

**Evald Flisar**

**Ivo Svetina**

**Dragica Potočnjak**

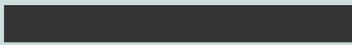
**Vinko Möderndorfer**

**Matjaž Zupančič**

**Saša Pavček**

**Žanina Mirčevska**

**rokgre**



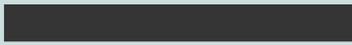
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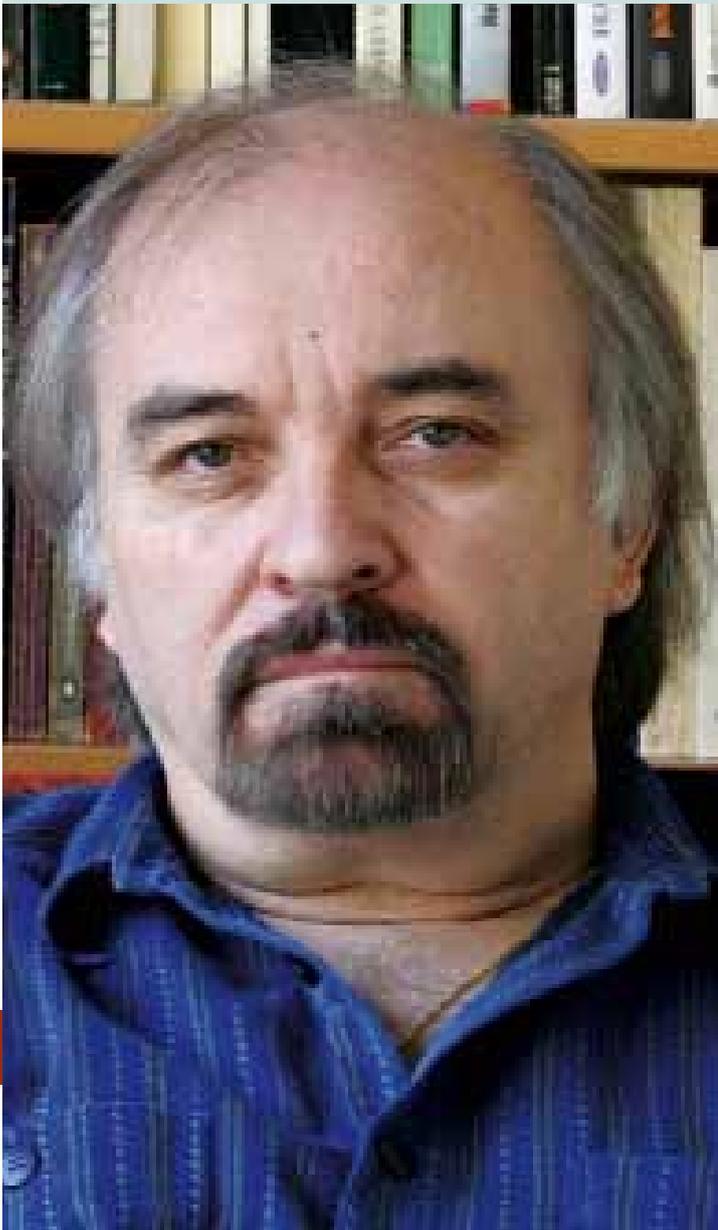
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**CONTEMPO-  
RARY  
SLOVENIAN  
DRAMA**

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Evald Flisar (b. 1945) is a playwright, novelist, short story writer, essayist and editor of the oldest Slovenian literary journal *Sodobnost* (published since 1933). He studied comparative literature at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and English in London, where he spent 17 years of his life, editing (among other things) an encyclopaedia of science and writing stories and radio plays for the BBC. From 1995 to 2002 he was president of the Slovene Writers' Association. Flisar's work has been translated into 29 languages. Winner of the highest awards for both prose and drama, he has travelled in over 80 countries and held public readings in many parts of the world. In addition to his 14 stage plays, some internationally acclaimed, he has written two collections of short stories, a collection of essays, three best-selling travel books and seven highly successful novels, four of them shortlisted for the Best Novel of the Year Award and one filmed for TV. His novel *Going Away with the Wild Tiger* (original title *Čarovnikov vajenec*) is arguably the most widely read Slovenian novel after World War II (first edition 1986, seventh edition 2008).

About the play *What about Leonardo?*:

Flisar's play excels not only because of the imaginatively (and accurately) employed results of psychiatric research, but also because of his brilliant dialogue, excellent characterisation and the lightness, almost elusiveness of his message. This is no doubt the best Slovenian play in recent years... (Matej Bogataj, *Republika*, 1992).

A remarkable study of a man out of touch with himself, who presents the journey from amnesiac to automaton with the sad, lost look of a man obeying instructions from he knows not where...' (Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, London, 1995).

Photo by IGOR MODIC

# EVALD FLISAR

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

### PLAYS

*Tomorrow*, London:  
Goldhawk Press, 1992  
*What about Leonardo?*,  
London: Goldhawk Press,  
1992

*Tristan and Iseult*, London:  
Goldhawk Press, 1993  
*Uncle from America*,  
London: Moran  
Publications, 1994

*Hvað um Leonardo?*,  
Reykjavik:  
Borgarleikhusid, 1994  
*A Leonardo?*, Novi Sad:  
Scena, 1996  
*Morgen*, Graz: Theater im  
Keller, 2000

*Sutra će biti bolje*, Niš:  
Srbsko narodno  
pozorište, 2001  
*Kemon ache Leonardo?*,  
Calcutta: Firma Klm  
Pvt. Ltd, 2002

*Alghad*, Cairo: Maktaba Dar Elkalema, 2004

*Elkawkab elhady ashar*, Cairo: Maktaba Dar Elkalema, 2004

*Nora Nora*, Podgorica: ARS, 2004

*Nora Nora*, Cairo: Maktaba Dar Elkalema, 2004

*Nora Nora*, New York: Texture Press, 2004

*Nora Nora*, Graz: Theater im Keller, 2005

*Collected Plays 1 (The Chestnut Crown, Tomorrow, What about Leonardo?, The Nymph Dies, Uncle from*

*America, The Eleventh Planet, Nora Nora)*, New York: Texture Press, 2006

*Nora Nora*, Brno: Vetrne Mliny, 2008

*Nora Nora*, Jakarta: Yayasan Komadjid, 2008

*Der Elfte Planet*, Graz: Theater im Keller, 2008

*Kenapa Leonardo?*, Jakarta: Yayasan Komadjid, 2008

*Leonardo wa doddai?*, Tokio: Gesshoku Kagekidan, 2009

*Shakuntala*, Kolkata: Ganakrishti Theatre Company, 2009

## NOVELS

*Čarobnjakov šegrt*, Belgrade: Dereta, 1989

*Čarobnjakov šegrt*, Zagreb: VBZ, 2001

*Tietäjän oppipoika*, Helsinki: Basam Books, 2001

*My Father's Dreams*, Norman: Texture Press, 2002

*Velika životinja samoće*, Podgorica: Udruženje nezavisnih književ. Crne gore, 2004

*Ta onira tu patera mu*, Piraeus: Odysseas Gavalas Publishers, 2004

*Isäni Unet*, Helsinki: Mansarda, 2006

*Going away with the wild tiger*, Norman: Texture Press, 2009

## SHORT STORIES

*Tales of Wandering*, Oklahoma: Texture Press, 2001

*Hekayat el tegwal*, Cairo: Maktaba Dar Elkalema, 2004

*Pribehy z cest*, Brno: Vetrne Mliny, 2009

*The Price of Heaven*, New Delhi/Katmandu: Nirala Press, 2009

## What About Leonardo?

### Synopsis:

A group of patients at a neurological institute exhibit a variety of bizarre behaviours, although behind their compulsive mannerisms seem to lie identifiable and universal human needs: the need for love, the need for approval, the need for security. Their problems are diagnosed as organic, not psychological in origin, and so, according to Dr. Hoffman, the head of the institute, incurable. But the psychologist Dr. DaSilva, coming to the institute to find a subject for her PhD, thinks otherwise.

Dr. DaSilva believes she can teach Mr. Martin – who has retreated into the comfort of total amnesia and then developed an extraordinary ability to learn and remember everything – to be another »Leonardo«, a Renaissance man of the 21st century. But does this represent »progress for the human race« or is it a cruel delusion? When the other patients mischievously start teaching Martin other things – rude jokes and Shakespeare – poetry seems to touch something elemental, an inner core of feeling in him that has not been lost. Is this his »real« identity, something more than a parrot-like imitation?

But Dr. DaSilva's teaching has great power, as she finds to her cost. Sinister forces become interested in Martin's potential usefulness, and he learns the lessons of violence as easily as the lessons of »culture« – without understanding the meaning of either. The final attempt to save Martin by giving him back »the freedom of choice« comes too late; by acting out the literal meaning of Shakespeare's poetry he commits mayhem without realizing what he has done.

### Act Two

#### I.

(Everybody except Martin and DaSilva. Patients sit and crouch in various poses, Hoffman is nervously pacing up and down, Nurse is watching him. Hoffman looks at his watch, sighs, looks at Nurse.)



CARUSO: What're we waiting for?

REBECCA: Yes, what are we waiting for, Doctor?

LEANING MAN: Better times.

NURSE: For the results of Doctor's inability to be the boss in his own house.

MR SNIFF: Everything that's happening here is due to cosmic rays. *(He sniffs the air.)* They're still getting stronger. There's worse to come.

REBECCA: When I was very small, teeny-weeny one, my Mammy died.

LEANING MAN:

And because I have Mammy no more  
I'm stranger than ever before.  
I dress like a drunken fool,  
That's not an exception, it's a rule.

REBECCA *(jumps)*: That's not an exception, it's a rule!

*(Nurse crosses to Leaning Man and removes his spectacles. Leaning Man tilts to the left.)*

NURSE: You'll get them back when you apologize.

LEANING MAN:

If a woman is a little overmature  
and in love with the boss who prefers beer  
her evenings are all without cheer,  
for her agony there is no cure.

REBECCA *(claps)*: What a nice poem, Mr Leaning Man! Applause, Professor! Applause, Doctor! Applause, Sister!

*(Leaning Man bows, imitating Caruso.)*

NURSE *(retreats to the back wall)*: You can forget about spectacles for at least two days.

LEANING MAN: Fine. Then I will now start slowly and methodically to destroy this fine furniture.

*(Reaches towards the nearest chair.)*

NURSE: If you as much as scratch a single chair you can pack your bags and go.

LEANING MAN: Are you going to throw me out?

NURSE: Why are you here at all? You could just as easily be at home.

LEANING MAN: I'm here because I like being among people where I'm the only one who is reasonably sane.

NURSE: Because here you have enough people to victimize.

LEANING MAN: Give me back my spectacles or I begin. *(He picks up the nearest chair.)*

HOFFMAN: Oh for God's sake... Nurse... Enough of these childish games... Give him his spectacles.

NURSE: Only if he apologizes.

HOFFMAN: Leaning Man.

LEANING MAN: Only if I get back my spectacles will I save the institute the cost of replacing this fine furniture.

*(Hoffman quickly walks over to Nurse, pulls the spectacles from her hands, walks to Leaning Man and sticks them on to his nose. Leaning Man straightens up.)*



MRS TWITCH: What about this one –

HOFFMAN: Madam, take pity on us. Please.

CARUSO: As an artist who is a slave to his wish for self-expression I would say the following:  
it is surely high time for me to delight the audience with a little-known aria –

HOFFMAN (*turns and marches towards the main door*): I'm not going to wait all day for the  
gipsy and her dancing bear.

MR SNIFF (*sniffs*): They're almost here... (*Hoffman stops and turns.*) Any moment now... One,  
two, three, four, five...

(*DaSilva and Martin enter through the main door.*)

HOFFMAN: At last.

REBECCA: What about the gipsy and her dancing bear, Doctor? Are they not coming?

NURSE: They're already here.

HOFFMAN: Can we start?

DaSILVA: Mr Martin. Would you dance with me?

(*Martin stands in front of DaSilva, bows, takes her hand, they dance a waltz.*)

DaSILVA: Rumba.

MARTIN: Rumba. (*They dance.*)

DaSILVA: Samba.

MARTIN: Samba. (*They dance.*)

DaSILVA: Lambada.

MARTIN: Lambada. (*They dance.*)

(*Martin moves like a professional dancer. Hoffman knits his eyebrows, Nurse fails to hide her  
astonishment. End of dance.*)

REBECCA: Oh how you danced, Mr Martin! How you danced, how you danced... Applause,  
Professor! Applause, Leaning Man!

DaSILVA: Einstein.

MARTIN: A pacifist who gave us the atom bomb. He died believing in God, denied by the  
results of his work. He left us with mysteries greater than any he managed to solve.

DaSILVA: Catulus.

MARTIN (*mechanically*):

Lucundum, mea vita, mi mihi proponis amorem,  
hunc nostrum inter nos perpetuum que fore,  
di magni, facite ut vere promittere possit,  
adque id sincere icat et ex animo,  
ut liceat nobis tota perducere vita  
aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae.

DaSILVA: How many languages do you speak, Mr Martin?

MARTIN: Twenty-nine.

DaSILVA: What do you think of Man in his present state?

MARTIN: I think that Man's centre for intuition and centre for feeling slipped from the level  
of consciousness to the subconscious, so that Man connects with his environment  
only through the centre for thinking, which he calls »I«. The education of the New  
Man must be based on a reconnection of the conscious with the subconscious, so that  
Man may finally function in accord with his real aims.

DaSILVA: Thank you for your attention, Dr. Hoffman.

MARTIN: Thank you for your attention, Dr. Hoffman.

REBECCA: Thank you for your attention, Professor. Thank you for your attention, Leaning  
Man. Thank you for your attention, Sister.



DaSILVA: Any questions?

MARTIN: Any questions?

REBECCA: Any questions?

HOFFMAN: Mr Martin. . . (*Slowly approaches him.*) How do you feel?

(*Martin looks at DaSilva.*)

DaSILVA: The question should be more concrete. For example, how do you feel at this very moment?

MARTIN: Within our darkest moments, our brightest treasures can be found.

HOFFMAN: And how do you feel generally?

MARTIN: Generally we mustn't suppress our negative feelings; by doing so we distance ourselves from positive ones as well.

HOFFMAN: Yes, but what does that mean – how do you feel right now, this very moment?

MARTIN: Within our darkest moments –

HOFFMAN: Feelings, Mr Martin! How do you feel inside – are you sad, are you glad, are you frightened, are you worried? What's in your heart – hope, despair, resignation?

MARTIN: It may not be the situation or the feeling that's causing the problem – it may be rejecting the feeling or situation that's causing it, and making it worse.

HOFFMAN: That may be so, Mr Martin, but I want to talk to you. I want to hear about your goals, your wishes.

MARTIN: I close my eyes, take a deep breath. As I breathe out I say to myself: My body is now relaxing. And again: My mind is relaxing. And again: I'm free, nothing binds me. I can give my body and mind whatever direction I choose. I can do what I want. My income is bigger than my expenses.

HOFFMAN: How many degrees Fahrenheit is 40 degrees Centigrade?

MARTIN: One hundred and four.

HOFFMAN: If the air temperature is 104 degrees Fahrenheit, is that cold, warm or hot?

MARTIN: That's 40 degrees Centigrade.

HOFFMAN: Is that hot, warm, or cold?

MARTIN: That's 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

DaSILVA: Mr Martin, what's the nature of each process?

MARTIN: If I'm building a house and someone says it won't keep out snow and rain because it has no roof I find it childish to have to explain that I can't hang a roof in the air but first have to build walls, in the same way that I cannot build walls before I lay the foundation –

DaSILVA: Thank you, Mr Martin.

HOFFMAN: All right. I accept that this may be no more than the first stage. But suppose that you've exhausted the opportunities given you by the neurological storm in Mr Martin's brain – a storm which can blow itself out as suddenly as it started, I hope you realize that. Suppose that you have here the final result of your efforts. A superman. Adam of the new generation. How would you describe him?

DaSILVA: As a man who is supreme in three basic fields of human endeavour.

HOFFMAN: And what are these fields?

DaSILVA: Intellect, art, religion.

HOFFMAN: In other words, Mr Martin should become a man with a brilliant mind, some kind of Voltaire, shall we say, and also an artist of genius, some kind of Van Gogh, if we limit ourselves to the visual arts. And finally he should become a saint, some sort of Mother Theresa in trousers, am I right?

DaSILVA: Very crudely, yes.

HOFFMAN: Don't you think that these basic fields of human endeavour, as you call them, are mutually exclusive?

DaSILVA: What about Leonardo? Isn't it possible that the first man of the new Renaissance might be at least equally, if not more universal?



HOFFMAN: Even the most universal man can act only in accordance with his values.  
DaSILVA: And why shouldn't Mr Martin be able to do the same?  
HOFFMAN: Because values are functional only if they're the fruit of experience, not if they're given to someone as abstract concepts.  
MARTIN: Booboori, boobooriboom.  
REBECCA (*jumps*): Booboori, boobooriboom.  
DaSILVA: Dr Hoffman, can't you envisage a man who won't be only universally capable, but will also be kind, just, averse to killing and taking what isn't his, and who will neither suppress nor cheat nor exploit?  
HOFFMAN: Does Mr Martin have an inner voice which tells him: you're going to do this because it's good or useful, but not that, because it's bad or meaningless?  
DaSILVA: Ask him.  
HOFFMAN (*looks at Martin*) And now we shall run to the door and bang our head against the wall...

*(He runs to the door, stops, looks at Martin.)*

MARTIN (*shakes his head and looks at his watch*): Now we shall have a lesson in Hebrew, then we will paint with watercolours, and then we will practice Brahms's Violin Concerto in D Major.

*(Hoffman slowly comes back. DaSilva is amused.)*

DaSILVA: Well, Doctor? Any other objections?

*(Hoffman stares at her. Stares at Martin. Acknowledges defeat by spreading his arms in a gesture of helplessness.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## 2.

*(Martin, Rebecca, Leaning Man, Caruso. Rebecca is kneeling, the others are standing around her.)*

REBECCA: When I was still very little, very tiny teeny one, my Mammy died.  
LEANING MAN: Mammy.  
MARTIN: When I was still very little, very tiny teeny one.  
REBECCA: My Mammy died. Big tears ran down my cheeks, huge wet tears, into my mouth, salty, very big tears.  
CARUSO: Did you like your Mammy?  
REBECCA: I cried, but not for her – for myself. She went somewhere warm, forever warm. But I remained here. There was winter inside me. *(She shivers.)*  
LEANING MAN: And then?  
MARTIN: She went somewhere warm, forever warm.  
REBECCA: Then I was cold for many years.  
LEANING MAN: And then you danced, and he led you over the smooth wooden floor.  
LEANING MAN, CARUSO: Tap tap...  
LEANING MAN: ... went your shoes...  
CARUSO: ... tap tap...  
MARTIN: On the smooth wooden floor.  
REBECCA: No.  
CARUSO: No?  
LEANING MAN: You said so. He rolled you around in the fallen leaves, and above you all you saw were the trees.  
CARUSO: And the sky.



LEANING MAN: Turning, and turning, and turning.

REBECCA: No!... That was my story.

LEANING MAN: It wasn't true?

REBECCA: He promised he'd take me to a dance. But I had no shoes... *(She starts to fight tears.)* All I had were boots with laces... Heavy, ugly, threadbare boots...

MARTIN: With laces.

REBECCA: Nobody wanted to buy me shoes. Nobody... So I couldn't go. He didn't want to.

LEANING MAN: But you went anyway. In your imagination.

REBECCA: *(crying)* I wanted a story, I wanted songs, poems! Everything...

*(Caruso, Leaning Man and Martin stand and watch. Martin takes a step towards her, hesitates, takes another step. He places his hand on Rebecca's shoulder and gives it a gentle squeeze. Rebecca stops crying, turns her head and looks at Martin. They look at each other, she grateful, he surprised at his action. He straightens up and moves away.)*

REBECCA: Poem?

