

The Lyric/Antilyric Paradigm, Hybridity, and Engaged Poetry in American and Post-Yugoslav Literature

Dubravka Đurić

Faculty of Media and Communication, Karadorđeva 65, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3677-9015>
dubravka.djuric@fmk.edu.rs

The central theme of this article is hybridization in the field of American and post-Yugoslav poetry. Hybridization raises the question of the status of experimentation in the field of poetry production, and with that in mind, I juxtapose American and post-Yugoslav poetry. I posit that a strong anti-lyrical paradigm was established in post-World War II American poetry, especially in the 1970s. This was possible thanks to the activity of the Language poets who simultaneously emerged as theorists, which coincided with the turn toward theory. The hybrid poem was the result of the response of mainstream poets who took up the procedures of Language poetry and hybridized them with the lyric paradigm. On the other hand, I argue that in post-Yugoslav cultures, where the lyric paradigm has reigned almost continuously since World War II (with a brief interruption in the 1960s) elements of the experiment have returned in an amalgam of hybrid poetic procedures. Therefore, I discuss here four books by post-Yugoslav women writers Snežana Žabić, Ana Seferović, Ivana Sajko, and Nina Dragičević, highlighting the constitutive elements in their hybrid structures. Since their books are socially and politically engaged and contain documentary material, and since an important source of their hybridity is the stimulus coming from the performing arts, I place their work in the broader context of these contemporary trends.

Keywords: American poetry / Post-Yugoslav poetry / hybridity / lyric paradigm / anti-lyric paradigm / social engagement / documentarism

The lyric and antilyric paradigm; the hybrid poem in American poetry

If we seek to explain hybridity, one of the terms in the title of this paper, we may approach it from different theoretical and poetic traditions and observe its self-manifestation in a diachronic perspective from antiquity to the present. This is exactly what Marko Juvan did in his study “Dialogues between ‘Thinking’ and ‘Poetry’ and Theoretical-Literary Hybrids” (2009). Using Jahan Ramazani’s terminology, I would say that in his discussion Juvan demonstrated the polytemporality and spatial plurality (Ramazani 1–7) of the concept of hybridity and the process of hybridization, although he covered only the western cultural domain. By contrast, I will focus on hybridity as a contemporary phenomenon and situate it within the *global* and/or *transnational turn*, as a broader context for the poetic practice of the post-Yugoslav female authors whose work I will briefly discuss at the end of this paper. But before that, I will deal with the specific context in which the hybrid poem and hybridity appeared in American poetry, because American poetic culture has been the most influential on the international stage since the second half of the twentieth century.¹

Hybridity questions the status of the poetic experiment, which I am interested in, and therefore I have to emphasize the difference between American and post-Yugoslav poetic cultures. After the Second World War, American poetry preserved the continuity of poetic experimentation, while experimental practices in former Yugoslavia completely disappeared in the 1980s (Đurić, “Contemporary”). In this sense, considering Slovenian poetry, Darja Pavlič argues that

[w]hile it can be argued that experimental poetry in the Slovenian language did not develop continuously and therefore did not create its own literary system, the question of its influence on contemporary poetry remains open and it is likewise an open question whether, following the example of American poetry, we may speak of the phenomenon of hybrid poetry here as well. (Pavlič, “Oseбно” 153)

¹ My research on the influence and exchange of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav poetries has showed that most anthologies of American poetry were published in Yugoslavia after the Second World War (see Đurić, “Američka”). It is no coincidence that the relationship between American and Slovenian poetry has been analyzed the most in Slovenia (see Pavlič, “Stiki”; Divjak, *Urbana*). In Croatia, Damir Španić has authored a book about Yugoslav connection to Beat generation, *Beatnici: Beat-generacija u južnoslavenskim književnostima* (2021).

For this reason, I will contrast American poetry with post-Yugoslav poetry cultures, where the lyric paradigm was persistent and for decades radically excluded poetic experimentation, until the global emergence of the hybrid poetic paradigm.

The hybrid poem appeared in American poetry as a reaction of the mainstream to the influential antilyric paradigm that was established and advocated by the Language poets from 1971 to the present.² This paradigm owes its existence to their poetry practice, but also to the elaborate and extensive theoretical production of the Language poets-theorists, which coincided with the turn to theory. The Language poets put language at the center of their interest, and that turn to language, according to the language poet and theorist Barrett Watten, “was so immediately identified with the turn to theory” (Watten 17).

