

I vincitori scrivono la storia, i vinti le storie.

*Da quando non penso, il numero di coloro che
condividono le mie opinioni è aumentato.*

Vista da lontano la democrazia era molto più bella.

Traduzione di Jolka Milič

ŽARKO PETAN – A WRITER IN DIVERSE GENRES

According to the lexicon, Žarko Petan was born on 23rd March of 1929 in Ljubljana, where he also graduated: first from the Faculty of Economics, then in theatre directing from the Academy of Film and the Performing Arts. He followed the second calling and became one of the founders of Oder 57, a theatrical equivalent of the contemporary magazine Revija 57 whose political loyalties were viewed with considerable suspicion. He started out as a freelancer, and then continued as a resident director of the Slovenian National Theatre Drama (1966-1971) and of the Ljubljana Municipal Theatre (1873-1994). From 1994 until his retirement, he served as director general of the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Company, RTV Slovenija.

Let us complete this rather general outline with additional, more detailed statistical information included in his poetry collection *Zgodbice / Anecdotes* (1995): his stage texts have seen 33 theatre productions in Slovenian theatres and 37 performances in theatres abroad. There have been 77 Slovenian and 75 foreign productions of his radio plays. Slovenian television broadcasting company has produced 7 of his texts for television films; 10 were filmed for the big screen. Petan's directorial resume includes 100 stage productions at home and 24 abroad, 17 radio plays by other Slovenian and 8 by foreign authors, 3 adaptations for television and 5 for film. Last, but not least: he has received more than 35 awards for his work in literature and film.

The bibliographic overview of his literary corpus starts with humoristic prose, and the list of books written in this genre runs

as follows: *Humoreske z napako / Humorous Stories with a Typo* (Lj., 1962); *Zgodbe v eni sapi / Stories Told in One Breath* (Mb., 1966); *Črni smeh / Black Laughter* (together with B. Šömen's *Red Laughter*, Lj., 1970); *PPP* (with co-authors A. Papler and S. Pregl, Lj., 1977); *Enciklopedija humorja / Encyclopaedia of Wit* (Lj., 1989) and *Ubežali smo svobodi / We Have Escaped Freedom* (Lj., 1992). With these books and his unique brand of satirical humour in these and other works, written in other genres, he became established as one of the most eminent contemporary Slovenian satirical writers.

His first book, *Humoreske z napako / Humorous Stories with a Typo*, came out in 1962, soon after his incarceration ended. The victim of a communist-rigged military court trial, Petan served time in prison from 1959 to 1961, and it is obvious that this collection of satirical stories had been written as a kind of a soothing balm after the trials and tribulations of his life in prison. The book shows Petan as a fully developed author, and the stories still hold their sparkle and vitality today, thirty years later. Their thematic scope is varied, ranging from intimate and marital to theatrical and political (*Naj živi diskusija / Long Live Discussion!*) satire. Some of the stories contain elements of black comedy (*Samomorilec / The Man Who Committed Suicide*), fantasy (*Rentgenske oči / X-ray Eyes*) and even science-fiction (*Idealna žena / A Model Wife*). The last story in the collection is a short satire about politically steered literary production under the communist regime and can be likened to the well-known satire *The Making of Robinson by Ilfa and Petrov*.

The title of his next book, *Zgodbe v eni sapi / Stories Told in One Breath*, is indicative of the brevity of the stories: their average length is less than three pages. The thematic scope is similar to that in the first collection, ranging from the drudgery of everyday life to reality transformed through fantasy (*Človek brez glave / A Man without a Head*). Especially notable is the presence of black comedy (e.g. *Plača po učinku / Pay According to Effect*), and the

collection includes two outstanding fables (*Papagaj, Rehabilitirani medved / The Parrot, The Rehabilitated Bear*). *Usodni madež / The Fatal Blemish* is a curious blend of a crime story and sci-fi. The last story, *Kako nastane humoreska / What Does It Take To Make A Satire*, is strikingly similar to the final story in the first collection, *Ste že slišali za Ilfa in Petrova? / Have You Heard of Ilfa and Petrov?*

The title of Petan's third collection of short satires indicates the predominant presence of the grotesque: *Črni smeh / Black Laughter*. The mood of the opening story is noticeably bitter: *Moj oče / My Father* is a story about an ex-capitalist who had been toiling all his life but was eventually "liberated" of all his possessions by the communist regime. Marital life, too, seems to lend itself well to black comedy, judging by the story *Črna Humoreska / The Black Satire*. Other model stories in this collection are: *Fakir / The Fakir*, *Vikend / Week-end*, and *Požiralec nožev / A Knife-eater*. *Stric iz Amerike / Uncle From America* is a typically Slovenian, "archetypal" portrait (of an uncle who has made it in America as a highly qualified mobster).