*(Martin looks at Leaning Man, then at Caruso.)*

CARUSO: I could, as an exception of course, because my *metier* are arias as you know, sing one of Strauss's *Lieder*, I mean of course Richard Strauss –

REBECCA: Mr Martin will tell me a poem. *(She looks at Martin expectantly.)*

LEANING MAN: What are you waiting for? The girl wants a poem. If possible – look at her eyes – a love poem.

REBECCA: Poem! *(She claps her hands with childlike enthusiasm.)*

*(Martin recites Catulus, this time not mechanically but with feeling, looking Rebecca in the eyes.)*

MARTIN: *Iucundum, mea vita... (etc.) (He bows.)*

REBECCA *(jumps to her feet and claps)*: Oh wonderful poem, beautiful wonderful poem, especially as I don't understand a word. Applause, Professor. Applause, Mr Leaning Man.

*(Caruso and Leaning Man clap. Martin claps, too.)*

CARUSO: I think this might be a good moment for me to ask you a rather interesting question. Are those gathered here aware that Easter in the year 8352 will be on the 29th of March?

LEANING MAN: Those gathered here don't give a hoot about that, Professor. Rebecca and Mr Martin are going to dance.

REBECCA *(expectantly)*: Little shoe, little shoe?

MARTIN: Rumba.

*(He dances rumba. Rebecca is trying to join him but is too awkward. Leaning Man and Caruso, a little less awkward, imitate Martin.)*

MARTIN: Samba. *(As before.)*

LEANING MAN: And now?

CARUSO: And now?

LEANING MAN: And now we're going to perform a play.

REBECCA: Oooooohhh. . . *(She jumps and claps.)* Story?

LEANING MAN: Story.

CARUSO *(wagging a finger at Leaning Man)*: What are you up to?

LEANING MAN: For our amusement, Professor, we're going to coax these two onto the thin



ice of romantic love. And when the ice breaks we're going to laugh.

CARUSO: That's not right.

LEANING MAN: Is it right that I cannot stand upright without having two pendulums swinging in front of my eyes? Is it right that you have more information stored in your head than two thousand computers, and fewer brains than a reasonably intelligent chimpanzee? If God can have fun at our expense, why shouldn't we have fun at other people's expense?

CARUSO: Rebecca is a small, vulnerable creature.

MARTIN: And when the ice breaks we're going to laugh.

REBECCA (*jumps and claps*): Story!

LEANING MAN:

Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head?  
How begot, how nourished?  
Reply, reply.

CARUSO:

It is engender'd in the eyes,  
With gazing fed; and fancy dies  
In the cradle where it lies.  
Let us all ring fancy's knell:  
I'll begin it – Ding, dong, bell.

CARUSO, LEANING MAN, MARTIN: Ding, dong, bell.

REBECCA (*jumps*): More!

MARTIN:

What find I here? Move these eyes?  
Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,  
Seem they in motion?! Here are sever'd lips,  
Parted with sugar breath; so sweet a bar  
should sunder such sweet friends...

LEANING MAN: If you be well pleas'd with this...

MARTIN:

If you be well pleas'd with this  
And hold your fortune for your bliss,  
Turn you where your lady is  
And claim her with a loving kiss.

LEANING MAN: Fair lady, by your leave...

MARTIN: Fair lady, by your leave...

LEANING MAN (*pushes Martin and Rebecca together*): ... claim her with a loving kiss.

(*Martin gently kisses Rebecca on the forehead.*)

REBECCA (*sighs*): Oooohhhh... Story...

(*Leaning Man steps behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders.*)

LEANING MAN: You see me, Mr Martin, where I stand...



REBECCA: You see me, Mr Martin, where I stand...

LEANING MAN: Such as I am...

REBECCA: Such as I am...

*(Hoffman and Nurse enter through the main door. They pause and listen.)*

LEANING MAN:

But the full sum of me is sum of nothing:  
an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd...

REBECCA: Unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd...

LEANING MAN:

Happy in this, she is not yet so old  
but she may learn...

REBECCA: But she may learn...

CARUSO:

Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit  
commits itself to yours to be directed,  
as from her lord, her governor, her king.

REBECCA: Her governor, her king...

*(Leaning Man joins their hands and pushes them into an embrace.)*

LEANING MAN: How sweet the moonlight...

MARTIN:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here we will sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

REBECCA: Sweet harmony...

*(They gaze at an imaginary sky, enthralled, hand in hand. Behind them, Leaning Man and Caruso exchange conspiratorial winks. They put their hands across each other's shoulders and assume a similar posture, gazing at the sky, barely able to suppress laughter.)*

*(Hoffman and Nurse approach. Leaning Man and Caruso become aware of their presence, move apart, grin apologetically.)*

LEANING MAN: Just passing the time.

HOFFMAN: So I see.

CARUSO: We meant no harm.

REBECCA *(disengaging herself from Martin's embrace)*: A wonderful story, applause, Doctor,  
applause, Sister!

*(Hoffman claps, looks at Nurse who hesitates, then joins him. Martin claps, too.)*

REBECCA: You see me where I stand, such as I am, a girl unseason'd, unschool'd,  
unpractis'd. Am I a good girl, Sister?



NURSE (*fiddling with Rebecca's clothes*): Ask Doctor.  
REBECCA: Am I a good girl, Doctor?  
HOFFMAN: You're always a good girl. For a change even Leaning Man wasn't bad today.  
LEANING MAN (*not sure he can believe this*): You mean I won't get a clip on the ear?  
CARUSO: We meant no harm.  
HOFFMAN: I would even suggest that you carry on with this.  
LEANING MAN (*exchanging glances with Caruso*): Are you joking?  
HOFFMAN: No.  
NURSE: Are you sure, Doctor?  
HOFFMAN: Positive.  
REBECCA: Rebecca loves poems! And Mr Martin too!  
MARTIN: How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank...  
REBECCA: And I? Leaning Man, tell me, what do I say?  
LEANING MAN:

Here will we sit, and let the music  
creep into our ears...

REBECCA: Creep into our ears... More! More!

(*Leaning Man looks at Hoffman.*)

HOFFMAN: I'll be very pleased if you carry on. But I must ask you a favour. Not a word about  
this to Dr DaSilva.  
LEANING MAN (*grins*): Conspiracy?  
REBECCA (*jumps*): Conspiracy!  
MARTIN (*jumps*): Conspiracy! Hop!  
NURSE (*satisfied*): Counterconspiracy.  
HOFFMAN: Are we agreed?  
LEANING MAN (*looks at Caruso*): You can certainly count on me, the problem is this walking  
software with a computer virus.  
HOFFMAN: Professor?  
CARUSO (*crossing his lips*): Sshhhhhhhhhh!  
REBECCA (*follows suit*): Ssshhhhhhhhh!

(*They all look at Martin.*)

MARTIN (*follows suit*): Sssshhhhhhhh!

Photo by JOŽE SUHADOLNIK

Ivo Svetina (b. 1948) graduated in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana. He writes poetry, drama texts and essays and has received several prizes and honourable mentions for his literary work. He has translated several significant texts, for e.g. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Tibetan Mystery Plays*. Between 1968 and 1977 he was engaged in the experimental theatre groups *Pupilija Ferkeverk* and *Pekarna* (Bakery); the performance *Gilgamesh* was created under his direction. In 1978 he became employed at the Cultural Society of Slovenia and later he worked as a stage manager and programme editor at Television Slovenia. In 1985-1992 he was a stage manager and artistic director at the Slovensko mladinsko gledališče (Mladinsko Theatre). From 1993 to 1998 as a state subsecretary at the Ministry of Culture he was in charge of artistic and other creative programmes. In 1998 he was appointed the Director of the National Theatre Museum of Slovenia in Ljubljana.

# IVO SVETINA

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

### PLAYS

#### *Scheherazade:*

documentary radio play, Ljubljana: Radio Slovenia, Uredništvo igranega programa, 1993

*Babylon*, Maribor: Drama des Slowenischen Nationaltheaters = The Drama of the Slovene National Theatre, 1996

#### *Contemporary Slovenian*

*drama*, Ljubljana: Slovene Writers' Association, 1997

### POETRY

*Botticelli*, Rijeka: Izdavački centar Rijeka, 1980

*Pesme*, Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1981



## Thus Died Zarathushtra

an asinine tragedy

Dramatis personae:

ZARATHUSHTRA  
ZARATHUSHTRA'S SHADOW  
SNAKE  
EAGLE  
ASS  
TIGHT-ROPE WALKER, *who has risen from the dead*  
HUNCHBACK  
SHEPHERD  
BEGGAR  
ZURVAN, *Zarathushtra's son*  
AMESHA, *Zurvan's mother*  
SELA, *daughter of the desert*  
DAUGHTERS OF THE DESERT: *a dancing chorus*

### ACT II.

#### SCENE 3

*In the midst of the frenzied, Bacchanalian dance two figures appear at the entrance to Zarathushtra's cave: a young man of tall stature, close on his twenties, and a woman, almost certainly younger than her almost senile appearance would suggest. The young man is leading the woman by the arm. It seems that the woman is blind. The two are: Amesha and her (and Zarathushtra's) son, Zurvan. For some while they remain standing, wordless, by the entrance; then they gradually approach the dancers, whose dance-steps and voices gently die down.*

ASS: Behold, behold, the night not only brings  
the joy of recognition and delight in dance,  
but also brings new guests!

SNAKE: The suffering and the yearning!

EAGLE: A modest and wretched little congregation to be seen, stumbling through the night.

ASS: A duo of tears and woe. Hee-haw, hee-haw, heee-haaaw!

AMESHA: My son, who are these revellers, foundering in the darkness, reeking of rancid oil?

ZURVAN: Weird masked fools, wrapped in beggar's rags, hiding their human faces  
behind animal visages.

ASS: I will show you masked fools, Stranger -  
you who enter, not with greeting  
but with affront, into the place  
of the Grand Announcer!

SNAKE: Try only to remove my bestial guise!  
Never again will you gaze  
on man or beast!

AMESHA: Their voices, my son, are fearful.  
Their hearts are troubled with doubt.

*Zarathushtra only now comes to, as if he had woken from a drunken stupor.*

ZARATHUSHTRA: The seed of my Annunciation has again borne fruit!  
Yet two more suffering and yearning ones  
have joined us. Let us receive them –  
even though the last –



as though they were the first!

AMESHA: Yes, Zarathushtra, your seed has borne fruit!

SHADOW: And recognition found its feet.

ASS: Let them now join in our dance!

For delight is most easily expressed through dance -  
so you have taught us, wise Master.

ZARATHUSHTRA: We are all born of the Great Noon.  
we are all his sons,  
we to whom the new time has given a name!

ZURVAN: *Time* is my name!

SHADOW: The Announcer of the new time  
when father and son meet!

SNAKE: The Announcer is father of the son  
whose name is time!

ZARATHUSHTRA: The son of man cannot bear the name of time!

AMESHA: For then his mother would be eternity –  
I am only blind!

ZURVAN: I am Zurvan.

AMESHA: Which in the language of my people means time.

ZARATHUSHTRA: Old woman, amongst your people I have been,  
and I have learnt their language,  
but in it I found so recognition.

AMESHA: Not only language, but also love  
you attempted to learn.

SHADOW: And love was recognition,  
higher than the highest Noon.

AMESHA: Painful as the labour spasms  
when with shrieks blindness is born in the eyes.

ZARATHUSHTRA: It is by pain that recognition is measured!

AMESHA: And when the star of sight goes out,  
with it pain evaporates,  
and the heart has learnt all  
and finds many stony-hearted brothers.  
And the blind old woman with her son  
sets off to the source of pain.

ZARATHUSHTRA: Blindness and age have embittered your speech.  
woman unknown.

AMESHA: Maybe to all who ate gathered around you,  
Zarathushtra, I truly am unknown.  
but to you I am more than known!

ZARATHUSHTRA: I do not know you, yet notwithstanding,  
you are no less welcome to my congregation  
of hunchbacks, beggars, the living dead...

AMESHA: Just as you were welcome to my bed!  
I am Amesha -  
And with me I bear your lash!

SHADOW: Recognition, your name is lash!

SNAKE: Recognition, your name is woman!

ZURVAN: Zurvan is my name!

ZARATHUSHTRA: No! No! Why? For what? What have you created,  
Great Noon! Have you chosen me  
that the long-passed time should return  
which drives man again back into the fold?!

SHADOW: The lash will sing again!



ASS: I am already lifting my hooves,  
 already bending my back!

ZURVAN: Father, I *am* your Time!

ZARATHUSHTRA: From the darkness of the night you have risen,  
 dead memory, blazing like the sun.

ZURVAN: I am not the sun, father, nor a dead memory.  
 I am your living son, and I have come in pain  
 so that you may return the time  
 which from my mother you have stolen!

ZARATHUSHTRA: Nothing have I stolen!  
 Love, which is god, I renounced  
 when still I was not who now I am!

SHADOW: You were who you are, but you were not love,  
 and still less *God*.  
 Like an ass straddling young passion!

ASS: With that I had nothing to do!

AMESHA: Nothing, Zarathushtra, can you return to me,  
 for you have given all away  
 to those you cursed as the rabble!  
 Only I can return you the whip  
 which you forgot *that* night with me.  
 That you may tame the wild, dancing rabble  
 which you proclaim as the congregations  
 of the suffering and the yearning!  
 and I give to you our son,  
 that you may give him your name,  
 and that which you have been given  
 by the Great Noon!

ZARATHUSHTRA: O, Love, are you truly god,  
 or just blind passion,  
 which drinks away sight, and breeds a child?  
 Are you a withered flower or a scented illusion,  
 between which is stretched the cord  
 upon which the animals crawl,  
 behind the guise of man?!

TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: All depends upon skill.

AMESHA: Now, take up your lash, Zarathustra,  
 and cease whining!  
 Now you have become the Great Announcer  
 and your deeds and words must testify  
 that the spirit has become incarnate  
 in your body!

SNAKE: Man sins, because for him goodness is incomplete.

EAGLE: Do not rely on fine words, Zarathushtra,  
 but rather on deeds – even though  
 they may not always be good.

ASS: Take up the whip, wise Master,  
 whose ears we respect, and let it crack  
 so that your flock – forgive me, your suffering  
 and yearning congregations – may gather around you,  
 and lead them out under the honeycomb of night,  
 that at midnight we may celebrate midday!

BEGGAR: That from the honeyed gold  
 into my palm may fall



at least a drop, a droplet.

ZARATHUSHTRA: I do not need the whip! I will not have it –  
destroyer and denier!

You, Shepherd, take it,  
to round up your flock which the wolves  
have scattered throughout the valleys  
and the dark mountain gorges!

SHEPHERD: Once already you have granted me a gift  
when you saved me from certain death., kind sage;  
your second gift will be the crown  
which I will place upon my empty head  
that my flock may recognize me  
as your faithful herald!

BEGGAR: O, awesome benefactor  
grant something more to me!

ASS: O Snake, you slinky server,  
pour him some resinous wine,  
that his tongue may be glued  
and that he may no longer be able  
to sing his alms-begging arias!

SNAKE: Let him mount on you, thick-headed sage,  
with his thirst to ride away!

EAGLE: Take, Beggar, a gnawed bone,  
to play upon it the solemn march  
in honour of the moment  
when son and father met!

ZARATHUSHTRA: Eternity and time!

SHADOW: End and beginning.

ZURVAN: You enjoy, Father, playing with my name.  
Yet when I was still a child,  
you were never there to play with me!

ZARATHUSHTRA: It is true, my son,  
the time for playing is dead.  
Before us lies the time of the Great Work!

ZURVAN: Behind me and before me  
there lies only one sole task:  
caring for my blind mother.

SNAKE: How touching it is  
when a son cares for his mother!

ASS: And tears well up into the eyes  
if both are disowned by the father!

SHADOW: If the father knows what it means  
to be a father!

ZARATHUSHTRA: “That about which the father was silent  
has found utterance in the son!”

SHADOW: For too long, Zarathushtra, you were silent,  
and the gold of silence has lost its glitter!

AMESHA: Just remain silent,  
for you were silent *that* night as well!

ZURVAN: I shall not be silent!

ZARATHUSHTRA: Speak, then, if for that alone you came!

ZURVAN: I, would not have walked so far  
if to speak were my only desire.

ZARATHUSHTRA: Why, then, did you walk so far?



Because you had heard my annunciation?  
 ZURVAN: I had heard that the announcer of the new time  
 was dying. That is why I came!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: You set off towards my death-bed?  
 To sweeten your enmity  
 with the poison of vengeance?  
 ZURVAN: Your death will be my new life,  
 for as long as a son has a father –  
 even though he does not know of him –  
 the son will be only a son  
 and never truly a man!  
 SHADOW: And a father!  
 SNAKE: And instead of lying down with his wife  
 and caressing his children,  
 you, wretch, must serve as a walking-stick  
 to your blind mother.  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Do you wish for my death, my son?  
 ZURVAN: This night, within yourself,  
 the father you have killed,  
 and I no longer need to be your son!  
 You have named yourself the great announcer,  
 and the rabble will be your only child!  
 BEGGAR: We are Zarathushtra's children!  
 HUNCHBACK: Do not dare, young man, to call us the rabble!  
 TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: To insult the dead is a sin –  
 .the risen-from-the-dead, a sacrilege!  
 SNAKE: Man sins, because goodness is too feeble.  
 AMESHA: Love, which conceives the child, is not sinful!  
 He who is sinful is the one who disowns the child,  
 which, instead of seed, spurts silver coins  
 into the woman, so that the silver  
 blinds her eyes!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Your words, Amesha, are harsh.  
 AMESHA: Harsher still were the acts of which they tell.  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Acts of love?  
 AMESHA: Acts of love bought!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: You sold your body?  
 AMESHA: So that I could be  
 mother and father to your son!  
 SHADOW: Body clothed in money, woman is your name!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Night, where is your bottom-point?  
 Do you have an end at all?  
 AMESHA: Once it ended in a woman's embrace.  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: O dawn, spread wide your hands and bathe my face  
 which Recognition has spattered with mud!  
 ASS: Till the morrow there are still some tender hours!  
 BEGGAR: Still some gentle draughts!  
 SHEPHERD: With the morning, my flock appears!  
 HUNCHBACK: With the morning, my hump is transformed into wings!  
 EAGLE: And we will fly up together, my comrade,  
 to the mountain of all mounts!  
 TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: With the morning, death calls me back!  
 SHADOW: With the morning, I acquire sharp edges  
 and, sword-like, press against the hip



of my ever-darker brother!  
 AMESHA: With darkness within me  
 in darkness I came to you,  
 that you, the Announcer,  
 might be illumined by the light of the son,  
 you who did not dare to be a father.  
 ZURVAN: Dawn is my brother, but father-never-father,  
 the Time which you do not yet know!  
 Your life is the Kingdom of Night!  
 The Great Noon never will waken again!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: You are his son, Zurvan, the time  
 when dreams become reality!  
 SHADOW: Whoever sets off through dreams  
 has overcome death and understood *His* teaching!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Son, your name is Recognition!  
 SNAKE: The mountains are laid low, the valleys exalted,  
 but you, Zarathustra, have remained a man!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: O Snake, my wisest creature,  
 grant me your wisdom!  
 SNAKE: Only with venom can I grant it to you.  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Thus, you poison people only so that they  
 should have to beg your for the remedy.  
 And now I beg you for the remedy!  
 SNAKE: You beg me for venom!  
 AMESHA: All that is left of your family,  
 Zarathushtra, is the rabble and the lash –  
 for you to use in taming them!  
 ZURVAN: The sun-lash, long and painful as time!

