

10 BOOKS *from* **SLOVENIA**

Literary Critics' Choice

[2018]



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LITERATURE

Kristina Hočevar

Drago Jančar

Miklavž Komelj

Boris A. Novak

Ana Pepelnik

Sebastijan Pregelj

Ana Schnabl

Simona Semenič

Tone Škrjanec

Nataša Velikonja

Kristina Hočevar – Rush

About the author



Photo by: A. Hočevar

Kristina Hočevar (1977) is a poet, but her regular job is teaching Slovenian at several secondary schools in Ljubljana. She has a BA in Slovenian Language and Literature and General Linguistics. Recently she started translating prose and poetry from English.

She is the author of six poetry collections. Her third poetry collection *Tails* (ŠKUC Lambda), and her poetry collection *Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips* (ŠKUC Lambda) received the Jenko Award and was nominated for the kritiško sito Award, conferred by Slovenian literary critics, as well as the Veronika Award. Rush also secured the author a nomination for the kritiško sito Award.

In 2014, Zavod Gulag published a three-way art book combining her poetry and original graphics by Gorazd Krnc. Kristina Hočevar is also one of the poets involved in the poetry platform Versopolis. Her poems have been featured in numerous anthologies and translated into fifteen languages. A German translation of *Aluminium on the Teeth, Chalk on the Lips* has recently been published under the title *Auf den Zähnen Aluminium, auf den Lippen Kreide* (DSP, 2017).

About the book



The poetry collection *Rush* consists of three books. “The texts are shaped into sharpened and impetuous fragments torn up by a bitter and heavy tension, loosened with grace and irony. The *Rush* steers, calibrates the bustle that eliminates the possibility of total control and redirects one towards facing individual details. Entering the *Rush* is an escalation and an endurance of this escalation.

The texts are distinguished by their tornness that presents speech as something that is to be torn out of context, that, in any case, always begins in the middle of everything, in the middle of the context, in the middle of the text, and then tears itself from it (into it). Incompleteness reveals its completeness, its finality. And the handling of all the non-words is happening against the background of extremely carefully outlined spaces, so that every empty space resounds like a breath that is uncancellable for the life of the text.” (V. Liponik)

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

my sky is lit and the windows are clean,

skyscrapers are gleaming.

loosen up (I loosen up) your forced posture, a dog is accompanying you, loosen up
(I loosen up) your forced movement.

to place a piece of flesh in the sun, you know you won't. to lift one's arms up, you know you
don't.

alternately

you're looking at your lit sky

but again

you're putting on bands.

(Rush, I)

you open up your legs, you begin. kites on the string
are stretching one's arms higher.

as though you were pressing stamps into the clouds, but there's only a swish.

you promise yourself that this won't be a crying.

perhaps the string will slide out of your hands, perhaps the swish will become a roar.

but still, it won't be a crying anymore.

(Rush, II)

what is it to say that someone died – there's only an indefinable absence,
gathering cancelled documents, unpaid numbers,

the shirts maintain the smell, they were still much too large
for dancing and new year parties, the smell till the first washing, why say

that someone died, why set up the new imaginary – reality, ease the imagined,

already long ago an early closeness, wasn't talking anymore, but looking;

you two the same in the tuning of strings;

the screen is displaying the same face, writing out
the same name, just the undelayable absence,

you deserve this gain, deceased,

unclenching oneself, deceased,

why the word, this verb sounds like betrayal,

like writing all over love – like betrayal.

(Rush, II)

Drago Jančar – And Love Itself

About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Drago Jančar (1948), writer, playwright and essayist, is one of the most prominent Slovenian authors. He has received numerous Slovenian and international literary prizes, including the Prešeren Award and the Prešeren Foundation Award, the Rožanc Award, the Grum Award and the European Short Story Award.

About the book



The title of Jančar's new novel, *In ljubezen tudi* (And Love Itself), might sound a bit unusual, being set in a time when hatred ruled the world. As violence escalates in the occupied Maribor, between the rebels in the woods of Pohorje, in a concentration camp in northern Europe and during the government takeover after the war, the four chapters follow the stories of people who, in this historical transgression of humanity, are the villains, the victims or both. And who are, each of them, trying to protect their own love, if nothing else, from the absurdity of evil and the defeat of human dignity. But despite all its strength, love itself, falters, and the spirit grows weary, according to a poem by Byron that one of the protagonists finds in a book that she randomly picks from a bookshop shelf years after the tragic events.

"And Love Itself is not, as the title may suggest, a love novel, nor is it a historical novel but a novel about love. Rather than the story and fate of some love and rather than the story of some war where this love happens, the book is about the lone efforts of an individual trying to protect and preserve love despite everything." (Ženja Leiler, *Delo*)

Excerpt

1

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The photograph taken by an unknown photographer shows two slender girls: one in a checked skirt, a light cardigan and dark stockings, the other in an elegant black coat and with two beautifully woven braids that fall down her back. The latter is not wearing any stockings; these are obviously the last, final warm summer days, early September, perhaps. A late-morning photograph of locals running errands, a woman with a briefcase, some people just standing about, doing nothing. A man with a bicycle, chatting with someone, about the weather, probably, another one sucking on his cigarette, puffing away on this calm, peaceful day. A discerning eye can see that something has happened with the sign on the large building: HOTEL OREL has become HOTEL ADLER; a minor correction, the practical owner only had two new letters made, A and D, and turned the word RESTAVRACIJA into RESTAURANT. In the bottom-right corner, with his back to the photographer, there is a man in a uniform. In black boots, a grey army jacket, with

a gun in his belt. The idyllic photograph of a quiet, early autumn morning in some street in Maribor suddenly turns into a moment of invisible tension: where is he coming from, where is he marching to, the man in the uniform that is almost certainly the uniform of a member of the *Schutzstaffel* units, an unfamiliar SS officer is coming from the edge of the photograph, heading into its depths. He is only unfamiliar to us for an instant – a moment later, the fair-haired girl in the checked skirt and black stockings is turning towards the man in the uniform and says to her friend:

– Doesn't he look just like Ludek?

Her braided friend just manages to catch a glimpse of the passing German officer's profile.

