

10  
Books  
from  
Slovenia

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Dušan Šarotar

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LITERARY CRITICS' CHOICE

2024

**NINA DRAGIČEVIĆ**

## **But Who?**

Ampak, kdo?, Škuc, 2023



Photo by: Nataša Velikonja

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

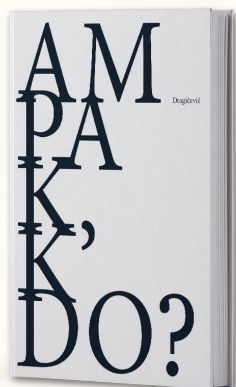
Dr Nina Dragičević is a poet and essayist, author of books *Kdo ima druge skrbi* (*Who Has Other Worries*; Škuc, 2014), *Slavne nezname* (*Famous Unknown*; Škuc, 2016), *Med njima je glasba* (*The Music Between Them*; Parada ponosa, 2017), *Ljubav reče greva* (*Love Says Let's Go*; Škuc, 2019), *To telo, pokončno* (*This Body, Upright*; Škuc, 2021), *Kako zveni oblast* (*The Sound of Authority*; Založba / \*cf, 2022), *Ampak, kdo?* (*But Who?*; Škuc, 2023) and *Auditory Poverty and its Discontents* (Errant Bodies Press, 2024).

Dragičević is a recipient of the 2023 Dr Ana Mayer Kansky Prize, the 2021 Jenko Award, the 2020 Župančič Award and the 2018 Dame of Poetry Award. In 2023, she was awarded the Werner Düttmann Fellowship (Akademie der Künste, Berlin). *But Who?* was shortlisted for the 2023 Jenko Award.

www.ninadragicevic.com

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In her distinct lyrical language, Nina Dragičević constructs the poetry collection *But Who?* around people under the pressure of society, people in the embrace of a repressive society, seen by the author as a small place, a neighbourhood of people living in a repressive neighbourhood and reproducing this repression within themselves and in their surroundings. With minute attention to detail, innovative poetry techniques and modern experiments with the medium of poetry, such as the poetry of erasure, she lays out repressed and repressive modi of living through daily chores, opinions and interactions, figures of the everyday that shape individuality under the pressure of sociality. The text being about communicational polyphony and co-dependence, it contains several characters, but the author focuses on that of a closeted homosexual, a homosexual in hiding, for the construction of a love subject in a repressive society is the construction of a closet, of hiding, with two central aspirations, namely social adaptation and breaking away from the constraints of society. Eventually, the winner of this battle will be the universal ideological imperative: to remain adapted. The collection forms a clear ethical arc, as the title question "But who?", who creates this society of circular terror, a question of responsibility, appears throughout the text. The most recent work by Nina Dragičević is set in the context of contemporary, socially engaged poetry; it is a frontal, eruptive thrust, which exposes our immediate environment by taking off its mask of the constructive common and portrays it as a platform of destruction.



### EXCERPT

#### **But Who?**

A bolus hurtles into the abyss.  
All pleasure a fall.  
Everything mixes up in the stomach.  
Elsewhere we do not mix.

\*

One mixes existential up with existentialistic.  
And one frowns upon this.  
But, who?

\*

Mr. Stanič says everybody's the same.  
Mr. Stanič eats cat food at times,  
this is just how everybody's the same.

\*

My father says he's sorry,  
I'd be a wonderful mother.  
I tell my father I'm sorry,  
because he, too, would be a wonderful  
mother.

\*

A small grudge next to a small desire,  
and one should keep an eye open,  
yet someone's so sleepy, so sleepy,  
someone takes a seat, eyes open, joined by someone.

\*

Doesn't help, doesn't help, all the time the same  
consistently distracted  
and  
that therefore everything  
is only replicated  
in search of a future turning to the past  
to the most recent past  
they say you need to love somebody  
you tell them fuck you where have you been so far.

\*

When the city's asleep, someone's not asleep,  
when someone's chasing oneself, someone's chasing  
someone else, someone's sleeping well.  
Then it's written down, then it's too late,  
when the city's asleep, it would sometimes be best  
if the city wasn't asleep.

\*

Somewhere frost elsewhere sweat  
the low clouds something about standing up  
someone's turning in their grave  
someone freezes on the spot,  
life itself.

\*

Mr. Stanič says everybody's the same.  
Mrs. Jerman thinks to herself,  
just look at yourself.

*Translated by*  
**Andrej Peric**

IVA JEVTIĆ

## Grace

Milost, KUD Zrakogled, 2023



Photo by: Taj Kosmač

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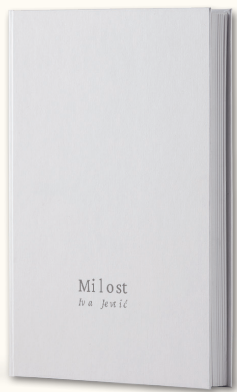
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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iva Jevtić (1976, Kranj), poet, translator and literary theorist. After completing her studies in English literature in Edinburgh, she obtained her PhD in literary studies from the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts on the topic of medieval mysticism. She regularly translates works from the fields of humanities, linguistics, social sciences and history. Her first poetry collection *Težnost (Gravity)* was published by Apokalipsa, which also released her monograph *Mistična podoba: miselna podoba v delu Julijane iz Norwicha (The Mystic Image: Mental Images in the Works of Julian of Norwich)*. In 2023, KUD Zrakogled published her second poetry collection *Milost (Grace)*, which won the 2023 Veronika Prize for best poetry collection.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Grace* is the thematic continuation of my first poetry collection *Gravity*, drawing on Simone Weil's belief that the soul is governed by the forces of gravity and grace. The only force capable of escaping gravity is grace; it is grace that makes us "fall toward the heights", that fills space and breaks density – but only where there is a void. Using a series of short poetic forms, which include elements of lyric self-expression, haiku, micro fiction and essay, my book explores the individual's perceptual thrownness into the world and searches for these fissures, for empty spaces filled with grace. It looks at instances where the line between the individual and the collective past is obfuscated, since they are both driven by the same impulses. The trauma we live through is that of the collective, our most intimate dreams reflect that of the many: "I awoke from a common dream into my own and in it I saw an angel. He was standing in the sun and cried with a loud voice to all the birds who fly in the air" [from the poem Revelation]. And because grace can be neither summoned nor grasped, as it only fills spaces hollowed by its own workings, (this) writing is fundamentally an act of hope, of waiting beyond meaning: a wavering between faith and abandonment. – Iva Jevtić



### EXCERPT

#### A R C H E R

Compressed into an arrowhead,  
he is holding tight his string, b o w  
d r a w n, aiming at a missing piece  
of tapestry: a feast after a battle  
won. But as it is, a mere depiction  
of slaughter. He has lost his thread,  
there is no end in sight. He forgets  
what it was like before stalling in  
a field in which there is no getting  
close or taking flight: where the only  
thing travelling is light.

