

10 BOOKS

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SLOVENIA

Literary Critics' Choice

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ZA SLOVENSKO
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LITERATURE

Esad Babačić

Jure Jakob

Alenka Jovanovski

Vesna Lemaić

Eva Markun

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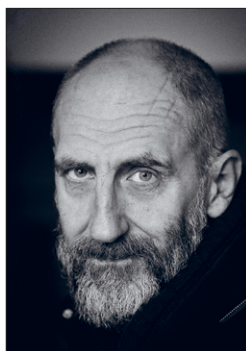
Andrej Tomažin

Bronja Žakelj

Esad Babačić – Cut off from the Sky

About the author

Photo by: Jože Suhadolnik



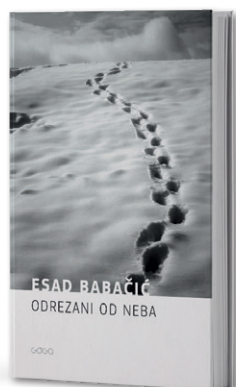
Esad Babačić (1965) is a poet, journalist and prose writer and the former frontman and author of the lyrics of the Slovenian punk band Via Ofenziva. His work has been presented in numerous literary magazines, such as Die Batterie, Edinburgh Review, Literaturundkritik and DG The Dirty Goat. 1990 saw the publication of his first translated poetry book *Lying Poet* in the USA. In collaboration with the world-renowned art group NSK, he also published an art book titled *Biospektiva* (2010).

The poem »Donava« (»The Danube«) has won him the international Hörbiger Award, and he was twice nominated for the Jenko Award (in 2013 and 2018). In 2014, he received the Velenjica-Immortality Cup for a

decade of putting out outstanding poetry.

In 2000, he was one of the three writers (the other two being Aleš Čar and Aleš Šteger) representing Slovenia on the Literature Train (Literature Express Europa 2000 c/o literaturWERKstatt Berlin), which in a month and a half visited a better part of Europe, with performances in Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Lisbon, Moscow, Tallinn, Riga and Brest, and with translations into all major European languages. Babačić has given poetry readings all over Europe, he has taken part in prestigious literary festivals (including Sommernacht der Lyrik, Struga Poetry Evenings, and the Days of Poetry and Wine) and has participated in writers' residencies (LITERARNI CORICULUM\LCB, Literarisches Colloquium Berlin Gäste – 2002 and LITERATUR HAUS, ATELIERR TOP 22, Unsere Gäste, Krems, 2004).

About the book



The poetry of Esad Babačić is characterised by a remarkable combination of melancholy, wisdom and warm-hearted humour. The result are elliptic poems, which are simple only at first glance: "Each step is big, / says the chief / who walks slowly." Babačić's poetry condenses the content to such an extent that sometimes a verse suffices for expressing something which could be turned into a story – a whole novel: "Rhythm sleeps on railway tracks." *Cut off from the Sky* is a book for everyday life, as it gives us back the moments which would otherwise get lost in it. To quote a poem: "The rain has given me back the roofs." It is no wonder that Babačić's poems are one of those readers know by heart.

Sometimes

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Sometimes you grasp a book
without having read it,
sometimes you read a person
without intending to.
Sometimes you can feel the luck
you haven't had.
Sometimes you burn
because you know
you'll be ashes.
Sometimes you wear black
although you're white.
Sometimes things are
just the way
they
used to be
and you're lucky
to be still in one piece.

Retreat

One of those days
when noone is defending themselves
as noone is attacking.
When stadiums are empty
and a draw is the best result
for all.
When ropes are lowered
beneath the knees
and belts are hanging
over the door
somebody forgets to close
because he doesn't care.
When emptiness is
returning to the suburbs.
When traffic lights are lighting up for their own sake.
When curtains are making love to windows
and the poor are looking for power.
When you are doing nothing, sitting in a corner
looking for the root of the word
quiet.

The First of September

Two solitudes
miss each other
on each
first of
September
at the same
crossroads.
I'm sorry
if what's raining
isn't
stones,
but
my
sadness.

Jure Jakob – Hunger

About the author



Photo by Matic Bajželj

Jure Jakob was born in 1977 in Celje, Slovenia. He has a Master's Degree in Comparative Literature from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. He is the author of five poetry books (*Three Stations*, *Wakefulness*, *Deserted Places*, *Pieces of Work*, *Hunger*), the monographic study about the narrative works of Lojze Kovačič *A Child's View*, a book of prose and essays *Houses and Other Free Compositions* and two poetry picture books for children (*The Sea*, *The Secret Forest*). His work has received the following awards: the Golden Bird Award (2004) for young, up-and-coming artists; the Critics' Sieve Award (2016) for the year's best book in Slovenian according to literary critics; the Rožanc Award (2016) for the year's best essay collection in Slovenian; and the Prešeren Fund Award for achievements in literature (2019). He lives and works in Savlje pri Ljubljani.

About the book



The light makes the apples grow, makes things visible and allows us attempts to describe them: a vine trellis, small plums, a birds' nest, a table, a house, a beloved person. But not only are we unable to describe light, the light is blind to us. It confirms our presence and reveals the tenaciousness in which we recognize life without being really able to understand it. And when the seasons change and the sun's path across the sky is drawing a different trail, it also seems right that days become shorter and fill with more darkness. The speaker of Jakob's calm and clean poetry believes in the existence of some kind of order, trusts nature and does not want to disturb it. He is aware of the miracle probably taking place, but he cannot see it as he can only say that something has been when this thing becomes absent. Thus he strives for nothing but – humbly – being and facing the surrounding world as well as the dark corners of his inner world sincerely, grateful for his hunger and grateful that the apple tree bears fruit. Because life that transcends the speaker is happening beyond his will and will reveal its meaning – the speaker must believe in – only in the end.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Sad Fingers

Some strings sound brighter,
some darker.
For rich sound, you need all.
Some days one of them
will shine with a special glow,
it's the light,
it's the way the guitar is leaning.
As if invitingly.
It persuades you, you find, you feel the vein,
you follow, let it lead you, let it ring,
let it take all the silence for itself.
Some other time, it's another.
Today, it's again the turn of
one of these poor days.
One cannot do without them.
I wish for something other
than that which has dazzled me,
but I comply.
I fear
it might break.
Or will precisely this

one that is most worn out,
this heavy and dull one,
really hold out the longest?

