

10

BOOKS

from

SLOVENIA

Veronika Dintinjana

Anja Golob

Tadej Golob

Kazimir Kolar

Barbara Korun

Mojca Kumerdej

Jedrt Lapuh Maležič

Lucija Stepančič

Suzana Tratnik

Goran Vojnovič

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Veronika Dintinjana – In Dry Dock

About the author



Photo by: Tihomir Pinter

Veronika Dintinjana is a poet and translator. Best young author in 2002 at the Festival of Young Literature, she has since had her poems published in *Mentor*, *Literatura*, *Sodobnost*, *Nova Revija*, *Dialogi*, *Poetikon*, *Lirikon*, and *Apokalipsa* magazines. Her first book of poems, *Rumeno gori grm forzicij* (*Yellow Burns the Forsythia Bush*) received Best First Book award at the 24th Slovenian Book Fair in 2008, when she also won the Slovenian poetry tournament and the 6th Ljubljana poetry slam. Various poems have been translated into Italian, English, Spanish, Galician, French, German, Macedonian and Dutch. *V suhem doku* (*In Dry Dock*), Veronika's second volume of poems, was published in December 2016 and nominated for critics' award in March of this year. In Gdansk and Vilnius a selection of poems from both volumes was published in chapbook form in Polish and Lithuanian translation as part of the *Versopolis* project. As a translator, Veronika has published poems and essays by Louise Glück, Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stanley Kunitz, and Ciaran O'Driscoll. She has co-translated the 20th century Irish poetry anthology, *Čudovita Usta* (*Marvellous Mouth*). As founder and manager of the *Kentaver Arts and Literature Society*, she organises monthly poetry readings *Mlade Rime*, hosted since 2005 by *Menza pri Koritu* at *Metelkova* and more recently at the *Autonomous Zone Rog* in Ljubljana. The reading season begins in October and ends in July with a festival. She also wears the hat of editor-in-chief and edits a book series of world poetry classics in Slovenian translation. Veronika lives in Ljubljana and commutes to work; her other vocation is medicine.

About the book



Indeed, the poems in the new book show an even greater precision, accentuated only by the composition of the book itself that unites smaller thematic blocks into a comprehensive whole, but above all, introduces a vivacious and diverse multitude of poems that span over a hundred pages. The central motif is that of Water or the Ocean, from which the images of Earth and other metaphors emerge. The rhythm is still that of a traveller. Few contemporary Slovenian poetry collections have such a wide range of geographic and historic references, from spiritual heritage of Ancient Rome and Greece to modern-day air travel. The poems seem to emerge from travels and temporary stops in new places; on the other hand, these new views and postcards bring realizations or epiphanies that took time shaping but needed “new eyes” to find their language. This could also be said about the use of mythology. It is relaxed, but intense in attitude; the archetypes of mother and father, the ancestors, with the metaphors of journey and homecoming, unveil a very personal experience and transcend it. The poems are well grounded, vivid depictions of everyday events, such as a drive to the seaside, during which we listen to a long, stream-of-consciousness-like self- and world-conscious meditation on death and closeness of the end of life, paradoxically camouflaged as a feeling of endlessness and freedom of movement. Similarly intense is the poet's attitude to the material world through which meanings flow abundantly, even those most abstract. ... Words in modern poetry are rarely so physically far-reaching, clear-sounding and unequivocal in their message. If I may let myself get a bit carried away, I can say – the words of Veronika Dintinjana would ignite the love of poetry even in those who in their free time enjoy reading nothing else but stock market reports. – *Mojca Pišek*

Excerpt

Translated by
the author and
Ciaran O'Driscoll

Απολογία

Ships, loaded to the last blade, wait. Each day
of postponement is costing a fortune.
My myrmidons grow impatient, their hands
begin to shake when the unsevered heads
of peace-loving citizens pass them by.
My ministers tremble to think that heaven
might turn against them, though the plans are good,
measured down to the last side of bacon.

Nothing is more terrible: every dawn
the sun rises instead of wind and stays suspended in the sky,
a log tied on a slope. Its taut rope holds as if we lacked for blades.
The sun sits on my temples. This crown torques my skull.

One life is all a prince has. Daughter, I pray
you'll forgive me: we need wind without delay.

Medea

Translated by
the author and
Ciaran O'Driscoll

My son knows. He calls me every night.
I can rely on him. He is a good,
caring son, they both are,
my sons. My care
and comfort.

I do still gladly wash and iron for them.
They adore my apricot cake.
When they were children, I'd embrace them tightly.
That repaid all unkept promises,
traces of lipstick on the shirt collar or the endless hours of work.

My younger son has a wife who knows I am getting old.
She knows how to wait. She is learning to bake cakes.
The other son has no wife or children.
He calls me every night.
There was no need to sully my hands with blood.

My husband died years ago.
It took ages before we got to bury him.
Night after night he sat awake by his bed.
Time is more efficient than the blade.
I think of myself, I age gracefully.

I am not a witch, but one must know
how to turn things in one's favour.

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Anja Golob – Stage Directions to Breathing

About the author



Photo by Jošt Franko

Up to date Anja Golob (1976) has published four books of poetry – three in Slovene and one in German translation –, selections of poems and other texts in numerous magazines, and about 750 theatre reviews. Her second book was nominated for both Slovene poetry prizes, awarded the 2014 *Jenko Poetry Prize* and sold out in 350 copies. In April 2016 the author was selected into *The 10 New Voices from Europe*. In October 2016 her third Slovene book was awarded the 2016 *Jenko Poetry Prize*. It sold out in three months in 400 copies. A reprint of 200 copies was released on January 23rd and is now available.

She is a poet, a writer and a translator. In 2013 she co-founded a small publishing house *VigeVageKnjige* and is currently its editor-in-chief. The publishing house specialises in Slovene translations of graphic novels for both children and adults. After studying philosophy and comparative literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana (Slovenia), she worked as a theatre critic for twelve years, mainly publishing in *Večer*, the second biggest Slovene daily. On occasion she still works as a dramaturg on contemporary art and dance performances.

About the book



The title can be translated as a kind of director's or poet's notes to being ... in order for the experience of being to become more genuine, more real. And perhaps for one's life to become happier, quieter, more satisfying? It almost sounds like a promise out of a cheap spiritual growth manual but Anja Golob's poetry steers well clear of them, leading the reader to these discoveries through constant scepticism, ambiguity, doubtfulness, vagueness, hiddenness.

With their generally masterful architecture, the poems oscillate between the perfect fragility of being and cognition, and the firm belief that cognition, authenticity and, last but not least, a fulfilling sense of being are possible after all, even if just for a moment, through a gap. Time and time again, they pave the way around this inexpressibility that is provisionally covered by the terms happiness, love, fulfilment, meaning. The verses multiply, build up, undulate rhythmically around the outlined crack, sometimes crashing into that something which the readers, anyone, must fill, find, capture, colour themselves.

