

“Between the East and the West”: Vladimir Bartol’s Self-Identification between Central European Ljubljana and Mediterranean Trieste (1946–1956)

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The article addresses Vladimir Bartol’s fluid self-identification in relation to changeable places of his stay in the first decade after the Second World War. The writer’s constant oscillation between Trieste and Ljubljana was accompanied by the shift in perspectives (minority/majority) and cultural/linguistic dualities which render the Slovenian literature in Italy with existentialist overtone. Bartol’s return to Trieste problematized his self-understanding not only in spatial terms but also with respect to overlapping temporalities (Habsburg multicultural free port of the past versus the present Cold-War image of the city). Consequently, his stay in Trieste gave way to the extensive personal writing which is also the paper’s main source (autobiography and unpublished fragments of diary). Drawing inspiration from the spatial turn and applying the phenomenological prism of experience of certain places, the author attempts to present Bartol’s self-identification reconfigured in alignment with his post-war existential topography stretched between Central European Ljubljana and Mediterranean Trieste.

Keywords: Slovenian literature in Italy / Bartol, Vladimir / cultural identity / Trieste / Mediterraneanness / Central Europe

Introduction: Triestine dualities

Where is Trieste? Where does it belong to? To the East, to the West or to a “a no-man's land”? (Campanile 147).¹ Geographical frontiers in this intermediate area between eastern and western Europe as well as metaphorical boundaries between reality and imagination have proved to be debatable and porous throughout history. In “that most slippery of spaces [...] caught on the edge of three worlds” (Waley 245), the Romance, Slavic and German heritages coexist in a Central European spiritual triad. This multiculturalism was embodied in the fate of Triestine writer Scipio Slataper, who described himself as “Slavic-German-Italian” (Biagio 59) and defined Trieste as “a place of transition” where everything “[...] is double and triple, beginning with its flora and ending with its ethnicity” (Slataper qtd. in Cary 46). This multiplicity leaves the imprint on personality as well. Dragan Velikić characterized the Triestine *milieu* as a source of dualities with a direct impact on self-identification. “Trieste has been from time immemorial radiating duality and this also marked its writers” (Velikić 70), for instance Italo Svevo. The commercialist Ettore Schmitz chose the pseudonym Svevo “to stress his double sense of belonging” (Campanile 150) or even triple considering besides German and Italian components of his identity also the Jewish one. This simultaneous presence of many personalities made Schmitz/Svevo write his life-story in the first person plural instead of singular.

Triestine dualities in form of double perspective (ethnic minority/majority) and the oscillation between cosmopolitan openness and centripetal nationalism also marked one of the representatives of Slovenian literature in Italy, Vladimir Bartol, born in 1903 in the village close to Trieste, Saint Ivan (now the city's quarter). In the aftermath of the Great War and the demise of the Habsburg Empire, when Italy annexed the Julian March (former Austrian Littoral), he left his homeland together with his family. In 1919 they moved to Ljubljana. Aware of embodying the dual perspective himself, Bartol, at some point explicitly expressed his kinship with Svevo. Both writers had much in common: inspiration with psychoanalysis, cultural and linguistic duality underpinned by isolation, and consequently late recognition of their works (Bartol, “Demonija”).² Bartol was schizophrenically viewing himself as

¹ Campanile defined Trieste in reference to Hermann Bahr's definition of this city in terms of “a no-man's land” and “a border between states” equivalent to a sense of not-belonging.

² Manuscript Collection of Vladimir Bartol, Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

oscillating between Trieste and Ljubljana, the perspective of minority and majority. Even after his return to the homeland, he felt a stranger (Bartol, *Mladost* 175). Bartol as a "Triestine apparition" (Poljaz 1–2; Košuta, *Scrittura* 105)?³ Remaining beyond national literary canons and established national formulas of identity, for a long time he was overlooked on both sides of the border.

Convinced about a strong influence of space on his literary work, Bartol noticed that this relationship could once in future become of great interest as an "instructive problem" to some psychologist or a literary historian (Bartol, "Balkanijada IX"). Following this intuition, the article addresses the impact of place on Bartol's self-identification in the first, post-war decade when his existential topography was delineated by the two cities: Ljubljana and Trieste. I will focus on his movement between them in the period from 1946, when he came back to Trieste to reconstruct and supervise the cultural life of Slovenians and Croats, until 1956 when due to the lack of Italian consent to prolong his sojourn, he had to return to Yugoslavia (Virk, "Vladimir" 140; Jevnikar 356).