Vase

The apple tree twig I brought home
from a walk a week ago,
has dropped its blossoms.
The leaves are drying.
The stem in the water is rotting.
I will throw it away.

Today the world is empty like my vase.
Somebody turns it upside down
and a cold wind pours out.
A starving dog rushes after it.
The dog is howling, wailing, it finds me
even if I hide far away.
Then he goes on to shake the vase
and a cloud of withered flowers falls down.
I quickly shut my eyes.
When I look up again,
my eyes sting.
I can't take this anymore.
It's better to bow my head,
bend my back.
This will enrage him,
he will strike against me
and break the vase.

I hope.
I believe in a new world.

Alenka Jovanovski – A Thousand and Eighty Degrees

About the author

Photo by Robert Ocvirk



Alenka Jovanovski is a poet, translator, literary critic, essayist and editor. After a PhD in Comparative Literature, she lectured at the Universities of Ljubljana and Nova Gorica. Since 2011 she has worked as a freelancer. She translates from contemporary Italian literature (Pavese in co-translation with G. Malej, Calvino, Milani, Scego, Prosa, Magrelli) and literatures written in the English language (M. Randall). Her poetry has been published in two collections of poems (*Trousers For G.*, *A Thousand and Eighty Degrees*) and translated into Spanish, English and Polish. It can be found in the anthology of women poets from the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Slovenia (in Polish, 2013) and in the American anthology of Slovenian poetry, *A Bridge of Voices* (2017). She also writes studies and essays about poetry focusing on the questions of ethics and aesthetics as well as the strategies of deactivating the biopolitical machine.

About the book



A book of poems *A Thousand and Eighty Degrees* (2018, Center for Slovenian Literature) deals with the question of how to subvert the mental matrices by which contemporary people are pushed into fascism. The title in Slovenian has three meanings or “steps” that are part of a long path. The book opens with the verses pronounced by the dying Che Guevara (“heart, do I really know your place”) and ends with words about love. The path in between could be described in terms of a poetic analysis of societal models and a clearly pronounced engagement. However, the middle part of the book can be compared to a stocking stripped off in the manner that exposes the layer of the fabric that usually touches the skin as there are also intimate reasons that push people into fascism. If heart is one of the central themes of this book, so is the eros in its broadest old Greek meaning: the eros and eroticism as dangerous and untamable forces that every society and civilization – regardless of time and space – strive to subjugate and suppress in some way. In late capitalism, eros is, through socialization, forged into desire that produces waste-things and waste-people, such as migrants, people who are unwanted. In the third part, poems speak again in a less intimate tone, yet in a new manner: with a carnival language and a multiplicity of voices. Here we see poets walking towards the centre of the exploitation of eros, side by side with other people-waste. Revolt is an erotic magma, changing every moment and being poured into different shapes (voices) as it will not let itself be shaped only into one. Thus, readers are invited to join and participate in such inner liveliness.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

A Walk Through the Tall Grass to an Algae-Covered Pond

My father is the wind:
it is only when I get quiet that he speaks.
Barely perceptibly, birch leaves are drawn apart,
gleaming, showing the way.

The day is finally a hot forgetting of rain.
I'm walking towards the pond amidst the grass.
The pond is gleaming like the moon.
At any moment it could burn my face.

My father has cancer,
my father doesn't see anything.
The pond in the distance is pure milky silver,
I don't know if silver can see at all.

Silver is a mirage: an icy surface across the pond.
Silver is the legs of a daddy longlegs skating.
Silver is the algae overgrowing living water.
And my thirst remains: motionless, untouched.

My father is the wind, my body a Geiger counter.
Can you hear, my love: thuk thuk ... thuk thuk,
barely perceptible shifts eating away at the birch leaves.
Don't fear, my love, it is only my body making these sounds.

My body is radiating, destroying the delicate cells.
I must set a limit to it,
for the sake of the spider web with dew drops
and the sake of the snail trail, I must set a limit to it.

I say: hush, calm down, you body of mine.
When it calms down, it doesn't radiate. It only aches,
but I don't see that. My body isn't my
body anymore; there is silence.

Now I am lying down into a heart.
A heart is moulded of wind:
I can find the firmest footing
only where each time

I slip.

Vesna Lemaic – Welcome

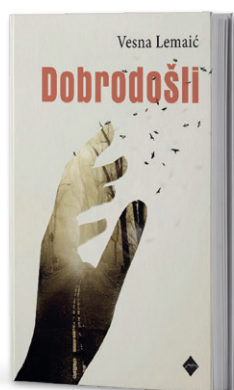
About the author



Photo by the author's
personal archive

Vesna Lemaic (1981) graduated from Comparative Literature. She introduced herself as a writer in 2008, with her first book *Popularne zgodbe* (Popular Stories). In 2010, the novel *Odlagališče* (Landfill) was published, followed in 2014 by *Kokoška in ptiči* (The Hen and Birds) and, in 2018, the book of short stories *Dobrodošli* (Welcome). For Radio Slovenia, she wrote the audio play *Podpotnik* (Subtrotter). One of her stories was included into the anthology *Best European Fiction*. Her work has received several awards, including the Slovenian Book Fair Award, the Fabula Award for the best book of short stories and the Golden Bird Award for literature. Lemaic conducts writing workshops for the young and experimental workshops that focus on group writing. For more than five years, she has also participated in organizing the Living Literature Festival in Ljubljana.

About the book



The short story collection *Welcome* juxtaposes themes of tourism and migrations. Small or fleeting events reflect diverse identities – voluntary or enforced –, and record spaces through which persons pass or in which they are trapped. The stories bring together feelings of familiarity and foreignness, rootedness and unrootedness, belonging and alienation, which emerge from the dividing line – the difference between Us and Others. The cracking of society is condensed through memories and experiences of the narrator, who is trying to put the pieces together, being aware that the surface is shaky due to the gaps behind which loom abysses of inequality that refuse to be filled with meaning. The only thing at the narrator's disposal is fragments of the past which she is laying into the present in the hope that they will resound in counterpoint, though discordantly. The stories are not looking for solutions; they are putting into focus trivial episodes, acknowledging that the latter are not merely something ephemeral, but that there are layered meanings lurking in their shadows. The collection is thus tracing life, which ceaselessly defies self-insight, knowledge and control.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Ugly

Not only me, we are all standing and waiting at the pedestrian crossing. Scalding cars are trickling by as beads of sweat over the road's softened crust. The midday sun does not shade anything, everything is in focus.

