



Marinko Koščec

“There’s a lot of good writing in A Handful of Sand, and there is also some very funny, dark humour in parts. The man is a literary editor, and his description of the chaotic life of a Zagreb publisher is both insightful and amusing.”

- Tony’s Reading List
on *Handful of Sand*

Marinko Koščec was born in 1967 in Zagreb.

- 1992: B.A. of English and French language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb

- 1995: M.A. in literature at the University of Paris VII, France (le Diplôme des Etudes Approfondies) ; a study on “Figuration du non-dit dans le roman contemporain”

- 2005: Ph.D. in literature with the thesis on the French writer Michel Houellebecq at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb

- from 2008: part-time editor in the publishing house SysPrint, Zagreb (so far edited about 30 novels and collections of short stories)

- part-time teaches novel writing ; in the Creative Writing Centre (CeKaPe), Zagreb since 2009 and in the Home of Creative Writing (KKP), Split since 2012

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<http://winstonsdad.wordpress.com/2013/04/07/a-handful-of-sand-by-marinko-koscec/>

<http://parrishlantern.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/marinko-koscecs-handful-of-sand.html>

<https://audioboom.com/boos/1334999-josip-novakovich-in-conversation-with-marinko-koscec-at-the-lbf-croatian-stand>

„There is humour in this book – it is brittle, sharp and it’s nature dark, but it’s there and at times will raise more than a smile to your face.”

– Parrishlantern on
on *Handful of Sand*

„This novel is a portrait of a doomed relationship, charting the depression beforehand, the brief rapture and the bitterness of loss.”

- ANZ LitLovers LitBlog

MAIN WORKS:

An Island under the Sea (*Otok pod morem*), novel

Someone Else (*Netko drugi*), novel - awarded with «Meša Selimović» prize 2002 (the best novel published in 2001 in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro)

Wonderland, novel - awarded with the prize «VBZ» for the best novel manuscript in 2003

A Handful of Sand (*To malo pijeska na dlanu*), novel

A Centimetre from Happiness (*Centimetar od sreće*), novel

The Forth Man (*Četvrti čovjek*), Algoritam, Zagreb, 2011

Sketches for a portrait of contemporary French prose (*Skice za portret suvremene francuske proze*), essays and translations

Murmur in the Dark (*Mrmor u mraku*), anthology of contemporary French short story

Michel H. - miracle, martyr, manipulator? (*Michel H. - mirakul, mučenik, manipulator?*), study of Michel Houlebecq

TRANSLATIONS:

A Handful of Sand (English translation), Istros books, London, 2013

Marinko Koščec

Handful of Sand

(excerpt from a novel)

All that has been, when viewed in retrospect, never happened. All of human history, from the instant just spent and buried back to the dawn of consciousness, exists only in the nonexistent space of memory.

How much subsequent tragedy am I interpreting into our first moments? Would they now look so dramatic and passionate without it, so charged with emotions and symbolism? In brief: how much am I lying to myself? Quite a bit, no doubt, but that doesn't matter, because what I still feel we felt together and what began between us is more real to me and more alive in my body than all the things the eye convinces me really exist; the whole universe is just one vast, painful lie compared to that.

In the downstairs area of the bar we're the only guests of the jazzers whose portraits populate the walls, beset by their gazes and the full-bodied, ebony-ivory vibrations of a piano. Syncopated saxophone motifs blast between the tables, electrifying the air, which is hot and dry to the point of crackling, enough to make it rustle beneath the blades of the ceiling fans, and burn our cheeks like a blast of sand; I'm on tenterhooks, like sand jammed into an hourglass, and every single grain is torn from my body because time has suddenly become terribly precious - not one second is to be surrendered without a fight.

You are a mirage on the other side of the small round table and one mistaken movement would be enough to make you disappear; but at the same time I can already feel your smooth skin beneath my fingers, which glow with anticipation to find yours, interlock, and keep exploring.

Everything on you is smooth and rounded. And diminutive, like a child's: your feet, touchingly curved inwards, joined at the front as if in conversation; your incredibly small hands; your shoulders so slight, as if they weren't there; your dolllike face with berry cheeks, your mouth only sketched and your nose barely hinted at. Only your eyes are too old and too big, sweeping away and erasing whatever is within their reach, and with those wing-shaped eyebrows overarching everything on your face, and engulfing all they see.

A glass model at my fingertips, begging for me to take it in my hands, a Murano miniature with space inside for a cathedral, a family of dolphins and a snowstorm; and at the same time an ultimate astuteness, a slippery darkness bordered by derision; just one step inside and it possesses me: there's no going back.

From the back room of this hospitality joint now emerges the proprietor, an international great of the vibraphone, a living legend, the main and only hero of the canto *Wine, wine, wine*, now of more girth than mirth. He trundles up to the table reserved for him on a kind of stage - the throne where he displays all one hundred and fifty kilos of his earthly manifestation to his myriad admirers and keeps an eye on all the events in the hall with the look of a sleepy toad. Since there are no other events apart from the two of us, and we're totally static, he overcomes his horror vacui by gurgling to himself something evidently amusing, causing him to giggle and hiccup, and at the same time he seems about to cry. At any moment he could melt down completely into a torrent of tears, and whatever is crushing him inside he generously gives to us, heartily treating us to a performance of his soliloquy, which he endlessly tops up from an ice-filled silver bucket.