How did Bartol define his self between the East and the West, between Ljubljana and Trieste? This general question will guide further interpretations of his autobiographical writing and fragments of diary (among others, a part titled "Between the East and the West" written just after the war). While his autobiography is published in three volumes, the diaristic notes still await further studies.⁴ As Tomo Virk noted, "due

(hereafter MC, ZRC SAZU). Bartol's awareness of "some strange affinity" to Svevo became especially strong when he realized that the writer's wife was living in the flat once inhabited by his family, just before their translocation to Ljubljana. Bartol was asking himself: "How is it possible that among so many houses the lady lives right here, or better expressed, how could it happen that 40 years ago we received the flat right here?" As he noticed: "Similarly to I. Svevo the same was happening also to me. His first novel was published in 1892 and passed unnoticed. Newspapers did not mention him at all, they pounced on Svevo's poor language and poor command of Italian."

³ Vlasta Polojaz gives an affirmative answer to this question in her essay on Bartol's psychoanalysis and the influence of his experiences of childhood spent in Trieste on his literature. She referred here to Miran Košuta's designation of Slovenian literature in Trieste in terms of "apparition." According to Košuta, the Italian literary history has not recognized the role of Slovenian writers born, living and writing in Trieste in their contribution to the multicultural image of the city. Overlooked they became invisible and ephemeral specters (see Polojaz).

⁴ Only a small part of them was published in fragments in the literary journal *Dialogi* in the 1980s. Some excerpts from 1930–1933 were published in 1982 (no. 4, 5, 6–7, 8–9, 10) and some other notes from 1958–1961 appeared in the same journal in 1983 (no. 1).

to this extensiveness, which is not possible to control totally—for the detailed examination of the entire legacy decades would be needed, it is always possible to expect, that potential future discoveries will complement current findings” (Virk, “Netipični” 78). Considering Bartol’s immense diaristic legacy, the article’s main aim is to suggest one of the possible interpretative paths which, if continued, would require more research and close reading of the author’s manuscripts.

Bartol in Triestine Mediterranean in-betweenness

According to Paul Waley, Trieste is “a powerful vehicle for geographical reflection. It forces us to think geographically, to think about the meanings of place and of affection for place and the expression of this affection in poetry and prose, as in the works of writers such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba,” (Waley 246) or Vladimir Bartol and other Slovenian writers. Following Michael Biggins’s remark on the predominant one-dimensional, solely Italian image of Trieste in the western languages, this study will try “to right that imbalance” by putting an emphasis on the Slovenian contribution to the multicultural city (Biggins 100–101). Concerning the methodological framework, the following interpretations revolve around the category of experience, recently widely explored in social sciences and humanities (Wolska 6–9). The article draws on the phenomenological approach applied both to history (David Carr, Frank Ankersmit) and space (Tim Ingold) which allows to conceptualize history in terms of individual experience and view space as a place of dwelling. The paper also refers to the spatial turn which, offering a particular terminology and understanding of place, helps to reconstruct self-identifications shaped in relation to space.

When life ceases to be an evident, given phenomenon but always questioned in an encounter with cultural otherness, as it happens in the borderland areas such as Trieste, it becomes “grounded in idea and literature.” In this “paper city,” where life is lived “under protection of literature,” it is the latter that allows to “convert uncertainty of one’s identity into a travel in search for it, that means a more authentic identity” (Magris 308–309). This existential understanding of writing marked the Slovenian literature in Italy and thus also Bartol’s *oeuvre*. As Marija Pirjevec and Miran Košuta claim, the particular historical and cultural experiences of Slovenians in Italy gave way to a certain typology of Slovenian borderland literature, distinguishing it from both the Italian literature and the one of the Slovenian hinterland

(M. Pirjevec, *Tržaški* 13, 24; *Na pretoku* 10, 14; "Zgodovinski oris" 19; Košuta, *E-mejli* 28).

Trieste's cultural status of a mediator between Italy and *Mittleuropa* entailed a search for identity within local literature (Pizzi, *A City* 38–43). Moreover, the Triestine intersection of changeable and complex identities nurtured the existentialist understanding of literature which manifests in "a robust autobiographism," (Pizzi, "Triestine" 147) "an inclination towards exaggerated introspection, hostility towards rhetoric, and a moral impulse" (Campanile 152). This dominant existentialist tone gave way to Bartol's extensive autobiography written in the 1950s during his stay in Trieste. It was published in fragments in the local Slovenian journal *Primorski Dnevnik* (Virk, "Vladimir" 141, 144).