#### T O W E R S

For each condition there is a pre-  
condition, for every loss another,  
older. On the ruins of past sorrows,  
we build new ones, adding grain to  
grain we bake bread, piling stone on  
stone we fortify a crag: bread and

stone and tears are made of memory. From our towers we see fires and enemies on speeding horses.

### S K I N

Before hysteria there came hunger. When the wheat ran out, people made bread out of poppy, rotten rye, lilies, and weeds. Their bodies contracted in spasms, they heard devils, saw spirits and danced in throngs all day and night. They were on fire, as if they had been born without skin, and they believed their delusions: when you have no skin, you cling to truth. Truth hurts when you have no skin.

### H O M U N C U L U S

By far the worst of all the screams was that of mandrake found under the gallows sprouting from the seed of executed men, that could kill you. Wary of the evil shriek, they tied the angry manlike rootlet to a dog which, having pulled it out of the ground, promptly died. (Hanged men and dogs were in abundance.) Women burned in numbers at the stake for giving refuge to the wily herb because, they say, it helped them fly at night across the seas and mountains. But still the women sheltered the good root, for in return for friendship and garments made of silk it healed all wounds.

### S A I L S

The books of conquerors claim that the natives never noticed the approaching ships, so foreign were they to their minds. If death had sails, it would land on shore under the scorching sun without a sound. It would cut its way through the forest buzzing with silver-winged beetles and rob the earth with the frenzy of a child finally allowed all. Finally all. But if it closed its eyes, the outline of a novel landscape would suddenly seem long familiar: terra precognita.

# ALENKA JOVANSKI

## Theatre of Paper

Teater iz papirja, KID Animot, 2023



Photo by: Robi Ocvirk

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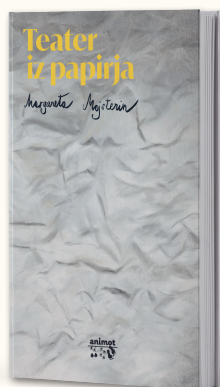
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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alenka Jovanovski is a poet, former literary journalist and literary theoretician who wrote essays about poetry, ethics and biopolitics. She translates contemporary literature (poetry, prose and plays) from Italian and English (Cesare Pavese, Italo Calvino, Lina Prosa, Igiaba Scego, Kevin Barry, Audre Lorde, Fleur Jaggy). She published three books of poetry (*Trousers for Dži*, LUD Literatura, 2012, *One Thousand and Eighty Degrees*, Center for Slovenian Literature, 2018; *Theatre of Paper*, KID Animot 2023). *One Thousand and Eighty Degrees* was chosen as best book of poetry in 2019 and awarded with Veronika Award. Her poems appear in different anthologies, they are translated in English and Polish language. Individual poems are also translated in Macedonian, Albanian, Italian, Spanish and Czech languages.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

At first glance, *Theatre of Paper* is a conceptual book of poetry, bound together by the characters of Master and Margarita. Loosely resembling the love couple from Bulgakov's novel, Master and Margarita are lovers who converse through non-contact, through poems as spoken love letters. The only sign of their contact are recurring themes and the changes that happen in their dramatic personae. Together, they probably try to answer the question of love in late global capitalism where every sentient being is exploited and destroyed at a cellular level. If Margarita, like a true witch, invokes the strength of nature and summons life from death, the Master walks the path from grotesque and powerlessness to a different way of living. He has to let-go of his paper-like identity that was built into him by the very system that exploits every form of life. Questions asked by Master and Margarita grow into a dramatic poem, but are transferred also into the poet's personal experience of a post-Covid world.



### EXCERPT

#### *margarita talking to the seeds*

for long, i've been afraid, gathering warmth and strength.  
there's something pagan in this.  
the lives in the ice-age conditions have become past lives.  
the springtime snow has become the snow of the past.  
those forty years, such a long time,  
and now nothing to be mine.

one by one, the seeds open their eyes.  
their external, internal and secret eyes,  
deep below the ground, they return their gaze.

the skinfold formed from the scar  
on your heart—  
the seed of polar dusk  
wants my finger pad  
to keep it warm.

seeds, seeds.  
each of them, i take in my hand.  
each of them, i grant the freedom of coming

and the freedom of going.  
to each of them, i stubbornly offer my breath,  
many times, if need be.

when the coat bursts, white pulp is exposed.  
the sprout is curled like a pig's tail.  
only naked can i ride it.  
only naked can i count:  
forty seeds, forty sprouts,  
forty times through the dark night.

what is an I when the night gets transparent?  
thin worms of light plummet,  
deep deep,  
through permafrost, tundra, dwarf birches,  
deeper than the leaves in the wind,  
deeper than the wind.

### **the master, on changing**

*for simona kopinšek  
swinging on the swing of the sun*

My mouth was speaking too loudly.  
Pursuing angular power as if tied up with wire.  
Now I can see, everything and all at once.  
I lie down at night, imploding.  
Shedding: first the leaves, then the bark.  
The wooden bits—my organs fall off in pieces.  
The pith is exposed, blindingly white and unyielding.  
When the pain grows too strong, I fail to restrain it.

I take shelter in the tunnel,  
a pith around which I have built my entire self.  
There I rest and forget. I recall what is one.  
Then I glow. As feebly as a filament, at first.

I am the sprout of a tree that cannot be cut down.  
I seek neither strength nor weakness.  
I do not try to prove anything: I stand.  
Then I run and I flow.  
The wave caresses me and changes my sex.  
I am not a sex. I am a bilberry bush  
with light green shoots. I am not  
a bilberry bush. I am in the dark, with thick bristles.  
A yellow eye looks at my core. And then again,  
I am not an eye. I pour. I dry up. I rise.  
Why should I grieve?

So feminine, I need to be very attentive  
when following the flow with my mouth.  
To speak like a flow, without commonplaces  
and sinewy habits.  
Not to shout it down, out of predominance.  
Not to shun it, out of fear.  
Not to renounce it, out of love.

VINKO MÖDERNDORFER

## The Countdown

Odštevanje, Miš, 2023



Photo by: Zeljko Stevančić

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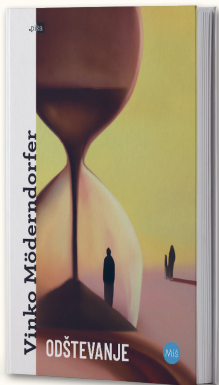
### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vinko Möderndorfer (1958) is a writer, poet, essayist and playwright, and theatre, radio, film and TV director. His director's oeuvre spans all theatrical formats, styles and genres. As a TV director, he mostly directed TV plays and documentaries based on his scripts. In 2003, he made the first feature film based on his novel *Suburbs*, which won numerous awards at international festivals. He began his literary path in the late 1970s, starting with poetry, before he expanded his writing to all literary arts – from prose to theatre plays, essays, radio shows, film scripts and children's and YA literature. His books include more than 60 works of prose, poetry, plays and essays. He writes articles and essays about theatre directing, dramaturgy, plays and current social topics. His literary works have been translated to numerous languages and won him the most prestigious Slovenian literary awards, two for short prose, namely the Župančič Award for *Krog male smrti* (Circle of Small Death, 1994) and the Prešeren Fund Award for *Nekatere ljubezni* (Some Loves, 2000).

