

Evald Flisar, ed. *From the Heart of Europe: Anthology of Contemporary Slovenian Writing*. Guilderland, NY and Norman, OK: Texture Press, 2007. 217 pp., \$14.95 (paper). ISBN-10 097120618X, ISBN-13: 978-0971206182.

The anthology *From the Heart of Europe* contains modern Slovene short narrative prose as well as excerpts from Vlado Žabot's novel *Sukub* (The Succubus, 2003) and Feri Lainšček's collection *Misljice: deset pravljic* (Small Thoughts: Ten Fairytales, 2000).¹ Both the collection's title and the foreword by Matej Bogataj titled "Contemporary Slovenian Literature: A Cohabitation, in Principle, of Styles and Generations" demonstrate the work's additional intention to present Slovene culture and history to American readers, place Slovene literature in a European context, and offer some basic information on Slovene history from 6th-century Carantania to the present (with particular emphasis on the attainment of independence in 1991). Throughout their history, the Slovenes were closely connected with the development of language and literature; it is therefore fitting that Bogataj's preface pays close attention to Slovene mythology and literature, and discusses the increasingly vital issue of financing the publishing industry.

The anthology includes 13 well-known Slovene authors; each is presented with a short biography, a bibliography, and in most cases one story. In alphabetical order, the writers are as follows. Andrej Blatnik (born 1963), with the short story "Electric Guitar" from the collection *Zakon želje* (The Law of Desire, 2000), which received the Prešeren Award in 2002, and Igor Bratož (b. 1960) with the short story "Imitatio Mundi: A Record of Triviality" from the collection *Pozlata pozabe* (The Gilding of Oblivion, 1988), which received the Golden Bird Award. The youngest and the oldest of the authors follow: Aleš Čar (b. 1971) with the short story "The Floors" from the collection *V okvari* (Out of Order, 2001) and Evald Flisar (b. 1945) with the story "Executioners"² from the collection *Zgodbe s poti* (Stories from the Road, 2000). Drago Jančar (b. 1948) offers the short story "Ultima Creatura" from his 1995 short story collection of the same name, and Milan Kleč (b. 1954) the short story "Škilan" from the collection *Balanca* (Handlebars, 1990). Next is Feri Lainšček (b. 1959) with three fairytales ("Agnes and the Angel," "Beautiful Angelica," and "Rebecca and The Gypsy"³) from the collection *Misljice: deset pravljic*, which gained the avant-titre *Tales of the Heart* in the English version. Vinko Möderndorfer (b. 1958) provided the

¹ In the foreword to this collection, which is filled with folk motifs, the author explains: "Because of the special creative process that allowed me various approaches to infinite layers of fairytale tradition, I have named these fairytales *mislice* [small thoughts]."

² Originally "Ukijev srečni dan" (Uki's Lucky Day).

³ Originally "Ignacija in njen angel," "Lepa Angelika," and "Zalika in Gusti."

novelette “A Shared Memory,” which was also the subtitle of his collection *Druga soba* (The Other Room), published in 2004. The largest number of texts was written by Andrej Morovič (b. 1960); five short stories from the collection *Padalci* (Parachutists, 1991): “East 12th Street, Apartment 10,”⁴ “The Painter at E 12th, #14,” “The House on Christopher Street,” “Christopher Street Stop,” and “Under My Window.” As the only woman in the group, Maja Novak (b. 1960) contributes the story “The Tomcat” from her collection *Zverjad* (Beasts, 1996). Andrej E. Skubic (b. 1967) follows with the short story “It’s Going to Be Alright” from the collection *Norišnica* (The Madhouse, 2004), and Jani Virk (b. 1962) with the novelette⁵ “On the Border” from his collection *Moški nad prepadom* (A Man above the Precipice, 1994). Last but not least is Vlado Žabot (b. 1958) with three passages (chapters 9 and 10, and the beginning of chapter 11) of his novel *Sukub*.

The dominance of short narrative prose probably stems from the fact that in Slovenia this genre has been increasingly published since the 1980s. The collection symbolically represents this period because most of the stories included were published in the 1990s. Short stories predominate; following the example of German literary theory—which was (at least with regard to the short story) a model for the literary theorists Matjaž Kmecl and Janko Kos—these can be successfully distinguished from the novella. In the 1990s, through Tomo Virk, Aleksander Kustec, and before them Gregor Kocijan, Slovene literary theory started actively addressing the issue of short narrative forms. This focus was probably a result of the increasing writing and publication of short stories after 1980.

This collection⁶ is a heterogeneous combination of various Slovene literary works, considering the span of the authors’ ages (the youngest was born in 1971 and the oldest in 1956), the genre and literary forms (from short stories, novellas, novelettes, and excerpts from novels to children’s literature), the numerous works by individual authors (most of them with one text, Lainšček with three fairytales, and Morovič with five short stories), and also its typological diversity, which speaks in its favor in today’s hyperactive and complex world of globalization and individualization. The diversity of the volume mirrors the shifts of modern society also reflected in Slovene literature—Ronald Higgins

⁴ Originally “510 East 12th Street, Apartment 10.”

⁵ Milan Dekleva classifies the form of Virk’s stories thus: “They carry the features of a longer story and at the same time display the conciseness of a short story” (Virk 1994: dust jacket).

⁶ A similar export project is, for instance, the collection of 23 short stories in Berger (2003); the foreword was written by Mitja Čander, one of the main representatives of Slovenia’s younger generation of publishers and editor at the publishing house Študentska založba.

(1978) believes that today's artists no longer ask themselves "Who am I?" but "Which world do I belong to?" Great stories in the sense of tales about the nation-state, religion, ideology, or politics are no longer of such interest in today's literature as they were back in the 1970s. The firm individual identity once immersed in great stories of mythical proportions is disappearing, being replaced by the modern hyperactive and complex features of everyday life that narrate and mythologize the story through everyday routine. The individual is daunted by the numerous possibilities and forced into a continuous journey of seeking the right path, the end of which promises enlightenment and wisdom, thus creating his or her own destiny. Although the realization of what they should have done before the end comes too late for characters in novels (following the aphorism "The journey is over, the path begins"), the characters in short stories repeatedly find out that there are countless and endless possibilities; the journey always starts anew. When or if it ends, the literary subject does not change; the journey yields no new wisdom or insights. There are no major turnabouts or fundamental existential questions; there is nothing to surpass daily life. Therefore, the characters in short stories do not try to save the world because they know it is impossible to do so. They try to save themselves, their everyday lives. However, because everything is possible, everything equally (un)safe, and everything marginal, everything and nothing at all can be (non)fatal in life. Not even death deters to this fact. Not even love. Great ideas are replaced by media that promote desires and fantasies; a fact clearly reflected in the title of Blatnik's collection *The Law of Desire* (2000)—modern society is condensed through narrativity—from stories constructed for the media, film stories, life stories of important and famous people, the fates of celebrities, politicians, artists, and influential individuals, to stories constructed for marketing, advertising and consumer stories, and stories about new products, services, offers, sales, and styles.

The translators Gerald Hansen, Andrej Morovič, Erica Johnson Debeljak, Evald Flisar, Lili Potpara, Tamara M. Soban, Sonja Kravanja, Maja Novak, and Rawley Grau are to be commended for their work. The anthology *From the Heart of Europe: Anthology of Contemporary Slovenian Writing* is an example of modern Slovene literary production that combines writers from different eras. It proves that Slovene literature, albeit with a slight lag, follows global guidelines after all. Hopefully, for those that encounter Slovene fiction, this collection will awaken a deeper interest in these (seemingly distant and unimportant) narrative worlds.

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