

Ajda Bračič

Kristina Kočan

Dijana Matkovič

Lukas Debeljak

Jedrt Maležič



LITERARY CRITICS' CHOICE

2023

Andreja Štepec

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Ana Schnabl

Pino Pograjc

AJDA BRAČIČ

Flying People

Leteči ljudje, Literatura, 2022



Photo by Veronika Bračič

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ajda Bračič (1990), architect, editor, curator and writer, is interested in intersections where space meets language, art and society. Since 2021 she has been running the Kajža platform dedicated to education on sustainable building and architectural renovation. She works with numerous architecture and culture media (Ekran, Delo, AirBeletrina, Hiše, Outsider, Razpotja, ETC, Literatura, etc.) on a regular or occasional basis.

Her poetry and short stories have been published in the magazines Literatura, Sodobnost, Rukopisi (RS), Medmet, Signaturen (DE) and Polja (RS), on Radio ARS and Radio Študent. She has also won a few awards in competitions. In 2018, the art collective Ignor issued a limited edition of booklets of her poetry, entitled *gravženroža*. In 2020, she was a finalist in the Pivec Publishing Poetry Competition, won the Beletrina Best Short Story Competition, and her story Škrlatica (Scarlet) was nominated for best short story by the magazine Sodobnost. She is one of the three Slovenian residents selected for this year's edition of the project Odysseus' Sanctuary.

Leteči ljudje (Flying People) is her debut short story collection. It was nominated for the Slovenian Best First Book Award in 2022.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The twenty stories featured in the collection *Flying People*, the debut of publicist and architect Ajda Bračič, cover the topics of transience, growing up, decisions missed or never made, love, death and human aspiration for progress in a distinctive, but incredibly meticulous and refined style. Flying people are individuals trapped in the intimate moments of minor turning points marking their past and future. One of the collection's distinguishing features is its clever play on time. The masterful shifting between different points in time and the intertwining of various narrative strands into complete stories produce unexpected twists and unpredictable connections between the events and the protagonists. The storylines, marked by short circuits and open possibilities, stretch out like the wiring of powerlines through the hustle and bustle of a city. The protagonists often dream about the lives that they could be living, which appear before them sometimes as ghosts and sometimes as completely tangible alternatives. Quitting and passiveness are common themes of the collection, but often as a (paradoxically) key element of active resistance to the circumstances at hand. Flying people take place in the crossroads between various destinies, where anything is possible, even if just for a moment. With its clear poetics and playful writing approach, *Flying People* tests the capacities of the short story format, stretching the boundaries of literature itself. Reading it feels like a new trick, a new narrative procedure or literary treat is waiting behind every corner: from extremely short stories, almost prose poems, portraying the essence of a particular atmosphere with confident strokes of a pen in merely a few sentences, to a story in dialogue, written in the form of e-mails, along with speeches, prose refrains, essayist reflections and longer, almost novel-like writings.



EXCERPT

When You're Absolutely Sure

"When you're absolutely sure, come and knock," said the wrinkly-faced woman and disappeared behind the closed door.

I wonder what she meant by that? The room was only a few feet long and its walls completely covered in wood panelling. A flickering candle stood in the corner –

But what did she mean by that? You could certainly say that I had never found myself in a similar situation before. I could have just walked up to the door, but I didn't move. Perhaps I would have felt better if the room was long, bright, instead of that small wooden box? Yes, it is quite possible that the room was completely different – with shoulder-high green paintwork and a single window looking out onto the park –

A silver mirror hung above the sink. My face floated in it like a bodiless apparition.

I don't remember what we talked about before. I don't even know if I knew the woman or not. "When you're absolutely sure, come and knock," she said. She had a cap that covered part of her hair, the kind cooks or lab assistants wear, and the hair that was visible under the cap (right by the corner of her face) was dark red with greyish strands and combed back tightly. Her face had gaping, canyon-sized wrinkles, adorning her lips with heavy draperies; could her name be Marija?

Anyway – there was definitely a bed in the room. I'm not sure if it had a metal or a wooden frame, but in any case, it was very narrow. I didn't want to lie on it. I had the feeling that I had heard something like that before, that all of it might have happened to someone else long ago.

It seemed as if Marija would not come back on her own. So I'm alone in this, until I decide? I was frustrated: she could have divulged a bit more. It seemed totally impossible to reach a decision about something I knew nothing about. I felt like running after her immediately and knocking, but the door had completely blended with the wall. So what was I supposed to do?

Here and there, the wooden panelling would come apart a little and seemed to let in some daylight. I put the suitcase on the bed (of course, the suitcase!) and started taking out my clothes. Thinking about having to sleep on that bed was giving me the chills. All my clothes were white. I was worried about getting them dirty with my fingers, which had mud on them –

Who knows, maybe Marija and I did talk before, and I forgot. All of a sudden, the room seemed like the tight belly of a sinking ship. Warm water enveloped my ankles. Maybe all I need to do is hold my breath?

And anyhow – one cannot be sure about anything in this place.

Right then, the room suddenly looked like a hospital, and I could see the park through the window. A few children were playing outside: they decided to make a circle around some object on the floor that was hidden from sight. A dead bird maybe? One time, I found a piece of a chewed-up wing on the ground. The window could not be opened, and soon after that, it was gone altogether.

"When you're completely sure, come and knock." God! About what, sure about what? That I want to get out of here?

Oh, Marija, I thought – this is a fine mess you got me into! And yet, the room was not that bad. If nothing else, something was always going on and changing, and once I had gotten somewhat used to it, it was actually fun to guess how the room would transform next. First it was the wood panels, then the hospital, then the body of a ship and a narrow glacier fissure. Inside that fissure, I tried to claw my way up to reach the narrow ice shelf with what seemed to be the sky overhead. My fingernails left wide dirt stains in the whiteness. When I slipped, I fell backwards and landed on that awful bed.

Maybe I could forgive Marija for bringing me here – is that the question? Or is the question if I want to bring someone here to succeed me?

Instead of a window, there was a gaping hole in the wall, covered with a thin, veiny membrane that looked alive. It was criss-crossed with tiny pulsating red and blue veins and felt moist to the touch. I could hear voices talking outside. It finally began to dawn on me where I was.

The bed underneath was sinking like quicksand. The feeling was pleasant and terrifying at the same time, and I felt like giving in, disappearing – and yet, it was clear that all of that unpleasant business could only end one way.

I got up and approached the wall: the membrane tightened as if listening. The narrow room had started to grow on me, so I had a hard time accepting the thought of leaving. Perhaps I should write a few lines in the guest book? I pushed away the thought and glanced at my old face in the mirror one last time.

Yes, yes – I am almost completely sure now.

