

SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ: AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM
VARIOUS NARRATIVE POINTS OF VIEW

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I

Sunčana Škrinjarić was born in Zagreb in 1931. There she completed her primary and secondary education, and graduated from the Teachers' College. Though she produced her first book in 1946, a collection of self-published poems entitled *Sunčanice* (*Sunflowers*), it was only in the 1960s that she made her mark as a writer of children's stories. She also worked for the Children's Educational Program on Radio Zagreb, and worked on the 1968 Zagreb Puppet Theatre production of the puppet-play *Bajka o maslačku* (*The Tale of the Dandelion*). In the 1970s there appeared a series of books: *Kaktus bajke* (*Cactus Tales: stories*, 1970), *Ljeto u modrom kaputu* (*Summer in a Blue Coat: stories*, 1972), *Dva smijeha* (*Two Smiles: stories*, 1973), *Zmaj od stakla* (*The Glass Dragon: stories*, 1975), *Svaštara* (*Scribble-Book: stories, poems and plays*, 1977), *Pisac i vrijeme* (*The Writer and Time: stories*, 1978) and *Noć s vodenjakom* (*A Night With an Aquarian: stories*, 1978). These titles clearly denote an orientation towards a younger audience, either by way of genre (tales) or through other associated meanings (for example, a glass dragon suggests a toy, and a child jots down various matters of 'life and death' in a scribble-book).

Škrinjarić became synonymous with 'writing for children', an image she would never completely shake off. During the 1980s, however, she also began to address a mature audience with the publication of numerous works: *Ulica predaka* (*The Street of Ancestors: novel*, 1980), *Knjiga o pajacima* (*A Book of Clowns: stories and poems*, 1980), *Pisac i princeza* (*The Writer and the Princess: novel*, 1983), *Cvijeće u listopadu* (*Flowers in October: poems*, 1983), *Kazališna kavana* (*The Theatre Cafe: novel*, 1983), *Slikar u šumi* (*The Painter in the Forest: novel*, 1985), *Kuća od slova* (*House of Letters: stories*, 1986) and *Čudesna šuma* (*The Magical Forest: novel*, 1989). In the 1990's there appeared three books: *Jogging u nebo* (*Jogging in the Sky: stories*, 1991),

Marijana u ruži vjetrova (*Marianne in Rose Winds*: novel, 1995) and *Pasji put* (*A Dog's Path*: stories, 1996).

Overall, we can divide Škrinjarić's literary activity into three periods:

- a) Writing for children;
- b) The transitional period;
- c) Writing for adults.

In spite of the fact that Škrinjarić has published a number of books for adults, she still has not fully settled in the world of serious literature. Apart from her popular image as a writer of children's stories, the main reason for this is her characteristic writing style. Namely, every book she has penned, however serious, has something of the magic of childhood and the fairy-tale world of infinite possibilities. For Škrinjarić, the fairy-tale is a world unto itself, something that should be believed in unreservedly, or at least accepted as something that is completely different to everyday life. Even in her serious texts the fairy-tale reappears, and that primarily as an ornament which functions as an illustration or framework for the 'real' story. It is perhaps also a code to a great puzzle. At any rate, the fairy-tale serves as a small window into the text.

It should be noted, however, that in Škrinjarić's serious texts fairy-tales do not refer back to childhood, but to the complex world of adults. In this sense, fairy-tales are not in the least innocent stories for the entertainment of children, but have multifaceted meanings and an important role in the history of civilisation. Their most prominent feature is their universality. They originate in an epoch when religion was the most important aspect of life, and they can be found, in different variants, in every culture and nation of the world, in both oral and written traditions. As such, fairy-tales have become the object of study for various disciplines, including ethnology, literary criticism, psychology and linguistics. The fairy-tale has a twofold important role in Škrinjarić's serious texts: first, the incorporation of a story within a story gives the text a formal freshness and, consequently, helps to achieve a certain ornamentality of expression; secondly, it is expressive of a

message, usually a moral one, which is otherwise difficult to convey through usual narrative techniques.

