

10
Books
from
Slovenia

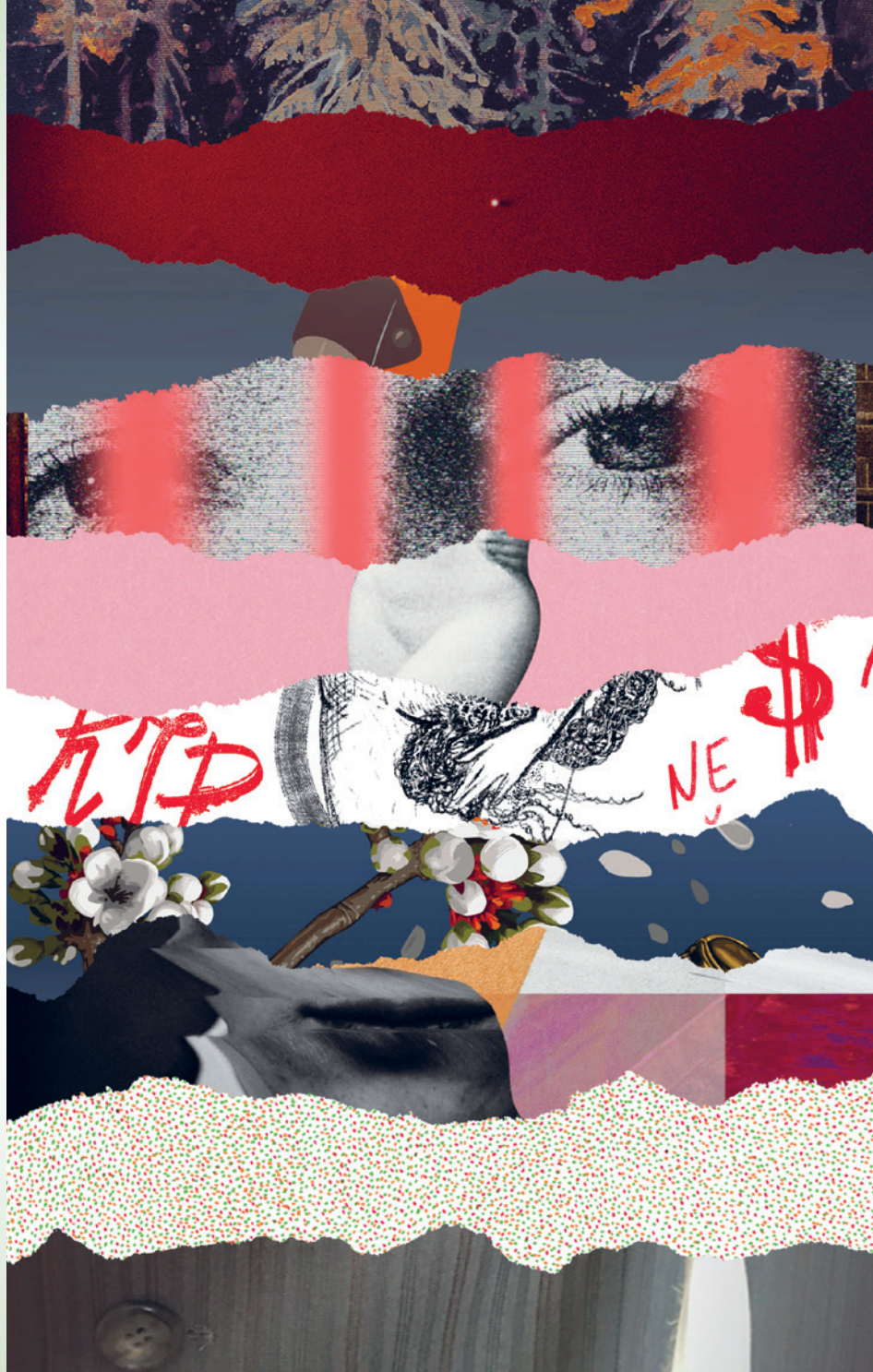
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LITERARY CRITICS' CHOICE

2025

Nataša Kramberger

Kazimir Kolar

Anja Zag Golob

Pino Pograjc

Vesna Liponik

ANJA ZAG GOLOB

An Attempt at Everyday Life

Poskus vsakdanjosti, samozaložba, 2024



Photo by: Boštjan Lah

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anja Zag Golob (1976) is a poet. *An Attempt at Everyday Life* is her first work of prose. She spent twelve years writing performance reviews and occasionally does translation work. She is a co-founder and editor-in-chief of *VigeVageKnjige*, a publishing company specialising in comic strips and graphic novels. For several years, she wrote culture and society columns for various media, including the national radio and television. She has published five independent poetry collections in Slovenian: *V roki* (In Hand, 2010), *Vesa v zgibi* (Pull-up, 2013), *Didaskalije k dihanju* (Didascalies to Breathing, 2016), *da ne* (that no, 2019), *watson* (2023), which won her three national awards. Her works, in whole or in part, have been translated into 13 languages and published in several anthologies.

She regularly attends events and writers' residencies abroad, for example Villa Waldberta (Feldafing, 2015), LCB (Berlin, 2017), AIR Niederösterreich (Krems, 2022 & 2023) and Stiftung Landis & Gyr (Zug, 2024). She is a member of national and international selection committees, e.g.: the 31st Open Mike (Haus für Poesie, Berlin, 2023), the 1st Mayröcker Residenz Wien (Literaturhaus, Vienna, 2024), the permanent selection committee for literature (Ministry of Culture, Slovenia, 2024 ->).

She works and lives in Maribor with her wife and dog.

ABOUT THE BOOK

An Attempt at Everyday Life is a silent book; a book that consciously whispers rather than screams. The basic idea for this collection of eleven essays originates from the post-pandemic period when it seemed that we suddenly no longer had access to previously everyday things we took for granted, the context having been rocked to its foundations to the extent that we lost touch with it. Hence the title *An Attempt at Everyday* – by recording some of the key, basic essentials in her life, the author attempts to reconnect with them in order to preserve her own humanity. Among others, the book features the following essays: Kiesłowski, *Culture*, EKV, Tea, *Restana rpica*, Poetry, Letters, The Köln Concert, Trains, The Bookshop and The Tree.

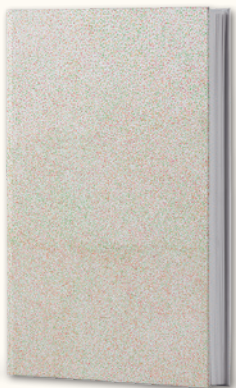
EXCERPT

The Köln Concert

According to the legend, one of the most notorious concerts in the history of not only jazz but contemporary music as a whole could just as well have not happened. It was organised by Vera Brandes who, on 24 January 1975, was 18 years old and had been in the music promotion business for a few years; this was supposed to be the fifth in her new series of concerts called New Jazz in Köln and the first ever jazz concert in the city's opera house.

Two problems occurred. The musician arrived tired; while he did receive a plane ticket from the organisers to fly from Zürich to Köln, he had allegedly decided to sell it and go by car instead, specifically as the co-passenger of Manfred Eicher, a producer with ECM Records, in his old Renault 4. The driving distance between the two cities is just under 600 kilometres. They arrived in the afternoon, the musician apparently suffering from terrible back pain.

