

**Andrej**  
**Blatnik**  
*Writer*



# The Writer

**Andrej Blatnik** (1963, Ljubljana, Slovenia) studied Comparative Literature and Sociology of Culture and got his PhD in Communication Studies. He is an Associate Professor of Publishing Studies at the University of Ljubljana, edits a book series of ›modern classics‹ in one of Slovenian major publishing houses and was the president of the jury for the Vilenica Central European Literary Prize for eight years.

He has published five novels, *Plamenice in solze* (*Torches and Tears*, 1987), *Tao ljubezni* (*Closer to Love*, 1996), *Spremeni me* (*Change Me*, 2008), *Luknje* (*Holes*, 2020) and *Trg osvoboditve* (*Liberation Square*, 2021), six collections of short stories, *Šopki za Adama venijo* (*Bouquets for Adam Fade*, 1983), *Biografije brezimnih* (*Biographies of the Nameless*, 1989), *Menjave kož* (*Skin-swaps*, 1990), *Zakon želje* (*Law of Desire*, 2000), *Saj razumeš?* (*You Do Understand*, 2009) and *Ugrizi* (*Bites*, 2018), five books of cultural studies (one of them, *Paper Labyrinths*, 1994, dedicated to the American metafiction, and the other, *Neon Seals*, 2005, to literature in digital age) and a ›how-to‹ book *Pisanje kratke zgodbe* (*Short Story Writing*, 2010). He translated several books from English, including Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles.

Andrej Blatnik won some major literary awards (the award of the city of Ljubljana,

Zlata ptica, the highest award for young artists, the Slovenian national state award, Prešeren Fund, and the Russian best Slavic book of short fiction ›Jugra‹ award in 2016 among them).

His stories were translated into more than 40 languages and published in literary magazines and various anthologies including *Best European Fiction 2010* (Dalkey Archive Press 2010) and *Short: An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short Short Stories* (Persea Books 2014). He has over 35 books in translation in fourteen languages, including four in English, three in German, Turkish etc.

Andrej Blatnik has read fiction around the globe, on literary festivals such as PEN World Voices in New York City, Toronto International Festival of Authors, Jaipur Literary Festival and Cosmopolis in Barcelona, and was a participant of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA, in 1993. He received various fellowships, including Fulbright. A list of his publications, along with some samples, is available at [www.andrejblatnik.com](http://www.andrejblatnik.com).

# Books by Andrej Blatnik

- 7** **Tao ljubezni**  
(novel, LUD Literatura 1996)
- ▶ in Croatian *Tao ljubavi*, Meandar, Zagreb 1998
  - ▶ in Slovakian *Tao lasky*, F. R. & G., Bratislava 2000  
*translated in English, rights available*

- 8** **Zakon želje (short stories,**  
**Študentska založba 2000)**
- ▶ in German *Das Gesetz der Leere*, Folio, Vienna 2001
  - ▶ in Croatian *Zakon želje*, Meandar, Zagreb 2002
  - ▶ in Czech *Zakon touhy*, Periplum, Olomouc 2004
  - ▶ in French *La loi du desir*, AlterEdit, Paris 2005
  - ▶ in Macedonian *Zakonot na želbata*, Magor, Skopje 2005
  - ▶ in Turkish *Arzu yasasi*, Pupa Yayinlari, Istanbul 2009
  - ▶ in Spanish *La ley del deseo*, Baile del Sol, Tegueste 2010
  - ▶ in English *Law of Desire*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign / London / Dublin 2014

- 1** **Šopki za Adama venijo**  
(short stories, Mladinska knjiga 1983)

- 4** **Menjave kož (short stories,**  
**Emonica 1990)**
- ▶ in Spanish *Cambios de piel*, Libertarias/Prodhufo, Madrid 1997
  - ▶ in English *Skinswaps*, Northwestern University Press, Chicago 1998
  - ▶ in Croatian *Promjene koža*, Durieux, Zagreb 1998
  - ▶ in Hungarian *Bőr, Jak*, Budapest 2002
  - ▶ in Czech *Promeny kuzí*, Periplum, Olomouc 2002
  - ▶ in German *Der Tag, an dem Tito starb*, Folio, Vienna 2005
  - ▶ in Turkish *Deri Degisimi*, Pupa Yayinlari, Istanbul 2008

- 9** **Neonski pečati**  
(essays, LUD Literatura 2005)

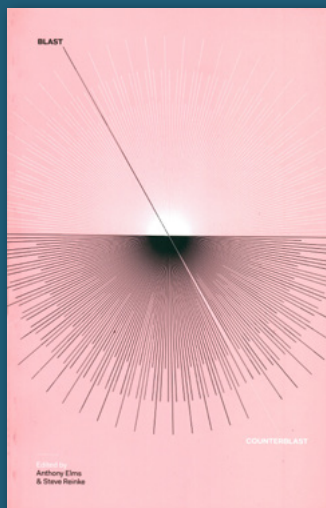
- 12** **Pisanje kratke zgodbe**  
(creative writing manual,  
LUD Literatura 2010)
- ▶ in Croatian *Pisanje kratke priče*, Cekape, Zagreb 2011
  - ▶ in Macedonian *Pišuvanje kratki raskazi*, Ikona, Skopje 2015

- 15** **Nezbrano delo**  
(nonfiction, LUD Literatura 2020)