*Zurvan grabs the whip and brandishes it at Zarathushtra. Then he takes his mother by the hand, and together they leave Zarathushtra's cave.*

#### SCENE 4

*The night is already dying, somewhere far away behind the eastern mountains the day is stirring. The desert is becoming pale; from its heart a gentle, quiet wind is rising. The fires in Zarathushtra's cave are already eating into themselves. The Congregations of the suffering and the yearning have eaten and drunk their fill.*

TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: The love which you teach us is God,  
 you have disowned, Zarathushtra,  
 and have rejected its fruit, proud sower!  
 Awesome orator who kills with words!  
 I too have been killed  
 by those honeyed words of yours  
 with which you inebriated the crowd,  
 so that nothing they cared  
 for my tightrope skills.  
 HUNCHBACK: They called me to you, those words of yours,  
 like trombes, which your heralds,  
 the snake and the eagle, rolled down  
 like deaf stones onto the soft nests  
 of men and animals.

And I hoped that this time  
you would nor deny me your goodness.  
That you would finally rid me of my deformity.

ZARATHUSHTRA: The weak I do not reward!  
BEGGAR: Then reward the poor!  
I came hoping that you would strengthen  
my mind, and also my body.  
And I was not mistaken.  
Well have I eaten, and sweetly drunk!

ZARATHUSHTRA: But your spirit still hungers, does it not?  
SHEPHERD: I left my flock,  
for your voice, my Saviour,  
was a singing reed-flute –  
calling, enticing!  
Singing of the succulent grasses,  
the limpid streams and the snow-white lambs  
which flock around me at noon.

ZARATHUSHTRA: I am – the Great Noon!  
SHEPHERD: Yet you are not so much a Father to your son  
as I am shepherd to my flock!

ZARATHUSHTRA: What would you have me be – a sheepdog!  
TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: You called me to rise from the dead,  
you, who proclaim *yourself* to be the Great Noon.  
Now send me back to the Dead, who have no need  
either of Announcers or of sheepdogs!

HUNCHBACK: Touch my hump, that its stony weight  
might reach to your heart, great one!

ZARATHUSHTRA: One hundred of your humps could not outweigh  
the cumber which this night has settled on my heart!

BEGGAR: What think you, Zarathushtra,  
would I get anything at the market  
if I were to sell your teachings there?

ZARATHUSHTRA: Whoever shall comprehend my teachings,  
will no longer wish to live!

TIGHT-ROPE WALKER: Because of your teachings,  
which – as I all the better realise –  
you yourself do not understand,  
I have once already died.  
The second time, I would rather do without them.

BEGGAR: If from your teachings there is nothing  
to be earned, then cast to me at least  
a silver coin – and we'll be quits!

ZARATHUSHTRA: Asses! Asses! And yet again – asses!  
ASS: Who calls to me?  
ZARATHUSHTRA: Asses, born as asses to honour asses!  
But, indeed, you deserve no better!  
In you, there is no true suffering or yearning!  
The Ass is your idol, honour him!

ASS: Zarathushtra the wise,  
I do not know how I come  
to deserve such honour.  
If it is only with your anger,  
then I accept it – the honour!

SHADOW: Zarathushtra, never! Do not drive your children



from you, if you were not able  
to keep your own son by your side!

ZARATHUSI-ITRA: The Great Noon has no children  
and also must not know the shadow!

SHADOW: Suffering and yearning are the children  
of this world! Be their father!

SNAKE: Father, he who is not capable of love,  
when from the love-bed he rises,  
let him not cloak himself in wisdom!

EAGLE: He who is fearful of love,  
let him lie down by himself.

ASS: Well, then – come on!  
You have heard Zarathushtra's command!  
You are donkeys, so you must honour your brother!  
That for once at least  
the family may be elevated!

ZARATHUSHTRA: Do as you are bidden  
by the one who is now your Master!  
The will and the might  
which have returned to the brute!  
For man is too feeble! The son  
breaks the father like a brittle cane,  
and pure love cloaks the noon with night.

ASS: *(to Snake)* Serving-maid, pour into the cups  
beaded wine and nectar divine,  
that in the dull heads the bitter-sharp sword  
of sense may flash,  
and may the mind –  
if any there be –  
be cleaved apart! Cleave!

*(to Eagle)*

And you, my aquiline comrade,  
stir the dormant fires ablaze  
that the dawn may fear their flame!  
May this night last and last and last!  
And may noon never again stray across the sky!  
And you, who have proclaimed  
your indigence as suffering,  
your deformity as yearning,  
you who have left your wretched flocks  
to the wolves, because you were lured on by incense,  
you who have returned from the dead,  
because there you found it tedious,  
and in the waters of repose  
did not dare to wash your backsides,  
all you, asses, now repeat after me, the Ass:  
There is no above  
nor any below!

CHORUS: There is no above  
nor any below!

ASS: The mountains have not been lain low,  
nor have the valleys been exalted!

CHORUS: The mountains have not been lain low,  
nor have the valleys been exalted!



ASS: Sky and earth have not united!  
 CHORUS: Sky and earth have not united!  
 ASS: Who still wishes co rule?  
 CHORUS: Who still wishes to rule?  
 ASS: And who to obey?  
 CHORUS: And who to obey?  
 ASS: The Ass wishes to rule!  
 CHORUS: The Ass wishes to rule!  
 ASS: And the rabble to obey!  
 CHORUS: And the rabble to obey!  
 ASS: The Ass is Love!  
 CHORUS: The Ass is Love!  
 ASS: The Ass is Wisdom!  
 CHORUS: The Ass is Wisdom!  
 ASS: Wisdom kills!  
 CHORUS: Wisdom kills!  
 ASS: Evil is Good!  
 CHORUS: Evil is Good!  
 ASS: Good is Evil!  
 CHORUS: Good is Evil!  
 ASS: Clean is Unclean!  
 CHORUS: Clean is Unclean!  
 ASS: Will is Might!  
 CHORUS: Will is Might!  
 ASS: Might is Will!  
 CHORUS: Might is Will!  
 ASS: Hee-haw, hee-haw, heee-haaaw!  
 CHORUS: Hee-haw, hee-haw, heee-haaaw!  
 ASS: Upon the ass the immortal ride!  
 CHORUS: Upon the ass the immortal ride!  
 ASS: Upon the ass we shall never ride!  
 CHORUS: Upon the ass we shall never ride!  
 ASS: The ass has wings!  
 CHORUS: The ass has wings!  
 ASS: The ass heals the mind!  
 CHORUS: The ass heals the mind!  
 ASS: The ass is the thread of life!  
 CHORUS: The ass is the thread of life!  
 ASS: The ass is the thread of death!  
 CHORUS: The ass is the thread of death!  
 ASS: The ass is Ahura Mazda!  
 CHORUS: The ass is Ahura Mazda!  
 ASS: Ahura Mazda! Ahura Mazda!  
 CHORUS; Ahura Mazda! Ahura Mazda!  
 ASS: Hee-haw, hee-haw, heee-haaaw!  
 CHORUS: Hee-haw, hee-haw, heee-haaaw!  
 ASS: Kill the Announcer!  
 CHORUS: Kill theAnnouncer!  
 ZARATHUSHTRA: Enough, enough! Enough, Ass! Asses, enough!  
     You call death down upon me, asinine fool!  
     You stir up the rabble to kill me!  
     Eagle, my proudest one, scatter them apart!  
     Dig your claws into their pumpkin-heads.  
     Stab their bulging eyes with your beak,



and pierce their rotten hearts!  
Rip out their reeking entrails,  
let them drown in their own filth!  
I sought for comrades, I called to me  
the lions and the children of my soul,  
that together with me they might pass through  
the trimphal arch of the Great Noon!  
But around me there gathered a thick-headed herd  
to drink and to devour, and to honour anyone  
as long as he would promise them  
in the heart of the desert  
a dark-shaded shrub and a silvery stream!  
Eagle, swoop down upon them!  
Merciless!

*Eagle swoops down upon the idolaters of the Ass; they scatter screaming, to cower  
in the corners of the cave. Eagle's dance.*

*Translated by* ALAN  
MCCONNELL-DUFF,  
*with the invaluable aid of the*  
AUTHOR *and* LILI POTPARA

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SHADOW: Zarathushtra, my groom, a dangerous game  
you have played, even though you have said  
that the time for play has already died!  
ZARATHUSHTRA: My shadow, my bride,  
this was the rehearsal for death!



Dragica Potočnjak (b. 1958) is a theatre and film actress, playwright, a mentor for theatre acting. Six of her plays have been nominated for the Grum award, the prize for the best Slovenian play of the year. She is the first woman to win this award. Since 1991 all of her plays have been staged at major theatres in Slovenia, including the Slovenian National Theatre, and some have been performed abroad, where she has also won awards. She is the author of 15 long and short radio dramas, all of which have been broadcast on Radio Slovenija since 1992. In 1992, she founded a theatre group of young Bosnian refugees: *The Incurrible Optimists*. For this work she was awarded the Europe Prize in Tampere, Finland, in 1994. *Hiša brez strehe* (House Without a Roof), 1996, was awarded the Župančičeva Prize. *Hrup, ki ga povzročajo živali, je neznošen* (*The Noise Animals Make is Unbearable*) was the winner of the international competition *Unbekannte Nachbarn*, Graz Kulturhauptstadt Europas, in 2003. She won the Golden Lion for the text *Alisa, Alice* at the International Theatre Festival in Umag, Croatia, in 2001. She also won the Grum Award in 2007 for the play *For Our Young Ladies*.

About the play *For Our Young Ladies*: the central focus of Dragica Potočnjak's opus is immoral, derailed, crooked human relationships. The protagonists of her plays are usually victims of individual abuse and collective exploitation within developed and nominally egalitarian societies. The author's sensitivity to social injustice and family violence usually focuses on a female protagonist. This is certainly true of *For Our Young Ladies*, a sort of kaleidoscope of scenes that illuminates the conditions and causes of the murder that the protagonist, Brina, commits. The dramatic structure is unusual in that it takes place almost entirely as a filmic *flashback*, jumping forward and back between scenes and various timeframes.



Photo by MIHAEL KLEP

# DRAGICA POTOČNJAK

## BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

*Alisa, Alice*, Oregon:

Intellect Books, 2003

*Alisa, Alice*, Bristol: Intellect

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*Sovremena slovenečka drama*  
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*Four Plays by Slovene*

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*Noise Animals Make is*  
*Unbearable)*, Oxford: P.

Lang, 2007

*For our Young Ladies / Za*

*naše mlade dame*, Kranj:

Prešernovo gledališče

Kranj, 2008

## For Our Young Ladies

*Ledig House, Omi, U.S.A., 2006*

Characters:

BRINA, 4, 14 and 18 years old

KATARINA, Her mother, 24, 34 and 38 years old

BORIS, Katarina's husband, her ex-husband and Brina's father, 34, 44 and 48 years old

POLICEMAN, Younger

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR, Older

VICAR

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR

Notes

*The Vicar and the Public Prosecutor can be played by the same actor.*

*The four-year-old Brina is only partially visible onstage. Her voice is heard over a loudspeaker.*

*The fourteen-year-old Brina can be shown on a screen, stretched like a white horizon behind a tree-trunk.*

*Katarina's voice is somewhat modified in the imaginary scenes.*

*The set remains the same throughout, representing different times and places. Downstage left is a solid old armchair, next to it a small table with a light and telephone. On the left and right are large doors, the left leading to the outside, the right to a child's bedroom. Downstage right is the entrance to the kitchen, not indicated by a door. Upstage centre is a tree-trunk.*

*Events in the play take place today, four years ago and fourteen years ago. Time differences are indicated by costume, and possibly the staging.*

**I.I**

*Today – a few hours ago.*

*Brina, wearing a long white bloodstained dress, is standing by the armchair, talking on the telephone.*

BRINA: What do you mean you don't understand me? I got a rifle and shot them. All of them that came out of the lake. ... The lake! Horses... First there were only two of them, but when they kept on coming out I got a rifle and ... Because they ate my children! Actually it was her. She did it, one after the other, all my children! ... What's so strange about that? She opened her big gob and ... I couldn't have any more ... No, you don't get it! She ate the children I gave birth to! That mare! Gigantic, glistening, lit by the sun ... That's got to be easy enough to understand ... No, please don't hang up. I'm frightened. I don't know ... Send someone round. Oh please ... No, I'm alright. Quite alright .. Well there is blood, there's blood everywhere but ... No, not from the horses, hers! She wouldn't die, she crawled after me ... What? Yes. No, I killed the horses in my dreams. That's right, in my dreams! ... Don't you know what dreams are then?! What I'm telling you, I saw it in my dreams ... The children were in the dreams too. I brought each one that was born out into the sun. The horses came up out of the lake, a mare and a stallion, and she started to ... One after the other. All of them ... Why? ... In dreams you can give birth a hundred times, a thousand ... No, I haven't yet ... Is someone going to come? ... Eighteen, today actually, it's my ... Yes. No, I'm not celebrating. I mean, I was celebrating, but then this happened ... Yes ... I'm not imagining anything ... No! No! ...

You listen to me, you lousy cunt, you just fuck ... For fuck's sake, don't you get it, I'm fucked! I'm well fucked, and all you can do is take the piss, go fuck ... Yes! Yes! ... All right, yes, whatever ... Yes. No. *She lets the receiver slip out of her hand. After a pause. I really didn't want to. I didn't. Maybe I was dreaming. No. Wait! Wait for me!*

### I.2

*Immediately beforehand.*

*A feeling of unreality. A strong beam of light. Katarina, dressed as she is at the end of the play, slowly enters it, with her back to us. Music begins with the tinkling of little bells, gets louder and changes into the ringing of bells, which are not church bells however.*

### I.3.

*Following on from the above.*

*A light on Brina downstage.*

BRINA: It's not true what I said, forget it ... Yes ... And even if it was ... What? No, I'm not mad, she was though! Perhaps she really was ... Oh, what do I know.  
*She throws down the receiver and runs after Katarina.*

### 2.

*Fourteen years earlier.*

*The sound of bells far off in the background. Katarina – dressed differently now – runs onto the stage. She looks all around her.*

KATARINA: Brina, Brina, where are you? I know you're hiding again. I know you're ... Come on out, darling. Brina?

*The doorbell rings. Katarina opens the door.*

Good morning. Oh!

INSPECTOR: Good morning, ma'am. Know this one?

KATARINA: Brina, I've been looking for you. Where were you ...?

INSPECTOR: By the river, near the bridge, apparently she was sitting looking at the water.

KATARINA: Oh my God!

INSPECTOR: Everything's alright. A policeman found her. But the little girl couldn't remember where she lived. So we drove about a bit, and when she caught sight of her house she was very pleased.

KATARINA: Thank you. I thought she was asleep. I didn't know she'd ... Brina, you shouldn't have ...

INSPECTOR: Don't tell her off now. She's been frightened enough already. Aren't you going to go to your mum?

KATARINA: Come on then. *To the Inspector.* You'd never believe it, I'd only just started to miss her. But she loves hiding and ... I thought she'd ... She's such an overactive child you know.

INSPECTOR: I can see that. You must watch out for her a bit more, ma'am. It turned out all



right today, but it might not have. Go to your mum, Brina.  
KATARINA: Come on, I'm not cross with you. See, I'm not.  
INSPECTOR: This is your mum. Brina, this is your mother, isn't it?  
KATARINA: Of course I am. She's obviously in a state of shock. She's only four.  
INSPECTOR: You're four already? That's great! Let go of me, Brina, I've got to get back to work. Be glad that you've found your mum.  
KATARINA: Let go of the kind man, Brina, he's got to go.  
INSPECTOR: Where's your husband, ma'am? Perhaps he could ...?  
KATARINA: Oh, him ... he's at work. He's always at work. Look, Brina, Mummy loves you, I love you very ..., you know, don't you.  
BRINA: No you don't!

### 3.

*Fourteen years ago.*

*Boris is in pyjamas. He is standing in front of the door. He hesitates for quite a while. He starts off, then disappears. After a moment he returns. A moment later he stands still and then enters warily. Before closing the door he looks around, making sure no-one has seen him.*

### 4.

*Today – a few hours ago.*

*Brina enters from the side. She is wearing jeans and a shirt.*

BRINA: Where have you put it? Where is it?  
KATARINA *answering from the kitchen*: Just look for it. Look.  
BRINA: Where am I supposed to look then? This is childish.  
KATARINA: So you're not a child then?  
BRINA: No, I'm an adult now. *She searches*. Oh come on, where have you put it? I can't be bothered any more ...  
KATARINA: You won't get your present then!  
BRINA: What a nerve. *She sits down in the armchair*. Got any music? Something, you know – it's as quiet as a graveyard. Really spooky. Whooooo, whooooooo.  
KATARINA: I hope you're hungry.  
BRINA: Yeah. *More quietly*. No.  
KATARINA: Have you found it?  
BRINA: Not yet. Oh yes, I have. I have! *She bends forward and looks under the armchair. The gift is hidden there*. My present, my present! My present, oh yes.

*Katarina enters, a dishcloth in her hand. Brina opens her gift.*

KATARINA: I wonder if you'll like it.  
BRINA: Course I will.  
KATARINA: Not necessarily.  
BRINA: Yes I will.  
KATARINA: Hope so.

*Brina is disappointed.*

BRINA: A nightdress? You know I don't like ...



KATARINA: It's not a nightdress. Try it on.  
BRINA: Well it looks like a nightdress.  
KATARINA: It isn't though. Try it on.  
BRINA: What is it?  
KATARINA: A dress. See, I can see you don't like it.  
BRINA: No, I do though. It's just ... Where am I going to wear it?  
KATARINA: Anywhere. Especially when you want to look extra nice for your boyfriend.  
BRINA: Stop bugging me! Do you always have to ...?!  
KATARINA: Oh dear, something's burning.

*Katarina exits.*

BRINA: No it's not. *Particularly loudly.* No, it's all right you know. It's really lovely. Thanks!  
Really. It's fantastic actually, except ... *More quietly.* As it's not really a nightdress.  
KATARINA: You might even really like wearing it. Try it on.  
BRINA: Not right now.

*Katarina enters holding a bottle.*

KATARINA: What's this then?  
BRINA: Can't you see?  
KATARINA: Don't you know I don't any ...?  
BRINA: That's why.  
KATARINA: How do you mean?  
BRINA: For fun. I'm clean now, aren't I, people can push it around me till they drop and I  
don't give a fuck. It's the same for you.  
KATARINA: Did he tell you to bring me this?  
BRINA: No. I didn't know what to bring you and it seemed like a good joke.  
KATARINA: A joke?  
BRINA: Yes, a joke.  
KATARINA: Well it isn't, just so you know!  
BRINA: It's a test though.

*Katarina exits.*

BRINA: You can always chuck it out. Pour it down the toilet. That'll be cool.  
KATARINA *from the kitchen:* He put you up to it, I know he did ... You'd never have thought of  
a thing like that.  
BRINA: I did though! *More quietly.* For fuck's sake, do you always have to get on my nerves,  
I mean always? Not once have I ... A bloody nightmare! *After a while and more loudly.*  
Don't get cross now. Hey, I'll pour it away and it'll be cool. And we'll put on some  
good music ... We mustn't argue today of all days. It's really shit. I don't want any  
more arguing. *More quietly.* I'll even wear this bloody awful dress if you'll just stop  
being a pain. *After a while and more loudly.* Hey, I must tell you what I dreamed about!  
Something really weird. Like my dreams are trying to tell me I'm never going to have  
any children!

*She exits to the kitchen.*

KATARINA: Not that as well!

*We now hear them both from the neighbouring room.*

BRINA: Where's the bottle then?

KATARINA: Gone.

BRINA: Great.

5.

*Fourteen years ago.*

*Katarina, exhausted and dishevelled, worn out, throws herself into the armchair. Boris comes in raging immediately after her.*

BORIS: Great! But I've asked you a thousand times, don't call me, don't spy on me. I'll come when I come. If we're together, or rather, if I'm with you, then a man has a right to expect we should trust each other. That we ... Like I trust you.

KATARINA: Yes.

BORIS: Because that's what I've decided. A person makes a decision and ... We all have opportunities ... you too. Well, you have been letting yourself go a bit, but still ... Still I made a decision and I trust you. You, though, you've done everything bar sending private detectives after me. I've only got to stick my nose through the door and you pounce on me with your reproaches. Reproaching me! If only once you'd, just once ...