And the musician was not just anyone – it was Keith Jarrett. For whom the opera house was supposed to supply a *Bösendorfer 290 Imperial concert grand piano*. The internet reports that Jarrett was a huge fan of Steinway pianos, but on that specific occasion, he wanted to try the then



biggest piano in the world with full eight octaves and 97 keys, which is nine keys and half an octave more than the standard instruments.

Anyway, instead of this beauty, what awaited him backstage was a *baby grand piano* of the same brand, which was not fully functional and, most importantly, completely out of tune, usually only used for rehearsals. Due to time constraints, an ongoing storm and low temperatures that could damage it permanently, the right piano could no longer be delivered to the venue. Although the instrument on stage was then tuned for hours, it remained, according to Jarrett, “below average, with a tiny upper register, weak bass and malfunctioning pedals”.

And Jarrett was about to cancel the performance. The hall was sold out; around 1400 people had bought tickets which sold for four marks. And these people were waiting. Music history knows that, at 11:30 PM, the man, one of the greatest jazz pianists ever, nevertheless decided to perform, purely due to Ms Brandes’ insistence and because the recording equipment had already been set up.

The concert recording was released by ECM Records on 30 November that same year. It is 1 hour, 6 minutes and 7 seconds long, contains four units marked Part I (26 minutes), Part II a and Part II b in the total duration of 33 minutes, divided due to a technicality (the recording was expected to be released as an LP), and Part II c (7 minutes). The last is a bonus track, Jarrett’s adaptation of his original composition *Memories of Tomorrow*, played alongside Gus Nemeth on double bass and Paul Motian on drums in December 1969 in Oslo.

This album – the concert was recorded with two Neumann U 67 microphones and a Telefunken M-5 portable tape recorder by sound engineer Martin Wieland – became the best-selling solo album in the history of jazz and the best-selling piano solo album of all times. It was sold in more than four million copies.

It could just as well have not happened. Max Brod could have granted his BFFs dying wish and burned everything he had ever written. Both were close calls. Would humanity be any different without them?

At the beginning of Part I, a faint laughter can be heard. If you listen to the recording on headphones and prick up your ears, you can hear it quite clearly. Jarrett opened the concert by repeating the phrase G-D-C-G-A, which he supposedly heard from the hall. Apparently, he later stated that he did not remember doing it consciously, but that his wish was to make the audience feel at ease. One of the most metaphysical renditions of improvised music in the world starts with a short intro, asking the audience to take their seats. Something completely banal, a sound signal carrying a simple call, transforms, under the fingers of a jazz giant – into a pure masterpiece. In this sense, the Köln concert manages to answer the question of what art is about in one single stroke. Art exists because it is capable of turning the commonest of sands into a 3106-carat diamond. People cannot live without hope. That is why we play the lottery and watch football games. Art shows that it is possible. A pianist, tired and in pain, arrives and realises that the piano is wrong, and not only that, the replacement piano – the only piano that can be on stage given the circumstances and the timeframe – is broken. Even after tuning, some parts of the register are completely unusable. And yet.

KAZIMIR KOLAR

The Defiler

Onečejevalec, Goga, 2024



Photo by: Matej Pušnik

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kazimir Kolar is an all-around writer. He writes for socially critical and literary magazines. He is inspired by contemporary schools of thought and unusual lifeforms. His first book was the novel *Glas noči* (The Voice of the Night; Litera, 2016), which was translated to Italian and published by the Wojtech publishing house in Naples. It was followed by the short stories *Zgodbe nekega slabiča* (The Stories of a Weakling; Litera, 2021), which won him a nomination at the Novo mesto Short Story Festival. He believes that literature should address concrete people in the present moment. It is therefore placed before an impossible task: to move the collective body or, at the very least, speak to it. He calls his style “fictional documentarism”. While the times we live in are not favourable for books, we are increasingly coming to a point when literature will become essential to humanity’s survival.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Defiler is the author’s second novel about a woman searching for a mystery person in Slovenia and abroad. The first-person narration gradually builds up an image of a reclusive, anonymous nomad who constantly violates the notion of good taste. The story is a mirror image and criticism of our time, the time of “the new normal”, when something is interesting only if it’s excessive. It can also be read as a tale about the emergence of inner fascism.

“*The Defiler* is, in short, a chronicle of perversions, deviations and transgressions, mysteriously concentrated around one character. It is a documentation of confusion, ruptures caused by undefined aggression, violence, disgust, which interfere with the order of things. The personage of Theodor Baumann raises many questions about the nature of good and evil, the boundaries between decency and indecency and, finally, the nature of reality and the role of (meta)fiction itself. With this novel, Kolar stays true to the poetics showcased in his first book *The Voice of the Night* and continued in *The Stories of a Weakling*. In the first, the author focuses on bizarre, strange, fringe, controversial, deviant characters, who often find themselves in borderline situations, but also consistently depicts “depraved” states of consciousness.” (from the foreword by Silvija Žnidar)



EXCERPT

The Defiler

In the autumn of 2017, an odd individual started attending literary events. He always sat in the first row.

He didn’t stink of urine; quite the opposite, he always smelled of expensive cologne. How could I describe his scent?

Something between lavender and Persian clover. But that was not what stood out. He had a certain presence about him, an air of authority.

I don’t know if you’re familiar with the literary scene or literary events in Ljubljana, but let me tell you, these nights are always very lively.

People chat and exchange opinions and, after the reading, almost every participant asks the author a question.

But this man never asked anything. Even though he seemed like he wanted to, and you could tell by his demeanour that he was interested in what was being read.

What struck me about him was his old clothes – in general he appeared to be getting on in age, I would say he was about 60 because his posture was very stooped and stiff, like an old man’s. And that would have been my impression if he hadn’t shown up one day clean-shaven and youthful.

I wouldn't give him more than 30. He was completely transformed, and I would have a hard time convincing anyone that, only a few months before, this man looked like a washed-out pensioner.

It wasn't long before the authors and organisers started wondering who this man was, whether he was merely a random participant or a critic, although the latter was unlikely because he always vanished like a ghost as soon as the event ended, and the former was also doubtful because he always chose the most prominent spot.

There was only one occasion when a participant heard him speak.

I remember that, on that particular night, there was a presentation of a young poet, and when this participant asked the man what he thought of the event, he answered, with a mysterious smile: "I'm looking."

This unusual answer, if I think about it now, still makes my blood run cold. What was this man looking for at literary events?

I remember something weird that happened. It was after a literary evening in the town centre, and I went for a drink with two friends of mine.

We hadn't drunk a lot, I remember just having a cup of tea and saying goodbye early because I had a deadline to catch and some more writing to do.

It was almost midnight when I rode my bicycle down Čopova ulica, which was completely empty at this time, when I saw a man standing by the stairs of the Franciscan Church, peeing on the wall.

It was the mystery man from the literary evenings.

His piss was spilling all over the street. I rode home and worked on my essay late into the night.

The next morning, one of the friends that I had been drinking tea with the night before called me up. "I almost had a heart attack," she said.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Do you remember that weird guy from the literary evening?"

"Yes," I said, "of course I do."

"I was walking home last night at 2 AM towards the main bus station and I saw him. He was standing by the Rudolf Maister statue, peeing on it.

There was no one around to stop him, and when I left for uni in the morning, I saw a huge puddle of piss there.

