the moonlight,
you, who don't believe in yourself yet, I, who have believed in you
from the moment you came with rosemary and mint,
believe in us. The colour of your eyes changes
with light, at night they shine with their own – two stars,
no longer shrouded by any cloud of dark matter.

Nataša Sukič – *Picnic*

About the author

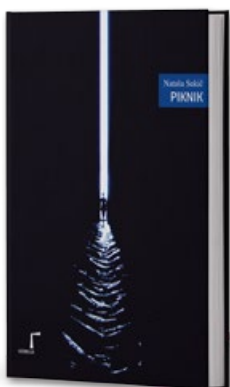


Photo by Nada Žgank

Nataša Sukič (1962) made her debut as a writer in 2005 with her short story collection *Desperadosi in nomadi* (Desperados and Nomads), followed by another short story collection *Otroci nočnih rož* (Night Flowers' Children) in 2008 that was shortlisted for the Dnevnik Fabula Award. Then came a change in course – she switched from short prose, in which her fragmentism often made it difficult to make out its short story form, to novels: 2010 saw the release of her novel *Molji živijo v prahu* (Moths Live in the Dust), followed by the novel *Kino* (Cinema) in 2013 that made it into the top ten for the Kresnik Literary Award and *Piknik* (Picnic) in 2015 (finalist for the Kresnik Literary Award). The latter is

Nataša Sukič' fifth literary work that is elusive in terms of form as it can be read both as a novel or a book of short stories.

About the book



... Much like Djuna Barnes, Nataša Sukič is fascinated by dramatic visions, erotic madness, frustrations, obsessive reminiscing, gallows humour, divine beauty, reaching for the unknown, confronting nothingness, to which she adds allusions to modern pop culture (either film or music); but rather than looking for comparisons in motifs and topics between her text and those of Djuna Barnes, she is interested in preserving a high language norm. In addition to innovative images, the atmospheric feel that doesn't seem forced even when the setting is moved from Ljubljana to Paris or New York, Nataša Sukič makes use of Pantagruel multiplication, randomly assembled stories. One of the storylines in the novel opens out into the stories exchanged between two lovers, another concerns the narrators; allusively and with an exceptional feel for detail, the author weaves the sketched stories together, thereby naturally materialising her obsession with narration and, above all, exposing and questioning her own autobiographicalness ... It is amazing that, despite its strong emotional gist and minimalist plot structure, she has managed to write not only a non-sentimental text but also a text that balances on a knife edge while being packed with a special kind of gentleness. – *excerpts from a review by Gabriela Babnik (Delo, 25 February 2016)*

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Picnic

Freedom – An Excerpt

It's nice to look out onto the mighty Manhattan from Jen's Brooklyn window while listening to the sounds of jazz and bebop.

Driving here from the airport, that crazy Cuban kept repeating – *Don't you worry about a thing, this is America.*

The radio was just playing full-blooded black bebop and the taxi driver – his name was Juan – was snapping his fingers and tapping out the rhythm on the dashboard in excitement ... *Yeah, yeah, yeah*, he sang, and I had to admit that the syncopated rhythm of the great Dizzy Gillespie was deadly contagious; and although thicker and thicker beads of sweat were forming on my forehead, from exhaustion and from sheer excitement, my feet were itching to dance.

I grabbed for my sunglasses and cigarettes to hide behind the dark lenses and a cloud of smoke.

That Cuban guy was completely crazy; the whole ride there, he kept fluttering on his seat like some bird, groaning and cooing, *tap, tap, tap* ...tapping on the dashboard, shaking his small bird-like head sitting on top of his bamboo-like neck this way and that, singing his lungs out, all the while anxiously repeating his mantra of the promised land of America – *Come here*, he said, *all my friends and relatives are already here* ... *don't you worry about a thing, this is America* ...

His enraptured face creased into a broad smile ... *Yes, yes, yes ...*

It was nice to see someone who was so happy; the cars were honking, the avenues were blaring and he expertly navigated his way through it.

Where did you say you wanted to go? he screamed ... Vanderbilt Avenue 147, just drop me off at the entrance, please ... I'm soooory, wheeere?

The pale sun is quivering, half-hidden behind a rain cloud, disappearing crescent by crescent behind the sharp edges of box-like rooftops; a tortoiseshell mass, cinnamon brown, funhouse mirrors, carnally-tinted tea with milk, the cup is a glaring abyss ...

