



Hans Christian Andersen Award 2026

Anja Štefan

Author nomination



Slovenian section of IBBY

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1.

**Biographical information
on the candidate**

Anja Štefan (born 1969) has devoted her life to fairy tales – as an author of original fairy tales (as well as poems and riddles), but also through re-telling folk tales, as a storyteller, translator and editor of numerous anthologies. She holds a master's degree in Folkloristics. She began publishing stories in the children's magazine *Ciciban* in 1993 and later also in the magazine for preschool children *Cicido*. As a book author she first appeared on the Slovene literary scene in 1998; since then, her opus has alternated between prose and poetry collections, and she also created two highly successful collections of riddles for the youngest curious minds. In 1998 Anja Štefan also set up the Fairy Tale Marathon (*Pravljični maraton*), which was initially aimed exclusively at children and was linked to the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana, but in 2004 it grew into the festival Fairy Tales Today (*Pravljice danes*), covering the entire country and inviting adults as well as children to storytelling events. Anja Štefan has received numerous awards for her work, her books are regularly reprinted and translated into foreign languages; in Slovenia, her name is without doubt a synonym for quality and a top-class reading experience.

2.

A high-resolution portrait
photograph of the candidate



3.

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

Innovative integration of folk traditions and the contemporary world

Prof. Dr. Igor Saksida

Anja Štefan graduated from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana and continued her studies in folkloristics, obtaining a master's degree in 1999. Her studies in folk storytelling have strongly marked her literary creativity and her work in reading motivation and research, collecting and exploring Slovene literary folklore. In 1998, she set up the beginnings of what evolved into the storytelling festival Fairy Tales Today (*Pravljice danes*). An important part of Anja Štefan's creativity is also collecting and retelling folk traditions; recently in her anthology of Slovene folk tales from the ethnological estate of Milko Matičetov, *Three Hundred Rabbits (Tristo zajcev, 2019)*, for which she wrote a comprehensive accompanying study, giving us a personally engaged and at the same time professional, in-depth portrait of the folklorist, presenting the fundamental dilemmas and decisions one encounters when recording or editing and retelling folk traditions.

In Slovenia, Anja Štefan has received numerous important awards for her work, among others the Prešeren Fund Award, the main Slovene award for youth literature Večernica, the Levstik Award, and the award from the Slovenian Section of IBBY.

Anja Štefan's literary world is marked by fairy-tale motifs of journeys and miracles as well as story repetitions, stemming from the author's engagement with folk literature, while at the same time her work is characterised by an innovative, childishly honest and playful attitude to the world, connected to experiencing nature, a sense of goodness and justice, and respecting the coexistence of diversity of all beings.

All this is already expressed in her first important collection of animal tales *Grind, Grind Grinder*, (*Melje, melje mlinček*, 1999), featuring a hedgehog, a mouse, a dog, a cat and a mouse,

while in the title story, a cockrel as a miller looks after his friends who respond with gratitude. One departure from Anja's prevailing pattern of purely animal tales is the text of *Bobek and the Tiny Boat* (*Bobek in barčica*, 2005), in which the protagonist is joined on his boat, built with their joint effort, by animals (a mouse, a frog, a rabbit, a fox and a bear), highlighting their cooperation and the joy of a

happy ending for all the heroes of the fairy tale. A similar theme also comes up in the more extensive collection of animal tales *A Swing for Everyone* (*Gugalnica za vse*, 2013), a collection of short stories (usually only half a page long) that build on the same theme with more prominent nonsense processes, e.g. repeating similar sentences (in the story *About a Rat Who Made Jam*), witty twists and nonsensical ingenuities by the animal literary heroes (the rabbit's sign 'Right Heads' in the story *Left Right*). The story about foxes (*Cake*), that includes a quarrel between the characters, also concludes with a typical fairy-tale reconciliation; the only exception is the story *Bicycle*, showing the consequences of inadequate communication between the wolf and his father which leaves the aging wolf alone at the end of the story. The animal tale *Seven Bears* (*Sedem medvedov*, 2018) connects the pattern of a folk counting song with wordplay weaving rhymes into the fairytale narrative, connecting travelling



to the unknown with the fairy tale experience, intertwining it with themes of children's courage and curiosity as well as the amazement at the beauty and vastness of the world: 'Such beauty! Such valleys! Such peaks far around!' A similar message is revealed in the animal tale *The Bear and the Hat* (*Medved in klobuk*, 2021), in which the hat has a fairy-tale attribute that makes anyone who wears it happy – the bear wearing the hat greets all the inhabitants of the fairy-tale forest, even himself and the sun. When the wind blows the hat off his head, his animal friends help him catch it and it is finally caught by the oak tree. The tale thus thematises helping the strongest animal (the bear) and the significance of the tiniest fairy-tale hero (the mouse retrieves the hat from the oak tree) and of cooperation between the literary characters (the mouse reaches the hat by the animals climbing onto each other to create an animal ladder) – the importance of cooperation and respect for all creatures is emphasised at the end of the text where the animals realise that they had all played an important role in achieving the goal, even the oak tree above them.

In the collection of short animal tales *Four Tiny Black Ants Morn 'Till Morn* (*Štiri črne mravljice od jutra do jutra*, 2022) the author returns to the form of a fable – some of the stories end with a wisdom or a piece of advice that does not sound moralising as it might in classical fables but humoristic. Several of the texts don't even have a specific educational gist but the reader can extract the values that the title characters adhere to from the stories, for example the importance of cooperating, of being kind, the joy of life, creativity as well as persistence, modesty, a search for an inner balance, respect for ancient wisdoms and tradition and especially having an ear for the languages of nature:



‘We know the language of the wind, the rustling of the grass. We know the singing of the cricket, the blackbird. We can recognize from afar the different buzzing of various flies. /.../ But are they not still languages? Rooted in the earth, woven from life.’ **The complexity of the message of this collection at the same time also points to its universality: younger readers will pick up on the collection’s imaginative play and humour, older ones the values and a socially critical stance to the world – this kind of communication complexity is, in connection with the fable structure of the stories and wordplay, an important innovative stance indicating that short animal tales are not always (only) for children.**