The Language poets criticized the mainstream lyric paradigm. Charles Bernstein, for example, wrote in the mid-1980s that the lyric paradigm was constituted in accordance with the romantic tradition in which, as I explained elsewhere, usually “the male voice, produced as neutral and universal, speaks of his experiences, feelings and adventures” (Đurić, “(Trans)national” 300). During the 1970s and 1980s, in mainstream American poetry, its operative ideologies included the strict separation of poetic and scientific language, poetry and prose, while poetry was defined as figurative, ironic, or connotative. As such, it was opposed to non-figurative discourses and considered subjective, dealing with personal feelings and experiences (Perloff 172).

Discussing the relationship between the avant-garde and antilyric paradigm, Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins have associated the antilyric paradigm of poetry with the work of the Language poets and the next generation of conceptual poets close to them, and I would add here the short-lived Flarf collective (Jackson and Prins 452). In discussions of antilyric poetry, the terms *avant-garde/experimental/innovative/radical poetry* are typically used as synonyms (Đurić, “Contemporary” 248). There is another term as well: *poetry in an expanded field* (Bernstein, “The Expanded”; Watten; Stephens). It points to the complex rela-

² Darja Pavlič has written in much detail about the relationship and dynamics of experimental and conventional poetry from the Second World War to Language poetry, conceptual writing, and hybrid poetry (Pavlič, “Osebnost”). In my book *Jezik, poezija, postmodernizam. Jezička poezija u kontekstu moderne i postmoderne američke poezije*, I discussed academic (conventional) and anti-academic (experimental) American poetry since WWII. On the transformations of American poetry since WWII up to the present, see Đurić, “Globalizacija”; on the Language and conceptual writers’ criticism of the concept of hybrid poem see Đurić, “Contemporary”.

tionships that experimental poetry established during the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War, with other arts, in a joint effort to transcend their established boundaries. That is why poetry in the expanded field is described as multi-media, trans-media, multi-genre, and interdisciplinary. This is also the reason why it must be viewed in its complexity and irreducibility to the traditional understanding of poetry as a literary genre, closed in on itself and reduced to the world of literature.

When we focus on the relationship between poetry and philosophy/theory, in the American context it is most significant to highlight the fact that the Language poets questioned the boundaries established between the fields of poetic and philosophical production. Bernstein wrote that

what makes poetry poetry and philosophy philosophy is largely a tradition of thinking and writing, a social matrix of publications, professional associations, audience; more, indeed, fact of history and social convention than intrinsic necessities of the “medium” or “idea” of either one. (Bernstein, *Content’s Dream* 217)

Bernstein’s position here is radically anti-essentialist, which would be used, much later, to relativize the difference between the lyric and anti-lyric paradigms. But the problem of distinguishing between poetry and theory can be approached from another perspective, as Juvan does, emphasizing hybridization and insisting that these two fields of cultural production are autonomous and different. Juvan notes that the 1960s witnessed a *literarization of theory* and, at the same time, a *theoretization of literature* (Juvan 201). He points out that theorists of poststructuralism, like Barthes, adopted literary techniques for theoretical ends, and, at the same time, writers (his example is the prose writer John Barth) incorporated theoretizations, which transformed literary production (202).

In contemporary debates about the lyric and antilyric paradigms, the anti-essentialist notion of *reading* in the sense that Virginia Jackson introduced in her 2005 book *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* is of particular importance. In her book, Jackson discussed the way critics and editors interpreted parts of Emily Dickinson’s letters to different people as poetry, even though they were not written that way. Analyzing this intervention that turned parts of her letters into poetry, Jackson developed her thesis about the *lyricization of poetry*, specifically that “from the mid-nineteenth through the beginning of the twenty-first century, to be lyric is to be read as lyric—and to be read as a lyric is to be printed and framed as a lyric” (Jackson 6). She

refers to the insights of Gérard Genette. Genette wrote that the notion of the “three major genres” as eternal and self-evident was the effect of “projecting onto the founding text of classical poetics a fundamental tenet of ‘modern’ poetics (which actually [...] means romantic poetics)” (qtd. in Jackson 8). Likewise important is the interpretation of Susan Howe, a Language poet, who pointed out the difference between “Dickinson-in-manuscript and Dickinson-in-print,” which would lead Jackson to conclude “that a history of reading Dickinson lyrically has been made possible by a history of printing Dickinson lyrically” (27).

Referring to Jackson, Gillian White has claimed “that avant-garde or antilyric is, like lyric, a way of reading” (White 14), arguing that there are two opposed paradigms of reading: lyric and antilyric (15). Furthermore, she concludes that this interpretation suggests the possibility “that the ‘lyric’ tradition against which an avant-garde antilyricism has positioned itself [...] never existed in the first place” (16). I have already emphasized that the Language poets aimed their critical edge at the lyric paradigm, where the lyric (however one defines it) was understood as the essence of the poetic. On the other hand, by questioning the boundary between poetry and philosophy and/or Theory, the field of poetic production is intellectualized to the extreme. The conservative critical reaction argued that the Language poets’ poetry was merely an illustration of their theory, or, as Watten wrote, “the Language School was often seen as being in complete denial of poetry in favor of some other, ‘alien’ discourse” (Watten 17).