Anja Golob's poetry is in constant dialogue with world and national poetical, musical and artistic tradition, both through its subtly weaved-in quotations and its poetic expression that scoops inspiration, with a spoon if not with a ladle, out of a wide variety of literary periods and movements. *Stage Directions to Breathing* most obviously reintroduce explicit intimism, uniquely combined with social engagement, into Slovenian poetry. – *Diana Pungeršič*

Excerpt**The Net above the Manege**

Translated by
Andrej Pleterski

Tom Daley turns around and slowly approaches the edge of the jumpboard, back first. He sticks his heels over and settles in silence. He goes through the sequence of somersaults in his mind. Srbská Kamenice, Czechoslovakia, 26 Jan 1972, Vesna Vulović is the sole survivor of the free fall from the height of 33,000 feet, at which the JAT Airways aeroplane was flying at the moment of the explosion. After his practice session, Josef K. is absorbed in reading an essay by Sartre on a park bench in the early afternoon. In the evening, dressed in a red-and-white bodysuit covered with spangles with a bolt across the chest, deep in thought, he sits on the trapeze bar underneath the top of the tent, observing the tiny spectators far below him. At this moment, he only wishes one thing: that no-one has thought of spreading out the net above the manege. That for once, even if only once, the once, it was for real. He's not insane, he only wishes to live, and dare it all without because. The stage manager sticks his head into the dressing room with a sign *Tura* on it: "Two minutes," he says and leaves. The man rises up self-confidently and heads towards the stage down a narrow hallway. In the next moment, he steps on stage, slows down, pretending to be reading, and starts absent-mindedly: "To be or not to be ..." And as though at someone's behest, as though at a behest, someone rises up in the stalls. This keeps repeating. That's the whole art of it. What exists, exits as poetry. So does death. So does nothing. So does so, so.

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Tadej Golob – The Lake

About the author



Photo by Rafael Marn

Tadej Golob (1967), journalist and one of the most active mountain climbers of the last few decades, is also one of the most original Slovenian authors whose body of works covers a wide range of genres. He appeared on the literary scene with his book *Z Everest* (Descending Everest, 2000), a narrative about the first ski descent from the world's tallest mountain that the author himself climbed, followed by biographies of basketball players Peter Vilfan (2004) and Goran Dragič (2015) and musician Zoran Predin (2009), young adult novels *Zlati zob* (Gold Tooth, 2011) and *Kam je izginila Brina?* (Where Did Brina Go?, 2013) – both featured in the White Ravens catalogue of the International Library for Young Adults in Munich –and adult novels *Svinjske nogice* (Pork Legs, awarded the 2010 Kresnik Award for best Slovenian novel) and *Ali boma ye!* (nominated for the 2014 Kresnik Award). 2017 saw the publication of his novel *Jezero* (The Lake) that is his first work of crime fiction. Tadej Golob was born in Maribor, eastern Slovenia, then moved to study journalism in Ljubljana where he now lives. He is the father of two children.

About the book



It is New Year's Eve. Chief Inspector Taras Birsa and his wife are on their way back from their ski trip when they stumble on a police car parked in the middle of the road in heavy snowfall. Sitting inside is a girl and her dog who found a headless corpse of a young woman in the ice of the nearby river. Taras helps the two young policemen on duty that night take care of the body. After returning to the capital, Ljubljana, he learns that the case has been assigned to him. With two of his colleagues and a young newbie who joins the team after the death of Taras' mentor, he returns to Bohinj, a closed-off alpine valley, where several possible suspects soon come into play, and the investigation must answer the question of whether the killer is a lone lunatic or a premeditating executor of a conspiracy of a big pharmaceutical company, one of the locals or a tourist on vacation. And, most importantly – who is the headless girl who was pulled out of the water on the 31st of December?

In the opinion of many, the best Slovenian crime novel.

“Finally it has arrived! An excellent Slovenian crime novel in the tradition of Scandinavian thrillers but devoid of overly gruesome scenes, blood spilling and various psychological perversions.”

– Katarina Mahnič, *Radio Slovenija*

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Introduction

It started snowing around noon, and when Joey, an impossible crossbreed between a Doberman and a schnauzer, scampered down the gentle slope, his black head with half-floppy ears was the only thing sticking out of the virgin snow, and every time he buried his snout in it, he would look up at his mistress at the roadside with a surprised and sad look on his face, then go on looking for for the yellow tennis ball. He was named after Joey from Friends, the favourite character of the young woman standing by the road, laughing at the helpless dog. When the sitcom came on, Alina – that was her name – was still in kindergarten, she only caught the last few seasons but later watched the entire show, and even now, ten years later, she would catch an episode here and there. Whenever she felt gloomy, nostalgic. At age twenty-five, she thought. What's next?

She couldn't quite explain why the sitcom was so dear to her. There are things that we like at a certain point in our lives but, when we come across them later, we are surprised to realize that we don't know what was so special about them, about books, films, TV shows, for instance, but it wasn't like that for her with Friends. Was it corny? Yes, it was. Was Phoebe a character that wouldn't last three days in real life? Yes ..., although, she smiled, she knew someone like her.

And Joey ... Joey Tribbiani.

“How u doin?”

She still found it adorably funny even though she had since gotten her degree in anthropology from the Faculty of Arts under the mentorship of Professor Nabernik, and she shouldn't really admit that to her friends when they were sober. And if she did, she always added that Friends were her *guilty pleasure*. At least she didn't listen to Bon Jovi.

Joey was sticking his snout in the snow that was almost twelve inches deep after five hours of snowing. He squashed the whiteness and the frostiness underneath him with his schnauzer paws, and when he made his way to the ball and grabbed it with his teeth, he didn't turn around and go back to his mistress, retracing his steps, but made a sharp turn and carved out a new path like a little snowplough.

That, too, was adorably funny. A short-legged Doberman with a yellow tennis ball in its mouth.

She grabbed the ball and, after a brief scuffle, he let go. She swung her arm but didn't let go of the ball; she hid it behind her back. The dog bounded into a new path, ran a few paces, leaps, until he was stopped by the snow, then he looked quizzically before him and back at his mistress.

“Oh, you knucklehead,” she said, turned slightly to the left and threw the ball as hard as she could from the embankment along the river and, like every time on their regular walks – if the third visit since her arrival to Bohinj could be considered regular –, hurled it across the white clearing until it disappeared into the branches of shrubbery. The dog found this even more intriguing, only this time she worried that she might have thrown it too far, that it might have fallen in the water.

“Joey, Joooooooooeeey ...”

The dog didn't listen to her, he never did. No matter how much she yelled, he was ploughing his way to the shrubbery through a new channel, getting swallowed up by the branches. He is not going to go in the water if the ball fell in, is he?

He barked. She waited for him to come back with the ball in his pointed mouth but he was nowhere to be seen. He barked again, and she thought he was barking at the ball sailing off towards Bohinjska Bistrica, but then the branches would be shaking if he followed the ball through the shrubbery, and they weren't. They were still and the dog kept barking.

“Joeey!”

She didn't feel like treading in the virgin snow. She had hiking boots on her feet made from waterproof Gore-Tex but they only reached up to her ankles, and if you got snow on your socks that slowly trickled into your boots, Gore-Tex wouldn't do you any good.

“Joeey!”

The dog emerged at the edge of the shrubbery, no ball, and she waved him to join her, slapping her things with her wool-mittened hands.

“Joey, Joey, come to mummy, dear ...”

The dog gave a short bark and disappeared into the thicket again.

She sighed and sloped off down the roadside. She was almost knee-deep in snow. She waded into one of the paw-trodden tracks, waiting with dread for moisture to start soaking through her socks. Her guest house was nearly a thirty-minute walk away. Stupid dog!