Anja Štefan is also an important contemporary poet for young readers. In the collection *Polka Dot Pot (Lonček na pike, 2008)* her seemingly simple poetic language stems from two points: firstly the search for the magical ‘Polka Dot Pot’ that fulfils all your wishes, and then also in discovering this magic in the contents and form of a traditional children’s poem that beside their animal poetic characters also convey thoughts about coexistence comprehensible to those with a child’s soul and not to ‘greedy people’ (*Bumblebee*). The message of the poems is diverse, it can present a humorous event or an unusual decision of one of the poetic characters (e.g. the snail who decides to go ‘to places far, far away, *The Snail Announced*), conveying its unusual, surprising image (a wolf in new shoes, *Wolf Puts on a Pair of New Shoes*) or plays with characteristic of fairy tales, e.g. the number seven (*Tiny Boats*); a (magic) journey is the dominant motif in this collection, which, beside its fairy-tale content stays connected to the world of children’s wishes and dreams – through the child’s eyes the poetic world is playful, magical and wonderful. Putting a kind of unique perspective into poetry, specifically children’s enthusiasm for

various kinds of fruit, determines the content of the collection *Sadje z naše ladje* (Fruit from Our Boat, 2016). In it the author, beside children's excitement over all kinds of fruit, in places also includes themes such as illness (*Lemon*), laziness (*Fool*) and injustice and poverty (*Bananas*). The prevailing mood in this collection remains playfulness of children and animals, reinforced by references to wordplay of traditional children's songs.

The author's poetry collection *Drobtine iz mišje doline* (2017, published in English as *Tunes from Mousedale Dunes*, 2020), stands out for its quality and innovation. It was awarded the

Večernica and Levstik Awards. It focuses on

the lives of mice as poetic heroes, small but truly great in their creativity, looking out onto the beauty of the world, playing with words, but also aware of the less comfortable truths of our contemporary times. One of the most convincing contemporary poems is *Gather Pluck and*

***Follow Me* – hope for a chance for a better world is precisely though indirectly conveyed in the final verses of the poem that preserves the poetics of the communicative minimum;**

this is also typical for other texts, even those with tabu motifs: a mouse that's gorged herself on peas becomes a threat... thunder rumbles and everybody tumbles, (*Peas*), now they're dead... who will eat their gingerbread (*Gingerbread*). She is very convincing in imitating and updating counting-out rhymes (*Eena, Meena,*), traditional children's counting songs (*The Diddle-Diddle Mouse Brought Home a Nut*) and other texts (*A Mouse Some Day May Bring Loose Change...*) and the sound game (*Cheese*) also works very well; All these content and stylistic features merge into a mosaic puzzle of the world of mice, conveyed through word play in the background of which is a clearly expressed path towards a better world. The possibility of coexistence woven into the scope of a longer poem about animals and fairy-tale creatures is the



central theme of the collection *Elfin Eyes* (*Škratovske oči*, 2018), in which an elf and his wife, a bear, and ant, a rhino and a parrot constitute a metaphor for a large family. Some poems look at greed (*Frogs*), illness (*Teran*) and a child's view of adults (*The Bogeyman*), others convey playful information on natural phenomena (*Giant*) or the faith in changing the world (*King Matjaž*). In this collection the darker tones once again stay in the background – drowned out by the beauty of the world (*I Have Been Singing All Morning*) and a linguistic-imaginary game (*Tintilin and Tintilince, Little Elf*). A similar thematic background is set out in the collection of poems *I Have a Pair of Green Shoes* (*Imam zelene čevljičke*, 2020): the released power of children's imagination is expressed in the motifs of carnival and looking at mysterious worlds (*Dance For Us, Masks, Little Star*), and the convergence of the human and animal worlds in a series of poems that humorously or seriously portray various problems (*Nettles, When It Thunders, When Aunt Has Backache, Rain*) and joy (*Teddy Bear Counts, I Have a Pair of Green Shoes, Little Skunk*). Admiration and respect for all creatures can be seen in the beautiful hymn to freedom and work (*Bee*) and in the poems about coexistence in a world that is the common home for generations of people and animals (*A Horse for the Grand-Daughter*).



A thorough review of the narrative and poetic opus of Anja Štefan is published in the extensive anthology *The World is Like a Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses* (*Svet je kakor ringa raja*, 2015), which presents the author's poems, stories and riddles over 385 pages and includes an introductory note from one of Slovenia's most important poets and writers Svetlana Makarovič, an

in-depth foreword by Gaja Kos, and an extensive bibliography listing awards and award nominations. **Anja Štefan is also actively involved in promoting reading through appearances at schools, and the promotion of high-quality literary experiences is also facilitated by the numerous musical interpretations and theatrical performances of her work. In all, Anja Štefan is a first-class creator, recognisable for her characteristic polished style and complex content with references to folk traditions but at the same time also building upon it with thoughts about the dilemmas and hardships of man in the modern world.**



4.

Interview with the author

Interview with Anja Štefan by Petra Vidali:

Such a great amount
of effort for the same thing
makes a difference.

Večer, 3.2.2022

There have in the past been authors who also write for children who received the Prešeren Fund Award, for example Andrej Rozman Roza, but in his case too, the focus was on his work for adults. You, however, have reached for this award solely through your work for children – the collection of adapted Slovene folk tales, *Three Hundred Rabbits*, the poetry collection *I Have a Pair of Green Shoes*, and the fairy tale *Rabbit's House*. Would you also highlight this aspect of the award?

‘When so many people contact you after you receive an award, you realise that you indeed already have a large pool of supportive companions. It was especially nice when many colleagues congratulated me, Neli [Kodrič Filipič], for example, said, ‘Wow, Anja, that is a breakthrough!’ Nataša [Konc Lorenzutti] said she was ‘As happy as if I had received the award myself.’ Peter [Svetina] said, ‘Well, How Great!’ and gave me a hug. I can’t generalise, of course, but I do feel that we all saw this as a collective public recognition of our field. It seems that various efforts of recent decades are bearing fruit.

For example, the meeting of youth writers Eye of the Word (*Oko besede*). When we started there was no shortage of comments and haughtiness over the efforts of organisers, but in the end we have to admit that it has become a lead. A lead in the sense of community, a lead in that once a year we authors take part in getting educated about a certain topic, a lead that once a year we affirm that we need to physically go out to our audiences. In the long term, this has had a positive effect on the relationships between authors and also on how we behave towards our public, how we are received. Of course we also have the Reading Badge which contributes greatly to the dynamic flow between authors and our readers, and the Slovenian Section of the IBBY, the Pionirska Library, the Maribor Library and many others, the journal *Otrok in knjiga* (Children and Books) and the youth section of the Slovene Writers' Association, which is the only truly active section of the association... I am not saying that all the relationships have been perfect but such a great amount of effort for the same thing makes a difference.'