LUKAS DEBELJAK

To Know Like Water

Poznati kot voda, Center za slovensko književnost, 2022



Photo by: Lar Nikolaj Leskovar

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lukas Debeljak, born in 1999 in Ljubljana. Studied philosophy at Deep Springs College in California and political thought at Bard College in Berlin. His poetry has been published in both Slovenia (Dialogi, Idiot, Literatura, Zamenjave) and abroad (Enklava, Slavicum Press, Rukopisi), and translated into English, Czech, Serbian, Spanish, and other languages. In 2017 he published *Circular/Circumferential Speed* (Mala Ignorirana Knjižica), which was reprinted. In 2022 he published his debut poetry collection *To Know Like Water* (CSK), which was selected for the literary festival Pranger 2023. He works as a translator. He lives and works in Berlin.

ABOUT THE BOOK

To Know Like Water is a polymorphous, polyrhythmical, hybrid poetry non-project, an anti-project, it is a poetry of the body, of the space that the body inhabits, and a voice that is constantly moving, permeating everything with the provocation of a wounded locality, with light and singing. The discursive lyricism of Lukas Debeljak is based on a risky, yet successful attempt at the incarnation of the voice. [...]

Restlessness, the gap, singing from the sinkhole of abstraction, all of this is a cry from down below that calls for presence, albeit through this shiny negation, beyond any kind of superficiality: look, we are here, bare, vulnerable, we are speaking, singing, dancing, come be water yourself. If you are a body.

(From the foreword by Ivan Antić)



EXCERPT

Testament

for Pavel

the symbolic order of things we received in the form of a testament. not in any sort of document: in the form of a testament. the symbolic order of things is expressed in the form of a distant and naked figure that moves through the water. it swims. *plava*. we know everything about this figure. the complex of tangled topological sequences that make up the movement of the figure's body and the movement of the figure's body that makes up the complex of tangled topological sequences can be described both by a language that names and by a language that does not name. it swims. *plava*. thus: blue, light blue, light light blue, a different blue, light light blue, light blue, blue, blue, a different blue, light blue, light light blue, and so on, but not exactly so on. the language by which we describe figures has the character of a model but also deviates from the model. by the same token, we know what happens when the distant and naked figure that moves through the water and expresses the symbolic order opens its mouth and starts to use its vocal cords. the symbolic order of things is expressed in the form of a distant and naked figure that moves through the water. swims. *plava*. everything about the figure feels like a machine, an animal, music, speech, science, like everything we know. we know everything about this figure. it swims. *plava*. the only thing we do not know about this figure is where we are viewing it from, and who it is who inhabits our vantage point. it swims. *plava*. the symbolic order of things is expressed in the fact that we know nothing about this order yet know everything about this figure. the symbolic order of things is expressed in the fact that we know nothing about this order yet know everything about this figure. the symbolic order of things we received in the form of a testament. not in any sort of document: we received nothing about the symbolic order of things. we received a testament and the testament is the symbolic order of things. a distant and naked figure that swims, *plava*.

Where Singing Goes

*

the thing
that happened there
was nothing.
words captured in socrates' voice,
which goes its way free of the body.
how you tell me:
that's where it happened,
the thing.

*

where singing goes –
where that which is ever being described
is already finished
here in this light in this thing
in this light between us
here o.

*

i recognize what i am saying
as everything the song is about
until you are listening to me.

when you hear me it becomes
what i am saying a song
everything about which i recognize.

*

all the differences between

between o and 'o'
between blue and blue

between everything else and everything else
between blue and blue.

*

i received a voice so I could say:

was i heard?

*

i received a voice
so the thing i don't know how to say
could be said

in my own voice

KRISTINA KOČAN

Settlements

Selišča, Litera, 2022

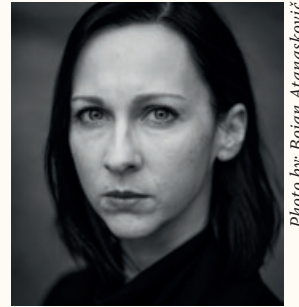


Photo by: Bojan Atanasković

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristina Kočan (1981) is an established Slovenian poet and translator. She holds a PhD in English and American literature. She has published four poetry collections, a multimedia book *s|prehod* (Stroll/Transition, 2019) and a collection of short stories *Divjad* (Wild game, 2019). Her first poetry collection *Šara* (Junk) came out in 2008 at Litera Publishing and was nominated for Best Debut Book of the Year. Her second book of poetry *Kolesa in murve* (Bicycles and Mulberries) came out at the end of 2014 at the Itadakimasu Institute. In 2018, Litera published her poetry collection *Šivje* (Stitchery). Her last book of poetry *Selišča* (Settlements) won the author the Veronika Prize and a nomination for the Jenko Award and the Velenjica Cup of Immortality. Since her debut, her poetry has received glowing reviews and critiques. In 2017, she was selected to represent Slovenia as one of the poets of the European poetry platform Versopolis. Her poems have been translated into more than 10 languages and featured in a number of international anthologies, including *Europe in Poems: The Versopolis Anthology*, *Other Words/Druge besede* and *Ulysses' Cat*.

In addition to writing poetry, Kristina Kočan is a renowned literary translator, translating mostly poetry, as demonstrated by her oeuvre, which includes a book of selected poems by American poet Carolyn Forché *Kamnlom duš* (A Quarry of Souls, 2022), an anthology of contemporary short prose by Native American writers *Po toku navzgor* (Upstream, 2021), a collection of selected poems by American poet Audre Lorde *Postaje* (Stations, 2009), and an anthology of post-1950 African American poetry – *Govoreči boben* (Speaking Drum, 2006).

ABOUT THE BOOK

The poetry collection *Settlements* is an upgrade and expansion, but also a radicalisation of the poet's distinct, carefully constructed and refined poetic expression, marked by clean verses, prominent sonority, use of intertextual techniques, which become an entirely organic element of the author's poetics in *Settlements*. Moreover, the poet lays out the themes of the book in a remarkable way: in *Settlements*, the duality of private/public, interior/exterior, intimate/social topics, historical realities/memories coexists without a short circuit, without a palpable and visible stitch, instead it merely metamorphoses into a new entity, i.e. poetry or better yet poetry collection. It is an exceptional achievement for such specific literary techniques to surpass the feeling of intervention into an easy flow of the poem or poetic tissue. The same can be said of the fact that this poetry organically combines the most diverse of topics and issues.

Settlements is a very contemporary poetry collection, known not to operate with a single viewpoint bearing a clear thread from one poem to the next, but to undertake an even more fundamental position; the kind that allows it to juxtapose various perspectives and build them into a new organic whole. *Settlements* rethinks certain established notions, be it historicization, geographic boundaries, anthropocentrism or something else, adding an important piece to the mosaic of understanding the world around us as a complex entirety, which can never be truly broken down and whose individual parts can never be truly comprehended without the wider context.

