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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 of 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 literature 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—his 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 of poetry collections and literature textbooks for primary schools. 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.

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.

*They say
that you guard us.
But me, I am guarded by Grandma.
She caught me one day
on the underpass stairs
and saved me a tumble.
But I can't catch her back
because I'm too small.
And that I don't like.
So let's make a deal:
if you promise
to catch her yourself
on the ice,
then I believe you,
then it's all right.*

(A prayer on the stairs)

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?*

A completely different theme is revealed in the book of five stories *The Ear of the World* (*Uho sveta*, 2017), in which the poetics of free fantasy play is surpassed to depiction of bitter images of the world (transitoriness or oblivion, anger, power), but also the liberating power of imagination and compassion that resists the deafness of modern times.

A distinct focus on emphasizing values, especially experiencing the world as a miracle and empathizing with every, even the smallest and seemingly insignificant creature, is also characteristic of the collection of forty-three short stories *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* (2019). These unusual literary "ideas" free the reader from being trapped in rational perception and mastery of the world by presenting him with the rules of the nonsense world as the only true logic – nonsense that does not seem scary, but distinctly comic, cheerful, bright. The second group includes texts in which, on the background of nonsensical play with living objects and human-like animals, the revival of seemingly inanimate reality and the rapprochement of man and the rest of the world is revealed. All this is recorded and almost shyly co-created by the narrator's eye and stylistically multifaceted language, in which humour, minimalism in expression, experiments with sentence order and a kind of poeticism are interlaced; thus specific poetic perspective is created, in which there is no room for any subjectivist “grabbing” of imaginative material; this perspective is shared by the narrator and the reader, both inclined to play and respectful vision of a world that cannot be explained or controlled in any other way.

A retreat from any appropriation of the world is also the thematic core of the fantastic tale *The Blue Portugal* (*Modri Portugalec*, 2021), in which, in addition to humor, intertextuality is particularly pronounced. This is reflected in the basic narrative framework: the girl Anja Klara experiences an accident, so together with a rat named Hijacacint she travels to an imaginary land controlled by Vlada Rizzi, a cruel ruler who imprisons children in a camp; the symbolism of Vlada’s character is clear: she has kidnapped modern children who are forgotten, overwhelmed with toys, so they are spiritless and have no personality of their own (“*their eyes have gone out*”). An almost grotesque land in which body parts, talking animals and objects act as living beings symbolizes the modern world, the struggle for supremacy, the world, trapped in modern technologies and even in the absurdity of virtual reality. The text is veiledly socially critical and intertextually related to classical literature (e.g. L. Carroll: Alice

in Wonderland, verses by the Slovenian romantic poet F. Prešeren); together with complex literary messages it crosses the verge of Children's literature and as such it is highly relevant for a competent adult reader who perceives the subversiveness of this type of literature as described by the author himself: "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." (Svetina, P. (2017): My Poetics in Nineteen Points (Devetnajst točk avtopoetike). *Otrok in knjiga*, 100, 7–9.)

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?

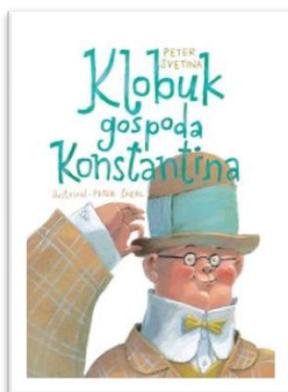
It's an enormous luxury. Yes, I feel compelled to write, though I also often have doubts about it, what with all the things that are being published. However, I'm never under any pressure, I have no deadlines to meet, I don't have to worry about subsisting on writing alone. I'm free to choose my own 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: *Mroček dobi očala/The Little Walrus Gets Glasses*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2003.

2004: Nomination for the Večernica Award



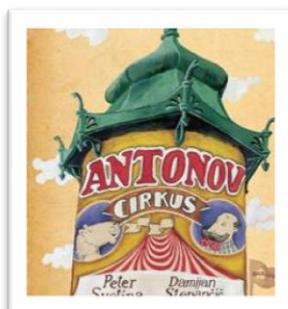
Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Klobuk gospoda Konstantina/Mr. Constantine's Hat*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2007.

2007: Best Designed Book Award, Slovenian Book Fair

2008: Award for an original Slovenian Picture Book

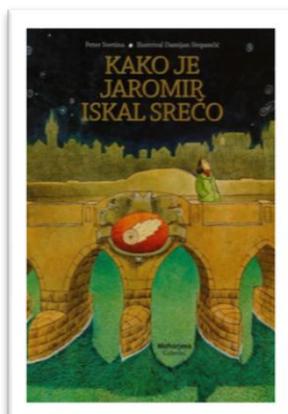
Statement of the jury:

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.



