

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2022



Peter Svetina
Author nomination
Slovenian section of IBBY



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1 Biographical information on the candidate

Peter Svetina was born in 1970 in Ljubljana. In 1995 he graduated in Slovenian Studies and defended his PhD thesis on Old Slovenian Poetry in 2001 (both at Faculty for Arts, University Ljubljana, Slovenia). He is an associate professor for Slavic literature at the Institute for Slavic languages, Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt, Austria. He writes for children, young adults and adults, but his work often crosses the borders between different target audiences and can be read as crossover literature. His literary debut was a picture book called *The Walrus who Didn't Want to Cut his Nails* (1999), which soon served as the basis for a puppet play, a path later followed by many of his works (e.g. *Mr. Constantine's Hat*). His books for children and youth have been translated into English, German, Spanish, Korean, Polish, Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian. Svetina's works often play with occurrences and images from his everyday life. They reflect not only his home town of Ljubljana and the destinations of his travels, but also his scholarly interests – Svetina's scientific research is focused on old Slovenian poetry, children's and youth literature (especially its socially and politically directed transformation after World War II), and detective novels. He translates poetry and children's literature from English, German, Croatian, Serbian, Slovak and Czech and works as an editor for poetry collections and literature textbooks for primary school. His books have received some of the most prestigious national and international awards and are immensely popular among literary critics as well as young readers. Peter Svetina is also the author of the 2020 ICBD message *Hunger for Words*, illustrated by Damijan Stepančič, sponsored by the Slovenian section of IBBY (for more information on the 2020 ICBD see: <https://www.ibby.si/index.php/icbd-2020>).

2 A high-resolution portrait photograph of the candidate



Photo: Tatjana Splichal

3 A statement on the candidate's contribution to literature for children and young people

Igor Saksida:

The Diverse and Communicative Nature of Peter Svetina's Fiction for Children and Young Adults

Peter Svetina's children's and young adult fiction begins with easily understandable, sometimes explicit patterns of communication: his first two animal fairy tales, *The Walrus who Didn't Want to Cut His Nails* (*O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov*, 1999) and *The Little Walrus Gets Glasses* (*Mrožek dobi očala*, 2003), deal with the issue of difference and acceptance, establishing a sort of intertextual dialogue with older texts focusing on similar subjects (e.g. Svetlana Makarovič: *A Special Kind of Squirrel* (*Veveriček posebne sorte*, 1994)). After his first forays into children's literature, Svetina's poetry and stories develop along two distinct paths: towards language play on the one hand, and towards real-life topics on the other; however, both developments reflect the author's distinctive poetics of combining nonsense and realism, including problem fiction.

Svetina's poetry books are extremely varied and represent one of the high points of contemporary Slovenian poetry. Svetina's first book of poetry, *By-World* (*Mimosvet*, 2001), could be categorized as a collection of problem poetry, although growing up is not shown against a background of symbolic concepts, typical of children's and young adult poetry at the time – instead, the poems show the reality as child-like and playful. Svetina's return to the flashes from the uncomplicated (but not naïve or idealized) children's world is one of the foremost characteristics of his poetics of the “message minimum,” which transcends the tradition of the complex linguistic innovation of late modernist poetry. On the other hand, language play is the basis of the brilliant *Poems from the Washing Machine* (*Pesmi iz pralne stroja*, 2006), wherein Svetina combines nonsense with taboo words and a lyrical attitude towards nature; many of the texts in the book are also visual poems, meaning that the collection provides the youngest readers with a glimpse of the possibilities of poetic expression without ever being pushy about it. Svetina's *Homeworks* (*Domače naloge*, 2014), another book of poetry, moves away from the poetics of language play; although one can still detect wordplay typical of nonsense poetry (e.g. play with letters, unusual neologisms), the poems are predominantly based on the real world of the modern child, who is not just playful and appreciative of the wonders of nature, but also sometimes lonely:

*For grandma to come
for us to school,
for kitty to wait for us
on our doorstep.*

*For someone to be home
when we come from school,
for us not to be alone,
I ask you, our Father,
I ask you, mom.*

(“Homework on Prayer”)

and aware of impermanence:

*On a white field
a crow pecks
forgotten autumn's
breadcrumbs.*

*From afar, it looks
like a breadcrumb
itself.*

*Will it be pecked
as well?*

(“Homework on Crows”)

A similar topic is at the centre of *Prayers from the Stairs* (*Molitvice s stopnic*, 2016), a poetry book based on an infrequently encountered subject, a child’s reflections on God. The book also deals with gratitude, fear, aging, and intergenerational dialogue. As such, the collection could easily have fallen to preachiness or idealization, however, Svetina avoids both pitfalls. His reflections also remain sufficiently concrete so as to give young readers a chance to engage in dialogue with the frequently ambiguous poetry that is both playful and serious at the same time.

Svetina’s storytelling is similar to his poetry, combining a realistic environment with elements of nonsense and lyricism, comedy with folklore (fairy tale subjects) and linguistic experimentation with a non-intrusive moral evaluation of the character’s actions. The Slovenian-English story *Anton’s Circus* (*Antonov circus*, 2008) occurs in an urban environment, where Anton and Leopold the Lion resist the boring modern times with an unusual circus show that is a combination of intertextual fairy tale references and opera. The nonsense urban motifs are also typical of a number of Svetina’s other tales, such as *Mr. Constantine’s Hat* (*Klobuk gospoda Konstantina*, 2007) and *How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race* (*Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom*, 2016). In both of these stories, the power of imagination is combined with a keen sense of the poetic aspects of the city, focusing on the value of seemingly unimportant details (e.g. a hat or an old bicycle), friendship and kindness. Nonsense is also one of the formal guiding principles of the cross-genre book of poetry and short stories *The Lumber Room* (*Ropotarna*, 2012): the author transforms various names, creates words out of letters and numbers, uses mirror text (which can be read by using an actual mirror), toys with fairy tale motifs (the frog, the princess, the vodyanoy), and shows the wonders of imaginary travels of people and objects through space and time. The game of nonsense betrays a deeper message, e.g. about the value of art (“Opera Beggar”) and creativity that can nowadays exist anywhere and at any time, even in the play of tiny fruit stickers (“The Sticker Fairy Tale”). Recently, Svetina is most recognized for his unique nonsense stories that feature unusual animals with similarly unusual names (hippos Hubert and Marcel, František the Water Buffalo, Franci the Cheetah, etc.). Young readers are first introduced to such characters in *Hippopotamus Wisdom* (*Modrost nilskih konjev*, 2010): in their world there is no place for the frenzy of human modernity. Nonsense wordplay and story ideas are combined with a focus on friendship and care for the other and the characters are filled with wonder at everything around them: the wisdom of their existence is that anybody can be child-like and ask seemingly irrelevant (absurd) questions and then try to

answer them with the same “logic” of nonsense – only to coexist with another in the dialogue of questions and answers, to hang out and talk (as in “What’s Most Important”):

*Tanami the Zebra came by. She visited her friends on her way back from the store.
“What are you doing?” she asked. “Oh, nothing,” said Marcel. “We’re just talking.”
“That’s what’s most important,” said Tanami and joined them.*