KATARINA: Can ...?

BORIS: No! You listen. You listen first! And don't interrupt, don't interrupt me!

KATARINA: Can I tomorrow than?

BORIS: No! Classic. Go on, now just say I've got myself worked up. That I'm ...! Because I'm not! It is normal for a person to raise their voice if they want to tell someone something. If they want anyone to hear them. If they want anyone even to hear them!

KATARINA: You're very ...

BORIS: What?

KATARINA: Yes.

BORIS: What is it I do to you? What do I do to you? Go on, what? You don't know? You don't know. Because I don't do anything to you. Because all I want is to explain something to you. Well and what if I was worked up. If I was. Who was it got me worked up? Who is it who's getting at me the whole time, who reproaches me, doesn't let me get a word in edgeways? Who?! Perhaps I do it to myself? Me, known for his perverseness, I enjoy it, because then I can be in a bad mood again. I can hardly wait to ...! Every day I can barely wait to get home so I can lose my temper again. It's great fun. Except soon I'll really have had it up to here!

KATARINA: I need to go to sleep ...

BORIS: Sleep?! She'd like to go to sleep! Anything, so long as she doesn't have to listen. You want to go to sleep? Stare into space! So I can listen to her sighs! But if I ask her something it's – oh, nothing. If I touch her – leave me alone. And now she wants to sleep?! She wants to sleep and we still haven't said a word. Have you any idea what it is I want to talk to you about? No, because you're not interested, you're not interested, and that's why you keep on interrupting me. I've only got to open my mouth and you're jumping down my throat. Do you realise this? Perhaps you don't. I don't think you realise it at all. You see sweetheart, if you didn't keep saying over and over ... Then I wouldn't either. I'd be ... Why won't you look at me? Look at me. Go on, look at me.

KATARINA: No.

BORIS: You already have anyway. You have a bit already. Look, I do know you don't really want it to be this way, you'd like ... We'll talk and ...

KATARINA: Leave me alone please.



*Katarina moves away from him.*

BORIS: When you don't want to listen any more, when know-all doesn't feel like it, it's – fuck off. Fuck yourself! I'll tell you to fuck off, you'll see, you won't be coming back again. Do you understand me?

KATARINA: No.

BORIS: Well, at least you're honest, at least that. As a start that's ...

*Boris approaches her again. Katarina pushes him away, he shoves her forcefully into the armchair.*

KATARINA: Stop it, Boris, calm down or else ...

BORIS: Are you going to threaten me? Instead of apologising! If you'd even apologised occasionally for some of the crap you dump on a person. But no. How could you! Madam is too proud. She's always provoking, always the first to start it. And she pounces on you with it, like a bloody hysterical old woman, oh how she pounces! Cracks right down on you. Just so she doesn't have to hear anything that might still do her some good. Oh no, she'll rather peck away, repeat herself over and over, repeating the same thing a hundred times like a chicken And all the time she'll make out she's as innocent as the Virgin Mary. She'll look at me with those big cow's eyes of hers, flutter her eyelashes, anything so as not to have to ...

KATARINA: At least vary your vocabulary ... I know it all off by heart!

BORIS: But I don't know yours, I suppose?! You're interesting, I suppose?! You're as boring as shit! Nothing but shit you are. And I'm not putting up with you any longer. Surely you don't think I'm such an idiot that I'll go on ..., that I'll always ...? You underestimate me, darling, you underestimate me a lot.

KATARINA: Who's underestimating who?!

*Boris hits her.*

BORIS: Why are you with me then, eh? If you're suffering so very much?! You poor thing. I feel so sorry for you. Oh, how I pity you, what a poor thing you are! A victim, really. *He laughs.* A typical victim. She doesn't want to be, but somehow she just is. Because in fact she does everything she can to become one! Be a victim then, go on, whatever you want, but you're not fucking me about any more, oh no!

KATARINA: Brina's crying.

*Katarina gets up, Boris pushes her back down into the chair.*

BORIS: She's not crying at all. I've got better hearing than you. *He listens.* What will she think of next, just so she can keep on blaming me for things.

KATARINA: I can hear her. Let me go to her.

BORIS: So, who's stopping you. Except she's not crying! But you're going to go now anyway and wake her. You're going to go and wake her just so you can say what an arse-hole I am, I've shouted at you so much I've woken her up again. There she is, sleeping soundly behind five closed doors, but arse-hole that I am, I've woken her up. And why?! Because I hate her! I hate my own child because ...

KATARINA: Stop it, please, stop!

BORIS: So do something about it then.

KATARINA: I'll go mad, I will ...!

*Katarina runs off, Boris follows her with his eternal monologue.*

BORIS: Of course you will. Did you think you wouldn't then? Because I reckon you already have. Mad. I've told you – You should have gone to the doctor's ages ago. I've been



telling you for far too long. And the kid will too in the end, I wouldn't be at all surprised, I wouldn't be surprised because ...

## 6.

*Today – a little earlier.*

*The room is as before. Brina's corpse in a pool of blood. Standing over her a young policeman, talking on his mobile phone.*

POLICEMAN: All the necessary ... that too, that too. Yes, they have to be seen by a doctor. Although there's no doubt about it. No doubt, they're both ... I don't know ... I won't now. As soon as possible, I hope, 'cos I'd like to get home, today if that's still possible. Go on, we had to wait three hours yesterday for a lawyer ... Yep, there's one practically every day now. What can you do. Although they're mostly men. Usually it's a son kills his father, ...yes, usually, but here it's, well ... That's the way it goes ...You can't do anything ... yes ... What can you do ... Yes, we're waiting. ... One of 'em's a bit of all right. Was! *He laughs. He looks down at the corpse, touches her bare leg with his shoe and lifts up her skirt.* No, not bad at all. ... Right, young. I reckon she's not twenty yet. ... Sexy? Well, it's hard to say now, unless you ... *Laughs.*

*The Inspector enters from the kitchen.*

INSPECTOR: Get your mitts off!

POLICEMAN (*into his phone*): Yes ... you too.

*He puts away his mobile phone.*

INSPECTOR: I'd say she did it at least five hours ago. If it was her. Hard to see it wasn't. It all points to it. Hardly any other possibility.

POLICEMAN: I agree.

INSPECTOR: She's pretty cold already.

POLICEMAN: When was the call then?

INSPECTOR: Didn't I tell you to make enquiries. About three hours ago, but I want it exactly ...

POLICEMAN: O.K.

INSPECTOR: We'll have to collect fingerprints, it can't be helped,. Once the others get here we won't be able to do any more.

POLICEMAN: But I've already ...

INSPECTOR: It's as if I'd met her before. I don't know, the whole time we've been here ... But I can't remember.

POLICEMAN: Which one, this one or that one in there? *He points in the direction of the kitchen, from which the Inspector had entered.*

INSPECTOR: No, no, this one. *He points at the corpse.* Anyway we'd booked the older one, she used to get drunk. The neighbours used to call us non-stop 'cos she got rowdy. Nothing much.

*Silence.*

POLICEMAN: I remember. *After a while.* How much longer will it take for her to bleed to death?

INSPECTOR: You bloody stupid idiot, didn't you go to school? There are more and more idiots all the time! Well, do something then!



POLICEMAN: Don't get excited. You've got a phone, make a call.

INSPECTOR: You call the professor, if he's still alive, and pass him over to me straight away.

POLICEMAN: What professor?

INSPECTOR: Yours, so I can ask him if he knows.

POLICEMAN: I only wanted to check.

*The Inspector reaches into his pocket and offers him his knife.*

INSPECTOR: Here you are, check it out. I'll time it. Oh my, when you're gone, I can't tell you.

You're not even listening to me now.

POLICEMAN: It's like she moved.

INSPECTOR: You're not listening, are you.

POLICEMAN: Leave off.

INSPECTOR *indicating the corpse*: I examined her, there's no hope.

POLICEMAN: Pity.

INSPECTOR: No it's not. It's better for her. After what she's done, it's just as well. Sometimes even God is merciful.

*Translated by* LESLEY WADE

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Photo by VITA MAVRIČ

Vinko Möderndorfer (b. 1958) is a director, playwright, poet and writer. He graduated in theatre direction from the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television in Ljubljana with the performance *The Proposal* by A. P. Chekov in 1982. He directs in theatre and opera, as well as on television and for the radio. In the last 20 years he has directed over 70 theatre and opera performances. In the period from 1992 to 2002 he directed and wrote 11 TV plays and documentaries. He writes dramas, poems (also for children), novellas, novels, TV and film scripts, radio plays for children and adults.

He has received several awards, including the Borštnik Award for Best Director (1986) for the performance *Potujoče gledališče Šopalovič* (The Šopalovič Travelling Theatre), the Župančič Award of the City of Ljubljana (1994) for the collection of novellas *Krog male smrti* (Circle of Small Death); for the book of novellas *Nekatere ljubezni* (Some Loves) he received the award of the Prešeren Fund for 2000; he won first prize at the anonymous competition of Radio Slovenia and WDR (1994) for his radio play for adults *Pokrajina* (The Landscape); the Rožanc Award (2002) for best collection of essays *Gledališče v ogledalu* (A Mirror to Theatre) and many others.

Möderndorfer's more recent plays perhaps already fully escape the characterisation 'dramatics of the transition'. They exist entirely in a new time, even though they still reflect on the past 'socialist utopia'. As such, they are completely autochthonous, even though they do not conceal their links to the tradition of drama and theatre (Cankar, Partljič, Shaffer, Dürrenmatt, Feydeau, and others). At the moment these plays (or their most expressive scenes) seem to have reached their 'furthest' point in the Slovenian context and have started dealing with the 'physics' and 'metaphysics' of modern times of globalisation most uncompromisingly and honestly. Möderndorfer's dramatics can make us realise that the time of the transition (from socialism to capitalism), which offered some kind of solace for almost a decade supported by an unclear but 'probable' hope for 'better times', is truly finally over. The 'transition' is over and we are where we are, with all the baggage of our past that we keep dragging along with us, while the path onwards is slippery and treacherous. That is a cold, bitter, desperate feeling – even though there is no reason for us not to laugh at it 'from the heart'. The author even demands such a reaction – laughter – from us by stubbornly sticking with comedy and it only depends on us whether we follow him in this sense or not (Blaž Lukan).

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# VINKO MÖDERNDOR- FER

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PLAYS

*Call mrs Mila: Murder at the opera*, Ljubljana: Radio Slovenia, Drama Department, 2000  
*Appelez madame Mila: Un meurtre a l'opera*, Ljubljana: Radio Slovenia, Rédaction du programme des pieces radiophoniques, 2000  
*The handsome janissary: radio serial for children*, Ljubljana: Radio Slovenia, Drama Department, 2001

*Le beau janissaire*, Ljubljana: Radio Slovenia, Drama Department, 2001  
*The bill (radioplay from the present time)* Radio Slovenia, Drama Entry, 2001  
*Drei Schwestern*, Österreichischer Bühnenverlag Kaiser & Co, 2003  
*Mama umrla dvakrat: tri komedije*, Bratislava: Juga publishing house, 2004

*Dugoprogaš*, Šibensko kazalište, 2004  
*Četiri godišnja doba*, Šibensko kazalište, 2004  
*Tri sestre*, Šibensko kazalište, 2004  
*Rodinne Štastie*, Divadla Jana Palarika v Trnave, 2004  
*Šah mat*, Šibensko kazalište, 2006

PROSE

*A carte da Maria e altri racconti*, Messina: Mesogea, 2002  
*Luogo numero 2: storia di un assassino*, Messina: Mesogea, 2003  
*Neke ljubavi*, Zrenjanin: Gradska narodna biblioteka Žarko Zrenjanin, 2004

Synopsis:

A family lives at the bottom: Mother, Father, Elder Brother, Younger Brother, the pregnant Mistress and Grandmother.

In the first scene we get to know the family and their social situation, which is by no means described in a dramatic, but in a humorous manner instead. The humour is absurd and timeless.

In the second scene we see that the family has kidnapped Prince Arthur and Guinevere. Prince Arthur is a son of a shopping mall chain owner. Terribly, utterly rich. Guinevere is his rich mistress. The family only kidnapped them in order to draw some attention to themselves. To the people from the bottom. But not in a social sense. The family only wants the people on the top to know that somebody exists at the bottom. To make the kidnapping more convincing (only so that the ones *on the top would believe them*), they cut off one of Prince Arthur's fingers.

In the third scene we see how the family itself ensures that their captives can escape. Now the family waits for the police to show up and arrest them. Their goal is prison, where they would be well taken care of. They say goodbye to each other. They are happy. But... Nobody comes to get them. Nobody arrests them. They have been forgotten. The ones on the top do not know there is anyone at all in the bottom. Mother will cook supper. They will eat the rat, otherwise a family pet.

At the Bottom is a social and poetic play, which focuses on serious social situations through absurd humour. In its exaggeration it goes very far, to the very edge. With its poetic language and a drastic social situation it depicts an image of reality of the globalised world.

**At The Bottom**

(a play in three acts)

This play combines poetic language with an intense, realistic atmosphere. The combination of poetry and theatre *naturalism* is supposed to set up a comedic distance; however, this does not mean that the play is supposed to lose any of its sharpness and roughness. Perhaps it even becomes a bit rougher because of it.

Despite the language they speak, the persons in the play are psychologically motivated and serious in their functions.



All of the quotes (familiar names of people, events and places) are not intended literally; instead, their meaning is an absurd travesty. They should be understood as such.

The play should be smooth, clear, and as far as characters are concerned serious and unyielding.

Characters at the bottom

YOUNGER BROTHER, *hungry*  
MISTRESS, *very heavily pregnant*  
GRANDMOTHER, *almost dead*  
BROTHER, *missing an eye*  
FATHER, *missing an arm*  
MOTHER, *as good as it gets*

Characters on the top

PRINCE ARTHUR, *handsome*  
GUINEVERE, *beautiful*

*A basement.*

*A door in the middle. There's a steep stairway behind the door. High up under concrete posts there are elongated windows. Perhaps a sort of chute for coal. Pale light from the street floods the space, reflecting on the wall.*

*Concrete. Grey concrete. Maybe a basement of a huge deserted building. A heap of rags - a kind of a makeshift bed - is stuffed in a concrete niche underneath the coal chute. The same on the other side. Crates litter the floor. Candles and broken oil lamps are scattered all over the crates. However, everything else is clean. Somebody cleans the place up, after all.*

## Two

*We hear noises at the door upstairs. Shoving. Shouting.*

*The door opens. Younger Brother, Mistress and Guinevere stumble into the room. Guinevere is very beautiful and very scared.*

GUINEVERE: Let me go! I don't want to...

*Guinevere spots Arthur Prince.*

GUINEVERE: Arthur!

*Rushes towards him.*

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinevere!

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was in a hurry when she left her home.

BROTHER: How do you know?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's not wearing any panties.

FATHER: Who's this?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We found her in the car.

MISTRESS: In the back seat.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She was sleeping.

MISTRESS: She wasn't sleeping. I know bitches like her! She pretended to sleep. I know these sluts! When you took Arthur Prince away she kept out of sight, but we found her.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Her eyes looked so sleepy.



MISTRESS: Not sleepy - vicious, cunning, treacherous.

*Mistress kicks Guinevere.*

ARTHUR PRINCE: Leave her alone! She doesn't have anything to do with this.

FATHER: Do with what, if I may ask?

ARTHUR PRINCE: My kidnapping.

FATHER: Well, she does now. Tie her up!

*Brother pulls a wide Scotch tape out of his pocket...*

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinevere, we've been kidnapped. We shared the good things, now we'll share the bad ones, too.

GUINEVERE: What do you mean *share*? Why *share*?

ARTHUR PRINCE: You're my Guinevere.

*Brother starts tying Guinevere's arms on her back with the Scotch tape.*

GUINEVERE: What in the Lord's name are you doing?

BROTHER: Tying your wee little hands behind your back.

GUINEVERE: But... I really don't have anything to do with him. I dumped him. I was fed up with him. And I left him today.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinny!

GUINEVERE: Why are you gaping at me as if I killed your pet or something.

ARTHUR PRINCE: We met in the car just after the opening, there was no indication of your leaving me...

GUINEVERE: I wanted to tell you it was over, that I was sick of you and your shopping malls.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You congratulated me. You hugged me.

GUINEVERE: I was gathering the courage.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You stuffed your tongue in my mouth...

GUINEVERE: Just to get you to quit rambling about the fitness centre, hostesses, air conditioning in your Ferrari, income and outflows, percentages and margins, new building plots, golf courses and the automatic bowling alley...

ARTHUR PRINCE: I fucked you.

GUINEVERE: Like performing an appendectomy.

ARTHUR PRINCE: I was so good you fell asleep on the back seat.

GUINEVERE: That was the only way to stop you from forcing your way into me.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You always fall asleep.

GUINEVERE: Because you never quit on time.

MOTHER: Now stop it!

BROTHER: Father, I tied her up.

FATHER: Way to go.

GUINEVERE: I don't have anything to do with him. Let me go! I don't even like him. I hate him!

MISTRESS: She's pretending! I know tramps like her! She just wants to save her life! The harlot!

GUINEVERE: I'm on your side. If you didn't kidnap him, I would. Kidnap him and dump him in a trash can.

MISTRESS: I told you.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Guinny, you're in shock, babbling nonsense. I'm your Arthur Prince! The richest son far and wide. You'll be sorry one day.

GUINEVERE: Let me go! I'm one of you, too. When they tore down our house and started building the *Shopping City* where it stood, I was hiding among the machines at the construction site.



ARTHUR PRINCE: I saved you.

GUINEVERE: You saved me from the construction workers, so that you could take their place in abusing me.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You said I was the only one, the best one, that you loved me...

MISTRESS: The bitch only wanted to survive, same as now. Mother, let me be the first to kill her.

GUINEVERE: Whaaat?!

MOTHER: (*resolutely*) We aren't going to kill anyone!

BROTHER: At least not just yet.

FATHER: Let's wrap this up. Now we've got both of them. We may have intended to get just one...

YOUNGER BROTHER: Ha, ha! Just like those super discounts. You buy one and get one free. Ha, ha.

FATHER: Let's pull ourselves together! Get down to business. Mistress, grab a pen and write a note.

*Mistress pulls a crumpled paper bag from her pocket and spits on the end of a tiny pencil.*

MISTRESS: Ready, Father.

*Father clears his throat. Everyone stares at him.*

FATHER: ... We have Arthur Prince, your son, and his Guinevere. We're ready for anything...

MOTHER: Well said!

FATHER: We demand...

BROTHER: That's right!

FATHER: ... We demand...

*Father glances at everyone...*

FATHER: What do we demand?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Money.

MISTRESS: Heaps of money.

BROTHER: A billion.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Million.

MISTRESS: (*writes it down*) A billion million!

MOTHER: Let's be modest. Money's not everything. There are other values.

MISTRESS: Then make them burn all shopping malls to the ground! Each and every one of them!

FATHER: A good idea.

MOTHER: I like it.

MISTRESS: (*fanatically*) Make them burn them to the bare black ground and then grow meadows and build children's playgrounds there, and sandboxes and slides and little tables for changing the babies' nappies, and make meandering footpaths sprinkled with white sand in between, and populate the park with birds, all kinds of birds, flocks of swallows, cockatoos from tropical countries, nightingales and finches, and make them set up a summerhouse in the middle and let musicians play A Little Night Music all day long.

BROTHER: You're pathetic.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And totally impractical. What do we get out of this, I ask you?

BROTHER: Even if they rebuilt the parks they'd surely charge entrance fees. And immediately set up stalls for popcorn, hot dogs and sodas of all kinds.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And, as always, they'd refuse to let you and your baby in. No, I vote for a billion!



BROTHER: A billion million!

FATHER: Right. Let's write a billion million. Whatever will be, will be. As long as it's over.

ARTHUR PRINCE: You're crazy. Crazy!

