

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2018



Peter Svetina

Author nomination
Slovenian section of IBBY



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1 Biographical information on the candidate

Peter Svetina was born in 1970 in Ljubljana. In 1995 he graduated in Slovenian Studies and defended his PhD thesis on Old Slovenian Poetry in 2001 (both at the Faculty for Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia). He is an Associate Professor for Slavic Literature at the Institute for Slavic languages, Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt, Austria. He writes for children, young adults and adults, but his work often crosses the borders between different target audiences and can be read as crossover literature. His literary debut was a picture book *The Walrus that 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, Korean, Polish and Lithuanian. Svetina's works often play with occurrences and images from his everyday life. They reflect not only his home town of Ljubljana and the destinations of his travels, but also his scholarly interests – Svetina's scientific research is focused on old Slovenian poetry, children's and youth literature (especially its socially and politically directed transformation after World War II) and detective novels. He translates poetry and children's literature from English, German, Croatian and Czech and works as an editor for poetry collections and literature textbooks for primary school. His books have received some of the most prestigious national and international awards and are immensely popular among literary critics as well as young readers.

2 A high-resolution portrait photograph of the candidate



Photo: Tatjana Splichal

2 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 that 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 diverse 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, however, 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 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 pralnega 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 *Homework* (*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 Stairway (Molitvice s stopnic, 2016)*, a poetry book based on an infrequently encountered subject, a child's reflections on God. The book also deals with gratitude, fear, aging and intergenerational dialogue. As such, the collection could easily have fallen to preachiness or idealization, however, Svetina avoids both pitfalls; his reflections also remain sufficiently concrete so as to give young readers a chance to engage in dialogue with the frequently ambiguous poetry that is both playful and serious at the same time.

Svetina's storytelling is similar to his poetry, combining a realistic environment with elements of nonsense and lyricism, comedy with folklore (fairy tale subjects) and linguistic experimentation with a non-intrusive moral evaluation of the character's actions. The Slovene-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 for a number of other Svetina's 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, 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 by *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 robs words of their meaning but also imbues 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 hyperbolas – 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 non-forcing manner that it is important to give others a visit from time to time, to be someone’s lighthouse, to dare to be fearsome like Genadij the Cricket, and most importantly, to ask important questions: *How to train a shadow? How to paint the wind? What is it like to be inside music like an ant inside a clarinet?*

Svetina has received many awards for his works (including twice the main Slovenian award for children's literature) 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 becoming a candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.**

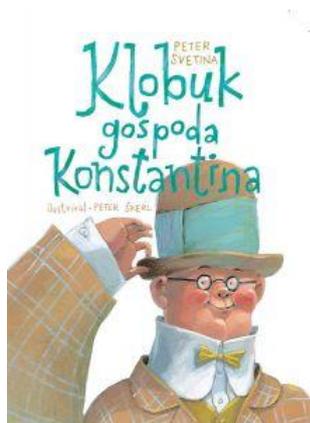
4 List of awards and other distinctions

2004: Mroček dobi očala/The Little Walrus Gets Glasses: Nomination for the Večernica Award

2007: Klobuk gospoda Konstantina/Mr. Constantine's Hat: Best Designed Book Award, Slovenian Book Fair

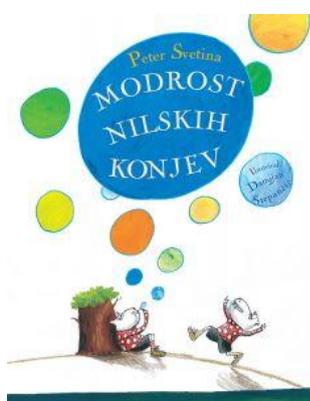
2008: Antonov Cirkus/Anton's Circus: Most Beautiful Slovene Book in the Literature and Books for Children & Youth category

2008: Klobuk gospoda Konstantina/Mr. Constantine's Hat: 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 end.*

2011: Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus' Wisdom: 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 over the world. These inimitable

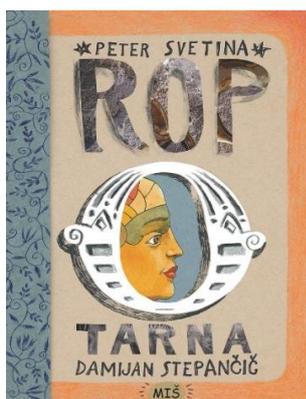
characters showcase common and uncommon human traits that come together either in thoughtful reflection or a funny twist at the end of each story.