In the autobiography there is an image of a young boy following his father's indications on a big map presenting changeable battlefronts during the Great War. This image served Bartol as an exemplary manifestation of his two instincts in relation to time ("historical sense") and space ("geographical instinct") (Bartol, *Romantika* 155–158). The writer viewed space as an important factor having an impact on one's perception and literary production. Given that he spent more than one-third of his life in Trieste (26 years), it goes without saying that the city's *milieu* essentially influenced his literature and self-understanding. As Košuta argues, Bartol's strong bond with Trieste manifested in more or less explicit "geospiritual influence" on his writing ("palimpsest multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and borderland character of the birthplace"). Košuta discerns in the writer's *oeuvre* a strong influence of *tržaškost* (multicultural identity of Trieste) (Toroš 19–30) expressed in "topos, themes, motives, ambiances, feelings, problems and even linguistic peculiarities of 'the city in the bay'" (Košuta, "Tržaški" 73–87).

Bartol's literary articulation of Trieste was nourished by "imaginary-historical space" marked with "at least two, unknown to central Slovenia typological peculiarities: *Mediterraneaness* and *multiculturalism*" (Košuta, *E-mejli* 40–43; Košuta, *Scrittura* 137). In the diaristic notes taken after the Second World War when the political status of Trieste was still uncertain, Bartol argued that due to the city's mediatory character as a sphere between the East and the West, it could become a center of a new, Mediterranean, cultural entity. He expressed his wish to convert Trieste into a place where diverse elements would intermingle and create a new cultural world. Already before his sojourn in the city by the hill of Saint Just in the aftermath of the war, Bartol was reflecting on "how to activate a symbiosis of the eastern and western cultures, Slavic and Romance elements, a new, specific culture upwards

of this place. Out of this symbiosis, some new, fresh Mediterranean culture would emerge which would absorb dynamics and storminess of the East and Apollinianness and sense for measurement of the West” (Bartol, “Balkanijada X Trst, 20.III. [47]”). The two elements in a complementary and reciprocal combination could coexist and contribute to some new cultural universe. One of its important features would be “a ‘Mediterranean clarity’: perhaps just in Trieste it will be possible to formulate definite problems of the ‘East’ much more clearly and easily” (Bartol, “Balkanijada IX Trst. Trst, VI. zvezek, Dvoživkarstvo, [13. II.47]”). According to Bartol, the Mediterranean character of Trieste could enable to look at the challenges (social, political?) posed by the East in another light depriving them of their burdensome complexities which in the end would strip the eastern communism of dogmatism with the help of realism.⁵

When historically contextualized, Bartol’s vision of Mediterranean Trieste becomes a response to the post-war more and more polarized political situation in Europe. In the city where the Iron Curtain (no matter how porous) would soon descend, the writer perceived himself as placed by fate on “Al Araf,” the line which in “Koran” divides heaven from hell and thus the two worlds of redemption and damnation. Trieste and its Mediterranean character could present to Bartol a certain remedy to this widening Cold War rift. The decade-long oscillation between the two different worlds enabled him to broaden the perspective by the possibility of a simultaneous look at the two opposite directions (Bartol, “Med Vzhodom in Zapadom”). Additionally, his image of the Triestine Mediterranean culture seems to be a project not devoid of political over-tone. Bartol viewed his official position in Trieste as the one forming part of “‘the first line,’ head of the spear directed against the West so that it tears the old, falling world” (Bartol, “Balkanijada X Trst”).

Bartol’s references to Trieste as a place of the necessary eastern ideological infiltration of the West should be placed in a broader, historical context of Slovenian political endeavors since 1848, namely Slovenian

⁵ Bartol was against the dogmatic identification with the official aesthetic doctrine of Socialist realism. As he remarked: “In opposition to social realism I put: universal realism. Realism in everything; in all phenomena: in psychological, sociological, material, moral. In observation, in ideology, in dialectics.” Consequently, instead of an outright identification with a specific political or artistic doctrine, Bartol was only approaching it in some aspects. As he underlined in one of the diaristic notes from 1945: “I need for myself to be always a bit ‘below,’ ‘in the background,’ that I have always still a top in front of me. Full recognition, I am afraid, could mean my standstill, standstill of my creative force.” (Bartol, “Vzhod in Zapad IV”)

fight for access to the Adriatic Sea (J. Pirjevec, *Trst* 11–13). The writer shared the view already established in the Slovenian scholarship which claims that city belongs to the hinterland. Following this logic, Trieste, regarded as the Italian island surrounded by the Slovenian countryside, also naturally pertains to the Karstic hinterland and politically, economically to Yugoslavia. Considering that at the beginning of the twentieth century Trieste was the biggest Slovenian city surpassing Ljubljana, it acquired an important role during the Slovenian struggle for national recognition. With the access to the sea, the city promised to Slovenians the end of isolation (Ara and Magris 66–67, 144). Trieste was thus of vital importance and the Adriatic question, resurfacing more vividly in the moments of territorial rearrangements, remained open till its official solution in the 1950s and also engaged Bartol.

