

## URBAN LANDSCAPES IN TRANSLATION: NARRATING THE MID-SIZED EUROPEAN CITY

***Other Destinations: Translating the Mid-Sized European City*, Kelly, Michael G., Jorge Mejía Hernández, Sonja Novak, and Giuseppe Resta, editors. Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, 2023. 187 pp.**

As urbanization and industrialization increasingly developed in the European societies during the 19th and the early 20th centuries, the complexity of city life and its psychological impact on citizens became an important theme in various European texts—for instance, the poem *London* by William Wordsworth, the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin, a memoir *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway, and other works. This trend remains to this day. Compared to the metropolises such as Paris, London, Berlin, and other large cities that are a frequent topic in literature, the mid-sized city is mostly given “cursory attention in the [existing] discussion of both culture and society,” leaving them often neglected and under-researched (Kelly, et al. 11). Due to the unexplored nature of the mid-sized European city, a network of researchers from different disciplines (literature, architecture, and urban planning) was formed under the name *Writing Urban Places: New Narratives of the European City*, which in the period from 2019 to 2023 investigated the relationships “that exist between citizens and their built environments” (Kelly, et al. 11) and the way in which the meaningfulness, integration, and appropriation of the built environment of a mid-sized city can be improved, with a special focus on “the potential of narrative methods for urban development in European medium-sized cities” (COST Action).

The book *Other Destinations: Translating the Mid-Sized European City*, emerged from a work done within *Writing Urban Places* and released in 2023 by Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, is a 188-page collection of English translations edited by Michael G. Kelly, Jorge Mejía Hernández, Sonja Novak, and Giuseppe Resta. It contains a total of fifteen translations of shorter texts including poetry, short stories, excerpts from novels, podcasts and the like. The special feature of these texts is that they are contemporary—the first published in the 21st century—and that they had not yet been translated into English before, so they offer a fresh view of cities that have so far received little attention in the European context.

The collection begins with an Introduction that initially draws on Umberto Eco's collection of essays *The Search for the Perfect Language* in which Eco discusses the "tension [ . . . ] between national identities built upon local" languages and the idea of a united Europe with one language (Kelly, et al. 7). The idea of a *local* language turns out to be unrealistic for an urban area because it is a space of intense multilingual contacts. In the introductory part, therefore, the relationship between language, narrative and built space is explored, relying, apart from the theories of Eco, on the works of the architectural historian Joseph Rykwert, the French architect E.-E. Viollet-Le-Duc, and translation theorists Michael Cronin, Sherry Simon, and Laurence Venuti. After the theoretical basis, the editors present the structure of the collection, referring to the fifteen cities that are the focus of the translation and conclude with the emphasis of the role of translation in shaping our understanding of European cities, whereby the transfer of experiences proves to be a unique challenge:

Only locals will understand, for example, why the "Golden Anchor" cafe is nicknamed "The Louse," why it's funny to pass that name on to a poetry magazine, or how this relates to a bookstore called "The Flea." Are these metaphors for tourists, or do they refer to leisure or the arts as parasitic, even irritating activities? (Kelly, et al. 15–16)

Although these texts "convey such a specialized understanding of singular aspects of reality that they become genuinely untranslatable" (Kelly, et al. 15), the editors point out that each of these translations is a unique fragment, which can serve as a powerful tool for conveying a culturally diverse and complex vision that can reveal new meanings and connections within European society.

The introductory part is followed by fifteen translations into English structured so that each translation is preceded by a description of the mid-sized city that will be the subject of the translated piece. The text in its original language on the left-hand side is paired with its translation on the right side of the book allowing the reader to follow both the original text and its matching translation simultaneously.