... I instantly flush at the thought of Ana's lobster-red nipples, her sweet buttons in the shape of snail shells.

To hell with it, I'm going to beat the sun like Jack, the screwed up boxer from that Charles Bukowski story, I say to myself, I'm going to leave behind those days of tepidness and, blending into the rustling rain coats and capes, in the heat of the drizzling morning spilling onto feverish avenues, I'm going to kiss that pale sun, really, to hell with it.

I'm exhausted from my long-haul flight over the Atlantic; all I want is a refreshing shower, some tobacco and a bed.

Hey, Jen, do you smoke in the bedroom?

Um, I don't but you can, you can do anything you want, she laughs, I'll be damned if you can't. But don't go taking too much advantage of it now that you know, she says, grinning, fixing her hypnotic brown eyes straight on mine, making me turn away in embarrassment for a moment.

I won't, no, I say, putting on a theatrically meek face, I know, I know, I'm really lucky and I'm deeply grateful for it, I go on exaggerating.

That you are, exclaims Jen, laughing, really lucky! What can I do, I like you ...you've always been my weak spot, it's awful, but what can I do ...

Jen never misses an opportunity to have a little flirt with me; she's like the wind blowing from all sides and is very persistent in her coquetry, she doesn't let up, not for anything.

She's standing right behind me and I can feel her breath on my neck.

No, I say to myself, *not this*.

But Jen has a heart of gold, it's hard to turn down someone like her. She already tried something when she and Christine were in Ljubljana.

I play dumb, pretending not to understand her hints. Every time she gives me *that* look my face turns red as a beetroot. It drives me crazy, I don't want her to think I'm like some poor girl from Kentucky or South Carolina, scared to death because her path has unexpectedly led her to New York, to this incredible festival of light and freedom.

My shyness is truly impossible; it hangs from my foot like a ball and chain. At the sight of my spotty neck and red cheeks, Jen lets out a teasing giggle and gives me a slap on the back.

Well, she says in a somewhat disappointed voice, puckering up her lips, why are you looking at me like that? I'm not a ghost.

With a sort of sadness, I watch her tiny hips and the fine lines of her shoulders and neck, cursing the cruel fate that has made me so inept.

Is this freedom, I say to myself, girl, have you ever been truly free, even for a minute?

Kaja Teržan – *Delta*

About the author



Photo by Jure Teržan

Kaja Teržan (1986) is an all-round artist who, over the years, has established herself at the crossroads of contemporary dance, physical theatre and performance. Recently, however, her performative practice has spilled over into poetry; the result is her poetry collection *Delta*, along with the author's performance of the same name, moulding a selection of poems into an entirely new and complete – both content- and form-wise – sequence of images. Sharpness, carved out by the unpredictability in the movement of words, is the main tangible common thread between the lyrical force of the atmospheric details (both in the scenography and within the poetic expression of meaning) and the subject's focus on her own constantly changing (self)realisation potential.

About the book



Her poetry is not easy to read. It contains all too many interruptions of airflow and consequently thoughts. The dance that the poet, herself a professional dancer, performs on these pages is constantly being interrupted – a foot slips, a knee buckles, a hand that is supposed to set the whole body into harmonic motion with one thrust falls out of rhythm, hangs in mid-air. And yet this is not a broken, miserable body. No, this body is strong, sharp, often evoking movements full of subtle irony, making it difficult to tell whether interruptions in movement are the result of clumsiness or intentional. I believe them to be the latter, as Teržan proves with every poem that she is in command of the poem's space, the body of the poem, the language; its "clumsiness" (now deliberately in quotation marks) therefore points beyond the written verses – on the one hand, the body in her poems is the social body ("I respond with the memory / of my first (real) student job – of a cleaner ...") while on the other it is that fragile yarn that holds us – like the poem – above the silence ("Sometimes I write out of awkwardness arising in the silence / that I wrap myself in"). Yes, as much as her speech is ecstatic, gleaming, sprinkled with tiny witty ideas, logical twists, sharp thoughts, but also with plastic images wafting from the pages of this book, her leaps, interruptions, ellipses and dashes also invoke silence. As if the poet has suddenly stopped in the middle of the poem and large concentric circles of solitude and silence have started to form around her, the solitude and the silence that keep bringing me back to the beginning of the poem, making me re-read it, breathe it in anew, follow the dance again – a Valery-like and physical dance. – *Peter Semolič*

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Delta

Deer

On this felled tree,
to which you are tying your next
fourteen days or more,
as many as you're about to persist
in the wilderness,
I had a habit of
laying my body.
Nearby there is a bush
which is in late August
full of
purple-blue fruits.
A cone –
just before it falls down –

sways.
There is a sound
of a door opening,
an old, heavy door.
Once a girl used to come here.
Offering fruit to me ...
strange, too sweet, luminous.
You've brought spaces and time
that have made the swaying quicker.