- 2** **Plamenice in solze**  
(novel, DZS 1987)
- 5** **Labirinti iz papirja**  
(essays on American literature,  
LUD Literatura 1994)
- ▶ in Croatian *Papirnati labirinti*, Hena-Com, Zagreb 2001
- 10** **Spremeni me (novel, Litera 2008)**
- ▶ in German *Ändere mich*, Folio, Vienna 2009
  - ▶ in Croatian *Promijeni me*, Novi Liber, Zagreb 2010
  - ▶ in Italian *Cambiami*, Atmosphere Libri, Rome 2014
  - ▶ in Macedonian *Izmeni me*, Matica makedonska, Skopje 2015
  - ▶ in Serbian *Promeni me*, Geopoetika, Belgrade 2019
  - ▶ in English *Change Me*, Dalkey Archive Press, McLean / Dublin 2019
- 13** **Ugrizi (very short stories, LUD Literatura 2018)**
- ▶ in Serbian *Ugrizi*, Geopoetika, Belgrade 2021
  - ▶ in Macedonian rights sold to Artconnect, Skopje
- 16** **Luknje (novel, Goga 2020)**
- ▶ in Macedonian rights sold to Magor, Skopje
- 3** **Biografije brezimenih**  
(short stories, Aleph 1989)
- 6** **Gledanje čez ramo**  
(cultural criticism, Aleph 1996)
- 11** **Saj razumeš? (very short stories, LUD Literatura 2009)**
- ▶ in English *You Do Understand*, Dalkey Archive, 2010
  - ▶ in Croatian *Razumiješ, ne?*, Cekape, Zagreb 2012
  - ▶ in Macedonian *Razbiraš, neli?*, Euro-Balkan, Skopje 2013
  - ▶ in Russian *Ты ведь понимаешь?*, Rudomino/Lingvistika, Moscow 2015
  - ▶ in Italian *Capisci, vero?*, Atmosphere Libri, Rome 2015
  - ▶ in Turkish *Anlıyorsun değil mi?*, Dedalus Kitap, Istanbul 2016
  - ▶ in Serbian *Kapiraš?*, Geopoetika, Belgrade 2017
  - ▶ in Odia *Tume bi jana*, Dhauli Books, Bhubaneswar 2019  
*translated in Czech, rights available*  
*translated in Polish, rights available*
- 14** **Izdati in obstati (studies on publishing, LUD Literatura 2018)**
- 17** **Trg osvoboditve (novel, Goga 2021)**

# Some Anthologies

- ▶ *Best European Fiction 2010*. Edited by Aleksandar Hemon. Dalkey Archive Press 2010. Thirteen short stories included.
- ▶ *Blast Counterblast*. Edited by Anthony Elms and Steve Reinke. Mercer Union 2011.
- ▶ *Short. An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms*. Edited by Alan Ziegler. Persea Books 2014.



# Menjave kož

## Skinswaps



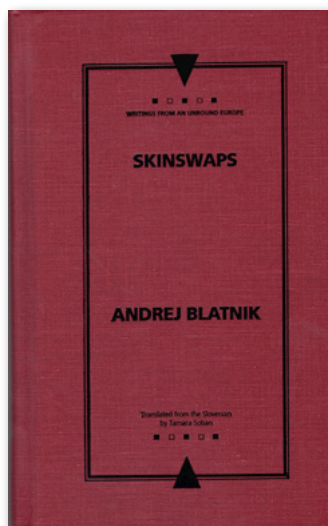
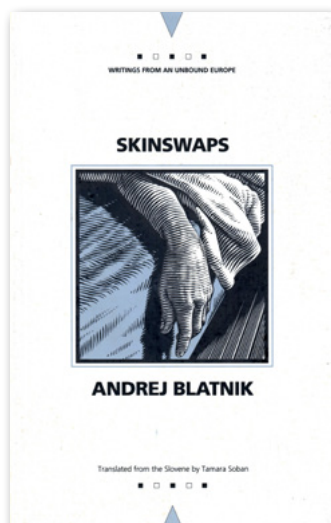
*Short stories.*

*Menjave kož.*

Emonica, Ljubljana 1990

*Skinswaps.*

Translated by Tamara Soban,  
Northwestern University Press,  
Chicago 1998



»This debut collection  
/.../ shows that after the  
opening of the former  
Eastern bloc, modern  
alienation travels faster  
than social and political  
change.«

*The New York Times*,  
February 28, 1999

»Blatnik's craftsmanship  
and modern flair direct our  
attention repeatedly to what  
is small, strange and essential  
in the world around us.«

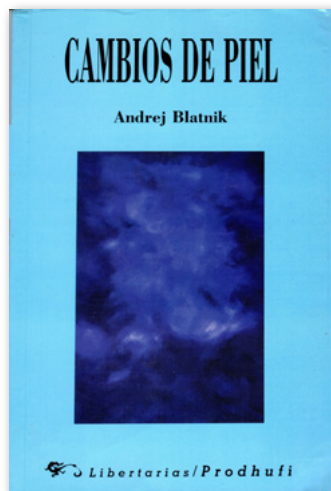
*Publishers Weekly*, October 12, 1998

»This collection is slender enough  
to be read in a single sitting,  
and good enough to be read  
several times. Let's hope that  
Blatnik's work finds an American  
audience large enough to keep the  
translations coming.«

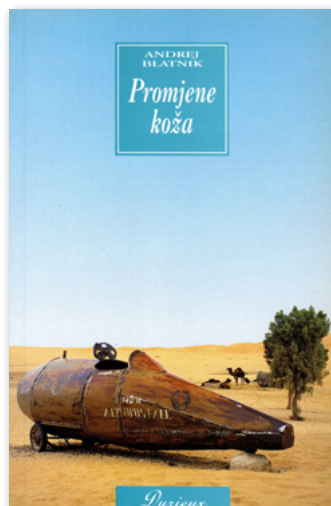
*San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 8, 1998

»Superlative short fiction  
from an exciting new writer.«

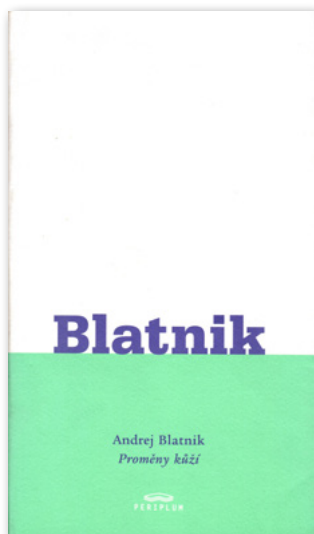
*Kirkus Review*, November 15, 1998



- in Spanish *Cambios de piel*, Libertarias/Prodhufi, Madrid 1997 translated by Marjeta Drobnič and Matías Escalera Cordero
- in Croatian *Promjene koža*, Durieux, Zagreb 1998 translated by Mirjana Hečimović
- in Hungarian *Bőr*, Jak, Budapest 2002 translated by Judit Reiman and Orsolya Gállos
- in Czech *Proměny kůže*, Periplum, Olomouc 2002 translated by Martina and Pavel Šaradín
- in German *Der Tag, an dem Tito starb*, Folio, Vienna 2005 translated by Klaus Detlef Olof
- in Turkish *Deri Degisimi*, Pupa Yayinlari, Istanbul 2008 translated by Ay Başman and Sina Baydur