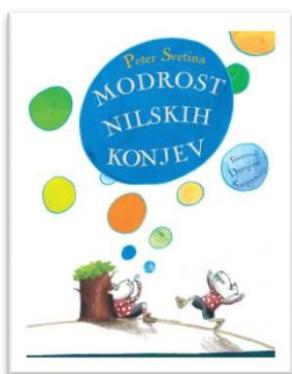
Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Erica Johnson Debeljak: *Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus*, Vodnikova založba, Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2008.

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 Toulouse-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

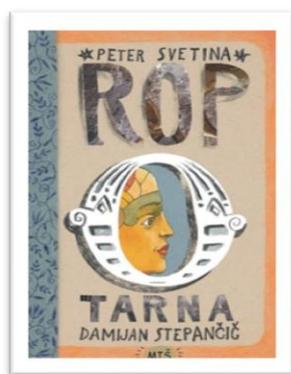
Statement of the jury:

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.

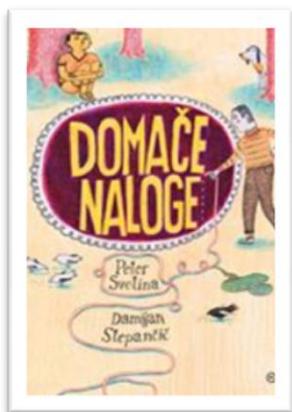
2016: IBBY Honor list

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 literally 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.

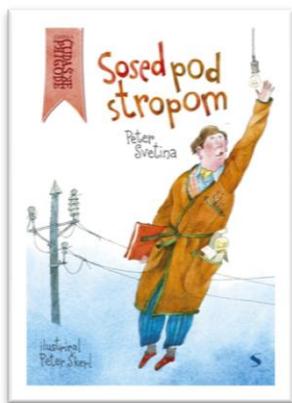
2016: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award



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.

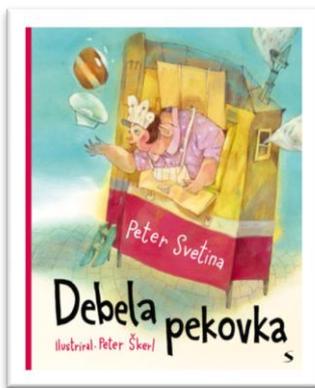
2020: Nomination for the Večernica Award

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.



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

2021: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award

2021: Recognition New Pathways for Diversity

6 Complete bibliography

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Petra Preželj: *Nekaj je v zraku: zapiski o dveh Ajdah in racaku letaku/Something is in the Air: Notes on Two Amelias and a Flying Duck*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2022.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Jokin Michelena: *Raznašalka kruha/Bread Lady*, Malinc, Medvode, 2021.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Lučka Lučka in senčka Senčica/Lucy Light and Shadow Umbra*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2021.

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Peter Svetina, Illustrations Krystyna Lipka-Sztarbato: *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.

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

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- Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Usodne platnice/Fateful Covers*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2001.
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- Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Cerjak: *Lila mesto/Lilac Town*, Pozoj, Velenje, 1999.
- 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.

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Peter Svetina. Translation Lucia Gaja Scuteri: *Darko Branko l'allegra orchestra di fiati e altre storie cosà* (original title: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*), BESA MUCI Editore, Nardò, 2022, Italian translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Darko Spasov: *Мудроста на нилските коњи* (original title: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom*), Tri-Skopje, Skopje, 2021, Macedonian translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Liza Linde, Jens Sakelšek: *Aus der Rumpelkammer* (original title: *Ropotarna/Lumber Room*), Sloweinsher Schriftstellerverband (DSP), Ljubljana, 2020, German translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Francisco Tomsich. Translation Florencia Ferre & Barbara K. Vuga: *Los sabios hipopotas* (original title: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom*), Malinc, Medvode, 2020, Spanish translation.

Peter Svetina: *Del pequeño morsa que no quería cortarse las uñas* (original title: *O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov/About the Little Walrus who Refused to Cut his Nails*). In: Ela Peroci, Milan Dekleva, Muck Desa, Andrej Rozman, Lila Prap, Majda Koren, Cvetka Sokolov, Anja Štefan, Peter Svetina, Jana Bauer: *Lo que susurraron las nubes Cuentos infantiles de Eslovenia*, Editorial Rosalba, Asuncion, 2020, Spanish translation.