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Vinko Möderndorfer's *The Countdown* is a novel about the journey and time needed for people to learn at least part of the truth about themselves, their roots and social context into which all of us are born. The story is set in 1998, when our society had already exited the former political and economic system but did not quite start living the new one. It covers the events of a single day – from 3 AM, when the protagonist, like so many times before, soils the toilet in his sleep, to the same time next day when, accompanied by his daughter, he returns from a gathering where he first meets his father and his family.

This suggestive, very personal narrative is not only about a meeting between a father and a son, but also about looking inside oneself, uncovering secrets, rummaging through memories, filled with assumptions, suspicions and self-reflection. Parallel storylines of several family generations afford us a rather intimate insight into a comparison of problems faced by young couples at the beginning, the middle and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the protagonist returns to the capital full of impressions, buzzing with snippets of information divulged to him by his father's relatives, he is no longer the same – he decides to quit advertising and become a full-time writer. In the novel *The Countdown*, Vinko Möderndorfer masterfully intertwines various literary forms into a poetic but utterly real and honest narrative kaleidoscope, suffused with twists of thought that enrich the protagonists' emotional worlds and offer the reader a broader view of time and people.



### EXCERPT

## The Countdown

"I sometimes feel like I can remember things before my time," I said when we were back on the road. "I piece together a story from the past, fragment by fragment. I recall my mother telling me that right before he died my grandfather got a craving for sausages. Heavily pregnant, with the due date only twelve days away, she ran to the butcher's shop, but they were out of sausages, so she bought a frankfurter instead. When she returned, her father was dead. You want sausages, but you get a frankfurter. The unfairness of life!" I joshed. Then I thought the idea was worth remembering. Something that triggers an association about a certain product, but turns out to be something entirely different ... It was then that I realised I probably wasn't going to write commercials ever again.

"Another thing I remember," I continued, "is my mother telling me on numerous occasions how a military doctor had been summoned. She was a soldier, a high-ranking physician in the army, and she killed my grandfather by injecting him with something. I didn't really believe her. She told the story differently each time. Once she said that the doctor was a major, a few years

later, when retelling the story, she said she was a colonel, and then the story suddenly involved two female doctors who had come to murder my grandfather ... She claimed that he was on the mend and that he would certainly have survived. He got a craving for sausages, after all, and when someone craves sausages, it means that their appetite has returned, which in turn means they are out of mortal danger.”

“He was consumed by cancer. Lung cancer,” said Father quietly.

It was the voice of someone who knew the story well. He must have done, he was there. A young lad, my mother’s fiancé. He witnessed it. He knew the truth.

“He used to smoke all kinds of rubbish,” he continued calmly, “when imprisoned during the interwar period, and later on Goli Otok.<sup>1</sup> They would roll cigarettes out of grass and compost using newsprint as rolling paper, and prisoners even used the paper they tore off the sacks of cement at the camp. That’s the kind of rubbish your grandfather smoked. He was ill.”

“I know,” I said.

“Your mother had a vivid imagination,” he smiled, “which makes me doubt that the sausage and frankfurter story was true. As for the colonel doctor lady, that sounds too much like something out of a Russian novel. I know she was into Russian authors back then. She adored them. She would stuff pillows under her bed covers at night, so that when her mother popped in to check on her, she would think she was sleeping, while your mother was hiding in the closet turning pages by candlelight. Well, I’m not sure that story holds water either, but she did mention it several times.”

“She told me that, too,” I said, recalling the story. She told me she read all the Russian classics in that closet.

My father looked at me from under a frown. His expression said, *aha! We both fell for her routine.* I smiled without looking at him and thought, *probably.* His eyes then started focusing on the road ahead. He breathed in sharply, held it for a while, then let out a long breath, like a man who had just reached the summit of a mountain and knew his ascent was over. His face reflected the distress of someone trying to end a never-ending story, which wasn’t far from the truth.

“Your mother was an incredible woman. That’s why I fell in love with her instantly. She used to read a lot. Novels, poetry, everything. But more than read, she would make up stories of her own. She had a knack for it. If times were different, she could have become anything she wanted. An actress, a writer, a singer, a teacher ... Anything at all. She emanated a vast array of talents ... That was the reason why I was completely hers the very moment she entered that room during a snow blizzard, and I she was completely mine.”

I slowed right down. Now driving in first gear, I pressed down on the accelerator pedal ever so lightly. I had a feeling our journey was coming to an end and I wanted him to finish his story, because there wouldn’t be any time later.

“She was as thin as a rake,” he continued, “which is what we used to call extremely thin people in my day. She was like a human skeleton with dark circles around her eyes. She was seventeen, but looked thirteen. A kid. A little girl. I was also seventeen at the time, a few months older than her, but despite the hard times I was a strapping, work-hardened young lad.”

He took another deep breath ... This stime, he held it in longer, or at least that was my impression. He reminded me of a swimmer who wants to stay underwater as long as possible. He finally exhaled and continued: “My father had brought her from the valley on a sleigh. Our fathers knew each other from before the war. The old man paid him. I think it must have been the only reason he let her stay with us. We needed the money. Times were tough. At first, Mother wasn’t too pleased that a city girl was coming to stay with us, but she caved in soon enough. Like I said, we needed the money. I remember them arguing. *Another child in the house? Don’t we have enough problems as it is? And her father’s a con, we’ll get the law on our backs before too long. And the State Police.*

Then the girl entered the room and took off the thick blanket and the oversized coat she was wearing. The scruffy little person was standing there in the middle of that warm room, scanning the place with her bight eyes. She immediately started talking and wouldn’t stop, as if afraid of being chucked out into the snow if she wasn’t interesting enough. We were inseparable after that. No wonder you were conceived so quickly,” he said with a smirk. I saw a sparkle in his eyes that made his entire being light up. If only for a few brief moments, the memory of puppy love transformed the crooked and tired man in the seat next to me into a youngster again.

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<sup>1</sup> Goli Otok is an uninhabited Croatian island, the site of a Yugoslav political prison between 1949 and 1989.

ANA PEPELNIK

## you don't say that

To se ne pove, LUD Literatura, 2023

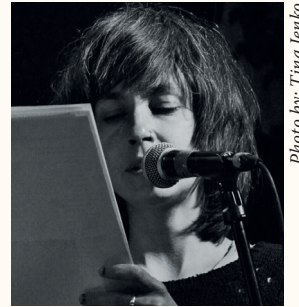


Photo by: Tina Jenko

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ana Peplnik. Poet and translator. Her first poetry collection *Ena od varijant kako ravnati s skrivnostjo* (One of the Ways How to Treat a Secret; Prišleki, LUD Literatura) was published in 2007 (nomination for Best First Poetry Collection Award). Two years later, in 2009, the same publishing house released her second book *Utrip oranžnih luči na semaforjih* (The Orange Pulse of Traffic Lights), followed by *Cela večnost* (A Whole Eternity, 2013), *Pod vtisom* (Under Impression, 2015, the Luda Šerpa collection), *Tehno* (Techno, 2017, nominations for the Jenko and Veronika Awards) and *Treš* (Trash, 2021, nomination for the Veronika Award). Her seventh and most recent book of poetry *to se ne pove* (you don't say that) was published by LUD Literatura in 2023.