Due to its singular, attentive, refined and convincing poetics, *Settlements* is an important contribution to the way we think about the world around us, as well as to the contemporary poetry.



last call

in early morning in the shadows
 chasing trees in blue
 magpie feather all of
 my love poems
 are for one who doesn't read
 waiting in prey in a rolling clod
 on the scree in the last
 call of the doe in the beak
 of the kestrel trembling
 above me when he
 is in front of me
 pairs of jays take flight
 into the forest I see
 flocks of brown birds
 clouds descend
 on his eyelashes
 tongues speak only
 one thing in me
 in the firm step over
 the fall heather

medusa

a shimmering little piece of earth
 a boundless beach like platinum
 a long way to the sea
 from the surrounding dunes
 it is beauty it is a free-floating
 medusa movement with pulse
 waiting in the shallow water
 to rise with the tide
 for the current to carry it out
 a wild translucent dancer
 one against the other against the water
 with gentle collisions
 sending faint scents
 far away on the winds
 no charm in captivity
 in that serene splendor
 like a beast in a cage like a butterfly
 behind glass what is caught
 in its tentacles destroys it
 smuggled in the silence of the sea
 in the reflection of a cloud
 golden samphire gently blossoms

Translated by

**Erica Johnson
Debeljak**

JEDRT MALEŽIČ

Square Pegs, Round Holes

Križci, krožci, Goga, 2022



Photo by: Boštjan Pucelj

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jedrt Maležič (1979) is a writer and a literary translator from English and French. Her first collection of short stories *Težkomentarci* (Heavymentals), published in 2016 and shortlisted for the best debut award, has opened and demystified the topic of staying in a psychiatric hospital as a totalitarian institution in the 21st century. The following book, *Bojne barve* (War Paint), shortlisted for the Novo Mesto Award, discusses the topic of several different LGBT entities and their troubles in coming out in a closed or hostile society. In 2018, she published her first novel *Vija vaja ven* (Eeny, meenie, mynie, moe), which tackles the subject of dangerous new age mentality and spiritual cults. Her last two novels, *Napol morilke* (Almost Murderers) and *Križci, krožci* (Square Pegs, Round Holes) were published by the publishing house Goga.

ABOUT THE BOOK

“So which one of you is the mother?” is the question that arises not only when Giga has to face the restraining order prohibiting her from seeing her child, but has marked her relationship with Alina ever since Zarja’s birth. Now the family that used to fight for equality in the world of heterosexual parents has disintegrated into two mums, two homes and Urban, Alina’s new partner, which causes Giga to sink into depression and leads to her breakup with the suffocating lesbian scene. But first, she orchestrates the biggest disaster in the pandemic capital on the longest night of the year. The humorous and critical novel *Noughts and Crosses* shows that even the unhappiest of endings can lead to the most beautiful beginnings. Her novel *Napol morilke* was nominated for the Kresnik Best Novel Award 2022.



EXCERPT

The doorman comes and gets me a few moments after I offer myself up to the sniper looks in Da Bar. Urban’s green bowtie is sticking out of his shirt pocket. I give it a little tap for good measure, as if unaware of what I’m doing.

Gruša gets up and, with the best of intentions, tries to give an awkward hug to our friend, “the bar owner”, to smooth the Wild West stand-off between myself, all weak from pot and alcohol, and the furious Urban, whose pride, judging from the giggles of random spectators, has been crushed to the ground.

The bouncers are coming. I take advantage of my newly acquired charisma and, despite my shaky knees, start gyrating on the dancefloor like a fucking fury. It must look terrible from the outside, but – small victories.

If they catch me and throw me out, I want to go out dancing.

There are a few of them, surrounding and closing in on me, the hipster disco music stops, the white surfaces of the bar are lit up under the florescent lights, but the bouncers are black black, except for the Security sign.

I almost let myself get caught, almost give in, then start dancing again, slipping away like Aska escaping the wolf in Andrić’s fairy-tale dance for survival. It feels like I’m barefoot, like dancing to the rhythm of an invisible drum is the only thing that can save me. Step one, step two, I go flying in the air, step three, step four...

Even if the music is turned off, even if this is the end of the year of all years, even so... until the bouncer twists my arm behind my back.

I see Urban, shaking his head in pity at the corner of my stage. He doesn’t see that I’ve tricked him, he doesn’t see out of his pathetic, sell-out of a bar.

Gruša is standing there with a finger on her chin, as if contemplating what she was thinking, abducting me and bringing me here. What is Gruša doing? Meh, I don't give a damn about Gruša. She's beautiful, and that's about it. Maybe there was a time when she was on my side, or maybe not, I don't care about her starry eyes. "People say someone has stars in their eyes," Zarja blurted out one day, then proceeded to ask me how stars can fit in a person's eyes if they're so big.

I'm a star in my own movie, a Western, even as I'm being led to the exit by force and under the stares of unknown moralists, I still got it. I have that royal aura. Some of the youths are shaking their heads, others are doing tsk tsk tsk, and I'm sure at least a couple of them are rooting for shit to hit the fan right now.

I'm not ashamed. *Will you remember me, you dirty piece of shit? Oh, who am I? What's my fucking name?*

We stop just before the exit, and I admit to the bouncer that he is hurting me. "Well, you shouldn't have gotten so wasted," he says, "a lot of good it did you." He lets me go mercifully.

There is a sign hanging over the toilets:

Mini slammer: EUR 4

Maxi slammer: EUR 5

Giga slammer: EUR 7.

"Wait, wait!" I cry out. "Giga slammers?!"

"I forgot something," I mumble to the bouncer that escorted me, and disappear from his view.

In the cloud of royal magic that has once again descended upon me from god knows where, I rush back inside, towards the bar, jump on the barstool leg, climb nimbly onto the bar, boldly defying the laws of gravity. Everyone, literally everyone is watching me now, pop-eyed.

All of a sudden, it seems so high. I have to kick off the drinks standing ready on the bar, which suddenly feels like the back of a giant horse.

I yell: "Giga slammers for everyone, on Giga!!!"

And I kick off the bouncer and kick again so as not to fall, and I keep kicking until they knock me off the bar. I fall face-down, on the floor again, this unroyal floor, rock bottom.

Too many things *mean* too much here. And all these signs portend evil.

Her eyes are so strangely and numbly warm, as if she has been scared for an eternity and she can now finally cuddle up against my all-so-smooth skin, right under my armpit. And I will never move this skin. I know I can't. I was never particularly wise, but in this case, I know it's pointless to move away.

The room is filled with smoke and my cawing acquaintances. One of them brought her along, unsuspecting, into this gossiping lesbian pack, and sat her on the sofa next to the birthday girl, me. I usually lack the imagination for small talk, but surprisingly, I keep the thread of conversation going somehow, thinking up inappropriate things to ask, just to make that look last, to keep the silver, laser filament between our lines from breaking, to stretch out this brittle time, which doesn't snap.

She has a ride home, but she stays anyway.

As I put away the slippers of the leaving cackle in the dresser, I have to stoop down right to the bottom drawer, tipsy, forced into a little squat. And as I stand up slowly, trying not to fall, I feel her hand on my stomach from behind, and I know that we are onto something that is not only pointless but also impossible to resist, it is too big, too strong. She turns me around oh so slowly, oh no, this line again, how is this possible and how very blue, I've never seen such blue eyes before how oh how is this even for god's sake.