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Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Mara Gredzena: *Brinumu gredzens* (original title: *Čudežni prstan/Magic Ring*), Liels un Mazs, Riga, 2018, Latvian translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič. Translation Barbara Pregelj: *El anillo mágico* (original title: *Čudežni prstan/Magic Ring*), Malinc, Medvode, 2017, Spanish translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič, Translation Katarina Šalamun-Biedrzycka: *Cyrk Antoniego* (original title: *Antonov cirkus/Anton's Circus*), Agencja Edytorska Ezop, Warszawa, 2015, Polish translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič, Translation Kristina Tamulevičiute: *Antono cirkas* (original title: *Antonov cirkus/Anton's Circus*), Nieko rimto, Vilnius, 2015, Lithuanian translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl, Translation Fabjan Hafner: *Der Hut der Herrn Konstantin = Klobuk gospoda Konstantina* (original title: *Klobuk gospoda Konstantina/Mr. Constantine's Hat*), Drava, Klagenfurt, 2008, German translation.

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik, Translation Fabjan Hafner: *Das kleine Walross lässt sich nicht die Nägel schneiden = O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov* (original title: *O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov/About the Little Walrus who Refused to Cut his Nails*), Drava, Klagenfurt, 2006, German translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik, Translation Fabjan Hafner: *Das kleine Walross bekommt eine Brille = Mrožek dobi očala* (original title: *Mrožek dobi očala/The Little Walrus gets Glasses*), Drava, Klagenfurt, 2005, German translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik, Translation Kim Yeongseon: *Bada kokkirineun sontop kkakkiga siltaeyo* (original title: *O mrožku, ki si ni hotel striči nohtov/About the Little Walrus who Refused to Cut his Nails*), Hangilsa, Payu-si, Gyeonggi-do, 2005, Korean translation.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnik, Translation Kim Yeongseon: *Pada k'okkiri ka an'gyong ul ssoosoyo* (original title: *Mrožek dobi očala/The Little Walrus gets Glasses*), T'omat'o Hausu, Kyonggi-do P'aju-si, 2005, Korean translation.

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; BESA MUCI Editore, Nardò, 2022 (Italian translation: Translation Lucia Gaja Scuteri: *Darko Branko l'allegra orchestra di fiati e altre storie cosà*).
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; Nanjing Normal University Press, Nanjing, 2018 (Chinese translation: 不一样的菲力克斯先生)
5. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015, 2017.
6. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Domače naloge/Homeworks*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2014.
7. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Ropotarna/The Lumber Room*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2012; Sloweinsher Schriftstellerverband (DSP), Ljubljana, 2020, (German translation: Liza Linde, Jens Sakelšek: *Aus der Rumpelkammer*)
8. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010; Tri-Skopje, Skopje (Macedonian translation: Darko Spasov: *Мудроста на нилските коњи*); Malinc, Medvode, 2020 (Spanish translation: Florencia Ferre & Barbara K. Vuga: *Los sabios hippopotamos*).
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*); Nieko rimto, Vilnius, 2015 (Lithuanian translation: Translation Kristina Tamulevičiute: *Antono circas*).
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 Igor Šinkovec: *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2019.
2. 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.
3. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Peter Škerl: *Sosed pod stropom/My Neighbour Up There*, KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana, 2016.
4. Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015.
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.

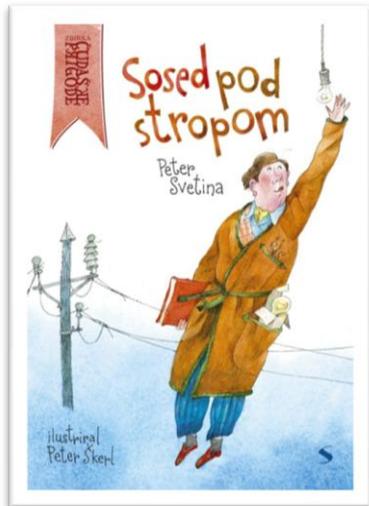


Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Kako zorijo ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, Ljubljana, 2015.

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.

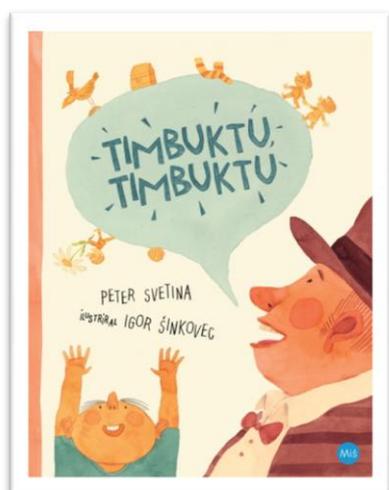
A new book of short animal stories by the Svetina – Stepančič duo, a book that introduces us to porcupines Helge and Nikozija as well as a number of their tiny animal friends and acquaintances (Tine the Salamander, Amela the Squirrel, Ferdinand the Possum, Astor the Elephant and many others), patiently 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 Vrabec, 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 Igor Šinkovec: *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2019.