After the Second World War, there were three possible solutions to the "Trieste question" envisaged during the Paris Peace Conference: the city's return to Italy, its annexation to Yugoslavia or a buffer state of Free Territory of Trieste. The latter option prevailed although in fact remaining unrealized (Sluga, "Trieste" 295–296). Slovenians were divided in their perceptions of the city's desirable fate. Besides supporters of Josip Broz Tito who fostered the idea of Trieste as a basis for the eastern ideological infiltration of the West, there were right-oriented Slovenians (Christian-liberal) who fought for the Free Territory of Trieste having in mind the western infiltration of the East. Furthermore, there were also Slovenians who after Tito's withdrawal from the Cominform in 1948 were closer to the Stalinist political line and Vittorio Vidali. The final demarcation of the western border in 1954 only entrenched the divisions between Slovenians in Trieste (J. Pirjevec, *Trst* 419, 483). Shortly after his return to the city by the hill of Saint Just, Bartol became a member of the Slovenian-Italian antifascist union for the Free Territory of Trieste, the movement supporting Tito's Yugoslavia. Additionally, he tried to become a member of the communist party (Košuta, "Komentar" 326).⁶

Until 1954 Trieste continued to be an international issue provoking many tensions. The ideologically and nationally polarized inner situation was marked with manifestations organized either in sup-

⁶ Even though the communist party was doubtful regarding his application, the writer declared that while waiting for the decision he would behave "as if he were accepted." For more information concerning Bartol's opinion about the situation in Slovenia during the Second World War and attitude towards communist ideology which in the end also resulted in his unsuccessful attempts to become a member of the party see the writer's interview with Ljenko Urbančič as well as Virk, "Komentar."

port of Yugoslavia or Italy (Košuta, “Komentar” 323). The city’s fate was dependent on the relations between the great political powers. Suspended between the West and the East, the inhabitants breathed the air imbued with feelings of loss and disorientation. In fact, stateless, “with no control over their destiny, at the mercy of the vagaries of international geopolitics,” they found themselves in a specific “political and cultural limbo” (Bialasiewicz and Minca 1097; Minca 268). The post-war indeterminate international status of Trieste had to be experienced by its inhabitants as extremely peculiar if Bartol chose this place as the setting of one of his short stories in which the main hero, a noble Englishman, sir Oliver Burke suffering from a strange indisposition of “*nihil admirari*” desperately searches for a source of astonishment. Having visited almost all the most distant corners of the world and experienced the most exotic phenomena, which, however, did not surprise him, the main protagonist finally succeeded in finding the desired sense of bewilderment in post-war Trieste (Bartol, “Zgodba” 40–74).

Trieste as a microcosm of European modernity and phenomena which shaped the twentieth century (psychoanalysis, fascism, antisemitism), was certainly a place that easily provided many different sources of bemusement. Bartol, upon his return in 1946 and having in mind Trieste in which he had come of age, namely the city under the Austro-Hungarian rule, was assuredly also bewildered by many contradictory aspects of new, post-war Trieste under Anglo-American administration. Referring to the image of the city delineated in one of his novellas, Bartol could find himself in an uneasy situation of in-betweenness

between black marketeers and allies, between fascists and communists, between black people, Italians, and Slovenians, between refugees of all shades, between Ustasas and chetniks, between experienced Anglo-American colonizers, between partisans and war orphans, between Jews, exiles and Annamites, between prostitutes and long-skirt Christian democrats, between an armada of unemployed;— in short in our old magnificent Trieste by the Adriatic, [...] between the West and the East. (Bartol, “Tržaška” 17)

Bartol’s amphibiousness and “wayfaring” between Trieste and Ljubljana

Spatial frames of self-identification become especially susceptible to problematization while travelling and if cultural contexts are often changed. After the Second World War, the main reference points on Bartol’s existential topography were the two cities: Trieste and