The softest lips, I don't know if I can handle it.

The beginning, yes, the very beginning, but of something big, something so very big, I know. I can do it.

I can do it, even if everything I ever thought I had gets washed away one day by this beautiful tide.

DIJANA MATKOVIĆ

Why I Don't Write

Zakaj ne pišem, Cankarjeva založba, 2021



Photo by: S. Zupancič

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dijana Matković (born 1984) is a socially engaged writer, translator and editor. She started her career as the founder and editor of a student magazine, and later founded and edited a literary portal, which became a springboard for many young intellectuals and writers of her generation. As a journalist, Dijana has worked as a columnist and reviewer for all the major Slovenian newspapers. Her first book was a short story collection called 'In the Name of the Father' (2013). She translates from the languages of former Yugoslavia and is now the editor-in-chief of the international opinion portal Disenz.

ABOUT THE BOOK

How to survive in a world where you can't pay rent, can't afford to focus, be healthy or remain principled? Dijana Matković tells a powerful story of searching for a room of her own in the late stages of capitalism.

'Why I don't write' is an autofiction, essay-based novel, which contains scenes from the author's life that are heavily intertwined with social and literary reflection, and which speaks of the forces that prevent those down below existing and creating. However, the title could just as well be 'Zakaj pišem' (Why I Write), as it also demonstrates that injustices can be juxtaposed by transcending and merging identities in class consciousness and by creating a wider, supportive community. It is a novel of the here and now, a novel of the society of the late capitalism of the 21st century, which Dijana Matković has given a voice – open-minded to pain, permeated with analytical doubts and combative in her demand for the truth.

It is a coming-of-age story for Millennials and Generation Z. How to grow up or even live in a world where no steady jobs are available, you can't pay your rent and can't afford medical or living expenses? It also touches on how to be a socially engaged artist in such a world, and more so, a woman in a post-#MeToo world.

Dijana, a daughter of working-class immigrants, tells the story of her difficult childhood and adolescence, how she became a journalist and later a writer in a society full of prejudices, glass ceilings and obstacles. And of how she gradually became a stereotypical 'success story', even though she still struggles with writing because she can't afford a 'room of her own'.



EXCERPT

"The problem with your position," *my beloved* suddenly said in one of our eternal debates about writing, "is that you're neither one nor the other. You come from a poor, working-class background, but you can't say you make a decent living as an intellectual. You're not an immigrant, but you're not Slovenian either," and he could go on listing all the things I'm not, I thought later.

"Who are you?"

I laughed at the question. Laughter, the first defence against sudden pain. He had reopened an old wound.

Who are you, you who doesn't belong anywhere? I heard an undertone that wasn't really there, but the underlying question sounded suspiciously like one of those threatening questions, causing my brain to sound the alarm. An untraumatized person wouldn't regard the question "who are you" as threatening, especially when the person asking is someone close to you. Because it wasn't. He was just challenging me to a debate: he wanted me to give more thought to my position to be able to write about it more accurately. After all, the question he posed is the kind I ask myself all the time – you can't write, not well, anyway, without answering who you are, where you are and where you're from – but coming from his mouth, it triggered me. It reawakened my sense of isola-

tion, of shame. Of terrible loneliness, dislocation. My feelings accumulated and intensified. And what I ended up hearing in his question was:

What kind of a freak are you?

I wanted to crawl under the covers, the safest refuge at my disposal, which has to be available at all times whenever my trauma reappears, I was drawing the blinds in my mind which, in itself, gave me a temporary peace of mind, I saw myself leaving everything that I couldn't or didn't want to deal with outside the doors of my room.

I have done that a hundred times, perhaps a thousand: waiting behind closed doors until the danger of further emotional pain passes. Until the existing pain stops stinging. The *I am not here* game that I had perfected in my childhood. I know the steps to initiate the game and turn off everything else, inside out. Draw the blinds, put the phone on flight mode, turn on Netflix, maybe open a book in better times, bed.

I was ready for another self-shutdown when I suddenly remembered the encouraging words I had written down somewhere a while back:

Just start gradually. Start anywhere.

Shit.

There is nothing quite so irritating as being confronted with your own piece of advice (a stupid one, I want to tell myself now) at a point when you really don't feel like following it.

I try anyway.

Gradually.

You can start anywhere. Even here.

It is late autumn. There is mud outside the terraced house, which is unpainted and is missing a balcony railing, and in the mud is a pile of unsawed firewood, in stark contrast to the neat little gardens and climbing roses coiling around the balcony railings outside the neighbouring houses. Dad turns into the driveway with one of his Bosnian friends, in a beige Renault 4, traditional Bosnian music booming from the radio. "Turn that down, we're not in Bosnia," he tells him as he pulls the handbrake. The neighbours stare from behind the fences. His friend, whom he calls *Mallet* on account of his evident physical strength, jumps and grabs onto the concrete of the bare balcony, swinging.

Things would have been much different if mum's older brother, a *Gastarbeiter* in Switzerland, hadn't loaned my parents the money to take out a loan so they could start building this wretched terraced house, stuffed between the others which, except for their architectural design, looked nothing alike. The downfall of the companies where they worked, of Yugoslavia and their marriage which, unlike the former common state, was not much to begin with, all happened too fast for them to finish the house. Instead of tiles or wood, the interior staircase was just bare concrete covered with mats or *krapare*, made from scrap rags that my older sister and I had to beat outside the house every weekend – again, in full view of our neighbours. The top floor forever remained a mysterious, glass wool darkness. Whenever anything broke, which was often, like when my sister turned on the water in the kitchen and the tap came off, it stayed that way, broken.

Things would have been much different if we had stayed in the block of flats below the terraced houses where a lot of immigrants lived because of the nearby companies where they worked. Lived, like I said, until the companies started to go under, after which they just tried to survive. Then we wouldn't have been practically the only blue-collar family in an all-Slovenian, white-collar neighbourhood. We wouldn't have stood out. Other people would have played traditional music or lacked the money for a balcony railing – one day, I would fall from that balcony trying to catch my slip-on, I would be fine, but the neighbour would yell at my mum for not keeping an eye on me. She really wasn't. She was probably too busy thinking about how – after my dad leaving and my sister running away from home very early on – the two of us would manage. Everything, from the hardship, the divorce, the judgmental looks of our neighbours, had probably pushed her to the edge, both emotionally and mentally.

I knew nothing of that at the time, nor did I have the capacities to understand it. Things just kept happening to me for a long time. I was a child. Who was constantly ashamed.

My shame was built in, it had been formed in the womb, like my stomach, lungs, large intestine. I was ashamed of my mother and the conditions that we lived in. I was ashamed because my mother didn't know how to behave in any social setting, because she didn't understand any of it. I was ashamed of the poverty. I was ashamed of that loud traditional music. And, as a result – I was ashamed of myself.