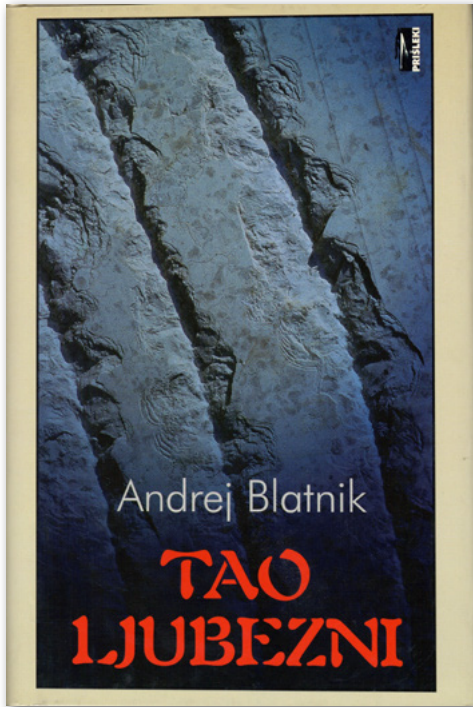


# Tao ljubezni

## Closer To Love

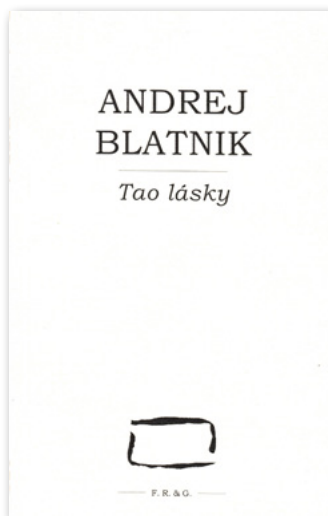
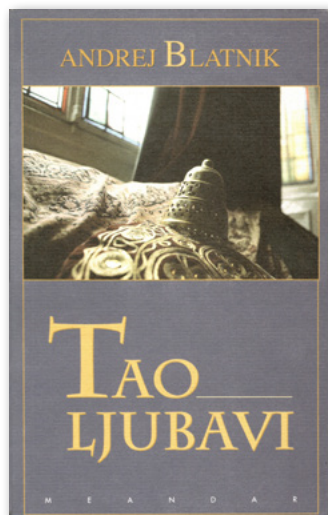
*Novel.*

LUD Literatura,  
Ljubljana 1996



- ▶ in Croatian *Tao ljubavi*,  
Meandar, Zagreb 1998  
translated by Sanja Pavlović
- ▶ in Slovakian *Tao lásky*,  
F.R. & G., Bratislava 2000  
translated by Karol Chmel

translation into English by Tamara M. Soban,  
rights available



# **Zakon želje**

## **Law of Desire**



*Short stories.*

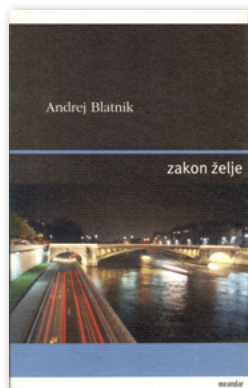
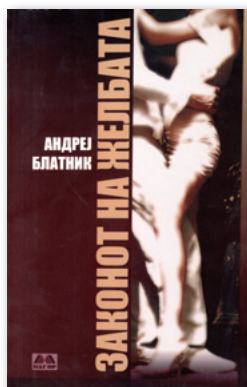
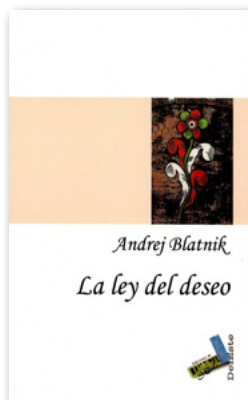
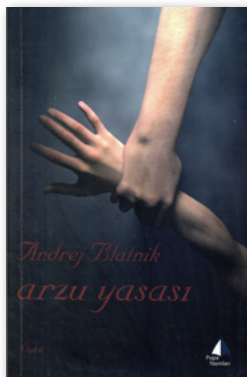
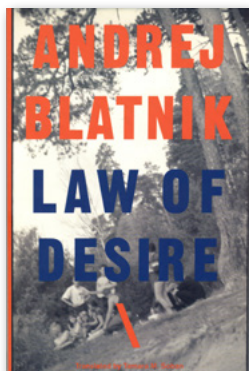
Beletrina,  
Ljubljana 2000

**Three reprints  
in Slovenia.**

**Prešeren Fund  
Award 2002.**

- ▶ in German *Das Gesetz der Leere*, Folio, Vienna 2001  
translated by Klaus Detlef Olof
- ▶ in Croatian *Zakon želje*, Meandar, Zagreb 2002  
translated by Jagna Pogačnik
- ▶ in Czech *Zakon touhy*, Periplum, Olomouc 2004  
translated by Martina and Pavel Šaradin
- ▶ in French *La loi du désir*, AlterEdit, Paris 2005  
translated by Andrée Lück-Gaye
- ▶ in Macedonian *Zakonot na želbata*, Magor, Skopje 2005  
translated by Lidija Dimkovska
- ▶ in Turkish *Arzu yasası*, Pupa Yayinlari, Istanbul 2009  
translated by Ay Başman
- ▶ in Spanish *La ley del deseo*, Baile del Sol, Tegueste 2010  
translated by Marjeta Drobnič and Matías Escalera Cordero
- ▶ in English *Law of Desire*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign / London / Dublin 2014  
translated by Tamara M. Soban





## Measured Transformations

by Petra Vidali

»A presentation of a successful literary development is necessarily always also a simultaneous presentation of continuity and discontinuity,« writes Tomo Virk in the opening of his essay accompanying Andrej Blatnik's *Biographies of the Nameless* from 1989. Though the *Biographies* were only Blatnik's third book, and his second short story collection (preceded by *Bouquets for Adam Fade* from 1983 and the novel *Torches and Tears* from 1987), there were already grounds for talking of continuity and discontinuity. Virk's study is entitled »How Big Stories Got Short« and delineates the postmodernist paradigm of exhausted literature and the metafictional and minimalist reversals. In 1996, Virk was to write another study of another of Blatnik's works, the novel *Closer to Love*, in which he again brilliantly registered the shifts in Blatnik's prose: The formal exhaustion of literature is followed by the visibly deeper, existential exhaustion of the character. Cases in point, albeit different in genre and style, are the novel *Closer to Love* and before that, a collection of short stories, *Skinswaps*, from 1990.