It was like a flood. How can one person produce this much urine?

It's impossible," she said.

After a week, I called my friend and told her that we should do something about this.

"This man is mocking art, don't you understand?"

I think I said something along these lines.

I remember that she resisted the idea, and I also clearly remember her implying that there was no use in dealing with all of this, which surprised me, as I thought she was completely dedicated to art.

"What do you mean, there's no use in dealing with this?"

"What I said," she said. "It's best to stay quiet so as not to step on anyone's toes."

"I thought you cared about literature," I said.

"That's exactly why – because I'm planning on having a career in this field," she said.

And so, in the end, no one did anything. And then I remember hearing about the man who attended literary events and was later seen urinating and desecrating statues in the late hours of the night.

No one ever spoke up and stopped him. Never!

Everyone knew what was happening, everyone knew that the man was causing considerable damage, and everyone also knew that it was a bad omen, as evil would continue to grow, leading to the most devastating circumstances, but in the end, they chose to look away or close their eyes and forget.

NATAŠA KRAMBERGER

Stonecrop

Po vsej sili živ, Goga, 2024



Photo by: Daniele Croci

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nataša Kramberger (born in Maribor, 1983) is a writer, columnist, youth worker and organic farmer. In her books, essays, reports and commentaries, she often links the rural and the urban, and merges different genres. She is also the author of interdisciplinary artistic projects on agriculture, natural construction with earth and nature conservation. She runs a small biodynamic farm in Jurovski Dol where, together with the collective Green Central, she hosts numerous young people from all over Europe, in an attempt to equip them with the knowledge and experiences to help combat climate change. During the winter she moves to Berlin, trying to understand and find ways of bringing this fight to the concrete of a city with millions of inhabitants.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Seven beginnings and seven ends of a season on a small farm can almost kill you, but also reward you, sober you up and teach you humility. Nataša Kramberger, who at the age of thirty-three took on a run-down estate and turned it into a vibrant biodynamic farm, seven years later, in a follow-up to her novel *Comparable Hectares*, reflects on what went right, what went wrong and what else we can do to avoid the next disaster.

In seven years of farming, the effects of climate change have become painfully obvious: one day, trees spontaneously topple after a prolonged drought, the following day the cellar turns into a swamp due to floods. Nature is out of control, it seems, no longer following any rules. In such circumstances, what practices can an organic farmer follow? While some try to follow the bureaucratic rules of European subsidies and the irrational demands of the markets, Nataša Kramberger discovers age-old wisdoms and learns how to observe. We are all part of a global environmental balance. So we have to accept responsibility. Responsibility for still having a chance.



EXCERPT

Stonecrop

It could've killed me.'

'Killed me.'

'Could have killed me.'

Mother comes rushing from the garden in her old waterproof coat, pale as a ghost, and without any kind of greeting throws herself into my arms. It's true she hasn't seen me for almost three weeks but I have never had such rapturous welcomes even when I was away from home for months, years.

'I went to see whether the lungwort was flowering...'

Hands still around my shoulders, she launches into a narrative, making me sway. No. This has nothing to do with welcoming me.

'There wasn't any there on the edge of the forest, so I decided to walk up the path, you know, up there at the stream...'

She finally breaks free from the embrace and I can see her face. Ashen-faced, grey and white, bone white. I can't help myself, 'You went into the forest in clogs?'

'What does it matter what I went in. I use these clogs for the garden. They're comfortable, fit well over my thick socks. Everything was dry as a bone anyway.'

Finally a little colour in her face but her voice is still shaking.

'And I am walking along, walking, and suddenly I get the feeling that something is rustling behind my back. You know, a kind of whoosh, whoosh sound, but louder, together with a cracking sound.'

My mother is an excellent narrator and I almost feel as if there in the yard, behind our backs, something is rustling violently, aggressively.

'I didn't have time to think what it could be, all I know is that I said to myself – that's not the wind, because we have had no wind today since morning. And, just as well that I didn't turn round, goodness knows why, something bothered me, I could feel the tension across my shoulder blades, making me shudder, strange goose bumps appeared across my neck, as if creeping upwards into my brain. Then a sharp cramp in my stomach and I heard a loud yell ringing in my ears, ruuuun! And without thinking I leaped, flew forward. There was a bluster and a roar behind me and a massive thump against the ground so the whole forest shook as if a giant rock had come tumbling through, and I was thrown forward, hurled through the air. It fell less than half a metre... only a few inches away from me. It could've killed me.'

A tree. On a clear, windless afternoon in March, a tree fell down in our forest, almost killing my mother.

'What was it? A spruce?'

'What, do you think I looked?! I just fled, rushed across the stream and ran, ran, ran, ran, until you appeared and I had to stop.'

There is something elementally aberrant in upturned roots that are pushing up towards the sky instead of into the ground. Close up they look like a basket with severed knots, defeated and useless. There is nothing in them, not even colour, they stick out of the tree trunk like broken cables with a few clods of soil and dry undergrowth accidentally hanging from them. It is impossible to imagine these straggly strands ever having been capable of stubbornly anchoring a tree that was as high as a skyscraper, lavish as a castle. A beech tree and a spruce. The overturned tree was not one but two. From the top of the highest hill in our forest they had toppled over like a pair of corpses, their crowns facing downwards, their trunks lying like some dam across the forest dale.

Drought.

The beech tree and the spruce, two healthy middle-aged trees were on Sunday, 19 March 2023 – the last day of winter – at around five in the afternoon, brought down by drought.

I was shocked at just how much the whole thing unnerved me. Only a few months earlier, in mid-summer, I had received an email from friends in Berlin, farmers, talking about hundred-year-old trees. In the sandy subsoil of Berlin and Brandenburg, that could no longer find water, so they were dying, not gradually but instantly, all of a sudden. 'They lie down on the ground like sedated elephants.' It coincided with the time when we were fervently watering the young apple and plum trees in our orchards, then we discovered that even the walnut trees planted in the wettest area alongside the forest were wilting. Even though our farm lies in a damp valley and has a well in the courtyard, during that heatwave we were unable to pump enough water for all the thirsty roots. It also all coincided with forest fires raging across Europe, turning the Karst, near the farm of some other friends, into a lunar landscape, something similar happening in Northern Sardinia where we had once celebrated the festival of the full moon. There and on remote islands in the middle of the sea, even cork oaks that were thought to be immortal were dying in forest fires.

Immortal? The first time I entered a cork oak forest, I thought I had lost my hearing. In a magical instant, all sound became muted and I could with perfect clarity hear my heart beating at a calm pace. Anything I said was absorbed by the silence, quite unusual for a country where words are usually swallowed up by noise. Pierfranco who lived in that forest had instantly understood my bafflement. Here there is no other world, he said. These trees are a world unto their own.