BRANE MOZETIČ

Notes of an Activist

Aktivistovi zapisi, ŠKUC, 2022



Photo by: Diana Andelić

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brane Mozetič (b. 1958) is a Slovenian poet, writer, editor of the Aleph and Lambda book series and translator from French (Rimbaud, Genet, Foucault, etc.), best known as an author of homoerotic literature. His oeuvre extends to 16 poetry collections, a book of short stories, three novels and six children's picture books. He has edited four anthologies of LGBT literature and several presentations of contemporary Slovenian literature. He has more than 70 books in translation, his poetry collection *Banalije* (Banalities, 2003) alone being translated into 13 languages, making him one of the most translated contemporary Slovenian authors. He also organises translation workshops, readings of Slovenian authors abroad, a small literary and music festival Living Literature, the Ljubljana LGBT Film Festival, etc.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Notes of an Activist are written mostly in the form of diary entries recording random moments from a long life of social engagement. Sometimes the poems assume the voice or the perspective of a perpetrator or a victim, at other times that of an active observant. These are not scenes of triumph, reconciliation, acceptance, inclusion, but most often express deep disappointment, failure, even utter despair, anguish... The verses take us to the scene of the crime, a blatantly obvious one, as the verbal, psychological and physical violence against the queer community intensifies or takes on subtler forms, such as social, institutional or political pressure, banishment from public places, withheld funding, etc.

The collection is a minute topography of struggles, not only relating to pure social activism for the rights, public visibility and work of the LGBT community, but mainly intimate attempts at connection, liberated sexuality, pleasure, sensuality and love. A free queer existence. While writing, editing, the Pride Parade, demonstrations, festivals and events are relevant to the poems' context, Mozetič always frames these topics around a person and their (tragic) fate. That is the merit of this collection which, despite its documentary format, is not a set of dry and raw data, just a *bare branch* or *a pile of excavated bones*, but throbs like an erect penis and a yearning heart at the same time. A poem as a device that not only records but also continuously creates the life of a gay man. So that this life is finally important, recognised, (forever) present in life: "If they erase all the stories, and this chair, they will also erase / me." *Notes of an Activist* may deal with disturbing facts, but hidden underneath them is an endless poetic (activist!) sensitivity to the fellow human being, to injustice, the desire to love and to protect the innocent. As well as innocent love desires.



EXCERPT

Today, I've carried away the last remaining chair. With a black metallic frame. With a wooden seat and back rest. In bright red. A chair like any other. Nothing special. How many people have sat on it in those thirty years. How many stories they have told. I listened to them. Or didn't. I'm watching the white walls. The empty shelves. Outside, the protestors are lying down on the streets. Throwing paper airplanes. While I'm here with this chair. Which tried to change the world. They might pick up the last little airplane someday. Gazing into the white walls and the empty shelves. Today, I've carried away the last chair. I need to save it, I was telling myself. If they erase all the stories, along with this chair, they will erase myself too. They will erase the

lying people, the little airplanes, themselves, just like this, in passing, the ground beneath our feet will cave in.

I'm standing on the Triple Bridge, right outside the public restroom. Trying to explain to the tourists the significance of public restrooms in the history of the gay community. They surely can't comprehend the edgy shuffling around in front of the urinals as you stood there, pretending to be pissing while watching the cocks, looking for the sign based on which the two pairs of eyes met. At times, this is how you were caught by an agent, who took you to the police station. I'm speaking about the signs, the language. A whole raft of religious terms was in circulation. Public restrooms were called chapels. You went to pray in the chapel. There you'd kneel down, took Communion and there were lots of angels floating around, you'd also happen to meet the odd fallen angel. There was also much innocence in this language. Such as violet sellers. But also the knitting, referring to the laborious process of never being too sure whether you'd knit anything up. Much later, the terminology modernized, we were no longer in the closet, some of us were called double agents, but also Mother Teresas, viragos, mimosas, the bear-hunting grounds opened. Still, how can you explain to tourists it's not just about the words, expressions, stresses, many casual words have a different hue, some other light that they cannot see. As if carrying a totally different meaning: friend, freedom, peace, family, world, man, woman, child, life, death...

It was back in the year 2003 as were we planning our Pride Parade. We could not avoid being constantly told that the mayors and mayoresses should deliver their speeches, faggots like to embrace rulers so much. Also, the initiative was put on the table that a priest should also give a speech, he's not gay, said the activists, but he supports our cause. I did not comprehend this wish, I'd never been to church, so I kept forgetting that many of them lived in sin. A fierce dispute escalated among us, leading to a split in activism for several years, so the church had got their way again. The priest ended up not having his speech at the parade. In a month, he hung up his cassock and established the Kapis group designed for healing homosexuals. They'd paste up their posters across the country, on lampposts and in health centers: *Do I really have to be gay?* I don't know how many they attracted. All in all, there's an increasing number of conformists, clericalists, collaborationists, fascists among us.

Translated by
Andrej Peric

PINO POGRAJC

Trgetanje

Trgetanje, IA, 2022



Photo by: Goran Tomičič

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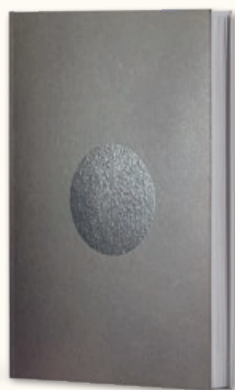
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pino Pograjc, born in 1997, is currently in his last year of dual-subject MA studies of English and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. He grew up in Kamnik, where (as a teenager) he first read his poems in front of an audience at the local slam poetry competition. He has been attending Brane Mozetič's poetry workshops since he completed his undergraduate Comparative Literature studies with his thesis *The Role of Civic Engagement in Brane Mozetič's Poetry*, after which he came into contact with the poet. In 2021 he spent a semester on a study exchange at St. Mary's College of Maryland in the USA. In 2022, the newly-formed, alternative publishing house Črna skrinjica ("Black Box") published his literary debut *Trgetanje* on the initiative of editor Dejan Koban. The poetry collection received the award for Best Literary Debut at the 38th Slovenian Book Fair. In 2022 he also became a member of the jury for the Ljubljana LGBT Film Festival, the oldest film festival of its kinds in Europe. At the end of 2022, *Trgetanje* was included in the "Books of the Year" list, compiled by *Mladina* magazine. In 2023, he joined the international poetry project POT-VOT (Poets of Today – Voices of Tomorrow), which aims to introduce contemporary poetry to secondary school students.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The poetry collection *Trgetanje* (the title being a portmanteau of "trganje" and "drgetanje" – "ripping" and "shivering" in Slovene) includes a foreword written by Veronika Razpotnik: "*I taste blood // and ask for more*, the poet writes in his poem 'machismo'. We, the readers of *Trgetanje*, can easily identify with this verse, because we eagerly lick the sweat and blood that flow throughout the collection and we cannot tear our tongues away from it. Each new poem reveals an intertwining of difficult and painful themes, which Pograjc describes with remarkable sensitivity, masterfully avoiding self-pity. The lyrical subject's bouquet of traumas includes psychological disorders, illness and alcoholism in the family, and a series of unhappy, impersonal relationships with men. [...] The delicate poetic voice, which oftentimes nevertheless has more than a hint of cynicism, plays with lyrics from popular music and words said by people close to the protagonist. There is also civic engagement, not an angry one, however, but one full of regret. Readers with weak stomachs, who would like to be given a break from the *emotional rollercoaster* [...], are informed by the poet in part six of the cycle 'primal fear preys': *oof // sorry pal, I'm not the one who can*. The title of the collection is clear: we can expect a slow ripping in the chest, one cardiac muscle fiber per poem. At best."