I will insist a little more on the 'leitmotif' of the Prešeren Awards – I do think we need to remind people that the so-called mother of contemporary Slovene children's literature, Kristina Brenkova, never received one. She must have been an important influence on your work as well?

'Kristina and I met at the award ceremony for the Levstik Awards when she received her lifetime achievement award and I performed. She came up to me and said she had noticed my poems and that I write well. It was one of those confirmations that are very important for a young person. Later I visited her when I was writing the foreword to her book of Slovene folk tales *The Magic Pot (Lonček kuhaj)*. I asked her about all the things I was uncertain about working with folk tales and writing my own stories. Initially quite formally, very shy, then we squeezed oranges

together and drank juice, she had – at least in her mature years – an excellent sense of humour with which she was able to lighten the atmosphere in a nice way. After that we called each other on the phone and I also visited her a number of times. These calls and visits were to me like wind to my wings. Even at the time, I felt that she filled me with energy but of course it was not just about that moment. There are people you take so seriously that they can have an immense influence on how you see yourself after that. They affect your confidence, your courage, your perseverance, your quest. Especially in times of crises, as we all go through, it is very important to have such support. Of course I had crises, I was overworked, I have a large family and the creative aspect – I mean in terms of time and energy that were available to me – was not easy to handle.’

With your superb combination of being an original author and also an expert on narrative tradition, as well as a communicative, kind person, we probably all imagine that you might also succeed Kristina Brenkova in her position as editor. Why not?

‘I don’t have any qualifications to become an editor. I know that I can feel a text, that I have the linguistic skills and that am able to sense the vibrancy of the language and also suggest where things might be corrected. But as a dyslexic, I could not possibly read everything that is an essential part of being an editor.’

I should admit that I wanted to reach this point, to be able to discuss this disability because it seems so fascinating that despite it, you can be a top-class author. The prevailing notion is that dyslexics should steer away from the humanities and literature as there would not be able to succeed in this field..

‘The art world is so diverse that everyone can find something for themselves. Maybe the dyslexia has in some ways made me stronger. I don’t really dare say it, but perhaps

that is why I relied so much more on my memory. Storytelling is telling a story, but not from paper, from memory. And perhaps that is why I pay more attention to hearing the language. Basically, I believe that there are even here some positive aspects, but it is true that dyslexia is a hindrance to the schooling process itself.'

One more thing related to the Prešeren Awards... Svetlana Makarovič was awarded one (she didn't accept) for lifetime achievement, but hers too was not merely for her work for children.

In your collection of stories, poems and riddles *The World is Like a Ring-a-Ring-a Roses (Svet je kakor ringa raja)*, you published a letter of hers in which she 'complains' that her famous mouse character Sapramiška now only wants to swing on your swing... A wonderful tribute from one author to another. What kind of letter would you write to Svetlana Makarovič?

'Svetlana wrote this letter as a foreword to the book. When I received it, I had to sit down, touched by the affectionate way she spoke of my work. And I did write back to her. I sent her a poem I had written for her a long time ago, dedicated to one of my most important literary role models. I had not intended to send it to her before. Otherwise Svetlana knows that I am completely devoted to her. Regardless of how much we manage or don't manage to chat casually in the meantime. Sometimes words get stuck, even when you are fond of someone. We both know very well that I am able to recognise the value of her work and that I see it as both a lasting asset to our society and also as a lasting superior learning material for myself. Nothing can change that, not the more or less well-chosen statements,



or the unusual reactions Svetlana sometimes has. I don't have to agree with them but I know that Svetlana is a precious person and was born a top-rate artist.

We seem to have two moulds for top-class women writers: kind, warm fairy godmothers and excentric old ladies. Of course you are in the first category. Would you say this is your natural place or did you along the way tune in to a kind of expected fairy-tale stance?

'I do think this is one of the stances that comes to me naturally, though it is not the only one. My other natural stance is that of child-like joy. It is harder to manifest in public because public positions are still rather stressful, but I do have it within me, plenty of it. But I would also like to reach the natural stance of an excentric old lady. As you grow older – if you didn't know how to before – you learn how to speak in a more straightforward way, also about less pleasant matters This is approximately where I am now. I think it is connected to a person's maturity and resilience.'



Here we also reach your connection with Milko Matičetov. In the book *Three Hundred Rabbits* you adapted 44 folk tales from his estate. Your sources were recordings of folk stories and field notes made by Matičetov. How much of his invaluable legacy still remains untouched? And, are you still interested in this kind of work?

'There is still a lot of material Milko had collected. Many notes that have yet to be transcribed and recordings on reels where we don't even know what is technically still good enough to copy into newer formats and listen to. I sincerely wish this could be sorted: firstly everything needs to be properly recorded and transcribed, then made public in professional publications. This way we would get the chance to select the best of his

random recordings. It is a vast collection of tales of varying quality, both from the aspect of the stories themselves as well as the way they are put into words. If funds were available for the entire technical part, a group of people would then need to work on the material for at least another five or ten years. There are also problems in transcribing accents that are not understood. There are very few people who speak the version of Slovene used in the Resia region in Italy, for example, who know our standard language well enough to be able to translate into it and there are very few of us who would understand enough Resian. I really wish things would move onwards in this area but at the same time there seem to be very few such prospects at the moment. I think that with the book *Three Hundred Rabbits*, I rounded off my own efforts towards publishing this kind of Slovene folk narrative tradition, at least for now. It is not easy work.'

You once said that, after graduating in Slovene and English studies, you took up studying Folkloristics in order to get rid of a crippling fear of folklorists. I guess you are no longer afraid, are you?

'I am no longer afraid. Because I have clarified to myself what I do in every medium and what is viable and produces results in each genre. At the same time, I do wonder why I should go down paths where I have had to, over and over again, spend a lot of energy, and continuously need to prove myself when I can walk down others where my work can be just as meaningful and I can focus my energy mostly on content. And because I am now aware that my time and energy are limited, I increasingly chose to go where I can accomplish more in the content field with fewer obstacles.'

One of the channels of bringing the narrative storytelling tradition closer to audiences is the festival Fairy Tales Today, which you conceived a quarter of a century ago. It is amazing



how popular this old-new medium has become during this time. Festivals, workshops, storytelling classes, there is no shortage of interest. I suppose this is not unique to Slovenia?