PPP, a compilation volume co-authored by Papler, Petan and Pregl, features another 15 of Petan's satirical stories. Black comedy is again represented very well, most notably with *Zadnji pešec / The Last Pedestrian* and *Krvnik / The Henchman*. *Vampir / The Vampire* is an extraordinary satirical story brimming with action. The final story, *Tercet / A Trio*, was in fact written as a stage scene: He, She, and Her Husband are set in a boat on high sea (it deserves comparison with Mrožek's one-act humorous play *On High Sea*); the plot unravels rather surprisingly, but in keeping with the style: the lover does not dispose of the husband (or vice versa). Both men become engaged in a game of chess; She interrupts them repeatedly, and the men consequently throw her overboard.

A twelve-year intermission followed before another book of Petan's satirical stories was published. When it finally came out,

the anthology carried a somewhat pretentious title: Enciklopedija humorja / An Encyclopaedia of Wit. It gives definitions and examples of the whole spectrum of humorous writing, listed from A to Z: aphorism, anecdote, fable, burlesque, black comedy, elegy, epigraph, epitaph, essay, low comedy, feuilleton, vignette, grotesque, satire, interview, comedy, humorous scene, chat, monologue, ode, parody, plagiarism, dispute, travelogue, fairytale, adage, maxim, commentary, radio play, journalistic commentary, novel, satirical poem, sporting humour, topographical satire, riddle, joke, and science-fiction. Listing the elegy as part and parcel of the humorous genre does seem a bit odd — a humorous elegy gives the impression of being a *contradictio in adiecto* to a degree, whereas a humorous ode is usually accepted with less reluctance in spite of the fact that the ode, too, originally belongs to the high style unavoidably calling for a more serious tone. All three examples (two elegies and one ode) presented by Petan, nevertheless, confirm the seriousness of both forms. The idea of putting together such an encyclopaedia certainly proved to be a felicitous one, and the book stands out as one of its kind, at least as far as Slovenian publishing is concerned. The alphabetically listed entries show that it is a truly Horatian blend of both the useful and the pleasurable — learning about literary genres combined with an amusing reading.

Petan's next book, a volume of satirical prose entitled *Ubežali smo svobodi* / We Have Escaped Freedom (as an allusion to Fromm's *Escape From Freedom*), brings us to the often all but distinct borderline between journalistic writing and fiction. Some of the passages tend to the former, some to the latter; the most obvious fact is, however, that it is a mix of both. The book includes reprints of Petan's texts that were originally published in the press from 1985 to 1991, the time when crucial political shifts began to take place in the society. Content-wise, the book is composed of two parts: The first part, entitled *Miscellanea*, is a collection of 24 texts of which almost half are labelled as satirical

commentaries, with an occasional article that could, perhaps, be taken as an essay or an odd stage scene, such as the *Telefonski pogovor* / Telephone Conversation I-IV. His epistle for the New Year 1988, entitled *Novoletna elegija* / New Year's Elegy, deserves special mention, for it proves that an elegy can, after all, be written on a humorous note (in the story a professional comic grieves over the fact that he has been outdone by amateurs). *Gospod Kožca ima besedo* / Mr. Kožca Has the Floor, the title of the second part, includes as many as 75 short political satires (only three of them exceed one whole page) unfolding around a dialogue between the central figure (at first, the man is referred to as "comrade Kožca", after 1990 he becomes "Mr. Kožca") and the narrator (the author?).

