
Contents

<i>A Note on Fragments From Slovene Literature</i>	11
The Song of the Fair Vida <i>a folk song retold by France Prešeren</i>	15
Protestantism	
Primož Trubar 1508-1586	18
Adam Bohorič 1520-1598	21
The Baroque Period	
Janez Vajkard Valvasor 1641-1693	23
Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism	
Urban Jarnik 1784-1844	26
France Prešeren 1800-1849	27
Post-Romanticism and Realism	
Janez Trdina 1830-1905	31
Fran Levstik 1831-1887	36
Simon Jenko 1835-1869	44
Josip Stritar 1836-1923	45

Josip Jurčič 1844-1881	46
Janko Kersnik 1852-1897	50
Anton Aškerc 1856-1912	56

Fin de Siècle, Expressionism, Realism,
and Early Traces of Existentialism

Ivan Cankar 1876-1918	58
Dragotin Kette 1876-1899	63
Zofka Kveder 1878-1926	65
Oton Župančič 1878-1949	72
Josip Murn Aleksandrov 1879-1901	75
Alojz Gradnik 1882-1967	77
Ivan Pregelj 1883-1960	78
Lili Novy 1885-1958	86
Izidor Cankar 1886-1958	87
France Bevk 1890-1870	94
Janko Glazer 1893-1975	99
Louis Adamič 1898-1951	100
Anton Podbevšek 1898-1981	107
Miran Jarc 1900-1942	108
Slavko Grum 1901-1949	109
Anton Vodnik 1901-1965	115
Milka Hartman 1902-1992	116
Vladimir Bartol 1903-1967	117
Vida Taufer 1903-1966	123
Srečko Kosovel 1904-1926	124
Edvard Kocbek 1904-1981	128

Božo Vodušek 1905-1978	132
Miško Kranjec 1908-1982	133
Ivan Rob 1908-1943	139
Literature after World War II	
Ciril Kosmač 1910-1980	140
Mila Kačič 1912-2000	143
Mira Mihelič 1912-1985	144
Jože Udovič 1912-1989	150
Matej Bor 1913-1993	152
Boris Pahor 1913	154
Vitomil Zupan 1914-1987	163
Mimi Malenšek 1919	169
France Balantič 1921-1943	173
Zorko Simčič 1921	174
Karel Destovnik Kajuh 1922-1944	179
Ivan Minatti 1924	180
Vladimir Kos 1924	181
Alojz Rebula 1924	182
Ada Škerl 1924	187
Andrej Hieng 1925-2000	188
Ciril Zlobec 1925	192
Beno Zupančič 1925-1980	193
Lojze Krakar 1926-1995	198
Lojze Kovačič 1928-2004	199
Tone Pavček 1928	202

Primož Kozak 1929-1981	203
Dominik Smole 1929-1992	207
Janez Menart 1929-2004	215
Žarko Petan 1929	216
Dane Zajc 1929	217
Marjan Rožanc 1930-1990	222
Kajetan Kovič 1930	234
Miloš Mikeln 1930	235
Gregor Strniša 1930-1987	241
Vladimir Kavčič 1932	250
Nedeljka Pirjevec 1932-2003	256
Veno Taufer 1933	263
Saša Vegri 1934	264
Rudi Šeligo 1935-2004	265
Andrej Kokot 1936	271
Miroslav Košuta 1936	272
Florjan Lipuš 1937	273
Gustav Januš 1939	274
Dušan Jovanović 1939	275
Niko Grafenauer 1939	281
Erika Vouk 1941	282
Tomaž Šalamun 1941	284
Andrej Inkret 1943	285
Marko Kravos 1943	295
Andrej Brvar 1945	296
Mate Dolenc 1945	297

Evald Flisar 1945	305
Iztok Geister Plamen 1945	311
Josip Osti 1945	312
Berta Bojetu Boeta 1946-1997	313
Milan Dekleva 1946	318
Tone Peršak 1947	319
Andrej Medved 1947	323
Drago Jančar 1948	325
Ivo Svetina 1948	339
Dušan Merc 1950	347
Milan Jesih 1950	352
Iztok Osojnik 1951	353
Boris A. Novak 1953	354
Milan Kleč 1954	355
Tone Perčič 1954	358
Goran Gluvić 1957	367
Jani Oswald 1957	370
Janko Ferik 1958	371
Brane Mozetič 1958	372
Vlado Žabot 1958	373
Feri Lainšček 1959	377
Miran Košuta 1960	381
Maja Novak 1960	391
Andrej Morovič 1960	400
Igor Bratož 1960	403
Aleš Debeljak 1961	405

