
Humor after Eclipse

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Is the novel *Sea at Eclipse* an adaptation of Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* transposed from Cuba to the Dalmatian Islands? The question was recently addressed to me by John O'Brien, the editor of the publishing house Dalkey Archive Press in Illinois, when he was visiting Ljubljana this year. The said labeling of Dolenc's novel could help Anglophone readers in contact with Slovenian literature for the first time to place Slovenian literature in general and Dolenc's novel in particular on their literary scope. However, who would want to read the Slovenian "adaptation" of Hemingway's novella, even though it is written with the same sincerity with which Borges' Pierre Ménard recopied, right down to the letter, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*? These landmarks help, but are at the same time detrimental. The reader/critic can use them as a conceptual net into which he catches the text-fish, but in such a way that he kills it even before reading it.

Nevertheless, the underlying structural similarities between Dolenc's and Hemingway's fables cannot be overlooked: both depict the leading character of an old man trying to catch a fish; he struggles with the sea and loses the battle. The question to be asked, however, is: is he also defeated in both texts?

Dolenc paraphrases Hemingway and openly quotes him through the words of his main narrating character, Val Sebald. At the same time, he firmly inserts elements in his text which do not appear in Hemingway's novella (e.g. love story). Furthermore, he evolves themes expressed in Hemingway's novel in his own manner (e.g. death), or he adopts claims that are the complete opposite of Santiago's attitude towards the sea. When discussing Hemingway's novella with Ivana, a young painter, Val Sebald says the following:

"The sea is stronger than anything," he said. "In the end, the sea defeats everything, but I'm not in conflict with it."

On an assertive level, *Sea at Eclipse* moves in the opposite direction from Hemingway's novella - towards accepting nature and with it accepting old age, which is part of nature. At essential moments the novel reads like Dolenc's paragram of Hemingway's novella. However, does Val Sebald also accept aging and death through his actions, and does he accept them differently from Hemingway's main character, Santiago?

The citations and references from Hemingway's novella are not the only ones found in the novel - there are numerous other references to prose writings by various authors (Baricco, Borges, Marquez, Saint-Exupéry and others), which are all listed in a kind of writer's epilogue at the end of the book. The epilogue is also the place where an interesting post-statement can be found: "*The books that Sebald and I had with us in the boat as we were writing this dory - I mean: story - included [...].*" Despite this overt postmodernist gesture, I was not satisfied with the idea that Dolenc only cares to reproduce the already reproduced postmodernist approaches. I was of the opinion throughout that the citations, Sebald's obsession with summarizing other stories, sending messages in bottles, and the mixing of fictional and real female characters in the imaginary "first story" of Sebald's tavern, all point to something else. If the key theme in the novel is confronting old age and death, then confronting illusory ego-images is an integral part of human experience - fiction as a genre deals with them in their purest form. In this perspective, the postmodernist features of Dolenc's novel construct a narrative technique that illustrates Sebald's identity crisis. Does he try to make the reader aware of what remains once the delusional ego-images are abandoned?

The approaches in the text applied to the delusional side of our lives resemble, if not in the final outcome then at least in its intentions, the antique and medieval approaches towards mortality. When confronted with the illusory nature of his ego-images, Santiago only senses his pain and escapes from it into dreams of power he can no longer impersonate. Val Sebald, the narrator of the stories in the text, is somewhat more courageous when observing the moment of his own weakness. Nevertheless, does Val Sebald skillfully manage his phantasms, or does he not perhaps use them to escape the painful reality? Moreover, does Val Sebald react differently to the delusional ego-images than Santiago?

The novel is ambivalent on this issue. Regardless, the author should be recognized and praised for the courage to write openly about death and aging in a world where these two subjects are taboo. There is yet another type of courage at play here. Dolenc does not treat the experience of the illusory side of human existence in a nihilist way, as in Borges' short fiction. Borges' works are permeated with the revelation that the ideas with which individuals interpret their existence and their world are in fact delusional. At the same time, though, this revelation is mistakenly projected onto the physical existence of man and his fellow human beings: when hurting someone's leg, for example, the responsibility for the act cannot be driven away by claiming that the pain is a delusion. Notwithstanding, zero knowledge and complete ignorance of illusory human ego-images is equally dangerous and ethically questionable. Dolenc is not only a writer, but also a fisherman and a scuba diver, very well acquainted with the experience of the fragility of human and animal bodies. This is also reflected in the novel: the donkey kneels under the gentle sky and puts out its body to the sun, wind and birds; when Val Sebald kills the fish he feels the last beat of its heart as if it were his own. (But why kill a fish with this in mind?) Dolenc's illusory identity images are ones to cover fragile bodies with; the annihilation of all illusions is probably related to the beholding of beauty and the fragility of the transitoriness of human existence.

Dolenc repeatedly likens the boat to a physical experience in life: the boat is the cradle and the coffin with which we are tied to the Sea; it is also the only medium through which we have the opportunity - despite its faults - to fathom the Sea. When the body and the ego are removed from the self, only the Sea remains - the source of love, fear and knowledge. Can Val Sebald truly overcome the greatest fear and become - the Sea?

Santiago, the Fisherman with Dreams

Hemingway's novella begins with the following phrase: "*He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.*"¹ Dolenc's

¹ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, (1952), Charles Scribner's Sons, NY.

novel starts in a similar way: “*He was an old man who fished alone in his motor boat all through the archipelago and for the past two months hadn’t caught a single fish worth mentioning [...].*” Both texts, each in its own fashion, deal with the themes of old age and the decline of vitality, but they each construct their own sacred space under the surface (the sacred space invokes fear and trembling [*mysterium tremendum*] and at the same time attracts us in Hemingway; in Dolenc it inexplicably fascinates us [*mysterium fascinans*]).

What, to be precise, is old age understood to be? Is it renouncing delusional images or purifying oneself of them?

In Dolenc’s novel forms of ritual sacrifice and purification can be detected. When Val Sebald is faced with the frustration of Ivana falling in love with young Drokun and not with him, he ritually purifies himself of desire: he cuts the *drokun* (snake) which Piacun killed into little pieces, fries and eats it, washes it down with alcohol and excretes it. It is not, however, solely a matter of treating his frustration, but also the purification of desire, more precisely, the purification of mistaken identity images of the ego as a lover.

Marcel Detienne writes about two different images in Ancient Greece: the good old age and the damned old age. An example of the good old age is Nereus, who is described in the *Theogony* as *alèthès* (he who has access to *alètheia*, i.e. the truth), *apseudès* (he who does not cheat or mislead) and *nèmertès* (the infallible, i.e. without fault, *hamartèma*).² The good old age wisely gazes into the truth of human existence; it succeeds, though, only by abolishing the illusory, misleading images and false actions. The damned old age (*gèras oulomenon*) acts in the exactly opposite way. Instead of abandoning the illusory images, it embraces them even tighter and strengthens the attachment to them, even while mourning their loss or suppressing the awareness of their falsity. The difference between them is that the good old age renounces illusory images, while the damned old age clutches on to them.

