

# Contemporary Slovene Genre Literature

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The main characteristics of Slovene postmodern narrative are plurality, heterogeneity and a flourishing of genre writing. The boundaries between 'high' and 'low' literature are being erased, while varieties of mass, popular or trivial literature are adopting a 'high' form and style. Genre writing is becoming established above all thanks to literary globalisation, to which can be ascribed the appearance, since 1990, of authors who have successfully published science fiction, crime novels and novels with historical, espionage, horror or erotic-pornographic elements and themes. The selection of authors for this collection is based primarily on the generic elements in their short stories, which cannot in most cases be characterised as 'typical' genre short stories, as many are merely a parody or imitation of a genre, which testifies to certain postmodern procedures skilfully employed by authors to create a genre-type story. In some stories there are apparent only fragments of generic elements, in others the emphasis is on stylistic generic imitation or on ironic literary strategies. This volume represents a selection of short stories which could roughly be labelled as genre, because they range from crime to vampire stories, some of them making expressively direct use of genre elements, at times even brutal eroticism that may in places come close to the pornographic description of sexuality. Some of the stories with sci-fi elements could immediately be placed under that heading, while others are merely flirting with the genre, as they make use only of fragments of supernatural or fantastic content.

The collection includes thirteen male writers and two women. The order in which the stories appear depends on the genre to which they belong: from vampire through crime themes to stories with erotic-pornographic and science fiction or supernatural elements. The first story, entitled *Vampire*, is

by Maja Novak, who in addition to a number of novels has published a collection of short prose with the title *Beasts*. In her stories the protagonists usually play out their roles in a rational world into which something horribly alien and incomprehensible unexpectedly intrudes. It could be said that *Vampire* is not a typical horror short story but rather a parody of that genre. The boundary between real and fictitious is erased, and reason is revealed to be unreliable as it succumbs to fantastic apparitions, which ultimately appear in the form of real and above all supernatural horror.

The included authors who flirt with crime themes are Miha Mazzini, Jani Virk, Gorazd Trušnovec and Vinko Möderndorfer. Mazzini is known to a wider public primarily as the author of the novels *The Cartier Project*, *Satan's Crown*, *The Collector of Names* and *Guarding Hanna*, which are in terms of genre closest to crime stories, with elements of the grotesque. But the story *All the Way to Pulsnitz* is reminiscent of a typical cinematic crime thriller in which we follow a jail breakout and then the hunt for the fugitives, who are by chance rescued by the driver of a car who takes them across the border towards the town of Pulsnitz. The protagonists do not know the driver, creating an added tension which is increased by the way in which the writer keeps the reader guessing, even failing to supply answers at the bloody conclusion. Jani Virk is one of the main representatives of what is referred to as young Slovene prose, which took shape in the mid nineteen-eighties. His work addresses mainly existential themes and his heroes are constantly lodged in the world of the meta-physical, where they encounter life's absurdities, love, death and the erotic. Thematically, the story *On the Border* (from the collection *A Man above the Abyss*) can not, unlike Mazzini's, be categorised as a crime story, but it does contain specific elements employed by the crime genre. One of these is brutal murder and its concealment, which in Virk's case forms only the framework of the story, as he is more interested in the psychological make-up of the main character and his incredibly strong desire to retain his current way of life and his love for the farm on which he lives. Gorazd Trušnovec's *The Gift of Life* also deals with murder, but in this case in a very different context and seen from a very different point of view. In Virk's story we are witness to the actions of marginalised

oddballs living in a rural environment, whereas in Trušnovec's the setting is a very urban one in which values change overnight, transforming the individual. Drugs, illegal boxing and the unexpected uncovering of a secret lead a steady family breadwinner to commit murder. The final story in this 'crime cycle' is by Vinko Möderndorfer, writer, director and screenwriter, who with a precise sequence of almost film-like scenes leads the reader to a crucial moment of unexpected horror and cruelty, the absurdity of which is intensified by the author's presentation of the protagonists as completely average individuals, friends who have gone on a Sunday trip.

The group of authors whose stories are coloured by eroticism includes Andrej Morovič, Milan Kleč, Zlatko Zajc, Marijan Pušavec, Mate Dolenc, Tomaž Kosmač and Aleš Čar. The main characters in Morovič's collection of short stories entitled *Parachutists* are completely abandoned to sexuality and love, while erotic games are central to their lives. When it comes to the sexual act Morovič is a master of detail, combining the most carefully selected language with that of the streets; at times his flights of style raise extremely graphic descriptions of lovemaking to the level of poetry. This applies to stories such as *Everything Will Turn Out Alright*, *Sirens*, *Little Colorado* and, above all, *Farewell*. Milan Kleč's prose is also to some extent erotically marked. The first person narrator is a protagonist in a world governed by grotesque, ironic and sometimes fantastic rules to which he willingly submits; some situations become absurd, while the hero's experience is usually developed up to the point where the narrative, instead of reaching a conclusion, is left paradoxically open. The stories *Telephone* and *Handstand* are typical of this writer, containing as they do the erotic elements that help form his distinctive style. Zlatko Zajc's *The Last Dreams and Thoughts of Tubercular L* appeared in the collection *Stories*, whose main characters come from a rural background, village eccentrics whose everyday life is depicted in a bizarre, at times grotesque manner. The central character in this story is a boy dying of tuberculosis who on his death bed relives sexual moments shared with F, a slightly backward village girl who is ready to make love with anyone that asks her. Zajc's language is veristic and the descriptions of the sexual act involving L and F are offered without gentle undertones, involving as they do intercourse re-