Separating the first and the third book are seven years and, roughly speaking, three styles: predominant pre-postmodernism (*Bouquets*), metafiction and formal minimalism (*Biographies*), and existential minimalism (*Skinswaps*). What separates *Skinswaps* and *The Law of Desire* is ten years and... And what?

The world of literature itself seems to revolve faster and faster: In just the few decades of the last century it turned around more times than previously in

its entire history. The Slovene reaction time got shorter too, to a great extent thanks to authors of Blatnik's generation and to Blatnik himself. Sensitized to new trends, they tried them out as soon as they emerged. The old style skin would be shed for a new one now even quicker than where it had originally appeared. That, however, is not to say that the works were »slapdash« or lacking in maturity. A proof to the contrary is the fact they still ring true. But it also seems in accordance with the »natural laws of growth« that the current has lost its turbulence, that the generation has abandoned their temporary shelters, and that those who remain are now turning to more stable literary essences.

*The Law of Desire* certainly seems a product of such a maturing process.\* For this reason it is probably not such a pivotal work as the *Torches* were, or the *Biographies*, or the *Skinswaps* either. In my view no injustice is done to *The Law of Desire* stories if the *Skinswaps* paradigm is ascribed also to them; that is, if we read them as accounts of exhausted existence. The designation seems as it were universal, and the state of affairs definite. How could a rupture of discontinuity even be made in this case, how could this exhausted existence not be continued, how could it be transcended?

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From the afterword in English by Petra Vidali. Whole text available at <http://www.andrejblatnik.com/specialties-law.html>.

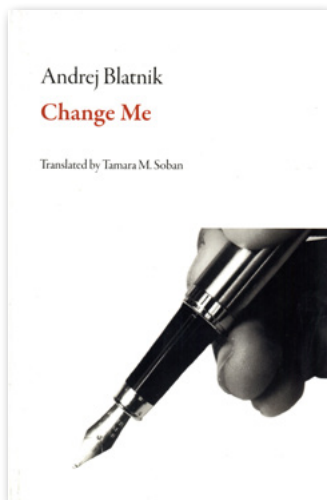
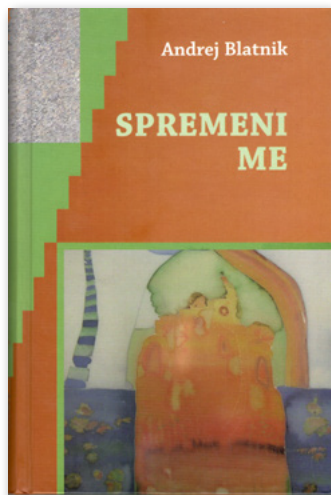
\* This is a book that displays maturity in subject matter and perfectionism in formal style. The author has been justly recognized as a master stylist before, in *Torches and Tears* and in *Biographies of the Nameless*, but in my view he has even further honed his skill. Feel the cutting edge of his dialogue.

# Spremeni me

## Change Me

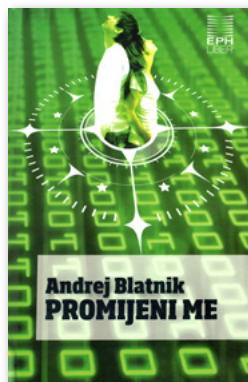
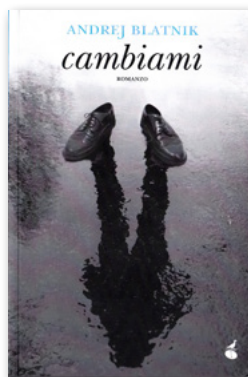
*Novel.*

Published in Slovenian by  
Litera in 2008, in German by  
Folio in 2009, in English by  
Dalkey Archive Press in 2019.





- ▶ in German *Ändere mich*,  
Folio, Vienna 2009  
translated by Klaus Detlef Olof
- ▶ in Croatian *Promijeni me*,  
Novi Liber, Zagreb 2010  
translated by Jagna Pogačnik
- ▶ in Italian *Cambiami*,  
Atmosphere libri, Rome 2014  
translated by Sabina Tržan
- ▶ in Macedonian *Izmeni me*,  
Matica makedonska, Skopje 2015  
translated by Sonja Dolžan
- ▶ in Serbian *Promeni me*,  
Geopoetika, Belgrade 2019  
translated by Ana Ristović
- ▶ in English *Change Me*,  
Dalkey Archive Press,  
McLean / Dublin 2019  
translated by Tamara M. Soban



# Saj razumeš?

## You Do Understand

*Saj razumeš?*, LUD Literatura, 2009

*You Do Understand*, Dalkey Archive, 2010

translated by Tamara M. Soban



Partly parables, partly fairy tales, *You Do Understand* is a comedy of errors for a species of talkers who've never learned to listen. This collection of sharp, spare, occasionally absurd, cruel, touching, and yet always generous shortshort fictions addresses the fundamental difficulty we have in making the people we love understand what we want and need. Demonstrating that language and intimacy are as much barriers between human beings as ways of connecting them, Andrej Blatnik provides us with a guided tour of the slips, misunderstandings, and blind alleys we each manage to fall foul of on a daily basis – no closer to understanding the motives of our families, friends, lovers, or co-workers than we are those of a complete stranger... or, indeed, our own.



**»Readers who actively participate in Blatnik's imaginative process will be richly rewarded.«**

*Library Journal*, September 2010

**»The pieces are well conceived and put together, and it makes for a quite compelling collection.«**

*Complete Review*,  
August 27, 2010

**»Andrej Blatnik accomplishes more in these limited spaces than many authors accomplish in stories several times as long.«**

*Howard County Times*, August 10, 2010

**»Short short story, I've come to love that form.«**

*Carp(e) Libris Reviews*,  
October 28, 2010

**»... the collective whole possesses a cohesiveness of purpose too rarely found in collections.«**

[www.damiankelleher.com](http://www.damiankelleher.com)

**»A distinctive contemporary stylist at the top of his game.«**

*3:AM Magazine*

**»I think this must be the shortest short-stories I have ever read. And yet, he manages to tell more than many. I really, really recommend that book!«**

[www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)



July 1, 2010

*You Do Understand*

Author: Blatnik, Andrej

Translator: Soban, Tamara M.