Behind my back, I hear, 'I liked the Triple Bridge and those statues on the Butchers' Bridge.' Another voice chimes in, 'Yeah, they're monumental. But the girls here are really ugly.'

The girl standing next to me and I glance at each other. None of us turns back to look at the two tourists. We would get even more confused if they laughed at the situation they have put us in. A bus pulls past, the brakes grating, and halts as a muscle in a spasm. The passengers are staring at us as though they have heard the comment and are now basking in our embarrassment.

We examine each other's faces, bodies, we are not rivals, we are mirrors. We can't say to each other: you look good. Her cheeks are heavy from greasy makeup, while there are blackheads, a broken capillary and protruding hairs by my mouth on mine. It crosses my mind that I would feel uncomfortable in her sundress which imitates the flayed skin of the virtually extinct African predator. And perhaps she has the same thoughts as me, she wouldn't even take the rubbish out to the dustbins in my tracksuit. We cannot find the right facial expressions, we do not know how to reflect each other. But this fleeting episode has connected us. The bus drives off, the metal tissue moans and releases a hot exhaust. I must do something, I wink at her and she smiles. We have nothing in common, merely this hometown where we live with other ugly local women. It does not matter how hard we try or whether we care at all, we cannot compete against Ljubljana's monuments.

She says, I hope they get pickpocketed.
The traffic light turns green.

Contact

On the Spanish beach Zahare de los Atunes in the vicinity of Cádiz, tanned bathers of all ages are lying on the sand. Suddenly some lean on their elbows, others sit up, and still others stand up, fastening their eyes on the sea. Unrest passes over the shore, as though people spotted a vast oil slick unstoppably approaching their bodies and the bodies of their loved ones. There is this sense that they are underdressed and unprepared, but at this moment this does not matter, as they should do something. Because what is approaching on the waves is not oil, neither a floating archipelago of blooming algae nor a swarm of moon jellyfish; it is something akin to tourists in form and structure. What is drawing closer is beating like a blurred, alien apparition. Bathers are shading their eyes with their hands, pulling out their mobiles to record the unheard of phenomenon. On the horizon, there are anchored sailboats with little French and German flags. A cruiser and the sun are jointly making their way across the horizon. But what has been deposited into sight is this thing that has overbalanced the still life. This thing that is coming into view, expanding, rising and falling on waves, moving ahead, arriving, and catching up with the shore and then on it. As far as this thing is concerned, one can do nothing. It is possible to be dumbstruck, to harden into immobility, while, amongst the deckchairs, inflatable floats, folding chairs, armbands, tourists' cold bags, a succession of feet is running, racing and triggering tiny explosions of sand. The heels and toes are digging into the soft sandy beach, and their footprints mix with others. As though the wet feet invaded from another reality, caught up with them and caused an intersection of incongruous proportions. As though the land belonging to the southern coast ran aground on the northern coast, and the apparitions turned into material bodies.

The bathers will show the videos from their phones, they will state that the foreigners took no notice of them. They have left behind only an inflatable rubber boat, which is innocently bobbing in the shallows until the arrival of the police.

Two German Women

On the island, we are pretending we are not tourists. But our appearance is such, fair and sunburnt, the locals all address us in German. Even when we remind them that we speak their language, that we are almost theirs, their tongues slip, again and again.

At the table, we are eavesdropping on what German holidaymakers have to say about politics, looking at what they are dismembering on their plates. There is something base in our behaviour.

To the locals serving us, the distances between our tables are the same, we cannot fool them.

Eva Markun – Menagerie

About the author



Photo by the author's
personal archive

Eva Markun was born in 1990 in Bled, Slovenia. A writer, translator and beekeeper, she studied French and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. Constantly returning to Southeast Asia, mostly Cambodia, she has translated a manual about beekeeping in Cambodia (from Slovenian to English) for a Slovenian beekeeping project in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Her short stories and poems have been published in Slovenian literary magazines Apokalipsa, Mentor and Poetikon, while her short story *Swarming* was chosen as the best entry at the Festival of Young Literature – Urška 2016. The story was translated to English and Czech for the

STRANOU – *Evropští básníci naživo* festival and published in the anthology *Stranou 2013-2017*. A year later, the short story collection *Menagerie* (2017) was published by JSKD. The short prose collection *Menagerie* consists of eight short stories that take place on the edge of wilderness, be it Slovenian or Cambodian, and that explore the fragile edges of the relationship between culture and nature.

At the festival *Novo mesto short*, which is organised by the publishing house Goga, *Menagerie* was chosen by the Slovenian Literary Critics' Association as the best Slovenian short story collection in 2017.

About the book



Menagerie contains eight short stories, which take place in the Slovenian countryside as well as in the jungle of Cambodia and play out on the border between wilderness and village, nature and culture, the unconscious and conscious. The focus of each story intertwines the personal dilemmas of protagonists and their (sometimes) fantastic encounters with their own fears and the Other, whose reflection they often find in nature and animals with which they come into contact; their reactions range from fascination and awe to absolute horror.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Without Mercy

»Should I check what sex ...«

»No! No, no need to!« utters Lidija even before the well-meaning gynaecologist manages to finish her sentence. »I really don't want to know. After five girls in a row I really don't want to know what sex it will be.«

»Maybe it will be another healthy little girl?« replies the gynaecologist good-naturedly and presses the appliance against her belly even a bit harder. Lidija flinches and tries to breathe deeply, to alleviate the unpleasant tension in her belly, while that thing is pricking her, forcing itself too deep inside her body. The gynaecologist peeks at the screen, which is, luckily, turned in such direction that Lidija would need to twist her head completely to be able to see the throbbing beating of a miniature heart on it, and thus she prefers to stare uneasily through the window into the falling snow behind icy glass, asking herself when will she finally wake up and this will all seem like an ill-conceived nightmare of a Jungian subconscious.