Bilban, Tina: "Thoughts on a book: What is Timbuktu?" *Sodobnost*, 84/6, 2020, Ljubljana, pp. 810-822.

Peter and I have worked together on a few books so far. He as the author, me as the illustrator—not vice versa. Whenever an editor calls me and asks whether I would illustrate Peter's text, I always start wondering what kind of text will it be this time: will it be poetry, will it be silly or will it be a detective story? I activate my senses and can't wait to read the text. As Peter's texts are so different, I as the illustrator also react differently to them: some are more intimate, some are colorful, some scream out loud, some are more subdued, and others whisper. I react to the text accordingly and look for a fitting solution in terms of illustration.

Interview with Damijan Stepančič commemorating April 2nd, 2020

[...]

To me, Damijan Stepančič is first of all a careful reader who fully lets the text sink in before placing it in interaction with his illustrations. That is why I can appreciate his attitude towards Peter Svetina's texts; the excitement that the wait on each Svetina's new text brings is known to me. Similarly to Stepančič, I am also first of all a reader of Svetina's texts—or co-reader, to be precise, since in our household his books are always first read out loud (more on the crossover nature of his texts later on).

All of this is also true for Peter Svetina's latest book which has been eagerly anticipated by his readers and fans ever since he has mentioned working on it in some of his interviews. *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* introduces a new form for Svetina and with it a new tool for perceiving the world, a new nature of space in which words resound, while at the same time being permeated with Svetina's attitude towards the world. Before being able to read the book quietly, by myself, and think about it, I was reading it out loud at home, just as was the case with his previous works. And it is reading his books aloud that really places them in context, clearly showing how many entry points for readers of different 'height' his books offer.

Timbuktu, Timbuktu is a collection of short short stories. These fiction flashes alternate between different realities, exploring the closeness between people and playing with the

sounds and meanings of words. The polished ultrashort texts reflect familiar worlds from different angles and in new contexts.

The book opens with a story of ‘A Little Wolf Who Ate Dirty Laundry’:

CHOMP! went Little Wolf and the dirty socks were gone.

CHOMP! he went and the dirty underpants were gone.

CHOMP! he went and the dirty T-shirts were gone.

CHOMP! he went and the dirty towels were also gone.

When M. Wolf wanted to put the dirty clothes into the washing machine, the only thing at the bottom of the laundry basket was a rather full Little Wolf, snoring lightly: zzzzzz, zzzzzzz.

If the walrus, the first hero of Svetina's children's books, refused to trim his nails, the Little Wolf obviously does not care for washing laundry. Luckily for him, all he needs to do is go CHOMP! and dirty socks, underwear, and shirts disappear.

It is words that shape, and, most of all, connect reality throughout this book. One CHOMP! (which brings many other connotations, just like the Abracadabra! or Hocus pocus!, because if anything, Svetina does not resort to stereotypes) is enough to solve the issue of dirty laundry—at least for a little while. Especially because the adult, Mr. Wolf, is willing to step into the same reality. If Walrus' mom (*The Walrus who Didn't Want to Cut his Nails*) worried about her little boy refusing to trim his nails, Mr. Wolf only stops to look at his offspring who is lightly snoring. These selected partially made up realities, connecting a child and an adult in symbiosis, are a common motif in Svetina's works. Another example is his book *I Recognized You by Your Red Socks*, where this motif is transposed from literature into reality through the act of joint reading.

After the Little Wolf comes the path:

There was a path that was cold. I'm cold, it said, and wrapped itself up. It wrapped itself from left to right. Where's the path, the children wondered on their way home from school. All they saw before them was an open field of grass.

In fact, a path is a common character in Svetina's works. It appears also in *The Lumber Room*, where it spends time with a washing machine, a coat rack, and a night lamp. In *The Lumber Room*, the language a path uses depends on its condition:

“Ugh, I'm stuck!” said the coat rack. Its leg was stuck between two cobblestones.

“No won derwith the segaps bet weencob blestones,” said the path. “It'sbeen awhile sinceany one has spre adany thingon me.”

[...]

And then the washing machine, the coat rack, and the night lamp spread icing sugar and powder on the path.

“OhImsoprettyImsosweetIcouldbeinacommercial,” said the path and admired itself in house windows.