Publisher: Dalkey Archive

Pages: 112

Price ( Paperback ): \$12.95

Publication Date: September 7, 2010

ISBN ( Paperback ): 978-1-56478-599-2

Category: Fiction

Fifty ultra-brief stories by the Slovenian writer that revel in absurdity and pointed ironies. This is his second collection (*Skinswaps*, 1998) translated into English.

No piece is longer than four pages, and many are only a paragraph or two. The fiction is driven more by aphorisms, jokes and paradoxes than storytelling—readers of Lydia Davis' fiction will be familiar with the technique. But Blatnik has a knack for wringing insight and meaning out of such concision, and he occasionally places stories with similar themes next to each other to exploit their resonances. "One," in which a man imagines an animal sleeping next to him, is followed by "Say That," about picking up a girl in a bar, which is followed by "Separation," in which a man wakes up in a strange woman's bed. In this trio and elsewhere, the theme is isolation; Blatnik is concerned with how our feelings of security are challenged while we're alone. He writes skillfully in a variety of tones. "Experts" is a slice of political satire in which PR pros discuss promoting a war; "Home From XpanD" compresses into five lines a joke about cultural consumers literally being consumed; and "Cracks" is a mini horror story, evoking the feeling of dread that strikes a man who hits a child with his car in the night. At his most experimental, Blatnik can be downright cubist: "In Passing," for instance, deploys a series of clipped, staccato sentences to capture a rock flying through the window of a moving train. The stories' chief flaw is that their brevity usually means that the stakes aren't very high for his characters—even when the subject matter is serious, Blatnik doesn't afford himself the space to give them much gravitas. (And the characters are typically nameless, which exacerbates the feeling.) The two pages of "Spinning," which describe a man who's panic-struck about his entire future after a botched DJ gig, are nicely turned, but the reader can't help but wonder what Blatnik might do with the story in five pages, or even ten.

Charmingly taut fiction that occasionally cries out for broader canvases.



July 26, 2010

*You Do Understand*

Andrej Blatnik, trans. from the Slovenian by Tamara M. Soban

Dalkey Archive, \$12.95 paper (112 pp)

ISBN 978-1-56478-599-2

Fifty brief, knotty thrusts at life's conundrums make up this hip collection. Themes of failure—particularly in love—dominate, as in the compendium of excuses the narrator of "And Since I Couldn't Sleep" makes the morning after she's left the apartment of a man she's finally slept with. In "An Almost Perfect Evening," the buttoned-down narrator wishes his equally well-brought-up date would reveal a drastic fault. A humorous mix-up occurs in "Words Matter," when a lonely man in a hotel room calls the number on a card offered by the desk clerk, though he has misunderstood the card's purpose ("So, you're not . . ." "No, I'm not"). And what to make of a world in which a person can go to a bed a bank mogul and wake up a rickshaw driver? Each of these short bursts (most are barely a page long) bubbles with a droll, dry humor handily captured by Soban's dead-on, deadpan translation. (*Sept.*)

- ▶ in Croatian *Razumiješ, ne?*,  
Cekape, Zagreb 2012  
translated by Jagna Pogačnik
- ▶ in Macedonian *Razbiraš, neli?*,  
Euro-Balkan, Skopje 2013  
translated by Lidija Dimkovska
- ▶ in Russian *Ты ведь понимаешь?*,  
Rudomino/Lingvistika, Moscow 2015  
translated by Julija Sozina
- ▶ in Italian *Capisci, vero?*,  
Atmosphere libri, Rome 2015  
translated by Sabina Tržan
- ▶ in Turkish *Anlıyorsun değil mi?*,  
Dedalus Kitap, Istanbul 2016  
translated by Sina Baydur
- ▶ in Serbian *Kapiraš?*,  
Geopoetika, Belgrade 2017  
translated by Ivan Antić
- ▶ in Odia *Tume bi jana*,  
Dhauri Books, Bhubaneswar 2019  
translated by Manu Dash

translated in Czech, rights available  
translated in Polish, rights available



# Pisanje kratke zgodbe

## Short Story Writing



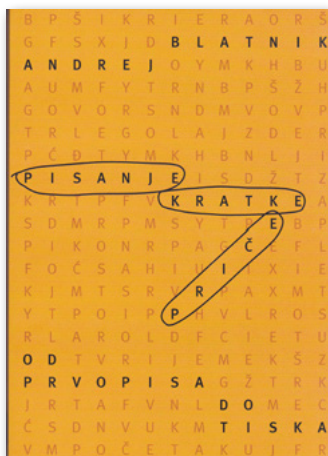
*Creative writing manual.*

LUD Literatura 2010.

Second expanded edition 2016.

Reprinted 2020.

- in Croatian *Pisanje kratke priče*,  
Cekape, Zagreb 2011  
translated by Jagna Pogačnik
- in Macedonian *Pišuvanje kratki raskazi*,  
Ikona, Skopje 2015  
translated by Dragana Evtimova



# Ugrizi

## Bites

*Short stories.*

LUD Literatura,  
Ljubljana, 2018.

Geopoetika,  
Beograd 2021.  
Translated by  
Ivan Antić.





## Children of Politicians

Children of politicians died in secret. They would hang themselves, stick their heads in gas ovens, buy heroin from their parents' functionary bonuses and shoot up in very excessive doses. Their parents attended their funerals in secret, patiently putting up with the hugs and the pats. They didn't write memoirs of their final days with their sons and daughters, they didn't speak of their pain in the breaks during Party meetings. Children of politicians were the secret story behind the much-touted social success. If anyone spoke their names too loudly, people would mutter. Don't interfere with progress, please. Whenever it's full speed ahead, something's bound to fall off. Everyone must make sacrifices. It's only proper that those above, carrying a greater load, also sacrifice more.

When he first connected his electric guitar to a Marshall amp and played the opening bars of *Bandiera Rossa*, he knew what name they would take. *Children of Politicians*. It would look good on magazine covers, and with that name, no one would wonder when they'd all be dead by twenty-seven. That's how it should be, people would think though not say it out loud, if you grow up in a family like that. Then they'd become really famous. Everybody would talk about how good they were, and wonder why nobody would acknowledge it before. It becomes best when it's over.