»Everything is as usual,« says the gynaecologist meaningfully. »A healthy baby. Would you like a picture?«

Lidija shakes her head, reaches for the hand towel, sheds the sticky gel and the apparatus from her stiffened belly, both at the same time, and pulls her T-shirt over her freezing belly. If this fishlike cluster of cells ever hatches at all, it will most probably be the coldest being in the

world. »So, everything as usual?» she repeats a bit miserably and gets the trousers which she has negligently dropped somewhere between the door and the torture chair.

»Uhm,« the gynaecologist nods indifferently and still prints out something black-and-white and striped from an antique machine. »If you want, I can send you to morphology, to the hospital – they have a better ultrasound machine there. Just to be safe.«

»What for?» sighs Lidija and pulls the coat over her shoulders, »it's not like I'm going to abort her if her heart valve does not function perfectly or if she has six fingers. You know.« The two women lock their gazes, from over the rims of their glasses and from under downcast eyelashes, but they turn their own way, Lidija's hand already on the knob. As it does not matter anyway. The gynaecologist squeezes the paper into her pocket and accompanies Lidija to the reception office, she waves the iron prescription in front of her, waits for the nurse to return the sleeping toddler in a car seat to Lidija, and politely closes the door behind her.

Number six. Lidija looks at the slumbering number five, which she has leaned against the bench, and strokes her eyelashes, making the toddler restlessly circle her covered eyeballs in sleep. She sits down next to her in the empty waiting room and dangles her legs as if she had to make sure about something, then watches the chair and her belly and the empty, cold socialist benches. In the Arabic world, six daughters might be a sort of blessing. Six daughters, six dowries which come into the family in exchange for daughters. Camels, cows, goats, sheep – to make up for the fertility and fecundity of the female body, which is rented out for discovery to the always greedy male nature. Perhaps not really in the Arabic world – in Nigeria, perhaps? Senegal? And not in an obscure village in an obscure country in an obscure part of Europe, where every child is an expense – an expense of parents, but the possession of the state, and her body with its ever-growing belly is an unspeakable perversion at which everyone is shaking their heads, as if it were something wholly abnormal. Six children. Six girls. Six proofs of her womb's incapacity to produce a male descendant, whose mythic penis was the only thing Matevž and her mother-in-law wanted, as though that was the sole proof of human greatness.

Lidija's hand slowly rises and strokes the toddler's cheek, and then she takes hold of the toddler together with the chair and the blanket, and she carefully, with a sigh of someone who has done this innumerable times, places the child at her hip and slowly shambles to the car. Six children. Six girls. For god's sake.

Mojca Širok – **The Contract**

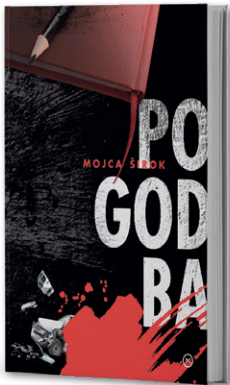
About the author



Photo by the author's
personal archive

Mojca Širok, a publicist and journalist of the Radio and Television Corporation of Slovenia (RTVS), was for thirteen years a correspondent from Italy and the Vatican. She wrote the first reportage on Sicilian mafia for the weekly Mladina; for the RTVS she made a documentary film *Silence in Palermo*. She has also demonstrated her knowledge on the topics of Italian politics and society in three books. *Power without a Face* (2010) outlines the power of Italian mafia. *The Last Roman Emperor* (2010) addresses the disintegration of the Italian party system and the political project of Silvio Berlusconi. In the last book, *From Benedict to Francis* (2014), which was also reprinted, Širok analyses the background of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the reasons for the election of Pope Francis.

About the book



The crime novel *The Contract* is her literary debut. In lush language, lively dialogues and with unpredictable twists the reader is led into the heart of the mafia goings-on. The main agents – criminal investigators, prosecutors, journalists and politicians – have faces, characters, personal stories and many times also the binding common past. Their bonds of love and friendship intertwine with their work assignments and the boundary between where the state ends and mafia begins is considerably blurred. The dense generic writing keeps up the suspense from the first to the last sentence; although the crime novel is set in Italy, where mafia is deeply ingrained into the social fabric, the themes the book tackles could easily be transposed into the Slovenian environment. *The Contract* earned Mojca Širok the *Blue Bird Award* 2018.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

He had no idea for how long the phone had been ringing. It took a long time before he realized that the piercing sound was not pounding in his head, but that the phone was ringing. How many times had he already told himself that he had to change his ringtone. It was not ringing anyway, it was emitting the disgusting disco hit from prehistory I'm a Barbie girl, in a Barbie wo-orld, hello, Barbie, let's go party ... uu-uuh, uu-uuh ... He cursed the asshole who had set it, and cursed himself even more because of not knowing how to change it. He could still see the idiots at his work, how they had been laughing their socks off when – for the first time, in his trouser pocket, right there next to his balls – it had started to squeal I'm a Barbie girl ... He had been red from rage, while Roberto had suggested, in the general guffaw, that he should consider buying a pink phone bag. The assholes had been aware of the fact that he could not change his ringtone and that he had no one he could ask to do it instead of him. Well, he couldn't care less for them, the assholes. He would rather throw the phone into the next waste bin he can find than ask them for anything. The phone was in his trouser pocket, the trousers were on the floor next to the sofa, at the bottom of a pile of clothes which he had taken off half-conscious last night, before crashing into sleep. Crashing, yes, he had passed out suddenly and completely, as always, when it had been already too late to realize that the last glass had always been one too many. He lifted his head, his cheek came unstuck from the fake leather pad of the beat-up sofa, which used to be the centrepiece in the anteroom of the office of a powerful Yugoslav communist director. Now that was prehistory! Relieved, even with a hint of pride, he established that he hadn't thrown up. What was left on the sofa was only a damp trace of his cheek and a little pool of saliva; he touched his face and felt that not all of it had gone to the sofa, from the corner of his mouth a drooly worm was crawling towards his chin. He wiped it off with the back of his hand and brushed his hand against the sofa. Then he reached out towards the clothes and swallowed down bile, which spurted into his throat like an enemy lying in wait. For a moment