Maja Haderlap 1961	406
Alojz Ihan 1961	407
Maja Vidmar 1961	408
Igor Škamperle 1962	409
Andrej Blatnik 1963	419
Barbara Korun 1963	422
Uroš Zupan 1963	423
Fabjan Hafner 1966	425
Brane Senegačnik 1966	426
Peter Semolič 1967	428
Andrej E. Skubic 1967	429
Primož Repar 1967	432
Taja Kramberger 1970	433
Primož Čučnik 1971	435
Lucija Stupica 1971	437
Aleš Čar 1973	438
Aleš Šteger 1973	445
Miklavž Komelj 1973	446

France Prešeren

The Song of the Fair Vida

A folk song from Ribnica, as retold by France Prešeren

The fair Vida stood upon the coast,
on the strand stood, washing swaddling-clothes.
Down the sea came sailing a black Moor,
asked of Vida, stopping by the shore:
“Wherefore, Vida! art thou not so red,
not so red and not so blooming fair,
as thou wert in years that are gone by?”

The fair Vida made him this reply:
“How could I be red and blooming fair?
Mine hath been a cruel yoke to bear;
O, at home I have an ailing child,
I have lent my ear to fools’ advice;
I have wed, become an old man’s wife!
Little joy, alas, I have in life;
all day long the ailing babe will wail,
all night long the man will cough and wake!”

Upon which replied the dusky Moor:
“Cranes, if they fare ill at home, will soar
high above the seas; thou too must start
far away with me to mend thy heart.
What I tell thee, Vida! I am sent
by the queen of Spain to fetch thee hence
that thou mightest nurse her little son,
royal heir unto the Spanish crown.
Thou shalt rock him, nurse upon thy breast,
cradle in thy arms and make his bed,
with a sweet song lull him into sleep,
no worse toil or care shall fall to thee.”

The fair Vida stepped into the boat;
but when they had pulled away from shore,
when the boat was cutting through the waves,
then did Vida weep and beat her breast:
“Wretched me, alas, what have I done!
Who shall care now for my little one,
for my helpless babe left back at home,
for my agéd husband all alone!”

When thrice seven days had passed between,
the black Moor brought Vida to the queen.
In the early morning she rose up,
waited at the window for the sun.
To allay her untold grief and ache,
the fair Vida asked his yellow rays:
“Sun! oh rays of sunlight! ye will tell
how my little ailing son doth fare!”

“How indeed should fare thy little babe?
Yesterday burnt candles by his bed,
and thy agéd man is now at sea,
he hath left his home to search for thee,
he is searching, weeping bitter tears,
and his heart is fit to burst with grief.”

In the evening, when the pale moon came,
Vida fair stood gazing out again,
and, to cool the burning in her heart,
called out to the pallid moon above:
“Moon! oh rays of moonlight! ye will tell
how my little ailing son doth fare!” -
“How indeed should fare thy little babe?
But to-day they laid him in his grave,
and thy agéd father is at sea,
he hath left his home to search for thee,
he is searching, weeping bitter tears,
and his heart is fit to burst with grief.”

Hearing this, fair Vida wept the more.
Up her lady came and fain would know:
“What befell thee, Vida! that thou weep’st
rivers of such hot and bitter tears?”
Vida fair made answer to the queen:
“What could I, poor wretch, do else but weep?
I stood washing here a golden bowl,
and it slipped into the sea below,
from this window high the golden cup
sank down to the bottom of the brine.”
Then the queen would comfort her and spoke:
“Weep no longer, wet thy cheeks no more!
I shall buy another cup of gold,
win thee pardon from the king, thy lord;
go now, nurse the little prince, my babe,
surely then thy grief shall pass away.”