Translated by

Gregor Timothy Čeh

VESNA LIPONIK

Apples

jabk, ŠKUC Lambda, 2023



Photo by: Borut Krajnc

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vesna Liponik is a poet, activist and researcher. She has published two poetry collections, *roko razje* (*eats away the hand*) in 2019 and *Jabk* (*Apples*) in 2023, with ŠKUC-Lambda. She has been nominated for the Veronika Poetry Award, the Critical Sieve Award and the Best Debut Award. Her work has been published in several (literary) magazines and anthologies, she has participated in festivals and done several readings in Slovenia and abroad. Some of her texts have been translated into Serbian, Croatian, German, Hungarian and English. In 2021, she held a performance *faq* at the Mediterranean: Young Artists Biennale and published a booklet of the same name. She holds a Master's degree in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory and Slovene studies from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. For her Master's thesis she won Nahtigal Prize for the best final thesis. She works as a research assistant at the Institute of Philosophy, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, and is a doctoral candidate at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Jabk continues and deepens the research that was already at the forefront in Vesna Liponik's debut poetry collection *roko razje* (*eats away the hand*): how to depict or embody in language, in an artistically authentic manner, diverse trans-species relationships among beings understood beyond the binary scheme of the human and the non-human, and against the backdrop of the realisation that none of these beings exist before the relationship itself. If the titular "hand" in Vesna's debut poetry book could still symbolise the power of exercising an otherwise already differently shaped human subjectivity, the latter now gives way to different beings – apples – in the very title. No longer subject to the processes of traditional tropization, apples, with their ubiquity and diversity, become the rhizomatic network of the book, rather than its centre. We are already alerted to this turn by the motto, Sappho's fragment, in which the power of the apple(s) is superior to that of the pickers, who then metonymically take on the role of the working class, to whom the book is intensely devoted. – *Varja Balžalorsky Antić*

The most innovative part of this poetry collection is the *Subject and Name Index* at the very end of the book, an element borrowed from non-fiction, which at least doubles this work. The poems, which are usually read on their own, are thus given a set of keys with which to return to deciphering them again and again, to catch new meanings and the overlooked correspondences, and add new structures. With this formally simple and at the same time very creative gesture, the book opens up and never really ends. [...].

By directly demonstrating the ramified complexity of someone's thinking, living and being, which fundamentally and thoroughly avoids the generalisations of abstract thinking, Vesna Liponik's *Jabk* is a real, unpretentious and complex political act at the very foundations of political being. – *Matjaž Zorec*



EXCERPT

nobody's pipe

an apartment building. a burst water pipe. a dripping from the ceiling into the corridor.

fabio says it's a shared pipe
because it's his pipe.

no, actually he says it's the neighbour's pipe. the neighbour says
he doesn't have a bathroom there, but he doesn't mind
if it's a shared pipe.

the yellow jacket would demolish the ceiling.
the house is crumbling, the house is falling down, haha.
the butch turns off the water supply. she calls her neighbour, šakanović.
the neighbour is visiting his brother in buttfuck nowhere.
the yellow jacket doesn't like šakanović,
he doesn't believe a word šakanović says, the ceiling will have to be demolished, haha.
water is dripping from the ceiling
into the corridor.
water, on the crates, heads, water.
we're standing in the corridor, watching the water,
I'm eating an apple, the ceiling. the water is dripping.
early in the morning somebody cleans up. the water.
asmira or tamara.
what about this japanese woman across the corridor who doesn't even pay for the water.
who doesn't even open the door.
even though there's a light on in the bathroom, and a light on in another room, and light.
the butch next door says
that when water was leaking into her apartment from tamara's,
tamara told her
she should pay for it herself.
the pipe moves from the corridor to the phone.
the yellow jacket wants water because, haha,
while we still have it.
nataša is calling from brussels,
calling šakanović, calling tamara.
the pipe,
nobody's pipe.
nobody's water in
nobody's pipe leaking
in nobody's house, nobody's problem.
the pipe of everybody
is nobody's.
nataša threatens with an external building manager,
law enforcement, the pipe is now
on the messenger
the butch's girlfriend has ordered gallons of water. though
the water is flowing. from the tap. the water from the pipe.
water in the sink. in the corridor. water.
this house is damp. it's leaking. no, the pipe is leaking.
the water from the pipe, the phone. water. flowing.
the butch's girlfriend immediately ordered
water. over the phone. gallons of water.
if we need. if there's no more water. if the water is shut off.
the water is flowing.
but if I need water, they have water.
in the evening we gather in the corridor
and watch water. drops of water. each alone and all together.
a deluge.
at night we crawl out of our apartments into the corridor.
first, we eavesdrop,
to make sure that whoever is in the corridor leaves
so that one can be alone
with water, so that everyone can be alone
with the water
in the corridor,
flowing.

PINO POGRAJC

Megalomast and Izbruhijada

Megalomast in Izbruhijada, Literarno društvo IA, 2024



Photo by: Goran Tomčić

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pino Pograjc (1997, Ljubljana) graduated from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, with a double MA in English and Comparative Literature. In 2022, the publishing house Črna skrinjica (Black Box) published his debut poetry collection, *Trgetanje*, for which he won the prize for the best literary debut awarded at the 38th Slovenian Book Fair. In March 2024, his second collection of poetry, *Trepete*, was published by ŠKUC-Lambda, after which he won the Mlado pero ("Young Pen") award by the Delo newspaper. His third collection, *Megalomast in Izbruhijada*, was published by Črna skrinjica in November 2024.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The poetry book *Megalomast in Izbruhijada* (Megalomast and Izbruhijada) was published in 2024 by Črna skrinjica. It consists of two long poems; the queer-schizo-poem "Megalomast" and the slam poem "Izbruhijada". The latter is a tribute to the poetry of Andreja Štepec and Karlo Hmeljak.

Both long poems can also be listened to – there are QR codes in the book that can be used to access the audio-interpretations. Especially "Izbruhijada" was written by Pograjc with the intention to be listened to, so he recorded it with Jaka Berger – Brgs (and with Mrtvo Rodena Živa Lešina on accordion). He also recorded "Megalomast", which Brgs sounded and reinterpreted as a fairy tale for adults. The text of "Megalomast" in the book is accompanied by illustrations by Maja Poljanc, who is also the author of the image of the cardboard cover, into which the two long poems are inserted. She drew the illustrations of the insane or sick historical figures, through whom Pograjc speaks in "Megalomast", in black, and then drew "graffiti" over them in blood red – a kind of perversion of the original classical images.

In the poetry collection, Pograjc touches upon themes that are already familiar to him, especially those related to his gay identity and his diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. The draft of "Izbruhijada" was created in a few days of continuous creative writing-vomiting in October 2023, after an unpleasant writing residency in Nova Gorica. "Megalomast" was created in 2024 as an attempt at a more thoughtful, controlled, Apollonian (as opposed to Dionysian) formulation of the same content. In "Megalomast", megalomaniacal language is used to refer to various historical figures associated with madness and illness.