An interesting example of Škrinjarić's use of fairy-tales in serious literature is *Snjeguročka u Challengeru* (*Snjegurochka in the Challenger*), from *Jogging u nebo*. In this case, the fairy-tale is a variation of the Snow White theme. A baby girl of unusual beauty is born to an elderly couple, and an appropriate (happy) future has to be arranged for her. Unexpectedly, as it so happens in fairy-tales, a handsome and rich nobleman appears one day and falls in love with the fair girl, and asks for her hand in marriage. There are no real obstacles to the match - no evil stepmothers, differences in social status, envious sisters, and so on. So Snjegurochka concocts an obstacle herself: she will marry the handsome nobleman only after the Midsummer bonfire, when girls, according to an old custom, jump over the fire to divine whether they will marry or not. It is thought that the girl who is unsuccessful in jumping over the fire will not marry. Snjegurochka, the most beautiful of all girls, flies into the fire and disappears. If this were not enough, the world itself disappears. Škrinjarić writes:

Soon afterwards, the girl's parents died, the village caved in like a run-down shack, for the girlish laughter and shouts had died out, and the never-to-be groom first lost his mind, then his property and, finally, his life. This is the way many things, which begin beautifully, end in complete, final ruin. (158)¹

At the fairy-tale's end, the reader is transported to New York, to the year 1990, where the main story takes place. We learn that an old Russian emigrant reflecting on the Challenger accident tells the tale of Snjegurochka.

Do you remember the accident with the American space shuttle? A young teacher was chosen out of thousands of candidates and she rushed to her death with a smile. It only took a few moments; her children, parents and husband were watching from the seats reserved for honoured guests. What irony! What a death! (158)

The moral of the story is obvious. By means of her imagination, ingenuity and knowledge of international current affairs, the author

¹ See *Jogging u nebo*, 152-159.

awakens in the reader an interest for traditional values, urging him or her to contemplate these at any time and in any place. Also, the allusion to the biblical story of the elderly parents, Zacharias and Elisabeth, and the slightly archaic language of the 'wise narrator' gives the fairy-tale special significance.

This happened in times long gone by, when people gave birth without sequence or wisdom, just the way nature would wish it, and chance would spin. The husband was well into his seventieth year, his wife a score younger. They were childless, when all of a sudden, the woman, in the fading bloom of her life, found herself with child and gave birth. A true miracle appeared in this world - a little girl, as delicate as pure snow, with fair hair and a milky white face, slim at the waist and of gentle hands - blessed with the gifts that cannot be seen or begotten among village folk.

It is in these moments that Škrinjarić's use of the fairy-tale, touching on the sources of human wisdom, harks back to its original purpose, to its roots, to magic.

II

Towards the end of the 1970s, and during the first half of the 1980s, feminist criticism was very prominent on the Croatian literary scene. It advocated, at least in its most ardent phase, the separation of male and female writers in national literature, and also emphasised differences in artistic expression between the sexes. A number of characteristics, it was thought, made female writing or the female style identifiable. On the basis of these, one could discern whether a woman or a man wrote a text, and one could therefore trace the fate of female contributions to the cultural heritage of the world.

In the article 'Ženska književnost i žensko pismo' ('Female literature and Female writing'), the most serious and convincing portrayal of female writing in Croatia, Ingrid Šafranek claims that the notion of female writing² denotes works "wherein women writers are more or less aware of their specific difference - and not

² According to Roland Barthes, writing refers to the artistic structuring of a text.

only sexually - which they inscribe not only at the thematic, but also at the textual level, and attempt to outline their position of woman-as-a-writing-subject" (7).³ Though admitting that there are very few explicitly female texts in which femininity is the consciously inscribed attitude, Safranek explains that there are a number of features that make a text female. There is a careless relationship to structure, a tendency towards fragmentation and free composition, a neglect of the thematic and referential element, and an apparent absence of action in the novel, all at the expense of expression, which is characterised by the intrusion of the poetic into the body of prose. This also accounts for the tendency for confessionalism and an autobiographical propensity. Since Škrinjarić's texts have no firm structure, do not remain within the limits of genre, and freely combine various literary models, feminist criticism recognised her as a convenient example of 'female' literature. Indeed, upon closer examination we can detect the basic characteristics of female writing in Škrinjarić: disorderly composition, a subconscious play with narrative models, and the introduction of poetic elements (rhythm, syntax, metaphor and rhetorical figures).