Simone de Beauvoir looks at many cases of the damned old age in her book *La vieillesse* [Old Age] (1970). Flaubert was tearfully mourning the lost golden days even before he got

² Marcel Detienne. *Les Maîtres de Vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*. Paris: Librairie générale française, 2006. Pp. 85-87.

old. Moreover, Hugo, who spent the mature period of his life in an outwardly exemplary marriage, spent his old age by obsessively cataloging every one of his voyeuristic experiences with young girls. Goethe's Faust fled his old age from the disappointment of wasting his youth in search of wisdom, which he ultimately did not find. However, the modern consumer goes a step further: the contract with the devil is not concluded out of disappointment, but from inertia, because he "must" meet the criteria of "normality". Old age has now become a *diseased, abnormal state*, which can be prevented by responsible individuals with an appropriate lifestyle. This, no doubt, requires a heap of money, needed also for surgical procedures suppressing the symptoms of old age already in one's twenties or thirties. The fear of aging is disguised under the L'Oréal advertising slogan: "Because I'm worth it." Language does not hide the truth, though: because I have to raise my market value, I have to *invest* in a youthful *look*. The cure for old age is money, but it only covers up uncertainty and fear – being normal means never voicing one's anguish.

To be normal is therefore to be possessed with escaping the confrontation of old age and death. The contemporary images of the good old age are contrary to the ancient Greek concept; in fact they fall into the category of the damned old age.

Old age is therefore something that is not "me". It is something from the outside penetrating me. Simone de Beauvoir described the experience of the damned old age as follows: "*Age is something outside (sic!) my life, about which I cannot have any full internal experience (sic!).*" The modern Mefisto says: Protect yourselves against external enemies when you are still young, when you still have a perfect complexion and your market value is high. I will take care of you. If you sell me your soul, I will save you at a better price. Sell me a pound of your soul and I will preserve your breasts and the skin around your eyes. If you insure your soul with me, I will give you eternal breath!

The difference between the good and the damned old age is in how one resolves the dichotomy between the illusory image, for which we are unconsciously negotiating, and the realization that these images are illusions. The reaction in the moment of the collapse of the identity image is therefore essential: will the identity crisis lead us to wisdom or to the

convulsive suppression of knowledge? Simone de Beauvoir goes on to say that ego-images are affixed to a transforming, dying object – which does not really exist. We tend to take this projection for a fact.

The problem is not in the existence of the identity image, but in the effort to meet its demands and to get hold of it. There exists a tie of desire between me and the (delusional) identity image. By including a love story in the novel, Dolenc shows that Val Sebald will tackle the root of the problem Santiago unsuccessfully confronted. Love and desire are the structure of the plot through which Val Sebald (and we with him) contemplates the possibility of renouncing his self-image. When Val gives up Ivana it seems at first to represent a metonymy for the renunciation of the strong wish for illusory ego-images. Val does not seem frustrated or self-destructive. However, is the story of Val's renunciation really that simple? Does Val actually blend into the Sea?

The Sea in Dolenc's novel unites life and death, the desire for illusory images and the renouncement of desire. Furthermore, the Sea is also an unfathomable and inapprehensible "Depth". The Sea could therefore be a sacred place where there are no images and no illusions, leading to the conclusion that a complete fusion with it is only possible by renouncing all identity images and desires. Dolenc offers two options for this kind of radical renunciation, death and priesthood, but nevertheless has an ironic attitude towards them both.

The dimension of the sacred (more religiously ritualistic than sacred) is also found in Hemingway's novella, in proper names, but on a metaphorical level: Santiago first appears as a mature man, Santiago Matamoros (killer of Moors – Muslims)³,

³ H. R. Stoneback. "Pilgrimage Variations: Hemingway's Sacred Landscapes." *Religion & Literature*. Vol. 35, No. 2/3 (Summer – Autumn, 2003), 49–65. Stoneback cites Hemingway's letter to Father Robert Brown from 1954 and his fascination with Santiago de Compostela, who in the medieval legend was first Santiago Matamoros (killer of the Moors) and then beheaded in Jerusalem. The first apostolic Christian martyr was then, after a difficult sea voyage in a small boat, delivered to the south-western Spanish coast, where the town Santiago de Compostela was slowly growing. Stoneback links Hemingway's term "Santiago El Campeón" and "The Champion" with Santiago Matamoros. The link with Santiago de Compostela is also etymological: *campus stellae* appears in

who beats a black man. Later on, he appears as an old man who wishes to take possession of his self-image for good (its symbol is the “fish”). The moment he exposes his catch to the light of reason and discovers that his offense was driven by pride⁴, the “sea devils” begin to attack the “fish”. He wants to suppress the awareness in order to preserve his self-image, and it is his suppressed awareness that manifests as external enemies, the sharks. Even when he loses the fight, he does not comprehend that his self-image has been destroyed; thus he is defeated and resorts to new scams.

Hemingway very cleverly demonstrates this at the end of the novella where the themes of ignorance appear three times. American tourists misunderstand the waiter’s explanation and interpret the consequences of the shark attacks as the body of a shark. This is actually a grotesque way through which they repeat and comment on Santiago’s error: the attachment to the self- image creates a destructive shark. Santiago’s feeling of personal defeat makes him resort to a double dream. On the one hand, he *dreams* of African lions, the symbol of courage and determination; the sea in his dreams looks like an African landscape, the reminiscence of the days when Santiago was still “Matamoros”. Even during the fish chase the sea appears to be similar to the African coast⁵, the memory of the “lions” playing “on the beach” in the evening (Hemingway, 10). At the end of the novella the sea therefore assumes the *appearance* of the power the old man desires, but is no longer available to him.

Santiago’s inner monologues about the stars. (Stoneback 53-54). For the etymology and meaning of the name Santiago Matamoros, see D. A. Spellberg, “Inventing Matamoros’: Gender and the Forgotten Islamic Past in the United States of America.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2004), 148-164, 150-153. See also Hernán G. H. Taboada. “Mentalidad de reconquista y primeros conquistadores”, *Revista de Historia de América*, No. 135 (Jul. - Dec. 2004), 39-48.

⁴ In Hemingway’s novella it is written: “You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman.”

⁵ In Hemingway’s novella it says: “The clouds over the land now rose like mountains and the coast was only a long green line with the gray lue hills behind it.” See also: “He could oy see the green of the shore ow but only tops of the blue hills that showed white as though they were snow-capped and the clouds that looked like igh snow mountains above them.”

On the other hand, Santiago also dreams in his real-life world; he dreams of re-justifying his place in society: he means to initiate Manolin into the world of adult fishermen and help him build the same self-image of the fisherman-hero which defeated him. Thus, Santiago adds joint responsibility for the reenactment of his own tragedy in Manolin to his personal defeat.

Santiago responds to the collapse of his self-image with frustration and a sense of defeat - as well as escaping into an imaginary world. In spite of everything, these developments are not necessary, since a different path is offered to him in the novella.