During the 1990s, several interrelated processes occurred: the Language poets gradually entered universities and became increasingly influential, and the work of critics such as Marjorie Perloff, Alan Golding, Hank Lazer, Jed Rasula, and Christopher Beach reinforced the division between experimental poetry and official verse culture (Epstein 211).³ Since the late 1990s, academic circles have started to address Language poetry, and mainstream poets like Jorie Graham and C. D. Wright have begun “incorporating avant-garde poetic strategies in their work” (212). At the beginning of the 1990s, alternative canons were created to deal with American poetry after 1945, which prioritized New American Poetry (Black Mountain, the New York School, Beat Poetry, and the San Francisco Renaissance) and, most importantly for us, Language poetry. Among them, Epstein singles out the following three: Eliot Weinberger’s *American Poetry since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders* (1993), Paul Hoover’s *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton*

³ “Official verse culture” is Charles Bernstein’s label for the mainstream poetry world (Epstein 210).

Anthology (1994), and another anthology, *From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry, 1960–1990* (1994), by the Language poet Douglas Messerli (211). These anthologies had a visible reception in the post-Yugoslav region. In Croatia, Hoover's anthology was crucial for Petar Opačić's own anthology, *Stars & Stripes: američka poezija postmodernizma* (*Stars & Stripes: American Poetry of Postmodernism*, 2003), and in Montenegro, Vladimir Kopicl and me consulted all three anthologies when we worked on our anthology *Novi pesnički poredak: antologija novije američke poezije* (*New Poetic Order: An Anthology of New American Poetry*, 2001). In both of these anthologies, the Language poets are represented to a significant extent. The title of our anthology, *New Poetry Order*, formulated by Kopicl, was inspired by a contemporary political phrase—New World Order—and pointed to the new established paradigm in American poetry whereby narrative and non-narrative poetics or, to use a different pair of rhetorical categories, lyric and antilyric poetics have almost the same treatment.

Turning to the domains of post-Yugoslav poetry from the mid-1990s, I would argue that a unique antilyric paradigm in Serbian poetry was established in the work of Ažin's school of poetry and theory, which was active from 1996 to 2010 and followed the model of Language poetry (Đurić, "Ažinova"). Its leading representatives were Ljiljana Jovanović, Jelena Savić, Danica Pavlović, Snežana Roksandić, and Tamara Šuškić—for them, just like it was for the Language poets before them, the heritage of the Italian Futurists, Russian Cubo-Futurists, Concrete and visual poetry, as well as the use of Theory were all crucial. Thanks to their work, writing poetics was reintroduced in Serbian poetry culture, as well as an interest in experimental poetry (see Balžalorsky Antić 184).

But let us return to the hybrid poem. Gillian White's interpretation highlights the performativity of reading, or the constructive or modeling power of the concepts with which we shape the object we describe—in this case: poetry. In her view, the avant-garde applied lyricizing readings, producing "the figure of the poetic speaker that is often assumed as quintessentially 'lyric'" (White 6). The claim that the lyric tradition never actually existed has the ideological function of canceling the distinction established in the previous period between the experimental and lyric modes, with the aim of recovering and redefining the lyric. If the lyric tradition never existed, then the existence of the avant-garde is completely unnecessary. That is why Bernstein wrote about the establishment of "new hybrids, new conditions of normalcy, new forms of correctness in the place of the old ones" (Bernstein,

The Pitch 295). The hybrid becomes a new centrism, and the procedures and theorizations introduced by the Language poets, “demonized a few decades ago[,] are now embraced as a mark of new inclusiveness, a fair and balanced approach to poetry styles, marking not the end of ideology but an indefinite cessation” (295). Bernstein explains:

In our time, the dominant strain of official verse culture is defined by its presumption of being above the fray of special interests, bickering movements, and groups. The recent rise of elliptical and hybrid poetics is a case in point, for this is not a movement but a strategy to contain disruptive and unruly ideological and historical—which is to say *aesthetic*—challenges. It is a poetics of assimilation and accommodation, and, as such, is very much in line with the traditional values of much American poetry criticism of the Cold War. (296)

Brian M. Reed’s term for the new hybrid paradigm is “new consensus poetics” (Reed 27–33). Considering the poetic practice of the last ten years in the post-Yugoslav region and beyond, I would apply Reed’s term and argue that it constitutes a “new consensus poetry” on a global scale. It was made possible, among other things, by the global historicization and canonization of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde and their successors in the postmodern era (in the US, the New American Poetry and Language poetry), which occurred during the 1990s. In this sense, I would argue, however contestably, that in the post-Yugoslav poetic cultures, the hybridization of poetry arose as an effect of a transnational or, in other words, a global wave, to use Franco Moretti’s term.