GUINEVERE: What if the manager father Prince refuses to give you a billion million?

MOTHER: He'll do it for his son. I would.

ARTHUR PRINCE: No son is worth that much.

BROTHER: You mustn't have such a bad opinion of yourself. We should think highly of ourselves. Otherwise we're nothing. Less than animals. Less than stones.

GUINEVERE: (*carefully*) What are you going to do with us if you don't get the ransom?

MISTRESS: (*fanatically, characteristically of a pregnant woman*)

We'll dismember Arthur Prince and burn Guinevere alive and scatter her ashes all over the highway.

MOTHER: Calm down! Mistress! Don't be so hectic. Think of the baby! I've read somewhere that violence is bad for the mammary glands.

FATHER: So, Mistress, write this down: *We want a billion million in cash for their lives.*

BROTHER: In small and medium bills.

FATHER: Now why's that?

BROTHER: I've read somewhere it's supposed to be like that.

FATHER: Right. *A billion million in cash in small and medium bills, or else we'll...*

*Father looks at everybody...*

MISTRESS: Dismember and incinerate...

MOTHER: Simmer down!

BROTHER: We can leave it unsaid. And let them imagine.

MOTHER: That's right. Let the imagination do the job. Son, I'm very proud of you.

FATHER: Right. Let's write... or else Arthur Prince and his Guinevere will be in a lot of trouble.

*Father looks at everybody...*

FATHER: Well, what do you think?

MOTHER: It's great, dad! One can really tell you have a classical education.

BROTHER: I think they'll pay right away.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Maybe we're not asking enough.

MISTRESS: We can still dismember and vaporize them.

FATHER: And what have our two victims to say?

*Father leans towards Arthur Prince and Guinevere.*

FATHER: Well, is it well written? Do you think a man with classical education should use more elaborated expressions?

ARTHUR PRINCE: No one will buy it.

FATHER: What?

ARTHUR PRINCE: A billion million! That's insane!

GUINEVERE: You don't know the old Prince. He won't even spit out a million.

ARTHUR PRINCE: They'll think that you're joking. No one has that much money. It's not serious!

FATHER: (*seriously*) As far as we're concerned, it's serious.

ARTHUR PRINCE: They'll never believe you.

MOTHER: Maybe he's right.

MISTRESS: What if we still made them burn everything down to the ground, to the black soil...

ARTHUR PRINCE: Ask for a normal amount.



MOTHER: But it's not just about the money...

ARTHUR PRINCE: What is it about, then?

*Brother grabs Arthur Prince by the collar and shakes him like a bag of sand.*

BROTHER: Shut up! We are the kidnapers and you are... *(tries to think of a word)* you are...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ... the kidnappee.

BROTHER: And you are the kidnappee.

MISTRESS: And this is your bitch... Also a kidnappee!

GUINEVERE: I have nothing to do with him. I've already told you.

BROTHER: It's not usual for kidnappees to lecture their kidnapppers.

FATHER: True. I've never read anything about that.

BROTHER: We'll do as we please. WE set the terms. Finally the world is in our hands. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Thus: everything!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Everything!

MISTRESS: Everything!

FATHER: Though, it's true what he says. They won't believe us.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Then let's make sure they believe us. Let's be violent!

MOTHER: We don't have any violence in the family.

YOUNGER BROTHER: It's not about how we really are, it's about whether they'll buy it or not. It's a game! It's business. Negotiating. That's why I suggest we rape Guinevere. Rape always works. Rape is the correct strategy. They'll know we mean it.

*Everybody is quiet.*

MOTHER: I won't watch.

MISTRESS: And I'll be glad to.

*Guinevere, even though her hands are tied, kicks Arthur Prince.*

GUINEVERE: See, you bastard, what you got me into. It's you they kidnapped, but I'm the one that gets raped.

*Mother stuffs pieces of newspaper in her ears and covers her eyes with her hands.*

MOTHER: See no evil. Hear no evil.

FATHER: Well, let's do it! As long as it's convincing. Who's going to sacrifice himself and do it?

BROTHER: I would, but I don't feel well.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Right. I'll do it.

BROTHER: I know it won't be difficult for you.

MISTRESS: Just don't be too gentle. She's not pregnant!

*Younger Brother drops his pants to his knees and kneels down in front of Guinevere. Guinevere lies on her back and spreads her legs.*

*Silence. Everyone waits. Everyone watches.*

YOUNGER BROTHER: *(in a while)* Something's not right.

BROTHER: What's not right?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She's supposed to resist.

MISTRESS: Goddamn bitch, resist!

GUINEVERE: I'm not crazy, am I? He'd tear my dress.

*Mother is still covering her eyes with her hands.*



MOTHER: Are you done yet?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I can't do it this way. I don't feel motivated.

BROTHER: (*spitefully*) Can't get it up?

FATHER: (*indignantly*) Son, there are women present!

BROTHER: Maybe there's too many of us around, perhaps he just needs some intimacy.

Wouldn't you agree, Mistress, that he doesn't have these problems when you two are alone?

MISTRESS: (*cries*) I said I'm sorry.

YOUNGER BROTHER: It's true, bro, your Mistress motivates me...

BROTHER: (*angrily*) Don't make me tear your arm off and throw it into the corner.

FATHER: What are you going on about? I don't understand anything.

MOTHER (*covering her eyes*) You done yet?

*Guinevere is still on her back.*

GUINEVERE: Well?!

*Younger Brother stands up. His trousers are still around his ankles.*

YOUNGER BROTHER: I can't do it. My buddy went limp on me. It's pointless if she doesn't resist. Resistance is what it's all about. A brutal rape would convince them that we mean business. That would be the psychological effect. This way it's senseless.

MOTHER: Can I look yet?

ARTHUR PRINCE: Even if she resisted, they wouldn't be convinced.

FATHER: Why not?

ARTHUR PRINCE: How would they know you really did it?

FATHER: We'd write in the letter: *because we're dead serious, we raped Prince Arthur's Guinevere.*

ARTHUR PRINCE: Same as a legend. Just written down without any material, any physical evidence. Nobody believes anything that's written anymore. Fairy tales!

*Everybody ponders.*

FATHER: He's right.

BROTHER: We need something to convince them, something tangible.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Can I put my trousers back on, then?

MOTHER: I'll look.

*Younger Brother pulls his trousers on and Mother opens her eyes.*

MOTHER: Is it done yet? That was kind of quick.

ARTHUR PRINCE: (*to Guinevere*) You can put your legs together again.

*Guinevere sits.*

GUINEVERE (*to Arthur*) See, you pig, what I was prepared to do for you?

FATHER: Well, what shall we do?

BROTHER: They must know we're dangerous and that we mean... (*tries to find a word*) and that we mean...

YOUNGER BROTHER: ...business.

BROTHER: And that we mean business.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Let's just try writing a letter. I'll take it to the corporate skyscraper and leave it in front of the entrance. After all, Arthur is the old Prince's son! (*to Mistress*) Hand over the letter!



*Mistress offers him the crumpled paper bag that she wrote the note on... Then pulls it back, remembering something...*

MISTRESS: I know!

BROTHER: What?

MISTRESS: A bag! A bag for fruits or vegetables...

FATHER: It would be better to have a real letter, I know. But where am I supposed to get a letter in these times?!

MOTHER: Yeah, our great great grandpa, a soldier in the Punic Wars, had his family crest on all his letters, in three colours. Black, gold and red!

MISTRESS: Bags are for putting something in.

BROTHER: No shit!

MISTRESS: We have to send them something in the bag, so that they know we're serious.

*A moment of silence.*

FATHER: What?

MISTRESS: A part of Arthur Prince.

ARTHUR PRINCE: Beg your pardon?

GUINEVERE: Well, now you're fucked, Art!

BROTHER: A bloody part...

YOUNGER BROTHER: A brilliant idea!

ARTHUR PRINCE: Wait!

*Mistress's eyes gleam.*

MISTRESS: Let's cut something off.

ARTHUR PRINCE: *(defends himself in panic)* There's no point, I tell you, you won't even be able to get a good grip on it. It's so small. And insignificant.

GUINEVERE: I can attest to that. First hand experience.

FATHER: What should we cut off?

BROTHER: Something symbolic.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Something he counts the cash with. People like him miss that most.

BROTHER: His fingers! Awesome! I'd never think of that.

FATHER: I suggest a finger. A single finger. For now.

GUINEVERE: Art, you're in luck again!

BROTHER: That's right. Let's cut off one of his fingers and send it to them.

YOUNGER BROTHER: The ring finger. I noticed he has a precious signet ring.

BROTHER: Wouldn't the thumb or index finger be better? He counts his profits with those. If you cut off a merchant's thumb and index finger, you cut him to the quick.

YOUNGER BROTHER: For starters it would be better if we cut off the finger with the ring.

ARTHUR PRINCE: My father's present.

YOUNGER BROTHER: His father will recognize it immediately.

BROTHER: Fine. The ring finger it is, then. For starters.

MOTHER: I won't watch.

*Stuffs the newspaper in her ears again and covers her eyes with her hands.*

MISTRESS: But I will! I've never seen an amputation before!

GUINEVERE: Art, I can watch, too, if that'll make you feel better.

ARTHUR PRINCE: *(screams)* Help! Help!!

FATHER: Who will do it?

BROTHER: Oh, that would be me.

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'll help you.



*The brothers grab hold of Arthur Prince, untie his hands, throw him on his belly and stretch out his left hand, Younger Brother kneels on his back and grabs him... Father pulls a little knife from his pocket...*

FATHER: It's grandfather's. A bit jagged.

BROTHER: Don't worry, I'll cut well, I'll press hard.

ARTHUR PRINCE: *(screams)* Help!

GUINEVERE: Hold on, Art! One, two, three, and it'll be over! Or actually: it'll be gone.

*Brother opens the little pocketknife and kneels next to the Prince's stretched-out hand. Mistress opens the bag and holds it out...*

BROTHER: Don't fret, you don't use your left-hand ring finger at all.

*And cuts off his ring finger with one energetic move.*

*Arthur Prince shrieks... Then all is quiet.*

*Brother throws Arthur's ring finger into the bag and Mistress immediately closes it... Then Brother stands up, wipes the blade into his trousers, closes the pocketknife and gives it back to his father.*

*Translated by* BORUT PRAPER

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Matjaž Zupančič (b. 1959) is an author, playwright, theatre director and associate professor of theatre directing at the Academy for Theatre, Film, Radio and TV in Ljubljana. One of the leading contemporary Slovenian playwrights, he has written several plays that have been published and staged in the last 15 years: *Izganjalci hudiča* (The Exorcists, 1990), *Slastni mrlič* (Delicious Corpse, 1991), *Ubijalci muh* (The Fly-Killers, 1994), *Vladimir* (1997), *Goli pianist* (The Naked Pianist, 2001), *Hodnik* (The Corridor, 2003), *Razred* (*The Class*, 2006). *Izganjalci hudiča* received the Slovenian Book Fair's award for the best literary debut (1991-1993), while four of his plays (*Vladimir*, *Goli pianist*, *The Corridor*, *The Class*) received the Grum Award for best play of the year. His plays have been translated into several foreign languages and have been staged in Slovenia, Poland, Luxemburg, Serbia, France, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia.

Matjaž Zupančič's latest play, *The Class*, deals with pressing questions of our everyday 'globalised' life. This black comedy hits a sensitive nerve – the question of modern mysticism as created by contemporary technocracy and all-embracing management. We live in a world of manuals, recommended knowledge and required skills, all of which are necessary just to keep our heads above water in this merciless market-driven world, to prevent us from drowning along with abolished departments, outdated products and 'regressive ways of thinking'. We have probably never lived so precariously in employment terms: today, we may have success and luxury – or at least a more or less decent living wage – but tomorrow everything might suddenly be turned upside down. Yet, no matter how exposed we are, we are not alone. Marketing 'experts' have developed all kinds of systems and mechanisms to help us. In depicting these new mechanisms, Zupančič is both witty and poisonous. In his play, a candidate appears before some corporate 'experts' for retraining – the sole member of an entire department which was to be abolished. He is slightly insecure and somewhat confused concerning what is expected of him, but he is determined to succeed and is ready for anything. No sacrifice is too great if it means we can join a 'happy, new class' of people, with jobs and a guaranteed income.



Photo by MATJAŽ REBOLJ



# MATJAŽ ZUPANČIČ

## PLAYS IN TRANSLATION

*Le pianiste nu*, Cahier De l'Adriatique a la mer Noive, Maison Antoine Vitez, France, 2001  
*Der Nackte Klavier Spieler*, Neue Stucke aus Europa, Bonner Biennale, 2002

*Vladimir, V: Dialog 6*, Scena slowenska, Czerwiec, 2004  
*The Corridor*, Kranj: Prešernovo gledališče =Prešeren Theatre, 2004  
*Three plays from Slovenia*, Ljubljana : Sodobnost International, 2005

*Sovremena slovenečka drama (Hodnik)*, Štip: Centar za kulturna inicijativa, 2006  
*Vladimir, Slovinske drama dnes*, Brno: Vetrne Mlyny, 2006  
*The Class*, Kranj: Prešernovo gledališče =Prešeren Theatre, 2007

*Slovene theatre and drama post independence: four plays by Slovene playwrights*, Oxford: P. Lang, 2007

## The Class

Characters:

SEMINAR LEADER  
STYLIST (*played by an actress*)  
SCHULTZ  
SANTORI  
THERAPIST (*played by an actress*)  
MAN  
CARETAKER

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Interrupting.*) How well do you know yourself?

MAN: Myself? How well do I know myself?

SEMINAR LEADER: Yourself, yes! Are you not reading me? Am I not speaking clearly?

MAN: You do, Seminar Leader, Sir ...

SANTORI: (*To Schultz.*) He must have grilled quite a few so far!

SCHULTZ: He really is quite good at it.

SEMINAR LEADER: Well?

MAN: Sometimes I go within. It's not far. I know myself well. Well, at least approximately.

SEMINAR LEADER: Good. But the suit you're wearing today, you don't have a clue about it, do you?

MAN: It's borrowed, but I've been thinking about buying it off.

SEMINAR LEADER: Why don't you check your pockets.

MAN: My pockets?

SEMINAR LEADER: Yes, fish them through.

STYLIST: And don't crease the suit too much, if I may suggest so!

(*The Man is fishing through his pockets.*)

MAN: What am I looking for?

SEMINAR LEADER: That's the fundamental question of control. You won't know until you've found it.

MAN: Nothing. All empty.

SEMINAR LEADER: What about the briefcase? Open your briefcase and search it.

STYLIST: (*Peevishly.*) Should he yodel in the process as well?

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Harshly.*) Quiet. I'm leading the seminar now. Search it thoroughly.

(*The Man is rummaging through the briefcase.*)

SEMINAR LEADER: Well?

MAN: Yes! There is something in here!

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Surprised.*) What? Impossible. That cannot be true!

MAN: There is something!

SEMINAR LEADER: It should be empty! What is in your hand?

MAN: A sheet of paper.

SEMINAR LEADER: A sheet of paper. Is it blank?

MAN: (*Checks, quickly looks away.*)

SEMINAR LEADER: I can see there's something on it. What is it?

MAN: (*Visibly embarrassed.*) Nothing special ...

SEMINAR LEADER: Why are you blushing? Did you write this?

MAN: No way!

SEMINAR LEADER: Show me!



*(The Man is hesitating.)*

SEMINAR LEADER: OK. You sum up the meaning of what is written there. In one word, please.

MAN: Harmful.

SCHULTZ: Look, he's beginning to sweat! He's hiding something!

SEMINAR LEADER: Now decide what you're going to do. On your own initiative.

MAN: On my own...

SEMINAR LEADER: That's right. And consider the security aspect. The control aspect. What will you do?

MAN: May I tear it up, destroy it?

SEMINAR LEADER: Is this a free country or not? You can do whatever you want to. Noone is forcing you into anything. But think twice!

*(Silence. The Man stares in front of himself hesitatingly; then he steps to the Seminar Leader and hands him the paper.)*

MAN: Here you are.

SEMINAR LEADER: Why are you giving this to me?

MAN: I think you should read it.

SEMINAR LEADER: Thank you. You may sit down. *(Triumphantly.)* Here we are. Now look at the result of my lesson, mister Santori. You, who like unconventional methods! The candidate came to me by himself. Noone forced him into anything. This is what I call internalised security system. Where everyone knows their limits. OK. Now I'm going to read what it says here.

*(He puts on his glasses and reads.)*

SCHULTZ: Well?

SEMINAR LEADER: *(Seriously.)* We have a problem.

STYLIST: What problem?

SEMINAR LEADER: A serious problem.

SANTORI: Are you exaggerating?

SEMINAR LEADER: I say, a serious problem! Who wrote this? Drew this ... blew this...?

*(Silence.)* Now I'm going to personally relate to your lesson, therapist. You know how? I'm going to get mad. Mad. *(Violently.)* Who is this swine rooting around my orchard?! You fucking prick, you! Don't you sell this innocent face here! Pretending you have nothing to do with this? And it was in your briefcase? What will the management say if this news breaks?

THERAPIST: This is not his briefcase!

SANTORI: Calm down. What does it say?

SEMINAR LEADER: *(To Stylist)* Madam, please, read it aloud!

STYLIST: *(Taking the paper, turns pale.)* I can't. It's awful.

SCHULTZ: Show it to me, is this kindergarten or what? *(Reading.)* Uh-huh. A typical form of intellectually inferior terrorism. It doesn't disprove one single law of economics - not a single one. No comment.

SANTORI: Give me that. *(After a short consideration.)* Rather daring from the standpoint of primitive communication. A rare case of extinct class consciousness. Maybe I'd even chance to support the basic idea, if it weren't so much in contrast with basic civilised intercourse. What do you say to this, madam?

THERAPIST: *(Takes the paper and reads, then begins to laugh uncontrollably, she roars with laughter. As she stops laughing, she's a bit embarrassed.)*

SEMINAR LEADER: Have you finished? Thank you. Give me the paper. *(Curious about something.)* What do you find funny about it?



THERAPIST: My apologies. A fit of hysteria. You know me. I get carried away sometimes ...  
Thanks for bearing with me. These boys of mine!

*(Giggling to herself.)*

SCHULTZ: Let's get back to the point, Seminar Leader, sir!

SANTORI: Maybe we really need to talk this over.

SEMINAR LEADER: We cannot talk in front of him. This is an internal affair. A delicate one.

STYLIST: Shall I give him a task?

SEMINAR LEADER: No. Caretaker! We'll send him out for a couple of minutes.

*(Enters Caretaker.)*

CARETAKER: What can I do for you?

SCHULTZ: He's really fucking with us!

SEMINAR LEADER: Take the candidate out. Take him to the canteen, get him a sandwich. A proper one!

MAN: Am I finished?

SEMINAR LEADER: Not yet. You still have to do the final presentation.

SCHULTZ: If we find out it wasn't you who wrote this piece of shit!

MAN: I swear!

SEMINAR LEADER: Go over all the lessons again, while we clarify a few matters here.

STYLIST: And prepare yourself well, so that you can correct the impression you gave before!

MAN: A summary?

SEMINAR LEADER: A summary. With your own comments. Of your own initiative. Any other instructions to the candidate?

STYLIST: Make it aesthetical.

THERAPIST: Emotional.

SCHULTZ: With some iron economical logic in the background, dammit!

SANTORI: And a bit of provocation, so we don't fall asleep.

SCHULTZ: *(Cynically.)* Yes, dress up as a woman, if you dare, and we'll give you an A, haha!

*(The Man leaves the classroom together with the Caretaker.)*

THERAPIST: You shouldn't make fun of him like that.

SEMINAR LEADER: OK now. Let's get straight to the point. *(To Stylist.)* Madam, are you out of your mind?

STYLIST: I don't get it ...

SEMINAR LEADER: Would you like to live up to a decent pension?

STYLIST: What are you getting at?

SEMINAR LEADER: This briefcase here is your prop, isn't it?

STYLIST: It's not mine personally, this is office equipment that...