In contrast, in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, the existence of a path depends on its words: “I'm cold, it said, and wrapped itself up.” And so the path becomes one with an open field of grass

whenever it is cold. Both possibilities are perfect for a short short story or a poem, which corresponds with the elements of a good poem:

*that's how you can peep
behind lines
because if a poem works
that's where you'll find
a slide a knife a bike
a window and on the other side
pines (Homeworks)*

A path, an open field of grass, a slide, a knife, a bike or a window can turn the dull everyday life into—everyday life, but a grand one. A 'timbuktu' one.

CHOMP! and dirty clothes disappear. *I'm cold*—and the path disappears. In his works, Svetina switches between realities with incredible ease, while never struggling with inconsistencies. That is because the backbone of his multiverse is language which is, after all, based on the basic logic principles of reasoning (the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of the excluded middle; MUNCH! is MUNCH! unless otherwise specified). Language is what transports us between worlds when we say MUNCH! or “I’m cold”. And it is what gives these worlds structure, connecting out limited reality with the reality of the little wolf and uncle Frederick:

The paddle that went on holiday was Uncle Frederick's paddle. And what does a paddle on holiday do? It does all kinds of things apart from paddle. Uncle Frederick's paddle flew round the world in a plane. It looked out of the airplane window upon high mountains and flocks of geese, and camels in the desert, and the Tuareg drinking tea. And it looked out upon vast seas. Floating out on one of these seas was Uncle Frederick's flip-flop. I am getting off here, said the paddle and jumped into the vast sea. It paddled home with the flip-flop. But that part was already no longer its holiday.

It goes without saying that a paddle will not row while on holiday. But it can do many other things that are not against the logic of a holiday.

Similarly, a town is not a town if its houses refuse to be in one place (*Of the Town that Was and Was Not a Town*). Luckily, the same signifier can have multiple signifieds which is exactly what makes it possible to travel between them:

Hey, ho! Hey, ho! sang the shark, rowing around the sea in a rubber dinghy. When the fish heard its terrible voice, the blood in their veins froze. Soon the sea was all frozen over. And the dinghy was stuck. Oh, dear! What now, all this ice!? I am terrible, really, terribly terrified, said the shark and tried to think what to do. He's terrified, said the fish, well, it'll be alright then. With great relief, they began to melt.

Naturally, the main character can choose among the different signifieds. One of the main messages of Svetina's works which was already proven by hippos Hubert and Marcel in *Hippopotamus Wisdom* and porcupines Helge and Nicosia in *The Ripening of Porcupines* is that perspective is (mainly) a matter of choice. The most direct example of this philosophy is Svetina's story *About the Sign Without Letters*:

All letters fell from the traffic sign. It is now empty. You can write on it where the road will lead you. For example, you can write CANDY or POOL or MOMMY or OHNOTHISROADISSOLONG. You could write A DREAM or EVA or GRANDMA or TICKLING. Whatever you write, that is where the road will take you.

However, this does not mean that in Svetina's literary worlds it is always raining candy, that there are pools everywhere and that mommies are behind every corner. Sometimes part of the world we are living in is also the cricket Gennady who wants to roll down the hill and crush anything that comes his way because he simply does not care (*The Ripening of Porcupines*) or a chocolate bar with two hands that put anything within their reach in chocolate's mouth (*Timbuktu, Timbuktu*). But even then, you and your friends can sit down with Gennady and convince him to postpone his crushing by a day. And then look at "the world which is beautiful. Although sometimes a little less so."

Without Nicosia Helge would not be able to convince Gennady, and after all the talk of crushing Helge might not have noticed how beautiful the world around them is. Another common theme in Svetina's works is exploring the need for affection. He does so while managing to avoid stereotypes, sentimentality, and corniness by employing nonsense and navigating between realities. If short animal stories from *Hippopotamus Wisdom* and *The Ripening of Porcupines* are predominantly an ode to friendship, short stories and picture books with human main characters explore mainly closeness and affection between family members (e.g. *Prayers from the Stairs, I Recognized You by Your Red Socks*), and the search for love (e.g. *My Neighbor Up There*).

This theme is also present in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*. A large man tried to give himself a hug around the stomach. "He tried, but to no avail." Yet even large men and their massive stomachs need hugging. That is why the fat man "lay down in the grass and built a tiny house around himself." Then, "his belly kept lifting the roof: up and down, up and down."