But it would be erroneous to view Škrinjarić's work exclusively as female writing, for many men have also written free-flowing poetic and confessional prose. Marcel Proust, and especially his descriptions of the extremely sensitive soul, could be taken as a striking example of male 'female writing'. In those rare texts with a first-person narrator, Škrinjarić uses description very sparingly, and she shrinks from entering into the depths of consciousness and the dark corners of the human psyche. She refrains from resolving physiological secrets and is very firm, even rigorous, with respect to the world she transforms into a story. A typical example of this is a short story from the 1970s, *Čarobnjakova smrt* (*The Sorcerer's Death*). Here, the favourite feminist motive, the relationship between men and women, is reduced to a brief description, which is presented from an unfamiliar (somewhat fairy-tale) perspective.

Orange-spotted salamanders glimmered in the dark in front of my tired eyes. For a moment I thought how exciting it would be to live in deserts

³ Ingrid Šafranek, 'Ženska književnost i žensko pismo', in: *Republika* 11-12, Zagreb, 1983, 7-28.

where wild fires burn as signs of human settlements, instead of living in the uniform wasteland of the city, fettered by electricity, by fire which comes at the press of a button. I yearned for a real fire, with which to warm my fingers, and to lie down with my man, so when we suddenly slipped into it, I feel neither surprise nor pain. Such must be the quiet transition between life and death, of which we always think with anxiety and fear. It seemed so soft and gentle to me - as if we had finally reached an end. The dark hill in front of us lit up and it became clear to me that there was nothing left any more, that all that was to be done was finished and that a holiday full of fireworks was setting in. (58)⁴

To view *female writing* within national literature as a particular stylistic format, one must first have an ideological background, i.e. feminism as a world-view. Such an ideological background does not exist in Škrinjarić's texts. She does not affirm her sexuality through the *writing of difference*, nor does she see herself as a woman who has to affirm herself over and against the masculine world (i.e. the civilisation in which we live). The world for her is not the sum total of men and women; it is not even the sum total of individuals. Rather than always express herself through first-person narration, through the 'simple I', Škrinjarić's perspective is god-like: it is the perspective of the writer,⁵ the omniscient and omnipresent narrator. The writer is the creator of worlds, each of which has its own possibilities and laws. In this sense, Škrinjarić is fascinated by the power of writing and the joy of creation.

Where Škrinjarić does express herself through first-person narration she mainly deals with the *other*, as a person *observed* by the author. This combination of the first-person narrator and the topic of the other is most evident in her autobiographical stories, such as *Oči mrtvih pjesnika* (*The Eyes of Dead Poets*) and *Severilije*. The other is Josip Sever (1938-1989), the renowned Croatian poet and Škrinjarić's intimate friend, to whom the stories are dedicated. These stories are above all reflections on Sever and his presence in the world.

⁴ See *Jogging u nebo*, 55-58.

⁵ Hence Škrinjarić's perhaps subconscious obsession with the character of the writer, to whom she has dedicated two of her books (*Pisac i vrijeme* and *Pisac i Princeza*) and a radio play (*Pisac i djevojčica - The Writer and the Little Girl*). The writer (poet), as an autobiographical fact, is the motive of her best short story *Severilije*, a rare text written in the first-person.

He hesitated for a while. The party at the joined tables seemed gentle and lonely. Probably merchant seamen. All were young, or at least seemed so. Sever finally decided to go over. He made friends easily, and had a familiarity about him which surprised and enchanted people. They remembered his words, which he spoke with ease and forgot quickly. He was a master of flattery, but was not in the least prone to fawning. At times he would beam and glow with some internal light, and those who met him then would never forget the strange absorbing appeal of his person. It was a mixture of childlike charm and immediacy, but also of roughness and crudity, even vulgarity. He approached the Chinese and reached with trembling hands for the nearest chair. I watched the scene from afar. At first the Chinese watched him with caution, and then, suddenly, one of the mutually alike faces started beaming with happiness. It was a round, moon-like face of a man fat from bad food. Obviously, they could understand each other. They were probably surprised at that strange man in a shabby suit who could speak their language, so impenetrable and strange to the rest of the world. (28)⁶

But the fictitious characters created by a hidden (albeit omnipresent and omniscient) narrator are portrayed through detailed, static descriptions of their appearance. One such character is Ana, the girl in the story *Mesareva ljubav* (*The Butcher's Love*).