She translates poetry by the young and not so young generations of American poets, including Joshua Beckman, Matthew Zapruder, Matthew Rohrer, Noelle Kocot and Jennifer Clement, as well as Sylvia Plath, James Tate, James Schuyler, Elizabeth Bishop, Wallace Stevens and Walt Whitman.

Her translation (in collaboration with Matthew Rohrer) of Tone Škrjanec's *Koža* (Skin) was published in the US.

As a poet, she took part in the international project *Metropoetica* (under the mentorship of Welsh poet *Zoë Skoulding*). As a speaker, she was a member of the impro trio *CPG Impro*. In both roles, she tested her skills in the *Poetrix* sound project of musician and sound producer Jaka Berger – Brgs.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

The poems in Ana Peplnik's latest book are still written with the reader in mind, in an accessible, informal and rhythmic language, technically (as in her previous collections) committed to an innovative – by now the author's characteristic – play on the laws of language, imbuing the substance with doubt, silence and polysemy, which allows several interpretations and linguistic possibilities. This goes beyond mere images (mimesis) and is reflected in the language, in the diversity of the vocabulary and speech peculiarities of Slovenian.

The focal point is still language, its flexibility, endlessness and building potential in poetry. The author sees it as the freest form of literary expression, which, at the same time, can be totally personal and lyrical. In these processes, she also contemplates her (own) meta-physical side. What happens with the fragments in a notebook, which are a type of pre-language, and how spaces emerge in these parts that may someday become a poem. How these (germs) piece together something that is already mentally formulated, shaped yet reserved due to its sensitive nature, as a result of which, as it undergoes the transformation into the written|spoken word, it is already damaged, wounded by exposure to light. It is dark inside; and as light enters it from the outside, it decides to become light itself.

That is what *you don't say that* is about. It talks about that which is afraid to be expressed but must be expressed. And by expressing it, to lean on something bigger, to reach for something beyond and then bring it back to earth.

### EXCERPT

#### becoming an ocean

okay i'll become a lotus eater you say why that's why i say  
but the question is | will someone point me home afterward |  
how so you say that's how i say this should be spoken about



not just written down not about the lotus eaters who don't know  
how to get home not about the birds flying ignorant above you say  
why that's why i say because everything is visible on your face  
your birth your birth depression malnutrition bloating malnutrition  
about how it's hurt since ever but I expected this not to show  
at a corner of the mouth in between the eyebrows on the side  
of the face right where the hair runs from left to right | but it is shown  
why you say that's why I say this is how the earth gets hurt the moon  
gets hurt it hurts as I look at it I can see some scratches the scratches  
of the earth the scratches of the mother who's my mom who's your  
mom all the way back to | where you say here i say | that's why  
a drop drop by drop becoming water becoming an ocean

### you don't say that

nobody tells you how the crown  
of the spruce tree rustles

that the body aches so bad when transforming  
it cannot go any deeper than the bottom

that very often there's no solid ground  
nobody tells you how the wind passes through

how a bird comes to perch inside how the needles  
crack how the moss rustles how the ferns

that you have a choice | always | how i choose  
determines how i'm doing

who i am how the shoe  
goes through how the paw stays in how

a digger whirrs how the ground remains  
just the ground the red soil the ruts

\*

speaking with you  
i speak myself directly

first through myself  
for us perhaps to begin

\*

but nothing before  
nothing after

perhaps a landscape in between  
no human in this landscape

just the one looking  
just the few birds

*Translated from the  
Slovenian by*  
**Andrej Peric**

# PIA PREZELJ

## Heavy Water

Težka voda, Goga, 2023



Photo by: Lana Spiler

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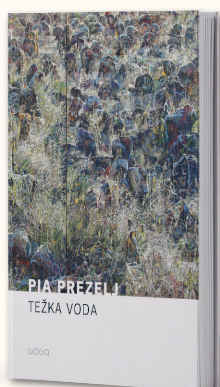
Pia Prezelj (1995) is a writer, translator and culture journalist at the *Delo* daily. She is the recipient of the 2022 Watchdog Award for best up-and-coming journalist, conferred by the Slovene Association of Journalists. In 2018 she published a translation of Lucia Berlin's short story collection *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (Cankarjeva založba). *Heavy Water* is her first novel which won the author the Debut of the Year Award of the Slovene Writer's Association in 2023.

"Pia Prezelj has gained a reputation as a tireless promotor of young Slovenian authors, a follower of women's footprints in writing, an astute reader, a voice of new generations, a recipient of the guild award for best up-and-coming journalist. But none of that can prepare us for her literary debut, *Heavy Water*, which is set not in the noise of young city life but in a suffocating rural habitus, the confines of a village community, focusing on an older woman, two older women and their intertwined bitter fates. This is a book of desire and despair, of ensnarement in patriarchal relationships, of exhaustion and disappointment, of untold secrets and deceptions, but also a presentiment of escape. Nothing in the novel suggests a debut, exhibiting a mature and complete mastery of form from the first to the last page, skilfully knitting a non-linear narrative and toing the thin line between the spoken and the unspoken," writes philosopher Mladen Dolar.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In the world inhabited by Ida, Marta, Tone and Lojze, tomatoes rot in the garden, stuffed rabbits are perched on bedside tables, and cows sooner or later need to be shot between the eyes. Not surprising then, if someone has a fateful slip on the muddy soil or their head gets crushed by a tree – after all, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and above all He forgives. In the novel *Heavy Water*, a unique anatomy of guilt that breaks with the tradition of Slovene storytelling, fragments of the life of the older protagonist Ida, amidst the consequences of a concealed past and an un-lived future, gradually assemble into a chipped whole. Through its expressive, perfected style, it reveals especially the bitter truth about how in a small village community everyone's lives are entangled. Where everything appears to be clear cut, one secret brings about new secrets.

"Ida lives on a piece of Slovenian land where you can't take a step without getting manure on your boots. She lives in a society in which parallels between cows and women are still a thing consumed with milk from early childhood onward." – *From the foreword by literary critic Maja Šučur*



### EXCERPT

## Heavy Water

Ida was staring at the colours turning in the foamy water. The first batch of clothes, held in the air with clothespins, was already stretched out between the two apple trees in the garden. In the mornings the swallows liked to join them on the line, jumping and chirping and crowding into the feeder. On the hill, rising from the village like a nipple, glittered a little church, ringing with the loud chimes of bells that ate into the plain and mixed above the potatoes and rapeseed with the rattling of a tractor.