A similar poetics is reflected in *The Ripening of Porcupines* (*Kako zorijo ježevci*, 2015), another collection that includes both linguistic and story-based nonsense. The former is expressed in literal interpretation of phrases and in repetitions that rob words of their meaning but also imbue them with new content, e.g. “*could also be the possum traffic officer Ferdinand, or traffic officer Ferdinand the Possum, or Ferdinand the Possum Traffic Officer*”, as well as in lists, repetitions and hyperbole – e.g. in “A Bus Stop in Twelve Parts”. All these elements come together in an intriguing “opposite world” that continuously throws the reader off balance and underlines the living, surprising, even challenging nature of language itself. The self-sufficient joy of creating new words and combining them in a pastiche of nonsense is logical, internally consistent, and intertextual, containing numerous quotes from and references to known works of literature. Alongside the unusual protagonists (possum, porcupine, zubr, ermine, nutria) that in themselves arouse the reader’s curiosity, the most significant feature of the book is its veiled message – readers are told in a very unobtrusive manner that it is important to give others a visit from time to time, to be someone’s lighthouse, to dare to be fearsome like Genadij the Cricket, and most importantly, to ask important questions: *How to train a shadow? How to paint the wind? What is it like to be inside music like an ant inside a clarinet?*

Svetina has received many awards for his works (including the main Slovenian award for children’s literature Večernica, which he has received three times) and has long been recognised as a significant author by literary critics, teachers of literature, and the literary field in general. He is generally included in all decent textbooks and reviews of contemporary Slovenian children’s literature. We believe this to be **good justification for Peter Svetina to become a candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.**

Every child is born curious and inquisitive – and more or less cheeky, in one way or another; but I believe every child has some curiosity. If you feed it, it'll grow, and if you don't, it'll be stunted. But without thought and imagination, man, I believe, is just a traffic light, programmed to turn from red to orange to green and left to stand there and light up. Can you imagine a traffic light strolling around and flashing all its three colours at the same time?

Peter Svetina

4 One or two appreciative essays, interviews or articles

I) Svetina, Peter: "Devetnajst točk avtopoetike"/"My Poetics in Nineteen Points". *Otrok in knjiga*, issue 100 (2017), pp. 7-9.

1. One's poetics is a reflection of one's own artistic creation. In contrast with (literary) theory, which observes and describes, poetics is prescriptive. It is thus a reflection of writing and literary techniques the author knowingly prescribes to himself or unknowingly adheres to.
2. The family that I'm descended from has always nurtured two virtues: respectful stubbornness and generosity. I take no credit for having been born into this setting.
3. Receptiveness is a deliberate readiness to accept what comes to you. For a writer, receptiveness is not an immutable fact; rather, it is the result of training. Being receptive and writing in the early hours of the morning help the writer avoid or reduce self-censorship.
4. Weirdos are people who refuse to conform in spite of the expectations of the majority. Their values and behaviour patterns do not conform to the values and behaviour patterns of the majority but may nevertheless be incidentally aligned with them. The existence of weirdos is a sign of a bearable social environment. When a literary author writes about weirdos, this is a sign of the author's personal affinity for them on one hand and a signal to the reader that such people exist on the other. If the writer presents weird characters sympathetically, the reader will feel sympathy for them as well.
5. Subversiveness is non-conformity of ideas or ideology that is not immediately apparent; it is the practice of hiding thumbtacks inside dominant social patterns, norms and preferences. To put it differently, subversiveness is an irritation that is generally not immediately noticed or sensed by its intended targets. In today's western society of acceleration, the mere abundance of free time can be subversive: subversiveness may be embodied by characters who take time to talk to each other and to observe things. Even the reading of stories may be subversive. If the writer is not concerned with whether their text will be published or not, they can be more relaxed in their non-conformity with the preferences and demands prevalent in their community.
6. An inclination towards comedy and nonsense may be inherent to one's character but is mostly the result of training. The picture of life painted from a comedic or nonsense-based perspective is no less true than one painted from a tragic, terrifying or melodramatic viewpoint. In each case, the work picks fragments out of reality and uses them to create a literary world, which, although in itself an illusion, is not necessarily any less true than the reality that exists outside of literature.
7. I believe people, when they're not sleeping, have at least two types of awareness. One is functional awareness, which allows people to carry out their everyday routines – drive a car, cross a pedestrian crossing, buy a fish or a salad, adequately answer a child's questions. The other kind of awareness is aligned in the same direction but separated from the first as the sidewalk is separated from the road. The second kind of awareness allows for creativity, is a creative awareness. A sports competition may be creative as well. It is similar to a state of trance. When practising this type of awareness, one has no sense of time, of hunger or cold, and does not notice when one

has to go to the bathroom. The author who has written a text in this state of mind is generally unable to relate how the text was created.

8. In certain circumstances, this creative state of mind can be maintained and easily returned to. Returning to it allows the author to write intensely, even if a day, or more, has gone by since they have concluded their previous writing session. Constant or oblivious use of the phone, internet or television deadens the author's creative awareness and strands him in the functional (or even dysfunctional) awareness.
9. Texts are created in different circumstances. They are also created in different locations. Steady movement – walking, riding a train or driving a car, though the driving must not be stressful – may stimulate the creative process. The author can simply commit the scenes for his story to memory or jot them down in a notebook as they occur.
10. In the text, these scenes and images combine with no regard to the author's real life or the details of their autobiography. The images that follow each other in a text may come from wildly different times and totally different places. The literary text creates a new reality, which is what the reader is interested in; the reader doesn't care about the (auto)biographic accuracy of the story – and this is not the story's aim.
11. The text is generally finalized at home or in an environment that at the time provides a substitute for home.
12. The activities of reading and translating beget new literature. Reading and translating, the writer learns of new literary techniques, which they may then try out in their own texts.
13. Literary elements that deserve observation and warrant study and reflection are: the speech of literary characters, composition of the text, ellipsis, metaphors, associations, wordplay and titles.
14. Everybody has a name. Everybody is called by their name. If a character lacks a name, it is actually a type.
15. Those who speak much may hear little. I believe an author needs to observe and listen to fill up their creative batteries. If the batteries are mostly empty, writing is merely a trade, though it may be carried out well.
16. If, after editing, the text is not missing anything that the author deems essential or central, there is no reason for the text to be longer. If a text is good, it will still be good six months or a year later.
17. If you finish your lunch when you could still take a couple of bites more, you'll remember it much better than you would if you stuff yourself to the point of bursting. Writing is similar: if the author has managed to end their text at a point when the reader would still be ready to read further, a chemical reaction has been set off in the reader, which will extend the text further; readers will generally retain more of such texts than of those that they had finished in their heads before the writer had done so on paper. Open endings and things that remain unsaid can only intensify the effect of the work.
18. Searching and a certain amount of experimentation improve the vitality of both the author and his texts.
19. If you have said what you had to say, it may be time to stop writing.

II) Svetina, Peter, Forstnerič-Hajnšek, Melita: “Praznil sem predale, potem pa žrebal”/“I Turned out Drawers and Picked out Random Bits and Pieces”: Intervju s Petrom Svetina/Interview with Peter Svetina, *Otrok in knjiga*, volume 40, issue 87 (2013) pp. 42-45.

The Lumber Room, your awarded book, is a very provocative work; at the same time, you and the illustrator, Damijan Stepančič, are an extremely coherent team. How did your wordplay, the wild associations of these texts, the oscillation between poetry and prose mesh together with the illustrator's playfulness and inventiveness? Were you already in communication when the book was coming together?