The satires are a concise chronicle of those turbulent times and were largely published in the *Pavliha* weekly (only six appeared in the *Delo* daily). Let us briefly take a closer look at the central character of the stories, the comrade or Mr. Kožca. In the first story we meet comrade Janez Kožca, a retired teacher whose pension happens to be the smallest one in the group of his retired schoolmates. In the satire *Mrtvi krivci* / The Culprits Are Dead, Kožca's identity changes to that of a certain Philomena Kožca, a retired citizen living in the capital city. *Skrb za umetnika* / Caring for the Artist reveals the reasons for such a point of view as Kožca admits straightforwardly: "...I am deeply indebted to the former totalitarian regime for everything it has inflicted on me... Had I not been persecuted and marginalised, I'd never have turned my hand to writing. If I hadn't spent a year and a half in detention, due to allegations of enemy propaganda and espionage, I would never have written the three books on life in the prison: *Preteklost* / The Past, *Preteklost se nadaljuje* / The Past Continued, and *Nebo na kvadrate* / The Framed Sky... " Kožca is clearly Petan's alias, and the narrator is the author's double, his other self. The above quotation provides an appropriate transition to proceed to his other literary works. The

Framed Sky (Lj., 1979) is in fact Petan's autobiographical prose which continues in the novels *Dvojčka / The Twins* (Maribor, 1983), *The Past* (Ljubljana, 1987) and *The Past Continued* (Ljubljana, 1989).

The Framed Sky is a collection of 16 novelettes about life in prison. In those years, literary treatments of such topics were extremely rare, which was all the more reason for attracting the readers' attention. These stories are a felicitous rendering of daily occurrences and experiences in the confined and anxiety-filled life in the prison, where all social encounters take on an unusual form, with the exception of days spent in solitary confinement (see the story *Samica / The Solitary Cell*). The prison becomes a meeting place for the most diverse kinds of people whose paths would most likely never have crossed outside the prison walls, and we are introduced to a series of interesting psychological profiles that lend the stories their titles: *Novinec / The Newbee*, *Rokohitrc / The Conjuror*, *Boksar / The Boxer*, *Morilec / The Killer*, *Zasliševalec / The Interrogator*. The author always faces up to the otherwise gloomy situations with a sense of humour that adds amusement to insight. In contrast to the few fleeting moments of the good life inside, the inmates are faced with basic existential questions (as in *Smrt / Death*) of life and destiny.

Petan's introduction to the *Twins* informs the reader of the biographical nature of the novel (which lacks the usual genre classification). The introductory dedication – To remember is to choose (Günther Grass) – is an additional indication that the work is, in fact, a fictionalized composition of highlights from the author's personal past. Since the author, too, draws the reader's attention to the title in the introduction, let us take a closer look at it ourselves. The title implicitly points to a collision between the actual state of affairs and the symbolic transfer: the twin brothers are not genuine twins; they were born a year apart (the first one in 1928, the second in 1929), but they look very much alike, so much so that they are generally taken for twins.

The ambiguity of the title affects the whole story. The twins look alike as long as they live in the same town, in similar circumstances, in the same social system. Eventually, the older brother emigrates to West Germany after the W.W.II, while the younger one continues to live in Slovenia, Yugoslavia. The twins that once symbolized unity have now become a synonym for separateness, distinctness. The first brother lives in the capitalist society, the other in the socialist system; the first one enjoys democracy, while the second lives under a dictatorship, etc. As the novel progresses, they begin to differ distinctly and increasingly from one another up to the point of total alienation. Can the lost unity be regained, and if so, how? It may only be done by taking old memory lane, going back to the time when they were both young. And this is the essence of the novel. At some point in his life, perhaps when he senses that his time on Earth is running out, the first brother starts writing letters to the younger sibling – he writes about their past, their youth together. There are seven letters in all, each written as a separate chapter, accompanied with the younger brother's (he has published his brother's letters) commentary. The framework of the novel is set by the publisher's prologue and epilogue, which is also a commentary to the 7th letter. Two points of view are brought together in a subtle, unobtrusive manner—the recollections of the first brother and the commentaries of the second. To put it differently, the reader is presented with two sides of the coin, so to speak – the truth as a completely relative notion. The time outlined in these recollections are the post-war years – troubled, strange, extraordinary, but at the same time brutal, violent years fraught with ideological pressure. The reader is acquainted with the family circumstances in which the “twins” were growing up and briefly enlightened about the Inform-bureau period, the unfree elections, the political prosecution of high-school students and their teachers, the ideological intolerance of the “decadent” western dance styles, the overstated political activism of the time.

The figure of the “twin’s” capitalist father stands out prominently; first he was deported by the Germans during the second world war, but when the war was over, all of his property was nationalized by the communist regime, together with the well-known pre-war coffee-house Astoria (compare with Petan’s script for the film, *Kavarna Astoria*). The *Twins* is a very subtly rendered literary text and a successful illustration of that period.