Ida was staring at the colours while misfortune roamed her garden, sticking its nose into zinnias and nibbling on the bramble. Someone was sipping coffee to her right, giving off gurgling sounds and whistling out of tune, while her fingers squashed the slippery and warm black, and she considered being lenient and graceful once again. She licked her finger and decided she would charge the man, terrible as an army in banners. After all, it has been a long time since she had some real fun.

The waiting room in the ER of the nearest hospital was a field of orange – worn down orange walls, orange joined chairs and orange linoleum. Orangey teeth of laughing nurses and the orangey hue of their skin. They sat Ida on one of the hard chairs, pushed a questionnaire into her hands and told her You will be comfortable here. She went through the purse between her legs, felt the cotton handkerchief, a handful of walnuts, an old lipstick. A squishy rotten pear got stuck to her wallet. She would have to stand up and get a pencil, explain that she cannot fill out the form without it, but she was too lazy, and her ankles hurt, her feet were swollen like a drowned man's.

Instead, she rather sucked and chewed on the pear, so juice dripped down her chin and trickled along her forearm. A girl in a stained bathrobe was coughing in the corner of the room, choking and gasping and leaning against the wall, shifting her feet in fluffy purple slippers with pom-poms. A boy with a busted upper lip sat across her, slurping juice out of a carton.

Ida permitted herself to think that the child belonged to her, that she gave birth to him, breastfed him, raised him, that she will now call him back in any moment and he will come running, of course, he will grab her arm and cling to her neck. She will caress his head, bury her nose in his hair, smelling soap, butter, the sweet joy of motherhood, sticky like a caramel. She knew that this would finally lay to rest the rumours that she once sat on the fireplace as a little girl and had such a frightful burn that nothing could be done, the poor thing could from then on only sit on the edge of her right buttock and proved to be completely without use as a wife. And on top of it all *the spot* reeked of burnt flesh.

The women at first recommended poultices, concoctions of St. John's wort and marigold oil, implored her to sit in a bucket of warm water that she boiled comfrey in, but soon realized harsher measures were necessary, so they prayed for Ida's health, lit candles for her in wayside chapels, and after years of effort decided it was all for naught and that it was all simply God's will. After that they pitied her, tried to comfort her, and told her If you want to, I can bring some of mine over, so you won't be lonely. Ida thought this was pointless until she slipped one day and fell down the stairs, ending up in the hospital with a broken leg, where they asked her Should we call one of your children? and she gave them her own phone number.

Ma'am? said someone behind Ida. Have you filled out the questionnaire yet?

I couldn't find a pencil, she said, spreading the sticky pear juice over her chin and neck and wiping it with her sleeve. The voice sat down next to her, leaned in closer, turned softer.

Can you tell me what happened?

He just stretched out across the plot, across the parsley and carrots, and lied there all broken, Ida was supposed to say, but she only said Did you find out what's wrong with him? And when can we leave?

I am not sure, ma'am, but it will not take long, I can't tell you, I understand, I understand, yes, I think it's best you wait down the hallway, the door next to last.

Ida shifted in her seat, leaning back and forth. The girl in the purple slippers disappeared and was replaced by a young man with his hands in plaster, covered with dried blood, who was barking into his phone, Tell that bitch I'm waiting for him, tell him, yeah, tell him that.

A nurse appeared from behind the corner and motioned her to get up. The young man stopped barking at his phone for a moment, pulled a cigarette from his pocket and pushed it through his broken teeth. Ida grabbed the questionnaire, the coat and her purse and followed her over the linoleum. The squeak squeak of clogs and carts, stretchers, and nursing beds.

Did you find out what is wrong with him by now? Could you tell me?

No other reply than the swaying of the behind that lead her down the hallway, here and there, here and there, here and there, here and

# MUANIS SINANOVIĆ

## On the Shady Side of Blocks of Flats

Na senčni strani blokov, LUD Literatura, 2023



Photo by: personal archive

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Muanis Sinanović (1989) is a Slovenian poet, writer, essayist and critic. He has published four poetry collections, a satirical novella and a collection of short stories. This year saw the release of his first novel. In 2012 he received the Slovenian Book Fair Award for best first book, followed by the 2021 Kritiško sito Award conferred by the Slovene Literary Critics Association for his poetry collection *Fragile Caravans*. *On the Shady Side of Blocks of Flats* is one of nine Slovenian books selected for the Fabula international festival and was included in the annual publication *10 Books from Slovenia* of the Center for Slovenian Literature. His critical writings also earned him the 2022 Stritar Award. He has appeared at numerous Slovenian and international literary festivals and featured in Slovenian and foreign anthologies, most recently in *Mein Nachbar auf der Wolke*, an anthology of Slovenian 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century poetry published by Carl Hansen. Occasionally he also works as an editor and translator. His latest translation from Serbian is Milena Marković's novel in verses, *Otroci* (Children). He co-organises international literary events Salon with a View, held in Slovenia's central cultural institution, Cankarjev dom.



### ABOUT THE BOOK

In a mix of realism and fantasy, the short-story collection *On the Shady Side of Blocks of Flats* explores the phenomena of modern life, mainly set in the local environment. The individual's alienation in cities, particularly in Ljubljana and other Slovenian towns, loneliness, hedonism, consumerism and post-socialist heritage. The writings are detail-oriented, a continuation of the author's poetic style of live images, silences and premonitions. They draw on this generation's experience of ideological emptiness, relationships and abandonment, with a distinct feel for the historical context and strands of light. The book's fantastic and surrealist elements are at times fairylike, while creating a contradictory blend of colourful melancholy.

### EXCERPT

## On the Shady Side of Blocks of Flats

He starts hanging out with radical right-wingers at a random apartment in Šiška. Based on the propaganda from his own camp, he imagined them to be the devil incarnate, but he realises that they are the biggest nerds he's ever met. They welcome him with open arms. On rainy evenings, he walks back along the Tivoli Park, crosses the centre past the Slon Hotel. The hubbub of the whole city seems to converge in this spot, the raindrops are like the condensed sound of drum brushes, and the car noises sound like distant basses and saxophones, lost in the fabric of the rain. Everything else is silence, and the silence in his inner ear is the sound of woeful, slow singing. Through a pair of really high-quality earphones, it sounds incredibly soothing.

Ramadani starts seeking a spiritual refuge. He asks a friend, a compatriot, to teach him the prayer, the sequence of all movements, as he absorbs himself in the Arabic text and reads the translations. His friend does it hastily and nervously, he has errands to run. Ramadani doesn't want to bother him, so he tries to blend his friend's movements with those he's seen in videos. Occasionally, he goes to the Ljubljana Mosque, alone.

He soon grows equally disappointed with the radical rightists, though it's not really clear why. Nothing about the discernible events suggests a definitive answer. He spends more and more time in his apartment in Bežigrad, between woodsheds and thick walls of blocks of flats, built before World War II. A writer acquaintance invested the grant that he received for his book from the Slovenian Book Agency in a large quantity of cocaine, and the chaotic situation created the

perfect conditions for the proliferation of illegal activities. Writer M. V. and our Šefket Ramadani embark on their enterprise and gradually expand their business: they open troll farms, sell illegal literature, extort the priests of the red region.