he was waiting for a stronger thrust to come, and as there was none, he grabbed a black piece of cloth sticking out of the heap, and pulled it towards himself. Barbie was squealing from the left pocket. It took a while before he dug the phone out of the depths of his pocket, and still a little longer before he, with his stiff fingers on the screen, hit the little square with a green earpiece, cursed the idiots who were making phones from window panes, and, finally, with a voice that would make any real Barbie shriek from horror, barked: »Hello!« In ten minutes he was already sitting in his car. Roughly dressed and roughly decent. Roughly sober. He knew that he would have blown more than he should, a lot more. But alcohol was such a big part of him that he was half in the bag even when asleep. Slightly half in the bag, he told himself. Just a bit, to file corners, blunt the sharp edges. So it did not hurt that bad when you bumped into them. He also knew that at work this was no secret anymore. Sober, he was even more annoying. But the other thing that nobody seemed to recall anymore was more consequential: when he was sober, was he also even more competent? Because he knew most certainly that the boss and everyone, well who cares about everyone, it was the boss who mattered, he knew that the boss was putting up with him only because of the results he brought him. And that he would, at the very moment when there would be no more results, without mercy or bad conscience, like some provincial copy of emperor Nero, feed him to the lions. Via Michele Mercati 6, said Luigi. He had a strange voice a little earlier on the phone. A body, he said, it looks like a male, probably white, Via Michele Mercati 6. How does a male, probably white, look like? Is he a male and a white man or not a male and not a white man, what does it mean, seems like, probably, maybe, sometimes yes, sometimes no?! Luigi was really a piece of work. Probably the hag was again giving him a hard time because his phone was buzzing in the middle of the night, and he had to get out of the bed he was sharing with her, his plump southern spouse, for whom he was a sheer loser, because he had been for fifteen years at one and the same job post with an unpredictable schedule, devastating work and no satisfaction. At least not the kind she would acknowledge. Poor Luigi. He could not remember whether he had always been that grey or whether he had turned grey, whole, in the face, in the hair and even the clothes, slowly after long years with her. They were really quite a pair, he and Luigi. The first always slightly half in the bag, the other all grey, and nobody could recall what they had been like before, as if it mattered whether there had really been a before. Now he was already getting close. It was still the wee hours of the night, that hour before the dawn when night owls were no longer cruising the city and when garbage trucks were not revving up their engines yet, blocking the traffic at all hours on every corner. Rome was asleep. Sleeping, well, the way Rome sleeps. Rome was like him, it occurred to him. Or he was like Rome, anyway. Even when asleep, he was slightly half in the bag. He turned into Viale Aldrovandi. A haze was rising above the trees in Villa Borghese. The stink of animal faeces was coming from the zoo. At the beginning of the street Michele Mercati there was a police barricade.

A uniformed man, all green and bleary-eyed, immediately recognized him. Nobody else at the police station had such a smashed Alfa. He turned into the street and was driving slowly towards the flashing red and blue lights. Ma que luxury. Que digs. This was a whole different world.

Denis Škofič – Reaching

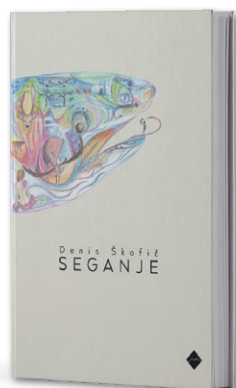
About the author



Photo by Helena Zemljč

Denis Škofič (1985) is both a poetry and prose writer and a literary critic. At the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, he graduated from Slovenian Language and Literature. He was the editor for prose and literary criticism at the student magazine *A Litre of Language*. His texts have been published in various literary magazines as well as other print and online media. His short story *Sveča* (Candle) was published in the anthology of the international Festival of Upcoming Literature *Alpe Adria* titled *Vrane, čečkarije in konfeti* (Crows, Squiggles and Confetti; Litera, 2017). He participated in the making of the monograph *Portreti sodobne slovenske literature (1991–2016)* (Portraits of Contemporary Slovenian Literature (1991–2016); Fit media, 2017). In 2014, he was the guest of the Pranger Festival, which is dedicated to reflections on contemporary Slovenian poetry; twice, he was the finalist of the Poetry Tournament (2011 and 2017). At the Beletrina publishing house, he published in 2013 his poetry debut *Sprehajalec ptic* (A Bird Walker), which garnered approval from both readers and critics; the book was nominated for the Jenko Award and the Critics' Sieve Award. In 2018, his second book of poetry, *Seganje* (Reaching), was published at the Cankarjeva založba publishing house; the book was nominated for the Jenko Award. He lives and works in the village of Dolnja Bistrica in the Prekmurje region.

About the book



The poetry collection *Reaching* is a conceptual book, based on the broad range of meanings of the word »reaching«, especially on the less familiar sense of the word – a term for a fishing technique, which requires the fisherman to grope for fish while swimming or diving and to catch them with their own bare hands. The major part of the book's symbols and metaphors is derived from the world of fishing and fish as well as myths and legends related to both: the fish Faronika, Jesus, Osiris etc. The book's conceptual structure allows for several ways of reading – linear, nonlinear, labyrinthine, individual and circular –, which is also reflected in the merging of the linear (human) and cyclic (mythological, divine) time. The poetry collection is not conceptual only at the level of form, which enables the reader to read the book also as a compact long poem or a novel, but also at the level of individual poems. Due to its experimental language which encompasses a range of registers, from dialect words to neologisms, mythology, strong symbolism, intertextuality, pop culture and art references, and the inventions of the author's own mythology, the poetry collection *Reaching* is in many aspects reminiscent of *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce, *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot and *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