Two concepts: Poetry in the age of globalization and poetry-in-transition

In order to show the importance of globalization theories, I would refer to the following definition given by Tomo Virk:

Globalization is certainly the overarching “most universal” phenomenon of today’s world, which demands from the humanities new epistemological tools and methods, certainly also those that will be able to think about the world and phenomena in all (cultural, etc.) diversity, but also in their unity, “globality.” (Virk, 83–84)

I would apply Virk’s phrase “comparative literature in ‘the age of globalization’” (84) to poetry and argue that we can now talk about *poetry in the age of globalization*, which, as a neoliberal imperative, requires an overabundant production and creativity that lead to dif-

ferent kinds of hybridizations, ranging from cooking and dressing to theory and poetry. We can also speak of poetry production and the theorizations that accompany it as a *contemporary global moment of poetry*, because it has turned from a marginal into a significant genre that has re-entered the public sphere, and I believe that since 2010 a *global turn to poetry* has occurred in this part of the world (Đurić, “Poezija” 7–8).

The contemporary global moment of poetry can also be conceptualized as *lyrical poetry-in-transition*, a term introduced by German scholars Ralph Müller and Henrieke Stahl. The term was borrowed from political theory, where it denotes the political and economic transition from communism to capitalism, redefined and applied here to poetry. Müller and Stahl insist that contemporary poetry exists on- and offline, poets continue the experiments of the historical avant-gardes and, I would add, the neo-avant-gardes. Contemporary poetry exists as performance, its hybridization with other media is increased; contemporary poetry has become culturally and stylistically hybridized, with so many intertextual and intermedial references, it has become dialogic and participatory, combining “dramatic, epic, and poetic-lyrical features” (Müller and Stahl 5–8). They point out that concepts such as *liminality*, *hybridity*, *transgression*, and *the third space* are related to their notion of *transition*, defined as the term that “combines societal and political transformation and cultural negotiation with an experimental approach to literature and language” (12). Müller and Stahl also emphasize that these transformations occur through “digital, mobility, and globalization that are causing changes in literature with regard not only to its themes but also to its genre system, its function, and its publication forms” (12). With this state of affairs in mind, in what follows I will focus on two aspects of contemporary poetry: engaged poetry and its documentary impulse.

Contemporary poetry can largely be defined as engaged. In the US, this new engagement has appeared since the global financial crash of 2008. In 2011, Christopher Nealon pointed out that the main theme of American poets was now focused on how capitalism works and how poets can respond to social changes. That is why he pointed to “a link they all explore between poetry as textual art and the resources of that textuality for preserving poetry in the face of disaster” (Nealon, *The Matter* 1). Nealon calls this tendency “anti-capitalist poetry” (Nealon, “Anti-capitalist”) and describes it as moving away from private, meditative poetry toward public lyric speech. Poets now address “all kinds of violence—racial, sexual, economic—all kinds of depredation—colo-

nial, environmental—that liberal political language has tended to grasp in parallel rather than as a part of a totality” (181). The engagement of this body of poetry relates largely to its criticism of the aggressive global onslaught of the most conservative political and social forces, the collapse of democratic institutions in the West, but even more so in former socialist countries. In the Slovenian context, Irena Novak Popov has labeled this poetic tendency as “socially critical poetry.” According to Novak Popov, it “destroys stereotypes and clichés and strives to create authentic representations of women, lesbians, workers, artists, minorities, classes, values, private relationships and social relations, i.e. inequality, repression, exclusion, denial of rights and opportunities” (Novak Popov, “Sodobna” 277).

This description leads me to connect contemporary engaged poetry with engaged poetry created in the USA during the countercultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Back then, poets were politically active, they wrote and recited poetry that entered the public sphere, and in this way, they participated in articulating the struggle for human and minority rights. I would particularly emphasize feminist poetry and the Black Arts Movement. As I wrote elsewhere, in the 1960s feminist “[p]oetry was a tool for expressing the protest against gender constraints and invited women to participate in [the] feminist movement with the goal to provoke social change” (Đurić, “(Trans)nationalism” 301). Poetry written by African American poets within the Black Arts Movement, “expressed a more militant attitude toward white American culture and its racist practices and ideologies” (Beach 130). This connection might be supported by the fact that, for example, the Slovenian poet Katja Gorečan was interested in the African-American feminist poet Ntozake Shange and, with her work in mind, introduced the genre of choreopoem into Slovenian poetry, which she describes as “a genre of dramatic expression or form of performative writing that includes poetry, dance, music and play” (cited in Pavlič, “Pesnitve” 128). Serbian poet Ivana Maksić has co-edited two anthologies of engaged poetry (2014 and 2016), etc. If we compare engaged poetry from the 1960s and 1970s and today, one might say that the poets of the 1960s and 1970s worked in a period that pursued emancipatory politics, while today’s poets are working in a period in which many of the twentieth century’s democratic achievements tend to be annulled. This is significant because in their books, authors from the post-Yugoslav region, Snežana Žabić, Ana Seferović, Ivana Sajko, and Nina Dragičević, among many others, have criticized capitalism, violence, especially violence against women, in war and peace alike.