EXCERPT

primal fear preys

III

when i arrived at the hospital,
i had to undress,
put on white pajamas
and hand over my phone

my mom's last words
before they took me in
were

*first they'll observe you,
then they'll transfer you
to another ward*

from behind the locked door
of the closed ward
i heard animal screams

when they opened the door, a sound barrier,
the bedlam crashed against me

they escorted me to my bed,
each person i saw
was playing a carefully assigned role

the security guard, the nurse,
the silent killer, the youthful friend,
the pretty temptation, the ugly screamer,
and many others,
who were orchestrating
my own personal
truman show

IV

you can't run away from psychosis,
you can only postpone it,
so i projected the outside world's lust for murder
onto the microcosm
of the closed ward

at night i heard screams
and became convinced
that the nurses
were flaying the patients
with no next of kin

the thought kept coming back

they're going to kill me

during my parents' visits
i advised them
to speak softly
because *they hear everything, they hear everything*

*Translated by the author
and proofread by*
Jernej Županič and
Rawley Grau

during my brother's visit
i stared in confusion
at his tears

JANA PUTRLE SRDIĆ

Over a Vast Plane Under the Sky

Po celi ravnini pod nebom, Center za slovensko književnost, 2022



Photo by: Nada Zgank

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jana Putrle Srdić is a poet, writer, art & science producer from Ljubljana with four published poetry books and a novel *Po celi ravnini pod nebom*, selected for translation into Spanish by the publishing house Gog y Magog (Buenos Aires). Twice she was nominated for the Jenko Award, and once for the Veronika Award. Poetry collections in translation are: *Puede pasar cualquier cosa* (Buenos Aires, 2011), *Este poema lo paga el pez* (Madrid, 2015), *În noaptea asta gândacii vor ieși din pământ* (Bucharest, 2015), *Anything Could Happen* (New York, 2014), and *Diese Nacht kommen Käfer aus der Erde gekrochen* (Ljubljana, 2018). Her work has appeared in 16 languages and she has read her poetry in many countries around the world.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The debut novel *Over a Vast Plane Under the Sky* (2022) opens with Hana's sudden, tragic loss of a man to whom she submitted as his 'toy' in a Dominant/subordinate (D/s) sado-masochistic relationship. Besides him she has lost the sense of belonging to the world and nature that she remembers from childhood. Hana's urge to move is facilitated by the disappearance of a literary friend in Buenos Aires. Her quest begins in Ljubljana, and ends in the extreme terrain of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost point of the South American continent before Antarctica.

(Re-)connectedness appears with fellow travellers, while in parallel, her awareness heightens of the landscape and animal world moving and interacting around her. Written in poetic fragments, the central message of the novel is conveyed through these parallel 'love affairs'. Hana learns through having a sexual bond with another woman a refreshingly alternative, egalitarian way of relating to her fellow human beings. But her affair with the natural world holds an existential importance for her that is even more profound than human relationships. (*Sue Vickerman*)



EXCERPT

"And now, what should I do about the wolf pack? It will be dark soon."

"Mhm. And cold."

"Ok. I know how to make a fire, but do I have matches?"

"Everything you have is around you."

"There is not much in the inventory."

"You're in the middle of the woods."

"Hmm... branches? Surely you're not suggesting I should rub some sticks? You're not serious. Alright, let's do it... at home I at least have paper to start a fire, and steel wool and chips of wood, a lighter..."

*"Wishful thinking won't do you any good right now. The wolves are about to eat your tribe."
"Wolves don't just attack people."*

"Maybe not the scared wolves that we have today. But those giants from the old days, starving after a long winter, would attack anything that moved."

"Is that smoke?"

"It is, you're doing well. Just keep at it."

"I'm running out of energy."

"You need fire, not smoke."

"It's fine, it's fine. My battery is down to two bars. Then we eat. Look, a flame. Fire!"

Igor smiles, looking at her as she presses buttons on the console, saving her people from the cold, from hunger, the wolves and the Chippewa defending their territory. In the end, when the avatar

wears herself out, when the losses are great, Hana irritably throws the console on the armchair and paces around the room.

"I don't like these fake worlds, these emotional manipulations! How can you spend half your life inside them?"

"What is so fake, taking care of others? It's also about having a new experience."

"When I read books, I think. But here I only experience, I'm immersed in situations, I can only react."

"Like in life? Didn't you think about how you're going to start a fire?"

"It's too fast, too strong."

"Intensity is a matter of habit. When someone from the countryside comes to the city, they have a hard time handling all the stimuli, but eventually they get used to it. Speed and time are relative."

"Our bodies are not relative."

"That's true, the synapses can only take so much. But for me, there is nothing wrong with simulation, reality is one, too."

"Who dreams reality? A computer simulation was built by people I don't trust."

"It was built by a person you trust." He grabs her by the elbows. "What is wrong with exiting the game when you run out of energy fighting the Chippewa?" His voice is gentle as he bends her arms behind her back. "You wouldn't have that possibility in your reality. You're so dismissive. To me, more experiences means a more intensive life."

"Let's say I trust my feelings and my body the most. The wind and the smell. A sense of passing, death."

Holding her elbows behind her back with one hand, he grabs her by the hair with the other, so that she feels him with her whole skull, and he pulls her head back. Her throat is now arched and exposed. As always, he makes her vulnerable, he likes it. She likes it, too.

*

Driving along the Western motorway towards Rosario in a yellow and pretty beat-up Kia, Victoria is overpassing lorries as they listen to the dark rhythms of El Mal. Hana is happy to be able to feel the wind coming through the rolled-down windows of the car and watch the herds of cattle, one pasture after another, one group of bodies after another, the green, flat landscape and so on and so on quietly wondering when Victoria will turn off the road, until she stops wondering, the El Mal fall silent in their dark evil, the grey afternoon sky is growing thinner and lets in the sunlight dimly filling the damp air, turning the pastures dark green, they are silent and driving in this torn-out time, surrounded only by the line of the horizon, the road before them and the weather that represents a shade of light, an intensity of colours and fading, clear skies and mist, a lot of air and wind, weather that usually means the shape and vastness of clouds. Hana's thoughts dissipate, she lets herself disappear into the landscape, there is something here that she didn't feel in simulations with wolves, something, even, that is too quiet, too much in the background to exist when talking to Igor, talking to other people. She is happy when she feels that the world around her is once again becoming a depth of space, populated by changes, and that these exchanges are something other than the company of people. This feeling only returns for a moment, before they turn onto a local road and find their way to Victoria's herd.

