

Contacts and Similarities Between Slovenian and American Poetry (An Introduction)

Darja Pavlič

The purpose of this thematic section is to illuminate and evaluate contacts between poetry in Slovenia and the USA from different perspectives, and to contribute to a more complex understanding of their typological similarities. The methodological starting point for the collected papers is the theory of interliterariness. As noted by Dionýz Ďurišin in his *Theory of Interliterary Process* (1989), literary phenomena are related either genetically or typologically. Literary contacts are a precondition for the development of literature, but it is possible to distinguish between those without particular influence on the literary process (external contacts) and those with a direct effect on creativity (internal contacts). Exploring the typological similarities between literatures, manifested in the use of similar topics and literary procedures, reveals noncausal forms of interliterariness, in which case the reasons for the similarities of literary works are economic, political, social, or psychological.

Although in Slovenia there is a fairly well-established belief that American poetry has influenced contemporary Slovenian poetry, knowledge of other aspects of interliterary community formation is poorly developed and requires continued consideration. Slovenian poets who come in contact with their American colleagues are usually better equipped linguistically, but both groups of poets increasingly appear in the role of (co)translators. The question of what Americans do with Slovenian poetry – other than translating it – has yet to be investigated, while Irena Novak Popov answers the inverted question in this issue of *Primerjalna književnost*. As she points out, Slovenian poets in the last forty years have intensively appropriated and adapted the subject's postures, poetic procedures, and motif-thematic, genre and linguistic choices (openness, conversational language, storytelling,

inclusion of popular culture, media and music, urban reality) asserted by American poets.

The role of Walt Whitman in the prosaisation of Slovenian poetry is dealt with by Igor Divjak in his paper. He emphasizes that, in the first half of the twentieth century, the American bard influenced Oton Župančič and Anton Podbevšek, while in the second half of the century and up to the present day, many Slovenian authors have been influenced directly through translations and indirectly through beatniks. Considering other influences, the development of free verse in Slovenia can therefore be understood partly as a continuation of Whitman's tradition. The relationship between Whitman and Župančič is dealt with in depth by Jelka Kernev Štrajn, by applying the concept of environment-poem to their poetry, as introduced by American literary theorist Angus Fletcher on the basis of Whitman's poetry, and by applying the concept of *intempestif*, as designed by Gilles Deleuze on the basis of Nietzsche's notions of willpower and eternal return. Seth Michelson also refers to this extremely topical French philosopher when explaining the title character from Taufer's collection *Waterlings* as a metaphor for *becoming* because of his hybridity. In addition to his inventive interpretation, Michelson develops the thesis that the figure of waterling influences the reading of other poetic works, and thus indirectly offers at least a partial answer to the question of what Americans do with Slovenian poetry.

The paper by Michelle Gadpaille and Tomaž Onič deals with the aesthetics of the poem "One Art" by Elisabeth Bishop, examining its global impact (measurable only by the prevalence of *polysemic repetend*) and the presence of *vilanella* in Slovenian poetry. The authors also analyze the Slovenian translation of the poem. Iztok Osojnik places Richard Jackson's poem "String Theory," which he translated himself, at the center of his discussion. His interpretation is derived from Lacan's psychoanalysis and assumes that the work of the unconscious also manifests itself in poetry, in its deformation rather than in its content. The poem "String Theory" thus vibrates between the dream fragments and repressed memory.

Richard Jackson deals with thematic similarities between Slovenian and American poetry, analyzing how the romantic concept of oneness was treated by Prešeren, Kosovel, Detela, and Osojnik on the Slovenian side, and James Wright, Mary Oliver, Joan Murray, Wallace Stevens, and Mark Strand among American poets. Barbara Carlson examines the stylistic and thematic similarities between the poets Meta Kušar and Jean Valentine, noting that they share a deep understanding of the

spiritual forces at the heart of existence. Dubravka Đurić's discussion deals with stylistic parallels between Šalamun's early poetry from *Poker* and so-called new American poetry, presenting the different contexts in which both poetries originated. In the last article, Darja Pavlič explores the revelation of personal experience in contemporary Slovenian and American poetry, pointing to the universality and historical conditionality of this poetic device.