The trend of documentary poetry or docupoetry is also connected with the critique of social relations. Michael Leong has pointed to the “documentary turn across the arts, humanities, and social sciences, all of which are invested in the production, preservation, and transformation of meaning over time” (Leong 40). Discussing this phenomenon in American poetry, Jeffrey Gray and Ann Keniston have written that many contemporary poets

consider the ways public events are represented by government, politics, and/or the media. This heightened awareness of mediation is particularly evident in the use of cited or appropriated discourse, whether from presidential speeches, newspapers, scientific texts, official or corporate directives, or popular culture. (Gray and Keniston 4)

Joseph Harrington points out that docupoetry “implicitly questions the status of both poetry and document” (Harrington, “The Politics” 67). The reaction to the earliest examples of American documentary poetry in the 1930s was an insistence on clear demarcation lines between literary and non-literary documents, between poetry and reportage. In accordance with the understanding of New Criticism, which was then at its most influential, a poem was understood as an organic whole and an original product of an individual imagination. By contrast, Harrington describes “docupoetry” as poetry “that (1) contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the poet and (2) relates historical narratives, whether macro or micro, human or natural” (Harrington, “Docupoetry”). As Harrington states, docupoetry tells “the story of history” but “with a heavy dose of skepticism of, and creativity toward, the framing of ‘facts’ (particularly official ones) and even narrative per se—especially those that purport to be true” (Harrington, “Docupoetry”). Poets are aware that documentary writing is always a form of mediation, so this new docupoetry narrates history, making “us aware of how we construct, perceive, and interpret history” (Harrington, “The Politics” 67). The reason why docupoetry is so attractive today is, among other things, the fact that we are living “in an era of intensive manipulation of images and information by the political and economically powerful” (68). Poets are aware that documents “are constitutive of social reality” (Leong 9).

Post-Yugoslav poetry cultures

My starting point in this essay was the thesis, however contentious it might be, that in the post-Yugoslav poetry cultures the experiment returned with the global wave in a hybrid amalgam. Namely, after the short hiatus of the Cold War global experimental wave in the 1960s, with the most radical examples emerging in Slovenia in the shape of reism and concretism, Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav poetries were, from the mid-1970s onwards, gradually and again institutionally, restructured according to the lyric paradigm.

The conceptualization of contemporary poetry as hybrid has proceeded in several directions. Most poets write poems that simultaneously belong to different poetic paradigms. They can be extremely narrative, or written in such a way as to refer to experimental traditions, ranging from the historical avant-gardes to, for example, models developed by American poets of the New York School, or concrete poetry. At the same time, many books are constituted as hybrids because they employ different writing strategies, which establish relationships between 1) poetry and prose, 2) poetry, prose, and drama, 3) poetry and theoretical discourses, 4) poetry and different performative practices, 5) poetry and documentary genres, 6) poetry and the visual arts, etc.

To discuss hybridity in post-Yugoslav poetry, I have chosen the following books: Snežana Žabić's *Broken Records* (2016), Ana Seferović's *Materina* (Serbian edition, 2016; British edition, 2023), Ivana Sajko's *Rio bar* (2006), and Nina Dragičević's *Ljubav reče greva* (Love Says Let's Go 2019). What attracted me to these books is that it seems that in their works, these poets use structural elements of the antilyric paradigm to a greater extent than most other writers do in the current model of the hybrid binary opposition between lyric and antilyric. I will discuss their books with regard to: 1) the positioning of the author in relation to their native culture, 2) engagement, 3) hybridity, 4) the documentary genres included in their works, and 5) performativity coming from outside literature. The concept of *reading* that I have already discussed appears here in a completely different context, important in reading Žabić's autobiographical book and Sajko's novel as poetry.