‘Other countries have similar things but those of us who have been part of the storytelling festival from the beginning, have noticed that our festival is truly at a high level compared to many abroad. From the very beginning we set high standards and were able draw on these traditions in innovative and creative ways, even though the contemporary art of storytelling was not so widely developed at the time. We knew how to appeal to people who added to the quality of the festival. I think that the storytelling festival has had a noticeable impact, together with a few other initiatives. This influence spreads at local levels and if a few teachers then dare tell stories freely and know how to encourage children to do so, if libraries organise events where interesting locals tell stories, if museum curators enrich their guided tours with interesting fact conveyed as short stories, then we can say that this effort has enriched our entire cultural space.’

And now let’s turn to your own original writing for children. Is, for example, the story *Rabbit’s House* something you devised on your own or does it also essentially come from folk narrative heritage?

‘It is my own. There is a Russian fairytale with the same title but it is different. In it the rabbit builds a solid house, and the fox builds a palace out of ice because it shines and she thinks it looks posh. Of course it melts. So this was more a story of the fox’s arrogance. In my story, hm – houses are one of those things that I seem to be drawn to all the time. There is something about these houses. They are a shelter, and a shelter is something we all seek and is linked with a sense of security and strength. Beside the point of having a home, the story

Rabbit's House also raises several other issues, that of solidarity, for example, or of fraudulent exploitation of an accident. Also the fact that I connected all this to a flood was my idea, I don't know of any traditional animal fable that uses this motif.

This will probably sound like a very unprofessional question, but it is the most spontaneous: Don't you ever run out of ideas? Do you not have any problems with inspiration, so to say?

'Of course I went through periods when I felt empty. Fortunately, I have a second hold, the folk narrative tradition, and in such times I worked more enthusiastically in this area. But recently I have not been short of ideas, there are so many things I would still like to tell. I think that, through the work I have done so far, I have developed a clear feeling for the structure of a story, a craftsman's knowledge with regards to putting ideas into words, choosing the right words, constructing sentences, and deciding how much of the text should be devoted to certain parts of a story. Verses also come easily, so I think I have become quite skilful in my craft. From here on it is a matter of content and, yes, various ideas keep coming, offering themselves to me to develop them further. Sometimes I do better, sometimes worse. What is certainly useful is that I am aware of a vast array of motifs that have been important to people through the ages, and at the same time observe our current society and today's individuals with curiosity. This can lead to many, many stories. I can dwell on a particular human trait, I can come across a situation that seems to be like a model for leverage within society, I can also simply indulge in some wordplay or a pun which is more fun than some great wisdom, but that is also what I like.'

In your collection of poems *I Have a Pair of Green Shoes*, I chose the poem *The Bee*: 'Collecting and sipping the blossom of spring / sweet nectar to the whole hive busy bees bring / from sunrise to sunset, all day without rest / the

bee's work is its freedom, its noble quest.' I cannot imagine a better way of conveying values that are worth being called that: a community breathing together, and hard work that is both a quest and an enjoyment...

'I also particularly like that poem. The book *I Have a Pair of Green Shoes* was created by me visiting the illustrator Jelka Reichman along the way with the poems I had finished, and we chose the ones she felt were closest to her. When I told her *The Bee*, she said, 'That's me.'

But also you, no?

'Yes, I think all of us who enjoy our work a lot are like that, all of us who see work as more than just a means of making ends meet, work that also feeds us with its contents.'



You are now at a point where you are receiving the highest awards for your outstanding work. Do you think it could still work out that way if you had to start today? What are the possibilities for today's young writers?

'Looking back at my path, I think that I was lucky in a number of ways. One luck is that you even start working persistently in a field you have a talent for. Sometimes it is difficult to recognise this and we can end up finding ourselves in a position where you need to invest too much effort for too little effect. So I was truly lucky to be able to so early take my path in a direction that could be permanently mine. Another luck is when you meet along this path people who can recognise your potential and develop it, offering you work through which you can reaffirm yourself and grow on. The third thing, which is of course essential, is that you can make a living out of it. Without this, any artists will have a hard time permanently believing in the purpose of what they are doing. Especially if they have a family, for they need to contribute in some way to their young family community and have responsibility for their children. In my case, all these things luckily fell into place.

Even now, when times are difficult for many people working in culture, I am doing fine because of the areas that have opened up to me over the years and because of my past work. I do often wonder, however, how I might do if I had to start now? I don't envy young people, I think that it is hard for them to get enough confirmation along the way and that it was easier when I was starting out. At the time we had organisations where it was easier for young writers to get their first jobs and pay. For example, The Union of Cultural Organisations paid for my studies abroad and I committed to completing twelve performances in schools. And they gave me a symbolic amount as payment. Today this kind of thing is not possible. Also the fees in children's magazines are too low to allow any truly substantial input that is essential in order for you to develop as a creator. The book series Čebelica for many years also made sure that less established authors with shorter texts could get published. Once your work is published as a book, you see it in a different way, with a different sense of responsibility. This helps you in nurturing the demands you have of yourself. These are steps forward. Now it is harder to make these steps. At this point it is hard to assess, to see, where the current situation in the field of culture is leading us. How many really strong young writers will there be in years to come?'



5.