SEMINAR LEADER: You're using it at your own risk. Which means you are responsible for it!

STYLIST: Wait a minute. Are you trying to say I wrote this?

SEMINAR LEADER: It seems highly likely.

STYLIST: I cannot respond to such an insinuation!

SANTORI: Come on, Mister Shriek. Just look at her! Be reasonable!

SEMINAR LEADER: If one lives with a unionist one is capable of anything!

STYLIST: My expertise is irreproachable!

SEMINAR LEADER: What about your loyalty to the company?

STYLIST: It has been proved! But keep your nose out of my private life! I'm no seamstress so you can turn me out into the street!

SCHULTZ: *(To Seminar Leader.)* I don't want to interfere with your speciality, but I would handle the matter a bit differently.



SEMINAR LEADER: Like how?

SCHULTZ: This is a provocation, right?

SEMINAR LEADER: It is. By all means.

SCHULTZ: Good. And who has been provoking us here all this time? Experimenting?

SEMINAR LEADER: Santori?!

SCHULTZ: Why not.

SEMINAR LEADER: (*To Santori.*) What do you say to that?

SANTORI: I say it is very transparent. This pamphlet was planted by Schultz, so he could denounce me. That's crystal clear.

SCHULTZ: What it says here is very much on your level according to academic criteria!

SANTORI: Proofs, please!

SCHULTZ: You have always hated authority, Santori. And you know why? Because you yourself have never had any. You agree with those outside, but just don't have the balls to live like them. It's much better to sit on an academic stool, draw a good salary and fool around!

SANTORI: If you're an authority, then I'm a submarine, Doctor Schultz. And a kraut one at that! Anyway, I'm communicating with you only in writing from now on. (*To Seminar Leader.*) Personally, I think this eagerness of yours is highly exaggerated, but if you think it's good for the seminar, OK. You're only forgetting one thing.

SEMINAR LEADER: What could that be?

SANTORI: If we're having this frank conversation, we could also say a few words about you.

SEMINAR LEADER: Such as?

SANTORI: You're suspecting each and every one of us. Who says it wasn't you who wrote it?

SEMINAR LEADER: Me? Are you out of your mind?!

SANTORI: Come on, Shriek. We all know you were not born yesterday. There were times when what it says here wasn't so alien to you, isn't that so?

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Frowning.*) Don't make me your enemy, Santori.

STYLIST: I don't know where this is going to get us. Shouldn't we at least for a moment consider the one option that you discarded immediately? I think it was the candidate himself who wrote it.

SEMINAR LEADER: I don't think it's a bad idea. Why do you think this is so?

STYLIST: He was confused. Unconvincing. We've all seen it, haven't we? He had guilty conscience. Obviously.

SANTORI: Why would he plant the paper into his own briefcase? That's not logical. What good would it do him?

THERAPIST: Oh, come on, the poor thing! Leave him be. It's really not his fault!

STYLIST: I also feel sorry for him, but it's the truth we're after, isn't it?

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Nervously.*) Truth ... booth ... sleuth ... tooth ...

SCHULTZ: You're blabbering again! Bring this investigation to the end, since you have started it!

THERAPIST: The boy is innocent!

SEMINAR LEADER: Why are you so strongly defending him?

SCHULTZ: I don't think he's guilty either. He is shrewd, all right, street-smart, but he's ambitious, too. If he wants to succeed, he won't fraternize with those downstairs again, that's clear!

SEMINAR LEADER: (*Circling around Therapist.*) That's a good one! It's not him – it's you, dear Therapist! One would never think of you!

THERAPIST: What do you mean, me?

SEMINAR LEADER: You kept on defending him and smiling at him!

THERAPIST: Is that forbidden?

SEMINAR LEADER: It's not forbidden, but it is also not right!

THERAPIST: Give me a break then!

SEMINAR LEADER: I won't give you a break. My boys, and all that. I've seen through you! You like them to remain urchins, so you can make them hot with such pompous



writing. It's you who needs some therapy, dear Therapist, and in a reforming institution at that!

SANTORI: They don't exist any more, Mister Shriek.

SEMINAR LEADER: Well, there could be one or two left just in case!

*(Silence.)*

THERAPIST: You're scared. You're all scared. I'm scared, too. I'm scared to have intercourse with you. I'm afraid of your beauty. I run away from your science. I cry over my foolishness. I sweat. Under my armpits. Between my legs. I'm dying when I'm not laughing. I'm running away from myself. I'm running away from you. You've caught me. I don't know how to get out any more. I can't. I can't tell. I lock the door. I shut the windows. I draw the curtains. So I don't see. So I don't hear. I smile into the mirror. I kiss the lipstick. I press my hands to my ears. I sweat. I wash. Every morning. Every evening. I don't know who I am. I don't know who I am.

*(Long silence.)*

SCHULTZ: I think this does ask for a response. What we're doing here now, has no practical value any more. None at all! Unlike esteemed Therapist I still know who I am. I'm going to tell you something. All of you. This kind of seminar is a piece of cake to me. You can all stand on your heads, but doctor Schultz knows what common sense is. Not only this candidate - none of you would pass an exam with me! But I don't care since you're not in my class. Not you, not him, not all those still waiting outside. I will personally tell the management what I feel about all this. My report will be short, exact and applicable. That's what I'm paid for; I don't care about the rest.

STYLIST: I strongly believe in what I'm doing. If there is any doubt anywhere, it's beyond this. I don't say I never falter, too! I also have my lows! I'm getting old. I know it. I feel it. Slowly, but surely, I'm getting old. My time interval also has an end somewhere. I'm not naïve. It's laying there in wait for me. But I'm not giving up! I'm a professional. When I go to work I mean business. So don't charge me with anarchism if your lives have no aesthetic dimension!

SANTORI: I could add something to what you're saying, but I won't. And you know why? Because I simply don't feel like it any more. I'm not interested. You're boring me. Endlessly and irreversibly, you're boring me. I don't interfere with anything any more, I just watch. This is what gives me pleasure. And when I get bored at this, too, I'll leave the seminars.

STYLIST: And what will you do then?

SANTORI: I'm a homosexual, madam. A faggot, as our practical Mr Schultz would put it. This is what gives me pleasure. Believe me, there are things I could do.

SCHULTZ: He's provoking again, dammit.

STYLIST: Maybe it's true?

SEMINAR LEADER: Let's stop selling this decadence ... dementia here! I won't bother you with this paper any more! I don't care if it was anyone of you who had planted it. Childish nonsense! You are corresponding members anyway, noone will take you seriously in this system! But I do care about the candidate. I am personally accountable to the management for the new department!

SCHULTZ: OK, we get your point. I suggest we admit him to the final performance and then say the last word.

STYLIST: That's right. Let's decide on the basis of his performance and not on the basis of this planted insinuation!

SEMINAR LEADER: Santori?

SANTORI: It might be interesting. Let's take a look at him one more time.



SEMINAR LEADER: *(To Therapist.)* And you ... you also don't mind, as much as I can tell.  
Good. Caretaker! *(To the rest.)* Get ready and write down your comments, please.

*(Enters Caretaker.)*

CARETAKER: What can I do for you?

SCHULTZ: I can't believe this!

SEMINAR LEADER: Bring the candidate in.

*(Exits Caretaker. After a while the Man enters. To everyone's surprise he is dressed up as a woman.)*

SCHULTZ: What's this now?!

THERAPIST: Our boy! What have they done to you?

SCHULTZ: What the fuck is he doing?

STYLIST: He does have style as a woman, I have to say that.

SCHULTZ: Wait, wait, is he making a fool of us?

SANTORI: You told him to, what's the surprise now?

SCHULTZ: Told him to? Maybe advised him, but as a joke!

SANTORI: He's taking us seriously!

SEMINAR LEADER: This is a kind of a compliment. One should respect the authority.

THERAPIST: He'd do anything to succeed!

SCHULTZ: *(Reconcilably.)* It's healthy in a way. From the economic point of view. He makes quite a chick!

THERAPIST: He has guts! He really has guts! Oh, my dear boy! Oh, my dear girl!

SEMINAR LEADER: OK then, let's get on with the performance.

STYLIST: And don't forget what I've been teaching you!

MAN: May I begin?

SEMINAR LEADER: Let's go! Caretaker! Demo!

*(Music. To everyone's surprise it's the »Internationale« playing. The Man dances as if he were dancing a strip-tease. He's performing the »Time interval«, this time slowly, seducingly, aware of his new charms in a kind of cunning way. One might say his dance has style; not vulgar yet a bit »whorish«.)*

SEMINAR LEADER: *(After the initial shock.)* Caretaker! Caretaker! It's clear now! He's the provoker! Caretaker, dammit! You bastard, you! It was him who planted the paper! What's this?! Where's the class? Find me the Caretaker! He's the pest ... jest ... pester ... jester ... pesterer ...

*(The Man – now a woman - doesn't let himself be disturbed during his dance performance. The seminar participants observe him each in their own ways. Santori is obviously having fun; Therapist keeps falling from tears to laughter and back. Stylist is moved by the choreography; she unconsciously accompanies him with small gestures. Schultz isn't quite immune to the female charms of the performer, but is trying to hide it. Seminar Leader is walking in and out, shouting and waving, to no real effect, until he remains still at one of the desk, exhausted.)*

Saša Pavček (b. 1960) is a leading actress at the Slovenian National Theatre in Ljubljana, a professor at the Academy for Theatre, Film, Radio and TV in Ljubljana and a playwright. She has performed in over 90 various roles of modern and classic repertoires in theatre. She has played also in films and was nominated for the best TV actress in 2001. She has received over 13 awards for her acting and dancing, with her important awards including: the Prešeren Award (2000), the international Veljko Maričić Award (1999), two Sever Awards (1982, 1992), the Golden Shell Award (2002) for her 200th performance of her mono-comedy, the award the Noblest Comedienne for her portrayal of the title character in Goldoni's *Mirandolina* (2003), the Borštnik Award (2007) etc.

Her first play *Čisti vrelec ljubezni* (*The Pure Spring of Love*) was nominated for the Grum Award 2003. Her comic monologue *Al' en al' dva* (*One or Two*, 2004), nominated for the Grum Award in 2004, was translated into Italian and English and received the international Umberto Saba Literary Award (Trieste Scritture di Frontiera 2004). Her first book, *Na odru zvečer* (*On the Stage in the Evening*, 2005) contains both the abovementioned drama and the one-act play *Arija* (*Aria*, 2005) which won the Second Unesco Prize 'Peace and Friendship' in the International Radio Festival in Esfahan, Iran in 2008. It was translated into English and French. Pavček also wrote its long version entitled *V etru* (*In the air*, 2007). Her latest poetic play entitled *Pod snegom* (*Under the snow*, 2007) was nominated for the Grum Award in 2007.

The well from which the new dramatic power of Saša Pavček draws is clearly verism. 'The truth which seethes' is the first law of her writing: to reveal the truth, to depict reality and, using the outstanding feeling for irony and self-irony, not to run from her own image. Tackling many problems and seething with energy, the new Slovenian play appears to be magnetic on stage and has some surprising (for a first play) distinctive literary features, particularly as regards dialogue and genre, including remarkable ironic characteristics. The dramatic dialogue is brilliant, creative, artful and exquisite. The language on stage is lively, fresh, invigorating and cheerful like has not been seen in Slovenian texts for some years. The play will no doubt be a success with audiences for it has all the essential components of a tragicomedy. The author depicts, with relaxed laughter and sophisticated irony, her dark fresco of a spiritually disabled artistic community... (Ignacija J. Fridl, *Ampak*, 2003)



Photo by JOŽE SUHADOLNIK

# SAŠA PAVČEK

## PLAYS IN TRANSLATION

••• *Sovremena slovenečka drama*  
••• (*Kladenec poln ljubov*),

••• Štip: Centar za kulturna  
••• inicijativa, 2006



## The Pure Spring of Love

### Characters

ANNAMARIA, a middle-aged actress

PETER, her husband

BRUNO, a middle-aged farmer

IDA, a student - a graduate of the Faculty of Education

MARINO, a twelve-year-old handicapped boy who does not appear on the stage, but whose presence we feel offstage

*The action takes place over four seasons in the year 2002.*

### SCENE SEVEN

*The living room*

IDA, MARINO, ANNAMARIA, PETER

*Ida is tidying up the flat, chatting with Marino; the girl really knows how to relate to him.*

IDA: Wait a minute, Marino, I'll be right there. My Marino's playing now. He's playing. Ida's coming, now, just let me put this here, there you are, here I am... Where's my Marino? What's my little darling doing?

*She goes into his room to him, and exclaims happily.*

Marino, what's this? Did you do this, eh, tell me, Marino. Don't mess about now, please, tell me, who made this little picture? Don't you want to? All right, don't then. Ida won't be cross, Ida's not cross, she isn't. You'd like to go to sleep? All right. A little nap, tired Marino. Ida will turn the light off. The light. You're going to get a kiss, yes, you will, you will, my darling... kiss. Ow! No! No, don't hit me, ow, no... All right, if you don't want one, O.K. Calm down, Marino. You're a good boy, aren't you? Good boy. My little bunny with little claws...

*She re-enters, picks up her mobile and telephones, dribbling onto her ruined nail varnish at the same time.*

Sorry, Peter, I know I shouldn't... but I have to. Yes, I'll be quick, I'm like that anyway. Hey, this little one's a genius! Yes, the Idiot's a genius! I've found a drawing. I can't believe it. I'd noticed he liked your colours, especially the wax crayons, but he's so gifted he's a genius! Jesus! I can't believe it, Peter. It's not normal... this boy's a real phenomenon. Well, we learned about it, but they didn't mention there were many such deviations. Yes, I'm going to stimulate him, so he'll develop even further in this direction. Only, children like that don't live very long. Some never live to see puberty, they die first. They obviously have no other prospects, but to pass away. Sometimes nature takes care of things. *Pause.* Why can't I tell anyone? No, I don't understand why not?! This is really something incredible, after all! Absolutely everyone should be told! What? Because you did it?! Are you having me on, Peter? It doesn't look like your style to me. What? Oh really? You drew it for me? Just for me? Good idea: just for me! Thanks. A genius present, definitely. No, I won't tell anyone, I promise. Never! I swear, a secret for ever! What? The pure spring of love? Is that the title? You should be a poet, too, not just an artist, but the picture's really something special. Wonderful. So gentle, so real. What do you want in return for the picture? What now? Just like that - verbally... Wow! O.K., O.K. *Sweetly.* I've missed you so much! We haven't for a long time, have we? Go on, go on tell me, what do you want, darling? What would you like today? I know what you'd like, you emperor you! You are pure power, you're the



best. Go on, touch me, touch my stomach. Can you feel it? I'm hot, aren't I? Can you feel it? I can feel you. Do you like it, it's beautiful. Mine's the most beautiful. I've got the most beautiful 'prism', haven't I? The lightest, most glowing. Prism! Passionate, free, orgasmic! No, your wife doesn't like it like that, your old bloated inhibited stingy cow... I love you, I love you, you know a young hot woman can warm you up the best... completely mad about you, even though she's had at least fifty others... No, I didn't say fifty, are you mad! You're my second. Well, all right, seventh. You're the best, you're a real challenge for me. A phoenix! What are you laughing at? Wow, you've got a lot of blood under your skin! My masculine fire... Come on... come on, take me, hold me... Have you got hold of me? Yes! Come on! Come on! Come on!

*Annamaria enters towards the end of Ida's monologue. Ida hasn't noticed her, she has probably lain down on the couch so that she can't be seen. Annamaria listens immobile; she thinks Ida is not alone on the floor.*

ANNAMARIA: Peter?!

IDA *exclaims*.

ANNAMARIA: What are you doing there?

IDA: Jesus, you scared me! Why are you looking at me as though you've been stabbed?

ANNAMARIA: What are you doing?!

IDA: Are you just pretending to be stupid, or are you...

ANNAMARIA: Where's Peter?

IDA: How do I know where your husband is? You hired me for the child and your child is completely looked after. What I do while he's asleep is my business, don't you think, madam?

ANNAMARIA: You can be heard, miss, the child could hear it too, and what's more I'm paying you!

IDA: I have a lot to pay for too, that's why I'm working. I've got my mobile line and they telephone me.

ANNAMARIA: Who telephones you?

IDA: That's my business. Men like to mess about like that. It's not dangerous, or stressful, it involves the imagination, and satisfaction, so they say. Well, I don't take it as so fatally shocking as you do, don't worry, you can't get AIDS from it. Oh wow, you really are a bit too old-fashioned. I'm sorry, but you are a bit 'behind'. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I'm telling you for your own good, because if you look at everything so seriously, you'll burn up with anger. Go easy. Life is different if you look at it differently, hey!

ANNAMARIA: Perhaps. But I'm against you doing it in my living-room, I don't know if you understand me, young lady.

IDA: No, no I don't understand you. What's the difference if I watch television while you're away, some soap, or if I'm working on a hot-line?! Eh? I've done the work you hired me to do. And I've done it very well. You've got to admit that the little guy's making brilliant progress, haven't you?

ANNAMARIA: Yes, Marino's all right.

IDA: He did something exceptional today. He laughed so beautifully. It's the first time he's laughed so openly. He's a lovely boy, it's a shame he came so late, there's a lot that could have been done with him.

## SCENE EIGHT

*A stable*

BRUNO, ANNAMARIA

BRUNO: When I saw you coming along, from far off like, I thought just for a moment I was standing by the shore looking at the sea. But it's a long while since the last time I was there. I was with the pioneers for helping the poor. I was ashamed because I didn't have as much to change into as the others, and then I didn't have swimming trunks like they did. I had an old black pair, they wouldn't dry, those, they were always sticking to my bum and then they stung me, and I got cold. But it doesn't matter, the sea was lovely. Ah, that sea seemed so lovely then. Well. The sea's the sea, but it was lovely to me. Well. I mean, I looked at you today, as you were walking towards me, like, and I saw those waves of the sea rising and falling as if you were the sea, then, when you came closer and looked me in the eyes, that surf, those waves, right - they suddenly went stiff, as if they'd frozen! Eh?! Can you imagine, eh?

ANNAMARIA: Yes, I can imagine.

BRUNO: Just like that. Right in front of me the sea turned into ... into stone. It was like one of those religious pictures, when Christ walked... You know the one?

ANNAMARIA: The Galilean sea.

BRUNO *shrugs*: That's the one. A real miracle. It seemed like God himself was standing in front of me.

ANNAMARIA: Go on, don't exaggerate now.

BRUNO: All right, I'll be quiet, it's better that way. I'm a poor man, me, with complexes, I'd say. But you, you've got eyes like the sea, so deep...

ANNAMARIA: Marino has eyes like that.

BRUNO: Him? Probably. No, you, you're like, like... fine. The Madonna, that time, the first time we were... before you went off to grammar school, to the town. When we were, like today, in the hay...

ANNAMARIA: Don't say anything, I'm ashamed.

BRUNO: I've loved you from that time on, or even right from when you were little.

*Annamaria remains silent.*

Don't be sad, come on, talk to me... Oh, I know, I've talked stupidities.

ANNAMARIA: What makes you think stupidities aren't good?

BRUNO: I don't know anything, but I don't think I'm stupid.

*Annamaria laughs.*

What are you laughing at? I turned out stupid, eh?! They're always making a fool of me, but I don't mind. If I feel I love someone, then I'm happy, it's lovely. And you can pretend it's all the same to you, but I can feel it's not. You took my Marino, you're looking after him as if you were his mother. You're more of a mother than those who give birth, you are!

ANNAMARIA: Do you think so? What, really?

BRUNO: Yes, a real mother. Every week you come to me and tell me lovely things...

ANNAMARIA: I do come, yes... I don't even know myself why...

BRUNO: You tell me about Marino and I'm sorry I left him, I'm sorry now and when you want to, come the both of you, I'll take you both and you'll see we can live here. Even though I know you're used to the town, but it's not far, you've got a car...

ANNAMARIA: Oh, I don't know... it's difficult.