Ljubljana. While he was fulfilling his professional duties in Trieste, in Ljubljana he had his family and acquaintances from literary circles who made him revisit this city frequently, sometimes almost every week for a couple of days (Bartol, "Balkanijada X. Trst. Vrhovni princ"). The city attracted Bartol not only because of the present familial ties but also due to the past experiences. In Ljubljana he was studying, made first attempts in a literary world and experienced many youthful adventures, love (Bartol, "Balkanijada IX"). His often travels from one city to another made him compare himself to a creature that needs simultaneously two environments to survive. He perceived this amphibiousness as "a very well-chosen combination" necessary for his literary creation and ascent as a writer.⁷

Change of place shapes the way of writing. In one of his diaristic notes Bartol remarked: "Besides, it is interesting to observe, how strongly a *milieu* also influences the psychological constitution itself, thoughts, triggering of ideas." Consequently, a context where a story is written inevitably leaves its imprint which does not necessarily accord with the story's imagined background. As Bartol recalled his work in Ljubljana, even though he aimed to overcome the city's general atmosphere of provinciality by placing his literary imagined universe within a "great world" of western metropolis, the outcome was "the Parisian stories" with an Alpine spirit of mountain pastures reminding more of Slovenia than of the western world (Bartol, "Balkanijada IX").

Interestingly, a particular remedy for this Slovenian provincialism emerged with a more open, vigorous Serbian context and Belgrade which in the interwar period with tripled number of population "was on a steady, though not necessarily linear, trajectory of modernization, urbanization, and Europeanization" and outpaced in its growth other Yugoslav cities such as Zagreb, Sarajevo and Ljubljana (Babović 5–6). In Belgrade in 1933 Bartol experienced "a dynamic pace of society developing into capitalism" which made on him "the mighty although not entirely delightful impression" and also influenced his writings (Bartol, "H kritikam" 212). The atmosphere of the Yugoslav capital enabled the writer to gain and then also apply in his literary work a wider perspective. Furthermore, the social structure in both cities, Ljubljana and Belgrade, was different as "the Yugoslav capital did

⁷ For Bartol's attitude to Ljubljana see Dolgan who emphasizes that for Bartol it was more convenient to live in Trieste than in Ljubljana just after the war. "Trieste due to the Allied 'capitalist' orientation soon in terms of living standards, cultural pulse and openness surpassed Ljubljana which was engulfed by collectivism, nationalization, staged trials, socialist realism and restrictions on creative freedom." (Dolgan 345)

not have a historic aristocracy or an established bourgeoisie before the Great War” (Babović 6). Therefore, less conservative Belgrade aspiring to become a modern European metropolis was more receptive to the present challenges such as for instance artistic inspirations coming from abroad. The Yugoslav main city diffused a spirit which to Bartol seemed more realistic. Even in Ljubljana, he tried to project some of this realism on his artistic production (Bartol, “Balkanijada IX”).

Bartol’s belief in the decisive role of spatial frames in shaping his literary work also reveals in his hypothetical considerations about a form which his most internationally famous novel “Alamut” would have taken if he had written it not in Slovenia but Serbia, Belgrade. In the same vein, the writer noticed an interesting divergence between the notes taken in Trieste and before his arrival there, as well as the difference between plans for writing and the outcome which emerged due to the change of place. What Bartol intended to write, when already written in a different spatial context, would very often assume another shape from the one planned: “It seems to me, that what differs (at least a bit) is also writing, which I brought in head from Ljubljana and here I put on paper and *vice versa*.” (Bartol, “Balkanijada IX”) The outcome did not meet expectations, and it was a change of place which introduced this discrepancy.

Each city possesses a unique *genius loci* made of different geographical locations, histories and cultural heritages. For Bartol, “an amphibious,” Ljubljana and Trieste represented divergent environments and thus every revisit had to entail a certain emotional response to a new context. Diverse ways of framing thoughts incited by the two cities were underlain with different moods and feelings. As the writer emphasized, “intellectual amphibiousness also corresponds to emotional amphibiousness” (Bartol, “Balkanijada IX”). Therefore, the emotional layer also underwent important changes following the switchable urban references of self-identification. While oscillating between the two cities, the writer experienced a specific change of “rhythm of organism, rhythm of thinking and feeling.” After each arrival in Trieste from Ljubljana he needed some days for his organism to calm down (Bartol, “Balkanijada VI”). While every visit to Ljubljana for Bartol was accompanied by “a stage fright,” in familiar Trieste, all anxiety and uneasiness dispersed (Bartol, *Mladost* 11). As if a human organism were a sensitive instrument which, in order to be harmonious, requires some special tuning in alignment with a particular melody of a place. Bartol’s description of his experience of arrivals and departures with regard to the two cities is worth quoting, (notwithstanding the length of citation), as it reflects

well the writer's sensitivity to change of places and his resultant dual self-identification in relation to space.