EXCERPT

Megalomast and Izbruhijada

all of my symptoms are positive

don't look a gift pill
in the side effects

it's better being a lone wolf
than a Kuhl's pipistrelle bat

what doesn't kill you
makes you starved

from now on I only believe in Russian sleep experiments
and living megalodons

I have such bad eyesight
that from my balcony I can't see
how raindrops fall against
the puddles on the asphalt,
I have such bad diarrhoea
that from the public toilet seat I can't see
how men advertise themselves
for a blowjob in the bushes

someone knocks on the door
of a public restroom
and asks whether I'd like to
wrap up baby Jesus together

I peek through the gloryhole
and see a hand,
a finger approaching my face,
so I point back
until the fingers touch at the tip
and I'm given the spark of life
just like in Michelangelo
or E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

whose are the rights
on the ground where they burnt Gomorrhaging farmers,
where the soil was tilled by two-sexed teeth

in front of the hospital in Izola
somebody carved an inscription into the ground,
EDVIN + KLEMEN,
and I was surprised most by the fact
no one had yet defaced it,
no one had yet separated them
like biologists separated the bonobos,
the common bottlenose dolphins
and the dragonflies

and as **Gaëtan Dugas** I cough out
you have no clue
how we faggoted together,
how we dyked together,
how many fairies, how many butches
crossed these rivers,
plowed these fields,
you have no clue
how the industrial revolution had poisoned me,
how I carried coal in my lungs,
how much copper had turned green
on my lesions,
yet you whipped me
with your chains,
dragged me along the mineshafts,
not even in a cart,
you shackled my ankles
and the floor scraped the skin off my body
all the way to hell

MANCA G. RENKO

Animal City

Živalsko mesto, No!Press, 2024



Photo by: Zoran Pungertar

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Manca G. Renko is a historian, editor, and writer with an academic background. She has co-authored international publications, including *Socialist Women and the Great War* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) and *Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women's Rights* (CEU Press, 2024). She has also been awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Vienna. Renko takes pride in the fact that her academic writing has (so far) not destroyed her language and that the academic precariat has (so far) not broken her spirit. In 2024, she published *Živalsko mesto: Eseji o popularni kulturi, zgodovini in čustvih* (Animal City: Essays on Popular Culture, History, and Emotions). The collection received positive reviews, with some even calling Animal City "one of the most important Slovenian books of the last decade." Her interests include feminism, Marxism, popular culture, internet, the theory of history, and dismantling the concept of genius.

ABOUT THE BOOK

"As soon as I devoured the manuscript of the *Animal City* by Manca G. Renko in one long evening, my reaction was: hologram. The hologram is one of the key concepts of quantum mechanics: as a mass of 'superpositions' (the virtual, possible variations of what could actually happen), it 'collapses' into a single reality; instead of disappearing, virtual variations continue to echo in a real result. And something quite similar to that happens in the *Animal City*: in a seemingly chaotical manner but essentially with great urgency, its linear narrative intertwines various levels – personal traumas, travelogue observations, an uncompromising analysis of violence against women, political reflections on the fate of the left, reminders of the forgotten feminism in the socialist movement in Yugoslavia, a theoretical discussion on the shortcomings of psychoanalysis, a detailed description of generational turning points in the last decades, entertaining and critical analyses of films and popular music... it's all here, terrifically readable. I strongly believe that the *Animal City* deserves success and awards – but for what and as what? Critical essays, memoirs, political theory... all of it together. The book has literally created its own genre." – Slavoj Žižek



EXCERPT

Animal City

In *Lettres au Castor*, a collection of letters by Jean-Paul Sartre edited by Simone de Beauvoir, the first letter of the couple's correspondence reads: *Would you be so kind as to hand over my dirty laundry (the bottom drawer in the wardrobe) to the washerwoman this morning?*

This was in 1929, when Simone de Beauvoir was 21 and Sartre was 24 years old; they had only just met, he was interested in her romantically, but she was not (yet). Both were already starting to see the bright prospects of a glorious intellectual path that lay ahead, yet this utterly banal sentence from the first letter suggests a major difference between them; the difference between the one who imposes the burden of work on others and the one who does this work. It would have been difficult to imagine the opposite, a young woman, as free-thinking as she may be, unashamedly entrusting the handling of her dirty laundry – blood-stained panties and torn stockings – to a man, even a man with zero genius potential. Even though Simone de Beauvoir was not a woman who would dedicate a significant portion of her life to household chores or care work, the self-evident matter-of-courseness with which Sartre referred her to the bottom drawer attests to the customary division of labour, even among intellectual equals. While we don't know whether Simone de Beauvoir understood at the time what it meant to live with a genius, this was certainly clear to her about two decades later when she wrote: *You marry a poet, but once you're his wife, the first*

thing you notice is that he doesn't know how to flush the toilet. Geniuses have almost always managed to find someone – a wife, a lover, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a maid – to flush after them. After all, any woman can flush a toilet, but genius is reserved for those who don't burden their life with the banalities of the world. The fact that Sartre handed over his dirty laundry to someone else was completely obvious, natural, even – the fact that that someone was Simone de Beauvoir required character training, stubbornness and an earned sense of entitlement. Only the washerwoman, who was so readily omitted from the anecdote about two geniuses, undoubtedly had no one to entrust with the piles of dirty laundry, not someone else's, much less her own. Of course, this does not mean that she never wrote poetry, but even if she did, history acts as if she didn't. History forgets more poems than it preserves. /.../

When book after book is issued about the extraordinary achievements of women and films are screened about overlooked female geniuses, scientists and great artists, it seems as if the more a woman was oppressed, abused and invisible, the quicker we are to celebrate her tremendous success after a series of defeats and, potentially – death. However, the repetition of the age-old pattern of remarkable stories that differ from previous ones only in that one gender was replaced with another – genius men for genius women – disregards the heart of the issue: that the world cannot be understood only in binary terms, nor only from the perspective of gender; rather, understanding the world requires us to consider the grey, hidden and silenced aspects; it's not enough to know what kind of attitude Jean-Paul Sartre or Simone de Beauvoir – as two major representatives (not necessarily through their own fault) of the binary view of the world – had against laundry; we must at least try to make out the cacophony of voices around them, from their mothers and washerwomen to the people they exploited without ever really being aware of it. We don't need #bossbabes, #rebelgirls, #queens, we have no use for measuring achievements as if they were measurable or having competitions about which woman achieved what first; what we really need is to understand the structures that generate inequality in society: be it social, class, racial or gender inequality. /.../

Equality in art and life will not be achieved by assuming pathological demands or aspirations for supremacy in the name of genius, but only by dismantling the concept of genius and understanding that it, too, like everything else, is a carefully thought-out construct. Just as capitalism won't fall with more women in corporate management positions, the suffocating chauvinist art won't stop existing when the last male genius is replaced with the last female genius. If profit is something that concerns everyone who has created added value through their own work, then genius also concerns everyone who has established this value through their work; in short, it's not just about Sartre or de Beauvoir, it's also about their washerwoman.

Translated by
Špela Bibič

ANDRAŽ ROŽMAN

Unerasable

Tega se ne da izbrisati, Goga, 2024



Photo by: Boštjan Pucelj

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Slovenian writer Andraž Rožman usually writes about marginalized people. He holds a degree in Journalism from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana and he worked as a journalist for more than 15 years. In recent years he has been working as a writer. He has published his first literary nonfiction book *Three Memories – between Haifa, Aleppo and Ljubljana* (publisher Goga, 2019), it is a story about Syrian-Palestinian poet, publisher and refugee, with whom Andraž became close friends. *Three Memories* were nominated for the prize Kresnik, the Slovenian novel of the year. He has published a novel titled *Tito's Son* in 2022 (Goga). It is a story of mental health, psychiatric institutions, deinstitutionalisation, hearing voices, psychoanalysis, homelessness... It was also nominated for the prize Kresnik. This cannot be erased is his third book, it is literary nonfiction based on the method of Svetlana Alexievich. It deals with the erasure of 25.671 people from the register of permanent residents in Slovenia, that happened on 26th February 1992. Andraž is strongly connected to alternative public spaces of Ljubljana, he is an activist for the human rights of various oppressed groups and is also finishing his master's degree at the faculty of social work on the topic of community mental health.