Let's look at one of Santiago's thoughts: "*But man is not made for defeat... A man can be destroyed but not defeated*" (Hemingway, 114). Santiago is destroyed three times: at the beginning of the novella, when he does not catch anything for three months, in the middle, when he catches the fish and it turns out he killed his alter ego, and at the end, when his fish is devoured by the sea devils. In all three cases, he has the opportunity to give up his attachment and accept living without his self-image. It is very human that he is afraid of this, but because he cannot conquer his fear, he suffers defeat: "*He knew he was beaten now finally and without remedy...*" (Hemingway, 131).

The paragram of the Latin proverb *quod me nutrit me destruit* is also interesting: fishing kills me as much as it keeps me alive. The reversed sequence of killing-preserving is meaningful - the truth is revealed to Santiago at sea: first one must destroy (the attachment to self-image) in order to preserve life. In this respect, sharks appear to be a force of wisdom and very helpful to Santiago, but he does not want to see this. Thus, Santiago alienates himself from fear of recognition (in a frightening disguise) offered by the sea.

It cannot be denied that Santiago completely blocks out the voice of wisdom: he is in contact with it when alone at sea. Hemingway illustrates this contact by the loud addressing of "you" with which Santiago unconsciously addresses the "I" (self-image).

A different example is the declarations about the sea, which are images of the sea as a sacred space.⁶ The sea is terrifying,

⁶ H. R. Stoneback. "Pilgrimage Variations: Hemingway's Sacred Landscapes." *Religion & Literature*. Vol. 35, No. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn, 2003), 49-65. See p. 52.

but also friendly and nice; the sea is like a woman, giving and taking great mercies; the sea is a mirror reflecting light (knowledge) into the old man's eyes. However, the old man struggles not to see what is reflected in the mirror and therefore chooses of his own free will to be blind to the light which will later cause him pain; the sea is a deep, dark water in whose depths the "fish" hides, "beyond all loops, traps and betrayals". In a sense, the sea is a space, or better yet a state of truth, infallibility and a non-illusion. It is the promise of a good old age. Santiago feels deeply connected to this place/state, but at the same time fights it and tries to tame it, not daring to go below the ego-surface.

The symbolic meaning of the Sea in Dolenc's novel is built upon this dimension of the sea as a sacred space.

Val Sebald, Unrequited Lover and Poet

Unlike Hemingway, who writes about the world beneath the surface of the sea in a way that constantly observes it from above, Dolenc describes the undersea world by shifting the narrator's viewpoint, both literally symbolically, beneath the surface. When Dolenc introduces the love story about the impossible love for Ivana, he creates a different perspective on the renouncing of illusions. The story of Sebald's love for Ivana supplements and gives meaning and value to a series of stories about death, which occur on an intra-diegetic level (e.g. Miloš's death) and on a meta-diegetic level: by means of embedded micro-stories about deceased islanders or as metonymical images of death (ex. the image of a donkey who gives itself up to the sky; the image of the agave plant that will be destroyed by its own blossom).

At first glance, Sebald's decision to let Ivana go appears to be a pragmatic decision, brought on by the age difference (nearly half a century) and especially by the fact that Ivana chooses a younger lover. If Val Sebald is the person who introduces her to the world below the sea and enables her to go and explore it by giving her a sealskin suit (the sea carries an erotic connotation here), then Drokun is the fisherman who introduces and leads her into the "real depths of the sea." Due to this unexpected twist, Sebald recurses to expelling his desire, more

precisely to the ritualized consumption of the snake/ *drokun* [dragon] (!), which he washes down with Dionysian fluid (alcohol), goes into Dionysian ecstasy (little death) and finally excretes it. It is only after this ritual that he is – or seems to be – cleansed of desire and superficial self-representations, permitting him to go catch the “fish”, his toughest self-image.

In addition to the love story, Dolenc succeeds in weaving representations of love and desire into the text, found in the European medieval and Romantic literary tradition. With the figure of Ivana the artist, Dolenc plays with the split between the ideal but unattainable Woman on the one hand, and the erotically attractive “mermaid” on the other, whose separate but complementary images render impossible a relationship and love for a real flesh-and-blood man. In the scenes preceding his death, the lovemaking with Albina Nevers, who is at this stage merely an imaginary woman, the love drive turns into a death drive.

Let us examine some of the instances in the book where continual representations of traditional love occur. One of them is the scene where Val Sebald takes Ivana to the Bear’s Cave as if to show her his inner world: the cave is a womb to him, a place where imaginary ego-images constantly come to life. The moment Val Sebald kneels before Ivana, the idealized image of the inaccessible Woman-Goddess renews itself in the uterus.

And in this grave in the belly of the island Ivana was holding onto Sebald by the shoulders with both hands now, and looking into his eyes. Only the light of the waterproof flashlight shone between their faces.

Fifty-one years separated them.

Up to their waists they were standing in water, from the waist up they stood in the air.

Moments that splashed against the white gravel of the far end of the cave.

Of the cave within the island.

He began to drop down onto his knees. Her hands followed him on his shoulders until he was in water up to his neck. For a moment he kneeled in front of her.

As if he were praying.

To her.

Then she released him. He turned the flashlight toward the exit, stretched out over the water's surface and started to swim. With her alongside him. Several times their arms collided, their sides touched, their flippers brushed against each other. Then the blinding triangle of light of the exit appeared and within it the boat, affixed to a patch of brilliant sky.

Sebald's kneeling is a symptom of his frustration. He is erotically attracted to Ivana, but at the same time he is afraid, because being with her would make him "feel" his old age. He immediately covers up his frustration by idealizing the unattainable object: Ivana is sublimated into a Woman-Goddess. The irony of the scene is of course the fact that Sebald, in the moment of his self-delusion, attests to the troubadour gesture of kneeling before his chosen lady. By that, he distances Ivana as a human being away from himself.

It seems that Ivana tries to avoid this even before she enters the cave. Although the cave represents a uterus (the source of his delusional images) for Sebald, it is a tomb to Ivana. True enough, Ivana dies in the tomb or rather ceases to play all of her roles except the one assigned her. The rest of the sequence is written through Sebald's point of view, centered on the idealized Woman.

The harmony in the last lines of the passage is strange and frightening, a mixture of the sacred moment (by Sebald) and Ivana's obliteration. But Ivana defies her supposed role when she "releases" Sebald and interrupts the scene. In spite of this, they both continue to act their designated roles. A metaphoric commentary is introduced into the image of the lovers, which only seems ironic in the general context of the novel: the lovers are metaphorically transformed into fish, into fantasies, fictional heroes. At the same time they focus on the boat attached to the sky. The boat is compared several times with the part of human life limited to the body - in this case it is attached to the sky, i.e. heaven - San Pedro, where the protagonist will sail to in the end. Another comment on Sebald's behavior can be found on the metaphoric level: the cost of maintaining the delusional images is death, joining St. Peter.