BRUNO: Oh, what's difficult, go on!

ANNAMARIA: Sometimes I feel so bad, I don't know... I suffer a lot... if you only knew...

BRUNO: Oh, go on, don't stand on the fence, throw yourself off, go on!

ANNAMARIA: Bruno, I like talking with you, I like listening to you, but... *Pause*. Do you remember when we were small, and we slaughtered... ?



BRUNO: When we slaughtered a pig and I accidentally spilled blood on you, you shouted and then we held each other with our red arms.

ANNAMARIA: I had a white dress on, my mother was cross. That was the last time she got cross. I didn't like her like that, then when she wasn't there any more I wanted her to tell me off, if only she were...

BRUNO: Yes, your mother knew that the two of us... She told my mother and then my mother said you were a little whore. There you go!

ANNAMARIA: Oh, you've just thought that up now.

BRUNO: No, I haven't, she said it, she did. And then I said I don't know what that is, and my mother said it's a kind of animal that attacks roosters, so they can make chickens after. After that I started to be afraid of you and I watched everything you did. I was checking up on you, I was! All your secret doings. I know a lot of your secrets.

ANNAMARIA: Oh, what then?

BRUNO: Your special bathroom where you carried a tub from the stable and washed yourself. And I hid behind the hay and spied on you, ha.

ANNAMARIA: You're a fox!

BRUNO: And you're just like a cat always cleaning itself. Born to preen itself, to be beautiful.  
*Pause.*

When will you come again?

*Annamaria remains silent.*

BRUNO: Go on, bring Marino. Does he miss me at all?

ANNAMARIA: He misses his mother.

BRUNO: Go on, you fibber. He's not aware of anything.

ANNAMARIA: His mother is his mother, you can't take her away from him, I'm not his mother.

BRUNO: Well his mother's crazy. The only normal relative he's got is you! You're his sister, aren't you!

ANNAMARIA: Bruno, this won't work long-term, you said for two weeks, and it's been almost half a year already...

BRUNO: Do you want me to put him in the hospital just because his mother's there?! She's so ill anyway she doesn't think of him at all! Not at all. Do you get it, what it means to say, 'not at all!' Eh? She just bangs her head and cries that she wants Frank. Your dad didn't now how to do anything but drink and crush her! He'd been doing those things to her since she was little!

ANNAMARIA: I've understood, don't say any more!

BRUNO: The bugger! But her, she got all ill from that.

ANNAMARIA: Bruno, you can't just leave her like that! You're her husband and you have to take care of her!

BRUNO: But how can I if she won't recognise me!? She only shouts at me that I killed Frank. But I didn't, he did it himself.

*Pause.*

There you are, you have a bit of wine too, go on, there you go!

*They drink.*

Bugger me, he drank more than a litre of the hard stuff that night at our place. He said: 'Thanks, Bruno, thanks for looking after my family!' *Shrugs.* Oh well! I stared at him like an owl, I didn't know what to say. Daft I was, I didn't see anything wrong and I gave him more to drink, and then, when he fell to the floor, Albinca went all giddy. She went completely mad, for Christ's sake! She hit him to wake him up, don't he leave her, and what's going to happen to Marino if he's going to be without his dad! She shouted and flung herself on him and picked up her skirt. I saw black then and I hit her, I did! Yes! I knocked her to the floor when I realised, idiot, what had been going on all those years. Only then I understood! Your father started moving his head a bit and I gave him more brandy, I did! I did, I gave it to him because he deserved it! Then he stopped moving. He went stiff.



*Gets his breath back. Drinks.*

Now report me if you want. Just report me. I'm not afraid.

*Annamaria remains silent.*

I'm not afraid of prison, or death. I'm only afraid you won't love me. Only that. I don't care about anything else.

*Annamaria remains silent.*

What are you looking at me like that for?

ANNAMARIA: Bruno, you're...

BRUNO: I'm a person without a heart. There you go. That's what I am.

*He thumps his chest with a regular beat.*

I've got your heart in here, and as long as you're there, so will I be.

ANNAMARIA: I'm scared.

BRUNO: Tell me what to do and I'll do it. For you. For you, Maria.

ANNAMARIA: Let me go, I'm going.

BRUNO: I'll wait for you, I'll always be waiting for you. Yes, go. It's best you go.

ANNAMARIA: Bye. Don't bother waiting for me, Bruno.

BRUNO: Don't kill me...

ANNAMARIA: I'm sorry, I can't...

BRUNO: What do you want, tell me!

ANNAMARIA: Nothing. I'm going.

BRUNO: What do want, Maria?

ANNAMARIA: The horse... can you hear the horse?

BRUNO: Yes. *Pause. He looks her in the eyes.* What would you like?

ANNAMARIA: You.

BRUNO: You're a woman from the strong north-east wind.

ANNAMARIA: You smell so sweet, so sweet...

BRUNO *gently*: Be quiet now, come here...

*They embrace.*

ANNAMARIA: I'm falling.

I feel.

I feel

your strong

arms...

Again

like the first time...

I love

you

love you!

Mother,

he'll kill me,

he killed him...

No!

I'll bleed

on you,

on me...

An angel...

is born...

An angel!

Žanina Mirčevska (b. 1967) is a freelance artist, playwright, translator and holds an MA in Dramaturgy. She was born in Skopje, Macedonia. She has worked as a dramaturge in many performances in professional theatres in Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Serbia and Montenegro; for these productions she prepared the concepts or made adaptations of plays which have been staged, such as *Tartuffe*, *The Task*, *Filoktet* and *Hamletmachine* by Heiner Müller; *Baal* by Bertolt Brecht; *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will*, *Othello*, *Richard III* by William Shakespeare; *Hinkman* by Ernst Toller; *Roberto Zucco* by B.M. Koltès, *Party Time* by Harold Pinter, *Woyzeck* by G. Büchner, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen, *Kabale und Liebe* by F. Schiller etc.

More than 10 plays by Žanina Mirčevska have been staged in professional theatres across Europe. She received a Special Award for Dramaturgy at the International Theatre Festival MESS in 1999 in Sarajevo. Her play *Dies Irae* (1990) was selected for The Anthology of Contemporary Macedonian Drama and *A Place I Have Never Been To* (*Tamu, kade što ne sum bil*, 1996) was included in a prominent edition of Ten Modern Macedonian Plays.

She received Slovenian citizenship; today she lives and works in Slovenia as a freelance artist and writes in the Slovenian, Croatian and Macedonian languages. Her plays have been put on in numerous countries; *Odstiranje* (*Disclosure*, 2004), *Na deževni strani* (*On The Rainy Side*, 2005) and *Žrelo* (*Swallow Hole*, 2006) were all nominated for the prestigious Grum award.

Each of her plays deals with a different problem and theme. Some of her plays deal with questions of existentialism, politics, history, philosophy or morality. Some of her plays are enriched with a poetic language, while others are full of lively humour. Her writing is unique and special. The genre she usually writes in is tragicomedy or farce.



Photo by IGOR BASEVSKI

# ŽANINA MIRČEVSKA

## PLAYS IN TRANSLATION

*Dies Irae*, Novi Sad: Scena, 2/1991

*Dies Irae*, Skopje: Kulturen život, 1993

*A place I have never been to*, Skopje: Matica Makedonska, 2000

*Esperanca*, Skopje: Kulturen život, 1-2/2002

*Due Mondi*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2002

*Esperanca*, Novi Sad: Scena, 1-2/2003

*Dies Irae*, Zagreb: Hrvatski centar ITI-UNESCO, 2004

*Esperanca*, Mostar: Tmačart, 2004

*Verter & Verter*, Skopje: Kulturen život, 1-2/2007

*Werther & Werther*, Paris: l' Espace d'un instant, 2007

*Effeuilage*, Paris: l' Espace d'un instant, 2007

*Esperanza*, Paris: l' Espace d'un instant, 2007



## A Place I Have Never Been to

### Dramatis Personae:

JULIA  
ANTON, *Julia's fiancé*  
PETER, *Julia's father, the Mayor*  
THE WHITE CHANTICLEER, *Anton's rooster*  
THE CHURCH  
THE GOLDEN BELL, *The church bell*  
THE COURT  
THE SCHOOL  
BEDLAM  
THE MORASS

### Location and Time:

*Surrounded by dangerous inaccessible morass once, a small hill with clouds floating above in celestial heights.*

### I: IN A GHASTLY MIST...

THE MORASS: In a ghastly mist, of a lead-gray dusk, a wanderer follows his path when he beholds the blossom of a lily. Its beauty lures him and he moves to pick it. The delicate layer of green moss resembles young grass and one cannot see the insipid ground, the Morass below. Once he steps onto the soft soil, the green moss cracks and the black bog opens its jaws. At first it gorges down his feet. In order to extract himself, the victim lifts up one foot but the ground is soft and feeble, the victim only loses balance and tries to regain it instinctively. Left, right, left, right - but the crevice of mud only grows larger; the bog has already devoured his knees. Confused and frightened, he is moving his legs even faster, using his arms as well to pull himself out. The gorge is becoming wider and wider, the mud has reached the waist of the victim. Panic-stricken, he tries to pull himself out, each time he tries harder and harder. Thus kicks his legs as if swimming, while his arms try to find a hold. But he only helps the bog to embrace him faster and easier in its womb. He cannot believe it, but he is already in the mud up to his shoulders. Exhausted by the aimless battle, his arms, legs and trunk in the cold mud cease to resist for a moment, the hapless victim thinking that the fight is over. Thus calmed, he realizes that he is sinking, inch by inch. He is in the mud up to his neck already. He feels his chin touching the clinging mud. He keeps sinking slowly deeper and deeper and deeper... This is the point when sheer terror takes over. With all his strength he began to fight, and he pulls himself out up to his knees. Just as he thought himself saved, he loses his balance and falls over into the bog. The mud, plowed up by his struggle, swallows him up completely at once. The victim still moves and gropes for something to save him from the mud, but the latter quietly and slowly permeates every pore and cavity in his body. Still conscious, the poor creature feels for the ground with his toes, but there is no ground at all. Plastered up in mud, the victim soon stops moving. Merely a crater of mire and black water is visible amidst the green moss resembling emerald velvet. The body starts to decay, give way to the assault to tiny parasites. Thus the innocent wanderer who merely wished to pick one of my lilies incidentally becomes their organic fertilizer. The beauty of the flower is to bait brooding over the hapless. Seduced by the beauty of the lily he became nourishment for even fairer lilies, which will seduce a new wanderer and so on and so forth. This beauty of the universe grows in mire,



just as man is born amidst excrements and urine. Its natal womb a blend of water and soil, of withered ashen-hued lichen, of decayed moss, organic rot, of decaying leaves, decaying grass, decaying boughs and the decaying wanderer.

## 2 : 100% LOVE

JULIA: Do you love me, Anton?

ANTON: I have gathered all the love in this world and locked it into my heart. So there is no love left for anybody but me.

JULIA: Love is not eaten, nor is it drunk. What will you do with so much love?

ANTON: I will tame three white steeds with flying manes, I will hitch them to a golden carriage and take you galloping to a house on three floors, with large windows and a huge door. I will carry you across the threshold in my hands, into the house we are to call our home.

JULIA: And then?

ANTON: And then we will fill our house with sunshine, while three wee curly-haired children play hide-and-seek.

JULIA: Anton, these are only words out of a fairy tale.

ANTON: What would you like Julia?

JULIA: What would I?! Well, ... give me a flower, Anton.

ANTON: My fairest flower merely wants a flower?

JULIA: Pick a marsh lily for me, my lover.

ANTON: I will go to the Morass and steal of it a lily for you.

JULIA: Is that really what you'd do?

ANTON: Your love is more than riches true.

JULIA: And then?

ANTON: And then I will take you clad in a white silk dress...

## 3 : IMAGES ON THE CLOUD

BEDLAM: Clad in a white silk dress a lass flew by on a cloud, as if on a magic carpet out of a fairy - tale. Her dress was flowing in the wind while her long golden tresses were dancing across her shoulders. The cloud majestically floated aloft the Morass, with the girl looking into the distance of the horizon, shielding her eyes with her hand. From above she looked down on our hill, like a pitiful ship, wrecked amidst the Morass. On the hill she spotted me. She raised her right hand into the air and waved to me. I waved back with my right hand, on top of the hill. She smiled at me, I smiled at her. The cloud kept floating further and further away, with the girl on it. With my hand raised, I waved until both the cloud and the girl became a blot on the horizon. There must be something beyond the Morass. Nobody knows, since nobody has ever been there. But she, clad in a white silk dress on that cloud was floating with her gaze fixed on something. Who knows? She may have already arrived there.

## 4 : ALAS, HOW TO GET RID OF THIS MORASS...

THE SCHOOL: This poor thing thinks that the Morass may be crossed on a cloud. Bedlam. Its images on the cloud are the reflection of a clouded mind. A mental disorder. A cloud is created through the sublimation and condensation of vaporized water in the more distant strata of our atmosphere. A cloud may be a *cumulous*, *stratus* or *castelatus*. A cloud is an amorphous mass... All this I know. All of nature is to me a joke. I knowledge, I science, I progress, enlightenment, I wisdom, rethorics, didactics,



I THE SCHOOL... But this Morass, this Morass. I have studied all achievements of modern science, but there is no riddance of this black swamp. Nothing! All theses, axioms, evidence and experiments went straight to the bog. Instead of drying out, it stretches out to the horizon itself. People are desperate, they come to me for advice, but I remain silent. I remain silent... Alas this Morass, this Morass, this Morass...

THE COURT: ... This Morass, this Morass, this Morass, alas! ... Salomon's Code, Roman Code, Civil Code, the Code of Codes... My laws are not binding for these lurid marshes. I order, I discipline, I power and governance, I the judiciary, I the law, the punishment and the award I, I THE COURT. In the name of order and safety I have pronounced a strict prohibition for people to go near the Morass to no avail. In a ghastly mist of a leaden-gray dusk one can easily lose one's way. How is one to establish order then?! How is one to enforce laws to the letter?! Based on the evidence obtained, I conclude that the victim drowned in the Morass... and where, how, whom am I to sentence to what punishment, in all my judiciary honour... Alas, this Morass, this Morass, this Morass... In a ghastly mist of a leaden-gray dusk...

### 5 : PETER IN HIS WINE CELLAR, TAPPING ONE OF THE WINE BARRELS FOR THE UPCOMING WEDDING

PETER: In a ghastly mist of a leaden-gray dusk my wife got lost on her way back from the Church. She went to evening mass and never came home. Three days and three nights we looked for her. Not a single sign. After the investigation the honourable Court said: *"Based on the footprints detected besides the Morass, it may be concluded that the victim lost her way in the impermeable fog, wandered astray and thus drowned in the Morass. With this I close the case regarding this accident."* The School explained in its expert opinion that *"due to the high vaporization level impermeable fog forms near the Morass, entailing the domination of invisibility."* Thus my wife left me a young widower. Our daughter had barely made her first steps back then. Tomorrow I am taking her down the aisle. She fell in love with Anton, son to our poor neighbours. They grew up together playing hide-and-seek. A few years ago his father was felled by illness and died, and soon afterwards his mother followed, overcome by grief. The only thing they left him is a rooster. The White Chanticleer he calls him. This is the sole possession of my son-in-law. He does not own more than the shirt on his back, as people would say, but the important thing is that the children love each other. I have enough to provide for my grandchildren as well. I have slain three oxen, made a cake of 150 eggs and I will drain 200 liters of red wine from this barrel. This wine is 18 years old. The harvest of the year Julia was born. As a diligent head of the house, a good father and respectable Mayor, I will welcome all guests in a way to be remembered and retold for years. The first summons of the White Chanticleer are heard. A votre santé! Julia's wedding-day has begun.

### 6 : THE EMBITTERED WHITE CHANTICLEER

THE WHITE CHANTICLEER: Anton's wedding-day has begun. I have been invited as a wedding-guest and I have to attend the wedding... but I cannot stand being near the Church Bell. Perched up on the belfry it will boisterously clamor, while everybody sighs at the sound of its voice - their eyes fastened to the heavens, waiting for God himself to descend at the sound of its song. Everybody adores its voice. What am I to them... What?! I remain awake all night for them, to let them know when the third, fourth, fifth or sixth hour has struck. And they?... *"Instead of you and your shrill cry the soft-spoken Golden Bell can herald the arrival of dawn. Its lay reaches God himself. It is the messenger between heaven and earth."* In order for this messenger to sing, it must



be hung off a rope. It cannot really sing without a rope, whereas I am signing with my vocal cords, my bands. And they?... “*You and your shrill cry only scare people out of their sweetest dreams. A lad dreaming of his lass, and you wake him in the middle of a kiss. A son dreaming of his dead father, and you wake him before he hears his father’s advice. A robbed man dreaming of his robber, and you wake him before he recognizes his face. You are a rooster and your cry is shrill. The Bell is made of gold and has a golden voice.*” Oh really !?! Well, I also have a sharp beak, which can cut through the rope. Once the Bell has fallen, you will be kneeling in front of me to herald the arrival of dawn. The Church already caresses its wee Bell of gold. It combs and braids threads into a rope, as if it were a maiden’s cloak of hair. Chanticleer dear, whet your rapier, while the Church prepares its Bell of gold for the wedding vows to be told.

## 7 : THE WEDDING

THE CHURCH: God be with them... (*the Golden Bell joins these words with its tune*), God when they go to sleep... God when they awake... God in their home... God on their fields... God with their offspring... Sing, sing my Golden Bell, until my praying knell for Julia’s and Anton’s wedding reaches Heaven on your winged swell.

(*Thus while the Golden Bell continues to knell, Anton the bridegroom arrives for his bride Julia, with the wedding band.*)

THE SCHOOL: As the blossom hides the fruit beneath its petals, the bride should receive her wedding wreath of flowers - as a symbol of fertility.

(*Places a wreath of flowers on Julia’s head.*)

THE COURT: As the house has a roof, the groom – the head of the house – should wear a hat.

(*Places a hat on Anton’s head.*)

ANTON: Just as this ring is circular, may SHE circle around me all her life.

(*Places the wedding band on Julia’s finger.*)

JULIA: Just as this ring is circular, may HE circle around me all his life.

(*Places the wedding band on Anton’s finger.*)

PETER (*crying with joy*): And inside me only tears, tears, tears... Ah, what a beautiful wedding...

BEDLAM (*mimicking Peter*): And inside me only tears, tears, tears... Ah, what a ridiculous wedding.

(*The Golden Bell sings, the White Chanticleer rips off the rope. The Golden Belle falls and tumbles down straight into the Morass. Everybody either screams or is dumbfounded.*)

## 8 : A DEMON’S HAND

THE CHURCH: Like a heart ripped out by a Demon’s hand, the Golden Belle was torn from my side. Miry hands blemish its golden body now. Alas God, have you renounced us, left us in the hands of the Demon. The Bell’s knell is a hand reaching Heaven. How



am I to deliver your prayers without this hand reaching the hands of God. God has forsaken the living and the departed alike...What do you dread !!! Send the first man of the town to save the Bell of gold, to save the town and save you all... School, say something !!!

THE SCHOOL: Peter the Mayor has to ask the Morass for the Golden Bell.

THE CHURCH: Court !!! ...

THE COURT: I rule that Peter the Mayor must ask the Morass for the Golden Bell.

## 9 : PETER AT THE MORASS

PETER:: Give us back our Bell, please.

THE MORASS: Why should I hand it back to you?

PETER: A Church is not a Church without a Bell. And a town is not a town without a Church.

THE MORASS:Why do you need a Church?

PETER: We cannot bury the dead, nor marry the living. Our prayers cannot be answered and told to God without the Bell of gold – neither secure rest to the dead nor happiness for the living. Give us back our Golden Bell, please.

THE MORASS: What do I get if I do?

PETER: Tell me what you want.

THE MORASS: I will get?!...

PETER: Whatever you want.

THE MORASS: I want your daughter.

PETER: Is it not enough that you've taken away my wife !?