And the queen she bought a cup of gold,
won her pardon from the king, her lord;
Vida stood and looked out every day,
cried her tears for father, husband, babe.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

Primož Trubar

(Reflections on Language)

But at the same time I also pondered and turned over in my mind that, come Judgement Day, the Lord would reckon seriously also with the servants whom He had given but one talent,¹ whether they had traded well with it and gained Him aught, even as with those who had received five talents, great gifts and offices. And the man who has not profited God and his neighbour with the gift delivered to him, be it ever so small and insignificant, but only used it for himself like the swine at the trough, wallowing in what is cast before them and eating it all - that man shall be crushed as an unprofitable, slothful, useless, neglectful, faithless and wicked servant, for he has not served his task and calling well and faithfully, and he shall be appointed his portion with the hypocrites² and cast into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.³ St Paul reckons divers tongues among the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and God has granted to me, by a singular grace through Jesus Christ, a knowledge of the Slovene tongue as it is spoken in the land of Carniola, so in that tongue I preached, as you know, for seventeen years in sundry parts of the Slovene lands; I also have a fair understanding of Latin, German and Italian. It was that and my own conscience which urged me to this task of translating. And, seeing that there is still none who would undertake it, and that you and the Lord Vergerius desired it of me, I did then venture upon it in the name of our Lord, starting where it seemed easiest.

1. The parable of the talents is from Matthew 25.14ff. The translation uses the phrasing from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

2. Matthew 24.51.

3. Matthew 25.30.

And as it may be seen and found not only in the Latin, German, and Italian translators of the Bible, but likewise in all other writings and arts, that the latest and newest masters surpass the first and ancient ones, and are ever increasing in multitude and numbers, I gather and am persuaded that the Lord, our God, shall rouse good men even after me, who may finish and perfect this rude, unformed work of mine. May God grant to them, through Jesus Christ, His Holy Ghost, grace, strength, and right good sense for this task! And it may soon come to pass! Amen. Yet there is no need to scorn or spurn the first and ancient scholars, even though they did not always hit the nail on the head at the very first; for, had those not toiled for us so honestly with their translations and so assiduously with their writings on the Holy Trinity and other Christian teachings, neither would the latest and newest ones have attained so far, to an understanding so profound of the Scripture, or to other arts. As is written in the words of Samson: “*Si non arassetis in vitula mea, non invenissetis propositionem meam.*”⁴

In my translating I endeavoured, where the words and style are concerned, that every Slovene might understand it easily, be he from Upper or Lower Carniola, Lower Styria, Carinthia, the Karst, Istria, or the lands around Varaždin. Therefore I kept to the Slovene tongue as it is spoken by the peasants at Raščica, where I was born. I would not mingle it with uncommon or Croatian words, nor invent new ones. And if some places be obscure in their telling and translation, it is not I or other translators who are at fault, but rather the evangelists, apostles and prophets, who often express and write their meaning obscurely, as is the manner and nature of the Hebrew tongue, and have left out some of the words. If I have translated some words inaccurately, it has happened, as I have said above, for the lack of Slovene words, or it may be that I did not know them, or perchance they did not occur to me at the time. However that may be, even if I have not translated or written all the words right or to everyone’s liking, still I expect you to take into account my goodwill, labour, zeal and desire to have done everything right and well, and to acknowledge my endeavour. But I pray you earnestly that you would soon send me word, with a Christian purpose, of any defect or

4. Judges 14.18: “If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.”

error you might find and note in the words and letters, so that I might do better in my future translating and writing.

I trust in God Almighty that, through this simple and pauper tongue and writings of ours, He will also work His will in you, His elect; that He will open the eyes of your souls and minds and shed light into your darkened and ignorant hearts, so that you may behold and recognise the true Saviour, the sure and steadfast helper in all tribulations and temptations, to whom the whole Scripture bears witness, namely our Lord Jesus Christ: who He is, what He commands to all men in the Gospel, and what He offers them to receive freely, by faith alone. And since the Lord, our God, has provided and allowed for our Slovene tongue to have been ever more frequently printed only of late, I hope that you will henceforth send to school and instruct in reading and writing, not only those of your young people whom you intend to send to foreign lands to learn other tongues, but also those whom you keep at home. Besides, methinks my translating shall lead some of the Croatian priests, who are earning their keep throughout the Slovene lands by reading Masses, to learn the Latin characters and translate our writings into their tongue and letters. And it shall aid fledgling Slovene priests, flown out of schools before they were due, at least to read out right the texts of the Gospels from the pulpit and not translate them wrongly: as did once the priest at Planina under Celje, who translated the passage “*invenietis asinam alligatam & pullum cum ea*” as “ye shall find an ass tied, and a pullet with her”, that is, “*ir werdet ein angebundene Eselin finden und ein jungs Hünlin bey ir*”.⁵

Translated by Nada Grošelj

5. Matthew 21.2: “... ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her.” The Latin word *pullus* in fact often denotes a chicken, but it may also refer to the young of any animal, and it is the latter meaning that should be understood here.