The sublime nature of the scene taking place in the Bear's Cave is also illuminated by further developments, where the

story is steered by the desire for the erotic image of Woman. Contrary to the Undine myth, Sebald gives Ivana a “sealskin”, as if he wanted to make amends to all the Undines of the world. His gift prompts Ivana’s emancipation and symbolically leads her into the “sea” – the erotic. On the one hand, his gift is ethical, because he tries to incite Ivana to be carefree and live out her female nature (the sexually desirable Mermaid and artist, the fabricator of imaginary ego-images), forbidden for the Woman-Goddess, because it would enable her to excessively control the “worshiper”. (However, does Ivana show signs of the split into Goddess and Mermaid, and does she really need Sebald’s gift?) Sebald is, in short, willing to risk a relationship with the woman as a whole, and not only with one of her halves. In doing so he finds himself in a situation where he might be willing to abandon his sublimation practices. However, his gift does not happen at the right time: Ivana prefers young Drokun to guide her into the real depths of the sea.

So, what exactly takes place inside Sebald? It seems that at this moment the only way out for him is the honorable way, to renounce desire. Once the renunciation seems complete, something new opens up to him, maybe just for a brief moment:

But now Piazzun was not his primary concern. Nor were sea maidens, nymphs, Nereids and sirens. Not even the women from the imaginary story.

Now that he had said goodbye to Ivana, she was his only concern.

When Sebald gives up the two delusive images of Ivana, he finally sees her as a real human being, a person without a name. I think this is one of the profoundest moments in Dolenc’s novel, also because from this moment onwards, Val’s desire to experience the Sea in its integrity can finally be fully expressed.

Only when Sebald renounces desire and is purified is he able to move on and catch the fish – his first illusion, his double. Mladen Dolar’s observation is clearly relevant to the protagonist’s conduct in this case:

The magnificent young girl is, rather, the obstacle in my privileged relation to myself, she is the real spoiler in this game, the spoiler of narcissism, so one has to get rid of her (and the double

*takes care of that) in order to join my real partner, my double. He detains that lost object that no woman can substitute. But of course joining one's jouissance, regaining one's "primordial being", is lethal, the subject can only attain it by his death.*⁷

In my opinion Sebald does not get rid of Ivana, but instead creates the possibility for new revelations through the experience of the real otherness of the other person. He will eventually attain it through recognizing his self-image, the Fish. As long as he remains ignorant, though, he cannot realize the ethical opacity of his actions – so he brings about the revelation by killing a living being.

The question is, though, by being a saint, can one also acquire knowledge, or do the devils inside a person have to be exorcised first in order to achieve it? Piazzun, Sebald's consciousness, protests against unethical actions. When Sebald encounters his double and kills it, he lets go of his attachment. Alas, his freedom has a bitter undertone. Even though this concept is a psychological process, the killing of an imaginary double, Sebald kills a real living being. At first his actions seem logical and comply with the demands of ritualistic purification. Sebald's story is set in the past, however, resulting in violence as its aftermath, not peace. Consequently, it is justifiable to doubt if Sebald entirely and truly detached himself.

It is obviously a different matter that the fish is symbolically linked to the female sex, a sacrificed virgin, while the act of sacrifice is misogynistic in its nature. The fish has given up its life for an idea; her death even enables a perpetual structure, where the goal (freedom) sanctifies the means (murder). This is deeply unethical for Piazzun – like “throwing a bag of fish onto the dock from far off”.

The Gaze of the Double

The fact that the fish is Sebald's double, the source of all other illusory images and projections, the illusory part of Sebald himself, is explicitly revealed in the following passage:

⁷ Mladen Dolar. “At a First Sight”. *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. Ed. by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996. P. 140.

As he came back up from a depth of fifty feet, he saw it. The fish tattooed onto his upper arm.

Mladen Dolar, the Slovenian Lacan specialist, analyzes the issue of two types of gazing meeting and intercrossing, which is the key motif in representations of being in love in European literature. Dolar says:

But "Their eyes met" is nevertheless the paradigm: there is an exchange of the gaze, the Real has returned the gaze, even if the other person didn't respond, or was unaffected by it, or even unaware of it. The lack of sense of a contingent fate, the haphazard string of events, was in that moment suddenly filled by the gaze, that Lacanian paramount evocation of what he called the object a. For once, one saw instead of just looking. For once once ceased to be blind, the gaze was returned [...].⁸

The moment their eyes meet Lacan's mirror stage center forms. As often pointed out in psychoanalytic theory, love is narcissistic by nature. In literary texts this moment is illustrated either by the motif "their eyes meet" (where lovers gaze into each other's eyes and see only their own eyes in them) or through the motif of the double, which is often found in Romantic literature.

Both motifs enclose a moment clinically known as *autoscopia*, but the effect of recognition is exactly the opposite of the expected self-recognition: instead of gaining wisdom and immortality, the character is on the way to ruin (Dolar 136). As soon as the subject meets its counterpart, he is condemned to death, while his double begins to carry out the subject's deepest and most repressed desires. In literary texts of the Romantic period the double survives, whereas the subject dies. Something similar happens to Narcissus: the moment when he most profoundly gazes at himself in the mirror, he perishes. Dolar believes that Narcissus dies because one cannot recognize oneself (be in duality), and simultaneously be one with oneself. When one recognizes oneself to be an ob-

⁸ Mladen Dolar. "At a First Sight". *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. Ed. by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996. 129-153.

ject, one loses the implicit coincidence of oneself with one's being in *jouissance* (Dolar, 138). Differently put, when gazing at the double, one is alienated from the most valuable part of one's being, the immediate self-being of *jouissance*. The consequence is either death – or the death of ego.

Sebald is afraid of confronting the fish's eyes, because he is aware that he will see in them the illusionary truth of his "self" and die. His fears are projected onto the marine landscape: when he shoots the fish, the sun begins to eclipse. Sebald's fear is repeated in Nives' sentence resonating in his imagination: "The sea's going to swallow you up". Nonetheless, he meets the fish's gaze in his dreams:

And in his dreams he saw fish swimming around him and below him, and fish eyes looking at him, and it struck them in some instances that he recognized the eyes of his visions of beauty [divnjice]⁹ from the imaginary story in Confín.

Herein lies the reason why the desire to confront the fish remains: "My only goal is this fish. There is no other goal." Their eyes finally meet and in the eye of the fish he sees a "moving train car". This complex image reminds me of Žižek's comments on Clearance Brown's film *Possessed* (1931) in *Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006): the image of the moving train car induces the girl to see her own projections. The moving car resembles a film roll – the exact same impression is evoked at Sebald's encounter with the fish: he meets his own projections:

At one corner of its pursed maw there was a tiny eye watching attentively. Sebald hovered in the blueness, sinking ever so slowly, as the spotted wall moved past him like a train car with lighted windows. It had the shape of a fish, but it wasn't a fish.

That eye wasn't tiny at all, it was bigger than an ostrich egg. It only seemed small against this enormous body.

It looked at Sebald as if it were imprinting him on its memory.