sulting from lust, which is alive, so that it seems that the dying boy, by focussing on this type of experience, literally grasps at life. The Eros-Thanatos theme is dealt with through the description of sexuality devoid of spirituality or longing for love. The world depicted by Marijan Pušavec is not unlike that of Zajc, with the characters located in a rural and expressively realistic context. Here, too, the expression 'erotic' could easily be replaced by one with less gentle undertones, as the sexuality contained in *The Chain* and *Pamela von Stibl* are more reminiscent of pornography, centred upon a brutal and bizarre sexual act. That being said, the climax of the story *Pamela von Stibl*, the dismembering of a woman with a chainsaw, offers a fantastic rather than veristic presentation of the event. The men in both stories manifest no feelings and even less passion. Mate Dolenc's *Pizza* is completely different. Here the main character is a man of flesh and blood, staying in the Italian skiing centre of Madonna di Campiglio with his lover and the whole time thinking about his passion for pizzas. His attempts at communication with the woman are not all that successful and he wants to end the relationship as there is someone waiting for him in Slovenia for whom he has stronger feelings. He spends a great deal of time sitting around in restaurants and drinking. The author presents us with a hero who, towards the end, with a considerable dose of self-irony, sleeps with the woman that he has been rejecting and during the sexual act turns into a pizza. The penultimate author whose story contains erotic elements is Tomaž Kosmač. In his two published collections he sketches images of his home town Idrija, while his hero Kosmo, usually with a litre bottle of wine in his hand, wanders from one drinking place to another. The story *Rape*, from his most recent collection *Punk is Dead*, is a typical Kosmač creation: the main character sets out on a drinking expedition with a friend and en route they pick up a drunken young woman who has had an accident on her bike, manhandling her and taking advantage of her sexually. The author concludes the narrative without any kind of moralising, but with an unexpected twist that pleasantly surprises the reader. The eroticism of the central scene in the car is of a rather straightforward nature: the men want sex and in effect help themselves to the woman. The last and youngest author in this 'erotic' group is Aleš Čar. The main characters in his

prose writings are usually individuals torn between different varieties of love that offer no certainty. In the story entitled *Coca Cola* the heroine's world is one of physical and psychological violence and self-destructive masochism that goes far beyond mere erotic satisfaction. She does not seek love, but rather despises it. She is aroused by the torturing and maiming of animals, of people and of her own body. For this reason we cannot talk about Čar's story as one with traditional erotic ingredients, as it involves an extreme form of self-destruction that brings relief only in the bizarre and corrupted sentiments of the heroine.

The final group of authors is made up of Edo Rodošek, Lenart Zajc and Mojca Kumerdej. Their short stories make use of the supernatural and the fantastic, while some also have science-fiction elements. *Wonderful New Age*, *The Pedlar* and *Just in Case* are the titles of the contributions from Edo Rodošek, who is primarily an author of genre short stories. The common denominator of the three selected for this volume are fantasy elements, which is most noticeable in *The Pedlar*. The fantastic embraces the time of uncertainty in which the literary hero or reader hesitates before choosing from among the available options. The supernatural event may be the fruit of imagination, a hallucination or an actual occurrence. This wavering dictates a specific interpretation which is necessarily non-allegorical, as the reader takes the supernatural event to be a real one. When, following her husband's total personal transformation, the wife also changes after a visit to the pedlar, the main condition of the fantastic is met, in other words the readiness of the reader or the literary figure to forsake any kind of doubt in the existence of the supernatural. The story *Just in Case* features a disoriented man, who has forgotten where he actually is and takes the attacks of space creatures for real. At the end, it turns out that the non-fictional is completely fictional: the beings that attack the hero of the story are merely the products of a simulator designed to test soldiers' psychological endurance. The third story, *Wonderful New Age*, can be labelled fantastic only in so far as it is set in the future, at a time when people have been robbed of human closeness, warmth and compassion. Lenart Zajc's *Michelle Pfeiffer* also has a future setting: a post-apocalyptic world where the only survivors are prey to extremely bloodthirsty and

aggressive zombies. In a horribly empty and ruined town people fight for survival with weapons and we can classify this story as science fiction. As we began this short presentation of this selection with a female writer, let us conclude with another. With the short story collection *Fragments* Mojca Kumerdej showed that she has a special talent for creating psychologically well-rounded characters and erasing the boundaries between reality and fantasy. The story *Love is Energy* contains elements of the fantastic, although it is above all else about an ordinary man, his everyday existence and his incredible longing for change, which gradually becomes persistence and, finally, obsession. The conclusion of the story wittily weaves together reality and fantasy.

The selection criterion for inclusion in this volume was above all the presence of genre elements, for pure genre stories are like the proverbial needle in the haystack in Slovenia, as there are very few writers here involved exclusively in genre prose. Thus, with the exception of Edo Rodošek, none of the presented authors are writers of genre literature.