*

The massive, black and white bodies are flocking by the fence, and Victoria lets them out of one pasture, grazed to the ground in a matter of days, and onto the other, and starts cleaning the water troughs. She shows Hana how to check the electric fence, and every once in a while, Hana takes refuge from the wind behind a large, warm body as she makes her rounds, looking at the smooth muzzles and long tongues hastily wrapping themselves around blades of grass, pulling them out, the feeding, the mastication, milk, calves, the whole cycle has begun again and she is happily fixing the odds and bits of the infrastructure, doing meaningless maintenance tasks compared to the cows' more meaningful existence. This time, she is not thinking about leather jackets and steaks, they are together in this weather and that is enough for now.

ANA SCHNABL

Tide

Plima, Beletrina, 2022



Photo by: Mankica Kranjec

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ana Schnabl (1985) is a writer and editor. A doctoral student of philosophy, her research focuses on feminist autobiography. She writes for several Slovenian literary journals, has collaborated with the daily *Dnevnik* and was the first editor of the *Versopolis Review*. In 2017, her short story collection *Razvezani* (*Disentangling*) received the Best Debut Award at the annual Slovenian Book Fair as well as several nominations for other awards. So far, she has written two novels, namely *Mojstrovina* (*The Masterpiece*) and *Plima* (*Tide*), and she is currently working on a collection of autofictional essays. In her spare time, she is a helicopter parent to two dogs and a cat.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Tide is a psychological-crime novel. No. *Tide* is a concert with broken instruments – people – set on the stage of the Slovenian coast. With a main protagonist, the writer Dunja, shrouded in marijuana smoke, haunted by the deaths of her father and brother. With Katarina, Dunja's childhood friend, tormented by the circumstances of her life. With Kristijan, who under social pressure sculpted his body and turned off his true self. With Mirela, who in her cramped apartment holds onto Michael Jackson for all the wrong reasons. With Duška, who is not yet quite broken because she is too young, and she never knew Dražen, Dunja's brother. *Tide* is a long composition about the violence brought about by human ambivalence, limitations, impossibilities and also – decisions. But *Tide* is not only a sad arrangement, nor is it loud, and its rhythms are not the rhythms of morality. It is permeated too by warm tones, the sounds of the sea, cicadas, the Adriatic wind and the transformation of distance, as it is freshly measured and found to be closeness.



EXCERPT

1

The branches of the old pine tree hung across the white balcony fence. They were long and heavy, and the cones were barely holding on. At the first gust of wind, which by evening became a storm, it really did, the branches banged against the metal and the inflorescence fell. Above, it tumbled across the tiles; below, across the paving stones of the path that led to the block of flats. Together with the cones, bunches of vivid green needles also surrendered. The orange balcony tiles were covered with heaps of sickly yellow pollen from the male inflorescence, which had not found the female scales in time, and which, when the wind blew again, albeit more feebly, collected in drifts in which he could certainly recognise animal forms. All around there was a smell of trees and – of what exactly? Of spring soil, worms, of soaked and then dried out grass, car exhaust, seafood risotto? Of course, naturally, exactly of that, but also of his generously applied deodorant, an overwhelming mixture of eucalyptus and grapefruit and juniper.

It was an unpleasant smell, extremely unpleasant; she and her mother and father often got a headache because of the fumes, but he would not be told. Then don't smell it, he kept saying. Then hold your nose, he would snap, giving them a black look.

The loose glass pane of the balcony door, thanks to which, spring after spring, damp crept into the living room, reverberated when he stepped through it, his slippers sliding on the tiles. Behind him, the pollen swirled once more. Rearranged itself once more. He bent his head and examined the creation that had poured across the floor. He didn't like it and so he furiously smeared it with his heel into his own creation; he forced it into symmetry, he wanted symmetry, always, everywhere, even though he knew that it could not exist, that something – life, fate, nature, but aren't those synonyms – would quickly spoil it. And indeed, the wind was gusting in circles. The

picture was suddenly scarily yellow and some pollen returned to its source, back to the tree. To a female flower, if it was lucky.

He waved his slender palm, with soft, spread fingers, in front of his nose, in an exaggerated way, as with a fan, as his idol did, that outrageously infamous singer – an artist, Art-ist, he corrected her – whenever he appeared on the high stage in front of a sea of people. There and then the drama of the gesture was justified, for it was the only one visible, but on the nameless balcony... Well, there was no need to begrudge him dreams and passion.

He also wanted to be dressed like this Art-ist. Only *wanted*, for the result was a cheap, quite eclectic approximation. The narrow, black, presumably leather or silk trousers became his father's too wide, ash-grey jeans, cut off above the ankles, instead of the white collarless shirt, again silk, a t-shirt advertising a local company, tucked deep beneath his belt, a leather jacket with hundreds of platinum studs and chains was replaced by a dark brown corduroy jacket with a gold zip. His socks *were* white, a great success, but unfortunately, so were his plimsolls. Black plimsolls could not be found so far from America, so far from the supply. For his parents to buy him some elegant black shoes, of which there were plenty on the market, he would have to behave more like a grown-up, they said, on the feet of an average teenager they would look more like a joke that had misfired, they teased him. The most stellar thing – again unfortunately – was the long silver-plated chain on which, to make it seem unique – but oh, how wrong he was – he hung a dog tag with the name of a fictitious soldier engraved on it, his blood group and Rh factor, which he bought on a stall at the beach.

He reached for the branch that was forcing its way into the shutter of his room – ever since he came back from school it had been scratching against the wood, scraping out its slow, bothersome rhythm – and pushed it lower, so that, for the thousandth time, it caught beneath the window sill. Sisyphus had to appear happy, cheerful at least: his mother had forbidden him to cut the branch, as it seemed charming, even atmospheric, and she *so enjoyed watching it* from her armchair in the living room and his mother's caprices had to be respected.

Before he leaned his elbows on the fence, he turned round again, suspiciously: the caught branch was swaying slightly, *for fuck's sake, if it comes unstuck again*, yes, her irritated brother had muttered something like that.

Supported by the cold metal, he then lifted his sharply formed shoulder and crossed his right leg over his left. He licked his lips and touched his left trouser pocket, in which he had, in which over the past year he *always had* a flat tin with cigarettes from different places, cadged, stolen or extorted, even one Italian and one French one. He would have a smoke, of course, but he had to be careful: if his father caught him, then he would give him a conspiratorial smile, as one smoker to another, maybe even praise his son's style, but if his mother caught him, oh no, then it would mean nothing other than a battle. So he rubbed his face and pushed his fingers into his black locks, from which he chose three strands and, impersonating a red hot hair straightener, he used his index and middle fingers to straighten and smooth them. He glanced nervously towards the car park and the driveway leading to it, stretched his neck, angled it, hopped left and right beside the fence, stood on tiptoe and bent his knees to take in the clearing between the trees and rhododendrons, the narrow tunnel without those damn branches, through which he could observe her and mother's arrival, but no bloody, erm, fucking angle was right. At least not for *him*, for his weak eyes, for which for two years already, out of vanity, he had refused to wear the glasses prescribed for him. But from the grass beside the driveway, hidden behind the massive metal container for waste paper, she could see him well. Very well, actually.