Solo

Am I a deceiver (of whom), a traitor (to what)
or am I just dumbly blinded by a constellation watching
over me? My words have become meta-factographic;
I have sucked the juices out of life and exported them into Space.
This isn't allowed. And there's nothing special about
the given task, but I have a feeling that it requires my full presence.
How shall we do this, I ask my continuity.
As everything up to now, my learnt inner structure concurs, we will thoroughly
examine the landscape and spots that border on the Opening.
And then should happen – What?
I'm not a Robin Hood to be able to tell riches from poverty.
There is quite a lot of useless gold in my chest.
(Or do I mean unused?)
These thoughts are interrupted by a friend who asks me where he should
sit, with a great deal of confusion. (Three chairs are a true vastness.)
But it's not about that. He's been waiting to be greeted, hugged.
While I've been in the midst of Dissolution ...

The water circle

I was fifteen when I (once again)
tirelessly cried in public (on a train).
A gentleman asked me if a
boyfriend had left me, or what ...
'Lack of self-realization! Lack of self-realization!'
I replied.
Not more than a year passed
when I watched Tarkovsky's
Sacrifice at some boy's
place and cried again ...
He asked me if I wasn't well.
I said I was wonderful!
Ten years later I gave birth to a child;
he cries a lot, while I dumbly ask:
'What is it?'

Nataša Velikonja – *Stay*

About the author



Photo by Rebeka Bernetič

Nataša Velikonja, born in 1967, sociologist, poet, essayist, translator, lesbian activist. In 1993 she received the Prešeren Award for her undergraduate thesis at the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences. She is active on several social and cultural fronts in Slovenia: she is a long-time associate of the Škuc Association and a former editorial board member of the magazine *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, did work for Radio Študent, was the editor of the *Lesbo* magazine and cofounded the Lesbian Library and Archive. She has published five books of poetry: her first poetry collection *Abonma* (Subscription; 1994) is considered to be the first openly lesbian poetry collection in Slovenia, followed by *Žeja* (Thirst; 1999), *Plevel* (Weeds; 2004), *Poljub ogleдалa* (Kiss of the Mirror; 2007) and *Ostani* (Stay; 2014). She is also the author of three books of essays and scientific papers: two essay collections *Fragmenti svobode* (The Fragments of Freedom; 2008) and *Lezbični bar* (Lesbian Bar; 2011), and the monograph *LL 25* that discusses the history of lesbianism and lesbian activism in Slovenia (2012) in co-authorship with Tatjana Greif. In the last twenty years she has published more than 500 essays, columns, sociological writings and other texts both at home and abroad. She has translated several works of lesbian theory, gender studies and radical social criticism, as well as theories of architecture and design, including authors like Teresa de Lauretis, Monique Wittig, Lillian Faderman, Colette, Laura Cottingham, Andrea Weiss, Richard Goldstein, Larry Kramer, Buckminster Fuller, Norman Potter, etc. She has been registered with the Slovenian Ministry of Culture as a freelance poet, essayist and translator since 1995.