She brushed aside the branches, trying not to get snow down her neck as well. It was barely three feet from the edge of the shrubbery to the river. The dog saw her, whined, wagged his tail, looked at her, then at the river. The ball was next to him.

“What is up with you?”

She picked up the ball.

“Let's go, Joey ...”

She raised her head and looked at the water that was frozen at the edges. Something white was jutting out of the ice. So white that it looked artificial, plastic, in the dusk of the night, like the hand of a mannequin.

Who on earth would throw a plastic mannequin in the river, she thought.

Kazimir Kolar – The Voice of the Night

About the author



Photo by Gašper Lešnik

Kazimir Kolar was born in 1979 in Vrhopolje pri Moravčah. He obtained his BA in Latin language and literature, and philosophy from the Faculty of Arts. He then went on to study midwifery at the Faculty of Health Sciences which he completed in 2012. He has done all kinds of things in his life. He now pursues his midwifery and philosophical mission in the literary sphere. He sees literature both as an ontological explosion and a mysterious fidelity to a particular event. When he runs out of ideas for writing, he plans to start translating philosophical mysticism from Latin. He collaborates with the Šum magazine.

About the book



The novel *Glas noči* (The Voice of the Night) is an exciting narrative in four parts. Each represents a period in the life of the main character, a 28-year-old historian suffering from psychosis who “... reports on his various temporary jobs: he was a night guard, worked at a meat storage facility, taught history, was a janitor and cleaning assistant and even an attendant at a maternity hospital where he helped women give birth. The description of his work on the maternity ward is particularly vivid and convincing.” (Tina Vrščaj, *Delo*, 3 January 2017) The narrative is nimble, the language is frequently marked by short, clipped, often nominal sentences. The novel is not only a reflection of the main character’s distress but also of the disorientation of the young and the semi-young generation.

The Voice of the Night is the author’s first literary work. Its depictions of labour and of women giving birth have earned it the label of a midwifery novel.

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Dreams in the morning. I am standing in the middle of the hallway of the maternity ward, nervous bodies running into me. There is such panic in the air that I can’t even turn. I am pushed left and right. What is going on? Something bad must be happening, something terrible. I’m turning my head, searching for faces, calling out to them. In vain. No one is taking any notice of me, everyone is running down the hallway. I hear indistinct voices. Finally someone in that crowd of people yells: *Respiratory distress in number four!* And that’s when I start running, too.

But I can’t move at all. My legs are completely numb. It’s even worse than that: I want to run at any cost, so I start sinking into the depth instead of moving forward. I’m sinking, down into the unknown and terrifying darkness, without stopping, as if I’m being swallowed by quicksand. But I don’t give up. My arms are still alive, I use them to propel myself forward, slowly making my way down the hallway. Two female doctors overtake me on my right. They run past me like crazy. They give me a look, a very *mean* look, and for about fifteen feet, they are big. Their white coats are fluttering all over the place, reaching up to the ceiling. I’m going to miss everything, I’m done for. I get even smaller. Have I sunk even deeper or have I started shrinking? I don’t know. I am a tiny dot, and everything is way up above, right over me. They are so perpendicular and unattainable. It dawns on me. I will never get to number four, *never*.

But I do. I grab onto the doorframe, hit the door with my hand, and the door opens. There is no one in the room, but the light is turned on and there is a baby lying on the changing table. I pull myself toward it with my hands. Its skin is grey. It has vomited some meconium. It is suffocating. Its hands are reaching out, twisting. Long, oblong wrinkles are forming on its forehead. I feel my legs again, I get up and turn on the aspirator with trembling hands. Then I clench open the baby’s mouth, insert the tube and shove it down its throat. The pressure in the tube gives a hiss. Soon it starts filling with black mucus, and the baby coughs. That is a good sign. I find a K vitamin ampoule, snap off its neck and aspirate. I turn the baby on its side, make a fold on its thigh, calm myself down and lean on my elbows. I stick in the needle. Then I hear the neonates behind me. I raise my head and listen. There are voices coming from the hallway.

They are discussing something. Arguing. There are many of them. Five, six or more. I hear them talking about me. Someone says: *that guy is completely mad*, then another one, *I don't know why they send such people to our ward if they're not suitable for this kind of work*. In a daze, I wipe the baby off, massaging it. It's getting rosier and rosier. It's breathing. Coming back to life, and that is the most important thing. It doesn't matter what they're saying, I tell myself, those are the voices of bad people, they are saying bad things about me, I shouldn't listen to them. Everything is going to be alright, I say to myself, everything is going to be ok.

I settle down a little when, all of a sudden, someone punches me on the shoulder. The punch is very powerful, giving me a 180-degree turn.

Ms. Sitar. She gives me the iciest of stares.

She says: *Do you realize what you just did?*

She shoves the ampoule with the broken neck in my face. I frown. I look.

She shakes the ampoule: *Read it.*

I look closely. The ampoule says: SYNTOCINON 5.I.E. Medicine for uterine contraction. I gave the baby medicine that stimulates contractions ...

Then a closet appears before me. I sit on the bed for a long time, staring at it like an idiot. My heart is pounding. I go to the bathroom, pour myself a glass of water and look at myself in the mirror. I don't recognize myself. My face is ashy, I have bags under my eyes reaching all the way down to my cheeks. My mouth is dry. I take a sip but I can't swallow it. I'm still there.

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Barbara Korun – In Between

About the author

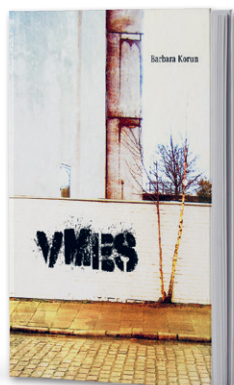


Photo by Peter Broetzmann

Barbara Korun was born in 1963 in Ljubljana where she obtained a degree in Slovene language and literature and comparative literature from the University of Ljubljana and taught literature in high schools. She also used to work at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana as a language advisor. She currently works as a freelance writer. Her first collection *Ostrina miline* (The Edge of Grace, 1999) received the National Book Fair Award for best debut collection. Her fourth book *Pridem takoj* (I'll Be Right Back, 2011) won her the Veronika Award (for best poetry collection of that year) and the Zlata Ptica Award (for outstanding achievements in literature).

Together with jazz composer and percussionist Zlatko Kaučič, she recorded the album *Vibrato tišine* (Vibrato of Silence, 2006) with poems by Slovene avant-garde poet Srečko Kosovel. For the past six years she has been organising regular monthly readings of works by Slovene women poets. She actively promotes the feminist cause and volunteers at a refugee centre. Her works have been published in twelve independent poetry collections and fifty anthologies in more than twenty languages. She also received two international awards for poetry in Italy, Leandro Polverini (Anzio, 2014) and Regina Coppola (Baronissi, 2016). *Vmes* (In Between, 2016) is her sixth poetry collection.