Well, the coherence, if it comes through, is probably due to us knowing each other. We talk a lot when we meet. In some cases, we meet often, in others, less so. I think we mostly know what to expect from one another. I find it a bit unfair when only one of the authors receives an award in such cases – I believe texts on their own could never work so well if it weren't for those exact illustrations in the book and for that exact book design.

Did you find the various old texts that make up The Lumber Room in your dusty drawers, did you add new ones? How exactly did this seemingly chaotic universe of forgotten objects and unusual heroes come together?

The book was created by taking some old texts that I hadn't included in any of the previous ones. Odds and ends, mostly. And then I wrote some new ones as well. At the end, as I discussed the index and how to really make the book similar to a lumber room with Gaja Kos, the editor at the Miš publishing house, it finally occurred to us: I'd ask my daughter to do a random draw of the texts' numbers. So I wrote out the index, numbered each story, put the numbers in a bag, and my daughter drew the order of the stories. The texts in the book thus came to be ordered randomly.

However, the book doesn't give the impression of randomness, but of solid construction and a deliberate dramatic arc.

That's funny. So it seems that there's some logic to it after all. I'm sure it wouldn't have turned out so well if I had thought it out thoroughly. And now it is what it is.

A friendly commotion, the meshing of different genres, forms, rhetorical devices, a veritable whimsical encyclopaedia of everything, poetic shifts, oscillation between the conscious and the subconscious – you are simply amazing! First you grab the reader's attention with a long fairy tale and then immediately, on the very next page, confuse them with nonsense, your signature mode of writing, or perhaps help them relax with gentle tercets. How does Svetina the literary theorist and historian interfere with Svetina the author? Or are they partners?

They're partners, I'd say. I'm generally never bothered by literary theory when I write. While I had done some work on meter, I don't think I'd be able to continuously produce convincing rhymes, so I generally avoid such writing. Reading is actually what helps me most, as well as translating, which is just very close reading. One internalizes a lot of such stuff and then writes like that without even realizing it. Of course readers can then recognize your

influences here and there, after all, literature usually begets literature, and I find that constructive. I doubt my texts would be as they are today if it hadn't been for my studies and the books I'd read.

The index of weirdos at the end of your book includes yourself, the illustrator, the editor, as well as Nebuchadnezzar, Beethoven, etc. In addition to the standard table of contents, there's also an "index of all sorts of things." Why all these indexes – to make the readers flex their brains as they finish the book?

There's another weirdo in the index whose only listed appearance is on the index page itself. And the "index of all sorts of things" includes an appendix, maybe somebody will go looking for it, which resides on a page that's no longer in the book and whose number is very similar to a phone number one would perhaps need to call if they encountered the subject of the appendix up close and personal. Anyway, I first saw such an abundance of indexes in Petr Šrámek's anthology of Czech children's poetry. There was a chronological index of authors by date of birth, an index of titles, an index of first lines, an index of lines by length, etc. So I said to myself, why not use such a scientific apparatus, footnotes, etc. with children's literature. The indexes are thus part of the "scientific apparatus". And if the book is supposed to be a lumber room, let everything be in a giant heap, together with names and things that appear in the book. I selected things more or less by feel, while the other index does indeed list all the weirdos.

As you contemplate your oeuvre, where does The Lumber Room fit in? Some of the stories are similar to those in The Magic Ring, and the characters are comparable as well. The book is quite daring, but could it have turned out chaotic, even impenetrable?

Of course. I think it was quite a courageous move on the part of the publisher to put out a book like this. I myself wanted to do an inconsistently illustrated book, one made out of various odds and ends, with dissimilar texts tossed in a heap without thought to order, as in a lumber room. What's funny is that a certain order eventually arose without actually being put there. Damijan had his work cut out for him as he nevertheless had to arrange the disorder into some kind of order, an impression, at least, of a visual balance of things. And with reference to daring that you make – yes, I guess I sometimes do such things deliberately. With the hippos, I also intentionally left in the beer and cigarettes. Some things always have to be a bit different, something has to diverge from the predetermined system of expectations. I believe a text must excite the reader, that's what makes one think, after all; whether they cry, laugh or fume over it, if the text elicits a reaction, that's it. A colleague once seriously complained to me about me writing a story about a walrus that refused to cut his nails, because apparently his nephew had now stopped allowing his nails to be cut as well. But what can I say – cough – that's not my problem anymore.

In a sense, The Lumber Room is your ars poetica. It contains everything that has appeared throughout your work up to now. From the fact that you're inspired to write by real, tangible events, to music, fatherhood, etc. A few years ago, you also wrote a guide on fostering family literacy. Is The Lumber Room really a concentrate of everything?

Perhaps it is. I rarely think about my work in these terms, truth be told, I'm bad at thinking about what I write in general, I'm too involved. I can do it with others, but not with myself. Just as you can't see your mistakes on second reading, I have a hard time talking about my

works and evaluating them. But yes, maybe it's true that all my previous work can be found in this book – short and long fairy tales, nonsense, poetry, and some of that deliberateness I'd mentioned before.

What are your writing principles? What inspires you, where do you get most of your ideas?

Let's take a look at my fairy tale about the vodyanoy that went to a thermal spa. In general, there are few vodyanoyes in Slovenian literature, but I'm terribly fond of them. There's plenty in Czech literature, and I feel close to the Czechs as I'd studied in Prague. The Czech's attitude towards the devil is interesting as well. He's often presented as a good guy, a simpleton that anybody can pull a fast one on. He's not a jerk, like in Slovenia.

Another experience connected to the fairy tale about the vodyanoy that went to a thermal spa was our family visit to one of the Danish islands where there was a skansen, i.e. an open air museum. They were having a medieval tournament, and there was a huge catapult. We rooted for two of those knights and they fired a huge stone ball from the catapult. I enjoyed the scene so much that I just had to stick it in one of my fairy tales. Such things tend to eventually come together into a story. The vodyanoy is constantly telling anecdotes, as the Czechs are prone to do. There are a couple of excursions, and each can be thought of as a separate little story. The texts contain many things that are, at least in my mind, very clearly connected to a certain thing in reality, for example Šiška with the Koseze Pond, which appears in the story. I live nearby.

Are there any political allusions to certain nitwits of our present time?

If readers are able to find them, then I guess they're there. Not always intentionally.

As the book was published in the previous year, you're sure to have received responses from schools, libraries, meetings with readers?

I haven't been visiting schools or any other places much because my job requires me to spend most of my time in Klagenfurt. But on the few occasions that there had been, I noticed that some texts were used as motivation for children to write their own pieces. At one school, the children thus figured out the *Bananas and Papayas* story, i.e. that the story was written using no other vowels than a's. And so they tried to write stories with only e's, i's, o's. I find this very creative. After all, Raymond Queneau has his *Exercises in Style*, and Balog has his *Little People*.

There's a lot of music in your fairy tales, and you use tiny discarded things to create big stories.

Yes, everything is full of music, there are opera singers singing, double bass players performing, I've noticed it. And regarding the ordinary objects, I don't know, at one time I was translating Vasko Popa, a Serbian poet whose first book of poetry featured a very unusual poetic inventory: an ashtray, moss, etc. I have a feeling that the text sometimes goes over my head, over what I'm trying to write; that's what I feel like sometimes when I'm writing, that the words are writing themselves. Not everything is thought out in advance, you simply get into a certain mood and things come together. If you're happy with the result, you keep it, if not, you throw it out.