– It could be him, I think, she says. He looks a bit older, she adds, laughing.

But grows more serious at the sight of her friend's face.

The face of the girl in the checked skirt and black stockings seems worried, something is on her mind, perhaps she has just shared her worries with her friend; suddenly, it hits her.

– It's him, she says, I know him.

They watch him for a while.

– Do you think I should tell him? asks the girl in the checked skirt in a distressed, almost quivering voice.

– I would if I were you, nods her braided friend encouragingly, shrugging her shoulders: What do you have to lose?

The girl in the checked skirt shifts nervously from one foot to the other.

– I'll ask my father to talk to him, he knows him well.

And in a few moments, she adds:

– If he wants to.

– Sonja! her friend exclaims, throwing her a somewhat teasing smile: I think it would be more effective if you talked to him yourself.

The smile is too much, it is unnecessary, Sonja, who is nervously clutching at her handbag, does not feel like laughing, she doesn't feel like smiles either, although she will have to smile soon; if she wants to talk to that man, she will have to smile very pleasantly.

With his decisive steps, the man in the uniform is now deep into the photograph, down there, at the end of the street that is now called Burggasse.

– Whatever happens, happens, says the fair-haired girl in the checked skirt suddenly, grabs a firmer hold of her purse and runs after the officer. No matter how fast she walked, she would never have caught up to him. She runs.

2

I see her running down the street past the windows of the Astoria Café after the man in the uniform, Slovenska Street, years ago, it used to be Slovenska, Slovenska Street, before that, in Austrian times, it was Windischstrasse and now it's Burggasse, she is running after the German officer, getting closer and closer. She loses sight of him for a moment, the officer turns into Tyrševa Street, now Herrengasse. The girl in the checked skirt, Sonja, stops at the corner, taking a breath, looking at him. It seems as if she has changed her mind, she can't do it. But she must, a certain hope is telling her she has to do it. A moment later she makes up her mind and starts walking up the street. Soon, she is walking almost alongside him, trying to breathe steadily, she doesn't want him to see her out of breath, she wants it to look as if she is taking a stroll, as if she is perhaps on her way to the park or as if she is headed his way to run some errands. She is almost alongside him, a step or two behind, perhaps she is having trouble deciding again, should she talk to him, maybe she doesn't have the nerve, maybe her heart is pounding. Then she overtakes him with hasty steps, looks at him and, as if noticing him for the first time, says:

– Ludek, it's you.

The officer looks at her.

– Don't you remember me? says the girl in the checked skirt, smiling, she has to smile.

The man stops, looking her up and down, he doesn't seem to know her.

– Don't you know me? says the girl, holding her handbag tighter to her chest, it's me, Sonja.

– What do you want, ma'am? replies the officer in German with an unpleasant, curt voice, glaring at her with his eyes that still betray a little curiosity, maybe he does find her familiar.

Miklavž Komelj – Liebestod

About the author

Photo by Blaž Samec



Miklavž Komelj (born in 1973 in Kranj) has published the following books of poetry: *Luč delfina* (The Light of the Dolphin, 1991), *Jantar časa* (The Amber of Time, 1995), *Rosa* (Dew, 2002), *Hipodrom* (Hippodrome, 2006), *Nenaslovljiva imena* (Unnameable Names, 2008), *Modra obleka* (The Blue Dress, 2011), *Roke v dežju* (Hands in the Rain, 2011), *Noč je abstraktnjša kot n* (The Night Is More Abstract than N, 2014), *Minima impossibilia* (2015), *Liebestod* (2017) and *11* (2018). *Dew* also appeared in Polish translation, and *Hippodrome* appeared in both English and Polish translation. His other works include the collection of short stories *Sovjetska knjiga* (The Soviet Book, 2011), the scientific monograph *Kako misliti partizansko umetnost?* (How to Think Partisan Art, 2009), the academic work *Jugoslovanski nadrealisti danes in tukaj* (The Yugoslav Surrealists of Here and Now, 2015) and the collection of essays *Nujnost poezije* (The Necessity of Poetry, 2010), as well as two short books for children. He is also a prolific translator: among other authors, he has translated the works of Karoline von Günderrode, Fernando Pessoa, César Vallejo, Djuna Barnes, Alejandra Pizarnik and Pier Paolo Pasolini. He published an extensive edition of the collective poems of Jure Detela with comments, along with a few similar publications; he is currently working on the publication of the collected unpublished writings of Srečko Kosovel. Komelj obtained his PhD in Art History with a thesis entitled *Pomeni narave v toskanskem slikarstvu prve polovice 14. stoletja* (The Meanings of Nature in Tuscan Painting in the 1350s) and published several scientific and scholarly articles in this field. He has received numerous awards for his work. He lives in Ljubljana.

About the book



The book *Liebestod* creates a textual labyrinth employing very different poetic procedures – along with poems, the book also contains short prose texts and fragments – in an attempt to reach the sublime. The book has us enter a variety of spaces and times, even the most traumatic ones; one of the key poems in the book is a ballad about puppies in Hitler's bunker. But the historical references are aimed at questioning any ordinary time perception and awakening the awareness of eternity; in this awareness, the ordinary relationship between life and death is turned around in the sense of, as Michelangelo Buonarroti put it, living from one's death. In his essay about Komelj's book, Muanis Sinanović wrote: "Parallels can be drawn with Sufism. Sufis access the Absolute through a friend who is also their teacher. And the one who achieves the highest degree of love towards the Absolute becomes the Absolute himself. (...) The established line between the living and the dead is a sign of deadness for Komelj – the world outside of poetic ontology is dead. The bet of his poetry is a bet on everything, on eternity, on the Absolute. In this respect, it is the exact opposite of the poetry that is prevalent in his time and space, the poetry of the finality and minimality of everyday life, the acknowledgement of this world, which Komelj sees as dead, is the only world alive for them. Komelj's poetry is a kind of total poetry, while the opposite poetry is trying to be the non-poetry of lethargic clauses. (...) Through a symbolic sphere in everyday life, Komelj is looking for cracks that open the path to the sublime. (...) A magnificent achievement."