List of awards and other distinctions

- 2001 • The Levstik Award for *Melje, melje mlinček*
- 2006 • Selected for the project Growing With a Book for *Bobek in barčica*
- 2006 • Nomination for The Original Slovene Picture Book Award for *Bobek in barčica*
- 2007 • The Original Picture Book Award for *Sto ugank*
- 2007 • The Levstik Award for *Kotiček na koncu sveta*
- 2008 • Ljubljana Reads for *Sto ugank*
- 2008 • Nomination for The Original Slovene Picture Book Award for *Štiri črne mravljice*
- 2008 • Nomination for The Večernica Award for *Štiri črne mravljice*
- 2010 • Ljubljana Reads for *Lonček na pike*
- 2010 • Nomination for The Desetnica Award for *Lonček na pike*
- 2012 • Nomination for The Kristina Brenkova Award for *Hudičeva volna*
- 2014 • The Golden Pear Award for *Gugalnica za vse*
- 2014 • Nomination for The Desetnica Award for *Gugalnica za vse*
- 2014 • Nomination for The Večernica Award for *Gugalnica za vse*
- 2015 • Cerknica Municipality Silver Prize for lifelong creative work in the field of writing and storytelling.
- 2015 • Diploma at the 60th Belgrade Book Fair for *Hudičeva volna*
- 2016 • Nomination for The Desetnica Award for *Še sto ugank*
- 2017 • Nomination for The Desetnica Award for *Sadje z naše ladje*
- 2018 • The Večernica Award for *Drobtine iz mišje doline*
- 2018 • The Golden Pear Award for *Drobtine iz mišje doline*
- 2018 • The Kristina Brenkova Award (Special Achievement Award) for *Drobtine iz mišje doline*
- 2018 • White Ravens for *Drobtine iz mišje doline*
- 2019 • The Levstik Award for *Drobtine iz mišje doline*
- 2019 • Slovenian Section of IBBY Award for promoting youth literature and reading
- 2022 • Prešeren Fund Award for *Tristo zajcev, Imam zelene čeveljčke* and *Zajčkova hišica*
- 2024 • Nomination for The Desetnica Award for *Mišji ženin*
- 2024 • IBBY Honour List for *Medved in klobuk*

6.

Complete bibliography of the books for children and young people by the candidate

Čmrlj in piščalka. Illustrated by Alenka Sottler.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 1998

Reprint: 2020

Melje, melje mlinček: sedem pravljic za lahko noč.

Illustrated by by Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 1999

Reprints: 2003, 2007, 2013, 2015, 2020, 2023

Lešniki, lešniki. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2000

Reprints: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022

Bobek in barčica. Illustrated by Polona Lovšin.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2005

Reprints: 2006, 2015

Kotiček na koncu sveta. Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2005

Reprints: 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2022

Iščemo hišico. Illustrated by Ančka Gošnik Godec.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2005

Reprints: 2009, 2013, 2016

Sto ugank. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2006

Reprints: 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2024

Štiri črne mravljice. Illustrated by Zvonko Čoh.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2007

Reprint: 2014

Lonček na pike. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2008

Reprints: 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2024

Gugalnica za vse. Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2013

Reprints: 2014, 2015, 2018, 2021, 2023

Še sto uganek. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2014
Reprint: 2015

Uganke. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2015
Reprint: 2017

Svet je kakor ringaraja: pravljice, pesmi in uganke.

Illustrated by Zvonko Čoh et al.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2015
Reprints: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023

Sadje z naše ladje. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2016
Reprint: 2021

Bobek in zlate kokoši. Illustrated by Polona Lovšin.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2017

Drobtine iz mišje doline. Illustrated by Alenka Sottler.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2017
Reprints: 2018, 2019, 2019, 2021, 2024

7 medvedov. Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2018

Škratovske oči. Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2018

Imam zelene čevljičke. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2020
Reprint: 2021

Zajčkova hišica. Illustrated by Hana Stupica.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2020
Reprint: 2021, 2022, 2024

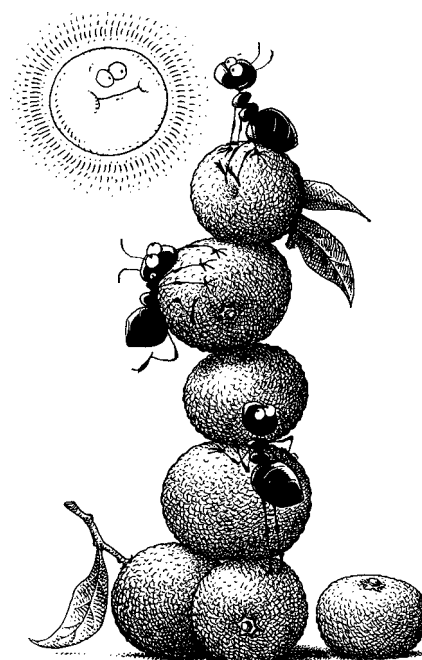
Medved in klobuk. Illustrated by Ana Zavadlav.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2021
Reprint: 2023

Štiri črne mravljice: od jutra do jutra.

Illustrated by Tomaž Lavrič.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2022
Reprint: 2023

Mišji ženin. Illustrated by Ana Zavadlav.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2023

Čez potoček in naprej. Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2024



7.

List of translated editions and their languages

English:

A swing for everyone: fairy tales: sample translation

(Gugalnica za vse). Illustr. Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Ljubljana: Javna agencija za knjigo Republike Slovenije, 2015

Bumblebee and the Flute (Čmrlj in piščal). Illustr. Alenka Sottler.

Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2020

Tunes from Mousedale Dunes (Drobtine iz mišje doline). Illustr.

Alenka Sottler. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2020

The Little Mill (Melje, melje mlinček). Illustr. Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Ljubljana: Litterae Sloceniae, Slovene Writers' Association, 2023

French:

Le chapeau de Basile (Medved in klobuk). Illustr. Ana Zavadlav.

Saint-Pierre-des-Corps: L'Élan vert, 2023

Italian:

Bestioline, vi saluto! Sette tra le piú belle fiabe di animali della Val

Resia. Illustr. Zvonko Čoh.

Trst: ZTT-EST, 2023

Macina, macina mio bel mulino (Melje, melje mlinček).

Illustr. Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Lubiana: Slovene Writers' Association, 2023

Korean:

Bobek wa jageun bae (Bobek in barčica). Polona Robsin grim.

Park Miyeon omgim.

Seoul: Hansol Gyoyuk, 2007

German:

Ein Haus für Hase (Zajčkova hišica). Illustr. Hana Stupica.
Zigelbrücke: Baeschein, 2023

Hinter den neun Bergen: slowenische Volksmärchen (Za devetimi gorami).
Celovec-Ljubljana-Dunaj: Mohorjeva Hermagoras družba v Celovcu – Hermagoras, 2023

Tanze, tanze, kleine Maus: Gedichte für Kinder und Mäuse (Drobtine iz mišje
doline). Illustr. Alenka Sottler.
Frankfurt am Main: Moritz, cop., 2023

Romanian:

Un colțisor la capătul pământului (Kotiček na koncu sveta). Ilustrații Marjanca
Jemec Božič. Traducător Eva Georgeta Catrinescu.
București: Mladinska, 2008

Spanish:

Lo que susurraron las nubes : cuentos infantiles de Eslovenia. Ela Peroci, Milan
Dekleva, Desa Muck, Andrej Rozman, Lilijana Praprotnik-Zupnačič, Majda Koren,
Cvetka Sokolov, Anja Štefan, Peter Svetina, Jana Bauer.
Rosalba, 2020



8.