The hippos in your book Hippopotamus Wisdom, with their calmness and peacefulness, came across as zen-like, which was quite unusual for Slovenian literature ...

In a safari zoo by Lake Garda, I once saw two hippos running. I'd never outrun them, I'm sure. But they were extremely likeable. What I wanted to do with the book, then, was to have them talking all the time, for them to have all the time in the world. I feel a lot of our communication is carried out by computer or by phone, and I think it's important to sit down and have coffee with people.

Working as a Professor at the Klagenfurt University, can you simply write because you're compelled to, can you make time for it?

It's an enormous luxury. Yes, I feel compelled to write, though I also often have doubts about it, what with all the things that are being published. However, I'm never under any pressure, I have no deadlines to meet, I don't have to worry about subsisting on writing alone. I'm free to choose my own subjects and I don't have to pay attention to any pressing issues. I simply write, and if things get published, that's great, whether now or in three years; and if they don't get published, that's okay as well. As I said, it's a luxury.

5 List of awards and other distinctions



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik: *Mrožek dobi očala/The Little Walrus Gets Glasses*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2003.

2004: Nomination for the Večernica Award



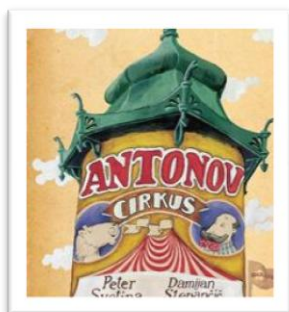
Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Klobuk gospoda Konstantina/Mr. Constantine's Hat*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2007.

2007: Best Designed Book Award, Slovenian Book Fair

2008: Award for an original Slovenian Picture Book

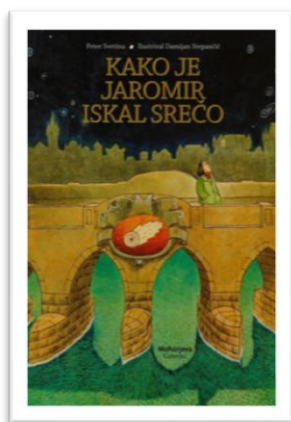
Statement of the jury:

A genuine urban fairy tale, nicely rounded, humorous, probably intended for everybody, young and old – the story has a good point, i.e. that things always end as they should, as even nature makes sure – beautiful stories of kindness have a happy ending.



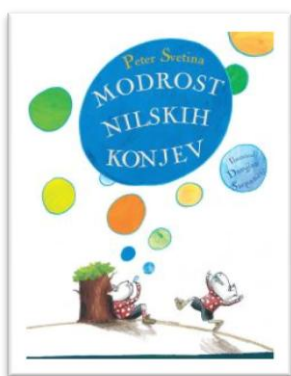
Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Erica Johnson Debeljak: *Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus*, Vodnikova založba, Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2008.

2008: Most Beautiful Slovenian Book in the Literature and Books for Children & Youth category



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako je Jaromir iskal srečo/How Jaromir was Searching for his Happiness*, Mohorjeva, Celovec, 2010.

2011: Nomination for Kristina Brenkova Award



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič:
Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010, 2015, 2016.

2011: Nomination for the Večernica Award

2011: The Golden Pear Award for Best Original Slovenian Children's Book

Statement of the jury:

The finest Slovenian storytelling, including stories intended for children and young people, often flirts with poetry. And so the heartbeat of the 21 short stories from this year's winner according to the Pionirska Library, with its rhythms and melodic sentences, also sounds like poetry, as Peter Svetina peppers his whimsical series of texts with recognizable literary "dances," such as the children's counting rhyme in "Twelve Penguins", the wisdom of programmatic poetry in "The Thoughts of the Philosopher Python", the onomatopoeia in "Silence", the free sound in "The Downpour", and the wordplay in "The Cold". The central role in this fantasy setting is played by all-encompassing wisdom, in this case represented by hippos and other animals from all around the world. These inimitable characters showcase common and uncommon human traits that come together either in thoughtful reflection or a funny twist at the end of each story. The author's dense vocabulary and the illustrator's expressive and characteristic drawings color these tales with optimism, naïve comedy, and clever oxymorons that show how to make something beautiful out of nothing: how to make a bouquet of nothing but rhymes, measure the breadth of summer, listen to silence, count imaginary penguins, and do the most important thing in the whole world: talk to each other. While Slovenian children's and young adult literature in 2010 mostly excels in the illustration aspect, editor Breda Rajar at DZS has managed to publish a book whose wisdom and kindness put it among the finest children's prose in Slovenian and promises to keep it there indefinitely.

2011: Listed in the White Ravens Catalogue

Statement from the White Ravens Catalogue:

How do you measure a summer's length? How to best explain the rainy season? What are the appropriate manners when meeting a kangaroo? How do you fill a skunk's garden with water? Marcel and Hubert, two hippos who love to sit under the sycamore tree and ponder while they throw mud balls into the river, have a ready solution for every problem - be it constructing a tape measure, using onomatopoeia, behaving correctly, or creating flood waves. In entertaining, partly absurd episodes, Peter Svetina has the sedate, and slightly clumsy and slowcoachy protagonists transform into helpers and world-explainers without them even realising it. And because Marcel and Hubert often take things literally, their stories are great fun to read.



**Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič:
Čudežni prstan/Magic Ring, KUD Sodobnost
International, 2011.**

2011: The Most Beautiful Slovenian Picture-book of the Year

Statement of the jury:

In this picture book, too, just as in his own original picture book without text *Zgodba o sidru/Story of an Anchor*, the illustrator devotes his creative attention to the Slovene capital, Ljubljana. This time the novelty is the graphic post-modernism. Metaphysical and nostalgic whiffs of bourgeois Ljubljana from the beginning of the 20th century can be felt. The boundaries of time are blurred and give the impressions of timelessness; it seems in fact as if the layers of time are laid one on top of another, with the presentation of subjects/objects from the past as symbols of time (Edvard Rusjan's airplane, a balloon, zeppelin, dragon, etc.). The airplane or aircraft can also be understood as a leitmotif, which leads us through the story. The exterior often appears in the interior and sections are reminiscent of a Japanese woodcut, which is not surprising, since the Secession was also modelled on the Japanese; on careful observation, the illustrations are reminiscent of the famous French painter, Henri Toulous-Lautrec. We find the psychedelic, unusual machines in the sky, an atmosphere such as in the futuristic silent cult film *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang, a futuristic view of a large city, a new unusual depiction of Ljubljana.