Petan’s prison biography *The Past* was published in 1987; that it had been published by the Borec publishing house was a sign that the change had already begun. As a rule, autobiographies make interesting reading, but those with an accent on politically conditioned destiny certainly attracted an additional interest of the reading public (had this been a more uncompromising regime, the book would not have emerged at all). Two key Slovenian ground-breaking novels helped to pave the way for Petan’s *Past*: Vitomil Zupan’s *Levitan* (1982), which the author had accompanied with the inscription: “a novel, or maybe not”, and *Umiranje na obroke / Death by Installments* by Igor Torkar (1984).

Regardless of both texts that preceded it, Petan’s *Past* went a step further in revealing the hard facts which were unpleasantly exposing the regime’s most favoured and almost absurdly idealized institution – the military. Let us examine more closely the reasons and the course of events that had provided Petan with the material for *The Past*. In 1959, when Petan served as a soldier in the people’s army, he was placed in detention shortly before his leave, under false allegations; he was tried before a military court in an unfair trial. In the name of the people, he was sentenced to seven years in a high security military prison. When the higher court reviewed the case on appeal, the sentence was overturned, but Petan had already spent no less than a year and a half in detention before that happy ending. He was released in 1961.

The Past is evidently strongly connected to the *Twins*, or to

put it more clearly, concerned with the relationship between both brothers. Failing to recruit the eldest of the twins into their ranks (the one living in Germany), the Yugoslav national security service decided to vent their frustrations on the younger brother (who was living in Yugoslavia).

In 1989, Petan published *The Past Continued*. The obviously ambiguous title is a fitting one, referring the reader to the previous book and referring to the past as that part of life that can never really be summed up and defined once and for all. Time-wise, however, it is not a continuation of the *Past*: *The Past Continued* is a supplement, an additional commentary to the autobiographical *Past*; the author’s testimonial is accompanied with selected documents (letters, the appeal of the military prosecutor, etc.). The essential difference between the *Past* and its “continuation” is noticeable when we see the names of actual people complicit in it; in *The Past* their identities are concealed behind their initials, whereas the *Past Continued* gives the full names of the interrogating officers, witnesses, and others. The inscription in the book, dedicated to his grandchildren, reads: “To Grega and Jaka, in hope “that they will live in happier, untroubled times...”

Having mentioned Petan’s grandchildren and his “story-like” well-wishing, we should now proceed to another facet of his literary work. Petan’s writing for children and adolescents is of excellent quality and comprises a notable part of his literary production since the sixties. His first collection of short satires and his first book of stories for children were published in the same year — 1962. These books were coming out in the following sequence: *Pravljice za Jasmino / Stories for Jasmine* (Maribor, 1962); *Andrejčkova glava je prazna / There Is Nothing at All in Andy’s Head* (Ljubljana, 1967); *Kako je svet postal pisan / How The World Got Its Colours* (Ljubljana, 1974); *Dobro jutro, dober dan / Good Morning, Good Day* (Ljubljana, 1979); *Pravljice za očeta / Stories for Father* (Ljubljana, 1986); *Pravljice za dedija /*

Stories for Grandad (Ljubljana, 1993), and Ja-Ga, tretji dvojček / Ja-Ga, the Third Twin (Ljubljana, 1995).

Many a literary work for children, be it prose or poetry, is written as their authors' have children of their own and become intimately involved in their growing up as would their mothers and fathers. Petan's first book of stories for children, Stories for Jasmine – later changed to Stories About Jasmine – clearly originates from this experience. Petan's daughter Jasmina plays a dual role: the first title stresses her passive presence as the listener of these stories, whereas the second title shows her to have an active part in their making. The narrative technique is unfettered, enjoyable and well-balanced; and the stories reveal the author's belief in fairytales as a positive force for facing the challenges of living in today's world.