The author's dense vocabulary and the illustrator's expressive and characteristic drawings colour 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 adults' literature in 2010 mostly excel in the illustration aspect, editor Breda Rajar at DZS has here managed to publish a book whose wisdom and kindness put it among the finest children's prose in Slovene and promises to keep it there indefinitely.

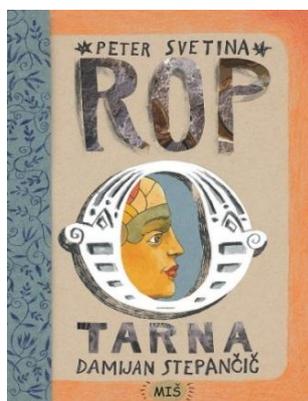
2011: Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus Wisdom: Nomination for the Večernica Award

2013: Ropotarna/The Lumber Room: 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. 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 Lumber Room leads to creative reading full of elusive twists and turns.*

2013: Ropotarna/The Lumber Room: Golden Pear Award for Best Original Slovenian Children's Book of Fiction



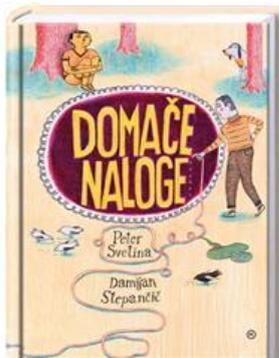
Statement of the jury: *The title of the unusual collection of texts in varying literary and visual forms, The Lumber Room, indicates that this is not just any old "repository of obsolete, useless things", but rather, in the context of individual stories, for a place, a temple of things without any labels 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 porthole formed by the "O" 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.

2015: Domače naloge/Homework: 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 relationships between people, 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.*

2016: Kako zorijo Ježevci/The Ripening of Porcupines: Večernica Award



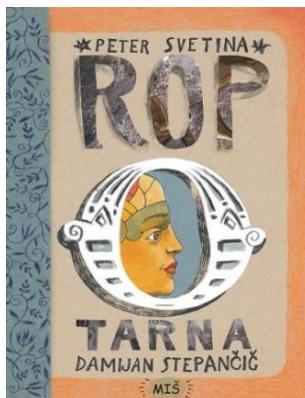
Statement of the jury: *The Ripening of Porcupines (Miš, 2015) by Peter Svetina is an excellent collection of nonsense animal stories dominated by witty linguistic and representative notions and playful twists and turns. What is unusual about such poetics, however, is that in Svetina's case laughter 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 makes words senseless and imbues 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 hyperbolas, 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 non-forcing 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 and 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.

2016: Ropotarna/The Lumber Room: IBBY Honor list



Statement of the jury: *This is a special book. The title, The Lumber Room, says that it is a store for "old, useless things"; the view of the lumber room is also indicative: a window, a large line in the letter »o« on the cover, through which passers-by can see the interior of the book: the interior of a head in which thought lives! In a single volume, the author has combined long and short tales, tales about people and tales about objects, poems and diminutive texts playing with language, some of them bordering on nonsense. Various literary genres and forms follow each other in an intentionally untamed order and rhythm, entirely breaking the expected horizon; each (next) page is a complete surprise. After the suspenseful events of a longer story, the reader is given a breather with a poem, a moment later is laughing at the author's trademark humour or simply marvelling 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 junk room offers the reader's fancy. The book received the Golden Pear Award 2013 for the best Slovene book for young people and the Večernica Award.*

2016: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award: Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr. Felix Took Part in a Bicycle Race

2016: Nomination for the Kristina Brenkova Award: Sredi sreče in v četrtek zjutraj/On Wednesday at Noon and on Thursday Morning

5 Complete bibliography

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Ana Razpotnik Donati: *Kako je gospod Feliks tekmoval s kolesom/How Mr Felix took part in a bicycle race*, Miš, Dob pri Domžalah, 2016.

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

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

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

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Osojnih: *Mrožek, mrožek/Walrus, walrus*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2013.

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Čudežni prstan/Magic Ring*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2011.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus wisdom*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010.

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Marjan Manček: *Ringaraja*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2009.

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

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

Peter Svetina: *Škržati umolknejo ob polnoči/Cicadas go Silent at Midnight*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2005.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Pesmi iz pralnega stroja/Poems from the Washing Machine*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2006.