Ten of the most important titles by the candidate

Melje, melje mlinček (Grind, Grind Grinder).

Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 1999

Reprints: 2003, 2007, 2013, 2015, 2020, 2024

Štiri črne mraljice (Four Tiny Black Ants).

Illustrated by Zvonko Čoh.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2007

Reprint: 2014

Lonček na pike (Polka Dot Pot).

Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2008

Reprints: 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2024

Gugalnica za vse (A Swing for Everyone).

Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2013

Reprints: 2014, 2015, 2018

Še sto ugank (Another Hundred Riddles).

Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2014

Reprint: 2015

Drobtine iz mišje doline (Tunes from Mousedale Dunes).

Illustrated by Alenka Sottler.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2017

Reprints: 2022, 2024

Zajčkova hišica (Rabbit's House).

Illustrated by Hana Stupica.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2020

Reprints: 2021, 2024

Imam zelene čevljičke (I Have a Pair of Green Shoes).

Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2020

Reprint: 2021

Medved in klobuk (The Bear and the Hat).

Illustrated by Ana Zavadlav.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2021

***Štiri črne mravljice: od jutra do jutra (Four Tiny Black Ants:
From Morn 'Til Morn).***

Illustrated by Tomaž Lavrič.

Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2022



9.

List of five books submitted to the jury



Lonček na pike (Polka Dot Pot).

Illustrated by Jelka Reichman.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2008



Gugalnica za vse (A Swing for Everyone).

Illustrated by Marjanca Jemec Božič.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2013



Drobtine iz mišje doline (Tunes from Mousedale Dunes).

Illustrated by Alenka Sottler.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2017



Medved in klobuk (The Bear and the Hat).

Illustrated by Ana Zavadlav.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2021



Štiri črne mravljice: od jutra do jutra (Four Tiny Black Ants: From Morn 'Til Morn).

Illustrated by Tomaž Lavrič.
Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2022

10.

Published reviews of the books
submitted to the jury



Note in the Handbook for Reading Quality Youth Literature (Priročnik za branje kakovostnih mladinskih knjig), Tilka Jamnik

The collection includes almost 30 poems featuring mostly animals and children. What distinguishes them is the poet's focus on children and her flirtation with folk poetry. In terms of sound and experience, the poems are closer to younger children; Motifs typical of folk poetry for children are very skilfully linked to values that are also pertinent in modern times. In one way, the illustrations are also like that: well-thought-out, cute, colourful, appealing to young children. **The picture book is an aesthetic enjoyment for preschool children and those in the early reading stages, both on a narrative and artistic level. The creators repeatedly confirm themselves with their well-known quality.** In this picture book they offer a world we have also seen from the authors in the past, one that is very kind in its multitude of diminutives and tiny details, and above all safe, where understanding and mutual help prevail... a true fairy tale quality.



Gaja Kos: Anja Štefan: A Swing for Everyone. Review in the journal *Sodobnost*, Vol. 4, 2014

Published in the past year when illustrator Marjanca Jemec, well-known and loved by many generations, celebrated her eighty-fifth birthday, beside the extensive anthology of her work A Fairy-Tale Flower (*Pravljični cvet*), a book that includes a selection of prose and poetry illustrated over more than half

a century by the acclaimed artist, was also a book with newly created illustrations – the richly illustrated *A Swing for Everyone* written by Anja Štefan. It is the third book project for the team Anja Štefan – Marjanca Jemec Božič, which has proved exceptionally successful with both *Grind, Grind, Grinder (Melje, melje mlinček)* and *A Corner at the End of the World (Kotiček na koncu sveta)* receiving the Levstik Award. Will *A Swing for Everyone* manage to swing as high as its predecessors?



The new book is a collection of twenty-three either very short or slightly longer stories accompanied by lively scenes. Mostly they are animal fables featuring a variety of characters, always likeable both in word and image, (from more classic ones such as bears, rabbits, pigs, mice, foxes and wolves to more rarely represented ones like rats, skunks and hamsters). In stories that feature human characters (Uncle Matic, Aunt Marjanca and the Bear), these are closely connected with animals and communicate and coexist with them; in this respect the only story that stands out in the entire collection is *Bobek Goes to Bed*, the centre of which is a human – a little boy or a ‘human cub’ surrounded by animal cuddly toys rather than real animals.

As we are used to with poet, writer and storyteller Anja Štefan, the texts from *A Swing for Everyone* are also highly refined, and in the final lines we often find cute turns and/or tiny words of wisdom. We will also find a lot of dialogue in the texts, which makes the stories particularly airy, animated and lively. Also worth noting is the author’s (well-known) sense of rhythm and rhyme – sentences or even entire paragraphs are often particularly well chosen, for example in the story *Pearls*. Combining the qualities of poetry with prose leads to an excellent result.

The words of wisdom – some are given directly, others need to be deduced from the story – are, even in the cases where they are more obvious, included in the text in an entirely organic, unobtrusive and non-moralizing way, in the best possible manner. ‘If we can’t go out into the world, then we can call the world to come to us,’ says Uncle Matic as he keeps company to his old dog and they pass the time with songs about faraway places, those they had visited and those they had not yet seen. ‘Words have power. Now I know it’s true. With words you can destroy and you can build. You gain, you lose, you change and choose. Watch what you say and write. And now, good night,’ the squirrel explains to its brother after wishing out loud for some hazelnuts and getting showered in them a moment later. Through the story *Cake* we find out that we can make a celebration out of anything, through *Rabbit and Little Rabbit*, we realise that we need to always make sure to find something we like about ourselves, the story *Bicycle* reminds us that we need to take up opportunities (for socialising) when they appear, and so on. Of course, the wisdoms offered are well-known and verified, but we all too often tend to forget them and youngsters have perhaps never encountered them before. **Anja Štefan in her stories addresses various themes, from those that children find amusing (for example the skunk family farting), to those that might disturb them or get them to ask themselves further questions (for example death in the story *Before Sleep*), in between, of course, there is no shortage of play and all kinds of exploration.**

The colourful illustrations by Marjanca Jemec Božič closely follow the texts and complement them well, only in the story *Man, stay cool*, do they diverge slightly – we read in the story that the little bear throws the figures into the box and runs out into the garden whereas the illustration shows how the bear (when Father Bear is winning the game) throws the dice and the figures on the floor and as she storms out into the garden also overturns a stool; in this case the illustration of its own accord builds

on the bear's bad mood. In any case, sympathetically depicted characters that speak not only through the text but also the illustrations, add to the book's impression of kindness, warmth, grace, wit and wisdom.

