

The Slovenian Book Agency and Forms of International Promotion, or Why Sample Translations?

Katja Stergar

The Slovenian Book Agency (Javna agencija za knjigo or JAK) is a government institution founded in 2009 that deals with all actors in the book publishing chain, from authors to publishers and readers. Most of the agency's activities are devoted to the Slovene territory, but international promotion is still among its most important functions.

The main form of international promotion is representations at book fairs. Each year, JAK organizes a Slovene booth in Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Bologna. In addition, it occasionally mounts exhibits at other fairs—for example, in Moscow, Tiran, Sophia, Belgrade, Pristina, Budapest, and Prague. Exhibits vary widely: in places the focus is on the most recent book production, while sometimes a program of authors' presentations is organized as well. An exhibit always offers a great deal of promotional literature.

Another traditional form of promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages. JAK annually holds a call for applications for co-financing translations of Slovenian authors' books into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction, and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatrical plays and comics. The applicant can be a foreign publishing house, theater, or translator. In each case, a contract is concluded with the translator, and therefore all funding goes directly to him or her.

Due to the fact that Slovene literature is still insufficiently known abroad, JAK also co-finances many international tours by Slovene writers, literary events abroad, writer-in-residence projects abroad, and underwrites mobility grants for individual authors. These funds, too, are awarded on the basis of the call for applications.

In August of each year, JAK organizes a seminar for foreign translators. The international seminar offers the sixteen translators from Slovenian who are selected insights into the current state of Slovene literature and the opportunity to cooperate with Slovene authors, critics, publishers, university faculty members, and colleagues from other countries. The seminar's goals are to increase the number of book publications abroad of superior translations of Slovene literary works, to enhance translators' knowledge, and encourage closer cooperation between Slovene writers, publishing houses, and translators.

The seminar produces sample translations into different languages from the works of authors invited to participate. JAK is aware that due to the small number of Slovene speakers translation is necessary to acquaint readers abroad with Slovene literature, and it therefore encourages sample translations in a supplemental call for applications. In recent years, this has resulted in a significant fund of texts that publishers and authors use for promotion during appearances abroad and on the Internet and in journals. The desire, of course, is to effect a greater number of book publications.

JAK has selected for Slovene Studies sample translations into six languages an excerpt from Tadej Golob's novel *Svinjske nogice* (Pig's feet), which received the Kresnik Prize for best novel of the year (2010).

Tadej Golob was born 16 September 1967 in Maribor, and grew up in Lenart in the Slovenske gorice region. After finishing the special social science high school (Gymnasium 1) in Maribor, he served in the Yugoslav National Army, then studied journalism in Ljubljana. He consulted for TV Slovenija for several years as a sports journalist, and then he worked at different magazines, such as *Grand Prix* (auto sport), *Grif* (alpine climbing), *Geo* (popular science), and *Playboy*, for which he still carries out interviews.

His first book-length publication, published in 2000, was *Z Everesta* (From Mt. Everest), a travelogue about Davo Karničar's descent on skis. (Golob also co-wrote the script for a documentary film about the feat.) There followed in 2004 *Peter Vilfan, biografija* (Peter Vilfan, a biography); in 2006, *Moške svinje* (Male pigs), a selection of *Playboy* columns; in 2008, *Zgodba iz prve roke, biografija Zorana Predina* (A first-hand story, a biography of Zoran Predin); in 2009, the novel *Svinjske nogice* (Pig's feet); and in 2011, *Zlati zob* (The gold tooth), a novel for young adults. In 2011, the newspaper *Delo* published his short story "Plaža" (The beach) in the collection *Poletne zgodbe* (Summer stories). His story "Monte Cristo" lent its title to the selected anthology *Nova mariborska zgodba* (Recent Maribor short stories), *Monte Cristo, kolesa, kurent*. The biography of Peter Vilfan was a best-seller. It was at the top of all sales lists in Slovenia for six months. *Zlati zob* placed in the 2012 White Ravens catalog (the International Youth Library München issues the annual selection of the best international books for young people). In addition, it was chosen for the national project *Rastem s knjigo* (Growing up with a book) and over twenty thousand copies were distributed to seventh graders in Slovenia and abroad. Golob's unpublished novel for children, "Kam je izginila Brina?" (Where has Brina disappeared?) was entered in the Mladinska knjiga publishing house's *Modra ptica* competition and was one of five nominees for the prize. The publishing house Miš will release it in 2013. Also in 2013, the publishing house Goga will bring out the novel for adults *Ali boma ye!*

When he was very young, Golob played soccer. He was a member of Maribor Branik's junior team. After moving to Ljubljana in 1987, he began rock climbing and alpine climbing, which he still does. He has completed extremely challenging first ascents in the Slovene mountains, the central Alps, the Andes, Kirghizia, and the Himalayas, where he climbed two eight thousand-meter peaks, Daulagiri (1998) and Everest (2000).

He is the father of two children, the twelve-year old Brina and ten year-old Lovro.

The black humor and irony of the novel *Svinjske nogice* set it apart from melancholy texts of the Slovene canon. The first-person narration about the comic strip artist Jani Bevk is written in lively conversational language, at times vulgar and very direct. It is the realistic story of an unsuccessful artist's experiences. Difficult daily coping, relieved by occasional moments with his three year-old son and sex with his female partner, suggest a fairly typical Slovene passive protagonist, but this is but the jumping off point into a text with plenty of suspense and surprising turns. A less skillful writer would stick with excessive anger, cocaine, or sawed off shotguns. However, Golob develops the story through all of the digressions and psychologically finished characters into a novel with an open ending, which causes the reader to think, in spite of being mocked, or maybe just because of that.

Ahmed Burić translated the novel into Bosnian. The publisher Buybook will bring it out in its entirety in Sarajevo in 2014. Darko Spasov did the Macedonian translation, which will appear with the publisher ESRA in 2014 as well. David Limon did the English translation, Ann-Catrin Epstein Müller the German, and Peter Senizza the Italian. These were until now intended only for promotional purposes. In the hope that this publication in *Slovene Studies* will spark interest in work that has been done, JAK has decided to prepare this representative project, which in the future can be continued with publications of the sample texts of other Slovene fiction writers who may be of interest to readers abroad.

Slovenian Book Agency, Ljubljana