But Ana was something else, she could be shown anywhere. She had grown beautifully in her thirteenth year, she was both slim and round, her breasts were like those on old figurines when femininity was judged differently. Unconstrained by bras or excess clothes, they lived a restless life of their own and everyone's look would, even unwillingly, stop at them for a moment. But there were many other things which stood out in the beauty of the poor girl - her gentle, transparent eyes, with a helpless look to them which was so touchingly out of accord with the fullness of her lips, her heavy red brown hair, just slightly curly, and a perfect complexion which no rich girl, nursed on the choicest food and all possible expensive skin preparations, ever had. (43)⁷

The best example of Škrinjarić's manner of presenting fictitious characters is certainly the novel *Kazališna kavana*, which appeared in the second, 'transitional' period, and which displays the narrator's complete detachment from the world of people. Compared to other texts, the novel has the most balanced characters, in the psychological, sociological and even political

⁶ See *Pasji put*, 26-32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-55.

sense. The characters have their own history, their own dreams, idioms, a broad geographical and social space in which they move, and are also reflections of other characters. But they still do not have the freedom to be themselves, to exist in their own right. Namely, when reading the novel, one soon draws the conclusion that these characters are just functions of something else, that they represent certain conditions and phenomena. It seems the author created them only to convey what she had elsewhere conveyed through fairy-tales, i.e. her reflections on life and its rules. Consider the following passage:

Those who were eliminated in the first round of selection were perhaps luckier. Rejected at once, they could surrender to real life. Some couldn't accept the verdict of the lack of talent, and continued for a couple of years to try to reach "the boards of life." The most persistent of them tried to enrol at drama schools and film academies, to pass exhausting entrance examinations in Zagreb and Belgrade, and circled around like a swarm of obtrusive birds. Then they started growing weary and dispirited, nearing their thirties, the middle age, and many of those ardent reciters and phantom-like actresses would end up as petty officials in statistical or other offices, or as school teachers encouraging their students to join the drama section.⁸

The theme of *Kazališna kavana* is not the fate of the individual, or an event which branded his or her existence, but a place that encapsulates the spirit of the times: the theatre cafe situated near the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. By recording the lives of some regular customers - a petty official, an overbearing student, a drunken poet, a crazy communist, a painter, a petty bourgeois couple, a flirt, and other typical representatives of post-war Zagreb - Škrinjarić paints a panorama of Croatian life in the capital and province. This picture covers the way the legal system operates, the political situation and, finally, a gallery of dominant psychological profiles of the middle class. Here, Škrinjarić successfully demonstrates her skill in employing the realist genre of the sociological novel, which functions as a 'gallery of social types'. But she also remains true to her open style of writing. At another level, *Kazališna kavana* captures the two senses of the metaphor 'theatre of the world': on the one hand, as life, which is in fact an imitation of life (the theatre), and, on the other, as a character,

⁸ *Kazališna kavana*, 76.

which carries numerous other characters. By describing people, their anxieties, their doubts, various events and the place which connects them, Škrinjarić presents the character of a time reflected in space. Her openness is symbolic. The last sentence does not have a full-stop. Indeed, it is time itself that flows - the time about which we read, the time in which we read, all times simultaneously. Time and space are the only categories of reality in this ambitious project.