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Skrivnost mlečne čokolade in druge detektivske zgodbe/ The Mystery of Milk Chocolate and Other Detective Stories*, Educy, Ljubljana, 2002.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Marjan Manček: *Mimosvet/Otherworld*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2001.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Svjetlan Junaković: *Goske, psički in oslički/Little Geese, Dogs and Donkeys*, Educy, Ljubljana, 2002.

Peters Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Usodne platnice/Fateful Covers*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 2001.

Peter Svetina: *Vidov angel/Vid's Angel*, Pozoj, Velenje, 2000.

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Mojca Cerjak: *Lila mesto/Lila 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.

6 List of translated editions

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 cirкас (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.

7 Five of the most important titles by the candidate

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

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus wisdom*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010.

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

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

8 List of the books sent to the jurors

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

Peter Svetina, Illustrations Damijan Stepančič: *Modrost nilskih konjev/Hippopotamus wisdom*, DZS, Ljubljana, 2010.

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

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

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.

9 One or two appreciative essays, interviews or articles

Svetina, Peter, Forstnerič-Hajnšek, Melita. ""Praznil sem predale, potem pa žrebal"." [Otrok in knjiga](#) volume 40. issue 87 (2013) pp. 42–45.

“I TURNED OUT DRAWERS AND PICKED OUT RANDOM BITS AND PIECES”

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 mash 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, editor at Miš, 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 metrum, 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 actually 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 weirdoes 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 brain muscle 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 in 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 weirdoes.

As you contemplate your oeuvre, where does *The Lumber Room* seem to 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 on 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 had also written 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 Slovene 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 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 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 *Exercices 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, 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 not or in three years; and if they don't get published, that's okay as well. As I'd said, it's a luxury.

Svetina, Peter, Rokavec, Živa: “ “Na Slovenskem je v ospredju problemska literatura, manj je žanrske”.” Dnevnik, 7. 8. 2013 (2013).

“IN SLOVENIA, THE FOCUS IS ON PROBLEM LITERATURE, NOT ON GENRES”

A talk with Peter Svetina about his literary work and the developments in young adult literature that he follows not only as author but also as a literary scientist, and about how he almost became a doctor and why he changed his mind.

Before Peter Svetina, author and lecturer of Slovenian Language at the Klagenfurt University decided to study at the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts, where he graduated in Slovenian Language and obtained a master's and later doctor's degree in old Slovenian poetry, he was a student of the Faculty of Medicine. However, as he was much better at learning the lines of the *Baptism at Savica* than he was at studying human anatomy, he returned to the path that he had planned as early as in third year of high school.

“It seems I was more interested in literature after all,” says Svetina, author of numerous books for children and young adults, among which *Hippopotamus Wisdom* boasts a Golden Pear Award for Most Original Slovenian Children's Fiction Book in 2011. Svetina, who draws inspiration from minor and major everyday events, says that he gets most of his creative work done while travelling and that he constantly has to balance his teaching work and writing. “There are times when I have to devote myself to my lectures and articles, and times where I don't have to be as focused.”

Where do you get your inspiration for writing?

It all usually happens in passing. I'm sitting in front of the school, waiting for Klara to return from piano lessons, and watching a nimble kid doing cartwheels and forward rolls on the grass by the pond. He's obviously waiting for one of his parents and it's obvious that this is the sport he's practicing, so why waste time. And so, sitting and watching becomes a “Homework on One's Own Self”. Just an example. There are tons of other such details. My eyes and ears are not always tuned in such a way as to notice them. But if I do, there goes another homework.

When did you decide that literary waters would probably suit you better than medical ones?

When my brother told me not to ruin my health because of my studies. My brother is a psychologist, and I tend to do what he says. I studied (for example, anatomy) and studied three times more than my colleagues, and I still flunked the first time on all my exams. And I said to myself: there's something wrong either with my memory or with my motivation. I took the *Baptism at Savica*, read it and knew the “Introduction” by heart after 20 minutes. And so I saw there was nothing wrong with my memory; it had been motivation all along. So I transferred to Slovenian Language, which I'd been

telling everyone I'd study all the way back in third year of high school. It seems I was more interested in literature after all.

[Did your time as a medical student influence your current writing?](#)

The influence of my studies was that I included a medical student in my short novel *Cicadas Go Silent at Midnight*. And that I knew how to consult an internal medicine textbook for the symptoms of his illness. However, an anaesthetist colleague later told me that she hasn't heard of any cases where the illness had taken the course I'd given it in my book. But she also said that there are many things she's never heard of.