1. *The authors' positioning.* Since we live in a transnational age, in which people, goods, ideas, and theories travel extensively, the authors discussed here can be seen as transnational. They have spent a significant part of their careers outside their native culture. In many interviews, the Croatian writer, theater director, and performer, Ivana Sajko

points out that this has been crucial for her work. As a refugee from Croatia, Snežana Žabić spent part of her life in Serbia, graduated from Belgrade University, and started publishing her prose and poetry in Belgrade. Later on, she lived in Budapest, Hannover, and finally in the United States. Her book *Broken Records* is an autobiography, written in English and published in America. At the moment, she belongs to both Serbian and American poetic cultures, but she has decided to write in English. Ana Seferović started her literary career in Belgrade, but eventually moved to Great Britain. She simultaneously writes in Serbian and English, and in an email she explained to me that her book is not a translation; rather, “*Materina* was created by writing in Serbian and English [...]. *Materina* does not have an original language. Everything in it is a translation.”

2. *Engaged poetry.* In terms of the themes they address, the books by Žabić, Seferović, and Sajko deal with war, primarily the war in former Yugoslavia. And yet, they do not approach this topic in the same way. In *Broken Records*, writing her personal story and the life stories of her family members, Žabić points to the geopolitical and geo-cultural historical reconfigurations of Yugoslavia, from the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, before moving her narrative focus to socialist Yugoslavia, in which Žabić was born, and the Yugoslav wars, which made her and her family refugees. Born in Vukovar, Croatia, she traces the changes in Yugoslavia’s history from its socialist revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, its self-management type of socialism, and the economic crisis in socialist Yugoslavia, to the emergence of nationalist ideologies and the outbreak of war.

Seferović’s vast narrative, almost epic in range, covers the following topics: gender power relations, alienation, migration, war, prostitution, domestic violence, sex trafficking, class divisions, the urban/rural relation, globalization, locality, masculinity, homophobia, nuclear family relations (husband-wife, daughter/son-mother/father), alcohol and drug addiction, socialism/post-socialism/capitalism, etc.

Since *Broken Records* is a hybrid autobiography, everything in it is localized, territorialized, and contextualized. Unlike Žabić’s book, Seferović’s work is basically de-territorialized, delocalized and de-contextualized when she is writing about war, refugees, the environment of war, rape, mass murders, etc. The experience that she might have had living in Belgrade in the 1990s, and fragments of local stories that she eventually addresses are given universal status. Therefore, her experience of war could be the experience of all those who have escaped a warzone.

In *Rio Bar*, Sajko tells the story of the war in Croatia in the 1990s, with references to the pre-war (socialist) and post-war times (neo-liberal transition). The war is at the center of her narrative, dealing with different kinds of violence, mass murder, torture, bombing, and conflagration. The reference to post-socialist transition concerns liberated Croatia as a nation that has realized its dream of independence. The dark side of democracy is the possibility of getting rich in a short period of time, mafia and criminal activities, and nationalism, with its violence directed at foreigners and all those who are othered in Croatia's society.

The focus of Nina Dragičević's book is not the wars in former Yugoslavia.⁴ Her long poem *Ljubav reče greva* belongs to the contemporary practice of anti-capitalist poetry. She points to the effects of neo-liberalism and the way that ideology makes people act against their own interests, insisting on the fact that the individual is forced to enter the brutal battles of competition. The lyric subject of her poem is a lesbian artist, i.e., a self-employed precarious cultural worker, who "day by day faces her existential hopelessness as well as the fight for survival in a suffocating, anxious city" (Slovič, "Neznosnost"). Dragičević investigates everyday unnoticed violence, pointing to "new forms of discrimination, *fascism*," from the institutional level to that of everyday interactions, which result in the dehumanization of individual human beings (Slovič, "Neznosnost"). According to Aljaž Koprivnikar, Dragičević addresses "xenophobia, homophobia, the negative treatment of minority groups and poverty, i.e., everything that is usually silenced or, rather, unheard" (Koprivnikar, "Nina Dragičević").

3. *Hybridity*. Hybridity is the most striking feature in the books by Žabić, Seferović, Sajko, and Dragičević. The publisher describes Žabić's book as not "a neat narrative but a bit of everything—part bildungsroman, part memoir, part political poetry, part personal pop culture compendium."

Seferović's *Materina* consists of 14 poems, divided in two parts. The first part comprises separate poems with titles, while the second part consists mostly of poems arranged in a continuum separated only by asterisks. That is why I would classify *Materina* as a "novel in poems," using Henrieke Stahl's new generic category. A "novel in poems," according to Stahl, is a "series of poems' that is used to depict a plot with characters and their external and internal worlds. The relative autonomy of the

⁴ In her next book *To telo, pokončno* (2021), Dragičević writes about her aunt Janja from Velebit who was killed during the war in Croatia together with her relatives (Pavlič, "Pesnitve" 128).

constituent poems, which makes their individual reading and publication possible, can indeed vary by degree” (Stahl 91).