⁹ *Divnjica* [divnyitsa] (pl. *divnjice*; from the verb *diviti se* [to be enchanted with]) is not a Slovenian word. It is taken from the Dalmatian dialect and means "a girl old enough to get married". But in the context of Dolenc's novel its etymology (a wondrous or miraculous being) cannot be overlooked.

Even after this moment in time Sebald still does not dare look into the fish's eyes. He stares away because of his pride and the fear that he would have to admit what he already knows: that his self-image is illusory:

*He didn't dare to look at it. Didn't dare to look in its eyes.
Pride and fear whirled through him.*

Sebald thus rejects the knowledge he acquires when their gazes meet, he rejects the recognition of the *object a*, which has been extracted from the Real. However, later on he defeats the frustration and accepts the fact that his self-image is illusory. On the coast, where the locals converse about the weight of the dead fish, Sebald remarks that the fish will feed no one, therefore it "doesn't weigh anything". The illusory self-image does not feed us, therefore weighs nothing. At this moment Val Sebald - I do not know if it was the author's intention or not - takes advantage of a possibility Santiago never considered: that which kills me also feeds me. The recognition kills the fish-illusion, concluding that it is not possible to survive on illusions. There are, nonetheless, other foods which are nourishing. This passage is followed by Sebald's pre-death vision, the erotic encounter with Albina Nevers, decorated with ironic comments and distancings.

In Dolenc's novel, in addition to the aforementioned moment of self-gazing, there is another moment of gazing, when their eyes meet. A dialogue forms between two images, Sebald's and Ivana's. When Sebald gives up Ivana, he draws a mental picture of a seascape into which Ivana "melts". The other image is Ivana's painting of Palagruža covered in snow, where Sebald's face is hidden in the island's lighthouse.

Sebald's portrait of Ivana concords with the Petrarchan practice of looking that subliminates the forbidden woman into a landscape or into *parts* of a landscape:

A stretch of the shore covered with macchia and a single tree bent forward, as though about ready to fall, a triangle of sea, and a patch of sky. That was all. Enough for the picture that remained. With this signature: Ivana.

Sebald's image is characterized by a double concealment. He does not only hide his authorship by drawing Ivana's signa-

ture on it. His portrait of Ivana simultaneously follows the Petrarchan practice, where the forbidden woman (the Real one) is sublimated into a landscape or parts of it, and justified through one of the discourses of power (theology, nationality, etc.). The sublimated desire has therefore kept the discourses of power, while the sublimated subject was involved in the dynamics of “hope and fear”. This sort of subject hopes, on the one hand, to touch the inaccessible whole with the production of artistic “landscapes”, while on the other hand, he is scared to destroy the sublimation with the force of his art and still touch the (forbidden) real. Hope and fear alike keep him in a fictitious, illusory dwelling.

Sebald’s sublimatory practice does not serve any discourse of power: (the imaginary) work of art is a medium through which it becomes visible, but nothing more. Sebald creates the image at the exact moment when he excretes *drokun* (snake-desire) from his body. The image of Ivana replacing the snake in his mind points to the fact that Sebald has not yet deracinated his desire, but keeps it under a different form.

Let us look at some of the narrative techniques used in the description of Sebald’s sublime landscape.

Sebald’s viewpoint is from the Island and from there Ivana appears to be the coast – a silhouette outlining a great void, where the sea and the sky blend into one. The coast is here for the sole purpose of being able to perceive an immense blueness despite the fear within. All in all, from Sebald’s point of view the sea and sky flow into a single One; in Val’s symbolic internal space this One becomes the Sea. When Sebald is confronted with the real, Val’s wish is embodied on the border of his desire for the “self”: to merge with the Sea, with *jouissance*. When Sebald bids Ivana farewell, Val’s only desire is for “her”.

In order for this to happen, though, he will first have to catch the Fish, kill it, and kill himself. In conclusion, Sebald’s sublimated desire slowly transforms into a death drive.

The content of Sebald’s gazing is answered by Ivana’s painting. Her picture is not an articulation of *object a* and therefore not Lacan’s “gaze”, but simply a double statement. Ivana holds up a mirror to Sebald in which he can perceive his own image as illusory. At the same time her painting is a statement addressed to the real man, addressing his state of being torn between life and death.

The painting of Palagruža in snow was already there [...]. Even the top of the lighthouse had a white cap on it. Sebald thought the lighthouse had the shape and the features of some old, wizened catain. The great reflectors beneath the lamp formed a face that seemed familiar to him, as if it were his own. She hid my portrait in the lighthouse, he smiled, that artist, that [divnjica], that miracolo and gift of the sea.

Ivana's point of view in the painting is the seascape, the Sea, whereas the focal point of her gaze is the landscape (product of sublimation), which manifests itself as Sebald's face. Ivana therefore inverts the classic process of sublimation. Sebald is wrong to think that Ivana hid his real image in the lighthouse; the lighthouse and the entire island in fact conceal Sebald's real image and, furthermore, Ivana renders transparent or even tears the sublimated landscape off Sebald, so that he would finally see himself for who he is. She transfers the moment of the transformation and detachment of images from a living human being - in accordance with Lacan's psychoanalysis and Dolar's claims - to the moment of death.

At this point a fine crack can be perceived in the novel and I am grateful to Dolenc for it. This crack would easily transform the novel about Val Sebald into a novel about Ivana as a real person, as a painter, who knowingly uses the art of producing illusory images to outline the gap through which contact with the Sea is finally possible. Especially because of the indirect encounter of the two points of view, Sebald's and Ivana's, which Sebald is aware of only after the fishing part, it can be concluded that Sebald proceeded quite far in the process of denouncing illusions.

Superseding this perception - appearing nowhere in the text in actual words - Val's three-story house comes crashing down. The cellar, the world of *id* (populated by erotic projections, mermaids and nymphs) and the imaginary first floor (the world of superego, sublimation practices and illusory women) break into the tavern. The *divnjice* become fish.¹⁰ What is left is reality. But when this happens, Val Sebald's ego starts to shatter and Sebald has to confront death.

¹⁰ This happens before, while Sebald is fishing, but only on a metaphoric level: "That night he lay on his bench in the open, looking up at the moon, and watched as a shadowy whale swam across it [...]."

Sebald's Death

If, in the passage with the scene that takes place in the Bear's Cave, the metaphors and Ivana's silence alone implicitly comment on Sebald's problematic sublimation practice, ironic comments begin to appear after Sebald's revelation, acting as an alienating force from the traditional representations of love.

One of them is, for example, the sight of Sebald's corpse, or what remains of the idealistic ego-images. Islanders preserve the body from decomposing by covering it with fish, which Sebald had been storing in his ice box. *Divnjice* have not only become fish, but frozen fish at that. Frozen fish carcasses (carcasses from eroticizing and sublimation practices) shroud Sebald's body and protect it from rotting. As a matter of fact, they preserve it for Jon to see.