Whatever holds this man in submission inside is stronger than the outer glitter and can't be rinsed away by his planetary glory. Perhaps that is precisely the message he's been entrusted to spread all over the world: that we reach for the stars in vain because there's no shine which won't sink into the internal mud.

But we don't hear him, at least for now. I don't know what we're saying, everything is absorbed in a mutual hypnosis, there's no other name for it, we've discovered a hunger in ourselves and seized it with both hands, and we can't take our eyes off each other. At least until the moment when the spilled wine reminds us that we have hands too, albeit unfit for handling objects, and warns us how brittle what we might build would be, and how readily the little liquid which distinguishes us from the angels brims over.

Your little red lake only lasts an instant before vanishing into the barman's cloth, but it's immediately replaced with two more glasses of wine, and several more serve as justification for the drunkenness in us which tears down the last remains of gravity, and everything accelerates and becomes more imaginable.

Even your *We can't go to my place* at closing time opens up beautiful vistas of what we *can* do, right now, because it allows us, and even invites us, to go to my place.

Outside, once we've negotiated the spiral staircase, I discover that linear, unidirectional time has ceased to exist. But in a way it still endures, consisting now of a myriad of separate, simultaneous tempi ticking inside me.

The street shudders from the heat of the day trapped in the asphalt and the movements of people which have stirred it up; I see straight through every pair of eyes into people's soul, that's what I feel; with all my being I understand what makes people the way they are and what it means to be that little piece of the universe.

I instantly turn into what touches me: the title of the book in the shop window, the smell drifting over from the toasted- sandwich kiosk, a fragment of the sentence which brushes us in passing. I no longer cower in myself but am my own bright, luxuriant, sparkling explosion; I exist in an unlimited number of dimensions, and they keep extending and I'm present in each of them with all my being, and every segment of the world is open for me to read in deep perspective.

Now we're in the car, beneath the horse chestnut in full bloom. It's not a big car but could fit a whole flock of folk your size because you take up only part of the seat; at the same time, this is no longer the car I knew, its purpose and potential are as yet undefined, and a tension reigns like in a spacecraft before lift-off. But my hands and legs do their job; some force tells them what to press and pull, and the scenery glides past and the intersections roll by in a recognisable sequence. Every time I dare to look to the right I find - incomprehensibly - that you're still there. With those eyes which hardly fit into the car, black fireflies glowing in the dark; for some reason they haven't flitted away but tamely escort me home.

I unlock the door and push it open, and still on the doorstep, without turning on the light, we're seized by a fever and reach for the other body, which immediately refuses to remain foreign, and in it we recognise the other half of ourselves; like a switch, this sets off a trembling in both of us, and our two halves inflame it further, stirring and fanning the fire in each other; our halves understand each other perfectly in their own language unearthed in regions of our being which have long languished in ignorance; we had no idea that we possessed them, and they us; our body takes us over completely, lifting us out of oblivion into its arms with a love swift and sudden, and we would instantly surrender it all we have, and that is now so much, more than can fit into the sum of our earthly existence minus this instant; it is one immense microcosm, it merits that we stay in it forever and ban other forms of existence, more of which arrive to vie with each other ever more frantically and destructively; which to choose, perhaps the one where it becomes certain, irreversible, that our lips will adhere; it already exceeds all my hopes, the horizon of my life's combined expectations, to think that the closeness of someone's lips would bloom in me into such splendour and riot, but they don't stop at that, they really do touch me, all of me and all at once; I tremble from head to toe from one single touch of that tiny, downy body because it answers every tremble like a mirror with a trembling of its own, and that mirror shows how much I've missed what you are, what now bedews your lips; I press myself into them and they absorb me whole, all that remains of us is a common mouth - a source and an orifice at the same time; all else is swept away by the darkness revolving around us, we're buffeted by a whirlpool and are at the same time its heated, delirious heart, freed of mental grime, and our fingers and mouths conquer centimetre after centimetre more of that naked throbbing, wherever I touch is terribly vibrant, it burns, renders, dissolves and draws me into itself, it can't stand clothes a second longer and we cast them off like fetters, it's inconceivable to ever wear them again, such an insult to the skin, it's unimaginable to touch anything except your skin; yours and mine have been tailor-made to press up to each other, envelop each other and enter every recess, to grind each other's presence into the grooves; all the separation we've endured now gushes forth, rushes to recover what is ours, all of life has marathoned and moulded us for this moment, with Spartan austerity for this eruption, whatever we experienced before was only for comparison with this, for the sake of euphoria at discovering the original; bare skin takes on the role of lungs, inhaling the heavenly manna from the other skin, drinking it without breath, with elemental passion, as if possessed; pedantically I sample one morsel after another, only to return obsessively to the epicentres, tirelessly drawing from the chambers of relish, from your breasts and armpits and groin and all the folds, furrows, openings, cavities and dark spaces; I penetrate, press, plumb, probe, plough; you tremble beneath me and rise up, fit flush against me, squirming, moaning, gasping, striving to break through the membrane which hampers complete osmosis, the fusion of the sexes, of shorelines and skylines; we'll stay uplifted in the stratosphere, the eddying elements, we'll blindly seethe in every segment of ourselves and hide in the astral expanses from all that is perishable and one iota less than intense, integral, hypnotic and boundlessly arousing; that's all we can do, it's the only place, there's no further than this.