## Mainland

This happened back in the day when I still had a full head of hair, way back it seems now, but back then it was all right here, every night was right here, but let's not, I don't want to go into that now.

I'd rather talk about that night, about how she, out of all the women there, caught my eye, how I said: *My, she looks fine!* and the laughter broke out, my friends saying, are you out of your mind, *her? fine?*

I let them scoff, say what they would, and I went over and asked her to dance, and she laughed and said: *You sure your mom's okay with this?*

It wasn't mean the way she said it, though, not mean at all, just nice and warm.

And then I said I'd buy us a drink, and she laughed again and said it was okay, that was nice, and that's just how it turned out to be, nice, and I didn't go home with the guys.

And then she told me she'd got the scar on her stomach from a captain she wanted to get away from fast, too fast to his mind.

And she said that after that she'd preferred to stay away from the coast, despite being asked to come; the coast's dangerous, some other captain could happen along. But then comes a time one must face one's fears, must go where it's hard to go, so now she's here, and she's having a ball.

She talked some more, she went on and on about stuff I didn't think was real, or at least wouldn't happen to anyone I'd ever know, but it had to her, and still did sometimes if she let herself go.

And then I had to, I *had* to say I had to go, I had to be in my bed in the morning or I couldn't go dancing anymore, and she laughed and said she knew, that she'd known all along that I'd have to, that I'd go.

And that it had been nice.

The last thing I said was at the door: *Will you come dancing again?*

And now every time I walk by that place where nobody's danced in years, the hall razed to make room for what's always going to be the biggest hotel for miles, owned by a new developer every few months and then all the work dies, every time I walk by that place I remember the look on her face as she said: *No, I have to go back tomorrow.*

What look, you ask? A sad look.

And I knew even back then that it had been the way it had, so that I would remember every time I walked by, and many other times as well, in sleepless nights, how it had been, then and there, way back when I still had a full head of hair.

## Garage

*for Karl Browksi*

Dear God, I hope you don't mind that we don't call on you as often as you'd want. We have our hands full. Lots of work.

Dear God, thank you for granting our wishes and getting rid of the new guy for us. There was no other way. Straight off he started talking about pay and conditions, disrupting our lunch breaks; discussions like that just start fights, everyone knows who works and who distributes the money, each to his own, that's the way of the world, who are we to change that? This guy, he wanted to turn us into martyrs, and we don't want that, we want to live and work!

You must understand, we were glad when the boss bashed his face in with a crowbar, and no, it wasn't just because we were worried about our paychecks that we told the police we didn't know what went down, that accidents happen in our line of work. It was better that way, dear God. We had to wash the floor, but now we're happy we can go on working; it was getting unbearable, now our garage is peaceful again.

## Most Exciting

When her therapist asks what was the thing that excited her most in life, she's silent along time. Then she says there was this time her husband was driving behind a couple on one of those little motorbikes, what they call a scooter, she thinks. It was a long, sweltering summer and the couple was obviously coming back from the beach. Sweat trickled down from under their helmets, her husband said he was driving real close behind and could see the tiny rivulets slithering down the skin. Riding pillion, the woman had a bright beach towel on the seat, they were both in bathing suits, the leather of the seats must burn if it's fake, and her bikini was teenyweeny, skimpy, her husband said, hardly more than dental floss.

And then this woman's bikini top came undone and she tried to catch the fugitive strings with one hand while holding on to her man with the other; he had no idea what was going on. She tried to catch the flimsy strings, and the thin tan line on her back wiggled around, she couldn't have sunbathed topless much that summer, reasoned her husband when he talked about that ride, and he talked about it a lot, in company or just to her, perhaps also to himself when he took along time coming out of the bathroom, who could say. But then they turned off the road, he said, and he couldn't say if she kept her bikini top or if it was blown off by the wind. I should've kept following them, he sometimes added, only in his mind, but she could hear him anyway.

That car ride her husband talked about, the view of that woman's back with the elusive bikini top—that was the most exciting thing ever. She's dreamed about it often.

She'll also dream about it tonight, she says at last, very softly. Her therapist nods understandingly.

*Translated by Tamara M. Soban*

# Luknje

## Holes



Novel.

Goga, Novo mesto, 2020.

The protagonist of the novel carelessly climbs out of his hole, which, like the other unfortunates, he's dug and filled with cans of food, waiting for the cataclysm on the surface to pass. He survives a violent encounter and sets out to save the world with his savior – with the help of art. He believes this idea is rather quixotic – but what are the other options?

Although the novel *Holes* was conceived as an anti-utopia, in a few short months of COVID-19 it began to describe our present and the dilemmas that arise for us. Is it possible to choose the right path among the endless choice of routes, or do they all lead only backwards, perhaps even into more severe trials?

The novel humorously plays a variety of genres, from a dialogue to a documentary novel, with numerous references to Yugoslav politics and pop culture, as we are accustomed to in Blatnik's writing, as well as to a number of classic works of world literature. But the suspension of the hero's mission also attracts the readers who might overlook the hints from cultural history.

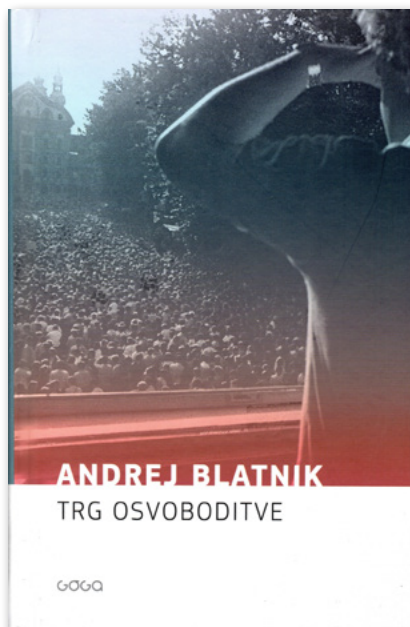
## 14.