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Oh, that strangeness to the world
that people proclaim
as their strangeness to the world
is already an assimilation.

But the dog... But the dog...

A human gets distracted to death
by the children's game »Fort – Da«.

But the dog... But the dog...

Someone thought he would get away
and went and shot
at the crowd –
and before that he wrote down:
»(...)
desolation is knowledge
pain is acceptance
denial is helpless
(...)
death is a reprieve
life is a punishment
people are alike
I am different«

But the dog... But the dog...

Richard Wagner played out
Liebestod on the piano
and went under the piano
and barked.

But the dog... But the dog...

Count Ciano noted (just before the outbreak of war) in his diary:
»Do you remember how I greeted you
when I was a boy, in La Spezia, while you were leaving,
and waved to you from the small terrace
of our house overlooking
the sea.
My voice was stuck in my throat,
my eyes were full of
tears, but I
controlled myself as long as you
were near, as I didn't
want to show my weakness
to a big soldier. Still, my effort
was in vain.
You knew all too well
that I threw myself on the floor
controlled by tears and loneliness
as soon as you hid
behind the corner ...«

But the dog... But the dog...

I'm petting him. I'm thus petting him.
The trees are in white bloom.
White hairs stay on my
hands.

But the dog... But the dog...

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Boris A. Novak – Doors of No Return: An Epic

About the author

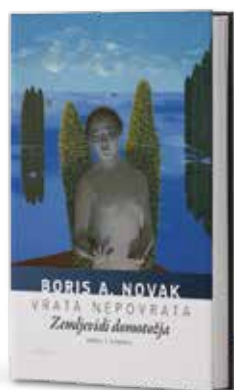


Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Boris A. Novak (born in 1953) is a Slovene poet, playwright, translator, and essayist. So far he has published 90 books.

Novak received several national and international awards, among them the highest Slovene one, the Prešeren Award for his life oeuvre, and *Bosanski stečak* (*The Bosnian Tomb*). He is a double knight of the French Republic (*Le Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes académiques*, and *Le Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*), a corresponding member of the French poetry academy *Mallarmé* and an associate member of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts.

About the book



The Doors of No Return (*Vrata nepovrata*) are one of the rare epic texts in the world poetry today, and one of the longest ever written – 44,000 verses on 2300 pages in the original edition of the Slovene publishing house Goga. The epos is divided into three books. The epos starts in Pinnacles Desert in the Western Australia, among ancient stones which the Aboriginals worship as a temple of the dead. Similarly as in *Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey* or *The Divine Comedy*, Novak's epos is a dialogue with the dead. His ambition with this mad project was to save the souls that he loved from oblivion with the power of the poetic word, passing their stories onto the next generation.

The first book, *Maps of Nostalgia*, is an atlas of memory, a gigantic geography of the places where the poet or his ancestors have lived, that they have touched, and that they have abandoned and lost. These places of nostalgia are spreading from the Balkans and Central Europe to France, Australia and both Americas.

The second book, *The Times of Fathers* is a painful history of the 20th century from the Austro-Hungarian Empire over Communism till today. It focuses on both world wars with many tragic stories, but with humour and beauty as well. As all epic poetry Novak's epos contains stories of battles, heroism and terrible deaths, but at the same time Novak shows the history through the eyes of its victims, women, children, elder people, and not through the celebration of arms.

The narrative frame of the third book, *Dwelling Places of Souls*, is the naval travelling to the North; the cargo of the ship turns out to be Memory, Souls, Stories ... It is the most metaphysical of all the three books. It irradiates a universal message about the human destiny, about the destiny of artists and art, about love and death.

Excerpt

Translated by
Erica Johnson
Debeljak

Tidying up after the Dead

Even now, as I write this, the taste of ash
fills my mouth and it is hard to breathe. Because
tidying up after the dead is a horror. To pass

a whole life through a sieve, to choose among
the unfortunate things destined for the hell of oblivion,
and the more happy ones, for the paradise of memory.

To find in this legacy gold used for fillings
and for wedding rings, bracelets and pocket
watches with broken hands, the old detritus

of souvenirs and letters, visiting cards and
post cards, important documents and photographs,
a sewing kit, a box of buttons, a broken necklace

and rusted keys, fruit rotting in the refrigerator,

someone's first tooth, primary school textbooks,
a dozen glasses with different lenses and frames,

two dozen identification cards and passports,
paintings and prints, and shelves filled to overflowing
with dusty books, books, books, books...

A last glance at a life, amazement, what a beauty
my mother was when she was young, the scent
in her skirts, her rounded soul hovering in the pleats,

so lovely. – My memory of her will live until her scent
abandons the empty clothes. – Tidying up after the dead
is a bittersweet ritual that revives for the last time

everything that she once was and had, before the death
shroud erased all traces. It's a terrible dilemma,
what to keep and what to throw away. Discarded

memories roam in boxes closed forever.
Two evening dresses with matching silk scarves,
which pair should I save from oblivion? ...

The zeal of the living continues relentlessly, the force
of the present pushing aside the weight of the past.
All those closets filled with junk would suffocate us,

we must make room, cleanse our memory,
lest it collapse under the weight of the burning
cargo it carries...

It burns for so long,

that statuette from the Horn of Africa –
who brought it so far, to this Alpine land –
and a faded letter, a passionate appeal,

from my father to my mother, just before they
became father and mother, dated 1953, *April 9*,
that father wanted to destroy but mother saved

after his death for future eyes, and now
I also save because I, who my mother – so feminine,
so mild – carried then, am mentioned in it.

I am tormented by the question: what will be the fate
of this letter when my time comes – the next tidying-up
by the living of the traces left behind by the dead?

Will another face

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lean over this letter and dream of lives lived
and lives ended? Will my parents' love be tossed
in the garbage bin
or in the box of memory?

Silence descends ...