III

We have seen that Škrinjarić relates paradoxically to her characters, by being both distant from and close to them. The feeling of closeness, as in the case with Sever and the autobiographical 'I', is used sparingly and indirectly, and that through other people's thoughts and reflections. Distant characters - infinitely distant! - are painted in detailed, static descriptions, and are situated in a definite place and time. Stories of persons that are close to Škrinjarić are fragmented and formally open (unfinished), whilst texts with fictitious characters are firmly structured, have an elaborate plot and are formally closed (finished). When making an inventory of the main characters in her last two books, however, we discover that she devotes more attention to men. That there is a prevalence of male characters adds to the thesis that Škrinjarić does not belong to Croatian feminist literature. Also, the stories' titles do not reveal a typically female preoccupation. The short-lived interest Croatian feminists had in Škrinjarić should, therefore, be attributed to an extra-literary detail. Namely, Škrinjarić's grandmother, Zofka Kvederova (1878-1926), a well-known and highly esteemed writer and journalist, was the author of *Misterij žene* (*The Mystery of Woman*: 1900), and was one of the most zealous advocates of women's rights during the first decades of the twentieth century.

But why the insistence on phases, one might ask, in Škrinjarić's literary career, and the seeming proximity of her work to the paradigm of female writing? The answer: in order to correct the existing, completely misleading, contextualisation of her work, to find for her a place in contemporary Croatian literature which she

objectively deserves. We have already seen that Škrinjarić's work can be divided into three phases or time-segments. The first phase is one of affirmation as a writer, spanning the period 1970-1980, in which she wrote a series of books for children and one collection of stories for adults, *Noć s vodenjakom*. The 1980s represent the second phase, characterised by two serious novels (*Ulica predaka* and *Kazališna kavana*), which aesthetically surpass her children's stories. In the 1990s, the third phase, Škrinjarić finally managed to get a foothold in 'serious' literature.

Ulica predaka, published - symbolically perhaps - by the then Zagreb publisher *Mladost* in their 'Jelen' series, marks the entrance of Škrinjarić into the world of serious literature. This move was a source of confusion for critics. Ljerka Car Matutinović wrote, for example: "Sunčana Škrinjarić's novel *Ulica predaka* has recently been published by *Mladost* Zagreb in the 'Jelen' series - and that would, actually, be the only objection."⁹ 'Jelen' is a well-known series for young people - and is 'slightly bastardly', thinks Vesna Kesić¹⁰ - because it publishes serious literature, including those texts by authors (Tolstoy, Krleža) one reads when parting ways with childhood. Škrinjarić was read, therefore, against the background of primary school reading. No wonder the book, as the most significant literary event of 1981, won the *Ivan Brlić Mažuranić* literary award for the best book for children and youth.

What is it that, apart from the author's reputation, made critics regard *Ulica predaka* a book for children (youth)? Probably its topic, i.e. childhood during the Second World War. Events are presented to the reader through the eyes of the main character, the little girl Tajana, i.e. through the eyes of a child, in a naive, simple and limited way. Commenting on the genre, critics described the book as a 'novelised biography' - in the tradition of *Zlatni danci* (*Golden Days*) by Jagoda Truhelka - 'a novel of formation', or simply a 'novel' with an infantile narrator, comparable to *The Brass Drum* by Gunter Grass. According to Vesna Kesić, *Ulica predaka* is a 'Zagreb variant' of Grass' novel: "The comparison is,

⁹ Ljerka Car Matutinović, *Ulica predaka Sunčane Škrinjarić*, in: *Odjek*, Sarajevo, 15-30 April 1982, 19.

¹⁰ Vesna Kesić, *Mračna strana Sunčane Škrinjarić (The Dark Side of Sunčana Škrinjarić)*, in: *Start* 344, 27 March 1982, Zagreb, 11.

naturally, inadmissible along formal, literary-theoretical criteria, because we are dealing with a different type of narration, a different function of the narrator and structure, but the association on the psychological and cognitive planes is powerful enough to encourage me to make it."¹¹ If we had to determine to which age group or to which type of literature *Ulica predaka* belongs, it would be of the serious kind, in spite of the fact that even school children can read it. So it would seem that the book was published in the right series after all.