[How do you coordinate your professional life of lecturer in Klagenfurt with the writing of children's literature? Is it difficult?](#)

I sometimes coordinate my job as lecturer at the Klagenfurt University and my writing literally on the go. Here I am, driving from Ljubljana to Klagenfurt and back from Klagenfurt to Ljubljana ... and thinking about things on my way back and forth. I sometimes make multiple stops in order to jot something down in a notebook that I usually carry with me. Other than that, it's usually like this: there are times that I have to dedicate myself to my lectures and articles, and times when I don't have to be as focused. The latter time is when I sometimes get a relaxed afternoon, a calm evening, and the ideas, both those in my head and those in my notebook, come together in a story or poem.

[You are also the author of academic articles on old children's literature. How has Slovenian children's literature developed? What are the principal changes that it had gone through?](#)

I'm currently preparing to write an article about the settings of Slovenian children's literature in the past hundred years. I've selected texts that more or less obviously feature Ljubljana. And one can see that in mid-1960s unambiguous setting markers, such as street names, start to disappear. And that immediately after World War II, the school became one of the main settings of Slovene children's fiction. Go figure. I have until the end of the month to do so.

[Is there enough literature in Slovene available to children and young adults nowadays?](#)

I believe children have to read good books, as well as bad ones, so as to hone their taste. There's plenty of both. However, the good ones are usually not as loud, and they tend to be harder to find.

Are the trends in children's and young adult literature in Slovenia different from those abroad, e.g. in Austria?

What I'd noticed but never actually verified in depth is that in Slovenia, the focus is on so-called problem literature, not on genres (history novels, adventure, etc.). I find the latter much more common in the German-speaking world. Children's poetry is uncommon both here and there, though I have a feeling that there's a bit more of it in Slovenia.

Do you think children still like to read?

We have two children right here at home. One reads when reading is required of them. The other reads on their own account, all the time, so it's sometimes necessary to require the opposite. I think they're a good reflection of the situation in general.

Can young readers anticipate any new books with your name under them?

Homework is waiting at Mladinska knjiga, and there are some other odds and ends. I have no idea whether they'll be going to the printer's anytime soon.

10 Published reviews of the books submitted to jury

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

Kos, Gaja. "Peter Svetina: Modrost nilskih konjev." *Sodobnost* (1963) volume 74. issue 4 (2010) pp. 582–583.

A person who has read a book titled Hippopotamus Wisdom could, perhaps rightfully, be expected to provide some wisdom of their own. Thankfully, such a person can always stand up to such expectations by wisely staying silent and letting others speak for them. For example (two hippos, Hubert and Marcel, are discussing 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." At least Tanami's wisdom can't be in doubt ... There are heaps of animal stories, not all of them good and even fewer of them wise. However, the 21 short stories included in the illustrated Hippopotamus Wisdom are definitely both, so it's no wonder that they reminded the present reader of the animal stories of Toon Tellegen. Anybody who has ever read anything by the Dutch master of sweet, humorous, bizarre and poetic animal philosophy miniatures will know why and how, and anybody who hasn't should do so immediately (*Mala nočna torta s plameni* would be a good start). But let us return to Hubert and Marcel, currently sitting in the shade of a sycamore, talking and throwing mudballs into the water.

In Hippopotamus Wisdom by Peter Svetina and Damijan Stepančič, we can expect to meet a variety of unusual animal characters, from hippos, pelicans, grasshoppers, camels, gnus and flies to countless others, though it's true that some are only encountered as extras. And the variety is wonderful! I'm a bit tired of all the countless bears and rabbits, often stuck in virtually identical sappy situations because of which I'm often unable, try as I may, to tell them from one another (there are exceptions, of course), and I don't think I'm the only one. On the other hand, the animals listed above live in a world where there are no people – a world that may appear foreign to us, an unfrenzied world free of hysteria and time pressure, ruled by gentle, peaceful moods in which animals have time to think, wonder, hang out, enjoy themselves and explore various sensations. "It was already evening when Marcel arrived. Hippos are rarely in a rush." Such timelessness (but never boredom) is of course the perfect setting for questions to ripen in curious minds, questions that are often such that they could have been posed by anybody (mostly children, of course) and at any time, which may lead you to think that their answers should likewise be easy and at arm's reach. You couldn't be further from the truth. It is true, however, that given enough time, we would find them, if they didn't find us first. All the stories in Hippopotamus Wisdom celebrate (and foster) that curiosity so inherent to children that often dissipates as we grow older. Adult