Adam Bohorič

(Reflections on Language)

It is commonly agreed that the knowledge of several languages is delightful and useful, nay, indispensable even. For what could please a noble spirit more than the ability to show his or another's thought, be it in speaking or in writing, through the proper choice of words (which are the mirror of the soul) and a suitable style of speech, or, so to say, look upon that thought with his very eyes as it is shown? Furthermore, what is more profitable than the capacity to understand rightly either a spoken disputation about God, the law or nature, or written works relating to these matters; to unearth and impress upon your mind their hidden treasures, and turn them to your advantage when the need arises? What, finally, could men so ill afford to lose as the knowledge of these matters through languages, since neither the teachings of the Church nor the administration of the state, neither private trade nor public office could be defended and maintained without their aid? I make no mention of how a man lacking the knowledge of languages, even when pressed to speak by necessity, is often forced to fall silent, like the frogs on Seriphus,¹ and to cut a ridiculous figure, not knowing what is being said and what answer he should return. Since numerous examples for this claim can be found in the learned writings, so that anyone attempting to give yet others would be justly suspected of threshing over old straw and vaunting his poverty rather than riches - it is, therefore, that I shall in the following, seeing that I must say something about the matter, touch at least in a superficial and general manner first upon the question of the spoken usage, or the most excellent purpose of languages;

1. An allusion to a phenomenon mentioned by the Roman polymath Pliny the Elder (1st cent. AD) in his *Natural History* (8.227): "Frogs are also silent in the island of Seriphus, but the same frogs croak when removed to some other place ..." (the Loeb translation).

after which I propose to add, as my modest ability shall permit, a few brief remarks on my native Slovene tongue, and, finally, to explain the cause and aim of this little volume.

As for the rightful use of languages, what applies to it best are the words from the prophet Isaiah which St Paul quotes in his epistle to the Romans, saying: "Every tongue shall confess to God."² Through these words, St Paul reveals to us a glorious precept and a sweet comfort, but also the rightful use of languages. For he establishes, firstly, that there shall always be a community of saints, learning about God and glorifying Him rightly with the aid of languages; secondly, he is clearly saying that this world shall not pass before the will of God is known among all peoples and all nations. Indeed, this is the only support for pious souls - however madly the world and Satan rage against the Church of Christ - to lean upon in all the trials of earthly life, as they may firmly hope, according to the word of God, that all evils shall come to an end and that the salvation of the saints is sure to come: and undoubtedly it shall be most nigh, so to say, at the very door, when God's glory is proclaimed in all languages.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

2. Romans 14.11.

Janez Vajkard Valvasor

The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola

Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain

XVI. Some Superstitious Practices

The Christian faith counts among its enemies the vices, one of which is named Superstition; and this Superstition will try, out of a singular envy on the part of its father Satan, to worm its way wherever Faith abides. For that reason it would be easier to find a land free of crawling snakes than one wholly devoid of superstitious folk. In this the good Carniola has no advantage or privilege over other countries: indeed, much of what goes on here among the common, ignorant people is contrary to Christianity rather than in keeping with it. Since superstition is therefore sinful and at variance with faith, it shall not be amiss to say a word about this or that superstitious practice, which - among the peasants in particular - darkens many a simple home in Carniola ...

The peasants of Istria have the following ill habit: on Christmas Eve, the master of the house brings home a hefty wooden stock, or log, which is called *panj* in the Carniolan tongue, and throws it into the fire; all Istrian rooms being fitted with hearths only and no fireplaces. The log on the hearth is left to smoulder slowly. Later, when the family sit down to supper, they offer the log a spoonful of each vegetable dish or soup and a piece of every other fare, entreating it to join them in the meal. There is no doubt but this stems from ancient heathen practices, as a remnant of the offerings made to the guardian spirit of the house. It is true that the custom has dwindled over a few years' time, with the priests preaching against it with might and main; yet many remain deeply rooted in the superstitious belief that neglect would be followed by a year-long streak of bad luck. Such log-feeders, then, prove themselves proper blockheads still!