Coming from Trieste to Ljubljana I often feel somehow cramped, I feel as if there appeared some ring around my brain. [...] And when I arrive from Ljubljana to Trieste, just at the first sight of the sea from Opčine or Nabrežina the horizon somehow widens, I take a wider breath, anxious bonds go off from me. Also before the war I felt a similar confinement in Ljubljana coming from Paris or Belgrade, my passion was not in vain, every so often to look at the world and widen one's horizons. Ljubljana is strong, root-like, profound—and also narrow, narrow-minded, it cannot be hidden. Ljubljana is an outstandingly cultural city, while Trieste and also Belgrade are not, at least not in the same degree. Strange, in this view Ljubljana is rather similar to Paris. [...] Ljubljana forces a man to contemplation, to determined dealing with some (narrow) problem, to depth, to intensive, deep experience, to thoroughness. Whereas Trieste in opposition to this, widens horizons, forces to big perspectives, goes "widely and highly." In Trieste you are more a realist than in Ljubljana. You think more clearly, you feel more clearly. You are open. Ljubljana forces a great man to "greatness in depth," Trieste to "greatness in width and height."

Trieste as a city under the sign of Mercury, because having at its origins trade and economy, could resemble a place where life is strongly marked with realism and pragmatism. In this regard, the former commercial harbor of the Habsburg Monarchy was opposed by Bartol with more metaphysical Ljubljana, which as a city dominated by cultural life seemed to him closer to Paris and western Europe in general. While Ljubljana privileged a contemplative look into depths of oneself or a scrutinizing search for roots of some problem, Trieste blurred this focalized and narrow perspective by opening a view at the seemingly endless sea widening the horizon and making a person more open. Suddenly the burden of intricate perception searching for rootedness in the Alpine hinterland could be shed or dissolved by the sea. Moreover, the atmosphere of realism encountered in the Triestine emporium would clarify self-perception, liberating it from a threat of restraining essentialism.

The seaside city relieved Bartol of the confinement he could feel in the Slovenian hinterland surrounded by the Alps where the cultural circles seemed to him devoid of a necessary "valve" (possibly present in Trieste because of the sea?). In Ljubljana, as the writer remarked, "all are somehow irritated, hysterical as if they cannot or must not out of themselves" (Bartol, "Vzhod in Zapad"). Trieste, in this context, presents a relieving counterweight because one glance at the sea may provide with some distance towards oneself opening a valve of escape from one's

confinement within a monad of the inner world (one dominant ideology or identity imposed by the majority). As if the constantly changing surface of the sea reminded its observer of the inevitable passage of time, fluidity and a fleeting nature of all historical phenomena, perceptions, identities. Therefore, the roots taken in “profound” Ljubljana could be undermined with a look at the sea and the metaphysical justification of bonds established between the Alps would evaporate in a more realistic atmosphere of the seaside city. “Anxious bonds go off” together with any seemingly fixed identity—in the Slovenian interior still taken for granted but in Trieste, when faced with different manifestations of otherness, it becomes relative and indeterminate.

Certain spaces, identified with specific “orders of time,” are experienced differently also in terms of perception of time. In this regard, in contrast to the hectic spirit of the port city of Trieste, Ljubljana could make an impression of a place defined by a considerably slower pace of life. In 1947 while roaming along the streets of Slovenian capital, Bartol immersed himself in a sullen mood provoked by an atmosphere of the city similar to the one he had encountered there ten years before as if time were brought to a halt. Was the rhythm of changes in Ljubljana so slow that the only images which could come to mind of its frequent visitor were those from the past? In opposition to Trieste which, as an urban experiment, a fruit of a future-oriented vision of Habsburgs, privileged a continuous focus on the present moment, Ljubljana would acquire a more traditional, conservative character rooted in the past. Furthermore, Bartol defined the temporal orientation of both cities also in ideological terms. While in the Slovenian Littoral he could experience the forward-looking partisan spirit more directly, Ljubljana with its rather conservative trait seemed only reluctantly subjugating itself to the subversive, partisan ideas. Bartol formulated his impressions from one of his stays in the Slovenian main city as follows: “So slow, calm, philister, bureaucratic it seemed to me. Is it because the wide, joyful partisan spirit vanished? Yes, Ljubljana is a heavy, strong city. Heavy is its ambient and it slowly absorbed the entire partisan spirit.” (Bartol, “V. i Z.”)