About the book



The poetry collection *In Between* took shape on the poet's travels, in an in-between space and time, in a fleeting yet inspiring moment that becomes more distinct on the road, prompting a *quick, half-hidden illegal report*. Its "illegality" is in fact its subversiveness that undermines the socially acceptable view of the modern world and reaches beyond safe impersonality to personal vulnerability; to the questioning of (the poet's own) existence in its physical and spiritual, as well as its personal and social entirety. The poetry narrator is an astute observer, particularly sensitive to those aspects of modern society (written in a dynamic, plastic style, with a sense for zoomed-in details) that expose *crimes and the inconceivable wickedness* which are all the more often covered up as *a social lie*. The poet confronts the ethical sense of responsibility towards the other (the underprivileged, the marginalised, as well as towards animals, trees, in short, everything that does not have a voice of its own) and the recognition of everyone's more or less primal right to happiness with the social existence of an individual as part of the impersonal, consumeristic and hedonistic, but no less deadly *social system*. She rebels against it as a human being (in a refugee centre, marked by her experience of a deeply primal *smell of people*), as a woman (most extremely, provocatively with the character of Medea) and as a poet (by challenging the neat, systematised language). From this clear (ethical) position, the poet ventures to construct a new language as an awareness-spreading poetic truth, *that starts to give things their form / actions their meaning*.

– Vita Žerjal Pavlin

Excerpt

Translated by
Barbara Jurša

Hannah Arendt is reporting on the trial against Eichmann

Jerusalem, Israel, May 1962

Poetry won't do.
Several thousand pages of reports.
Each word is preceded by a name.
Each name is a human being: a body and a spirit.
Let everyone account for
what they said and did.
Not in front of God, but people.
In front of the judges.

There's no room for poetry here.
There are rules and regulations, article
by article. Laws, constitutions,
resolutions, amendments.
A desperate attempt – the only one that matters –
to perceive evil, to link it with a name,
to link the name with the person, to put the person in court.
To patiently follow each curve of the letters
without losing meaning from sight.
To forget about one's own pain.
To limit evil. Merely this.

No, poetry won't do.
But it's precisely poetry, this source of light,
that can turn evil visible.
It's its exactness that allows
me to distinguish between layers of
individual and social reality,
to trace the immense seeming
interconnectedness of causes and effects.

All of my systems of justice have fallen apart.
My language has broken down.
I am rebuilding it,
patiently, carefully,
page by page.
Even without a language
I can be in my senses.
The scar in the language
is serving me, testifying
vigilantly.

As I am writing, it is
whispering to me
the opposite, destructive nonsenses,
unbridled plays of words
and fates, all kinds of impossibilities;
with a wild, unstoppable power
it is tearing the truth from my hands
and returning it the same, but altered:
with a shadow, immeasurable
and quivering,
the one that gives things their form,
the one that gives deeds their meaning.

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Mojca Kumerdej – The Harvest of Cronus

About the author

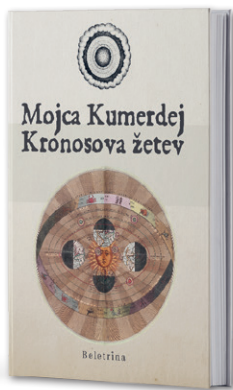


Photo by Jože Suhadolnik

Mojca Kumerdej (1964) is an award-winning writer and philosopher. She also works as a critic, covering dance, performance and intermedia arts. In her first novel, *Krst nad Triglavom* (*Baptism Above Triglav*, 2001) Kumerdej ironically dealt with Slovenian cultural and literary traditions. Her two collections of short prose, *Fragma* (2003) and *Temna snov* (*Dark Matter*, 2011), show an utterly original world, one that derives from the inner corners of contemporary society. Her stories have been translated into Spanish, German, English, Hungarian, Russian, Czech, French, Polish, Bulgarian, Lithuanian and Slovakian, and have appeared in various Slovenian and foreign anthologies.

In 2017, Kumerdej received the Prešeren Fund Award for her second novel *The Harvest of Cronus* (*Kronosova žetev*, 2016).

About the book



The Harvest of Cronus is a picturesque portrait of the 16th century, tempestuous times rife with religious clashes, political plots and witch trials. It is a novel set in times when the Inner Austrian lands – modern-day Slovenian territory – were plagued by ceaseless battles for supremacy between the Protestant political representatives of the estates of the realm and the ruling Catholic Habsburg Monarchy. The battles for supremacy are fought among the rulers and between the rulers and the people, who diligently survey each individual and single them out as different and suspicious.

The novel, in which history and fiction intertwine in wavelike fashion, is a colourful portrait of the Renaissance – permeated by humanist attempts to resurrect antiquity, by art, by scientific findings, and by animated as well as spirited philosophical and theological debates. All this against the backdrop of intrigues, accusations of heresy, political betrayal, and burnings at the stake.

The Harvest of Cronus is an eternal melody about the executioners, who bring scapegoats forth to the sacrificial altar in the name of God, the sovereign or the common good, and about extraordinary individuals, who oppose the masses, dominant beliefs and way of life.

Excerpt

Translated by
Rawley Grau

‘Not long ago certain writings came into my hands in which someone argues that nature behaves solely and exclusively in accordance with natural laws created by God, and that miracles do not exist and are, in truth, merely unusual phenomena which the finite mind of man is unable to grasp. It may well be true that miracles don’t exist, but that nature never goes mad, well, I’m not convinced. One moment it can be benevolent and calm, the very next, run riot, whether in keeping with nature’s laws or opposed to them – and exactly the same thing can happen with human nature. Everything is fine and good and then, in a single moment, it runs off track... What do you think, Julian?’ the prince-bishop asks, turning again to his travelling companion. ‘Ah, yes, enjoy your little catnap. When we arrive in the late afternoon, there will be a splendid supper waiting for us. Count Friedrich is a generous and hospitable man, and he’ll be so even more when he hears the nature of our visit. Hahaha, wherever you turn there’s always some sort of nature. Just one more task and my work is done. Not here. Somewhere else. Not as I am now. Merely similar.’

Slowly, in a syncopated rhythm with the accent on the first, fourth and sixth beats, the carriage moves across the softly illuminated landscape, as the hand sticking out of the window alternately squeezes into a fist and opens again. The person opposite, with slightly parted lips, is asleep and gently snoring, unaware, the prince-bishop thinks, of how quickly his tender, youthful features will be wrinkled by time. He is unaware that man’s greatest enemy are not the dark forces hurtling through the Holy Roman Empire and flying across the Hereditary Provinces of Inner Austria – he is unaware that his worst enemy is not the devil, who leads men and women into temptation and sin, nor the Protestant preachers who serve communion under

two kinds, nor the Turks, who for centuries have been striking terror into the hearts of the local populace, nor the naked madwomen who rub their open loins on broomsticks, nor the simple folk who cook up potions and creams for the populace, who can't afford even barber-surgeons, let alone real physicians. No, man's greatest enemy is time. Tossed at birth into its mill, man kicks and struggles, but in vain. Against so powerful a foe the battle is lost before it begins. The cruel and voracious god Cronus, who sires children only to chomp them in his teeth and in the end, whether that end is quick or slow, to mash them up, swallow them whole, or spit them out. And young Julian, swinging his milky white hands in the lap of his cassock, is still at an age when he believes everything is possible. Changing the world for the better, for instance. Yes, passion, visions and utopias – these too are part of that ancient deity's dark plan; that's why a creature flush with the juices of life is so succulent, right up until the juices start drying up and disappear altogether. And in the end – well, what about the end? Most people believe only that the body ends, after which some other life follows. Others, a very few, believe that everything begins and ends with the body. We know what we believe – or could it be the other way round, and we believe what we think we know?