About the book



As we expect from the poetics of Nataša Velikonja, her fifth collection *Ostani* (Stay) is a distinct mix of lyricism, love poetry and elements of social criticism. Its main topic is the Ljubljana *lesbian scene*, a lyrical and critical insight, an intersection of the social and the intimate. Through fifty *prose* poems, the author covers various aspects of life on *the scene*: love, sex, physicality, interpersonal relationships, the manner of communication, social life, the political context, the cultural atmosphere, homophobia and finally the power relations that are present in all spheres of society. Velikonja is first and foremost a love poet but the distinguishing feature of her poetry is her understanding of *love* which she doesn't see as some isolated, aseptic transcendence, but as one of the elements of power relations, the distribution of power that, in this modern, divergent, destructured world, in *the world of bare survival*, reveals itself merely as a fictitiously humanising socialness. Thus, where the reader expects gentle transcendental impressions of the heart, he or she finds the rawness, brutality and terror of the reality of love. The book explores how changes in the general society echo on *the lesbian scene*; simply put, *it is a lesbian story in an antisocial world*; it is a reflection on *the lesbian community* that, in the past decades, has established its place in society but is now once again being forced into social isolation and disappearance from the public space by the current social dynamics – this time not only because of blatant homophobia but also because of the covert antisocial and anti-political forces of *the digital culture*. But in *the digital era*, where everything that the modern civilisation has built seems to be disappearing, where everything is broken down into disconnected, self-sufficient and irresponsible *units* or turned into a *spectacle*, Velikonja nonetheless calls for the preservation of the basic postulates of the modern, rationality-based culture, society, humanity and subjectivity. Hence the title of the collection *Stay* – with this plea, the poet seeks to eliminate – or perhaps at least postpone – the inevitability of total surrender to this *divergent, distant, digital culture*.

Translated by
Špela Bibič

this could be fun

when I told her, *I'm in love with you*, she said she liked it because lesbians don't say things like that, they say, *I think you're so cool*, or, *you have such beautiful eyes*, and when I told her that I was in love with her, the first thing she did was ask me, *why*, because lesbians don't know how to say things like that, she said, *lesbians say, I think you're so cool*, or, *you have such beautiful eyes*, she liked it that I told her, *I'm in love with you*, but she didn't respond, and then one time when I was exhausted from my explicitness in this mute world, I asked urška, *what do people think when you sincerely tell them about your love for them*, and she said, *they think, 'ooh, this could be fun!'*

the nude

nina is sitting in the hallway, her face is sleepy and she is completely silent, she wants to be in complete silence, I sit on the rocker next to her, we sit in silence, I get out my notebook and I write, today is a homosexual holiday, *the International Day Against Homophobia*, in the morning I see pictures of activists at the raising of *the rainbow flag* on the balcony of the US embassy, and all I can say is this: when I was a teenager, I wouldn't hang out with them. not to forget. all they want is to be there, and they would crush anyone who would interfere with their wishes of a small Eastern-European man: to stand on the balcony of the US embassy and experience imperial rapture, if even just for a moment. I sit on the hallway of a nineteenth-century apartment building and next to me sits nina and she is speechless and dead tired and our surroundings are miserable and it's almost two o'clock in the afternoon and she got out of bed two hours ago and is already dead tired and we're sitting in this miserable and freezing hallway and there is no flag and there is no rapture, no country around us, and we're both scrawny, the people on the balcony of the US embassy have devoured everything, they have devoured the hope that *homosexuality* used to have way back when, around the time it all started, that the body would not be a cage, that the body would not be an empty and hollow volume, a long time ago I used to think there would be *more rock'n'roll on the scene* and nina thought there would be *less conventions on the scene* and urška, who says she only eats enough to feel full and not a bite more, while others devour everything they see, *they think that, because of a certain position*, says urška, *they're entitled to everything*, and so they think they can devour everything and that's why they have devoured everything and keep on devouring and just think of all the things they have already devoured, anyway, urška used to think *there would be more flirting on the scene* and, in the end, these servile, colonised morons have brought us to national flags on national embassies, and all of them are standing on that national balcony and we're here in this miserable and freezing hallway of an old apartment building, both of us scrawny, we're completely silent, we're whispering, we're listening to Shostakovich's *quartets*, drinking coffee, nina's staring into space and if I look at her long enough, she looks back at me and smiles, rising before us we see elite postmodern apartment buildings from the seventies where they have put up the moronic elite of then and now, and they're falling apart now, they're oozing, rust is leaking from their metallic rooftops, there are dried water stains under the concrete planters on the concrete balconies, the blinds are rotten and the shutters are rotten, nina gets up, goes to her room and brings me a drawing of me standing on the terrace of a modernist apartment building from the fifties, looking out into the horizon before me, on the wall next to me is a white sheet of paper on which she would draw a nude of herself that day.

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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

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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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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 subsidize 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 subsidize translation; translators can apply for translation grants directly through the Slovenian Book Agency www.jakrs.si

10
BOOKS
from
SLOVENIA

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