Another similar scene is linked to the protagonist's *ante mortem* vision. But let us look first at the protagonist's name: Val Sebald. The name indicates his fundamental problem. Women (from the tavern's phantasmal first floor) call him Val [Wave]; everyone else - especially the men - call him Sebald (as the German novelist - therefore, a manufacturer of illusions). He keeps reminding himself, though, that he is Sebald and not the mythological Sinbad, who succeeded in harmonizing both: the fusion with the Sea and the passion for narration.

Both of the character's poles are uncoordinated, thus affecting his encounter with death, the Sea. Val's nature wants a fusion with the Sea; in order to achieve the greatest well-being he should turn away from subjectivity and desire death.

In the erotic encounter with Albina Nevers the climax is, however, not described as something exceptional. Val's vision of death is crossed with mistakes demolishing common *topoi*: the idealized Woman is the Old Granny-Death, the lovers quarrel and their climax is "more comical than magnificent" comparable to "the feeble descent of a single drop into a dry riverbed". Most importantly, though, the lovers are able to laugh at the dissolved visions/phantasms.

Albina Nevers surprised him, too. She was the same as he remembered, only her hair was white. Long and white.

Albina sighed.

"Never satisfied. The same old peevishness. But I'm taking you with me anyway."

"Where to? Sebald asked."

"Why, to San Pedro. Or is that wrong, too?"

[...]

*They undressed slowly and Sebald could see that the bones were sticking out of Albina's sides like a badly pitched tent, and he could smell the powder in her hair. She passed her hand over his sagging belly and wrinkled member, which hung out from a tuft of sparse gray bush. But despite these realizations and others that followed, they laughed and managed to bring their love to some sort of a climax, more comical than magnificent, without any great whirls and whitewater, rather more like the feeble descent of a single drop into a dry riverbed, and later, when they woke up from their giddy half-sleep, Sebald quoted her a passage from the book *Love In Time Of Plague* [...]*

Val is thus annihilated in the mortal vision and flows into the sea, but his *jouissance* is not absolute. Val's pleasures in his lifetime have the same destiny: he does not seek radical or absolute pleasure, but a safe enjoyment of the sea. Between the absolute and realistic pleasure there exists a place for laughter. Even at the time of Val's death a bit of Sebald remains – a bit of the poet and weaver of dreams who wants to maintain some degree of illusory subjectivity (and quotes from Marquez's novel!). Val and Sebald form a harmonious pact in the old man: Sebald permits Val safe enjoyment while Val gives Sebald space to defend his reflections. Both gain from the storytelling: Val compensates for the lack of pleasure, Sebald protects his subjectivity. Quotes or reinterpretations from other literary texts, legends, stories or myths, which form a strong component in Dolenc's novel, also function as Sebald's need for constructing illusory images and Val's compensatory deficits in pleasure.

The love *story* (in the sense of *fiction*) is thus a kind of empirical machine in which Dolenc, in all sincerity, records possibilities and limits, which Val Sebald battles at the moment in time when he should have been letting go of his illusory ego-images. Consequently, the love story gets stuck in three

places: in the scene in the Bear's Cave (Ivana's interpretation of it as a tomb), the scene of the protagonist's vision before death (due to alienating components and the lovers' mocking laughter), and in excerpts about Sebald's fishing. In all three cases, the subtext penetrates the surface of the carrying story, requiring a psychoanalytic reading that reveals the following: the story of renunciation is highly ambiguous. Who succeeds in the end: Val, Sebald - or Jon?

Desire as a "Deadlock": Where Is the Key?

Sebald's toll for confronting the fish is death. Paradoxically, he dies when he is closest to being Val and merging with the sea. Yet another crack is revealed at this stage in Dolenc's text. It concerns the renunciation again: psychoanalysis does not suffice to explain it, because at the key moment the Sea as a sacred place¹¹ interferes with all the dilemmas of a religious man (religious in terms of Eliade's *homo religiosus* and religious as someone who dares to face the question of his death); and the reading that tries to point out the structure of religious renunciation does not suffice as well, because of the quantity of the unresolved psychoanalytical material.

Such an interpretative dilemma applies also for the ending of the novel. To be precise, the novel has two endings. The first one, Sebald's (sexual) meeting with Albina Nevers, forms a part of the dying process. Here, the unresolved desire for the Other (actually for the "self") turns into a death drive. When the "self" dies, what then takes pleasure instead of self? Is not the habit of desire stronger - does it not, beyond all ends, once again invent for itself an equally illusory, although different "self" with all its phantasmal fixtures and results? All in all, does Val Sebald really achieve wisdom after death? Or does wisdom exist only in the telling of stories?

The second ending is written in a realistic manner, torn between the serious awareness of "what should be" and the ironically grotesque inserts. Val Sebald's son, the priest Jon

¹¹ "Ahead of him was the sea. The high priest of Sebald's faith." See also: "Sebald swam and dove to the bottom, to the line that had been drawn for him. As far as he was allowed."

Sebald, comes to take his father. Perhaps the son continues in his father's steps to renounce all desires. At the same time he seems to be aseptic, rigid, his eyes are "almost" innocent, although not entirely, because there is enough knowledge in them. Jon's renunciation seems false and marked by rigidity. That is the reason why his rigidity and seriousness are disturbing – they could be a symptom of the resistance against the final recognition. They could also be another form of frustration and the disobeying of "God's will".

Jon's direct speech is always embedded in a context Jon is not aware of and thus ironically comments on his speech. With Jon, the question is also raised whether the rigid renunciation of his own will and self is not, in truth, also a subtle lie. The extent to which Jon is actually prepared to accept God's will can be perceived in the scene with the corpse of his dead father covered in frozen fish. When talking to the villagers, Jon behaves like Christ, who drives out the merchants from his Father's temple, but his behaviour seems comic due to ironic comments or undertones. All key scenes with Jon suggest that he also cultivates ego-images.

Let's drink a glass, the young man said. It is his blood, after all. After these words Fiamengo wondered whose blood he meant, since there were two possibilities.

[...]
He was covered with plastic bags of all different strange shapes, which disturbed the young man. The cellar was saturated with the smell of fish worse than a fish market. [...]

The young man in the collar looked at him with his blue eyes, which flashed behind his round glasses.

"[...] We had to, uhm, preserve him, and we don't have any block ice around here," Fiamengo said.

"So you preserved him with..."

"Deep-frozen fish." [...]

"Understand, sir, there's nothing wrong with fish. After all, that San Pedro of yours was a fisherman, and even Christ divided the fish..."

"Please, s'gnor, the gentleman said testily."

"It's not s'gnor, it's barba," Fiamengo said, "Barba Žiko Fiamengo, of the house of Martini. Vintner, fisherman, beekeeper."

“All right, Barba Fiamengo, then,” Mr. Jon Sebald-Nevers said. “I might perhaps – if I had time – be very happy to join you on your terrace for a fish dinner prepared by you or your wife. But for you to cover my dead father with frozen fish...”

