

"identity search." Lipuš's free verse, with its roving first-person narrator who both converses and observes, is meticulously built upon both aesthetic and philosophical concerns. There is a strong sense of fullness in the poems, imparted by short, erudite, visually rich sentences spiked with powerful verbs that convey decisive, if brief, action. But there is also an abiding feeling of expectancy. There is a positive kind of anticipation in the poems that waits or calls for fulfillment, or recognition, but there is also a mood of incipient defeat, relocation, clogging, threatening. Finally, there is everywhere the need to take stock, to line up and be counted, to get to the essence of things, even to impose order on multifarious life in its bewildering or murky manifestations.

Lipuš sets up for the reader a kind of archetypal tension in our consciousness. On the one hand there is the world, familiar and chronicled and rendered fecund by her inimitable language, and on the other hand there is an absence or a stillness, a kind of no-man's-land—both tranquil and pagan, perhaps—where we find out what animates or links our blood and bones. The individual, including you and me and the narrator alike, must take note of the gravity of our task: "In an enduring / singular tense, you lap at the edge of your clan."

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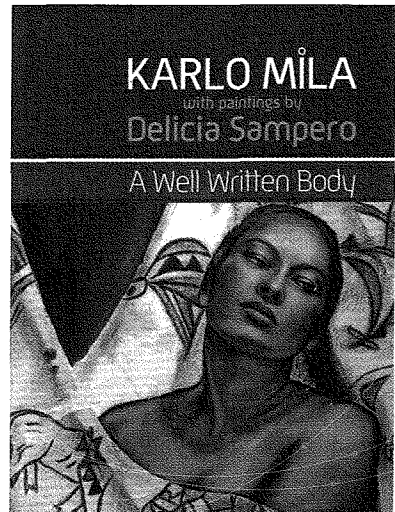
Immanuel Mifsud, Adrian Grima, et al. **Riħ min-Nofsinhar**. San Ġwann, Malta. Edizzjoni Skarta. 2008. 60 pages. €6. ISBN 978-99932-652-5-2

Slowly but very surely, contemporary Maltese verse is garnering an ever-greater presence on the inter-

national scene, in a process running parallel to the broadening of Maltese poetic expression in terms of spirit and thematic scope. Whereas the Movement for the Promotion of Literature of the 1960s was closely linked to political independence, this second *épanouissement* of Maltese poetry is not such a joyous one, and necessarily so. The shift from insularity to the acute awareness of forming part of a worldwide jigsaw where the laws of cause and effect stretch far beyond political and geographical borders—particularly in view of the changes suffered by the global environment and the peoples that inhabit it—bridges Maltese writing with the growing supranational continent of "green" literature.

*Riħ min-Nofsinhar* (Wind from the south) is an essential book of poetry on climate change by Immanuel Mifsud and Adrian Grima, two well-traveled authors who have fully understood Jonathan Bate's reassertion that literature essentially works upon consciousness and leads to unpredictable long-term practical consequences (*The Song of the Earth*, 2002). Following in the steps of publications such as *Earth Shattering* and *Feeling the Pressure*, the poems of *Riħ min-Nofsinhar* are interspersed with prose contributions from a wide range of social actors. Launched during last June's World-Fest, the impact of the publication can be gauged by the two editions printed within five months, as well as by favorable reviews from prominent members of civil society and a speech in Parliament by an opposition spokesman quoting a Mifsud poem in its entirety.

The planetary meets the local in a series of compositions by Mifsud entitled "The Poems of the Sahara," in which a family of Maltese farm-



ers laments the desert sand brought increasingly more often with the subtle, frightening noise of the southern wind. In another local poem, Grima speaks of "The Ice-cream Man" transferring his business from the abandoned beach to the front of a school, in plain language by no means devoid of a lyrical rhythm.

To a large extent, the authors appear to have consciously sacrificed aesthetics and metaphor in favor of a clearer message, in contrast to the more dense, probing poetry usually composed by both of them, and perhaps rightly so, in view of the urgency with which this poetry needs to be communicated. Neville Bezzina of Friends of the Earth has pointed out the sing-along quality of Mifsud's poems as a sign that the effects of climate change are "a song we must all sing together"; meanwhile, Grima's freer, journalistic diction can easily be seen as bordering on the naïve if not read in the correct key.