readers of the book will enjoy the animals' peculiar logic, their brows becoming ever more furrowed as they find themselves deep in thought, their understanding of the world and their strange behaviours – never laughing at them, as silly or infantile, but with them, because everything is so imaginative, funny, unusual and novel. As well as very foreign. Young readers, on the other hand, will certainly enjoy the book just as much, if not more, but for the opposite reason – because they'll find everything so familiar. The language of the stories is simple, sentences are short, clear and uncluttered – this is also evident at the level of the plot – while dialogues, which are the source of a major part of the dynamism of these stories, are charmingly funny, as we've already come to expect from Svetina. In short, Hippopotamus Wisdom is rife with charm and positive attitude, which are completely untainted by obnoxious sappiness, and of course with the titular wisdom, which, when not explicit, is certainly always found between the lines. And that's what (good) writing is all about – communicating ideas without stating them explicitly, inspiring and making people laugh, with or without hippos.

The visualization of the large African herbivore mammals and their companions was entrusted to Damijan Stepančič, Svetina's most frequent collaborator in the past few years; let us just point out the much-praised Anton's Circus from two years ago. In Stepančič's illustrations, Hubert and Marcel are extremely likeable, and the drawings in general correspond well with the spirit of the stories. It is unfortunate, however, that the protagonists are sometimes located in the centre of the book, i.e. across the binding, resulting in their bodies being folded and deformed, most evidently in *How Wide Is the Summer*, the second story in the book.

The two hippos can thus take their time for deep discussions or just hanging out in good company – and we should perhaps follow their example. It's sad and troubling that authors (of countless animal stories) often withhold such luxury both from themselves and from their characters who consequently become superficial, one-dimensional and clichéd, and become lost among thousands that are just like them. On the other hand, we won't soon forget about Hubert and Marcel.

Katja Stergar: "Modrost nilskih konjev" In: Peter Svetina – Hippopotamus Wisdom, Short stories. Sample translation, Javna agencija za knjigo Republike Slovenije, Slovenian Book Agency, Ljubljana, 2014.

Hubert and Marcel are hippopotamuses who do not take life as a bare fact, but come to know life, taste it, reflect on it a bit, learn about it – or perhaps not – and, last but not least, enjoy it together with their friends. Hubert and Marcel have time to listen to silence and to rhyme rhymes. They do not rush into contact with the human world, and neither do the supporting characters of these 21 short stories – Tanami the Zebra, Claudia the Skunk, Rudolf the Rhinoceros, pelicans, flies, penguins, and many more. Relaxation is one of the virtues of this text, and when I say relaxation, I mean both the relaxed ways of the heroes, who can forget about time altogether or can find time to fling mud balls or think about shelling peas, as well as relaxation at the linguistic level of the text. The sentences, but also individual stories as a whole, are clear and short, without any unnecessary baggage, they are full of dynamism, sometimes lyricism, while sometimes being concise, yet always full of comedy and optimism. Occasionally the author deliberately foregoes adult auto-censoring and spices up the text by depicting characters who are not always perfect role models. This not only allows children to think independently, but encourages them by making them doubt, by giving them a chance to be wise. The short stories in Hippopotamus Wisdom can be read as individual chapters of a short children's novel or as standalone stories that arouse children's curiosity and make us all laugh.

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

Ogrizek, Maša. "Oživiljene stvari in zaljubljeni čudaki Petra Svetine." Delo volume 55. Issue 233 (2013) p. 14

Peter Svetina's Living Things and Weirdos in Love

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

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

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

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

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

Brilliant wordplay

To some extent, Svetina's wordplay is certainly a matter of pure enjoyment, however, these "exercises in style" are usually an echo, a formal doubling of the content. For example, the stumbling speech mentioned above is the result of the fact that it's been a long time since a

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

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

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

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

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

Coincidences fueled by love

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

Another aspect of Svetina’s work that should be noted is the fact that his writing doesn’t try to teach anything, which is a rarity in Slovene children’s literature. The author doesn’t want to teach or educate; instead, he shows that what’s sometimes needed is not a different action, but a different perspective. This is particularly evident in poem *Every Gentleman*, in

which “Every gentleman / Slurps his soup as loud as he can / To draw attention from those / Stuffing themselves with the rest”.

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

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

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

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

Gaja Kos: "Lahko noč, pa eno bolho za pomoč", in: Delo, issue 51, vol 34, Ljubljana 2009.

For the second time in a row, the title of "Most Beautiful Book in Slovene" 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's and Young Adult Books" 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 colours, 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 Book in Slovene". Among 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, however ... 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.