There Is Nothing at All in Andy's Head is a captivating modern-time tale. Transition from Andy's regular way to school into a fantastic fairytale world takes place very naturally, without any ados. Andy's head shape-shifts into a balloon and Andy lifts off, taking along his school-mate Janezek by holding his hand. The two boys are up and away, and they meet an astronaut in his spaceship and a police officer in a helicopter. When cold and boredom start to set in, they return to Earth and head to the school building. The teacher promptly explains why Andy's head changed into a balloon – because it was empty. Andy, on the other hand, thinks to himself: "Well, it isn't as bad, after all, if your head turns into a balloon every once in a while. It's surely more fun to fly around in the air than walk on the firm ground, at least most of the time." And that's how the story ends. One could hardly think of a better way of expressing the differences between the down-to-earth attitude needed for everyday living and the flight of the imagination that knows no bounds.

The story was reprinted in the next book, How The World Got Its Colours. The introduction informs us that the writer's daughter Jasmina is now "twenty-two already and well past her

storybook age". The well of inspiration in the writer's home has thus dried up for the time being. The book features two children: Andrejček (6 stories) and Majda (11 stories), and had gotten its title after the first story in which Andrejček makes the white world drawn on paper with colours: "And so the world got its many colours." Majda is of course just another version of Jasmina.

Good Morning, Good Day offers considerably more in the way of novelty. It is harmoniously structured; between the Beginning and the End there are 16 stories in all, each named after 16 children of which eight are boys and the rest are girls, and each story about a boy is followed by a story about a girl. The title of the book is reminiscent of Petan's first book for children, and the story about a girl named Jasmina is the author's adaptation of the Little Red Riding Hood. Adaptation and re-write of classical stories for children (especially those of brothers Grimm) are a recurring feature of Petan's writing for children and adolescents. A totally novel approach is seen in the book that followed it: Stories for Father (reminiscent of the Stories for Jasmina). The novelty is the storyteller, the son of the father for whom the stories were written. In the introduction the author refers to the son as "the only fictional character in the Stories for Father, but nonetheless a spitting image of my actual daughter as she was some twenty-five years ago." The link between Petan's first and latest collection of stories is more than obvious. The stories in this collection vary considerably. The first one is in fact an aphorism. The narrator gives an interpretation of the nature of the question mark: "The question mark is a full stop that has given in to curiosity." Daily occurrences alternate with variations of classical fairytales (e.g. The Fairytale About Hansel Without Gretel, The Fairytale About a Sleepy Sleeping Beauty and The Bleary-eyed Little Matthew). Stories for Father are proof that even the bleakness of everyday life can be turned into practical use for the purpose of storytelling. Stories for Grandpa are also connected to the author's first book for children, the difference

being that the father from the first book has become a grandpa, whereas Jaka and Grega, his twin grandchildren, have replaced Jasmine and rekindled his inspiration. The stories are told by the Grandpa with the lively cooperation of both boys; they start with the birth of both twins and end with their sixth birthday. The narrative structure follows that of the *Stories for Father*: some are based on daily life, others are variations of classical tales (e.g. the Tale of Five Cinderellas, One Martin and a Half, The Little Red Riding Hood), but the readers are also introduced to the "sequels" of Snow White, The Sleeping Beauty, and to the "anti-story" based on The Emperor's New Clothes. On the whole, the book is a sparkling and compelling yarn of tales.

Petan's most recent book for children, *Ja-Ga, The Third Twin*, is a sequel of the *Stories for Grandpa*. It features the same characters: Grandpa, Jaka and Grega. And who may the Ja-Ga be? It is a sprightly and invisible spook invented by the twins to be their playmate. In the first story, Ja-Ga is born into this world, in the last he leaves it; the twins' comment on his disappearance being: "If we miss him too much, we'll make up another one and name him Ga-Ja or Ga-Ga..."

We shall list two of Petan's texts, notably the short novel *Poloneza / Polonaise* (Ljubljana, 1991) and *Veseli diktator / The Merry Dictator*, a farce in prose (Maribor, 1994), under the heading of "other narrative prose works." With regard to its conciseness, the first one is actually closer to a short story than a novel, whereas the farce concerns amusing anecdotes about Josip Broz, the late Yugoslav communist dictator, told in a biographical fashion. Both works are written in the same genre, that of the short story. The satirical overtone of the second work brings it close to satirical prose; it deserves special mention on account of its thematic focus.

Polonaise is yet another example of Petan's wordsmanship in different genres. It belongs to the entertainment or leisure literature, with love as the central theme. *Polonaise* is an

appropriate title for the book as a whole and for the closing, decisive chapter, for the story is set in Poland. It may be of interest that two other well-known Polish comedies, namely Gombrowicz's *Operetta* and Mrożek's *Tango* also take the name of a musical form as their title.