The carriage lumbers on in its syncopated rhythm across the landscape, above which a dark cloud is gathering, the prince-bishop notices. Is it going to rain? he wonders, leaning a little out the window and knocking on the carriage frame, but the shape of the coachman sitting in front of him makes no response. It might rain, the prince-bishop thinks, or it might not. Does it matter? Did he ask the question for no particular reason, without actually being interested in the answer, without thinking? Is there not, perhaps, in many questions, statements and comments a certain automatism unworthy of man, who as a spiritual creature should possess free will and the ability to make his own decisions? Are we really little more than those mechanical toys that move their limbs, those ballerinas who spin when you wind them up, that metal dog which wags its tail and yaps at you?

He sticks his arm out the window, extending it all the way, as if wanting to check for rain. As if, he thinks, but is this really what I intended to do, or did I stick my arm out and only then, after a certain delay, realize something that my body knew before me? He rotates the palm of his extended hand towards himself and feels in the air the cold spray of tiny droplets. He then spreads his fingers slightly apart and is looking through the gaps when, suddenly, a strange scene appears to him. A miracle, perhaps? What would those writings say, which he had recently been reading?

Jedrt Lapuh Maležič – Heavy Mentals

About the author



Photo by Saša Spačal

Jedrt Lapuh Maležič (1979) is a freelance literary translator from English and French, and the author of two short story collections, both published in 2016 – *Težkomentarci* (Heavy Mentals) by LUD Literatura and *Bojne barve* (War Paint) by Škuc Lambda. Her debut *Heavy Mentals*, although drawing on her experience of being hospitalised in a psychiatric clinic, is expressed in literary form, albeit in closely interlinked stories told mostly by a first-person narrator, whereas her second collection *War Paint* has a more pronounced literary tone and covers a more diverse range of topics explored from a variety of perspectives relating to LGBT identities in the local environment. As a translator, Maležič favours authors like Julie Otsuka (*The Buddha in the Attic*), Khaled Hosseini (*And the Mountains Echoed*), Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*), Nelson Mandela (*Long Walk to Freedom*), Martin Luther King Jr. (*The Autobiography*), Mohsin Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*), John Boyne (*Stay Where You Are And Then Leave*), Eve Ensler (*I Am an Emotional Creature*), Mircea Eliade (*Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*), etc.

About the book



Psychiatry used to be portrayed largely as a repressive institution but here Lapuh Maležič speaks of its entrails with irony and mockery; through observations, though shrouded in a woolly fog and riddled with memory holes, and with the help of somewhat ridiculed or affectively written portraits of her service co-users, we can see where the pain of the world begins; when the shell of the ego is cracked to the degree that a tragic perception of life permeates through it. Which, however, does not mean that its portrayal should be such; Lapuh Maležič depicts the adventures of her subjects, who are as exceptional as they come, with a zest of humour and knowing resignation. One gets the feeling that the first-person episodes of her prose are accompanied by a wise and distanced voice that watches everything with timeless indifference while waiting to outshine the blurry images and fragmented memories; when it comes into full view and finally prevails, it is a moment of healing. And an opportunity for writing in which the sentiments and stages of rebellion change, capricious like the weather, with their own logic, but in a formally precise and (well-)measured prose. – *Matej Bogataj*

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Michael Jackson Just Liked Children

Fugazi on my USB-player while a debate about Michael Jackson and about everything and anything is taking place on the balcony. Sancho says that, in his opinion, Michael Jackson just really likes children. He says that, to him, Zyprexa is a magic pill and that he is never going to get monstrously fat because he likes to work out all the time. *Sitting in the waiting room, I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait.* To prove his agility, Sancho throws himself flat on his nose before me from a standing position, catching himself in a push-up, then does a hundred of them, out of sheer enthusiasm.

Sancho has never heard of Don Quixote and Don Quixote has never heard of Sancho. His real name is Samir, his parents' names are Samir Senior and Samira. He says that they didn't have much of an imagination. Sancho barely got here and, several days in, he is already the boss of the ward because almost everyone is afraid of him and he is just strong enough to force those who don't into submission. He is respectful towards the elderly, he says. He is respectful towards everyone, anytime and anyplace, because that is how you earn everyone's respect, he was telling us five minutes after he was brought upstairs to our ward in his pyjamas. As he is slicking back his gangster-style haircut with water, I notice that he has some Arabic letter or writing, even, tattooed on the back of his neck under his shaved hair. Hafez, he says, a Sufi poet. But he doesn't know what the verse means and he doesn't care, he says. They say that he

has come back from Afghanistan where he killed god knows how many people in the service of his homeland. Probably no one.

Beads of sweat are trickling down Sancho's cheeks. *I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait.* He says it's because his body is cooling down when he is agitated or anxious. I ask him if he is agitated and anxious now, among us, and he just shakes his head nervously and says that one must distinguish between sweat from physical exertion and sweat from psychological factors. Michael Jackson sweat all the time when he danced, he says, and look at him, he has wiped the floor with the competition and he doesn't seem to be fazed by fame. Hearing that last remark, I almost choke on the coffee that I've just gulped down, and I think to myself that it wouldn't be wise for me to challenge his authority and embarrass him in front of everyone, seeing as I don't know how many people he has killed.

It's my turn to talk to the shrink. *Sitting in the waiting room, I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait* for him to start asking questions. Fugazi say goodbye as he finally gestures me to turn off the private party in my headphones. Recently, my world has been revolving more and more around the people in the hospital, and it makes it harder to think when the doctor is interrogating me about my family outside these walls. I can easily keep myself busy inside, among these stumblers, I've grown to love their sweat and tears. Sancho says that it's kind of like the army. You forget the places and the people outside the walls, immersing yourself in the drama within them.

In time, as I see it, you master reality in this miniature world enough to be able to function in a similar pattern when you get back home.

The shrink is not happy with my progress. Throughout his interrogation about my family situation, I answer with concrete examples from the hospital balcony. All I talk about is Sancho, remarks the shrink. I do realise that he has his own history that is completely different to mine? Of course, but histories are contagious, I say.

What do I mean? I don't know. I stay silent. I feel like I've caught something, I think to myself, and that I'm going to have to get back on my feet soon. What if he told me that Sancho was being prosecuted? That sobers me up. So he did kill a few people, down there, I say. No, no, no. Let's just say I should keep an eye on my things, the doctor tells me.

So he steals, nothing drastic, I think, and besides, I didn't bring any valuables with me to the hospital, old clothes and a couple of diaries and pens.

When I put my earphones back in, I hit replay and *I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait* to work out which virus has attacked my brain, making me feel more at home here than in my own room back home. I don't go out to the balcony because Sancho is too loud as he is waiting for his talk, showing off with his push-ups; instead, I'm thinking about how I want to give him something so he won't have to steal it.

But I have nothing here with me. Maybe in the car that is standing in the nearby parking lot. It's worth checking. I just mustn't get tempted to drive, that's all.

So I venture beyond the walls and the song changes the moment the sliding door opens. I replay the previous song again, I'm not tired of it yet. As if I'm waiting for someone to surprise me. When I get to the car, I sit inside and stare out the window for a while, then it hits me. In the boot I keep my collection of audio cassettes which, granted, has shrunk over the years and for which I don't have a proper cassette player anymore. There are a few boxes' worth, including some gems that I'm slightly ashamed of, such as Michael Jackson's *Bad* album.