Another aspect of *Materina* that makes it a hybrid is the author’s usage of procedures from another genre, drama, for poetic ends. This is why I would propose another term: *drama into poetry*. Seferović also incorporates the diary form: for example, on pages 63 and 68, the phrase “Dear diary” appears several times, while on page 101 we encounter the fairy tale mode. Like in new experimental drama, Seferović uses many voices to tell their life stories, and sometimes it sounds like a monologue, sometimes like a dialogue.

Although published as a novel, Sajko’s *Rio bar* establishes relations between poetry, drama, and prose. Alida Bremer, Sajko’s German translator, wrote in her afterword titled “Paralelni svjetovi” (Parallel Worlds) that “[t]he text which is in front of us is not prose” (Sajko 137) and in a 2006 interview Sajko said that she always writes generic hybrids. Hybrid genres are, in her words, “a natural way of writing after post-modernism” (“Pisci-na-mreži”).

We might say that Dragičević activates in her work the heritage of sound and concrete poetry in addressing contemporary everyday life and behavior, confronting the dehumanizing communication with state bureaucracy as well as within the NGO sector, with its interactions and hierarchies. It is important to emphasize her interest in dealing with form beyond the confines of a single book. Dragičević’s intention is to write a *serial* work. Serial poems are open-ended and a common form in American experimental poetry (Pavlič, “Pesnitve” 124–125). A book may be composed as a serial poem, like Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* or Louis Zukofsky’s “A”. A serial poem could be incorporated with other poems within a single book, like Michael Palmer’s “Notes for Echo Lake 1,” each numbered and published in a book of the same title. A serial poem could be found in several books, under the same title and numbered, like Robert Duncan’s “Structure of the Rhyme 1 ...”. Or, the poet could work with a series at the level of a book, like Ron Silliman’s *The Age of Huts*—a book comprising previously published books intended to be a series of books (Đurić, *Jezik* 142–143).

4. *Documentarism*. In their works, Žabić and Sajko use documentary materials. In Ed Sanders’s terms, we might say that Žabić is interested in providing a “description of *historical* reality” (cited in Leong 37), creating “primary sources” from her own “experience and reporting” (37). That is why her style most of the time sounds dry and factual. The documentary genres she employs comprise an interview with her grandmother (Žabić 119–120), fragments from *Po(jest)zija/Po(eat)ry*,

a bilingual book she wrote with her Zagreb friend Ivana Percl and published in 2013 in Novi Sad, with Žabić's critical commentary on the book. She also included her own diary from 1998 (143–147). On pages 49 to 51 she describes the apartments she occupied as a refugee in Belgrade. Each paragraph is titled Apartment #1 through 8, and this part of the book might be viewed as a serial poem within a book. The documentary materials used in the book also comprise two Case Information Sheets (IT-97-27 and IT-03-67) from the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Žabić explains that the ICTY was “an institution that’s rapidly running out of time, and so their long list of indicted war criminals from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina will never be completed” (44).

Sajko's *Rio Bar* is divided in two parts. The first part uses a mixture of poetic, dramatic, and fictional procedures, while the second part is much shorter and documentary in character. Documents are an important aspect of her work. Sajko explains that

[t]he war in *Rio bar* is subjective; the story follows a curve of an emotional deformation that started from innocence, humiliation, pain, through fear to hatred and revenge. This story has its counterpoint, the apparent documentary part, which aspires to objectivity. (“Pisci-na-mreži”)

The function of the documentary part is to provide factual information about the historical and political context to which the “personal” stories relate.

5. *Performativity*. In the first phase of her work, when *Rio bar* was written, Sajko worked on the non-narrative theater and dance scene in Zagreb and abroad, and her plays formed part of the New European Drama. All of this was crucial for her writing from that time. Likewise, the fact that Nina Dragičević is a composer and sound artist significantly affects her writing as well. Because her writing comes from her experience of working in theater, we might conclude that Sajko's texts were always made with the intention to be performed. On the other hand, her practice departs from theatrical conventions in that she uses “the experience of live theatre performance, its concepts, conventions, its eroticism and, finally, mortality, applying it to the textual medium” (“Pisci-na-mreži”). That is why we can say that *transmediation* lies at the core of her artistic activities. It is a way of questioning established theatrical relations between the text and performance. Every point of a realization, whether a written or performed text, becomes a site of hybridization. Live performance provides an opportunity to change the printed text; therefore, literary texts do not constitute fixed material to

be performed, but a material to work with. Researching at the end of the 1990s the relation of poetry and its oral performance, what he calls “performed word,” Charles Bernstein insists that a text has a “plural existence” (Bernstein, “Introduction” 9), and that we may speak of its intertranslatability from printed to oral iterations and vice versa. In other words, a printed text also exists in its many oral interpretations; therefore, one may say that as a material used in performance, the text is questioned “as a fixed, stable, finite linguistic object” (9).