Another semantic potential can be added on top of this, one made possible by the biblical reference to Jonas, who avoided fulfilling God’s will the first time, because he keenly cultivated his desire for the “self”. In the book of Jonah 1.1-1.3 there is a clear warning about Jonah’s refusal: instead of focusing on “the Lord’s face” and following it, he heads for a large market town called Tarshish, a metonymic for a mind full of desire and diffusion. Jonah must therefore undergo the purification with the water (Jonah 2,4) and lands in the belly of a big fish, where he spends three days and three nights – just the period of time that they left the dead in the ancient cultures, before burying their corpses. Due to the wrong decision Jonah dies, not physically though, but it seems that his *will* dies. The desire to see the “holy temple” saves him from the awareness that the true acceptance of God’s will is not the attachment to “hollow idols” (what else is this but ego-images, sublimations, rigid Ideals with which one can easily hurt oneself and others?). But when it seems that Jonah has become a true follower of God’s will, it is revealed that his clutching onto God’s will is actually very rigid and without any real compassion for sentient beings. On behalf of his rigid Ideal which is in truth his rigid self, Jonah “demands justice”, i.e. condemnation for the people of Nineveh, for those who trade and sell – who therefore do the same as he initially started out to do! For this reason God wants to cure Jonah for the second time: he has him undergo the purification with fire so he would abandon his fanatic behavior (Jonah 4.6 to 10).

If Val Sebald had to travel through purifying water, it looks like his son, Jon Sebald-Nevers still has to undergo a journey through cleansing fire.

The only way out of the deadlock, which somehow does not lead to a complete renunciation, and therefore distances man from the love for other beings, is a sense of humor, which makes the rigidity of any ideal and sublimation practice a relative matter, and hence also the attachment to it. The crux of the humor in Dolenc’s novel suggests the myth about the

sea which fooled God when it took in salt (death, suffering) and transformed it into wisdom, into countless almost inconceivable forms of life. This said humor, the crack in the fish's mouth, the crack between smiling lips, is in fact the place where Dolenc's novel tries to lure the reader.

*Translated by Ana Petkovšek
Excerpts from the novel Sea at Eclipse translated
by Michael Biggins*

Mate Dolenc (Ljubljana, 1953) je študiral primerjalno književnost in nekaj časa delal kot novinar revije Mladina. Potem ko se je zaljubil v južnodalmatinske otoke (Vis, Komiza), je svoj čas delil med prevajanje, pisanje literature za otroke in odrasle ter podvodni ribolov.

Dolenc je pripadnik literarne generacije '50, ki je na različne načine skušala preseči tradicionalno nacionalno konstitutivno vlogo, ki jo je literature igrala v Sloveniji vse od 19. stoletja. Del generacije se je zapletal v manjše konflikte s socialistično oblastjo (Drago Jančar, Boris A. Novak) in pozneje v povezavi s krogom Nove Revije pomembno prispeval k ustanavljanju samostojne Republike Slovenije. Druga polovica generacije je iskala povsem druge poti. Namesto da bi se posvečala vprašanjem demokracije kot političnega izraza notranjega boja za človeško svobodo, se je z ironijo odzvala na malomeščansko mentaliteto v socialističnem režimu (Milan Jesih) ali pa se je osredotočala na vprašanja in teme, kot sta ekologija in medsebojna soodvisnost živih bitij v nekem prostoru, ki so pomembne tudi za civilno družbo v 21. stoletju. Navdihovala jih je generacija ameriških bitnikov (Tone Škerjanec, Iztok Osojnik), Borgesova kratka zgodba in urbana literature (Mate Dolenc). Prizadevali so si, da bi v družbi spoštovali vse oblike življenja, človeškega in živalskega (Jure Detela). Nenazadnje pa so v tradicionalne reprezentacije ljubezni v slovenski literaturi vnesli motive homoseksualne ljubezni (Brane Mozetič).

Mate Dolenc se je že v štartu odvrnil od proznega mainstreama in je namesto abstraktno filozofske proze raje pisal o posameznikovi realni izkušnji, v katero pa je postopoma začel vpletati mitološko gradivo oziroma arhetipsko-simbolne vsebine. V devetdesetih so začela nastajati dela o morju kot geografskem in arhetipskem prostoru, kjer je realna izkušnja prepojena z imaginarnimi elementi (sanjami in miti). Čeprav

se Dolenc včasih igra s pripovednimi strategijami magičnega realizma in postmodernizma, to počne s prepričanjem, da je eksistencialna izkušnja eno s knjigami.

Motivi in teme v Dolenčevih tekstih za odrasle se pojavljajo tudi v njegovi prozi za mladino (mit o Undini; zgodba o Joni in ribi; zgodba o slikarju, ki je odplul po svoji sliki; zgodba o zaljubljenem morskem medvedu). Prisotnost mitskih in arhetipskih elementov v Dolenčevem pisanju kaže globoko, čeravno nikoli eksplicitno izraženo avtorjevo intuicijo o tem, kaj nam preprečuje, da bi v času globalnega kapitalizma izgubili svojo dušo. Posameznik in celotna družba lahko preživita edinole z raziskovanjem globin našega uma in (kolektivnega) nezavednega. V tem smislu je ponavljajoči se simbol Morja v Dolenčevi prozi več kot poveden.

Morje v času mrka obravnava teme staranja in smrti in je do zdaj najboljši Dolenčev roman. Kljub jasnim referencam na novelo *Starec in morje* se Dolenc odmakne od Hemingwayeve fabule in jo avtonomno preoblikuje: umesti jo v podvodni svet, jo začini z erotiko in s humorjem kot bistvenima potezama svojega pisanja. Roman je bil preveden v hrvaščino, češčino in angleščino.

Za roman *Pes z Atlantide* in za zbirko novel *Rum in šab* je pisatelj dobil nagrado Prešernovega sklada (1995). Za mladinsko literaturo je dobil kar dve nagradi; leta 1986 mu je Mladinska knjiga podelila Levstikovo nagrado, leta 2004 pa je postal prvi dobitnik nagrade Desetnica, ki jo Društvo slovenskih pisateljev vsako leto podeljuje najboljšemu delu za otroke in mladino.

Dolenčeva proza navdihuje filmske ustvarjalce, saj sta v letu 2008 nastala kar dva filma, *Vampir z Gorjancev* (Vinci Vogue Anžlovar) in *Morje v času mrka* (Jurij Pervanje).

Mate Dolenc (Ljubljana, 1953) studied comparative literature and worked for the journal *Mladina*. After he fell in love with the islands around Vis (in Croatia) he started to dedicate his time to scuba diving, writing literature (for youth and adults) and translating.

Dolenc belongs to the literary generation that explored different ways of surmounting the national constitutive role that literature played in the Slovenian cultural field from the 19th century onwards. Half of the generation entered into minor conflicts with the socialist authorities (e.g. the novelist Drago Jančar; the poet Boris A. Novak) and later on contributed to the creation of the Republic of Slovenia. The second half of the generation searched for completely new paths. Instead of being interested in questions of democracy as the political expression of the inner fight for human freedom, they responded with irony to the petit-bourgeois mentality of the socialist regime (the poet and playwright Milan Jesih) or concentrated on questions and themes typical of the contemporary civil initiative, such as ecology and coexistence. They were inspired by the American Beat generation (the poets Tone Škrjanec and Iztok Osojnik), Borges' short stories and urban literature (Mate Dolenc). They claimed an absolute respect for all forms of life, human and animal, and therefore opened the problem of an ecological way of life (the poet Jure Detela). And finally, they introduced themes of homosexual love into traditional literary representations of love in the Slovenian literature (the poet Brane Mozetič).