Moreover, the country wenches of Carniola and other parts likewise practise all manner of superstition on Christmas Eve, at dusk or at night: such as eavesdropping, drawing and cast-

ing of lots, divination of the future bridegroom's face, and the like. A few years ago this was the occasion of an adventure, in part comical, in part, because of its ending, well-nigh sad; and this I will describe to my dear reader both in copper engraving and in words.

In a certain village between the town of Kamnik and the castle Volčji Potok, there were two milkmaids who agreed to walk on the night of Christmas Eve to a brook running through a nearby grove, and look into its water at midnight, to catch a glimpse of their future bridegroom. Listening in, however, was a young, vigorous farm-hand, who overheard their plan unnoticed. And as he wanted one of those two, he thought it would advance his cause rarely if he could but show them his own image in the water, suiting the prophecy to his own purposes. He accordingly went ahead of them into the wood, to the aforementioned brook, and, climbing into a tree, straddled a bough stretching far away from the trunk, just over the water. So he sat, longingly waiting for the girls to come. He had heard them lay it down, as a solemn rule and law, that neither should glance either up or backwards, nor utter a word; for superstitious to-do of this kind usually enjoins silence, whose purpose, to my mind, is to prevent the curious seekers from letting slip, through fear or wonder, the Lord's name, which is hateful to Satan's ear. - The night was bright and clear, so that our two husband-eager Galateas hoped to see their lover's image as clearly as could be; just as the love-smitten Carniolan Corydon supposed, for his part, that the brook would mirror his face to perfection.

Having arrived at the brook thus engrossed, the maids peered into the water with close care and attention. Noting this, the farm-hand craned his neck to make his features appear as plainly as possible in the water, which spread out there into a wide puddle or pool. But lo! The pool soon came to life, for before the village gallant knew it, the bough had broken and dropped him, so that he plumped in with a mighty crash and splash. The two Amaryllises or village nymphs, believing that none other than the Devil himself had leapt into the water, took to their heels in fright, while the ardour of the amorous country fox was assuredly cooled in no small measure by the cold bath. But the two peasant girls fell mortally ill, and one of them indeed died, which was - as is believed - brought about by the fear she had suffered. Later the grove

came to be called Kurbin Boršt, “Slut’s Wood”; the name remains to this very day. - And follies of this kind still abound.

Witches and sorceresses have been fairly purged from the land, except round Snežnik, Lož, Cerknica and Planina; for those places, lying in the midst of a vast wilderness, sometimes begin to teem with such vermin. But as soon as the word spreads, the harridans are caught at once and sent to the stake. This frightens them and drives them into hiding with their wretched arts, just as toads and other poisonous worms like best to creep unseen in holes or through dark thickets and coppices. Often have they reaped a fiery reward, and many have been sent to the hot seat, yet still the vermin could not be rooted out. It was hoped that the oft-rising flame had driven out all this filth - the witch spawn, I mean - once and for all, but underneath the vast mound of ashes still linger sparks, which may all too easily set fire to this or that woodpile. As soon, then, as witchery began to smoulder and flicker again, they hastened to douse the impure flame with the fires of justice and with human blood, for whenever they catch a whiff of burning - that is, of witchery - they drive out fire with fire or blood, and bury it in ashes. And if these ashes be spilled into the ears of witches and other superstitious, witchcraft-ridden folk, they cause great trepidation and a resolve to abstain from the vices which light and kindle such fires, or to hide them carefully from the eyes of men and not reveal them by tempting yet other folk, as this would be the surest way to betrayal.

It may also be that a spark of corruption, or a contagious whiff of this pestilence of the soul, is sometimes wafted in from a neighbouring land, where such dragon’s spawn is by no means scarce. In Carniola, however, this accursed vice is fiercely battled, and justice in such cases is right stern and not inclined to mercy in the least.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

Urban Jarnik

Starkind

Here upon the heights are spinning
 Vastnesses unknown to us,
Ever in their circles milling,
 Haloed by the shining sun;
Each star dwells beside another,
 Never can we count their lot,
Bright they gaze upon each other,
 Each a shining light to God.

Where a gleaming road is arching
 On the endless wall of skies,
Rides the Father's splendour, guiding
 Stars on their curving paths:
All is rounded, twinkling, lively,
 All aglow with living flames,
All proclaims it was a mighty
 Hand that shaped the universe.