I'll give those to Sancho.

Lucija Stepančič – Take It up with Our Complaints Department

About the author



Photo by Orlando Stepančič

Lucija Stepančič (b.1969, Jesenice), entered the literary scene in the previous millennium, first as a short story author (*Mrtvaki in šlagerji – Corpses and Schlagers*, 1997) and a few years later as a literary critic, writing for the magazine *Sodobnost* and later for *Dnevnik* and *Književni listi*. A selection of her critical writings was published in the book *Sedem let* (Seven Years, 2007). Her next collection of short stories *Prasec pa tak* (What a Pig, 2008) was nominated for the Fabula Award, and her novel *V četrtek ob šestih* (Thursday at Six, 2011) for the Kresnik Award. In 2010 she also published the poetry collection *Ljubljanski imenik* (Ljubljana Phonebook, 2010). Her short story collection *Tramvajkomanda, oddelek za pritožbe* (Take It up with Our Complaints Department) came out in 2016.

Stepančič is the author of children's picture books *Poččkani ropar* (Scribble Robber, 2010), *Martinček in dinozavri* (The Sand Lizard and the Dinosaurs, 2011), *Kako so videli svet* (How They Saw the World, 2012), *Na otoku zakladov* (On Treasure Island, 2013), *Kaj nam povejo besede* (What Words Tell Us, 2014) and *Prehlajeni čarodej* (The Magician Gets a Cold, 2016). The picture books *Anton!* (2014) and *Arsenije!* (2017) are based on true stories from World War I.

The *Mladina* magazine ran her graphic novels *Trbovlje* (2011) and *Bohinj* (2014) in weekly instalments and the *Literatura* magazine published her comic strip columns between 2011 and 2016. She is currently finishing her second novel and preparing two comic strip collections, bringing together both her previously published and new comic strips.

About the book



Take It up with Our Complaints Department brings short stories spanning diverse topics and styles but with a common tendency to exploring absurd and grotesque aspects of being through black humour, most often aspects that come to the forefront in failed love scenarios. The author's writing does not concern itself with differences between the living and the dead, interweaving different levels of being and feeding on conflicts between them. Real and made-up people, dead celebrities and poor devils, idealised figures from dating shows and ghosts from the deepest layers of oblivion tread on each other's toes. Just as social criticism aimed at concrete events combines with head-spinning insights of sub specie aeternitatis. The line between reality and imagination keeps moving. While one can be immersed in the fictional atmosphere from the very beginning, an abyss can open up in the middle of seeming normality completely out of the blue and without warning.

The author tests the limits of the fantastic genre, honed most efficiently on everyday stumbling blocks, and her greatest ambition is exploring and improving the possibilities provided by a metaphysical burlesque.

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

Machine Gun

My mistress has a taste for soap operas and no tact whatsoever. That is the only possible explanation why she would follow me to the men's toilet in a pub, swearing at me in front of a whole line of blokes standing at the urinals. And she is wearing a wedding dress. She is trailing her bridal train through puddles of piss, hitting me with her bouquet until the flowers start flying around while my fellow urinators are literally pissing themselves laughing. I barely make it back to the bar, followed by roars of laughter enriched with her hysteric screams. But the fuck-around is not over yet; in fact, it has only just begun. Because a terrible, terrible silence falls over the entire pub. A silence that heralds the end of the world. Which is immediately followed by the panicked cries of relatives who turn green at the sight of me and start screaming and jumping through the windows and under the tables. Don't tell me I've found myself at my own funeral again? Yep, that's right, that's exactly right, again.

I had the feeling this morning that a logical chain of events was going to be a problem again. And I keep telling my crazy women that they have to kill me first and then bury me, not the other way around. Is that so hard to understand? I think not. And now I'm supposed to deal with these broads, all of them spoiled by the fact that every one of their ideas, no matter how crazy, is realised and materialised, ignoring any kind of order, disregarding all laws of reality. And today of all days when the football championship is in full swing. The commercial break will be over any minute, the second half will begin, they took the painting of a homestead, the work of a tacky local artist, off that giant wall and hung a big plasma TV, and there is beer anxiously awaiting us in the refrigerator. It's enough to make a man cry at the thought of not being able to enjoy it in peace. And on top of everything this wedding dress to make the whole thing even more distasteful. I can't even properly enjoy the fact that I got rid of my zombie relatives so easily.

But there is no going around it, I have to face the facts. Because there will be no peace until this whole thing plays out from beginning to end, or to the beginning that leads right to my murder. My mistress is ready, she has just come back from the toilet, she has even changed her clothes, dressing up as a nun this time, I don't know why when I am just about to fuck her right here on this table, for which I will later pay dearly when my wife shows up at the door with a gun in her hands. So once again, I can't make any sense of what is happening and my mistress is breaking my concentration, hypocritically apologising for the wedding dress, she actually didn't mean to wear it, she actually put it on by mistake, it was actually a classic Freudian slip, I should read some psychology books so I'll stop being so primitive and finally understand the woman's soul, but the silly woman doesn't ask herself if I even want that. On the one hand, we spent way too much time blabbering about wedding dresses, psychology and the woman's soul, and on the other hand, the wife came in way too early today. Not only is she in a rush, she is pointing a machine gun at me instead of the good old little gun. She, too, is overdoing it today, grossly overdoing it, she, too, is going overboard, she is pathetic as hell, I barely have time to be astonished at the effortlessness with which she is holding that huge thing, I remember from my army days that it weights twenty-five pounds, and she is holding it like a cigarette holder, letting me know just how incredibly, deeply and absolutely she hates me. She shoots.

Only when the police arrives does it become clear why my mistress is dressed the way she is, if she was dressed in her usual whorish outfit, my wife would have gotten away with a crime of passion. As it is, my mistress will explain in a trembling voice that she is just a poor nun, a bride of Christ, who came to me asking for a charity donation, and my wife will go down in flames before the jury of hypocritical tyrannosauruses. There. Can I watch the game now? My friends are back now (all of them real men who aren't going to let some broad with a machine gun get to them). Although the mood is more or less spoiled, I can barely keep up with the game, the one thing I have to look forward to tonight is loosening my bandages and tending to my poor wounded heart. Which is so full of bullets that they creak like crazy at any change of weather. Especially today when all of us are on edge, when all of us are overdoing it, dragging various props to the scene, brandishing our hate like children.

But I have to admit that I, too, am a little distasteful, I, too, am overdoing it. Just between us – and don't tell the blokes who are watching football with me, please – between us: I even started imitating Jesus and Mary. Though on a spiritual level, taking their sinless life as an example and so on. Actually, I'm only imitating the two old tasteless pictures that used to hang over my grandmother's bed, Jesus and Mary, nicely framed, each with their burning heart armoured with a crown of thorns and pierced with a sword. And now I'm standing here like them instead of yelling like crazy at the people that keep butchering my soul. So that, even in the moments of my agonizing death, I'm wearing the slightly reproachful, dreamy look of a proper saint. I have my left hand over my heart and my right index finger shoots out automatically, as if preaching, look at what you're doing to me, and I love you so much.

Jesus Christ of all people. He who blocked my path to the heavens because of my all-too-numerous sins, sending me off to hell when I died to join the most deranged women devils, stupid and hysteric nymphomaniacs the lot of them. And threw me into one of the lowest circles of hell where they only broadcast the football championship so that crazy broads can interrupt it and drive us even madder.