2012: The Hinko Smrekar Award for Illustrations

2012: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award

Statement of the jury:

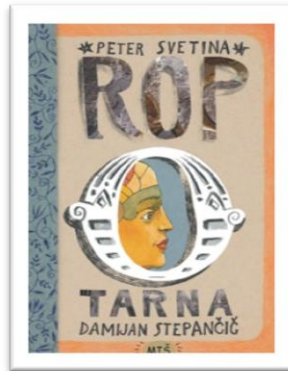
This is a story about the loneliness of an opera singer, Ljudmila Krasinc, and the magical powers that are supposedly hidden in a miraculous ring. The several times awarded author Peter Svetina is a master of refined humour, which does not function »at face value« and the amazing miracle is wittily realised in the »Ljubljana marathon«, in a mass competition that unfurls through the streets of Ljubljana. The humour intensifies and, because of following the ring, a growing number of competitors combine and link the inhabitants of old Ljubljana, which witches try to capture although they are the ones because of which the whole thing is taking place. The picture book is distinguished by witty exaggeration and an exciting intensification of the narrative, which is also outstandingly supported in the illustrations. These are polished to masterly excellence. They function in an antiquarian manner but timelessly: this timelessness is connected in the illustrator's story with the symbols of Ljubljana, with the Ljubljana dragon, city hall, Robbo's fountain, details of well-known Ljubljana buildings can be recognised etc. The excellent cooperation of two already well trained artists brings a clear ethical message on cooperation and solidarity, which is stressed for us together with the welcome humour.

2013: Listed in the White Ravens Catalogue

Statement from the White Ravens Catalogue:

Never change a winning team: Peter Svetina and Damijan Stepančič were awarded a prize for their book *Modrost nilskih konjev* (DZS publishing house, Slovenia) in 2010 and have now completed another successful co-production. In this story, a ring with supposed magical powers rolls away from an opera diva, and half the city joins in her hunt. In the end the ring

falls irrecoverably into the river. It did reveal some of its power, however: the lonely singer has made some friends along the way. Svetina brings the fairytale-like story to life with a refreshing concreteness, by giving the singer a name and setting the story in Ljubljana. Stepančič's understated illustrations (coloured pencil on brown paper) lure one into the Jugendstil era, allowing the bohemians to elegantly stroll about.



**Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič:
*Ropotarna/The Lumber Room, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah,
2012.***

2013: Golden Pear Award for Best Original Slovenian
Children's Book of Fiction

Statement of the jury:

The title of the unusual collection of texts in varying literary and visual forms, *The Lumber Room*, indicates that this is not just any old “repository of obsolete, useless things,” but rather, in the context of individual stories, a place, a temple of things without any labels indicating their usefulness. And not only that; in *The Lumber Room*, even order comes without labels and is thus wholly available to explorers young and old. A look inside the lumber room offers a warning as well: through a window, the O-shaped porthole on the cover, passers-by can see the interior of the book, as well as the interior of a head inhabited by thoughts. *The Lumber Room's* poems and stories are thus associated with imagination and feelings. Using universal experiences, fears and courage, the author speaks to us as his friends who would never harm anybody, as people who respect and sometimes take comfort in things and other people around them. The publisher, Miš, and both authors were clearly up to the challenge, giving us an original, imaginative book and receiving the Golden Pear Award.

2013: Večernica Award

Statement of the jury:

The Lumber Room is an organized jumble of little treasures that patiently wait for the reader to find them and dust them off. The author deftly sails between prose and poetry, between the conscious and the subconscious, creating playful waves full of rhetorical devices whose dynamics carry the reader from the real to the irrational, from the possible to nonsense, etc. A walk through Svetina's *The Lumber Room* leads to creative reading full of elusive twists and turns.

2016: IBBY Honor list

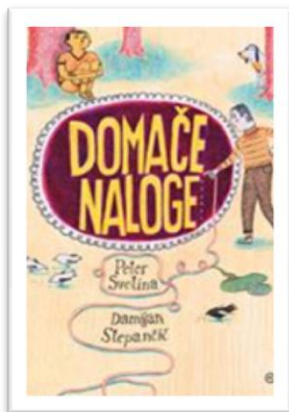
Description in the catalogue:

This is a special book. The title, *The Lumber Room*, says that it is a store for “old, useless things”; the view of the lumber room is also indicative: a window, a large line in the letter “o” on the cover, through which passers-by can see the interior of the book: the interior of a head in which thought lives! In a single volume, the author has combined long and short tales, tales about people and tales about objects, poems and diminutive texts playing with language, some of them bordering on nonsense. Various literary genres and forms follow each other in an intentionally untamed order and rhythm, entirely breaking the expected horizon: each (next) page is a complete surprise. After the suspenseful events of a longer story, the reader is given a breather with a poem, a moment later is laughing at the author's

trademark humor or simply marveling at the sound of the language and the acrobatics with words. The illustrator also follows this relaxed attitude. In addition to the normal index, which follows 12 stories and 9 poems, two material indexes are added at the end, subject and name inventories of everything that the lumber room offers the readers' fancy. The book received the Golden Pear Award 2013 for the best Slovenian book for young people and the Večernica Award.

2018: On the list of books recommended by the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury

<http://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/awards/hans-christian-andersen-awards/hcaa-2018/the-jury-recommends/>



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Domače naloge/Homeworks*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2014.

2015: Nomination for Večernica Award

2015: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award

2015: New Paths Award

Statement of the jury:

The book consists of poems whose common denominators are school and learning. However, homework isn't limited to school but understood in a broader sense, as the author also talks about personal relationships, etc. Svetina's poetic diction is hard to describe. As the reader first settles into the poetic world, a tiny sapling looking inward through the biggest, bigger or big "little window" ("Homework on Sizes") invites him to carefully reread the book; and the tiny blade of grass suddenly grows into a huge, strange tree whose branches/fingerposts point in a completely different direction. ... How is it possible for the head in the "Homework on an Empty Head" to be full of poetry? Damijan Stepančič's illustrations make it possible, and he uses such methods to deftly navigate the unique poetic landscapes of Peter Svetina. Stepančič uses visual elements to construct surprising moods that poems can settle into as if they were a comfortable armchair. It wasn't easy, but Peter Svetina and Damijan Stepančič have done their homework. At its heart, the book is an ode to language, a homework on interpersonal communication that goes beyond the technicalities – communication of all aspects of the human soul, communication between you and me and everybody.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015, 2017.:

2016: Večernica Award

Statement of the jury:

The Ripening of Porcupines (Miš, 2015) by Peter Svetina is an excellent collection of nonsense animal stories dominated by witty linguistic and representative notions and playful twists and turns.

What is unusual about such poetics, however, is that in Svetina's case laughter is intertwined with an attentive and deliberate feel for the sound and meaning of the words. It is as if the words freed themselves of their everyday meaning and, like any of the fragile creatures from these stories, taken on new, exciting, and inspiring lives. The book is built upon nonsense, which is found both at the language and story levels. The former manifests itself in the literal interpretation of common phrases and in repetition that simultaneously make words senseless and imbue them with new meaning. For example, 'could also be the possum traffic officer Ferdinand, or traffic officer Ferdinand the Possum, or Ferdinand the Possum Traffic Officer'. The latter type of nonsense manifests itself in lists, repetitions and hyperbole, e.g. in "A Bus Stop in Twelve Parts". All these elements come together in an intriguing "opposite world" that continuously throws the reader off balance and underlines the living, surprising, even challenging nature of language itself. The self-sufficient joy of creating new words and combining them in a pastiche of nonsense is logical, internally consistent, and intertextual, containing numerous quotes from and references to other works, e.g. to songs like "Kekčeva pesem" or "Dan ljubezni", and to characters from other children's books. Alongside the unusual protagonists – possum, porcupine, zubr, ermine, nutria – that in themselves arouse the reader's curiosity, the most significant feature of the book is its veiled and unobtrusive message to the readers that it is important to give others a visit from time to time, to be someone's lighthouse, to dare to be fearsome like Genadij the Cricket, and most importantly, to ask important questions: How to train a shadow? How to paint the wind? What is it like to be inside music like an ant inside a clarinet? We congratulate the author for the award and wish him all the best if he ever meets Genadij. There will always be porcupines ripe enough to help him reach the 33rd floor and visit the two lilac sloths.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Kristina Krhin: *Sredi sreče in v četrtek zjutraj/On Wisdom at Noon and on Thursday Morning*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2015.