Meanwhile, granny finds herself in a short story on missing pills which took off to Alaska, to the North Pole, and further on. But in the end, we are mainly worried about granny and her lub-dub, lub-dub. In *Prayers from the Stairs* (2016), the narrator turns to God and asks him to take care of granny so she doesn't slip on ice. In contrast, in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*, the narrator turns to the reader in the story "About the Eleven Missing Pills":

The twelfth has just been swallowed by Gran, so her heart will beat lub-dub, lub-dub. Because if she doesn't take her pill, then it beats lub-lub-dub, lub-lub-dub. If you happen to meet any of the eleven missing pills, do let them know about this lub-dub ticking of the heart.

Another one of Svetina's regular themes can also be found in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*. In fact, I've touched upon it while discussing all the previous ones. This is his focus on everyday things and ordinary people which the author likes to transpose from their usual context, thus placing them into a new context. He focuses on the people we meet in everyday situations and often take for granted. He does so by opening the doors to all the worlds that are transposed from and into a (seemingly) everyday moment:

You put some plums into the sink and pour water over them. Then you let the water drain away until the plums appear. That is how islands are created. One of them has high mountains, snowed-over all year. On one of them grows a pine tree and in the summer its

shade covers the entire island. On one of them is a stand full of figs, watermelons and melons. Ferries walk between islands, wearing high boots. But there are fewer and fewer islands. Plums are sweet and very tasty. Soon the sea is silent, calm, without waves. All that is left are underwater reefs inhabited by mermaids.

The parable of the plums or *About How Islands Are Created* is actually very close to Svetina's poetry for adult readers which tends to focus on everyday details and make them shine (perhaps with the exception of his last collection *The Jasper Krull Report*).

Such is the case with *Everyday Geometries* where the adjective everyday appears already in the title:

*From the pier, I watch the opposite shore:
children blowing into vinyl water pipes,
throwing them like spears, riding them like horses.
The elbows of water pipes are submarine
periscopes, exploring. The wind
twists the curtain behind my back into
a heart; it is waving as though it were beating. A cheesy
image which would be cheesy only if wind
was not truly pumping blood through the veins
of the curtain behind my back.*

In Svetina's work, there is no clear distinction between his books for children and his books for adult readers. The same of similar motifs can be found in different works (perhaps conceived at around the same time?) regardless of the target readership group. In fact, the target readers are mainly defined by the design and the publishing house with its specific audience. For example, in *Everyday Geometries*, a tram, a boat and a girl appear together:

Thoughts Upon Adulthood

*I'm sitting on a bench,
it's sunny.
I'm counting:
one tram crossing a bridge,
one boat going under the bridge,
one girl running by,
another tram crossing the bridge,
another boat going under the bridge,
another girl running by,
one boat crossing the bridge,
one girl going under the bridge,
one tram running by,
one girl boating a tram,
one by running under the bridge,
one going crossing a bridge.
And a man with a guitar who has no idea
how he found himself in the picture.
And it's evening.*

And these same—or are they perhaps different?—tram, boat and girl can be found in *My Neighbor Up There*, a short story collection illustrated by Peter Škerl, categorized in the COBISS (the Slovenian library information system) database as ‘tales for schoolchildren’:

Just so You Know

A ship sailed under a bridge. A tram drove over the bridge. A girl with a ponytail ran past a bench. First.

The ship sailed under the bridge. The tram drove over the bridge. The girl with a ponytail ran past the bench. Second.

The ship sailed under the bridge. The tram drove over the bridge. The girl with a ponytail ran past the bench. Third.

The girl with a ponytail sailed under the bridge. The tram drove over the bridge. The ship ran past the bench.

The tram drove under the bridge. The girl with a ponytail ran over the bridge. The ship sailed past the bench.

The tram with a ponytail ran under the bridge. The ship sailed over the bridge. The girl drove past the bench.

The tram ran past the bench under the bridge. The ship carried the girl with a ponytail across the bridge. Someone sailed past the bench. Who?

The ship ran under the bridge past the bench with the ponytail on the tram, it drove over the bridge, sailed across the girl.

Under the bridge with a ponytail past a boat with a bench, a tram on a girl with a bench across the bridge, thud!

At that moment, Mr Sylvester Intelbar suddenly found himself beside the bench with a guitar. He strummed it.

And...

Again, a ship sailed under the bridge. The tram drove over the bridge. And the girl with a ponytail ran past the bench.

There. Just so you know.

Having the same motif appear in books for different groups of target readers offers an interesting cue for considering how a text is perceived within its context. Does *Thoughts Upon Adulthood* lead us to think more about the moment, does *Just So You Know* have a greater emphasis on wordplay? Do Peter Škerl's illustrations open up a world which is always created jointly by Svetina and Škerl and which Sylvester Intelbar has to set right time and time again, a world which perhaps does not open up the same way in *Thoughts Upon Adulthood*? Is tranquility created by either the night or Sylvester Intelbar with his guitar any different?