A Swing for Everyone even with its title (and appropriate front cover depicting the friendly company) entices young readers, something that the relatively large print run (for Slovenia) of 2000 copies, also counts on. And rightly so, for anyone who will climb onto Anja Štefan's and Marjanca Jemec Božič's swing will be making a good move – in good company they both, one with words and the other with images, swing high.



**Lara Paukovič: A Winning Combination,
Mladina 39, 28.9.2018**

I first encountered Anja Štefan's work as a child when, for one of my earliest birthdays, I was given a copy of her collection *Over the Hill Into the Woods* (*Čez griček v gozdiček*) published in 1995 – at a time she was only starting out as a storyteller. The innovative book in the form of rebus stories (text combined with tiny pictures by Jelka Reichman), offers thirteen short stories featuring personified animals. It became a bestseller, was reprinted twice, and new generations of children still read it today. **In the over twenty years since, Anja Štefan has grown into one of the most important names in children's and youth literature**, and is also one of the few authors actively looking into folk narrative tradition. Her latest project, a picture book of poems for children *Tunes from Mousdale Dunes* (*Drobtine iz mišje doline*) which has just received the Večernica Award, is another story of success, co-created with two equally distinguished artists, illustrator Alenka Sottler and designer Sanja Janša. It was actually Alenka who came up with the idea of mice, she had been developing the motif of mice as an independent illustration during a period when she did not have enough projects. Even as one of our most established illustrators and recipient of numerous international awards, she still has to face

the difficulties of temporary nature of an illustrator's work, not having a constant flow of projects, months when it is not easy to get a commission. 'I drew the mice as an independent project, something I could offer to galleries and get an income from, so I didn't have to worry about surviving during periods when I didn't have enough work,' she explains. The drawings of mice proliferated and Alenka had the idea that Anja Štefan, whom she had previously collaborated with only one, might be someone who could interpret the images.

When the collaboration was agreed, at the request of the editors who wished the mouse motif to be slightly modified, Alenka began to think about a different drawing technique. 'I tried to imagine what would attract children and decided on fingerprint painting, which I like because of the philosophy close to my heart that things should be kept simple, creativity stems from simplicity. Besides this, fingerprints are something children are close to. The first thing parents tell children off for is leaving their fingerprints everywhere!' Moreover, the illustrations created out of fingerprints also capture the contradiction that creates a poetic duality. 'Duality is essential to poetry,' Alenka is convinced. 'So you don't say everything directly, for example, this is an animal and this is an apple. What you say is, 'this looks like an apple' or 'this looks like a mouse.'

While creating the picture book, Alenka and Anja adapted to each other – some of the poems did not make it into the collection because, according to Alenka, the illustrations were too simple for them and at the same time a few illustrations stayed without a poem, but both were satisfied with the final product. As was the jury for the Večernica Award, which normally does not take illustrations into consideration



when making up their decision about the Award, but this time exceptionally also stressed the importance of the illustrations. **In their award justification the jury noted that the heroes of the poems are ‘tiny but truly great in their creativity,’ and are beside the beauties of the world also aware of the less pleasant realities of our times, so the collection is especially pertinent and current.** And indeed, the verses of the poem *This mouse, plump and peacock-proud* ‘all’s for her and no-one else: she’ll come to a sticky end,’ can also be seen as a criticism of capitalist greed, the poem, *Gather Pluck and Follow Me*, reflects the unfair state of the world but still offers a hope in a better tomorrow. This way poems are not only interesting to children but also their parents. ‘This has been recently almost a norm with me. Even in *A Swing for Everyone* the stories vary a lot, some are for very small children, playful and repetitive, others I wanted to also address adults. The same is true for *Tunes in Mousedale Dunes*,’ Anja Štefan explains, pointing out that really young children are not yet critical to the contents of what they read, so it is up to the adult to think about what they are offering children. ‘Of course it is also up to us, the creators, to put in the effort to create high quality contents, and up to those who bring these contents to the public.’ On her feeling for writing quality content for children, Anja comments the following, ‘I think I’m lucky in a number of ways. One is that I like simplicity of expression anyway, but at the same time I want words to say something and have meaning. The second is that I get to spend time among children a lot and know first-hand what they like and what they react to. The third is that I have for a long time been interested in the narrative and poetic traditions. And although I come across many things there that are not quite as polished, I still find examples of high quality traditions. Out of all of this, my own personal poetics have gradually emerged.’

Picture books remain a comfort in a frantic and technologically advanced world – time in them stops, but also the time devoted to picture books is time parents make for their children outside all their obligations, and the children at these moments give them all their attention. **And if they are created as carefully as *Tunes from Mousedale Dunes*, reading them is a truly special experience.**



**Gaja Kos: Lots of scurrying paws and some solid roots.
Review in newspaper *Delo*, 9.8.2022**

We are used to Anja Štefan working with a number of the best Slovene illustrators, so it was merely a matter of time before she also joined forces with Ana Zavadlav; the high print run clearly indicates that the publisher thinks this will be a winning combination and I don't doubt this myself. **Two of our top children's book creators have met in an animal fable about a bear, a hat and the wind.** Hats don't only find their way onto heads of gentlemen or, in the summer when the sun is high onto the heads of tourists, but clearly also into picture books where we can find hats that are lost, stolen, blown away, multifunctional and many other kinds of hats (for example, Jon Klassen: *This Is Not My Hat* and *I Want My Hat Back*, Peter Svetina and Peter Škerl: *Mr Konstantin's Hat* and others). Anyone who has ever worn a hat knows that the wind likes to blow the hat off the head, with the great exception in the picture book *Mr Konstantin's Hat* where the wind blows a forgotten hat onto a head and does so just at the right moment.