The decade-long oscillation between Central European Ljubljana and Mediterranean Trieste enabled Bartol on the one hand to assume a privileged position due to a wider and more complete perspective. On the other hand, his amphibiousness implied a certain schizophrenia provoking problematic identity dilemmas. The mediating position between the East and the West makes possible reciprocal enrichments but also poses a threat of double isolation as a result of marginalization

from two sides of the border and from two societies distortedly represented by national identities as homogenous. Bartol experienced both positive and negative aspects of his existential situation marked with in-betweenness.

As "the Littoral Slovenian among continental Slovenians, a fish on dry land" (Košuta, "Tržaški" 86), the writer viewed himself as more open and liberal than his compatriots living in other parts of the country. Bartol explained this clash of worldviews and experiences, referring to his particular origins immersed in the open and multicultural atmosphere of Trieste, foreign to other Slovenians:

A man, who as a child could each day watch ships coming from all the continents of the world and who saw in his birthplace day by day representatives of the most divergent nations, people and races walking along his streets, listened to unknown languages and unknown melodies, necessarily accumulated in his memory different impressions, as a child necessarily indulged in different wishes and fantasies than someone who was born and grew up in the midst of patriarchal peace [...] in a separated from the world Slovenian village and its more or less poetic idyll. (Bartol, *Pot* 293–294)

Bartol found himself in an uneasy situation of double alienation which he described as follows: "In Ljubljana I was a foreigner, they thought it because I am Triestine [...]. Here I was a foreigner for them because they thought that I am from Ljubljana. [...] I am a guest among Slovenians, they accepted me as an annoying intruder." (Bartol, "Zapiski")

In Ljubljana, Bartol experienced isolation predominantly on the artistic plane. As Taja Kramberger noted, the writer's provenience and thus different "social habitus," "*topoi*" and "places of collective memory" (sea, *urbs*, intellectuality, humour) which compose his "literary topography" made him foreign and unaccepted within the "Slovenian literary field" characterised by provincialism, sentimental rusticism and "scholastic antiintellectuality" (Kramberger 889–892). Bartol was a nonconformist escaping the predominant in Slovenia aesthetic classifications. Distant from abiding any clearly defined genre, he wished to elaborate his own formal way of expression. This "multi-genre author" transcended the commonly adopted and expected artistic, mental patterns with his particular attitude to art and approach to the world which combined irony, cynicism, nihilism and Machiavellianism (Belšak 124–135). As an outsider, referencing the dominant aesthetic currents, the writer remarked: "In my notes on numerous places I complain about my loneliness and misunderstanding ..." (Bartol, *Romantika* 269, 275)

Reflecting on his own fate and alternative, untaken paths of life, Bartol concluded that if he had remained in Trieste, he would have become an entirely different person. While in the seaside city he could sense a certain unity with its inhabitants and life in general (“here I am with people and life one”), in Ljubljana he felt more foreign. Many years spent in the Slovenian capital could not mitigate his experience of alienation. Bartol compared himself to a “foreign bird” which as a victim of the locals’ hostility was lost and unaccepted on the Slovenian territory. “The native birds pecked and banished the foreign bird seeking shelter. And where shall it fly away if it cannot go home? In the heights?” He could not go home because with the passage of time it became recognizable only in memory (Bartol, “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 2. VII. 46”). Bartol managed to go beyond this double estrangement founded on excluding national identities and the binary perspective of majority-minority by placing himself within some wider frames of a universal spirit. As he noted: “In reality I was only the messenger of the universal spirit, *der Herold des Weltgeistes*. Erratic bloc, meteor which fell on the earth and by accident on the Slovenian ground.” (Bartol, “Zapiski”) Convinced that life itself forced him to follow the “steep way up,” Bartol perceived his fate as similar to France Prešeren, whose literary work was recognized only posthumously. Misunderstood by his contemporaries, Bartol believed that his original contribution to the Slovenian and world literature would receive a proper recognition in future (Bartol, “Balkanijada VI. Trst, 2. VII. 46”).