Already from the very beginning, Mate Dolenc rejected the mainstream in the Slovenian prose of the 60's. Instead, he chose to deal with the individual urban experience and gradually introduced archetypal and mythico-symbolic dimensions into his novels. In the 90's, his prose-work dealt with the sea

as a geographic and archetypal space where the individual experience of reality is permeated by imaginary elements such as dreams and myths. Although he sometimes plays with narrative strategies of magic realism and postmodernism, he does it with the firm conviction that life and books are one.

The motives and themes that appear in Dolenc's literature for adults find their way also in his prose for children and youth (the Undine myth, the story about Jonah and the fish, the story about the painter that sailed off into his painting, the story about the love of the Sea-Bear). The persistence of mythical and archetypal dimension of Dolenc's writing shows a deep, but never explicit expressed author's intuition about what prevents us from losing our soul in the period of global capitalism. In fact, it is only by exploring the depths of our mind and our (collective) unconscious that we and our society can survive. From this point of view, the symbol of the Sea in Dolenc's later work seems more than pertinent.

Sea at Eclipse deals with the themes of old age and death and is the Dolenc's best novel so far. Despite clear references to *The Old Man and the Sea*, Dolenc makes significant changes to Hemingway's fable by placing it under the sea surface, by introducing erotic elements and by humor as the key feature of his writing. The novel has been translated into Croatian, Czech and English.

In 1995 Dolenc received the Prešeren Fund Prize for his novel *Dog from Atlantis* and the collection of short stories *Rum and Chess*. His youth literature was awarded twice: in 1986 the largest Slovenian editing house Mladinska knjiga honoured him with the Levstik Award and in 2004 he became the first author to win the Award Desetnica for the best annual work for children and youth.

Dolenc's prose work has also inspired film-makers, such as Vinci Vogue Anžlovar (*The Vampire from Gorjanci*, 2008) and Jurij Pervanje (*The Sea at Eclipse*, 2008).

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Sea at Eclipse. Prevedel / Translated by Michael Biggins. Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih pisateljev [Litterae Slovenicae], 2010.

Michael Biggins poučuje slovenski jezik in kulturo na Univerzi v Washingtonu in v tamkajšnji knjižnici vodi Oddelek za slovanske in vzhodnoevropske jezike. Od devetdesetih let 20. stoletja dalje je eden od ključnih prevajalcev sodobne slovenske književnosti v angleščino. V prevodih mu uspeva uloviti duh teksta. Biggins je izjemen v tem, da skuša poustvariti stilistične značilnosti ciljnega teksta. V romanu *Morje* v času mrka se je spopadel s problemom prevajanja besed iz hrvaščine oziroma iz dalmatinskega dialekta, ki ohranja močne ostaline beneške italijanščine.

Biggins ni prevajal le najpomembnejših slovenskih sodobnih avtorjev, temveč tudi avtorje, ki so – tudi zaradi njegovih prevodov – postali poznani izven Slovenije:

- Vladimirja Bartola (*Alamut*, 2007)
- Aleša Debeljaka (*Somrak idolov*, 1994; *Chronicle of Melancholy*, 1989)
- Draga Jančarja (*Severni sij*, 2001; *Posmehljivo poželenje*, 1998)
- Edvarda Kocbeka (*Pesmi*, 1995)
- Borisa A. Novaka (*Mojster nespečnosti*, 1991; *Kronanje*, 1991)
- Borisa Pahorja (*Nekropola*, 1995)
- Tomaža Šalamuna (*Sinji stolp*, 2011; *Table*, 2004; *Balada za Metko Krašovec*, 2001; *Painted Desert*, 1991 – s Tomažem Šalamunom in Bobom Perlmanom).

Michael Biggins teaches Slovenian language and culture at Washington University. As a head of the Slavic and East European Section, he also works in the University Library. From the 1990s onwards he has been one of the key translators of contemporary Slovenian literature into English. In his

translations, he manages to catch the spirit of the text. Biggins is remarkable in his will to reproduce the stylistic characteristics in the target text. In the novel *Sea at Eclipse*, he successfully reproduced not only the poetic language, but also solved the problem of translating Croatian words and dialect spoken in the area of the Dalmatian islands.¹

Biggins has translated not only the most important Slovenian contemporary authors, but also authors who, partly due to his translations, have become well-known outside Slovenia:

- novelist Vladimir Bartol (*Alamut*, North Atlantic Books & Scala Publication Group, 2007)
- poet and essayist Aleš Debeljak (*A Twilight of Idols*, White Pine Press, 1994; *A Chronicle of Melancholy*, Chatanooga Poetry Miscellany Chapbooks, 1989)
- novelist Drago Jančar (*Northern Lights*, Northwestern University Press, 2001; *Mocking Desire*, Northwestern University Press, 1998)
- poet Edvard Kocbek (*Poems*, Litterae Slovenicae, Ljubljana 1995)
- poet Boris A. Novak (*Master of Insomnia*, Litterae Slovenicae 1991; *Coronation*, Chatanooga Miscellany Press, 1991)
- novelist Boris Pahor (*Pilgrim among the Shadows*, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1995; *Necropolis*, Dalkey Archives, 2010)
- poet Tomaž Šalamun (*The Blue Tower*, 2011; *Blackboards*, 2004; *A Ballad for Metka Krašovec*, 2001; *Painted Desert*, 1991 - together with Tomaž Šalamun and Bob Perlman).

¹ Traces of the Venetian Italian dialect in the speech of Dalmatian islands are a linguistic residue of the Republic of Venice. The Dalmatian coast underwent different grades of Venetian domination from the 15th century onwards.

Alenka Jovanovski piše eseje o sodobni slovenski literaturi, prevaja iz sodobne italijanske literature (Pavese, Calvino) in poučuje literaturo na Univerzi v Novi Gorici. Članke je objavljala v različnih literarnih in strokovnih revijah, izdala je tudi monografijo *Temni gen: mistično skozi prizmo estetskega izkustva* (2001). Leta 2004 je dobila Stritarjevo nagrado za mladega kritika. Od leta 2009 dalje je odgovorna urednica ediciji *Litterae Slovenicae*.

Alenka Jovanovski writes essays about contemporary Slovenian literature, translates from contemporary Italian literature (Pavese, Calvino) and teaches literature at the University of Nova Gorica. She has published in various literary and scientific journals. In 2001, a monograph *A Dark Gene: Mystical Experience in the Prism of the Religious Experience* appeared. In 2004, she won the Stritar Award for young critics. Since 2009, she has been the editor of *Litterae Slovenicae*.