A business trip to Istanbul. On the first night, he and M. V. stand on the rooftop, watching the ferries in Bosphorus. The strait looks like an upside-down starry sky, dotted with boat lights. From all directions, in various tempos, intensities, whispered or screamed, flood the calls to prayer. M. V. is smoking his cigarette peacefully, as Ramadani watches him from the side. There is a type of love there. When the calls to prayer end, they remain silent, contemplating the city lights. They spend a few days wandering the outskirts of Istanbul; their meeting takes place in a towering glass skyscraper. In the evening, they party at a club for rich African emigrants, the writer beats them at pool, Ramadani at arm wrestling. They slide up and down the smooth stones of Galata, meeting people, snorting coke in a street right next to Istiklal. The Golden Horn comes into view between the buildings, bewitching Ramadani with its mysterious power. The pair ends up at a giant club, where they see a seven-foot-tall transvestite, a woman places the writer's hand on her right breast, a gay guy blows a puff of intoxicating smoke in Ramadani's face just as he steps out of the toilet, which makes him dance wildly for about an hour. The field of vision reveals a colourful spectre of patterns.

Fast-forward a few weeks later: he gets into a taxi in the middle of the night, a car with tinted windows and strong headlights drives past. Is this a sign of what happened to M. V.?

Then come the post-war years, Ramadani spends a lot of time in the company of the minister for recovery. He becomes his confidant. Despite his public reputation as a dogmatic person, the minister turns out to be a broad-minded and sensitive man, capable of detecting the slightest changes in society and relationships. This is the starting point for many interesting debates. A dinner party hosted by a girlfriend of his, caviar and champagne. Her sweat suit is printed with the names of famous brands. A fight ensues; a subject tells the minister that the host is unsuitable for him. There appears to be a triangle or general polyamory with circulating partners. Occasional orgies, which neither Ramadani nor the minister attend, preferring to spend their time talking in the kitchen. Business runs smoothly, no hiccups. Life slides into banality and the so-called depressive hedonia, while the city and its surroundings develop and become the green centre of Europe that we know today. There are many foreign tourists, including important ones, Ramadani seems cheerful, but at night he goes to bed alone and avoids sexuality. Years pass, people grow old and sink into a comfortable existence, polyamorous contacts peter out, and so do the orgies.

A man's voice resembling M. V.'s invites Ramadani for lunch to Šentvid, supposedly to discuss something important. After a quick check, it turns out to be the writer's son. The lunch takes place, turns into a coke session that continues long into the night. Just before Ramadani crosses the Zvezda Estate, he hears a bang and falls.

The case seems rather simple, but a complicated evidentiary procedure will have to be initiated and the recollection material justified as a source. The general picture, however, contains some atypical elements. The statement of facts, which seem eventful and, from the point of view of an average resident, more exciting than average, reveals tiny notches, like spots on an old celluloid, firmly imprinted on memory, imbued with a kind of luminous inspiration. But the scenes behind these layers of light are completely banal: a piece of bread picked up by a subject in the shop, a sequence of trees between two blocks of flats, a crowd of people crossing the street, trains, a look through the window at night, a pair of feet in bed, the washing of glasses. The only thing they have in common is that, in every one of them, Ramadani is alone, but his inner state, as presented in a chart, is recording a particular dialogic disposition, as if he was a subject in society, negotiating an offer. Be as it may, after these negotiations, life always went back to normal.

The material itself is authentic, properly processed and suitable for study at universities. I make a tick on the screen, grab my coat and lock the office. I can still make it to the match with my daughter who is quite a big fan of football.

DUŠAN ŠAROTAR

# Nicomachus Reports

Nikomah poroča, Goga, 2023



Photo by: Boštjan Pucelj

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dušan Šarotar (1968) is a writer, poet, translator, screenwriter and photographer. The central theme of his recent works is the fate of the Jewish community and the Holocaust in Prekmurje. His novels, *Biljard v Dobrayu* (*Billiards at the Hotel Dobray*), *Panorama* and *Zvezdna karta* (*Star Chart*) were all nominated for the Kresnik Award for best novel of the year in Slovenia and translated into numerous languages. In 2023 he received the Župančič Award for his novel *Zvezdna karta* (*Star Chart*). The English editions of *Panorama* and *Billiards at the Hotel Dobray* were shortlisted for the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize, the novel *Panorama* was on the longlist for the 2018 Dublin Literary Award and received the Cesar-Lopez Cuadras Award in 2017. His poems and prose have been featured in Slovenian and foreign anthologies and translated into several languages. Šarotar is the author of numerous scripts for documentary and feature films and portraits of Slovenian artists. In 2012 Šarotar began developing and exhibiting his photographic series *Duše* (*Souls*). His photographs are included in the permanent collection of the Murska Sobota Gallery. His last work, *Nicomachus Reports*, is a mix of poetry and prose, exploring memory, sadness, feeling and the human soul, approached with a poetic of slowness, characterised by descriptions of nature, cities and a specific atmosphere in which the author places his protagonists.

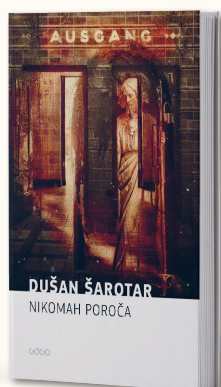
## ABOUT THE BOOK

Šarotar's *Nicomachus* is a mix of poetry and prose, accompanied by the author's photographs, which lends the book a feel of invisibility and inexpressibility.

"Šarotar is a poet of space, an explorer of inner landscapes, even when his gaze is directed outward. In his view, we are always at the centre, and his micro world is a reflection of the macro world and *vice versa*, the boundary between them is porous or non-existent. And, much like there is no dividing line between the outside and the inside, the lines between the past, present and future are blurred." – *From the foreword by Diana Pungeršič*

"A remarkable book, a literary masterpiece *sui generis*. I rarely read a language so well-measured and collected, establishing both the distance of observation and storytelling, while being so polysemous and utterly suffused with energy and pain. The mixing of times, even whole historical periods, is astounding, with minute descriptions of exact sensorial details. From the origin of the universe to billions of stars to the last drop of water wandering lightyears away from now, from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the book's centrepiece, *Nicomachus*, to the present days of tourism, refugees and wars, consumption and downfall of the world, all the beauty and all the terror!

All this pain of history can be carried and all this light of the miracles of living can be expressed only by a great and pure soul. *Nomen omen: Dušan.*" – *Boris A. Novak*



## EXCERPT

### Nicomachus Reports

I.

Nicomachus, a man of strong character, is standing in the town square. He is watching a disagreeable and most unpleasant event unfold. He is doubtful, Nicomachus, about whether to intervene or merely observe from the sidelines; later, much later, he will record it in his book and form a judgement of conscience, he thinks.