Suzana Tratnik – No Voice

About the author



Photo by Nada Zgank

Suzana Tratnik (1963) is a writer, a translator and a journalist. In addition to the collection of short stories *Noben glas* (No Voice) she has published five other short story collections: *Pod ničlo* (Below Zero, 1997), *Na svojem dvorišču* (In One's Own Backyard, 2003), *Vzporednice* (Parallels, 2005), *Česa nisem nikoli razumela na vlaku* (Things I've Never Understood on the Train, 2008), *Dva svetova* (Two Worlds, 2010), *Rezervat* (Reservation, 2012), two novels – *Ime mi je Damjan* (My Name Is Damjan, 2001) and *Tretji svet* (Third World, 2007) –, and the children's picture book *Zafuškana Ganca* (The Hany Rattie, 2010). She also wrote the monodrama *Ime mi je Damjan* (My Name is Damjan, 2002), the radio play *Lep dan še naprej* (Have a Nice Day, 2011), two monographs on the lesbian movement in Slovenia and the memoirs *Lezbični aktivizem po korakih* (A Step by Step Guide to Lesbian Activism, 2013). In 2007 she received the national Prešeren Foundation Award for Literature. Her books and short stories have been translated into more than twenty languages.

About the book



No Voice, a collection of seven short stories by Suzana Tratnik, centres on a young protagonist, a girl in her early teens, who observes the world around her from a mixed, no-longer-a-child-but-not-yet-an-adult perspective. The death of her grandmother, the brutishness of a dissatisfied village teacher, the painful feeling of exclusion and her parents' divorce are accompanied by fantastic elements, a child's interpretation of the world, irony and original humour colliding with an adult, much duller view on life. Out of all of Suzana Tratnik's works, *No Voice* is the purest description of a first encounter with the transience of everything, it is the most sensitive description of a point of transition from some – perhaps not the happiest, but fulfilling and familiar, homey – world of childhood to the lonely world of growing up too fast, false homes and large burdens.

Excerpt

Translated by
Špela Bibič

I don't like the lunch break when everyone has to go out in the hallway. If I can help it, I prefer to avoid the sidelong glances and the whispers behind my back. One never really gets used to that. Last week, I even found earth in my bag. The main joke is that I'm dead. Which is not true, of course, because I'm alive – I breathe, speak, eat and go to school, but the jokers don't care about that at all. Before I was pronounced dead, I loved going to school and I loved to sing. But it was the singing that did me in. Come to think of it, it all started that afternoon when I put my name down for the choir audition and entered the music classroom.

“Ooooooooo ...” Deep breath. “... oooooooooO!”

“Enough, enough! Now sing a note lower!”

I took another deep breath and sang even louder: “OOOOOOOOOOOO ... Ooo ... oo ... o.”

I was starting to lose my voice, and I thought that was what singing a note lower meant.

“That's not it!” said the music teacher and choral conductor whom we called Grey because she home-dyed her hair grey, even though she wasn't that old.

“Now you try!” she said to Mirela who was auditioning after me and whom we called Braid because of her long braids. She sang in a resonant, clear voice, and Grey smiled and nodded amicably without interrupting her beautiful singing. When my schoolmate's sonorous voice finally fell silent, the teacher put a big tick next to her name on the list of choir singer candidates, then turned reluctantly to me:

“You don't know what it means to sing a note lower or higher.”

Of course I didn't know exactly, I never went to music school. I didn't know much about

notes either, except that they were somehow thrown together into a five-line staff, some of them even ended up below or above the staff.

“Of course I do,” I protested, as if fighting for an A. “I sang a note lower.”

Grey shook her head, pursing her thin lips. “You only think you did because you can’t hear notes at all.”

Braid quickly turned around, and I saw in the reflection of the shaded window that she covered her mouth. She often laughed at other people’s expense, but she was clever enough never to let the teachers see her.

Well, this is nice. I came to the audition only to learn that I can’t sing properly and can’t hear either. I kept standing at the teacher’s desk, waiting to hear at least one word of encouragement. In vain. Grey looked at Braid and gave her a short smile: “You, of course, are accepted. You could sing anything but the choir needs a first voice – your voice!”

Braid, too, smiled kindly – to me, not the teacher – showing me just how clever her mocking methods were. To make my humiliation even greater, she didn’t even leave the classroom, even though she had already been accepted and had received her mark, she just stood there.

“And what are you waiting for now?” Grey asked me as if I was the one who didn’t get the message.

“I want you to tell me which voice I am.”

As I said that, Braid looked at the teacher with curiosity, waiting open-mouthedly to hear her reply.

You got a spot in the school choir based on your voice number – first, second or third. I wasn’t aiming for first voice because I wasn’t one of those damn long-haired girls standing at the far end of the choir reserved for first voice, all puffed up. I almost didn’t give a damn anymore. I would even settle for third voice, though it seemed to me to be the least important.

Grey slowly shook her head, adding almost indignantly: “No Voice.”

I wanted to take it stoically but, as always, my tears were more relentless than my dignity. I bowed my head, looking at the floor, so Braid had to bent her head quite low and look at me from below to be able to revel in my tears from up close.

“Do you want to be in a choir so badly?” Grey asked me in a more relenting tone as if she was just about to give me a reprimand but decided to let me off with a caution in the last minute.

I nodded, sniffing loudly.

“Come, now,” she said, turning away.

“I want to sing!” I said in a trembling voice that sounded even uglier now. But to sing in a choir, that was really a big wish of mine.

Braid nodded keenly, pretending that she only stayed to support me: “Yes, she really likes to sing, although ... not very well.”

Goran Vojnović – The Fig Tree

About the author



Photo by Tanja Draškić Savić

Goran Vojnović (1980) is a writer, poet, screenwriter and film director. The film *Good Luck Nedim* (he co-wrote the script with Marko Šantić) won the Heart of Sarajevo Award and was nominated for the European Film Academy's Best Short Film Award in 2006. He has directed three short films and his first feature film *Piran/Pirano* premiered in 2010. He exploded onto the Slovenian literary scene in 2008 with his debut novel *Čefurji raus!* (*Southern Scum Go Home!*). The novel became an instant bestseller and reaped all the major national literary awards, including the Kresnik Award for best novel of the year, was made into a theatre play and a movie (the latter was directed by the author himself), and translated into eight languages. His second novel *Yugoslavia, My Fatherland* (*Jugoslavija, moja dežela*, 2012) also received the Kresnik Award for best novel of the year, was made into a theatre play and translated into ten languages. *The Fig Tree* (*Figa*, 2016) is his third novel and was one of last year's most eagerly awaited books amongst readers.

About the book



The Fig Tree follows the intertwining stories of Aleksandar and Jana, Vesna and Safet, Jadran and Anja. And others. But mostly that of Jadran, a 30-something year-old, who tries to piece together the story of his family to help him understand his own story. Because he cannot understand why Anja walked out of their life, he tries to understand why, supposedly with the help of a suspicious pill bottle, his grandfather Aleksandar left. He tries to understand the withdrawal of his grandmother Jana, the disintegration of her memories, and her retreat into oblivion and dementia. Jadran tries to understand the departure of his father Safet, his disappearance from Ljubljana in the first year of the war in the Balkans. And he tries to understand his mother Vesna, her bewildering resentment of his grandfather, her silent disappointment with his father. Vojnović is a master storyteller and while fateful choices made by his characters are often dictated by historical realities of the turbulent times they live in, at its heart *The Fig Tree* is an intimate story of a family, of relationships, of love, freedom and the choices we make.