What makes *Ulica predaka* serious reading? First of all, its topic. As the title suggests, the novel is about a time and location connected with the main character's life - Zagreb during the Second World War. The theme, therefore, is of a serious and historical nature. Though events and observations are related by a child, i.e. through the prism of child psychology, the narrative's naiveté is just a device for giving more expressive force to an interpretation of the outside world, and for making it unfamiliar at the same time, thereby rendering it more amusing, different. This way of looking at the world, through the eyes of an unusual narrator, is well-established in world literature. In one episode of *War and Peace*, for instance, Tolstoy has a little girl comment on the situation after an important battle. There are also numerous examples in which the world is presented through the eyes of an animal.

The narrative technique (or the narrative mask) of employing a naive character is called *skaz* (Russian for *tell, narrate*), and is based on the stylisation of child's speech. The narrator in Škrinjarić's novel, whom we have identified as omnipresent and omniscient, assumes the world-view of an infantile character and imitates her speech. *Skaz* helps create the illusion of reality. In one passage, Škrinjarić writes:

Mother and Father were fighting because of the tall fair-haired man, or maybe because of someone else. It was not very clear to Tajana, she could hear screams from the bedroom, Mother was standing in her night-gown by the window, threatening to throw herself out on the street, Father was dragging her by the hair, in the end he fell on his

¹¹ Ibid.

knees at her feet, pulled her towards him, and they rolled on the floor, when he suddenly noticed Tajana peeking at the door, and shouted: "Get lost, you little bitch!" Tajana went to bed, cried and kissed her worn-out teddy-bear, and the next day at table Father told Mother she was a psycho, and she tried to poison herself with quinine that afternoon, so she was taken to hospital and had her stomach pumped out. Then it was peace for a while. Father bought Mother a golden bracelet, but then it all started again, threatening silences and poisonous words. Mum despised the new Father, she didn't like Tajana, who let all her anger out on Aunt, beating her and pricking her with knitting needles. (35)

As for the narrative framework, *Ulica predaka* possesses the most important features of a novel - an open narrative space based on a developed plot with intrigue, numerous episodes and impediments, allowing a variety of subjects and motives. Here, documents and newspaper clippings occupy a special place, which underscore the historical framework and create the impression of reality.

"Rozamunda Pinchot, one of America's most beautiful women, has committed suicide. She was 32, two children, seven and nine, ideal of sculptural beauty, a horrible scene in a hermetically sealed car," Tajana was reading in *Jutarnji list*. (50)

Apart from frequently cited newspaper articles, events, characters and places that are woven into the story, the novel also contains biographical elements. By casting a glance at interviews in various magazines and rare autobiographical documents (such as the Preface to the 1991 edition of *Ulica predaka*), one notices some parallels between life and literature. Indeed, Škrinjarić confirms this in the said Preface, stating:

I was born on December 11 in Zagreb. My childhood was uneventful, nothing special, entirely middle-class. There was the impending war, people were changing, getting on or not getting on. This impending, but still distant war, without bombs or real, bloody battles, is the theme of *Ulica predaka*. (135)

As already stated, some critics saw Škrinjarić's novel as a 'novelised biography' - a biography presented in the form of a novel. However, literary theoreticians, and especially some recent ones, claim that any and every novel is a kind of autobiography. In his essay *De L'ouvre au Texte*, the French critic Roland Barthes

describes the author as living two lives - one in reality, the other on paper.

(S)'il est romancier, il s'y inscrit comme l'un de ses personnages, dessine dans le tapis. Son inscription n'est plus privilegiee, paternelle, alethique, mais ludique: il devient, si l'on peut dire, un auteur de papier, sa vie n'est plus l'origine de ses fables, mais une fable concurrente a son oeuvre., il y a reversion de l'oeuvre sur la vie (et non plus le contraire). C'est l'oeuvre de Proust, de Genet, qui permet de lire leur vie comme un texte... le mot 'biographic' reprend un sens fort, etymologique. Et du meme coup. La sincerite de l'enoncation, veritable 'croix' de la morale litteraire, devient un faux probleme. Le je qui ecrit le texte n'est jamais, lui, aussi, qu'unje de papier. (185)¹²

Another French theoretician, Phillippe Lejeune,¹³ suggests that the reader and the author should arrive at an agreement as to how one should read a text, i.e. whether, how and to what extent a text should be considered autobiographical, and whether one should seek out parallels with the author's life. Such an agreement would help establish the genre to which a text belongs and the identities of its characters.