Ana Pepelnik – **Techno**

About the author

Photo by Wolfgang Kuhn



Her first poetry collection *Ena od variant kako ravnati s skrivnostjo* (One of the Ways How to Treat a Secret – Prišleki, LUD Literatura) was released in 2007, followed by her second book published by the same publisher, *Utrip oranžnih luči na semaforjih* (Flashing Yellow Traffic Lights) two years later, in 2009, and finally, *Cela večnost* (Whole Eternity), in 2013. In 2015, *Šerpa* (Luda Šerpa book series) published her fourth poetry collection *Pod vtisom* (Under the Impression) and in 2017, her fifth poetry collection *Tehno* (Techno). She translates the poetry of the younger generation and the not so young generation of American poets, Joshua Beckman, Matthew Zapruder, Matthew Rohrer, Noelle Kocot, Jennifer Clement, as well as Sylvia Plath, James Tate, James Schuyler and Elizabeth Bishop. Her translation (done in collaboration with Matthew Rohrer) of Tone Škrjanec's book *Skin* was published in the United States.

About the book



The fifth book by Pepelnik, *Techno*, the title poem of which, after being published online, became one of the most well-known poems in contemporary Slovenian literature, continues to pursue the poet's distinct comma less, vernacular-friendly writing, taking it to the brink of a vulnerable, emotional declaration. If the author's previous book was written Under the Impression of the life of other books, a good part of the new one was written under the impression of the author's direct existence. *Techno* discusses depression, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, but also the triumph of faith, hope and love. The *Dasein* of *techno* is thus, at times, a very anxious being but, as if the poet was using it to say something, the predominantly "solid" narration from the first part of the collection starts falling apart at the end, breaking into a kind of prolonged and open breakbeat without any full stops at the end.

Excerpt

Translated by
Jasmin B. Frelih and
Ana Pepelnik

beloved god

dear
beloved god.
It's hard
to start

when once
you've stopped.
So I'll tell
you

now. Thanks
for being there
for me while
I wasn't there

for myself. You were
in my universe
but together
with me so horribly

far. My second son
was born new
love we became
four. And may the

assistant at the clinic
have the chance to
make the world nicer
for someone. And may the

pediatrician at the maternity ward
have the chance to be
kind to at least one mother.
And it will be plenty. And may the

starved psychiatrist
at the psychiatry clinic
have the chance
to be loved. So she can

eat the chocolate
and be given love in kind.
And it will be plenty. And may the
gynecologist

have the chance to be
blessed with her fifth child.
And it will be plenty. And may it
beloved god

may it please be destined
that the main fuse of
the shopping mall is blown out
one of these nights

so that all those
fucking too bright lights go out
so I can go
to the garden and see

the stars. And may I
have the chance that
my love will be meant
for the crowds. Understood.

And may my death
be light. May it not
hurt.
No one. Beloved god.

May I see at least one firefly
and may it hold
my hand
before I fall asleep

Sebastijan Pregelj – Breathe In. Breathe Out.

About the author

Photo by Jože Suhadolnik



Sebastijan Pregelj (1970) has published six novels and four short story collections. Four of his novels were shortlisted for the Kresnik Award for best novel of the year. In the summer of 2014, his novel *Pod srečno zvezdo* (Under a Lucky Star) was published in serial form in the newspaper *Večer*, while his short stories have been featured in several anthologies in German, Slovak, Polish and English translation.

2014 saw the birth of two series of stories for younger readers. *Duh Babujan in prijatelji* (Babujan the Ghost and Friends) is set here and now, while *Zgodbe s konca kamene dobe* (Stories from the End of the Stone Age) take us back to the times of the pile dwellers. The first book, *Deček Brin na domačem kolišču* (Brin, the Pile Dweller), was nominated for the Desetnica Prize awarded by the Slovene Writers' Association for best work of children's or young adult literature. The first two parts of the series also received the Golden Pear sign of quality.

Sebastijan's novels regularly appear in German translation. Both of the Babujan books appeared in German translation last year.

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

About the book



Translated by
Jeremi Slak and
Gregor Timothy Čeh

Adam, a man hunting mute birds, visits the big city. He returns to his house on the shore with an empty birdcage and a parentless boy, who soon grows to love Adam and his roommates, Ema Olivia and Kan. Everything seems mundane, except that the adult residents of the house sometimes vanish in the night and then spend the morning doing work they never talk about. The boundaries between reality and fiction are fragile and thin – the book seems to be a dark dystopia, yet each page reveals more and more resemblance to our real world. Inhale. Exhale. is a brilliantly written simile while also being a socially engaged book with a unique response to the refugee crisis.

The novel speaks on the current topic of the refugee crisis, achieving universality with its delightful use of the fantastic and a loosely defined geographical setting. The leading protagonist spends his days writing (compiling, inventing) the personal stories of the people who perished on their dangerous journey across the sea, breathing life and consciousness back into the individuals we so frequently reduce to the technical term "refugee", a word ostensibly absent from the text. As such, the narrative carries great relevance in our zeitgeist and will certainly appeal to the broad circle of readers invested in the consideration of humanity's global social issues.

Excerpt

Translated by
Jeremi Slak

Seventeen

Lun sleeps tight. He hasn't had a dream yet since arriving to Adam's, and if he did, it would most likely have been about birds.

Like every evening after supper, he heads to the bathroom to wash, then from the bathroom straight to the bedroom. Along the way he says *bye* to Adam who, like every evening, wishes him a *good night*, then slips into bed, curls up and covers, closes his eyes, counts to ten and falls asleep.

In the night he hears strange voices. Eyes closed for a while, he waits for them to go away but instead they grow louder, so he wriggles out of bed and approaches the window. The night is bright enough for him to see the sea, and on it the two boats, the origin points of the yelling. On one stands a tall man, brandishing his oar against the people on the other. The people are reaching into the water, trying to pull out something heavy, but the man from the other boat isn't letting them pull it out. Each time they almost manage, he edges close enough for his long oar to reach their vessel, poking and sending it rocking, or swishing right over their heads so they must let go of whatever they're dragging or risk plunging into the water. They curse and shake their fists at the man, but eventually, they turn their boat and row away.

Lun doesn't know what he's seen, but he thinks it can't be good, so his heart keeps on pounding even after he's back in bed, eyes closed and counting. He stops at one hundred, scared of something vague, tossing, pondering, till at last he's overcome by sleep. He wakes up when the sun's already high in the sky.