Content-wise, the story is wholly "international" in character. The main figure is a Montenegrin by the name of Boro Petrovič, a painter by education and occupation, who had settled in Sweden, made a name for himself, married and divorced a Swedish girl, and is now looking for a suitable match. His friend Rade, a correspondent of the Belgrade daily in Warsaw, places an ad in a Polish magazine for women, stating that "...a Yugoslavian, resident in Sweden, well situated, seeks the acquaintance of an unattached female..." Boro leaves for Warsaw and singles out four candidates from a heap of letters. Unexpectedly and at long last, he meets someone named Barbara, falls in love with her, and settles in Poland. The key thought of the story is probably this one: "Between Barbara and the Polonaise, I could definitely put the sign for "equal."

Internationality and Slavic connections in particular are overwhelmingly part and parcel of Petan's book about Tito, *The Merry Dictator*. The work has had a bit of an unusual destiny: it was first published in German translation (Graz, 1992, second ed. 1993). The Romanian edition followed (Bucurest, 1993) closely, while the Slovenian edition appeared with a delay.

The Merry Dictator is comprised of two different parts—one being a journalistic outline with the head title; the other, pure fiction, entitled *Čudovito življenje Josepha B. / The Wonderful Life of Joseph B.* The author's introduction to the second part of the book reads: "The Wonderful Life of Joseph B. is a grotesque farce in prose, closely linked to the first part as its fabulised variation or literary upgrade. I had consciously resorted to kitsch as a means of enhancing the credibility of literary expression because I believed that without it I would not have been able to

render a faithful literary description of Tito's life, which was a farce as far as comedy goes, *La Comedie Humaine*, if I may borrow Balzac's phrase."

The life of Josip Broz has so far been the subject of over 900 books. Petan's *Merry Dictator* (an allusion to Lehar's operette *The Merry Widow*) is certainly one of the most unusual ones. The author has successfully avoided both extremes: the overstated cult of personality the dictator enjoyed in Yugoslavia during his rule and the purely politically spurred negative perceptions of this narcissistic strongman. Seen through Petan's lens, Broz was primarily the "artist of living" who knew how to enjoy the good life and was able to afford (at the expense of taxpayers) everything he could ask for. As theatre director, Petan was especially taken with the theatricality surrounding Broz's personality, and he first wrote a stage text with the same title, subtitled "a socialist operette". The prose text in the book is an adaptation of the original stage text. Petan's stories (and scenes) are playful, unreserved and imaginative variations of the biographic theme, closely intertwined with predominantly political and erotic overtones. Petan's closing statement in the 1st part of the book is also a superb illustration of the 2nd: "The life of Josip Broz finished with a happy-end, like every good operette."

Poetry remains one of the less notable genres in which he has worked. His first collection of poems, *Definicije / Definitions*, was published in Ljubljana as late as 1989, and was followed by *Zgodbice / Anecdotes* in 1995. The reader may find it interesting to know that *Definitions* had already been published earlier, in Serbian translation, in 1986. The title of this poetry collection would certainly lend itself well to a book of aphorisms, and the aphoristic quality is indeed present in most of the poems, beginning with the first which includes several of Petan's already known aphorisms. Some of the poems are satirical, but on the whole they are typically realistic descriptions of daily life, rendered in simple words and in a predominantly melancholy tone. Petan's

free verse borders closely on prose. The same features are also typical of the second collection. The title is indicative of narration, which is obvious in several places. In addition to satirical poetry, the collection includes meditative poems that concern existential issues (e.g. *Odhod / Departure*; *Strah / Fear*; *Kako se naučiš umreti / How to Learn to Die*; *Smrt / Death*; *Grob / A Grave*). The poem *Ljubezen / Love* is made up of nine aphorisms to the theme and stands out from the rest.