ABOUT THE BOOK

On 26 February 1992, the Slovenian State erased 25,671 people from the register of permanent residents, thus costing them all their civil rights. Numerous people were deported from the country, including to the warzone in the former Yugoslavia, others slipped into extreme poverty, mental distress or illness, many died, some committed suicide. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that this was a mass human rights violation.

Following the example of Svetlana Aleksijević, Andraž Rožman turned for answers to the erased, their families and advocates to translate their testimonies into stories. In the interviews, the author looked for small moments that might appear very trivial at first glance, but once given the space, can reveal the true depth of (traumatic) experiences. This resulted in around 40 chapters of documentary prose that may seem unconnected but are not. They are linked by a shared experience, though lived from very different perspectives and told from various narrative angles; several threads of narration are woven into a common arch recounting the story of the erasure and the fight for the rights of the erased.

The author also focused on the other side of the erasure process, the residents who did not lose their permanent status, the more or less ordinary people. Drawing from his imagination, the theoretical concept of organised innocence and his own observations about the world, he composed fictional stories questioning the share of responsibility of the majority population in the country's crime, which is still ongoing.



EXCERPT

If we had stayed in Slovenia

I think of the boy.

Mum tells me about Slovenia. We had everything there.

Work, food, an apartment, our parents were part of the community, my brother and I went to kindergarten, we were about to start school...

Mum is crying now.

The harder it gets, the more she cries and the more she tells me about my hometown. About Kranj.

She remembers the threats in Slovenia.

But Slovenia is still her ideal.

My mum didn't have an unkind word for anyone, neither in Slovenia nor in Serbia.

She didn't care about nationalism, but nationalism cared about her,
first in Kranj, then in Žitorada.

When she took my brother and I to kindergarten, the teacher would tell her that we were in danger and that it won't end well.

I tell my mum that it was just nonsense, but her moist eyes become sharper, her face more sombre.

She explains that things were extremely difficult.

Her boss at Iskra kept pushing her to change her papers from Serbian or Yugoslavian to Slovenian nationality.

But she decided not to do it. This was followed by various forms of pressure, transfers, threats...

People would say "Hang the Serbs..."

Mum was afraid for my brother and I. So we left.

I often see her before my eyes in our modest apartment in our grandparents' house, where she cries and repeats the words over and over again. "If we had stayed in Slovenia, we would have had everything."

Mum's voice is ringing in my head before I fall asleep.

Then I think, things will be different someday. When I grow up, it'll be different. Someday, we won't be poor.

Žitorada. It's wartime.

Every once in a while, an injured soldier returns from the battlefield, the air in the village is filled with hatred against other nations. Dad gets beat up in the village because he is a Croatian national.

He starts drinking, hitting on mum, so I renounce him.

Eventually he moves out, but mum is too afraid to leave the house because he continues to threaten her.

Then dad leaves the village and I'm relieved.

I also get picked on for being a Croat, but I tell them I'm not Croatian, I'm Slovenian.

They say it's the same fucking thing and start calling me Janez.

I want to prove that I'm no Janez, I'm a Serb like the rest of them, but to them, I'm still a Janez.

Then a pang of resistance awakens inside me. I tell myself: "If you say I'm a Janez, I'll be a Janez," jumping in the air with my arms stretched and fists clenched when Zahović scores a goal against Serbia.

Mum is unemployed, we live with grandma and grandpa. To survive, we grow tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers...

But that is barely enough for food, it doesn't cover clothes and school supplies. My brother and I go to school without any snack or lunch in our bags.

The more the school bell approaches, the hungrier we get and can't wait to come home.

We don't have videogames and can't join our classmates on school trips. But things will be better someday. I know it.

I'm a teenager now.

I fall in love.

We hold hands, we kiss, we start dating... Then the moment comes to meet her parents.

I put on my best clothes and go to their house.

I shake hands with her father, hoping that we'll have something to talk about.

"Your father is a Croat, you're born in Slovenia. What are you doing here?"

What do you want?"

The next day, my girlfriend breaks up with me.

...

ANA SCHNABL

September

September, Beletrina, 2024



Photo by: Luka Dakskobler

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ana Schnabl (1985) is a writer and occasional translator. She writes for various Slovenian media outlets and the British *The Guardian*. Her short story collection *Razvezani* (2017) won the award for best debut at the Slovenian Book Fair, followed by two more nominations and the Eda Budiša Award in Croatia. Three years later, her first novel *Mojstrovina* (2020) was released and was well received by readers both at home and abroad – it even made it to the wider selection for the prestigious Dublin Literary Award. Her second novel *Plima* (2022) was nominated for the Kresnik Award. *September* is her third novel. The author is known for her stylistic and formal boldness – her books are not remotely similar to one another in this regard, yet they are all united by a refined sense of character psychology and narrative atmosphere, which together create an almost visceral reading experience. Her prose works to date address patriarchal violence, either implicitly or explicitly – both its triggers and its consequences.

ABOUT THE BOOK

September is a powerful showcase of the author's boundless literary talent and investigative spirit, easily described as a genre hybrid, where the elements of developmental and problem-focused fiction intertwine and complement each other with finesse. In *September*, all of the author's well-established qualities come to the fore: a rich and lavish language, formal versatility, a strong psychological foundation, and a keen sensitivity to societal conflicts. The novel's central theme is domestic violence, which the author delves into by guiding her "heroine" through three pivotal developmental stages—childhood, adolescence, and the transition into adulthood.

September is a profoundly mature, intellectually rich, and masterfully crafted work of fiction that challenges us with its complexity, inviting reflection, emotion, and personal experience. However, it is not only a novel about the most pressing issues—growing up and violence—but also a story about friendship, love, and the other precious elements that make life bearable, with the power to soothe pain and steer us away from inflicting it upon others.

EXCERPT

September

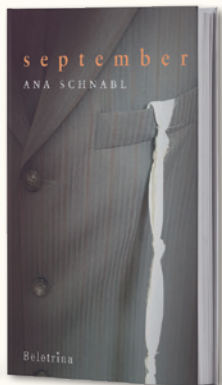
Dad surprisingly returns home right

BEFORE LUNCH

– sober. He probably paid a visit to a friend who lives with his wife and two children a few streets away, thinks mum. Evelin's guess is that the only thing awaiting him there was a cup of cold coffee; he looks worn out. Pale. Still, at the sight of today's setup – three soup and three flat pates with three sets of cutlery – he immediately becomes talkative.