O Eternal One, your glory!
 Voices of the clustering stars
Promise us a great rejoicing
 If we come to you at last.
Our soul shall praise its Maker
 Through this world of many worlds,
Drinking in the song of angels,
 Perched atop the starry swirls.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

France Prešeren

To the Poet

To whom

'Tis given to lighten the soul-fretting gloom!

Who may

Rout the vulture that seizes the heart for its prey
From dawn unto darkness, from darkness till day I

Who shows

How to blot out the memory of yesterday's woes,
And the eyes before threatening anguish to close,
To flee from today with the irk of its throes!

Thy care

A poet to be is not vain if thou dare
Both heaven and hell in thy bosom to bear!

Nor cease

To think of thy calling, and grieve without peace!

Translated by Paul Selver

A Farewell to My Youth

O happier half of days decreed to me,
My early years, so soon you passed away;
Few were the flowers that blossomed on that tree,
And they, scarce budded, fell into decay.
Few were the rays of hope that I could see,
And storms would often rage in wild array;
Still, for my youth, dark though thy dawn may be
My heart will ever cry: God be with thee!

Too soon the fruits of knowledge did I eat!
Where dripped their poison, faded all delight:
I saw how honesty and truth could meet
Among the human kind with scorn and spite.
I sought true love – an empty dream and fleet,
Which disappeared as dawn broke into light!
And wisdom, justice and the learned mind
Were dowerless maids – no suitors could they find.

I saw how those who are not loved by fate
Their ship in vain against the wind may steer;
For him who is not born to high estate
Will Fortune at his cradle not appear;
I saw how fame is purchased at the rate
Of current cash – no price too high, too dear;
I saw in glory's and in honour's seat
All that beguiles men's minds with lies, deceit.

These sights and others uglier by far
Burned in my heart till
cruelly it bled;
Yet thoughts like these the joys of youth will bar
And quickly drive them out of heart and head;
Fair cloud-born castles glimmer from afar,
Green lawns arise where desert places spread,
Hope kindles many a wanton, beckoning light,
To lure the young and tempt them in the night.

They know not of the sudden storm that blows,
Dispelling phantom shapes that cannot last,
And all too soon forget misfortune's woes,
Forget the wounds once they are healed and past -
Until the changing years show how life flows
Into a vessel that is leaking fast.
Still, O my youth, dark though thy dawn may be,
My heart will ever cry: God be with thee!

Translated by G. Koritnik & V. Pinto

Ghazals; 3

Who has not yet heard the bitter *secret* that I love her,
poems tell but one thing, never *ceasing*: that I love her.
Night itself knows well, which hears me sadly sighing, sleepless,
and the dawn, which calls bright day to *being*, that I love her.
E'en the morning knows, and noon, and dusky chill of evening,
what my hollow cheek is dumbly *speaking*: that I love her.
'Tis well known to walls of my abode, its lonely silence,
to the busy town, so gaily *teeming*, that I love her.
Every flower, grown beside the way where she walks, knows it,
every bird which darts above it *fleety*, that I love her.
The damp threshold of her home, the very stones must know it,
e'en the path which past her house will *lead me*, that I love her.
Every thing knows all there is to know or hear about me,
yet the maid I love will not *believe me* that I love her.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

Sonnets of Unhappiness

V

Life is a prison, Time the hangman fell,
And Care the bride with youth renewed for ever,
Despair and Woe are slaves that falter never,
Remorse – the guard who does his duty well.

Dear Death, do not delay to break the spell!
O happy road, O key to our endeavour:
You lead us where mortality shall sever
Life's chains and free us from these pains of hell;

Yonder where persecutions all will cease,
Her gains no longer will Injustice reap,
And from his burden man may find release;

Yonder where waits a bed both dark and deep:
There he who lays him down shall know such peace
That all earth's noises cannot break his sleep.