If *Thoughts Upon Adulthood* and *Just So You Know* create a dialogue between poetry and short prose, *The Ear of the World* and *The Jasper Krull Report* create a dialogue between two books. *The Ear of the World* is a short story collection classified in the COBISS database as a

picture book and addresses similar, very specific themes (although in another form and in constant dialogue with Damijan Stepančič's illustrations) as the poetry collection *The Jasper Krull Report*, primarily intended for adult readers but with Stepančič's illustration from *The Ear of the World* on the cover. They both address the topics of talking and listening, of searching, and of that which (can) bring meaning.

Svetina's books for children are most often characterized as crossover literature: the target readership group is not abstract or unspecified, but unlimited. The warm humor in combination with crossings between different worlds, wordplay and all the resulting absurd situations draw young readers also to the author's more demanding texts, such as the short story collections *Hippopotamus Wisdom*, *The Ripening of Porcupines*, *The Ear of the World*, *My Neighbor Up There* and also *Timbuktu, Timbuktu*. At the same time, all these works also retain conceptual layers and twists that open up mostly to adult readers who have already read many books or, perhaps even primarily, to readers who like to return to the same texts, first giving themselves some breathing space and then allowing them to resonate again. After all, this is the case with all good poetry, also Svetina's.

In contrast, the text of Svetina's picture books (e.g. *How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race*; *Walrus, Walrus*; *Anton's Circus*) are simpler, different layers can easily be accessible to young readers at the first reading (but even if this is not the case, it does not make the reading process any less fun), yet their surprising twists (as was already mentioned, Svetina is definitely not an author who would resort to stereotypes), the typical warmth, and humor are enough to make them interesting also to older readers.

Back to *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* and the parable of the plums. The short, poetic story 'About How Islands are Created' could easily have been incorporated into any of Svetina's poetry collections for adult readers without standing out from the other texts. This is also partly because Svetina's language has a strong emphasis on sound and rhythm. The specific sentence construction which produces specific rhythm can easily be recognized as being that of Peter Svetina. In both his poetry and prose, each word is exactly in the right place and in sonorous dialogue with all other words (which can lead to despair in literary critics who would like to quote some of his works without quoting the entire text).

The emphasis on sound, together with playfulness which sets the rhythm, are interesting to both younger and older (co-)readers, who (most likely?) both create their own images in the mind while reading, at least with some of the short short stories. Due to their extreme shortness, the stories in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* can be divided (more so than in Svetina's previous short story collections with longer stories) into those that can easily fascinate younger readers and those primarily intended for older readers. After all, shortness means that the events cannot unfold very much (but allows them to keep unfolding and developing in the reader's mind); although action is not one of Svetina's fortes, it is nevertheless what draws younger readers also into more hermetic Svetina's worlds.

On the other hand, shortness of stories brings other specifics which seem ideally fitted to Svetina's literary expression. Similarly to poetry, short short stories open up space between the lines. The space we explore during the reading, after the reading, and in between each consecutive new reading. Svetina's multilayered texts manage to take advantage of that space

very well: the realities created by the author open up before the readers, wordplay has enough room for real fun, and associations have the possibility of making an additional skip or two.

[...]

Importantly, Svetina's ultrashort stories in *Timbuktu, Timbuktu* do not exist on their own; they are complemented by Igor Šinkovec's illustrations. Igor Šinkovec is very successful in creating polyphone illustration dialogues to match Peter Svetina's texts.

Svetina's oeuvre is co-created in tandem with exceptional illustrators. He has most often teamed up with Damijan Stepančič (e.g. in *Hippopotamus Wisdom, The Ripening of Porcupines, Anton's Circus, The Ear of the World, Magic Ring, The Lumber Room, Homeworks*). Stepančič thoroughly absorbs Svetina's texts and manages to create time and again both his visual interpretation of the text and spaces in between—a selection of those layers of Svetina's texts which speak to him the most; these are rarely the upper, most evident layers. What possibilities of symbiosis with illustration Svetina's texts offer is demonstrated also by two relatively recent Svetina's books: *My Neighbor Up There* in which Peter Škerl managed to capture the absurd world of Svetina's characters which sometimes breaks at unusual angles, yet always manages to get pieced back together in one way or another, and *Prayers from the Stairs* accompanied by extremely warm illustrations by Ana Zavadlav who portrays a more realistic and direct Svetina's expression, leading us from the surface layer of wordplay into the deeper layers of children's perception of the world through interpersonal relationships.