Instantly he remembers the nocturnal event, hopping over to the window. Down there he sees Adam next to Kan, a row of human bodies lining the shore. He throws on some clothes and runs out to see what's going on. Adam tries stopping him when he reaches the two. Too late. What happened? the boy is asking. A big one capsized at night, the adult informs. The people inside are all dead.

Lun stares at Kan, feeling his blood freeze, cold spilling over into his extremities. It was him! echoes in his head. He was the one pushing away that boat at night, with those people grasping at the water to help those swimming inside. Him! he backpedals behind Adam, glancing terrified at Kan who says there are seventeen. They haven't taken off with anyone. Good, nods Adam, then turns his head to look for the boy. When their eyes meet he understands they should walk away. Come, he nods, heading for the house. The boy follows.

When Lun is certain they're far enough so Kan can't hear them, he blurts: I saw everything at night! It was him! Him! Who was that? Adam glances quizzically, slowing his pace. What happened?

It was Kan! states the boy with conviction. There were two boats in the bay! Kan in one, the people trying to help in the other, but he wouldn't let them! He swung an oar at them until they gave up! the boy is nearly screaming.

Oh, no, no, shrugs Adam, patting Lun's ruffled hair. I was hoping I could tell you about it some other day. I thought we had time. You see, I'm not quite sure you'll understand. Try! begs the boy in a voice attempting to sound grown-up. Well, here's the, Adam bites his lip unsure how to begin, choosing his words for a long while. After all, the boy is one of them. He starts by saying this stretch of land is closest to the other continent; that a ferry used to sail between in better times, needing no more than four or five hours for the journey, perhaps even less. The ferry hasn't been around in a decade. People looking to cross, desperate for a better life, float over in skiffs and discarded barges. Many are swallowed by the sea. Most of those who make it are rounded up by the soldiers and border police who send them back where they came from. Some even succeed. But evading capture doesn't mean they've found peace or the life they've been after. It still means nothing, Adam shrugs.

I saw it! persists the boy. Kan didn't let them help those in the water! No, no, counters the man, those in the water were already dead. Carried into the bay by the current. It's the same every time: a boat shatters on the reef or turns over, the people drown. Even the best swimmers sink before reaching the shallow, the current dragging them back to the open is too strong. In time, as if playfully, it floats them into the bay. Dead. The people on the other boats aren't there to help, aren't there to rescue but to scavenge. They come foraging for belongings they could snatch from those who ended up in the water. Stealing. That's why Kan was chasing them off, like he chases them off every time there's an accident. I'm not sure you can understand, the man steps into the slipstream of the house. The boy is right behind him.

Ana Schnabl – Disentangling

About the author



Photo by Matej Pušnik

Ana Schnabl (1985) is a PhD student of Philosophy, her thesis focusing on the issues of guilt and shame in the autobiographies of women's authors. She regularly writes columns and reviews for the portal AirBeletrina and magazines *Literatura* and *Sodobnost*. She was a culture journalist with the Slovenian daily *Dnevnik* for nearly a decade. She is the editor of the international European poetry magazine *Versopolis*. She has transferred her musical ear and her sense of tempo and rhythm that she developed as a dancer for many years into her writing. Her short stories, which appeared in the *Literatura* magazine and on the AirBeletrina portal, have met with an enthusiastic reception by both the general audience and experts. For her first book, the short story collection *Razvezani* (*Disentangling*), she received the Award for Best First Book at the 2017 Slovenian Book Fair. The collection also won her a nomination for the Mira Award conferred by the women's section of the Slovenian PEN. She is currently working on her second book, a love novel with a meaningful and ironic title, *Mojstrovina* (*Masterpiece*).

About the book



The protagonists of the short story collection *Disentangling* are a pothead, an anorexic and other people on a personal or social edge who, instead of cynically dissecting their own position, adopt a different attitude to their problems. As we can read in the Preface by Aljoša Harlamov, one of the characteristics of the new generation of writers to which Ana Schnabl belongs is going beyond the "hipster" attitude to reality that is not being completely serious although it is being completely serious. The defence mechanism of empty intellectualism is replaced with an integrated establishment of vulnerability. With her detailed familiarity with the rules of the genre and her sophisticated understanding of the laws of psychology, Ana Schnabl has a sharp, funny and often moving way of exposing the anatomy of almost forgotten positions of emotion: guilt, shame, terror, joy and (consequently) real freedom, disentanglement from the fear of being one's self. Another feature that plays an enormous role in Ana Schnabl's writing is physicality, which is not reduced to sexual experiences but, together with them, concerns all positions of emotion. Her writing, as the panel of experts wrote in their announcement of the Award for Best First Book, "is driven by the rarely seen notions of ethics, humanism and empathy, and the voracious reader of her stories is only interrupted in key places by well-placed moments of disillusionment attesting to her excellent knowledge of the chosen topic". The book is a literary masterpiece "with a strong message that allows readers to identify with the literary characters, giving them a new perspective on their own decisions – past and future – thus a perspective on their own (dis)entanglement in life."

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

The Plough

A person realises that their life can change very suddenly when their life does change very suddenly – they sleep with a stranger and end up getting chlamydia, they cheat on their spouse and end up in an unhappy marriage, they invest a billion in an online scam – before that, they plan the course of their life based on the fact that they still have legs to walk on and that they still have a partner to have relatively casual sex with. So, even though something had *clearly* happened, the first feeling I got deep in my stomach was merely that *my life could* undergo a fatal change if I didn't take appropriate action, that *I* had the means to turn back the wheels of pregnancy, as pregnancy would mean the end end end of *my* life, a carefully set up and constructed life of comfort and countless pleasures that I could procure practically by myself, with just a little bit of help from my drug dealer, a life in which I didn't submit to any higher power, not capital, not religion, not ideology, not the media. It would mean the end of *my* perfect, fully customised life in which common human categories were dropping like flies. Who needed that many petty worries – bills and spending and a roof over one's head and a