The first translated literary text refers to the mid-sized city of **Varna**. It is an excerpt from the novel *Havra* by the Bulgarian writer Zahari Karabashliev, translated by Traci Speed. The town of **Viseu**, an old and historic Portuguese town, is the focus of the second translated text called *Visit Viseu . . . with Almeida Moreira*

the text *Zaharias Scrip* as the third text in the book refers to the port city of **Volos** in central Greece, where halva vendors roam the streets and where citizens inhale polluted air due to the factory work. *Zaharias Scrip* is translated by Elisavet Kiourtsoglou, Angeliki Sioli, and Vincent Cellucci. The fourth translation is an excerpt from the novel *Caponapoli* by Massimo Siviero, translated by Asma Mehan, in which Siviero writes about contemporary **Naples**, its culture, transformation, and dysfunction. The fifth translation differs in the medium: it is a translation of the podcast series *The Memory of the Windy City* [Rüzgarlı Kentin Hafızası] by Özge Doruk. The focus is on the city of **Çanakkale**, and the text was translated by Berna Göl. The city of **Porto** is the subject of the story *A Libertarian Gaze* [Um Olhar Libertário], which together with twenty other short stories and essays make up Francisco Duarte Mangas's book *The City of Lifeless Bookshops* [A Cidade das Livrarias Mortas]. This text was translated into English by Clara Sarmiento, Luísa Álvares, and Sandra Ribeiro. *The Clock Tower* is the seventh text in this collection, translated by Dorina Pllumbi and Elona Pira, which offers excerpts from the essay *Kulla e Sahatit* by Ardian Vehbiu with a focus on the Albanian city of **Tirana**, followed by a translation of an excerpt about another Albanian city, the city of **Durrës**. This text is an excerpt from the contemporary novel *The Monk* [Murgu] by Artan Fuga, translated here into English by Marisa Kerbizi. The ninth translation *Chocolate Days* is a fragment translated from the novel *Schokoladentage* by Gabriele Diechler. It is about the Austrian city of **Salzburg** and has been translated from German by Iris Spajić. Ivan Ivanji's original *The Ghosts from one Small City* [Aveti iz jednog malog grada] focuses on the city of **Zrenjanin** and represents the ninth translation from Serbian by Nevena Daković, Maja Marsenić and Jana Živkić. The following text entitled *On the confinement and Zé, from the Postigo Café* by Salvador Santos and translated by Maria José Marques thematizes the city of **Loulé**, representing everyday life on the eve of the lockdown due to the pandemic. Similarly, the following text *Lockdown Rules*, translated by Noemi Alfieri, deals with everyday life during the quarantine and simultaneously takes the reader to the city of São João da Madeira, but also primarily to the city of **Lisbon**. These are excerpts from the work originally titled as *Regras de Isolamento*, which is a combination of text by Djamilia Pereira de Almeida and photographs by Humberto de Brito. The thirteenth text refers to a translated excerpt from the novel *Singing Lesson* [Sat pjevanja] written by Nenad Rizvanović, translated by Sonja Novak, and set in the Croatian city of **Osijek**. What follows is a translation of the short story *How Much is Love Worth?* by the Bulgarian writer and photographer Desislava Gramadnikova. The story is set in

the Bulgarian city of **Plovdiv**, and the text was translated by Stela Todorova and Desislava Gramadnikova. The last translation entitled *Temporary Stop* refers to Erik Lindner's poem *Tijdelijke halte*, translated by Francis R. Jones, whose protagonists are placed in the space of the Dutch city of **The Hague**.

From the text about the city of Varna all the way to The Hague, the translated excerpts provide not only an insight into the everyday lives, culture, problems of citizens, but also historical events and transformations of these mid-sized cities, where each excerpt shows the urban landscape in its own way, whether through nostalgic reflections, intimate depictions of everyday life, criticism of society and politics or through descriptions of the city's underground, private spaces or public ones.

In addition to the uniqueness of this collection being its transparency and clear structure, this is also the first collection of translations that contains translated contemporary texts about the lesser-known European mid-sized cities and is therefore an extremely valuable contribution to the European literary corpus as well as representing a significant secondary source and reference. Since the editors of this collection are experts from various scientific disciplines, this collection can serve as a valuable resource for various researchers, scientists and students, primarily those who deal with urban studies, architecture, literature and even the sociology and culture of urban spaces. The collection is also intended for a wider audience with possible interest in travel literature or city novels as these translated texts not only provide an insight into the traditional, spatial and cultural diversity of a mid-sized European city, but also insight into the challenges, successes and history of lesser-known and often neglected European cities, thus contributing to a better understanding of the richness and complexity of urban life in the broad and diverse European context.

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### Works Cited

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