His hangover blabber often irritates Evelin who doesn't know whether this feeling is genuinely hers or just an emulation, continuation of her mother's. When her and dad are alone in the dining room or the kitchen or the living room, even for a brief moment, his chatter, which frequently evolves into plans and promises, sometimes makes her feel something completely different. Something that is always accompanied by shame. Something that merely stutters, mumbles, rattles in Evelin's thoughts or stomach because it should not, cannot be thought or felt clearly: *When dad and I are alone in the dining room or the kitchen or the living room, even for a brief moment, his chatter, full of plans and promises, makes me feel a budding warmth. A budding gratitude because the plans and promises have been tailored for me.*

As mum didn't leave them alone this time, Evelin cannot release her irritation. Extinguish it. Cool it. Instead, mum and her plainly – openly – roll their eyes, giggling and kicking each other



under the table at dad's familiar refrains *tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow (we will have everything and everything and everything)*. After the third, fourth, maybe fifth kick, dad suddenly grows silent – did he feel the kicking? – hanging his head. Evelin is instantly worried. Did the mocking, she asks herself, hurt him? Does it make him feel bad? Is he growing sad? Is he getting angry? Evelin promptly settles down over her soup and under the table, but mum –

– mum shows no sign of flagging at dad's response. To an amateur, her face would appear at the least tired and at the most expressionless, but Evelin is no amateur; she has hundreds, thousands of hours worth of the most meticulous readings of her mother's features. From the wrinkled light skin around her mouth, her open nostrils, the size of her pupils, the red hue of her ears and cheeks, she can tell that she is satisfied with the effects of her – their – kicks. This (dad suddenly goes silent), exactly this (dad suddenly goes silent, dejected) is what she actually wanted.

"What, you out of stories?" says mum, setting down her spoon into the empty plate and pushing it away.

"Daša," says dad, gripping the porcelain so tightly that his knuckles go white, "don't push it". Evelin notices his chest expanding, but he is holding his breath. Her chest also expands and she, too, holds her breath. Despite thousands thousands thousands of hours spent with him, she is still a beginner in dealing with him – what (oh what oh what oh what) could she tell him, what (oh what oh what oh what) essential piece of information could she whisper in his ear –

– "I'm not pushing anything, I just miss your stories a little," mum says, oh mum, before Evelin can get a word in. She crosses her arms over her chest, Evelin knows this gesture too, puts her hands under her shoulder blades and holds them? Squeezes them tightly? (Squeezing, everywhere nothing but tight squeezing.) "So, what else are we going to buy this year?"

Mum closes her eyes now. She closes them tightly, too tightly, thinks the nine-year-old Evelin. In that moment, mum probably realises –

What is the smallest measurable unit of time called? The one that only the most advanced watches can measure. Is it nano- or picosecond? It would only take a moment – five ordinary seconds – to find the answer online, of course, but that would not be honest. Fair. I have to work with what Evelin has before her, and school physics was never her thing. She only understood the laws of free falling. In her case, always just: falling.

So definitely too bad because I can't say it clearly. Too bad because I have to write: twenty-nine years ago on Whit Sunday, Evelin's dad, when they were having lunch, in the smallest possible measurable time interval, knocked over the table, pounced on Evelin's mum so that the pair of them – intertwined, entangled, knitted – fell on the floor, and started choking her? But starting to choke is merely a verb of persistence compared to asphyxiating, which is a verb of completion, and her dad neither persisted nor completed. The grip loosened, followed only by

mum's gurgling,
mum's screams,
mum's tears.

And Evelin? What should she do with her? She doesn't know. The body is pressed against the rough wall, but one would sooner find her floating. Above them, above herself, above everything above everything above everything, right under the ceiling.

DENIS ŠKOFIČ

Tusculum

Tuskulum, Cankarjeva založba, 2023



Photo by: Tadeja Lamut

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denis Škofič (1985) is a poet, writer and literary critic. He has published three poetry collections: *Sprehajalec ptic* (Bird Walker; Beletrina, 2013) – nominated for the Jenko Award and the kritiško sito; *Seganje* (Reaching; Cankarjeva založba, 2017) – nominated for the Jenko Award, and *Tusculum* (Tusculum, Cankarjeva založba, 2023), nominated for the 2024 Jenko Award and awarded the Cankar Award for best original literary work of the past year, as well as the Veronika Award for best poetry collection of the year. His short stories have been featured in the *Vrane, čečkarije in konfeti* journal (Litera, 2017) and the *Petdeset izbranih kratkih zgodb avtorjev in avtoric rojenih po 1980* (A Selection of Short Stories by Authors Born After 1980; Dialogi, 2019). In 2019 he won the Poetry Tournament, receiving the title of Knight of Poetry. In 2021 the Greek publisher Thraka released a translation of his collection *Reaching*. His poems have been translated into several languages.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Following the renowned and critically acclaimed *Bird Walker and Reaching*, *Tusculum* is Denis Škofič's third poetry collection that has firmly secured his place in the Slovenian poetry landscape as a notable voice of his generation. The lyrical subject, removed from the centre in his "tusculum", his "peaceful and comfortable refuge", constructs and builds the poetry texts as if they were a Borgesian aleph, a cosmic point from which he simultaneously lives the past, the present and the future. The metaphor of building used to describe Škofič's literature is deliberate: his writing draws from the depths of linguistic matter, tries out numerous metaphorical and figurative positions and composes the text from (pop)cultural, literary references, allusions and quotes, folklore fragments, images and moments; it also draws on spoken language or the author's own dialect. The themes and motifs of *Tusculum* are most often nature: be it the animal and plant world, which intertwines with the human world in the original grotesque sense, or comes into some sort of contact, even conflict or violence, with this world; or human nature – a person's daily or festive rituals through which they reveal themselves in time in their true or deeply fundamental image, as well as the social constructs they assume. On more than one occasion, the poetry also opens complex existential and essential questions of life and spirit, and expresses ecological awareness and criticism of destructive anthropocentrism. *Tusculum* is undoubtedly a masterpiece of contemporary Slovenian poetry thought and ability to build an independent artistic vision that concerns us in our very essence and our transitory existence. – *Aljoša Harlamov, Editor*



EXCERPT

Lord of the Flies

The adults' voices wondered where the head had gone.
The colour of the light seemed to justify the phrase:
sun cut throat. A sense of dignity lingered in the air,
mingled with incense, an infusion of skin, spices and blood.
While he was letting blood, somebody had to stir it vigorously,
so it would not coagulate. Soon the air would grow warm with baking blood,
and only then the hacking of the flesh would proceed, the hacking into pieces
like those shown by the periodic table of elements at the butcher's shop.
By then, however, we'd be deep in the forest, the crunch
of fallen leaves beneath our feet, the buzzing of flies stirring the air,
drowning out the world of adults.
The silty scent of damp would fill our noses.

We'd argue over who would be Jack, who would be Ralph and Roger and Robert,
who would be Eric and Sam, and who would play the role of Simon.
Almost everyone would want to be Jack, but you'd get Simon's part.
In madcap horror, you'd run through the forest on all fours.
Kill the pig! Cut her throat! Kill the pig! Bash her in!
Kill the pig! Cut her throat! Kill the pig! Bash her in!
Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!

In a cloud of flies, our black thoughts swarmed around the pig's head
that Jack had stuck on a tall pole in the middle of the forest.

The Carnival

They dressed us up as infantrymen,
shoved muskets and flintlocks in our hands.
Sent us off from doorway to doorway,
from hamlet to hamlet.
We danced to military marches,
crooning:
Turnips fat and flax stalks tall,
Lent's a-coming, all y'all.
Don't drink water, drink some wine,
don't eat meat, but turnip's fine.

We shot with our eyes.
We looked with our blanks.

We dressed up as soldiers,
took rifles and revolvers in our hands.
We went from door to door,
from village to village.
We danced to military marches,
singing:
From door to door,
from street to street
we bring you spring
and laughter sweet.
So give us please,
we ask of you,
three cakes, some meat,
a coin or two.