In this rather limited outline of Petan's literary work, we shall refer to his prolific writing for the stage only very briefly, with a few texts that were published in books, brochures or magazines: *Gospod Evstahij iz Šiške / Mr. Eustachius of Šiška* (a vaudeville show based on the *Celimare le bien aimé* by E. Labich), Ljubljana, 1970; *Igralec / An Actor* (a play), *Dialogi*, 1981; *Pet radijskih iger / Five Radio Plays* (*Igralci / Actors*; *Maturantje / High-school Graduates*; *Dvojniki / A Double*; *Avtor išče šest oseb / The Author in Search of Six People*; *Monolog moškega o ženskah / A Male Monologue on Females*), Maribor, 1981; *Votli cekini ali popotovanje od očeta in nazaj / Hollow Gold Coins or A Journey Away From the Father and Back Again* (a theatre play in seven acts), *Dialogi*, 1985; *Avdicija / Audition* (theatre play), *Sodobnost*, 1990; *Mrtvi so svobodni / The Dead Are Free* (TV play), *Sodobnost*, 1992; *Don Juan in Leporella / Don Juan and Leporella* (a short play), *Gledališki list MGL* 1992/93. A master of variations to diverse themes, Petan re-wrote in a rather unusual manner the well-known story of the renowned European literary hero, *Don Juan*. Petan's *Don Juan* is an elderly blind man. *Leporello* is replaced by the maid, *Leporella*, who takes on the roles of *Don Juan's* lady-loves (it remains unclear whether *Don Juan* really isn't aware of her deception or has merely conceded to take part in *Leporella's* travesties) and eventually takes on the guise of the *Stone Guest*. Among the many plays written for children and the teenage audience, I shall list those which were published in books or brochures: *Starši naprodaj / Parents for*

Sale (a play for children), Ljubljana, 1964; Obtoženi Volk / A Wolf Standing Trial (a play for children), Ljubljana, 1978; Poslednja vojna njegovega veličanstva / His Majesty's Last War (a radio play for children), Ljubljana, 1984; Metka in Janko / Hansel and Gretel (a play for children), Ljubljana, 1988; Pet Pepelk / Five Cinderellas (a fairytale play for the children), Ljubljana 1994. A Wolf Standing Trial achieved considerable international acclaim – it was staged no less than thirty times in various theatres across Europe. The play is an ingenious re-write of the classical tale of the Little Red Riding Hood.

We finally arrive to Petan's aphorisms, his most notable and internationally acclaimed form of literary expression. In the Encyclopaedia of Wit, Petan informs the reader of the number of aphorisms he has written in the past thirty years – some 5,000 in all, by all means an impressive figure. As for their literary provenance, Petan states: "Aphorisms do not belong to the epic or the lyrical. They belong to the ethics."

Petan's collections or selections of aphorisms were published in the following order: Prepovedane parole / Prohibited Words, Lj., 1966; Slečene misli / Nude Thoughts, Lj., 1969; Avtobiografija / Autobiography, Lj., 1972; Telefonski imenik / Telephone Directory, Lj., 1974; Izbrani aforizmi / Selected Aphorisms, Lj., 1981; 1001 Aphorisms, Lj., 1986, Aforizmi od A do Ž / Aphorisms from A to Z, Lj., 1989; Pred nami potop / Before Us, The Deluge, Lj., 1992; Do amena in naprej / All the Way to Amen and Further, Lj., 1994; Koledar aforizmov / A Calendar of Aphorisms, Lj., 1995.

Many of his aphorisms were also included in his satirical theatre panopticum entitled Beseda ni konj / Words Break No Bones (Lj., 1965). From Petan's first book of aphorisms, political and social life of the time continued to be a constant source of inspiration. The communist regime in its endless self-approving, long-winded verbosity and puffed-up self-glorification watched with close scrutiny over any potentially dissenting voice of the

citizens. Satire and satirical aphorism were clearly in the inner circle of politically suspicious forms of expression. The short, acrimonious and intense reality-check nature of the aphorism was perhaps the best suited among all possible responses to the tedious and hollow political speeches of the day. The following is probably one of the sharpest of Petan's politically satirical aphorisms: "I have been asked why do I write, and this is my reply: unfortunately, I cannot shoot with the pen." Witty, one-page photo-caricatures made by Stane Jagodič illustrate Petan's most remarkable book of aphorisms, Pred nami potop / Before Us, The Deluge. The title, paraphrasing Louis XV's famous maxim: After us, the deluge, is an endorsement of the quality which is ever present in Petan's work; perhaps it could best be summed up by the phrase "new skin for ancient wisdom." We should keep in mind that as much as it is distinctly Petan's, it is also quintessential to the identity of the European culture and above all, to the European literary tradition.

Andrijan Lah

Translated by J. M. Dintinjana