career and finally a pension and a home and a garden and healthcare – when you simply had to start feeling at home in a given moment, grind some weed, lick the white, thick paper and roll it, *relax* in the continuous effort of being alive and be a little dead after all the suffering, just dead enough for all the demands of time to pass you by, not noticing you, all those bills and the spending and the roof and the career and the garden and the healthcare for your pregnant wife. My life had to continue resembling itself and, in that resemblance, there was no room for little screamers placing their expectations of better lives and adulthoods on *me*, they should go and ask someone else, I didn't have anything to do with it and I didn't want to have anything to do with it. My projection of the future was merely a projection of the present, a brilliant constellation, almost as strong as the Plough; and I ask you, has anyone ever asked the Plough not to be the Plough, to become, for example, Draco, Draco is a mightier constellation, after all, a more complex and singular constellation, so damn singular that some people can't even see it, while the Plough is a simple and recognisable constellation? No, never, no one has ever expected the Plough to change because they know that, deep inside, the Plough is fundamentally at peace, it is not moving anywhere because it has already maximised itself in terms of its content and form. Everyone knows that and everyone acknowledges it and everyone respects the Plough's content and form, no one is bothered by the fact that it consists of a small number of items. That's just the way it is.

Because of these worms crawling through my intestines, I told Manca right through the closed door that she could have an abortion, that the procedure supposedly wasn't as scary and harmful as online forums suggested, it took about an hour, then you slept a little, and bled and rested for a few days, and you couldn't do sports for a month or so, jumping was probably not good for your hurt reproductive organs, then you could go back to business as usual. I came up with the information about abortion so quickly and so unexpectedly that Manca didn't even manage to react, on the contrary, it seemed as if she wasn't going to respond at all, that she was never coming out, that she would remain glued to the toilet seat or the sink or the windowsill – I didn't know exactly where and in what position she was in –, that she would leave me in the uncertainty of an eternally long silence, that the matter would never be resolved, neither with the suppression of pregnancy nor with birth, with nothing, really. To put my mind at ease, I kept telling her how sorry I was that she would have to go through with it, I wanted to show her how very aware I was of the extent of bother that an abortion entailed, all the unpleasant, uncompassionate doctors and judging nurses of Christian background, and the smell of chloroform and stale urine, and the ugly walls of gynaecology wards, and older women who had lost their womanhood on account of dodgy contraception pills or HPV, and the clumsy hospital gown, unsuitable for skinny, shy individuals with small breasts. I made an effort to describe the nuisances as meticulously and broadly as possible, concluding that, *despite everything*, abortion was the only possible option, that the second option, the birth of the child, would be the death of all of us, as there wasn't any room in our lives for a child and, because we didn't have any room for it, we couldn't love it. Let's say that lack of love is not that big of an issue, I said to her, the child's material want, however, would become a big issue, we couldn't provide for the child and the child would grow up undernourished and sickly, and sickness eventually got extremely expensive, and because we couldn't cure it, we would eventually raise an emotionally and physically feeble individual, at which point I stressed that the chances of an emotionally and physically feeble child growing up to be a proper, independent individual were extremely slim, since growth required a certain amount of psychological and physical energy that was impossible to fabricate, one was either equipped with it or not and had to acquire it, and it was hard for an emotionally and physically feeble being to go anywhere, especially leave home, which would eventually mean that we would be saddled with this emotionally and physically feeble child until the rest of *our* lives, draining us like buffalos drained water from the streams.

Simona Semenič – **Three Plays**

About the author



Photo by Tone Stojko

Simona Semenič (1975) is a Slovenian playwright and performer. She completed her Dramaturgy studies at the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (AGRFT) in Ljubljana.

Simona is a recipient of the Prešeren Fund Award, the highest Slovenian national award for artistic creation. She is also a three-time winner of the Grum Prize, the highest national award to be bestowed on a playwright in her native Slovenia. Her first award winning play *5boys.si* (2008) was translated into twelve languages, staged in several countries in Europe, USA and in the Middle East and also published in several countries outside her homeland. She also won awards for *24hrs* (2006) and *Seven*

Cooks, Four Soldiers and Three Sophias (2014) and was nominated for *1981* (2013) and *This Apple, Made of Gold* (2016). Her other plays include *You Didn't Forget You Just Don't Remember Anymore* (2007), *Feast* (2010), *Blame It All on Donnie Darko* (2011), *Sophia* (2011), *We, the European Corpses* (2015).

About the book



We, the European Corpses (2015)

A contemporary play dealing with the invisible intimate story of a woman in a contradiction with loud political voices and impotent economical context.

7 Cooks, Four Soldiers, Three Sophias (2014)

A story about the real martyrs, their hangmen and those cooking for all of them, since the beginning of time.

1981 (2013)

A unique form of play that deals with the premise of travelling into your future body and back, thus experiencing the world in the future and the present as one.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Skubic

We, the European Corpses

milena walks across the stage again
this time even more beautiful, more glamorous, she changed her dress, milena crosses the stage wearing a gorgeous silk evening gown, a red one
cut low, oh, all the saints in heaven, have a look at this low cut
milena crosses the stage

and right behind her tiptoes a dog

and behind the dog
a talking parrot
a dancing bear
an acrobatic elephant
a clapping lion
a tiger on a horse
and of course
a monkey on a bicycle

a human head transplant is being planned
based on a soviet experiment of the group lead by vladimir demikhov in 1954 carried out on dogs, sergio canavero, a neurosurgeon from turin, is forecasting the first successful human

head transplant for 2017

it's time, yells the extra character again
who is this extra character?

jožica, 88, and milan, 91, are making out
we still don't know what to think of this

why would two people as old as sin be making out, it's not logical, it makes no sense, it's not
what people tend to do
so why?