Anja's bear unfortunately has to deal with a 'classic' mischievous, even cheeky wind, which does not bode well if we consider just how happy the bear was while he had his new red hat on his head. Now things are quite different. Only a short while ago the bear looked forward to all meetings where he could wear his new acquisition, joyfully greeting

with a gentle rise of his hat anyone he met, living creatures and inanimate objects, even his own reflection in the lake. But after the wind snatches his hat, a good day turns sour. Initially the bear believes he will be able to catch it, big and strong as he is! But the longer the chase lasts, the more discouraged he becomes, feeling helpless despite his beary strength. How do you stand up a trickster as skilful the wind? You can't grab it, it doesn't pay any attention to orders and requests... **The bear in the forest is of course not alone and soon enough, one after another, other animals join the chase; as we are used to from other stories by Anja Štefan, she gradually adds characters with certain parts of the text repeating, almost like a refrain. This time, as almost always, her text is very melodic**, 'They ran, they begged, they grumbled – do you think that did any good? No, as if it ever would.' What eventually tricks the wind into returning the hat? Actually its own recklessness, helped a little by the oak tree. After the animals

climb and retrieve the hat from the top of the tree, the tiny mouse comments that it was not they who caught it but the oak tree. Funny, isn't it, that a whole bunch of animals run as fast as their paws will take them, and in the end the one who catches it is the one who can just stand in one place, the wolf muses. Ha, but stands in the right place!, comments the fox. Both observations are true, and after all, don't so easily dismiss the scurrying paws either.

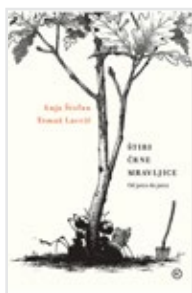
Basically – we can look at every situation from various angles (so we need to be careful in assigning both blame and credit and need to look at each situation with our minds



and eyes wide open), and the key message of the picture book is that true strength lies in unity. Sometimes being big and strong is not enough and it can be very useful to have friends around you, even if they are very small. More heads know more, more paws climb higher, and so on. Or, to put it the way musketeers might put it – all for one and one for all!

The book *Bear and the Hat* is, like its setting, wrapped in forest colours (browns, greens, oranges), and Ana Zavadlav adds other small forest inhabitants to the man set of characters, for example, birds, beetles, a squirrel, a ladybird etc. The reader can tell who the key characters are from the front cover and all of them are depicted in amusing ways also on the endpaper in the form of a kind of tree graffiti (or carved into the bark). There are lots of things going on in the illustrations, especially where the animals are depicted running, lively. The wind, as an important character in the story, is depicted merely by gentle, barely visible curves, which serves only to accentuate its enigmatic ‘character.’ The illustrations, radiating warmth with their colours, are also important in another aspect – the reader will notice that all four animals who come to help the bear each wear an item of clothing (the fox wears boots, the wolf a pair of trousers and boots, the rabbit a top, the tiny mouse a pair of tiny boots or socks), which leads us to the idea that the hat is truly important to the bear. After all, it is not just about a hat, but also about equality, pride and joy.

Reading warm, soft, melodic and positive stories by Anja Štefan, you get the same joy that the bear experienced with its new hat. In this case, the message about the importance of cooperation in today’s often soloist and egotistic times is even more important and valuable for the coming generations tailoring of our common future.



Lara Paukovič: To the Ants for Some Advice.

***Mladina* 41, 14.10.2022**

***Four Tiny Black Ants: From Morn 'Til Morn* is a collection of short ant adventures (each takes up one page at the most) for young readers and adults, teaching us many things about life, mutual affection, understanding, the world, and also about very everyday skills such as waking up early or cooking beans.** Anja Štefan began writing them over seventeen years ago, initially mostly for herself. *'At the time I felt very drained, I barely managed to pull along the huge cart that everyday life imposed on me. Most of all, I was not entirely certain that I would survive as a creative writer. From time to time we arranged meeting up with three friends and it did a world of good, filling me with joy, life, and enthusiasm for the future,'* Anja recalls. It was from these meetings of four friends that the ants sprung. Initially the stories reflected fragments of true events – for example, the story about bread was written after we baked bread together. Later the ants took on a life of their own, they became a special way of observing the world, being inquisitive, curious and questioning. *'They think about all sorts of things, sometimes in silly ways, sometimes with snippets of wisdom,'* Anja Štefan smiles.

In 2007 she first decided to publish a few of their adventures. Seven of them were included in the book *Four Tiny Black Ants* with illustrations by Zvonko Čoh, later also adapted into a puppet play directed by Martina Maurič Lazar. But there were a number of stories left on the author's computer. *'The editor and I were not sure what to do with them – we felt they were too complicated for children and were not thinking about a book for adults because there were not enough of them.'* So she continued to add to them. Over the years she collected over three hundred and they also diversified thematically. Anja Štefan and her

editor at Mladinska Knjiga Irena Matko Lukan thus created a new selection, aimed at children and adults, adding all seven stories from the first book because they complement the whole well and the first edition was long out of print.

The illustrator of the first edition Zvonko Čoh was busy with other projects, so editors Irena Matko Lukan and Tanja Komadina suggested Tomaž Lavrič. Even though he is better known as a comic artists and caricaturist, he handled the cute and humorous illustrations of tiny ants in an excellent way, creating a book that young and old will love to browse through, giving it his own original tone. He was happy in this role and explains that *'in satirical strips I can be meaner, illustrations are done quicker.'* Anja Štefan is enthusiastic about his work, *'His illustrations are super – you look at them and think to yourself, this person really has it, his hand sings. The ants are mischievous, animated, dynamic, and at the same time the entire drawing is masterful, from tangerine peels to cypress branches.'* And the illustrator jokes that it was precisely this point that was his greatest challenge in this book, how to, with merely a black felt-tip pen, draw tangerines that will have the right tangerine texture – and look orange. And what did he get from the ants? *'I learned that tiny black ants are gentle and kind animals, it is probably only the red ones that bite.'*

One of the stories also addresses the mission of writing. *'Write every day for all us tiny burnt-out ants. We need your stories, we need your songs,'* one of the tiny ants tells the other. Perhaps the writer wanted to also encourage herself and remind herself why writing, passing on information to others, is still so important even in these days. *'This story was written during the coronavirus pandemic,'* Anja Štefan explains. *'With all the news about people falling ill and dying, I began to wonder what I was doing. Would it not be more useful if I were a doctor or a nurse.'*

For seven months we stayed at home, no performances, and for me contact with those I write for is very important. I don't know how to replace it with modern technology.' Fortunately, now the tiny ants can socialise freely with their readers – let us hope things stay this way. 'I hear they are good for many people, perhaps especially because they know how to support each other,' Anja Štefan concludes. 'And because, when necessary, they know how to stop this hectic world.'

