

Anna Valencic. *Petunia in an Onion Patch / Petunia en un cebollar.* Santiago, Chile: RIL Editores, 2003. 106 pp., CLP 5,950 (\$10.33). ISBN: 956-284-252-5.

The time is 1953. The place is the universe of eight-year-old Nastasia (Nasty) Martinovic; it consists of her yard, the surrounding streets, a foundry where her father works, a Slovenian club, and a ravine.

What is equally part of the setting is a place that Nasty never sets foot in, the land where Nasty's family is from. This is Slovenia, a place her neighbors are unable to locate in their mental geography.

Anna Valencic captures with apt, unadorned prose the world of a girl so displaced and who lives in the bosom of a loving family: a protective eldest brother, a teasing middle brother, an exacting and somewhat frustrated mother, a doting father, and dog whose name *Zhenska* aptly illustrates the often awkward means by which Slovene immigrant children have incorporated Americanisms—in this case, the ubiquitous “Lady.” With the support of these, Nasty navigates the small universe of childhood and the dangers and refuge it offers.

Equally present are also those that have been left behind: a grandmother, villagers, and extended family. They are kept alive for her in her imagination by her mother.

This short, sweet tale of one summer in the life of a Slovenian-American girl is prompted by a grandmother's dream. The adult narrator captures what she knows will otherwise vanish. Thus she fulfills what her mother—a former teacher, but in America a housewife that speaks accented English—tells her is the imperative of literature: to keep the culture alive. For tiny Slovenia, dominated culturally and geographically throughout history, this task is all the more urgent.

For this reviewer—a Slovenian daughter that arrived in Rochester, New York in 1959 as a two-year-old—Valencic's short tale rings poignantly true. Valencic captures the essence of Slovenian culture that made me feel so different from American or “Anglo” counterparts, right down to the ubiquitous obsessively well-tended gardens, the propensity to hold grudges, and the indoctrination of children to refrain from taking too much food when offered by hosts. Odd habits, but they are deeply ingrained, almost genetic, I believe.

I would have liked to learn more about the city Nasty grew up in and more about her later life. More needs to be told of the story of the post-World War II wave of Slovene emigration that extended into the 1950s. Even so, I am grateful to add Valencic's work to that of Louis Adamic in the still-too-spare canon of Slovene immigrant literature.

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