it is time
it is time

why don't people in the public sector all get laid amongst each other?
because they're all related

it's not time yet, dammit
we're not ready yet
can't you see, i haven't yet
i haven't yet
i haven't yet

jerking off compared to sex is like

haven't yet explained enough that we're swimming in shit

is like

i haven't yet explained it in detail enough

a light bulb compared to the sun

it is true that we're in shit, but we have to look at it from the bright side
a glass can be half empty or half full
minuses have to be turned into pluses
there's something beautiful in everything
it is true that we're in shit, but at least we're swimming
this is how you should be looking at it
at least we're swimming

told often enough that this way things will lead us nowhere

what things

things
things, like
society
social structure
state structure
garden structure
gardens

i haven't yet

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Tone Škrjanec – Breathe

About the author

Photo by Tihomir Pinter



He published his first poetry collection *Blues zamaha* (The Blues of a Swing) relatively late, in 1997, later followed by others on a fairly regular basis: *Sonce na kolenu* (A Sun on a Knee, 1999), *Pagode na veter* (Wind Pagodas, 2001), *Noži* (Knives, 2002), *Baker* (Copper, 2004), *Koža* (Skin, 2007), *Duh želve je majhen in zelo star* (The Spirit of the Turtle is Small and Very Old, 2009), *Med drevesi* (Between the Trees, 2010), *V zraku so šumi, izbrane in zelo stare pesmi* (There are Noises in the Air, Selected and Very Old Poems, 2012), *Sladke pogačice* (Sweet Cakes, 2015) and finally *Dihaj* (Breathe), which was published last year. Seven of his books of poetry have been published abroad (Poland, Bulgaria, the USA and Croatia). His poems have appeared in a number of Slovenian and foreign anthologies of Slovenian poetry, and have been translated into many languages.

As an author, he likes to collaborate with various musicians; some of these fusions of poetry and music have also been recorded – his collaboration with Jani Mujič on the records *Košček hrupa in ščepec soli* (A Bit of Noise and a Pinch of Salt, 2003) and *Lovljenje ritma* (Catching the Rhythm, 2006), and with Ille on the record *Pri besedi z glasom in zvokom* (The Word in Voice and Sound, 2011). In 2017 he received the Velenjica, Cup of Immortality Award, for his outstanding ten-year poetry oeuvre. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

About the book



Tone Škrjanec could definitely not be seen as belonging to the conservative part of the population. He sees democracy similarly as was described, with the enthusiasm of himself at the centre, by the American romantic bard Walt Whitman. This free verse poet is undoubtedly his first true known ancestor. Considering everything that separates them and that remains unknown. With the important note that the wide little land of Slovenia, which is home to a characteristically post-socialist and late capitalist little society, is Mediterranean, islandy (a scatter of hundreds of small islands) and almost typically subalpine (rocky and moss-grown). And quieter. Not as conspicuous. There are the basic coordinates that we need when we head into the mountains of this poet or into his wide sea. We must also bring a body, and something to drink wouldn't hurt, while we're at it. One must breathe and sometimes pant. This is a big part of the secret, but it is not everything. A secret is so secret because there is always a little bit of it left. For some other time. For later.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Don't Know Don't Know

Stay together. Learn the flowers. Go light.
Gary Snyder

i'm writing in lower case out of sheer joy and laziness.
i'm reading a book of poems,
some kind of manual on sailing,
ropes and ancient skills.
is it making me better. perhaps,
i don't know, but certainly i breath better,
it's easier for me to ride the bike up the slope of the morning.
i remember the days when we mentioned
spruces mostly in connection to slenderness and beauty,
and in this context we shouldn't forget about
majestic ships with thick ropes
lowered into the sea, overgrown with moss and
families of shells and surrounded by

larger and smaller fish and multitudes of
very tiny things – i'm convincing myself
that this is plankton and not decomposed litter – and everything together
looks like outer space, as i am thus sitting on the edge of a pier,
swinging my legs and observing, between my knees,
this mini cosmos covered with the reflection of the sky.
the dance is, like always, extended into a carnival and
in the evenings, when the music stops,
the lights are turned on, the lights are turned on
and the doors are shut. there comes the time of
weaving infinite thresholds, babbling
about superbeautiful witches, a reflection on
first letting yourself be seduced and then
being drawn back home. there's a lot of sea, on all ends,
and a lot of birds. no sails in sight. only the remains
of eastern cuisine, exotic swinging of hips, a lava of words,
and a small heap of collapsed panna cotta.
become immaterial, be light.
i'm thinking, but still, i don't know.

Delusion

There's a pain in my stomach called hunga
Tom Pickard

bad thoughts a castle a wind of change
a green spoon of sticky medicine
a rope with a knot a tree with a saw
a nice juicy word
i don't say it out loud i don't write it down
skin, artfully ruptured, is addressing me
i'm looking at finger pads
breathing in the scent of laces
i'm looking at the sun let it shine
at least symbolically
the day kills the night is peace it is quiet the night is
velvet it's the colour i don't see

Bats

it's cold. the fire is dying out.
thus this jumper
from shetland with deer.
the invention of unburnable paper
is the final folly
and the beginning of the end.
it's only in the evening that the bats appear.
you know all this. you have been there.

Nataša Velikonja – Too Polite

About the author



Photo by Tihomir Pinter

Nataša Velikonja, born in 1967, sociologist, poet, essayist, translator. In 1993 she obtained her BA in Theoretical Sociology from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, and received the Faculty Prešeren Award for her undergraduate thesis. She has published six poetry collection; her first poetry collection *Abonma* (Subscription; 1994), considered to be the first openly lesbian poetry collection in Slovenia, was followed by *Žeja* (Thirst; 1999), *Plevel* (Weeds; 2004), *Poljub ogledala* (Kiss of the Mirror; 2007), *Ostani* (Stay; 2014) and *Preveč vljudna* (Too Polite, 2017). She is also the author of four books of essays and scientific papers; in the last twenty years she has published more than 500 essays, columns, sociological writings and other texts in different media both at home and abroad. She has translated several works of lesbian and gay theory and radical social criticism, as well as theories of architecture and design. She is active on several social, cultural and art fronts in Slovenia: she used to sit on the editorial board of the magazine *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, was the editor of the *Lesbo* magazine, is a long-time columnist for Radio Študent, a homosexual activist since 1993 and founder of the Lesbian Library and Archive at the Autonomous Cultural Zone of Metelkova. She has been registered with the Slovenian Ministry of Culture as a freelance poet, critic and translator since 1995. In 2016 she was awarded the Župančič Award for her work.