He was right, Nicomachus, as I read, time has shown that the event has had far-reaching consequences, the disaster can still be felt today. The square, enclosed by a fence, is empty, Nicoma-

chus is long dead, all that is left is the never-finished judgment, written by a shaky hand, like a dilemma that remains, as Nicomachus said, as a matter of fact.

II.

Nicomachus often travels around the country of his native tongue. He eavesdrops on conversations, fascinated by anything that speaks, if only he can discern the meaning, even more so he likes to tell stories, honing his skills in the art of persuasion. Nicomachus explains, everything has its *logos*, a language echoes in another language, only silence is untranslatable.

III.

Necessity, an important invitation from the rector of a famous university, perhaps the temptation of fame, immortality in a foreign language, who knows, but Nicomachus is now on his first express train to the Nordics. Was it escape or fear of oblivion, no one will ever know, there are no reports from Nicomachus. Surprised, he goes into his usual observation of events taking place on a far-off platform, away from the central station cathedral, his spectacled eyes contemplating the black board gently swinging over the waiting room selling cold and hot drinks. He is thirsty, Nicomachus, he has been travelling alone for a long time, constantly absorbed in thought, but he does not understand the language offering him water. The passenger writes on a piece of paper, nothing quenches the thirst of a heart searching for the hidden meaning of the unknown.

IV.

The weather is his changeable companion. Sitting down to dinner, Nicomachus recapitulates as he sits alone at a little table for two, cuts open the cold fish, picking the meat off the sharp bone, afraid it might prick his tongue. Now he chimes in with the thought of a stranger chatting with a lady sitting under the dusty chandelier, that cold, rain and lack of sunlight have a bad effect on his mood. But no one hears his echoed words, embellished with the dead sea, the smell of rosemary and salt. I increasingly resemble the atmosphere, the mood is irritating the marrow in my bones.

V.

On a narrow and untrodden path, he returns. Like he used to, he walks along the beach but knows that he is living an illusion, the shimmering autumn water is not the sea, the wind of an unknown origin, these are not his coordinates, in a foreign land he now stands and watches white sails half-way to the horizon, stops for a moment on the pier, a crew of rowers are catching their breath in an eight, the cox is treating them to a loud reading from the breviary on his horn. Motionless, tired bodies glumly sit in the narrow wooden shell, their long rows resting on the dark surface like a millipede. The creature, heartened by exalted words, rises over the lake, standing firmly on its wooden legs. The hymn of victory is playing as they stagger on their crutches. Nicomachus retreats in shock, finding refuge under a nearby bridge, sits down in the tent with the homeless. The sun is shining through the leaves, the rays hitting the paper as he writes, this regatta will be the end of us all.

VI.

Walking, movement in a healthy head, Nicomachus says at last, but a walker in light black gear passing him in a gallop retorts curtly, only a brisk march truly heals, drives away the tumorous parasite. Those who know the land by the cold sea where the sunshine is scarce, cheering up even an unknown bard, absorbed in words leading him into the invisible inwardness, hidden between the black bile and brain matter; they know that there, deep inside, a sun unchanging truly shines, visible for but a second, but this light, the pale, gentle yellow glimmer will leave a lasting mark. Like a blind man, shining from within, you wander the desolate landscape. Neither night nor inundation can stop you. Nicomachus, he is free as a star, the dust searched by Hubble's cornea.

The lengths, he thinks, as he nearly collapses with exhaustion on the bench in the garden, the distances between us are enormous, if I walk across icy lakes, wet plains and wild pastures; infinities add up only in solitude, time is the arch of an open sky, with a multiplied view I disappear in the cloud. There is only one thing that binds, that you love more than infinity, tell me, Nicomachus.

MILAN ŠELJ

# Language is the Key

Jezik je ključ, Škuc, 2023



Photo by: Robert Taylor

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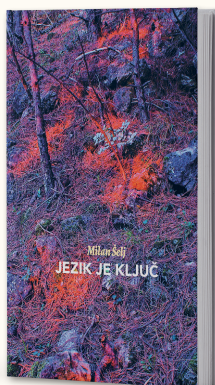
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Poet, translator and essayist. Milan has been living and working in London since 1992. His first collection of poetry *Darilo (Gift)* was published in 2006 and it was described as *one of the most explicitly homoerotic poetry books in Slovenia thus far*. *Kristali soli (Crystals of Salt)* followed in 2010, *Gradim gradove (Building Buildings)* in 2015, *Slediti neizgovorjenemu (Tracing the Unspoken)* in 2018 and *Jezik je ključ (Language is the Key)* in 2023, all published by ŠKUC-Lambda.

His poems were translated into several languages. Poems in a Hebrew translation were published in an anthology *Cavafy's Sons and Grandsons* in Israel in 2015. A substantial selection of his poems in Italian translation are in the Magazine *Fili d'aquilone* and in English translation in *The Riveter* magazine in the UK. His collection of poetry *Tracing the Unspoken* was published in English translation by A Midsummer Night's Press in New York in 2019 and his first illustrated poetry book for children *Kosmatice* in 2020. He is currently preparing his second illustrated book of poems for children. He translated poetry collection *Do mraza* by Romeo Mihaljević, which was published by Aleph publishing house in Ljubljana in 2022.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

The poetry collection is divided into four parts. The first is an ironic take on gay stereotypes. The second is the clearest expression of the poet's lyrical passion, as well as of curiosity, a confrontation with his most intimate fears and the experience of other as different and at once the same. The third part comprises reminiscences of Ljubljana's and London's alternative gay scenes. Finally, the last and the longest part, *War Is Different When It Has a Human Face*, is a series of lyrical poems about a fatal encounter between people forced to find their temporary home abroad.



"The poetry collection suggestively blends language and body, its passions and fears, desire and worship of everything earthly, unveiled as glimpses from everyday life and the collective phantasm that we are part of, regardless of our gender identity or sexual orientation. Be it through modern myths or innocent rhetorical phrases, slips of the tongue or dreams that reflect the suppressed world of the unspeakable." – *Miša Gams*

"The poetry collection is characterised by its intense language and an intertwining of bold beauty and horror. All of it emanating from the human being, either through acceptance, denial or dismissal. The poet vociferously portrays the world as it is, never insisting on a single path or a single way of doing things, while allowing himself to be vulnerable and honest." – *Tonja Jelen*

## EXCERPT

A gentle breeze drifts off the Duino cliffs  
brushing my eyelids. Warily, I half close them.

Rilke sits down on the bench.  
Smiling, he takes us by the hand.

Then we escape his grip;  
mesmerized, I dive into the marine caverns  
while he wanders about, jumping from rock to rock,  
demanding assurances to console him.

*Stop wasting your time looking for answers,  
Rilke keeps telling him, grow fond of questions.*

I push off the seabed to the surface  
and agree with him:

*Grow fond of questions and live by them!*

\*

Among the cracks and the sinking ground  
under our feet, we overlook the ceiling falling  
on our heads.