Dragičević insists that her relation to poetry as well as all human interactions occurs through language, but the most important aspect is that it concerns not only the “what” but also the “how.” In terms of the “how,” Dragičević uses different procedures, and her compositional strategies are, according to Novak Popov, developed “by the repetition of sounds, sentences, onomatopoeia (vre, bm, sssss, he, hm, ou, e) and syntactic parallelisms” (Novak Popov, “Nove” 59). In formal terms, Dragičević destabilizes fixed texts and fixed meanings, putting the audience in the active position of having to produce meaning by themselves. Accordingly, Dragičević argues:

Every reading is already an interpretation, every reading establishes the poem again and again. And it happens more than once, at least as many times as there are listeners. Listening is not a passive role; on the contrary, a poem is composed on its own in relation to the way it is mediated. The insight that poetry as well as the reading of poetry process the sound potential is important for the author, because it is a question of the communication contact, which releases the wholeness, fixity, and absoluteness of the text. The text stops being on a sheet of paper, where it never was to begin with. It is clear that what is at stake here is the process of spatialization. (Zemljič)

Conclusion

A conceptualization of the contemporary field of poetic production in the post-Yugoslav cultural space is possible if one begins from the global almost universally valid principle of hybridization. In a large number of cases, hybrid poetic practices question the status of poetic experimentation in contemporary production. Focusing on the poetic experiment as an aesthetic value, I compared two completely different and opposite worlds of poetry: American poetry and post-Yugoslav poetic cultures. The difference is that in post-WWII American poetry, poetic experimentation was never interrupted, while experimentation in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav poetic cultures was only sporadic. Whereas

in American poetic culture, owing primarily to the Language poets and, from the end of the 1990s on, to conceptual poets and the Flarf collective, it was possible to establish a strong antilyric, that is, experimental paradigm, in post-Yugoslav cultures, experimentation has returned in an amalgam offering a model of hybrid poetry. In order to explain the characteristics of the literary production of four post-Yugoslav authors, Snežana Žabić, Ana Seferović, Ivana Sajko, and Nina Dragičević, in addition to hybridization, I also discussed the current tendencies of engagement and documentarism, again keeping in mind primarily the discussions taking place in American poetry. Finally, I analyzed the books of the four authors mentioned above, highlighting the issues of their positioning in their own native cultures, hybridity as an organizational principle of language material, engagement, documentarism, and, finally, performativity, which can also be understood as a specific form of hybridization.

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Lirska/Protilirska paradigma, hibridnost in angažirana poezija v ameriški in post- jugoslovanski literaturi

Ključne besede: ameriška poezija / postjugoslovanska poezija / hibridnost / lirična paradigma / antilirična paradigma / družbeni angažma / dokumentarnost

Osrednje vprašanje v prispevku je hibridizacija na področju ameriške in post-jugoslovanske poezije. Hibridizacija zastavlja vprašanje o statusu eksperimentiranja na področju pesniške produkcije in s tem v mislih sopostavljam ameriško in post-jugoslovansko poezijo. Moja teza je, da se je v ameriški poeziji po drugi svetovni vojni, zlasti v sedemdesetih letih, vzpostavila močna protilirska paradigma. To je bilo mogoče zaradi delovanja t. i. jezikovnih pesnikov, ki je sovpadlo z obratom k teoriji, saj so bili obenem teoretiki. Hibridna pesem je bila rezultat odziva pesnikov mainstreama, ki so absorbirali postopke

poezije jezikovnih pesnikov in jih hibridizirali z lirsko paradigmo. Po drugi strani ugotavljam, da so se v post-jugoslovanske kulture, kjer je vse od druge svetovne vojne skoraj neprekinjeno prevladovala lirski paradigmi (s krajšo prekinitvijo v šestdesetih letih), vrnilo elementi eksperimenta v amalgamu hibridnih pesniških postopkov. Na tem mestu zato obravnavam štiri knjige post-jugoslovanskih avtoric, Snežane Žabić, Ane Seferović, Ivane Sajko in Nine Dragičević, pri čemer izpostavljam konstitutivne elemente v njihovih hibridnih strukturah. Ker so knjige, ki jih pišejo, družbeno in politično angažirane, vsebujejo dokumentarno gradivo, in glede na to, da hibridnost v veliki meri spodbujajo uprizoritvene umetnosti, postavljam njihovo delo v širši kontekst omenjenih sodobnih tendenc.

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