While it was just climatologists talking about the disrupted natural balance on television, nobody took them seriously, what a lot of palaver, they said, it's always been cold in the winter and hot in the summer, how's that going to change, what do these eggheads know, they're full of hot air, and getting paid for it, too! Then people began to feel the changes in their shoes. Tropical downpours inundated the streets, the drains incapable of swallowing all the water. Traffic jammed as flooded vehicles stalled erratically, even those still drivable could no longer navigate the clogged-up roads. The people who simply had to go on took off their shoes, rolled up their pants, and waded wherever it was. Then the rumors started that one had better not do that. Floods like this flush out of the drains, out of the depths where nobody knows what lives, creatures that are normally never seen. And then larvae burrow under your skin without your knowledge and start feeding on your flesh, and when you notice the change, when you feel the writhing under your skin, when you see it and scream, it's already too late, you rush to the doctors, they shake their heads, taking lab reels and coiling and coiling on them the worms living in your body for hours on end, but no amount of probing does any good, you're punctured full of holes in the morning, your juices mix freely, unimpeded, the way they're really not supposed to if you're to stay alive, but you won't if it goes on like this, everything blends and you rot alive, there's no amount of prayer that can save you, we've seen stuff like that before and we'll see it again, anyone can get infected, the tiniest injury anywhere on your body is enough for the creatures from down there to crawl in and reproduce inhibited, feeding on your tissue, those places need to be closed, sealed off, but how, and besides, how now, it's too late now.

*Translated by Tamara M. Soban*

# Trg osvoboditve

## Liberation Square



Novel.

Goga, Novo mesto, 2021.

On June 21, 1988, a crowd gathers in Liberation Square in protest against political arrests. In the crowd is a young man who treads on the toes of a woman his own age, thus starting a complicated relationship. The novel follows the pair through decades that see a ten-day war, change of the political system, upheaval of ethical norms, as well as transformations of ideals, unfolding before us the complexity of the transition of dreams forced to meet the reality of the free market of both goods and values, with the tissue of family and society tearing under the pressure.

Alongside the country transforming into an independent state, the young man becomes an adult. After a short and unusual affair he doesn't see his partner from the years of social and personal liberation very often, though they do run into each other again and again, different each time. He no longer writes literary reviews, having gone to work for a marketing firm, while she – with the support of her privatization tycoon father, who supports her work-free and worry-free existence although she refuses to have anything to do with him – seeks independence in faraway places with the aid of meditation and diving, both into the depths of the ocean and her self. The same people keep meeting in different constellations, with every encounter raising the same unspoken question: after so many – also social – transformations, do they still have enough in common to preserve hope for a happy ending?

## Revolution Square

The rally was scheduled for two p.m. He came some fifteen minutes early and found the square virtually empty. The organizers rushed about in confusion. Stage hands exchanged quizzical looks: Such a stage, such a sound system, and for what – a few dozen people?

Darko jogged past him, glancing around, as if it might do some good to keep checking if somebody else was coming so that pulling all the cables wouldn't have been for nothing. For a few dozen people, that's too few. For nothing. He caught his questioning look and spread his arms. *I did my best, there's nothing more I can do.* They both seemed equally baffled. All that excitement over the past days, all those people saying something should be done, and now they've all gone and stayed at home! That's no way to change the world. Not even your own street.

And then it began. All the side streets started spouting rivers of people. From the left, from the right, from everywhere. Unstoppable. Hippies, punks, students, bums, businessmen, workers, university professors, farmers. Everyone. In a matter of minutes the square filled to capacity. Total strangers nodded hello to one another. Saying wordlessly, we're in this together. We're not alone. There're many of us, and more are coming. There'll be even more of us.

The action onstage also began. The guitars twanged. Pan-krti, a band from the working-class district of Moste that had broken up six months before, came together specially for this occasion. Pero the front man yelled from the stage that this was not about politics, that they wanted their friends from their football team back, friends that were now in military lockup. The intimate is political. The political is intimate. Neither the state nor the system nor any political party can give one happiness – but they sure can take it away.

*Translated by Tamara M. Soban*





# When a writer outlives his country

Slovenian writer Andrej Blatnik was born, grew up, and began writing in a country that no longer exists — Yugoslavia. Now a citizen of Slovenia, Blatnik, on a recent visit to India, spoke to Malavika Velayanikal about how shifting identities is integral to his writing

MEET THE AUTHOR

That every man is a potential killing machine isn't an obvious truth to many. But it dawned early on Andrej Blatnik because of his rather unusual destiny: He was born in Yugoslavia in 1961 when the nation changed its official name to Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Josip Broz Tito was named president for life. He grew up writing through the nation's tumultuous years, took part in a war for independence — almost swapped his pen for a gun — and now lives in independent Slovenia, part of the European Union. Blatnik started writing even before the history he witnessed gave him new perspectives. His first book, a collection of short stories: *Sopki Za Adam Vainjo* (*Bouquets For Adam Paul*) was published when he was 20. "I took to writing primarily because that was one art where I could really be alone," he tried his hand at other creative arts and even played with a music band for some time before switching back to writing. "I am a very private person and writing was a kind of progression of that nature. I don't cooperate much. For me, writing required the least amount of co-operation, so that was it," he says.

**'Pacifism is not the answer to war'**

When he started out, he had no motive to focus on writing. But soon, the events unfolding around him claimed most of his time. "Yugoslavia was once a happy marriage of the diverse — different nations, different religions and different cultures — made to fit within one state. As often happens to marriages, the individuals screwed up. Other nations wanted to be independent of the then-strongest Serbia and the so-called idea of one Yugoslav nation. Thus the war started," Blatnik recalls.

The Slovenian war was a short one. Nobody really even thought of it as a war because it only lasted for 10 days, says Blatnik.



Till date Andrej Blatnik has published three novels, *Pamenjeni in Sotne Torčice And Tears*, *Tao Ljubozni* (*Closer To Love*) and *Soremeni Me (Chang Me)*

nik. Before that, he was active in the pacifist movement in Slovenia. "During the first two or three days of the war, I believed it was a mistake and would stop. But then it didn't. And I felt I had to fight back. It was like, if you have a child, you'll do anything to protect your child."

That, he says, was a huge change for him. "I realised I could turn into someone who forgot that the person on the other side was also human. Luckily the war didn't last long enough for me to grab a gun. "Others too had similar experiences, and the pacifist movement fell apart as they realised how close they were to becoming 'killing machines.'"

He explains, "The best response to a war may not be a pacifist stand because then you are almost willing to be the victim. During the war, the trend was to write about the nation and politics — the idea was to liberate the nation first and then move on to other topics. But he wrote *Skinswaps* which was about relationships. It took him another 20 years to write about politics. "I am more interested in writing about the politics of daily things — how you treat animals, how you treat nature, how you treat your not-so-lucky cohabitants, how you separate your garbage, etc. These subjects appeal to me."