The English Patient

I don't know who I really am is.
I only know that they have found me him
crashed in the desert,
all in flames,
with antlers of fire
out of which I was rushing my his skin.
I only know the desert
which I have has walked through and mapped,
the desert with the cave of swimmers.
The desert which is sand which has been
left behind by a shattered clepsydra,
when Caliban's tempest hurled itself
into the sails, so that it, together with the ship,

also took away the sea.
Burnt beyond recognition,
I am lying here in a room painted with
a forest which in the flickering
dusk of quiveringly boastful, quiveringly irascible
candlelight gives an impression of being
real, as though it will venture forth
tooth and nail and one of the leaves
on the painted trees will start to sway
if a moth lands on it,
the moth circling Ponge's candle.
Everything I have has brought
with me through the flames, through the fire,
is a copy of Herodotus's *Histories*,
which I have has added to,
cut out pages from other books and glued
them into it
or made my his own footnotes.
The spaces of the house in which I am lying
are linked to a staircase
which in many places leads nowhere,
as the war left it without numerous
steps which have been at some
points replaced by books.
If I could descend them,
I would be leafing through into walking or else
falling into the reader's gaps.
In order to escape this prison,
I should, with the needle of a compass,
tattoo a map onto my skin.

Insomnia

When it grows dark, I watch black fishermen on boats driving large logs; to each log is attached a strong line with a hook. In order not to scare the fish away, they use long wooden poles instead of oars, and they push off the bottom and onwards. They look for bushes growing in the water, under which sheatfish dig their burrows into the bank and wait for prey. That is what they told me when I first asked them about their unusual activities. When they come to the right spot, they stop the boat inaudibly with one move, take a dead bird out of the bucket, most often a sparrow, put it on the hook and submerge it into the water by the bush, together with the log. Then they depart inaudibly, with one move.

When the dawn breaks, the whole surface is full of shifting logs, reeling at the water's nape. Some logs momentarily disappear under the surface, only to be thrown back with full force. In time, black fisherman arrive and go after them with their boats. They pick the logs from the water, with lines they pull heavy sheatfish into boats, and the fish are just as large as the fisherman, if not larger. The morning is cold, this is why my throat is burning. There is a strange feeling in my mouth, which is dry, as though all saliva was soaked up by the feathers of the dead bird I feel between my teeth. The pain in my mouth is growing unbearable, I want only to go into the black burrow. I am propelling myself towards it with all my strength, but the dead bird in my mouth pulls me back to the surface again and again. The burrow is drawing me in ever more strongly, but the buoyancy of the dead bird in my mouth is even greater. I strain with all my power, and then I am amazed by the ease with which the black fisherman drags me into his boat, although I am much larger than him.

Kaja Teržan – Circle

About the author



Photo by Gregor Rozman

Kaja Teržan (1986) is a poet, performer and kindergarten teacher. She has published two books of poetry. Her literary debut *Delta* (Delta, Center for Slovenian Literature, 2015) was nominated for the Veronika Award. Recently, the same publishing house has issued her second poetry book *Krog* (Circle, 2018), which delves still deeper into the fundamental questions of life and existence. As Teržan is a former dancer, her poems often return to the body and dance in the broadest sense of the word.

About the book



Kaja Teržan's second poetry book *Circle* symbolises eternal search, remembering and rummaging of the lyrical speaker: of oneself, other people and thus life. This ceaselessly biting ouroboros, a hawk that does not stop pecking, is a dance in a circle, in which the author most times remains by herself – or breaks away, or is somehow pushed out by others. This chase after others and oneself is constant hitting and fighting battles, which the speaker of these poems can never escape.

Circular motion, or well-established motion which is at times stifling, can be found anywhere: in nature, skillfully outlined in details primarily with associative strings of miniature fragments – the four seasons, water and waterdrops resembling leaves which are also changing colours; and in interpersonal relationships; with people who do not need you anymore, neither in their official nor in their personal environment. In the departure of those you love and who died when you were still a child, all of a sudden, against their will. Death, dismissal from work, partings and separations – those concerning family, love and friendship – and losses that deprive you of your favorite things, seem to be – in the poem »You can't lose what you don't have, but still« – a reply to the poem *One art* by Elizabeth Bishop. But the memory remains, a certain nostalgia which leads you back to childhood, to little bits and parts, such as crocodile pegs, chocolate wafer cubes and children's games back when children could still hold soil in their hands – these gentle images discreetly testify to the author's skill of depicting totally trivial scenes and turning them into most beautiful memories which surpass commercials that use retro imagery. But there is also a lighter circle, in the cycle *Mappings*, which quietly praises the beauty of new life: »A squeezed out accordion like a squeezed out summer morning / reverberating with noon across the sea«.

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

A View Above the Lake

Each morning is this immobile beginning
with silence wrapped in cries
for breath, food, water.
He's been trying since morning, the woodpecker...
or there may be several – I don't know
how many blows are necessary
for a comfortable hole, a flat of one's own.

You have no idea how badly I wish
to submerge into this lake,
and finish, for a moment,
my surface existence.
Where I share everything
precisely apportioned.

This is mine, this yours;
my bed and wardrobe,
my shoe compartment and
a massive chest for colder days;
everything mine has been *turned over*.

Almost as if I don't exist.
I'm a view;
I've got an out-of-body experience of the lake.

We are probably noticed when we don't want to be.
Liquefaction as the call of free will.
Who's drowning?
Those who want to help see the world
as unresolved.
Aren't troubles only beings who haven't arrived yet:
a soul that hasn't covered itself in the suitable yet.

Fruit

We were seated in a bunch (as in school or theatre), and then she came; quite plump and all red in the face. She looked around the room, she even danced a little, and then she introduced her snake to us. Robust, long, white with pink-purple spots – almost circles. The head and neck and torso and legs – all in one – slithered with extraordinary elegance... *I don't like snakes*, I was repeating, in case anyone was interested. It came right up to me, just as I had anticipated, but it didn't even twitch or flick its tongue out, and neither did it bite me with its stare. It was reading me with the surface of its body and then the tears, which I was in the meantime secretly gathering in my hands, turned into small yellow and orange-red tomatoes. It moved on, while I was saying – *I can't eat them, they're full of fear*.