Excerpt

Translated by
Gregor Timothy Čeh

The Fig Tree

I picked up the book from the stool by the bed that Grandpa used as a nightstand and opened it at the point where there was a torn piece of newspaper tucked in between the pages. He always thought it was a shame to use the leather, cotton or paper bookmarks which, instead of inside his books, were rotting away in various untidy drawers and other messy corners of his house while their role was taken on by pencils, toothpicks, coins and other pointy or flat objects that happened to be at hand. His latter life was a series of unimportant details. Dried stains on shirts, remnants of food on plates, different coloured shoelaces, burnt out light-bulbs, chipped glasses, pens that didn't write, expired ID cards, long out of date horoscopes, keys without locks and locks without keys, all these to him were tiny details, of no consequence to anyone, for which he could not be bothered to waste his allotted time.

With his remaining hours rushing by, Grandpa never bothered to rummage through his house to find things that were created with a specific purpose, for example to be inserted in between pages of a book, for there were always plenty of other things in the immediate vicinity he and his sworn indifference could use to equal effect for the given and perhaps even more demanding task. He kept coffee in a mayonnaise jar and tipped it straight into the coffee pot, stirring it with the handle of the gas lighter and pouring it into empty plastic yoghurt pots whilst Grandma's beautiful ceramic sugar, salt and coffee pots, gold-plated coffee spoons and porcelain cups gathered dust in the display cupboard.

Mother lost her temper when he used his ID card as a bookmark and then returned the book to the library from where it was returned only once the book was borrowed again. Furious she set off on a hunt for bookmarks, turning out drawers, moving armchairs, cupboards and even the refrigerator, crawling under tables and beds and eventually, out of breath, placed seven bookmarks on Grandpa's stool and ordered him to use them. Against any expectations he promised her he would.

Grandpa, however, only read close to the stool in the evenings before he fell asleep and very few of the books he read ever landed there, so it wasn't long before he was once more sticking anything he came across between the pages, from electricians' business cards to fliers left by Jehovah's Witnesses. Most of the time though, he simply tore off a piece of newspaper and once when he was reading a really thick book he had the obituary with a photograph of Julia Morosin sticking out of it for months.

Her resigned face stared at me from the table in the living room, from Grandpa's armchair, from the top of the stove, from the hallway drawer, even from the bathroom floor. More than once I counted her eighty-seven years, her three daughters with their families, the days until the funeral before apprehensively looking away, until I eventually relieved poor Julia of her posthumous duties and, true to Grandpa's style, replaced her with just under half an article on a sailing regatta.

Despite the fact that everything in his house had immense freedom, that bathroom towels might be found sunbathing on the bedroom floor and dictionaries resting on the cistern above the toilet, my Grandpa was an extremely disciplined reader. He never finished reading mid-page, let alone mid-sentence. When he read he would not allow himself to be disturbed, even if the doorbell was ringing or something vaguely resembling a broth was boiling on the stove. He always read each chapter from beginning to end and if a chapter happened to be too long he always finished reading at the end of the first paragraph on the left page. This means it was easy to determine where Grandpa had finished his reading the previous night and figure out what the last ever sentence he had read in his life was.

I opened the book I found on the stool where he had tucked the torn piece of newspaper. The paragraph on the top of the left page was merely a last part of a sentence so I turned the page and read the paragraph from the beginning.

Over a century ago my ancestors on my father's side left what was then known as Galicia, the eastern-most part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now part of Western Ukraine) and settled in Bosnia Herzegovina that had recently been annexed to the Hapsburg Monarchy. My farming ancestors brought with them some beehives, ploughs, a few songs about the abandoned home and a recipe for perfect Borscht, a dish unknown until then in these parts of the world.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is a member of LAF – (Literature Across Frontiers)

www.lit-across-frontiers.org

The Center for Slovenian Literature is a non-governmental organization dedicated to literary and publishing activities. It was founded to contribute to the international promotion of Slovenian literature and began operating in 1999.

The Center is dedicated to attracting support for, and encouraging work in the following areas:

- making quality translations of contemporary and classic Slovenian literature possible,
- drawing the attention of international publishers to the rich, albeit not very well-known, heritage of Slovenian literature,
- presenting relevant information to the interested public in the international context.

In this way, the Center responds to the needs which other institutions in this field are either unable or unwilling to meet. While the Center's primary task is to address an international audience, it is no less committed to informing the Slovenian public about important international literary trends, authors and publishing events. It is open to collaboration with other local and international institutions and individuals working toward similar goals.

The Center finances its activities with funds raised both locally and internationally. Its priorities include, but are not limited to, creating computer-assisted databases of translations and translators; providing information to chosen target-audiences; presenting selected works and authors abroad; enabling, coordinating and promoting international collaboration; integrating into existing international programs and networks with similar aims; and developing a creative approach to the promotion of Slovenian literature.

The Center for Slovenian Literature supplies information on contemporary Slovenian literature to its foreign partners through mail and contacts at various fairs. It sponsors translations and translators' visits to literary events and residencies. It supplies translators with books and literary magazines; occasionally, it provides them with grants for translations given by the Slovenian Book Agency.

The Center for Slovenian Literature is the publisher of the *Aleph* book series, which includes new Slovenian literary works as well as translations of contemporary world literature. While the Slovenian authors are supported by the Slovenian Book Agency, the majority of translations are published with the help of foreign translation/publication grants. Over a hundred titles have been published in the series, some bilingual.

Co-financing Publications of Slovenian Authors in Foreign Languages

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Slovenian Book Agency (JAK)

Founded in 2009, the Slovenian Book Agency (JAK) is a government institution that deals with all actors in the book publishing chain, from authors to publishers and readers.

Subsidies to translator for the translation of Slovenian authors

The main form of international promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages. JAK annually publishes a call for applications for co-financing translations of Slovenian authors' books into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatre plays and comics. Applicants can be publishing houses, theatres, and individual translators. In each case, a contract is concluded with the translator, and therefore all funding goes directly to him or her. The subsidy covers up to 100 % of the translation costs. Grants cannot be awarded retroactively.

Mobility grants for Slovenian authors

The call for applications is published once a year. The applicant can be a Slovenian author who has been invited to a literary event abroad. The application must be enclosed with the invitation and the program of the event. The subsidy covers up to 100 % of eligible travel expenses.

Contact

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The Trubar Foundation

The Trubar Foundation is a joint venture of the Slovene Writers' Association (www.drustvo-dsp.si), Slovenian PEN and the Center for Slovenian Literature. The financial means for its activities are provided by the Slovenian Book Agency and by other sources. The aim of the Trubar Foundation is to subsidize publications of Slovenian literature in translation.

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies to publish Slovenian authors in their native languages. The Trubar Foundation contributes up to 50% of printing costs (see the form at: www.ljudmila.org/litcenter). It does not subsidize translation; translators can apply for translation grants directly through the Slovenian Book Agency www.jakrs.si

10
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from
SLOVENIA

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JAK SLOVENIAN
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LITERATURE