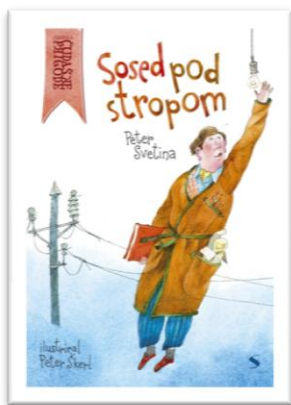
2016: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016, 2017.

2016: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award

2017: Chosen for a gift book presented to every child entering the primary school by the Reading Badge Association



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2016.

2017: Nomination for the Večernica Award



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Zavadlav: *Molitvice s stopnic/Prayers from the Stairs*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2016.

2017: Levstikova Award

Statement of the jury:

The poetry book *Prayers from the Stairs* consists of seven poems – little prayers said by a child, connected primarily to the child’s loved ones and borne out of concrete circumstances (a grandfather whose eyesight is getting worse, a concern that a cat is cold, anxiety before a piano recital, etc.). These prayers don’t follow any established patterns and do not concern themselves with rhyming; they’re vital and genuine. As well as gentle and warm, though they can hurt as well. In these poems, the child initiates a dialogue with an angel or with God, a dialogue that’s characterized by a charming combination of doubt/questioning and faith/trust. In Peter Svetina’s prayers, the reader can truly feel the power of a child’s wishes, seeing what’s truly important for the child, what’s running through her head, what she fears and what she worries about. The tiny verses are thus extremely touching, which would have been hard for the author to achieve if he didn’t have great insight into the child’s mind and soul. Some of the wishes are relatively simple, almost trivial, while others are far from it; Svetina is able to fill a seemingly simple poem with extremely heavy and complex topics, such as the unfulfilled desire to have a baby in “A Visiting Prayer”. This is what makes these poems multi-dimensional and ultimately interesting for adult readers as well: through them, adults get acquainted with children and their world, while children get acquainted with poetry. What more could you ask for in a book of poetry? Very little. *Prayers from the Stairs* may be a tiny book with only a couple of poems (accompanied by illustrations by Ana Zavadlav that create a convincing, tangible atmosphere), but these are telling, intense and powerful, certain to leave a mark on the readers or nudge them towards a better understanding of the (child’s) world and themselves in it or towards a more fluent reading of poetry. We’re not only faced with Svetina’s finest collection of children’s poetry to date – the book is also the perfect embodiment of the Čebelica series – it’s tiny, but great.

2017: Večernica Award

Statement of the jury:

Prayers from the Stairs is a wonderful book of poetry, extraordinarily genuine and convincing thanks to its minimalist expression (which can also be encountered in some other works by Peter Svetina – including those based on the poetics of nonsense) that communicates not only what is being said but also, and perhaps primarily, what is left unsaid and transcendent. The

poems are based on a child's perspective that is seemingly naïve and simple but in truth profoundly wise: even God and the angel, the main persons addressed and solicited by the child that is the lyric subject of these poems, are child-like, presented in a thoroughly human manner, as they can almost be chatted with and are almost part of the large family that includes a short-sighted grandfather, a shivering cat, an aunt who can't have children, and the intelligent but scared and lonely child. The themes explored in the collection, as well as the fact that it includes religious subjects and motifs, could have easily resulted in an idealized or preachy presentation of "prayers" spoken by a perfect child, however, Peter Svetina always manages to avoid this: in her solicitations and his sadness and love for everything that exists, the child remains naïve; these are also the tones of Svetina's language, which approaches Dane Zajc's poetics of "silence", concealment, of merely pointing at that which cannot be expressed ... Prayers from the Stairs are thus without doubt one of the most important poetry books in contemporary Slovenian children's poetry – their marvelousness, together with the illustrations, provides an immediate and unforgettable and staggering reading experience.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Igor Šinkovec: *Timbuktu, Timbuktu, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah*, 2019.

2020: Nomination for the Večernica Award

2020: Kristina Brenkova Award

Statement of the jury:

Peter Svetina, poet, short story author, novelist, playwright, translator and literary historian, is certainly one of the most versatile contemporary Slovenian authors of children's literature. He has received a number of awards for his work and has been nominated for the Andersen Award, the highest international accolade for children's literature. Svetina's quirky stories and poems are gently humorous, subtly poetic and full of playfully absurd twists, exciting the reader's imagination both semantically and syntactically and offering a new perspective on everyday relationships, people, things, occurrences and events. In terms of its message, Svetina's work is characterized by an optimistic faith in the fundamental goodness of people. Picture book *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* comprises over 40 short short stories, which could also be called prose poems, as Svetina pays particular attention to the rhythm and sound of the words and works hard to condense their message as much as possible. Reading these masterfully executed minimalist stories, a careful reader can sense that what they are saying is multifaceted and appropriate for readers of all ages. The imagery is rich and innovative, the motifs extremely diverse. While the stories are not interconnected, the book nevertheless functions as a whole, stringing associations, flashes of meaning and twists of thought to take readers on endless imaginary journeys, always different from one reading to the next. Igor Šinkovec's mastery is evident from how well his illustrations complement the text. The shapes and colours never take over completely – instead, they whimsically complement the short stories. For *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, Šinkovec has created a series of 40 illustration gems, which tie together into a consistent result. Using a slightly wavy line that circles objects and figures, Šinkovec has created a consistent rhythm. Even initials remain in step. The colouring is elegant, dominated by shades that are tranquil, yet rich: Šinkovec uses everything from powerful yellows through emerald blues to earthy reds. To illustrate a book of quirky oxymorons was surely quite a challenge, but one that the illustrator was certainly up to: his humorous illustrations walk hand in hand with the texts, creating a dance of visual poetry. Fascinating.

6 Complete bibliography

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Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Debela pekovka/Fat Baker*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2020.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Igor Šinkovec: *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2019.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Krystyna Lipka-Sztarباتo: *Spoznal sem te po rdečih nogavicah/I Recognised You by Your Red Socks*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2019.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Uho sveta/The Ear of the World*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2017.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Zavadlav: *Molitvice s stopnic/Prayers from the Stairs*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2016.

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7 List of translated editions

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8 Ten of the most important titles by the candidate and the names of the publishers of all editions.

1. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Igor Šinkovec: *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2019.
2. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Zavadlav: *Molitvice s stopnic/Prayers from the Stairs*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2016.
3. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2016.
4. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016.
5. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015, 2017.
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8. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010.
9. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus*, Vodnikova založba, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2008; Agencja Edytorska Ezop, Warszawa, 2015 (Polish translation: Translation Katarina Šalamun-Biedrzycka: *Cyrk Antoniego*).
10. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik: *O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov/About the Little Walrus who Refused to Cut his Nails*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 1999; Hangilsa, Payu-si, Gyeonggi-do, 2005 (Korean translation: Translation Kim Yeongseon: *Bada kokkirineun sontop kkakkiga siltaeyo*); Drava, Klagenfurt, 2006 (German translation: Translation Fabjan Hafner: *Das kleine Walross lässt sich nicht die Nägel schneiden = O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov*)

9 List of the five books sent to the jurors

1. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016.
2. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2016.
3. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015.
4. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Ropotarna/The Lumber Room*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2012.
5. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus*, Vodnikova založba, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2008.