She saw how he patted his left pocket, to check whether the tin also contained his lighter, and with what eagerness and transgressive skill, which was far from being vulgar, he then lit the cigarette. He placed it avidly against his lips, shook his head as if it was resonating, and inhaled. He exhaled and brought it to his thigh with his hand, which did not travel through air, but through something denser, something tangible, something that already had a beat, something that already had rhythm. He flicked the ash far from the balcony, but without effect, for each time the wind blew it towards the building and the flakes clung stubbornly to his clothes. Now and then he supported the hand that held the cigarette with his other hand, bending his elbow, straightening like a peacock and tapping his padded heels. She giggled a little, of course, because standing there like a prince he looked laughable, and most of all because she envied him: he could be an exceptional dancer, like Michael. His gift was a rare one, it even trickled into the choreography of smoking, tidying up and walking, even sometimes into the way he cut a pizza.

ANDREJA ŠTEPEC

Knives of the Fall (I'm So Tired)

Jesenožki (jst sm tok utrujena), LUD Šerpa, 2022

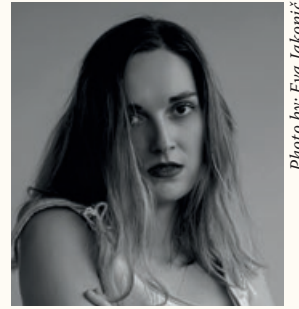


Photo by: Eva Jakopič

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andreja Štepec was born in the summer of 1986 in Jesenice. She obtained her MA in Italian language and literature and is a professor of pedagogy and andragogy. Her writings have been published in magazines such as I.D.I.O.T., Sex Zin and Lud Literatura and translated into German, Russian, English, Albanian, Hungarian, Czech and Spanish. She has appeared at various festivals around Europe, from Prague, Vienna, Vaduz, České Budějovice and London to Braşov in Romania. Her poetry debut *Edit Paf* (2018, LUD Šerpa) was featured in the 2019 Pranger Festival critical review. In 2022, LUD Šerpa published her second poetry collection *Jesenožki (jst sm tok utrujena)* – Knives of the Fall (I'm So Tired), which was again selected for critical review at the 2023 Pranger Festival. In addition to writing, she also translates from Italian and English and produces video poetry, including a compilation of poems *Jesenožki* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujv5VrcpSqc&ab_channel=EP) and a video with the opening poem from her new collection, *Fnt moj, bodi moj do-bar klastrfak* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDd-qtr0WBo&ab_channel=EP). She lives and works in Ljubljana but regularly goes back to her hometown of Jesenice.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Unlike *Edit Paf*, Andreja Štepec's second poetry collection *Knives of the Fall (I'm So Tired)* delves even more openly into the specific situation of the past few years, the distance between people that has grown, made a deeper metaphorical cut, as the title itself suggests. The title and the topic refer to Jesenice, its sociological and cultural impact on growing up in and returning to one's hometown as an adult and reliving one's childhood. Or autumn as a season of decomposition, which also offers the chance to unwind after a stormy summer, after "overheated" events, and provides an escape to steadier breathing and a new beginning. The collection, which also draws on photographs and movie clips that inspired some of the author's verses questioning existence, the inevitability of mortality, the bare seeing and the human being's incredible fragility, as well as cruelty, adopts different poetical formats at times. Substance and form complement each other nicely with pauses, a long and smooth rhythm and very short and concise poems, which attempt to cut into the sky but are sometimes prevented from doing so by the reality of certain situations. In other cases, however, the actual situations in the poems seem like a painful cry into emptiness. The poet breathes summers into autumn, cutting them with silence.



Pornstaking

I.

it's too comfortable
 people are born
 people give birth
 my heater went south
 and when it's not like this
 it's too painstaking
 shoot the first spring
 it's too mild
 the pretense aches
 yet I'm not at all
 wide-open

II.

only honey badgers
 will trick
 the trenches
 bypass the sun
 nothing will discharge
 rat-bite fever
 is eating away granny's
 agricultural picture book
 at the back of beyond
 beneath the newly built
 highway

III.

tik tak tik tok
 I digitalize (my) everything
 I mine (my) everything
 I minimalize (my) everything
 MHz subsiding
 Herz 89.3 bpm
 a brutal pulse
 like on that morning
 when I got back from the seaside
 and everything had already been
 lost

IV.

conceived in cryptocurrency
 placed in cryptodepression
 slept with his eyes open
 in fear of his soul
 penetrated with apnea
 platonic anamnesis
 do not lie down with me
 we are not in the Bible
 your knife will not give you away
 only your
 hand

Jeder Mensch ist brutal

to scratch out the pain
 as deep in
 as
 an unborn baby
 the revolution is expanding into a sentiment:
 Euthanasia for everyone!
 not just the precious few

give me the pain

I've wanted to hang myself
 but they say
 it's indecent
 you'd better drown yourself
 girl
 this way you'll prove
 your
 innocence

the vertical

it's not the path that's hard
 it's the human who's heavy

how do you name this
 vastness?

after the beaten sensation

folklore

what's up, little girl?
 are you a badass?
 I'm a bit of a badass and a bit from Jesenice.

Tenders and Public Calls

Slovenian Book Agency: funding opportunities for foreign publishers

Grants for the translation and publication of works by Slovenian authors

Yearly open call for translations from Slovenian and translations of works, written in other languages, when author is a part of Slovenian cultural environment, into foreign languages includes first translations of adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, plays, graphic novels and comics. Applicants must be legal persons (publishing houses, theatres) registered abroad. The subsidy covers up to 100% and maximum of 10.000 € of the translation costs.

Grants for printing costs

Yearly open call for printing costs for translations from Slovenian and translations of works, written in other languages, when author is a part of Slovenian cultural environment, into foreign languages includes first prints of adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, plays, graphic novels and comics. Applicants must be publishing houses registered abroad. The subsidy covers up to 70% and maximum of 3.000 € of the printing costs.

Slovenia – Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2023

Yearly open call for translations from Slovenian into German language includes first translations and reprints of adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, plays, graphic novels and comics. Applicants must be publishing houses registered in Austria, Germany or Switzerland. This subsidy covers up to 50% and up to 11.000 € of all types of costs connected with book publication (excluding license fees) and promotion for first translations or 50% and up to 3.000 € for reprints, eligible costs are printing, typesetting, cover design and corrections.

Travel Grants

Travel grants are also available for Slovene authors, translators, editors or rights agents, who have been invited to literary or industry events abroad. An invitation and the program for the event must be enclosed with the application.

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