Timbuktu, Timbuktu is the first collaboration between Svetina and illustrator Igor Šinkovec. At first glance, the book is very similar to previous Svetina's books—short story collections which were published by the same publishing house and illustrated by Damijan Stepančič. But a closer look reveals that this book is very much typical of Svetina, but also of Igor Šinkovec. The typical traits of characters illustrated by Šinkovec are there, reminding us of Professor Florian Brainy, the mascot of the Natural History Museum of Slovenia, or the Hiker family from *Hikers go Hiking* by Gaja Kos. The element of playfulness in the work of Igor Šinkovec is present throughout the book (for example, in the story 'About A Good Hour and How it Was Less and Less', the illustration itself is enough to make us laugh), as is the illustrator's humorous interpretation which is sometimes conveyed in comic book bubbles. His work is extremely esthetically pleasing—monochrome characters, such as the orange/blue/red girl in the story 'Of Nine Pairs of Feet', have extremely high esthetic value—yet at the same time it also conveys playfulness and humor. Often, Šinkovec interprets Svetina's stories in his own way, as is the case in the story 'About a Large Man who Built a Tiny House' where he draws a house on top of the man's stomach, thus spurring the reader to explore the theme further. Indeed, why limit ourselves to only one interpretation when reading short stories which open up so many worlds?

Before I conclude, let me go back to the question from the beginning: what is Timbuktu? The cover reads: "Timbuktu is a town in Africa which used to be known as the center of erudition and tolerant discussions. Now, Timbuktu is a book which just might have a connection with that. But it is also a word which sounds interesting, the way it is pronounced is captivating." I've already mentioned that words are the means of transportation being able to transport us

between worlds and bring us back home. What does the author say about Timbuktu in the book?

What is Timbuktu?

Timbuktu is where you play. Timbuktu is where you have your father and mother and brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts. Timbuktu is where you keep your socks in a drawer.

Timbuktu is where there is someone who loves you. Timbuktu is where you have hidden your most precious treasure. Timbuktu is where bread rolls grow for everyone, where there are tomatoes ripening for all. Timbuktu is where if you get burnt, a hand offers you a cold pack before you have a chance to say ouch! All that is Timbuktu. Timbuktu! Timbuktu!

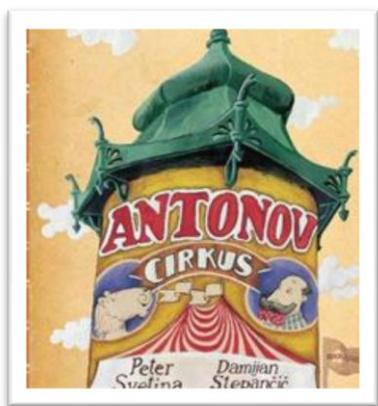
Bottom line: Timbuktu is a kind of utopia. Since this is Peter Svetina's book, something that might seem as utopia from a distance might actually be something here and now (and not necessarily perfect), you just need to know where to look. Also, timbuktu is a word that sounds interesting and is pronounced in a captivating way. Just say *timbuktu*, and there are your socks. Just say *timbuktu* and there's your tomatoes. Especially if anyone can hear you.

*

[...] Peter Svetina was the first Slovenian author to be among the finalists for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, and on that occasion IBBY made a short presentation film with the finalists. This is how Peter Svetina begins his presentation in the film:

Hello, my name is Peter. At home, I'm a father, an uncle, a husband, and the designated dog-walker. At the university, I am a professor; I teach students how and what to see in literature and how to look out from literature at other things. But most of the time, I am an observer and a listener. When I write, either here in my study or elsewhere, I can be anything that finds its way into my stories. I can be a man so in love that he floats up to the ceiling or his neighbor doing her best to pull him down by a string. I can be rain or autumn leaves getting rained on.

And, it so happens that we as readers of Svetina's works can be all those things too. His literary world is an open world, a reader can enter it in different places or skip a little in between. They can be Gennady if they're having a day when they don't care for the world, or they can be Helge. Or both. They can be rain or the road or a big ear. No matter what they are, they meet the author who is not high up on a pedestal, telling others how things should be. After all, if our entry point is a little different and we look at the world a little differently, things can be different. That is why we can enter Svetina's texts alone or as co-readers, spend some time in the same places between lines or in different places. Remember—on an empty sign, some would write SWEETIES or SWIMMING POOL or MUMMY, while others would write EVENING or CAFE or CHILDREN ON THE PIER. Or we can all just write TIMBUKTU.



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.