We shot with our eyes.
We looked with our blanks.

We dressed them up as soldiers,
shoved machine guns and pistols in their hands.
We sent them from door to door,
from town to town.
They danced to military marches,
singing:
Trili-lee, trili-lee,
do you know us – who are we?
Tralala-tralala,
we're all wearing masks, ha-ha!

They shot with their eyes.
They looked with their blanks.

LIU ZAKRAJŠEK

Breakfast of Championesses

Zajtrk prvakinj, LUD Literatura, 2024



Photo by: Anja Papuga

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liu Zakrajšek was born on 15 September 1998. After high school, she enrolled in a double master's programme of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory and Philosophy, obtaining her degree in 2024. She regularly contributes literary texts and articles to various Slovenian journals and portals (Airbeletrina, LUD Literatura, Outsider, ElNormal, Literatura and ETC. Magazine). Her short stories *Otožnost zmajev* (The Sadness of Dragons) and *Tone* were played on Radio Ars' "Collected Prose" shows. She translated the play *How I Learned to Drive* by Pulitzer Prize winner Paula Vogel, which was performed by the Slovenian National Theatre Maribor. In 2021, she collaborated on Beletrina Publishing's project "European Poetry in the Breeze", translating a selection of poems by Greek poet Lily Michaelides. That same year, she was the first poet to be presented in the Mladopero (Young Pen) column of the Slovenian daily Delo. She also collaborated on the translation of the last authorised collection by Tomaž Šalamun, published as a bilingual edition, *In povsod je bil sneg/And All Around There Was Snow*. Her poems were featured in the anthology *Millimeter in pol* (Millimetre and a Half), published by the Cultural Centre Maribor, and appeared in the children's magazine *Curious Kid* by HiBird Books publishing. She writes columns for Val 202 Radio. *Zajtrk prvakinj* (Breakfast of Championesses) is her first novel, which won her nominations for Best First Book and the Grand Prize at the Slovenian Book Fair.

ABOUT THE BOOK



Breakfast of Championesses is the first book by Liu Zakrajšek, in which the protagonist gives us an insight into three different student workplaces: a cinema, a cultural centre and a bookshop. When she's not in class or at work, she spends her time in a small and stuffy attic room of an apartment that she shares with the impulsive and chaotic Vesna and the well-organised and serious Pia. From chapter to chapter, the dynamic between them interchangeably builds and collapses in more or less dramatic ways against a backdrop of broader housing crises experienced by the young generation who is yet to enter the labour market – from precarious work and soaring property prices to the growing class segregation, loneliness and poor mental health. The young people in the novel, who are supposed to be thinking about their dreams and their future, can only concern themselves with how to pay the next month's rent. Drawing inspiration from Kurt Vonnegut, the novel is a subtle satire of modern times that we badly need now.

EXCERPT

Breakfast of Championesses

"Don't you think it's crazy," I stumbled, "that you have to live according to other people's rules in your thirties?" Vesna wasn't even looking at me but went on sipping her Aperol, adjusting the bra under her dress. "I'm older than you, just about old enough to know that it doesn't pay to worry too much in life. You take things as they come. Right after high school, I wanted to go to this university in Italy. I really wanted it. So I called up my dad for the first time in four years. We hadn't spoken in a while because he had cheated on mum. Ok, but that's another story." She took a deep breath.

"And I told him that I would like to study abroad and if he could give me money for half of my scholarship. And mum would cover the other half. And you know what he said to me?"

She looked straight at me. "What?" I asked.

"If you're broke, don't worry. You're a cute girl, I'm sure some nice guy will take you out for lunch sometime. And hung up on me."

I kept staring at Vesna's face, expecting her to start crying. But she seemed completely at ease. Then she took another sip.

"That's what I'm talking about. This could have traumatised me forever. But instead, I just went to uni and some day, when I have enough money, I'll get the fuck out of here and that will be the end of it. Until then, I couldn't care less about other people. Because everyone has their issues.

Including Val, by the way. The other day, he said he didn't know if we were a couple or not."

I told her I was sorry, referring to Val's sense of superiority.

"In the end, everyone is a little psycho. I'm a little psycho, too. But once you start thinking about other people, your life is over," continued Vesna. Then she took the straw out of her glass and tapped my nose with it. I didn't know what to say.

I was getting tipsy.

I thought, Vesna has no idea that she is the only person in my directory that I can call on a Friday night, that I can go out and get drunk with in a bar, tell her anything about my life. People like her don't need loneliness to feel that they're real.

"But don't you want to feel you're in control of things?" I asked her.

She looked around and shook her head. "No. Control only matters to people who don't have it. What do you think gets Pia off? This."

"Didn't Joan Didion say that? This thing about control?" I wondered. She took a compact mirror out of her purse and started examining her eyebrows, caressing them with her long finger bearing a shiny ring with a big red stone.

"Maybe. I'm not a humanities student so I don't have to quote my sources all the time."

"Well, but," I said a little anxiously through tightened lips, "I want to feel understood. To not be invisible. You know, I already feel invisible most of the time. I don't know if I ever did anything important, ever. To be somebody."

Vesna merely threw me a weary look. "To be somebody?" she repeated, confused.

"Well, yes. To do something that really matters."

"Like what?"

If I didn't know her, I would have thought she wasn't taking me seriously at all. Maybe she wasn't. She reached over the table and grabbed my hand.

"I don't want to do anything that matters," she said. "I couldn't care less if I die without ever doing a single important thing. You get it? The only thing that matters to me is having enough money to pay the rent, to go out, to get my family off my back.

I want to live a normal life. When you think about it, a normal life is a big accomplishment."

"To be happy?" I asked, half drunk.

Vesna burst out laughing. She covered her face with her hand, as if what I said was the stupidest thing she has ever heard. Then she looked at me, red in the face.

"What's wrong with you? You're obsessed with happiness. That doesn't exist, forget it. You expect too much out of life. Because you think life is like a film. But it's not. In films, each scene is there for a reason, everything else gets cut. While in life, half of everything that happens is just a filler episode.

It doesn't mean anything. You grit your teeth and hope it passes. Nothing matters."

I stared at her, convinced that she didn't know what she was talking about. I wished that the power in the bar would go out and I could just sit there, in total darkness. That the ceiling would collapse and everything would simply be over.

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Grants for the translation and publication of works by Slovenian authors

Annual open call for translations from Slovenian and translations of works, written in other languages, when author is a part of Slovenian cultural environment. It includes first translations of adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, plays, graphic novels and comics. Applicants must be legal persons (publishing houses, theatres) registered outside Slovenia. The subsidy covers up to 100% and maximum of 10,000 EUR of the translation costs.

Grants for printing costs

Annual open call to cover the printing costs of translations from Slovenian and translations of works, written in other languages, when author is a part of Slovenian cultural environment. It includes first editions of adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, plays, graphic novels and comics. Applicants must be publishing houses registered outside Slovenia. The subsidy covers up to 70% and maximum of 3,000 EUR of the printing costs.

Travel Grants

Travel grants are available for Slovenian authors, translators, editors or rights agents, who have been invited to literary or industry events abroad. An invitation and the program for the event must be enclosed with the application. There is one call per year, which is open for trips throughout the year.

www.jakrs.si/en/tenders-and-public-calls/tenders-and-calls

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Books
from
Slovenia

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