Torn between heaven and earth,  
I bid you welcome  
inside me.  
Vulnerable, I sob, least terrified  
when most terrified  
with you.

I spread tears on my distorted face,  
the vortex sucks me in with its power,  
until it gives way, alleviating convulsions.

Exhausted, I sink into the softness  
of your shoulder, the sweet smell of your skin.

And surrender.

\*

Over the years, we have created our own language  
that needs no words.

We suck out each syllable with our saliva,  
their meanings can be sensed  
in tiny bites  
while skin is rubbing against skin.

We write out sentences in ecstasy.  
Scattered over the pages of the manuscript,  
least of all, worrying about  
whether the syntax is correct.

My tongue is the key—with it  
I enter you.

Your key is your tongue—silently  
you consume me.

*Translated by*  
**Andrej Peric**

SUZANA TRATNIK

## Scissors

Škarje, Škuc, 2023



Photo by: Katarina Kolenc

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzana Tratnik (1963) has published eight collections of short stories: *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), *Noben glas* (*No Voice*, 2016), and *Škarje* (*Scissors*, 2023); six novels: *Ime mi je Damjan* (*My Name is Damian*, 2001), *Tretji svet* (*Third World*, 2007), *Tombola ali življenje!* (*Bingo or Life!*, 2017), *Norhavs na vrhu hriba* (*Madhouse on the Hilltop*, 2019), *Pontonski most* (*A Pontoon Bridge*, 2020), and *Ava* (2020); a children's picture book *Zafuškana Ganca* (*The Hany Rattie*, 2010) as well as a monodrama *Ime mi je Damjan* (*My Name is Damian*, 2002) and a radio play *Lep dan še naprej* (*Have a Nice Day*, 2012). She has also published four non-fiction books on the lesbian rights movement, literature and activism. In 2007 Tratnik received the national Prešeren Fund Award for Literature, in 2017 the Novo mesto Short Award for best short story collection, and in 2018 the Desetnica Award and in 2023 the Levstikova Award for best children's or YA work. Her stories and books have been translated into more than thirty languages.

A selection of Tratnik's stories was published in the English translation in *Games with Greta and Other Stories* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2016).

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Scissors* by Suzana Tratnik is a collage of stories about girls, adolescents, women walking untrodden paths with a determined step day in and day out, hoping to leap onto the field of freedom and independence like Njusi, the crazy rabbit.

When they find themselves in a series of unenviable situations that nearly break them and keep them even further away from achieving their goals, the only thing that the protagonists can count on is their inner voice. Sometimes they experience small miracles that help them keep their cool, such as the ability to jump further than anyone in the world, nine cats, a photo in the left jean pocket or a bag of potatoes at a picnic.

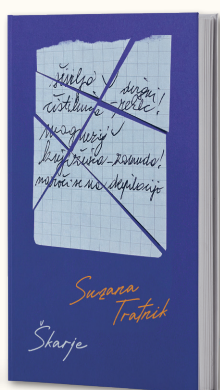
With her direct language and an incredible sense of detail, Suzana Tratnik cuts, pieces together and situates her stories in various periods and spaces, filling her dialogues with dialect, colloquial language and e-mail exchanges. Thus she opens the door to a typical wooden house in Prekmurje, standing on flattened ground, and a rental annex, so we can understand the uncompromising stance and determination of her protagonists who wish to move beyond *narrations of curse*, even if it means being the only one on the street to hang out with a *tart from the local whorehouse*. As usual, the author doesn't miss an opportunity to address the part of society who is still happy if a lesbian relationship ends with the death of at least one of the partners.

The core of Tratnik's storytelling is still focused on relationships – family, friend, erotic and, finally, social relationships – because of which the protagonists are prepared to cut someone off, just so they can invent and shape their life as they see fit. – *Tanja Matijašević*

### EXCERPT

## National Geographic

With great care, Mara takes off her checked shirt. "I'm hot," she says with a cigarette in her mouth. The cast is the only thing she's wearing now. The tattooed life philosophies in faded blue ink, the standard in juvies and prisons, become even more prominent on her white torso. *Born To Be Wild*, *Your Own Dream Catcher*, *Led by Zeppelin*, *Crash*, *Combat Now Never Lose...* And the image of a rose on her left shoulder and a snake wrapped around an anchor on her right, while the giant Pink



Floyd wall on her back is covered by the cast. Mara has always been the best image of herself. From the corner of my eye, I watch the scout table in the bar, the two leaders are looking our way now. I know the scene is worth staring at. Mara seems like a real-life sculpture of her own life, something I've never experienced from up close before.

"I know! The programme on ID Discovery!" I hear a young girl say.

"The one about prisoners running away?"

"Yes, it's called... I almost got away with it!" the scout team yells out in unison.

/.../

Mara stretches her neck, turning her head left and right, like a turtle trying to get out of its shell, even though it'll be even more vulnerable without it.

"You asked me earlier how I got out of the shed. I learned to listen to fear... many years ago, I spent some time at my uncle's. He lived in a garage. And he drank ever since I can remember. My mum had *him* babysit me. He raped me when I was twelve."

"I'm sorry." I say it just because I can't stay quiet. I don't know how one is supposed to express a shock like that. "What... what happened after that?"

"A few years later he burned to death in that garage of his."

"You never told me that."

"I never told anyone. I felt so cut up... I was worried other people would notice I was no longer whole, that I was not in one piece anymore, get it? I do everything, I smash and destroy everything when I need to, just so I never have to feel so helpless again."

The scout table bursts into laughter, this time at a joke told by the elder with a strong French accent.

"You never talked to anyone about this? What about at the juvie? With psychologists? How on earth did you get through it... I mean if you ever did... you probably haven't?" I'm serious with these questions, but I hear myself stammering like a beginner helpline operator.

She shakes her head. "I don't know. That's why I'm a lesbian."

"Because of the rape?" I ask.

She nods.

"No," I say decisively. "That's why you're a junkie."

She stares at the burnt-out cigarette between her fingers. After a few moments, she tosses it in the ashtray and puts her hands together.

"You know what... I'll catch a bus home. Can you walk with me a little?"

I nod. "I'll just go to the toilet first."

In the cubicle with an indigo blue light that prevents junkies from finding a vein to shoot up, I pull out a piece of paper from the back pocket of my pants and read.

*seamstress*

*cleaner's – pick up jacket!*

*magnesium*

*post office*

*library – late!*

*depilation appointment*

Just normal stuff. I read it three times under my breath. If that's not normal, I don't know what is. Just an everyday routine. *Vita regolare*. I put the list in my wallet. Too precious to lose.

When I get back, Mara is ready to leave, and her armour is hidden under layers of clothes. We attract the attention of the young crowd sitting at the table next to us again. We pretend not to notice, can't be bothered now. I do her shoes first, then mine, pick up our heavy bags and we leave the oriental room.

The scout community breaks into a loud debate.

# **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 – Trubar**

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.

### **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.

Contact: [katja.urbanija@jakrs.si](mailto:katja.urbanija@jakrs.si)

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