THE MORASS: I have not taken away anything. But whoever drops in is welcome.

PETER: I will give you everything, but do not ask for my child.

THE MORASS: You said I would get whatever I want.

PETER: Take me.

THE MORASS: The Bell or Julia.

PETER: Wait !!!

THE MORASS: At midnight sharp my horn I will sound loud enough to be heard to the top of the hill from here. If you and Julia my call do not hear never will the song of the Bell knell here. Clear?!... Have I made myself clear ?!...

## 10 : A LIE

JULIA: My father is returning with a secret that blackened his soul in the Morass. He is mute, but I can hear him screaming inside. His silence tells me more than a thousand words. I can read the wish of the Morass in your eyes, father! ... I thought I would lie down in my wedding-bed with Anton as a wife today and rise from it as a mother in the morning.

ANTON: My Julia has received a secret of her father that blackened his soul in the Morass. She is mute, but I can hear her screaming inside. Her silence tells me more than a thousand words. I can read the wish of the Morass in your eyes, Julia! ... I thought I would lie down in my wedding-bed with Julia as a husband today and rise from it as a father in the morning.

*(The Church, the Court and the School enter. Bedlam sneaks along almost inconspicuously.)*

PETER: ... he held the golden body of our Golden Bell, pressing it coarsely to keep it from drowning while mud was drooling from his mouth and withered grass and roots were hanging out of it. "All I have to do is let go and it will sink into my miry womb like a cookie. My lilies need manure. They will grow into golden lilies." I begged him on my



knees and tore out my hair, pleading for the return of our Golden Bell. In the end, having no other choice, I said: “*Well then, take me and release our Golden Bell !*” ... He grunted with laughter like a hog, he grunted until he cried with laughter, while I squealed and howled like a wounded puppy. “*At midnight sharp my horn I will sound loud enough to be heard to the top of the hill from here. If you do bring me gold enough to weigh the Bell, I will give back to you its swell. If as little as an ounce is amiss, never will the song of the Bell knell here. Clear!?... Have I made myself clear ?!*”...

THE CHURCH: The Golden Bell weighs 777 kilograms of solid gold.

THE SCHOOL: We must collect this much gold, by midnight !?

THE COURT: We have to collect this much gold, by midnight !

BEDLAM: But we do not own so much gold! This means we no longer have the Golden Bell. But if you ask me nicely enough, I may step in for it. I am not made of Gold, of course, but I have a golden tooth in my mouth, thus like the Golden Bell, I will carry your prayers to Heaven with my rhyme, I will sing bing-bang, bing-bang, bing-bang, bing-bang...

THE CHURCH: Court, bring it hither.

*(The Court grabs Bedlam.)*

THE CHURCH: Rip that golden tooth out of its mouth.

*(The Court ruthlessly pulls out the tooth, while Bedlam roars with pain. The Court passes the tooth to the Church.)*

THE CHURCH: Thank you very much... What are you waiting for?! Collect the gold!

*(The Court takes the wedding bands of Julia and Anton of their fingers, and it takes Peter's gold watch.)*



Rok Vilčnik (b. 1968). Educated for 'drawing' classes. He paints. When he adds to his installation in space movement and sound, he concludes: 'This is theatre!' One night when moonlighting, he injured his left hand badly, which has forced him thereafter to be right-handed. Since then he has seriously started writing, writing and writing. In the first year (1993) he wrote three plays. In 2000 he received the Slavko Grum Award for *To* and in 2004 the 'Žlahtno komedijsko pero' for the monocomedy *Pavlek*. In 2008 he received a second Grum for what is considered to be his best play *Smeti na luni* (Garbage on the Moon).

There have so far been more than 20 premiers of his plays at home and abroad: dramas, comedies, cabarets, plays for children. *Zvezda, To, Kleščar (Dule Vaupotič), Enajsto čudo, Leticija in Silvester, Blok, Milan, Mravljinčar ali gozd rdečih sadežev, Pavlek, Othella, Kokolorek, O čem govorimo, kadar govorimo o ljubezni, Sirup sreče, Bonton* etc. Some texts have also become radio plays: *Legenda o človeku, Dež, Kleistovo pismo...*

He is one of the writers of the successful comedy serial *Naša mala klinika* (Our Little Clinic). He is in addition a founder and songwriter of the band *Patetico* and a songwriter for the well-known singer Neisha. He has published two novels (*Mali ali kdo si je življenje zmislo?; Deset let razmišljanja*), a book of fairytales called *Vesoljne pravljice* and a book of poems entitled *Sanje*. Rokgre lives and works in Maribor.

Photo by ALEKSANDRA DORANN

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# rokgre

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## Garbage on the Moon

(play)

VASILKA *Sulking and stubborn.* Hah! It's just the opposite.

LAWRENCE What's just the opposite?

VASILKA They want to lock you up because you like little children, but it's just the opposite.

*Gets off the motorcycle and steps toward her, interested.*

LAWRENCE Who wants to lock me up?

VASILKA I don't understand that. Why would they lock someone up because he likes children? Isn't that nice? Isn't that what people are supposed to do?

LAWRENCE *He gently pats her on the head.* Little girl ... What do you know about the world?

VASILKA I know, oh, I know. I know we're supposed to love each other otherwise we'll be sad.

LAWRENCE You're right. That should be enough.

*Lawrence stands beside her. He thinks. They linger awhile. Vasilka steps toward the motorcycle.*

VASILKA All grown-ups are the same. But I thought you were different. Somebody who likes children so much that he's chased by the police can't be bad. That's what I thought.

LAWRENCE They're not chasing me. *He smiles at her.*

VASILKA And you think I'm funny. *She turns toward the motorcycle.* Well. Help me up now. *She lifts her leg up to the pedal.*

LAWRENCE Wait ...

*The little girl puts her leg down. Lawrence steps toward her and turns her round. He kneels in front of her. They look into each other's eyes.*

Okay. Let's stay a little longer. Just a little. *He points at her.* But this has to be our little secret, alright?

VASILKA *She says excitedly.* Alright, Lawrence, alright. It's so boring at home when mommy's not there. And anyhow...

LAWRENCE Shh! *He stops her and puts a finger to her lips.* Just for a little while, I said. And not a word to anyone.

VASILKA I won't! *She shakes her head.*

LAWRENCE You understand that I would have troubles if you did?

VASILKA I understand. *Twice more, slowly, with lips pressed together, she shakes her head very seriously to show that she understands.*

LAWRENCE *He stands up.* So, what did you want to do?

VASILKA Can I sit there? *She points to the sleeping bag.*

LAWRENCE You may.

*She sits.*

VASILKA It's really nice. *She smooths out the sleeping bag.* You can even lie down. *She lies on her back and looks at the sky.* I've never slept in a sleeping bag before.

LAWRENCE *He sits next to her.* How can that be?

VASILKA We've been to the seaside, in a hotel, and once in an apar ... apar ...

LAWRENCE *He helps her.* An apartment.

VASILKA An apartment. I always say words again if I don't know them. And then I remember them.

LAWRENCE Smart.

VASILKA *Looks up at the sky again.* I've never been in the mountains. And I've never slept in a tent. I have a little one in my room, but it's more of a toy. I don't have a real sleeping bag. Daddy says we're not cut out for the mountains.



LAWRENCE You know, a sleeping bag is used in a different way.  
VASILKA I know. You unroll it, unzip it, and then climb inside ...  
LAWRENCE And you're like some kind of caterpillar.  
VASILKA Caterpillar – ha! I can see that.  
LAWRENCE It's nice to sleep outside, in the open.  
VASILKA Wow, I bet. I'd like to try it once.  
LAWRENCE I'm sure you will.  
VASILKA Yeah. *As if she were overcome by a sort of melancholy, her eyes become sad and her mouth extends into a single line. She looks at the sky.*

*Silence.*

*Lawrence lies beside her. They both look at the sky.*

LAWRENCE You see, that this is my workshop. Every night my eyes bring life far up there.  
VASILKA Aha. So there is life in the universe?  
LAWRENCE Of course there is. Aren't we in the universe?  
VASILKA Hmm ... of course ... that makes sense.

*Silence. The two reflect.*

LAWRENCE For millions of years, the image of a star travels toward us so we can see it.  
VASILKA I don't understand.  
LAWRENCE The star is so very far away that my gaze has to travel an incredible distance to reach it.  
VASILKA Who's travelling now – your gaze or the star?  
LAWRENCE You're such a smart little girl. Both probably.  
VASILKA And where do they meet?  
LAWRENCE Good question. Who knows?  
VASILKA So every time you look at the stars or the moon, you meet them too.  
LAWRENCE That's right. Your gaze comes to them...  
VASILKA And they to you.  
LAWRENCE Just so. *He smiles at her.*  
VASILKA But ... *She thinks seriously, pouting again.*  
LAWRENCE But what ...?  
VASILKA What about the stars, the moon, the sun – do they see us? They don't see us.  
They're not alive. They don't have eyes.  
LAWRENCE In my opinion, everything that exists is alive.  
VASILKA How can that be?  
LAWRENCE It's too complicated for your sweet young mind.  
VASILKA No, tell me – please, please! *She pleads with her hands.* Lots of times there is something that I don't understand but at the same that I do understand.  
LAWRENCE Now what are you saying to me?! *He laughs.*  
VASILKA No, Lawrence, don't joke! I don't know how to say it any other way. I don't know how to put it... *She reflects for a moment* ... Some things for example I don't understand but deep inside of me I know how it is, I know how it has to be.... it doesn't matter that I don't understand, and anyway I do understand.... Hmmm... it's weird but true.  
LAWRENCE Oh, Vasilka, I know what you want to say. That's the way it is with all people. There are many things we don't understand, although we do. That's what they call intuition.  
VASILKA Intuition?  
LAWRENCE Yes. Intuition is when you just sense something. And sometimes you just know that it's that way, even though you can't see it or say it with words. it say it with words  
VASILKA Yes. Exactly! Sometimes your heart knows something, even though everything else makes it seem another way. I, for example, know that my mommy



and daddy love each other, even though it doesn't seem so.

LAWRENCE Don't they get along?

VASILKA For a whole year, daddy has lived somewhere else. And yesterday he came to pick up his tools. That's all he had left with us, except for his baseball mitt. I'll never let him have it. Then at least he'll come back. Now they've worked out that he'll have me on Saturdays, that I'll sleep at his house. Tomorrow will be the first time and we'll see how it goes. I can hardly wait. I hid his mitt under the bed and I won't give it back. He doesn't even know I have it. He thinks mommy hid it from him. To annoy him.

LAWRENCE *He laughs without meaning to, and then grows serious again.* Sorry. I won't laugh anymore.

VASILKA It's alright. I'm happy if I say something funny. I'm usually not very good at that.

LAWRENCE Oh, I think you are.

VASILKA *She shakes her head gravely.* No, I'm not. It's great of you to be so nice, but I'm not. I never know how to tell jokes.

LAWRENCE There's nothing wrong with that. I've never been very good at telling jokes either. Actually, I don't even know any jokes.

VASILKA Me neither. At least I don't remember them now. Paulie, my neighbour, knows lots of them.

*Silence.*

The moon will be full soon, isn't that right?

LAWRENCE Yes. On Monday.

VASILKA What will it be full of?

Translated by ERICA JOHNSON  
DEBELJAK

## Paulie

(christmas monologue)

I really liked being Santa Claus.

Actually; they are the best people anyway – little kids, children.

When they grow up they become everything but people: rascals, scoundrels, grudgers, bosses, doctors, motor mechanics, artists, and so on.

Only not people.

And it's these people who are most likely to borrow money from Paulie. I heard why: because they supposedly don't need to return it.

"Just be a bit friendly with him and he will give it to you," is what they say. They see me as such a wretch and a sissy who doesn't dare say anything.

It's not that I wouldn't dare. I leave it up to each person who borrowed money from me.

I dare to look in everybody's eyes, many a man doesn't dare to look into my eyes. Many a man.

But this also gives me some kind of power. Sometimes I'm a bit vicious too – because I wish sometimes they wouldn't return my money, so I would give them a sideways look and make them feel embarrassed.

I don't say anything, I know just how to give them a look. Directly. They are most afraid of this. Almost everyone looks away.

I don't lend much, I'm not crazy. About fifty quid, just so much that it's not worth giving back, and enough that they owe me.

Only, if I count it all up, it would be enough for a scooter.

Ach (*reconcilably swings with his hand*), I wouldn't drive it anyway. Not with my sight.



Yeah, I really liked being Santa Claus. (*Thinks about that*)

(*Remembers*) How they looked at me when I started to limp – the kids were frightened, what’s wrong with Santa?!

And I said to them: “This happened when Santa fell down the chimney.”  
Then they tell me to look after myself. Oh, they are so sweet. A five year old said to me that I should watch out not to kill myself, because I wouldn’t be able to come back next year and bring them presents.

I ruffled his hair with my hand and laughed.

“Don’t you worry,” I said to him, “Santa will buy himself a parachute!”  
And we laughed, me and the parents and the kid, although he didn’t know why.

When I got invalided, they let me be Santa Claus for a while and didn’t need to pay me. Then, suddenly it all came to an end. The factory also stopped the presents, the parents needed to buy them themselves – well, then they went bankrupt anyway.

I could have even been Santa till the end, yes, but they’d rather use some director’s cousin. Suddenly he was better looking to them, although they needed to pay him.  
I just played stupid and went there – I simply put on my costume. Then we hustled a bit, we could both give out presents. But then the guy – the director’s cousin, I don’t know, some actor from the theatre or what, as he made faces when he spoke – dragged the sack with the presents into another corner and started to call the children over there and gave them the presents.

I just stood there.

I stood there for a while, I don’t know what I was waiting for, and then I left.  
I went to town – it was already dark, so what – I went to a toy store, right. I bought a whole sack of this and that. After that I went uptown, where most people pass by, took up my post on a corner, and worked.

So I put on my costume each year and go there to give away presents.  
I buy toys in that shop where everything costs under a pound. Just fine. It doesn’t need to be expensive. It is about giving.  
Then I stand there the whole day and give away presents.  
And some idiots praise the community: “How nice of the mayor!”

*Translated by* KSENIJA VIDIC

Then I limp off home.

## **Eleventh Wonder**

(fairy tale about siamese twins)

### **SCENE ONE**

RUDDI: You know, love is a hollow need, the quest for some sort of missing other half, which is supposed to be perfect. It should be perfectly in tune with your own life – in word and deed, in body and spirit. Why does everything then come to an end in such a cruel and wretched manner?

RUDI: You know, love is merely a passion for painless survival, hanging onto a dream and touching – at least for some brief moments – that better part in each of us.



RUDDI: That sounds like our story.

RUDI: If hatred is a part of love, then we loved in an inexhaustible way, and forever after.

RUDDI: That certainly sounds like us.

RUDI: We were born and therefore we were bound to exist.

RUDDI: And since we were born – we could do nothing but love.

### SCENE THREE

RUDDI: There's so much struggle in a life like this; it takes so much effort, such exertion ... Always having to say "Get up!" and then getting up. "Sit down!" and sitting down, let's go that way, let's go this way, wait, stop, eat, spit, I'm sleeping and ... (*she stops*) ... in the long run one has to relieve oneself.

They told us we had special gift – and that we should be happy about that. There has never been such a case, a medical phenomenon, a biological wonder and an enormous joke on the part of mother nature.

We only share internal organs, all the rest is... separate. Two human beings, as if forcefully joined together. Some sort of a damned punishment, or what?

We spent two years at that Institute before they finally decided to attempt surgery. At that time I was against the idea, I admit it. I was not ready. I admit it. I could not have made it on my own in this world, which has turned out to be so cruel. Even though there was always the common shoulder to cry on, the two of us together had such a hard time making it. He didn't drink then. He only started when we quit the performances. Well, it never was like a real performance anyway, it was just "showing off our *diversity*". Diversity, yes diversity – that's a good word, sort of makes you feel that you're not so different from the rest - the normal ones. Most people in this world are different, I realised that. And I held onto this concept of diversity, even though I was spat at. That episode will never cease to hurt, never; you don't even spit at a dog. Spit on the ground, the pavement, and street; yes, you can spit there – there's nothing there that would count for anything. Though to whom could you ever demonstrate such scorn and the fact that they mean something less than nothing to you? A display of such total repugnance and indignation was thus reserved for me - this inhuman scum, this terrestrial leprosy, an object of derision and offence against the beauty – and the wealth – of the diversity of life on Earth. Yes, it was a statement. Behold: a freakish monster which I would never dream of touching nor saying a word to; I spit at it. Because I know now, I do not blame the child anymore, the different living creature, I blame myself. Oh God (*crying*), this is so awful. To be such an outcast in the world, meant for no one and disturbing everyone. All I am is an object of disgust, a freak of nature suitable only for a circus sideshow!

God, why on earth did you plant this heart in me, give me a brain and sexuality, which shivers in futile anticipation, without hope of satisfaction in this half a body. Why give me these desires, feelings and emotions? Don't you care? Do you want to see suffering and cruelty? Why did you fasten me, tie me, chain me, to yet another waning soul like my own? Why is every day nothing but a fight for survival? Why shouldn't I just give up and become engulfed by the other, to become the one and perfect entity, instead of tearing at myself in the futile attempts to break these painful chains. I figure that one day I shall explode – all the way to the stars - in the hopelessness of it all. God I would like to be up there. To give me peace, there has to be peace somewhere, peace...

I can't even die without him; we have to do everything together.

God, are we learning? Is this a lesson? And where is it leading us?

RUDI: Sis, are you writing?

RUDDI: Yes, I'm writing, I'm writing.

RUDI: What's the matter? What's wrong?



RUDDI: Nothing.

RUDI: Give me your hand. Good girl. And fall asleep now. Everything will look brighter in the morning.

*Translated by* rokgre

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The Center for Slovenian Literature is a non-governmental organization dedicated to literary and publishing activities. It was founded to contribute to the international promotion of Slovenian literature, and began operating in 1999.

The Center is dedicated to attracting support for, and encouraging work in, the following areas:

- making quality translations of contemporary and classic Slovenian literature possible,
- drawing the attention of international publishers to the rich, albeit not very well-known, heritage of Slovenian literature,
- presenting relevant information to the interested public in the international context.

In this way the Center responds to the needs which other institutions in this field are either unable or unwilling to meet. While the Center's primary task is to address an international audience, it is no less committed to informing the Slovenian public about important international literary trends, authors, and publishing events. It is open to collaboration with other local and international institutions and individuals working toward similar goals.

The Center finances its activities with funds raised both locally and internationally. Its priorities include, but are not limited to, creating computer-assisted databases of translations and translators; providing information to chosen target-audiences; presenting selected works and authors abroad; enabling, coordinating and promoting international collaboration; integrating into existing international programs and networks with similar aims; and developing a creative approach to the promotion of Slovenian literature.

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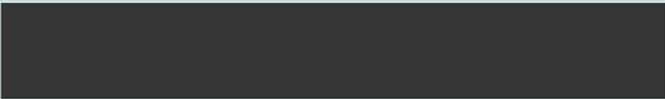
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The Center for Slovenian Literature supplies information on contemporary Slovenian literature to its foreign partners through mail and contacts at various fairs. It sponsors translations and translators' visits to literary events and residencies. It supplies translators with books and literary magazines; occasionally, it provides them with grants for translations given by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is the publisher of the *Aleph* book series, which includes new Slovenian literary works as well as translations of contemporary world literature. While the Slovenian authors are supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture, the majority of translations are published with the help of foreign translation/publication grants. Over hundred titles have been published in the series, some bilingual.





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# THE TRUBAR FOUNDATION

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is a joint venture of Slovene Writers' Association ([www.drustvo-dsp.si](http://www.drustvo-dsp.si)), Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The financial means for its activities are provided by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and by other sources. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidy 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](http://www.ljudmila.org/litcenter)). It does not subsidy translation; translators can apply for translation grants directly to the Slovenian Ministry of Culture ([www.gov.si/mk](http://www.gov.si/mk)).



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