In conclusion, *Riħ min-Nofsinhar* is a huge step forward in a process that began only very recently: in addition to advancing collaboration between committed literature and

the civil society it communicates with, Maltese poetry joins the global trend of becoming a voice for the planetary conscience, which evermore urgently needs to be fostered across the four continental masses and the seven seas of our ailing Earth.

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Karlo Mila. **A Well Written Body**. Delicia Sampero, ill. Wellington, New Zealand. Huia. 2008. 79 pages, ill. NZ\$34. ISBN 978-1-86969-321-3

Karlo Mila's most recent book of poetry immediately strikes one as a work of art, "a well-written body"; her poems and the powerful paintings of Delicia Sampero coexist on the pages, the poems reacting to the images and the images to the poems. This book is the product of what Karlo Mila, in her poetically crafted acknowledgments, calls "creative conversations . . . an extraordinary dialogue."

*A Well Written Body* is divided into five sections. The first, "Where are you from?", deals with the challenges of Mila's mixed heritage of Tongan, Samoan, and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent). In the poem titled "There are no words for us" she writes: "There is no language // genome, germ lines, genomics / that captures / the rupture and joy / of gene-pool crossings // a channel as wide / as humankind."

Mila is part of the disparate cultures of her heritage, but she is also an outsider experiencing difficulties in understanding vital elements of these cultures: she is trapped between modern ways and ancient traditions. She writes in the poem "Fonu": "fleeing tall glass cities / in

search of fonua / only to find yourself / foreign." *Fonua* is the elusive Tongan word for "land" but also the word for a land's connection to its people and, in a deeper sense, the link it offers individuals to one another.

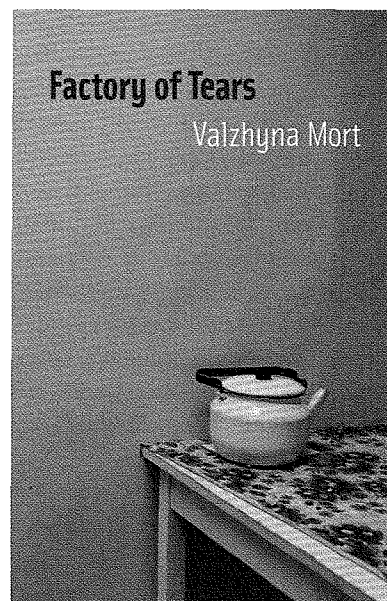
Also, in the subsequent sections of the book, different worlds and languages intersect. Mila at times weaves into the poetry a Tongan, Māori, or Samoan word or phrase, creating an effect that can be read for sound alone or also for meaning (the expressions are explained in a glossary at the back).

The poems range from deeply personal to political and polemic. The section "How I came to love the king" is her response to the death in 2006 of Taufa'ahau Tupou IV of Tonga. There is her angry reaction to mainstream New Zealand's patronizing media coverage of the king's reign and the obituaries centering on the monetary scandals of 2001 involving Jesse Bogdonoff, who was both the official court jester to the king and the official financial adviser to the Tongan government.

*A Well Written Body* is part of Huia's publishing mission to present indigenous literary perspectives within a Pacific framework, attracting new voices with its annual Pikihuia Award for Māori Writers. Huia has published English and Māori works by Patricia Grace, the 2008 winner of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and has reached out to native writers from other parts of the world, such as Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (of the Nawash First Nation of Canada), Serie Barford (of Algonquin and Samoan background), and the Samoan writer Albert Wendt. In 2004 Huia also published Karlo Mila's first book of poetry, *Dream Fish Floating*, which won one of the

prestigious Montana New Zealand Book Awards and established her as a new and original poetic voice.

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Valzhyna Mort. **Factory of Tears**. Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright, Franz Wright, and the author, trs. Port Townsend, Washington. Copper Canyon. 2008. viii + 116 pages. \$15. ISBN 978-1-55659-274-4

In a recently published anthology, *New European Poets* (2008), twenty-seven-year-old Valzhyna Mort from Belarus set herself apart from many other young poets. Recipient of the 2005 Crystal of Vilenica Award in Slovenia and of the 2008 Burda Poetry Prize in Germany, she is most characterized by an obstinate resistance and rebellion against the devaluation of life, which forces her to multiply intelligent questions, impressive thoughts, and alluring metaphors, while her rhythm surprisingly arises as a powerful tool for the most dramatic moments of her verses.