Translated by V. Pinto

Janez Trdina

Myths and Tales about the Gorjanci

8. The Dead Copse

The pedlar Pavle was known all over the White and Low countries,¹ and many a land besides. He had had his share of trial and ill luck on his travels, but nowhere had he seen or tasted such horrors as in the “Dead Copse” in the Gorjanci. This was what the talkative old man told me of his adventure:

“I’d meant to set out again for Germany, as we called it, or the Krautland, as our younger folk say. Two good acquaintances who used to be my partners on the road saw me to Štreklovci. It was a hot summer day and Sunday. We pedlars soon fall out of the habit of going to the service. Without Mass, we went straight for a drink at Štreklovci. There was little food, but the wine went down very well, and we sat supping it from seven till ten. I can’t call to mind now just how many pitchers we put away, but I do know that it was too many for a morning. A man in his cups is likely to think of any nonsense. So one of the friends says to me: ‘Pavle, let’s make a bet! I say that you haven’t the heart to strike out across the Gorjanci straight from here, with no road, through wood and hill. I know you’re scared of the *Dead Copse*, because the folk here say it’s haunted.’ Now these words stung me and set me on fire. I said: ‘Here’s my hand! It’s old women who are scared of the Dead Copse, not I. The bet’s on! If I win, as I’m bound to, you’ll give me a tenner. We’re soused good and proper; it’s time to say goodbye and split. I’ll strike out for the Gorjanci straight away, so that you can see me with your own eyes if you want.’

The friend was agreeable. Once we’d settled the bet in all particulars, we paid the reckoning, kissed, said farewell and went our ways, I to the left, the other two to the right, back towards Črnomelj.

1. Bela Krajina and Dolenjska.

I'd started out from Štreklovci at ten sharp. I was much younger and stronger in those days than now, so I could run like a stag. At eleven, leastways not much later, I was already standing atop the Gorjanci. I could see a steep drop in front of me, a fairly high hill rising behind it, and behind the hill nothing but low hillocks and woods. The last of them had the Chapter Church of Novo Mesto shining atop. As soon as I got my breath back, I said to myself: 'Onward ho!' I was in the valley before I knew it. Then it was uphill again, up that high slope. Here I fell to thinking about my trade, where I should buy my wares, where to peddle them, and suchlike. When I'd got rid of these thoughts and glanced around again, I stood amazed, and frightened too. The world around me had all changed. One hill had turned into ten, twenty or more. They rose wherever I looked, and higher mountains still were jutting out behind. Now, at Štreklovci, the air had been thick with birds. You could hear the song and whistle of goldfinches, blackbirds, bullfinches, linnets, and plenty more. But where I was walking now, there wasn't a sound to be heard. It was as dead and still as the grave. Terror was making my skin crawl, now with ice, now with heat. I'd have gone back, but I didn't know where or whither. Slowly I trudged on, like a lost man. I could no longer doubt that I'd wandered into the *Dead Copse*, a wood *where no church bell is heard*, a wood never hallowed by the foot of an innocent child, or the prayer of a repentant sinner, *to the wretched place that has never received the blessing and grace of God*.

How dreadfully I'd been fooled and led astray by my foolhardiness! With each step rose new horrors and apparitions such as I'd never seen before, in Slovene or in German countries, and they crossed my path, just think of it, in broad daylight, which they say all ghosts are scared of. If I looked up to the clear sky, a mournful, bloody sun was hanging over me, beating down on my head like hellfire itself. When I dropped my eyes, I noticed a new wonder: I'd lost my shadow! And the copse, too, stood around me without a shadow or shade. It must have been hardly past noon, and yet there were owls staring at me from the rocks and trees, as if it was midnight. It hadn't rained for a month, but there were foul lizards crawling on the cracked ground, just like after a storm. I'll warrant those woods had never heard the sound of an axe, and yet they were

all twisted, hollow, awry and broken. An oak stood here, a beech, hornbeam or maple there, but the branches were all blackened, as if they'd caught fire, and bristling with thorns, which snagged and pricked me all the while. And what ugly, grey and blotchy leaves! I'd never seen such a wretched sight, not even late in the year. Every leaf would crumple and crumble between my fingers, as if it was dry. Now this, let me not forget, was in the middle of June! But that's all nothing: there were other, much worse sights. The ground was fair strewn with human arms, legs, and other bones, all torn and bloody, as if wolves had just been at them. In a crack in the rocks, a death's head was grinning at me! Dangling from a twig, by a red vein, was a foul swollen eye. I all but stepped on another. When I jumped back and looked at it close, it turned - into a live slug! From all sides, ugly faces were leering at me like Shrovetide masks. If I glanced right, they sprang away left; if I looked left, they'd tease me, half seen and half unseen, on the right. There was a little horned black head in every bush, lolling out its tongue at me. But if I took a step closer, it twisted into a dry knurl or gnarled root.