About the book



The poetry collection *Too Polite* is a continuation of the poetically shaped social commentary that Nataša Velikonja creates in her works with her distinct mix of lyricism and social criticism. Once again, her poetry in prose is defined by an accurately located poetic subject – the poet herself: the writing is autobiographical, representing an extremely individualised position of a lesbian intellectual hitting against various layers of micro-authorities. That is also the topic of her latest poetry collection.

This micro-authority stretches across all aspects of one's intimate and social life, it is everywhere, not only in the conventional centres of repressive action, but also where one would expect symbiosis, support, brotherhood and sisterhood, rebellion, resistance, in short, even in love, friendships, emancipatory movements, minority communities, minority scenes, even with their supporters, with declared fighters *for a better world*. That is why the embrace of social hypocrisy is all the more total and toxic, as there is no way out, precisely because of the omnipresent repressive mechanisms and the fake efforts for this *better world*. Social action that would lay the foundations for change, is overgrown with personal psychopathologies, non-reflected colonialist identifications and therefore with inauthenticity, critical blindness, mute authority that is in fact obstructing social progress. Analysing the exercising of power and hegemony, the author outlines many specific forms of social hypocrisy that could once be called conformism but can no longer be called that today, as this is no longer about the logic of establishing a more long-term structure but merely a current, instantaneous satisfaction of an authoritative, egomaniac reflex. This widespread social schizophrenia, this game without rules, leads into social chaos, into a constant state of conflict, the war of all against all and particularly into social regression. Accordingly, the author's discourse breaks with social correctness.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Too Polite

a correction: I can live a hundred lives and read thousands of books, I can be present in countless conversations, on these plains of the unconscious, battles, debts, muddlements, ruses, concealments, denials, lies you don't even dream of,

and it doesn't matter if I'm here for eternity, whether I'm here for the first and the only and the

last day, I'm extricating myself, believing *I'm living*, from this crime which is the first and the only and the last and a whole life, and it's as if I'm without any attributes of the living,

I know nothing therefore I'm not going to complicate anything, but don't you ever join anything, don't stay, at some point she will demand what doesn't belong to her, she, the pretense of *power*, the pretense of being *the point of origin*, with thousands of proper names, at some point she will say, *everything is here due to me*,

but I only walked by and wrote a few sentences, and if there was anything due to her, these were only the sentences I didn't write, but now I will write them down, because now I'm making a correction and thus I will now write down everything, because this age is either an anticivilization or its catalyst,

and at the moment that you arrive, cut into, destroy, interrupt civilization, don't look towards all those lights at the end of the tunnels, don't go there, don't get closer and don't join in like some moronic civilizer,

this is a scam, in the end you will get stuck in a torture chamber, guilty, and you won't close your eyes anymore and you won't know anything and you won't see anything and most of all you won't see anyone and you won't be able to run away from this *love* anymore,

power incessantly lurking from behind a blinding searchlight, which is for the time being still wallowing over there in a puddle with three unread books and preaching, and when you get closer, she gets born, and this age into which we stare as repressed morons is above all just the response she is capable of,

power and a *victim* simultaneously, and me inserted into this mosaic of hers, in which the elements must be totally mute, because this creature into which we're investing our lives so that she becomes our life, knows everything, because everything belongs to her, because she is everything, she devours and cleanses space, to disguise her unhealable insufficiency, the only possible space,

and what you find around here is her *posthigienization* solitude, this martyrdom of hers is her absolute, she is the *victim* which is your incapacitating, she is the *victim* which is healing herself with the absolute, which is your minus, she measures out crumbs because she is the *victim*, which is the good authority, and her good deeds are crimes, and the guilty one is me,

but I have only written a few sentences, in passing, I don't know where I was headed, onwards through that darkness, I only encountered her over there and for a moment I communicated, thinking that *I'm living*, that I'm passing by, and then this one with the proper name *president* installs this passing-by *life* of mine into her mosaic and cheers, *how wonderful that you participate*,

but I don't participate, I don't agree with anything, and in those moronic sociological concoctions you can read everywhere, *power cannot create identification, though it can attempt to do that through repression, but identity escapes power*, which is the very essence of the mistake, for *power* doesn't create identification, what does *she* care who you are, *power* encloses you into a moronic mosaic from which *you cannot escape* and where you then tolerate moronic concepts, the blows for which you don't know where they come from, and *nobody escapes until the living collapses*,

Slovenia – Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2022

The project will be carried out by the Slovenian Book Agency

Slovenia's appearance as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair (19-23 October 2022) was formally sealed in early 2018 when intensive preparations for this role began. The presentation of the Republic of Slovenia as the main guest at the most important international book fair is significant both from the point of view of long-term visibility and positioning of Slovenian authors and Slovenian creativity in the field of books in German-speaking countries as well as from the point of view of a greater recognition of Slovenian creativity and cultural and economic potential.

A successful performance of countries as main guests at the Frankfurt Book Fair substantially increases the number of publications of showcased authors in German-speaking countries and other book markets. At the same time, the performance enhances the cultural and tourist potential of the country and contributes to economic growth and the development of cultural and service activities and creates new employment opportunities.

The aims of the Guest of Honour programme are to support the publishing industry and cultural institutions of the selected country in order to integrate them internationally and thus increase visibility of its literature and the number of translations from its language. From the point of view of the book industry the programme leads to an increased trading of copyright and helps publishers develop international contacts even after the end of the fair and the country's role as Guest of Honour. The entire book industry benefits from the additional attention the showcased authors receive due to the increased promotion and presence of publishers at the world's largest book fair.

As of 2013, 582 works by Slovenian authors were translated into German, 304 into English, and by the time of Slovenia's appearance as the Guest of Honour the number of translations of Slovenian authors into German and English is expected to increase by 30 percent annually and increase even further after the presentation.

More: <http://www.jakrs.si/en/>

Guest of Honour role brings many benefits for foreign publishers of Slovenian literature – from new financial mechanisms for support of translations to highly increased visibility of the authors and their translated works.

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.

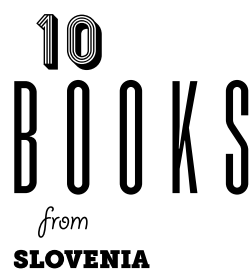
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The Trubar Foundation

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.



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