Ulica predaka is a novel that is written in the third-person narrative, with an omniscient and omnipresent narrator. As already mentioned, numerous elements in the plot and some features the characters display have led informed readers to conclude that the novel is autobiographical, and that it is a description of a particular period of Škrinjarić's life. The narrative develops *as if* Škrinjarić were speaking of someone else.

It seemed to Tajana that no one had ever kissed her, except at Christmas and Easter, and that only somehow officially; that there had never been any sudden tenderness or showers of kisses, no certainty that one was coming home where one was expected. (36)

The apparent distance between the narrator (who expresses herself not as the author, but as an outsider) and the main character, which suggests that the story should be seen *as if* it were about someone

¹² Roland Barthes, *De l'oeuvre au texte*, in: *Revue d'Esthetique* 3, Paris, 1971, 230.

¹³ Phillippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, in *Le pacte autobiographique*, Seuil, Paris, 1975, 13-46.

else, is in reality a *figure of reading* which gives the text its three-dimensional quality and tension. The reader expects the absent first-person (the autobiographical 'I') to enter the narrative and reveal her identity, her name, her past and present. For this 'I' exists prior to the act of reading: it does the writing and we, as readers, have consented to this *exchange*. We have identified it as a figure (way) of reading, which consequently creates the effect of unfamiliarity. Such reading *by agreement* helps make the narration more convincing, and opens up sufficient space for the reader's super-structuring of the text, for his or her own conclusions and imagination, which is not easy to achieve in the enclosed space of first-person narration. A certain distance is necessary for the reader, because the focus in the story is a child's consciousness, wherein the informed narrator takes on the role of a mediator of sorts, or an interpreter, for the child's simple thoughts and feelings.

Ulica predaka is written in a modern fashion, as a sequence of transparent, fast moving film images, giving a panoramic, wide-angled representation of a mind-set, social group and location at a certain period in time. This film-like series of images is structured as a whole, with a beginning, middle and end, and as a logically developed story. However, every sequence of a page or two can be read separately, as an individual story within the overall narrative. Each of the mini-stories, each narrative sequence, has its own title and a page number in the book's index. So *Ulica predaka* can be seen not as a single, unified story (with one subject-matter, one motive, one character, one location), but as a sequence of fifty-two stories. Škrinjarić's prose is extremely musical, and is organised along poetic principles. It is rich in metaphors, which sparkle from ideas branching into different semantic fields. An excellent example is the chapter (or poem in prose, or fragment, or story perhaps) *Bradavice (Warts)*.¹⁴

It's nothing, said my beautiful Mother, you always make fuss about nothing. I'll take you to a doctor to burn them, I have more important things right now, why don't you go and play like other children. You're always whining about something, you're such a nuisance. And Mother went with painter Franc to *Lavica* to eat, there was a stream there and a large park, the painter's girls were in blue outfits, they were playing hopscotch and boys were chasing them, trying to untie the ribbons in

¹⁴ *Bradavice* (Croatian) - warts, nipples.

their hair, while Tajana sat on a bench like an old maid and fantasised about Tarzan and the Last of the Mohicans. The new Father was toiling at the plant, Mother was studying the menu with painter Franc, he liked to eat and drink well, he was a real *gourmet*... The painting was very large and good, Mother was sitting in an armchair, with a plunging neckline, one could well see the necklace Grandma left her, and almost the nipples as well, thought Tajana. Nipples are important and exactly where they should be, whereas warts on hands or under the nose, like the one Auntie has, with hairs growing out of them, are such a nuisance. (58-59)

If, finally, some general principles could be outlined which Škrinjarić's opus (her prose for children and adults, drama and poetry) is built upon, then one of the most important would certainly be the principle of homological parallelisms - ranging from concepts (as is evident in the above example) to genres, provided that in the latter case the key should not be sought outside her own world.

Translated by Damion Buterin.