This haunting went on for an hour and more, and so I fell to thinking: dear me, it can't be that the Dead Copse is as vast as that. There are churches at Rožni Dol, Laze, Uršna Sela, Pod Gradom, on Ljuben and at Cerovec. By now, I ought to be hearing some bell or other. What if I was by some awful mistake turning aside all the time, instead of heading straight for Novo Mesto? To find out the truth, I tied a white ribbon to a branch and went on among the trees along my old path. You can imagine how my jaw dropped when I came back to my ribbon in five minutes! Ugh, there was a thick drop of blood hanging from it! Well, at least I'd made sure that I hadn't been moving ahead for a good while now, but ever circling around. I left the path at once and turned into the thicket, come where I might. Soon I saw a pass and behind it a low, round, lovely green dell. Around it towered high black cliffs, and in its middle blossomed a linden tree. As I came into the dell, three things appeared that sent a new chill through me. Moments ago, I'd been without shadow; now, you see, I had too much of it, it lay round and round me, and was now indeed round! The tops of the cliffs were spread over with something white and swaying, just like huge sheets drying and a low wind

lifting and blowing them up. The air was so still that not a blade stirred, but there was a whooshing in the linden's boughs, like in a grey cloud before it starts to hail.

Uneasy or not, I walked over to the linden and lay down in the thick grass to rest. The tiredness and heat soon glued my eyes together, but I still couldn't fall asleep. I lay there dazed and numb, without a feeling or thought, for some ten minutes. Then I heard light footsteps coming towards the linden from many sides; I heard them close in around me, not far away, and start whirling round the tree. At the same time there comes the sound of singing, a singing so sweet and soft as my ears hadn't heard before. I'd often heard tuneful voices of rare skill in the churches of Vienna and Munich. I'd loved to hear the pretty songs of young Slovene scholars, and even more the pure singing of the only girl who'd turned my head in this world. But all those voices were nothing, less than nothing, against the singing that rang in my ears in the Dead Copse under the spreading linden tree. So may sing the angels in Heaven, but no human throat has been blessed with this sweetness and delight.

Now hear one more wonder, the last but, to me, the most dreadful. I'm always moved and overcome beyond words by good singing. There's nothing in the world that gives me such joy, not even music. It seems to me that I've grown wings and could fly up to the clouds like a lark. But the songs I heard under the linden weighed on me and stifled me so that I could hardly breathe. A sadness and despair were coming over me, such as I'd never felt in my life. I was endlessly sick, worn and wretched. All I wanted was to die. Not even the lost souls in Hell, I think, can feel worse. I raised my head to see whose were the voices stopping my breath and worrying me so bitterly. But looking was hard, dreadfully hard. A black mist was crawling before my eyes, with firebolts flashing through. The glare blinded me to everything but little shoes prancing past. *The shoes were woven out of speckled vipers!* The sight well froze my blood. It was but then that the truth dawned on me. *Such are the shoes of the devil's elves.* I knew now that I was in the middle of an elf dance, listening to the mind-numbing singing of elves. All human horrors raced through me, but at that moment the Lord sent me a good thought too, which saved me from Hell's powers. I crossed myself piously and began to

pray the Angelus, which I'd forgotten on my way, not hearing the bell.

When my prayer was ended, all my troubles and pains fell away in a trice. I sprang to my feet hale and hearty, and looked again at a world I knew. I saw the lovely hill of Ljuben and the friendly St Vitus church on it. The elves and all other monsters of the Dead Copse had vanished, as if the earth had swallowed them. The scorching heat had slackened, as a cool north wind had begun to blow. To my great joy I saw next to me my dear old shadow, which was again such as God had given me. I pushed on through the thicket with no more trouble. In an hour I came to the road and in two hours more to Novo Mesto, where I was headed. As you see, I won my bet, but I wouldn't take a penny.

My tale is not easy to believe, and well I know it. It may be that you'll laugh at it. I'm no liar, but I cannot force you to belief. Still, say what you will, you and every honest man must agree that God still has the right and power to punish sinners, and that Sunday has been made for a Christian man to pray and serve God, not for swilling wine on an empty stomach and tramping like a hunted beast through lonesome dens and strange woods."

Translated by Nada Grošelj