10 Published reviews of the books submitted to the jury



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016.

Gaja Kos: Short annotation on "How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race", Ljubljana, 2020

Mr. Felix, always dressed in green overalls and always with a plaited beard, is considered by many to be quite eccentric, but that's what makes him an exciting and sympathetic literary character. Out of the blue, Mr. Felix one day decides to participate in a bicycle race: numerous racing bikes are thus joined by an old (grandfather's) bicycle, lent to Felix by a student of history. The wonderful Peter Svetina, who is even better at handling his stories than Mr. Felix is at handling his bike, knows well what works with young readers: a pinch of miracle (the fact that an amateur cyclist with an antique bicycle can compete with professionals), gradually mounting suspense (Svetina describing Mr. Felix's unexpected bursts of speed in a quick staccato), delayed gratification (Mr. Felix calmly taking breaks during the race, baffling the crowds of spectators), and a twist ending, which shines a completely new light on the book and is one of its trump cards. *How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race* makes for wonderful reading aloud (as I can confirm first-hand), and its unexpected ending and Mr. Felix final thoughts offer a great starting point for a conversation with the children – about what's truly important in life, about what winning is, etc. The quirky Mr. Felix and exciting bicycle race are rendered by Ana Razpotnik Donati in her characteristic style with elements of caricature, while the funny cover and full page illustrations in the book contribute the final piece to the mosaic.

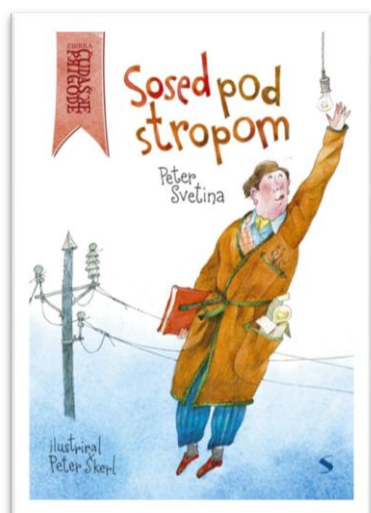


Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015.

For the statement of the Večernica Award jury, see page 21.

Perko, Manca: Short annotation in "Od gnezd do zvezd: Priročnik za branke kakovostnih mladinskih knjig"/"From Nests to Stars : The Manual for Reading Quality Children's Literature" (editors: Darja Lavrenčič Vrabec, Ida Mlakar Črnič), Mestna knjižnica Ljubljana, Ljubljana 2017.

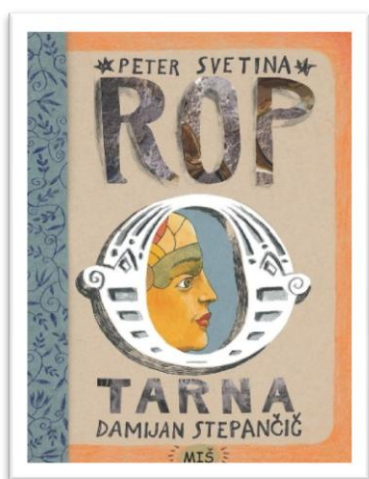
A new book of short animal stories by the Svetina – Stepančič duo, a book that introduces us to porcupines Helge and Nikozija as well as a number of their tiny animal friends and acquaintances (Tine the Salamander, Amela the Squirrel, Ferdinand the Possum, Astor the Elephant and many others), patiently awaits its young readers. Every story is special, and although all are characterized by humour, the flavour of comedy varies from story to story, tickling one's fancy in different ways. Sometimes the humour is found in word-play, sometimes in dialogues, sometimes in unusual situations and sometimes in the endearing and well-rounded animal characters. And sometimes it also offers a bit of a sting. Although Svetina never forces it, the stories can sometimes make one think ... It would be an injustice though if the wonderful stories made us forget about the illustrations, which characteristically complement and enhance the text, elevating the book to one of the finest publishing achievements of the year. For the *The Ripening of Porcupines*, Svetina received the 2015 Večernica Award.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2016.

Bilban, Tina: Short annotation in: “Odklenjeni kriki: Priročnik za branje kakovostnih mladinskih knjig 2017”/“Screams unlocked: The Manual for Reading Quality Children's Literature” (editors: Darja Lavrenčič Vrabc, Ida Mlakar Črnič), Mestna knjižnica Ljubljana, Ljubljana 2017.

The short story collection is characterized by the author's recognizable style, by wordplay, inventive humour, by layers of meaning and well-thought-out elements of nonsense, which combine with and enrich the stories' comedy and their many messages. At the same time, there is a certain novelty to the stories, as the animal characters from Svetina's lauded short story books *The Ripening of Porcupines* and *Hippopotamus Wisdom* have been replaced by adult weirdos, which also changed the range of the topics dealt with. The stories, whose bizarre plots often thicken and unravel because of (unrequited) love, are thus addressed to older children, though their wacky comedy and nonsense poetics, taken sometimes to the extreme, will get a laugh out of younger readers as well. As is typical of all literary classics, *My Neighbour up There* is a book that should be read again and again, in different periods of childhood, discovering new layers every time we do so. The stories are accompanied by considered, telling and appropriately wacky illustrations. With great attention to detail, as we're used to from Škerl.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič:
Ropotarna/The Lumber Room, Miš, Dob pri
 Domžalah, 2012.

For the statements of the Večernica and Golden Pear
 Award juries, as well as description in the IBBY
 Honour List catalogue, see pages 19-20.

Ogrizek, Maša. "Oživiljene stvari in zaljubljeni čudaki Petra Svetine." / "Peter Svetina's Living Things and Weirdos in Love" *Delo* volume 55. Issue 233 (2013) p. 14

The Lumber Room: an award-winning patchwork of odds and ends that works as a convincing whole

The Lumber Room by Peter Svetina, for which the author had recently been awarded the Večernica Award, bestowed by the *Večer* newspaper to the best original Slovenian children's and young adult book of fiction published in the previous year, is a bricolage of different texts: short stories, poems, word puzzles, and brief exercises in style. The book doesn't try to hide that it was cobbled together from various "odds and ends" found on the floor of the author's workshop, however, it is extremely successful as a whole.

The book's title, *The Lumber Room*, alludes to its genesis in another sense of the word. With most texts in the book, we get the feeling that a fragment of reality – a banana sticker, a paper boat, a fragrant piece of soap, etc. – started a series of meaning- and sound-based associations. We can thus interpret the hole cut in the front cover of the book, through which an anatomical representation of a head can be seen, as an invitation to look inside the author's mind.

However, upon closer reading, the book reveals not only the anatomy of its creation but also the inner workings of language itself. Like a magician, Svetina pulls rhymes out of his sleeve, using nothing more than the sound of a name to bring a character to life – "There once was a Frank Gloomyrache / who couldn't stop twirling his moustache." He also shows, in a funny way, that language can sometimes be extremely economical – with words such as *to decline* and *(at)tempt* having more than one meaning – and sometimes redundant – although an umbrella does a perfectly good job of protecting us from rain, there's also the rainshade.