Settlement

I wanted to see how red existed in yellow – without spilling the colours into each other, and threw a cherry into polenta. As I remembered how the sunset had almost deceived me, how the lenses, my eyes, had misled me, and I had seen the sun-yellow-radiant over everything – the sky, the people; and then, although it had been travelling progressively, it had all of a sudden sunk red... Thoughts inserted themselves and emotions and craters of memories – they are so selfish – they are always kept only for the past. While I wonder how, in the future, my memories will sink into red craters – as given in nature.

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Andrej Tomažin – Anonymous Technology

About the author



Photo by Matic Bajželj

Andrej Tomažin (1988) is a prose writer, poet, radio and television journalist as well as critic. At the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, he graduated in Comparative Literature and Slovenian Language and Literature. He was one of the editors at the magazine *Idiot* and at *Radio Študent*. He cooperates with the magazine for contemporary art *Šum*. His debut *Stramorjevi koraki* (Stramor's Steps, Litera, 2014), a book of short stories, was shortlisted for the Slovenian Book Fair award for the best literary debut of 2014. He is the author of the novel *Črvi* (Worms, Litera, 2016), the poetry book *Izhodišča* (Starting Points, Hiša poezije, 2018) and the short story collection *Anonimna tehnologija* (Anonymous Technology, LUD Literatura, 2018). Excerpts from his texts have been translated into German, Spanish, Hungarian, English, Estonian and Serbian. His prose writings, essays and poetry have been published in all the major Slovenian magazines. He lives in Ljubljana.

About the book



In times when artificial intelligence has outgrown humans, and life is inseparably imbedded in enormous digital archives, what could be »human«? Terror or love? In Andrej Tomažin's short stories, multinationals literally throw their employees through the windows, and free will is only a euphemism for data mining and the infallible machine forecasting of individual's decisions. *Anonymous Technology* is a no limits accelerationist mindfuck. Life is completely networked, futurist cities are haunted by gruesome homunculi, nightmares leave tangible traces on the soft forest ground. However, this is not a domestic slasher, technological porn or a postsemantic phantasmagoria. We are dealing with daring thought accelerations of systemic processes of neocapitalism, which have created impossible interferences and links, joining human tissue to machines, and fusing the tissues of history and the future into impossible objects, which reveal exterminator cyberpunk matrices of a world with a will gone wild. The truth is, after all, merely a question of the programming code, while literary awards are presented to the purest algorithm for the perfect crime of murdering the text.

Excerpt

Translated by
Jeremi Slak

How to Write like Roberto Bolaño in Less than an Hour

All my life I wanted to write like Roberto Bolaño: that unassuming style encompassing the complete history of human crap, all those creamy-brown droplets lining the edge of the toilet bowl along with the rest of our base unpleasantries. Please just don't talk to me about Danielewski. His stature as a contemporary great, his courage soaring the edges of over-crammed pages, surpassing even the haughtiest praise on the sleeves of his books ... Not here, where we shall discuss the grubby and the insidious. Stating I loathe the man would be an exaggeration; suffice to say he's not on my list of favourite authors, if such a thing might be coalesced into the eye-pleasing form featuring nicely segmented paragraphs & edges adorned with artful vignettes.

Bolaño is a special kind of storyteller – and not just because he's already dead. After the body's final collapse, we tend to grant people favour far greater than prior to their passing. Some, though, deserve their due praise – and this I mean without a hint of sarcasm. Bolaño descended to the bottom of every hole drilled by his indiscriminate pen, raking out with his claws the acute details of blowjobs in crumbling toilets, death at the outskirts of narco-wars, harrowing even more profoundly over its apparent triviality, the body parts hanging around the suburban bridges, rotting for lack of money to get them off – he spoke, in short, of all that which I, as a little boy in a fledgling state torn between the slaughter of the Balkans and the Vienna Opera, could only be dreaming. Or better still: he burrowed into every skin hole punctured by the heroin-filled syringe, sinking into each depression made by the rage-clenched fist in those massive late-20th-century keyboards that wouldn't be manipulated so easily, persisting in that reeking pit till he was all out of breath.

I've no idea of the particular devices used by Bolaño to confess his stories. At some point it must have been a typewriter, though the excess gravity surely wasn't something he had any need for. Perhaps I'm lucky these instruments enter my experience merely in the form of aged newspaper clips and the blind alleys of internet archives. You could try and convince me to unplug from the internet, like Franzen, removing the battery from my smartphone in paranoid angst, turning my gaze inward: a futile proposal at any rate, as it is likely evident by now.

All my life I was tempted to take up writing, to make my way into the arena of global literature, but up to this moment – at least in regard to the globality of my reach – I've only managed to visit a bunch of sites showcasing Latin American porn, where the agitated glances of teenage girls are drowning in terrible set design and the video clicks my brain's memory card stopped counting ages ago are diligently crunched by browsers and internet service providers. I imagine I could connect every single one of those clicks, presented in smart data visualisation form, with second thoughts: are those girls getting paid; who forced them into it, institutional capital or narco-cartels as if the two could ever be neatly separated; how their libido process even operates, is it a perverse passion or just momentary lust as if I ever really understood any of the two.

I must have been wondering about similar stuff every time I consumed pornography, but just as persistently as my fingers juggled between the unending clips my brain would repeatedly decide, with imminent ejaculation ahead, that those were some entirely irrelevant details, putting a damper on my sensations of worthlessness and apprehension concerning social inequality, which then promptly transformed, moments after a sad smattering of jizz was at last catapulted forth, into a whirlwind of self-questioning and inevitable infinite melancholy.

Well, even that isn't all bad come to think of it. In many ways it resembles the stuff of Bolaño, and it had certainly influenced my decision, upon brief days of contemplation, to finally send a short email to the generic *info@* address of the once-startup and now booming enterprise seated in one of the tax havens, *de facto* managed from the eastern fringes of the Balkans, which found its economic niche within the well-to-do industry of adult chat providers.

Maybe I'm not being sufficiently clear. All my life I wanted to write like Roberto Bolaño, but I failed to write a single word worthy of feature in a book on the serious literature shelf of your closest library. Not out of artistic inclination, at least, or in a natural language. I've contemplated getting down to writing several times. It was an age when, in the first oscillations of the global meltdown, I lost my job of eight years as a *debugger* in a major IT company. I'd spend most of my days sprawling around, binge-watching TV shows on my laptop. I'd start in the early afternoon, wrapping up with the arrival of the earliest garbage trucks around five in the morning. Most of the time I was lying on my stomach. In a state of mild confusion effected by sequences of plot twists, I tried jotting down a couple sentences every coming dawn but simply couldn't get them out.