Conclusion

Trieste with its flourishing harbor, for centuries attracting a flux of newcomers, became the city of immigrants (Cattaruzza 193)⁸ where arrivals and departures made up discontinuous life-stories tinged by on the one hand uprootedness and on the other hand a search for some bonds. Intermingled nationalism and cosmopolitanism informed inhabitants’ positions depending on their social background, economic and political interests as well as historical circumstances. Given that both cosmopolitanism and irredentism in Trieste were, in Pamela Ballinger’s words, “interrelated ideologies upon which individuals may

⁸ For the study of the role of immigration (“driving factor”) and demographic development in the transformation of the city’s social structure and its fast economic growth see Kalc 12.

draw in different realms or moments," Triestines' self-identifications acquired a changeable character. This coexistence of only seemingly contradictory ideologies was embodied by many Triestine writers who "simultaneously embraced 'nationalist' and 'cosmopolitan' positions in different aspects of their life" (Ballinger 92–93). This duality was also mirrored in Bartol's *oeuvre* which thus could be characterized as both supranational and local, Slovenian. Following this line of interpretation, the writer was described by Košuta as "glocal," on the crossroads of globality and locality (Košuta, "Tržaški" 73–88). Bartol's global openness, trespassing national boundaries, radiates from his past experience of cosmopolitan and to great extent mythologized Habsburg Trieste. Later in the Cold War period the city marked with a tense atmosphere of increasing national divisions shaped the writer's locality.

Multicultural Trieste, where omnipresent otherness led to contingent self-delineations *per negationem* (Ara and Magris 13–16), is also a place reverberating with absence, not only of the past, origins but also of unfulfilled (geopolitical) visions of future. Claudio Minca, who presents Trieste's history through the prism of "ideal geographies of absence" which in 1848 shifted from "cosmopolitan/Mediterranean" to "national/territorial," underlines that "dominant imaginations of the city have always been (and continue to be) structured around such 'geographies of absence'—both in ideal terms (absence as a value in itself), as well as in clear opposition to the 'geographies of essence' that sustained the other grand project of European bourgeois modernity: the territorial nation-state." These manifold instances of absence refer to the absence of Italy (Trieste as an orphan), Vienna (Trieste as "Austria's widow"), Istrian Peninsula, Slavic nation-state with Trieste as capital (advocated among Slovenians) as well as a new future-oriented cultural horizon and a political project which could restore to post-war Trieste its bygone cosmopolitan spirit (Minca 269–272). Bartol's experiences of the Triestine reality after the Second World War combined both cosmopolitan (nostalgic) and territorial (future-oriented) "geographies of absence." At one end, faced with the renewed Italian-Slovenian confrontation, the writer sensed a certain absence of the multicultural, cosmopolitan city of his youth. At the other, convinced about Trieste's adherence to the Slovenian hinterland, his experience of absence also related to the unfulfilled but desirable annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia.

Bartol's self-identification in relation to space in terms of amphibian reveals his topographical imagination and indicates his sensitivity to changeability of places. The writer's amphibiousness shaped by his

decade-long oscillation between Mediterranean Trieste and Central European Ljubljana enriched his self and his literary work but also provoked double isolation. He managed to transcend the sense of alienation by identifying himself with a world spirit (*Weltgeist*) and by the intensified work of memory which could to a certain extent mitigate the temporal discordance between bygone Habsburg Trieste and Free Territory of Trieste, between a mythicized cosmopolitan openness and the Cold War confinement.

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»Med Vzhodom in Zahodom«: Samorazumevanje Vladimirja Bartola med srednjeevropsko Ljubljano in sredozemskim Trstom (1946–1956)

Ključne besede: slovenska književnost v Italiji / Bartol, Vladimir / kulturna identiteta / Trst / mediteranskost / Srednja Evropa

Članek obravnava fluidno samorazumevanje Vladimirja Bartola v povezavi s spremenljivimi kraji njegovega bivanja v prvem desetletju po drugi svetovni vojni. Stalno nihanje pisatelja med Trstom in Ljubljano so spremljale spremembe perspektiv (manjšina/večina) in kulturno-jezikovne dvojnosti, ki so slovensko književnost v Italiji zaznamovale z eksistencialističnim predznakom. Bartolova vrnitev v Trst je postavila pod vprašaj tako njegov odnos do prostora

kot do časa oz. sobivanja preteklega habsburškega multikulturnega pristanišča v spominu z doživeto hladnovojno podobo mesta. Bivanje v Trstu je tako botrovalo obsežnim zapisom, ki predstavljajo glavni vir članka (gre za avtobiografijo in neobjavljene fragmente dnevnika). Pri predstavitvi Bartolove samoidentifikacije se avtorica navdihuje pri prostorskem obratu ter fenomenologiji. Na ta način skuša prikazati pisateljevo samorazumevanje, rekonfigurirano v skladu z njegovo povojno eksistencialno topografijo, razpeto med srednjeevropsko Ljubljano in sredozemskim Trstom.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

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