Svetina juxtaposes similar-sounding words for comedic effect, magically turning e.g. a hag into a bag, and obscure the meaning of the words by incorrectly grouping their syllables, e.g. "Ithas beena longtime sinceany bodysprinkled me." In a passing manner and in line with the story, Svetina also calls attention to the difference between the literal and figurative meaning of the phrases "don't take your dirty laundry outside" and "devilish."

Brilliant wordplay

To some extent, Svetina's wordplay is certainly a matter of pure enjoyment, however, these "exercises in style" are usually an echo, a formal doubling of the content. For example, the

stumbling speech mentioned above is the result of the fact that it's been a long time since a path has been sprinkled with salt. In some of the texts, the form and content are so intertwined that it is impossible to differentiate between them. One such case is "Oh, No, a Fairy Tale," which makes us burst into laughter with its very first line, which goes: "In Koder there once lived a fount who often brimmed the ledge in his yarn." As is customary with puzzles and crosswords, the author provides a solution, however, the solution itself is another puzzle, a mirror sentence, which can be understood if read from the back.

The first thing that one notices with *The Lumber Room* is its rejection of hierarchy. Svetina convincingly shows that virtually everything, no matter how banal, can be the subject of literature. Even literary genres in the book follow each other as equals. Different formal levels of speech are likewise never used to signify aloofness or to humiliate – they are simply there to better sketch out individual characters. In one of the short stories in the book, the vodyanoy, urged to do so by his friend, the devil, learns formal speech, only to conclude in the end that "it sounds mighty stoopid tho."

Rejection of hierarchy is also typical of Svetina's literary characters; in addition to various (living) things, *The Lumber Room* is populated by all sorts of people: from a water polo player, a marine biologist, and a maid to a beggar, a clerk, and a conductor. The author treats them with equal respect and equal sympathies. If there's anything that slightly elevates an individual in Svetina's eyes, it's their weirdness.

In common parlance, the word "weirdo" usually has negative connotations and denotes people who are different because they refuse to behave in accordance with certain social norms. In today's deluge of sameness and uniformity, weirdos are becoming increasingly rare – and precious. Just like the seemingly worthless, but actually priceless things we find in the lumber room.

For Svetina, the word "weirdo" has an almost noble sound. And at the end of the book, the standard table of contents is accompanied by an index of weirdos. Tellingly, these include Peter Svetina, Damijan Stepančič, who illustrated the book, and editor Gaja Kos.

Coincidences fueled by love

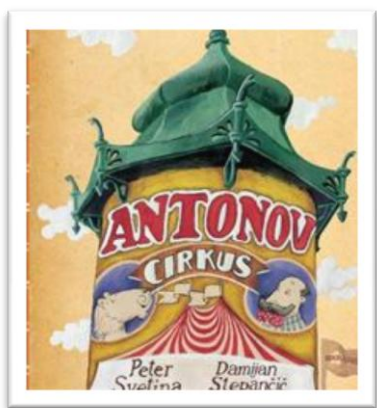
The short stories included in the book – like many other children's books by Svetina, e.g. *Mr. Constantine's Hat* and *Magic Ring* – are characterized by a serial structure of cause and effect. The initial flap of the butterfly's wings is always a tiny, unimportant event, for instance a piece of soap falling from a garden fence to the ground; however, this event sends the dominoes falling. Although it initially seems that what follows is a series of coincidences, it turns out that there was always a hidden telos for everything; and the telos is always the same: love.

Another aspect of Svetina's work that should be noted is the fact that his writing doesn't try to teach anything, which is a rarity in Slovenian children's literature. The author doesn't want to teach or educate; instead, he shows that what's sometimes needed is not a different action, but a different perspective. This is particularly evident in the poem called "Every Gentleman", in which "Every gentleman / Slurps his soup as loudly as he can / To draw attention from those / Stuffing themselves with the rest."

With such an attitude, accompanied by an animist belief in the living nature of things and by a passion for puzzles, Svetina steps into doubtlessly too small, but actually comfortable children's shoes, giving a nod to his predecessors who had done the same: one of the fairy tales in the book is thus (intertextually) visited by bandit Grdavškar, the little cousin of the bandit Ceferin.

As indicated above, Svetina's *The Lumber Room* is a convincing whole. The wonderful texts are accompanied by illustrations by Damijan Stepančič, with whom Svetina has already successfully collaborated in the past. Stepančič gives each text a singular image, further accentuating the impression of a pastiche. Like Svetina, Stepančič often creates incredible synergy between form and content; for example, the owners of the umbrella and rainshade in love are depicted in watercolors, as reflections in a puddle.

Cleverness also spills over to the back cover and to an index of all sorts of things that gives a joking nod to science books. Alongside both authors, praise should also be given to the editor and publisher for a gutsy step, which has thankfully been noted and deservedly awarded.



Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič:
Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus, Vodnikova založba,
KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2008.

Gaja Kos: "Lahko noč, pa eno bolho za pomoč"/"Good Night and Sleep Tight", in:
Delo, issue 51, vol 34, Ljubljana, (2009). p. 22.

For the second time in a row, the title of "Most Beautiful Slovenian Book" was bestowed on a picture book by Peter Svetina; two years ago, the title was given to *Mr. Constantine's Hat*, illustrated by Peter Škerl, in the "Children and Youth" category, while last year it was awarded to *Anton's Circus*, illustrated by Damijan Stepančič and designed by Sanja Janša, in the "Literature" category. Which is funny – because truth be told, if anybody had tried to convince me, before *Anton's Circus*, that a book from the Spominčice series would ever receive such an award, I'm sure I wouldn't have taken them seriously, based on what I'd previously seen.

Now, what was the source of my doubts? The visual aspect of the series, or, to be specific, its design, which is handled, as mentioned above, by Sanja Janša. Fortunately, however, it has turned out that the series, at least in this aspect, is far from uniform; the predominant vibrancy and liveliness that can sometimes drift into kitsch and motif overcrowding can apparently still be tamed into a harmonic whole, and *Anton's Circus* is the book where the designer best succeeds in doing so. Calm colors, harmony and pleasant warmth, a suitable typeface, and a balanced placing of text and illustrations that's easy on the eye certainly combine in an aesthetic whole, a beautiful book that is even better than last year's "Most Beautiful Slovenian". Compared to the other books from the Spominčice series, the awarded book also stands out with its illustrations; Stepančič's excellent drawings accompany the reader on a tour of old Ljubljana and please the attentive eye with clever details. The heroes of the book are Anton, the lion, and the fleas who perform in a circus known as the Grand Comedy of Anton Bon and Leopold the Lion. Things are going along smoothly until the fleas one day flee a new shampoo, resulting in a show that just isn't what it used to be. Anton and the lion try to figure out how to jazz up their show and eventually arrive at the idea to create a play, ... As we're used to when it comes to Svetina's works for young children, the text is imaginative and humorous; what stands out, however, are the dialogues, which are fun and entertaining. To sum up, *Anton's Circus* is a charming book in all respects, while Spominčice might become a permanent fixture on the scene, provided they proceed in the direction taken here.