**'Mixed identities help a writer'**

For Blatnik, the question of identity is tricky: He believes the identity of a Yugo was made up. "That was one of the reasons for the disillusionment with Yugoslavia. Another was that Slovenia was the most economically powerful and technologically advanced nation in the region. We Slovenians, who were just about 8% of the population, controlled 25% of the national income. We had a democratically elected government in power. We didn't belong in Yugoslavia."

Even so, he says, for some time the idea of Yugoslavia was a good one. Before the

World Wars, all nations were colonies of the Austrian empire. During World War II, they had a mutual enemy: the Axis powers. But after the war ended, they had nothing left in common.

Everyone straddles multiple identities, he says. "Slovenians were more connected to a Yugoslav identity than, say, a German or an Austrian one. I feel I am European, even though it has only been a few years since we officially joined the European Union."

As for his literary tradition, he feels his writing belongs to Europe. "I believe in shifting identities; we are never only one thing." This mixed identity, he says, helps his writing. Blatnik's books have been translated into 27 languages, including Kannada. Some of his books have "a concrete playground" — where and when it happened is clear. "For example, in one of my novels, the story is set in my hometown. But this is visible only to those who are familiar with what happened in a certain era," he says. Mostly, he likes writing stories that don't stick to one cultural background and can be set in any place and time.

"If I restrain my writing to a purely Slovenian cultural context, perhaps my neighbours would understand, but you in India might not." His stories have no boundaries, he says. And several of them — especially the latest collection, *You Do Understand* — aren't set in a particular time and place.

"That is quite intentional," he says. "If readers away from Slovenia connect with the story that means it succeeded."

This is Blatnik's eighth trip to India. "Now I know how this country functions, so it is easier for me to come here than go to other places."

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Short stories: *Sopki Za Adam Vainjo* (*Bouquets For Adam Paul*), *Biografije Brezimenih* (*Biographies Of The Nameless*), *Menjavo Ko* (*Skinswaps*), *Zaloni* (*Law Of Desires*) and *Saj Razumeš* (*You Do Understand*)



He has also published a collection of cultural criticism *Gledanje čez rame* (*Looking Over The Shoulder*). His books have been translated into 27 languages, including Kannada

I realised I could turn into someone who forgot that the person on the other side was also human. Luckily, the war didn't last long

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THE CULTURE • Arts 35

## ANDREJ BLATNIK: FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

Andrej Blatnik ([www.andrejblatnik.com](http://www.andrejblatnik.com)), who started his artistic career in the early 1980s playing bass guitar in a punk rock band, has published two novels and four collections of short stories, including *Menjavo Ko*, translated into English as *Skinswaps* and available from Amazon. Here are some of his views on:

**Art in the previous regime** 'Art was viewed as something high-class and intellectual. Punk rock brought art to street level in Slovenia.'

**Censorship before independence** 'By the 1980s things were very open here, even local communist cells were lenient. They'd call you in and say "It's OK if you think that, but do you have to write it?" The state was more interested then in what we were doing.'

**Literature in Slovenia** 'Literature has always had other duties in Slovenia beyond just art. Writers drew up early nationalist programs, the nation's constitution, they were the first to open up parts of our hidden history, putting the torture and the trials after WWII subtly in their novels. In a small country everything has a bigger effect, a greater echo. [Today] Literature has become more a personal task than one of team work. Once we used it to foster our identity and feed our pride. Now we have other successes and can rely on things like football. No one can rely on the previous experience of literature today.'

**Themes in Slovenian writing** 'Hipenecija [p31], the desire for something uncertain perhaps linked with the lack of independence over the centuries, is very prominent in the work of Prešeren and Cankar. Urban themes are few and far between as there is no real city life as such here. Most people in Ljubljana are only first or second generation. There are exceptions [For example, Andrej E. Skubic's *Father Blue*], with some young writers focussing on what is an increasingly multi-ethnic society. But most urban novels have been traditionally written abroad and end with the protagonist coming back to Slovenia and the countryside — usually to their mother's burial in the mud and the rain.'

**Being a writer in Slovenia** 'Between 60 to 70 novels are published a year and 200 books of poetry. There is some funding from the state and also a certain amount of prestige. You can make a living as a writer in Slovenia. State grants help as do public readings but it is a very, very modest living.'

top: DNA India

left: Lonely Planet Slovenia  
2007



# Slovenian Book Agency's funding opportunities for foreign publishers

## **Subsidies for translation and publication costs of Slovenian authors**

The main form of international promotion is the co-financing of translations from Slovenian into other languages, including adult fiction, children's and young adult fiction and essayistic and critical works on culture and the humanities, theatre plays and comics. Applicants can only be legal persons (publishing houses, theatres). The subsidy covers up to 100% of the translation costs but max 10,000€. Grants cannot be awarded retroactively.

In light of Slovenia's role as a Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2023 a special tender for translations into German language has been introduced in 2017. This subsidy can cover up to 50% of all costs connected with the book publication and promotion (except license costs) but max 11,000€ for first publications and 50% and max 3,000€ for reprints, where eligible costs are printing costs, book setting, cover design and corrections.

## **Subsidy for printing costs**

Foreign publishers can apply for subsidies for printing costs for translations of Slovenian authors. The subsidy can cover up to 70% of printing costs but max 3,000€. Applicants can only be legal persons (publishing houses, theatres). Grants cannot be awarded retroactively.

## **Special subsidies pertinent to the realization of the project Slovenia – Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2023**

In 2022 and 2023 publishers from EU can apply for a subsidy for publication costs of Slovenian translations into other languages. Successful applicants are granted a fixed sum of 5,398.48€, which can be used towards translation costs, editorial work, printing costs and other.

Another form of subsidy are mobility grants. The applicant can be a Slovene author, translator, editor or rights agent, who has been invited to a literary or industry event abroad. The application must be enclosed with an invitation to and the program of the event. Successful applicants are awarded a fixed sum of 747.67€ for events in Europe or a fixed sum of 1,343.65€ for events outside Europe. There is one call per year covering trips throughout the year.

## **For more information**

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(special subsidies for Slovenia – Guest of Honour at FBF 2023)

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