

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

DAVORIN LENKO
BODIES IN THE DARK

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Davorin Lenko: Bodies in the Dark

About the author

Davorin Lenko was born on 8 February 1984. He studied comparative literature that introduced him to the magic (and the snares) of postmodern poetics and diverse metafictional techniques. He obtained his bachelor's degree in 2012 with his thesis *Intertextuality and Metafiction in Stephen King's Dark Tower Book Series*. For a number of years, he worked as a music critic for different media, writing on metal and rock. He publishes his short fiction – and occasionally poetry – in various Slovenian literary magazines. In 2012, his story *Zver in brezno* (The Beast and the Abyss) won him first prize in a bilingual competition in Bleiburg, Austria, and his story *Samoumevnosti* (Self-evidences) was nominated for the Best Short Story Award at the 17th Slovenian Book Days that same year. His texts generally deal with gender politics, crossing the boundaries between “the linguistic” and “the pornographic” and the integration of metafictional techniques into the narrative.

In October 2013, the Center for Slovenian Literature (the Aleph book series) published his novel *Telesa v temi* (Bodies in the Dark), which was nominated for the Best First Book Award at the Slovenian Book Fair. In June 2014, the novel received the Kresnik award, which is granted by the publishing house Delo for best novel of the previous year. In November 2014, Lenko also won the Kritiško sito award, granted by Society of the Slovenian Literary Critics.

About the book

He is a writer. He is most likely the person behind the answers attributed to “O” in the quoted passages from the interview. His friend Andrej refers to him by his fictitious name “Hank”. Neither he himself, nor his students, nor his psychotherapist, nor “his” women – Mandy, Sara and her daughter Tea, Anita (like the character from one of Wallace’s stories), Anette (the author’s bizarre invention) etc. – call him by “his” name. Not even the signifier of the personal name settles on a definitive signified. And so “he” unfolds like a sequence of fragments in editing: his discursive “identity” is constantly on hold. It is generated by analogy with references to contemporary music, film and literature, quotes from autopoetic reflection, quotes from others and quotes from his own stories. He is – “feedback”. Who is he then? And does he even exist? He is what he speaks: a metafictional character blurring the line between “fiction” and “reality”. He is an author in a time when Barthes declared “the death of the author,” which Foucault then replaced with a set of discourse “author-functions”. The cited interview with “the author” also meets traditional readers’ expectations in that the author “O” distances himself from them. There is only one phenomenon that truly angers him: his readers keep associating his erotic writing with the biographical fact: the loss of his libido after his testicular cancer operation. – O! If the author is unable to live what he writes about, how can the reader continue to believe in this omnipotence of meaning, that he is saying something – true? In a post-modern fashion, the composition of *Bodies in the Dark* dismantles the illusion of truth in literature. (...)

Vanessa Matajč; an excerpt from the foreword

I wanted to sniff cocaine; quantum mechanics, anal sex. I wanted to immerse myself in the occult, establish telepathic communication with the dead. I wanted to take LSD, magic mushrooms, fuck magic women; take part in a Wiccan Sabbath, feel God, feel the cool of old churches in summertime, see the small ancient villages in the south of France, write something that would transcend Slovenian mentality, become a mentor, have sex with teenage girls, get a tattoo ...

Then sometimes I become aware of the linguistic undertone of all my internal monologues and I check myself.

Why do I talk about myself in the past tense?

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Yes, of course I could do something to make my life easier. I could broaden my sexual horizons to include all intimate contacts with human beings that I have left after my castration: smell, taste, touch, oral sex ... Countless people have advised me to do so but, for some reason, I am unable to.

I am alone in my apartment, only the deep voice of Leonard Cohen keeping me company. I sit there drinking red wine, lighting candles in my mind. One for Sara and one for Andrej. One for Edita and one for Tea. One for Anita. I was never a great romantic, but I did like my sex. I liked the feel of it. And another thing. I fondly cherish my memories of those moments right before the sexual union. In one of his texts, Cohen talked about the orgasm as an indication of having met someone: "When I see a woman's face transformed by the orgasm we have reached together, then I know we've met. Anything else is fiction," he wrote. But I am not that kind of person. Metafiction and metaphysical nihilism have left their mark on me and I have never perceived orgasm, neither mine nor my partner's, as a confirmation of reality. Everything is as fictitious as anything else, including orgasm. And that is why I have always been more interested in the process of narration. The story. The clumsy foreplay. The fumbling in the dark. The discontinuity of desire. I value this quote of Cohen's and revisit it in my mind almost every day, but in essence, I cannot agree with it though I actually – and ultimately – would like to make my sex life easier and embrace it like my adopted child.

But I cannot escape myself. My time is ticking and experience shows that I find it increasingly difficult to commit myself to – this or that – body lying next to me. I close my eyes and, quite spontaneously, a fragile chain of events unravels before me again that, some day, somewhere, somehow had led to a sexual union; even though it was ages ago and all of the actors are now long gone.

So: not the orgasm nor the face nor the scream nor the spasm, but the narrative. The narrative of the state of bodies and minds before sex is the only thing standing against the clichéd, conventional logic of orgasm.

Sure, I can satisfy my partner in a number of ways, but all that is left for me in such a union is the cold logic of her orgasm. Therefore, I cannot really blame myself for not giving it a go more

often; for preferring to go to sleep at night instead of finding myself a pair of lips, breasts, armpits, some genitals. There is no libido and no mystery of gradual coupling. My love is sad, but also quite egocentric. That's how I've been ever since I was a child; I can't really change. Cancer has only shown me something that should probably have been obvious to me for a long, long time. My whole life ... But it wasn't and there is no way back now. And, yet, in spite of all my pain and suffering, I still love myself. But I miss sex ... And of course those fragile moments before it.

"There is a crack in everything," says Cohen. And he's right. That's how the light gets in.

/.../

And then I'm drunk, somewhere in the open air. It is a beautiful, warm summer night. I think I can smell the sea. I look around and there is Sara, her name is biblical and I realise I don't know whether she's Jewish or not, but that doesn't matter because it doesn't matter to me. The wind is ruffling her hair. I have no idea when we are. I tell her that Barthes wrote about text as a form of pleasure and she says: "I know," letting out a laugh. "It's right here with us." Right here. Right there. Now. Then. I listen to Cohen, the room is full of warm doom and this is a text – a pleasure – that will never really be written.