Bronja Žakelj – Whites Wash at Ninety

About the author



Photo by Marolt

Bronja Žakelj (1969) has a graduate degree in journalism, but her love of writing got lost somewhere between the lines of magazine articles and editorial offices of daily newspapers. So she found her first job in marketing and today works in banking. Since there is not much space for creativity in the world of finances, and her love of writing had never been entirely forgotten, she decided it was time to write her first book. *Whites Wash at Ninety* was published in September 2018 to much acclaim and was reprinted four times in just six months.

About the book



Whites Wash at Ninety is an exhilarating debut, a powerful, witty and most of all an inspiring novel that tells the story of the narrator who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. In her childhood, her world revolves around her parents, her brother Rok, her grandmother Dada, her aunts and uncles, the Sarajevo Winter Olympics and all the other big and small things that made up the world of every child growing up in Yugoslavia back then. And although it speaks about all these things, the novel is most of all a story of growing up, of facing loss and illness, of overcoming fears and of everything that we do not want to see until we are inevitably faced with it. It is a book that mercilessly confronts readers with the biggest questions of life and death, with humour and charm, and without a trace of moralising or self-importance.

Excerpt

Translated by
Olivia Hellewell

‘I took Mum to the hospital last night,’ says Dad one Sunday, and he’s completely white. ‘We’re going to do the washing and ironing ourselves today.’

The washing dries quickly that Sunday, as there’s a breeze and by this time it’s already June, so I can do the ironing that same afternoon.

‘She ironed a whole load by herself,’ says Dad when we go to visit you at five.

‘You’re a good girl, darling,’ you say. ‘I’ll be home soon – and we still have to find an outfit for your leaver’s ball. And shoes.’

I don’t know why you don’t want to admit you’re having a baby.

In the end I don’t buy my outfit for the leaver’s ball with you, but with my school friend Andreja, because when you come home you’re still lying down. The dress is light blue, cut to the knee. I’m scared that you won’t like it.

When we buy it, we go sit on the benches on Črtomirova, because that’s where Andreja’s from, only a short way from the place where the swing once fractured the bone above my eye, right in front of you. Sat on the bench, I say:

‘What would you do if your mum died?’

I don’t know why I say it, because I could have said any number of things, because it’s a busy day, a perfect spring day, and my new dress is perfect too, with its silver stitching.

‘I couldn’t live without my mum,’ Andreja says.

‘I couldn’t live without my mum either,’ I say, barely audibly, muscles tensed, and I immediately want to rush back home to you.

'It's wonderful, it really is wonderful,' you exclaim, when I bring the dress up to your bed to show you my beautiful purchase. 'Try it on!'

I put the dress on. You take a long look at me and start to cry.

'My girl,' you say softly, before shouting from the bedroom into the living room: 'Janez, come look at this!'

'Boy oh boy,' says Dad, when he comes in.

You can't come to find shoes with me either. You ask Marina, because Marina has good taste.

When Marina arrives, her daughter Barbara is with her. Barbara likes to eat ham, and I know this because she's always saying: 'am! 'am!' She doesn't have red spots anymore, because she's three years old now.

Marina and I buy white ballet pumps with a small white bow, at the shop next to the photography place.

When it gets to Monday, there's only three days until the leaver's ball, and you're still lying down all the time. I'm worried that you won't be there, I'm worried that out of all the mums there, my mum will be the only one missing.

'You are coming on Thursday, aren't you?' I say to you.

'You know I'm coming, my little poppet,' you say, and you caress my cheek, and then stay stroking my face. I keep still, so you don't stop, because sometimes you stop and drift off to sleep.

On Thursday, the day of the ball, you still haven't got up.

'Mum, it's at five,' I say to you, when I come up to see you. 'Don't forget!'

'I'll be there,' you whisper into my clean hair. 'Don't worry. I'm just getting a bit more rest.'

It's ten-to-five when the caretaker opens the doors to the hall. He opens them out wide, opens them as if to open a grand exhibition.

Everyone is waiting for their healthy mums, and the healthy mums are arriving from all sides, the dads with them.

'Is your mum coming?' everyone asks.

'Is your mum coming?' says my teacher, putting her arm around my shoulder. The lump in my throat is enormous.

When it gets to five, you're not there. I go to the bathroom. I stare at the ceiling for a long time to stop myself from crying. When the lump in my throat feels smaller, I go back out to wait. The seats are filling up, the benches too, but I'm still on the lookout in the entrance, waiting to catch sight of you, waiting to see you in this awful crowd of happy mums.

And then you arrive. You're wearing your grey coat and new white blouse with the blue collar. That's the second time you've worn it. Your hair is washed and curled, your make-up is done and you've powdered your face. You're glowing. Of all the mums, you are yet again the most beautiful.

'You're shaking, poppet,' you say, when you hold me close.

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.

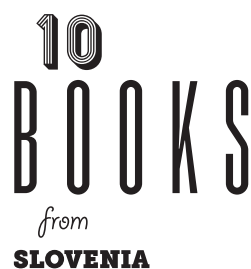
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The Trubar Foundation

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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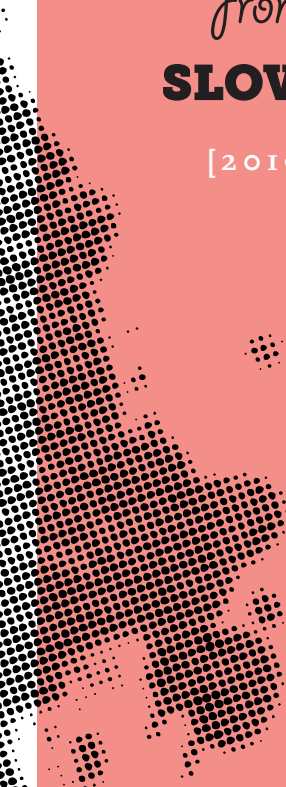
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10 BOOKS

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